



The Commission on
INDEPENDENT
Colleges & Universities
in New York

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President

Independent Sector Profile

OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL

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Background

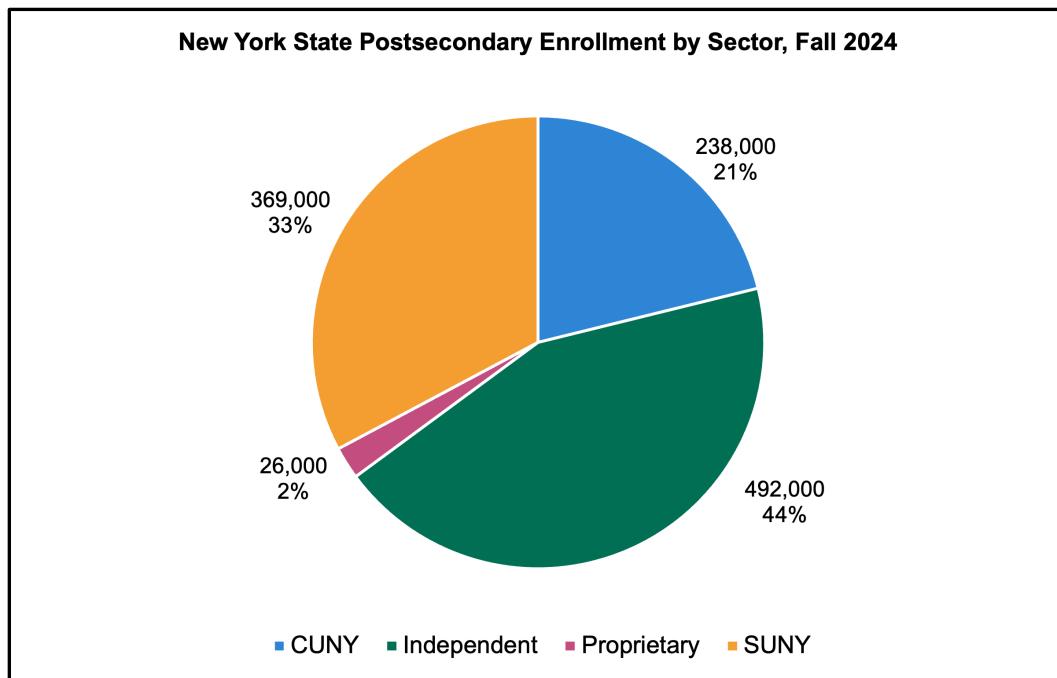
There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to higher education, as the best college choice depends on individual needs and priorities. New York State's higher education ecosystem includes both private and public colleges and universities where 1.1 million students choose to enroll annually.¹

New York's private nonprofit colleges and universities are known collectively as the Independent Sector of higher education.² New York's collection of independent institutions is the largest in the country, with over 100 institutions to choose from. The Independent Sector includes campuses that are defined by history and tradition; diverse missions and programs; strong academics and research; urban, suburban, and rural locations; and enrollment sizes that range from less than 100 to nearly 60,000 students.

New York's independent institutions are each different in many ways, but there are a few elements that they share: generous financial aid, small class sizes, personal attention, distinguished faculty, unparalleled experiential learning opportunities, stability, strong global alumni networks, and unmatched lifetime support services to help students complete their studies and thrive.

Enrollment Diversity

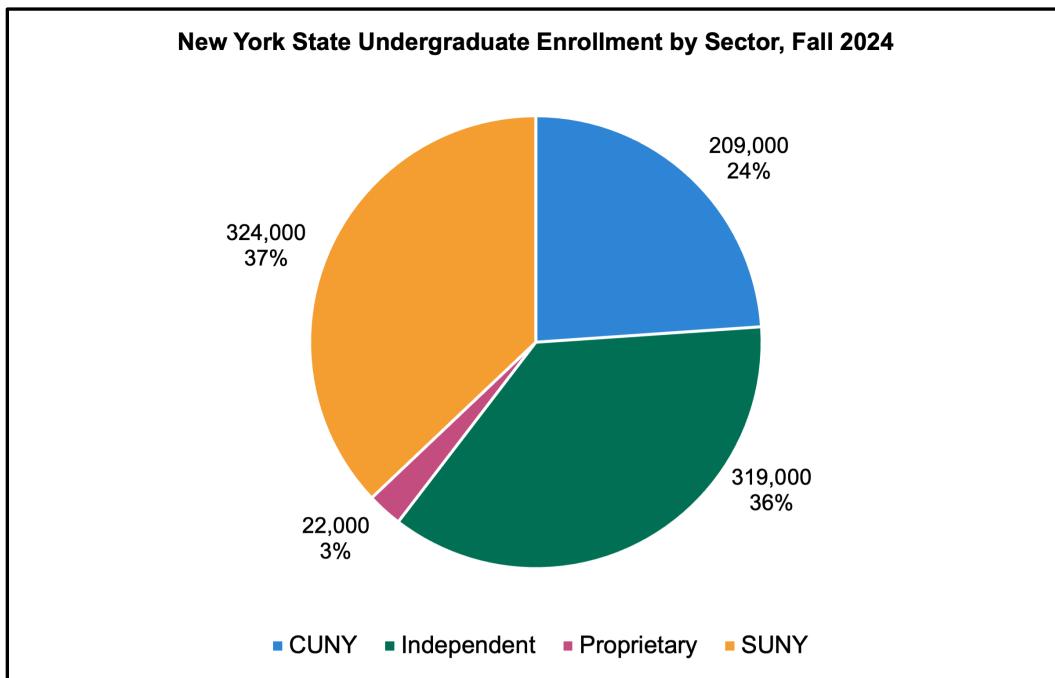
New York's independent colleges and universities enroll 44 percent (or, nearly 500,000) of the 1.1 million students enrolled in postsecondary education in New York State.



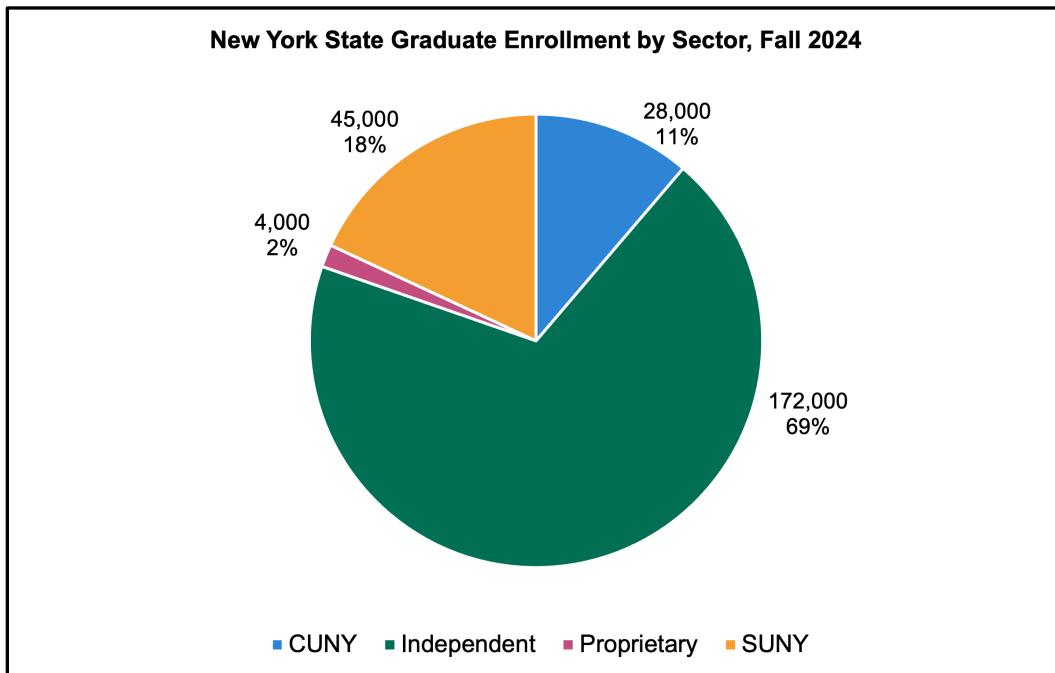
The Independent Sector and SUNY enroll similar shares of undergraduate students: 36 percent, and 37 percent, respectively.

¹ The source for enrollment data in this report is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) unless otherwise noted. Full-time and part-time students are included, and totals represent headcounts in fall 2024 unless otherwise indicated.

² Proprietary colleges are also known as for-profit institutions. Public institutions include the State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY).



