

Getting to the Degree

LaGCC 2009-10 Graduates and Credits Attempted & Transferred

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Finding

The average LaGuardia 2009-10 graduate's transcript listed courses totaling 83 equated credits, including those that she transferred in, those she failed, and those she took for no credit (like basic skills). Examining this by major, the number of credits listed for a 60-credit degree varied from 70 credits for Vet Tech majors to 96 credits for Fine Arts majors.

In the analysis we found that the large differences among majors were predominately the result of non-credit developmental skills courses. Fine Arts graduates traveled the longest basic skill course road before reaching graduation, lengthening their required trip by 40%.

The success of Fine Arts in getting students to graduation and the burden they face in doing so require further investigation.

Discussion

For this study we examined the courses of 1,838 LaGuardia graduates during the year 2009-10. On average, these graduates took 7.6 semesters to graduate, of which 1.3 semesters were spent stopping out. There are many reasons why students take nearly eight years to graduate. Most of our students begin full-time, taking loads that appear to be heavier than their counterparts at other institutions (17 credits at LaGuardia compared to 14 for first-time, full-time students in a Noel-Levitz 2009 national sample). After several semesters, however, many of these students drop to part-time.

This is only part of the story. The majority of our students must improve their basic skills, taking courses that do not count against the 60 credits required for a degree. Our average graduate from 2009-10 attempted more than 83 equated credits before graduating, more than 1/3 higher than their graduation requirement. These graduates received six credits on average when they transferred in and successfully passed 62 credits in credit-bearing courses. They also failed three degree credits during their career. In addition, they took 12 credits in courses for which no degree credit was granted. Most of these non-credit courses were developmental basic skills courses.

Figure 1 shows the full breakdown for those majors with more than 14 graduates during 2009-10. Students in Vet Tech graduated with the fewest attempted and transferred-in credits with 70, while those in Fine Arts had the most with 96.

The Impact of Changing Majors

In the label for each major in Figure 1, the average number of majors held by graduates from 2009-10 is shown. For example, the college average is “#Majors = 1.83.” That is, the average graduate changed majors about once during his or her career (or 83 out of 100 changed once, while 17 did not change or some other combination including some with three changes, etc.).

We calculated the average number of credits taken over 60 (the “excess”) for each major by adding the number of degree credits successfully taken to the number transferred in and subtracted 60 from that number. We then attempted to see if the average number of “excess” degree credits correlated with the average number of majors held by the graduates. It did not. That is, the average number of major changes by graduates in a field was not useful in predicting the number of degree credits with which they graduated.

While switching majors may add course requirements for individual students, the students most hurt by changing majors did not group by majors in a way that allowed us to predict that a major field attracted students who would graduate with excess degree credits.

Previous studies have revealed that most major changes occur between related majors where credit loss is least likely to happen. We also found that, while many students switched out of liberal arts, as predicted, many also switched into that area.

