TRANSFER AND COMPLETION
SIX-YEAR COMPLETION RATES: UNITED STATES

Completion and transfer rates for United States Community Colleges, by student and program characteristics

PARENTS' EDUCATION

OVERALL

INCOME PERCENTILE RANK WHEN FIRST ENROLLED
What Is Measured?
Completion and transfer rates within six years of first enrolling in a community college

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

Some 46 percent of U.S. community college students attained a credential or transferred to a four-year college within six years: 34 percent of them attained a credential, while an additional 11 percent transferred to a four-year institution but had not yet attained a credential. Among the students who attained a credential (34 percent), 12 percent earned a bachelor's degree, 14 percent earned an associate degree, and 8 percent earned a certificate. Among the students who did not attain a credential (66 percent), 20 percent were still enrolled after six years, and 46 percent left community college with no credential.

The rates of completion or transfer were associated with the highest level of education attained by either of the students' parents. Only 8 percent of students whose parents did not attend college earned a bachelor's degree compared with 12 percent of students who had a parent with some college education and 18 percent of students who had a parent with a bachelor's degree. Students whose parents did not attend college were also more likely to have left community college without a credential (51 percent) compared with students who had a parent with some college education (43 percent) or a bachelor's degree (40 percent).

Full-time attendance or a mix of full- and part-time attendance was associated with higher combined rates of completion and transfer than exclusive part-time attendance (56 percent and 51 percent, respectively, vs. 16 percent).

Why It's Important

At community colleges, graduation means attainment of a certificate or associate degree. However, many students attend community colleges to take lower-division courses for a bachelor's degree, and some transfer to a four-year institution without obtaining a credential. From the perspective of the community college, these students have finished a curriculum that prepared them for transfer and, therefore, should be considered as having completed. Some states even track and report which community college students graduate from other institutions. Most sources, however, do not specify what proportion of transfer students have finished the coursework required for upper-division standing at the four-year college, and research suggests that many students transfer without reaching this threshold (Moore, Shulock, & Offenstein, 2009, table 3). A completion rate that combines transfer and degree attainment is sometimes referred to as a “success rate.”

ABOUT THE DATA

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

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.

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.

Income percentile rank: calculated separately for dependent and independent students and then combined. Each ranking thus compares the respondent only with other respondents having the same dependency status. Uses parents' income if respondent is dependent and uses respondent's own income if respondent is independent.

Some figures do not sum to totals due to rounding.

DATA SOURCE