



REACHING HIGHER, ACHIEVING MORE



INDIANA
PART-TIME
COLLEGE STUDENTS
2014 STUDY

A study of the economic and academic needs
of Indiana's part-time student population



INDIANA *for* COMMISSION
HIGHER *for* EDUCATION



COMPLETION



PRODUCTIVITY



QUALITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Indiana needs more college graduates. By 2025, it is estimated that 60 percent of jobs will require education and training beyond high school. Currently, only 34 percent of Hoosiers have completed a postsecondary degree. Even after we include shorter-term credentials and push graduation rates for the current pipeline to very ambitious levels, we still fall short of meeting our 60 percent goal – and the needs of our employers and our economy. Our policies must address a population that is ever-growing, critical to our success, and so often overlooked: the [non-traditional student](#).

The Indiana General Assembly in 2014 passed legislation, supported by Governor Pence, to dedicate a portion of existing education and training dollars to adult learners pursuing high-demand, high-wage jobs. The bill called for further action, calling for the Commission to submit a report including the size of the part-time student population, the financial need of the population, the completion rates of the population and most important, recommendations for increasing the completion rates of the part-time population by using financial support and student incentives. This report will look broadly at all non-traditional students to answer these questions and provide recommendations designed to bring us closer to our 60 percent goal.

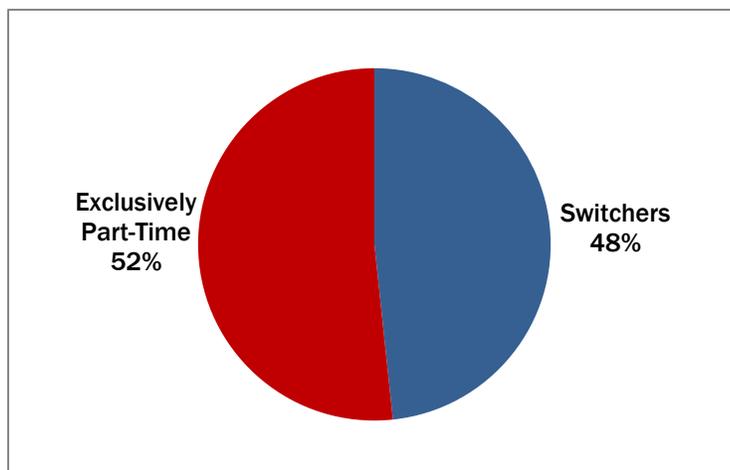
Framework

We must change our thinking about what “part-time” means. For every student who goes to college part-time every semester, there is another with blended enrollment – attending full-time some semesters but dropping to part-time for other semesters.

EXCLUSIVELY PART-TIME STUDENTS:
students who always enroll part-time
(fewer than 12 credits per semester)

SWITCHERS:
students who blend full-time and part-time
enrollment over their academic careers.

Students who attend at least one semester part-time



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (cont.)

Findings

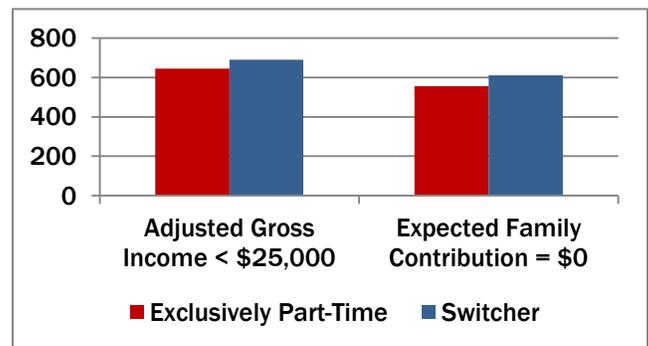
Students who are independent—typically students who are over the age of 23, married, or have children of their own—demonstrate substantially more financial need than those who are considered to have parental support in financing higher education.

The majority of independent students are in the bracket demonstrating the greatest level of need. This is true for both the switcher group and the exclusively part-time group with little distinction between the two as it relates to financial need.

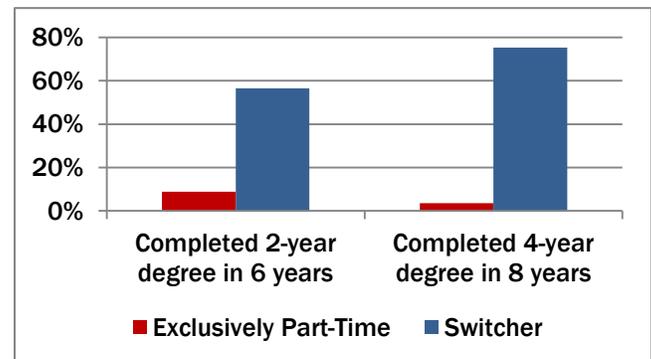
Independent students are more likely than dependent students to file the FAFSA after Indiana’s March 10 deadline, further limiting their ability to pay for college.

Although need is similar between switchers and exclusively part-time students, performance varies substantially. Switchers are six times more likely to complete a 2-year degree and more than 20 times more likely to complete a 4-year degree when compared to students who always attend part-time. The Commission’s College Completion Reports clearly show that full-time students fare better than part-time students, even when allowing for extra time to complete. This study reveals that the same is true for students who attend full-time some semesters and part-time for others, confirming that increasing students’ enrollment intensity whenever possible is a strategy for student success and completion.

Number of Students in Highest-Need Bracket



Rates of Completion



The implication for financial aid is clear: to administer a **part-time grant program that does not embrace and fund the **switchers** would **overlook** a significant portion of our student population that, according to the data, has a **much greater chance of completing**.**

The recommendations on the following page stem from these findings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (cont.)

Recommendations

Academic Support Strategies for Non-Traditional Students



Create and guide students to academic structures that support continuous full-time enrollment or more structured part-time enrollment and enable students to complete a minimum of 18 credits per year.



Enhance opportunities for and awareness of competency-based education and prior learning assessment that enable students to earn college credit whenever they demonstrate mastery of the course material, even if that experience comes from outside the classroom.



