



EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL SERIES

The Illinois Class of 2002 and College Readiness: A descriptive summary four years after high school

Bradford R. White, Christopher M. Mullin, and Kathleen Sullivan Brown.

Executive Summary

In 2001, Illinois began administering the ACT test to all 11th graders in Illinois public schools as part of the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE). For the first time, ACT scores and background information were available for most public-school students who would be completing high school one year later, rather than just those who elected to take the test because they were expecting to apply to a postsecondary institution that asked for ACT scores. We refer to this cohort of public high school graduates as the Illinois Class of 2002. In this study, we use a unique dataset combining student ACT and background information with postsecondary enrollment and completion information from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), the Illinois Community College board (ICCB), and the Illinois Shared Enrollment and Graduation (ISEG) to track the Illinois Class of 2002 on their journeys into higher education throughout the country. The goal of this longitudinal project is to understand students' transitions from high school to college and their persistence and attainment over time. We plan to follow the cohort for six years, through the 2007-08 academic year.

This report focuses on the relationships between college readiness and students' enrollment and completion patterns during the first four years of this longitudinal study, through Summer 2006. The IERC college readiness index combines information on students' ACT scores and high school grades into five levels—from not/least ready, through minimally ready, somewhat ready, more ready and most ready. Table A shows how the Class of 2002 is distributed by readiness category.

Table A. Index of College Readiness

ACT	High School GPA (self-reported)				
	<= 2.4	2.5 - 2.9	3.0 - 3.4	3.5 - 4.0	Missing
<20	19.7%	8.0%	6.5%	1.9%	14.6%
20-22	3.1%	3.5%	5.2%	2.9%	4.0%
23-25	1.1%	1.7%	4.2%	4.8%	2.7%
26+	0.4%	0.8%	2.7%	9.5%	2.8%



Altogether, roughly a third (37.3%) of the Class of 2002 was classified as more- or most-ready for college, while approximately another third (28.4%) was somewhat or minimally ready for college, and the remaining third (34.3%) was not/least ready for college. Our previous studies of the cohort have shown that college-readiness matters somewhat for postsecondary enrollment, more for enrollment at a four-year (as opposed to two-year) institution, and the most for enrollment in a more-competitive (as opposed to less-competitive) college. That is, students who are from more-ready groups are slightly more likely to enroll in postsecondary school, more

likely to enroll at four-year campuses, and much more likely to enroll at highly competitive institutions than their counterparts from less-ready student groups.

Has the relationship between college readiness and student enrollment and completion changed through four years beyond high school? This report attempts to answer that question, and our results are summarized below.

Key Findings

College Readiness and Enrollment

Our findings revealed a close alignment between college readiness and enrollment in postsecondary education, such that students who were more ready and most ready for college enrolled at much higher rates than their less-ready peers. However, more than half of the students in each college readiness group enrolled at some point during this period, indicating that even the least ready students have some access to higher education. Enrollment rates were typically highest in the fall and spring semesters, while dropping off during summer terms, when enrollment trends showed less variation by readiness level. Overall, enrollments in two-year institutions tended to decrease over time, while enrollment patterns for all types of four-year institutions were quite stable for the duration of the study.

Though more ready and most ready students typically had higher enrollment rates than minimally and not/least ready students overall, enrollment patterns varied substantially by institution type and over time. Enrollment levels at public and private four-year institutions and all in-state and out-of-state institutions taken together were all closely aligned with college readiness. Further, most ready students predominated at both private four-year institutions and out-of-state institutions, with a fairly large enrollment advantage over even the second highest readiness category (more ready students). As a result, enrollment rates across all in-state institutions for most ready students were slightly lower than those for more ready students in some semesters early in our study. Enrollment patterns at public community colleges were quite different, however, indicating that most ready students primarily utilize such institutions during the summer, while less ready students attend public community colleges primarily during the fall and spring semesters.

College Readiness and Completions

Completion patterns for the Class of 2002 also reflected college readiness, with larger proportions of the more ready and most ready student groups than their less-ready counterparts earning degrees and certificates through the first four years after high school graduation. However, completion of a degree or certificate within four years was the exception rather than the norm for all but the most

college ready students in our cohort. Even among the most ready students from the Class of 2002, fewer than three in five earned a degree or certificate through Summer 2006. While the differences between readiness groups in terms of completions through the Fall 2005 semester were not substantial, the proportion of students attaining a degree or certificate during this time period were very low overall. However, in Spring 2006—coinciding with the expected end date for completion of a four-year degree—we found quite large differences in completion trends that varied systematically by readiness. For example, 44% of most ready students earned a degree/certificate this semester compared to only 3% of not/least ready students.

Completion trends by readiness level at public and private four-year institutions, and total for all in- and out-of-state institutions each illustrated patterns that were quite similar to the overall certificate and degree attainment patterns. That is, all student readiness groups recorded relatively few completions from these types of institutions in each semester through Fall 2005, with large increases in the proportions of students earning a degree or certificate for all readiness levels in Spring 2006. Completion patterns through Fall 2005 did not appear to be related to student readiness, and instead appear to be more a product of the proportion of students enrolled in two-year certificate or degree programs. However, at each of these institution types, certificate and degree attainment in Spring 2006 was closely tied to readiness, with more and most ready student groups completing at much higher rates than not/least and minimally ready students. The types of degrees and certificates earned also reflected college readiness, with the more ready student groups more likely to earn baccalaureate degrees than the less ready student groups. There was little relation between completions and readiness at two-year institutions, and completion levels for two-year institutions remained at less than 5% per semester for all readiness groups throughout the first four years of our study.

Summary

Taken together, these data illustrate that more ready and most ready students from our cohort both enrolled in postsecondary education and completed certificates and degrees at higher rates than students from the somewhat, minimally, and not/least ready groups. From Fall 2002 through Summer 2006, over half of the students in each college readiness category enrolled in postsecondary education at some point, while the proportions of students earning degrees or certificates ranged from 56% for most college ready students to 9% of those categorized as not/least ready for college. At out-of-state institutions and four-year institutions (both public and private), enrollment rates were relatively stable over time and within each readiness category, but not across readiness categories. Enrollment

rates at these types of institutions were consistently and substantially higher for more and most ready students compared to their less-ready peers. Our data also indicate that less-ready students tend to utilize community colleges during the fall and spring semesters while students in higher readiness groups are more likely to enroll in such institutions during the summer. Regardless of institution type or college readiness, few certificates/degrees were awarded to our cohort through Fall 2005 and there was little difference between readiness groups in terms of completion trends. In Spring 2006, however, there was a large increase in the number of degrees and certificates earned by all readiness groups, coupled with systematic differences in completion rates by college readiness. Overall, more ready and most ready completers were more likely to complete baccalaureate degrees, while minimally and not/least ready completers were more likely to earn certificates or associate degrees.

A Gained Perspective

The various ways by which members of the Class of 2002 interact with opportunities for postsecondary education frame this study. Presented are results for the cohort as a whole. We display data by fall, spring, and summer semesters to capture the annual rhythms of educational participation.

As we attempt to study educational pursuits beyond high school, it is important to note that the legal parameters guiding education from kindergarten to graduate school shift at that critical juncture that is education beyond high school. The compulsory, lock-step pattern of enrollment and promotion as seen in K-12 education no longer applies. Postsecondary education represents the various branches sprouting from a tree, not the rigid trunk that gets one there. It is our hope that the descriptive nature of this study, and others forthcoming in the Education Beyond High School Series, provide both the foundation for action and new avenues for exploration into the enrollment and completion puzzle that is postsecondary education for the students from Illinois' K-12 system.

Research Notes

In reading through this material, it is important to note who exactly is a member of the Class of 2002 cohort in order to understand the findings, implications, and limitations of this cohort.

Who is included in this cohort

- The 113,660 individuals who, as public high school students, took the Prairie State Achievement Exam in Spring 2001

Who is not included in this cohort

- Private high school graduates
- Out-of-state high school graduates that migrated to higher education institutions in Illinois
- Non-traditional, older students who entered or returned to postsecondary education
- Dual enrolled/dual credit students currently in high school
- It is important to note who is included in this study as the resulting recommendations may apply only to one segment of postsecondary education in Illinois. Further, by noting who is not included in this study, several items are important as they impact the findings presented herein:
 1. The fact that September 11th attacks of 2001 occurred during this cohorts' senior year in high school would likely have an impact on those who chose to enlist in the various branches of the military as opposed to postsecondary education. We have attempted to identify individuals who entered the various branches of the military, but have yet to be successful.
 2. Private high school students and students from out-of-state would greatly enhance our dataset, but they were not included as data sharing agreements were not established with other states and private education entities.
 3. Non-traditional and dual enrollment/dual credit students were not included as they were/would be part of a different graduating cohort.

