

2. Postsecondary Education Key Findings

The potential benefits of attaining a postsecondary degree include increased earnings (Carnevale and Desrochers 2003), improved health (Mirowsky and Ross 2010), and increased job satisfaction (Wolniak and Pascarella 2005); and as the American economy becomes progressively more knowledge based, attaining a postsecondary education becomes more critical (Carnevale and Desrochers 2003). For example, only 20 percent of workers needed at least some college for their jobs in 1959; by 2000, that number had increased to 56 percent (Carnevale and Fry 2000).

Along with their peers in the general population, young adults with disabilities are increasingly focusing on postsecondary education. Postsecondary education is a primary post-high school goal for more than four out of five secondary school students with disabilities who have transition plans (Cameto, Levine, and Wagner 2004). In addition, young adults with disabilities increasingly are taking rigorous academic courses in high school, including college-preparatory courses, such as a foreign language and science (Wagner, Newman, and Cameto 2004).

However, even when their high school programs prepare them for postsecondary education, students with disabilities can encounter a variety of challenges in the transition from secondary to postsecondary school. Postsecondary schools are guided by a legal framework of rights and responsibilities that is different from the framework governing secondary schools. When students leave high school, their education no longer is covered under the IDEA umbrella but instead is under the auspices of two civil rights laws—Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Stodden, Jones, and Chang 2002; Wolanin and Steele 2004).

This chapter describes the postsecondary education enrollment and completion rates of young adults with disabilities who had been out of high school up to 6 years. It focuses on participation in three types of postsecondary institutions—2-year or community colleges; postsecondary vocational, business, or technical schools; and 4-year colleges—and addresses the following questions:

- To what extent do young adults with disabilities enroll in postsecondary schools?
- How does their level of enrollment compare with that of their peers in the general population?
- What are the completion rates for young adults with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary schools?
- How do the postsecondary completion rates of young adults with disabilities compare with those of their peers in the general population?
- How do postsecondary enrollment and completion rates differ for young adults in different disability categories and for those with different school-exit and demographic characteristics?

This chapter presents findings related to postsecondary enrollment and completion for young adults with disabilities as a group as well as differences between young adults who differ in their disability category, high-school leaving status, and demographic characteristics that are significantly different at least at the $p < .01$ level.

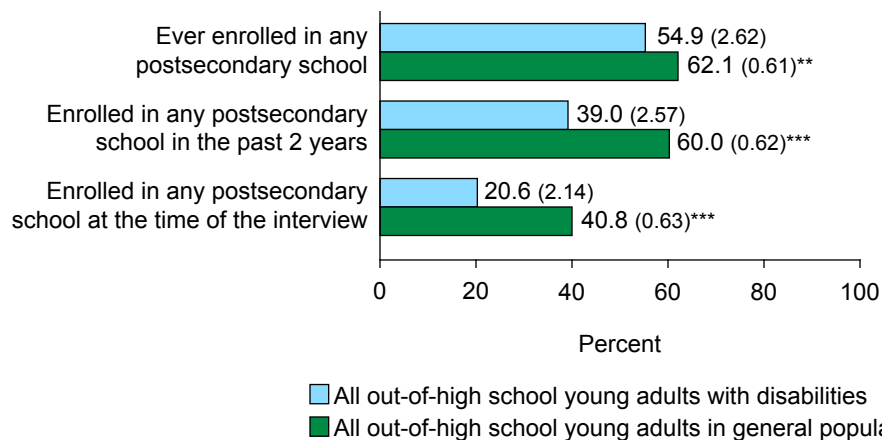
Postsecondary School Enrollment

Ensuring that students with disabilities have “access to and full participation in postsecondary education” has been identified as one of the key challenges in the future of secondary education and transition for such students (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition 2003, p. 1). Postsecondary education has been linked to increased earning potential for young adults who continue their education after high school, even for those who have not earned a degree (Marcotte et al. 2005).

