THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCATION IN UNDERSTANDING THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF GATEWAY TO COLLEGE STUDENTS

SUPPORTED BY THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK

January 2015
The Gateway to College National Network

BCC_MA  Bristol Community College
CCC_JN  Camden County College
CCSF  City College of San Francisco
CCDA  College of the Albermarle
CCP  Community College of Philadelphia
CCC_CA  Contra Costa College
CCC_OH  Cuyahoga Community College
DMACC  Des Moines Area Community College
DC  Donnelly College
DTCC  Durham Technical Community College
EFC  Eastfield College
EPCC  El Paso Community College
ECC  Essex County College
FSCJ  Florida State College at Jacksonville
FRCC  Front Range Community College
GPC  Georgia Perimeter College
HTC  Hennepin Technical College
HCC_WA  Highline Community College
HCC_MS  Hinds Community College
HCC  Holyoke Community College
HC  Holyoke Community College
LC  Laney College
LACC  Los Angeles City College
MATC  Madison Area Technical College
MCC_MA  Massasoit Community College
MCC_NE  Metropolitan Community College
MCC_NY  Monroe Community College
MCCC_PA  Montgomery County Community College
MC  Montgomery College
MWCC  Mount Wachusett Community College
OCC  Owens Community College
PAC  Palo Alto College
PSC  Polk State College
PCC_OR  Portland Community College
PCC_CO  Pueblo Community College
QCC  Quinsigamond Community College
RCC  Riverside City College
SLCC  Saint Louis Community College
SAC  San Antonio College
SRJC  Santa Rosa Junior College
SC_CA  Shasta College
STC_TX  South Texas College
SCC  Spartanburg Community College
SFCC  Spokane Falls Community College
STCC_MA  Springfield Technical Community College
TCTC  Tri-County Technical College
INTRODUCTION

The socioeconomic character of the United States is unevenly distributed among the country’s diverse places. This research highlights these inequalities and situates the students enrolled in a Gateway to College program within this uneven landscape.

Gateway to College students live in zip codes that experience poverty rates, racial compositions, education levels, housing conditions, and income inequality that can be typical or very different from the overall United States and the rest of the national network.

The following pages will present information about the overall student population as well as the population for each program. The research seeks to describe each student’s geographic location based on the zip code characteristics, but makes no attempt to directly assign those characteristics to each student’s individual household. The study uses the zip code information to help portray the local conditions that each student witnesses and experiences on a daily basis when they go to school and interact with their surroundings.

In order to avoid the assignment of a zip code’s characteristics to an individual student’s household, the results are presented in a manner that compares the student’s experience to other programs and citizens. Program averages and network averages should be interpreted as the “summed values of each student’s zip code averaged by the total population of a program or network living in these zip codes.”

By understanding more about the local conditions and resources in each student’s life, we can better support their work toward academic success.
THE STUDY

This study describes the zip code characteristics for all students who enrolled in at least one course in a Gateway to College program prior to June 2014. The students are assigned the characteristics of the zip code of their primary address. The zip code characteristics are from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates released by the Census Bureau. Only zip codes from the 50 states and the District of Columbia that contained population were included in the analysis. Students from 1,228 unique zip codes are included in the analysis.

GATEWAY STUDENTS LIVE IN:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Districts</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Districts</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zip Codes</td>
<td>1,228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study includes 17,414 students from 49 programs.
KEY FINDINGS

1. Gateway to College students live in zip codes with a poverty rate that is slightly higher than the national average.

2. A higher percentage of Gateway to College students live in a zip code where the majority is non-white than the United States population.

3. The majority of students living in non-white communities also experience poverty rates above 20%.

4. The educational attainment of a student’s zip code varies based on where the student attends Gateway to College.

For more information about the Gateway to College National Network visit www.gatewaytocollege.org
2. A higher percentage of Gateway to College students live in a zip code where the majority is non-white than the United States population.

