



INDIANA *for* COMMISSION  
HIGHER EDUCATION

**COMPLETE  
COLLEGE  
AMERICA**

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**New Report: '4-Year' Degrees Now a Myth in American Higher Education**

INDIANAPOLIS – In their latest report, *The Four-Year Myth*, Complete College America and its Alliance of States reveal that the vast majority of full-time American college students do not graduate on time, costing them and their families tens of thousands of dollars in extra college-related expenses, as well as lost wages from delaying entry into the workforce. The report also points to spikes in debt in years 5 and 6 and shows that the overwhelming majority of public four-year colleges graduate less than half of their students on time.

At public 2-year institutions nationwide, **5%** of full-time students pursuing associates degrees graduate on time. An extra year costs \$15,933 in tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation and other expenses. In addition, students give up approximately \$35,000 in lost wages by graduating late. The total cost: \$50,933.

At public 4-year institutions nationwide, **19%** (non-flagship) and **36%** (flagship/very high research) of full-time students graduate on time. An extra year costs \$22,826 in tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation and other expenses. In addition, students give up more than \$45,000 in lost wages by graduating late. The total cost is over \$68,000.

Only **50 out of the more than 580** public four-year institutions we reviewed have on-time graduation rates at or above 50% for their full-time students.

Two extra years on campus **increase debt by nearly 70%** among students who borrow, according to data from Temple University and the University of Texas – Austin.

As a solution, Complete College America advocates for a restructuring of higher education delivery called Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) that would provide students with the most direct route to graduation. Utilizing GPS, majors are organized into a semester-by-semester set of courses that lead to on-time completion, saving students and their families the time and money associated with extended time on campus.

GPS creates a partnership between students and institutions. Students commit to a structured schedule of courses and elective offerings that represent the shortest distance to completion. In return, institutions provide clear degree maps, closely monitor student progress and guarantee that the necessary courses will be available when they are needed. Institutions that have implemented these approaches have seen dramatic improvements in completion. For example, Arizona State University's use of GPS strategies through their eAdvisor system has led to an increase of nearly 16 percentage points in the number of students who graduate on time.

"Student loan debt has for the first time topped one trillion dollars – more than credit card and auto loan debt combined," said Complete College America President Stan Jones. "Our Alliance of States is committed to shining a light on on-time graduation rates and pursuing reforms that increase college completion and shorten the time to degree. We know that the best strategy to make college more affordable is to ensure many more students graduate and graduate on time."

In Indiana, a member of Complete College America’s Alliance of States, efforts are currently underway to address low on-time completion rates and to ensure college is more affordable.

“We know from experience in Indiana that an on time degree is the most affordable degree and the data suggest that many Indiana students would benefit from programs that offer greater predictability and more structured support,” said Teresa Lubbers, Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education.

### **Indiana Initiatives**

Indiana has a number of GPS-aligned initiatives underway that support on time completion, including:

- Requiring clear semester-by-semester degree maps for every public college student;
- Promoting more proactive college advising practices to keep students on track and intervene as needed; and
- Launching a statewide “15 to Finish” campaign to change the long standing perception that taking 12 credits per semester is enough to graduate on time.

### **In Indiana**

- 6% of full-time students pursuing associates degrees at 2-year institutions graduate on time. On average, students graduate in 4 years with 93 credits (rather than the customary 60 credits). Each extra year costs \$51,748 in school-related expenses and lost wages.
- 17% of full-time students at 4-year non-flagship institutions graduate on time. On average, students graduate in 5 years with 143 credits, rather than the customary 120 credits. Each extra year costs \$68,176 in school-related expenses and lost wages.
- 42% of full-time students at 4-year flagship/very high research institutions graduate on time. On average, students graduate in 4.4 years with 134 credits, rather than the customary 120 credits. Each extra year costs \$68,176 in school-related expenses and lost wages.

### **About Indiana Commission for Higher Education**

The Indiana Commission for Higher Education is a 14-member public body created in 1971 to define the missions of Indiana's colleges and universities, plan and coordinate the state's postsecondary education system, and ensure that Indiana's higher education system is aligned to meet the needs of students and the state. Learn more at [www.in.gov/che](http://www.in.gov/che)

### **About Complete College America**

Established in 2009, Complete College America is a national nonprofit with a single mission: to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations. For more information, visit [www.completecollege.org](http://www.completecollege.org)