

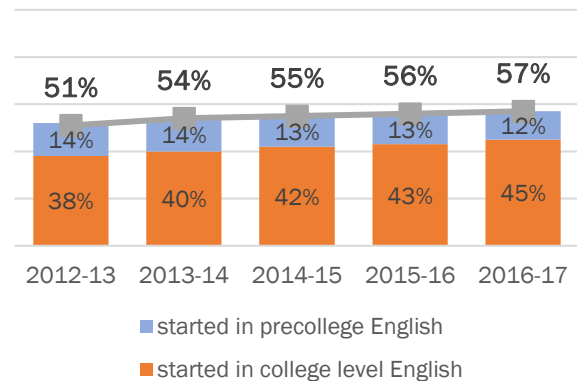
FIRST YEAR ENGLISH: KEY DATA POINTS

Several researchers and national organizations have identified completion of first year English and math as key strategies for increasing college student success (see [Complete College America](#) as an example). This research brief provides a summary of key data points and poses lingering questions related to first year English in the Washington Community and Technical College system. For most students in the system, first year English means the commonly numbered course English 101. The data points and questions in this brief were first developed for a group of English faculty that met to discuss progress and future steps for students' pathways into, pathways through, and pathways out of first year English.

Pathways into first year English

Over the past five years, more students¹ have completed a college level English course in their first year (see Figure 1). The total percent completing a college English course in their first year is up from 51 percent in 2012-13 to 57 percent in 2016-17. Note that this growth primarily reflects an increase in the percent of students who started in and completed college level English in their first year (from 38 percent to 45 percent). There has been little change in the percent of students who started in precollege English and completed a college English course in their first year (from 14 percent to 12 percent). This does not necessarily mean that college efforts to improve outcomes for students starting in precollege courses have not been successful; it means that in aggregate more students starting at college level appears to have had the larger impact on first year English completion.

Figure 1. Percent of new transfer intent students completing a college English course in their first year



Some colleges in the system have seen dramatic changes in English placement and first year English completion over the past five years. Colleges that have seen large increases in the percent of students starting in college level English have seen similar increases in the percent of students completing a college level English course within a year. Current evidence suggests that colleges could continue efforts to place more students into college level English and see more progress in the percent of students completing a college level English course within their first year.

Lingering questions

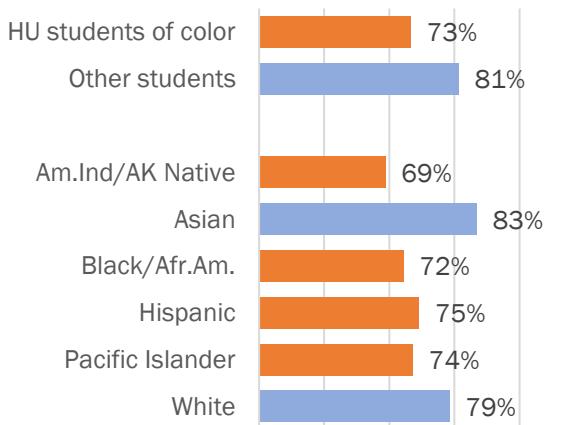
- How many students never make it into English 101 because they are avoiding it (including those who enroll in short-term programs because they do not want to take English 101)?
- Does starting more students in college level English have an impact on long-term outcomes?

¹ New students does not include International, dual enrollment, or those with prior college level experience

Pathways through first year English

Students are completing English 101 at different rates. Figure 2 shows a summary of English 101 completion rates during the 2016-17 school year by students' reported race/ethnicity. Students identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander have been historically underserved (HU) by postsecondary education and are grouped together at the top of the chart as "HU students of color" in comparison to other students. For HU students of color, 73 percent completed English 101 with a 2.0 or higher, compared to 81 percent of other students. Overall, 43,372 students enrolled in English 101 during 2016-17 and 9,149 students did not complete the course with a 2.0 or higher.

Figure 2. English 101 course completion rates by race/ethnicity (completion with a 2.0 grade or higher)



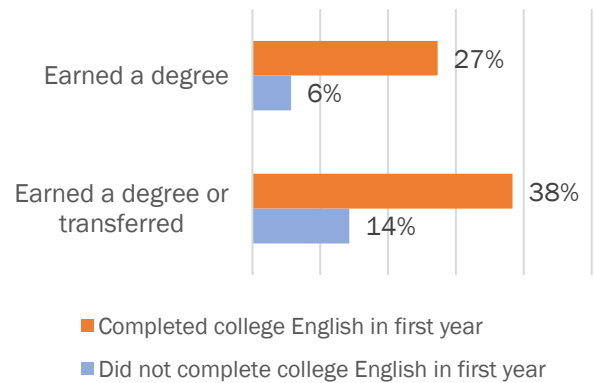
Lingering questions

- What are the primary reasons for students not successfully completing English 101?
- What strategies are effectively helping more students successfully complete English 101?

Pathways out of first year English

Completing a college English course in the first year is an important predictor of eventual completion of educational goals. Figure 3 shows four-year outcomes for transfer intent students who completed a college English course in their first year compared to students who did not complete a college English course in their first year. Transfer intent students who finish a college English course in their first year are almost three times as likely to have completed a degree or transferred to a four-year institution after four years (38 percent vs. 14 percent, does not include international, dual enrollment, or those with prior college students).

Figure 3. Degree completion and transfer rates by first year English completion



Lingering questions

- Is first year English completion an important predictor of program completion because it is a course that helps students be more successful in later coursework?
- Alternatively, is first year English completion an important predictor of program completion because it is an early hurdle that shows which students are more likely to succeed in later coursework?



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