

Postsecondary Outcomes for Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Among students who started at public 2-year institutions in 2009, completion rates 8 years after entry were higher among full-time students (30 percent for first-time students and 38 percent for non-first-time students) than among part-time students (16 percent for first-time students and 21 percent for non-first-time students). Also at public 2-year institutions, transfer rates 8 years after entry were higher among non-first-time students (37 percent for part-time students and 30 percent for full-time students) than among first-time students (24 percent for both full-time and part-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 among institutions, or leave postsecondary education temporarily but later enroll again. Newly available data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) shed light on the outcomes of nontraditional students in higher education.

The new Outcome Measures (OM) component of IPEDS collects students’ enrollment and completion statuses 8 years after entering the reporting institution. 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,

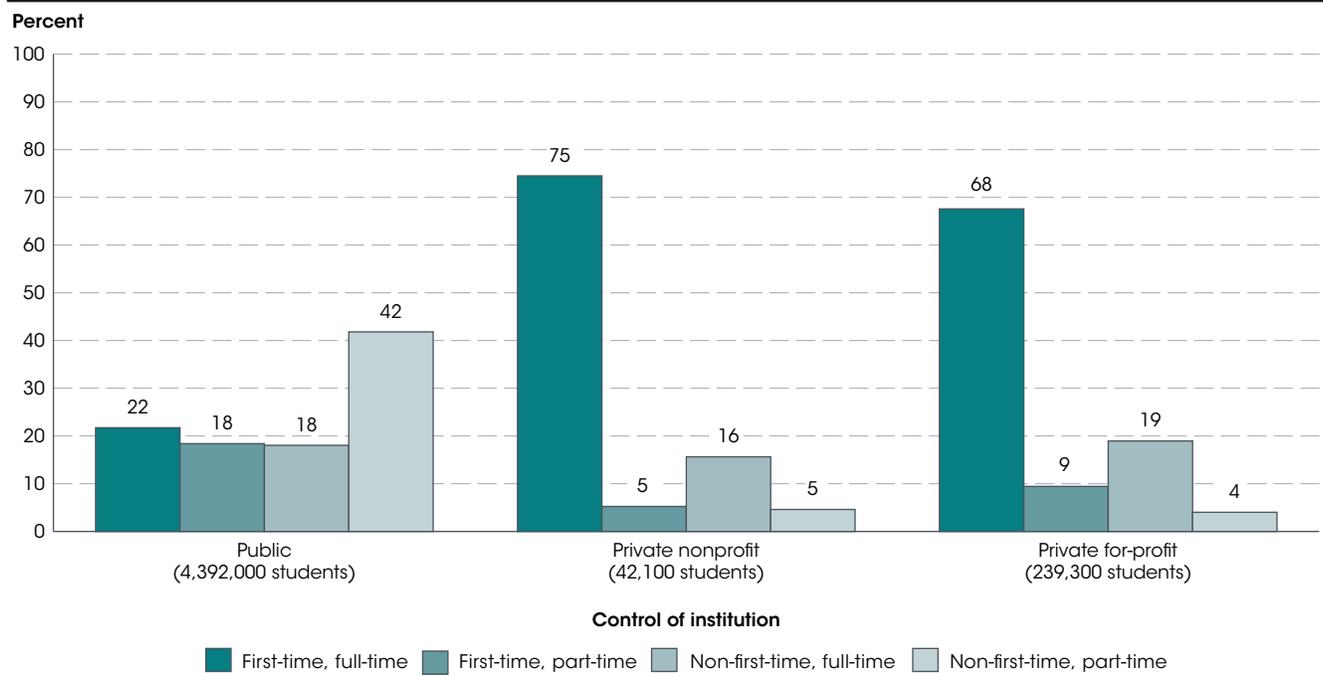
(c) transferred to a different postsecondary institution, or (d) were no longer enrolled at their initial institution and had not completed a credential at their initial institution. The final category includes students who would be considered “dropouts” as well as those who transferred but did not notify their initial institution.

