



2021 STRATEGIC PLANNING COMPREHENSIVE SCAN

OZARKS TECHNICAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Introduction

As Ozarks Technical Community College sets out to begin its annual strategic planning process, information on the external environment of the college has been collected in order to assist in planning strategically for the future. This report is a compilation of important issues and trends that impact the institution and the communities it serves.

The purpose of this document is to anticipate and plan for the opportunities and challenges that OTC will face in the future. Key findings have been categorized into

five areas of change: demographics, higher education, economy and workforce, public policy and politics, and technology. These five trend areas interact to shape the environment in which OTC functions.

The emerging trends identified in this report inform the strategic planning process at OTC and are vital to setting and achieving the goals and initiatives of the college. As planning for the future continues, information about these areas provides a context for decision-making related to how OTC fulfills its mission.

Guiding Principles

Mission Statement

The college mission is to provide accessible, high quality and affordable learning opportunities that transform lives and strengthen the communities we serve.

Vision Statement

The college vision is to serve our communities by expanding opportunities for personal and professional growth through our commitment to excellence and innovation.

Core Values

Quality
Opportunity
Accessibility
Learning

Inclusion
Innovation
Collaboration
Respect

Integrity
Affordability
Personal Growth
Professional Growth

OTC BY THE NUMBERS

Facts and Figures from the 2020-2021 Academic Year

15,455

Unduplicated students enrolled

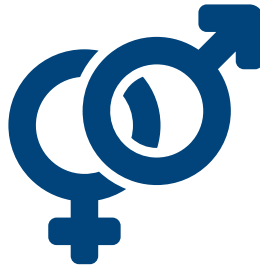


2,269

Students graduated, including
717 A+ students
107 veterans



20 Median student age



Student body

60%

Female

40%

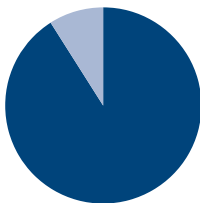
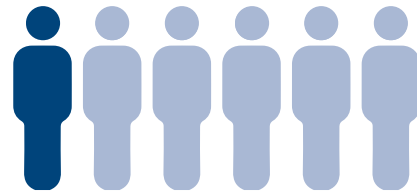
Male



72%

Students who worked while attending OTC

1 in 6 students are underrepresented minorities

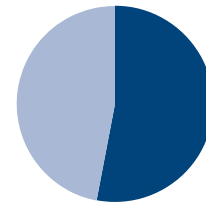


91%

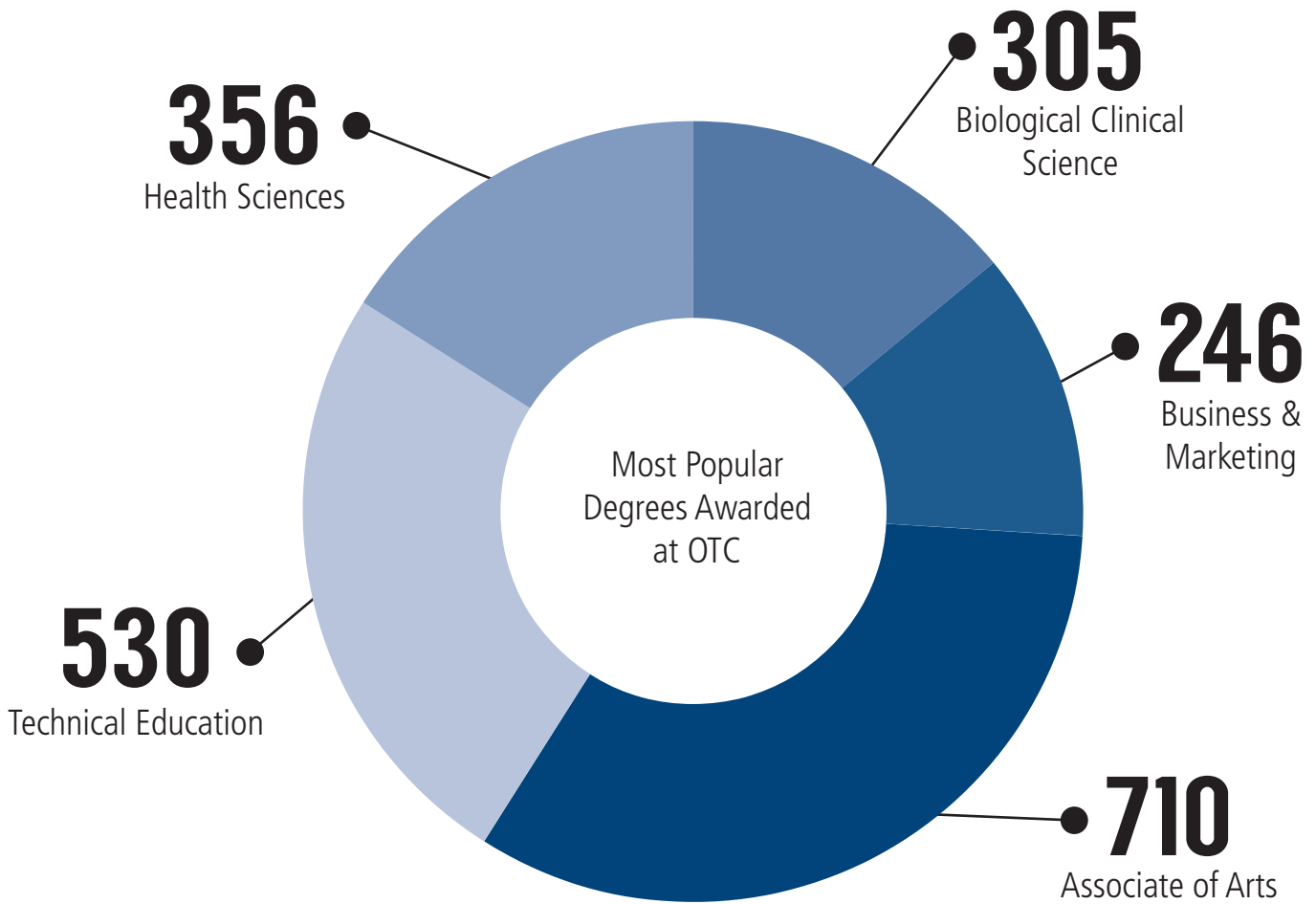
Graduates who found employment or transferred to a 4-year institution

