

RESEARCH BRIEF



African American Students in South Carolina's Technical College System: An Overview of Critical Indicators

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For many individuals, two-year colleges are their best chance to obtain a postsecondary education. Open admissions policies, affordable tuition, and a wide range of program and degree options make community colleges especially attractive. In addition to certificate and degree programs, attending a community college can provide students with an inexpensive way to earn lower division credits toward a bachelor's degree (Kasper, 2003).

Community college students differ in important ways from students attending four-year colleges and universities. In general, two-year college students are more likely to be enrolled part-time, they are more likely to be employed, and are far less likely to be in the usual age range of traditional colleges students (18-24). These students are also more likely to be part of a minority group, are more likely to come from families in lower socioeconomic strata, and are less academically prepared than students who attend four-year institutions. Most importantly, especially for policy makers, students at two-year colleges persist and graduate at rates significantly lower than students at four-year schools (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009).

Given the diverse nature of community colleges and their students, any analysis is bound to be complex (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). As a result, this research brief limits its scope to enrollment, retention, and completion data for African American students in South Carolina's 16 public technical and community colleges. This brief utilizes data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Average retention rates, which are not disaggregated by race in either data source, are shown for the three schools that are predominantly (more than 50%) African American.

Findings

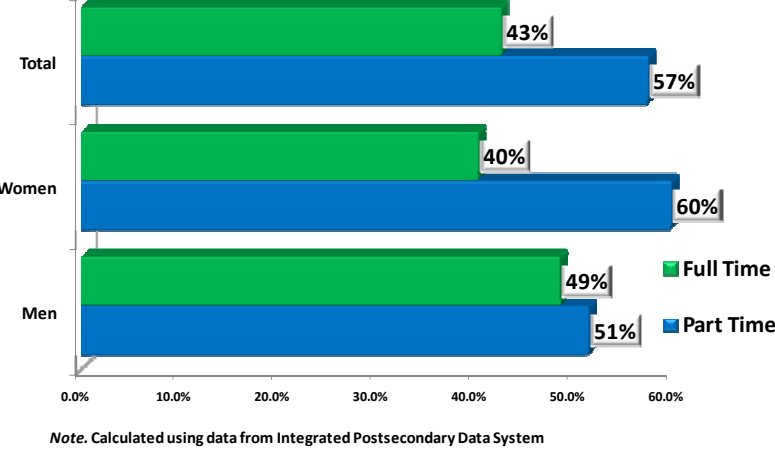
African American students constitute 26% of all students enrolled in public postsecondary institutions in South Carolina. The largest concentrations of these students are found in two-year institutions, either the community and technical colleges or the two-year regional campuses of the University of South Carolina (See Table 1). Of the 16 technical and community colleges, three are predominantly

Table 1
African American Enrollment in South Carolina's Public Colleges and Universities by Gender and Institution Type: Fall 2008

	Total Enrollment All Races	African American Enrollment		
		Men	Women	All
Senior Institutions	79,263	5,520 (7.0%)	9,382 (11.8%)	14,902 (18.8%)
Two-year Regional Institutions	4,233	353 (8.3%)	939 (22.2%)	1,292 (30.5%)
Technical and Community Colleges	84,270	8,113 (9.6%)	19,396 (23.0%)	27,509 (32.6%)
Total/All Institutions	167,766	13,986 (8.3%)	29,717 (17.7%)	43,703 (26.0%)

Note. Calculated using data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Fall Enrollment 2008, Undergraduate Students.

Figure 1. Full and Part-time Status of African American Students Enrolled in South Carolina's Technical Colleges by Gender: Fall 2007

