

## Momentum: A Focus on First Term Success and Persistence to Spring Term

One of the most important and challenging problems facing community colleges is the persistence of students. Although our students have access to higher educational opportunities, many students drop out before completing an award or achieving their academic goals. Cliff Adelman suggests that what we need to work on is meaningful participation in college, where students succeed in their classes and persist through graduation.<sup>1</sup>

This Snapshot examines student success during the first fall term of enrollment in terms of percent of credits completed and subsequent rates of persistence to the following spring term.

### Cohort

Fall 2006, first-time-in-college, program-placed students comprise the cohort. Students who began their coursework during the prior summer or who were formerly dual enrolled were also included in the cohort.

### Definitions

In order for students to be considered “persisters” to a given term, students either enrolled in that term or completed an award by that term.

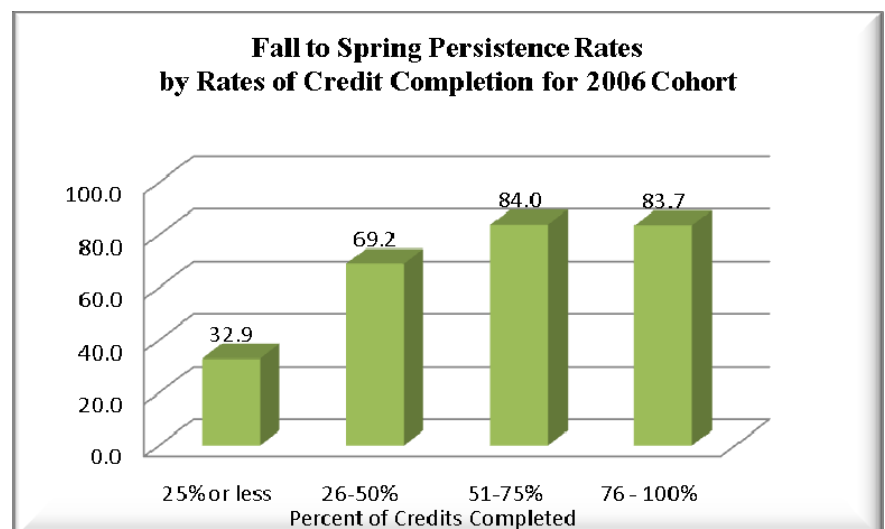
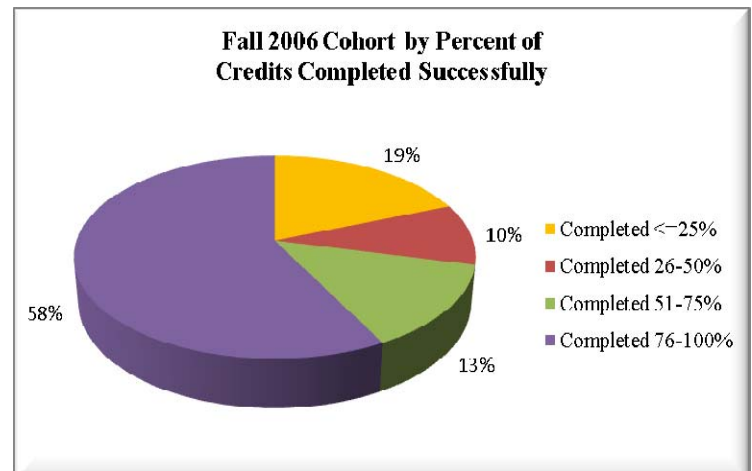
Successful completion of a course means the student received a grade of A, B, C, P, or S.

### Highlights

- Systemwide, only 70% of credits attempted were completed.
- Three in four students (73%) returned the subsequent spring.
- Students who completed more than half of the credits they attempted returned at much higher rates (84%) than those who completed less than half of the credits (69% and 33%).

