

POWERED BY PELL: A Grassroots Perspective

A study of the present flow of federal student financial aid, notably the Pell Grant, across the Kansas community colleges over a cycle of three successive fall terms, made by Garden City Community College February, 2012. Assisted by The Education Policy Center at the University Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

**Provided for KACC Trustees and ACCT Congress
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Garden City COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Garden City, Kansas

Forward by Herbert J. Swender

As president of a rural serving comprehensive community college, I believe it is imperative for the reader, especially elected local, state and national policymakers, to clearly understand the significance of our greatest portal to higher education—the Pell Grant. As a lifelong educator serving 29 years at four different rural colleges in two states, Texas and Kansas, it is obvious to me that access for women, and the life blood for rural community colleges, depends on America's Pell Grants. An extensive report led by Dr. Stephen G. Katsinas, University of Alabama, further explores in depth the significance of today's Pell Grants across Kansas and our nation. A technical briefing and full report may be viewed at the Garden City Community College's website at www.gcccks.edu.

The original 1965 Higher Education Act set the stage and provided a platform for the 1970 Pell Grant discussions to begin. The reauthorization of the 1972 Act opened the door of opportunity, which gave birth to the Pell Grant. This grassroots initiative is consistent with our identity —today's community college. I personally want to acknowledge the intellectual efforts of the late Senator Pell and others, who championed this cause for students. One particular individual is Dr. Frank Mensel, who worked hand in hand with Senator Pell and others. To put into context the magnitude of today's Pell Grant, it has served more than five times the number of students than the nation's most notable legislation, the Montgomery GI Bill that followed WWII. Thank you, Dr. Mensel.

Introduction by Ron Schwartz, GCCC Trustee

This study of the distribution and impact of federal student financial aid, most notably the Pell Grant, has been spearheaded by the Garden City Community College and President Herbert Swender.

The data speak volumes and are beneficial to the colleges. The data show clearly that the Pell Grant widens access to both college degrees and workforce development. Again, the data may well be equally useful to the lawmakers who enact the aid and the agencies that administers and monitor it.

The architect of the study is Frank Mensel, Senior Fellow with the Education Policy Center of the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa. As a former director of government relations for the Association of Community College Trustees, he also serves as national adviser on public policy and research with the American Student Association of Community Colleges, a national network of student government that Dr. Mensel helped found three decades ago.

Mensel worked closely with Mohawk Valley Community College, NY, and its president, Randall VanWagoner, in perfecting and piloting the survey instrument used in this study. The data collected from MVCC, showing the college's substantial dependence on Pell Grants, prompted President Swender and our trustees to ask all Kansas Community Colleges to duplicate it.

Deanna D. Mann, Assistant to GCCC President, led the collection of data from the responding colleges. This focused study we believe is the first by any state tracking Pell Grant recipients by gender. Mann and Mensel have coauthored the analysis that follows.

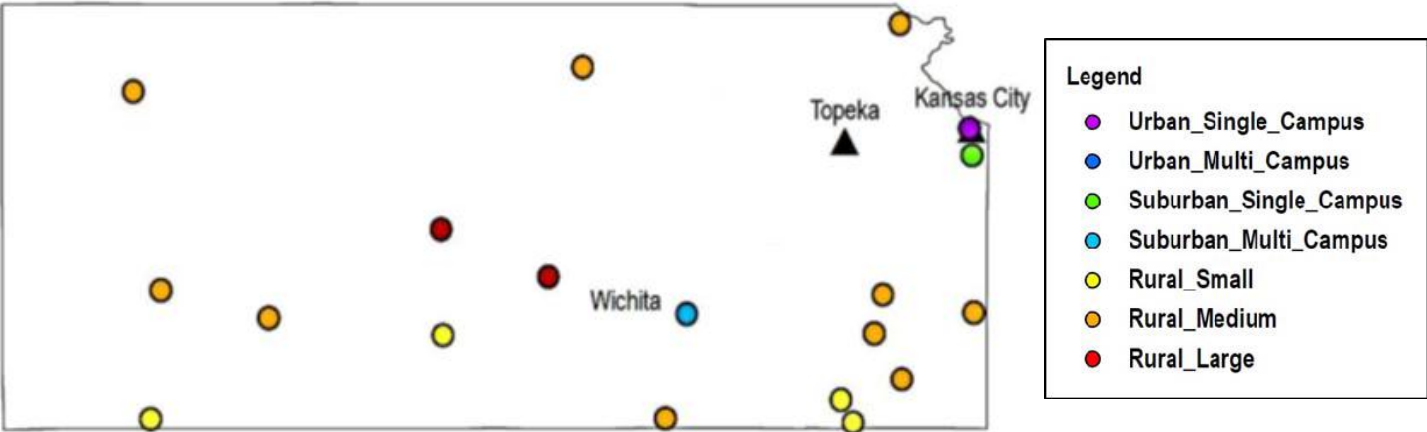
It seems obvious that the more we know about the people we serve and their means, the better we will be at meeting their needs, thus enhancing the contributions that our colleges are making to community life, economic growth, and individual fulfillment. Hopefully, other States, their public colleges, and their trustees will see the benefit of making similar surveys, which in turn can make it easier for legislators to track the gains that students, families, and the nation's global competitiveness reap from the postsecondary learning access that the student aid programs provide, and to make wise choices in renewing and refining these programs.