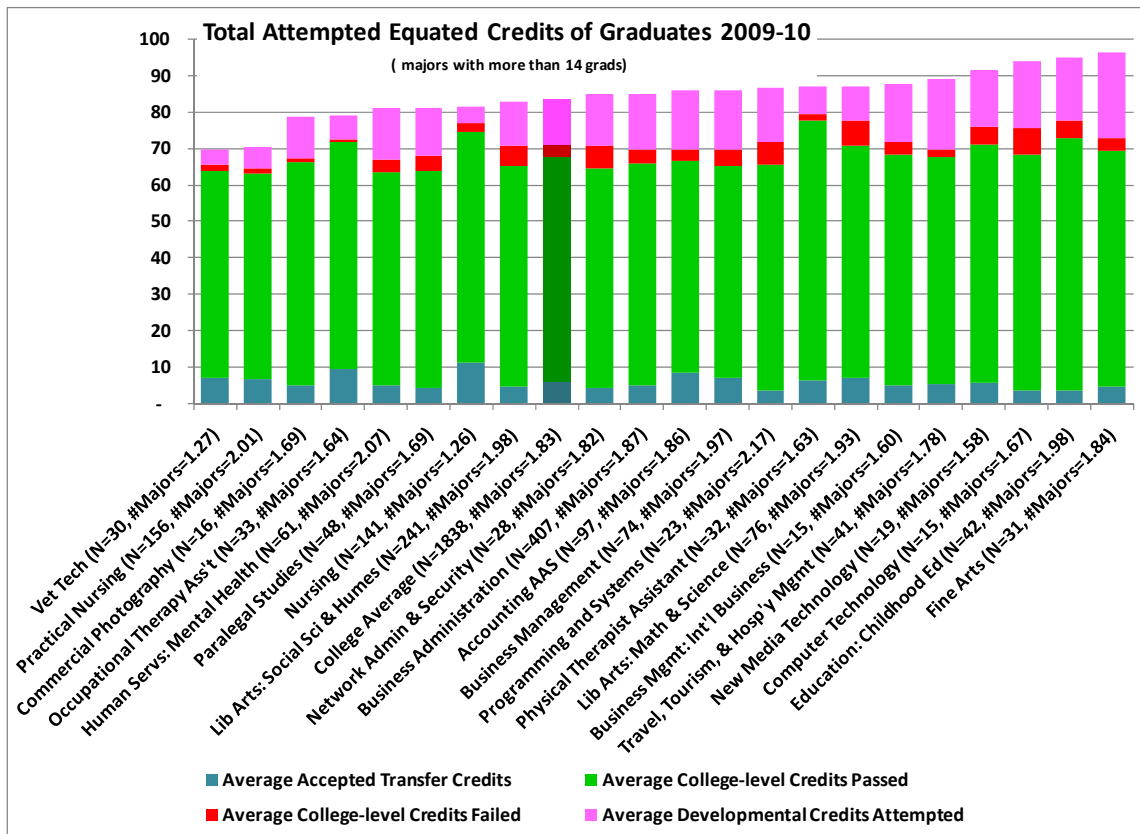


Figure 1

The Impact of Degree Credits

In Figure 2 we looked at only the credits that might count toward a degree. This is essentially Figure 1 without failed degree credits and without non-credit equated credits.

In this figure Fine Arts moves much closer to the college average and the health fields move up. Students in the health fields tend to repeat courses to gain a higher grade and win entrance to the clinic level. These students also appear to transfer-in a number of courses from other colleges.

