

# Who Goes and Who Stays? College Attendance and Persistence by Parental Characteristics

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## Introduction

Approximately 3 million Americans aged 16-24 complete high school every year<sup>1</sup>

- Around 2/3 of these graduates transition to college
- 80% of first-time, full-time undergraduates persist to the following year at four-year institutions; 60% at two-year institutions

Parental characteristics have been shown to be important determinants of the transition to and persistence in college for children:

- Large parental wealth and income gaps exist<sup>2</sup>
- Increases in parent housing equity increase attendance and attainment<sup>3</sup>
- Associations are changing over time<sup>4</sup>

SIPP provides both the ability to **observe parental characteristics for financially independent college students** and an **updated look at the relationships between parental characteristics and college transitions and persistence**

## Data and Methods

**Data:** 2014-2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation, public-use data files

- Respondents asked enrollment status in each month of the previous year
- *Transition sample:* 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the spring semester
- *Persistence sample:* First-year college students in the spring semester
- Students in both samples must have lived with parents at some point during the survey for parental characteristics to be available

**Dependent Variables:**

- *Transition to college:* The rate at which students experience the start of a college enrollment spell in the same wave as high school completion
- *Persistence in college:* The rate at which students report college enrollment at the end of the wave following first college enrollment

**Main Independent Variables:**

- Parental net worth, housing equity, monthly income, and educational attainment

**Methods: Summary across parental characteristics and logistic regressions**

- Compare transition and persistence rates across parental characteristics
- Likelihood of transition to college and persistence in college
- Logit regressions--Odds ratios across parental characteristics

## Discussion and Future Research

- **Transition and persistence gaps remain across parental wealth, housing equity, and income; large gaps also exist across parental education**
- Logit models confirm that parent wealth and education are associated with higher odds of college attendance after completing high school
- Logit models show greater odds of persistence with higher parental income; however, this effect may be isolated to children of highly educated parents
- The higher education landscape continues to change and the relationship between parental characteristics and college attainment may continue to evolve with it. The SIPP is well positioned to provide updated looks at who goes and who stays in college, with a unique look at the parental resources of financially independent students

