

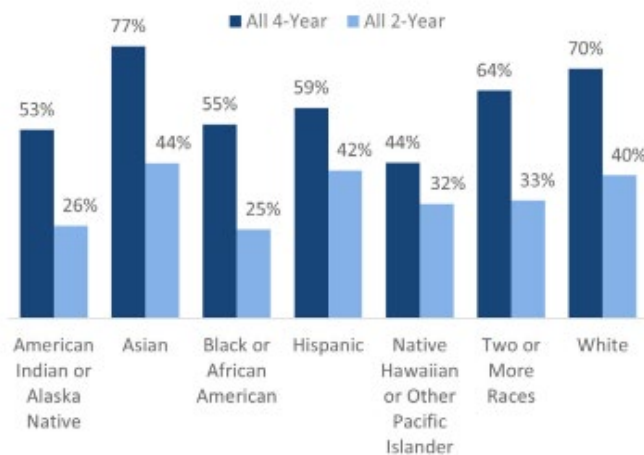
Postsecondary Student Success

Context

Washington’s overall completion rate at public four-year institutions is 69 percent, and 39 percent at public two-years.¹ There are significant racial inequities in graduation rates in our state for students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

Reaching our goal of dramatically expanding the postsecondary education level of Washington residents and meeting our 70 percent attainment goal for the state’s 25- to 44-year-olds (i.e. our early and mid-career residents) to have a postsecondary credential requires a greater rate of student success. While not the only measure, completion of a postsecondary program is a widely accepted indicator of student success that has gained national attention. As of 2021, 46 states have attainment goals, with the first set in 2008 by Hawaii, followed by Tennessee in 2010.² Washington’s attainment goal was adopted in 2013. Completing a program is necessary in order to earn a credential that can help students achieve their life and career goals.

Figure 9. Washington Graduation Rates within 150 percent of Normal Time, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Washington graduation rates within 150 percent of normal time (within 3 years for 2-year institutions, within 6 years for 4-year institutions), Fall 2014 cohort for 4-year and Fall 2017 cohort for 2-year, by race.

WSAC has an opportunity to explore and define completion goals that are inclusive of all learners seeking a credential. This includes not only students who enroll in postsecondary immediately after completing K-12, but also: “earner learners,” who are pursuing a credential while contributing to Washington’s workforce; students who transfer among institutions; part-time students; and those who have stopped out along the way. These students are disproportionately people of color, low income, and often ages 25 and older, compared to “traditional” students who are more likely to be white, attend four-year colleges, and attend programs without having work or family obligations. Washington must also consider pathways to upskill, re-skill, or re-engage students who have previously pursued credit but did not finish a credential.

Determining how we measure completion is identified as a key task in WSAC's 2022 Strategic Action Plan. **What does success look like for students in terms of postsecondary attainment? Can we define completion and measure our progress in a way that centers students and examines equity? Should we measure post-completion impacts, and what might that entail?**

Measuring Completion

Exploring Completion Policy: Guiding Questions

What does success look like for students? What are the stories of student success?

- How does success vary across types of students? For instance, consider a student who has a full-time job, cares for their children, and has attended multiple institutions.
- How might student success vary?
 - How much time does a student need to complete a credential?
 - How might where a student lives impact their ability to earn a credential?
 - How are students who have significant responsibilities outside of the classroom navigating and/or experiencing postsecondary education?
 - What do we know about the ways our postsecondary system is serving (or not serving) students?
 - How is higher education experienced by students who come to college with skills and knowledge acquired through work, military, and other experiences? Are there policies and practices in Washington that help these students earn a credential?

What are the key indicators available to measure completion?

WSAC has identified three potential intermediate indicators to track progress toward completion: persistence, retention, and transfer rates. In alignment with WSAC's equity goals, ensuring data can be disaggregated is critical to understanding equity gaps and understanding patterns of student behavior.

- What are the most important measures that will help us measure our statewide attainment goal?
- Is there a particular frequency for examining the data? For instance, should we examine completion annually, quarterly, etc.?

After a student earns a credential, what does success look like?

- What do we know about recent graduates' connection to employment and wages upon earning a credential?
- How does the type of credential influence securing employment and wages?
- What opportunities could Washington explore to measure post-completion impacts?
- Career Connect Washington (CCW) is in its third year. What do we know about CCW programs and students earning credentials? Are there models we should learn and scale?

Background Materials

The [2022 Strategic Action Plan](#) includes a summary of the existing completion landscape in Washington, including previously determined Council priorities. The [Washington State Encyclopedia of Data and Equity Landscape Report: Exploring Equity Gaps in Washington Postsecondary Education](#) examine completion rates for Washington postsecondary students, including persistence, completion and transfer rates by gender, race/ethnicity, income status, sector, and institution.

Additional Research

What are some examples of high-impact practices for completion or emerging strategies that might inform our strategy?

- WSAC's 2020 [Research Spotlight: Closing Equity Gaps in Postsecondary Access and Completion](#) emphasizes strategies such as wrap-around student supports, frequent advising, holistic and cohort-based learning, integrated learning in and outside of the classroom, and completion grants to help address racial inequities.
- Puget Sound College & Career Network (PSCCN), the Community Center for Educational Results (CCER), and Highline College examined how college placement policies perpetuate institutional racism in their [Inequity by Design](#) report.

How does Higher Education impact the Labor Market in Washington?

- [Washington's Skilled and Educated Workforce Report](#) provides an overview of the current state of workforce preparation in Washington, identifies key drivers of employment demand in the various occupational fields, and highlights occupational fields in which students may find expanding employment opportunities.
- COVID-19 triggered a recession, and Washington residents need clear and efficient pathways to reskill to jobs in new industries that offer more opportunities for career advancement. The [Reskilling and Upskilling in the Post-COVID-19 Economy Snapshot](#) includes short- and long-term strategies for a sustainable and equitable recovery.
 - Additional resources for COVID-19 response and impact include [Lessons on Recovery: The Value of Potential Higher Education in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis](#) and [Maintaining Investment in Higher Education During a Time of Crisis](#).

Related Materials

- Washington's Ecosystem for Students who Transfer
- Adult Learner Study Summary
- Completion indicators (slide – next page)

Notes

¹ [11](#) WSAC analysis of National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Washington graduation rates within 150% of normal time (within 3 years for 2-year institutions, within 6 years for 4-year institutions), Fall 2012 cohort for 4-year and Fall 2015 cohort for 2-year.

² https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/static/States_with_Higher_Education_Attainment_Goals.pdf

Completion indicators

Note: An **orange** outline indicates data that are already reported by ERDC in a dashboard.
A gray outline indicates data that are publicly-available from IPEDS.

