

Descriptive Summary of 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students: Three Years Later



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JULY 2008

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Executive Summary

In the 2003–04 academic year, approximately 4 million students enrolled in postsecondary education institutions for the first time. A sample of these students were selected to be interviewed during or just after their first year in 2004 and interviewed again in 2006 as part of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/06). This report describes the background and characteristics of these beginning postsecondary students, some of their experiences while enrolled, and their persistence and completion of any programs of study in the 3 years after they had first enrolled.

Data and Methods

The 2004/06 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/06) collected information from a sample of about 19,000 undergraduates who enrolled in about 1,300 postsecondary institutions for the first time between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004. These students were interviewed in 2004 as part of the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:04) and were then interviewed again in 2006. The BPS:04/06 study includes first-year data about the students that were collected in NPSAS:04, as well as data collected in 2006 about their experiences after the first year of enrollment. The BPS:04/06 sample represents those first-time undergraduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States and Puerto Rico that participate in the federal Title IV student aid programs. Additional information about the

sample design is available in appendix B of this report.

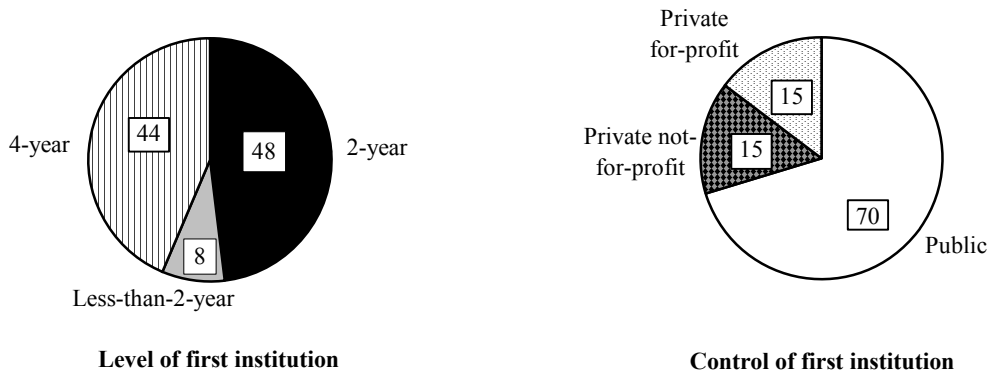
The estimates presented in this report were produced using the BPS:04/06 Data Analysis System (DAS). The analysis uses standard *t* tests to determine the statistical significance of differences between estimates. All differences noted are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. For more information on statistical methods, see appendix B. The findings presented here are descriptive. Although associations are noted and discussed, no causal inferences should be made.

Types of Institutions Attended

About one-half (48 percent) of the first-time students in 2003–04 began at a 2-year institution, 44 percent began at a 4-year institution, and 8 percent began at a less-than-2-year institution (figure A). Seventy percent of the students started at public institutions, 15 percent started at private not-for-profit institutions, and 15 percent started at private for-profit institutions.

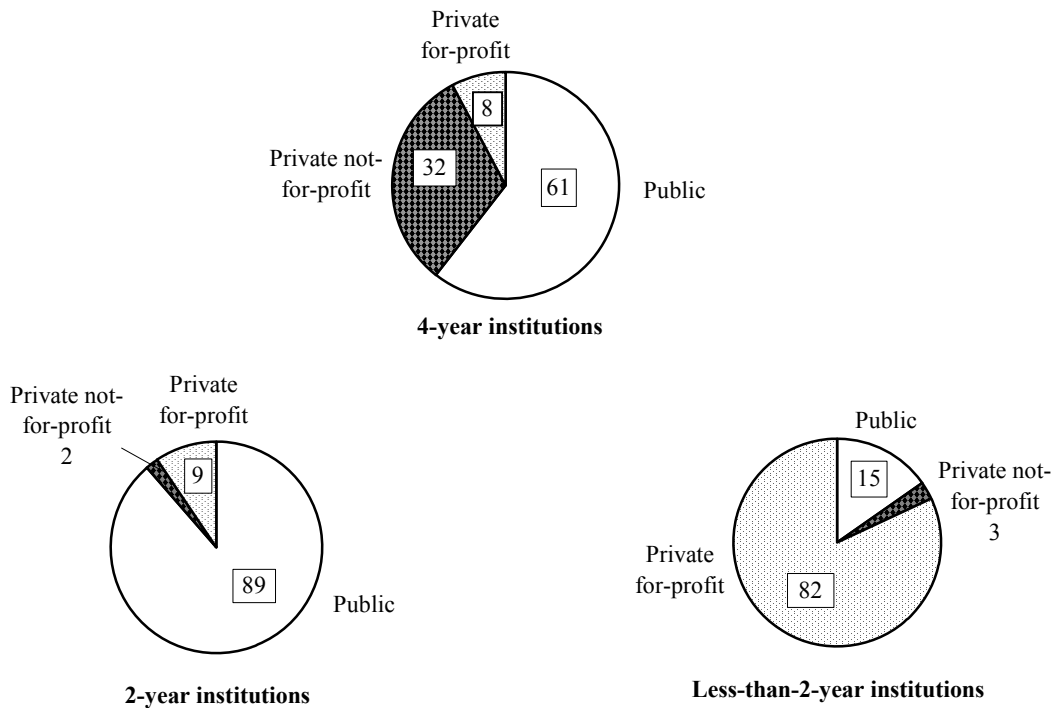
When looking within levels of institutions, 89 percent of the beginners at 2-year institutions were first enrolled in public 2-year institutions (usually called “community colleges”), and 82 percent of the beginners at less-than-2-year institutions were first enrolled in private for-profit institutions (figure B). At the 4-year institutions, 61 percent of the beginners were first enrolled in public 4-year institutions, 32 percent in private not-for-profit

Figure A. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students, by level and control of the first institution attended: 2003–04



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Figure B. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students, by control of the first institution attended, within institution level: 2003–04



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

institutions, and 8 percent in private for-profit institutions.

Degree Plans

In 2004, during or just after their first year of enrollment, beginning postsecondary students were asked about their degree plans. Forty percent said that they were working on a bachelor's degree, 36 percent on an associate's degree, and 13 percent on a certificate in a vocational program; 10 percent said that they were not working on any particular degree (table A). At the less-than-2-year institutions, 89 percent of the beginners planned to get a certificate. At the 2-year institutions, 64 percent of the beginners planned to get an associate's degree, and about 10 percent each planned to get either a certificate or a bachelor's degree (by transferring to a 4-year

institution). At public and private not-for-profit 4-year institutions, 84 percent of the beginners were planning to complete a bachelor's degree, but at the private for-profit 4-year institutions, 57 percent were working on an associate's degree and 39 percent were working on a bachelor's degree.

Student Characteristics

The background characteristics of the beginning postsecondary students varied with the level of the first institution they attended. About two-thirds (66 percent) of the 2003–04 beginning students were 19 years or younger when they started (table B). Among those who started at 4-year institutions, 85 percent were in this age group, as were about one-half (54 percent) at the 2-year institutions and about one-third (32 percent) at the less-than-2-year institutions.

Table A. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' first-year degree plans, by level of first institution and control of first 4-year institution attended: 2003–04

Level and control of first institution	None	Certificate	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree
Total	10.4	13.2	36.3	40.0
Level of first institution				
4-year	5.6	1.9	11.6	80.9
2-year	16.2	10.4	63.6	9.8
Less-than-2-year	1.6	89.2	8.0	1.3
Control of first 4-year institution				
Public 4-year	6.8	1.7	7.0	84.4
Private not-for-profit 4-year	4.6	1.9	9.2	84.4
Private for-profit 4-year	0.6	3.0	57.2	39.2

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Table B. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' age in the first year enrolled, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	18 years or younger	19 years	20–23 years	24–29 years	30 years or older
Total	42.6	23.4	12.8	7.9	13.3
Level of first institution					
4-year	58.0	27.4	6.5	3.5	4.5
2-year	32.9	21.4	17.0	9.8	18.9
Less-than-2-year	18.0	13.9	22.0	19.4	26.6

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

For financial aid purposes, students are classified as “dependent” on their parents for financial support, or financially “independent.” Students under age 24 are assumed to be dependent, unless they are married or have dependents of their own (usually children) or meet some other less common criteria; all students age 24 or older are assumed to be financially independent. Seventy-one percent of all beginning students were dependent (table C). The percentage of beginning students who were dependent ranged

from 89 percent at 4-year institutions, to 61 percent at 2-year institutions, to 36 percent at less-than-2-year institutions.

One-fourth of the dependent beginning students came from families with annual incomes below \$32,000 (table D). The percentage of dependent beginning students with family incomes below \$32,000 was 20 percent at 4-year institutions, 28 percent at 2-year institutions, and 65 percent at less-than-2-year institutions.

Table C. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' dependency and marital status in the first year enrolled, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Single, no children (dependent)	Single, no children (independent)	Single parent (independent)	Married (independent)
Total	70.9	7.1	10.5	11.5
Level of first institution				
4-year	88.6	3.5	4.2	3.7
2-year	60.9	9.4	12.8	16.8
Less-than-2-year	36.1	12.2	30.5	21.2

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Table D. Percentage distribution of dependent beginning postsecondary students' annual family income, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Less than \$32,000	\$32,000–59,999	\$60,000–91,999	\$92,000 or more
Total	25.1	26.7	24.9	23.3
Level of first institution				
4-year	19.7	24.5	26.1	29.7
2-year	28.2	29.9	25.3	16.6
Less-than-2-year	64.7	24.6	6.4	4.3

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Academic Preparation

Because the information about high school academic preparation in BPS:04/06 is incomplete for older students who have been out of high school for more than 5 years, it is only reported for beginners who were under age 24 when they began postsecondary education in 2003–04 (about 80 percent of all beginners) (table 1.7).

