

# ***Yearly Success and Progress Rates***



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*In the latest entering cohort, the steady growth in the six-year college completion rate started to slow down for full-time starters, and the rate declined notably for part-time starters.*

*Full-time starters at community colleges earned a credential at the highest rate in six years whereas the stop-out rate increased sharply for their part-time counterparts.*

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

In this report, we examine yearly academic progress for approximately 2.3 million individuals who began college for the first time in fall 2014 with the intent to earn a credential. Their yearly progress and success rates can be compared with previous cohorts nationally, and by state, through the interactive [data dashboards](#) newly added this year.

Academic progress is measured in each subsequent academic year for six years after entry. We show the highest level of academic progress made, broken out by the type of starting institution and enrollment intensity at entry (full-time vs. part-time). Please note that starting enrollment intensity is not the sole factor determining a student's outlook on college completion. Results do not account for enrollment status changes after entry.

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

## Success and Progress Overview – At All Institutions

Among first-time degree-seeking students enrolling full time in fall 2014, 45.4 percent had completed a postsecondary credential by the end of year four, while 22.9 percent were no longer enrolled. By the end of year six, 65.4 percent had graduated, including 10.5 percent who did so after transferring to another institution, while 26.6 percent had left college without earning a credential (**Figure 1**). The six-year completion rate is improving at a slower rate for full-time entrants. The 0.6 percentage point gain made by the 2014 cohort is less than half the gains seen in the two previous cohorts (for cohort-to-cohort comparisons, see **Tab 1** on the new [data dashboards](#)).

For students entering part time, 19.4 percent had completed a postsecondary credential by the end of year four, while 49 percent were no longer enrolled. By the end of year six, 31.7 percent had graduated—22.3 percent from the starting institution and 9.4 percent from elsewhere—while 54.4 percent had left college without earning a credential (**Figure 2**). This six-year graduation rate is 1.5 percentage points below the 2013 cohort, undoing the gain made by the previous cohort (Tab 1, [data dashboards](#)).

The retention and persistence disadvantage in students entering part time appears to be worsening. The rate at which part-time beginning students stopped out relative to those entering full-time by year six steadily increased each

cohort year, from 1.5 times the rate of full-time entrants in 2009, to over twice the rate of full-time entrants in 2014 (Tab 1, [data dashboards](#)).

### First-Time Degree-Seeking Students Fall 2014 (N=2.3M)

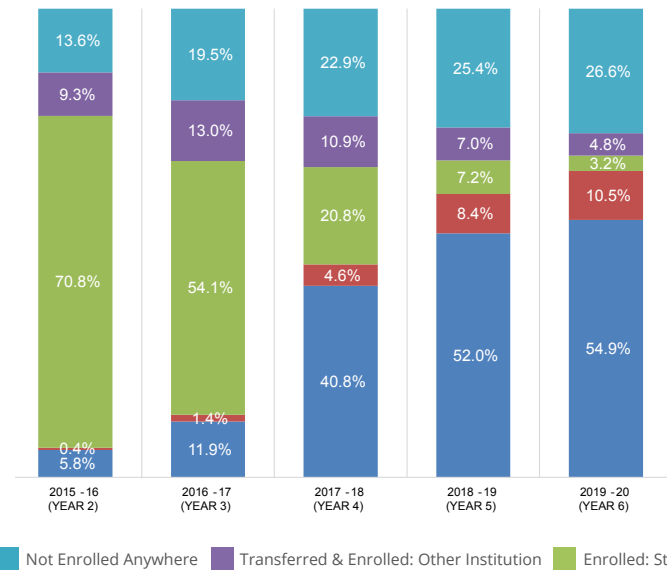
- 81 percent starting college full time
- Women
  - 53% of full-time starters
  - 53% of part-time starters
- Age 20 or younger
  - 86% of full-time starters
  - 62% of part-time starters

