



GRADUATING IN FOUR YEARS

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Earning a bachelor’s degree in four years is the goal for students and their families. But that timeframe is often not met, with consequences in terms of extra costs and lost earnings. New data analysis highlights how enrolling at a private college in Minnesota, including Bethany Lutheran College, increases the odds of meeting the four-year goal.

Start with all the people who graduate with a bachelor’s degree in Minnesota and consider those who did so in four years at the same institution. That’s what we’re measuring with the four-year **completion rate** for graduates.

A study released in early 2016 looked at degree earners at the seventeen private colleges that are members of the Minnesota Private College Council. The share who graduated in four years was 87%. Bethany’s four-year **completion rate** was slightly lower than the MPCC average but still stood at 79% for our 2015-16 graduates, and it was 81% for 2014-15 graduates.

So why do graduates from private colleges such as Bethany do so well at actually completing their degrees in four years? With smaller enrollments and a focus on smaller classes, students receive more personal attention at private colleges.

Another way to consider what happens at colleges and the odds of earning a degree is by looking at the actual **graduation rate**. This measure looks at a group or cohort of entering students and considers how many of them have stayed at that institution and earned their degree. (Unlike with the **completion rate** for graduates, students who leave a college either to transfer or to stop being in school would lower the four-year **graduation rate**.)

Jeff Younge, Bethany’s Director of Financial Aid, explained, “When I’m visiting with prospective students and parents, the **graduation rate** question comes up frequently. What is more applicable, and perhaps the better question to consider, is the **completion rate**, which I think is really what parents are looking for, and is a good indicator that if a student comes to Bethany with a plan, they most certainly can complete their degree in four years or less.”

Completing a program in four years allows students to move on sooner to begin careers and go on to earn additional degrees. But finishing in four years also matters because it helps families control their costs. The consequences of taking longer aren’t just about the extra tuition. You have to consider the so-called “opportunity cost” too; that’s the income a student doesn’t have a chance to earn while they’re still working on that degree. ■

TIPS FOR GRADUATING IN FOUR YEARS:

- 1 Take some courses in high school that can be used for credit in college. (AP, Dual Enrollment, PSEO, etc.) Bethany now offers this option for high school students through our Dual Credit program.

- 2 Enroll in 16 credits or more per semester while in college. BLC encourages this by offering banded tuition, in which a student is charged the same tuition in the 12-18 credit range.

- 3 Decide on a field of study prior to sophomore year of college, to ensure you’re enrolled in the courses required for your degree.

- 4 Work closely with your Bethany Academic Advisor and the Registrar when deciding on a major and choosing courses to ensure a straight path to graduation.