

Some College, No Degree

A 2019 Snapshot for the Nation and 50 States



SOME COLLEGE, NO DEGREE

A 2019 SNAPSHOT FOR THE NATION AND 50 STATES

In the United States, approximately two million people each year enter postsecondary education for the first time. Eight years later, one-third of those who started have not earned any formal credential and are no longer enrolled.¹ While it is true that more people have been going to college than ever before, the college completion rate hasn't changed much. Because of this, we expect the number of people who start—but don't finish—college to grow as well.

This former student population, also known as the *Some College, No Degree* population, is an important indicator for an economy that demands more workers with education and training beyond high school, as is true in the United States. This population is also important as a source of possible enrollment growth for postsecondary institutions in many parts of the country that are struggling with recent declines. Former students themselves also reap great personal benefits from obtaining degrees and certificates.

However, many questions remain: Where in the nation are they concentrated? How many are “near completers” who may be only a few credits away from graduating? When, and at which type of institution, did they last interact with postsecondary education? Which students, and how many, have returned and earned degrees? What kind of degrees, and in which major fields? Which educational pathways did they traverse to make it to graduation? This report from the National Student Clearinghouse® (NSC) Research Center™ provides some insights into these questions.

This report is the second in a series that analyzes the characteristics of this former student population and their postsecondary education enrollment history and pathways. We have drawn data from the nation's most comprehensive and current student-level enrollment and degree records, provided to NSC by the nation's colleges and universities since 1993.²

The Research Center reports that as of December 2018, the number of Americans identified in the NSC data with some prior college enrollment since 1993, but no completion anywhere in the U.S., rose to 36 million. This figure represents an increase of 6.6 million or 22 percent in five years, up from 29 million identified as of December 2013. New findings quantify the growth and offer details and insights about this untapped population of potential returning adult students, both nationally and in each state.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Thirty-six million Americans in the NSC database today hold some postsecondary education and training but no completion and are no longer enrolled, also known as the *Some College, No Degree* population.
- Ten percent of this population are “potential completers” who have already made at least two years' worth of academic progress up until their last enrollment. Potential completers were found more likely than other former students to re-enroll and finish college.
- About 940,000 students identified as *Some College, No Degree* five years ago, in our first report, have since re-enrolled and are now new completers. In addition, more than a million are still enrolled as of December 2018, for a combined success and progress rate of 54 percent among re-enrollees.
- Compared to where they last enrolled, returning students were more likely to have re-enrolled at public institutions, and less likely to have done so at private institutions. But online enrollees were more likely to have returned to online institutions.
- Completers tend to finish at the institution where they first re-enrolled and complete within two years of re-enrolling, without stopping out.
- Completers typically re-enrolled and finished in the same state where they last enrolled, with a few exceptions.

WHAT TO FIND IN THE REPORT

1. [Some College, No Degree students today are nearing middle age. They were typically in their 20s or younger at last enrollment.](#)
2. [The typical Some College, No Degree student left postsecondary education 10 years ago after a short college career, often at a local community college.](#)
3. [Ten percent of the Some College, No Degree student population, or 3.5 million, have high potential to attain a credential \(the group called “potential completers”\).](#)
4. [States vary in the prevalence of potential completers in the overall Some College, No Degree population, from a low of five percent to a high of 15 percent.](#)
5. [A total of 3.8 million Some College, No Degree students from 2013 re-enrolled sometime in the past five years, and 940,000 completed college \(25 percent\). More than a million others are still enrolled as of December 2018 \(29 percent\).](#)
6. [Completion rate increases with academic progress made up until last enrollment and decreases as the length of stop-out increases. Potential completers, as expected, made greater strides than other former students.](#)
7. [Associate degrees and certificates are the most common credentials earned. Completers typically did not stop out again after re-enrolling, earning a credential within two years on average.](#)
8. [When re-enrolled, only 38 percent went back to the same institution where they last enrolled. Most completers stayed at the institution where they first re-enrolled until graduation.](#)
9. [For most completers, the institutions of last enrollment, re-enrollment, and awarding of credential were all located in the same state.](#)

Figures & Tables

- Figure 1a. [Some College, No Degree Population’s Age Profile](#)
- Figure 1b. [Potential Completers’ Age Profile](#)
- Figure 2. [Some College, No Degree Population and Potential Completers by State: 2018](#)
- Figure 3. [Some College, No Degree Population by State and Institution Type of Last Enrollment: 2018](#)
- Figure 4. [Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Returning Some College, No Degree Students Who Earned a Credential: 2018](#)
- Figure 5. [Re-Enrollment Rates by Academic Progress Made Through 2013](#)
- Figure 6. [Completion Rates for Re-Enrollees by Academic Progress Made Through 2013](#)
- Figure 7. [Completion Rates for Re-Enrollees by Length of Stop-Out Before Re-Enrollment](#)
- Figure 8. [Common Majors Among Some College, No Degree Students Who Earned a Credential](#)
- Figure 9. [Some College, No Degree Students’ Re-Enrollment and Completion by Institution Type](#)
- Figure 10. [Returning Some College, No Degree Students’ Educational Pathways: From Last Enrollment to Re-Enrollment](#)
- Figure 11. [Percent Completed by Institution Type of Re-Enrollment](#)
- Figure 12. [Some College, No Degree Students Who Re-Enrolled and Completed in Their State of Last Enrollment vs. Elsewhere](#)
- Table 1. [Postsecondary Enrollment and Some College, No Degree Population by State](#)
- Table 2. [Some College, No Degree Pathways to Re-Enrollment After 2013](#)
- Table 2.1. [Some College, No Degree Pathways to Re-Enrollment After 2013 \(Re-Enrollees Only\)](#)
- Table 3. [Some College, No Degree Pathways from Re-Enrollment to Completion](#)

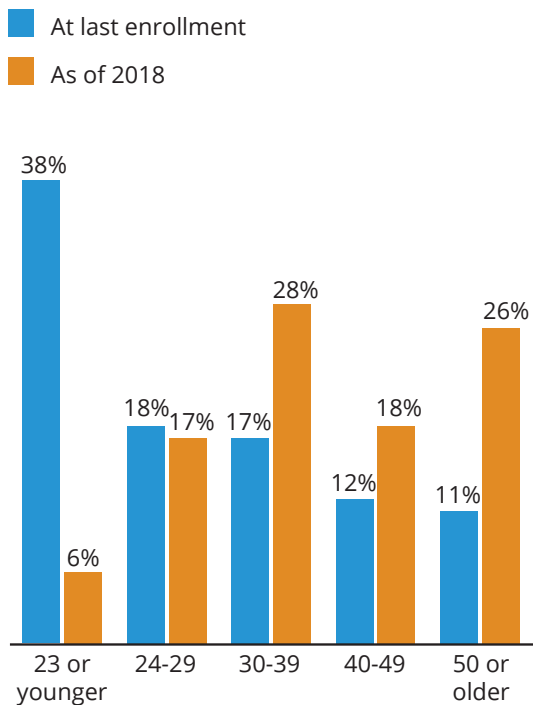
1. Some College, No Degree students today are nearing middle age. They were typically in their 20s or younger at last enrollment.

These 36 million former students without a credential are nearing middle age today, with a median age of 39 and an average age of 42. As shown in **Figure 1a**, 26 percent are 50 years of age and older, and those below 30 make up 23 percent. However, most had left postsecondary education when they were in their 20s or younger (56 percent). Half are women (51 percent).

2. The typical Some College, No Degree student left postsecondary education 10 years ago after a short college career, often at a local community college.

These former students left postsecondary education and did not return for a decade. The timing of their last enrollment was on average 10 years ago, circa 2008. Findings suggest that their interaction with higher education was often minimal. Twenty-nine percent of them had only a single term of enrollment, and 53 percent left college within two years or less after entering. As a result, data shows that these students mostly interacted with only one institution during their short college career

Figure 1a. Some College, No Degree Population’s Age Profile



Note: Figure may not total to 100 percent because of missing data (5%). Total N=35,952,051.

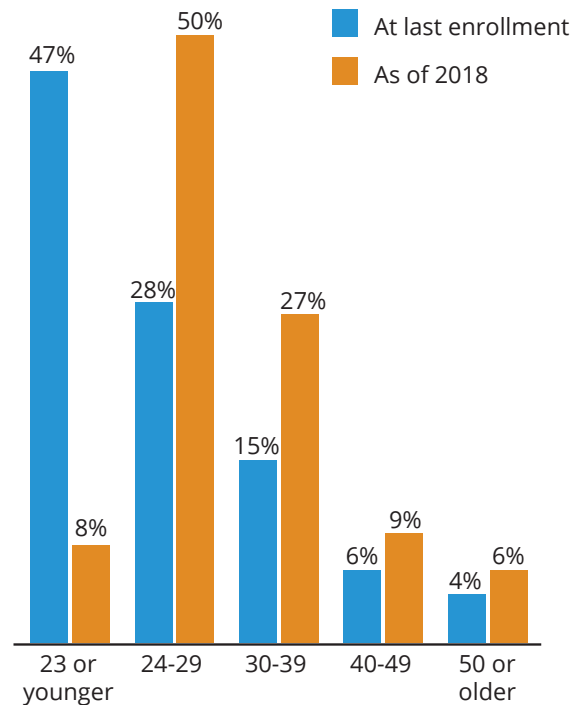
(74 percent). Community colleges were also likely the starting and last-enrolled institution for most of the *Some College, No Degree* population (67 percent).

3. Ten percent of the Some College, No Degree population, or 3.5 million, have high potential to attain a credential (the group called “potential completers”).

We further examined how many among these former students are potential completers who had already made significant progress toward completion up until their last enrollment, defined as the equivalent of at least two years’ worth of full-time enrollment over the past 10 years. We found 3.5 million potential completers, comprising 10 percent of the overall *Some College, No Degree* population as of 2018.

Potential completers are recognizably different in several ways from the overall *Some College, No Degree* student population (see [Appendix](#)) for comparisons). First, in terms of demographic characteristics, they are younger, as **Figure 1b** demonstrates. Six out of every ten potential completers are below age 30 (58 percent), which is more than two times as large as that of the overall *Some College, No Degree* population (23 percent). Potential

Figure 1b. Potential Completers’ Age Profile



Note: Figure may not total to 100 percent because of missing data (1%). Total N=3,513,178.

completers were also more likely in their 20s when they last attended college (75 percent, compared to 56 percent overall), and they were more recently enrolled in college, which is consistent with their enrollment history, as we describe below.

In terms of racial/ethnic background, about half of potential completers are white (53 percent). African American and Hispanic students combined make up a sizable proportion, 38 percent (22 percent, 16 percent, respectively). Asian American students constitute 3 percent.³ Half are women.

Potential completers tend to follow distinct educational pathways. Unlike other *Some College, No Degree* students, who mostly interacted with only one institution (74 percent), as many as 35 percent of potential completers attended two institutions, while only 41 percent attended a single institution. Nearly one-quarter attended three or more. For two-thirds of the overall *Some College, No Degree* students, a community college was either their starting or last enrolled institution, but potential completers less likely followed this path: 53 percent started at a community college and 48 percent last enrolled at a community college.

Potential completers tend to have stopped out more frequently during their college career, compared to other former students. About 64 percent of potential completers stopped out more than once, compared to 40 percent overall. What is more, potential completers last attended college more recently than other former students. The data shows that they were last enrolled four years ago, on average, circa 2014.

In short, potential completers are a more distinct group of younger students with more recent enrollments, who followed more diverse education pathways involving multiple types of institutions and more stop-outs.

