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INDIANA PROJECT ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

IPAS TOPIC BRIEFS

INQUIRY-BASED RESEARCH

Part-time Students

ENROLLMENT AND PERSISTENCE IN THE STATE OF INDIANA

BY Tina Tuttle

Part-time students have comprised a significant part of America's undergraduates since at least the 1970s. Enrolling part time has been a strategy to attend college among a significant portion of college students for decades, increasing from 29% in 1970 to a high in the late 1990s of 42% (see Display 1). The reasons students attend part time are varied, including working full time, raising and supporting a family and for financial necessity.

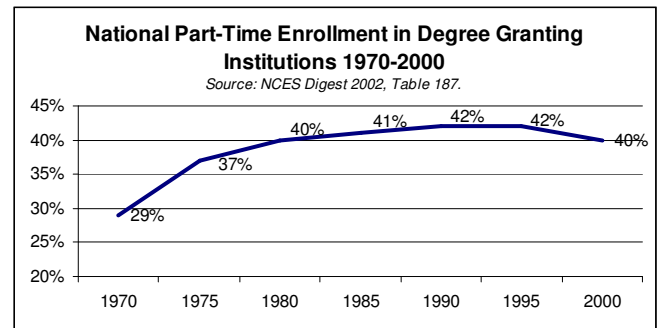
The concern of institutions under fiscal pressure to demonstrate outcomes through graduation rates results in institutions (and researchers) often regarding part-time enrollment as a retention "risk factor." The concern is centered around increased time to completion and higher risk of non-completion. In the state of Indiana, state appropriations for public sector funding are tied to FTE (full-time equivalent), and the formula for appropriations (one-third of full-time equivalent) does not favor schools with a large proportion of part-time students.

Never the less, part-time enrollment is not only unlikely to decline, but instead will likely rise as education becomes more and more important for access to economic security. Those in the population without a degree will continue to pass through Indiana institutions for education and necessary job credentials. The rising cost of education will also make part-time enrollment a financial strategy for many students on their pathway to a certificate and degree.

This IPAS brief is excerpted from a research report on part-time students in Indiana following the 2000 first-year cohort¹ through two years of enrollment and persistence (Tuttle & Musoba, 2005). Two definitions of part time will be used in this brief; **part6** referring to students who are enrolled 6 or fewer hours (one or two classes at most institutions) and **part11** which is enrollment in 7-11 hours.

The data set used, the IPAS data set, includes merged data from the Indiana Commission on

Display 1.



Indiana Part-Time Highlights

- Students enrolled 7-11 hours were more likely to persist than students enrolled 6 or fewer hours.
- Part-time students with a "C" GPA in high school were more likely to persist than students with a "B" GPA in high school.
- Part-time students receiving combinations of grants and loans or mixed packages including work study were 1.5 times to more than 2-times more likely to persist than those receiving no aid.
- 60% of part-time students did NOT apply for aid.
- Of those who did file for financial aid only 29% received aid.

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Smith Center for Research
2805 East 10th Street
Suite 100
Bloomington, IN 47408

Phone: 812-855-0186
Email: retain@indiana.edu
www.indiana.edu/~ipas1/
Edward P. St. John, Director

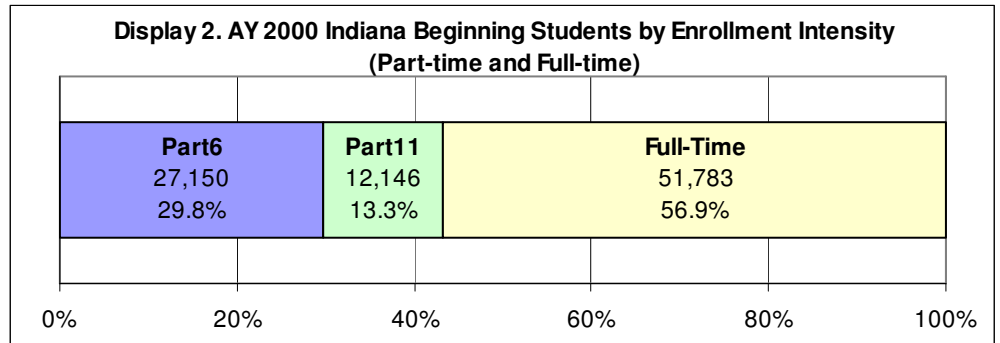
This IPAS Topic Brief
by

Tina Tuttle
(ttuttle@indiana.edu)



Higher Education (ICHE) and financial data for students who filled out their FAFSA form at least in their first semester of classes.

Of students starting school in Indiana in 2000, 40,583 students or 43% of total first time students, attended college part-time. Of these, 29.8% attended 6 hours or less, and 12,420 (13.1%) attended between 7-11 hours. (See Display 2.) These part-time figures are consistent with national averages of 40% in 2000 (Choy, 2002).