Considerations in interpreting the data

- While the findings presented in this series suggest that postsecondary enrollment and completion are associated with college readiness, we note that these analyses do not take into account other measures which may help to explain these relationships.
- With regard to the attainment of certificates and degrees, remember that completion is at least partially dependent upon enrollment and that students from different sub-groups enroll at various institution types at quite different rates.

- Finally, it is important to note that in order to provide the level of detail required to illustrate our findings, the scales utilized in the charts of this report often vary. Since the graphs do not all have a consistent scale, figures that may appear similar at first glance might, in fact, represent substantially different enrollment or completion rates.

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Reports in this Series:

The Illinois Class of 2002—An Overview: A descriptive summary four years after high school (IERC 2009-1)

The Illinois Class of 2002 and College Readiness: A descriptive summary four years after high school (IERC 2009-2)

The Illinois Class of 2002 and Gender: A descriptive summary four years after high school (IERC 2009-3)

The Illinois Class of 2002 and Parent Income: A descriptive summary four years after high school (IERC 2009-4)

The Illinois Class of 2002 and Race/Ethnicity: A descriptive summary four years after high school (IERC 2009-5)

Previous IERC studies on the Illinois Class of 2002:

The demographics and academics of college readiness in Illinois (IERC 2005-3), by Yuqin Gong and Jennifer B. Presley

The demographics and academics of college going in Illinois (IERC 2006-2), by Yuqin Gong and Jennifer B. Presley

Following the Illinois high school class of 2002: Three years into college (IERC 2006-5), by Yuqin Gong, Jennifer B. Presley and Bradford R. White

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The IERC College Readiness Index

The IERC college readiness index is modeled on the work of Berkner and Chavez (1997) who categorized academic characteristics of high school seniors from a national sample dataset who were attending four-year institutions. The IERC readiness index is a simplified version of this approach that combines information on students’ ACT scores and high school GPAs. We apply the readiness index to all students in the cohort, not just those who attended a four-year institution in 2002-2003. The index has five levels—from not/least ready, through minimally ready, somewhat ready, more ready and most ready. Table 1 shows how the Class of 2002 is distributed by readiness category.

Table 1. Index of College Readiness

	High School GPA (self-reported)				
ACT	<= 2.4	2.5 - 2.9	3.0 - 3.4	3.5 - 4.0	Missing
<20	19.7%	8.0%	6.5%	1.9%	14.6%
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23-25	1.1%	1.7%	4.2%	4.8%	2.7%
26+	0.4%	0.8%	2.7%	9.5%	2.8%

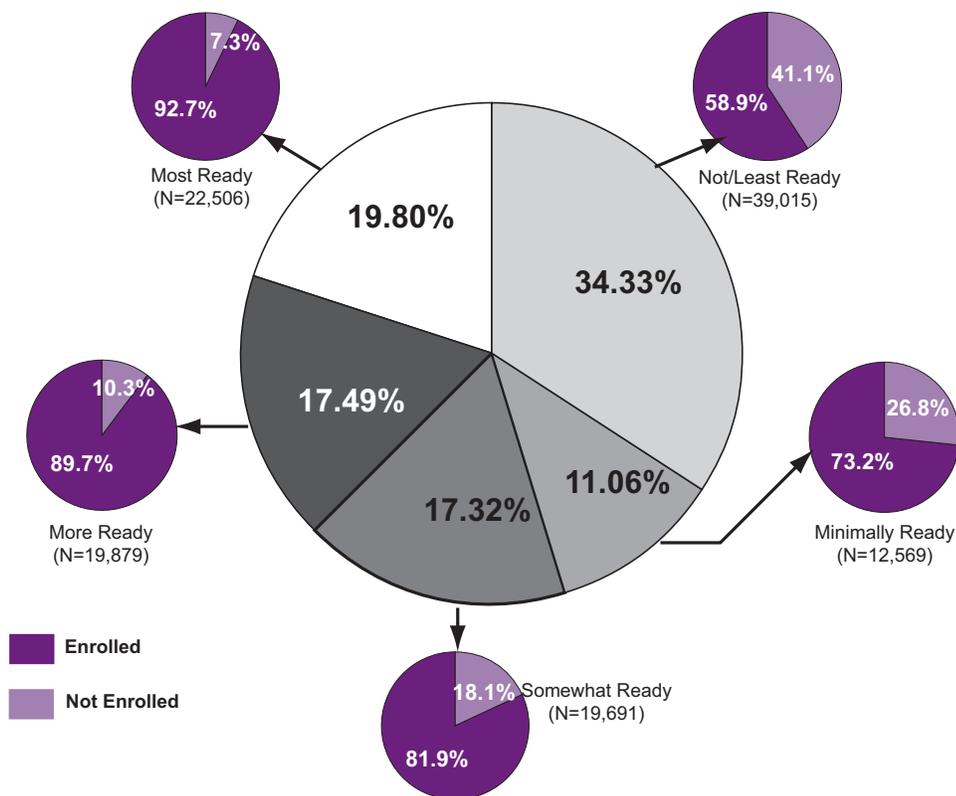


The three previous reports in this series (Presley and Gong, 2005; Gong and Presley, 2006; and Gong, Presley, and White, 2006) have revealed that college readiness is not equally distributed across the entire Class of 2002 cohort. Most notably, females are more likely than males to be more/most ready, low-income students were more likely to be less ready than high income students, and non-Asian minorities were less ready than whites or Asians.

While these previous IERC studies found that readiness for college matters in terms of enrollment, still almost half of the not/least ready students enrolled immediately in postsecondary education. Further, these studies showed that college readiness had an even stronger association with the types of institutions in which students enrolled. More-prepared students were more likely to enroll in four year, out-of-state, and more-competitive institutions, while their less-prepared peers were more likely to enroll in two-year, in-state, and less competitive institutions. This previous work also revealed that college readiness is strongly related to continuation in higher education, with more ready first year starters more likely than less ready first year starters to still be enrolled after three years, and more ready students who start in the two-year sector more likely to transfer to the four-year sector and more likely to earn degrees/certificates through the first three years.

Enrollment

Figure 1. Percent of the Class of 2002 that Ever Enrolled in Postsecondary Education, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

