

Initiative to Aid Illinois Adult Learners

About 36 percent of Illinois college students are “adult learners” – students over 24 years of age. Many of these students work full-time and attend college part-time, a substantial number are low-income, and some are supporting families. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that they often have difficulty completing their education for a variety of reasons, including financial constraints. Illinois has provided Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grants to part-time students who are from low-income families and who enroll for at least six credit hours since 1974 and is now considering extending support to part-time low-income students who enroll for fewer than six hours. A pilot program was designed and implemented by ISAC to provide data to evaluate the efficacy of extending MAP grant eligibility to these students. An analysis of the statistical and survey data generated by the pilot indicates that students enrolling for fewer than six hours per semester have socio-economic characteristics and financial need that are very similar to those students who enroll for more hours. In fact, they often are the same students – they just find it necessary to enroll in fewer hours during a particular semester.

Introduction

“For a nontraditional student it can be very difficult because we have a different frame of mind and a different frame of reference [for] why we are here. We are here not just to make money, we are here because it is a necessity. I mean, we came back [to college] because we are not getting anywhere. And, you know, it’s not all about owning a BMW. It’s not all about having a big house in the suburbs and, you know, having all these lofty goals. It’s about survival.”

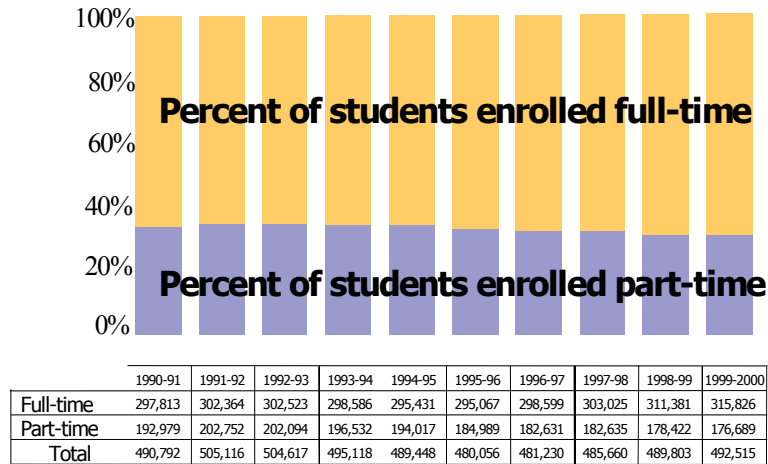
Spring 2000 focus group participant

When designing initiatives to help adult learners, a heterogeneous group of individuals whose only unifying feature is that they are not classified as dependent 18 to 24 year olds, one aspect dominates – the average adult learner leads a very complicated life. Their educational goals are only one element of their lives, and usually not the most important one at that. Adult learners face many obstacles to continuing their education and many responsibilities compete for their time. Children, work, and the extended family consume much of their lives. The “typical” adult learner is a part-time student by necessity, and a student who can come with a variety of special needs.

In the spring of 2000, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) staff conducted a series of focus groups with nontraditional students – those students who are older than 25. Forty-two percent of the students in the groups attended college on a part-time basis. They indicated, regardless of their enrollment status, that their primary motivation for attending college was to improve their personal economic situation – to advance in their current job or secure a better new position. Non-traditional students are serious students with substantial needs.

The remainder of this paper provides additional background about the impetus for student aid for less-than-half-time enrollment, describes the demonstration project implemented in FY2000 to provide state grant aid to students who enroll on a less-than-half-time basis, reports on the school financial aid administrators’ evaluation of the demonstration project, and summarizes findings about the student awardees enrolled in year one of the project.

Figure 1: Full-time and Part-time Illinois College Enrollment

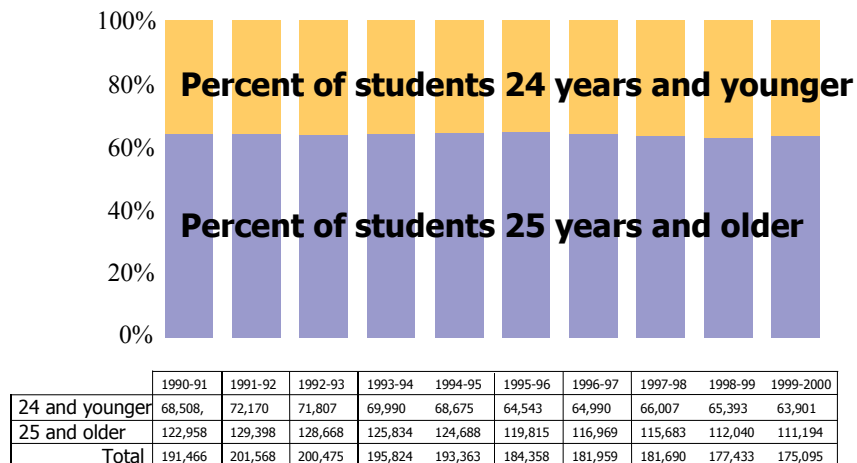


Who Are the Part-time Students at Illinois Colleges?

Illinois colleges serve a large part-time student population, defined as students taking fewer than 12 credit hours per semester. As shown in Figure 1, part-time students make up about 36 percent of college enrollment, down a bit from 40 percent in the mid-1990s but fairly stable overall during the past decade. In FY2000, 176,689 part-time students were enrolled in Illinois colleges, at all types of institutions.

