DATA POINT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Persistence and Attainment Among Postsecondary Subbaccalaureate Students

This Data Point uses data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). BPS follows a nationally representative cohort of students who have enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time, tracking their progress over 6 years. The BPS students examined here were initially surveyed in 2003–04 (at the end of their first academic year) then re-surveyed in 2005–06 and in 2008–09. The final BPS:04/09 dataset contains information on nearly 16,700 students.

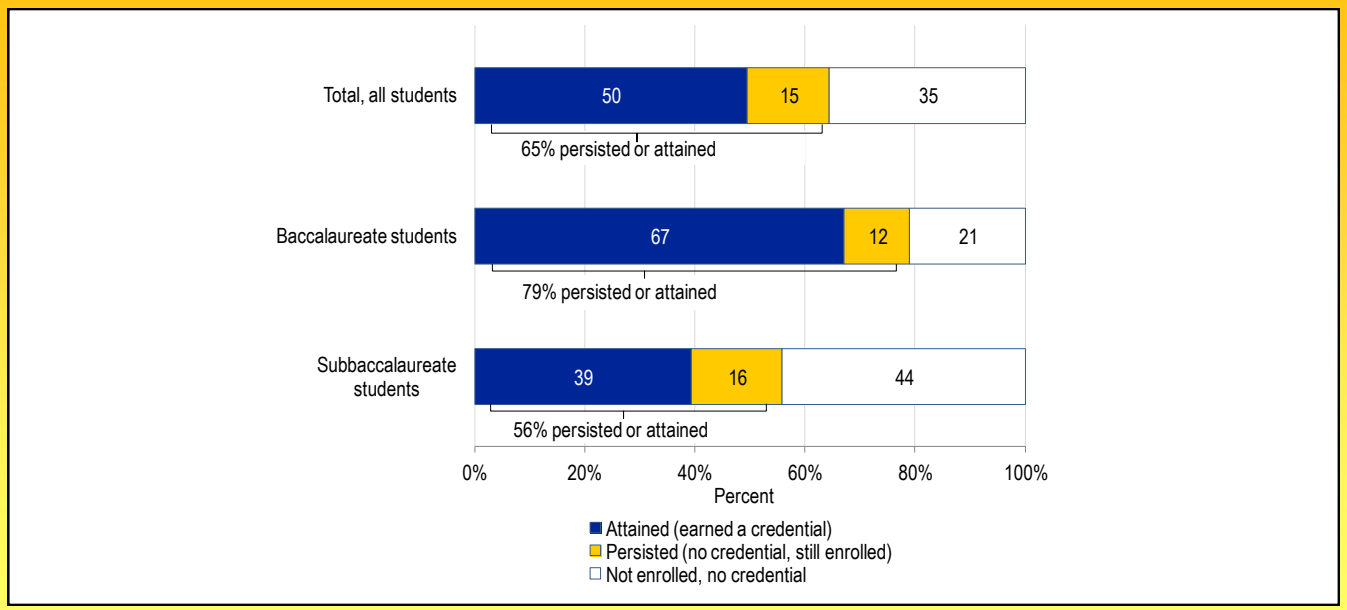
This Data Point examines the persistence and attainment of students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in 2003–04, focusing on subbaccalaureate students (those seeking a certificate or associate's degree) and, among subbaccalaureate students, those who pursue occupational education[1] (sometimes referred to as career and technical education (CTE)). Attainment is defined as having earned a postsecondary credential as of 2009, whether or not it is the same credential the student initially sought. Persistence is defined as being enrolled in postsecondary education in 2009, without having earned a credential. Among 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students, 50 percent had earned a credential by 2009, and 15 percent had not earned a credential but were still enrolled, resulting in an overall 6-year persistence and attainment rate of 65 percent (**figure 1**).

Subbaccalaureate students have a lower rate of persistence and attainment than baccalaureate students.

Among beginning postsecondary students in 2003–04 who initially sought a subbaccalaureate credential, 56 percent continued to seek or had attained a credential 6 years later (in 2009), compared to 79 percent of students who initially sought a bachelor's degree.

Looking at persistence and attainment separately shows that this difference arises from a difference in attainment rates. Only 39 percent of students seeking a subbaccalaureate credential earned a certificate or degree within 6 years of entering postsecondary education, compared to 67 percent of students seeking a bachelor's degree (**figure 1**).

FIGURE 1. Persistence and attainment status of 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students after 6 years, by initial credential level: 2009



NOTE: Standard errors for estimates can be found at http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/B01.asp. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09).

To learn more about the data collection used in this report, visit http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/bps. For questions about content or to view this report online, go to http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016083.

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In contrast, the proportion of students who had not earned a credential but were still enrolled was higher among subbaccalaureate students than among baccalaureate students (16 versus 12 percent, respectively).

