

ACCELERATE AND COMPLETE

“Although federal graduation rates provide important comparable data across institutional sectors, limitations in the data understate the success of students enrolled at two-year institutions and can be misleading to the public.”
– Committee on Measures of Student Success, Report to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan,
December 2011

Opening doors for all

Washington's community and technical colleges have an open door policy that gives everyone a fair shot at enrolling in college and improving their lives if they have the drive and determination. We accept students at any age and stage in their lives and at any educational level. We take students from where they are, to where they want to be.

The beauty of community colleges is that success comes in many different forms. We provide pathways for everyone, from the aspiring dental hygienist and computer technician, to traditional transfer students and professionals who take a class or two to update their skills. We also serve students seeking to finish their high school degrees, adults needing basic education in reading and writing and people who want to learn English.

The educational paths are varied, but they all point to a common destination: better careers and a life enriched with learning.



Moving students further

Community and technical colleges continually develop and improve ways to move more students through school and into jobs faster.

- **More completions:** The past five years have seen a 29 percent increase in workforce degrees, a 62 percent increase in science-focused transfer degrees, and a 23 percent increase in general transfer degrees.¹
- **Higher state ranking:** Washington's two-year college system ranks 6th in the nation for certificates and degrees produced.²
- **Successful transfers:** Forty percent of public baccalaureate graduates in Washington start at a community or technical college. Students who transfer from two-year colleges to four-year universities do just as well as those who started as freshmen, with similar GPAs and credits earned. Transfer students make up 47 percent of business majors, 46 percent of health field majors and 35 percent of majors in science, technology, engineering and math fields.³
- **Arrival at momentum points:** Colleges track every student to find out whether the student is reaching key momentum points that lead to completion. These include completing math, the first year of college, or a certificate or degree. We monitor each student's progress — from basic education courses all the way through to completion.

National completion rates paint an incomplete picture

National completion data is typically drawn from the IPEDS database (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System). However, the IPEDS completion calculation paints a misleading picture of community and technical colleges. It only captures full-time, degree-seeking students who have never enrolled in college before and who start fall quarter — a common profile for students at universities, but only a fraction of those at community and technical colleges. It excludes students who:

- **Attend part time.** Nearly half of Washington community and technical college students attend school part-time, usually because they work and cannot take on a full load of credits.⁴
- **Are returning to college.** Many students are adults returning to college to complete a degree, enhance their skills or expand their knowledge to be competitive in today's workforce. The median age of a Washington community or technical college student is 26.⁵

- **Began their studies in winter, spring or summer quarters.** Community and technical colleges are generally more open than four-year institutions to accepting new students after fall quarter.
- **Take longer than three years to complete a degree.** Many community and technical college students take longer to complete their studies because they work (42 percent), raise families (28 percent), and attend part-time (49 percent).⁶
- **Transfer before earning an associate degree.** Students in some majors are advised to transfer to universities early or choose to transfer before completing an associate degree.

A more accurate IPEDS number

If IPEDS completion rates must be used, a more accurate figure for Washington's community and technical college system, also using a 3-year time frame, would read:

"In Washington state, 47.6 percent of first-time, full-time students at community and technical colleges complete a degree or certificate or transfer within three years."

Even these numbers do not tell our entire success story because, as described above, the data captures only full-time, degree-seeking students who have never attended college before and who start in the fall — a small share of our students.

Using national completion data is like studying one, small puzzle piece and then trying to project the entire picture.

Cohort year	Completion (certificates and degrees) – This is the IPEDS completion calculation	Transfer	Completion + Transfer	Still Enrolled	Total (completed, transferred or still enrolled)
Started fall 2010	28.7%	18.9%	47.6%	9.8%	57.4%

1. SBCTC 2013-14 Academic Year Report.

2. CollegeMeasures.org, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

3. SBCTC research report: The Role of Transfer in the Attainment of Baccalaureate Degrees at Washington's Public Bachelor's Degree Institutions, class of 2011, August 2013.

4-6. Data comes from SBCTC 2013 Academic Year Report and SBCTC 2013 Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report.