

Completion Rates at Thomas Nelson Community College

2020 Overview and Analysis

Overview

Community colleges serve a highly diverse population, both in terms of student demographics and socioeconomic status and in terms of educational goals. This level of diversity is at the core of community college missions of access to quality, affordable education for all. However, that diversity also makes it more challenging to evaluate student success and completion. Traditional definitions of completion in higher education have focused on full-time students, and on graduation from the student's initial institution of enrollment within 150% of time for their declared program. Recognizing that such measures overlook many community college students (e.g., part-time students, students who move between institutions), broader definitions of completion have been developed and more widely adopted. This report provides an overview of two prominent methods for evaluating student completion and the resulting Thomas Nelson Community College completion rates based on those two methods.

Completion at Initial Institution within 150% of Intended Time

Each year, as part of the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), all institutions of higher education that operate in the United States and participate in federal student financial aid programs report on the graduation outcomes of their students. The IPEDS Graduation Rate component collects information on the number and percent of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students that graduated from their intended program of study within 150% of expected time (e.g., three years for an associate's degree, six years for a bachelor's degree).

In Fall 2016, 815 individuals entered Thomas Nelson as full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students. Of those 815, 217 (26.6%) graduated from Thomas Nelson within the 150% of time window. An additional 132 (16.2%) transferred to another institution of higher education (without graduating from Thomas Nelson) within the 150% of time window. Table 1, below, summarizes these completion and transfer rates over recent years, and shows that the rates have been improving at Thomas Nelson.

Table 1. IPEDS Graduation and Transfer-Out Rates for Thomas Nelson, Fall 2008 through 2016 Cohorts

Entering Semester	Cohort Students N	Graduation within 150% of Time		Transfer without Graduation, within 150% of Time		Combined Total, Graduation or Transfer	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Fall 2008	951	102	10.7%	106	11.1%	208	21.9%
Fall 2009	1,104	151	13.7%	147	13.3%	298	27.0%
Fall 2010	934	147	15.7%	176	18.8%	323	34.6%
Fall 2011	877	139	15.8%	136	15.5%	275	31.4%
Fall 2012	854	143	16.7%	162	19.0%	305	35.7%
Fall 2013	935	176	18.8%	172	18.4%	348	37.2%
Fall 2014	857	162	18.9%	138	16.1%	300	35.0%
Fall 2015	824	162	19.7%	139	16.9%	301	36.5%
Fall 2016	815	217	26.6%	132	16.2%	349	42.8%

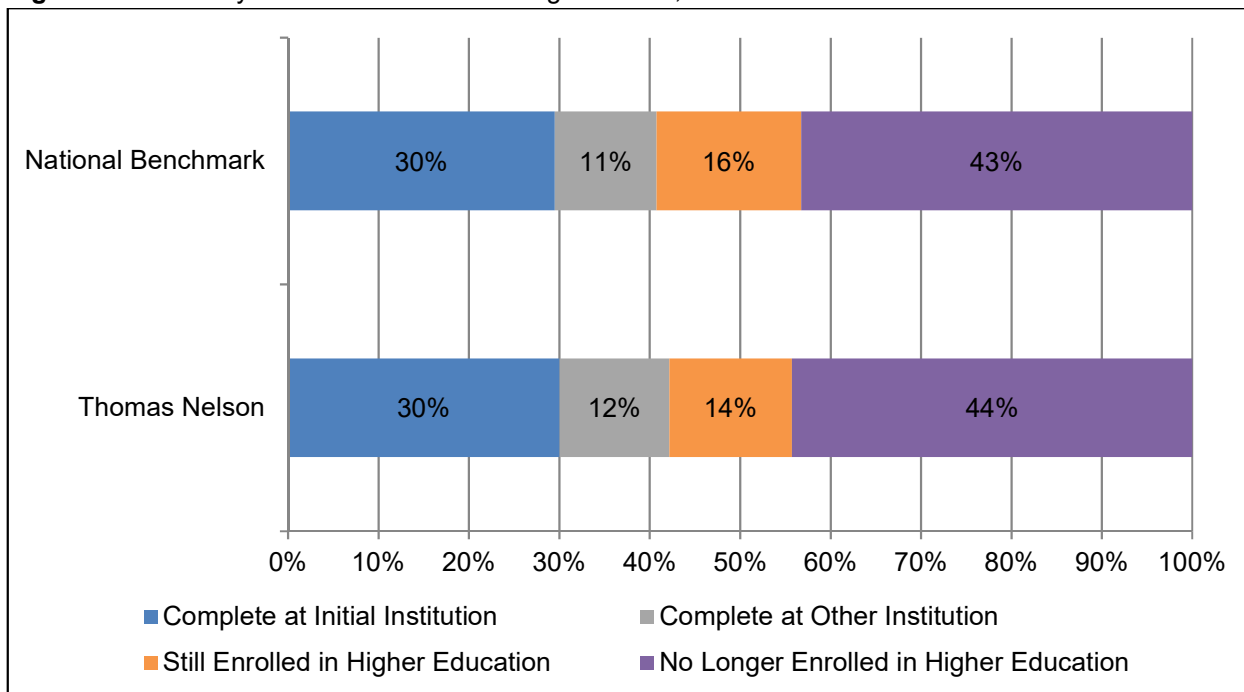
Of particular note here is the increase in the 150% of time graduation rate at Thomas Nelson in recent years. For the Fall 2008 entering cohort of students, that rate was 10.7%. With the most recent cohort (Fall 2016), that rate has risen to 26.6%. This equates to a 149% increase in the College's graduation rate over that time period.

