

## Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream is a multiyear national initiative to help more community college students succeed. The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that traditionally have faced significant barriers to success, including students of color and low-income students. The initiative aims to help participating colleges identify at-risk student groups in their student populations and then design and implement intervention strategies that will increase the success of these at-risk groups.

## When Do Students Stop-Out?

About half of all college freshmen stop out<sup>1</sup> of college before their sophomore year. ACT an independent organization that provides educational assessment, research, and information, estimated that the first- to second-year retention rate of incoming community college freshmen was 52 percent in 2005. Additional research shows that many of these students stop out during their first year.<sup>2</sup> A 2007 study conducted by Policy Analysis for California Education found that 60 percent of California community college freshmen with high school diplomas and transfer aspirations stopped out or lowered their academic goals after one semester.<sup>3</sup>

This issue of *Data Notes* is the first of a two-part series investigating which academic terms have the highest frequency of stop-outs at Achieving the Dream colleges. In this issue, students who stop out during high-frequency terms are examined by enrollment status, gender, and race/ethnicity. The next issue will examine the developmental needs, Pell Grant status, credits completed, age, and grade point averages of students up to the point at which they stop out, by college calendar system.

For purposes of this analysis, stop-outs were defined as students who did not enroll in a given term, and did not re-enroll for the balance of the year or during the consecutive academic year. Summer terms were not included in this analysis, as many students do not enroll during these terms. Transfer students or those obtaining credentials were not considered stop-outs. Data for the earliest cohorts of all Achieving the Dream participants were included in this analysis.<sup>4</sup> Institutions on semesters and those on quarters/trimesters are reported separately.<sup>5</sup>

When reviewing these results, it is important to keep in mind that, given the nature of community college students, there is a chance that students categorized as having stopped out may re-enroll at some point beyond the period studied. In addition, not all colleges report transfer data, so the annual percentages of students who are reported as having stopped out may be slightly overstated.<sup>6</sup>

## Enrollment Status

Slightly different results were found by students' enrollment status during their first term of enrollment, as well as by calendar system. Similar to the findings in national reports, slightly more

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Figure 1. Percentage of Achieving the Dream students<sup>1</sup> who stopped out<sup>2</sup> by attendance status during the first term, and term of stop-out

	COLLEGES ON SEMESTERS		COLLEGES ON QUARTERS OR TRIMESTERS	
	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME
TERM 1	-	-	-	-
TERM 2	16	33	13	29
TERM 3	N/A	N/A	10	11
TOTAL, YEAR 1	16	33	23	40
TERM 1	19	19	17	14
TERM 2	9	8	6	7
TERM 3	N/A	N/A	4	4
TOTAL, YEAR 2	28	27	28	25
TERM 1	15	10	17	8
TERM 2	8	6	5	4
TERM 3	N/A	N/A	3	3
TOTAL, YEAR 3	22	15	25	14
TOTAL YEARS 1, 2 & 3	66	76	76	78

<sup>1</sup> Includes: Earliest cohort for Rounds 1, 2, 3, and 4 (2002 for Rounds 1 and 2; 2003 for Round 3; 2004 for Round 4).

<sup>2</sup> Stop-outs are those who did not enroll in the reported term, and did not return or re-enroll during any terms through the following consecutive academic year. Transfer students or those obtaining credentials were not considered stop-outs.

<sup>3</sup> Stop-outs are those students who do not re-enroll during a given time period. They may, however, return to the college or university after the defined study period.

<sup>4</sup> Choy, S. (2002). *Access and persistence: Findings from 10 years of longitudinal research on students*. Washington D.C.: American Council on Education, Center for Policy Analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Driscoll, A. (2007). *Beyond access: how the first semester matters for community college students' aspirations and persistence*. Policy Analysis for California Education, University of California, Davis.

<sup>6</sup> Earliest cohort for Rounds 1, 2, 3, and 4 (2002 for Rounds 1 and 2; 2003 for Round 3; 2004 for Round 4).

<sup>7</sup> There were 81 colleges on the semester system and 9 on the quarter or trimester system.

<sup>8</sup> A previous issue of *Data Notes* indicates about one-half of the Achieving the Dream colleges report student transfers, with an annual transfer rate of three to five percent. Thus, it is estimated that the annual stop-out rates reported herein may be overstated by as much as 1.5 to 2.5 percentage points. Clery, S. "Transfer Students," *Data Notes: Keeping Informed about Achieving the Dream Data*, Vol. 4, No. 1. Jan/Feb 2009.

