



March 2007

# California Higher Education

## Accountability: Goal - Student Success

### Measure: California Community College Students' Degrees and Certificates Awarded and Successful Transfers

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*This report examines degree and certificate attainment and transfers into the California State University and the University of California for a selected group of first-time freshmen in the California Community Colleges. It is the first in a series on this accountability measure and is presented as part of the Commission's "Accountability Framework" for California postsecondary education.*

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The Commission advises the Governor and the Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the State's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at [www.cpec.ca.gov](http://www.cpec.ca.gov).

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Commission Report 07-06

## Summary of Findings

Too few community college students are earning two-year degrees, certificates or transferring to one of California's public universities. The data show that:

- Only 17% of the students tracked by the Commission over five years earned a two-year degree or certificate.
- 22% transferred to one of California's public universities.
- About half left the community college system without earning a degree or transferring to a public California university.
- Almost one in five were still enrolled in a community college as of 2005.
- Women attained degrees/certificates and transfers at higher rates than men.
- Latinos and African-Americans, particularly males, earned fewer degrees/certificates or transferred to California's public universities.

## The Community College Door

The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education designates California Community Colleges (CCC) as a primary point of entry—and completion—for postsecondary education in California.

In its strategic plan for the system, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office lists student success as one of its primary goals. The plan identifies student transfers, career pathways, and collaboration on programs and services among

colleges as being important to this goal. The two sets of community college student outcomes examined in this accountability measure, degrees/certificates and transfers, are among the most important missions of community colleges and provide an indicator of the performance of this segment.

## Degree/Certificate & Transfer Success

The Commission examined two-year degree/certificate earning and transfer success of 52,622 community college students over a five-year period (2001 to 2005). The data showed:

Less than 1 in 3, 15,053 (29%), earned a community college degree/certificate and/or transferred to a California public university.

Many, 10,084 (19%), were still enrolled in community college as of 2005.

The largest group, 27,485 (52%), left without transferring or earning a degree or certificate.

11,287 (22%) transferred to a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) campus.

A total of 8,893 (17%) were degree or certificate earners, of which 5,127 (10%) were also among the students who transferred to a CSU or UC campus. Of the 17% who earned a degree or certificate, 3,766 (7%) earned degrees or certificates but did not transfer. Of the students who earned degrees or certificates, one-fifth earned more than one degree or certificate.

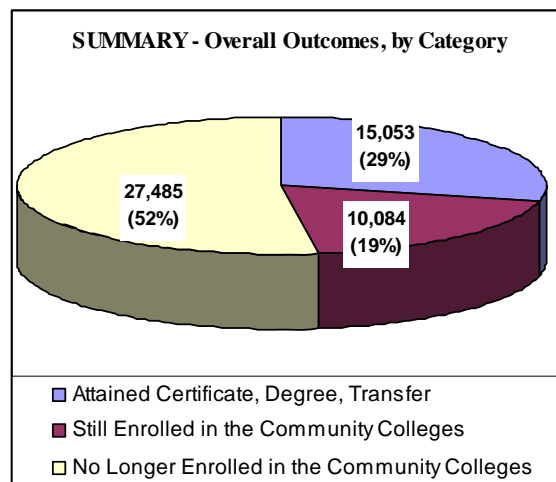
Nearly 1 in 5 of the students was still enrolled as of 2005.

Of the students earning degrees and certificates, women accounted for 57% of the successful students. Women also accounted for 55% of the students who transferred to a four-year university. This is significantly higher than their proportion of the State's population and points to a gender gap in college attainment consistent with findings in other research.

Latino students accounted for one-third of degree earners but less than a quarter of transfers, despite representing one-third of this group of community college students. Blacks attained degrees and certificates at only two-thirds the rate of their proportion of the students studied and transferred at only half this rate. Asians/Pacific Islanders acquired degrees/certificates at just over three-quarters of its share of the students studied, but accounted for nearly twice as many transfers as their proportion of the student population.

## Analyses of Findings

During the five-year period, less than one-third of the students studied achieved one of the measured outcomes. About 1 in 6 students earned a two-year degree or community college certificate, and less than 1 in 4 transferred to a CSU or UC campus. These low rates of success indicate that community colleges are not being fully utilized as gateways to a two-year degree/certificate or transfer to a CSU or UC campus. Most students exited before achieving either of these goals.



The data also show differential achievement by ethnicity and gender. Outcomes by gender showed that women achieved better degree/certificate and transfer outcomes than men. Data on outcomes by ethnicity showed that White and Asian/Pacific Islander students had more transfer success than other ethnic groups.

Latinos and males are underrepresented among community college students and have less transfer success or degree/certificate attainment. African-American students had lower degree/certificate attainment rates than other students studied.

The poor degree/certificate attainment and transfer success as well as the disparate gender and ethnicity outcomes raise questions about the extent to which the State's annual investment in community colleges is being expended to assure the best outcomes for all students.