Among the students under age 24 who began at 4-year institutions, about one-half (47 percent) reported a high school grade point average (GPA)

of 3.5 or higher, compared with 17 percent of the beginners at 2-year institutions (table E). One measure of the rigor of the courses taken in high school is the highest level of mathematics taken. Among students under age 24 who started at 4-year institutions, about one-fourth (27 percent) reported taking calculus in high school; 6 percent reported taking only courses below algebra II. Among beginners under age 24 starting at 2-year institutions, 5 percent reported taking calculus and one-fourth (25 percent) reported taking only courses below algebra II (table F).

Table E. For beginning postsecondary students under age 24, percentage distribution of their high school grade point average (GPA), by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Below 3.0	3.0–3.4	3.5–4.0
Total	31.7	35.7	32.6
Level of first institution			
4-year	17.7	35.1	47.2
2-year	46.2	36.8	17.0
Less-than-2-year	57.2	32.6	10.2

NOTE: Grades are self-reported and only include students with a regular high school diploma. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Table F. For beginning postsecondary students under age 24, percentage distribution of the highest level of mathematics courses taken in high school, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Below Algebra II	Algebra II	Trigonometry	Pre-calculus	Calculus
Total	15.7	30.4	17.6	19.9	16.3
Level of first institution					
4-year	6.3	20.2	19.4	27.0	27.1
2-year	24.9	40.2	16.0	13.4	5.5
Less-than-2-year	29.5	46.7	14.2	6.8	2.8

NOTE: Courses are self-reported. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

About 90 percent of beginners had regular high school diplomas, but the percentage who did not varied by institution type (compendium table 2.1). Four percent of students who began at 4-year institutions, 13 percent who began at 2-year institutions, and 25 percent who began at less-than-2-year institutions did so without a regular high school diploma.

Among beginning students under age 24, about one-fifth reported that they had earned Advanced Placement Test college credits which were accepted by their institution (19 percent) or that they had earned college credits for courses taken at a college while in high school (21 percent) (table 10).

Retention and Attainment at the First Institution Attended

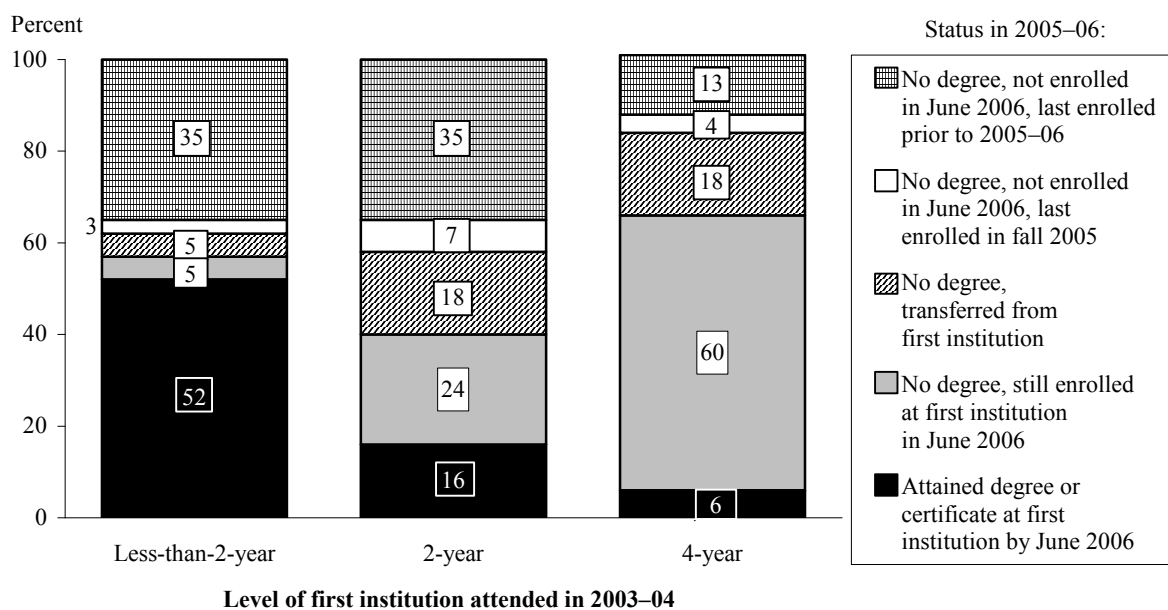
The 3-year period covered in this report is too brief to determine whether students who had not attained a certificate or degree and were no longer enrolled anywhere in June 2006 had permanently left postsecondary education. Some beginning students may “stop out” by leaving an institution for a semester or more, and then return to that or a different institution later. Students who have “stopped out” can only be identified as such after

they have returned, which may be after the 3-year period of this study. When the term “left” is used in this report, it only refers to the enrollment status of the student at the end of the 3-year period, and includes some “stop-outs” who cannot be identified until later.

Institutions usually measure student retention as the percentage of beginners still enrolled in the fall term of each year after they first started. The figures below for 3-year retention at the first institution show the percentage of the 2003–04 beginners who were not enrolled at any time in 2005–06 and also those who were enrolled only in the fall of 2005.

Less-than-2-year institutions offer certificates in vocational fields that can be completed in less than 2 years of full-time enrollment. About one-half (52 percent) of the students beginning at a less-than-2-year institution in 2003–04 had attained a certificate by 2006 at the same institution where they had started (figure C). Five percent of the beginners at less-than-2-year institutions were still enrolled at the same institution without completing a certificate in June 2006; 3 percent were last enrolled there in the fall of 2005; and 35 percent left the institution without completing a certificate and were not enrolled

Figure C. Retention and attainment at the first institution attended after 3 years among students who began in 2003–04, by level of first institution attended



NOTE: The term “degree” includes certificates in vocational programs. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

anywhere in 2005–06. Five percent had transferred to a different institution without a certificate.

Two-year institutions offer associate’s degree programs, which can normally be completed in 2 years of full-time enrollment, and may also offer certificates in vocational programs. Sixteen percent of the 2003–04 beginning students at 2-year institutions had attained a certificate (6 percent) or associate’s degree (10 percent) within 3 years at the institution where they had first enrolled (table 5.1). Twenty-four percent of the beginners were still enrolled at the same institution without completing a degree in June 2006; 7 percent were last enrolled there in the fall of 2005; and 35 percent had left the institution before completing a degree and were

not enrolled anywhere during the 2005–06 academic year. Eighteen percent had left the institution without a degree and transferred elsewhere during the 3-year period.

Four-year institutions offer bachelor’s degrees, which can usually be completed in 4 years of full-time enrollment, but may also offer associate’s degree and certificate programs. Two percent of the beginners at 4-year institutions completed a bachelor’s degree in 3 years and 4 percent completed an associate’s degree or a certificate at the institution where they had started (table 5.1). Sixty percent were still enrolled at the same institution without a degree in June 2006; 4 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 13 percent had left the institution and were not enrolled

anywhere during the 2005–06 academic year. Eighteen percent had left the 4-year institution where they had started and transferred to a different institution before completing any program.

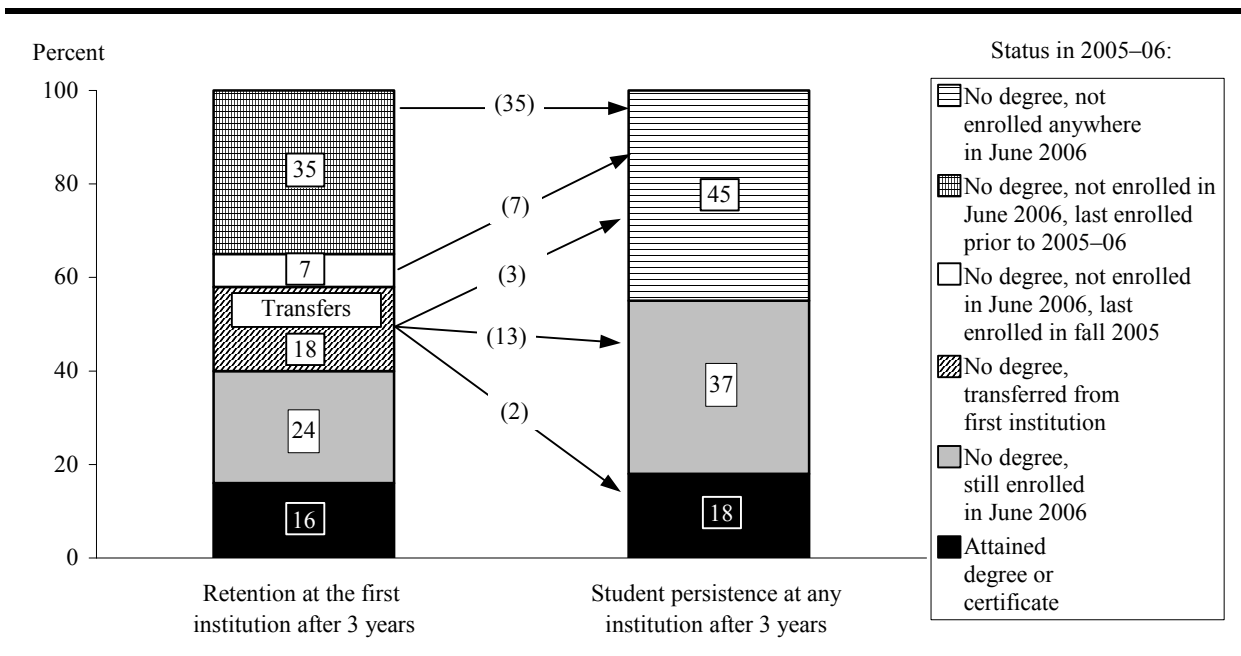
Persistence and Attainment Anywhere

In this report, the term *retention* is used to refer to the experience of the beginning postsecondary students after 3 years at the institution where they first enrolled. From the perspective of the institution where they started, students are retained if they are still enrolled at that institution or have attained a degree or

certificate there. The figures below compare the 3-year retention at the first institution, which includes students last enrolled in the fall of 2005, to the 3-year persistence of the same students anywhere in the spring of 2006. The students enrolled only in the fall term at the first institution are included among those not enrolled anywhere in June 2006.

