

Encouraging Student Success: The 2010 Retention Study



A REPORT PRESENTED TO
THE ENROLLMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
BY
THE RETENTION TASK FORCE
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2

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Introduction

3

BACKGROUND

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Introduction

4

- Since 2004, significant advancements have been made to support undergraduate retention and graduation.
- The 2004 retention study was a university-wide study of UNC-Chapel Hill's undergraduate retention policies, services and procedures.
- Institutional performance measures identify retention and graduation rates as key performance indicators.

Introduction

5

- UNC General Administration's 2011-12 targets for UNC-Chapel Hill (75% four-year and 87% six-year graduation rates) have been met more than a year ahead of schedule.
- The current report aims to identify this and similar successes as well as highlight areas requiring further growth and attention.

Contents of the Report

6

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Introduction
- III. 2004 Study Recommendations and Implementations
- IV. Methodology of the Current Study
- V. Limitations of the Study
- VI. Findings
- VII. Recommendations
- VIII. The Future and Concluding Statements
- IX. Appendices

Today's Presentation

7

- Methodology
- Study Limitations
- Key Findings
- Recommendations
- The Future

Methodology

8

1. LONGITUDINAL DATASET
2. STUDY OF NEW INITIATIVES
3. QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

Longitudinal Dataset

9

- First-year cohorts who entered Carolina in the fall of 2002 (n=3,457) and 2003 (n=3,511).
- Analyses included:
 - demographic variables
 - admission application information
 - term-by-term records of enrollment
 - academic eligibility status, grades, and credit hours attempted and earned
 - financial aid eligibility and awards
 - responses to first-year and senior year surveys

Study of New Initiatives

10

- Study of the data on the success of recent retention/graduation improvement initiatives, some of which were created in response to recommendations from the 2004 study findings.
- For example:
 - Outcomes of 2007 new academic eligibility policies tracked to determine if participation in a semester of academic probation and intervention helped students regain eligibility and remain in good standing in subsequent semesters.
 - Members of the first cohorts of Carolina Covenant Scholars and C-STEP transfer student programs (initiated in 2004 and 2007, respectively) have also been followed and their graduation rates compared with non-participants.

Qualitative Analyses

11

- Qualitative data were gathered through telephone interviews and web-based surveys of first-year students who had left Carolina in the past two years without graduating.
- Interviews with transfer students from different types of institutions to better understand their experiences adjusting to life at Carolina.

Study Limitations

12

- Period of observation which may not capture complete academic life cycle of a cohort.
- Difficulty in measuring quality of student experiences and degree to which students' personal issues influence academic decisions.
- Retrospective study - much of what we know about the experiences of these students is limited to making inferences from existing student records, surveys, and interviews.
- Data reflecting engagement in out-of-class academic activities as well as co-curricular and social activities not available for all members of cohort group.

Key Findings

13

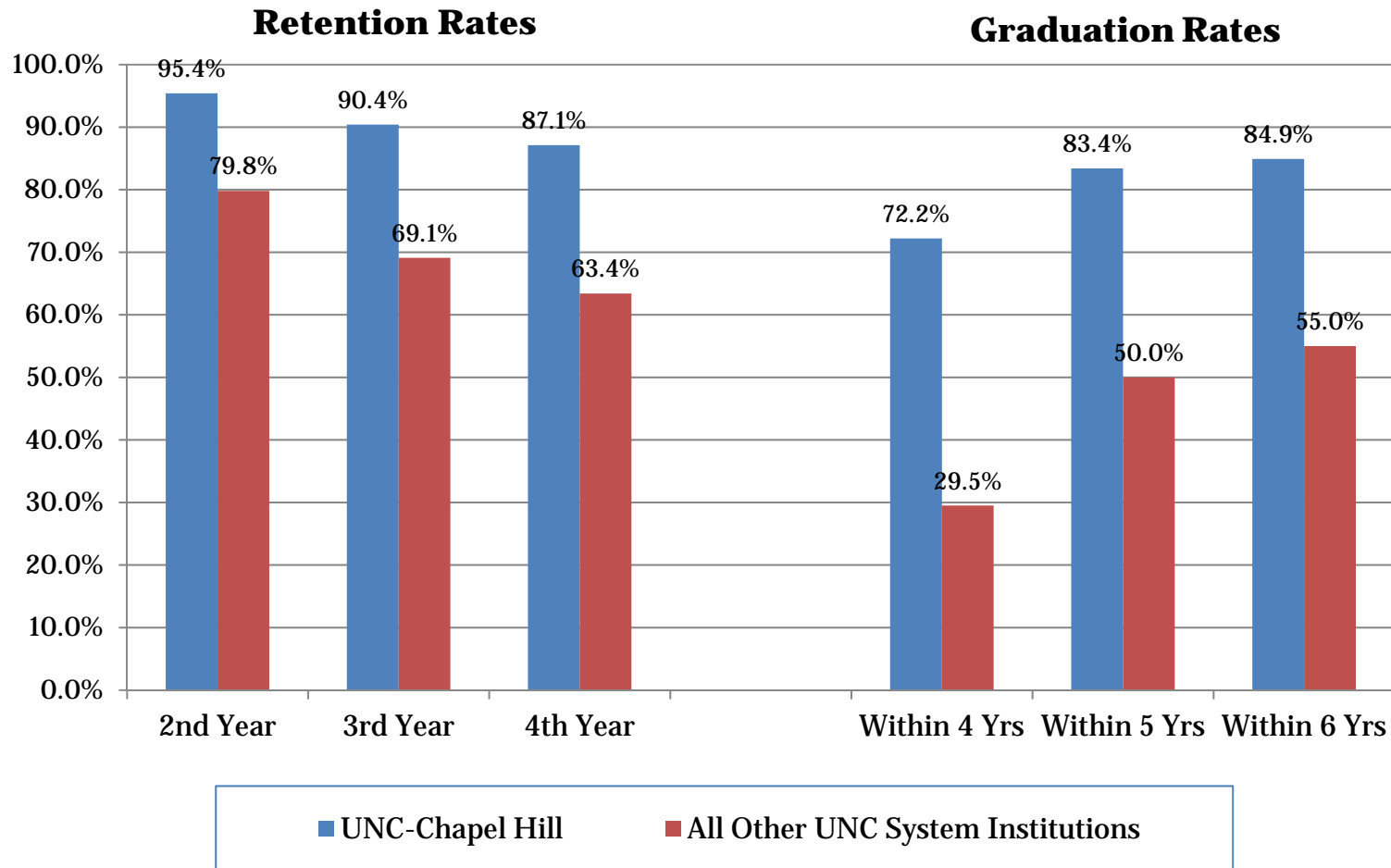
- I. Retention and Graduation Rate Comparison
- II. Persistence and Graduation Patterns of First-Year Students
- III. Persistence and Graduation Patterns of Transfer Students
- IV. Students Who Do Not Complete Their Degrees at Carolina
- V. Student Perceptions of Factors Related to Their Decision to Leave Carolina
- VI. Factors Related to Retention and Graduation
- VII. Evaluation of the Probation Semester

Retention and Graduation Rate Comparison

14

1. Within UNC System, Carolina's first-year student retention rates continue to be significantly higher than the rates for the other system schools combined.
2. Carolina's graduation rates increased more between 1998 and 2003 than did other UNC institutions.

Retention and Graduation Rates UNC-Chapel Hill vs. Other UNC System Institutions Entering Cohort of 2003

