

Some College, No Credential

A 2024 Snapshot for the Nation and the States



SOME COLLEGE, NO CREDENTIAL

A 2024 SNAPSHOT FOR THE NATION AND THE STATES

The fall 2023 and spring 2024 [undergraduate enrollment increases](#), marking the first growth since the COVID-19 pandemic, show signs of a post-pandemic turnaround for higher education. However, a significant share of current undergraduates will eventually disengage from college before earning a degree or other credential. They will join tens of millions of other adult Americans who are Some College, No Credential (SCNC).

The SCNC population has been consistently rising over time. In 2019, it comprised 36 million adults. Although some SCNC students have re-enrolled in college or earned a credential since then, the majority remain out of college with no degree or other postsecondary credential. In fact, today's SCNC population is 41.9 million students, 36.8 million of whom are between the ages of 18 and 64. This represents 18.1 percent of the total United States population between 18 and 64 years old. Re-engaging those who stop out remains a persistent challenge and a priority for [the forty states that have set ambitious postsecondary attainment goals](#). It will also help to increase the national credential attainment rate, which currently stands at [54.3 percent](#) for those 25 to 64 years old according to Lumina Foundation's Stronger Nation initiative.

This report aims to provide timely insights into the SCNC population, offering state leaders and policymakers accurate data on its current status, along with tracking progress and outcome measures for SCNC students. The first section of this report describes who makes up the SCNC population and how it has changed since our last report. In this section, we pay particular attention to Recent Stopouts, who joined the SCNC population after being stopped out between January 2021 and July 2022. In the second section, we report on SCNC re-enrollment in the 2022-23 academic year as well as first-year credential earning for re-enrollees. We also provide new updates on continued enrollment and second-year credential earning for SCNC re-enrollees in the 2021-22 academic year, whom we first reported on last year.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The SCNC population currently under 65 stood at more than 36.8 million at the end of July 2022, an increase of 2.9 percent from the previous year.
- Pandemic-related enrollment declines at community colleges led to fewer Recent Stopouts between January 2021 and July 2022 compared with the same period a year prior.
- Declines in Recent Stopouts did little to impact the SCNC population, which increased in nearly all states.
- The SCNC population continues to be less White and more male than the overall undergraduate population. Recent Stopouts, however, continue to be younger and more female than the overall SCNC population.
- SCNC student re-enrollment increased in the 2022-23 academic year (+9.1%).
- Primarily online institutions (POIs) are an increasingly popular destination sector for students who switch schools at re-enrollment, although students re-enrolling at POIs have the lowest credential earning rate of all sectors after two years.
- Although men and Hispanic, Black, and Native American students are disproportionately represented among the overall SCNC population, women and White and Asian re-enrollees are more likely to complete a credential in the first year or persevere into a second year of enrollment.
- Potential completer re-enrollees earn credentials at nearly twice the rate of their SCNC peers and earn more associate and bachelor's degrees within two years.

Report Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <u>Introduction</u> | 2 |
| <u>Report Overview</u> | 4 |
| <u>1. The SCNC Population at the Start of the 2022-23 Academic Year</u> | 6 |
| <u>SCNC Population: Overview and Growth Since Last Report</u> | 6 |
| <u>SCNC Population: Demographic Stability</u> | 7 |
| <u>2. Progress and Success for SCNC Students During the 2022-23 Academic Year</u> | 9 |
| <u>Re-Enrollment: Trends and Student Pathways</u> | 9 |
| <u>Outcomes for Re-Enrollees: Perseverance, Progress, and Credential Earning</u> | 11 |
| <u>Outcomes for Re-Enrollees: Strong Advantages for Potential Completers, Limited Advantages for Recent Stopouts</u> | 11 |
| <u>Outcomes for Re-Enrollees: Demographic Disparities</u> | 12 |
| <u>Credential Earning: Award Types and Pathways Among Re-Enrollees</u> | 13 |
| <u>Credential Earning: Credentials After Stopout Without Re-Enrolling</u> | 14 |
| <u>3. Summary and Implications</u> | 15 |
| <u>Methodological Notes</u> | 16 |

Figures & Tables

[Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the SCNC Population](#)

[Figure 2. Annual Change in Recent Stopout Population by Sector of Last Enrollment](#)

[Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity Composition of the SCNC Population \(entering college in 2013 or later\) and the Undergraduate Population in the 2022-23 Academic Year](#)

[Figure 4. Gender Composition of the SCNC Population \(entering college in 2013 or later\) and the Undergraduate Population, 2022-23 Academic Year](#)

[Figure 5. Credential Type of Re-Enrollment Program by Race/Ethnicity, Re-Enrollees in the 2022-23 Academic Year](#)

[Figure 6. Combined Two-Year Credential Earning Rate, by Institution Sector of Re-Enrollment](#)

[Figure 7. Combined Two-Year Credential Earning Rate for Potential Completers and Recent Stopouts, Compared to Other SCNC Students, Re-Enrollees in the 2021-22 Academic Year](#)

[Figure 8. Share of Re-Enrollees Earning a Credential in the First Year or Persevering into a Second Academic Year \(Total Progress\) by Race/Ethnicity, Re-Enrollees in the 2021-22 Academic Year](#)

[Figure 9. Share of Credential Earners Awarded the Credential of their Program at Re-Enrollment, Academic Year 2021-22 Re-Enrollees](#)

REPORT OVERVIEW

Throughout the report, we break down the SCNC population into three subgroups. Unless otherwise noted we focus on the SCNC population between the ages of 18 and 64 years old:

1. *Potential Completers*: Students with at least two years of full-time equivalent enrollment in the last decade. As of this year, Potential Completers comprise 7.7 percent (2,840,000 individuals) of the SCNC population. Individuals in this group are called Potential Completers because the combination of credits accumulated and the relative recency of their prior enrollment makes them the most likely to be able to complete a degree or other credential.
2. *Recent Stopouts*: Students who were newly identified as SCNC this year, having been stopped out between January 2021 and July 2022. These Recent Stopouts make up 6.2 percent of the SCNC population (2,267,000 individuals) in this report.
3. *Existing SCNC*: Students who had previously stopped out of college and neither re-enrolled nor earned a degree or other credential between July 2021 and July 2022.

