Trends in Community College Enrollment and Completion Data, Issue 6

Jolanta Juszkiewicz
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For more information, contact:
Jolanta Juszkiewicz, Ph.D.
Director of Policy Analysis
American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-416-4502
E-mail: jjuszkiewicz@aacc.nche.edu

This is the sixth issue in a series of American Association of Community Colleges analyses of trends in community college enrollments and examination of completion rates. Two sources are used, enrollment, graduation rates, and outcomes measures information from the U.S. Department of Education and enrollment and completion rates published by the National Student Clearinghouse.

I. Overview and Highlights

Being retrospective, the data neither capture the state of the postsecondary landscape nor the evolving situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic resulted in the shuttering of schools and college campuses at postsecondary institutions and nationwide cancellation of in classroom education. Almost instantaneously, all educational institutions from pre-K to graduate programs had to provide distance education. Although data at the time of the pandemic are not yet available, anecdotally we know that many students withdrew. For many the reason was the inability or unwillingness to switch to on-line pedagogy. Those already financially challenged and others experiencing financial hardship brought on by job losses or reduced hours could not afford to continue their education. There were other challenges associated with handling at-home children and other family members. None of this will be reflected in this report. Nonetheless, as part of a series, it is important not to skip an issue. This report will allow pre- and post-pandemic comparisons.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) release data on fall enrollment and student outcomes for postsecondary institutions. Previously, reports with summary findings accompanied the data release. Beginning with the 2017-2018 data year for IPEDS surveys, in lieu of issuing reports, ED has provided tables for the surveys, including fall enrollment, graduation rates, and outcome measures.[1] NSC continued to publish both fall and spring term enrollment reports.

The two higher education data sources differ with respect to how data are collected. ED data are aggregated at the institution-level, whereas NSC data are based on student-level information. Both use the same postsecondary institutional classifications[i] categorizing community colleges as public 2-year institutions, facilitating comparative analysis. This definition of community colleges necessarily excludes public colleges that confer mostly associate degrees and certificates but also some four-year degrees. In this report, however, the terms “public 2-year institutions” and “community colleges” are used interchangeably.

Technically, this is not an accurate reflection of the sector, as community colleges increasingly include institutions that offer one or more baccalaureate programs, which, using IPEDS categorization, places then in the public 4-year rather than 2-year sector. Enrollment trends in community colleges, particularly in comparison to public 4-year institutions, therefore, are concomitantly problematic. Over the years, how community colleges are designated has changed. The College Board’s student financial aid data, has historically used the IPEDS definition of community colleges as public 2-year institutions. For several years it has used a broadened definition of community colleges to include public 4-year institutions that are primarily associate degree-granting institutions. AACC has long promoted a broader definition and its designation of community colleges does not exclude primarily associate and

[i]The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) classifies postsecondary institutions into nine categories based on control and level. https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/VisGlossaryAll.aspx. Control categories are public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit. The level categories, based on the highest degree awarded, are 4-year and higher (4 year), 2-but-less-than 4-year (2 year), and less than 2-year.

certificate granting institutions that also offered one or more bachelor's degree programs.[2] In April 2020, the Community College Research Center delved into this topic and estimated that community college enrollment undercounts about a million students.[3] Because the NSC continues to use the IPEDS categorizations of various sectors of higher education, this issue presents information for public 2-year institutions.

The overall higher education fall enrollment peaked in fall 2010 and continuously declined through fall 2018. This was true for trends in enrollment in public 2-year colleges and for-profit institutions. Some sectors, namely public and private non-profit 4-year institutions, however, have experienced a steady increase in enrollment during this period. Projections through 2028 show a modest growth in postsecondary enrollment, including at community colleges.[4] However, those projections were calculated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Everything is up for grabs as a result of the consequences of the pandemic. Early indications about current college students is that they are reassessing continuing their enrollment this fall. A survey of college students conducted in March revealed that one out of five were uncertain about whether they would reenroll in the fall term.[5] FAFSA renewals in March were 5% lower than the previous year, down by about 350,000 applications. Hardest hit were students from the lowest-income backgrounds, who represented more than seven out of 10 students who did not renew their FAFSA applications.[6] More anecdotal reports paint a dire picture. The pattern may not follow what happened during the Great Recession.[7] Enrollment surged in 2010-2011 in certain sectors, those with a high concentration of workforce programs, including community colleges and for-profit institutions. There are no definitive forecasts for whether college enrollment will go up, as is typical during economic downturns, or down because of the public health nature of this recession. What some surveys show is that for those considering further training or education, there is more appeal for short-term, non-degree programs, either provided by postsecondary institutions such as community colleges or employers. Going locally is a strong factor in college choice in this climate.[8] Some will opt to take a year off from college. A survey of high school seniors found that 16% reported that they are likely to take a gap year.[9]

Key findings of this report include:

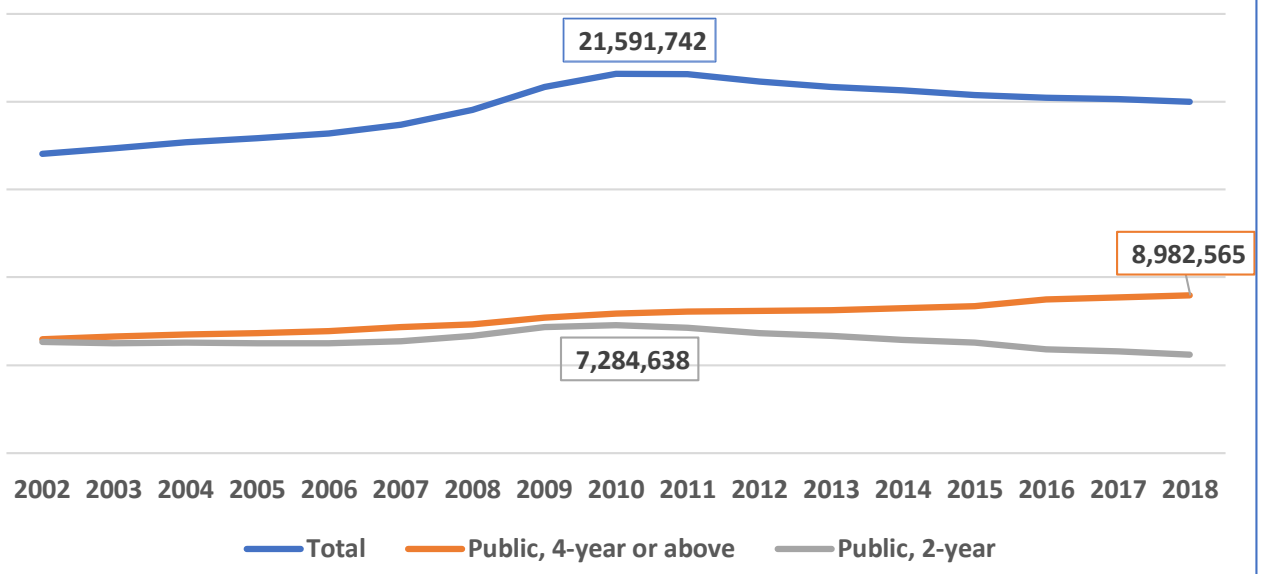
- Between fall 2017 and fall 2018, the decline in enrollment continued nationwide in community colleges, although the decrease was less pronounced than in previous years for both men and women, all age categories, and regardless of enrollment intensity.
- Community college enrollment is projected to start increasing over the next decade, but not reaching the peak of fall 2010.
- The official IPEDS graduation rate for community colleges, which measures completion of the first-time, full-time cohort for 150% of "normal time," grew by over 20% in the past decade, from 21.9% to 26.6%.
- The NSC community college completion rate for full-time-only students, which is the most comparable to ED's official graduation rate, is 61%, or more than two times higher than ED's graduation rate. The NSC tracks students for six years rather than ED's three years.
- ED's new 8-year completion rate, referred to as an outcome measure, is 30% at the same institution for the cohort of full- time, first-time community college students. Full-time, non-first-time students had the highest completion rate at the same institution, 38%.

II. Trends in Community College Enrollment

ED collects and reports institutional-level data from postsecondary Title-IV eligible institutions for fall enrollment.[ii] As is depicted in Figure 1, there were two distinct periods before and after the peak enrollment year for higher education overall and community colleges. Four-year public institutions bucked that trend. Leading to the Great Recession enrollment increased annually and peaked in its wake, particularly in community colleges. In fall 2018, and for the fourth straight year, overall enrollment in postsecondary institutions declined by about 89,000. This was modest compared to a drop of more than 165,000 between 2015 and 2016. Decreases in overall enrollment were primarily driven by declining enrollments at for-profit and public 2-year institutions. Public 2-year college enrollments declined less than 3% for the third consecutive year. Between fall 2016 and fall 2017, enrollment fell by about 112,000. This was three and a half times less than the 389,000 decrease between fall 2015 and fall 2016. Private, for-profit 4-year institutions experienced a much sharper decline from the previous fall.[10]

ED enrollment data are collected once a year. Because the NSC receives the information periodically throughout the year, enrollment data are more current than ED's. When fall 2018 enrollment data are made available by ED, NSC publishes an estimate of fall 2019 enrollment.

Figure 1: Trend in IPEDS Fall Enrollment: All Institutions, Public 4-Year and Public 2-Year, 2002-2018



The NSC fall 2019 enrollment information mimics the continued decline across all sectors of higher education and community colleges. Potentially concerning is NSC data showing a decline in the fall enrollment at public 4-year institutions, a first in decades.[11] As one data point, it is unknown, however, whether this is the beginning of a trend or a one-year blip. The impact on fall 2020 enrollment that the universal closure of classroom

[ii]For the 2018 fall enrollment, the data collection occurred in spring 2019. Another survey collects 12-month unduplicated enrollment for the same institutions.

education starting in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis is not fully known yet. ED and NSC data are comparable in the general direction of changes in enrollment across sectors; however, they differ somewhat in terms of the intensity of the increases and decreases. (Table 1)

fall 2018 and 2019, whereas they represented almost 5% in fall 2017. Public 2-year institutions have consistently accounted for about 30% of the enrollment each of the three years.

As Table 2 shows, regardless of group (gender, age, and enrollment intensity) NSC fall enrollment

Table 1: Percent Changes in Fall Enrollment by Select Institutions, 2016-2019

Percent Change from Previous Year						
	Total Fall Enrollment		Public 4-Year Institutions		Public 2-Year Institutions	
	IPEDS	NSC	IPEDS	NSC	IPEDS	NSC
Fall 2016	-0.8%	-1.4%	4.7%	0.2%	-6.0%	-2.6%
Fall 2017	-0.4%	-1.0%	1.3%	-0.2%	-2.3%	-1.7%
Fall 2018	-0.6%	-1.7%	1.5%	0.0%	-2.8%	-3.2%
Fall 2019		-1.3%		-1.2%		-1.4%

Table 2: Percent Changes from Prior Year in NSC Fall Enrollment at Public 2-Year Institutions by Gender, Age, and Enrollment Intensity, 2017-2019