Completion at Any Institution within Six Years

In an effort to more fully document student completion, the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) has recently begun producing its own reports on student outcomes for participating institutions of higher education. The NSC serves as a warehouse of student data across United States institutions of higher education, and facilitates broader views of student movement between institutions and completion across institutions. Reporting from the NSC also recognizes that many students, and particularly those enrolling at community colleges, do not begin as full-time students. Even those who do enter as full-time students rarely maintain that level of enrollment throughout their studies. For these reasons, the NSC reporting includes both full- and part-time entering students, and looks at their outcomes over a period of six years from first enrollment in higher education.

In Fall 2013, 1,196 individuals entered Thomas Nelson as first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students under the NSC definition. Of those 1,196, 504 (42%) graduated from Thomas Nelson or another institution of higher education within six years. An additional 162 (14%) were still enrolled in higher education at the six-year point. These rates are very close to national benchmarks for community colleges, which for the same year were 41% for graduation and 16% for continued enrollment in higher education (Figure 1).

Figure 1. NSC Six-year Outcomes for Entering Students, Thomas Nelson and National Benchmark



When considering a more traditional group of college students (those who enter at 20 years old or younger and attend college in an exclusively full-time manner), graduation rates from Thomas Nelson are considerably higher. In Fall 2013, 159 such individuals entered Thomas Nelson as first-time, degree/certificate seeking students under the NSC definition. Of those 159, 123 (78%) graduated from Thomas Nelson or another institution of higher education within six years. An additional 1 (1%) was still enrolled in higher education at the six-year point. These rates are somewhat higher than national benchmarks for community colleges, which for the same year were 68% for graduation and 2% for continued enrollment in higher education.

To better understand its six-year completion rate data and where disparities exist among its major student populations, Thomas Nelson disaggregates the data by race/ethnicity and gender. Figure 2, below, provides disaggregation by race/ethnicity. Of particular note is the considerable disparity between the two largest race/ethnicity groups within the Thomas Nelson student body – Black students and White students. Black

student six-year completion rates are at 32%, which is 18 percentage points below the 50% completion rate for White students.

Figure 2. NSC Six-year Outcomes for Entering Students, by Major Race/Ethnicity Groups

