Even ONE Semester
Full-Time Enrollment and Student Success
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1901, J. Stanley Brown, superintendent of Joliet Township High School, and William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, created Joliet Junior College (JJC), the nation’s first public college to accommodate students who wanted to remain within the community yet still pursue a college education. With only six students in the beginning, I assume all attended full-time.

Here we are now, 116 years after the birth of JJC. Community colleges are still serving their communities, yet now a large majority of students attend part-time. The lives of today’s students are complex. They work, have families, and care for parents—all while taking classes.

This report is dedicated to all the students who desire to be full-time but, because of competing demands in their lives, attend part-time. The report is also dedicated to the colleges that recognize the complexity of their students’ lives and are making strides to help more part-time students attend full-time—or have an experience that is comparable to that of their full-time peers.

This report would not have been possible without transcript data provided by 28 community colleges. We would also like to thank Front Range Community College in Colorado for allowing the Center for Community College Student Engagement (the Center) to conduct focus groups on attendance patterns.

Evelyn N. Waiwaiole
Executive Director
Center for Community College Student Engagement
A Fresh View of Attendance Patterns

Our national dialogue about higher education continues to focus on college completion, and it does so for good reason. If our country has an under-educated workforce, we collectively lose our edge in global competitiveness. Equally important are the individual costs. Students who do not attain their educational goals cannot take advantage of all that a college degree brings, including better jobs, higher incomes, and the many benefits that accompany them.

Community colleges have long known that full-time students are more likely to complete college than are their part-time peers. In fact, a number of new completion efforts focus on full-time attendance throughout college (see page 5). However, current Center findings show that students benefit from even one semester of full-time attendance.

Many in the field of higher education tend to regard part-time and full-time as fixed classifications. But the reality is that attendance patterns are fluid for many students.
Redefining Attendance Patterns

While the higher education field tends to think of part-time and full-time as fixed classifications, many students switch their enrollment status over time. Throughout this report, the Center refers to three types of enrollment status:

- **Always-part-time.** Students who have attended college part-time in every term they have enrolled and never attended full-time.

- **Fluid attendance pattern.** Students who have attended college part-time in some semesters and full-time in others. Some students change their status once; others move back and forth between part-time and full-time enrollment.

- **Always-full-time.** Students who have attended college full-time in every term they have enrolled and never attended part-time.

Some begin college as either part-time or full-time students and then switch. Others move between the two categories multiple times throughout their college experience.

Because of this fluidity, colleges may not realize how prevalent the part-time student experience is on their campuses. In fact, 2016 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data show that more than 80% of third-term students report being part-time for at least some of their college experience—a figure that is considerably higher than the widely accepted binary classification (roughly two-thirds of students attend college part-time, and one-third attend full-time).\(^1\)

**Even One Semester Creates the Full-Time Edge**

Data in this report confirm the benefits of full-time attendance: Survey data show that always-full-time students have consistently higher levels of engagement than always-part-time students. Transcript data show that always-full-time students are more likely to complete gateway courses, persist, and earn credentials than their always-part-time peers. These data points, however, do not tell the full story.

Students with fluid attendance patterns frequently fall between the two extremes—and they often look more like always-full-time students than like always-part-time students. *These findings indicate that any experience as a full-time student provides a benefit.*

Given the demonstrable value of the full-time edge—and the fact that the vast majority of community college students attend part-time at least some of the time—how can colleges help students do better regardless of their enrollment status?

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**Most Students Have Fluid Attendance Patterns**

Among students who have attended their college for three terms \((N=18,887)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always-full-time students</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with fluid attendance patterns</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always-part-time students</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.*

**Students Who Start Full-Time Do Not Necessarily Stay Full-Time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-term students who attend full-time</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-term students who attend full-time</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(N=22,450\)

\(N=18,887\)

*Source: 2016 CCSSE special-focus item respondents*

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*I went full-time when I first got out of high school. [But] as you get older, life changes and you just only have so much time for school. I wish I could go full-time to finish quicker, but I just don’t have time.*

— STUDENT

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2 Even One Semester
enrollment status? One approach is to encourage more students to attend full-time. However, because full-time attendance will not be realistic for many students, colleges also can work to help more part-time students have an educational experience—particularly in terms of how they interact with faculty and staff—that more closely mirrors that of full-time students.

