

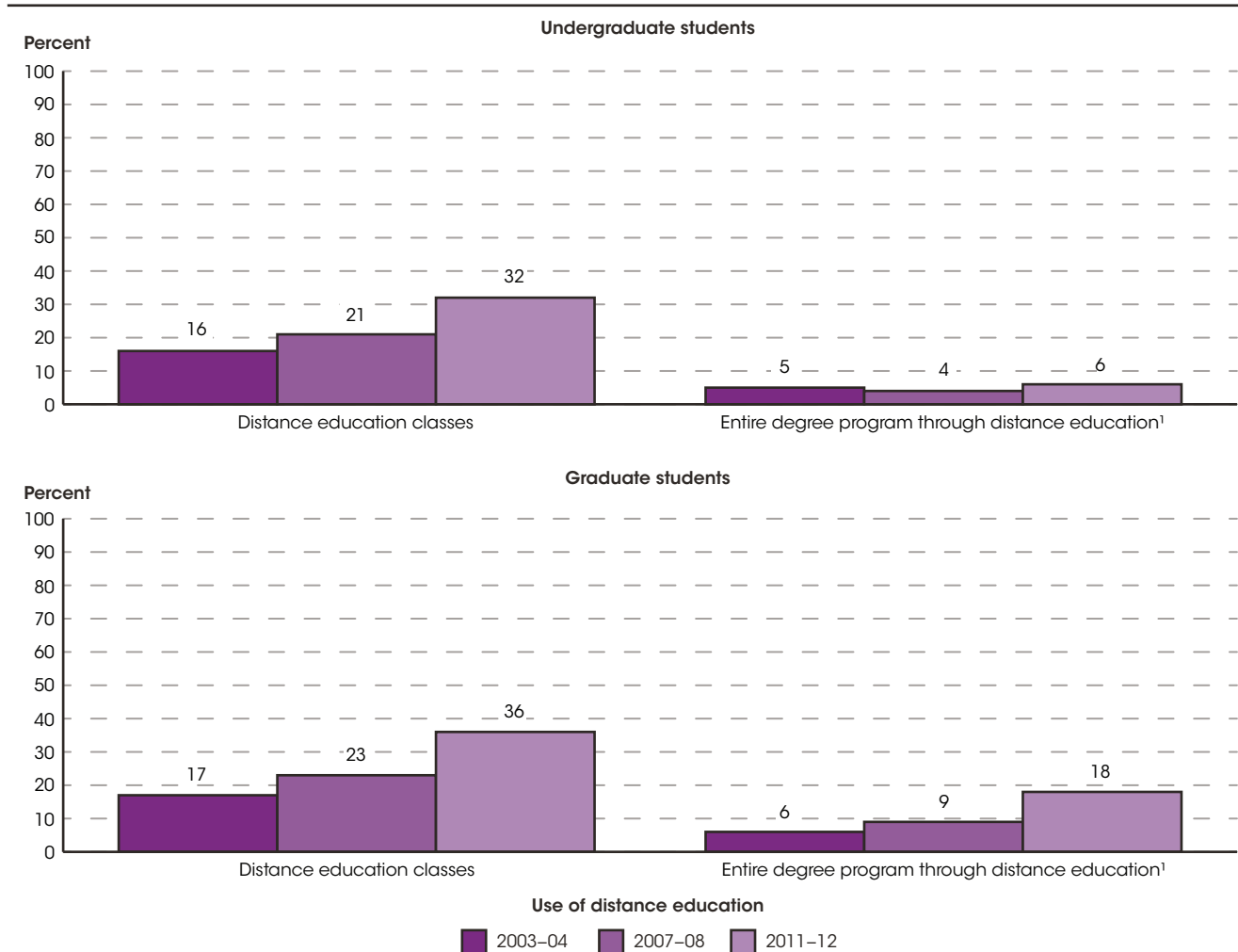
## Distance Education in Postsecondary Institutions

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During the 2011–12 school year, about 7.4 million undergraduate students and about 1.3 million postbaccalaureate (graduate) students took at least one distance education class. These numbers also include those who took their entire degree program online. Distance education<sup>1</sup> classes and programs provide flexible learning opportunities to both undergraduate

and graduate students. During the 2011–12 school year, a higher percentage of graduate students than of undergraduate students took distance education classes (36 vs. 32 percent). In addition, a higher percentage of graduate students than of undergraduate students took their entire degree program through distance education (18 vs. 6 percent).