Continue to implement innovative approaches to remediation that help adult students refresh their skills at the same time they start college-level coursework, shortening time to degree and immersing students in their intended course of study sooner.

Financial Support Strategies for Non-Traditional Students



Redesign the existing State part-time grant to meet the needs of today's independent students by allowing switchers to participate and setting the application deadline at August 1, much later than the March 10 deadline for full-time students.



Increase the State's financial commitment to independent part-time students by allowing unspent financial aid dollars for full-time students to be redirected to this population.



Replace the current subsidy for "high-demand, high-wage" jobs that exists in the State part-time grant statute with newly created graduation grants for students in these fields.



Draw from other state programs to supplement financial aid with resources that can help students pay for books, housing, food, childcare and other related expenses.

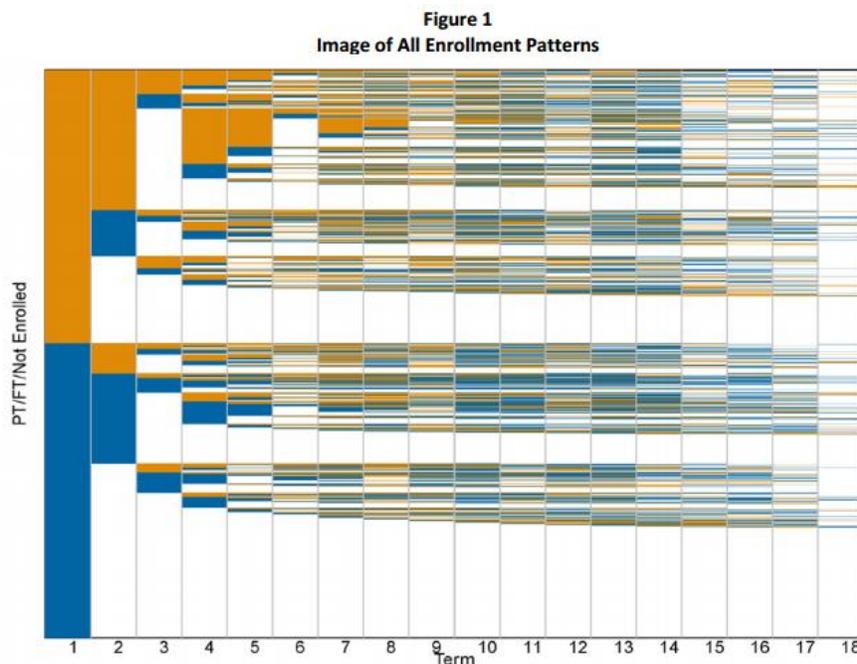
I. DEFINING AND MEASURING THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT POPULATION

What is a Non-Traditional Student?

We often oversimplify, thinking of full-time students as the 18-year-old living on campus and part-time students as working adults. But in fact, these lines are incredibly blurry and the non-traditional student population contains many types of students. The Commission's report entitled *Guided Pathways to Student Success* conveys that "today, a majority of students—now commonly referred to as "new traditional students"— are older, working full- or part-time, often have family responsibilities, often attend school part-time and often take courses from multiple institutions. Many of these students are the first in their family to attend college, arrive underprepared, lack goal clarity and are unconfident learners." While many adult students do attend part-time, the phrases "adult student" and "part-time student" are far from synonymous.

What is a Part-Time Student?

That question, like the last, is not cut and dry. According to a recent analysis by the Community College Research Center (CCRC), a center affiliated with the Teachers College at Columbia University: "Although there are thousands of distinct patterns of students' enrollment intensity, they are all generated from the same basic components: students attempt different course loads at different points in time."¹ Figure 1, from the same study, shows that students who start as part-time students (the blue group in term 1) end up with a lot of full-time (orange) semesters, and vice versa.



Note: Blue indicates part-time enrollment; orange indicates full-time enrollment; white space indicates non-enrollment. The height of each block of color in each term is proportional to the number of students it represents.

¹ Crosta, Peter M. 2014. "Intensity and Attachment: How the Chaotic Enrollment Patterns of Community College Students Relate to Educational Outcomes." *Community College Review* (42:2), pp. 118-42.

The study finds that “after five to six years, most of [the community college students in the study] forged paths that are not highly productive or efficient. The diversity in individual patterns cannot be overstated...students took thousands of distinct pathways involving full-time, part-time and interrupted enrollment. Characterizations of students as either part-time or full-time are thus largely inaccurate as they ignore the high degree of switching between these two enrollment statuses.”²

Over the past four years in Indiana, 55 percent of students attended at least one semester part-time. However, only 30 percent of the population during that time was **exclusively part-time**. The **switchers** represented a full 25 percent of the student population. These numbers differ somewhat from national estimates, as the part-time student population accounts for roughly 38 percent of national enrollment in postsecondary institutions of all types.³ The CCRC study found that the mostly part-timers represented only 16 percent of the students they studied.

While the preponderance of “switching” poses some challenges, it also points to an opportunity. If the “part-time population” sometimes enrolls in full-time coursework, it may be possible to increase their enrollment intensity – and graduation rates – by making it easier for them to attend full-time. This will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

For the purpose of this report, we will look at these as separate groups, with **exclusively part-time students** representing those who always enroll part-time (fewer than 12 credits per semester) and with **switchers** representing those who blend full-time and part-time enrollment over an academic

The students included in the study are undergraduate, resident, degree-seeking students who enrolled for the first time in the fall semester of the year studied. To allow for extended-time completion analysis, the year of entry for four-year students is 2006 and the year of entry for two-year students is 2008. Only students who attended public postsecondary institutions and filed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) were included.

² Ibid.

³ National Center for Education Statistics. 2014. “Table 303.60: Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level of enrollment, sex of student, and other selected characteristics: 2012.” Available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_303.60.asp.

II. THE FINANCIAL NEED OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT POPULATION

What metrics do we use to evaluate financial need?

To apply for federal and state financial aid, students fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year. The FAFSA collects information about [adjusted gross income \(AGI\)](#), assets and family size and calculates an [expected family contribution \(EFC\)](#). The EFC represents the amount that a student is presumed to pay out of pocket. Scholarships and loans fill in the gap. Students with \$0 EFC are considered to have the greatest need.

