

# ***Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes***

## Annual Progress Report – Academic Year 2020/21



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Low student success rates are widespread in American higher education. More than a quarter of freshmen do not return for their [second year](#); at community colleges, it is 41 percent. In [2019](#), the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center identified 36 million adults who had some postsecondary experience but had yet to earn any type of credential and were no longer enrolled, the *Some College, No Credential (SCNC)* students.

Enabling SCNC students to finish a postsecondary credential brings personal and societal benefits, which are recognized by the many states that have established [postsecondary attainment goals](#). But high college costs, inaccessibility, and the currently strong labor market have kept low-skilled workers out of higher education. If these trends continue, a growing number of U.S. workers lacking education credentials risk being left behind in the twenty-first century economy. At the same time, most colleges are still reeling from [historic enrollment declines](#) during the pandemic, suggesting that the continued health of higher education institutions, and their ability to meet the needs of future students, may depend on their success at re-engaging SCNC students today.

In this context, national, state, and institutional leaders should think about how higher education could become more accessible and more equitable for SCNC students. To succeed, policy makers and education leaders will need accurate and timely information about the current SCNC population, their progress, and outcomes attained upon returning to the educational pathways they had left behind.

This report is the third in a series that quantifies the SCNC population growth over time and identifies the levels of opportunity within each state for re-engaging SCNC students in the postsecondary attainment pipeline. In this edition, we introduce three new metrics for tracking SCNC student outcomes: “*Re-Enrollment*” after stop-out, completion of “*First Credential*,” and “*Perseverance*” as indicated by continuous enrollment beyond first re-enrollment. We report these outcomes during the academic year 2020/21, both for the nation and by state, with details on student subgroups categorized by gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Next year, we will provide updated results for the academic year 2021/22, with the ability to track the year-over-year progress for each state.

The data in this report shows that the SCNC population has reached 39 million as of July 2020. This represents an 8.6 percent increase from the 36 million we reported in [2019](#), and it has grown in every state except two. New findings offer insights into nearly one million returning students and over 60,000 credential earners during the first year of the pandemic (AY 2020/21). The report is accompanied by the national and state data dashboard with key information about SCNC student profiles and their success and progress in returning to higher education, for all 50 states including D.C. and U.S. territories.

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## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The number of SCNC students rose to 39 million as of July 2020. Forty-eight states and D.C. experienced a net growth of SCNC students.
- California, Texas, New York, and Illinois account for more than a third of the nation's SCNC students. However, Alaska shows the largest number of SCNC students per 1,000 currently enrolled undergraduates among all states.
- The SCNC demographic and prior enrollment characteristics remain the same as we reported in 2019. Most were younger than 35 when stopping out. Most SCNC students last attended a community college.
- During the academic year 2020/21, 944,200 SCNC students re-enrolled and 60,400 students earned their first-ever postsecondary credential. An additional 531,700 students were still enrolled after re-enrolling the previous year. (These outcomes reference SCNC students aged 18 to 64.)
- About 62 percent of the 944,200 students changed institutions upon re-enrolling, and those who did change institutions also commonly crossed institution sectors (67%). Re-enrolling in a community college after last attending a community college was the most common pathway for SCNC re-enrollees (363,400 students, 38.5%).
- Seventy percent of the 60,400 completers obtained their credential from a public institution (two- or four-year). Private nonprofit four-year institutions had the highest perseverance rates (64.8%), while community colleges had the lowest (50.2%).
- SCNC re-enrollees and credential earners pursued and completed the most-common college majors, but bachelor's degree-seeking SCNC students more likely than other undergraduates majored in business.
- Women outnumbered men in re-enrollment, credential earning, and perseverance. The share of re-enrollees among minority women was substantially higher than men (63.5% versus 34.6%).
- Associate degrees were the most common credential earned by Latinx SCNC students (42.5%), whereas Black students were most likely to have completed a certificate (42.7%). Asian and White students persevered at a higher rate than other groups.
- Nearly half of Northeast credential earners were bachelor's degree recipients (46.2%), in contrast to the South where more than three-quarters of the recipients had a sub-baccalaureate credential (76.1%). Florida institutions produced a higher share of credential earners, and Illinois produced a smaller share, compared to their share of SCNC students.

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## ***I. SCNC POPULATION: Geographic, Demographic, and Education Profiles***

### ***1. The number of SCNC students rose to 39 million as of July 2020. Forty-eight states and D.C. experienced a net growth of SCNC students.***

Thirty-nine million people are now identified as SCNC as of July 2020. A combination of net growth and methodological enhancements contributed to the 3.1 million (8.6%) increase over the 36 million previously reported. Specifically, there was a 1.9 million (5.3%) net growth during the 19 months between December 2018 (the data cut-off date of the previous research) and July 2020, and an additional 1.2 million SCNC students newly identified in the Clearinghouse data due to improved student matching and our decision to include those whose last enrollment was at a Title-IV institution in a U.S. territory (see methodological notes for further details).

Over 19-months, nearly all states and D.C. saw an increase in SCNC net growth numbers, with Arizona showing the steepest (+86,400, +15.0%; see **Appendix**). Only two states, Nebraska and Connecticut, did not experience growth (-250, -0.1% and -1,200, -0.3% respectively). Although not included in individual state counts, SCNC students who stopped out of Multi-State institutions or Primarily Online Institutions (POIs) showed the second fastest rate of growth (+315,000, +13.7%).

### ***2. Over a third of the SCNC population were last enrolled in California, Texas, New York, and Illinois (34.9%). After adjusting for current undergraduate enrollment, Alaska shows the largest number of SCNC students among all states.***

In general, the SCNC population by state (defined by the location of their last enrolled institution) is proportional to current undergraduate enrollment levels, with over a third of SCNC students last enrolled in California, Texas, New York, or Illinois (34.9%; see **Table 1**). However, there are states whose SCNC population is relatively large given the size of current undergraduate enrollment in the state.

As a proxy measure for the levels of opportunity within each state for re-engaging SCNC students in the postsecondary attainment pipeline, we calculated the SCNC population per 1,000 undergraduates currently enrolled in the state. For example, California's enrollment adjusted SCNC number is 2,354, the 19th largest in the country, even though it has the largest share of the nation's SCNC students (17.5%; see **Figure 1**). In contrast, states that comprise a very small percentage of the total SCNC population (3.1% or less), such as Alaska, Oregon, Nevada, Washington, and Wyoming, have considerably large SCNC student numbers, over 3,200 per 1,000 undergraduates, well above the national average of 2,147 per 1,000 undergraduates.

