

Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a bold national effort to help more community college students succeed, with a special focus on students of color and low-income students. The initiative proceeds from the premise that success begets success, using a student-centered model of institutional improvement to create a culture of evidence in which data and inquiry drive broad-based institutional efforts to close achievement gaps and improve student outcomes overall.

Late Stop-Outs, Part 2

This issue of *Data Notes* is the second in a two-part series looking at the characteristics of students who accumulate at least 30 credits within the first two years of college, only to leave college without completing credentials or transferring. Roughly half of the students that reached this goal left college with no degree or certificate. The September/October 2009 issue of *Data Notes* reviewed the relationship between credit accumulation and student persistence, and reported that Hispanic and black non-Hispanic students who earned at least 30 credits during their first two years were less likely than white non-Hispanic students to achieve their academic goals within five years. Furthermore, the positive association between receiving Pell Grants and student persistence dissipated over time; students who accumulated 30 or more credits but did not receive a Pell Grant had higher persistence and completion rates than did Pell Grant recipients.

This analysis reviews other variables that differentiate fifth-year outcomes among students completing 30 credits by the end of their second

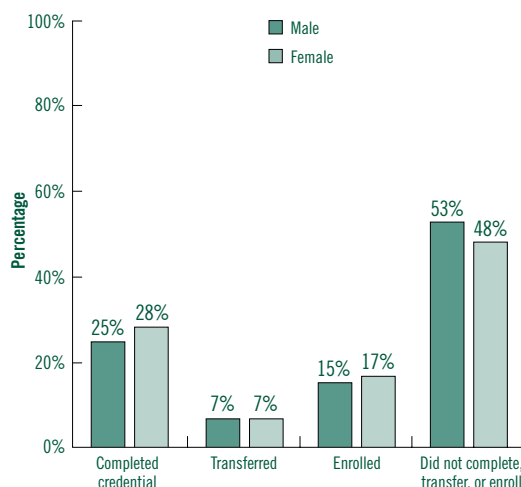
academic year.¹ The distribution of students who completed their credentials, transferred, persisted, or did not re-enroll at some point during the ensuing three years was disaggregated by gender, age, full- or part-time enrollment status, program of study, and developmental education referral status.

Gender & Age

Research has shown that male students are less likely than female students to enroll in postsecondary education, persist, and attain awards.² The same tendency is evident at Achieving the Dream colleges: 25 percent of male students who had earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second year completed a credential by the end of the fifth year, compared with 28 percent of female students (Figure 1). Fifteen percent

“Twenty-five percent of male students who had earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second year completed a credential by the end of the fifth year, compared with 28 percent of female students.”

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students who earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year by fifth-year enrollment outcomes and gender



Note: Includes the 2002 and 2003 cohorts for Rounds 1 and 2 colleges.

of the male students persisted into their fifth year, compared with 17 percent of female students who continued enrollment. Transfer rates were the same for both male and female students (7 percent).

Disaggregating the data by age when first enrolled shows that students between the ages of 20 and 29 years old were more likely to stop out late in their academic career than were students under 20 and students 30 or over (Figure 2). About 55 percent of students in their twenties who had accumulated at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year left college by the end of their fifth year, compared with 52 percent of students 30 or older and 47 percent of students under 20 years old. Thirty percent of students 30 or over had completed a credential within five years, making

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¹ This analysis includes the 2002 and 2003 cohorts for Round 1 and 2 Achieving the Dream colleges.

² National Center for Education Statistics (2005). *Gender differences in participation and completion in undergraduate education and how they have changed over time*. U.S. Department of Education. Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005169>

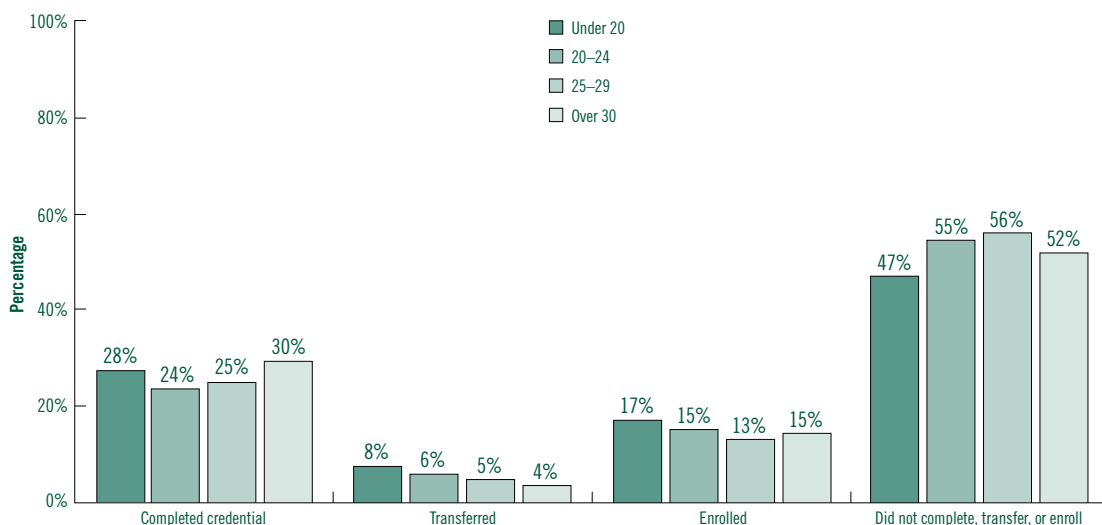
What Is a Cohort?

