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California Postsecondary Education Commission

California Higher Education Accountability: Goal - Student Success Measure: First-Year Persistence Rates

This report examines the persistence rates of first-year students at the University of California and the California State University.

It also compares California campuses with similar institutions nationwide.

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The Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

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Background

Measuring the progress of students toward completing their college education is an important gauge of how well California's postsecondary education systems are meeting the needs of students and the public. This report provides an assessment of persistence as a measure of student success at California's public universities and is one of a series of metrics used in the California Postsecondary Education Commission's (CPEC) Accountability Framework to measure the success of students in public higher education. In addition to the measure discussed in this report, time-to-degree, degrees conferred for transfer students, and the impact of full-time and part-time enrollment on degree completion are also measures adopted by the Commission as part of its accountability framework to assess how well California is doing to help students succeed in completing educational goals.

Methodology and Data

The term "persistence rate," as used in this report, is the percentage of students who return for a second year as full-time or part-time students after completing their first year of study. Student persistence data were examined to determine rates in the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems by campus, ethnicity, and family income. Campus-specific analysis is not intended for the purpose of drawing comparisons between the UC and the CSU systems, which serve different functions in the California public postsecondary system. Neither is it intended for the purpose of comparing campuses within a system. Rather, identifying campus rates is useful in identifying where successful practices are occurring. By also examining ethnicity and family income data, this analysis explores variations in persistence by students within the UC and CSU systems.

Student data used to measure persistence in this report reflect the experience of first-time freshmen between the ages of 17-19, who maintained a full-time schedule for the duration of their first year at UC and CSU campuses. First-year persistence is a good indicator because it is often the most difficult year of adjustment to college-level work and the social challenges of university life. Data used for this part of the analysis was supplied to CPEC by the CSU and UC systems.

This analysis also compares persistence at postsecondary institutions similar to UC and CSU. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education¹ was used to identify campuses with characteristics comparable to UC and CSU campuses. Persistence rate data for these comparisons were obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), managed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).² It is important to note, that while IPEDS data are useful for drawing comparisons between California universities and other universities nationwide, unique student data provided to CPEC by UC and CSU provide a more detailed examination of what percent of first-time freshmen return their second year as full-time, part-time, or intermittent students, and what percent do not enroll at all their second year. Therefore, with the exception of using the IPEDS data to measure performance of California campuses with that of their national counterparts, all analyses, including the examination of ethnicity and family income variables, were conducted using the CPEC database³.

Why This Measure is Important and What it Tells Us

The importance of student educational persistence is recognized in the Master Plan for Higher Education as well as a Higher Education Compact between the Governor and the university systems. The Master Plan recommends using regular reporting of persistence rates to gauge how well public colleges and universities are performing. The Higher Education Compact requires that persistence data be included in annual performance reports.

Persistence rate data provide useful insights about students who are successfully progressing toward degree attainment and those who are struggling. It can also help to identify programs that are helping students overcome barriers to earning degrees. Additionally, persistence rate data provide important insights into the adequacy of efforts to prepare students for college success and their likelihood of earning a college degree after admission. For example, of the California public universities examined in this study, those with the highest four- and five-year time-to-degree rates also had the highest persistence rates.

Low persistence rates may be an indication of a number of issues, both academic and social. Factors causing students to drop out may include insufficient college preparation, social or personal issues, family obligations, cost of attendance, estrangement from their campus community, or an inability to adjust to being away from home. The impact of many of these issues can be mitigated through campus-based

¹ The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is a tool used for categorizing institutions based on Basic Classification, Undergraduate Programs Offerings, Graduate Program Offerings, Undergraduate Student Profile, Enrollment Profile, and Size and Setting. For a description of the Carnegie criteria for UC and CSU campuses and their national comparator universities, refer to Appendix A.

² IPEDS data are limited to measuring either 1) first-year, full-time students who return their second year for full-time enrollment, or 2) first-year, part-time students who return their second year for part-time enrollment.

