NORTH CAROLINA
INSIGHT

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A Strong Economy
Through Post-Secondary Education

North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

A Strong Economy through Post-Secondary Education

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, post-secondary education and training have become increasingly crucial to the American economy. In 1973, workers with a post-secondary education held only 28 percent of jobs; by comparison, they held 59 percent of jobs in 2010 and will hold 65 percent of jobs in 2020.[1] At the current rate of production, the United States will fall short by 5 million workers with post-secondary education by 2020.[2] While opinions vary on how to increase educational attainment, the overwhelming agreement is that more workers than ever before will require some post-secondary credential to ensure our economic vitality into the future.

The exponential growth of jobs requiring post-secondary credentials has created a lag effect in the workforce. Changing policies and practices within education that will get more students into the pipeline at any stage have traditionally been a slower process and, as a result, the production of a highly educated citizenry to effectively compete for these jobs has not kept pace with demand. Not surprisingly, those who suffer the most because of this challenge tend to be either low-income, minorities, or from more rural areas, if not all three. Addressing the need to increase educational attainment will not only boost our national and state economy but, if a particular focus is placed on traditionally disadvantaged groups, this effort will begin to address some of the social inequities that persist in society. Education can and must assume the role as the ultimate equalizer, in addition to its role as an economic engine.

There is something of a "chicken and egg" phenomenon happening in terms of the link between educational attainment and economic strength. Not only will highly educated people be better prepared to compete for high-paying, high-skill jobs, but post-secondary education and training for the workforce is key to creating and attracting high-paying and high-skill jobs. Companies tend to relocate or open new locations in areas where there is a highly trained workforce from which they can easily pull to meet their needs. In turn, companies with a skilled labor force tend to grow and expand, creating new jobs to be filled. This trend is part of the reason why areas with a highly trained workforce tend to have a stronger economy, a higher quality of life, and are less impacted by economic volatility like recessions.

UNC Wilmington
Photo: Paige Worsham

Over the course of many years, we have seen our economy change. Once powered by low-skill, low-wage jobs—jobs held by those with a high school diploma or less that could provide a secure spot in the middle class—our economy has seen a sharp shift to a knowledge and service base. This trend has had a profound impact on the value we place on education. The link between education and a thriving economy is now more apparent and crucial than ever in our history. The fastest growing sectors with the highest predicted job growth will require increasingly higher levels of educational attainment to fill these jobs. Recent data show that education, healthcare and professional and business services will grow fastest, with over 80 percent of workers requiring post-secondary education and training.[3] This trend was exacerbated by the recent recession when the economy lost 5.6 million jobs for Americans with a high school diploma or less. What is especially noteworthy is that
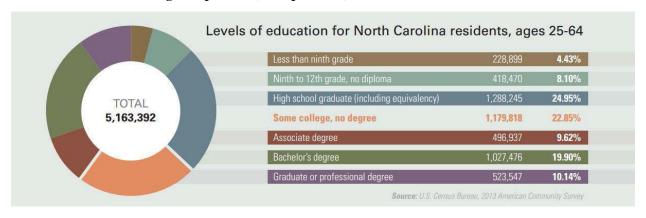
while jobs in every other educational category fell, jobs for those with a bachelor's degree actually increased during the recession, albeit slowly, by 187,000.[4]

It is estimated that 65 percent of all jobs in the economy by the year 2020 will require at least some post-secondary education.[5] That is only five years away. This percentage can be further broken down to show that 35 percent of jobs in 2020 will require at least a bachelor's degree, 30 percent will require some college or at least an associate's degree, and 36 percent will not require any credential beyond high school.[6] Not only will more jobs be available for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, but obtaining a post-secondary credential ensures higher earnings over a lifetime with few exceptions. In fact, the earnings gap over a lifetime between individuals with a post-secondary degree and those without continues to grow. In 2002, a bachelor's degree-holder could expect to earn 75 percent more over a lifetime than someone with only a high school diploma. Today, that divide is closer 84 percent.[7]

In North Carolina, the trend is no different. As our state's economy has shifted from traditional manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy, it is expected that by 2018, 59 percent of jobs in the state will require education beyond high school.[8] According to 2013 Census data, "39.7 percent of North Carolina's 5.2 million working-age adults (25-64 year-olds) hold a two- or four-year college degree."[9] However, our state's college attainment rate is increasing, albeit slowly. According to the Lumina Foundation, one indicator for future college attainment rates can be found by looking at rates among young adults (between the ages of 25 and 34). Census data in 2013 put the North Carolina attainment rate for young adults at 40.1 percent, about the same as the entire adult population and below the national rate of 41.6 percent.[10]

Education levels among North Carolinians vary widely, particularly when examining degrees and demographic groups. The largest percentage of adults (ages 25-64) in North Carolina hold at least a high school diploma or the equivalent at 24.95 percent of the population. The next largest percentage of adult North Carolinians have

some college but no degree (22.85 percent of the population). This number could reflect a breakdown in the education pipeline that must be fixed if attainment rates are to increase in the state. Other leaks in the pipeline can be seen in the percentage of students dropping out by ninth grade (4.43 percent) and those dropping out in high school before receiving a diploma (8.10 percent).[11]

Levels of education for North Carolina residents, ages 25-64

TOTAL 5,163,392

Less than ninth grade	228,899	4.43%
Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	418,470	8.10%
High school graduate (including equivalency)	1,288,245	24.95%
Some college, no degree	1,179,818	22.85%
Associate degree	496,937	9.62%
Bachelor's degree	1,027,476	19.90%
Graduate or professional degree	523,547	10.14%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey

Source: "A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2015

Considerable statewide demographic change offers an important qualification that requires careful consideration when addressing the goal of increased attainment. The 2010 Census shows that North Carolina's Hispanic population has doubled, our African American population has grown as well, and our state has become increasingly urbanized. In addition, we are experiencing a growing aging population (the Baby Boomers), many of whom entered the workforce when a high school degree was sufficient to earn a living wage. They now find themselves remaining in the workforce for financial reasons, but many are not adequately trained for the jobs of the changing economy.

All of these demographic trends will have an impact on the best methods to increase college attainment rates among North Carolinians. Because our state is experiencing such extreme demographic changes, particularly given the rapidly growing minority population, it is without question that attainment rates will not reach necessary numbers without a particular focus on Hispanic and African American

students. In fact, there simply are not enough qualified workers for the high-skill jobs of today, much less those jobs expected to exist in our economy in the decades to come. Ensuring that *all* students graduate from college with relevant coursework or obtain an applicable credential is the only way North Carolina will develop a workforce that will meet the needs of the future job market, both in numbers and skills. Without an educated minority population, our state will fall short of filling the number of expected high-skill jobs and, ultimately, this could mean significant and long-term economic instability.

According to the UNC System's Compact with North Carolina, "Our Time, Our Future," 26 percent of the state's population holds a bachelor's degree. The UNC system has set as its system-wide goal a 32 percent bachelor's degree attainment rate by 2018 and 37 percent by 2025, putting North Carolina in the top ten best educated states in the country.[12] The North Carolina Community College System also has a broad effort in place to increase the percentage of students who transfer, complete credentials, or remain continuously enrolled, from a six-year baseline of 45 percent for the fall 2004 cohort to a six-year success rate of 59 percent for the fall 2014 cohort. Doing so will double the number of credential completers by 2020.[13] Given that the North Carolina Community College System increased statewide enrollment by 44 percent from 2000-2009,[14] they are on their way to achieving this goal.

The following chapters and research will examine strategies to increase attainment rates among specific groups of students who are most vulnerable to falling short of their educational promise. This includes first-generation college students, students from rural parts of the state, and minority students. Without educational participation and achievement from North Carolina's entire population, our state risks falling behind in our ability to compete in the global economy.

Bennett College classroom;
Students at Elizabeth City State University;
UNC Wilmington Randall Library
Photos: Paige Worsham

Chapter One

Increasing Educational Attainment

College attainment is most broadly defined as the percentage of the adult population that holds a two- or four-year college degree. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) figures show that the college attainment rate of American adults ages 25-34 is only 42 percent, placing the United States 13th among other developed countries.[15] Many notable statewide (for example, the University of North Carolina system and the North Carolina Community College System) systems and national (for example, the Lumina Foundation) organizations have identified increasing attainment rates as the single most important goal related to producing a workforce that is prepared to succeed in the jobs of the future. For this reason, this research focuses on raising attainment levels with a particular emphasis on underserved populations and offers various strategies that could impact college attainment across North Carolina.

Defining Key Terms

College attainment rate — the percentage of the adult population that holds a two- or four-year college degree.[1]

College enrollment rate — the percentage of first-time college students who enroll at an accredited institution of higher learning.[1]

College completion rate — the percentage of individuals who complete a certificate or degree[1] within 6 years. [1]

Sources: These are definitions commonly used in the context of college attainment.
Lumina Foundation
http://www.luminafoundation.org/state_work/main_narrative/; NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis
http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=63&year=2008&level=&mode=definitions&state=0;
"Complete to Compete," National Governors Association
http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1007COMMONCOLLEGEMETRICS.PDF

Numerous strategies exist to increase overall attainment levels, including tactics focused on plugging the pipeline in two distinct areas:

1.) between high school and college by raising college enrollment numbers, and

2.) in college by increasing college completion rates.

College enrollment and completion rates are inextricably linked to attainment rates; without seeing these two rates increase, it is very unlikely to see overall attainment rates increase either.

College enrollment,[16] for the purpose of this report, is defined as the percentage of first-time college students who enroll at an accredited institution of higher learning. This term includes recent high school graduates as well as adults over the age of 18 who enroll in college several years after completing high school or earning a GED. Also included are military personnel and others who took a break for any reason between high school and college. Increasing enrollment in general requires a multi-pronged approach aimed at prospective students at varying stages of life and employment. Increasing enrollment of recent high school graduates by identifying ways to plug the educational pipeline between high school and college is a different approach than tactics used to attract working adults, for example.

Between 2000 and 2010, enrollment in degree-granting institutions in the United States increased by 37 percent, from 15.3 million to 21.0 million.[17] Much of the growth between 2000 and 2010 was in full-time enrollment; the number of full-time students rose 45 percent, while the number of part-time students rose 26 percent.[18] However, a report released by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center shows a 2.3 percent drop in college enrollment in the spring of 2013. Some suggest students are opting out of college due to an improving economy, allowing more students to return to gainful employment in the workforce.[19] This may work in the short-term but long-term sustainability of success without post-secondary credentials is uncertain at best. In

North Carolina, high school graduation rates have been slowly, yet steadily, rising. The 2014 four-year graduation rate for North Carolina public schools was 83.8 percent.[20]

Enloe High School, Wake County
Photo: Paige Worsham

More on N.C. High School Graduation Rates

The four-year high school graduation rate increased to 83.8% in 2013-14, up from 82.5% in 2012-13. The graduation rate, which has increased each year the rate has been reported, is calculated as "the number of graduates divided by the number of students who entered ninth grade in 2010-11, plus any incoming students and minus any students who leave North Carolina in subsequent years," according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

	Four-Year Graduation Rate
2014	83.8%
2013	82.5%
2012	80.4%
2011	77.9%
2010	74.2%
2009	71.8%
2008	70.3%
2007	69.5%
2006	68.3%

DPI also breaks down the graduation rate by demographic group, and each subgroup shows a higher rate over last year:

	2014 Four-Year Rate	2013 Four-Year Rate
Male	80.2%	78.6%
Female	87.6%	86.6%
American Indian	79.3%	77.3%
Asian	91.4%	89.9%
Black	79.8%	77.5%
Hispanic	77.3%	75.2%
Two or More Races	82.7%	81.5%
White	87%	86.2%
Economically Disadvantaged	77.9%	76.1%
Limited English Proficient	51.8%	48.8%
Students with Disabilities	64.4%	62.3%
Academically Gifted	>95%	>95%

