

Yearly Success and Progress Rates

Fall 2015 Beginning Postsecondary Student Cohort



National Student Clearinghouse™
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In the fall 2015 beginning postsecondary student cohort, enrolling part time was a significant disadvantage.

In each subsequent year after entry, part-time students were more than twice as likely to stop out, while full-time students were more than twice as likely to earn credentials by year six.

The *Yearly Success and Progress Rates* report goes beyond traditional student outcome measures by showing year-by-year rates of retention, persistence, transfer, completion and stop-out. It is designed to help institutions and states better identify and inform effective intervention points to increase student success.

In this report, we examine yearly academic progress for approximately 2.3 million individuals who began college for the first time in fall 2015 with the intent to earn a credential. Their yearly progress and success rates can be compared among 50 states and Washington D.C. through interactive [data dashboards](#) available on the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's website.

Academic progress is measured in each subsequent academic year for six years after entry. We show the highest level of academic progress made, broken out by the type of starting institution and enrollment intensity at entry (full-time vs. part-time). Results do not account for enrollment status changes after entry.

The outcome categories are modeled after those used in the [Student Achievement Measure \(SAM\)](#), and can be used as the most current national and state benchmarks for institutions participating in SAM. Unlike in SAM reporting, undergraduate certificates are counted as completions in this report.

A recent data reporting change occurred that improved student-level data matching in the Clearinghouse database. As a result, the outcomes of the fall 2015 beginning postsecondary student cohort are the primary emphasis of the report this year. There may be some trend discontinuities from the previous editions.

Success and Progress Overview – At All Institutions

Among first-time degree-seeking students enrolling full time in fall 2015, 47.3 percent had completed a postsecondary credential by the end of year four, while 21.7 percent were no longer enrolled. By the end of year six, 67.4 percent had graduated, including 10.7 percent who did so after transferring to another institution, while 24.9 percent had left college without earning a credential and 7.7 percent remained enrolled (see **Figure 1**).

For students entering part time, 20.3 percent had completed a postsecondary credential by the end of year four, while 48.4 percent were no longer enrolled. By the end of year six, 32.9 percent had graduated—23.6 percent from the starting institution and 9.3 percent from elsewhere—while 53.6 percent had left college without earning a credential (see **Figure 2**).

The retention and persistence disadvantage in students entering part time are significant. The rate at which part-time beginning students stop out is more than twice the rate of full-time entrants in each subsequent year observed.

First-Time Degree-Seeking Students Fall 2015 (N=2.3M)

- 82 percent starting college full time
- Women
 - 51% of full-time starters
 - 51% of part-time starters
- Age 20 or younger
 - 91% of full-time starters
 - 71% of part-time starters

Type of Starting Institution:

- Public four-year (47%)
- Public two-year (33%)
- Private nonprofit four-year (20%)
- Private for-profit four-year (1%)

Note: Excludes private two-year institutions and small cases of missing gender (5%) and enrollment intensity (1%).

Figure 1. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at all Institutions (N= 1,845,033)

