Postsecondary Success

Issue Brief

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Executive Summary

The Washington Student Achievement Council is charged with setting educational attainment goals to meet the needs of Washington's residents and its workforce. The Council is also charged with developing a ten-year Roadmap to identify key strategies for meeting those goals.[1] The ten-year Roadmap is complemented by a short-term Strategic Action Plan, submitted in December of even-numbered years. The Action Plan includes budget and policy recommendations for implementing the strategies identified in the Roadmap.

In 2013, the Council created the first Ten-year Roadmap, including two overarching educational attainment goals. In 2014, the Washington State legislature adopted these goals, which state that, by 2023:

- All adults in Washington, aged 25–44, will have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- At least 70 percent of Washington adults, aged 25–44, will have a postsecondary credential.

The Ten-Year Roadmap is updated in odd-numbered years, beginning in 2015. This issue brief provides context for updates to the 2013 Roadmap. The brief also provides specific examples of the challenges we face and the efforts currently underway to achieve our goals.

The population of Washington State is becoming increasingly diverse. At the same time, historically underserved populations continue to be underrepresented in postsecondary education. Low-income students and certain populations of color have lower high school graduation rates and are less likely than their peers to enroll in postsecondary education and complete a degree or certificate. In order for Washington to meet its goal of 70 percent postsecondary attainment among adults by 2023, educational systems and staff must be prepared to serve a population with shifting demographics.

To provide the best support for students enrolled in postsecondary education, we must understand the barriers students face as they transition into and complete college. Traditionally, higher education institutions were designed to serve younger students who had recently completed high school. This traditional design poses barriers for today's students, the majority of whom are older and may be juggling work, school, and family. This brief will address barriers—faced by both traditional age and returning adult students—to successful college transition and completion.

[1] RCW 28B.77.020

Institutions, states, and the federal government have developed policies, programs, and practices to address the barriers students face in completing postsecondary education. Because of the diversity of institutions and institutional missions that evolved in a context of limited state and federal control, most of the effort has been at the institutional level. Although institutions offer a variety of programs and policies designed to help diverse students overcome barriers to postsecondary completion, institutions continue to face barriers of their own, including limitations of resources and the complexity of implementing systemic change.

From a student perspective, the college experience can be overwhelming. Students must learn to successfully interact with college personnel, college structures and systems, and college policies.[1] Students may also face financial challenges, and challenges interacting with peers and the classroom learning environment.

First-generation or first-in-family, low-income, and minority students are particularly affected by barriers to successful college completion:

1) **First-generation or first-in-family college students.** These students are, for the purposes of this brief, students whose parents have not attained a postsecondary credential. These students are more likely to enter college without the skills, knowledge, confidence, aspirations, and preparation necessary to succeed in college.[2] This combination of social and academic barriers to successful transitions has a notable effect on these students' persistence rates. One in three students whose parents' highest level of educational attainment was a high school diploma drop out of college within the first 18 months. That number rises to almost one in two when parents have not completed high school. [3]

2) **Socio-economic status.** The poverty level of the high school attended is the strongest factor in determining whether or not a student will go to college.[4] Low-income students are more likely to come from high schools with limited opportunities for academically rigorous coursework. Low-income students struggle to pay for the academic and non-academic expenses associated with college (e.g. living expenses and other costs). They are more likely to enroll part-time, and they often need to rely on loans to cover education expenses not covered by financial aid.

3) **Ethnicity and Race**. Latino, African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and some subgroups of Asian students face substantial barriers to completion. These include greater likelihood of being first generation or first-in-family to attend college, underprepared, low-income, or working. These students may also face racial discrimination. Additionally, students may face the personal struggle of reconciling certain cultural norms with college norms (e.g., caring for the family versus leaving home to live at school and pursue a degree full time).

Furthermore, English language learners, students with disabilities, former foster youth, incarcerated youth and adults, and returning adult students—including military veterans and service members—can all face additional challenges in completing college. It is important to remember that many students belong to multiple groups highlighted in this brief. While students face a diversity of challenges, they also bring a diverse set of skills and attributes to postsecondary education, such as survival skills, interpersonal skills, and a strong desire to succeed.[5]

Below are five stages of the transition and completion journey that are crucial for all students in postsecondary programs, regardless of demographics or background. Programs and policies to support students in these five areas will be especially crucial to enhance successful student transitions to college and college completion.

1) **College readiness** includes both formal pre-college preparation that occurs in K-12 education and informal preparation acquired through social capital, community engagement, and other life experiences. Students who are ready for college have the combination of skills, knowledge, and habits of mind necessary to fully participate in college-level courses to completion.[6] Students who enter college academically underprepared are often required to complete pre-college-level coursework. This lengthens time to graduation, because remedial coursework does not count towards a degree. Nationally, fewer than 1 in 10 students who began with remedial coursework graduate from community colleges within three years, and fewer than 4 in 10 complete a bachelor's degree in six years.[7]

2) **Postsecondary placement** determines the level of coursework at which a student begins his or her postsecondary pathway. Standardized exam scores, high school GPAs and high school coursework are common determinants of placement. Placement practices can be inconsistent and inaccurate. Research has indicated that a quarter to a third of students assigned to remedial courses could have succeeded (defined as receiving a grade of B or better) in college-level courses without remedial coursework first.[8]

3) **First year experiences** are critical to students' ability to persist through the first term and continue on the path toward attainment. Acclimation to college culture and engagement in the college community are key. Students who participate in first-year experience programs demonstrate more positive relationships with faculty, greater knowledge and use of campus resources, more involvement in campus activities, and better time-management skills than their non-participating peers.[9]

4) **Academic momentum** is the ability to move forward through completion of gatekeeper courses or other benchmarks, such as required math, and continue to enroll and attend from term to term. Momentum is also built through stacking

of credentials to earn degrees, stacking degrees to further education, and may include transfer to other institutions.

5) **Pathways to completion** can be guided through clear and consistent advising. This ensures students take the most direct route to graduation and helps them avoid a long and winding route that leads to credits without degrees.

At the institutional level, effective practices to enhance student success and persistence are those that promote high expectations, student support, frequent assessment and feedback, and student engagement and involvement.[10] Many strategies to improve pre-college interventions, postsecondary placement, student support (academic, financial, social), and ease of transfer are currently in place, which support implementation of the Roadmap.

INTRODUCTION

The Washington Student Achievement Council is charged with setting educational attainment goals to meet the needs of Washington's residents and its workforce. The Council is also charged with developing a ten-year Roadmap to identify key strategies for meeting those goals.[2] The ten-year Roadmap is complemented by a short-term Strategic Action Plan, submitted in December of even-numbered years. The Action Plan includes budget and policy recommendations for implementing the strategies identified in the Roadmap.