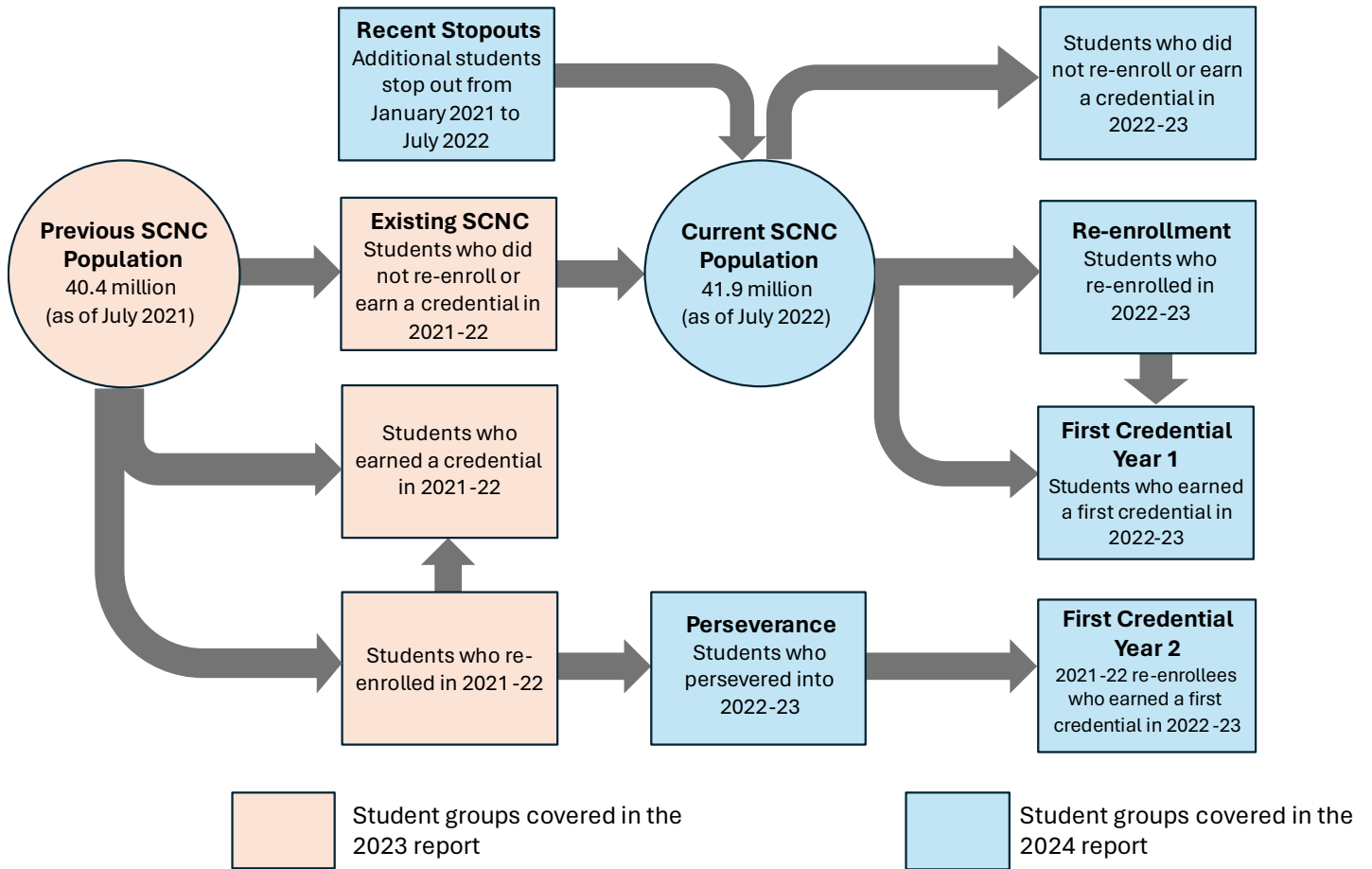
We use the following metrics to assess the progress and performance of these student groups:

1. *Re-Enrollment*: Defined as enrolling (part-time or full-time) at least once during the academic year following a stopout of at least three consecutive terms.
2. *First Credential*: Defined as earning a credential in either the first or second academic year following a stopout of at least three consecutive terms. We report of the first credential metric in three ways:
 - For those who re-enrolled in the 2022-23 academic year, we look at first credentials earned in the same academic year (“first-year credential earning”).
 - For those who re-enrolled in the 2021-22 academic year, we report on first credentials earned in the 2022-23 academic year, their second year after re-enrolling (“second-year credential earning”). We also discuss the combined two-year credential earning rate for these re-enrollees. We initially reported on their first-year credential earning in the previous report in this series.
 - Finally, for the first time, we look at credential earning after stopout without having to first re-enroll. Students in this group earn credentials more than three full terms after their last enrollment and may include students who have needed to resolve administrative barriers or have received reverse transfer awards.
3. *Perseverance*: Defined as continuing enrollment into a second academic year. Here, we report on perseverance for the cohort of SCNC students who re-enrolled in the 2021-22 academic year and continued enrollment into the 2022-23 academic year. Because members of this cohort who earned a credential in 2021-22 are no longer SCNC, our perseverance measure excludes these students.
4. *Total Progression*: Defined as earning a credential in the first year of re-enrollment or persevering into a second year of enrollment. In this report, we look at this metric for re-enrollees in the 2021-22 academic year. This measure does not include students who earned a credential without re-enrolling.

The flow chart below (Figure 1) demonstrates the process by which the SCNC population changes and how we cover these changes and student outcomes through this report series. The chart shows that most of the students in the SCNC population for this report were also in the SCNC population in the previous report, meaning that they did not re-enroll or earn a credential in the intervening year. New students become SCNC when they experience a stopout lasting at least three terms. Once part of the SCNC population, there are three potential pathways:

- (1) Remaining unenrolled in college and therefore continuing to be SCNC
- (2) Re-enrolling in college
- (3) Earning a degree or other credential

Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the SCNC Population



1. The SCNC Population at the Start of the 2022-23 Academic Year

This section provides insights into who made up the SCNC population just prior to the start of the 2022-2023 academic year, with particular attention paid to change and stability compared to the same time a year earlier. We also focus on the group of Recent Stopouts that joined the SCNC population since the previous report in this series.

SCNC POPULATION: OVERVIEW AND GROWTH SINCE LAST REPORT

At the end of July 2022, the national SCNC population stood at 41.9 million, up 3.6 percent from 40.4 million a year earlier. The SCNC population currently under 65 stood at more than 36.8 million, an increase of 2.9 percent from the previous year.

There are now 41.9 million people considered “some college, no credential” as of July 31, 2022. This increase represents a 3.6 percent increase from the 40.4 million SCNC students reported last year. The most recent figure includes 5 million SCNC students currently 65 years old or older, a number which is growing at rates much faster (+8.9%) than the SCNC population overall as the population continues to age. This report will focus on the population under age 65, following most state postsecondary attainment goals, which focus on working age adults. This is also the population most likely to re-engage with postsecondary education.¹

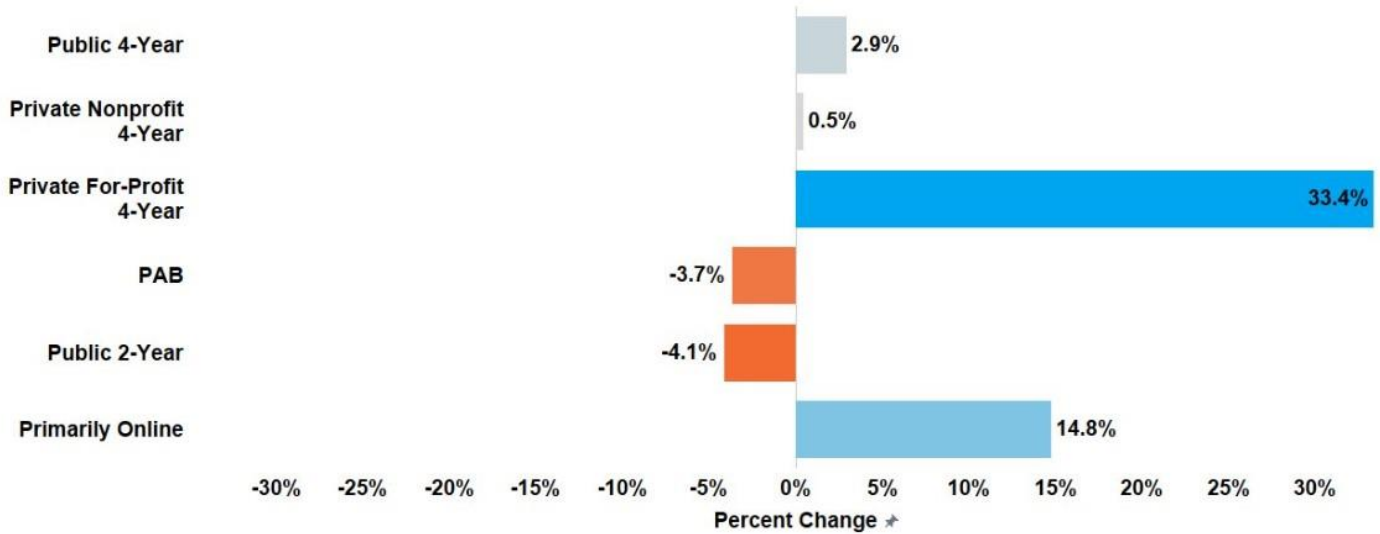
The SCNC population currently under 65 stood at 36.8 million at the start of the 2022-23 academic year, up 2.9 percent compared to the previous year (35.8 million). While all age groups saw growth, the rate of growth was considerably smaller for students currently aged 25-34 (+15,100, +0.1%) compared to the rest of the population, which saw increases ranging from 2.9 percent (for those aged 35-44) to 5.1 percent (for those aged 45-64).

