

TRANSFER AND PROGRESS

Fall 2022 Report



Transfer and Progress: Fall 2022 Report

About the *Transfer and Progress* report series

This new series is a redesign of the NSC Research Center’s two primary transfer reports, combining the enrollment focus of the [COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility, and Progress](#) reports (how many students enrolled as a transfer within a current term), with the outcomes focus of the [Tracking Transfer](#) reports (what percent of entering community college students reach transfer and completion milestones within six years). It also expands on these reports with additional levels of disaggregation (see [New & Improved on page 2](#)) and introduces a new experimental measure of students’ income background. This new research illustrates how closely postsecondary transfer pathways track students’ socioeconomic circumstances before and after the pandemic began. The new series also significantly expands upon *Tracking Transfer* by additionally analyzing more recent cohort years of community college starters beyond those that began 7-8 years earlier. Coming out of the pandemic, it is particularly valuable for understanding how these pandemic-era starting cohorts fared in their early college careers compared to pre-pandemic cohorts. As data accumulates over time, we can also compare baccalaureate degree attainment rates within six years of enrolling for pandemic-affected cohorts.

This redesigned and expanded report series aims to better serve the education community with new, timely, and detailed data that are only available through the Clearinghouse. These include, but are not limited to, postsecondary participation, mobility, and progress among economically disadvantaged students, disparities in pandemic recovery across differing student and institutional characteristics, and early success indicators for the recent freshman classes at community colleges, the hardest hit sector of higher education during the pandemic. This series was created with the urgent need for timely information in mind, to help educational leaders and policy makers address enduring enrollment impacts from the pandemic.

This first report in the annual Transfer and Progress series covers 11.5 million undergraduate students without a prior bachelor’s degree that were enrolled in fall 2022 in a three-year fixed panel of institutions (fall 2020 to 2022), representing approximately 89.0% of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions. Additionally, to establish the pre-pandemic baseline for all newly introduced metrics, an expanded five-year fixed panel of institutions (fall 2018 to fall 2022) was employed, that represents 11 million undergraduates without a prior bachelor’s degree and 83.8% of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Fall transfer enrollment continues to drop in 2022, but at a slower pace than the previous year. The number of transfer students is decreasing at a higher rate than non-transfer students.
- Upward transfer enrollment fell further in fall 2022, while reverse and lateral transfer began to rise. Upward transfer accounted for the majority of fall 2022's decline in transfer enrollment. Upward transfer deteriorated during the pandemic for students at all income levels.
- With the upward transfer decline continuing from fall 2021, baccalaureate degree programs appear increasingly out of reach for community college students, particularly those enrolled in urban and suburban community colleges, and in transfer-focused community colleges.
- Transfer pathways to highly selective public flagship and private institutions are dominated by students from the top 20% in the U.S. household income distribution.
- For the first time since the pandemic, transfer increased among students returning from a stop out (+5.4% or +26,800 over Fall 2021). Primarily online institutions accounted for nearly 40% of this growth.
- Women fared worse in transfer enrollment overall, especially among continuing transfers.
- Only younger (20 or younger) transfer and non-transfer students made gains in fall 2022.
- The transfer-in population is a diminishing share of the four-year college student body for all races except Black students enrolled in private nonprofit four-years.
- Baccalaureate degree attainment rates for the Fall 2016 community college cohort improved even during their pandemic-impacted 5th and 6th years of enrollment.

Transfer and Progress — New & Improved

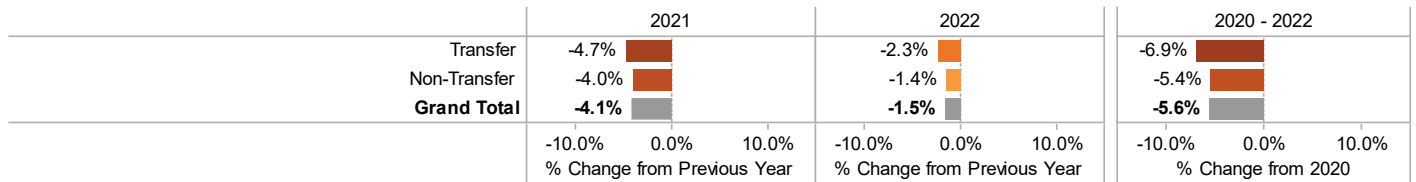
1. Analysis of an experimental measure of student income background (categorized in income quintiles based on the U.S. household income distribution)
2. More comprehensive definition of “community colleges” that is inclusive of both public two-year institutions and primarily associate-degree granting baccalaureate institutions (PABs)
3. Additional community college disaggregation by urbanicity (urban, suburban, and rural & town) and program focus (highly transfer, highly vocational, and mixed)
4. Analysis of changes of major by students along all transfer pathways (analyzed at the two-digit CIP level)
5. Disaggregation of transfer enrollment trends by state
6. Analysis of upward transfer by the selectivity of receiving institutions and by student income quintile, for approximately 1,000 public and private nonprofit four-year institutions
7. New reporting of early success indicators among recent cohorts of community college starters, enabling comparisons between pre-pandemic and pandemic-era cohorts
8. Expanded and interactive data dashboards in Tableau, with the underlying data available for download

SECTION I. FALL TRANSFER ENROLLMENT OVERVIEW 2020-2022

Fall transfer enrollment slowed its decline in 2022, but still decreased at a faster rate than non-transfer enrollment.

Non-freshmen undergraduate enrollment declined at a slower rate in fall 2022 compared to the previous year (-1.5% vs. -4.1%) but declines continued to be steeper for transfers than non-transfers (-2.3% vs. -1.4%), resulting in a 6.9% transfer decline since fall 2020 (see Figure 1). Even with these continued declines, transfer enrollment still represents slightly over 13% of non-freshmen undergraduate enrollment (see Appendix Tab 1).

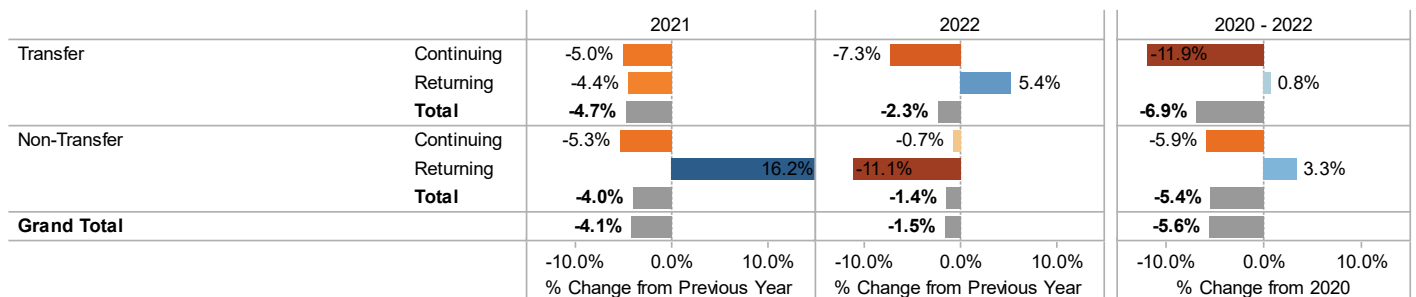
Figure 1. Percent Change in Undergraduate Enrollment by Transfer Status



In fall 2022, continuing transfers declined a further 7.3% (-55,300 students), but transfer enrollment increased among returning students for the first time since the pandemic (+5.4%, +26,800).

Among transfer students, those continuing enrollment into fall 2022 decreased in number compared to fall 2021 (-7.3%, -55,300 vs. -5.0%, -40,000 see Figure 2). Those who returned after stop-out grew in number in fall 2022 compared to fall 2021 (+5.4%, +26,800 vs. -4.4%, -22,900). This is the first time returning transfer enrollment grew since the pandemic began.

Figure 2. Percent Change in Undergraduate Enrollment by Transfer Status and Student Group



Returning transfer student growth was particularly strong at primarily online institutions in fall 2022 (+12.5%, +10,400).

Returning students transferring into primarily online institutions (POIs) in fall 2022 accounted for nearly 40% of the growth in returning students (+10,400 of +26,800, see Appendix Tab 1). Additionally, returning transfer enrollment gains at private for-profit four-year institutions (+14.5%, +1,800), and community colleges (+3.0%, +6,900) resulted in overall transfer enrollment increases for these sectors (see Dashboard Tab 1).

Upward transfer declined further in fall 2022, especially at highly selective public and private four-year institutions.

Upward transfer was the only pathway to continue declining in fall 2022 (-7.5%, -37,600; see Figure 3), resulting in double digit declines of 14.5% (-78,500) since fall 2020. Upward transfer decreased at all selectivity levels of destination institution (for public and private nonprofit four-years). However, declines were steepest for students transferring to highly selective institutions (-13.4%, -6,200; see Figure 4). In addition, students who earned an associate degree before transferring declined more than those without a prior associate (-12.7%, -21,700 vs. -4.9%, -16,000, respectively, see Appendix Tab 2).

In other transfer pathways, enrollment began to rebound in fall 2022 (+2.0% or +6,800 for four-year lateral, +0.3% or +600 for two-year lateral, and +1.0% or +1,700 for reverse transfer), largely because of an increase in returning students, especially those younger than 25 (see Appendix Tab 4). The increase in lateral four-year transfers was particularly notable among students moving into institutions at lower selectivity categories (jumping between 1.4% to 3.4%), compared to a decline of 7.1% at the top selectivity category.

Figure 3. Percent Change in Transfer Enrollment by Transfer Pathway and Student Group

