

One-Third of All College Students Transfer Schools

By [Caralee Adams](#) on February 28, 2012 6:32 AM

Although many high schools seniors will soon be deciding which college to attend in the fall, new research shows for many it might not be the only time they choose a school.

A new [report by the National Student Clearing House Center](#) finds that one-third of all students transferred a least once within five years before earning a degree. Most did so in their second year (37 percent), although 22 percent switched in their fourth and fifth years—and 25 percent transferred more than once. Transfer rates were similar for part- and full-time students.

When the federal government tracks college graduation, it focuses on first-time, full-time freshmen who graduate from the same institution they enter. Students who do not receive a degree from their first institution are treated as dropouts in standard reporting.

[The Signature Report Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions](#) chronicles what many in higher education have been saying: Often students today no longer follow a traditional path from college entry to degree at a single institution. This mobility makes it hard to accurately capture graduation rates as they are currently measured.

The report found overall transfer rates for two- and four-year institutions, and for public and private non-profit institutions were very similar, ranging from 32.6 to 34.4 percent, while transfer rates for private for-profit institutions were lower (16.3 and 19.6 percent for two- and four-year private for-profit institutions, respectively).

Nearly 27 percent of students crossed state lines when they transferred, according to the report.

The authors of the "Signature" report suggest that another view of completion may be useful, in which students are the unit of analysis and institutions are viewed as stepping stones along a diverse set of educational paths. "This view could lead to new approaches and metrics that better inform students and institutions about the range of successful enrollment patterns," the report notes. "Moreover, rather than focusing criticism on institutions when they fail to capture the entirety of each student's educational career, it would properly recognize all of the institutions that play a role within that career."

The analysis looked at enrollment data over five years of 2.8 million full- and part-time students of all ages in all institution types who began postsecondary education in the U.S. in fall 2006. The research was done by the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#), in partnership with the [Indiana University Project on Academic Success](#).

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