A DPI report released last year shows a 2012-13 dropout rate of 2.45%, down from 3.01% the previous year. The dropout rate in North Carolina declined each year from 2006-07 (5.24%) to 2012-13. Dropouts are calculated as students who attend any part or all of a school year and do not return for the next school year.
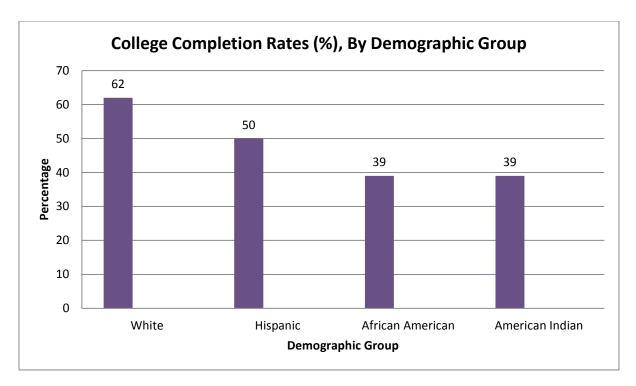
-- *Paige C. Worsham*

Source. N.C. Department of Public Instruction

Increasing levels of college completion statewide would also result in greater attainment overall. College completion[21] refers to a student earning a certificate or degree within six years of enrolling in college. Too many students drop out of college before earning a credential for a variety of reasons such as affordability, outside responsibilities, or lack of interest. These and other hurdles to completion must be addressed, particularly for underserved populations, in order to increase levels of attainment and ensure a prepared workforce and a strong economy. Approximately 58 percent of first-time, full-time students in the U.S. who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in the fall of 2004 completed a bachelor's degree at that institution within six years. This is a slight increase from 1996, for example, when 55 percent of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in the fall of 1996 earned a bachelor's degree within 6 years at that institution.[22]

Recent data show nearly 58 percent of females seeking a bachelor's degree at a public college graduated within 6 years, compared with 53 percent of males. Completion rates at public universities varied across racial and ethnic groups as well. For example, Asian and Pacific Islander students had the highest 6-year graduation rate (69 percent), followed by white students (62 percent), Hispanic students (50 percent), and African American and American Indian students (39 percent each).[23] It is important to note, however, that these particular data on college graduation rates do not account for part-time students who represent 37 percent of all college students, 61 percent of public two-year college students and more than 40 percent of all black and Hispanic students.[24] Nor do the numbers include data on transfer students, of whom 37 percent earned a bachelor's degree through more than one institution and 23 percent through more than two institutions.[25]

College Completion Rates (%), By Demographic Group

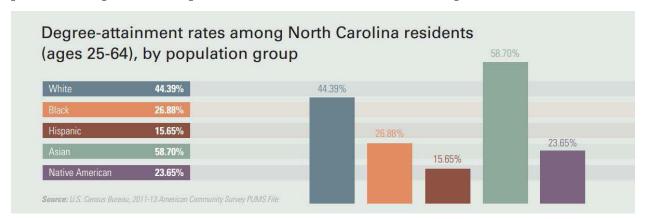| Demographic Group	Percentage
White	62
Hispanic	50
African American	39
American Indian	39

To fully understand the scope of the attainment challenge and to identify meaningful strategies to address it, it is critical to disaggregate data on enrollment, completion, and overall attainment rates in order to highlight core demographic groups. This report focuses primarily on presenting data on college attainment rates and offering sound strategies for increasing these rates among targeted demographic groups and geographies across the state. While the focus may be on attainment, increasing college enrollment and completion rates, as defined above, are both interconnected and critical to growing the overall percentage of adults in North Carolina with a post-secondary credential.

The Demographic and Geographic Divide

Without full participation in education by all North Carolinians, the state will suffer both economically and socially, with growing socio-economic disparities among population groups. Targeting particular groups that have traditionally suffered from low attainment rates will help raise the tide for the entire workforce, signaling a thriving economic engine. Increasing attainment rates for first-generation college

students, minority students, and students from rural parts of the state has proven critically important but also a significant challenge. Many members of these groups fall into a broader category of adults who have received partial credit in higher education, but did not receive a credential. It would be reasonable to assume that targeting these adults, in particular, for reenrollment and completion would yield greater attainment rates with less in-depth outreach.

There is great variation in degree attainment rates among demographic groups in our state, which indicates a persistent need to focus efforts targeting particular minority groups with historically low attainment rates. For example, 44.4 percent of white adults (ages 25-64) in North Carolina have earned a post-secondary degree, compared to 26.9 percent of African American adults, 15.7 percent of Hispanic adults and 23.7 percent of American Indian adults.[26] North Carolina falls below the national rates of degree attainment among whites (44.5 percent), African American (28.1 percent), Hispanics (20.3 percent), and American Indians (23.9 percent).[27]
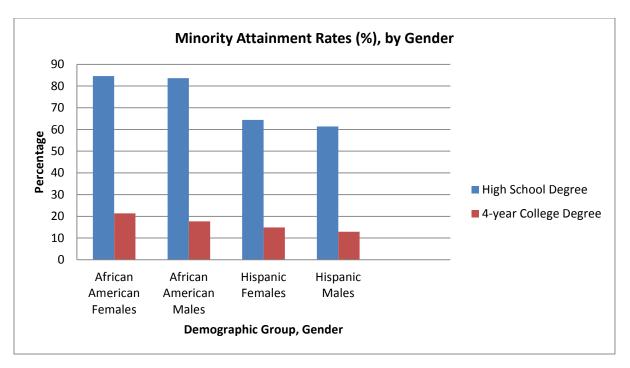

Degree-attainment rates among North Carolina residents (ages 25-64), by population group

White	44.39%
Black	26.88%
Hispanic	15.65%
Asian	58.70%
Native American	23.65%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-13 American Community Survey PUMS File

58.70%
44.39%
26.88%
15.65%
23.65%

Source: "A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2015

A disturbing sign shows that the educational pipeline is losing minority students at a troubling rate. The U.S. high school graduation rate in 2010 was 87.6 percent for white students, 84.2 percent for African American students, and 62.9 percent for Hispanic students. While graduation rates have continued to rise over the last several

decades, the real challenge is establishing proven methods of ensuring that these high school graduates go on to earn post-secondary credentials. Unfortunately, of these high school graduates in 2010, only 30.3 percent of white students, 19.8 percent of African American students and 13.9 percent of Hispanic students went on to earn 4-year college degrees.[28]

Another challenging wrinkle in the demographic data is the attainment distinction between men and women. Overall, women have been increasing degree attainment levels, while their male counterparts' levels have consistently remained lower. For example, in 2011, 45 percent of women (ages 25-64) held a two- or four-year degree, compared to 40 percent of men. This gap doubles when looking at women and men ages 25-29. Furthermore, the attainment rate for African American women, ages 25-34, (32 percent) is higher than that of African American men (28 percent), as is the rate for Hispanic women of the same age range (24 percent) and men (16 percent).[29]

When breaking down these numbers by gender, it becomes apparent that both African American and Hispanic males fall short of their female counterparts, both in terms of graduating from high school and also in terms of earning a 4-year college degree. While 84.6 percent and 64.4 percent of African American and Hispanic females, respectively, graduate from high school, only 83.6 percent and 61.4 percent of males graduate from high school, respectively.[30] When examining those who earned a 4-year college degree, females again have higher rates of degree completion, with 17.7 percent of African American males, compared to 21.4 percent of females earning a degree, and 12.9 percent of Hispanic males, compared to 14.9 percent of females.[31]

Minority Attainment Rates (%), by Gender

Exacerbating the challenge of increasing attainment rates among these particular population groups is a lack of access to higher education in the state's most rural counties. Educational attainment levels in rural counties are, on average, considerably lower than the state's more urban counties. In North Carolina, 27 of the state's 100 counties have an attainment rate (defined in this case as at least an associate's degree) of 25 percent or lower, with seven holding a rate below 20 percent. This is compared to an average attainment rate of 48.3 percent[32] for the state's four most populous counties (Mecklenburg, Wake, Guilford, Forsyth). Furthermore, many rural counties have minority populations that fall above the state average, highlighting the challenge of increasing attainment levels for minority groups in particular. For example, in Tyrrell County in eastern North Carolina, 14.4 percent of the adult population has at least an associate degree, the lowest rate in the state.[33] According to Census data, Tyrrell County's population is 36.6 percent African American, more than 14 percentage points higher than the statewide African American population as a whole.[34]

First-generation college students, those whose parents did not attend college, are even less likely to earn a degree themselves, either by never enrolling in college or by

dropping out. Most first-generation college students are low-income minorities or from rural parts of the state where access to higher education is limited. A 2010 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that 50 percent of the college population is made up of first-generation students, or those whose parents did not receive education beyond a high school diploma.[35] These numbers can be further broken down by the educational levels of parents of current college attendees. Minority groups made up the largest groups of students with parents with a high school education or less, with 48.5 percent of Hispanic students and 45 percent of African American students. Thirty-five percent of parents of American Indian students had a high school diploma or less. Of students who identified themselves as Caucasian, only 28 percent were first-generation college students.[36]

There are certain characteristics that distinguish first-generation students. For example, they are more likely to be older, have lower incomes, be married, have dependents and attend part-time, when compared to their non-first-generation peers. Finally, and most notable, is the finding that first-generation students at both 2-year and 4-year institutions succeed in post-secondary education at lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts. However, if first-generation students earn bachelor's or associate's degrees, they go on to earn comparable salaries and are employed in similar occupations as their non-first-generation peers, suggesting that earning a degree, not simply enrolling in college, is the most likely way to break down barriers to success for first-generation students.[37]

According to UNC system enrollment numbers, in the fall of 2011, 61.5 percent of students were white, 21.5 percent were African American, 4.1 percent were Hispanic and 1 percent of students were American Indian.[38] According to 2012 Census data, general demographic make-up of the state at that time was 71 percent white, 22 percent African American, 8.7 percent Hispanic and 1.5 percent American Indian.[39] While UNC system enrollment numbers somewhat reflect the statewide demography, a significant

push is needed to enroll and graduate African American students, who traditionally have low attainment numbers and Hispanic students, who also have low attainment numbers and comprise the fastest growing population in the state. The impact on our economy of the fastest growing population also being the most undereducated would lead to significant imbalance, given that there simply are not sufficient low-skill jobs in our current economy to support the influx of low-skill workers. This would result in high unemployment and increased state and federal spending on social services. Furthermore, because people with greater educational attainment earn more over the course of their lives, the educational discrepancies among various groups would extend income and social inequalities.

Looking Ahead

The chapters ahead focus primarily on college attainment rates, which are widely believed to be among the most important indicators of educational and economic strength, and strategies currently underway aiming to increase these rates among targeted demographic groups and geographies across the state. Not only will a focus on increased college attainment allow North Carolina's economy to thrive, but such a commitment will also begin to address many societal inequities among different demographic groups and across our state's varied geographies. Through post-secondary attainment for all North Carolinians, the state can harness our collective human capital to ensure our state's continued economic competitiveness.

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[1] "Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020," June 2010, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, Executive Summary, http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/Recovery2020.ES.Web.pdf

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2013, http://www.issuelab.org/resource/stronger_nation_through_higher_education_visualizing_data_to_help_us_achieve_a_big_goal_for_college_attainment_a

[5] "Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020," June 2010, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, Executive Summary, http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/Recovery2020.ES.Web.pdf

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] "The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime earnings," August 2011, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, Executive Summary, http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/collegepayoff-summary.pdf

[8] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2013, http://www.issuelab.org/resource/stronger_nation_through_higher_education_visualizing_data_to_help_us_achieve_a_big_goal_for_college_attainment_a.

[9] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2015, http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/#north-carolina.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] "Our Time, Our Future," The UNC Compact with North Carolina, Strategic Directions Initiative, 2013-2018, https://www.northcarolina.edu/?q=content/our-time-our-future.

[13] NCCCS, SuccessNC Initiative, http://www.successnc.org/guiding-goals.

[14] "Education," Institute for Emerging Issues http://iei.ncsu.edu/iei-issue-areas/education/.

[15] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2013, see above.

[16] "College enrollment" is used interchangeably throughout this report with "college going" and "college participation."

[17] National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] "Fewer U.S. Graduates Opt for College After High School," The New York Times, Apr. 25, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/26/business/fewer-us-high-school-graduates-opt-for-college.html?_r=0.

[20] N.C. Department of Public Instruction, 2014 North Carolina Cohort Graduation Rate, http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/1314cohortgradrate.pdf.

[21] "College completion rates" is used interchangeably with "college graduation rates" in this report.

[22] National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts, http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] "Complete to Compete;" 2010 report from the National Governors Association, http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1007COMMONCOLLEGEMETRICS.PDF.

[25] *Ibid*. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics tracks first-time, full-time undergraduate students in its database (IPEDS). Additional methods of measuring college attainment use different criteria. For example, the National Student Clearinghouse tracks students that transfer institutions.

