



# Closing the College Graduation Gap

2016 National College Access and Success Benchmarking Report

September 2016

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whose financial assistance made this report possible.*

## Introduction and Summary of Findings

The National College Access Network (NCAN) represents nearly 400 college access and success organizations nationwide that are united by a mission of helping low-income, first-generation students, often of color, follow a path with more frequency that students across the United States have trod for years. That path, which includes preparing for, applying to, being accepted by, matriculating into, persisting through, and finally completing at a postsecondary institution, is one that can change futures and break the cycle of poverty for individuals, families, and communities. NCAN member organizations assist students at all of these steps, each of which has obstacles for our students to navigate that often derail them and their peers.

NCAN member organizations, new and old, large and small, and across organization scope and practice, have turned in recent years to using data as a way to improve performance and scale capacity. NCAN member organizations use data for continuous improvement, to demonstrate impact, and to be held accountable for the support they receive from funders and the trust they receive from students and their families. Organizations now see the intrinsic value in the act of considering the questions, “What is our impact? Are we achieving our goals?” These organizations have accepted that the way to growth is to learn from the data that show stumbles as well as those that show strides.

For the third year in a row, NCAN, in collaboration with members, has asked these questions. This year’s Benchmarking Report represents a continued refinement in the pursuit of understanding the difference NCAN members make for the students they serve. Our ongoing work with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) has expanded our understanding of the enrollment and completion rates of students served by NCAN members.

Round 3 of the Benchmarking Project enjoyed an increase in the number of participating organizations from 42 to 73. As more organizations participate, we move closer to a representative sample and the results become more generalizable to the broader NCAN membership. However, methodological challenges to account for the broad diversity in member shapes and sizes do persist. In future rounds, we hope to engage all member organizations in order to move closer to a more perfect understanding of our collective impact. We hope individual organizations are pursuing a similar understanding about their own work.

Round 3’s findings are mixed in their positivity. Students served by members participating in this round of the Benchmarking Project continue to enroll in college at rates exceeding their peers; these NCAN member-served students’ enrollment rates are more comparable to students from better-resourced communities. The completion gap between the average student in the benchmarking sample and available national comparisons is wider than in previous years, but member-served students’ completion rates are still in excess of attainment rates of low-income students nationally (see Appendix A for a discussion of student-level reporting). This completion rate gap is potentially partially explained by the economic conditions facing students and the country at-large in 2009 and the subsequent economic recovery that took place over the next six years.

This report provides college enrollment and completion rate benchmarks for students based on gender, race/ethnicity, Hispanic background, and first-generation status. Additionally, for the first time we consider additional national benchmarks beyond those released by the NSC. The expanded data collection from Rounds 2 and 3 of the Benchmarking Project means that there are far more analyses of interest to members and the field than can fit in one report. We look forward to releasing regular Benchmarking breakdowns and other briefs throughout the year to illuminate enrollment

patterns, persistence rates, and the correlation of various combinations of programmatic interventions on student outcomes.

NCAN members are well-acquainted with the stumbles and setbacks that students encounter on the path to postsecondary success. Although this year's results are not as comprehensively encouraging as in previous years, they do support the conclusion that NCAN's members are making progress toward closing the access and completion gaps that plague underserved students. However, these gaps are not yet closed, and the need for NCAN members' work is greater than ever. Moreover, the use of these data is valuable irrespective of the results derived from it. NCAN's cycle of inquiry will continue in much the same way it continues for our members. We constantly strive to improve our data collection, understand what works for students, and communicate that clearly to members. Together, as a national network that is stronger by the year, we are making a difference in students' lives.

## Data Source and Methodology

Once again the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) served as NCAN's partner in conducting this study. The NSCRC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to using data from the NSC to inform educators and policymakers. The NSC is a 501(c)(6) organization that collects information on enrollment and degree completion from 3,600 higher education institutions covering 98 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States.

Through the NSC, virtually any organization related to college access and success—whether a community-based nonprofit, a public high school, a university-based outreach organization, or a state higher education agency—can obtain data about whether the students they assist enroll in, persist, and complete a postsecondary credential. The NSC provides these data affordably to these entities if they have obtained students' permission to access their records.

The NSCRC examined student-level data to create enrollment and completion rates for students served by 73 participating NCAN members. These data covered students who graduated from high school in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2015; these years correspond to 6-, 5-, and 4-year completion rates and a first-fall following high school graduation enrollment rate, respectively. The data submitted by NCAN members included the standard student identifying information required by the NSCRC to determine a student's enrollment or completion status, as well as other data elements (listed below) that NCAN was interested in studying this year.

All data were submitted to the NSCRC through its StudentTracker service to determine students' postsecondary enrollment and completion rates. These rates are the "NCAN Benchmarks" against which organizations can measure their own outcomes and against which NCAN members' outcomes overall can be compared to national benchmarks.

The continued lack of reliable annual data on the outcomes of low-income, first-generation students, both those who did and did not receive college access and success services, makes the Benchmarking Project critical. Federal data collections and surveys have to date been either too incomplete or too infrequent when it comes to providing a clear picture of the performance of underserved students. Recent legislative and regulatory developments may soon provide some relief. As part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, high schools and states will be required to report first-year postsecondary enrollment rates at public, in-state colleges and universities and, where available, private higher education institutions and institutions outside of the state.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, recent

proposed changes to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) would result in postsecondary institutions reporting six-year completion rates for Pell Grant-receiving students across various combinations of first-time status and enrollment intensity.<sup>2</sup> In the results section that follows, we use the best available postsecondary enrollment and graduation rate comparisons. We acknowledge that they are not perfect, but we remain hopeful about the availability of better such comparisons in the near future.