Upward Mobility

In several respects this study is a first in higher education. Though the Pell Grant is now four decades old and whose beneficiaries number in the millions, this report is the first that tracks the flow of Pell Grants by gender across a statewide system of like colleges. The significance of that focus is clearly justified in the findings, as will be shown later.

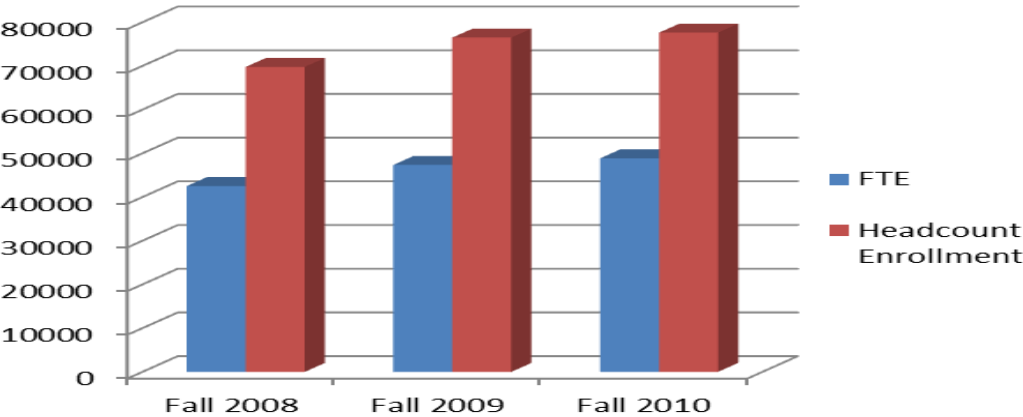
Kansas is also significant as a showcase for such a study. No State is more representative of rural America than Kansas. As Table 1 indicates, sixteen of the 19 community colleges in this system are recognized as “rural serving” under the Carnegie Classifications of institutions of higher learning. The three that aren't are the three largest colleges include Johnson County Community College, which serves suburban Kansas City, Butler Community College, which serves suburban Wichita, and Kansas City Kansas Community College.

Table 1: Kansas Community Colleges by Carnegie Basic Classification



The study is advantaged by the perspective of tracking the student financial aid in a cycle spanning three successive fall semesters. In that two-year spread, both overall enrollment and Pell dollars rose dramatically across the State. As Table 2 indicates, headcount enrollment increased by 11% to 77,820 and FTE increased by 15% to 49,066 from Fall 2008 to Fall 2010.

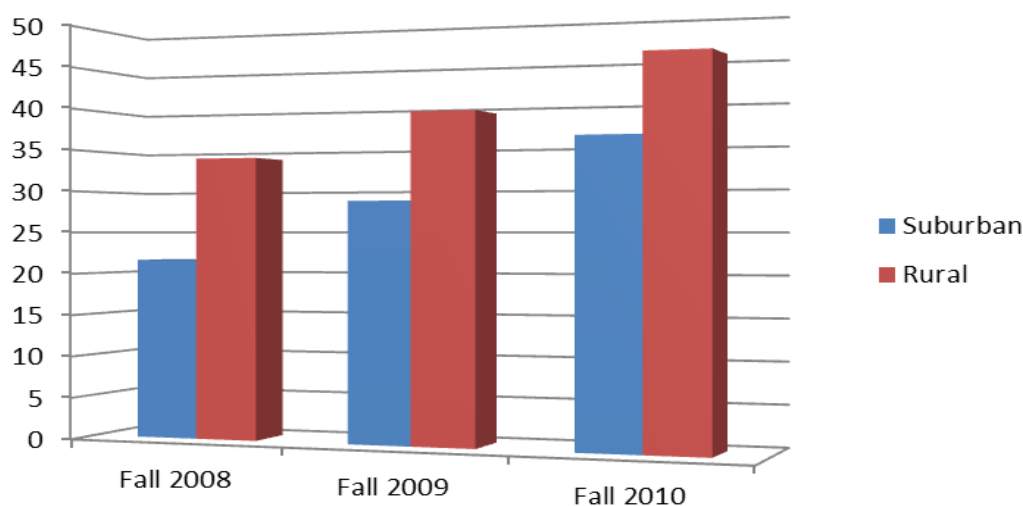
Table 2: Enrollment Increases at Kansas Community Colleges, Fall 2008 to Fall 2010



