

TEACHER CERTIFICATION, RETENTION, AND RECRUITMENT IN PALAU: Understanding Graduation Patterns of Teacher Education Students at Palau Community College

Bradley Rentz, Sinton Soalablai, Natasha A. Saelua, and Avalloy McCarthy

Why This STUDY

To strengthen teacher preparation in the Republic of Palau, Public Law 10-32 (enacted in 2018) requires all teachers in the country to hold an associate's degree in education or in the subject area they will teach by the end of 2023. This policy change required many current teachers and those interested in the teaching profession to enroll in an associate's degree program at Palau Community College (PCC), the country's only postsecondary institution.

To support policymakers' understanding of how long it takes teachers and teacher candidates to meet the requirements of Public Law 10-32, this study examined the graduation patterns of teacher education students enrolled in associate's degree programs at PCC. The results of this study will support PCC and the Palau Ministry of Education's efforts to successfully train, retain, and recruit qualified teachers.

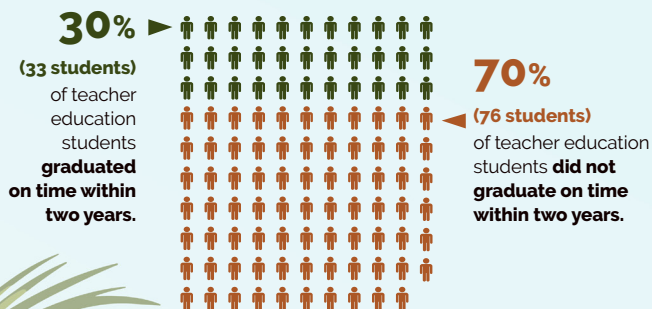
What We DID

To understand the graduation patterns of education students at PCC, researchers analyzed data from 109 teacher education students who enrolled in an associate's degree program at PCC during academic years 2019/20–2021/22.^{1,2} The study team calculated graduation rates and estimated average graduation times from the date students entered their teacher education programs during the course of this study.³

Furthermore, to understand student performance across different groups, results were separated by the student's prior college experience, major, and organizational affiliation (Ministry of Education, Palau Community Action Agency, or unaffiliated).⁴ For students with prior college experience (55 percent of teacher education students), the data did not include time spent earning prior credits. Therefore, for these students, time-to-graduate only measures time following students' re-enrollment in the program, not the total amount of time students spent in college. For additional details, see the [study's appendixes](#).

What We FOUND

Thirty percent of teacher education students seeking an associate's degree graduated on time,⁵ within two years. Thirty-three of the 109 teacher education students enrolled at PCC seeking associate's degrees during 2019/20–2021/22 graduated within two years⁶ (six terms), which PCC considers on time for full-time students. Thirty-one of the 33 graduates (94 percent) had prior college experience.



TIANG A NGAR NGII A
OMESODEL EL TEKOI ER A BELAU.
A Palauan language version of this study is available.

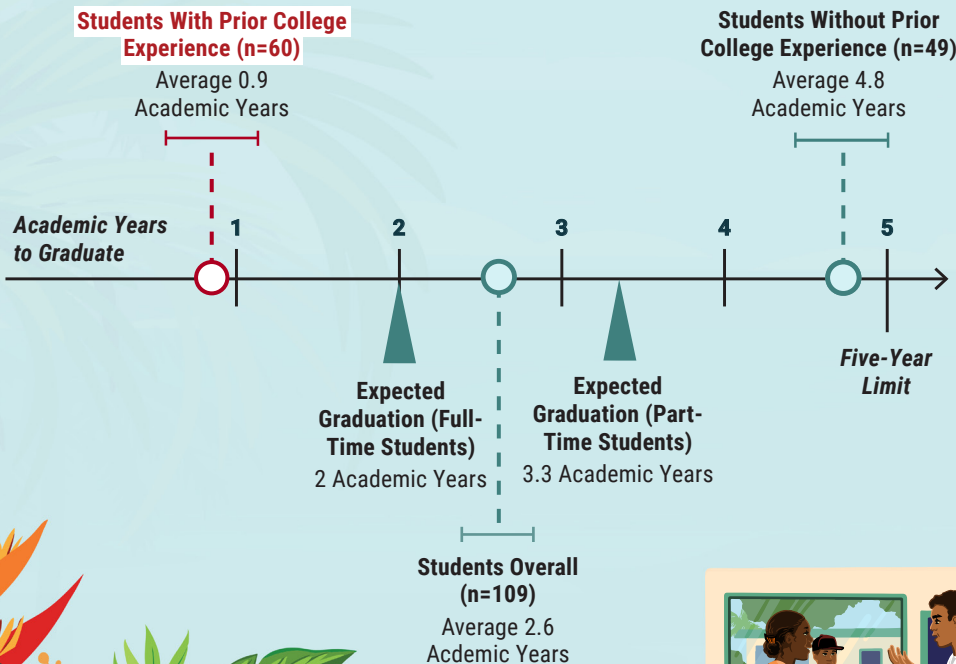
The overall estimated average graduation time was at least 2.6 years (about eight terms).