	Gender		Age		Enrollment Intensity	
	Men	Women	18 - 24	Over 24	Part-Time	Full-Time
Fall 2017	-2.0%	-1.5%	-0.2%	-4.3%	-1.9%	-1.5%
Fall 2018	-4.6%	-2.1%	-4.7%	-3.5%	-2.2%	-4.7%
Fall 2019	-2.2%	-0.8%	-1.5%	-3.7%	-1.6%	-1.1%

The volatility in the decrease in enrollment has eased in recent years. (Table 1) However, the most recent NSC data show another dip in overall enrollments as well as in both public 2-year and 4-year institutions. The most pronounced change in enrollment occurred at for-profit 4-year institutions. Although losses in enrollment continued, they were noticeably smaller than previous years. These institutions experienced a decrease of 15.1% between the fall of 2017 and fall 2018 and only a 2.1% decrease the following fall. Nonetheless, the for-profit institutions share of total fall enrollment remained about 4% in

has decreased, although not evenly between 2017 and 2019. The decline can be characterized as jagged rather than linear. The decline in women's enrollment has consistently been less than for men. Between fall 2018 and fall 2019 the decline in enrollment for women was less than one percent. Little separated the enrollment decline in the past year between those attending part-time versus full-time. The decline in enrollment for adults over the age of 24 was highest between fall 2016 and fall 2017, subsided somewhat the following fall and increased recently between fall 2018 and fall 2019. The decrease in enrollment

of this age group was more than double that for young adults, ages 18 to 24. The group differences between fall 2019, pre-COVID-19 and fall 2020, post-COVID-19 will be of interest.

Programs and Majors

For the first time, NSC released enrollment data by program level and major beginning fall 2017, when it started collecting such information. As Table 3A shows, year-to-year changes in the enrollment of undergraduate programs, except for bachelor's programs between fall 2016 and fall 2017, have all shown declines. The opposite has been true for enrollment in graduate programs where there has been a consistent increase, albeit less than 1%. The largest decline of any category occurred between fall 2016 and fall 2017 for "other undergraduates" defined by NSC as including undergraduate certificate/diploma, teacher preparation and special noncredential programs that have been classified by institutions as undergraduate programs, as well as enrollments that are not part of any structured program. The next largest decline of 2.8% occurred in enrollment in associate degree programs between fall 2018 and fall 2019. The next table will focus on these programs.

The 2.8% average decline in enrollment in associate degree programs between fall 2018 and fall 2019 masked the wide differences across sectors as shown in Table 3B. The biggest drop in enrollment in these programs occurred in public 4-year institutions. Year-to-year volatility for most of the sectors is also evident. The trend in enrollment has been most steady at public 2-year institutions, with annual declines during this period of less than two percent. For an underdetermined reason(s) enrollment in associate degree programs decreased by a whopping 20.6% at for-profit 4-year institutions between fall 2016 and fall 2017 but levelled at around 5% in subsequent years.

Table 3A: Percent Changes from Prior Year in NSC Fall Enrollment by Program at All Sectors, 2017-2019

Sector	Program Level	Fall 2019	Fall 2018	Fall 2017
All Sectors	Undergraduate (All)	-1.7%	-2.1%	-1.4%
	Associate Degree-Seeking	-2.8%	-2.0%	-2.3%
	Bachelor's Degree-Seeking	-0.9%	-2.1%	1.5%
	Other Undergraduate	-2.0%	-2.5%	-10.7%
	Graduate/Professional	0.8%	0.5%	0.9%

Table 3B: Percent Changes from Prior Year in NSC Fall Enrollment in Associate Degree Programs by Sector, 2017-2019

Sector	Fall 2019	Fall 2018	Fall 2017
Public 2-year	-1.5%	-1.8%	0.7%
Public 4-year	-6.6%	-1.6%	-1.1%
Private non-profit 4-year	-5.3%	-5.3%	-7.9%
Private for-profit 4-year	-5.7%	-5.0%	-20.6%

As Table 4 demonstrates, of 34 majors tracked, only three majors at 2-year institutions (not exclusively public institutions) experienced an increase between fall 2018 and fall 2019: science technologies, construction trades, and psychology. The decline in enrollment in the other majors ranged from the smallest decline of 1% in architecture and related professions to the largest decline of almost 13% in agriculture and related sciences. Given the workforce shakeup during the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be even more important to record program changes in enrollment next year.

Table 4: Percent Change in Estimated Undergraduate Enrollment by Major at 2-Year Institutions Between Fall 2018 and Fall 2019

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP)	% Change
Science Technologies/Technicians	16.0%
Construction Trades	1.4%
Psychology	0.6%
Architecture and Related Services	-1.0%
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	-3.2%
Communications Technologies/Technicians and Support Services	-4.3%
Legal Professions and Studies	-4.9%
Precision Production	-5.0%
Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness Studies	-5.2%
Mathematics and Statistics	-5.3%
Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians	-5.4%
Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services	-5.8%
Natural Resources and Conservation	-5.8%
Visual and Performing Arts	-6.0%
Basic Skills and Developmental/Remedial Education	-7.0%
Communication, Journalism, and Related Programs	-7.1%
Transportation and Materials Moving	-7.1%
Engineering	-8.2%
Personal and Culinary Services	-8.6%
Education	-8.7%
Social Sciences	-8.8%
Health Professions and Related Programs	-9.0%
History	-9.1%
Engineering Technologies and Engineering-Related Fields	-9.3%
Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support	-9.4%
Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	-9.7%

Eight programs experienced more than 10% declines in enrollment, ranging from 10.5% for the homeland security, law enforcement, firefighting and related protective services to 12.7% in the agriculture, agricultural operations and related services. In between were enrollment losses in these six programs: public administration and social services, liberal arts and sciences, general studies and related studies, physical sciences, foreign languages, English, and family and consumer sciences.

