

Research Notes

University System of Georgia Board of Regents — Office of Research and Policy Analysis

Time-to-Degree for FY2008 Bachelor's Degree Graduates **Executive Summary**

Time-to-degree (TTD) studies differ from graduation rate studies in that TTD studies start with a cohort of graduates and examine how long it took them to get the degree, while graduation rate studies start with a group of entering students and examine the percentage that eventually receive a degree. This TTD study is based on the 28,247 students who received a bachelor's degree from University System of Georgia (USG) institutions in FY2008.

Most bachelor's degree programs consist of 120 credit hours and as many as eight additional credit hours of physical education, health, and orientation. These programs are designed so that students who plan their courses carefully, do not change majors, and earn at least 15 credit hours each semester can complete the degree in eight semesters. Those enrolling in fall and spring terms each year will take 3.7 years to earn the degree. Programs such as engineering and secondary teacher education require more than 120 credit hours.

MEDIAN TTD FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

- **4.3 YEARS**
- **11 SEMESTERS**
- **128 HOURS**

Of the bachelor's degree recipients, 49.4 percent started at and graduated from the same USG institution (termed native students). The median time it took these graduates to earn the bachelor's degree was 4.3 years, with 37.2 percent completing the degree within four years and 75.5 percent completing the degree within five years. 12.9 percent of native students took over six years to complete the bachelor's.

Within-System transfer students, those who started at one USG institution but graduated from another, made up 22.9 percent of the FY2008 graduating class. The median time it took these graduates to earn the bachelor's degree was 5.3 years, with 14.7 percent completing the degree within four years and 44.7 percent completing the degree within five years.

MEDIAN TTD FOR WITHIN-SYSTEM TRANSFERS

- **5.3 YEARS**
- **13 SEMESTERS**
- **132 HOURS**

An additional 22.8 percent of the graduates were students who had transferred from non-System institutions. Also in FY2008, 3.0 percent were excluded from the study because their matriculation information was unknown, and data were not available on how long these groups of students took to earn the degree.

Native students completed a median of 11 semesters and 128 credit hours before graduating. Although USG native students took somewhat longer than four years to graduate, they did not earn excessive credit hours. Instead, they appear to be earning fewer than 15 credit hours per term and enrolling in at least one summer term. The median TTD for transfer students was a year longer and took 13 semesters to complete, but transfer students earned only four more credit hours than native students (median, 132 credit hours).

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA
TIME-TO-DEGREE FOR FY2008 BACHELOR'S DEGREE GRADUATES

Introduction

Increasing the number of graduates while decreasing the average length of time it takes for a student to obtain an associate or bachelor's degree are two significant goals for colleges and universities of the University System of Georgia (USG). Extending time to graduation increases the cost to the student and his/her family because of the extra tuition paid, the cost of living during college, and the opportunity costs in delayed entry into the full-time labor market. Costs for the institutions and the state also increase. Each student who graduates "on time" frees scarce facilities and faculty resources for the next student in the pipeline.

Previous USG studies on student success have focused primarily on retention and graduation rates of first-time, full-time freshmen. To provide a different perspective on student success, a time-to-degree study of USG FY2008 bachelor's degree recipients was conducted. In addition to elapsed time from college entry to degree completion, the average number of terms enrolled and cumulative credit hours earned upon graduation were investigated.

Tracking time to degree is especially important for monitoring any changes due to the guaranteed tuition policy approved by the Board of Regents in 2006. Implemented in Fall 2006, the policy initiative, called "Fixed for Four," seeks to provide predictability in college tuition costs for students and their families. Tuition is fixed for four years at the time of first matriculation but increases for students still enrolled in the fifth year. The fifth year increase is greater at research universities than state universities, and greater at state universities than at state/two-year colleges. If the policy is effective, students will respond by changing their behaviors in ways that shorten time to degree. There has been very little research nationally on how tuition changes affect time to degree. We are seeking to study whether the knowledge that tuition will go up in the fifth year is sufficient to send a price signal to students to graduate "on time."

What is Time-to-Degree?

A time-to-degree (TTD) analysis describes the elapsed chronological time in years and months that it takes for a graduate to complete his/her degree. The student who enrolls for 8 terms every fall and spring for four years has a time-to-degree of 3.67 years; the student who enrolls for 8 terms, but only in the fall term, for 8 years, has a time to degree of 8.3 years (see Figure 1). Terms are assumed to be of equal length, although there are slight actual variations.

Figure 1.
Example of Enrollment History of Student with Traditional Enrollment Patterns
(3.66 Years to Graduate)

Undergraduate Year	Spring Semester	Summer Term	Fall Semester	Terms Enrolled	Elapsed Time in Years
Year 1	Graduate from HS	Not Enrolled	Enroll Semester 1 and Earn 15 SCH	1	0.33
Year 2	Enroll Semester 2 and Earn 15 SCH	Not Enrolled	Enroll Semester 3 and Earn 15 SCH	2	1
Year 3	Enroll Semester 4 and Earn 15 SCH	Not Enrolled	Enroll Semester 5 and Earn 15 SCH	2	1
Year 4	Enroll Semester 6 and Earn 15 SCH	Not Enrolled	Enroll Semester 7 and Earn 15 SCH	2	1
Year 5	Enroll Semester 8 and Earn 15 SCH	←Graduate from college		1	0.33
Total				8	3.66

A TTD study is different in perspective from a study of graduation rates (GR). TTD studies begin with a cohort of graduates and look backward to track the amount of time elapsed from the students' first matriculation to degree attainment. TTD is a measure of how long graduates took to complete their degree requirements, from first entering the institution to graduation. A GR is a measure of the rate at which freshmen who start at an institution will finish a degree within a certain period of time, usually four or six years for a bachelor's degree. Another distinction between TTD and GR is that a TTD cohort shares a common degree-completion date, whereas a GR cohort shares a common starting date. TTD and GR also differ in their cohort components. The TTD cohort includes all students who completed their degrees regardless of full-time or part-time status at matriculation; the GR cohort usually focuses on first-time, full-time freshmen.