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

- First-time, full-time students
- First-time, part-time students
- Non-first-time,¹ full-time students
- Non-first-time, part-time students

This indicator examines how completion, transfer,² and enrollment rates vary among these four groups.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of undergraduate students beginning at 2-year institutions for each institutional control category, by attendance level and status: 2009



NOTE: The 2009 entry cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010. 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 2009-10 entry into the reporting institution. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

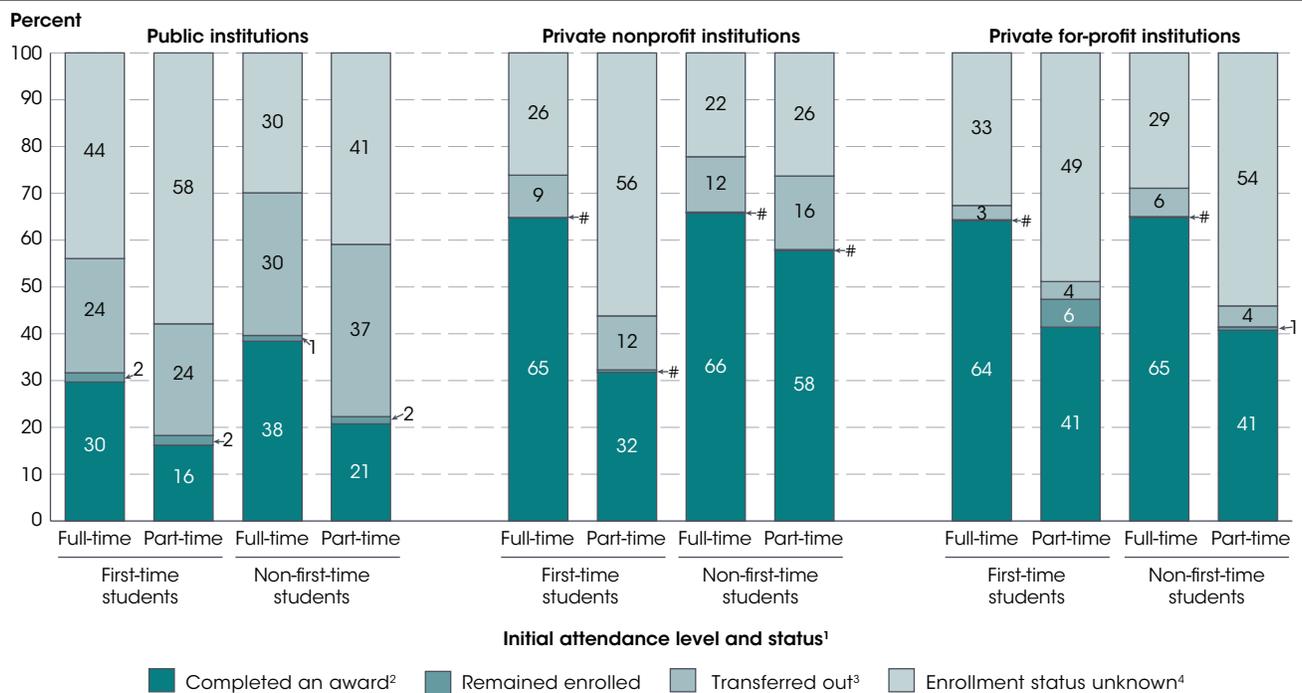
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2017-18, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.27.

Two-Year Institutions

In 2009, some 4.7 million students began at 2-year postsecondary institutions, and only 25 percent were full-time students who were attending college for the first time. The remaining three-quarters of students were those who were not included in traditional graduation and retention rates. The largest group was part-time students who were not first-time college students (40 percent). In addition, 18 percent were first-time, part-time

students and 18 percent were non-first-time, full-time students. Most students who began at 2-year institutions in 2009 enrolled in public institutions (4.4 million students). Smaller numbers enrolled in private nonprofit (42,100 students) and private for-profit (239,000 students) institutions. First-time, full-time students made up only 22 percent of students who began at public 2-year institutions in 2009, but they made up 75 percent of those who began at private nonprofit institutions and 68 percent of those who began at private for-profit institutions.

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of students' postsecondary outcomes 8 years after beginning at 2-year institutions in 2009, by initial attendance level and status: 2017



Rounds to zero.

