

## Postsecondary Outcomes for Nontraditional and Traditional Undergraduate Students

*Among students who began at 2-year institutions in 2013, completion rates 8 years after entry were higher among full-time students (45 percent for non-first-time students and 37 percent for first-time students) than among part-time students (24 percent for non-first-time students and 19 percent for first-time students). Also at 2-year institutions, transfer rates 8 years after entry were higher among non-first-time students (38 percent for part-time students and 26 percent for full-time students) than among first-time students (25 percent for part-time students and 22 percent for full-time students).*

College graduation and retention rates often focus on first-time, full-time undergraduate students (see *Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates*). Those measures, however, do not fully capture the experiences of students who do not fit the profile of a “traditional” undergraduate student. Examples of “nontraditional” students include those who enroll part time, transfer between institutions, or leave postsecondary education temporarily but later enroll again. Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) shed light on the outcomes of both nontraditional and traditional students in higher education.

The Outcome Measures component of IPEDS collects information on whether students completed an award (i.e., certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree) 4, 6, and 8 years after entering the reporting institution.<sup>1,2</sup> At the 8-year mark, the collection measures whether students (a) completed an award at their initial institution, (b) remained enrolled at their initial institution,

(c) transferred to a different postsecondary institution, or (d) were no longer enrolled at their initial institution and had not completed a credential at their initial institution. IPEDS also reports a final category that includes students who dropped out as well as those who transferred but did not notify their initial institution.

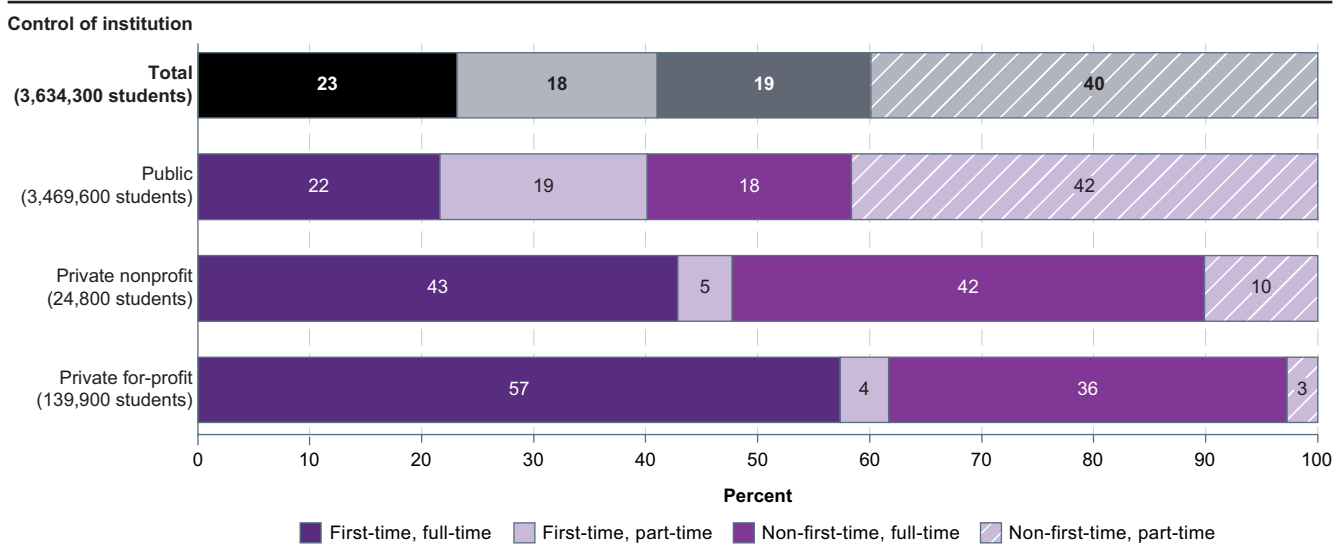
To better describe outcomes for nontraditional college students, the IPEDS Outcome Measures data are collected for four student groups:

- first-time, full-time students
- first-time, part-time students
- non-first-time,<sup>3</sup> full-time students
- non-first-time, part-time students

This indicator examines how completion, transfer,<sup>4</sup> and enrollment rates vary among these four groups.