**Figure 1. Percentage of undergraduate and graduate students taking distance education classes or entire degree programs through distance education, by level: School years 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12**

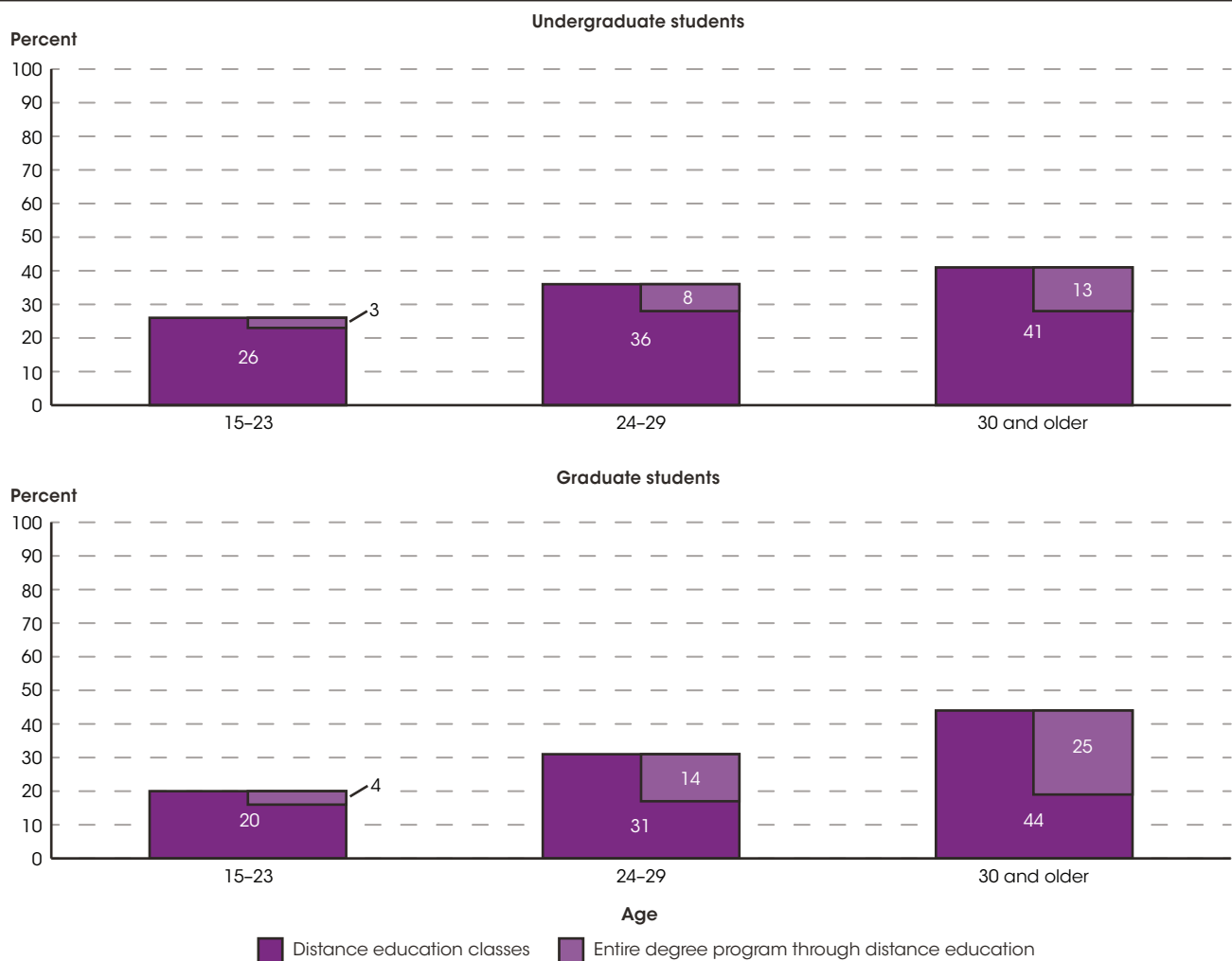


<sup>1</sup> Excludes students not in a degree or certificate program.  
 NOTE: For school years 2003–04 and 2007–08, distance education classes include live, interactive audio- or videoconferencing; prerecorded instructional videos; webcasts; CD-ROMs or DVDs; or computer-based systems accessed over the Internet. Distance education does not include correspondence courses. For the 2011–12 school year, distance education is defined as any online class or degree program conducted entirely online.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:04, NPSAS:08, and NPSAS:12). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, tables 311.22 and 311.32.

