

# FINDINGS

## What Proportion of Oregon High School Graduates Are Attending College?

Statewide, over 70% of survey respondents from the class of 1999 were attending some sort of college, with a handful of students still delaying enrollment until winter term (Table 1). Though not statistically significant, this continues the trend toward higher college enrollment seen in earlier surveys. Among all college-going respondents, 84.8% were attending full time, with students enrolled in four-year colleges more likely to attend full time (96.3%) than those in two-year schools (69.6%).

The overall college enrollment rate and the rates by gender are comparable to national figures (Table 2). College attendance among African American graduates in Oregon is slightly higher than the national average, and the college attendance rate among Hispanic/Latino graduates, while low compared to other Oregon populations, surpasses the national rate.

## Where Do Oregon High School Graduates Choose to Go to College?

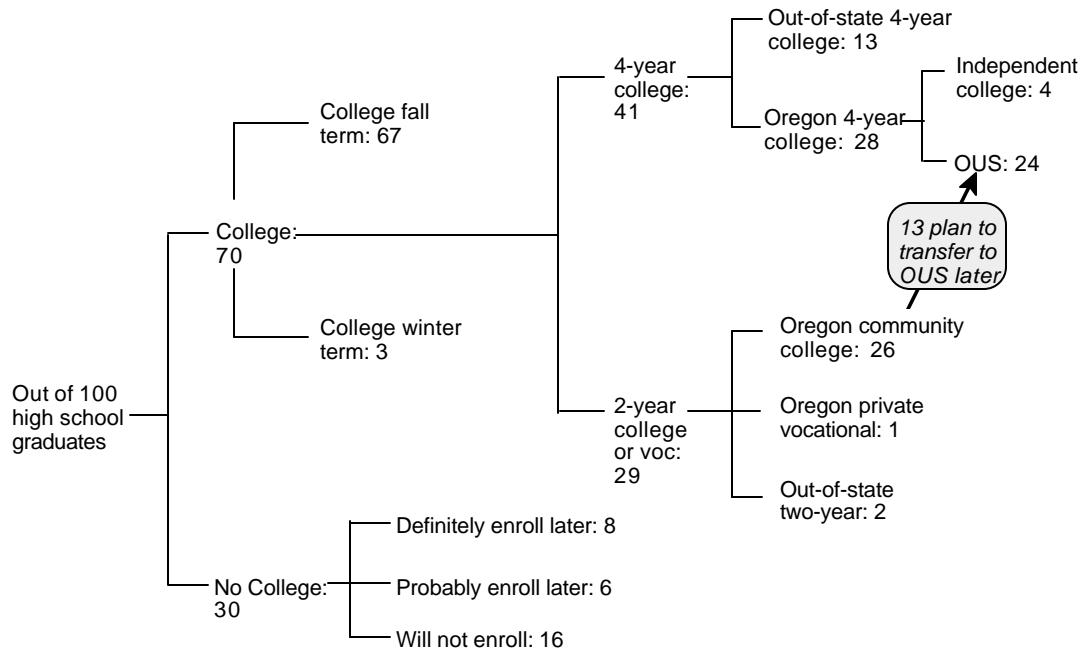
In comparison to the class of 1997, a greater proportion of college-bound respondents from the class of 1999 enrolled in four-year institutions (41.0% compared to 35.3%). Among these students, as shown in Table 3, the largest proportion (23.9%) chose an Oregon public university, with 13.3% selecting out-of-state four-year universities. This compares to 19.4% of the class of 1997 respondents attending OUS and 10.2% going out of state. An additional 3.7% chose to attend an Oregon independent college (compared to 5.3% of class of 1997 respondents). As in previous years, the largest group of college-bound respondents selected an Oregon community college (25.5%), with Oregon public universities the second-most popular choice, though the gap is narrowing.

Oversamples of graduates in the Portland metropolitan area and Central Oregon indicate that a significantly higher proportion of Portland-area graduates choose four-year colleges (50.0% compared to 30.6% in Central Oregon and 35.1% in all other regions), while Central Oregon graduates are significantly more likely to choose an Oregon community college (36.0% compared to 23.6% in Portland and 26.1% in all other regions). Non-white Oregon high school graduates are significantly more likely than their white classmates to choose an Oregon public university (30.2% compared to 22.7%).