**Enrollment for Undergraduates at 2-Year Institutions**

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of undergraduate students beginning at 2-year institutions for each institutional control category, by attendance level and status: 2013**



NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for degree-granting institutions, which grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The 2013 cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. Attendance level (first-time or non-first-time student) and attendance status (full-time or part-time student) are based on the first full term (i.e., semester or quarter) after the student entered the institution. First-time students are those who had never attended a postsecondary institution prior to their 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution. First-time students include students enrolled in academic or occupational programs, students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits or recognized postsecondary credential earned before graduation from high school). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2021–22, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2013, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27.

In 2013, of the 3.6 million students who began at 2-year postsecondary institutions, 23 percent were first-time, full-time students. The remaining 77 percent were not first-time, full-time students and were thus not included in traditional graduation and retention rates collected in IPEDS. Of this 77 percent,

- 18 percent were first-time, part-time students;
- 19 percent were non-first-time, full-time students; and
- 40 percent were non-first-time, part-time students.

In comparison, 25 percent of students in the 2009 entry cohort at 2-year institutions were first-time, full-time students.

Most students who began at 2-year institutions in 2013 enrolled in public institutions (3.5 million students). Smaller numbers enrolled in private for-profit (139,900 students) and private nonprofit (24,800 students) institutions. Among students who began at 2-year institutions in 2013, first-time, full-time students made up

- 22 percent of those who began at public institutions;
- 43 percent of those who began at private nonprofit institutions; and
- 57 percent of those who began at private for-profit institutions.

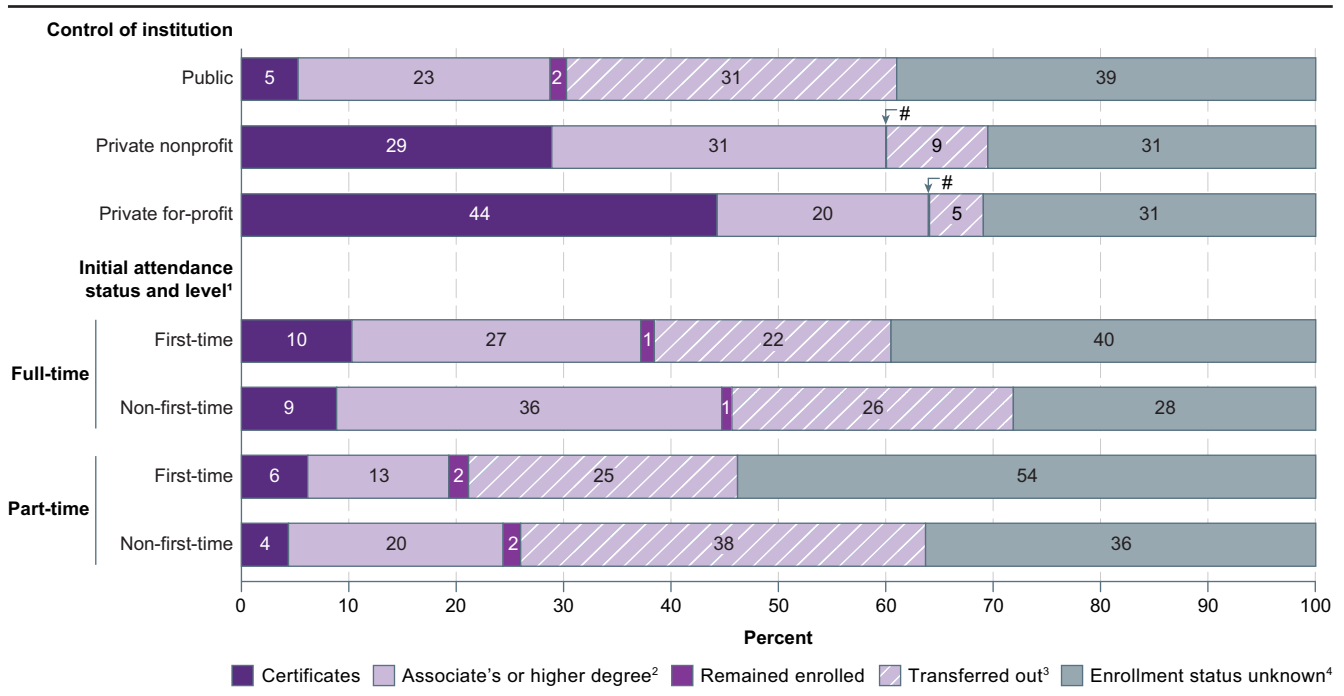
**Postsecondary Outcomes for Undergraduates at 2-Year Institutions**

IPEDS measures completion rates 4, 6, and 8 years after cohort entry.<sup>5</sup> The overall completion rate includes completion of a certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree. At 2-year institutions, the completion rates for the 2013 entering cohort were 25 percent after 4 years, 29 percent after 6 years, and 30 percent after 8 years. At each time point after cohort entry, the

completion rate for the 2013 cohort was 3 percentage points higher than for the 2009 cohort.