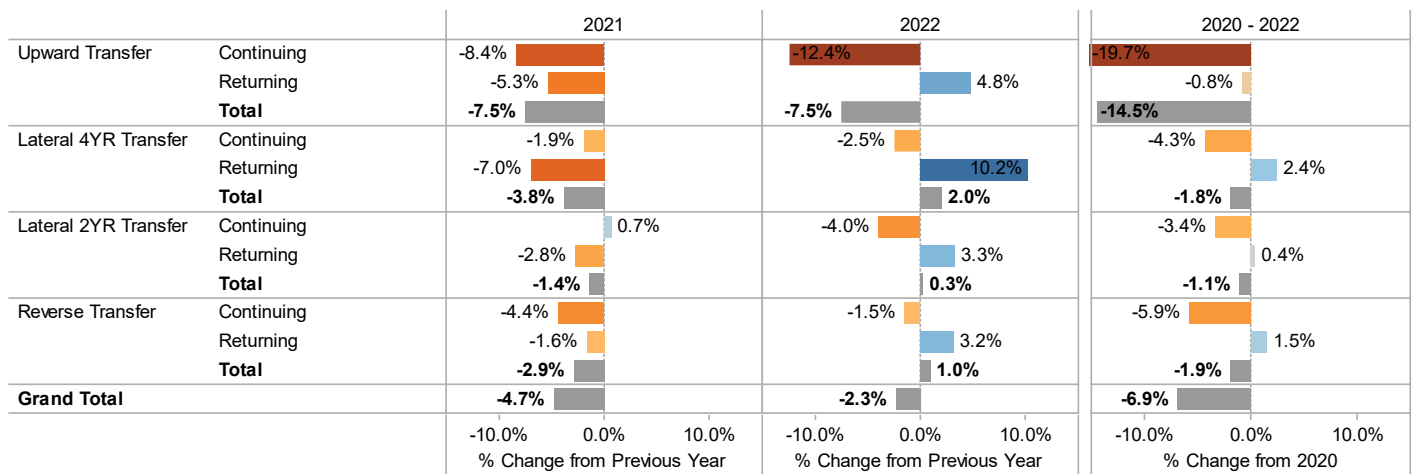
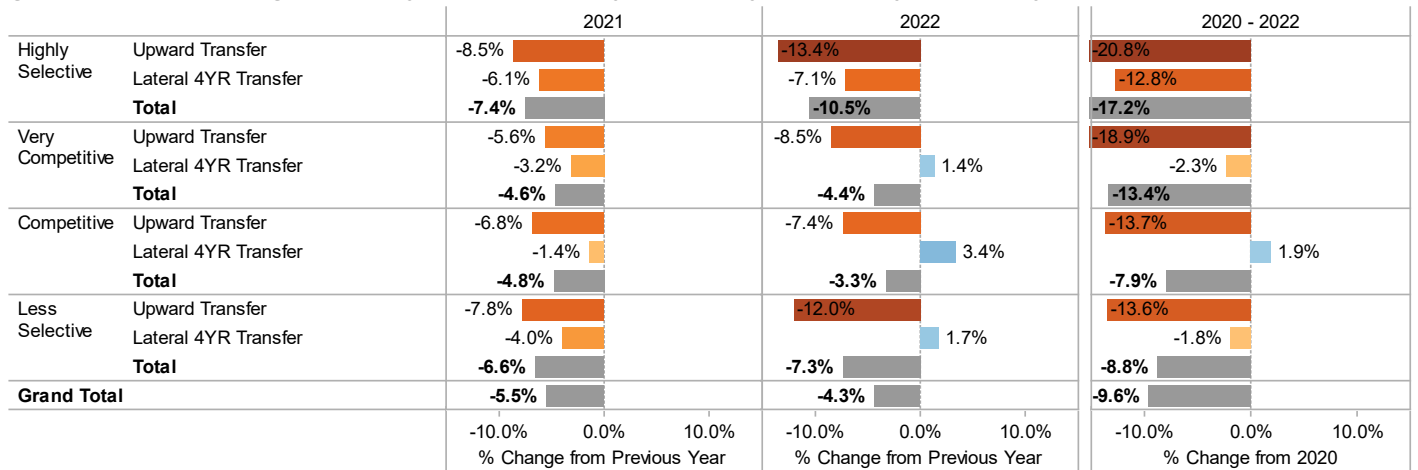


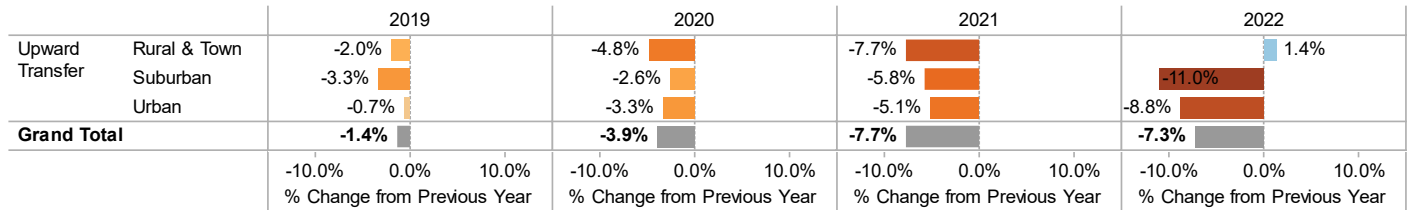
Figure 4. Percent Change in Transfer Enrollment by Selectivity and Transfer Pathway



With upward transfer enrollment declines accelerating, bachelor's degree programs appear increasingly out of reach for students, particularly those enrolled in urban and suburban community colleges and transfer-focused community college students.

Upward transfers originating from urban and suburban community colleges were declining before the pandemic. These declines became more acute in fall 2022 (-8.8%, -20,200 and -11.0%, -16,300, respectively; see Figure 5). However, rural and town origins stabilized, accounting for 23.1% of all upward transfer students in fall 2022 (see Appendix Tab 3).

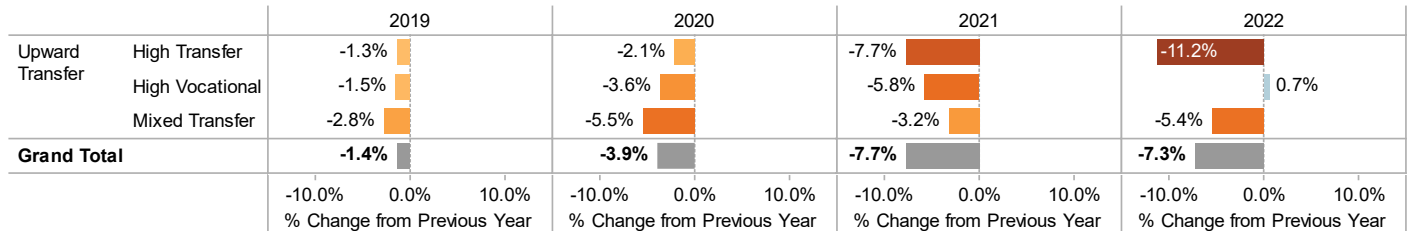
Figure 5. Percent Change in Upward Transfer Enrollment by Urbanicity of Prior Community College



Note: For analyses on prior community college location and other new analyses in this report, a five-year panel from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022 was utilized to set the pre-pandemic baseline. See Methodological Notes for more details.

Upward transfers from community colleges with a high transfer program focus experienced the steepest declines to date (-11.2%, -26,800), while those originating from high vocational focus community colleges stabilized (see Figure 6). As a result, the share of upward transfers from high vocational community colleges increased to 16.4% (up 1.6 pp from fall 2019), while the share of high transfer origins is now 47.6% (a 1.2 pp decline; see Appendix Tab 3).

Figure 6. Percent Change in Upward Transfer Enrollment by Program Focus of Prior Community College

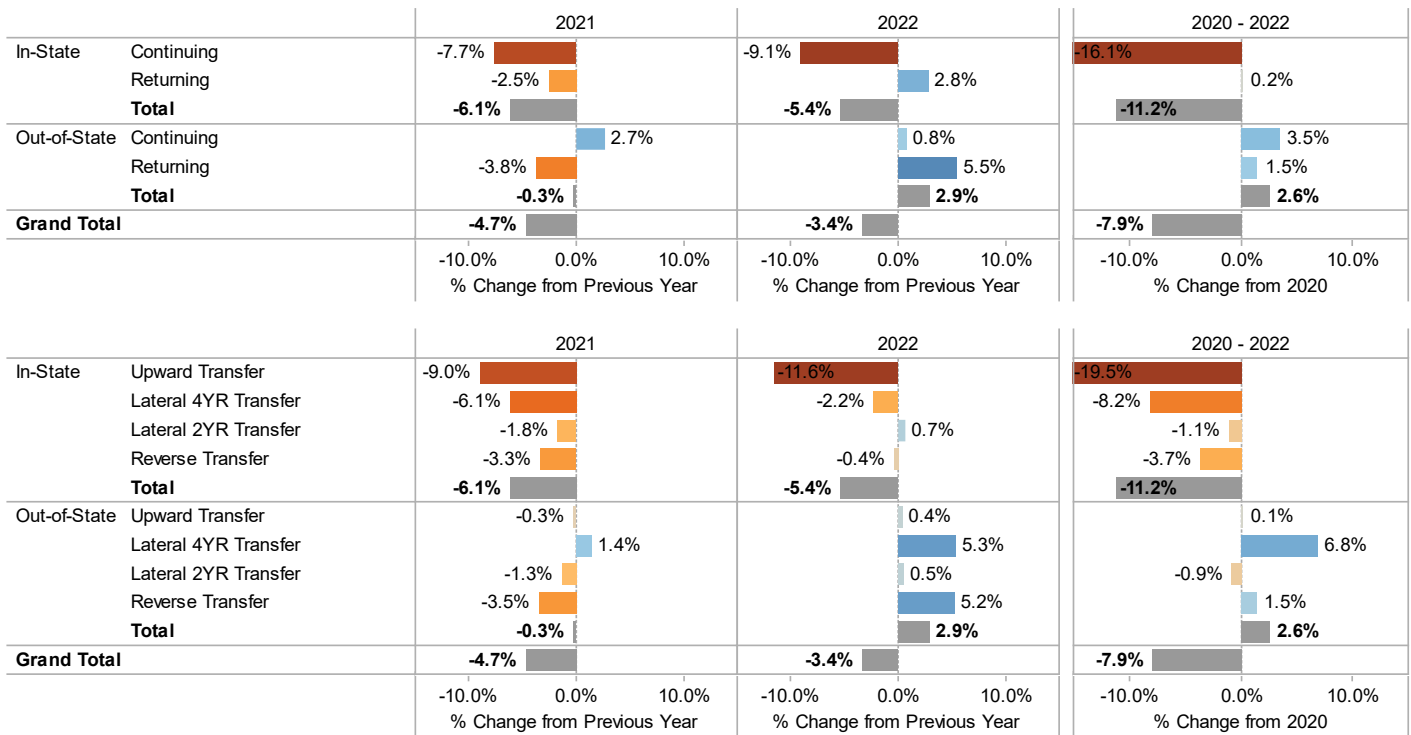


Note: For analyses on prior community college program focus and other new analyses in this report, a five-year panel from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022 was utilized in order to set the pre-pandemic baseline trends. See Methodological Notes for more details.

Declines accelerated for in-state upward transfers, while out-of-state transfers stabilized.

