

Front Range Community College Office of Institutional Research
RESEARCH BRIEF – APRIL 2017

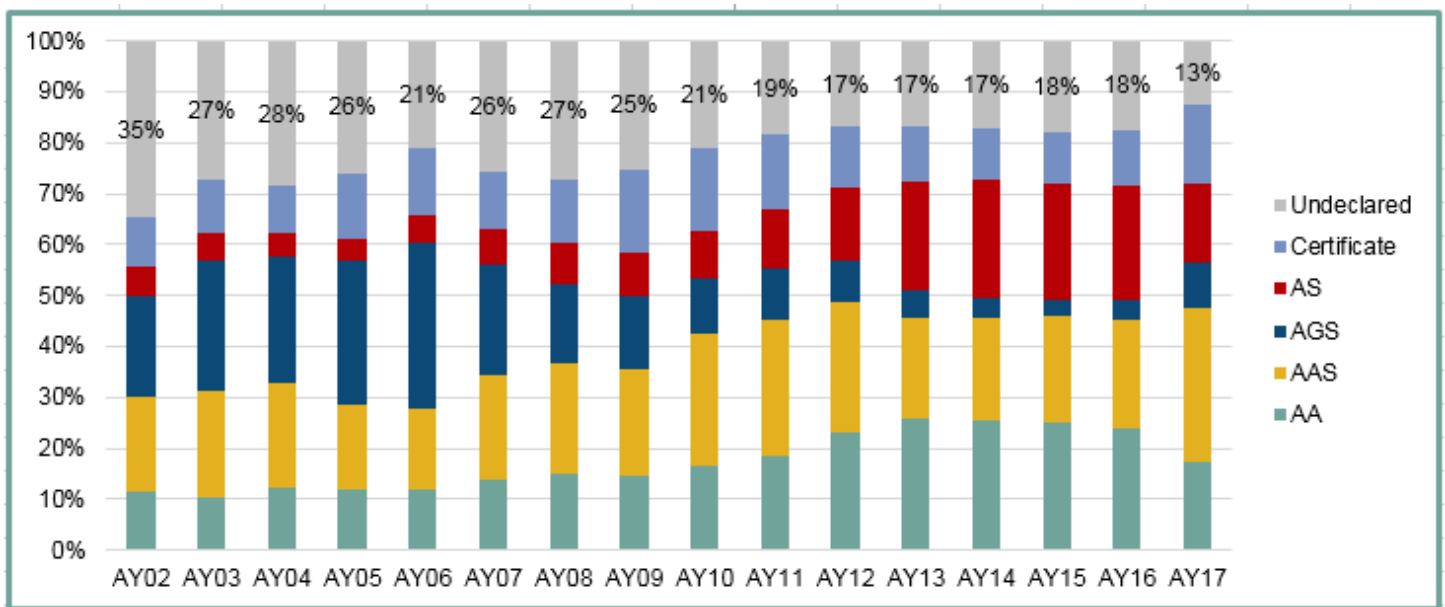
“Collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and delivering institutional information.”

Students with Undeclared Degrees: Undecided in need of Advising, or Guest Students?

As FRCC moves forward with student success projects including the Guided Pathways Initiative, there has been an increased focus on advising students into the correct program from their first term. This research brief examines students who do not declare a degree path in their first term to answer the question of whether they are “undecided” students in need of advising, or if they are “Guest” students who do not intend to pursue a degree at FRCC.

HISTORIC TRENDS

The proportion of new students who are undeclared has declined over the last 15 years to the current 13%. This trend could be affected by the economy, changes in financial aid requirements, or advising practices.



DO UNDECLARED STUDENTS REMAIN UNDECLARED?

In order to track students long enough to give them time to be successful, IR aggregated students by their initial declared degree from their first term at FRCC between AY12 and AY14, omitting students who were in College Now (concurrent enrollment). This cohort has had between three and five years to attend FRCC through spring 2017. They were tracked forward to see how many terms they attended, if they graduated or transferred, and what their declared degree was in their final term at FRCC.

Undeclared students were similar to “declared” students in the stability of their declared degree---approximately 85% of all students have the same degree in their first term as their last term. The surprise in this table was with the Associate of General Studies (AGS) students. Over one-fourth of these students changed their degree declaration over time. This appears to be the population that may need more focused advising.