Preparing Students With Information

One factor that is essential for student success is making sure students have the information they need to act in their own best interests.

Since the Center began its work in 2001, survey data and focus group responses have consistently indicated that community college students do not always know how to be successful in college and, more important, many do not know how to access the resources that will improve their educational experience and outcomes. Often they do not even know what questions to ask.

Colleges can help students better understand what it takes to succeed in college—and improve their odds of doing so—by asking every student the question noted earlier: “Is there any way you could attend college full-time, even for one semester?”

Asking this question invites students to better calibrate their expectations for succeeding in college. It opens a

What Is Behind the Full-Time Edge?

Students who attend college full-time have better outcomes. These factors may contribute to their success:

- Many colleges have different requirements for full-time and part-time students, such as mandating orientation for only first-time, full-time students. Orientation introduces students to a range of services and supports, all of which lead to a more engaging experience for students who use them. Because it is more likely to be mandatory only for full-time students, part-time students are less likely to attend and become familiar with these services.

- Full-time students spend more time on campus so they are more likely to be engaged with campus activities and to use support services. They also are more likely to be on campus during the day, when more services and more faculty are available.

- Full-time students have more opportunities to build relationships with other students, collaborate on projects, or study in groups.

- Full-time students are more likely to be exposed to full-time faculty, opening more possibilities for building connections with faculty outside of class.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.CCCSE.ORG.

I think, maybe, not ‘easier’ is the word, but easier to stay focused on school when you were going full-time.

— STUDENT
conversation about a range of critical issues, such as the number of credits needed to earn a degree, the school and life demands on the student's time, and the types of engaging experiences that can improve the student's likelihood of success.

Colleges also can engage students in conversations about what they think it takes to succeed as a part-time student. Center focus groups indicate that full-time students identify primarily as college students and develop habits that promote engagement, such as spending time on campus, taking advantage of student supports, and making coursework a top priority. A student who always considers him or herself a part-time student might identify as a worker who goes to school and is likely to see college as one of multiple competing demands.

Students who attend full-time early in their college experience might form habits that lead to greater engagement—and stick with those habits throughout the remainder of their college career, even during terms of part-time enrollment.

Additional research is needed to further assess the extent of the benefit of attending full-time for even one semester as well as how helpful each additional full-time term may be. In the meantime, colleges that engage students in conversations about enrollment status can explore ways to help students who cannot attend full-time adopt the behaviors of full-time students.

Time to Degree: Expectations and Reality

Center data show that students have unrealistic expectations about the time needed to earn a degree, with always-part-time students having the least realistic expectations. Moreover, the earlier students are in their college experience, the less practical they are about time to completion.

For example, among always-part-time students who have been enrolled two terms, 47% expect to earn an associate degree one to two years from the time they started college. That figure is 38% for always-part-time students who have been enrolled three terms.

This finding suggests that experience gives students more realistic expectations. Thus, having better information before beginning college likely would help new students better calibrate their expectations—and possibly their actions.
When students do not complete college, they lose not only the benefits of a credential, but also the money they invested in their unfinished education—and they may still have student loans to repay. Former Secretary of Education John King was referring to this multi-layer setback when he said, “The most expensive degree remains the one you don’t get.”

Given the correlation between full-time attendance and completion, some new initiatives are designed to encourage full-time attendance. These include the following:

- Complete College America has proposed that Congress create a new on-time status for Pell Grants. The on-time Pell would allow students 30 funded credits per year—completed with or without summer coursework—so students could earn an associate degree in two years. (Currently, the Pell Grant covers only 12 credits per term or 24 credits per year. Therefore, students who want to graduate on time must fund the remaining six credits per year without support from a Pell Grant.)

