Coursetaking and Success

In fall 2019, 88,946 students were enrolled at Tennessee community colleges, representing more than 800,000 credit hours and amounting to over 285,000 individual course enrollments. TBR colleges served these students through course formats designed to meet students’ needs and schedules.

Enrollment in online courses has increased 35% over the past four years. In fall 2019, 20% of all course enrollments at TBR community colleges were delivered in an online format.

However, access to online courses differs by college and program, and success rates in online courses are lower than in courses delivered through other formats. In fall 2019, students earned passing grades in 73% of campus-based online classes, compared to 79% in conventional, in-person classes. Online course enrollments and success rates also differ for students of color and adult students.

Patterns & Trends in Online Coursetaking

Online coursetaking has grown over time but is more widespread at some colleges than others.

In fall 2015, 15% of all course enrollments were delivered through campus-based online or TN eCampus options. By fall 2019, 20% of all course enrollments were delivered through these formats. At some colleges, online coursetaking is more widespread. For example, in 2019, 28% of course enrollments at Volunteer were delivered online whereas at Northeast, online coursetaking was less common as only 15% of enrollments were delivered through campus-online courses or via TN eCampus.

Interactive Dashboards

TBR’s Analytics and Reporting Portal includes interactive dashboards for system office users to explore patterns and outcomes in coursetaking. These dashboards allow us to answer questions about students’ enrollment and success in courses, including:

- How have course formats changed over time?
- Who takes online courses?
- Which colleges have historically offered more online courses, and in which subject areas?
- How well do students succeed in online course, and does this differ by college or subject?
- How many adult students, low-income students, or students of color enroll in online courses, and how well do they succeed?
Who Took Online Courses?

Online coursetaking was most popular with female students and less common among students of color.

In fall 2019, 23% of courses taken by female students were online, compared to only 15% of courses taken by male students. This is especially true among white female students, for whom 25% of courses were online.

Among courses taken by students of color in fall 2019, only 17% were delivered through campus-based online instruction or TN eCampus. For African American male students, online coursetaking was lower at only 12%.

Percent of Course Enrollments Online

Who Succeeded in Online Courses?

Success rates in online courses are typically lower than success rates for other types of courses though gaps vary by college.

In fall 2019, 79% of in-person course enrollments resulted in a passing grade, compared to only 73% of campus-based online courses and 67% of courses delivered through TN eCampus. However, some colleges have very high success rates in online courses, and the gap between in-person courses and campus-online courses is also small at some colleges. For example, at Dyersburg, 80% of campus-online enrollments resulted in a passing grade – only 5 percentage points lower than in-person courses.

Course Success Rates in Fall 2019

Gaps in success rates persist across student groups, but gaps are widest for students of color.

Success rates in online courses are lower than success rates in in-person courses, across all student groups.

The gap in success rates is widest for students of color. In fall 2019, 61% of campus-online courses taken by African American students resulted in a passing grade, compared to 70% of in-person courses.

Course Success Rates in Fall 2019

In-Person  | Campus Online | TN eCampus
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Black | 70% | 61% | 53%
Hispanic | 78% | 69% | 65%
White | 81% | 75% | 72%
Other | 79% | 73% | 64%
All | 79% | 73% | 67%