



Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities

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Introduction and Background

This annual report provides data and analysis on enrollment, retention, graduation, and transfer for students who registered with disability services¹ at Maryland colleges and universities. In order to gain insight into the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities in Maryland, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) partnered with the Maryland Department of Disabilities and the state's higher education institutions to create a survey used by colleges and universities² to collect these data in aggregate form. MHEC encourages the use of these data to improve policies and practices to support the success of students with disabilities.

As noted on the Maryland Department of Disabilities website³, "Federal law and Maryland state laws require that all students with disabilities be provided a 'free, appropriate public education' that helps them learn and prepares them for employment and daily living. This means local public school districts will provide individualized or special education and related services to students with disabilities from birth until they leave high school. Students who leave high school prior to their 22nd birthday will no longer be eligible for these services."

Under these laws, students in higher education must self-identify as having a disability (with appropriate documentation) to receive necessary supports and accommodations. Evidence shows that less than a third of students who identify in K-12 school as having a disability go on to self-identify as such in post-secondary education⁴. As self-reporting is the only way to identify these students, figures in this report should not be interpreted as representative of all students with a disability in higher education⁵.

In fiscal year 2023⁶, 18,234 undergraduate students and 2,739 graduate students were registered with their institutions' disability services office as students with disabilities⁷. This constitutes 4.9% of all students enrolled in fiscal year 2023; these data represent 5.4% of undergraduate students and 3.1% of graduate students enrolled.

¹ For the purposes of this report, the terms disability services and disability services office will be used throughout for consistency. It is important to note that the name of this office can vary from campus to campus.

² Surveys are administered annually to Maryland's 16 community colleges, 13 four-year public institutions, and 13 state-aided independent colleges and universities.

³ <https://mdod.maryland.gov/education/Pages/Special-Education-Services.aspx>

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, 4, and 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009 and Newman, Lynn, Mary Wagner, Anne-Marie Knokey, Camille Marder, Katherine Nagle, Debra Shaver, and Xin Wei. "The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years after High School: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). NCSER 2011-3005." National Center for Special Education Research (2011). Retrieved September 14, 2017 from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncenter/pubs/20113005/pdf/20113005.pdf>.

⁵ For citations and more complete background information on students with disabilities in Maryland and the nation, please refer to [previous MHEC reports on this subject](#). For a deeper discussion about data in these reports not representing all disabled students, please refer to our [2018 Report on Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities](#).

⁶ July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022.

⁷ Students registered with their institutions' disability services office in this report's analysis include those who have permanent or temporary disabilities.

Four-Year Institutions⁸

In fiscal year 2023, Maryland's four-year public and state-aided independent institutions reported that 13,430 students were registered as students with disabilities with disability services. This represents a 10.3% increase of students registered with disability services compared to fiscal year 2022. Four-year public institutions reported 7,118 undergraduate students and 1,357 graduate students, while state-aided independent institutions reported 3,573 undergraduate students and 1,382 graduate students (see [Appendix 1](#)).

Maryland's four-year public and state-aided independent institutions also reported on the second-year retention rates of the first-time, full-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students who entered as freshman in Fall 2022 who were registered with the disability services office. A student counts as retained if they return to the institution the following fall after entering as a freshman. [Appendix 2](#) shows the retention rates of the most recent undergraduate student cohort, as well as trend data for past cohorts.

Retention rates for students registered with disability services at four-year institutions increased compared to the previous cohort. Additionally, retention rates were comparable to that of the overall undergraduate population at public four-years, but slightly lower compared to the overall rate at the state-aided independent institutions. At public four-year institutions, the 2022 cohort was retained at 83.8%, an increase of 1.2 percentage points from the previous year's cohort. At state-aided independent institutions, the 2022 cohort was retained at 83.0%, marking an increase of 1.3 percentage points from the previous year's cohort. Among public four-year institutions, these rates are comparable to the overall retention rate of the Fall 2022 cohort of first-time, full-time students for the states' public four-year institutions; among state-aided institutions, rates for students registered with disability services are about 2 percentage points lower than the overall retention rate.