[26] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2015, http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/#north-carolina.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0230.pdf.

[29] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2013, see above.

[30] U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0230.pdf.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," Lumina Foundation Annual Report, 2015, http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/#north-carolina.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] U.S. Census Bureau, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37177.html.

[35] U.S. Department of Education, Profile of Undergraduate Students 2007-2008, published September 2010, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010205.pdf.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] First-Generation Students: Undergraduates Whose Parents Never Enrolled in Post-secondary Education; NCES Statistical Report, June 1998, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98082.pdf.

[38] "Our Time, Our Future," The UNC Compact with North Carolina, Strategic Directions Initiative, 2013-2018, https://www.northcarolina.edu/?q=content/our-time-our-future.

[39] U.S. Census Bureau http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html.

Chapter Two

Strategies to Increase Educational Attainment in North Carolina

It is not surprising that all three higher educational systems in North Carolina—The University of North Carolina (UNC), the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU)—have each made increased educational attainment a priority. There are numerous established programs, many of which are collaborative across systems, with the objective to raise overall numbers of the population with a credential beyond high school. Outlined in this chapter are some of the strategies being carried out across North Carolina's systems of higher education. Improvement for North Carolina attainment numbers will require continued focus and support at the local, state, and federal levels in the coming years.

The University of North Carolina System

In 2013, UNC published a plan detailing its strategic directions for 2013-2018 entitled, "Our Time, Our Future." This compact with the state identified the following five, broad-based goals, the first of which deals specifically with attainment:

1.) Set degree attainment goals responsive to state needs

2.) Strengthen academic quality;

3.) Serve the people of North Carolina;

4.) Maximize efficiencies; and

5.) Ensure an accessible and financially stable university.[1]

By setting its first goal, UNC has pledged to help the state reach a bachelor's degree or higher attainment level of 32 percent by 2018 (the current rate is close to 27 percent). In addition, UNC is committed to ensuring that North Carolina becomes one

of the top ten most educated states by 2025 by increasing the percentage of the population that holds a bachelor's degree or higher to 37 percent.[2]

The compact outlines several strategies for increasing attainment levels and achieving the first goal. These strategies assume that they will be carried out in a way that takes into account the state's varied demographics and also the need for flexibility in order to adapt to changing circumstances over time. The compact also assumes that UNC alone cannot account for reaching the proposed attainment levels and, therefore, the effort must be in close collaboration with both the community colleges and private institutions.

In order to increase attainment levels, UNC will target the following specific demographic groups:

- High school graduates
- Community college graduates and transfers
- "Part-way home" students (individuals with some college credit, but no degree)
- Military-affiliated students/veterans
- Adult and distance learners[3]

The number of graduates will increase not simply through increasing enrollment, but also by improving retention and graduation rates among current and future students. The UNC system, through its compact, has outlined a variety of strategies and corresponding action steps to increase overall attainment rates. Because of the nature of tracking attainment, it will inevitably take two to six years to move students through degree completion. Therefore, degree attainment rates will not show immediate improvement but should instead rise steadily over time.
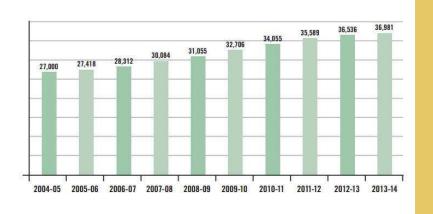
Update on the Strategic Directions Plan

The UNC Board of Governors reviews quarterly progress on these strategic directions initiatives. During a recent meeting, the Committee on Strategic Planning reviewed the status and progress of several initiatives as of the first quarter of 2015. For example:

- An expansion of College Application Week, which is typically held in November and targeted toward high school seniors who would be first generation college students, waives the application fee for qualifying students.
- Implementing early warning systems to alert schools when students are falling behind or missing classes, like the Starfish early alert tool in use at East Carolina University
- Reach out and engage "part-way" home students and help them return to school and complete a degree, like the 49er Finish program at UNC Charlotte

Other components of the Strategic Directions plan have been placed on hold, due to lack of funding or resources. For example, an expansion of the Minority Male Mentoring program is on hold, as is the creation of Transfer and Adult Services offices to support community college transfer students.

In the 2015 Interim Report on the UNC Strategic Directions plan, the UNC System highlights a revised Comprehensive Articulation Agreement, which streamlines the process and expectations for students transferring courses between the N.C. Community College System and the UNC System, and an increased focus on active-duty military and veteran students.

BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED BY THE 16 UNC INSTITUTIONS 2004–05 THROUGH 2013–14

Year	Degrees
2004-05	27,000
2005-06	27,418
2006-07	28,312
2007-08	30,084
2008-09	31,055
2009-10	32,706
2010-11	34,055
2011-12	35,589
2012-13	36,536
2013-14	36,981

--Paige C. Worsham

A Focus on Military-Affiliated Students

The development of a system-wide recruiting strategy for the military-affiliated student population, which includes custom academic pathways, academic success contracts, targeted materials, and other best practices is currently underway. This includes the establishment of system-level support and logistical assistance for UNC institutions that are recruiting, enrolling, and graduating military-affiliated students.[4]

A process by which admission and transfer policies are streamlined for consistency in determining residency and value of credit is also nearing completion. Incentives for faculty to develop flexible online courses that can be taken outside the normal semester schedule to meet degree requirements is on-going.[5]

The North Carolina Community College System

Photo: Paige Worsham

SuccessNC

SuccessNC, a multi-year strategic planning process, began in October 2009 with the goal of increasing the access and success of students and improving the performance of programs across the N.C. Community College System (NCCCS).[6] Through a listening tour of each community college campus across North Carolina, best practices as well as barriers to student success were identified. Following these conversations, a set of initiatives was developed that focused primarily on increasing student success rates from the first point of contact with a community college through program completion. Today, the refined mission of SuccessNC, after years of development, is to increase graduation rates of community college students in order to

provide more North Carolina families with the ability to earn a sufficient and reliable income.[7]

The primary goal of SuccessNC has three components:

1.) *To Improve Access* so that a greater number of students can successfully enroll and complete their desired course of study.

2.) *To Enhance Quality* by providing programs and courses that not only meet the changing demands of the workforce, but that guarantee the rigor to allow graduates to excel in the workforce or in further higher education pursuits.

3.) *To Increase Success* by getting more students through to completion so that they graduate with a credential that will ensure their ability to find steady employment as well as provide the foundation for continued skill development over a lifetime.[8]

Completion by Design

North Carolina and the NCCCS was one of only four states selected in 2011 to participate in the pilot program of Completion by Design, which is designed by and funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The SuccessNC framework is modeled after the Completion by Design program, with the primary goal of implementing innovative strategies to increase student completion. A leadership group was formed to determine policy changes that would move the state's 58 community colleges toward that goal. These policy priorities were organized into four main categories:

1.) Legislative,

2.) K-12 and higher education alignment,

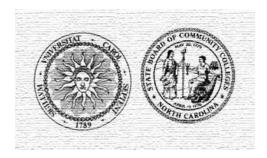3.) State Board of Community Colleges, and

4.) College policy levers.[9]

While the leadership group determined numerous innovative strategies, the following three were identified as having the highest priority:

1.) <u>Revise the State Board of Community Colleges' student placement and developmental pre-requisite policies:</u> This change would allow students' qualifications for admission to be determined by more qualitative research rather than a single test score. It would also allow students to enroll in courses even if they placed "near college-ready" so they can take both the developmental course and the supplemental course simultaneously. This would remove barriers to degree attainment by improving the quality of study the student receives and reducing the time to credential.

2.) <u>Revise the NCCCS curriculum standards to facilitate highly structured programs of study at the college level:</u> By clustering similar programs and stacking credential options to allow for multiple points of entry and exit, this change would create flexibility and increase opportunities for students as they pursue a course of study.

3.) <u>Revise the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the North Carolina Community College System and The University of North Carolina's 16 constituent college institutions to develop structured pathways to majors and reduce elective options:</u> The revision would provide a more seamless transition between courses of study at community colleges and at UNC campuses across the state would promote attainment through course of study alignment and easier credit transfer.[10]

Comprehensive Articulation Agreement

The North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), a statewide agreement facilitating the transfer of credits between NCCCS and UNC campuses, was recently revised to allow for a more streamlined and transparent transition of students

from one system to the other on the path toward degree completion. A community college student may choose to earn an Associate's degree in Arts or in Sciences, which will afford him or her junior status upon transfer to a four-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree. The existence of the CAA, as approved by both the UNC Board of Governors and the NC State Board of Community Colleges, ensures the transfer of any community college student who has successfully earned an Associate's degree in Arts or in Sciences. Further, the student is protected in that he or she may file a grievance if it is believed that the CAA has not been upheld.[11]

Reverse Credit Transfer Program

The Reverse Credit Transfer Program is a partnership between fifteen states, including North Carolina, and five major education foundations. The program allows community college students who transfer to four-year universities before earning an Associate's degree to send their earned credits back to the community college they previously attended and obtain the degree they would have been awarded. There is no additional cost to the student. For many, this is merely a formality and requires no additional coursework since the student has already accumulated the credits to earn the Associate's degree.

Receiving the Associate's degree while at a four-year college can have several benefits. For example, it will: 1.) bolster future earning potential, 2.) strengthen psychological resolve to complete a Bachelor's degree, and 3.) allow students to receive the full credentials they have earned. Furthermore, for the student who does not go on

to complete a Bachelor's degree, the Associate's degree boosts their lifetime earning potential. Currently, the Reverse Credit Transfer Program is being piloted at eight UNC campuses and fifteen community colleges statewide. The pilot is on track to meet its goal for reverse transfer Associate's degrees awarded and, therefore, the program is expected to begin scaling up across both systems.[12]

Career and College Promise

The Career and College Promise initiative is an innovative solution for plugging the educational pipeline between high school and college by providing overlapping credit accumulation. The program works by allowing high school students to earn credits while still in high school (at no cost) that count toward a post-secondary degree. High school juniors and seniors are eligible to participate; in some participating schools, high school freshman and sophomores may enroll to receive a high school degree and an Associate's degree in a reduced timeframe. The initiative gives students a head start toward the degree of their choice in three ways:

1.) College credit is completely transferrable to all UNC campuses and many of North Carolina's private institutions.
2.) A credential, certificate, or diploma in a technical career can be earned.
3.) A high school diploma and two years of college credit in four to five years through innovative cooperative high schools (limited availability) can be earned.[13]

Minority Male Mentoring Program

The goal of the Minority Male Mentoring Program (3MP), a student coaching program, is to increase the college completion rates and, in turn, the professional opportunities available specifically for minority males enrolled at North Carolina community colleges. Started in 2003 and supported by the N.C. General Assembly and

federal grants through the U.S. Department of Education, 3MP has received sub-grants to operate in 46 of the 58 community colleges statewide. The focus of the 3MP is consistent: to complete required coursework, to return to school each semester and each year, to earn a degree, and/or to transfer to a four-year institution. Given the program's success, the aspiration is to expand its presence to all 58 community colleges and to continue to provide innovative pathways to increased educational attainment for minority males, particularly given that they traditionally have the lowest levels of completion among any demographic group.[14]

Christian Fernandez, Emanuel Moss, and Leon Davis, Students in M.E.D.I.A., College of The Albemarle Minority Male Mentoring Program

Photo: Paige Worsham

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities

College Access Challenge Grant

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) is a federal grant through the U.S. Department of Education used to support programs that increase college enrollment

and completion, particularly among underrepresented groups. The population of each state determines the amount of funds received through the grant. Each state has relative autonomy in determining how they use the funds to support programs and scholarships. Our state's private colleges and universities rely on this funding stream to provide programs that increase the success rates of low-income, first generation, adult and/or minority students on their campuses.[15]

During the 2010-2011 grant year, a handful of private colleges implemented programs using CACG funds that enjoyed a good deal of success. For example, at Guilford College, the Getting Prepared for Success (GPS) program was established to prepare both traditional age (18) and non-traditional age (adult) first generation or at-risk students for success in college. GPS offered a summer retreat that focused on study skills and strategies. In addition to creating a supportive community, GPS provided participants with the background necessary to navigate the college experience successfully. Data show that, although the sample size was relatively small (only 18 participants), academic performance among participants of GPS was greater than performance of non-participants, particularly among adult learners. GPS was offered the following year and increased in participation by 50 percent. Success rates among participants continued to climb, establishing GPS as an effective effort to increase persistence and completion rates among underrepresented groups.[16]

During the 2011-2012 grant cycle, the number of private colleges offering programs for underrepresented groups grew and saw important successes in accomplishing their missions. For example, Chowan University established the "1st Flight" program that engaged thirteen at-risk students in a 5-day residential program to prepare students for the challenges of college life. The program was highly successful, as 100 percent of participants enrolled for the following fall semester and the cumulative GPA of participants was higher than that of the control group.[17]

At Duke University, "The IG Network: a Program for First Generation College Students" was established to ease the transition to college life for first generation students by helping them build and cultivate meaningful relationships with faculty. Consistently, 98 percent of participants indicated that the program helped them navigate the college environment successfully.[18]

Several private colleges, including Methodist University and Shaw University, established Summer Bridge Programs with the express intent of preparing at-risk students for college life. The programs at these two campuses produced data indicating a positive impact on student participants, including increased levels of academic achievement, persistence and re-enrollment.[19]

[1] UNC Strategic Directions 2013-2018: "Our Time, Our Future," p. 4

[2] UNC Strategic Directions 2013-2018: "Our Time, Our Future," p. 13

[3] UNC Strategic Directions 2013-2018: "Our Time, Our Future," p. 19

[4] *"Our Time, Our Future," UNC General Administration, Interim Report 2015,* http://www.northcarolina.edu/sites/default/files/documents/14-3741-gad-university_strategic_plan.pdf.