Potential completers are presumed to have the highest potential to re-enroll and complete a credential, which is why they were the focus of our first report. This year's report presents the opportunity to further examine their subsequent educational outcomes since 2013. As we will discuss later, they were found to have achieved better re-enrollment and completion outcomes over the past five years than other former students within the *Some College, No Degree* population. This is to say; potential completers are the most relevant sub-group for institutions looking to increase enrollments today, as well as for policymakers looking to reach state and national postsecondary attainment goals tomorrow.

4. States vary in the prevalence of potential completers in the overall *Some College, No Degree* population, from a low of five percent to a high of 15 percent.

Are former students geographically dispersed, or are they concentrated in certain parts of the nation? For each state, how many among the *Some College, No Degree* population are potential completers with the highest potential to return to college and finish a credential? For the purpose of this analysis, we define students' states by the location of their institution of last enrollment as of 2018, not the location of their starting institution, and not necessarily their state of residence.

As **Table 1** illustrates, the overall *Some College, No Degree* population sizes vary across states and are generally proportional to postsecondary enrollments. The top nine states – California, Texas, New York, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, Washington, Michigan, and Pennsylvania – account for half of the nation's total *Some College, No Degree* population. California has the largest *Some College, No Degree* population, representing over 16 percent of the 36 million former students nationally. This is expected, given that California enrolls the largest number of college students in the nation (over two million students). Additionally, in a dozen states that include California, Illinois, Washington, and Oregon, the *Some College, No Degree* population outweighs the postsecondary enrollment, based on the state's share of each population nationally.

We provided detailed information for 50 states in [Appendix](#) and [state profiles](#) for three select states, highlighting their *Some College, No Degree* populations today and five years ago in comparison with the state's adult population with postsecondary attainment, and the educational outcomes and pathways of returning *Some College, No Degree* students over the last five years. This set of data can guide a state, as it works to develop a new statewide strategy, or assess its existing strategy on how best to engage returning adult learners for postsecondary attainment especially when the size of *Some College, No Degree* student population increases disproportionately large.

The number of potential completers, who have the highest potential to earn a credential, is generally proportional to the size of the overall *Some College, No Degree* population, comprising 10 percent of the overall population on average. But the prevalence of potential completers, measured as a share of the overall *Some College, No Degree* population, varies among states from a low of five

Table 1. Postsecondary Enrollment and Some College, No Degree Population by State

State	Postsecondary Enrollment (2019)	SCND Population (2018)	State Share of Nat'l Enrollment	State Share of Nat'l SCND
Alabama	288,000	426,336	1.7%	1.2%
Alaska	24,412	111,080	0.1%	0.3%
Arizona	439,805	589,661	2.6%	1.6%
Arkansas	148,969	288,594	0.9%	0.8%
California	2,404,485	5,737,962	14.0%	16.0%
Colorado	268,341	677,166	1.6%	1.9%
Connecticut	184,392	368,388	1.1%	1.0%
Delaware	54,510	56,637	0.3%	0.2%
Florida	904,696	1,540,460	5.3%	4.3%
Georgia	497,862	720,390	2.9%	2.0%
Hawaii	51,314	92,251	0.3%	0.3%
Idaho	100,836	164,692	0.6%	0.5%
Illinois	591,735	1,790,351	3.5%	5.0%
Indiana	338,012	794,070	2.0%	2.2%
Iowa	195,725	348,099	1.1%	1.0%
Kansas	183,428	345,035	1.1%	1.0%
Kentucky	232,341	557,533	1.4%	1.6%
Louisiana	223,860	441,476	1.3%	1.2%
Maine	63,868	120,904	0.4%	0.3%
Maryland	330,929	570,129	1.9%	1.6%
Massachusetts	426,371	636,107	2.5%	1.8%
Michigan	493,688	1,070,323	2.9%	3.0%
Minnesota	353,046	566,296	2.1%	1.6%
Mississippi	162,938	293,536	1.0%	0.8%
Missouri	328,083	653,151	1.9%	1.8%
Montana	44,559	102,090	0.3%	0.3%
Nebraska	126,055	306,540	0.7%	0.9%
Nevada	108,675	346,398	0.6%	1.0%
New Hampshire	151,457	94,986	0.9%	0.3%
New Jersey	367,658	736,761	2.1%	2.0%
New Mexico	106,096	271,815	0.6%	0.8%
New York	1,035,053	1,818,922	6.0%	5.1%
North Carolina	518,914	1,014,619	3.0%	2.8%
North Dakota	49,132	64,106	0.3%	0.2%
Ohio	590,723	1,318,364	3.4%	3.7%
Oklahoma	178,492	372,009	1.0%	1.0%
Oregon	199,927	742,386	1.2%	2.1%
Pennsylvania	633,886	1,033,617	3.7%	2.9%
Rhode Island	68,503	120,670	0.4%	0.3%
South Carolina	228,560	447,228	1.3%	1.2%
South Dakota	46,087	61,605	0.3%	0.2%
Tennessee	297,377	592,753	1.7%	1.6%
Texas	1,453,234	2,288,430	8.5%	6.4%
Utah	342,136	370,745	2.0%	1.0%
Vermont	38,686	63,401	0.2%	0.2%
Virginia	475,932	908,888	2.8%	2.5%
Washington	312,379	1,098,345	1.8%	3.1%
West Virginia	135,076	177,019	0.8%	0.5%
Wisconsin	303,260	662,167	1.8%	1.8%
Wyoming	28,904	89,553	0.2%	0.2%
US	17,132,407	35,952,051		

Notes: Institutions operating in multiple states or primarily online institutions are included in the US total. Postsecondary enrollment data are from Spring 2019 Enrollment Estimates, NSC Research Center, 2019.

percent to a high of 15 percent (**Figure 2**). Particularly, California, Washington, and Illinois appear to face the dual challenge of having a relatively large *Some College, No Degree* population and a disproportionately small number of potential completers within that population.

Several findings in this report suggest that the *Some College, No Degree* pathways are reflective of community colleges' broad-access missions. As previously mentioned, two-thirds of *Some College, No Degree* students started postsecondary education at a community college, or last enrolled at a community college before stopping out. These figures are far greater than those for public four-year institutions (21 percent and 20 percent, respectively). Similar patterns are seen at the state level as well (**Figure 3**). In 37 states, more than half of former students last enrolled at a community college, and in six states, Wyoming, California, Oregon, Illinois, North Carolina, and Iowa, the figure exceeds 80 percent. This number ranges from 90 percent in Wyoming and California to less than 30 percent in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Alaska.

This cross-state variability can be explained in part by the total number of postsecondary enrollments in community colleges as compared to public four-year college enrollments in each state. In states with larger community college enrollments, the majority of *Some College, No Degree* students were last enrolled in community colleges.

In addition, community colleges were the most common path to postsecondary education for returning *Some College, No Degree* adult students. As we will discuss in the five-year follow-up findings, a local community college was the first or second most common institutional choice for returning adult learners, regardless of the type of institution at which they last enrolled. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the most common credentials earned by returning adults were associate degrees or certificates (60 percent).

Taken together, community colleges serve as the major routes of initial entry, re-entry, and completion on the postsecondary education pathways for *Some College, No Degree* students. In other words, not only are community colleges indispensable to the process of broadening postsecondary access to diverse students, but they also could have a significant effect on reaching a state's postsecondary attainment goal.

5. A total of 3.8 million *Some College, No Degree* students re-enrolled sometime in the past five years, and 940,000 completed college (25 percent). More than a million are still enrolled (29 percent) as of December 2018.

The five-year follow-up analysis examined the current education status of the 29 million *Some College, No Degree* students last identified by our first report in 2014. The follow-up analysis looked at who among the *Some College, No Degree* population have returned to postsecondary education after December 2013, who ultimately crossed the finish line to graduate with a credential over the five-year period, and which education paths they took to re-enroll and finish.

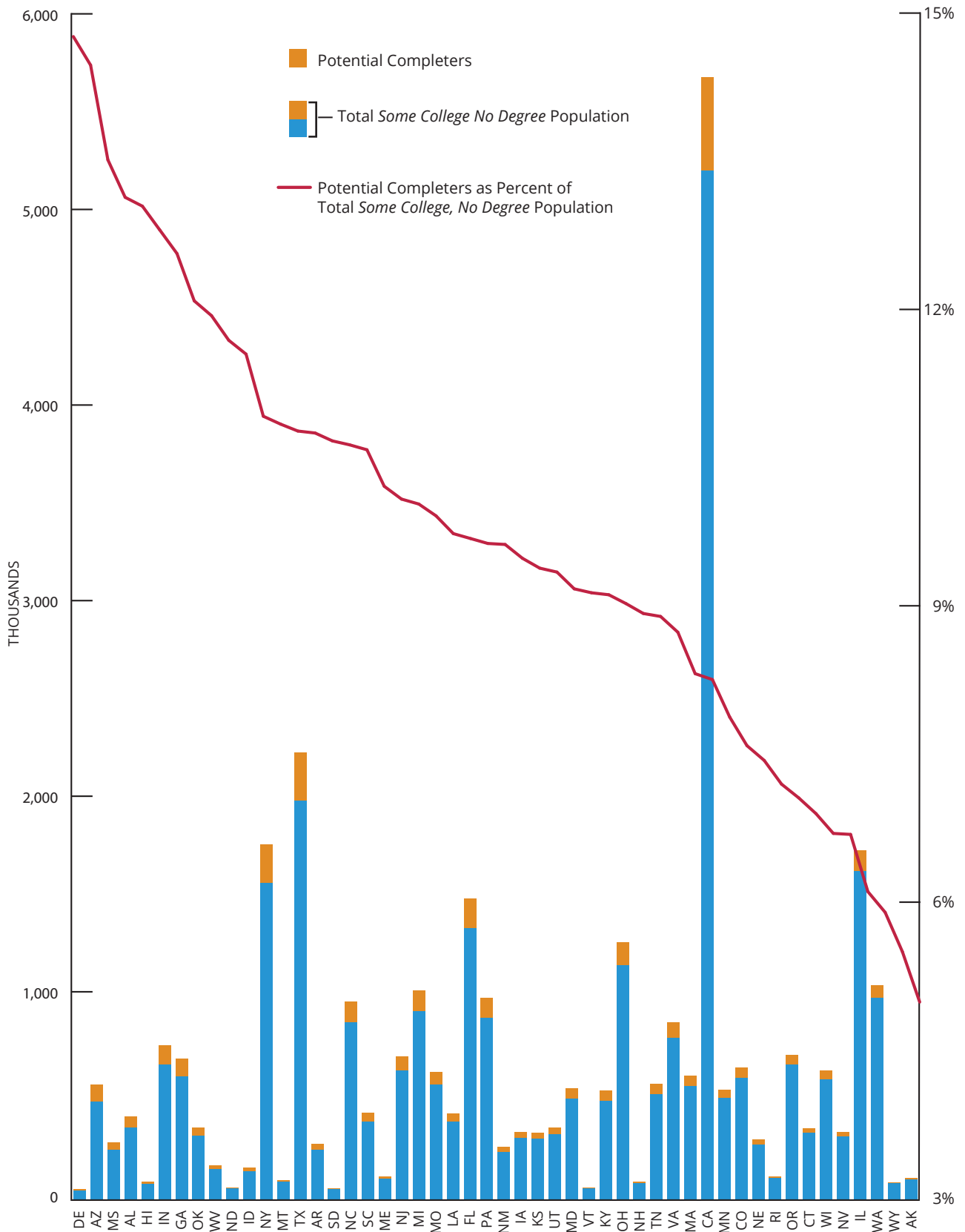
Overall, 3.8 million, or 13 percent, of the 29 million former students have returned to postsecondary education since 2013. Among all re-enrollees, 25 percent graduated with a degree or certificate, and an additional 29 percent, or 1.1 million people, are still enrolled without a credential as of December 2018.