As in previous rounds of this study, members provided additional data beyond the essential elements needed to run student names through the StudentTracker service. These data allow NCAN to perform deeper analyses of student outcomes. The additional data collected in this round of benchmarking included:

- race/ethnicity
- gender
- first-generation status (participants were asked to use the definition of “first-generation” that they use in their own organizations)
- selectivity of program (participants were asked to report on whether they serve all students, or limit participation based on financial or academic criteria, or both)
- Pell Grant status (participants were asked to report whether a student was a Pell Grant recipient and, if not, whether the student was not qualified because of financial or other reasons)
- whether a student was provided with scholarship funds by the organization during the student’s first postsecondary year

Participants were also asked to indicate whether students had received any of eight different interventions. These interventions do not represent the full range of services NCAN members provide to their students, and their implementation differs across organizations. Despite these caveats, collecting these data offers insights into the experiences of students in the benchmarking sample. Members were asked to report whether students received:

- assistance in completing and submitting the FAFSA
- financial literacy/aid education (e.g., paying for college, sources of financial aid, loan repayment)
- academic support/counseling/advising while in high school (e.g., course selection, tutoring, dual credit opportunities)
- college admissions test preparation courses and/or materials
- postsecondary admissions counseling (e.g., fit/match, college tours, application/essay completion assistance)
- specific curriculum and/or activities designed to encourage grit, persistence, non-cognitive, or other social/emotional/life skills
- information for their parents/families (e.g., postsecondary education, financial aid/paying for college)

- success/completion/retention services while in postsecondary education

These additional data allow us to provide new analyses and insights and will in time allow us to better assess how reflective the benchmarking sample is of the entire NCAN member population. For more on this report's methodology, consider the technical notes in Appendix A.

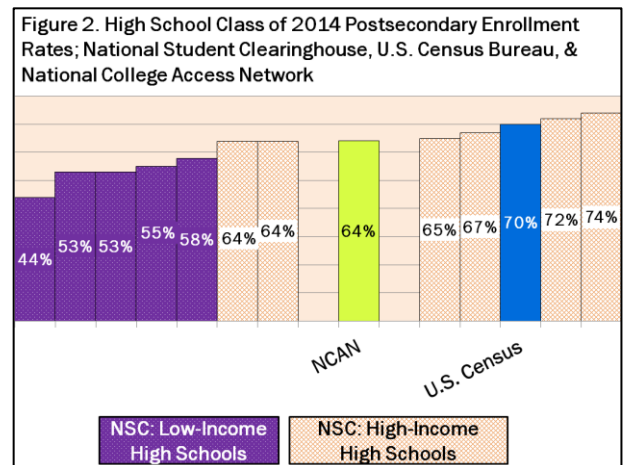
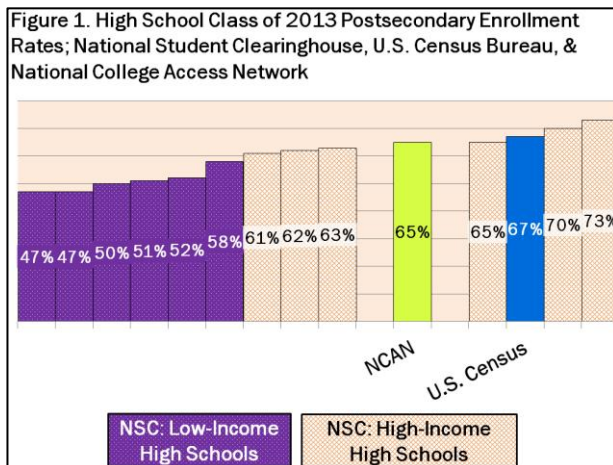
# Results: Postsecondary Enrollment – Overall

Using the data submitted by the 73 NCAN members in Round 3, the NSCRC calculated the percentage of students who enrolled in college at any point in the first year after high school graduation for the four cohorts (2009, 2010, 2011, and 2015). These rates appear in Table 1. Enrollment rates by student-level characteristics follow below.

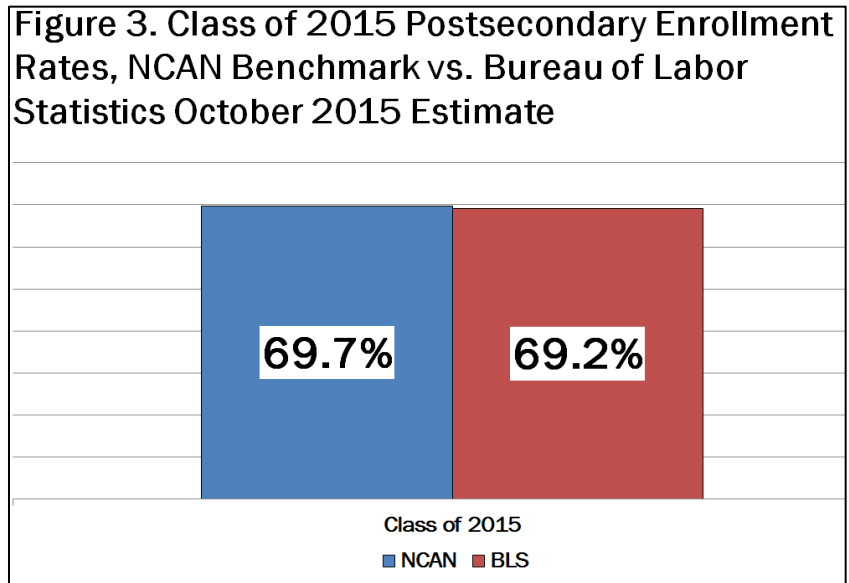
<b>2009</b>	71.4% (9,883)
<b>2010</b>	71.7% (28,109)
<b>2011</b>	72.4% (30,169)
<b>2015</b>	69.7%* (45,372)

\* Only five months of postsecondary enrollment data were available at the time of analysis

Although the enrollment rates in Table 1 are important for NCAN members, they become more useful when put in context. NCAN employs different national measures of enrollment for benchmarking purposes. NCAN compared our first-year postsecondary enrollment rates to the NSCRC’s High School Benchmarks Reports.<sup>3,4</sup> These annual reports include first-year postsecondary enrollment rates for students from 12 categories of public non-charter high schools that participate in the NSCRC’s StudentTracker service. The first-year enrollment rates for the high school classes of 2013 and 2014 are presented below in Figures 1 and 2. These figures also include a national enrollment rate estimate that is published by the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>5,6</sup> The NSCRC report for the high school class of 2015 had not been published as of the time of this report, but NCAN has adjusted the upcoming data collection cycle for Round 4 of the Benchmarking Project so that the two reports will align in the future.