53%

First-generation college students



Source: OTC Office of Research & Governmental Affairs



43%
Students who received Pell Grants



69%
Students who received Financial Aid

A⁺

3,729

A+ students served annually



2,151

Students awarded OTC Foundation or Institutional scholarships



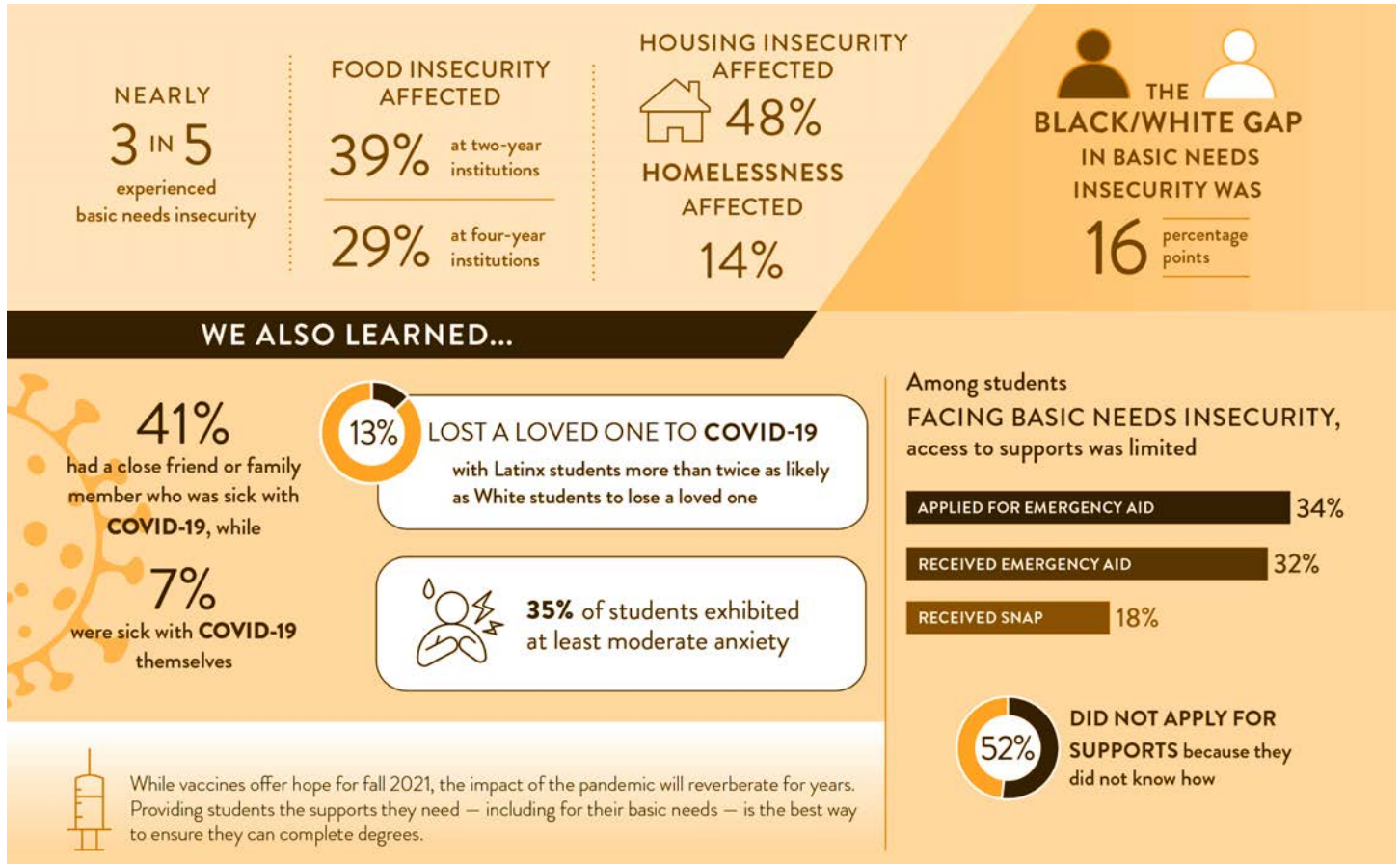
\$8.1M⁺

Scholarship money awarded

DEMOGRAPHICS

National Data: Basic Needs Insecurity and Student Well-Being

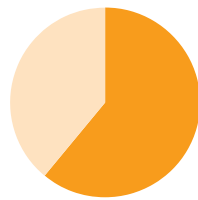
In fall 2020, The Hope Center surveyed over 195,000 students (from 130 two-year and 72 four-year colleges and universities) across the United States to examine the pandemic's impact on students who were able to continue their education in this challenging environment. The data below is a snapshot of some of the key findings about students' basic needs security and well-being, as indicated by employment status, academic engagement, food and housing insecurity, and mental health.



Source: The Hope Center, "#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic" (2021)

Defining Basic Needs Insecurity

Students' basic needs include access to nutritious and sufficient food; safe, secure, and adequate housing—to sleep, to study, to cook, and to shower; healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical well-being; affordable technology and transportation; resources for personal hygiene; and childcare and related needs.

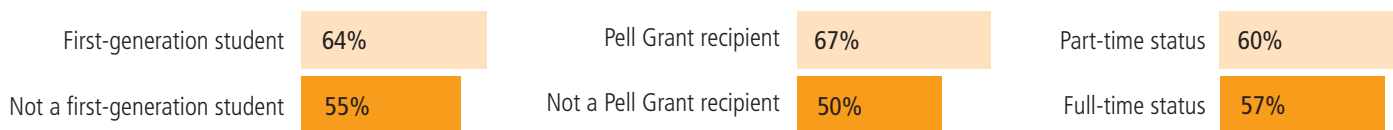


61% of two-year college students experience basic needs insecurity.

Basic needs security means that there is an ecosystem in place to ensure that students' basic needs are met.

Basic needs insecurity is a structural characteristic affecting students, not an individual characteristic. It means that there is not an ecosystem in place to ensure students' basic needs are met.

First-generation college students, Pell Grant recipients, and part-time students are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than their counterparts. The rate of basic needs insecurity is especially high (67%) among Pell Grant recipients when compared to the rate (50%) among students who are not Pell Grant recipients.



Three Primary Types of Basic Needs Insecurity

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger.

39%

of two-year college students experience food insecurity.

Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable and consistent place to live.

52%

of two-year college students experienced housing insecurity. The most common challenges for respondents were not being able to pay the full amount of their rent, mortgage or utility bills.

Homelessness means that a person does not have a fixed, regular and adequate place to live. This includes living in a shelter, temporarily with a friend or relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation.