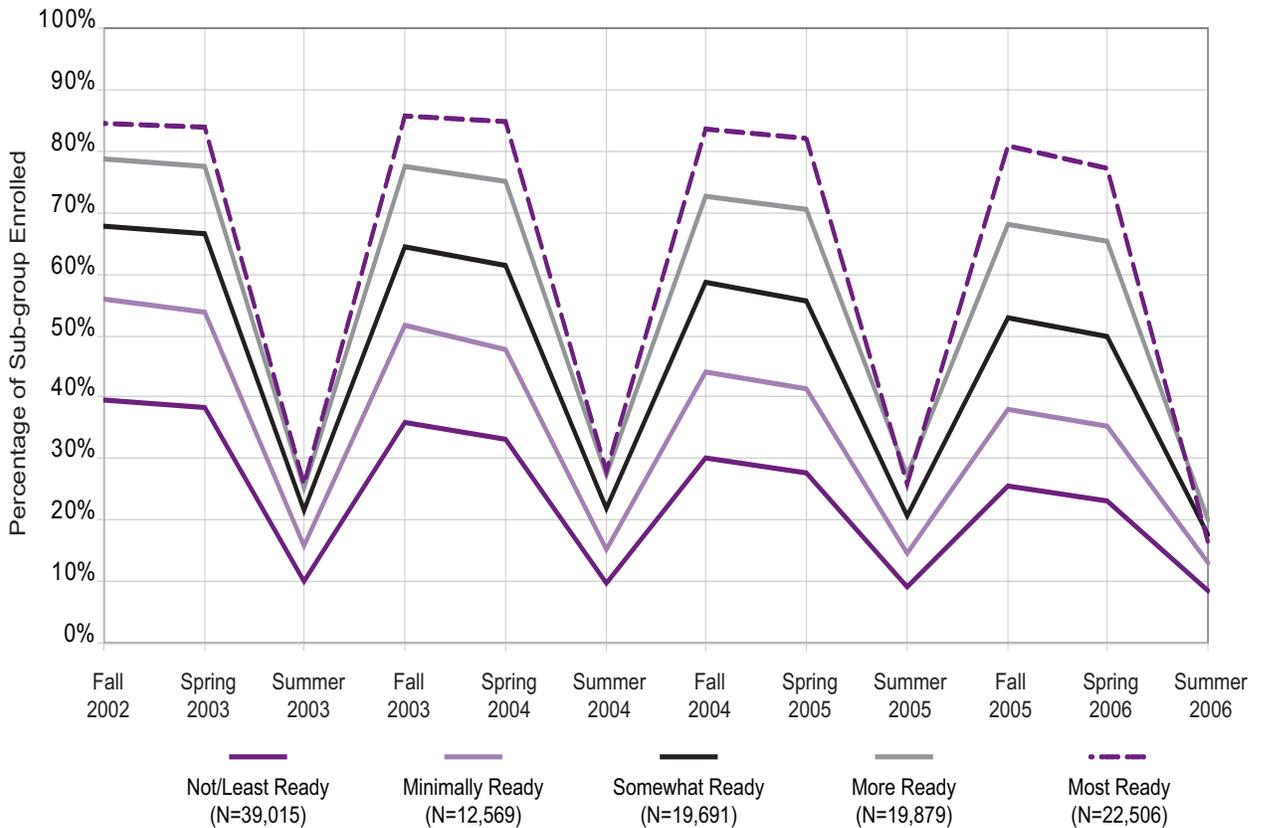


What proportion of the Class of 2002 ever enrolled in postsecondary education in the four years after high school graduation by college-readiness status?

After tracking the cohort for four years, we found that about 90% of students who were most or more ready enrolled in college at some point during this time period, compared to 82% of students who were somewhat ready, 73% of minimally-ready students, and 59% of not/least-ready students.

These findings show the relationship between college readiness and enrollment in postsecondary education, with more ready students having higher enrollment rates than less-ready students. Nonetheless, more than half of the students classified as not- or least- ready for college enrolled at some point during this period, indicating that even students with very low grade point and ACT scores have access to higher education. However, these data do not tell the whole story—while they do reflect some degree of engagement with postsecondary education at some point in time during these four years, they say little about success in postsecondary institutions, which are addressed later in this report.

Figure 2 Enrollment Trends for the Class of 2002 by College Readiness: Semester Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

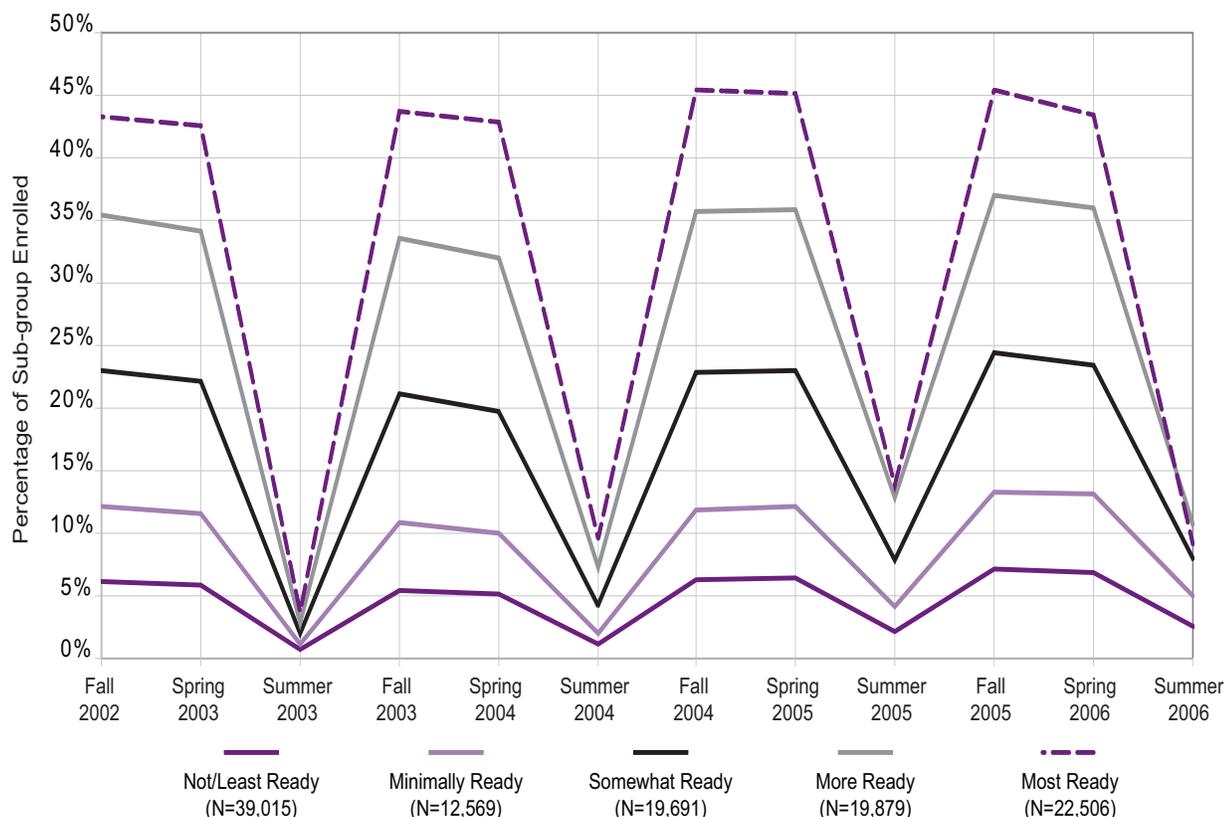


What were the enrollment trends by readiness level of the Class of 2002 during the four years after high school graduation?

Looking at enrollment trends by college readiness shows that, for most of the readiness categories, enrollment was highest the semester after high school graduation. Enrollment levels then decreased slightly each subsequent spring or fall, with substantially lower enrollment rates during each summer. Enrollment percentages for most-ready students, however, actually increased slightly between Spring 2003 and the subsequent fall semester, from 84.0% to 85.8%.

For almost every semester, enrollment rates were higher for more-ready student groups than for less-ready groups. Each fall and spring semester, there were enrollment gaps of about 12-15% between the not/least ready and the minimally ready groups, the minimally ready and the somewhat ready groups, and the somewhat ready and most ready groups. The enrollment gaps between the more ready and most ready groups were slightly smaller, but increasing over time. Enrollment trends in the summer showed less variation by readiness level and, in fact, enrollment rates for the more ready group and the most ready group were quite similar during summers, though still higher than less-ready students (except in Summer 2006 where the three highest readiness groups enrolled at similar rates).

Figure 3. Public Four-Year Institution Enrollment Trends, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

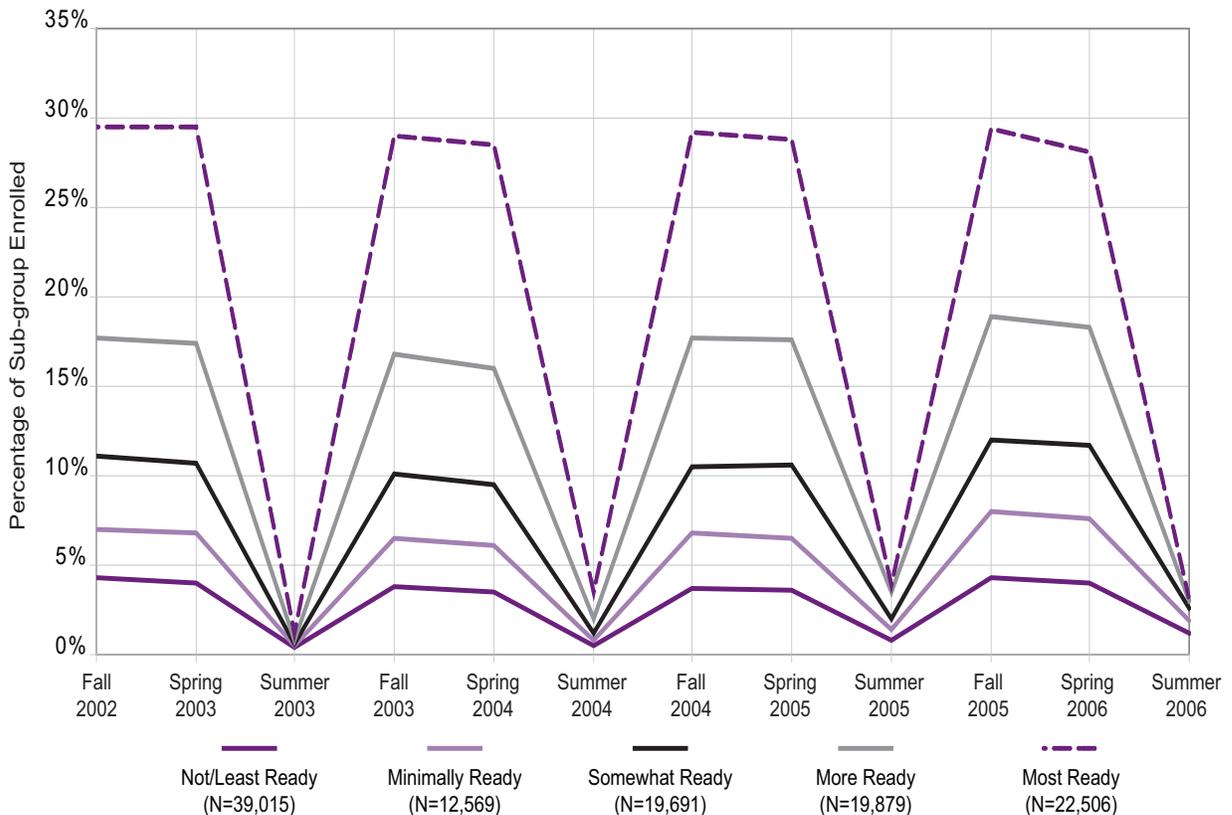


What were the enrollment trends at public four-year institutions by readiness level for the Class of 2002?