Among students beginning at a 2-year institution, 35 percent left the institution without completing a program before the 2005–06 academic year and did not enroll anywhere else; 7 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 18 percent transferred elsewhere without a degree (figure D).

Figure D. Retention at the first institution attended and persistence anywhere after 3 years among students who began at 2-year institutions in 2003–04

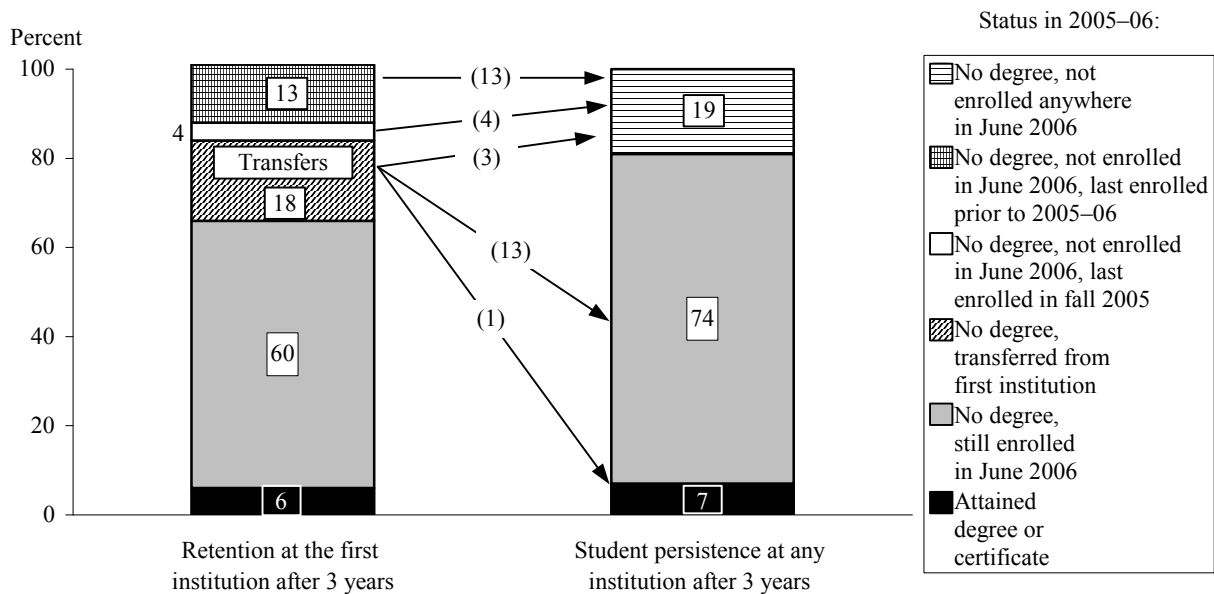


By June 2006, 45 percent of the students who started at a 2-year institution had not attained any degree and were not enrolled anywhere; this proportion includes the students who transferred and then left the second institution, as well as those last enrolled in the fall of 2005. Eighteen percent had attained a degree or certificate, and 37 percent were still enrolled without a degree, either at the first institution or at the transfer institution.

Among students beginning at a 4-year institution, 13 percent left the institution without completing a program and were not enrolled

anywhere in 2005–06; 4 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 18 percent had transferred elsewhere without a degree (figure E). By June 2006, some 19 percent of the students who started at a 4-year institution in 2003–04 had not attained any degree and were not enrolled anywhere; this proportion includes the students who transferred and then left the second institution without a degree as well as those last enrolled in the fall of 2005. Seven percent had attained a degree or certificate, and 74 percent were still enrolled without a degree, either at the first institution or at the transfer institution.

Figure E. Retention at the first institution attended and persistence anywhere after 3 years among students who began at 4-year institutions in 2003–04



NOTE: The term “degree” includes certificates. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Some student characteristics associated with persistence and attainment include program type, enrollment intensity, dependency status, and employment while enrolled. In 2005–06, students in certificate programs had higher rates of completion than those in associate’s degree programs; students who were enrolled full time completed degrees at higher rates than those enrolled part time; and independent students had higher completion rates than dependent students, although larger percentages of dependent than independent students were still enrolled. Students who worked full time left postsecondary education without completion at higher rates and remained enrolled at lower rates than those who did not work or worked part time.

Summary

Most of the first-time students who began at 4-year institutions in 2003–04 were young (85 percent were age 19 or younger) and financially dependent on their parents. Among those under age 24, nearly all (94 percent) had taken algebra II or higher mathematics courses in high school, and about one-fourth had taken calculus. About one-half had a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher. Eighteen percent of students who began at 4-year institutions in 2003–04 transferred

from the institution where they started. After 3 years, 81 percent were either still enrolled in postsecondary education or had attained a degree or certificate.

About one-half (46 percent) of the students beginning at 2-year institutions in 2003–04 were age 20 or older when they started, and 39 percent were financially independent. Among those under age 24, one-fourth had not taken algebra II or higher high school mathematics, and about one-half had a high school GPA below 3.0. Eighteen percent transferred from the 2-year institution where they had started without a degree. After 3 years, 55 percent had either attained a certificate or degree (18 percent) or were still enrolled without a degree at some postsecondary institution (37 percent).

About two-thirds (68 percent) of the students beginning at less-than-2-year institutions in 2003–04 were age 20 or older when they started, and about two-thirds (64 percent) were financially independent. Among those under age 24, about one-half had a high school GPA below 3.0. Within 3 years, about one-half (52 percent) of the students starting at a less-than-2-year institution had completed a certificate program from that institution.

Foreword

This report provides a description of the student characteristics, persistence, and degree attainment of a nationally representative sample of students who began postsecondary education for the first time during the 2003–04 academic year. The report describes the background, academic preparation, and experience of these beginning students over 3 academic years, from July 2003 to June 2006, and provides information about rates of program completion, transfer, and attrition for students who first enrolled at various types of postsecondary institutions using data from the 2004/06 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/06). The BPS survey is the longitudinal component of the 2003–04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:04), a nationally representative sample that includes students enrolled in all types of postsecondary institutions. The BPS:04/06 cohort consists of students in the NPSAS:04 sample who were identified as having enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time during the 2003–04 academic year. These beginning students were initially interviewed in 2004, at the end of their first year in postsecondary education, and then interviewed again in 2006, some 3 years after they had started.

The estimates presented in the report were produced using the NCES Data Analysis System (DAS), a web-based software application that enables users to specify and generate tables for most of the postsecondary surveys conducted by NCES. The DAS produces the design-adjusted standard errors necessary for testing the statistical significance of differences in the estimates. The DAS for BPS:04/06 is available on the NCES website (<http://nces.ed.gov/das>). For more information on the DAS, see appendix B of this report.

Acknowledgments

The 2004/06 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study was conducted by RTI International and MPR Associates for the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES). Jennifer Wine of RTI was responsible for the overall direction and management of the project. Others at RTI who made major contributions were Jeff Franklin for student interviews, Joe Simpson for data processing, Melissa Cominole for instrument development, Theresa Gilligan, Donna Anderson, and Kristin Dudley for the data files, Sara Wheelless for weights, and Darryl Creel for imputations. Sara Wheelless, Marcinda Mason, and Lesa Caves prepared the methodological appendix for this report.

At MPR, Shirley He, Stephen Lew, and Joanna Wu wrote the programs for the derived variables and prepared the documentation for the Data Analysis System files. Vicky Dinger, Terry Lew, and John Vavricka created the Data Analysis System files. Barbara Kridl was responsible for the production of the report; Alicia Broadway formatted the tables and the text of the report; Rosa Van prepared the glossary; and Andrea Livingston and Emily Forrest Cataldi edited the text.

The report was also reviewed by Jacqueline King (American Council on Education), Catherine Millett (Educational Testing Service), and Tammy Halligan (Career College Association) who provided many useful comments and suggestions for revisions.

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Introduction

Approximately 4 million undergraduates started postsecondary education for the first time during the 2003–04 academic year, enrolling in a wide variety of institutions, including 4-year colleges and universities, public 2-year community colleges, and private for-profit institutions. A sample of these first-time beginning students was surveyed in 2004, at the end of their first year in postsecondary education, and then surveyed again in 2006, some 3 years after they had started. This report describes the background and characteristics of these first-time beginners at various types of institutions, some of their experiences while enrolled, and their persistence and completion of any programs of study in the 3 years after they had first enrolled.

Data and Methods

The data in this report are from the 2004/06 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/06), the latest in a series of BPS studies covering the years 1990–94 (BPS:90/94) and 1996–2001 (BPS:96/01). The students in the BPS:04/06 study will be contacted again and interviewed in 2009. The descriptive reports and public access datasets for all of these studies are available from the NCES website (<http://nces.ed.gov/das>).

The BPS:04/06 study includes the results of the 2004 survey, administered during the students' first year of enrollment, as well as the results of the first follow-up survey of 2006. The 2004 survey was administered as part of the 2003–04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:04). NPSAS:04 is a nationally representative sample of about 90,000 undergraduate, graduate, and first-professional students in about 1,600 postsecondary institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico¹ that are eligible to participate in the federal Title IV student aid programs. Approximately 19,000 respondents were identified as first-time beginners in the NPSAS:04 survey and became the sample for the BPS:04/06 longitudinal study. The NPSAS:04 study sample represents the approximately 19 million undergraduates enrolled in 2003–04, while the BPS:04/06 study sample represents about 4 million of these undergraduates who were first-time beginners that academic year.

¹ Approximately 300 students in the sample (1.2 percent weighted) were enrolled in Puerto Rico. No statistically significant differences were detected in the totals of any of the following tables when Puerto Rico was excluded.