- Overall, 28% of students live in a zip code where the majority of the population is non-white. 15% of the US population lives in a zip code with a majority non-white population.
- For 15 programs, at least 50% of students live in non-white majority zip codes.
- For 21 programs, less than 2.5% of the student population lives in a non-white majority zip code.
- For 9 programs, the entire student population lives in a zip code where the white population is the majority.

3. The majority of students living in non-white communities also experience poverty rates above 20%.

- Six of out every ten Gateway students who live in a zip code with a majority non-white population also experience a poverty rate that exceeds 20% of the population.
- 17% of Gateway to College students live in zip codes with a poverty rate greater than 20% and a non-white majority population - double the national average of 8.5%.

4. The educational attainment of a student’s zip code varies based on where the student attends Gateway to College.

- For 8 programs, at least 80% of its students reside in a zip code with a higher percentage of high school diploma attainment than national average of 85%. On the other hand, there are 13 programs where only 20% of students live in such zip codes.
- For 25 programs, more than 2/3 of students live in a zip code with a high school diploma attainment rate below the US average.
- The percentage of the Gateway student population living in a zip code where more than 25% of its residents have obtained a bachelor’s degree is 44%, comparable to 48% for the US population.
34% of Gateway to College students live in zip codes where at least 20% of the population lives below the poverty line.
FOR **18** PROGRAMS, THE MAJORITY OF STUDENTS LIVE IN A ZIP CODE WHERE THE POVERTY RATE EXCEEDS 20%

A neighborhood tends to experience the impacts of poverty once 20% of its population is living below the federal poverty line.¹ Approximately 25% of the United States population lives in a zip code with a poverty rate greater than 20%. 34% of all students live in a zip code with a poverty rate that exceeds 20%. Many of these zip codes are located in the same metropolitan area as zip codes with dramatically lower poverty rates. Overall, 15% of the total population in the United States lives below the federal poverty line.

Students in the Philadelphia and New York metropolitan areas

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS LIVING IN A ZIP CODE WITH A POVERTY RATE GREATER THAN 20%

Camden County Community College - 89%
Springfield Technical Community College - 87%
Monroe Community College - 86%
Los Angeles City College - 86%
South Texas College - 85%
Donnelly College - 84%
Essex Community College - 83%
Cuyahoga Community College - 80%
Mott Community College - 76%
Holyoke Community College - 74%
Palo Alto College - 74%
Owens Community College - 72%
Durham Technical Community College - 72%
Community College of Philadelphia - 71%
El Paso Community College - 67%
St. Louis Community College - 65%
Bristol Community College - 62%
Laney College - 61%

POVERTY RATE

LESS THAN 20%  
GREATER THAN 20%  
1 DOT = 5 STUDENTS
The average Gateway to College student lives in a zip code that has a poverty rate of 18%. Only two programs do not have at least one student from a zip code with a poverty rate greater than 20%. Students in these programs, Montgomery County Community College and Santa Rosa Junior College, reside in much different communities than students in the nearby Gateway to College programs in Philadelphia-New Jersey and the San Francisco Bay area.

8 PROGRAMS HAVE 50% OR MORE OF ITS STUDENTS LIVING IN ONE OF THE POOREST 10% OF US ZIP CODES BASED ON POVERTY RATE
28% OF STUDENTS LIVE IN A ZIP CODE WHERE THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION IS NON-WHITE

Racial segregation in the United States continues to decline from its peak in the 1960’s-1970’s. However, the populations that remain in segregated neighborhoods still face the consequences of unfair lending practices and crime-prone communities.

Approximately 15% of the US population lives in a zip code where the majority of the racial composition is non-white. For the Gateway to College student population the percentage is almost double (28%).

For 15 programs, the majority of students live in non-white majority zip codes. For nine other programs, the entire student population lives in a zip code where the white population is the majority. Overall, 21 programs have less than 2.5% of its student population living in a non-white majority zip code.

