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ABSTRACT

This study compares the educational aspirations of college freshmen students in public and private two-year colleges around the nation. Surveying a sample of over 13,000 first-time, full-time students from a national database elicited the following results: about half of students at public and private two year colleges aspired to obtain the baccalaureate degree; 24.7% of students at the public two-year colleges aspired toward the master's degree compared with 27.9% at private two-year colleges; and almost 10% of public and 14% of private two-year college students indicated that they aspire to obtain a doctorate. The study also examined the extent to which academic aspiration is influenced by factors such as background characteristics, high school experiences, and other affective measures. For each of the two groups, being female, father's education, mother's education, and parental income revealed positive associations with high aspirations for students at public and private two-year colleges. Additionally, younger students were more likely than older students to have higher academic aspirations. High school experiences such as years of mathematics, foreign language, and biological science, high self-ratings of academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence were significant variables. (Contains 34 references.) (JA)

Two-Year College Students' Degree Aspirations

Paper presented at the 40th Annual Forum of the
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ABSTRACT

This study examines a sample of over 13,000 college freshmen students' educational aspirations separately for two groups: students enrolled in public and private two-year colleges around the nation. For each group, analyses address the extent to which highest academic aspiration is influenced by factors such as background characteristics, high school experiences, and other affective measures. The findings suggest some differences in how these factors operate for students at public and private two-year colleges.

The nation's 1,600 two-year colleges play a critical role in providing educational opportunity to a large diverse population by educating over 10 million students enrolled in credit and non-credit courses (American Association of Community Colleges, 1999). To illustrate the impact this segment has in American higher education, these institutions enroll almost half of all U.S. undergraduates each fall. A unique aspect of these institutions is that it serves a diverse student clientele. For example, about half of all African American, Hispanic, and Native American students in higher education are enrolled in two-year colleges. These students come to the community college to pursue a variety of educational objectives, including academic transfer, vocational-technical, remedial, continuing education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Coley, 2000). Today, a large proportion of students begin their education at a two-year college and take advantage of the academic transfer function. Many of these students aspire to transfer to a four-year college or university to pursue a bachelor's degree.

An argument advanced by educational researchers is that there is a substantial amount of evidence that where one begins his or her postsecondary experience has a statistically significant influence on educational aspirations, persistence, and eventual level of educational attainment (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Specifically, for students who begin their education at the two-year rather than a four-year college or university, the chances of a student attaining a bachelor's degree is lowered significantly (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Velez, 1985). Because institutional environments are unique, these influences will have profound effects on students' academic goals, college experiences, and self-concept (Astin, 1993).

What are the educational aspirations among students who attend a public and private two-year college? What factors predict students' highest degree aspirations? Are the factors similar or different for students who attend a public or private two-year college? This study addresses

these questions by analyzing survey responses from 13,000 college students from two-year colleges around the nation. Research that examines students at two-year institutions will provide valuable information to our understanding of these students as well as to researchers and policy makers. Moreover, by studying the aspirations of different students separately (e.g., public and private), we can develop a better understanding of the extent to which the factors that drive the aspirations of students vary by institutional control.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature is filled with evidence of the American system of education regularly sorting students (Boatsman, 2000). The sorting process takes place is many different ways and at different levels in education. In the K-12 system, there is a plethora of studies documenting this phenomenon (Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, 1980). Similarly, there does exist a sorting or tracking system in higher education (Hearn, 1984, 1990; Karabel & Astin, 1975). To better understand the aspirations of college students, it is important to briefly discuss the educational context in the postsecondary segment and the arguments that have been posed pertaining to educational tracking and sorting.

Evidence was documented in an article published by Karabel (1977) who found that tracking existed within higher education. Students from lower SES backgrounds were more likely to attend less prestigious colleges (e.g., community colleges), thus, tracking them into low status jobs. Conversely, elite universities were more likely to have an overrepresentation of students from high SES backgrounds, and channel them into relatively high prestige occupations. Based on his study, Karabel concludes that the inter-generational transmission of inequality is influenced by the tracking system in higher education.

Particularly for community colleges, the research on the phenomenon of educational sorting dates back to the 1960s with the work of Burton Clark. Grounding his work from a sociological perspective, Clark (1960) studied the role of the two-year college with respect to the selection and allocation of students for further education and occupational placement. According to Clark (1960), the "cooling out function" is a process consisted of several gently but cumulatively convincing steps designed to convince "marginal students" to substitute their original goal to pursue academic transfer with a vocational objective. In his study of public two-year colleges, Clark maintains that these institutions perpetuate a form of "tracking" in which the working and lower-middle class students are "cooled-out" and redirected away from the path to a bachelor's degree. In particular, institutional factors such as the curriculum and college personnel (i.e., faculty, counselors, and student peers) play a major role in redirecting students by lowering their educational and occupational goals (Hunt, Klieforth & Atwell, 1977; Karabel, 1972; Shea, 1974).

The transfer function in community colleges has long been viewed as a stepping stone to educational upward mobility. Students complete the first two years of general education and transfer to a senior institution (or four-year) to pursue a bachelor's degree. However, scholars have argued that where an individual begins their postsecondary experience has an effect on educational aspirations, persistence, and eventual level of educational attainment (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). For community college students, the arguments posited by scholars and researchers is that the baccalaureate attainment rates are lower for students who first attend at two-year college, even after controlling for educational aspirations.