From the statewide snapshot the combined data provide, three findings loom as paramount:

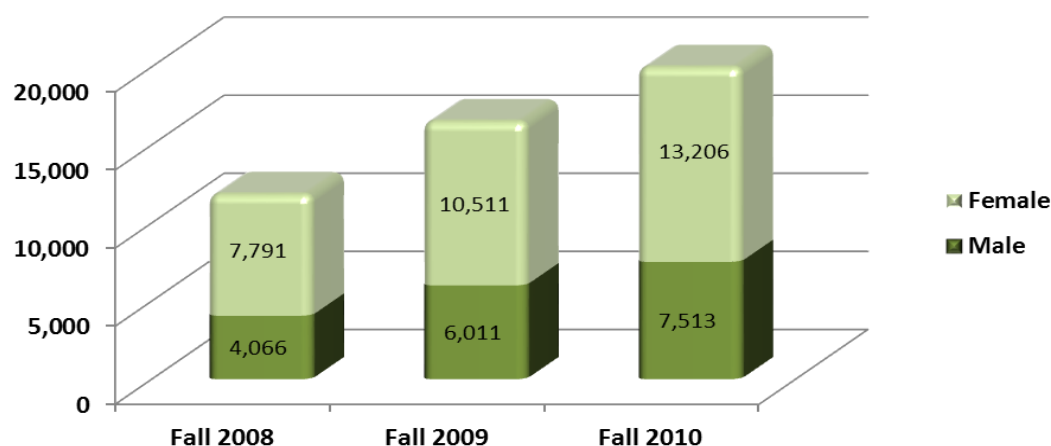
- **The combination of the community college and the Pell Grant are an indispensable source of college opportunity and lifelong learning in rural Kansas.** This is underscored by the consistently large numbers of Pell Grants and dollars that each college has reported. To the extent that Kansas typifies rural America, most rural communities that have a community college are drawing much the same benefit.
- **Nearly half of the college credit being earned in the 16 rural colleges is going to students on Pell Grants.** In as much as conservative Kansas is so representative of rural America, the responses suggest that rural community colleges generally are heavily dependent on Pell Grant enrollment, and their FTE in credits earned could approach or equal the level of the Kansas colleges. Other States would serve the national interest by duplicating the Kansas survey. Broader research is clearly indicated.

Table 3: Percentage of Kansas Community College FTE using Pell Grants



- **Pell Grants are contributing strongly to the march of women to a still greater majority in undergraduate studies.** Both men and women have significantly benefited from Pell Grants. The number of women receiving Pell Grants increased by 70 percent in two years and the number received by men increased by 85 percent. However, in general within the Kansas community colleges, women are outpacing men by upwards of 43 percent on Pell Grants. Again, deeper research would serve the national interest.

Table 4: Pell Awards at Kansas Community Colleges by Gender



Since earlier studies have shown that community colleges are enrolling a still growing proportion of all undergraduates in this century, expanding their lead over all other postsecondary sectors, they have also shown that the rural community colleges are now outpacing both the urban and suburban members of this family. Thus the rural colleges carry the largest subsector of enrollment in the largest sector of undergraduate enrollment.

The study originated at Garden City Community College, from the desire of President Herbert Swender and its Trustees to look at enrollment supported by student aid. The preferred instrument was a survey with a 30-year history. In its original form, it was used in the 1980s by both the Association of Community College Trustees and the American Student Association of Community Colleges, so members could show the data on their visits to Congressional offices. Its author, Frank Mensel, led Congressional liaison at that time for the ACCT, while also advising ASACC on its legislative priorities. For this study, the instrument was modified to track grants by gender.

When Garden City invited other Kansas community colleges to answer the survey, their wholehearted response gave the study national significance. While assisting Garden City with the survey, the Education Policy Center of the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa spun the Kansas data into a study of its own, also released publicly this month. As part of one of the EPC's occasional briefs, it is a deeply nuanced analysis typical of scholarly works.

Grassroots

In this more succinct analysis, the focus is on the grassroots, and what the individual returns tell each college about itself. It reminds the college that it pays to know where the students are coming from, especially when taxpayers are footing much of the cost for both the institution and the student.