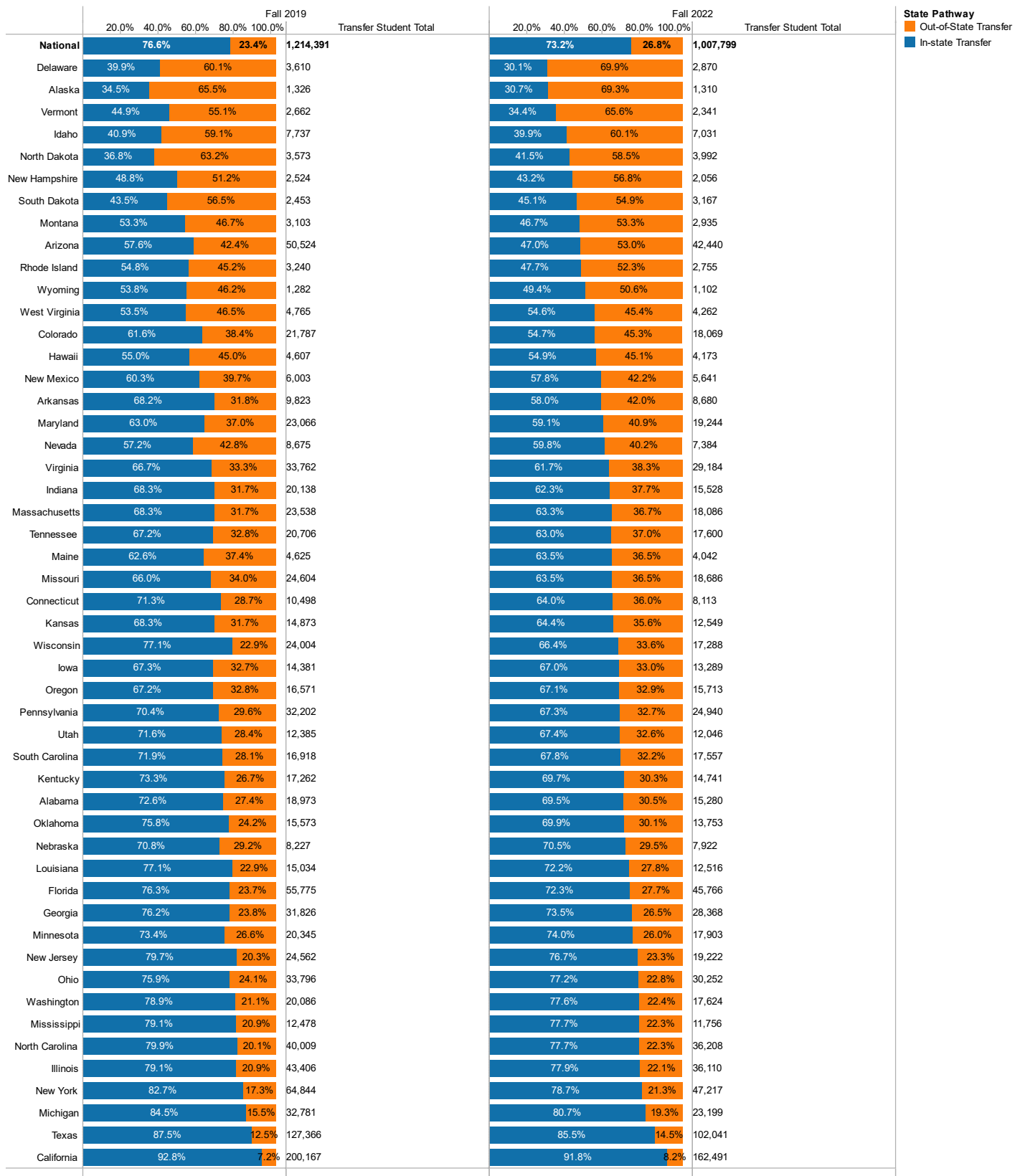
In fall 2022, in-state transfers decreased overall by 5.4% (-44,400) while out-of-state transfers increased 2.9% (+8,000). In-state upward transfer declines worsened in fall 2022, showing no sign of recovery (see Figure 7). Out-of-state transfers increased for total lateral transfers (four-year and two-year combined) and reverse transfers (+3.7%, +5,700; +5.2%, +2,000, respectively; see Appendix Tab 2).

Figure 7. Percent Change in Mobility Crossing State Lines by Student Group and Transfer Pathway



Out-of-state shares of transfer enrollment differ vastly by destination state, ranging from 8.2% of students transferring into colleges in California originating from a different state, to 69.9% for Delaware (see Figure 8). Additionally, Alaska, Vermont, and Idaho are among the highest shares of out-of-state origins in transfer population (over 60%), and Texas and Michigan are among the lowest shares. Out-of-state shares increased in most states from 2019 to 2022.

Figure 8. In-State and Out-of-State Origins as a Share of Statewide Transfer Enrollment



Demographic trends for 2022 include: Transfer enrollment fell more for women; only younger students (20 or younger) made gains; and Black student transfer enrollment stabilized as returning students increased.

Women transfers continued to drop more than men (-3.5% and -0.7%, respectively, see Figure 9), driven by the decline in continuing transfer students (see Figure 10).

Figure 9. Percent Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollment by Gender

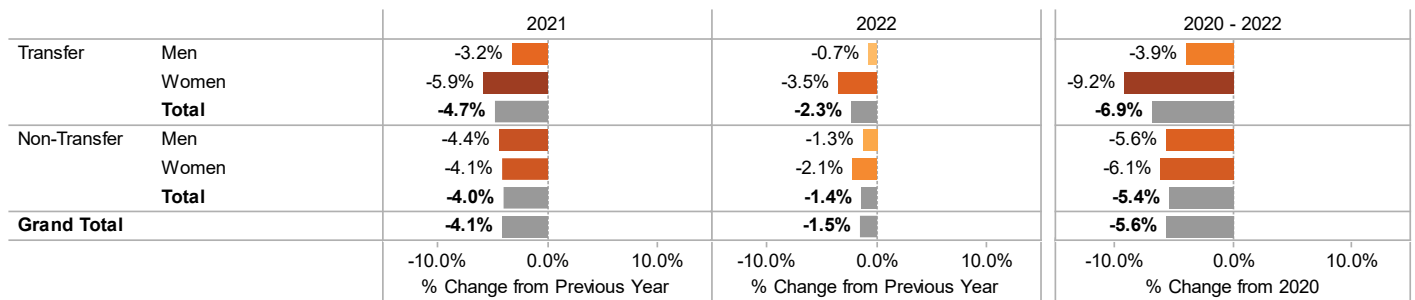
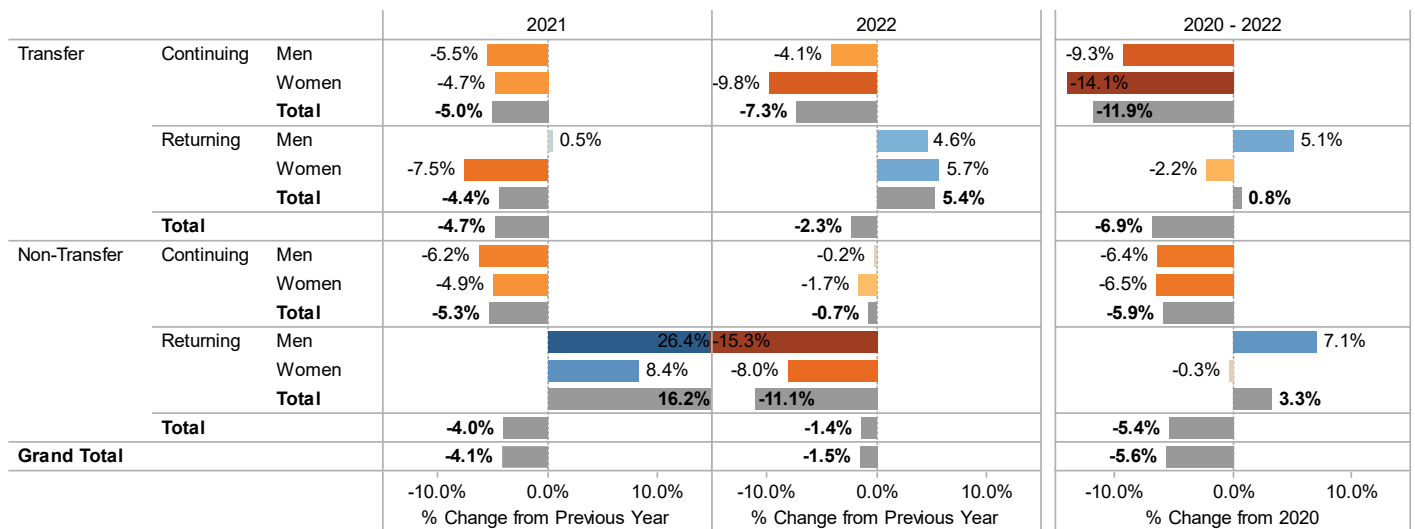
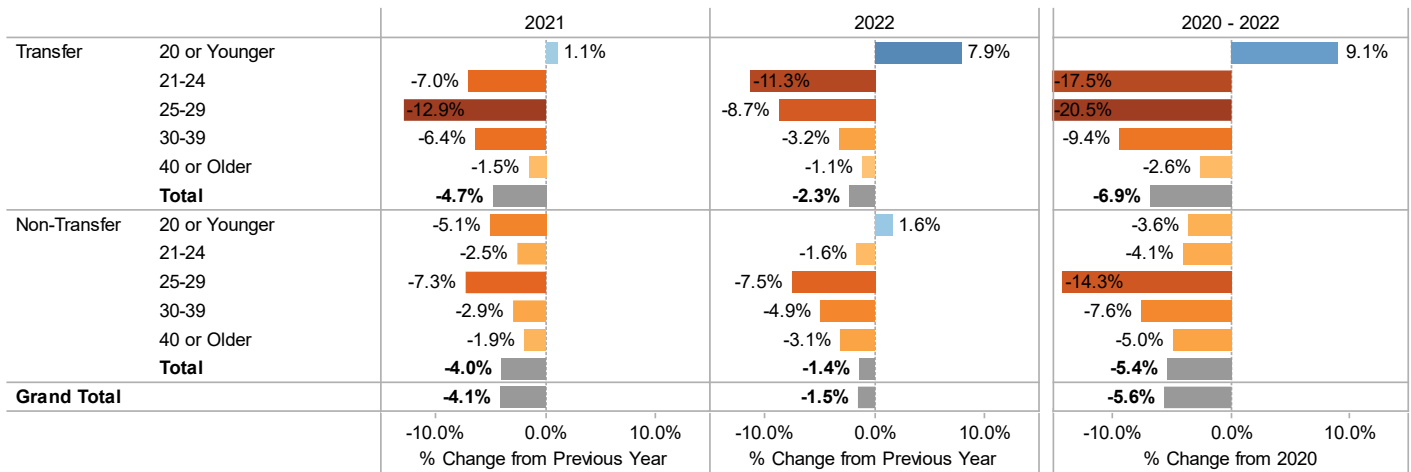


Figure 10. Percent Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollment by Student Group and Gender



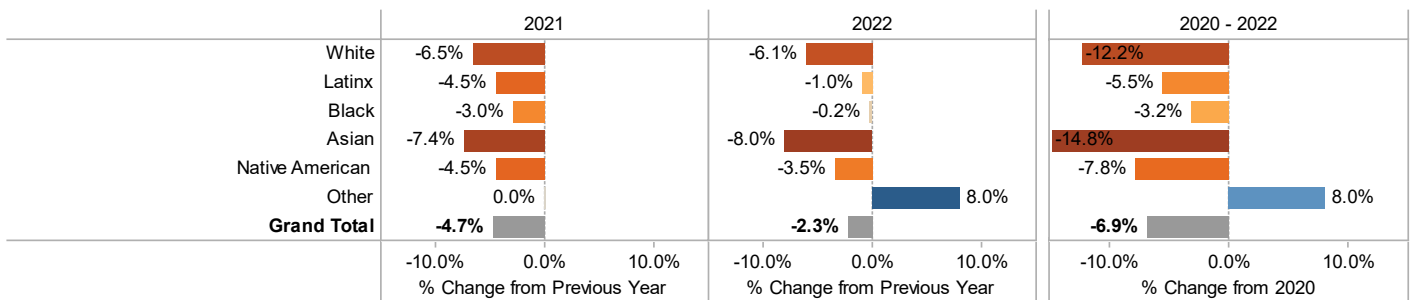
Only younger students (20 or younger) made gains in transfer enrollment (+7.9%, +34,300), continuing the trend from fall 2021, for a total increase of 9.1% over fall 2020. Students in their 20s continued to fall most steeply (-11.3%, -40,100 and -8.7%, -15,400 for students 21-24 and 25-29, respectively; see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Percent Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollment by Age Group



Transfer enrollment declined across all major racial and ethnic groups, except for Black students whose enrollment stabilized from fall 2021 (-0.2%, -400; see Figure 12) due to an increase in returning transfer students (+8.0%, +7,600; see Appendix Tab 4). Returning transfer enrollment also grew for Latinx (+9.7%, +8,200) and Asian (+8.3%, +1,300) students, but not enough to overcome the continuing transfer student declines (see Appendix Tab 4).

