

AGENDA ITEM C2: DEGREE COMPLETION
BOARD RULE 400.0200.00
RATE OF GOAL ATTAINMENT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING: APRIL 28, 2011

“Belmont Technical College is a learning-centered organization that embraces a culture of continuous knowledge acquisition, integrity, openness, caring and respect for all. Access, affordability and quality are operational values that inspire the college community to be its best. The college continuously transforms itself to respond to changing community, regional, and state needs.” This statement guides members of the college community who are engaged in helping students achieve their education goals and experience success in higher education. Academic programs and student support services are geared toward helping students realize their career and educational goals. Students’ rate of goal attainment is measured by monitoring the number of certificates and degrees earned. This report discusses factors affecting degree and certificate completion rates, explains how cohorts are used to measure completion rates on the College Navigator, and shows the degree completion rate trend for Belmont graduates over the last four years.

Data

During the 2009/2010 academic year, 75 certificates and 287 degrees were awarded by the College to 339 students. The difference between the number of awards (362) and the number of students (339) is the result of a few students earning more than one certificate or degree, or a combination of certificates and degrees. Table 1, *Certificate and degree completions, 2009/2010*, displays the distribution of awards by quarter for the academic year.

Table 1, *Certificate and degree completions, 2009/2010*

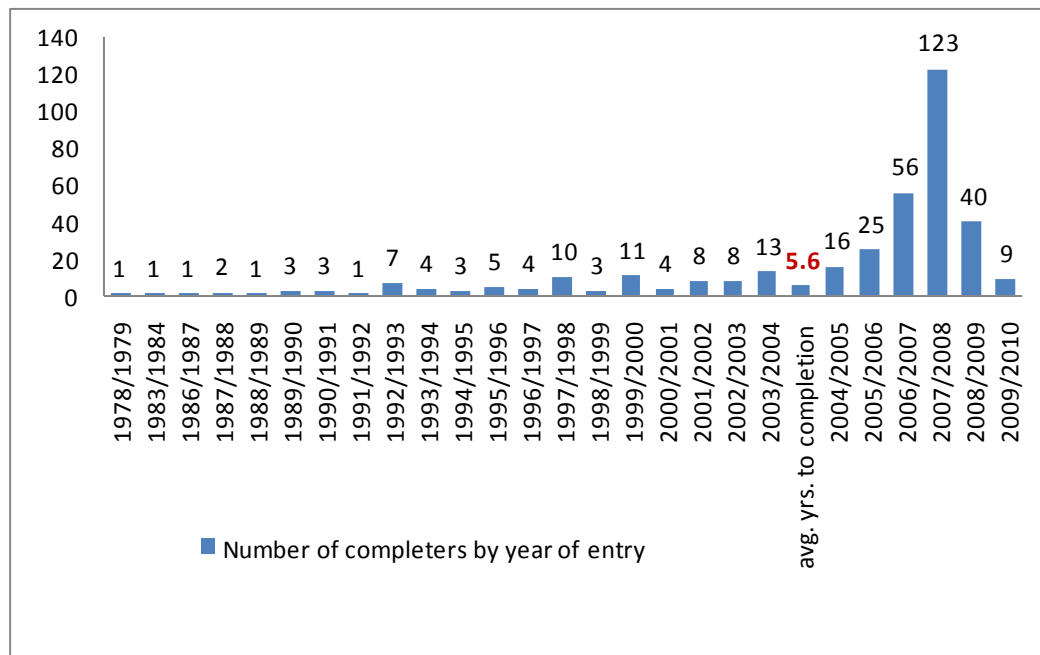
	Certificates	Degrees
Summer 2009	33	52
Fall 2009	1	36
Winter 2010	2	50
Spring 2010	39	149
Total	75	287

There are numerous variables in the experiences of college students that can affect their success in completing educational and career goals. Some students are working while attending college; some attend college part-time while others attend full-time; some students have financial support from their families while others pay for expenses without family support; students begin attending college at different ages and levels of academic readiness; students choose programs that take varying lengths of time to complete, and some students have more pre-college and pre-requisite courses to complete before they begin the programs they choose. Some of the factors affecting completion rates can be measured. The length of time between when students enter Belmont and when students graduate is one such factor that can be measured. The average length of time for students who completed certificates and degrees in 2009/2010 was 5.6 years.

