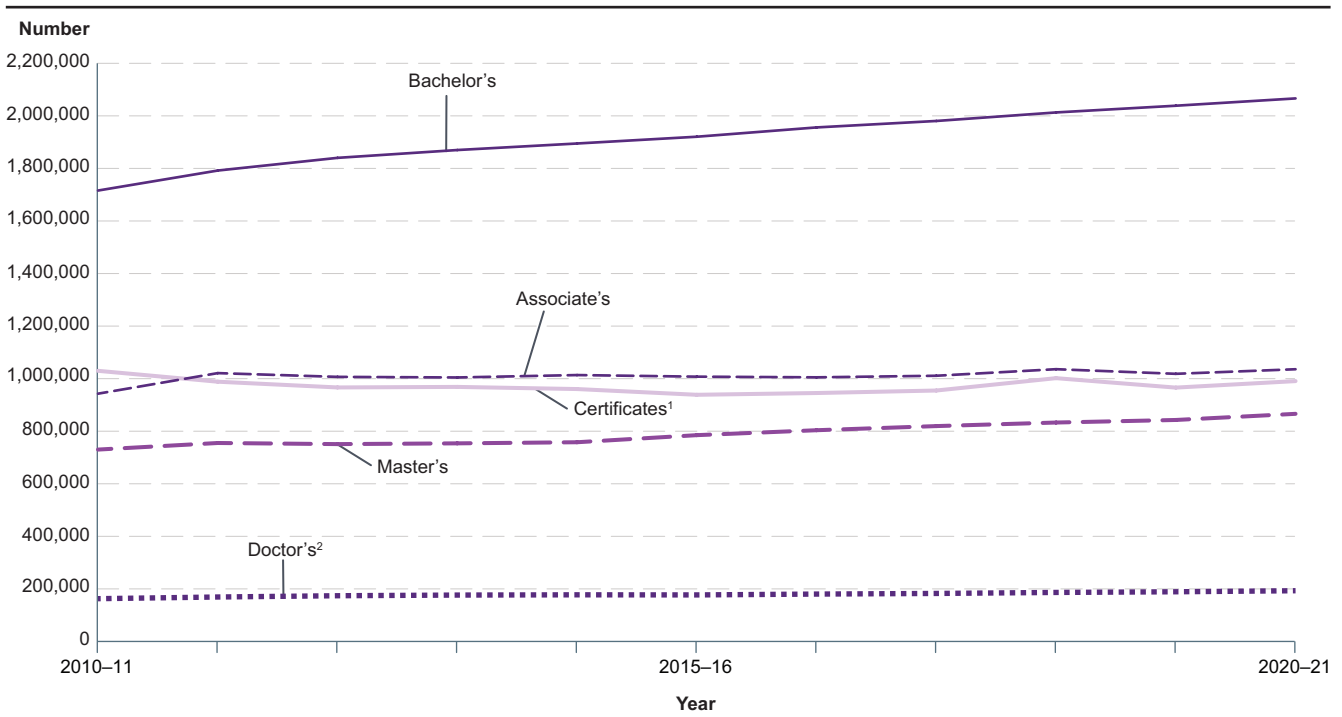


Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees Conferred

Between 2010–11 and 2020–21, the number of postsecondary certificates and degrees conferred by public institutions increased at every award level. The number conferred by private nonprofit institutions increased at every award level above associate’s. Meanwhile, the number of certificates and degrees conferred by private for-profit institutions decreased at every award level except the doctoral level.

Overall Awards Conferred

Figure 1. Number of certificates and degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by award level: Academic years 2010–11 through 2020–21



¹ Data are for certificates below the associate’s degree level.

² Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level. Includes most degrees formerly classified as first-professional, such as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Degree counts are limited to degree-granting institutions; certificate counts include both degree- and non-degree-granting institutions. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011 through Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 318.40.