That is, more than half (54 percent) of returning *Some College, No Degree* students have already earned, or still are on a path toward, a credential. This combined success and progress rate varies across states ranging from 49 percent in Alaska and California to 65 percent in North Dakota (see [Appendix](#)) for 50 states' re-enrollment and completion outcomes). Keep in mind that some of these students might have returned to college only toward the end of the five-year follow-up window and have not yet had adequate time to finish a credential. Thus, our results are not meant to be a full assessment of all returning adults' outcomes.

Approximately 940,000, or 3.2 percent, of the 29 million are now "new completers," who have attained a postsecondary credential sometime between 2013 and 2018. Who are these new completers? What distinguishes them from the rest of the former students? And what educational paths did they traverse?

New completers are still young, in their late 20s (32 percent are between the ages of 24 and 29) or 30s (34 percent) at completion. They have a median age of 30 years. Women's advancement trends in higher education continued with *Some College, No Degree* students. Among new completers, men are slightly outnumbered by women (54 percent). Women were more likely than men to re-enroll and to earn their first undergraduate credential (14 percent of women re-enrolled, as opposed to

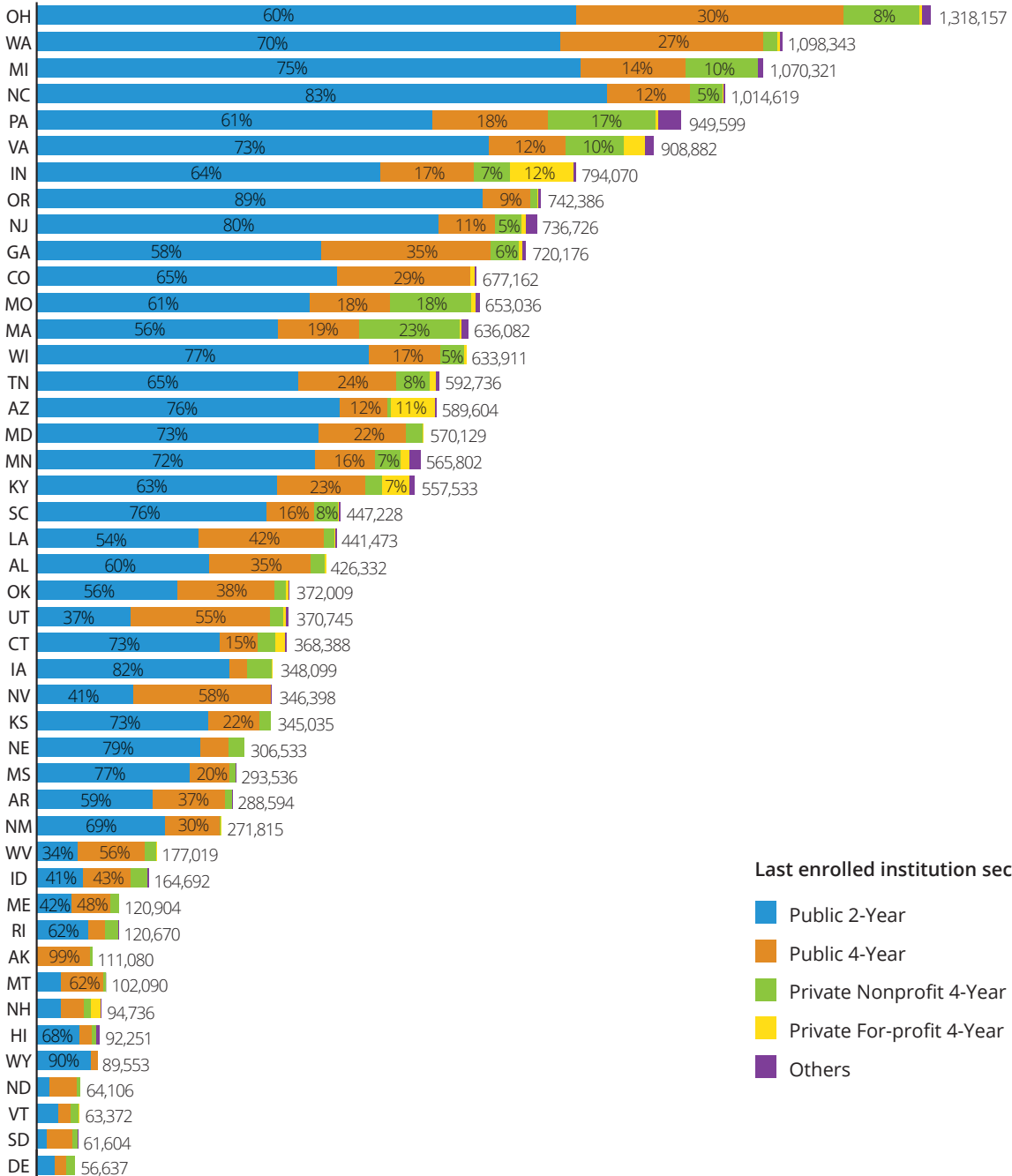
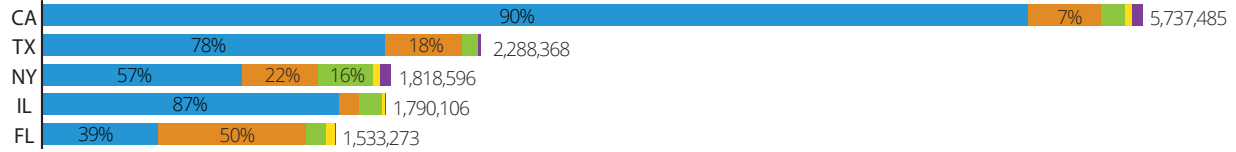
Figure 2. Total Some College, No Degree Population and Potential Completers by State: 2018



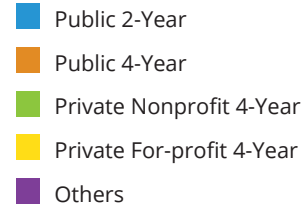
Note: Data for figure 2 can be found in Appendix.

Figure 3. Some College, No Degree Population by State and Institution Type of Last Enrollment: 2018

Top Five States



Last enrolled institution sector



Note: State details above should be read with caution due to limited data coverage for some states in the early years of NSC's data collection.

12 percent for men, and 3.5 percent of women earned a credential compared to 3.1 percent for men).

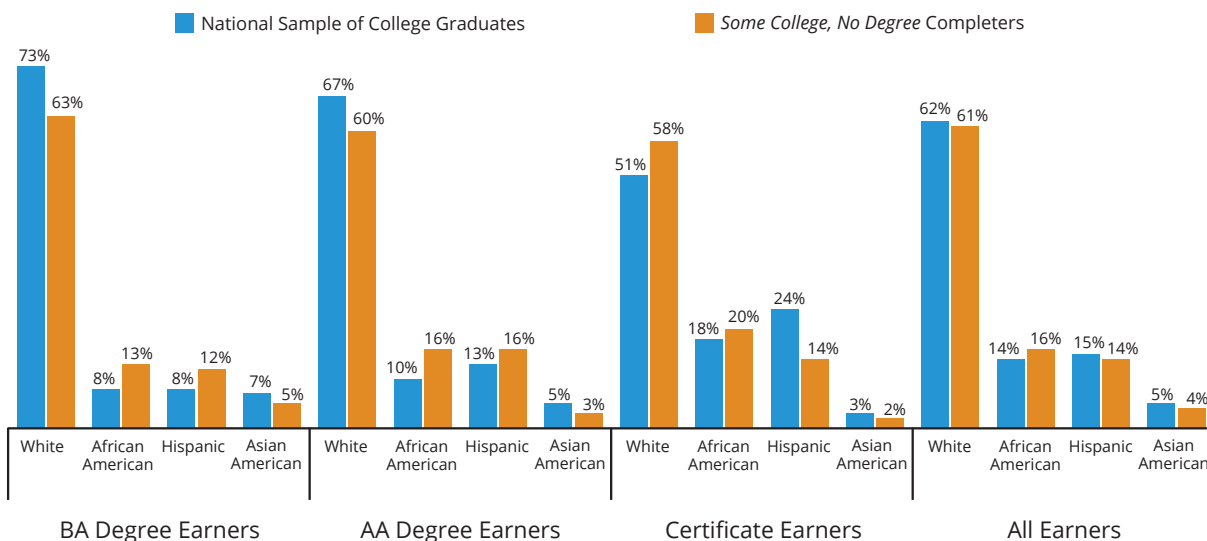
In terms of racial/ethnic background, new completers generally mirror the national sample of college graduates, based on the share of each race/ethnicity (**Figure 4**). However, a closer look at the type of credential they earned reveals that African Americans and Hispanics are over-represented among bachelor’s degree earners and associate degree earners. They make up 25 percent of bachelor’s degree earners, compared to just 16 percent in the national sample of college graduates, and 32 percent of associate degree earners, as opposed to 23 percent in the national sample. Among certificate earners, white students are over-represented (58 percent compared to 51 percent in the national sample), whereas Hispanic students are under-represented (14 percent compared to 24 percent in the national sample). Asian students are under-represented across all credential types.

6. Completion rate increases with academic progress made up until last enrollment.

Not surprisingly, *Some College, No Degree* students’ likelihood of finishing college is related to the earlier academic progress they made before stopping out. Based on enrollments from 2003 to 2013, we measured academic progress in three categories: single-term enrollment, multiple-terms of enrollment adding up to less than two years, and enrollment equivalent of at least two years’ worth (the definition used to identify “potential completers”).

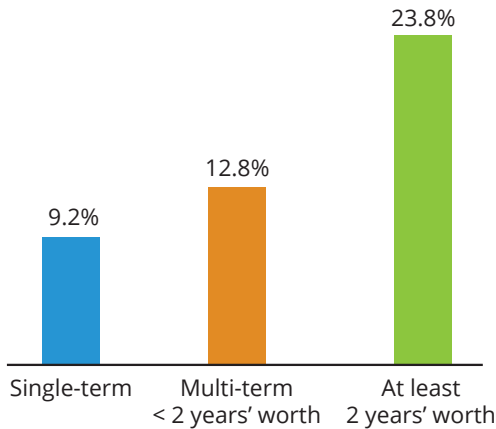
Both re-enrollment and completion rates are related to prior academic progress. That is, the rate at which *Some College, No Degree* students returned to any postsecondary institution after 2013, as well as the rate at which those who returned finished college by 2018 increased with the amount of academic progress made during the previous ten years. This was most evident for potential completers (**Figures 5 and 6**).

Figure 4. Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Returning *Some College, No Degree* Students Who Earned a Credential: 2018



Notes: Racial/ethnic categories do not total to 100 percent because of the “other” category that constitutes a small share (5 percent) and is not shown here. Data for the national sample of college graduates are based on the analysis of NCES QuickStats for Beginning Postsecondary Students Study: 2009.

Figure 5. Re-Enrollment Rates by Academic Progress Made Through 2013



Potential completers, as expected, made greater strides than other former students.

The five-year follow-up found that potential completers were far more likely to return to postsecondary education than other *Some College, No Degree* students, and were also more likely to complete a credential. In **Figure 5**, potential completers were almost three times as likely to re-enroll (24 percent) as one-term enrollees (9 percent), and nearly twice as likely to re-enroll as multiple-term enrollees with less than two years' worth of progress (13 percent).