The FAFSA also determines whether a student is considered [independent](#)—assumed not to have the support of parents. The U.S. Department of Education’s Federal Student Aid website explains dependent and independent status this way: “The federal student aid programs are based on the concept that it is primarily your and your family’s responsibility to pay for your education. And because a dependent student is assumed to have the support of parents, the parents’ information has to be assessed along with the student’s, in order to get a full picture of the family’s financial strength. If you’re a dependent student, it doesn’t mean your parents are required to pay anything toward your education; this is just a way of looking at everyone in a consistent manner.”⁴ Figure 2 on the following page provides further details about how independent status is determined.

[These three factors—dependency status, AGI and EFC—are the metrics we use to evaluate financial need in both our switchers and exclusively part-time students.](#) Because of the reliance on FAFSA data, this analysis includes only students who completed the FAFSA for the years studied.

What conclusions do we reach after examining the data?

We reach three key conclusions that inform the recommendations in the final section of this report.

CONCLUSION #1: Independent Students have much greater financial need

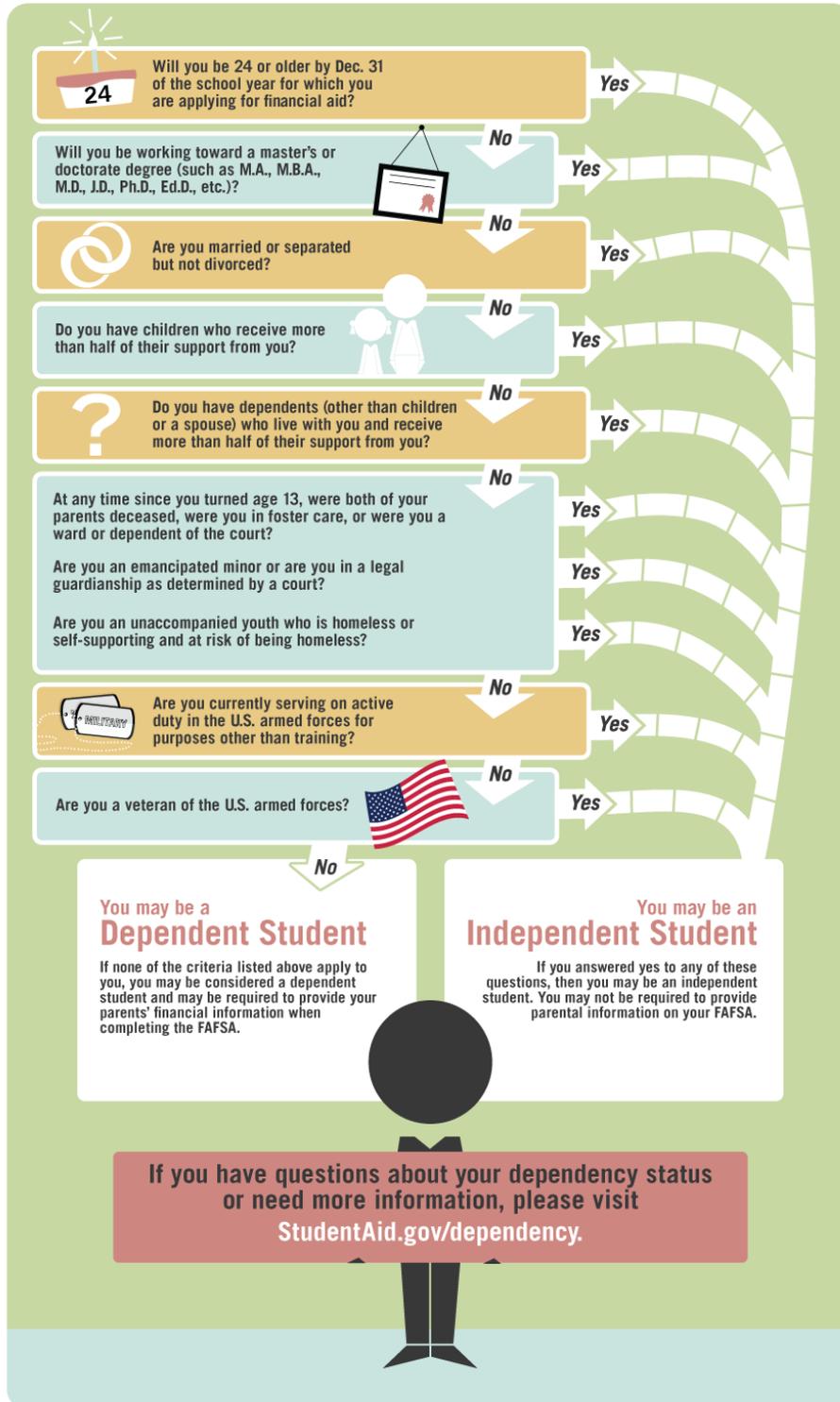
The first conclusion we reach is that financial need is much more concentrated in the independent student population. Certainly, dependent students also are to be found in the population attending less than full-time. These students, though, exhibit much lower levels of financial need. A sizeable percentage of dependent exclusively part-time students (42 percent) have parents with AGIs over \$50,000, and nearly half (48.2 percent) of those students have EFCs exceeding \$5,000. Among the switchers, the numbers follow a similar pattern: over half (61 percent) of these students live in homes with an AGI of over \$50,000 and over half (63 percent) have EFCs above \$5,000. These figures indicate that the financial need is greatest among the independent students, an intuitive notion that is supported by research elsewhere.

⁴ <https://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/filling-out/dependency#dependent-or-independent>

Figure 2: Determination of Independent and Dependent Status

Do I Have to Provide My Parents' Information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSASM)?

All applicants for federal student aid are considered either "independent" or "dependent." Dependent students are required to include information about their parents on the FAFSA. By answering a few questions, you can get a good idea of which category you fit into.



CONCLUSION #2: Substantial financial need exists among both switchers and exclusively part-time students, with little distinction between the financial needs of the two groups.

