



# **Completions Trends in Higher Education: Focus on Four-Year Colleges and Universities**

Findings from Enhanced IPEDS 2023 Data

September 26, 2024

# Agenda

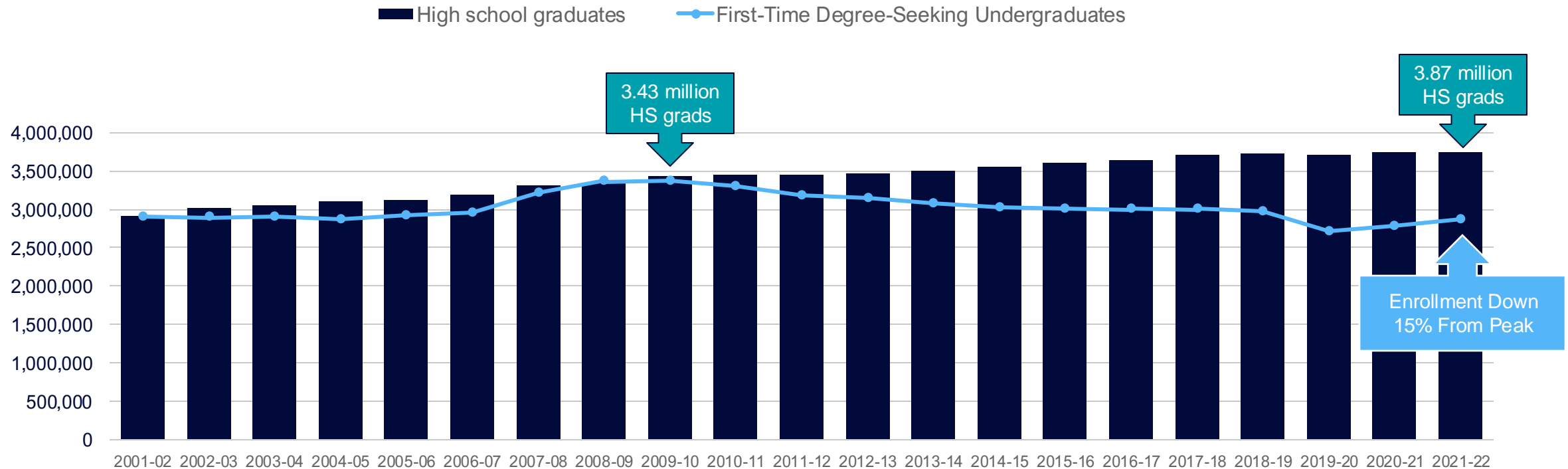
- **Overview of Enrollment and Completions Trends**
- **Undergraduate Certificates**
- **Associate Degrees**
- **Bachelor's Degrees**
- **Graduate Certificates**
- **Master's Degrees**
- **Doctoral Degrees**
- **Summary and Conclusions**

Today's data analysis was done to support the upcoming quarterly update to Gray's Program Evaluation System (PES).



# New enrollments have been dropping since 2010.

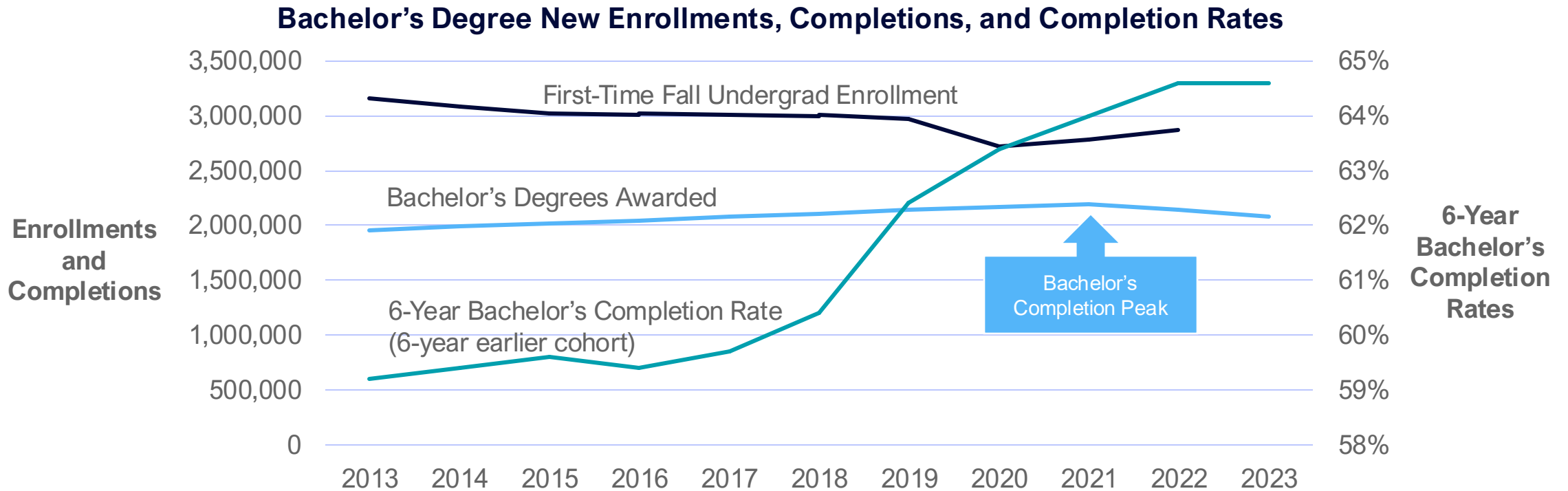
## Trends in High School Graduates and First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment



Sources: High school graduates - National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2023 Table 219.10. Graduates for academic year.  
 First-time (degree-seeking) undergraduate enrollment, fall term - National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS (Data Trends). Enrollment data plotted for fall term after high school graduation.

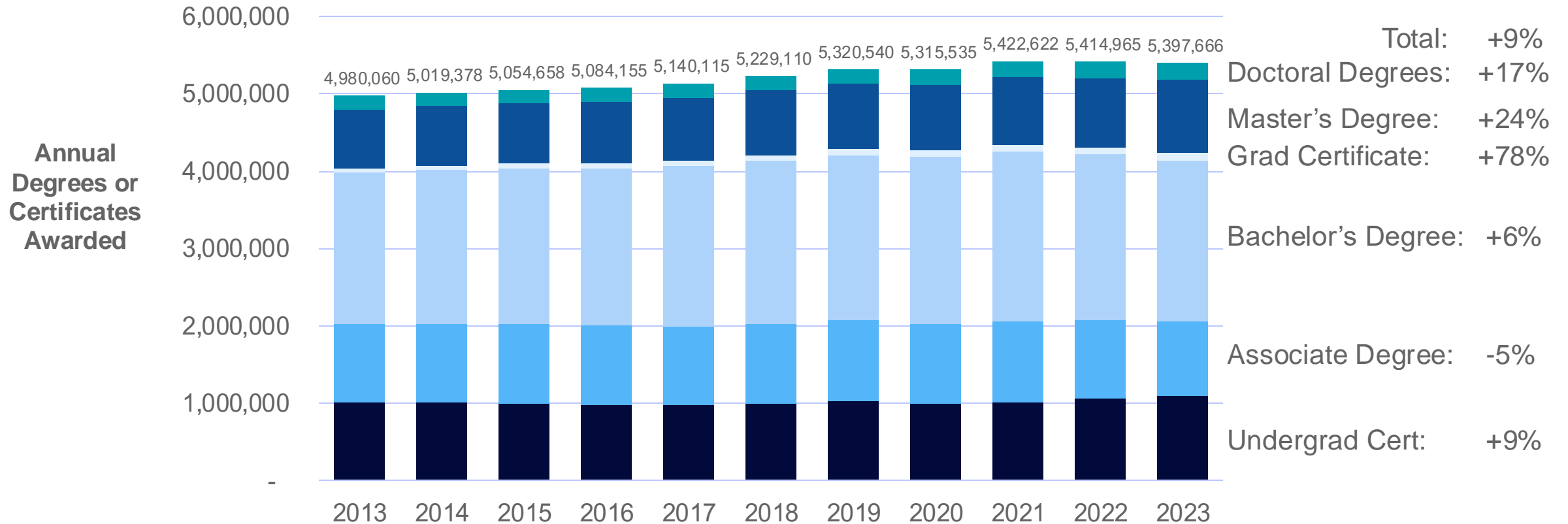
## In contrast, bachelor's degrees grew through 2021.

Lags in completion time and increases in completion rates account for the delay in the completions downturn.

