

Data Story:

An Introduction to RI's College Access and Persistence Programs



Essential Question: What do we know about historically underserved populations on RI public college campuses and recent efforts to support them?

Description:

To improve higher education degree completion rates, the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC) has launched three new programs that partner with existing college access efforts.

Data Sources: Rhode Island Department of Education, College Visions, Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, The College Crusade of Rhode Island

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Introduction: RI's public colleges expand efforts to retain "historically underserved" students

Nationally, as in Rhode Island, certain groups of students have been disproportionately under-represented on college campuses. Minority youth, students with special needs and especially those who've been raised in poverty find that college is out of reach for them.

Therefore **Access and Persistence Programs** have emerged and evolved. They help students gain **access** to college by supporting stronger guidance counseling and mentoring during the K-12 school years, demystifying the tangle of college applications and financial forms, and more. Once the student has gained access, these programs help students receive comprehensive services to help students **persist**, to weather the challenges to academic success, until they have a college diploma in hand.

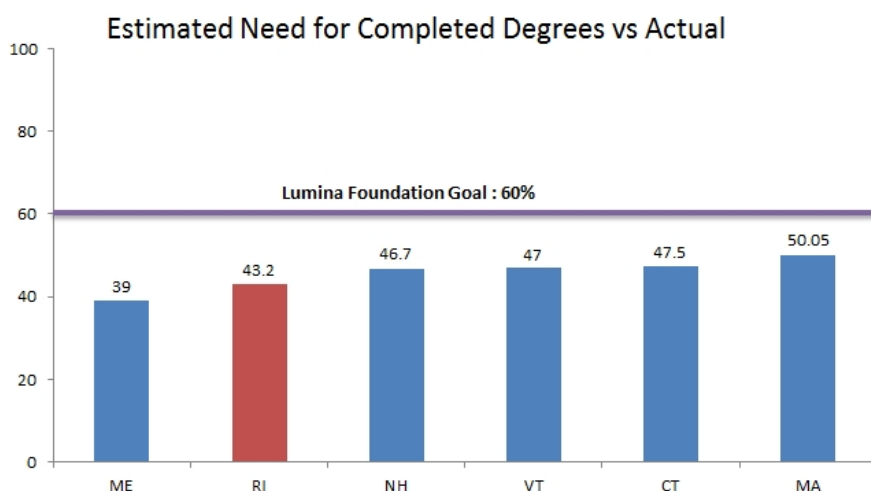
This story examines the new programs that RI's three public colleges have recently implemented, building on existing efforts. While they're new, are they beginning to have a positive impact? If so, what seems to be working?

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To become economically stronger, RI needs more college graduates



Estimates regarding the foreseeable future's need for postsecondary degrees hover at 60%. RI is almost 17 percentage points shy of this goal.

Nationally, RI's neighbor, Massachusetts, has the highest proportion of postsecondary degree attainment. And even that state is almost 10 percentage points below the estimated need. MA has led the nation in K-12 achievement for the last decade and is home to a wealth of higher educational institutions. While that state also struggles to reach adequate college access and completion rates, it launched the [Vision Project](#) to aggressively increase postsecondary degree attainment.

Particularly worrisome for Rhode Island is that the proportion of all adults with degrees is the same as those of young adults (43%), ages 25 to 34, who are the best indicator of the state's future workforce. Helping those older than 30 to finish their

degrees is important, but systematically boosting the degree-completion rates among young people will yield the most robust long-term results.

The Lumina Foundation's report [*A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education*](#) explores the estimated need for future postsecondary degree attainment and how states currently measure up.

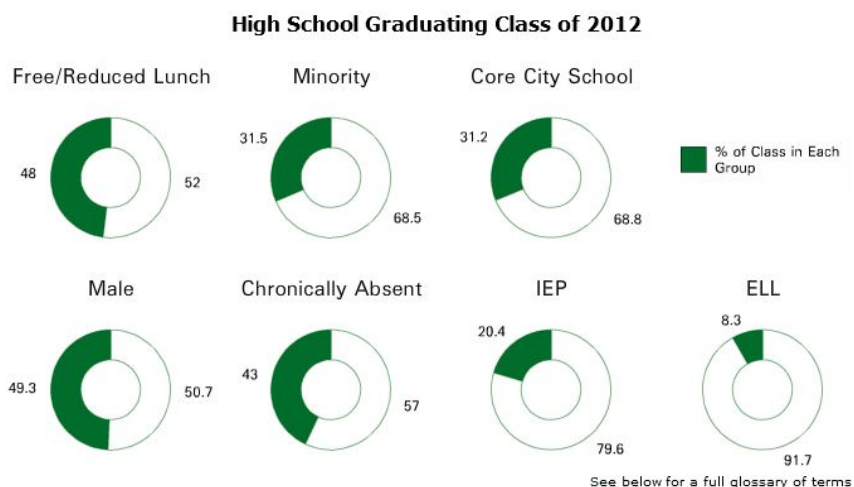
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Who are Rhode Island's historically underserved students?