14%

of two-year college students experienced homelessness. Most respondents experiencing homelessness — about one in 10 survey respondents overall — stayed in temporary accommodations or couch-surfed in the past year.

Source: The Hope Center, "#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic" (2021)

Recommendations for Supporting Students

Supporting students means implementing policies and practices that put the focus on their humanity, through direct service, institutionally based policies and programs and government regulations. Any change in, or development of, support for students must be forward-thinking, long-term and grounded in sound, evidence-based research.

The Hope Center provided the following recommendations on how colleges and universities can directly support students:



Create new or expand existing emergency aid programs: Many students remain unaware of existing emergency aid sources. Colleges can take direct steps to remedy that problem by making aid programs abundant, accessible and free of stress and stigma.



Discuss basic needs during enrollment: Proactively let potential students know that the institution has a culture of caring and supports students' basic needs. Use this culture to encourage enrollment.



Increase student awareness of available supports: By providing students with information about existing supports from day one, they will feel more empowered to seek support when and if they need it. Useful actions include adding a statement of care on class syllabi, posting information about available supports on the college's webpage and student portal, and collaborating with student organizations to promote a message of caring.



Destigmatize use of public benefits: Identify and target outreach to students who may be eligible for benefits before they need them. Normalize the conversation about access to SNAP and other public benefits, so that students feel comfortable seeking out support.



Gather data on basic needs: Monitor students' needs, access to supports and use of supports, and use the resulting data to better allocate resources, fundraise and engage policymakers.



Streamline student supports: Ensure students can make "one stop" when seeking out resources—and that seeking out support does not cause students who are experiencing basic needs insecurity even more stress. This will require collaboration between front-line staff and college leadership. It may also require establishing external partnerships with community-based organizations, community health centers and government agencies, all of which can provide non-academic supports that institutions struggle to provide on their own.

