

Growing With Data

A Partnership With the National Student Clearinghouse

2021–22 Progress Report

Building upon its focus on student success in quality assurance and supported by funding from Lumina Foundation, HLC initiated a data partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse in 2021. This partnership allows HLC to gain deeper insight into the student populations served by HLC’s member institutions and access to key student outcome metrics without placing the reporting burden on the institutions. In addition to the Clearinghouse data, HLC examines federal data sources such as the IPEDS surveys and the College Scorecard, as well as survey data collected from member institutions on student success measures and other sources. These research initiatives are grounded in HLC’s growing body of work on defining and advancing student success, as evinced in a series of recent whitepapers also completed with Lumina’s support.¹ The research results will guide HLC in developing benchmarks for differentiated groups of institutions and enhance its capacity to monitor and review institutional performance relative to student outcomes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The National Student Clearinghouse (the Clearinghouse) has described itself as a nationwide network of nearly 3,600 postsecondary institutions that represents 97% of the postsecondary enrollment today. Working with the institutions that are both members of HLC and the Clearinghouse and making use of the data

submitted by the HLC institutions for specific entering student cohorts, the Clearinghouse has agreed to provide HLC with a series of reports, modeled on the Clearinghouse’s research reports on national trends in student outcomes. In the first phase of the data partnership, the Clearinghouse provided HLC with the student outcome metrics reported in aggregate for use as existing HLC benchmarks. In the second phase, the Clearinghouse will provide institutional-level reports upon receiving consent from participating institutions to release information. This more granular information will enable closer engagement with individual institutions for purposes of continuous improvement.

RESEARCH DATA DESCRIPTION

Using data reported to the Clearinghouse by HLC member institutions, the Clearinghouse provided HLC with three data reports on the student outcomes measures and entering student cohorts listed on page 2. The student outcome measures included in the research data were defined by the Clearinghouse in its national research reports, and the beginning postsecondary student cohorts included in the reports are first-time-in-college, degree- or certificate-seeking students.



¹ See hlcommission.org/student-success

- **Persistence and Retention Report**

- Student outcome measures: First-to-second-year persistence and retention outcomes
- Beginning college student cohorts: Fall 2014–Fall 2018

- **Completing College Report**

- Student outcome measures: degree and certificate completion outcomes within six years of study
- Beginning college student cohorts: Fall 2010–Fall 2014

- **Tracking Transfers Report**

- Student outcome measures: cohort transfer-out rate, cohort transfer-with-award rate (earning a certificate or associate degree from the community college), and cohort bachelor’s degree completion rate
- Beginning college student cohorts at community colleges: Fall 2010–Fall 2013

Student and Institutional Characteristics

HLC seeks to study student persistence, retention, transfer, and completion outcomes at member institutions within the context of student and

institutional characteristics. The student characteristics examined in the research data (varying across reports) are:

- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Age at entry
- Enrollment intensity
- Program level
- Major field

The institutional characteristics include:

- Control (public, private not-for-profit and private for-profit)
- Level (two-year, four-year)
- Urbanicity (rural, suburban/town, urban)

PHASE 1: AGGREGATE DATA FROM HLC MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

The aggregate data from HLC member institutions provided by the Clearinghouse in the first phase of the data partnership were analyzed and compared to the national data that were reported in the Clearinghouse’s research publications (Causey et al., 2022; Gardner, 2022; Shapiro et al., 2017) and their accompanying appendix tables.

Persistence and Retention Rates

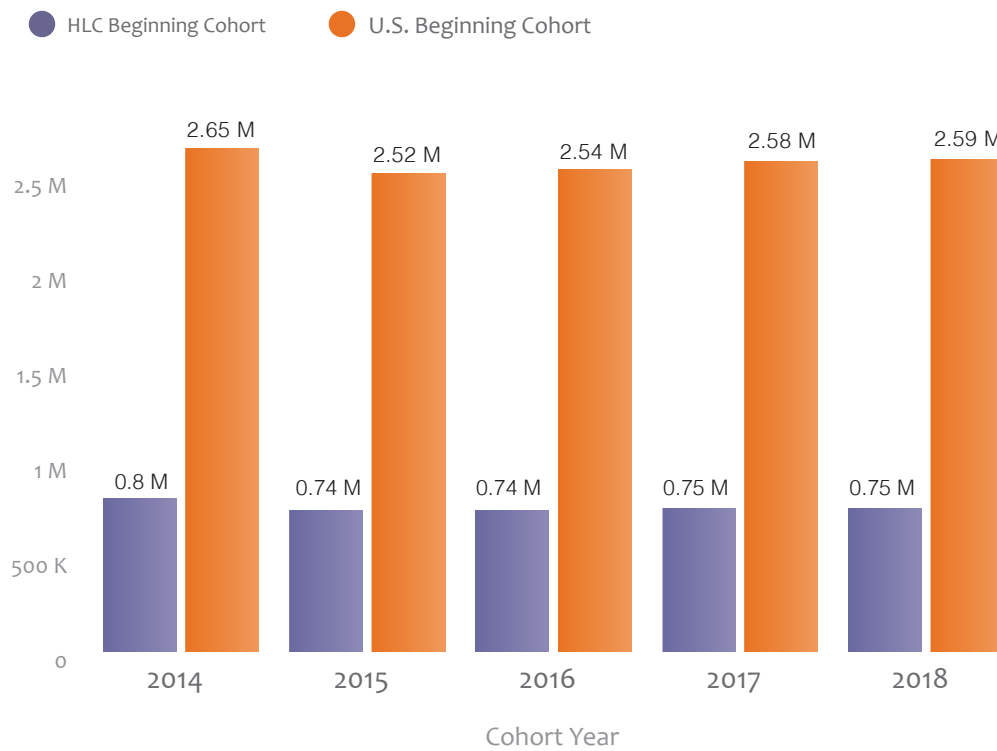
The issue of college student persistence and retention has been identified as one of the key challenges for institutions in their strategic enrollment management efforts. Drawn from the findings of the decades-long research literature, institutions have implemented a wide variety of programs and services to engage and support students in their first year of college studies. These efforts often include curriculum enhancement, high-impact practices and support services that target beginning college students to increase the likelihood of their continued enrollment.



