



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Susan Davis (CA-53)

House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing
The Cost of Non-Completion: Improving Student Outcomes in Higher Education
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Thursday, May 9, 2019 at 10:15 a.m.

Today, we will examine the importance of improving student outcomes in higher education.

As this Committee continues its work to expand college access, we must also ensure that today's students have the support they need to complete college and enjoy the life changing benefits of a college degree.

This is really a matter of national importance. The students enrolling in college today—students who are increasingly diverse, who have fewer financial resources, who are juggling work and family obligations—these students are the future of our economy.

Research unequivocally shows that—compared to high school graduates—college graduates are more financially stable, enjoy healthier lives, and are better able to pass on their success to future generations.

The benefits of attaining a college degree go far beyond individual gains. When more students earn degrees, we all benefit. And I know you all agree with that.

Increased degree attainment contributes to the economic health of our towns, cities, and states. It reduces reliance on public safety net programs. It helps make our communities healthier and reduces rates of incarceration.

Simply put, investments in quality higher education will pay for themselves. In fact, researchers have found that for every \$1 a state invests in higher education, it receives up to \$4.50 in return.

The lasting, undeniable benefits of a college degree illustrate our responsibility, as a nation, to ensure that students have an opportunity to enroll in and graduate from college. However, the data show us that there is a lot of work to be done.

Roughly only six out of every 10 students graduate with a degree. And the odds of graduating are worse if you are a student of color or a low-income student.

Today, white students complete college degrees at one-and-a-half times the rate of Black students. Similarly, graduation rate gaps disadvantage low-income families, with Pell Grant recipients 18 percentage points less likely to graduate than non-Pell recipients.

These gaps do not reflect a lack of effort or desire on the part of students. They reflect the numerous barriers underserved students face throughout their educational careers.

These challenges begin in K-12 education where systemic inequities leave too many students underprepared for college coursework, and they are compounded by the challenges facing America's increasingly "non-traditional" student body.

Today, more than one-in-three students enrolls part-time. One in every two students holds down a job while in college. A quarter of students care for children of their own. And more than 40 percent of students live in poverty.

To reach graduation, these students need not only academic supports, but also wrap-around services—like counseling, child care support, and assistance with food and housing—so they can focus on studies without sacrificing necessities.

Congress has a responsibility to ensure that today’s college students have the support they need to make it to graduation day. Otherwise, we will continue to leave far too many students without a degree, struggling with student loans they can’t repay. In many cases, this burden and the emotional toll of not having completed college can set students further back than when they enrolled.

We cannot sit idly while, every day, students across the country are forced to choose between their degree, their income, their children, and their health.

Rather than splitting hairs about a one or two percent increase in funding levels, we should take bold steps to invest in students, feeling secure in the knowledge that our investment will pay off as we see more Americans earning college degrees, filling high-demand jobs, and giving back to their communities.

Education, we know, has a transformative power and an unparalleled impact on intergenerational mobility, especially for those who rely on federal financial aid and federally-funded student support programs. We must invest in higher education, so that all students who begin college—no matter their race, income, background, or circumstance—can complete a degree that leads to a rewarding career.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today for this important discussion.

I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Smucker, for his opening statement.