



EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL SERIES

The Illinois Class of 2002 and Parent Income: 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 scores and background information with postsecondary enrollment and completion information from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), 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 parent income and students' enrollment and completion patterns during the first four years of this longitudinal study, through Summer 2006. Our parent income data derives from the ACT background questionnaire completed by students. The three previous reports in this series (Presley and Gong, 2005; Gong and Presley, 2006; and Gong, Presley, and White, 2006) have revealed that parent income is closely related to college readiness, as students from low-income families were less likely to be academically ready for college than students from high income families. However, even after controlling for readiness, the prior studies found that postsecondary enrollment and continuation rates vary considerably by family-income level, with students from higher-income families more likely to start and continue than students from lower-income families. Controlling for readiness, students from the highest-income families were also most likely to attend out-of-state and more competitive institutions and least likely to choose Illinois two-year and less competitive institutions, according to these earlier reports.

Has the relationship between parent income 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

Parent Income and Enrollment

Looking at data for the four years after high school graduation, we see a close connection between parent income and enrollment for the students from our Class of 2002 cohort. Eighty-eight percent of students with high income parents had enrolled in postsecondary education at some point between Fall 2002 and Summer 2006, compared to 85% of students with middle-high income parents, 76% of students with middle-low income parents, and 68% of students with low income parents. For all income levels, participation was highest in the semester immediately following high school graduation and gradually decreased each spring and fall thereafter, with substantially lower enrollment rates and less variation between income levels during the summer terms.

Enrollment rates for out-of-state institutions and both public and private four-year institutions were each closely linked with parent income. This was especially true for out-of-state institutions, which were predominantly utilized by the highest income quartile. Enrollment at these institution types was quite stable (or increasing) across all four years and within each income bracket. In-state institutions and public community colleges, on the other hand, showed declining enrollment rates each fall and spring semester across all parent income groups. Public community colleges and in-state institutions as a whole were also the only two institution types where enrollment rates did not perfectly mirror parent income, because even though students from the highest parent income quartile participated in higher education at greater rates, they were more likely to enroll outside of Illinois and they enrolled in public community colleges at the lowest rates during the fall and spring semesters. As a result, students with middle-high income parents had the highest enrollment rates across all in-state institutions (both two- and four-year).

Parent Income and Completion

As with enrollment, we observed a close relationship between postsecondary completion and parent income in our cohort's first four years after high school, with students from higher income families completing degrees/certificates at much higher rates than those from lower income families. Overall, the proportion of students earning a degree or certificate after four years was 42% for students with parents in the highest income quartile compared to 35% for those with middle-high income parents, 24% for those with middle-low income parents, and only 16% for those with low income parents. Less than five percent of the students in each parent income group earned a degree or certificate in any semester except Spring 2006, with only small completion gaps between income groups during these times. However, in Spring 2006 (four full academic years after the cohort graduated from high school), the proportion of completers rises dramatically for all income groups, but we again see evidence that completions are strongly and positively aligned with parent income.

Completion trends at public and private institutions and all in-state and out-of-state institutions were quite similar to the overall completions patterns described above—i.e., small proportions of completers from Fall 2002 through Fall 2005 with large increases and more variation by income categories in Spring 2006. Each of these institution types (public, private, in-state and out-of-state) also showed completion trends that were closely related to parent income, with higher proportions of students whose parents were from higher income groups earning degrees or certificates.

While completion trends at four-year institutions follow patterns similar to those discussed above, completions at two-year institutions follow a completely different trend. Public community college completions were the highest in the spring semesters of 2004, 2005, and 2006, though these peaks were still relatively low. And despite enrolling at public community colleges at higher rates than their high income peers, the proportions of completers from low income backgrounds were quite similar to those of students from high income families. Further, the types of degrees/certificates earned also strongly reflected parent income, with students from higher income backgrounds earning baccalaureate degrees at higher rates than the lower parent income students. Conversely, students from lower income backgrounds who earned degrees or certificates were much more likely than their higher income counterparts to complete certificate or associate degrees programs.

Summary

To summarize, students from our Cohort with higher income parents both enrolled and completed at higher rates than their lower income peers from Fall 2002 through Summer 2006. Over two thirds of the students in each parent income group enrolled in postsecondary education at some point, while the proportions of students earning degrees or certificates ranged from 42% for high income students to 16% for low income students. Enrollment at out-of-state institutions and both public and private four-year institutions mirrored parent income and was quite stable across all four income brackets. Looking across all in-state institutions (both two- and four-year), students from middle-high income families had the highest enrollment rates, as students from the highest income group were much more likely to enroll at out-of-state and private institutions. Regardless of institution type or parent income group, very few certificates/degrees were awarded to our cohort through Fall 2005 and there was little difference between income groups in terms of completions. In Spring 2006, however, there was a large increase in the number of degrees and certificates earned by all income groups, coupled with systematic differences in completion rates by parent income. Overall, students with higher income parents were more likely to complete baccalaureate degrees, while students with lower income parents 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 parent income, 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.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bradford R. White (brawhit@siue.edu) is a Senior Researcher with the Illinois Education Research Council.

Christopher M. Mullin (cmullin@siue.edu) is a PostDoctoral Fellow with the Illinois Education Research Council and Assistant Research Professor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Kathleen Sullivan Brown (katbrow@siue.edu) is Executive Director of the Illinois Education Research Council and Visiting Associate Professor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Brenda Klostermann, Jennifer Barnhart, and Jacqueline Twitty for their help in preparation of this report.

Table of Contents

Enrollment 6

Figure 1. Percent of the Class of 2002 that Ever Enrolled in Postsecondary Education, by Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660).....	6
Figure 2. Enrollment Trends for the Class of 2002, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	7
Figure 3 Public Four-Year Institution Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	8
Figure 4. Private Four-Year Enrollment Trends for the Class of 2002, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	8
Figure 5. Public Community College Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	9
Figure 6. In-State Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	9
Figure 7. Out-of-State Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	10

Completions 11

Figure 8. Percent of the Class of 2002 that Ever Completed a Certificate or Degree Program, by Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)	11
Figure 9. Completion Trends, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	12
Figure 10. Completions at Public Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	13
Figure 11. Completions at Private Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	13
Figure 12. Completions at In-State Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	13
Figure 13. Completions at Out-of-State Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	14
Figure 14. Completions at Four-Year Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	15
Figure 15. Completions at Community Colleges, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	15
Figure 16. Percent of Completions, by Parent Income.....	17
Table 1. Total Number and Type of Earned Credentials, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006	17