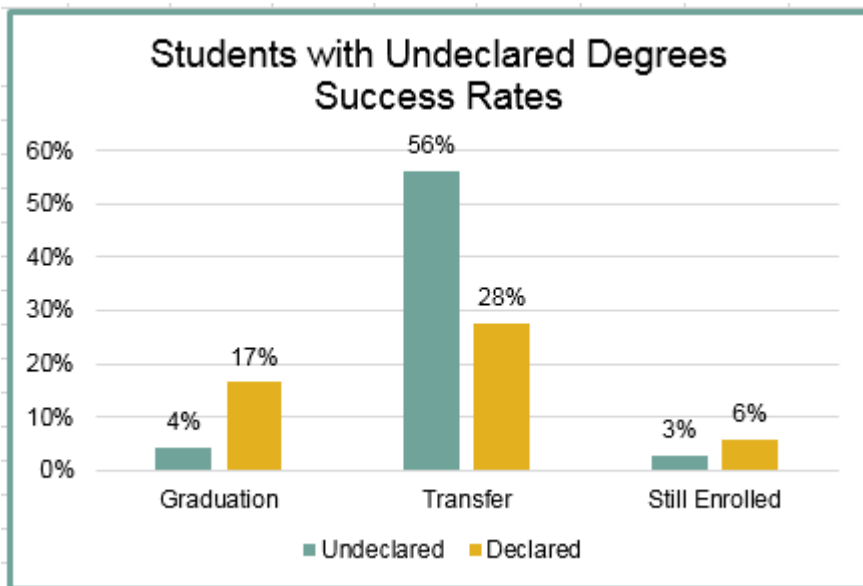
1st Term Declared Degree	Head Count	Average # of Terms	% in same degree First and Last term
AA	8,037	3.5	89%
AAS	7,128	3.7	85%
AGS	1,920	3.4	74%
AS	6,251	3.5	82%
Certificate	3,552	2.6	84%
Undeclared	5,513	2.2	85%
Total	32,401	3.2	85%

DO THEY GRADUATE OR TRANSFER?

Undeclared students are similar to certificate-seeking students in the number of enrolled terms. But the big difference between these two groups is that the latter have the highest graduation rates, 35% grad rate in 2.9 terms, while the Undeclared have the highest transfer rates, 56% in 1.7 terms (additional charts with average terms available upon request.)

Graduation is defined as earning any degree or certificate within three years of starting at FRCC.

Transfer is defined as entering a 2-year or 4-year institution within three years of starting at FRCC, without first graduating from FRCC. This means the graduation and transfer rates are unduplicated.



UNDECLARED STUDENTS WHO GRADUATE AT FRCC

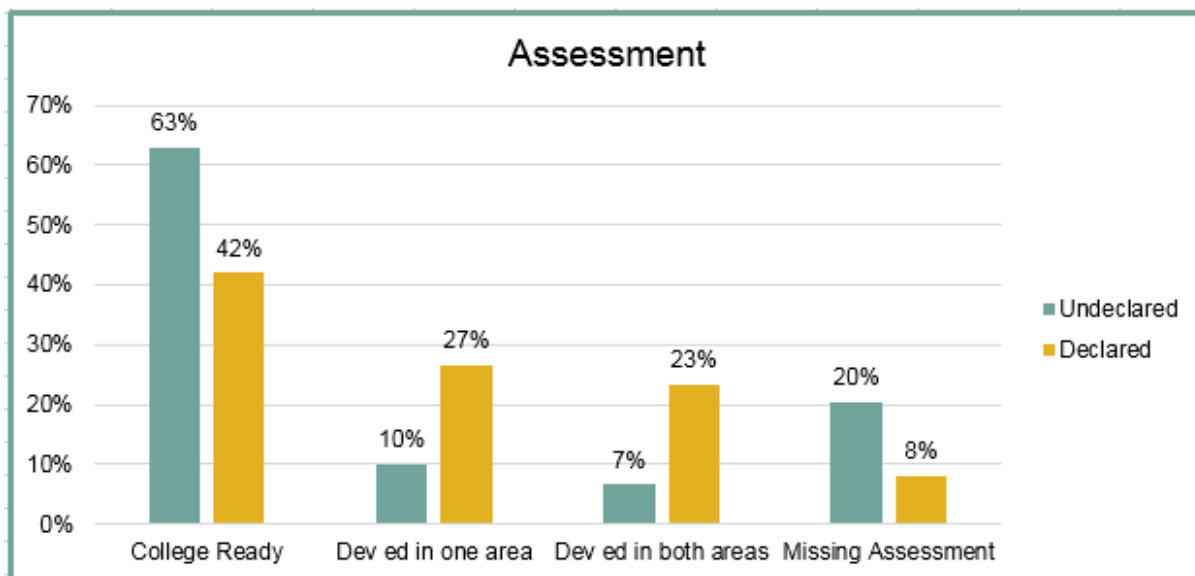
14% of this AY12-AY14 cohort graduated within three years, with 55% of those graduates earning the same degree that they originally declared. This rate is highest for those declaring an AA (72%) and Certificate