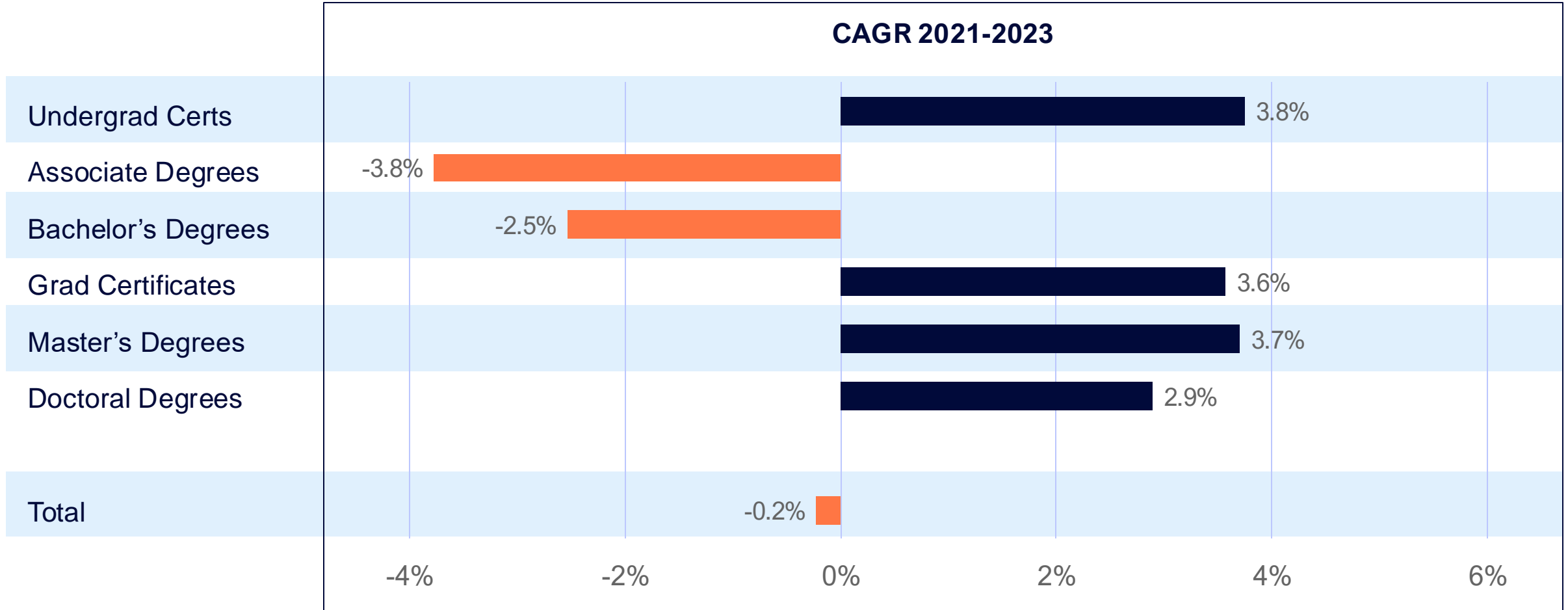


## Despite widely varying growth rates, the mix of completions by level is stable.

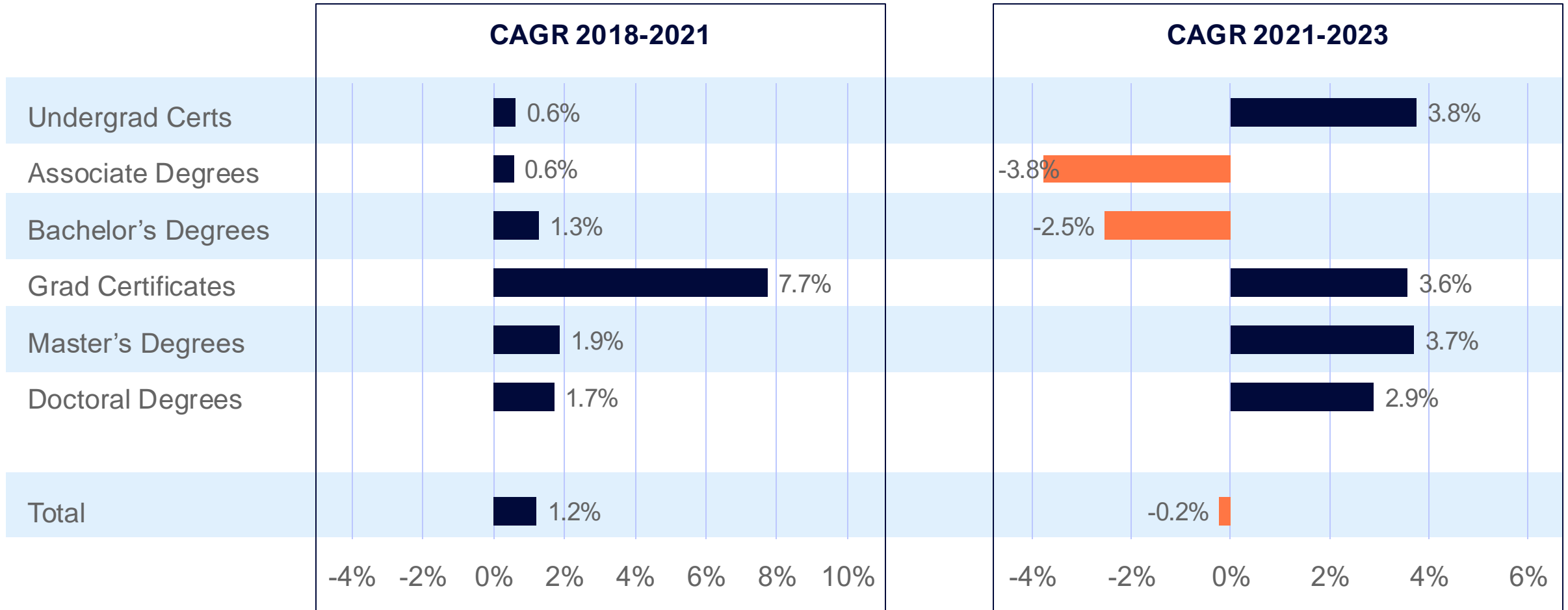
### National Higher Education Completions by Award Level