Why do students attend part time?

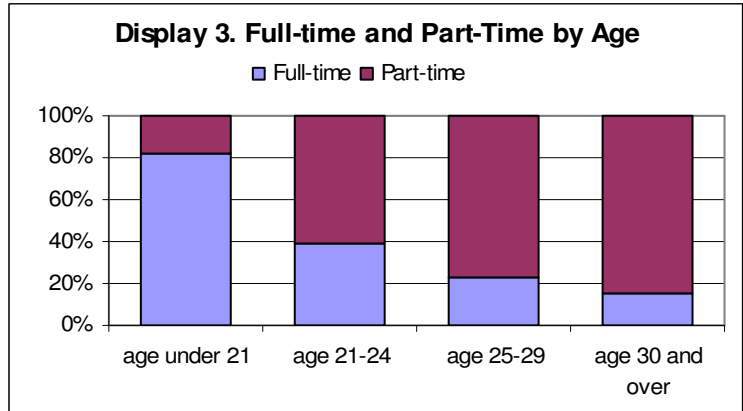
Part-time enrollment is a choice for many students who must work and/or raise families but still want to pursue a college education. Part-time students are most likely to be older, most likely to attend community colleges, to delay entry to college, to enroll while maintaining family and work commitments and consequently take longer to complete their degree.

Trends over the past three decades in opening new opportunities and access to college to a broader group of students have made part-time enrollment a necessary tactic for adults with commitments. Economists talk of the forgone income—the opportunity costs—of pursuing an education full time as an adult. This cost has increased in two respects: with the ever-rising costs of tuition, books, computer equipment, and fees and the increased risks involved in taking out loans to cover the costs and with the probability of not graduating over the extended period of time. Rising tuition and fees and the cost of books and technology requirements over the past 20 years have changed the financing and balancing act of paying for a college education. Student aid has long since lost pace (and the race) to offset education costs for low-income students and families (St. John, 2003). Many students must attend part time because they must work to pay as they go and/or support their family.

Part-time enrollment lengthens the time to degree significantly, making the strategy of taking out loans a much more costly proposition, especially loans that require an immediate repayment cycle (private or unsubsidized loans). Part-time enrollments are not only here to stay, but are likely to become the norm for future generations of students as costs are unlikely to stop escalating and aid has long since ceased to keep up with rising costs. Indeed, the need for a higher education credential to achieve economic stability will only increase, especially as adults around the world become lifelong learners who must adapt to constant change through education.

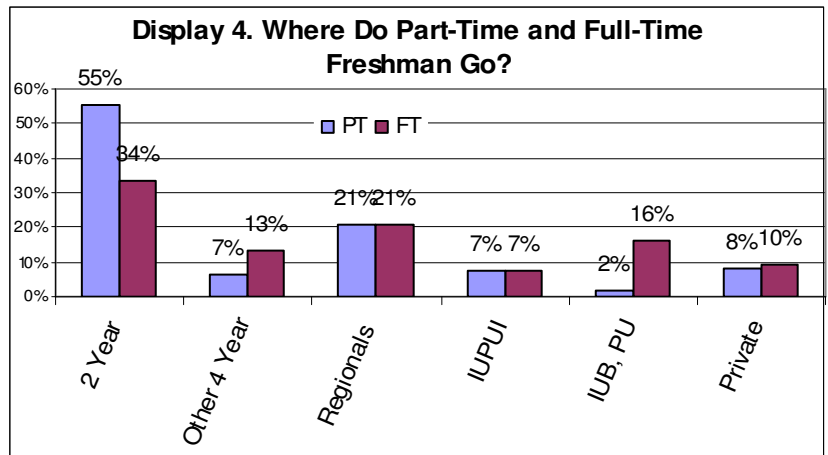
Who among Indiana students attend part time?

There were no major differences between full-time and part-time enrollment by demographic categories like gender or ethnicity. There is a general notion that part-time students are older students. In the Indiana 2000 first year cohort 24% of part-time students were under age 21. The gap between full time and part time attendees increased with age with 54% of students 25 or older attending part time compared to 45% of students 24 years old or younger (see Display 3).



Where do part-time students attend?

In Indiana, 55% of part-time students are enrolled in community colleges as well as 34% of all freshmen in Indiana. They were next most likely to be found on regional campuses of IU and Purdue (21%), followed by private institutions (8%) and IUPUI (7%).