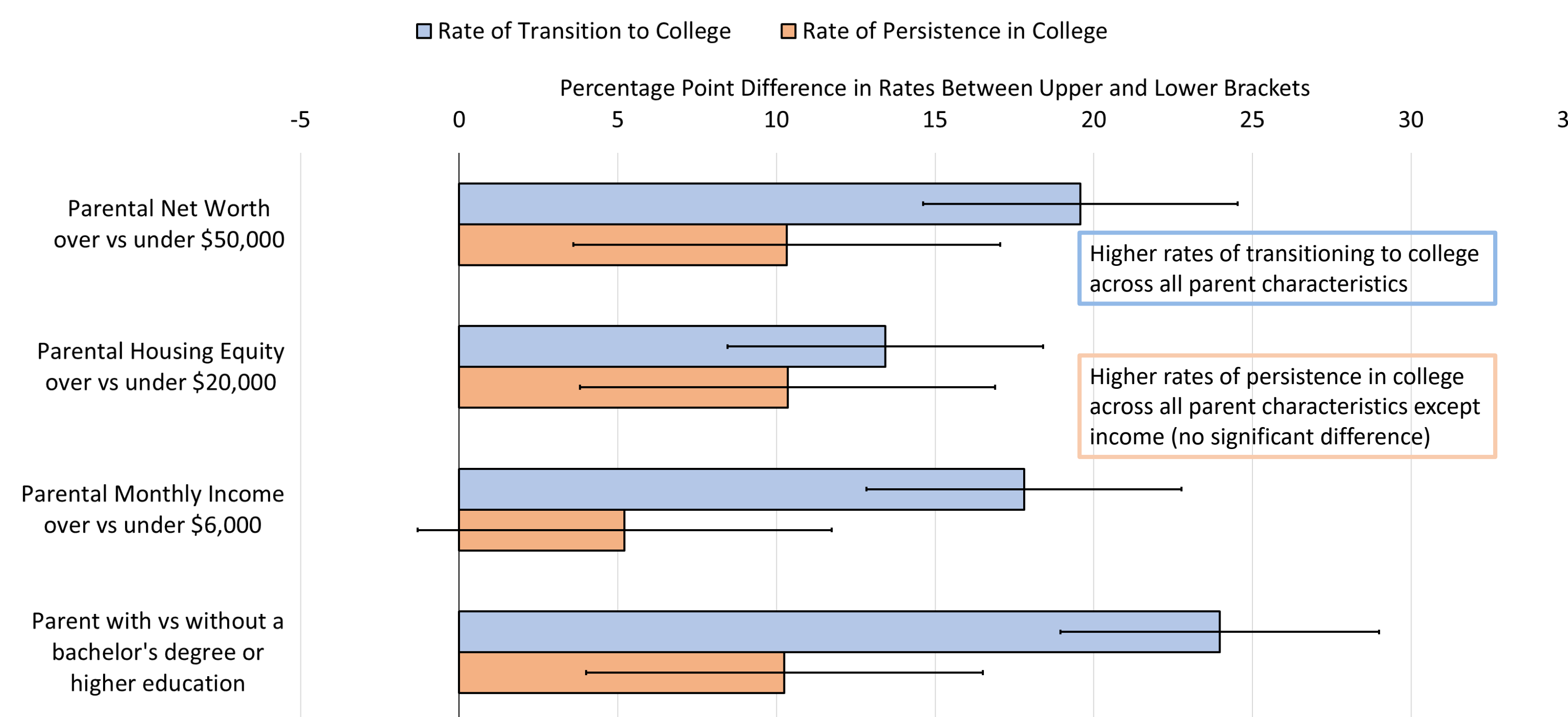
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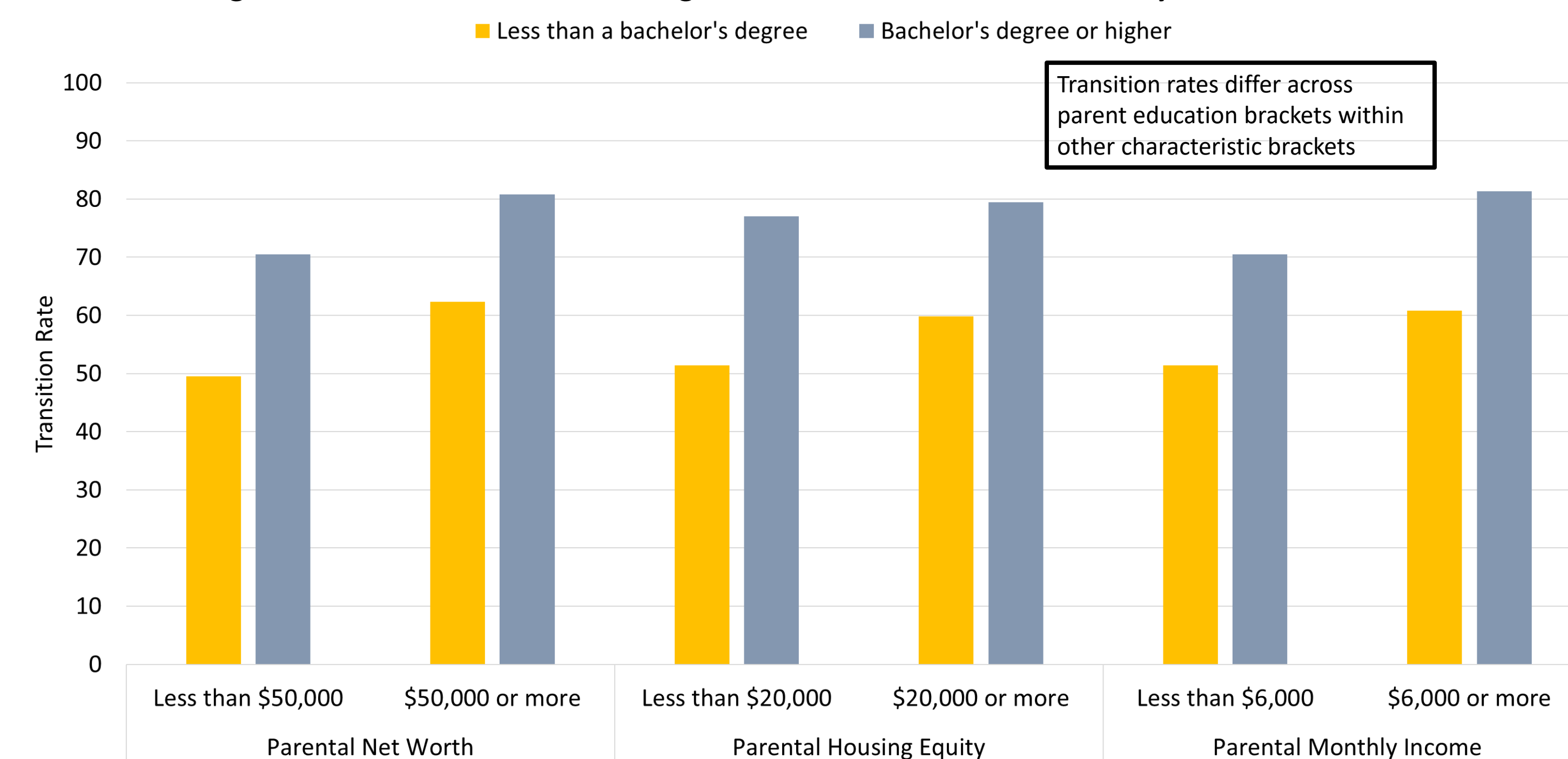
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**Figure 1: Difference in College Transition and Persistence Rates Across Parental Characteristics**