Regarding postsecondary enrollment of young adults with disabilities who had been out of high school up to 6 years:

- Fifty-five percent reported having continued on to postsecondary school since leaving high school (figure 1).¹⁸
- They were less likely to enroll in postsecondary school than were their same-age peers in the general population, of whom 62 percent ever had attended postsecondary school ($p < .01$).¹⁹
- They were less likely to have been enrolled in any postsecondary school in the past 2 years than their same-age peers in the general population (39 percent vs. 60 percent, $p < .001$).
- They were less likely to have been enrolled in any postsecondary school at the time of the interview than their same-age peers in the general population (21 percent vs. 41 percent, $p < .001$).

Figure 1. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults with disabilities and those in the general population



** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ for difference between young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population.

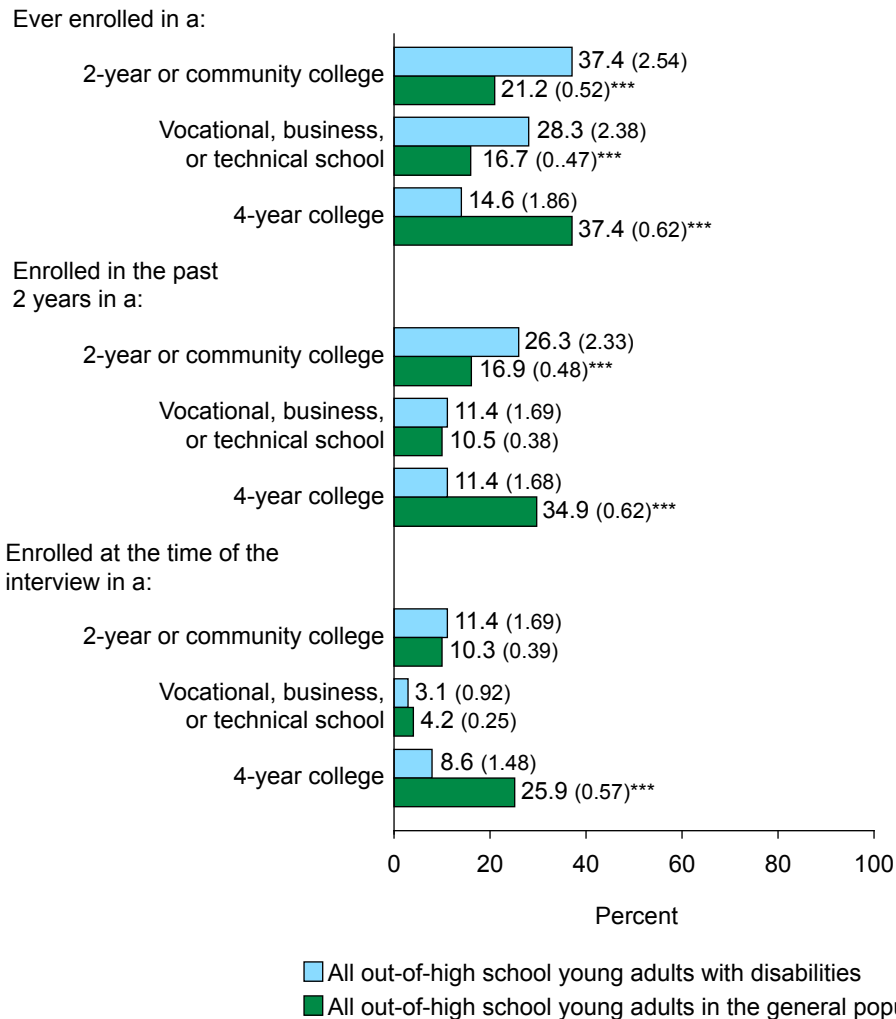
NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 3,610 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) 2001 youth survey, responses for 19- to 23-year-olds.

¹⁸ Respondents were asked, “Since leaving high school have you taken any classes from a [postsecondary school]?”

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) 2001 youth survey, responses for 19- to 23-year-olds.