Pandemic-related enrollment declines at community colleges led to fewer stopouts between January 2021 and July 2022 compared with the same period a year prior.

Between January 2021 and July 2022, there were fewer stopouts compared to the same period a year prior (-0.7%, -16,100). This was driven primarily by public 2-year and primarily associate degree granting baccalaureate (PAB) institutions, which saw historic enrollment declines during the pandemic. Additionally, students starting at these institutions in fall 2020 saw [higher persistence rates](#) into the following fall than students starting in fall 2019. These two sectors—which accounted for more than two-thirds of SCNC students—were the only ones to see stopouts decline (public 2-year: -4.1%, -52,100; PABs: -3.7%, -9,800). In contrast, Recent Stopouts from primarily online institutions (POIs), where enrollment grew during the pandemic, increased 14.8 percent (+21,700; see Figure 2), representing 7.4 percent of Recent Stopouts. This is a higher share than the 5 percent of the total SCNC population that last enrolled at a POI. Despite the overall declines in Recent Stopouts, SCNC re-enrollment in the 2021-22 academic year declined at even faster rates (-8.4%, -79,300). As a result, the total SCNC population under 65 increased 2.9 percent between the start of the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years.

¹ An additional factor leading to high growth rates among the oldest SCNC adults is our inability to identify individuals who exit the population when they die. Our focus on the population 64 and younger is in part an effort to address this limitation, as deaths will occur at higher rates among the population 65 and older.

Figure 2. Annual Change in Recent Stopout Population by Sector of Last Enrollment



The SCNC population increased in nearly all states.

A similar pattern played out at the state level. Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia had larger SCNC populations going into the 2022-23 academic year than they did a year prior. The sole exception was Alaska, which saw stability (-0.1%, -100) in the size of the SCNC population.

However, given that Alaska too saw more stopouts between January 2021 and July 2022 than there were re-enrollments in the 2021-22 academic year, this stability is due to older SCNC students exiting the population and offsetting the number of Recent Stopouts.

SCNC POPULATION: DEMOGRAPHIC STABILITY

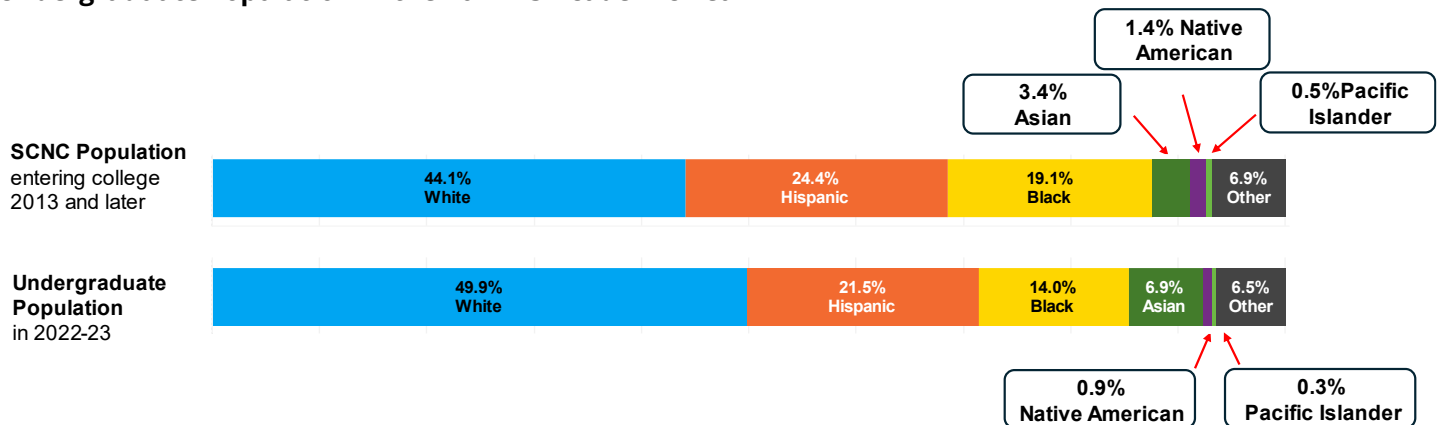
Many features of the SCNC population have remained stable. Notably, among those under 65, it continues to be less White and more male than the current undergraduate population.

The racial composition of the SCNC population remains relatively consistent, as do differences in the racial composition of the population compared to the current enrolled undergraduate population. Among SCNC adults, those from ethnoracial minority backgrounds were overrepresented compared to the population of undergraduates. In particular, Hispanic students were 24.4 percent of the SCNC population as of July 2022 compared to 21.5 percent of all enrolled undergrads in the 2022-23 academic year (see Figure 3). Black students accounted for 14.0 percent of all undergraduates but were 19.1 percent of the SCNC population.²

² Throughout our reporting, data on the racial composition of the SCNC population is limited to those students who entered college in 2013 or later. In comparing to the currently enrolled undergraduate population in this subsection only, we also limit the gender composition of the SCNC population to those students who entered college in 2013 or later. In both cases this is due to higher coverage of these data elements in more recent years. The comparisons with the currently enrolled undergraduate population also omit students with missing race and gender data.

although these students are reported on in the accompanying Data Dashboard and downloadable Data Appendix. Additional details on missing rates for these data elements are available in the Methodological Notes.

Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity Composition of the SCNC Population (entering college in 2013 or later) and the Undergraduate Population in the 2022-23 Academic Year



In contrast to the overall undergraduate population, a higher share of SCNC students currently under 65 are men (51.8%, see Figure 4). These numbers have not changed from the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year. In contrast, in the 2022-23 academic year, among all enrolled undergraduates for whom we have valid gender data, 42.3 percent were men and 57.7 percent were women.

Figure 4. Gender Composition of the SCNC Population (entering college in 2013 or later) and the Undergraduate Population in the 2022-23 Academic Year



Recent Stopouts are younger and more likely to be female than the Existing SCNC population. They are also more likely to be Potential Completers, a group which comes disproportionately from 4-year institutions compared to other SCNC students.