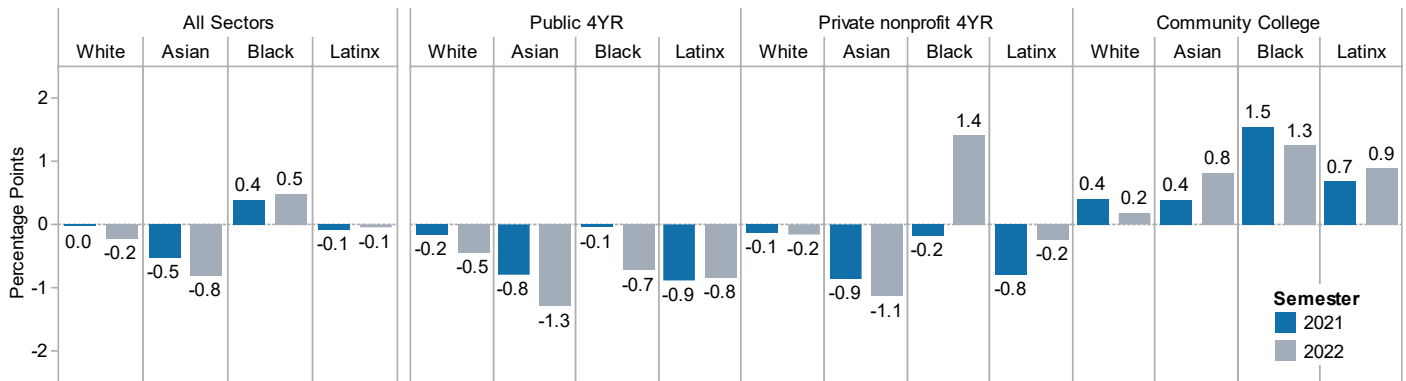
Figure 12. Percent Change in Transfer Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



Transfer-in rates increased at community colleges, but transfer students fell as a share of the four-year college student body. This is true across all races except Black students at private nonprofit four-year institutions.

The transfer-in rate represents the number of students who transferred into an institution in a given term as a percent of all undergraduates enrolled in that term. This differs from the annual rate of change in transfer enrollment; a transfer-in rate may remain unchanged even as total undergraduate numbers decrease. In fall 2022, transfer-in rates for four-year institutions decreased across all races, except for Black students in private nonprofit four-year institutions (+1.4 pp, 17.0% transfer-in rate; see Figure 13). Transfer-in rates for community colleges increased for all races, especially for Black, Latinx, and Asian students (+0.8 to +1.3 pp).

Figure 13. Percentage Point Change in Transfer-In Rates by Sector and Race/Ethnicity

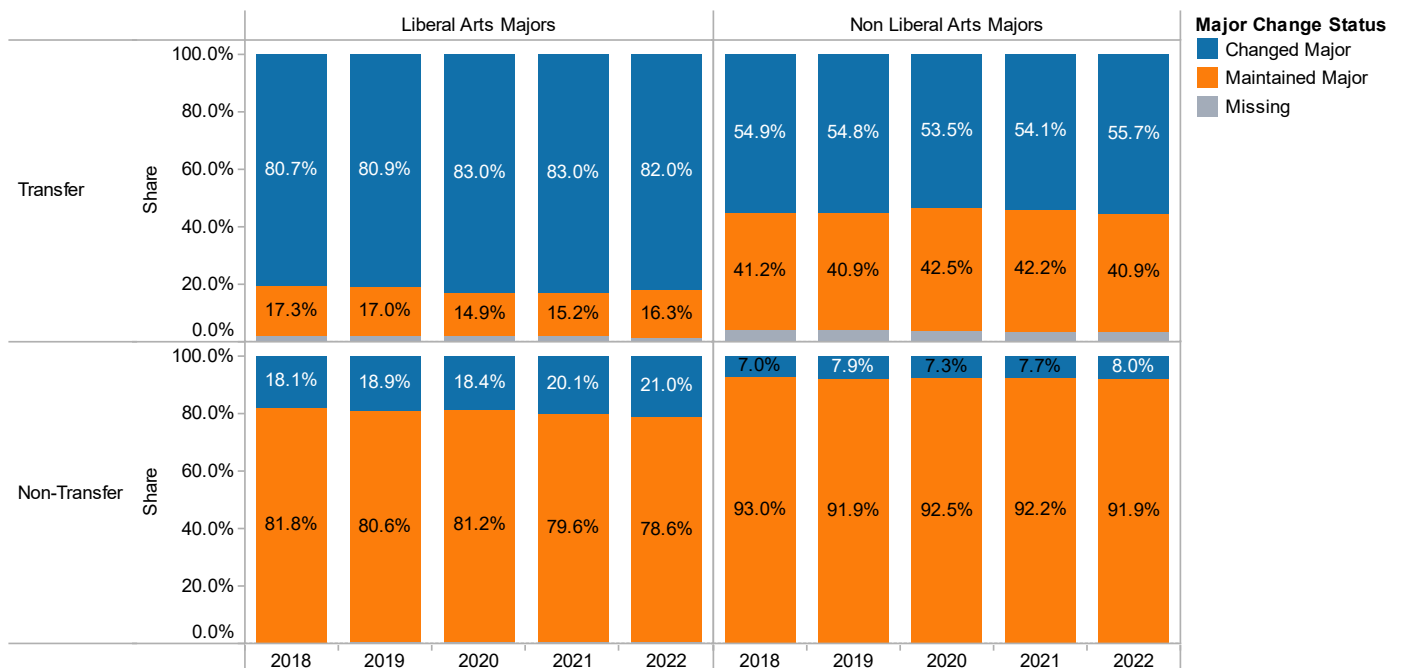


When transferring to a four-year institution from a community college, liberal arts majors appear far more likely than non-liberal arts majors to change their major. This pattern was largely unaffected during the pandemic.

Over half of transfers changed their major when transferring to another institution (53.9%), a pattern that remained consistent during the pandemic. In fall 2022, 82.0% of transfers with a liberal arts major changed that major on transferring, in contrast to 55.7% for non-liberal arts majors (see Figure 14 and Appendix Tab 3).

Even among liberal arts majors, change of major appears more common with upward transfer. Nine in ten changed their major upon transferring from a community college to a four-year institution (90.5%), compared with 88.0% of lateral four-year transfers and roughly 59% for reverse transfers and lateral two-year transfers (see Appendix Tab 3). This higher change rate is expected given that transfer-seeking community college starters who typically do not have a declared major are assigned in the liberal arts major until transferring to a four-year college.

Figure 14. Change of Major Among Transfer Enrollments



EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

A NEW INCOME BACKGROUND ANALYSIS OF FALL TRANSFER STUDENTS 2018-2022

KEY FINDINGS

- Transfer students from lower income backgrounds (in the bottom 40% of U.S. household income) were hit hardest during the pandemic, but their enrollment is beginning to recover in fall 2022.
- Transfer enrollment declines in fall 2020 were smallest for students in the top quintile and grew steadily larger for each lower quintile.
- Upward transfer mobility has significantly deteriorated across all income quintiles during the pandemic, with no sign of recovery in fall 2022.
- Transfer pathways to highly selective four-year institutions, upward or lateral, are dominated by students from the top 20% of the U.S. household income distribution.

Income Background Analysis

The Research Center developed a new proxy measure for income designed to use permanent address and geographic location data for students in the Clearinghouse data to estimate their socioeconomic backgrounds. The first permanent address reported for a student to the Clearinghouse is matched with U.S. Census Bureau data on the income profile of the census tract for 2017-2021 that this address refers to, a process known as geocoding.

The home address at the time of first entry into postsecondary education is used to approximate students' family socioeconomic status. A student is assigned to the income quintile of their home census tract, relative to the income levels of all census tracts in the U.S. (see the Methodological Notes at the end of this report for more information). This new measure allows us to track higher education access and success by socioeconomic status. This is important in the analysis of transfer enrollment patterns because upward transfer is a key pathway to baccalaureate attainment for low-income students starting out in community colleges.

We emphasize, though, that this measure is still under development and the results should be considered experimental. They are particularly imperfect at the individual level but should be informative at the aggregate statistical levels used in this report.

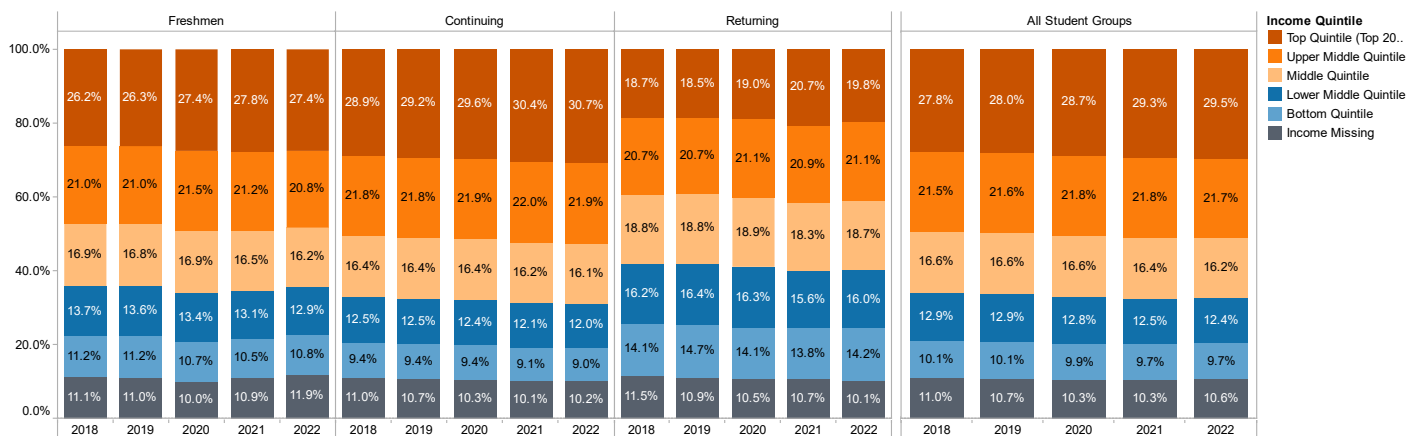
This section focuses on undergraduate students aged 24 and younger without a prior bachelor's degree, because first-reported permanent addresses are more likely to coincide with the socioeconomic backgrounds of traditional college-age students. The section also excludes students with addresses outside the U.S.

