Date: **Contact:**

Graduating on time can help reduce college costs for students
(Name of college or university) participating in 15 to Finish initiative

One sure way students can reduce the cost of college is to graduate on time.

Less than half of college students in Missouri complete an average of 15 credit hours per semester, making it impossible, in most cases, to earn an associate degree in two years or a bachelor's degree in four years. As a result, students who take less than 15 credit hours a semester often need an extra year or more of college to graduate.

(*Name of college or university*) has joined a statewide initiative to encourage students to take 15 or more credit hours a semester and reduce the amount of time it takes to complete a degree.

The 15 to Finish initiative is sponsored by the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Complete College America, a non-profit organization working to increase college completion rates in the United States.

Additional time in the classroom comes at a steep price. An extra year of college can cost students more than $50,000 in tuition, fees, books, room and board, and lost wages they would have earned if they had graduated and joined the workforce.

Graduating on time also can help reduce student loan debt. Fewer students will need to borrow money to pay expenses associated with an additional year of college.

Higher education officials say many students have become accustomed to taking 12 hours of college credit a semester because it is the minimum number of hours required to receive federal financial aid and is considered full-time enrollment by most colleges and universities.

In many cases, students need to take just one more three-hour course every semester to graduate on time, allowing them to earn a degree and enter the workforce sooner.

Legislation signed into law in 2016 established the 15 to Finish Act, which calls for the Department of Higher Education to develop policies to promote on-time college completion.

For more information about the 15 to Finish program, visit dhe.mo.gov/15tofinish.

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