Dougherty (1991) has argued that although community colleges provide educational opportunities to a significant proportion of first-generation, ethnic minority, and low-income

students, this alternative route to the bachelor's degree is in question. According to Dougherty, baccalaureate aspirants are less likely to succeed if they enter a community college rather than a four-year college. This baccalaureate gap is only partially explained by the different characteristics of the two student bodies. It also arises from different institutional characteristics of the community college that produce lower rates of persistence in the lower division, of transfer to the upper division, and of persistence in the upper division than is the case for four-year colleges.

In his book entitled *"A Contradictory College,"* Dougherty (1994) presents his arguments of why baccalaureate aspirants garner less education if they first enter a community college rather than a four-year college. Students receive less financial aid and the colleges are less able to integrate their students into the academic and social life. Community colleges lack dormitories. The drop out rate is high and for students who decide to transfer to a senior institution, they experience a difficult adjustment process. Once at the four-year, students are at risk as they experience difficulty integrating into the academic and social environments. According to Dougherty (1994), these are some of the institutional obstacles that may influence the lack of success among community college students.

The educational aspirations of community college students are different from their four-year counterpart. About half of community college entrants indicated that they planned to obtain a bachelor's degree, and 37% aspired to a post-baccalaureate degree. In general, these aspirations were more modest than the educational aspirations of students entering four-year institutions (Coley, 2000).

Although the arguments by Dougherty remain popular in the research literature, another set of perspectives have been advanced that offer a different view (Baker & Velez, 1996) about

the impact of attending a community college and educational aspirations. Lee, Mackie-Lewis and Marks (1993) found that while starting at a community college lessens a student's chances of attaining a bachelor's degree, students who are socially and academically advantaged benefit from attending a less-expensive institution and are still successful in attaining their bachelor's degree. Further, their research cited studies that found that community college students who subsequently transferred to four-year colleges and students who entered four-year colleges directly from high school had an equal probability of attaining a bachelor's degree.

In a report published in 1997, McCormick & Carroll analyzed data drawn from the second follow-up of the 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Study. The BPS sample was drawn from students who participated in the 1990 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), a nationally representative cross-sectional survey of graduate and undergraduate students. Entitled, "Transfer Behavior Among Beginning Postsecondary Students: 1989-94," the report described patterns of multiple institution attendance and transfer by students who first entered postsecondary education during the academic year 1989-90.

The authors advanced the following results regarding transfer from public two-year colleges to four-year institutions (p. vii):

- One out of four community college students indicated in 1989-90 that they were working toward a bachelor's degree (prospective transfers). Of this group, 39% transferred directly to a four-year institution by 1994.
- Among community college beginners who transferred to a four-year institution, 65% transferred without a degree. About one out of three completed an associate's degree before transferring.

- While one out of four community college transfers had received a bachelor's degree by 1994, another 44% were still enrolled at a four-year institution, for an overall persistence rate of 70%.
- The bachelor's degree attainment rate was higher among the minority of community college transfers who completed an associate's degree before transferring.

The research examining the effects of institutional control and educational attainment has primarily focused on students at four-year public and private institutions. Based on their meta-analysis, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) posit that although the evidence is not totally consistent, their findings suggest that attending a private rather than a public college or university has a net positive influence on bachelor's degree attainment, plans for attending graduate school, and overall level of educational attainment (p. 376-377). Although they argue that it is difficult to isolate the causal mechanism underlying the relationship between attendance at a private institutions and persistence or degree completion, they provide the following arguments. Most private colleges are residential, with students living on or near campus as opposed to living at home and commuting. Public institutions tend to have a higher percentage of commuting students. The body of research suggests that there is a positive relationship between living on campus with persistence and degree attainment. Given the residential nature of private colleges, these institutions are likely to have advantage of achieving high retention and graduate rates of students.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Two frameworks are useful in studying the degree aspirations of college students: status attainment and undergraduate socialization. According to status attainment theory (Blau & Duncan, 1967), children from higher social origins have higher occupational goals compared to children from working class. Further, socialization and encouragement offered by parents, siblings, relatives, or significant others are relative to the students' social position. This socialization process ultimately affects students' educational aspirations (Sewell & Hauser, 1972; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970). Weidman's (1989) theory of undergraduate socialization also provides an additional perspective. Specifically, this theory takes into account both internal and external influences as well as inter-personal and intra-personal relations.

As applied to this study, these frameworks provide a useful guide in understanding how specific factors (background characteristics, high school preparation, and other affective measures) will influence or explain the educational aspirations of students at public and private two-year colleges. Further, the body of research provides evidence that certain background characteristics (i.e., gender, socio-economic status, and parental education) and high school experiences (i.e., high school GPA and academic self-concept) are positively associated with educational aspirations. Finally, external factors such as parents, peers, teachers and role models could serve as possible influences or socializing agents with respect to the formation or development the aspirations of students.

OBJECTIVES

Given what we know in the literature and the voids in regards to the research of students who attend community colleges, this study will analyze a sample of over 10,000 first-time full-

time students from a national database. This study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding the background characteristics and degree aspiration of students at the community college. This study will be most useful to those who ascribe to the philosophy that community colleges should be used as a stepping stone towards upward mobility for the disadvantaged, under-prepared, and ethnic minorities. At the most basic level, however, the findings from this study will create a springboard from which to conduct future research on community college students at the national level.