The persistence and retention data provided by the Clearinghouse was based on the beginning college students entering in the fall terms from 2014 to 2018. Based on the Clearinghouse’s data tables (Snapshot Report, Summer 2020), the number of beginning U.S. college students in the fall term 2018 was 2.59 million

students, which was a decrease of 2% from fall 2014. In comparison to the national data, HLC institutions’ cohort of beginning college students in fall 2018 was 0.75 million (29% of the U.S. total), reflecting a decline of 7% from fall 2014.

Figure 1: HLC and the U.S. Beginning Postsecondary Student Cohorts by Year (number of students)



Persistence Rates

Persistence is defined in the Clearinghouse reports as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution—including one different from the institution of initial enrollment—in the fall terms of a student’s first and second year. The persistence rates of the recent student cohorts (fall 2014–2018 cohorts) show a consistent pattern where younger and full-time students persisted at high rates.

For the fall 2018 student cohort, traditional college-aged undergraduate students (aged 20 or younger group) have the highest persistence rate (80%), followed by the 20–24 age group (46%) and the over-24 age group (44%). Students who enrolled full-time persisted at 82%, while only half of the part-time students persisted and 54% of the non-credential students persisted from the first year into the second year.

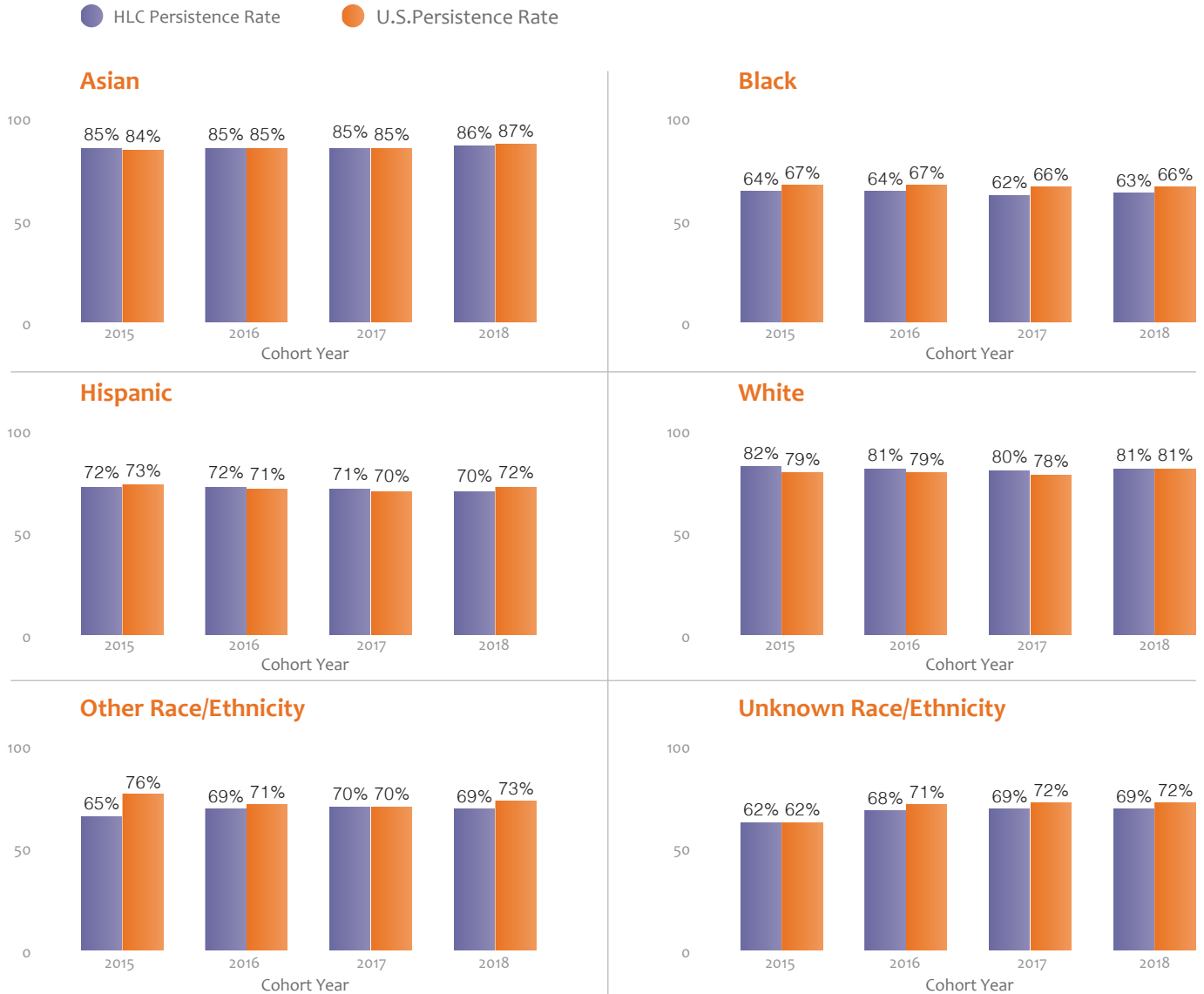
Figure 2: HLC First-year Persistence Rates by Age at Entry and Enrollment Intensity (%)