State Variations

In 15 states, enrollments increased between fall 2018 and fall 2019 as shown in Table 5. In the other 35 states and the District of Columbia enrollments declined. Alaska experienced the largest decline of 10.6%. The two states next in line with respect to enrollment declines were Florida and Arkansas with 5.3% and 4.9% , respectively. One can only speculate what enrollments will be in the wake of COVID-19 in fall 2020.

Any projections[12] beyond the coming fall are even more speculative because post COVID-19 is more accurately only the first stage. Until a vaccine is developed and its effectiveness demonstrated, there may be more waves of COVID-19 and ensuing stay-at-home orders. These all have consequences for college attendance.

III. Measuring Completion

Access to college remains important and is a major driver of federal student financial aid as well as many state aid policies. For some time, however, access is viewed through the lens of success. Yes, it is important to attend college and lack of finances should not impede going to college, but it is as important to finish the

Table 5: States with Percent Increase in Enrollment Between Fall 2018 and Fall 2019

State	% Change
Utah	4.9%
New Hampshire	3.4%
Arizona	1.8%
Georgia	1.5%
Kentucky	1.5%
North Carolina	0.6%
Louisiana	0.6%
Tennessee	0.6%
Nebraska	0.4%
Rhode Island	0.3%
Delaware	0.3%
Texas	0.3%
Mississippi	0.3%
Nevada	0.3%
South Carolina	0.1%

program and earn a degree or other credential. Most states have adopted performance-based funding plans and at the federal level, policy discussions focus on student outcomes and institutional accountability. While the value or return on investment of higher education may be questioned by some, the evidence consistently shows that there is a premium to attaining a degree or other postsecondary credential.

One would think that it would be easy to collect information on the number and percent of degrees or other credentials that are earned. But that is not the case. There is no standard measure of program completion.

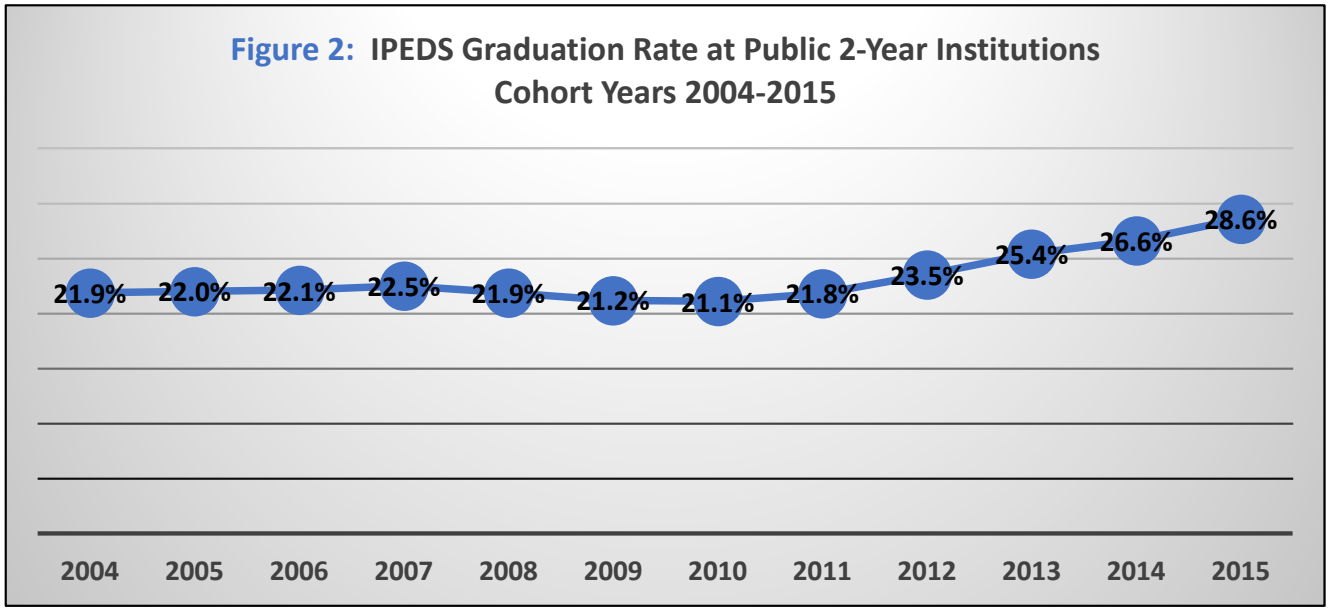
The official graduation rates that the U.S. Department of Education (ED) releases each year are statutorily mandated by the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act (PL—101-542) of 1990.[13] Under this act, ED is required to generate and report the graduation rate for all Title-IV eligible postsecondary institutions as defined in the statute. The graduation rate is calculated for a cohort of first-time, full-time certificate- and degree-seeking students who complete their programs within 150% of the "normal" time to completion. The graduation rate for 2-year associate degree programs, therefore, measures the specific cohort of students who began college at the same time and completed within three years. The graduation rate does not include students who transfer in because they are not first-time students. It also does not count students who transfer out, a detrimental exclusion to community colleges because transfer is an important element of their mission.

The 3-year window for completion of 2-year programs is based on the educational experience of a cohort of students who used to be the norm but now represent a small sliver of the student population – recent high school graduates of traditional age, dependent on parents for financial support and attending full-time. The typical community college student has a profile that is almost diametrically opposite – delayed entry to college, 24 or older, independent, often with dependents, and attends part-time. To reflect the new postsecondary reality, AACC strongly supports a statutory change in the graduation rate measure for community colleges to 300% of the normal time to completion, and the inclusion of transfers-out. Such a graduation rate would more accurately measure community college student success and align with the AACC-led Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA).[14]

ED has augmented the official graduation rate by releasing completion data for several new cohorts under before Outcome Measures.[15] Since 2018, as part of IPEDS, ED has released data from both the Outcome Measures (OM) and Graduation Rate surveys. Because Outcome Measures (OM) consist of three student cohorts in addition to the one used in the graduation rate and tracks students for six and eight years instead of only 150% of normal time to completion, they help portray a more accurate picture of student success at community colleges than the graduation rate. The cohorts in addition to first-time, full-time are part-time, first-time; full-time, non-first-time; and part-time, non-first-time students.