When completions from the 2009/2010 academic year are organized by years in which students entered the College, the range of entry dates covers 26 years. The data show that one third of the students completing in 2009/2010 entered the college during the 2007/2008 academic year. Of the total 362 completions, 228 were completed within the last four years. Of the remaining 134

earned degrees and certificates, students took greater than four years to complete. Chart 1, *Completions in 2009/2010 by academic year of entry*, displays this pattern. On average, students who completed certificates and degrees during the 2009/2010 academic year took 5.56 years to finish.

Chart 1, *Completions in 2009/2010 by academic year of entry*



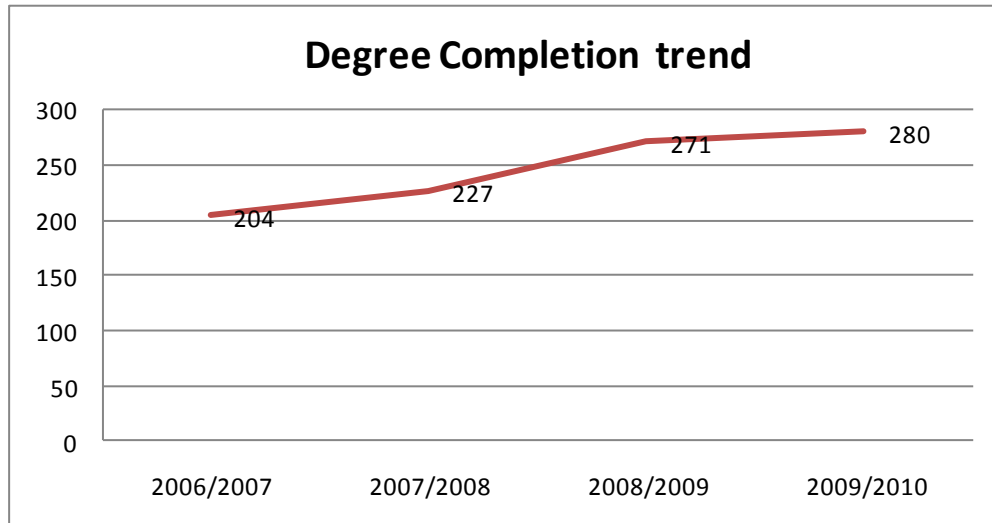
Age of students is another factor that seems to affect the length of time students take to complete certificates and degrees. Descriptive statistics for ages of students completing degrees in the 2009/2010 academic year indicated that the median age of students was 28 years old; the average age of students receiving degrees was 31 years of age. Of the two students in this group who are over the age of 70 years, one completed an associate’s degree and one completed a certificate. Overall, 36.6% (n=124) of completers were under the age of 25, and 63.4% (n=215) were over the age of 24 years. When all completions are included for analysis, this means that more students 24 years and older completed their studies than students who were younger.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides higher education institutional data on the *College Navigator*¹ web site. Data for this web site are gathered through the Integrated Post Secondary Education System (IPEDS) and organized to inform the public about public institutions and to allow potential students and their families to compare institutions. The College Navigator posts graduation rates for cohorts of students who entered the institution in the same academic year. Currently, the graduation rate for the first-time, full-time, degree/certificate seeking cohort that entered Belmont in 2006 is shown as 10%. The data that have been submitted this spring for the 2007 cohort show a 31% graduation rate. This increase in graduation rate posted on the College Navigator is the result of more attention being paid to the importance of accuracy in tracking and reporting and increased efforts by all members of the college community in helping students meet their educational goals.

¹ <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

The USO is another organization that provides data to the public about completion rates at public institutions. The USO data is complete for associate degrees awarded and allows the College to see the trend that has developed over the last four years. Chart 2, *Degree completion trend, 2006/2007 through 2009/2010* displays the USO data for Belmont.

