

Utah's Post-Secondary Participation and Completion Patterns

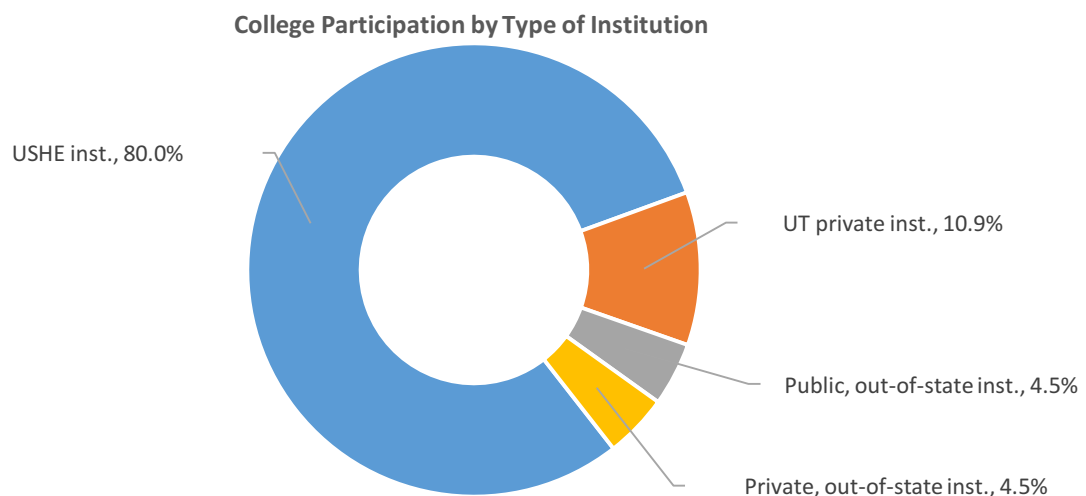
Utah State Board of Regents' Participation and Completion Goals

In 2016, the Utah State Board of Regents adopted a 10-year strategic plan, including two specific goals related to students' participation in and completion of higher education: first, that 75% of Utah's 12th graders would enroll in post-secondary education within five years of high school graduation by the year 2025; and, second, that degree productivity at institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education would increase to 28 awards (*i.e.*, certificates or degrees) per 100 full-time equivalent students by the year 2025.¹ This Issue Brief explores the current patterns of higher education participation and completion in Utah.

Participation and Completion in Utah

Participation Patterns in Utah, 2007-2012

Longitudinal data for the five-year period 2007-2012 show that only 52% of Utah high school seniors enrolled in college during the first year after their high school graduation. However, by ten years after graduation, 71% of the class of 2007 had finally enrolled in a postsecondary institution.² The majority of students from those cohorts of high school graduates, 80%, enrolled in a USHE institution, while 11% attended a private college within the state. Only 9% of Utah high school graduates went out-of-state for college, with enrollment evenly split between public and private institutions.³



¹ Utah State Board of Regents. (2016). "Utah: A State of Opportunity, Utah State Board of Regents Strategic Plan 2025." Salt Lake, Utah State Board of Regents.

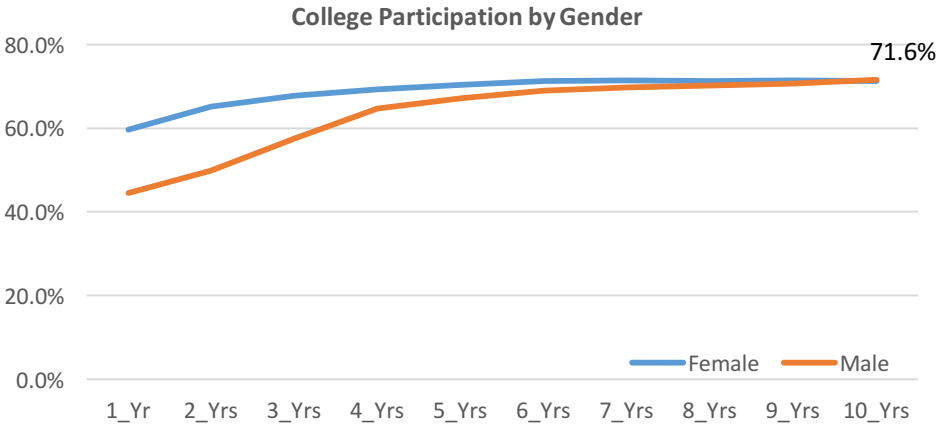
² Ma, D. (2017). "College Participation and Completion of Utah High School Graduates: Cohorts 2007-2012." Salt Lake City, Utah System of Higher Education, p. 1.

³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

These patterns fall shy of the Board's goal of 75% college enrollment within five years of high school graduation. Breaking down the data shows the demographic characteristics of students most and least likely to enroll.