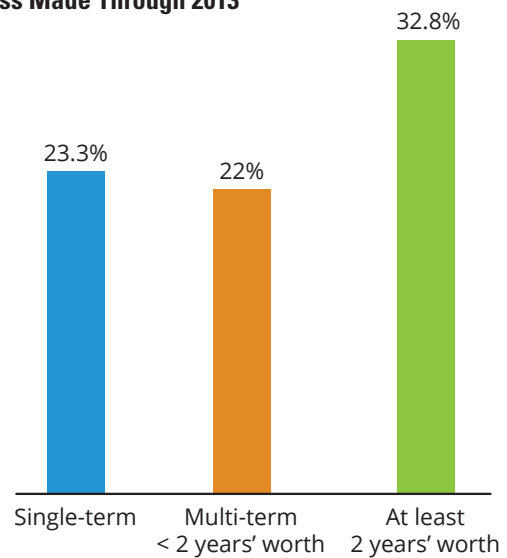
Once re-enrolled, the difference in completion rates was less pronounced but still showed a large advantage for potential completers. Among re-enrollees who were identified as potential completers in 2013, 33 percent of them have earned a credential since, compared to 23 percent of those with only a single term of prior enrollment, and 22 percent of those with multi-term enrollments of less than two years' worth (**Figure 6**).

Consistent with this, data also shows that those who already had multi-term enrollments prior to stopping out made up a very large share of the 940,000 new completers (78 percent). Notably, 30 percent of them were potential completers.

Completion rate decreases with the length of stop-out.

The *Some College, No Degree* students who completed college are more likely to have re-enrolled after stopping out for a shorter period. The median length of stop-out

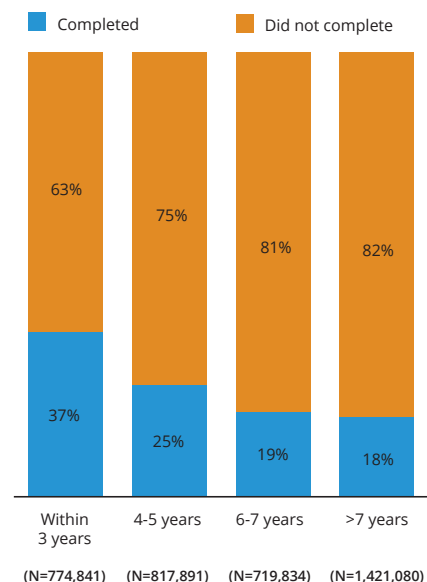
Figure 6. Completion Rates for Re-Enrollees by Academic Progress Made Through 2013



(the elapsed time between last enrollment and first re-enrollment) was five years for completers, compared to 6.6 years for those who re-enrolled but did not complete by 2018 (including those who may still be enrolled).

In fact, the likelihood of graduating gradually declined as the length of stop-out increased, as shown in **Figure 7**. When students re-enrolled within three years of their last enrollment, they had a 50 percent greater chance of completing than those who re-enrolled after four or five

Figure 7. Completion Rates for Re-Enrollees by Length of Stop-Out Before Re-Enrollment



years. After seven years, the chances of completing were cut in half.

Adult students can return at any point to finish college, and some may have done only near the end of the five-year follow-up period. Out of the 29 million *Some College, No Degree* students from 2013, more than a million have returned since and are still enrolled today. Completion rates are expected to increase as we continue tracking their progress.

7. Associate degrees and certificates are the most common credentials earned. Completers typically did not stop out again after re-enrolling, earning a credential within two years on average.

The majority of new completers, 60 percent, earned an associate degree or sub-baccalaureate certificate. This is contrasted with the national pattern for first-time undergraduate degree earners, who were more likely to earn bachelor’s degrees. In 2018, less than half of the overall completers received sub-baccalaureate credentials (45 percent).⁴

In terms of the “elapsed time to degree” between re-enrollment and completion, it took new graduates 1.9 years on average to finish college. This elapsed time may over-represent those who enrolled early in the five-year period of analysis; thus, the result is best understood as a preliminary result, which will be revised as we track the re-enrollees for a longer period. We found elapsed time to degree tied to the type of credential earned. For bachelor’s

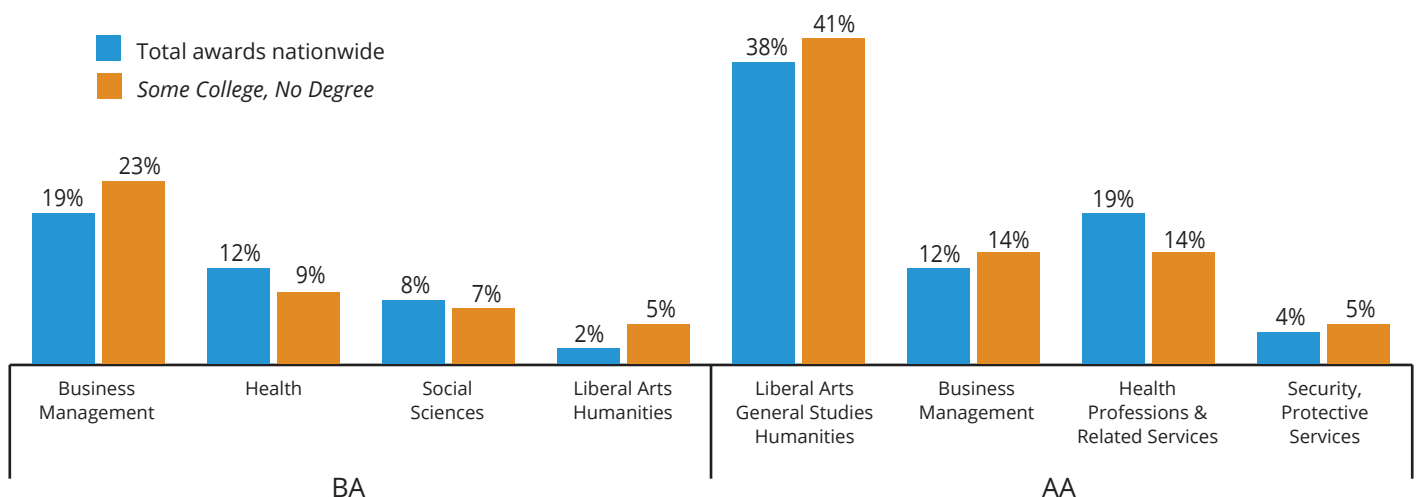
degrees, the median time to degree was 2.1 years, slightly longer than 1.9 years for associate degrees or 1.4 years for certificates.

The number of stop-outs after re-enrolling was also a factor in whether *Some College, No Degree* students completed a degree or certificate within the five-year period. Those who did not stop out after re-enrolling and stayed enrolled until they completed made up 84 percent of new graduates; more specifically, 85 percent of bachelor’s degree earners, 81 percent of associate degree earners, and 86 percent of certificate earners never stopped-out once they re-enrolled after 2013. It took them a median of 1.5 years from re-enrollment to completion. The elapsed time to degree nearly doubled, to 2.8 years, for those with one stop-out, and stretched to 3.5 years for those who stopped-out twice after re-enrollment.

Based on the number of enrolled weeks and enrollment intensity, we estimated that the new completers’ actual enrolled time was on average 2.5 academic years for a bachelor’s degree, 1.7 years for an associate degree, and 1.1 years for a certificate.

The most common major fields among new completers were business and management, liberal arts, general studies, and humanities, and health professions and related services, which are all popular undergraduate degree major programs for college graduates generally (Figure 8). However, slightly more popular majors among *Some College, No Degree* completers were business and management (23 percent compared to 19 percent at the

Figure 8. Common Majors Among *Some College, No Degree* Students Who Earned a Credential



Note: Total awards data are from the National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2019, Table 318.50. Nationwide data are unavailable for certificates.

bachelor's degree level), and liberal arts, general studies, and humanities (41 percent compared to 38 percent at the associate degree level), while health professions and related services was somewhat less common (9 percent compared to 12 percent at the bachelor's degree level; 14 percent compared to 19 percent at the associate degree level). Interestingly, health professions and related services was most popular among certificate holders (31 percent, not shown in Figure 8 due to the lack of comparable national data).

8. When re-enrolled, only 38 percent went back to the institution where they last enrolled. Most completers stayed at the institution where they first re-enrolled until graduation.

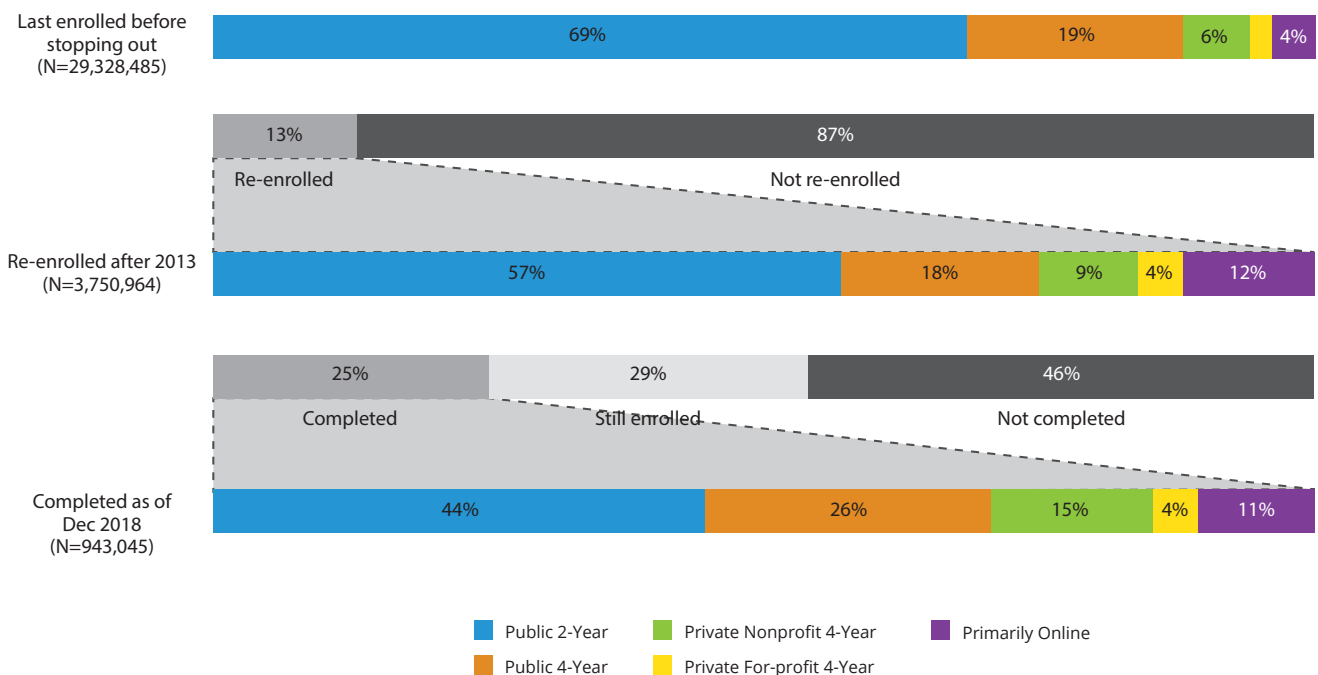
Between 2013 and 2018, a total of 3.8 million *Some College, No Degree* adult students returned to postsecondary education, and 940,000 of them earned their first undergraduate credential. A close look at the 3.8 million re-enrollees and 940,000 completers revealed that there was no single predominant educational pathway for returning adults. Instead, we saw various patterns of adult student mobility across institutions, and sometimes across

different types of institutions (also known as institutional sectors), before earning a credential.