Within the independent portion of the population, both the exclusively part-time students and the switchers have substantial financial need. Tables 1 details the adjusted gross income (AGI) of Indiana’s independent, *exclusively part-time students*.

Table 1: Independent Exclusively Part-time Student Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)		
Student AGI	Count	Percentage of Total
\$0	30	2.5%
\$1-\$25,000	615	51.2%
\$25,001-\$50,000	252	21.0%
\$50,001-\$75,000	102	8.5%
\$75,001-\$100,000	28	2.3%
\$100,001-\$125,000	7	0.6%
>\$125,000	2	0.2%
Not reported	165	13.7%
Total	1,201	100%

Table 2 shows the adjusted gross income of Indiana’s independent *switchers*.

Table 2: Independent Switchers Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)		
Student AGI	Count	Percentage of Total
\$0	26	2.3%
\$1-\$25,000	663	59.0%
\$25,001-\$50,000	169	15.0%
\$50,001-\$75,000	71	6.3%
\$75,001-\$100,000	17	1.5%
\$100,001-\$125,000	5	0.4%
>\$125,000	0	0.0%
Not reported	172	15.3%
Total	1,123	100%

In both cases, majorities of students in both categories have AGIs below \$25,000. Financial need examined through this lens does not differ greatly between exclusively part-time students and switchers.

Looking through the lens of Expected Family Contribution (EFC), the story remains the same. Table 3 displays the expected family contributions (EFC) for the [exclusively part time students](#).

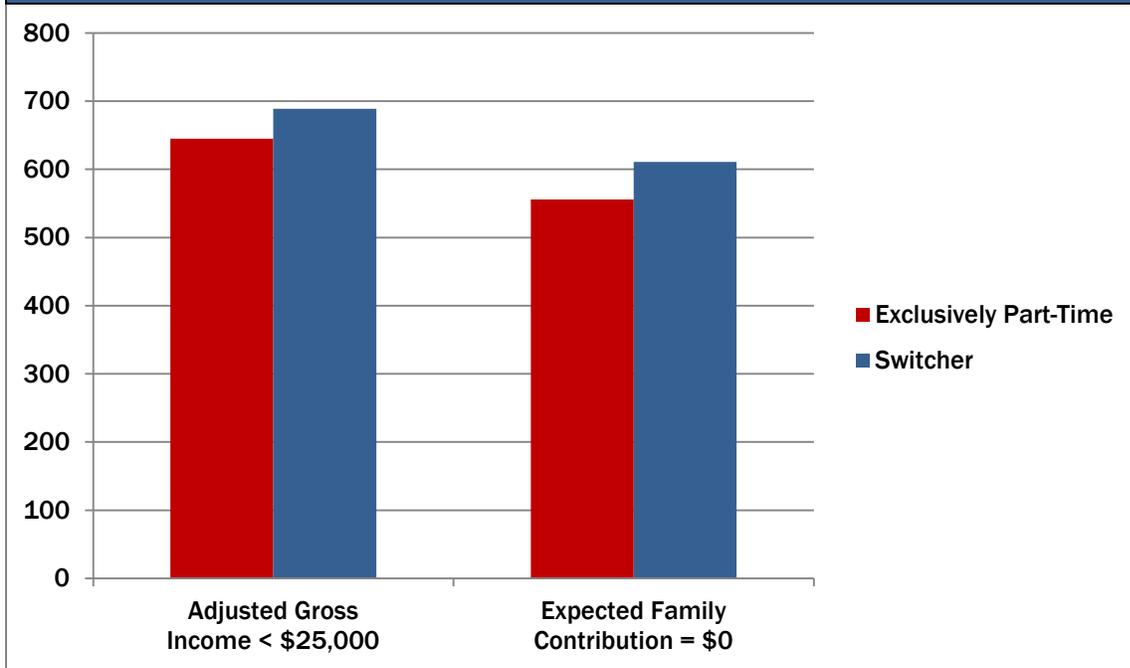
Table 3: Independent Exclusively Part-time Student Expected Family Contribution (EFC)		
Student EFC	Count	Percentage of Total
\$0	556	46.3%
\$1-\$1,000	95	7.9%
\$1,001-\$2,000	110	9.2%
\$2,001-\$3,000	70	5.8%
\$3,001-\$4,000	47	3.9%
\$4,001-\$5,000	49	4.1%
>\$5,000	230	19.2%
Not Calculated	44	3.7%
Total	1,201	100%

Table 4 shows the EFC of Indiana’s independent [switchers](#).

Table 4: Independent Switcher Student Expected Family Contribution (EFC)		
Student EFC	Count	Percentage of Total
\$0	611	54.4%
\$1-\$1,000	90	8.0%
\$1,001-\$2,000	81	7.2%
\$2,001-\$3,000	60	5.3%
\$3,001-\$4,000	31	2.8%
\$4,001-\$5,000	36	3.2%
>\$5,000	189	16.8%
Not Calculated	25	2.2%
Total	1,123	100%

The EFC for both groups are low. An EFC of \$0 is the modal value for each group, with a clear majority of the switchers having an EFC of \$0 (a strong plurality of the exclusively part-time students have an EFC of \$0). Again, we see very little difference between the two groups of students we examined. Figure 3 on the following page summarizes these findings.

Figure 3: Number of Students in Highest-Need Brackets



For financial aid purposes, need is typically calculated by comparing what a student must pay to attend (including tuition and other costs such as books and housing) with what they can pay out of pocket (the EFC). The greater the gap between these two, the greater the financial need.

The fact that the switchers take more courses on an annual basis means that they also pay more tuition, leading to a higher cost of attendance. This means that switchers can pay the same out of pocket as their exclusively part-time counterparts but their costs are even greater. Simply put, the “gap” between cost and ability to pay for switchers is greater.

CONCLUSION #3: The State's March 10 FAFSA application deadline disproportionately affects independent students.

In Indiana, students who hope to receive financial assistance through most of the state's financial aid programs must complete the FAFSA. Indiana has one of the earliest FAFSA filing deadlines in the country (March 10). The current date allows for more accurate fiscal projections to be made by the Commission. It also allows for the Commission to provide information to schools much earlier so that awards can be packaged in a timely fashion. The Commission remains committed to an early FAFSA deadline for traditional, full-time college students to protect the Frank O'Bannon and 21st Century Scholars programs.

