

# DATA POINT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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## Trends in U.S. Subbaccalaureate Certificate Seekers: 2003–04 to 2011–12

Subbaccalaureate certificates<sup>1</sup> are postsecondary credentials conferred as the result of a student's successful completion of a formal program of study below the baccalaureate level. These certificates are mainly earned through seat time in classrooms and issued by postsecondary educational institutions (Horn and Li 2009). Most certificates are conferred in vocational fields and intended to prepare students for jobs requiring education at the subbaccalaureate level.

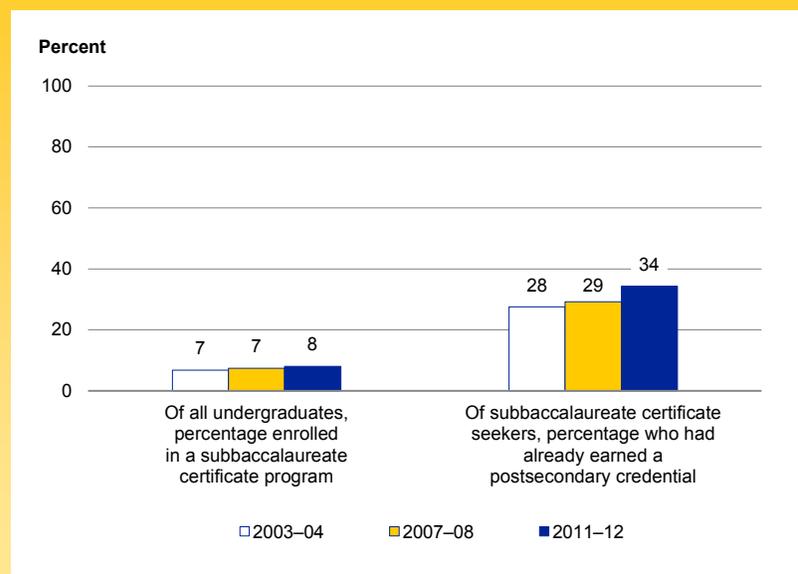
This Data Point shows recent trends in the number of students enrolled in subbaccalaureate certificate programs, their prior educational attainment, and their certificate fields of study. Data are from the 2004, 2008, and 2012 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). These studies are nationally representative sample surveys of how U.S. students finance their postsecondary education.

### Did the percentage of undergraduates enrolled in subbaccalaureate certificate programs and the percentage of enrollees already holding postsecondary credentials change between 2003–04 and 2011–12?

In 2011–12, about 8 percent of undergraduates<sup>2</sup> were enrolled in subbaccalaureate certificate programs in the U.S. postsecondary education system, representing a slight increase from the 7 percent who were enrolled in 2003–04 (**figure 1**).

In 2011–12, one-third of subbaccalaureate certificate seekers (i.e., enrollees) had already earned a postsecondary degree or certificate, rising from 28 percent in 2003–04.

**FIGURE 1. Percentage of undergraduates enrolled in a subbaccalaureate certificate program, and, of these, percentage who had already attained a postsecondary credential: 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12**



NOTE: Estimates include students enrolled in Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Standard error tables are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016411>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies (NPSAS:04, NPSAS:08, and NPSAS:12).

To learn more about the NPSAS, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas>. For questions about content or to view this report online, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016411>.

### In which fields were subbaccalaureate certificate seekers enrolled? Did the enrollment in these fields change between 2003–04 and 2011–12?

Subbaccalaureate certificate seekers concentrated in three broad fields: health care, personal/consumer services, and manufacturing/construction/repair/transportation (**figure 2**). Together, these three fields accounted for 77 percent of all subbaccalaureate certificate seekers enrolled in the U.S. postsecondary education system in 2011–12, with health care the predominant field (42 percent).

Compared with enrollment in these three fields, fewer subbaccalaureate certificate seekers were enrolled in STEM fields<sup>3</sup> (7 percent), business (5 percent), social sciences/humanities (1 percent), and other miscellaneous fields (9 percent) in 2011–12.

From 2003–04 to 2011–12, subbaccalaureate certificate enrollment in personal/consumer services increased (from 13 percent to 21 percent), but enrollment decreased in STEM (from 10 percent to 7 percent) and business (from 11 percent to 5 percent). There was no measurable change in the enrollment in health care fields during this period (39 percent and 42 percent).

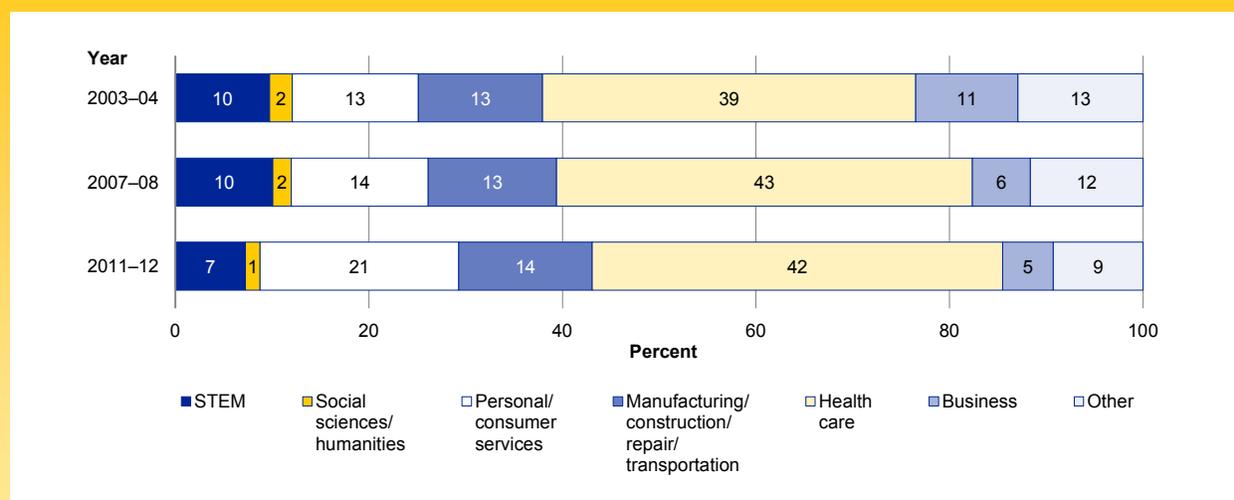
### References

Horn, L., and Li, X. (2009). *Changes in Postsecondary Awards Below the Bachelor's Degree: 1997 to 2007* (NCES 2010-167). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Certificates can also be awarded at the postbaccalaureate level; those certificates, however, are not included in this analysis.
- <sup>2</sup> Undergraduates refer to students enrolled in Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- <sup>3</sup> Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

**FIGURE 2. Percentage distribution of subbaccalaureate certificate seekers according to their certificate field of study: 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12**



NOTE: The figure excludes students who did not declare a major field at the time of the interview. STEM refers to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Estimates include students enrolled in Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Detail may not sum to total because of rounding. Standard error tables are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016411>.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies (NPSAS:04, NPSAS:08, and NPSAS:12).

This National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Data Point presents information on education topics of interest. It was authored by Xianglei Chen of RTI International. Estimates based on samples are subject to sampling variability, and apparent differences may not be statistically significant. All noted differences are statistically

significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.