At each time point after cohort entry, overall completion rates for the 2013 entering cohort at private 2-year institutions were more than twice as high as the completion rates at public 2-year institutions. In addition, completion rates were higher for full-time students than for part-time students.

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of students’ postsecondary outcomes 8 years after beginning at 2-year institutions in 2013, by control of institution and initial attendance status and level: 2021**



# Rounds to zero.

<sup>1</sup> Attendance status (full-time or part-time students) and attendance level (first-time or non-first-time student) are based on the first full term (i.e., semester or quarter) after the student entered the institution. First-time students are those who had never attended a postsecondary institution prior to their 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution.

<sup>2</sup> Associate’s or higher degree includes associate’s degrees and bachelor’s degrees. Includes only those awards that were conferred by the reporting institution (i.e., the institution the student entered in 2013–14); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.

<sup>3</sup> Transfer out data are required to be reported, regardless of whether the institution has transfer-preparation as part of its mission. The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

<sup>4</sup> Includes students who dropped out of the reporting institution and students who transferred to another institution without notifying the reporting institution.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for degree-granting institutions, which grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Student enrollment status and completion status are determined as of August 31 of the year indicated; for example, within 8 years after the student’s 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2021. The 2013 cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. First-time students are those who had never attended a postsecondary institution prior to their 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution. First-time students include students enrolled in academic or occupational programs, students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits or recognized postsecondary credential earned before graduation from high school). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2020–21, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2013, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27.

Eight years after entry, overall completion rates for the 2013 cohort at private 2-year institutions were more than twice as high as those at public 2-year institutions. However, this pattern was not found among students who were awarded an associate’s or higher degree. Specifically, completion rates for the 2013 cohort were

- 29 percent at public institutions, including 23 percent with an associate’s or higher degree;
- 60 percent at private nonprofit institutions, including 31 percent with an associate’s or higher degree; and
- 64 percent at private for-profit institutions, including 20 percent with an associate’s or higher degree.

In addition to providing student instruction and related activities through a range of career-oriented programs at the certificate and associate's degree levels, 2-year institutions also prepare students to transfer to 4-year institutions. Transfer rates for the 2013 cohort were more than three times higher at public institutions (31 percent) than at private institutions.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, transfer rates for the 2013 cohort were

- 31 percent at public institutions;
- 9 percent at private nonprofit institutions; and
- 5 percent at private for-profit institutions.

The percentage of students in the 2013 cohort whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry was higher at public institutions (39 percent) than at private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions (both 31 percent). The percentage of students who remained enrolled at their initial institution 8 years after entry was 2 percent or less of students at institutions of all control types.

These outcome rates also varied among the four student groups discussed in this indicator. Completion rates for the 2013 cohort 8 years after entry were higher among full-time than part-time students. Specifically, completion rates were