Another available comparison, considered for the first time this year, comes from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). As part of the Current Population Survey, BLS estimated that 69.2 percent of recent high school graduates from the class of 2015 were enrolled in college in October 2015 (see Figure 3).<sup>7</sup> The NCAN enrollment benchmark for the class of 2015 was 69.7 percent, which indicates that students served by the members in this sample are enrolling at rates slightly greater than the national average.



The enrollment rate comparisons between NCAN member-served students and students covered in the NSCRC reports show the progress NCAN members have made in helping to close the enrollment rate gap. Even though they represent just six months of the academic year following high school graduation (whereas the comparison groups are for the full year), both the 2013 and 2014 NCAN cohorts exceed the enrollment rates for each of the categories of low-income high school graduates. Additionally, both NCAN cohorts are on par with or exceeding the enrollment rates of multiple categories of students who attend high-income high schools. The 2013 and 2014 NCAN cohorts do lag behind the national enrollment rate estimates, but available estimates on low-income student enrollment suggest that the NCAN member-served students are enrolling at rates greater than their low-income peers nationwide.<sup>8</sup>

Figures 1 and 2 are evidence that the students served by NCAN members can enroll at rates comparable to students from better-resourced communities where supports are more available and the expectation to matriculate is stronger. The supports provided to students by NCAN members are making a difference in helping their students to enroll, which is the first step toward a degree (or credential) that can help to change their lives. NCAN members should take pride in this finding and make their education leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders at all levels aware of it.



## Results: Postsecondary Enrollment – By Student Characteristics

Although the aggregate enrollment rates are a major indicator of the success of both NCAN members and the field, members are also interested in disaggregating enrollment data by student-level characteristics. Disaggregation helps identify gaps in service provision and student outcomes. This report disaggregates both enrollment and completion rates. The values in Table 2 may be valuable for individual NCAN members' comparison purposes to see how their organization measures up against a large sample of other member-served students. Cross-tabulations of combinations of various organization- and student-level characteristics are available from NCAN upon member request.

**Table 2. First-Year Enrollment Rates, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Hispanic Heritage, and First-Generation Status  
Classes of 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015**  
(Number of Enrolled Students in a Given Group in a Given Year)

	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multiracial	Unknown Race
<b>2009</b>	68.1% (3,170)	72.3% (5,173)	76.1% (1,540)	79.2% (2,760)	74.8% (1,768)	73.1% (3,424)	76.2% (1,200)	83% (664)	69.3% (43)	‡	63.3% (287)	67.6% (3,690)
<b>2010</b>	70% (10,132)	72.8% (17,078)	70.8% (899)	71.5% (13,297)	75.5% (4,559)	74% (7,603)	69.2% (9,922)	78.6% (2,308)	69.1% (132)	71% (147)	71.5% (1,422)	67.9% (11,938)
<b>2011</b>	69.8% (10,910)	73.9% (18,832)	74% (427)	71.3% (16,360)	73.4% (4,763)	74.6% (7,815)	70.9% (12,608)	79.6% (2,304)	62.4% (171)	66.8% (113)	71.4% (1,497)	70% (13,506)
<b>2015</b>	67.7% (15,969)	71.9% (27,319)	60.1% (2,084)	70.4% (24,395)	69% (7,445)	67.7% (9,374)	70.8% (21,188)	76.4% (3,624)	56.3% (214)	65% (177)	70.6% (2,171)	70% (22,367)

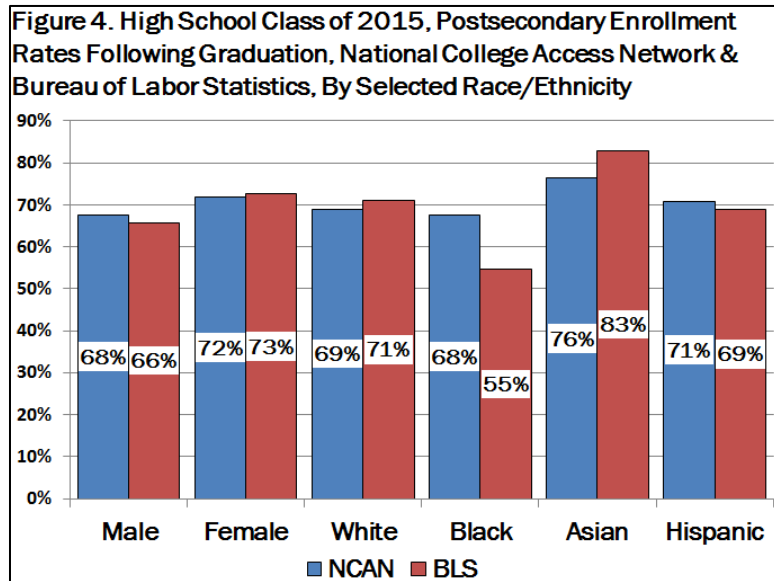
Note: The values for unknown gender and unknown race are particularly susceptible to influence from a small number of organizations. One organization accounted for over 66% of students with race reported as "unknown." Four organizations accounted for over 74% of students with gender reported as "unknown." The values for these columns are more reflective of the outcomes of these particular organizations' students, not the outcomes of all organizations who submitted data for this study.

\* Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values and Hispanic.

