



## Following the Illinois high school class of 2002: Three years into college

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### Executive Summary

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This report provides an update on the Illinois public high school class of 2002 and its progress through the higher education system. Three years after graduation, who has persisted, who has stopped out, who has transferred, and who has completed a two-year program?

By the end of Year 3 (2004-2005):

- 73% of the Class of 2002 has had at least some post-secondary education, and 48% have been enrolled for all three years.
- Of those who enrolled in the first year after high school graduation, 79% were still enrolled in some form of higher education, with 57% still at their initial institution, while 21% had transferred to a different institution.
- The overall persistence figure is even better for four-year institutions, where about 70% of first-year starters were still enrolled at their first institution, and 90% were still enrolled somewhere in higher education. For two-year full-time starters, 72% were still enrolled somewhere in Year 3.
- However, for students who stopped out, a return to higher education is unlikely the next year—only 17% of Year 2 stop-outs from two-year institutions and 23% of Year 2 stop-outs from four-year institutions returned in Year 3.
- As a result of transfers, Illinois regained about 1,750 students who initially attended out-of-state institutions. However, this gain was fully offset by a similar number of students who initially enrolled in state and had transferred out of state by Year 3.

We identify five important lessons learned from our Year 3 progress report:

#### **1) Institutional Persistence Rates Underestimate Student Success**

Our findings on persistence provide a very different—and more positive—picture of college-retention than looking at individual college persistence rates. The complicated attendance patterns of college students make it impossible to get a complete picture of the higher education system as a whole by simply examining figures from each individual institution. The difference between institutional and system persistence emphasizes the importance of tracking students through the

whole higher education system to get an accurate depiction of systemic effectiveness and student success.

## **2) College Readiness (Still) Matters**

Academic preparedness is the critical correlate to college access, and it is even more strongly related to the type of institution attended, and to continuation. Only 10% of more/most ready first-year starters were not enrolled in Year 3, compared to 41% of not/least ready first year starters.

For the 10% of the Class of 2002 who were most ready for college and had not enrolled in higher education at any time during their first three years after graduation, we found that this failure to enroll has almost no relationship to family income—12% of low-income most-ready students still had not enrolled compared to 8-9% of most-ready students from higher-income families. For less-ready students, income continues to play a strong role in college access through Year 3.

## **3) Starting Full-Time Matters**

Starting part-time is a tremendous handicap to students' college persistence, whether they start in the two-year or four-year sector. Students who started part-time are much less likely to be enrolled anywhere in Year 3. In fact, we show that full-time status trumps readiness—at two-year institutions, college-ready students who start part time are less likely to remain enrolled anywhere by Year 3 than not/least-ready students who started full time.

## **4) Where Students Start College Matters**

We found that students from the Class of 2002 benefit from gaining entrance to a more-competitive college environment, independent of their college-readiness. For example, 64% of full-time not/least ready two-year starters were enrolled in Year 3, compared to 74% of similar students who started at a non/less-competitive four-year institution, and 83% of those who started at a competitive four-year institution. Perhaps more-competitive four-year institutions can provide more help and attention to their less-ready enrollees because those students constitute a smaller component of those institutions' student bodies.

## **5) Early Transfer Is More Likely For College-Ready Two-Year Starters**

Almost half (47%) of the most-ready two-year starters had already transferred to a four-year institution by Year 3, and almost half of these transferees did so with an Illinois community college award in hand. More-ready students, whom we also consider to be "college ready," also show a strong four-year-institution transfer rate (31%). In contrast, only 9% of not/least ready two-year starters had transferred to a four-year institution by Year 3, and 47% were not enrolled anywhere (most with no program completion). We will be tracking return and completion rates over the coming three additional years.

## **Recommendations**

Several key policy variables and recommendations have begun to emerge during our first three years of tracking the Illinois public high school Class of 2002.

First, academic readiness is vital to both college access and persistence in higher education, and high schools must maintain a laser-like focus on intellectual rigor. Students, teachers, guidance counselors, and leaders in Illinois middle schools and high schools and the policy arena must have a clear and firm understanding of the knowledge and skills that are expected of college freshmen, and must work together to put forth the effort and structures needed to ensure their acquisition. College freshmen need to enter higher education ready to learn in order to make the most of the opportunity.

Secondly, attending college full-time trumps college readiness as a predictor of persistence. Teachers, counselors, financial aid advisors, and the higher education community should work together to ensure that students and their parents understand the financial aid resources that are available to them—including loans when needed—as alternatives to extensive employment while attending college.

And finally, the initial choice of college type matters. Students who start at two-year institutions need a supportive institutional and policy environment that facilitates retention and transfer to four-year institutions. Now that two-year institutions and less-selective four-year institutions are much more likely to have ACT scores for at least their traditional-age entrants (because they took the test as part of PSAE), these types of institutions should identify academically talented students upon entry to be sure that they receive strong encouragement to remain enrolled, and for the two-year sector, transfer especially to very- and most/highly competitive four-year institutions. In turn, four-year institutions must take responsibility to help community college students—especially the more than 7,000 who start college ready—make the transition to the four-year sector after having spent their first year(s) in the usually smaller, more local environment of a two-year institution. Some of these students will be living away from home for the first time while trying to negotiate a peer group that has had the opportunity to bond and become comfortable with campus life. These students deserve scholarship opportunities, assurance of course transfers and respectful academic advising, and access to residential housing.

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## Introduction

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In 2003, the Illinois Education Research Council began to follow the 113,660 members of the Illinois public high school class of 2002 (the Class of 2002) on their journeys through postsecondary education. The incorporation of the ACT test into the Prairie State Achievement Examination (the statewide assessment tests administered to 11<sup>th</sup> graders in the state’s public schools) provided the opportunity to have results of this assessment, together with student questionnaire information, for nearly all public school graduates, not just those who would normally have taken the ACT in order to be considered for admission to colleges that required it. We have previously published two reports using these data—the first on the college readiness of this cohort of high school seniors (The Demographics and Academics of *College Readiness* in Illinois, Presley & Gong, IERC 2005-3), the second on their college-going patterns in the 2002-2003 (The Demographics and Academics of *College Going* in Illinois, Gong & Presley, IERC 2006-2). We can now provide a status report of what has happened to the Class of 2002 three years into college—by the academic year 2004-2005. We include results regarding who persists, who completes a program from a two-year college within three years, and who has stopped out of higher education. (We use the term “stop out” rather than “drop out” because at this point in time we cannot be certain that these individuals will not return either to the same institution or to another one to continue their postsecondary education.)

There is a growing body of evidence confirming the importance of postsecondary education to individual economic opportunity. We described the private and public benefits of educational attainment in the *College Going* report (p. 6). These included the increasing gap in earnings between those with high school diplomas and a college degree, and the benefits to the state and the nation through increased tax revenues, lower incidences of violence, addiction, illness and incarceration, and increased likelihood of social and political participation.