A cohort is a group of people studied during a period of time. The individuals in the group have at least one statistical factor—such as when they started college—in common.

The Achieving the Dream 2002 student cohort, for example, is the group of credential-seeking students that attended Achieving the Dream institutions for the first time in fall 2002.

Tracking a cohort makes it possible to compare progress and outcomes of different groups of students (e.g., groups defined by race, age or other demographic characteristics) and to determine if there are gaps in achievement among groups of interest.

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students who earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year by fifth-year enrollment outcomes and age when first enrolled



Note: Includes the 2002 and 2003 cohorts for Rounds 1 and 2 colleges.

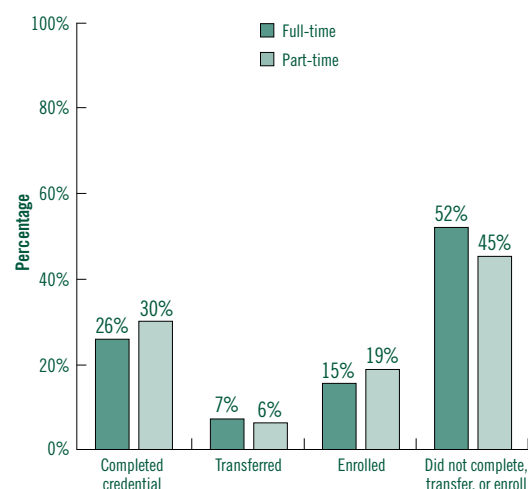
this age group the most likely to complete the credential, followed by 28 percent of students under 20.

Further research needs to be conducted to determine why students in their twenties are less likely to persist than students in their thirties. It may be that students in their twenties are far enough away from high school to be unaccustomed to the academic structure or rigors of college, while students under twenty have college aspirations of traditional postsecondary students. Similarly, students in their thirties may be more focused on completing a credential and/or career advancement.

Enrollment Status & Program of Study

Fifty-two percent of students who enrolled full-time during their first term were not enrolled by the end of their fifth year, compared with 45 percent of students who started part-time (Figure 3). Full-time students were slightly more likely than part-time students to transfer by the end of

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students who earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year by fifth-year enrollment outcomes and attendance status during the first term



Note: Includes the 2002 and 2003 cohorts for Rounds 1 and 2 colleges.

“Students with either a major or a degree goal were...more likely to have completed a credential by the end of their fifth year than were undeclared students.”

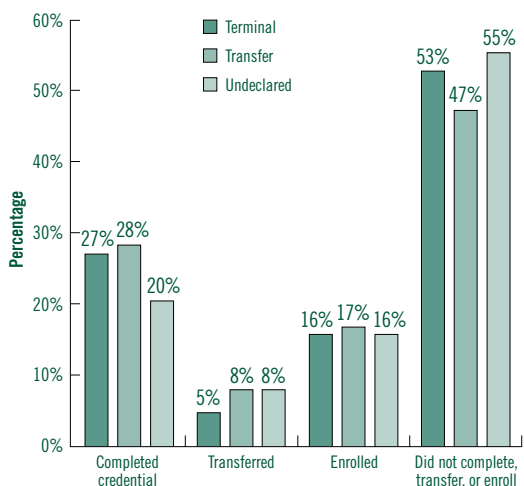
year 5 (7 percent versus 6 percent, respectively), and were less likely to still be enrolled (15 percent versus 19 percent, respectively). Twenty-six percent of students enrolled full-time during their first term earned a certificate or degree by the end of their fifth year, compared with 30 percent of comparable part-time students.

Several possible explanations might be considered. First, many students who start full-time

do not continue as full-time students. Indeed, the data show that only 15 percent of students who were enrolled full-time during the first term were still enrolled full-time during year 5. Part-time students are also more likely to complete short certificate programs, which by definition take less time to complete than do associate degrees. The data show that 45 percent of part-time students completed a short program of study, compared with 39 percent of full-time students. In addition, the percentage of students who actually transferred may be higher than reported here, as data on transfer status are often underreported. There is, however, no reason to believe that this affects one group of students more than another.

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Figure 4. Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students who earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year by fifth-year enrollment outcomes and program of study



Note: Includes the 2002 and 2003 cohorts for Rounds 1 and 2 colleges.

Award intention at time of enrollment is a predictor of completion.³ Fifty-five percent of students without a declared major or program of study left the college by the end of their fifth

“Students who had earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year and were referred to developmental education courses one level below college level...had five-year outcomes that were not dissimilar to those for non-referred students.”

year, compared with 53 percent of students with a terminal goal and 47 percent of students with a transfer goal (Figure 4). Students with either a major or a degree goal were also more likely to have completed a credential by the end of their fifth year (27 percent) than were undeclared students (20 percent).

