



7 reasons—other than cost—that students don't graduate

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As graduation season approaches, the excitement can overshadow a harsh reality: The students we're celebrating only make up about 41% of bachelor's degree students who entered college four years ago.

As for the remaining students—the ones who won't be donning their caps and gowns this spring—there are a number of hurdles that could have gotten in their way.

National Student Clearinghouse research says cost is the number one reason students fail to complete college in four years. But cost isn't the only barrier students face.

Here are a few other reasons your students might not graduate on time.

1: They're juggling work and school

One of the biggest culprits for stopping out is the struggle to balance college with external commitments, according to [research](#) from **EAB**. A 2009 **Public Agenda study** found that the majority of adults who left school attributed their decision to problems with juggling work and school, nearly twice as much as the next most common issue, tuition affordability.

For example, students who work more than 25 hours per week struggle to pass their classes—and only 45% of students who do so manage to keep their GPAs above 3.0, according to **Georgetown University's** Center on Education and the Workforce.

2: No one told them how many credits to take

Students must take a minimum of 12 credits to be considered full-time students and qualify for federal financial aid. However, taking 12 credits per semester does not keep a student on track to graduate on time.

Most students aren't warned of this discrepancy—and end up taking too few credits to graduate on time, Rebecca Torstrick, an Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs at **Indiana University**, **told** the *New York Times* in 2017.

3: They transferred schools, but their credits didn't come with them

Roughly a third of students transfer schools, but 40% of transfer students don't get credit for completed courses. Even in cases where colleges agree to accept a student's credits, specific departments and majors are unlikely to do the same.

Community college students who try to transfer their credits to a four-year institution can face an uphill battle. Only **23%** of community college students who intend to attain a bachelor's degree successfully earn one within eight years. And on average, students **lose 43%** of their academic credits when they transfer.

4: They fell into the "exploration" trap

After a rigid high school curriculum, the freedom to choose between thousands of course options can seem liberating for first-year students—but can ultimately prevent students from graduating on time.

Students overwhelmed by course choices often wait too long to take major requirements, only to discover those courses are full. Or they accumulate extra credits and bounce between majors, which lengthen their time to degree and tack on extra costs.

5: They got stuck in remedial courses

Between 40% and 60% of first-year students take remedial courses in English, math, or both, according to a **report** from the **Center for American Progress**. But only 10% of students who begin their college career in remedial classes graduate on time. And two out of three remedial students don't earn a degree at all, according to **Columbia University's** Community College Research Center.

Remedial courses don't count for credit, which gives students little-to-no motivation to do well—or even complete them. Students in remedial courses can feel like they're "treading water," since they're paying for courses that don't feel like they're bringing them closer to a degree, says Tristan Denley, the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer at the **University System of Georgia**.

6: They lack confidence

One of the key differences between well-resourced students and students of lower socioeconomic status is a "resilience gap," finds one EAB [study](#). Many low-income, first-generation, and minority students are vulnerable to doubting their ability to succeed in college. These students question their place at university and may take any one misstep as a sign that they shouldn't be there.

7: They couldn't navigate the hidden curriculum

One of the biggest challenges facing first-generation students is that they have relatively few adults in their lives who can help them prepare for college. When these students arrive on campus, they may struggle to understand how the institution works and what is expected of them. Navigating this [hidden curriculum](#) can make low-income and first-generation students feel unwelcome on campus.

First-gen students can struggle to know where to turn to for help, even when colleges have a wealth of resources available. And when students encounter [intimidating](#) higher ed jargon terms, like "FAFSA," they may overlook campus resources, like librarians or office hours.