

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.

Enrollment Status and Student Outcomes

Achieving the Dream focuses on student populations that tend to be at risk — students of color and those from low-income families. Community colleges also should pay attention to additional factors that may be related to student outcomes. For example, research indicates that part-time students are less likely to succeed than full-time students: Part-time enrollment was associated with lower rates of persistence and attainment compared with full-time enrollment, even after taking into account other student characteristics, such as gender, race/ethnicity, type of institution attended, dependency status, number of dependents, marital status and socioeconomic status.¹ Part-time students are of particular concern to Achieving the Dream colleges, as nearly half (46 percent) of the students in the 2003 cohort enrolled on a part-time basis during the first term.

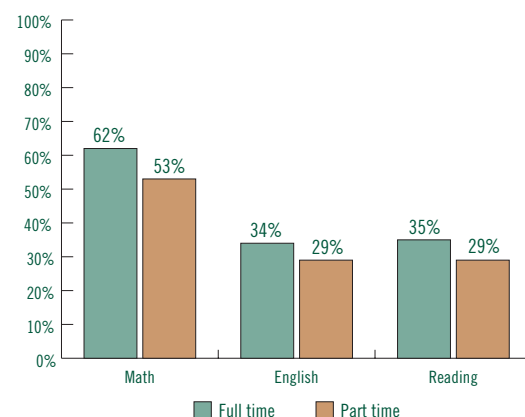
“Nearly half (46 percent) of the students in the 2003 cohort enrolled on a part-time basis during the first term.”

This analysis examines the impact of attendance status in the first term for students entering 49 Achieving the Dream colleges in fall 2003.² The differences in developmental needs between full- and part-time students, along with several outcome measures — persistence, credits completed, and accumulated and cumulative GPA — were compared. This analysis will open the door to a discussion about the need to design appropriate intervention strategies for part- and full-time students.

Developmental Needs

Figure 1 displays the differences in developmental needs, by subject, of students who enrolled

Figure 1. Percentage of the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort referred to developmental education by attendance status during the first term of enrollment



This analysis includes 49 of 57 colleges that began participating in Achieving the Dream in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

part time and full time during the first term. In all subjects, a larger proportion of full-time students were referred to developmental education than were part-time students. The largest proportion of students was referred to developmental math. Sixty-two percent of full-time students were referred to developmental math, compared with 53 percent of part-time students — a difference of 9 percentage points. The difference between the needs of full- and part-time students was smaller in the two other subjects: 34 and 35 percent of full-time students were referred for developmental education in English and reading, respectively, compared with 29 percent of part-time students in both subjects.

One possible explanation for these results stems from the belief that younger, traditional-age students — who were more likely to attend full time³ — may have less academic experience and preparedness than older students and, therefore, require more remediation.⁴ Further,

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¹Horn, L. and Carroll, C.D. *Nontraditional Undergraduates: Trends in Enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment Among 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students* (NCES 97-578). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. November 1996. Available: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/97578.pdf>.

²This includes colleges that began Achieving the Dream participation in 2004, 2005 and 2006; reported data on the 2003 cohort of students; and provided data through the 2005–06 academic year. Of the 57 colleges that met these criteria, 49 colleges provided data that could be used for this analysis.

³Sixty-six percent of the 2003 cohort age 18 to 22 enrolled full time during their first term, compared with 31 percent of those over the age of 22.

⁴In all three subjects — math, English and reading — students referred to developmental education, on average, were younger than those not referred; the difference was statistically significant for all subjects.

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.

traditional-age students were more likely to aspire to transferring than older students (56 percent, compared with 44 percent, respectively), while older students were more likely to enroll in terminal majors (44 percent, compared with 31 percent, respectively).⁵ Terminal-major fields often do not require the depth and breadth of academic coursework that transfer-seeking students are required to complete and, consequently, do not require the same level of developmental education. All of these factors, working together, may explain the higher portions of full-time students with developmental education needs.

Persistence

Persistence was measured at three points in time: at the second term, at any time during the second year and at any time during the third year. The group of students who persisted includes those who re-enrolled any time during the year, completed their credentials or transferred. As displayed in Figure 2, large differences exist between the persistence rates of part- and full-time students. Full-time students were 21 percentage points more likely to persist to the second term than part-time students — 58 percent of part-time students, compared with 79 percent of full-time students. Of students enrolled anytime during the second year, 47 percent of part-time students persisted, com-

pared with 63 percent of full-time students. This disparity continued in the third academic year, when 34 percent of part-time students persisted, compared with 46 percent of full-time students.

“Full-time students were 21 percentage points more likely to persist to the second term than part-time students.”

The largest persistence gap between full- and part-time students was seen at the second term (21 percentage points) rather than in the second or third academic years (16 and 12 percentage points, respectively). This indicates that, compared with full-time students, a larger portion of part-time students left college early in their postsecondary education: 42 percent of part-time students did not continue to the second term, while the second and third year non-persistence rates showed less erosion, with an additional 10 to 15 percent not persisting. On the other hand, among full-time students, the initial loss rate was lower than that of part-time students (21 percent), while the second and third year additional non-persistence rates were steady at slightly more than 15 percent for both years. It should be noted that some part-time students may have short-term goals that are satisfied with one semester’s work.