A higher percentage of undergraduates took distance education classes in 2011–12 (32 percent) than in 2007–08 (21 percent) or in 2003–04 (16 percent). Also, a higher percentage of undergraduates took their entire degree program through distance education in 2011–12 (6 percent) than in 2007–08 (4 percent) or in 2003–04 (5 percent). In addition, 36 percent of graduate students took distance education classes in 2011–12, compared to 23 percent in 2007–08 and 17 percent in 2003–04. Also, a higher percentage of graduate students took their entire degree program through distance education in 2011–12 (18 percent) than in 2007–08 (9 percent) or in 2003–04 (6 percent).

There were differences in the percentage of undergraduate students participating in distance education programs by institutional control in 2011–12. For example, a higher percentage of undergraduate students at private for-profit institutions (36 percent) took distance education classes than undergraduate students at public institutions (33 percent). Also, a higher percentage of undergraduate students at both private for-profit and public institutions took distance education classes than undergraduate students at private nonprofit institutions (21 percent). Also, a higher percentage of undergraduate students at private for-profit institutions (22 percent) took their entire degree program through distance education than students at either public institutions or private nonprofit institutions (4 percent each).

**Figure 2. Percentage of undergraduate and graduate students taking distance education classes or entire degree program through distance education, by level and age: School year 2011-12**



NOTE: Distance education is defined as any online class or degree program conducted entirely online. It does not include correspondence courses.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011–12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:12). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, tables 311.22 and 311.32.

A higher percentage of older adults enrolled in distance education classes than younger adults. In 2011–12, for example, a higher percentage of undergraduates 30 years old and older took distance education classes or their entire degree program through distance education (41 percent and 13 percent, respectively) than undergraduates 24 to 29 years of age (36 percent and 8 percent, respectively) or undergraduates 15 to 23 years of age (26 percent and 3 percent, respectively). In addition, in 2011–12, a higher percentage of graduate students 30 years old and older took distance education classes or their entire degree program through distance education (44 percent and 25 percent, respectively) than graduate students 24 to 29 years of age (31 percent and 14 percent, respectively) or graduate students 15 to 23 years of age (20 percent and 4 percent, respectively). The same pattern of higher percentages of older rather than younger undergraduate and graduate students taking distance education classes or entire degree program through distance education was evident in 2007–08.

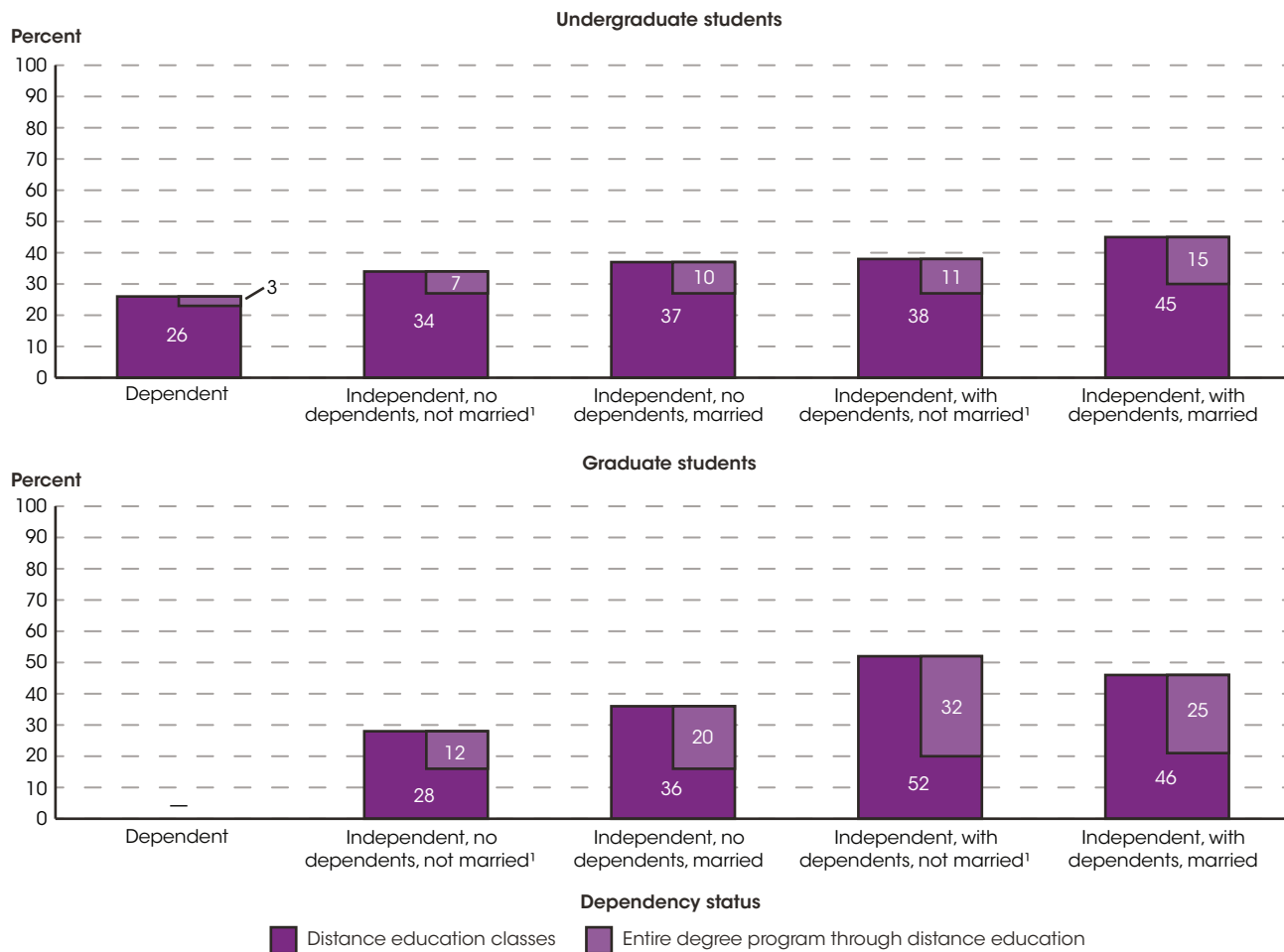
Student participation in distance education classes and programs was higher for employed students (employment excludes work-study/assistantships). In 2011–12, a higher percentage of undergraduates who had a job than of undergraduates who had no job took distance education classes (36 vs. 25 percent) or took their entire degree