Source: The Hope Center, "#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic" (2021)

HIGHER EDUCATION

Supporting the Success of Student Populations

In this section, the support needs for four community college student populations are examined. For each population, think not only how resources can be leveraged or expanded to help these students meet their educational goals.



Student Population #1 – Students Enrolled Part-Time

Research provided by Achieving the Dream (ATD)

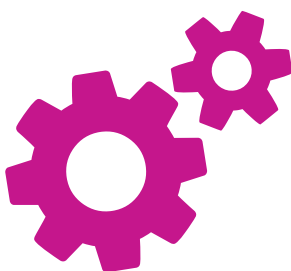
ATD is the national, nonprofit leader in championing evidence-based institutional improvement, and leads the most comprehensive non-governmental reform movement for student success in higher education history. ATD works with over 300 higher education institutions (including OTC), 75 coaches and advisors, and numerous investors and partners throughout the U.S. to improve the success rates of community college students.



Student Population #2 – Students Who are Single Mothers

Research provided by The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR)

IWPR is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that engages in research and its dissemination to shape public policy and improve the lives and opportunities of women from diverse backgrounds. IWPR conducted a comprehensive research study to estimate the economic costs and benefits at the state and national level of single mothers' pursuit and attainment of college degrees.



Student Population #3 – Students Who Work While Enrolled

Research provided by The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE)

CCSSE provides research services for community and technical colleges interested in improving educational quality through strengthened student engagement and student success (OTC participates in their Community College Survey of Student Engagement every 3-years). In 2020, CCSSE explored the intersection of working lives and academic lives for those entering community college as first-time students.



Student Population #4 – Students from Rural Communities

Research provided by MDRC and the Association of Community College Trustees (AACC)

Recognizing rural communities are often confronted with unique educational challenges, research from two organizations – MDRC, an intermediary bringing together public and private funders to test new policy-related ideas, and the AACC, a nonprofit educational organization of governing boards representing elected and appointed community college trustees – was utilized to explore how community colleges can improve educational attainment for rural students.

Supporting the Success of Students Enrolled Part-Time

Getting to Know Students Enrolled Part-Time:

As with other student populations community colleges serve, part-time students often face multiple challenges that present additional barriers to completion, including unfamiliarity with the college experience, parenthood and food/housing insecurity.



65% of community college students are enrolled part-time*



61% worry about having enough money to pay for school



75% work for pay while going to school



22% do not know how they will pay for college next semester



38% have dependents to care for



19% of fully part-time students complete within six years**



52% are both low-income and first-generation

*Students who are more likely to attend part-time are women, American Indian and other Native American, Hispanic or Latino, or Black or African American students, over the age of 25, low-income, or first-generation

**compared to 61% who remained enrolled full-time

Key Items to Consider:

Making colleges more accessible to part-time students could provide new opportunities for institutions to meet their broader mission of improving individual and economic outcomes throughout their service areas. Data shows there is not one solution to the challenges of serving part-time students – and there is much more to learn about the diverse experiences and needs of this population.

The following recommendations provide a starting point to better support part-time students:

- **Understand the Diversity of Experience and Needs of Your Part-Time Students**

While part-time students share many common experiences, such as working while enrolled, in order to best serve part-time students, an understanding of their diverse needs is required. Consider collecting data to answer questions in greater depth, such as percentage of part-time students who work over 20 hours a week, have multiple jobs, or have dependents to care for, as well as examining items such as how long do part-time students spend on campus and what periods of the day are they most likely to be on campuses, etc.


- **Use the Knowledge Acquired to Examine how Structures, Processes, and Culture Support or Hinder the Progress and Success of Part-Time Students**


Based on the deeper data collected about the experience and needs of the part-time student population, explore items such as clarifying time to degree expectations, rethinking how courses are offered and when, and how support services are designed and delivered.

Source: Achieving the Dream, "Equity in Design for HSS: Supporting the Success of Students Enrolled Part-Time" (2020)

Supporting the Success of Students who are Single Mothers

Getting to Know Students who are Single Mothers in Missouri:

 **25%** of community college students are parents, 40+% are single mothers

 **33%** of income is spent on child care, leading many to only attend part-time and incur debt

 **8%** of single mothers earn an associate or bachelor's degree within six years*

 **38%** of the day single mothers spend caring for children and other responsibilities

 **89%** of single mothers are low-income

*Compared with nearly half (49%) of women in college who are not mothers.

Single mothers in Missouri who graduate with an associate degree:

- Are **47%** less likely to live in poverty than a high school graduate
- Earn **\$216,962** more over their lifetime than those with only a high school education
- Save Missouri **\$21,857** in public assistance spending over their lifetime
- Contribute **\$57,284** more in lifetime taxes than a single mother with only a high school diploma
- See a **1,617%** return over their lifetime after graduating with an associate degree (In other words, for every dollar spent on earning an associate degree, single mothers get back **\$16.17**.)

