

Nontraditional Student Success in Public Two-year Colleges

While data are available through the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey about first-time, full-time freshmen, very little is known about the retention and graduation of other types of degree/certificate-seeking students, particularly nontraditional, adult learners.

Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education as part of the Emerging Pathways project at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, this research provides new insights into the educational experiences of two-year college students.

The data for this study were initially compiled by NCHEMS, working with SHEEO offices in the contiguous states of Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia to study student migration. Data from Virginia and the State University of New York (SUNY) system were added as part of a proof-in-concept for a new type of multi-state Student Unit Record Exchange (SURE). No data are released at the state or institution level. Numerous tables and the first report are available at <http://highered.org/lumina.asp>.

The results provide six years of longitudinal data from six states about half a million first-time freshmen beginning in Fall 1998 and Fall 1999, including 203,786 students who began at two-year colleges. Data were compiled about majors, dropout, transfer, same school retention, overall retention, and certificate, associate's, and bachelor's awards. The results suggest that:

- Two-year colleges serve a very different population of first-time students than do four-year schools. There is a much higher percentage of nontraditional students (19.4%) than in four-year (7.3%). The proportion of traditional age starting full-time is almost half (47.0%) that of four-year (84.8%).
- The two-year cohort has many more first-time students who are either part-time only (15.2%) or incidental (11.2%) compared to the four-year cohort (2.8% and 1.7% respectively).
- Not counting incidental students, the two-year cohort has a much higher dropout rate (34.5%) than the four-year (16.3%).
- The attrition rate for traditional full-time students (29.0%) is double that for four-year (13.7%). Among nontraditional students, the dropout rate is 41.9% vs. 32.9% for four-year.
- The transfer rate for traditional full-time students is 6.4%, slightly less than that for four-year (7.9%). This rate is lower for nontraditional students (3.9%), but higher for traditional starting part-time (11.8%).
- Two-year students are much more likely to earn a certificate (2.6%) or an associate's degree (22.9%) than those in the four-year cohort (0.6% and 6.4% respectively). However, they are much less likely to earn a bachelor's degree (7.8%) compared to the four-year cohort (50.4%).
- Under-represented minorities (URM) do not do as well in retention (59.0%) or associate's degree attainment (13.1%).

Student Typology

Traditional age starting full-time
Traditional age starting part-time
Nontraditional, age 20+
Part-time only for 2+ semesters
Incidental, part-time 1 semester

Demographic Data

Gender
Race
Age
Residency

Enrollment Behavior Data

Dual enrollment
Attendance patterns
Enrollment continuity
Transfer patterns
Transfer direction
Time to degree
Degree paths

School Characteristics Data

IPEDS new derived variables
Carnegie Classification
Faculty/staff/student diversity
Resources per student
Adult learner-friendly policies
Environmental supports

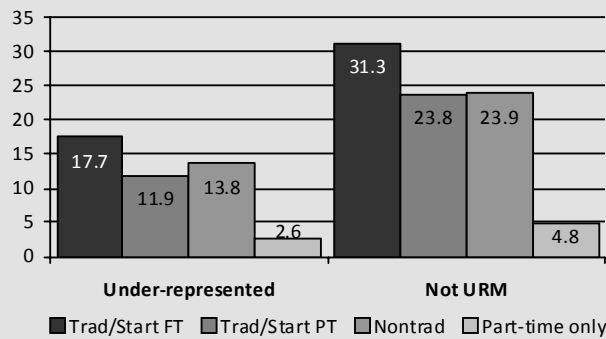
Disciplines/Majors

CIP Codes
STEM
SMART
Career and technical education
Areas of national need
Nontraditional fields by gender
Academic and career-oriented
Career clusters and pathways

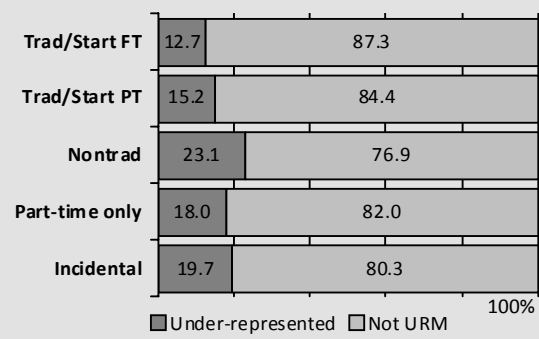
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Associate's Rates by URM and Student Type