The persistence rates by race/ethnicity as reported by the Clearinghouse showed that Asian students persisted at the highest level at 87% nationally, followed by white students (81%), Hispanic students (72%) and Black students (66%). When compared to the overall

national averages, HLC institutions' persistence rates by race/ethnicity closely tracked the national levels. It is noted that the persistence rate of Black students at HLC institutions was about 3% lower than the national average.

Figure 3: HLC and the U.S. First-year Persistence Rates by Race/Ethnicity (%)



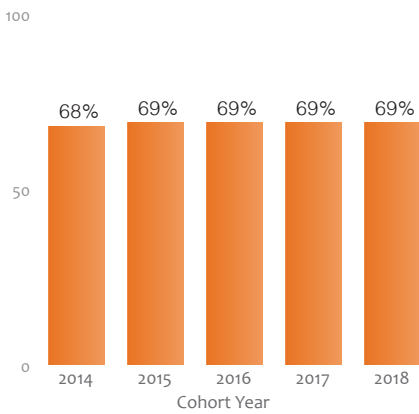
Retention Rates

First-year retention rate is defined as the percentage of entering student cohort who continues to enroll at the institution in the second consecutive fall term. The Clearinghouse reports provide a breakdown of the retention rates by age at entry and enrollment intensity. Retention rates are expected to be lower than the

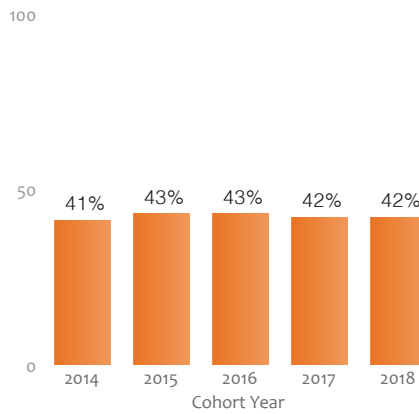
persistence rates because these rates are calculated based on the continued enrollment at the starting institutions. Similar to what was observed earlier with the persistence rates, younger and full-time students retained at rates (69% and 72%, respectively) that were much higher than that among older and part-time students.

Figure 4: HLC First-year Retention Rates by Age at Entry and Enrollment Intensity (%)