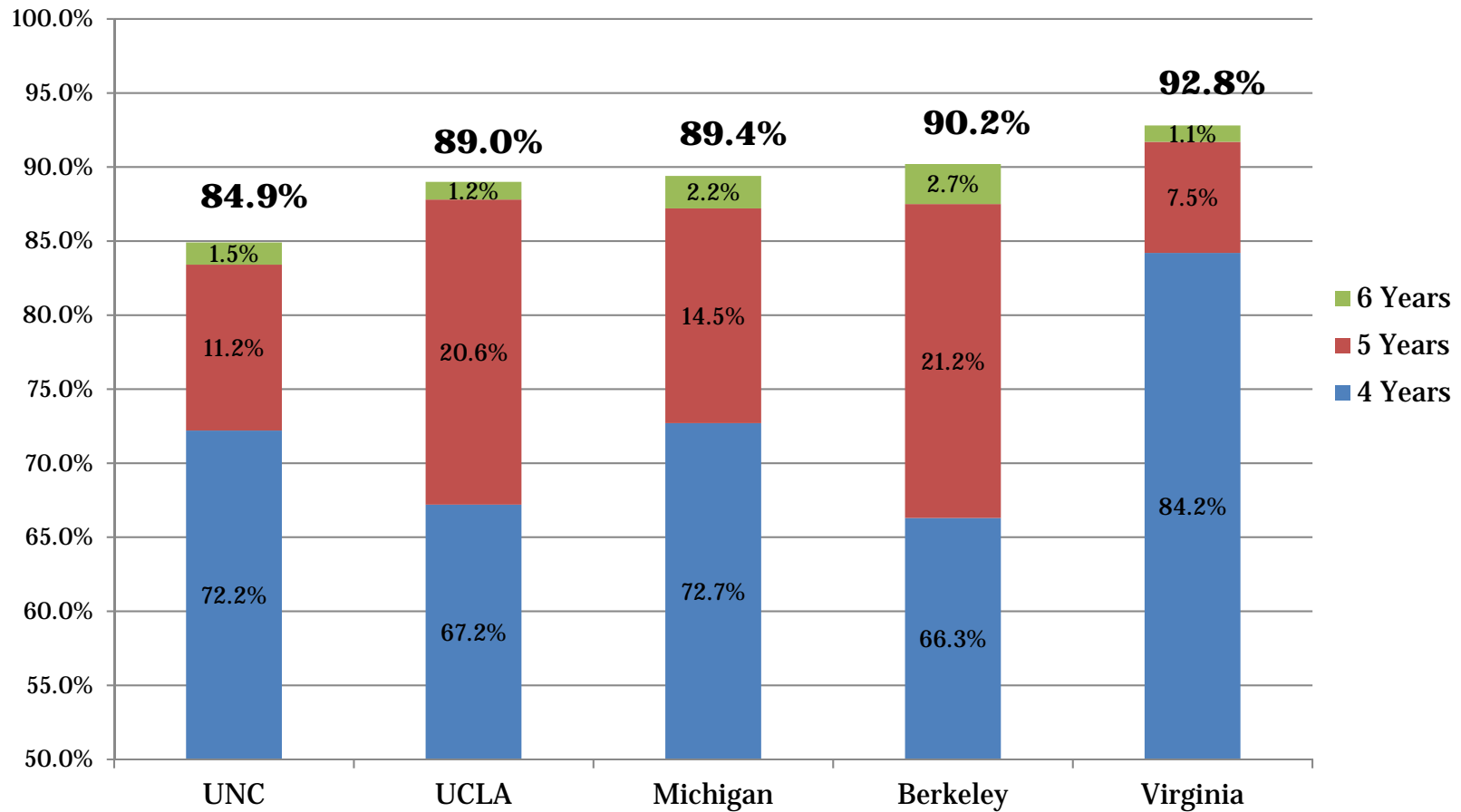


Retention and Graduation Rate Comparison

16

3. Compared to the 4 public institutions the University uses most often for benchmarking (Virginia, Berkeley, UCLA, and Michigan) Carolina's four-year graduation rate is in the middle of its peer group.

Graduation Rates and Time to Degree for Carolina and Top Four Peer Institutions 2003 Entering First-Year Cohort

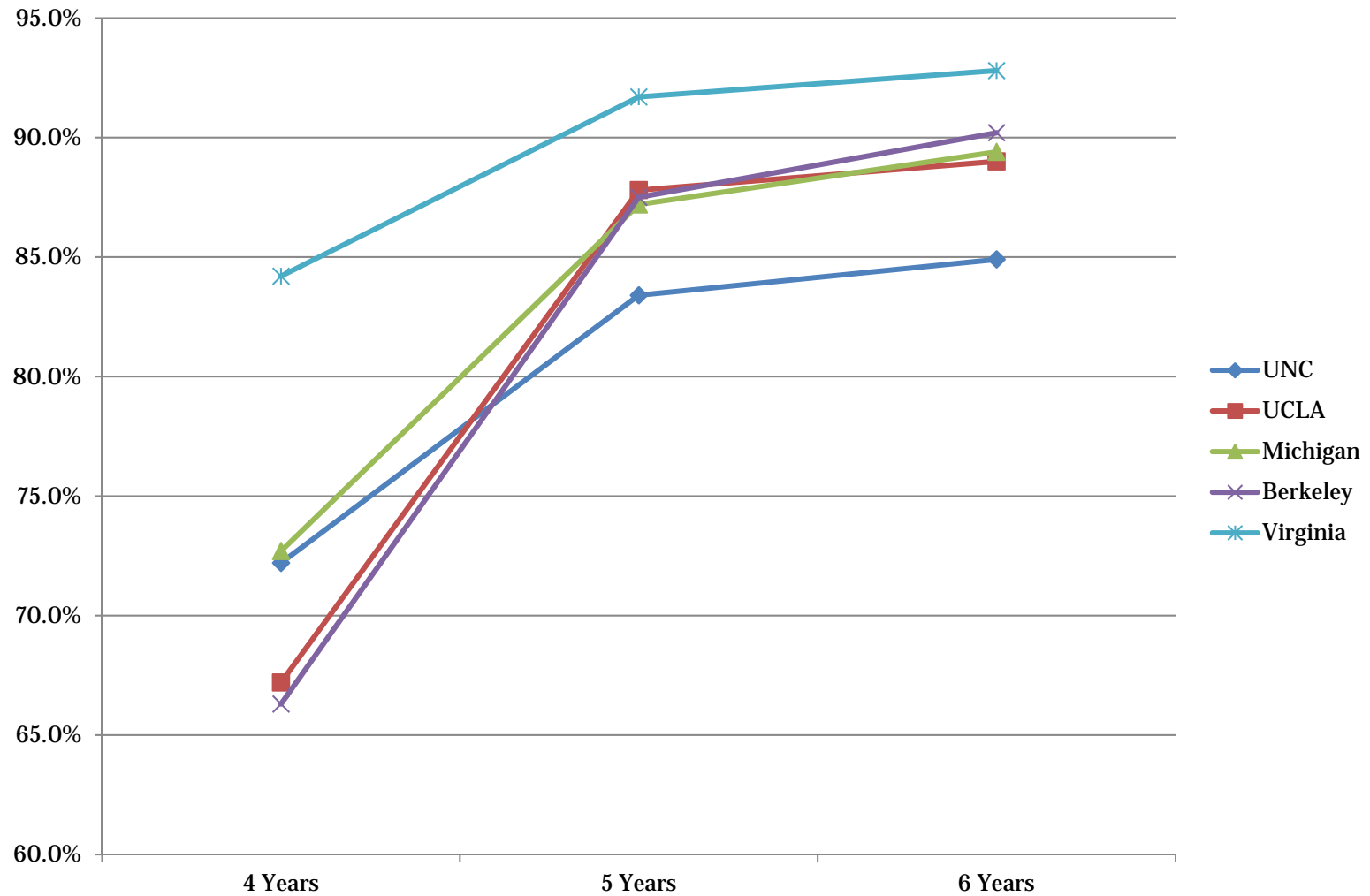


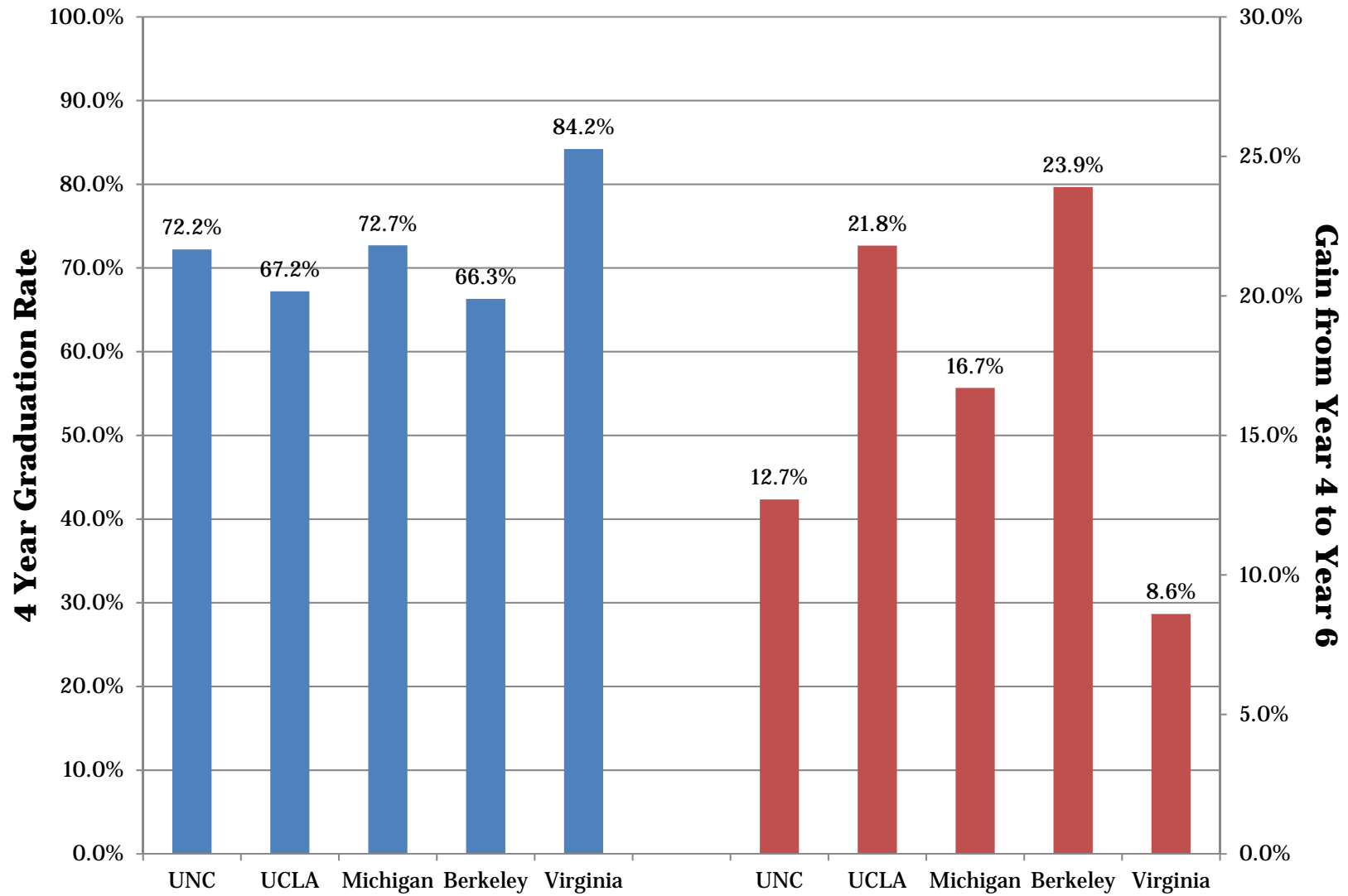
Retention and Graduation Rate Comparison

18

4. Carolina students are just as likely as their counterparts at peer institutions to graduate in four years, but less likely to complete their degrees after that point.

