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New Report Ranks States Based on Colleges' Performance in Helping Students Transfer to Four-Year Universities and Earn Bachelor's Degrees

Research Shows Many Community College Students Failed by Current System of Transfer

New York, January 19, 2016 – A new report released today by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University; the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program; and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center finds that across the United States, only 14 percent of students starting in community colleges transfer to four-year schools and earn a bachelor's degree within six years of entry. Even in states with the best track records, only about one in five community college students transfer and graduate within six years of enrolling. In states at the bottom of the list, transfer and graduation rates are in the single digits. Read the full report [here](#).

“Too many students are failed by the current system of transfer between community colleges and universities,” said Davis Jenkins, Senior Research Associate at CCRC. “This report enables us, for the first time, to see in which states colleges are supporting students in this journey so we can figure out what works and enable students everywhere to be successful. Greater success for more students will cut down on the waste in taxpayer money when students drop out or lose credits as they transfer.”

Studies have shown 80 percent of new community college students want to earn a bachelor's degree. However, only 14 percent of the 720,000 degree-seeking students examined in the study—who enrolled in community college for the first time in fall 2007—transferred to and graduated from a four-year university within six years of entry. Among students who started at community college and successfully transferred, only 42 percent completed a bachelor's degree. This is far below the 60 percent degree attainment rate of students who started at public four-year colleges.

The report, funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, is the first phase in a major initiative to tackle low transfer rates and to provide colleges with the tools they need to improve. The report recommends a comprehensive set of five measures as a new way to track which institutions are effective in serving transfer students and which

states have a robust transfer pipeline from community colleges to four-year schools. To break down the number of students transferring out of two-year colleges and their subsequent success in earning a bachelor's degree, the report used a comprehensive national dataset to track for six years after entry first-time community college students who first enrolled in fall 2007.

Key Findings

The report found that in most states lower income students, who are more likely to start at community colleges, do worse on almost all transfer measurements than their higher income peers.

“Transfer challenges disproportionately impact students who are already at a disadvantage,” said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. “Knocking down barriers to transfer will help narrow our nation’s opportunity gap by boosting the rate at which low-income students and students of color earn bachelor’s degrees. At the same time, it will help create a better educated workforce—planting the seeds for sustained economic growth.”

The data also showed huge variation in the effectiveness of the community colleges and four-year colleges in helping students transfer and complete bachelor’s degrees.

Breaking down the numbers by type of college challenges assumptions about why some schools are less effective than others. Whether a community college served primarily lower or higher income students; was located in an urban, suburban, or rural setting; or was primarily academically (as opposed to occupationally) focused did not account for the differences in the rates. Among four-year colleges, students at public colleges overall earned their bachelor’s degrees at higher rates than their peers at private colleges and for-profit colleges. And students at very selective colleges earned their bachelor’s degrees at higher rates than their peers at nonselective colleges. But even among these groups at the four-year level, substantial variation in performance among individual schools remained.

“These data indicate that the practices of the colleges—their programs for transfer students and collaboration between two- and four-year destination colleges—can make a big difference in whether transfer students are successful,” said Douglas Shapiro, Executive Research Director at the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. “This makes it clear how important it is for two- and four-year institutions to work together to fix the transfer problem.”

Report Highlights

- **States above the national average both in transferring students from community colleges to four-year schools and in bachelor’s degree attainment include:**

- Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Texas

- **States with mixed results on transfer and bachelor’s degree attainment include:**

- **Washington:** Among bottom 10 nationally (26 percent) for students transferring to a four-year college; among top 10 nationally (49 percent) for transfer students earning a bachelor’s degree

- **California and Iowa:** Below-average transfer out rates but top-10 bachelor's attainment rates
- **Michigan and Montana:** Students transferred out of community colleges at above-average rates but had trouble graduating from the four-year schools
- **States more successful in reducing disparity between low-income transfer students and higher income peers on bachelor's degree attainment include:**
 - Florida, Iowa, North Dakota, and New Hampshire

Building on this research, CCRC and the Aspen Institute will develop a “playbook” for creating effective transfer partnerships for community college and university leaders. It is scheduled to be released in spring 2016 in collaboration with Public Agenda.

The full report can be found at: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>

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The **Community College Research Center (CCRC)**, Teachers College, Columbia University, conducts research on the major issues affecting community colleges in the United States and contributes to the development of practice and policy that expands access to higher education and promotes success for all students.

The **Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program** aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. Through the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the New College Leadership Project, and other initiatives, the College Excellence Program works to improve colleges' understanding and capacity to teach and graduate students, especially the growing population of low-income and minority students on American campuses.

The **National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™** is the research arm of the National Student Clearinghouse. The Research Center works with higher education institutions, states, districts, high schools, and educational organizations to better inform practitioners and policymakers about student educational pathways. Through accurate longitudinal data outcomes reporting, the Research Center enables better educational policy decisions leading to improved student outcomes.