

Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B:16/20)

A First Look at the 2020 Experiences of 2015-16
College Graduates During the COVID-19 Pandemic—Summary

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Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B:16/20): A First Look at the 2020 Experiences of 2015–16 College Graduates During the COVID-19 Pandemic

First Look–Summary

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Contents

	PAGE
Introduction.....	1
Selected Findings	4

Introduction

This First Look presents selected findings on the work and life experiences of recent bachelor's degree earners before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings in this report are based on data from the 2016/20 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B:16/20), which took place in 2020. B&B:16/20 is the second follow-up in a national study of students who completed the requirements for a bachelor's degree during the 2015–16 academic year.¹ The first follow-up took place in 2017 and asked graduates about their bachelor's degree programs and any education or work in the first year after they earned their degrees.²

The B&B:16/20 data offer a snapshot of selected experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic among 2015–16 bachelor's degree earners, many of whom were early in their post-bachelor's careers and still paying off student loans when the pandemic began in 2020. The study captures enrollment, student debt and repayment, work, and family experiences 4 years after respondents earned their bachelor's degree. For some, this timing was *before* the COVID-19 pandemic and for others, it was *during* the COVID-19 pandemic. In this report, unless otherwise specified, the time frame “before the COVID-19 pandemic” is from July 2019 through February 2020. The time frame “during the COVID-19 pandemic” is from March 2020 through June 2020.³ These data reflect experiences early in the pandemic only.

Data from B&B can generally be used to address questions about the education, work, family, and household experiences and outcomes of bachelor's degree earners. B&B data capture student loan debt and repayment, as well as education and work history after completion of a bachelor's degree. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the B&B:16/20 survey added items on how bachelor's degree earners experienced the pandemic. Several items asked respondents to report whether they had different experiences “due to the COVID-19 pandemic.” Whether an experience was “due to the COVID-19 pandemic” was the

¹ The criteria for B&B eligibility include the date when a student *completed the requirements for a bachelor's degree program*. In this report, the date of *earning* a bachelor's degree also refers to the date on which the student completed all degree requirements, which may differ from the date of graduation.

² For each wave of data collection, the data collection continued into early the following year.

³ The COVID-19 pandemic national emergency was declared on March 13, 2020.

respondent's perception. COVID-19 pandemic-related items in B&B:16/20 include the following:

- **Enrollment**—Items asked respondents about withdrawal or a leave of absence from a degree program and enrollment or delayed enrollment in additional education or training due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Employment**—Items asked if respondents had been laid off or furloughed, had hours at work reduced, were allowed to work remotely, were offered extra paid leave, received unemployment benefits, worked more or fewer hours than desired, or took a job outside their field or a less desirable job due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Personal and family**—Items asked if respondents had delayed buying a home, getting married, or having a child; if they had taken on more family or child care responsibilities; and if they were able to meet essential expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the time period covered in the B&B:16/20 survey, the country was experiencing high rates of unemployment, and federal policies were enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between March and April 2020, as COVID-19 spread across the United States, the nation's economy lost over 22 million jobs (Beach 2020). The national unemployment rate rose to 14.7 percent in April 2020, a sharp increase from the 3.5 percent 2 months before in February 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). In response, Congress enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March 2020. The Act provided additional unemployment benefits to American workers; suspended payments on federal student loans by placing them in forbearance; paused collections on defaulted loans; and waived interest on federal student loans through September 30, 2020, and as of the publication of this report, through August 31, 2022.⁴

This First Look focuses on a subset of these issues that describe outcomes related to the COVID-19 pandemic 4 years after respondents earned a bachelor's degree. For more information on the outcomes of 2015–16 bachelor's degree recipients 4 years after graduation, see *Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B:16/20): A First Look at the 2020 Employment and Education Experiences of 2015–16 College Graduates* (Henderson et al. 2022).

⁴ The CARES Act student loan forbearance applied only to federal student loans owned by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that were not already in a nonrepayment status (e.g., deferment, grace period, default) as of March 13, 2020.

Readers should not infer causality from the data in this report. Although many of the factors discussed (“variables”) are related to each other, the relations between them have not been explored. The variables in this report are just a few of the several hundred that will be available in the B&B:16/20 data.

For readers interested in appendixes with estimate and standard error tables, definitions of terms used in the findings and tables, and additional information about the study from which the findings are drawn, please see the full report at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2022251>.

Selected Findings

Professional experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (table A-1)

- Twenty-six percent of 2015–16 bachelor’s degree earners said they worked more than desired due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 27 percent said they worked less than desired. Eight percent took a job outside their field of study, and 8 percent took a less desirable job. Thirteen percent said they delayed enrolling in additional education or training, while 14 percent said they pursued additional education or training due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (table A-2)

- Among 2015–16 bachelor’s degree earners, 29 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native graduates said they took on additional family or child care responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nineteen percent of Black and 19 percent of Hispanic or Latino graduates said they took on additional family or child care responsibilities. Fourteen percent of Asian graduates, 12 percent of those of Two or more races, and 11 percent of White graduates said they had additional family or child care responsibilities.

Student debt repayment during the COVID-19 pandemic (table A-3)

- Among 2015–16 graduates who had all federal student loans in administrative forbearance as of June 30, 2020, some 52 percent made a payment while in administrative forbearance.⁵ Of those who made a payment, the average total amount paid in the 3.5 months before the COVID-19 pandemic was \$1,140. In the first 3.5 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the average total amount paid was \$750.

Employment status 4 years after bachelor’s degree completion (table A-4)

- Four years after earning their 2015–16 bachelor’s degrees, graduates’ full-time employment rates ranged from 73 percent in the Far West and Outlying areas region to 81 percent in the Great Lakes and Plains region before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, full-time employment rates ranged from 68 percent in the Far West and Outlying areas to 78 percent in the Great Lakes and Plains.

⁵ While in administrative forbearance, borrowers with federal student loans did not have to make payments because of the CARES Act.

Employment characteristics among full-time workers (table A-5a)

- Among those who worked full time 4 years after earning their 2015–16 bachelor’s degrees, those whose parents had a high school diploma or less earned an average of \$58,900 a year before the COVID-19 pandemic and \$56,800 during the early months of the pandemic. Among those whose parents had a graduate or professional degree, the average pay was \$61,300 before the COVID-19 pandemic and \$65,500 during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employment characteristics among part-time workers (table A-5b)

- Four years after earning their 2015–16 bachelor’s degrees, unmarried graduates who were part-time workers with dependents were paid an average of \$27,600 per year before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their average pay was \$18,100 per year during the early months of the pandemic. Unmarried graduates who worked part time and had no dependents were paid an average of \$18,000 per year before the COVID-19 pandemic and \$21,700 per year during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changes at work reported due to the COVID-19 pandemic (table A-6)

- Among bachelor’s degree earners who were working for pay and for whom the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred 4 years after bachelor’s degree completion, 51 percent said they were allowed to telecommute due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those who majored in education, 75 percent said they were allowed to telecommute due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unemployment compensation reported due to the COVID-19 pandemic (table A-7)

- Among bachelor’s degree earners for whom the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred 4 years after bachelor’s degree completion, 13 percent said they received unemployment compensation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sixty percent of those who said they received unemployment compensation due to the COVID-19 pandemic were female, and 40 percent were male.