

The Path Least Taken

A quest to learn more about high school graduates who don't go on to college

Who We're Talking About

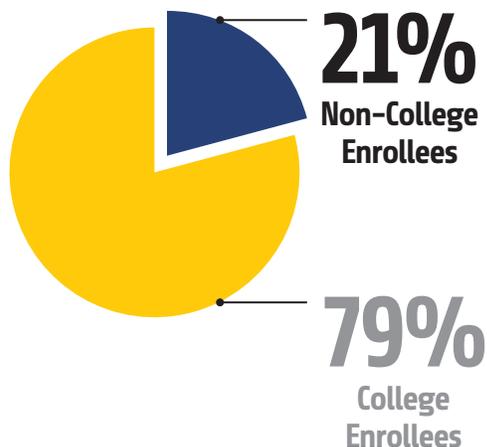
High school graduates: those students who graduated high school on time with a standard high school diploma or higher. It does not include students who earned a GED, a certificate of completion, vocational diploma, special education diploma or any other credential that illustrates student accomplishments but not satisfaction of high school requirements. This analysis does not include students who dropped out of high school.

Non-college enrollees: high school graduates who had not attended a two- or four-year college, but may have enrolled in a non-academic institution like a trade school.

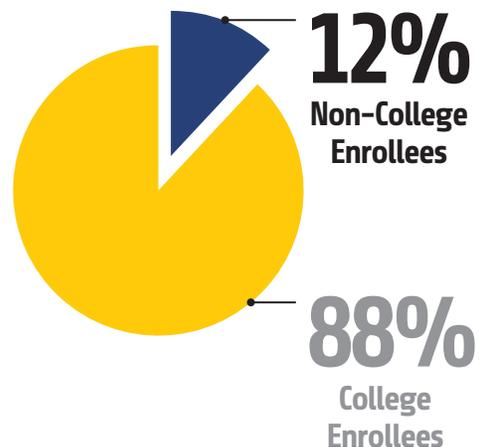
A Startling Discovery

The percentage of high school graduates who don't advance to a two- or four-year college is remarkably small.

College attendance by age 20



College attendance by age 26

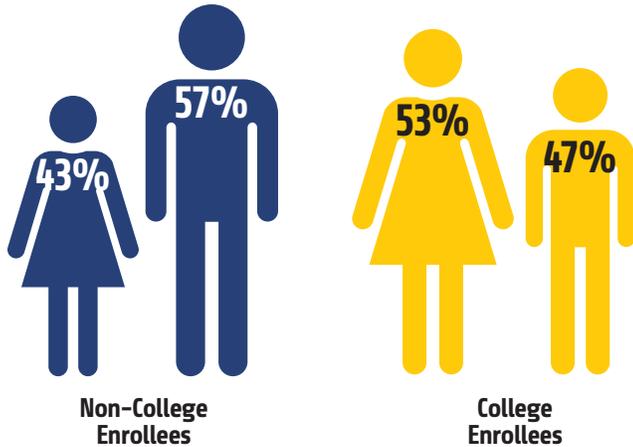




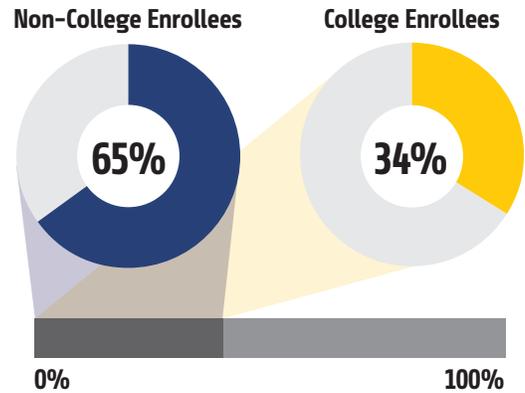
Who Are the 12%?

Comparing Class of 2004 non-college enrollees to their college-going peers

They tend to be male.

