

What does a degree have to do with it?

# Higher Education and the Single Parent Mother

— Lucy M. Freibert

What kind of work would you like to do to earn a living for yourself and your dependents? Would it be purely physical, purely mental, or a combination of the two? Would it be customer-related or research-oriented, verbal or mathematical, individual or team-based, creative or routine? What monetary demands would it have to meet? Today, especially for the single-parent mother, such questions are not merely casual speculation. They are essential questions to be answered if one would survive in this economy and have a fulfilling life.

The series will look at the ramifications of preparing for a meaningful career. This installment covers some sobering facts about the effects of advanced education. The next article will

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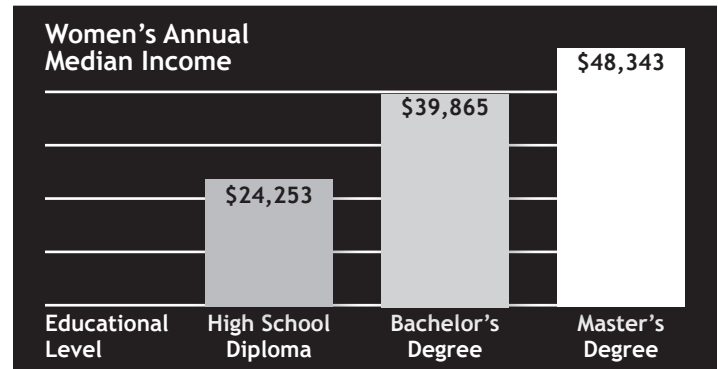
a baccalaureate degree has when one applies for a job. As a counselor wrote to me recently, “no matter what the job is, from unskilled labor to professional occupation, if a potential employer has a choice between hiring a person with a high school diploma or one having a four-year college degree, the employer will almost invariably choose the degreed person. An exception would be if the non-degreed person has years of experience in some highly technical specialty and the degreed person is a beginner.”

Government statistics witness to the fact that women with a four-year college degree do far better economically than women with less education. In 2000, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that a woman holding a bachelor’s degree could expect to earn 68% more per year than a woman holding only a high school diploma. In 2002, even with the economic slide in motion,

cover, in general, the degree plans some Project Women participants have set for themselves, the specific courses they are taking, and the ones they find most helpful, not only for the future but for right now. The participants will, of course, remain anonymous out of respect for their privacy. The final essay will treat a variety of specific jobs to which the courses could lead, given creative planning. For now, a consideration of the hard facts of “the real world” will sharpen the picture.

One of the most basic facts about the job market is the power that simply having

the US Census Bureau cited the following annual median comparisons:



And in a recent publication, “From Poverty to Self-sufficiency: The Role of Postsecondary Education in Welfare Reform,” the Center for Women Policy Studies observed that while women who have any additional education beyond high school enhance their income, “women who earn four-year college degrees increase their annual incomes most significantly ...”

The importance of these observations and statistics to the Project Women community is that they reinforce the premise on which the main goal of Project Women—to assist single mothers to get a four-year college degree—is based. Other data reveal additional benefits. According to the Center for Women Policy Studies, women who have

struggled to get baccalaureate degrees have found their success has had an enormously positive impact on their children. Forty percent of the mothers surveyed in Illinois reported that their children worked harder in school as a result of their mothers’ going to college. Women in the Boston area reported that getting their college degrees influenced their mothers and sisters to return to school to complete four-year degrees from which they had previously withdrawn. Other advantages reported included higher self-esteem, greater self-confidence, improved parenting skills, development of their children’s study habits, and enrichment of family life.

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