Recent Stopouts were slightly younger this year compared to the previous year. Students 18 to 34 years old at the time of stopout accounted for 83.8 percent of Recent Stopouts compared to 82.9 percent in the 2021-22 academic year. Even though men outnumber women in the SCNC population overall, women accounted for a higher share of Recent Stopouts than men (49.2% vs. 45.9%, respectively). As with last year, more than a quarter (27.4%) of Recent Stopouts are also Potential Completers, with at least two years of full-time equivalent enrollment in the last decade (compared to 7.7% of the Existing SCNC population). As with Recent Stopouts, the Potential Completer population is more likely to be female than the SCNC population in general. Potential Completers also come disproportionately from 4-year institutions (41.2% vs. 23.7% for non-Potential Completers).

The number of Potential Completers declined this year (-70,900, -2.4%). This is due to two factors. First, the number of Potential Completers who are also Recent Stopouts was flat compared to the prior year. Second, more Potential Completers "aged out" as their previous enrollments moved beyond the 10-year window.

Recent Stopouts and Potential Completers continue to represent a small share of the overall SCNC population, with only about 12.2 percent in at least one of these categories. However, as laid out in the next section, students in these groups continue to show certain advantages in re-engaging with higher education compared to other SCNC students.

2. Progress and Success for SCNC Students During the 2022-23 Academic Year

The following section outlines SCNC student progress and performance. First, we report on re-enrollment, examining changes from the previous academic year and assessing student pathways from their previous institution to their current one. We then analyze differences in progress among re-enrollees of different backgrounds and with different enrollment histories. Finally, we report on credential earners, looking at who earns degrees versus non-degree credentials and in what timeframe. We also provide insights on a subset of students who earn a credential after stopout without re-enrolling.

RE-ENROLLMENT: TRENDS AND STUDENT PATHWAYS

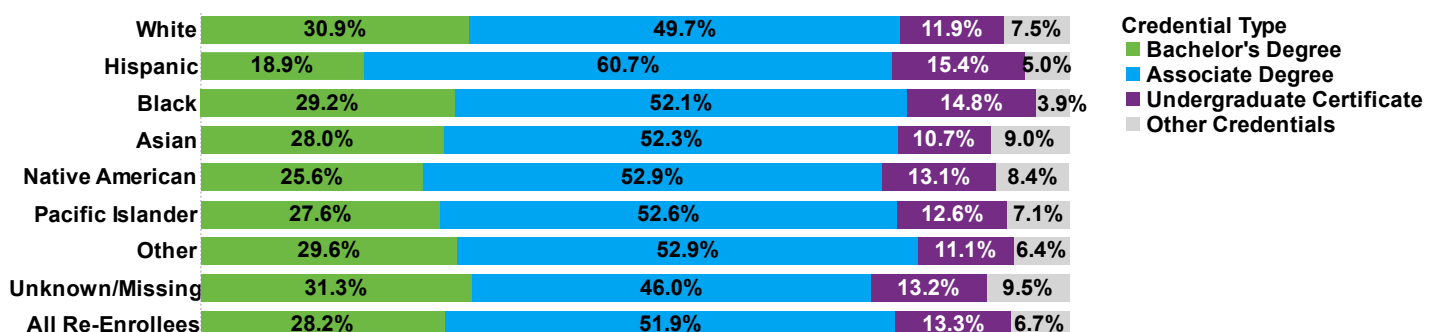
Increases in SCNC re-enrollment in the 2022-23 academic year reversed declines in the previous year.

During the 2022-23 academic year, 943,200 students re-enrolled in postsecondary education, up 9.1 percent from the previous academic year. The overall re-enrollment rate for SCNC students was 2.6 percent, up 0.2 percentage points (pp) from the previous year. The increase in re-enrollees is an optimistic sign that more students are re-engaging with higher education, as the number of re-enrollees returned to the same level as the 2020-21 academic year. Re-enrollment increased among all gender, race/ethnicity, and age groups. Notably, the numbers of Black, Hispanic, and Asian re-enrollees grew at double-digit rates from the 2021-22 academic year.

Associate degree programs continue to be the primary destinations for SCNC re-enrollees.

Among those who re-enrolled, associate degrees remain the most popular credential pathway, though their share is lower compared to the previous academic year (51.9% vs. 52.6%, -0.7pp), as more students re-enrolled in either bachelor's (28.2%, +1.2pp) or undergraduate certificate programs (13.3%, +0.5pp). The trends by race also remained relatively consistent compared to the previous year, with a higher share of Hispanic SCNC students re-enrolling in associate degree programs (60.7%) compared to all other reported racial and ethnic groups (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Credential Type of Re-Enrollment Program by Race/Ethnicity, Re-Enrollees in the 2022-23 Academic Year



Most SCNC students re-enroll at a different institution than the one they last attended.

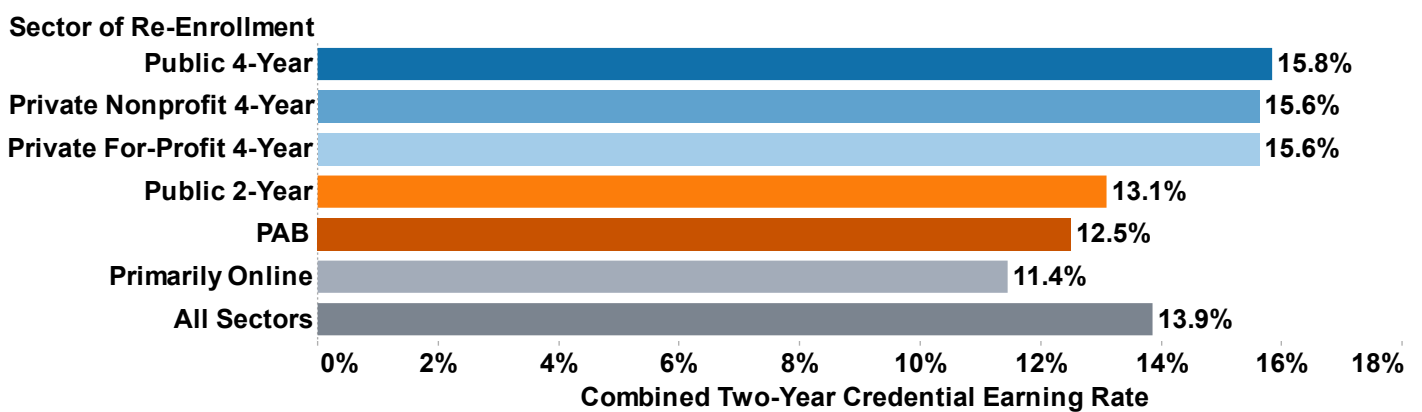
In the 2022-23 academic year, nearly 63 percent of re-enrollees attended a different institution than the one they were previously enrolled at. This number has hovered between 61 and 63 percent for the past three academic years. Of those switching institutions, roughly two-thirds (about 67% in each of the last three years) also changed sectors. The exception to this trend is Recent Stopouts, who are more likely to return to the institution at which they were last enrolled (52.6%).

Primarily online institutions (POIs) are an increasingly popular destination sector for students who switched schools. However, students re-enrolling at POIs earn a first credential at the lowest rates.