## What Is a Cohort?

A *cohort* is a group of people studied over 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 over time makes it possible to compare the 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 of Achieving the Dream students<sup>1</sup> who stopped out<sup>2</sup> by gender and term

	COLLEGES ON SEMESTERS		COLLEGES ON QUARTERS OR TRIMESTERS	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
<b>TERM 1</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>TERM 2</b>	26	22	20	18
<b>TERM 3</b>	N/A	N/A	11	10
<b>TOTAL, YEAR 1</b>	26	22	30	28
<b>TERM 1</b>	19	18	16	16
<b>TERM 2</b>	9	8	7	6
<b>TERM 3</b>	N/A	N/A	4	4
<b>TOTAL, YEAR 2</b>	28	27	27	26
<b>TERM 1</b>	12	12	15	13
<b>TERM 2</b>	7	7	4	5
<b>TERM 3</b>	N/A	N/A	3	3
<b>TOTAL, YEAR 3</b>	19	19	22	20
<b>TOTAL YEARS 1, 2 &amp; 3</b>	73	69	79	74

<sup>1</sup> Includes: Earliest cohort for Rounds 1, 2, 3, and 4 (2002 for Rounds 1 and 2; 2003 for Round 3; 2004 for Round 4).

<sup>2</sup> Stop outs are those who did not enroll in the reported term, and did not return or re-enroll during any terms through the following consecutive academic year. Transfer students or those obtaining credentials were not considered stop outs.

than half of part-time students at Achieving the Dream colleges stopped out by the fall of their second academic year, regardless of calendar system (semester-system – 52 percent; quarter/trimester-systems – 54 percent; Figure 1). However, full-time students' first to second year stop-out rates were lower – 35 and 40 percent, respectively—for colleges on semester and quarter/trimester systems. By the end of the third academic year, two-thirds of students enrolled full-time during their first term at semester-system colleges stopped out, as did three-quarters of those enrolled part-time.

Part-time students stopped out earlier in their academic careers than did full-time students. More specifically, part-time students were about twice as likely to stop out during the first year than full-time students. During the second academic year, stop-out rates for part- and full-time students were similar. By the third academic year, part-time students had a lower average stop-out rate than full-time students. Overall, because of the high stop-out rate for part-time students during the first year, more part-time students stopped out than full-time—10 percentage points higher in semester system colleges, and 2 percentage points higher for those on quarters/trimesters.

Students enrolled at colleges on quarter/trimester systems had different stop-out patterns than those on semester systems during the first academic year: colleges on quarter/trimester systems had first-year stop-out rates of 23 percent for full-time students and 40 percent for part-time students, which were higher than for students on semesters. Otherwise, a comparable pattern was seen in stop-out rates during the second and third academic years. A sizeable percentage of students stopped out before enrolling in the first term of the subsequent years, but a smaller share of students stopped out in subsequent terms, regardless of calendar system. Interestingly, a larger portion of full-time students stopped out during the third academic year than did during the first academic year, regardless of calendar system.

## Gender

Overall, female students were significantly less likely to stop out than male students (Figure 2). At colleges on semesters, 73 percent of males stopped out over the course of three years, compared to 69 percent of females. Slight differences in stop-out rates by gender were seen during the first year, where males stopped out at rates about two to four percentage points higher than females: For colleges on semesters, the rates were 22 and 26 percent, and at colleges on quarters/trimesters, 28 and 30 percent, respectively, for females and males. During the second academic year, the stop-out rates for males and females were not significantly different. During the third academic year, stop-out rates for both males and females at colleges on semesters were 19 percent; however, for colleges on quarters/trimesters, females once again had a slightly lower average stop-out rate: 20 percent, compared with 22 percent for males.

## Race/ethnicity

Noteworthy is the finding that Hispanic students were less likely to stop out over the three years than were black, non-Hispanic; white, non-Hispanic; or Native American students. Further, with only a few exceptions, the Hispanic stop-out rate was equal to or less than that for white, non-Hispanic students (Figure 3). Of students enrolled at colleges on semesters, 67 percent of Hispanic students stopped out through their third academic year, compared to 72 percent of black, non-Hispanic; and white, non-Hispanic students; and 77 percent of Native American students. The results were comparable for the racial/ethnic groups, excepting Native Americans, for colleges on quarters/trimesters: by the end of the third academic year, 81 percent of black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic students, and 82 percent of white, non-Hispanic students, stopped out, compared to 71 percent of Native American students.