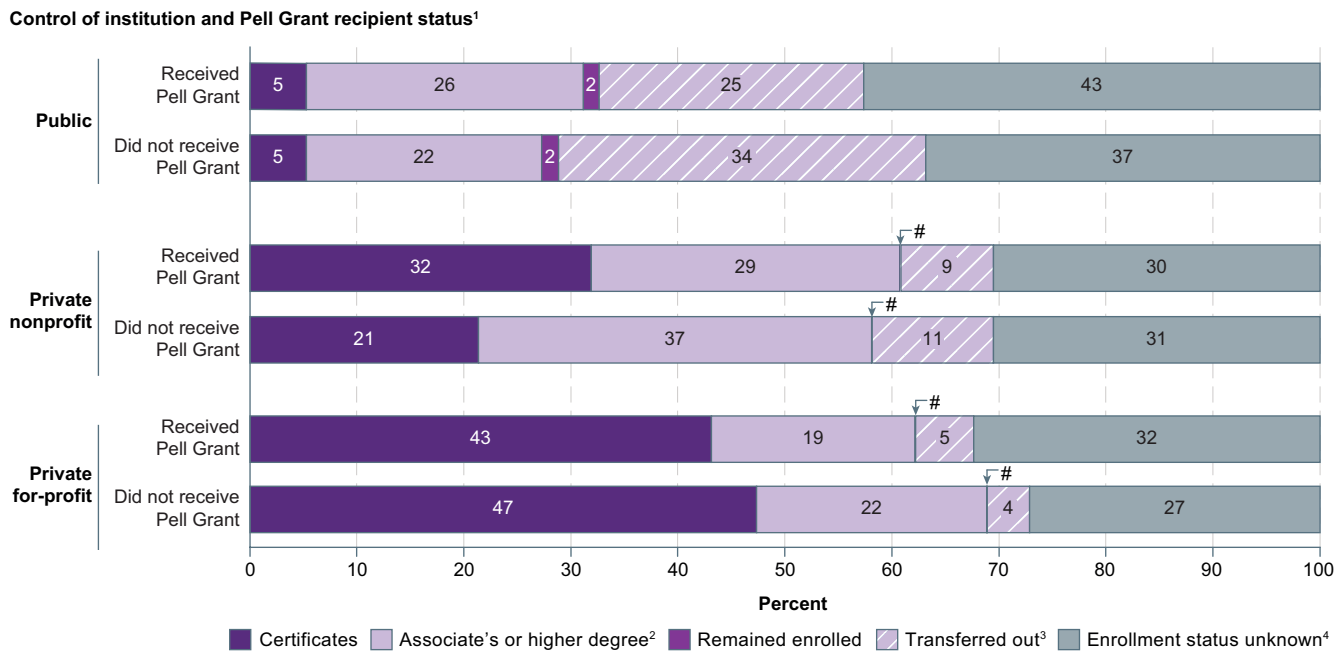
- 37 percent for first-time, full-time students, including 27 percent with an associate's or higher degree;
- 19 percent for first-time, part-time students, including 13 percent with an associate's or higher degree;
- 45 percent for non-first-time, full-time students, including 36 percent with an associate's or higher degree; and
- 24 percent for non-first-time, part-time students, including 20 percent with an associate's or higher degree.

Transfer rates for the 2013 cohort 8 years after entry were highest for non-first-time, part-time students. Specifically, transfer rates were

- 22 percent for first-time, full-time students;
- 25 percent for first-time, part-time students;
- 26 percent for non-first-time, full-time students; and
- 38 percent for non-first-time, part-time students.

The percentage of students in the 2013 cohort who remained enrolled at their initial institution 8 years after entry was 2 percent or less for each group. Finally, the percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry varied, from 28 percent for non-first-time, full-time students to 54 percent for first-time, part-time students.

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of students' postsecondary outcomes 8 years after beginning at 2-year institutions in 2013 for each institutional control category, by Pell Grant recipient status of student: 2021**



# Rounds to zero.

<sup>1</sup> Pell Grant recipient status is based on whether students had a disbursed Pell Grant during their first year at the reporting institution.

<sup>2</sup> Associate's or higher degree includes associate's degrees and bachelor's degrees. Includes only those awards that were conferred by the reporting institution (i.e., the institution the student entered in 2013–14); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.

<sup>3</sup> Transfer out data are required to be reported, regardless of whether the institution has transfer-preparation as part of its mission. The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

<sup>4</sup> Includes students who dropped out of the reporting institution and students who transferred to another institution without notifying the reporting institution.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for degree-granting institutions, which grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Student enrollment status and completion status are determined as of August 31 of the year indicated; for example, within 8 years after the student's 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2021. The 2013 cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2020–21, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2013, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27.

The IPEDS Outcome Measures data provide information separately for students who received Pell Grants and those who did not. The federal Pell Grant program provides need-based financial aid to eligible students, and Pell Grant recipients represent a subset of lower income students within the general undergraduate population.