In Illinois, as in other states across the nation, the acquisition of postsecondary education and degrees does not accrue equally to people from different race/ethnic and family income backgrounds. The longitudinal study of the Class of 2002 allows us to examine, for Illinois, where gaps in attainment are occurring. In the *College Readiness* report on the Class of 2002, we examined gaps in college readiness for students from different race/ethnic and family income backgrounds and regions of the state. We found that about one third of the Class of 2002 was ready for college coursework, about one third were not/least ready, and one third were somewhat ready. High school course-taking, high school quality, and student demographic

characteristics all contribute to the different levels of college readiness. Black and Latino students, students from low income families, and students in high schools having a cadre of teachers who themselves were less academically successful (i.e., had lower high school Teacher Quality Indexes (TQIs)—see DeAngelis et al., IERC 2005-1, and Presley et al., IERC 2005-2) are less likely to be ready for college after graduating from high school than Asian and white students, students of high income families, and students in high schools with higher TQIs. In our second report, the *College Going* report, we first noted that the vast majority (87%) of the Class of 2002 aspired to complete at least a bachelor's degree, including almost three quarters of those in the not/least ready group, and three quarters of those who did not even enroll in college in their first year after high school. We then found that while readiness was somewhat related to going to college in the year immediately following high school, it mattered more when it came to who started at a two-year versus a four-year institution, and it mattered most in distinguishing those who went to more-competitive (i.e., more selective) four-year colleges and universities. Further, not/least ready students from Chicago Public Schools were more likely than others in that readiness group to enroll in four-year institutions, while students from the Southeast were more likely to start in the two-year sector, including 35% of the most-ready students from that region. And Illinois' more-prepared students were more likely to enroll out of state than less-prepared students. Finally, we found that having higher school TQIs contributed to students going on to college from low-performing schools, and when such a cadre of teachers was teaching in a high-performing high school, it appears to contribute to an environment leading to more selective college enrollment for students.

In this third report in the series, we describe who stayed, who transferred, and who was not enrolled three years after starting in college straight out of high school. We also provide information on whether those who started at a two-year institution had received an award within three years. We expect to extend this analysis in subsequent reports as we obtain and analyze data on fourth, fifth and eventually sixth year enrollments and completions.

## Methodology

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### Data

In 2001, Illinois began administering the ACT test to all 11<sup>th</sup> graders in Illinois public schools as part of the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). Scores and background information were, for the first time, 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 were able to receive a copy of the 2002 senior class data from ACT under shared data agreements with the Illinois Board of Higher Education and ACT. We refer to this cohort of Illinois public high school graduates as the Class of 2002.

Student college enrollment information is obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a national collaborative in which most postsecondary institutions participate. The data enable us to examine student transfers among different institutions, a valuable advantage in studying student mobility in higher education.

Illinois public community college student completion data are obtained from the Illinois Community College Board.

College characteristics (such as level and control) are taken from Institutional Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, Barron's Profiles of American Colleges 25th edition (2003) was used as the source for college competitiveness information.

### Key Measures

**College Enrollment:** College enrollment is defined as enrollment in any format (full-time, half-time, or less than half-time) at any time during a given academic year. Summer enrollment is not considered. Recognizing the complex pattern of postsecondary education participation, we made several decisions in order to make the study manageable. In cases where multiple institution enrollments were found for a given student within an academic year, we selected the first institution as representing the student's enrollment for that year. In cases where simultaneous enrollments were found, the institution where the student was enrolled with the highest status (i.e., full-time over part-time) was chosen. This definition does not take into consideration within-academic-year withdrawal, but it is consistent with the common practice of universities and colleges for counting their enrollments and persistence.



**Full Time Status:** As reported by each institution when it reports enrollment to the National Student Clearinghouse. We use the highest enrollment status for students' first year of enrollment. The standard definition of full-time is 12 credit hours.

**Persistence:** Traditionally, persistence refers to the continued enrollment at the same institution in subsequent years after initial enrollment. Given the considerable student mobility across institutions, we pay more attention to what we call “system persistence”—enrollment at any institution in subsequent years after initial participation in postsecondary education. System persistence is consistent with Adelman’s definition of persistence in his recent work (2006), which includes those who left their initial institution for other institutions.

**Stopout:** Refers to non-enrollment at any institution after initial attendance in postsecondary education. We use the term “stopout” over “dropout” because we do not yet know whether those students will shortly return to resume their studies.

**Transfer:** Refers to change in institution across academic years, indicating enrollment at a different institution after discontinuing enrollment at the original institution. This term is used in the loosest sense. It does not consider whether the destination institution grants credit for coursework taken at the original institution. If students transfer mid-academic year, they will not be counted as transfers until they appear the next academic year as enrollees in the institutions to which they transferred. We exclude summer enrollments from our analysis, so students who take summer courses at a different institution will not be counted as transfers unless they stay at that institution into the following academic year.

**Completion:** Since this report provides information three years into college, we took account of program/degree completion for Illinois public two-year institution starters. Completion at this point is defined as the award of any degree or certificate from any Illinois public two-year institution. We combined the many degree/certificate categories used by the Illinois Community College Board into four categories: Associate Degrees in Transfer Programs, Associate Degrees in Career Programs, Occupational Certificates, and Basic Skills Certificates. For the small number of students who earned a degree and a certificate, the degree is chosen to represent the completion. Later reports will include baccalaureate completion.

For other measures used in this study such as college readiness, college competitiveness, region, family income, and race/ethnicity, please refer to Presley & Gong, IERC 2005-1 and Gong & Presley, IERC 2006-2.

## Going to College Within the First Three Years After High School

### The Status of the Class of 2002

*Almost three in four (73%) of the Class of 2002 has had a taste of post-secondary education by the end of the third year after high school graduation.*

Overall, almost three in four (73%) of the Class of 2002 (N = 113,660) has had a taste of post-secondary education by the end of the third year after high school graduation (Table 1). Almost half (48%) of the Class of 2002 have enrolled in each of the three years (2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005). The third year status is closely related to college preparation as measured by the IERC college readiness index, with the percentage of not-ever-enrolled students consistently decreasing (from 45% to 9%) and the percentage enrolled all three years consistently increasing (from 24% to 78%) as college readiness goes from “not/least ready” to “most ready.”