[5] The University of North Carolina Partnership for National Security, UNC General Administration, http://uncserves.northcarolina.edu/.

[6] "SuccessNC Final Report," NC Community College System, 2013, http://www.successnc.org/sites/default/files/SuccessNC%20Report.pdf.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] "Completion by Design," N.C. Community College System, http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/completion-design.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] "Comprehensive Articulation Agreement," N.C. Community College System, http://son2.nccommunitycolleges.edu/programs/comprehensive_a_a.htm.

[12] "Reverse Transfer Credit," N.C. Community College System, http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/comprehensive-articulation-agreement-revision-reverse-transfer-credit-0.

[13] "Career and College Promise," N.C. Community College System, http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/career-college-promise-0.

[14] "Minority Male Mentoring Program," N.C. Community College System, http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/minority-male-mentoring-program.

[15] "College Access Challenge Grant," N.C. Independent Colleges and Universities, http://www.ncicu.org/student_collegeaccess.html.

[16] *Ibid.* Follow program and accomplishments links.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

Encouraging College Attainment for At-Risk Students: Highlighting Promising Programs across North Carolina

As outlined in the first chapter, our state's demographics are in a constant state of change. Minority populations are growing and baby boomers are retiring en masse, all at a time when our economy is shifting to one based on high-skill jobs that require a credential beyond high school. Our approach to higher education must adapt in order to meet the needs of students in the face of a changing job market. The higher education structure must establish new, and retool existing, mechanisms to ensure that enrolled students graduate on time and with a relevant degree. The structure must also work to enroll and graduate more students not currently in the system.

A particular focus must be placed on at-risk populations whose attainment rates tend to suffer more than their counterparts. This can be due to many underlying factors; for example, geography, socioeconomic status, access to broadband, and family and community culture. These are certainly barriers, but they are not insurmountable. When an entire demographic group is consistently underrepresented in our educational system and, subsequently, in the high-skilled workforce, this can have far-reaching, negative economic consequences such as high unemployment rates, increased spending on social service programs, and a decrease in state and local revenues. Numerous programs statewide have seen a great deal of success in increasing attainment for at-risk students.

The previous chapter highlighted several initiatives geared toward increasing educational attainment across all three higher education systems in our state, many of which focus specifically on engaging minority and nontraditional students. A sound education is the ultimate equalizer. However, the most disadvantaged groups in our

state face the greatest challenges to receiving a quality education capable of providing them with a lifetime of upward mobility.

In this chapter, educational institutions targeting and assisting underserved populations such as African Americans, Hispanic students, first-generation college students, nontraditional students and students from rural counties will be highlighted. These institutions are doing so in collaborative ways, often using a mix of mechanisms including distance education and the creation of a comprehensive support network to give students the best chance of success. This chapter is dedicated to detailing more of these critical programs and the successes and challenges they have faced as they work to increase attainment levels among some of our state's most underserved populations. Many common elements can be identified among these programs, which, in turn, will serve to inform the replication and scaling of the most promising programs statewide and beyond.

Guilford Technical Community College
Photo: Paige Worsham

Groups Constituting the At-Risk Student Population

Nationally, the average four-year college graduation rate for African American students is almost 20 percentage points below that of white students. The graduation rate for African American students from private colleges is 55 percent while the rate for white students is 73 percent. The graduation rates in public universities show a similarly wide gap, with 43 percent of African Americans graduating in six years compared to 60 percent of white students.[1] While the achievement gap and graduation gap is closing for minority students, African American students often graduate high school with a weaker performance than their white peers.[2] So it can be argued that the challenge lies in improving academic performance for minority students within secondary education. However, research has shown that strategies used in higher education to enroll, retain, and graduate minority students can have a significant impact on improving their attainment levels, despite the disparity in earlier educational experiences.[3]
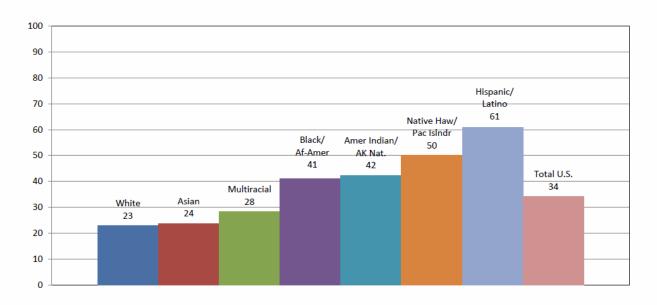
Similarly, Hispanic students, on average, have significantly lower graduation rates than white students. This is due, in part, to lower enrollment numbers, but also to the lack of a tailored support network within higher education to ensure successful degree completion. This is evidenced by the fact that less than half of Hispanics who enroll in college graduate within six years, compared to 60 percent of their white peers.[4] Hispanics are expected to comprise one-third of the workforce in the United States by the year 2050. However, they are currently the least academically prepared to succeed in the changing economy. Only 13 percent of Hispanics have earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 39 percent of whites and 21 percent of African Americans.[5] While private colleges tend to graduate higher proportions of Hispanic students (65.7 percent compared to 47.6 percent at public institutions), most Hispanic students, about 80

percent, attend public universities where 60 percent graduate less than half of enrolled Hispanic students within six years.[6]

In 2012, about 39 percent of American Indian students who enrolled in a four-year institution graduated (compared to about 60 percent of white students).[7] It is often more likely for American Indian students to be first-generation students. In 2011, about 19 percent of young adult American Indians had a parent with a bachelor's degree, compared to about 48 percent of white young adults.[8] In addition, American Indian students tend to come from low-income families and from rural communities, both of which present significant barriers to access and success in higher educational pursuits.

First-generation college students are significantly underrepresented among the college student population and even more so among those who have earned a degree. This is due in large part to the fact that first-generation students are less likely to perform well academically and persist throughout the educational pipeline. Of all non-first-generation students graduating from high school, 82 percent enroll in college, compared to 54 percent of students whose parents had only completed high school and only 36 percent of students with parents holding less than a high school diploma.[9] In terms of persistence, first-generation students are less likely to be enrolled continuously and earn a degree at their initial post-secondary institution than students whose parents had completed college.[10] First-generation students are more likely to require remedial coursework, delay entry into college and stop out before completion, making them among the most critically high-risk student group. Furthermore, traditionally underserved minority groups make up the overwhelming majority of first-generation students.

Percentage Distribution of U.S. 5- to 17-Year-Olds by First-Generation Status and Race/Ethnicity, 2011

Sources: The Condition of Education 2012, NCES; "First Generation Students: College Aspirations, Preparedness and Challenges," CollegeBoard PowerPoint, 2013.

Adult learners, also referred to as nontraditional students, are constituting an increasingly large percentage of the college student population. It is estimated that roughly half of the student population enrolled in colleges and universities nationwide is over 25 years old, which prompts the question of whether these students are, in fact, more traditional than their name implies.[11] According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students over age 24 have traditionally been defined as nontraditional. In addition, they must meet one of seven criteria: 1.) delayed enrollment, 2.) having dependents, 3.) being a single parent, 4.) being employed full-time, 5.) being financially independent, 6.) attending part-time, or 7.) not having a traditional high school diploma.[12] This encompasses a large cohort of the total student population. The overarching focus in providing educational opportunities for nontraditional students is providing tailored support and flexibility to address the varied challenges they might face as they balance work, family, and academic responsibilities.

Many underserved students from different demographic groups live in rural areas. In fact, many rural towns in the South and Southwest regions of the United States have high numbers of low-income, minority residents. Coming from rural areas can present additional hurdles to degree completion. Only 17 percent of adults (25 years old or older) from rural areas have earned a college degree, which is about half the percentage of adults from urban areas.[13] Furthermore, only 31 percent of rural college-age adults (age 18-24) were enrolled in higher education in 2009, compared to an average of 44 percent in urban and suburban areas.[14]

This is particularly troubling given that roughly a quarter of all public school children are from rural areas.[15] This means that the educational pipeline is breaking down at much higher rates beyond city limits. This is the case for a variety of reasons For example, the expectation that students will attend a higher education institution is typically not a cultural norm in rural areas, residents are less likely to live near an institution, and students are less likely to have family members who attended college.[16] With rural educational resources lacking, distance education is held up as a realistic means for increasing educational attainment in rural areas. However, access to reliable high speed internet remains a significant impediment to a sound education in rural communities. Certainly, increasing overall attainment levels cannot happen without increasing access to education in rural areas.

If effective support programs are put in place, graduation gaps among students from different at-risk groups are not inevitable. One student can fall into several different at-risk groups, so many of the successful programs in place target and support a host of underrepresented groups. There are numerous institutions—public and private universities and community colleges--that have very small graduation gaps among at-risk groups. Some excellent examples exist here in North Carolina. This chapter will highlight some of those institutions and attempt to extrapolate some

important common elements found among these strategies in the hopes of scaling or replicating these efforts statewide.

A Snapshot of Promising Programs Statewide

[Fayetteville State University: Boosting Bronco Brothers (B³), the Bronco MILE, and My Brother's Peer-Keepers](#)

As outlined in Chapter 1, African American males have among the lowest attainment rates of minority peer groups. This is a troubling fact that has had tremendous impact on our economic well-being. This is why the challenge of providing African American males with the education necessary for success in the workforce has become a national priority. Numerous efforts are underway nationwide to encourage academic and professional success among minority males and many excellent examples can be found in North Carolina. Many young African American males face challenges navigating, first, the college application and enrollment process, but also the academic process that leads, ultimately, to degree completion. Several programs have been established across the state to fill this void and to support and encourage African American males as they earn a post-secondary degree and find the high-skill employment and professional success for which they are trained.

Fayetteville State University (FSU) is a historically black college within the University of North Carolina system. FSU offers numerous programs designed to improve the success rates of its predominantly African American student body, for example, Boosting Bronco Brothers (B³), the Bronco MILE, and My Brother's Peer-Keepers, all of which engage African American males specifically. Data collected by FSU indicate that these programs are succeeding. For example, 92 percent of students who participated in B³ during the 2013-2014 academic year finished in good academic standing. In addition, the majority of members of Bronco MILE had higher cumulative

GPAs than their non-member counterparts and many of them held leadership positions on campus, including student body president. Participants also are more likely to engage in service-learning and travel study opportunities.[17] Though these programs are relatively new, early results indicate that they are working and that the target demographic--young African American males--is reaping the benefits academically, personally, and professionally.

Boosting Bronco Brothers (B3)

Boosting Bronco Brothers, or B3, is a three-day program for freshman males at FSU with the mission to ease the transition into college life by introducing support networks and building a strong community among peers and mentors.[18] This is achieved through workshops, networking opportunities with peer leaders, and bonding experiences through outdoor adventures. In its first year, 2012, 66 students took part in B3 and by the following year, the number of participants grew to 105.