In a 2007 report, *Rules of the Game*, the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy reported that 40% of the 520,407 students it examined were non-degree seekers. The Commission's data appears to support a finding that many students are not intensely pursuing transfer or a community college degree/certificate.

A wide range of factors affect performance in regard to community college student outcomes. They include State funding, the preparation levels of incoming students to perform college-level academic and vocational program work, and individual student characteristics. In order to improve student outcomes and maximize the benefits of postsecondary education investments, State policymakers should support initiatives that increase the number of community college students earning degrees/certificates or successfully transferring to four-year colleges.

## Policy Considerations

In the decades ahead, California's demographic diversity is expected to increase with larger shares of the State's population projected to be Latinos and Asian/Pacific Islanders. There is both an economic and public policy need for all of the State's residents to achieve higher educational attainment.

While recognizing that a large share of community college students do not seek degrees, certificates or transfers, there are opportunities to better serve those students who do. The State and the community colleges can pursue options such as:

- Improving matriculation programs (a collection of services designed to help students better define and pursue their educational goals) and helping students assess and pursue educational goals.
- Providing a more robust counseling system targeted at populations that are showing the poorest outcomes.

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### The Commission's Accountability Framework

This report is one in a series that is part of the Commission's accountability framework for higher education in California. The framework, adopted in June 2006, consists of 17 performance measures corresponding to four goals: Student Preparation for College, Affordability and Access, Student Success in Progressing through College, and Public Benefits of Postsecondary Education.

California will spend over \$14 billion in fiscal year 2007-08 to fund postsecondary education. The accountability framework gauges how well taxpayer dollars are spent to serve the needs of students and to inform policymakers on progress toward achieving the State's higher education goals.

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- Continuing to develop community college “guarantee” programs, such as transfer partnerships with baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, to provide a clearer path to goal attainment.

In 2006, state lawmakers authorized a \$24 million augmentation for matriculation and student counseling. Another \$33 million is proposed in 2007-08. Policymakers have determined that these programs facilitate student progress and increase the completion rates of students.

The Commission, in previous research on student transfers, evaluated the increased use of intersegmental transfer guarantee programs and found that they represent a clearly-defined path to transfer and eventual graduation for community college students. That and other evaluations of transfer have identified the need for a more seamless system of student transfer to UC and CSU campuses.

Some of the initiatives that California colleges and universities are undertaking to improve student academic preparation in middle schools and high schools, may also help address degree earning and transfer shortcomings.

## APPENDIX

### Methodology

This report examines certificate, degree and transfer attainment rates for the cohort of first-time freshman California Community Colleges students (students who graduated from high school in Spring 2000) who initially enrolled in a credit program during Fall 2000. The outcome data examined are for the years 2001 through 2005. The report also measures outcome attainment by gender and ethnic groups. The Commission examined community college student records using its “Unique Student Identifier” data system of information supplied by the three public systems. The Commission examined the “completions table” of student records to determine the number of students in this cohort who obtained a community college degree or certificate. The Commission examined the “enrollment table” to determine the number of students enrolled in the CSU and the UC in academic years subsequent to 2000.

Commission staff selected a cohort of students for this study by using following criteria:

- Non-Credit students were excluded
- Fall term 2000 students were selected
- Enrollment status = First-time
- High school of origin = school ownership < ‘81’ (eliminating colleges)
- High school of origin = school ownership > ‘06’ (eliminating unknowns)
- High school graduation year = ‘2000’
- Student not concurrently enrolled at CSU or UC anytime in academic year 2000 (Fall 2000 to Summer 2001)
- Student did not attend a CCC prior to ‘2000’

This last process also eliminates any students concurrently enrolled in high school and CCC.

There were 1,792 CCC students who obtained more than one degree or certificate. 5,127 CCC students who transferred *also* obtained at least one degree or certificate.

Commission staff first determined the number of students from the starting cohort that transferred to a UC or CSU from 2001 to 2005. These students were then eliminated from the cohort to obtain an unduplicated count in the following steps. Next, Commission staff determined the number of students who obtained at least one certificate or degree. Again, these students were then eliminated from the cohort to obtain an unduplicated count in the following steps. Commission staff then determined the number of students in the pared-down cohort that attended a community college any time during the 2005 academic year. This inquiry also provided information on students who had not completed one of the three measured outcomes, but who were no longer enrolled in the community colleges in the 2005 academic year.

Many of the students in this cohort attained multiple outcomes. Therefore, the Commission determined that further disaggregating these data (e.g., separating degrees from certificates, and CSU transfers from UC transfers) produced duplicative results. While not the only method for examining student outcomes, this cohort analysis provided the most reasonable results from the data available. In addition, it provides a clear, simple baseline against which such analyses may be compared in the future.