Peer Comparison Graduation Rates at 4, 5 and 6 Years



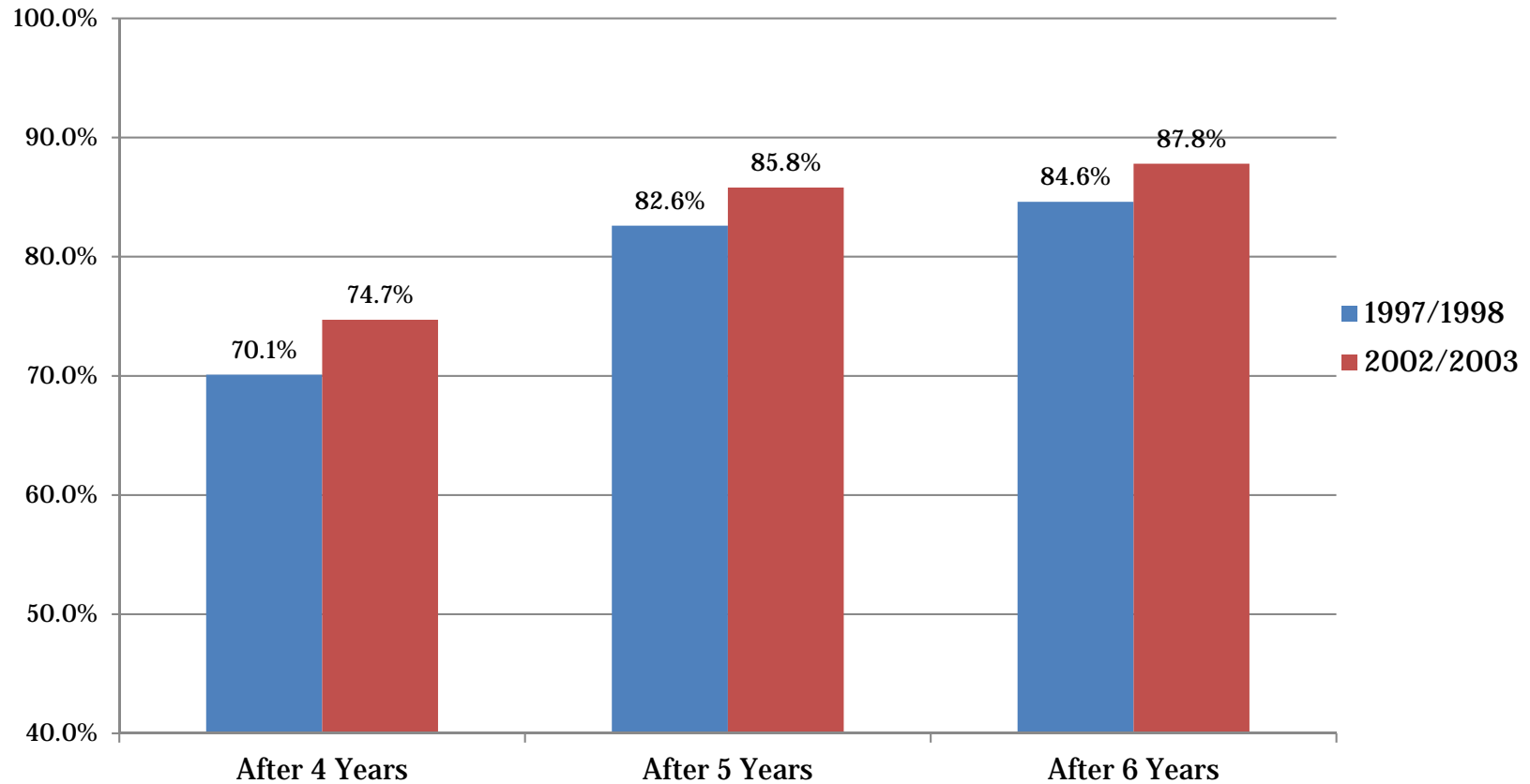


Persistence and Graduation Patterns of 1st Years

21

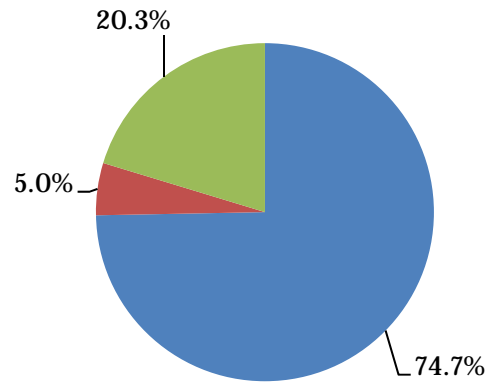
1. The 4 year graduation rate has improved since the 2004 study. In the current study, nearly 75% of all cohort members graduated in four years or less. In the 2004 study, only 70% of students graduated in four years.

Change in Graduation Rates Comparison of 1997/1998 and 2002/2003 Cohorts



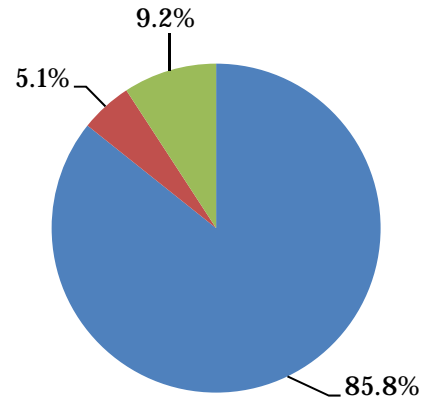
2002-2003 Cohort 4, 5 and 6 Year Outcomes