The mission of the Bronco MILE (Male Initiative on Leadership and Excellence) is to create supportive personal and educational conditions that will allow its young male participants to excel. Bronco MILE is designed to support and develop the entire student by providing a community of engaged and dedicated students and offering academic support services as well as leadership development opportunities. The program, which also began in 2012, has grown considerably. Twenty students comprised the program's inaugural class, while more than 200 students now participate.[19] By the end of the first semester of freshman year, B3 participants transition into Bronco MILE.[20]

Display Case for FSU BRONCO MILE and B³
Photo: Paige Worsham

Critical to achieving academic success in college is a support network of peers. Building camaraderie and learning from those who have gone through the college ropes before is an important element of peer support provided by My Brother's Peer-Keepers.

This program is at the heart of FSU's male initiatives by functioning as a "GPS," guiding participants and helping them make sound personal and academic decisions on their way to degree completion.[21] Female students at FSU are also supported through similar programs. For example, the Bronco MILE's partner program is called Saving Our Sisters (SOS) and provides similar and often collaborative support services. In addition, FSU's female students are supported by a program modeled after B^3 called S^3 (Strong Sisters Soaring), which provides academic support for first year females.[22]

According to staff members within FSU's Office of Student Retention, which houses the B^3 and Bronco MILE programs, the programs have seen such immediate success for a few important reasons:[23]

1.) The programs have an open door policy that allows students to visit with any staff member at any time, which is particularly important in addressing personal or academic matters requiring immediate attention.

2.) Each B3 student is assigned a peer mentor in the Bronco MILE program. The relationships between mentor and mentee are crucial and can provide purpose and guidance for both parties.

3.) Participation in these programs offers opportunities for cultural immersion, something that is often not readily available for African American males. While the achievement gap between minority males and their white counterparts is well-documented through data, what some call the "cultural gap" often goes without much attention. Many African American males do not have the opportunity to travel and experience culturally and educationally significant locations, enriching their academic and personal perspectives.

4.) Grade alerts are issued and responded to immediately. This early warning system can help correct poor academic performance quickly and ensure students are on track for degree completion.

5.) Bronco MILE and B3 students have access to a study lounge, which offers an important sense of place. A physical place builds community and begins to eliminate some pervasive stereotypes among African American males that being studious is in some way inconsistent with their cultural perspective of masculinity.

6.) Each participant in the programs receives a unique bow tie at the end of the fall semester to indicate inclusion and success in the program. This is another important way to build community and a sense of purpose and belonging.

While the B3 and Bronco MILE Initiatives have achieved a great deal of success in their first years in existence, they must overcome significant barriers to do so. For example, an ongoing challenge is helping students address their education proactively instead of reactively. In addition, as is often the case, funding is a

FSU Students in B³ Study Lounge
Photo: Paige Worsham

substantial challenge, both in terms of supporting programmatic activities but also from a personal standpoint because students often do not have the financial means to buy educational supplies and cover tuition.

Profiles: Bronco MILE and B[3] Members at Fayetteville State University

When I met *Travis Hearndon*, he was a sophomore from Charlotte, NC, majoring in computer science.

He serves as a peer mentor and leader with Dr. Jason DeSousa in the Student Retention office.

Donovan Ledy, a criminal justice major from Wilmington, is a first-generation college student. He was elected Mr. University College by his peers at FSU.

Christian Ellis, a junior studying biology, explained that the Male Initiative programs helped set his sights on making a specific G.P.A.

Dr. Jason DeSousa, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Retention, and members of BRONCO MILE and B[3] at FSU

Profiles: Bronco MILE and B3 Members at Fayetteville State University
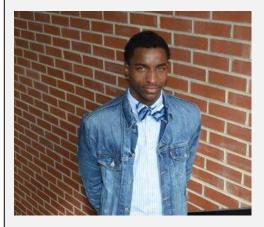

Keorie McMillan, a sophomore from Lumberton, said that the brotherhood and support he found in BRONCO MILE helped him like school more.

Tre Cooper, from Red Springs, NC, is studying Biology and other STEM courses at FSU.

He spoke highly of the B3 experience, and said it helped him in all aspects of his college experience, both academically and socially.

William Mobley, who moved from Buffalo, NY, to Goldsboro, NC, is a business administration major and serves as a peer mentor.

Akanni Evans, a pre-med student from Rock Hill, SC, also serves as a peer mentor and explained that BRONCO MILE provides an extra initiative to succeed at FSU.

--Paige C. Worsham

<u>Elizabeth City State University: "First-Year Experience," MERIT, and JEWELS</u>

Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), located in Pasquotank County in eastern North Carolina, is also part of the UNC system. In the fall of 2014, 73 percent of students enrolled were African American.[24] Because ECSU is predominantly African-American, the programs and initiatives the institution offers to increase enrollment, completion, and overall attainment levels, while not necessarily designated for minority students, significantly impact the success rates for minority students. Much like FSU, ECSU offers programs targeted for freshman specifically because ECSU staff found that the greatest leak in the college pipeline was between freshman and sophomore year.[25]

For this reason, the school offers a program called "First-Year Experience," or "FYE," which aims to ease a student's transition to college life by introducing them to academic and extra-curricular opportunities as well as building communities with peers

Photo: Paige Worsham

and faculty. FYE allows the student to feel comfortable and invested in ECSU's campus community, which works to reduce attrition rates between first and second year.[26] To support the FYE program, ECSU established mentoring programs called MERIT, in 2012, and JEWELS, in 2013, which support male sophomore and female sophomore students, respectively, to ensure increased levels of retention between those most critical years of college.[27]ECSU has programs in place to both recruit high school and community college students and to facilitate the transfer of students from other higher education institutions. ECSU alumni comprise most of the recruiters and they use a comprehensive approach to reach

prospective students. Through fairs at local churches, open house events at high schools, and other methods, ECSU recruiters engage students as young as high school freshmen, as well as community college students who possibly have not considered transferring to a four-year institution as an option. Most of ECSU's transfer students come from nearby College of The Albemarle, a community college also located in Elizabeth City. Transfer students, generally, are more likely to re-enroll each academic year because they have made the proactive decision to continue their education at a four-year institution.[28] The Transfer Student Center at ECSU tracks and assists transfer students on campus, providing various support services to ease their transition.

According to ECSU staff, the greatest barrier to degree completion at ECSU is financial. Over 90 percent of ECSU students receive some kind of financial aid. Many students must suspend study for a semester to work and earn income, and some do not return. During interviews at ECSU, administrators suggested the University College model as one that would mitigate the financial challenges that often prevent students from earning a degree. The University

Transfer Students

The number of transfer students is growing each year, with the majority transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions. Initiatives such as the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina and similar agreements with private institutions exist to facilitate the transfer process. There is also the Reverse Credit Transfer Pilot Program that allows a student to retroactively earn an associate's degree from a community college while enrolled at a four-year institution after completing the sufficient number of credits.

Despite these programs that facilitate the transfer process, there are still hurdles for transfer students. For example, many colleges require transfer students to pay a nonrefundable deposit before finding out which credit hours will transfer and how much they would need to pay in order to earn a degree. This lack of transparency both increases cost and time to degree completion but, most detrimentally, creates an additional barrier to degree completion that many cannot overcome. Because transfer students are more likely to be poorer, from minority backgrounds, and first-generation students, these challenges in the transfer process disproportionately affect the most at-risk populations.

–Michelle Goryn

College model, which is available on several UNC campuses but not at ECSU due to lack of funding, is a one-stop-shop for support services, advisors, and tutoring where students can address multiple issues under one roof.[29] This model is designed to provide comprehensive support for incoming students, academically, culturally, and personally.

College of The Albemarle: M.E.D.I.A. (Men of Excellence and Distinction in the Albemarle)

College of The Albemarle's Elizabeth City campus is the only one of its campuses to offer a program called M.E.D.I.A. (Men of Excellence and Distinction in the Albemarle). M.E.D.I.A.'s inaugural class was inducted in 2012. The program is designed for minority males and provides them with critical academic, personal, social and professional support. The program in founded on members achieving four principal goals: 1.) completion of developmental courses, 2.) persistence from semester to semester, 3.) graduation and earned credential from College of The Albemarle, and 4.) successful transfer to a four-year institution or into the workforce.[30]

Several M.E.D.I.A. workshops are offered, some optional and some mandatory, that address essential topics. For example, one workshop helps members understand the importance of their personal brand created through social media and the long-term impact, whether positive or negative, that brand can have. Other relevant workshops include counseling on personal appearance, personal finance, time management, and civic engagement and volunteerism. All M.E.D.I.A. members must be drug-free during their entire course of studies and must dress presentably. M.E.D.I.A. members are fitted for and provided new suits, free of charge, and are required to wear the attire on certain occasions. M.E.D.I.A. members say the way they feel in the suit and the positive attention they receive has not only boosted their self-esteem, but has motivated them to achieve success in the different areas of their lives.[31]

M.E.D.I.A. members also have access to two different centers on campus. One is a tutoring center that members say is used up to three times per week on average and the other is a test preparation center that helps members prepare for and take tests effectively. M.E.D.I.A. members are offered opportunities to travel across North Carolina as well as to other states. This is something some of the students have never done before, and the experience is invaluable to broadening their horizons and enriching their perspectives.[32]

Personal stories from students participating in the M.E.D.I.A. program are very motivational. One student said that being part of M.E.D.I.A. gave him confidence and helped him find the commitment he lacked in terms of his education. He not only finished his first year but re-enrolled for the second year. Other participants shared that their relationship with a student or faculty mentor was critical in increasing their personal interest in their education. The expectation of checking in with someone teaches students a valuable lesson in accountability, making students responsible for going to class and working for the grades they deserve. Students also said that M.E.D.I.A. taught them they were capable of reaching for high aspirations. For example, when one student earned a B in a course, he resolved to make it an A and made sure he did everything in his power (speaking with the professor, using the tutoring center, etc.) to earn an A. In many

M.E.D.I.A. program graduate, Dakeem Lumsden, and Maenecia Lewis Cole, former director of M.E.D.I.A.
Photo: Paige Worsham

instances, the students pointed to the M.E.D.I.A. staff as instrumental to their success. When the staff is supportive and accessible, it sends the message that students have resources in their corner and a team of people encouraging them.[33]

Anecdotal evidence from staff and student interviews gives the impression that the M.E.D.I.A. initiative has been successful in increasing attainment numbers among minority males at College of The Albemarle. However, actual attainment data may not always reflect the reality of achieving success, particularly at the community college level. For example, a student may take one welding course but never receive a credential. That same student may find work that pays a decent wage, but the student does not appear in the data as holding a credential or degree. However, the community college has been successful in terms of retraining and providing that student with an applicable skill set.[34]

Therefore, while the M.E.D.I.A. initiative may enjoy great anecdotal success, it still must produce measurable statistics to illustrate success in quantitative data. The program is still new and will need to establish both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks to determine the positive impact on its students. Key quantitative benchmarks identified include retention, transfer, graduation rates, job placement, developmental courses taken and completed, and progression through academic programs. Qualitative metrics identified include self-image, critical reflection, societal perception, and student attitude and behavior toward the institution.[35]

These benchmarks, both quantitative and qualitative, can be translated into important metrics that can be used to secure funding. Funding is a constant challenge for M.E.D.I.A. and other programs like it. Therefore, securing a reliable funding stream will allow M.E.D.I.A. to continue engaging one of the most traditionally underserved demographics in our educational system. In addition, as the program expands, student members seek to launch a M.E.D.I.A. website, radio station, and TV program to reach a larger membership.[36]

M.E.D.I.A. is the first of its kind of student program at College of The Albemarle. Initial funding for the program was earmarked more broadly for all students from a low socioeconomic background. Ultimately, the M.E.D.I.A. program was developed and refined to target minority males specifically. While College of The Albemarle does not have a specific program for minority females, there is an effective, but informal, mentoring network on campus for minority females that is modeled after M.E.D.I.A. The aspiration of college faculty and staff is to expand M.E.D.I.A. by formalizing a partner program designed for minority females.

Profiles: M.E.D.I.A. Students at College of The Albemarle

Christian Fernandez,
Emmanuel Moss,
Leon Davis (l-r)

Christian, originally from Florida, now lives in Hertford County, and continues to take courses at CoTA to work toward an associate's degree.

Emannuel says that the M.E.D.I.A. program helps him from getting "side-tracked." He hopes to become an E.R. nurse.