In 2013, the Council created the first ten-year Roadmap, including two overarching educational attainment goals. In 2014, the Washington State legislature adopted these goals, which state that, by 2023:

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Across the nation, demographic, social, and workplace changes are exerting pressure for increased educational attainment. During the Great Recession of 2007-2012, those who were the least educated took the hardest hits – highest unemployment, income losses, and so forth. Recovery from the recession is placing demands on employees for better education credentials and job training across new fields of employment.[11]

Postsecondary education is facing a new reality, where increasing numbers of students are not recent high school graduates, but rather adults seeking flexible educational programs and they are seeking educational programs that are not constrained by traditional time and place restrictions.[12] Additionally, we are entering an era in which 70 percent of living-wage jobs require a postsecondary credential or degree[13]. However, the fastest growing segment of the population has been traditionally underserved in postsecondary education: students of color, English language learners, returning adult students, and students with children, jobs, and life experience. According to Complete College America, 75 percent of today's students (mostly adult learners) are juggling

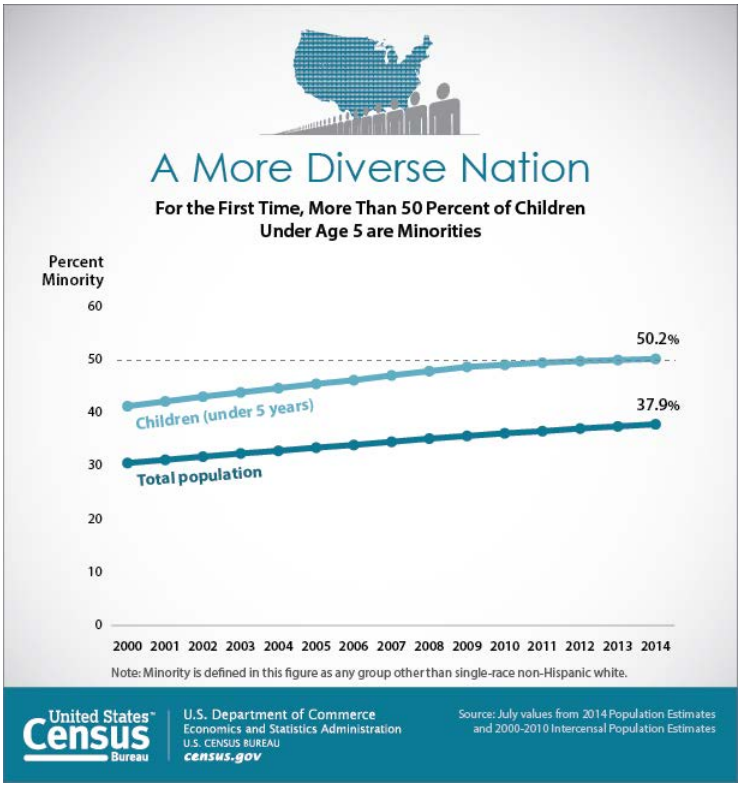
[2] RCW 28B.77.020

some combination of family commitment, job, and education, while commuting to campus.[14]

To help postsecondary education meet these challenges, Washington's policymakers will need to think differently about transitions. Instead of thinking solely in terms of the transitions recent high school graduates make from K-12 to postsecondary education, policymakers also need to think in terms of how working adults will incorporate postsecondary education in their lives to attain, maintain or enhance employment.

Limited resources will force policymakers to prioritize efforts to help postsecondary institutions meet their challenges. Sound prioritization should be based on knowledge of who the state's potential students are. For example, adults with some college are a very important target group in terms of helping the state meet its attainment goals. Roughly 700,000 adults in Washington State have some college credit, but no degree[15]. Outreach and support is needed to help them complete their degrees. In addition, the population of Hispanic/Latino students, a historically underserved group, is rapidly growing in size. It is important that this large group of students is served in ways that lead to greater numbers of Hispanic/Latino college graduates.

For the first time in U.S. history, the majority (50.2 percent) of people age 5 and under are people of color. The remaining 49.8 percent are single-race, non-Hispanic, White. In fact, the nation is heading rapidly towards a point where people of color will be in the majority. This is already the case for our early learning cohort - birth to 5 years of age.



Populations of color increased in Washington State from 18 percent to 28 percent in the ten-year period from 2000 to 2010. During this period, the Hispanic population increased by 71 percent, the Asian population by 49 percent, and those who identify as multiracial increased by 41 percent.[16]

Background

Washington offers a diverse array of public and private postsecondary institutions. These include five public universities, five public university branch campuses, one state college, and thirty-four public community and technical colleges. In addition, there are 10 Independent Colleges of Washington, over 50 other private degree-granting institutions physically located in Washington, more than 320 private career schools, and 230 registered apprenticeship programs. Private institutions include both for- and not-for-profit education providers.

All students face barriers during their educational journeys. Some groups of students face additional barriers based on their background or individual circumstances. These barriers take many forms and often have root causes that predate a student's enrollment in postsecondary education. For example, the opportunity gaps many African American, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian American students face during their K-12 education may cause them to drop out of high school or require pre-college coursework during postsecondary education. Depending on race or income level, students who graduate from high school may be more or less likely to continue on to postsecondary education.

Figure 1 shows postsecondary enrollment patterns for recent high school graduates in Washington. The data demonstrate that Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, and low-income students are considerably less likely to enroll in college immediately after high school than other students.

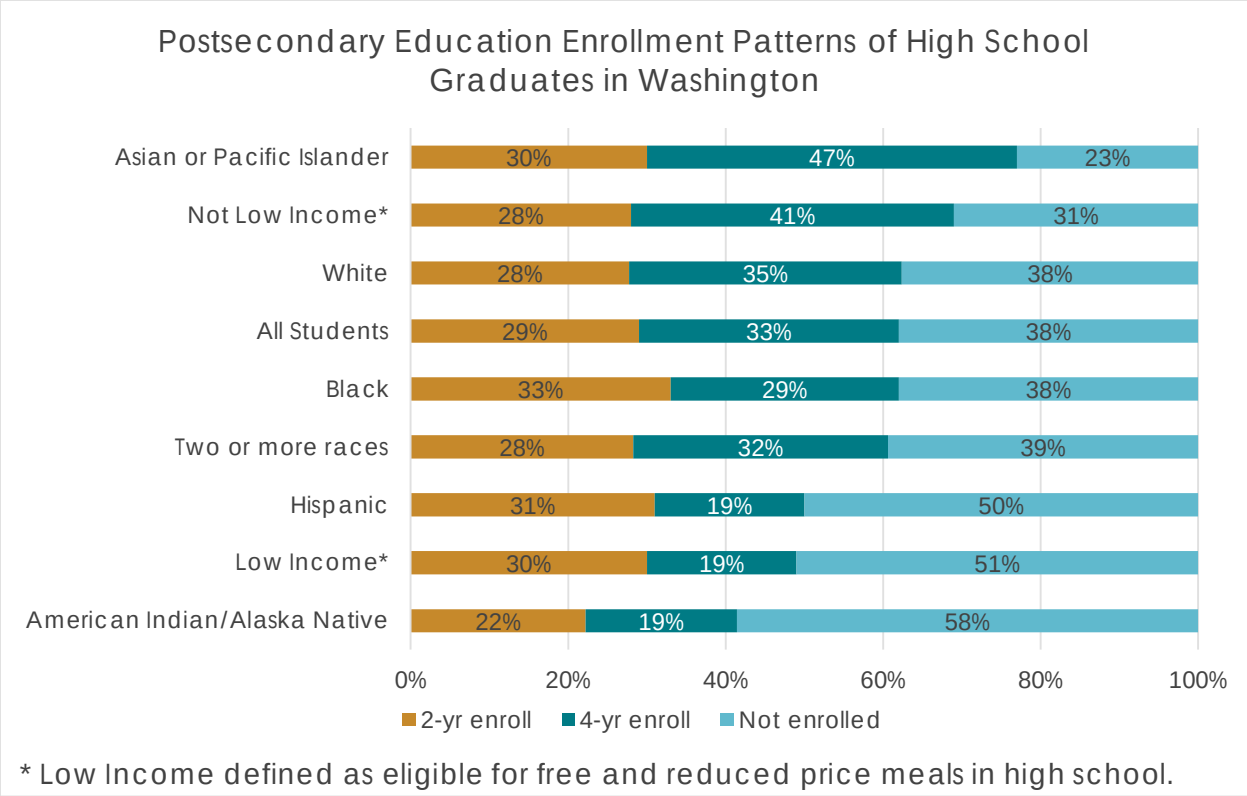


Figure 1: Postsecondary Continuation

Source: Education Research and Data Center (http://www.erdcdata.wa.gov/hsfb.aspx).