4 Year Outcomes



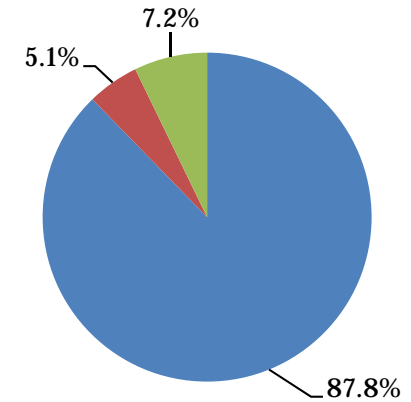
■ Graduated ■ Transferred
■ Other

5 Year Outcomes



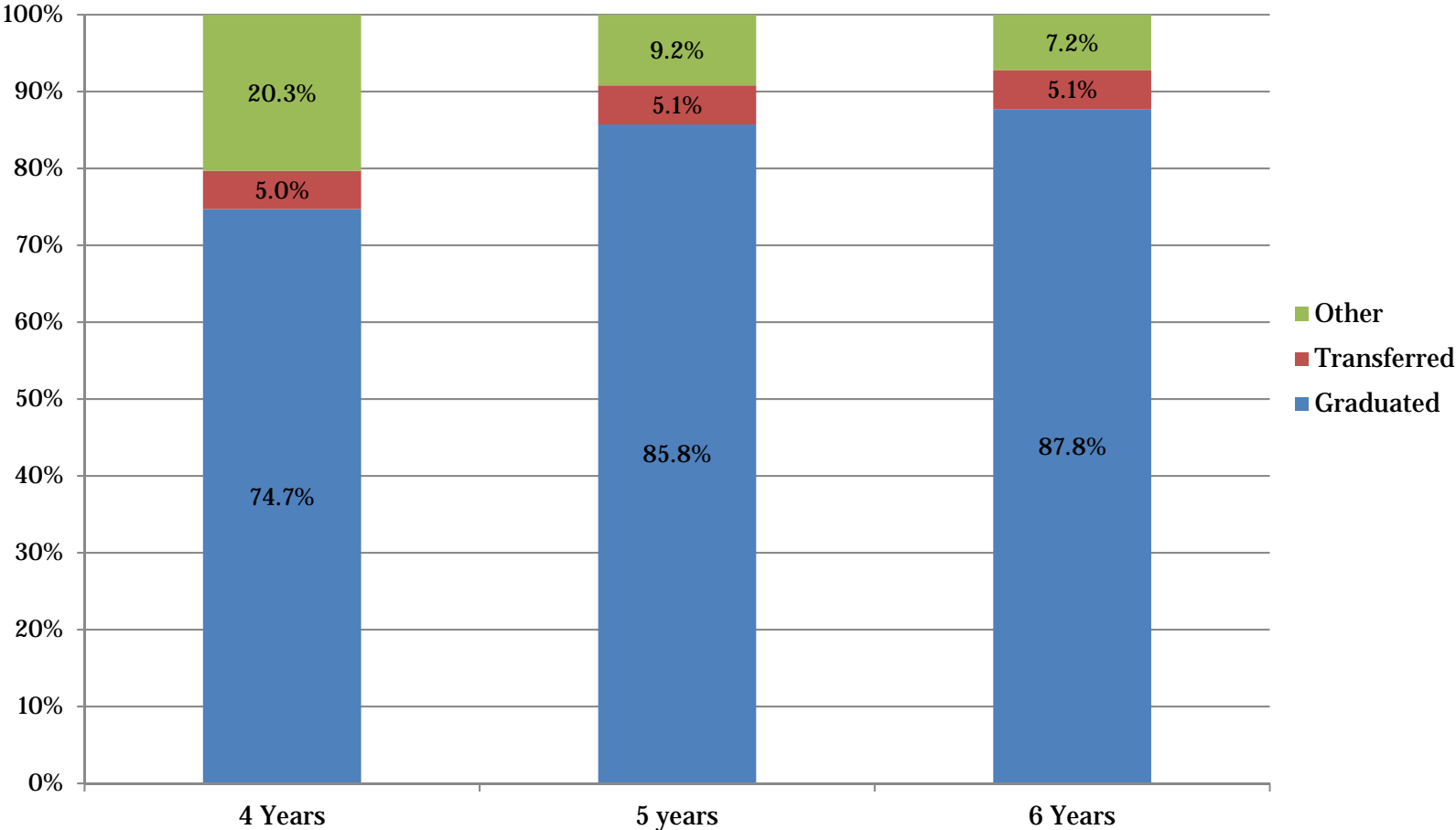
■ Graduated ■ Transferred
■ Other

6 Year Outcomes

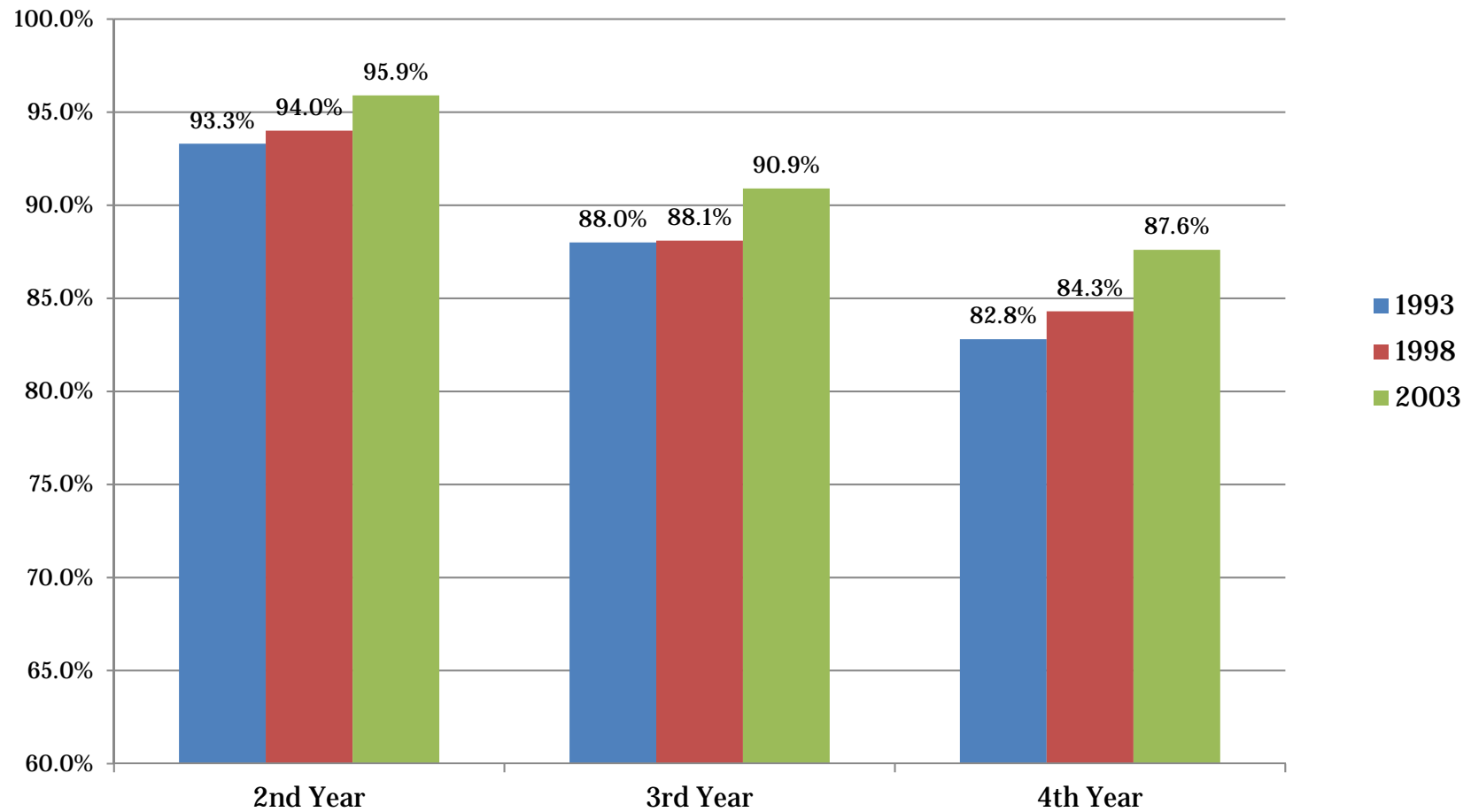


■ Graduated ■ Transferred
■ Other

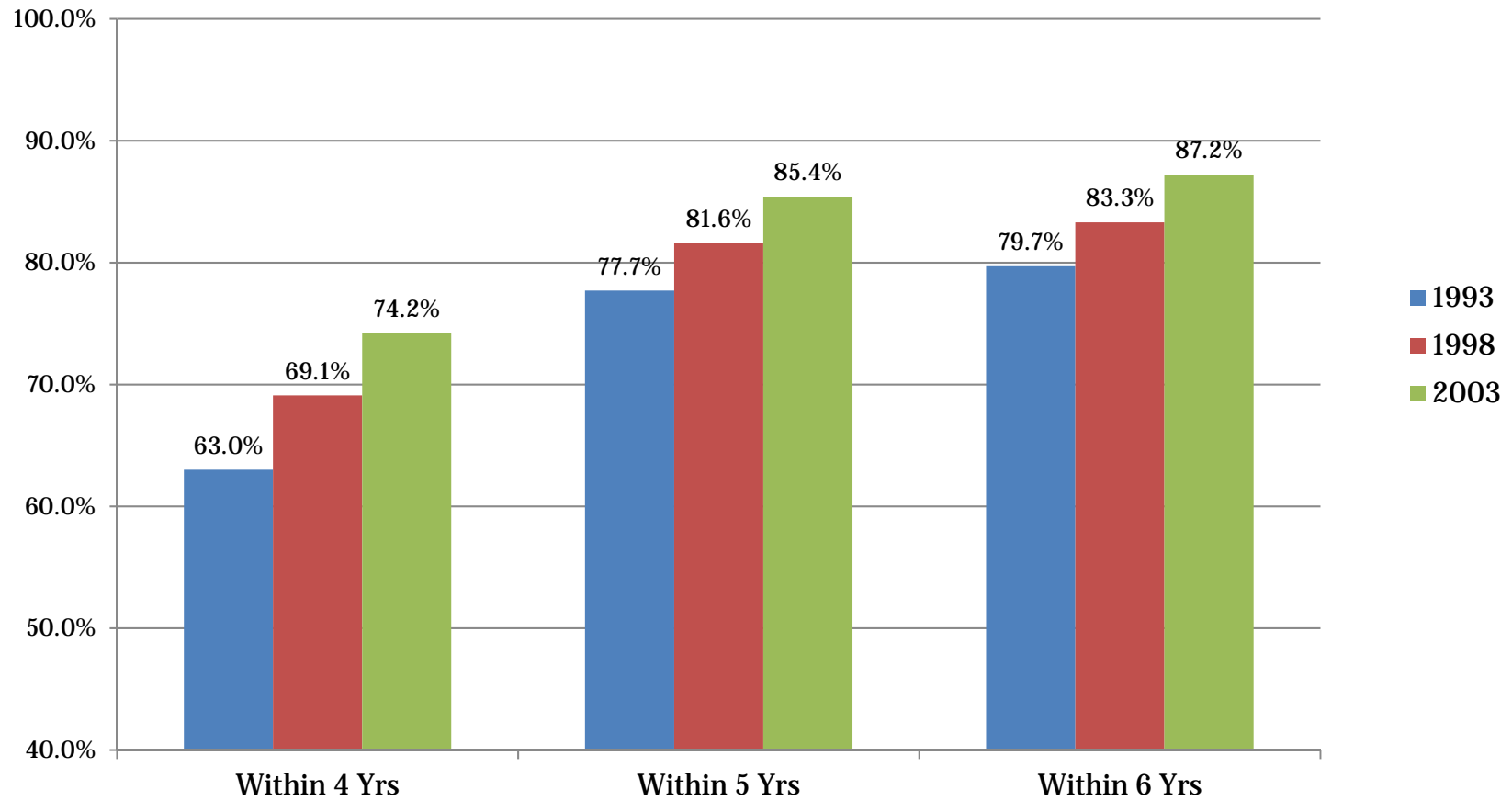
Outcome Variables for Analyses of 2002/2003 First-Year Cohorts



