

# The Changing Profile of University of The Bahamas Graduates

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## Abstract

This paper uses graduation data to show the changes which have occurred in the profile of University of the Bahamas's graduates from 1976 to 2023 as it enters its 51st year of operation. The data demonstrate the rise and fall in the number of graduates receiving associate's degrees and the subsequent rise in the number of graduates receiving bachelor's degrees. The graduation data show a complex ongoing picture of change and consolidation since the College was granted university status by the Government of The Bahamas in 2016. The *2019-2024 Strategic Plan* stated that it "builds on the previous plan by recognising the institution's responsibility to the growth and development of the individual and the nation, its commitment to sound undergraduate and graduate programmes" while at the same time acknowledging the institutions' heritage by reinforcing "the foundation upon which University of The Bahamas continues to be built" (University of The Bahamas, 2019, p. 9; College of The Bahamas, 2009).

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In 1974, The College of The Bahamas was modelled on a British-style sixth form college. Accordingly, at its founding, the College offered British General Certificate of Education or GCE A-levels (advanced school-level examinations typically taken by those seeking entrance to United Kingdom universities), as well as technical vocational subjects. In 1977, students graduated from programmes, the levels of which are not clearly recorded in existing institutional records; consequently these graduates are typically recorded as unknown in this report with respect to their programme. The graduation booklet of 1978 demonstrates the diverse nature of the programmes completed by students; they included diplomas in electronic and radio communication as well

as associate's degrees in business and unspecified programmes in education. It is clear that the College then was not solely an academic-focused institution, but a hybrid one which also taught technical vocational subjects. Graduates in the technical vocational areas are seen in the graduation booklets until the early 1990s.

In 1980, students graduated with the University of the West Indies baccalaureate degree in education. Although the programme was not a College of The Bahamas degree, it was taught at the College, and so these graduates represented a tangible outcome of the College's instruction and characterised a clear orientation towards academic programmes associated with that of

a university. A similar model was used in the LLB programme which started as a University of the West Indies degree in 2000, before the College offered its own programme in 2014. It was not until 1991 that the College started to teach its own bachelor-level programmes. The emergence of bachelor's degrees saw the phasing out of associate's degrees. The model of the College teaching a third-party curriculum was again followed at the master's level, again in the area of education in 2007, and these programmes were later followed by the College offering its own master's degrees in education and business, starting in 2010.

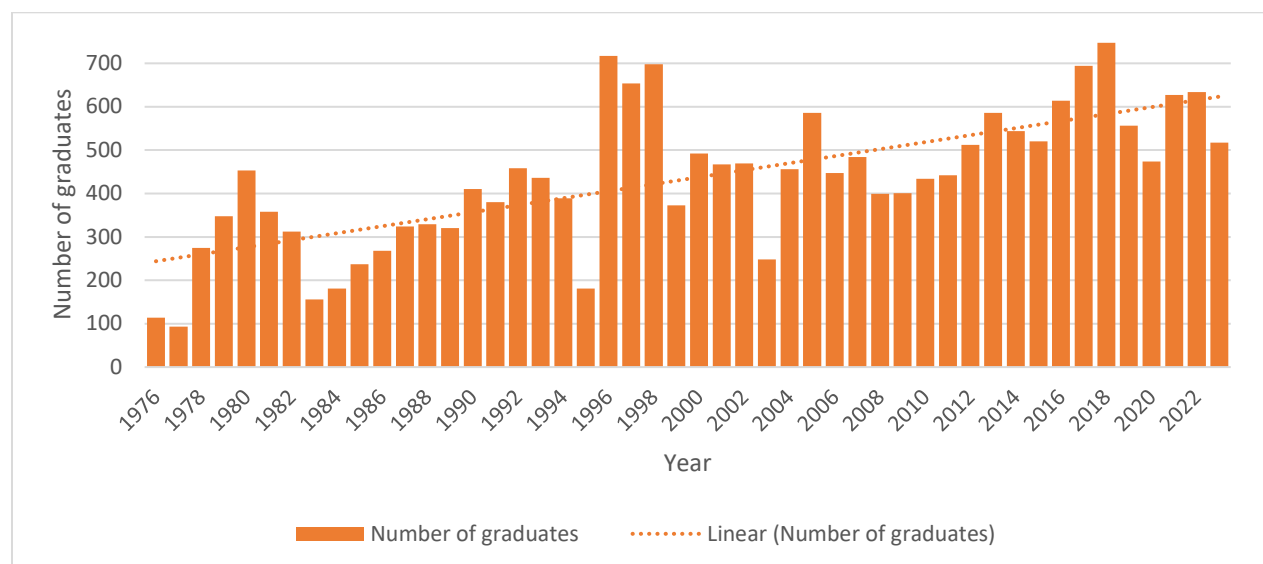
In 2016, The College of The Bahamas was granted its university charter (University of The Bahamas Act, 2016), and it is now moving to expand its programmes at the master's levels which will further distance itself from its college background, yet also build on its college foundations.