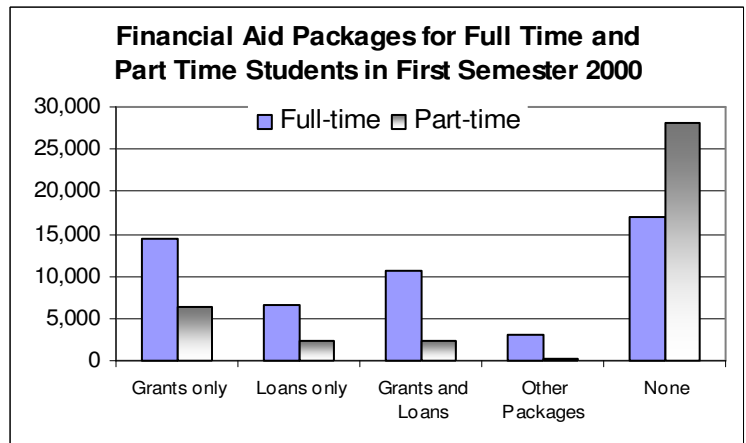


Delayed entry and academic preparation

Academic preparation is frequently found to be strongly linked to college success. In the case of part-time students, the limits of academic preparation data on students who did not start college immediately after high school limit our findings regarding academic preparation. Over 28% of first-time beginning part-time students began college in the spring instead of the fall. Those who delayed entry this way were 1.3 times more likely to persist through their fourth semester ($p < .001$)².

Financial aid and part-time students

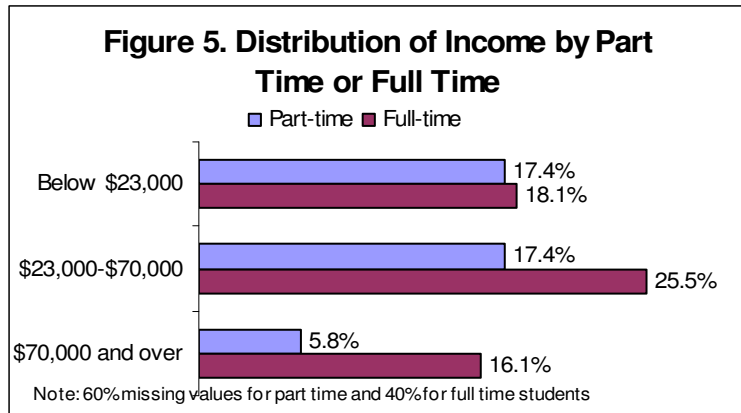
The literature on part-time students would seem to suggest shortcomings in the financial aid available to them to help attend college. Several studies illustrated that part-time students were less likely to receive financial aid. In this cohort of nearly 40,000 students, 60% did not submit a financial aid application (FAFSA). Of those students who DID apply for financial aid (40%), nearly three-quarters (71%) did not receive any aid. These high numbers of non-applicants and non-awardees certainly hint at something about eligibility and awareness of financial aid application procedures. A recent study by the American Council on Education indicated that nationwide, in academic year 1999-2000, 850,000 students who did not apply for financial aid would likely have been eligible for at least a Pell grant (King, 2004).



What about students with employer fee remis-

sions or either private sector or institutional and departmental scholarships? We were curious as to how many students received some form of financial aid but did not apply for financial aid through the FAFSA. Fully 18% (1,141) of the students NOT submitting a FAFSA received a grant of some sort from one of those above-mentioned sources.

Because so many part-time students did not submit a financial aid application, the source of much student financial and socio economic data, income data is missing for nearly 60% of this population.



Why don’t more part-time students apply for financial aid?

The development of an extensive network in the state of Indiana to communicate college preparation has succeeded in increasing the numbers of students going on to post secondary education and communicating to students and their families the financial aid opportunities.

There is no such effort to communicate the availability of aid programs to those not in high school, however. Many of the activities are centered on the college access cycle that is well-coordinated with the high school academic year. Students who have been out of high school for any length of time do not have the same information bombarding them, and only a certain percentage will receive information in their enrollment process.

Part-time students are enrolled predominantly in lower cost institutions, as they tend to enroll nearest their house instead of relocating as do many newly graduated high school students.

Part-time students and persistence through fourth semester

Using a statistical analysis called a multiple logistic regression, we compared both full-and part-time students and conducted a second analysis comparing part-time 6 hours or less to students enrolled 7-11 hours. In these analyses, we controlled for a variety of elements, or variables. These elements are known to affect college access and persistence and are adapted from the St. John “workable models approach”.

Persistence findings

Enrollment intensity was found to be strongly related to persistence; Part11 students were nearly twice as likely to persist to their fourth semester as Part6 students (1.91 p<.001). Comparing full-time students to part-time students, Part6 were less than half as likely to persist than full-time students(.43, p<.001), and Part11 students had nearly the same odds of persisting as full-time students(.94, p<.01).