Did former students come back to the institution where they had last enrolled, or did they go to a different institution? Did they move to a private from a public institution or cross state lines? How many opted for online postsecondary institutions? In the following sections, the *Some College, No Degree* educational pathways are presented on three levels: institution-sector level (Figure 9), student-level (Figure 10), and state-level (Figure 12).

Figure 9 shows that most of the 29 million *Some College, No Degree* students had last enrolled at public institutions prior to stopping out (88 percent), most often at community colleges (69 percent). The vast majority, 87 percent, of *Some College, No Degree* students have not returned to postsecondary education since. Regardless of where they last enrolled, the rate of re-enrolling was low and did not vary much across the different types of institutions, ranging from 10 percent to 16 percent (see Table 2). Only 38 percent of re-enrollees went back to the same institution where they had last enrolled. This number was higher among potential completers at 43 percent.

Figure 9. *Some College, No Degree* Students' Re-Enrollment and Completion by Institution Type



Notes: Among new completers, approximately 58,000 students earned degrees and certificates that could not be matched to an enrollment record since December 2013 and are not included in the total number re-enrolled shown in the chart. Some of these degrees may have been awarded through reverse transfer programs. The total N includes a small number of enrollees in private nonprofit 2-year and private for-profit 2-year institutions, but these institutions are excluded from institutional breakdowns shown.

At which types of institutions did they re-enroll? As shown in Figure 9, six out of every ten re-enrollees went to community colleges (57 percent), and 18 percent went to public four-year colleges, for a total of 75 percent who re-enrolled at public institutions. This percent is lower than the public share of 88 percent among institutions where former students had last enrolled before stopping out, largely due to the drop in the community college sector (from 69 percent). Notably, 12 percent of re-enrollees chose primarily online institutions, far in excess of the 4 percent share for primarily online institutions at last enrollment.

Of the *Some College, No Degree* students who re-enrolled, 25 percent completed, and 29 percent are still enrolled without a credential as of December 2018. This leaves nearly half (46 percent) of re-enrollees who stopped out again without earning a credential.

Most *Some College, No Degree* completers earned their first undergraduate credential from a public institution (70 percent). Community colleges are the largest single sector awarding credentials to returning *Some College, No Degree* adults, accounting for 43 percent of all new credentials awarded.

However, the shrinking shares of community colleges as former students progress from stop-out to re-enrollment to completion are in notable contrast to the increases in both the public four-year and private nonprofit four-year sectors. This means that *Some College, No Degree* adults who returned not only went to a different institution but also moved across institutional sectors, most often, from the private sector to the public sector, as we describe below.

Figure 10. Returning *Some College, No Degree* Students' Educational Pathways: From Last Enrollment to Re-Enrollment

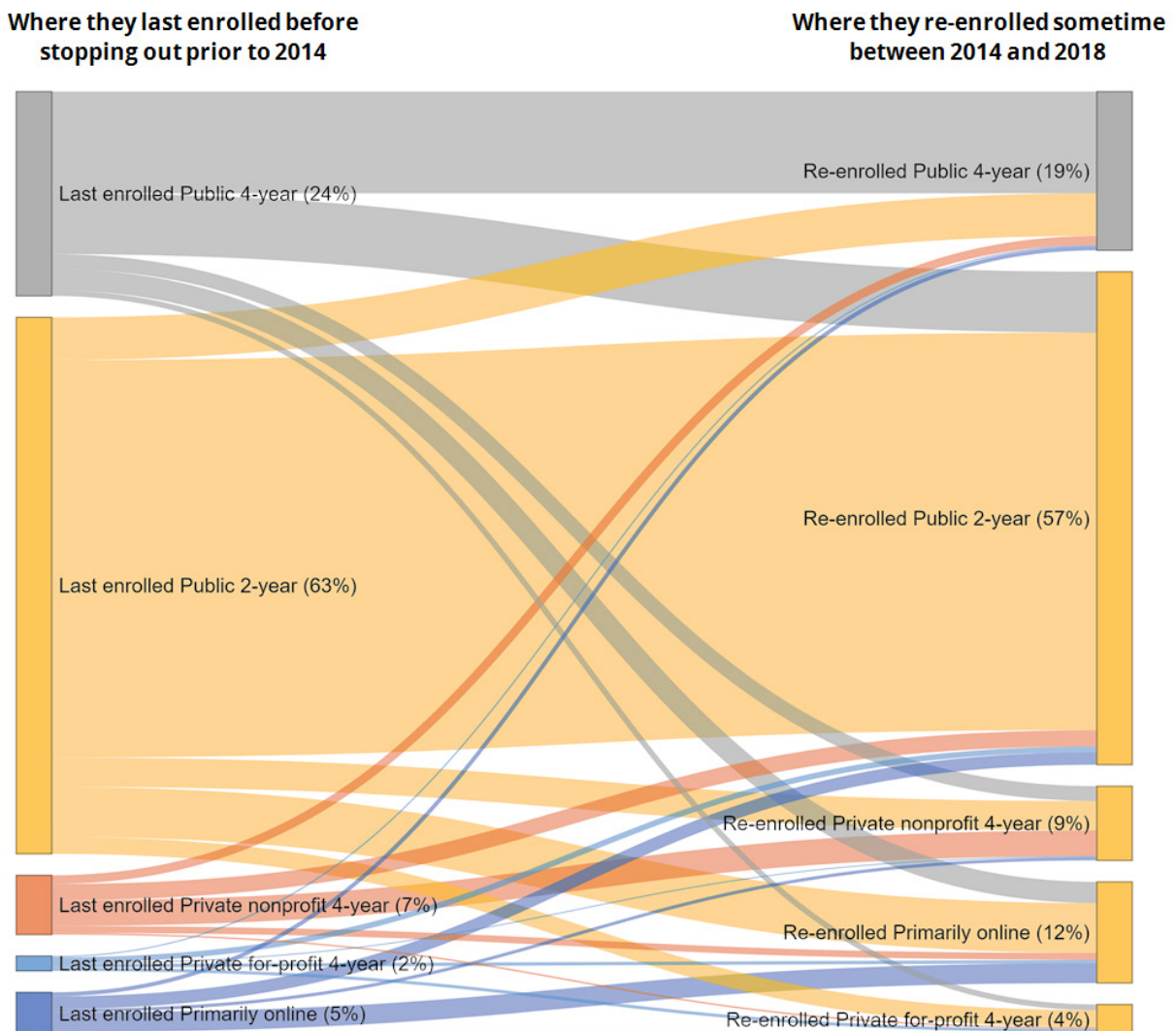


Figure 11. Percent Completed by Institution Type of Re-Enrollment

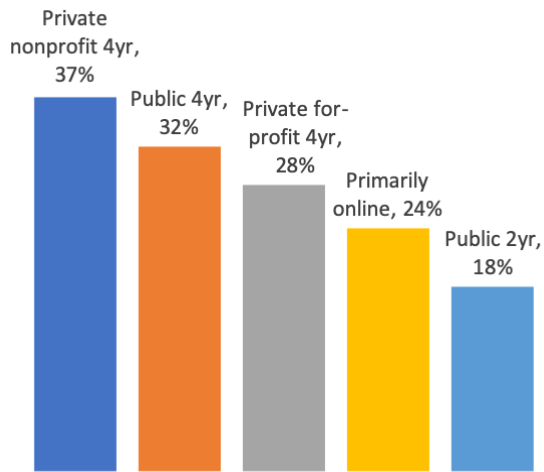


Figure 10 demonstrates the *Some College, No Degree* student mobility within and across institutional sectors from their last enrollment to first re-enrollment. Viewed alongside **Tables 2 and 3**, it unveils new details about individual student-level inflows and outflows that were otherwise invisible in aggregation. **Figure 11** shows the differences in completion by institution type of re-enrollment.

From where they last enrolled to where they re-enrolled.

Compared to where they last enrolled, returning *Some College, No Degree* students were more likely to have re-enrolled at public institutions, and less likely to have done so at private institutions, with the exception of online enrollees. Those who last enrolled in the primarily online institution sector were also likely to have returned to the same sector, which is largely made up of private for-profit four-year institutions. (Institutions with more than 90 percent of students enrolled exclusively online are considered primarily online.)

More specifically, among re-enrollees, 73 percent of those who had last enrolled in the community college sector went back to the same sector (**Table 2.1**). Inversely, 80 percent of those re-enrolled in the community college sector had also last enrolled in the community college sector (Table 2.1). Such lateral mobility is also common in the public four-year sector, where 49 percent of the re-enrollees who had last enrolled in the sector also re-enrolled there, the second-highest rate among the sectors. In contrast, lateral or within-sector mobility is less common for students from private for-profit four-year institutions that are not primarily online, where only 21 percent of the re-enrollees who had last enrolled

also re-enrolled in the same sector while 38 percent (the largest share) of the re-enrollees from this sector went to the community college sector. On the whole, community colleges were the most-preferred or second-most-preferred choice for the returning *Some College, No Degree* adults from every sector of last enrollment.

From where they re-enrolled to where they completed.

Though most re-enrollees have yet to earn a credential within the five-year period we followed, those who have earned a credential likely have done so in the sector where they first re-enrolled. (In fact, in most cases, this was also the same institution where they first re-enrolled.) This is true across all institutional sectors: Over 90 percent of completers in the community college or primarily online institutional sectors, and 84 percent in the private nonprofit four-year or public four-year sectors did not move across sectors on their paths from re-enrollment to completion (**Table 3**).

In higher education, there is little evidence by which to objectively assess the impact of the growing online institutions on adult access and success, as well as on postsecondary attainment generally. Our analysis unveiled as many as 10 percent of the *Some College, No Degree* completers are recipients of online undergraduate credentials and this number is even higher among bachelor's degree earners (17 percent). In contrast, college graduates in general are less likely to earn a credential online, for only 2.6 percent of associate degrees and 4.7 percent of bachelor's degrees were conferred by primarily online institutions nationally in 2017.⁵

9. For most completers, the institutions of last enrollment, re-enrollment, and awarding of credential were all located in the same state.

For most new completers, the institutions of last enrollment, re-enrollment, and awarding of credential were all located in the same state. **Figure 12** shows the percentage of new completers who re-enrolled and earned a credential in the same state where they had last enrolled (remained in-state), versus the percentage who went to a different state to re-enroll and/or to complete (out-of-state), and the type of awarding institutions for those who remained in state. (Each breakdown totals to 100 percent of all new completers from the state. The total completer headcounts can be found in the [Appendix](#).)

Utah, Minnesota, Arkansas, Michigan, Wisconsin, and New York are the states with the highest in-state rate where more than 70 percent of new completers

Table 2. Some College, No Degree Pathways to Re-Enrollment After 2013

Last Enrolled Institution Sector		Re-Enrolled Institution Sector								Total
		Not-Enrolled	Private for-profit 4-year	Private nonprofit 4-year	Public 4-year	Private for-profit 2-year	Private nonprofit 2-year	Public 2-year	Primarily online	
Private for-profit 4-year (1.6%)	N	402,840	12,973	4,720	6,416	1,931	92	26,998	15,557	471,527
	%	85.4	2.8	1.0	1.4	0.4	0.0	5.7	3.3	100
Private nonprofit 4-year (6.4%)	N	1,642,120	7,499	90,076	41,921	1,712	1,552	70,602	30,630	1,886,112
	%	87.1	0.4	4.8	2.2	0.1	0.1	3.7	1.6	100
Public 4-year (18.7%)	N	4,721,712	21,268	66,592	345,142	5,818	1,677	245,789	82,492	5,490,490
	%	86.0	0.4	1.2	6.3	0.1	0.0	4.5	1.5	100
Private for-profit 2-year (0.8%)	N	214,904	2,279	1,554	1,900	1,901	95	11,227	3,979	237,839
	%	90.4	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.0	4.7	1.7	100
Private nonprofit 2-year (0.2%)	N	40,310	198	533	463	115	302	2,159	593	44,673
	%	90.2	0.4	1.2	1.0	0.3	0.7	4.8	1.3	100
Public 2-year (68.4%)	N	17,610,000	77,428	143,156	268,075	29,061	4,132	1,711,688	230,542	20,070,000
	%	87.7	0.4	0.7	1.3	0.1	0.0	8.5	1.2	100
Primarily online (3.8%)	N	948,782	11,705	14,447	17,528	2,188	355	53,853	75,280	1,124,138
	%	84.4	1.0	1.3	1.6	0.2	0.0	4.8	6.7	100
Total	N	25,580,000	133,350	321,078	681,445	42,726	8,205	2,122,316	439,073	29,330,000
	%	87.2	0.5	1.1	2.3	0.2	0.0	7.2	1.5	100

Note: Re-enrollment data refers to first re-enrollment after December 2013.