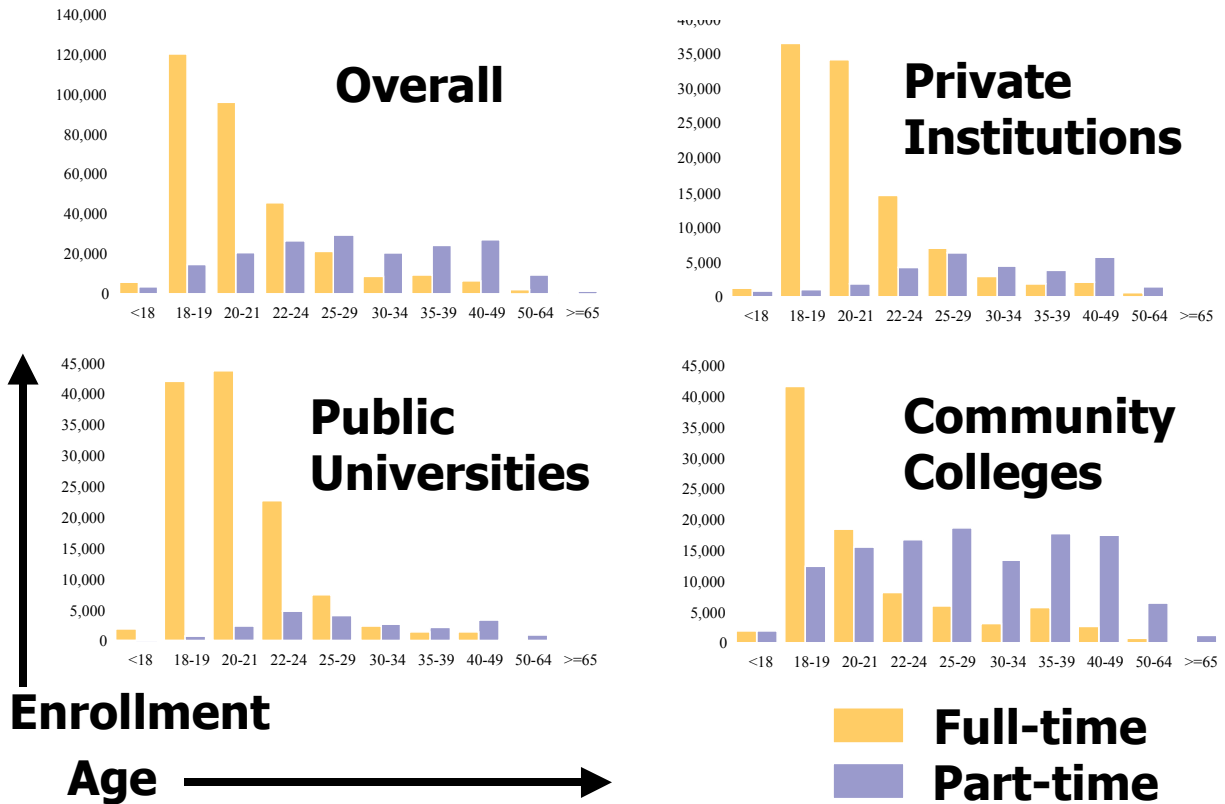
Part-time students tend to be older students. The ratio of “older” students (over 24) has remained nearly constant over the decade – about 65 percent of part-time students are over age 24, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Part-time College Enrollment by Age



As Figure 3 illustrates, part-time students are not evenly distributed over all college sectors but tend to cluster at community colleges where they outnumber full-time students in all age groups over age 21. Far fewer part-time students attend public universities or private institutions but those who do are mostly older and they outnumber full-time students age 30 and over.

Figure 3: Part-time Enrollment by Age and Sector



Distance Learning May Increase the Number of Part-time Students

Although the percentage of students attending Illinois colleges part-time has declined about 5 percent over the past six years, this trend may be halted or even reversed by the increased availability of distance learning. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) defines a program as a distance learning program if the teacher and the learner are separated geographically or by time, if the learning is controlled more by the student than the teacher, and if instruction is “mediated by print or some other technology.” Distance learning via correspondence courses has been in existence for over 100 years but in the past decade high speed Internet access has facilitated the development of distance learning programs.

From 1996 to 1999, IBHE granted 493 approvals for private college off-campus degree programs, up 110 percent from the 1991 to 1995 period, and dwarfing the 186 approvals for on-campus programs during the same period. These programs, primarily Internet-based, became part of the 2,600 Internet, interactive television and stored media programs offered by all institutions during the Fall 2000 semester (Figure 4.) These distance learning courses had enrollments nearing 38,000 students. Most of the enrollments were at community colleges (1,916 courses with almost 28,000 enrollments) and the largest number of enrollments were for Internet-based programs. While both full and part-time students enroll in these courses, they may have particular appeal for the older, part-time student with work and family obligations.

Figure 4: Distance Learning Participation Increases

**Based on enrollment surveys conducted
by the Illinois Virtual Campus**

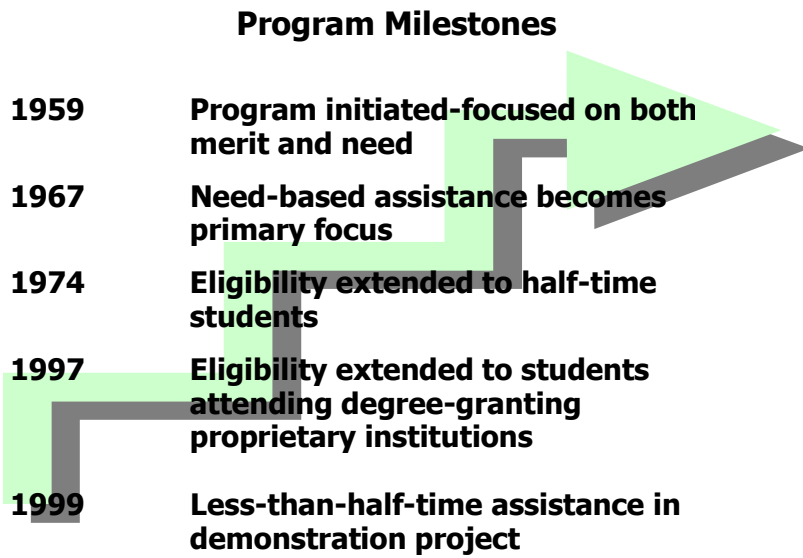
Period	Number of Courses Offered	Number of Students Enrolled
<i>Fall 1999</i>	932	14,869
<i>Spring 2000</i>	1,434	26,214
<i>Fall 2000</i>	2,615	37,705

