



Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities

William G. Bowen, Matthew M. M. Chingos, Michael S. S. McPherson

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The United States has long been a model for accessible, affordable education, as exemplified by the country's public universities. And yet less than 60 percent of the students entering American universities today are graduating. Why is this happening, and what can be done? *Crossing the Finish Line* provides the most detailed exploration ever of college completion at America's public universities. This groundbreaking book sheds light on such serious issues as dropout rates linked to race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Probing graduation rates at twenty-one flagship public universities and four statewide systems of public higher education, the authors focus on the progress of students in the entering class of 1999--from entry to graduation, transfer, or withdrawal. They examine the effects of parental education, family income, race and gender, high school grades, test scores, financial aid, and characteristics of universities attended (especially their selectivity). The conclusions are compelling: minority students and students from poor families have markedly lower graduation rates--and take longer to earn degrees--even when other variables are taken into account. Noting the strong performance of transfer students and the effects of financial constraints on student retention, the authors call for improved transfer and financial aid policies, and suggest ways of improving the sorting processes that match students to institutions.

An outstanding combination of evidence and analysis, *Crossing the Finish Line* should be read by everyone who cares about the nation's higher education system.

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