
Pathways into Careers in Information Technology: Community College Student Decision Making About Academic Programs and Jobs

Despite opportunities for graduates to enter well-paying, high-demand careers, only 20% of community college students on technician pathways complete their programs of study within six years. Prior research highlights the challenges facing students who confront the array of programs and course offerings at community colleges. However, the career development literature includes little research on community college students and their decision-making processes and contains even less on students in technician fields. The goal of the quantitative and qualitative mixed methods research project is to increase understanding of the decisions students make in pursuing credentials (e.g., degrees and certificates) at two-year institutions and careers in information technology. The research focuses on Information Technology (IT) based on its wide-array of opportunities and specialties and the relevance of IT programs developed for two-year institutions to address the growing need for middle skills IT professionals. Relying on multiple data sources, the project brings together a multidisciplinary team to investigate the complex phenomena of student decision-making.

The project examines how students' experiences and information resources influence their decision making, particularly early in their enrollment in college, and how that evolves over time. The project employs a variety of research methods (student surveys, in-depth longitudinal student interviews, and interviews on campus policy and practice). The research project is designed to generate knowledge useful to students, the public, community college/technician education professionals, and policy-makers committed to increasing student success in advanced technological programs and to meeting the demand for a middle skills workforce.

Our first paper offers insights about community college students' decision-making processes related to IT programs and careers. It provides suggestions for colleges to better help support students by providing more information on relevant topics early on and reaching students through online resources. The paper is available online:

<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/content/pathways-careers-information-technology-community-college-student-decision-making-about>

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