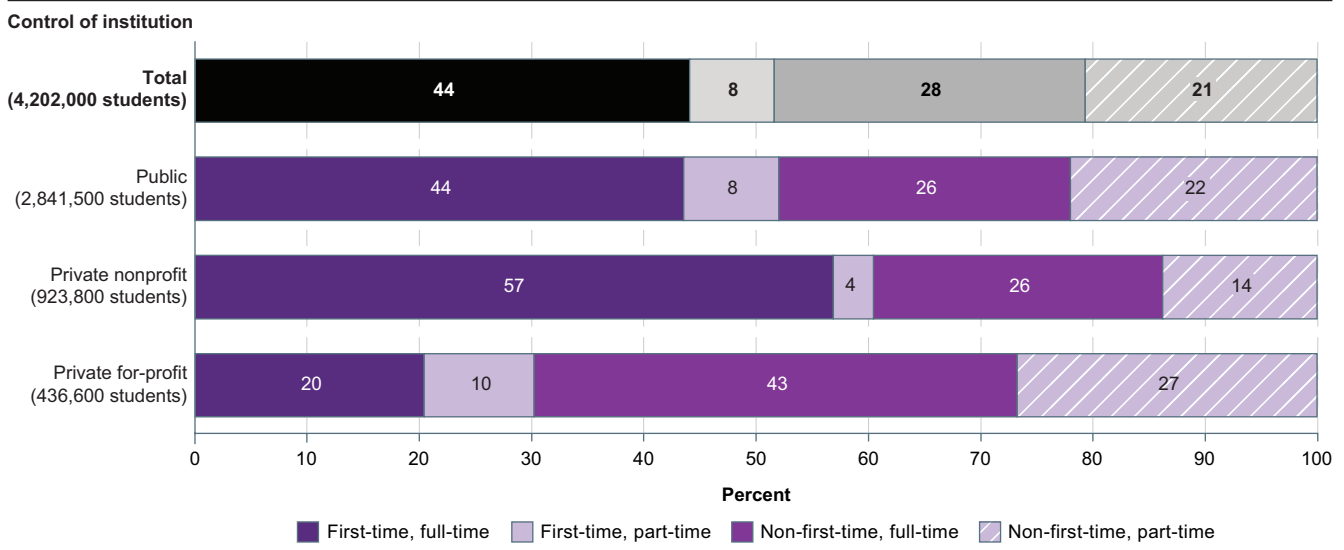
At 2-year institutions, postsecondary outcome rates 8 years after entry for the 2013 cohort varied by Pell Grant recipient status. Overall completion rates were higher for Pell Grant recipients at public and private nonprofit institutions, and higher for nonrecipients at private for-profit institutions. Specifically, completion rates were

- 31 percent for Pell Grant recipients vs. 27 percent for nonrecipients at public institutions;
- 61 percent for Pell Grant recipients vs. 58 percent for nonrecipients at private nonprofit institutions; and
- 62 percent for Pell Grant recipients vs. 69 percent for nonrecipients at private for-profit institutions.

This pattern differed for private nonprofit institutions when considering students awarded associate's or higher degrees. The percentage of students awarded an associate's or higher degree at private nonprofit institutions was lower for Pell Grant recipients than for nonrecipients (29 vs. 37 percent).

**Enrollment for Undergraduates at 4-Year Institutions**

**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of undergraduate students beginning at 4-year institutions for each institutional control category, by attendance level and status: 2013**



NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for degree-granting institutions, which grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The 2013 cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. Attendance level (first-time or non-first-time student) and attendance status (full-time or part-time student) are based on the first full term (i.e., semester or quarter) after the student entered the institution. First-time students are those who had never attended a postsecondary institution prior to their 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution. First-time students include students enrolled in academic or occupational programs, students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits or recognized postsecondary credential earned before graduation from high school). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2021–22, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2013, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27.

In 2013, some 4.2 million undergraduate students began at 4-year institutions, and 44 percent were first-time, full-time students. The remaining student groups made up smaller percentages. Specifically,

- 8 percent were first-time, part-time students;
- 28 percent were non-first-time, full-time students; and
- 21 percent were non-first-time, part-time students.

In comparison, first-time, full-time students also accounted for 44 percent of the 2009 entry cohort at 4-year institutions.