Table 2.1. Some College, No Degree Pathways to Re-Enrollment After 2013 (Re-Enrollees Only)

Institution Type of Last Enrollment		Re-Enrolled Institution Sector							Total
		Private for-profit 4-year	Private nonprofit 4-year	Public 4-year	Private for-profit 2-year	Private nonprofit 2-year	Public 2-year	Primarily online	
Private for-profit 4-year (1.7%)	N	13,926	4,494	5,958	1,403	96	24,788	14,547	65,212
	%	21.4	6.9	9.1	2.2	0.2	38.0	22.3	100
Private nonprofit 4-year (6.8%)	N	7,407	109,516	37,523	1,705	1,032	69,169	29,295	255,647
	%	2.9	42.8	14.7	0.7	0.4	27.1	11.5	100
Public 4-year (23.5%)	N	24,350	63,199	433,001	6,986	1,909	259,268	90,171	878,884
	%	2.8	7.2	49.3	0.8	0.2	29.5	10.3	100
Private for-profit 2-year (0.7%)	N	2,376	1,761	2,207	2,778	74	13,586	4,752	27,534
	%	8.6	6.4	8.0	10.1	0.3	49.3	17.3	100
Private nonprofit 2-year (0.1%)	N	150	750	538	33	957	1,524	517	4,469
	%	3.4	16.8	12.0	0.7	21.4	34.1	11.6	100
Public 2-year (62%)	N	72,754	125,162	181,784	27,396	3,730	1,692,139	212,529	2,315,494
	%	3.1	5.4	7.9	1.2	0.2	73.1	9.2	100
Primarily online (4.9%)	N	11,656	14,127	17,615	2,152	334	53,889	84,598	184,371
	%	6.3	7.7	9.6	1.2	0.2	29.2	45.9	100
Total	N	132,619	319,009	678,626	42,453	8,132	2,114,363	436,409	3,731,611
	%	3.6	8.6	18.2	1.1	0.2	56.7	11.7	100

Note: Re-enrollment data refers to first re-enrollment after December 2013.

Table 3. Some College, No Degree Pathways from Re-Enrollment to Completion

Re-Enrolled Institution Sector		Sector of Awarding Institution							Total	
		Not Completed	Private for-profit 4-year	Private nonprofit 4-year	Public 4-year	Private for-profit 2-year	Private nonprofit 2-year	Public 2-year		Primarily online
Private for-profit 4-year (3.6%)	N	96,080	31,239	3,723	326	387	9	1,118	683	133,565
	%	71.9	23.4	2.8	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.8	0.5	100
Private nonprofit 4-year (8.6%)	N	203,587	287	106,398	2,867	163	67	7,034	982	321,385
	%	63.4	0.1	33.1	0.9	0.1	0.0	2.2	0.3	100
Public 4-year (18.2%)	N	465,084	614	3,985	196,922	460	87	12,940	1,662	681,754
	%	68.2	0.1	0.6	28.9	0.1	0.0	1.9	0.2	100
Private for-profit 2-year (1.1%)	N	21,226	2,083	51	33	19,099	1	211	53	42,757
	%	49.6	4.9	0.1	0.1	44.7	0.0	0.5	0.1	100
Private nonprofit 2-year (0.2%)	N	5,383	4	829	72	119	1,702	83	16	8,208
	%	65.6	0.1	10.1	0.9	1.5	20.7	1.0	0.2	100
Public 2-year (56.6%)	N	1,739,813	1,964	9,629	23,497	1,888	327	342,606	3,954	2,123,678
	%	81.9	0.1	0.5	1.1	0.1	0.0	16.1	0.2	100
Primarily online (11.7%)	N	335,067	1,006	1,285	1,769	262	29	13,729	86,470	439,617
	%	76.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.0	3.1	19.7	100
Total	N	2,866,240	37,197	125,900	225,486	22,378	2,222	377,721	93,820	3,750,964
	%	76.41	0.99	3.36	6.01	0.6	0.06	10.07	2.5	100

Note: Re-enrollment data refers to first re-enrollment after December 2013.

re-enrolled and completed in the same state where they had last enrolled. On the other hand, in Alaska, Maryland, Nevada, and Vermont, less than half of the completers returned and finished in state, and the rest of the completers moved out of state or opted for a primarily online institution on their paths to a credential (see [state profiles](#) as a guide to understand the state-specific data in a broader context.)

IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE POLICY LEADERSHIP

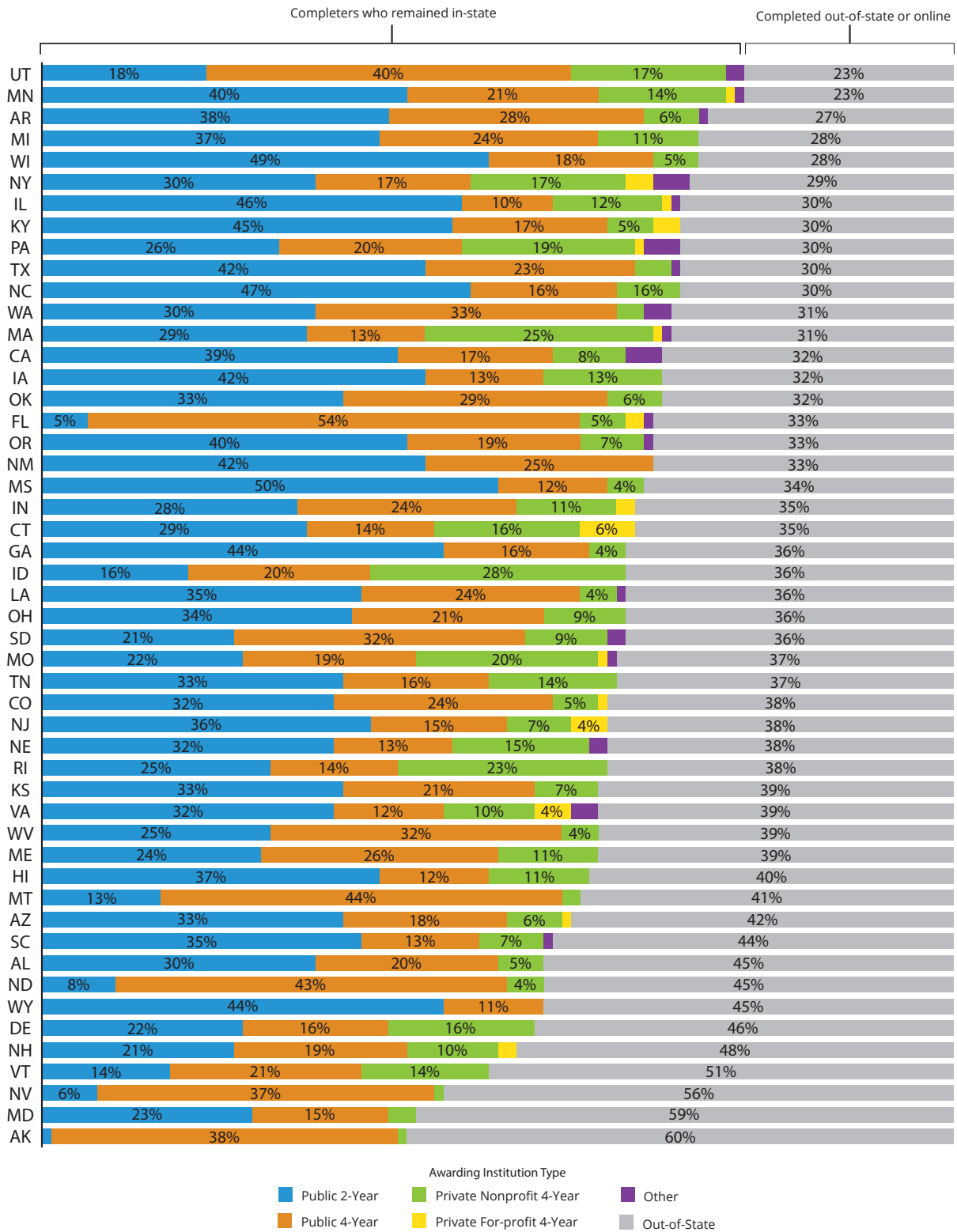
More than 40 states now have a numerical postsecondary attainment goal established for residents in their states.⁶ The findings in this report tell a story of partial success and point the way to further success, which can be especially instructive to states seeking to advance their goals. The nation saw nearly one million former students in just five years who, against all the odds, found their way back into postsecondary education and worked their way through to ultimately earn their first undergraduate credential. An additional 1.1 million former students returned and are still enrolled in pursuit of a credential today: Taken together, a combined success and progress rate of 54 percent among the 3.8 million returning *Some College, No Degree* students.

These students have completed college, or are on track to do so, without much concerted effort to help them on the part of educational leaders and policymakers. Imagine how far America could advance its attainment goals if states and colleges and universities, informed by the evidence from this report, actually tried to re-enroll students from the 36 million current *Some College, No Degree* population, reaching out with tailored programs and policies to meet their needs.

Adult students can return at any point to finish college. The 3.5 million adults identified in this report as potential completers have the highest potential to return and finish college. The implications that can be drawn from the five-year follow-up analysis are clear, and they are especially relevant to the states that have a disproportionately large number of potential completers relative to the overall *Some College, No Degree* population.

Potential completers are most pertinent to raising the state’s attainment goal. Given the projected decline in the number of high school graduates in many states, persistent equity gaps for students from low-income, first-generation and minority background, and regional attainment gaps, tapping into this population should be an

Figure 12. Some College, No Degree Students Who Re-Enrolled and Completed in Their State of Last Enrollment vs. Elsewhere



Note: Data for Figure 12 can be found in Appendix.

essential part of a state’s strategy to accelerate and reach its attainment goal.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The demonstrated success and progress of the *Some College, No Degree* students from 2013 also offer important insights for higher education institutions, many of which are facing real enrollment declines. ***Some College, No Degree* students are most likely to re-enroll and complete in a different institution than their institution of last enrollment, but in the same type of institution and state. Returning adult students are drawn to online programs, but their most common destination is a local community college.** They are older but their gender makeup and racial and ethnic diversity, as well as the majors they seek, are not vastly different from the typical student body on campus today. **This report points the way to identifying students who are the most promising candidates and the types of institutions and programs that are most likely to meet their needs.**

One way that postsecondary institutions can better serve returning adult students is by eliminating barriers around procedures and policies on campus that are typically built around traditional college students and are not adult learner-friendly. Existing barriers related to student support services, childcare, credit transfer, class scheduling, and financial aid were likely the reasons behind 94,000 of the returning adults, comprising 10 percent of all new completers, having done so at the growing online institutions. This percentage is more than two times greater than that of college graduates in general, and the online awards received by *Some College, No Degree* students are largely bachelor’s degrees (66 percent). Although new completers are less likely to have earned bachelor’s degrees, and more likely to have earned associate degrees or certificates (60 percent), it is notable that almost one in every five bachelor’s degrees they earned in the past five years (17 percent) was conferred by primarily online institutions.