**Table 1**

**Enrollment Status of 113,660 Students in the Illinois Class of 2002 by the Third Year After High School Graduation, by College Readiness**

College Readiness	Enrolled All Three Years	Enrolled Two of The Three Years	Enrolled One of The Three Years	Still Not Enrolled Any Time	N
Not/Least Ready	23.5%	14.2%	17.1%	45.2%	39,015
Minimally Ready	37.3%	16.5%	15.8%	30.4%	12,569
Somewhat Ready	52.3%	14.4%	11.8%	21.5%	19,691
More Ready	66.4%	12.9%	8.2%	12.5%	19,879
Most Ready	78.1%	8.3%	4.2%	9.3%	22,506
Total	48.3%	13.1%	11.9%	26.6%	113,660

*The enrollment gap by family-income level is narrowing slowly over the three-year time period, but is still very wide among not/least ready students.*

In a previous report (Gong and Presley, IERC 2006-2), we noted that 21% and 16%, respectively, of the more- and most-ready students did not enroll in any college the first year after high school graduation. By the end of the third year, Table 1 shows that 13% and 9% of these two groups are still out of the postsecondary system. Table 2 shows the change in the proportion enrolled by Year 3. While an additional 8% of more-ready and 6% of most-ready students did start college after one or two “gap” year(s), it remains intriguing that about one in ten well-prepared students in the Class of 2002 have not attended college three years after high school graduation. At each readiness level, lower-family-income students from the Class of 2002 are somewhat more likely to have started enrollment in college after the first year (2002-2003) in comparison to similarly ready students from higher income families. For example, an additional 14% of not/least ready low-income students had enrolled, compared to 11.5% of those from high-income families, and an additional 10% of most-ready low-income students had enrolled compared

to an additional 7% of those from high-income families. So the enrollment gap by family-income level is narrowing slowly over the three-year time period, but is still very wide among not/least ready students (50% compared to 32%). Among most-ready students, the attendance gap has almost closed by Year 3—12% of low-income most-ready students still are not enrolled, compared to 8-9% of most-ready students from higher-income families.

**Table 2**  
**Percent of Students That Have Not Attended College by the Third Year After High School Graduation and Change From First Year, By Income and College Readiness**

Family Income Quartile	Not/Least Ready		Minimally Ready		Somewhat Ready		More Ready		Most Ready		All Readiness Levels	
	No Attendance in Three Years	Change from First Year	No Attendance in Three Years	Change from First Year	No Attendance in Three Years	Change from First Year	No Attendance in Three Years	Change from First Year	No Attendance in Three Years	Change from First Year	No Attendance in Three Years	Change from First Year
Low	50.0%	-14.0%	34.1%	-12.6%	28.1%	-10.6%	16.5%	-8.5%	11.6%	-9.6%	35.5%	-11.9%
Lower middle	45.5%	-12.0%	31.0%	-12.3%	23.3%	-10.0%	14.1%	-7.9%	8.8%	-5.8%	26.8%	-9.8%
Upper middle	37.4%	-12.8%	23.7%	-10.5%	16.3%	-9.8%	11.0%	-7.6%	7.5%	-5.7%	17.5%	-8.8%
High	32.0%	-11.5%	21.7%	-9.8%	15.4%	-8.4%	9.5%	-9.7%	9.4%	-6.6%	14.2%	-8.6%
Income missing	45.9%	-11.2%	38.8%	-12.1%	20.5%	-8.9%	13.2%	-8.2%	10.6%	-6.5%	32.3%	-9.9%
All income levels	45.2%	-12.1%	30.4%	-11.7%	21.5%	-9.5%	12.5%	-8.4%	9.3%	-6.4%	26.6%	-9.9%

We remind the reader that the actual numbers of low-income students in the most-ready category is small, so these non-enrollees represent a small proportion of all most-ready students who are not enrolled—just 13% compared to 42% who are from high-income families (Table 3). Non-enrolling more-ready students are quite evenly drawn from the four family-income quartiles, while again we see in Table 3 that less-ready non-enrolling students are more likely to be drawn from lower-family income quartiles.

**Table 3**  
**Family Income Distribution of Students Who Have Not Enrolled by the Third Year After High School, by College Readiness**

College Readiness	Low Income	Lower Middle Income	Upper Middle Income	High Income		N*
Not/Least Ready	47%	31%	14%	8%	100%	9,180
Minimally Ready	38%	32%	18%	11%	100%	3,141
Somewhat Ready	39%	31%	17%	12%	100%	3,050
More Ready	22%	30%	26%	22%	100%	1,894
Most Ready	13%	21%	25%	42%	100%	1,566
All readiness levels	39%	30%	17%	13%	100%	18,831

\* Those with missing family-income data are excluded from this table.

### Do Those Who Stopped Enrollment in the Second Year Return to Higher Education the Third Year?

In Year 2 (2003-2004), 23% (7,018) of two-year starters and 6% (2,350) of four-year starters were not enrolled anywhere (Table 4). Of the 7,018 two-year stop-outs, only 17% of them returned in Year 3 (2004-2005)—2% transferred to four-year institutions and 15% returned to two-year institutions—leaving 83% not enrolled in Year 3.

**Table 4**  
Stopout and Return of Year 1 (2002-2003) Starters

	Number	Year 2 Stopouts	Year 3 status		
			Returned to 2-Year Institution	Returned to 4-Year Institution	No Return
Two-year starters	29,743	7,018	15%	2%	83%
Four-year starters	41,450	2,350	14%	9%	77%

Of the 2,350 second-year stop-outs from four-year institutions, 14% re-enrolled at two-year institutions and 9% re-enrolled at four-year institutions, totaling 23% (541) returning to higher education and leaving about three in four still un-enrolled in the third year.

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## Persistence of 2002-2003 College Starters

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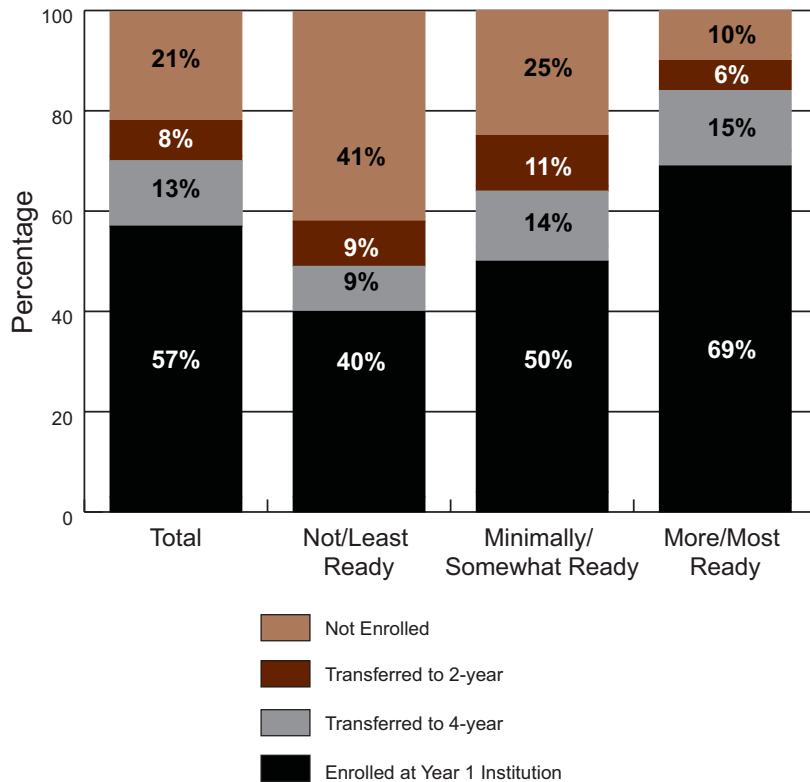
In this section, we provide an overview of the persistence of those members of the Class of 2002 who started college the first year out of high school, by their college readiness, and the institutional sector in which they initially enrolled. In later sections we show the importance of starting full-time, and the role of institutional competitiveness in students’ persistence in college.

