

Patterns of Attendance

Conventional wisdom often suggests college students enroll either full-time or part-time, and that full-time students intending to transfer stay at community colleges for two years and then transfer. Neither assumption is correct, however. Using the model of Achieving the Dream, a national initiative to improve student achievement at community colleges, we look at the attendance patterns of 9,386 students who first came to Oakton in the Fall terms 2002 through 2005 and did not report having an associate degree or higher when they first enrolled. We wanted to look at nine ‘terms of opportunity’ for enrolling at Oakton, beginning with the first fall semester and including summers. Therefore, we did not include the Fall 2006 Cohort because students in this group did not have nine terms of opportunity. There was little variation in race/ethnicity, gender, age or placement test results among the four cohorts (students entering in the same fall term are considered a cohort).

What did we find?

As you review the data, remember these students entered Oakton with less than an associate degree.

- Nearly half (45%) the students attend Oakton for just one or two terms. Table 1 shows the number of terms of attendance (including summers), and the number and percent of students attending for that number of terms.

Table 1: Terms of Attendance

N Terms	N Students	Pct Students	N Terms	N Students	Pct Students	N Terms	N Students	Pct Students
1	2,452	26%	4	1,037	11%	7	601	6%
2	1,800	19%	5	1,009	11%	8	342	4%
3	1,039	11%	6	974	10%	9	132	1%

- Sixty-six percent of these students persist from their first fall to the spring semester, and 20 percent enroll in the summer term following their first fall at Oakton.
- Few students enter *and persist* as full time students. Of the 9,386 students, 4,351 (46%) were full time in their first term at Oakton. However, only 1,166 (27%) of them continued as full time students during four consecutive fall and spring semesters beginning with the first term. Put another way, 12 percent of all new students in the fall term were full time for four consecutive fall and spring semesters.
- Full time students don't take enough credits to complete a degree in four semesters. On average, full time students take just 13.5 credits during a fall or spring semester, including developmental courses that do not count toward a degree.
- On average, students take the equivalent of one year of coursework at Oakton over the nine terms. The average number of credits taken by a student is 31.9, including developmental courses and courses that are repeated.
- Some students take many credits at Oakton. Four hundred and seventeen students (4%) took 80 or more credits over the nine terms, again including developmental and repeated courses. On the other hand, 17 percent took just six or fewer credits.

The bottom line: students move back and forth between full time and part time status. Therefore, classifying students as full or part time based on their first term of enrollment is likely to be misleading, because relatively few remain full time throughout their terms of attendance.