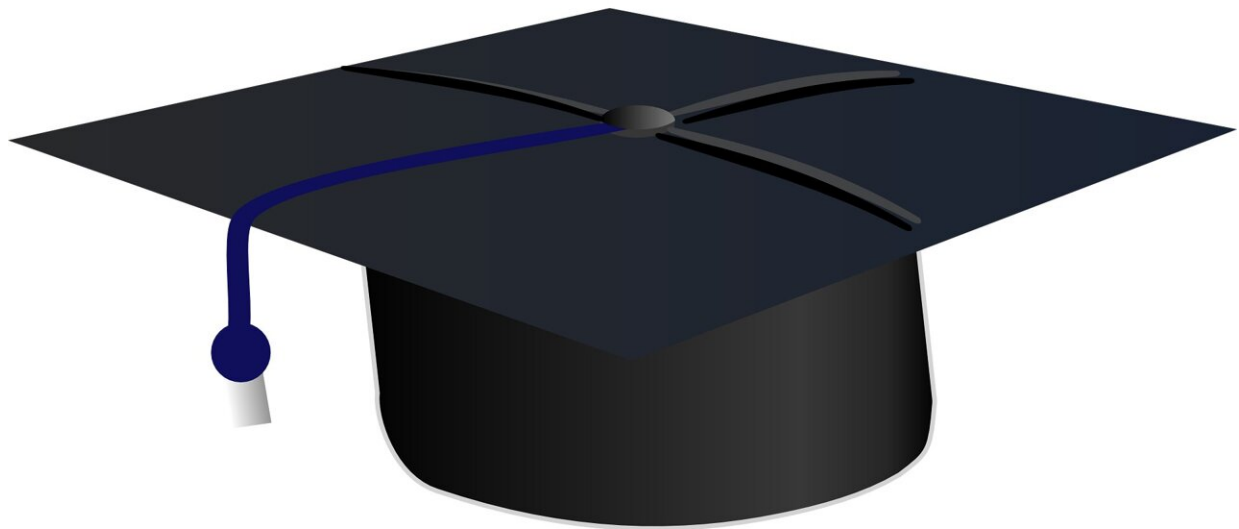


One in six high school students want a bachelor's degree but don't expect to get one

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About 85% of high school juniors want to go to college, according to a new study from the University of Georgia. But one in six think that's not a possibility for them.

Published in the journal *Educational Policy*, the [study](#) found that students with [lower grades](#) wanted to go to college but were less likely to believe they could attain a bachelor's degree, as were those attending public high

schools. Students from [low-income families](#) were also less likely to believe they could go to college, even though they desired higher education.

Male and Hispanic students were particularly likely to want to go to college but not expect to actually attend.

"In school, we often put kids on tracks and assume that once a student reaches [high school](#), they're either on the college track or they're not on the college track," said Robert Toutkoushian, corresponding author of the study and a professor of higher education at UGA. "We treat them as if they're stuck on those tracks. And we often focus on the kids who aren't on the college track and try to convince them to go to the other route.

"But I think our work also says you need to keep paying attention to the kids that say they're on the college track because a substantial number of them at some point will fall off that track."

The researchers found several factors affected students' confidence in their ability to go to college. Taking advanced placement, or AP, courses and completing prep courses for college admission exams, such as the ACT or SAT, made students more confident in attaining higher education.

Going on college tours and positive peer pressure from friends planning to attend college also had a positive effect on students' belief in their ability to be successful in college.

Students who don't expect to go to college less likely to apply

The study uses data from the 2009 High School Longitudinal Study [HSL:09], conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, which is a nationally representative sample of high schoolers from 944 public and [private schools](#) who were followed from ninth grade through 11th. The present study focuses on responses from more than 9,650 students' junior year.

The researchers analyzed responses to two main questions: "If there were no barriers, how far in school would you want to go" and "as things stand now, how far in [school](#) do you think you will actually get?"

Although the vast majority of students aspired to earn at least a bachelor's degree, if not a master's or doctorate, only 74% thought they would do actually do so.

As a result, the researchers found those students were less likely to search for, apply to and enroll in college.

Of the students who had low expectations for going to college, about half decided to attend a two-year institution. The other half did not pursue higher education.

Increasing access to financial aid, academic assistance key

Today's students may have misunderstandings about the affordability of college or their likelihood of succeeding in earning a bachelor's degree, the researchers said. And those students are potentially making life-altering decisions based on that misinformation.

"We should strive to figure out how schools and institutes of higher education can make sure students know about the resources available to

make college more affordable," said Hee Jung Gong, lead author of the study who is now a professor of higher education at the University of Alabama and a recent graduate from UGA's Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education.

Common resources available at most universities, such as free tutoring, student care and outreach centers, and accommodations like disability resource centers, make a bachelor's degree more accessible than ever.

While [college](#) may not be for every [student](#), the researchers said, encouraging those [students](#) who want to pursue [higher education](#) to do so and retaining those who say they want a bachelor's degree but fall off the path along the way is key.

"From society's point of view, it's important to try to get more people to get more [education](#)," Toutkoushian said. "Not only would they benefit, but we would all benefit from that."

More information: High School Students' Expectations and College Aspirations: Causes and Consequences, *Educational Policy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/08959048231153](#)

Provided by University of Georgia

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