<p>In the fall of 2000, community colleges accounted for about 75 percent of the distance learning courses offered and about 75 percent of the total distance learning enrollment.</p>

MAP Awards are Available to Half-time Students

The Monetary Award Program (MAP) provides tuition and fee assistance at Illinois institutions for Illinois undergraduate residents who are financially needy. The award has been available to part-time students who enroll on at least a half-time basis (minimum of six credit hours) since 1974 (see Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Monetary Award Program (MAP)



While the majority of MAP recipients are full-time students, a significant portion of this population are “at least half-time” students as shown in Figure 6. Most of these “at least half-time” students are independent students both with and without dependents.

Figure 6: FY2000 MAP Recipients

By Enrollment and Dependency Status Spring Semester, 2000

<u>Dependency Status</u>	<u>Enrollment Status</u>	
	Full-time	At least half-time
Dependents	93%	7%
Independents with dependents	61%	39%
Independents without dependents	79%	21%
Overall	83%	17%

Characteristics of LTHT Students

The six-hour minimum figure for MAP-eligible status has been subject to some scrutiny in recent years. A 1996 survey of students who attended college on a less-than-half-time basis (e.g. taking fewer than six credit hours during a single term) revealed that these students “looked” like half-time students and, in fact, many of them were half-time students who occasionally dropped below six hours. In ISAC’s *Study of FY2000 MAP Applicants Who Did Not Receive a MAP Grant*, eight percent of those eligible for MAP grants did not receive their grant because they were enrolled for fewer than six credit hours.

Figure 7 lists the major demographic characteristics of less-than-half-time students surveyed in the 1996 study. Three-quarters were women, forty percent were minority and they had an average age of 30. The average number of hours worked by these students per week was 28 and when they enrolled in classes, 62 percent enrolled at community colleges. This demographic profile was very similar to part-time students as a whole.

Figure 7: Characteristics of LTHT Students

- **73 percent were women**
- **71 percent were unmarried**
- **40 percent were minority**
- **62 percent were enrolled at community colleges**
- **Employed an average of 28 hours per week**
- **Average age of 30**

Figure 8: Enrollment Patterns of LTHT Students

- **60 percent usually enroll for at least 6 hours**
- **20 percent were enrolling for the first time**
- **20 percent usually enroll for fewer than 6 hours**
- **Expect to be enrolled an average of 8 years**

When asked about their enrollment patterns (summarized in Figure 8,) 60 percent of the 1996 survey participants responded that generally they were enrolled at least on a half-time basis. Another 20 percent were enrolling for the first time. Only 20 percent of the respondents indicated they were regularly enrolling for fewer than six hours.

Extending MAP Awards to Less-Than-Half-Time Students

According to a 2000 ISAC study, *Changes in Affordability of a College Education for Dependent Students in Illinois*, in current dollar terms, Illinois total college costs increased by 29 percent at community colleges, 53 percent at public universities, and 54 percent at private institutions between FY1992 and FY2000. In constant dollars, the increases were 7 percent, 26 percent, and 27 percent respectively. These increases are felt by all students but can be especially difficult for the lower-income non-traditional student, whether full or part-time.

Interest in funding less-than-half-time students has gained ground in Illinois and a pilot program providing financial assistance to students in selected

institutions has been in place since 1999. The pilot program resulted from a recommendation by the IBHE’s Committee to Study Affordability established in 1994. The Committee’s recommendation was that:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission with the assistance of colleges and universities, shall use various means to evaluate the benefits and program costs of providing aid to students enrolled less than half time.

The subsequent less-than-half-time pilot program reviewed in this paper was initiated by ISAC to provide data to facilitate the evaluation. Funding students who enroll on a less-than-half-time basis is gaining support because it helps two groups of students with special needs – working women with dependents and minority adult learners. This initiative is part of a larger effort to develop new ways of increasing college attendance and completion rates among less traditional student populations. In 2001, IBHE’s *Gateway to Success: Rethinking Access and Diversity for a New Century*, concludes with a list of recommendations addressing ways to improve access to and diversity in Illinois colleges and universities. One of the recommendations is to expand eligibility requirements of MAP “to students registered less than half-time.”

The Less-Than-Half-Time Demonstration Project

In response to the need to determine whether to provide State gift assistance to needy students enrolled on a less-than-half-time basis, ISAC initiated the Demonstration Project for Aid to Less-Than-Half-Time Students to provide financial aid to students enrolled on a less-than-half-time basis during the 1999-2000 academic year. It was intended that information from the project could be used to help characterize the less-than-half-time student population with financial needs and help determine the best method by which the State can meet their student financial aid needs while continuing to provide assistance in an efficient manner to all eligible Illinois students.