### What is the Third Year Persistence of 2002-2003 Starters?

Of those in the Class of 2002 who started college the first year out of high school, 79% (100%-21%) remain enrolled in the third year (Figure 1), with 57% still at their first institution and 21% having transferred to other institutions. There is also a strong relationship between students’ college readiness and their persistence. For example, 90% of more/most-ready students were still enrolled, with 69% at their first institutions. By Year 3 (2004-2005), 14-15% of both minimally/somewhat-ready students and more/most-ready students had transferred to a four-year institution. (This could be transfer from one four-year institution to another, or from the two-year sector to the four-year sector. We provide more information on this later in the report.) The corresponding numbers for the not/least ready students are 59% still enrolled, with 40% still at their first institutions.

*Of those in the Class of 2002 who started college the first year out of high school, 79% remain enrolled in the third year, with 57% still at their first institution and 21% having transferred to other institutions.*

**Figure 1**  
**Third Year Enrollment Status (AY 2004-2005) of Those Who Went to College in AY 2002-2003, by College Readiness**

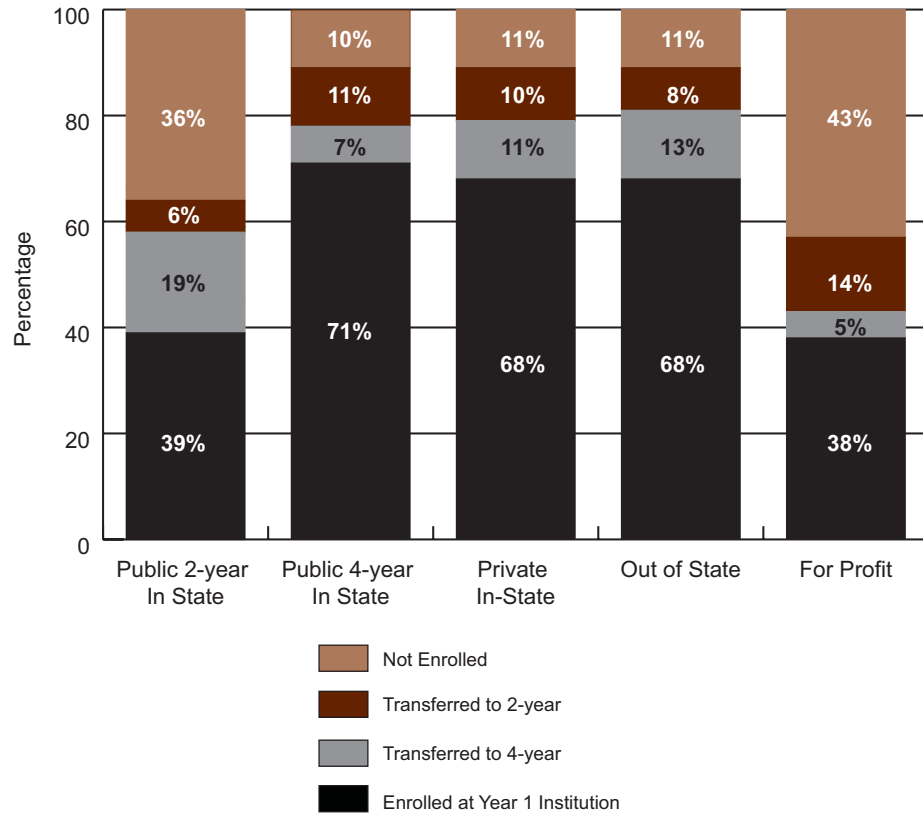


In the next chart (Figure 2) we show overall continuation and transfer rates by college type. Not surprisingly, we can see that there are differences in persistence among students attending two-year versus four-year institutions. What is striking, however, is the importance of the transfer data to our assessment of persistence. Including these data provides a very different picture of both student success and system success at both the two-year and four-year levels. Of those who started college at an Illinois public two-year institution, nearly two thirds (64%) are still enrolled somewhere in Year 3. We see that 39% remain enrolled at their first institution, another 19% transferred to a four-year institution and 6% transferred to a different two-year institution, leaving about one third (36%) not enrolled anywhere. For four-year starters, 70% remain at their first institution and about 20% transferred to other institutions, leaving 10%–11% who are not enrolled in the higher education system. About half of the transfers are “reverse transfers” to the two-year sector. For-profit institutions have the largest percentage of starters not enrolled anywhere the third year (43%).

*What is striking is the importance of the transfer data to our assessment of persistence. Including these data provides a very different picture of both student success and system success.*

**Figure 2**  
**Third Year Enrollment Status (AY 2004-2005) of Those Who Went to College in AY 2002-2003, by College Type**

Among four-year starters, only 10-11% are not enrolled anywhere in Year 3. Another 8-11% have "reverse-transferred" to the two-year sector.



**Who Are the Inter-Sector Transfer Students?**

*Two-Year to Four-Year Transfers*

Two-year to four-year transfer students were initially somewhat less ready for college than those who enrolled as freshmen at a four-year institution

In this section we examine two-year starters who were enrolled in a four-year institution in Year 3, and where they went. Almost half (45%) were initially college ready (more plus most ready), while 19% started out as not/least ready students (Table 5). This compares to 66% and 11%, respectively, of four-year starters. We will be able to compare over time whether this group of students is as likely to

**Table 5**  
**College Readiness of Two-Year to Four-Year Transfer Students and Four-Year Starters in 2002-2003**

College Readiness	Two-Year to Four-Year Transfers by 2004-2005		Four-Year Starters in 2002-2003	
	N	% of Total	N	% of Total
Not/Least Ready	1,049	19%	4,413	11%
Minimally Ready	635	11%	2,594	6%
Somewhat Ready	1,370	24%	6,994	17%
More Ready	1,472	26%	10,847	26%
Most ready	1,071	19%	16,613	40%
Total	5,597	100%	41,461	100%

Note: two-year transfers here include starters in a small number of private or out-of-state institutions.

complete baccalaureate degrees than similarly ready four-year starters who also persisted to Year 3.

What sorts of four-year colleges did these two-year transfers go to? The majority (64%) transferred to competitive institutions (this category of institution enrolls the largest numbers of students), and just 6% transferred to a most/highly competitive institution (Table 6). Perhaps more importantly, the pattern of enrollment for more- and most-ready students shows that they are less likely to enroll in very competitive and most/highly competitive institutions than are similarly ready students in the Class of 2002 who started immediately at a four-year institution. Just 16% of most-ready transfer students enrolled in the most/highly competitive four-year institutions, compared to 41% of four-year starters, and only 13% enrolled in a very competitive institution, compared to 25% of four-year starters.<sup>1</sup> We urge both the two-year and the four-year higher education sectors to consider strategies that would encourage these strongly college-ready students to consider applying for admission to more selective four-year institutions. These results also suggest that, as is being recommended nationally, very and most/highly competitive four-year institutions should also tap this reservoir of college-ready students as transfers.