These are RI's public-education students. Better serving those who have been historically underserved will best help the state boost post-secondary training and degree completion.

This story focuses on students from the high school graduating class of 2012. This was the first group of students to have access to the new programs at RI's three public colleges which launched in 2012. We will learn more about these programs as the story progresses.

Please note that many of the students represented above are duplicates since one student can be male, low-income, minority, and attend an urban school.

To see a glossary of terms for the graph above, see the Appendix.

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What are some of the barriers to college enrollment?

There are many factors, such as **chronic absenteeism**, that are highly predictive of low college enrollment and persistence.

Other barriers students face when enrolling and persisting in college include, but are by no means limited to:

- **Finances** -- the family's ability to pay or access grants and scholarships
- **Family obligations** -- some students are already parents themselves or care for ailing, aged or young family members
- **Counseling** -- high-school guidance counselors, who often have extremely high case loads, are not always able to offer adequate college-going support
- **High residential mobility** -- students whose families move residences frequently often have profound gaps in their education that are neither identified nor remediated
- **Inadequate K-12 preparation** -- students whom schools have matriculated but who have not met the grade-level expectations can't meet college expectations or they give up and drop out before high-school graduation.

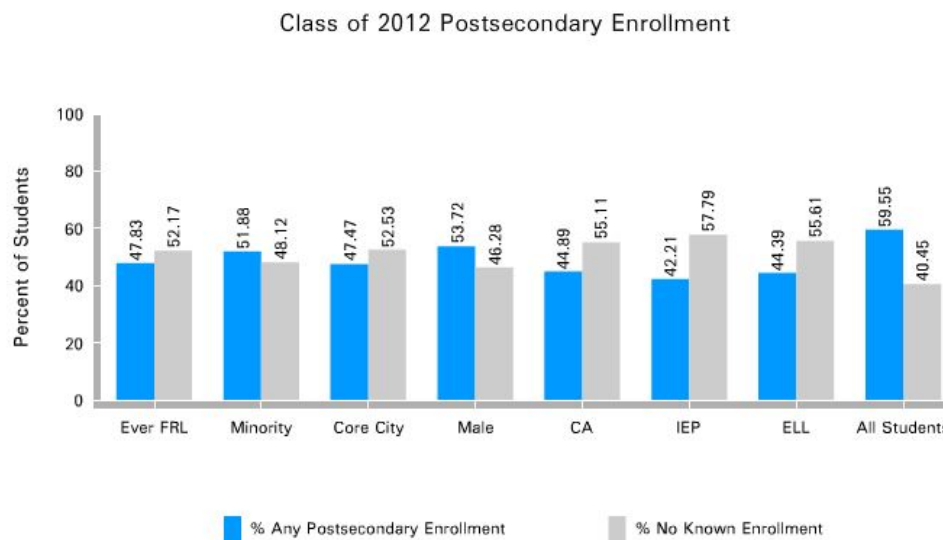
Related Materials: The DataHUB High School Absenteeism and College Persistence data story explores the considerable impact that chronic absenteeism has on college enrollment and persistence. And the DataHUB Math Preparation and Post- Secondary Success data story follows the paths of students based on their math proficiencies. [Attendance Works](#) has extensive research on this subject, some of which is summarized in the list above.

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College-going rates by student characteristics



High-school graduates are far more likely to attend college if they don't have any of our focus characteristics.

The College Access and Persistence Programs work to change the educational trajectory of students who have the characteristics traditionally associated with low-college enrollment rates. This chart looks at college enrollment for the class of 2012 in the fall immediately following their high school graduation.

This story concentrates on the three new college-based access and persistence programs (Connect to College at CCRI, Learning for Life at RIC, Project Recruit & Educate Local At-risk Adults & Youth at URI) and two of the established pre-college access programs they work with (College Visions and The College Crusade of Rhode Island).

Note: Enrollment data is from the National Student Clearinghouse which covers 98% of all students.