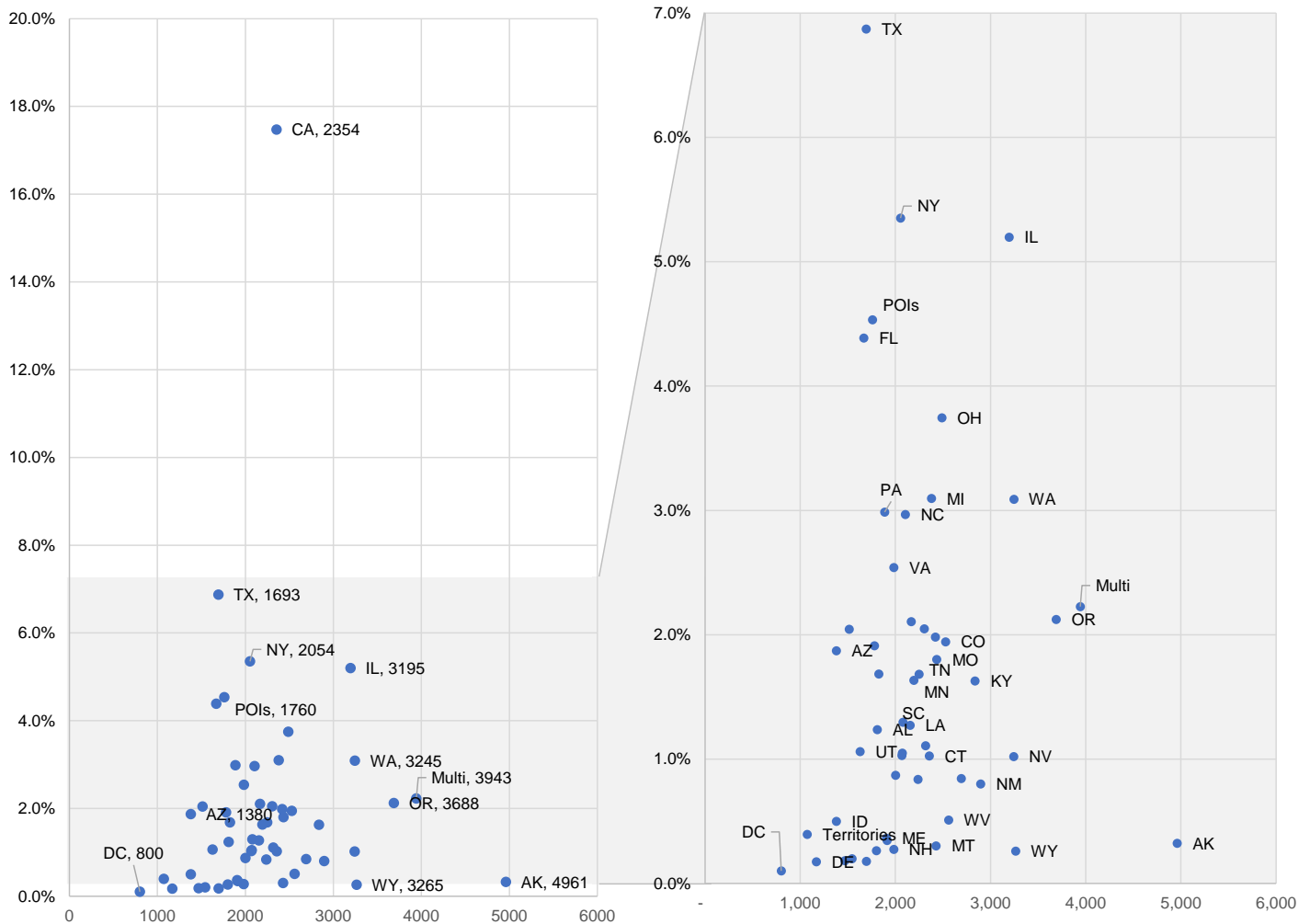
The highest number is Alaska's (4,961), more than twice that of California. Given that its SCNC student population is nearly five times greater than current undergraduate enrollment, and as **Table 1** shows, 43.9 percent of its SCNC population are younger than 35—the age group constituting two thirds of SCNC students who re-enrolled (see **National Dashboard**), Alaska represents one of the highest levels of untapped SCNC population that states can leverage to improve the postsecondary attainment rate.

**Table 1. SCNC Population by State**

| State            | SCNC Population (as of July 2021) |                        |                     | State Share of National SCNC | State Share of National Undergrad Enrollment | SCNC Counts Per 1,000 Undergrad Enrollment | National Undergrad Enrollment (AY2020/21) |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--|--|---|
|                  | Total Counts                      | Age Under 35 (Percent) | Age 35-64 (Percent) |                              |  |  |   |
| Alabama          | 450,300                           | 24.8%                  | 53.1%               | 1.2%                         | 1.5%   | 1,811                                      | 248,710                                   |
| Alaska           | 117,912                           | 43.9%                  | 48.3%               | 0.3%                         | 0.1%   | 4,961                                      | 23,767                                    |
| Arizona          | 681,252                           | 44.1%                  | 46.1%               | 1.9%                         | 2.9%   | 1,380                                      | 493,808                                   |
| Arkansas         | 304,513                           | 39.7%                  | 46.3%               | 0.8%                         | 0.8%   | 2,237                                      | 136,108                                   |
| California       | 6,360,375                         | 30.2%                  | 51.6%               | 17.5%                        | 15.9%  | 2,354                                      | 2,701,427                                 |
| Colorado         | 707,584                           | 27.1%                  | 53.8%               | 1.9%                         | 1.7%   | 2,527                                      | 280,033                                   |
| Connecticut      | 373,312                           | 29.3%                  | 45.8%               | 1.0%                         | 0.9%   | 2,356                                      | 158,453                                   |
| Delaware         | 63,522                            | 53.7%                  | 39.6%               | 0.2%                         | 0.3%   | 1,170                                      | 54,289                                    |
| D.C.             | 36,575                            | 41.5%                  | 43.7%               | 0.1%                         | 0.3%   | 800  | 45,693                                    |
| Florida          | 1,596,975                         | 39.5%                  | 51.3%               | 4.4%                         | 5.6%   | 1,668                                      | 957,174                                   |
| Georgia          | 744,495                           | 44.1%                  | 45.2%               | 2.0%                         | 2.9%   | 1,514                                      | 491,713                                   |
| Hawaii           | 96,224                            | 49.8%                  | 44.9%               | 0.3%                         | 0.3%   | 1,801                                      | 53,438                                    |
| Idaho            | 181,897                           | 40.0%                  | 45.4%               | 0.5%                         | 0.8%   | 1,379                                      | 131,892                                   |
| Illinois         | 1,892,039                         | 35.7%                  | 41.3%               | 5.2%                         | 3.5%   | 3,195                                      | 592,151                                   |
| Indiana          | 745,358                           | 35.1%                  | 49.0%               | 2.0%                         | 1.9%   | 2,304                                      | 323,499                                   |
| Iowa             | 374,653                           | 35.0%                  | 49.0%               | 1.0%                         | 1.1%   | 2,068                                      | 181,126                                   |
| Kansas           | 381,941                           | 35.4%                  | 46.9%               | 1.0%                         | 1.1%   | 2,072                                      | 184,320                                   |
| Kentucky         | 592,803                           | 33.5%                  | 54.5%               | 1.6%                         | 1.2%   | 2,837                                      | 208,952                                   |
| Louisiana        | 462,882                           | 36.1%                  | 48.9%               | 1.3%                         | 1.3%   | 2,155                                      | 214,794                                   |
| Maine            | 132,459                           | 34.2%                  | 49.0%               | 0.4%                         | 0.4%   | 1,906                                      | 69,485                                    |
| Maryland         | 613,138                           | 37.4%                  | 52.2%               | 1.7%                         | 2.0%   | 1,826                                      | 335,792                                   |
| Massachusetts    | 695,898                           | 32.7%                  | 50.3%               | 1.9%                         | 2.3%   | 1,781                                      | 390,789                                   |
| Michigan         | 1,127,317                         | 37.6%                  | 51.7%               | 3.1%                         | 2.8%   | 2,379                                      | 473,833                                   |
| Minnesota        | 594,996                           | 30.2%                  | 52.1%               | 1.6%                         | 1.6%   | 2,194                                      | 271,164                                   |
| Mississippi      | 316,491                           | 45.0%                  | 44.4%               | 0.9%                         | 0.9%   | 2,001                                      | 158,198                                   |
| Missouri         | 655,908                           | 37.1%                  | 51.8%               | 1.8%                         | 1.6%   | 2,434                                      | 269,428                                   |
| Montana          | 110,090                           | 34.9%                  | 48.3%               | 0.3%                         | 0.3%   | 2,428                                      | 45,345                                    |
| Nebraska         | 307,345                           | 26.9%                  | 52.2%               | 0.8%                         | 0.7%   | 2,692                                      | 114,190                                   |
| Nevada           | 371,384                           | 28.5%                  | 55.3%               | 1.0%                         | 0.7%   | 3,243                                      | 114,516                                   |
| New Hampshire    | 99,823                            | 36.7%                  | 48.5%               | 0.3%                         | 0.3%   | 1,982                                      | 50,360                                    |
| New Jersey       | 766,459                           | 37.5%                  | 51.1%               | 2.1%                         | 2.1%   | 2,166                                      | 353,872                                   |
| New Mexico       | 291,443                           | 37.3%                  | 48.4%               | 0.8%                         | 0.6%   | 2,897                                      | 100,616                                   |
| New York         | 1,948,109                         | 35.3%                  | 43.3%               | 5.4%                         | 5.6%   | 2,054                                      | 948,472                                   |
| North Carolina   | 1,080,138                         | 33.8%                  | 53.5%               | 3.0%                         | 3.0%   | 2,105                                      | 513,117                                   |
| North Dakota     | 72,725                            | 37.9%                  | 48.3%               | 0.2%                         | 0.3%   | 1,544                                      | 47,091                                    |
| Ohio             | 1,363,710                         | 31.9%                  | 53.6%               | 3.7%                         | 3.2%   | 2,488                                      | 548,047                                   |
| Oklahoma         | 403,289                           | 42.4%                  | 49.3%               | 1.1%                         | 1.0%   | 2,317                                      | 174,070                                   |
| Oregon           | 773,080                           | 24.5%                  | 47.6%               | 2.1%                         | 1.2%   | 3,688                                      | 209,606                                   |
| Pennsylvania     | 1,087,555                         | 34.9%                  | 50.9%               | 3.0%                         | 3.4%   | 1,887                                      | 576,321                                   |
| Rhode Island     | 125,883                           | 32.5%                  | 55.5%               | 0.3%                         | 0.4%   | 1,912                                      | 65,842                                    |
| South Carolina   | 472,043                           | 38.0%                  | 49.3%               | 1.3%                         | 1.3%   | 2,080                                      | 226,918                                   |
| South Dakota     | 67,022                            | 37.3%                  | 49.3%               | 0.2%                         | 0.3%   | 1,469                                      | 45,639                                    |
| Tennessee        | 612,326                           | 37.3%                  | 52.4%               | 1.7%                         | 1.6%   | 2,249                                      | 272,219                                   |
| Texas            | 2,501,802                         | 43.6%                  | 49.7%               | 6.9%                         | 8.7%   | 1,693                                      | 1,477,545                                 |
| Utah             | 386,318                           | 34.4%                  | 53.1%               | 1.1%                         | 1.4%   | 1,628                                      | 237,316                                   |
| Vermont          | 64,723                            | 31.2%                  | 47.9%               | 0.2%                         | 0.2%   | 1,696                                      | 38,158                                    |
| Virginia         | 924,765                           | 30.8%                  | 52.8%               | 2.5%                         | 2.8%   | 1,983                                      | 466,445                                   |
| Washington       | 1,124,642                         | 22.7%                  | 56.8%               | 3.1%                         | 2.0%   | 3,245                                      | 346,575                                   |
| West Virginia    | 185,449                           | 36.6%                  | 43.5%               | 0.5%                         | 0.4%   | 2,560                                      | 72,429                                    |
| Wisconsin        | 721,678                           | 25.8%                  | 54.8%               | 2.0%                         | 1.8%   | 2,420                                      | 298,233                                   |
| Wyoming          | 94,687                            | 28.2%                  | 50.9%               | 0.3%                         | 0.2%   | 3,265                                      | 29,002                                    |
| U.S. Territories | 143,464                           | 72.7%                  | 26.1%               | 0.4%                         | 0.8%   | 1,074                                      | 133,620                                   |
| Multi-State*     | 869,313                           | 40.6%                  | 55.3%               | 2.2%                         | 1.2%   | 3,943                                      | 220,453                                   |
| POIs*            | 1,770,015                         | 25.1%                  | 69.1%               | 4.5%                         | 5.5%   | 1,760                                      | 1,005,579                                 |
| National         | 39,040,099                        | 34.0%                  | 51.4%               |                              |  | 2,147                                      | 18,181,632                                |