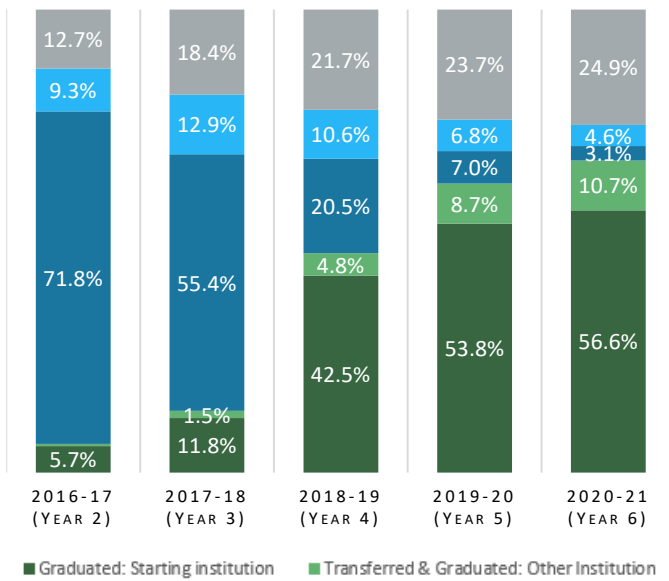
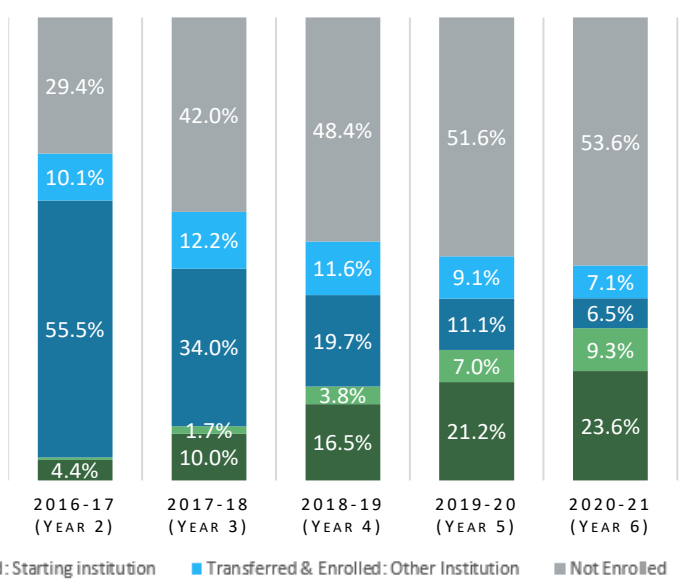


Figure 2. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at all Institutions (N= 411,248)



Starting at Public Four-Year Institutions

The four-year completion rate for students beginning full time is 45.9 percent, and the six-year rate is 72 percent. Most students persist to their second year at their starting institution (78%), a rate comparable to private non-profit institutions (78.8%). Public four-year institutions saw 9.7 percent of full time entrants stopping out within a year of enrolling, growing to 17 percent by year four and 20.3 percent by year six (see **Figure 3**).

The completions rate for part-time starters at public four-year institutions is 20.7 percent by year four and 37.2 percent by year six. Nearly half of part-time starters in the sector left their starting institution, either through transfer (13.6%) or stop-out (31.6%) following their first year of enrollment. Nearly half of part-time public four-year starters stopped out by year four, having earned no credential (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 3. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at all Public Four-Year Institutions (N= 934,160)

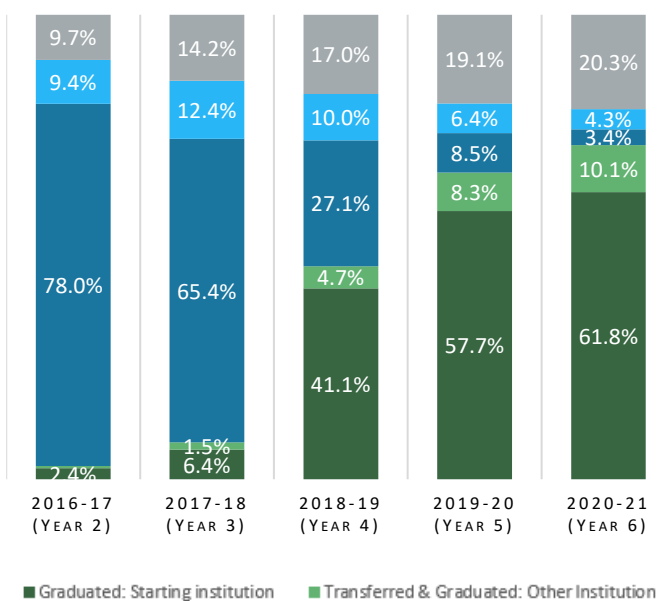
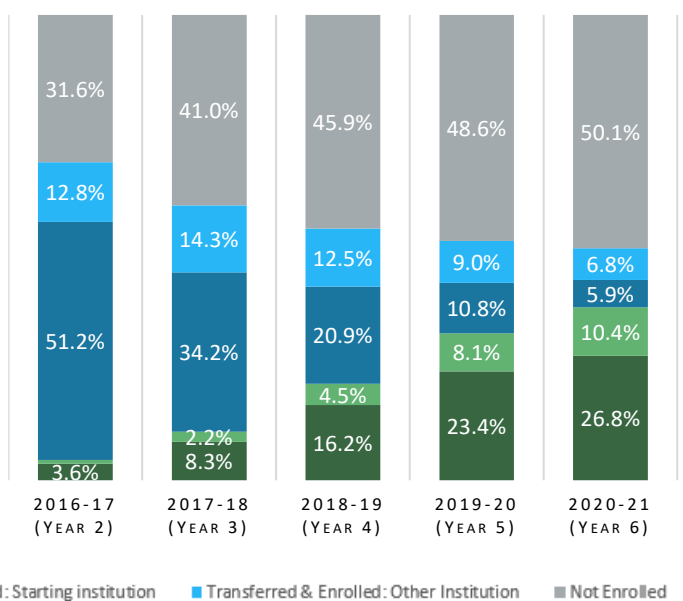