Adult learners who are returning to finish credentials have different needs from those who are attending college for the first time. **Institutions can consider joining strategic partnerships within the region or nationally to better meet these needs. There are many state-based or national initiatives already underway to support and help institutions that want to identify and serve *Some College, No Degree* students.**

As an example, some of the promising results from Indiana’s statewide campaign “You Can. Go Back” include reaching out to more than 9,000 adults, awarding 5,000 adult student state grants, and bringing 30 Indiana public and private colleges on board. The institutional partners focused their effort to ease the transition of returning adults by ramping up online and flexible course offerings and offering academic credit for work and military experience.⁷ As shown in this report, Indiana saw an increase of 32 percent in *Some College, No Degree* students who were last enrolled in the state since 2013, from 603,000 to 794,000. Among 794,000 students, 13 percent are potential completers, which is above the national average of 10 percent. In addition, our five-year follow-up analysis on those 603,000 students revealed that 12 percent returned sometime in the last five years. And more than half of them earned a credential, or are still enrolled as of December 2018, for a combined success and progress rate of 53 percent among re-enrollees. All these findings present a promising opportunity for re-enrollment and future postsecondary attainment for the state of Indiana.

To reach a state’s postsecondary attainment goal or to address enrollment challenges facing institutions, each state should start with the most up-to-date information from this report to assess and target, for example, how many *Some College, No Degree* students are residing in state, which students are most likely to return, where they last enrolled, where they are most likely to re-enroll and graduate, and what type of credentials they are likely to pursue.

Endnotes

¹Shapiro et al., *Completing College: Eight Year Completion Outcomes*, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Feb 2019, available [here](#) for downloading.

²The data analyzed in this report are from institutions that collectively enroll 97 percent of total postsecondary students nationally. The first report in the series can be found [here](#) for downloading (Shapiro et al., *Some College, No Degree: A National View of Students with Some College Enrollment, but No Completion*, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, July 2014).

³Due to data limitations, use caution to interpret the race/ethnicity patterns described in the report. (Missing data made up 40 percent.)

⁴Undergraduate Degree Earners 2019, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Feb 2019, available [here](#) for downloading.

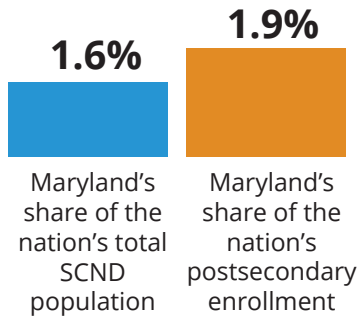
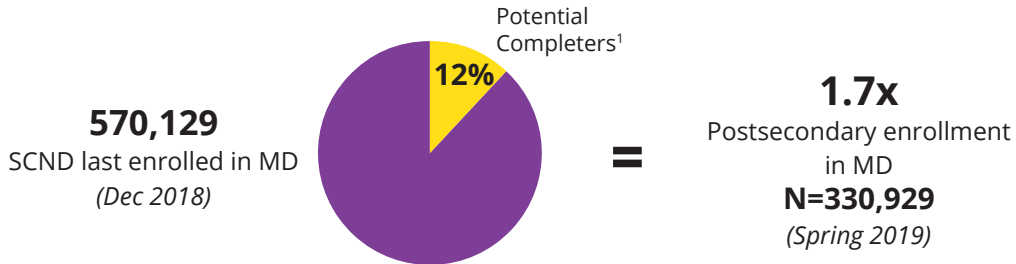
⁵U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 311.33, May 2019.

⁶Lumina Foundation assessed that so far, 42 states have set attainment goals that meet Lumina's criteria for rigor and efficacy (i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, long-term, addresses gaps, and is in statute and/or a strategic plan). <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#nation> (accessed 8/12/2019).

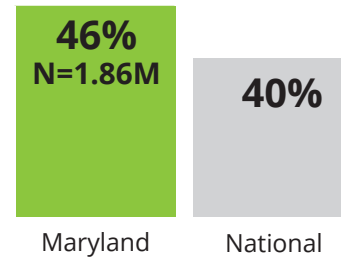
⁷http://www.learnmoreindiana.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2017_Lumina_YCGB_Information_Sheet_01_27_17.pdf (accessed 8/23/2019).

Maryland State Profile

Some College, No Degree Today

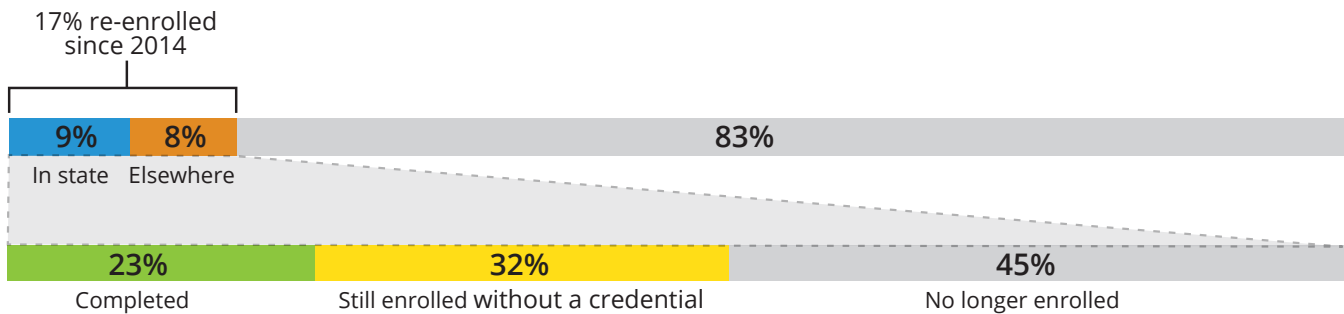


Postsecondary attainment rate for adults age 25 and over²



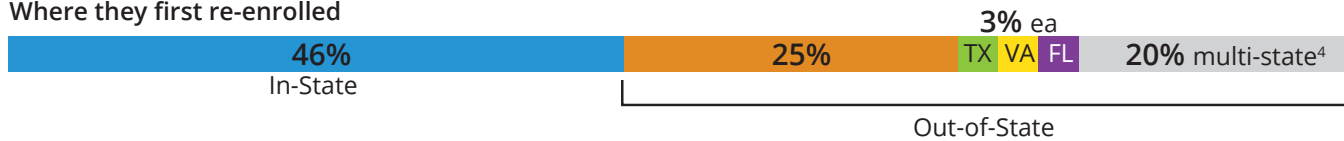
From Stop-Out to Completion - Some College, No Degree Five-Year Follow-Up

Among 457,706 SCND students we identified five years ago³

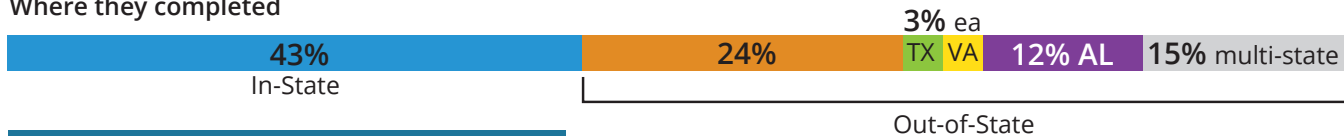


New completers' educational pathways (N=18,161)

Where they first re-enrolled



Where they completed



42% Re-enrolled and completed in-state

12% Re-enrolled and completed online⁵

¹Those who have at least two years' worth of academic progress up until last enrollment.

²Adults age 25 and over with an associate degree or higher, based on the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

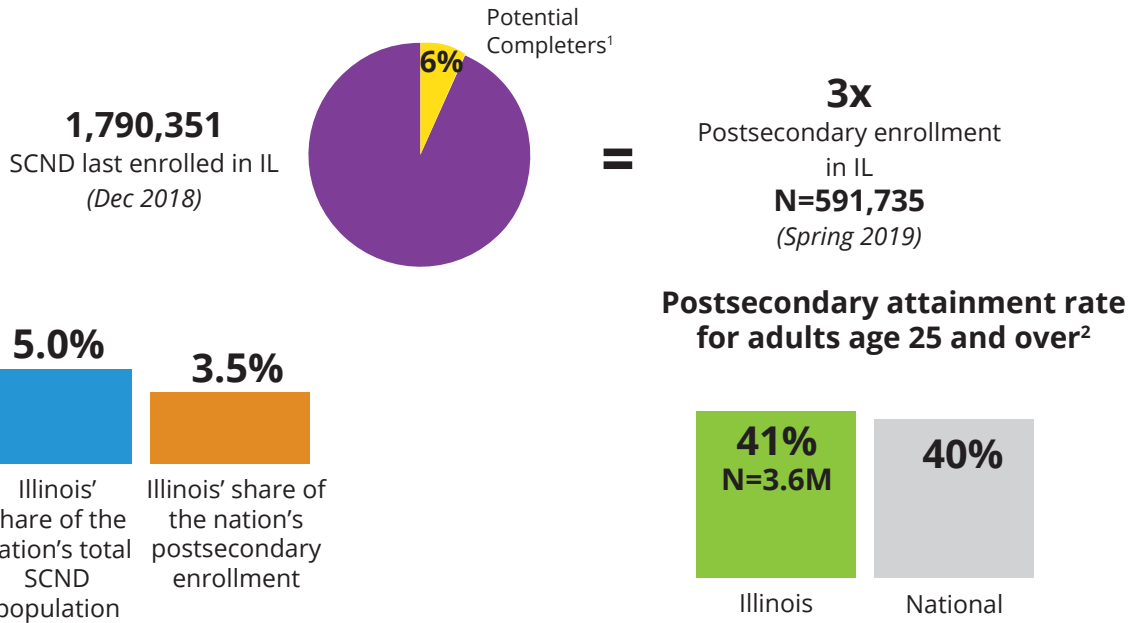
³SCND students last identified in our first report (as of Dec 2013).

⁴Multi-state refers to the institutions operating in more than one state, or primarily online institutions.

⁵Online refers to primarily online institutions where more than 90 percent of the students enrolled exclusively in distance education.

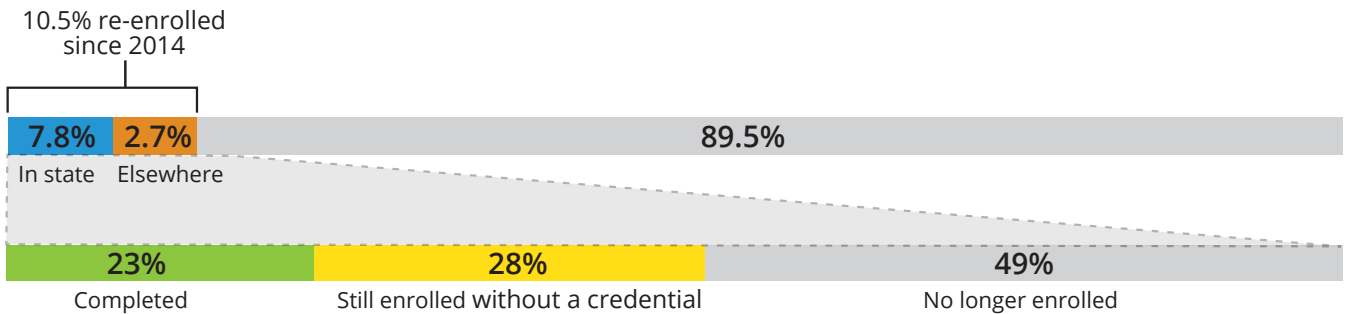
Illinois State Profile

Some College, No Degree Today



From Stop-Out to Completion - Some College, No Degree Five-Year Follow-Up

Among 1,563,729 SCND students we identified five years ago³



New completers' educational pathways (N=36,830)

Where they first re-enrolled



Where they completed



69% Re-enrolled and completed in-state

6% Re-enrolled and completed online⁵

¹Those who have at least two years' worth of academic progress up until last enrollment.