\*Multi-State and Primarily Online Institutions (POIs) are not included in individual state counts, but are included in the national total.

**Figure 1. Number of SCNC Students per 1,000 Undergraduates Enrolled in State (with Detailed Insert)**

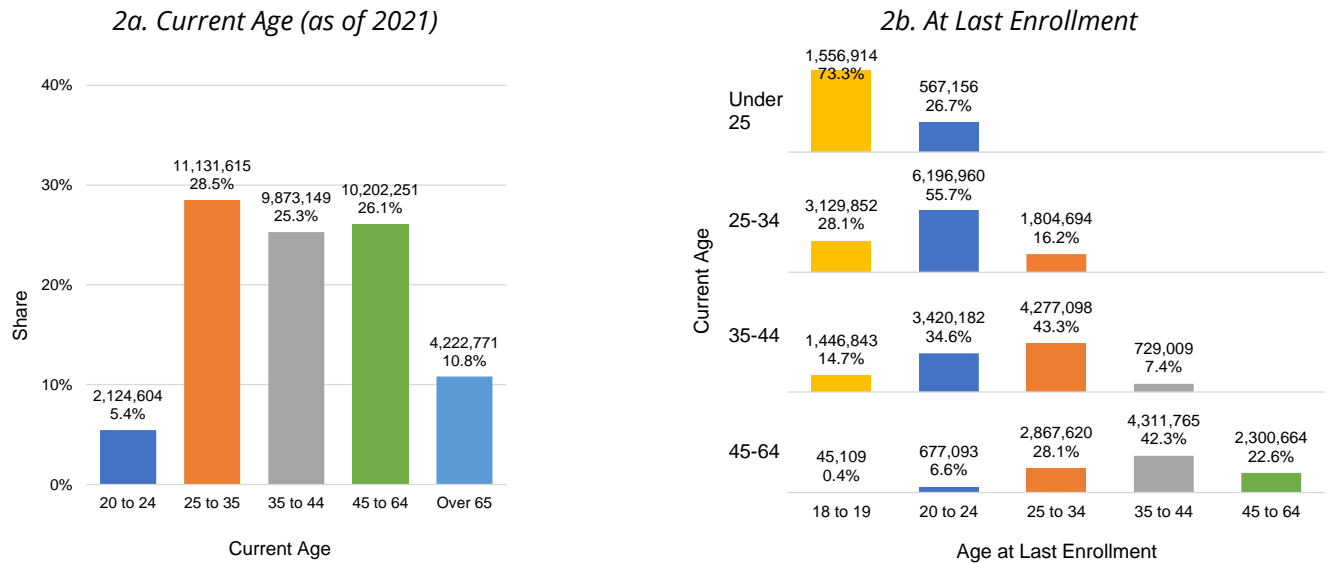


Note: Multi refers to multi-state institutions (see methodological notes for more details).

**3. The SCNC demographic and enrollment characteristics remain largely the same as we reported previously in 2019. Most were younger than 35 when stopping out. Men tended to be younger than women at last enrollment. Most SCNC students last attended a community college.**

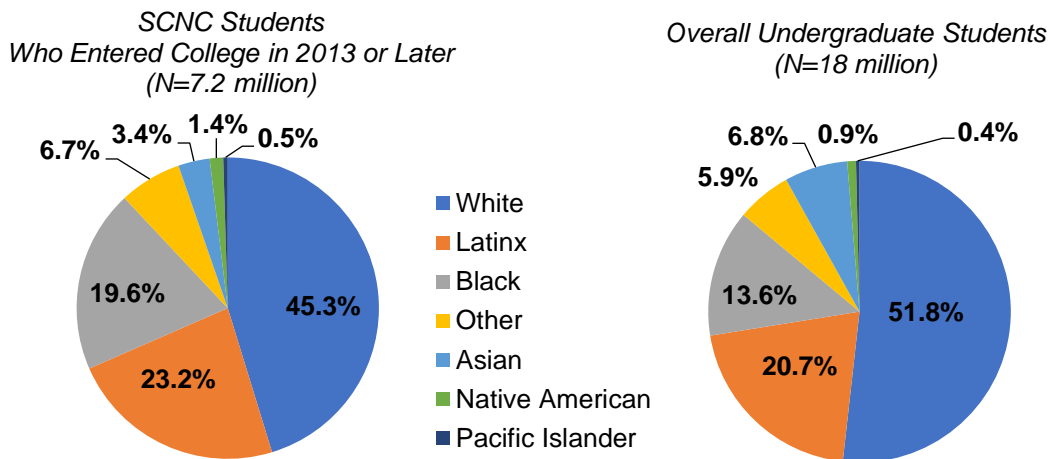
The 39 million SCNC students are middle-aged, with a median age of 40.3 and average age of 43.7, as of July 31st, 2021. As shown in Figure 2a, 28.5 percent of SCNC students are currently between 25 and 35 years old, and over half are between 35 and 64 years old (51.4%). In contrast, SCNC students who are now under 25 make up a small share of the population (5.4%). However, many were under 25 when they left postsecondary education. Of the 9.8 million students who are currently between 35 and 44 years of age, 49.3 percent left postsecondary education before they turned 25, with 34.6 percent leaving between the age of 20 to 24 (see Figure 2b). It is worth noting that since the Clearinghouse enrollment data reporting began in 1993, SCNC students who left postsecondary education more than 25 years ago are likely to be underestimated in this report (see methodological notes for more details).