## What Proportion of Oregon Graduates Leave the State for College?

Among respondents attending a four-year university, 32.3% of the class of 1999 chose to leave the state for their postsecondary education. This compares to 28.8% of respondents from the class of 1997. While this increase, unlike the decrease noted two years ago, does not represent a statistically significant difference, it bears watching. It should be noted, however, that students graduating high school with a high grade point average do not appear to be leaving the state at a greater rate, a finding that is discussed more fully later in this report.

## Where Did the Class of 1999 Go After Graduation?



## What Are the Demographic Characteristics of College Enrollment?

Table 4 shows the distribution of demographic characteristics and grade point average within each college category. Gender differences in college attendance are not statistically significant for class of 1999 respondents. The distribution by region and by ethnic group is generally comparable among the college choice categories. The differences in grade point average distributions are discussed later in the report.

College attendance rates within Oregon regions<sup>1</sup> (Table 5) show a statistically significant difference between enrollment in the Portland metropolitan area (77.8%) and that in Central Oregon (69.2%) or other regions (64.8%). Taken as a whole, non-white graduates were as likely to attend college as their white classmates (70.4% compared to 70.5%). An analysis among racial/ethnic groups, however, reveals a statistically significant difference between enrollment rates for white students and Asian Americans (with the highest rate, 86.3%) and American Indians (enrolling at 47.8%, the lowest rate reported). White students and those of mixed race or ethnicity enroll at rates comparable to the overall average of 70.5%, and African Americans are just below that at 66.7%. Hispanic/Latino graduates show enrollment rates of 63.0%.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical analysis by region was conducted using oversamples of 439 respondents from the Portland metropolitan area and 402 respondents from Central Oregon. Analysis by ethnic group used an oversample of 401 ethnic minority respondents.

## Why Did Oregon High School Graduates Choose the College They Did?

The reasons cited by Oregon high school graduates for their choice of college were similar to those expressed in previous years. All students enrolled in four-year universities were concerned about the *academic reputation of the school they chose*, the *availability of their desired major*, *cost issues* (including scholarships and financial aid), and their *desire to be near to or far away from home*.

*Scholarships* and *financial aid* played a more important role in students' choices for the class of 1999 than they did for the class of 1997. The importance of a scholarship to a respondent's choice of college increased significantly for students attending an OUS institution or Oregon community college, as well as OUS students who graduated high school with a high GPA. Though the changes are less dramatic, a scholarship offer was considered important by greater proportions of respondents attending an Oregon independent college or out-of-state four-year institution. Smaller increases were also noted in the importance of a good financial aid package.

While students attending two-year colleges were also concerned about cost and distance from home, they are increasingly more interested in the academic reputation of their college and the availability of their desired major.

In an unexpected finding, class of 1999 respondents indicated significantly more *concern about cuts to OUS academic programs or other activities*, reversing a trend noted in the classes of 1995 and 1997. The source of this concern is puzzling since there have not been large-scale program cuts since 1993, in the two biennia following the passage of Ballot Measure 5.

## Why Did Oregon High School Graduates Choose an OUS Institution?

As with the class of 1997, the *availability of their desired major*, *affordable cost*, and *good academic reputation* were the most important reasons for choosing an Oregon public university, with over 80% of respondents citing each as very important or somewhat important to their choice (Table 6). Secondarily, respondents attending OUS chose their university for its *proximity to home* (74.4%) and the *campus social environment* (71.6%).

The importance of *scholarships* to graduates' choice of an Oregon public university nearly doubled, with 52.2% of class of 1999 respondents citing it as important, compared to 27.0% of the class of 1997, a statistically significant difference. Receipt of a *good financial aid award* also increased from 29.7% of respondents two years ago to 41.2% this year.

Table 7 presents the results of an open-ended question asking respondents to name the reasons they chose an OUS institution. These remarks generally support the findings reported above and add some depth to our understanding of students' decision making.

*"They've got great teachers and good classes in science and medical fields."*

– OUS  
university  
student

## Why Did Oregon High School Graduates Choose Another Four-Year University?

*“As an undergraduate I get to work with sophisticated instruments that are generally reserved for graduate students at a state college.”*

– out-of-state university student

According to this survey, the most important factor for respondents choosing a four-year university other than OUS was the *institution’s academic reputation*, considered very or somewhat important by 88.9% of students attending an Oregon independent college and by 78.8% of students attending out of state (Tables 8 and 9). The other most important reasons were a *desire to leave Oregon* (students attending out of state) or *stay close to home* (students attending an Oregon independent college) and *receipt of a scholarship or financial aid*. Almost 65% of students enrolled in an Oregon independent college indicated their receipt of a scholarship was a very important reason for their choice, with an additional 20% considering it somewhat important. When asked an open-ended question about their reasons for choosing the college they did, 47.0% of those attending an Oregon independent college and 29.9% of those going out of state mentioned their *desire for a smaller school or smaller classes*. Additionally, 18.6% of Oregon independent students and 13.7% of out-of-state students *wanted a religious school or atmosphere* while 12.9% of Oregon independent students and 9.2% of out-of-state students *wanted to go to a private school*.