**Figure 3.** Percentage of round 1, 2, 3, and 4 Achieving the Dream students<sup>1</sup> who stopped out<sup>2</sup> by term and race/ethnicity

	COLLEGES ON SEMESTERS						COLLEGES ON QUARTERS OR TRIMESTERS					
	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Non-resident alien	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Non-resident alien
TERM 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TERM 2	25	25	22	20	30	23	29	18	21	19	20	21
TERM 3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	13	8	9	10	10	11
TOTAL, YEAR 1	25	25	22	20	30	23	42	26	29	29	30	32
TERM 1	19	21	18	16	20	18	19	18	22	16	15	15
TERM 2	9	7	9	8	10	8	4	7	8	7	5	5
TERM 3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-	4	5	4	3	2
TOTAL, YEAR 2	27	29	27	24	29	26	23	30	34	26	23	22
TERM 1	13	13	11	12	12	12	9	16	9	12	10	8
TERM 2	7	5	6	8	7	7	5	6	6	5	5	4
TERM 3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	3	4	3	3	4
TOTAL, YEAR 3	20	19	17	20	18	20	17	25	18	19	17	15
TOTAL YEARS 1, 2 & 3	72	72	67	64	77	68	82	81	81	74	71	70

<sup>1</sup> Includes: Earliest cohort for Rounds 1, 2, 3, and 4 (2002 for Rounds 1 and 2; 2003 for Round 3; 2004 for Round 4).

<sup>2</sup> Stop-outs are those who did not enroll in the reported term, and did not return or re-enroll during any terms through the following consecutive academic year. Transfer students or those obtaining credentials were not considered stop outs.

At colleges on quarter/trimester systems, black, non-Hispanic students had the lowest year 1 stop-out rates, while white, non-Hispanic students had the highest – 26 percent and 42 percent, respectively. Also of interest is the finding that during the second academic year, the stop-out rate for Hispanic students does not follow the otherwise relatively low path. During the second academic year, the Hispanic stop-out rate was 34 percent, compared with 23, 30, and 23 for white, non-Hispanic; black, non-Hispanic; and Native American students, respectively. The second year rate reverses that of the first, where the stop-out rate for Hispanic students was lower than that of white, non-Hispanic students (29 compared with 42 percent).

At semester-system colleges, Asian/Pacific Islander students were the least likely to stop out during the first academic year, while Native American students had the highest stop-out rate – 20 percent and 30 percent, respectively. Another note of interest is that, although there was some fluctuation in stop-out rates for colleges on semesters, the rates followed similar patterns by term and academic year, and race/ethnicity. However, for colleges on quarters/trimesters, the overall stop-out rate patterns fluctuated widely by race/ethnicity.

## What Does this Mean?

National research shows that community college students are more likely to stop out during their first year of college than are students at four-year institutions,<sup>7</sup> which is not entirely surprising, given that community colleges enroll larger percentages of “at-risk” students – those attending part-time, having inadequate academic preparation, having

greater financial need, and/or working full-time – than do four-year institutions.

Given the large portions of at-risk students enrolled at community colleges, and the high stop-out rates indicated, colleges would benefit from an analysis of those students who do not re-enroll. Determining the specific groups of students that do not continue, and at what point they are most likely to leave the institution, is important. The different stop-out patterns revealed by race/ethnicity at colleges on quarters/trimesters point to the increased need to conduct a detailed analysis that disaggregates student groups. The following questions can help guide your discussion when looking at your college data disaggregated by term:

- During what terms are students likely to not re-enroll at our institution?
- What could it be about these terms that cause students not to re-enroll?
- Are the reasons different for different terms and academic years?
- Do different stop-out rates exist for different types of students?
- Do we have evidence-based programs in place to help retain students in these terms?
- If not, what programs can we implement to help them persist?

The companion tables to this issue of *Data Notes*, which feature your college data, can be accessed and downloaded through the [www.dreamwebsubmission.org](http://www.dreamwebsubmission.org) site.

*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, Research Associate, JBL Associates, Inc., and edited by Will Sutton of Achieving the Dream at MDC, Inc., and designed by Rachel Goodwin.

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](mailto:sclery@jblassoc.com).

Note: This report uses the April 2008 version of the Achieving the Dream database. Institutions are identified by the year they started work with the initiative.

<sup>7</sup> Bradburn, E. M. (2003). *Short-term enrollment in postsecondary education: Student background and institutional differences in reasons for early departure, 1996-98* (NCES 2003-153). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.