The Independent Sector enrolls more graduate students than the other sectors combined, with 69 percent of the state's total.³



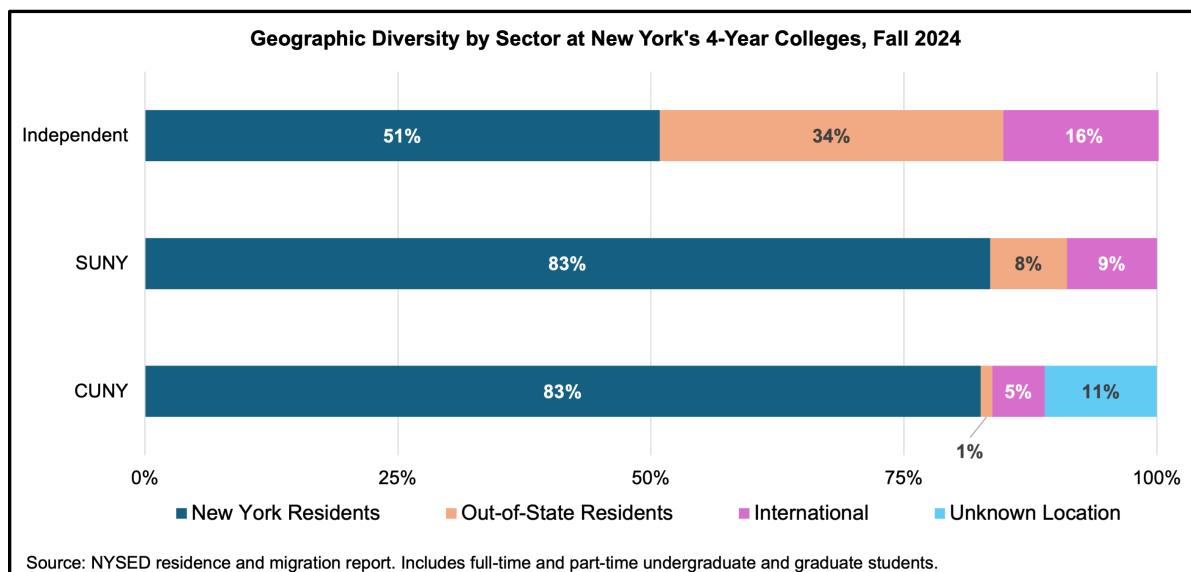
The student mix at independent colleges in New York State is geographically diverse, drawing students not only from New York but also from a wide array of other states and countries.

³ Includes graduate students and those pursuing professional degrees such as medicine or law.

Approximately half of the sector's students travel to New York from other states or countries.⁴ This geographic blend is a key advantage, enriching the on-campus experience.

- New York State residents (51%): These students provide a foundational understanding of the state's culture, industries, and political landscape, offering valuable local perspectives and connections within their home regions (upstate and downstate).
- Students from other states (34%): Students from outside New York introduce diverse regional cultures, different approaches to education, and varied socioeconomic viewpoints from across the nation. This exposure broadens the dialogue and helps students understand national trends and differences.
- International students (16%): Students from other countries bring a global dimension to the campus. They introduce different languages, histories, political systems, and professional norms, which is crucial for preparing all students for the increasingly interconnected global economy.

This convergence of students from diverse origins creates a dynamic, multicultural learning environment where discussions are richer, perspectives are challenged, and networking opportunities extend worldwide, giving graduates a distinct edge in their future careers.



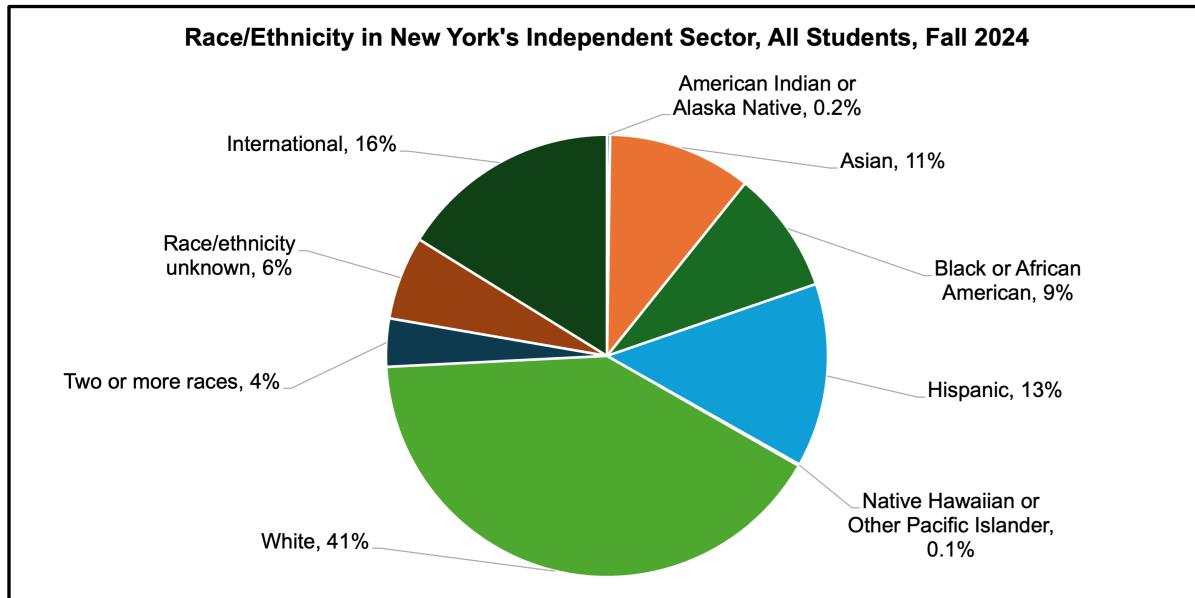
There is racial and ethnic diversity in the Independent Sector as well. Thirty-seven percent of the sector's students are students of color, which creates an inclusive and representative learning environment.⁵

Academically, diversity enriches classroom discourse by introducing multiple perspectives on history, literature, social issues, and scientific challenges, moving beyond traditional monocultural narratives. This exposure directly prepares all students for successful engagement in a globalized and increasingly heterogeneous workforce where cultural fluency and the ability to collaborate across differences are paramount skills. Moreover, it fosters a vital sense of belonging and

⁴ New York State Education Department (NYSED), includes undergraduate and graduate/first professional students, full-time and part-time students at 4-year/graduate institutions.

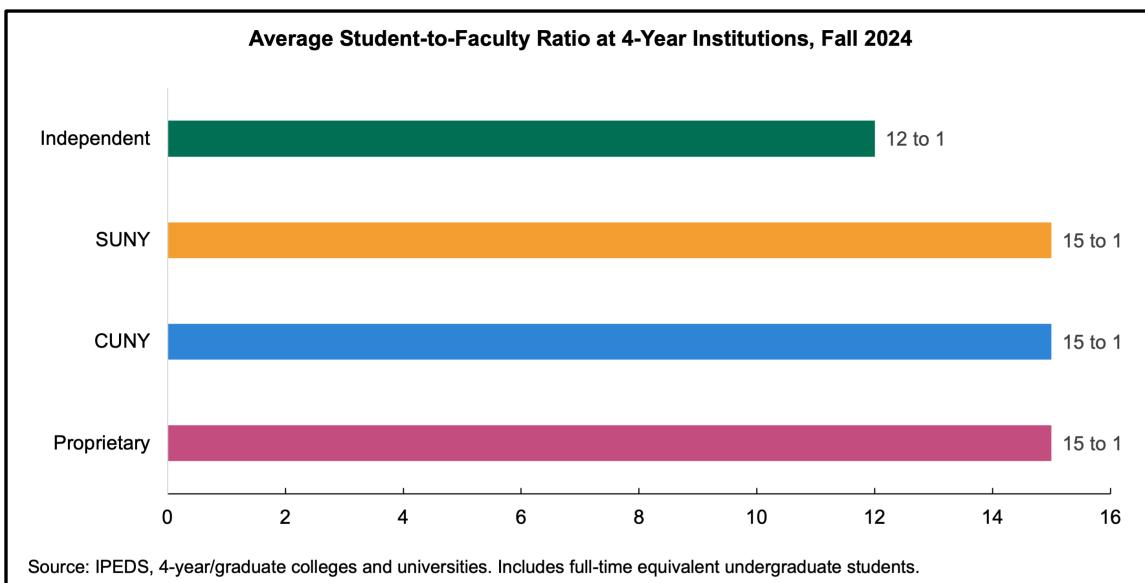
⁵ IPEDS, fall 2024, includes undergraduate, graduate/first-professional, full-time, part-time students at independent 2-year and 4-year/graduate institutions.

representation for students of color, improving educational outcomes and establishing networks that often extend into professional life.



Student-to-Faculty Ratio

Independent institutions often have lower student-to-faculty ratios, leading to smaller class sizes and more opportunities for professors to interact with students individually. This can translate to more personalized guidance, mentorship, and feedback. Independent colleges and universities have the lowest average student-to-faculty ratios for undergraduates when compared to New York's other sectors of higher education.