Figure 9: Overview of Selection Criteria

Demonstration Project: Institution Selection Criteria

Institutional applications were scored on:

- Reason why they wanted to participate
- How project funds would benefit students
- Award packaging approach
- Award rationing criteria
- Planned communications with students
- Overall application quality

After applications were evaluated and scored:

- The two highest scoring applications from each of 4 ZIP code zones were selected
- The highest scoring applications from sectors not represented were added
- Additional institutions were added until funding was allocated

Selection Process

Applications to participate in the project were sent to 88 eligible Illinois institutions in April, 1999. Eligible institutions were defined as those Illinois institutions of higher education that participated in gift assistance programs administered by ISAC and had at least 20 percent of their undergraduate student body enrolled on a part-time basis. Applications were received from 33 institutions and 21 were selected to participate. In their applications, institutions were asked to report the amount of funding they would need to provide awards to their financially needy LTHT students. Selection of participating institutions was based in part on geographic location with additional institutions selected to ensure an appropriate distribution among all school types.

Selection Criteria

Figure 9 describes the competitive criteria used to select schools. They were “scored” on six factors subject to geographic and other constraints. Schools were required to describe their reasons for wanting to participate in the project, their allocation mechanisms for the grants, and how they would interact with students receiving the grants. Selection was based on the quality of the applications plus geographic and sector considerations. Each type of institution and all major geographic areas (by ZIP code zones) were represented.

In total, the project provided \$697,867 in financial aid to 2,741 students. The largest portion of project funding went to students at community colleges who received about \$290,000, or 42 percent, of total funding, with public university students receiving \$210,808, or 31 percent, private institution students \$159,432, or 23 percent, and proprietary institution students \$21,661, or 3 percent, of total funding. Of the 2,741 awardees, 622, or 23 percent, were at public universities, 1,667, or 61 percent, were at community colleges, 401, or 15 percent, were at private institutions, and 51, or 2 percent, were at proprietary institutions. Figure 10 provides summary data on the institutions selected.

Figure 10: Colleges Selected

Demonstration Project: Institution Selection Results

- **The 21 participating institutions included:**
 - 4 public universities
 - 3 private institutions
 - 14 community colleges
- **Participating institutions had:**
 - Part-time percentages ranging from 24% to 68%
 - Enrollments ranging from 280 to 10,700
- **Institutional allocations ranged from:**
 - \$8,000 to \$183,000



Figure 11: Funds by Sector

Demonstration Project:
Awarding Information

Sector	Number of Institutions	Dollars of Awards	Students Assisted	Average Award
Public University	4	\$210,808	622	\$339
Community College	14	\$287,966	1,667	\$173
Private Institution	2	\$159,432	401	\$398
Proprietary Institution	1	\$ 21,661	51	\$425
Total	21	\$679,867	2,741	\$248
Number of students who received aid under the project in the traditional academic year only				1,512
Number of students who received aid under the project during the regular academic year only AND who also received regular MAP at some point in the traditional academic year				770
Percent				51%

Awarding Information

In order to receive aid under the project, students at participating institutions were required to have met all MAP eligibility criteria, except minimum half-time enrollment, as specified in ISAC's rules governing MAP and in Illinois statute and to be enrolled for at least three credit hours per term. Individual annual award amounts under the project were calculated as 25 percent of an eligible student's full-time annual MAP award amount not to exceed tuition and fees. Per term awards were equal to 25 percent of the MAP term amount. The \$300 annual minimum award did not apply for the project. As shown in Figure 11, the project provided students with an average regular academic year award of \$248.

ISAC Demonstration Project: Findings From Schools

Financial Aid Advisors say:

“Most of the students who benefited would otherwise not have attended school. Due to work schedules, family commitments, and daycare, these students could not manage to enroll in more than one or two classes. This program made school attendance possible for a previously forgotten group of students.”

As part of the project evaluation, participating institutions were asked to provide a final report on their experiences with the project and feedback they might have concerning project procedures. The reporting process was intended to give institutions an opportunity to provide constructive input about the project and the need for less-than-half-time aid, and to make recommendations for providing less-than-half-time student assistance as part of MAP.

- **Financial aid administrators generally recognized the benefits of providing aid to LTH students during the academic year.**

Institutions were asked to provide an assessment of the overall impact of the project and the impact of the project with regard to student enrollment behavior and the levels of half-time and less-than-half-time enrollment. Several institutions indicated the project had positive effects on individual student enrollment decisions and was very important to some students. Other institutions felt that while the project may have benefited particular students, it had little impact on overall enrollment behavior.

- **Financial aid administrators were more supportive of providing aid to LTHT students enrolled during summer term.**

“There is a greater need for LTHT MAP during summer, as more students are attending less than half time.”

Several institutions suggested aid for summer term to students who enroll on a less-than-half-time basis should be a priority because they cited a greater need for less-than-half-time assistance during the summer term, because students have fewer resources available to them. One financial aid director commented: “Students who used their entire scheduled Pell award took advantage of the summer LTHT MAP to pay for one or two courses.”

- **Students have different reasons for enrolling on a LTHT basis.**

According to financial aid administrators, students who took advantage of the program did so for a variety of reasons. Some liked being able to take a time-consuming or difficult course by itself, others used the award to “test their educational abilities” before undertaking multiple classes. Others only needed a single course or could find only one course that fit their schedules.

- **Students should not be required to earn a minimum number of credit hours before being eligible for LTHT aid.**

Institutions were asked to make recommendations concerning any additional eligibility criteria, such as requiring students to have earned a minimum number of credit hours before being eligible for less-than-half-time aid. Several institutions felt adding additional eligibility criteria for less-than-half-time assistance was not desirable. They suggested that additional qualification requirements would represent one more hurdle to enrollment less-than-half-time students would need to overcome.