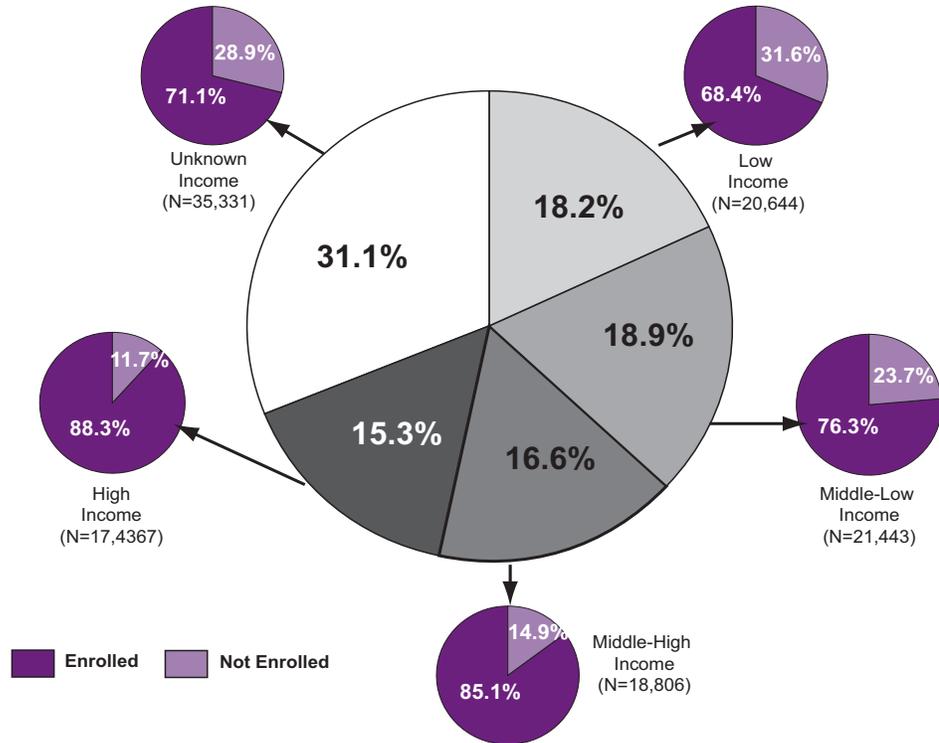
Key Findings 18

Suggested citation:

White, Bradford R., Mullin, Christopher M., and Brown, Kathleen S. (2009). *The Illinois class of 2002 and parent income: A descriptive summary four years after high school*. Education Beyond High School Series (IERC 2009-4). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council.

Enrollment

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

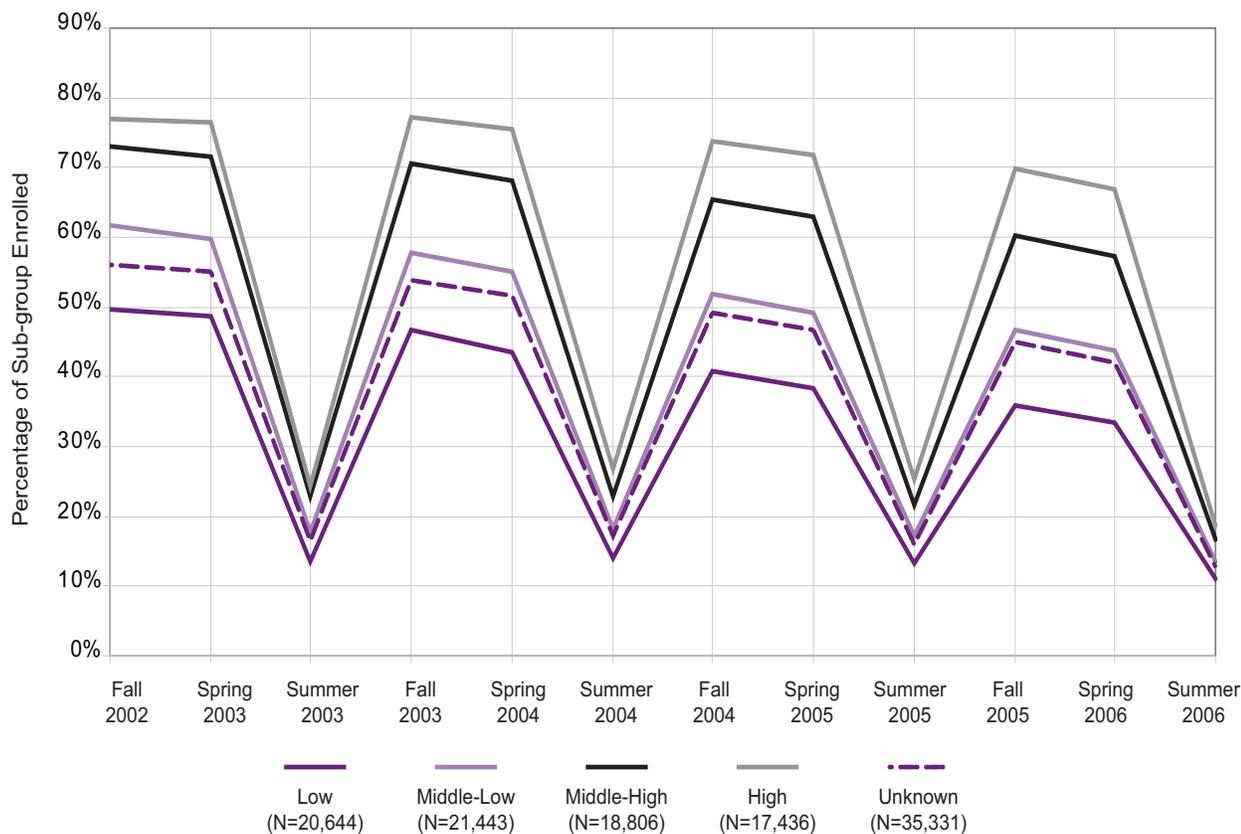


What proportion of the Class of 2002 by parent income ever enrolled in postsecondary education in the four years after high school graduation?

Our data on the income of students’ parents comes from the ACT background questionnaire they completed as part of the Prairie State Achievement Examination during the cohort’s junior year in high school. Thirty-one percent of the students in our cohort did not answer this question, and their parent incomes are classified as unknown. For those who did respond to this item, we divided responses into four approximately equal groups as follows: low income = \$0-\$30,000; lower-middle income = \$30,000-\$50,000; upper middle income = \$50,000–\$80,000; and high income = \$80,000 and above.

Looking at data for the four years after high school graduation, we see a close connection between parent income and postsecondary enrollment. Eighty-eight percent of students with high income parents had enrolled in postsecondary education at some point between 2002 and 2006, compared to 85% of students with middle-high income parents, 76% of students with middle-low income parents, and 68% of students with low income parents. Seventy-one percent of students who did not respond to the parent income question on the ACT background survey had enrolled in postsecondary education at some point during this period, placing the participation of this group squarely between those of the low and middle-low income brackets.

Figure 2. Enrollment Trends for the Class of 2002, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What were the enrollment trends by parent income for the Class of 2002 during the four years after high school graduation?

Enrollment trends by parent income mirrored overall enrollment trends, with participation highest in the semester immediately following high school graduation and gradually decreasing each spring and fall thereafter, with substantially lower enrollment rates during summer semesters. For example, the postsecondary enrollment rate for students with high income parents was 77.1% in Fall 2002, dropping slightly to 76.4% in Spring 2003, falling to 24.3% in Summer 2003, then returning to slight below the previous spring’s level in Fall 2003.

In each semester from Fall 2002 through Summer 2006, students with higher income parents enrolled at higher rates than students with lower income parents. These trends continued to hold during the summer terms, as well as both fall and spring. We also observed a small but notable enrollment rate gap (of about 5-10%) between the highest and middle-high parent income groups in most fall and spring semesters, and a more substantial gap (of about 10-15%) between the middle-high income group and the middle-low group. These findings suggest that postsecondary enrollment is influenced by parent income, with students from higher income families enrolling at higher rates, though these analyses do not take into account college readiness or any other measures which may be associated with parent income and that might also help to explain college going and persistence (see, for example, Gong, Presley, and White, 2006).

