New CCRC research based on a national survey of students finds that taking a few courses at a community college can potentially help four-year college students earn more credits and more STEM credits, increase their chances of earning a bachelor’s degree, and improve employment outcomes. Some benefits of this type of enrollment at a community college are especially strong for low-income students, women, and Black and Latinx students.

The survey tracked students who were in 10th grade in 2002 for eight years, and our analysis compared similar four-year college students who did or did not earn 1–10 credits at a community college. About 8% of students who primarily enroll in a four-year college also complete a few courses at a community college. We call them supplementally enrolled students.

Key Findings

Compared to four-year college students who earned no community college credits, supplementally enrolled students:

- **All Students**
  - Had a 4.5 percentage point higher bachelor’s degree completion rate
  - Earned $1.40 more per hour

- **Low-income Students**
  - Had a 6.8 percentage point higher STEM bachelor’s degree completion rate
  - Had an 11 percentage point higher STEM bachelor’s degree completion rate

- **Women**
  - Earned 4.3 more STEM college credits
  - Had a 6.2 percentage point higher STEM bachelor’s degree completion rate

- **Black & Latinx Students**
  - Earned $377 more STEM college credits
  - Had $5,888 less in student loan debt

Why Four-Year Students Might Benefit From Community College Enrollment

- **Cheaper Courses**
- **Increased Course Options & Availability**
- **Smaller Classes with More Personal Attention**
- **Supportive Environment**
  - More diverse & welcoming STEM classrooms

Implications for Policy and Practice

- Institutions and policymakers should monitor patterns of enrollment and outcomes of four-year college students who take community college courses to provide better guidance to students and to build processes for tracking transfer credits among colleges and college systems.

- Community colleges and four-year institutions should explore why women and low-income students succeed in STEM courses at community colleges and scale promising practices across colleges.

- Given the emphasis on institutional accountability, understanding supplemental enrollment behavior could help in evaluating the role and performance of four-year and two-year institutions.

FURTHER READING

For more on this research read Does Taking a Few Courses at a Community College Improve the Baccalaureate, STEM, and Labor Market Outcomes of Four-Year College Students? by Vivian Yuen Ting Liu and Maggie P. Fay