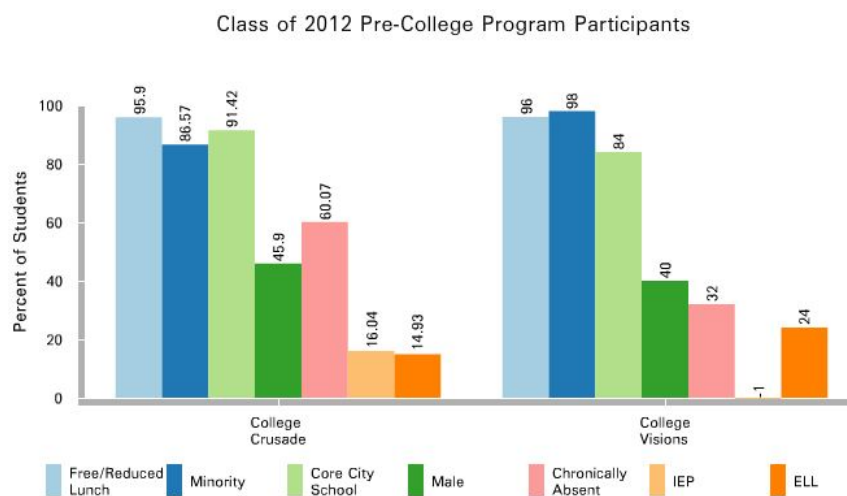
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The College Crusade and College Visions: Examples of two vital programs



These mature programs work specifically with the groups who most struggle with getting to and succeeding in college.

Because the difficulties related to college access and completion often begin during the K-12 years, College Visions and The College Crusade of Rhode Island start their work early in the academic lives of their students.

The College Crusade of Rhode Island (CC) - Founded in 1989, The College Crusade annually provides college-readiness services and scholarships to approximately 3,900 students who are attending middle and high schools in low-income RI urban districts. Read more about The College Crusade in the Appendix.

College Visions (CV) - Since 2004, College Visions has provided low-income and first-generation youth in Rhode Island with the individualized advisory and resources needed to enroll and succeed in college. Read more about College Visions in the Appendix.

Note: Values of -1 represent data that have been suppressed to protect student confidentiality.

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Student Perspective: Getting to College



"My mother always told me, "Get good grades and you will do well in life." However, my mother never spoke to me about college specifically until my brother entered high school. And even then she never spoke about the logistics, only that I should focus on making college my goal. When my friend suggested joining The College Crusade, I told my mother and she jumped at the chance to get me thinking about college.."

--Anthony Agudelo (College Crusade and RIC L4L)

[Read more of Anthony's story.](#)

Anthony Agudelo -- The College Crusade of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College L4L

My mother always told me, "Get good grades and you will do well in life." However, my mother never spoke to me about college specifically until my brother entered high school. And even then she never spoke about the logistics, only that I should focus on making college my goal. When my friend suggested joining The College Crusade, I told my mother and she jumped at the chance to get me thinking about college.

But during sophomore year in high school I was kicked from pre-AP English and most of my honors classes, excluding math. After that, I started to feel that I did not need school. I missed 20 days during my junior year, all while refusing to do homework, getting by only on my test grades. Only when my Science teacher took me under his wing, after he believed in me, that I told myself that I have to show him I could do it or at least pretend I could. That event was perhaps the biggest turning point in my high school career.

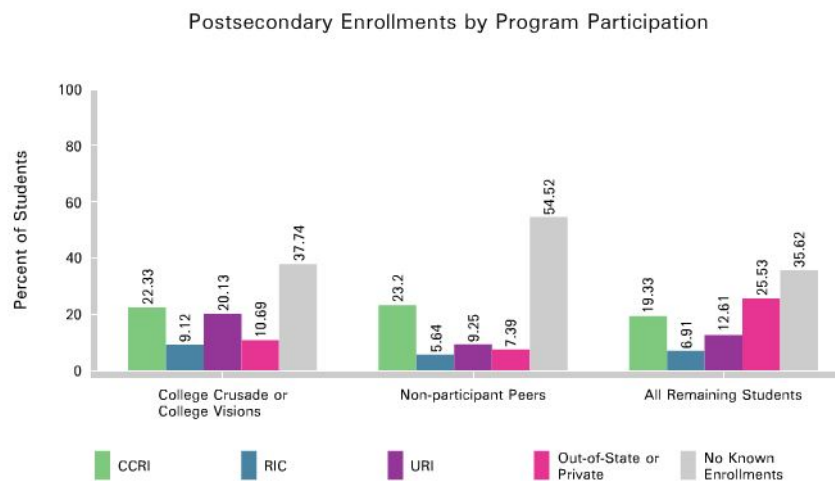
As soon as I came to RIC, my Crusade counselor, Jessica, recommended Learning for Life. L4L was very helpful, and asked me what I was good at and what I needed help with. In particular, I thought this was helpful, that there was someone there to support me. My biggest challenge now is overcoming my habit of procrastination. It was, and is, still a problem.