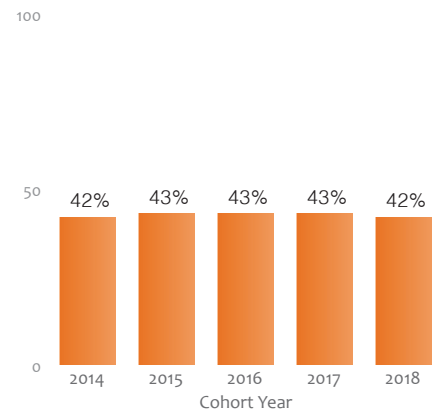
Age 20 or Younger



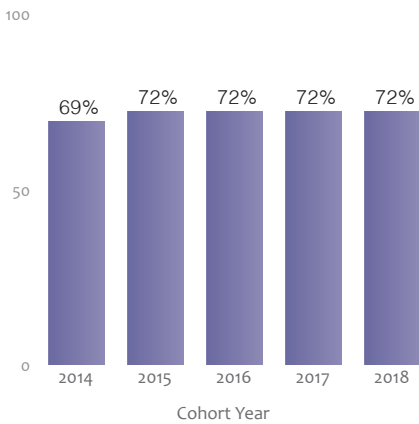
>20-24



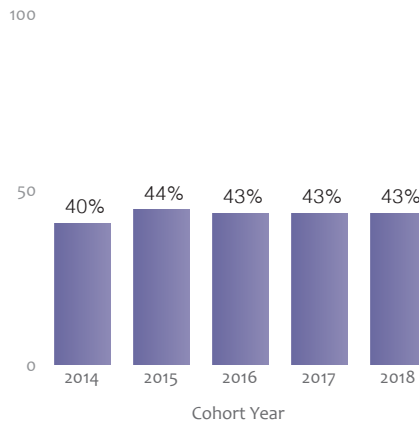
Over age 24



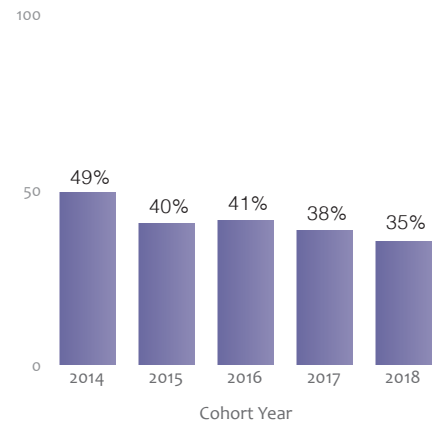
Full-time



Part-time



Non-Credential



As with the persistence rates, the first-year retention rates varied across racial/ethnic categories. Asian and white students were retained at higher rates than

Hispanic and Black students. Compared to the national average, Black students at HLC institutions retained at a slightly lower rate.

Figure 5: HLC and the U.S. First-year Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity (%)

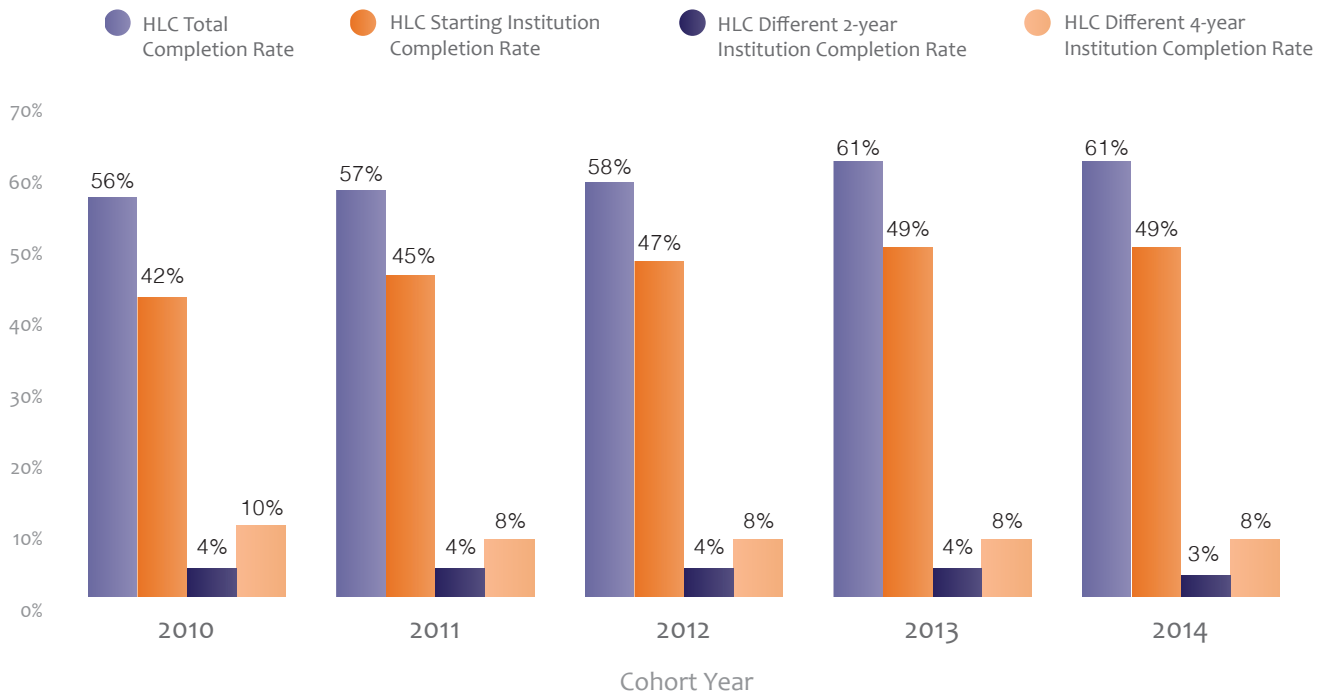


Six-year Completion Rates

One of the most important measures of college completion that the Clearinghouse reports is the total completion rate, which is a combined rate of completion at the starting institution, completion at a different 4-year institution, and completion at a different 2-year

institution. HLC institutions' data for the fall 2014 entering cohort shows a total completion rate of 61%, a gain of 5 percentage points from 56% in the fall 2010 cohort. This gain was largely due to the increase in the completion rate at the starting institutions, which moved from 42% to 49% over this 5-year period.