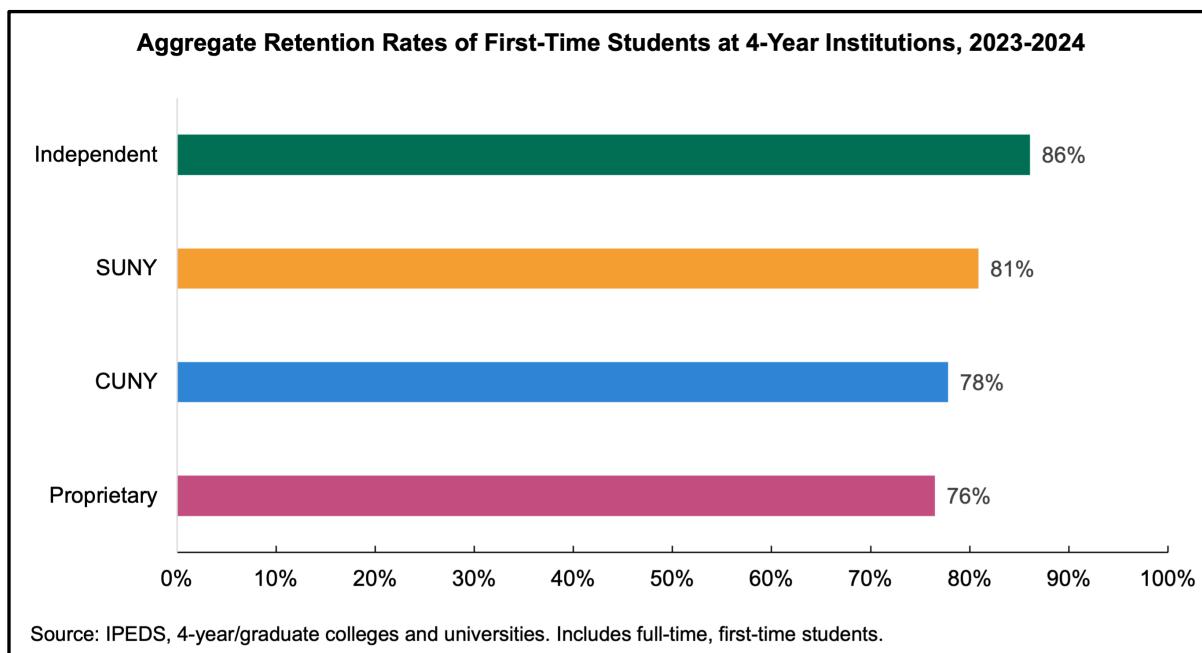


Retention Rate

Students and parents should consider an institution's retention rate, or persistence of first-time students who return for their second year. For students, choosing a college with a high retention rate is one of the most effective ways to safeguard their educational investment. Retention rates can reveal a lot about an institution, for example:

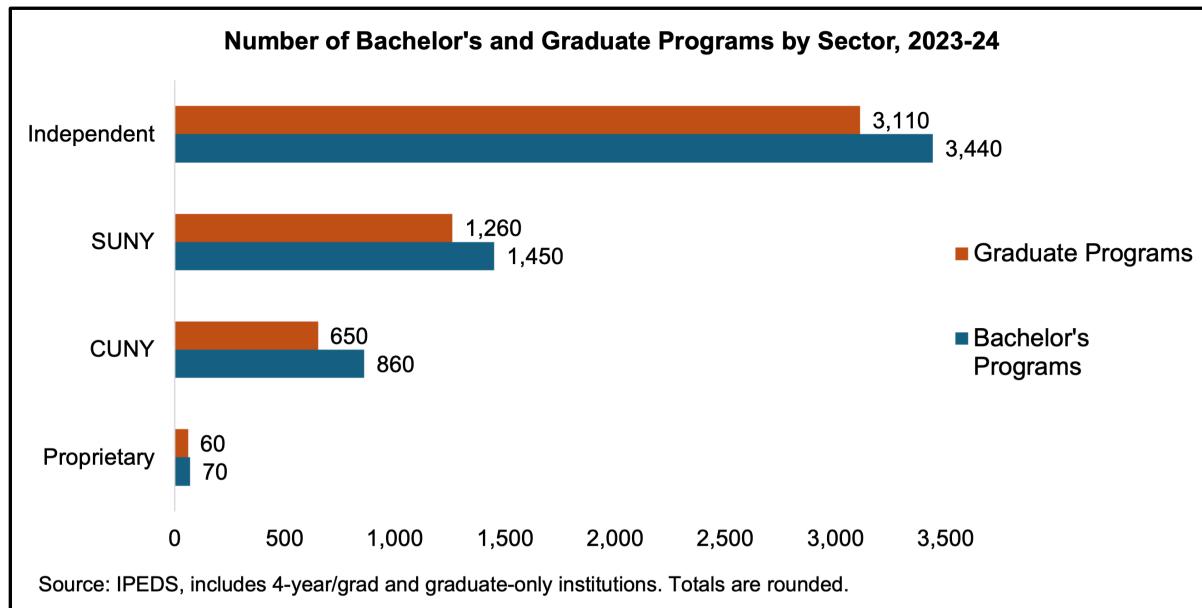
- Evidence of Strong Support Systems: High retention rates generally indicate that a school provides robust academic advising, tutoring, and mental health resources. If a large majority of freshmen return for their second year, it is a sign that the college successfully helps students navigate the difficult transition to college life.
- A Culture of Belonging: Research shows that the primary reason students drop out is not academic failure, but a lack of connection to the campus. High retention signals a campus community where students find friends, participate in clubs, and feel socially integrated.
- Predictor of Graduation Success: Retention is the first and most critical step toward graduation. If you choose a school where most people stay, you are more likely to finish your degree on time.

New York State's independent colleges and universities have the highest retention rates among four-year institutions in New York. In total, 86 percent of students who began their studies in fall 2023 returned for classes in fall 2024.



Academic Opportunity

With more than 3,400 bachelor's programs and 3,100 graduate programs, the Independent Sector offers more than the other sectors combined.



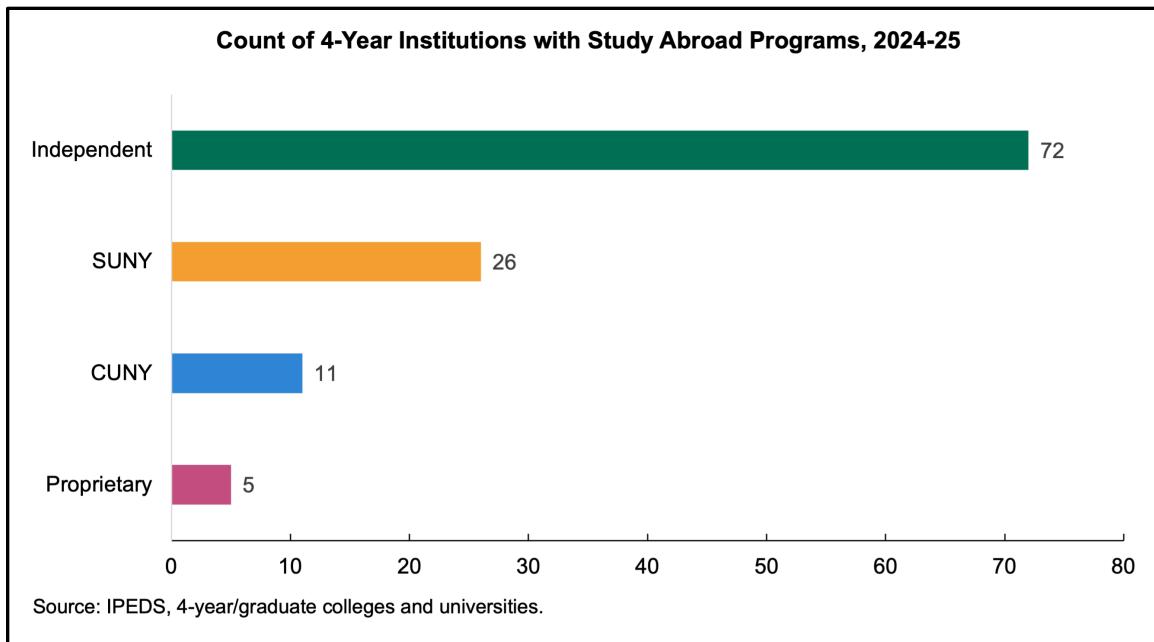
Many independent institutions have specific academic strengths or unique programs that may not be available at public or proprietary institutions. This could include specialized research opportunities, study abroad opportunities, or ROTC programs.