Programs with a majority of students living in non-white majority zip codes
22% OF STUDENTS LIVE IN ZIP CODES WHERE THE FOREIGN BORN POPULATION IS TWICE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

Education attainment tends to be lower for children of parents who are immigrants. In the United States, 13% of the overall population was born outside of the country. There are sections of major cities and small towns where the foreign born population exceeds 50% of a zip code. These zip codes provide diverse cultures and languages for local communities, but also challenges for historically homogenous schools. For students living near programs in California and Texas, the foreign born percentages are very high. In the Southeast and Midwest - there are programs with very low percentages.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS LIVING IN A ZIP CODE WITH A FOREIGN BORN PERCENTAGE ABOVE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE OF 13%

Contra Costa College - 100%
City College of San Francisco - 100%
Los Angeles City College - 100%
South Texas College - 100%
Laney College - 99%
El Paso Community College - 99%
Riverside Community College - 99%

College of the Albemarle - 0%
Hinds Community College - 0%
Owens Community College - 0%
Savannah Technical College - 0%
Shasta College - 0%
Spartanburg Community College - 0%
Tri-County Technical College - 0%
Poverty and Race

In the United States, people of color experience poverty in greater proportions than their white counterparts.\textsuperscript{3} Nationally, 8.5% of the population lives in a zip code where the poverty rate exceeds 20% and the majority of the population is not white. 17% of Gateway to College students live in these zip codes - nearly double the national average. These zip codes experience the intersection of poverty and race.

At 3 programs, over 25% of the program’s student population is concentrated in a single zip code that has a poverty rate above 20% and a non-white majority population. These programs are: Donnelly College (34%), Springfield Technical Community College (30%), and Laney College (26%). At Camden County College, 57% of students are concentrated in two zip codes with high poverty and a non-white majority.

6 OUT OF EVERY 10 STUDENTS WHO LIVE IN A ZIP CODE WITH A MAJORITY NON-WHITE POPULATION ALSO EXPERIENCE A POVERTY RATE THAT EXCEEDS 20%

If a student lives in a non-white majority zip code, what are the chances that zip code also has a poverty rate above 20%?
In the United States, approximately 28% of the population has attained a bachelor’s degree or greater. The percentage of the Gateway student population living in a zip code where more than 25% of its residents have obtained a bachelor’s degree is 44%, comparable to 48% for the US population. The presence of highly educated individuals in a local community can indicate labor market strength, social conditions, peer expectations, and overall resources.

When examining the Gateway student population on a program and regional level there is noticeable variation. Almost all of the students in some programs reside in zip codes with a bachelor’s degree rate greater than 25%, while other programs have very few students in these zip codes. The programs in the Northwest have the highest median percentage, while programs in the Northeast have the lowest.

**PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS LIVING IN A ZIP CODE WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE RATE**

**GREATER THAN 25%**
- Madison Area Technical College - 100%
- Montgomery College - 99%
- Durham Technical Community College - 99%
- Lake Washington Institute of Technology - 94%
- Portland Community College - 88%
- Quinsigamond Community College - 73%

**LESS THAN 25%**
- Bristol Community College - 97%
- Palo Alto College - 97%
- Camden County College - 95%
- Springfield Technical Community College - 94%
- Donnelly College - 94%
- Mott Community College - 92%

**THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS BY PROGRAM AND REGION THAT ARE LIVING IN A ZIP CODE WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE ATTAINMENT RATE ABOVE 25%**

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
FOR 25 PROGRAMS, MORE THAN 2/3 OF STUDENTS LIVE IN A ZIP CODE WITH A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA ATTAINMENT RATE BELOW THE US AVERAGE

The high school diploma attainment of a student’s zip code varies based on where the student attends Gateway to College. For 8 programs, at least 80% of its students reside in a zip code with a higher percentage of high school diploma attainment than national average of 85%. On the other hand, there are 13 programs where only 20% of students live in such zip codes. Overall, 47% of all students in the network live in a zip code above the national high school diploma attainment rate (approximately 85% of adults). For the total US population, the number is 59%.

Students at programs in Massachusetts

Programs where the average student lives in a zip code with at least a 90% high school diploma attainment
Housing

Housing vacancy and home ownership rates are indicators of economic health in a neighborhood. The average Gateway student lives in a zip code with an average home ownership rate of 75% - above the national average of 65%.

