Community College Pathway to the BA: Challenges to Getting an Optimal Return

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Why Do We Care?

1.7 Million new students enroll in a community college each year; groups with lower socioeconomic background are concentrated

80% plan to get a bachelor’s degree or higher
Too few students manage to make the leap

Just 33% of students who started community college in fall of 2007 transferred to a four-year school

Source: Jenkins & Fink, 2016
Of the students who successfully transferred, only 42% went on to get a bachelor’s within 6 years of starting.

Source: Jenkins & Fink, 2016
How and Why Does Two-Year College Entry Influence Baccalaureate Aspirants’ Academic and Labor Market Outcomes?

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Data

• 2004-2005 cohort initiating in either two-year or four-year public and private not-for-profit colleges (SCHEV)

• Student award data matched with enrollment and graduation data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)

• Student unit-record administrative data matched with UI data from Virginia

• Followed to 2012

• BA seeking students: (N = 43,735, 1/3 in community colleges)
## Key Findings: CC Entrants vs. 4yr Entrants

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<th>Regression on unmatched sample</th>
<th>Regression on matched sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BA Attainment</strong></td>
<td>-0.379***</td>
<td>-0.218***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average Quarterly Earnings in 2012</strong></td>
<td>-$1553***</td>
<td>-$256</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average Quarterly Earnings in 2012 (conditional on BA attainment)</strong></td>
<td>-$1606***</td>
<td>-$535</td>
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Barriers to Transfer Success

1) Slow early academic progress
2) Students make progress, don’t transfer
3) Credit loss
4) Post-transfer “academic shock”
Transfer Success Barriers:

1. Slow early academic progress
VA Fall 2004 Matched 2- and 4-Year FTIC Students
Cumulative Credits Earned by Term

[Graph showing cumulative credits earned by term for 4-year and 2-year entrants]
Transfer Success Barriers:

2. Students Make Progress, Don’t Transfer
VA Fall Starting 2004 CC Cohort, Bachelor’s Degree Seekers
Rate of Transfer to Four-year Colleges

- All two-year entrants: 23%
- Associate earners: 68%
- College-level credits earned from CCs:
  - < 20: 5%
  - 20-39: 18%
  - 40-59: 36%
  - ≥ 60: 57%

Overall Transfer Rate: 77%
Associate Transfer Rate: 32%
College-level credit Transfer Rates:
- < 20: 95%
- 20-39: 82%
- 40-59: 64%
- ≥ 60: 43%
Transfer Success Barriers:

3. Credit Loss
VA Fall 2004 Matched 2- and 4-Year Entrants, Total Credits Earned at Graduation

Average number of college-level credits
- 4-Year Entrants: 125
- 2-Year Entrants: 133

Average number of credits (any type)
- 4-Year Entrants: 126
- 2-Year Entrants: 136
Credit Transfer Inefficiency

Just 58% of students successfully transferred 90% of their credits.

And 15% can’t transfer any credits at all.

Students who can transfer 90% of their credits were 2.5x more likely to get their bachelor's degree, compared to those who transfer half or less.

Transfer Success Barriers:

4. Post-transfer “academic shock”
Term-by-Term Fluctuations in GPA Among Transfers and Matched Native Students

- Transfer student community college GPAs pre-transfer much higher than matched sample of 4-Year Entrants
- "Transfer Shock" initial drop in GPA; still higher than matched sample of 4-Year Entrants
- Transfer Student GPA consistently higher than matched sample of 4-Year Entrants