Enrollment levels at public four-year institutions also reflected students' college readiness. Again, for every fall and spring semester, enrollment rates were substantially higher for the more ready and most ready student groups than for less-ready groups. Roughly 40-45% of most ready students were enrolled at public four-year institutions each fall and spring from 2002 through 2006, compared to around 5% of not/least ready students. There were also large gaps in fall and spring public four-year enrollment between the more ready (around 35%) and somewhat ready (20-25%) groups, as well as between the somewhat ready and minimally ready (10-15%) groups.

Contrary to overall enrollment trends which slowly decreased over time, enrollment at public four-year institutions generally increased slightly each year of our study until finally decreasing in Spring 2006 (at least partially due to early completions, see Table 14). These trends for public four-year enrollment held across all readiness groups, and were especially evident for summer enrollments among the more ready and most ready students, whose enrollments climbed from about 3% in Summer 2003 to approximately 13% in Summer 2005 (before falling off again in Summer 2006, which may also be related to completions). These data suggest that the public four-year sector as a whole continues to attract additional students of all readiness levels from other sectors of higher education, while simultaneously retaining the students who initially enrolled directly out of high school.

Figure 4. Private Four-Year Institution Enrollment Trends, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What were the enrollment trends at private four-year institutions by readiness level for the Class of 2002?

College readiness was also reflected in the enrollment levels at private four-year institutions. Unlike public four-year enrollment, where enrollment levels within a given semester tended to decrease relatively steadily between readiness groups, there is marked drop-off each semester in private four-year enrollment between the most ready group (at about 30% each fall and spring) and all other groups (at less than 20% each semester). While these enrollment patterns may make it appear that enrollment at private four-year institutions is the primary domain of the most ready students, it is also important to remember that still larger proportions of most ready students enrolled in public four-year institutions (about 40-45% in fall and spring, see Figure 3) than in private four-year institutions (about 30%) each semester.

Across the readiness groups, trends show that enrollment in private four-year institutions remained remarkably stable over time, with only slight decreases from fall to spring each year and large enrollment dips in the summer. The most noteworthy exceptions to this stability were the increase from about 1% to about 4% summer enrollments for more and most ready students between 2002 and 2005, and the small increase in private four-year enrollment for somewhat and most ready students during between Fall 2002 and Fall 2006. In fact, enrollment in private four-year institutions for our cohort is perhaps most striking for its consistency.

Figure 5. Public Community College Enrollment Trends, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

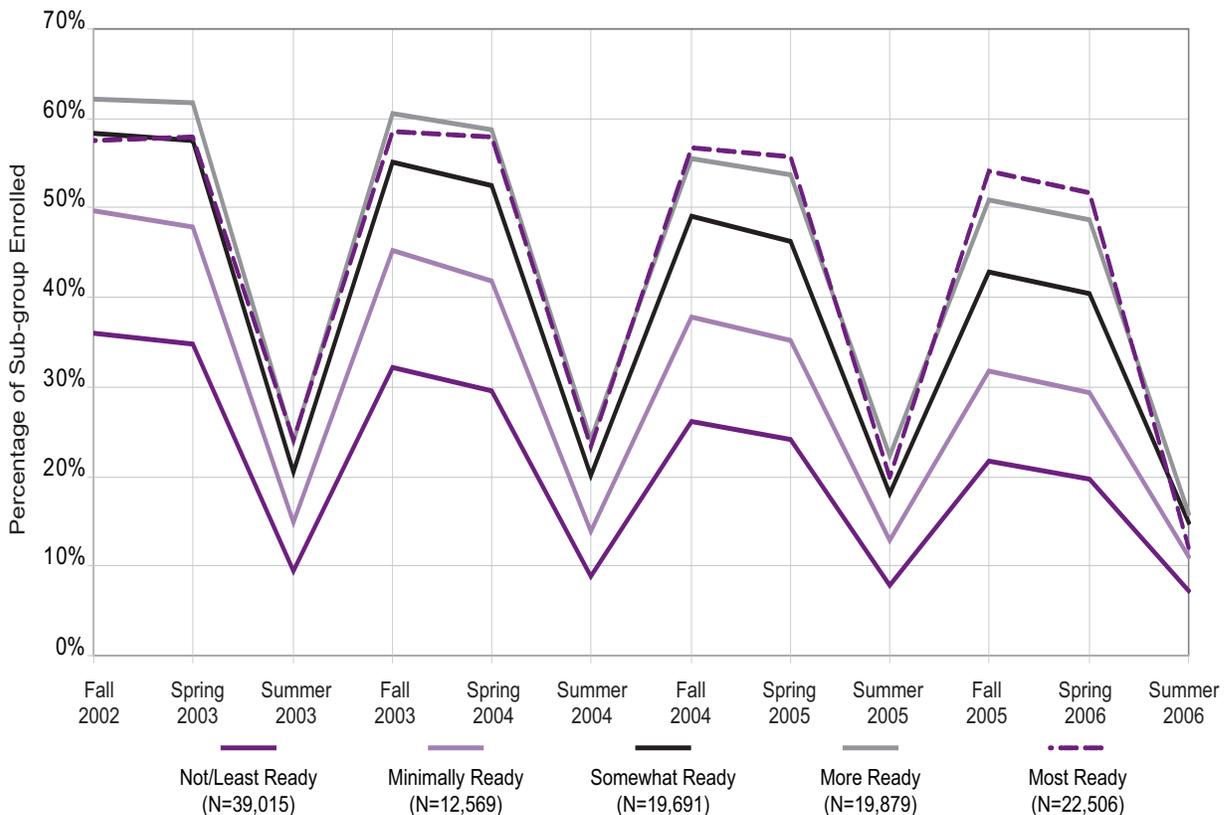


What were the enrollment trends at public community colleges by readiness level for the Class of 2002?

Enrollment patterns for public community colleges by readiness level produced some very interesting trends from 2002 through 2006. First, most ready students make the least use of public community colleges overall, and the enrollment terms they do choose are mainly in the summer (spiking in their first summer after high school and gradually decreasing summers thereafter). For all other readiness groups, however, enrollment at public community colleges is higher during the fall and spring than during the summer. Somewhat ready and minimally ready students from the Class of 2002 had the highest enrollments at public community colleges each spring and fall semester, while more ready students were most likely to be enrolled during summers. Enrollment trends for the not/least ready group mirrored those of the minimally ready and somewhat ready groups (i.e. much greater utilization during the fall and spring than in the summer), but with lower total enrollment levels than these other groups throughout the time period.

Taken together, these data suggest that most ready and, to a lesser extent, more ready students primarily utilize public community colleges during the summer, while less-ready students attend such institutions primarily during the fall and spring semesters. Overall utilization of public community colleges declined sharply for all readiness groups over time, and some of this attrition may be explained by completions (see Figure 15). For example, the proportion of minimally ready students from our cohort who attended public community colleges fell from 35% in Fall 2002 to 13% in Spring 2006, and comparable proportions for more ready students fell from 24% to about 9%.

