



CAEL

The Council For Adult & Experiential Learning

Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success:

A 48-Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes

Workshop Overview

- Adult degree completion – a national priority
- PLA as a solution
- Benefits of PLA... and questions
- The 48-institution study of PLA and academic outcomes
- Findings: what we learned about PLA and
 -graduation rates
 -student persistence
 -time to degree

Adult Learning: A National Priority

- Great and growing need for the nation's workforce to acquire more postsecondary credentials
- National push for greater success and persistence among college enrollees
- **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** is one way to make a positive contribution to this national goal



Prior Learning Assessment as Degree Completion Solution

What is PLA?

PLA is the process by which many colleges evaluate for academic credit the **college-level knowledge and skills** an individual has gained outside of the classroom, including employment, military training/service, travel, hobbies, civic activities and volunteer service.

PLA awards credit for learning, not credit for experience.

PLA Methods

- Standardized exams
 - Advanced Placement (AP)
 - College Level examination Program (CLEP)
 - Excelsior College Exams
 - DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)
- Challenge exams
- Evaluation of non-college training (e.g., corporate or military)
- Individual student portfolios

CAEL's History with PLA

- CAEL's origins
- Workshops and conferences
- Trainings
- Studies on policies and practices
- Assessment Center

Benefits of PLA

What do (we think) we know?

- PLA motivates students to continue their studies and complete their degrees
- PLA saves time
- PLA saves money
- Portfolio PLA develops skills
- What else?

CAEL's PLA Study

What we wanted to know:

- Do adults who earn PLA credit have better graduation rates, compared with those who do not earn PLA credit?
- Do they have better persistence?
- Do they earn their degrees in a shorter period of time?

Who Participated

48 postsecondary institutions who

- serve many adult learners
- offered PLA credit earning options between 2001 and 2008

The 48 Institutions

- 41 four-year, 7 two-year
- 22 public, 24 private not-for-profit, 2 private for-profit
- Range in size from under 1,000 students to more than 20,000
- From all regions in the US, with heaviest representation from Mid East, Great Lakes, Plains and Southeast
- 46 US institutions, 2 Canadian

The Data

1. Student record data on 2001-2002 adult cohort
2. Information on PLA policies and practices, reasons for offering PLA, etc.
3. IPEDS institutional data

The PLA Programs

- 66% of the institutions had offered PLA since before 1980
- 64% offered five or more PLA methods
- 94% offered standardized exams, 88% offered portfolio assessment

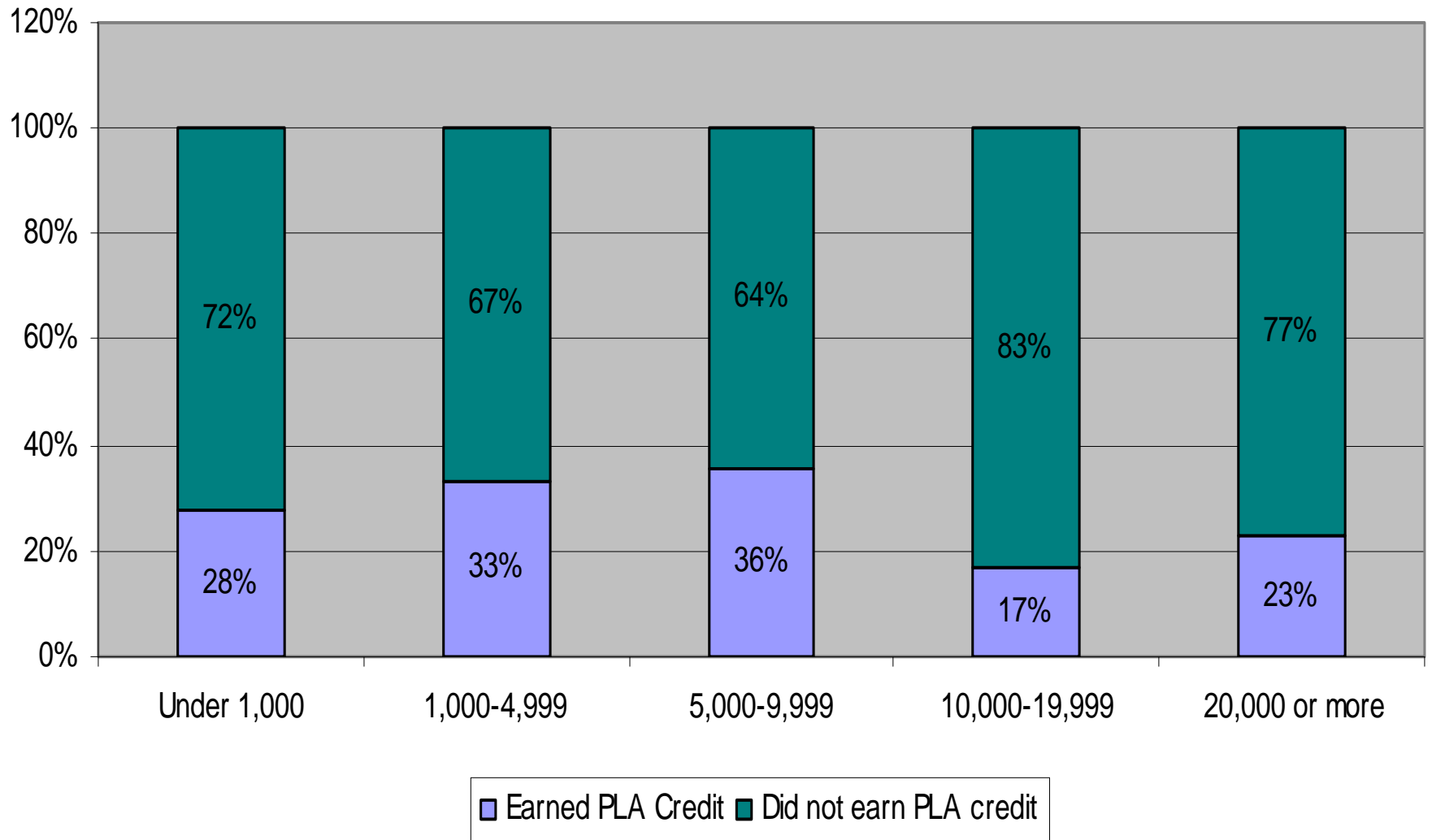
Top Reasons for Offering PLA

- To provide a time-saving avenue for degree completion, 92%
- To fulfill our mission to serve adult learners, 92%
- To encourage greater student persistence towards a degree, 90%
- To recognize the value of learning that happens outside of the classroom, 88%
- To provide a cost-effective avenue for degree completion, 85%
- To remove barriers to education, 83%
- To offer a way for students to avoid class work that would be redundant, 73%