In the 2022-23 academic year, of students who returned to a different school, 22.9 percent (135,600) chose a primarily online institution. This includes 19,800 students whose last enrollment was also at a POI. Enrollment was stronger along all pathways leading to a POI from a different sector at last enrollment than from a POI to a different sector. For instance, 64,800 students previously enrolled at public 2-year institutions re-enrolled at a POI. In contrast, only 15,600 students previously enrolled at a POI re-enrolled at a public 2-year. Overall, there was a strong increase in total re-enrollment at POIs (including students who returned to the same or a different school) in the 2022-23 academic year (+27,800, +22.1%). As a result, 16.3 percent of all re-enrollees chose a primarily online institution, though this was lower for Recent Stopouts (10.8%) and Potential Completers (13.6%).

Despite being a popular re-enrollment destination, students re-enrolling at POIs had a first-year credential earning rate of 2.2 percent in both the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. This was the lowest rate of all sectors in 2021-22 and the second-lowest rate in 2022-23 (after private for-profit 4-year institutions, 2.1%). In those two years, the overall first-year credential earning rate was 4.6 and 4.4 percent, respectively. For all students re-enrolling in 2021-22, the combined two-year credential earning rate was 13.9 percent. In contrast, for POI re-enrollees the rate was 11.4 percent, the lowest of all sectors (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Combined Two-Year Credential Earning Rate, by Institution Sector of Re-Enrollment



OUTCOMES FOR RE-ENROLLEES: PERSEVERANCE, PROGRESS, AND CREDENTIAL EARNING

The share of re-enrollees who persevere into a second year of re-enrollment or earn credentials within two years has remained relatively consistent.

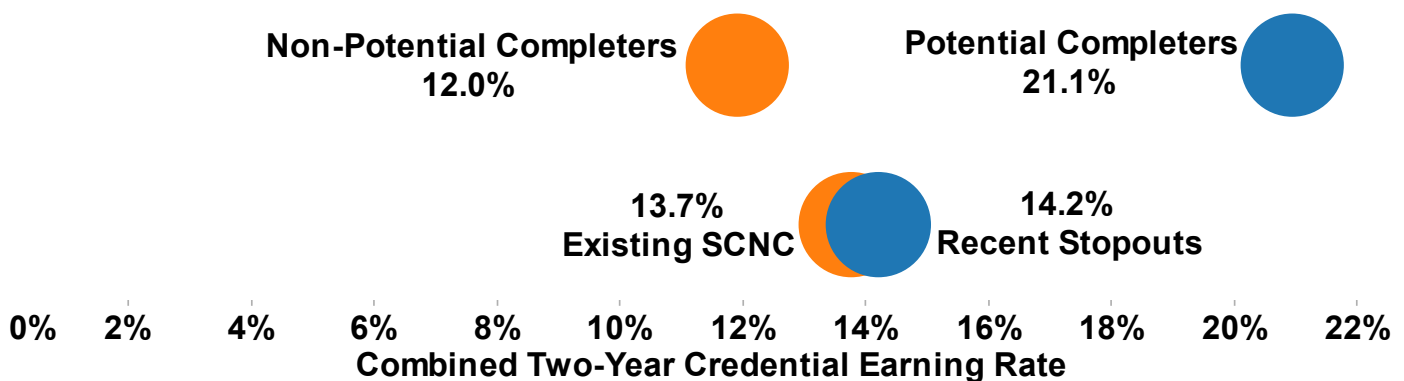
Of the 864,800 students who re-enrolled in the 2021-22 academic year, 39,900 (4.6%) earned a credential in that year. Of the remaining re-enrollees, 467,000 (56.6%) persevered into the 2022-23 academic year, a rate which was identical to that for 2020-21 re-enrollees. The total progress rate for 2021-22 re-enrollees was 58.6 percent compared to 58.7% for 2020-21 re-enrollees. An additional 80,000 students earned a credential in their second year of re-enrollment for a combined two-year credential earning rate of 13.9 percent, which was again identical to that for 2020-21 re-enrollees. For 2022-23 re-enrollees, the first-year credential earning rate declined 0.2pp to 4.4 percent even as more students earned credentials due to the higher number of students who re-enrolled. This was the second consecutive annual decline of this magnitude in the first-year credential earning rate.

OUTCOMES FOR RE-ENROLLEES: STRONG ADVANTAGES FOR POTENTIAL COMPLETERS, LIMITED ADVANTAGES FOR RECENT STOPOUTS

Potential Completers continue to make greater progress toward credential attainment than do their SCNC peers who were enrolled for less time prior to stopping out.

Like the previous year, Potential Completers re-enrolled in 2022-23 at three times the rate of other SCNC students (6.6% vs. 2.2% in 2022-23, 6.1 vs. 2.1 in 2021-22). Potential Completer re-enrollees also have a strong advantage in the first year of re-enrollment. Among the 179,000 Potential Completers who re-enrolled in 2021-22, 14,700 earned a credential in the first year, a rate that was more than twice that of their Non-Potential Completer SCNC peers (8.2% vs. 3.7%). The Potential Completer advantage in perseverance into the 2022-23 academic year was more limited: 59 percent of Potential Completers persevered, compared to 56 percent of Non-Potential Completers. However, the large Potential Completer advantage in first-year credential earning put their total progress rate at 62.4 percent compared to 57.6 percent for Non-Potential Completers. Moreover, an additional 23,000 Potential Completers who re-enrolled in 2021-22 earned a credential in their second year of re-enrollment, for a combined two-year credential earning rate of 21.1 percent compared to 12.0 percent for Non-Potential Completer re-enrollees (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Combined Two-Year Credential Earning Rate for Potential Completers and Recent Stopouts, Compared to Other SCNC Students, Re-Enrollees in the 2021-22 Academic Year



While Recent Stopouts re-enroll at much higher rates than Existing SCNC adults, they have only slight advantages when it comes to progress and earning credentials.

The Recent Stopout advantage in re-enrollment is even stronger than the Potential Completer advantage, with a re-enrollment rate more than five times that of the Existing SCNC population. This was consistent both in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years (Recent Stopouts: 10.7%, Existing SCNC: 2.0%). Despite this, the Recent Stopout advantage in first-year credential earning is slight (for 2022-23 re-enrollees, Recent Stopouts: 5.0%, Existing SCNC: 4.3%). Moreover, Recent Stopouts who re-enrolled in 2021-22 and did not earn a credential in that year, persevered into 2022-23 at slightly *lower* rates than Existing SCNC students re-enrolling in the same year. Overall, there is no Recent Stopout advantage in total progress compared to Existing SCNC students (58.3% vs. 58.7%) and only a slight advantage in the combined two-year credential-earning rate after re-enrolling (14.2% vs. 13.7%; see Figure 7).