- Some states, such as West Virginia, have started to charge students a flat-rate tuition for full-time attendance, whether they take 12 or 15 credits. Thus, full-time students who can expand their course load from 12 to 15 credits get the last three credits for free.

- Some states, such as Tennessee, have created last-dollar scholarship programs for certain populations of students. Through these programs, which require full-time attendance, the state pays any part of tuition and fees that is not covered by other grants and scholarships.

- The City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) offers structured course enrollment and comprehensive student supports, but students must enroll full-time to participate. Students benefit from services such as high-touch advising; tutoring; and financial supports including tuition waivers, textbook vouchers, and monthly MetroCards to cover transportation costs. MDRC concluded that “ASAP’s impacts on graduation rates are unparalleled among experimental evaluations in higher education,” with the program graduating 40% of ASAP students, compared with 22% of students in a control group.

If someone wants to pay my bills, that would be great. I’ve really been working this semester on trying to do scholarships and trying to get more help financially, but that’s also time, so it’s the time/money balance.

— STUDENT
Data presented in this report are derived from two sources. The first source is the 2016 CCSSE administration. The second source is transcript data for students who completed CCSSE between 2005 and 2013. These data sources are briefly described below. Complete details are available in the full methodology documentation on the Center website, www.ccsse.org/nr2017.

Survey data
Data from the 2016 survey administration include 60,730 respondents in their second or third academic term from 253 colleges in 38 states and three U.S. territories; all of these respondents attended colleges where the part-time focus items were administered. Unless otherwise noted, all survey results presented in this report are based on this response set.

Transcript data
The transcript data used in this report are from 28 colleges. These data include complete transcripts for 17,085 students whose first year of enrollment was between 2005 and 2011 and who completed CCSSE between 2005 and 2013 and provided a valid student identifier on the survey. These students were enrolled at their colleges for up to 20 terms. It is important to emphasize that these data are not for all students at these colleges but only those students who completed CCSSE and provided a valid student identifier on the survey. In addition, CCSSE is administered in the spring, which means that students who started in the fall but did not persist to the spring did not have the opportunity to complete the survey.

While overall survey respondents are, with few exceptions, representative at the college level, the subset of students who provide valid identifiers may not be. While the results presented here are valid for the sample of students included in the analyses, generalizability may be limited by the distribution of student respondents and an over-representation of large, urban, and suburban colleges in this data set. These results are meaningful for the students in this data set, but a larger and more representative data set may produce different results.

Defining Full-Time
According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 38% of community college students attend college full-time. However, colleges, students, and legislators may not always define full-time the same way:

- 12 credit hours per term is considered full-time in terms of financial aid; however, 12 credit hours per term (fall and spring) is not enough to earn an associate degree in two years.
- 15 credit hours per term is necessary for a student who wants to complete a typical associate degree in two years (without summer coursework).

For this report, the Center is using two definitions of full-time:

- Students’ reports of their own enrollment status for 2016 CCSSE data
- 12 credit hours per term (the same as the definition for financial aid) for 2005–13 transcript data

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I just became a part-time student for this semester. It’s the first semester I’m a part-time student, and this is also the first semester I’m working full-time. It’s a whole new experience. It’s really [hard] to want to go home after a full day of work and want to do homework, especially when it’s things like calculus or programming that require a lot of mental thought.

— STUDENT
### Respondent Characteristics

#### 2016 Administration Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>Always-full-time</th>
<th>Fluid attendance pattern</th>
<th>Always-part-time</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female (55%)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (45%)</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<td>16%</td>
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<table>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional-age (76%)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontraditional-age (24%)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13,821</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE/ETHNICITY</th>
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<th>Always-part-time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or other Native American (2%)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish (19%)</td>
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<td>43%</td>
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<td>White, Non-Hispanic (55%)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>32,029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (4%)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2,516</td>
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</table>

Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. Always-full-time students are overrepresented in survey data due to sampling bias.