Figure 3 Public Four-Year Institution Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

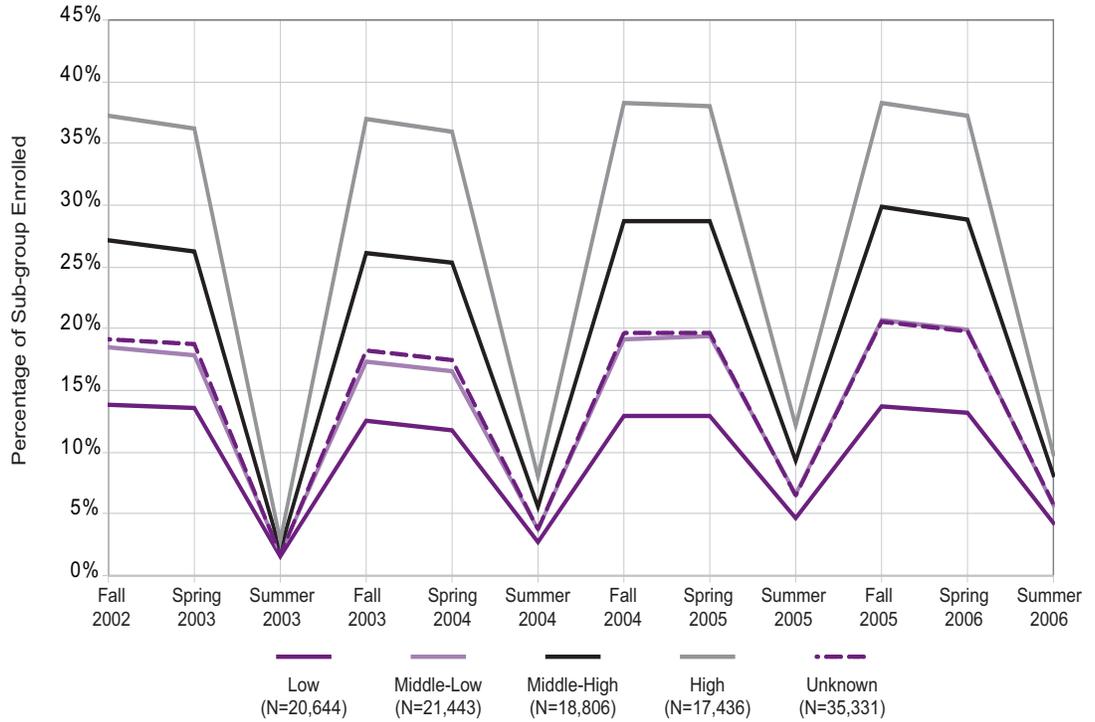


Figure 4. Private Four-Year Enrollment Trends for the Class of 2002, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

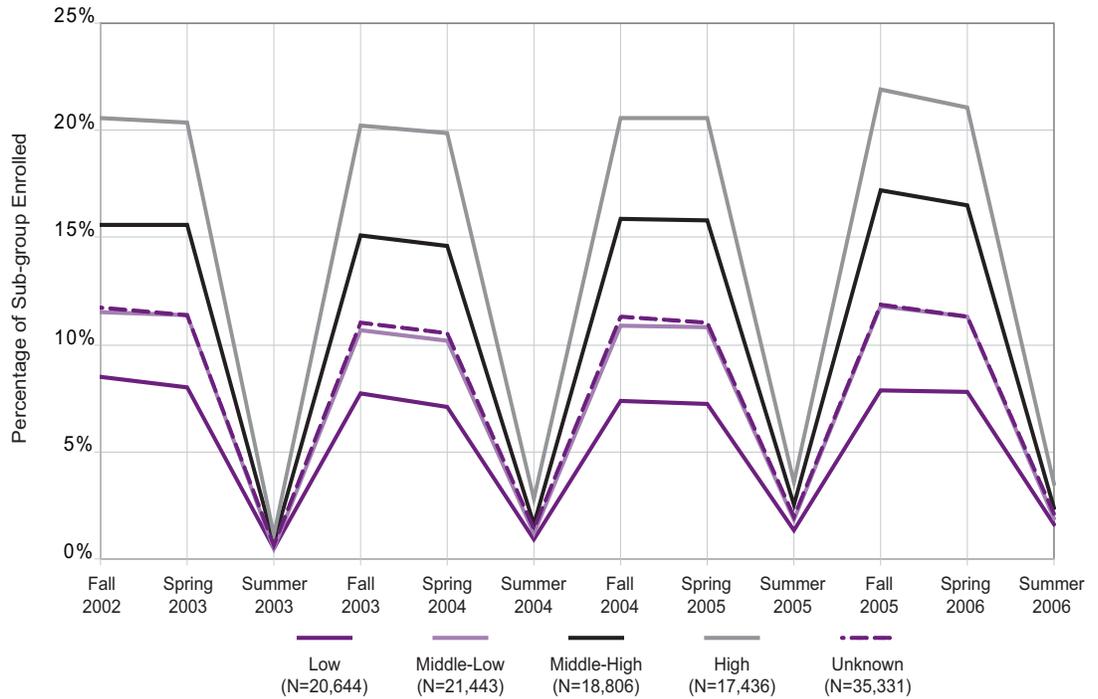


Figure 5. Public Community College Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

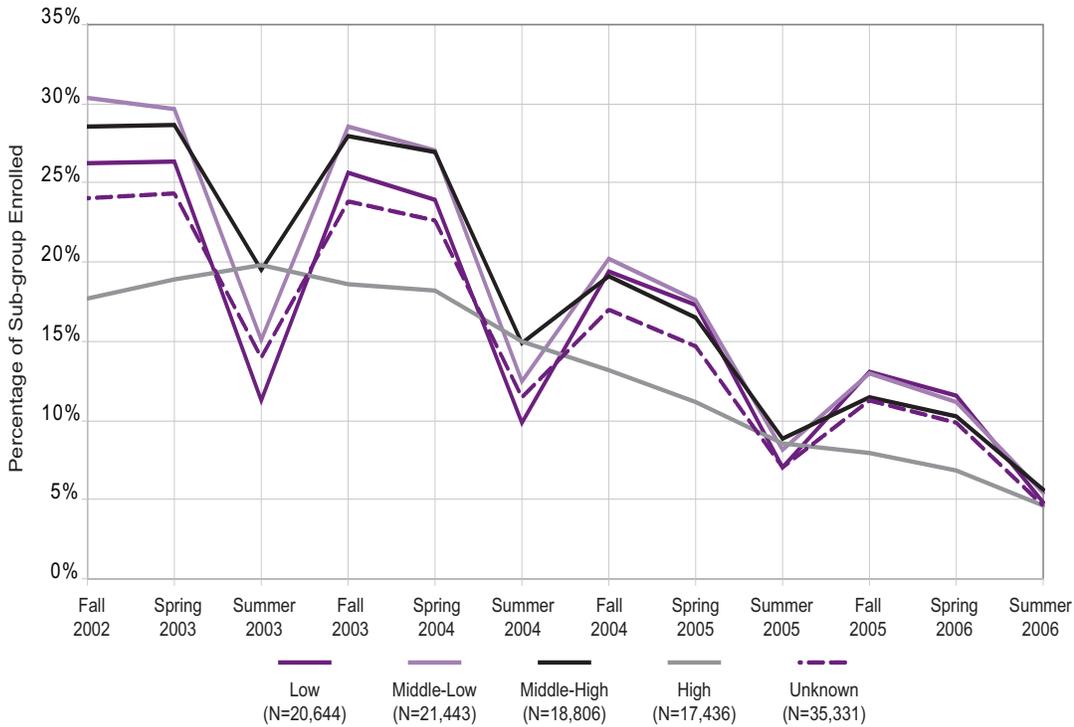


Figure 6. In-State Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)