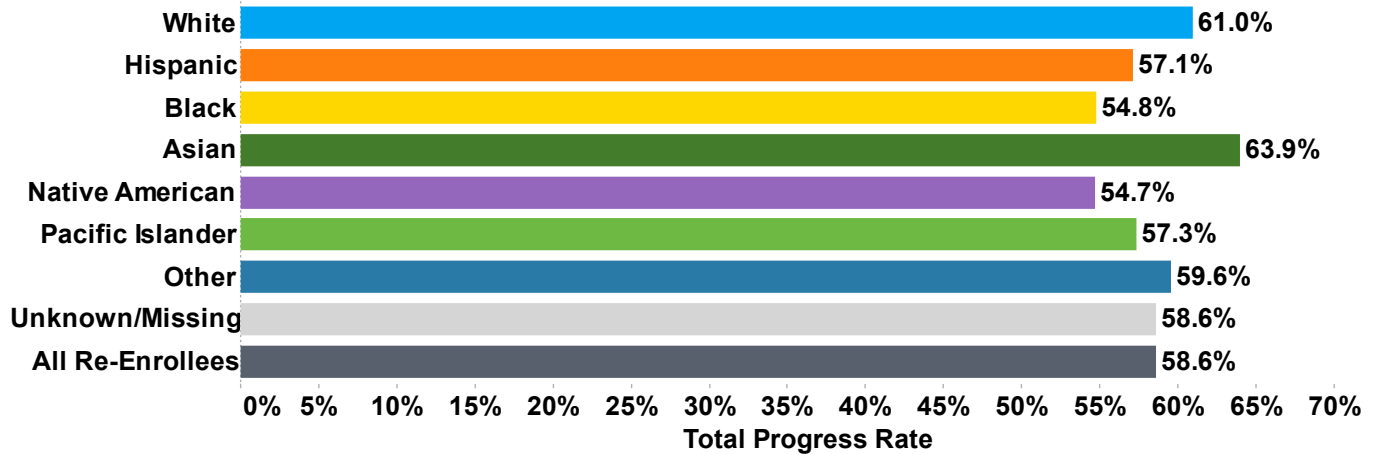
OUTCOMES FOR RE-ENROLLEES: DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

Although men and Hispanic, Black, and Native American students are disproportionately represented among the SCNC population overall, women and White and Asian students are more likely to complete a credential in the first year or persevere into a second year of enrollment.

For men, gaps begin at re-enrollment. Whereas there are slightly more men than women among SCNC students, among re-enrollees, women predominate (56.6% among all re-enrollees). Even though male re-enrollees earn a credential at slightly higher rates in the first year (2021-22: 5.0% vs 4.3%; 2022-23: 4.9% vs. 4.2%), the higher share of women re-enrollees ensures that there are more women with a credential at the end of the first year than there are men. Among 2021-22 re-enrollees, over half (51.9%) of first-year credential earners are women while 44.4 percent are men. Among those who do not earn a credential in the first year, women persevere into a second academic year at higher rates than men (58.1% vs. 54.6%) so that the total progress rate for women was 59.9 percent compared to 56.8 percent for men.

In contrast, gaps favoring White and Asian students emerge after re-enrollment. The ethnoracial composition of the re-enrollee population is similar to that of the SCNC population overall, with Hispanic and Black students re-enrolling at slightly higher rates than White and Asian students. Within the first year, however, White and Asian re-enrollees earn credentials at higher rates (2021-22: 5.4% and 4.8%, respectively) than do their Black, Hispanic, and Native American peers (2021-22: 4.2%, 4.1%, and 4.5%, respectively). Moreover, among those who do not earn a credential in the first year, Black, Hispanic, and Native American re-enrollees are less likely to persevere into a second year (52.8%, 55.3%, and 52.6%, respectively, compared to 58.8% and 62.1% for White and Asian students, respectively). This results in a higher total progress rate for White and Asian students (61.0% and 63.9%, respectively; see Figure 8) than Hispanic, Black, and Native American students (57.1%, 54.8%, and 54.7%, respectively).

Figure 8. Share of Re-Enrollees Earning a Credential in the First Year or Persevering into a Second Academic Year (Total Progress) by Race/Ethnicity, Re-Enrollees in the 2021-22 Academic Year



CREDENTIAL EARNING: AWARD TYPES AND PATHWAYS AMONG RE-ENROLLEES

Among all re-enrollees earning a credential in the first year, undergraduate certificates are the most common type of award. After two years, more SCNC students earned associate and bachelor’s degrees, with larger shares of Potential Completers awarded associate and bachelor’s degrees within two years.

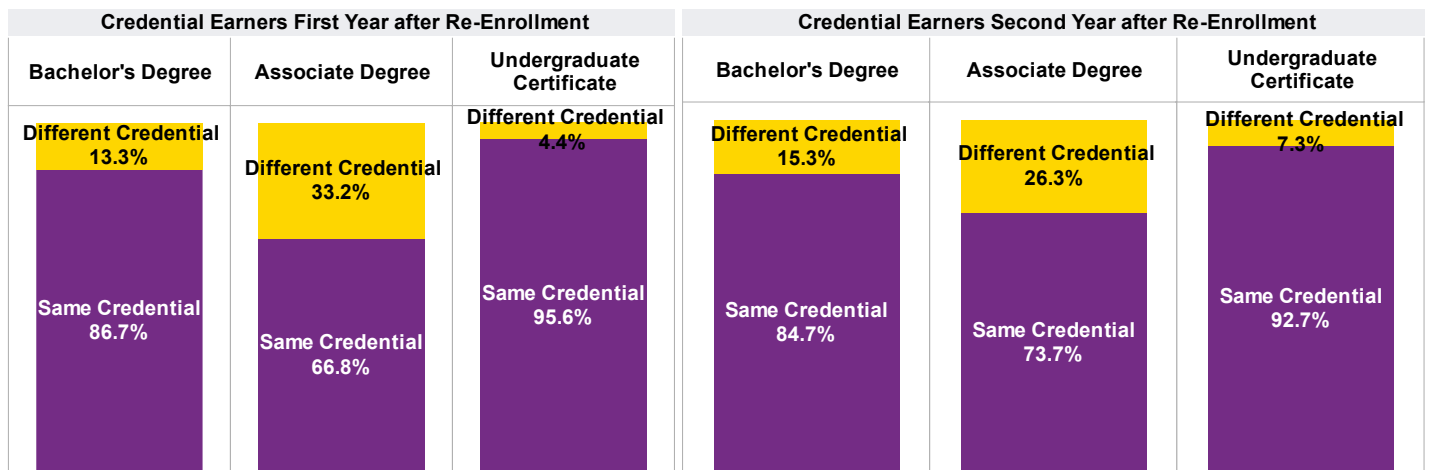
Nearly 41,900 re-enrollees in the 2022-23 academic year earned a credential in the same year, for a first-year credential earning rate of 4.4 percent. As in the prior year, the largest share of them earned a certificate (48.7% compared to 29.4% who earned an associate and 19.7% who earned a bachelor’s degree). Much of this is due to the one-year timeframe in our analysis, which favors shorter-term credential earners. However, Potential Completers, with their longer enrollment histories, should need to complete fewer credits to earn associate and bachelor’s degrees. In fact, 76.9 percent of Potential Completer re-enrollees who earned a credential in the first year were awarded an associate (42.0%) or bachelor’s (34.9%) degree. (Higher shares of Recent Stopouts who re-enrolled and completed in the first year also earned associate or bachelor’s degrees, although this pattern was driven by Recent Stopouts who were also Potential Completers.) In contrast, only 33.5 percent of Non-Potential Completers who earned an award got an associate or bachelor’s degree.

When we expand the analysis to include those who earned a credential in their second year of re-enrollment for 2021-22 re-enrollees, we find that 13.9 percent (119,900) did so within two years. After the second year, higher shares of these credential earners were awarded associate and bachelor’s degrees (35.9% and 21.0%, respectively). For Potential Completer re-enrollees, associate and bachelor’s degrees each account for about 40 percent of all credentials awarded in the first two years of re-enrollment. This means that not only does this group have a higher combined two-year credential-earning rate, as outlined above, but that these students are more likely to earn associate and bachelor’s degrees than their Non-Potential Completer peers.

Students beginning their re-enrollment in associate degree programs are most likely to end up earning a credential that differs from the credential level of their program at re-enrollment.

