

ACCESS & SUCCESS – APPALACHIAN OHIO  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 2009

## Access & Success – Appalachian Ohio

Appalachian Ohio will improve its economic competitiveness and standard of living as educational attainment levels increase. The most recent (2007) U.S. Census estimates indicate that bachelor's degree holders earned approximately \$26,000 more than those with just a high school diploma. An educated workforce is widely regarded as the key to Ohio's future economic competitiveness. While Ohio lags the nation as a whole in educational attainment, this situation is worse in Ohio's Appalachian counties. However, progress has been made, both in the college going rate as well as in students' aspirations and preparedness for college since 1992. This brief presents some key findings from a 2007-08 study examining Appalachian Ohio college students' access, retention, postsecondary pathways, and degree completion.

These findings are based on a two-year study, *Access and Success-Appalachian Ohio*, conducted by Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs with assistance from Ohio University's Center for Higher Education. Project sponsors were the **Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education**, the **Ohio Board of Regents**, the **Ohio College Access Network**, and **Ohio College Tech Prep**. The full reports and additional briefs are available at <http://www.oache.org> or <http://www.voinovichschool.ohio.edu/publications.aspx>

This study combined secondary data with surveys of high school and college students from Appalachian Ohio. Secondary data sources included databases maintained by the Ohio Board of Regents, the Ohio Department of Education, and the National Center for Educational Statistics. The surveys were designed both to replicate the *1992 Appalachian Access and Success* report and to provide new data on retention and college program completion. A total of 1,145 seniors from the class of 2008 completed the high school surveys in the fall and spring of their senior year. These seniors represented 25 high schools in 14 Ohio Appalachian counties. Parents and high school guidance counselors also completed surveys and interviews during the 2007-08 school year. During the late fall after their high school graduation, 167 of the high school seniors completed a follow-up post-high school survey. For the post-college survey, a total of 268 recent college graduates who had gone to high school in Appalachian Ohio responded. See the full reports for details of the methodology, including sample selection, response rates, and potential sources of bias.

### Acknowledgements

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We also thank Jake Bapst at Rio Grande Community College for his help in shaping the research questions. Darrell Glenn and William Wagner at the Ohio Board of Regents provided a significant number of the data files used for these analyses. Mike Williford and Annette Skillman from Ohio University's Office of Institutional Research provided data and guidance.

We owe debts of gratitude to many individuals and organizations, without whose participation and assistance this study would have remained incomplete. We are especially grateful to all students and parents who responded to our survey invitations, and to the guidance counselors who took the time to be interviewed. A similar debt is owed to all participating school districts, high school principals, school counselors, teachers, and project coordinators that not only welcomed us into their schools but also helped us deploy the high school student and parent surveys. We would also like to acknowledge Jefferson Community College, Kent State University, Ohio University, the Ohio State University, University of Rio Grande, University of Cincinnati, and Zane State College for assistance with the college graduates' survey.

Researchers responsible for the project include Amy Jennings, Lesli Johnson, Barry Oches, Marsha Lewis, Anirudh V.S. Ruhil, and Nicole Yandell at the Voinovich School. Valerie Martin Conley and Dmitry Suspitsin at the Center for Higher Education also contributed to portions of this report. Ohio University students Holly Craycraft, Ann Deaton, Trevor Glew, Mayla Puckett, and Scott Wingenfeld provided valuable support.

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the work of the late Wayne White and the late Dewey Lykens. Dewey was one of the primary investigators on the 1992 Access and Success study. Wayne was the founding executive director and led the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education from 1993 to 2004.

### From the 2008 Appalachian Ohio high school seniors, we learn . . .

- More seniors from the class of 2008 planned to attend college right after high school than did their counterparts in 1992. Seniors from 25 high schools across Appalachian Ohio were asked this question in both the fall and late spring of their senior year. Approximately 80 percent of the Appalachian Ohio high school seniors surveyed planned to go on to secure some form of postsecondary education immediately after high school, as compared to 65 percent in 1992. That 80 percent of the Appalachian Ohio high school seniors we surveyed aspire to college suggests no lack of ambition or motivation on the part of the students. However, as we document in this report, numerous barriers prevent these aspirations from being realized.

**There still exists a gap in aspiration to attend college right after high school between students whose parents have no college experience and those with at least one parent having attended college. However, this gap narrowed for students who participated in college access program in high school.**

- Having a parent who has attended college increased the likelihood that a senior planned to continue his or her education immediately upon graduation. Students whose parents had college experience were significantly more likely to report plans to continue their education right after high school (89 percent planned to) as compared to first-generation students (i.e., whose parents had not attended college). Only 75 percent of first-generation students planned to continue their education right after high school.
- Participating in a program in high school that helps students prepare for college increased the likelihood that students planned to attend college right after graduation and narrowed the gap between first generation college students and students with a parent who has attended college. Among students participating in such a program, 83 percent of would-be first generation college students and 93 percent of students whose parents have some college report that they planned to continue their education right after high school. In addition to this narrowing of the gap between students with and without parental college experience, the overall percentage of students who planned to

attend college right after high school was greater for students who participated in a high school program to prepare them for college.