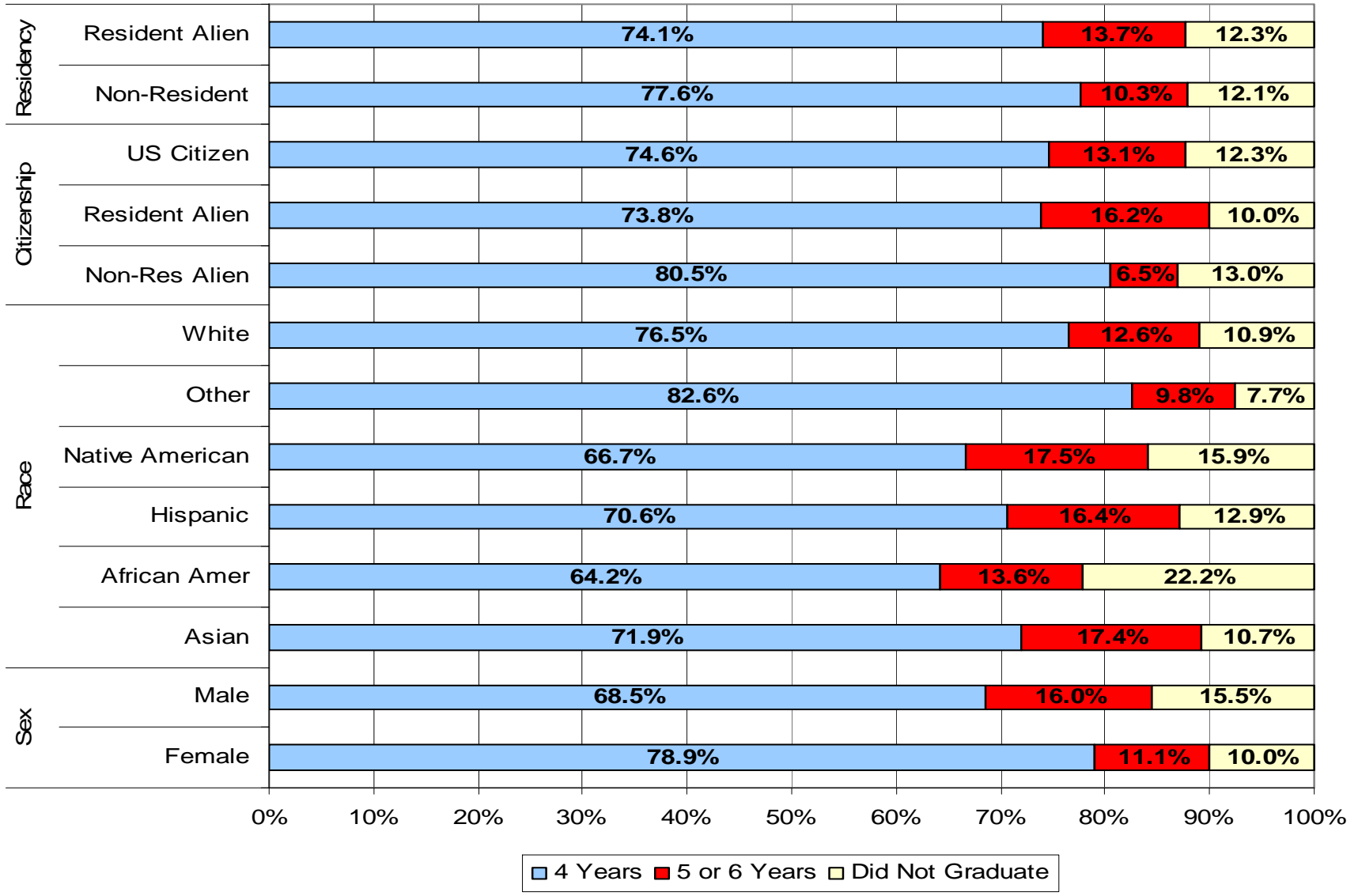
Change in Retention Rates Entering First Year Cohorts of 1993, 1998, and 2003



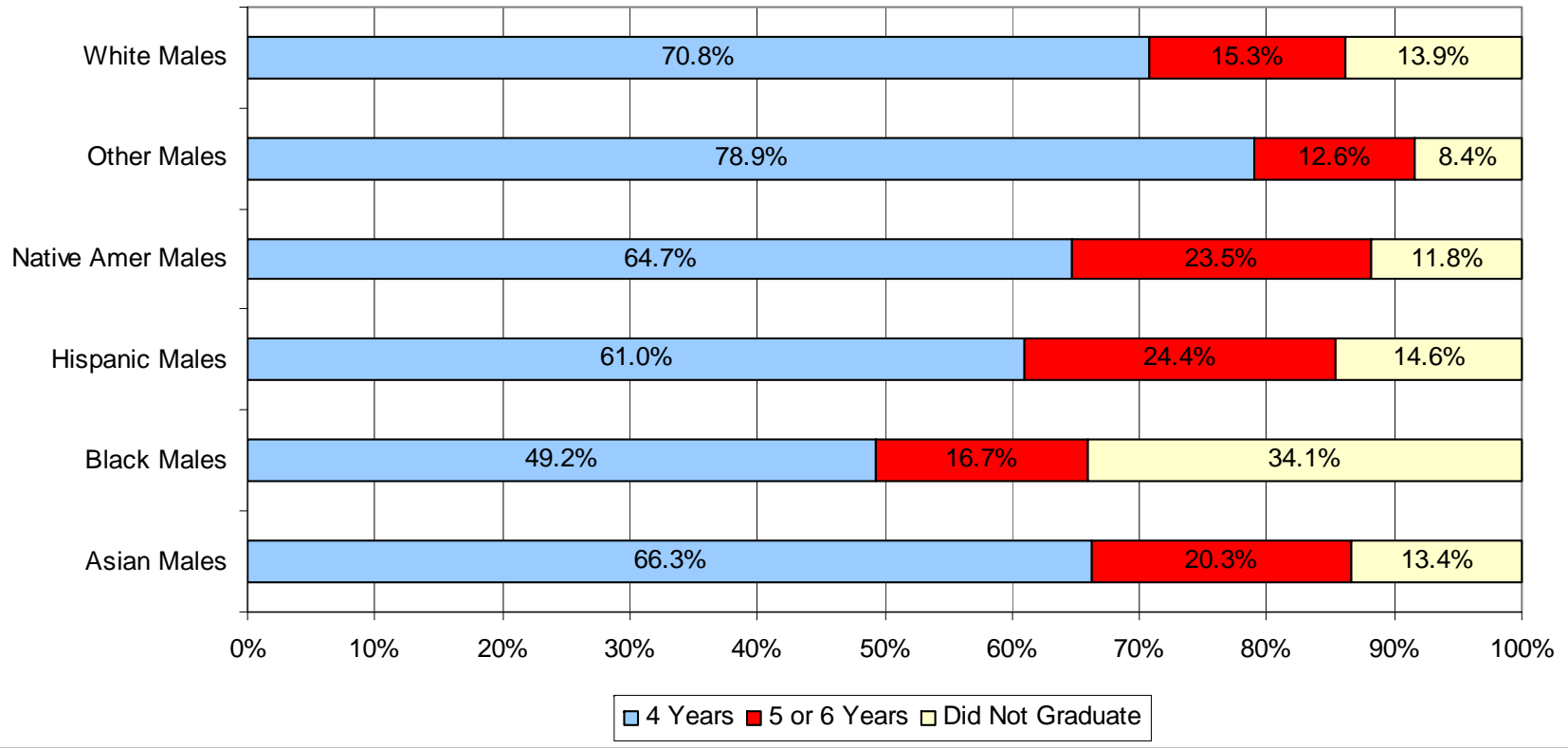
Change in Graduation Rates Entering First Year Cohorts of 1993, 1998, and 2003