‡ Value suppressed because of low sample size

As in the Round 2 Benchmarking Report, female students enrolled at greater rates than male students on average across all four years. White and Black students enrolled at comparable rates across all four years, while Hispanic students enrolled at higher rates than either group in 2009 and 2015. Asian students were again consistently the racial group with the highest enrollment rates over all four years. Exercise caution when considering Pacific Islander and American Indian students' enrollment rates because of these groups' relatively low sample sizes. In 2015, American Indian students' enrollment rate was noticeably lower than that of other student groups. Encouragingly, first-generation students' enrollment rates were comparable to, or in excess of, those of other student groups in all four years, especially in 2009 when first-generation students were second only to Asian ones.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics report cited earlier also includes enrollment rates by gender and selected race/ethnicity. Figure 4 compares class of 2015 high school graduates in the NCAN Benchmarking and BLS cohorts. These results are also encouraging. NCAN member-served male and female students enroll at approximately the national rate. Black students in the NCAN 2015 cohort enroll at much higher rates than the national average, while NCAN member-served Hispanic students slightly edge their peers nationally. White and Asian students in the NCAN member cohort lag behind their comparison group; White students do so just slightly, while the gap for Asian students is more substantial.



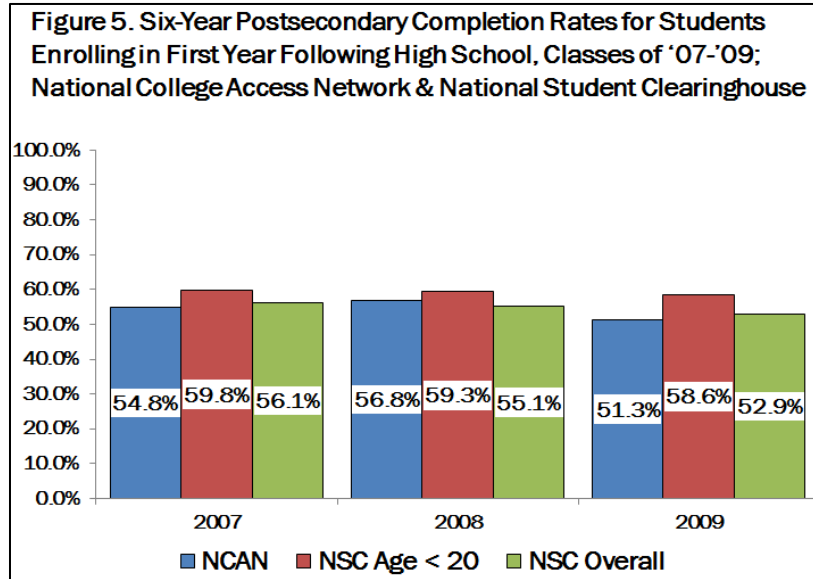
Overall, NCAN members should be encouraged by their success in getting students to enroll. Low-income students typically enroll in postsecondary institutions at lower rates, but by multiple measures considered here, the students included in the NCAN Benchmarking Round 3 cohort were comparable to, or even exceeded, multiple national benchmarks.

## Results: Postsecondary Completion – Overall

As discussed above, NCAN member-served students outperform their peers and enroll at rates comparable to higher-income students. But after enrolling, do our students complete? Using the 2009 high school graduation cohort, the NSCRC examined a six-year window, or 150 percent of traditional completion time after enrollment, to receive a postsecondary degree or credential. Overall, 51.3 percent of NCAN member-served students from the class of 2009 completed a degree or credential within six years.

NCAN compared this result to the national six-year degree completion rate published in the [NSCRC's Degree Completion Report](#). This report, published in the fall of 2015, analyzes degree completion rates for the cohort of students that entered college in fall 2009.<sup>9</sup> NCAN can compare our completion rates from the first three rounds of the Benchmarking Project against these national completion rates for three cohorts: 2007, 2008, and 2009.<sup>10,11</sup>

Figure 5 sets side by side these three cohorts of high school graduates. These cohorts include students who enrolled in the first year following graduation separated into three groups: the NCAN benchmark, the NSC benchmark for students age 20 or younger upon enrollment, and the NSC overall completion rate. Based on the NCAN members submitting to this round of the Benchmarking Project, the best comparison provided by the NSC is for students who were age 20 or young upon first enrolling. Although this is not a perfect comparison, the vast majority of the students in the age-20-or-younger cohort are 18 and enroll in college in the academic year immediately following high school graduation.<sup>12</sup>



In the first two rounds of the Benchmarking Project (classes of 2007 and 2008), the six-year completion rate for NCAN-served students approached the comparable rate published by the NSCRC. The most recent round of the Benchmarking Project, which considers the six-year completion rate of the class of 2009 (51.3%), shows a relatively wider gap. This gap is the widest it has been (7.3 percentage points) since the start of the Benchmarking Project. This disparity is not aligned with the positive outcomes shown by NCAN member-served students' enrollment rates; the average student served by a participating NCAN member organization lags behind the national completion rate.

## Discussion of Overall Postsecondary Completion Rates

In the introduction for this year's Signature Report, the National Student Clearinghouse notes that, compared to the class of 2008, the class of 2009 had 8 percent more students enrolling in the fall, 0.5 percentage points more students enrolling at less than full-time status, and 1.3 percentage points more students enrolling in community colleges.<sup>13</sup> Each of these measures increased in the class of 2008 over the class of 2007, as well. The students who enrolled in 2009 "were part of the surge of increased enrollments that accompanied the Great Recession, arriving on campus at a time when institutions were already dealing with reduced public budget support."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, these students were arriving at colleges and universities that were "forced to increase tuition just as students and their families found themselves with diminished financial resources, leading

to questions about growing levels of student debt and whether this might affect rates of degree completion.”<sup>15</sup>