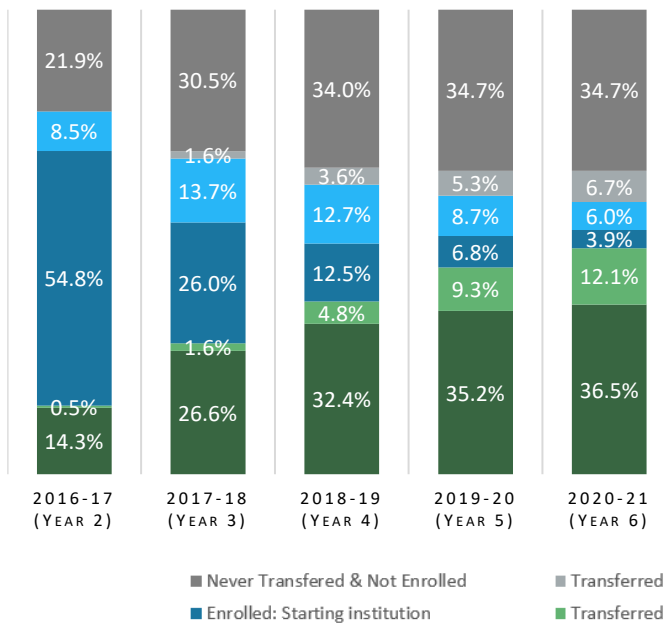
Figure 4. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Four-Year Institutions (N= 118,745)



Starting at Public Two-Year Institutions

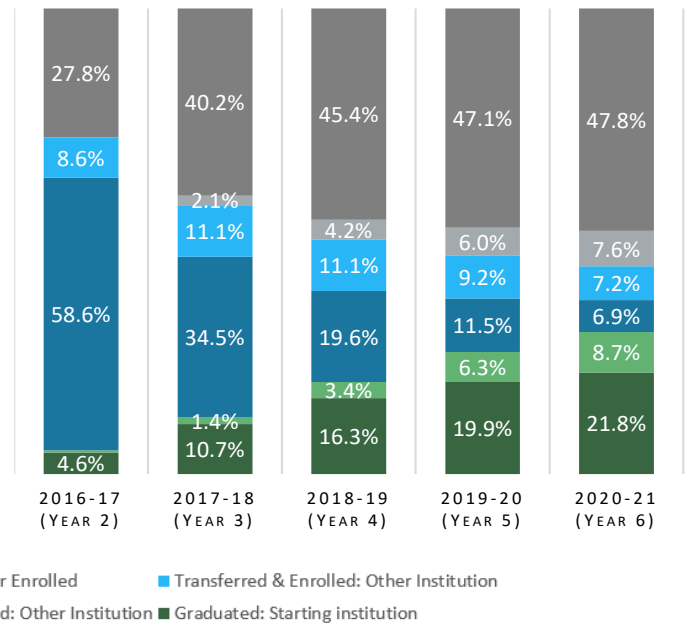
The three-year completion rate for full-time community college entrants starting in 2015 is 28.2 percent, increasing to 48.7 percent by year six, with 36.5 percent of students in this cohort graduating from their starting institution. Over one-third of these students left college, having earned no credential, by year three, increasing to 41.4 percent by year six (see **Figure 5**). Not until year five does the completion rate exceed the stop out rate for full-time entrants.