Note: "All Students" category includes other race or ethnicity not separately shown.

Though it is helpful in pointing out disparities among groups, Figure 1 does not tell the whole story. For example, although Asian or Pacific Islander students as a group enroll at high rates, the category includes a diverse set of subcategories, such as Southeast Asian students, who face barriers other students do not. To gain a clear picture of the situation, policymakers need data disaggregated into racial and ethnic subcategories, as recommended by the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee.[17]

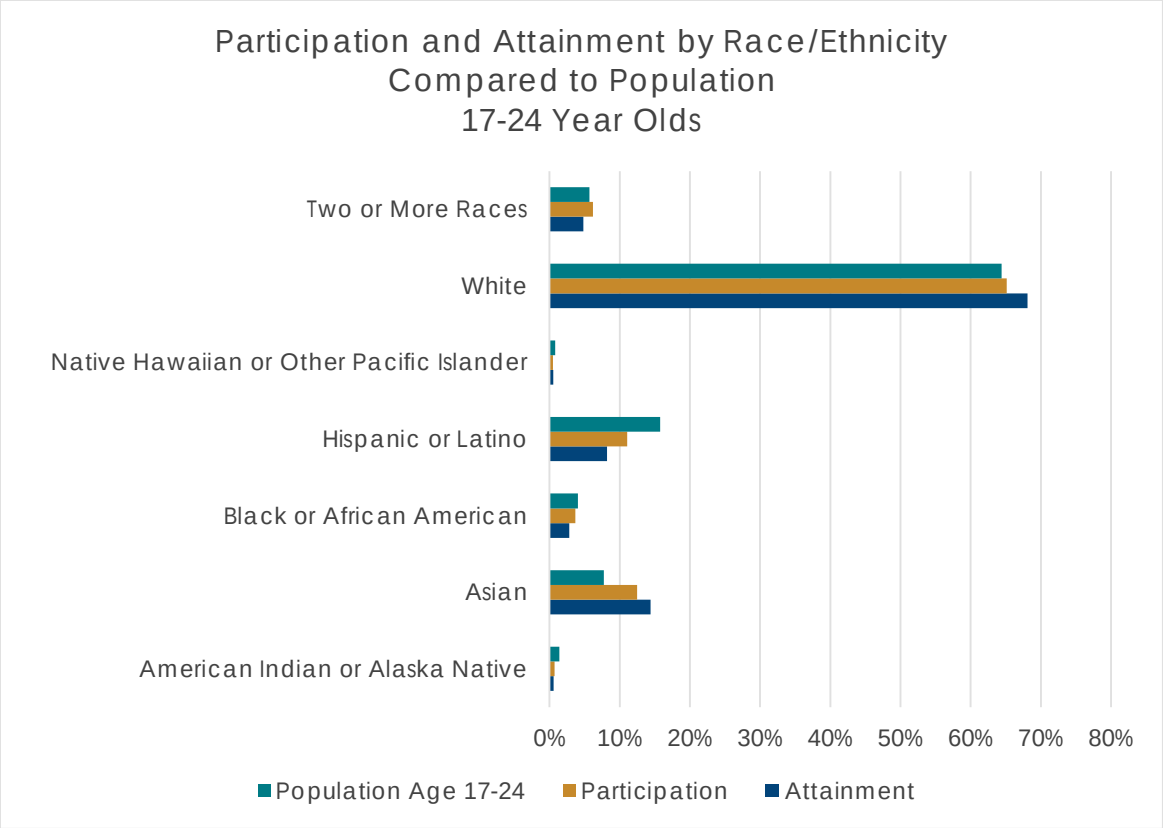


Figure 2: Participation and Attainment. Source: Washington Student Achievement Council analysis of American Community Survey 3-Year 2011-2013.

Both younger students (17-24) and older students (25-44) show differences in attainment based on race or ethnicity. As shown in Figure 2, Hispanic or Latino 17-24 year olds make up nearly 16 percent of the population in Washington, yet account for only 11 percent of the undergraduate population and just over 8 percent of the population age 17-24 with an associate degree or higher. Asian Washingtonians of the same age range are achieving at rates higher than other racial/ethnic groups in both undergraduate enrollments and attainment at the associate degree level and higher. Further analysis of American Community Survey data demonstrates that students who are underrepresented at younger ages (particularly Black or African American students), make up a larger share of the enrollments in the 25-44 age range. Further research is needed to identify reasons for this delay in college enrollments.

In addition to student demographics, it is important to know students' motivations. Figure 3 shows that employment-related issues and programs are students' main considerations in determining whether and where to go to college. These data reflect the results of an online survey of 1,011 U.S. residents, age 16-40, who were in the first semester of college, or planning to attend college within the coming year.[18]

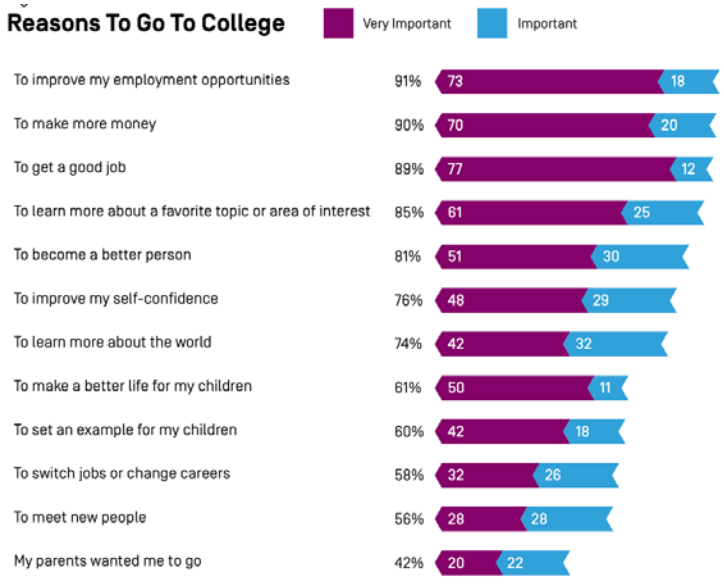


Figure 3: Reasons to go to college

The study found that once a student decides to go college, they consider many factors in selecting a specific institution. When students were asked to indicate the *single most important* factor, 63 percent said the cost of attending was their biggest concern.[19]

Broad Challenges

Institutions, states, and the federal government have developed policies, programs, and practices to help students address the barriers students face in completing postsecondary education. Because of the diversity of institutions and institutional missions that evolved in a context of limited state and federal control, most of the effort has been at the institutional level. Although institutions offer a variety of programs and policies designed to help diverse students overcome barriers to postsecondary completion, institutions continue to face barriers of their own.