Postsecondary enrollment is economically countercyclical, i.e., as the economy worsens and the number of jobs decreases, enrollment swells as students who otherwise might have joined the workforce or workers who are displaced and looking to gain more skills enter college classrooms.<sup>16,17</sup> Enrollment rates increased as a result of the Great Recession. Long (2015) finds that, from 2007 to 2009, enrollment gains were greater in older, non-traditional students than in traditional-aged students.<sup>18</sup> Taylor et al. (2014) describe a surge in the enrollment of minority freshmen from 2007 to 2008, including 15- and 8-percent increases, respectively, in Hispanic and Black postsecondary enrollment.<sup>19</sup> The authors note that, “the freshman enrollment boom has not been spread evenly across the nation’s postsecondary institutions” and that two-year public institutions and for-profit institutions of all types saw the largest enrollment increases.<sup>20</sup> During and after the Great Recession, students from low-income households faced decreases in institutional aid when they were least willing or prepared to make significant investments in education. This was due to a decline in state subsidies to higher education.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, the increase in overall enrollment decreased the capacity of campuses to accommodate all of the students who wanted to attend.<sup>22</sup> A potential explanation of decreased rates for the 2009 cohort includes a combination of increased enrollment by student groups who on average need more supports to succeed, a lack of available institutional aid, and a disproportionate shift of students toward less selective institutions with lower completion rates. Additionally, while the struggling economy added students to college campuses during and after the Great Recession, the nation’s steady economic recovery and restoration of jobs from 2009 to present<sup>23</sup> may have lured students on the margin out of college and into the workforce. This is especially true for low-income and first-generation students<sup>24</sup>, who many NCAN members have unfortunately seen stop out in order to work because of individual or family needs.

The takeaway here for NCAN members is unclear and requires future years of data and research to clarify. On one hand, a 51.3 percent six-year completion rate is the lowest achieved by an NCAN Benchmarking Project cohort to-date, and many NCAN members will be dissatisfied with not achieving their goal of closing the attainment gap between their students and students nationally. On the other hand, a 51.3 percent completion rate is comparable to that of other low-income students in a similar (but not exact) six-year window.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps NCAN members’ services helped to insulate the students they serve from succumbing to the many obstacles a postsecondary education presents. As the NSC notes:

These results should not be taken as an indication that the considerable efforts to drive improvement in student outcomes at the institutional, state, and federal levels have been ineffective. Indeed, one might easily conclude that without them the declines could have been even worse for particular types of students or institutions, given the demographic and economic forces at play.<sup>26</sup>

NCAN will continue to use the Benchmarking Project data, as well as other literature in the field, to better understand ways in which to promote postsecondary completion overall and to prescribe interventions for those student groups that are particularly at-risk or poised for growth.

## Results: Postsecondary Completion – By Student Characteristics

Much like enrollment outcomes, we are able to examine students' six-year completion outcomes for the 2009 cohort based on their individual characteristics. Table 3 below examines the six-year completion outcomes of four groups of students:

- those who enrolled in postsecondary education during the 2009-10 academic year, their first year after graduating high school;
- those who enrolled in postsecondary education any time after the 2009-10 academic year;
- those who enrolled any time in the six years between 2009-10 and 2014-15; and
- all students from the class of 2009, regardless of when, or whether, they ever enrolled.

**Table 3. Students Who Completed by 2015, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Hispanic Heritage, and First-Generation Status  
Class of 2009**

*(Total Number of Students in a Given Group)*

	All Students	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Unknown Race
Enrolled First Year After HS	51.3% (9,883)	46.5% (3,169)	55.5% (5,174)	46.7% (1,540)	55.6% (2,769)	62.3% (1,769)	42.6% (3,432)	55.9% (1,213)	69.2% (669)	55.8% (43)	‡	43.7% (288)	51.4% (3,675)
Enrolled Two or More Years After HS	18.9% (1,156)	16.3% (417)	21.4% (591)	16.2% (148)	30.1% (229)	24.8% (169)	13.1% (464)	27.8% (133)	23.6% (38)	‡	‡	10.8% (46)	23.3% (432)
Enrolled Any Time After HS	47.9% (11,039)	43% (3,586)	52% (5,765)	44% (1,688)	53.6% (2,998)	59% (1,938)	39.1% (3,896)	53.1% (1,346)	66.7% (707)	51% (49)	‡	39.2% (334)	48.4% (4,107)
Total, Class of 2009**	38.3% (13,823)	33.2% (4,654)	42% (7,147)	36.8% (2,022)	45.9% (3,484)	48.4% (2,363)	32.3% (4,683)	44.9% (1,574)	58.3% (800)	40.3% (62)	‡	28.9% (453)	36.7% (5,453)

‡ Value suppressed because of low sample size

\* Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values *and* Hispanic.

\*\* An initial version of this report overestimated completion rates in this row because it did not include students not matched by the National Student Clearinghouse in the denominator of this calculation

Unsurprisingly, students who enrolled in the first year following high school graduation completed at higher rates than those who enrolled two or more years after graduating high school. Because these data only cover a six-year window, this lower completion rate for later-enrolling students may be a result of their having a smaller window in which to

complete a credential. However, research shows that students who enroll immediately following high school tend to complete at higher rates.<sup>27,28</sup> Female students, White students, and Asian students completed at higher rates while male students and students of color, notably Black students, completed at lower rates. Although each Benchmarking Project round is a snapshot rather than a longitudinal entry, completion rates for Hispanic students are higher in Round 3 than in Round 2. First-generation students, regardless of race, outperformed Black students and were on par with American Indian and Hispanic students.

Appendix B contains five-year completion rates for the 2010 cohort and four-year completion rates for the 2011 cohort.