#### Type of Starting Institution:

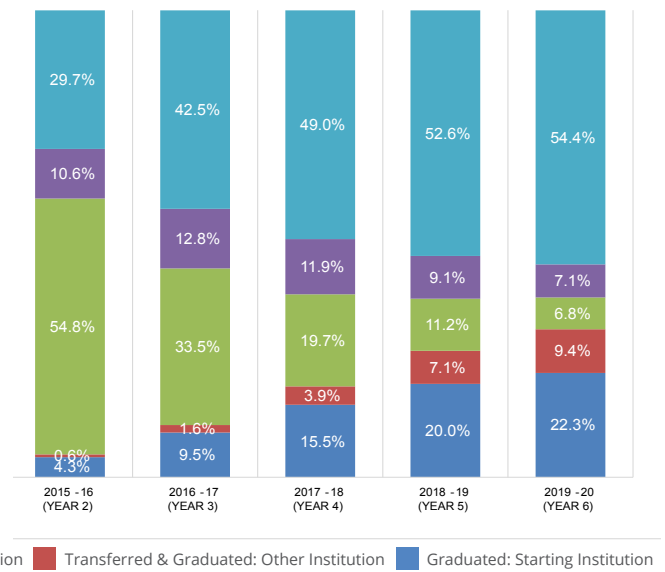
- Public four-year (45%)
- Public two-year (34%)
- Private nonprofit four-year (19%)
- Private for-profit four-year (2%)

*Note: Excludes private two-year institutions and small cases of missing gender (6%), age (1%), and enrollment intensity (2%).*

**Figure 1. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at all Institutions (N= 1,830,684)**



**Figure 2. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at all Institutions (N= 429,459)**

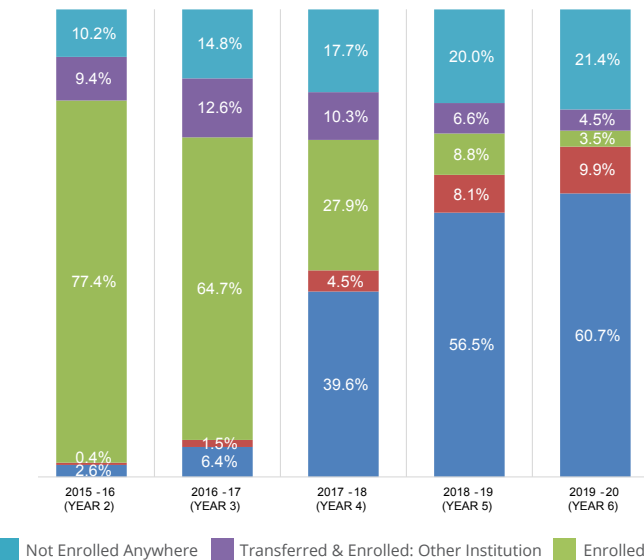


**Starting at Public Four-Year Institutions**

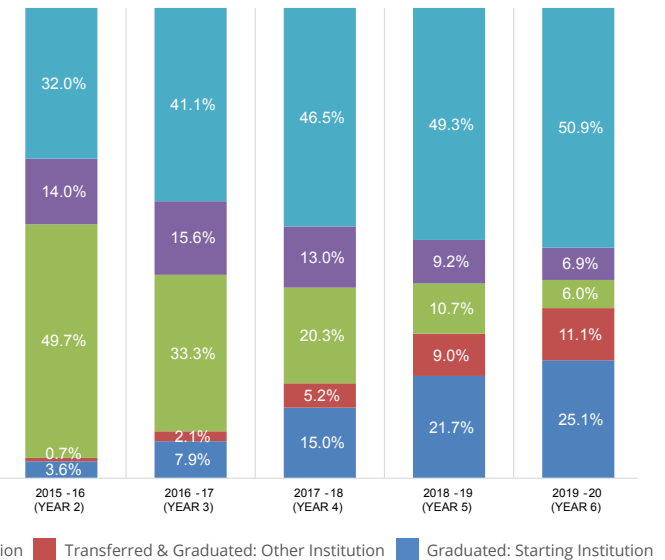
As **Tab 2** in the [data dashboards](#) shows, the six-year completion rate for students beginning full time increased slightly over the 2013 cohort by 0.3 percentage points, the smallest increase in recent years. Specifically, graduation from their starting institution grew whereas the completions after transferring to another institution decreased slightly to 9.9% in 2014 (see **Figure 3**). Yearly stop-out rates remained largely unchanged from previous cohorts (21.4% in year six).

