

Statistics

- Part-time students rarely graduate. Even given twice as long to complete, no more than a quarter graduate (College for America, 2011).
- The 6-year completion rate for adult students in four-year colleges is 21% lower than for traditional students (Shapiro, Dunder, Wakhungu, Yuan, Nathan, & Hwang, 2016).
- Students take too many credits and too much time to complete. Excess courses slow progress to graduation (Complete College America, 2011).
- Besides the increased risk of dropping out, each additional semester in college may cost a student \$50,556 - the average salary of a new college graduate (Poppick, 2015).

Non-Traditional Returning College Students: If you accelerate, they will finish

The longer it takes the adult college student to complete a credential, the more likely “life will get in the way.”

Acceleration refers to a reduced amount of time spent on college coursework and it is important for adult students for two reasons:

1. Acceleration reduces overall time to completion, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of completion. Nationally, the 6-year completion rate for traditional students enrolled in a four-year college is 21% higher than the completion rate for adult students (Shapiro, Dunder, Wakhungu, Yuan, Nathan, & Hwang, 2016) which is no surprise given their busy and complex lives. In fact, in a review of adult student success data from 33 states, one common theme emerged: the longer college completion takes, the less likely it is that adult students will complete (College for America, 2011). It seems the longer adult students are in college, the more likely that life will get in the way. This is particularly true for Complete Florida students who, having stopped out of college once before, may find it easier to leave school again (Business Innovation Factory & University of West Florida, 2013).
2. Acceleration contains student cost. Acceleration options can reduce tuition costs either through testing out of some amount of coursework or through enabling the completion of a relatively large number of credits for students enrolled through a block tuition or ‘subscription plan.’ But tuition and fees are not the only costs that are reduced through acceleration. The total cost of a college education includes what economists call “opportunity costs” which are the earnings a student foregoes every year that she or he is not actively employed in the workforce (Sullivan, 2010). When the average salary of a new college graduate is \$50,556 (Poppick, 2015), every additional semester a student spends in college becomes a very expensive endeavor.

So, as speed goes up, time and cost go down.

Let’s look at some examples.

- Based on data of 2,500 students, The California Acceleration Project found the “odds of completing college English were 2.3 times higher than students in traditional remediation. In accelerated statistics pathways, students’ odds of completing transfer-level math were 4.5 times higher than in traditional remediation” (Hayward & Willett, 2014, p XX).
- Tennessee students in an accelerated program paid 4–14% less per credit and 9–19% less per degree in tuition and fees (Belfield, Jenkins, & Lahr, 2016).



Acceleration Options

There are various acceleration strategies institutions can employ including terms that are shorter than the typical 16-weeks; competency-based education; awarding credit for prior learning or work experience; and alternative credentialing.

Accelerated Courses

Accelerated college courses that are five, six, and eight weeks in length are becoming increasingly common, especially in online degree programs. This is greatly in part due to the preferences of many adult learners who, because of their busy and complex lives, find it easier to complete multiple courses one at a time and sequentially instead of taking them all at once. While the length of specific courses varies among institutions, all are designed to minimize the amount of time to completion. There is also variation in the rules that govern enrollment into accelerated courses. For example, some institutions limit the number of accelerated courses a student may take at one time; some subscription plans require that students take a minimum number of hours per semester.

Alternative Credentialing

Alternative credentialing is the award of some type of credential other than a degree to recognize knowledge or skill gained through non-degree coursework such as continuing education or training courses (Alternative Credentials, n.d.). Common alternative credentials include digital badges, certificates, and the new kid on the block, micro credentialing. Alternative credentialing is not commonplace yet, but many institutions are exploring its potential.

The Transient Process

Using the transient process, students enrolled in Florida's colleges and universities no longer have delay progress through their course of study while waiting for one of their required courses to be offered by their home institution. Instead, they may enroll in that course at another Florida institution so long as it is deemed the 'same' course by both the home institution and the institution offering the course. This is called the "transient process" and students who use it are considered "transient students" while at the non-home institution. Being a transient student is particularly easy in Florida because the state's colleges and universities all share a common course numbering system. Under state policy, each state public institution must accept credit for courses with the same common number offered by other state public institutions.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Many adult students come to college with knowledge and skills acquired from years on the job: corporate or military training, non-college training programs, or self-study. Prior learning assessment (PLA) is the process of evaluating these existing skill and knowledge levels for the purpose of awarding college credit for them (Tate & Klein-Collins, 2015). To earn college credit, PLA typically requires that students pass a rigorous examination (or series of examinations) and/or submit a portfolio of their work to demonstrate their mastery of objectives associated with a given course. This ability to 'bring college credits in the door' with them, provides many adult students the boost they need to ensure a successful return to college: the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) found that adult students who earn PLA credit are two-and-a-half times more likely to earn their degrees than adult students without PLA credit (Klein-Collins, 2015).

Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Competency-based education (CBE) in higher education is an instructional model that permits students to progress through a course or program based on their demonstrated mastery of required competencies, usually through various forms of authentic assessment, such as projects or portfolios. This contrasts with traditional higher education models in which students progress through courses based on completion of coursework over an established time period such as a term or semester. The intent of the competency-based model is to reduce the cost and time required to obtain an academic credential through acceleration of coursework, and award of credit for demonstration of mastery rather than completion of a designated number of coursework hours (Implement Competency-Based Education for Adult Students, n.d.).

