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Institutional Research Clips
June 2015

Completions: Beyond the Boundaries
A look at UND completion rates beyond the UND boundaries using the National Student Clearinghouse data.

Completion, or graduation rates, are a measurement where institutions can track student academic outcomes. Students who begin as new, incoming freshmen are tracked by cohort year until they graduate or otherwise leave the institution. At UND, we track three-, four-, five-, and six-year completion rates.

Nationally, the most commonly reported rate is the six-year completion rate. Every year we report six-year rates to the federal government via the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Because of this commonly defined measurement and query capabilities within IPEDS, benchmarking can be done to compare rates with peer institutions and used as an institutional measurement of student outcomes. While it’s important to benchmark completion rates against national comparable institutions, much criticism has circulated regarding limitations of the IPEDS completion rate methodology. Those limitations being that IPEDS only tracks incoming full-time freshmen for fall, it does not account for spring students nor does it account for out-going or incoming (transfer) students. That is, if a student leaves an institution without graduating, IPEDS counts that student as a failure in that it does not account for the “transfer-out” students who successfully complete elsewhere.

Due to the increasingly mobile student population, along with the availability and flexibility of online programs, we see more and more “swirling” of students. That is, students coming and going, transferring in and out of academic programs and institutions. Students offer a variety of explanations for this movement. From our 2010 Withdrawing, Non-Returning Survey, students report reasons such as personal, academic, institutional, financial, and/or employment for leaving UND. How do we account for students who begin their coursework at UND but then find themselves pursuing a degree elsewhere? This IR Clip reports recent six-year completion rates using the IPEDS definition but mainly draws on the findings from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSCH) Institutional Benchmark Report. The NSCH tracks 96% of college enrollments nationwide and by partnering with this organization, institutions can further track students who have started at their own institution but then continued at another. This data provides completion rates beyond the UND boundaries, providing a more complete picture of student progress and accounting for the increased mobility. Besides looking at completions beyond the institution, the NSCH data differs from the IPEDS rate in that it also includes part-time students, tracks enrollment intensity (full-time, part-time, mixed), and student age at entry.

Figure 1 reports the IPEDS six-year completion rate compared to the NSCH rate for two years of beginning freshmen (cohorts). The National NSCH group is comprised of all four-year public institutions.

Figure 1. Six-year completion rates of the 2007 & 2008 cohorts

As reported in Figure 1, 55% of the 2007 UND IPEDS reported freshmen graduated after six years, compared to the UND NSCH reported 66% who started at UND, either full-time or part-time, and then either graduated from UND, or transferred to another institution and graduated. While these two rates present two different methodologies (with part-time students included in the NSCH rate), the NSCH rate does provide a more comprehensive approach to viewing student success and is a rate that should be assessed just as closely as the IPEDS rate.

For more detailed information about any of our surveys, please refer to http://und.edu/research/institutional-research/survey-timelines.cfm
How does the NSCH rate differ among genders?

Figure 2 reports the NSCH rates, including still enrolled by gender. Women complete at a higher rate than men; both UND groups complete at higher levels than the national group.

How does the NSCH rate differ among age groups?

Figure 3 compares six-year outcomes by age group. Overall, the younger the age group the higher the outcome rate. When comparing UND to the national group, UND rates are higher for the 20 and younger and 21-24 groups, but lower for the older than 24 students.

How does the NSCH rate differ by enrollment intensity?

The NSCH data provides six-year completion rates by enrollment intensity (full-time, part-time, and mixed). The enrollment intensity factor is based on the enrollment in all terms. It should be of no surprise that full-time (FT) students complete at a higher rate than other enrollment types. At the same time, it is quite revealing to see the differences in the completion rates of these enrollment groups.

Figure 4 shows that UND students who start as full-time and continue exclusively full-time complete at 87% compared to 50% of students whose enrollment is mixed (varies between full-time and part-time), and 27% exclusively part-time (PT). Overall, UND freshmen exceed the national group in the FT and PT category. For mixed enrollment, the two groups are both at a 50% completion rate.

Completion rates “at same institution” are similar for UND vs the national group. 71% of the FT students complete at UND (72% natl), 33% of mixed enrollment complete at UND (34% natl), and 21% of PT complete at UND (17% natl). Interactive dashboards are available for the UND campus community.

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