³ Using the CPEC data, persistence is examined by using a population of students who attend full-time during their first year, and analyzes their divergence into one of four groups for their second year: full-time, part-time, intermittent, or not enrolled.

programs designed to offer academic support, emotional counseling, and a sense of inclusion in a campus community.

What the Data Show

Persistence rate data for UC:

- The persistence rate for first-time students who began their first term with a full-time course load was higher at UC (92%) than at comparative institutions (88%) nationwide.⁴
- The average persistence rate for UC students who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first year and returned their second year with full-time or part-time status was 92%.⁵
- When looking at family income, UC persistence, combining full-time and part-time sophomore year enrollment, varied only slightly (94% for highest income to 91% for lowest income).
- UC students with higher and middle family income were more likely than those with lower family incomes to enroll their second year and were less likely to have intermittent enrollment patterns. Combined intermittent or non-enrolled percentages were 6% for higher income, 8% for middle income, and 9% for lower income students.
- Overall UC persistence rates (including students who return full-time and part-time) do not vary greatly among ethnic groups: Asian American students had the highest persistence rates (94%) and African American students had the lowest (90%). However, there was a gap in enrollment status between ethnic groups: African American and Latino students had a higher part-time enrollment status in their second year (12% and 10%, respectively) than Asian American or White students (both 6%).
- Of UC campuses where the percentage of African American students was above the system mean, UC Los Angeles had the lowest rate of African American students who did not return their second year.
- Of UC campuses where the percentage of Latino students was above the system mean, UC Los Angeles had the lowest rate of Latino students who did not return their second year.

Information on the comparison of specific UC campuses is shown in Display 1 and Display 2 (page 4). Percentages in parentheses indicate the proportion of the entering class that was Latino or African American.

DISPLAY 1	
UC Campuses with Highest Latino Persistence Rates:	
UC Los Angeles (11%)*	95%
UC Santa Barbara (14%)*	93%
<i>* class of 2000 % Latino</i>	
UC Campuses with Highest African American Persistence Rates:	
UC Los Angeles (3%)*	96%
UC Riverside (6%)*	93%
<i>* class of 2000 % African American</i>	

⁴ IPEDS data.

⁵ UC student data.

DISPLAY 2 UC and Comparator Schools Persistence to Second Year, Full-Time Students

UC Berkeley UC Los Angeles U. of Michigan-Ann Arbor U. of Virginia U. of N. Carolina, Chapel Hill	UC Irvine UC San Diego U. of Georgia U. of Md, College Park U. of Texas, Austin	4 UC Campuses in Top 25th Percentile 93% or Higher
U. of Washington-Seattle Campus U. of Wisconsin-Madison UC Davis UC Santa Barbara U. of Connecticut U. of Illinois Urbana-Ch. Texas A & M University	U. of Delaware U. of Pittsburgh UC Santa Cruz Rutgers University Ohio State University Florida State Sunny At Stony Brook	3 UC Campuses in Middle 50th Percentile 87% or Higher
U. of Minnesota-Twin Cities UC Riverside Louisiana State -Hebert Laws U. of Colorado at Boulder	U. of Missouri-Columbia Sunny at Albany Sunny at Buffalo U. of Mass.-Amherst	1 UC Campus Bottom 25th Percentile Below 87%

Persistence rate data for CSU:

- The persistence rate for first-time students who begin their first term with a full-time course load was higher at CSU (80%) than at comparative institutions (68%) nationwide.⁶
- The average persistence rate for CSU students who maintain a full-time course load for the entirety of their first year and return their second year with full-time or part-time status was 82%.⁷
- Overall CSU persistence, combining full-time and part-time sophomore year enrollment, varied minimally according to income (84% for highest income to 79% for lowest income).
- CSU students with higher and middle family income were more likely than those with lower family incomes to enroll their second year and less likely to have intermittent enrollment patterns. Combined intermittent or non-enrolled percentages were 16% for higher income, 18% for middle income, and 21% for lower income students.
- CSU persistence rates (including students who return full-time and part-time) varied among ethnic groups: Asian American and White students persisted at 83%, Latino students persisted at 80%, and African American students persisted at 73%. Latino, African American, and Asian stu-