A 2013 statewide survey of 49 public and private colleges (including community and technical colleges) and universities identified scarce financial resources along with insufficient human resources and staffing as the biggest barriers they face in serving students of color.[20] Other barriers include: insufficient faculty and staff diversity[21] (affecting diversity of mentors and role models); limited professional development opportunities on supporting diverse adult students;[22] and the tendency to place diversity initiatives at the periphery of an institution.[23]

Information technology infrastructure can also pose challenges for institutions. For example, disconnects between K-12 and higher education systems mean that high school and beyond plans fail to go "beyond" in terms of being easily available for use after high school. An additional technology challenge institutions face is a lack of capacity to use learning analytics which could improve efforts to individualize instruction and learning.

From a student perspective, the college experience can be overwhelming. Students must learn to successfully interact with college personnel, college structures and systems, and college policies.[24] Students may also face financial challenges, and challenges interacting with peers and the classroom learning environment. There are a handful of areas in the pre- and post-enrollment postsecondary education experience where students tend to face particular challenges, regardless of demographics:

1) **College readiness** includes pre-college preparation that occurs formally (K-12 education) and informally (social capital, community engagement, and so forth). Students who are ready for college have the combination of skills, knowledge, and habits of mind necessary to fully participate in college-level courses to completion.[25]
2) **Postsecondary placement** determines the level of coursework at which a student begins his or her postsecondary pathway. Standardized exam scores, high school GPAs and high school coursework are common determinants of placement.

3) **First year experiences** are critical to students' ability to persist through the first semester and continue on the path toward attainment. Acclimation to the college culture and engagement in academics and the college community are key.

4) **Academic momentum** is the ability to continue to move forward through completion of gatekeeper courses or other benchmarks, such as required math, and continue to enroll and attend from term to term. Momentum is also built through stacking of credentials to earn degrees, stacking degrees to further education, and may include transfer to other institutions.

5) **Pathways to completion** can be guided to ensure the most direct route to graduation is taken, avoiding a long and winding route that leads to credits without degrees.

These areas are especially difficult for students who face barriers due to their race/ethnicity, income level, age, or other characteristics – especially being the first in the family to attend college which may mean that they have little or no understanding of college culture and processes, sometimes referred to as "college knowledge."[26]

College Readiness

Many college students are academically underprepared when they transition to postsecondary education. For example, 54 percent of recent high school graduates enrolling in our community and technical colleges take at least one pre-college course in English or math (See Figure 4).

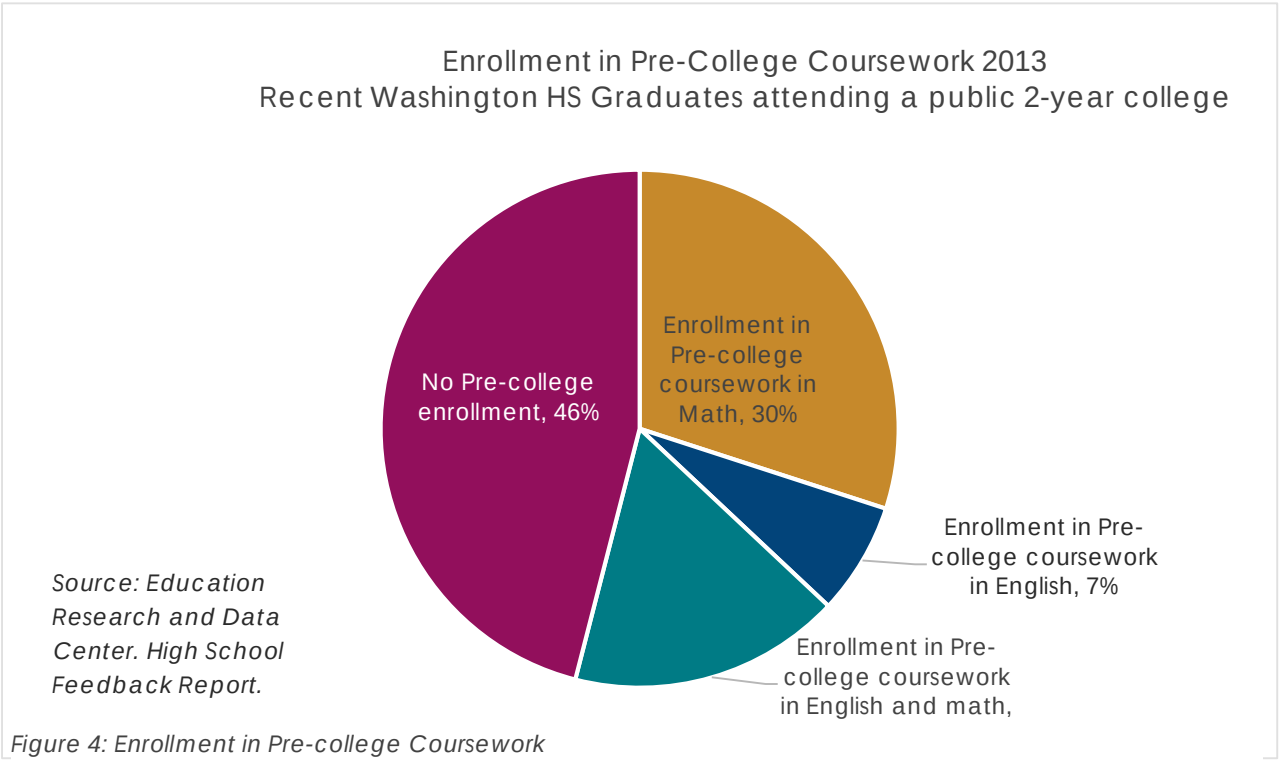


Figure 4: Enrollment in Pre-college Coursework

In addition, many students may be academically prepared, but experience difficulty with other aspects of college life. Success in college requires independence, discipline, and resourcefulness, as well as an awareness of the college-going experience and culture. The transition is often particularly difficult for first-generation college students who may not receive enough guidance to develop the confidence and skills they need to successfully transition to college life.[27]

Many of the challenges that students face are rooted in policies and practices that apply to both traditional and non-traditional students. For example, many students report the FAFSA form is too long, too complex, and requires information that they do not have or information that families are hesitant to reveal. From the White House: "Each year, more than 16 million college students and their families complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). They spend hours answering needlessly complicated and intrusive questions that undermine the fundamental goal of student aid: to help more students attend and graduate from college."[28]

Postsecondary Placement

Inaccurate and inconsistent placement practices create a system of chance as to whether or not a student must enroll in, pay for, and complete pre-college coursework. A recent large-scale review of data indicates that a quarter to a third of students assigned to remedial courses based on standardized test scores could have passed college-level courses with a grade of B or better. Previous research indicated that less than 25 percent of students assigned to remediation go on to earn a community college credential or transfer to a four-year college.[29]

First-Year Experiences

Students who participate in first-year experience programs demonstrate more positive relationships with faculty, greater knowledge and use of campus resources, more involvement in campus activities, and better time-management skills than their non-participating peers.[30] The more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely are they to persist and graduate.[31] While absenteeism or incomplete coursework may be indicators of lack of engagement, it is also possible for a student to be passively attending and completing work, without being engaged in discussions or building relationships with peers and faculty.[32] Lack of engagement lowers chances of success. Student engagement is the single most significant predictor of persistence.[33]

Academic Momentum

Academic momentum is exemplified though persistence in coursework leading to a credential. A student who successfully passes specific milestones is much more likely to complete a certificate or degree. Examples of these milestones include: earning 12 college credits in high school; entering college right after high school; earning credits in college-level math in the first two years of college; completing the equivalent of full-time enrollment each year; and being continuously enrolled (excluding summer).[34]

Pathways to Completion

Unclear pathways to completion, including transfer options, increase the time and cost of postsecondary education for both the student and the institution. Providing students with step-by-step academic roadmaps that include transfer options takes the guesswork out of the process, providing students the information needed to make informed choices and avoid courses that won't count toward their chosen degree. Formal transfer pathways, like those established in Washington,[3] encourage students to persist and graduate on time.

