The National Summit on Near Completion

Convened by the Institute for Higher Education Policy

The National Press Club
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Goals for the National Summit on Near Completion

• Define the challenges and opportunities of the near-completion phenomenon.

• Outline questions still to be addressed.

• Find ways in which higher education stakeholders can identify, reengage, support, and graduate these students.

• Elevate the issue nationally to better inform policy makers and help them craft and strengthen policy.
Putting Near Completion in Context

• Federal and state policy makers, higher education associations, colleges and universities, philanthropic organizations, and other stakeholders are working to increase the number and diversity of college graduates.

• Current efforts are mostly focused on: increasing college readiness, strengthening student support, improving pathways to degrees and credentials for adults who seek new skills.

• These efforts largely ignore the phenomenon of near-completion—the sizeable population of adults who are eligible for a degree yet left college without receiving it or who left college a semester or less from satisfying degree requirements.

• Transforming near-completers into college graduates increases degree completion rates; provides opportunities for students to realize long-term economic and social benefits; and provides opportunities for institutions, policy makers, and other stakeholders to change policies and practices that are hindering completion.
The near completion population falls into two distinct groups:

“Eligibles” qualify for a degree in their program of study, but have not been granted a degree:
- Accumulated required number of credits
- Completed required courses
- Hold a GPA above the required minimum

“Potentials” are close to qualifying either for a degree in their program of study or another, academically similar degree:
- Need to earn a relatively low number of credits
- Need to complete specific course or competency requirements
Scope of Near-Completion

• Almost 16% of students who graduated high school in 1992 and enrolled in college had earned 60+ credits by 2000, but had not earned a degree and were no longer enrolled (NCES, 2000).

• Of those students who did not earn a credential by the 1999-2000 academic year, almost 9% had attained at least 45 but fewer than 60 credits (NCES, 2000).

• Among first-time beginning students of all ages who entered college in 2003-2004
  • Of those who last enrolled in a 2-year institution, about 30% had enrolled for 37-48 months but did not earn a degree by 2009 and were no longer enrolled, and about 10% for those who had enrolled 49 months or more (NCES, 2009).
  • For 4-year institutions, this was 10% for 37-48 months and 5% for 49 months or more.

• These do not count other requirements, such as GPA or specific coursework, which would lower the estimates.
Factors Associated with Near-Completion

- **Recruitment**: how to reengage students?
- **Assessment**: what have students learned?
- **Recognition of completion**: who awards the degree and how?
- **Affordability**: how to reduce financial burden?
Recruitment

Recruitment refers to the process institutions or states undertake to identify and reengage students who might be eligible for a degree or who need a few more credits to graduate.

Questions to consider include these:

- Do institutions and state have **adequate data systems** to identify former students who have reenrolled or completed degrees at other institutions?
- What state and federal resources are available to institutions to provide **accurate student contact data**? What role does transfer/mobility play?
- How can institutions showcase **campus services**, such as extended hour or one-stop-shop student services, that support near-completers’ situations?
Assessment

Assessment refers both to (1) the process institutions undertake to determine who is eligible for a degree or needs a few more credits to graduate and (2) how institutions recognize credits and prior learning in order to get potentials over the degree threshold.

Questions to consider include these:

- Do institutions have adequate degree audit systems to identify eligibles and potentials?
- How are decisions made about the impact of curricular changes or new course requirements? How do institutions deal with course substitutions? What about the age of the credits?
- How do state agencies and institutions develop consistent prior learning standards and procedures? Do institutions have the capacity to evaluate prior learning portfolios?
Affordability

Affordability refers both to (1) nonacademic financial holds on the records of eligible students and (2) the financial burden of reenrollment and persistence for potentials.

Questions to consider include these:

- What role do state tuition and financial aid policies play?
- What financial supports can be offered to ease the financial burden of reenrollment? Should institutions change their financial policies in order to reduce or eliminate nonacademic degree holds? What about financial holds from previous institutions?
- How can federal, state, and institutional policies support financial literacy training?
Recognition of Completion

Recognition of completion refers to the formal process of awarding a degree.

Questions to consider include these:

- What happens when students have attended multiple institutions?
- Which agency can or should award degrees if no clear “home” institution exists?
- Are students required to request the degree or reenroll before a degree can be awarded?
Factors Associated with Near-Completion

- Enrollment/attainment elsewhere
- Data systems
- Locating students

- Degree audit
- Curricular change
- Age of credits
- Prior learning

Recruitment: how to reengage students?

Assessment: what have students learned?

Recognition of completion: who awards the degree and how?

Affordability: how to reduce financial burden?

- Transfer issues
- “Home” institution
- Formal award process

- Financial holds
- Literacy
- Availability of aid

Recruitment

Assessment

Recognition of completion

Affordability
What’s Next

• Panel
  • Project Win Win
  • Non Traditional No More
  • Adult Degree Completion Network
  • Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative

• Breakout sessions
  • Recruitment
  • Assessment
  • Affordability
  • Recognition of completion

• Luncheon keynote

• Close with broad themes and next steps