Figure 5. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Two-Year Institutions
(N= 471,908)



In contrast, those beginning part time in 2015 had a three-year completion rate of 12.1 percent, less than half the rate of their full-time counterparts. The six-year completion rate at the starting institution was 21.8 percent, with an additional 8.7 percent that graduated after transferring to another institution. Over 55 percent of these part-time starters had not completed a credential and were no longer enrolled by year six (see **Figure 6**).

Figure 6. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Two-Year Institutions
(N= 263,323)



Starting at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions

The four-year completion rate for full-time beginning students at private nonprofit four-year institutions was the highest of any institution sector, at 62.5 percent, with the majority (57.4%) graduating from their starting institution. Therefore, only 13 percent of this cohort completed in the fifth year, in contrast to 20.2 percent for public four-year full-time starters. Their stop-out rate by year six was 15.6 percent, roughly five percentage points lower than their counterparts at public four-year institutions (see **Figure 7**).

The outcomes for part-time students are starkly different. Immediately following the first year of enrollment, 34.2 percent of students were no longer enrolled, increasing to 42.9 percent by year three and 49.8 percent by year six. These stop-out rates are similar to those experienced by part-time students starting at public four-year institutions, with half of part-time students leaving college without a credential within six years. The four-year completion rate for these students was 23.9 percent and their six-year completion rate was 38.2 percent (see **Figure 8**).

Figure 7. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions (N= 413,899)

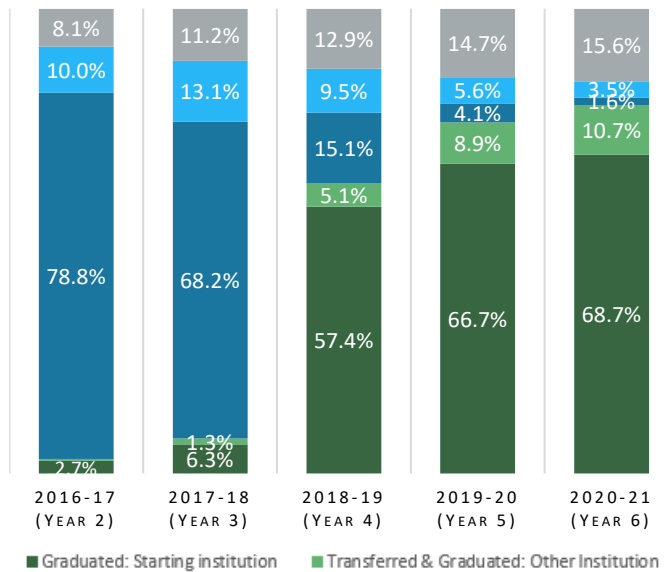
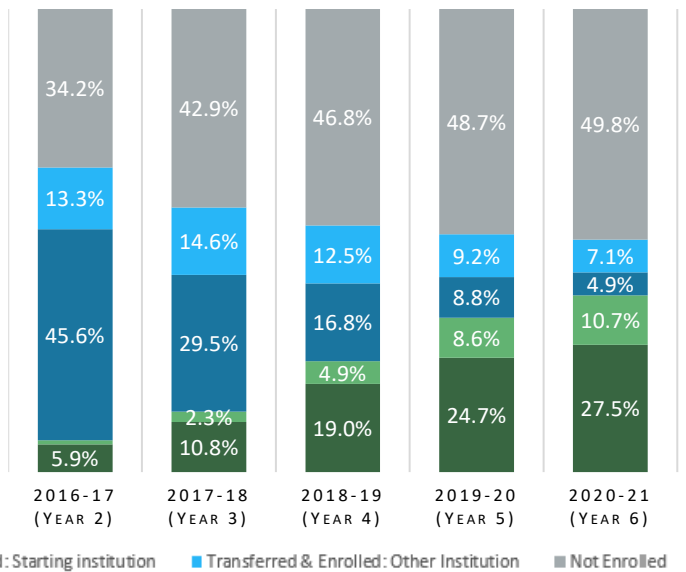