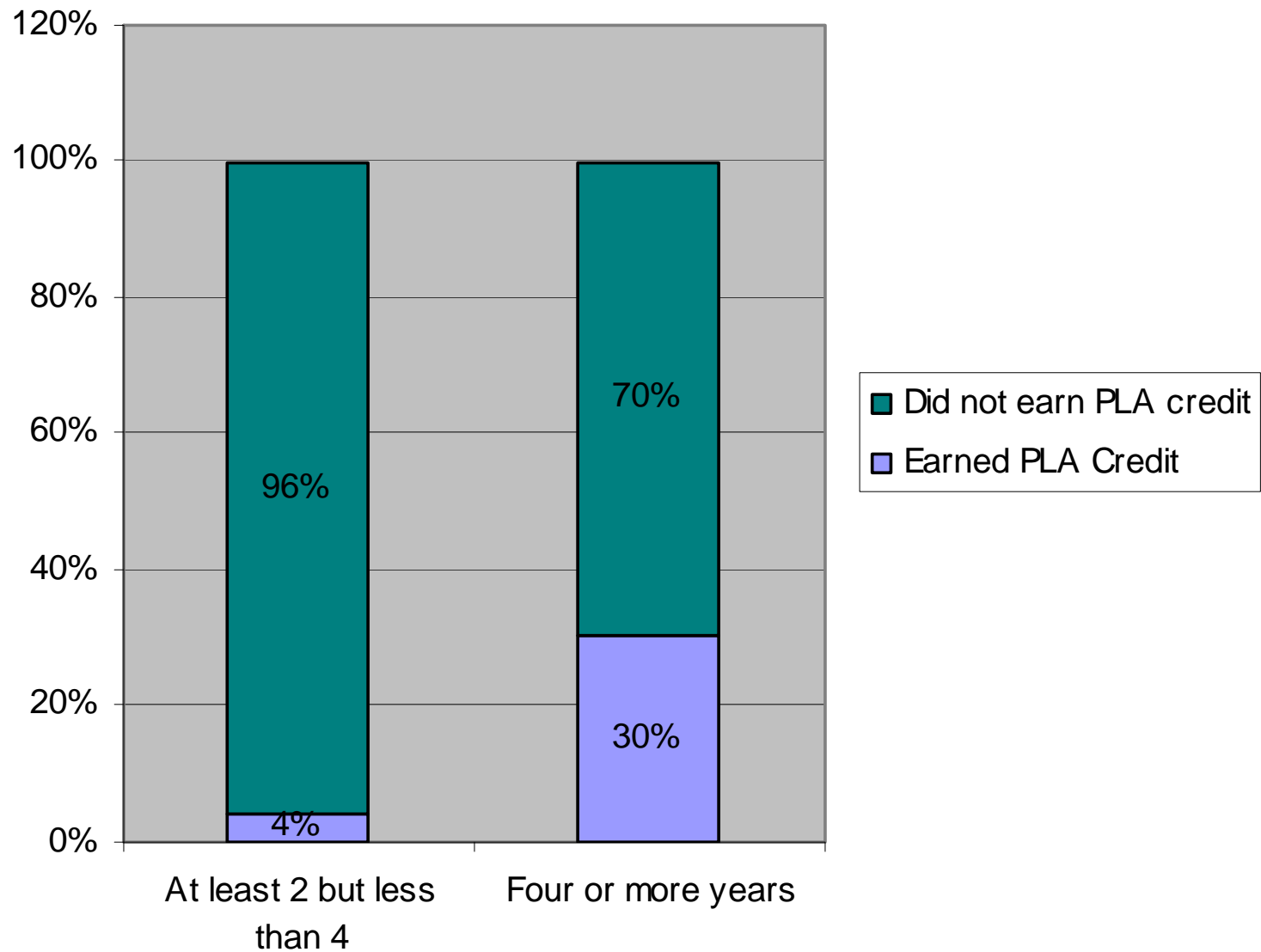
The Students

- 62,475 total adult students in our sample (adult = age 25 or older)
- 15,594 (25%) had earned PLA credit between 2001 and 2008

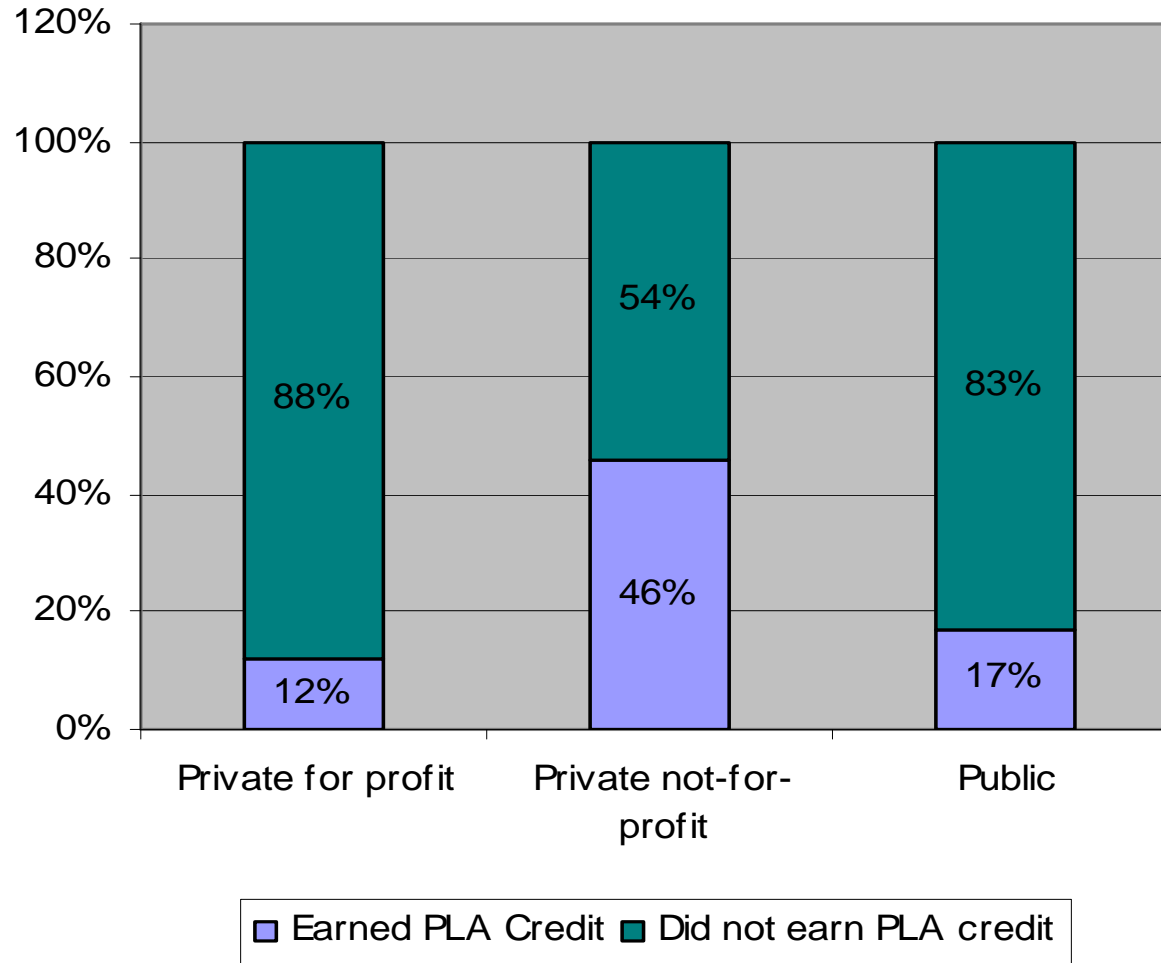
PLA Students by Size of Institution



PLA Students by Level of Institution



PLA Students by Control of Institution



PLA and Student Demographics

- Higher percent of male (29%) than female students (22%) earn PLA credit
- Higher percent of white, non-Hispanic (33%) and Asian (40%), compared to black, non-Hispanic (24%) or Hispanic (15%)
- Slightly higher rate of PLA earning among those aged 35-54, compared to younger and older groups

