“Although federal graduation rates provide important comparable data across institutional sectors, limitations in the data understate the success of students enrolled at two-year institutions and can be misleading to the public.”

– Committee on Measures of Student Success, Report to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, December 2011

Opening doors for all

Washington’s community and technical colleges have an open door policy that gives everyone a fair shot at enrolling in college and improving their lives if they have the drive and determination. We accept students at any age and stage in their lives and at any educational level. We take students from where they are, to where they want to be.

The beauty of community colleges is that success comes in many different forms. We provide pathways for everyone, from the aspiring dental hygienist and computer technician, to traditional transfer students and professionals who take a class or two to update their skills. We also serve students seeking to finish their high school degrees, adults needing basic education in reading and writing and people who want to learn English.

The educational paths are varied, but they all point to a common destination: better careers and a life enriched with learning.

Measures of success

- **More completions**: The percent of students who started in the fall 2013 (2013 cohort) and completed degrees and certificates within three years increased 2 percent from the previous year (2012 cohort). This is the largest gain since the 2008 cohort. The past five years have seen a 38 percent increase in science-focused transfer degrees, and an 14 percent increase in general transfer degrees.

- **Transfer**: About 66 percent of our students who transfer to universities transfer with an associate degree in-hand. This is significant, because students who transfer with an associate degree are more likely to finish a bachelor’s degree. In fact, Washington ranks first in the nation for transfer students completing bachelor's degrees.

- **Arrival at momentum points**: Colleges track every student to find out whether the student is reaching key momentum points that lead to completion. These include completing math, the first year of college, or a certificate or degree.

Fast Facts About Our Students

- **Family and Finances**: 45% Students who work, 27% Students with children
- **System Attendance (Headcount)**: 52% part-time, 48% full-time
- **Purpose for attending (FTE) state supported**: 40% academic/transfer, 46% workforce education
- **Need-based financial aid**: 38% Students receiving need-based financial aid in eligible programs (2015-16), 11% basic skills, 3% other
National completion data is typically drawn from the IPEDS database (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System). However, the IPEDS completion calculation paints a misleading picture of community and technical colleges. It only captures full-time, degree-seeking students who have never enrolled in college before and who start fall quarter — a common profile for students at universities, but only a fraction of those at community and technical colleges. It excludes students who:

- **Attend part time.** About half of Washington community and technical college students attend school part-time, usually because they work and cannot take on a full load of credits.  

- **Are returning to college.** Many students are adults returning to college to complete a degree, enhance their skills or expand their knowledge to be competitive in today’s workforce. The median age of a Washington community or technical college student is 26.  

A more accurate IPEDS number

Even these numbers do not tell our entire success story because, as described above, the data captures only full-time, degree-seeking students who have never attended college before and who start in the fall — a small share of our students.

Using national completion data is like studying one, small puzzle piece and then trying to project the entire picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort year</th>
<th>Completion (certificates and degrees) – This is the IPEDS completion calculation</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
<th>Completion + Transfer</th>
<th>Still Enrolled</th>
<th>Total (completed, transferred or still enrolled)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Started fall 2013</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. SBCTC research division, March 14, 2017.
2. SBCTC 2015-16 Academic Year Report.
6. Data in charts comes from the SBCTC 2016 Fall Quarter Report, except financial aid data, which comes from 2015-16 Academic Year Report.
7-9. Data comes from SBCTC 2016 Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report.