“I disagree with the idea of limiting the program to students only after earning a particular number of credit hours. Community college students traditionally sign up for one or two courses ... to acclimate themselves to college before increasing their course load. I feel that the program should ... be another incentive for students to enroll.”

A number of institutions suggested less-than-half-time aid should be available for students enrolled for one and two hours. Many community colleges, for example, offer courses that are fewer than three hours but are part of a program that leads to a degree or certificate. While the financial need of these students may be relatively small, several institutions participating in the project asserted that there are few sources of aid to help these students and that these students represent an unserved population. They felt students enrolled at these levels have few other sources of financial assistance.

- **If funding is to be provided for LTHT enrollment, it should be incorporated into the MAP grant program.**

“The LTHT MAP population closely resembles our LTHT Pell grant population. These students are not consistently enrolled less-than-half-time. In general, they are full- and half-time students who needed to drop to a lower enrollment status for only one term.”

Most institutions wanted ISAC to include less-than-half-time eligibility in its regular MAP processes and not have it remain as a separate project or separate funding source. Most institutions used existing MAP rosters and systems, although one institution reported initiating an additional application process. In lieu of predetermined guidelines, most schools awarded project aid on a first-come first served basis, and did not target the aid to specific populations or students enrolled in specific programs.

“We noted three groups of students who utilized the LTHT MAP program. First-time students appreciated the opportunity to test their educational abilities with one course prior to committing themselves to a more rigorous schedule. Other students utilized LTHT MAP to help pay their costs for a particularly difficult course. The third group ... utilized LTHT MAP during a semester when they only needed one class rather than add hours to qualify for state funding.”

Since the awards are generally going to the same group of students – students who generally enroll for at least six credit hours per semester but occasionally enroll for 5 hours or less – it made sense to institutions for the aid to come from a single program.

- **A major awareness campaign would be needed if aid for less-than-half-time enrollment becomes available.**

Schools were asked to make an assessment of the best methods to make information available to the less-than-half-time student population, the student population at large, and the public regarding the availability of less-than-half-time aid. Institutions asserted that some students were not aware of the project and therefore did not seek out project assistance. In general, institutions seemed to want ISAC to take the lead on providing information about less-than-half-time assistance to the target population.

One financial aid officer summed up the problem: *“Lack of awareness that aid was available was a factor in our inability to award as much of our funds as we anticipated. Many students still believe they must be enrolled full time in order to qualify for assistance ... “We were concerned because so few students were eligible to benefit from the demonstration project. ... part of the problem was related to educating our student population.”*

ISAC Demonstration Project: Findings About Students

Less-than-half-time students look like their half-time counterparts receiving MAP grants in most demographic and economic respects. The majority of LTHT students are independent students with dependents, just like half-time students. As shown in the comparison of LTHT students with their half-time and full-time counterparts at the pilot schools during spring term, 2000 (Figure 12,) over 50 percent of both half-time and LTHT students were independent students

Figure 12: Students by Dependency Type, Spring Term, FY2000

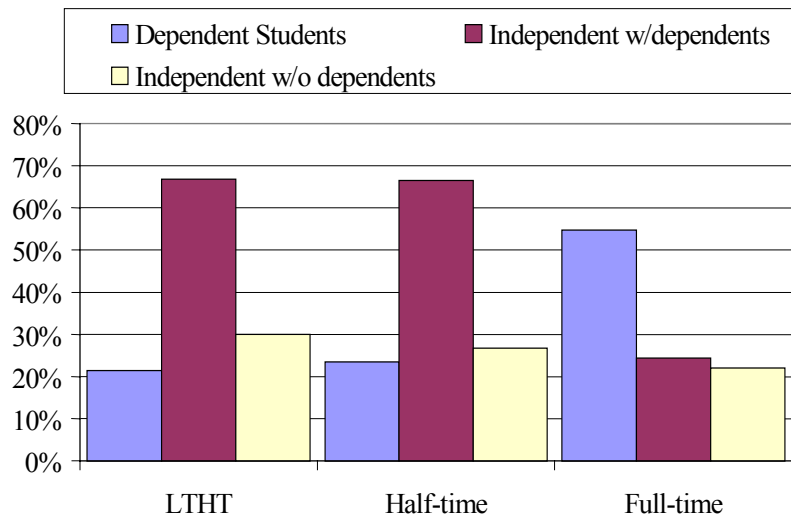
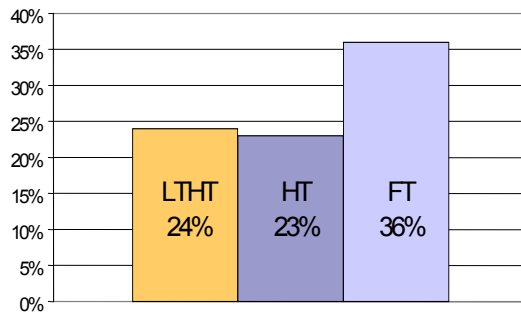


Figure 13: Mean Percent of MAP Recipients Who are Male, Spring 2000



with dependents, while only about 20 percent of both were classified as dependent.

LTHT students are mostly women, just like MAP-eligible half-time students. Only about a quarter of each group are males compared to over a third of MAP eligible full-time students (Figure 13.) LTHT students are older than full-time students, as are half-timers as shown in Figure 14. Half-time and LTHT students are five or six years older

than the average full-time student who is 24.

