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Leaving late: Understanding the extent and predictors of college late departure

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Research on college dropout has largely addressed early exit from school, even though a large share of students who do not earn degrees leave after their second year. In this paper, we offer new evidence on the scope of college late departure. Using administrative data from Florida and Ohio, we conduct an event history analysis of the dropout process as a function of credit attainment. Our results indicate that late departure is widespread, particularly at two- and open-admission four-year institutions. We estimate that 14 percent of all entrants to college and one-third of all dropouts completed at least three-quarters of the credits that are typically required to graduate before leaving without a degree. Our results also indicate that the probability of departure spikes as students near the finish line. Amidst considerable policy attention towards improving student outcomes in college, our findings point to promising new avenues for intervention to increase postsecondary attainment.

Keywords: Postsecondary completion; college dropout; late departure; human capital

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