## Why Did Oregon High School Graduates Choose an Oregon Community College?

*“The quality of education and the area are great. The professors are very experienced; they give you personal attention.”*

– Oregon community college student

As in previous years, survey respondents attending an Oregon community college cited their *plans to transfer to OUS* as the most important reason in their choice of college, with 80.2% considering it very or somewhat important (Table 10). This was followed by a *desire to stay close to home* (noted by 75% as very or somewhat important) and an *inability to afford an Oregon public university* (cited by 70.1%). Compared to the class of 1997, however, more students this year indicated their plan to transfer was somewhat, rather than very, important.

A number of factors were deemed more important by those choosing community colleges this year. The *institution’s academic reputation* moved into fourth place, considered important by 50.3% (compared to 30.2% in 1998), and *OUS not offering a desired major* was cited by 31.2% (compared to 17.0%). Inexplicably, *concerns about academic program cuts at OUS* were important for 28.9% of those choosing an Oregon community college compared to 9.4% two years ago. As with those choosing four-year universities, the *receipt of a scholarship or financial aid* was also considerably more important for respondents attending community colleges than was noted in the last survey. These apparent changes in attitude represent statistically significant differences.

## Where Do High Achievers Go to College?

The high school GPA data used in this study are self-reported by the student or are recollected by a parent. For this reason, some caution should be used in interpreting these results.

As would be expected, respondents graduating with a high grade point average show higher rates of college attendance, with 92.7% of those graduates enrolled compared to 66.2% of respondents with a GPA below 3.75. Table 11 shows the college choices of respondents with a GPA of 3.75 or higher compared to those with a lower grade point average. An Oregon public university was the choice of roughly the same proportion of high achievers (36.9%) as other students (33.2%). Respondents reporting a high GPA were far more likely than other students to select an out-of-state four-year institution (34.1%) or an Oregon independent college (10.1%).

Table 12 compares the college choices of respondents with their counterparts two years ago. A greater proportion of the class of 1999 high achievers chose an Oregon public university (36.9% compared to 30.9% of the class of 1997), while their attendance at Oregon independent colleges declined to 10.1% (compared to 16.4% of the class of 1997). While Oregon graduates as a whole are leaving the state in greater proportion, the rate at which Oregon high achievers are leaving the state appears to be holding steady, with 34.1% attending an out-of-state four-year university this year compared with 34.5% two years ago. These survey results suggest that while high achievers leave the state at a higher rate than other students, that rate has not increased over the past two years. These findings, though not statistically significant, reinforce the decline noted in the class of 1997 survey.

The reasons considered most important by high-achieving respondents in their choice of an OUS institution (Table 13) mirror, in most regards, those of all respondents choosing an Oregon public university (Table 6). A *scholarship offer* was the most notable difference, cited as an important reason for their choice by 81.8% of high-GPA respondents attending OUS, compared to 52.2% of all respondents attending OUS. This marks a significantly different change from the class of 1997, in which 52.9% of high achievers cited a scholarship offer as important to their choice.

Respondents with a high grade point average who selected other four-year institutions considered the same issues important as all students making the same choice. Their responses to an open-ended question add some further insight into the reasons for their choice: 33.9% mentioned a *desire for a smaller school or classes*, 9.2% indicated that they *wanted to go to a private school*, and 9.1% mentioned a *desire for a religious school*.

*"I think that honors college gives students that want to attend an Ivy League school an opportunity to experience it at a fraction of the price."*

– OUS  
university  
student

## How Did an OUS Institution Rate in Students' Choices?

For the first time this year, college-going respondents who had not chosen an OUS institution were asked how OUS schools rated in their consideration of college options (Table 14). Survey results indicate that an Oregon public university figured prominently in the decision-making of one-quarter of the respondents attending other colleges, with almost ten percent (9.4%) indicating that an OUS institution was their second choice. However, over 60% did not even apply to an OUS school. Students choosing four-year colleges were significantly more likely than those selecting two-year colleges to apply, even if they were not strongly considering the OUS university. It should be noted, however, that a number of respondents enrolled in two-year colleges plan to transfer to an OUS institution at a later time, which may affect their decision to submit an application directly out of high school.