DISPLAY 3	
CSU Campuses with Highest Latino Persistence Rates	
CSU Stanislaus (34%)*	87%
CSU Monterey Bay (26%)*	86%
CSU San Bernardino (34%)*	83%
CSU Fullerton (24%)*	81%
* class of 2000 % Latino	
CSU Campuses with Highest African American Persistence Rates	
CSU San Bernardino (12%)*	80%
CSU Northridge (12%)*	79%
CSU East Bay (10%)*	74%
CSU Dominguez Hills (42%)*	71%
* class of 2000 % African American	

⁶ IPEDS data.

⁷ CSU student data.

dents had a higher part-time enrollment status in their second year (22%, 20%, and 19%, respectively) than White students (13%).

- Of CSU campuses where the percentage of African American students was above the system mean, CSU San Bernardino had the lowest rate of African American students who did not return their second year.
- Of CSU campuses where the percentage of Latino students was above the system mean, CSU Stanislaus had the lowest rate of Latino students who did not return their second year.

Information on the comparison of specific CSU campuses is shown in Displays 3 and 4. Percentages in parentheses indicate the proportion of the entering class that was Latino or African American.

DISPLAY 4 CSU and Comparator Schools Persistence to Second Year, Full-Time Students

CAL Poly-San Luis Obispo CSU Long Beach CSU Fresno San Diego State CSU Chico CSU East Bay San Jose State CSU Fullerton CSU Sacramento	CSU Stanislaus CSU San Bernardino Cal Poly-Pomona San Francisco State CUNY - Staten Island CUNY Brooklyn College Rhode Island College SUNY College At Buffalo	13 CSU Campuses in Top 25th Percentile 78% or Higher
Sonoma State Eastern Washington U. CSU Northridge Humboldt State Kennesaw State U. Valdosta State U. Salem State College New Jersey City U. CSU Bakersfield CSU Los Angeles Pittsburg State U. Eastern Michigan U. Kean U. CSU San Marcos CSU Monterey Bay CSU Channel Islands CUNY Lehman College Arizona State U.	Saint Cloud State U. Worcester State College U. Of Alaska Anchorage Youngstown State U. CSU Dominguez Hills Mcneese State U. Nicholls State U. U. Of North Alabama Saint Cloud State U. Augusta State U. Southeastern Louisiana U. U. Of Southern Maine Indiana U.-Southeast Northeastern State U. Jacksonville State U. Indiana U.-South Bend Coppin State U. Western Oregon U.	9 CSU Campuses in Middle 50th Percentile 65% or Higher
Northern Kentucky U. East Central U. Armstrong Atlantic State U. Boise State U. Purdue U.-Fort Wayne Southern Oregon U. Texas A & M U.-Corpus Christi U. Of Central Oklahoma	Midwestern State U. Tarleton State U. Auburn U.-Montgomery Chicago State U. U. Of Texas At Tyler Montana State U.-Billings Cameron U.	No CSU Campuses Fall in the Bottom 25th Percentile Below 65%

Campus Efforts to Improve Persistence

CSU Stanislaus is a campus that is performing at a high level with regard to persistence rates. Its efforts were profiled in a recent national study highlighting best practices of universities that are improving student outcomes across the country. The study, by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), sent research teams to 12 campuses to conduct interviews and observe administrative practices designed to promote student success in degree completion. CSU Stanislaus was chosen to participate in the study based on its consistently high persistence and graduation rates; the campus serves a large minority population.

CSU Stanislaus' success in student persistence is attributed to a number of factors that include a strong campus and departmental mission to promote a "family" environment, the centralized geographical placement of all student service departments, "curricular coherence" designed to maintain academic consistency among departments, and leadership that encourages staff at all levels to engage in creative problem solving. Many of the staff members who head student service departments are first-generation college graduates of CSU Stanislaus and can identify with the experiences of new students.