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College-going for Class of 2012 by institution



College Visions and The College Crusade participants are more likely than their non-participating peers to enroll in a postsecondary institution immediately following high school graduation.

At 62%, CC and CV students enrolled in college at a similar rate following high school as compared to more traditionally represented students from the Class of 2012. These "**all remaining students**," who were not participants in CC or CV and were not part of our underserved populations, enrolled at a rate of 64%. Both groups contrast starkly to the 45% of "**non-participant peers**" who enrolled immediately following high school graduation. These students did not participate in CC or CV, but are from core urban communities and/or were eligible for subsidized lunch (a poverty indicator). We use these two characteristics to identify our underserved population. More than half of these students did not enroll in a postsecondary institution following high school and could potentially benefit most from the targeted support provided by the college access and persistence programs highlighted in this story.

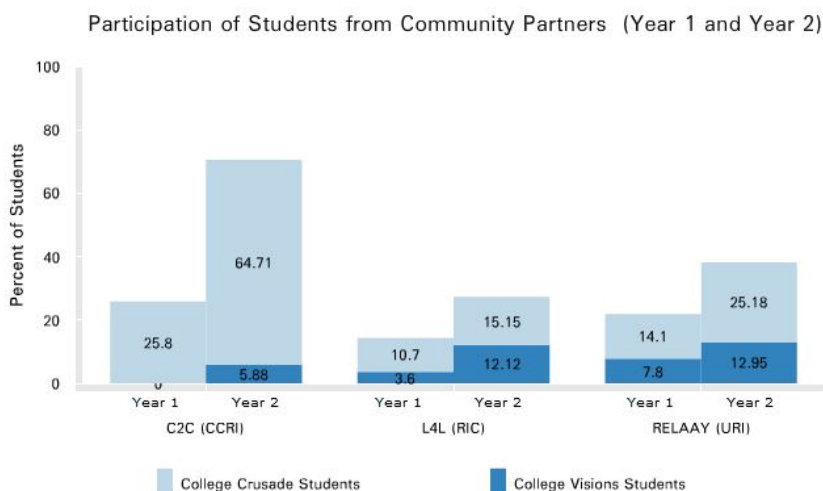
These data do not specify whether students are enrolling with the intention of earning a degree or merely to take a course or two. We do know that nearly 80% of students initially enrolled on a full-time basis.

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The hand-off from high-school to public-college support programs



High-school participants of College Visions (CV) and The College Crusade (CC) make up a large portion of the participants in the new, college-based support programs, about 20% the first year and 38% the second year -- a smooth, promising hand-off.

Using a federal College Access Challenge Grant, the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is providing resources for each of RI's public colleges to establish strong partnerships with existing college access organizations such as CV and CC and develop coordinated, student-centered support services. These new Access and Persistence Programs (APP) are described on the next slide.

Though in this story we are focusing on students who graduated in 2012, the entire inaugural group of APP participants included both first-time freshmen as well as adult students. Including the adult students, the total number of students served in the first year by institution were CCRI: 77 ; RIC: 118 ; URI: 683. By the second year these numbers had changed to 162, 217, and 601, respectively.

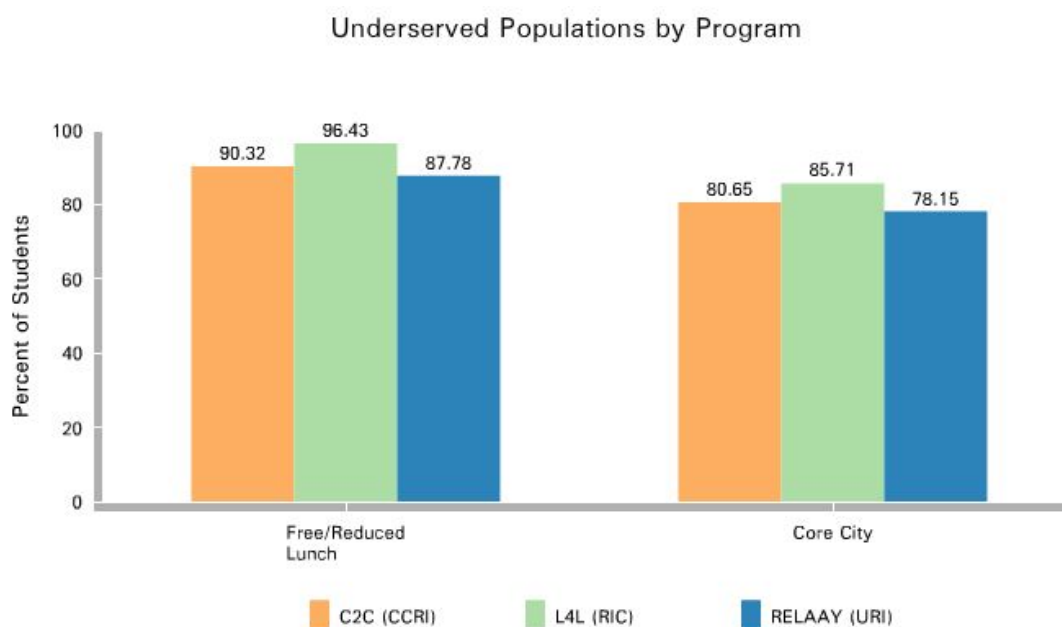
Other college-based support programs exist, but here we focus on these three new ones.