Figure 8. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions (N= 24,933)



Starting at Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions

The four-year completions rate for full-time entrants was 36.7 percent, increasing 11.5 percentage points by year six for a total six-year completion rate of 48.2 percent (see **Figure 9**). Nearly 30 percent of students stopped out after their first year, with another 9 percent exiting the following year. Ultimately 42.7 percent of students are no longer enrolled at any college six years after starting.

Part-time entrants had four-year completion rates of 23.3 percent. An additional 8.1 percent completed in the following two years, for a six-year completion rate of 31.5 percent. Forty percent of part-time students exited without completing after their first year, with an additional 14 percent exiting by year four. Most part-time students (59%) had exited without having completed a credential by year six (see **Figure 10**).

Figure 9. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions (N= 20,432)

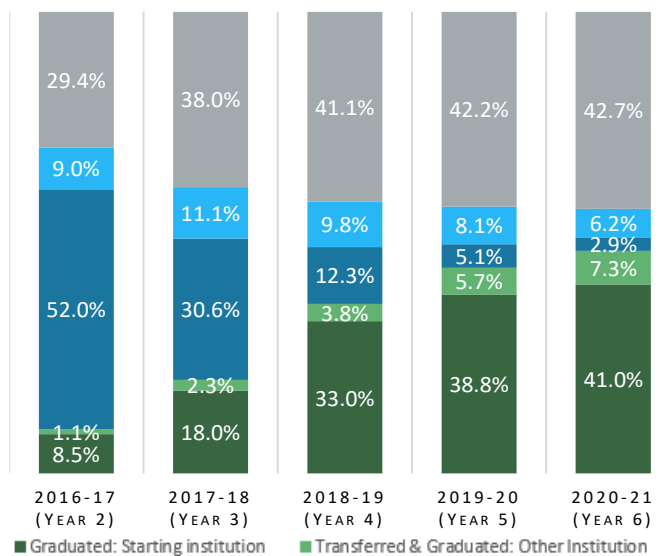
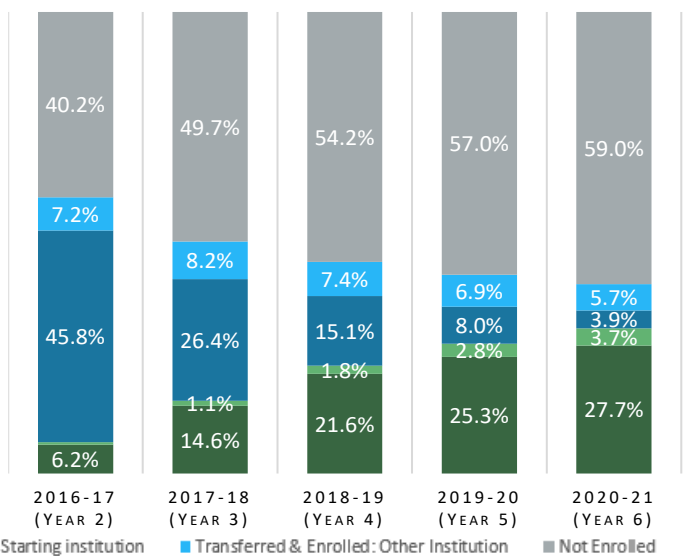


Figure 10. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions (N= 4,013)



SUMMARY

Over 2.3 million students entered college for the first time in fall 2015. These students experienced varying levels of success in the six years that followed. Leaving college without earning any credentials is a situation that 680,000 first-time students experienced six years after entry. This report explores their outcomes, year by year, with special attention to enrollment sector and intensity during their first term. Differences in credential completion and stop-out are particularly stark when observing by enrollment intensity at entry.

