Does Family Income Determine Earning a Degree for Students who Start College at UPIKE?

In 2011, an estimated 27.5% of 24 year olds had completed a bachelor’s degree (Postsecondary, 2012). But an analysis of bachelor’s degree attainment by age 24 by the Mortenson Seminar on Public Policy Analysis of Opportunity for Postsecondary Education uncovered that students born into the top quartile of family income (above $105,000) were seven times more likely to have earned a bachelor’s degree by age 24 than were students born into the bottom quartile (below $33,000). For this reason, they claimed that higher education has been called an Engine of Division. Is this pattern the same for students who begin college at the University of Pikeville?

UPIKE achieves its mission, in part, by creating a pathway to higher education for all students who desire to embark upon that journey and attracting and retaining high caliber students who will be future regional, national and global leaders. There were 1,013 new freshmen (full-time) at UPIKE from fall 2004 to fall 2008 (five years of cohorts). To see if family income influenced degree completion, this study included 85 percent of these students (N=858) after removing those who died before graduating; were seeking associates’ degrees (however included those ended up earning bachelor’s degrees); were seeking baccalaureate degrees who ended up earning associates’ degrees; no parental income was available from the students’ FAFSAs, or were over 19 when they matriculated at UPIKE.

To make this study more replicable, household income quintiles by the Census Bureau (2015) by year were used rather than the 2011 family income quartiles from the original Postsecondary research. While the share of all new freshmen at UPIKE for these five years is bottom-heavy (52%) with the lowest and second lowest family income groups, the following chart displays the stability of distribution of students enrolled by household income quintile across these freshmen cohorts.

The following six charts describe how students who enrolled at the University of Pikeville for their first semester of college and came from the lowest family income quintile had (1) the lowest average Composite ACT, (2) the lowest average high school grade point average, (3) the highest share of minority students, (4) the highest share of first generation students, and (5) the highest enrollment rate in developmental courses. These charts also show that this is the exact opposite for the students at the UPIKE from the highest family income quintile. However, the continuation in college rates for the students in these five income groups do not show as clean of a progression.

Citation of this report:
Bachelor's Degree Completion Rates by Age 24
Of the students born into the top quintile of family income (above an average of $97,795, 2005-2009) and attended the University of Pikeville their first semester of college, 66% completed a bachelor’s degree by the age of 24. On the other hand, 40% of the students born into the lowest quintile of family income (lower than an average $20,134, 2005-2009) completed a bachelor’s degree by the age of 24 who attended the University of Pikeville their first semester of college. This difference is visibly smaller than what was witnessed nationally in 2011 by the Postsecondary study.
Continuing to Meet its Mission in Central Appalachia

UPIKE continues to enroll students from all economic family backgrounds and strives to even the degree attainment playing field. Beginning in fall 2011, the University of Pikeville Promise is a guaranteed full tuition, four-year scholarship that places an emphasis on academics and financial need. Of the 352 new freshmen in fall 2014, 40% received this grant and 80% of the recipients ended their first semester in good academic standing. The staff and faculty at UPIKE take their lead from President Hurley, “At the University of Pikeville, student success is at the heart of everything we do. Across the campus family, our number one priority is to provide a quality learning experience and the encouragement and support students need to make the most of their education.”


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