In today’s society, a postsecondary education is critical to good citizenship, individual opportunity, and national competitiveness. Higher education in the United States comprises thousands of institutions that serve a wide diversity of students and an equally wide variety of academic preparation levels. As the demand for higher education grows, unpacking this diversity has become important to inform public dialogue about how students access higher education and whether or not they are successful.

### Institutions, Students, and Degree Production

**Increases from 2002 to 2012**

- 4,726 institutions currently offer postsecondary degrees
- 21 million people are attending college
- 4.7 million degrees and certificates are awarded annually

### Student Outcomes

**Students obtaining an undergraduate degree or certificate, or are still enrolled after 6 years at any institution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Still enrolled</th>
<th>Completion at Different Institution</th>
<th>Completion at Same Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private nonprofit</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 4-year</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National average</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 2-year</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit 4-year</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Widespread Payoffs of College Education

Compared with those with a high school credential only, college-educated adults are:

- earning more
- more likely to work
- more likely to participate in civic activities
- more likely to have healthy habits
- less likely to rely on public assistance

### Remediation Rate

31% Students taking at least one remedial course after enrolling

### First-Year Dropout Rate

31% College freshmen not returning for their second year at any institution

### Highly Mobile Learners

24% Students graduating from an institution different than their starting institution

### Profile of College Students

Typical undergraduates are no longer 18-year-olds straight out of high school.

74% Post-traditional learners* on U.S. campuses today

* Post-traditional learners are diverse, and include those who delayed entry to college after high school, obtained an alternative high school credential such as the GED® credential, studied part time at the start, were financially independent, had children, were single parents, or worked full time while enrolled. These characteristics are known to adversely affect college persistence and completion.

**Sources:**


Analysis by Mikyung Ryu