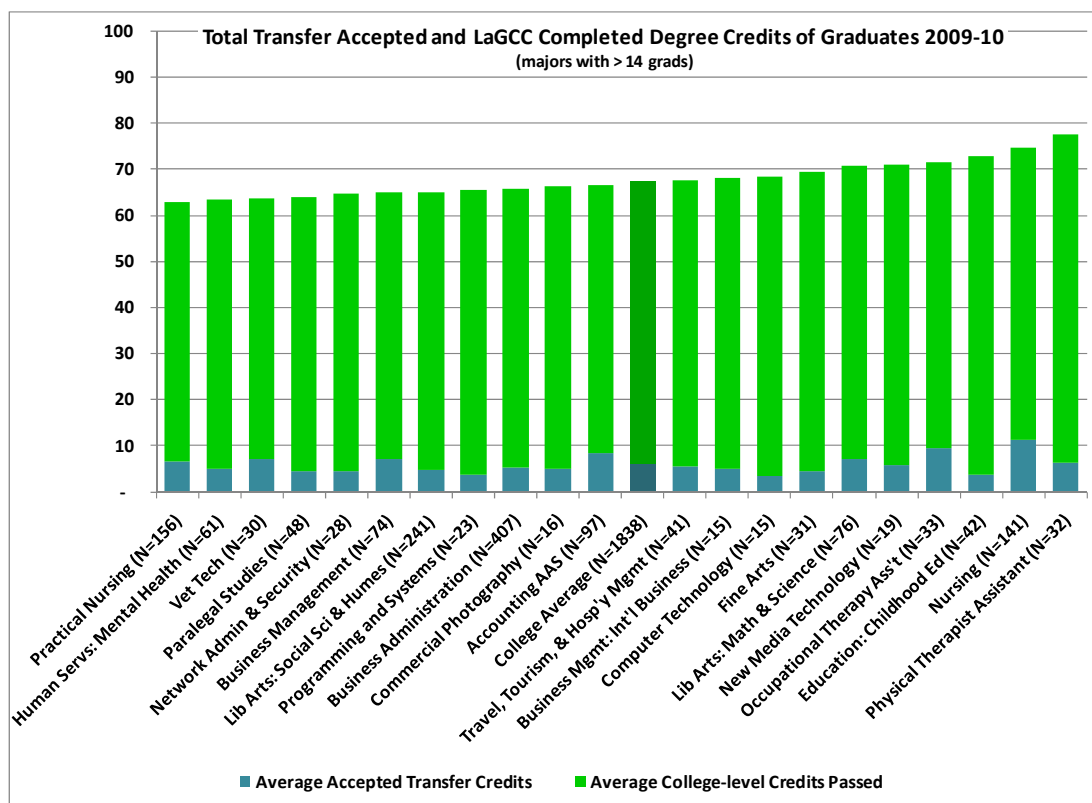


Figure 2

Failed Degree Credits and Attempted Non-credit (Equated) Credits

Figure 3 gives the other half of the story. Here we see that Fine Arts' high level of attempted credits stems from the number of developmental credits that their graduates list on their transcripts. In addition to degree course work, the average Fine Arts graduate of 2009-10 attempted 24 credits of non-credit equated credits, largely developmental education. This is equivalent to a 40% surcharge to reach a two-year diploma. These graduates are perhaps our most determined.

It is also interesting to note that the average graduate of a number of the computer areas and liberal arts: math and science had approximately two failed courses on his or her transcript.

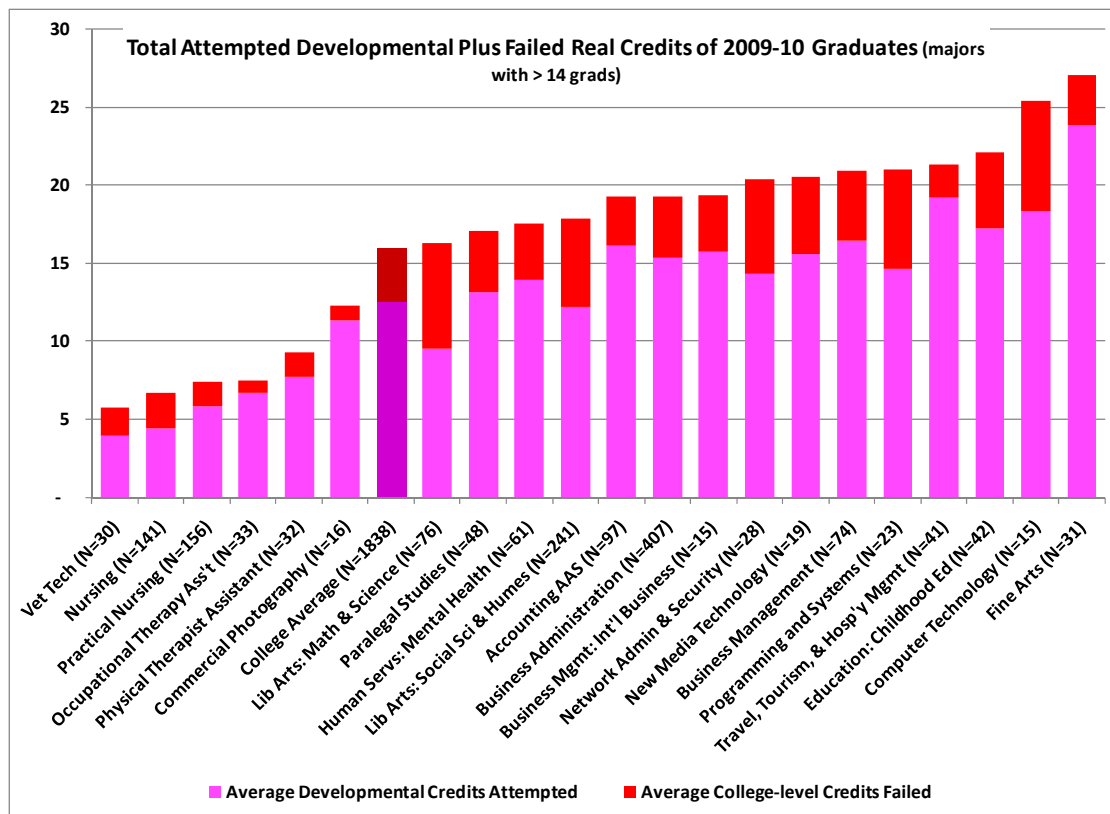


Figure 3

Conclusion

The individual struggles of our students to reach graduation become clearer when we disaggregate by majors. Certain majors, like Fine Arts, attract, and appear to support to graduation, students who have unusually high basic skills difficulties.