To better understand students enrolled in two-year colleges from around the United States, this study will assess the different characteristics of students at public and private two-year colleges. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how the degree aspirations differ for students who attend a public and private two-year college. The research questions guiding this study include the following:

1. What are the background characteristics and high school experiences of two-year college students? How do students differ in terms of their highest academic degree aspirations by institutional control (i.e., public versus private)?

2. What are the unique effects of variables such as background characteristics, high school experiences, and attitudes, and students' highest degree aspirations? How do these factors differ for students by institutional control?

This study moves beyond previous research on degree aspirations in several ways. First, this study fills a void in understanding the characteristics of students in two-year institutions. Majority of the research in this area focuses on the aspirations of students at four-year institutions. Second, this study examines the independent effects of selected characteristics by institutional control. Finally, by examining the impact of students' high school experiences, this study provides important information about the extent to which high school preparation impacts the educational aspirations for students at different institutions.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

The target population for this cross-sectional study is the cohort of students who were first-time full-time freshmen, enrolled in public and private two-year colleges in fall 1996. The data for this study are drawn from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is sponsored by the American Council on Education and the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Student Information Form (SIF), which contains over 250 variables, is administered to students during the beginning of the fall 1996 term during registration, freshmen orientation, or the first few weeks of classes. The SIF is designed to elicit a wide range of information that include the following: biographic and demographic data, high school background, career plans, educational aspirations, financial arrangements, high school activities, and current attitudes, beliefs and self-concept.

Included in the sample are two-year colleges offering associate degrees. Conversely, excluded in the sample are proprietary special vocational or semi-professional institutions. The sample for this study includes 13,801 first-time full-time freshmen attending 50 public and 25 private two-year colleges across the U.S. This study includes students from each of the following institutional control groups: public (11,154), and private (2,647). The variable, institutional control (i.e., public or private), was determined by a coding scheme.

Variables

The variables included in this study are described below. Complete details on coding schemes for all variables are provided in Appendix A.

The dependent variable, students' highest degree aspirations planned, was measured in fall 1996. Students were asked to indicate their "highest degree planned anywhere." In order to

group the responses into a scale from low aspirations to high aspirations, this variable was recoded and collapsed into six categories: 1="none," 2="vocational certificate," 3="associate degree," 4="bachelor's," 5="master's," and 6="doctorate."

The independent variables are organized into three groups: 1) background characteristics; 2) high school experiences; and 3) affective measures. The background characteristics include gender, parental education background, income, age, and student of color status. The student of color status variable was coded into a dichotomous variable (white or non-white). The high school experiences include GPA, years of study in different academic subjects (e.g., English, math, foreign language, physical science, biological science), self-ratings, and reasons for attending college. The self-ratings include academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence. On these items, students were asked to rate themselves on a 5-point scale from "lowest 10%" to "highest 10%" as compared with the average person their age. Two items that probe students' reasons for deciding to go to college were included: parents wanted me to go, and role model/mentor encouraged me to go. The rationale for including these variables was to examine possible external factors that may be predictive of educational aspirations. The literature suggests that support and affirmation from family members and other individuals can have a profound effect on persistence and aspirations.

The final group includes several affective measures that probe students' goals. Students were asked to respond to these questions on a scale from "not important" to "essential." Specifically, the items in this group include: become an authority in own field, influence political structure, and be very well off financially.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were conducted at the preliminary stage to describe the overall sample as well as the two primary comparative groups (public and private). Additionally, the independent variables are crosstabulated with institutional control to provide a portrait of students at public and private two-year colleges.

Another set of analyses focuses on the independent effects of the following variables on students' highest degree aspirations: background characteristics, high school experiences, and affective measures. A separate hierarchical regression analysis was conducted for each group included in the study. Variables are added to the regression equation and entered in blocks according to the temporary order in which they may influence student aspirations. The rationale for controlling for the same sets of variables within each group allows to more accurately compare the unique effects of each independent variable across the two groups. To guard against potential problems resulting from multicollinearity, analyses were run with a tolerance protection set at .30.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 illustrates a crosstabulation analysis of students' background characteristics by institutional control. Overall, half of students attending public and private two-year colleges are women. Since this study focuses on first-time full-time students, it is not surprising that almost all students in the sample are of traditional age (i.e., 24 or below). In terms of distance as measured in miles from home to the college, 81.5% of students at public two-year colleges indicated between 10-50 miles. Comparatively, 57% of students at private two-year colleges

indicated that the miles from home to college was between 51-100+. Students' residential plans in fall were strikingly different for the two groups. Over 60% of students at public colleges indicated they will live with their parents, compared to 25% of students at private colleges. Further, over 67% of private students indicate that they will live in a dormitory at the college.

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INSERT TABLE 1

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On the question, "was this college your first choice," both groups were similar. That is more than half (66%) indicated that this was their first choice. The patterns of students' educational attainment of parents are different. Among students at public colleges, over half had mothers and fathers who completed high school. Conversely, about one-third of students at private colleges had parents who graduated from college and obtained post baccalaureate credentials, compared to less then one quarter of their counterparts. Students' reported parental income was similar for both groups. Students at private two-year colleges had slightly more parents (20.7%) with incomes above $75,000+, compared to 14.5% of their counterparts. On the question about being concerned with the ability to finance their college education, there was virtually no difference between the groups. A third of students in both groups indicated that they had "none." Almost half of students indicated "some" concern in financing their college education. In examining the racial/ethnic background by institutional control, about three-fourths of students are white, followed by Black, and Chicano/Latino. The Chicano/Latino category includes students who indicated Puerto Rican and other Latino. This finding is

supported when the racial/ethnic category is recoded into a dichotomous variable (white and non-white). Finally, when comparing students' average high school GPA, both groups were similar.