Leon, originally from New Jersey, is studying audio broadcasting at CoTA. He explains that the "M.E.D.I.A. programs provides confidence" and helped him adjust to the new school.

Dakeem Lumsden (opposite page) participated in the M.E.D.I.A. program at CoTA and transferred to Elizabeth City State University to work toward a four-year degree.

Paige C. Worsham

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College: The Minority Student Leadership Academy (the Academy)

The Minority Student Leadership Academy (the Academy) at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (ABTech) was established in 2008 to increase retention and graduation rates among minority male students as well as provide

leadership and training opportunities. Initial funding was provided through the NC Community College System, secured through a federal crime prevention grant, to address retention and graduation for minority males, specifically.[37] However, over time, the initiative has expanded its reach to allow all students at ABTech to participate if they wish to join. Similar to other programs of its kind, the Academy seeks to develop the whole student by offering a wide range of support services from academic tutoring and mentoring, to workshops on time and financial management and health and physical appearance.[38]

However, unlike other similar programs, ABTech received a grant specifically to determine the Academy's impact through both quantitative and qualitative data. This is significant because data to support program goals and outcomes will increase the chances of securing future funds to maintain and enhance the program. It will also allow staff to accurately assess what is working and what needs refinement to make sure the initiative is supporting students in the best and most effective ways possible.

The commissioned evaluation report was divided into five sections:

1.) *Community snapshot-* the student body profile of the Academy participants

2.) *Retention-* a comparison of retention rates between Academy participants and the general student body

3.) *Perceptions-* interviews of students, faculty, and staff about their experience with the Academy

4.) *Benchmarking-*examination of and comparison with other similar programs initiated through the community college system's Minority Male Mentoring program

Photo: Paige Worsham

5.) *Literature review*- a compilation of recent reports and other documents on the topic of minority student retention.[39]

Community Snapshot

While the Academy was originally designed for minority males specifically with a more targeted intervention, ABTech made the decision to expand its reach first to include minority females and then to all interested students, regardless of minority status. This means that the demographics of participants may not reflect the demographics of similar programs on other campuses. For example, the growth rate of minority male participants has grown but not nearly as fast as that of minority female participants over the years since the program's inception. In addition, in a random sample taken in the fall 2012 semester, 63 percent of Academy participants identified as African American, 11 percent identified as white and 5 percent as Hispanic. The age of participants also varies widely. While the average age of participants is 31, the spread ranges from 18 to 60 years old.[40]

Retention

William Hoke, ABTech Student and Academy Member

Among both male and female participants in the Academy, there is a clear retention trend from fall to fall semester but a drop-off in the spring semester. This can be attributed to the fact that students recognize the support of the Academy when enrolling in new classes, something that normally happens in the fall. Even though students are less likely to re-enroll in the Academy in the spring semester, they do tend to re-enroll at ABTech. Notably, the retention rate for Academy members on average consistently meets or exceeds the retention rate for the

general student body at ABTech, suggesting that the support provided by the initiative is instrumental.[41]

Perceptions

The participant perception of the Academy is, for the most part, very positive. Many students underscored the critical support and community building the initiative provides. The concern most echoed by students was the lack of awareness of the program across campus. Many describe it as ABTech's "best kept secret." Students also react positively to the Academy's mentoring, although most claimed that the relationships between students and mentors tended to form organically between interested parties with no central mechanism to connect students to mentors. With the benefits of mentors well-documented, this could be a possible area for improvement within the Academy. Among the most favorable aspects of the program, according to participants, are the relationships built with administrators and faculty. These relationships provide support and increased personal accountability that, in turn, lead to increased success both academically and personally.

Jeremy Jackson, Minority Student Leadership Academy Alumnus

Jeremy Jackson, a graduate of the Minority Student Leadership Academy at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, enrolled in 2010 at the community college. Identified as a special education student in high school, he tested into developmental courses at AB Tech. A first generation college student, he explained that "he didn't know how to be a student" when he got to college.

He joined the Academy soon after he started classes, which helped him concentrate his classes and decide on physical therapy as a profession. Jeremy graduated with two associate degrees in May 2013 and was working toward a third in the therapeutic massage program at AB Tech when I met him. In summing up the importance of the Academy personally, Jeremy explained that he didn't have a father growing up and the program acted like a father to "bring him up in the college realm." "It really changed my life," he said.

Now an Exercise Physiology major and transfer student at East Carolina University, Jeremy is working to graduate with his bachelor's degree in 2016 and become a Physician assistant.

–Paige C. Worsham

The feedback from faculty and staff paint a similar picture of the Academy. Faculty and staff are committed to the program and its students and view the relationships developed as one of the most important benefits. They also feel that while the program is seeing relative success on the ground, it is not supported enough by the administration in order to reach its full potential.[42]

Benchmarking

The Minority Male Mentoring Program (M3P), sponsored and supported by the NC Community College System, is currently being implemented on 46 of the system's 58 campuses. However, in the fall of 2012, ABTech declined to reapply for funding from the central office. This may be due to the fact that the Academy's mission has shifted away from traditional M3P principles of targeting and supporting only minority males. For this reason, it is difficult to set benchmarks alongside other M3P programs. However, in general, programs established to raise attainment levels through the provision of critical mentoring and support services tend to see favorable results.[43] This is indeed the case at the Academy at ABTech.

Literature Review

The program evaluation concludes with a bibliography of resources on the topic of minority student retention and graduation that can be used to provide context regarding the challenge of minority student educational attainment and offer an important description of the Academy and programs like it.[44]

One of the Academy's greatest challenges, as perceived by participants and staff, is a lack of clarity and exposure. There is confusion around the Academy's role, which creates barriers to access and participation. This could be caused by a lack of internal marketing or by expanding the target audience beyond what is usually the case with other minority mentoring programs. Because the Academy is open to all ABTech students and not only minority males, the services and mission may be diluted or perceived to be diluted. However, this must be weighed against the additional number of students who benefit from the Academy each year.

Dr. Joseph Fox, former director of the Academy and Chair of Business Administration at ABTech, now retired

Bladen Community College: Distance Learning Program

Bladen Community College (BCC), located in rural southeastern North Carolina, has one of the most effective distance learning programs in the state. It is one of five institutions of higher learning (along with Duke University and UNC-Charlotte, for example) and the only community college in North Carolina to have received certification from the U.S. Distance Learning Association. It has recently ranked in the top 4 of the 58 community colleges for the percentage of students completing coursework online. BCC has been offering online courses since 2002 and boasts online enrollment at over 12 percent of total enrollment. The majority of these students choose

to combine distance and traditional courses to meet requirements of full-time enrollment.[45]

It is important to note that Bladen County is in the heart of rural North Carolina and has had a population hovering around 30,000 for the last 100 years. With a robust distance learning program in place, the school is particularly well-positioned to serve rural residents in this corner of the state. In fact, BCC enrolls students from neighboring counties, even those with their own community colleges, simply because of the access and flexibility provided by the distance learning program. Many students opt for a hybrid education consisting of mostly online courses and one to two traditional courses. Some of these students live in nearby Robeson County and drive by Robeson County Community College to reach BCC for their traditional coursework because the distance learning complement is unmatched in that part of the state.

This anecdote is reflected in the data, which show that only 50 percent of enrollment comes from inside the county, a number that is surprisingly low for a rural community college. This number typically tends to be closer to 90 percent. The key to BCC's distance learning success is focusing on increasing access and providing flexibility for students. By meeting students where they are and making the education process more accessible, attainment levels rise and employment levels rise.

BCC has nearly tripled in size over the last 13 years but the school has managed to keep a small town feel where students can walk in without an appointment and receive tailored support and advice when needed. The majority of enrolled students are first-generation college students so providing unlimited access to in-person support to guide them through the process is often the most critical asset in ensuring educational success.[46]

As is the case for many community colleges, educational success is not based only on degree completion. In fact, limiting success metrics to number of degrees awarded can misrepresent the accomplishments of community college students and

undermines the role the community colleges play in preparing a skilled workforce. Not all students come to BCC for the sole purpose of earning a degree and many of them, in fact, do not leave with a credential. Statistically, this would reflect low educational attainment rates; however, the reality can often be very different.

If students enroll to learn a particular skill but do not earn a degree, they may still achieve high academic standing and find gainful employment. Anecdotally, this type of story is, for all intents and purposes, a success story for which community colleges can claim responsibility. However, state and federal statistics do not account for that measure of success. Because of this distinction, BCC is often not eligible for performance funding when only more traditional success measures are considered.[47]

This illustrates a misrepresentation in the role community colleges play in preparing students for successful transfers to four-year universities or into the workforce. Furthermore, while the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the UNC System and NC Community College System is designed to move students through school and to completion faster and more smoothly, it could have some unintended consequences. For example, mastering many crucial skills that make students more marketable (such as written and oral communication) is often limited because the degree track was expedited to improve metrics.

Bladen Community College
Photo: Paige Worsham

As with any educational program, there are multiple barriers to the success of distance learning. In theory, distance learning can be an efficient and effective way to increase educational attainment in the more isolated areas of the state, helping to level the educational

Veteran and Military Students

Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) has been rated one of the nation's top colleges for veterans and one of the most military friendly. With its close proximity to Fort Bragg, active military and veteran students and their families comprise a large portion of the student body and there are numerous programs designed to facilitate their educational achievement.

The FTCC Fort Bragg Center is located on the military base and offers counseling, registration, and testing services. FTCC also offers courses at Fort Bragg specifically for service members and families. These courses are taught on an expedited schedule and many of them are offered completely online in order to be as complementary to the fluctuations in military life as possible.

Service members and their families based in North Carolina are eligible for in-state tuition. FTCC also offers the All American Veteran Center, designed to provide higher education support for veterans and their families. It is not just a physical home base for veterans but also a place where they can get tailored academic and career guidance.

The North Carolina Military Business Center (NCMBC) is housed within the North Carolina Community College System with locations at ten community colleges statewide, including its headquarters at FTCC. As a collaborative effort between North Carolina businesses and the state's community colleges, NCMBC provides business development services and leverages military and federal employment opportunities to spur job creation and improve the economy.

NCMBC also offers support to highly skilled military personnel, family members and veterans as they transition into the state's workforce. NCMBC has seen success since its inception in 2005, creating defense-related jobs in North Carolina and ensuring that there is a skilled military workforce to fill these jobs.

Sources: Military Programs, Fayetteville Technical Community College, http://www.faytechcc.edu/fort_bragg/index.aspx; N.C. Military Business Center, http://www.ncmbc.us/index.php.

--Michelle Goryn

playing field and removing geography from the list of barriers to receiving a quality education. However, this is a doubled-edged sword. In rural counties in particular, like Bladen, the lack of sufficient bandwidth and internet access generally are pervasive and significant impediments. Many rural residents still have dial-up internet access in their homes, if any at all. Some students resort to taking their online classes on their smart phones, which is incredibly resourceful but troubling at the same time.

More should be done to provide students with access to fast, reliable internet access. In addition, while public schools are supposed to prepare students in the area of technology, many arrive at BCC with little computer literacy. Another ongoing challenge is ensuring quality instruction for online courses. BCC does this by requiring that online courses are taught by the same instructors that teach traditional courses and by establishing a mechanism by which students can access their

instructors and receive feedback with the same reliability as traditional students. Also challenging is marketing BCC's distance learning program.

At present, the best tool for enrollment is word of mouth.[48] However, as the program expands and can sustain greater enrollment from all corners of the state and beyond, there must be a stronger and more embedded strategy for marketing the opportunity, particularly through online channels. The key to an effective distance learning program is rooted firmly at the intersection of access, reliability, quality and a quick response to changing circumstances and workforce demands.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, many community colleges, including BCC, offer their own version of the centralized Minority Male Mentoring program. At BCC the program has been in place for six years. However, unlike many of its counterparts on other campuses, BCC's version of the program targets first-generation minority males and students who have a GPA of 2.0 or lower, both of whom are considered to be at-risk.[49] In rural counties, first-generation college students tend to be more common and, therefore, a more tailored approach to their success is required. Similar to other efforts statewide, BCC's program provides mentoring sessions, tours of four-year colleges, and workshops on critical skills to support growth.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro: A Focus on Hispanic students and the Degrees Matter! Initiative

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) offers an effective initiative geared toward increasing persistence and completion among its Hispanic students, many of whom also tend to be first-generation students. Enrollment of Hispanic students at UNCG has increased by almost 8 percent in the last 10 years without any concerted effort by UNCG. This increase is a testament to the demographic shift in state. The initiative, which is in its early stages, focuses on the recruitment of the student as well as his or her family. Targeting the family in earnest addresses an

important cultural aspect that is reflected in the very close-knit Hispanic community. Furthermore, because a large number of Hispanic students are first-generation students, getting the family's support is often difficult in some circumstances.

