

**Definitions Used in
Undergraduate Degree Graduation Rate Reports
and First-Year Retention Rate Reports**

Introduction

Retention rates are a measure of academic progression of a group of students from one period of time to the next. Graduation rates are a measure of the success of those students in attaining their academic goals. Both retention rates and graduation rates are affected by student characteristics, choices, and behaviors and by institutional characteristics and programs.

A retention rate is the percentage of students in a given cohort who are enrolled in a USG institution in a specified term (in this case, one year later) or are not enrolled in the specified term but have graduated from a USG institution between matriculation and that term. The number of students in the cohort is the denominator of the rate; the number of students enrolled or graduated but not enrolled one year later is the numerator of the rate.

A graduation rate is the percentage of students in a given cohort graduating within a specified period of time. The number of students in the cohort is the denominator of the rate; the number of students graduating is the numerator of the rate.

For both retention and graduation rates, the definition of the cohort may vary according to the subject of interest; however, the most common cohorts studied are first-time/full-time, degree-seeking freshman students and all beginning freshman students. An example of a sub-cohort is first-time/full-time students who attended college in the fall after spring graduation from high school (traditional students).

Definitions are provided below for the beginning student cohorts and for graduation and retention rate reports. The definitions used here are based on data elements from the University System of Georgia Student Information Reporting System (SIRS). Data element numbers are shown in parentheses.

First-Time Freshman Base Cohort

The base cohort for undergraduate student retention rate and undergraduate degree graduation rate reports includes all undergraduate degree-seeking "freshmen."

Degree-Seeking Status (S314). Degree-seeking status is determined by SIRS field S314. The definition includes degree level codes "Z," "C," "E," "V," "A," "B," "Q," and "Null," but it does not include students with degree level codes "N," "X," "F," "M," "S," "D," and "P."¹ During several years, institutions could leave

¹ In prior years, "X," i.e., "Non-Degree Seeking, Post-Baccalaureate," was not defined as specific to undergraduates only, and it was included in the codes selected for undergraduates. Beginning with the

S314 blank. Students with missing data on S314 were assumed to be seeking a bachelor's degree, if they were at a four-year institution, or an associate degree, if they were at a two-year institution. The codes used to identify undergraduate degree seekers are summarized in the table below.

Undergraduates (Based on Degree-Seeking Status in S314)	
<i>Included as Undergraduates</i>	<i>Not Included as Undergraduates</i>
Certificates of less than one year (Z)	Advanced certificates (F)
One-year vocational-related certificates (C)	Masters (M)
Two-year vocational-related certificates (E)	Educational specialist (S)
Career associate (V)	Doctorate (D)
Associate (A)	First professional (P) -- Called "First Professional A" in historical reports
Bachelors (B)	Non-degree seeking, post baccalaureate (X)
First-professional B (Q)—Historical code	Non-degree seeking undergraduates (N)

Student Level (S301). All first-time students coded as "freshmen" are included in the base cohort (S301 = 10). Other historic codes for freshmen are also included (01, 02, 05, 12 and 81). In addition, because of the structure of SIRS, some first-time students with AP credit may be coded as sophomores or higher. They would not be included if the program selected only "10's." Thus the base cohort selects student levels 20, 30, and 40, as well, but it removes transfer students from this group. (The code further ensures that freshmen are not over-selected by restricting the non-transfer 20, 30, or 40 students to those who graduated from high school the previous spring.)

Matriculation Term. To be selected for the cohort, students must matriculate at a USG institution for the first time in the Fall term of the cohort year. For IPEDS and for retention and graduation rate reporting, first-time Summer matriculants are also included if they are enrolled in the Fall term of the cohort year. (Summer first-time matriculants are counted at the institution attended in the Fall term.) As reviewed above, transfer students, i.e., students with a transfer college record, are not included in the base cohort unless their high school graduation year is equal to the cohort year. This means that the student who attends college in the summer near home, for example, and then enrolls in Fall at their intended institution would count at the fall institution; that student would not count "against" the summer institution.

Undergraduate Degree Graduation Rates

Graduation rates are the percentage of those students who graduated from the same or another USG institution (depending on the specific report) with the specified degree or equivalent within a specified number of years of their original matriculation. Graduations are counted through Summer term of the target year. (Note: Summer graduation records are reported to SIRS in the following Fall term.)

Fall 2000 cohort, freshmen with a degree level code of "X" were not included in the base cohort.

The preceding base cohort definition is amended for specific reports by the appropriate combination of the following options:

- C **Full-Time** - Only full-time freshmen, defined as enrolled for 12 or more credit hours in the cohort Fall term, are included in the base cohort.
- C **Part-Time** - Only part-time freshmen, defined as enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours in the cohort Fall term, are included in the base cohort.
- C **All First-Time** - Both full-time and part-time freshmen, i.e., the entire base cohort, are included. Credit hours enrolled are not considered.
- C **Learning Support/System Requirement (Developmental Studies prior to FY1995)** - Students with a code of "S" in fields S418, S420 and/or S422.
- C **Traditional** - Students who graduate from high school the same year as college matriculation.
- C **Traditional - Graduated High School One through Five Years Ago** - Students who graduate from high school one to five years before college matriculation.
- C **Non-Traditional** - Students who graduate from high school more than five years before college matriculation.
- C **Unclassified Traditional/Non-Traditional** - High school graduation date unknown at time of first matriculation to college.
- C **Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Sub-Cohort** - For research, regional, and state universities, only bachelor's degree-seeking freshmen in the base cohort (i.e., those with a SIRS degree level field containing "B," "Q," or "Null") are included. This definition is used for sections of the IPEDS GRS survey, the CSRDE retention/graduation reports, and all USG bachelor's degree graduation rate reports. (Note that cohorts prior to the Fall 2000 cohort included students with degree status of "X".)