Graduation and Six-Year Completion Rates

Since 2010, when the graduation rate for public 2-year institutions was at the lowest (21.1% in the time frame between 2007 and 2018), the rate has gradually increased annually. It culminated in 2018 for the 2015 cohort at 28.6%. (Figure 2) This represents the official ED public 2-year graduation rate, which follows first- time, full-time students until 150% of normal time to completion. The 2010 cohort was made up of a higher proportion of non-traditional students who were driven to



college during an historic economic downturn. With each succeeding year, as the economy improved enrollment declined, particularly of older, working adults, who remained in or returned to the workforce. As the enrolled student population increasingly resembled the pre-Great Recession enrollment – somewhat younger and more likely to attend full-time – the graduation rates have increased. A plausible explanation for the graduation rates rising to higher levels than pre-recession is an increase in completions per se.

Completion rates calculated by NSC differ from ED's graduation rates. Regardless of program length, NSC tracks 6-year outcomes. Another major difference between the two rates is the institution(s) used in the completion/graduation measure. ED's graduation rate uses only one institution, the institution at which a student started college. In comparison, the NSC tracks students across all institutions attended during the 6-year timeframe.

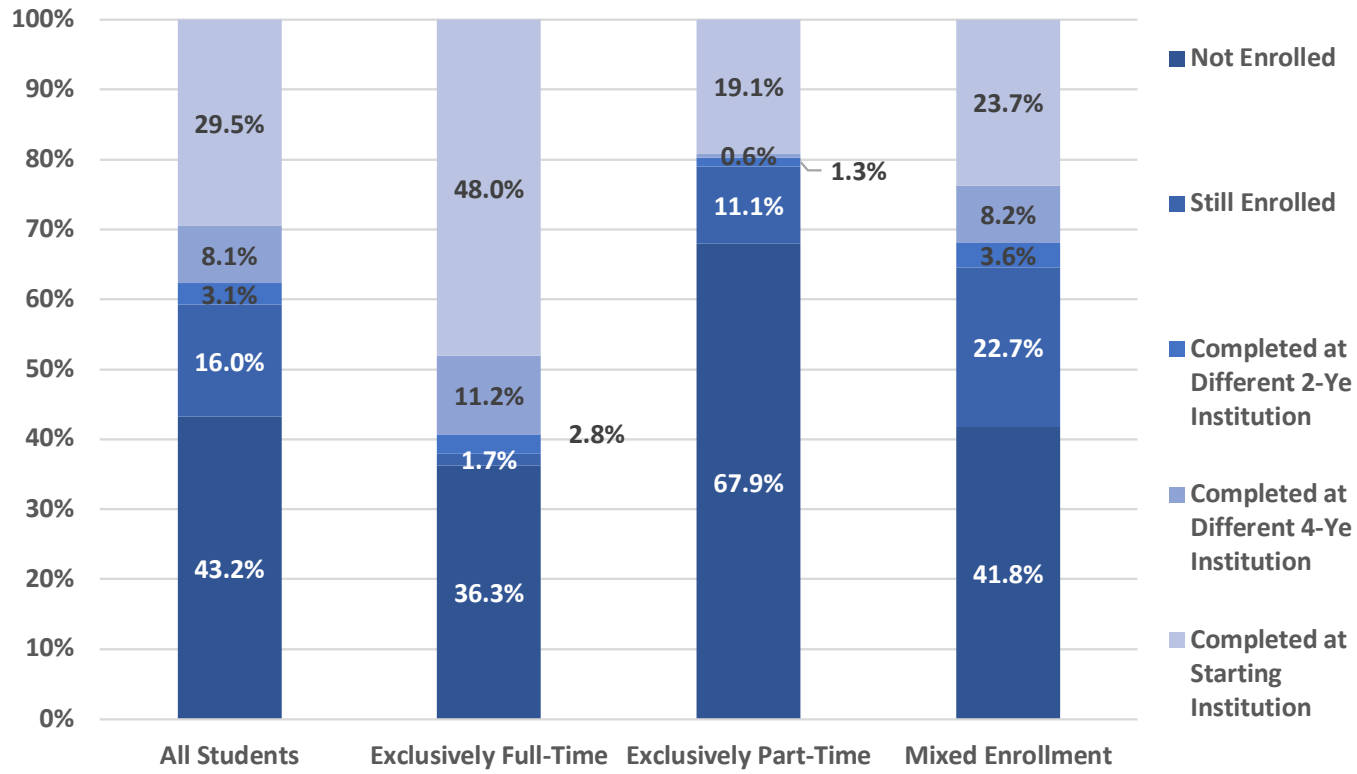
According to the NSC's completion report[16] (Figure 3), almost 30% of all community college students, whatever their enrollment intensity, who started in the fall of 2013 completed their program at the same institution within 6-years. Another 12% completed at a different institution (3.3% and 8.6% at a 2-year institution and a 4-year institution, respectively). Within six years, 41% of public 2-year students, completed a program either at the starting institution or a different institution. An additional 16% of the students were still enrolled after six years.

Community college students who attended exclusively full-time had a much higher completion rate, with nearly half (48%) at the same institution. Tracking students for six years instead of the "official" 3-year window (150% of normal time to completion) resulted in a 48% completion rate compared to ED's 28.6% graduation rate. For students who attend full-time and complete their program at either their starting institution or another institution, the completion rate is 62%, basically no different than students at 4-year institutions.

