

More freshmen struggle with classes and money

by *The Detroit News*

More college freshmen say they need to take remedial college classes to make up for what they didn't learn before they reached the campus. And an increasing number also face problems in paying for college. Too many just can't afford it. Those are among the key findings released this week by "American Freshman: Forty-Year Trends, 1966-2006," the latest installment of a report which has documented freshmen attitudes and behaviors over four decades by using data collected from 8.3 million students at 1,201 colleges.

Today's freshmen are clearly not as prepared by their elementary and high schools to reach their goals. While the percentage of high school students taking a college-preparatory curriculum has increased since 1984, the share of students reporting they need remedial work in mathematics and science has risen, the report's authors say.

Remedial classes are courses - often paid for but taken without credit - offered by colleges for students whose skills are not sufficient enough to take classes with regular college content.

Another disturbing trend: rising inequality in terms of the ability to pay for college. In 1971, the freshmen's' median parental income was \$13,200, which was 46 percent higher than the national average.

Today, the freshman family median income is \$74,000, 60 percent higher than the average - a trend that accelerated during the mid-1980s.

Multiple factors are at work here. Rising income and wealth inequality among Americans is an issue, while the growing cost of college tuition and fees is also at play. Students from wealthier families can afford the rising price for a university degree; it's much tougher for less well-off students.

The report was developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California Los Angeles Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

Clearly, states are falling down in equipping college-bound students with the necessary skills in science and math. And both colleges and states need to continue to find ways to restrain the spiraling tuition and fees that are pricing deserving kids out of a chance at higher education. Today's college freshmen know what they need. Our country's leaders need to listen to them, for the sake of our future.

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