

# Report Outlines Persistence of Community College Transfer Students



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by [Tiffany Pennamon](#)

A new report from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF) aims to dispel misperceptions about the success and perseverance of community college students, particularly those who transfer to selective four-year institutions.

The report titled "[Persistence: The Success of Students Who Transfer from Community Colleges to Selective Four-Year Institutions](#)" finds that community college transfer students at selective institutions perform as well as or even better than their peers who enroll directly from high school or who transferred from other four-year schools.

The foundation's report is also the first of its kind to disaggregate academic outcomes for students transferring in to selective schools from two-year versus four-year institutions. At the nation's top 100 selective schools, 14 percent of students are transfer students, but only five percent come from community colleges, the report found.

"It's pretty striking to see that very few students enrolled at the more selective institutions come from community colleges," said Dr. Jennifer Glynn, director of research at the Cooke Foundation. "We've certainly seen this anecdotally with our own scholars how well these transfer students do, but [it is interesting] to be able to document definitely that students who transfer from a community college are equally, if not more, likely to graduate at these selective schools than students who come from high school or that transfer in from another four-year institution."

JKCF's report examines National Student Clearinghouse data on students enrolled between 2010 and 2016. Moreover, results show that the percentage of students transferring from community colleges has remained stagnant or slightly declined over the last 10 years at the nation's most selective institutions, while other institution types have seen a slight percentage increase in their community college transfer population.

Additional report findings include:

- Public institutions enroll four times as many community college transfer students as private institutions: 305,730 versus 75,190, respectively.

- Degree recipients at the most competitive institutions take slightly less time on average to earn their degree than students at less competitive institutions: 2.6 versus 2.8 years.

-Community college transfer students have roughly equal one-year retention rates to students enrolling from high school, and higher one-year retention rates than those students transferring from other four-year institutions.

-Community college transfer students have equal to higher graduation rates than students enrolling from high school or transferring from other four-year institutions, a trend that holds true across all institutional selectivity categories.

-Community colleges with larger enrollments, situated in more urban areas, and offering honors programs are more likely to transfer students to selective institutions.

“One of the most interest findings we had was the fact that 84 percent of the public two-year institutions in the United States have sent at least one, if not more, students to transfer to a selective institution,” Glynn said. “These students really are coming from everywhere.”

While researchers did not take a “deep analytic dive” into the community college characteristics in this report, “there is some clustering there that schools in the northeast that are more geographically located to a lot of these selective schools are more likely to have higher proportions of community college” students transferring to selective schools, Glynn added, “as well as [in] states like California that have really robust partnerships” between four-year schools and community colleges in the state.

However, JKCF leaders highlighted the importance of intentionality in institutional efforts to better target, recruit, enroll and support community college transfer students.

Having leaders say, “‘We are interested in building these pathways,’ ‘We want to extend our faculty connections out to the faculty at local community colleges’ and ‘We want to create programs to bring community college students on to our campus so we can talk about the possibilities for transferring’ ... that institutional purpose set goes a long way,” Glynn said.

The foundation’s latest report aims to spark conversations at selective institutions to encourage them to look at their own disaggregated data about transfer student groups. Data analyses and ongoing conversations about recruiting and supporting transfer community college students can help selective institutions who want to diversify their student body in terms of first-generation status, socioeconomic status, age and more, leaders said.

“Enrollment management is going to require a new and deeper look at community college students,” added Giuseppe “Seppy” Basili, executive director of the Cooke Foundation.

“Admissions officers at selective colleges and universities should seek out these high-achievers to support institutional goals including campus diversity and degree

completion,” Basili said in a separate statement. “The performance of students like our Cooke Transfer Scholars exemplify the incredible potential of this group.”

Luis Rosales, a Cooke Transfer Scholar who transferred from Montgomery College to Georgetown University, said that the support he received at his community college helped him navigate the transfer process. As a finance major and government minor, he is now on track to graduate from Georgetown this spring.

“I wasn’t even thinking of transferring to begin with but seeing other students a year above me on top of their schoolwork and on top of their transfer applications and essays set an example for me,” Rosales said. In addition, supportive professors — including one who helped with his Cooke Scholarship application — and a community of Cooke Scholars helped the first-generation student.

“I’ve had so much support ... It just goes to show the power that community colleges can have on students,” Rosales added. “Frankly, I don’t know if I would’ve been the student that I am now if it weren’t for Montgomery College.”

Rosales admits that there are a lot of nuances and challenges that come along with being a community college transfer student no matter what institution a student transfers too.

“Community colleges ... you can make the most of it, and they can provide the skills to succeed at a four-year school or at least be competent and be able to hold yourself up,” he said.

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation will conduct a follow-up study with the National Student Clearinghouse over the next year that identifies the community colleges that send the highest amount of students to selective colleges as well as four-year institutions that enroll the highest amount of transfer students from two-year schools.

“In places where these numbers are higher, is that because it’s an intentional commitment on the part of the institution? Is it primarily being driven by geographics or budget considerations? What are the factors that have led some selective institutions to be more likely to enroll more community college students?” Glynn asked.

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