

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

ANNUAL REPORT ON STUDENT RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Action Requested: Receive the Fall 2005 graduation and retention rates report.

Executive Summary: The graduation and retention rates report describes two cohorts: (1) first-time, full-time freshmen and (2) transfer students. Data for the first-time, full-time freshmen cohort include first- and second-year retention rates as well as four- and six-year graduation rates. Data for the transfer student cohort include first-year retention rates and four-year graduation rates.

Highlights of Graduation and Retention Rates Report:

- ❖ **Definition of Retention Rates.** Retention is the rate at which members of an entering class return to that same institution in successive years until the completion of a degree. Research¹ shows that the majority of students who withdraw, transfer, or otherwise leave an institution do so during the first two years of college.
- ❖ **Retention Factors.** Previous national and state studies, as well as the Regent universities' own experience, have demonstrated that the following factors contribute significantly to the retention rate – (1) student input; (2) institutional environment; and (3) academic standards.
- ❖ **Best Practices in Retention.** Retention practices responsible for the greatest contribution to retention include first-year programs, academic advising, and learning support². The Regent universities³ have established a variety of initiatives, programs, and services (such as tutoring labs, academic advising, career development services, and learning communities) to help students make a successful transition to the rigors of postsecondary learning and to the challenges of independence and adulthood.
- ❖ **One-Year Retention Rates.** During the past ten years, the average one-year retention rate at SUI has been 83.1%; at ISU, it has been 83.9%; and at UNI, it has been 81.7%. At SUI and ISU, the current one-year retention rates are the institutions' highest during that ten-year period – 84.3% and 85.8%, respectively.
- ❖ **One-Year Retention Rates by High School Rank.** There is clearly a difference in retention rates when high school rank is considered. The average one-year retention rate for Regent university students who graduated from high school in the 90th-99th percentile was 92.6% while the average one-year retention rate for students who graduated in the 50th-59th percentile was 74.3%.
- ❖ **One-Year Retention Rates by ACT Score.** There is also a difference in retention rates when ACT score is considered. The average one-year retention rate for Regent university students with an ACT score of 32-36 was 96.6% while the average one-year retention rate for students with an ACT score of 19-21 was 78.8%.

¹ Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

² Source: ACT – What Works in Student Retention?

³ Attachment 1 (pgs. 4-5) describes the retention initiatives implemented by the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa.

- ◇ Six-Year Graduation Rates. ISU's six-year graduation rate for the entering class of 1999 is at an all-time high of 68.0%. UNI's six-year graduation rate of 65.0% increased for the entering class of 1999 after two years of decreases; SUI's six-year graduation rate of 66.1% remained basically the same as the prior year's which was at an all-time high. During the past ten years, the average six-year graduation rate at SUI has been 64.2%; at ISU, it has been 63.3%; and at UNI, it has been 63.2%.
- ◇ Six-Year Graduation Rates by First-Term GPA. There is clearly a difference in graduation rates when first-term GPA is considered. The average six-year graduation rate for students with a first-term GPA of 3.50-4.00 was 86.0% while the average six-year graduation rate for students with a first-term GPA of 2.25-2.49 was 61.7%.
- ◇ National Averages. The national average one-year retention rate for public four-year institutions was 72.7% in 2005⁴. The national average six-year graduation rate for NCAA Division I schools (including both public and private institutions) was 60.0%⁵ in 2005; for public four-year institutions, it was 55.0%⁶ in 2004.
- ◇ Average Time to Degree. The average number of years to complete an undergraduate degree by students in the entering classes of 1999 at the Regent universities who graduated within six years was 4.5 years. The time beyond four years typically reflects students' participation in additional activities, such as study abroad programs, internships, and double majors. It also reflects students' major changes⁷.
- ◇ Diversity. Ethnic and racial minority students generally had lower retention and graduation rates than non-minority students. The average one-year retention rate and six-year graduation rate of racial/ethnic minorities at the Regent universities were approximately four percentage points lower and approximately 16 percentage points lower respectively than the average rate for non-minorities. Men typically had lower retention and graduation rates than women. While there was a small difference (1.5 percentage points lower) in the average one-year retention rates of men compared to women, the difference in the average six-year graduation rate was more than five percentage points lower for men than for women.
- ◇ Transfer Students. Students who transferred from Iowa community colleges after they completed an associate of arts (AA) degree had a higher one-year retention rate (81.7%) and a higher four-year graduation rate (70.4%) than transfer students who had not completed an associate of arts degree (75.5% and 50.1%, respectively). Students with a transfer GPA of 3.00-3.24 had a significantly higher average one-year retention rate than students with a transfer GPA of 2.00-2.24 (66.1% and 35.4%, respectively) and higher average four-year graduation rates (70.4% and 50.1%, respectively).
- ◇ First-Year Non-Persistence Study. The five most frequently occurring major reasons cited by the respondents to the first-year non-persistence study were (1) desired program was not available; (2) classes were too large; (3) transferred to a lower cost institution; (4) undecided about major or vocation; and (5) did not achieve a feeling of belonging.