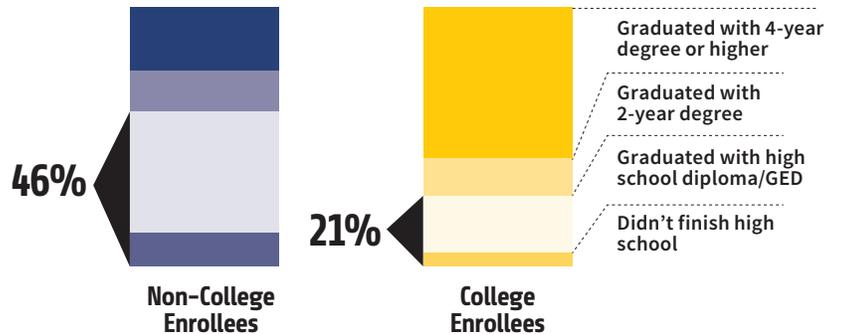


Two out of three come from the lower end of the socioeconomic scale*.

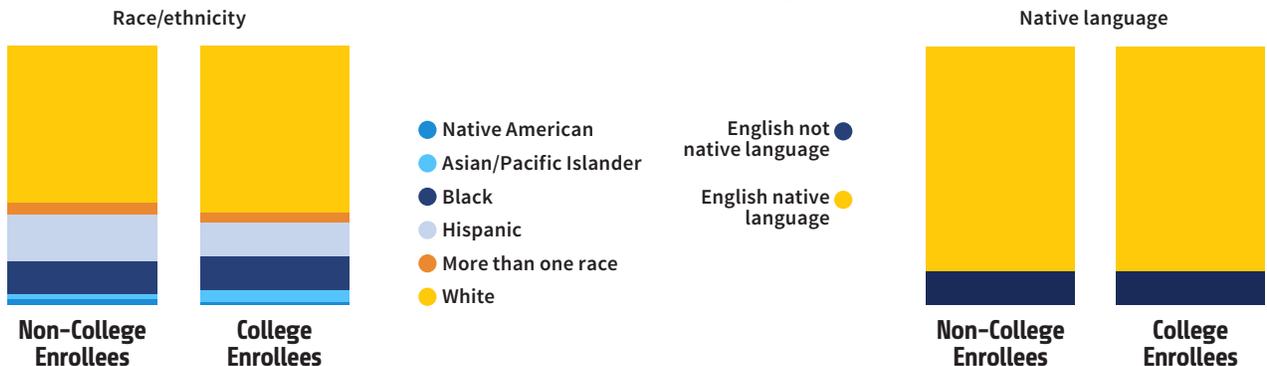


*Note: The bottom two quintiles or the lower 40% of the socioeconomic scale.

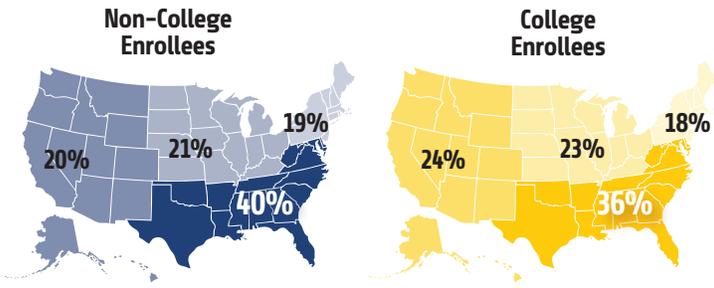
About half (46%) have parents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma or less.



They are as ethnically and linguistically diverse as their college-going peers.



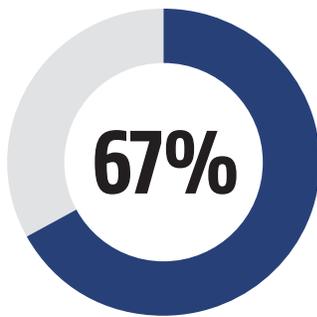
Southern graduates were less likely to attend college.



Rural graduates were less likely to attend college, while urban graduates were more likely to attend college.