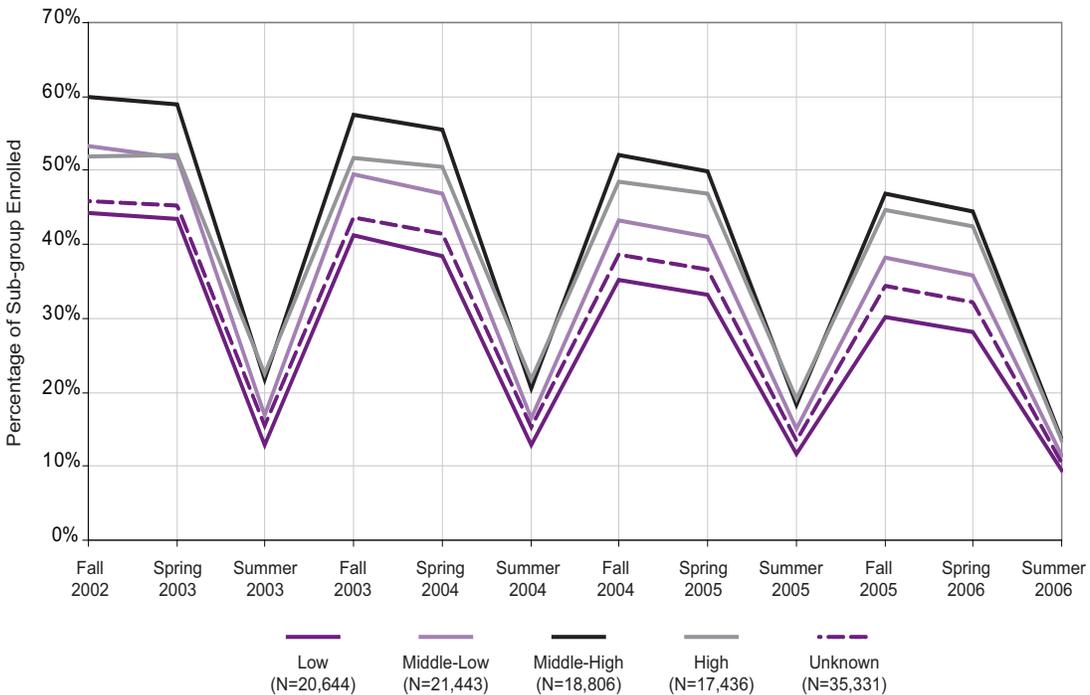
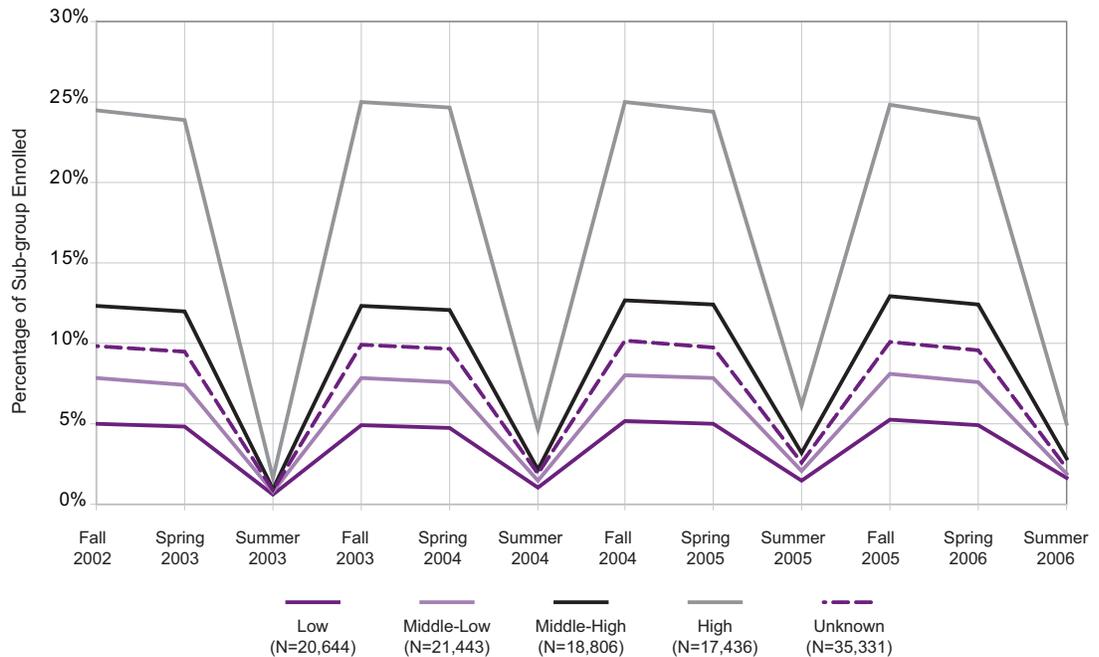


Figure 7. Out-of-State Enrollment Trends for Those Enrolled, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



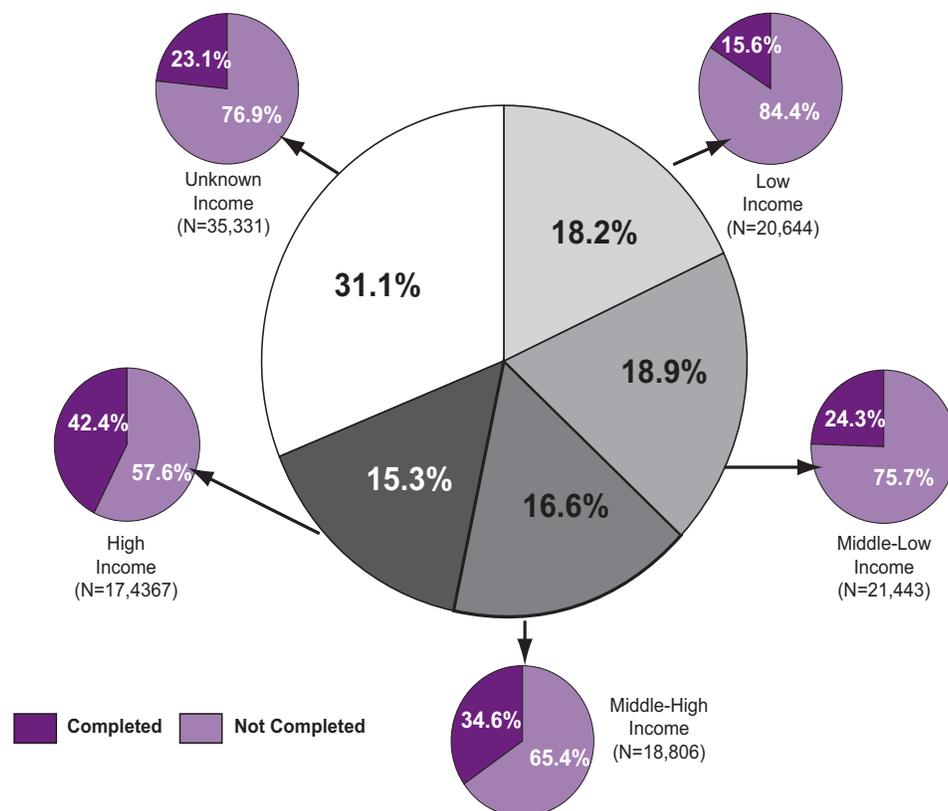
What were the completion trends at different institution types for the Class of 2002 by parent income during the four years after high school graduation?