Gateway to College programs located in the eastern half of the United States have the highest percentage of students living in zip codes with high levels of housing vacancy. Three-quarters of all students from the Michigan and Ohio programs are living in a zip code with a vacancy rate that exceeds the national average of 12.5%.

THE AVERAGE HOME OWNERSHIP RATE FOR EACH PROGRAM’S AVERAGE STUDENT ZIP CODE

The top third of programs with the highest housing vacancy rates

Students in the Flint, Toledo and Cleveland metropolitan areas
Income Inequality

At 30 out of 49 programs, the average student lives in a zip code with more income inequality than the average US citizen’s zip code.

The Gini index measures the income distribution of a defined area. In this study, the Gini index measures the degree of inequality between the highest and lowest income earners in a zip code. Inequality can vary depending on the geographic unit that is used to compare the income distribution. The average Gateway student lives in a zip code that is more equal than the average US citizen. However, when the students are grouped by their program, the average student at 30 of 49 programs experiences more inequality in their zip code than the average American citizen. More inequality does not necessarily indicate more poverty. There are programs in the network with high values for one variable but not for both.

The Programs with the Most and Least Income Inequality

According to the Gini index for the zip code of the average student in each program:

- FRONT RANGE: 0.3752
- EASTFIELD: 0.3827
- HINDS: 0.3968
- RIVERSIDE: 0.3989
- MOUNT WACHUSETT: 0.3995
- AVERAGE US CITIZEN: 0.4262
- SAN FRANCISCO: 0.4714
- CAMDEN: 0.4754
- ESSEX: 0.4838
- SOUTH TEXAS: 0.4955
- CUYAHOGA: 0.5013

The average student’s zip code versus the average US citizen’s zip code:

- 0: Less equal program
- 1: More equal program

More inequality does not necessarily indicate more poverty. There are programs in the network with high values for one variable but not for both.
The study is intended to provide a greater understanding of the characteristics of the communities where Gateway to College students live. The needs, resources, and vulnerabilities of a student’s local community can be understood from a student’s zip code address joined with Census data. We expect the study confirms most of a practitioner’s existing knowledge of their students’ communities. Based on practitioner knowledge, programs have already tailored interventions to encourage student successes that counter the influence of community conditions on a student’s education and college readiness.

The findings should help further the case that resource intensive support is needed for students living in low resource communities. It is important to highlight the Gateway students who live in communities that exist outside of the consciousness of powerful decision markers. While the characteristics of an individual student’s household might differ from their community, we must acknowledge that the local environment can influence a student’s academic performance. Gateway to College programs have the flexibility to adapt program practices to meet student needs and provide holistic student support that engages community stakeholders outside the classroom.

Programs that understand the socioeconomic character of their local zip codes can implement recruiting strategies to enroll students from the communities that are most in need. Programs might also find it beneficial to compare and develop their best practices with programs residing in similar socioeconomic and demographic landscapes. The range of local conditions in the network provides opportunity for unique interventions to be geared towards various subsets of programs that can cross state or regional boundaries.

Students are often forced to make difficult life choices while pursuing a college education. Geographic location is only one component of a student’s life that can impact their academic success.

For more information about the Gateway to College National Network visit www.gatewaytocollege.org


Suggested citation:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was conducted with the generous financial support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Gateway to College National Network is thankful for their work to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.

ABOUT US

Gateway to College National Network (GtCNN) is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to helping disconnected young people and struggling students succeed. The network includes 42 colleges and more than 150 school districts, working together to build alternative pathways to success in higher education. We have served more than 20,000 of the nation’s most at-risk students, including students who left high school before graduation and youth facing the systemic challenges of poverty.

We engage young people with a history of academic struggle and provide intensive student supports along with an innovative structure and high expectations. Gateway to College students enter with an average high school GPA of 1.6 and fewer than half of the credits they need for a diploma. Using dual credit to create alternative pathways to both a high school diploma and a college credential, we have achieved notable success with teen parents, youth who have been bullied, foster youth, students involved with gangs or juvenile justice, homeless youth, and young people who have struggled with illness and learning challenges.