For this study, bachelor's degree recipients were classified into one of the following categories based on their matriculation and graduation records:

- Native Students: those who started at and graduated from the same institution.
- Within-System Transfer Students: Students who started college at one USG institution and graduated from another USG institution. TTD was calculated from graduation back to the original matriculation at an institution within the System.
- Other Transfer Students: Students who transferred to a USG institution from an institution outside the USG.
- Undetermined: Students whose status as a native or transfer student could not be determined.
- Prior-Degree Recipients: Students who either obtained at least one bachelor's degree from a USG institution prior to FY2007 or who were granted more than one degree in FY2007.

Additional definitions are available in Appendix 1, along with more explanation of the categories.

Factors Affecting Time to Degree

A number of factors affect time to degree, including student characteristics and academic preparation, student engagement and behaviors, and institutional characteristics.¹

Student Characteristics and Academic Preparation

- Underprepared students must take additional courses (in Learning Support) or courses to make up for College Preparatory Curriculum courses they did not take in high school. Serious academic deficiencies can take a year or more to remediate.
- Students who have opportunities to take AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses in high school may shorten time-to-degree.
- Traditional students, those who begin college following high school, are less likely to work or to work full-time than non-traditional students, and they less often have children to support. As a result, they can devote more time to their education. Traditional students may be able to move toward their degree on time, while non-traditional students may have more constrained choices. However, there is much variation among traditional-aged students, as many may need to work or choose to work as an alternative to taking a loan.

Student Engagement and Behaviors

- Students who delay making a choice for a major area or who change majors multiple times take courses that they likely will not need for their degree. TTD increases with a delay in making a major choice and with an increase in the number of major changes.
- Students who pursue double majors, minors, or dual degrees will generally take longer to graduate. Students may also choose activities that enrich their degree program, such as study abroad programs, internships, or coop/work programs, even though they take longer to complete. Most of these activities enrich the undergraduate degree.
- Students who are highly engaged in their program, with sufficient time devoted to out-of-class preparation, are less likely to need to withdraw from a course or (generally) to fail a course. Many students face difficulties in adjusting to college life, spending too little time preparing for class.
- Students who withdraw from multiple courses lengthen TTD. Withdrawal patterns may reflect inadequate academic preparation for college or course “shopping” behaviors. Course withdrawals with no penalty and repeats of courses for no credit are two of the major factors that extend TTD identified in a major national study.²

¹A review of additional factors is provided by Knight, William E. and Arnold, W, “Towards a Comprehensive Predictive Model of Time to Bachelor’s Degree Attainment,” paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 2000; and Knight, William E., “Why the Five-Year (or Longer) Bachelor’s Degree?: An Exploratory Study of Time to Degree Attainment.” AIR 1994 Annual Forum Paper.

²Clifford Adelman, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor’s Degree Attainment*, June 1999; *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College*, February 2006.

Institutional Characteristics

- Institutions may have policies and practices that lengthen time to degree. Offering too few slots for critical courses means that students have to enroll for additional semesters to take the courses needed for their majors.
- Access to advising and the quality of advising may affect TTD. Students who choose courses that are not needed for a degree lengthen the time to degree.

Clearly, some factors affecting time to degree are outside the control of the student or the institution. The student who must work to support himself or herself has fewer hours to devote to study, and that student may perform at a lower level in college and have to withdraw from and later retake courses. In addition, the working student must balance a work and a class schedule. Not all needed courses may be available when the student can take them. Guaranteeing tuition for four years may not send the same message to non-traditional students as to traditional students, as their choices may be constrained.

This report begins with a brief profile of the demographic and academic characteristics of the FY2008 bachelor's degree recipients followed by an analysis of the time that cohort of USG graduates took to complete the bachelor's degree.

Profile of FY2008 Bachelor's Degree Graduates

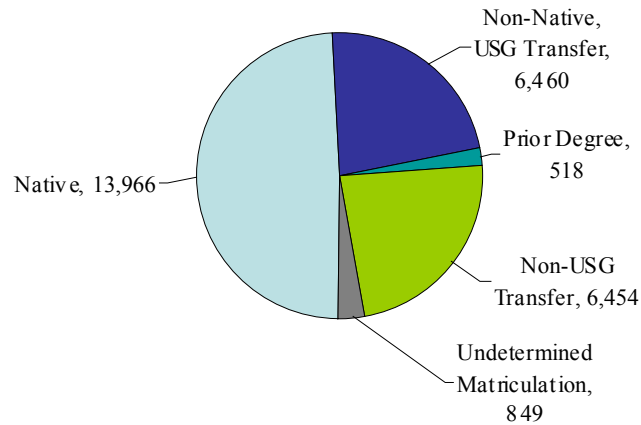
Demographic Characteristics

Of the 28,247 bachelor's degree recipients in FY2008, 58.3 percent were female and 41.7 percent male. 67.9 percent of the degree recipients were white, non-Hispanic; 18.4 percent Black or African American, non-Hispanic; 2.6 percent Hispanic or Latino; 5.9 percent Asian; 2.5 percent multi-racial; 0.2 percent American Indian or Alaska Native; and 2.4 percent undeclared or unknown. Most of the graduates (83.3 percent) initially started as full-time students.

Student Type

Among the FY2008 bachelor's degree recipients in the System, 49.4 percent started at and graduated from the same institution, 22.9 percent started at one USG institution and finished at another, and 22.8 percent transferred in from outside of the System. Initial matriculation status could not be determined for 3.0 percent because there is no source of data from outside the USG on initial matriculation date, and 1.8 percent had obtained at least one bachelor's degree from the System prior to FY2008 (Figure 2). These last two groups, students with undetermined matriculation dates and students with a prior bachelor's degree, will be excluded from further analysis.