While this allows the Commission to provide to students and institutions very early information about awards, it also works against the student who makes a late decision to attend college. Students who complete a FAFSA after the state deadline generally are not considered for full-time state student assistance; this seriously impacts the ability of non-traditional students to enter, much less complete, college. Recent analysis of FAFSA filing data indicates that dependent students are much more likely to file the FAFSA than are independent students, and are more likely to do so by the state's deadline.⁵ A recent study by McKinney and Novak (2014) found that community college students are especially likely to not file a FAFSA or to file it late. Those who delay entry to college and those who attend part-time are also among those less likely to file a FAFSA on time or at all.⁶

Data on Indiana FAFSA filing in 2013 supports the notion that independent students are more likely than dependent students to file the FAFSA late. Table 5 shows that dependent students are more likely to file applications during January, February, and March, the months preceding the state's FAFSA deadline. Independent students also file in large numbers during those months, but also file in large numbers in later months, missing key deadlines and thus missing out on state (and in some cases institutional) financial aid opportunities. This makes sense when we consider both the decision-making process and the outreach available. Traditional high school students receive significantly more guidance through their schools about applying for college and getting financial aid. Events aimed at FAFSA completion (by March 10) are often centered around high school settings. These traditional students have likely known for some time they would pursue postsecondary education, and they enter when they do because they just graduated high school.

For students not in the "pipeline" of high school to college, the catalyst to return is often different. Adults may decide to enter higher education based on economic or personal circumstances that occur at any point in time. This makes the FAFSA application deadline of March 10 problematic for this population. First, they do not fall in a natural outreach population for publicizing the deadline. Second, even if they know of the deadline, the circumstances that cause them to return to education are likely to occur after March 10.

⁵ Kelchen, Robert. 2014. "State Financial Aid Application Deadlines – A Lousy Rationing Tool." *Washington Monthly*. Available online at

http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/blog/state_financial_aid_applicatio.php?page=all.

⁶ McKinney, Lyle and Heather Novak. 2014. "FAFSA Filing Among First-Year College Students: Who Files on Time, Who Doesn't, and Why Does it Matter?" Forthcoming in *Research in Higher Education*.

The data in Table 5 demonstrate that independent students file FAFSAs on a much more fluid basis, and therefore are disproportionately impacted by the March 10 deadline.

Table 5: Monthly FAFSA Applications By Dependency Status (2013)			
Month	Dependent Apps	Independent Apps	Total Applications
January	14,627	22,143	36,770
February	66,579	49,230	115,809
March	76,523	75,488	152,012
April	5,519	17,106	22,625
May	3,890	14,698	18,589
June	3,876	13,746	17,622
July	4,917	17,343	22,260
August	4,593	14,463	19,057
September	1,826	7,734	9,560
October	1,808	7,372	9,180
November	1,844	7,030	8,874
December	1,704	6,766	8,470
Grand Total	187,706	253,119	440,828

Large disparity between dependent and independent application submission

Indiana’s postsecondary attainment goals are negatively affected when students who would otherwise eligible for state financial aid are unable to use this funding based on the date they apply. While some deadline must be set, a later deadline would help increase the number of students that can pursue postsecondary education and limit the debt they incur to do so.

III. THE SUCCESS RATES OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT POPULATION

What metrics do we use to evaluate success?

This answer is straightforward: we measure completion. The Commission stands strongly behind the idea that completion is what matters and that whenever possible students should strive to complete faster both to limit their cost and increase their chances for success.

What conclusions do we reach after examining these metrics?

CONCLUSION #4: Switchers complete at substantially greater rates than exclusively part-time students.

As data in Table 6 show, within the exclusively part-time population at 4-year institutions, no student completes within four years, which is to be expected. The percentages improve minimally when looking at those FAFSA filers who complete degrees within six (2.8 percent) or eight years (3.5 percent), but these percentages are still far below state averages for the general population, where 68.6 percent of students complete within the 8-year timeframe.⁷ The picture is very different for the switchers. At 4-year institutions, 12.1 percent of FAFSA filers complete on-time, 54.2 percent complete within six years, and 75.3 percent complete within eight years.

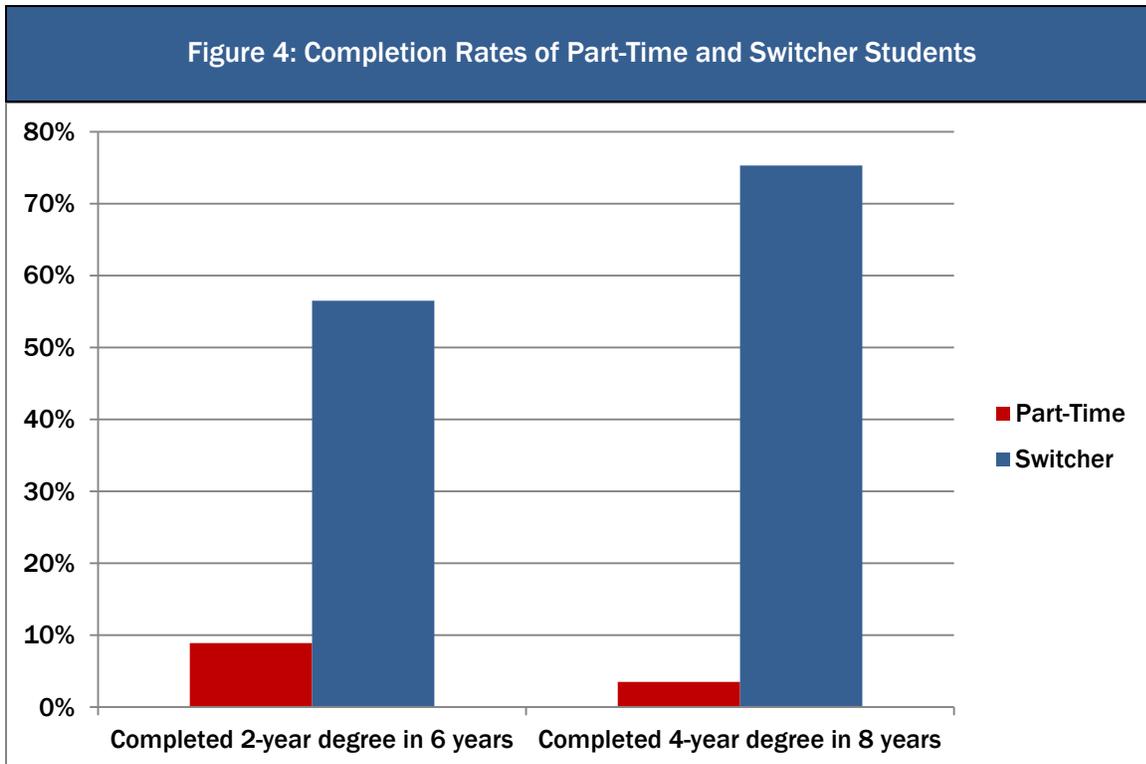
Table 6: Completion Rates at 4-year Institutions			
Category	In 4 Years	In 6 Years	In 8 Years
Part-time	0.0%	2.8%	3.5%
Switcher	12.1%	54.2%	75.3%