#### Transcript Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>Always-full-time</th>
<th>Fluid attendance pattern</th>
<th>Always-part-time</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female (59%)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (41%)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6,984</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
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<th>Fluid attendance pattern</th>
<th>Always-part-time</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional-age (63%)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontraditional-age (37%)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6,229</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE/ETHNICITY</th>
<th>Always-full-time</th>
<th>Fluid attendance pattern</th>
<th>Always-part-time</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or other Native American (&lt;1%)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander (4%)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>623</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or African American, Non-Hispanic (10%)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish (21%)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3,453</td>
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<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic (61%)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10,248</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (3%)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>583</td>
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Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.

### Institutional Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>28 transcript colleges</th>
<th>2016 CCSSE administration colleges</th>
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<tr>
<td>INSTITUTIONAL SIZE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra large</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOCATION</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>46%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I need a break because if I do classes all day, then by the time I get home, I’m just tired, and I don’t want to do homework. — STUDENT

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.CCCSE.ORG.
The field typically treats enrollment categories as binary—part-time or full-time—but that is not the experience of 2016 CCSSE respondents. More than one-third of those enrolled two or three terms moved between the two enrollment categories. Transcript data findings, which represent students enrolled up to 20 terms, show that two-thirds of those students switched at least once. The Center’s findings, therefore, look at three types of enrollment: always-full-time students, always-part-time students, and students with fluid attendance patterns.

Across all benchmarks and many items within the benchmarks, full-time students are more engaged than are part-time students. Students with fluid attendance patterns typically fall between their always-part-time and always-full-time peers. Moreover, students with fluid attendance patterns often look more like their always-full-time peers than their always-part-time peers, suggesting that having any experience as a full-time student improves student engagement.

**More Full-Time Attendance Leads to More Engagement**

For every benchmark, always-full-time students are the most engaged, and always-part-time students are the least engaged. Students with fluid attendance patterns fall in between but are closer to always-full-time students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always-full-time students</th>
<th>Students with fluid attendance patterns</th>
<th>Always-part-time students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active and Collaborative Learning</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Effort</td>
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<tr>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2016 CCSSE special-focus item respondents
Below, survey items with statistically significant differences among enrollment categories are presented by benchmark. In most cases, the data focus on the percentage of students who reported that they never had certain engaging experiences.

**Active and Collaborative Learning**

- **Students who report that they never worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments**
  - Always-full-time students: 30% (N=16,659)
  - Students with fluid attendance patterns: 33% (N=20,834)
  - Always-part-time students: 45% (N=18,753)

- **Students who report that they never discussed ideas from their readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)**
  - Always-full-time students: 13% (N=16,682)
  - Students with fluid attendance patterns: 14% (N=20,879)
  - Always-part-time students: 16% (N=18,777)

**Student Effort**

- **Students who report that they never prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in**
  - Always-full-time students: 14% (N=16,638)
  - Students with fluid attendance patterns: 16% (N=20,830)
  - Always-part-time students: 22% (N=18,716)

- **Students who report that they never worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources**
  - Always-full-time students: 5% (N=16,686)
  - Students with fluid attendance patterns: 7% (N=20,884)
  - Always-part-time students: 12% (N=18,784)

**Academic Challenge**

- **Students who report that they never worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations**
  - Always-full-time students: 7% (N=16,662)
  - Students with fluid attendance patterns: 8% (N=20,839)
  - Always-part-time students: 11% (N=18,732)

Source: 2016 CCSSE special-focus item respondents
[Being part-time] is not easy…. I was a lot better at my studying, and I was a lot better in my classes when I had the ability to just completely sit down and focus 100% on my classes.

— STUDENT
Faculty’s Part-Timeness Affects Interaction With Students

In Contingent Commitments, the Center reported that part-time faculty are less likely to engage with students than are full-time faculty. Among other reasons, at many colleges, full-time faculty are more likely to have offices and spend more time on campus.

Engaging with part-time faculty outside of class may be easier for students if they are aware of the faculty members’ schedules. However, many students do not know if their instructors teach full-time or part-time—and always-part-time students are least likely to have this information.