Part-time starters at public four-years saw their six-year completion rate increase (up 0.8 percentage points to 36.2%) and stop-out rate decline to a four-year low at 50.9 percent, down 2.3 percentage points from 2011 (see **Figure 4**). It should be noted that only the public four-year sector improved the six-year outcomes for part-time starters.

**Figure 3. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Four-Year Institutions (N= 902,852)**



**Figure 4. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Four-Year Institutions (N= 122,174)**

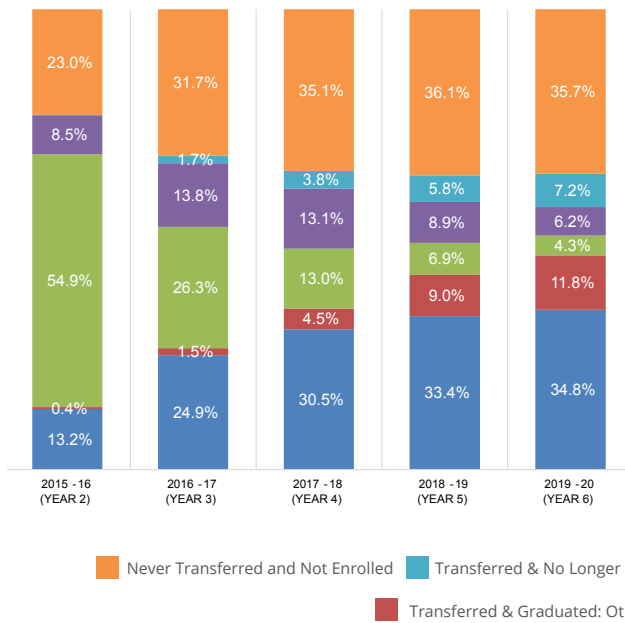


## Starting at Public Two-Year Institutions

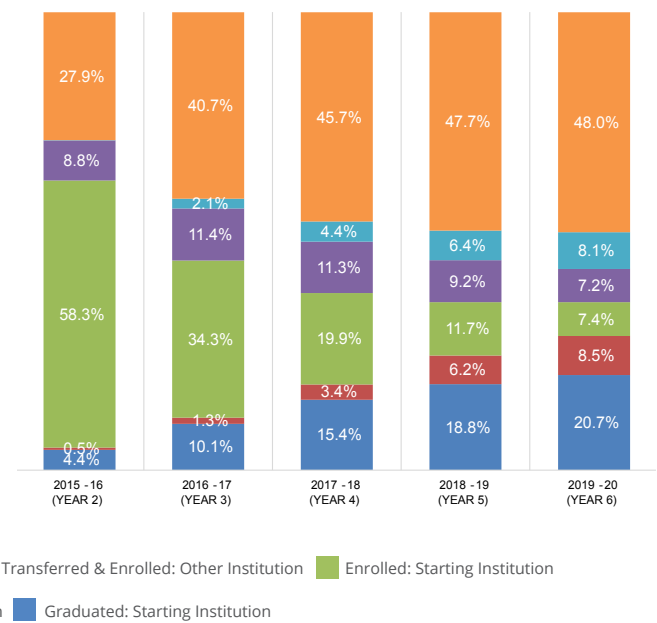
The rate at which 2014 full-time community college entrants attained a credential is at an all-time high since tracking started, from 26.4 percent (by year 3) to 46.5 percent (by year 6), while the three-year stop-out rate has steadily decreased from 35.8 percent for the 2011 cohort to 33.5 percent for the 2014 cohort (**Tab 3, data dashboards**). The six-year graduation rate between 2009 and 2014 increased both for those completing at their starting institution (29.9% to 34.8%) and those who transferred before completing (11.4% to 11.8%); see **Figure 5**.