In fall 2022, more than half of all traditional age undergraduates stem from higher income backgrounds and this share has been steadily rising over time. Lower income students experienced the steepest enrollment declines during the pandemic (-10.8% or -225,200 students from fall 2019).

The traditional college-age undergraduate student body (aged 24 and younger) is increasingly comprised of higher income students (the top 40% of the U.S. household income distribution). This trend of growing income inequality in college enrollment continued throughout the pandemic.

Higher income students expanded their share within traditional-age undergraduates without a prior bachelor's degree, from 49.3% in 2018 to 51.2% in 2022 (see Figure 15). In contrast, students from the bottom 40% of the U.S. household income distribution represent far smaller shares (22.1% of overall undergraduates; 23.7% of freshmen; and 30.2% of returning students in 2022). Higher income students are particularly overrepresented among continuing students (52.6%), compared to their shares of the freshman and returning student populations.

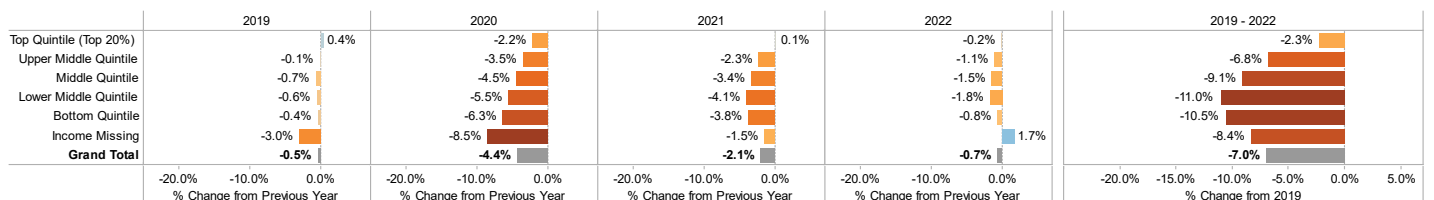
Figure 15. Undergraduate Students (24 and Younger) by Income Quintile



Note: Throughout this section, students with missing income are shown in their own category and the share of students with a known income value does not total to 100%. As a result, reported shares for those with a known income value should be considered minimums.

Lower income students (the bottom two quintiles) experienced the steepest enrollment declines during the pandemic, down by 10.8% or 225,200 students from fall 2019, exacerbating existing income inequalities in college access (see Figure 16).

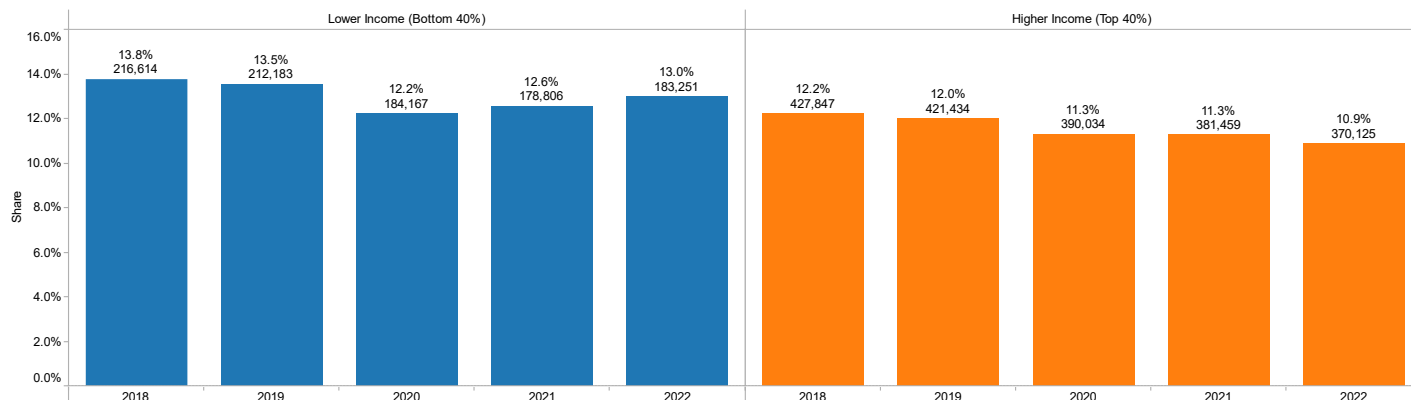
Figure 16. Percent Change in Undergraduate Students (24 and Younger) by Income Quintile



Transfer students make up a higher share of lower income students than higher income students.

Transfer students made up 13.0% of lower income students in fall 2022, compared to 10.9% of higher income students. This overrepresentation of lower income transfer students has increased steadily since the beginning of the pandemic (see Figure 17) after an initial share drop in fall 2020. Transfer enrollment as a share of higher income students has been declining since 2018.

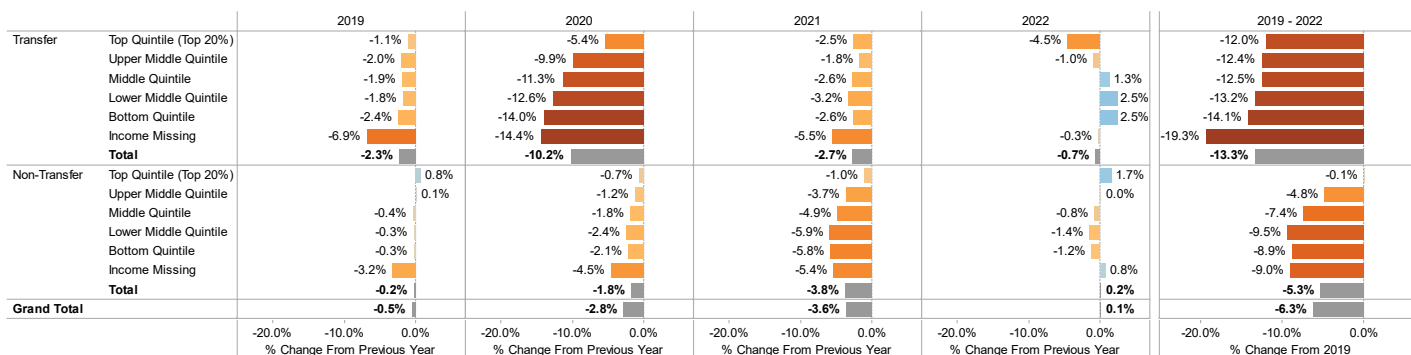
Figure 17. Transfer Enrollment as a Share of Non-Freshman Undergraduates (24 and Younger) by Lower and Higher Income Quintiles



Transfer enrollment declines in fall 2020 were smallest for students in the top quintile and grew steadily larger for each lower quintile.

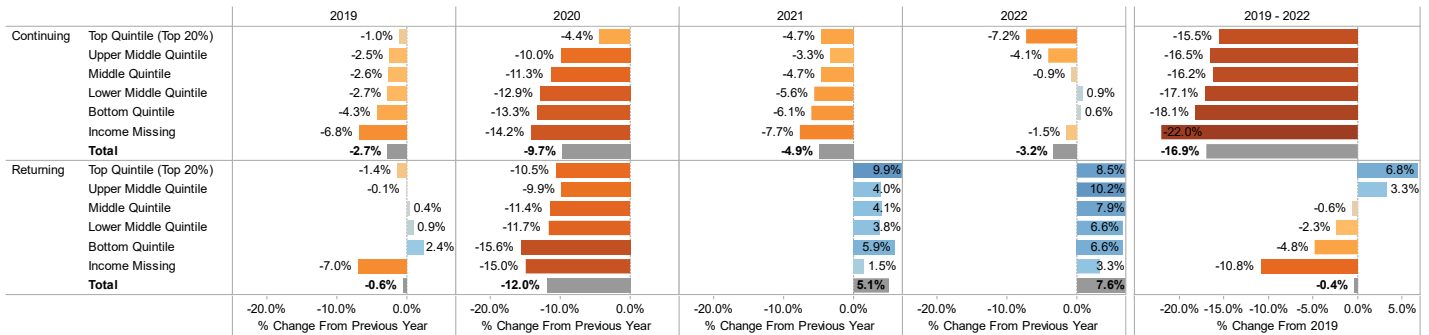
Transfers in the bottom income quintile fell 14.0% (-13,000 students) in fall 2020, compared to only 5.4% (-12,400 students) in the top quintile. The transfer student declines were much steeper than non-transfer declines, which were consistently small for all quintiles. Transfer and non-transfer enrollment losses continued across quintiles in fall 2021, followed by increases in fall 2022 for lower- and middle-income transfer students and further declines in the top quintiles. Due to these fall 2022 shifts in transfer enrollments, the bottom quintile has nearly returned to fall 2020 levels and the total pandemic-era declines (since 2019) had largely equalized across income levels with only slightly larger drops in the two lowest quintiles (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Percent Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollment (24 and Younger) by Income Quintile



The fall 2022 increase in lower income transfer students was driven by students returning after a stop out. While returning transfers grew across all income quintiles, growth has been more pronounced among higher income students since fall 2021, a reversal of pre-pandemic declines (see Figure 19).

Figure 19. Percent Change in Transfer Enrollment (24 and Younger) by Student Group and Income Quintile



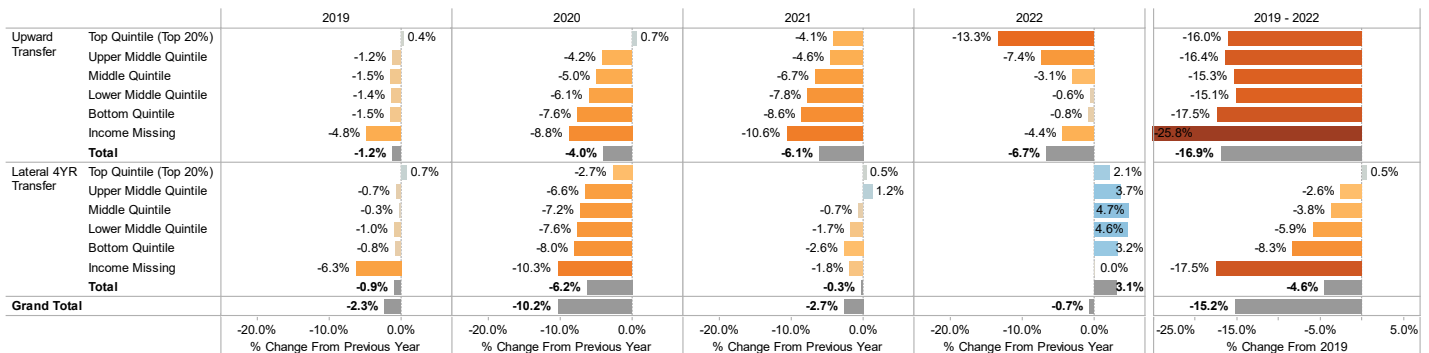
Upward transfer mobility significantly deteriorated during the pandemic irrespective of income background, while lateral four-year transfer enrollment has started to rebound in fall 2022.