**Figure 2. SCNC Population's Age Profile**



In line with our previous report, racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented among SCNC students today, relative to current undergraduate students (see **Figure 3**). Race and ethnicity data are limited in the early years of the Clearinghouse data reporting. Based on a subset of the 39 million SCNC students who entered college in 2013 or later, we were able to examine the racial and ethnic makeup of SCNC students. White students comprised 45.3 percent of the total SCNC students with valid race and ethnicity data, compared to 51.8 percent in overall undergraduate students. Black and Latinx SCNC students collectively made up 42.8 percent, compared to 34.3 percent in overall undergraduates.

**Figure 3. A National Snapshot of the SCNC Racial/Ethnic Composition**



Note: Race and ethnicity data are missing for 27% of SCNC students and 16.9% for overall undergraduates (AY2020/21). "Other" includes multi-race and non-resident aliens.

Compared to women, men were typically younger when they stopped out; 48.3 percent of men (8.5 million) left before turning 25, compared to 39 percent of women (7 million; see Appendix). This is notable since the overall numbers are relatively similar (17.6 million men and 17.9 million women). One contributing factor to the gender difference in age makeup is that there were 3 million women who were between 45 and 64 years old at the time of their last enrollment, compared to 2 million men in the same age category.

Community colleges were the most common institution type of last enrollment, representing 22.7 million students (58.3% of total SCNCs; see Appendix), followed by public four-year institutions (15.4%) and private four-year institutions (6.8% nonprofit and 1.5% for-profit, respectively). An additional 4.7 million students (12.2%) stopped out of "Primarily Associate's Four-Year" institutions (see methodological notes) and 1.7 million other students (4.5%) last attended a POI.

## II. SCNC Student Success and Progress

In the sections that follow we report SCNC student outcomes in reference to those aged 18-64 as defined at the time of the observed outcome. While people older than 64 comprised 10.8 percent of the SCNC population (4.2 million), only a very small number of them re-enrolled (6,200, or 0.1%) and even fewer completed a credential (300, or 0.007%). Thus, we limited our analysis of SCNC outcomes to 18- to 64-year old adults in order not to skew the outcomes, due to older SCNC students being less likely to return to postsecondary education. However, the SCNC demographic profile in the previous section is inclusive of all ages.

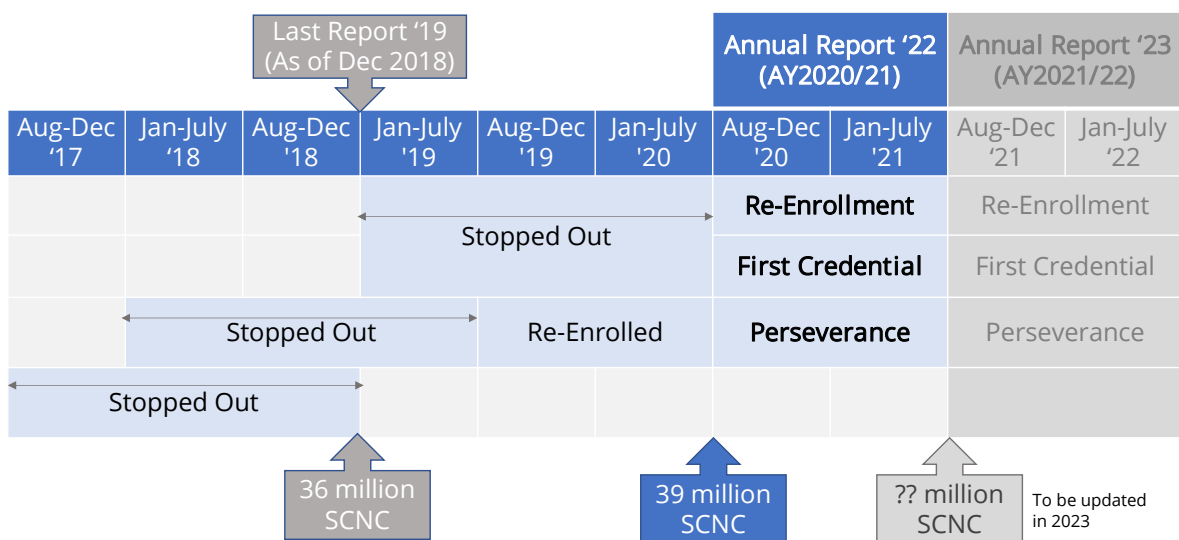
Three additional metrics for tracking SCNC student outcomes are new to this year’s report, reflecting their outcomes during the academic year 2020/21 (observed August 2020 to July 2021): Re-enrollment, first credential, and perseverance. **Figure 4** illustrates a timeline of the three metrics as defined below.

**Re-Enrollment** is defined as students who hold a valid enrollment record (a full-time or part-time enrollment status) in the year following a stop-out of at least three consecutive terms (see the methodological notes for more information). In 2020/21, **over 944,200 (or 2.4% of the 39 million) SCNC students re-enrolled** in postsecondary education.

**First Credential** measures the number of SCNC students earning their first ever credential during the first academic year after stopping out. In 2020/21, **60,400 students earned a credential (or 0.2% of the 39 million SCNC students)**.

**Perseverance** captures approximately **531,700 SCNC students who continued enrollment in 2020/21 after first re-enrolling in the previous year (2019/20)**. Of the 966,200 SCNC students who re-enrolled in 2019/20, 531,700 students persevered in the following year (55.0%) and an additional 58,450 students (6.1%) earned a credential within a year of re-enrolling, resulting in a combined success and progress rate of 61.1 percent among 2019/20 re-enrollees (“**total progress rate,**” hereafter). A decline of 22,000 (2.1%) re-enrollees between 966,200 in 2019/20 and 944,200 in 2020/21 is indicative of the initial impact of the pandemic, which varied by state (see Appendix). We will look at the pandemic’s impacts next year with more data across the three academic years (2019/20 to 2021/22). It is worth noting that the baseline population for the perseverance metric differs from the other two metrics’ population. The perseverance metric tracks SCNC students with a stop out and re-enrollment period one year prior to the period captured for re-enrollment and first credential (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Timeline of Re-Enrollment, First Credential, and Perseverance Metrics**





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**4. 944,200 SCNC students (aged 18-64) re-enrolled and 60,400 students (aged 18-64) earned their first postsecondary credential in AY2020/21. About 62 percent of re-enrollees chose a different institution from their last enrollment. Re-enrolling in a community college after last attending a community college was the most common pathway for SCNC re-enrollees (363,400 students, 38.5%). Seventy percent of completers obtained their credential from a public institution. Private nonprofit four-year institutions had the highest perseverance rates (64.8%), while community colleges had the lowest (50.2%).**

During the 2020/21 academic year, 944,200 SCNC students returned to postsecondary education. The largest number re-enrolled at a community college (50.6%) and all other types of institutions follow by a wide margin, such as POIs (14.8%), public four-years (12.8%), primarily associate's four-years (10.7%), and private nonprofit four-years (8.0%; see Appendix). Private for-profit four-years that are not POIs accounted for 1.8 percent.