The economic characteristics of LTHT students closely track both MAP eligible half-time and full-time students, as measured by the financial aid calculation of expected family contribution (EFC), mean taxable income, and Federal Pell eligibility. The mean EFC and the percent

Figure 14: Average Age of MAP Recipients, Spring 2000

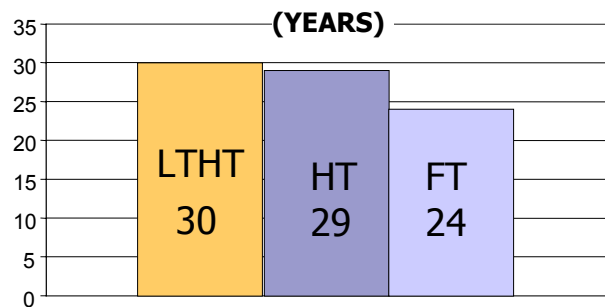
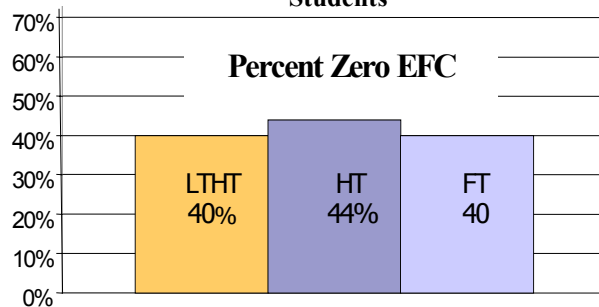
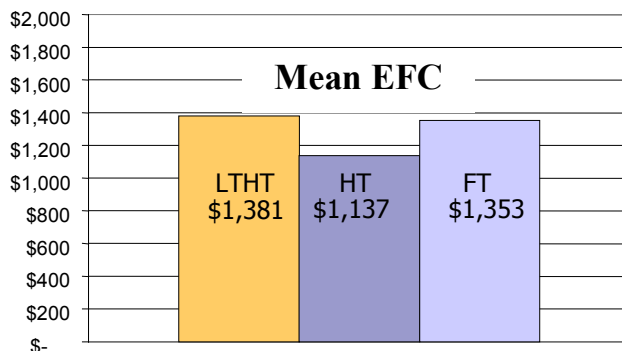


Figure 15: Comparison of Percent Zero EFC and Mean EFC of LTHT, HT and FT Students

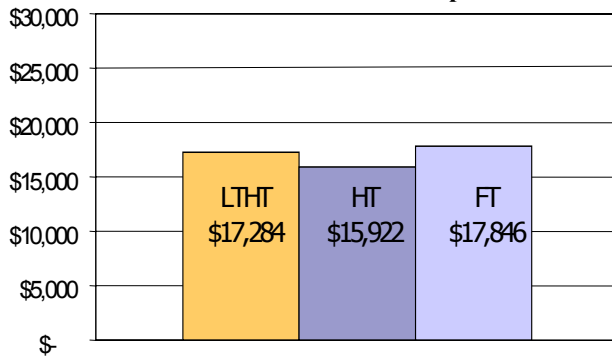


of recipients with zero EFCs is similar for all MAP recipients, regardless of enrolled status, as shown in Figure 15. The LTHT mean EFC is slightly higher than the half-time mean EFC (\$1,381 and \$1,137) and the percentage of students with a zero EFC is a little lower (40 percent vs. 44 percent) for LTHT students than for half-time students.



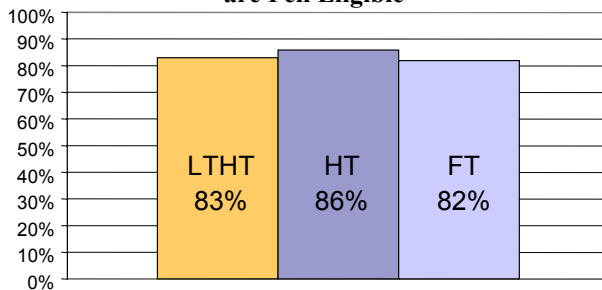
LTHT students are employed an average of 28 hours per week and may work more hours than half-time students. Table 16 shows that their mean taxable family income is somewhat higher, at \$17,284 compared to the \$15,992 for MAP-eligible half-time students. This is closer to the MAP eligible full-time student income level of \$17,846.

Figure 16: Mean Taxable Family Income of MAP Recipients



Finally, about the same percentage of all three groups of students are “Pell-eligible.” Half-time MAP recipients were slightly more likely to be Pell-eligible than full-time MAP recipients (86 vs. 82 percent.) LTHT students are in the middle at 83 percent (Figure 17.)

Figure 17: Percent of MAP Recipients Who are Pell Eligible



In summary, demographically LTHT students looked just like their half-time counterparts – they are mostly female independent students with dependents -- with an average age of 30. Economically they look like other MAP recipients: generally Pell eligible, with similar EFCs, and mean taxable family incomes.

Survey of Participants in Less-Than-Half-Time (LTHT) Project

“... the assistance should be there no matter how many credits one takes. One semester I wasn't prepared to take a full-time load, or at times the credits I needed weren't available and I had to take less ...”

LTHT student's comments

Student participants in the FY2000 LTHT program were surveyed after the project to determine their future enrollment patterns and their attitudes about the program. Six hundred of the FY2000 LTHT participants in the spring of 2001 were surveyed regarding their major, their degree objectives, their attendance patterns for the following year, and financial aid received. They were also asked to describe barriers they have encountered during their education. About 40 percent of those sampled responded to the survey.

From the demonstration project data it appeared that LTHT students looked like their half-time counterparts. The larger question the survey sought to answer was: are LTHT students a distinct group apart from half-time students or are most LTHT students really “mostly half-time” students who had to carry a lighter load for a semester or two? Even more fundamental, given the perception that many of these students are not serious about completing their education, was the answer to the most basic question...

"Most students that enroll less-than-half-time tend to have other commitments that affect their ability to take more credit hours such as work, children, etc. Some do better in classes when they do not have to take so many classes each semester."

