

SUPPORTING STUDENT COMPLETION

March 14-15, 2022

INTRODUCTION

This third gathering of the 2021-22 Complete Tennessee Leadership Institute (CTLI) program will focus on supporting postsecondary completion for all students. These topics build on the themes of the first CTLI meeting, which focused on equity and quality of access to higher education, as well as the second meeting that focused on supporting student success in persistence and completion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Students not only need to be able to access and afford higher education, but it is also important to ensure that students complete their degrees in a reasonable amount of time. Students who do not complete their degrees on time are more likely to accumulate student loan debt and are not able to realize the earnings benefits that come with a postsecondary degree.

Postsecondary completion is a key gateway to obtaining social and economic mobility. On average, individuals with postsecondary credentials have 1.5 times higher wages than those without. In Tennessee, 16 of the top 25 high-demand occupations by projected growth require some sort of postsecondary credential, from certificates to bachelor's degrees.

NATIONAL COMPLETION STATISTICS

According to nationwide data from the National Student Clearinghouse, completion rates have increased steadily over the last decade with the rate of growth slowing slightly in recent years. College completion rates vary by the type of institution of higher education (IHE). Students at private nonprofit four-year IHEs are considerably more likely to complete their postsecondary degrees. Students at private for-profit four-year IHEs and students at public two-year IHEs have completion rates that are below the national average. The graph below shows these rates for first-time students who entered higher education between the years 2006-2014 and enrolled either full- or part-time.

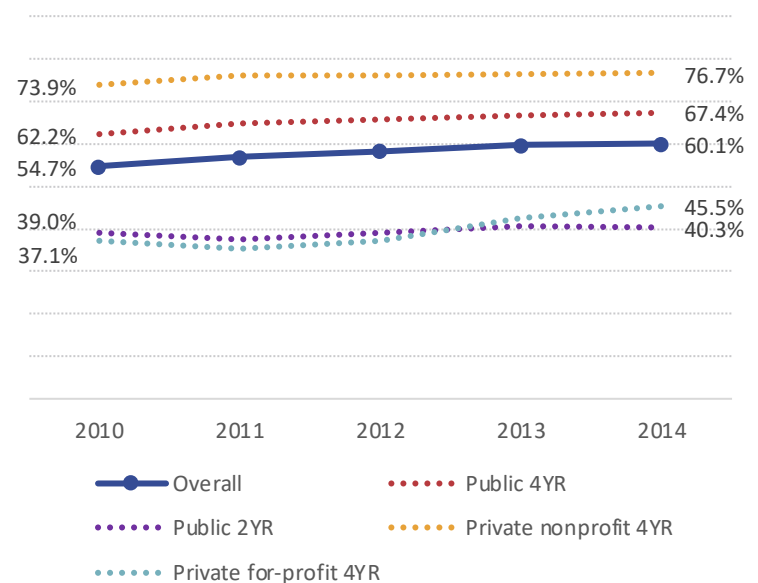
Overall completion rates can mask important differences between student completion rates by age and racial/ethnic subgroups. The following breakdown (Figure 2) of national completion rates by age and race/ethnicity shows:

- There are concerning equity gaps in the students that complete postsecondary credentials, with white and Asian students significantly more likely to receive a credential than Black and Hispanic students; and
- Breaking down completion rates nationally by age shows that students at IHEs who are over the age of 21 are at greater risk of not completing their degree.