Similar to our previous report in 2019, overall SCNC students tend to re-enroll in a different institution from where they last enrolled (61.7%, 583,300 students; see Figure 5a); when they re-enroll in a different institution, they are likely to go to an institution of different sector (67.0%, 391,000 students), for whom community colleges and POIs appear to be the most popular destinations (see Figure 5b).

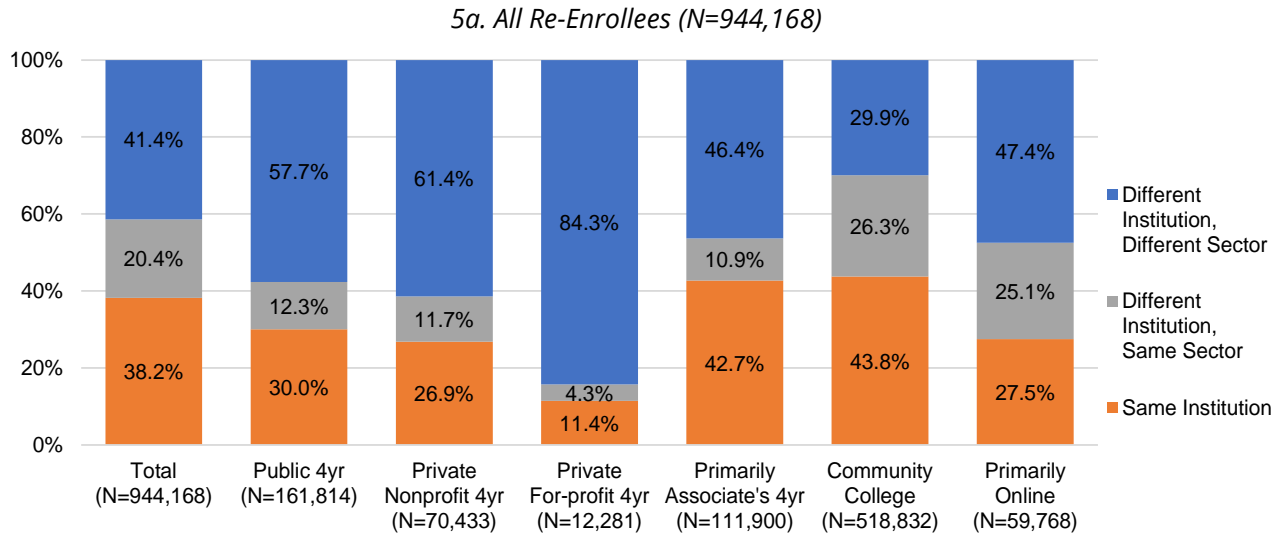
Taking a deeper look by the institution type of last enrollment, the overall pathways described above begin to diverge (see Appendix). For SCNC students who stopped out of community colleges (519,000 students; 54.9% of all SCNC re-enrollees), they likely returned to the community college they left (227,000 students or 43.8%; see Figure 5a), or went to a different community college (136,000 students or 26.3%) or a POI (60,800 students or 11.7%; see National Dashboard). In comparison, public and private four-year stopouts are less likely to return to the institution they last attended (30% or fewer; see Figure 5a). In fact, over half of public and private four-year stopouts returned to an institution of different sector (ranging from 57.7% for public four-year stopouts to 84.3% for private for-profit four-year stopouts).

Those stopping out of community colleges were least likely to return to an institution of different sector (29.9%; see Figure 5a), but when they did, they were twice as likely to enroll at a POI versus other institution sectors (20.8% for POIs versus 10.9% for public four-years, for example; see Figure 5b). Interestingly, for students stopping out of a POI or a four-year institution, they were more likely to re-enroll in a community college rather than a different POI or four-year institution (see Figure 5b).

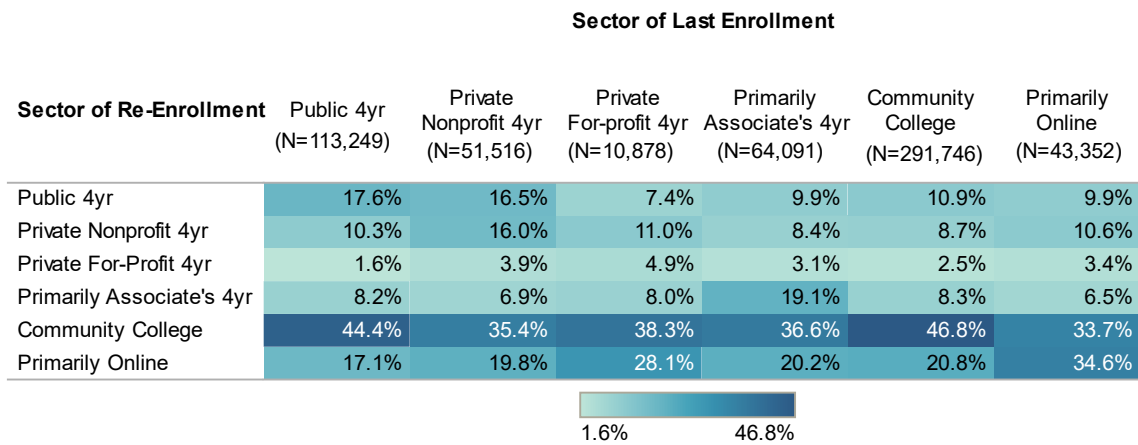
Public institutions account for over 70 percent of the total credential earners in 2020/21 (43,000 students). Nearly half completed at community colleges (48.2%, 29,200) and almost a quarter finished at public four-year institutions (22.5%, 13,600). A small number of new graduates completed at POIs (5.7%, 3,400). The share of credentials earned at a POI was highest for bachelor's degrees (10%), followed by associate degrees (4.9%) and undergraduate certificates (2.3%).

Overall, perseverance rates were the highest at private nonprofit four-year institutions (64.8%) and the lowest at community colleges (50.2% see Figure 6). Including students who earned a credential during the 2019/20 academic year, the total progress rate for the 2019/20 re-enrollees at public four-year institutions is 72.5 percent, surpassing private nonprofit four-year institutions (72.3%), while community colleges still trail all other institutions (56%). With the national perseverance rate at 55 percent, states' perseverance rates vastly vary from a low of 45.1 percent (Alaska) to a high of 72.2 percent (Washington D.C.; see State Dashboard). Idaho had one of the highest perseverance rates (68.2%, 4,300 students). Regionally, only the Northeast had higher than the national average perseverance rate (56.5%; see Appendix). In other regions, the perseverance rates ranged from 50.4 percent (Midwest) to 54.8 percent (South).

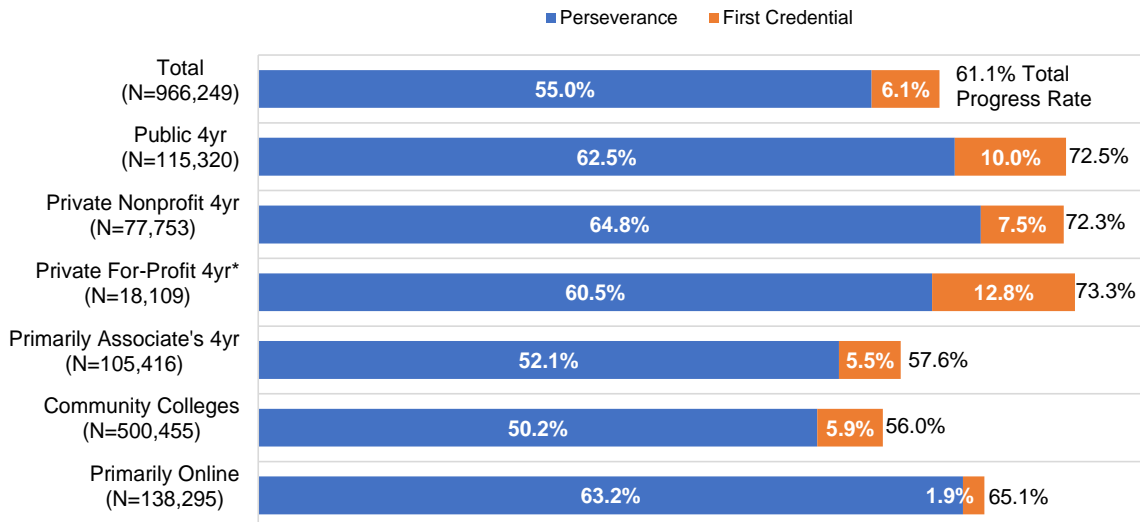
**Figure 5. Education Pathways from Last Enrollment to Re-Enrollment**



5b. SCNC Students Who Changed Institutions Upon Re-Enrolling (N=583,349)



**Figure 6. Total Progress Rate for 2019/20 Re-Enrollees by Sector of Re-Enrollment**



\*Interpret the data with caution due to one large institution's impact on the private for-profit four-year sector that has small enrollments.

