STUDENT AND INSTITUTIONAL VARIABLES THAT AFFECT TIME TO
DEGREE COMPLETION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research study investigated student and institutional variables associated with timely degree completion of the associate degree by community college students. Along with increased community college enrollments, time to degree has also increased. Three years (150% time or six semesters) currently stands as the community college standard for two-year associate degree completion (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2011a). To investigate time to degree, the following research question was posed: For community college students pursuing the associate degree, is there a difference in student and institutional variables between students who complete the associate degree in six semesters or less and those who complete the degree in more than six semesters? Extant data from two community colleges—both in the U.S. Bureau of the Census’ Hickory, NC metropolitan statistical area—were retrieved for this explanatory correlational study. An independent samples $t$ test was conducted to analyze continuous variables; Pearson’s chi-square test ($\chi^2$) was performed on categorical ones. Results revealed that the following variables differed significantly between students who graduated in six semesters or less and those who graduated in more than six semesters for both schools: enrollment age, final GPA, enrollment status, and enrollment continuity. The following variables did not differ significantly for either school: ethnicity, gender, summer credits, academic skills course completion, and program major. Results differed for the schools on math remediation, first semester GPA, and enrollment time frame. Findings provide data to inform institutional decision making and practice on time to degree completion and suggest ways to accelerate completion, establish a culture of inquiry and evidence-based practice, and set clear guidelines for student success.