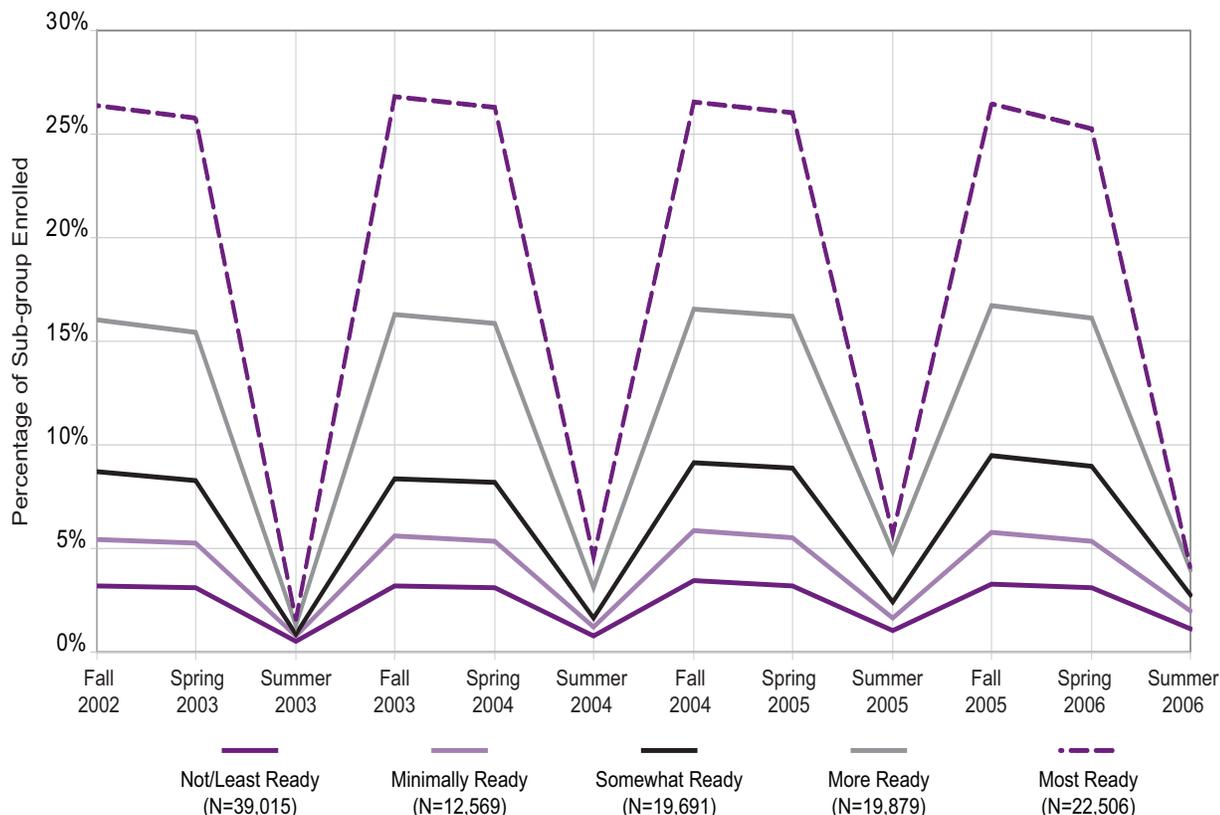
Figure 6. In-State Enrollment Trends, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What were the enrollment trends at in-state institutions by readiness level for the Class of 2002?

In-state enrollment for the Class of 2002 is the only enrollment category which was not consistently led by most ready students—though they do have the largest proportions by years three and four of our study. Initial enrollment rates right after high school (Fall 2002) show that most ready students enrolled at in-state institutions (both two- and four-year) at lower rates than both more ready and somewhat ready student groups. However, in-state enrollments declined for the next four years for more and somewhat ready students, while in-state enrollment figures held steady for most ready students from 2002-03 to 2003-04 and declined more slowly than the other groups in the fall and spring semesters thereafter. This suggests that most ready students are either less likely than their less-ready counterparts to transfer or stop out of in-state institutions, or more likely than their less-ready counterparts to transfer into in-state institutions after beginning elsewhere. Taken together, these enrollment trends look quite similar to those shown in Figure 2 (for all postsecondary enrollments), since the majority of students who enroll in college opt to stay within Illinois.

Figure 7. Out-of-State Enrollment Trends, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

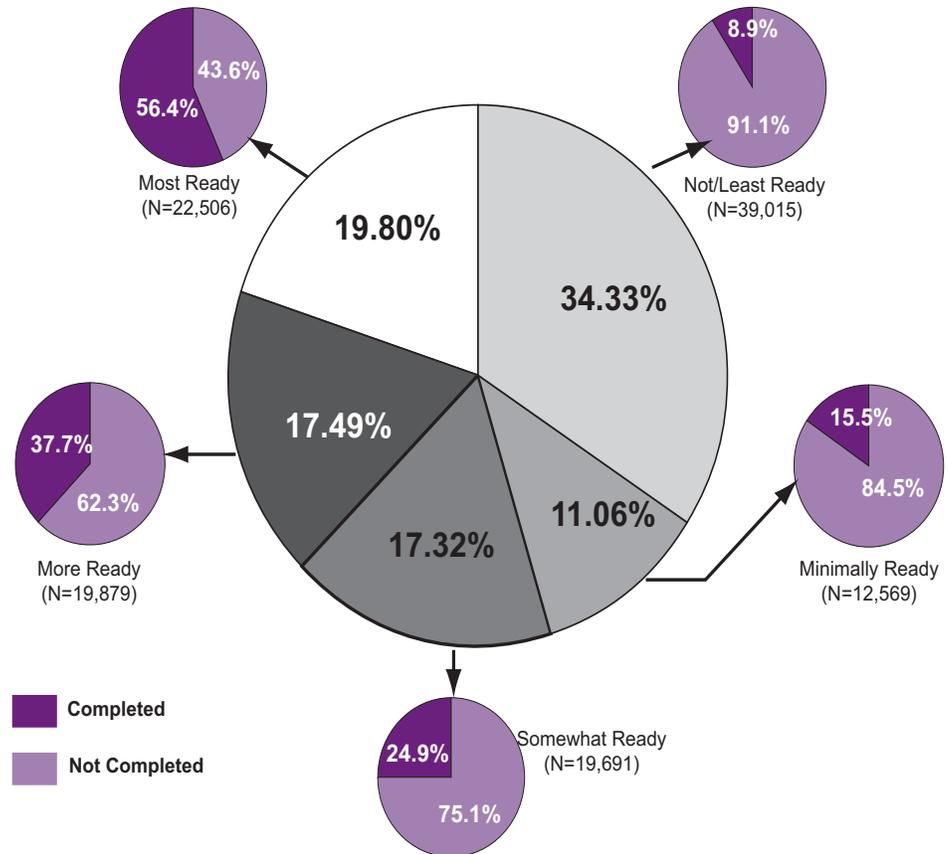


What were the enrollment trends at out-of-state institutions by readiness level for the Class of 2002?

As with private four-year institutions (see Figure 4), out-of-state institutions were predominantly attended by students from the most ready group, enrolling around a quarter of such students each fall and spring. About 15% of more ready students attended institutions outside of Illinois, compared to less than 10% of the remaining readiness groups. As with public and private four-year institutions (which most of these are), enrollment in out-of-state institutions tended to be quite stable from the fall to the spring, with much lower summer enrollments that increased over time, especially for more and most ready students. Also similar to private four-year trends (Figure 4), out-of-state enrollment levels for the Class of 2002 by readiness are remarkably stable.

Completions

Figure 8. Percent of the Class of 2002 that Ever Completed a Certificate or Degree Program, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

