INTRODUCTION

College Stop-outs and Drop-outs

• Individuals who began college or university but left before receiving their degree
• Represent 8 million individuals between ages 25-34 (2007 United States Census)
• >30% college enrollees leave school for at least one semester and may or may not return to finish their degree (Stratton et. al. 2008)

The potential of MOOCs for this population

• Act as alternative to traditional education system
• Serve as “stepping stone” to re-enter college
• Help individuals acquire practical knowledge or job-related skills

Research Questions

• What characteristics do current MOOC participants share, and how are they currently using MOOC courses?
• Does participation in MOOCs affect academic confidence, self-efficacy, attitudes towards learning, and/or educational plans in this population?

Importance of Research

• Much research done on factors that cause students to drop-out, comparatively little is known about how students recover and continue learning later in life
• No previous work has focused on this population’s MOOC experience
• Could help give appropriate recommendations to this population and aid MOOC developers in designing courses for their use

METHODS

Recruiting Population

• 3 introductory science and statistics Duke Coursera courses were chosen
• Individuals who took these courses from Jan 2014 - Jan 2016 meeting population characteristics were identified based on responses to previous survey
  • Highest level of education “Some College”
  • Not currently enrolled as a student
• Emails were sent inviting them to take a brief survey

Instruments Used

• 10-15 minute survey about educational experience, interest in educational resources and opportunities, and academic engagement.

RESULTS

Population Characteristics

• 94 respondents
• 53% male
• Age (range: 25-80, median: 46)
• 14% have been part-time college students
• 80% have been full-time students
• 10% have taken an online class for college credit
• Majority of population have been out of school for many years

Reason Behind Discontinuing Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial (difficulty paying tuition)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Opportunity</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Responsibilities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Interest</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Worth Cost</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

45% of respondents reported that multiple factors contributed to their decision to discontinue.

Educational Goals

• 29% did not want to go further than they already had in formal education.
• 45% were “optimists” - believed they would not go as far as they wished to

CONCLUSIONS and FUTURE WORK

Conclusions

• Much of population were full-time students who left college or university more than 5 years ago due to a variety of reasons, the most common of which include difficulty paying tuition, professional opportunities, and family responsibilities.
• A significant portion of population believes they will not reach the level of schooling they hope to reach, while 28% do not wish to go any further in formal education.
• Population expressed more interest in lower commitment ways to earn degree (Online degree or Part-time) than returning to school full-time (72 % and 51% vs. 31%). Coursera course more likely to increase interest in these alternative methods of receiving degrees.

Future Work

• Connecting results with Duke Coursera pre- and post-course survey
  • Allows for the collection of information regarding motivation behind taking course, expectations, satisfaction with course, and additional demographics
• Similar pre- and post-course survey currently being deployed in courses related to a Data Science business specialization
  • Better gauge influence of Coursera with pre-/post-survey format
  • See if and how members of the target population in professional development courses differ from that of introductory science and statistics courses and the effect of their Coursera experience

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