The picture at 2-year institutions is better, but only slightly: only 1.6 percent complete within two years, 2.9 percent complete within three years, 4.8 percent complete within four years, and 8.9 percent complete in six years. At 2-year institutions, 9.4 percent complete on-time, 24.9 percent complete in three years, 39.0 percent complete within four years, and 56.5 percent complete within six years. These students complete at or above the state averages at 2- and 4-year institutions.

Table 7: Completion Rates at 2-year Institutions				
Category	In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years	In 6 Years
Part-time	1.6%	2.9%	4.8%	8.9%
Switcher	9.4%	24.9%	39.0%	56.5%

⁷ Six and eight year completion rates at 4-year institutions are 62.9 percent and 68.6 percent, respectively. More complete data can be found in the Commission's annual College Completion Reports, available online at <http://www.in.gov/che>.

While it is not surprising that switchers complete faster than exclusively part-time students, the variance in success rates is quite large even after allowing extra time. If an exclusively part-time student completed two courses per semester that applied to the degree program, that student would generally graduate in five semesters (2.5 years) with an associate degree, barring any complications. Yet even when we look out to the six-year mark, 1 in 10 exclusively part-time students will have completed, while 5 in 10 of their switcher counterparts will have. The four-year numbers show even greater disparity. Figure 4 summarizes these findings.



These success rates certainly indicate that students who take more courses, even if they are not full-time every semester, are much more likely to graduate than those who stay in exclusively part-time status.

The implication for financial aid is clear: to administer a part-time grant program that does not embrace and fund the switchers would overlook a significant portion of our student population that, according to the data, has a much greater chance of completing college.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data presented here, the Commission recommends the following as it relates to academic support and financial support for the adult population.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #1: Create, and guide students to, academic structures that support continuous full-time enrollment or more structured part-time enrollment.

Perhaps the best way to help part-time students complete is by providing them with more clearly defined program maps, enhanced feedback about progress and academic support in the classroom to create more efficient pathways through college. These elements should be built in such a way that either (1) facilitate continuous full-time enrollment, especially for the switchers or (2) provide a more structured part-time enrollment experience, through more structured, default programs, such as the program operated at Subaru in conjunction with Purdue University, for example. These structures can become the basis for more predictable and consistent schedules for students to enable them to organize their lives around school more easily. The Commission and Indiana's postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to all Hoosiers to create a system of higher education that is free of unnecessary roadblocks and that provides a clear pathway toward postsecondary success.

From the CCRC study: "It may also be the case that the structure of community college programs of study is related to enrollment variation. The highly flexible structure of many community college programs, in which students can drop in and out at will at the very least allows, but may also encourage, great variation in enrollment patterns. Community colleges are in many cases offering access to courses but not adequately facilitating program completion (Jenkins, 2011). Students who are in more coherent programs (such as nursing, for example) may be much more constrained in their ability to drop in and out and even to attend full- or part-time, but this may indeed promote stronger program completion."⁸

Earlier this year, Governor Pence announced that Indiana has been selected as one of only three states in the country to participate in a grant through Lumina Foundation and Complete College America to take Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) strategies to scale on our college campuses. These evidence-based strategies are designed to provide an enhanced student experience in support of clearer and more direct paths to completion. Each of our public institutions stood with the Governor in support of the project, and we now need to determine which of our public campuses will partner with the Commission and CCA to take GPS strategies to scale.

⁸ Crosta, Peter M. 2014. "Intensity and Attachment: How the Chaotic Enrollment Patterns of Community College Students Relate to Educational Outcomes." *Community College Review* (42:2), pp. 118-42.

Nearly all public institutions have committed to taking the following GPS practices to scale in the next two years:

GUIDED PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS (GPS)

At a Glance

Most American college students do not graduate on time — costing them, their parents, and taxpayers billions. Using GPS, students make “packaged deal” choices of majors, not random courses. Then they are required to proceed on highly structured degree maps, guaranteed for on-time completion.

INFORMED CHOICE AND “META MAJORS”
“Undecided” students enter college and select among a set of initial broad clusters of majors. As students progress, these meta majors narrow into more specific areas of study.

MATH ALIGNED TO MAJORS
Students — especially those in non-STEM disciplines — are more likely to succeed when their mathematics are relevant and aligned with their majors. Rigorous statistics and quantitative reasoning courses are often most appropriate for many majors. Mathematics faculty around the country are saying that college algebra has one purpose: preparation for calculus.

ACADEMIC MAPS
Students choose coherent programs, not random, individual courses. Students make the “big choices” of meta majors and academic majors — all the other choices of necessary credits and course sequences are laid out for them.

DEFAULT PATHWAYS
Students do not “discover” the right path; after choosing a major, the academic map is their default schedule. Exploration outside one’s major is still allowed and enabled as intentional investigation, replacing aimless wandering.