## A Deeper Dive into the Benchmarking Sample

Round 3 of the Benchmarking Project enjoyed the participation of more NCAN member organizations than ever before. With each successive year, the number of organizations submitting data has increased (from 24 in Round 1 to 42 in Round 2 to 73 in Round 3). Even with this increased participation, the results from this round of the study should not be considered a representative sample of NCAN member-served students or students nationwide. Future rounds of this study will better consider the overall NCAN membership’s characteristics and examine how closely the benchmarking sample mirrors those characteristics. For this round, we say only that the organizations and students participating are a subset of NCAN’s membership. This subset of students considered in this report still provides important insights into student outcomes for our field.

Table 4 shows the number of students submitted for each of the four years examined in this year’s study. Over 40 percent of the students submitted for this round of benchmarking came from the high school graduating class of 2015. 2009 had the fewest number of students and organizations submitting data. With each successive year of data collection, both the sample sizes and number of organizations have increased. We expect this trend to continue. Data collection and management have become more common in the field, especially in the last few years, which means that as the years from which data are being collected roll forward, organizations should be able to report more data than in the past.

Members using the NSC’s StudentTracker service often have questions about the student-level “match rate” that they receive. Students, even students that organizations know are enrolled, can fail to be matched by the NSC for a wide variety of reasons.<sup>29</sup> These match rates can vary from organization to organization, but the NSC estimates that “the average match rate for high school cohorts is typically closer to [93-95%] for the StudentTracker aggregate counts of enrolled students (which include students with FERPA blocks) and 88% to 90% in the detailed student list results (which exclude students with FERPA blocks).” The overall match rate for Benchmarking Round 3 was 79.8 percent while the rates for 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2015 were 82.8 percent, 83.4 percent, 83 percent, and 74.9 percent, respectively. A future NCAN Benchmarking Breakdown will more closely examine match rates by organization- and student-level characteristics.

<b>2009</b>	13,827 (60 organizations)
<b>2010</b>	39,184 (64 organizations)
<b>2011</b>	41,660 (61 organizations)
<b>2015</b>	65,031 (71 organizations)
<b>Total</b>	159,702 (73 organizations)

## Organization-Level Characteristics

Although there have been large organizations that have participated in the Benchmarking Project's first two rounds, this year's data include an outlier that is particularly large in terms of number of students submitted. This organization ranged from over 55 percent to over 66 percent of the yearly sample in three of the four years this report considers (2009 excluded). As discussed in Appendix A's Technical Notes, this report elects to report student-level outcomes, even with this outlier included, for lack of a satisfactory way to reconcile very large and very small organization sizes at this time. Table 5 describes the percentage of organizations by number of students submitted per year for Benchmarking Round 3.

Annual Number of Students Submitted	Number of Organizations	% of Round 3 Organization Sample
1-50	23	32%
51-100	13	18%
101-250	12	16%
251-500	12	16%
501-1,000	6	8%
1,001-2,500	6	8%
2,501+	1	1%

NCAN also examined the Benchmarking Project participants by a number of other characteristics.

- Overall, 50 percent of participating organizations submitted 100 students or fewer annually.
- Considering selection criteria for student participation, 34 participating organizations (47%) had academic and financial requirements for students to be served. Another 22 organizations (30%) had neither academic nor financial requirements, while 11 organizations (15%) had financial requirements only, and five (7%) had academic requirements only.
- Geographically, 11 organizations (15%) were based in the U.S. Census-defined Northeast region, the least-represented region in terms of number of organizations. Twelve organizations (16%) came from the Midwest, while the West (20 organizations, 27%) and South (30 organizations, 41%) were the most well-represented. Eight organizations (12%) served or will serve students in multiple regions. Compared to the overall NCAN membership, the Round 3 sample under-represents the Northeast and Midwest (20% and 24%, respectively) and over-represents the South and West (41% and 27%, respectively).



## Demographic Characteristics

Student-level characteristics for the entire sample appear in Table 6 below. These characteristics can be found by year in Appendix B. Overall, the sample tended to be more female, Black, and Hispanic than other characteristics. American Indian students were particularly underrepresented, comprising just 0.5 percent of the overall sample. For the second year in a row, it is notable how few students (just under 50 percent) had their race/ethnicity data reported by members. Although more and more NCAN members are coming to understand the value of tracking demographic data about their students (for disaggregation purposes), the level of reported data on race and ethnicity here is distressing. We hope that in future years NCAN members participating in this project will be able to report these data at higher rates. Members participating in Round 3 were able to report more data on student gender than was provided in Round 2; in Round 2, 8 percent of students had an unknown gender, but in Round 3 just 3 percent had an unknown gender.

**Table 6. Submitted Students, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Hispanic Heritage, and First-Generation Status Round 3 Cohorts**  
(Classes of 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015)

Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Unknown Race
36.5% (58,310)	58.8% (94,032)	4.5% (7,335)	49.8% (79,615)	16% (25,671)	24.5% (39,250)	39.8% (63,568)	7.1% (11,362)	0.5% (907)	0.4% (657)	4.7% (7,608)	46.4% (74,222)

\*Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values and Hispanic. Consequently, the sum of all of these values is greater than 100%.

## Scholarship Recipients

Many NCAN members provide some type of scholarship for the students they serve. Although the qualifications for these scholarships vary from organization to organization, these funds are invaluable for students pursuing postsecondary education. As in Round 2, NCAN asked organizations to report on whether they provided a student with a scholarship to be used toward their first year of postsecondary education.

- Overall, 11 percent of students in the Round 3 sample received scholarships from the organization that submitted them (down from 15% in Round 2). The percentage of scholarship recipients declined in each successive year. 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2015 had values of 36%, 13%, 10%, and 5%, respectively. The larger sample sizes in later years were the reason for this skew. Removing the large outlier organization from the denominator changes the percentage of scholarship recipients dramatically; under this condition, 30 percent of students in 2010 and 2011 received scholarships, and 12 percent received a scholarship in 2015.
- Organizations reported scholarship values for 65% of students across the entire sample. This figure is larger than that of last year's sample (54%). 16 organizations (22%) did not award any scholarships to students entering their first year of postsecondary education.