## Recent growth trends have differed strongly by award level.

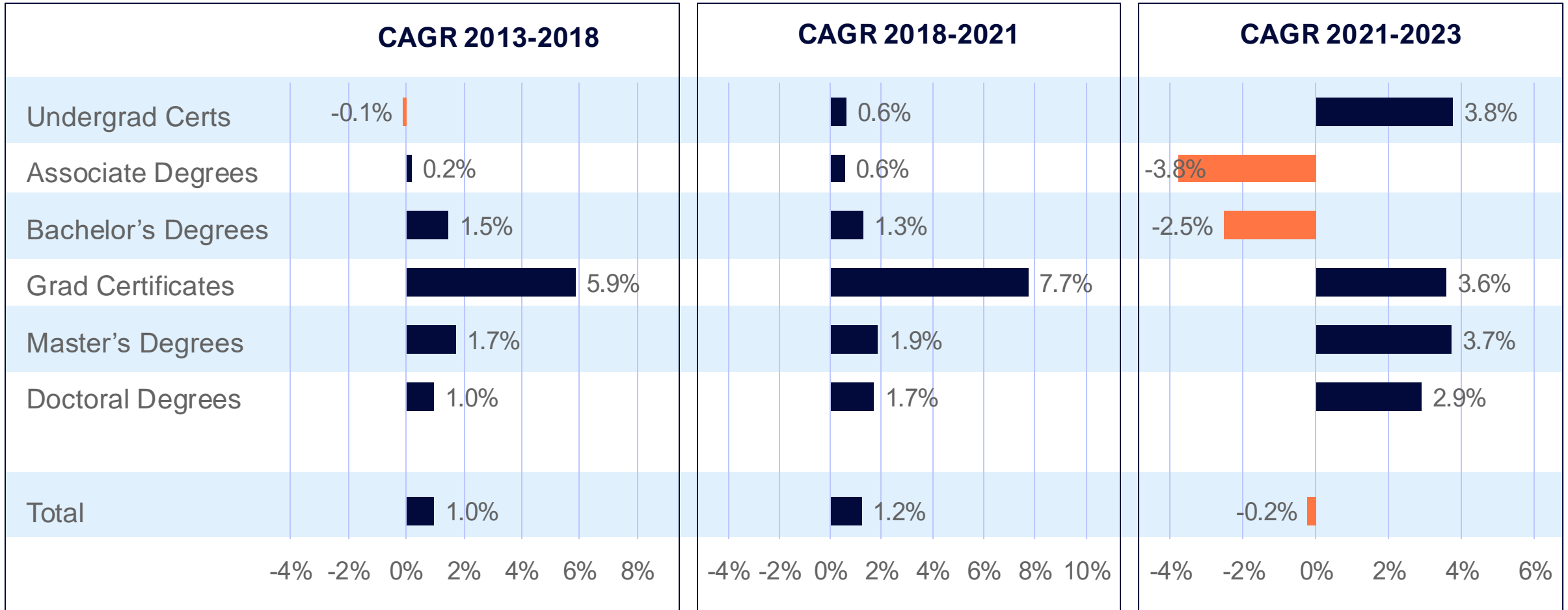


## Recent growth trends were a significant change from prior trends.



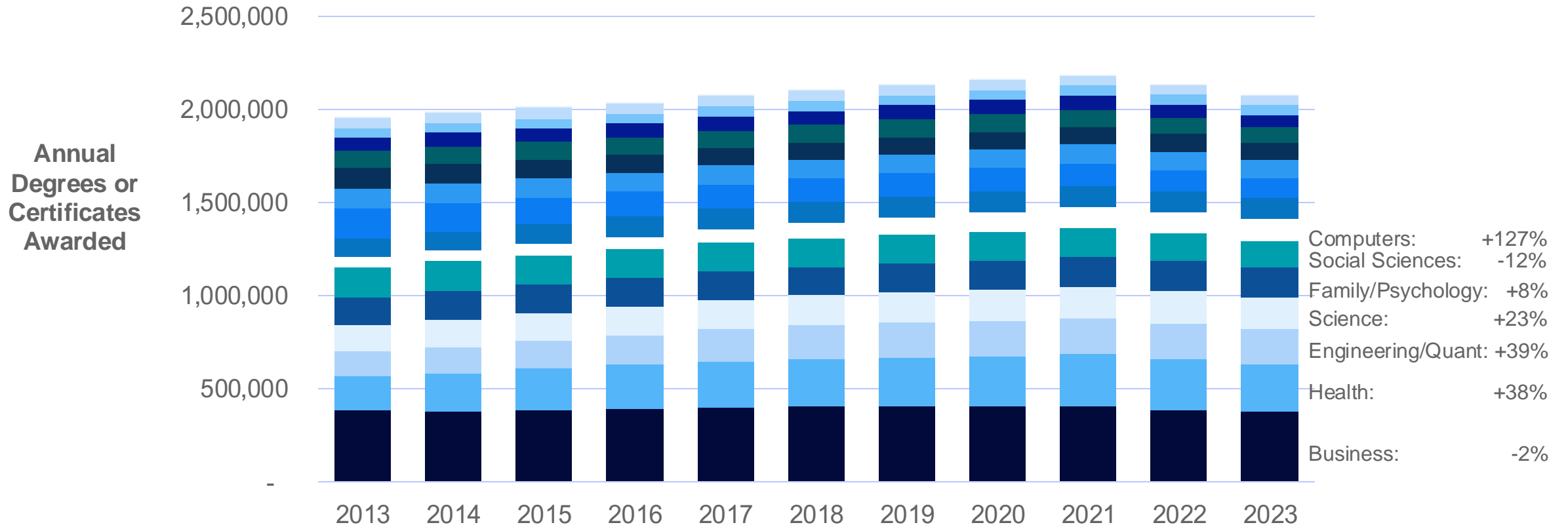


## Recent trends differ from comparatively stable pre-COVID trends.



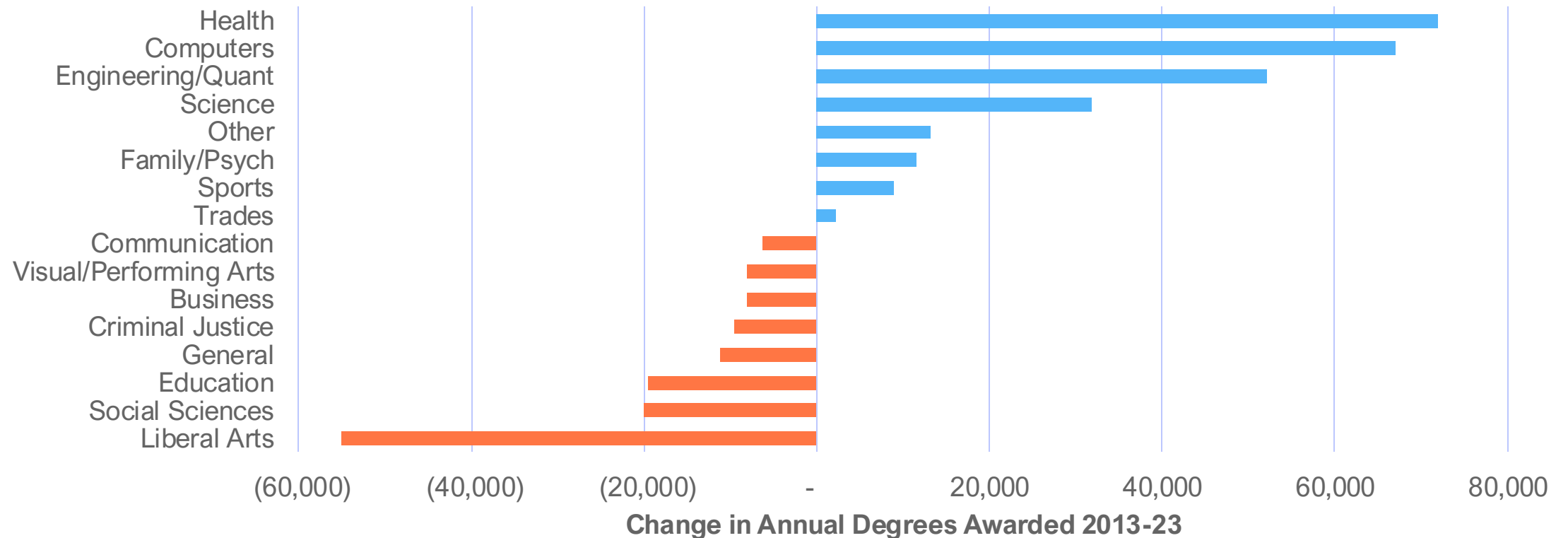
# Bachelor's degrees are not very concentrated by discipline.

## Bachelor's Degree Completions by Discipline



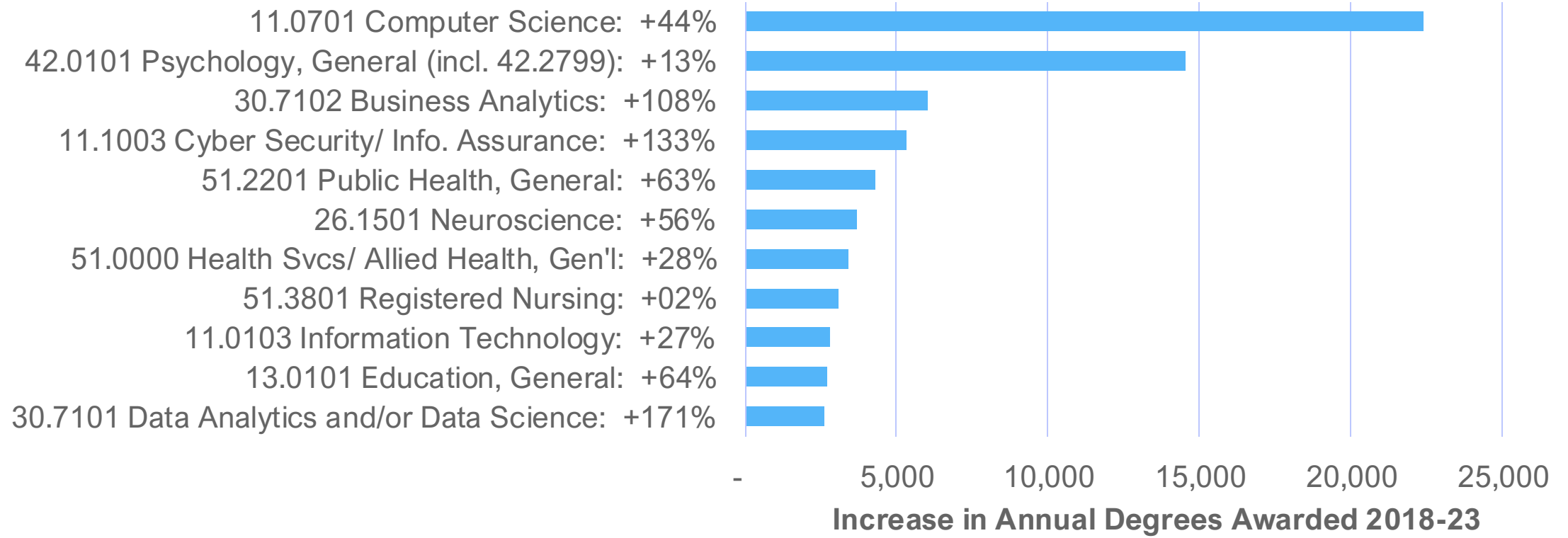
**For bachelor's degrees, health, computing, and engineering/quantitative fields have shown the most growth.**

**Trends in Bachelor's Degrees by Discipline**



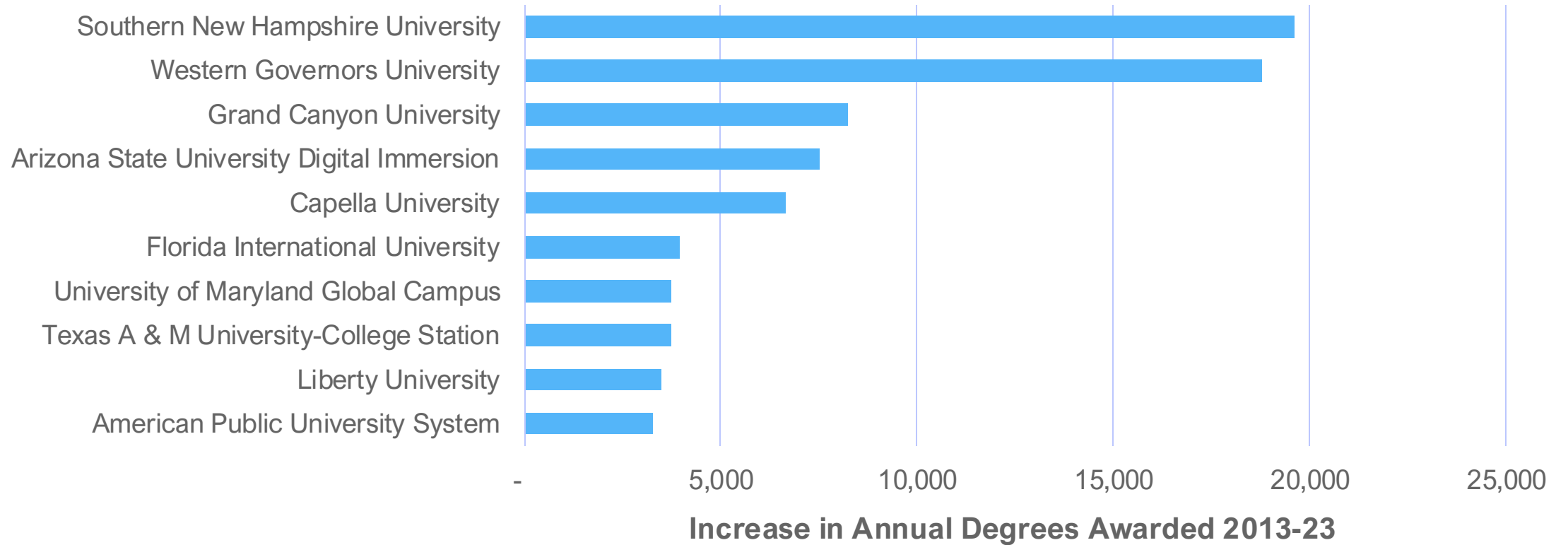
# Computer Science and Psychology have been the highest-growth bachelor's degree programs.

