

REPORT BRIEF

Supporting Rural Students in Oregon:
Male College Enrollment and Completion

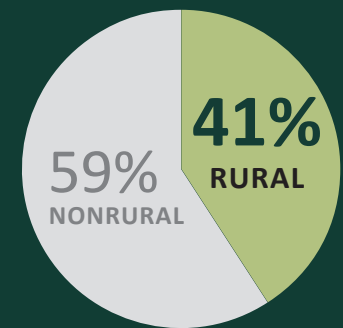
College enrollment, persistence, and completion rates are lower for male than for female students in Oregon, especially in rural areas.

A recent [collaboration](#) between The Ford Family Foundation and Education Northwest found that college enrollment rates among male students in Oregon have declined overall in the last 14 years, and more dramatically for rural than for nonrural male students. While we recognize there are many noncollege pathways to successful lives, such as apprenticeships and military service, this brief focuses on the college pathways of Oregon’s rural male students after high school to raise awareness of declining college enrollment and success.



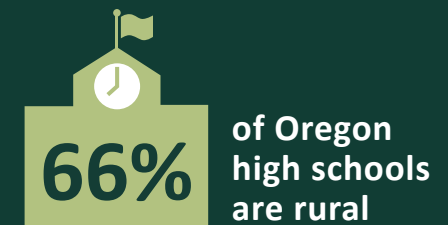
QUICK LOOK
OREGON HIGH SCHOOLS

THE CLASS OF 2019



37,744 Oregon high school students graduated in 2018/19.

50% of these graduates enrolled in college in fall 2019.



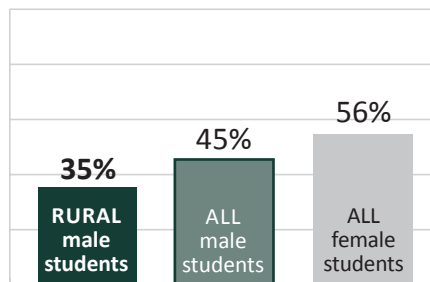
based on this study’s definition.

Beginning in 2018/19, the Oregon Department of Education allowed students to identify as non binary when reporting gender. Students who identified in this way are included in the overall rates reported in this brief. All outcomes are from National Student Clearinghouse data, which represents 99 percent of students in public and private, in-state and out-of-state postsecondary institutions nationwide.

ENROLLMENT

refers to a high school student attending college in the fall immediately following high school graduation.

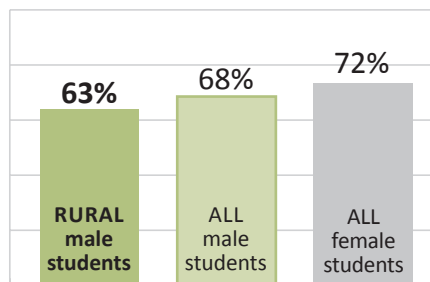
Enrollment in fall 2019 for those who graduated high school in spring 2019



PERSISTENCE

refers to a student enrolled in the fall term immediately following the student’s first academic year of enrollment.

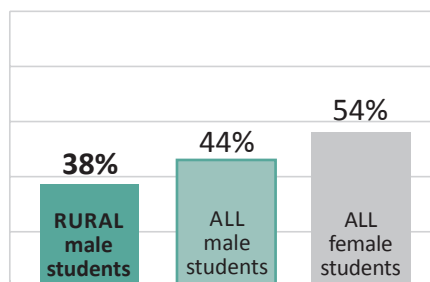
Persistence to the fall of 2019 for those who first enrolled in 2018/19