On the survey, students were asked to respond to a question regarding their educational aspirations. The question, "what is the highest academic degree that you intend to obtain," had two parts. Students had the option to indicate their highest academic degree planned anywhere (see Table 2) and at this college. For the latter, about 40% of public and 37% of private two-year college students indicated that they aspired to obtain an associate's degree.

For this study, the focus is to examine students' highest academic degree planned anywhere. Since students in two-year colleges have aspirations beyond the associate degree, the question that probes students' education aspiration serves as a proxy for an individual's ultimate aspiration. In Table 2, students' highest academic degree planned is presented by institutional control. This variable is recoded into a six-item category from "none" to "doctorate." The results show that about half of students at public and private two-year colleges aspire to obtain the baccalaureate degree. The next highest response for both groups is aspiring toward the master's degree (24.7% versus 27.9%). Finally, almost 10% of public and 14% of private two-year college students indicated that they aspire to obtain a doctorate. This finding suggests that although these students are attending a community college to begin their postsecondary experience, they have intentions to transfer to a four-year institution to pursue a baccalaureate degree and ultimately a post-baccalaureate degree.

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INSERT TABLE 2

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Table 3 presents the frequency responses of high school experiences and goals by institutional control. Across most academic subject areas in high school, students attending private two-year colleges completed more years of study in English, mathematics, and foreign language. In terms of self-ratings, private two-year college students were more likely to rate themselves above average and highest 10% in their academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence, compared to their counterparts. Two items that probed students' reasons for attending college revealed similar results for both groups. About three-fourths of public and private two-year students indicated that their parents' encouragement to attend college was somewhat/very important. About half for both groups indicated that a role model/mentor's encouragement was somewhat/very important.

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INSERT TABLE 3

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Regression Analyses

The descriptive results provide a portrait of students at public and private two-year colleges with respect to background characteristics as well as educational aspirations. However, examining the effects of other variables (e.g., high school experiences and affective measures) after controlling for the effects of these variables is critical in broadening our understanding of these students. For both groups, students' highest academic degree aspirations were regressed on the set of 20 independent variables (see Appendix A). Table 4 reports the simple correlations between each independent variable and highest academic degree aspiration planned, as well as

final standardized regression coefficients (betas). The correlation matrices for all variables are provided in Appendix D.

Appendix B and C illustrate the standardized regression coefficients (betas) for the two separate regression models. Appendix B depicts the results for students at public two-year colleges, while Appendix C depicts the results for students at private two-year colleges. Model 1 includes the background characteristics and pre-college variables in the equation, Model 2 adds high school variables to the equation, and Model 3 incorporates variables that measure students' goals and values.

For each of the variables, the difference in magnitude between the simple correlation and beta represents the extent to which that variable shares predictive power with other variables in the equation. The blocked entry strategy allows the ability to determine specifically which blocks of variables may have caused such changes in beta coefficients.

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INSERT TABLE 4

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Background Characteristics. For each of the two groups, simple correlations reveal significant relationships with educational aspirations. In particular, being female, father's education, mother's education, and parental income reveal positive associations with high aspirations for students at public and private two-year colleges. Only one variable has a negative relationship with aspirations for both groups – age. In other words, younger students are more likely than older students to have higher academic aspirations. By the final step in the equation,

gender remains the only significant predictor of high aspirations for students at private two-year colleges. For students at public two-year colleges, gender, age, father's education, mother's education, and student of color (non-white status) remain significant predictors of educational aspirations.

High School Experiences. Simple correlations reveal significant relationships for both groups between educational aspirations and several high school variables: high school GPA, years of study in various subjects (i.e., English, mathematics, foreign language, physical science, biological science), and self-ratings (i.e., academic ability, drive to achieve, intellectual self-confidence). Reasons for attending college (i.e., parents and role model/mentor) were the only two variables that reveal no significant relationships. After controlling for students' background characteristics, the significant variables that are predictive of public two-year college students' aspirations include years of mathematics, foreign language, and biological science; high self-ratings of academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence. Conversely, years of foreign language and academic ability remain significant at the final step in the regression for students at private two-year colleges.

Goals and Values. Simple correlations reveal significant positive relationships for both groups between the three goals and educational aspirations. The goals include: become an authority in own field, influence political structure, and be very well off financially. In other words, students at public and private two-year colleges who indicated that these goals are important are more likely to aspire to higher educational aspirations. At the final step, the effect of becoming an authority and influencing the political structure remain significant for both students at public and private two-year colleges.