Postsecondary students can be classified into three broad areas of study based on their initial field of study: those in an occupational field of study, an academic field of study, and an as-yet undeclared field of study.

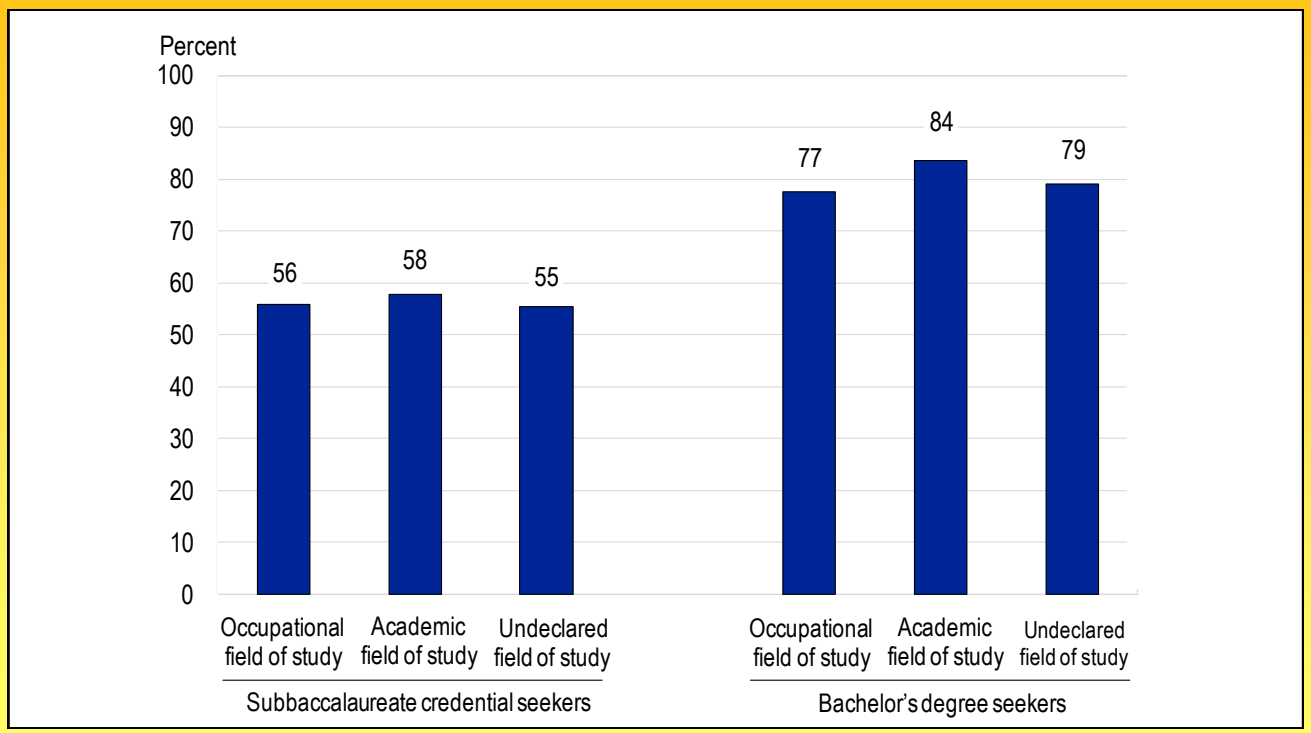
Students seeking a subbaccalaureate credential in an occupational field of study have a persistence and attainment rate that is not measurably different from that of subbaccalaureate students in other fields of study.

Among 2003–04 subbaccalaureate students, there were no measureable differences in the percentages of students in each broad area of study—occupational, academic, and undeclared—who were still enrolled or had already earned a credential 6 years later (56, 58, and 55 percent, respectively) (**figure 2**). However, among students seeking a bachelor's degree, the rate of persistence and attainment of those in an academic field of study (84 percent) was higher than that of students in occupational or undeclared fields of study (77 and 79 percent, respectively).

Endnotes

[1] *Occupational* fields of study include agriculture and natural resources; business management; business support; communications; computer and information sciences; construction; consumer services; design; education; engineering, architecture, science, and communications technologies; health sciences; manufacturing; marketing; protective services; public, legal, and social services; repair; and transportation. *Academic* fields of study include biological and physical sciences, English/letters, fine and performing arts, foreign languages, history, liberal/general studies, mathematics, philosophy and religion, social and behavioral sciences, and interdisciplinary studies. These categories have been used in numerous NCES reports (see e.g., http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008001) and are described in more detail at http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/postsec_tax.asp.

FIGURE 2. Persistence and attainment rates of 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students after 6 years, by initial credential level and broad area of study: 2009



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This National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Data Point presents information of education topics of current interest. It was authored by Ashley Roberts of the American Institutes for Research. Estimates based on samples are subject to sampling variability, and apparent differences may not be statistically significant. All stated differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize effects of non-sampling errors, such as item response, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.