Together these tables are a proud illustration of the importance of community colleges to quality of life in 21st century rural America. Rural America has been changed dramatically and inexorably with the tide of economic and technological change that has swept America since World War II. Innovation and reform in agriculture itself has contributed heavily to that change, and the explosion of community colleges through the same years has made them a complementary and constructive influence in community development.

Under the separate classification for the two-year colleges that Carnegie has instituted and refined in the last

decade, half of its members are identified as rural. As Kansas again illustrates, the rural colleges average much smaller enrollments than their suburban and urban neighbors, but the weight and spread of their number makes them equally important to the quality of life across the State. They put college opportunity and lifelong learning, including higher job skills, within reach of farm families that otherwise would find such opportunity beyond their reach.

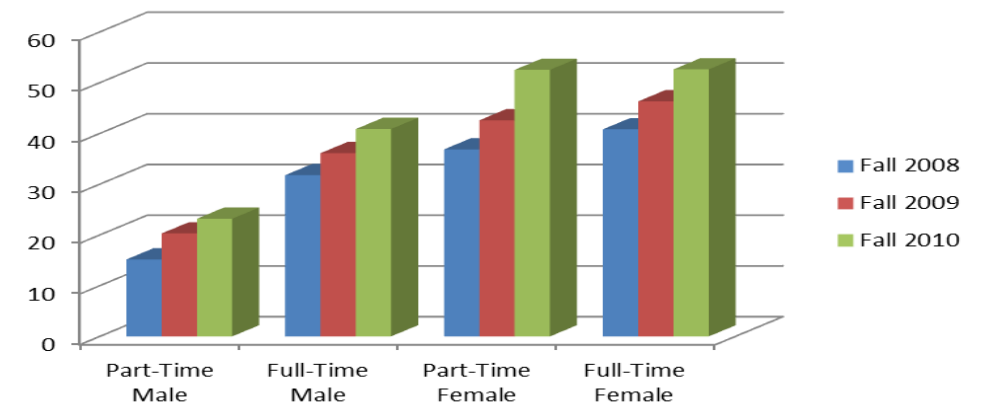
Pell Grants are a big part of this picture in every State. They combine with community colleges to raise upward mobility for both full-time and part-time students as well as jobless workers who are studying toward a degree and striving for marketable skills. It's a win-win connection for both student and community that data from such studies as this one can only help the taxpaying public to more fully understand and appreciate.

Each table has a story to tell, as different as the community it serves. Collectively, the data yield details helpful to students, the community and the State, as the other findings suggest:

- Even as typically rural and conservative (“red”) as Kansas is, *Pell Grants are vital to enrollment* as rural institutions are generally heavily dependent on Pell Grants to serve their students. At more than a few, Pell Grants are the lifeblood of the college. At Independence Community College, for example, Pell Grants covered two-thirds of the fall 2010 full-time enrollment, and at Highland College they covered 60 percent.
- In a large majority of the colleges, Pell *dollars more than doubled* between Fall 2008 and Fall 2010, even though their enrollment drew increases in the same span of between 20% and 30%. It seems virtually certain that the economic downturn and high unemployment contributed to both.

In each of those colleges, *women outnumbered men in both headcount enrollment and Pell Grants*. In fact, women generally led men in Pell awards by even larger margins than in enrollment. At Cloud County Community College, for example, women led men in Fall 2010 enrollment by roughly 20 percent, yet led them in Pell Grants by more than 60 percent. The picture is different at Garden City, the college that led this study. In the FTE of its Fall 2010 headcount, men led women by some 20 percent, yet they ran dead-even in Pell awards. Collectively, by Fall 2010, more than one-half of the FTE enrollments by both part-time and full-time female students were funded by Pell Grants.

Table 5: Percent of Full-Time Equivalent Rural Community College Students Using Pell Grants



Summary

If the Kansas community colleges are generally typical of the nation's rural community colleges, then their overall significance is growing in higher education as a whole. As previous studies have shown, community colleges nationwide are the fastest growing sector of undergraduate enrollment, while within this network, the rural colleges have taken the lead in enrollment gains. In the more rural states, this could mean that universities will be increasingly dependent on the community colleges for transfer enrollment.

Further, if the Kansas system is typical, roughly half, and sometimes more, of the FTE in college credits is being earned by students on Pell Grants. It also means that as women have taken a significant lead over men in enrollment, they've taken an even larger lead in Pell awards.

These trends should be tracked in continuing research as they are bound to bear upon workforce development and the nation's economic competitiveness globally. How much of this change is driven by the economic downturn and high unemployment? How much by the determination of women to compete in the workplace?