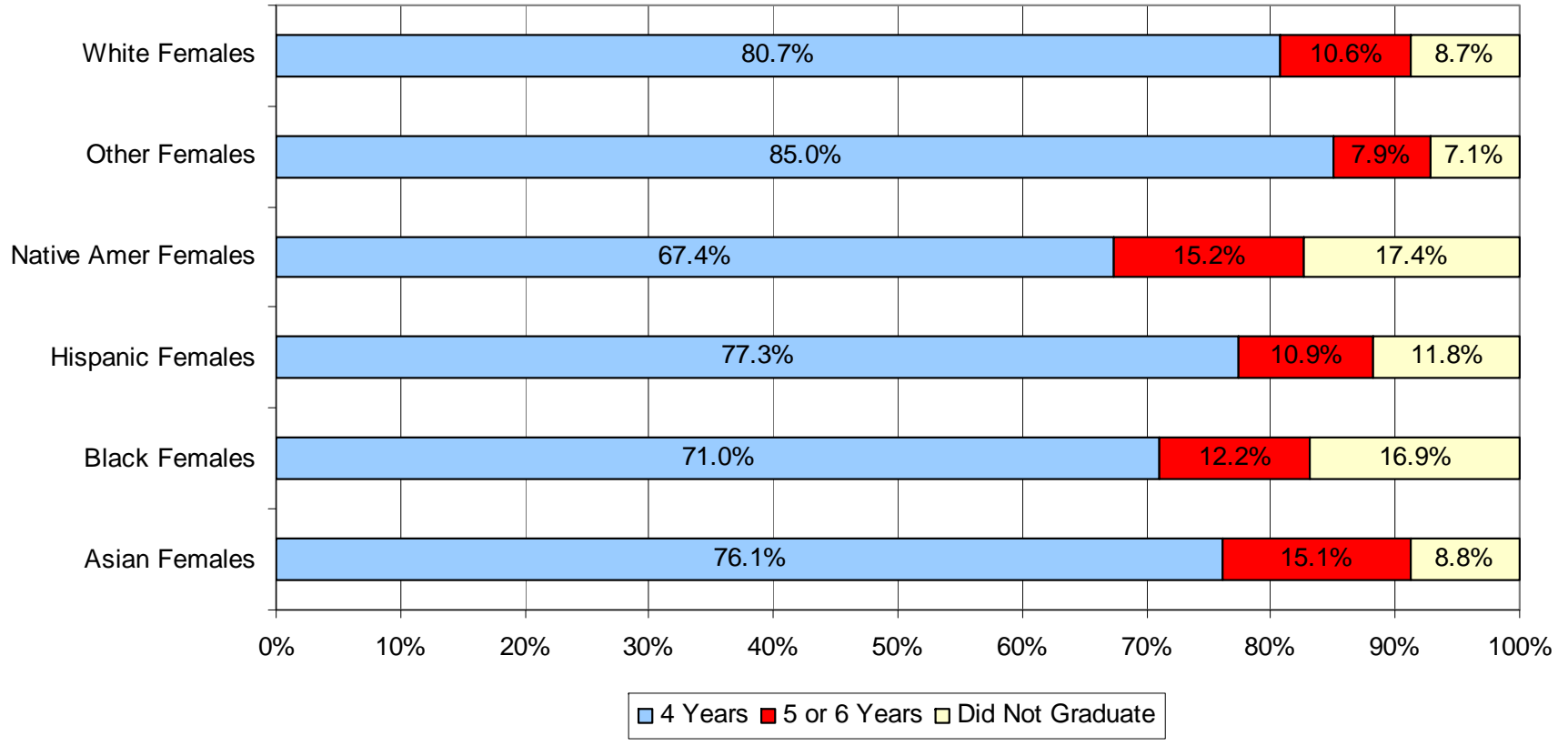
Graduation Outcomes by Demographic Characteristics



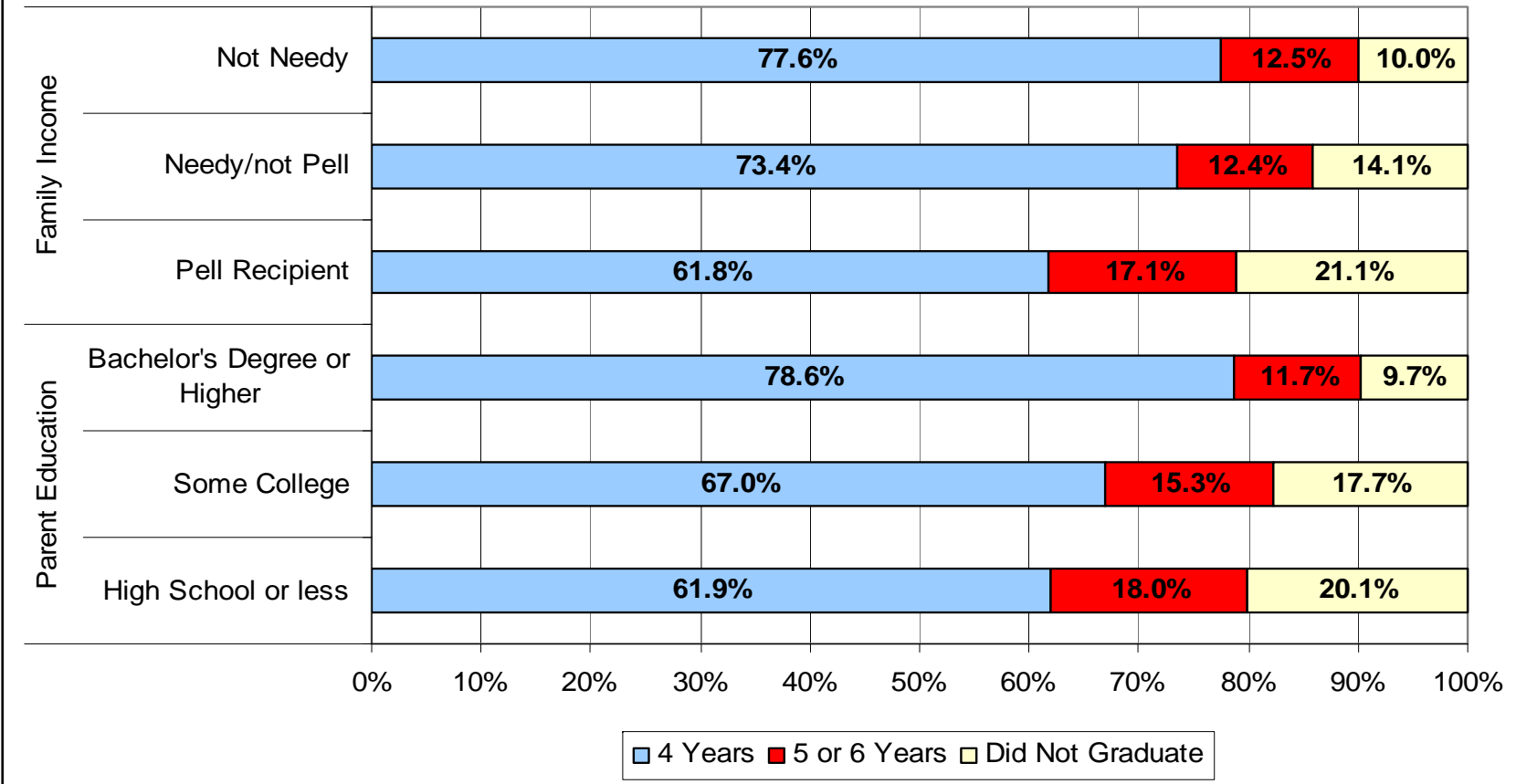
Males by Race



Females by Race



Graduation Outcomes by Family Income and Parent Education



Persistence and Graduation Patterns of 1st Years

31

2. Estimated percentage of students graduating over ten years is approximately 90%.
3. Nearly 70% of graduates enrolled in at least one summer session.
4. About 22% of five year graduates and 65% of six year graduates “stopped out” for one or more semesters.
5. Only 21% of five year graduates were actually enrolled 10 semesters, and only 12% of six-year graduates enrolled for 12 semesters.