Figure 2.
USG FY2008 Bachelor's Graduates
by Native/Transfer Student Type



Sector Where Students Earned Degree

Almost half of the graduates (45.6 percent) received their bachelor's degree from a research university, 14.2 percent from a regional university, and 38.3 percent from a state university. State colleges, which offer a limited number of bachelor's degrees, accounted for 1.9 percent of the graduates.³

Time-to-Degree for Native and Within-System Transfer Students

Most bachelor's degree programs consist of 120 credit hours and as many as eight additional credit hours of physical education, health, and orientation. These programs are designed so that students who plan and sequence their course-taking, do not change majors, and earn at least 15 credit hours each semester can complete the degree within four years. (If there are eight additional semester credit hours required for physical education, health, and orientation, the student must take more than 15 hours per term or enroll in a summer in order to graduate in four years.) Those enrolling in fall and spring terms each year will take 3.66 years to earn the degree. Programs such as engineering and secondary teacher education require more than 120 credit hours. In addition, some bachelor's programs are combined with Master's degree programs and require up to an additional year of study.

³ Only four state colleges are included in these reports, Dalton State College, Gainesville State College, Georgia Gwinnett College, and Macon State College. Although additional state colleges existed in the USG in FY2008, only these four conferred bachelor's degrees in this period.

The following time-to-degree summaries are restricted to native students and students transferring within the University System of Georgia. Detailed information on TTD at USG institutions can be found in Appendix 2A.

Median Time to Degree

The median time for bachelor’s degree completion was 4.3 years for native students and 5.3 years for students transferring within the System.

For native students, 37.2 percent completed the degree within four years, 75.5 percent completed the degree within five years, and 12.9 percent completed in more than six years. For USG transfer students, 14.7 percent completed the bachelor’s degree within four years, and 44.7 percent completed the degree within five years. More than one-third (35.8 percent) took more than six years to graduate (see Figures 3 and 4).

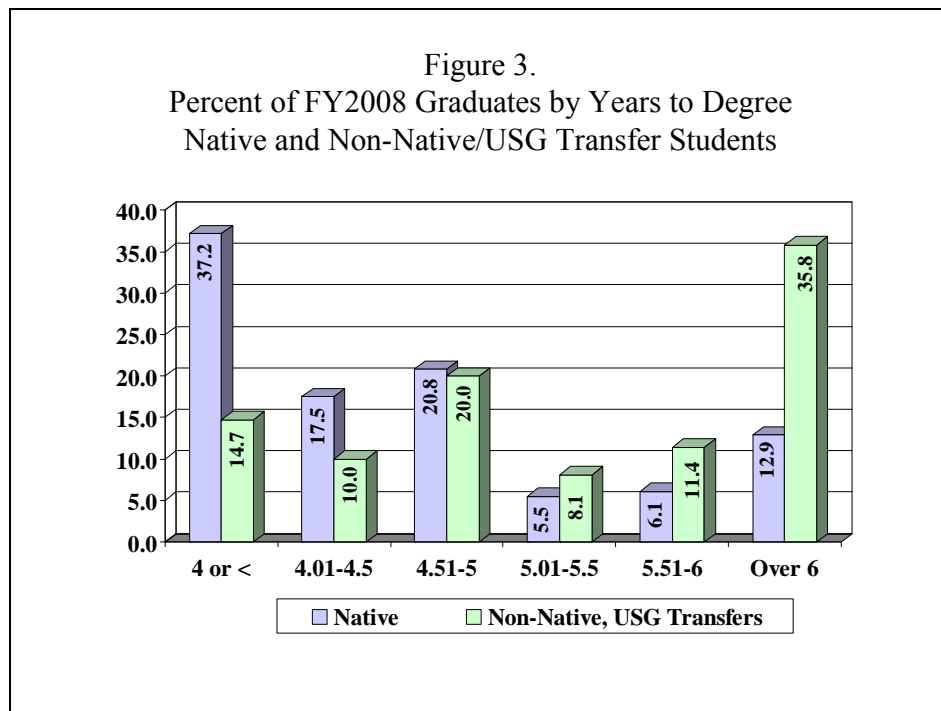
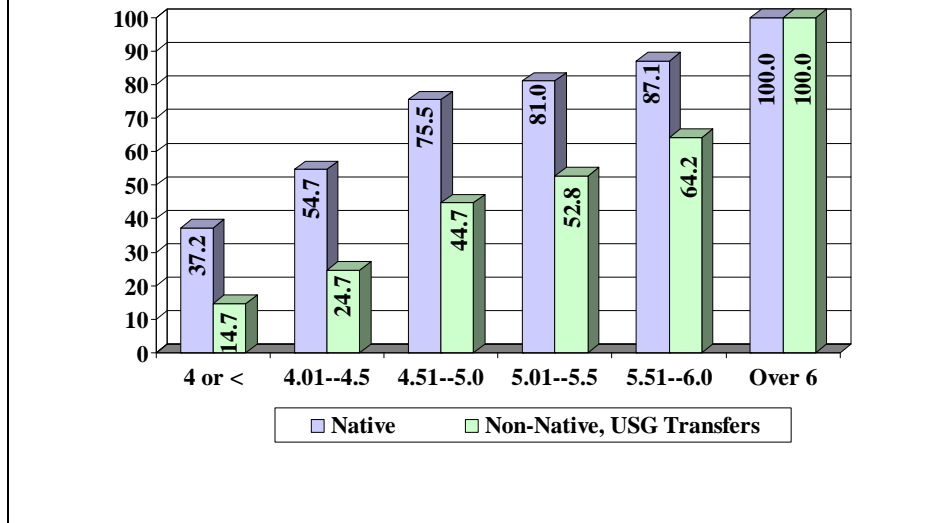


Figure 4.
Cumulative Percentage of Years to Degree, FY2008 Graduates,
Native and Non-Native/USG Transfer Status



Terms Enrolled and Credit Hours Accumulated

Native students completed a median of 11 semesters and earned 128 credit hours before graduating, while within-System transfer students completed a median of 13 semesters and 132 credit hours. The small difference between native and transfer students reflects the ease of transfer in the USG, with little time and few credits to be made up for transfer students. Given that many students transfer because of changes in majors, this transfer lag is not unexpected.

