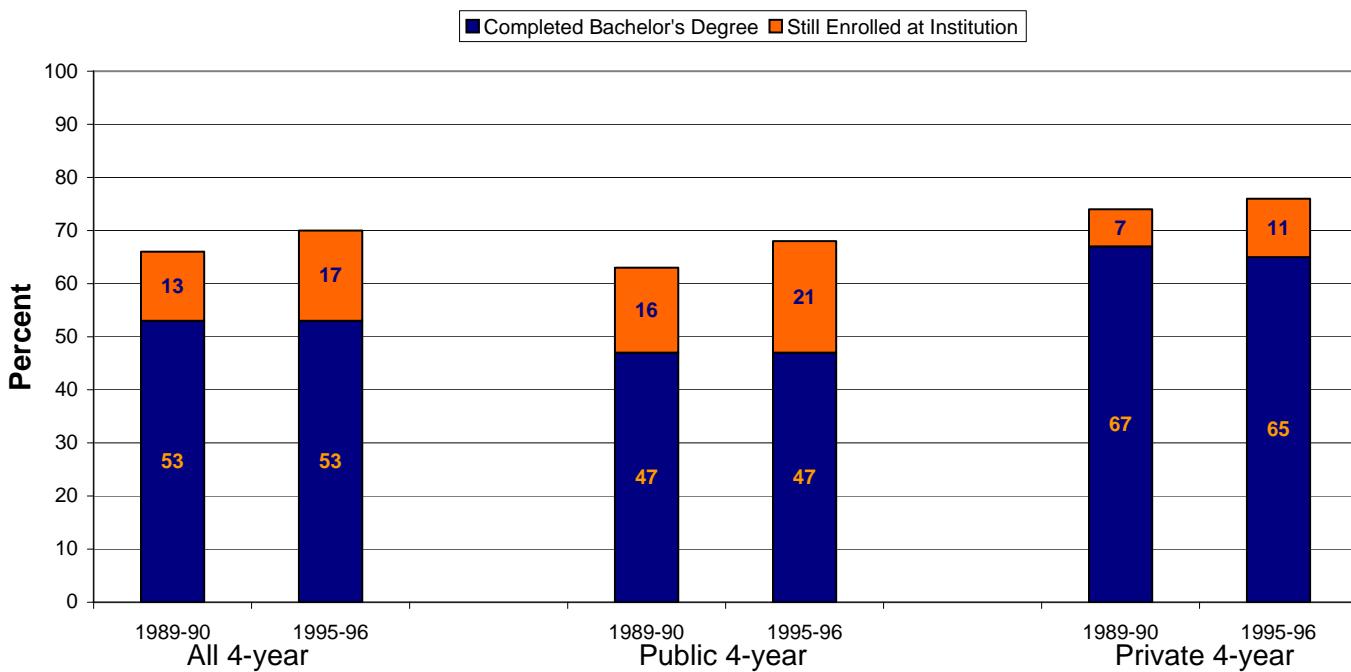


IN SHORT

College Completion and Persistence

The conversion of enrollment to actual college completion is critical for understanding how the education system might be an element impeding economic growth. While the incentives to earn a college degree have been growing, and college enrollment has been responding to these incentives, there has been slower growth in college completion rates. Enrollment indicates the demand for college, but completion rates are also affected by the transfer of time and resources into actual degrees conferred. The Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Studies show that, between 1990 and 1996, completion rates in all four-year institutions were constant. At the same time, enrollment rates grew rapidly ([see link](#)). Lower completion rates are caused both from larger attrition rates and longer time needed to complete a degree. As seen in the figure, the percent of fifth-year students still working to complete their four-year college degree has increased from 13% to 17%. The growing gap between enrollment and actual completion indicates that the education process is not allowing for maximum growth. It may be that more individuals don't complete college in four years because the increase in enrollment is from individuals who are less likely to complete college in the first place. If this is indeed the case, then the problem is not how to increase college access, but instead is how to increase the probability or college completion.

Five-year undergraduate completion and persistence



NOTE: Percentage of 1989-90 and 1995-96 beginning postsecondary students (at 4-year institutions) who had completed a bachelor's degree or were still enrolled in a 4-year institution at the end of 5 years, by type of first institution and year first enrolled. "Private 4-year" is limited to private, not-for-profit institutions.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 1989/90 and 1995/96 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Studies (BPS:90/94 and BPS:96/01)

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