Many students do not follow the traditional path of entering and graduating from a single institution. Roughly one-third of students, nationwide, transfer at least once before earning a degree.[35] In Washington, more than 40 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded at public colleges and universities are awarded to students who have transferred from a Washington community or technical college.[36]

Nationally, about 64 percent of community college students transfer to a baccalaureate institution without first getting an associate's degree. While many transfer students will go on to complete their bachelor's degree, about 26 percent will drop out without a degree.[37] In many cases, these students have either completed more than enough credits to have earned an associate's degree or are only a few credits short.

Through reverse transfer, these students have the opportunity to gain the associate's degree they have earned. This gives them a valuable credential in the workforce, while also motivating further efforts towards a bachelor's degree.

[3]See http://www.wsac.wa.gov/transfers

Specific Challenges

Some challenges are more pronounced for students from particular demographic backgrounds. Demographic groups are not mutually exclusive—many students belong to more than one. For example, a student from a family with low income may also be the first in her family to attend college. Conversely, as discussed above, some barriers, such as financial barriers, impact multiple groups.

1) **First generation or first-in-family.** Students whose parents have not attained a postsecondary credential face particular challenges related to understanding and navigating college processes and college culture.
2) **Socio-economic status.** Poverty is the most significant barrier to college attainment. Conversely, attaining postsecondary credentials leads to higher wages and higher likelihood of breaking generational cycles of poverty.
3) **Ethnicity and race.** Latino, African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and some subgroups of Asian students face significant barriers to completion. These include greater likelihood of facing one or more of the following challenges: being first generation or first in family, underprepared, low-income[4], or working too many hours.
4) **English Language Learners (ELL)** are a multi-faceted and complex group of students who have not yet acquired proficiency in English.
5) **Students with disabilities** encounter very different standards governing accommodations and modifications in postsecondary institutions than they experienced in the K-12 system.
6) **Former foster youth** usually lose significant support when they age out of care and shoulder adult responsibilities on their own.
7) **Incarcerated students** have restricted access to postsecondary educational resources, including credited courses and online resources.
8) **Returning adults** must prioritize their time and other resources to meet multiple responsibilities including family, dependents, and work.
9) **Service members and veterans** possess skills and knowledge that do not always translate easily to civilian situations and college-level learning.

[4] For purposes of this brief, the term low-income students includes both recent high school graduates and adult learners.

First-Generation or First-in-Family

First-generation or first-in-family[5] college students are more likely to lack the skills, knowledge, confidence, aspirations, and preparation that are necessary to succeed in college.[38] They may not know how to apply for college or connect education with a career path.[39] They face challenges related to knowledge of college norms, processes related to financial aid, and support systems to successfully transition to college. They come disproportionately from underserved racial/ethnic groups. They also tend to be older, less likely to receive financial support from parents, more likely to have multiple obligations such as family and work, and more likely to enroll part-time or take multiple breaks in their education to balance these obligations.[40]

Parents may lack financial resources of their own to help these students pay for college; they may also lack information about the process of applying and going to college. This is particularly important for those accessing financial aid, which may cause parents to discourage their children from aspiring to and attending college.[41] One in three students whose parents' highest level of educational attainment was a high school diploma drop out of college within the first 18 months; that number rises to almost one in two when the parents have not completed high school.[42]

First-generation students, especially those who are low-income or from traditionally underserved populations, face barriers to academic, social, and cultural integration upon transitioning to college. They are more likely to have come from high schools with limited opportunities for advanced placement, international baccalaureate, honors, or other academically rigorous courses.[43] These students report waiting to get involved in extracurricular and campus life during the initial transition to college until they feel they "have their academic lives under control." While first-generation students derive more benefit from extracurricular activities than their peers, they are less likely to participate.[44] In addition, first generation students are less likely to live on campus and more likely to perceive campus environments and faculty as less supportive than other students.[45] They are also more likely to work more and work off-campus.[46,47]

Getting information about college is more difficult for first-generation students, which can lead to additional barriers, particularly in filling out the FAFSA. First-generation students often have a significant need for financial aid but find the application process confusing and stressful.

Socio-Economic Status

Poverty remains a more important indicator of whether a student will go to college than high school demographics or location.[48] Additionally, researchers have found a clear relationship between family income level and higher education attainment.[49] Of youth

[5] Students whose parents have not attained a postsecondary credential.

from low-income families, only 60 percent graduate high school. One out of three will enroll in college, and only one out of seven will earn a bachelor's degree.[50, 51] In contrast, more than eight out of ten youth from families in the top income quartile will earn a bachelor's degree.[52] To complete postsecondary education, low-income students must overcome multiple financial, academic, and social barriers.

Financial barriers to completion include difficulty paying for academic and non-academic expenses (e.g. living expenses and other costs), being more likely to enroll only part-time in order to save money, and needing to take out loans.[53] For low-income, first-generation students, "unmet financial need— need that remains after applying all financial aid— is a major problem."[54]

Low-income students face challenges similar to those faced by first-generation students in terms of academic and social barriers to successful college transition and completion. They have lower levels of academic preparation and are less likely to participate fully in academic experiences that foster postsecondary success. These include studying in groups or interacting with faculty and other students. Additionally, low-income students tend to be older and more likely to have family and work obligations that limit their ability to participate fully in extracurricular activities and support services.[55]