Since the start of the pandemic, upward transfer enrollment has declined precipitously across all income levels, but in fall 2022 the decline is most acute in the top income quintile (see Figure 20). This is a reversal of the pattern in the previous two years, where lower income students suffered the sharpest declines, leaving the effect of total pandemic-era declines since 2019 roughly equal across income levels for upward transfer (ranging from 15.1% to 17.5%).

Higher income students had increased their share of total upward transfer enrollment by 2.3 pp (from 50.4% in 2019 to 52.7% in 2021) but the gains are now erased in fall 2022, returning to pre-pandemic shares. The lower income share of upward transfer enrollment in fall 2022 is 23.9% (see Appendix Tab 5).

Lateral 4-year transfer enrollment has declined across almost all income quintiles compared to fall 2019, except for the top quintile where enrollment is on par with pre-pandemic levels (+0.5% over fall 2019). Fall 2022 was the first time since the pandemic that there has been any enrollment growth along this pathway for lower income students and those in the middle quintile.

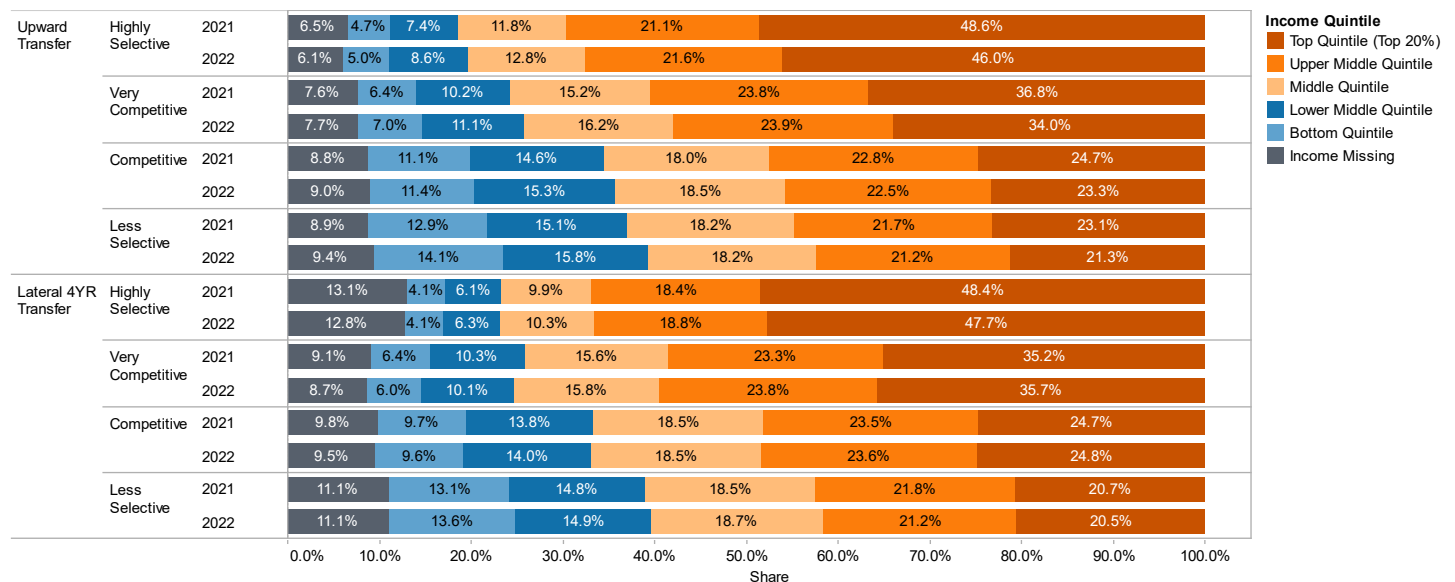
Figure 20. Percent Change in Upward and Lateral Four-Year Transfer Enrollment (24 and Younger) by Income Quintile



The top income quintile dominates the transfer pathways into highly selective four-year institutions, accounting for 46.0% of upward transfers and 47.7% of lateral transfers in fall 2022.

Students from the most affluent 20% of U.S. households continue to dominate the upward and lateral transfer pathways into the approximately 200 most selective four-year institutions in the country (46.0% and 47.7%, respectively, in fall 2022), whereas the lowest income quintile assumes no more than 5.0% on either pathway (see Figure 21). The overrepresentation of the top income quintile among transfers to highly selective institutions became more pronounced during the first two fall terms of the pandemic (Upward transfer: 47.4% in fall 2020, 48.6% in fall 2021; Lateral 4-year: 49.0% in fall 2020, 48.4% in fall 2021, see Figure 26 on data dashboard). The shares of lower income quintiles increase steadily as the selectivity of the destination institution decreases, with the share of the lowest quintile among upward transfers to less-selective institutions at 14.1%, nearly triple that of the lowest quintile at highly selective institutions.

Figure 21. Upward and Lateral Four-Year Transfers (24 and Younger) by Income Quintile and Institution Selectivity



Note: Less Selective refers to the combined categories of Less Competitive, Noncompetitive, Special Focus and Unranked. Unranked accounts for 6.0% (102,200) of all upward transfer students and 7.7% (90,600) of all lateral 4-year transfer students in this report. The income quintile distributions among upward and lateral 4-year transfer enrollments are similar between Unranked and Less Competitive and Noncompetitive institutions. Special Focus institutions, however, display relatively higher shares of higher income students in their upward and lateral 4-year transfer enrollments. See the Appendix for the full details of selectivity index beyond the four categories above and corresponding income quintile distributions.

SECTION II. COMMUNITY COLLEGE BEGINNING COHORTS: TRANSFER PATHWAYS AND OUTCOMES

Unlike the measurement of transfer enrollment within single terms in Section I, this section tracks community college entering cohorts over time, measuring annual transfer rates within one, two and three years of enrolling, and baccalaureate attainment rates within six years. Analyzing across entering cohorts enables comparisons between pre-pandemic and in-pandemic community college cohorts. We report transfer-out rates for six community college cohorts, three who started in pre-pandemic fall terms (2014, 2015, and 2016) and three later cohorts (2019, 2020, and 2021) that were hit with pandemic impacts during the crucial early years of their postsecondary careers.

Transfer-Out Rates During First Three Years of Enrollment

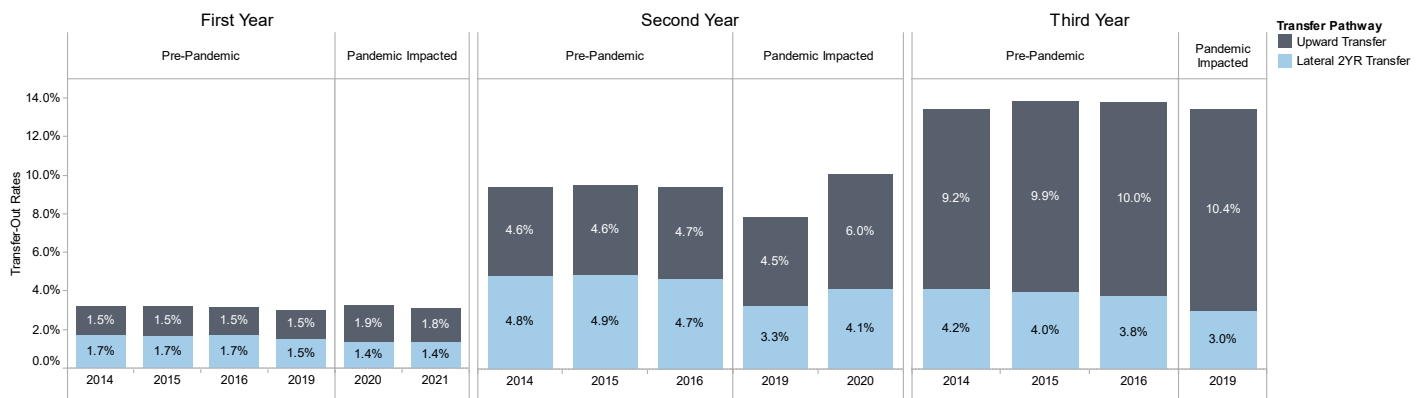
Pandemic impact was most evident in the first pandemic academic year 2020-21, indicated by the shrinking size of the community college beginning cohort particularly among lower income students and decreases in community college student mobility.

The size of pre-pandemic community college beginning cohorts were consistently around one million students while the pandemic impacted 2020 cohort drastically shrank (-17.1% or -166,700 students from 2019), yielding about 809,700 students (see Appendix Tab 6). Students from the bottom quintile in the U.S. household income distribution were hit hardest (-22.7% or -33,400 students from 2019, compared to -11% or -19,700 students in the top quintile; see Appendix Tab 6). In 2021, the community college entering cohort rebounded slightly to 826,800 students (+2.1%) but not enough to return to pre-pandemic numbers.

Yearly transfer-out rates measure the students who transfer out of their starting community college at any point during each subsequent academic year, as a share of the entire community college beginning cohort. The pandemic's impact on community college student mobility was most apparent in the 2020-21 academic year, which was the second year of enrollment for the 2019 cohort, with their transfer-out rates showing large declines (compared to little change over the 2014-2016 cohorts; see Figure 22). This decline was driven almost entirely by declines in lateral transfers.

However, the pandemic-led impacts appear to have been short-lived as transfer-out rates began to rebound or stabilized in the following year (AY 2021-22), where the second year transfer-out rate rebounded 2.3 pp for the 2020 cohort, and the third year transfer-out rate stabilized for the 2019 cohort (see Figure 22). As we continue tracking these pandemic impacted cohorts, we will be able to see whether these signs of recovery continue.

Figure 22. Annual Snapshot of Transfer-Out Rates for Community College Beginning Cohorts



Note: Data are not cumulative transfer-out rates and students may be counted more than once across comparison years.

Yearly Progress in Baccalaureate Degree Attainment Six Years Later

This section takes a closer look at whether the shares of students in each cohort who transferred to four-year institutions and completed a credential, were still enrolled, or no longer enrolled changed over time, by tracking the fall 2014, 2015, and 2016 beginning cohorts for six years. And, among those who completed a credential, we further examine the type of credential earned, with particular emphasis on bachelor’s degree attainment.