**5. SCNC re-enrollees and credential earners pursued and completed the most-common college majors, but bachelor's degree-seeking SCNC students more likely than other undergraduates majored in business.**

Closely mirroring the overall undergraduate students, the three most popular majors among both re-enrollees and credential earners were liberal arts, business, and health care fields. It is notable, however, that at the bachelor's degree level, the largest share of re-enrolled students were those studying business (27.2%; see Appendix), over nine percentage points larger than the overall share of current bachelor's degree students studying business (17.8%). Health care had a slightly smaller share among re-enrollees (10.2%) compared to overall undergraduates (11.4%).

A small number of SCNC students who persevered switched colleges (50,100 students, 9.4% of perseverers; see Appendix). Moreover, 80.4 percent of them changed their major after switching. This is intriguing because the reverse held true for students who did not switch institutions: 83 percent kept the same major (399,600 students).

**6. Women outnumbered men in re-enrollment, credential earning, and perseverance. In particular, the share of re-enrollees among racial/ethnic minority women was substantially higher than men (63.5% versus 34.6%). Younger women also re-enrolled at rates over 1.5 times higher compared to men.**

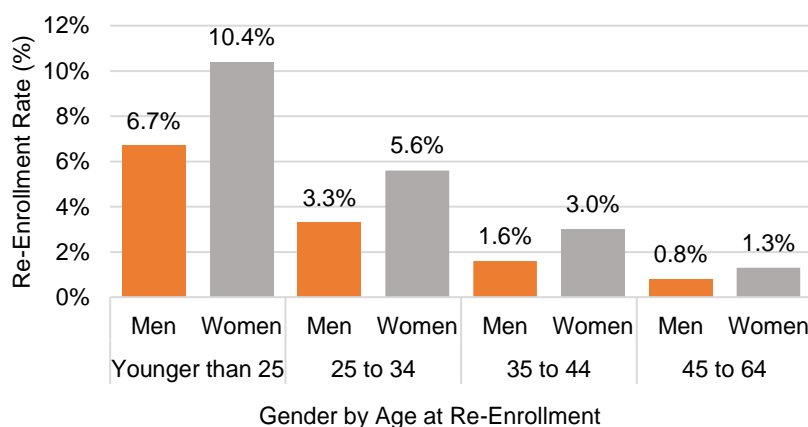
Women outnumbered men across all three outcome metrics. They re-enrolled at a higher rate than men: 3.1 percent of SCNC women re-enrolled versus 2 percent of men. This, in turn, led to a larger share of the re-enrolled student population (59% women vs. 38.3% men, which is similar to the gender split for the overall student population). More women re-enrolled within each racial and ethnic group as well, with particularly higher shares of Black, Latinx, and Native American re-enrollees (66.4%, 60.6%, 64.8%, respectively). Combined, these are more than 20 percentage points higher than the share of men within each group. This 63.5 percent of re-enrollees were women compared to 34.6 percent of men—a difference of nearly 29 percentage points. This contrasts with White and Asian re-enrollees (56.5% and 51.3% women, respectively), where the gap in the share of re-enrollees between women and men was narrower (14 and 7 percentage points, respectively).

The re-enrollment rate among younger SCNC students demonstrates further gender disparities: 10.4 percent of women under 25 re-enrolled in 2020/21, a rate 1.5 times as high as the rate among men in the same age group (6.7%, see Figure 7). Similarly, among students 25 to 34 years old, 5.6 percent of women re-enrolled compared to 3.3 percent of men. The disparities narrowed among older students.

A higher share of SCNC students who earned a credential in 2020/21 were women compared to men (53.6% and 43% respectively), regardless of credential type completed. Additionally, over 70 percent of first credential earners were between 25 and 44 years of age at the time they completed. This trend aligns with the fact that the largest share of re-enrolled students are those aged 25-44, which is also much higher than in the enrolled population overall (70.6% and 27.8%, respectively).

Women also outpaced men in perseverance: 57.6 percent of women persevered compared to 51.6 for men. Women persevered at higher rates than men regardless of age or racial/ethnic group (see Appendix).

**Figure 7. Re-Enrollment Rate by Gender and Age at Re-Enrollment**



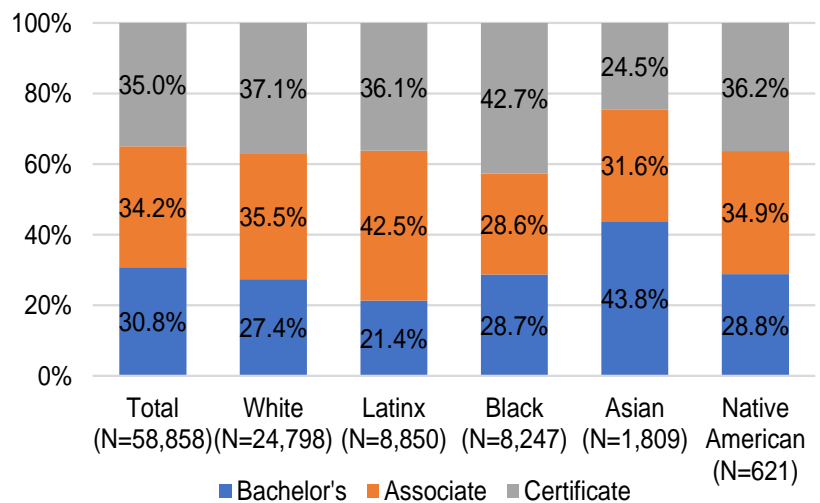
**7. Re-enrollment rate showed little variability across race and ethnicity (5.7% to 6.8%). Associate degrees were the most common credential earned by Latinx students (42.5%), whereas Black students were most likely to have completed a certificate (42.7%). Asian and White students persevered at a higher rate than other groups.**

Based on SCNC students who enrolled in college in 2013 or later and had a valid race and ethnicity (see Figure 3 for the racial/ethnic composition), re-enrollment rate did not vary significantly across racial and ethnic groups (see Appendix). Latinx and Asian re-enrollees both had somewhat higher re-enrollment rate of 6.8 percent, in comparison with White and Black students (6.4% and 6.3%, respectively) or Native Americans (5.7%).

Looking at the types of credentials awarded to SCNC students, certificate and associate degree shares were similar (35.0% and 34.2%, respectively; see Figure 8) and the bachelor's share was the smallest (30.8%). However, the most predominant credential received by SCNC students differed across racial and ethnic lines. Associate degrees, for example, accounted for 42.5 percent of Latinx credential earners, the largest associate degree share of any race and ethnicity. In contrast, certificates were the most predominant award for Black earners (42.7%) while Asian students most commonly earned a bachelor's degree (43.8%).

Asian students had the highest rate of perseverance (61.2%, 15,300 students), followed by White students (57.6%, 211,200). The lowest perseverance rates were observed among Native American students (51.1%, 5,600) and Black students (51.4%, 88,600). Latinx students persevered at a rate of 55.0 percent (90,700). Factoring in students who completed a credential a year after re-enrolling, Asian students had the highest total progress rate (68.8%), while Native American and Black students had similar rates (57.0% and 56.1%, respectively).

