

'Time poverty' can keep college students from graduating—especially if they have jobs or children to care for

August 23 2024, by Claire Wladis



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Many college students don't have enough time for their studies. This "[time poverty](#)," as we call it, is often due to inadequate child care access or the need to work to pay for college and living expenses.

In an effort to understand how much time poverty affects student outcomes, we surveyed more than 41,000 U.S. college students. We found that the more time poverty, the greater the chances of a student [earning fewer credits or dropping out](#). This is especially true for Black and Hispanic students and for women, who have [significantly less time for college](#) compared with their peers, largely due to time spent on their jobs and caring for children.

Our research describes how differences in time available for college are [often the result of structural inequities](#) in [higher education](#), such as insufficient financial aid for students who have children or who have to work to pay the bills.

Why it matters

Time poverty explains major differences in student outcomes. In one study, students who dropped out of college had on average [nine fewer hours per week available for college](#) than those who did not drop out. And students who earned over 12 credits in a term had on average 18 more hours per week available for college than students who earned only six credits or less. Thus, student outcomes are highly correlated with available time for academics.

Often, there are [gaps in college credit attainment](#) between students from different racial or ethnic groups or by gender. However, those gaps shrink significantly—or disappear altogether—when we compare students with similar time available for college. This shows just how important time is as a resource for finishing a college degree.

Time poverty also leads to overwork, which can cause burnout. For example, Black women had the [least time for college of any group](#). Compared with the group with the most time—Asian and Pacific Islander men—Black women had on average 24 fewer hours per week to devote to their studies. However, both groups spent the same amount of time on college.

How is this possible?

Black, Hispanic and women students [sacrificed an even greater proportion of their free time](#)—time left over after paid work, housework and child care—on college than their peers. The average total time Black women spent on college as well as paid and [unpaid work](#) was 75 hours per week, or equivalent to more than two full-time jobs.

Our findings show that this holds true for all students. On average, the more time-poor they are, the more free time they sacrifice for their studies.

This sacrifice comes at a cost: Students must give up time spent on sleep, meals, [health care](#), leisure and exercise to make time for college. This is particularly worrisome because overwork has been linked to [negative impacts on mental](#) and [physical health](#).

In prior research, my colleagues and I have also found that [students who are parents—particularly mothers](#)—and [students who choose to take online courses](#) have less time available for college than their peers. This explains differences in academic outcomes. Time poverty affects students from many different groups, yet existing college policies, practices and structures rarely take it into account.

What's next?

Even though [nearly 1 in 4 current undergraduates have children](#), the availability of on-campus child care has been [shrinking for decades](#), and [child care](#) costs are [not automatically included](#) in financial aid. Student-parents also have to work extra hours to pay for their children's living expenses, which are [not covered by federal financial aid](#).

Even for students without children, financial aid rarely covers actual expenses. Federal financial need calculations often [underestimate actual need](#), especially for students with lower socioeconomic status or more family responsibilities. Current federal financial aid meets the needs of only [35.7% of U.S. undergraduates](#). Accordingly, most U.S. students have to work to pay for college, taking away time that would likely be better spent studying.

Providing students with enough financial aid to enroll in college, but not enough to complete college, is counterproductive. Providing students with enough time—and thus money—for college is therefore not only a sound investment but also critical to honoring the values of fairness and opportunity for all.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: 'Time poverty' can keep college students from graduating—especially if they have jobs or children to care for (2024, August 23) retrieved 25 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-08-poverty-college-students-jobs-children.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.