

Starting at a Community College Can Help Students Earn a Bachelor's Degree

By Catherine Groux

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According to a 2011 College Board report, at least 50% of the 7 million students who attend [community colleges](#) plan to one day transfer to a four-year school to earn a bachelor's degree. While some of these individuals may worry that the time they spend at a community college will only hold them back from earning a bachelor's degree, a new report by the National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™ shows this is not the case. In fact, students who first attend a community college may have an advantage when it comes to earning a four-year credential.

The report shows that 80% of associate's degree holders either graduated from a four-year institution upon transferring or remain enrolled. Additionally, 71% of these community college graduates were able to earn their bachelor's within four years. In comparison, NPR reports that just over half of all students graduate with their bachelor's within six years of enrolling in a college.

Carrie B. Kisker, director of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, told The Chronicle of Higher Education that this data is significant for various reasons. Primarily, it "reinforces the importance of community colleges in increasing the number of bachelor's degrees in America," but also "it clearly demonstrates that earning an associate degree prior to transfer leads to greater baccalaureate attainment."

Kay M. McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, told the Chronicle that the report also debunks the myth that community college courses are not up to par with those at other postsecondary institutions. In recent years, she said, various studies have proven that community college students perform as well or better than their peers when they transfer to a four-year college.

Still, despite the high quality of a two-year education, McClenney said many four-year schools will not accept credits for various community college courses and will not count them toward students' graduation requirements. For this reason, she would like more states to adopt Florida's educational approach and allow associate's degree holders who studied based on a common core curriculum to seamlessly transfer to a four-year school and receive junior status.

"It's still too easy for institutions to thwart the pathways of transfer students," McClenney told the Chronicle.