Chart 2, *Degree completion trend, 2006/2007 through 2009/2010*



Analysis

From July 2009 through June 2010, Belmont Technical College awarded 287 degrees and 75 certificates to 339 graduates. The average age of the graduates was 31 years, which coincides with the national average age reported by the AACC (2009). Highlighted facts from the 2009/2010 graduation include the following:

- The Registered Nursing program awarded 86 Associate's degrees, the highest number of degrees of all programs.
- The program awarding the second highest number of degrees, 26, was the Industrial Electronics program.
- The Practical Nursing program awarded 51 certificates, the highest number of certificates of all certificate programs.
- The program awarding the second highest number of certificates was the Medical Coding program, which awarded 12 certificates.
- The oldest graduate was 87 years old and the youngest was 20 years old.
- The percentage of completers over the age of 24 years old was 63.4%.
- Of the total degrees and certificates awarded, 6 were awarded to Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students, which was 2.1% of the total. The number of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students earning a certificate or degree in 2008-2009 was 9 and in 2007-2008 the number was 2.
- Of the 331 degrees and certificates awarded, a total of 157 degrees and certificates were awarded to first-generation college students.
- The percentage of Belmont Technical College students graduating from July 2009 through June 2010 that were first-generation college students was 47%. The national percentage of community college students that are first-generation college students is 39% (AACC, 2009).

Information reported to University System of Ohio in fall of 2010, indicates that the College awarded 280 degrees and 51 certificates for a total of 331. Differences in the numbers are attributable to graduation application deadlines and differences in certificate metrics. The USO only reports certificates that require more than one year but less than two years to complete. For comparability, the reported USO data will be analyzed. The number of degrees awarded has increased from 204 in 2006-2007 to 280 in 2009-2010. Of the 331 degrees and certificates, 198 were in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. This is an improvement over the previous year, which had only 185.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Some academic programs have greater numbers of students completing their studies. The data suggest that the programs with the highest number of certifications and degrees awarded are in the health field. Almost half (49.45%) of the degrees and certificates awarded were in a program in a health field. Program review may allow the College to identify if low completion rates are due to low enrollment in programs with fewer students or if there is higher attrition in those programs. The College benchmark of 8 completions in each program per year may influence the decision to combine some programs so that they may reach the program benchmark. Currently, Information Technology faculty are studying the merits of combining the IT – Programming major and the IT-Web Design major into one IT-major program.

Time to degree seems to be a barrier to completion. Efforts to keep students on sequence include improving continuing attendance, encouraging full-time enrollment, and enhancing efforts of faculty to counsel students to avoid stopping-out. Due to planning for the semester conversion, advisors will be completing Degree Completion Plans with every student to chart for efficient completion and transitioning. This Degree Completion Plan will continue to be used for every student in order to guide the student through their curriculum. Creating this pathway for the student may help students envision their completion. Students who drop in and out disrupt their curriculum sequence.

Enrolling more students from non-traditional ethnic and racial backgrounds will also allow the college to meet certain metrics. There are not enough students from non-traditional racial and ethnic backgrounds to establish a trend in completions. Plans addressing recruiting and retaining underrepresented minority students may increase the number of completions. The average age of students also seems to be increasing. Programs and engagement activities like internships and co-ops, that create opportunities for developing experience in the field and support direct employment, may be attractive to all students, but particularly older students who may want to work and attend college simultaneously.

The Associate of Arts and Associate of Sciences degrees are relatively new to Belmont's offerings, and recruitment and advising strategies will result in increases in the numbers of completions for these degrees. An increased emphasis in marketing on the value of the AA and AS degrees may also contribute to increases in enrollment in these degree programs.

Strategies for Improvement

- Complete Degree Completion Plans for every student to create a pathway to completion. Include information in Orientations about the importance of staying in school, taking suggested classes on sequence, and the benefits of following the Degree Completion Plan pathway.
- Create and implement a plan to market the value of the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees.

- Implement a plan to recruit and retain more Black, Hispanic and American Indian students and those of other underrepresented minority status.
- Establish ways to help students complete more quickly through life experience credits, and scheduling courses when it is more convenient to working students.
- Realign programs so that students are encouraged to complete the program before they transfer or leave to work in the field. An example may be in the Real Estate program, where students complete their credentials and leave the program in order to begin working. Completing the degree is not needed to enter the workforce.
- Create and implement a plan that increases a better understanding of the culture of poverty from which many of our students are a product.
- Better publicize and utilize faculty office hours in order to better counsel students through programs.
- Continue to work to publicize services available at the Student Success Center.
- Adapt transitional coursework in order to help students enter college course sequences more quickly.
- Continue to engage first-year students with additional first-year experience activities and services.