Figure 2. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population, by school type



*** $p < .001$ for difference between young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population.

NOTE: Young adults who had enrolled in more than one type of postsecondary school were included in each type of school they had attended. Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 3,610 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) 2001 youth survey, responses for 19- to 23-year-olds.

- Young adults with disabilities were more likely to have ever been enrolled in 2-year or community colleges (37 percent) than in vocational, business, or technical schools (28 percent, $p < .01$) or 4-year colleges or universities (15 percent, $p < .001$), and of those options, were least likely to have ever been enrolled in 4-year colleges (figure 2).
- Young adults in the general population were more likely to have ever been enrolled in a 4-year college (37 percent) than were young adults with disabilities (15 percent, $p < .001$). Conversely, young adults with disabilities were more likely to have ever been enrolled in a 2-year or community college (37 percent) or vocational school (28 percent)

than were young adults in the general population (21 percent and 17 percent, respectively; $p < .001$ for both comparisons).

- The rate of enrollment of young adults with disabilities in 2-year or community colleges or vocational schools at the time of the interview (11 percent and 3 percent, respectively)²⁰ did not differ significantly from that of their peers in the general population (10 percent and 4 percent, respectively). This stands in contrast to differences in enrollment rates at 4-year colleges. Similar-age young adults in the general population were about three times as likely as young adults with disabilities to be taking courses at a 4-year college at the time of the interview (26 percent vs. 9 percent, $p < .001$).

Disability Differences in Postsecondary Enrollment

- Overall postsecondary enrollment varied widely by disability category, with attendance since high school ranging from 28 percent to 71 percent (table 2).
- Young adults with hearing impairments or visual impairments were more likely to attend any postsecondary school (71 percent, each) than were those with autism (47 percent, $p < .001$ for comparison with hearing impairments and $p < .01$ for comparison with visual impairments), emotional disturbances (45 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons), multiple disabilities (31 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons), or mental retardation (28 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons).

Table 2. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults, by disability category

	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent											
Any postsecondary school	60.9 (3.88)	63.0 (3.77)	27.6 (3.64)	44.9 (4.36)	70.6 (4.63)	70.8 (5.23)	59.8 (4.59)	56.6 (4.14)	46.6 (5.25)	56.2 (7.49)	31.3 (5.28)	48.8 (6.83)
2-year or community college	41.0 (3.93)	40.9 (3.84)	21.5 (3.35)	29.7 (4.01)	44.9 (5.06)	47.0 (5.74)	45.5 (4.66)	42.9 (4.14)	32.6 (4.93)	33.5 (7.12)	17.2 (4.31)	29.1 (6.21)
Vocational, business, or technical school	31.5 (3.71)	21.3 (3.21)	15.2 (2.92)	28.1 (3.94)	36.8 (4.92)	21.2 (4.70)	21.2 (3.83)	27.7 (3.74)	20.4 (4.26)	33.6 (7.18)	14.8 (4.05)	18.9 (5.35)
4-year college	15.5 (2.89)	29.1 (3.55)	6.3 (1.98)	7.6 (2.32)	31.3 (4.71)	42.7 (5.69)	22.5 (3.91)	19.5 (3.31)	15.5 (3.82)	15.7 (5.49)	8.0 (3.09)	18.2 (5.27)

NOTE: Young adults who had enrolled in more than one type of postsecondary school were included in each type of school they had attended. Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,650 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007.

²⁰ Respondents were asked, “Are you [YOUTH] going to a [postsecondary school] now?” Those who had been enrolled in a postsecondary school but were not currently enrolled, were asked, “Are you [YOUTH] not going to a [postsecondary school] now because you: are on school vacation, graduated or completed the program, or some other reason?” Young adults who were on school vacation were recoded as being currently enrolled in postsecondary school.