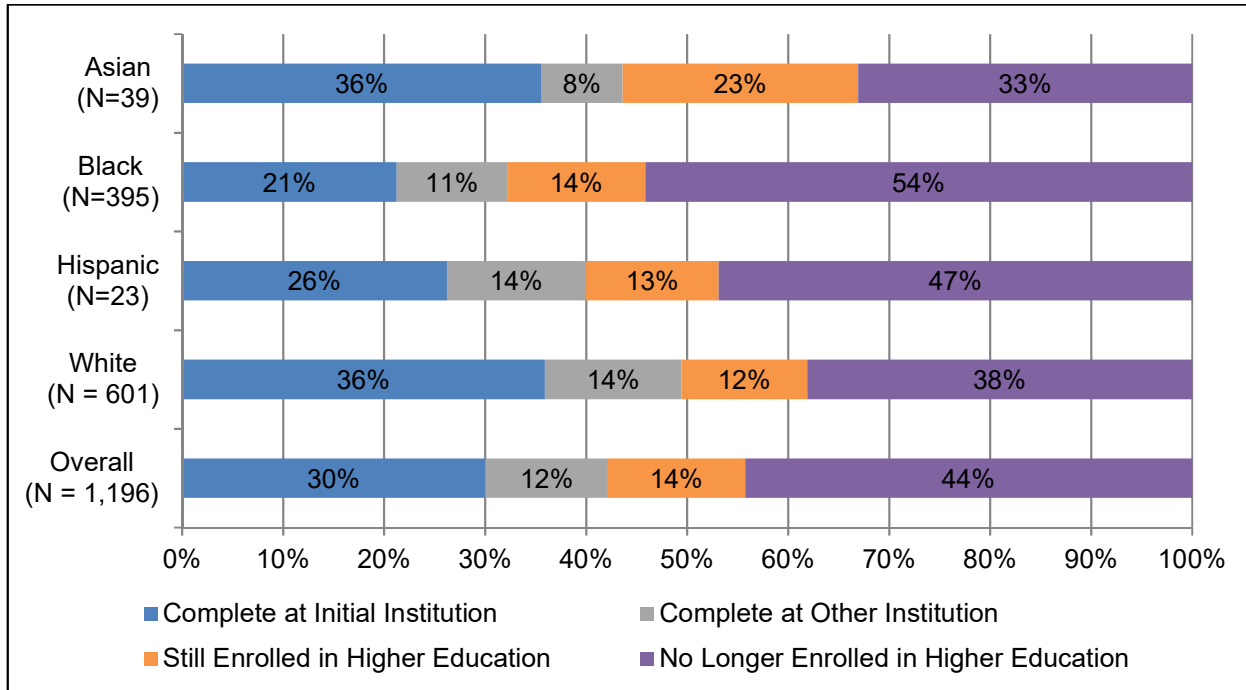


Figure 3, below, provides disaggregation by race/ethnicity for male students. Here, disparities in six-year outcomes between Black males and White males is even more pronounced. Black male student six-year completion rates are at 28%, which is 20 percentage points below the 48% completion rate for White male students.

Figure 3. NSC Six-year Outcomes for Entering Male Students, by Major Race/Ethnicity Groups