The estimates presented in this report were produced using the BPS:04/06 Data Analysis System (DAS). A glossary describing the variables in the DAS that were used to produce the tables is provided in appendix A. All comparisons made in the Selected Findings were tested using Student's *t* statistic, and all differences cited were statistically significant at the .05 level. Standard errors for estimates in this report are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/das/library/reports.asp>. The findings presented here are entirely descriptive in nature. Although associations are noted and discussed, these associations do not support causal inferences.

The information about the BPS students in their first year comes from the NPSAS:04 study, which is based on a wide variety of sources such as institutional records, federal financial aid applications, federal student loan and Pell grant records, and a student interview. The information about the BPS students in 2006 is primarily based on the follow-up student interview, supplemented with data from the same federal databases, college admissions test agencies, and the National Student Clearinghouse enrollment records. The student interviews in both years were a web-based questionnaire that was either self-administered or conducted via telephone with a trained interviewer. In 2006 about 15,000 students completed the interview, resulting in a weighted response rate of 77 percent. The technical notes in appendix B supply additional information about response rates, the methodology of the data collection, file preparation, and analysis.

Related Studies

The standard works on college student retention are by Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993). More recently, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have provided a comprehensive review of a decade of research on the persistence and attainment of college students. The literature which they summarize has shown that higher rates of student persistence and degree attainment are associated with the following student characteristics: academic achievement in high school, immediate entry into college after high school, full-time and continuous enrollment while in college, academic and social engagement with faculty and peers, working part time for less than 15 hours a week while enrolled, and beginning at a 4-year institution instead of a 2-year community college. Lower rates of persistence and attainment are associated with delayed entry into college after high school, weak academic preparation, part-time enrollment and interruptions in enrollment continuity, low levels of interaction with faculty and little participation in school activities, working more than 15 hours a week while enrolled, and beginning at a 2-year community college.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also review the research on the relationship of parental education and family income to student persistence. Student persistence in college is positively associated with higher levels of parental education; students whose parents attended college are more likely to go to college and to complete a degree. Persistence is also positively associated with family income, but financial aid enhances the persistence and degree completion of low-income students. The recent literature by economists examining the complex relationship of persistence to financial aid, family income, parental education, and academic preparation has been reviewed by Long (2007).

The first study in the Beginning Postsecondary Students series followed a cohort of students beginning postsecondary education in 1989–90 through their fifth year in 1994 (Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, and McCormick 1996). The second BPS study was based on a cohort of students beginning in 1995–96. The characteristics of these students in their first year were described by Kojaku and Nunes (1998) and their 3-year persistence and attainment was described by Berkner, Horn, and Clune (2000). These two reports provide information about the 1995–96 beginning students that is comparable to the information presented in this report about the 2003–04 beginning students.

The persistence and degree completion rates of the 1995–96 cohort after 6 years is described in Berkner, He and Cataldi (2002). The persistence and attainment rates of the 1989–90 and the 1995–96 cohorts of beginning students are compared in Horn and Berger (2004). Adelman (2006) analyses the BPS data in relation to the college enrollment experience and completion rates of a cohort of students who were in the eighth grade in 1988. Choy (2002) provides a summary of the results of the NCES studies on students that is written for a general audience.

Organization of the Report

This report describes some of the findings from the BPS:04/06 survey data that was recently released by NCES. The report has two purposes: (1) to present an overview of the characteristics of students who began postsecondary education for the first time in 2003–04 and their enrollment patterns during the 3 years after they first enrolled, and (2) to provide a reference tool for federal and state policymakers, postsecondary associations, college administrators, and others looking for detailed information based on national data about first-time students and their experience in postsecondary education.

The report is divided into two parts. The first part is a narrative that presents a profile of the demographic characteristics of students who began postsecondary education in 2003–04, their

academic preparation, and their enrollment patterns during the 3 years after they first enrolled. The focus of the narrative is to show the differences in the backgrounds and enrollment persistence of students who started at either 4-year, 2-year, or less-than-2-year institutions in 2003–04. The student enrollment and attainment patterns are described both in terms of retention at the first institution attended and as persistence anywhere in postsecondary education.

The second part of the report is a table compendium that provides more detail about the topics discussed in the narrative. The compendium also includes tables and summaries of findings on a variety of other topics of interest that are covered in the BPS:04/06 survey. These topics include faculty contact, distance education and remedial courses, academic performance and experiences, reasons for leaving a college, participation in community service, job characteristics and salaries of those no longer enrolled, and financial aid received during the first year of enrollment. Each section of the compendium includes highlights of some of the important findings shown in the tables.

The variables selected for the rows in the tables describe institutional and student characteristics associated with persistence, such as the type of first institution attended, degree plans, enrollment intensity, age, gender, race/ethnicity, dependency status, family income, parental level of education, recent high school graduation, high school mathematics courses, and admissions test scores.

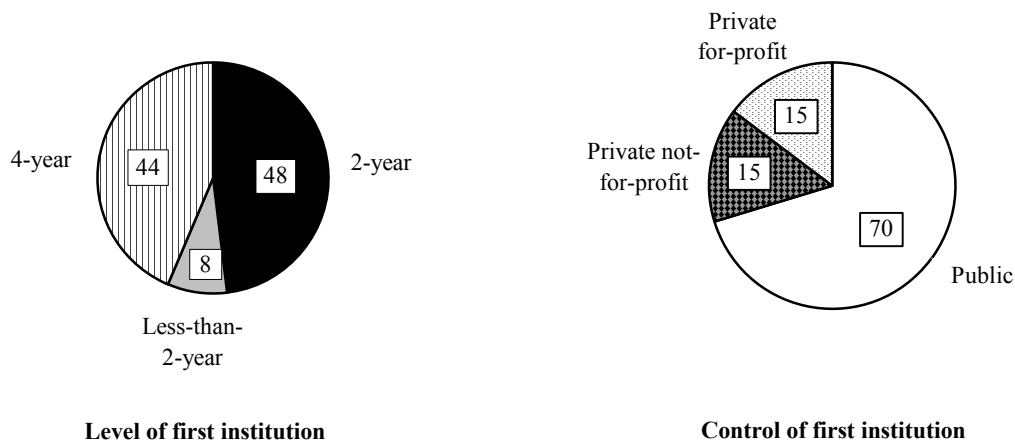
Profile of Beginning Postsecondary Students in 2003–04

Type of First Institutions Attended

About one-half (48 percent) of the first-time students began at a 2-year institution, 44 percent began at a 4-year institution, and 8 percent began at a less-than-2-year institution (figure 1). Seventy percent of the beginners started at public institutions, 15 percent started at private not-for-profit institutions, and 15 percent started at private for-profit institutions. In the BPS:96/98 study, which described first-time students in 1995–96, 73 percent began in public institutions, 16 percent in private not-for-profit institutions, and 11 percent in private for-profit institutions (Berkner, Horn, and Clune 2000, table 6.2b).

Less-than-2-year institutions offer certificates or other awards below associate’s degrees in vocational programs. About 82 percent of the beginners at less-than-2-year institutions were first

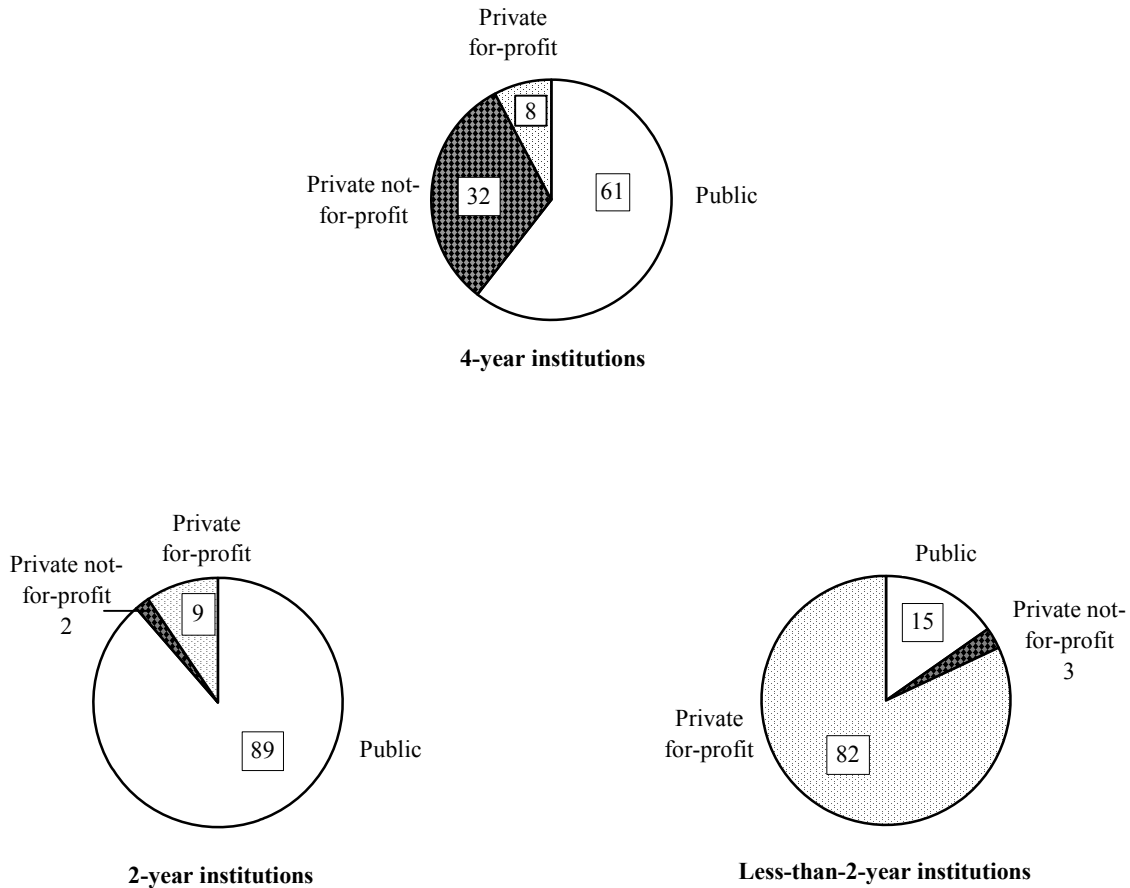
Figure 1. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students, by level and control of the first institution attended: 2003–04



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

enrolled in private for-profit institutions (figure 2). Two-year institutions offer associate’s degree as well as certificate programs. About 89 percent of the beginners at 2-year institutions were first enrolled in public 2-year institutions, which are usually called community colleges. Four-year institutions offer bachelor’s degree programs for undergraduates, but may also offer associate’s degrees and certificates. About 61 percent of the beginners at 4-year institutions were first enrolled in public institutions, 32 percent in private not-for-profit institutions, and 8 percent in private for-profit institutions. Among those who were first-time beginners in 1995–96, 63 percent of the beginners at 4-year institutions were enrolled in public, 36 percent in private-not-for-profit, and 1 percent in private for-profit institutions (Berkner, Horn, and Clune 2000, table 6.2b).