- Enrollment at any postsecondary school was higher for young adults with learning disabilities (61 percent), speech/language impairments (63 percent), orthopedic impairments (60 percent), other health impairments (57 percent), traumatic brain injuries (56 percent), autism (47 percent), or emotional disturbances (45 percent) than for those with mental retardation (28 percent, $p < .01$ for comparison with autism and emotional disturbances, $p < .001$ for other comparisons).
- Similarly, overall postsecondary enrollment was higher for young adults with learning disabilities (61 percent), speech/language impairments (63 percent), orthopedic impairments (60 percent), other health impairments (57 percent), or traumatic brain injuries (56 percent) than for those with multiple disabilities (31 percent, $p < .01$ for comparison with traumatic brain injuries, $p < .001$ for other comparisons).
- In addition, young adults with speech/language impairments (63 percent) or learning disabilities (61 percent) were more likely ever to have enrolled in any postsecondary program than were those with emotional disturbances (45 percent, $p < .01$ for all comparisons).
- Young adults with visual (47 percent), orthopedic (46 percent), hearing (45 percent), other health (43 percent), or speech/language impairments (41 percent), or learning disabilities (41 percent) were more likely than those with multiple disabilities ($p < .001$ for all comparisons) or mental retardation ($p < .001$ for all comparisons) to attend a 2-year or community college.
- Young adults with hearing impairments (37 percent) were more likely than those with multiple disabilities (15 percent, $p < .001$), mental retardation (15 percent, $p < .001$), deaf-blindness (19 percent, $p < .01$), speech/language impairments (21 percent, $p < .01$), or orthopedic impairments (21 percent, $p < .01$), to attend a vocational, business, or technical school.
- In addition, young adults with learning disabilities (32 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (15 percent, $p < .001$) or multiple disabilities (19 percent, $p < .01$) to attend a vocational, business, or technical school.
- Young adults with visual impairments (43 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (6 percent), emotional disturbances (8 percent), multiple disabilities (8 percent), learning disabilities (16 percent), autism (16 percent), traumatic brain injuries (16 percent), deaf-blindness (18 percent), other health impairments (20 percent), or orthopedic impairments (23 percent) to attend a 4-year college ($p < .01$ for comparison with deaf-blindness and orthopedic impairments; $p < .001$ for other comparisons).
- Young adults with hearing impairments (31 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (6 percent), emotional disturbances (8 percent), multiple disabilities (8 percent), learning disabilities (16 percent), autism (16 percent), or traumatic brain injuries (16 percent) to attend a 4-year college ($p < .01$ for comparison with learning disabilities and autism; $p < .001$ for other comparisons).
- Young adults with orthopedic impairments (23 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (6 percent, $p < .001$), emotional disturbances (8 percent, $p < .01$), or multiple disabilities (8 percent, $p < .01$) to attend a 4-year college.

- Young adults with other health impairments (20 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (6 percent, $p < .001$) or emotional disturbances (8 percent, $p < .01$) to attend a 4-year college.
- Young adults with learning disabilities (16 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (6 percent, $p < .01$) to attend a 4-year college.

Differences in Postsecondary Enrollment by High School-Leaving Characteristics

- High school completers were three times as likely as their peers who did not complete high school to have enrolled in any postsecondary school (59 percent vs. 17 percent, $p < .001$, table 3).
- Completers were more likely than noncompleters to ever have been enrolled in 2-year or community colleges (40 percent vs. 12 percent, $p < .001$); vocational, business, or technical schools (31 percent vs. 6 percent, $p < .001$); and 4-year colleges (16 percent vs. <1 percent, $p < .001$).
- Rates of enrollment in postsecondary schools did not differ significantly by the number of years since leaving high school.

