

Encourage people to complete degrees. 20130415 Masako Hara, Nikkei,inc

In the U.S. there are many of the world's notable universities. On the other hand about half of the students who advance to post-secondary education, do not complete their degrees,

“Dropout paradise”

It is getting more difficult for young people to find jobs, so a college degree is also getting very important. For the last ten years not only the number of college students but also the number of drop-out students has increased. A lot of American people are noticing that. Colleges and states are now working together.

In Philadelphia, one of the most historical cities in the U.S., there are more than 100 universities and colleges. It is known as a college city. But more than half of the people do not complete college degree. Only 18% of its adult population had a college degree in 2004. The national average was 26%.

“It's a shame”, some people from the city, public and private colleges and citizens thought, and so they established Graduate Philadelphia in 2008, which helps college dropouts to complete their college education.

“Why not go back to college?” they put advertisements in magazines and on website. They have booths at shopping malls and unemployment benefit desks of the city and invite people who are interested to their office.

In the office of Graduate Philadelphia, staff from private and public colleges is always waiting for them. They ask how many credits they got before drop-out, lifestyle, income and so on. “We accept people who are from colleges in other states. If we do not have a major they are interested in, we would introduce them to other colleges”, William F. Parshall, Executive director of Temple University said.

The staff of Graduate Philadelphia helps them to prepare documents, borrow money from student loans and build schedules that enable them to balance work and college. “I just follow the steps Graduate Philadelphia shows,” Sarina Coleman, now a student at

Temple University said with a smile. Through Graduate Philadelphia, about 2,000 people went back to college.

Colleges accept adult students without examinations. Philadelphia University gives students tuition discounts of up to 25% depending on their past grades.

The U.S. is enthusiastic about special educations for gifted students and has not paid much attention to the drop-out rate. For the last 4~5 years, people have noticed this problem. The economy is recovering but companies have not increased jobs for young people. For people without college degrees the problem is severe.

In the U.S. there are “Open Door” colleges, which accept all students who want to study at these colleges. Students whose math and English scores are below the standard, have to take remedial educations. After passing exams, they can take credit-bearing courses.

But the lack of academic ability is serious. The longer remedial education takes, the more students leave college before graduation. Danette Howard, secretary of higher education, Maryland higher education commission, said, “Under 60% of students are required to take remedial courses in either English or math. There is a problem in how we teach remedial courses.”

Harford Community College introduced online education for remedial courses. Students can study at their own pace. “Compared to the traditional teaching, students get better since redesigning remedial mathematics courses. As a whole more students get through”, Howard added.

“We have to let them feel they are progressing. Dropout students failed once in the past. We have to think about them,” Frank Condon, Executive director of continuing and professional studies at Philadelphia University said.

States and city governments have started to take this problem seriously. People check more strictly how governments use money.

Tom Sugar, senior vice president of Complete College USA, which helps state governments to increase graduation rates, said, “People think high dropout rates are a

waste of money.”

In the U.S there are a lot of famous dropouts, like Bill Gates. People could succeed without college degrees. But Anthony Carnavale from Georgetown University, predicted that by 2020 63% of jobs require at least an associate degree.” Having a degree or not is very important.

Government officials noticed that if people without college degrees increase, tax revenue would decrease. But it will take a few years for their effort to bear fruit.

Expensive tuition, burden for students

The number of college dropouts has been increasing. In 2009 about 650,000 students left school before graduation. “Financial concerns play a big part,” Hadass Sheffer, president of Graduate Philadelphia said. In the U.S. tuition is very expensive and two thirds of students have to work.

Government has cut money for public universities, and they have to increase tuition to compensate. Courses are very strict for student to complete college in 4 years. The longer time they take to graduate, the more money they need. That makes the dropout rate rise. Data show that two-third of students use student loans.

State governments started to give money to colleges depending on the graduation rate not on the number of students colleges accepted (performance based funding). By now 35 states, including 12 states still in planning stages, have introduced performance based funding.