LIMITATIONS

This study had several limitations. First, the study's cross-sectional design prohibits the researcher to examine change over time. As a result, the researcher is only able to investigate a snapshot of time of students upon entrance to the two-year college. Because the experiences of students at the two-year college are not available to the researcher, it is important to acknowledge the various factors that may influence or affect the aspirations of students. The literature provides evidence that certain educational experiences (such as faculty interaction, involvement on research project, honors participation) are positively related to high aspirations of students (Arredondo, 1995; Astin, 1984, 1993; Iverson, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1984; Pascarella, 1980, 1984). Second, because of the cross-sectional nature, the researcher is unable to examine the impact of the educational environment. In other words, understanding the unique impact of attending a public or private two-year college on students' academic aspirations is not possible. A study that takes into account the institutional factors could contribute to our overall understanding of the aspirations of students at different types of two-year institutions. Third, an important limitation is that the percentage of variance in highest academic degree aspirations that is accounted for by the variables in each equation is relatively low, ranging from 14.6% among students at public two-year colleges to 13.2% among students at private two-year colleges. Finally, measuring students' educational aspirations is a difficult challenge. Although students indicated their highest academic aspirations upon entrance to the two-year college, it is uncertain if whether or not students' aspirations changed over time. Only with a longitudinal design can this determination be made.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that students attending public and private two-year colleges differ on a number of dimensions. Most notably is the fact that students at private two-year colleges are more likely to be attending college at distances further than their counterparts. As a result, they are more likely to live in campus residential facilities. This finding is not surprising as most private two-year colleges are more likely to offer housing for students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). On the contrary, students attending public two-year colleges are more likely to live close to the college and either live with their parents or commute a short distance to campus.

Interestingly, the background characteristics also differ for students by institutional control. In terms of the educational background of parents, students at private two-year colleges are more likely to have parents with higher education levels compared to their counterparts. This trend is repeated for parental income. That is, students at private two-year colleges have parents from higher income levels. This finding suggests that there may be a relationship between SES and attending a private institution. A student's college choice is likely to be influenced by the tuition and financial support offered by the college. Not surprisingly, the tuition at private institutions is likely to be substantially higher than public institutions.

Since this study controlled for first-time full-time students, the rationale for specifically examining these students is to better understand their background characteristics, high school experiences, and affective measures. Given that two-year colleges are known to enroll a diverse student population (i.e., older, under-prepared, ethnic minorities, etc.), this study sought to investigate the educational aspirations of a student population that is of traditional age. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2000), the average age of

students attending community colleges is 29. Moreover, because of a diverse clientele, students attending two-year colleges are likely to have differing educational aspirations and as a result, enroll in credit and noncredit courses. In their summary of findings of a portrait of America's community college students, Phillippe and Valiga (2000) note that more than one-fourth of students attending community colleges were enrolled in noncredit courses and had already attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, a large percentage of student attending community colleges enroll in courses for reasons including, acquiring new skills, job retraining, or lifelong learning. For these reasons, it was important that this study control for the diverse student characteristics to better understand the aspirations of students in public and private two-year colleges.

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the educational aspirations of students enrolled in public and private two-year colleges. Students reported two responses on their highest degree planned at *this* institution and highest degree planned *overall.* In terms of their aspirations at the two-year college, about one-third indicated they aspired to obtain an associates' degree. However, when students were asked to indicate their highest degree planned anywhere, more than a fourth of students at public and private two-year colleges indicated that they aspired to the bachelor's and master's degree. This finding suggests that students upon entering the two-year college had intentions or aspirations to transfer to a four-year college or university. Further, a sizable percentage of these students aspired to obtain a doctorate degree. A chief limitation of this study is the inability to measure students' ultimate degree completion due to the cross-sectional nature of the study. However, the finding suggests that students possess the aspirations that go beyond the associate degree.

Previous studies examining the effects of background characteristics on educational aspirations support the findings that emerged in this study. However, the independent effects show different results for students at public and private two-year colleges. Among students at public two-year colleges, parental education, non-white status, and being female have positive predictive power on high degree aspirations. The finding that younger students (or traditional age) is a positive predictor with high aspiration is also not surprising. This suggests that younger students, compared to their counterparts (older or non-traditional) are pursuing higher education in hopes to achieve upward mobility in terms of income and occupational status. On the other hand, older students enrolled in college may possess the objective to enroll in classes for job retraining or lifelong learning or to pursue a terminal degree (vocational certificate or associate degree).

After controlling for background characteristics, the variables that are predictive for both groups reveal interesting results. For students at public two-year colleges, high school preparation, self-ratings, and reasons for attending college account for a little more than twice in terms of variance explained. The number of mathematics, foreign language, and biological science courses completed in high school is predictive of high academic aspirations. This finding is an important one as there is little empirical research that shows the impact of high school preparation on students' educational aspirations for students at two-year colleges. Further, for students at public two-year institutions, possessing high levels of self-concept in the areas of academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence contributes positively to high educational aspirations. On the hand, for students at private two-year colleges, after controlling for background characteristics, years of foreign language completed in high school and high academic ability are significant predictors at the final step in the equation. The results

suggest that high school preparation and self-concept measures have unique effects for both groups.

When the third block of variables are entered in the equation, the goal to become an authority in own field and influence political structure remain significant positive predictors of high degree aspirations among students at public and private two-year colleges. This finding suggests that possessing these goals serve as motivating factors that positively influence students' drive to pursue academic credentials beyond the associate degree. In other words, the goal to be an expert in one's field and to influence the political structure in society, is therefore critical to obtain academic credentials to achieve occupational status. The variance explained with all the variables included in the model for students at public two-year colleges is 14.6%, compared to 13.2% respectively.