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Introducing RI's Access & Persistence Programs



Overwhelmingly, participating students are low-income and from urban communities.

The College Access and Persistence Programs, by institution:

Connect to College (C2C) at Community College of Rhode Island: Centralizing critical services, C2C assigns Coordinators to every participant and provides wrap-around support to address individual student needs.

Learning for Life (L4L) at Rhode Island College: This program offers a broad-range of academic, financial, and social-support services designed to address potential obstacles to college persistence for both at-risk college-age students and adult learners.

Project Recruit & Educate Local At-risk Adults & Youth (Project RELAAY) at the University of Rhode Island: Aiming to boost the number of minority students graduating within six years, RELAAY serves both traditionally under-represented students and older adults who already have some college-level education.

Read more about each program in the Appendix.

Data note: Our story captures only the incoming freshmen. Upper class and older students, who make up an especially large portion of the L4L program, are not included.

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Student Perspective: Transitioning into College

"When I got to CCRI I was terrified. With all the deadlines and emails I was quickly overwhelmed. There was no one around to help me but my friends and they had tons of things to do already. I went looking for help, but quickly found out that counseling was not nearly what it was in high school. But I then found C2C and was set up with a C2C coordinator. C2C was amazing; it was like having a Crusade Advisor for college."

--Kenny Luis Recio (College Crusade and CCRI C2C)

[Read more of Kenny's story.](#)



Kenny Luis Recio -- The College Crusade of Rhode Island and Community College of RI C2C

I wasn't always the student that I am today. Honestly, I didn't think I would graduate high school or get any sort of college education, and for me it was normal. Growing up in a family where no one else had gone to college and very few had even finished high school, so not going to college was a real option for me. In my last 2 years of high school, I was struggling. But then I met my College Crusade advisor, who had a big influence in my life. He would talk to me about my future and make it feel like going to college was something that I could actually do. He also made sure I was on top of my assignments and just provide that extra support that I needed to succeed. With his help and support I graduated from Hope High School.

When I got to CCRI I was terrified. With all the deadlines and emails I was quickly overwhelmed. There was no one around to help me but my friends and they had tons of things to do already. I went looking for help, but quickly found out that counseling was not nearly what it was in high school. But I then found C2C and was set up with a C2C coordinator. C2C was amazing; it was like having a Crusade Advisor for college. I could meet with her whenever and would get the help I needed from picking classes to financial aid, and the more I learned about C2C the more I noticed that they really cared. C2C has become more than just an office and program to me, it's a place where I can get important and fun information and receive support and motivation to continue towards my goals.

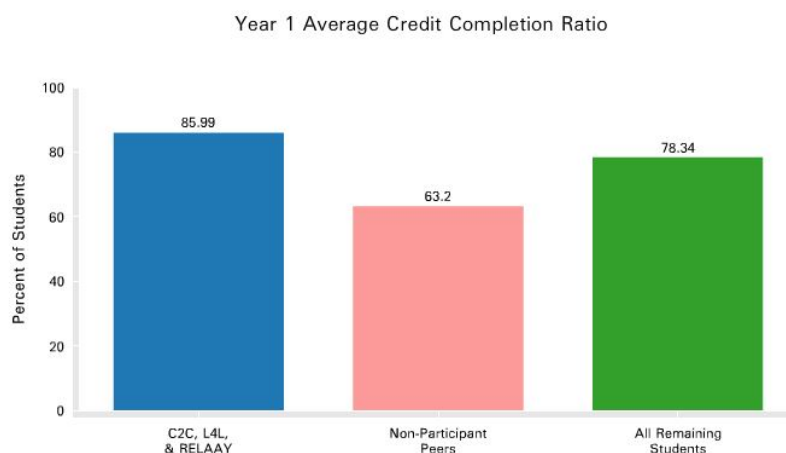
I am really grateful for all the help I have gotten in order to get to where I am now.

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Program effect on students' persistence in course completion



On average, program-supported students complete course credits at a significantly higher rate than low-income peers, as well as the general student population.

