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Poll Finds Many Americans Trying to Turn Lemon Economy into Lemonade
Higher Education Fostering Career Reinvention

Washington, DC – The Career College Association (CCA) today released the results of a new commissioned survey, conducted by Harris Interactive®, finding more than two out of three Americans either taking steps or considering steps to address their employment situation in the midst of the current economic turmoil.

One silver lining in all the economic gloom appears to be the extent to which people may be “reinventing” their working lives with new educational programs and career skills. Over one-third of survey respondents (38 percent) indicated an interest in higher education and 32 percent of these “education seekers” say they are doing so in order to pursue a long-standing passion or an intellectual interest.

“A substantial percentage of Americans are looking at the current downturn as the opportunity to reinvent themselves with new skills, new interests and new professional pursuits, notwithstanding the distress that many in the workforce currently feel,” said CCA President Harris N. Miller. “Nobody likes to be out of a job, but this survey suggests that people who are unemployed, under-employed or simply anxious about their current employment prospects are using lemons to make lemonade.”

“Career re-inventors,” those pursuing a long-standing passion or interest, constituted 43 percent of 25-34 year olds in the education seeker group. Thirty percent of adults age 55-64 say the same, suggesting that many Americans have found the freedom—whether they wish it or not—to pursue long standing professional interests.

Other “silver lining” points of interest include:

- ✓ One of four high school graduates in the education seeker group likewise indicated career reinvention as their back to school motivation;
- ✓ The career re-inventor phenomenon is just as prevalent for those making less money than those with more income. Forty-three percent of earners at the \$15,000-\$35,000 salary range indicated career reinvention as their motivation, almost identical to the 44 percent of those earning between \$75,000-\$100,000 per year;
- ✓ Thirty-two percent of both those employed and unemployed indicate a reinvention motive for pursuing higher education;

- ✓ Career re-inventors are just as likely to be people with children at home as people with no children (31 percent versus 35 percent). Even care for young children doesn't appear to stand in the way, with 35 percent of those with children under 10 years of age indicating that they will return to school to pursue a long-standing passion or intellectual curiosity.
- ✓ Those in the western region are much more likely than those in the Midwest to pursue their career reinvention interests through higher education (43 percent versus 24 percent). Those in the South are closer to the Midwestern model, with 26 percent of education seekers so motivated to seek higher education.

The survey finds that 33 percent of Americans describe themselves as either unemployed or under-employed, working fewer hours per week than they would like. An additional 12 percent describe themselves as either newly hired in the past six months but at lower salary or benefits or employed but anxious about remaining so in the near term. Just 23 percent of those surveyed say they are secure in their current position up to retirement.

Younger workers hit hardest

- ✓ Thirty-five percent of respondents in the 18-24 age group describe themselves as either unemployed or laid-off and another 23 percent say they are under-employed.
- ✓ Respondents in the 18-24 age group are also most likely to be newly employed but with lower salaries and lesser benefits;
- ✓ One of four respondents ages 25-34 and 35-44 also say they are unemployed or laid-off;

Middle class anxiety widespread

Looking at those making between \$35,000 and \$125,000 per year, almost 60 percent report employment anxiety at some level:

- ✓ Almost one in five percent (19 percent) say they are unemployed or laid off;
- ✓ Nineteen percent say they are securely employed but anxious about their ability to retire as planned.
- ✓ Eight percent report being under-employed;
- ✓ Six percent say they are newly employed but at lower pay and benefits;
- ✓ Eight percent indicate being employed but anxious in the near term over their employment status.

Almost one third of middle class Americans report having little or no savings.

Higher education looms large as an employment booster

Forty-four percent of Americans who are taking steps to address their employment situation and financial prospects say higher education is part of their plan and another 11 percent say they are thinking about it for the future.

In terms of characterizing the people who are thinking about additional higher education as an employment booster, the survey shows:

- ✓ Seventy-five percent of those age 18-24 are using higher education as an action step to improve employment prospects and another 21 percent are seriously considering it;
- ✓ Sixty-four percent of those age 25-34 are pursuing a higher education course of action while only five percent said they are only thinking about it;
- ✓ Females are somewhat more likely to pursue higher education as an action step than males (51 percent versus 38 percent);
- ✓ Blacks and Hispanics are significantly more likely than whites to have higher education as part of their action plan, with 65 percent of Black respondents and 66 percent of Hispanic respondents saying college is one of the steps they will take while only 32 percent of whites said the same.
- ✓ Respondents with some higher education appear more likely than other groups to improve their circumstances by going back to college (54 percent), but 44 percent of those without a high school degree as well as 44 percent of those with a high school degree indicated a college plan;
- ✓ A significant percentage of respondents with a college degree (37 percent) said they are going back to college.

Middle class primed to take action

Two of three respondents deemed middle class—individuals earning between \$35,000 and \$125,000 per year--report that they are currently taking steps to address their employment uncertainties and, of this number, nearly 40 percent say higher education is part of their plan and another 13 percent say they are seriously considering it. Career oriented programs far out-perform liberal arts programs. For instance:

- ✓ Over 27 percent say their higher education plan would include career college (as compared to 43 percent for a community college and 16 percent for a private, independent college);
- ✓ Almost one in four (24 percent) express an interest in a certificate or degree program and another 18 percent indicate an interest in a bachelor of arts or sciences degree in a professional field such as nursing or accounting as compared to 9 percent who indicate a preference for an undergraduate degree in the humanities, languages or social sciences.

In terms of higher education options, nearly four out of ten (36 percent) of education seekers say they are most interested in either a graduate or professional degree. Thirty-two percent say they are most interested in pursuing an undergraduate degree, 5 percent indicate an associate's degree is of most interest, and 20 percent cite a preference for a certificate or diploma in fields such as auto mechanics, medical or culinary arts.

Non-traditional students seek faster re-skilling options

- ✓ Adults over 24 years of age appear to be substantially more likely to pursue certificate and diploma programs than younger adults (ages 18-24). Twenty-six percent of those between ages 25-34 indicate such a preference while only 12 percent of those in the younger age group do so;
- ✓ Thirty percent of education seekers 55-64 and 34 percent of those over 65 say they are most interested in certificate or diploma programs;
- ✓ Almost half of education seekers (46 percent) in the 18-24 age group express a preference for a Bachelor of art or science degree, while only 28 percent of those between the ages of 25-44 do the same.

Just over one in four education seekers (28 percent) appear to be responding to job market trends and another 13 percent are mobilized to keep their skills current.

- ✓ Those in their middle years, ages 35 to 54, are twice as likely to be motivated by market trends as their younger counterparts;
- ✓ Forty percent of those 35-44 and 43 percent of those 45-54 say their interest in higher education is spurred by where the job market is going, while only 18 percent of those 18-24 years of age say the same.

As to what type of institution education seekers are considering, 44 percent indicate a public four-year college or university, 13 percent say they might go out of state to attend such a school, 39 percent register their preference for a community college, 21 percent give the nod to a career college, and 14 percent indicate a private independent four-year college.

This education survey was conducted via telephone within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of Career College Association between February 18 and February 22, 2009 among 1,008 adults, ages 18 and above. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

The Career College Association (CCA) is a voluntary membership organization of accredited, private postsecondary schools, institutes, colleges and universities that provide career-specific educational programs. CCA has more than 1,500 members that educate and support over one million students each year for employment in over 200 occupational fields. CCA member institutions provide the full range of higher education programs: masters and doctoral degree programs, two- and four-year associate and baccalaureate degree programs, and short-term certificate and diploma programs. Visit CCA at www.career.org.

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