- Parents, followed by peers and friends had the most influence on a student's decision to attend or not attend college.
- Almost half of the students who planned to continue their education indicated that they planned to attend a college close to their home. Of the 2008 sample, 47 percent indicated that they planned to attend an Ohio college within fifty miles of home. Another 25 percent indicated plans to attend a college in Ohio, but farther than 50 miles from home. Eleven percent expressed plans to attend college in a neighboring state, and another 3 percent planned to attend in some other state. Approximately 14 percent were unsure about college location at the time of the fall survey. In comparison to the 1992 study, in 2008 more students indicated attending a college within 50 miles of home, while fewer were unsure about location.

**Finances and the lack of information about financial aid options and procedures have increased in importance as barriers to higher education since 1992.**

- Overall, high school seniors ranked lack of finances as their biggest problem or difficulty regarding college. Lack of information in terms of college programs and financial aid was also found to be high on the students' list of major problems or difficulties, followed by the desire for an immediate income.
- A higher percentage of 2008 high school seniors reported lack of finances as one of their top barriers to higher education than in 1992.
- The percentage of 12th graders reporting lack of finances as a barrier increased 16 percentage points between the fall survey and the spring survey. As students approached graduation, began the application and financial aid processes, lack of finances became a major problem for more high school seniors.
- One in four high school seniors who planned to go on to higher education immediately after high school had not completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as of April/May of their senior year.
- Over 80 percent of parents surveyed reported lack of finances as a major barrier to their child continuing their education. A similar percentage of

school counselors reported that money was the primary obstacle facing Appalachian high school students and their parents when thinking about postsecondary education.

- School counselors also emphasized that many parents were unsure about how to navigate college financing and were often overwhelmed by the process.

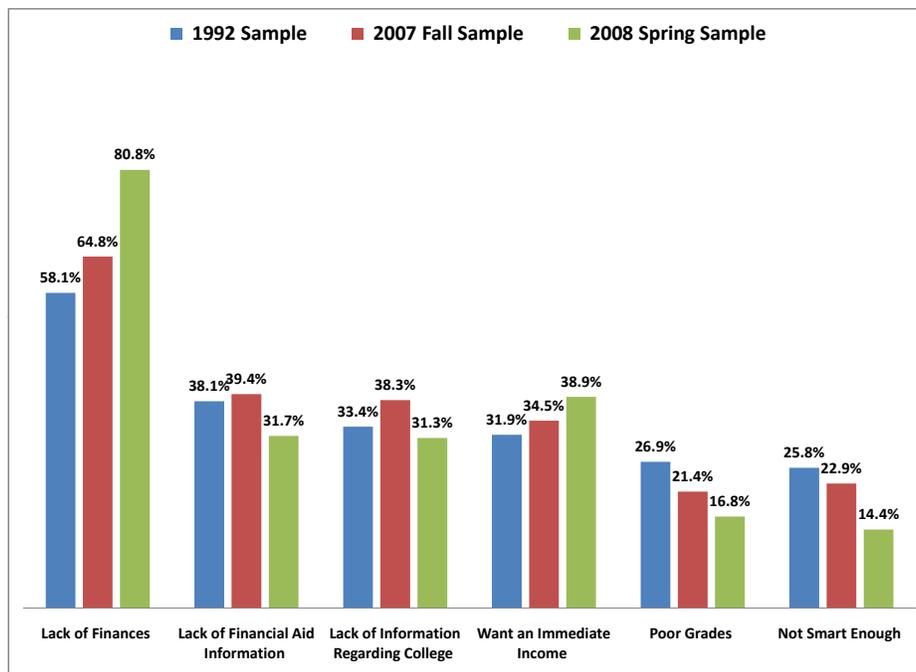
- More than a third of all parents surveyed had not taken any steps to help finance their high school senior's postsecondary education.

- High school students estimated that loans would account for the largest share of their college expenses; college students from Appalachian Ohio reported that loans comprised the largest share of their college expenses.

**Table 1: College Readiness Behaviors of High School Seniors (2008) by First-generation Status**

	FAFSA Completed	Visited a College	Took ACT
First-Generation	63%	86%	70%
Not First-Generation	74%	95%	83%

**Figure 1: Self-reported Problems Encountered Regarding College (High School Seniors)**



**Table 2: High School Graduate Survey Respondents' Reasons for Choosing Their College (2008)**

Reason	Percent
Location	60%
Program of Study	51%
Cost	49%
Reputation	43%
Personal/Family	18%
Other	10%

### Academic Preparation

- Approximately 70 percent of the 2008 high school seniors reported participating in a college prep or tech prep course of study.
- Seventy-two percent of the 2008 high school seniors surveyed self-reported that they were educationally prepared for college, compared to 58 percent of the 1992 respondents.

### According to the 2008 Appalachian high school graduates who completed the follow-up survey during the fall/winter after their high school graduation, we learn ...

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents to the post-high school survey indicated that they were currently enrolled in college, vocational school or trade school. It is important to note the likely bias in the sample, as students who had successfully gone on to higher education were more likely to have completed the post-high school survey.