Figures 3 through 7 show the enrollment rates at various institution types broken down by the income levels of students’ parents. These charts show that enrollment rates for public and private four-year institutions (Figures 3 and 4) and out-of-state institutions (Figure 7) were all highly reflective of parent income. In each of these types of institutions, students with low income parents enrolled at lower rates than students with high income parents. This was especially true for out-of-state institutions which were quite predominantly accessed by the highest income quartile. Also, enrollments at these types of institutions were remarkably stable—or, if anything, increasing—across all four years and within each income bracket, unlike the overall enrollment trends across all types of institutions (Figure 2) which showed declining enrollments over time. This suggests, that the declining overall enrollment rate is reflected in the remaining institution types—in-state institutions and public community colleges. Figures 5 and 6 bear this out, and show declining enrollment rates over time across all parent income groups. Figure 5 shows public community college enrollment rates slipping from about 25-30% for most groups in Fall 2002 to around 10% in Spring 2006, while Figure 6 shows less dramatic decreases for all in-state institutions of about 5-10% for each parent income group over this four year duration.

Perhaps even more interestingly, public community colleges and in-state institutions as a whole are the only two institution types where enrollment rates do not consistently mirror parent income. High income students are actually the least likely to enroll in public community colleges during the fall and spring semesters, and their summer enrollment rates are among the highest at such institutions suggesting that such students are more apt to view the public community colleges mainly as a source for earning credit during the summer. While students with low income parents were less likely to enroll in public community colleges than their middle-high and middle-low income peers during the first couple of years of our study, this separation vanishes in years three and four as community college enrollment rates for the middle-income groups decline more rapidly than those for low income students. Looking across all in-state institutions (both two- and four-year), enrollment rates were highest for students with middle-high income parents. Though students from the highest parent income quartile participated in higher education at greater rates, they were much more likely to enroll outside of Illinois, which helps to explain this finding.

Completions

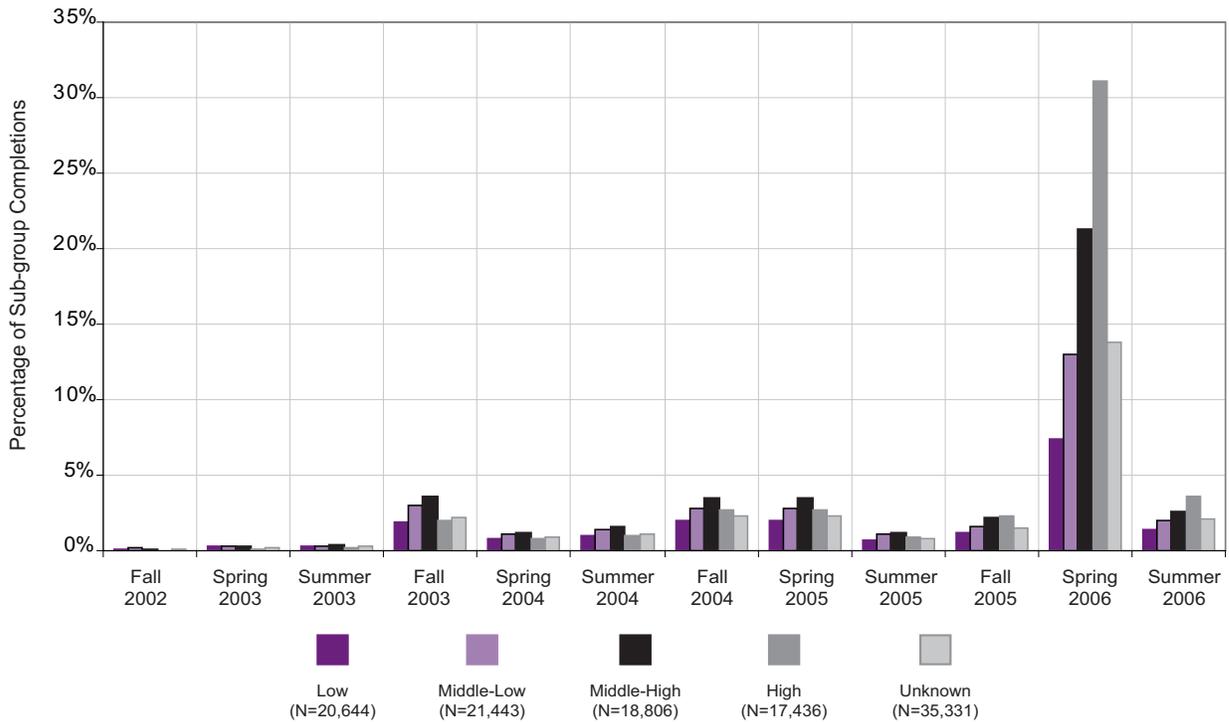
Figure 8. Percent of the Class of 2002 that Ever Completed a Certificate or Degree Program, by Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006 (N=113,660)



What proportion of the Class of 2002 by parent income ever completed a certificate or degree program in the four years after high school graduation?

As with enrollment, we observed a close relationship between postsecondary completion patterns and parent income in our cohort's first four years after high school. Students from higher income families completed degrees and certificates at a much higher pace than those from lower income families. Forty-two percent of students from high income families earned a degree or certificate through four years, compared to 35% for those with middle-high income parents, 24% for those with middle-low income parents, and only 16% for those with low income parents. The completion levels for those students missing parent income data was similar to those from the middle-low income group at 23%. Again, though it seems clear that there is some relationship between parent income and completion, it is difficult to draw any solid conclusions about the causality of these data before considering other intervening variables, as we plan to do in future studies. Nonetheless, the differences between parent income groups in terms of completion are striking.

Figure 9. Completion Trends, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006



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

Less than five percent of the students in each parent income group earned a degree or certificate in any semester except Spring 2006. In Spring 2006 (four full academic years after the cohort graduated from high school), we again see evidence that completions are reflective of parent income—over 30% of students with high income parents, about 21% of students with middle-high income parents, about 13% of students with middle-low income parents, and about 7% of students from low income families completed a degree or certificate during this semester. Approximately 14% of the students for whom we were missing parent income data earned a certificate or degree in Spring 2006.

About 2-4% of each parent income group completed degrees or certificates in Fall 2003, Fall 2004, and Spring 2005, with the middle-high income group completing at higher rates in each of these semesters. Slightly smaller proportions of each group completed in Spring 2004, Summer 2004, Summer 2005, and Fall 2005. Completion levels for all parent income groups were negligible in Fall 2002, Spring 2003, and Summer 2003.

