

INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES AFFECTING THE COLLEGE-GOING DECISIONS  
OF LOW-INCOME MOTHERS ATTENDING A RURAL MIDWESTERN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

Education has proven one path out of poverty for low-income single mothers, yet many are not completing and transferring at high rates. Using theories of economic development as the lens for analysis, I sought to study how single mothers used certain government and institutional policies to facilitate their attendance at a rural community college in a Midwestern state, and how these policies shaped the women's choices about college attendance. More specifically, I wanted to understand how the single mothers' college-going decisions related to access, persistence, completion, and transfer were affected by the federal, state, and local policies they used to manage their economic circumstances. This was a qualitative study using a multiple-case study approach, and there were ten cases studied. For the participants in the study, the Pell Grant was an important avenue of access to the community college; however, it was not sufficient to serve as an avenue of access to the baccalaureate. As well, the lack of access to health coverage, child custody agreements, and an unwillingness to relocate proved to be important barriers to degree completion.