Ashley Scott

H.E.L.P. Committee

College Completion Rate

A major issue in the United States is the college graduation rate. However, the higher education policy tends to focus on the cost of college. Yes, there are several factors that are important that affect college students such as the student loans and the steadily increase rate of college. But there is a lost focus on students, and can they actually earn a degree once they are in the institution. In 2016, more than forty percent of all students who started at a four-year college six earlier had not yet earned a degree. This is a national issue for colleges across the United States and the retention rate of college students needs to increase. There are huge advances of being a college graduate. Earning a bachelor’s degree will increase average worker salary about a $1 million more than a worker without a postsecondary education.

The origin of the graduation completion rate started in the mid 1980’s. There was no record of the national level institution data on university graduation rates until 1985. The NCAA, National Collegiate Athletic Association, wanted to compare the academic records and the performance of student athletes with overall student body. After, the research was done the records were only released to NCAA member institutions and none of the information was release to the public (Cook and Pullaro). Then, in 1988 U.S. Senators Bill Bradley and Edward Kennedy proposed a bill S. 2498, also referred to the Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act. This bill required higher institutions that receive Title IV funds to submit an annual report to the Secretary of Education containing information on graduation rates.

However, in the last decade there has been legislation to help improve the college completion rate. The Obama Administration reward colleges for doing a good job of enrolling and graduating significant numbers of low-income students on time through the new College Opportunity and Graduation Bonus. These programs would recognize and provide a bonus to high-performing universities that enroll and graduate a significant number of low- and- moderate income students. This would be demonstrated by high graduation rates for Pell Grant recipients and low default rates. This encourage all universities to improve their performance (U.S. Department of Education). The H.R. 6542 bill is to amend and strengthen the Higher Education Act of 1965 so that every student has a path to a quality, debt-free degree or credential that leads to a rewarding career (Congressional Record). This bill also has a section on graduate and postsecondary improvement programs. This section of the bill gives various programs to help improve the university graduation rate. The programs give aid to minorities and give aid to grant money. This bill was introduced in 115th Congress during the 2017- 2018.

Money is a key factor improving college completion rate in legislation. In 2018 Congress agreed to spend additional $4 billion over the next two years on programs to improve college completion rates (U.S. Department of Education). Providing federal matching grants directly to institutions to spend on core instruction and academic support services would increase college completion rates. Since there are budget restrictions, many public universities offer large classes but do not provide additional support services for the class. The support services are for the many students who are particularly for poor and first- generation college students who needs them. However, spending more on core instruction and academic support does help more, Deming proposes a 1:1 federal matching grant for public spending on institutions.

The Increasing College Completion with a Federal Higher Education Matching Grant is an alternative route to address the college completion rate. This would lead to increase spending on academic support programs. There is evidence that shows spending more on per student especially on instruction and academic support service would increase course completion, GPAs and college completion rates (Deming). The people who tend to support the proposal want to see low students succeed and get their bachelor’s degree. The people who also support federal matching grant for students spending in state commits to supporting free tuition for in-state students attending public universities. This also comes with an opposing side since “free college” is a huge debt in government. Yes, free college sounds nice, but it requires some to pay for it. That means someone is getting tax to provide for this and many Americans are against being taxed for free college. Also, people tend to argue that it would devalue the worth of a diploma, too.

However, the college completion rate is a national issue. It is necessary for students to have a bachelor’s degree. Workers with a college degree are less likely to face unemployment. In addition to the potential to make money, earning your college degree could also lead to more career stability. Just 2.7% of workers with a bachelor’s degree are facing unemployment, compared to the 5.2% of workers with only a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education). There are too many advantages of having a bachelor’s degree and therefore the college completion rate needs to be higher than fifty-nine percent.

Bibliography

Congressional Record. H.R. 6543. Aim Higher Act. July 26, 2018. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6543/text#toc-HB1F52CB39E9A452B94FF32FE5B00E8AD>

Cook, Bryan and Pullaro, Natalie. College Graduation Rates: Behind the Numbers. <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/College-Graduation-Rates-Behind-the-Numbers.pdf>.

Deming, David. To increase College Completion rates, ivest directly in public postsecondary institutions. February 18, 2018. Brookings.<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/02/12/to-increase-college-completion-rates-invest-directly-in-public-postsecondary-institutions/#cancel>

U.S. Department of Education. Fact Sheet: Helping More Americans Complete College: New Proposals for Success. <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-helping-more-americans-complete-college-new-proposals-success>.