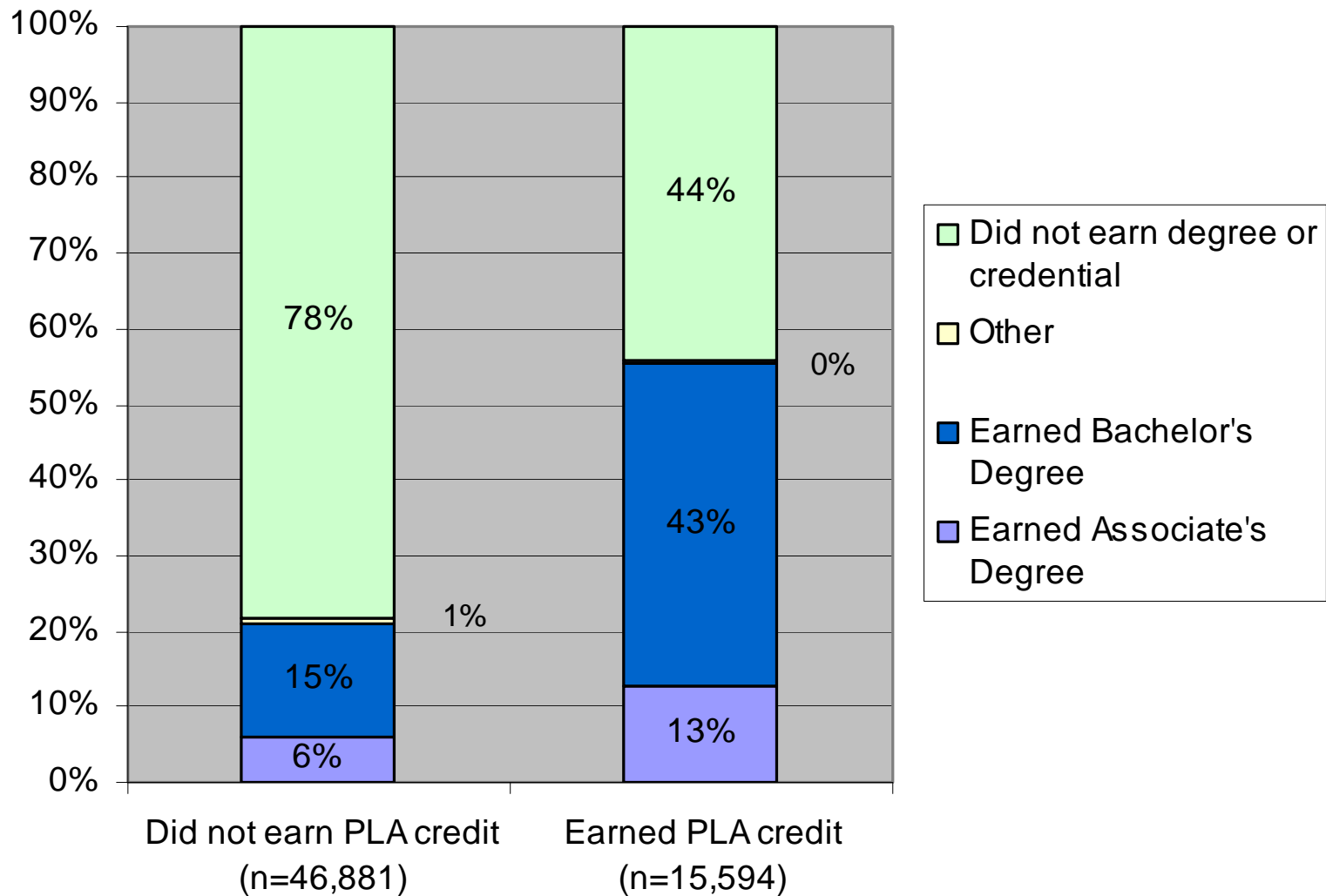
PLA and Academic Outcomes

- Graduation rates
- Persistence
- Time to degree

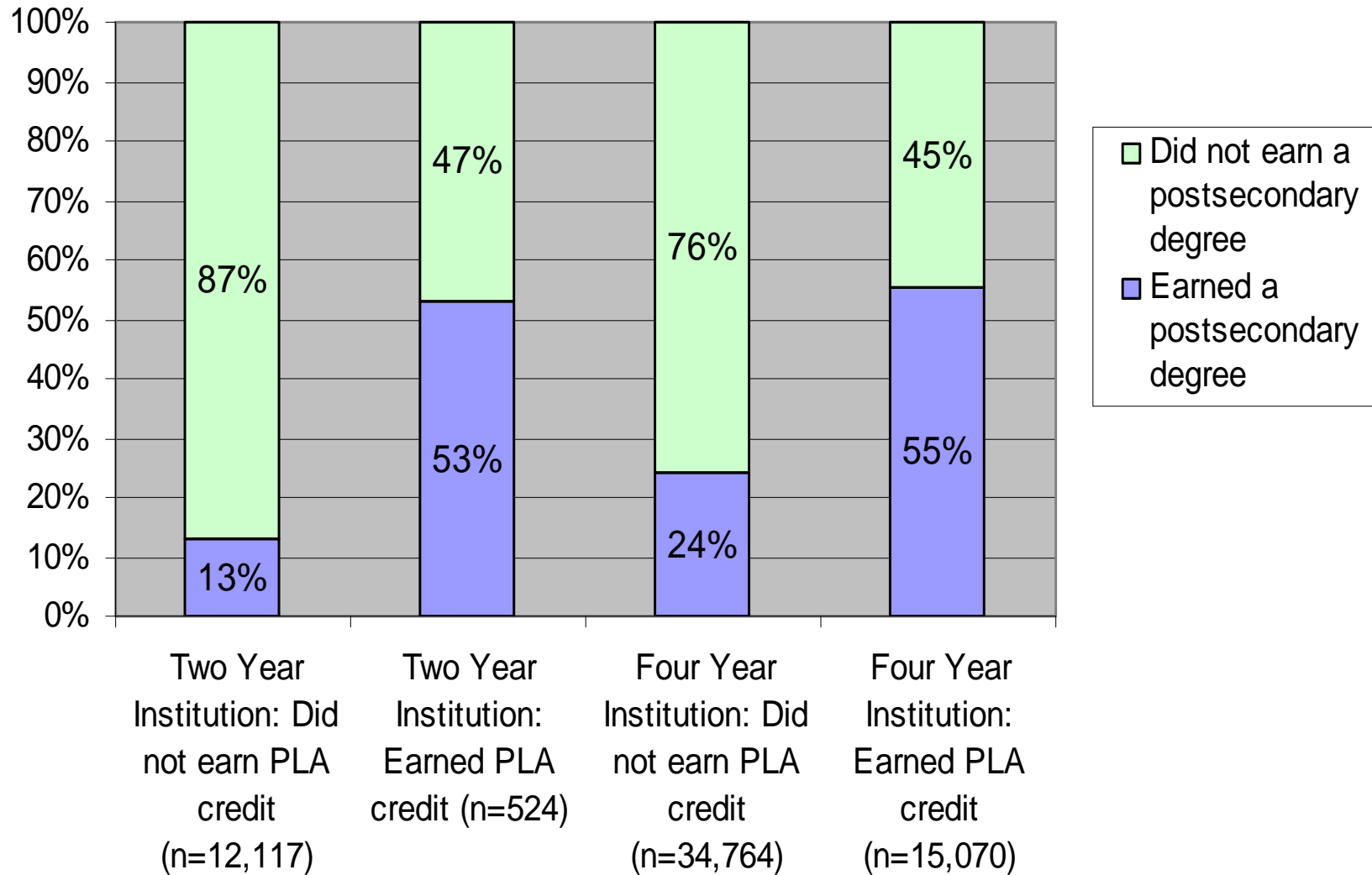


Graduation Rates

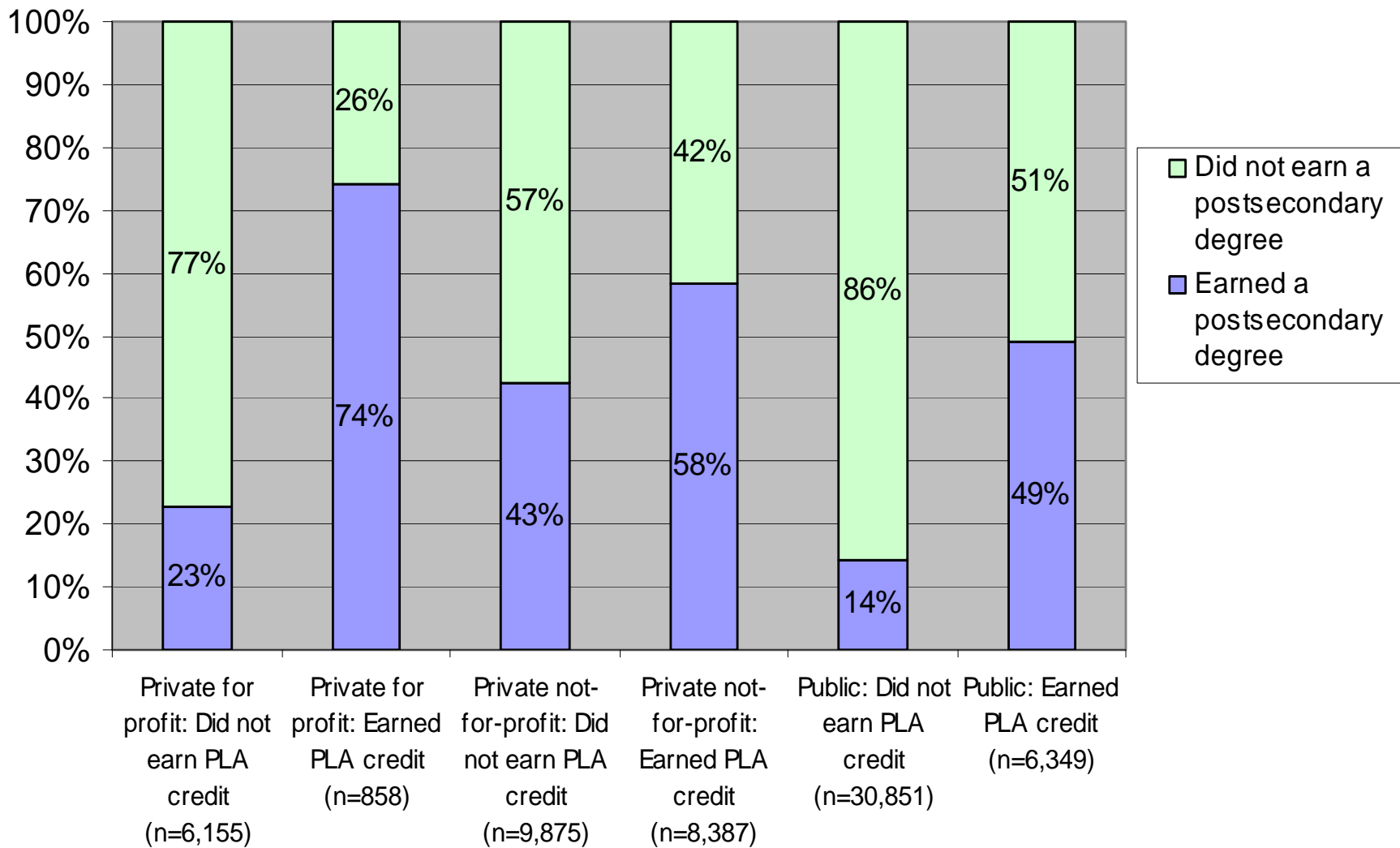
Graduation Rates