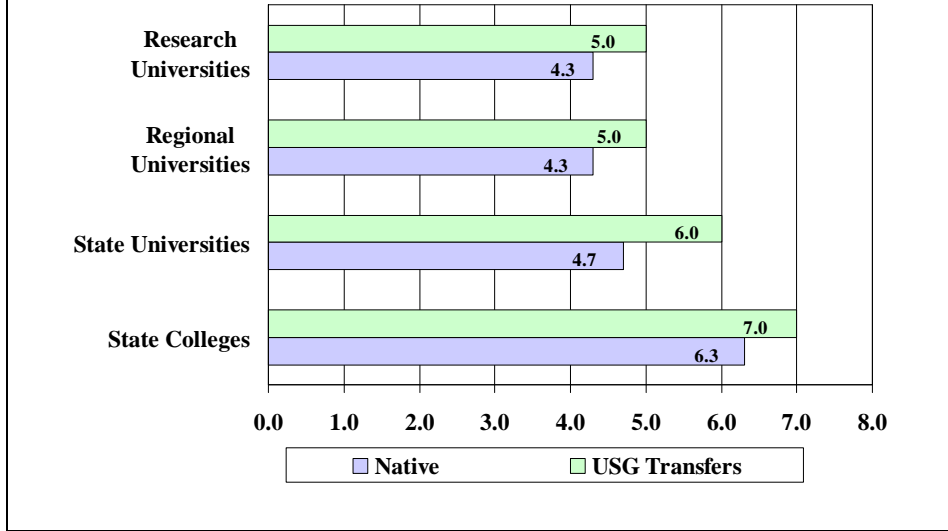
Differences in Median Time to Degree by Initial Course Load

As would be expected, students who started college as full-time students tended to take less time to attain the bachelor's degree than students who started as part-time students. The median time to degree for full-time native students was 4.3 years, compared to 5.0 years for students who started college with a part-time credit load. Among USG transfer students, full-time students graduated in a median of 5.3 years, compared to 6 years for part-time students.

Differences in Median Time to Degree by USG Sector

USG sectors vary significantly in median time to degree. Native students graduating from research and regional universities take the least amount of time to graduate (4.3 years), followed by students graduating from state universities (4.7 years) and state colleges (6.3 years), with similar differences among USG transfer students (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.
Median Time to Degree in Years for FY2008 Graduates
by USG Sector



In part, this reflects sector and institutional differences in their enrollment of traditional and more affluent students. Traditional students are less likely to work during college, and they may also have greater resources, knowledge and skills, in planning for and negotiating college life. However, these differences may also reflect institutional resources and commitment to advising and to ensuring that sections of required courses are offered at enough times to allow students to complete a major.

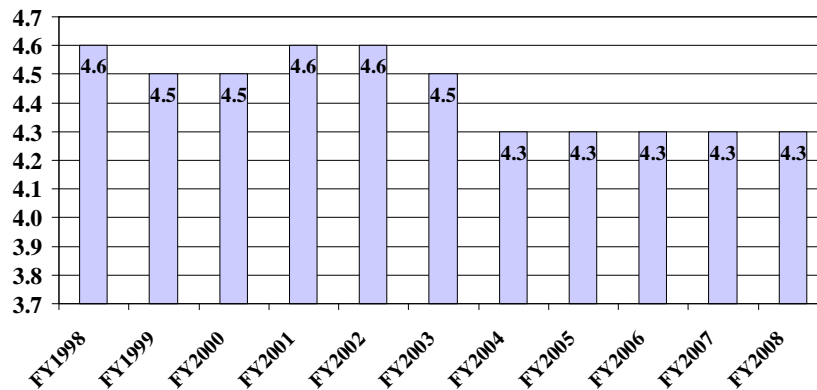
Time-Since-Transfer for Non-System Transfer Students

Because original matriculation dates and terms enrolled prior to transfer are not available for students who transfer from institutions outside the USG, it is not possible to determine the total time-to-degree for the 6,454 students who graduated from a System institution after transferring from a non-System institution. Following transfer from a non-System institution to a System institution, these students had a median number of years to graduate of 3.3, taking a median of 10 terms and 136 hours in the USG.

Changes in Time to Degree over Time

A decade ago the median time to degree was 4.6 years, roughly equivalent to one more semester enrolled than for today’s graduates. As shown in Figure 6, the median TTD fluctuated slightly until FY2003 when it declined to 4.5 years and then 4.3 years in FY2004. Time-to-degree has been remarkably stable for native students, at 4.3 median TTD for five years. One of the most striking findings of this study is the resiliency to change of TTD.

Figure 6.
Median Time-to Degree for Bachelor's Graduates
Native Students, FY1998—FY2008



For transfer students, the median TTD was stable over the last decade. The statistic was 5.4 years in FY1998, dropping to 5.3 years in FY1999 and remaining at that level through FY2008.

State and National Comparisons

Understanding how the USG is doing on TTD compared to the nation is not possible, because time-to-degree information is not collected at the federal or national level. However, several states, systems, and institutions track time to degree. Although there are differences in how other systems define TTD and measure it (and only a few systems study TTD annually), the results from several similar studies are presented below.

In 2008, Thomas Mortensen released a study of TTD for 2004 degree holders using U.S. Census data from panel surveys (Survey of Income and Program Participation, SIPP).⁴ Mortensen found the average time to degree for all degree holders in 2004 to be 5.2 years. (Degree holders may not have earned the degree that year, and thus, this is not strictly comparable.)

