



College Completion in California

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Many California freshmen do not finish college in four years, but rates have improved.

- ▶ Half of the state’s freshmen graduate with a bachelor’s degree within the traditional four years. This is a marked increase from ten years ago (39%).
- ▶ Four-year and six-year graduation rates are highest at the University of California (73% and 86%). Promisingly, UC’s four-year rate has risen by 10 points over the last ten years. The system is likely on track to achieve its [2030 graduation rate goals](#) (76% for the four-year rate, 90% for the six-year rate).
- ▶ At California State University, graduation rates are much lower: only 36% of students graduate in four years; 62% graduate within six years. CSU has nearly doubled its four-year rate in the last ten years, but its six-year rate has only risen about a percentage point in the last five years. The system is [unlikely to meet](#) the four-year (40%) or six-year (70%) goals set out in its [Graduation Initiative 2025](#).
- ▶ Among private universities, nonprofits have relatively high completion rates, though a quarter of students still do not graduate within six years. The majority of students at for-profit colleges never graduate.

Graduation rates vary widely across California’s four-year institutions

Bachelor's degree completion rates among first-time freshmen in California

	All	UC	CSU	Private nonprofit	Private for-profit
All students					
4-year rate	50.4	72.9	35.5	64.8	14.3
6-year rate	71.4	85.7	62.2	76.0	23.8
Race/Ethnicity					
Asian	82.7	91.1	71.5	84.5	58.1
White	75.2	87.1	71.7	78.4	18.2
Latino	64.4	78.5	56.3	71.1	24.8
Black	51.9	78.6	47.2	67.6	11.6
Gender					
Female	73.8	87.7	65.5	78.0	21.2
Male	68.4	83.3	57.6	73.3	26.8
Pell Grant status					
Non-recipient	75.8	87.7	68.3	77.5	24.3
Recipient	62.5	82.6	56.0	67.1	13.9

Sources: UC Information Center - Undergraduate graduation rates. CSU Institutional Research & Analyses Data Dashboards - Graduation Rates (First-time Full-time Freshmen). Statewide and private institution data from IPEDS bachelor’s degree 4- and 6-year completion rates for bachelor’s degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students.

Notes: Outcomes by race/ethnicity, gender, and income reflect six-year graduation rates. All outcomes presented are from latest data available from each source. For UC and CSU, we present four-year rates among the 2019 cohort and six-year rates among the 2017 cohort of first-time students. UC data for Asian students includes Pacific Islanders. For statewide and private sector outcomes, we present graduation rates among the 2016 cohort of first-time students. IPEDS data is from the 2023 collection year, and is restricted to institutions that are degree-granting, primarily baccalaureate or above. Pell-recipient data from IPEDS reflects trends among full-time first-year degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students. 25 of 96 listed nonprofit institutions, and 9 of 27 listed for-profit institutions did not report graduation data.

Longstanding equity gaps in college completion persist.

- ▶ Asian (83%) and white (75%) students are significantly more likely to graduate within six years compared to their Latino (64%) and Black (52%) peers.
- ▶ Women are more likely to graduate within six years (74%) than men (68%).
- ▶ Freshmen who received a Pell Grant (a proxy for low-income status) are significantly less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree within six years (63%) than their peers (76%).

- ▶ Campus and regional disparities are stark. For example, freshmen graduation rates vary widely across CSU campuses, from a six-year rate of 85% at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, to 46% at CSU East Bay. At UC, freshmen from high schools in the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire have the lowest six-year graduation rates (79% and 81%), while those from Orange County and the Bay Area have the highest (90% each).
- ▶ Despite progress, equity gaps at UC remain nearly as large as they were [in 2018](#). At CSU, gaps have widened over time; however, [many campuses have made progress in closing them](#).

Degree and transfer attainment remain low at California Community Colleges (CCC).

- ▶ Transfer pathways are improving: the number of degrees awarded through the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)—a program that prepares students for transfer to any CSU campus—has increased from about 11,500 to nearly 64,500 over the last ten years. Yet only 10% of students earn an ADT within six years.
- ▶ Overall, while about two-thirds of CCC students aim to transfer or earn an associate degree, a little more than a quarter transfer or complete a “[Vision for Success](#)” goal (earn any associate degree or certificate) within six years, and less than one in ten do so within the traditional two years.

Students who do successfully transfer tend to earn a bachelor’s degree.

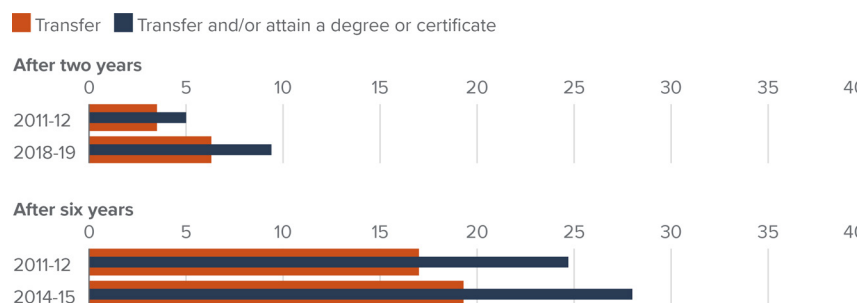
- ▶ A majority of CCC transfer students at CSU (79%) and UC (90%) graduate within four years, a significant jump from the traditional two-year rate (42% and 64%, respectively).
- ▶ Time to degree for transfer students is shortening. Two-year graduation rates at both systems have risen significantly over the last ten years—by 13 and 9 points at CSU and UC, respectively.
- ▶ Graduation rates among transfers have increased for all student groups, and though equity gaps persist, they are significantly smaller in magnitude compared to gaps among freshmen.
- ▶ ADTs are translating into baccalaureate completion: CSU transfers with an ADT are more likely to graduate in two (47%) and four years (82%) compared to their peers without an ADT (36% and 78%, respectively).

Improving college completion is critical.

- ▶ A college degree pays off when it comes to [future earnings and job quality](#). In addition, UC and CSU consistently [rank among the top colleges and universities](#) for advancing economic mobility.
- ▶ Over the last ten years, the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded has increased by 29% at UC and 24% at CSU; however, this number has declined at both institutions since the onset of the pandemic in 2020–21.
- ▶ Low graduation rates and delayed completion are costly: they increase individual expenses and [rates of loan default](#), delay entry into the workforce, and limit slots for new students.
- ▶ Meeting the state’s [70% postsecondary attainment](#) goal by 2030 will require boosting graduation rates and shortening time to degree. Students who do not graduate [identify costs and work constraints](#) as their primary obstacles, highlighting the vital role of financial aid and flexible course delivery in promoting completion.

Transfer rates have increased but remain low

Share of first-time CCC students in each cohort that transferred to a four-year institution or attained a degree or certificate



Source: CalPassPlus Student Success Metrics Cohort Data.

Notes: Outcomes represent unduplicated counts of students. Blue bars show “Vision for Success” goal completion, which includes students who earned one or more of the following: Chancellor’s Office approved certificate, associate degree, and/or CCC baccalaureate degree, and had an enrollment in the selected year in the district that they earned the award within a certain time frame.

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Sources: UC Information Center: [Undergraduate graduation rates](#) and [Degrees awarded data](#). CSU Institutional Research & Analyses Data Dashboards: [Graduation and Continuation Rates](#) and [Degrees Issued](#). CCC CalPassPlus Student Success Metrics: [Cohort Data](#). CCC Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems (MIS) Data Mart: [Program Awards Summary Reports](#). Private institution data from [IPEDS](#): Bachelor’s degree 4- and 6-year completion rates for bachelor’s degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students.