



Home / News

https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/study-new-college-students-benefit-from-taking-full-load-of/article_8fcc2e9a-dc51-5ba0-b898-85eb716020fa.html

Study: New college students benefit from taking full load of classes

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 2 hrs ago

Students starting school at a Kentucky college or university this year should take at least 15 credit hours a semester for the best chance at graduating on time with less debt.

That's the finding of a new report from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. Students who take 15 hours in their first semester are nearly twice as likely to graduate on time, the report said.

"If you're taking 30 hours a year, you're on track to graduate in four years," said Doug McElroy, Western Kentucky University's associate vice president for academic enrichment and effectiveness.

McElroy shared data from WKU's Office of Institutional Research that showed other gains for students who took 30 hours in their first year. Along with a greater likelihood of graduating in four years, the data also showed higher grade-point averages.

McElroy noted that it's difficult to say that taking more hours leads to greater academic success. However, he speculated that taking more hours consistently helps a student build momentum.

For example, according to university data, about 61 percent of students taking 30-plus hours in their first year graduated in four years. For students who didn't take 30-plus hours in their first year, that percentage was about 17 percent.

"Taking more hours provides that momentum. It helps build patterns that I think are beneficial throughout," McElroy said.

The likelihood of timely graduation continues to improve for students earning 30 credit hours their first year, according to the Council on Postsecondary Education.

That holds true for students in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System and the state's four-year universities, the report said.

Students working toward associate degrees at KCTCS graduate at roughly three times the rate if they complete 30 credit hours during their first year, compared to their peers who don't.

For students seeking bachelor's degrees, the four-year graduation rate jumps from the overall rate of 28.9 percent to 60 percent for students completing 30 hours during their freshman year, according to the CPE.

Aaron Thompson, the CPE's executive vice president and chief academic officer, said in a news release that the report debunks the common notion that students should ease into college.

"The report's findings are crystal clear. The prevailing notion that students might need to ease into college and take only 12-14 credit hours their first semester is clearly not the best approach for the vast majority of first-time, full-time students," he said.

"Academic momentum in the freshman year is a great predictor of student success at both the associate and bachelor's degree levels," Thompson said.



The report also showed positive effects on graduation rates for underrepresented minorities, low-income and underprepared students at both the associate and bachelor's degree levels, according to the news release.

The full report is available online at cpe.ky.gov/data/reports/academicmomentumreport.pdf.

The CPE makes several recommendations for Kentucky's colleges and universities, including stepping up advising and outreach efforts when students register for less than 15 credit hours.

Although 15 hours may not be ideal for every student, McElroy said the university is already following the CPE's advice in some ways.

With the university's entering class, McElroy said it's pre-registering students for 15 hours where it used to pre-register for nine to 12 hours. It's also encouraging advisers to get students thinking about completing 30 hours each year.

– *Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.*

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.