When examining the overall results of this study, it is important to consider the issue of the admissions policy of two-year institutions. Public two-year colleges have historically been known to be "open access" institutions. That is, students are not turned away from admission or enrollment in classes because of their lack of preparation or lack of college readiness. On the other hand, private two-year colleges are likely to be different from public two-year colleges in that they may have more selective admissions criteria. Considering this argument, this notion may support the finding that the high school variables have different effects for students at public and private two-year colleges. A plausible reason for the same significant predictors of high school experiences for students enrolled in public two-year colleges do not hold true for students in private two-year colleges is that students attending private colleges come to the institution already completing college preparatory courses, which may be a prerequisite for college admission. Further investigation is required in order to tease this out of the analysis.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the predictors of students' highest degree aspirations vary by institutional control. Based on the variables examined in this study, the significant predictors of students' aspiration are different for both groups of students. The results indicate that there is a need to conduct further investigation to better understand the between-group and within-group differences. An important theoretical contribution of this study is the aspect of understanding the impact of high school preparation on students' educational aspirations. Since this study only examined background and pre-college characteristics, high school experiences, and selected affective measures, future research will need to examine the college experiences and institutional impact to fully account for factors influencing the degree aspirations of students.

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Table 1
Background Characteristics by Institutional Control
(N=13,801)

	Percent Among	
	Public (n=11,154)	Private (n=2,647)
Gender: Female	52.7	54.8
Age		
24 or below	94.5	97.9
25 or over	5.5	2.1
Miles from home to college		
10 or less	39.0	18.2
11 – 50	42.5	23.0
51 – 100	7.7	12.9
101 or more	10.4	45.8
Plan to live during fall		
With parents	65.5	25.3
Private home	15.7	5.1
Dormitory	14.2	67.7
Fraternity/Sorority	0.0	0.1
Other campus	2.1	1.0
Other	2.4	0.8
This college as first choice	66.5	66.3
Father's Education		
Some H.S. or less	18.3	15.9
H.S. graduate	34.6	28.3
Some college	20.1	18.0
College graduate	17.7	23.7
Some graduate	1.1	1.7
Graduate degree	8.2	12.6
Mother's Education		
Some H.S. or less	16.0	13.3
H.S. graduate	36.4	31.0
Some college	22.4	21.3
College graduate	17.1	23.7
Some graduate	1.4	1.8
Graduate degree	6.7	8.9

Table 1 (continued)
Background Characteristics by Institutional Control
(N=13,801)

	Percent Among	
	Public (n=11,154)	Private (n=2,647)
Parental Income		
$24,999 or below	29.5	26.7
$25,000 – 49,999	32.1	29.9
$50,000 – 74,999	23.8	22.6
$75,000+	14.5	20.7
Concern about finances		
None	32.2	31.4
Some	46.5	47.9
Major	21.3	20.7
Racial/Ethnic Background		
American Indian	2.4	2.3
Asian	2.6	3.7
Black	10.1	9.1
Chicano/Latino[1]	9.4	8.2
White	74.4	75.9
Other	2.7	3.4
Race Grouping		
White	75.9	76.8
Non-White[2]	24.1	23.2
High School GPA		
A	13.0	15.8
B	57.8	50.8
C	28.1	32.1
D	1.1	1.3

[1] Includes Chicano, Puerto Rico, and Other Latino.
[2] Includes American Indian, Asian, Black, and Chicano/Latino groups.

Table 2
Highest Academic Degree Planned by Institutional Control
(N=13,801)

Highest Academic Degree Planned	Percent Among Public (n=11,154)	Percent Among Private (n=2,647)
None	3.5	2.9
Vocational Certificate	1.8	0.6
Associate's	8.8	5.4
Bachelor's[3]	24.2	27.1
Master's	24.7	27.9
Doctorate[4]	9.9	14.2

[3] Includes B.A., B.S., B.D., and M. Div.
[4] Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M., L.L.B., or J.D.

Table 3
Frequency of High School Experiences and Goals By Institutional Control
(N=13,801)

	Percent Among	
	Public (n=11,154)	Private (n=2,647)
English		
One or Less	1.8	1.5
Two	2.3	1.6
Three	6.0	4.7
Four or More	90.0	92.2
Mathematics		
One or Less	2.3	1.8
Two	11.8	7.5
Three	33.9	31.1
Four or More	51.9	59.6
Foreign Language		
One or Less	34.8	25.6
Two	38.8	43.5
Three	17.1	18.9
Four or More	9.3	11.9
Physical Science		
One or Less	57.9	57.5
Two	24.0	25.1
Three	11.6	11.3
Four or More	6.5	6.1
Biological Science		
One or Less	66.4	63.4
Two	23.7	26.6
Three	6.5	6.3
Four or More	3.4	3.7
Self-Rating: Academic Ability		
Lowest 10%/Below Average	4.5	5.6
Average	59.0	55.6
Above Average/Highest 10%	33.9	37.3
Self-Rating: Drive to Achieve		
Lowest 10%/Below Average	5.5	4.6
Average	41.1	35.8
Above Average/Highest 10%	50.5	58.3

Table 3 (continued)
Frequency of High School Experiences and Goals By Institutional Control
(N=13,801)

	Percent Among	
	Public (n=11,154)	Private (n=2,647)
Self-Rating: Intellectual Self-Confidence		
Lowest 10%/Below Average	9.1	9.8
Average	48.0	44.1
Above Average/Highest 10%	40.0	44.5
Parents wanted me to go to college		
Not Important	20.0	17.2
Somewhat Important	37.9	33.8
Very Important	42.1	44.0
Role model/mentor encouraged me to go		
Not Important	49.7	39.3
Somewhat Important	34.5	41.3
Very Important	15.7	19.4
Goal: Become authority in my own field		
Not Important	10.4	10.6
Somewhat Important	28.6	27.8
Very Important	38.6	38.0
Essential	22.4	23.6
Goal: Influence political structure		
Not Important	46.9	42.2
Somewhat Important	38.1	38.8
Very Important	10.8	12.8
Essential	4.2	6.2
Goal: Be very well off financially		
Not Important	3.6	5.3
Somewhat Important	17.9	21.4
Very Important	37.3	37.6
Essential	41.2	35.6