Level of Remediation

Research shows that developmental education referral is a predictor of college outcomes:⁴ students who come to higher education unprepared for college-level coursework are less likely to persist and earn a credential than students who are not referred to developmental education. While this finding holds true at Achieving the Dream

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Figure 5. Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students who earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic by fifth-year enrollment outcomes and developmental education referral

	Completed credential	Transferred	Enrolled	Did not complete, transfer or enroll
Not referred	30	8	12	50
Referred				
MATH				
1 level below college	29	8	16	47
2 levels below college	22	5	19	54
3 levels below college	21	3	22	54
ENGLISH				
1 level below college	26	7	19	49
2 levels below college	21	4	22	53
3 levels below college	19	5	24	52
READING				
1 level below college	29	7	19	45
2 levels below college	22	5	22	51
3 levels below college	21	4	26	50
Number of subjects				
One	28	7	15	50
Two	25	7	19	50
Three	23	5	22	49

Note: Includes the 2002 and 2003 cohorts for Rounds 1 and 2 colleges; figures may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

³ Cabrera, A; Burkum, K.; & La Nasa, S. (2003). *Pathways to four-year degree completion: Determinants of degree completion among socioeconomically disadvantaged students*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Portland, OR, November 13–16, 2003.

⁴ Russell, A. “Enhancing College Student Success Through Developmental Education,” *Policy Matters*. American Association of State Colleges and Universities, August, 2008. Available at: <http://www.aascu.org/media/pm/pdf/pmaug08.pdf>.

colleges, the amount of developmental education coursework that students require makes a significant difference in college outcomes.

Students who had earned at least 30 credits by the end of their second academic year and were referred to developmental education courses one level below college level—regardless of subject area—had five-year outcomes that were not dissimilar to those for non-referred students.⁵ Thirty percent of non-referred students completed a credential by the end of year 5, compared to 29 percent of students referred to developmental math and reading and 26 percent of students referred to developmental English (Figure 5). Students referred to coursework one level below college level also had transfer rates consistent with those reported for non-referred students. The more developmental levels below college level to which students were referred, the less likely they were to complete a credential or transfer; however, they were more likely to continue their enrollment into the fifth year than were students referred to one level below college level, or non-referred students.⁶

What Does This Mean?

So much emphasis is placed on helping students survive the first year that we might forget that even those students who have finished half their requirements frequently do not complete a credential. The same markers that indicate students who may leave college early continue to be important in predicting these late leavers. More than half of male students who earned 30 or more credits by the end of their second academic year left college by the end of their fifth year. Students in their twenties were more likely than younger or older students to quit college before earning their credential. Full-time students and

those with undeclared majors were also more likely to leave by the end of year 5 than were their counterparts. This result is also more likely for students referred to developmental education two or more levels below college level.

Colleges may want to consider developing or reviewing intervention programs that target students who stop out late in their college careers. Research indicates that students who have been successful during their first two years of college may experience a different set of challenges in ensuing years as they work toward attaining their postsecondary goal—whether credential completion, transferring to a four-year institution, or persisting in their program of study.⁷ Questions colleges can consider while designing programs for experienced students include:

- What are the differences in student outcomes between male and female late stop-outs at your institution?
- Are there differences in credential completion and transfer rates of late stop-outs when disaggregated by age?
- Is there a relationship between the level of developmental education to which students are referred and student outcomes?
- What programs do we have in place to facilitate credential completion for these students?
- How do these more experienced students differ from students who drop out early in their academic careers with only a few credits accumulated?

Achieving the Dream colleges can download the companion tables to this issue of *Data Notes*, featuring your college's data, at www.dreamwebsubmission.org. ■

Data Notes is a bimonthly publication that examines data to illuminate the challenges facing Achieving the Dream colleges and to chart their progress over time.

This issue of *Data Notes* was written by Amy Topper, Achieving the Dream Data Coordinator with JBL Associates, Inc., and edited by MDC Inc.'s Communications Director, Richard Hart. Newsletter production by Linda Marcetti, Asterisk & Image.

If you have questions regarding this issue, or if there is a topic you would like to see addressed in *Data Notes*, please contact Sue Clery at sclery@jblassoc.com.

Note: This issue of *Data Notes* uses the June 2009 version of the Achieving the Dream database. Institutions are identified by the year they started work with the initiative.

Data may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

⁵ Additional analyses show that the percentage of referred students who have accrued 30 credits by the end of their second year is equal to or greater than the percentage of comparable non-referred students. These referred students may not be the normal referrals, and further research is warranted. It may be that some of these students transferred credits, or were more likely to have enrolled in summer terms.

⁶ About one-quarter of Achieving the Dream students who were referred to developmental education did not attempt it during their first term (*Data Notes*, Vol. 1 No. 6). Preliminary research shows that some students who are referred to one level below college test-out early in the term and enroll in gateway courses, which may inflate outcomes.

⁷ Juillerat, S. (2000). *Assessing the expectations and satisfaction levels of sophomores: How are they unique?* in Schreiner, L.A., & Pattengale, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Visible solutions for invisible students: Helping sophomores succeed*. (Monograph No. 31). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.