Texas initiated a plan to reduce time to degree in the late 1990s. They found that fewer than 30 percent of students earned a bachelor's degree within four years. On average, Texas students

⁴ Thomas Mortensen, *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, March 2008, Number 189. "Time to Degree, 1996 to 2004." SIPP data are from samples of 14,000 to 36,700 households surveyed every four months over a period of 2 ½ to four years. The 2004 panel began with 46,500 households to be interviewed eight times.

earned a degree after six years, were enrolled for 14 semesters, and attempted 155 semester credit hours.⁵

Following a time-to-degree and credits-to-degree study in Wisconsin in FY1994, the system implemented an initiative to decrease credits to degree from FY1994 to FY2001. Time to degree decreased over the period as required credits were decreased, with 33 percent of graduates earning degrees in four years or less in FY2001 compared to 21 percent in FY1994.⁶

Results from two other studies are shown in Table 1, along with results for native, FY2008 USG graduates. The National Center for Educational Statistics study, although dated, shows a smaller percentage of students graduating in four years than in Georgia. However, in Florida, where efforts have been focused on reducing time-to-degree for a number of years, more than half of bachelor's recipients graduate within four years. In Florida, a higher percentage of students enroll in community colleges than in Georgia, and the entering freshman population at Florida universities may be more similar to the population of students entering USG research universities. For example, the average SAT score for Florida entering freshmen in fall 1997 (six years before the graduation date examined) was 1139, while the average SAT for students entering universities in the USG in 2000 was 1075 and for research universities was 1194. We would expect better prepared students to have a shorter time to degree.

The federal government has released two studies of TTD using longitudinal data.⁷ The 1999 study found that the five-year bachelor's degree had become the norm as early as the 1970s. The median TTD in the 2006 study was 4.24 years, a slightly shorter TTD than for the USG.

In short, the System's median TTD of 4.3 years appears to be consistent with the median for the nation and a few other systems, but the proportion of USG bachelor's graduates completing the degree in four years (37 percent) is well under the benchmark set by Florida's students (54 percent).

⁵ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, "Ten Strategies and Their Financial Implications for Reducing Time-to-Degree in Texas Universities," October 1996. Texas found that the cost to student increased 46.8 percent for earning a degree in six years rather than four, and the cost to the state increased 27.3 percent.

⁶ University of Wisconsin System, *Occasional Research Brief*, Volume 2, Number 1: May 2002. "Institutional Efficiency and Student Success: The Relationship Between Credits to Degree, Time-to-Degree, and Graduation Rates."

⁷ Clifford Adelman, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment*, June 1999; *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College*, February 2006.

Table 1
Nation, Florida, and Georgia Public Institutions
Time Elapsed to Bachelor's Degree Completion from Initial Matriculation

<i>Study</i>	Percent by Years to Degree			
	Within 4	4 to 5	5 to 6	More than 6
NCES National Sample of FY2000 Graduates, All Public Institutions*	31.6	28.2	12.2	28.0
Florida FY2003, State University System, Native Students**	54.2	31.4	8.4	6.0
USG FY08 Native Students	37.2	38.3	11.6	12.9

*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *A Descriptive Summary of 1999–2000 Bachelor's Degree Recipients One Year Later, With an Analysis of Time to Degree*, NCES 2003–165, by Ellen M. Bradburn, Rachael Berger, Xiaojie Li, Katharin Peter, and Kathryn Rooney. Project Officer: James Griffith. Washington, DC: 2003.

** Florida Board of Governors. *How Long Do Students Take to Graduate in the State University System?* Information Brief 2004-4, Planning and Institutional Research, Florida Department of Education, 2004.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to examine TTD and to set baseline data for such studies in the future. USG native students took somewhat longer than four years to graduate, 4.3 years. Although the study did not investigate the reasons for differences in TTD, the median number of credit hours of 128 earned in a median of 11 semesters indicates that students did not earn excessive credit hours in their bachelor's degrees. Instead, they appear to have earned fewer than 15 credit hours average per term. In addition, USG students generally enrolled for at least one summer term. The median TTD for within-System transfer students was a year longer than for native students, but they earned a median of only 5 more credit hours. It appears that transfer students tended to earn fewer credit hours per term than non-transfer students (or fewer hours transferred as earned hours).

As expected, students who started with full-time rather than part-time loads took less time to graduate. The differences were not large, however, suggesting that some full-time freshmen changed their load status to part-time during their period of enrollment.

Students from sectors that required higher preparation for entering freshmen took less time than students from sectors with lower admissions standards. This is expected, given that students with lower levels of preparation may spend a year or more in remedial courses that do not count toward the bachelor's degree and may be more likely to withdraw from, fail, and repeat courses.

Future USG or institutional studies tracking student paths to degree attainment and initiatives to reduce TTD should investigate factors contributing to extended TTD. The following factors should be considered:

- **Financial Aid.** TTD increases if a student enrolls for a lighter load for even one semester. Financial reasons such as having to stop out to work or taking a reduced course load because of employment and the role of financial aid should be reviewed. Institutions should ensure that students can easily access financial aid information.
- **Impact of Advising on Student Decisions.** Student choices, such as change of major, transfer among institutions, attaining dual majors, minors, multiple minors, or embedded certificates, impact TTD.

Although the System would not want to limit students' choices to explore other majors, and not all student decisions can be influenced by policies, sound advising may have some impact on these decisions.

- **Institutional Procedures and Practices.** Factors under the direct control of the institution, such as the quality of advisement, availability of the courses students need to graduate, and policies on course withdrawals, impact TTD.

The number of course withdrawals allowed by institutional policies may have a significant impact on TTD. There is no Board policy that would limit the number of withdrawals in an undergraduate career. Five USG institutions reported that they have internal policies that limit the number of withdrawals (see Table 2). Academic policies on withdrawal from courses and procedures for repeating courses should be reviewed at each institution with a goal of discouraging or limiting repeated withdrawals.