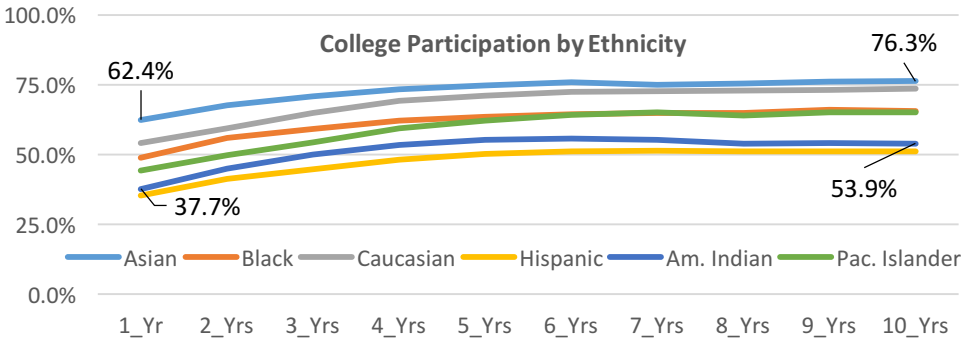
Gender and Participation

Although there was an initial gender difference in college enrollment immediately after high school graduation during the five years under study, that participation gap narrowed over time. In the first year after high school, 60% of Utah female students from the classes of 2007-2012 attended college, while only 44% of male graduates did so. By the tenth year after high school graduation, Utah men and women from the 2007 cohort had enrolled in college at equal rates.⁴



Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and Participation

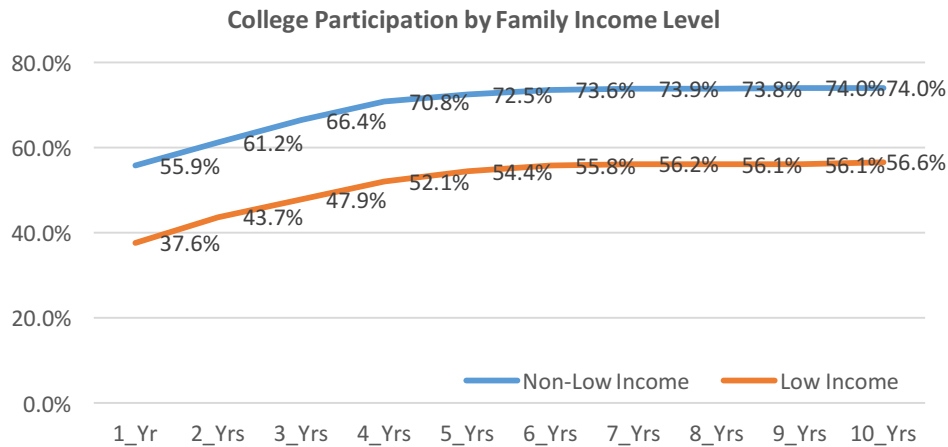
Although gender differences ultimately evened out, there were significant differences in access and participation rates based on other demographic categories that did not disappear with time. Utah's Asian and Caucasian students were the most likely to attend a college or university. Black and Pacific Islander students fell in the middle; while Hispanic and Native American students were least likely to enroll.⁵



⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

A family's income level posed a significant barrier to college participation. Students from low-income families were almost 20% less likely to attend college than their peers.⁶



Students with limited English proficiency were the least likely to attend, with only a 31% participation rate after ten years.⁷

Initiatives to work with secondary schools to increase college participation rates

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education works closely with public education partners, students, and parents to try to increase college participation rates and access to higher education. There are several initiatives designed specifically to provide data and training for educators and outreach for junior high and high school students in order to improve their odds of enrolling in and being successful in college.

For the past two years, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education has been providing High School Feedback Reports to principals and school district superintendents to allow them to track their students' college participation rates following high school graduation. The Feedback Reports also track placement into remedial or college-level math and English courses for students who attend institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education. Separate reports disaggregate data on low income students and students with limited English proficiency by district and by school. These reports allow public and higher education partners to work together to identify groups of students that need the most attention.⁸

In addition, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education also works closely with high schools across the state to organize Utah College Application Week events throughout the month of November, which the Governor has declared Utah College Application Month. These events provide high school seniors with an opportunity to apply to college during the school day with support from adult volunteers. In November of 2016, 117 high

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁸ See, for example, Utah System of Higher Education. (2016). High School Feedback Reports, <https://higheredutah.org/reports/high-school-feedback-reports/>.

