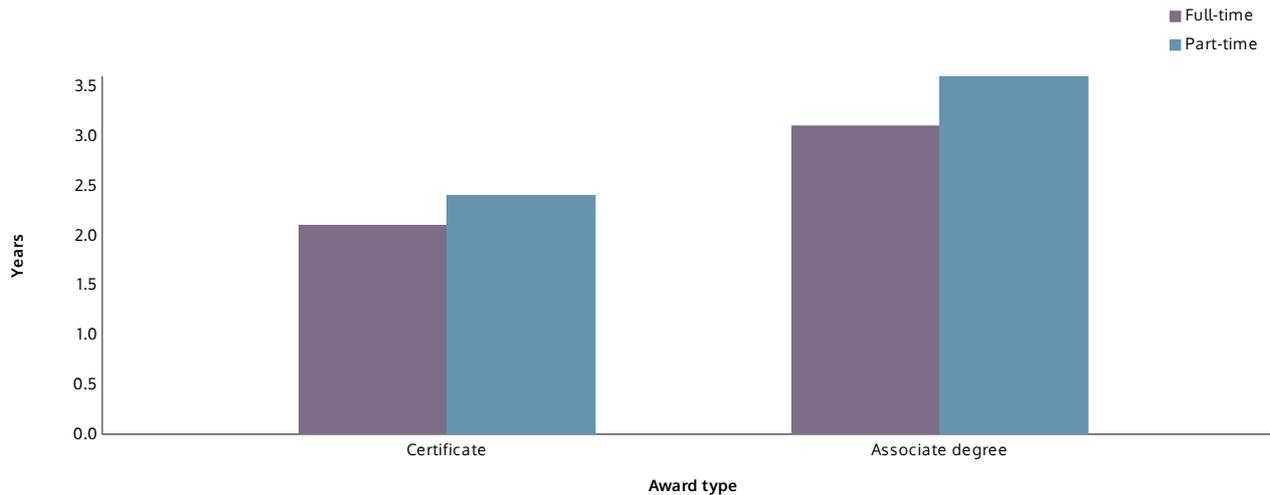# TRANSFER AND COMPLETION
AVERAGE TIME TO A CERTIFICATE AND AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE: NORTH CAROLINA

Average time to a certificate and an associate degree in North Carolina Community Colleges

What Is Measured?

Average elapsed time from initial enrollment to completion of a certificate or an associate degree

Who Is Counted?

North Carolina Community College students who completed a certificate or an associate degree in 2007-08

What It Tells Us

For students who graduated from North Carolina Community Colleges, the average time it took to complete a certificate was 2.4 years for part-time students and 2.1 years for full-time students. The average time to complete an associate degree was 3.6 years for part-time students and 3.1 years for full-time students.

Why It's Important

How long it takes to complete a degree is one of the most commonly asked questions about postsecondary education (Adelman, 2006, p. 159). This measure is particularly relevant to community colleges because the longer a student is enrolled, the more it costs both the students and the college in terms of direct costs and opportunity costs. The students may continue paying tuition and fees and forgoing employment, while the college continues to spend on instruction and other services while possibly turning away other students. But this measure only includes students who actually earn a credential, and the result depends on how long the students are followed. For example, if students are tracked for five years, students who take six years or longer to complete are not counted, though doing so would inevitably increase the average time to degree.

ABOUT THE DATA

Certificates: include postsecondary programs that are equivalent in length to at least one academic year for full-time students or equivalent to 30 semester/trimester credit hours, 45 quarter credit hours, or 900 clock or contact hours.

Time elapsed to completion: calculated starting from a student's first enrollment in any postsecondary institution.

Full-time status: defined as enrollment in at least 12 semester or quarter credits or at least 24 contact hours per week at time of entry. Part-time status is defined as less than 12 semester or quarter credits or less than 24 contact hours per week at time of entry.

Results may include some certificates and associate degrees earned at four-year institutions.

DATA SOURCE

Complete College America. (2011, September). *Time is the enemy*. Washington, DC: Author.

Complete College America. (2011, March). *Common college completion metrics technical guide*. Washington, DC: Author.