For the 2024 reporting year, MHEC collected graduation rate data for students enrolled in the state's public and state-aided independent four-year institutions. The data demonstrate a modest gap between graduation rates for students registered with disability services and rates for the general undergraduate population. Specifically, institutions reported on the six-year graduation outcomes of the first-time, full-time cohort who first enrolled in Fall 2017. That data reveal that among the first-time, full-time students who started in Fall 2017 and registered with disability services, 65.0% graduated within six years. This rate is about 4 percentage points lower than the 69.0% six-year graduation rate of *all* first-time, full-time undergraduate students from the Fall 2017 cohort⁹.

Community Colleges

In fiscal year 2023, 7,543 undergraduate students registered with the disability services office of their community college campus. This represents 5.5% of the total undergraduate enrollment at

⁸ The Four-Year Institution data do not include all 26 institutions, as the University of Maryland, Baltimore is not included in the retention and graduation rate data. It does not enroll first-time, full-time undergraduate students and therefore cannot report on the outcomes of those students.

⁹ *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)*, U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved February 2025 from <http://nces.ed.gov>

Maryland's community colleges in FY2023. Over the past five years, the proportion of students who have registered with disabilities services has remained relatively stable, in spite of decreasing enrollment.

Maryland's community colleges report outcome data for undergraduate students registered with the disability services office using the Degree Progress Analysis model¹⁰. [Appendix 3](#) compares outcomes between all students starting in Fall 2019 and the subset of this group who registered with disability services. It also shows the same comparison for the previous four cohorts. The Degree Progress Analysis shows that 50.1% of the undergraduate students who registered with disability services offices either graduated or transferred within four years after initial enrollment. The rate is 3.5 percentage points lower than the statewide graduation/transfer rate of 53.6% for the Fall 2019 cohort. However, the difference between the graduation/transfer rate for students registered with disability services and the overall rate for undergraduates has steadily decreased over the last five consecutive cohorts (for the 2019 cohort, students registered with disability services had a graduation/transfer rate about 9.9 percentage points lower than the overall rate).

Also shown in [Appendix 3](#), undergraduate students from the 2019 cohort who registered with disability services offices have a successful persister rate of 75.2%. This value is lower than the rate for the Fall 2018 cohort (77.4%), but it is higher than the statewide rate (72.4%). A successful persister rate reflects the proportion of students within the cohort who, within four years, graduate or transfer, are still enrolled at the institution, or who complete at least 30 credits or more with a GPA of 2.00 or better¹¹.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities are a unique population within the Maryland higher education system. With proper accommodations and support, these students can succeed in their academic journeys.

Overall, the data collected for this report show that students who register with disability services are succeeding at rates comparable to their peers. In addition to these successes, this year's report reveal several noteworthy findings. First, even as enrollment has declined over the last several years, the proportion of students who register with disability services has remained relatively stable, or even increased in some instances. For example, the number of graduate students enrolled in fiscal year 2023 decreased compared to 2022, but the proportion of students who registered with disability services increased by about 20%.

The trend data show that, over the past five years, undergraduate students seeking disability services has grown 15% and graduate students seeking these services has increased 93%. These

¹⁰ The Degree Progress Analysis is a cohort model used to report the progress toward degree completion of community college students. It incorporates measures of success including completion and transfer rates to other institutions and successful persisting as indicators of progress. Specifically, the measure tracks the success of first-time full- and part-time students over four years who have attempted at least 18 credit hours within the first two years of initial enrollment.

¹¹ Students included in the graduation/transfer rate are also included in the successful persister rate.

findings suggest that more students with disabilities may be enrolling in higher education in Maryland and/or that institutions have improved their practices for supporting students in accessing disabilities services.

Another noteworthy finding is that the rates at which students registered with disability services are retained, graduate, and/or transfer are largely comparable to overall rates. The fact that students who are registered with disability services are succeeding at rates similar to those of the general student population is a testament to the support institutions have provided.