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students, by control of the first institution attended, within institution level: 2003–04



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Degree Plans and Enrollment Intensity

In 2004, during or just after their first year of enrollment, students were asked what degree they were working on. Forty percent said that they planned to get a bachelor’s degree, 36 percent an associate’s degree, 13 percent a certificate in a vocational program, and 10 percent were not planning to get any particular degree (table 1). At the less-than-2-year institutions, 89 percent of the beginners planned to get a certificate. At the 2-year institutions 64 percent of the beginners planned to get an associate’s degree, and about 10 percent each planned to get either a certificate or a bachelor’s degree (by transferring to a 4-year institution). At the public and the private not-for-profit 4-year institutions, 84 percent of the beginners were planning to complete a bachelor’s degree, but at the private for-profit 4-year institutions 39 percent planned to complete a bachelor’s degree and 57 percent planned to complete an associate’s degree.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students’ first-year degree plans, by level of first institution and control of first 4-year institution attended: 2003–04

Level and control of institution	None	Certificate	Associate’s degree	Bachelor’s degree
Total	10.4	13.2	36.3	40.0
Level of first institution				
4-year	5.6	1.9	11.6	80.9
2-year	16.2	10.4	63.6	9.8
Less-than-2-year	1.6	89.2	8.0	1.3
Control of first 4-year institution				
Public 4-year	6.8	1.7	7.0	84.4
Private not-for-profit 4-year	4.6	1.9	9.2	84.4
Private for-profit 4-year	0.6	3.0	57.2	39.2

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Completion of a program in the normal time assumes that the student is enrolled full time. About three-fourths of the beginners at 4-year and less-than-2-year institutions always attended full time while they were enrolled (table 2). At public 2-year institutions, 36 percent were always enrolled full time and 27 percent were always enrolled part time. At private for-profit 2-year institutions, 84 percent were always enrolled full time and 3 percent were always enrolled part time.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' attendance intensity while enrolled through June 2006, by level of first institution attended and control of first 2-year institution: 2003–04

Level and control of institution	Always full-time	Mixed	Always part-time
Total	59.5	26.9	13.5
Level of first institution			
4-year	76.8	20.2	3.0
2-year	41.1	34.7	24.2
Less-than-2-year	75.3	17.2	7.5
Control of first 2-year institution			
Public 2-year	35.9	37.3	26.8
Private not-for-profit 2-year	71.4	20.3	8.3
Private for-profit 2-year	83.8	13.2	3.0

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Student Characteristics

About two-thirds (66 percent) of the 2003–04 beginning students were age 19 or younger when they started (table 3). Among those who started at 4-year institutions, 85 percent were 19 or younger, at the 2-year institutions about one-half (54 percent) were 19 or younger, and at the less-than-2-year institutions about one-third (32 percent) were 19 or younger.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' age in the first year enrolled, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	18 years or younger	19 years	20–23 years	24–29 years	30 years or older
Total	42.6	23.4	12.8	7.9	13.3
Level of first institution					
4-year	58.0	27.4	6.5	3.5	4.5
2-year	32.9	21.4	17.0	9.8	18.9
Less-than-2-year	18.0	13.9	22.0	19.4	26.6

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

For financial aid purposes, students are classified as dependent on their parents for financial support, or financially independent. Students under age 24 are assumed to be dependent, unless they are married, have dependents of their own (usually children), are veterans, or are orphans; all students 24 or older are assumed to be independent. Seventy-one percent of all beginning students were dependent (table 4). The percentage of beginning students who were dependent ranged from 89 percent at 4-year institutions and 61 percent at 2-year institutions, to 36 percent at less-than-2-year institutions.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' dependency and marital status in the first year enrolled, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Single, no children (dependent)	Single, no children (independent)	Single parent (independent)	Married (independent)
Total	70.9	7.1	10.5	11.5
Level of first institution				
4-year	88.6	3.5	4.2	3.7
2-year	60.9	9.4	12.8	16.8
Less-than-2-year	36.1	12.2	30.5	21.2

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Among dependent students, about one-fourth (27 percent) came from families where neither parent had more than a high school education; among independent students, 58 percent came from families where neither parent had more than a high school education (compendium table 1.10). Fifty-five percent of beginners at 4-year institutions had a parent with a bachelor's degree, compared with 28 percent of those at 2-year institutions, and 15 percent of those at less-than-2-year institutions (table 5).

One-fourth of the dependent beginning students came from families with parental annual incomes below \$32,000 (table 6). The percentage of dependent beginning students with family incomes below \$32,000 was 20 percent at 4-year institutions, 28 percent at 2-year institutions, and 65 percent at less-than-2-year institutions. Thirty percent of the dependent students beginning at 4-year institutions came from families in the highest income group, compared with 17 percent of those at 2-year institutions and 4 percent of those at less-than-2-year institutions.

Table 5. Percentage distribution of beginning postsecondary students' parents' highest level of education, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	High school or less	Some postsecondary	Bachelor's degree or higher
Total	35.9	25.2	38.9
Level of first institution			
4-year	22.9	22.1	54.9
2-year	43.0	28.8	28.2
Less-than-2-year	65.2	19.9	14.9

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Table 6. Percentage distribution of dependent beginning postsecondary students' annual family income, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Less than \$32,000	\$32,000–59,999	\$60,000–91,999	\$92,000 or more
Total	25.1	26.7	24.9	23.3
Level of first institution				
4-year	19.7	24.5	26.1	29.7
2-year	28.2	29.9	25.3	16.6
Less-than-2-year	64.7	24.6	6.4	4.3

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Academic Preparation

Not all beginning students enter postsecondary education with the same level of academic preparation or performance, and this information is useful for understanding rates of persistence and attainment. For all beginning students, information is available on the type of high school credential they earned (if any) and the type of high school from which they graduated. For students under age 24 when they began their postsecondary education, information was usually available on their high school grade point average, the highest level of high school mathematics courses taken, any college credits they earned during high school, and their scores on college admission tests (ACT or SAT). This type of information is less relevant for older students who have been out of high school for a long time and were age 24 or older when they first started

postsecondary education. With the exception of the admissions test scores, all data in this report related to academic preparation and performance in high school are student reported.

About 90 percent of the beginning students had received a diploma at a public (79 percent), private (8 percent), or foreign high school (3 percent) (compendium table 2.1). The remaining 10 percent did not have a regular high school diploma—that is, they had a high school equivalency certificate based on their General Educational Development (GED) Test scores or other certificate of completion, or had been home schooled, or had not finished high school. The percentage of beginners without a high school diploma was 4 percent at 4-year institutions, 13 percent at 2-year institutions, and 25 percent at less-than-2-year institutions.

About 80 percent of the beginners under age 24 had taken the ACT or SAT college admissions tests: 95 percent of those at 4-year institutions, 67 percent at 2-year institutions, and 37 percent at less-than-2-year institutions took these tests (table 7). Among those under age 24 who took one of the tests, about one-third (35 percent) of those starting at 4-year institutions were among those with the highest scores and 13 percent were in the lowest category of scores. At 2-year institutions, 41 percent of those under age 24 who took the tests were in the lowest score category. Admissions test scores are usually neither required nor considered in admission to 2-year or less-than-2-year institutions.

Table 7. For beginning students under age 24, the percentage who took the college admissions tests (SAT/ACT), and among those who did, the percentage distribution of their test scores, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Took admission tests (ACT or SAT)	Among test takers, admissions test scores ¹			
		Lowest	Low middle	High middle	Highest
Total	79.4	24.8	27.4	23.3	24.5
Level of first institution					
4-year	95.1	13.4	24.6	27.1	34.9
2-year	66.7	41.5	32.0	18.0	8.6
Less-than-2-year	36.5	57.5	27.2	9.3	6.1

¹ Categories represent approximate quartile values determined by using the CENTILE function in the DAS, and are based only on the scores of the students in the BPS:04/06 sample. SAT scores are reported in 10-point intervals and the median score was 990. Because 52 percent scored 990 or less, the percentages shown for the two middle quartiles are not close to the 25 percent that would be expected.

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

About one-half (47 percent) of beginners at 4-year institutions reported a high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or higher (table 8). About one-half (46 percent) of the beginners at 2-year institutions and over one-half (57 percent) at less-than-2-year institutions reported a high school GPA below 3.0.

Table 8. For beginning postsecondary students under age 24, percentage distribution of their high school grade point average (GPA), by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Below 3.0	3.0–3.4	3.5–4.0
Total	31.7	35.7	32.6
Level of first institution			
4-year	17.7	35.1	47.2
2-year	46.2	36.8	17.0
Less-than-2-year	57.2	32.6	10.2

NOTE: Grades are self-reported and only include regular high school graduates. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

One measure of the rigor of the courses taken in high school is the highest level of mathematics courses taken. Among students under age 24 who started at 4-year colleges, about one-fourth (27 percent) reported taking calculus in high school and 6 percent reported taking only courses below algebra II. Among beginners under age 24 starting at 2-year institutions, some 6 percent reported taking calculus and one-fourth (25 percent) reported taking less than algebra II (table 9).