Table 3. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults with disabilities, by high school-leaving status and years since leaving high school

	Completers	Non-completers	Less than 2 years	2 up to 4 years	4 up to 6 years
	Percent				
Any postsecondary school	59.4 (2.79)	16.9 (5.13)	51.6 (5.06)	52.1 (3.94)	60.4 (4.62)
2-year or community college	40.4 (2.79)	11.6 (4.42)	34.7 (4.83)	32.3 (3.70)	45.5 (4.71)
Vocational, business, or technical school	30.9 (2.62)	6.1 (3.31)	18.8 (3.97)	29.5 (3.61)	31.9 (4.41)
4-year college	16.3 (2.10)	0.2 (0.61)	14.2 (3.54)	11.5 (2.52)	18.9 (3.69)

NOTE: Young adults who had enrolled in more than one type of postsecondary school were included in each type of school they had attended. Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,650 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007.

Demographic Differences in Postsecondary Enrollment

- Postsecondary enrollment differences were apparent for families with different income levels. Young adults with disabilities from households with parent incomes of more than \$50,000 were more likely to have ever enrolled in any postsecondary school (68 percent, table 4) than were those from households with parent incomes of \$25,000 or less (43 percent, $p < .001$) or \$25,001 to \$50,000 (51 percent, $p < .01$). Young adults with disabilities from households with parent incomes of more than \$50,000 were more likely than those from households with parent incomes of \$25,000 or less to have enrolled in a

2-year or community college (49 percent vs. 24 percent, $p < .001$) or a 4-year college (22 percent vs. 8 percent, $p < .01$).

- Rates of enrollment in postsecondary schools did not differ significantly by race/ethnicity or gender.

Table 4. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults with disabilities, by parents' household income and young adults' race/ethnicity and gender

	\$25,000 or less	\$25,001 to \$50,000	More than \$50,000	Race/Ethnicity			Male	Female
				White	African American	Hispanic		
Percent								
Any postsecondary school	42.8 (4.73)	50.8 (5.22)	68.0 (3.70)	56.4 (3.14)	50.6 (6.04)	62.5 (7.71)	53.5 (3.27)	57.3 (4.39)
2-year or community college	24.4 (4.12)	36.1 (5.02)	48.9 (3.97)	38.7 (3.09)	30.5 (5.56)	46.0 (8.00)	38.0 (3.19)	36.3 (4.28)
Vocational, business, or technical school	27.9 (4.29)	26.8 (4.64)	30.7 (3.67)	28.8 (2.88)	24.1 (5.17)	35.9 (7.64)	28.5 (2.97)	28.0 (3.99)
4-year college	8.3 (2.64)	10.6 (3.22)	22.0 (3.29)	15.2 (2.28)	14.4 (4.24)	12.0 (5.17)	15.1 (2.34)	14.0 (3.08)

NOTE: Young adults who had enrolled in more than one type of postsecondary school were included in each type of school they had attended. Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,650 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007.