In 2020-21, postsecondary institutions conferred about 5.2 million awards, ranging from certificates below the associate’s level to doctor’s degrees. The number of awards conferred above the certificate level increased between 2010-11 and 2020-21 for

- associate’s degrees, by 10 percent (from 943,500 to 1.0 million);
- bachelor’s degrees, by 20 percent (from 1.7 million to 2.1 million);
- master’s degrees, by 19 percent (from 730,900 to 866,900; and
- doctor’s degrees, by 18 percent (from 163,800 to 194,100).

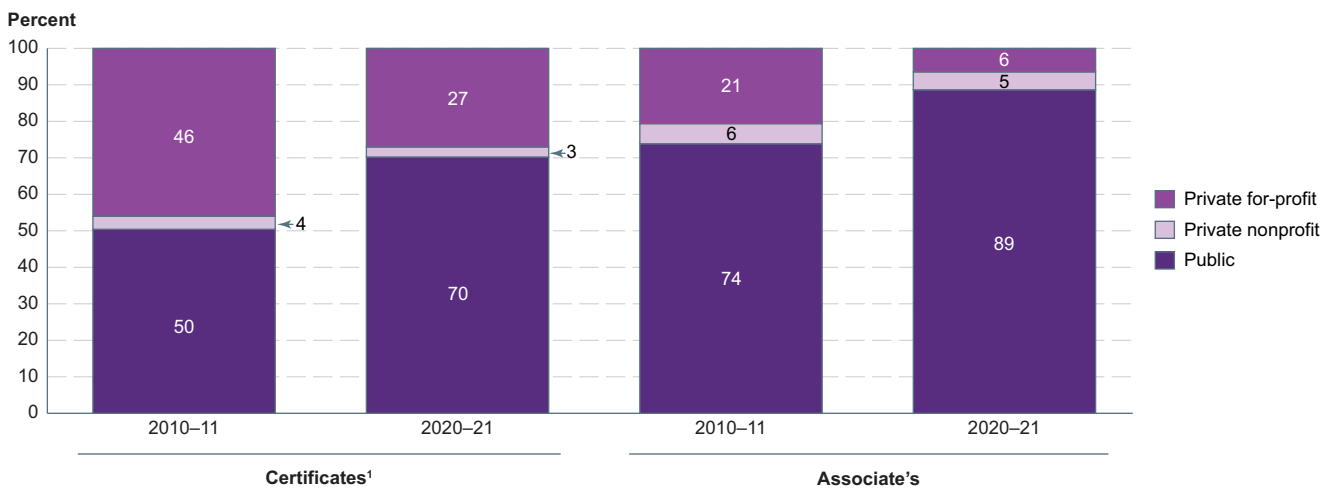
Meanwhile, fewer certificates were conferred in 2020-21 (991,400) than in 2010-11 (1.0 million), although there was no consistent trend throughout the period.

The coronavirus pandemic brought disruptions to education beginning in spring 2020.¹ It is not possible to determine the extent to which the pandemic may have impacted degree completion, because it is unknown how many students would have completed degrees in the absence of the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is important to understand patterns of degree completion before and since the onset of the pandemic. At the certificate and

associate’s degree levels, the number of awards conferred in 2019-20 was lower than in 2018-19 but still higher than in 2017-18. In contrast, at the bachelor’s degree level and above, more awards were conferred in 2019-20 than in 2018-19. Additionally, across all degree levels at the associate’s level and above, more degrees were awarded in 2020-21—during the first full school year of the pandemic—than in 2019-20.

Certificates and Associate’s Degrees Conferred, by Control of Institution

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of certificates and associate’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by control of institution: Academic years 2010–11 and 2020–21



¹Data are for certificates below the associate’s degree level.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Degree counts are limited to degree-granting institutions; certificate counts include both degree- and non-degree-granting institutions. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011 and Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 318.40.