Among respondents attending a four-year institution, those attending an Oregon independent university were most likely to consider an Oregon public university, with 14.8% ranking an OUS school as their second choice and 27.0% strongly considering an Oregon public university.

## Do Students at Other Schools Plan to Transfer to OUS Institutions?

To gain further insight into graduates' attitudes toward the Oregon University System, students at other colleges and universities were asked if they intended to transfer to an Oregon public university at a later time (Table 15). Close to half of those asked (46.5%) reported some inclination to transfer, with 22.1% definitely planning to transfer and an additional 24.3% believing they will probably transfer. Predictably, the majority of these respondents are currently enrolled in Oregon community colleges. Almost one-third of students attending Oregon community colleges (32.9%) definitely plan to transfer to an Oregon public university, compared to 5.0% of students attending an Oregon independent university and 6.5% of those at out-of-state four-year universities. When referenced to an earlier question, we see that while one-third of Oregon community college students reported a definite plan to transfer, almost one-half (49.4%) considered their intention to transfer a very important reason for their choice of college.

*“She realized that she could get her core subjects whether she took the classes here or at a four-year college.”*

– parent of  
an Oregon  
community  
college  
students

## What Sources of Information Do High School Graduates Use in Choosing a College?

Also for the first time this year, survey respondents attending college were asked about the sources of information they used in making their choice (Table 16). The four most commonly used resources were printed materials from colleges, such as booklets or brochures; family and friends; high school

counselors or teachers; and visits to college campuses, all of which were used some or a lot by over 70% of college-going respondents. College web sites were used by fewer graduates, with 55.9% reporting their use as “some” or “a lot.” Published college guides, such as *Peterson’s* or *Fiske Guide*, were the least commonly used, the only listed resource consulted by fewer than 50% of respondents. A look at the sources used “a lot,” suggests that Oregon high school graduates rely most heavily – and almost equally – on three resources: information from family and friends (35.4%); visits to college campuses (35.2%); and printed materials from colleges, such as booklets and brochures (32.4%).

Among subgroups of graduates, some interesting differences emerge:

- C While visits to college campuses were the most heavily relied on source for those choosing a four-year college (used a lot by 47.6%), an almost identical proportion of those attending two-year colleges (46.9%) did not use such visits at all.
- C In statistically significant findings, information from high school counselors and teachers was a primary resource for those choosing two-year colleges (used a lot by 29.9% compared to 20.9% of four-year students) and by members of ethnic minorities (32.8% compared to 22.8% of white respondents). Graduates belonging to Oregon’s ethnic minority populations were also more likely than white graduates to rely on information from college representatives visiting their high school campus (used a lot by 25% compared to 16%).
- C Almost half (49.3%) of high achievers based their decision in large part on a visit to the college campus. They were also more likely than the general college-going population to rely on information from family and friends (used a lot by 40.9% compared to 35.4%) and published college guides (used some or a lot by 46.9% compared to 38.1%).
- C Graduates attending an Oregon public university, more often than those attending other four-year universities (in or out of Oregon), indicated that they did *not* use printed materials from the campus (20.2% compared to 7.2% for Oregon independent and 9.2% for out-of-state) or college web sites (48.9% compared to 44.4% for Oregon independent and 31.9% for out-of-state) in their decision making. This may reflect a greater familiarity with Oregon public universities or a particular campus.

*“They took us around and showed us the campus. It helped us as parents understand what (the university) was all about.”*

*– parent of an OUS university student*

## **What Are Oregon High School Graduates Majoring In?**

Compared to the class of 1997, fewer first-year students from the class of 1999 reported an undeclared or undecided major (25.3% compared to 33.5% two years ago). This difference may result, in part, from a later data collection period in contrast to previous years; students still undecided in February may have made up their minds by April. As shown in Table 17, respondents attending two-year colleges were far more likely to have an undeclared or undecided major than their counterparts at four-year colleges. This may be affected by the intention expressed by many to transfer at a later time to a four-year college.

Among identified majors, eight fields of study were in the top ten for both four-year and two-year students, though their relative position and popularity differ: Business, Natural Sciences, Computer Science/Mathematics/Statistics, Fine Arts, Education, Engineering or Engineering-Related Technologies, Health Professions, and Liberal Arts/Humanities. Four-year students also chose Social Sciences and Pre-Professional Programs, while two-year students selected Professional/Service Trades and Criminal Justice/Human Services/Public Administration.