Although some withdrawals are necessary due to personal emergencies, other withdrawals represent a phenomenon known as course shopping, where students register for more courses than needed and then plan to withdraw from one or more courses depending on the interest in or difficulty of the course. Students use these mechanisms to protect their grade point average to remain in good academic standing or to keep the HOPE scholarship.

Table 2.
USG Institutions with Policies that Limit the Number of Withdrawals*

Institution	Withdrawal Policy
Georgia State University	Maximum of six total withdrawals for each student's program. After this limit is reached, a student who withdraws from a course will automatically receive a 'WF'.
Albany State University	Maximum of 16 semester hours of course withdrawal. A student will receive a 'WF' once this limit has been reached.
Georgia College & State University	Maximum of five total withdrawals. A student will receive a 'WF' once this limit has been reached.
Kennesaw State University	Maximum of 8 total withdrawals. A student will receive a 'WF' once this limit has been reached.
Southern Polytechnic State University	Students must complete 2/3 of all courses attempted. If not, the student is placed on progressively stricter academic standing.

*Information was provided in a USG survey in Winter 2008.

- USG Policies. Incentives and disincentives for increased TTD impacted by System policies should be examined.
 - Current USG initiatives such as the emphasis on graduation and retention rates may have beneficial effects on time-to-degree.
 - In addition, although the “fixed for four” guaranteed tuition rate for entering freshmen should provide a financial incentive for students to complete college in a timely manner, the stability of TTD over the last five years does not suggest that there is an impact. It is possible that there are unknown countervailing impacts or that insufficient time has elapsed to view the impact of the guaranteed tuition plan.
 - In 1998, during semester conversion, the USG implemented an initiative to cap most bachelor’s degree programs to 120 hours. The USG policy requiring that bachelor’s degrees have a maximum of 120 credit hours (exclusive of health, orientation and physical education) should have a beneficial effect on TTD. Although some waivers to the 120-hour rule are required for accreditation, the increasing number of waivers to this policy should be monitored periodically.
- Georgia Legislation. HOPE scholarship eligibility, which is based on number of credits rather than amount of time or semesters enrolled, may contribute to extended time to degree if students take a reduced load in order to maintain GPA eligibility.

In short, the System and institutions should monitor TTD with a goal of decreasing TTD and increasing the number of students who graduate within four years. The USG should build understanding of differences in TTD among institutions based on mission and the proportion of non-traditional students enrolled.

Appendix 1

Definitions of Terms Used in USG Time-to-Degree Analyses

Time-to-Degree

Time-to-degree (TTD) describes the time it takes for a student to complete his/her degree. TTD is measured in elapsed chronological time in years from graduation back to first matriculation.

Elapsed Chronological Time

TTD was calculated based on elapsed chronological time assuming an April 15 degree date for spring, December 15 for fall, and August 15 for summer term graduations. The number of years to degree was the difference between this date and the starting date of the term (quarter or semester) the student first enrolled, using assumed dates of August 16 for fall, December 16 for spring and April 16 for summer terms. There is no System data source for the actual dates of graduation each year at each institution, but all occur within a narrow window of time.

Median Time-to-Degree

To avoid the influence of extreme values, median rather than mean values are reported in this study (the mean and median are included in Appendix 2A). The median is the mid-point between the lower and upper halves of the distribution. Half of the cases are below the median, and half are above.

Terms Enrolled

An alternative method of examining time to degree, by number of terms enrolled, was also used in order to provide a different view on the time actually spent on campus. A student who graduated with a TTD of four years and one with eight years might have the same number of terms enrolled.

Credit Hours Earned

Credit hours earned is the sum of hours earned at the institution, plus transfer hours when applicable. Quarter credit hours (before 1998) were converted to semester credit hours for this analysis.

Types of Students

Degree recipients were classified into one of the following categories based on their matriculation and graduation records:

- Native Students: those who started at and graduated from the same institution. A small group of native students who enrolled at other institutions in between matriculation and graduation are also included as Native Students.
- Within-System Transfer Students: Students who started college at one USG institution and graduated from another USG institution. Students may have enrolled in other institutions outside the USG in between the beginning and ending points in time.

- **Other Transfer Students:** Students who transferred to a USG institution from an institution outside the USG. It is not possible to determine the time of first matriculation for these students. For these students, time since transfer, starting from the first matriculation term at the degree-granting institution, is reported.
- **Undetermined:** Students whose status as a native or transfer student could not be determined. An example is a student who matriculated with an incorrect SSN that was later corrected and reported for graduation. For that student, there is no way to link the beginning and ending record. Other students first matriculated before the USG began keeping student data in 1984.
- **Prior-Degree Recipients:** Students who either obtained at least one bachelor's degree from a USG institution prior to FY2008 or who were granted more than one degree in FY2008. Because prior credit toward a degree may be counted as transfer credit toward a second degree, the time to degree is shortened. These students may appear in data to have graduated in a short period of time, but their records are not comparable to those of native students.

Appendix 2A
USG Time to Baccalaureate Degree in Elapsed Years
FY 2008 Baccalaureate Degree Recipients
by Student Type