Pursuing higher education can be very intimidating— from the application process to the physical campus itself— especially for those not familiar with the institution. Aware of this, UNCG is succeeding at making college more accessible by inviting families of incoming Hispanic freshman to come to campus on a Saturday afternoon. The invitation itself is addressed to the family of the student. The first orientation of this kind was very well attended by parents, siblings, and even cousins of the students. In addition, the orientation was entirely in Spanish, a first for UNCG.

Not only does this effort help build family support for the student, which will increase persistence and completion, but the approach also introduces higher education as a very real opportunity for other family members. In addition to this tailored orientation for Hispanic students, UNCG is increasing its efforts to provide scholarships specifically for Hispanic students.[50]

UNCG has strengthened efforts focusing on part-way home students, or those who have "stopped out" temporarily, thanks in large part to a regional effort called

UNC Greensboro
Photo: Paige Worsham

Degrees Matter!. Degrees Matter! is a partnership between The Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, Opportunity Greensboro, The United Way of Greater Greensboro, and all of

the higher educational institutions in the area including community colleges, public four-year universities, and private institutions. The mission of Degrees Matters! is to increase the number of adults in the area with college degrees. The effort targets those adults who have achieved some college credits but dropped out before earning a credential.

With support from the Lumina Foundation, Degrees Matter! has joined the effort to increase degree completion to 60 percent by the year 2025. Currently, about 40 percent of the population in the greater Greensboro area hold some type of credential.[51] The graduation rate for returning or transfer students tends to be higher than for other students so that makes this particular population critical to increasing overall attainment levels. The Spartan Finish Program, for example, recruits former UNCG students who dropped out with senior status but before degree completion. The university hosts an expansive phonathon twice a year aligned with admissions deadlines. Former students are invited to a "come back" clinic where they are offered the opportunity to return to earn their degree with the support of a network of services. This program was piloted in the spring of 2014 and has seen success.[52]

In partnership with a private nonprofit organization, UNCG also offers a program called Beyond Academics, which makes a post-secondary credential for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities a reality through a robust support network. The four-year certification program prepares students for 21st century jobs, independent living, and to be engaged and civically-minded members of their communities. Created in 2007, the program continues to experience great success with demand consistently outpacing availability (with an average of 56 applications for 15 openings). Students who participated in Beyond Academics experienced greater success in all measured outcomes (including education completion, independent living, paid employment, and community service) than their peers without critical support services.[53]

[Bennett College: Emerging Scholars Mentoring Program](#)

Located in Greensboro, Bennett College is a small, private, historically black college for women. Bennett College offers what is known as the Emerging Scholars Mentoring Program, which provides a layered support network for students that has shown increased levels of persistence and graduation. The program's roughly 35 participants are selected based on their potential for personal, academic, and professional success if provided a certain level of targeted support. Participants are assigned their own personal adviser who are volunteers from both on and off campus. The program offers mentoring, tutoring, and academic tracking.

For example, developmental courses are offered in addition to an in-person check-in once a week with peer tutors and professional advisers. If a student's standing hasn't improved after the first year, then more tailored support is provided, including a pairing between students and mentors for a weekly one-on-one approach. Since the program was implemented in 2013, retention rates have jumped from 54 percent to 83 percent.[54]

Photos: Paige Worsham

In addition, Bennett College has entered into an articulation agreement with seven nearby colleges through which they can offer shared courses and seamless credit transfer. Increased academic options and opportunities cater to the student and allow for greater rates of completion.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte: 49er Finish

Recognizing the importance of increasing attainment levels for nontraditional students, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) has created an office dedicated to the adult learner called the Office of Adult Students and Evening Services (OASES). This office is charged with recruiting both new and "stopped-out" adult learners and supporting them through to degree completion. The office offers services and schedules unique to adults, such as evening and weekend classes and tailored scholarships. The adult students enrolled at UNCC span all types from single or working parents to retirees and mid-career professionals looking to switch careers.

Photo: Paige Worsham

To target the adults who are "part-way home" students, meaning they earned some college credit but stopped out before earning a degree, UNCC offers the 49er Finish Program focused on identifying and welcoming these potential graduates back into the educational pipeline and supporting them as they move to degree completion. This program provides students with mentors and step-by-step guidance in order to make the transition back to college and to graduation as seamless as possible. In addition to the 49er Finish Program, OASES offers a variety of other programs for adults, including an adult mentoring program and two adult honor societies.

Photo: Paige Worsham

University of North Carolina at Pembroke: Student Support Services (SSS) and Cash Course

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) is an historically American Indian liberal arts college located in Robeson County in southeastern North Carolina. The town of Pembroke is home to the Lumbee Indian tribe, which is the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River. About 57 percent of the student body at UNCP is minority and 16 percent is American Indian specifically.[55] This number is incredibly high in comparison to other institutions where the percentage of American Indian students hovers around 1 percent or less.[56]

Given the university's high minority population and history as an American Indian college, the school is committed to providing the supports necessary for minority populations to succeed on campus. UNCP offers Student Support Services

(SSS), a federally funded program, to support disadvantaged students, especially those who are low-income, disabled, or first-generation. American Indians often fall into the low-income and first-generation categories and, therefore, benefit greatly from this support network at UNCP. With a goal of increasing retention and graduation rates, SSS provides tutoring, mentoring, career development, financial aid assistance and social counseling among many other services to help enrich and support the entire student.[57] Support is provided by faculty, staff, and peers.

Through SSS, UNCP also offers a service called Cash Course[58] which is an online program designed to help students take charge of their finances and provide them with the financial literacy required for success in college and beyond.[59] An understanding of basic finances, such as saving and budgeting, is often taken for granted. Without these basic financial skills, students will never achieve financial independence. This service is an example of how UNCP enriches the whole student.

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[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Interview with UNC Greensboro administrators and faculty: Steve Moore, Director of Degrees Matter!; Dana Saunders; Mark Davenport; Sarah Carrigan; Gabriel Bermea; Camy Sorge; Steve Roberson

[51] About Degrees Matter!, http://degreesmatter.org/about/.

[52] UNCG Interview, note 49 above.

[53] Interview with Terri Shelton, UNCG Vice President for Research and Economic Development, and Joan Johnson, Executive Director of Beyond Academics

[54] Interview with Karen Green, Bennett College Vice President of Enrollment.

[55] About the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, http://www.uncp.edu/about-uncp/quick-facts.

[56] National Indian Education Association, http://www.niea.org/Research/Statistics.aspx#HigherEd.

[57] Student Support Services at UNC Pembroke, http://www.uncp.edu/academics/opportunities-programs-resources/academic-resources/trio-programs/student-support-services.

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Cash Course, http://www.cashcourse.org/.

Chapter 4

Lessons Learned: Identifying Common Elements

North Carolina's higher education institutions are working to increase attainment levels among our state's most underserved populations in impressive ways. The programs highlighted in this report offer important lessons in terms of what works and what does not. Drawing commonalities across these lessons is the best way to move forward in creating a culture of personal, educational, and professional success for all students, particularly those most at-risk of falling short of their promise. It is the responsibility of higher education, government, business, and community partners to ensure that all students are prepared for success in a workforce that will continue to become increasingly dominated by high-skilled jobs.

University of North Carolina at Asheville
Photo: Paige Worsham

The most important first step is strengthening the collaborative effort among these partners. Students require and deserve the support system that will best help them succeed, which includes reinforcing that system with the safety nets necessary to plug the leaky educational pipeline. It is equally important to take a closer look at both the successes enjoyed by these programs and also the barriers they face in order to replicate and scale the most promising version of each initiative. The entire country and

even the world look to North Carolina as a model of higher education and as home to some of the best colleges and universities. Only through careful self-evaluation and a deep commitment to collaboration will North Carolina keep its title as one of the best states for opportunities in higher education. The following have been identified as the most important ingredients for successful educational attainment, especially for at-risk students:

1.) Establishing a comprehensive and collaborative **support network**.

2.) Expanding **distance education**.

3.) Building a **sense of community** to increase accountability.

4.) Reframing **metrics for success**.

Establishing a Support Network

One of the most effective ways to increase educational attainment, as evidenced by the highlighted programs, is to provide a comprehensive support network that addresses the needs of the whole student. The greatest successes were seen in efforts that not only provided academic support but also created a community and a sense of pride for each student. In addition, those networks offering social supports, including workshops to manage personal finances or to learn how to dress for any given situation, offer lessons that will impact a student well beyond their time on campus.

Of course, academics is the top priority. Many colleges have early warning systems in place that alert faculty as soon as a student's grades dip below a certain grade point average. This way, the support network in place is able to provide a safety net for the student by offering one-on-one tutoring and mentoring to ensure that the student's academic standing improves before preventing him or her from graduating on time or at all.

Having support mechanisms in place to assist the student from their first point of contact with the college through degree completion is critical. Navigating the application and enrollment process is often a student's first experience with the college. If this process is not smooth, future success is threatened. Ideally, students would be able to find support for the entire duration of their time at the college in the same place. This is often referred to as the University College model and many experts hold this model up as one that would have far reaching positive impact on levels of attainment if it could be established in some form on every campus— public, private, and community college— across the state. Obviously, funding is one of the most pervasive

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Photo: Paige Worsham

constraints to this achievement. However, many campuses are building impressive support networks for their students with very limited funds, a testament to the impact and importance this initiative holds.

Expanding Distance Education

The increased access and flexibility provided by online learning is indispensable to improving attainment levels for at-risk students. Non-traditional students and students from rural areas are especially vulnerable to being shut out of the educational

pipeline simply due to geography or the demands of a very busy life. This is unacceptable. Many colleges are actively expanding their distance education efforts by offering full course loads online. Some students are able to earn a degree without ever setting foot in a traditional classroom. However, while this is certainly impressive, attention must be paid to the ability of students to access online educational opportunities on their end. High-speed internet is not widely available throughout the state, especially in rural areas. This disproportionately affects low-income residents.

Without fast, reliable internet access, the best distance education programs at our colleges and universities might as well not exist for a numerous North Carolinians. Nearly 25 percent of North Carolina's population lives in rural areas.[1] While North Carolina is fortunate to have an excellent community college system that reaches every corner of the state, there are still some counties that have no institution of higher education. Distance education is the only option for many rural residents to earn a post-secondary degree. In order to close the gap in educational attainment for at-risk students, it is imperative that statewide access to broadband internet be part of the equation.

Building Community

Evidence showing that a strong community boosts academic performance is not hard to come by. Strong relationships between a student and his faculty and peers provides encouragement, boosts confidence, and provides a sense of accountability. Much of the anecdotal evidence provided by student participants of the programs highlighted attributed their success to the accountability they felt to attend class, follow through, and graduate. This is especially true for students who come from a culture or family where education is not highly valued or, in some cases, where it is threatening. Students with this background are especially vulnerable to slipping from the

educational pipeline and stand to benefit greatly from a strong sense of community, where they can meet and rely on others who support their educational and professional pursuits.

Building relationships and becoming engaged in the community through service learning programs work to build confidence and a sense of responsibility in the student to improve the lives of others. Many colleges offer community service projects that relate to the subject matter of particular courses. Student engagement can be difficult, particularly at community colleges where students have so many other demands on their time and are not traditional, residential students. Providing opportunities for at-risk students to support others with similar backgrounds can have a positive impact on overall attainment numbers. In fact, service-learning students have higher success rates overall in retention from semester to semester, higher grades, and higher levels of completion.[2]

As mentioned, at Fayetteville State University, the Minority Male Mentoring program offered participants a unique bow tie that indicated inclusion and success in the program. While the bow tie itself is not unique, its symbolic representation is. For many participants, being a part of a positive community to provide support, friendship, and guidance is the most important experience. The power of community to build self-worth and improve chances for academic, professional, and personal success cannot be underestimated.