Figure 6: HLC's Overall Total Completion Rate and Its Components by Cohort Year (%)



Six-year Completion Rate by Sector

Institutional sector is one of the ways that the Clearinghouse uses to benchmark the completion rates among institutions. Figure 7 indicates that HLC institutions' total completion rates of the fall 2014 cohort had a wide range, from a low of 38% among private for-profit institutions to a high of 74% among

private not-for-profit institutions. Two-year public institutions had a total completion rate of 42%, more than a quarter of which was contributed by the results achieved after students had transferred out. Four-year public institutions had a total rate of 69%, which includes about 12% completion of transfer students.

Figure 7: HLC's Total Completion Rate and Its Components by Sector (%)

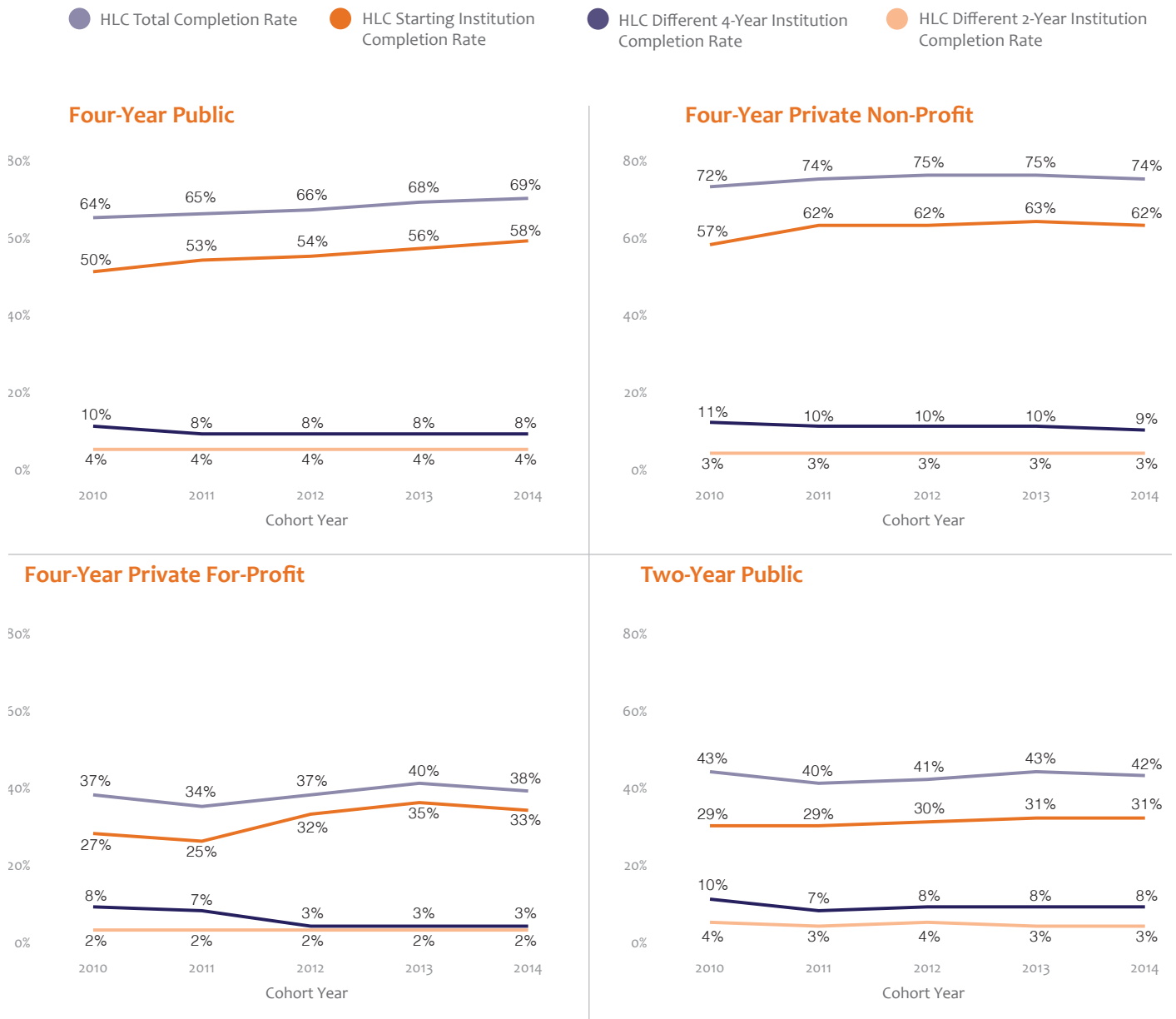
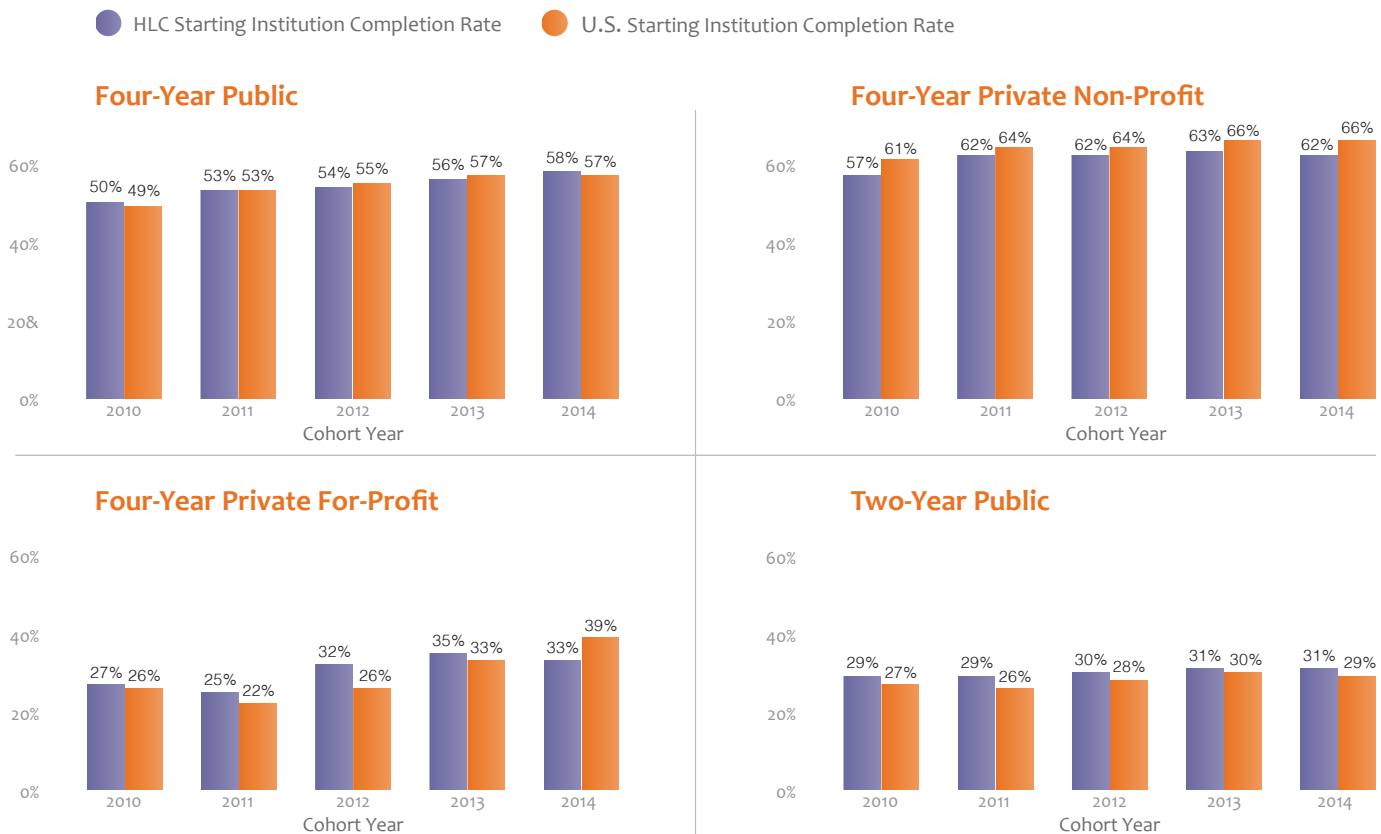