Appendix 1

Students Registered with Disability Services at Maryland Colleges and Universities: FY2019-2023 Enrollment Trends

Four-Year Public Institutions

	FY 2019		FY 2020		FY 2021		FY 2022		FY 2023	
	UG	GR	UG	GR	UG	GR	UG	GR	UG	GR
12-month enrollment	174,660	52,080	176,058	51,493	172,668	50,027	168,408	47,631	172,990	47,591
Registered with disability services office	4,961	776	5,141	809	5,368	927	6,660	1,204	7,118	1,357
Percent of enrollment	2.8%	1.5%	2.9%	1.6%	3.1%	1.9%	4.0%	2.5%	4.1%	2.9%

State-Aided Independent Institutions

	FY 2019		FY 2020		FY 2021		FY 2022		FY 2023	
	UG	GR	UG	GR	UG	GR	UG	GR	UG	GR
12-month enrollment	29,223	36,638	29,073	36,565	28,020	40,805	28,047	43,011	27,491	41,736
Registered with disability services office	2,830	641	2,827	659	3,058	1,097	3,236	1,078	3,573	1,382
Percent of enrollment	9.7%	1.7%	9.7%	1.1%	10.9%	1.1%	11.5%	2.5%	13.0%	3.3%

Community Colleges

	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
12-month enrollment	163,749	159,058	152,468	137,235	138,235
Registered with disability services office	8,023	7,905	7,511	7,278	7,543
Percent of enrollment	4.9%	5.0%	4.9%	5.3%	5.5%

Notes:

The trend data (Maryland and IPEDS data) does not include the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) for FY 2019. In Spring 2020, MHEC was notified that the University's data were incorrect for the prior three years of submissions; therefore, MHEC removed the institution's data from analysis, which results in different totals and subtotals than previously published reports. FY 2020 data once again include UMES.

Data include counts of students registered with disability services office from the Maryland Survey and total 12-month enrollment from *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (IPEDS), U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. FY 2023 data retrieved February 2025 from <http://nces.ed.gov>.

Appendix 2

Retention Rates for First-time, Full-time Undergraduate Students Registered with Disability Services at Maryland Four-Year Colleges and Universities, 2018-2022 Cohorts

Four-Year Public Institutions

	Cohort				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
All undergraduates	85.8%	84.9%	84.8%	83.7%	83.6%
Registered with disability services office	85.5%	84.4%	85.8%	82.6 %	83.8%

State-Aided Independent Institutions

	Cohort				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
All undergraduates	84.8%	81.8%	83.0%	83.0%	85.1%
Registered with disability services office	85.4%	82.8%	86.5%	81.7%	83.0%

Notes:

Retention rates at four-year colleges and universities give the percentage of a given cohort of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who enter in a given fall (cohort year) returned to the same institution for the following fall.

Due to an incomplete data submission to MHEC, data for Coppin State University are not included in the 2020 cohort retention figures for all undergraduates and those registered with disability services.

Data for the University of Maryland Eastern Shore is not in the trend data for the 2018 cohort due to the institution’s inability to accurately or appropriately retrieve the data. Their data have been removed from the students with disabilities data and from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); therefore, the data in this report should not be compared to data from previous reports.

Statewide retention rates are obtained from *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (IPEDS), U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Fall 2022 cohort data retrieved February 2025 from <http://nces.ed.gov>.

Appendix 3

Degree Progress Analysis Rates Four Years After Initial Enrollment, Maryland Community Colleges, 2015-2019 Entering Cohorts

	2015 cohort		2016 cohort		2017 cohort		2018 cohort		2019 cohort	
	Students Registered with Disability Services	Statewide	Students Registered with Disability Services	Statewide	Students Registered with Disability Services	Statewide	Students Registered with Disability Services	Statewide	Students Registered with Disability Services	Statewide
Graduated and/or Transferred	42.3%	52.2%	44.5%	52.6%	47.2%	53.8%	47.0%	52.4%	50.1%	53.6%
Successful Persister	72.0%	71.6%	73.9%	71.3%	75.3%	72.7%	77.4%	71.8%	75.2%	72.4%

Notes:

Cohort includes full- and part-time students who complete at least 18 credits within the first two years of entry to the institution; a cohort year is determined based on the year of entry as a first-time student.

Graduation/Transfer Rate – this includes students who have graduated with a degree or certificate or transferred within four years. All transfer values are based upon student movement across institutions and represent a change of institution in which a student is enrolled.

This does not necessarily represent formal transfer activity (e.g., where academic credits are recognized between institutions).

Successful Persister Rate – this includes students who, within four years, graduate or transfer, are still enrolled at the institution, or who complete at least 30 credits or more with a GPA of 2.00 or better. Note that all students included in the Graduation/Transfer Rate are also included in the Successful Persister Rate.