



UPDATE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

New report shows Catholic college and university students excel

Degree Attainment Soars at Catholic Campuses

By Paula Moore

Now that campuses across the country have celebrated commencement, a new report demonstrates the impressive record that Catholic colleges and universities have in helping students attain degrees.

Bachelor's Degree Attainment: Catholic Colleges and Universities Lead the Way, released by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), reveals that students who begin at Catholic institutions tend to stay enrolled in their initial institution and reap the benefits of more rapid degree completion than students in any other sector of higher education.

Using data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, the ACCU report shows how students who began their undergraduate studies in a Catholic institution in 2006 fared after four, five, and six years. Of the first-time, full-time students within Catholic higher education, 54 percent had achieved their baccalaureate degree in four years, with nearly 70 percent doing so in six years. While these figures are comparable to the broader sector of private, four-year institutions (which include Catholic colleges among their total), the rates specific to Catholic institutions are higher than any other sector (see table on page 2).

These outcomes translate into real, tangible benefits, the report notes. Federal data show that the average cost of a year of education, after scholarships and grants, at a four-year public campus is \$12,800 and at a four-year private institution is \$22,620. For every one of our graduates, those are costs avoided—and replaced by earning potential.

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Commitment from the Top

As the report shows, degree completion among students who started in Catholic higher education exceeds the rates of students in other sectors, even among those who transferred from their original institution. Even the relatively few students in the cohort who began part-time at a Catholic institution show impressive rates of degree completion, although often at a different institution and over a longer time period. The study also demonstrates that students who transfer into Catholic institutions attain degrees at rates much higher than their peers who transfer to public or for-profit campuses.

How do Catholic colleges account for this level of success? In many cases, innovative approaches to helping students excel, coupled with a commitment to the inherent value of every person, results in a supportive environment that promotes success. Take the example of Saint Mary's College in Indiana, which in April announced its

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Catholic Colleges Help Students Succeed

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Four-Year Graduation Promise. Starting in the fall, with the incoming class of 2017, students who follow Promise guidelines are guaranteed to graduate in four years or the college will pay for any additional courses the student needs to earn her degree.

development of leaders who know how to listen, ask good questions, and articulate their ideas. We believe that young women become more active global citizens if they learn in an environment built on core values of community, faith, and justice.”

Table: Bachelor’s Degree Attainment, by Time to Completion and Sector: Fall 2006 Cohort (percentage)

	After Four Years			After Five Years			After Six Years		
	At Original Institution	At Different Institution	Total	At Original Institution	At Different Institution	Total	At Original Institution	At Different Institution	Total
<i>All Entering Students</i>									
Public, Four-Year	34.1	4.9	39.0	46.0	8.7	54.7	49.4	10.9	60.3
For-Profit	26.5	2.3	28.8	29.3	3.8	33.1	30.3	4.9	35.2
Private, Four-Year	48.4	5.4	53.8	55.1	9.0	64.8	56.9	11.8	68.7
Catholic	48.4	5.8	54.2	55.0	10.5	65.5	56.8	13.0	69.8

“This isn’t a recruitment strategy for us, or a new initiative on campus,” says President Carol Ann Mooney. “Our students have always worked closely with their advisors and professors to stay on track and achieve their goals. We offer the courses they need, when they need them, led by exceptional faculty who are dedicated to teaching.”

As a result, in the past 10 years, 93 percent of Saint Mary’s graduates have earned a degree in four years.

Mooney adds, “The value of a Saint Mary’s education is immeasurable. We believe that small, discussion-based classes are critical to the

The Real Story

Behind these statistics and initiatives are the students who choose Catholic higher education—students like Nhu Le, who was born in Vietnam and moved to Omaha as a child to be near her grandmother. Although she could barely speak English, Le says she dreamed of going to college. She excelled academically in high school and vividly recalls the day her uncle drove her past Creighton University, telling her that if she wanted to go to the best college, to go there. That became her goal even though, she says, “I was painfully shy, and not very confident as English was not my first language.”

Enrolling at Creighton with a scholarship, the 2013 recipient of a bachelor’s degree in chemistry says the university lives its mission and is committed to student success.

“Everyone is very helpful and seems to genuinely care about each other,” she says. “Even though there is a diversity of students and cultures, you were part of one big family or community.”

Le became active in many of the organizations at Creighton and participated in numerous service immersion trips. But her college days were not without challenges. Because her parents do not speak English, Le lived at home while a student, helping her family navigate doctor appointments, paying bills, and other daily chores.

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Support for Students Enables Achievement

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“But staff and faculty believed in me and wanted me to succeed ... especially helpful was Creighton’s Student Support Services,” she explains. Their efforts paid off, and in the fall, Le will enter Creighton’s School of Dentistry.

Jenny Treviño has a similar story. The first in her family to go to college, Treviño graduated in May from the University of Saint Thomas (UST) in Houston with a degree in international studies.

“If I hadn’t had educators who took an interest in me, I wouldn’t be in college,” says one recent Catholic university alumna.

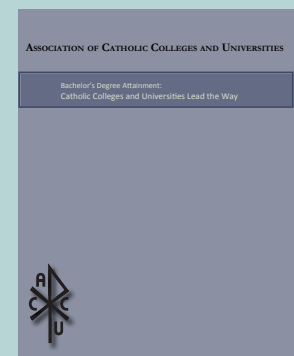
President of the French Club, vice president of the International Studies Society, and a member of several honor societies, Treviño recalls a time when she didn’t think she was even going to college until encouraged to consider it. “My college counselor in high school and my geography teacher, who is a UST alumna, suggested St. Thomas,” Treviño said. “They were both really encouraging, and they were right.”

Having graduated, Treviño is looking forward to her next adventure: teaching with Teach for America

in Detroit. “I grew up kind of the same way as some of those kids,” Treviño said. “I really feel passionate about this. If I hadn’t had educators who took an interest in me, I wouldn’t be in college. I want to do that for students—even if I help just one, it will be worth it.”

Treviño says she will strive to emulate those at UST who shaped her and invested in her future. “I don’t know if they know how much they affected me,” Treviño said. “They had really high expectations of me and kept me motivated. I learned a lot about myself and [about] being a well-rounded individual at St. Thomas, and I think that’s really valuable.” □

Download Bachelor’s Degree Attainment: Catholic Colleges and Universities Lead the Way and read more stories of student success on the ACCU website: www.accunet.org/students



Update Newsletter

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Submissions

If you have a news item pertaining to Catholic higher education mission that you would like included in an issue of *Update*, please submit them to pmoore@accunet.org. Please observe the following deadlines for article submission:

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