The credit completion ratio compares the number of credits a student attempted to the number of credits completed. In other words, do students complete the classes they start? Program participants completed 85% of all the classes in which they enrolled. Clearly, strategic, coordinated support is making a difference.

It should be noted that students taking pre-freshman summer courses improve their overall first-year outcomes. The influence of this summer running start on subsequent course completion and on-time graduation needs further study.

As a reminder, **"non-participant peers"** are students who are from core urban communities and/or were eligible for subsidized lunch, but did not participate in one of the three access and persistence programs. **"All remaining students"** did not participate in one of the three programs and were not part of our underserved populations.

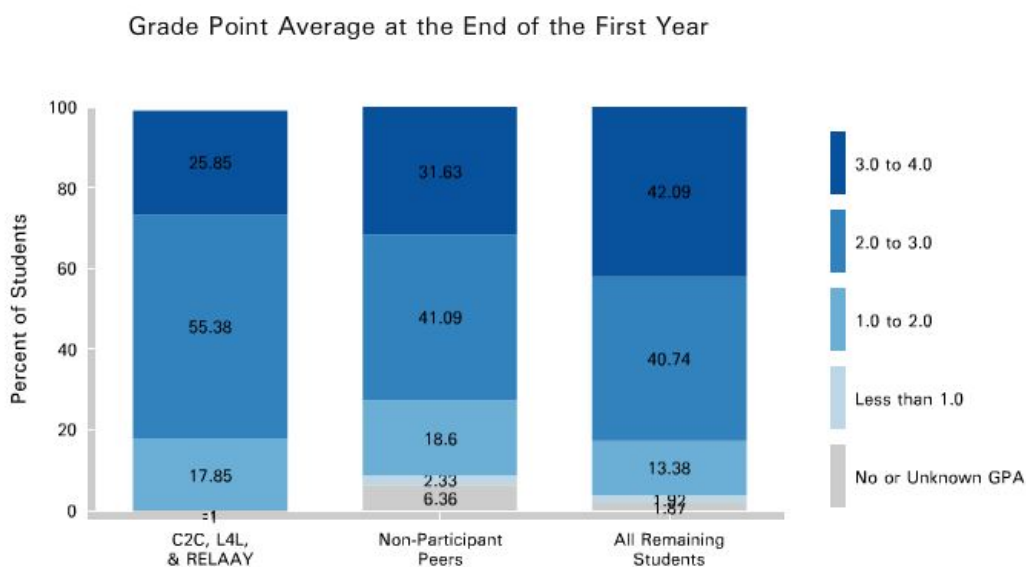
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Program effect on first-year grade-point averages (GPA)



More than their low-income peers, program participants earned grades that kept them in good academic standing. Over 80% of program participants had at least a 2.0.

Inadequate GPAs create additional barriers to student persistence. Students can lose their financial aid and some majors even have specific GPA requirements to stay in the program. In addition, consequences occur for students whose GPAs are lower than 2.0. URI puts students on academic probation for the following semester and RIC does not consider students with such GPAs for graduation.

Data Note: Across all colleges, students have no recorded GPA at all if they enrolled exclusively in non-credit bearing, developmental courses. Developmental courses are not credit-bearing, meaning they do not count towards a degree or towards a GPA.

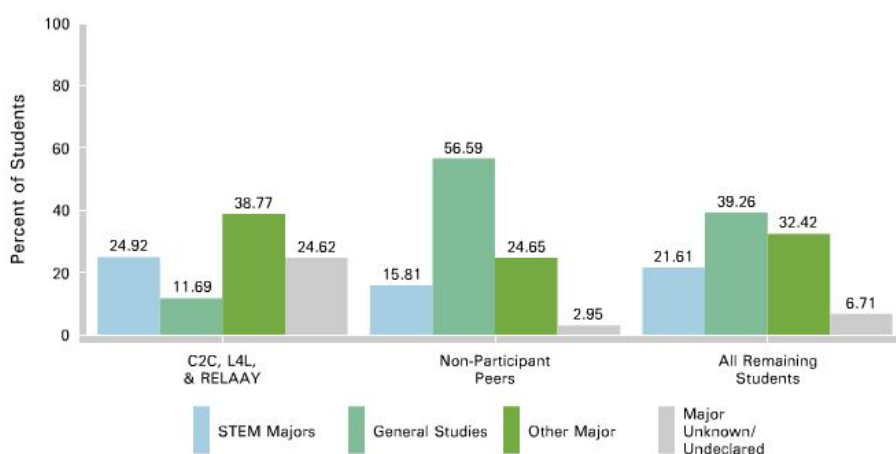
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Students' intended academic paths after the first year

Declared Majors at the end of Year 1



Program participants enroll in challenging STEM fields at far higher rates than their non-participant peers, but also more than students in general.