**Figure 8. Type of First Credential Earned 2020/21**

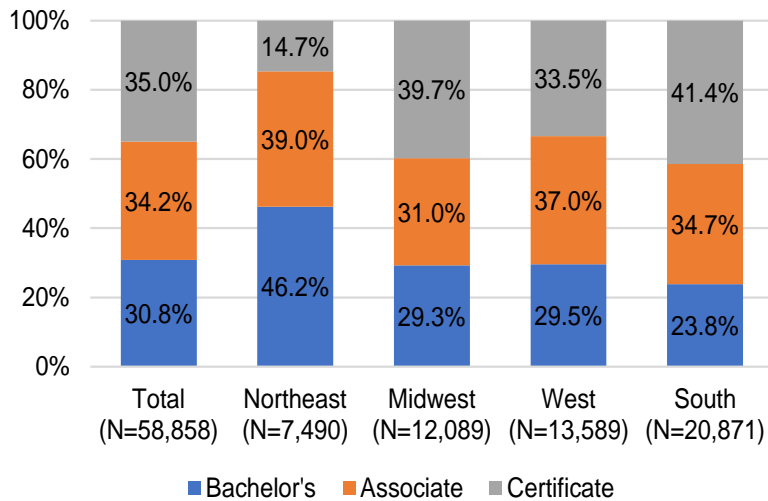


Note: Data are for three major credentials and a small number of other credentials are not shown.

**8. Florida institutions produced 7.2 percent of credential earners, well above its share of SCNC students, while Illinois produced a smaller share compared to its share of SCNC students. Sub-baccalaureate credential earners were predominant in the South (76.1%) while the Northeast had the highest percentage of bachelor's degree earners of all regions (46.2%).**

Credential earners in each state were generally proportional to the overall state undergraduate enrollment shares, but several states stand out (see Appendix). For example, Florida institutions produced 7.2 percent (4,000 students) of new credential earners, which is well above its 5.5 percent share of the total re-enrollees and 4.4 percent share of the total SCNC population. In contrast, Illinois represents 5.2 percent of the SCNC population but only 3.5 percent of re-enrollees and 4.5 percent of first credential earners (see State Dashboard).

**Figure 9. Type of First Credential Attained by Region 2020/21**



Note: The figure does not display a small number of "other" credential types. Multi-state institutions, POIs, and territories are not captured in regional counts but are included in the total.

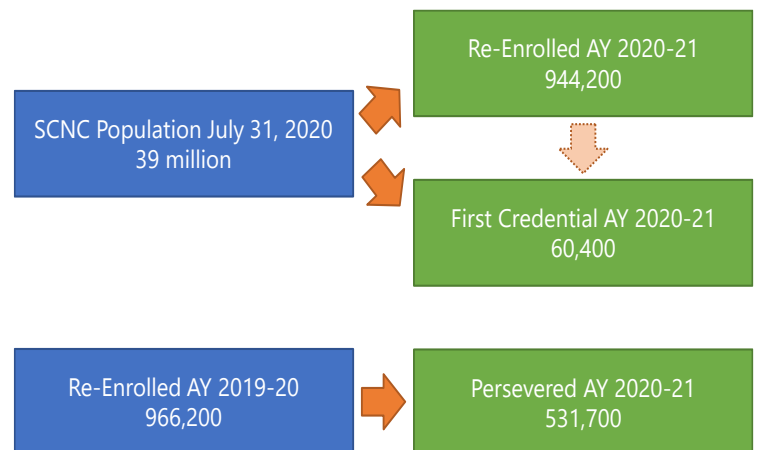
By region, sub-baccalaureate credentials are most prevalent in the South (41.4% certificates and 34.7% associate degrees; see **Figure 9**). This is more pronounced in states such as Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Arkansas where sub-baccalaureate awards comprise over 80 percent of the total credentials awarded in their respective states during 2020/21 (see Appendix).

In contrast, bachelor's degrees are far more common in the Northeast (46.2%). In fact, the share of bachelor's degree earners in nearly all northeastern states is higher than the national average (30.8%). It is also notable that certificate earners in the Northeast represent the smallest share of all regions.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

As of July 2020, the number of SCNC students has reached 39 million, which is approximately 22 percent of [U.S. residents age 18 or older](#). The 39 million SCNC number reflects both a net growth of 1.9 million (5.3%) over the past 19 months since our last study, and the 1.2 million additional students newly identified through enhancements in our data and methodology. SCNC students increased in all but two states. The SCNC demographic and prior enrollment characteristics are largely unchanged from those of the 36 million identified in our last study. SCNC students tended to be younger than 35 when they stopped out, and they most likely last attended a community college.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 944,200 SCNC students age 18 to 64 (2.4% of the 39 million) re-enrolled during the 2020/21 academic year. Moreover, 60,400 SCNC students (6.4% of the re-enrollees) earned their first ever credential in 2020/21, within just a single year of re-enrolling. Also, tracking re-enrollees in the 2019/20 academic year for a two-year period after re-enrolling, a total of 61.1 percent had either persevered into the second year (531,700 students or 55%) or completed a first credential within a year of re-enrolling (58,450 students or 6.1%). These outcomes indicate the scale of opportunity that the SCNC population represents for efforts to raise the level of postsecondary education attainment in the U.S., and particularly in the many states that have higher than average numbers of SCNC students relative to their currently enrolled student populations.



Yet, the benefits of re-enrolling are not equitably shared among racial and ethnic groups. Even though traditionally underserved minorities are overrepresented among SCNC students today relative to the overall undergraduate student body, which is a result of higher stopout rates, Asian and White SCNC students who re-enrolled persevered at a higher rate than Latinx, Black, and Native American SCNC students. Over 40 percent of Latinx credential earners received an

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associate degree, the largest associate degree share of any race and ethnicity among SCNC students, whereas the same percentage of Black earners completed a certificate.

Gender-related disparities were evident as well. Women outpaced men in re-enrollment, credential earning, and perseverance, and this was particularly true within racial and ethnic minority groups. The gender gap was more pronounced among younger SCNC students.

Overall, 62 percent of SCNC students changed institutions upon re-enrolling, often crossing institution sectors as well (67% of those who changed institutions). The education pathways they traversed differ by the institution type of their last enrollment. For SCNC students who stopped out of community colleges (519,000 students or 54.9% of all re-enrollees), they are likely to return to the community college they left (227,000 students or 43.8%), or go to a different community college (136,000 students or 26.3%) or a POI (60,800 students or 11.7%). Public and private four-year stopouts are less likely to return to the institution they last attended (30% or fewer). Community college stopouts are least likely to go to an institution of different sector; but when they do, they are twice as likely to enroll at a POI versus other institution sectors. However, students stopping out of a POI or a four-year institution are more likely to re-enroll in a community college rather than a different POI or four-year institution.

As of 2021, [46 states](#) had numeric goals for higher education attainment of state residents. As these states seek to improve their postsecondary attainment rate, the 39 million SCNC students—who were already on the path to postsecondary attainment—may seem to be a natural place to start. Even though the likelihood of re-enrollees returning to the institution they left differs by the institution type of last enrollment, they are likely to persevere at the institution where they re-enroll, and some are able to complete their first credential within a single year.

With a new data dashboard, each state can now track three outcome metrics for SCNC student progress towards attainment goals. Our analysis reveals distinct strengths for different states. For instance, Florida institutions produced 7.2 percent of all first credential earners in 2020/21, well above its 4.4 percent share of the SCNC population. Idaho had a relatively small share of SCNC re-enrollees (0.5%), but one of the highest perseverance rates (68.2%). In addition to state-level results, trends in credential earning emerge across regions. SCNC students finishing sub-baccalaureate credentials appear to be most prevalent in the South (34.7% associate degrees and 41.4% certificates), while baccalaureate completions are more common in the Northeast (46.2% of completions in the region).