¹ 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 2009-10 entry into the reporting institution.

² Includes certificates, 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 2009-10); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.

³ Refers to the percentage of students who were known transfers (i.e., those who notified their initial postsecondary institution of their transfer). The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

⁴ Includes students who dropped out of the reporting institution and students who transferred to another institution without notifying the reporting institution. NOTE: The 2009 entry cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010. 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 2009-10 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2018. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

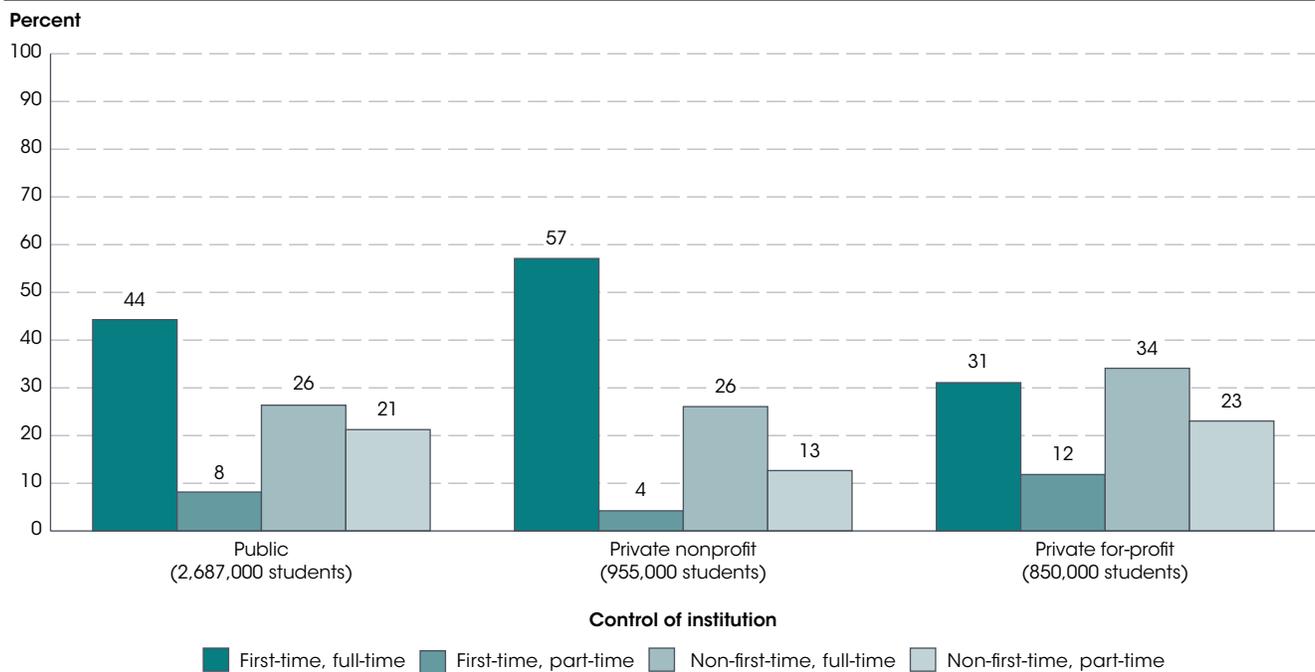
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2017-18, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.27.

At public 2-year institutions, completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort varied widely among the four student groups reported in IPEDS. The 8-year completion rates for the cohort³ were higher among full-time students (30 percent for first-time students and 38 percent for non-first-time students) than among part-time students (16 percent for first-time students and 21 percent for non-first-time students). Two percent or less of students in the four groups remained enrolled 8 years after entry. Transfer rates 8 years after entry were higher among non-first-time students (37 percent for part-time students and 30 percent for full-time students) than among first-time students (24 percent for both full-time and part-time students). The percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry, however, varied widely among the four groups, from 30 percent for non-first-time, full-time students to 58 percent for first-time, part-time students.

