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Even One Semester of Full-Time Enrollment Improves Outcomes and Engagement

AUSTIN, TX –

Even One Semester: Full-Time Enrollment and Student Success, a report released today by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (the Center), reveals that any enrollment as a full-time student can improve engagement and outcomes. While students who always enroll full-time are the most successful, this report shows that 34 percent of students who enrolled full-time for at least some of their community college career earned an associate degree or a certificate, compared to only 23 percent of those who always enrolled part-time.

“Because there is an obvious benefit in students having some full-time experience, ‘a full-time edge,’ you might say, colleges should consider asking each student one straightforward question: ‘Is there any way you could attend full-time, even for one semester?’” said Evelyn Waiwaiole, executive director of the Center.

The report findings based on transcript data of more than 17,000 students from 28 institutions show that those who enrolled full-time at least some of the time were more likely to complete gateway classes in math and English than their always part-time peers. The transcript data also revealed that full-time enrollment in the first term makes a difference: Students enrolled full-time in the first term were more likely to persist to the second year (77 percent vs. 64 percent) and were more likely to earn an associate degree or a certificate (38 percent vs. 31 percent) than those who enrolled part-time in the first term.

The engagement data in the report are based on survey responses from almost 61,000 students at 253 institutions. Traditionally, the field tends to think of part-time and full-time as fixed classifications; in this report, the Center looks at three classifications of enrollment: always-part-time, fluid attendance pattern (students who attend part-time and full-time), and always-full-time. Among the highlights are these:

- 30 percent of always-part-time students report never talking to an advisor or instructor about career plans, while 22 percent of students with a fluid attendance pattern and 19 percent of students who always enrolled full-time report never doing so.
- Almost half (45 percent) of always-part-time students report never working with others outside of class while 33 percent of students with a fluid attendance pattern and 30 percent of students who always enrolled full-time report never doing so.
- One-third of always-full-time students do not know if their instructors teach part-time or full-time at the college, compared to 38 percent of students with a fluid attendance pattern and 43 percent of always-part-time students.

“Always-part-time students are less likely to talk about career plans with an advisor, less likely to seek career counseling services, and less likely to participate in a college orientation program or course than their always-full-time peers or peers with fluid attendance patterns,” said Waiwaiole. “While attending full-time will be unrealistic for every student, we need to think about why always-part-time students are having a qualitatively different experience and push for changes to be made.”

To assist with this, the report includes discussion questions that colleges can use to spur internal conversations about how to dive into this work. The report also includes links to student and faculty focus group guides that can be used to capture different perspectives about how best to improve the part-time student experience.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement is a research and service initiative of the Program in Higher Education Leadership in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.