



## Two-Year Progress Report

### Overview

According to international data comparing degree attainment across 36 developed nations, the United States is experiencing a steady decline in the percentage of adults age 25 to 34 with a tertiary degree, and is now ranked 12th in the world (1). Further, degree attainment projections through 2020 indicate that this downward trend will continue unabated as degree attainment among younger Americans continues to slow, while their same-age peers in other countries continue to attain degrees in greater numbers. This data led President Obama to issue a challenge to the higher education community to help the nation reclaim its prominence of being first in the world in the proportion of college graduates.

Independent higher education has embraced the administration's 2020 goal with focus and energy, renewing its historical commitment to help all Americans realize the opportunity to enroll in college and complete a degree. The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in partnership with the Council of Independent Colleges [launched](#) an initiative in 2009 titled Building Blocks to 2020.

This ongoing effort highlights the work of private, nonprofit colleges and universities to raise college enrollment and graduation rates in total, as well as in areas of national need, place greater emphasis on access by extending outreach and support of first-generation and at-risk students, and provide the tools and support systems needed for all students to achieve their college goals and enable their successful transition into the workforce. This document serves as a two-year progress update on many of the programs originally submitted as part of this continuing effort.

### Interim Progress Report

We understand the pivotal role independent institutions play in helping the nation reach President Obama's 2020 goal, and we are continually challenging ourselves to make an even greater contribution. [Launched](#) in 2010, the Building Blocks to 2020 [website](#) hosts a growing compendium of campus level success initiatives that is available and accessible to the public. This bottoms-up, web-based approach encourages information sharing and discussion among institutions based on innovative practices and lessons learned. It provides opportunities for education professionals to voluntarily share their programs and experiences, learn from peer institutions, and build upon proven strategies.

The website also serves as a resource for external stakeholders and other interested parties that details what colleges are doing to reach out to students from diverse backgrounds and increase all students' odds of success. The nature of this approach respects the diversity of mission and student populations that institutions serve, and celebrates the historic strengths of the U.S. higher education system - to be innovative, dynamic and responsive.

To date, the initiative has collected nearly 700 programs from almost 300 institutions. Summaries of the programs posted on the website can be browsed alphabetically by institution and by state, and are searchable by 37 topics. This progress report represents updates to over 100 of those campus programs, demonstrating how independent institutions are actively engaged in making a difference and moving forward right now. The programs vary in goals and are targeted at different student populations as identified by the institutions through a range of self-assessment tools and methods. Evidence of the website's usefulness as a resource comes from data that shows the site registering between 4,000 and 6,000 webpage views per month.

### Sector Statistics

Private, nonprofit colleges enroll approximately 20 percent of all students yet award nearly 30 percent of all postsecondary degrees (2). The six-year graduation rate at all four-year institutions for students seeking and attaining a bachelor's degree is 57.2 percent compared to the four-year private, nonprofit rate of 64.6 percent.

The independent sector's graduation rate also compares favorably to those at four-year public institutions (54.9 percent) and four-year for-profit institutions (22.0 percent) for that student cohort (3).

These data serve to provide strong evidence of the commitment to student success that pervades the culture of independent institutions. This success holds true even when selecting out student populations most at-risk for non-completion. For example, at four-year institutions, 58 percent of first-generation students succeed in earning a degree within six years - this compared to the independent institutions' rate of 70 percent, public institutions' of 57 percent, and for-profit institutions of 43 percent for the same cohort (4).

### **Retention**

Over 40 percent of the programs updated looked at retention rate as a single indicator - or one in a group of indicators - of their program's effectiveness. The freshmen-to-sophomore retention rates at these institutions ranged from 50 percent to 90 percent overall, but the retention rates of the program cohorts ranged from 59 percent to 100 percent. Additionally, 74 percent of these programs achieved retention rates greater than or equal to their institution average. Finally, for those programs where historical data are available (54 percent), retention rates tended to show an increase over time. Only six programs failed to produce a higher retention rate versus the previous year, but all six equaled or outperformed the institution's average.

### **Participation**

A little more than one-quarter of the programs chose to collect the number of students taking advantage of academic support or student services as a means of evaluating program effectiveness. Student voluntary participation across support programs ranged from as few as eight students to well over a thousand, depending upon both the size of the institution and program cohort targeted. Institutions providing previous year data showed increased student involvement ranging from 14 percent to 94 percent.

### **Six-Year Graduation Rate**

Fifteen percent of respondents provided program data that was graduation rate inclusive or the program's singular measurement. These colleges and universities reported institution six-year graduation rates ranging from 22 percent to 81 percent (2004 cohort completing by 2009-10), while graduation rates for the program cohorts ranged from 55 percent to 88 percent. Further, the vast majority (83 percent) of program graduation rates were greater than or equal to their corresponding institution rate. For those providing previous year statistics, only three programs did not see an increase in their 2004 program cohort's graduation rate; however, all three programs outperformed the institution's average, ranging from six to 23 percentage points.

### **Grade Point Average**

Four percent of the programs utilized GPA as a complete or partial measure of program effectiveness. The cohort GPAs submitted ranged from 2.7 to 3.5, with one program reporting that 55 of their students made the Dean's List on their campus, an increase of 72 percent over the previous year.

### **Making a Difference**

The programs on the Building Blocks to 2020 website represent only a fraction of the support programs, resources, and activities that fuel the culture of success across independent colleges and universities nationwide - a landscape that includes diverse size, mission, and populations of students seeking a better way of life and future for themselves and their families. These programs support campus cultures that help students thrive no matter what their beginnings, academic preparation, or risk factors. Independent institutions understand that a quality education isn't about statistics; it's about individuals, opportunities, and lives transformed.

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(1) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2010.

(2) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Estimated Fall Enrollment, 2009 and Completions 2009 components. Data is for U.S., degree-granting, Title IV institutions only. Analysis by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

(3) The Condition of Education 2011 (NCES 2011-033), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Supplemental Tables to Indicator 23, Table A-23-1.

(4) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09). Data is for full-time, first-generation students. Analysis by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.