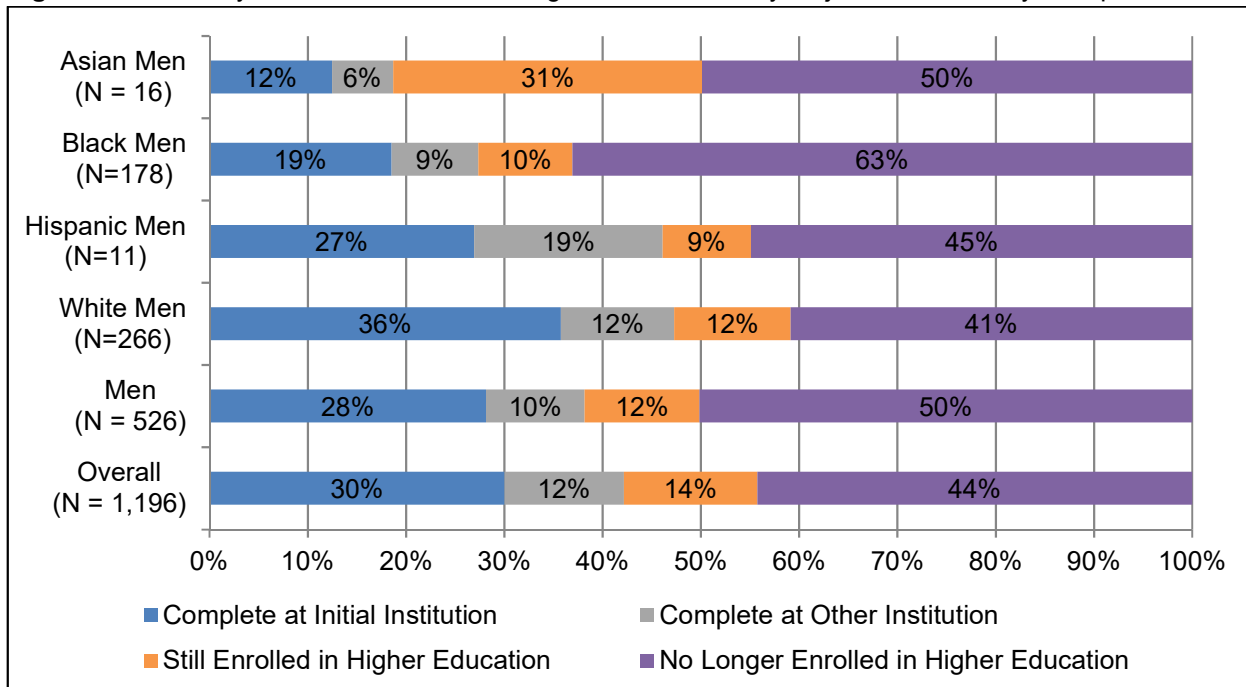
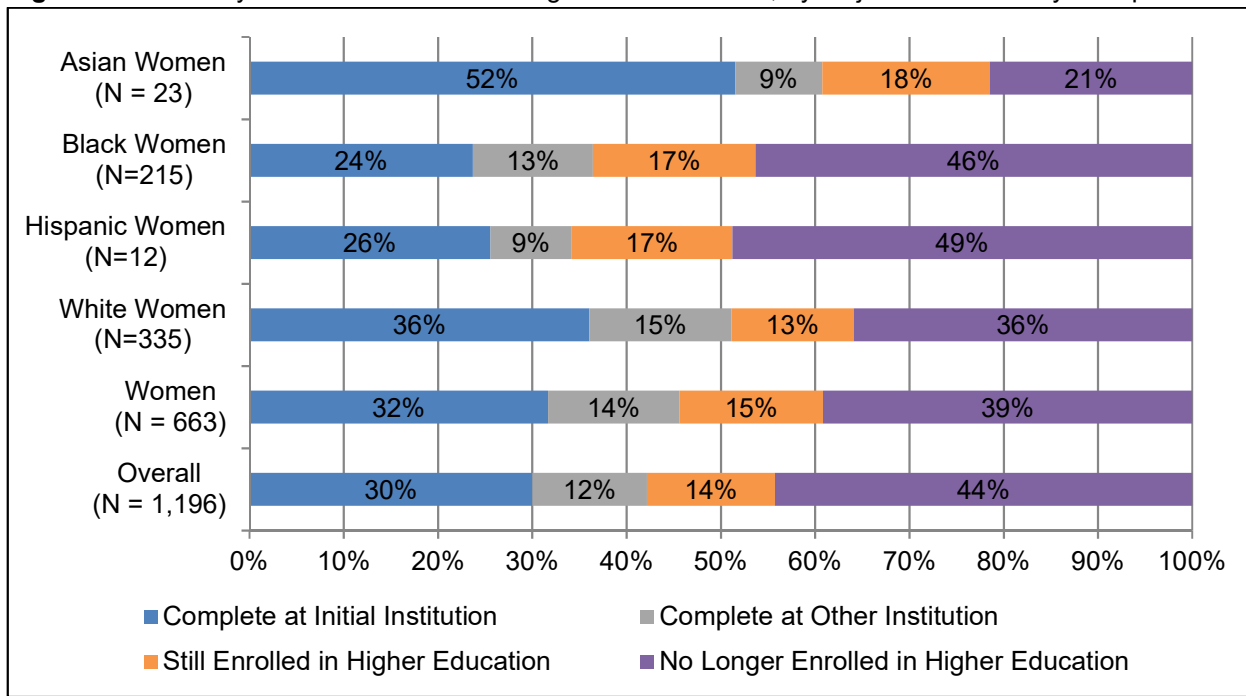


Figure 4, below, provides disaggregation by race/ethnicity for female students. Again, disparities in six-year outcomes between Black females and White females is considerable. Black female student six-year completion rates are at 37%, which is 14 percentage points below the 51% completion rate for White female students.

Figure 4. NSC Six-year Outcomes for Entering Female Students, by Major Race/Ethnicity Groups



Overall, female students have more positive six-year completion outcomes than male students, with 48% of females completing within six years and 38% of males completing within six years.

Summary

Overall, recent data from IPEDS and from the NSC demonstrate that Thomas Nelson graduation rates are improving, and that six-year completion outcomes for Thomas Nelson students are comparable to those at other community colleges. Increases in completion rates have accelerated in recent years, and at least a portion of those increases can be attributed to concentrated work on improving academic advising and course scheduling.

Disaggregation of six-year completion outcomes suggests that considerable disparities continue to exist among students of different genders and race/ethnicity. The disparities are particularly pronounced when looking at data for the College’s two largest student groups in terms of race/ethnicity – Black students and White students. Among the large groups of students that the College serves, Black males are experiencing the lowest six-year completion rates. This indicates that the College should engage in discussions regarding the causes for these disparities and recommended actions to address them.

The College is continuing its work on improving completion outcomes through the goals and related objectives of its strategic plan and the Virginia Community College System’s strategic plan and will be evaluating new data on completion as they become available. Both strategic plans emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusion and seek to address in a holistic manner the equity gaps that exist in student attainment and completion.