
Summary of Background Paper

Committee on Measures of Student Success Meeting
Wednesday, October 20, 2010
Washington, DC



CMSS Authorization

- HEOA of 2008 authorized the creation of the Committee on Measures of Student Success with two primary focuses:
 - Develop recommendations for the Secretary of Education regarding the accurate calculation and reporting of completion or graduation rates of entering certificate- or degree-seeking, full-time, undergraduate students by two-year degree-granting institutions of higher education.
 - May also recommend additional or alternative measures of student success that are comparable alternatives to the completion or graduation rates of entering degree-seeking full-time undergraduate students, taking into account the mission and role of two-year degree-granting higher education institutions.

Overview

- Current methods for calculating completion and graduation rates
- Brief summary of current efforts in the higher education community to develop alternative measures of success
- Next steps for the Committee

Completion and Graduation Rates

- Each year institutions must make available to prospective and enrolled students the completion and graduation rates of *first-time, full-time, certificate- or degree-seeking* undergraduate students.
- The graduation rate is calculated for a cohort of these students who complete programs within 100, 150, and 200 percent of the normal time required.
- Institutions with a mission to prepare students for transfer must also disclose the number of students who successfully transfer to another postsecondary institution.

Completion and Graduation Rates

- Graduation rates are one of about forty higher education disclosure requirements that an institution must meet.
 - “***Disclosure requirement***” is information that a postsecondary education institution is required to distribute or make available to another party, such as students or employees.
- Graduation rates are also a reporting requirement.
 - “***Reporting requirement***” is information submitted to the U.S. Department of Education or other agencies.
- To comply with these requirements NCES created the IPEDS GRS component.

Completion and Graduation Rates

- Graduation rates have been disaggregated by:
 - Gender and race/ethnicity
- HEOA also requires disaggregation by:
 - Students who received a Pell grant
 - Students who received a FFEL loan (except for unsubsidized Stafford loans) but did not receive a Pell grant
 - Students who did not receive a Pell grant or a FFEL loan
- Institutions with small numbers of students in the subgroups may note that there were too few students to disclose graduation rates with “confidence and confidentiality.”

Recent Efforts to Improve Reporting of Graduation Rates

- Collecting data on cohorts of students and then identifying several years later the number of completers can be challenging.
- NCES commissioned studies to explore ways to reduce confusion and complexity of reporting data.
 - Reports suggested improvements to instructions and definitions associated with GRS and IPEDS training.
- NCES could also provide guidance to institutions on how to comply with statutory language regarding cohorts with small numbers of students.

Current External Efforts to Develop Alternative Measures of Student Success

- There are concerns about using current graduation rates for measuring student success, particularly for two-year institutions.
- Many initiatives focused on increasing student completion have proposed a number of alternative measures of student success.
- Initiatives have also proposed disaggregating graduation rates for various student subgroups.
- Initiatives range from targeted efforts within certain sectors of institutions or within a state to broader and national efforts that encompass many states.

Current External Efforts to Develop Alternative Measures of Student Success

- Common themes across initiatives in the alternative measures proposed:
 - Student progress towards important milestones or analyzing the time it takes a student to complete a degree
 - Average number of credits a student has earned after one year of enrollment
 - Average number of credits it took to earn a degree or certificate
 - Success of students not adequately prepared for college-level coursework
 - Number of students that complete remedial education and then the subsequent entry-level credit-bearing course
 - Students' wages in post college employment

Next Steps for the Committee

- Committee has a number of options available for possible recommendations, but needs to be cognizant of impact on institutions, states, and other stakeholders.
- The Committee could:
 - review guidance drafted by NCES for how two-year institutions can comply with requirement to disaggregate graduation rate data
 - make recommendations to the Secretary of Education that institutions disclose certain information or be required to report information to the U.S. Department of Education
 - consider measures that may not be under the purview of the federal government, but about which the Secretary of Education could provide incentives to institutions and states to collect data