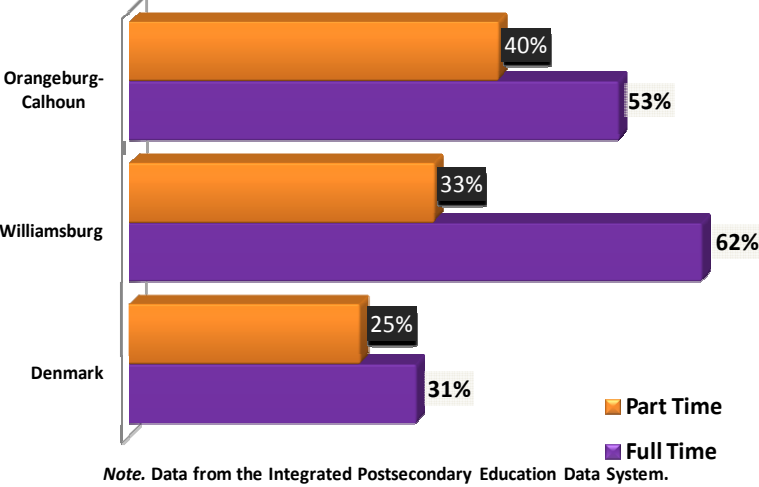


African American (more than 50% of their enrollment); Denmark Technical College (95%), Williamsburg Technical College (73%) and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College (59%). Another four schools have African American enrollments over 40%. These are Central Carolina Technical College (49%), Florence-Darlington Technical College (44%), Northeastern Technical College (44%) and the Technical College of the Lowcountry (43%).

As with most of higher education today, there is a gender gap in enrollment (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006) with women outnumbering men, on average, 7 to 3. There are also more students attending on a part-time basis with men being more likely than women to attend full time (See Figure 1). The average retention rates for the three predominantly African American schools are 49% for full-time students and 33% for part-time students. However, these rates vary by individual school (See Figure 2). The average full-time retention rate for students in all 16 schools is 52%. For part-time students, the rate is 38%.

The African American graduation rate for all two-year public colleges in South Carolina is 8.2% while the transfer rate is 12.7%. These rates differ slightly by gender (See Figure 3). For the predominantly African American institutions, graduation rates are slightly higher for men and over 7 percentage points higher for women compared with the overall state rates. Transfer rates, however, are somewhat lower than overall rates for the state.

Figure 2. Student Retention Rates at Predominantly African American Technical Colleges in South Carolina: 2008

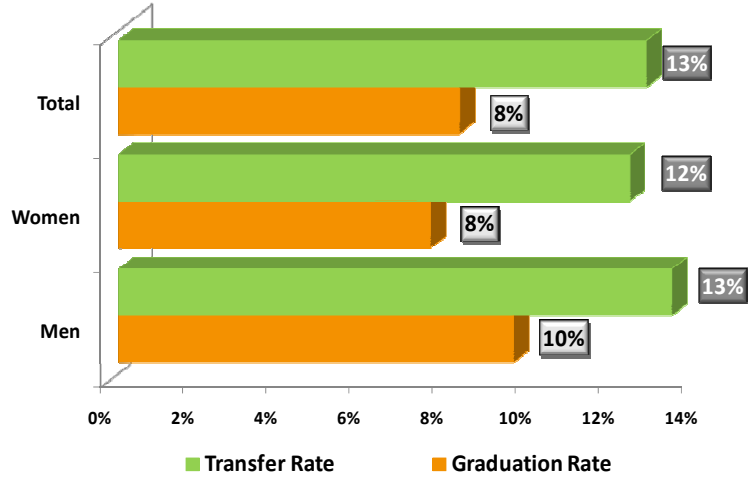


Implications

There are many factors that might impact student performance at the community college level. Some, such as the size of the college, tuition prices, proportions of full and part-time faculty, and distribution of resources are decided at the state level (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005). Others reflect student characteristics. High percentages of minority students, part-time students, and women have been found to negatively impact graduation rates at community colleges (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Leinbach, & Kienzl, 2006). Still other factors such as campus climate and community involvement are the result of policies and programs specific to individual institutions (Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009).

With African American students comprising over a quarter

Figure 3. Completion Rates for African American Students at South Carolina's Technical Colleges By Gender: 2007 (150% time)



of all students enrolled in South Carolina's public colleges and universities, their experiences have significant influence on the overall outcomes for postsecondary education in this state. In addition, because many of these students are enrolled in two-year colleges and because these outcomes differ significantly from four-year schools, what happens to these students as they enter and make their way through higher education become important issues for educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders.

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