Study Abroad Programs

Seventy-two independent colleges and universities offer study abroad programs that provide a transformative set of benefits that span far beyond a student's university experience, positively impacting their future career and contributing to broader societal needs. These programs provide a structured way for students to immerse themselves in a new academic and cultural environment, fostering personal growth and developing essential global competencies.⁶

In the 2024-25 academic year, independent colleges and universities offered more study abroad opportunities than public and proprietary colleges combined.

⁶ Institute of International Education, "Why Study Abroad," <https://www.iie.org/programs/generation-study-abroad/why-study-abroad>, accessed December 4, 2025.

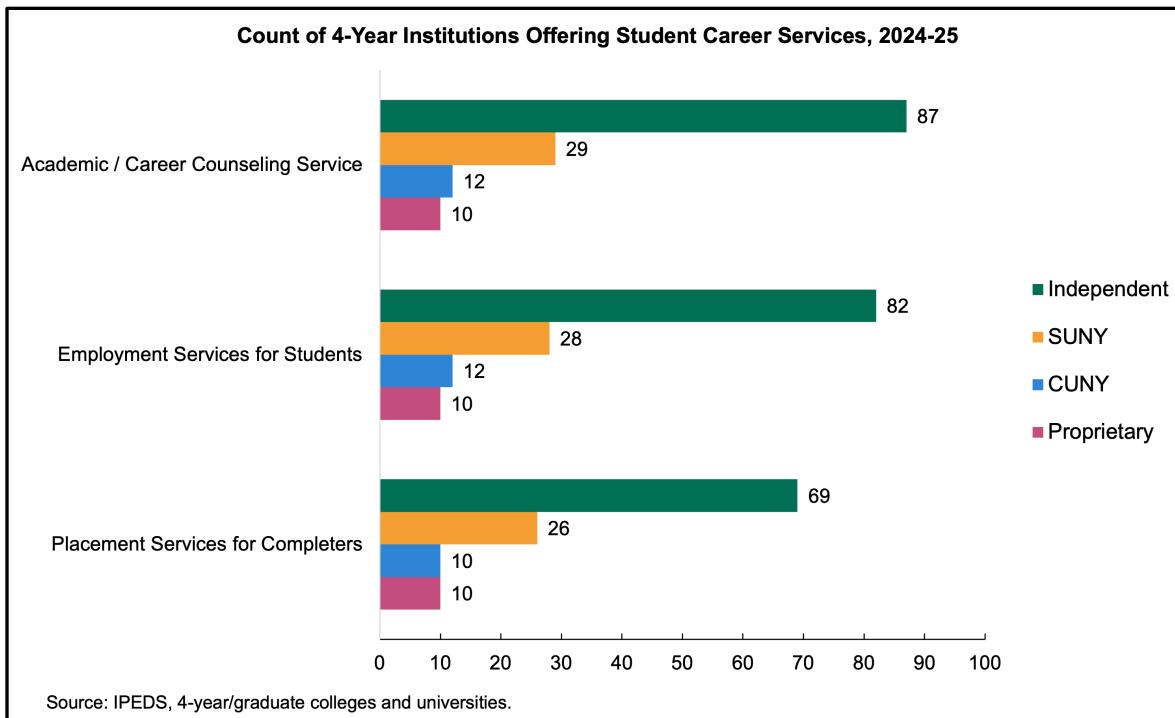


Career Services

Independent colleges and universities provide a lifetime commitment to students and alumni by offering a robust set of support services that are critical for navigating the academic environment and transitioning successfully into the professional world. These services, particularly the three listed below, offer distinct yet complementary benefits that support students at every stage of their educational and professional journey.

- Academic/Career Counseling Service: Activities designed to assist students in making plans and decisions related to their education, career, or personal development.
- Employment Services for Current Students: Activities intended to assist students in obtaining part-time employment as a means of defraying part of the cost of their education.
- Placement Services for Graduates: Assistance for students in evaluating their career alternatives as well as in obtaining full-time employment upon leaving the institution.

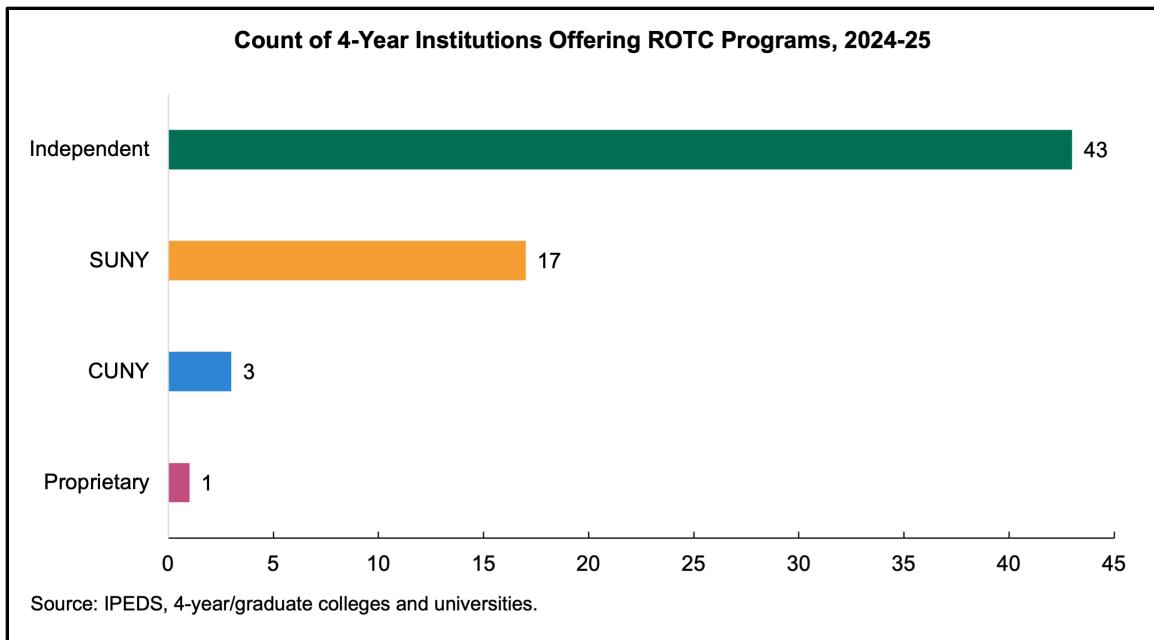
More independent colleges offer each type of career service than public and proprietary institutions combined.



Participation in Reserve Officers' Training Corps. (ROTC)

ROTC programs, offered across Army, Navy, and Air Force branches at many independent colleges and universities, provide a unique and beneficial path for students seeking to combine a civilian education with military preparation. The benefits of participating in ROTC are extensive, covering significant financial aid, world-class leadership training, and a guaranteed career upon graduation.

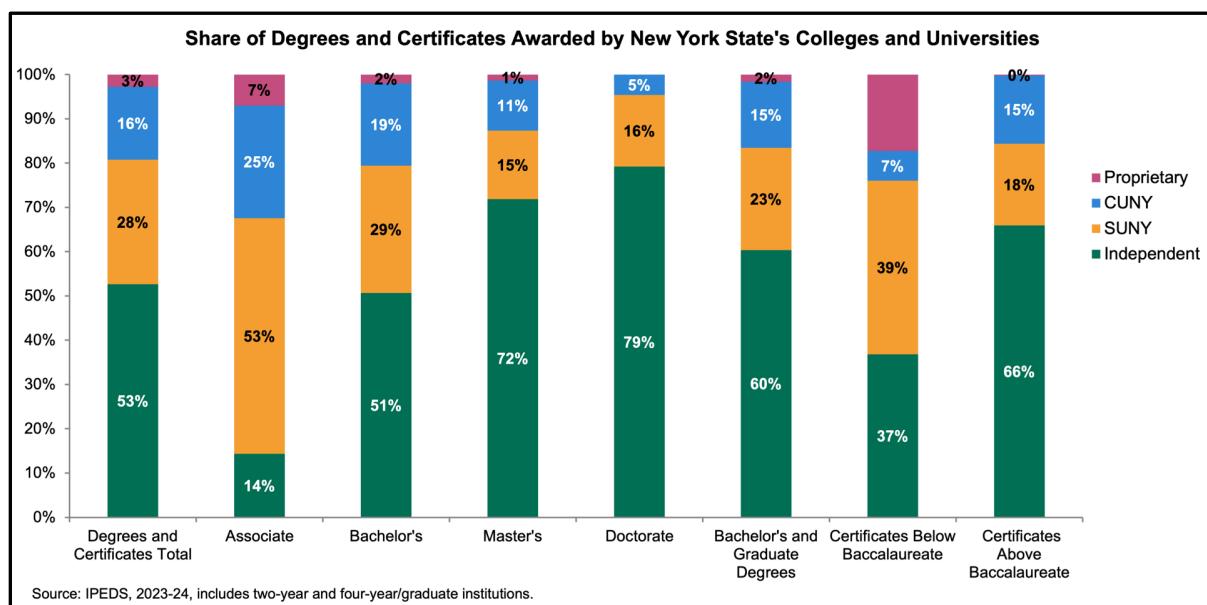
Forty-three independent institutions offer ROTC programs to their students, more than twice the number of public and proprietary institutions.