### Highest-Growth Bachelor's Degree Programs



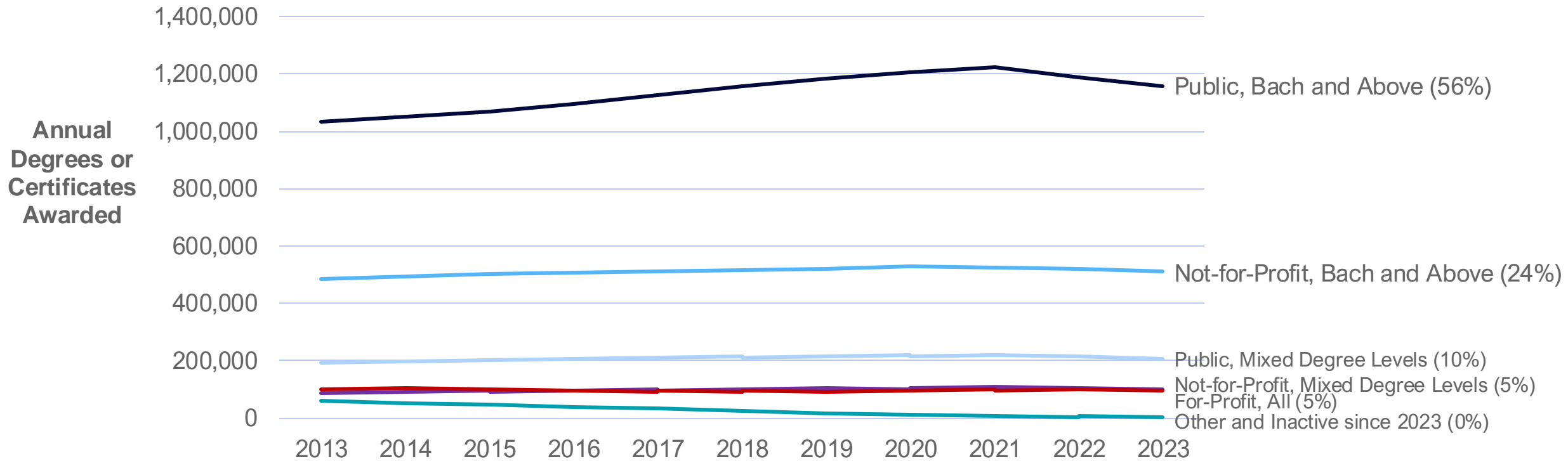
# The highest-growth institutions for bachelor's degrees are nearly all primarily online.

### Highest-Growth Institutions for Bachelor's Degrees



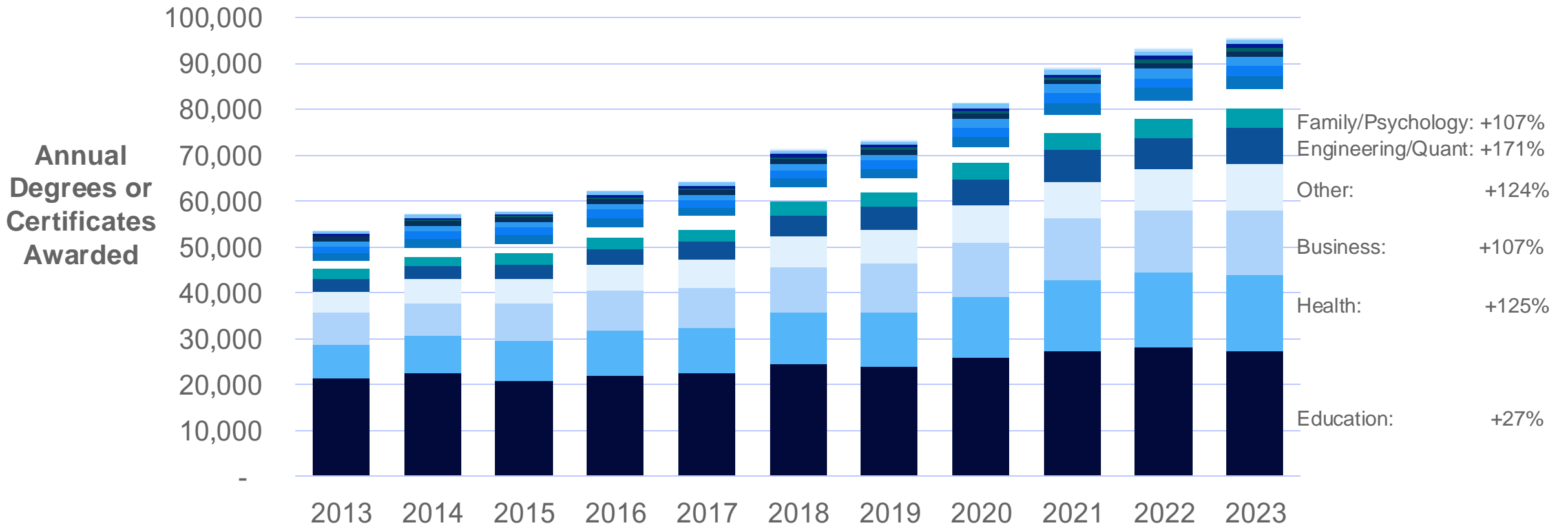
## Public colleges and universities dominate bachelor's degree completions.

### Bachelor's Degree Completions by 2023 Sector over Time



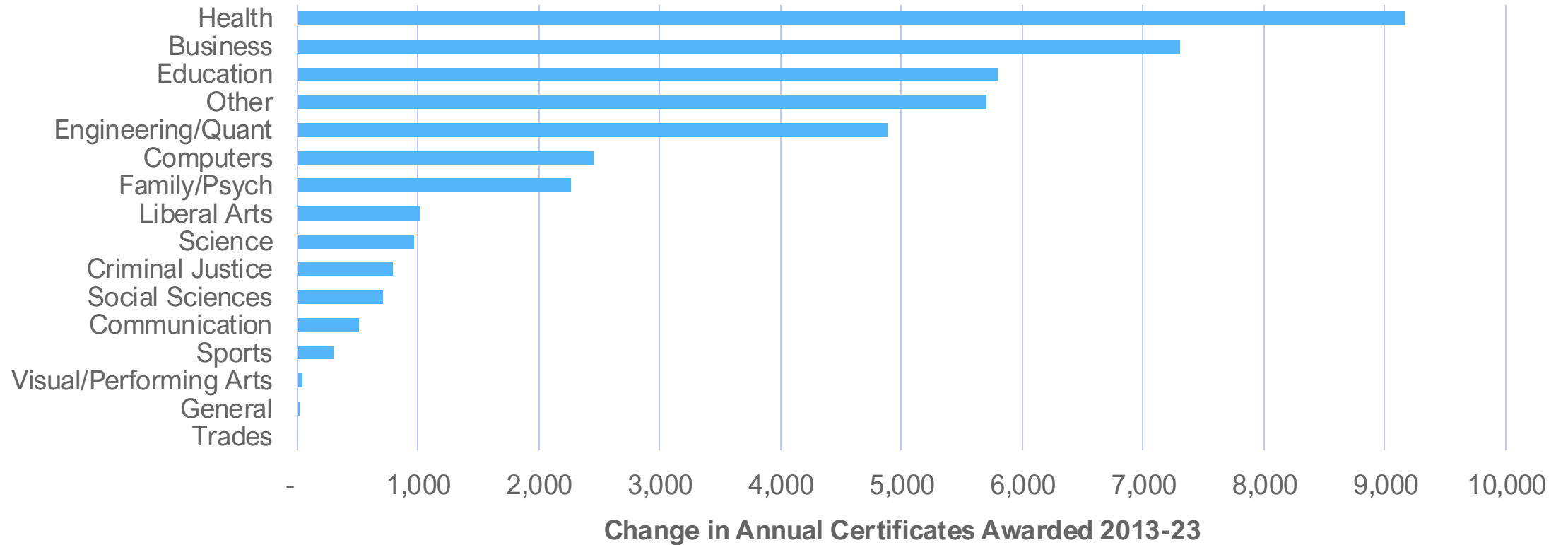
# Education and Health dominate graduate certificate completions.

## Graduate Certificate Completions by Discipline



## Every discipline showed growth in graduate certificates.

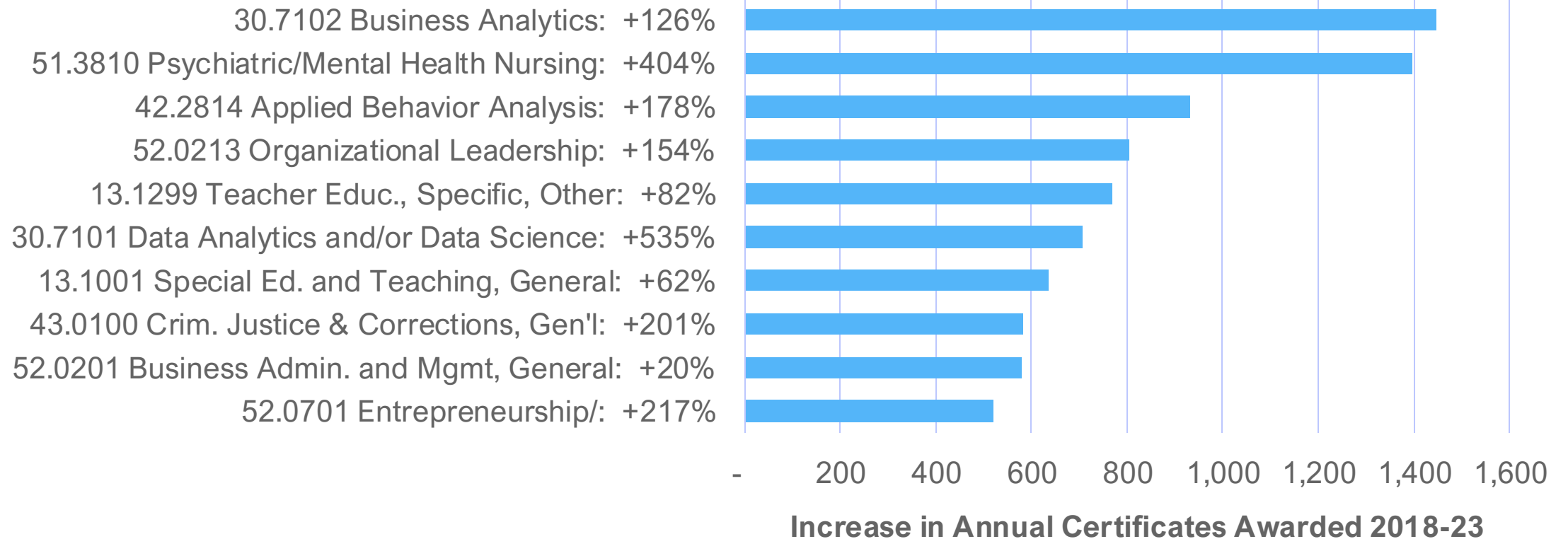
Trends in Graduate Certificates by Discipline