⁴ Source: NCES.

⁵ Source: NCAA 2005 Graduation Rates.

⁶ Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

⁷ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 20% of college students change their degree major.

- ◇ Non-Persisters⁸. Using data from the National Student Clearinghouse, the Regent universities were able to “track” students who did not return for their second year. Approximately, one-fifth of those students who did not persist at a Regent university transferred elsewhere and more than 5% of those students graduated from another institution. When those numbers are factored into the total completion rates, the six-year graduation rates increase to 72.6% - 74.7%.
- ◇ Trends/Changes.
 - 📖 An average of more than 82% of the past five entering classes returned for the second year of studies at the Regent universities.
 - 📖 Six-year graduation rates for all three Regent universities have remained at 62% or higher since 1994.
 - 📖 One-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates have consistently exceeded the national average during the past five years.
 - 📖 The average number of years to complete a degree by Regent university students who graduated within six years decreased from 4.61 for the entering classes of 1995 to 4.54 for the entering classes of 1999.
 - 📖 Retention and graduation rates for ethnic and racial minority students have continued to be lower than for non-minority students.
- ◇ The Graduation and Retention Rates Report addresses the following strategies in the Board’s Strategic Plan – continue to improve efforts to recruit, enroll, and retain a qualified and diverse student population (1.1.2) and determine levels of student program completion and promote degree attainment (1.3.1).
- ◇ The data tables prepared for the Graduation and Retention Rates Report and the First-Year Non-Persistence Study are available on the Board of Regents website.

⁸ Lack of completion of a degree from the matriculating institution does not necessarily reflect failure on the part of the institution or the student. Many legitimate, unexpected, or uncontrollable factors can lead to this result.

Persistence and Graduation Report
The University of Iowa
Fall 2005

“The University of Iowa is pleased with the results of the Fall 2005 persistence and graduation report. Our first year retention rate has gone up 1.2% since last year (to 84.3%), a result that we attribute to our two courses aimed at freshmen students. These are: The College Transition, a first-year experience course intended to help students adjust to the new responsibilities and higher demands of college; and, an expanded series of First Year Seminars intended to help students understand the research and scholarship and their professors engage in.

Our four-year graduation rate also increased by a tenth of a point, to 39.6%, and the average time-to-graduation continues to drop as more students graduate in four or five years and fewer in six. Our five-year graduation rate increased three-tenths of a point (to 62.4%) while our six-year graduation rate dropped one-tenth of a point, to 66.1%.

Although most national persistence figures focus on students who enter an institution as first-time, full-time freshmen, the University of Iowa has also begun to attend very closely to transfer students, particularly those from Iowa Community Colleges. In fact, we are engaged in developing a version of our Four-Year Graduation Plan that will include transfers from participating community colleges. These partnerships will help students get a head start on major choice and career planning issues that transfer students rarely think about while they are at the community college. This advance planning should, in turn, help transfer students move more quickly once they enter the university.

At present, students transferring to SUI with the Associate of Arts degree tend to require three additional years. For example, of those who entered SUI in Fall 2002, only 25.2% graduated within two years, while 61.0% graduated within three years. (Those rates correspond to four and five year graduation rates for students who earn their AAs in two years.) We hope that by linking advising services across the community college-SUI gap, we can smooth the transition for students who wish to pursue a 2+2 strategy and help them graduate in the same timeframe they might have achieved by starting directly at UI.”

University of Northern Iowa
Comments on the Persistence and Retention Report
Fall 2005

“This year’s findings are very similar to previous years with an increase noted in overall graduation rates and a reduction in the average number of years to completion. Together these indicators show more students are graduating and doing so in less time. This fact is indicative of the efforts of the university to reduce barriers to graduation and increase opportunities which facilitate movement through the system to graduation.

The University of Northern Iowa continues to have one of the highest graduation rates for institutions of our type. According to statistics published in the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the U.S. Department of Education the graduation rate of 61 other universities identified by IPEDS as similar to UNI have an average graduation rate of 45.0% while the most recent UNI rate is 65.0%. The comparison of the UNI rate to our Board of Regents selected peer institutions show we continue to have a graduation rate which is approximately 15% higher than the average for that peer group.

While the University is pleased with these comparisons, we continue to focus and direct efforts towards increasing student retention and persistence rates. The Plan of Study is now entering its third year and we continue to see high participation rates in this innovative advising system. Other unique programs and facilities such as the integrated Follon Student Services Center and the Innovative Teaching and Technology Center, due to open in Summer 2006, should assist us in improving these statistics beyond their already exceptional levels.”