FIGURE 1

SIX-YEAR NATIONAL COMPLETION RATES BY STARTING INSTITUTION TYPE

Source



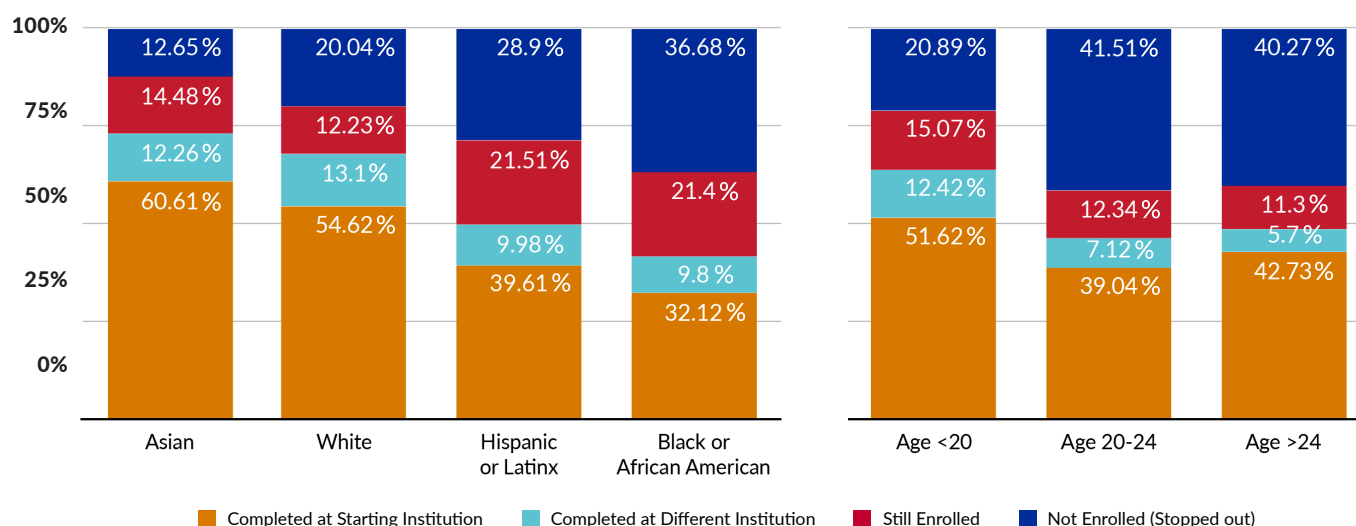
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Complete Tennessee
Leadership Institute
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FIGURE 2
NATIONAL GRADUATION RATES BY AGE & RACE/ETHNICITY

Source

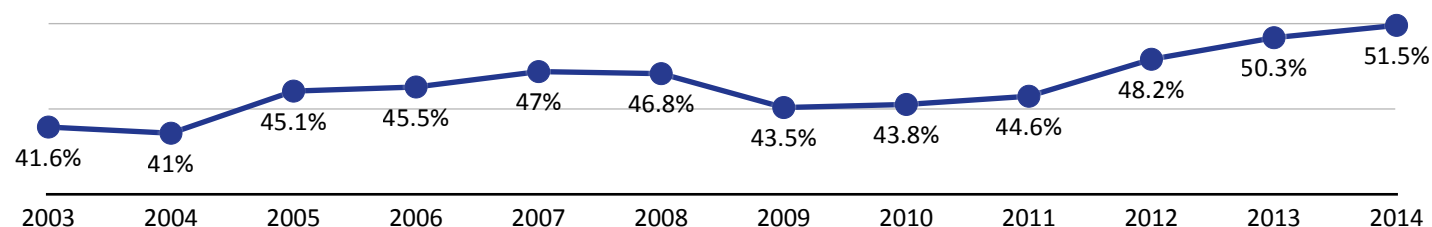


TENNESSEE COMPLETION STATISTICS

In Tennessee, overall completion rates have risen over time – reaching just over 50 percent for the most recent up-to-date data. This increase in completion rates has occurred across different types of colleges and universities in the state.

FIGURE 3
OVERALL SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATES IN TENNESSEE OVER TIME

Source



Tennessee has 27 colleges of applied technology, 9 state universities, and 13 community colleges, each with unique missions and student demographics. Completion rates across these institutions vary by institution type, as seen in Figure 4. The three universities in the University of Tennessee (UT) system are four-year IHEs with relatively selective admissions rates – these IHEs have the highest completion rates in the state. There are also six public four-year IHEs that are locally governed institutions (LGIs). 13 community colleges (TBR CC) also exist across the state. These two-year IHEs serve multiple roles and a variety of students, including adult learners – nearly 30 percent of community college students are over the age of 24. It is important to note that the Tennessee Reconnect program, first implemented in 2018, has been a driving force in boosting adult learner completion rates. In line with national averages for two-year IHEs, the completion rates of Tennessee’s community colleges are lower than the rates for LGIs and UT schools.