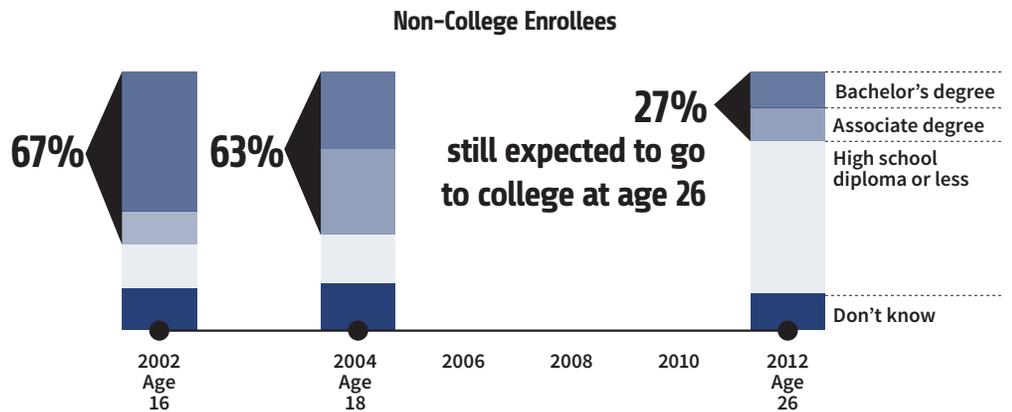
What Were Non-College Enrollees' Expectations For After High School?



Non-College Enrollees

Two-thirds of non-college enrollees began high school believing they would go on to college.

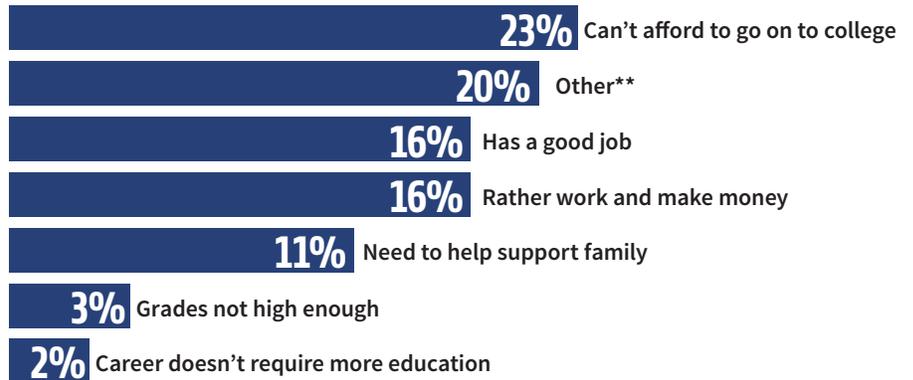
Among non-college enrollees, desire for college stayed steady during high school.





And Then What Happened?

Finances were cited most often for not attending college. Yet there were other factors.

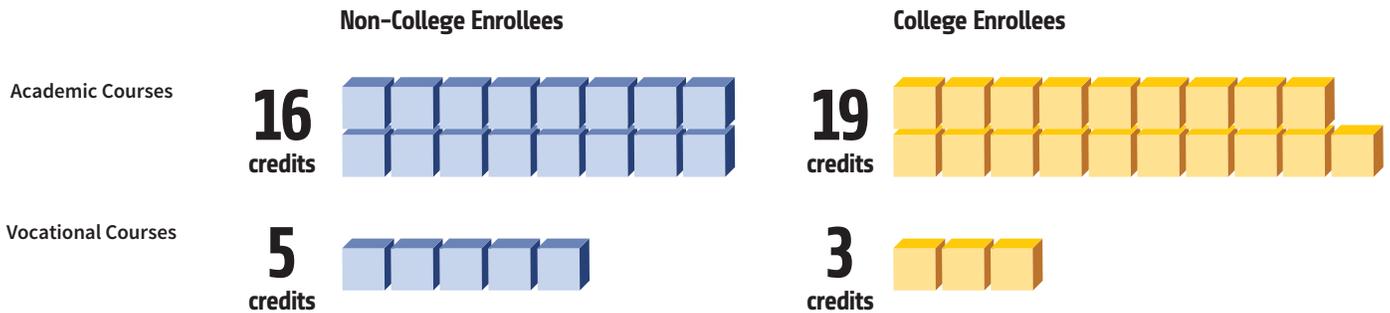


**Combines the responses of pregnancy/child care/marriage, taking a break, undecided, military, and other infrequently cited reasons such as incarceration.