*Just 16% of most-ready transfer students enrolled in the most/highly competitive four-year institutions, compared to 41% of four-year starters.*

**Table 6**  
**College Competitiveness of Two-Year Transfers and Four-Year Starters**

College Readiness	Two-Year to Four-Year Transfers by 2004-2005				Four-Year Starters in 2002-2003			
	Not/Less Competitive	Competitive	Very Competitive	Most/Highly Competitive	Not/Less Competitive	Competitive	Very Competitive	Most/Highly Competitive
<b>Not/Least Ready</b>	22%	63%	12%	2%	35%	51%	12%	2%
<b>Minimally Ready</b>	22%	62%	13%	2%	27%	61%	11%	1%
<b>Somewhat Ready</b>	17%	67%	12%	5%	17%	58%	20%	5%
<b>More Ready</b>	14%	67%	13%	6%	10%	55%	26%	10%
<b>Most ready</b>	12%	59%	13%	16%	5%	29%	25%	41%
<b>Total</b>	17%	64%	13%	6%	13%	45%	22%	20%

<sup>1</sup> We investigated whether this different institutional enrollment pattern was related to family income, and found that it was not. At each income level, college-ready transfer students are less likely to attend very-competitive and most/highly-competitive four-year institutions than did four-year 2002-2003 starters.



*Four-Year to Two-Year Transfer Students*

We have begun to analyze those students in the Class of 2002 who started at a four-year institution but subsequently transferred to a two-year institution—the reverse transfers. In Year 3, 4,026 four-year starters were enrolled in a two-year institution. Adelman (2005), in his study of 1992 high school graduates, reports that 56% of reverse transfers did so three or more years after the first term of attendance at a four-year institution. For this reason, we will defer detailed examination of the characteristics of this group of students in the Class of 2002 until we have further years' enrollment data. In the meantime, we can say that those who transferred by Year 3 were somewhat less college ready than all four-year starters (47% compared to 66%), and somewhat more likely to come from families with incomes in the lower two quartiles (47% compared to 38%) (data not shown).

**What is the Impact of Full-Time and Part-Time Enrollment?**

In our efforts to understand the relationships between various student and college characteristics, we examined the extent to which enrollment status is an intervening variable in the persistence of the Class of 2002. For this analysis, we examine persistence based on whether a student started as a full-time enrollee (as reported by their institution to the National Student Clearinghouse).<sup>2</sup> Table 7 shows the proportion of students starting full time by type of institution. More than 80%

**Table 7**  
**Proportion of 2002-2003 Starters with Initial Full-Time Enrollment Status**

Institutional Type	% FT of FT+PT
Two-Year Institutions	83%
Four-Year Institutions	
Non/less Competitive	96%
Competitive	99%
Very Competitive	99%
Most/Highly Competitive	100%
Total, All Institutions	93%

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that students move from full-time to part-time status and back over time. However, initial enrollment status is an indicator of whether students view postsecondary education as a full-time activity.



of those starting at a two-year institution were reported as full-time students.<sup>3</sup> The proportion enrolling full time jumps to 96% for those attending non/less competitive four-year institutions, and reaches 100% for those attending most/highly competitive institutions.

Table 8 shows the third-year enrollment status of 2002-2003 starters based on whether they started full time, part time, or had missing information on this variable (see footnote 3 regarding missing data). Looking first at four-year starters, we see that the few students (387) who started part time are much less likely to be enrolled anywhere in Year 3—just 50% compared to about 90% for full-time starters—and one quarter had transferred to a two-year institution. For two-year part-time starters, we find an even smaller proportion still enrolled—40% compared to 72% of those who started full time. Furthermore, one quarter of full-time two-year starters had transferred to a four-year institution by Year 3. Starting part time is a tremendous handicap to students’ college persistence, whether they start in the two-year or four-year sector.

*Starting part time is a tremendous handicap to students’ college persistence, whether they start in the two-year or four-year sector.*

**Table 8**  
**Third Year Persistence by Initial Enrollment Status**

First Year Enrollment	Not Enrolled	Enrolled at Year-1 Institution	Transferred to 2-Year Institution	Transferred to 4-Year Institution	System Persistence Rate	N
<b>Starting at a Four-Year Institution</b>						
Full-time	9%	72%	10%	9%	91%	33,266
Part-time	50%	17%	23%	10%	50%	387
Missing	13%	65%	11%	11%	87%	7,792
Total	10%	70%	10%	10%	90%	41,445
<b>Starting at a Two-Year Institution</b>						
Full-time	28%	41%	6%	24%	72%	14,822
Part-time	60%	28%	7%	5%	40%	2,992
Missing	40%	39%	6%	16%	60%	12,920
Total	36%	39%	6%	19%	64%	30734

<sup>3</sup> Our analysis is complicated by the fact that some institutions do not include students’ enrollment status when they provide data to the National Student Clearinghouse. However, by comparing the third-year status of those with missing information to the results for those with known information (see Table 12), we can surmise that most of those with missing information who started at a four-year institution probably started full time since their third year status is very similar to the status of those whom we know started full time. Using the distribution of known persistence among full-time versus part-time starters at two-year institutions, and given that we know the overall distribution of persistence among two-year starters, we were able to estimate that 80% of those with missing enrollment status were probably full-time starters. So the estimated overall full-time rate is 82% at two-year institutions. Remember that we are looking only at traditional-age students who go to college immediately following high school.

**The Role of College Readiness**

*College-ready two-year starters who begin as part-time students are less likely to remain enrolled than are not/least-ready students who start full time.*

We next look at the role of college readiness in this full-time/part-time persistence picture. Since there are so few part-time four-year starters (387), we limit this analysis to **two-year starters** only. Table 9 shows persistence for two-year starters at the three-year enrollment point by initial enrollment status and college readiness. The benefits of full-time enrollment persist at each college-readiness level. For example, among more-ready students, 35% of those who started full-time have transferred to four-year institutions and only 23% have stopped enrollment, while the corresponding rates for part-time students are 11% and 51%. College-ready two-year starters who begin as part-time students are less likely to remain enrolled than are not/least ready-ready students who start full time.

**Table 9**  
**Third Year Status by Freshman-Year Enrollment Status for Two-Year Starters**

First Year Enrollment	Not Enrolled	Enrolled at Year 1 Institution	Transferred to 2-Year Institution	Transferred to 4-Year Institution	System Persistence Rate	N
<b>Not/Least Ready</b>						
Full-Time	36%	43%	8%	13%	64%	5,025
Part-Time	66%	25%	7%	3%	34%	1,628
Missing	50%	37%	6%	7%	50%	5,571
<b>Somewhat Ready</b>						
Full-Time	30%	46%	7%	17%	70%	2,194
Part-Time	60%	29%	7%	4%	40%	484
Missing	43%	38%	7%	13%	57%	2,009
<b>Minimally Ready</b>						
Full-Time	24%	45%	6%	26%	76%	3,392
Part-Time	48%	34%	10%	7%	52%	523
Missing	33%	43%	6%	19%	67%	2,675
<b>More Ready</b>						
Full-Time	23%	38%	4%	35%	77%	2,770
Part-Time	51%	33%	5%	11%	49%	274
Missing	27%	40%	5%	27%	73%	1,833
<b>Most Ready</b>						
Full-Time	19%	27%	3%	50%	81%	1,441
Part-Time	37%	29%	6%	28%	63%	83
Missing	19%	36%	3%	42%	81%	832

Note: 26 students are missing on level of third-year institutions.