Persistence and Graduation Patterns of 1st Years

32

A Note on Time to Degree:

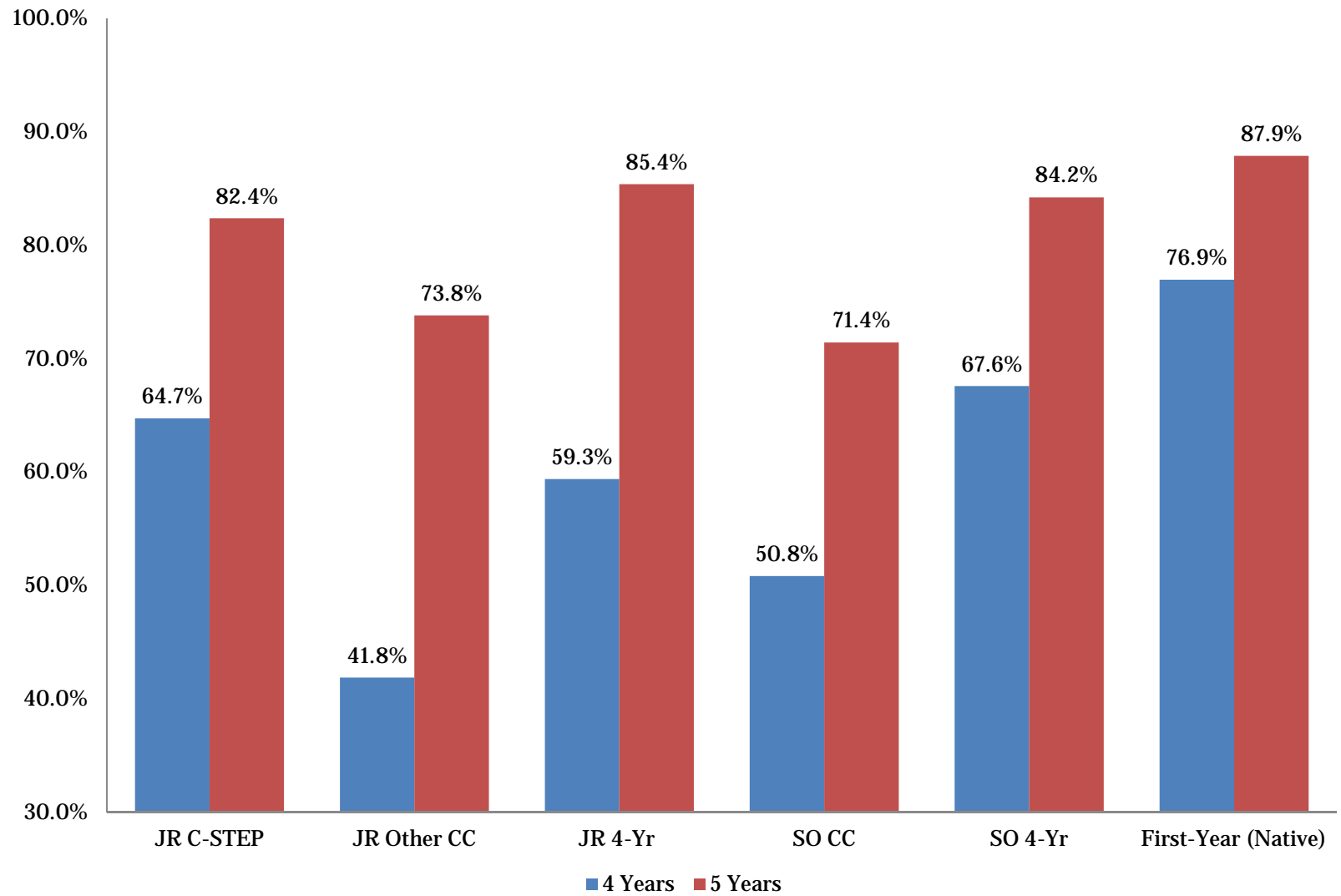
- Graduation rates are computed based on actual calendar years elapsed since entry as first-year degree-seeking student.
- However, most students who graduate in five or six years have not been continuously enrolled during those years.

Persistence and Graduation Patterns of Transfers

33

1. Retention and graduation rates differ based on the type of institution attended prior to transferring (CC vs. 4 year) and class standing at the time of transfer (Soph vs. JR).

Transfer Student Graduation Rates



Transfer Student 4- and 5-Year Graduation Rates

Comparisons By Class and Institutional Origin

	4 Years	5 Years
JR C-STEP	64.7%	82.4%
JR Other CC	41.8%	73.8%
JR 4-Yr	59.3%	85.4%
SO CC	50.8%	71.4%
SO 4-Yr	67.6%	84.2%
First-Year (Native)	76.9%	87.9%

** Transfer student graduation rates based on equivalent years of study at prior institution plus years at Carolina. For example, junior transfer students are counted as having graduated within 4 years if they completed degree requirements within two years after transferring to Carolina.*

*** 5-Year rates include only 2006 cohort*

Persistence and Graduation Patterns of Transfers

36

- Overall, transfer students were more likely than native students to be ineligible or to have withdrawn by the end of their first semester.

Fall 2008 Academic Eligibility Comparison		
Academic Eligibility	N = 3865 Native Students <i>at the End of their 1st Semester</i>	N = 789 All New Transfer Students <i>at the End of their 1st Semester</i>
Probation	4%	4%
Ineligible	less than 1%	2.50%
Withdrew	less than 1%	3%

Persistence and Graduation Patterns of Transfers

37

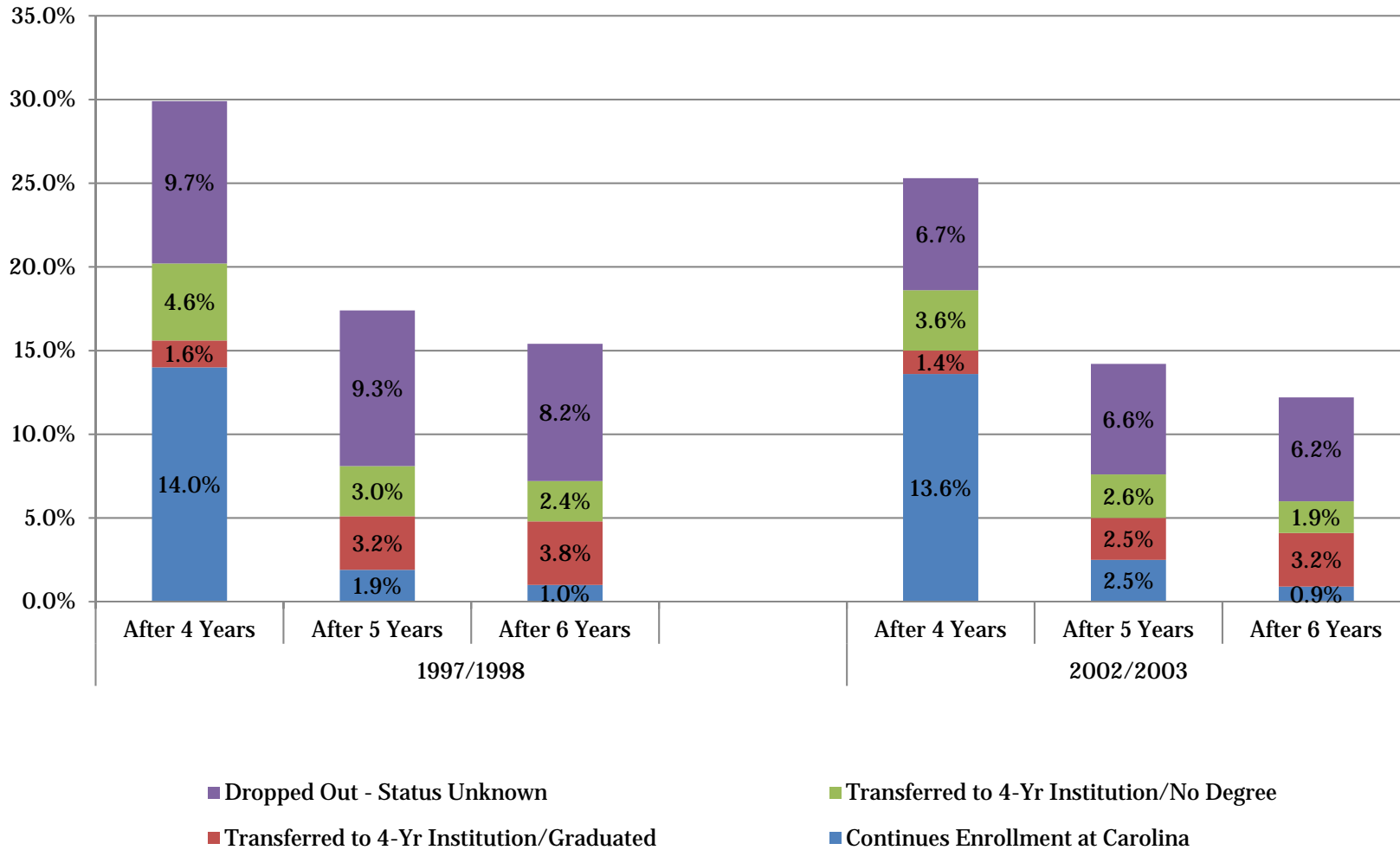
3. Junior transfer students from community colleges are among the least likely to graduate from Carolina with only 44% graduating in four years.
4. To date, C-STEP participants have demonstrated exceptionally high persistence, academic achievement, and graduation rates.

Students Who Did Not Complete Degrees at Carolina

38

1. 11% of the 2002/2003 cohort discontinued enrollment at Carolina before graduating and had not returned by the end of six years. Another 1% of the cohort did not graduate within six years either, but continued to enroll at Carolina at the beginning of year seven. This is a **significant improvement** over the 1997/1998 cohort statistics which showed that over 15% had not completed their degrees at Carolina.
2. Substantial proportion of students who do not continue their studies at Carolina go on to graduate from other four-year institutions. **No less than 91% of the 2002/2003 cohort completed a bachelor's degree either from Carolina or another institution within six years.**

Comparison of Outcomes for Students Not Graduating from Carolina 1997/1998 and 2002/2003 Cohorts



Students Who Did Not Complete Degrees at Carolina

40

3. The majority of students who transfer to another 4 year institution do so after the first or second year.
4. Students who discontinued their enrollment after year two without transferring to another 4 year institution tend to have a history of academic difficulty.