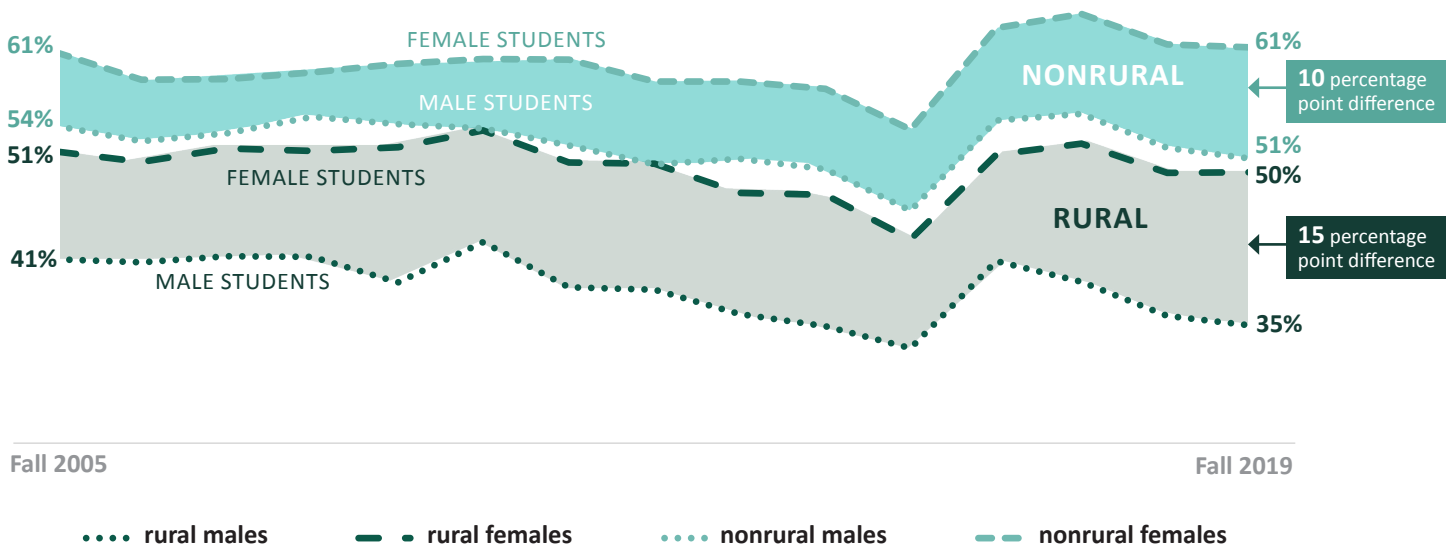
COMPLETION

refers to a student who completed a college credential (certificate or degree) within six years of high school graduation.

Completion by 2019/20 for those who first enrolled in 2013/14



College enrollment rates among Oregon's male high school students are on the decline, particularly in rural areas.



POSSIBLE FACTORS IN RURAL MALE STUDENTS' LOWER ENROLLMENT RATES

A nationwide study of rural adolescents found that rural female students had higher levels of academic achievement, educational aspirations, and parental expectations compared to rural male students. Rural male students reported higher levels of rural identity and more positive perceptions of labor market opportunities in rural areas compared to rural female students (Agger et al., 2018).

NOTE ON RURAL IDENTITY: Rural identity was assessed by a student's agreement with the following statements: "I have a clear sense of my rural background and what it means for me"; "I am happy that I live in a rural community"; "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own rural community"; "I have a lot of pride in my rural background"; and "I feel a strong attachment towards my rural background."

Rural male students are more likely to enroll in Oregon community colleges.

ENROLLMENT

Among rural male high school graduates who enrolled in college for the first time in 2013/14, **58% enrolled in an Oregon community college and 20% enrolled in an Oregon four-year public university.**

**OREGON
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE**

58% Enrollment

26% Completion

COMPLETION

Among those students first enrolling in an Oregon community college, **26% completed any postsecondary degree or credential by 2019/20.**