## Does Where Students Start Matter?

We have already shown that starting college as a college-ready student and as a full-time student each strongly influences a student’s likelihood of staying enrolled. In this section, we want to examine whether attending different types of institutions is also related to students’ persistence—not only four-year versus two-year, but the competitiveness of the four-year institution, as well. Because we cannot precisely identify who among those with missing enrollment status were actually enrolled full time, and since the purpose of the rest of this section is to examine whether attending different types of institutions adds to students’ likelihood of persisting, we will continue in this section by examining the third year status of 2002-2003 *full-time starters only* to ensure that we are providing an “apples to apples” comparison among different types of institutions. Table 10 shows how persistence increases as institutional selectivity increases. It is important to note first that even for two-year starters, almost three quarters (72%) are still enrolled somewhere in Year 3, about 9 percentage points behind those starting full-time in non/less competitive four-year institutions. Furthermore, the two-year sector is used for “reverse transfer” by 9-14% of all four-year full-time starters (with the exclusion of most/highly competitive starters).

**Table 10**  
**Third Year Status of Full-Time Starters, by First Institution Type**

First Institution Type	Not Enrolled	Enrolled at Year 1 Institution	Transferred to 2-Year Institution	Transferred to 4-Year Institution	System Persistence Rate	N
Two-Year Institutions	28%	41%	6%	24%	72%	14,822
Non/Less Competitive 4-Year	19%	58%	14%	9%	81%	3,780
Competitive 4-Year	10%	68%	12%	10%	90%	14,666
Very Competitive 4-Year	7%	74%	9%	9%	93%	7,078
Most/Highly Competitive 4-Year	3%	88%	3%	5%	97%	7,101

We know that starters at different types of institutions differ in their average college readiness, but does this help to explain the differences we see in Table 10? Table 11 shows third year enrollment status by college readiness, and the same pattern is evident, with similar relative persistence gaps at each student readiness level. So we conclude that students benefit from gaining entrance to a more academically competitive college environment, independent of their college-readiness.

There also appears to be an institutional-type effect on student persistence, even after controlling for students’ college readiness and full-time starter status. We remind the reader that the 86% of the Class of 2002 who started college at a two-year institution in 2002-2003, and 98% of those who started at a four-year institution, indicated in their ACT questionnaire that they expected to earn at least a bachelor’s degree (see Table 3 of Gong and Presley, 2006-2, p. 10).

*Students benefit from gaining entrance to a more academically competitive college environment, independent of their college-readiness.*

**Table 11**  
**Third Year Status of Full-Time Starters, by First Institution Type<sup>4</sup>**

First Institution Type	Not Enrolled	Enrolled at Year 1 Institution	Transferred to 2-Year Institution	Transferred to 4-Year Institution	System Persistence Rate	N
<b>Not/Least Ready</b>						
Two-Year Institutions	36%	43%	8%	13%	64%	5,025
Non/Less Competitive 4-Year	26%	52%	16%	7%	74%	1,004
Competitive 4-Year	17%	56%	17%	11%	83%	1,578
Very Competitive 4-Year	17%	59%	17%	7%	83%	394
Most/Highly Competitive 4-Year	11%	73%	8%	7%	89%	83
<b>Minimally Ready</b>						
Two-Year Institutions	30%	46%	7%	17%	70%	2,194
Non/Less Competitive 4-Year	21%	52%	18%	9%	79%	503
Competitive 4-Year	16%	57%	18%	9%	84%	1,184
Very Competitive 4-Year	13%	63%	18%	6%	87%	234
Most/Highly Competitive 4-Year	0%	88%	9%	3%	100%	32
<b>Somewhat Ready</b>						
Two-Year Institutions	24%	45%	6%	26%	76%	3,392
Non/Less Competitive 4-Year	18%	56%	17%	8%	82%	880
Competitive 4-Year	12%	64%	14%	10%	88%	3,281
Very Competitive 4-Year	11%	64%	16%	9%	89%	1,098
Most/Highly Competitive 4-Year	6%	73%	11%	10%	94%	330
<b>More Ready</b>						
Two-Year Institutions	23%	38%	4%	35%	77%	2,770
Non/Less Competitive 4-Year	16%	61%	12%	12%	84%	815
Competitive 4-Year	8%	70%	11%	11%	92%	4,903
Very Competitive 4-Year	8%	72%	9%	10%	92%	2,183
Most/Highly Competitive 4-Year	4%	84%	5%	7%	96%	896
<b>Most Ready</b>						
Two-Year Institutions	19%	27%	3%	50%	81%	1,441
Non/Less Competitive 4-Year	9%	75%	7%	10%	91%	578
Competitive 4-Year	6%	78%	6%	10%	94%	3,720
Very Competitive 4-Year	4%	82%	5%	9%	96%	3,169
Most/Highly Competitive 4-Year	3%	90%	2%	5%	97%	5,760

<sup>4</sup> In order to test the differences in persistence based on whether students start at a two-year versus a four-year institution more rigorously, we used regression analysis, a statistical technique that lets us control for many student demographic and academic attributes in addition to college readiness and initial enrollment status. After controlling for students' precollege academic preparation, precollege degree expectation, whether they started full time, their expected hours to work during college, family income, and other factors, initial attendance at a two-year college reduced the likelihood of remaining in higher education the third year by about 12 percentage points. The finding persists when we look only at more/most ready students.

**Estimate of the Difference in Persistence Between Two-Year Starters and Four-Year Starters**

Model*	Estimate	Delta-p
All Students	-0.6123**	-0.1177
More/Most Ready Students	-0.8488**	-0.1010

\* All models include as control variables gender, race/ethnicity, family income, college readiness, math courses taken in high school, core, high school region and locale, highest degree expected to receive, certainty about major, enrolled full time or part time, expected hours to work during college.

\*\* p < .001

These results suggest that the more-competitive four-year institutions may be able to provide more help and attention to their less-ready enrollees because those students constitute a quite small component of the institutions' student bodies. Rather than being more likely to leave institutions for which students are "under-prepared," these data provide strong evidence that students benefit from gaining entrance to a more competitive college environment, independent of their college-readiness. College readiness still matters, but so does where students attend.

*College readiness still matters, but so does where students attend.*

### **What is the Role of Work During College?**

A recent study from the American Council on Education (King, 2006) showed that, nationally, 78% of undergraduates worked while they were enrolled, a rate that has not changed since at least the mid-1990s. These students spent an average of 30 hours per week working. The report also showed no differences in work patterns regardless of age, gender, race/ethnicity, or even income or educational and living expenses. King also reported that large shares of white and upper-income students work more than 20 hours a week and about one quarter of full-time students in her national sample work full time. In an earlier study, King showed that low-income students who combined borrowing with part-time work (especially less than 15 hours) were more likely to enroll full time, and more likely to attend a four-year institution, both of which are predictors of persistence (King, 2002).