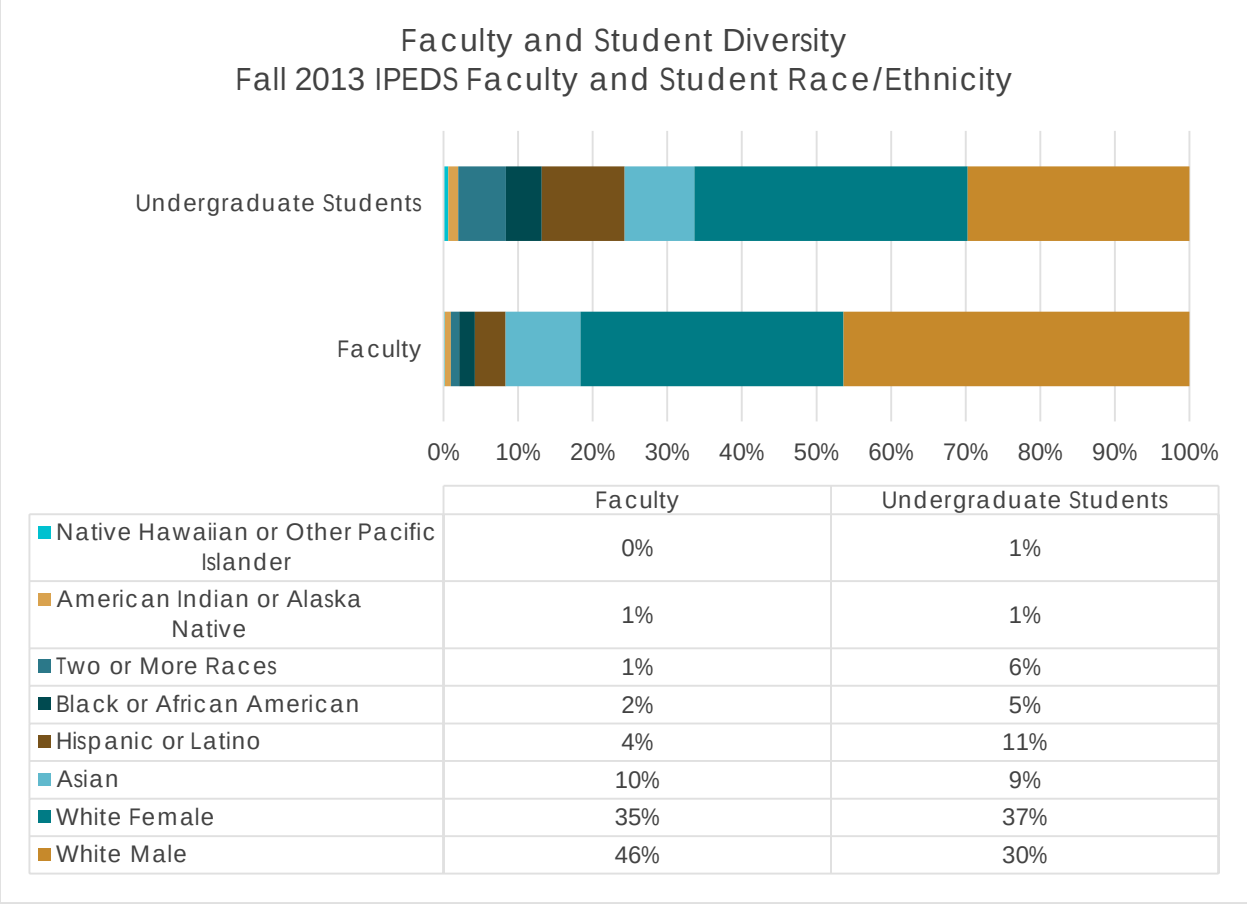
Low-income students may face additional challenges such as homelessness, hunger, and violence, which need to be addressed before their educational goals can be realized.

> *While many students are successfully navigating poverty, fractured family environments, rough neighborhoods, and underperforming public schools, they struggle with a range of academic and personal vulnerabilities — from a lack of proficiency in math and English to family stresses. They often have a strong desire to succeed and extraordinary survival skills. What they are lacking is academic confidence, and understanding of how to bring their interpersonal skills and strengths to bear in academic and professional settings.*[56]

Ethnicity and Race

> *I think people from communities of color really suffer a lot from isolation, from feeling the need to prove themselves. And over time it becomes very difficult to continue to work at a pace like that, and you have to really believe that the benefits outweigh the cost.*[57]
>
> —Mamie Parker
> Former assistant director of fisheries and habitat conservation at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and first African American to head a regional office for that agency.

Latino, African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and some subgroups of Asian students face significant barriers to completion. These students of color are more likely to be first-generation, academically underprepared (needing remediation), low-income, or working.[58] These students are more likely to have difficulty integrating into academic and social communities within a campus climate that may not be welcoming.[59] Research identifies several factors that increase or decrease how welcome students of color feel on college campuses. For example, one factor is racial diversity among teaching faculty. As illustrated in Figure 5, students of color are most often taught by faculty who do not look like them.[60] For example, 11 percent of students identify as Hispanic or Latino, while 4 percent of the faculty are Hispanic or Latino. On the other hand, 30 percent of undergraduate students are white males, and 46 percent of their instructors are white males.



	Faculty	Undergraduate Students
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	1%
Two or More Races	1%	6%
Black or African American	2%	5%
Hispanic or Latino	4%	11%
Asian	10%	9%
White Female	35%	37%
White Male	46%	30%

Figure 5: Student and Faculty Diversity (Source: WSAC Analysis of IPEDS data)

Students of color tend to view campus racial climates differently than white students. For example, researchers have found that students of color were more likely to rate as negative the same campus racial climate white students rated as positive; less likely to feel that the campus racial climate is improving than white students; and less likely to agree with the statement "racial discrimination is no longer a problem" than white students.[61]

Students of color may face underlying discrimination in many forms, ranging from the use of degrading and insensitive stereotypes[62] to racial slurs[63] and hate crimes[64]. At the same time, these students may also be experiencing systemic discrimination including discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities.[6] Members of each racial or ethnic group face shared barriers as well as unique barriers.

Latinos make up the largest and fastest growing[65] of the racial or ethnic groups in Washington, increasing 71 percent since 2000. However, they have the lowest rate of educational attainment.[66]. The majority of Latinos are U.S.-born high-school graduates who predominately speak English.[67] A barrier that many Latinos face is reconciling identity conflicts rooted in cultural norms. These conflicts are illustrated by the voice of first-generation Stanford University graduate Nerina Garcia Arcemet. "Culturally you aren't supposed to leave your parents' house until you are married…When someone like me thinks about college, we have to wrestle with our identity…For us, education is not just about what we gain, but also about what we lose."[68]

Asian American students struggle against a fiction that they "are a homogenous racial group with uniformity in educational and financial attainment, culture, religion, and histories."[69] In reality there are many cultural subgroups, most of which are underrepresented in college. In addition, they have to deal with a "model minority" stereotype.[70] This can be particularly harmful when an instructor holds the stereotype that students are just coasting in class. In the words of one student, "One of my professors told me that Asian American students are apathetic and they are here just to study and get their degree and get out."[71] Also, recent Asian American immigrants are accustomed to different educational norms. In the words of another student, "It took me about two years to understand that asking questions to teachers was OK."[72]

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students[7], like Native American or Alaskan Native students, are on college campuses in small numbers. They must work to proactively address barriers in terms of having their voices heard on campus: "Less than one percent of UW students are Pacific Islander, so our goal is to make our voices heard both at the UW [University of Washington] and working with youth outside the UW."[73] In addition, some students walk a tightrope between getting an education and losing their cultural identity. In the words of a Samoan community member in Long Beach "I

[6] Researchers refer to these types of systemic issues as structural and institutional racism. For a detailed definition of these terms, see Lawrence, Keith and Terry Keleher (2004) Structural Racism (Race and Public Policy Conference 2004)
http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Definitions%20of%20Racism.pdf

[7] Outside of Hawaii.

hear the Samoan elders say that their families are being split apart. Their kids – after they go to college – somehow the Samoan-ness has been educated out of them."[74]