Data on college majors were tabulated differently this year to capture the individual fields of study chosen by respondents with dual majors. As a result, comparisons with results from previous years are not conclusive. However, with only 2.7% of respondents in the class of 1997 indicating a dual major, the data suggest there may be some actual increases in the proportion of respondents choosing Health Professions (3.1% in spring 1998 to 9.7% in spring 2000) and Education (4.7% in 1998 to 9.1% in 2000). Over 15% of college-going respondents in the class of 1999 were pursuing more than one major.

Members of ethnic minorities were significantly more likely than their white classmates to opt for majors in Business (20.1% compared to 11.7%) and Pre-Professional Programs such as Pre-Med, Pre-Law, and Pre-Vet (8.8% compared to 3.8%). A look at differences among students choosing different types of four-year colleges shows that Computer Science/Mathematics was the choice of more students attending an OUS institution (8.6%) or an out-of-state university (12.0%) than those in Oregon independent universities (0.7%). Education was the choice of significantly more students at Oregon's independent universities (23.0%) than OUS students (6.7%).

The fields of study preferred by respondents with a high grade point average are similar to those of all respondents choosing a four-year university. High achievers in this survey were somewhat more likely to choose majors in Education (9.8%) and the Natural Sciences (12.4%) and somewhat less likely to choose Business (13.2%), Computer Science/Mathematics (6.4%), and Fine Arts (4.8%).

### **Do High School Graduates Not Attending College Plan to Enroll Later?**

Almost 30% of survey respondents had not enrolled in college at the time of the survey. Of those, 26.6% reported that they have definite plans to enroll during the next twelve months, with an additional 20.4% indicating they will probably enroll during that time. The proportion of respondents intending to enroll within the year represents a decline from the last two surveys, but the higher overall enrollment rates may suggest that those most serious about enrolling have already done so. White respondents not attending college were significantly more likely than their non-white counterparts to be convinced that they would not enroll, with 19.1% indicating they would definitely not enroll compared to 8.8%.

*"No one told me about financial loans until it was too late."*

– Oregon  
high school  
graduate

## Why Do Oregon High School Graduates Not Attend College?

As in previous years, the most commonly cited reasons for not attending college (Table 18) are a *work schedule that precludes school* (reported by 30.3% of respondents), an *inability to afford college* (25.2%), and a *desire to take a break from school* (18.5%). The various reasons given by respondents tend to fall into several general categories, with *money-related issues* being the most common (noted by 41.7%), followed by a temporary or permanent lack of interest in college. *Work demands; lack of preparation; other plans, such as the military, travel, or child rearing; and assorted other conflicts* were also mentioned. It is worth noting that, in their remarks, a number of respondents indicated a continued interest in pursuing their education.

## What Else Did Respondents Say?

Respondents were offered an opportunity to include additional comments in the study results. These remarks often help elucidate respondents' attitudes toward higher education or Oregon public universities or offer feedback on the survey itself. Appendix 2 presents the unedited comments from this year's survey, compiled separately for respondents attending four-year and two-year institutions, and those not attending college.

## What Trends Found in This Survey Bear Watching?

*Where Have Oregon's Graduates Gone?* provides a biennial snapshot of postsecondary enrollment patterns among Oregon's high school graduates. Subsequent studies should reveal whether there is, indeed, a long-term trend toward enrollment in four-year institutions or a gradual increase in the popularity of OUS institutions among recent graduates. In particular, it will be important to watch the number of graduates leaving the state and the college choices of Oregon high-achieving high school graduates.

Survey results suggest that an individual's choice of college represents a complex interaction of desires and concerns, with perceptions – accurate or inaccurate – playing a significant role. For the class of 1999, scholarships and, to a lesser extent, good financial aid packages directly and unquestionably affected their choice, helping to allay the perennial concerns about cost. Subtler, but equally important, are the perceptions held by high school graduates – and those whose advice they seek – regarding the reputations of OUS institutions and the programs they provide. Data provided by this survey on the sources of information used in making college choices may help to address these issues.

Finally, the question of majors desired by Oregon high school graduates, and the relationship to OUS program offerings, also bears watching. While this survey does not indicate how students select their major, it does suggest that Oregon's high school graduates are looking to potential colleges not only for their desired field of study but for a program with a reputation for quality.

*“They offered a lot of scholarships to keep the kids with high GPAs in Oregon rather than have them go out of state. That made the difference for a lot of kids.”*

*– parent of  
OUS  
university  
student*