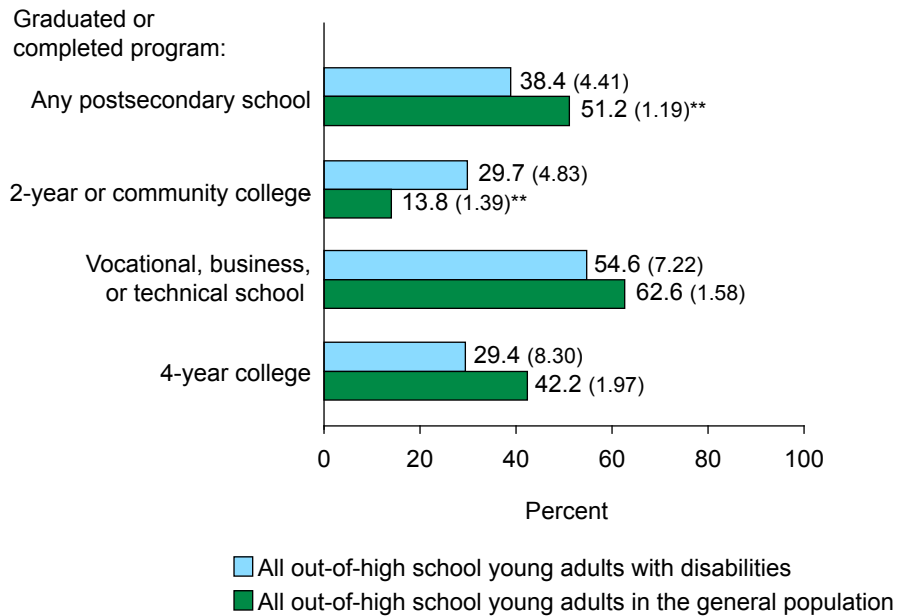
Postsecondary School Completion

For many students in the general population, postsecondary school enrollment does not result in degree attainment or program completion. Fewer than two-thirds of students in the general population who began as full-time freshmen in 4-year universities in 1995 received a bachelor's degree within a 6-year period (Berkner, He, and Cataldi 2002). This section examines the postsecondary completion rates of young adults with disabilities who have been out of high school up to 6 years. Postsecondary completion is considered for the 63 percent of young adults who had ever attended postsecondary school but no longer were enrolled at the time of the interview.

- Within 6 years of leaving high school, of the 63 percent of young adults with disabilities who had ever enrolled in postsecondary education, but no longer were attending, 38 percent had graduated or completed their programs (figure 3).²¹

²¹ Respondents who had been in a postsecondary program earlier but were not currently enrolled were asked, "Are you [YOUTH] not going to a [postsecondary school] now because you are on school vacation, graduated or completed the program, or some other reason?"

Figure 3. Postsecondary school completion of young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population who had ever enrolled in a postsecondary school, by school type



** $p < .01$ for difference between young adults with disabilities and young adults in the general population.

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on samples that range from approximately 340 to 1,520 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2007.

- The postsecondary completion rate of young adults with disabilities was lower than that of their peers in the general population. Fifty-one percent of similar-age peers in the general population had graduated or completed postsecondary programs ($p < .01$).
- Postsecondary school completion rates for young adults with disabilities ranged from 29 percent at 4-year universities, to 30 percent at 2-year or community college, to 55 percent at postsecondary vocational, business, or technical school. When considering completion rates at 4-year universities it is important to be aware that some young adults had been out of high school for less than 4 years.
- Rates of completion did not differ significantly by disability category, secondary-school leaving characteristics, parents' household income; or young adults' race/ethnicity or gender (tables 5 through 7).

Table 5. Postsecondary school completion of young adults, by disability category

	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent											
Graduation or completion rate of students who had been enrolled in postsecondary school but were not enrolled at the time of the interview	37.5 (6.13)	48.4 (6.64)	40.0 (3.65)	41.1 (10.17)	38.9 (8.80)	49.7 (9.35)	35.7 (7.55)	33.8 (6.09)	35.2 (10.35)	50.4 (12.59)	32.1 (10.55)	‡

‡ Responses for items with fewer than 30 respondents are not reported.

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 1,520 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, and 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007.

Table 6. Postsecondary school completion of young adults with disabilities, by secondary-school-leaving status and years since leaving high school

	Completers	Non-completers	Less than 2 years	2 up to 4 years	4 up to 6 years
			Percent		
Graduation or completion rate of students who had been enrolled in postsecondary school but were not enrolled at the time of the interview	38.5 (4.50)	34.8 (21.60)	35.0 (11.84)	32.3 (6.35)	45.4 (6.94)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 1,520 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, and 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007.

Table 7. Postsecondary school enrollment of young adults with disabilities, by parents' household income and young adults' race/ethnicity and gender

	\$25,000 or less	\$25,001 to \$50,000	More than \$50,000	White	African American	Hispanic	Male	Female
	Percent							
Graduation or completion rate of students who had been enrolled in postsecondary school but were not enrolled at the time of the interview	32.8 (8.75)	39.2 (9.00)	39.9 (6.25)	39.2 (5.25)	29.3 (9.24)	46.3 (13.27)	36.2 (5.22)	41.9 (7.87)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 6 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 1,520 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, and 4 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007.