African American students face significant barriers to postsecondary success. Poverty disproportionately affects African Americans.[75] For example, 11 percent of students at public institutions and 13 percent of students at private non-profit institutions are African American, yet about one quarter of all Pell grant recipients are African American. Coming from poverty can interfere with a student's social involvement at the institution. For example, a student said "… I feel like that price tag they have on dorms, that deters a lot of students and probably a lot of African American students from living in the dorms. If you don't live in the dorms, you don't feel involved."[76] African American students also experience racism as a significant barrier,[77] reporting "guarded, tense, and threatening" interactions at a higher rate than not only white students but also other students of color.[78]

Native American students make up a relatively small part of the population and an even smaller share of postsecondary enrollments. This can make them feel isolated. Moreover, the federal government's historical legacy of using boarding school education to colonize Native Americans may "hold students back due to distrust of the higher educational system."[79] Both of these themes are reflected in the words of a Native American student at Calvin College in New Mexico: "Less than 1 percent of Calvin students are Native American and it is common to feel isolated, like no one understands what I am going through. . . . Another frustration I experience is living in two worlds—though never quite fitting in either. When I go back home, I have to justify going to two schools that are affiliated with an institution that viciously oppressed my elders."[80]

Other Specific Challenges

English language learner (ELL) students represent one in nine of the 49.5 million students enrolled in U.S. public schools – a number that has risen dramatically, from 3.5 million during the 1998-99 school year to 5.3 million a decade later. ELL students who worked while in high school were more likely to go to college after graduation. Further research is needed to determine if these jobs offer opportunities to strengthen English language development as well as accrue earnings for family and college expenses.

Washington has a high degree of linguistic diversity. In fact, Tukwila School district is the most diverse school district in the nation[81], with more than 60 world languages spoken by students as their first language.[82] As of May 2014, Washington's public schools enrolled 102,339 K-12 students in the transitional bilingual instruction program, representing 9.7 percent of overall enrollment.[83]

Students with disabilities face unique challenges that may prevent them from successfully transitioning to postsecondary education.[84] Time management, study-skills, communication, and self-advocacy may be a struggle for students with select disabilities. These challenges may cause difficulty navigating the postsecondary system.

Additionally, the federal disability laws that apply to K-12 education and postsecondary education are different. The type and level of accommodations and modifications students received in K-12 may not be available in college. Postsecondary enrollment by students who self-identify as having a disability is low (4.6 percent)[858] when compared with the percentage of K-12 students with disabilities (15.6 percent)[869], and the percentage of working age adults with disabilities (16.6 percent)[8710].

Adult students with disabilities, including military service members and veterans with disabilities, may face additional transition issues specific to their circumstances. This is particularly significant if the disability is recent, and they are managing both the transition to their new physical status as well as the transition to the college environment. In addition to any physical and sensory impairments, it is estimated that as many as 25 percent of the veterans enrolled in postsecondary education have so-called "hidden" disabilities, such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression.[88]

Former foster youth transitioning to life on their own frequently face challenges to succeeding in postsecondary institutions. There are currently 10,068 children in foster care in Washington State.[89] Currently in Washington, only 18 percent attend college within one year after leaving state care; 42 percent of non-foster students from the same cohort enrolled in college.[9011] And, only 2.7 percent complete a bachelor's degree by the age of 25.[91] Sixty-five percent of foster youth experience seven or more school changes between elementary and high school. [92] This academic instability hinders student academic preparedness for a postsecondary education.

Incarcerated and previously incarcerated juveniles receive basic K-12 education services. The goal is to provide incarcerated youth the opportunity to meet the same challenging academic content and achievement standards that all children in the state are expected to meet. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) offers specific guidance to and oversees the four Educational Service Districts and 35+ school districts that provide these services. Services are provided inside state-operated juvenile institutions and group homes, county-operated juvenile detention

[8] This is an average estimate based on survey results from approximately 20 of the 52 public postsecondary institutions in Washington State (38% response rate).
[9] Students with disabilities includes special education students (13.2%) and Section 504 students (2.4%). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities by school districts receiving federal financial assistance.
[10] Ages 21-64.
[11] Percentage includes graduates and non-graduates in the same cohort.

centers and group homes, adult jails and state correctional facilities, and community schools.

In addition, approximately one third of youth in [U.S.] juvenile facilities have identified special education needs – more than double the rate in the general population.[93]

Washington State law also allows some juveniles to be incarcerated in adult facilities. This complicates the delivery of educational services, and reduces the schools ability to prepare students for college-level work.

Incarcerated adults in state prisons are offered postsecondary instruction through a contract between the Department of Corrections and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. In 2012-13, eight colleges offered contracted instruction for the Washington Department of Corrections at 12 correctional facilities. Students enroll in courses to increase literacy and gain occupational skills.[94] Although state funds cannot be used for postsecondary education beyond basic education and short-term vocational programs—and incarcerated adults are not eligible for Pell grants—a few opportunities to pursue a degree do exist. These programs receive financial and staff support from philanthropic and volunteer organizations.

According to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, "Most of the men and women entering correctional facilities lack the literacy and employment skills needed to succeed in our communities upon release."[95] According to SBCTC's research and analysis, correctional education programs benefit all citizens of Washington State.[96] Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan shared research findings showing that inmates who participated in correctional education programs were 43 percent less likely to return to prison than inmates who did not.[97]

Returning Adult Students

Adult learners comprise an increasing proportion of the total enrollment in today's colleges and universities, and yet they continue to be the least understood, the most difficult to recruit, and the least likely to persist. Adding to the challenge of ensuring that adults have up-to-date and accurate information about postsecondary options and support, many adults obtain information about colleges from family, friends, community groups, and colleagues rather than from more official sources.[98]

Returning adult students, with some college but no degree, are a diverse and complex population, and there is a significant lack of data on demographics and educational characteristics for this group.[99] Because they come from a wide range of life circumstances, they face a variety of barriers to postsecondary credential completion.

The primary challenge faced by returning adults in postsecondary education is the wide range of responsibilities these students often juggle: families, dependents, and often part- or full-time work.[100,101] Research on the topic consistently identifies four major barriers to education for working adults: 1) lack of time; 2) family responsibilities,

including a need for childcare; 3) scheduling and location of courses (often transportation-related); and 4) cost of education.[102]

For adult students, either being employed or being unemployed while in school can pose issues. Unemployment while in school limits resources, but employment limits time. Employment can also put people in the position of earning too much to be eligible for federal aid but not enough to pay for college, given their other financial obligations.

Students of particular interest to policymakers in Washington are the nearly 700,000[103] state residents who have some college credit, but no degree. To meet the state attainment goals, it is imperative that institutions reengage and support these former students.

However, working adults often want to participate differently. For example, they do not spend much time on campus, nor do they have much patience for multiple levels of developmental courses or courses that cover material they already know. They want acceleration because they have less time.

In addition, there are some distinct subgroups, such as veterans, adults with disabilities, or adults with some college credit, whose members face barriers that other adults do not. Research shows that a valuable approach to serving adult students is to identify these subgroups and work to address their specific needs.[104]

Adult students pose unique measurement challenges for policymakers. For example, time to postsecondary credential completion, a popular progress measure, may not adequately capture progress for students who cycle in and out of courses and programs over time or attend part-time.

