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Overview

Private career schools, institutes, colleges and universities provide diverse educational opportunities for students interested in being trained for career-specific opportunities in art, business, information technology, allied health, culinary arts, and over 200 other fields of study. These educational institutions cover the full spectrum of postsecondary education: short-term certificate and diploma programs, two-year and four-year associate and baccalaureate degrees, and masters and doctoral programs.

Career colleges comprise 39% of the institutions participating in Title IV programs. These career colleges enrolled nearly 2.2 million students in the 2006-2007 academic year. The majority of career college students attended institutions whose longest program is 4 years or more. The career college sector is more likely than the non-profit sector to serve students who are independent, have incomes in the lowest quartile, have parents with an education below the high school level, and are racial or ethnic minorities. Because of this student profile, a higher proportion of career college students received federal financial aid in 2005-2006 than did students from other sectors.

Forty-three percent of students attending career colleges are minorities. Career colleges and universities do not simply enroll large numbers of minority students; they provide a much higher level of student services to help those students persist and succeed in their studies. Thirty-eight percent of degrees conferred at career colleges went to minorities, compared to 19% at public, and 16% at private, not-for-profit institutions. Twenty-two percent of all African-Americans and 19% of all Hispanics who received an associate's degree earned it at a career college.

Graduation rates at career colleges are higher than at other comparable institutions. Three years after enrollment, students at private career schools and colleges have a higher completion rate (64%) and lower dropout rate (33%) than students at community colleges (38% and 45%, respectively). And six years after initial enrollment, a follow-up study on students who enrolled in certificate or associate's degree programs revealed that students at career colleges attained certificates 8 months sooner and associate's degrees 7 months sooner, than students who started at public colleges.

Occupations requiring postsecondary career training will have a significant increase in job growth through 2016. Career college programs will meet the market needs of high-growth occupations, such as computer support; information systems; business; nursing; dental and medical assisting; occupational and physical therapy; health technology; and legal assisting. Along with the benefits career schools and colleges provide to students, they also provide financial benefits to the community.