Table 4
Predictors of Two-Year College Students' Highest Degree Aspirations by Institutional Control

Variables	Public (n=5,439) *r*	Public (n=5,439) Final Beta	Private (n=1,502) *r*	Private (n=1,502) Final Beta
Block 1				
Gender: Female	.09 ***	.10 ***	.04 *	.06 *
Age	-.13 ***	-.06 ***	-.11 ***	-.04
Father's Education	.14 ***	.07 ***	.09 ***	.04
Mother's Education	.12 ***	.04 **	.08 ***	.03
Parental Income	.08 ***	.01	.04 *	-.00
Race: Non-White	.00	.03 *	-.01	-.00
Block 2				
High School GPA	.12 ***	-.00	.15 ***	.02
Years: English	.06 ***	-.01	.10 ***	.02
Years: Mathematics	.12 ***	.03 *	.12 ***	.04
Years: Foreign Language	.22 ***	.13 ***	.17 ***	.08 **
Years: Physical Science	.06 ***	.00	.07 **	-.01
Years: Biological Science	.12 ***	.05 ***	.11 ***	.04
Self-rate: academic ability	.21 ***	.11 ***	.24 ***	.14 ***
Self-rate: drive to achieve	.16 ***	.07 ***	.15 ***	.02
Self-rate: intellectual self-confidence	.15 ***	.04 **	.16 ***	.05
Reason: parents wanted me to go	.01	-.01	.02	.00
Reason: role model/mentor encouraged me to go	.00	-.00	.02	.00
Block 3				
Goal: become authority in own field	.16 ***	.09 ***	.18 ***	.10 ***
Goal: influence political structure	.12 ***	.07 ***	.13 ***	.09 ***
Goal: be very well off financially	.06 ***	.01	.08 **	.04
R2		14.6%		13.2%

Note: Students' highest degree aspirations is coded in a six-point scale: 1="none" to 6="doctorate"
**p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

Appendix A
Regression Equation Blocking Schema:
Variables in the Regression Model

VARIABLE	CODING SCHEME
Block 1: Background Variables	
Gender: Female	1=male; 2=female
Age	1="16 or younger" to 10="55 or older"
Father's Education	8 pt. Scale, "grammar school or less" to "graduate degree"
Mother's Education	8 pt. Scale, "grammar school or less" to "graduate degree"
Estimated Parental Income	14 pt. Scale, "less than $6,000" to "over $200,000"
Race Grouping	1=white; 2=non-white
Block 2: High School Variables	
High School grade point average	1="D" to 7="A or A+"
Years of Study: English	1="none" to 7="five or more"
Years of Study: Mathematics	1="none" to 7="five or more"
Years of Study: Foreign Language	1="none" to 7="five or more"
Years of Study: Physical Science	1="none" to 7="five or more"
Years of Study: Biological Science	1="none" to 7="five or more"
Self-Rate: Academic ability	1="lowest 10%" to 5="highest 10%"
Self-Rate: Drive to achieve	1="lowest 10%" to 5="highest 10%"
Self-Rate: Intellectual self-concept	1="lowest 10%" to 5="highest 10%"
Reason: Parents wanted me to go to college	1="not important" to 3"very important"
Reason: Role model/mentor encouraged me to go	1="not important" to 3"very important"
Block 3: Goals and Values	
Goal: Become an authority in my own field	1="not important" to 3="essential"
Goal: Influence political structure	1="not important" to 3="essential"
Goal: Be very well off financially	1="not important" to 3="essential"

Appendix B
Predicting Students' Highest Academic Degree Aspirations at Public Two-Year College:
(n=5,439)

Variable Blocks	standardized regression coefficients model 1	model 2	model 3
Background Variables			
Gender: Female	.10 ***	.10 ***	.10 ***
Age	-.10 ***	-.06 ***	-.06 ***
Father's Educatior	.10 ***	.08 ***	.07 ***
Mother's Educatior	.05 **	.04 **	.04 **
Parental Income	.04 **	.02	.01
Race: Non-White	.04 ***	.04 **	.03 *
High School Variables			
High School GPA		-.01	-.00
Years: English		-.01	-.01
Years: Mathematics		.02	.03 *
Years: Foreign Language		.13 ***	.13 ***
Years: Physical Science		.01	.00
Years: Biological Science		.06 ***	.05 ***
Self-Rate: academic ability		.11 ***	.11 ***
Self-Rate: drive to achieve		.09 ***	.07 ***
Self-Rate: intellectual self-confidence		.06 ***	.04 **
Reason: parents wanted me to go		-.00	-.01
Reason: role model/mentor encourage me to go		.00	-.00
Goals and Values			
Goal: become authority in own field			.09 ***
Goal: influence political structure			.07 ***
Goal: be very well off financially			.01
R2	.051	.128	.146

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Appendix C
Predicting Students' Highest Academic Degree Aspirations at Private Two-Year College
(n=1,502)