### Reflections

- Non-success is costly to the student in terms of lost momentum and having to repeat courses. It is also costly to the institution in terms of less efficient use of faculty and staff and support services.
- The more colleges can do to support students to be successful in first term, the more likely students are to maintain momentum—to persist and ultimately attain success.



<sup>1</sup>January/February 2008 Educational Equity Brief. Downloaded August 6, 2008 from [www.marineducationfund.org/downloads/EquityBrief-JanFeb\\_2008.pdf](http://www.marineducationfund.org/downloads/EquityBrief-JanFeb_2008.pdf).

**Mean Percent of Credits Completed Successfully in First Term and Persistence Rates  
for the Fall 2006 Cohort of First-Time-in-College, Program-Placed Students**

	Cohort	Percent of Credits Completed	Fall to Spring Persistence Rates by Quartile							
			25% or less Credits Completed		26-50% Credits Completed		51-75% Credits Completed		76 - 100% Credits Completed	
			N	% Persist	N	% Persist	N	% Persist	N	% Persist
Blue Ridge	765	66.6	168	29.8	75	69.3	116	85.3	406	87.4
Central Virginia	720	72.6	134	27.6	63	60.3	77	75.3	446	82.3
Dabney S. Lancaster	229	70.2	39	25.6	23	65.2	36	86.1	131	87.8
Danville	568	79.1	69	31.9	40	75.0	66	77.3	393	92.1
Eastern Shore	181	80.0	23	4.4	11	54.6	16	75.0	131	85.5
Germanna	1051	71.6	180	36.1	118	67.0	130	76.2	623	84.4
J. Sargeant Reynolds	1267	65.4	321	30.5	118	62.7	136	78.7	692	82.5
John Tyler	925	70.1	154	41.6	109	72.5	165	86.7	497	91.4
Lord Fairfax	972	71.1	196	25.5	77	59.7	108	82.4	591	85.6
Mountain Empire	527	67.0	127	23.6	41	68.3	63	85.7	296	75.7
New River	573	70.6	95	31.6	72	69.4	78	82.1	328	86.6
Northern Virginia	6995	71.1	1292	39.3	666	73.1	934	86.5	4103	82.3
Patrick Henry	501	73.8	88	21.6	39	74.4	57	75.4	317	87.4
Paul D. Camp	267	70.3	55	21.8	24	75.0	30	73.3	158	83.5
Piedmont Virginia	728	74.1	119	24.4	56	67.9	107	82.2	446	84.1
Rappahannock	379	71.9	65	32.3	44	68.2	40	82.5	230	83.5
Southside Virginia	620	76.6	86	26.7	57	73.7	73	76.7	404	81.2
Southwest Virginia	546	74.6	90	18.9	36	63.9	69	87.0	351	82.6
Thomas Nelson	1638	69.4	319	29.2	161	63.4	230	83.0	928	79.0
Tidewater	4435	68.0	869	38.8	518	69.3	696	87.1	2352	82.6
Virginia Highlands	402	67.3	86	32.6	44	65.9	63	81.0	209	86.1
Virginia Western	974	64.0	253	22.5	89	73.0	137	83.2	495	88.7
Wytheville	388	78.8	50	12.0	33	60.6	33	78.8	272	90.4
System	25651	70.4	4878	32.9	2514	69.2	3460	84.0	14799	83.7

**How Were Data Generated?**

- Fall and Summer 2006 AKT files were used to build the first time in college cohort. Courses where students audited, received an incomplete, or had missing grades were eliminated from the calculations.
- The previous four years of UDT annual files were used to determine students who were formerly dual enrolled.
- Graduate files 2006-07 were used to determine who had earned awards.
- Spring 2007 AKT files were used to determine students still enrolled.
- Financial aid files 2006-07 were used to determine Pell recipients.

**Where Can I Learn More?**

Visit <http://www.vccs.edu/studentssuccess> to learn more about student success. Data in this Snapshot were analyzed by full-time/part-time status, age, developmental course taking in Fall 06, and Pell award status. These data can be found on the student success website.