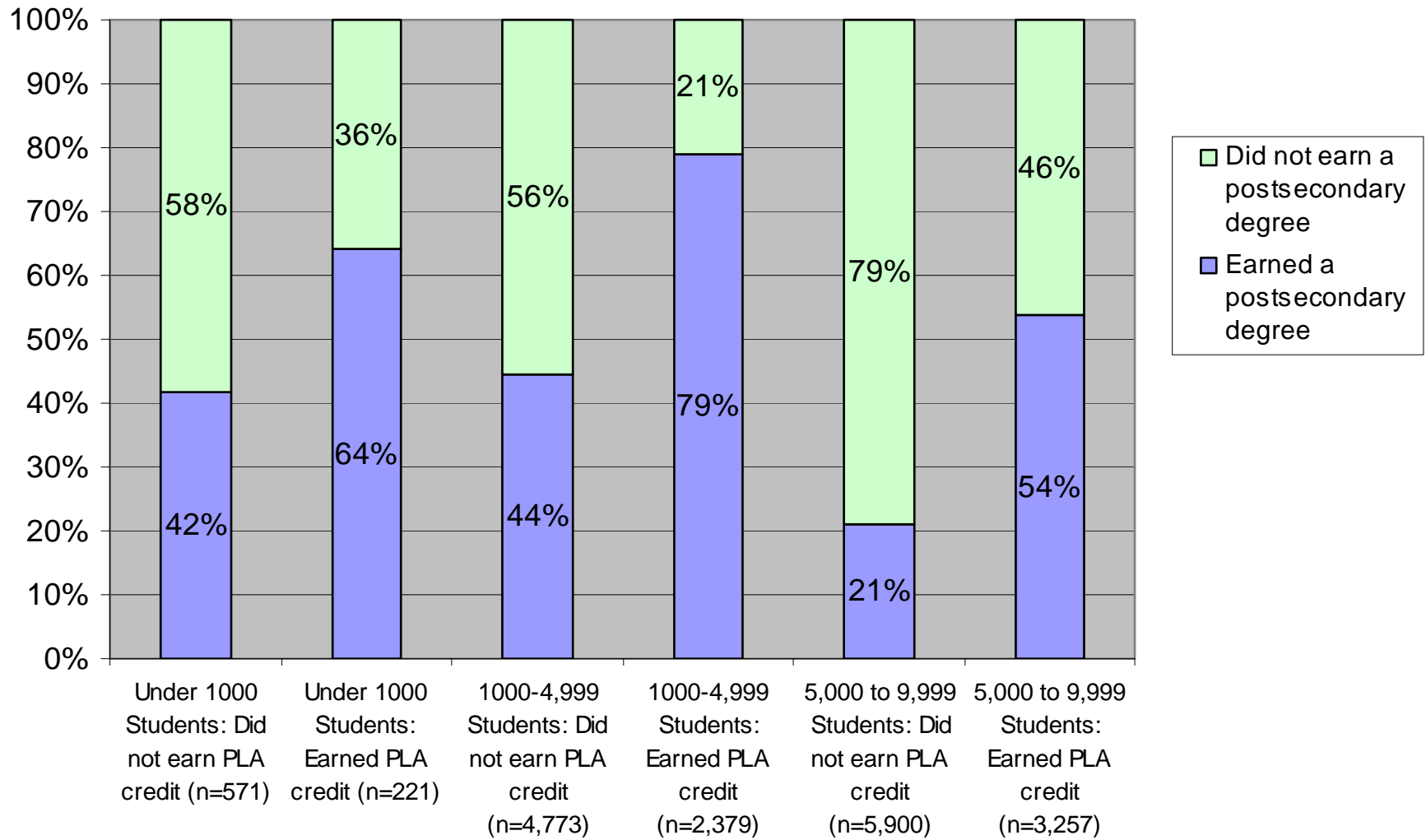
Graduation Rate by Institution Level



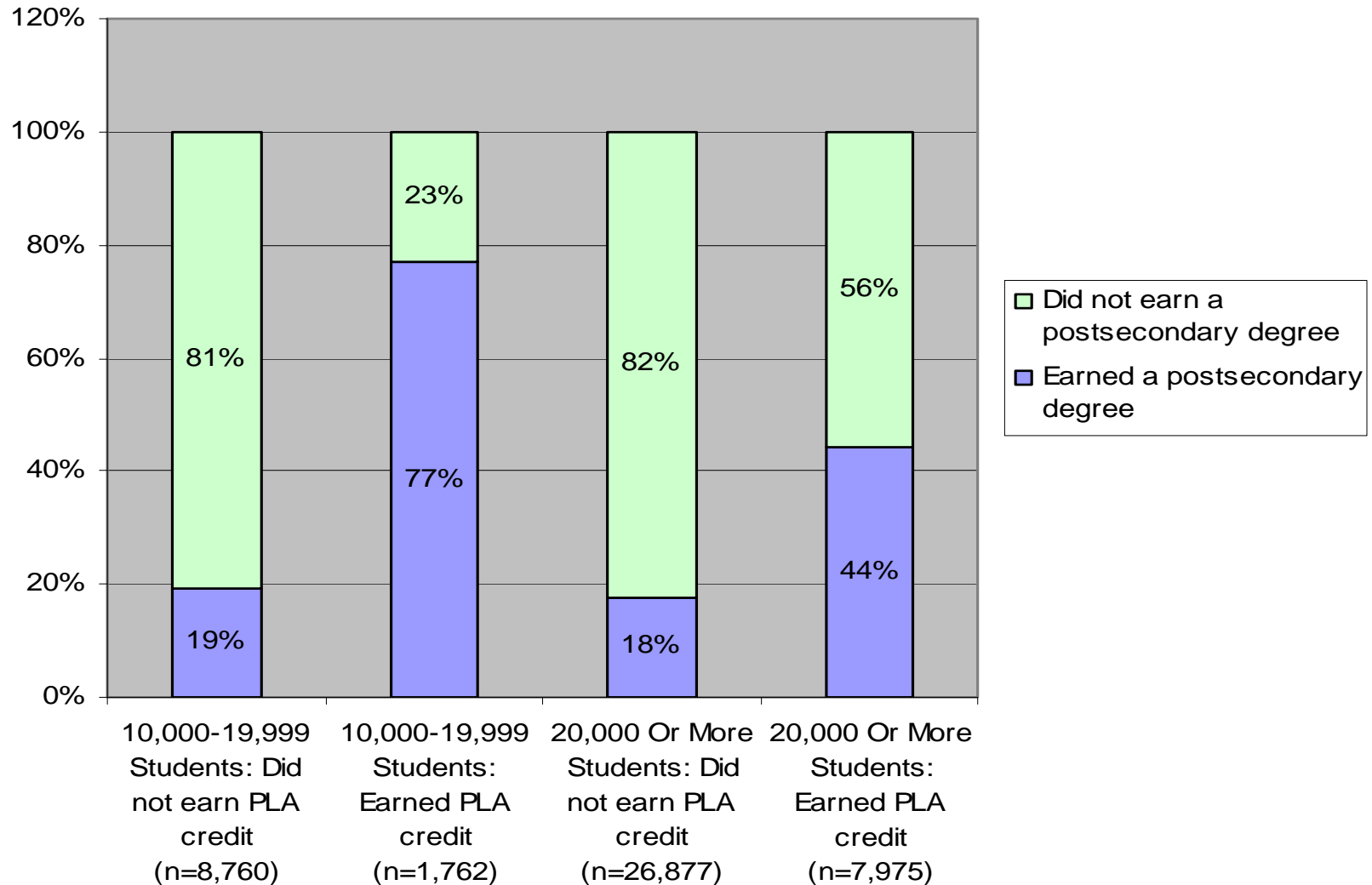
Graduation Rate by Institution Control



Graduation Rate by Institution Size



Graduation Rate by Institution Size