Under-Represented Minority (URM) % by Type



- For under-represented minorities who are traditional starting full-time, the associate's rate is higher at 17.7%. The traditional full-time, associate's rate for African Americans (14.5%) is less than Hispanic (25.0%) and Native American (21.7%), which are closer to those for Asian (27.5%) and white (31.4%).
- Nontraditional students age 30+ have higher certificate (8.0%) and bachelor's (7.2%) rates than average.
- In-state students have higher retention rates (66.2%) than non-resident (57.4%). Out-of-state rates for associate's (16.6%) and bachelor's (4.1%) awards are lower than in-state (23.2% and 7.9%).
- Mixed attendance, a combination of full- and part-time enrollment, dramatically increases overall retention, from 52.7% for full-time status to 79.8% for mixed. Associate's attainment is a little higher (28.3%) for mixed compared to full-time status (24.6%). Among nontraditional students, the associate's rate is 26.6% for mixed vs. 14.6% for full-time and the bachelor's rate is 4.7% for mixed vs. 2.8% for full-time.
- Associate's attainment for nontraditional students drops from 23.2% for those who continuously enroll to 16.2% for two enrollment spells and 8.1% for three or more spells.
- Two-year students who attend college full-time for eight continuous terms have remarkably high attainment, with an associate's rate of 55.0% for traditional starting full-time and 61.7% for nontraditional students. The bachelor's rate is 69.0% and 49.0% respectively for these two student types.
- The availability of institutional resources, such as instructional expenses per student FTE, and the presence of adult learner-friendly programs and policies do not noticeably impact retention or attainment.
- There is significant variation in majors by student type. 29.1% of nontraditional, 30.0% of part-time only, and 20.4% of traditional starting full-time majors are in STEM. Overall, 13.2% are in SMART disciplines.
- The certificate rate for nontraditional students in STEM is 8.0%, compared to 4.2% for all majors. In areas of national need, this rate goes up to 14.9% in agricultural sciences and conservation, 10.8% in the health professions, and 10.6% in nursing. These are higher than rates for traditional full-time students.
- Associate's rates for traditional full-time and nontraditional students are slightly higher in STEM.
- Part-time only students do well in a handful of majors, with certificate rates of 6.1% in health sciences and associate's rates of 12.5% in consumer sciences, 14.3% in nursing, 13.6% in physical sciences, and 27.0% in multi/interdisciplinary. Very few part-time only students complete the bachelor's (0.2%).
- Transfers from 2 to 4-year result in higher retention (89.7%), associate's (43.4%), and bachelor's (44.9%).
- Examining degree path, 74.8% of students do not earn an award. Among those completing one award, 1.5% earn a certificate, 16.0% an associate's, and 3.4% a bachelor's. In terms of multiple awards, another 0.8% earn a certificate and an associates, 0.1% go from certificate to associate's to bachelor's, and 3.4% go from associate's to bachelor's. No certificate to baccalaureate paths are shown in these data.

Student Type	Count	Dropout	Transfer	Same school Retention	Overall Retention	Certificates	Associate's	Bachelor's
Total Two-year Cohort	203,786	34.5%	5.6%	60.0%	65.5%	2.6%	22.9%	7.8%
Traditional, starting FT	95,853	29.0%	6.4%	64.6%	71.0%	2.3%	29.6%	11.4%
Traditional, starting PT	14,489	22.9%	11.8%	65.3%	77.1%	2.4%	22.0%	10.5%
Nontraditional age 20+	39,633	41.9%	3.9%	54.1%	58.1%	4.2%	21.5%	3.9%
Part-time only	30,973	47.2%	2.2%	50.5%	52.8%	1.9%	4.4%	0.2%
Incidental	22,838	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%