

# AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

## The College Completion Challenge

### Fact Sheet

#### What is the College Completion Challenge?

The College Completion Challenge commits to increasing the number of community college students completing a degree or other credential by 50% - to 5 million students by the year 2020.

#### How and why are community colleges supporting the College Completion Challenge?

This goal was set in 2010 when the American Association of Community Colleges and other leaders joined forces to make history by collectively signing an agreement, *Democracy's Colleges: A Call to Action*. In 2009, President Obama called on community colleges to reach for this goal – which is attainable – if we all work together and focus on eliminating barriers to success.

*Only three in ten community college students complete a degree. That is not good enough.*

#### How many community colleges students don't complete a credential or degree?

- **College completion rates today are dismally low.** Only 34% of all college students graduate with a degree from a two or four-year college.<sup>1</sup> Only 3 out of 10 students who start at community colleges full-time graduate with an associate degree in three years.<sup>2</sup>
- **Nationally, too few students are completing college.** The United States ranked sixth (See Figure 1) in postsecondary attainment in the world among 25-64 year-olds with only 40.3% of the population holding an associate's degree or higher.<sup>3</sup>
- **The numbers are even worse for minority populations.** Only 19.2 percent of Latinos between the ages of 25 and 34 had earned an associate's degree or higher—less than half the national average of 41.1 percent and the lowest of any major racial or ethnic group.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011, June). *Affordability and transfer: Critical to increasing baccalaureate degree completion*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from [http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa\\_at/index.shtml](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa_at/index.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Higher Education Management Systems - Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis (2009). *Progress and completion: Graduation rates*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?measure=19>

<sup>3</sup> College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2011). *The college completion agenda 2010 progress report executive summary*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from [http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/reports\\_pdf/Progress\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/reports_pdf/Progress_Executive_Summary.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2011). *The college completion agenda 2011 progress report. Latino edition*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from [http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/latino\\_pdf/progress\\_report\\_latino\\_2011.pdf](http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/latino_pdf/progress_report_latino_2011.pdf)



- **Even students enrolled in structured programs, can struggle to finish.** Nearly 4 out of 10 (38%) of those who enroll in occupational certificate programs and 6 out of 10 (58%) of those enrolling in occupational associate degree programs fail to earn a credential of any type within six years.<sup>5</sup>

### Why Do Some Students Not Complete a Degree or Credential?

- **Students start behind. They don't arrive "ready" for college.**

Six out of 10 students entering community colleges must take remedial courses to make up for knowledge and skills they did not learn in high school. This puts them at a severe disadvantage when they enter college for the very first time.<sup>6</sup> Half of students seeking an associate's degree need remedial classes. Only 13.1% of remedial students finish a certificate within a year and a half, 9.5% of them complete an associate's degree, and 35.4% of them complete a bachelor's degree.<sup>7</sup>

*"Today we have flat-lined, while other countries have passed us by."*

*U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan  
The Washington Post, August 9, 2010*

- **Many students do not have role models to follow.** Forty-two percent of community college students are the first generation in their families to attend college.<sup>8</sup>
- **College costs are going up.** College costs have risen 400% in the last 25 years. Even with their modest tuition, community college costs have risen 200% in the last 7 years and 7.3% since 2009.<sup>9</sup>
- **Financial aid does not meet student needs.** Full-time, full-year community college students from families with the lowest incomes averaged \$6,544 of unmet financial need per year; students from the lower middle income quartile had an average unmet need of nearly \$5,000.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Wheary, J. & Orozco, V. (2010). *Graduated success: Sustainable economic opportunity through one- and two-year credentials*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from *Dēmos* web site:

[http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Graduated\\_Success\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Graduated_Success_Demos.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Wheary, J. & Orozco, V. (2010). *Graduated success: Sustainable economic opportunity through one- and two-year credentials*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from *Dēmos* web site: Retrieved October 27, 2011, from

[http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Graduated\\_Success\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Graduated_Success_Demos.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Complete College America (2011). *Time is the enemy*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from