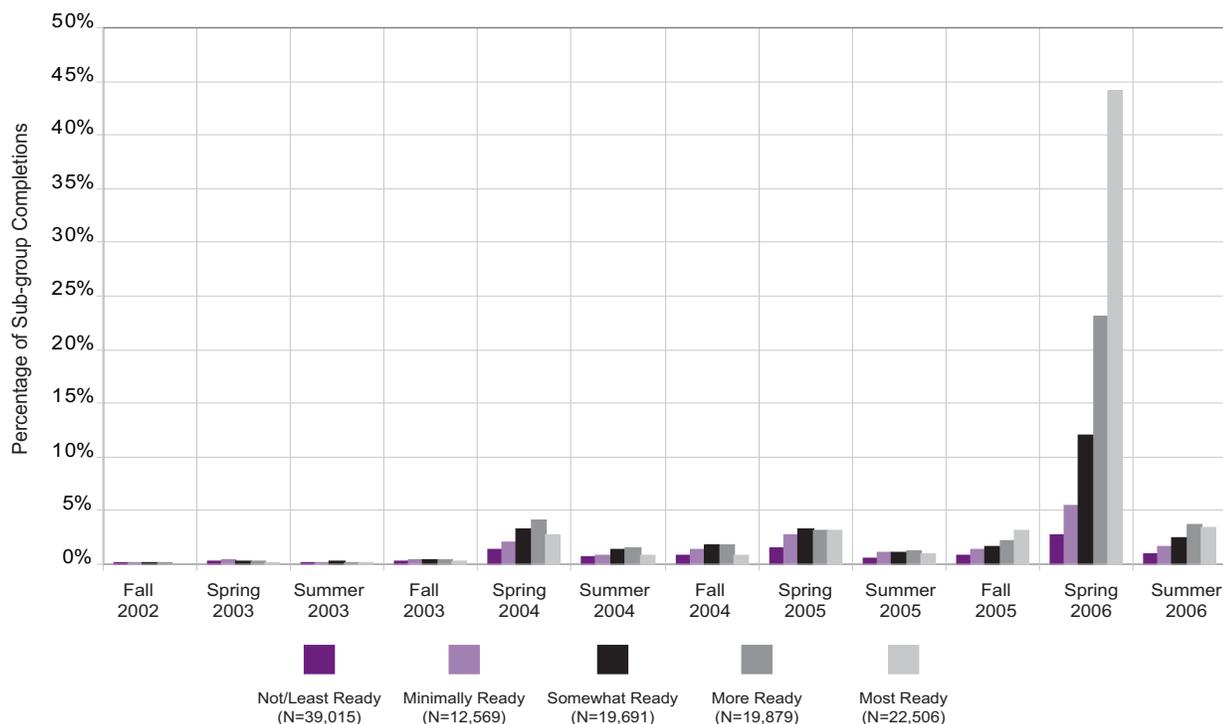


What proportion of the Class of 2002 ever completed a certificate or degree in the four years after high school graduation by college-readiness status?

As illustrated above, college readiness was also strongly reflected in the attainment of degrees and certificates for the Class of 2002. Over half (56.4%) of most ready students obtained at least one postsecondary degree or certificate by four years after high school graduation, compared to just over a third (37.7%) of more ready students and about a quarter (24.9%) of somewhat ready students. Meanwhile, only 15.5% of minimally ready students and 8.9% of not/least ready students from the Class of 2002 received a postsecondary degree or certificate by four years after high school. Remember from the previous charts in this report that readiness is also closely aligned to enrollment, so it should not be surprising that students who enroll in greater proportions also receive degrees at higher rates, as enrollment is a prerequisite for completion. That is, since 59% of not/least ready students enrolled in college at any point in time during these four years – compared to 93% of most ready students (see Figure 1)—we would expect the proportion of not/least ready student who completed to be somewhat lower, even if all enrollees completed at the same rate.

These findings indicate that, for all but the most college-ready students in our cohort, degree completion within four years is the exception rather than the norm. And even among those most ready students, more than two in five have yet to earn a degree within four years. Future IERC studies will continue to investigate how these completion proportions increase through years five and six of our study.

Figure 9. Completion Trends, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006
(N=113,660)



What were the completion trends of the Class of 2002 by readiness during the four years after high school graduation?

Unsurprisingly, there were very few postsecondary completions recorded by the Class of 2002 regardless of readiness level from Fall 2002 through Fall 2003. From Spring 2004 through Fall 2005, approximately 1% to 4% of each readiness group completed a degree or certificate, with a very slight increase across all readiness groups in Spring 2004, the expected timeframe for completion of a two-year degree (assuming continuous full-time enrollment). The somewhat ready and more ready groups, who enrolled at public community colleges at higher rates than the most ready group (see Figure 5), attained degrees and certificates at the highest rates during these semesters. Overall though, completion rates and the differences between readiness groups through Fall 2005 were not substantial.

In Spring 2006, however, we see quite large differences in the proportion of students completing by college readiness. Nearly 45% of most ready students in the Class of 2002 earned a degree this semester— aligning with the expected end date for completion of a four-year degree. An additional 23% of more ready students and 12% of somewhat ready students also earned degrees in Spring 2006, four academic years after high school graduation. The proportions of minimally ready and not/least ready students who earned degrees and certificates also hit their peak this semester, at 5% and 3% respectively. Yet, by the following summer, completion trends fall back to a pattern quite similar to those observed from Spring 2004 through Fall 2005, with all groups between 1% and 4%.

Figure 10. Completion at Public Institutions, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

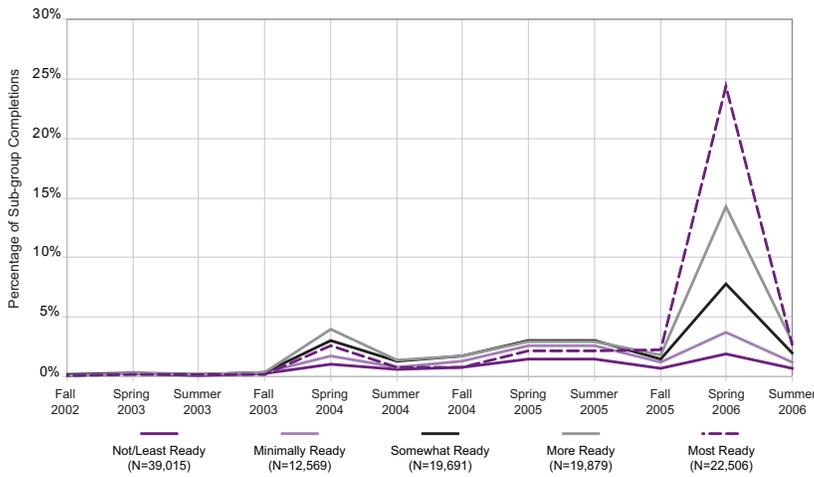


Figure 11. Completion at Private Institutions, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

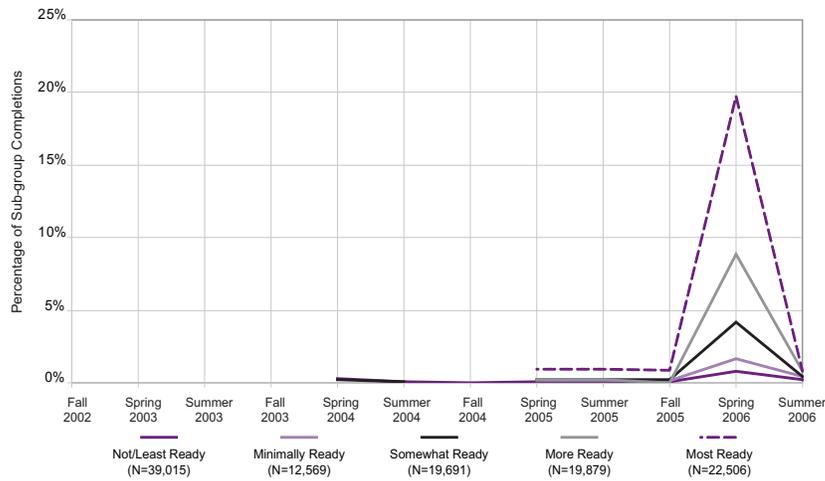


Figure 12. Completion at In-State Institutions, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

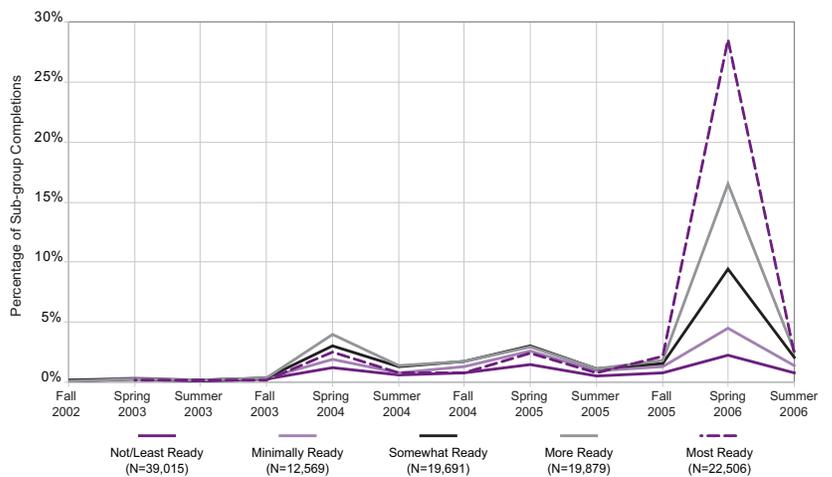
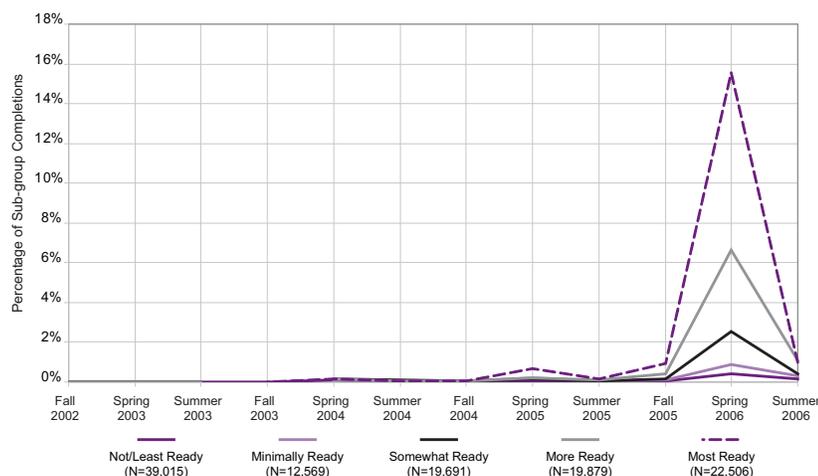