Eight-year completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort were higher at private nonprofit and private for-profit

2-year institutions than at public 2-year institutions. At private nonprofit institutions, completion rates ranged from 32 percent for first-time, part-time students to 66 percent for non-first-time, full-time students. At private for-profit 2-year institutions, completion rates ranged from 41 percent for part-time students (both first-time and non-first-time) to 65 percent for non-first-time, full-time students. In all categories of private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions 1 percent or less of students remained enrolled 8 years after entry, except for first-time, part-time students at for-profit institutions, where 6 percent remained enrolled. Transfer rates were generally higher at private nonprofit 2-year institutions (ranging from 9 to 16 percent) than at private for-profit 2-year institutions (ranging from 3 to 6 percent). The percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry was similar at private nonprofit 2-year institutions (ranging from 22 to 56 percent) and private for-profit 2-year institutions (ranging from 29 to 54 percent).

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of undergraduate students beginning at 4-year institutions for each institutional control category, by attendance level and status: 2009



NOTE: The 2009 entry cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010. For 4-year institutions, the cohort includes only bachelor's degree-seeking students. 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 2009-10 entry into the reporting institution. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

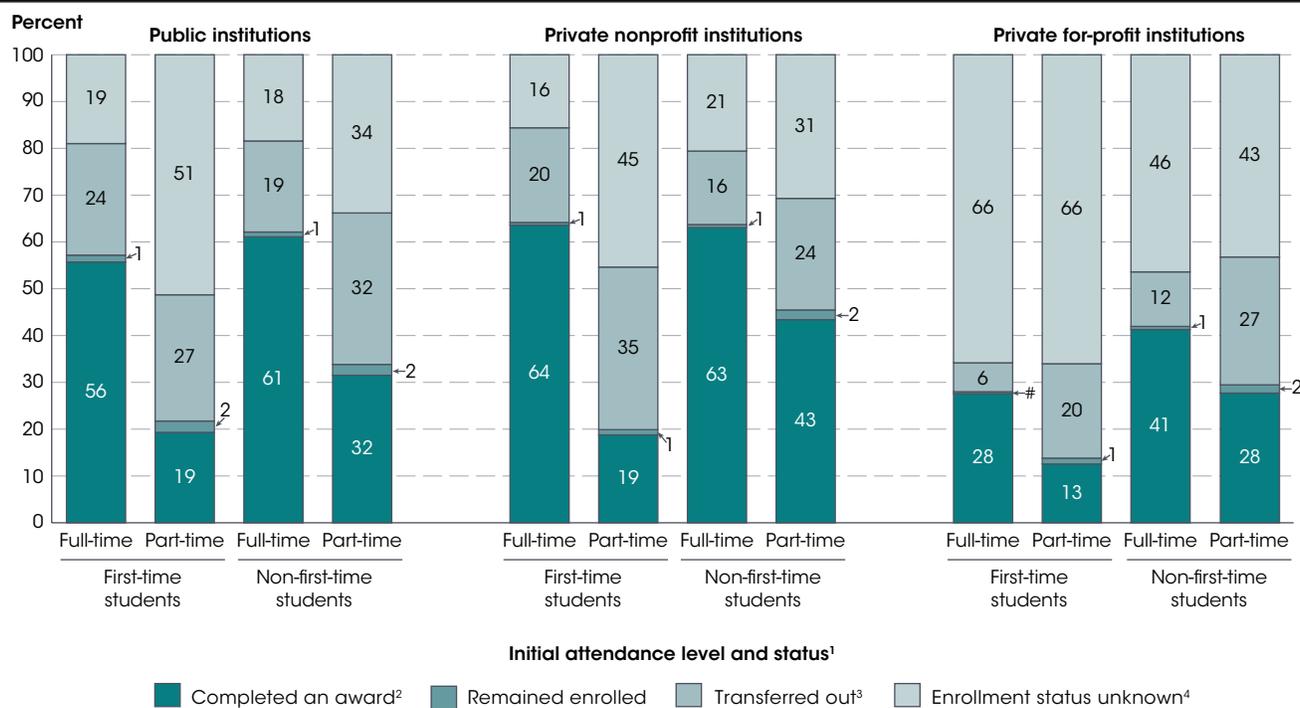
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2017-18, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.27.