Institution and Sector	Total	Type of Students					
		Native			Non-Native, USG Transfer		
	N	N	Median	Mean	N	Median	Mean
Georgia Institute of Technology	2,583	1,569	4.3	4.5	355	5.0	5.4
Georgia State University	3,630	1,338	4.7	5.2	1,051	5.7	6.5
Medical College of Georgia	278	0	NA	NA	138	4.7	6.1
University of Georgia	6,378	3,652	4.0	4.3	1,222	4.7	5.3
Research Universities	12,869	6,559	4.3	4.5	2,766	5.0	5.8
Georgia Southern University	2,383	1,424	4.3	4.9	553	5.0	6.0
Valdosta State University	1,621	862	4.3	5.0	359	5.3	6.6
Regional Universities	4,004	2,286	4.3	4.9	912	5.0	6.2
Albany State University	505	310	4.7	5.3	122	6.2	8.1
Armstrong Atlantic State University	835	315	4.7	5.9	209	5.7	7.2
Augusta State University	573	264	5.3	6.6	118	5.7	6.7
Clayton State University	842	235	5.0	6.3	287	7.3	8.9
Columbus State University	839	477	4.7	5.8	112	5.3	6.4
Fort Valley State University	268	171	4.7	5.2	43	5.3	6.7
Georgia College & State University	913	509	4.3	4.5	190	4.8	5.9
Georgia Southwestern State University	362	139	4.7	5.3	158	5.5	7.4
Kennesaw State University	2,854	1,064	4.7	5.6	736	6.3	7.5
North Georgia College & State University	766	360	4.3	4.6	200	5.7	6.8
Savannah State University	300	218	4.3	5.0	28	5.7	7.8
Southern Polytechnic State University	550	147	5.0	5.6	187	6.7	7.9
University of West Georgia	1,222	699	4.7	5.1	264	5.7	7.1
State Universities	10,829	4,908	4.7	5.4	2,654	6.0	7.4
Dalton State College	162	80	5.7	7.5	27	6.3	6.7
Gainesville State College	25	9	NR	NR	10	NR	NR
Georgia Gwinnett College	5	0	NA	NA	4	NR	NR
Macon State College	353	124	6.7	8.7	87	7.7	9.1
State Colleges	545	213	6.3	8.2	128	7.0	8.6
Total for USG	28,247	13,966	4.3	5.0	6,460	5.3	6.6

Appendix 2A (Continued)
USG Time to Baccalaureate Degree in Elapsed Years
FY 2008 Baccalaureate Degree Recipients
by Student Type

Institution and Sector	Type of Students (continued)								
	Other Transfer			Undetermined Matriculation Date			Prior Degree		
	N	Median	Mean	N	Median	Mean	N	Median	Mean
Georgia Institute of Technology	576	3.7	3.6	46	3.0	3.9	37	5.7	6.5
Georgia State University	1,021	3.0	3.7	133	3.3	7.8	87	4.3	4.9
Medical College of Georgia	93	1.7	1.8	16	1.7	2.0	31	2.0	1.8
University of Georgia	1,284	3.7	3.6	141	3.7	6.2	79	4.7	5.9
Research Universities	2,974	3.3	3.6	336	3.3	6.3	234	4.7	5.1
Georgia Southern University	328	3.3	3.6	62	3.7	4.8	16	2.3	2.9
Valdosta State University	305	3.0	3.7	45	3.3	8.4	50	4.7	5.8
Regional Universities	633	3.3	3.6	107	3.3	6.3	66	4.3	5.1
Albany State University	54	3.8	5.3	13	7.3	10.2	6	NR	NR
Armstrong Atlantic State University	248	3.3	4.0	40	4.2	7.4	23	5.0	6.5
Augusta State University	165	3.7	4.7	23	12.1	15.2	3	NR	NR
Clayton State University	279	3.7	4.4	28	6.8	12.2	13	3.7	4.7
Columbus State University	227	3.7	3.9	18	4.2	13.3	5	NR	NR
Fort Valley State University	39	3.7	3.9	14	5.8	11.1	1	NR	NR
Georgia College & State University	190	3.0	3.4	16	2.7	6.9	8	NR	NR
Georgia Southwestern State University	46	2.7	3.2	12	4.5	8.9	7	NR	NR
Kennesaw State University	853	3.3	4.1	101	3.7	7.6	100	5.2	7.0
North Georgia College & State Univ.	169	3.0	3.3	28	3.3	6.0	9	NR	NR
Savannah State University	46	3.3	3.6	7	NR	NR	1	NR	NR
Southern Polytechnic State University	170	3.7	4.7	35	3.7	6.1	11	5.7	7.0
University of West Georgia	209	3.0	3.7	36	2.7	6.9	14	5.7	6.7
State Universities	2,695	3.3	4.0	371	4.0	8.6	201	5.3	6.9
Dalton State College	42	4.0	4.6	4	NR	NR	9	NR	NR
Gainesville State College	3	NR	NR	2	NR	NR	1	NR	NR
Georgia Gwinnett College	1	NR	NR	-	-	-	-	-	-
Macon State College	106	3.7	5.6	29	11.3	16.3	7	NR	NR
State Colleges	152	3.7	5.2	35	11.3	16.3	17	3.7	5.4
Total for USG	6,454	3.3	3.8	849	3.7	7.7	518	4.7	5.8

Note: NA, Not Applicable; NR, Not Reported (Redacted)

Appendix 2B.
USG Time to Baccalaureate Degree of FY 2008 Baccalaureate Graduates
Native Students (Matriculated and Graduated from Same Institution)

