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## **Academic Squeeze TRANSCRIPT**

Airdate: June 22nd, 2005

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SPOKESMAN: Okay, bring all the injured parties over here. We'll establish a triage sector.

JOHN MERROW: This is not real. In fact, this is a college class in homeland security training...

MAN ON STREET: You don't know. It could be a terrorist attack.

JOHN MERROW: That students hope will lead to jobs. This is a remedial math class at the same college.

SPOKESMAN: What do you multiply two by to get four?

SPOKESPERSON: Two.

SPOKESPERSON: Right two.

JOHN MERROW: Sixty-five percent of the incoming students at this college have to play catch-up.

SPOKESPERSON: Plato sees the mind as an essential tool for each of us human beings.

JOHN MERROW: In this classroom the subject is philosophy.

SPOKESPERSON: We use our minds. We use the ideas in our minds, but the ideas in our minds are a far cry from the model.

JOHN MERROW: Community colleges like this one in Denver are proud of their open-door policy. Anyone who wants to go can.

In fact, 46 percent of the nation's undergraduate students are enrolled in community colleges. Christine Johnson has been president of Community College of Denver, CCD, for the past four years.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: This is the institution these students come to. And either they come here or they don't go anywhere in higher education.

JOHN MERROW: Public attitudes about paying for college have changed. Twenty years ago, most government help did not have to be repaid. Today, most of it comes as a loan.

Twenty years ago, a Pell Grant to the poor paid 98 percent of the tuition at a public four-year college or university. Today, it's about 50 percent. In part because of steep tuition increases at most of the nation's four-year public colleges and universities -- about 51 percent over the past 10 years -- more students than ever are heading to community colleges, where tuition is only about \$2,000 a year.

JOHN MERROW: How much has your budget been cut in the last two years?

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Thirty percent.

JOHN MERROW: Has enrollment gone up?

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Thirty percent.

JOHN MERROW: Fewer dollars, more students.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHN MERROW: Budget cuts are particularly tough on community colleges because about 55 percent of their operating funds come from state and local resources. By contrast, public four-year institutions rely on state and local funds for only about 30 percent of their operating budgets. Community colleges are also more reluctant to raise tuition than four-year public institutions because they don't want to cut off the students who need them the most.

JOHN MERROW: What keeps you awake at night?

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Budgets. Just saying, "Okay, where do I cut? Who do I cut?" And the impact that it has on both the students and the services we'll provide them and the individuals whose lives will be impacted by that decision.

JOHN MERROW: What's happening in Denver is happening at many of the nation's roughly 1,200 community colleges. Last year, community colleges in Florida and California turned away an estimated 210,000 would-be students because they had neither the space nor the money to expand.

KAY McCLENNEY: We tend to think we can keep giving them more and more to do and fewer and fewer dollars with which to do that. We got away with that for quite a while, but we're really at a point now where community colleges from coast to coast have cut as much as they can out of their budgets without seriously affecting

access for students who want and need to enroll in those colleges.

JOHN MERROW: Kay McClenney is a professor in the community college leadership program at the University of Texas-Austin.

KAY McCLENNEY: Community colleges essentially have two major functions in our communities and the society. The first one is to provide the open door to higher education opportunity. The second one is to ensure that that open door doesn't become a revolving door; that is that students don't empty out of the colleges just as soon as they get into the college because they're not finding the services and the support that they need.

JOHN MERROW: Some people go to community college just to take a class or two, poetry or pottery. But of the 6.5 million people who hope to get a degree, 40 percent don't make it.

KAY McCLENNEY: Community colleges do have lower persistence rates and lower graduation rates than four-year colleges and universities. In significant part that's because they are serving more students who bring more challenges to college with them. Students who have children, students who are working one or more jobs, 20 or more hours a week, and the like.

JOHN MERROW: People like 29-year-old Debra Stake. A high school dropout with four children and a 25-hour-a-week job at a daycare center, she's trying to get her associate's degree at CCD. But her journey has not been easy. She's failed here once before.

DEBRA STAKE: Well, I started at CCD in the summer, I believe, of '93. I believe that's when it was. And I didn't do well. I did not do well at all and ended up failing out.

JOHN MERROW: This time around, she's studying early childhood education. CCD is trying to make sure she succeeds by providing her with support in a special program for students who are the first in their family to go to college.

TODD RAMIREZ: Okay, so you have everything complete. You should be hearing from financial aid in a couple weeks. We work with them in academic advising, career counseling, scholarship, financial aid, community resources such as child care.

DEBRA STAKE: There absolutely has been times when I felt like quitting. And there probably be times when I'll feel like quitting again. But there's too many more things that keep me going.

JOHN MERROW: Matt Brewer is also turning his life around.

MATT BREWER: If I kept going where I was going, I'd either be dead or in prison.

JOHN MERROW: Before he was a college student studying to become a nurse, Matt led a different life. He carries reminders of it wherever he goes.

MATT BREWER: Well, I've got tattoos that -- I've got them on my chest, my back, my legs.

JOHN MERROW: His troubles started when he was about 12.

MATT BREWER: I started out in a little gang and progressed myself into bigger and better things as I continued on with that lifestyle. Assaults and fights and getting jumped and being shot at. You name it.

JOHN MERROW: When Matt became a father, he decided it was time to change. He qualified for a federal Pell Grant, got some financial help from his employer and borrowed the rest. Now at age 27 -- two years younger than the average community college student -- he's working as an EMT while going to school full time.

MATT BREWER: This will enable me to do exactly what I wanted: Further my life and my daughter's life.

JOHN MERROW: Matt credits his success at CCD to the diverse student culture.

MATT BREWER: We've got people that are 50 years old, we've got people that are 18 years old. You have the full spectrum of people you're going to run into in an everyday work environment.

KAY McCLENNEY: If you look around the country, you will see places where there are community colleges where two-thirds of their students are people who were born in another country. You will see places where 120 or 140 different foreign languages are spoken on a community college campus. That is why community colleges become the real Ellis Island of American higher education.

JOHN MERROW: Community colleges face great challenges. Tight budgets mean low salaries and part-time teachers. On average, 66 percent of the faculty at these schools are part-timers. This means students do not always get the attention they need.

Community colleges also help supply the local labor force. They've trained more than 65 percent of the nation's new health care workers. When funds are cut, training programs get cut, and that, some experts say, puts the country at risk.

KAY McCLENNEY: We ignore these problems at great peril if we do not find ways to provide and secure the promise of access to higher education. If we cannot find

ways to ensure that that access is available across the society and not just for a privileged few, then we're going to pay a serious price in the future, both economically and, I believe, morally as well.

JOHN MERROW: There are two pieces of good news: The situation at CCD is looking better. For the first time in three years, it's not facing a budget cut. And while many states continue to grapple with limited funds, voters in California recently approved a \$12.2 billion bond to renovate and expand its community colleges.