



Office of Academic Affairs

Access to Success Initiative



In October 2007 the Tennessee Board of Regents entered into an agreement with the Education Trust to study student access and success in higher education. The intent of this study is to develop goals designed to facilitate postsecondary access and successful degree attainment, particularly for traditionally underserved populations. During the summer and fall of 2008 TBR provided the Education Trust with aggregate student data from the 2005-06 academic year. This data depicts Tennessee Board of Regents students at the system and institution level, while paying particular attention to student background characteristics. In 2009, the Education Trust provided feedback to the board in the form of a series of tables focusing on access, retention, and successful completion for minority and low-income students.

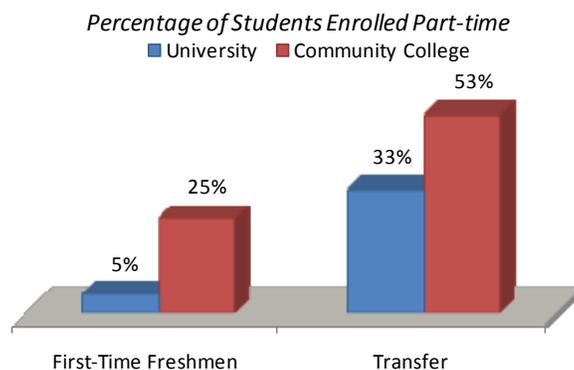


The Education Trust

The Education Trust's data study examines the representation of minorities and low-income students in the Tennessee Board of Regents institutions, and observes whether these students are as successful as their more traditional counterparts. In addition to this main focus, the data from the board reviews transfer and part-time enrollment to see if these factors further impact minority and low-income students. Therefore, the cohorts in this study transcend more traditional measures by including all students in retention and graduation rates, not just first-time, full-time freshmen. Also the Education Trust, with the understanding that community college and university missions differ, defines "successful completion" differently for each type of institution: a successful university student graduated with a Bachelors degree while a successful community college student graduated or transferred to a four-year institution.

Findings

The summary tables provided by the Education Trust as a response to the TBR offer a variety of viewpoints which are counter to what has become accepted in higher education. The chart below shows the percentage of students enrolled on a part-time basis at TBR institutions for the 2005-06 year.



The data suggest that measurements which only account for first-time, full-time students are no longer representative of the entire student body.

- 25 percent of first-time students and over half of transfer students at community colleges are enrolled part-time.
- Transfer students make up over 30 percent of community college students entering in the 2005-06 academic year.

The Education Trust data studies access to higher education for low-income and minority by comparing the representation of these groups in the 2005-06 TBR cohort to the population graduating from college the previous year. Several conclusions can be made by reviewing this data.

- Minority students make up a larger percentage of first-time freshmen at universities (28%) and community colleges (24%) than the percentage of minority students in the high school graduating class (23%). For transfers, the representation of minority students is comparable to that of the high school class.
- Early data indicates that low-income students are not as well represented in TBR institutions low-income students in the high school graduating class. However, the actual gap is difficult to determine because of limitations to the data metric.

In order to study student attainment, the Education Trust used a six-year graduation rate for TBR universities, and a four-year graduation rate for community colleges in an attempt to offset the inclusion of part time students in the cohort. The graphs below show success rates for the community colleges, and graduation rates for the universities for the 2005-06 academic year.

- The graphs indicate that first-time freshmen that are low-income students are less likely to be successful at community colleges (6% gap) and universities (8% gap) compared to the total cohort. The Education Trust data indicates that most of the attrition for this group occurs in the first academic year. Low-income students that transfer are just as likely to graduate when compared to the total cohort.
- For universities, first-time freshmen that are minorities graduate almost as well as the total cohort, but there is a 10 percent graduation gap for university transfers that are minority. At community colleges, a gap in likely success exists for both first-time freshmen (9%) and community colleges (6%).