LTHT student's comments

Did They Come Back?

Yes, they did, and in large numbers, too. Figure 18 illustrates the enrollment patterns of the demonstration participants during the following school year. Seventy-three percent came back for at least one term. Of those who did not, 20 percent (5 percent of the total) finished their education. Therefore a total of 78 percent, or nearly four of five LTHT students returned to school the following year or finished their education. Fifty-three percent of them came back for at least two terms and the average number of credit hours earned per term was 7.6. Clearly, the LTHT student is often a half-time or more than half-time student.

Figure 18: Did they come back?

- **73% came back for at least one term**
- **25% of those who returned the following year attended for three terms**
- **28% attended two additional terms**
- **20% came back for one term**
- **the average number of credit hours per term was 7.6**

Figure 19: LTHT Enrollment Pattern, Spring 2001

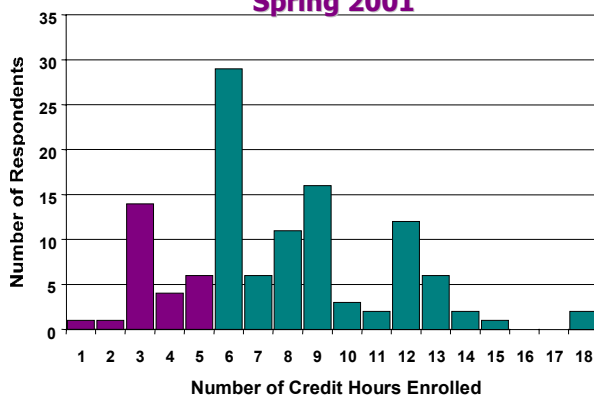


Figure 19 shows the spring 2001 enrollment pattern for the LTHT survey respondents. Six credit hours (half-time enrollment) was the mode of the distribution and nine credit hours was the second most frequent course load, however, students carried from as few as one to as many as 18 credit hours during the term.

What Problems do These Students Encounter?

Most of the LTHT students face significant barriers to continuing their college education. The difference between those LTHT students who continue and those that don't appears to come from the severity and not the type of barriers faced.

Figure 20 lists what LTHT students most commonly cited as barriers to continuing their education. Tuition costs top the list followed by other financial obligations and work constraints. Convenient class times, fee costs and family commitments round out the top six. Similarly, "could not afford" was the number one reason why students did not return.

Family reasons were also mentioned often; day care problems and medical reasons were also cited as reasons for not enrolling. Many of these students had multiple problems. Cost and family issues were paramount for both those who returned and those who didn't. For those who returned, the barriers were at least somewhat surmountable; for those who did not come back, they were not. Those who did return also had work/class time issues; those who did not come back did not mention that constraint as frequently.

Figure 20: Barriers to Persistence for LTHT Students

Barriers to Persistence:		Reason Not Enrolled:	
• Tuition Costs	68%	• Could Not Afford	61%
• Financial Obligations	68%	• Family Reasons	53%
• Work Constraints	63%	• Finished Education	20%
• Convenient Class Times	61%	• Day Care Problems	18%
• Fee Costs	60%	• Medical Reasons	18%
• Family Commitments	55%	• Other	63%

Who is being helped?

Students who badly need financial assistance. The affordability issue is important. As shown in Figure 21, three-quarters of the students who returned received Federal Pell grants and over six in ten received MAP awards. The percentage of MAP grant recipients might have been higher had all students enrolled at least half-time. Twenty-five percent have student loans and only 5 percent received any employer assistance. While employee assistance is frequently cited as a source of aid for LTHT students, it does not appear to be a source for low-income students.

Figure 21: Financial Aid Received by LTHT Students

In subsequent terms:

MAP Grant	64%
Pell Grant	74%
Student Loans	25%
Employer Assistance	5%
Other	11%

Figure 22: Respondents' Top 5 Majors:

Education	19%
Business	15%
Nursing	11%
Other Health	10%
Computer Science	9%

The survey respondents were disproportionately minority (38 percent) when compared to total undergraduate enrollment (28 percent) but nearly matched the racial and ethnic composition of MAP recipients as a whole (39 percent.) Nearly 65 percent of them were majoring in one of five career areas listed in Figure 22. Education

topped the list with business, health professions and computer science also in the top five. Three of these professions, education and the health professions, currently are experiencing labor shortages and the demand

for computer programmers and technicians is robust as well. These are “serious” majors in fields where more trained personnel are needed. The overwhelming practicality of the majors selected should tend to dispel the notion that LTHT students are casual students without career goals.

In summary, the survey respondents tend not to conform to some of the labels that have been affixed to this group of part-time students. Contrary to expectations, most do return to school following a semester of less-than-half-time study, most return on a half-time or more basis, and most are majoring in “serious” subjects.

“I think students should be enrolled part-time sometimes. It depends on what type of class you are taking. For example, don't take math and biology together.”

LTHT student's
comments

Additional Benefit to Funding a Less-Than-Half-Time Program: Better Use of Scarce Resources

In response to the charge from the IBHE Committee on Affordability to assess the cost and benefits of providing MAP grants to students enrolled on a less-than-half-time basis, a survey of MAP eligible students who do not claim MAP awards was undertaken. It is estimated, based on this survey, that nearly 10 percent of eligible MAP applicants who do not claim a MAP award enroll on a less-than-half time basis. Fully funding these students would increase program costs by an additional \$3.5 million based on a \$600 per student stipend. But because of another set of student behavior dynamics at work, some of this cost might be recouped if the LTHT program was implemented.