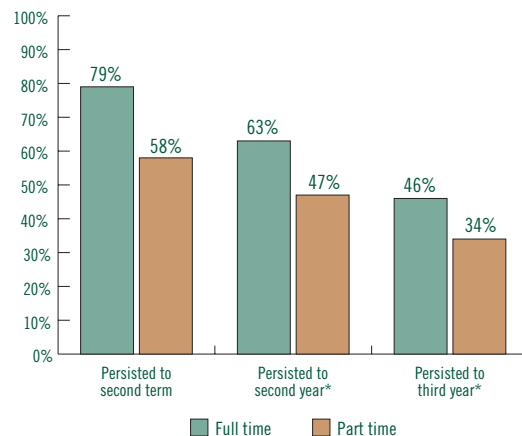
Grade Point Average and Credits Earned

Students’ grade point averages (GPA) were examined for the 2005–06 academic year only for those students in the cohort who persisted to and were enrolled at some point during the 2005–06 academic year. Full-time students had a lower average GPA (2.5) than part-time students (2.8); this difference was statistically significant. Full-time students may have a lower average GPA because they take more difficult courses, such as upper-level math and English requirements, or because they are less prepared academically (Figure 3).

Credits accumulated over the three academic years also were examined only for those students who persisted and enrolled at some time during the 2005–06 academic year. As would be expected, students who enrolled full time during their first term earned more credits (51 credits) than those who enrolled part time (35 credits). For students attending colleges with traditional semester calendars, this translates to

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Figure 2. Percentage of the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort persisting by attendance status during the first term of enrollment



*“Students who persisted” include those who re-enrolled any time during the year, completed their credentials or transferred.

This analysis includes 49 of 57 colleges that began participating in Achieving the Dream in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

⁵Some students seek specific education or training that can be completed at their community college. This course of study, which can result in a certificate or an associate degree, usually is preparation for a specific occupation. Students who fit this description enroll in terminal-major programs. Other students begin their education with the goal of transferring to a four-year college to pursue bachelor’s degrees; these are transfer-seeking students.

Figure 3. Average GPA and number of credits accumulated by the end of the third year for the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort by attendance status during the first term of enrollment

	Full time	Part time
GPA	2.5	2.8
Credits accumulated	51	35
Percent of credits completed	76	77

This analysis includes only students who persisted to the third year. "Students who persisted" include those who re-enrolled any time during the year, completed their credentials or transferred.

This analysis includes 49 of 57 colleges that began participating in Achieving the Dream in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

full-time students' completing an average of 8.5 credits per term, compared with 5.8 credits for part-time students. This indicates that students who enrolled on a full-time basis during their first term, although accumulating more credits than those attending part time, did not continue through their second and third academic years on a full-time basis.

Students who initially enrolled full time completed a slightly smaller percentage of credits attempted than those who started part time (76 percent versus 77 percent). Although this difference may be small from a policy standpoint, it is statistically significant. Time allocation, academic preparedness and course selection all may help explain this difference in credits earned. Also, recall that a larger portion of part-time students (as compared with full-time students) did not return for the second term. This higher attrition rate among part-time students may have removed lower-achieving part-time students from the cohort earlier than lower-achieving full-time students. This would result in slightly higher outcome measures for part-time students.

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Additional research is needed to examine differences in GPA and percentage of credits completed between full- and part-time students, as well as the enrollment patterns of students who begin full time.

What Does This Mean?

Given the significant number of part-time students at Achieving the Dream colleges⁶ and differences in the needs and outcomes of students who start full time or part time, community colleges should consider initial attendance status — along with other student characteristics — a predictor of persistence and degree completion. The differential results may be due to differences in students' developmental needs, educational goals and majors. Interventions that help full-time students may not be suitable for part-time students.

Questions that colleges can examine include:

- How do our part- and full-time students differ?
- Does attendance status make a difference in persistence at our institution?
- Do a larger portion of either our part-time or full-time students have developmental needs? What does this mean in terms of our program offerings? Are we offering classes and programs on a schedule that part-time students can take advantage of, as part-time students tend to need more program offerings at nontraditional times?
- What strategies does our institution have in place that target each of these groups? Is the assistance appropriately tailored to the needs of full- and part-time students?

Achieving the Dream's Database

Achieving the Dream colleges can use the Achieving the Dream database created by JBL Associates, Inc. to replicate the analysis presented here for their own institutions. This analysis might help colleges identify areas of their curricula or groups of students needing special attention. ■

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 Sue Clery and Amy Topper, Research Associates, JBL Associates, Inc. and edited and designed by KSA-Plus Communications, Inc.

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.

This report uses the March 2007 version of the Achieving the Dream database. Colleges are identified by the year they started work with the initiative.

⁶It is assumed the percentage of part-time students at Achieving the Dream colleges is similar among the cohorts.