Variable Blocks	standardized regression coefficients model 1	model 2	model 3
Background Variables			
Gender: Female	.04	.05 *	.06 *
Age	-.10 ***	-.04	-.04
Father's Educatior	.07 *	.04	.04
Mother's Educatior	.04	.03	.03
Parental Income	.01	.00	-.00
Race: Non-White	.02	.00	-.00
High School Variables			
High School GPA		.00	.02
Years: English		.02	.02
Years: Mathematics		.04	.04
Years: Foreign Language		.08 **	.08 **
Years: Physical Science		.00	-.01
Years: Biological Science		.05 *	.04
Self-Rate: academic ability		.15 ***	.14 ***
Self-Rate: drive to achieve		.04	.02
Self-Rate: intellectual self-confidence		.07 *	.05
Reason: parents wanted me to go		-.01	.00
Reason: role model/mentor encourage me to go		.02	.00
Goals and Values			
Goal: become authority in own field			.10 ***
Goal: influence political structure			.09 ***
Goal: be very well off financially			.04
R2	.026	.102	.132

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Appendix D-1: Intercorrelations
Public Two-Year College

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 Gender: Female	-	-.06	-.07	-.06	-.12	.05	.17	.00	-.02	.13	-.07	.02	-.04	-.02	-.15	.03	.02	-.05	-.07	-.04
2 Age		-	-.14	-.14	-.14	.07	-.19	-.25	-.20	-.27	-.05	-.12	-.08	.03	-.01	-.17	.01	.01	-.01	-.04
3 Father's Education			-	.55	.35	-.17	.04	.07	.09	.12	.03	.03	.12	.02	.08	.06	-.03	.03	.04	-.01
4 Mother's Education				-	.30	-.16	.04	.08	.08	.10	.03	.04	.10	.01	.07	.04	-.02	.00	.02	-.02
5 Parental Income					-	-.31	-.01	.08	.10	.13	.08	.08	.07	.02	.05	.03	-.05	.05	.02	.02
6 Race: Non-White						-	-.09	-.04	-.02	-.08	-.05	-.05	-.03	.04	.10	.10	.10	.05	.07	.05
7 High School (HS) GPA							-	.08	.17	.19	.06	.09	.40	.21	.11	.02	-.02	.01	-.05	-.03
8 HS Years: English								-	.40	.23	.14	.19	.02	.01	-.01	.07	.00	.05	-.01	.02
9 HS Years: Mathematics									-	.30	.18	.20	.15	.06	.04	.05	-.02	.03	-.03	.03
10 HS Years: Foreign Language										-	.16	.19	.20	.04	.04	.02	-.04	.02	-.01	.03
11 HS Years: Physical Science											-	.24	.07	.03	.04	.01	.02	.02	.03	.00
12 HS Years: Biological Science												-	.08	.07	.06	.02	.05	.06	.01	.02
13 Self-rate: academic ability													-	.30	.39	-.05	-.04	.10	.06	.01
14 Self-rate: drive to achieve														-	.37	-.02	.08	.20	.12	.10
15 Self-rate: intellectual self-conf.															-	-.03	.04	.18	.16	.06
16 Parents wanted me to go																-	.26	.02	.08	.07
17 Role model/mentor encouraged me																	-	.08	.13	.03
18 Become authority in own field																		-	.31	.29
19 Influence political structure																			-	.12
20 Be very well off financially																				-

Appendix D-2: Intercorrelations
Private Two-Year College

riables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 Gender: Female	-	-.13	-.12	-.11	-.16	.03	.22	.02	-.04	.09	-.10	.00	.00	-.03	-.16	.03	.03	-.07	-.10	-.05
2 Age		-	-.06	-.06	-.06	.11	-.18	-.26	-.15	-.21	-.08	-.07	-.11	-.03	-.05	-.06	-.01	-.01	-.01	.00
3 Father's Education			-	.57	.37	-.28	.07	.06	.08	.12	.10	.08	.11	.01	.05	.03	.00	.03	.04	-.10
4 Mother's Education				-	.31	-.23	.03	.05	.06	.10	.08	.04	.10	.02	.06	.02	-.06	.01	.03	-.05
5 Parental Income					-	-.27	-.09	.08	.06	.10	.09	.06	.03	-.01	.07	.05	-.02	.02	.03	.02
6 Race: Non-white						-	-.11	-.08	-.02	-.03	-.06	-.01	-.03	.02	.08	.03	.05	.07	.04	.09
7 High School (HS) GPA							-	.06	.15	.17	.05	.09	.50	.25	.14	-.04	-.02	-.02	-.09	-.12
8 HS Years: English								-	.46	.22	.16	.16	.06	.05	.02	.08	.00	.01	-.02	.00
9 HS Years: Mathematics									-	.29	.16	.16	.15	.08	.04	.05	-.02	.01	-.03	-.05
10 HS Years: Foreign Language										-	.17	.21	.21	.11	.07	.00	-.04	.02	-.03	-.04
11 HS Years: Physical Science											-	.21	.14	.05	.13	-.03	.00	.07	.07	.01
12 HS Years: Biological Science												-	.11	.09	.08	.02	.08	.06	.01	.07
13 Self-rate: academic ability													-	.37	.42	-.03	-.03	.12	-.01	-.03
14 Self-rate: drive to achieve														-	.40	-.01	.06	.17	.06	.07
15 Self-rate: intellectual self-conf.															-	-.02	.02	.19	.10	.09
16 Parents wanted me to go																-	.23	.02	.07	.08
17 Role model/mentor encouraged me																	-	.06	.12	.02
18 Become authority in own field																		-	.34	.32
19 Influence political structure																			-	.16
20 Be very well off financially																				-

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