Remember throughout these upcoming charts that, compared with their peers from other income groups, students with high income parents were more likely to be enrolled in four-year institutions and less likely to be enrolled at public community colleges during non-summer semesters.

Figure 10. Completions at Public Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006

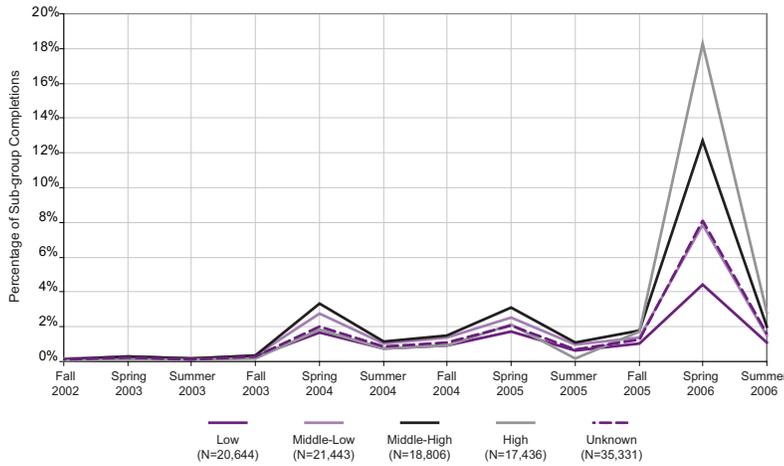


Figure 11. Completions at Private Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006

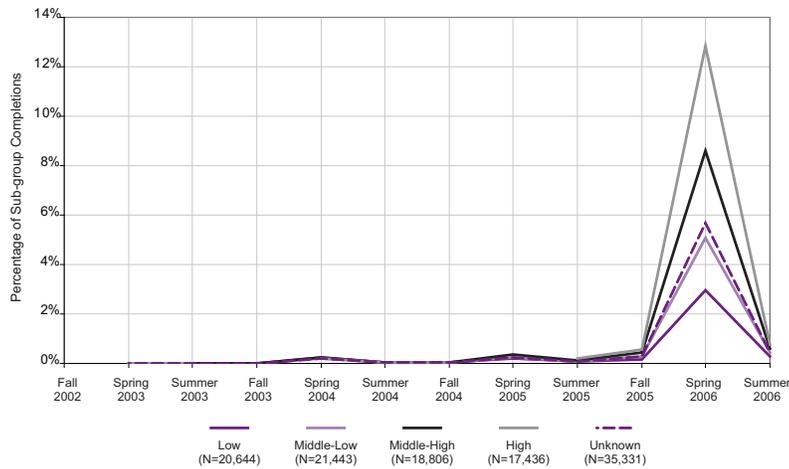


Figure 12. Completions at In-State Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006

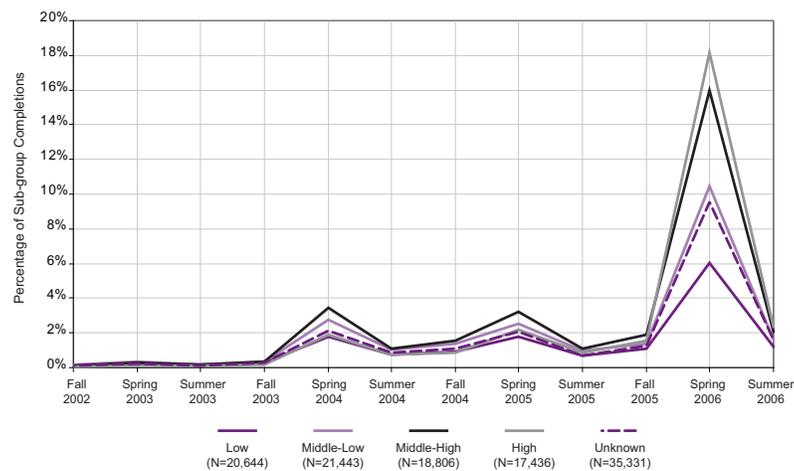
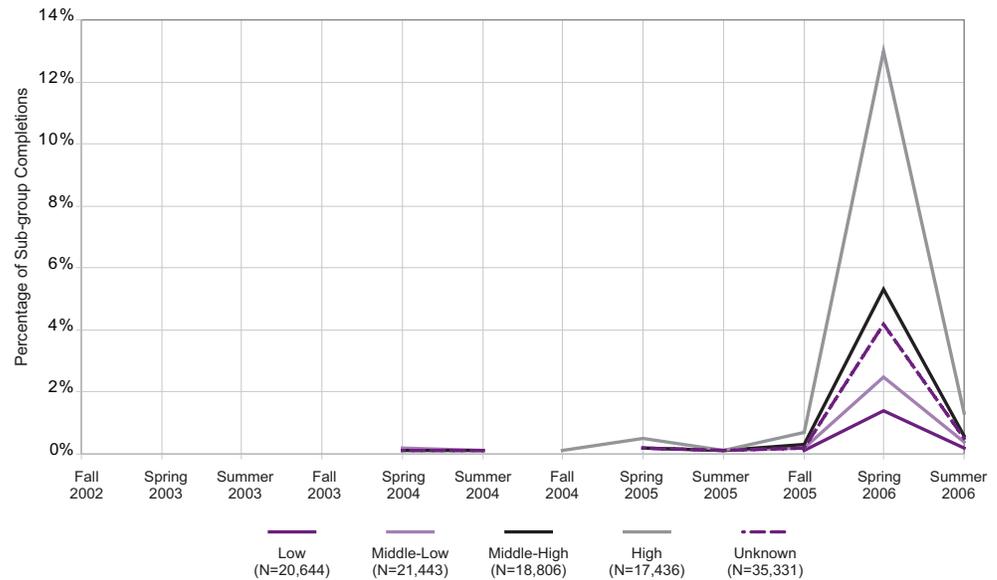


Figure 13. Completions at Out-of-State Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006



What were the completion trends at public, private, in state and out-of-state institutions for the Class of 2002 by parent income during the four years after high school graduation?

In general, the completion patterns at public (Figure 10), private (Figure 11), in state (Figure 12), and out-of-state (Figure 13) are each quite similar to the overall completions discussed above. That is, we see quite small proportions of completers from Fall 2002 through Fall 2005 with large increases in Spring 2006. The proportions of students from high income families who earned a degree or certificate at each of these institution types in Spring 2006 ranged between 13% and 19%. Completion patterns were closely related to parent income in each of these institution types, with proportions of completers amongst students whose parents were from higher income groups. For example, about 18% of students from high income families received a degree or certificate from a public institution in Spring 2006, compared to 13% of students from the middle-high income quartile, 8% from the middle-low and unknown parent income groups, and 4% from the lowest income group. Remember, of course, that completion is at least partially a function of enrollment, and that students from different parent income backgrounds enrolled at these institutions at quite different rates.