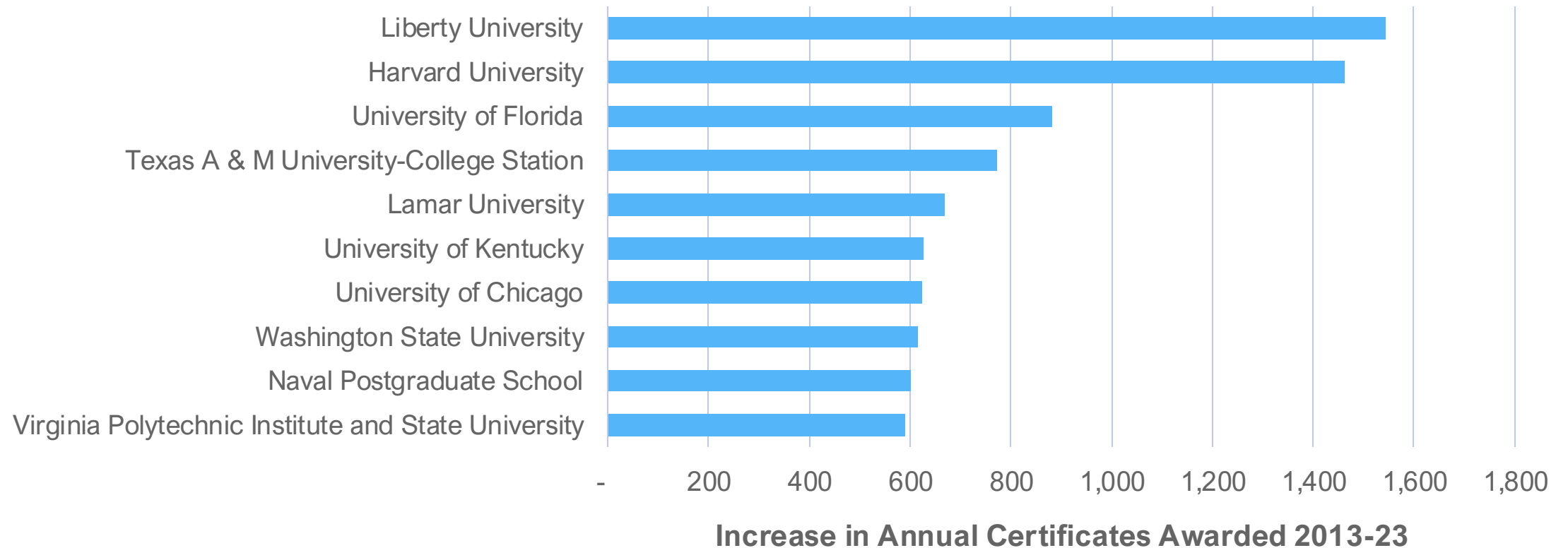
## Business Analytics and Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing have been the highest-growth graduate certificate programs.

### Highest-Growth Graduate Certificate Programs



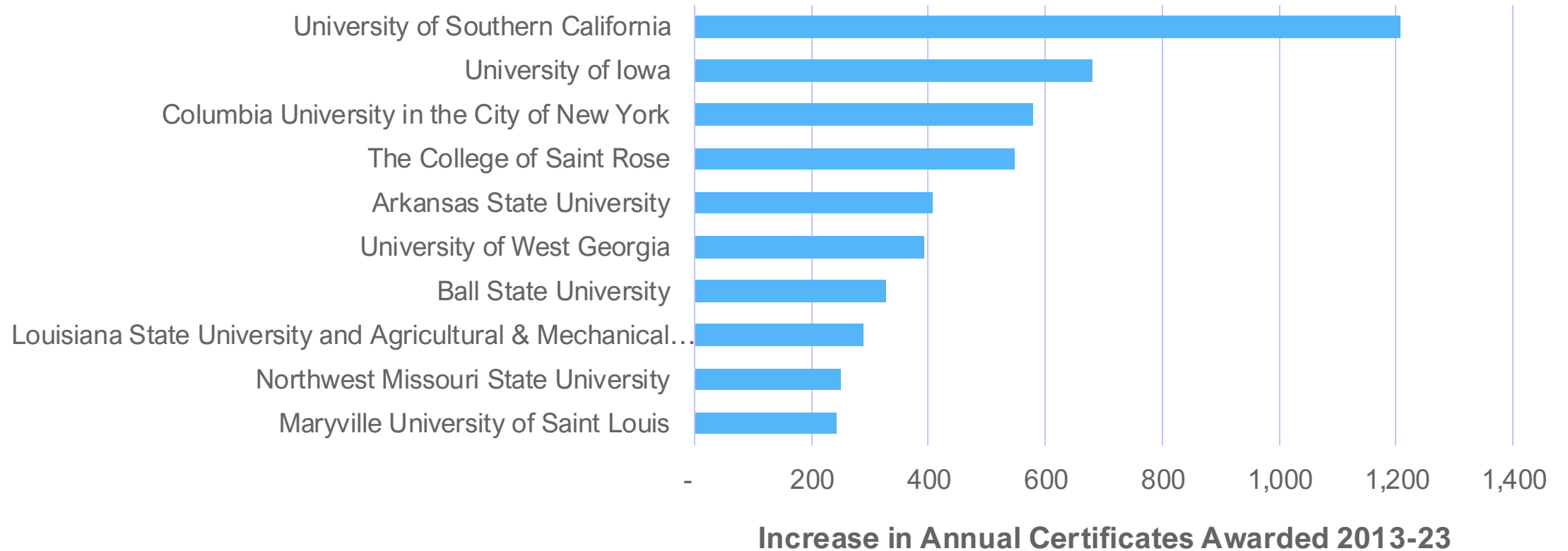
**The two highest-growth institutions for post-baccalaureate certificates are very different from each other.**