Key Items to Consider:

To capitalize on the many benefits of single mothers' higher educational success, institutions should consider the following recommendations:

- Invest in supportive services – such as affordable, campus-based child care services, holistic case management, and programs that provide targeted support and information to students with children – that can help single mothers persist in and complete college.
- Remove obstacles to single mothers' educational progress in college policies, such as allowing makeups for absences due to child illness, and building campus environments that embrace and acknowledge student families.
- Inform students that child care is an allowable college expense that can be considered in calculating financial aid and assist them in applying for the dependent care allowance.
- Collect and report data on students' parent status and educational outcomes to inform the design and implementation of interventions to increase completion rates among student parents.

Source: The Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education in Missouri" (December 2019)

Supporting the Success of Students Who Work While Enrolled

Getting to Know Students who Work While Enrolled:

Of students who are entering community college for the first-time:



69%

work for pay, with 29% of those students working 40+ hours a week



64%

say it is equally important to them to be a student and be an employee



55%

of non-traditional age students (25+) work 40+ hours a week



36%

report working makes it difficult for them to take the courses they need



77%

are not currently working in the same field as their program of study



49%

have difficulty scheduling classes due to their work schedule



62%

of part-time students indicate they are enrolled part-time due to working*

*Compared to 28% of full-time students.

Key Items to Consider:

For most community college students, work and learning coexist. When faculty and staff talk with entering students about their work and help them find balance between their working lives and their academic lives, they are helping those students onto a path of being more successful.

Some helpful questions to consider are:

- In what ways is the college designed to serve students who work full-time or more?
- If part-time students and older students work more than other students, what types of additional supports and services might they need to ensure they have an equitable experience?
- How does the college consider students who work in matters of policy and practice, such as scheduling and course offerings?
- How does the college encourage faculty to be aware of its students who work?
- How does the college encourage and train advisors and other staff to talk with students about balancing work and school?

Source: Center for Community College Student Engagement, (2020). *The intersection of work and learning: Findings from entering students in community colleges*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy.

Supporting the Success of Students from Rural Communities

Getting to Know Students from Rural Communities:

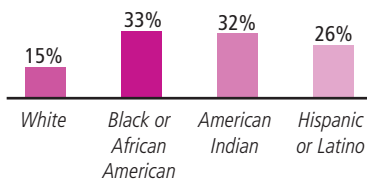
 **20%** of Americans live in rural areas of the country

 **28%** of rural adults have a college degree (compared to 41% of urban adults)

 **63%** of rural adults have internet at home (compared to 75% of urban adults)

 **20%** of rural America residents are people of color

 **44%** of military personnel come from rural areas



Poverty rates for rural people of color significantly exceed those of white rural residents

Key Items to Consider:

In many rural areas, a community college is the only nearby postsecondary institution. Additionally, while individuals stand to benefit from attending community college in numerous ways, there are several barriers that hinder them from enrolling in college that arise out of the rural environment itself, such as living a long distance from the nearest postsecondary institution, lack of reliable transportation, and unavailable or insufficient internet access.

Some best practice strategies to consider include:

- **Partner with high schools to encourage students to go to college**
Enrolling in dual enrollment courses during high school may also strengthen students' connections to their local community colleges. Additionally, introducing the importance of postsecondary education at a younger age (before finishing high school) can help students consider college as a route to achieving their personal and career goals.
- **Ensure students have access to all available resources**
Explore "one-stop centers" designed to connect students with community resources, which in turn can help students maximize their financial aid award.
- **Bring the college closer to students' home and work**
Providing remote classroom or online course options helps students who have transportation barriers, or work and family responsibilities, that may prevent them from traveling to a main campus.
- **Connect students to the internet**
To help students with inadequate broadband service, explore alternatives to help students connect — from providing hot spots, to encouraging use of technology at campuses and centers, making courses mobile-friendly, and listing required technology in the course syllabus, along with available resources to acquire the necessarily technology.

Source: MDRC, "Rural Higher Education Realities and Opportunities" (2020).

Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), "The Rural Male in Higher Education: How Community Colleges Can Improve Educational and Economic Outcomes for Rural Men" (2020).

ECONOMY & WORKFORCE

Opportunity America, a nonprofit promoting economic mobility — work, skills, careers, ownership and entrepreneurship for poor and working Americans — partnered with 22 educators and education policy experts to outline a strategy for community colleges to increase their role as the nation’s premier provider of workforce education.

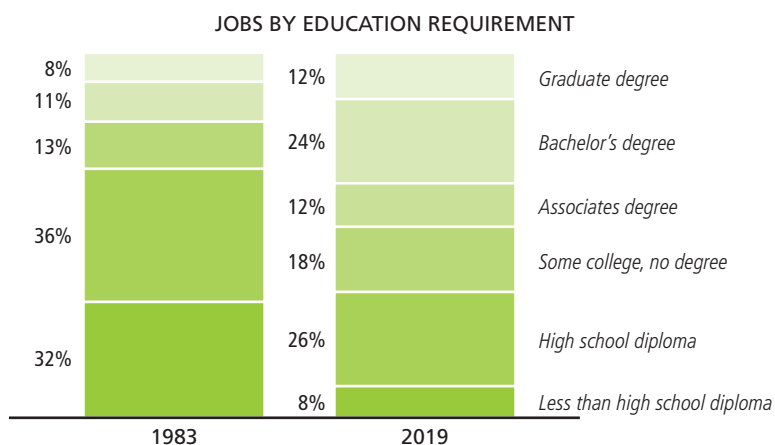
Current Observations of Community College Workforce Education

1. COVID is hastening the arrival of what was once called the “future of work.”

Automation and artificial intelligence are transforming the workplace, requiring more sophisticated skills – technical skills but also problem solving, creativity, communication and teamwork – from a larger and larger segment of the workforce.