Nationally, the new, so-called "Knowledge Economy" is demanding far more workers with STEM credentials than the institutions of higher education are currently granting. Therefore, the RI Access and Persistence programs are also tracking their ability to help non-traditional students not only persist, but choose and complete these valuable degrees.

Broadly, STEM majors include engineering, health, animal science or mathematics. Industry-specific STEM tracks include such areas as computer software engineering, pharmaceuticals and drug design, poultry science, and statistics. See the Appendix for a full definition of all majors included in the STEM category.

General Studies majors are studying to have a broader understanding of all the arts and sciences. All three public postsecondary institutions in RI offer this track, but it is most popular at CCRI.

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Student Perspective: Persisting while in College

"After the first semester of college, I told my College Visions advisor about my experience. She supported me in growing as a college student and doing a better job. She encouraged me to keep my head held high, and helped me focus on the next semester and to try harder for what I actually wanted. Then in the spring of 2013, I was introduced to my RELAAAY advisor, which completed my network of support for college. Seeing that I was doing better than before made me continue wanting to do better."

--Kayla Paulino (College Visions and URI RELAAAY)

[Read more of Kayla's story.](#)



Kayla Paulino -- College Visions and The University of Rhode Island RELAAAY

I didn't really feel prepared for college once I started all of my classes with different students -- seeing how they were all prepared for the material. I questioned the way I learned in high school and compared it to how I would learn in college. The transition was also tough because I was pretty much on my own and everything was my responsibility. I always went home on the weekends, since I never found anything to do on campus which then made me begin to get homesick and lose hope since I was not happy with my choice of major.

After the first semester of college, I told my College Visions advisor about my experience. She supported me in growing as a college student and doing a better job. She encouraged me to keep my head held high, and helped me focus on the next semester and to try harder for what I actually wanted. Then in the spring of 2013, I was introduced to my RELAAAY advisor, which completed my network of support for college. Seeing that I was doing better than before made me continue wanting to do better.

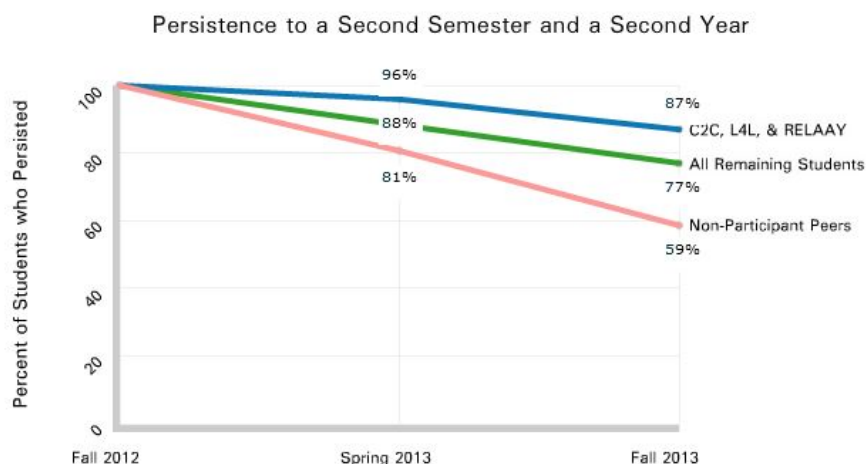
Now I enjoy learning new things about my major (business/accounting) and seeing the connection between what I'm learning in the classroom and its connection to my future career. I also enjoy the social life on campus within the student organization I'm in and am making new friends, who also provide me support.

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Program effect on persistence into the second year of college



Fully 87% of program participants persisted into their second year, as compared with 59% of their low-income peers or 77% of all other students enrolled.

The first year of data suggest that the traditionally underserved students in these programs are overcoming their challenges to college persistence. Following this inaugural group of students, we see that they are persisting at a higher rate than both of the other groups of students.

The preliminary conclusion: these programs are working and are making a difference for Rhode Island's underserved students.

Note: These data continue to represent students from the graduating class of 2012 who enrolled in one of the three public in-state institutions. This includes both full- and part-time students.

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Take-aways and Recommendations

Clearly, partnerships among college access and postsecondary support programs successfully smooth students' transition to college and coordinating comprehensive services while in college enhances their chances for success.