Do you know if your instructors this academic term teach full-time or part-time at this college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always-full-time students</th>
<th>Students with fluid attendance patterns</th>
<th>Always-part-time students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do NOT know this about any of my instructors.</td>
<td>33% (N=16,524)</td>
<td>38% (N=20,676)</td>
<td>43% (N=18,603)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2016 CCSSE special-focus item respondents

STUDENTS’ AND FACULTY MEMBERS’ VIEWS

“I know that my biology teacher, she’s part-time because she doesn’t have an office of her own. She just uses a spare room in the science department.”

— FULL-TIME STUDENT

“We might tell them, ‘I’m full-time faculty,’ or ‘I’m a part-time instructor,’ but they may not necessarily know what that means. Does that change the access that I have to you? Does that change the way I’m supposed to communicate with you? Does that change where I can find you, and when? I don’t know that students know the difference, the true difference between a full-time faculty member and a part-time instructor, in terms of access and how to get [in touch with] them.”

— FACULTY MEMBER

“A lot of students don’t know whether their instructors are full-time or part-time. [They] wander into our department looking for their part-time instructor’s office, expecting them to be there all day. They’re not aware that that instructor’s not here all the time.”

— FACULTY MEMBER

“The full-time faculty, you definitely see them more around campus. Usually, the adjunct teachers—and I don’t think they mean it maliciously—but they’re like, ‘Oh, I have to run to this other school because I have to pick up another class.’ As far as content, I’ve never felt like they just don’t have time for me or they didn’t put enough time into their lecture.”

— PART-TIME STUDENT
Additional Student Services and Experiences
(Not benchmark items)

- Always-full-time students
- Students with fluid attendance patterns
- Always-part-time students

Students who report that they attended a college orientation program or course
- 38% (N=16,474)
- 34% (N=20,567)
- 28% (N=18,530)

Students who report that they participated in an organized learning community
- 12% (N=16,517)
- 11% (N=20,655)
- 8% (N=18,603)

Students who report that they use transfer credit assistance services sometimes or often
- 44% (N=11,289)
- 43% (N=13,750)
- 39% (N=11,674)

Students who report that transferring to a 4-year college or university is their number one goal AND who say they sometimes or often use transfer credit assistance services
- 49% (N=5,367)
- 49% (N=6,217)
- 42% (N=4,514)

Source: 2016 CCSSE special-focus item respondents

"Making it a point to actually be on campus is kind of hard. Utilizing anything like the writing center, the math lab, or anything like that is tough because I have two other jobs outside of this. So having only two classes here, it’s tough to force myself to be here any additional time than I need to.

— STUDENT"
Students who enroll full-time at least some of the time are more likely to complete gateway courses than those who are always-part-time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Pattern</th>
<th>Gateway English Completion</th>
<th>Gateway Math Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always-full-time</td>
<td>87% (N=1,496)</td>
<td>89% (N=7,731)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid attendance</td>
<td>77% (N=1,230)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always-part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td>85% (N=970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66% (N=710)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Students who never attempted a gateway English course are excluded from this analysis.
**Note: Students who never attempted a gateway math course are excluded from this analysis.

Source: 2005–13 CCSSE-matched transcript data

Students who enroll full-time in their first term are more likely to persist to the second fall term than those who enroll part-time in their first term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Pattern</th>
<th>Persistence to Second Fall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>77% (N=5,977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>64% (N=5,075)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Includes only students who started at their college in a fall term.

Source: 2005–13 CCSSE-matched transcript data

Transcript data show that having any full-time enrollment improves student outcomes, including completion of gateway courses, persistence, and completion of a certificate or degree.
Students who enroll full-time in their first term are more likely to complete college than those who enroll part-time in their first term.