Figure 8 shows a side-by-side comparison between HLC’s and the U.S. completion rates at starting institutions by sectors. As data on the fall 2014 cohort indicated, with 58% and 31% completion rates among the four-year and two-year public institutions, HLC institutions had comparable outcomes to the national averages. Notably, HLC’s public two-year colleges

have produced slightly higher completion rates, by two percentage points in the fall 2014 cohort, than the national averages in this sector. However, in comparison to the national completion rate for the fall 2014 cohort, the average completion rates at starting institutions among HLC private non-profit and for-profit institutions were lower by 4% and 6%, respectively.

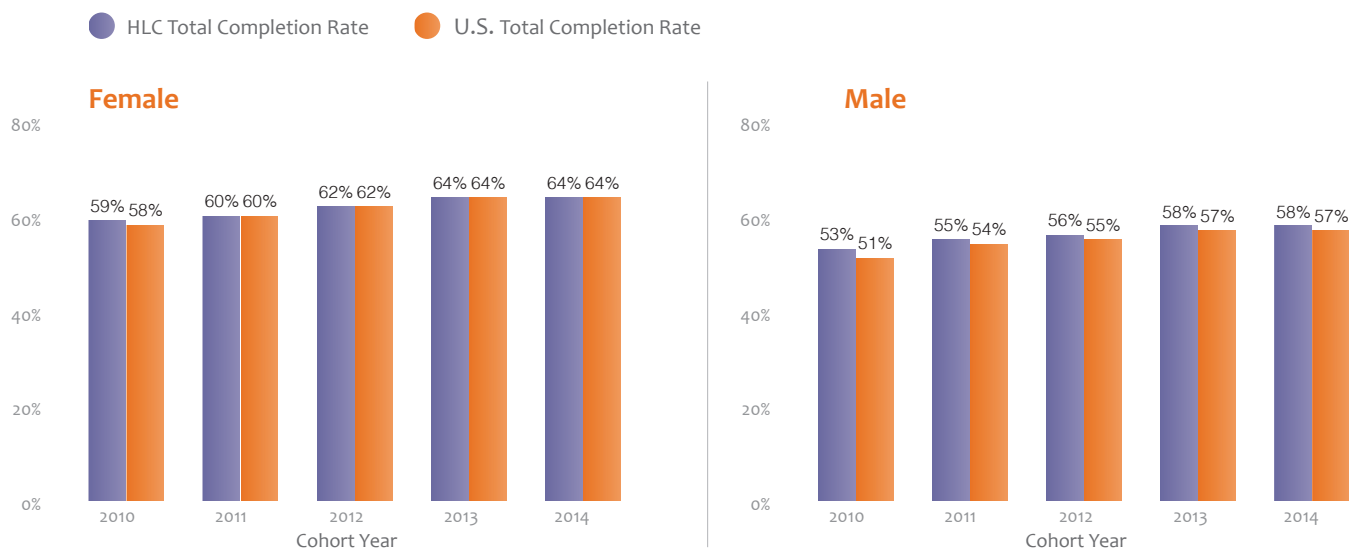
Figure 8: HLC and the U.S. Completion Rates at Starting Institutions by Sector (%)



The last 5-year trend data in the total completion rates by gender shows that female students had higher success rates than male students. Among HLC institutions, the fall 2014 female student cohort graduated at the rate of 64%, a gain of 6 percentage points from the fall 2010 cohort, and the male students graduated at the rate of 58%, a gain of 5 percentage

points from the fall 2010 cohort. As indicated in the trend data, female completion rates at HLC institutions were at or higher levels than the national average and the total completion rates among male students, although lower than that among female students, were also higher at HLC institutions through these cohort years.

Figure 9: HLC and the U.S. Total Completion Rates by Gender (%)



The total completion rates by race/ethnicity showed a similar pattern to that which was found earlier in the data on persistence and retention rates. Among HLC institutions, in the fall 2014 student cohort, Asian and white students lead in the total completion rates, 73%

and 68%, respectively, followed by Hispanic students (51%) and Black students (37%). Also, like previous findings relative to persistence and retention rates, Black students at HLC institutions had a lower total completion rate than the national average.

Figure 10: HLC and the U.S. Total Completion Rates by Race/Ethnicity (%)



Note: Completion rates of other race/ethnicity groups were not included in this chart due to the mismatched categories in the aggregate data for HLC institutions and the national data reported in Causey et al. (2022).

The total completion rates by enrollment intensity clearly show that students enrolling exclusively full-time had an exceedingly high chance of completion within 6 years of study, namely 81% among HLC institutions and

82% among all U.S. institutions. Mixed enrolled students had about a 4 in 10 chance, and exclusively part-time students only had about a 20% chance of completion within 6 years of study.

Figure 11: HLC and the U.S. Total Completion Rates by Enrollment Intensity (%)

