

EDUCATION

FINANCE

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EFP Takeaways

Improving Graduation Rates in the 2-4 Pathway to BA Degrees

Background

Transferring from a two-year program to a four-year program has become increasingly common in the U.S. higher education context. Yet, attrition rates for these students prior to receiving a bachelor's degree remain high. Zhengren Zhu examines the impact of two institutional reforms in the University System of Georgia on bachelor's degree attainment, transfer rates, and credits lost during transfer. His work is published in vol. 17 issue 3 of *EFP*.

The Study

Two series of reforms occurred within the University System of Georgia in recent years. First, a couple of two-year colleges started offering bachelor's degrees. Second, three pairs of colleges merged their academic programs; specifically, colleges offering two-year degrees merged with colleges that also offer four-year degrees. Using a difference-in-differences approach, Zhu estimates the impact of these reforms on a range of student outcomes, including degree attainment.

Findings

The author finds that both reforms in the University System of Georgia increased the bachelor's degree attainment rate for community college students by 3 percentage points, which represents a 20 percent improvement. Both reforms also reduced the loss of credits during transfer by around 36 percent.

The author cautions, however, that university administrators and policy makers consider the impetus behind the college mergers, as they may lead to differing impacts. In this case, the consolidations were planned for the purpose of improving student outcomes; in cases where the mergers are implemented solely due to financial distress, the same results might not apply.

For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in *Education Finance and Policy*](#).
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- Summary of:
Zhengren, Z. (2022) Improving Graduation Rates in the 2-4 Pathway to BA Degrees. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (3): 432-453.