First-time full-time students complete credentials at more than twice the rate of their part-time counterparts by year six (67.4% versus 32.9%). The stop-out rate of part-time students is more than twice that of full-time students (53.6% versus 24.9%).

The four-year completion rate for first-time full-time entrants is highest at private nonprofit four-year institutions (62.5%), 16.6 percentage points higher than students with the same enrollment intensity at public four-year institutions (45.9%). Among first-time full-time starters at public four-year institutions, 20.2 percent needed five years to complete a credential, compared to 13 percent for private nonprofit four-year starters.

Strikingly, the gaps between part-time and full-time students and public four-year and private non-profit four-year institutions exist almost entirely for students that completed at their starting institution. The percentage of students that completed after transferring to another institution is almost identical when comparing these groups.

Overall, transfers from starting institutions over the six years observed comprise between 20 and 24 percent of both the full-time and part-time entrants. Student retention is an important factor to consider for the health of an institution. Full-time students being retained at their starting institution in their second year comprise 71.8 percent of the original cohort. This number is far lower for part-time entrants (55.5%).

As reflected in the report, there remains a great deal of room for improvement to close gaps for both full-time and part-time students. Special attention to enrollment persistence beyond the first year as an early indicator of academic success can inform decisions made to support students throughout their college career.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Definition of *First-Time Student*

This report is focused on all first-time undergraduate degree-seeking students who began postsecondary education in fall 2015. Students are considered first-time if they met all of the following conditions:

- Enrolled in a Title IV, degree-granting U.S. institution, excluding those located in U.S. territories.
- Did not have a previous enrollment record in the Clearinghouse data prior to the first date of enrollment, unless the previous enrollment record was before the student turned 18 years old.
- Did not receive any degree or certificate from a postsecondary institution prior to the first date of enrollment.

Definition of *Progress and Success*

Students are counted in only one outcome category per year. Where the student is counted is based on a hierarchical order of outcomes listed below. For example, if a student completed a credential from the starting institution, then that outcome was rolled over for each subsequent academic year, regardless of any subsequent enrollment or completion the student may have achieved. Academic years run from July 1st through June 30th.

1. *Graduated from Starting Institution* – Students received a certificate or degree from the same institution in which they started college. Once a student completes a credential at the starting institution, the student will be counted in this category across all subsequent years, even if the student continued their education elsewhere.
2. *Transferred & Graduated from Other Institution* – Students did not receive a certificate or degree from the starting institution but did receive a credential from a different institution. Students will be counted in this category in all subsequent years unless the students eventually complete a credential at their starting institution, in which case, they will **only** be counted as completing at the starting institution for the applicable year, and each subsequent year.

3. *Enrolled at Starting Institution* – Students have not yet received a certificate or degree but are still enrolled at the starting institution.
4. *Transferred and Enrolled at Other Institution* – Students have not yet received a certificate or degree but are still enrolled at an institution other than the starting institution.
5. *Not Enrolled* – Students had no enrollments during the academic year in question. This is not a terminal outcome. In other words, a student can be counted as “not enrolled” in one academic year, but then counted as “enrolled” in a subsequent year if the student returns to college.

For two-year institution starters only, the “not enrolled” category is further disaggregated into the following two categories:

- *Transferred and No Longer Enrolled* – Students had no enrollments for the academic year in question, but in a previous academic year, had transferred to an institution other than the starting institution.
- *Never Transferred and Not Enrolled* – Student had no enrollments during the academic year in question, and had never transferred to an institution other than the starting institution.

Completion of Certificates

Unlike the [Student Achievement Measure \(SAM\)](#), the graduate headcounts in the current report account for undergraduate certificates. The inclusion of certificates increases graduate headcounts by 12.4 percent at public two-year institutions, 4.3 percent at private for-profit four-year institutions, 1.6 percent at public four-year institutions, and 0.8 percent at private non-profit four-year institutions.

Suggested Citation

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