Students who enrolled full-time in their first term: 38% (N=8,635) vs. Students who enrolled part-time in their first term: 31% (N=8,449)

Percentage of students who graduated with an associate degree or certificate

Source: 2005–13 CCSSE-matched transcript data

Students who enroll full-time at least some of the time are more likely to complete college than those who are always-part-time. Recent findings from the National Student Clearinghouse show similar results.⁹

Always-full-time students: 50% (N=2,569) vs. Students with fluid attendance patterns: 34% (N=11,556) vs. Always-part-time students: 23% (N=2,959)

Percentage of students who graduated with an associate degree or certificate

Source: 2005–13 CCSSE-matched transcript data

Students who enroll full-time at least some of the time are more likely to be taught by full-time faculty.

Always-full-time students: 62% (N=2,376) vs. Students with fluid attendance patterns: 59% (N=10,806) vs. Always-part-time students: 48% (N=2,764)

Percentage of courses taught by full-time faculty

Source: 2005–13 CCSSE-matched transcript data

I’m working just as hard as I was last semester, but now I’m working full-time on top of it. It’s really hard to find that balance and timing between everything.

— STUDENT
THE FULL-TIME EDGE

Questions for Colleges

Students gain advantages by attending college full-time for at least one semester—the full-time edge. How can colleges use this fact to improve student outcomes?

Some colleges and programs encourage more students to attend full-time. However, without considerable financial support, that option is unrealistic for every student. Nevertheless, colleges may be able to better serve the majority of their students by designing a part-time experience that more closely mirrors the experience of full-time students.

Colleges can conduct focus groups to capture students’ and faculty members’ ideas on how best to improve the part-time student experience. To download focus group guides to use with your students and faculty, visit www.ccsse.org/nr2017.

Colleges also can make sure students have the information they need to effectively plan for and approach their education. Below are questions colleges can use to spur internal conversations about how to dive into this work.

- Are there systematic processes built into our college that unintentionally encourage students to attend part-time?
- How is the part-time student experience qualitatively different from the full-time experience at our college—and what disparities do these differences create?
  - What do we require full-time students to do (such as orientation) that we do not require part-time students to do?
  - Do part-time students have the same advising experience as full-time students?
  - Do part-time students have fewer opportunities to engage with faculty and other students?
- How can our college help more students attend full-time for at least one term?
  - Can we make sure every student is informed about the benefits of attending college full-time, even for one semester?
  - Can our college begin advising students earlier—perhaps when they enroll in the college rather than when they register for classes—so students have more time to explore the possibility of attending full-time?
  - Can we work with community organizations to provide funds (scholarships) for one term of full-time attendance?
  - Can we provide more student jobs for students who are interested in attending full-time for one term?
- If more students at our college could attend full-time, what steps would we need to take to ensure that we are able to meet the increased demand?
- For students who cannot attend full-time (at all), what can our college do to help part-time students have an experience that is more like that of full-time students?
  - How can we help students take the right sequence of courses so they are using their time wisely?
  - Can we require students to take advantage of support services?
  - Are we ensuring that support services are available when part-time students are on campus?
  - Are we providing professional development to make sure all full-time and part-time faculty know how to direct students to support services?
PART-TIME STUDENTS’ ADVICE TO THEIR COLLEGES

“I think that goes back to connecting to the advisors. If you’re a part-time student, you’re not going to be on campus. You might not be able to meet in person. I think being really good about communicating over e-mail or phone would be helpful to part-time students.”

“I think having more counselors. We have one for the whole campus. I know I’ve e-mailed the last one—apparently, she quit—with no response, so that’s definitely discouraging.”

“If you could have one advisor and not just shuffle to whoever has time. If they could take the time to [say], ‘Oh, you want your associate of science. Let’s look at the next year and a half and see if this is feasible.’ I [wish] someone would’ve told me, ‘You’re going to be here for three years if you go at this rate.’

Also, I think a big part would also be the advisors, possibly, having longer hours, longer times where you can meet with them. A normal meet would be 15 minutes. That’s barely enough time for them to get you logged into the computer.”

I found [orientation] useful, but at the same time, it was a little bit too much information to take in one day.

Endnotes


8 Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). Contingent commitments: Bringing part-time faculty into focus (A special report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement). Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Program in Higher Education Leadership.

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