Two-thirds of all jobs require some postsecondary education or training.

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

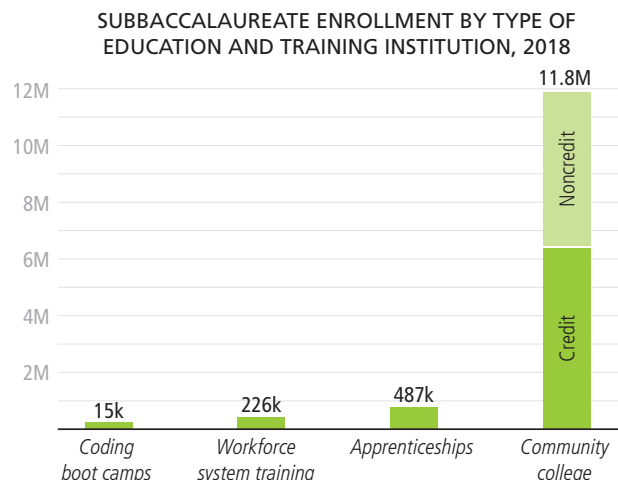


2. Many community colleges already put a premium on career-focused education and training.

They have a long track record of innovating quickly and nimbly to meet the needs of learners and employers. And only community colleges have the infrastructure – size, reach and training resources – to provide upskilling on the scale that will be needed for a robust recovery.

Most career-focused learners attend community college.

Sources: Course Report, August 2019; US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, March 2020; US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2019; and American Association of Community Colleges, 2020.



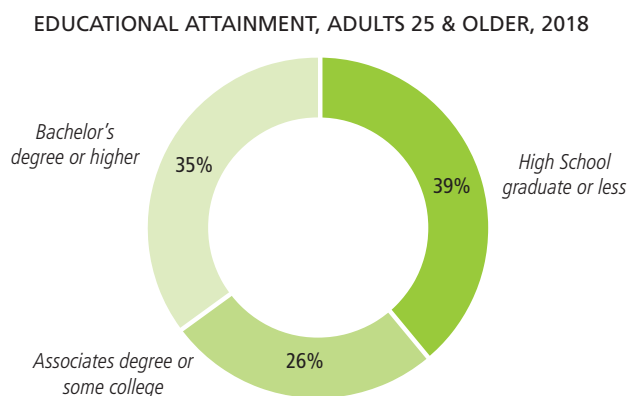
3. The promise of equal opportunity hinges on access to postsecondary education including, for many, job-focused career and technical education.

Community colleges need to focus on workforce skills and rethink what and how they teach to better serve midcareer adult learners. Programs will be offered in collaboration with local employers who stand ready to hire graduates.

Only 35% of American adults have bachelor’s degrees.

Source: 2018 Current Population Survey.

Source: Opportunity America, “The Indispensable Institution – Reimagining Community College” (2020)



Community Colleges Find a New Way Forward

In the wake of a crisis, community colleges have an opportunity to embrace a new, more ambitious role — to accept and champion that they are the nation’s primary provider of job-focused education and training.

Opportunity America developed the following recommendations for community colleges to meet this challenge:



1. Rooted in the Local Labor Market

Programs, credentials and strategic initiatives should be geared to regional workforce needs. The primary goal for most learners: not credentials for credentials’ sake, but employment and, ultimately, economic mobility — leaving the college well-prepared for a high-demand, high-paying job.



2. Midcareer Adults

What older students often want from college are short-form, applied courses designed to help them get a job or a better job in the near term. Community colleges seeking to attract older learners should offer more classes, credit and noncredit, in the evenings and on weekends. Whenever possible, programs should be offered in partnership with employers who help design the content and stand ready to hire graduates.



3. Engaging Employers

Employers need to offer honest, actionable feedback. Educators need to listen and act on it, and when they do — when they produce well-trained, job-ready graduates — local companies should be prepared to hire them.



4. Academic and Technical Skills

Learners need grounding in two crucial, complementary realms: foundational skills and career-focused competencies. Foundational skills start with critical thinking, problem solving, communication, creativity and basic research techniques. Essential job-focused competencies — essential for all students — include workplace communication, applied math, teamwork, time management, data analytics and the rudiments of coding. The best community college programs braid both kinds of learning, helping students advance along both fronts.