Table 9. For beginning postsecondary students under age 24, percentage distribution of the highest level of mathematics courses taken in high school, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Below Algebra II	Algebra II	Trigonometry	Pre-calculus	Calculus
Total	15.7	30.4	17.6	19.9	16.3
Level of first institution					
4-year	6.3	20.2	19.4	27.0	27.1
2-year	24.9	40.2	16.0	13.4	5.5
Less-than-2-year	29.5	46.7	14.2	6.8	2.8

NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

About one-fifth of the beginning students under age 24 reported that they had earned Advanced Placement Test college credits, which were accepted by their institution (19 percent), or that they had earned college credits for courses taken at a college while in high school (21 percent); 30 percent reported earning college credits one or both ways (table 10). Among those under age 24 beginning at 4-year institutions, 41 percent reported having earned college credits while still in high school, and 21 percent of those under age 24 starting at 2-year colleges also reported doing so.

Table 10. For beginning postsecondary students under age 24, percentage who reported earning college credits while in high school, by level of first institution attended: 2003–04

Level of first institution	Advanced Placement credits accepted	Earned credit for courses at a college	Earned any college-level credits
Total	18.8	21.0	30.1
Level of first institution			
4-year	28.4	25.9	40.5
2-year	9.7	17.1	20.7
Less-than-2-year	2.6	7.4	8.8

NOTE: Credits are self-reported. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

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Persistence and Attainment After 3 Years

Retention and Attainment at the First Institution Attended

The tables in this report present the information about beginning student enrollment and program completion from two different perspectives. One is from the perspective of the first institution attended. The first institution attended designates students as first-time beginners (or freshmen) and reports whether those students continue to be enrolled or complete a program *at that institution*. This perspective will be referred to as *retention and attainment at the first institution attended*. The other is from the perspective of the student. It looks at the beginning student's enrollment history and degree attainment at *any* postsecondary institution over the 3-year period under consideration. This will be referred to as student *persistence and attainment anywhere*. The difference between these two perspectives reflects the fact that many students transfer out of the first institution attended. When beginning students leave the institution where they first enrolled and then enroll at a different institution, they continue to persist in postsecondary education, but from the perspective of the institution where they started, they have no longer been retained. Similarly, graduation rates reported by institutions do not include outcomes for students who have transferred elsewhere; this additional information requires a survey like the BPS study.

The normal length of time it takes for a full-time student to complete a program and attain a certificate or degree depends on the type of program. Vocational certificate programs normally take less than 2 years to complete, associate's degree programs can be completed in 2 or 3 years, and bachelor's degree programs can be completed in 4 or 5 years. The 3-year period covered in this report (from July 2003 to June 2006) is long enough for students beginning in 2003–04 to complete certificates and associate's degrees, but too short for most students to complete bachelor's degrees at 4-year colleges and universities.

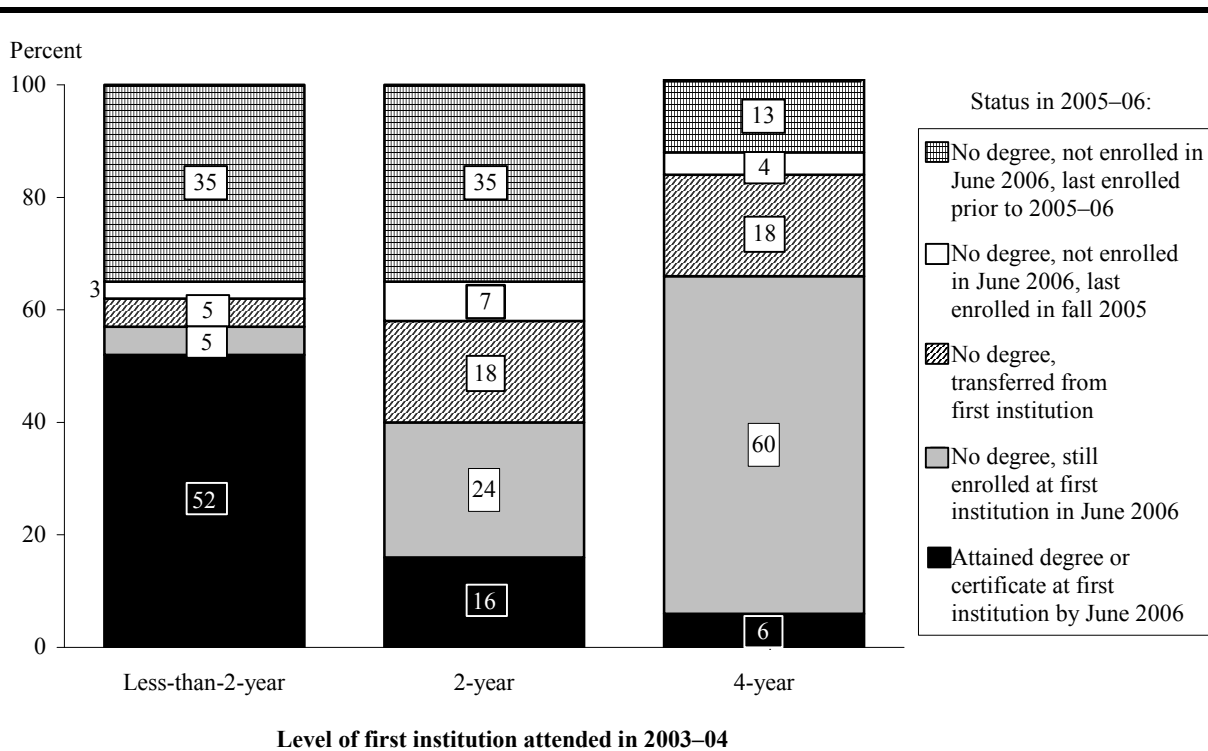
The 3-year period covered in this report is also too short to determine whether students who had not attained a certificate or degree and were no longer enrolled anywhere in June 2006 had permanently left postsecondary education. Some beginning students may "stop out" by leaving an institution for a semester or more, and then returning to that or a different institution later. Students who have "stopped out" can only be identified as such after they have returned, which may be after the 3-year period of this study. When the term "left" is used in this report, it only

refers to the enrollment status of the student at the end of the 3-year period, and includes some “stop-outs” who cannot be identified until later.

Institutions usually measure student retention as the percentage of beginners still enrolled in the fall term of each year after they first started. The figures below for 3-year retention at the first institution show the percentage of the 2003–04 beginners who were not enrolled at any time in 2005–06 and also those who were enrolled only in the fall of 2005.

Less-than-2-year institutions offer certificates in vocational fields that can be completed in less than 2 years of full-time enrollment. About one-half (52 percent) of the students beginning at a less-than-2-year institution in 2003–04 had attained a certificate by 2006 at the same institution where they had started (figure 3). Five percent of the beginners at less-than-2-year institutions

Figure 3. Retention and attainment at the first institution attended after 3 years among students who began in 2003–04, by level of first institution attended



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

were still enrolled at the same institution without completing a certificate in June 2006; 3 percent were last enrolled there in the fall of 2005; and 35 percent left the institution without completing a certificate and were not enrolled anywhere in 2005–06. Five percent had transferred to a different institution without a certificate.

Two-year institutions offer associate’s degree programs, which can normally be completed in 2 years of full-time enrollment, and may also offer certificates in vocational programs. Sixteen percent of the 2003–04 beginning students at 2-year institutions had attained a certificate (6 percent) or associate’s degree (10 percent) within 3 years at the institution where they had first enrolled. Twenty-four percent of the beginners were still enrolled at the same institution without completing a degree or certificate in June 2006; 7 percent were last enrolled there in the fall of 2005; and 35 percent had left the institution before completing a degree or certificate and were not enrolled anywhere during the 2005–06 academic year. Eighteen percent had left the institution without a credential and transferred elsewhere during the 3-year period.

Four-year institutions offer bachelor’s degrees, which can usually be completed in 4 or 5 years of full-time enrollment, but may also offer associate’s degree and certificate programs. Two percent of the beginners at 4-year institutions completed a bachelor’s degree in 3 years and 4 percent completed an associate’s degree or a certificate at the institution where they had started. Sixty percent were still enrolled at the same institution without a degree in June 2006; 4 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 13 percent had left the institution and were not enrolled anywhere during the 2005–06 academic year. Eighteen percent had left the 4-year institution where they had started and transferred to a different institution before completing any program.