Figure 14. Completions at Four-Year Institutions, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006

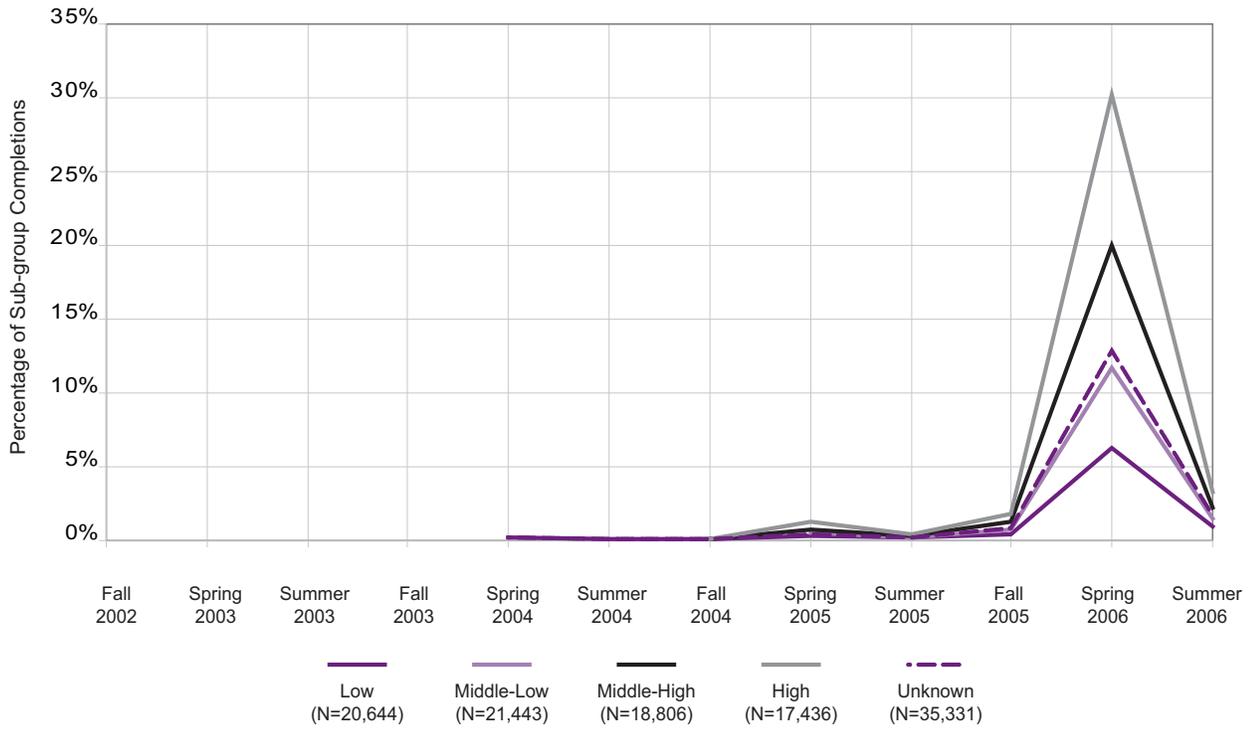
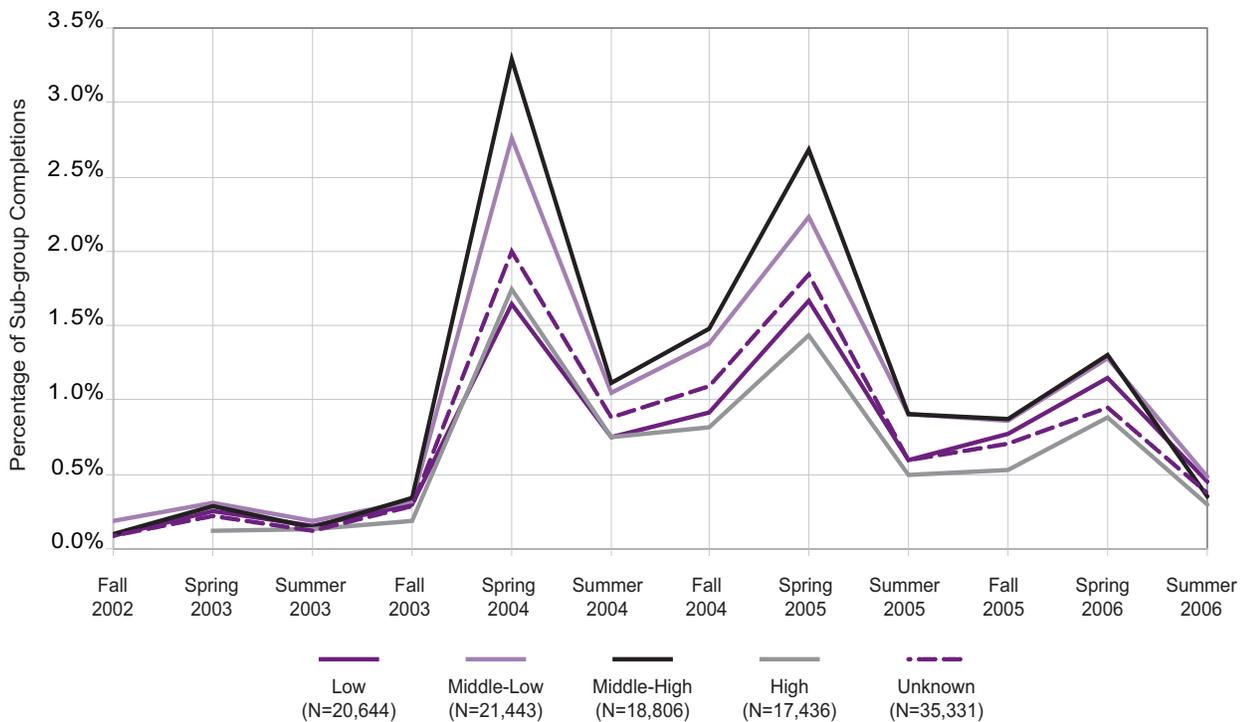


Figure 15. Completions at Community Colleges, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006



What were the completion trends at four-year institutions and public community colleges for the Class of 2002 by parent income during the four years after high school graduation?

The completion trends for all four-year institution types (Figure 14) reflect those findings which have been discussed previously, with few completers and little overall difference in proportion completing by family income from Fall 2002 through Fall 2005, and a large spike in completions in Spring 2006 with large differences by parent income group. Completions at public community colleges (Figure 15), on the other hand, follow a completely different trend pattern. These differences are not entirely unexpected, given that public community colleges generally provide two-year certificate and degree programs, while the other institution types primarily house four-year programs.

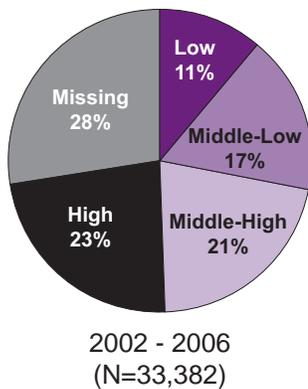
Public community college completions were highest in the spring semesters of 2004, 2005, and, to a lesser extent, 2006, though the overall rates of completion from these two-year institutions were quite low (ranging from negligible to about 3.5%). Students with parents from the middle-high income group were most likely (or tied for most likely) to earn public community college degrees and certificates in each semester, followed closely by students from the middle-low income quartile. Despite attending public community colleges at rates that were more similar to the middle-high and middle-low income groups (see Figure 5), completion trends for the low income group were quite similar to those of the high income students who enrolled in public community colleges at much lower rates.