5. Work-based Learning

All community college students, traditional college-age and older, should have an opportunity for work-based learning — an internship, an apprenticeship, a co-op job, time at a simulated worksite or other similar experience.

Source: Opportunity America, “The Indispensable Institution — Reimagining Community College” (2020)



6. Job Placement

What's needed at the college: a dedicated employer outreach office, additional resources for placement staff, more robust career services, better coordination between curriculum and the labor needs of local employers.



7. Integrating Credit and Noncredit Education

Both credit and noncredit divisions bring distinct advantages to preparing learners. Credit and noncredit divisions have much to learn from each other, and learners should be able to move easily between credit and noncredit programs.



8. Credentials of Value

Every credential earned at a community college, including the traditional, academic associates of arts degree, should be designed to have value in the labor market.



9. Student Navigation and Supports

Students, traditional college-age and older, need better labor market information. No working adult returning to the classroom should have to retake courses or relearn skills, and they should receive college credit for any relevant learning acquired on the job.



10. Movement Toward a Single Public Workforce System

A globally competitive United States cannot afford two overlapping, duplicative job training networks: community colleges and the public workforce system. Community colleges and local workforce boards seeking to cooperate more closely can start with small, practical steps: colocation, combining staff and sharing labor market information.

Ozark Region

The Ozark Region is comprised of seven counties, including Greene County. The top industry is health care and social assistance, which accounts for 17% of the region's employment. The average annual wage for all industries in the Ozark Region is \$39,463.

The Ozark region is projected to have almost 36,000 annual job openings through 2028, with the vast majority (96%) of openings in the A, B, and C grade occupations. In general, higher graded occupations earn more and have higher growth rates.

Annual Job Openings and Wages by Career Grades

Grade A 4,786 Job Openings \$63,737 Average Wage	Grade B 21,246 Job Openings \$39,830 Average Wage	Grade C 8,443 Job Openings \$31,573 Average Wage
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Top Outlook Occupation Groups

Major Occupation Group	Total Openings	A & B Openings	A/B Concentration
Health Care Support	1,079	1,079	100%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	1,617	1,610	100%
Management	1,141	1,135	99%
Health Care Practitioners and Technical	1,522	1,507	99%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	5,048	4,675	93%
Personal Care and Service	2,461	2,279	93%
Construction and Extraction	1,161	1,059	91%
Community and Social Service	596	537	90%
Business and Financial Operations	1,011	892	88%
Computer and Mathematical	468	407	87%
Education, Training, and Library	1,160	1,006	87%
Transportation and Material Moving	2,720	2,023	74%
Protective Services	513	345	67%
Sales and Related	4,466	2,689	60%
Office and Administrative Support	4,896	2,809	57%

Source: Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC), "Ozark Region Missouri Career Grades" (2020)

Missouri Workforce 2020 Employer Survey Report

For the second consecutive year, Missouri has conducted a survey asking questions about the workforce from a representative sample of Missouri's employers. Nearly 700 Missouri companies, with five employees or more, were surveyed between July 13 and September 11, 2020, to gauge the state of the workforce from the employers' point of view.

Key highlights:



Employers are optimistic about employment levels in the coming year.

- 56% expect staffing levels to remain the same as last year.
- 33% plan to expand employment over the next 12 months, with 64% planning to hire new full-time employees.



Employers continue to face barriers to expanding employment.

- 46% report a shortage of workers with knowledge or skills is the largest barrier to expanding employment.



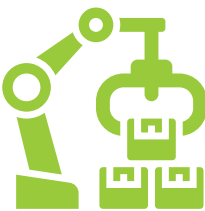
Skills and education are crucial components of the workforce.

- 58% have jobs requiring middle-skill education (defined as education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree).



The largest shortages statewide are in the skilled trades and patient care functional groups.

- 60% report a shortage of skilled trade applicants.
- 49% report a shortage of patient care skilled applicants.
- 40% report a shortage of manufacturing/maintenance skilled applicants.



Some businesses are planning to automate processes and incorporate new technologies into their businesses, indicating a possible need for upskilling to operate new equipment or processes.

- 27% report they are very likely to automate processes.
- 26% will require retraining of existing employees.
- 23% report new automation added to existing parts of the business.



Justice-involved individuals represent a potential workforce for employers, but may have a difficult time securing employment.

- 20% state that they would not consider hiring an applicant convicted of a felony offense who had completed their sentence and/or probation, up significantly from less than one percent in 2019.

Source: Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC), "Missouri Workforce 2020 Employer Survey" (2020)

PUBLIC POLICY

OTC's Legislative Priorities for 2021



Priority 1: Higher Education Equity Funding

\$30 million for community colleges

Recommendation:

OTC is the lowest funded community college in Missouri. Adding \$30 million to Missouri's community college core funding would result in approximately \$8.5 million each year for OTC. More than \$30 million was added to the four-year universities' core in 2019, with no increase for community colleges. Core appropriation cuts in 2020 worsened this inequity. This recommendation would restore those cuts and help bring the sectors back into balance.