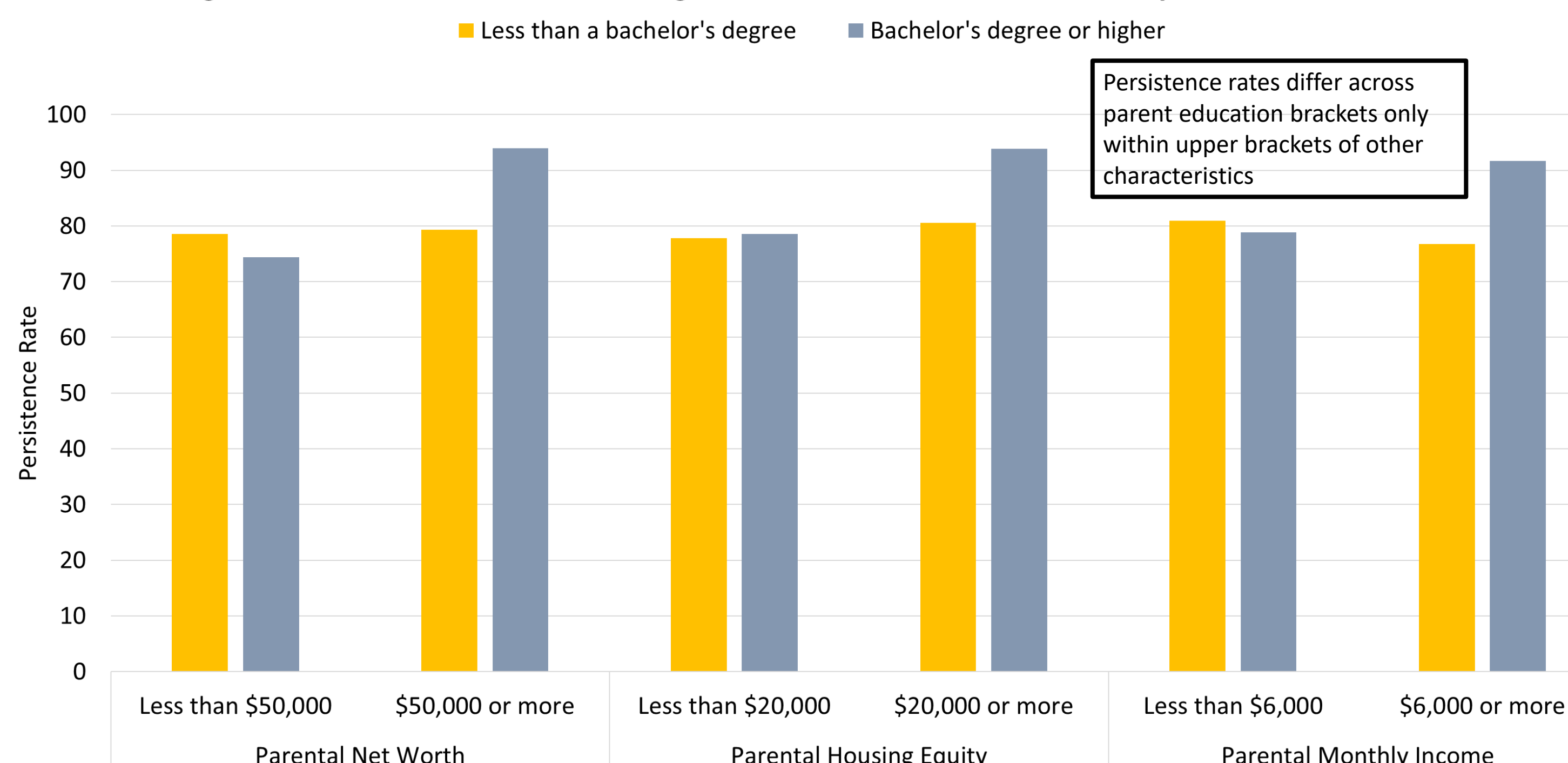
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation public-use files.  
Notes: Error bars correspond to 90% confidence intervals.