In contrast, those beginning part time in 2014 showed the worst stop-out rate since tracking started, and the largest year-over-year increase among all starting institution sectors. This is due to a 7.8 percentage point jump to 28 percent in the stop-out rate by year two over the previous cohort. The completion rate in subsequent years suffered as a result, most apparently in years 5 and 6, having lost 2.1 and 2.5 percentage points, respectively, over the 2013 cohort (Tab 3, [data dashboards](#)). The six-year completion rate at the starting institution dipped slightly to 20.7 percent, and to 8.5 percent for those completing after transferring (**Figure 6**).

**Figure 5. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Two-Year Institutions (N= 487,454)**



**Figure 6. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Public Two-Year Institutions (N= 276,140)**



## Starting at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions

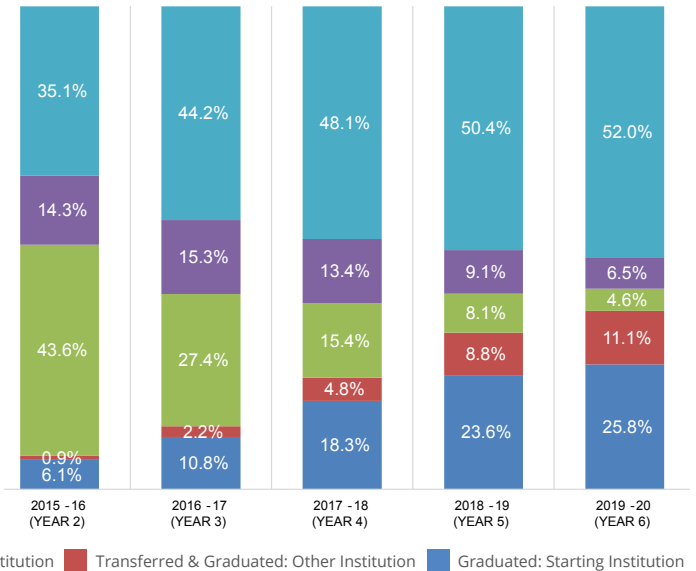
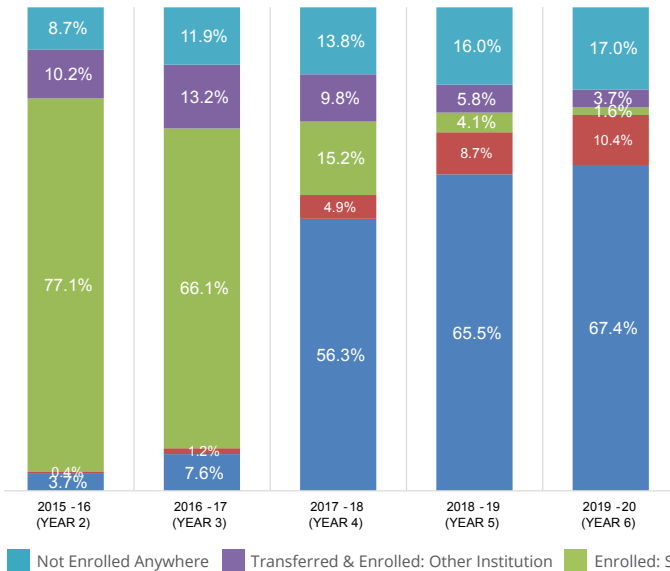
The four-year completion rate for students beginning full time continued to rise, having reached its highest level yet at 61.2 percent (**Figure 7**). However, growth in the six-year completion rate has stalled for the first time since tracking began in 2009, decreasing slightly over the 2013 cohort, driven by a 0.5 percentage-point drop in those completing at a different institution (**Tab 4, data dashboards**).

Completion at the starting institution remained stable from the previous year.

