

## SSCC provides outreach for students juggling work, families

Are you a college student trying to juggle the demands of work and family? You're in good company. Approximately 84 percent of the total number of students enrolled in college classes nationwide are adult learners, with families and jobs.

To meet the needs of this growing student population, colleges have reinvented the entire education process, including admissions and enrollment procedures. The Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) at Southern State Community College is a part of this outreach to adult learners.

The EOC helps first-generation, low-income adults enter or re-enter college by offering a comprehensive counseling and referral program providing free academic, vocational, career and financial aid information to eligible adults.

"The best way to land on your feet in a constantly changing job market is to keep upgrading your education and your skills," said Ed Huck, EOC Coordinator at Southern State. "With a college degree, you will be more open to new job opportunities, and more able to transfer your knowledge from one career sector to another. With every college degree you earn, your potential earnings rise. With every year of college you complete, your career options increase, along with your opportunities for promotion."

The EOC provides counseling and information on college admissions to qualified adults who want to enter or continue a program of postsecondary education. The program also provides services to improve the financial and economic literacy of participants.

"An important objective of the EOC is to counsel participants on financial aid options, including basic financial planning skills, and to assist in the application process," Ed explained. "The goal of the EOC is to increase the number of adult participants who enroll in postsecondary education institutions."

U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that employees with an associate degree earn 19 percent more than those with a high school diploma alone, employees with a bachelor's degree earn 62 percent more, and those with a master's degree earn almost double the pay.

Additionally, the chances of being unemployed are much lower for workers with a college degree than for those with a high school diploma alone, probably due to the greater ability to transfer knowledge and skills at the college level.

Even more dramatic is the difference between the poverty rates of the families of college graduates and the families of high school graduates, particularly in families headed by single mothers. In 2005, families of workers with only a high school diploma were three times more likely to fall into poverty than families of workers holding a college degree.

The cost of attending college is another concern for non-traditional students, who often work and have family and community responsibilities.

"With rising college costs and all the expenditures associated with that, there is a great need for student aid," said Huck. "The EOC exists to find ways to economically assist -- to get that student through school without wrecking the family budget."

Most aid comes from filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). To qualify for federal aid, the student must be seeking a qualifying certificate or enrolled in a degree program, and have a financial basis for that need.

Studies show that fear of the process is one of the major factors that keep adults from pursuing higher education.

"Many adults find the idea of going to college very intimidating, even frightening," said Huck. "Adults may feel overwhelmed by all the different things they have to do to get admitted, or they may even have doubts about their ability to succeed in college. Those feelings are common to all beginning students, regardless of age,

gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The good news is that there are things students can do to prepare for school and lessen that anxiety. And, the EOC exists to assist in that process.”

Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s TRIO program, the EOC is a comprehensive counseling and referral program providing free academic, vocational, career and financial aid information to eligible adults (age 19 and above) in the 29-county Appalachian Ohio area.

Those seeking additional information on EOC services may contact Ed Huck at Southern State Community College by calling 1-800-628-7722, ext. 3514, or emailing ehuck@sscc.edu.

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