Unfortunately, we do not have information on the work patterns while in college of the Class of 2002. But we do know what their *work expectations* were when they responded to the ACT questionnaire as part of taking the ACT. We have shown in the previous section that students who start college on a part-time basis are more likely not to remain enrolled in Year 3. It is probable that most of these part-time students are working, and this may indeed contribute to their discontinuing their studies. But how does work impact full-time students? We look at the pre-college work expectations of those in the Class of 2002 who started college *full time* and examine whether their expected work hours are related to college persistence (Table 12). As expected work hours increase, the proportion of full-time starters enrolled two years later declines within each college-readiness level, both for two-year and for four-year starters. We cannot read too much into these results because they do not represent actual work hours in college, but they do suggest that most of Illinois' traditional-age students may be trying to juggle work and study in ways that are similar to those described in the national study (King, 2006). As King said, "... for some students, work may be an absolute necessity; for others, working may represent a choice about consumption levels" (King, 2006, p. 6). The policy implications are not simple, but what is clear is that many students are working their way through college.

*Most of Illinois' traditional-age students may be trying to juggle work and study.*

**Table 12**  
**Third Year Status of Full-Time Starters by College Sector, College Readiness and Expected Work Hours**

Expected hours of work during first year of college	Four-Year Starters					Two-Year Starters				
	Not Enrolled	Enrolled at Year-1 Institution	Transferred to 2-Year Institution	Transferred to 4-Year Institution	N	Not Enrolled	Enrolled at Year-1 Institution	Transferred to 2-Year Institution	Transferred to 4-Year Institution	N
<b>Not/Least Ready</b>										
0-10 hours	19%	51%	17%	13%	566	33%	44%	8%	15%	845
11-20 hours	24%	44%	20%	12%	535	36%	44%	8%	12%	1,288
21 and more hours	35%	44%	15%	6%	357	46%	41%	7%	6%	1,054
<b>Somewhat Ready</b>										
0-10 hours	13%	59%	16%	13%	831	25%	46%	5%	24%	522
11-20 hours	19%	54%	19%	8%	778	28%	46%	8%	18%	942
21 and more hours	23%	51%	19%	7%	389	36%	45%	7%	11%	673
<b>Minimally Ready</b>										
0-10 hours	9%	68%	12%	10%	1,866	18%	42%	5%	35%	704
11-20 hours	15%	59%	16%	10%	1,595	24%	46%	5%	24%	1,225
21 and more hours	22%	50%	22%	7%	705	29%	48%	7%	16%	845
<b>More Ready</b>										
0-10 hours	6%	76%	7%	10%	3,567	18%	35%	3%	44%	554
11-20 hours	10%	67%	12%	10%	2,968	22%	38%	5%	36%	1,232
21 and more hours	18%	58%	15%	9%	904	28%	40%	5%	27%	628
<b>Most Ready</b>										
0-10 hours	3%	87%	3%	7%	6,656	15%	28%	3%	55%	341
11-20 hours	5%	80%	6%	8%	3,789	18%	26%	3%	53%	639
21 and more hours	10%	74%	9%	8%	903	28%	31%	4%	37%	296
<b>All Readiness Levels</b>										
0-10 hours	6%	78%	7%	9%	13,486	23%	40%	5%	31%	2,966
11-20 hours	10%	69%	12%	9%	9,665	26%	41%	6%	26%	5,326
21 and more hours	19%	58%	15%	8%	3,258	35%	43%	6%	16%	3,496

Missing data for 6,857 four-year starters and 3,034 two-year starters not included in the table.



## What Happened to Those Who Went to Other States for College in AY 2002-2003?

Illinois sends a large number of freshman students to other states (Gong & Presley, IERC 2006-2). The longitudinal study of the Class of 2002 provides data that enables us to examine whether they stay out of state or return, and where they transfer to. Looking first at the data for four-year starters, we see that 2,334, or 20% of the original 11,744 migrants, transferred to another institution by Year 3, and about 71% (1,656) of those transfers, or 14% (20%\*71%) of all out-of-state enrollees, returned to Illinois institutions by the third year (Table 13). Meanwhile, 648 first year in-state enrollees transferred to institutions in other states during the same period. As a result, Illinois regained about 1000 out-of-state four-year starters by Year 3. Interestingly, more than half of in-

*More than half of in-state four-year starters who transferred moved to a two-year institution.*

state four-year starters who transferred moved to a two-year institution.

Among the small number of those in the Class of 2002 who started at an out-of-state two-year institution, one third transferred to another institution by Year 3, most likely to an out-of-state four-year institution (Table 14). More

*1,244 in-state two-year starters transferred to an out-of-state institution.*

significant are the 1,244 in-state two-year starters who

**Table 13**  
Third Year Status of Out-of-State and In-State Starters at Four-Year Institutions

Four-Year Starters								
First Year Out-of-State Enrollees				First Year In-State Enrollees				
Transfers Who Returned to Illinois	To 4-Year Institutions	40%	937	Transfers Who Stayed in Illinois	To 4-Yr Institutions	35%	1,946	
	To 2-Year Institutions	31%	719		To 2-Year Institutions	54%	3,025	
Transfers Who Remained Out-of-State	To 4-Year Institutions	22%	511	Transfers Who Went Out-of-State	To 4-Year Institutions	9%	533	
	To 2-Year Institutions	7%	167		To 2-Year Institutions	2%	115	
Total Out-of-State Starters Who Transferred			100%	2,334	Total In-State Starters Who Transferred		100%	5,619
Net Return = (937 + 719) - (533 + 115) = 1,008								
Remained at Year 1 Institution			8,432	Remained at Year 1 Institution			20,216	
Not Enrolled in Year 3			978	Not Enrolled in Year 3			3,023	
Total Out-of-State Starters			11,744	Total In-State Starters			28,858	

**Table 14**  
Third Year Status of Out-of-State and In-State Starters at Two-Year Institutions

Two-Year Starters								
First Year Out-of-State Enrollees				First Year In-State Enrollees				
Transfers Who Returned to Illinois	To 4-Year Institutions	17%	54	Transfers Who Stayed in Illinois	To 4-Yr Institutions	63%	4,633	
	To 2-Year Institutions	26%	82		To 2-Year Institutions	20%	1,434	
Transfers Who Remained Out-of-State	To 4-Year Institutions	43%	134	Transfers Who Went Out-of-State	To 4-Year Institutions	13%	964	
	To 2-Year Institutions	13%	42		To 2-Year Institutions	4%	280	
Total Out-of-State Starters Who Transferred			100%	312	Total In-State Starters Who Transferred		100%	7,311
Net Return = (54 + 82) - (964 + 280) = -1,108								
Remained at Year 1 Institution			214	Remained at Year 1 Institution			11,719	
Not Enrolled in Year 3			418	Not Enrolled in Year 3			10,705	
Total Out-of-State Starters			944	Total In-State Starters			29,735	

transferred to an out-of-state institution. Overall, Illinois had a net loss of about 1,100 two-year starters to out-of-state institutions by Year 3.

