Community college transfers shine at four-year schools

A report released this month indicates that most students who transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college will earn a bachelor’s degree.

And, the two-year student transfer graduation rate is slightly higher than for students who go straight to college from high school.

Within six years, about 62 percent of students who transferred from a two-year school in 2005-06 graduated with a four-year degree, and 8 percent were still working toward a degree, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center’s annual Signature Report. Graduation rates are even higher for community college students who obtain a two-year degree or certificate before transferring: 72 percent, according to the report. The National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization, collects enrollment, degree and certificate records for more than 3,500 higher education institutions.

About 58 percent of first-time, full-time students who started seeking a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution in fall 2004 earned a bachelor's degree within six years, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, a federal entity that collects and analyzes data.

In addition, data for Portland, Clackamas and Mt. Hood community colleges show a greater percent of students than in previous years are transferring, and enrollment is growing.

Lake Oswego resident Nazgul Kutmanalieva Chester earned a nursing degree this year at Linfield College after obtaining a two-year degree at PCC, and Chester said community colleges do a great job of supporting students and preparing them to transfer.

She also said community college students “are determined,” and “it doesn’t surprise” her that they perform well academically after changing schools.

The National Student Clearinghouse figures demonstrate the crucial role two-year institutions play for students seeking a bachelor’s degree, the Signature Report states.

“The results will help students, institutions and policymakers to better understand the different pathways to college success,” National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Executive Director Doug Shapiro said in a written statement. “The majority of students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution are successful, but pre-transfer degrees, destination institutions, timing of transfer and enrollment intensity are all important factors in completion.”

Portland Community College

More than 7,000 credit students attending PCC during the 2010-11 academic year went to an Oregon University System institution in 2011-12, 49 percent more than the 2004-05 PCC transfers to OUS in 2005-06.

About 3,000 PCC students enrolled in a private university in 2011-12, and 2005-06 data were not available for private university transfers.
General PCC enrollment is skyrocketing. There were 59,520 credit students at PCC in 2011-12 and 40,917 credit students there in 2005-06.

The Portland Community College student headcount was 94,634 in 2011-12, up more than 2,000 students from the previous year and higher than the 88,255-student head count of 2005-06, according to PCC records.

Data analysts included the caveat that many PCC students enter the work force upon graduation rather than transferring to a four-year college. For example, a student who obtains a one-year auto-body collision repair technology certificate at PCC may immediately start working at a mechanic shop.

**Clackamas Community College**

More than 1,489 credit students attending Clackamas Community College during the 2010-11 academic year went to an Oregon University System institution in 2011-12, 28 percent more than the school’s 2004-05 transfers to OUS in 2005-06 of 1,157 students. OUS comprises a branch campus and seven public universities, including Oregon Health & Science University, Oregon State University, Portland State University and the University of Oregon.

There were 15,915 credit students at CCC in 2011-12 and 16,042 credit students there in 2005-06.

The CCC student head count was 35,191 in 2011-12, down from the previous year and higher than the 25,024 student head count in 2005-06.

“Most community colleges experienced strong growth during the economic downturn,” said Janet Paulson, public information officer at CCC.

**Mt. Hood Community College**

More than 769 credit students at Mt. Hood Community College in the 2010-11 academic year went to an Oregon University System institution in 2011-12, 53 percent more than the school’s 2004-05 transfers to OUS in 2005-06.

About 417 MHCC students enrolled in a private university in 2011-12, and 252 students enrolled in a private university in the 2005-06 school year.

There were 16,471 credit MHCC students in 2011-12 and 12,272 credit students there in 2005-06.

The unduplicated student head count was 29,350 in 2011-12, down 3,083 students from the previous year and higher than the 25,721-student head count of 2005-06.

Like Paulson, MHCC spokeswoman Maggie Huffman pointed to the economy as the chief impetus for enrollment changes, which affect the jump in transfer numbers.

**Two exemplify transfer success**

Soufiane El Moussi, 22, earned an associate degree at PCC before heading to Portland State University, where he plans to complete his bachelor’s in civil engineering in December.

El Moussi, who came to the United States from Casablanca, Morocco, said he attended the Casablanca American School, an international pre-K to 12th-grade education institute where students learn English. So, when he arrived in the Portland metro area in 2009, he spoke the United States’ primary language. His parents always wanted him to seek higher education, and American schools have a good reputation, El Moussi said.

He said as a first-generation, international student used to small high school classes, the 15- to 20-student classes at PCC were a better transition for him than he would have had if he’d gone straight to the lectures held in an auditorium at a larger school. His PCC instructors took the time to guide him through a problem if he got stuck.

“It’s a lot easier to learn from your mistakes if your professor is there at your back,” said El Moussi, who lived in Lake Oswego while attending PCC and now resides in downtown Portland.

El Moussi said the community feel of PCC also made it easier to make friends and get involved. He served as the program director of the Associated Students of PCC, organizing events with social, cultural and educational value.

“PCC took the time to reach out to those people who do not necessarily know anything about college,” he said. “They were a lot more welcoming” than some schools.

He added that the price was right as well.

This year, it costs $88 per credit for a resident to attend PCC, compared to $147 per credit for a resident at Portland
State University. It’s $97.25 per credit for in-state Mt. Hood Community College students, and $84 per credit for in-state students attending Clackamas Community College.

El Moussi received a full-ride scholarship to PSU from KPFF Consulting Engineers. He found the scholarship on the PSU website, and PCC advisers showed him how to properly format and present his application, which included a resume and cover letter.

PCC advisers also helped guide Chester, 32, to a Ford Family Foundation scholarship that paid 90 percent of her tuition, books and fees for Linfield College. At Linfield College, tuition for fall and spring semesters is $1,118 per credit for less than 10 credits and $17,950 for 10 to 18 credits.

Chester left her country in 2006 and spent a year in Atlanta, Ga., before settling in the Portland metro area.

“I wanted to go to school (in America) after the Soviet Union collapsed,” she said.

Chester said the resources at PCC are excellent, including the writing center, where the former Talas, Kyrgyzstan, resident could get help creating advanced text in a language other than the ones she grew up with, Kyrgyz and Russian.

“While I was going to Linfield, I did feel that things that I learned through those resources at my community college came in really handy,” Chester said.