MOMENTUM
CREDITS EARNED WITHIN ONE YEAR: UNITED STATES

Percentage of U.S. community college students who completed one-year credit milestones, by demographic and enrollment characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC

GENDER

AGE WHEN FIRST ENROLLED
Student and program characteristics

RACE/ETHNICITY

INCOME PERCENTILE RANK WHEN FIRST ENROLLED

PARENTS' EDUCATION
What Is Measured?
Percentage of students who completed 12 or more credits, 24 or more credits, or 30 or more credits after one year

Who Is Counted?
First-time college students who first enrolled in U.S. community colleges in the 2003-04 academic year as of spring 2009

What It Tells Us
Two-fifths (40 percent) of community college students completed 12 or more credits within their first year, while 30 percent completed 24 or more credits, and 13 percent completed 30 or more credits. Students who attended exclusively full time were more likely to reach these one-year credit milestones than students who attended both full time and part time or exclusively part time (62 percent vs. 5–41 percent; 52 percent vs. 2–28 percent; and 25 percent vs. 0–12 percent).

Why It’s Important
Researchers generally agree that students need to earn a certain number of credits during their first year to gain momentum toward completion and transfer. Although the probability of completing a certificate or degree increases almost linearly with the number of first-year credits completed (Offenstein et al., 2010, figure 11), the indicators in this measure specify a particular threshold number of credits in the first year. Community college students who earn at least 20 credits in their first year are more likely to complete a certificate or associate degree (Offenstein et al., 2010, figure 12) and to earn a bachelor’s degree than those who do not (Adelman, 2005, table 42). Policies that encourage full-time and summer enrollment in the first year can facilitate early credit accumulation.

ABOUT THE DATA
Race/ethnicity: Other includes Native American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and individuals who indicated Other or Two or more races. Race categories exclude Hispanic/Latino origin unless specified.
Income percentile rank: calculated separately for dependent and independent students and then combined. Each ranking thus compares the respondent only to other respondents of the same dependency status. Uses parents’ income if respondent is dependent and uses respondent’s own income if respondent is independent.
Social sciences and humanities: includes cultural and gender studies; visual and performing arts; English language and literature; family and consumer sciences; philosophy, theology, and religious studies; psychology; social sciences and history; and liberal arts, general studies, and humanities.
STEM: includes agricultural and natural resource studies; biological and biomedical sciences; computer and information sciences and support; engineering; mathematics and statistics; physical sciences; science technologies and technicians; and engineering technologies and related fields.

Full-time/part-time enrollment: indicates student's cumulative enrollment through 2009. Full-time is defined as 12 or more credit hours per semester.

DATA SOURCE