The same pattern occurred among part-time starters, who saw their four-year completion rate increase slightly (0.3 percentage points to 23.1%) and their six-year completion rate decrease slightly (-0.5 percentage points to 36.9%); see **Figure 8**.

**Figure 7. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions (N= 407,958)**

**Figure 8. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions (N= 25,867)**



**Starting at Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions**

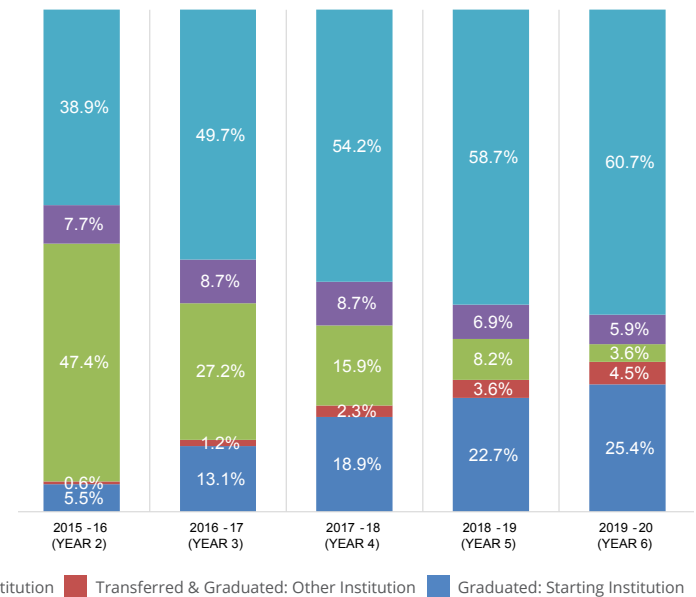
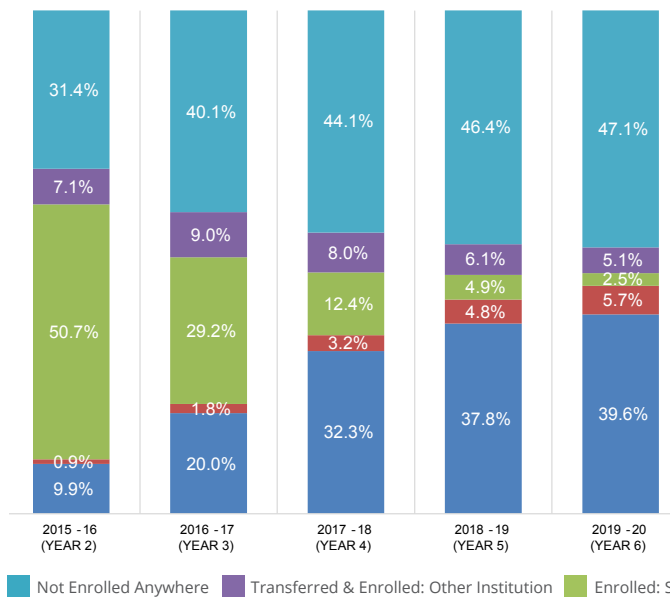
After peaking in the 2013 cohort, the four- and six-year completion rates dropped for students beginning full time (1.1 percentage points to 35.5 percent and 0.3 percentage points to 45.3 percent, respectively; see **Figure 9**). After a considerable improvement in the stop-out rate occurred for this group in the 2013 cohort compared to 2012 (-6 percentage points by year four and -4.8 percentage points by year six, respectively), the four-year stop-out rate increased by 0.3 percentage points to 44.1 percent and the six-year rate remained stable at 47.1 percent in 2014 (Figure 9).

The percent of students completing at a different institution dropped 1.6 percentage points to 5.7 percent, continuing a downward trend from a high of 9.9 percent in 2011.

Those beginning part time trended similarly, though the decline in four- and six-year completion rates was more severe (-3.8 percentage points to 21.2% and -3.9 percentage points to 29.9%; see **Figure 10**), representing the largest decline of all institution types.