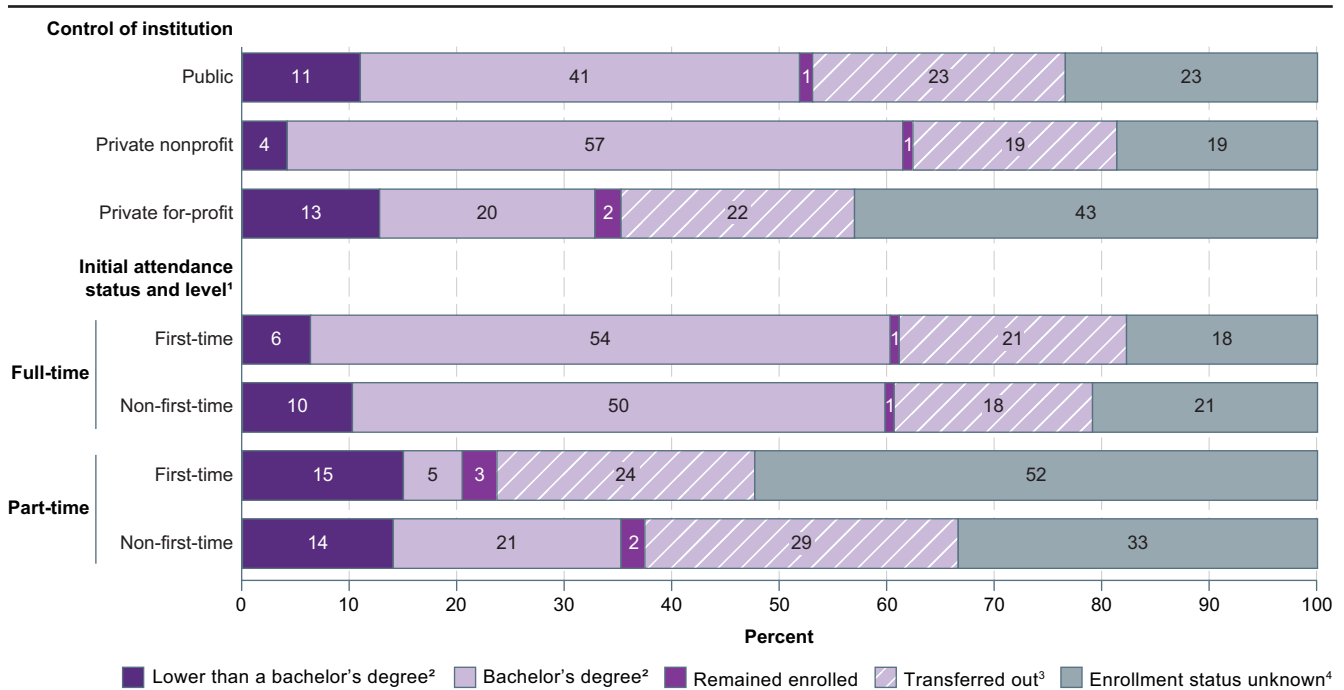
The majority of students who began at 4-year institutions in 2013 enrolled in public institutions (2.8 million students). Smaller numbers enrolled in private nonprofit (923,800 students) and private for-profit (436,600 students) institutions. First-time, full-time students made up the largest shares of the 2013 cohort at public (44 percent) and private nonprofit (57 percent) institutions. Meanwhile, first-time, full-time students made up 20 percent of the cohort at private for-profit institutions.

**Postsecondary Outcomes for Undergraduates at 4-Year Institutions**

At 4-year institutions, the completion rates for the 2013 cohort were 40 percent after 4 years, 50 percent after 6 years, and 52 percent after 8 years. At each time point after cohort entry, the completion rate for the 2013 cohort was 4 percentage points higher than for the 2009 cohort.

For the 2013 cohort at 4-year institutions, there were larger differences between completion rates 4 years and 6 years after entry than between 6 years and 8 years after entry, particularly at public institutions and for the first-time, full-time group. In addition, at each time point, overall completion rates were higher at private nonprofit and public institutions than at private for-profit institutions. Similar to 2-year institutions, completion rates at 4-year institutions within 4, 6, and 8 years were also higher for full-time students than for part-time students.