- The 145 respondents who were currently enrolled in college had gone on to 52 different postsecondary institutions, including 21 institutions outside of Ohio. Sixteen percent of those currently enrolled in college had chosen an out-of-state school.
- When asked how many of their friends from high school or hometown were attending the same college, 85 percent indicated at least one friend was attending.
- There was congruence between the senior year of high school and the first year of college relative to

plans to enter a particular occupation. Approximately 75 percent of the respondents who had indicated an interest in pursuing a STEM-related (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medical) occupation when they were seniors in high school were still pursuing that field during their first year of college.

- Most (94 percent) of the 2008 high school graduates who had enrolled in college said that at least one of their two closest friends had also gone onto college.
- For the 12 percent who were not currently enrolled in college, the two main reasons cited were, "I cannot afford to continue my education," and "I have a good job."
- Of the 2008 high school graduates who were surveyed during their first year of college, approximately 31 percent indicated that their high school experience did not adequately prepare them for college. Most of these same students had thought they were educationally prepared for college when asked that question as a high school senior.
- Of those enrolled in college, 15 percent self-reported taking a remedial course in writing and 19 percent reported taking a remedial course in math.
- Fifty-one percent of the students in college had worked since enrolling, including 28 percent who had worked all of the weeks they had been enrolled.
- Fifty percent of those in their first year of college reported having a student loan.

**Table 3: Students' Plans to Continue After High School  
(by Parents' Education & College Access Program Exposure)**

	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
All Respondents	75.0%	89.0%
Had Some College Prep Program	83.0%	93.0%

**From recent college graduates who attended high school in Appalachian Ohio, we learn...**

**Appalachian Ohio college students are just as likely to persist from their first to second year of college as students in the rest of the state.**

- Persistence to a baccalaureate degree is lower for Appalachian Ohio students than for their non-Appalachian counterparts.
- Although most Appalachian college graduate respondents indicated no interruptions in their studies, 1 in 4 indicated that they had stopped out at least once, and this was also true of respondents who were first-generation students. Respondents who had interrupted their studies at least once did so because of financial issues.
- Most respondents had enrolled in college within a year of graduating from high school.

**Finances and the lack of information about financial aid options and procedures have increased as barriers to higher education since 1992.**

- College graduate respondents from Appalachian Ohio ranked lack of finances as the number one problem or difficulty they faced regarding college.
- They also indicated they relied on parents, loans, grants, and non-athletic scholarships to pay for college. They had also worked for most of the weeks that they attended college.
- Respondents also identified parents and their peers as the strongest (and area college representatives as the weakest) influences on their decision to pursue a postsecondary degree.

**Appalachian college graduate respondents' plans for post-secondary education do not end with an Associate's or Bachelor's degree.**

- Most students expressed an intent to pursue further education. However, fewer first-generation Appalachian college graduate respondents expressed a similar intent.

**Most Appalachian college graduate respondents are employed either full-time or part-time, and the unemployed are enrolled in college/vocational technical programs.**

- Location, opportunities related to their field of study, and good income potential appear to have influenced their present employment choices.
- A number of graduates also indicated that they were challenged by a limited/saturated job market and their lack of work experience when seeking employment
- One in five respondents was employed outside his or her field of study.

**From existing data sources, we learn...**

- A lower percentage of Appalachian Ohio students take a high school curriculum to prepare them for college than students from the rest of the state.
- A slightly lower percentage of Appalachian Ohio school districts reported having one or more 2006-07 high school graduates taking advantage of the Postsecondary Enrollment Option that allows college courses to be taken while in college.
- Based on the 2006-07 Local Report Card data from ODE, approximately the same percentage of 2006-07 of Appalachian and non-Appalachian Ohio high school graduates had taken at least one tech prep course.
- Approximately 54 percent of Appalachian Ohio districts had one or more 2007 high school graduates taking an Advanced Placement test, while 71 percent of non-Appalachian districts in Ohio had one or more 2007 graduates taking an Advanced Placement test.
- Approximately 40 percent of recent graduates from high schools in Appalachian Ohio enrolled in Ohio colleges in 2006. Statewide, approximately 44 percent of recent graduates enrolled in Ohio colleges that same year. These figures do not include recent graduates enrolling in college in other states,

or some students enrolled in private Ohio colleges not reporting data to the Ohio Board of Regents. Statewide, the Ohio Board of Regents estimates the overall college going rate of recent graduates in 2004 as 57 percent.

- The percentage of first generation college students is higher for Appalachian Ohio than for the rest of the state. In 2006, 51 percent of first-time Ohio college freshmen from Appalachian Ohio counties were first-generation college students as compared to 40 percent of the freshmen from non-Appalachian counties.
- Ohio's future economic growth is seen as heavily dependent on an educated workforce with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Medical services fields are also predicted as high job-growth areas for the state. Based on both the primary and the secondary data sources analyzed in this report, it appears that Appalachian Ohio students are increasingly seeking degrees in some fields that support the state's current and emerging growth sectors, especially the medical field.



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