[http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf) (page 14)

<sup>8</sup> American Association of Community Colleges (2011). *Fast facts*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from

<http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfacts.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Community College Completion Corps (2010). *Student guide*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from

<http://www.cccompletioncorps.org/cccorps/sites/default/files/pdfs/student-guide-low-res.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Orozco, V. (2009). *Work less, study more and succeed: How financial supports can improve postsecondary success*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from *Dēmos* web site:

[http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/WorkLessStudyMore\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/WorkLessStudyMore_Demos.pdf)

- **Today's students often carry responsibilities into the classroom.** More than 80% of all community college students are employed full or part-time.<sup>11</sup> Many juggle family responsibilities while going to college and are caring for children and other family members while earning a living and going to college.

### What effects does non-completion have on people and our country?

- **For students, not completing a credential or degree can be devastating personally.** Some feel like they failed. Many will not return to campus.
- **It's also devastating financially for the student – and his or her family members - for a lifetime.** Without a credential or degree, adults are often trapped in low-wage jobs and struggling to make ends meet and support their families. The lifetime earnings gap between those with a high school education and those with a college degree is now estimated to be nearly \$1 million. In 2008, median earnings of workers with bachelor's degrees were 65% higher than those of high school graduates (\$55,700 vs. \$33,800). Similarly, workers with associate's degrees earned 73% more than those who had not completed high school (\$42,000 vs. \$24,300).<sup>12</sup>
- **Employers are not able to find enough workers with the skills they need.** Today's employers are scrambling to locate workers who are qualified to fill the jobs they have available – too many don't have the skills needed. And it's only going to get worse. By 2018, 63% of all jobs will require at least some postsecondary education – but not enough students are completing credentials or degrees. Employers will need 22 million new workers with postsecondary credentials. If current college completion rates remain the same, employers will be short 3 million workers by 2018. That's a deficit of 300,000 college graduates, piling up, each year.<sup>13</sup>
- **Our prosperity is at stake. America is falling behind other industrialized nations.** The United States ranks behind 11 countries in the share of young workers with associate's degrees. Among 25- to 34-year olds, slightly more than 40% have associate's degrees or higher, only a little higher than for their parents' generation.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> American Association of Community Colleges (2011). *Fast facts*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfacts.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2010). *Education pays 2010*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from [http://trends.collegeboard.org/education\\_pays](http://trends.collegeboard.org/education_pays)

<sup>13</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2010). *Press release: New jobs forecast predicts millions of workers at risk of being left behind*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from <http://cew.georgetown.edu/uploadedfiles/Press%20Release%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2010). *The college completion agenda 2010 progress report*. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from [http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/reports\\_pdf/Progress\\_Report\\_2010.pdf](http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/reports_pdf/Progress_Report_2010.pdf)



## How You Can Get Involved

- **Students** – pledge to complete your education path at community college. Take a pledge to complete at your college, or start a pledge drive using the toolkit found at: [www.cccompletioncorps.org/ptk](http://www.cccompletioncorps.org/ptk)
- **College staff and administrators** – set a goal to raise completion rates at your college, form a working group, and rally college stakeholders to support completion and make changes when needed.
- **Business and community leaders** – contact your local community college and ask about their work to raise completion rates. Offer an internship or scholarship program to help students complete their educations. Volunteer to serve on an advisory committee, or talk to the press about the challenges businesses face in locating trained workers.

## Partners in the College Completion Challenge

The Community College Completion Challenge, [www.cccompletionchallenge.org](http://www.cccompletionchallenge.org)

American Association of Community Colleges, [www.aacc.nche.edu](http://www.aacc.nche.edu)

Association of Community College Trustees, [www.acct.org](http://www.acct.org)

The Center for Community College Student Engagement, [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org)

League for Innovation in the Community College, [www.league.org](http://www.league.org)

National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, [www.nisod.org](http://www.nisod.org)

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, [www.ptk.org](http://www.ptk.org)