Institution and Sector	Total	Number and Percent Graduating Within Specified Time, in Years											
		4.0 or Fewer		4.01 - 4.5 yrs		4.51 - 5 yrs		5.01 - 5.5 yrs		5.51 - 6		Over 6 yrs	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Georgia Institute of Technology	1,569	574	36.6	323	20.6	446	28.4	84	5.4	63	4.0	79	5.0
Georgia State University	1,338	388	29.0	232	17.3	275	20.6	110	8.2	122	9.1	211	15.8
University of Georgia	3,652	2100	57.5	705	19.3	527	14.4	63	1.7	89	2.4	168	4.6
Research Universities	6,559	3062	46.7	1,260	19.2	1,248	19.0	257	3.9	274	4.2	458	7.0
Georgia Southern University	1,424	473	33.2	292	20.5	345	24.2	76	5.3	83	5.8	155	10.9
Valdosta State University	862	272	31.6	177	20.5	201	23.3	54	6.3	47	5.5	111	12.9
Regional Universities	2,286	745	32.6	469	20.5	546	23.9	130	5.7	130	5.7	266	11.6
Albany State University	310	97	31.3	48	15.5	73	23.5	26	8.4	18	5.8	48	15.5
Armstrong Atlantic State University	315	70	22.2	46	14.6	56	17.8	27	8.6	23	7.3	93	29.5
Augusta State University	264	51	19.3	19	7.2	46	17.4	21	8.0	35	13.3	92	34.8
Clayton State University	235	57	24.3	29	12.3	36	15.3	23	9.8	17	7.2	73	31.1
Columbus State University	477	117	24.5	66	13.8	89	18.7	34	7.1	50	10.5	121	25.4
Fort Valley State University	171	59	34.5	21	12.3	33	19.3	13	7.6	18	10.5	27	15.8
Georgia College & State University	509	242	47.5	79	15.5	111	21.8	22	4.3	30	5.9	25	4.9
Georgia Southwestern State University	139	42	30.2	26	18.7	26	18.7	13	9.4	7	5.0	25	18.0
Kennesaw State University	1,064	182	17.1	155	14.6	282	26.5	92	8.6	98	9.2	255	24.0
North Georgia College & State University	360	163	45.3	43	11.9	82	22.8	13	3.6	23	6.4	36	10.0
Savannah State University	218	78	35.8	42	19.3	27	12.4	21	9.6	17	7.8	33	15.1
Southern Polytechnic State University	147	25	17.0	16	10.9	39	26.5	14	9.5	24	16.3	29	19.7
University of West Georgia	699	187	26.8	114	16.3	174	24.9	48	6.9	62	8.9	114	16.3
State Universities	4,908	1370	27.9	704	14.3	1,074	21.9	367	7.5	422	8.6	971	19.8
Dalton State College	80	10	12.5	2	2.5	19	23.8	1	1.3	10	12.5	38	47.5
Gainesville State College	9	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Macon State College	124	14	11.3	5	4.0	15	12.1	10	8.1	13	10.5	67	54.0
State Colleges	213	24	11.3	7	3.3	38	17.8	12	5.6	23	10.8	109	51.2
Total for USG	13,966	5201	37.2	2,440	17.5	2,906	20.8	766	5.5	849	6.1	1,804	12.9

Appendix 2C
USG Time to Baccalaureate Degree of FY2008 Baccalaureate Graduates
Non-Native (Transfers from USG Institutions)

Institution and Sector	Total	Number and Percent Graduating Within Specified Time											
		4 or Fewer		4.01 - 4.5 yrs		4.51 - 5 yrs		5.01 - 5.5 yrs		5.51 - 6		Over 6 yrs	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Georgia Institute of Technology	355	44	12.4	46	13.0	96	27.0	49	13.8	49	13.8	71	20.0
Georgia State University	1,051	130	12.4	100	9.5	207	19.7	84	8.0	132	12.6	398	37.9
Medical College of Georgia	138	53	38.4	0	NA	31	22.5	2	1.4	15	10.9	37	26.8
University of Georgia	1,222	292	23.9	182	14.9	317	25.9	99	8.1	109	8.9	223	18.2
Research Universities	2,766	519	18.8	328	11.9	651	23.5	234	8.5	305	11.0	729	26.4
Georgia Southern University	553	82	14.8	62	11.2	143	25.9	44	8.0	74	13.4	148	26.8
Valdosta State University	359	67	18.7	38	10.6	67	18.7	28	7.8	39	10.9	120	33.4
Regional Universities	912	149	16.3	100	11.0	210	23.0	72	7.9	113	12.4	268	29.4
Albany State University	122	5	4.1	7	5.7	18	14.8	12	9.8	19	15.6	61	50.0
Armstrong Atlantic State University	209	26	12.4	22	10.5	29	13.9	20	9.6	17	8.1	95	45.5
Augusta State University	118	12	10.2	8	6.8	20	16.9	14	11.9	15	12.7	49	41.5
Clayton State University	287	10	3.5	9	3.1	28	9.8	26	9.1	34	11.8	180	62.7
Columbus State University	112	11	9.8	18	16.1	22	19.6	14	12.5	12	10.7	35	31.3
Fort Valley State University	43	6	14.0	8	18.6	4	9.3	5	11.6	6	14.0	14	32.6
Georgia College & State University	190	45	23.7	22	11.6	39	20.5	11	5.8	26	13.7	47	24.7
Georgia Southwestern State University	158	19	12.0	16	10.1	36	22.8	8	5.1	15	9.5	64	40.5
Kennesaw State University	736	63	8.6	47	6.4	114	15.5	58	7.9	64	8.7	390	53.0
North Georgia College & State University	200	32	16.0	16	8.0	31	15.5	14	7.0	31	15.5	76	38.0
Savannah State University	28	3	10.7	1	3.6	6	21.4	3	10.7	2	7.1	13	46.4
Southern Polytechnic State University	187	7	3.7	11	5.9	18	9.6	12	6.4	27	14.4	112	59.9
University of West Georgia	264	34	12.9	24	9.1	45	17.0	21	8.0	38	14.4	102	38.6
State Universities	2,654	273	10.3	209	7.9	410	15.4	218	8.2	306	11.5	1,238	46.6
Dalton State College	27	2	7.4	3	11.1	3	11.1	0	NA	3	11.1	16	59.3
Gainesville State College	10	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Georgia Gwinnett College	4	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Macon State College	87	4	4.6	5	5.7	14	16.1	2	2.3	10	11.5	52	59.8
State Colleges	128	8	6.3	8	6.3	20	15.6	2	1.6	14	10.9	76	59.4
Total for USG	6,460	949	14.7	645	10.0	1,291	20.0	526	8.1	738	11.4	2,311	35.8

*For more information, contact:
Cathie Mayes Hudson, Ph.D.
Vice Chancellor for Research and Policy Analysis
Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
cathie.mayes.hudson@usg.edu*

*Kathleen Burk, Meihua Zhai, and Phyllis Gagne
contributed to the analysis of time to degree.*

March 26, 2009