In combination, the number of out-of-state starters transferring to an in-state institution just about balanced the number of in-state starters who had transferred to an out-of-state institution by Year 3.

## How Many Two-Year Starters Have Completed Programs by 2004-2005?

This report includes data covering the first three years of college for those in the Class of 2002 who started college immediately after high school. During this period, it is possible that some students have completed programs requiring two years or less of study. We obtained completions data from the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) covering the years 2002-2003 through 2004-2005 to examine this question. We begin by providing an overview of Illinois community college awards to the Class of 2002, and then examine whether these awards went to those who subsequently transferred, and/or to those who were not enrolled anywhere in Year 3.

*By the end of the third year, 16% of the Illinois public two-year starters have earned at least one degree/certificate.*

By the end of the third year, 4,741 students, or 16% of the Illinois public two-year starters, have earned at least one degree/certificate (Table 15).<sup>5</sup> Degrees in transfer programs were the most common among all degree/certificate completions (3,142, or 66% of all awards). More-ready and most-ready students were most likely to have earned an award (20% and 28% respectively). Only 8% of not/least ready starters had earned an award of any kind by 2004-2005.

**Table 15**  
Degrees/Certificates Awarded to Illinois Community College Starters by the End of the Third Year (2004-2005), by College Readiness

College Readiness	No Degree or Certificate	Degrees in Transfer Programs	Degrees in Career Programs	Occupational Certificates	Basic Skills Certificates	N
Not/Least Ready	92%	3%	1%	2%	< 0.5%	11,814
Minimally Ready	87%	8%	2%	3%	< 0.5%	4,532
Somewhat Ready	82%	12%	3%	3%	< 0.5%	6,393
More Ready	73%	20%	4%	3%	< 0.5%	4,734
Most Ready	66%	28%	4%	2%	0%	2,288
<b>Total</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>&lt; 0.5%</b>	<b>29,761</b>
N	25,020	3,142	790	766	43	

<sup>5</sup> We found 560 four-year starters who had also received an Illinois community college award by the end of 2004-2005. While 61% of this small group earned an Associate transfer degree (339) and almost 7% a career degree (39), 32% earned an occupational certificate as their highest award (178), compared to 16% earning an occupational certificate among two-year starters who earned an award.



While it is useful to see this overall award picture, it is also helpful to know whether awards were earned by those who were not enrolled anywhere in Year 3, or those who had transferred to the four-year sector. Of the 36% (10,705 students) of two-year starters who were not enrolled in any postsecondary institution by the third year after initial Illinois community college, most (94%) had not completed any program before they stopped out of the higher education system (Table 16). Almost half (47%) of not/least ready starters were not enrolled anywhere in Year 3, and almost none (about 4%) had received any kind of award. Even among more- and most-ready system stop-outs, most have initially departed from the postsecondary system without any degree/certificate in hand. And this is not because these students did not aspire to more success—in our college-going report (Gong & Presley, 2006-2), we showed that 86% of two-year starters expected to earn a bachelor’s degree. We will be tracking how many of these students actually return within the next three years (for a total of six years) to continue their postsecondary studies.

*Most two-year stop-outs had not completed any program.*

**Table 16**  
**Third Year Enrollment and Completion Status of Illinois Community College Starters, by College Readiness**

College Readiness	Not Enrolled		Enrolled at Year 1 Institution		Transferred to 2-Year Institution		Transferred to 4-Year Institution		N
	Without Degree or Certificate	With Degree or Certificate	Without Degree or Certificate	With Degree or Certificate**	Without Degree or Certificate	With Degree or Certificate	Without Degree or Certificate	With Degree or Certificate	
Not/Least Ready	45%	2%	34%	4%	6%	<0.5%	7%	2%	11,798
Minimally Ready	36%	2%	34%	7%	6%	<0.5%	10%	4%	4,529
Somewhat Ready	27%	2%	35%	9%	5%	1%	15%	6%	6,391
More Ready	23%	3%	28%	11%	3%	1%	19%	12%	4,730
Most Ready	16%	3%	21%	10%	2%	1%	27%	20%	2,287
Total	34%	2%	32%	7%	5%	1%	13%	6%	29,735*

\* Information on level of third year institution was missing for 26 students.

\*\* Note that students who were still enrolled in their Year 1 institution in Year 3 could also be reported as having earned an award since we included awards made in that same year -- 2004-2005.

Early transfer is more likely for college-ready two-year starters—almost half of the most-ready starters had transferred by Year 3, and almost half of these transferees did so with an Illinois community college award in hand. More-ready students, whom we also consider to be “college ready,” also show a strong four-year-institution transfer rate (19% + 12% = 31%), with fewer earning an award before they did so. Almost half of two-year to four-year transfer students so far were initially college ready. About a third of not-college-ready (not/least ready through somewhat ready) were still enrolled in their first two-year institution in Year 3, and another 5% had transferred to a different two-year institution. We will be able to update these students’ progress in later reports.

*Early transfer is more likely for college-ready two-year starters—almost half of the most-ready starters had transferred by Year 3.*

## **Recommendations**

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Several key policy variables and recommendations have begun to emerge during our first three years of tracking the Illinois public high school Class of 2002.

First, academic readiness is vital to both college access and persistence in higher education, and high schools must maintain a laser-like focus on intellectual rigor. Students, teachers, guidance counselors, and leaders in Illinois middle schools and high schools and the policy arena must have a clear and firm understanding of the knowledge and skills that are expected of college freshmen, and must work together to put forth the effort and structures needed to ensure their acquisition. College freshmen need to enter higher education ready to learn in order to make the most of the opportunity.

Secondly, attending college full-time trumps college readiness as a predictor of persistence. Teachers, counselors, financial aid advisors, and the higher education community should work together to ensure that students and their parents understand the financial aid resources that are available to them—including loans when needed—as alternatives to extensive employment while attending college.

And finally, the initial choice of college type matters. Students who start at two-year institutions need a supportive institutional and policy environment that facilitates retention and transfer to four-year institutions. Now that two-year institutions and less-selective four-year institutions are much more likely to have ACT scores for at least their traditional-age entrants (because they took the test as part of PSAE), these types of institutions should identify academically talented students upon entry to be sure that they receive strong encouragement to remain enrolled, and for the two-year sector, transfer especially to very- and most/highly competitive four-year institutions. In turn, four-year institutions must take responsibility to help community college students—especially the more than 7,000 who start college ready—make the transition to the four-year sector after having spent their first year(s) in the usually smaller, more local environment of a two-year institution. Some of these students will be living away from home for the first time while trying to negotiate a peer group that has had the opportunity to bond and become comfortable with campus life. These students deserve scholarship opportunities, assurance of course transfers and respectful academic advising, and access to residential housing.

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The Illinois Education Research Council was established in 2000 at Southern Illinois University to provide Illinois with education research to support P-16 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 an annual research symposium, the IERC brings objective and reliable evidence to the work of state policy makers and practitioners.