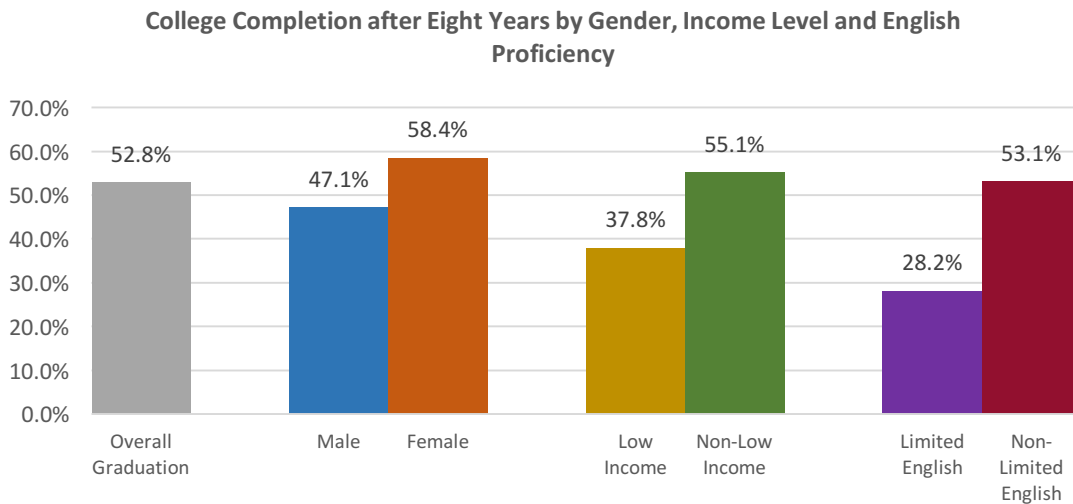
schools—out of the 187 high schools in Utah— organized a College Application Week. Follow up surveys completed by 19,519 students show those students completed 25,365 college applications.⁹ This figure means that half of Utah's public high school seniors participated in the Utah College Application Week survey and had completed applications to college, while even more students participated in the event without submitting the survey.

The Utah Scholars Initiative targets even younger students, encouraging 8th graders to carefully plan their high school schedules, start savings programs, and engage in other activities to help them prepare for college. It also provides newsletters and text reminders about things like scholarship opportunities and application deadlines for high school students.

The Utah System of Higher Education also provides multiple forms of outreach for primary and secondary school counselors, including an annual counselor conference attended by over 800 counselors and administrators, published resources like the annual *College Guide* for counselors to use in their career and college readiness sessions with students, curriculum support for counselor training programs, and the new Career and College Readiness professional certificates.

Completion Patterns in Utah, 2007-2012

What happened to the cohorts under this study after they enrolled in college? The longitudinal data from 2007-2012 show that 58% of female students graduated from a USHE institution within eight years of first enrollment, while only 47% of male students graduated in that same amount of time. Again, students from low-income families were at a disadvantage, completing at a rate of 38%. Of those students who graduated from high school with limited English proficiency and who eventually did enroll in a USHE institution, only 28% graduated within 8 years.¹⁰

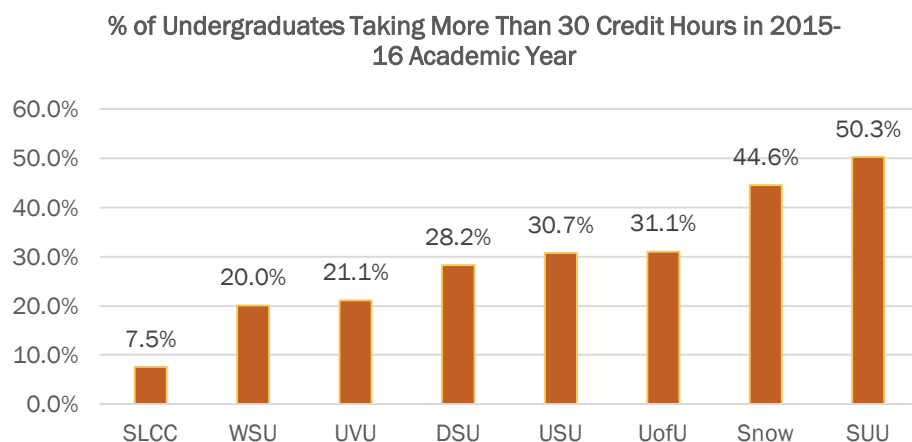


⁹ Office of Outreach and Access. (2017). "UCAW 2016 Data Summary." Salt Lake City, Utah System of Higher Education.

¹⁰ Ma, D. (2017). "College Participation and Completion of Utah High School Graduates: Cohorts 2007-2012." Salt Lake City, Utah System of Higher Education, p. 5.