**Highest-Growth Institutions for Post-Baccalaureate Certificates**

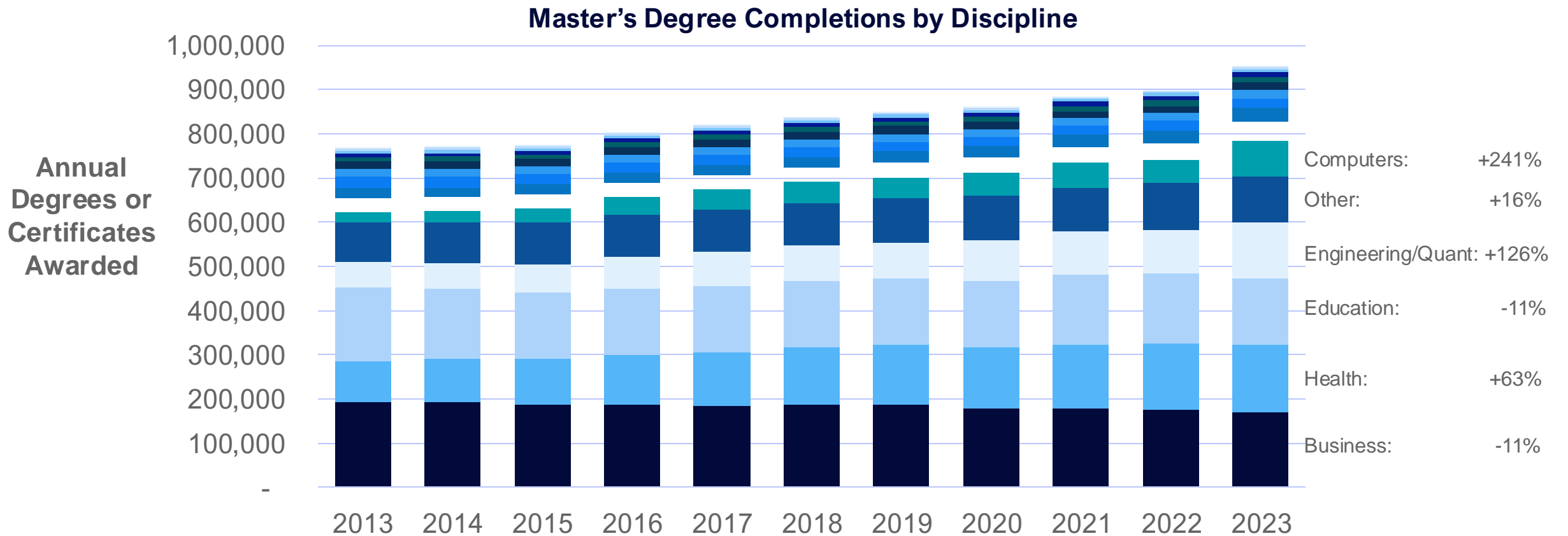


## The highest-growth institutions for post-master's certificates are all primarily on-campus.

### Highest-Growth Institutions for Post-Master's Certificates

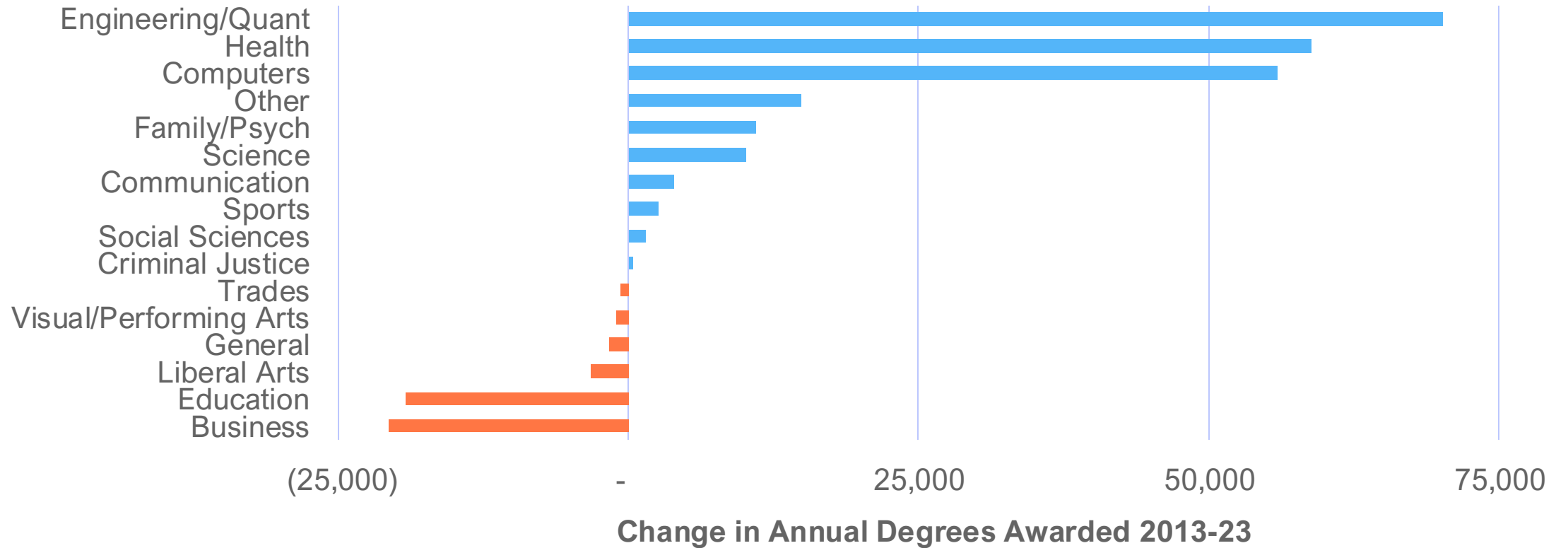


# Business, Health, Education, and Quantitative programs account for two-thirds of master's degree completions.



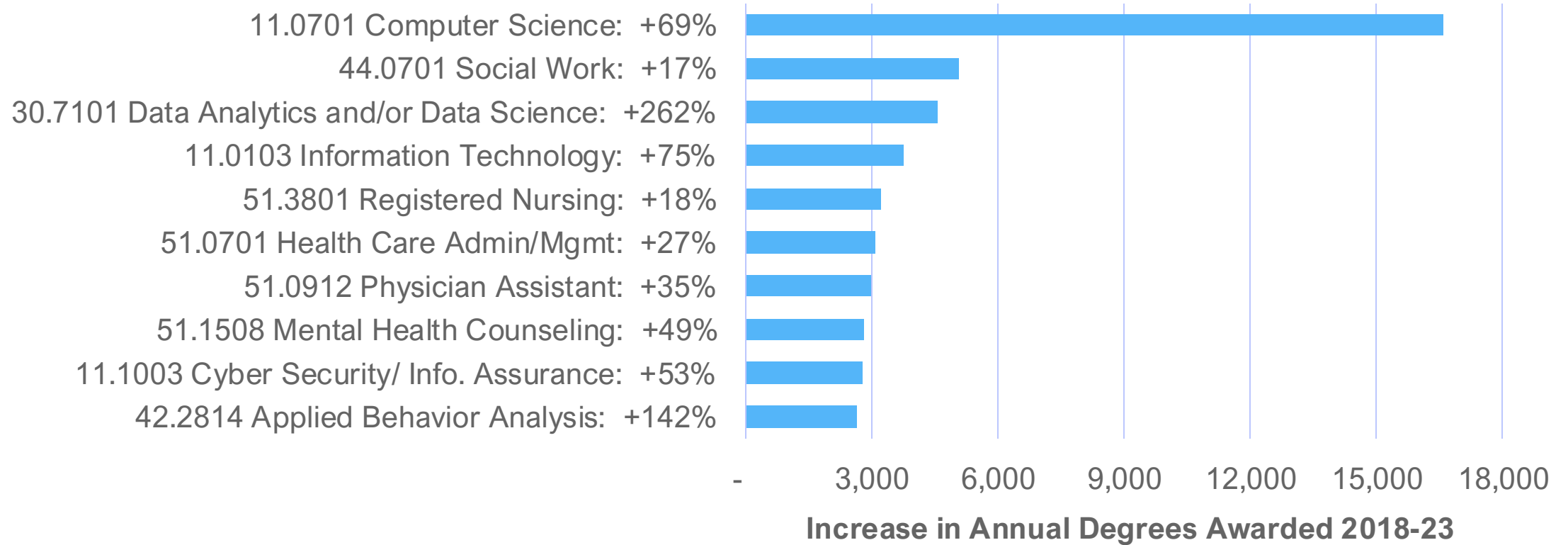
## Quantitative, Health, and Computer disciplines accounted for most growth in master's degrees.

Trends in Master's Degrees by Discipline 2013-23



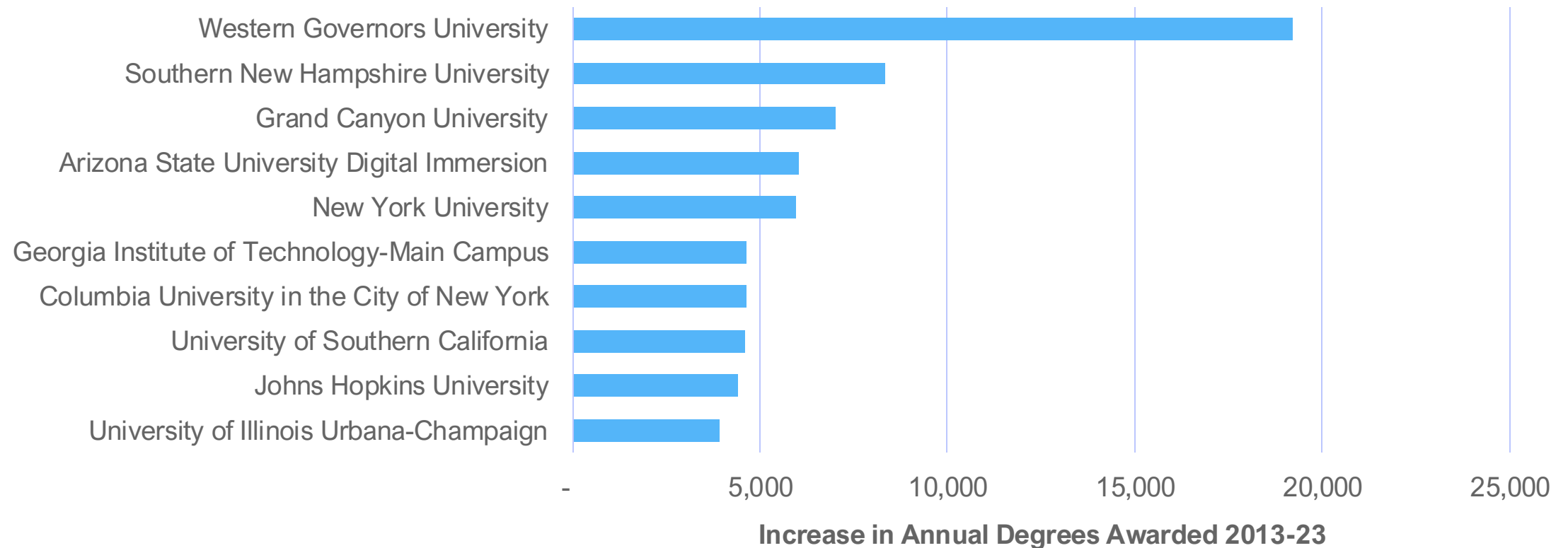
# Computer Science has been the highest-growth master's degree program.