**Figure 5. Percentage distribution of students' postsecondary outcomes 8 years after beginning at 4-year institutions in 2013, by control of institution and initial attendance status and level: 2021**



<sup>1</sup> Attendance status (full-time or part-time student) and attendance level (first-time or non-first-time student) are based on the first full term (i.e., semester or quarter) after the student entered the institution. First-time students are those who had never attended a postsecondary institution prior to their 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution.  
<sup>2</sup> Lower than a bachelor's degree includes certificates and associate's degrees. Includes only those awards that were conferred by the reporting institution (i.e., the institution the student entered in 2013–14); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.  
<sup>3</sup> Transfer out data are required to be reported, regardless of whether the institution has transfer-preparation as part of its mission. The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.  
<sup>4</sup> Includes students who dropped out of the reporting institution and students who transferred to another institution without notifying the reporting institution.  
 NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for degree-granting institutions, which grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Student enrollment status and completion status are determined as of August 31 of the year indicated; for example, within 8 years after the student's 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2021. The 2013 cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. First-time students are those who had never attended a postsecondary institution prior to their 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution. First-time students include students enrolled in academic or occupational programs, students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits or recognized postsecondary credential earned before graduation from high school). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2020–21, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2013, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27.



Eight years after entry, completion rates for the 2013 cohort at 4-year institutions were higher at public and private nonprofit institutions than at private for-profit institutions. Specifically, completion rates were

- 52 percent at public institutions, including 41 percent with a bachelor's degree;
- 61 percent at private nonprofit institutions, including 57 percent with a bachelor's degree; and
- 33 percent at private for-profit institutions, including 20 percent with a bachelor's degree.

Overall transfer rates for the 2013 cohort varied less by institutional control at 4-year institutions than at 2-year institutions, ranging from 19 to 23 percent. The percentage of students who remained enrolled at their initial institution 8 years after entry was 2 percent or less of students at institutions of each control type. The percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown after 8 years was higher at private for-profit institutions (43 percent) than at public (23 percent) and private nonprofit (19 percent) institutions.

These outcome rates also varied among the four student groups discussed in this indicator. Completion rates were higher among full-time than part-time students. Specifically, completion rates for the 2013 cohort 8 years after entry were

- 60 percent for first-time, full-time students, including 54 percent with a bachelor's degree;
- 20 percent for first-time, part-time students, including 5 percent with a bachelor's degree;
- 60 percent for non-first-time, full-time students, including 50 percent with a bachelor's degree; and
- 35 percent for non-first-time, part-time students, including 21 percent with a bachelor's degree.

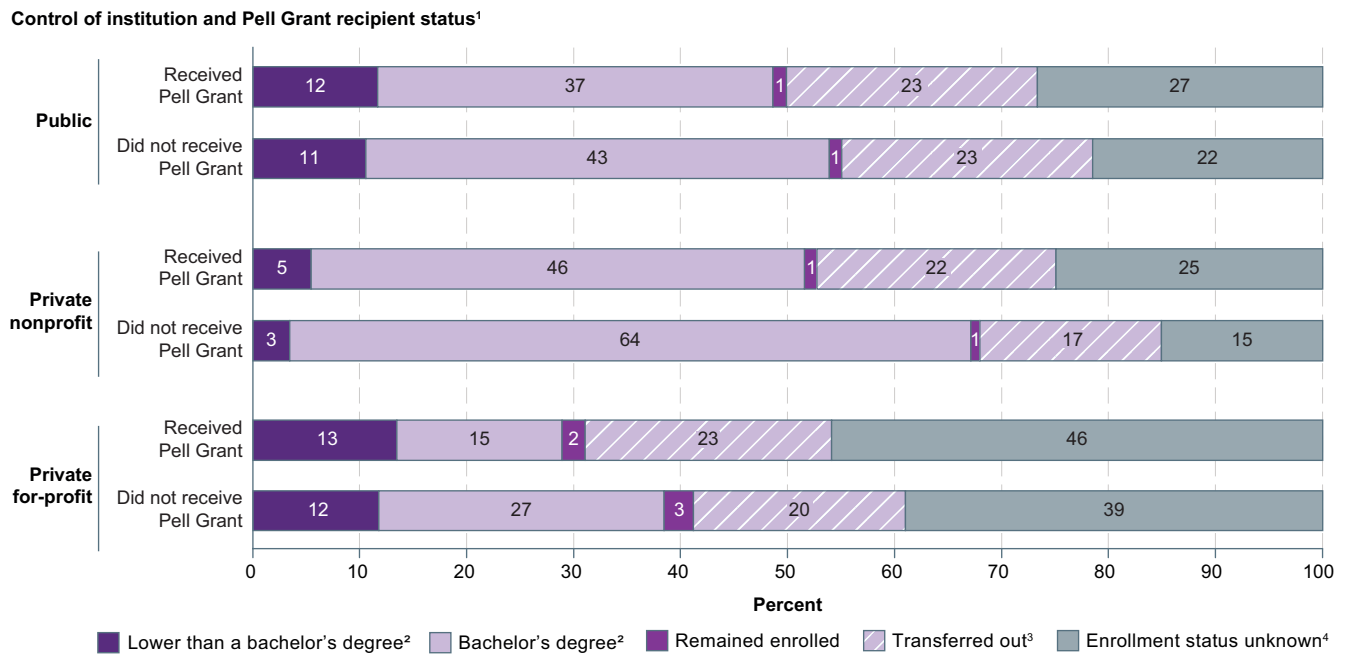
Transfer rates for the 2013 cohort 8 years after entry were highest for non-first-time, part-time students (29 percent), indicating that some students make multiple transfers throughout their postsecondary education. Specifically, transfer rates for the 2013 cohort were