Degrees Awarded and Graduation Rates

New York's independent colleges and universities are major contributors to the state's educational landscape, consistently awarding a significantly higher share of bachelor's and graduate degrees than the public or for-profit sectors. They grant approximately 60 percent of all bachelor's and graduate degrees in the state. This impressive degree production is a result of several key advantages these institutions possess, often revolving around student support, specialized offerings, and financial aid.

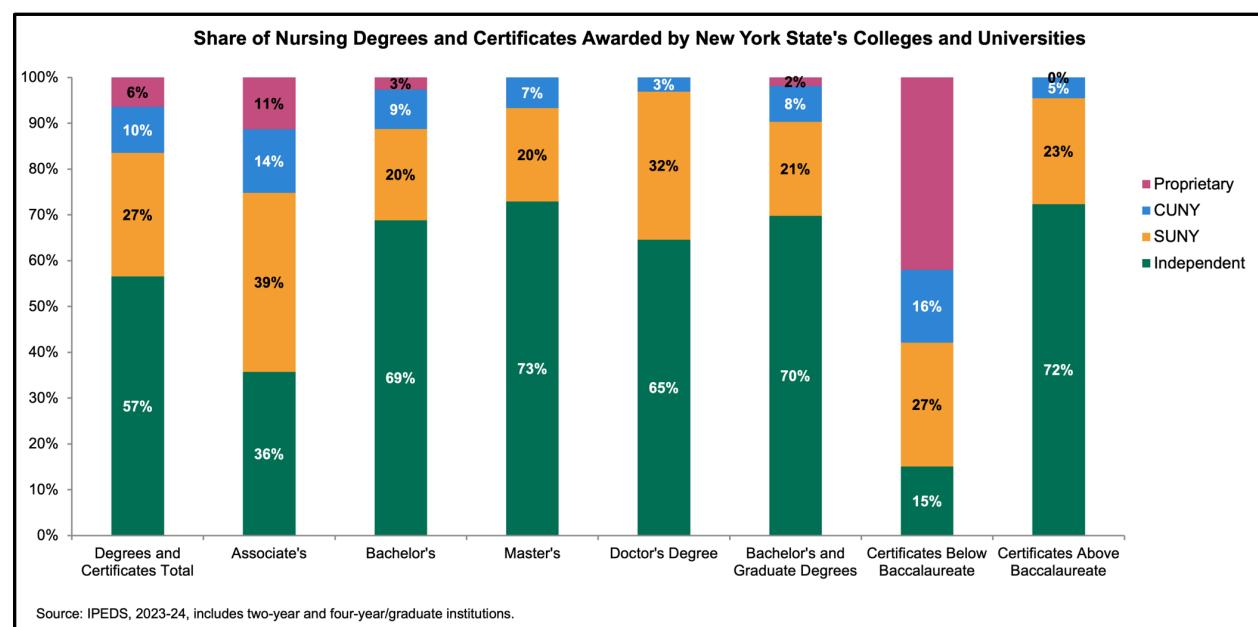
By awarding the most degrees in fields like nursing, STEM, and education, they are directly and efficiently feeding the state's skilled workforce pipeline in critical fields. This contribution ensures New York has the talent required for innovation, sustainable economic growth, and maintaining a competitive edge nationally and globally.



Nursing

New York State is currently grappling with a nursing shortage that threatens the stability and quality of its healthcare system. This crisis is fueled by an aging workforce nearing retirement, high levels of burnout following the pandemic, and an increasing demand for care as the state's population ages. The demand for nurses will continue to grow over the next decade. In New York State, there will be a need for 50,000 additional registered nurses to fill the projected growth in positions – an increase of 26 percent (204,040 positions in 2022 to 256,080 positions in 2032).⁷ The average age of registered nurses in New York is 49 years. Nearly 60 percent of New York's nurses are 45 or older and 18 percent are 65 or older.⁸

It's more important than ever for New York to educate new healthcare professionals. New York's independent colleges and universities award 70 percent of the bachelor's and graduate nursing degrees earned by New York students (6,840 of 9,800 awarded in 2023-24), which is more than the other sectors combined.⁹



Teaching

New York State is currently facing a critical juncture in its education system as it navigates a persistent and evolving teacher shortage. Approximately one-third of New York's teachers are eligible to retire within the next five years, and the state estimates a need for 180,000 new educators over the next decade.¹⁰

Educating the next generation of teachers is vital for New York's long-term economic and social health. Teachers are the primary drivers of student success, and a stable, highly qualified workforce is necessary to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code, graduate ready for college and careers. New York's independent colleges and universities award 52 percent of

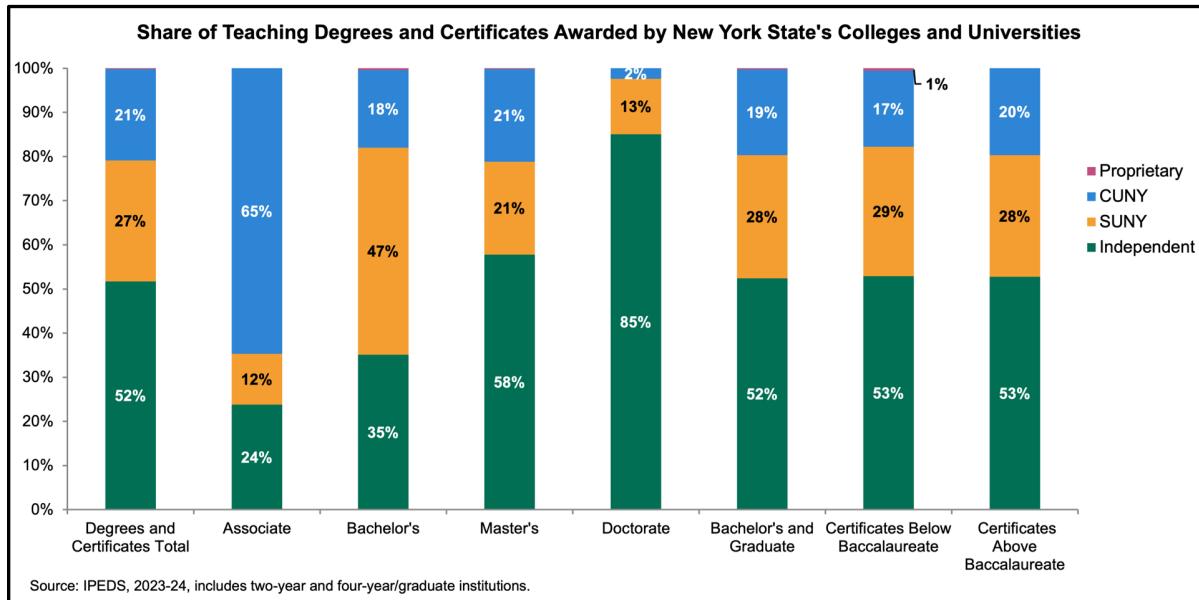
⁷ New York State Department of Labor, <https://dol.ny.gov/employment-projections>, accessed 1/2/2026.

⁸ Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/nchwa/nursing-workforce-dashboard>, accessed 1/26/26.

⁹ IPEDS Completions, 2023-24, includes 2-yr and 4-yr/graduate institutions, full-time and part-time, undergraduate and graduate students.

