

EDUCATION

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Guest Column

'Gainful employment rule' will devastate career colleges

Kansas City Business Journal - by [Ed Colon](#) Contributing Writer

Time and time again, we have heard President Obama emphasize the need for education and his goal of regaining our No. 1 higher education status in the world by 2020.

It is not an unattainable goal, given the proper tools and support, but the **U.S. Department of Education** is considering its so-called “gainful employment rule.” This rule does not require the approval of Congress or a presidential signature. It becomes policy when the secretary of education enacts it. This rule will work against, and could cause a major setback in, the very goals established by President Obama.

The enactment of this policy will have the greatest impact on career colleges and the student population they serve. Career colleges traditionally serve and educate a very diverse student population. Career colleges often are referred to as technical or vocational schools, and students have the opportunity to earn a certificate, associate’s degree or, at some colleges, a bachelor’s degree in their chosen fields.

Data provided by the **Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** for fiscal year 2008-2009 showed 113,856 students enrolled in some area of occupational training in the state. Postsecondary programs accounted for 67,193 students, while adult career programs trained 46,663.

As economic times worsen, many people have found themselves unemployed and looking for a career change. Many are going to school for the first time, and some are single parents. All these students are nontraditional students, and they are at risk of losing government financing for their education. Some of these nontraditional students are the first in their families to attend college.

These Title IV government funds are not free. Six months after a student completes his or her education, repayment of the loans begins and continues until his or her obligation is met.

The gainful employment rule will penalize students who have made the decision to enter the work force by denying them the funds to pay for their education. The rationale behind the rule is that starting salaries of career college graduates are too low to justify the federal dollars received by students.

The future of our country's work force will be impeded with the gainful employment rule. Charles Rivers Associates released a report estimating that, by 2020, there will be approximately 5.4 million students on track to attend career-focused postsecondary schools, and they will be denied that right due to the criteria contained in the gainful employment rule.

Career colleges look to the future, and the career training provided prepares students for a variety of different careers and industries. When students graduate from programs like wind turbine technology, health information technology, medical assisting, personal training, culinary arts, heating and cooling, electronics and numerous others, they are work force-ready. Many programs require an externship that gives students a true insight into the work force world.

Unlike their traditional counterparts, career colleges strive to reach every student every day, encouraging them to become productive and contributing individuals with newfound self-esteem. These students are the future of this country's work force. To deny them that opportunity is unfathomable, and to deny our country's work force the benefit of their knowledge is wrong.

Ed Colon | Colon is vice president of operations for Pinnacle Career Institute in Kansas City.

Read more: ['Gainful employment rule' will devastate career colleges - The Business Journal of Milwaukee](#)