What we now can say

Evidence shows that PLA students, on average, have higher rates of degree earning than do non-PLA students.

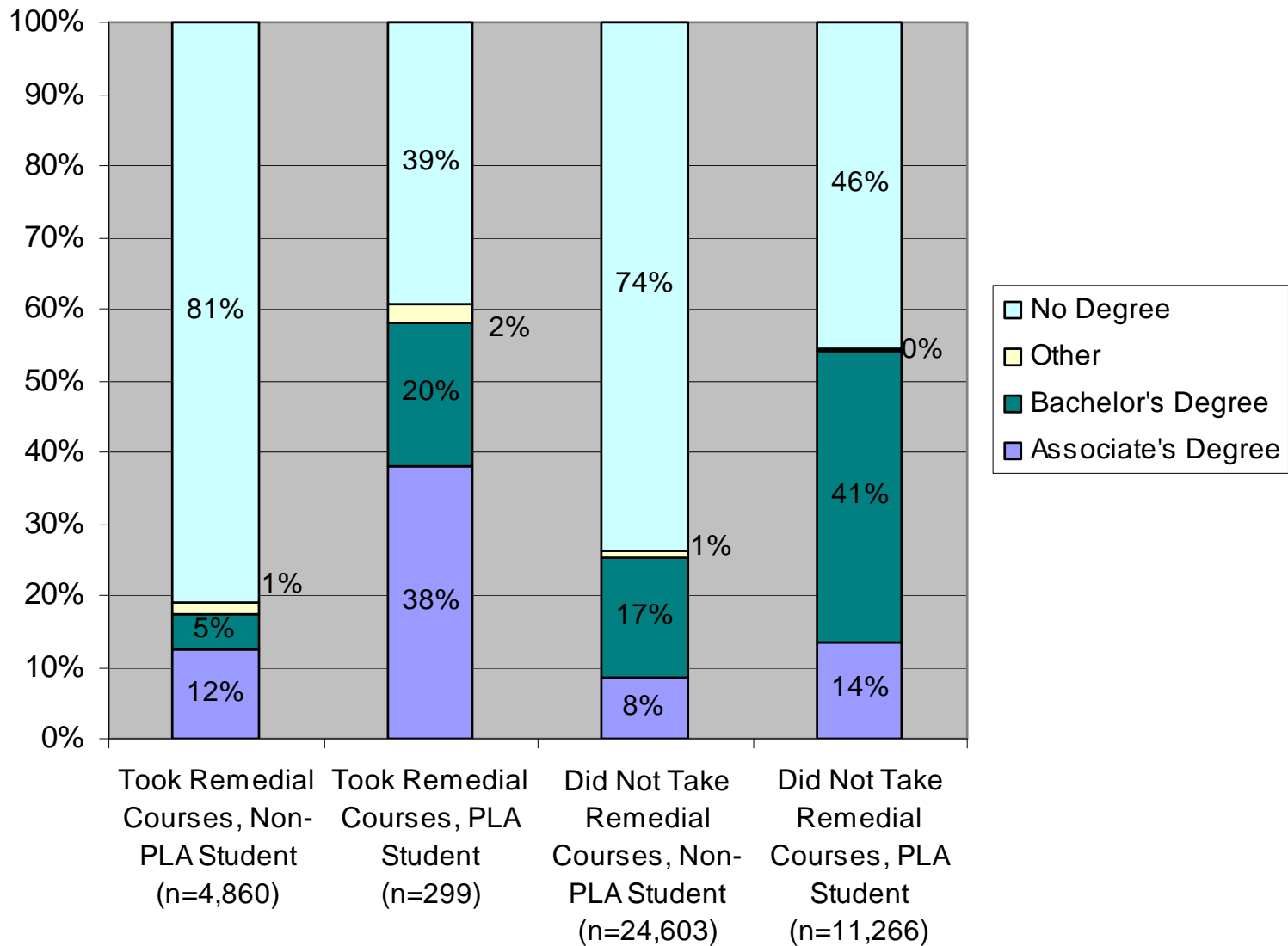
This is true at institutions of all sizes, levels and controls.