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on higher education enrollment brings increased importance to a focus on the SCNC population. Outcomes in the 2020/21 academic year discussed in this report occurred during a time of historic declines in undergraduate enrollments, impacting freshmen, continuing, and returning students alike. The 944,200 re-enrollee number in the 2020/21 academic year represents a 2.3 percent drop from the previous year, suggesting the initial impact of the pandemic on SCNC re-enrollment. Next year, we will further examine the pandemic effect using the data across three years (2019/20 to 2021/22). The students who managed to re-enroll, complete, and persevere in these extraordinary times are indicative of perhaps even higher potential for success emerging from the SCNC population as pandemic-disrupted conditions improve, an eventuality that our annual reporting series will continue to track, through these metrics, in the coming years.

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## METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

### NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

The National Student Clearinghouse currently collects data from more than 3,600 postsecondary institutions, which represent 97 percent of all U.S. postsecondary enrollments in degree-granting institutions, as of 2020. Data collection began in 1993, and coverage has been above 90 percent nationally since 2007. However, some states and sectors have lower coverage rates, particularly in the earlier years. Historically, the representation of private for-profit institutions has been lower than that of other institution types. Details of annual data coverage rates by institution type and state are available [here](#). Variations in coverage, particularly during the early years of the study period, may result in an underestimate of the true population of *Some College, No Credential* students, in both national and state-level results. Further, the data may overestimate the students included in the study cohort if they earned a degree or were enrolled at a non-Clearinghouse participating institution during the study period.

### STATE DATA COVERAGE

Note: While most institutions that currently report to the Clearinghouse reflect over 90 percent of institutions that report to the U.S. Department of Education by state, this coverage was much lower in the earlier years of NSC data collection (refer to [enrollment table](#) for historical coverage rates). Since this lower coverage may impact the overall number SCNC students by state, please use caution when interpreting the state shares of SCNC populations.

### SCNC STUDENTS AND METHODOLOGICAL CHANGES

SCNC students identified in the Clearinghouse data as of July 2020 are those who had at least one enrollment record at U.S. colleges and universities after January 1, 1993 (the beginning of the Clearinghouse database), with a period of stop-out defined as having had no enrollment records between January 1, 2019, and July 31, 2020 (representing roughly over three consecutive academic terms), and no degree or certificate awarded anywhere as of July 31, 2020. The resulting number of students was 39,040,099 students. This report differs methodologically from the previous report in the inclusion of two additional populations:

1. Students without a valid identifier reported to the Clearinghouse were excluded from previous SCNC cohorts. However, these students are now included within the SCNC cohort to better reflect the national population. This category includes 1,026,000 students, or 2.9 percent of the total SCNC population.
2. Students whose last enrollment before stopping out was at a college located in a U.S. Territory. These students were not included in previous SCNC analyses due to the low coverage of institutions from U.S. territories reporting to NSC. However, to better track attainment goals across the entire country, we included these students in both the national and state data for this report. Institutions from

three territories typically report to NSC: Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Together, they represent 143,000 students, or 0.4 percent of the total SCNC population.

For measuring the perseverance metric, the stop-out period to define the SCNC population was defined as students having no enrollment records between January 1, 2018, and July 31, 2019. They also had to have a valid re-enrollment record between August 1, 2019, and July 31, 2020, and then have a valid enrollment record between August 1, 2020, and July 31, 2021 to be counted as persevered.

In the previous report, SCNC measures included students who were over 65 years old at the time of their last enrollment. This report includes those students in the SCNC population (there are 716,000 of them, or 1.8%) to better compare with the previous report. However, the success metric analyses focus only on students 64 or younger at the time of either re-enrollment, or credential achievement. The number of re-enrollees and credential earners over 65 is very small (6,000 and 300 students, respectively).

### DUAL ENROLLMENTS

NSC data includes dual enrollments in college for students who are still in high school. Dual enrollments are identified by using student age at the time of enrollment (under 18) as a proxy. Students with dual enrollments were removed from the cohort only if the dual enrollment was their only enrollment record across the study period. In other words, students with dual enrollments and no earned credential were included in the SCNC cohort only if they had continued postsecondary enrollment after they turned 18.

### AGE CALCULATION METHODS

- SCNC profile defines current age of a student as of July 31, 2021 (the end of the academic year studied) and age at last enrollment was based on the term begin date of a student's last enrollment record prior to stopping out.
- SCNC student outcomes:
  - Re-enrollment by age was calculated using the term begin date of the student's first re-enrollment record after stopping out.
  - First credential by age was based on the award date of the first credential.
  - Perseverance by age was calculated using the term begin date of the student's first re-enrollment record after stopping out (to calculate the rate at which a student persevered into the following year).

### PRIMARYLY ONLINE (POIs) and MULTI-STATE INSTITUTIONS

Primarily online institutions (POIs) were identified based on the distance education survey items in the IPEDS fall 2019 enrollment survey. Any institution that reports more than 90 percent of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses before the COVID-19 pandemic began is

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considered a POI. Using this method, there were a total of 36 institutions identified as POIs. There are some institutions or systems of institutions that report their online campuses as separate entities to IPEDS while combining them with offline campuses into a single reporting entity when submitting data to NSC. In these cases, the students enrolled at POIs identified in IPEDS are not accurately identified as enrolled at a POI in this report, resulting in an underestimation of POIs in our reporting. In reporting student outcomes in each state, POIs are not included in individual state counts in this report.

We defined multi-state institutions as those with at least one branch campus operating in a different state from the main campus as reported to the Department of Education. To better reflect an institution's multi-state status for the postsecondary attainment metrics, we applied whether the institution had operating branch campuses in different states based on the fall 2020 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey data. While this designation will differ from whether the institution was multi-state or not at the time of a student's last enrollment, utilizing the current multi-state status will enable for more accurate reporting as we continue to update this annual progress report.

#### **CHANGES IN SECTORAL DESIGNATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT**

Institutional sector was determined according to the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics.

- For the SCNC population's last enrolled sector, we use the sector at the time of enrollment, and any future changes to that institution's sector were not applied. One exception was for institutions classified by IPEDS as four-year, primarily associate-degree granting as of 2021. These institutions, where over fifty percent of degrees conferred are associate degrees, were grouped with community colleges in the previous SCNC report. In order to better bridge the previous report's analysis of last enrolled sector, we re-coded these institutions as "Primarily Associate's Four-Year" to better represent these institutions.
- For sector of re-enrollment, first credential and perseverance, we use the 2021 IPEDS reported sector to reflect the current sector designation.

#### **DATA LIMITATIONS**

##### **MISSING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

While in recent years, the data coverage rate for gender and race/ethnicity has improved, with over 96 percent of the current undergraduate population having a valid gender value, and 83 percent of the undergraduate population with a valid reported race/ethnicity, this coverage previously was low, with less than 15 percent of institutions reporting this information to the Clearinghouse as late as 2008/09 (see our [Additional Data Elements](#) for historic coverage rates). As a result, the share of SCNC students with missing gender or racial/ethnic information is 70 percent compared to 8.4 percent. In both cases, the missing rates are higher for historical enrollment dates. Due to this higher level of missing data, demographic analyses of the entire SCNC population should be interpreted with caution.

##### **DATA PRIOR TO 1993**

Since the Clearinghouse's enrollment reporting began in 1993, SCNC students who stopped out more than 25 years ago are likely to be underestimated in this report. Interpret age-related findings with caution.

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#### **Acknowledgements**

This annual progress report was created with generous support from Lumina Foundation. A special thanks goes to our former and current colleagues at the Research Center: Liu, Q. who helped with initial research design and data construction; and Gardner, A., Lee, S., Lu, T., and Pevitz, A. for their efforts of teamwork in reviewing early drafts of the report and data dashboard.

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#### **Suggested Citation**

Causey, J., Kim, H., Ryu, M., Scheetz, A., & Shapiro, D. (May 2022), *Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes, Annual Progress Report - Academic Year 2020/21*, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.