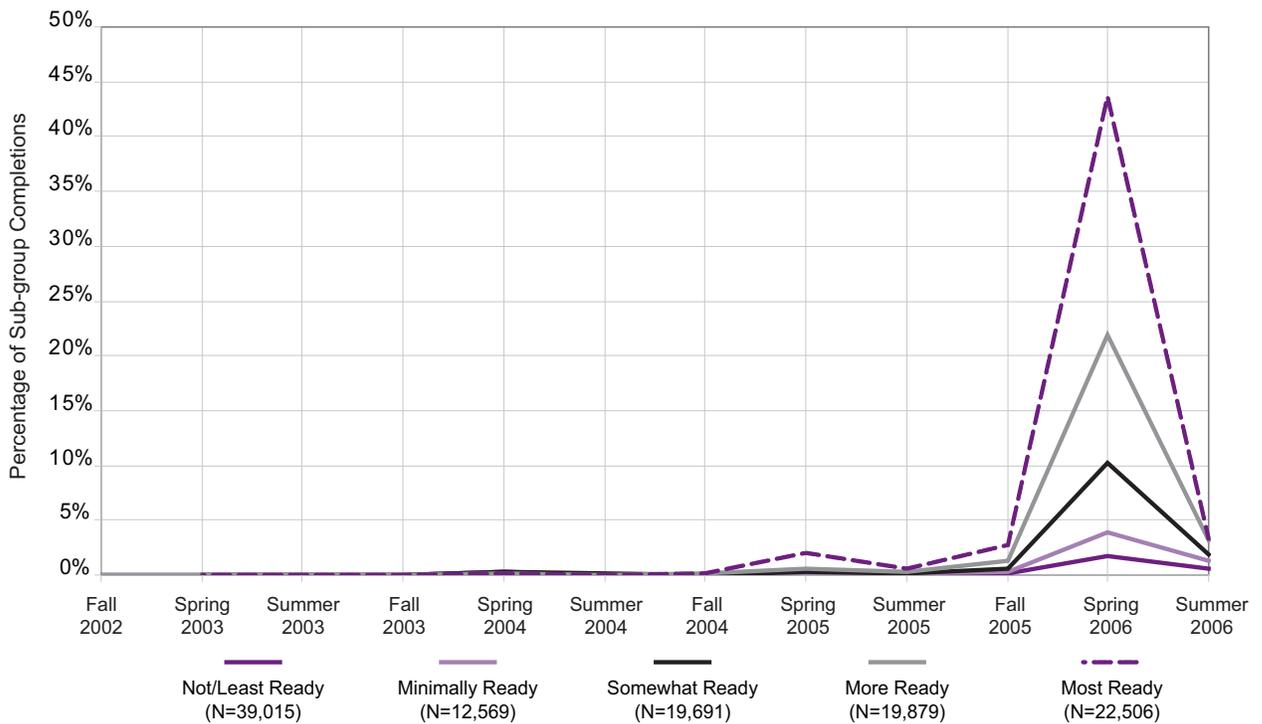
Figure 13. Completion at Out-of-State Institutions, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What were the completion trends at different institution types for the Class of 2002 by readiness during the four years after high school graduation?

We group together Figures 10 through 13 (completion trends by readiness level at public, private, in-state, and out-of-state institutions, respectively) because they all illustrate similar completion patterns, and are each quite similar to the overall trends for all institutions. Most prominently, we see a large increase in completions for all readiness levels in Spring 2006, coinciding with the end of the fourth year after high school. Not/least ready students recorded the lowest proportion of completions at each time point for each institution type, never rising above 5% in a given semester. Completion patterns for Spring 2006 were closely tied to readiness, with more ready and most ready students groups completing at higher rates than not/least and minimally ready students at all institution types. There is also slight increase in completions at the end of the second academic year (Spring 2004) for in-state and public institutions—i.e., those institution types that include larger numbers of students likely enrolled in two-year programs. Completion trends for semesters before Spring 2006 do not appear to be related to student readiness, and appear to be more a product of the proportion of students enrolled in two-year degree or certificate programs. That is, since smaller proportions of more ready and most ready students (compared to their less-ready counterparts) enrolled in two-year institutions, it should not come as a surprise that smaller proportions of such students received degrees within two to three years after high school.

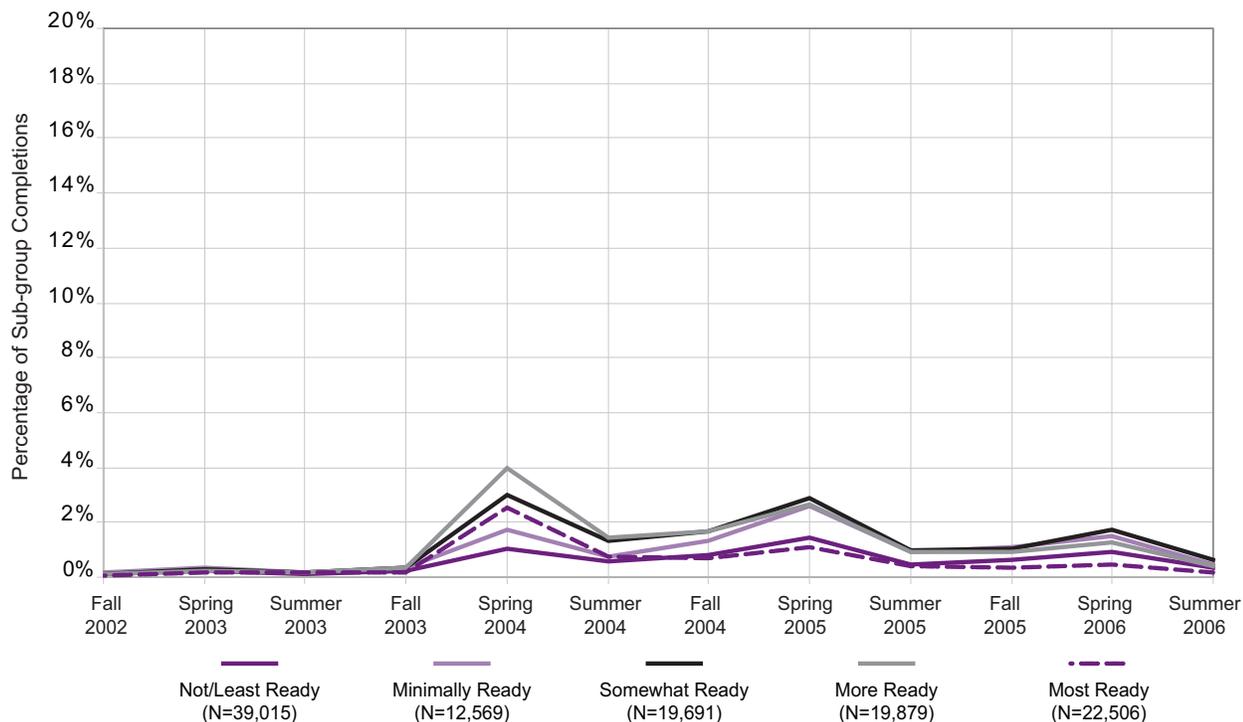
Figure 14. Completion at Four-Year Institution, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What were the completion trends at four-year institutions for the Class of 2002 by readiness during the four years after high school graduation?