Over a quarter of 2021-22 re-enrollees in associate degree programs who went on to earn a credential in either their first (33.2%; see Figure 9) or second (26.3%) year after re-enrolling were awarded a first credential other than an associate degree, with most earning a certificate instead (30.9% first year; 24.2% second year). In contrast, the shares of credential earners who initially re-enrolled in bachelor’s degree and undergraduate certificate programs who then earned a different credential were much lower (see Figure 9). It is important to note that our method captures the first credential earned, not the highest (unless the credentials were awarded at the same time). This pattern could therefore be due either to students changing their plans to focus solely on earning a certificate (perhaps because of a change in major) or to students earning a certificate along the way towards earning an associate degree. Importantly, though, this pattern is seen even among Potential Completers, who, in theory, already have sufficient enrollment (two years’ worth) for an associate degree. This speaks to the popularity of certificates among the SCNC population, even among those who may be on the verge of earning a degree.

Figure 9. Share of Credential Earners Awarded the Credential of their Program at Re-Enrollment, Academic Year 2021-22 Re-Enrollees



CREDENTIAL EARNING: CREDENTIALS AFTER STOPOUT WITHOUT RE-ENROLLING

Nearly a quarter of credential earners in the 2022-23 academic year received their award without having to re-enroll following a stopout of at least three academic terms, suggesting that barriers beyond credit attainment may be significant for SCNC students.

For the first time, this report separately analyzes individuals who earned a credential after stopout without having to re-enroll. These students represent a significant minority—nearly a quarter—of the credential earning population (23.6% in 2022-23). Notably, students in this category earned more associate and bachelor’s degrees than undergraduate certificates. In contrast, those who earned a credential after having to re-enroll were much more likely to earn a certificate. Furthermore, Potential Completers represent a larger share of this population (44.7% despite accounting for just 7.7% of the total SCNC population) suggesting that many of these students may have completed the credit requirements for earning a credential but faced other barriers such as fees or administrative holds that may have delayed final receipt of their award. In the case of reverse transfer awards (for students who stopped out of a bachelor’s

program having nonetheless completed enough credits for an associate degree), they may not even have been aware of the possibility of earning a degree until long after stopping out.

3. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Re-engaging with the SCNC population has broad benefits for states, institutions, and students. For states, seeing additional SCNC students earn credentials can help to increase the attainment levels of their workforces and make their economies more competitive. For institutions, SCNC students can help address enrollment shortfalls amid a shifting demographic landscape. Perhaps more importantly, helping SCNC students through completing their first credentials can advance institutional missions to drive social mobility for students of all backgrounds. For SCNC students, re-engaging with higher education can mean reclaiming dreams and aspirations along with the chance to realize social and economic mobility by earning credentials that start or advance careers and boost earnings. But realizing these benefits is not a given.

In the 2022-23 academic year, more than 943,000 SCNC students re-enrolled in higher education and 134,800 formerly SCNC students earned their first credential. This is positive news for these students. However, our report suggests there is still much more work to be done. These students represent only a small fraction of the 36.8 million adults who make up the working age SCNC population. Moreover, while re-engaging SCNC students holds promise for increasing the educational attainment of the workforce generally, it also can reduce disparities in who completes a college education. The fact that students from historically underrepresented groups are overrepresented among SCNC students means that re-engaging these students can be an important means of ensuring that the population that holds postsecondary credentials looks like the population of the nation writ large. Unfortunately, the data in this report suggests that while the SCNC students who re-enroll in higher education reflect the diversity of the SCNC population, institutions will need to engage in additional work to ensure that these re-enrollees ultimately earn a credential. They will need to focus on Hispanic, Black, and Native American re-enrollees, whose credential earning and progress into a second year of re-enrollment remain below those of their peers. Troublingly, these disparities appear to be persistent across the last three years of our reporting on this population. More support is needed to ensure that states reach their attainment goals in ways that narrow, rather than expand, existing gaps.

States and institutions could look to the Potential Completer population to help reach their re-engagement and attainment goals in equitable ways. Hispanic, Black, and Native students are well-represented in this group, which is almost twice as likely to complete credentials within two years of re-enrollment as their other SCNC peers. Potential Completers who earn credentials are also more likely to earn associate and bachelor's degrees than other SCNC re-enrollees.

As higher education continues to chart a course out of the enrollment losses of the COVID-19 pandemic and faces new demographic realities that will result in fewer traditional age students, re-engaging with the SCNC population has never been more crucial. Doing so in ways that lead to credential attainment benefitting individual learners regardless of their backgrounds will ensure that students, institutions, and states can succeed together.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

The National Student Clearinghouse currently collects data from more than 3,600 postsecondary institutions, representing 97 percent of all U.S. postsecondary enrollments in degree-granting institutions, as of 2022. Data collection began in 1993, and national coverage has been above 90 percent since 2007. However, some states and sectors have lower coverage rates, particularly in the earlier years. Historically, private for-profit coverage 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 Credential students in both national and state-level results. Further, the data may overestimate the students included in the study cohort if they earned a degree or enrolled at a non-Clearinghouse participating institution during the study period.

STATE DATA COVERAGE

While most institutions that currently report to the Clearinghouse reflect over 90 percent of institutions that report to the U.S. Department of Education by state, this coverage was much lower in the earlier years of NSC data collection (refer to enrollment table for [historical coverage rates](#)). Since this lower coverage may impact the overall number SCNC students by state, please use caution when interpreting the state shares of SCNC populations.

SCNC STUDENT IDENTIFICATION AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS CALCULATION

SCNC Population: SCNC students identified in the Clearinghouse data as of July 2022 are those who had at least one postsecondary enrollment record after January 1, 1993 (the beginning of the Clearinghouse database), with a period of stop-out defined as having had no enrollment between January 1, 2021, and July 31, 2022 (representing roughly three consecutive academic terms), and no degree or certificate awarded as of July 31, 2022. This resulted in 41,881,485 students.

As the SCNC population continues to grow older, more students are currently over 65 (12%) compared to the year before (11.4%). In order to align with most state postsecondary attainment goals, which limit the population of focus to some set of working age adults, the report focuses the SCNC population currently under age 65. This also addresses a limitation of our data—the inability to identify those who exit the SCNC population through death—since death rates will be higher in the population 65 and older. The age restriction results in 38,840,442 individuals under the age of 65 identified as SCNC. For the remainder of these notes, all shares of the total SCNC population refer to the population under age 65.

Recent Stopouts: Student identifiers were utilized to connect the SCNC population from this year's report to last year's to identify those who were not in last year's population. Based on the stop-out period identified above, students who were newly identified as SCNC students (2.3 million, 6.2%) last enrolled sometime during 2020 and had no enrollment records between January 1, 2021, and July 31, 2022. For this reason, these students are referred to as recent stop-outs.

Potential Completers: A subset of SCNC individuals (2.8 million, 7.7%) were identified as being “potential completers” due to having made substantial academic progress toward a credential before stopping out. These are students who had completed at least two years' worth of enrollment or four 15-week semesters at full-time in the past ten years (see Academic Progress below).

Academic Progress Calculation: A standardized definition of a “full-time week” (FTW) equivalent was used to create units to calculate students' accrued enrollment across institutional contexts in the past ten years. This was determined by crossing the number of enrolled weeks with enrollment intensity, described below:

- One week enrolled at full-time enrollment equaled one full-time week (FTW) equivalent
- One week enrolled at three-quarters equaled 0.75 FTW equivalent
- One week enrolled at half-time equaled 0.5 FTW equivalent
- One week enrolled at less than half-time or quarter-time equaled 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.