The change in the number of certificates conferred between 2010-11 and 2020-21 differed by control of institution (public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit). Between 2010-11 and 2020-21, the number of certificates conferred

- increased at public institutions by 34 percent (from 519,700 to 696,200);
- decreased at private for-profit institutions by 43 percent (from 474,200 to 268,000); and
- showed no consistent trend at private nonprofit institutions.

At private nonprofit institutions, the number of certificates conferred peaked at 46,100 in 2014-15. Between 2014-15 and 2020-21, this number decreased by 41 percent to 27,200, which was lower than the number conferred in 2010-11 (36,500).

With these changes in the number of certificates conferred, the proportion of certificates conferred by institutional control also changed between 2010-11 and 2020-21. Specifically, the proportion of all certificates conferred

- increased at public institutions (from 50 to 70 percent);
- decreased at private for-profit institutions (from 46 to 27 percent); and
- showed no consistent trend at private nonprofit institutions.

Over this period, the proportion of certificates conferred at private nonprofit institutions peaked at 5 percent in 2014-15 and then decreased to 3 percent in 2020-21.

At the associate's level, the number of degrees conferred also differed by control of institution. Between 2010-11 and 2020-21, the number of associate's degrees conferred

- increased at public institutions by 32 percent (from 696,900 to 918,700);
- decreased at private for-profit institutions by 66 percent (from 194,700 to 66,900); and
- showed no consistent trend at private nonprofit institutions.

The number of associate's degrees conferred at private nonprofit institutions peaked at 58,600 in 2014-15.

Between 2014-15 and 2020-21, this number decreased by 13 percent to 50,900.

With these changes in the number of all associate's degrees conferred, the proportion of associate's degrees conferred between 2010-11 and 2020-21

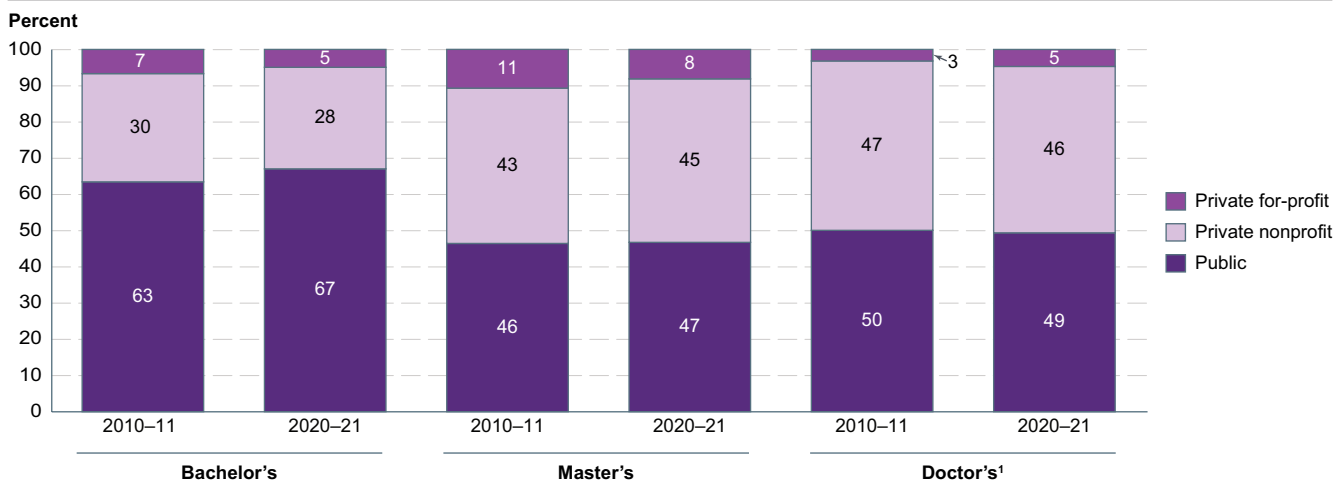
- increased at public institutions (from 74 to 89 percent);
- decreased at private for-profit institutions (from 21 to 6 percent); and
- showed no consistent trend at private nonprofit institutions.