- Across the sample, \$766 was the average scholarship amount among students receiving any scholarship for their first academic year.
- Average organizational scholarships ranged from \$506 for the class of 2015 to \$997 for the class of 2009. The class of 2010 (\$900) and 2011 (\$860) were somewhere in the middle. These numbers are affected by the much larger sample sizes in later years, compared to earlier.
- A future brief will specifically examine the outcomes of scholarship-receiving students.

### ***Pell Grant Status and Award Amount***

Students served by NCAN members primarily come from low-income families. Although NCAN is not able to collect information directly on students' family incomes, we have attempted to find a suitable proxy. In Round 1, we collected data on whether students received a Pell Grant and whether their expected family contribution (EFC) was greater than or less than \$5,000. Unfortunately, the sample sizes were not large enough for these variables to draw reliable conclusions about whether they were correlated with higher postsecondary enrollment and completion rates. In Round 2, some participating organizations reported students' EFCs, but 83 percent of students' EFCs went unreported. In Round 3, we asked organizations to report on whether students were Pell Grant recipients, whether they were ineligible for financial or other reasons, or whether that information was unknown.

From the Round 3 data collection, we determined that there was a large percentage (91%) of students in the sample for which Pell status was reported as "unknown." This varied from 80 percent in 2009 to 93 percent in 2015. 45 organizations out of 73 reported unknown Pell status for more than 75 percent of their submitted students. This data quality is disappointing for a few reasons:

- First, participating organizations are either unable or unwilling to supply these data; this could be because they themselves are not collecting them or they are not available for easy export.
- Second, the low level of reported data makes it difficult, if not impossible, to disaggregate student enrollment and completion outcomes by Pell recipient status, which is a topic no doubt of interest to NCAN members.
- Third, the Pell Grant is a valuable access and completion lever for low-income students; better data quality reported here could add to the evidence in support of this federal program.

In future rounds, NCAN will continue to work with members to find a suitable and more widely reportable proxy for students' low-income status.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

NCAN's Benchmarking Project continues to examine whether college access and success organizations are meeting their goals of moving underserved students to and through college. This year's National College Access and Success Benchmarking Report offers more evidence that these organizations are achieving these goals, though considerable work remains. This report provides NCAN members and the field with more benchmarks against which to compare outcomes.

More members than ever before participated in this year's study, and we hope that this sample will grow in Round 4. NCAN will turn with increased focus toward questions of methodological fine-tuning to ensure that these metrics come ever closer to representing NCAN members' outcomes more broadly. We hope that even more members will see their colleagues' contributions and decide to engage us in this important work.

As important as this study's findings are, this release also marks the beginning of a series of shorter interim reports with even more insights. Analyses benchmarking student persistence, disaggregating completion by degree, and examining interventions received by various student groups are forthcoming. These studies will further contribute to the field of college access and success and serve as resources for NCAN members.

The Benchmarking Project is in many ways a perfect example of the strength of the relationship between NCAN and our members. Together, combining our resources and knowledge, we have produced insights that are of value both to individual organizations and more broadly. Although this year's results will not be universally celebrated or encouraging, we must collectively persevere and persist in our efforts to do better, much as we encourage our students to do every day. We thank our member organizations for working with us hand-in-hand on this initiative and look forward to learning more together in years to come.

## Appendix A: Technical Notes

As in past years, this report relies on “student-level” reporting, rather than “organization-level” reporting. Effectively, outcomes reported here are for “the average student reported by all participating NCAN organizations.” “Organization-level” reporting would describe “the average student in the average participating NCAN member organization.”

Organization-level reporting attempts to account for differences in organization size that might skew overall outcomes; these benchmarks would allow organizations to compare themselves to the average *organization* submitting to the Benchmarking Project, rather than comparing their students to the average *student* in the benchmarking sample. The difference may seem subtle, but the impact on the benchmarks themselves is substantial. Organization-level enrollment and completion rates would, by and large, be greater than student-level benchmarks because a larger number of organizations serving fewer students (and with relatively higher outcomes) would be more heavily weighted. In the current absence of a way to reconcile the large variations in organization size in the benchmarking sample and an incomplete knowledge of the characteristics of the overall NCAN membership, this report elects to stay the course with student-level benchmarks. Organization-level enrollment and completion benchmarks by student characteristics will be released in the future.

Readers should not interpret this report’s benchmarks as longitudinal. These enrollment and completion figures should not be directly compared to results in either of the Benchmarking Project’s previous two rounds. This is because the samples in each organization are different. Although there is some overlap round-to-round in the participating organizations, that overlap is incomplete and some organizations drop out of the sample while others are added in. Instead, readers should interpret each round of the Benchmarking Project as an individual snapshot in time. As more organizations participate in this study, these snapshots become clearer as they encompass a greater proportion of the entire NCAN membership. NCAN is considering various approaches to data collection that would allow for the creation of trend lines based on the Benchmarking Project.

## Appendix B: Additional Demographic and Completion Rate Data

### Demographics

Submitted Students, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, First-Generation Status, and Hispanic Heritage Classes of 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015												
Class Year	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Unknown Race
2009	33.6% (4,654)	51.7% (7,147)	14.6% (2,022)	25.2% (3,484)	17% (2,363)	33.8% (4,683)	11.3% (1,574)	5.7% (800)	0.4% (62)	0% (9)	3.2% (453)	39.4% (5,453)
2010	36.9% (14,464)	59.8% (23,457)	3.2% (1,269)	47.4% (18,590)	15.4% (6,036)	26.2% (10,272)	36.5% (14,335)	7.4% (2,933)	0.4% (191)	0.5% (207)	5% (1,988)	44.8% (17,563)
2011	37.5% (15,629)	61.1% (25,455)	1.3% (577)	55% (22,938)	15.5% (6,483)	25.1% (10,469)	42.6% (17,774)	6.9% (2,891)	0.6% (274)	0.4% (169)	5% (2,094)	46.2% (19,281)
2015	36.2% (23,563)	58.4% (37,973)	5.3% (3,467)	53.2% (34,603)	16.5% (10,789)	21.2% (13,826)	45.9% (29,885)	7.2% (4,738)	0.5% (380)	0.4% (272)	4.7% (3,073)	49.1% (31,925)
*Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values and Hispanic. Consequently, the sum of all of these values is greater than 100%.												