EVERYBODY WHO WENT TO
THE MOON HAS EATEN
CHICKEN!

GOOD GRIEF.
CHICKEN MAKES
YOU GO TO
THE MOON!



Students Taking Remedial Courses



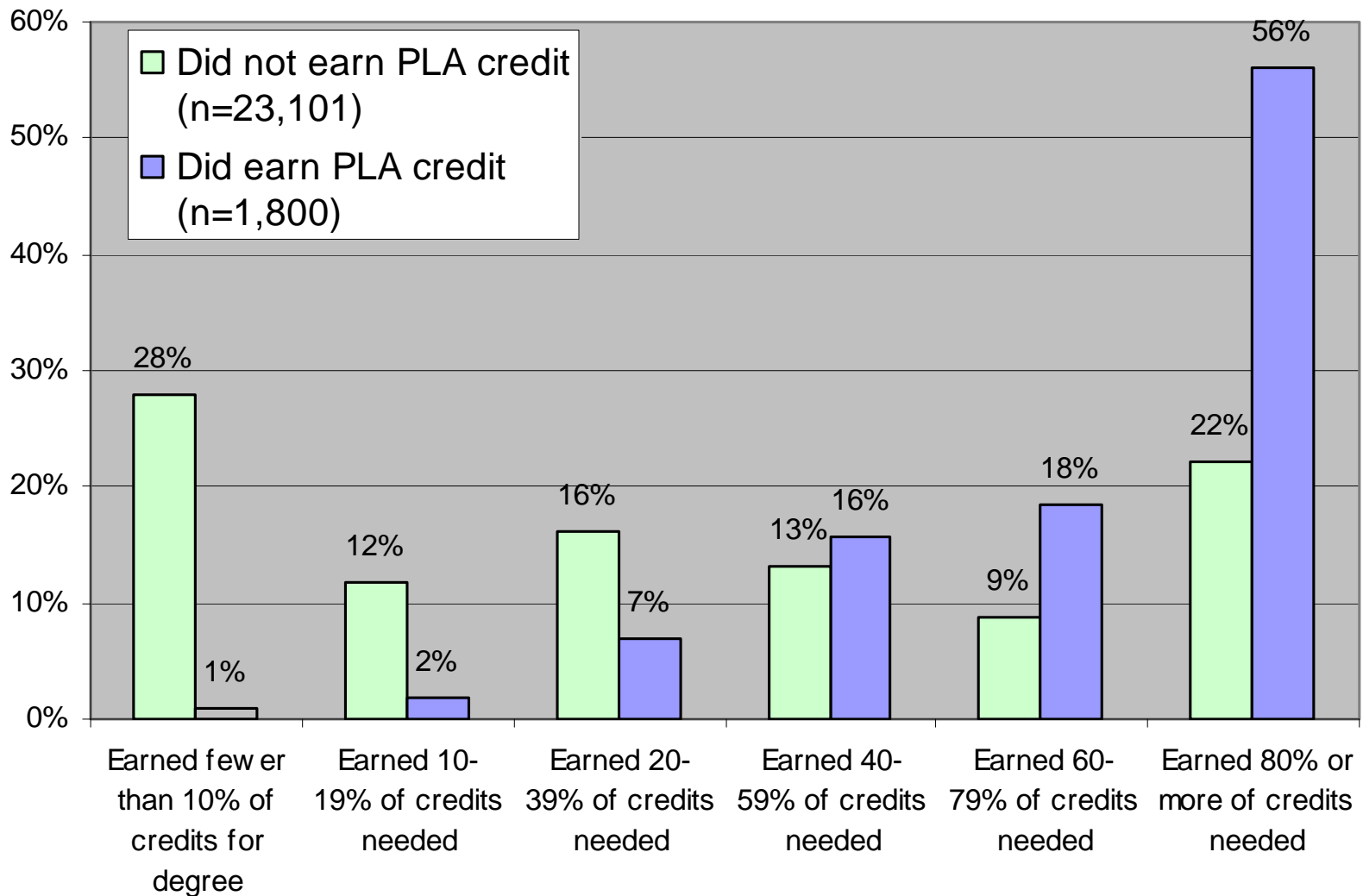


Persistence

Ways We Measured Persistence

- Credit accumulation towards an associate's or bachelor's degree
- Number of years in which the student earned credit between 2001-2002 and 2007-2008

