

Road to baccalaureate often includes a two-year college

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A [new report](#) illustrates the prominent role that community colleges play in attaining a four-year degree.

In 2010-11, 45 percent of students receiving a four-year degree previously enrolled in a two-year institution, according to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#). Although the number varies among states—from 19 percent in Alaska, to 78 percent in Texas—it exceeds 50 percent in 13 states.

Students who followed this path typically earned their four-year degree in a reasonable amount of time. More than half of baccalaureate students who attended a two-year college earned their four-year degree within three years of leaving their two-year college, according to the data. Three-quarters of them did so within five years.

In addition, the report showed that nearly a quarter of students who attended a community college on their way to earning a four-year degree were enrolled at a two-year college for one term. About three-quarters of these students attended a community college for six or fewer terms.

The research center also released data on [interstate mobility](#), showing that 15 percent of postsecondary degree recipients previously attended a college in another state.

A shift in policy

“It is important to note a public policy shift in the states that encourage more students to start at community colleges and go on to earn their degrees at four-year institutions,” said Doug Shapiro, executive director of the research center. “This shift, coupled with interstate mobility, leads to the growing realization that few students start at one institution and remain there. Too little attention has been paid to postsecondary education pathways that span multiple institutions.”

A forthcoming report from the the [American Association of Community Colleges](#) shows that 28 percent of students earning a bachelor’s degree start at a community college.

“The extent to which community colleges both serve as a starting point to a bachelor’s degree and, as this research by the National Student Clearinghouse suggests, the role they play in accelerating success for students at other institutions reinforces how critical the transfer function of community colleges is in student success,” said Christopher Mullin, AACC’s program director for policy analysis and author of the forthcoming brief.

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