**Figure 2: Rate of Transition to College Across Parental Characteristics by Parental Education**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation public-use files.

**Figure 3: Rate of Persistence in College Across Parental Characteristics by Parental Education**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation public-use files.

**Table 1: Weighted Logit Regression (Odds Ratios) for Transition to College by Parental Characteristics**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parental net worth (\$10,000)	1.005	1.004	1.003	1.003	1.009**	1.008**
Parental housing equity (\$10,000)		1.009		1.007		1.012
Parental monthly income (\$1,000)	1.042**	1.042**	1.019	1.019	1.030	1.030
Parent with a bachelor's degree or higher			2.360***	2.356***	3.120***	3.144***
Parental net worth interaction (\$10,000)					0.992*	0.993
Parental housing equity interaction (\$10,000)						0.989
Parental monthly income interaction (\$1,000)					0.983	0.983
Constant	1.053	1.045	0.862	0.856	0.763	0.762
N	1,443	1,443	1,443	1,443	1,443	1,443

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation public-use files.  
Notes: All specifications include controls for race, sex, and number of children in the family. Increments in parentheses. Net worth excludes housing equity when both variables are included in a specification.

**Table 2: Weighted Logit Regression (Odds Ratios) for Persistence in College by Parental Characteristics**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parental net worth (\$10,000)	1.003	1.000	1.002	1.000	1.000	1.000
Parental housing equity (\$10,000)		1.036**		1.036**		1.021
Parental monthly income (\$1,000)	1.074***	1.069***	1.062***	1.055**	1.013	1.005
Parent with a bachelor's degree or higher			1.606	1.588	0.630	0.533
Parental net worth interaction (\$10,000)					1.004	0.998
Parental housing equity interaction (\$10,000)						1.047
Parental monthly income interaction (\$1,000)					1.109**	1.120**
Constant	1.913*	1.663	1.680	1.454	2.447**	2.210*
N	540	540	540	540	540	540

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation public-use files.  
Notes: All specifications control for the number of children in the family. Increments in parentheses. Net worth excludes housing equity when both variables are included in a specification.

## Logit Model Results

*Parental net worth and education associated with higher odds of transitioning to college; high-education parental income associated with persistence*

- The odds of attending college are **0.8-0.9% higher for every \$10,000 increase in parent net worth** at the time of children's high school graduation
- The odds of attending college are **2-3 times as high for those whose parents have a bachelor's or higher education**, independent of net worth and income
- First-year college students are **5.5-7.4% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 increase in parent monthly income**. Interacting income with education shows that this increase in likelihood occurs only **for students with highly educated parents, who are 11-12% more likely to persist for every \$1,000 increase**
- Higher housing equity associated with 3.6% higher odds of persistence

## References

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