Table 1. Total Number and Type of Earned Credentials, By Parent Income: Fall 2002 to Summer 2006

Parent Income	Missing Degree Information	Unknown Certificate/ Associate Type	Transfer Associate/ Certificate	Terminal Associate/ Certificate	Baccalaureate Degree	Masters Degree	Total
Low	436	378	712	669	1,373	*	3,568
Middle-Low	786	489	1,189	754	2,584	*	5,802
Middle-High	889	357	1,312	661	3,940	*	7,159
High	920	237	737	308	5,619	21	7,842
Missing	1,269	631	1,483	962	4,649	17	9,011
Total	4,300	2,092	5,433	3,354	18,165	38	33,382

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

Figure 16. Percent of Completions, by Parent Income



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

These findings again show that parent income is reflected in degree and certificate completion, with students from higher parent income groups earning degrees and certificates at higher rates than their peers from lower parent income groups. For example, even though they made up only 15.3% of our cohort, students from high income families earned the largest proportion (23%) of degrees/certificates awarded to the Class of 2002 through four years after high school (Figure 16). Similarly, students from the middle-high income group accounted for 16.6% of the cohort, yet earned 21% of its degrees and certificates. Together, the low and middle-low income groups accounted for 37% of the students in the cohort and only 28% of degrees and completions earned through these first four years.

The types of degrees and certificates earned were also closely aligned with parent income, as students from higher income backgrounds were more likely to earn baccalaureate degrees than the lower parent income students. Almost three quarters (5,619 of 7,842 or 71.7%) of the completions recorded for students from high income families were baccalaureate degrees, compared to 55.0% for middle-high income students, 44.5% for middle-low income students, and 38.5% for low income students. Conversely, students from lower income backgrounds who earned degrees or certificates were much more likely than their higher income counterparts to complete certificate or associate degrees programs. For example, transfer certificates and associate degrees accounted for about 20% of the completions for students with low and middle-low income parents, compared to only 9% of the degrees earned by students with high income parents. Similarly, terminal associates/certificates accounted for 19% of low income students' completions, compared to 9% of middle-high income students' completions and just 4% of high income students' completions.

Key Findings

Participation

Looking at data for the four years after high school graduation, we see a close connection between parent income and enrollment. Eighty-eight percent of students with high income parents had enrolled in postsecondary education at some point between Fall 2002 and Summer 2006, compared to 85% of students with middle-high income parents, 76% of students with middle-low income parents, and 68% of students with low income parents. For all income levels, participation was highest in the semester immediately following high school graduation and gradually decreasing each spring and fall thereafter, with substantially lower enrollment rates and less variation between income levels during the summer terms.

Enrollment rates for out-of-state institutions and both public and private four-year institutions were each closely linked with parent income, especially out-of-state institutions, which were predominantly utilized by the highest income quartile. Enrollment at these institution types was quite stable (or increasing) across all four years and within each income bracket. In-state institutions and public community colleges, on the other hand, showed declining enrollment rates each fall and spring semester across all parent income groups. Public community colleges and in-state institutions as a whole were also the only two institution types where enrollment rates did not perfectly mirror parent income. Though students from the highest parent income quartile participated in higher education at greater rates, they were much more likely to enroll outside of Illinois and they enrolled in public community colleges at the lowest rates during the fall and spring semesters. In fact, students with middle-high income parents had the highest enrollment rates across all in-state institutions (both two- and four-year).

Completion

As with enrollment, we observed a close relationship between postsecondary completion and parent income in our cohort's first four years after high school, with students from higher income families completing degrees/certificates at a much higher rates than those from lower income families. Overall, the proportion earning a degree or certificate after four years was 42% for students with parents in the highest income quartile, compared to 35% for those with middle-high income parents, 24% for those with middle-low income parents, and only 16% for those with low income parents. Less than five percent of the students in each parent income group earned a degree or certificate in any semester except Spring 2006, with only small gaps between income groups in terms of proportions completing during this time. However, in Spring 2006 (four full academic years after the cohort graduated from high school), we again see evidence that completions are strongly and positively aligned with parent income.

Completion trends at public and private institutions and all in-state and out-of-state institutions were all similar to the overall completions patterns described above—i.e., we see quite small degree and certificate attainment levels from Fall 2002 through Fall 2005 with large increases and more variation by income categories in Spring 2006. Each of these institution types (public, private, in-state and out-of-state) also showed completion trends that were closely related to parent income, with

higher proportions of students from higher income groups completing degrees or certificates.

While completion trends at four-year institutions follow patterns similar to those discussed above, completions at two-year institutions follow a completely different trend. Public community college completions were the highest in the spring semesters of 2004, 2005, and 2006, though these peaks were still relatively low. And despite enrolling at public community colleges at higher rates than their high income peers, the proportions of students from low income families who earned degrees or certificates were quite similar to those of students from high income families.

Further, the types of degrees/certificates earned were also strongly related to parent income, with students from higher income backgrounds earning baccalaureate degrees at higher rates than the lower parent income students. Conversely, students from lower income backgrounds who earned degrees or certificates were much more likely than their higher income counterparts to complete certificate or associate degrees programs.

Summary

To summarize, students from our Cohort with higher income parents both enrolled and completed at higher rates than their lower income peers from Fall 2002 through Summer 2006. Over two thirds of the students in each parent income group enrolled in postsecondary education at some point, while the proportions of students earning degrees or certificates ranged from 42% for high income students to 16% for low income students. Enrollment at out-of-state institutions and both public and private four-year institutions mirrored parent income and was quite stable across all four income brackets. Looking across all in-state institutions (both two- and four-year), students from middle-high income families had the highest enrollment rates, as students from the highest income group were much more likely to enroll at out-of-state and private institutions. Regardless of institution type or parent income group, very few certificates/degrees were awarded to our cohort through Fall 2005 and there was little difference between income groups in terms of completions. In Spring 2006, however, there was a large increase in the number of degrees and certificates earned by all income groups, coupled with systematic differences in completion rates by parent income. Overall, students with higher income parents were more likely to complete baccalaureate degrees, while students with lower income parents were more likely to earn certificates or associate degrees.

References

- Gong, Yuqin and Presley, Jennifer B. (2006). *The demographics and academics of college going in Illinois* (IERC 2006-2). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council.
- Gong, Yuqin, Presley, Jennifer B., White, Bradford. (2006). *Following the Illinois high school class of 2002: Three years into college* (IERC 2006-5). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council.
- Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success*. (2008). National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)/Illinois State Board of Higher Education (IBHE). Springfield, IL. Retrieved 5/5/09 from <http://www.ibhe.org/Board/agendas/2008/December/PublicAgenda.pdf>
- Mullin, Christopher M., White, Bradford R., and Brown, Kathleen Sullivan. (2009). *The Illinois class of 2002—an overview* (IERC 2009-1). Education Beyond High School Series. Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council.
- Presley, Jennifer P. and Gong, Yuqin. (2005). *The demographics and academics of college readiness in Illinois: A descriptive summary four years after high school* (IERC 2005-3). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council.

Contact the IERC toll-free at 1-866-799-IERC (4372)
or by email at ierc@siue.edu.
<http://ierc.siue.edu>

About the Illinois Education Research Council



The Illinois Education Research Council was established in 2000 at Southern Illinois University to provide Illinois with education research to support P-20 education policy making and program development. The IERC undertakes independent research and policy analysis, often in collaboration with other researchers, that informs and strengthens Illinois' commitment to providing a seamless system of educational opportunities for its citizens. Through publications, presentations, participation on committees, and a research symposium, the IERC brings objective and reliable evidence to the work of state policy makers and practitioners.