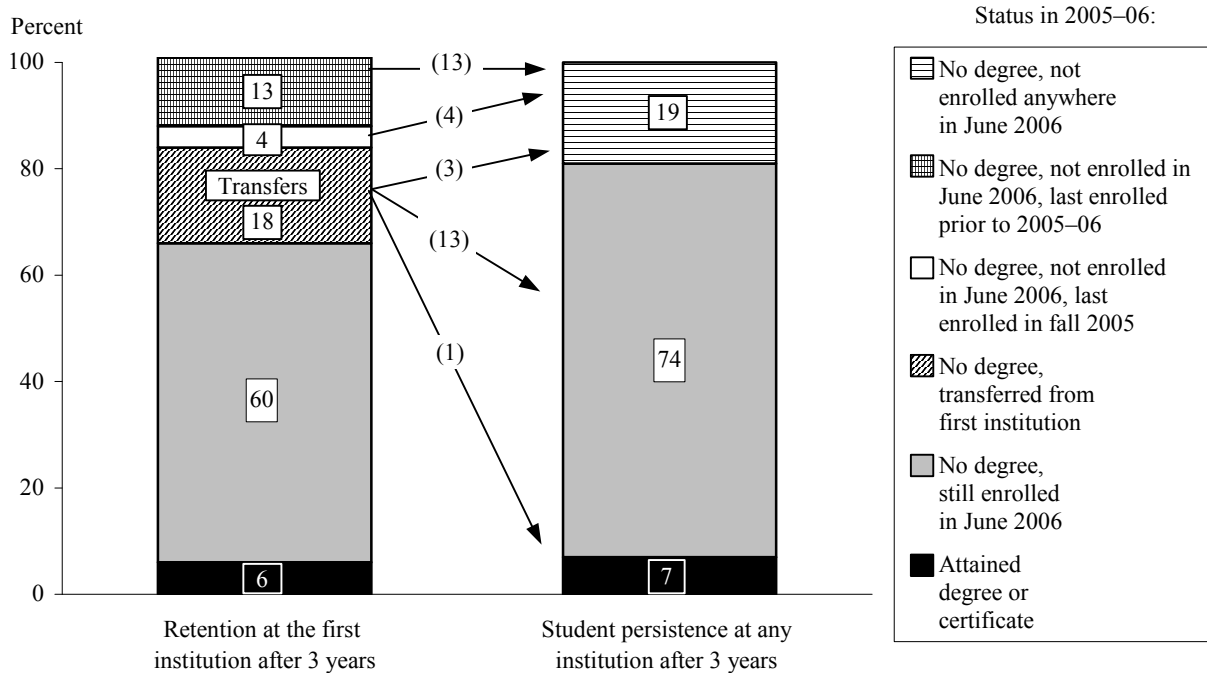
Student Persistence and Attainment Anywhere

The students who left the institution where they had started without completing a certificate or degree either did not enroll anywhere else or they transferred (with or without credits) to another institution. Figures 4, 5, and 6 illustrate the relationship between the enrollment outcomes after 3 years at the first institution attended and the students’ enrollment experiences anywhere in postsecondary education. The difference between the two is what happens to the transfers: they may still be enrolled without a degree, may have attained a degree at the transfer institution, or they may also have left the transfer institution without a degree. Since this study is limited to a 3-year period, some of those without a degree and not enrolled anywhere in June 2006 may actually be “stop-outs” who will enroll again later. The figures below compare the 3-year retention at the first institution, which includes students last enrolled in the fall of 2005, to the 3-year persistence of the same students anywhere in the spring of 2006. The students enrolled

only in the fall term at the first institution are included among those not enrolled anywhere in June 2006.

Among students beginning at a 4-year institution, 13 percent left the institution without completing a program and were not enrolled anywhere in 2005–06; 4 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 18 percent had transferred elsewhere without a degree (figure 4). By June 2006, 19 percent of the students who started at a 4-year institution had not attained any degree and were not enrolled anywhere; this includes the students who transferred and then left the second institution without a degree as well as those last enrolled in the fall of 2005. Seven percent had attained a degree or certificate and 74 percent were still enrolled without a degree, either at the first institution or at the transfer institution.

Figure 4. Retention at the first institution attended and persistence anywhere after 3 years among students who began at 4-year institutions in 2003–04

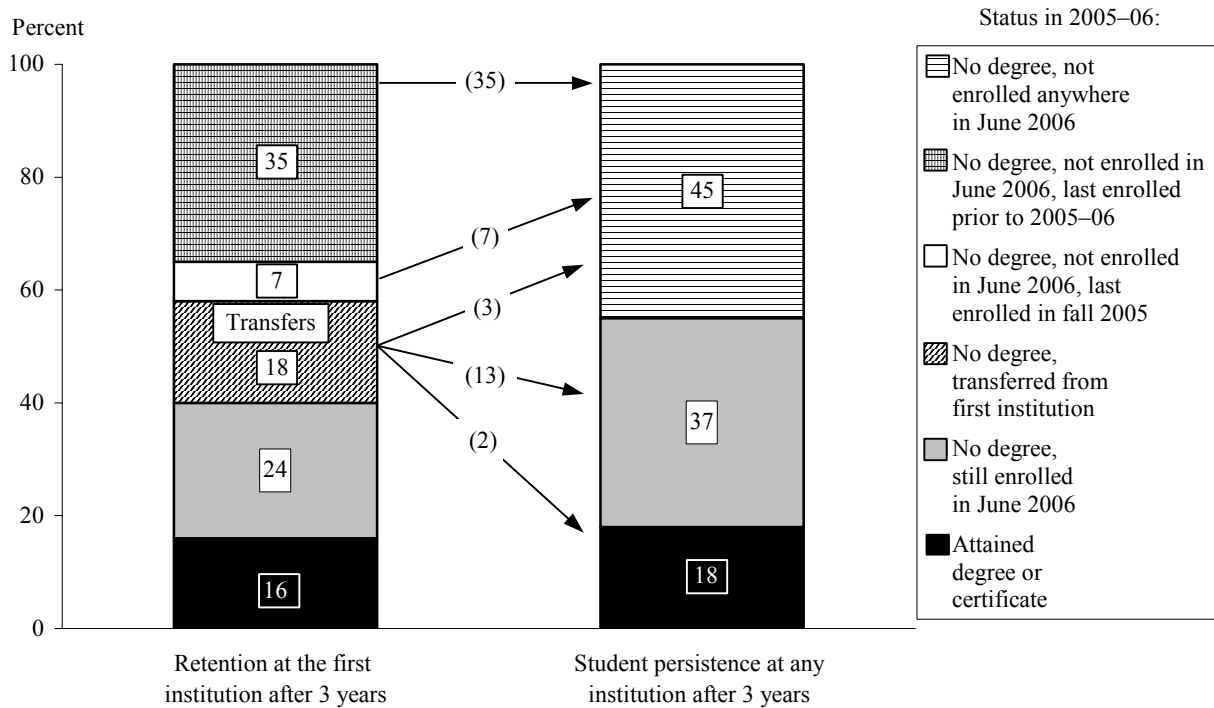


NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Among students beginning at a 2-year institution, 35 percent left the institution without completing a program before the 2005–06 academic year and did not enroll anywhere else; 7 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 18 percent transferred elsewhere without a degree (figure 5). By June 2006, 45 percent of the students who started at a 2-year institution had not attained any degree and were not enrolled anywhere; this includes the students who transferred and then left the second institution as well as those last enrolled in the fall of 2005. Eighteen percent had attained a degree or certificate and 37 percent were still enrolled without a degree, either at the first institution or at the transfer institution.

Among students beginning at less-than-2-year institutions, 52 percent attained a certificate at the first institution attended; 35 percent left the institution without completing a certificate and

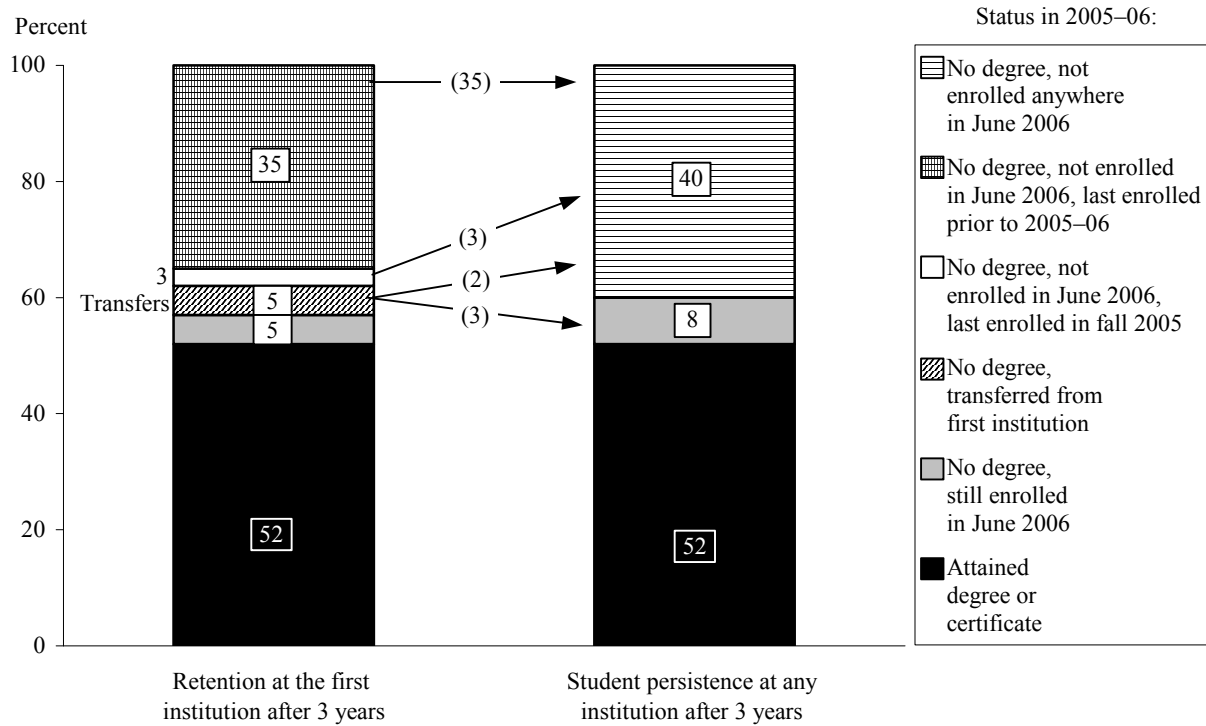
Figure 5. Retention at the first institution attended and persistence anywhere after 3 years among students who began at 2-year institutions in 2003–04



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

were not enrolled anywhere in 2005–06; 3 percent were last enrolled in the fall of 2005; and 5 percent left without completing a certificate and enrolled at a different institution (figure 6). By June 2006, 40 percent of all those who started at a less-than-2 year institution had left postsecondary education without completing a program anywhere.