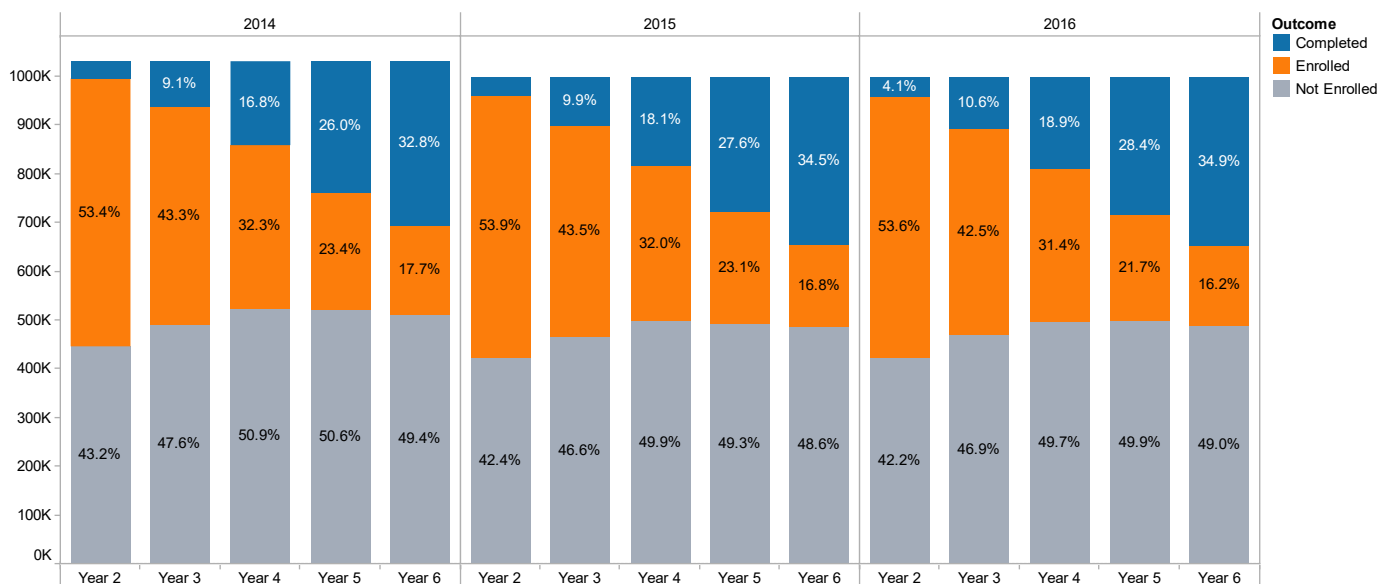
The six-year completion rate is improving for upward transfers as more students earned a bachelor’s degree even during their pandemic-impacted 5th and 6th years of enrollment.

The pandemic has had no apparent impact on the overall six-year completion rate for the community college beginning cohorts (32.8% for 2014; 34.5% for 2015; 34.9% for 2016, see Figure 23a). This seems true for those earning a bachelor’s degree even when its impacts hit during their 5th and 6th years of enrollment—when community college starters typically earn their bachelor’s degrees. Nearly half of all 2016 cohort credentials were earned during their 5th and 6th years (45.8%, Year 5 was AY 2020-21 and Year 6 was AY 2021-22; see Appendix Tab 8).

Among 2016 cohort upward transfers, the total six-year completion rate of 69.2% was also 2.1 pp higher than the 2014 cohort, and the share of bachelor’s degree recipients among the completers increased (83.7%, up 1.1 pp from 2014, both with and without a prior associate degree; see Figure 23b). This increase is notable because nearly three-quarters of all baccalaureate completions among upward transfers took place during their pandemic-impacted 5th and 6th years of enrollment.

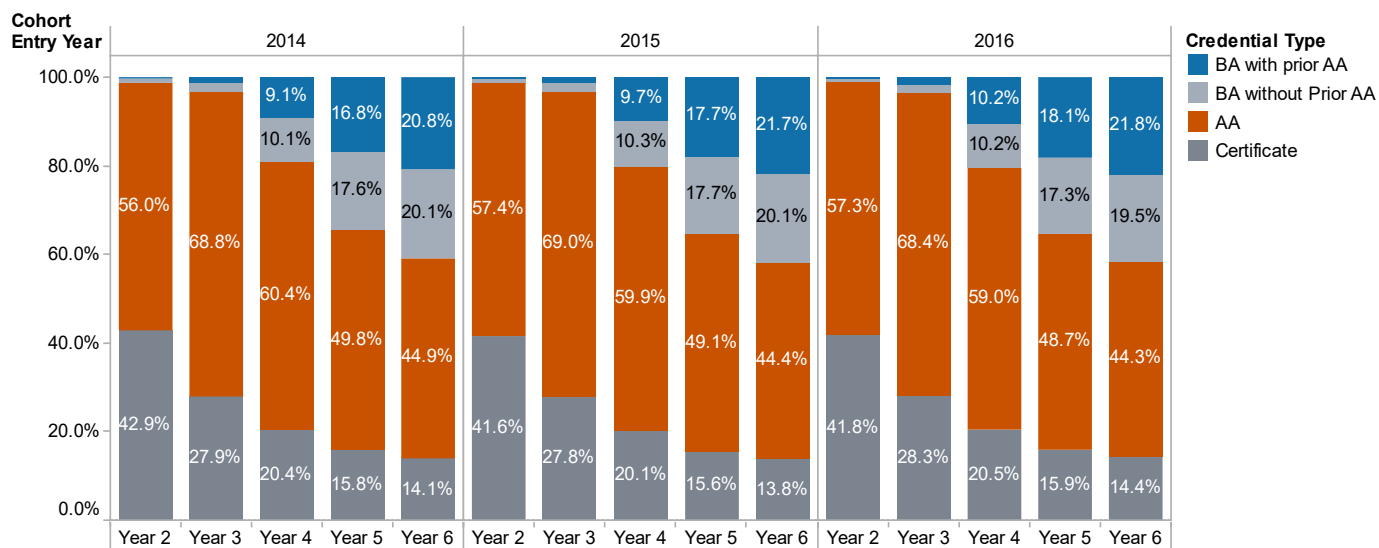
Black upward transfer students gained the most from this phenomenon. Black student completion rates by year 6 were 4.1 pp higher for the 2016 cohort than the 2014 cohort (see Figure 30 on data dashboard). A higher share of these completers had earned bachelor’s degrees (+2.7 pp) while the share of associate degree earners was lower (-2.4 pp; see Appendix Tab 8) compared to the 2014 cohort. Six-year completion rates for White, Latinx, and Asian upward transfers were about 2 pp higher for the 2016 cohort with a larger share of bachelor’s degree earners for White and Latinx students (+1.1 pp and +1.3 pp, respectively) than the 2014 cohort. Latinx, Black, and Asian upward transfer students took longer to earn a credential than White students with about 67% of White student completions occurring in years 5 and 6 compared to over 72% of Latinx, Black, and Asian student completions.

Figure 23a. Annual Cumulative Completions for Community College Beginning Cohorts



Note: Data represents yearly cumulative completions and students are only counted once for their highest-level attainment across comparison years.

Figure 23b. Type of Credential Earned as a Share of Annual Total Completions



Note: Data represents yearly cumulative completions and students are only counted once for their highest-level attainment across comparison years.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility, and Progress series highlighted the pandemic’s severe impact on transfer enrollment trends. Despite many institutions’ efforts to return to pre-pandemic levels, this *Transfer and Progress* report demonstrates the enduring impacts of the pandemic not only on transfer enrollments into fall 2022, but also on transfer outcomes for community college beginning cohorts that experienced the pandemic within their first six years of enrollment. Furthermore, the inclusion of an experimental income proxy measure brings focus to the limited postsecondary educational pathways for students from lower income families, in contrast to those of their higher income peers.

Upward transfer pathways serve an essential role for providing students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds access to a baccalaureate degree or higher. Although other transfer pathways began to rebound, upward transfer continued its decline in fall 2022. Among those who did transfer, students from the upper income quintiles of the U.S. household income dominated the field in transferring to highly selective institutions. Upward movement to highly selective and very competitive institutions for the bottom quintiles is drastically lower, highlighting a substantial challenge to be addressed in order to make good on the promise of equitable access to a bachelor’s degree for low-income students.

Institutions and policymakers must focus on the needs of lower income students and the barriers they face if higher education is to increase equity in student access and success. As this report shows that transfer to primarily online institutions drove 40% of the annual growth in transfer for students returning from a stop out in fall 2022, further investigation of online options may lead to stronger pathways for some students. Although it is still too early to know whether the current, small signs of recovery will continue beyond fall 2022, there is reason to be hopeful that growth in enrollment, transfer, and completion will continue, and will broaden its reach to include students of all demographic characteristics and all income backgrounds.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The *Transfer and Progress* series is designed to track postsecondary transfer and mobility using the latest data available and the historical data for tracking cohort trends. It updates the COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility, and Progress report data dashboards, disaggregated by various subgroups of students, programs, and institutions. Also, the report introduces an experimental proxy income measure, and analyzed multiple community college entering cohorts for their yearly transfer-out rates within three years of enrollment and their baccalaureate attainment rates six years later.

This first report captures transfer pathways across 89% of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions reported as of December 15, 2022. It focuses on year-over-year percent changes in enrollment based on the same institutions' fall 2020 to fall 2022 enrollments (or fall 2018 to fall 2022 for some of the metrics) as of December 15 of the applicable year.

INSTITUTION PANEL SELECTION

To accurately assess the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary transfer and mobility, the analyses focused on a fixed panel of all institutions that submitted data to the Clearinghouse during the same time frame across all comparison years. We created a panel to control institutional submission variability as well as variations in data submission dates. For section I of this report, only institutions that submitted enrollment data in 2020, 2021, and 2022 were included in the analyses. To better capture pre-pandemic baselines, we expanded the panel for the new measures, such as the income proxy analyses, to capture institutions who submitted enrollment data in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Institutions that discontinued or only started submitting enrollments at any point within these years were excluded. To control for submission timing among these institutions, only data that was submitted within the data submission window (specified in Term Definitions below) in each of the three academic years was included. The three-year panel includes 89% of institutions that report to the Clearinghouse while the five-year panel includes 83.8% of institutions. However, it is important to note that even with these controls, enrollments at some institutions in the panel may have been overcounted or undercounted for 2022 due to unusual file submission patterns. Our investigations suggest that such data noise is minor.

Term Definition

7/1 – 12/31 (Fall Term) 8/1 – 12/15 (Submission Window)

Using the panel method, less than 10% of transfer students (approximately 130,000) were excluded each year, or less than 1% of each year's transfer population. Our internal investigation confirmed that the patterns of transfer enrollment declines remain largely the same with or without the panel restrictions.

SECTION I

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT POPULATION

This study includes all degree-seeking students who were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution in the U.S. in the fall of the applicable year, reported as of December 15, 2022. This definition also includes students who were dual enrolled prior to beginning their postsecondary career but excludes current dual enrollees. We then look at students' enrollment history to classify students into the following three subgroups: (1) first-time students, (2) continuing students, and (3) returning students. Continuing and returning students were included only if they had not previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher. However, students were included as either continuing or returning students if they had previously earned an associates or undergraduate certificate.

- 1) Freshmen or first-time students are those who had no enrollment records or degree/certificate awards at Title IV U.S. institutions prior to the fall of the applicable year, unless the previous enrollment record was before the student turned 18 years old or before the student graduated from high school (prior dual enrollment). Freshmen are not included in the analysis of student transfer and mobility for this report.
- 2) Continuing students are those students who had at least one valid enrollment in the previous spring or summer term prior to their fall enrollment.
- 3) Returning students are those students who returned after a stop-out and were therefore not enrolled in the same year prior to their fall enrollment.