²Adults age 25 and over with an associate degree or higher, based on the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

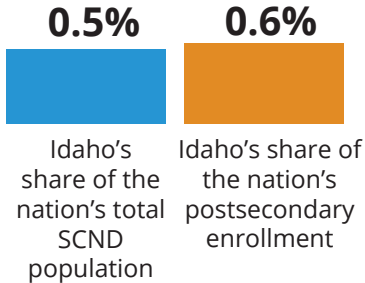
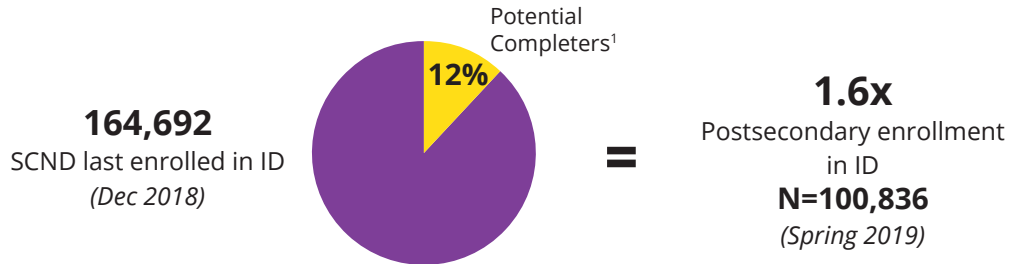
³SCND students last identified in our first report (as of Dec 2013).

⁴Multi-state refers to the institutions operating in more than one state, or primarily online institutions.

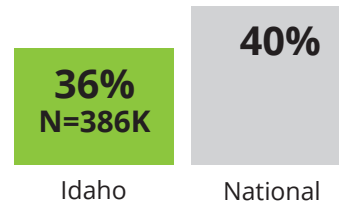
⁵Online refers to primarily online institutions where more than 90 percent of the students enrolled exclusively in distance education.

Idaho State Profile

Some College, No Degree Today

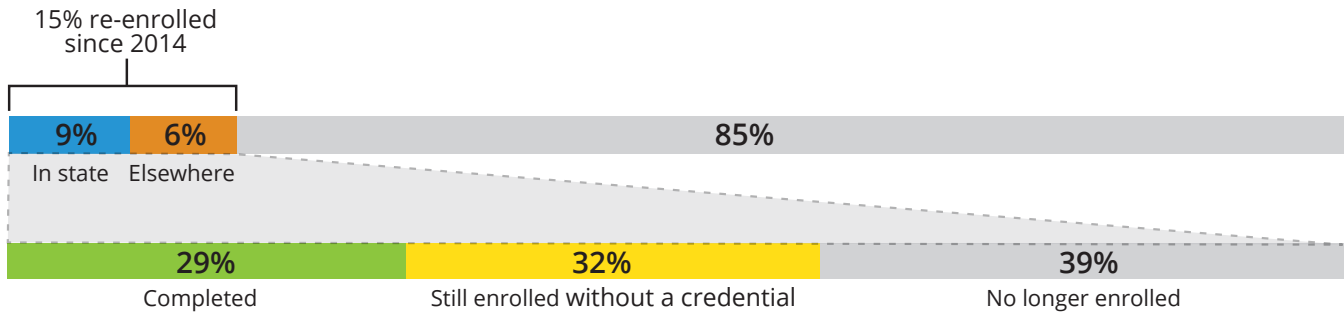


Postsecondary attainment rate for adults age 25 and over²



From Stop-Out to Completion - Some College, No Degree Five-Year Follow-Up

Among 124,083 SCND students we identified five years ago³

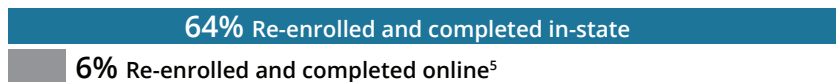


New completers' educational pathways (N=5,408)

Where they first re-enrolled



Where they completed



¹Those who have at least two years' worth of academic progress up until last enrollment.
²Adults age 25 and over with an associate degree or higher, based on the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.
³SCND students last identified in our first report (as of Dec 2013).
⁴Multi-state refers to the institutions operating in more than one state, or primarily online institutions.
⁵Online refers to primarily online institutions where more than 90 percent of the students enrolled exclusively in distance education.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

National Coverage of the Data

The National Student Clearinghouse currently collects data from more than 3,600 postsecondary institutions, which represent 97 percent of all U.S. postsecondary enrollments in degree-granting institutions, as of 2018. Data collection began in 1993, and coverage has been above 90% nationally since 2007. However, some states and sectors have lower coverage rates, particularly in the earlier years. Historically, the representation of private for-profit institutions has been lower than that of other institution types. Details of annual data coverage rates by institution type and state are available [here](#). Variations in coverage, particularly during the early years of the study period, may result in an underestimate of the true population of *Some College, No Degree* students, in both national and state-level results. Further, the data may not account for the students included in the study cohort who had earned a degree or a certificate or were still enrolled at a non-Clearinghouse participating institution during the study period.

Cohort Identification, Data Cut, and Definitions

This report focused on two national cohorts of former students, which differed by the timing of cohort identification for the purpose of the analysis, and by the resulting length of the lookback window:

1. *Some College, No Degree* students as of December 2018, the focus of the Current Snapshot: Students who had at least one enrollment record at U.S. colleges and universities after January 1, 1993 (the beginning of the NSC database), with no enrollment records between August 14, 2017, and December 31, 2018, and no degree or certificate awarded anywhere as of December 31, 2018. The resulting number of students in this 25-year lookback cohort was 35.9 million.
2. *Some College, No Degree* students as of December 2013, the focus of the Five-Year Follow-Up: The *Some College, No Degree* cohort identified in the first SCND report was analyzed for their subsequent re-enrollment and completion during the five-year window between Jan 2014 and December 2018. This 20-year lookback cohort included all students who had at least one enrollment record at U.S. colleges and universities after January 1, 1993, with no enrollment records between August 13, 2012, and December 31, 2013, and no degree or certificate awarded anywhere as of December 31, 2013. See [here](#) for detailed methodological notes. The first report, which was released in 2014, identified a total of 31 million *Some College, No Degree* students. There have been

improvements to the Clearinghouse data since 2013, resulting in a refined estimate today of 29.4 million students in the 2013 SCND cohort.

Academic Progress Calculation

A standardized definition of a “full-time week” (FTW) equivalent was used to create units by which we could calculate students’ accrued enrollment across institutional contexts. Specifically, in the report, we identify students who have completed at least two years’ worth of enrollment (so-called “potential completers”) as well as students’ actual enrolled time between re-enrollment and completion. This was determined by crossing the number of enrolled weeks with enrollment intensity, which is described below:

- One week enrolled at full-time enrollment was considered one full-time week (FTW) equivalent
- One week enrolled at three-quarters was calculated as 0.75 FTW equivalent
- One week enrolled at half-time was calculated as 0.5 FTW equivalent
- One week enrolled at less than half-time or quarter-time translated as 0.25 FTW equivalent

For the purposes of these analyses, two years’ worth of progress was defined as the completion of 60 FTW enrollment, equivalent to four 15-week semesters at full-time. All enrollment records, including short terms, summer terms and concurrent enrollments, and dual enrollments were included when calculating progress by FTW equivalent. Because the estimation of academic progress is based upon enrollment intensity, a proxy for the number of credits attempted, rather than completed, the calculation of academic progress is an overestimate.

Dual Enrollments

NSC data includes dual enrollments in college for students who are still in high school. Dual enrollments are identified by using student age at the time of enrollment (under 18) as a proxy. Students with dual enrollments were removed from the cohort only if the dual enrollment was their only enrollment record across the study period. In other words, students with dual enrollments and no degree were included in the cohort only if they had continued post-secondary enrollment after they had turned 18. For these former dual enrollment students, their dual enrollment records were counted towards the calculation of progress based on FTW.

Dual enrollment records were excluded from consideration in institutional sector analyses. Students’ starting sector was determined based on the institution of the first non-

dual enrollment term. For example, if a dual enrollment term occurred at a two-year institution, but the first non-dual enrollment term occurred at a four-year institution, then the student would have been counted as starting at a four-year institution.

Defining Stop-Outs

For this report, we reported on the number of stop-outs included in each student's enrollment pathway. A discrete "stop-out" was defined as a period longer than 123 days between the end-date of an enrollment record and the begin-date of the next enrollment record.

Determining Still Enrolled

The *Some College, No Degree* students who re-enrolled after December 31, 2013, and have not earned a credential since, but have had at least one enrollment record in the 12 months ending December 31, 2018, were considered "still enrolled."

Identifying Primarily Online Institutions

Primarily online institutions were identified based on the 2017 fall enrollment survey data from IPEDS, specifically, from the distance education enrollment survey items. According to IPEDS, any institution that reports more than 90 percent of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses is considered a primarily online institution. Using this method, there were a total of 103 institutions identified as primarily online institutions as of fall 2017. There are some institutions or systems of institutions that report their online campuses as separate entities to IPEDS while combining them with their offline campuses into a single reporting entity and reporting all of their campuses under a single OPE identification when submitting data to NSC. In these cases, the students enrolled at the primarily online campus identified in IPEDS are not accurately identified as enrolled at a primarily online institution in this report, resulting in an underestimation of the impact that primarily online institutions may have on the postsecondary attainment among *Some College, No Degree* students.

Changes from the Previous Report

This is the second report in the *Some College, No Degree* series. The [first edition](#) was released in 2014. Since the initial report, several enhancements to the methodology have been made resulting from feedback by experts in the field, and improvements in NSC data. The original *Some College, No Degree* population identified five years ago was 31.5 million students. Using the most current data available today, the original cohort was revised to 29.4 million. This update is a result of increased institutional participation in NSC, improved collection of degree and certificate data, and better matching algorithms.

An additional change was the method by which we define a semester-worth of academic progress. In the previous report, a semester was defined as 14 weeks. However, feedback from external experts suggested that a semester is more accurately defined as 15 weeks. As a result, years of academic progress in the current report uses 15 weeks to define a semester as opposed to 14 weeks.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge with much appreciation the contributions of the research team at Indiana University at Bloomington, particularly, Phoebe Wakhungu, Victor Borden, Ayesha Bhimdiwala, Jiangqiong Li, and Sean Eric Wilson, for their technical and analytical support behind this research project. Within the NSC Research Center, a special thanks goes to Afet Dunder who helped with initial research planning, Yuanqing Zheng who guided us in identifying primarily online institutions, and Diana Gillum who made the NSC dataset analysis ready. We also appreciate the crucial role of the NSC Communications team in the development of this publication and public release planning. Thanks also to our colleague Vanessa Brown as a reviewer of the early draft. This publication would not have been possible without the exceptional support of these individuals. They saved us from many errors and omissions but those that inevitably remain are entirely our own responsibility.

Suggested Citation

Shapiro, D., Ryu, M., Huie, F., & Liu, Q. (October 2019), *Some College, No Degree, A 2019 Snapshot for the Nation and 50 States*, Signature Report No. 17, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.