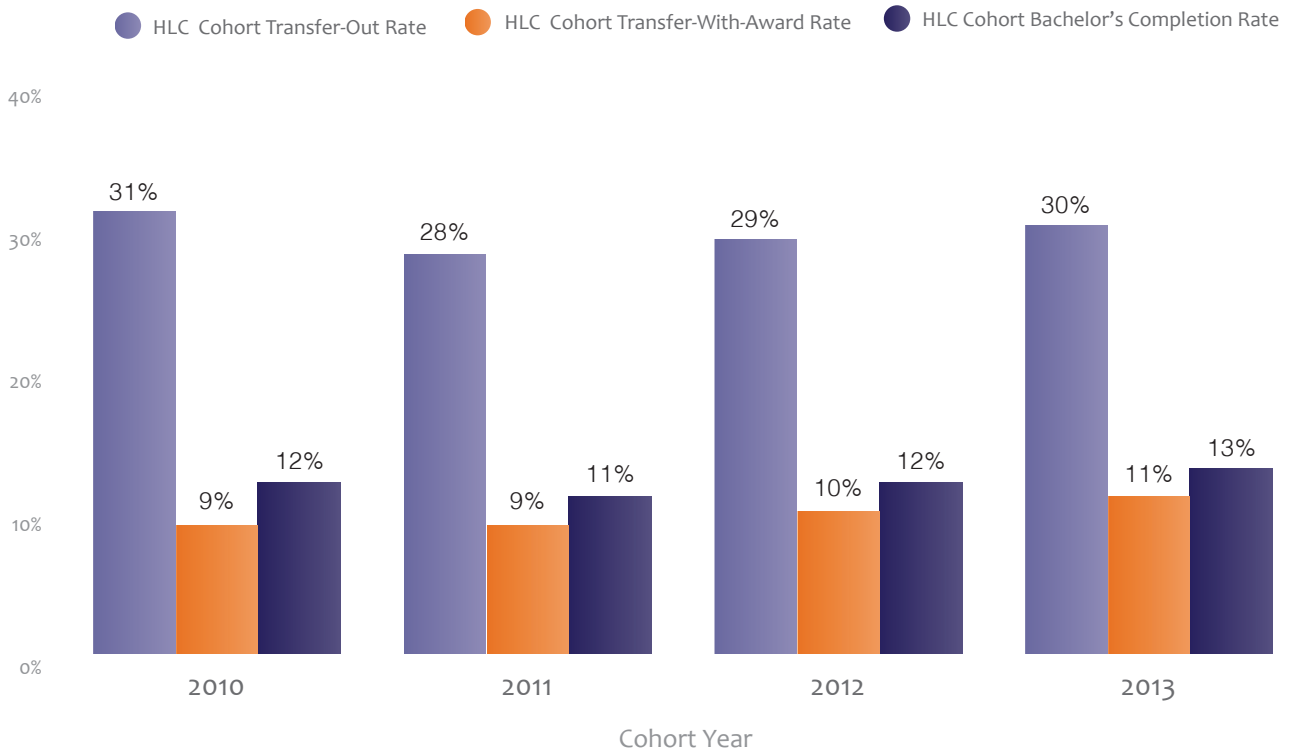


Transfer Outcome Measures

The Clearinghouse reports provide three key outcome areas of transfer students from two-year colleges to four-year institutions: cohort transfer-out rate, cohort transfer with an award of a certificate or associate degree from the originating college, and cohort transfer

with earning a bachelor's degree within 6 years of study. Specifically, among HLC's two-year colleges 30% of students in the fall 2013 cohort transferred out to four-year institutions, 11% transferred with an award, and 13% earned a bachelor's degree within six years of beginning enrollment at a community college.

Figure 12: HLC Transfer Outcome Measures (%)



HLC institutions closely tracked with the national averages in transfer outcomes by gender. Female students transfer out at a slightly higher rate than male students (32% to 29% for HLC). At HLC institutions and

similarly at the national level, the community college cohort bachelor's degree completion rates were nearly the same for female and for male students (15% and 14%, nationally).

Figure 13: HLC and the U.S. Cohort Transfer-Out Rate and Bachelor's Degree Completion Rate By Gender (%)



In summary, the comparisons between data from HLC member institutions and the U.S. data on key measures in persistence, retention, completion, and transfer outcomes across institutional and student characteristics indicate that HLC membership as a group performs at the same level as the national averages. Some areas the HLC membership needs to improve to achieve parity with the national level include completion rates at starting institutions among private institutions, as well as persistence, retention and total completion rates among Black students.

The data also shows an encouraging trend in completion rates at starting institutions, which have improved in the last five student cohorts (fall 2010 to 2014) across all institutional sectors. Notably, HLC's public four-year institutions had the largest gain (8%) in this period and, while public two-year colleges did not achieve as high an increase, they consistently maintained a slight edge over the national average.

Lastly, the data on transfer outcomes of two-year college students shows an almost unchanged trend among the recent cohorts. This data indicates that transfer students, in general, have continued to face many hurdles on the path toward college completion, and there's much to be done to ensure the successful outcomes of transfer students.

PHASE 2: INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL DATA

In the next phase of the data partnership with the Clearinghouse, HLC will examine institutional-level data to gain a better understanding of how data on student outcomes varies across institutions and how the institutional context informs the data. This work will also contribute to the development of relevant benchmarking approaches such as by peer groups or Carnegie classifications.

In spring 2022, HLC reached out to its member institutions to request their authorization for the Clearinghouse to release institutional-level outcome data to HLC. This request was significant because the data that institutions submit to the Clearinghouse is inaccessible to third parties (such as accreditation agencies) without the express permission of the institutions themselves. Most of the membership

has indicated their support for the data partnership in light of HLC's mission-driven research on defining and advancing student success. Among the 970 member institutions that were contacted at the time, 800 institutions consented to release the requested Clearinghouse information, 37 institutions denied consent, 64 institutions did not respond to the request, and 69 institutions indicated that they do not share student data with the Clearinghouse. Since receiving the consent information, the Clearinghouse has indicated to HLC that it will deliver the institutional-level outcome data reports in early fall 2022. HLC is also partnering with the Clearinghouse to extend this research project to include additional cohort years as these data become available.

The detailed information of institutional-level outcome measures will help HLC better understand the differences as well as overarching patterns and trends among institution types and student populations. The Clearinghouse student outcome measures will be examined in conjunction with outcome measures from other data sources, such as IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System), College Scorecard and others, as HLC continues to improve its review and monitoring of institutions relative to student achievement.

References

Causey, J., Pevitz, A., Ryu, M., Scheetz, A., & Shapiro, D. (February 2022), *Completing College: National and State Report on Six-Year Completion Rates for Fall 2015 Beginning Cohort* (Signature Report 20), Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Gardner, A. (June 2022), *Persistence and Retention Fall 2020 Beginning Postsecondary Student Cohort*, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. (September 2017). *Tracking Transfer: Measures of Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students to Complete Bachelor's Degrees* (Signature Report No. 13). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.