(95%). The figures for AAS are misleading with its high rate of certificates earned (56%) because this analysis looks at the first award earned, even if they are continuing on for an associates after earning a certificate. The 4% of students who were undeclared but eventually graduated were evenly divided between earning an associates and earning a certificate. The top majors these undeclared earned an award in were AA, EMT, and Nurse Aide.

Original Degree	Graduate Degree	Graduates	% Earn Original Declared Degree
AA	AA	698	72%
	Different Associates	90	9%
	Certificate	176	18%
AAS	AAS	417	32%
	Different Associates	154	12%
	Certificate	732	56%
AGS	AGS	37	16%
	Different Associates	75	32%
	Certificate	121	52%
AS	AS	240	34%
	Different Associates	215	30%
	Certificate	254	36%
Certificate	CER	1,186	95%
	Any Associates	56	5%
Undeclared	Any Associates	116	49%
	Certificate	119	51%
Total		4,686	55%

DO UNDECLARED STUDENTS HAVE DIFFERENT ASSESSMENT PLACEMENT?

Undeclared students have higher rates of placement in two assessment areas-- College Ready and Missing Assessment. This would indicate the majority are not coming to FRCC to fulfill their developmental courses so they can transfer. Those who are missing assessment often avoid testing because they do not plan to return after their first term.



HOW DOES THEIR COURSE-TAKING BEHAVIOR DIFFER FROM STUDENTS WITH A DECLARED DEGREE?

All of the courses of this AY12-AY14 cohort were aggregated to see what the most popular courses were for those declaring a degree vs. those who did not declare a degree in their first term. The same courses were in the top five for both groups, ENG121, MAT121, PSY101, ENG122, and BIO111. After that, the two groups had divergent hierarchy of courses.

Undeclared were more likely to take several upper-division courses and gateway courses, while Declared students were more likely to take CTE courses and developmental education courses. The courses with the biggest disparity in hierarchy are as follows:

Top Undeclared	Top Declared
MAT 135	MAT 060
BIO 204	HUM 115
MAT 201	CIS 118
MAT 202	MAT 030
CHE 111	MAT 050
SPA 111	MAT 045
PHY 111	NUA 101
CHE 112	CRJ 110
HIS 202	NUA 170
BUS 226	EMS 170
MAT 125	CIS 115
SPA 211	HPR 102
AAA 090	EMS 121
SPA 112	MET 150
AAA 050	
PHY 212	
MAT 203	
PHY 112	
PHY 211	

CONCLUSIONS

Like all populations, students who do not declare a degree in their first term are not totally homogenous, and our advisors would approach each student as an individual. However, the combination of high rates of transferring, college-ready assessment status, and course-taking behavior that favors gateway courses indicate that undeclared students are not necessarily *undecided* about their pathway; they may be strategically taking the courses they require for their intended terminal institution, but at a lower price and in the smaller setting of FRCC. It may be helpful to add this “guest” status as an option when choosing a degree to differentiate them from the truly undecided.

Additional, more detailed, analyses about co-enrolled students are available upon request. Please contact Kim Wallace by phone at 303-404-5316 or by e-mail at kim.wallace@frontrange.edu to request such an analysis.