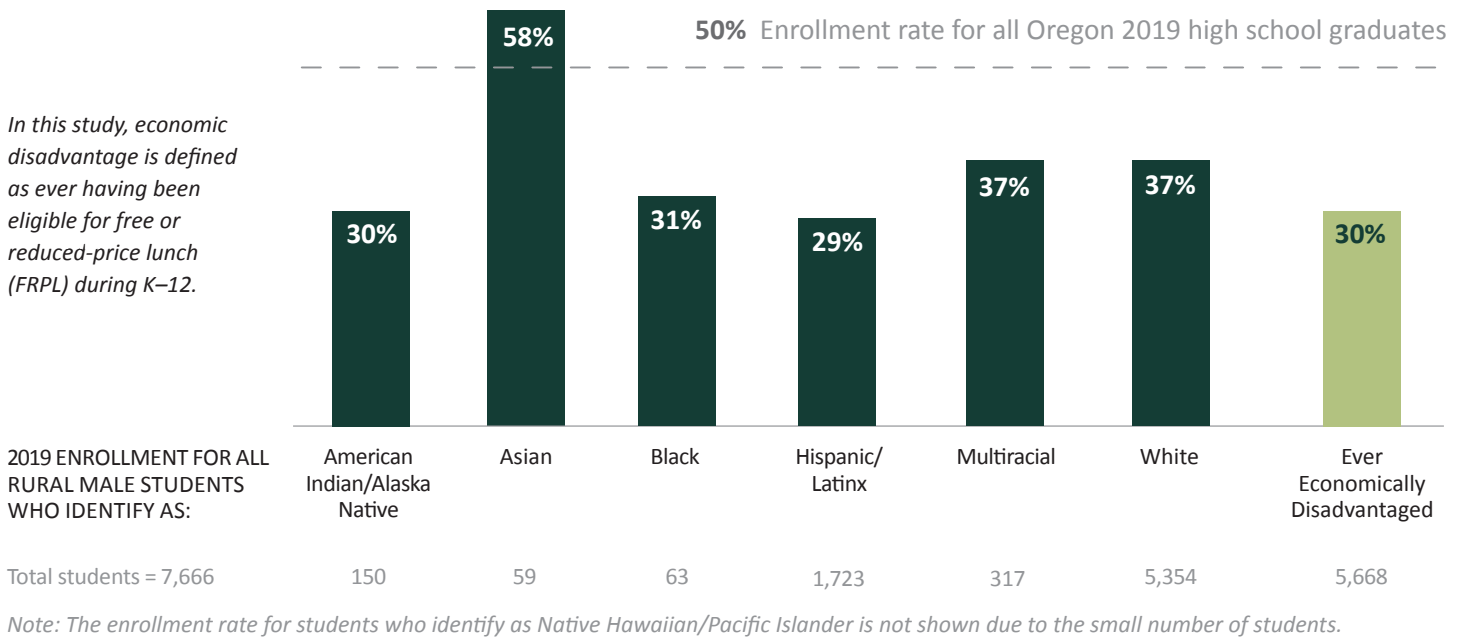
**OREGON
FOUR-YEAR
PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY**

20% Enrollment

Among those students first enrolling in an Oregon four-year public university, **56% completed any postsecondary degree or credential by 2019/20.**

56% Completion

College enrollment rates for rural male students are lower when intersected with race and family income.



How can we support rural male student college enrollment in Oregon?



1. Increase opportunities for rural male students to take more academically rigorous coursework

This study, along with other Oregon and national studies (e.g., Byun et al., 2012; Byun et al., 2015; Riggs et al., 2020), finds that rural students who take dual credit, direct enrollment, or other academically rigorous coursework during high school are more likely to enroll and succeed in college than those who do not. However, opportunities for these courses are often limited in rural areas. Education stakeholders can continue to invest in programs that support opportunities for rural students to engage in rigorous coursework during high school.



2. Emphasize the benefits of completing a postsecondary degree

Rural males may forego college enrollment in favor of immediate entry to the labor market due to the opportunity cost of college and a competing necessity to provide financially for their families. Colleges and universities can support rural males by emphasizing the long-term financial benefits associated with earning a postsecondary degree or credential by providing financial support to defray costs of attendance (Bray et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2019).



3. Invest more in community colleges and the students they serve to improve outcomes

The majority of rural male students who go on to college enroll in Oregon’s community colleges. Students attending these institutions have historically persisted, transferred, and completed at lower rates than their peers who attend four-year colleges and universities, and the Covid-19 pandemic has already exacerbated these trends (Howell et al., 2021). A greater investment in community colleges—and the students they serve—is needed.



4. Encourage rural students to explore all educational pathways beyond high school

In addition to supporting community colleges and the students they serve, education stakeholders can also encourage rural male students to broaden their higher education aspirations to include four-year options, when possible. Some students may be more likely to succeed at a university than a community college, and we also recognize that community colleges will remain an important path for many students.

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