Since 1976 to the graduation in May 2023, 20,815 students had completed programmes

taught at the College (Figure 1; although this figure does not represent unique students). As the College entered the 21st century, associate's degree programmes started to be phased out in favour of four-year programmes. This clearly had an impact on the number of graduates, as students had to remain at the College for longer before they could graduate. This could probably explain the decline in the graduate numbers in the early 2000s as seen in Figure 1. The number of graduates by degree over time is depicted in Figure 2. Associated with the ever-changing mix of programmes have been changes in the size of the graduating class. In part, these changes can be attributed to the University responding to national needs to provide cohort training in order to address skills shortages, for example in nursing and education. Notwithstanding short-term changes in the sizes of graduating classes and the influence of external shocks, notably the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2023 (World Health Organization, 2023), Figure 1 demonstrates a strong underlying increase in the graduating class size.

## Figure 1

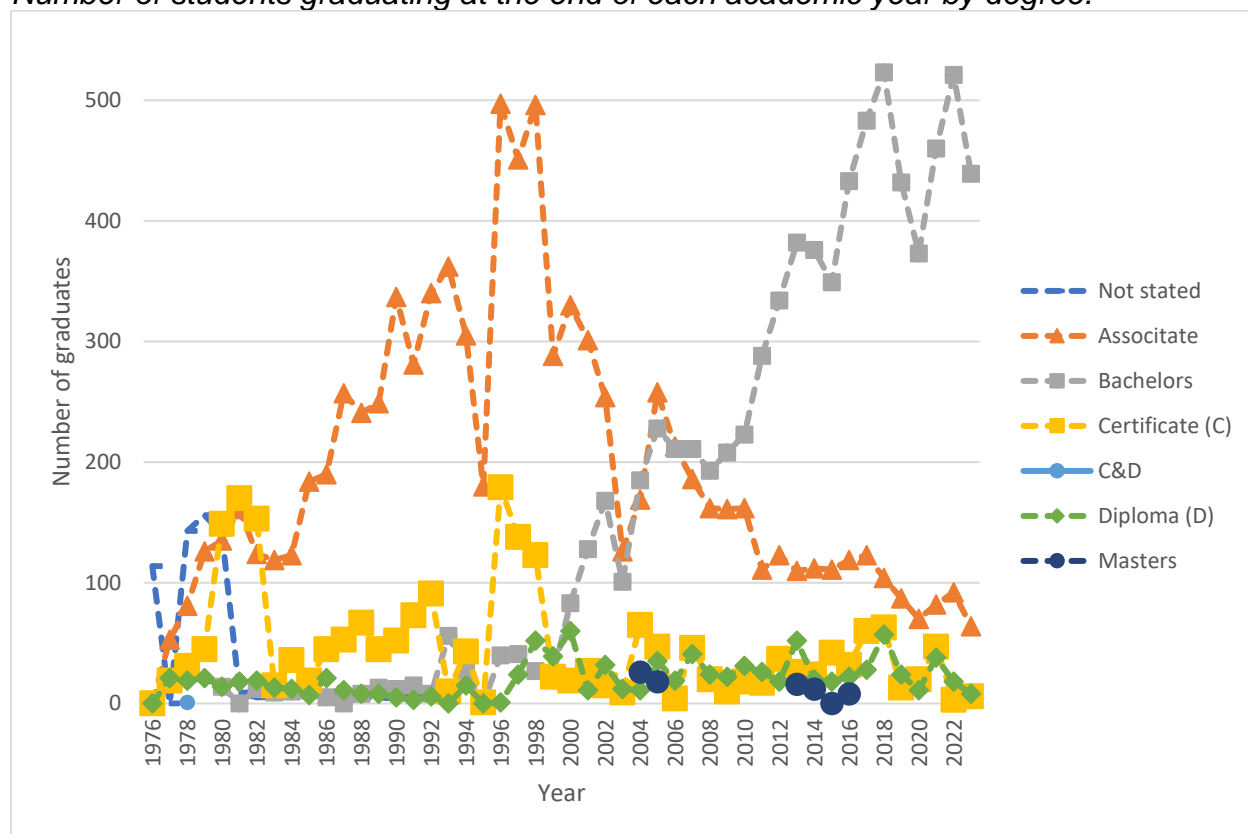
*Number of students graduating at the end of each academic year.*