Students with prior college experience graduated on time and faster on average. Students with prior college experience took at least 0.9 years (just under one academic year), on average to graduate, after re-enrolling in the education associate's degree program. Prior college experience likely enabled these students to graduate faster than the two years (six terms) that PCC expects for full-time students.

Of students without prior college experience, only 12.9 percent graduated within five years. The average student without prior college experience would be expected to take at least 4.8 years to graduate, exceeding the 3.3 years on-time graduation that PCC expects for part-time students. This extended time to graduate also puts students at risk of hitting the five-year mark at PCC, where their credits may expire or degree requirements may change, requiring them to take new courses. Thus, hitting this five-year mark could further delay their graduation.



Students who had **any prior college experience** had much shorter estimated average times to graduation.



Technical Note on Graduation Time Calculation

PCC allows five academic years for students to graduate before credits begin to expire and degree requirements may change. After five years, students may need to retake those courses, as well as take new courses. Because of this, the calculation for expected average graduation time has an upper limit of five academic years. Expected average graduation times that are close to five years mean that at least some of those students reached that limit.

About the Figures in This Study

- All data were provided by PCC, and values were calculated by the study authors.
- The overall sample for each figure included 109 students at PCC.
- The bars (▬) represent the 95% confidence intervals for the average graduation times, indicating where the true average is likely to be. Wider bars show more differences in graduation times.
- The average graduation times shown are the minimum estimated average graduation times, but the actual average graduation times could be higher.



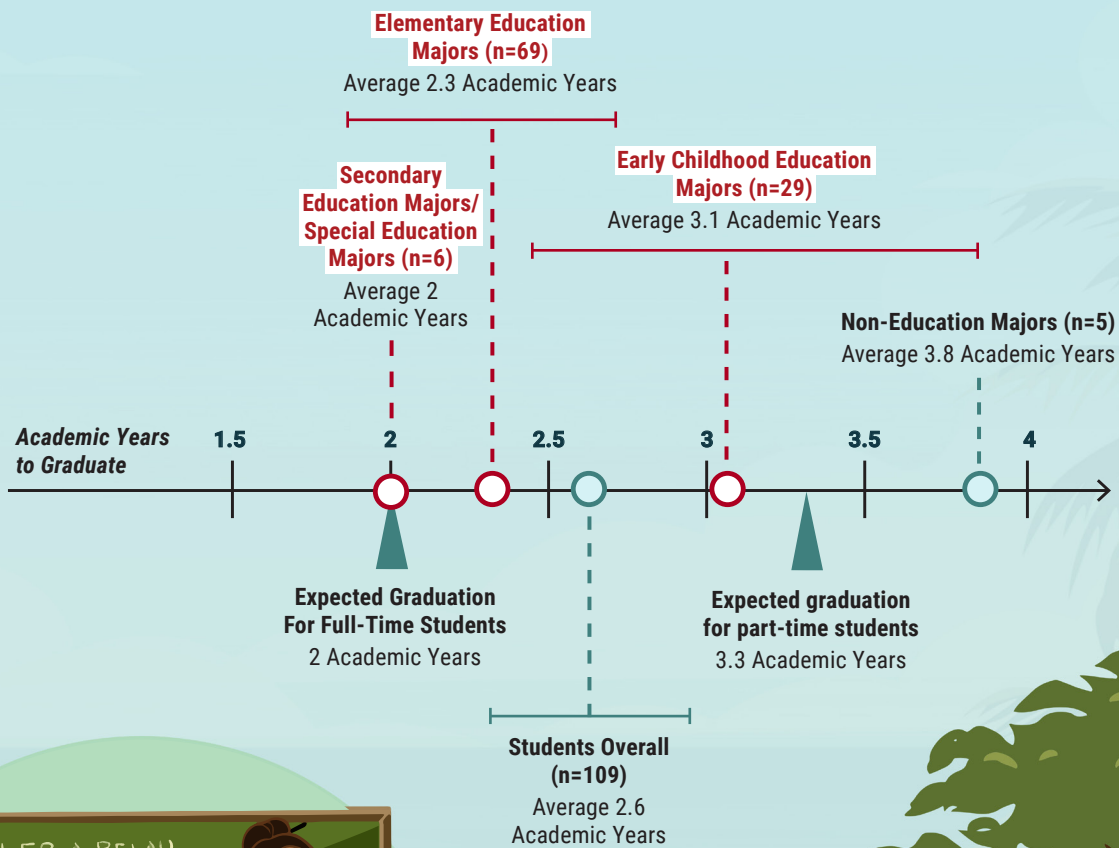
The average graduation times for **education majors** overlapped with or were less than the 3.3 academic years expected for part-time students.

