First-generation College Graduates’ Enrollment After Earning a Bachelor’s Degree

About one year after earning a bachelor’s degree in academic year 2015–16, first-generation college graduates reported a lower expected level of educational attainment than continuing-generation graduates.

- Did not expect to earn a graduate degree: 36% of first-generation college graduates, 32% of continuing-generation college graduates.
- Expected to earn a master’s degree: 45% of first-generation college graduates, 46% of continuing-generation college graduates.
- Expected to earn a doctoral degree: 19% of first-generation college graduates, 22% of continuing-generation college graduates.

A lower percentage of first-generation college graduates had taken a graduate or professional entrance exam within a year of earning a bachelor’s degree.

GRADUATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Within a year after earning a bachelor’s degree, 23% of first-generation college graduates and 24% of continuing-generation college graduates enrolled in postsecondary education again. Among those who enrolled again, more first-generation college graduates enrolled in a master’s degree program than continuing-generation college graduates.

Percentage who enrolled in a master’s degree program among those who enrolled again within a year of graduating, by participation in a research project with a faculty member as an undergraduate student:

- Total: 58% (first-generation), 50% (continuing-generation).
- Participated in a research project: 60% (first-generation), 46% (continuing-generation).
- Did not participate in a research project: 57% (first-generation), 52% (continuing-generation).

Percentage who enrolled in a doctoral degree program among those who enrolled again within a year of graduating, by participation in a research project with a faculty member as an undergraduate student:

- Total: 12% (first-generation), 22% (continuing-generation).
- Participated in a research project: 15% (first-generation), 30% (continuing-generation).
- Did not participate in a research project: 11% (first-generation), 17% (continuing-generation).

Fact sheet represents individuals who received a bachelor’s degree in academic year 2015–16 from a Title IV postsecondary institution. A first-generation college student/graduate is an individual whose parents do not have a bachelor’s or higher degree. A continuing-generation college student/graduate is an individual who has at least one parent with a bachelor’s or higher degree. “Did not expect to earn a graduate degree” includes graduates whose highest expected attainment was a post-baccalaureate certificate or graduate level courses. Master’s degree includes master’s degrees and post-master’s certificates. Doctoral degree includes research and professional doctoral degrees. Percentages are rounded. Data source is U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016/17 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B88R16/17). B88R16/17 was released in 2019 and is the most recent cohort of B88R. Total sample size is 19,490. Weighted sample size (population size) is 2 million. Fact sheet produced by RTI International.

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