Over this period, the proportion of associate's degrees conferred at private nonprofit institutions peaked at 6 percent in 2014-15 and then decreased to 5 percent in 2020-21.

Private for-profit institutions were the only institutional control to confer the majority of their awards below the bachelor's degree level, including just over half (52 percent) at the certificate level.

Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctor’s Degrees Conferred, by Control of Institution

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctor’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by control of institution: Academic years 2010–11 and 2020–21



¹ Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level. Includes most degrees formerly classified as first-professional, such as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Degree counts are limited to degree-granting institutions. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011 and Fall 2021, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 318.40.

At the bachelor’s level, the number of degrees conferred between 2010-11 and 2020-21

- increased at public institutions by 27 percent (from 1.1 million to 1.4 million);
- increased at private nonprofit institutions by 13 percent (from 512,800 to 579,200); and
- decreased at private for-profit institutions by 11 percent (from 114,500 to 102,000).

Over this period, the proportion of all bachelor’s degrees conferred

- increased at public institutions (from 63 to 67 percent);
- decreased at private nonprofit institutions (from 30 to 28 percent); and
- decreased at private for-profit institutions (from 7 to 5 percent).

The number of master’s degrees conferred followed a pattern similar to that of the number of bachelor’s degrees conferred. The number of master’s degrees conferred between 2010-11 and 2020-21

- increased at public institutions by 19 percent (from 339,400 to 405,200);
- increased at private nonprofit institutions by 25 percent (from 313,300 to 391,200); and
- decreased at private for-profit institutions by 10 percent (from 78,200 to 70,500).

Over this period, the proportion of all master’s degrees conferred

- increased at public institutions (from 46 to 47 percent);
- increased at private nonprofit institutions (from 43 to 45 percent); and
- decreased at private for-profit institutions (from 11 to 8 percent).

The number of doctor’s degrees conferred increased between 2010-11 and 2020-21 across all institutional controls. Specifically, over this period, the number of doctor’s degrees

- increased at public institutions by 17 percent (from 82,000 to 95,800);
- increased at private nonprofit institutions by 16 percent (from 76,600 to 89,100); and
- increased at private for-profit institutions by 75 percent (from 5,200 to 9,100).

Doctor’s degrees were the only award type that increased in number at private for-profit institutions over this period.

The proportion of all doctor’s degrees conferred between 2010-11 and 2020-21 showed no consistent pattern overall at either public institutions or private nonprofit institutions. The proportion of doctor’s degrees conferred at public institutions peaked at 51 percent in 2014-15 and then decreased to 49 percent in 2020-21. At private nonprofit institutions, the proportion of doctor’s degrees conferred decreased from 47 percent in 2010-11 to 45 percent in 2014-15 and then increased to 46 percent in 2020-21. Between 2010-11 and 2020-21, the proportion of doctor’s degrees conferred at private for-profit institutions increased from 3 to 5 percent.

Endnotes:

¹ Office of Postsecondary Education. (2020, June 16). *Guidance for Interruptions of Study Related to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. Retrieved December 6, 2022, from <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2020-03-05/guidance-interruptions-study-related-coronavirus-covid-19->

[updated-june-16-2020](https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2020-03-05/guidance-interruptions-study-related-coronavirus-covid-19-). Office of Postsecondary Education (2020, August 13). *CARES Act: Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund*. Retrieved December 6, 2022, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/caresact.html>.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 318.40

Related indicators and resources: [Degrees Awarded](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Graduate Degree Fields](#); [Postsecondary Outcomes for Nontraditional Undergraduate Students](#) [*The Condition of Education 2019 Spotlight*]; [Trends in Student Loan Debt for Graduate School Completers](#) [*The Condition of Education 2018 Spotlight*]; [Undergraduate Degree Fields](#); [Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates](#)

Glossary: Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Certificate; Control of institutions; Doctor's degree; Master's degree; Private institution; Public school or institution