## Highest-Growth Master's Degree Programs

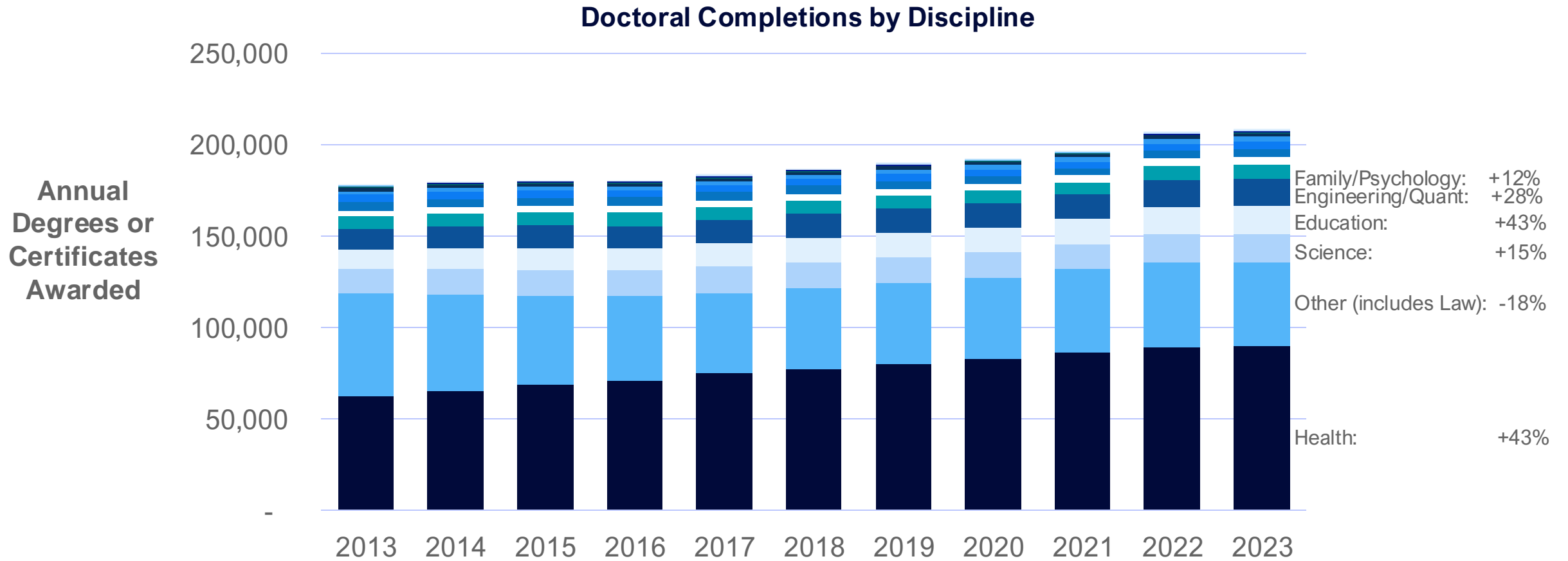


**While the four highest-growth institutions for master's degrees are all primarily online, the next group are all primarily on-campus.**

**Highest-Growth Institutions for Master's Degrees**



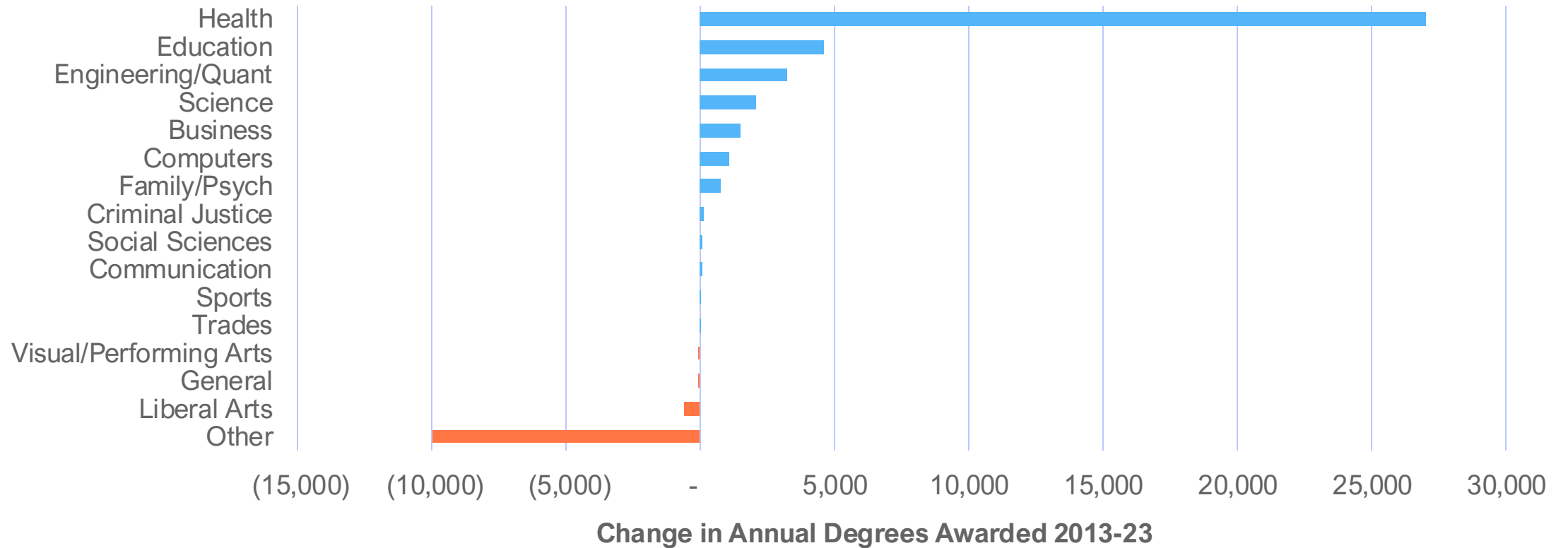
## Health and Law programs dominate doctoral completions.





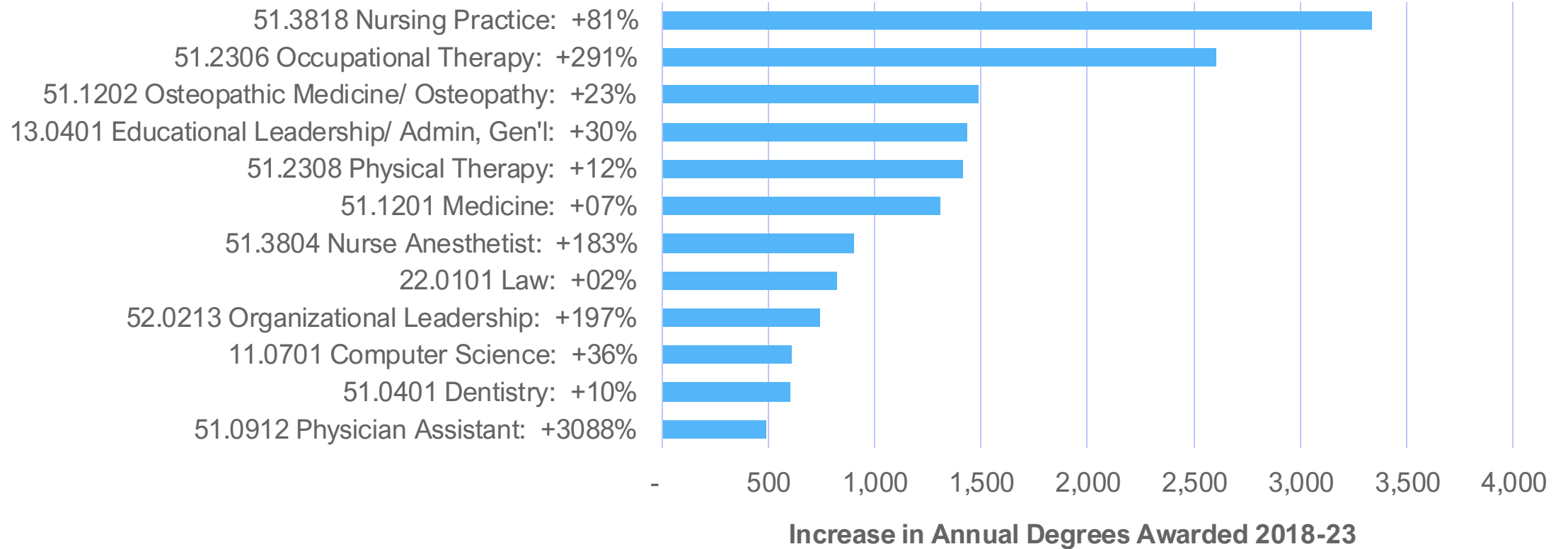
## Health disciplines accounted for most growth in doctoral degrees.

Trends in Doctoral Degrees by Discipline 2013-23



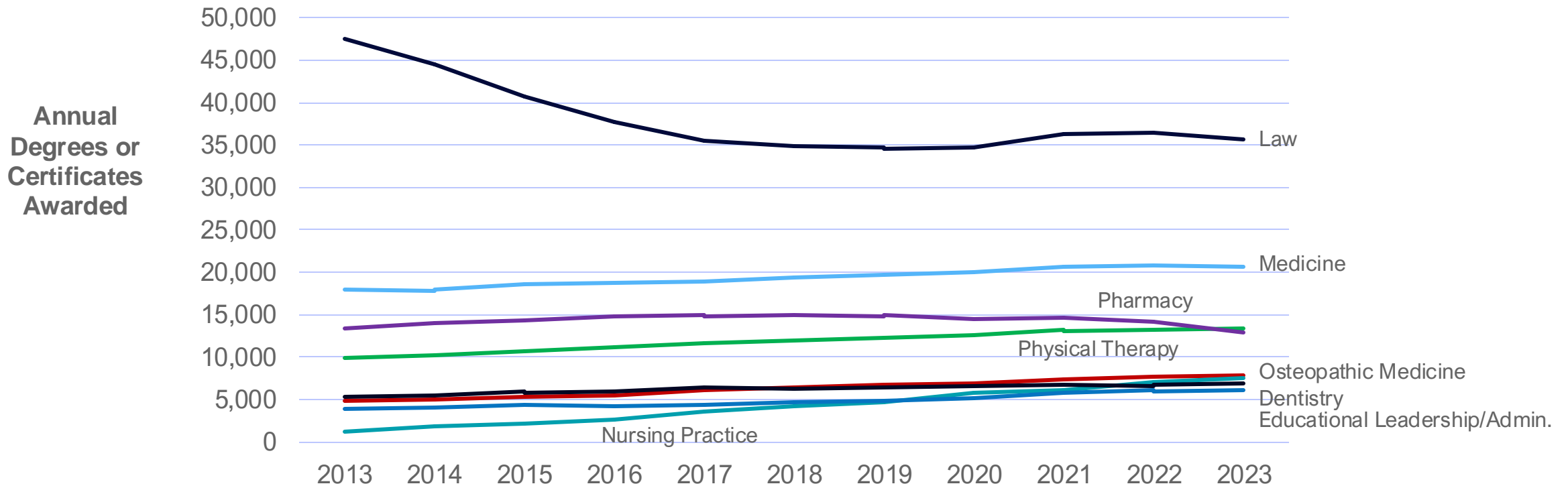
## DNP and Occupational Therapy have been the highest-growth doctoral programs.