Transfer Definition

We define students as transfer students in fall 2022 if they previously were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution, and subsequently enrolled in another Title IV, degree-granting institution in fall 2022. Note that we only consider the change of institution a student is enrolled in, regardless of whether academic credits are recognized between institutions. For more in-depth analysis of transfer patterns, we group all transfer students into two categories:

- 1) Continuing transfer students are those who had at least one valid enrollment record in the spring term or summer term and enrolled in the fall term at an institution different than their last enrolled institution.
- 2) Returning transfer students are those who had previously enrolled in postsecondary education but had stopped out up until the fall term, and re-enrolled in the fall at an institution different than their last enrolled institution.

Non-transfer students are either continuing or returning students defined as above who enrolled in fall at the same institution as their last enrolled institution. The same logic is applied to the years 2020 and 2021 to determine the comparison groups.

Transfer Pathways

This report also investigates differences in the directions of student mobility. We categorize the following types or pathways of student mobility:

- 1) Upward transfer: Students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, with or without first receiving an award (either a certificate or associate degree). This is also known as vertical transfer.
- 2) Lateral transfer: Students who either transfer from a two-year to a two-year institution or from a four-year to a four-year institution.
- 3) Reverse transfer: Students who transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

The report focuses on six racial/ethnic categories: White, Latinx, Black, Asian, Native American, and Other. The 'Other' category includes Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, International, Two or more, and Unknown/Missing students. Not all institutions report race and ethnicity data to the Clearinghouse. Missing data (for institutions that do not report to the Clearinghouse) and unknown data (for students that do not report to their institution) account for an average of 16% of all enrollments, and an average of 10% of all transfer enrollments reflected in the report.

IN-STATE AND OUT-OF-STATE TRANSFER

Transfers are considered in-state if both institutions (of current enrollment and previous enrollment) are located in the same state, and they are considered out-of-state if they are in different states. These designations apply regardless of the student's state of residence. Transfers to or from a multi-state institution (with campuses in more than one state) or a

primarily online institution (any institution that reports more than 90% of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses) are excluded from state analyses.

INSTITUTION SELECTIVITY INDEX

The Barron's Selectivity Index evaluates the competitiveness of an institution based on several admissions factors such as an institution's acceptance rate, SAT score, high school GPA, and high school class rank. Utilizing the 2016 Barron's selectivity list, the ranking categories are as follows:

- Highly Selective are institutions identified as either "Most Competitive" or "Highly Competitive" according to the Barron's Selectivity Index. Their definitions are as follows:
 - Most Competitive: Institutions that generally admit less than a third of their total applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally have a high school class rank in the top 10-20% of their graduating class, and high school grade averages from A to B+. SAT/ACT scores are in the top 80th percentile.
 - Highly Competitive: Institutions that generally admit between a third to half of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally are in the top 20-35% of their high school graduating class, with high school grade averages from B+ to B. SAT and ACT scores are in the top 75th percentile.
- Very Competitive: Institutions that generally admit between 50-75% of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally are in the top 35-50% of their graduating class and have high school grade averages of a B- or better. SAT and ACT scores are in the top 67th percentile.
- Competitive: Institutions that generally admit between 75-85% of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted are generally in the top 50-65% of their high school graduating class and have a high school grade average of a B- or better. SAT and ACT scores are in the top 60th percentile.
- Less Selective are institutions identified as either "Less Competitive," "Noncompetitive," "Special Focus," or "Unranked," according to the Barron's Selectivity Index. Their definitions are as follows:
 - Less Competitive: Institutions that generally admit more than 85% of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally rank in the top 65% of their graduating class and have high school grade averages below a C. SAT and ACT scores are below the top 60th percentile.
 - Noncompetitive: Institutions that either admit more than 98% of their applicant pool, admit all in-state

residents, but have some requirements for out-of-state students, or require evidence of a high school diploma from an accredited school.

- Special Focus: Institutions that are specialized, such as professional schools of art, music, or other disciplines. Schools oriented towards adult learners are also sometimes in this category.
- Unranked: All institutions not otherwise categorized in the Barron's selectivity index.

PRIMARYLY ONLINE INSTITUTIONS (POIs)

Primarily online institutions (POIs) have been grouped with multistate institutions for state analyses in this report. Previously, some primarily online institutions that were not already designated as multistate institutions by the Research Center had been included in state totals. POIs were identified based on the distance education survey items in the IPEDS fall enrollment survey for each respective year (using the 2021 survey for Fall 2022 estimates). An institution that reports more than 90% of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses is considered a POI. This applies as long as the entire institution—rather than a single branch campus—meets this metric. For the post-pandemic onset terms of 2020-2022 we applied the additional decision metric that a school's pre-pandemic share of students enrolled exclusively in distance education (based on the 2019 IPEDS fall enrollment survey) had to be at least 80%, in order to omit institutions whose move to online status was driven by temporary pandemic needs. Using this method, there were between 27 and 32 institutions identified depending on the year.

PRIMARYLY ASSOCIATE DEGREE GRANTING BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS (PABs)

As more and more associate colleges have begun to offer bachelor's degree programs, there has been a growing number of the sector reclassifications by IPEDS, where two- and four-year colleges are determined based on program offerings. However, these reclassified four-year institutions often educate and award degrees primarily at the associate-degree level, which are considered Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate Institutions (PABs). PABs can be identified using the institutional category variable from the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics survey, which relies on both program offerings and degrees awarded. Alternatively, PABs can be identified based on an institution's Carnegie Classification, which similarly relies on program offering (there must be one bachelor's-level program offered) and degrees awarded. The IPEDS methodology identifies more institutions than the Carnegie methodology. This is because Carnegie

excludes tribal colleges and special focus colleges (e.g., those focused on health sciences, arts, or religious instruction) from its PAB designation. IPEDS does not. We elect to use the more conservative Carnegie Classification. PABs carry Carnegie Classifications of either 14 (Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges: Associate Dominant) or 23 (Baccalaureate/Associate College: Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate). In general, the difference between a 14 and a 23 designation lies in the share of degrees awarded at the associate degree level. Institutions with a 14 designation award 90% or more of degrees at the associate level while those with a 23 designation award more than 50% but less than 90% of degrees at the this level. To keep the panel methodology consistent across the years, the 2021 Carnegie designations were applied across all years analyzed in this report and we classified PABs as two-year institutions for all comparison years. In this report, community colleges are broadly defined to be inclusive of both PABs and public two-year institutions and are reported in a single category.

URBANICITY (CAMPUS SETTING)

Urbanicity refers to the geographic location of a college categorized on a continuum ranging from urban to rural, as defined by IPEDS. The IPEDS codes incorporated the population size and distance from an urbanized area, resulting in 12 distinct codes, grouped into the following four categories:

- Urban: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city
- Suburban: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area.
- Rural & Town (combined):
 - Town: Territory inside an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area.
 - Rural: Territory outside of an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM FOCUS

The program focus of a community college is classified in the following four categories based on the 2021 Carnegie Classification for Associate Colleges:

- High Transfer – Institutions where 35.7% or fewer of their awards were in career and technical disciplines.
- Mixed Transfer/Vocational – Institutions where between 35.7 and 53.8% of their awards were in career and technical disciplines.
- High Vocational – Institutions with at least 53.8% of their awards were considered high career and technical program mix.

- Other/Missing – Includes institutions classified either as “special-focus two-year institutions” and those without a basic Carnegie classification.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION - INCOME PROXY

The experimental measure aims to estimate the socioeconomic backgrounds of traditional college-age students (24 and younger). The measure utilizes U.S. street addresses reported to the Clearinghouse with each enrollment submission to locate students’ homes in a particular census tract through geocoding procedures. To best approximate socioeconomic origins, we use the first permanent address reported to the Clearinghouse for each student, so that the census tract is most likely to represent the socioeconomic status of their family home at the time they first entered postsecondary education. Income data for each tract are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2017-2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates and adjusted using Regional Price Parity values from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to account for economic differences by state and metropolitan area. In this report, we use tract median household income adjusted for household size to represent tract socioeconomic characteristics. This measure standardizes income with respect to household size. To accomplish this, we adjusted the median household income variables by household size provided for each census tract by the square root of household size and then calculated a weighted average of these adjusted measures based on the share of each size of household (1-7+ members) in a census tract. Income quintiles were generated using the national income distribution of all census tracts using this median household income adjusted for size. In this report, an average of 88.1% of students in the five-year fixed panel of institutions, and an average of 89.8% of the community college beginning cohorts, were successfully geocoded and assigned an income quintile.

Because this is an experimental proxy measure, readers should exercise caution in interpreting the results, particularly with respect to age and race/ethnicity. There is likely a greater disconnect between first addresses and socioeconomic origins for older students, particularly those whose first postsecondary enrollment occurred at older ages that are likely financially independent students, or whose first enrollment pre-dates the start of Clearinghouse data collection in 1993 or occurred in the early years when Clearinghouse data coverage was less extensive than it is now. In addition, because certain racial and ethnic groups have higher missing income values for this measure, we have limited the results presented in this report to only the four main groups (White, Latinx, Black, and Asian students) whose

missing rates are not higher than the panel average missing rate in each year. Moreover, issues relating to the quality of address information such as P.O. Box, incomplete street addresses, and non-U.S. addresses, which prevent the accurate matching of a student to a census tract, are the main reasons for missing values in the income estimate, and these conditions may also be correlated with income, as well as with race.

SECTION II

COMMUNITY COLLEGE BEGINNING COHORT

Students who were first-time during a fall term had no enrollment records or degree/certificate awards at Title IV U.S. institutions prior to the fall of the applicable year unless the previous enrollment record was before the student turned 18 years old or before the student graduated from high school (former dual enrollment). Community college beginning cohorts are identified by selecting all first time in college students who attended a public two-year or PAB institution in the fall term of interest.

Transfer Definition

We use the same definition of transfer students as Section I, but use academic year analysis of transfer which is specified as follows:

- Academic year transfer is defined by a student having a transfer record in either the fall, or spring term of the applicable academic year. A transfer designation was only counted once within an academic year. If a student transferred twice within an academic year, the first transfer record during the academic year was prioritized.
- Academic year non-transfer students are those who enrolled at the same institution as their last enrolled institution. If a student did not have a transfer record in either the fall or spring term of the applicable academic year, they were classified as non-transfer.

Spring/fall term and academic year are defined as follows:

- Fall (07/01-12/31); Spring (01/01-04/30)
- Academic year: 07/01-06/30

Yearly Outcomes

Students are counted in only one outcome category per year. Where the student is counted is based on a hierarchical order of outcomes listed below. For example, if a student completed a bachelor's degree, then that outcome was rolled over for each subsequent academic year, regardless of any subsequent enrollment or completion the student may have

achieved. All outcomes are grouped by transfer pathway: lateral two-year or upward transfer. If a student has an upward transfer at any point during the six years, the upward transfer is captured.

- Completed – Student earned any undergraduate-level credential, or the highest-level credential attained if there are multiple awards.
- Enrolled – Students have not yet received any undergraduate-level credential but are still enrolled.
- Not Enrolled – Students had no enrollments in the given academic year. This is not a terminal outcome. In other words, a student can be counted as “not enrolled” in one

academic year, but then counted as “enrolled” in a subsequent year if the student returns to college.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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