Secondary education/special education majors had the fastest estimated average graduation time of 2 years, followed by 2.3 years for **elementary education majors**, and 3.1 years for **early childhood education majors**.

The non-education majors were the only majors to have estimated average graduation times greater than the expected graduation time for part-time students.

These estimated average graduation times may have been influenced by the percentage of students enrolled in each major who had prior college experience. The majors that had the fastest estimated average graduation times—secondary education/special education and elementary education—also had the highest percentages of students who had prior college experience (61 and 67 percent, respectively, compared to about 40 percent for other majors).

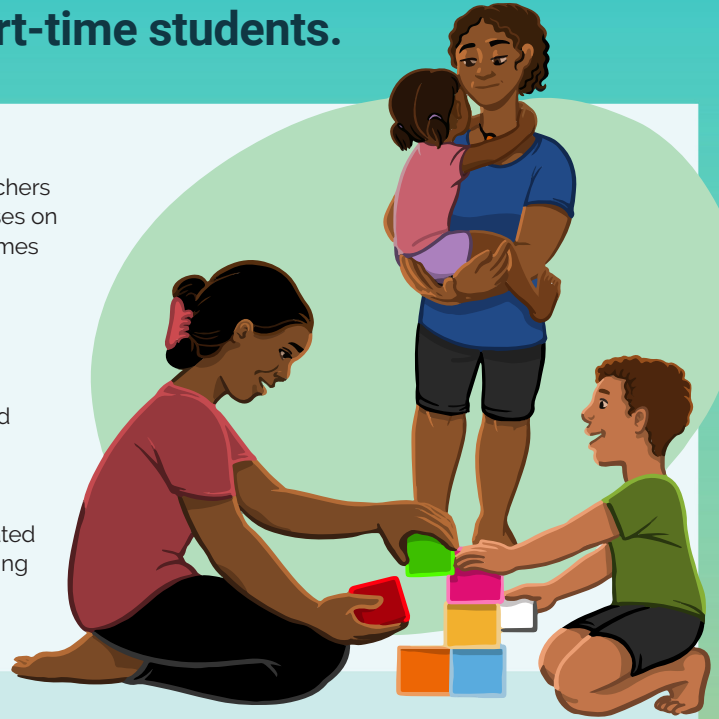
What is the estimated average time to graduation based on the student's major?