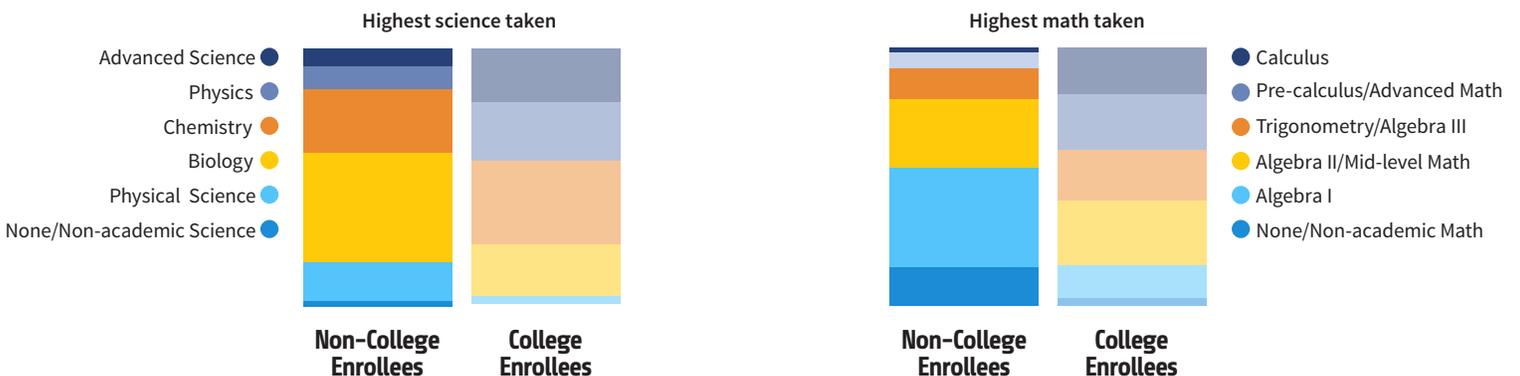


But How Academically Prepared Were Non-College Enrollees in High School?

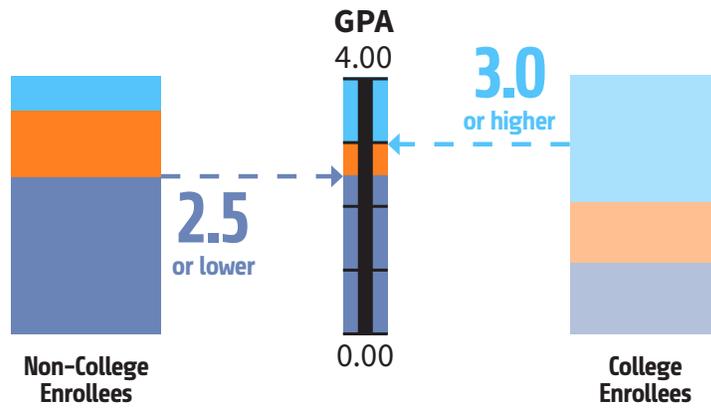
On average, they took three fewer academic courses than college-goers.



They took less rigorous courses.



They earned lower grades.



They spend fewer hours on homework per week in high school.



And ultimately performed poorer on math and reading assessments.



What's the Big Takeaway?

It's important for public schools to prepare all students to be life-long learners, regardless of whether or not they go on to college. Such preparation includes rigorous courses and more student support, especially in bridging the gulf between aspiration and attainment. Ultimately, more needs to be known to better meet the needs of the non-college goer.

Questions School Leaders Should Ask

What do students expect?

How many students expect to go onto college when they enter high school?

Do these expectations change while in high school?

What do students actually do?

How many high school graduates don't enroll in college right after high school?

How many high school graduates don't ever enroll in college?

How many high school graduates don't go onto college but wanted to?

What prevented them from going to college?

Who are they?

Do the demographic backgrounds differ between those students who go onto college and those who don't?

How does the high school preparation differ between those students who go onto college and those who don't?

What do non-college enrollees do after high school?

How well do we assist students with their post high school plans?

Do we have enough trained guidance counselors who are knowledgeable in postsecondary options and their entry requirements?

Do we provide opportunities for internships and college visits?

Do we encourage all students to take rigorous courses in high school, regardless of their plans after graduation?

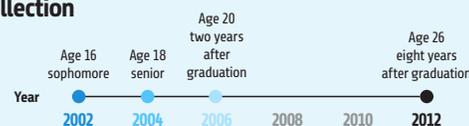
Methodology

- Data from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS, 2002) is the primary information source for this analysis.
- ELS is a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics that followed a nationally representative sample of 15,000 high school sophomores from 750 high schools. Participation in the ELS at both the student and school level is voluntary.

Data Sample



Data collection



What was collected?

Student Survey



Transcripts



High School Location



Assessment Data math and reading



Acknowledgments

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