As one would expect, there were very small proportions of any readiness group who earned degrees from four-year institutions in less than four years (through Fall 2005). Those students from the Class of 2002 who did complete their degrees early were primarily from the most ready student group—approximately 2% in Spring 2005 and 3% in Fall 2005. Also unsurprisingly, Spring 2006, the end of the fourth year, saw the largest proportion of degrees awarded to our cohort from four-year institutions. The proportions of students earning degrees and certificates in this semester were closely aligned with college readiness, with about 44% of most ready students earning a degree in Spring 2006, compared with 22% of more ready students, 10% of the somewhat ready group, 4% of the minimally ready group, and 2% of not/least ready students. Again, these completion patterns are closely tied to enrollment rates (see Figure 3), since enrollment at a four-year college is a precondition for completion from such an institution.

Figure 15. Completion at Community Colleges, by College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What were the completion trends at public community colleges for the Class of 2002 by readiness during the four years after high school graduation?

Completions for the Class of 2002 from two-year institutions remained at less than 5% per semester for all readiness groups throughout the first four years of our study. Unlike the other completion charts shown in this paper—but similar to enrollment for public community colleges (see Figure 5)—there is little systematic or direct relationship between readiness and the proportions of degrees and certificates awarded by two-year institutions. In Spring 2004, 4% of more ready students attained a certificate or degrees – the highest rate through the first four years – while 3% of somewhat ready students and 2.5% of most ready students also earned a degree or certificate from a public community college that semester. In Spring 2005, the proportions of completers from two-year institutions for the more, somewhat, and minimally ready groups were each between 2.5% and 3%.

Table 2. Total Number and Type of Earned Credentials, By College Readiness: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006

College Readiness	Missing Degree Information	Unknown Certificate/ Associate Type	Transfer Associate/ Certificate	Terminal Associate/ Certificate	Baccalaureate Degree	Masters Degree	Total
Not/Least Ready	609	638	912	1,071	730	*	3,960
Minimally Ready	275	289	611	491	552	*	2,218
Somewhat Ready	725	476	1,378	816	2,111	*	5,506
More Ready	1,058	450	1,556	651	4,560	*	8,275
Most Ready	1,633	239	976	325	10,212	45	13,430
Total	4,300	2,092	5,433	3,354	18,165	45	33,389

* indicates that more than zero but fewer than 10 completions were observed.

What were the trends in degree and certificate level completion for the Class of 2002?

Figure 16. Percent of Completions, by College Readiness

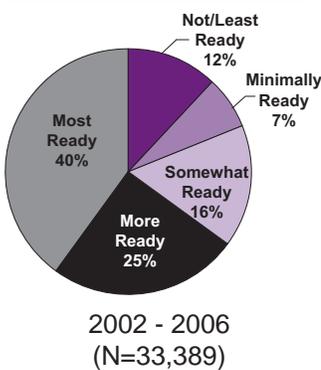


Table 2 suggests that attainment of a degree or certificate through the first four years after high school is closely aligned with college readiness, with the more and most ready student groups earning degrees or certificates in greater numbers than their less-ready counterparts. Even though they made up only 19.8% of our cohort (see Figure 1, p. 7), most-ready students earned the plurality (40%) of degrees/certificates awarded to the Class of 2002 by four years after high school (Figure 16). Similarly, more ready students accounted for 17.5% of the cohort (see Figure 1) and 25% of its degrees and certificates through 2006. Together, minimally and somewhat ready students accounted for 28.4% (see Figure 1) of the students and 23% of degrees and completions, while the 34.3% of students who were classified as not/least ready (see Figure 1) accounted for only 12% of the degrees and certificates earned through these four years. (Note that even though a larger proportion of all degrees and certificates were earned by the not/least ready group compared to the minimally ready group, the former group consisted of three times more students than the latter.)

College readiness was also reflected in the types of degrees and certificates earned, with the more ready and most ready student groups more likely to earn baccalaureate degrees than the less ready student groups. Approximately three quarters (10,212, of 13,430 or 76%) of the completions recorded for most ready students were baccalaureate degrees, compared to 55.1% for more ready students, 38.3% for somewhat ready students, 24.9% for minimally ready students, and 18.4% for not/least ready students. Conversely, somewhat, minimally and not/least ready students who earned degrees or certificates were much more likely than their more- and most-ready peers to complete certificate or associate degrees programs. For example, transfer certificates and associate degrees accounted for 23% to 27.5% of the completions for somewhat, minimally, and not/least ready students, compared to only 7.3% of the degrees earned by most ready students. Terminal associates/certificates accounted for 27% of not/least ready students' completions, compared to 7.9% of more ready students' completions and 2.4% of most ready students' completions.

Key Findings

Enrollment

Our findings revealed close alignment between college readiness and enrollment in postsecondary education, such that students who were more ready or most ready for college enrolled at much higher rates than their less-ready counterparts. However, more than half of the students in each college readiness group enrolled at some point during this period, indicating that even the least ready students have some access to higher education. Enrollment rates were typically highest in the fall and spring semesters, while dropping off during summer terms, when enrollment trends showed less variation by readiness level. Overall, enrollments in two-year institutions tended to decrease over time while enrollment patterns for all types of four-year institutions were quite stable for the duration of the study.

Though more ready and most ready students typically had much higher enrollment rates than less-ready students overall, enrollment patterns varied substantially by institution type and over time. Enrollment levels at public and private four-year institutions and all in-state and all out-of-state institutions were all closely aligned with college readiness. Further, most ready students predominated at both private four-year institutions and out-of-state institutions, with a fairly large enrollment advantage over even the second highest readiness category (more ready students). As a result, enrollment rates across all in-state institutions for most ready students were slightly lower than those for more ready students in some semesters early in our study. Enrollment patterns at public community colleges were quite different, however, indicating that most ready students primarily utilize such institutions during the summer, while less ready students attend public community colleges primarily during the fall and spring semesters.

Completions

College readiness was also reflected in completion trends for the Class of 2002, with larger proportions of the more ready and most ready student groups than their less-ready counterparts earning degrees and certificates through the first four years after high school graduation. However, completion of a degree or certificate within four years was the exception rather than the norm for all but the most college-ready students in our cohort. Even among the most ready students from the Class of 2002, fewer than three in five earned a degree or certificate through Summer 2006. While the differences between readiness groups in terms of completions through the Fall 2005 semester were not substantial, the proportion of students earning a degree or certificate during this time period were very low overall. However, in Spring 2006 – coinciding with the expected end date for completion of a four-year degree – we found quite large differences in degree/certificate attainment that varied systematically by readiness. For example, 44% of most ready students earned a degree/certificate this semester compared to only 3% of not/least ready students.

Completion trends by readiness level at public and private four-year institutions, and total for all in- and out-of-state institutions each illustrated patterns that were quite similar to the overall attainment patterns. That is, all student readiness groups recorded relatively few completions from these types of institutions in each

semester through Fall 2005, with large increases in the proportion completing for all readiness levels in Spring 2006. Completion patterns through Fall 2005 did not appear to be related to student readiness, and instead appear to be more a product of the proportion of students enrolled in two-year certificate or degree programs. However, at each of these institution types, the proportion of students earning a degree or certificate in Spring 2006 were closely tied to readiness, with more and most ready student groups completing at much higher rates than not/least and minimally ready students. The types of degrees and certificates earned were also strongly aligned with college readiness, with the more ready student groups more likely to earn baccalaureate degrees than the less ready student groups. There was little relation between readiness and completion at two-year institutions, and the proportion of students earning degrees or certificates at two-year institutions remained at less than 5% per semester for all readiness groups throughout the first four years of our study.

Summary

Taken together, these data illustrate that more ready and most ready students from our cohort both enrolled in postsecondary education and completed certificates and degrees at higher rates than students from the somewhat, minimally, and not/least ready groups. From Fall 2002 through Summer 2006, over half of the students in each college readiness category enrolled in postsecondary education at some point, while the proportions of students earning degrees or certificates ranged from 56% for most college ready students to 9% of those categorized as not/least ready for college. At out-of-state institutions and four-year institutions (both public and private), enrollment rates were relatively stable over time and within each readiness category, but not across readiness categories. Enrollment rates at these types of institutions were consistently and substantially higher for more and most ready students compared to their less-ready peers. Our data also indicate that less-ready students tend to utilize community colleges during the fall and spring semesters while students in higher readiness groups are more likely to enroll in such institutions during the summer. Regardless of institution type or college readiness, very few certificates/degrees were awarded to our cohort through Fall 2005 and there was little difference between readiness groups in terms of completion trends. In Spring 2006, however, there was a large increase in the number of degrees and certificates earned by all readiness groups, coupled with systematic differences in completion rates by college readiness. Overall, more ready and most ready completers were more likely to complete baccalaureate degrees, while minimally and not/least ready completers were more likely to earn certificates or associate degrees.

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