SUCCESS METRICS: DEFINITIONS

This report focuses on the following success metrics:

Re-Enrollment: Defined as students who hold a valid (full-time or part-time) enrollment record at least once during the academic year following a stop out of at least three consecutive terms.

First Credential: Defined as earning a credential in either the first or second academic year following a stopout of at least three consecutive terms. We report of the first credential metric in three ways:

- For those who re-enrolled in the 2022-23 academic year, we look at first credentials earned in the same academic year.
- For those who re-enrolled in the 2021-22 academic year, we report on first credentials earned in the 2022-23 academic year, their second year after re-enrolling. We also discuss the cumulative two-year credential earning rate for these re-enrollees. Additional details on credential earning in the first year of re-enrollment for this group can be found in the previous report in this series.
- Finally, for the first time, we look at credential earning after stopout without having to first re-enroll. Students in this group earn credentials more than three full terms after their last enrollment and may include students who have needed to resolve administrative barriers or have received reverse transfer awards.

Perseverance: Defined as continuing enrollment into a second academic year. Here, we report on perseverance for the cohort of SCNC students who re-enrolled in the 2021-22 academic year and continued enrollment into the 2022-23 academic year. Because members of this cohort who earned a credential in 2021-22 are no longer SCNC, our perseverance measure excludes these students.

Total Progression: While not an official metric, progression is defined as earning a credential in the first year of re-enrollment or persevering into a second year of enrollment. In this report, we look at this metric for re-enrollees in the 2021-22 academic year. This measure does not include students who earned a credential without re-enrolling.

SUCCESS RATES: CALCULATION METHODS

The calculations for the re-enrollment, first credential, perseverance, and total progression rates used in this report are outlined below. Students who earned a credential without having to first re-enroll are excluded from the first credential, perseverance, and total progression rates:

RE-ENROLLMENT RATE:

$$\frac{\text{Number of ReEnrollees}}{\text{Size of SCNC Population (under 65)}}$$

FIRST-YEAR CREDENTIAL EARNING RATE:

$$\frac{\text{Number of ReEnrollees Earning a First Credential in Year One}}{\text{Number of ReEnrollees}}$$

SECOND-YEAR CREDENTIAL EARNING RATE:

$$\frac{\text{Number of ReEnrollees Earning a First Credential in Year Two}}{\text{Number of ReEnrollees}}$$

PERSEVERANCE RATE:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Perseverers}}{(\text{Number of ReEnrollees} - \text{Number of ReEnrollees Earning a First Credential in Year One})}$$

TOTAL PROGRESSION RATE:

$$\frac{\text{Number of ReEnrollees Earning a Credential in Year One} + \text{Number of Perseverers}}{\text{Number of Re-Enrollees}}$$

State-Level Success Rates: For the states, the re-enrollment rate is calculated with respect to the state of last enrollment, rather than the state where re-enrollment occurred. This is because state SCNC populations are defined based on the state of last enrollment prior to stopout. The state re-enrollment rate captures the share of students last enrolled in a particular state who re-enrolled in *any* state rate. To provide additional aid in interpreting state re-enrollment numbers, we provide counts of re-enrollees who remain in the same state from last enrollment to re-enrollment for all states. The formula for the state re-enrollment rate is:

$$\frac{\text{Number of ReEnrollees Last Enrolled in State X}}{\text{Size of SCNC Population (under 65) Last Enrolled in State X}}$$

If Virginia is "State X" in the formula above, then the state re-enrollment rate captures the share of SCNC student last enrolled in Virginia who re-enrolled in any state. The remaining state-level outcome rates (first credential in years one and two and perseverance) are calculated with a denominator based on the re-enrollment population *in the state of re-enrollment*. Continuing with our Virginia example, this means that the outcome rates are calculated based off of the population of all students who re-enrolled in Virginia regardless of the state in which they were last enrolled prior to stopping out.

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 earned credential were included in the SCNC cohort only if they had continued postsecondary enrollment after they turned 18.

AGE CALCULATION METHODS

This report defines a student's current age as their age on July 31, 2023 (the end of the academic year studied) and a student's age at last enrollment as their age on the term begin date of their last enrollment record prior to stopping out.

- Age at re-enrollment: the student's age on the term begin date of their first re-enrollment after stopping out. This calculation is also used to assess perseverance by age.
- Age at first credential: the student's age on the award date of the first credential.

PRIMARILY ONLINE AND MULTI-STATE INSTITUTIONS

Primarily online institutions (POIs) were identified based on the distance education survey items in the IPEDS fall 2021 enrollment survey. Any institution where the primary campus reports more than 90 percent of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses before the COVID-19 pandemic began is considered a POI. There are some institutions or systems of institutions that report their online campuses as separate entities to IPEDS while combining them with offline campuses into a single reporting entity when submitting data to NSC. In these cases, the students enrolled at POIs identified in IPEDS are not accurately identified as enrolled at a POI in this report, resulting in an underestimation of POIs in our reporting. In reporting student outcomes in each state, POIs are not included in individual state counts in this report.

We defined multi-state institutions as those with at least one branch campus operating in a different state from the main campus as reported to the Department of Education. To better reflect an institution's multi-state status for the postsecondary attainment metrics, we applied whether the institution had operating branch campuses in different states based on the fall 2021 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey data. While this designation will differ from whether the institution was multi-state or not at the time of a student's last enrollment, utilizing the current multi-state status will enable for more accurate reporting as we continue to update this annual progress report.

INSTITUTION SECTOR RECLASSIFICATIONS

There has been a growing number of sector reclassifications by IPEDS from associate colleges to four-year institutions. These reclassified institutions continue to educate and award credentials primarily at the sub-baccalaureate level. We consider these schools to be Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate Institutions (PABs). We identify PABs and the level (2-year or 4-year) of each institution based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2021), which relies on program offerings (there must be one

bachelor's-level program offered) and degrees awarded. PABs carry Carnegie Classifications of either 14 (Associate Dominant) or 23 (Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate). In general, Institutions with a 14 designation award 90% or more of degrees at the associate level while those with a 23 designation award 51% to 90% of degrees at the this level. While the Carnegie Classification largely follows IPEDS sector designations, where there are differences between the two, we follow Carnegie. These discrepancies primarily affect PABs as well as 34 institutions considered four-year institutions by IPEDS but two-year institutions by Carnegie. Institution sector designations are applied consistently across all years to enable us to analyze student pathways without the disruption of sector reclassifications over the years.

DATA LIMITATIONS

MISSING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: While in recent years, the data coverage rate for gender and race/ethnicity has improved, with over 96 percent of the current undergraduate population having a valid gender value, and 83 percent of the undergraduate population with a valid reported race/ethnicity, this coverage previously was low, with less than 15 percent of institutions reporting this information to the Clearinghouse as late as 2008/09 (see our Additional Data Elements for historic coverage rates). As a result, the share of SCNC students with missing gender or racial/ethnic information is 68.2 percent compared to 8.9 percent. In both cases, the missing rates are higher for historical enrollment dates. Due to this higher level of missing data, demographic analyses of the entire SCNC population should be interpreted with caution.

DATA PRIOR TO 1993: Since the Clearinghouse's enrollment reporting began in 1993, SCNC students who stopped out more than 25 years ago are likely to be underestimated in this report. Interpret age related findings with caution.

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