

School Enrollment Trends among Displaced Workers: 1995-2010

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Background

The increasing demand for a more highly educated workforce (Goldin and Katz, 2008) coupled with an increase in the individualization of the life course leads to the expectation that more adults will pursue additional education and training in the face of unemployment.

As nontraditionally-aged college attendance has become more common, displaced workers may be less and less hesitant to enroll in school later in life, especially within the context of an increasing return to human capital.

In addition to these changes in demand for human capital and variability in life course trajectories, Turner (1976) argues that modern times in the U.S. have led to a shift in self-conceptualization that is less institutionally defined and increasingly defined by impulse and self-gratification. If this is the case, I expect displaced adult workers to feel more inclined to take advantage of their circumstances and enroll in school to pursue intrinsic returns to education.

An aggregate shift from institutionally centered locus of self to an individually centered locus of self also suggests that displaced workers may be less actively pursuing fulltime employment once they enroll in schooling and/or less inclined to take a fulltime job as soon as one should become available.

Data and Hypotheses

I use IPUMS-CPS data from 1995 to 2010 to analyze trends in adult college enrollment. Additionally, I attempt to identify college enrollment among workers who report involuntary loss of their most recent job.

Based on changes in the acceptance of non-normative sequences of life course transitions, increasing economic returns to education, and how we prioritize institutional roles and self-discovery. **I expect to find:**

- an increasing percentage of job losers who enroll in college or vocational training
- a decreased commitment to finding work among job losers attending college as indicated by a less active job search and a decline in the proportion who are available for work*

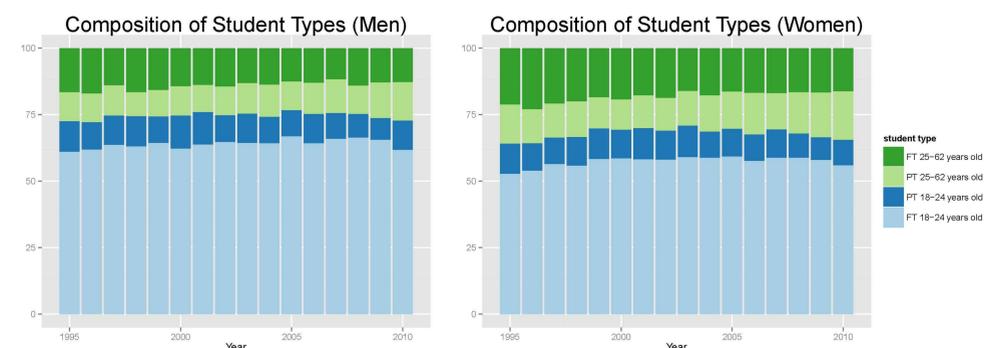
Key CPS items used in the analysis include:

- Current school enrollment status → **enrolled college level**
- Reason for unemployment → **Job loser; temporary job ended**
- Main reason not looking for work → **Believes no work; couldn't find work; lacks schooling**

I consider differences in trends for men and women separately.

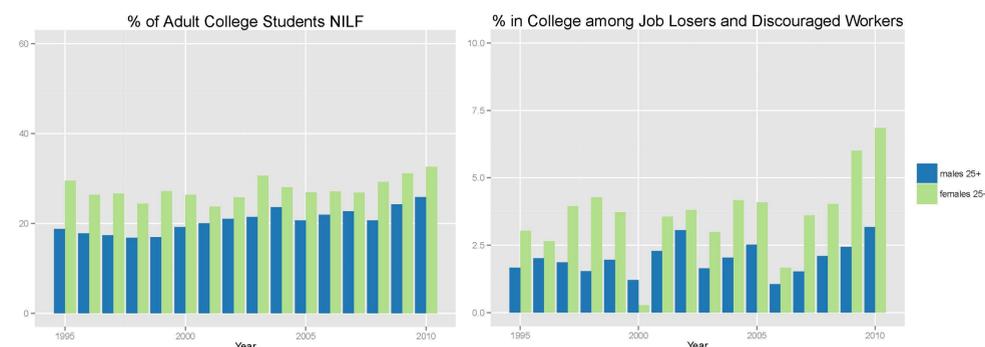
*In progress

Adults in College



CPS data indicate a steady trend in the composition of the college population from 1995-2010. Traditional-age students (18-24 years old) make up nearly three-quarters of the male college population and 60-70% of the female college population. Students ages 25-62 years old are more likely to be part time.

Job Losers and Non-Lookers in College



Among male college students over the age of 24 there has been a slight increase in the proportion not in the labor force over the years. This could indicate these students are increasingly prioritizing their educational pursuits over work, or perhaps, they are increasingly discouraged by the poor labor outlook and stop looking for work while they are in school. The proportion of women students over the age of 24 who are not in the labor force has remained around 30% from 1995-2010.

When considering the share of people who are unemployed following job loss or believe there is no work out there, the proportion enrolled in school has increased among both men and women.

Industries and Occupations Enrolling after Job Loss

From 1995 to 2006, people losing jobs in **construction, restaurants and food services, and other recreational industries** represented the modal industries among job losers enrolling in college (a combined 22% of job losers and discouraged workers enrolling in college came from these industries). From 2007 to 2010, these industries were still well represented among enrollees as were **hospitals and schools** (combined 25%).

Job losers and discouraged workers enrolling in college between 1995 and 2010 represent a range of occupations. From 1995-2006, the most common previous occupations among those enrolling in college were low or semi-skilled, including waiters and waitresses, cashiers, and construction laborers. From 2007 to 2010, individuals losing jobs in **more highly skilled occupations** enrolled in college, including licensed practical nurses, elementary and middle school teachers, and first-line managers.

These trends parallel broad patterns in overall job loss during the recent recession.

Discussion and Next Steps

Current Population Survey data are useful for identifying national trends across time. Here, data from the October supplemental surveys on school enrollment indicate less of an increase in enrollment among nontraditionally-aged college students than popular discourse leads us to believe. The same holds when we include vocational training in the analysis. Older students do not appear to represent an increasing proportion of the college-going population.

When we consider the rate at which unemployed and discouraged workers over the age of 24 enroll in college, we see a **steady increase** (particularly among women) from 1995-2010. The effect of the recent recession can be seen in the types of workers we see enrolling in college after job loss.

I plan to utilize CPS items that ask about work-search activities and availability to accept fulltime work. I expect to find that individuals enrolled in school will be increasingly less active in looking for work and, increasingly unavailable/unwilling to take fulltime work, if offered.

I also plan to take a closer look at the demographic characteristics of who returns to school after job loss or worker discouragement, such as marital status, prior education and children.

Acknowledgements

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Goldin, C. D., & Katz, L. F. (2009). *The race between education and technology*. Harvard University Press.