¹⁰ TeachNY, <https://newyork.teach.org/about>, accessed 1/21/26.

the bachelor's and graduate degrees earned by New York students (9,600 of 18,300 awarded in 2023-24), which is more than the other sectors combined.¹¹



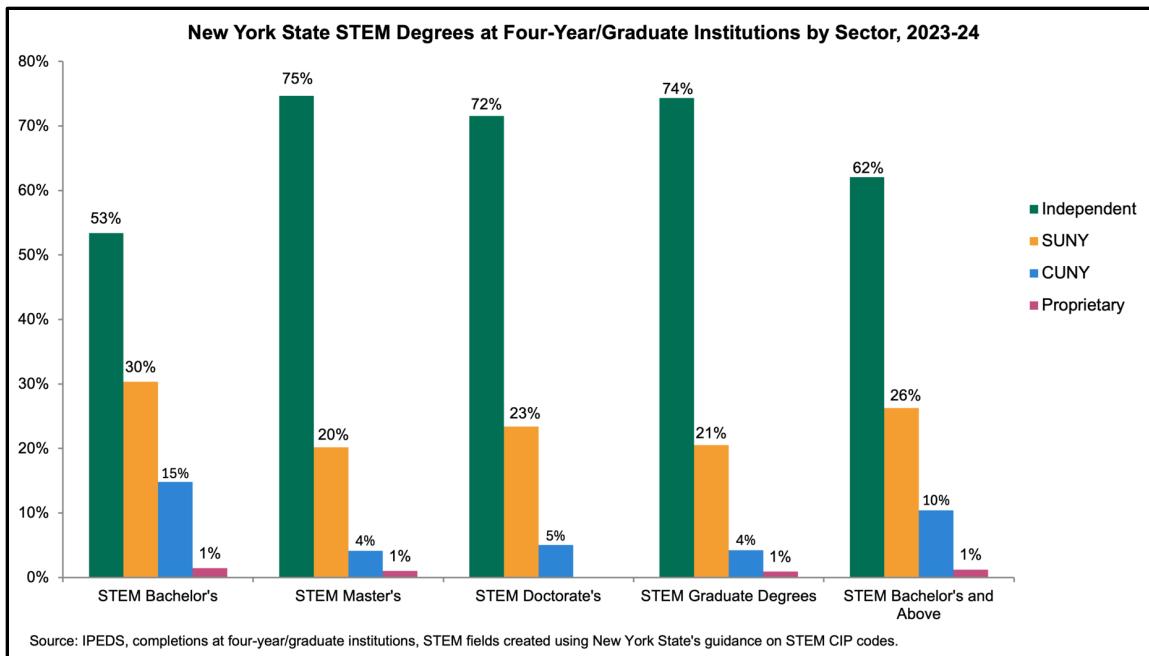
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

The importance of STEM degrees cannot be overstated in a global economy increasingly defined by rapid technological advancement and complex global challenges. For students, these degrees offer more than just a pathway to high-paying jobs; they foster a unique "STEM mindset" characterized by critical thinking, evidence-based problem-solving, and the resilience to iterate through failure. As industries from healthcare to finance become more data-driven, STEM literacy has evolved from a specialized skill set into a fundamental requirement for the modern workforce.

New York's independent colleges and universities award 62 percent of the STEM bachelor's and graduate degrees earned by New York students (32,500 of 52,400 awarded in 2023-24), which is more than the other sectors combined.¹²

¹¹ IPEDS Completions, 2023-24, includes 2-yr and 4-yr/graduate institutions, full-time and part-time, undergraduate and graduate students.

¹² IPEDS Completions, 2023-24, includes 4-yr/graduate institutions, full-time and part-time, undergraduate and graduate students.

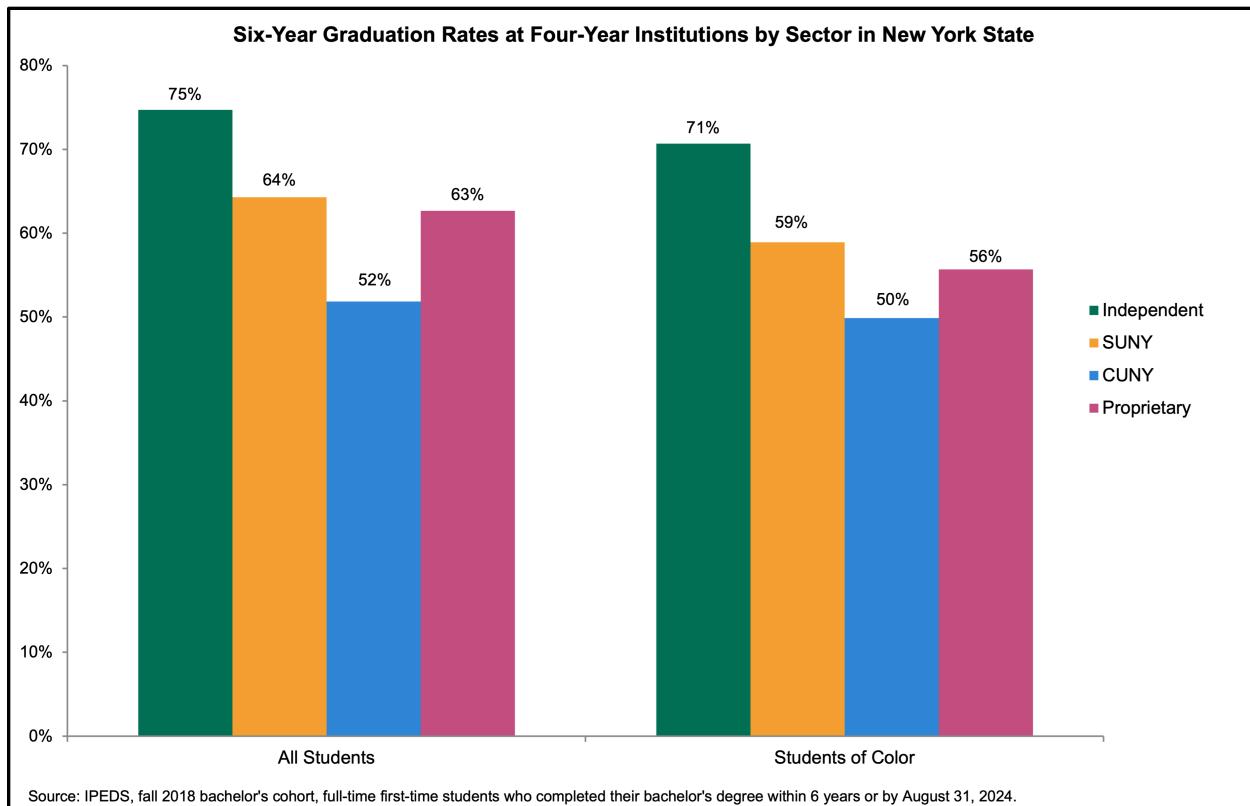


Graduation rates

First-time students who pursue bachelor's degrees in the Independent Sector complete their degrees at higher rates than students in other sectors. The six-year graduation rate for students who began their studies in 2018 was 75 percent in the Independent Sector, which is higher than the six-year rate for other sectors (SUNY: 64 percent, CUNY: 52 percent, and Proprietary: 63 percent).¹³ The Independent Sector's six-year graduation rate also exceeds the national six-year graduation rate for all sectors, 65 percent. National six-year rates by sector:

- Independent: 69 percent
- Public: 64 percent
- Proprietary: 34 percent

¹³ IPEDS, fall 2018 cohort, full-time, first-time undergraduate students at institutions offering bachelor's degrees.



The True Cost of College May Surprise You

Much has been said and written about the cost of college. However, the rhetoric around this issue can be misleading, especially when it comes to sticker price and what students *actually* pay.

Sticker Price

This is the advertised total cost of attendance for a year at a college. It includes tuition, fees, room and board, books, and other expenses. Essentially, it's the full price BEFORE any discounts or financial aid. When headlines highlight high college costs, they use the sticker price, which doesn't tell the whole story. Sticker price can be misleading. Many colleges with seemingly high sticker prices offer generous financial aid packages, bringing the actual cost down significantly.

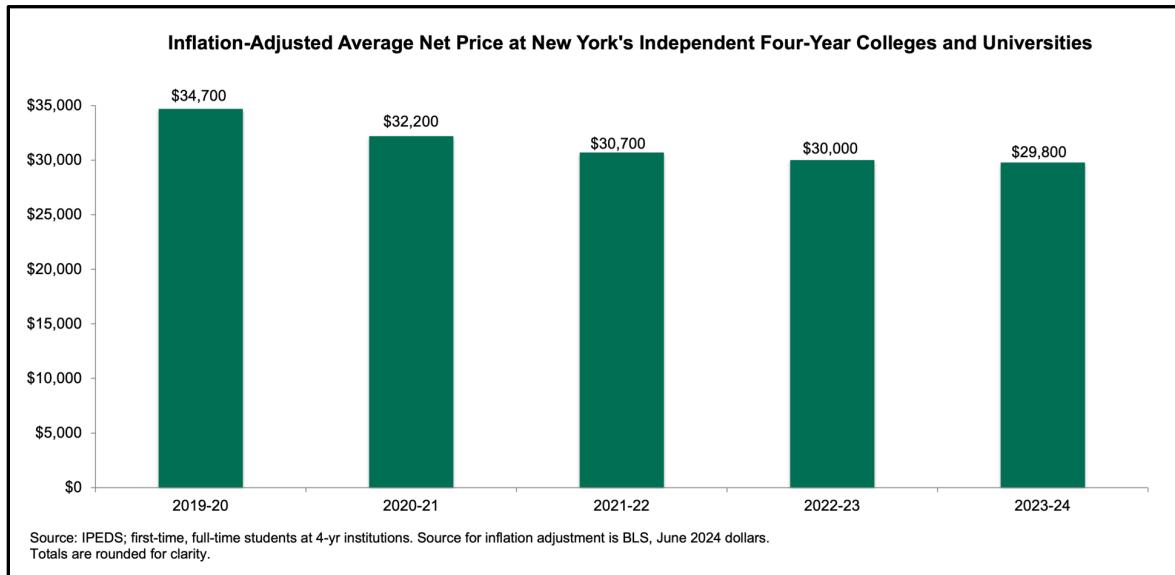
Net Price

This is the actual cost of attendance AFTER factoring in financial aid such as grants, scholarships, and work-study programs. It's the amount students realistically pay out of pocket. The net price is typically much lower than the sticker price, especially for students with financial need. This is because many colleges offer financial aid to make attending more affordable.