Active Duty and Veteran Service Members

It is estimated that 5 million U.S. veterans will transition from military life to civilian life by the year 2020. Currently, 603,623 veterans reside in Washington State.[105] Transitioning veterans must balance searching for jobs, researching education and training opportunities, and meeting family responsibilities. Additionally, some veterans may also be managing emotional challenges or physical disabilities.[106]

Veteran students are often older (average age of 33), and more likely to be first-in-family college attendees than their college classmates. For example, 62 percent of veterans are first-in-family college students compared to 43 percent of non-veteran students. Veteran students arrive on campus with many skills, but are less likely to earn a college degree and are more likely to be unemployed than their non-veteran peers.[107] Awarding college credits for skills learned in the military may shorten time to college completion. This, in turn, may lead to improved employment prospects.[108] One barrier to awarding credit for prior learning is the limit set by the Northwest Commission for Colleges and Universities: no more than 25 percent of the credits for a certificate or degree can be from credit for prior experiential learning.[109]

Some veterans rely on their education benefits as their only source of income while searching for employment. In the short term, their benefits assist with living expenses, but in the long term, this path may not lead to achievement of their academic and career goals.

Current Strategies in Washington

In order to achieve the educational attainment goals set forth in the Roadmap, and adopted by the Washington State Legislature, policies and practices must reflect the realities of today's educational and economic landscapes. Educators and policy leaders in Washington State are working collaboratively - across sectors - to implement strategies that we know support students who face barriers to college transition and completion. The goal is to make postsecondary education transitions and completion a logical next step for students—not a giant leap. These strategies are aligned with three primary objectives of the attainment goals, which are to:

- **Ensure access**. Ensuring cost is not a barrier and making college affordable; ensuring high school graduates are career and college ready; streamlining and expanding dual-credit opportunities; and, increasing support for all students.

  Highlight: Designed for students scoring just below college and career ready on the high school standards assessment, 12th grade transitions courses (Bridge to College Mathematics and ELA) provide targeted curriculum and support to ensure that students passing the course are fully prepared for college-level coursework.

- **Enhance learning**. Aligning education with employment; providing work-based learning; encouraging adults to earn postsecondary credentials; and, leveraging technology to improve student outcomes.

  Highlight: In 2013-14, nearly 20,000 students were awarded credit for prior learning, and 306,308 prior learning credits (equivalent to more than 6,806 annual FTE) were accepted by Washington State colleges and universities.

- **Prepare for future challenges**. Responding to student, employer and community needs; increasing awareness of postsecondary opportunities; and helping students and families save for postsecondary education.

  Highlight: 12th Year Campaign, a combination of two national programs (College Goal Washington and the College Application Campaign), increases college application rates and financial aid application rates in Washington.

At the institutional level, effective institutional practices create institutional settings that promote high expectations, support, frequent assessment and feedback, and student involvement.[110] Many strategies are in place, supporting the implementation of the Roadmap, and can be broadly categorized as:

- **Pre-college interventions.** Interventions or support programs designed to help students prior to postsecondary enrollment. These may include various outreach efforts, communication, and targeted support as well as academic interventions like transition courses, and other programs to foster college readiness.

  Highlight: 55% of bachelor's degree completers who began their postsecondary education in a community or technical college started in a pre-college English or Math course in[11].

- **Postsecondary placement.** Policies and practices that are designed to ensure students are able to reduce or minimize time spent in pre-college coursework.

  Highlight: K-12 and higher education sectors collaborated to implement an agreement to use 11th grade Smarter Balanced assessment scores to exempt entering college students from placement into remedial coursework.

- **Student support (academic, financial, social).** Support programs designed to help students successfully transition to postsecondary education and complete a degree or certificate. Examples may include first-year transition programs, student aid programs, academic supports, or affinity groups.

  Highlight: Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST) allows students to learn basic skills in reading, math, writing, or English and professional/technical academic content simultaneously, thus streamlining the time it takes to earn a credential and enter the workforce.

- **Transfer improvements.** Programs and policies designed to ensure students are able to receive credit for prior coursework and prior learning. This includes policies like the direct transfer agreement and local articulation agreements.

  Highlight: A new Associate in Arts Nursing DTA/MRP allows for a three year program at a community or technical college that prepares students for licensure with a pathway designed for transfer to a post-licensure, one-year BSN degree program.

A sampling of the statewide, system-wide, and institution-level strategies, which specifically support the implementation of the Roadmap and achievement of the two statewide educational attainment goals, is included in an asset map available on the Washington Student Achievement Council website[12]. Please note that the asset map highlights additional examples of the strategies listed above, and is not all inclusive.

[12] 2015 Asset Map, compiled by WSAC (http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2015.Asset.Map.xlsx)

Next Steps

Over the next decade, more Washingtonians will need postsecondary credentials to meet the needs of employers and to meet their own financial needs. The statewide attainment goal of at least 70 percent of adults having a postsecondary credential is based on this fact. In order to reach this goal, all Washingtonians who do not hold a credential must be viewed as potential students. Students need to be well prepared to enter postsecondary apprenticeships, certificate and degree programs; and educational institutions need to be prepared to serve more students with a wider range of diverse skills and needs.

A particular focus must be on students who are first-in-family to attend college, low-income, or people of color. A new push must begin to reach out and engage adult learners, particularly those who have some college credit but no credential, and including the many service members and veterans in Washington.

Rising expectations and standards, along with evolving instructional and assessment strategies in the K-12 system, will help more students to reach the career and college-readiness benchmarks needed to be successful in postsecondary education. Expansion of dual-credit programs in high schools will ensure that more students have college-level experience. Outreach programs will increase the chances that students have the information they need, while continued funding of State Need Grant along with other financial aid programs will give students the resources they need to transition to career training and college.

The Washington State Roadmap for Educational Attainment provides the goals and the strategic vision of the journey ahead. The Strategic Action Plan identifies the key investments needed each biennium to ensure that all Washingtonians have postsecondary educational opportunities necessary to reach the educational attainment goals.

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Appendix: Glossary

Attainment. Achieving established milestones toward an industry-recognized apprenticeship, certificate or degree. Generally applied to a population (e.g. attainment level of 25-44 year olds in Washington).

Big Data. Refers to massive amounts of data that are difficult to analyze and handle using common database management tools. Big Data, including keystrokes and time spent in specific sections of online learning tools, can be used to provide individualized feedback and instruction.

College readiness. Students who are college and career training ready demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary to successfully complete entry-level, credit-bearing college courses, or necessary to successfully complete certificate or workplace training programs.

Completion. Earning a postsecondary credential: certificate, degree, or industry-recognized apprenticeship. Generally applied to individual or cohort. (e.g. completions in 2013)

First Generation or First-in-Family. Students whose parents have not attained a postsecondary credential.

Learning analytics. The measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs.

Opportunity gap. Disparity in access to the resources needed for all students to be academically successful.[112]

Postsecondary education. The term postsecondary education includes structured education or training after high school, including apprenticeship, college or university, and any career training that leads to an industry-recognized credential.

Postsecondary institution. A provider of postsecondary education.

Successful transition to college. A transition to college involves many stages, including applying for college, paying for college, acclimating to college and completing college-level coursework. A student is considered to have made a successful transition to college when he or she enrolls in college and earns credits in college-level coursework which apply to a certificate or degree.

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