**Figure 9. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private For Profit Four-Year Institutions (N= 28,226)**

**Figure 10. First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Private For Profit Four-Year Institutions (N= 5,079)**



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## Summary: Cohort Trends

Over the past six cohort years starting in 2009, the steady growth in the six-year college completion rate for full-time starters began to slow down in 2014. The continued growth has largely been fueled by a growing number graduating from their starting institution. Full-time starters completing college after transferring has remained largely unchanged.

Part-time starters, in contrast, have seen their completion rates decline over the past year after two straight years of improvement. This decline is due to a stop-out rate hike by year two (+5 percentage points). The increase in stop-out rates for part-time beginners is driven primarily by those starting at a community college, who saw their stop-out rates by year two climb 7.8 percentage points over the past year.

It should be noted that for those beginning part time at a public four-year college, the stop-out rates by year four have steadily declined over time.

Between full-time and part-time entrants, the gap in stop-out rate has been widening across cohorts. Tab 1 in the [data dashboards](#) illustrates the persistence disadvantage in part-time starters; between 2009 and 2014, their stop-out rate increased significantly (44.8% to 54.4% by year six), while this rate declined for full-time starters (29.7% to 26.6%). Taken together, the latest entering cohort suggests that the retention and persistence disadvantage in students entering part time appears to be worsening.

## Suggested Citation

Lang, R., Ryu, M., and Shapiro, D. (Feb 2021), Yearly Success and Progress Rates, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

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## Methodological Notes

### Definition of *First-Time* Student

The current report is focused on all first-time degree-seeking students who began postsecondary education in fall 2014. Students are considered first-time if they met all of the following conditions:

1. Enrolled in a Title IV, degree-granting U.S. institution, excluding territories outside the U.S. (e.g. Guam, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands).
2. Did not have a previous enrollment record in the Clearinghouse data prior to the first date of enrollment, unless the previous enrollment record was before the student turned 18 years old.
3. Did not receive any degree or certificate from a postsecondary institution prior to the first date of enrollment.

First-time students analyzed in the past reports included a small subset of students who earned a postbaccalaureate credential as their first college completion (approximately 3.7% of each cohort). To ensure the beginning cohort consisted solely of undergraduate-degree-seeking students, these graduate credential earners were removed from the first-time student cohort and the data for all previous cohorts that appear in the current report have been restated to reflect the change.

### Definition of Progress and Success

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

**Graduated from Starting Institution** – Students received a certificate or degree from the same institution in which they started college. Once a student completes a credential at the starting institution, the student will be counted in this category across all subsequent years, even if the student continued their education elsewhere.

### **Transferred & Graduated from Other Institution** –

Students did not receive a certificate or degree from the starting institution but did receive a certificate or degree from a different institution. Students will be counted in this category in all subsequent years unless the students eventually complete a credential at their starting institution, in which case they will only be counted as completing at the starting institution for the applicable year and each subsequent year.

**Enrolled at Starting Institution** – Students have not yet received a certificate or degree but are still enrolled at the starting institution.

**Transferred and Enrolled at Other Institution** – Students have not yet received a certificate or degree but are still enrolled at an institution other than the starting institution.

**Not Enrolled** – Students had no enrollments during the academic year in question. This is not a terminal outcome. In other words, a student can be counted as “not enrolled” in one academic year, but then counted as “enrolled” in a subsequent year if the student returns to college.

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

**Transferred and No Longer Enrolled** – Students had no enrollments for the academic year in question, but in a previous academic year had transferred to an institution other than the starting institution.

**Never Transferred and Not Enrolled** – Student had no enrollments during the academic year in question and had never transferred to an institution other than the starting institution.

### Completion of Certificates

Unlike the Student Achievement Measure, the graduate headcounts in the current report account for undergraduate certificates. The inclusion of certificates increases graduate headcounts by 14.5 percent at public two-year institutions, 3 percent at private for-profit four-year institutions, 1.6 percent at public four-year institutions, and 0.7 percent at private non-profit four-year institutions.