Students Perceptions of Factors Related to Their Decision to Leave Carolina

41

1. About half of respondents indicated that they decided to transfer to a different college because they wanted to: (1) pursue a major that was not offered by UNC, (2) were accepted by a higher ranked university, or (3) wanted a different college experience (closer to home, smaller, etc.).
2. 22 out of the 51 students interviewed cited difficult transitions from their high school life at home to life at UNC-Chapel Hill as the main reason why they left UNC.

Students Perceptions of Factors Related to Their Decision to Leave Carolina

42

3. Most of the students interviewed did not believe that UNC could have done anything for them to help them stay as they left mostly because of personal reasons.
4. The most frequent recommendation was to improve academic advising to provide timely individualized advising.
5. Students from out-of-state recommended the university find ways to make them feel welcomed, comfortable and adjust to life at UNC.

Factors Related to Retention and Graduation

43

1. Progress has been made regarding the success of first generation college students. In the 2004 study, 75% graduated within 5 years. In the current study, 79% of first generation students graduate within 5 years.
2. Approximately 8.5% of all students in the 2002/2003 cohorts became academically ineligible at least once during their enrollment at Carolina, which is considerably less than the 11.8% reported for the 1997/1998 cohorts.
3. Low-income students do not persist and graduate at the same rates as other students. Four-year graduation rates for Pell recipients are over eleven percentage point differences than other needy students and sixteen percentage points lower than those with no need.

Factors Related to Retention and Graduation

continued

44

4. Four-year graduation rates are lower for males and underrepresented minorities.
5. Academic performance, as measured by cumulative grade point average, has a strong relationship to retention and graduation outcomes.
6. Students are more likely to become ineligible at the end of the first-year than at any other time, followed closely by the end of the second year.
7. **Of those who became academically ineligible even once, less than 40% graduated within six years.** (Note: this is for the pre-probation/2007 cohort)

Evaluation of the Probation Semester

45

1. Students who have been on academic probation are more likely to have the following characteristics compared to their counterparts who have not been on probation: male, Black, first generation, and low-income.
2. Students who end up on academic probation are more likely to have lower SAT scores (by approximately 100 points) and fewer AP credits.
3. Approximately 3.63% of first-year students ended up on academic probation after their first semester.

Evaluation of the Probation Semester

46

4. Junior transfer students are more likely than first-year students to end up on academic probation after their first semester. Approximately 6.5% of transfer students (sophomore and junior) ended up on academic probation after their first semester.
5. Nearly 73% of students who complete the probationary term return to good standing.
6. Students who complete **all** of the intervention steps are more likely to return to good standing than students who complete only some of the steps.

Evaluation of the Probation Semester

47

7. Students who complete the Bounce Back program are more likely to return to good standing than those who do not complete the program.
8. Many students, especially transfer students, returned to good standing during summer school.
9. On average, students who completed the probationary semester improved their cumulative GPA.

Recommendations

48

Recommendations

49

1. Continue current practices at Carolina that positively influence student retention.
2. Develop and sustain strategies to improve junior transfer student retention and graduation.
3. Promote the efficient and effective use of resources that lead to student success.
4. Ensure effective and efficient implementation of retention tools in ConnectCarolina.
5. Continue support for cultural and co-curricula programs promoting smaller communities, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging at Carolina for all students, and particularly students from historically underrepresented populations.

Recommendation 1

50

Continue current practices at Carolina that positively influence student retention.

- Maintain programs and current practices at Carolina that positively influence student retention including, but not limited to, Summer Bridge, Carolina Covenant, Minority Peer-Advising, C-STEP, living-learning communities, Bounce Back and academic advising.
- Continue the on-going program of research on student retention and graduation at Carolina, stay apprised of best practices at peer institutions, and evaluate the efficacy of initiatives targeted at improving degree completion rates.
- Include retention efforts and evaluation in the annual reports of all programs and units which influence persistence and graduation.
- Explore changes to the current procedures for conferring, dating and reporting degree awards so that the University can more accurately report its completion rates for external accountability purposes.

Recommendation 2

51

Develop and sustain strategies to improve junior transfer student retention and graduation.

- Support successful programs enhancing junior transfer student success including C-STEP, the Junior Transfer Seminar, the Transfer Success Group, Tau Sigma and the Tar Heel Transfers.
- Develop new strategies to raise the Junior Transfer graduation rate from 45 to 50% by 2014.

Recommendation 3

52

Promote the efficient and effective use of resources that lead to student success.

- Hire and support professional staff at the levels required to continue providing exceptional student support, including academic advisors, learning specialists and academic counselors, by filling vacant positions as quickly as possible and replacing positions lost to budget cutbacks.
- Fully implement the system of probation. This growing program requires more personnel to manage the case load and provide support to students in academic jeopardy.
- Develop mechanisms to support students performing just above the probation threshold (2.000-2.200 cumulative GPA).
- Develop programming for sophomores that removes barriers to persistence into the junior year.
- Support efforts to normalize help seeking behavior among undergraduates.
- Continue to increase this number of students who participate in Summer Bridge.

Recommendation 4

53

Ensure effective and efficient implementation of retention tools in ConnectCarolina.

- Ensure the development, maintenance and use of an accurate degree audit system.
- Utilize an online academic early warning system to enhance faculty-student communication and to connect students with academic resources in a timely manner.
- Make full use of the robust reporting and communication tools in ConnectCarolina including Comments (used for graduation clearance), Communications (used to track official communications with students) and Checklists (used to encourage students to complete essential tasks).

Recommendation 5

54

Continue support for cultural and co-curricula programs promoting smaller communities, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging at Carolina for all students, and particularly students from historically underrepresented populations.

- This includes enhancing multicultural programs, services and resources and living-learning communities.
- Enhancing programming for transfer students, first generation college students, Covenant Scholars and African American and Latino males).
- Expand opportunities for personal contact and counseling with professional staff and faculty, who mirror the diversity of our students, through initiatives that address concerns identified by culturally discreet populations.
- Gather data on and evaluate participation in co-curricular activities.

The Future

55

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE
RETENTION STUDIES AT CAROLINA

Faculty-Student Interaction and Small Learning Communities

56

- Study after study has proven that faculty-student interaction and opportunities for learning in small group settings positively influences undergraduate retention. It is recommended that the University continues to provide opportunities for students to interact with faculty members and instructors in small class settings and one-on-one. Furthermore, small learning communities across campus should be promoted and we should build on the success of learning communities such as the Latina/o Collaborative, First-year Seminars, the Junior Transfer Seminar, Undergraduate Research, Honors Seminars and living-learning communities in Housing and Residential Education. Efforts to encourage students to take advantage of office hours, utilizing the lecturer-advisors in academic advising and providing academic enhancement workshops are additional ways to promote smaller communities and faculty-student interaction.

Questions for Future Study

57

- How do the academic eligibility policies implemented in 2007 influence retention and graduation?
- How will enrollment growth influence retention and graduation rates?
- How will economic climate influence retention and graduation rates?
- Why are Carolina students just as likely to graduate in four years as their counterparts at peer institutions but relatively less likely to complete their degrees after that point?

The 2007 Cohort

58

- It is recommended that the performance of the 2007 cohort subject to probation and the new eligibility standards including the 9th semester rule are carefully tracked and the implications of these new policies are assessed. Furthermore, the implementation of the online academic early warning system within ConnectCarolina has great potential to positively influence student success and should be evaluated after it has been utilized for several semesters.

Study Student Strengths

59

- While the university continuously tracks institutional retention and graduation rates, inevitably there will be a call for another retention study of this size. Perhaps in 5 or 6 years when this call comes, instead of revisiting the model presented in 2004 or the model utilized here, a different, empirical approach should be employed. Historically higher education assessment has had an eye toward pathology with a focus on repairing students' problems. To this end, much research exists on why students fail to persist as opposed to why they succeed. It is recommended that a future retention study take a strength-based approach. An empirical study of this nature would involve studying our successful students and may provide new insight into understanding the retention and graduation of our undergraduates. Studying what is right with our students may illuminate new aspects of successful student experiences which can in turn be applied to supporting all students. This work may help establish a campus ethos which identifies student strengths and encourages students to make informed decisions based upon reflection on those strengths.

Study Excellence to Achieve Excellence

60

- A retention study of this kind would assess individual traits common among successful students. Such a study would involve studying not just the least successful students but to also studying flourishing students who are fulfilled, accomplished and learning. Key questions of this study may be: who are optimally functioning students and what can we learn from the students who are succeeding? The way in which the current study recognizes the interventions that work as well as provides a listing of the many initiatives currently on campus in support of retention is a nod in the direction of studying what is right with our students and right with our institution. UNC-Chapel Hill's current retention and graduation rates are very strong, competitive among public institutions nationally and a point of pride for the state of North Carolina. It seems appropriate at this juncture to suggest that if we want to achieve further excellence, then we should study excellence. If we want to increase retention and student success, perhaps we need to more fully appreciate not just weaknesses but the unique strengths of our students.

Notes

61