- 21 percent for first-time, full-time students;
- 24 percent for first-time, part-time students;
- 18 percent for non-first-time, full-time students; and
- 29 percent for non-first-time, part-time students.

The percentage of students in the 2013 cohort who remained enrolled at their initial institution 8 years after entry was 3 percent or less of students in each group. The percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry was highest for first-time, part-time students (52 percent), followed by non-first-time, part-time students (33 percent), non-first-time, full-time students (21 percent), and first-time, full-time students (18 percent).



**Figure 6. Percentage distribution of students' postsecondary outcomes 8 years after beginning at 4-year institutions in 2013 for each institutional control category, by Pell Grant recipient status of student: 2021**



<sup>1</sup> Pell Grant recipient status is based on whether students had a disbursed Pell Grant during their first year at the reporting institution.

<sup>2</sup> Lower than a bachelor's degree includes certificates and associate's degrees. Includes only those awards that were conferred by the reporting institution (i.e., the institution the student entered in 2013–14); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.

<sup>3</sup> Transfer out data are required to be reported, regardless of whether the institution has transfer-preparation as part of its mission. The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

<sup>4</sup> Includes students who dropped out of the reporting institution and students who transferred to another institution without notifying the reporting institution.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for degree-granting institutions, which grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Student enrollment status and completion status are determined as of August 31 of the year indicated; for example, within 8 years after the student's 2013–14 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2021. The 2013 cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2020–21, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2013, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27.

At 4-year institutions, completion rates for the 2013 cohort 8 years after entry were lower for Pell Grant recipients than for nonrecipients for every institutional control type. Specifically, these rates were

- 49 percent for Pell Grant recipients vs. 54 percent for nonrecipients at public institutions;
- 52 percent for Pell Grant recipients vs. 67 percent for nonrecipients at private nonprofit institutions; and
- 29 percent for Pell Grant recipients vs. 38 percent for nonrecipients at private for-profit institutions.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) defines a cohort as all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1 of a given year and June 30 of the following year. The cohort is adjusted to exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled as well as students who left school to serve in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., the Peace Corps), or to serve on official church missions. This indicator focuses primarily on the cohort entering between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014, referred to as the 2013 entering cohort.

<sup>2</sup> Includes only those awards that were conferred by the reporting institution (i.e., the institution that the student entered in 2013-14); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.

<sup>3</sup> Refers to students who had prior experience at a different postsecondary institution before attending the reporting institution.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the indicator, “transfer rate” for the 2013 entering cohort refers to the percentage of students who were known transfers (i.e., those who notified their 2013 entry institution of their transfer) within 8 years. The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

<sup>5</sup> Completion rate 8 years after 2013 entry is defined as the percentage of the 2013 cohort that completed an award at their 2013 entry institution at any time between 2013 and 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Transfers include students who transfer to 4-year institutions, where they may go on to earn bachelor’s degrees.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 326.27; *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.27

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Postsecondary Students](#); [Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates](#)

**Glossary:** First-time, full-time students; Full-time enrollment; Part-time enrollment; Postsecondary education; Postsecondary institutions (basic classification by level); Private institution; Public school or institution; Undergraduate students