Samuel Chapman, Student at ABTech
Photo: Paige Worsham

Reframing Success

Traditional ways of measuring educational attainment, such as enrollment numbers and time to graduation and graduation rates, are simply not sufficient and do not reflect the big picture of what it means to successfully prepare a student for a lifetime of professional and personal achievement. This is especially true for community colleges, where the student profile varies greatly, not only from four-year institutions, but even from one community college to another. Most community college students are part-time, which means they will not graduate in the traditional two years. Also, it is not uncommon for one student to attend several schools, much in the same way that young professionals today do not expect to hold the same job for a lifetime. However, simply because a student did not graduate from one school should not mean that the student was not successful or that the institution failed. There are additional, nuanced ways to determine and define success.

The U.S. Department of Education recognized this and now measures community colleges based on three-year graduation rates.[3] This is an improvement, but still does not offer the most accurate reflection of the ability of community colleges to successfully prepare its students. For example, success rates should be measured by the goals of each unique student. The role of higher education, and community colleges in particular, is to prepare its students to become employed in their field of study. An accurate measurement would be to determine whether a student gains employment in the field for which they enrolled. However, the federal government does not combine education and employment data in that way. This method would be a strong measure of success, especially at community colleges where training is often aligned with current workforce demands.[4]

Another potential way to measure student success, regardless of graduation, is whether the student left the institution in good academic standing. This could carry

over into a successful transfer to a different institution or to positive on-the-job training. Because the majority of students stop out of school for non-academic reasons— such as family demands, finances, or health— there is a better chance they will choose to continue their education at a later point.[5]

There are many important qualifications to consider when measuring the success of institutions in student performance. Some colleges enroll a larger number of students from a low socioeconomic background. Therefore, those colleges are pulling students from a greater deficit, but are compared to other schools that did not have the additional hurdle to overcome. For example, many students attending Central Piedmont Community College come from communities where poverty is more concentrated and pervasive, and where the secondary education is not as strong as in other parts of the state. The grade point average for students who enroll immediately after high school graduation is an average of 2.3, compared to the statewide average of 2.8. Pulling data on a student's GPA when he or she leaves CPCC, whether with a credential or not, is a simple statistic to obtain and could be used as a baseline metric for success across all institutions of higher education.[6]

Another important option for measuring student success should be based on his or her ability to repay student loans upon graduation. This would reflect consistent employment with paycheck that allows for basic cost of living as well as loan repayment.

While there have been positive changes for educational success measurement, more needs to be done to take into consideration the unique situation of each student as well as each institution of higher learning. Each student has a very different goal in mind when enrolling in higher education. For some, it is degree completion; for others it is learning a specific skill without necessarily receiving a degree or credential. Similarly, each college (whether public, private, or community college) provides educational services differently because they are each serving a different student body

with unique needs. These nuances should be taken into account when measuring the success of students and the institutions that prepare them, in order to shape a more complete view of how North Carolina measures up in terms of college attainment.

East Carolina University
Photos: Paige Worsham

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[1] Rural Assistance Center, http://www.raconline.org/states/north-carolina.
[2] Interview with Dr. Tony Zeiss, President of Central Piedmont Community College, Dr. Marcia Conston, Vice President for Enrollment, and Dr. Clint McElroy, Dean of Retention Services
[3] *Ibid.*
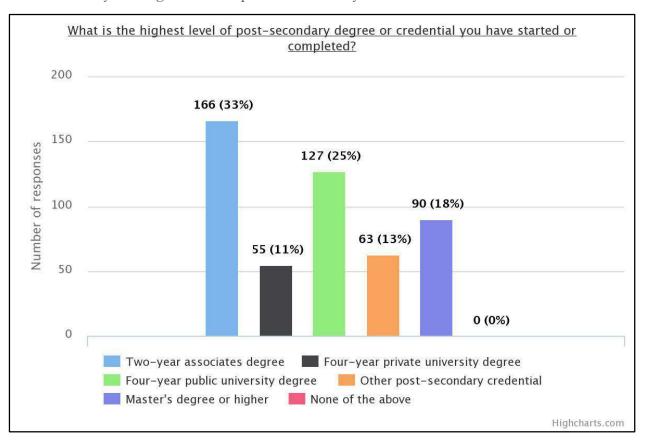[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

Polling Data on College Completion and Tuition
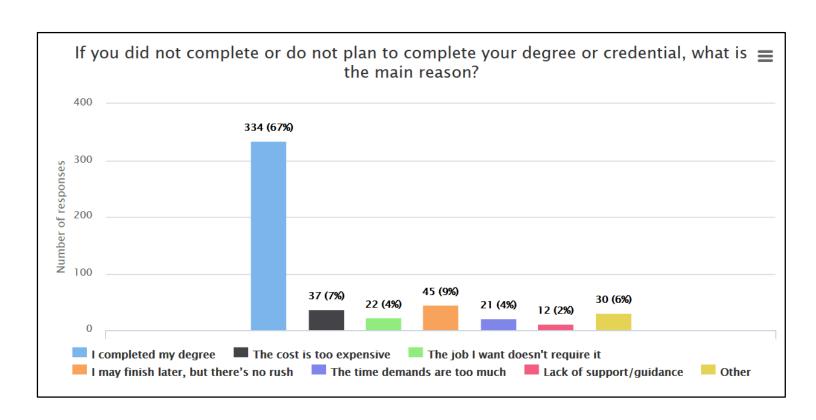# in North Carolina

By: Paige C. Worsham

The Center conducted an online statewide poll in November and December 2014 to survey opinions on highest credential completed, student loan amounts, and reasons North Carolinians do not complete their degree. Some of the survey results provide additional insight into the state-specific story of how individuals are pursuing higher education and what types of barriers they are facing.
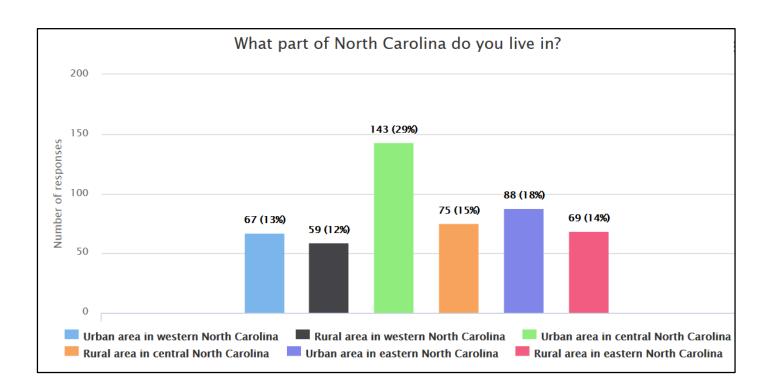
For example:

► 33% of the respondents have started or completed a two-year associate degree, compared to 11% with a four-year degree from a private university and 25% with a four-year degree from a public university.
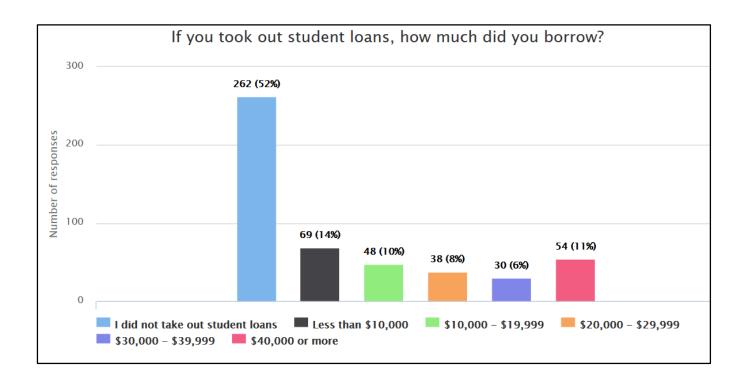

What is the highest level of post-secondary degree or credential you have started or completed?

► 13% of respondents reported starting or completing a different type of post-secondary credential (See "Other post-secondary credential" above). The UNC Board of Governors is revising the UNC System Strategic Directions Plan as it relates to the educational attainment goal to "work with the North Carolina Community Colleges System to develop an educational attainment measure that captures degrees earned at the Associate's and Bachelor's levels, as well as awarded certificates, diplomas, and third-party industry certifications."

► Among the reasons for not finishing a degree or credential, 7 percent of respondents cited financial reasons and 9 percent answered they may finish later.

If you did not complete or do not plan to complete your degree or credential, what is the main reason?
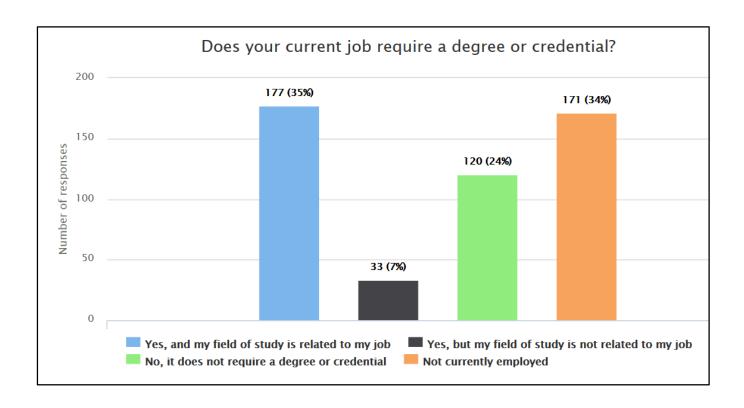
► The survey polled respondents from across the state: 29 percent from an urban area in central N.C., 18 percent from an urban area in eastern N.C., 15 percent from a rural area in central N.C., 14 percent from a rural area in eastern N.C., 13 percent from an urban area in western N.C., and 12 percent from a rural area in western N.C.

What part of North Carolina do you live in?

Number of responses

- 143 (29%)
- 88 (18%)
- 75 (15%)
- 67 (13%)
- 69 (14%)
- 59 (12%)

Urban area in western North Carolina | Rural area in western North Carolina | Urban area in central North Carolina
Rural area in central North Carolina | Urban area in eastern North Carolina | Rural area in eastern North Carolina
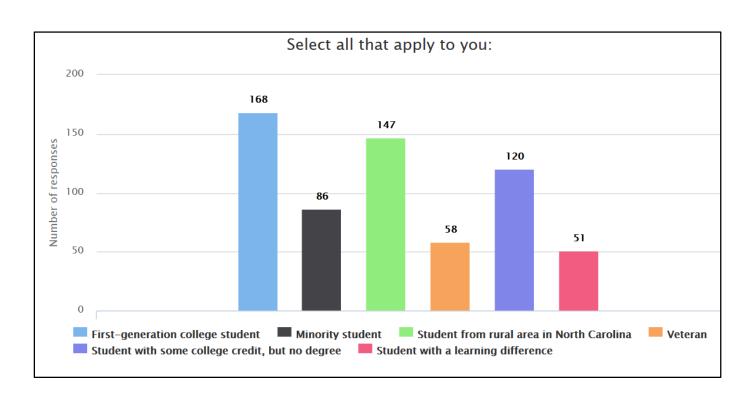
► Survey respondents that took out student loans generally fell on the outer ends of the borrowing spectrum, with 66% borrowing nothing to $10,000, and 11 percent borrowing $40,000 or more.

If you took out student loans, how much did you borrow?

262 (52%)

69 (14%)

48 (10%)

38 (8%)

30 (6%)

54 (11%)

Number of responses

- I did not take out student loans
- Less than $10,000
- $10,000 – $19,999
- $20,000 – $29,999
- $30,000 – $39,999
- $40,000 or more

► 35 percent of respondents said their current job requires a degree or credential and their field of study in school is related to their occupation. 24 percent responded their current job does not require a specific degree or credential.

Does your current job require a degree or credential?

177 (35%) 171 (34%)

120 (24%)

33 (7%)

Number of responses

200

150

100

50

0

■ Yes, and my field of study is related to my job   ■ Yes, but my field of study is not related to my job
■ No, it does not require a degree or credential   ■ Not currently employed

► The survey respondents included multiple demographic groups.

Select all that apply to you:

Bar chart — Number of responses:
- First-generation college student: 168
- Minority student: 86
- Student from rural area in North Carolina: 147
- Veteran: 58
- Student with some college credit, but no degree: 120
- Student with a learning difference: 51

Legend:
- First-generation college student
- Minority student
- Student from rural area in North Carolina
- Veteran
- Student with some college credit, but no degree
- Student with a learning difference

Note: Survata Online Survey conducted Nov.-Dec. 2014, Respondents: 501 adults living in North Carolina. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

High Point University
Photo: Paige Worsham

North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research