Other statistically significant findings include

- Out-of-state part-time students were 2.4 times more likely to persist than in-state part-time students.
- Among part-time students, those who started in the spring semester instead of the fall semester (27.8%) were 1.3 times more likely to persist (1.31 p<001).

Financial Aid & Part-time

- Of 39,296 part-time students in Indiana, 28,032 student did not receive federal or state financial aid.
- 11,264 (29.1%) received some form of federal, state or institutional aid.
- 60% of part-time students did not apply for financial aid.
- 55% of part-time students went to Indiana 2-year public institutions.
- 18% of the students who did not file a FAFSA received some other financial award (employer fee remission, departmental fee remission or scholarship).

- Not surprisingly, part-time students whose college GPA was “C” or lower were significantly less likely to persist than students with a college GPA of “B.”
- When compared to community colleges, where the majority of the part-time students attended, persistence was consistently and significantly negative at all other institution types.

Financial aid and persistence

Echoing findings from other recent studies on persistence of Indiana college students, financial aid was strongly associated with persistence. Receiving loans was positively associated with persistence (1.16, $p < .05$), while a combination of grants and loans increased odds of persisting by 1.67 times (1.67, $p < .001$). Receiving other financial aid packages, including work-study more than doubled persistence of part-time students (2.16, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Part-time enrollment will continue to be an important part of college enrollments in the state of Indiana and the nation. This study indicates some interesting findings in persistence, but perhaps most worth additional investigation is why part-time students are less likely to apply for financial aid. Is this because more part-time students are of low socio economic status and lack knowledge of the system? Is this because of lack of information related to cultural or social capital (parents and family members familiar with the system)? Is this because community colleges, whose enrollments have been growing quicker than staff are hired, have not been able to concentrate on financial aid information counseling as part of enrollment counseling? Or is it because of the growing reliance on web-based enrollment cuts out the face to face contact with an enrollment officer that is often the first source of financial aid contact for a new or returning student? Employee tuition benefits have frequently been assumed to explain part of the disparity, but there is evidence from national studies indicating these benefits are more likely to be awarded to the more educated executive-level employees, rather than the students more likely to attend community colleges and those pursuing their first degree.

Some reports have suggested that many low-income working adults would greatly benefit from financial aid (Bosworth & Choitz, 2004), but those who learn about financial aid often apply too late to qualify for most state and institutional aid, which require early application. Since aid is known to impact access, persistence, and graduation, it might be worth investigating the benefits of financial aid awareness programs, especially in view of the ACE report on FAFSA application trends (King, 2004).

Since financial aid was found to be significantly associated with persistence for part-time students in Indiana, colleges and universities would be well served to find ways to reach out to part-time students with information on the availability of and application for financial aid to assist them in reaching their education goals. Although it cannot be known how many students are enrolled in postsecondary education who are taking classes for work or personal enrichment, for those who are degree seeking, on-time financial aid applications can be the difference between barely scraping by and at least having the resources for basics.

Other Support Services. Colleges and universities may also want to examine the climate and support services available to part-time students whose schedules may make it difficult for them to make it to offices with 9-4 schedules, especially if there are parking difficulties in getting to those offices. Are part-time students included as part of orientation or first year seminars? The web is often seen as the most cost-efficient and expedient way to reach students and a vehicle for many services, including, at some campuses, advising. However, for some types of students at some campuses, this is not the best medium as web access may be sporadic for some students, including adults, low-income and disadvantaged populations.

As Indiana looks for solutions to providing a technologically skilled workforce that stays in state and serves to attract business and industry from the technology sector, it would be worthwhile to further examine the characteristics of this population and develop aid programs and support initiatives that would create incentives for students to stay in school, even part time, and to finish their degrees or transfer to four-year institutions.

Notes

1. Students in 2000 cohort are beginning students, defined as “freshman” or first year students. This can include students with previous credits, but not enough for second year status.
2. Where “p-levels” are indicated after an odds ratio, these indicate the statistical strength of the finding. A $p < .001$ indicates the chances that this finding being not true is 1 in 1000; one chance in 100 of not being true is expressed $p < .01$, and $P < .05$ is 5 in 100. These statistics are derived from multiple logistic regressions which control for a host of demographic, socio-economic, and academic category and are expressed as an odds ratio. An odds ratio results from a comparison with another category of the variable taking into account the other student characteristics. For much of this study, the two regressions discussed are comparisons between part time and full time, or between the two categories of part time (Part6 and Part11) with an outcome (dependent) variable of persistence to the fourth semester. An odds ratio written as 2.16, $p < .001$ indicates that one variable (say Hispanic/Latino) was more than 2 times more likely than the comparison (say the comparison was African American) of persisting to the fourth semester, and that this was significant at the .001 level, indicating one chance in a thousand that this finding was not true.

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