Figure 6. Retention at the first institution attended and persistence anywhere after 3 years among students who began at less-than-2-year institutions in 2003–04



NOTE: Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

Persistence, Attainment, and Student Profiles

Table 11 shows some of the relationships between persistence, attainment, and certain student characteristics found in the more detailed compendium tables of this report. Among students in programs that can be completed in 3 years or less, those in shorter programs have higher rates of completion than those in programs that take longer to complete. Students working on certificates, which can usually be completed in less than 2 years, attain certificates at a higher rate (44 percent) than the students who are working on associate’s degrees attain associate’s

Table 11. Percentage of 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students who attained a degree and percentage distribution of their persistence and attainment status anywhere through June 2006, by student characteristics

Student characteristics	Attained degree anywhere through 2006				Persistence anywhere through 2006				
	Any degree	Highest degree			Total	Attained degree, not enrolled	Attained degree, still enrolled	No degree, still enrolled	No degree, not enrolled
		Certificate	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree					
Total	15.9	7.8	7.0	1.0	100.0	8.9	7.0	50.7	33.5
Degree plans first year									
None	9.4	4.8	4.3	0.3	100.0	4.3	5.1	46.9	43.7
Certificate	45.8	43.7	2.0	0.1	100.0	36.4	9.5	13.2	41.0
Associate's degree	18.6	3.5	14.9	0.2	100.0	6.7	11.9	36.2	45.2
Bachelor's degree	5.1	0.6	2.2	2.3	100.0	3.0	2.1	77.2	17.7
Enrollment intensity through 2006									
Always full-time	18.3	8.6	8.3	1.4	100.0	11.1	7.2	53.8	27.9
Mixed	14.9	7.2	7.0	0.7	100.0	6.3	8.6	57.2	28.0
Always part-time	7.0	5.6	1.5	#	100.0	4.3	2.7	23.9	69.1
Dependency status first year									
Dependent	13.7	4.7	7.6	1.4	100.0	6.6	7.1	60.7	25.6
Independent	21.2	15.4	5.6	0.2	100.0	14.6	6.6	26.2	52.7
Age first year enrolled									
18 years or younger	13.0	3.9	7.6	1.5	100.0	5.7	7.3	64.5	22.4
19 years	15.2	5.4	8.2	1.5	100.0	7.6	7.5	57.7	27.2
20–23 years	17.4	10.9	6.3	0.2	100.0	11.3	6.2	33.7	48.9
24–29 years	21.5	16.2	5.2	0.1	100.0	15.7	5.8	26.1	52.4
30 or older	21.4	16.4	4.9	0.1	100.0	15.1	6.3	24.7	53.9
Worked while enrolled in 2003–04									
Did not work	16.8	9.4	5.9	1.6	100.0	11.0	5.8	55.4	27.8
Worked part time	15.7	6.1	8.5	1.1	100.0	7.6	8.1	55.6	28.7
Worked full time	14.9	9.0	5.6	0.2	100.0	8.6	6.2	34.7	50.4

Rounds to zero.

NOTE: "Persistence and attainment anywhere" include students who transferred out of the first institution attended. "Degree" includes certificates in vocational programs. Dependent students were under age 24, unmarried, and had no dependents of their own in 2003. Totals include students in private not-for-profit less-than-2-year institutions; sample size was too small to show as a separate category. Estimates include postsecondary students in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

degrees (15 percent). Students who are always enrolled full time have higher completion rates (18 percent) than those who are always enrolled part time (7 percent), and part-time students leave postsecondary education without completion at higher rates (69 percent) than full-time students (28 percent).

Independent students both leave postsecondary education without completion at higher rates (53 percent) than dependent students (26 percent) and have higher overall completion rates (21 percent) than dependent students (14 percent). Dependent students, on the other hand, remain enrolled without having earned a degree at higher rates than independent students (61 percent vs. 26 percent). About one-fourth (27 percent) of the independent students are working on certificates, compared with 8 percent of the dependent students (compendium table 1.3), and 15 percent of all independent students attained a certificate, compared with 5 percent of all dependent students (table 11).

About 90 percent of independent students are age 20 or older (compendium table 1.7). During the first 3 years, older students leave postsecondary education without completion at higher rates than younger students (table 11). Students who began at age 18 or 19 had 3-year rates of departure from postsecondary education without completion of 22 and 27 percent, respectively, while those in the 20 or higher age groups left postsecondary education without completion at a rate of about 50 percent.

Among students who worked full time while enrolled in 2003–04, one-half left postsecondary education without completing a degree within 3 years, representing a higher rate of departure than those who did not work (28 percent) and those who worked part time (29 percent) (table 11). Students who worked full time remained enrolled after 3 years at lower rates than their peers who did not work or worked part time (35 percent vs. 55–56 percent).

Because bachelor's degrees normally take at least 4 years of enrollment, the low 3-year attainment rates at 4-year institutions shown in this report are not meaningful. At 4-year institutions the rates at which students leave postsecondary education without completion within 3 years are more relevant to understanding differences in persistence (table 12).

Among 4-year beginners, 69 percent who were always enrolled part time had left postsecondary education without completion by June 2006, compared with 22 percent who were enrolled both full and part time and 17 percent of those who were always enrolled full time. About 85 percent of the beginning students at 4-year institutions are age 19 or younger and nearly 90 percent are dependent (tables 3 and 4, above). Among the dependent students beginning at 4-year institutions, those from families with incomes below \$60,000 left postsecondary education without completion at higher rates than those from families with incomes of \$92,000 or more

Table 12. Among 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students who started at 4-year institutions, percentage who attained a degree and percentage distribution of their persistence and attainment status anywhere through June 2006, by student characteristics

Student characteristics	Attained degree anywhere through 2006				Persistence anywhere through 2006				
	Any degree	Highest degree			Total	Attained degree, not enrolled	Attained degree, still enrolled	No degree, still enrolled	No degree, not enrolled
		Certificate	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree					
Total	7.0	0.8	3.9	2.3	100.0	3.8	3.2	73.8	19.2
Enrollment intensity through 2006									
Always full-time	7.4	0.6	4.3	2.5	100.0	4.0	3.4	76.1	16.5
Mixed	6.5	1.5	3.0	2.0	100.0	3.9	2.7	71.1	22.4
Always part-time	0.7	0.7	#	#	100.0	0.6	0.1	30.1	69.2
Dependency status first year									
Dependent	6.7	0.6	3.6	2.5	100.0	3.7	3.0	78.0	15.3
Independent	9.2	2.3	6.3	0.6	100.0	4.7	4.5	41.1	49.7
Dependent student family income									
Less than \$32,000	7.0	1.1	4.1	1.9	100.0	3.6	3.4	69.4	23.6
\$32,000–59,999	7.7	0.4	5.0	2.3	100.0	4.1	3.6	73.3	19.0
\$60,000–91,999	6.1	0.8	3.0	2.3	100.0	3.7	2.4	82.1	11.8
\$92,000 or more	6.4	0.1	2.9	3.4	100.0	3.7	2.7	84.0	9.6
Admissions test scores (ACT/SAT) ¹									
Lowest	9.0	0.7	7.0	1.3	100.0	3.8	5.3	60.3	30.6
Low middle	5.9	0.9	3.5	1.5	100.0	2.8	3.1	77.3	16.8
High middle	5.7	0.3	3.1	2.4	100.0	2.8	2.9	80.3	14.0
Highest	6.2	0.3	2.1	3.9	100.0	4.3	1.9	85.4	8.4
Worked while enrolled in 2003–04									
Did not work	5.6	0.1	2.6	2.9	100.0	65.9	3.0	16.3	9.2
Worked part time	5.4	0.4	2.9	2.1	100.0	60.5	3.5	19.8	10.8
Worked full time	6.8	0.9	5.0	0.9	100.0	39.5	6.4	17.1	30.2

Rounds to zero.

¹ Beginners under age 24 only.

NOTE: "Persistence and attainment anywhere" include students who transferred out of the first institution attended. "Degree" includes certificates in vocational programs. Full-time enrollment is 12 or more credits per term or 24 credits per year.

Dependent students were under age 24, unmarried, and had no dependents of their own in 2003. Family income of dependent students is the annual income of the parents in 2002. Full time work is 35 or more hours per week. This table includes students enrolled at postsecondary institutions in Puerto Rico. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

(table 12). Departure without completion was also related to admissions test scores. Thirty-one percent of those with the lowest 25 percent of test scores left postsecondary education without completion, compared with 8 percent of those with the highest 25 percent of test scores. However, test scores are also positively related to family incomes (compendium table 2.5): 39 percent of dependent students in the highest income category were also in the highest test score category, compared with 14 percent of dependent students in the lowest income category.

Summary

Most of the students who began at 4-year institutions in 2003–04 were young (85 percent were age 19 or younger) and financially dependent on their parents. Among those under age 24, nearly all (94 percent) had taken algebra II or higher mathematics courses in high school, and about one-fourth had taken calculus. Eighteen percent of students who began at 4-year institutions in 2003–04 transferred from the institution where they started. After 3 years, 81 percent were either still enrolled in postsecondary education or had attained a degree or certificate.

About one-half (46 percent) of the students beginning at 2-year institutions in 2003–04 were age 20 or older when they started, and 39 percent were financially independent. Among those under age 24, one-fourth had not taken algebra II or higher high school mathematics, and about one-half had a high school GPA below 3.0. Eighteen percent transferred from the 2-year institution where they had started without earning a degree. After 3 years, 55 percent had either attained a certificate or degree (18 percent) or were still enrolled without a degree at some postsecondary institution (37 percent).

About two-thirds (68 percent) of the students beginning at less-than-2-year institutions in 2003–04 were age 20 or older when they started, and about two-thirds (64 percent) were financially independent. Among those under age 24, about one-half had a high school GPA below 3.0. Within 3 years, about one-half (52 percent) of the students starting at a less-than-2-year institution had completed a certificate program from that institution, but 40 percent had not completed a program and were not enrolled anywhere.

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