Note: University of The Bahamas data

**Figure 2**

*Number of students graduating at the end of each academic year by degree.*



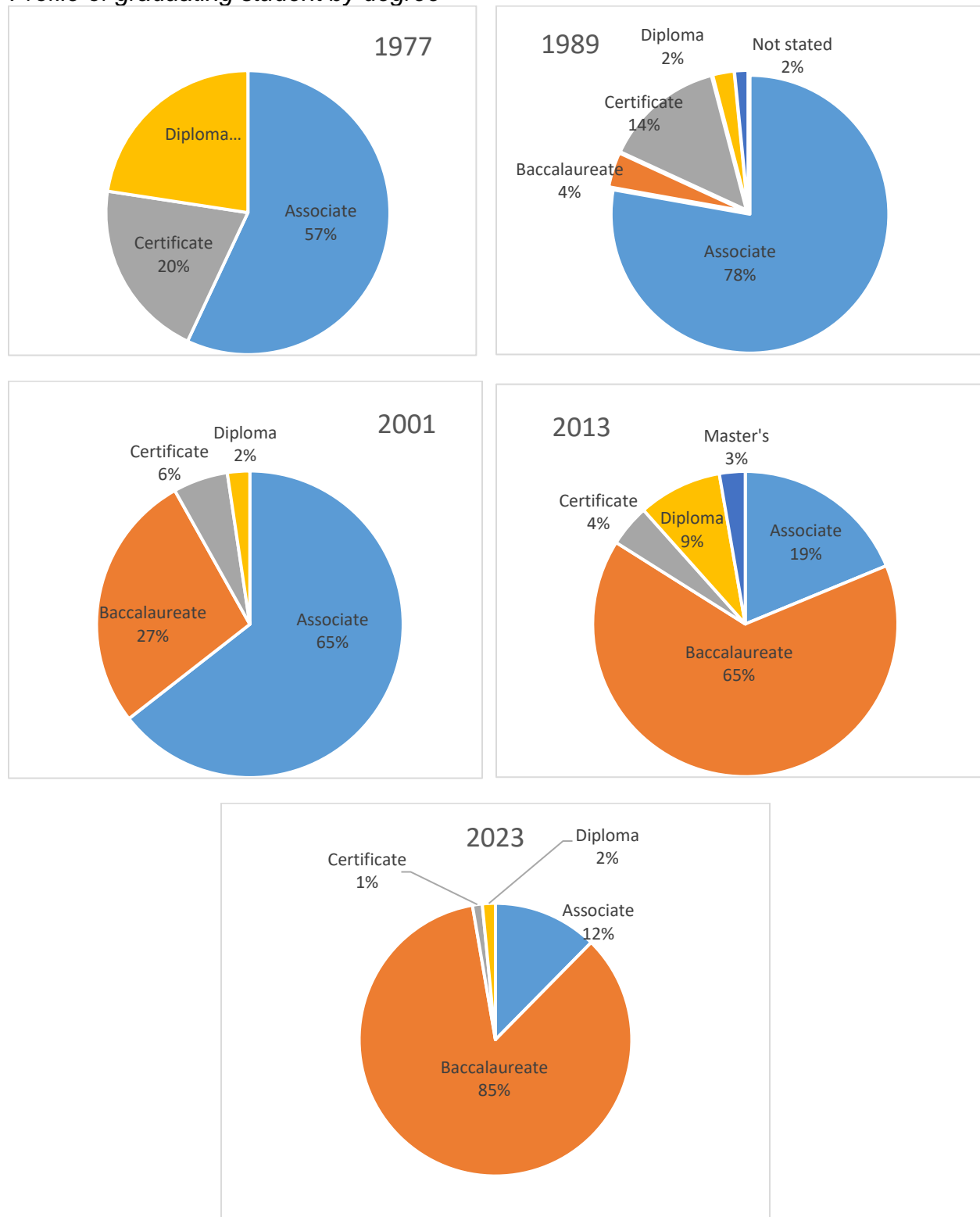
The growth and consolidation in the types of academic programmes offered by the University are demonstrated in Figure 3. In 1977 three main offerings were available to students: associate's degrees, certificates and diplomas. In that year 93 students graduated, of which 57% graduated with associate's degrees, 23% with diplomas and 20% certificates. Twelve years later in 1989, 320 students graduated, 227 more than 1977. By 1989, the percentage of students graduating with associate's degrees increased to 78%. This increase in the associate's degrees is accompanied by a shrinking percentage of students graduating with diplomas and certificates. It is at this time that students graduating with baccalaureate degrees (4%) start to be seen.

This is followed by a period of consolidation as the profile remains fairly constant until the

early 2000s. In 2001, 467 students graduated an increase of 46% over 1989. The number of students graduating with bachelor's degrees increased by 23% over 1989. There was a decrease of 13% of students graduating with associate's degrees. By 2013, 586 students graduated, an increase of 25% over 2001. In 2023, 517 students graduated, 85% with bachelor's degrees, rather than the 65%, ten years earlier. Although the number of graduates represents a decrease on the 2013 figure, given the fact that the world was just emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2023) the number shows resilience in the face of adversity. It should be noted that the effects of the pandemic were compounded in Grand Bahama as a result of Hurricane Dorian in September 2019 (Deopersad, et al., 2022).

### Figure 3

Profile of graduating student by degree



## Discussion

The profile of graduates allows us to illustrate the growth of the institution starting a community college orientated and now being a university. With 85% of graduates now matriculating a bachelor's degree, the university status attained in 2016 is evident. Overall, the changes in the graduate profile represent an unambiguous path to being a

university. The offering of master's level programmes ultimately paves the way to doctoral degrees being offered. Doctoral degrees represent the apex of university teaching, and so their addition to the mix of university academic programmes can be expected to be the next goal of the institution.

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