CRITICAL PATH COURSES
From beginning to end, academic pathways contain critical courses that must be completed in sequence each semester to certify that students are on track. These courses give students early signals about their prospects for success in a given field of study.

INTRUSIVE, JUST-IN-TIME ACADEMIC ADVISING
Innovations in technology allow student supports to be targeted and customized to meet the needs of individual students. Early warning systems make it possible for institutions to track student performance in required courses and target interventions when and where they are most needed.

Complete College America

The Commission has previously endorsed modification of program structure to help non-traditional students overcome their unique challenges. A May 2014 resolution stated the following:

- I. The Commission will study the academic and financial needs of working adults pursuing higher education and publish recommendations for use of state and institutional resources in support of the success of this population by November 1, 2014. (This study)
- II. The Commission calls on Indiana employers to encourage and support its employees in their higher education pursuits.
- III. The Commission calls on Indiana colleges and universities, particularly those serving adult students, to implement success strategies for this population by May 9, 2014, taking these strategies to scale by 2016.

The Commission continues to offer encouragement and assistance to institutions as they implement student success strategies for all types of students while reiterating the importance of addressing unique challenges faced by non-traditional students.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #2: Enhance opportunities for competency-based education and prior learning assessment and increase student awareness around these opportunities.

Competency-based education and prior-learning assessment provide other opportunities to assist in growing the number of non-traditional students who successfully complete postsecondary work. A 2012 report from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance singled out competency-based education and prior-learning assessment as ways to grow the number of non-traditional students who graduate.⁹ A great deal of meaningful learning takes place outside of traditional higher education (particularly for non-traditional students), and competency-based programs and prior-learning assessments can help students make faster progress and, perhaps, even enable more students to enroll on a full-time basis. Indiana has already made some progress in these areas (e.g. the state's partnership with WGU-Indiana and recent legislation to require public colleges to provide credit for military training), and the Commission previously offered a strong endorsement of innovative models of delivery and assessing learning in its strategic plan *Reaching Higher, Achieving More*. A greater commitment to growing these types of programs at the state's public two- and four-year institutions could yield large dividends to the state in terms of the number of graduates among the non-traditional student population.

⁹ Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. 2012. *Pathways to Success: Integrating Learning with Life and Work to Increase National College Completion*. Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/acfsa>.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #3: Continue to implement innovative approaches to remediation.

As it did in its strategic plan, *Reaching Higher, Achieving More*, the Commission again emphasizes the need to address remediation in higher education. Many positive steps have been made in this direction, between the work of the Indiana General Assembly with the adoption of HEA 1005-2013 and with the work of Ivy Tech in adopting the promising practice of co-requisite remediation for English and mathematics. Institutions offering remediation should adopt the co-requisite approach or other policies that will accelerate developmental education. This is particularly important for adult learners, who may need some initial help as they transition back into postsecondary work.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #1: Continue to better align state and institutional services and resources to address non-academic challenges facing non-traditional students.

Finally, it is acknowledged that many non-traditional students face personal and economic obstacles to enrollment in, persistence through and completion of postsecondary work. Even a financial aid program that provides full tuition and fees leaves many short of the resources necessary to pursue postsecondary education due to total cost of attendance. This is particularly true of students who choose to take more courses at a time – which we know is a valuable success strategy – because that increases the foregone wages and childcare costs for working adults. In the current economic climate, it is not feasible to create a support program that finances all components of the cost of attendance faced by students. The Commission is, however, very supportive of the work discussed in the Indiana Career Council around system alignment and the development of a “no wrong door” approach to providing services to Hoosiers. There are many resources available to low-income Hoosiers that could help make it financially feasible for them to go back to school and earn the credentials that will help them no longer need such services. Unfortunately, these tend to be housed in separate state agencies and potential students find it difficult to find a single person to counsel them through the various options available. By creating a “seamless system of partners that provides worker-centric and student-centric services,” Indiana can effectively support non-traditional students regardless of their life circumstances.¹⁰ The Commission is committed to providing training to its staff to ensure that students who have questions about the supports available in other agencies will receive accurate and helpful advice on next steps.

Another non-academic challenge for adult students is the availability of institutional services. While many institutions offer night, weekend and online offerings, many of the administrative offices are open only during regular business hours. Students who can finish their classroom assignments but cannot get in to see an academic advisor, tutor or financial aid professional will likely find themselves in peril of not completing. We recommend that institutions offer night and weekend hours for these wrap-around services, particularly if the institutions serves a substantial population of adult students.

¹⁰ Indiana Career Council. 2014. *Align, Engage, Advance: A Strategic Plan to Transform Indiana's Workforce*. P. 24. Available online at http://www.in.gov/icc/files/Indiana_Career_Council_Strategic_Plan_-_Align_Engage_Advance_-_FINAL.pdf.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #2: Redesign the existing State part-time grant to meet the needs of today's non-traditional students.

Indiana's current Part-time Student Grant Program has not demonstrated the successes hoped for when the program was created in 1991. Because the law has seen little amendment in the intervening years, it becomes relatively easy to weigh the costs versus the benefits of the program. For a number of years, the program was administered by the colleges and universities, which received a block grant from the State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana (the forerunner of the Commission's Division of Student Financial Aid) to be distributed among the part-time students attending the respective institution. Many of these students were eligible for other awards from the state aid programs, and most were independent students. Because of outside commitments, these students typically were prevented from attending college full-time (or even near full-time in many cases). The Commission recommends the replacement of the existing Part-time Student Grant Program with a program designed to meet the unique needs of non-traditional students. This recommendation is supported by a 2010 study conducted by the Commission and then-SSACI, which recommended that "the state should consider establishing a separate fund to meet the financial needs and aspirations of adult students."¹¹ We recommend that the State part-time grant be renamed the "Adult Learner Grant", made available exclusively to independent students, and be altered according to the remaining financial aid recommendations that follow.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #3: Adopt a later FAFSA filing deadline for the Adult Learner Grant.