Initiatives to address completion rates

The Board of Regents has adopted specific initiatives to encourage students to aim for timely completion of their degrees and to support them in their efforts. One specific initiative emphasizes the importance of taking 30 credits per academic year in order to complete a degree on time: an associate degree in two years or a bachelor's degree in four years. Most USHE institutions have adopted a plateau tuition schedule to provide students with a financial incentive to take 15 credits per semester. Plateau tuition – or “banded” tuition – is a set tuition price for undergraduate students within a set range of credits. In other words, at almost all USHE institutions, it is the same tuition and fees for students to take 15 credits a semester as it is for them to take 12. This is intended to encourage students to take additional course loads to graduate sooner. Still, during academic year 2016, only 23.7% of all USHE undergraduate students took 30 or more credits, even including summer terms. Of those full time students, 17.5% were Hispanic.¹¹



Another of the Regents' completion initiatives is to encourage students to get started on a quantitative literacy (mathematics) pathway appropriate to their intended career within their first year of college. In academic year 2016, 22.2% of first-year students entered a USHE institution with their general education quantitative literacy requirement already completed, either through a concurrent enrollment math course or through a score of 26 or higher on the math portion of the ACT exam.¹² In the coming years, the percentage of students entering USHE colleges with their quantitative literacy requirement completed should increase, due to the Legislature's approval of the High School Math Competency Initiative (2015 SB 196) that supports enhanced math concurrent enrollment offerings.

In 2016, an additional 64.5% of incoming USHE students, who had not already completed their quantitative literacy requirement, enrolled in math during their first year of college.¹³ This means that 87% of all first year students were on or had finished their math pathway early in their college experience. Among those who started a math pathway, 21.3% had to take a remedial math course, and only 54% of them were able to pass it. Pass rates were better in college-level math courses, with 61% of students passing during their first year. The course with the largest enrollment, Math 1050, had a drop, fail, or withdraw rate of 42.7%.¹⁴ The Commissioner's Office has been

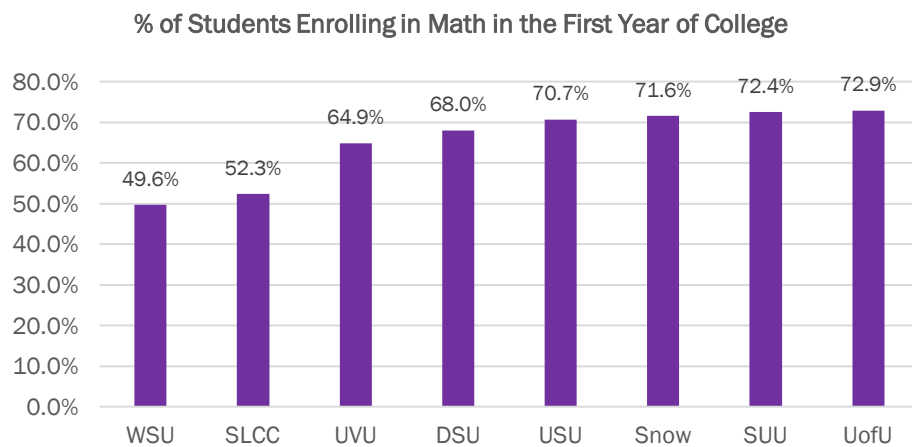
¹¹ Utah System of Higher Education. (2017). "2016 USHE Completion Report," tab "30 to Finish All Ethnicity."

¹² *Ibid*, tab "QL Completed."

¹³ *Ibid*, tab "QL Pathway 1."

¹⁴ *Ibid*, tab "Highest Math Pass/Fail."

working closely with institutions and academic programs to redesign mathematics pathways in order to place students into the math class best aligned with their career plans, with the most common options being Math 1030 (Quantitative Literacy), Math/Stats 1040 (Statistics), and Math 1050 (College Algebra). These partnerships will continue to aggressively address students' success in mathematics courses over the coming year.



Completion rates 2016

Degrees and certificates awarded per 100 FTE (full-time equivalent) is a metric used nationally to measure institutional efficiency. Measuring this outcome simultaneously accounts for student growth and capacity, year-to-year retention of students, and overall success in degree completions. USHE's output in this metric has improved over the last decade: in 2004-05, USHE institutions awarded 22 degrees and certificates per 100 FTE students; by 2014-15, the rate had increased to 25. However, the top states produce 28-30 degrees and certificates per FTE.

USHE is committed to increasing its efficiency to 28 degrees per FTE (a 12% increase) by 2025. This will be accomplished by continued implementation of strategies resulting in more timely completion of degrees and certificates. In 2016, the awards per 100 Full Time Equivalent Students reached 26, a full point increase over 2015. The USHE institutions are tracking and making progress toward reaching the Board Goal of 28 awards per 100 FTE by 2025.¹⁵

¹⁵ Utah State Board of Regents. (2017). "Utah: A State of Opportunity, 2017 Progress Report." Salt Lake City, Utah State Board of Regents.