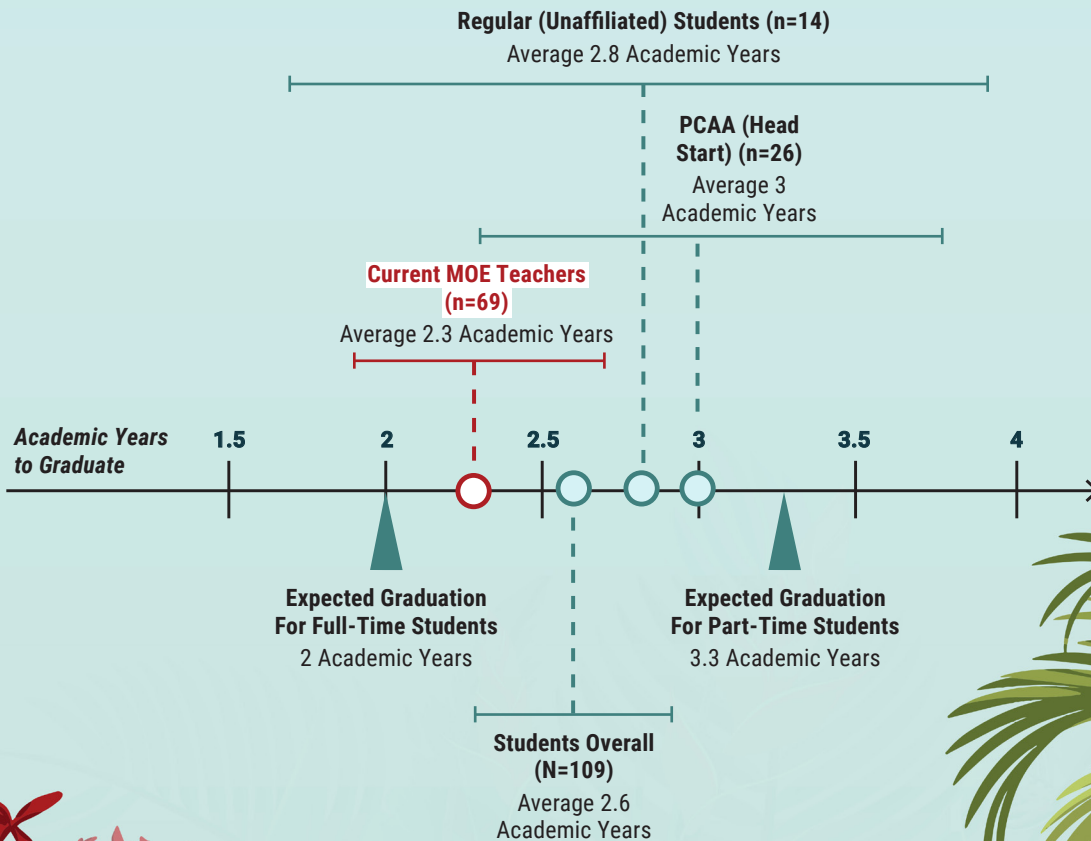
Ministry of Education-affiliated students had estimated average graduation times less than the 3.3 academic years expected for part-time students.

Ministry of Education (MOE)-affiliated students—MOE current teachers whose enrollment was funded by the MOE and who attended classes on top of full-time employment—had estimated average graduation times of 2.3 years. The current MOE teachers group also had the largest percentage of students who had prior college experience, about 61 percent, which may contribute to their shorter graduation times.⁷

Palau Community Action Agency (PCAA; Head Start)-affiliated students—currently employed Head Start teachers—and unaffiliated students had estimated average graduation times of 3 years, overlapping with the 3.3 years expected graduation time for part-time students. PCAA (Head Start) had fewer students who had prior college experience (42 percent compared to 50 percent for unaffiliated students). Each of the organizational affiliation groups had overlapping estimated average graduation times with one another.



What is the estimated average time to graduation based on the student's affiliation?



ENDNOTES

1. Many of these students had previous college experiences but had a gap in enrollment. Students included in the study were identified by PCC as having (re)started enrollment or having joined a Ministry of Education (MOE)-sponsored cohort at PCC during academic years 2019/20–2021/22. The sample excluded students who were taking associate's degree courses but who were enrolled in a bachelor's degree cohort. Eighty-eight percent of students in the sample were enrolled part time for at least one of the terms they were enrolled in at PCC, while 59 percent were only ever enrolled part time. All seven students who had only enrolled full time at PCC were only enrolled for a single term. Therefore, the study did not disaggregate by full-time versus part-time status.
2. The research questions answered in this infographic are: (1) What are the educational pathways to earning an associate's degree in education at PCC, and what are the characteristics of those individuals pursuing these pathways? (2) What is the number of enrolled teacher education students seeking associate's degrees for each pathway? (3) On average, how long do students in each pathway take to complete their degrees? (4) What number and percentage of teacher education students graduate from each pathway within the expected two-year timeframe?
3. Estimated average graduation times were calculated using Kaplan-Meier curves, which are a statistical method for modeling how long it takes for an event, like graduation, to happen and how likely it is for that event to happen at various points in time.
4. The student's organizational affiliation represents whether the student was currently employed as a teacher by the Palau Ministry of Education, employed as a Head Start teacher, or unaffiliated.
5. On-time graduation for full-time students is two academic years; for students enrolled part time (at half the number of credits of full-time students), it is 3.3 academic years.
6. The result is similar to PCC's IPEDS 2019 overall graduation rate of 34 percent.
7. See table B2 in the study's [appendixes](#) for additional details about the percentage of students who had prior college experience.
8. Museus, S. D. (2013). The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model: A new theory of success among racially diverse college student populations. In M. Paulsen (Ed.) *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 29) (pp. 189–227). Springer.