The data in SECTION 2 clearly indicate that the March 10 deadline disproportionately affects independent students. We recommend a later deadline, as late as August 1 (for a clean FAFSA), for this grant. Due to separate fiscal and operational constraints of the full-time grant programs, we recommend that the deadline for those remain at March 10 and that the later deadline apply only to the Adult Learner grant population.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #4: Allow switchers to participate in the Adult Learner grant.

The data in preceding sections illuminate the fact that the **switchers** are roughly the same population size as **exclusively part-time students** and have approximately the same financial need. The student success measures show the stark difference in completion rates between the two groups, pointing clearly to a better return on investment for the State in the switcher population. We recommend that the Adult Learner grant not discourage or prevent full-time enrollment as a condition of eligibility. This change will not only open up funding to the switchers, it will also incorporate the population of students who sign up for full-time coursework but do not complete at least 24 credits per year (thus making them ineligible for continued full-time grant eligibility). The Adult Learner grant should retain the minimum credit enrollment of six credits per semester, but remove the maximum cap of eleven credits. To ensure students are making progress, we recommend that the current credit

¹¹ http://www.in.gov/che/files/Budget_Bill_Summer_Study_-_FINAL_8-25-10.pdf

completion requirement of 18 credits per year remain intact, though students could reach that threshold with a blend of full-time and part-time semesters. Despite retaining the minimum of six credit hours, institutions providing degree maps to exclusively part-time students should try to create maps on the basis of enrollment in 9 credits per term, so that students can be sure to meet the 18 credit hour per year minimum. We further recommend retaining the requirement that the students' GPAs meet the institution's GPA for satisfactory academic progress (SAP).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #5: Adopt grant amounts that are lower than the full-time Frank O'Bannon grant but prioritize applicants according to their financial need.

We must acknowledge the additional cost of completing more credits and to avoid creating an incentive for students to slow their progress. For this reason, the amount of the Frank O'Bannon "full-time" grant (based on completing 24-29 credits per year) must exceed that of the Adult Learner grant (based on completing 18-23 credits per year).

We also recommend a system for prioritization of award recipients, with particular emphasis going to those students who previously received an award and those with greatest need. This may include considering the number of dependents a student has and the amount of support and/or tuition reimbursement received from non-governmental sources (such as the student's employer) in addition to the student's EFC. Details about prioritization are still being discussed with internal and external partners.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #6: Fund the Adult Learner grant more generously than the State part-time grant through additional flexibility, not new appropriations.

We must maintain our long-standing commitment to our full-time students; this is an important consideration when looking at relative funding levels for programs including this one. In a rapidly changing financial aid system, it is still unclear the extent to which students will shift from one grant pool to another. For example, a 21st Century Scholar who does not complete 30 credits by the end of freshman year but still demonstrates financial need would be ineligible for 21st Century Scholarship but eligible for Frank O'Bannon "full-time" level of award. Similarly, as discussed previously, students who do not meet the Frank O'Bannon threshold of 24 credits would be eligible for the Adult Learner grant if they are independent students. We do not yet have the data to evaluate even the first-year effects of the changes of HEA 1348-2013, much less predict the long-term implications of the law.

Conceptually, however, it is clear that some students will shift from higher-level award pools into lower-level award pools. In absence of a clear prediction of the extent of this, we recommend short-term flexibility for the Commission for the upcoming biennium to allow appropriations to follow students as they shift from one pool to another. This will, in essence, increase our support for our Adult Learner grant without reducing award amounts for all students – only those that did not complete the necessary credits to continue.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION #7: Replace the current subsidy for “high-demand, high-wage” jobs that exists in the State part-time grant statute with newly created graduation grants for students in these fields.

Indiana has been working hard in various ways to ensure that its postsecondary environment is one that has the right incentives and supports to meet workforce need. It is clear that certain sectors in the economy have a shortage of qualified applicants, and that most applicants could become qualified with an associate degree or certificate. In its recently-adopted strategic plan *Align, Engage, Advance: A Strategic Plan to Transform Indiana’s Workforce*, the Indiana Career Council calls on the General Assembly to provide further financial incentives to spur completion in the form of a “graduation grant.” The grant would be awarded to Hoosiers who complete postsecondary sub-baccalaureate programs offering degrees or quality workforce credentials tied to priority sectors identified by the Career Council. The program would be administered by the Commission, and would exist as “a separate program and funding stream from our existing need-based aid programs”.¹²

These new graduation grants could find an easy revenue stream in the existing statutory requirement to direct at least 50 percent of the current State part-time grant to independent students “pursuing a program of study that will lead to a specific high demand, high wage job.”¹³ Utilizing existing dollars would allow for the creation of graduation grants equal to \$1,000 for those with financial need and who are enrolled in sub-baccalaureate programs in priority sectors. The Commission would be able to fulfill both the mandate of the General Assembly (to designate a portion of the fund to the support of those in high-demand, high-wage programs) and do so in a way that aligns with the Indiana Career Council’s strategic plan (specifically, Strategy 3.1).¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Indiana has an unprecedented opportunity to build on previous years’ financial aid reforms and become a leader nationwide in supporting returning adults in targeted, population-specific ways. Our Big Goal of 60 percent attainment depends on adults getting degrees and credentials. Even if we increase graduation rates dramatically within the “pipeline” of traditional students, this will only get us half of the way to what our economy needs. It is also clear, from this study as well as national research, that non-traditional students have unique needs and will see greater rates of success in academic programs and financial aid programs designed specifically for them. The Commission is committed to working with Governor Mike Pence and the Indiana General Assembly to accomplish just that.

¹² Indiana Career Council. 2014. *Align, Engage, Advance: A Strategic Plan to Transform Indiana’s Workforce*. P. 24. Available online at http://www.in.gov/icc/files/Indiana_Career_Council_Strategic_Plan_-_Align_Engage_Advance_-_FINAL.pdf.

¹³ IC 21-12-8-2(5)(B)

¹⁴ Indiana Career Council. 2014. *Align, Engage, Advance: A Strategic Plan to Transform Indiana’s Workforce*. P. 24. Available online at http://www.in.gov/icc/files/Indiana_Career_Council_Strategic_Plan_-_Align_Engage_Advance_-_FINAL.pdf.