Four-Year Institutions

In 2009, some 4.5 million students began at 4-year institutions, and 44 percent were first-time, full-time students. Smaller numbers were first-time, part-time students (8 percent); non-first-time, full-time students (28 percent); and non-first-time, part-time students (20 percent). At public and private nonprofit

institutions, first-time, full-time students made up the largest shares of the 2009 entry cohort (44 percent and 57 percent, respectively). At private for-profit institutions, however, non-first-time, full-time students made up the largest share (34 percent), followed by first-time, full-time students (31 percent); non-first-time, part-time students (23 percent); and first-time, part-time students (12 percent).

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of students' postsecondary outcomes 8 years after beginning at 4-year institutions in 2009, by initial attendance level and status: 2017



Rounds to zero.

¹ 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 2009–10 entry into the reporting institution.

² Includes certificates, 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 2009–10); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.

³ Refers to the percentage of students who were known transfers (i.e., those who notified their initial postsecondary institution of their transfer). The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

⁴ Includes students who dropped out of the reporting institution and students who transferred to another institution without notifying the reporting institution. NOTE: The 2009 entry cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010. For 4-year institutions, the cohort includes only bachelor's degree-seeking students. 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 2009–10 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2018. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2017–18, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.27.

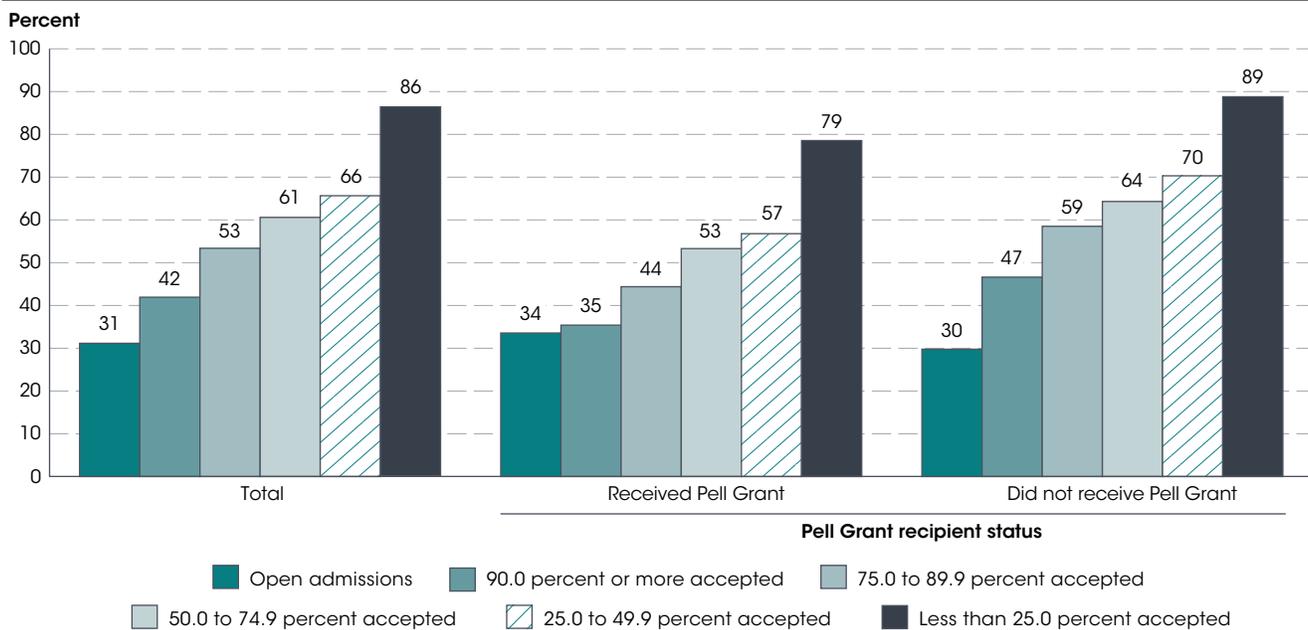
At public 4-year institutions, the 8-year completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort were higher among full-time students (56 percent for first-time students and 61 percent for non-first-time students) than among part-time students (19 percent for first-time students and 32 percent for non-first-time students). Few students (2 percent or less) remained enrolled 8 years after entry, regardless of attendance level and status. Transfer rates 8 years after entry were highest for non-first-time, part-time students (32 percent), indicating that some students make multiple transfers throughout their postsecondary education. The percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry was highest for first-time, part-time students (51 percent), followed by non-first-time, part-time students (34 percent); first-time, full-time students (19 percent); and non-first-time, full-time students (18 percent).