program through distance education (8 vs. 5 percent). Likewise, a higher percentage of graduate students who had a job than of graduate students who had no job took distance education classes (44 vs. 20 percent) or their entire degree program through distance education (24 vs. 6 percent).

Also, a higher percentage of part-time undergraduates than full-time undergraduate students took distance education classes (35 vs. 29 percent) or took their entire program through distance education (7 vs. 6 percent). Similarly, a higher percentage of graduate students attending classes part time than of those attending classes full time took distance education classes (41 vs. 32 percent). There was no measurable difference by student attendance status in the percentage of graduate students taking their entire degree program through distance education.

In 2011–12, a higher percentage of female undergraduates than of male undergraduates took distance education classes (35 vs. 29 percent) or took their entire degree program through distance education (8 vs. 5 percent). And, a higher percentage of female graduate students than of male graduate students took distance education classes (39 vs. 32 percent) or their entire degree program through distance education (20 vs. 16 percent).

Figure 3. Percentage of undergraduate and graduate students taking distance education classes or entire degree program through distance education, by level and dependency status: School year 2011–12



— Data not available.

<sup>1</sup> Includes separated.

NOTE: Distance education is defined as any online class or degree program conducted entirely online. It does not include correspondence courses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011–12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:12). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, tables 311.22 and 311.32.

There also were differences in distance education participation by student dependency status. In 2011–12, a lower percentage of financially dependent undergraduates (26 percent) than of financially independent undergraduates of any category took distance education classes. A higher percentage of financially independent undergraduates who were married and had dependents took distance education classes (45 percent) than did other types of financially independent undergraduates,

including those who were unmarried or separated, with (38 percent) or without (34 percent) dependents, as well as those who were married and without dependents (37 percent). Also, a higher percentage of graduate students who were unmarried with dependents than of graduate students of any other family or marital status took distance education classes (52 percent) or took their entire degree program through distance education (32 percent).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> In 2011–12, students were asked whether they took classes that were “taught only online” and, if so, whether their entire degree program was online. In 2003–04 and 2007–08, students were asked about distance education, which was defined in 2007–08 as “primarily delivered using live, interactive audio or videoconferencing, pre-recorded

instructional videos, webcasts, CD-ROM, or DVD, or computer-based systems delivered over the Internet.” The 2003–04 definition was very similar, with only minor differences in wording. In both years, distance education did not include correspondence courses.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, tables 311.22 and 311.32

**Glossary:** College, Higher education institutions, Private institution, Public school or institution, Undergraduate students