Looking more granularly, an astounding two-thirds of students who attended exclusively part-time were no longer enrolled by the end of the 6-year window. This is almost twice higher than the withdrawal rate for students who attended

exclusively full-time. Students who attended exclusively full-time were seven times more likely than their part-time counterparts to have completed at a different institution, 14% versus 2%, respectively. Of the students who started at a public 2-year institution and attended exclusively full-time were much more likely to complete at a different 4-year institution (11.2%) than another 2-year institution (2.8%).

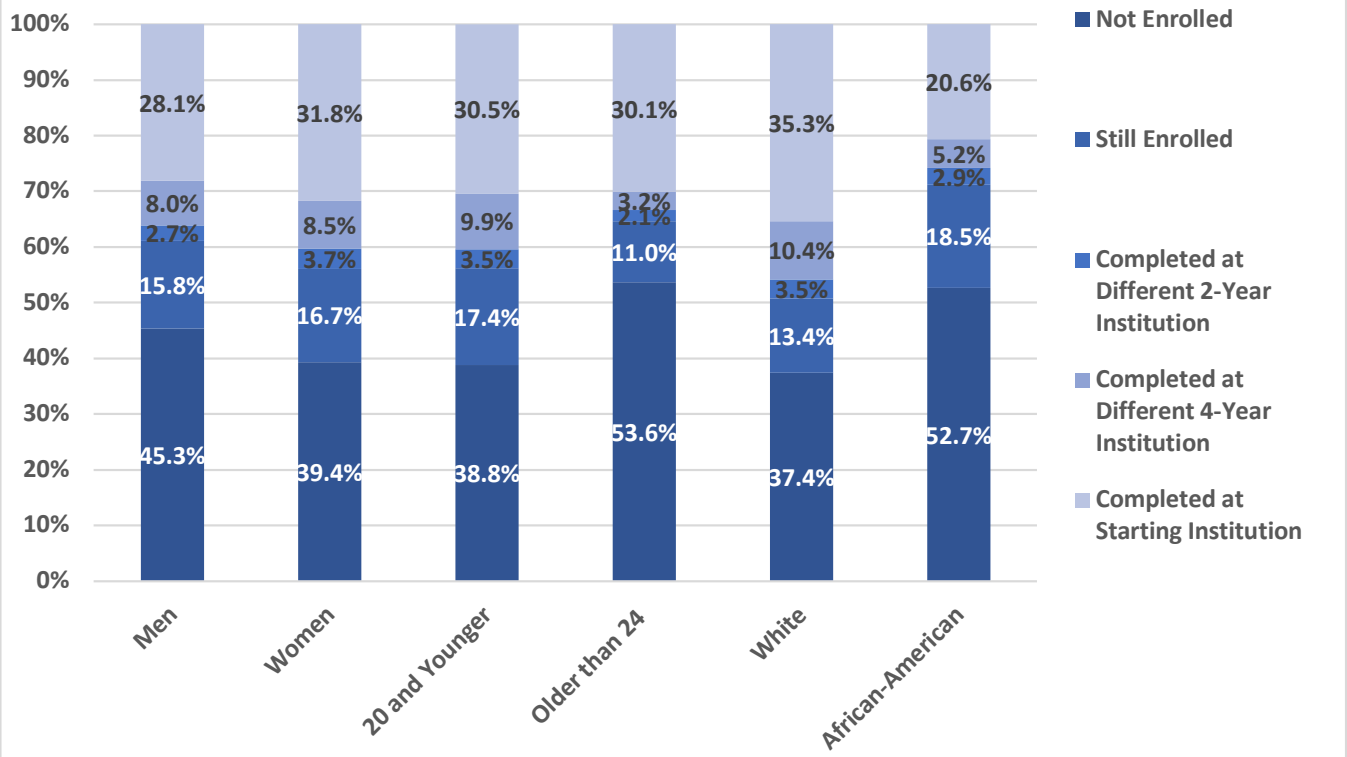
Figure 3: Six-year Outcomes for Fall 2013 Students who Started at Public 2-Year Institution by Enrollment Intensity



Not all students complete at the same rate. There are differences by sex, age, and race. As Figure 4 shows: (1) women had a higher completion rate than men—39% and 44%, respectively; (2) adult learners (those over age 24) had a lower completion rate than those 20 or younger, 44% compared to 35% respectively; and (3) white students had higher completion rate than African American students, 49% compared to 29%. While the completion rates have increased by varying extent for these different groups of students, the gaps based on sex, age, and race have remained constant over the years.

By the end of year six, more than half of older adults, those 24 years of age or older, and African Americans in general were no longer enrolled. In comparison, about 40% of women (39.4%), those 20 years of age or younger (38.8%), and white students (37.4%) withdrew sometime during a 6-year window. Except for African American students, about the same percent of the other groups completed at the starting institution, around 30% (slightly higher for white students – 35.2%). In comparison, only one out of five African Americans completed at the starting institution.

Figure 4: Six-Year Outcomes for Students Who Started Fall 2013 at Public 2-Year Institutions by Sex, Age, and Select Race



The exception with respect to completing at a different institution are older adults, who were about half as likely to do so (5% compared to about 10% for the other groups, slightly lower for African Americans).

As is true with many factors related to higher education, states vary with respect to completion rates. According to the NSC, for the fall 2013 cohort,[17] of the 42 states where data from public 2-year institutions were included, 23 states had completion rates that were higher than the overall rate of 40.6% and 19 had lower rates. In six states the completion rate exceeded 50% (Minnesota, Iowa, Wyoming, and Mississippi) and of those, in two states the rate was over 60% (South Dakota and North Dakota). In 12 states, the completion rate at public 4-year institutions was 60% or lower.