**Completion  
Class of 2009**

**Table 3. Students Who Completed by 2015, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Hispanic Heritage, and First-Generation Status  
Class of 2009  
(Total Number of Students in a Given Group)**

	All Students	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Unknown Race
<b>Enrolled First Year After HS</b>	51.3% (9,883)	46.5% (3,169)	55.5% (5,174)	46.7% (1,540)	55.6% (2,769)	62.3% (1,769)	42.6% (3,432)	55.9% (1,213)	69.2% (669)	55.8% (43)	‡	43.7% (288)	51.4% (3,675)
<b>Enrolled Two or More Years After HS</b>	18.9% (1,156)	16.3% (417)	21.4% (591)	16.2% (148)	30.1% (229)	24.8% (169)	13.1% (464)	27.8% (133)	23.6% (38)	‡	‡	10.8% (46)	23.3% (432)
<b>Enrolled Any Time After HS</b>	47.9% (11,039)	43% (3,586)	52% (5,765)	44% (1,688)	53.6% (2,998)	59% (1,938)	39.1% (3,896)	53.1% (1,346)	66.7% (707)	51% (49)	‡	39.2% (334)	48.4% (4,107)
<b>Total, Class of 2009**</b>	38.3% (13,823)	33.2% (4,654)	42% (7,147)	36.8% (2,022)	45.9% (3,484)	48.4% (2,363)	32.3% (4,683)	44.9% (1,574)	58.3% (800)	40.3% (62)	‡	28.9% (453)	36.7% (5,453)

‡ Value suppressed because of low sample size

\* Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values *and* Hispanic.

\*\* An initial version of this report overestimated completion rates in this row because it did not include students not matched by the National Student Clearinghouse in the denominator of this calculation

**Class of 2010**

Students Who Completed by 2015, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Hispanic Heritage, and First-Generation Status Class of 2010 (Total Number of Students in a Given Group)													
	All Students	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Unknown Race
<b>Enrolled First Year After HS</b>	44.3% (28,110)	38.7% (10,132)	47.5% (17,081)	44.8% (897)	44.7% (13,212)	53.6% (4,543)	38.2% (7,596)	44.2% (9,926)	51.8% (2,302)	42.4% (132)	44.2% (147)	36.5% (1,427)	44.1% (11,963)
<b>Enrolled Two or More Years After HS</b>	19.2% (3,395)	16.2% (1,213)	21.3% (2,063)	13.4% (119)	21.5% (1,589)	27.1% (401)	14.4% (885)	20% (1,420)	29% (172)	‡	‡	15.8% (183)	19.3% (1,718)
<b>Enrolled Any Time After HS</b>	41.6% (31,505)	36.3% (11,345)	44.7% (19,144)	41.1% (1,016)	42.2% (14,801)	51.4% (4,944)	35.7% (8,481)	41.2% (11,346)	50.2% (2,474)	37.9% (153)	41.3% (162)	34.1% (1,610)	41% (13,681)
<b>Total, Class of 2010**</b>	33.4% (39,190)	28.5% (14,464)	36.5% (23,457)	24.2% (1,269)	34% (18,590)	42.3% (6,036)	29.5% (10,272)	32.6% (14,335)	42.5% (2,933)	30.3% (191)	32.3% (207)	27.6% (1,988)	31.8% (17,563)
‡ Value suppressed because of low sample size													
* Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values <i>and</i> Hispanic.													
** An initial version of this report overestimated completion rates in this row because it did not include students not matched by the National Student Clearinghouse in the denominator of this calculation													

**Class of 2011**

Students Who Completed by 2015, By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Hispanic Heritage, and First-Generation Status Class of 2011 (Total Number of Students in a Given Group)													
	All Students	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	First-Gen	White	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Unknown Race
<b>Enrolled First Year After HS</b>	28.6% (30,172)	23.5% (10,916)	31.3% (18,834)	35.3% (422)	27.4% (16,368)	39.5% (4,756)	25.2% (7,815)	26.2% (12,614)	36.1% (2,309)	26.9% (171)	23% (113)	26.1% (1,470)	25.8% (13,538)
<b>Enrolled Two or More Years After HS</b>	12.5% (3,128)	10.3% (1,234)	13.7% (1,846)	18.7% (48)	12.4% (1,802)	18.3% (393)	8.3% (703)	12.9% (1,517)	17.5% (137)	3.3% (30)	‡	10% (169)	12.8% (1,683)
<b>Enrolled Any Time After HS</b>	27.1% (33,300)	22.2% (12,150)	29.8% (20,680)	33.6% (470)	25.9% (18,170)	37.8% (5,149)	23.8% (8,518)	24.8% (14,131)	35% (2,446)	23.3% (201)	22.2% (126)	24.4% (1,639)	24.3% (15,221)
<b>Total, Class of 2011**</b>	21.7% (41,661)	17.3% (15,629)	24.2% (25,455)	32.6% (577)	20.6% (22,938)	30.1% (6,483)	19.4% (10,469)	19.7% (17,774)	29.6% (2,891)	17.1% (274)	16.5% (169)	19.7% (2,094)	19.1% (19,281)
‡ Value suppressed because of low sample size													
* Because the Hispanic indicator variable was collected separately from the race/ethnicity variable, students could be identified as any of the race/ethnicity values <i>and</i> Hispanic.													
** An initial version of this report overestimated completion rates in this row because it did not include students not matched by the National Student Clearinghouse in the denominator of this calculation													

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