

# Financial Insecurity and Time Poverty Among Modern Learners

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Fletcher, C. (2024). Financial Insecurity and Time Poverty Among Modern Learners. Trellis Strategies.

## Modern Learners

Modern learners, sometimes referred to as adult learners, are typically defined as college students aged 25 and older. These students are more likely to face particular barriers to their success, such as work and family responsibilities, compared to their younger peers.<sup>1,2</sup> Financial stress and reduced time to dedicate to academics can threaten their academic success. The latest data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center show that students who start college after age 24 have lower graduation rates than their peers who enrolled at a younger age.<sup>3</sup> This brief will discuss findings from Trellis' Fall 2023 Student Financial Wellness Survey that demonstrate these financial insecurities and time constraints for modern learners.

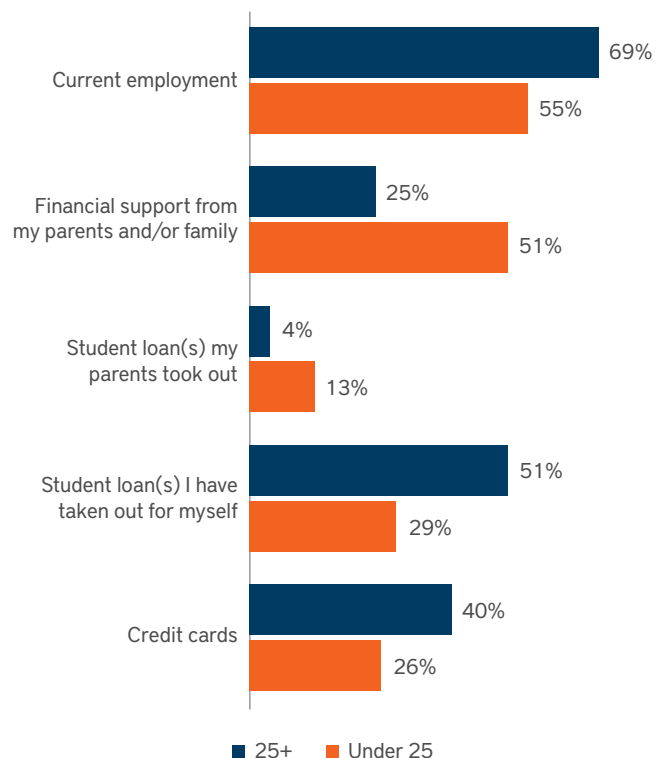
## Financial Insecurity

More than three-quarters of students aged 25 and older reported experiencing financial difficulties while enrolled, compared to two-thirds of their younger peers. Additionally, higher percentages of modern learners said they would have trouble getting \$500 in cash or credit in case of an emergency. Modern learners were also less likely to have access to financial support from family. Students aged 25 and older were more often used income from work, student loans, and credit cards to help pay for school, and less often received financial assistance from family, compared to younger students.

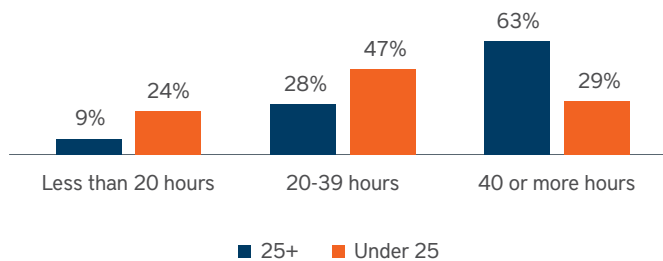
Modern learners were more likely to have had low or very low food security, had housing insecurity, or experienced homelessness compared to students younger than 25. Forty-one percent of modern learners reported receiving some form of public assistance in 2023 compared to 25 percent of younger students. Additionally, students aged 25 and older were less likely than their younger peers to say their school had the support services to help them address their financial situation.



**Q20-28: Do you use any of the following methods to pay for college? Respondents who answered 'Yes'**



**Q126: During the school year, about how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week working for pay? (of respondents who reported they work for pay)**



## Time Poverty

Much higher percentages of modern learners were parents, and higher percentages reported financially supporting children, spouses, parents, or other family members. Seventy percent of students aged 25 and older said it was important that they financially support their family while in college, compared to just 34 percent of younger students.

Nearly three-quarters of modern learners reported working while enrolled, and, among those who worked, 63 percent reported working 40 or more hours per week. Balancing

school, work, and family can be very challenging and can sometimes mean placing school at a lower priority. A majority of students aged 25 and older—62 percent—think of themselves as workers who go to school, rather than students who work. Conversely, only 24 percent of younger students consider themselves to be workers first. When the student persona is a lower priority, it may be more difficult to focus on academics and persist to graduation.

## Conclusion

Whether to advance or change careers, earn a higher salary, improve job security or a myriad of other reasons, higher education can expand opportunities for those who earn a credential. Modern learners are more likely to experience financial insecurity and time poverty while enrolled compared to their younger peers, potentially leading to reduced graduation rates. Acknowledgement of these unique personas is essential to providing targeted support to help these learners achieve success.

<sup>1</sup> Tuset, M. (2022). Overcoming Barriers for Adult Learners. CAEL. <https://www.cael.org/resouces/pathways-blog/overcoming-barriers-for-adult-learners>.

<sup>2</sup> University of Texas at Austin (2023). How Can Mature Students Overcome the Barriers They Currently Face? <https://sites.utexas.edu/discovery/2023/06/17/how-can-mature-students-overcome-the-barriers-they-currently-face/>.

<sup>3</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2023). Completing College: National and State Reports with Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates Dashboards. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/completing-college/>.

## About Trellis Strategies

Trellis Strategies is a leading strategic nonprofit research and consulting firm focused on advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce. Our commitment is to provide unparalleled insights into the modern learner experience, spanning from application through graduation. Leveraging over four decades of experience in serving higher education institutions and assisting students in navigating intricate processes, Trellis Strategies' dedicated team possesses the knowledge, insight, and expertise to empower organizations to turn data into impactful action and tangible results.

We are dedicated to the belief that education serves as the cornerstone for unlocking new opportunities, fostering individual economic mobility, and growing community prosperity. For more information, visit our website: [www.trellisstrategies.org/about-us/](http://www.trellisstrategies.org/about-us/)

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