

BLS Releases Latest College Enrollment and Work Activity Data

By Don Sutherland

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released its annual data on college enrollment and work activity for recent high school and college graduates. The data was collected in October 2017.

Highlights:

For 2017 high school graduates (aged 16-24), 66.7% were enrolled in college. 71.7% of female high school graduates and 61.1% of male high school graduates were enrolled in college. Even as the total percentage of high school graduates being enrolled in college has remained relatively stable over the past three years, the percentage of female and male college enrollment has fluctuated considerably.

In addition, 39.8% of recent high school graduates who had enrolled in college also reported being employed or looking for work. The female and male labor force participation rates were similar at 38.8% for females and 41.2% for males. In contrast, 67.4% of recent high school graduates who did not enroll in college were in the labor force.

The labor force participation rate for full-time college students was 43.9%. For part-time college students, it was 85.4%. The labor force participation rate for students enrolled at four-year colleges was 46.0% and for those enrolled at two-year institutions, it was 60.0%.

Among recent college graduates, 77.6% were in the labor force and the unemployment rate was 8.3%. Among recent female college graduates, the labor force participation rate was 79.0% and the unemployment rate was 4.7%. For recent male college graduates, the labor force participation was 76.1%. However, the unemployment rate for recent male graduates was more than 2 1/2 times that for recent female graduates at 12.7%. The relatively higher rate of unemployment for recent male college graduates is broadly similar to last year's data. In 2016, 4.7% of recent female college graduates were unemployed while 12.0% of recent male college graduates were unemployed.

The large gap in employment outcomes between recent female and male graduates is not explained in the data. Further examination of that gap could offer an opportunity for assessing student success at the institutional level.