Credit Accumulation, No Degree Earners



Total Credits Earned at Institution

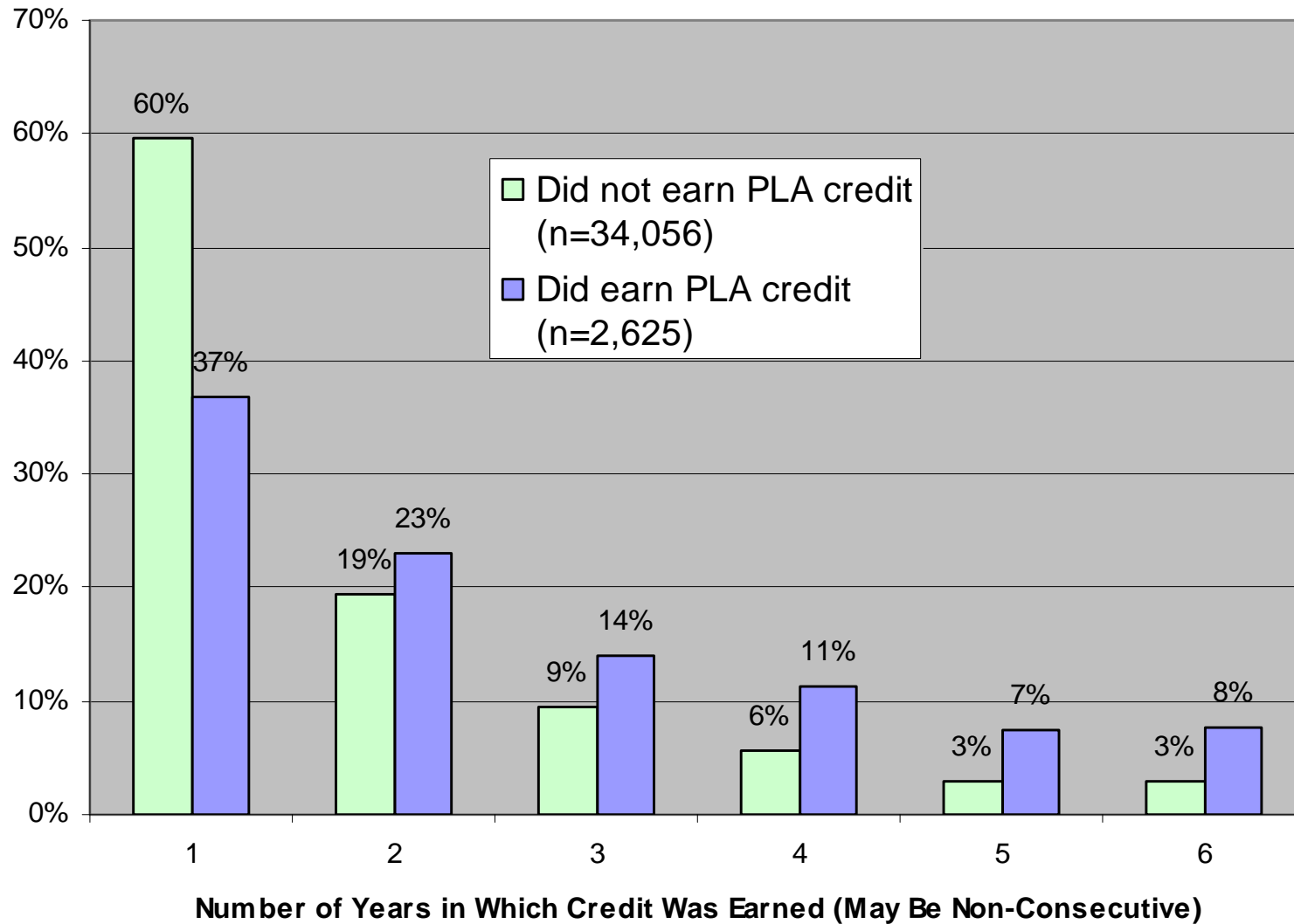
**Average for All PLA
Students**

53.7 credits

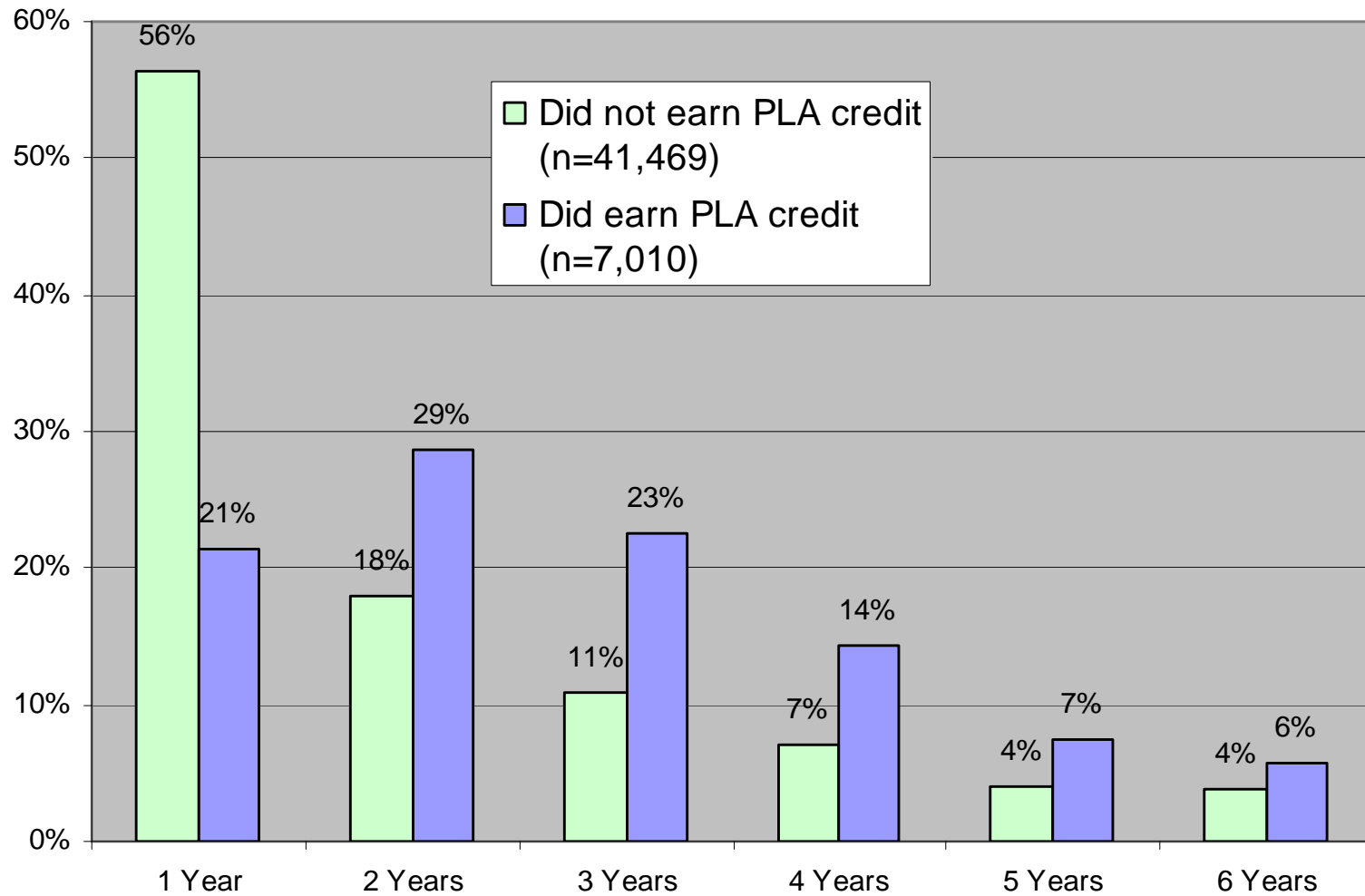
**Average for All Non-PLA
Students**

43.8 credits

Persistence – Number of Credit-Earning Years



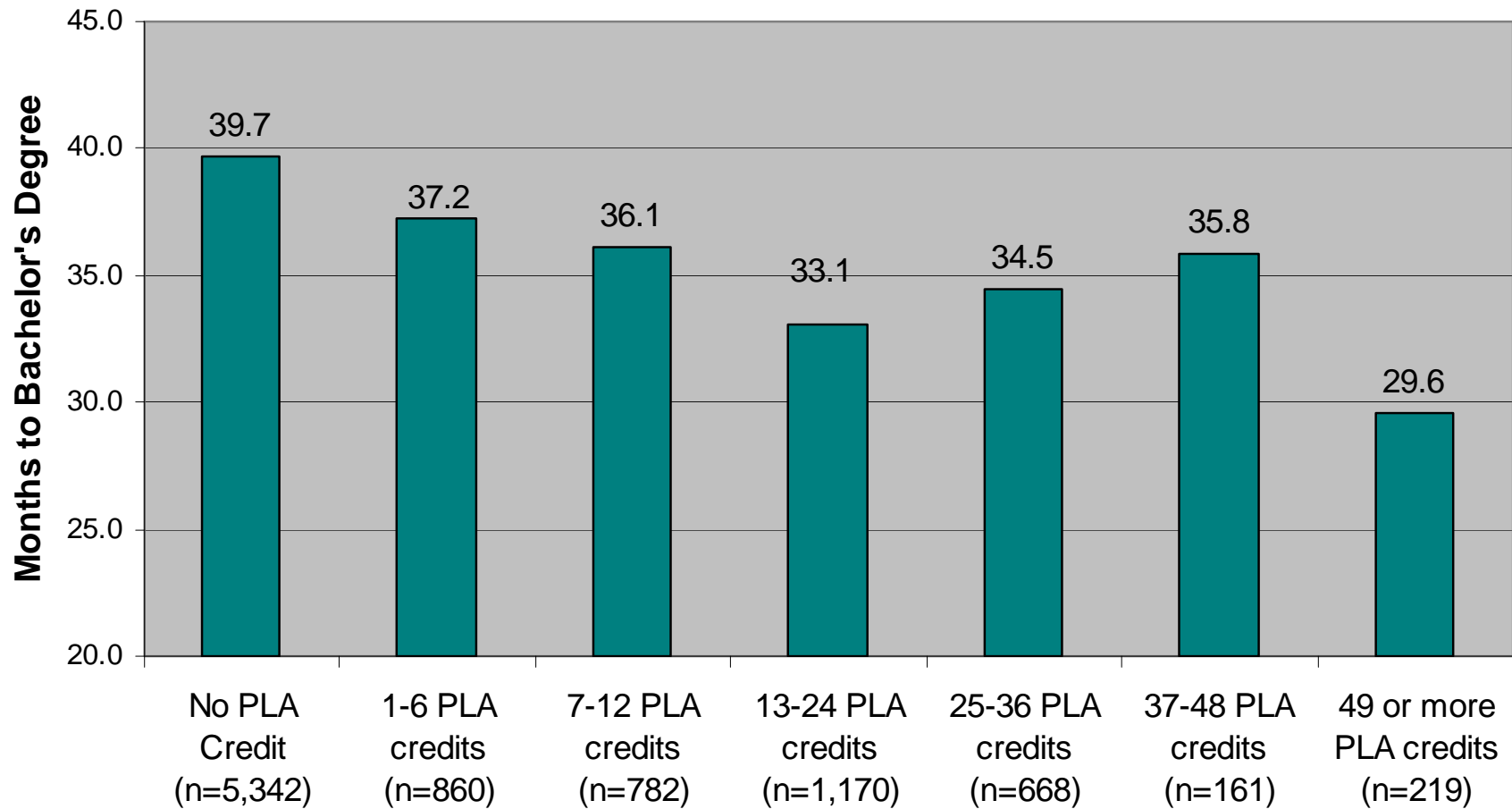
Persistence – Consecutive Credit-Earning Years



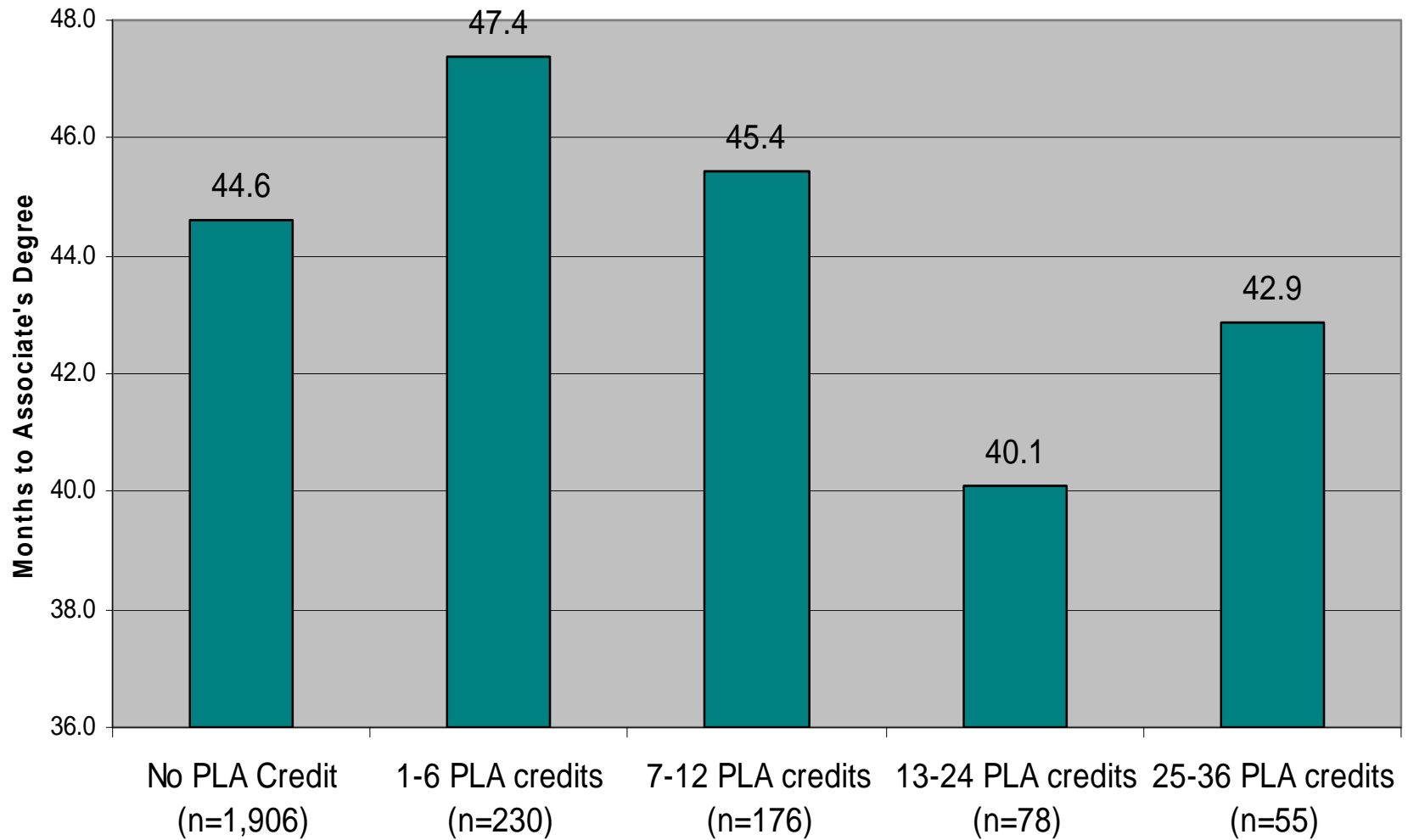


Time to Degree

Time to Bachelor's Degree



Time to Associate's Degree





Do Institutional Policies Matter?

Institutional Policies on PLA

- PLA credit can be used to obtain advanced standing at the institution
- PLA credit can be used to waive course prerequisites
- PLA credit can be used to meet general education requirements
- PLA credit can be used to meet program/major requirements

What the Student Data Showed:

The greater the flexibility the student has for using the PLA credit, the better the academic outcomes.

Additional findings, student demographics

- Gender
- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Financial aid recipients

Summary – Graduation Rates

- **PLA students in this study had better graduation rates than non-PLA students:**
 - regardless of institutional size, level (two-year or four-year) or control (private for-profit, non-profit, or public)
 - regardless of the individual student's academic ability or grade point average
 - regardless of the individual student's age, gender, or race/ethnicity
 - regardless of whether or not the individual student receives financial aid

Summary - Persistence

- **PLA students have higher rates of persistence compared with non-PLA students.**
 - In terms of credit accumulation/progress towards the degree
 - In terms of number of years of credit-earning

Summary – Time to Degree

- **PLA students earned bachelor's degrees in a shorter periods of time compared with non-PLA students** – a difference of between 2.5 and 10.1 months, depending upon the number of PLA credits earned.
- **PLA earners with associate's degrees saved an average of between 1.5 and 4.5 months of time in earning their degrees, compared to non-PLA students earning associate's degrees.**

Want to read more about this?

Our published report on this study was released in March 2010.

Executive summary:

www.cael.org/pdf/PLA_Executive-Summary.pdf

Full report:

www.cael.org/pdf/PLA_Fueling-the-Race.pdf



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