

PREFACE

Think about college in America. Traditionally speaking, this brings to mind images of young people engaged in weekday classes combined with dorm life, sports teams, social experiences and opportunities to explore their interests en route to attaining a four-year degree. For a non-traditional student, however – one who is likely to be older, a racial minority and/or a military veteran, less academically prepared, and working or juggling other responsibilities – this picture doesn't fit.

Can these students, whose American dream for higher education focuses less on the college experience and more on self-improvement via specific professional or occupational goals, count on career colleges to deliver?

If they don't, they probably should. Statistically, career colleges deliver good student outcomes in successfully educating non-traditional students. As such, they are key players in individualized education and skill development for adults who are searching for ways to quickly and efficiently increase

their capacity and career options. This, in turn, is important to the collective recovery of the U.S. economy and its ability to rebound and compete in the global marketplace.

In sizing up the impact of career colleges compared to other types of educational institutions, this study focused on two outcome measures: student retention in school (from fall to fall) and student program completion or graduation.

Initial data analysis was derived from the 2006 annual surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the 6,750 institutions participating in federal student financial aid (Title IV) programs. Of these, 40 percent are career colleges.

Secondary analysis derived from the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) survey, a longitudinal study of approximately 19,000 beginning students from 1,360 institutions at three- and six-year intervals.

The analysis in the report was divided by type (career college; public institution; and private, not-for-profit) and the length of core programs (four-year, two-year and less-than-two-year).

Findings:

- Not only are career college students, on average, older than students attending other, traditional institutions, but they are also more likely to be of a minority race and affected by social risk factors such as delayed enrollment, lack of high school diploma, income independence, part-time enrollment, single parenthood and/or dependent children, and full-time work during enrollment.



- Career colleges have higher percentages of at-risk students, including students who are affected by multiple, and cumulative, risk factors.
- Career colleges educate a very high percentage of Pell Grant receiving students – a leading indicator of low income status, as Pell Grants are need-based.
- Career college students, regardless of level and with almost no exception, are much more likely than students attending other types of institutions to be older, of color, poor, and from a family that has no educational legacy, i.e., parents who did not pursue postsecondary education.

Despite these apparent barriers to student success, statistical analysis reveals that:

- Career colleges do a good job of graduating low income/at-risk student populations compared to public institutions.
- Four-year career colleges that are predominately minority-serving exhibit a higher graduation rate than public and private institutions that also serve minority students (47 percent versus 33 percent and 40 percent, respectively).

- Career colleges graduate African-American and Hispanic students at higher rates than public institutions graduate Caucasian students.

This report only touches on why students attending career colleges do as well as or better than students attending other types of institutions.

The report suggests that career colleges work hard to provide appropriate student services and support. Such support could be found in flexible class schedules, one-on-one tutoring, a variety of learning modalities, hands-on practice and faculty who are trained to meet the needs of non-traditional adult learners. Those needs include less time spent in school and training that is directed toward developing occupational skills and enhancing career outcomes.

There is still much to be learned about the successes of career colleges, but this report makes one fact very clear: career colleges remain an important component of our nation's higher education system, particularly for the non-traditional adult student.