Eight-Year Outcome Measures and Completion Rates

Annual release of 8-year completion information is now an established part of both the ED and the NSC. The most recent release of both ED Outcome Measures (OM) survey[iii] and NSC is the 2010-2011 cohort.[18] Tracking students for eight years rather than six years, especially beyond the starting institution show a much higher percentage of community college completions. While it may not be surprising to find that full-time students graduate at higher rates than those attending part-time, it may at first glance be surprising that the cohort with the highest 8-year completion rate is of the not-first time, full-time students.[19]

[iii]In addition to the 8-year Outcome Measures, there are also 4-year and 6-year for certain outcomes.

According to OM data, for the 2010-2011 cohort of first-time, full-time students the 8-year completion rate was 29.6% compared to the 21.1% graduation rate, measured for a 3-year window. This constitutes a 40% increase. The completion rate for this cohort was virtually unchanged from the previous cohort (29.7%). (Table 6) There was a slight uptick in the completion rates for the other cohorts since the previous year's cohorts. Similarly, the transfer rates for all groups was higher for this cohort and a concomitant lower rate for the unknown status category. A particularly bright spot at public 2-year institutions, was the completion rate for the full-time, non-first-time students, also referred to as transfer-in students at 38.7%.[iv] All sectors of higher education experienced this phenomenon.

The overall 8-year completion rate as calculated by NSC is higher than the IPEDS completion data for the fall 2011 cohort because it includes actual completions at different institutions, whereas IPEDS only captures if students transferred to other institutions but does not track the outcome at the transfer institution.[v]

The trend in NSC 8-year completion rates for public 2-year students shows that since the 2006 cohort, the completion rate was on an upward trajectory, albeit not a linear one, vacillating slightly each year. (Figure 5) The completion rate for the 2011 cohort, however, was an aberration; it was lower than for the previous year's cohort as well as lower than the fall 2006 cohort. A plausible explanation is that public 2-year institutions reached peak enrollment in fall 2011, having attracted a large swath of individuals who in an economic downturn sought to improve their employability prospects by pursuing postsecondary education. They were disproportionately non-traditional and as such at-risk of not completing.

Table 6: IPEDS Outcome Measures at Public 2-Year Institutions by Enrollment Status, Cohort Year 2010-11

	Completed	Still Enrolled at Entering Institution	Transferred to Another Institution	Enrollment /Transfer Status Unknown
Full-time, first-time	29.6%	1.8%	25.1%	43.5%
Part-time, first-time	16.4%	2.1%	25.4%	56.1%
Full-time, non-first-time	38.7%	1.3%	30.1%	29.9%
Part-time, non-first-time	20.7%	1.9%	37.7%	39.7%
Overall	25.2%	1.8%	31.2%	41.8%

[iv] ED's outcomes measures now include attainment of a certificate or specific degree at four, six, and eight years. Nonetheless, without inclusion of transfer out, OM remain less comprehensive than AACC's Voluntary Framework of Accountability, which is also an institutional-level data collection. In addition to the lack of transfer information, unlike the VFA, the OM do not include progress measures or otherwise document how many students who did not complete the program had completed one or more term or earned a certain number of credits at the institution.

[v] Without a student unit record, it is impossible to track students across institutions. There is a ban in place for the U.S. Department of Education to collect student level data. AACC strongly supports lifting the ban on a national student unit record data system (SURD). In addition to allowing cross-institutional tracking of student progress and outcomes, a SURDS would reduce institutional administrative burden of student-based data collection. Based on legislation the has been introduced to lift the ban, SURD is likely to be the subject of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The House's HEA reauthorization bill called the College Affordability Act, contained such a provision. The Senate was actively engaged in a comprehensive reauthorization but the COVID-19 pandemic relief legislation superseded other legislation. HEA reauthorization is unlikely in the 116th Congress.

Completion Challenges for Part-Time Students

The typical community college student attends part-time, representing about 60% of enrollees; 64% in fall 2018.[20] IPEDS Outcome Measures for part-time students show their completion rate, which is measured only for the entering institution, is about half that of full-time students. (Table 6) Moreover, NSC, which tracks students to institutions they transfer to found large gaps in the completion outcomes for part-time and full-time students.

As Table 7 shows, the NSC data for the end of the third year, which is the IPEDS window for graduation, mimic IPEDS', namely part-time students at public 2-year institutions complete at about half the rate of full-time students. What is alarming is that the completion rate for the NSC data track students across different institutions. At the end of the year six, more than half of part-time students are not enrolled in their starting institution or if they transferred at some point, no longer enrolled at the transfer institution. A higher percentage of part-time students than full-time students are still enrolled at the end of year six.

FIGURE 5: NSC 8-YEAR OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS STARTING AT PUBLIC 2-YEAR INSTITUTION, 2006 - 2011 COHORTS