- Strengthening the coordination of efforts across programs and levels would continue to greatly enhance their efficacy.
- Coordinating comprehensive systems of support, especially during the vulnerable transition from high school to college, needs good longitudinal data. Such data will help all partners work together to achieve their common goals for student success.
- Already further study is needed to identify which core services and institutional policies are having the greatest impact on these students. For example, how do the pre-college summer courses impact GPAs, credit accumulation and on-time graduation?
- To be strategic about providing the best services to students, the college support programs must measure their impacts and outcomes continuously.
- Identify other related programs that might be interested in participating in these longitudinal studies. Sharing these results among programs would further expand and improve services for students.
- Sustaining the program-supports over the course of some student's college careers will be essential to ensure that they reach completion.
- Since many more students could benefit from these comprehensive services, expanding and sustaining the programs' success will require finding other sources of funding.

APPENDIX

An Introduction to RI's College Access and Persistence Programs

Original story link: <http://ridatahub.org/datastories/ris-college-access-and-persistence-programs>

Data Sources

Rhode Island Department of Education
<http://www.ride.ri.gov/>

College Visions
<http://www.collegevisions.org/>

Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary
Commissioner
<http://www.ribghe.org/>

The College Crusade of Rhode Island
<http://thecollegecrusade.org/tccri/>

Related Terms

- **KEYWORDS**
 - Education
- **Tags**
 - Persistence, Education, Higher Education, Access, Postsecondary

Glossary

- **Low-income** students are identified by their eligibility for free-and-reduced lunch.
- **Minorities** include anyone who is not Caucasian. The self-reported demographics included among the students represented in the graph above are: Native American (0.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.6%), Black (9.1%), or Hispanic (18.0%).
- **Core City Schools** are those located in the urban and high poverty cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, or Woonsocket.
- **Chronically Absent** students missed at least 10% of school days.
- **IEP** means Individual Education Plan and includes all students with special needs such as learning disabilities or mental-health issues.
- **Males'** college-going rates have changed relatively little over the years. But since the 1960s, female participation has increased so much that on average, females now earn a greater number of degrees, from Associates to Doctorates.
- **English-language learners (ELL)** are those students whose native language is other than English. Our data flags as ELL any who have ever been enrolled in an ELL program during their K-12 experience in RI.

Majors that fall into the following 2-digit CIP codes are considered to fall into the broad definition of a STEM field:

01) AGRICULTURE, AGRICULTURE OPERATIONS, AND RELATED SCIENCES.

03) NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION.

11) COMPUTER AND INFORMATION SCIENCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES.

14) ENGINEERING.

15) ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGIES AND ENGINEERING-RELATED FIELDS.

26) BIOLOGICAL AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES.

29) MILITARY TECHNOLOGIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES.

27) MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS.

40) PHYSICAL SCIENCES.

41) SCIENCE TECHNOLOGIES/TECHNICIANS.

51) HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND RELATED PROGRAMS.

Also included are any other 6-digit CIP code not covered above, but include in the ICE's STEM-Designated Degree Program List which can be found here:

<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>

The College Crusade of Rhode Island (CC)

Founded in 1989, The College Crusade annually provides college-readiness services and scholarships to approximately 3,900 students who are attending middle and high schools in low-income RI urban districts. From the time they join in 6th or 7th grade, through their 12th grade, Crusaders receive steady, nurturing support of caring adults. They participate in activities that promote academic enrichment, social and personal development, career awareness and exploration, and postsecondary preparation.

College Visions (CV)

Since 2004, College Visions has provided low-income and first-generation youth in Rhode Island with the individualized advisory and resources needed to enroll and succeed in college. Students join as 11th graders, where they have weekly one-on-one meetings with their advisor. These advisors see them through the maze of college choices, financial aid, and college applications. This guidance helps students make informed college choices that maximize the chances of successfully completing a degree.

Connect to College (C2C)

Centralizing critical services, C2C assigns Coordinators to every participant and provides wrap-around support to address individual student needs.

Tailored for low-income, first-generation, and other challenged students, services include academic advising, career assessments, remedial interventions and financial literacy.

C2C also has a strong community service component, providing participants the opportunity to work together on local issues.

Learning for Life (L4L)

This program offers a broad-range of academic, financial, and social-support services designed to address potential obstacles to college persistence for both at-risk college-age students and adult learners.

Linking students to a variety of resources, Navigators offer personal support both on and off campus. L4L's four key elements are:

1. Improving college know-how;
2. Making attending college feasible;
3. Connecting students to campus and social networks; and
4. Clarifying future goals.

Project Recruit & Educate Local At-risk Adults & Youth (Project RELAAY)

Aiming to boost the number of minority students graduating within six years, RELAAY serves both traditionally under-represented students and older adults who already have some college-level education.

RELAAY also offers coordinated services. Most of the entering freshmen participate in the Talent Development program which provides a jump-start to college through summer courses and workshops. Those that do well in the summer program start college with several completed courses and an established GPA (grade-point average).