The new funding would allow OTC to provide on-site advising support for high schools, particularly in rural districts, and dramatically increase the number of students who graduate. It would also benefit all community colleges and support improved workforce development across the state.



Priority 2: Workforce Training

Invest in Robert W. Plaster Center for Advanced Manufacturing

Recommendation:

In 2019, OTC received \$4.75 million toward the Robert W. Plaster Center for Advanced Manufacturing (PMC) project on the Springfield campus. This was the first half of a \$10 million ask. In 2021, OTC requests the remaining \$5.25 million for PMC. OTC has secured \$5.25 million in private support for the project and requests a matching appropriation for the capital project.

PMC will serve as the pilot for Missouri's recommended center of excellence model for workforce training, making Missouri the regional leader in training for this industry. The project, scheduled to open in the fall of 2022, will provide training for students in high-demand fields like mechatronics, robotics and precision manufacturing.



Priority 3: A+ Funding

Keep the A+ promise to Missouri's high school students

Recommendation:

The A+ program provides Missouri's high schools with a critical incentive to encourage attendance, volunteerism, and strong academic performance for all students. It provides each Missouri high school graduate, particularly those from middle class families who are typically not eligible for other financial aid programs, with an affordable path toward a college degree. OTC requests supplemental appropriations be adopted to fund A+ at the level originally requested by the Governor in 2020, and funding for requested increases in 2021.

Research from the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development shows that the A+ program significantly increases retention and graduation rates for students from all financial backgrounds. As one of the state's leading destinations for A+ students, OTC sees these improved results for over 2,000 students each year.

Source: OTC Office of Research & Governmental Affairs

TECHNOLOGY

Online Isn't Optional

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan nonprofit research and advocacy organization committed to promoting access and success in higher education. In May 2021, IHEP shared polling data outlining which students are facing the gravest technological challenges, including the lack of reliable internet connection and the need to share devices with others in their household, both of which limit their ability to consistently participate in higher education.

Key Findings:



While most students report sufficient internet access, many have difficulty connecting to courses

- 24% of students report having difficulty connecting to course content because of internet issues.
- 31% of students with a household income <\$50,000 report having issues with internet connectivity, highlighting a lack of reliable high-speed internet disproportionately burdening these students.



Internet costs can strain student budgets

- 54% of all students, and 72% of students who care for dependents, report internet affordability is a somewhat or very significant challenge for them.



Access to devices can impact academic engagement.

- A majority of students access online course content on their laptop; however, 13% of Black or African American students primarily use a tablet or cell phone to complete coursework, compared to 8% of all college students.
- Accessing course content only through a cell phone or tablet may negatively impact students' ability to fully engage in their education, particularly if learning management systems are not mobile-optimized.
- Sharing devices within households was also a common practice among respondents, meaning students may not always be able to use their devices when they need to access course content.

Source: IHEP, "Online Isn't Optional: Student Polling on Access to Internet and Devices" (2021)

Expanding Broadband and Device Access for Students

IHEP's findings highlight the importance of expanding access to high-speed internet and ensuring students have access to adequate devices to engage fully in their learning. Trouble accessing the internet and connecting to coursework, reliance on tablets or mobile phones, and the need to share devices with others are all more common among students from low-income households and those who are Black or Latino.

Three recommendations to expand broadband and device access include:



Acknowledge Technology as a Postsecondary Education Necessity by Accounting for it in Financial Aid and Cost of Attendance

- As colleges and universities continue to offer hybrid and online classes, and as students continue to need access to learning resources, ways to connect with faculty and staff, and means to submit coursework online, it is critical that all students be able to access the necessary technology.
- Colleges and universities should continue to assess connectivity expenses when determining students' financial need and awarding institutional aid.



Collect Data and Publish Regular Updates – Disaggregated by Race, Income, and Geographic Location – to Understand Student Access to Reliable Internet and Technology

- Institutions should regularly assess the technology needs of their students through routine surveys and analysis of student requests, and use of Wi-Fi hotspots, loaner laptops, rental technology and computer labs. They should use supplemental surveys or touchpoints during times of educational disruptions and shifts to remote learning.



Strengthen Broadband and Technology Support for Students, Including by Leveraging Federal Resources

- Institutional leaders should continue to build or strengthen sustainable connectivity assistance for students. This should include developing and/or making permanent in-kind support services, such as technology loaner programs or Wi-Fi hotspots, so students can attend classes, contact staff and faculty, and study on and off campus.
- Institutions should bolster and improve on-campus resources, like open computer labs in buildings and at hours that are accessible for all students, including part-time students, commuter students, and students who work, parent and caretake. They should also consider providing emergency grants to students who face financial barriers to broadband and technology access.
- Finally, institutions should clearly communicate these benefits and resources to students in admissions and orientation materials, during required and supplemental advising appointments, on course syllabi and on institutional websites.

Source: IHEP, "Online Isn't Optional: Student Polling on Access to Internet and Devices" (2021)

**OZARKS TECHNICAL
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