TRANSFER AND COMPLETION
AVERAGE TIME TO A CERTIFICATE, AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE, OR A BACHELOR’S DEGREE: UNITED STATES

Average number of months from initial enrollment to completion of a certificate or degree, by demographic and enrollment characteristics

DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM WHEN FIRST ENROLLED

FULL-TIME/PART-TIME ENROLLMENT
What Is Measured?
Average number of months from initial enrollment to completion of first award, including certificate, associate degree, and bachelor's degree

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
U.S. community college students took an average of 27 months to earn a certificate, 39 months to earn an associate degree, and 54 months to earn a bachelor's degree. Students who started in a certificate program took less time to earn a certificate (18 months) than students who started in an associate or bachelor's degree program (31 months). Students who started in an associate degree program earned an associate degree more quickly than students who did not start in a degree program (38 months vs. 43 months). Also, students who started in a certificate program earned their first award in about half the time (20 months) of students who did not start in a degree program (38 months) and of students who started in an associate or bachelor's degree program (40 months).

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
Average number of months to award: indicates the average number of months from entry into postsecondary education to award, not including students who had already earned the award at time of entry.

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.

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.

DATA SOURCE