

The Challenge: College Wasn't Built For Today's Student

Imagine you don't have a bachelor's degree and decide to enroll in college while nothing else in your life changes. Perhaps college was an old dream you never gave up on, or maybe you want to learn a new set of skills. **You might need a credential for a better job, because bachelor's degree holders earn 74% more than those with only a high school diploma².**

But you also have a family and a full-time job. Where would school fit in your schedule, and what would you need to sacrifice to make it all work?

A Structural Challenge

While college students are often thought of as 18 and living on campus at a four-year university, that is no longer the norm. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 74% of college students are now post-traditional, meaning they have at least one of seven indicators, including:

Works full-time	Enrolled part-time	Dependents other than a spouse
Single parent	Financially independent	Delayed college enrollment

These students stand to benefit immensely from the economic mobility afforded by a degree, but they are often the least likely to graduate. Post-traditional students might work two part-time jobs in the service industry with changing shifts that preclude regular class attendance; they might have a good job and kids in middle school without time to spare; or they might be 18 and working full-time to support their parents who recently immigrated as refugees.

Community college is where these students most often enroll part-time, yet only 17% ever graduate³. **This has led to 45 million Americans who started college and have not yet earned a degree,⁴ representing over a quarter of the American labor market.**


The reason is simple: college wasn't built for today's student. The varying responsibilities of post-traditional students don't fit within the fixed structure and rigid pacing of higher education.

The Broader Issue

As a result of the structural challenges post-traditional students face, higher education no longer reliably provides a path to the middle class. Tuition has skyrocketed, student loan debt has reached \$1.4 trillion, and employers aren't sure graduates have the needed skills. At the same time, the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce reports that 95% of jobs created since 2008 require a degree.


Without addressing the structural challenge of credit hours and semesters, colleges cannot offer the needed flexibility or support that post-traditional students need to graduate.

74%



of college students
are now **post-traditional**

45M



Americans have some
college and **no degree**

² Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose, Ban Cheah, "The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, and Lifetime Earnings," Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, August 2011, <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/the-college-payoff/>

³ "Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Completion Rates - Fall 2012 Cohort," National Student Clearinghouse Research, March 2019, https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/NSCSignatureReport16_StateSupp.pdf






⁴ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey Data, 2013-2017 5 year estimates, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_S1501&prodType=table



PelotonU’s Solution: Flexibility & Support

Post-traditional students need a new college experience: one that offers both the flexibility to fit school alongside competing responsibilities and the support to ensure students can navigate unexpected obstacles until graduation.

THE PELOTONU MODEL

Flexibility	Support
 Competency-Based Education	  Coaching  Community  Care

Flexibility

Flexibility is uniquely provided by an emerging pedagogical approach called competency-based education⁵.

Competency-Based Education. Delivered online, this model offers flexibly-paced coursework, project-based assessments, employer-aligned curriculum, and affordable tuition, thus allowing class to fit around a students’ schedule.

This is a ground-breaking and affordable delivery modality, and yet like many efforts that have come before, CBE has struggled to deliver hoped-for increases in persistence and time-to-degree. That’s because online education can only go so far - it’s an important but often insufficient part of learning. In self-paced courses, students still struggle when juggling competing responsibilities.

Support

Support is what PelotonU offers alongside CBE for a complete solution. We spent the past six years refining our program to provide the right structure so students can earn their degree.

Coaching. We pair students with a trained educator who meets with them in-person each week to provide encouragement and accountability⁶. The early months prepare students academically, logistically and emotionally; over time, the coach tailors her support to each student’s needs.

Community. We operate study spaces on nights and weekends so students have a space to focus on school without the demands of home or work to distract them. While there, they meet with tutors, use computers and other academic resources, and study alongside peers.

Care. We mitigate common obstacles by offering specific academic resources and through partnerships with social service providers to address secondary barriers like childcare, financial aid, or access to mental health counseling.

Taken together, high-quality CBE and our coaching program provide the flexibility and support needed to address the structural challenges post-traditional learners face when pursuing a college education.

More than that, the PelotonU model is versatile. In Austin, it has worked for parents, recent immigrants, 18 year olds, and shift-workers. Beyond Austin, practitioners in Boston, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Chicago, and South Texas operate similar programs tailored to their communities’ needs.

Like a trainer at a gym, we all need folks to help us do hard things, especially when we begin.

⁵ Stephanie Malia Krauss, “How Competency-Based Education May Help Reduce Our Nation’s Toughest Inequities,” Lumina Foundation, October 2017, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/how-cbe-may-reduce-inequities-1.pdf>

⁶ Gloria Grisp and Irene Cruz, “Mentoring College Students: A Critical Review of the Literature Between 1990-2007,” Research in Higher Education, 50, no. 6, (September 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-009-9130-2>



“I was crying within the first conversation because it was the first person who had ever said, ‘We’re here to help you.’ I was just so relieved because no one had ever offered to genuinely help me like that.”

Cori McCorkle, PelotonU Student



Demonstrated Impact

Not only does this approach effectively address the logistical and personal needs of students, it goes a step further by delivering high-quality outcomes for students who traditionally struggle in college. **Most of the 180 students served thus far by PelotonU mirror the national characteristics of post-traditional students:**

82%

will be the first college graduate in their family

\$23,640

is the average starting income

55%

have tried college before

88%

are students of color

29

is the average age

42%

are parents

Student Outcomes

PelotonU has seen 55 degrees earned while demonstrating best-in-class results over five years, six coaches, and two Austin study spaces. **These results include:**

78%

Persistence rate for students studying with PelotonU.

90%

on time to earn a Bachelor's degree in 6 years for students studying with PelotonU. What's more, 52 of our 55 degree earners graduated in 100% time or faster

\$18,324

average wage gain for PelotonU Bachelor's degree earners. AA graduates through PelotonU see their income increase \$10,479 on average. Overall, we have seen 124 pay raises, promotions, or career-aligned job changes across 56 students

Compared to

33%

Persistence rate for part-time students in Texas.⁷

Compared to

52%

on time to earn a Bachelor's degree in 6 years for public four-year universities in Texas

Because the students we serve all work full-time, they have limited options for earning their degree, typically: a community college part-time, an online university full-time, or no further education. Far too many students who stopped out of college before graduation feel stuck with this last option, especially after reflecting on the time and financial costs of their alternatives.

	PelotonU	2-Year Public College	University of Phoenix
150% Graduation ⁸	90%	11%	14%
Average Net Price ⁹	\$5,500	\$6,574	\$14,913
Expenses Per Student ¹⁰	\$5,025	\$14,192	\$11,808

⁷ Graduation Rates", Texas Higher Education Data, Universities - 6-Year Rate by Full-Time / Part-Time (Entering in the Fall), <http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectid=27718BD7-BD77-2355-39495E1FB4605755>

⁸ 2017 outcome measures in reported data <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/Facsimile.aspx?unitid=adadadb4b4ad>

⁹ 2016-2017 net price in institution profile <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/InstitutionProfile.aspx?unitid=adadadb4b4ad>

¹⁰ Reported Data 2017 Finance <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/Facsimile.aspx?unitid=adadadb4b4ad>