Across Tennessee, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission found disparities between racial and ethnic subgroups among higher education students in Tennessee. As seen in Figure 5, historically underserved students in Tennessee – Black students and Hispanic students – are less likely to complete a degree or certificate than white students. These gaps are most pronounced in Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Community Colleges.



FIGURE 4

Source

GRADUATION RATES BY INSTITUTION TYPE

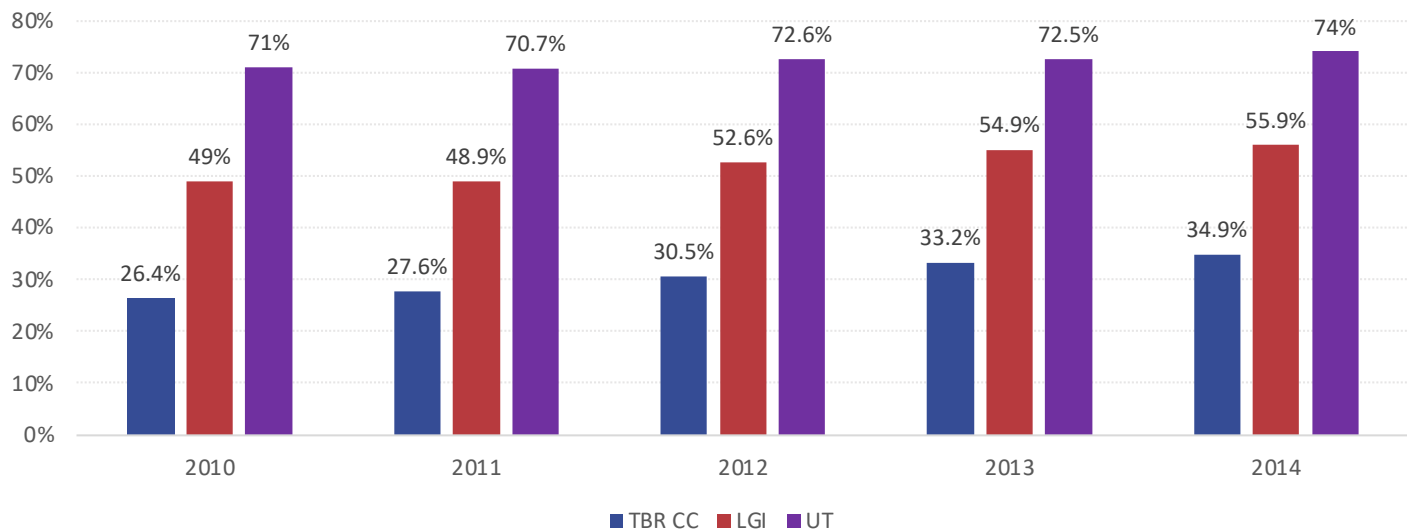


FIGURE 5

Source

COMPLETION RATES BY RACIAL AND ETHNIC SUBGROUPS

IHE Type	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Unknown
TBR CC	38.3%	18.4%	37.0%	30.7%	46.5%
LGI	61.6%	43.9%	55.3%	50.6%	61.6%
UT	75.3%	65.8%	64.8%	69.0%	83.8%

CONCLUSION

Throughout the CTLI meetings you have engaged in policy discussions that span the continuum of higher education policy, from equity and quality of access, to supporting student success in persistence and retention, and now helping all students complete. This knowledge base should inform the action plans you develop and the work that you will do in your communities for years to come. Please note that The Hunt Institute and SCORE are always available as thought partners in your work.

If you would like to visit any of the sources used to compile this brief, please visit bit.ly/CTLIIm3ib2022, or scan the QR code to the right.





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