### Highest-Growth Doctoral Programs



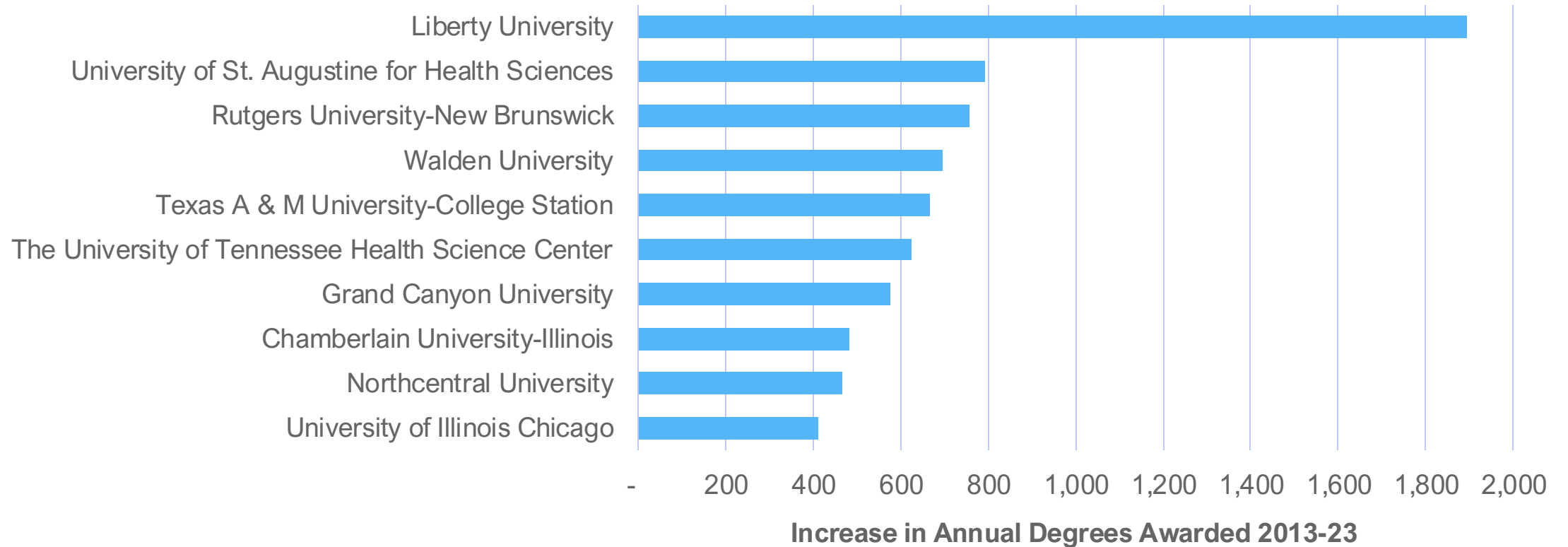
## Law doctorates declined sharply, while DNP, Osteopathy, and PT have grown.

**Doctoral Degrees Awarded: Seven Largest Doctoral Programs in 2023**



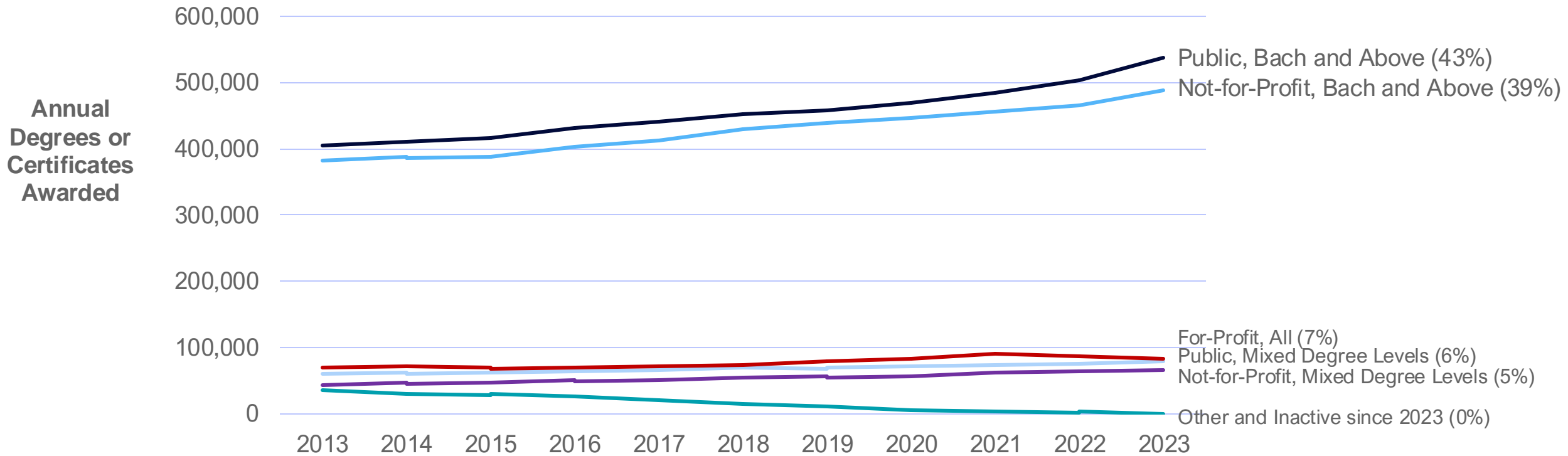
## The highest-growth institutions for doctoral degrees are diverse.

### Highest-Growth Institutions for Doctoral Degrees



## Public and not-for-profit universities split the graduate degree and certificate markets.

Graduate Degree and Certificate Completions by 2023 Sector over Time



## Summary and Conclusions: Overall and Bachelor's Degrees

- Total completions peaked in 2021 and have begun a slow decline.
  - Associate and bachelor's degrees are driving the overall decline, dropping 3.8% and 2.5% annually, respectively, for the past two years.
  - In contrast, undergrad certificates and graduate degrees and certificates have each been growing at 3% to 4% annually.
  - This represents a big change from the previous eight years, when completions at most levels were growing slowly, except for rapid growth in the relatively small market for graduate certificates.
- For Bachelor's degrees, the ten-year trends are what we've all heard:
  - Liberal arts completions have dropped more than any other disciplinary area.
  - Fields with more obvious employment opportunities – health, computing, engineering and quantitative analysis – have shown the most absolute growth.
  - General studies has declined despite highly visible initiatives to increase degree completion by transfer and stopped-out students.
  - While business continues to be the biggest disciplinary area, degrees awarded in business peaked in 2019.
  - All the highest-growth institutions have been online-focused.
  - There have not been meaningful share changes by sector for Bachelor's degrees in the past 10 years.

## Summary and Conclusions: Graduate Certificates

- Graduate certificates have growth dramatically, though that growth has slowed in the past few years.
  - The biggest growth areas have been health and business – but essentially every disciplinary area has had some growth.
  - Business Analytics and Mental Health Nursing are the two programs with the most grad certificate growth in the past five years.
  - The institutions with high growth in post-baccalaureate certificates are very disparate: the top two are Liberty and Harvard Universities.
  - The institutions with high growth in post-master’s certificates are all on-campus focused.
  - Anecdotal evidence indicates that much of the growth in graduate certificates is as exit ramps from graduate degree programs rather than as stand-alone programs or as stacked-credential entries to Master’s-degree programs.

## Summary and Conclusions: Graduate Degrees

- The number of Master's degrees awarded has grown steadily for 10 years, with 2023 showing a larger-than-average increase.
  - Business is the largest discipline for Master's degrees, but it has been slowly declining even as Master's degrees overall have grown.
  - Health has shown the most growth and is now one of the top three fields for Master's degrees.
  - Like Business, Education is one of the top three Master's fields but has not been growing. It saw significant declines 2013-2015 but has been fairly stable since.
  - Computer Science has shown the most growth for an individual program, with Data Analytics/Data Science close behind.
  - Growth has been dominated by primarily online institutions, with #1 Western Governors U. achieving more than twice the unit growth as #2 SNHU.
  
- The number of doctoral degrees has been growing steadily.
  - Health-related fields have been the biggest driver of this growth and account for significantly more doctorates than any other disciplinary area.
  - Six of the top seven fields for 5-year doctoral growth are health-related: DNP, OT, Osteopathy, PT, Medicine, and Nurse Anesthetist.
  - While Law had been declining, it has begun to grow again.
  - The highest-growth institutions for doctoral degrees are diverse, reflecting strengths in different disciplines. Liberty U.'s 10-year growth in doctorates awarded is more than double that of any other institution.
  - Public and not-for-profit institutions roughly split the doctoral market. They account for similar shares of doctorates awarded and of the growth in doctoral degrees.



## Upcoming October Webinars

### Higher Education Demand Trends

Join us next month as we present the latest data on student demand and employment opportunities.

## GRAY DI OCTOBER DEMAND TRENDS WEBINARS

TOPIC	DATE
COMMUNITY COLLEGES	OCT 30 @ 2 PM ET
BACHELOR'S AND ABOVE	OCT 31 @ 2 PM ET