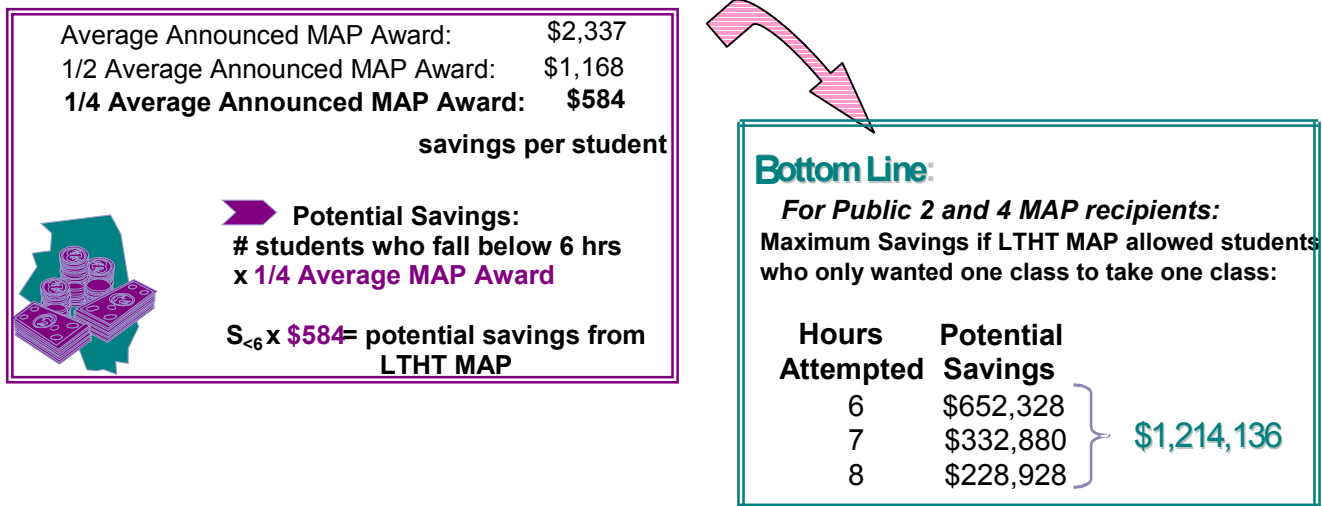
From the survey responses, it became clear that some students might be attempting more credit hours during a semester than they want or need in order to receive financial aid. To try to determine how many students might be engaging in this behavior, MAP recipients who attempted six to eight hours during the fall, winter, and spring semesters at community colleges and public universities during FY1999 but who actually earned fewer than six hours for the semester were identified and tabulated, as shown in Figure 23. Students who dropped out altogether were not counted.

Figure 23: 1999 MAP Recipients Who Earned More than Zero but Fewer Than Six Credit Hours

	FALL	WINTER	SPRING	TOTAL
Hours Attempted	# of Students	# of Students	# of Students	# of Students
6	1022	37	1117	2176
7	536	42	570	1148
8	395	17	392	804
Total	1953	96	2079	4128

If these students only wanted to enroll for one class, i.e. 3 to 4 credit hours, but chose to enroll in two classes to qualify for student aid, then some savings might accrue by providing aid to LTHT students. Half-time MAP recipients received half their announced award and LTHT students received one-fourth of the award. Based on the average regular academic year announced award at public institutions, if these students initially enrolled as LTHT, then as shown in Figure 24, the savings on the average announced MAP award for these students would be about \$584 per student yielding a total savings that could be somewhere in the \$1 million range. This figure is an estimate and uncertainties associated with it could alter the value either up or down. For example, some students may have really wanted to complete two classes but had to drop or could not pass one of the classes for some reason. Or, the students evaluated were from public schools only; there could be more students who would choose to be LTHT at private institutions in the state. The first example would decrease the savings, the second would increase them.

Figure 24: Calculating Potential Savings from Offering LTHT Program



Conclusions

Figure 25: Conclusions

1. Extend MAP eligibility to students who enroll less-than-half-time.

2. Publicize and promote the availability of student aid for less-than-half-time enrollment.

Two recommendations have been developed from the results of the Demonstration Project for Aid to LTHT Students, as shown in Figure 25. The first is the logical extension of part-time MAP assistance to students who enroll on a less-than-half-time basis. Since less-than-half time students are mostly just half-time students who need to step back for a semester or two, eligibility requirements for these students should be the same as those for half-time students. For the most part, they are not a discrete population but are financially needy students who sometimes enroll on a full-time basis, sometimes on a half-time basis and sometimes, for a variety of reasons, only enroll for one class per term.

A second recommendation centers around promoting the program. The program needs a formal, coordinated effort to get the word out. Financial aid administrators were reluctant to publicize the availability of aid until they were sure they had sufficient funds. The most straightforward way to encourage the use of less-than-half-time MAP grants is to incorporate them into the regular MAP program. Financial aid administrators will then be better able to market the program and help it reach the students the program was designed to aid.

Figure 26: Potential Benefits of Providing Aid to Students Who Enroll on a Less-Than-Half-Time Basis

- Increased Illinois educational attainment levels
- Increased participation rates of minority students in higher education
- More efficient use of state grant aid

There are general economic and social benefits to less-than-half-time MAP assistance (Figure 26.) The extra aid can increase persistence and completion among the part-time population as a whole by keeping students in school even when they cannot enroll on a half-time basis. Since these students are often minority students, facilitating their continued enrollment in higher education

increases their participation rates and diversity on Illinois campuses. Finally, there may be some economic efficiencies gained by offering aid to less-than-part-time students. Students can take only the courses they want, need, or are able to carry and the state does not then have to pay for courses attempted but not completed.