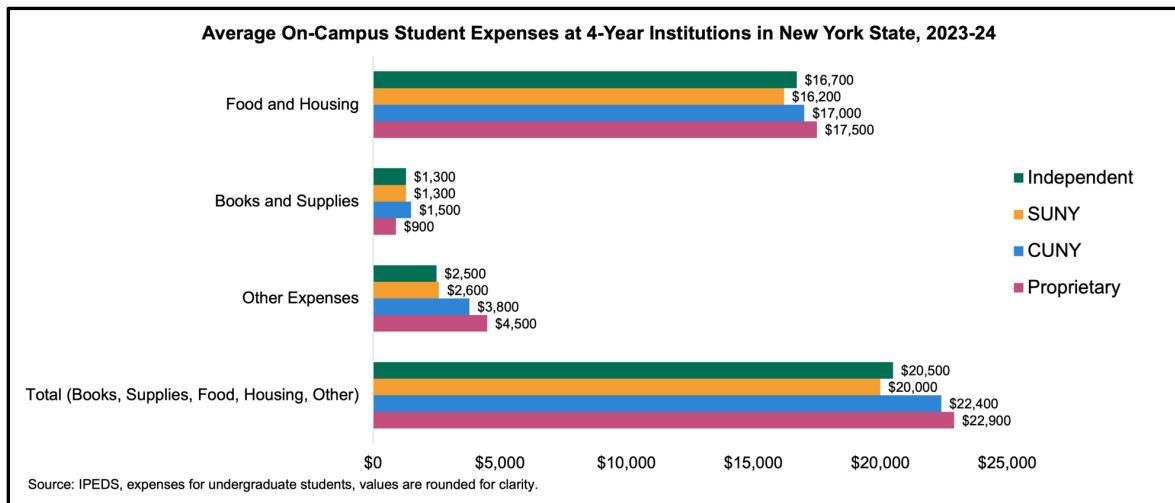
When comparing colleges, net price is a much more accurate reflection of what students actually pay. Colleges provide net price information on their websites or financial aid award letters.

Average Net Price at New York's Independent Colleges and Universities¹⁴

The average net price (or, actual cost) at independent four-year colleges and universities in New York State is \$29,800.¹⁵ When adjusted for inflation, the actual cost has decreased by 14 percent since the 2019-20 academic year (\$34,700 to \$29,800). On average, this is a reduction of nearly 4 percent each year since 2019-20.



While tuition charges vary between public and independent colleges, the cost of on-campus food and housing is about the same. In the 2023-24 academic year, average student expenses for food, housing, books, supplies, and other expenses were \$20,000 at SUNY and \$20,500 independent colleges.¹⁶



¹⁴ IPEDS, first-time, full-time students at 4-yr institutions. Source for inflation adjustment is the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), June 2024 dollars. Totals are rounded for clarity.

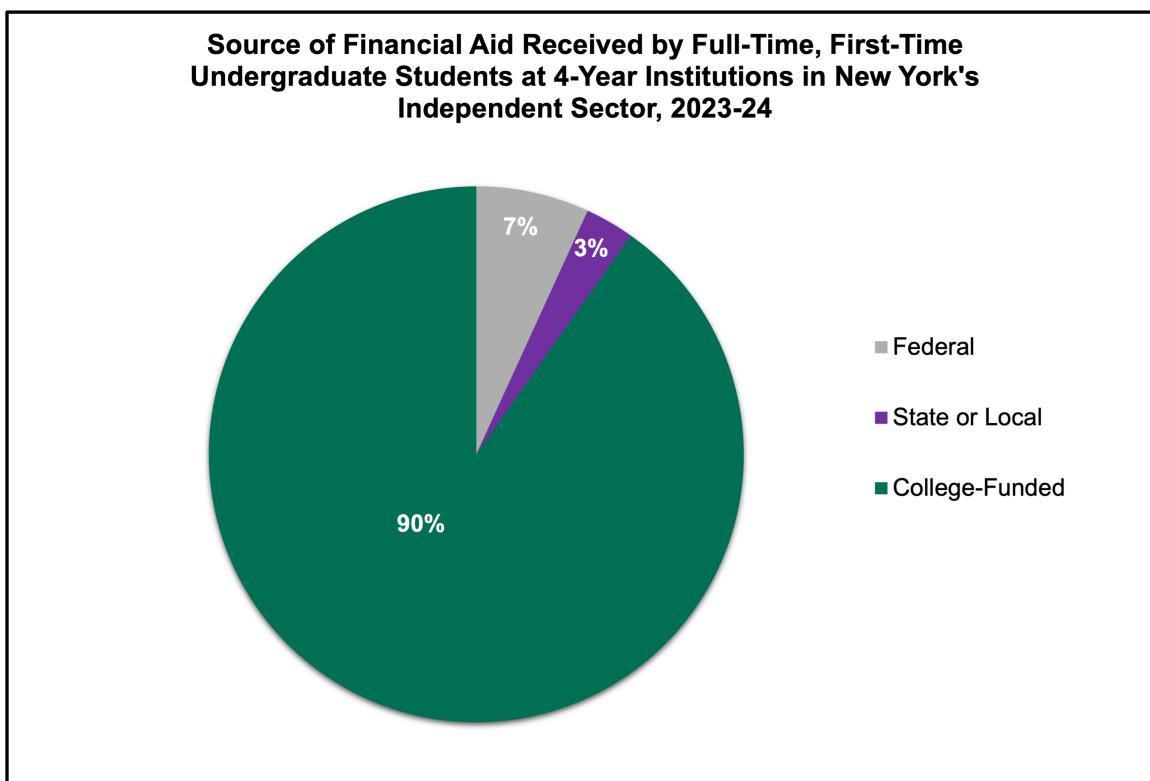
¹⁵ IPEDS, 2023-24, average net price for full-time, first-time undergraduates. Amount is rounded for clarity.

¹⁶ IPEDS, 2023-24, expenses at 4-yr/graduate colleges and universities.

Student Aid

While some independent institutions often have higher sticker prices than public universities, they tend to offer more generous financial aid packages, including merit-based scholarships and need-based grants. This can make them more affordable for some students, especially those with high academic achievement or financial need. Independent colleges and universities in New York gave students \$8.1 billion in financial aid from their own resources in academic year 2023-24.¹⁷

Sources of financial aid for first-time, full-time students: 90 percent from colleges, 7 percent from the federal government (e.g., Pell grants), and 3 percent from New York State (e.g., TAP, opportunity programs, Bundy Aid).¹⁸



Eighty-five percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate students enrolled in independent institutions receive some type of student aid.¹⁹ On average, first-time, full-time students at four-year independent colleges and universities in New York receive \$34,000 in financial aid per year (from institution, state, and federal sources).

Research and Development

Breakthrough research and development (R&D) on college campuses serves as a primary engine for societal progress, transforming abstract scientific inquiries into tangible solutions for global challenges. Unlike corporate R&D, which is often tethered to immediate marketability, university-based research thrives on "blue-sky" thinking—the pursuit of fundamental knowledge that can lead to radical innovations. Campus R&D spending supports medical research areas such as