Success at CSU Stanislaus is also attributed to improved management practices, such as the campus' efforts to "flatten" its leadership and organizational structure, resulting in greater flexibility of campus personnel to implement changes that improve student success. The campus also strives to help students access needed services effectively. For example, a new building on the campus is home to all student service departments. Not only is this building a convenience to students seeking advice or assistance, it also promotes seamless communication among student service departments, resulting in the sharing of, and prompt adaptation to, best practices.

Campuses vary in their capacity to support successful student persistence. Models that work well on one campus may not be easily transferred to another campus, but administrators can often learn important lessons from successful programs. This allows them to customize philosophies and organizational structures to fit the needs of their campus. It is important and useful to recognize the success of campuses and to promote effective programs that have been proven to elevate student success rates.

Conclusion

Persistence, along with the other measures used to gauge student success, provides a framework for evaluating and improving student achievement in California's public university systems. This brief is one of the ongoing efforts by CPEC to regularly assess student persistence success and gain knowledge and insights into how such success can be encouraged through public policy and educational initiatives. Through this process, CPEC is striving to illuminate challenges, opportunities, policies, and programs that improve student outcomes in higher education.

California's campuses are achieving high student persistence rates compared to similar institutions nationwide. Many UC and CSU campuses also are demonstrating success achieving high persistence rates among student populations that are traditionally underrepresented in public postsecondary education. The data also show that income factors impact student persistence, with low-income students more likely to return as part-time, intermittent students or not enroll their second year.

The success of some campuses to show high persistence rates strongly suggests commitment, leadership, and the adoption of effective strategies that embrace recognized "best practices" can and do make an important performance difference.

APPENDIX A Carnegie Foundation Criteria Used to Determine UC and CSU Comparable Public Schools

All UC comparative schools meet the following criteria:

Basic Classification

RU/VH: Research Universities (very high research activity)

Undergrad Program Classification

A&S-F/HGC: Arts & sciences focus, high graduate coexistence

A&S+Prof/HGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, high graduate coexistence

Bal/HGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence

Graduate Program Classification

CompDoc/MedVet: Comprehensive doctoral with medical/veterinary

CompDoc/NMedVet: Comprehensive doctoral (no medical/veterinary)

Undergraduate Profile Classification

FT4/S/LTI: Full-time four-year, selective, lower transfer-in

FT4/MS/LTI: Full-time four-year, more selective, lower transfer-in

FT4/MS/HTI: Full-time four-year, more selective, higher transfer-in

Enrollment Profile Classification

HU: High undergraduate

MU: Majority undergraduate

Size and Setting Classification

L4/R: Large four-year, primarily residential

L4/HR: Large four-year, highly residential

All CSU comparative schools meet the following criteria:

Basic Classification

Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)

Master's M: Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)

Undergrad Program Classification

A&S+Prof/NGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, no graduate coexistence

A&S+Prof/SGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, some graduate coexistence

Bal/SGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, some graduate coexistence

Bal/HGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence

Prof+A&S/SGC: Professions plus arts & sciences, some graduate coexistence

Prof+A&S/HGC: Professions plus arts & sciences, high graduate coexistence

Graduate Program Classification

Postbac-Comp: Postbaccalaureate comprehensive

Postbac-A&S/Ed: Postbaccalaureate with arts & sciences (education dominant)

S-Doc/Ed: Single doctoral (education)

Undergraduate Profile Classification

MFT4/I: Medium full-time four-year, inclusive

MFT4/S/HTI: Medium full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in

FT4/I: Full-time four-year, inclusive

FT4/S/HTI: Full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in

Enrollment Profile Classification

VHU: Very high undergraduate

HU: High undergraduate

Size and Setting Classification

M4/NR: Medium four-year, primarily nonresidential

L4/NR: Large four-year, primarily nonresidential