Patterns at private nonprofit 4-year institutions were largely similar to those at public 4-year institutions. The 8-year completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort at private nonprofit 4-year institutions were higher among full-time students (64 percent for first-time students and 63 percent for non-first-time students) than among part-time students (19 percent for first-time students and 43 percent for non-first-time students). Two percent or less of students remained enrolled 8 years after entry, and transfer rates ranged from 16 percent for non-first-time, full-time students to 35 percent for first-time, part-time students. The percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry ranged from 16 percent for first-time, full-time students to 45 percent for first-time, part-time students.

For each of the four student groups reported in IPEDS, the 8-year completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort were lower at private for-profit 4-year institutions than at public and private nonprofit 4-year institutions. At private for-profit institutions, completion rates ranged from 13 percent for first-time, part-time students to 41 percent for non-first-time, full-time students. The percentage of students who remained enrolled at their initial institutions 8 years after entry was 2 percent or less. Transfer rates 8 years after entry at private for-profit 4-year institutions were higher among part-time students (20 percent for first-time students and 27 percent for non-first-time students) than among full-time students (6 percent for first-time

students and 12 percent for non-first-time students). For each of the four groups, the percentage of students whose enrollment status was unknown 8 years after entry was higher for private for-profit 4-year institutions than for public and private nonprofit 4-year institutions. The enrollment status of about two-thirds (66 percent) of first-time students (both full-time and part-time) at private for-profit 4-year institutions was unknown 8 years after entry. Among non-first-time students at private for-profit 4-year institutions, the percentage whose enrollment status was unknown was 46 percent for full-time students and 43 percent for part-time students.

Figure 5. Students' completion rates 8 years after beginning at 4-year institutions in 2009, by Pell Grant recipient status of student and selectivity of institution: 2017



NOTE: The 2009 entry cohort includes all degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who entered a degree-granting institution between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010. For 4-year institutions, the cohort includes only bachelor's degree-seeking students. Student completion status is determined as of August 31 of the year indicated; for example, within 8 years after the student's 2009–10 entry into the reporting institution means by August 31, 2018. Completion rates include only those awards that were conferred by the reporting institution (i.e., the institution that the student entered in 2009–10); excludes awards conferred by institutions to which the student later transferred.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2017–18, Outcome Measures component; and IPEDS Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.27.

The new IPEDS OM data can be used to examine how postsecondary outcomes vary by institutional selectivity (based on acceptance rates). For example, among 4-year institutions, the 8-year completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort were lowest (31 percent) at institutions with open admissions policies and highest (86 percent) at the most selective institutions (those that admitted less than 25 percent of applicants).

In addition, the IPEDS OM 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 4-year institutions, 8-year completion rates for the 2009 entering cohort were lower for Pell grant recipients than for nonrecipients within every institutional selectivity category except open admissions. For example, among institutions that accepted 90 percent or more of applicants, completion rates were 11 percentage points lower for Pell grant recipients than for nonrecipients (35 vs. 47 percent).⁴ Among 4-year institutions that accepted less than 25 percent of applicants, the completion rate was 10 percentage points lower for Pell Grant recipients than for nonrecipients (79 vs. 89 percent). In contrast, among 4-year institutions with open admissions policies, completion rates were 4 percentage points higher for Pell grant recipients than for nonrecipients (34 vs. 30 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ Students who had prior experience at a different postsecondary institution before attending the reporting institution.
² Throughout the indicator, “transfer rate” refers to the percentage of students who were known transfers (i.e., those who notified their initial postsecondary institution of their transfer). The actual transfer rate (including students who transferred, but did not notify their initial institution) may be higher.

³ The percentage of the 2009 cohort that completed an award at their initial institution at any time between 2009 and 2017.
⁴ Percentage point differences were calculated using unrounded percentages.

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

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

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