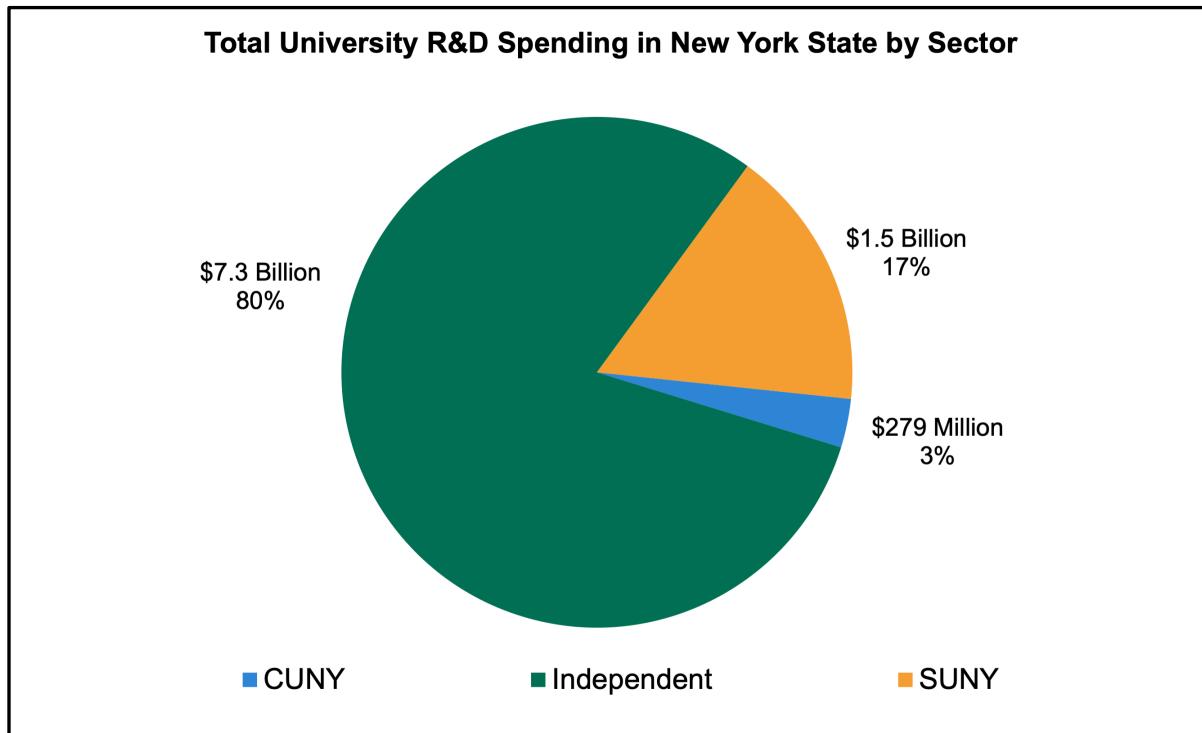
¹⁷ IPEDS, 2023-24, total institutional grants.

¹⁸ IPEDS, 2023-24, 4-yr/graduate institutions, first-time, full-time students.

¹⁹ IPEDS, 2023-24, 2-yr and 4-yr/graduate institutions.

cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes; and technology such as quantum computing, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, biotechnology, and advanced materials. When these breakthroughs occur, they do more than fill academic journals; they bridge the critical gap between theoretical discovery and commercial application, ultimately driving competitiveness and improving quality of life.

- New York State ranks second in the U.S. for higher education R&D spending with \$9.1 billion. California is first with \$13.5 billion.²⁰
- In fiscal year 2022-23, 80 percent of New York State's college and university R&D spending was done by independent institutions (\$7.3 billion of \$9.1 billion).²¹

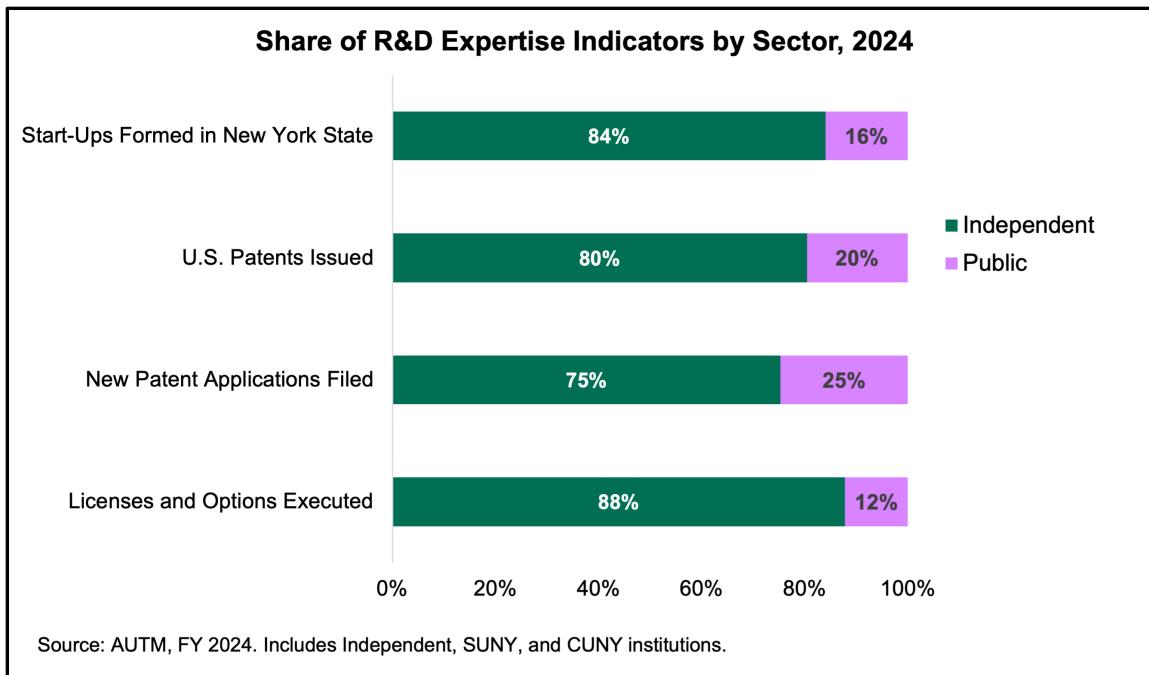


Independent institutions lead in the production of startups, patents, and technology licensing,²² which helps to connect students and faculty in a way that stimulates innovation and inspires students to convert their ideas into action. A high volume of patents indicates a robust pipeline of original ideas, while licensing agreements demonstrate that industry partners see real-world value in that research. Startups spun out of campus R&D activity signals a vibrant entrepreneurial culture where students and faculty are not just discovering new phenomena but are actively building the companies and industries of the future.

²⁰ National Science Foundation (NSF) - The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) - Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey 2023.

²¹ Ibid.

²² AUTM (formerly known as Association of University Technology Managers), fiscal year (FY) 2024.



Counts of Licenses, Patents, and Startups, 2024 ²³				
NY Sector	Licenses and Options Executed	New Patent Applications Filed	U.S. Patents Issued	Startups Formed in New York State
CUNY	3	18	9	0
Independent	439	685	312	21
SUNY	58	207	67	4
Total	500	910	388	25
% CUNY	1%	2%	2%	0%
% Independent	88%	75%	80%	84%
% SUNY	12%	23%	17%	16%
% Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Most Independent Sector Students Remain in New York After Graduating

New York's Independent Sector is the largest in the country, with nearly 500,000 students. The migration of first-time college students has become a prominent feature of contemporary higher education. Millions of young people annually leave their home states to attend colleges and universities located elsewhere. This migration, often driven by a complex set of factors, has profound implications for students, institutions, and states.

There are many reasons why students leave their home state to attend college. Advantages include:

- Access to specialized programs and renowned faculty
- Exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives
- Increased alignment with political views and values

²³ AUTM, FY 2024. Percentage totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

- Greater independence and self-reliance
- Potential for lower costs of living or more generous financial aid
- Proximity to job markets in certain fields

In fall 2024, 59,000 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in New York's four-year independent colleges and universities.²⁴ Fifty-two percent of these students graduated from New York State high schools and 48 percent travelled to New York from other states, countries, or U.S. territories. Upon graduating, 65 percent of independent sector students remain in New York State where they pursue their career goals and contribute to the state's economy.²⁵

Alumni

Independent colleges often have smaller, more tightly knit alumni communities. A strong alumni network provides students with a distinct competitive advantage by offering direct access to mentorship, internal job referrals, and a lifetime of professional development. Beyond just immediate career leads, these connections help students build essential social capital and industry-specific insights that are rarely taught in textbooks.

There are at least 5.4 million living alumni of Independent Sector colleges and universities. Forty-three percent (or, 2.3 million) live in New York State, and 57% (or, 3.1 million) live out-of-state.²⁶

Conclusion

Independent colleges and universities leverage a student-centered model that prioritizes low student-to-faculty ratios and generous financial aid packages, resulting in higher retention and graduation rates. These institutions cultivate communities where diverse student bodies excel in high-demand fields like nursing, teaching, and STEM fields, supported by immersive R&D and global study abroad programs. Independent colleges utilize their robust alumni networks and comprehensive career services to provide a seamless transition from the classroom to the workforce.

By excelling across these key metrics, the independent sector remains the premier choice for a high-impact, transformative education that yields lifelong professional and personal value.

²⁴ IPEDS, fall 2024, includes first-time students who enrolled within 12 months of having graduated from high school.

²⁵ This estimate is specific to state of residence five years after graduation. It's derived by analyzing publicly available data on college and university alumni webpages from LinkedIn. Years of attendance are self-reported by LinkedIn account holders. The self-reported profile information includes a geographic component that is aggregated at the state level.

²⁶ CICU Fall 2025 Preliminary Enrollment and Workforce survey.