

## Ky. Voices: Look behind jobless numbers

By Aaron W. Hughey at 12:00am on Jan 15, 2011

When it comes to jobs, the playing field has never really been level. This has become painfully obvious over the last few years. The world is fundamentally changing and education — in all its various forms — will be essential to our economic vitality in the coming decades.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the official unemployment rate is currently hovering just under 10 percent. Around 15 million Americans are currently out of work.

But dig a little deeper to get the real story. The unemployment rate for workers who did not finish high school is over 15 percent, compared to just 4.6 percent for those with a college degree.

In addition to education, race is also a big factor in the jobs picture. The unemployment rate for African-Americans is over 15 percent; for Latinos, over 12 percent. Unemployed African-Americans and Latinos are also 25 percent less likely than unemployed whites to receive benefits, due to their disproportionate representation among low-wage, part-time and seasonal workers who are ineligible for or poorly covered by unemployment benefits.

Jennifer Wolf, writing at [singleparents.about.com](http://singleparents.about.com), adds yet another thorny dimension to employment realities: marital and child status. Divorce rates are lower among college-educated couples but higher for poorer, less-educated couples.

The divorce rate in America for a first marriage is 41 percent. For a second marriage, it is 60 percent; for a third marriage, it's 73 percent.

About 84 percent of custodial parents are mothers, while 16 percent are fathers. Almost 80 percent of custodial single mothers are gainfully employed — 49.8 percent work full time and 29.7 percent part-time.

By comparison, approximately 90 percent of custodial single fathers are gainfully employed — 71.7 percent full-time and 18.4 percent part-time.

The Social Security Administration estimates the U.S. economy will need to add at least 200,000 jobs each month during 2011 in order for the unemployment rate to fall below 8 percent by 2012. What Americans should realize is that many of the jobs lost in the recession are not coming back — particularly if they were in manufacturing.

Eddy Elfenbein, at [crossingwallstreet.com](http://crossingwallstreet.com), provides some very sobering statistics: At the beginning of 2010, fewer than 12 million Americans worked in manufacturing jobs. The last time this was the case was 1941. In 1959, manufacturing accounted for 28 percent of U.S. economic output. By 2008, it was down to around 11.5 percent.

The number of manufacturing jobs has declined 32 percent since 2000. Over the last decade, 42,400 factories closed their doors in this country — 75 percent of which employed at least 500 workers.

So will everyone need a college degree? No. But everyone should plan on extending their education beyond high school.

Lifelong learning — job training and retraining — is already becoming the new norm. Education will increasingly be the only key to economic prosperity for most Americans.

The truth is that the next few years are going to be difficult for many Americans. But the more we recognize and accept the challenges that lie ahead, and the sooner we develop a realistic plan for meeting them, the better off we will all be.

Aaron W. Hughey is a professor in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University. Reach him at [Aaron.Hughey@wku.edu](mailto:Aaron.Hughey@wku.edu).

**<http://www.kentucky.com/>**