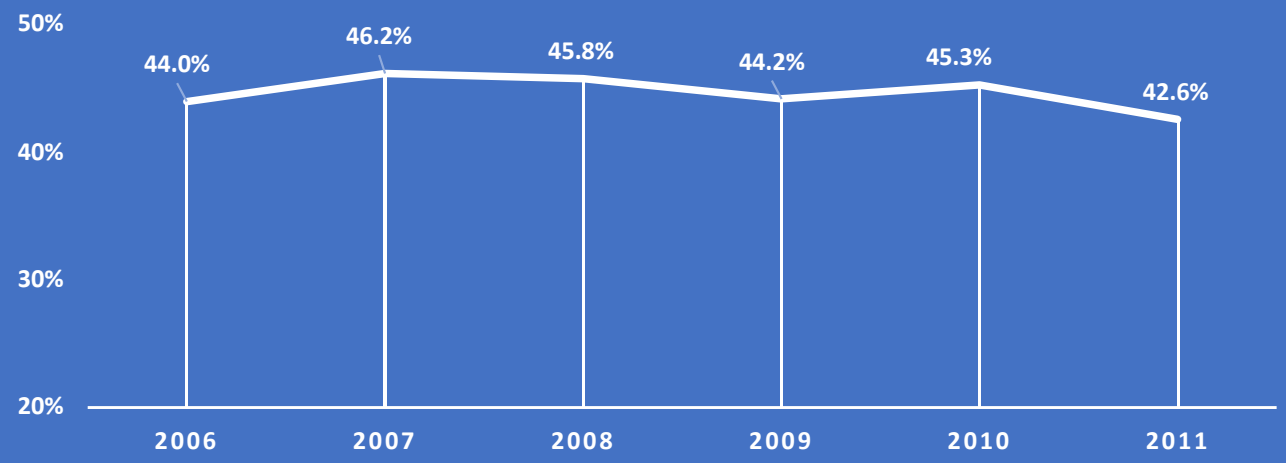


Table 7: NSC Progress and Success Fall 2013 First-Time Cohort at Public 2-Year Institutions Full-Time and Part-Time Comparisons

	Full-time		Part-time		Difference	
	End of 3rd Year	End of 6th Year	End of 3rd Year	End of 6th Year	End of 3rd Year	End of 6th Year
Not Enrolled Anywhere*	33.8%	43.8%	37.4%	52.4%	3.6%	8.6%
Enrolled Somewhere*	40.8%	11.0%	50.5%	15.9%	9.7%	4.9%
Graduated from Somewhere*	25.3%	45.3%	12.1%	31.7%	-13.2%	-13.6%
* Starting Institution and Transferred Institution						

The biggest gap between the two groups is for the completion rate, both at the end of the third year and the sixth year.

A myriad of reasons explain why part-time students are at greater risk than their full-time counterparts of withdrawing prior to completing their program. A seminal study by Complete College America called *Time is The Enemy* demonstrated that part-time students struggle and are less likely to complete even when they stay enrolled longer.[21] They are more likely to be non-traditional, balancing academic work with caring for dependents and working while attending college.

In the time of COVID-19 there are many uncertainties about whether prospective students will enroll in college, and if so, which type of institution. Will current students return to their institution or transfer to one closer to home or take a year off to decide what to do? Another uncertainty is whether part-time enrollment will increase due to students having to cope with the many financial challenges facing them and their families. Improving the success of part-time students has been a longstanding focus of community colleges. Moving forward, it will be imperative for all institutions to pay even more attention to achieving this goal.

IV. Factors Affecting Changes in Enrollment and Completion Rates

Since the onset of this series of monographs, the trend in community college enrollments has continued in a downward, although diminishing, direction. What happens with enrollment overall and in community colleges specifically this fall is anyone's guess. Early survey results show mixed findings depending on type of institution and region. People and economies in different parts of the country were and are being affected differently by the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortfalls in state and local budgets are already emerging. The progress made in returning to pre-Great Recession funding levels for public postsecondary institutions will likely erode. On the other hand, states and institutions do not want to resort to increasing tuition, as they did post-Great Recession because of the economic hardships that current and prospective students are facing. There are many other uncertainties, such as the status of college promise programs. According to the College Promise Campaign, there are more than 330 college promise programs in 47 states across the country.[22] Are these going to continue, contract, or expand? Dual enrollment numbers are likely to increase. Dual enrollment data are not up-to-date, but this may change.

College completion is a good news story in many respects, with increasing graduation rates and increased degree and certificate attainment. This tide has not lifted all boats equally, however. Gaps remain among races and ethnic groups, the sexes, and different age groups. It has been documented that the groups who historically have been left behind are the very ones to disproportionately suffer economic hardship due to the coronavirus. Equity will have to remain the bull's-eye in the target to increasing completion.

What a difference a year makes. The U.S. economy in the last monograph was described as "experiencing an extraordinary period of growth since the Great Recession," with record setting low rates of unemployment and the longest period of positive GDP growth. The millions of workers who lost their jobs in the Great Recession were employed. Now records also are being set but in the reverse direction. As of mid-May, 38 million workers applied for unemployment insurance and the unemployment rate skyrocketed to 14.7% for April and on the road to Depression era rates for May.

In June, the employment picture improved somewhat with 4.8 million individuals returning to the workforce. The unemployment rate declined to 11.1%[23]. Even this good news came with a caveat as the Bureau of Labor Statistics admitted that the unemployment rate had misclassified the employment status of millions of individuals resulting in a higher than publicly released unemployment rate.[24]

College enrollments and the state of the economy have historically been countercyclical as the latter goes down, the former goes up. This economic downturn is different from previous ones because it was induced for public health reasons. Without a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, the economy will likely not return to normal for a long time. This makes predicting who and how many will pursue higher education to improve their employment situation very difficult. Some occupations may never experience a rebound and some previously secure jobs are more tenuous now. Affordability, which has always been a critical factor, plays an even more important role now. Student financial assistance, Title IV as well as emergency grants, will no doubt make a difference on college going.

Getting a good job has been consistently the number one reason for pursing higher education. That goal remains. What has changed is the type of higher education being sought. In a time when long-term plans are thought of in terms of months not years, 4-year plus programs are less appealing than shorter-term programs provided by institutions located closer to home.

Community colleges seem to be the right fit for these days, offering affordable workforce sub-baccalaureate programs as well as local pipelines to 4-year institutions for more certain times. All these factors bode well for community college enrollment and completion.

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