



AMERICAN
TALENT
INITIATIVE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 27, 2018

Media Contact: McKenzie Maxson (McKenzie.Maxson@aspeninstitute.org)

The Talent Blind Spot: New Research Shows Top Colleges Overlook High-Achieving Community College Students Who Have Potential to Excel

Aspen Institute College Excellence Program finds selective colleges and universities miss out on opportunity to enroll an additional 15,000 high-achieving community college students

WASHINGTON, DC – New research conducted as part of the American Talent Initiative finds that community college students have the potential to achieve at the country’s top colleges and universities but, due to a number of barriers, do not end up transferring to or completing a degree at a four-year institution.

Community college students represent approximately 37 percent of all entering first-time degree-seeking undergraduates, with a total fall enrollment of 6.4 million students. Each year, more than 50,000 students in community college who are fully prepared to excel at a four-year university fail to transfer, according to analysis from the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. Approximately 15,000 of these students have earned a 3.7 GPA or higher in community college, indicating that they could graduate at the top of the class at even the most selective U.S. colleges and universities. This missed opportunity is part of a larger national challenge—each year, 80 percent of community college students say they intend to transfer to a four-year college or university and earn a bachelor’s degree, yet only 14 percent of community college students attain a bachelor’s degree within six years of beginning their higher education.

“There are so many talented students in our nation’s community colleges who can provide the fuel needed to drive our economy forward, strengthen our democratic institutions and prove that the American Dream is alive and well,” said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and a member of ATI’s steering committee. “For many thousands of community college students, completing a bachelor’s degree from a top four-year institution will expand their chances of leading discovery and innovation in many fields essential to national progress. In this way, fixing transfer at ATI institutions is an incredible opportunity for the entire nation.”

The American Talent Initiative – a partnership between Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program, and Ithaca S+R – is an alliance of top four-year institutions committed to attracting, enrolling and graduating an additional 50,000 talented, low-

and moderate-income students at colleges and universities with the strongest graduation rates by 2025. Launched with 30 members in December 2016, ATI now has 100 members, including the entire Ivy League, every school in the University of California system, leading national liberal arts colleges, and public and private research universities. Aspen Institute researchers examined data from the National Center for Education Statistics on transfer rates from community college to four-year schools for students who had achieved a GPA in the 3.0-4.0 range, revealing an untapped pool of talented students with the potential to achieve at the country's best institutions.

The Talent Blind Spot demonstrates that ATI-eligible colleges and universities — defined as those that consistently graduate 70 percent or more of their students in six years — can help meet this challenge by creating substantially more opportunity for community college students. Across all 290 ATI-eligible institutions, only 18 percent of new students are transfers, compared to 32 percent at all four-year institutions.

Modest changes at individual institutions could have a major impact. If every ATI-eligible institution enrolled an additional 40 transfer students as juniors each year, the American Talent Initiative would be nearly halfway toward reaching its 50,000-by-2025 goal. Improving transfer outcomes can also significantly expand opportunity to reach students of color and lower-income students who are historically underrepresented in four-year schools.

Several American Talent Initiative members are showing what's possible. For example:

- **Smith College**, through its Ada Comstock Scholars Program, enrolls about 30 new non-traditional college age transfer students each year to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree. Ada Comstock Scholars include students who are working, parenting, veterans or returning to college after gaps in their studies.
- **The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** developed the Carolina Student Transfer Excellence Program (C-STEP), a partnership between Carolina and 10 North Carolina community colleges, with the aim of identifying high-achieving, low- and moderate-income students and supporting them in completing their associate degrees and transferring to Carolina with the skills to excel. C-STEP currently has 186 students enrolled in its program.
- At **The University of California, Los Angeles**, transfer students make up more than 33 percent of the undergraduate population, with more than 3,150 transfers enrolling at UCLA annually and over 90 percent of them enrolling from California community colleges. Community college transfer is prioritized at the highest levels, reinforced through significant resource allocation, and visibly celebrated as a major contributor to campus excellence.

“There are many pathways by which colleges can find high-achieving transfer students, whether of traditional age or older. I understand the obstacles and situations that students can face on the route to a four-year degree, and I am enormously proud of the extra lengths that a place like Smith goes to make sure women of promise can realize their dreams,” said Smith College President Kathleen McCartney.

American Talent Initiative member institutions commit substantial resources to increase opportunity for lower-income students, as well as collect institutional data that will be annually published to assess their aggregate progress toward meeting the national goal.

For more information, visit: <https://americantalentinitiative.org/who-we-are/>

###

About Bloomberg Philanthropies:

Bloomberg Philanthropies works in over 120 countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organization focuses on five key areas for creating lasting change: Arts, Education, Environment, Government Innovation, and Public Health. Bloomberg Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg's charitable activities, including his foundation and his personal giving. In 2017, Bloomberg Philanthropies distributed \$702 million. For more information, please visit www.bloomberg.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Snapchat](#), and [Twitter](#).

About The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program:

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program (www.aspeninstitute.org/college-excellence) aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. The Program is part of The Aspen Institute www.aspeninstitute.org, which has a mission of fostering leadership based on enduring values and providing a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues.

About Ithaka S+R:

Ithaka S+R (www.sr.ithaka.org) is a not-for-profit service that provides research and strategic guidance to help the academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, technological, and demographic change. Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA (www.ithaka.org).