For state colleges, only bachelor's degree-seeking freshmen in the base cohort with a SIRS degree level field containing "B" or "Q" are included. (Degree level codes "N" and "Null" should be included in the Associate's Degree-Seeking sub-cohorts at state colleges as they are at USG two-year colleges.)

- C **Bachelor's Degree Graduation Rates** - Students in the bachelor's degree sub-cohort (above) who graduated from the same institution (i.e., "institution-specific rates") or any USG institution (i.e., "System-wide rates") with a bachelor's degree or equivalent (i.e., degree level codes "B" or the historical code "Q") within a specified number of years of their original matriculation are counted in the graduation rate calculation.

Bachelor's Degree Graduation Rate reports are run by institution with sector subtotals and System totals only for research, regional, and state universities. A separate report by institution and sector is run for the two USG state colleges; the latter are not included in the System total calculation.

Bachelor's degrees awarded at USG institutions will be used in calculating bachelor's graduation rates as appropriate to the specific report, i.e., institution-specific or System-wide, with universities, sectors, and System totals. The reports for state colleges show sector totals.

- C **Associate's Degree-Seeking Sub-Cohort** - Only freshmen in the base cohort seeking the associate's degree (i.e., those with a SIRS degree level field containing "A" or "V" at all USG universities, and "A" and "V" plus "Null" at USG two-year colleges and state colleges) are included. This definition is used for USG associate's degree graduation rate reports. (In the past degree-seeking sub-cohorts included "X". Beginning with the Fall 2000 cohort, Degree-Seeking sub-cohorts will not include "X.")
- C **Associate's Degree Graduation Rates** - Only students in the associate's degree sub-cohort who graduated from the same institution (i.e., "institution-specific rates") or any USG institution (i.e., "System-wide rates") with an associate's degree or equivalent (i.e., degree level codes "A" or "V") within a specified number of years of their original matriculation are counted in this graduation rate calculation.
- C **Certificate-Seeking Sub-Cohorts** - Only freshmen from the base cohort are included as follows:
- A. **Less Than One-Year Certificate-Seeking Sub-Cohort.** Students seeking a "less than one-year certificate" (i.e., those with a SIRS degree level field containing "Z" at all USG universities and two-year colleges) are included.
- B. **One-Year Certificate Seeking Sub-Cohort.** A "one-year" certificate (i.e., those with a SIRS degree level field containing "C" at all USG universities and two-year colleges) are included.
- C. **Two-Year Vocational Certificate Seeking Sub-Cohort.** A "two-year" certificate (i.e., those with a SIRS degree level field containing "E" at all USG universities and two-year colleges) are included.
- C **Certificate Graduation Rates** - Only students in each certificate sub-cohort who graduated from the same institution (i.e., "institution-specific rates") or any USG institution (i.e., "System-wide rates") with the respective certificate graduation record within a specified number of years of their original matriculation are counted in this graduation rate calculation.
- C **Institution-Specific Rates** - Only those students who are awarded the specified degree at the institution in which they matriculated are counted in the graduation rate calculation. A System total

rate on these reports is calculated by summing the number of graduates in the specified cohort and dividing by the summed number of students in the cohort across institutions.

- C **System-Wide Rates** - Students who are awarded the specified degree at any USG institution are counted in the graduation rate calculation.

First-Year Student Retention Rate Reports

First-year retention rate is the percentage of the First-Time Freshman Base Cohort students which are enrolled at the same or another USG institution (depending on the specific report) in the Fall term following the Fall term of matriculation or are not enrolled in the following Fall term but have graduated from a USG institution since the Fall term of matriculation. This does not mean that the retained, re-enrolled students have necessarily advanced to the next student level; some may re-enroll as sophomores, but others may still be freshmen. Students enrolled in co-op programs that are part of the program of study (defined in SIRS with a transaction code of 3) in the following Fall term are counted as retained depending on the "institution-specific" or "System-wide" nature of the report. Students who have completed their program of study are counted as retained, i.e., students in the base cohort who were awarded a certificate or degree from their matriculating institution between the cohort Fall term and the following Summer term but are not enrolled in a USG institution the following Fall term are counted in the Graduated Institution-Specific and included in the calculation of the Institution-Specific Retention Rate. Students in the base cohort who were awarded a certificate or degree from any USG institution between the cohort Fall term and the following Summer term but are not enrolled in a USG institution the following Fall term are counted as Graduated System-Wide and included in the calculation of the System-Wide Retention Rate.

The preceding base cohort definition is amended for specific retention rate reports by the appropriate combination of the following options:

- C **Full-Time** - Only full-time freshmen, defined as enrolled for 12 or more credit hours in the cohort Fall term, are included in the base cohort.
- C **Part-Time** - Only part-time freshmen, defined as enrolled for fewer than 12 credit hours in the cohort Fall term, are included in the base cohort.
- C **All First-Time** - Both full-time and part-time freshmen, i.e., the entire base cohort, are included.
- C **Learning Support/System Requirement (Developmental Studies prior to FY1995)** - Students with a code of "S" in fields S418, S420 and/or S422.
- C **Traditional** - Students who graduate from high school the same year as college matriculation.
- C **Traditional - Graduated High School One through Five Years Ago** - Students who graduate from high school one to five years before college matriculation.

- C **Non-Traditional** - Students who graduate from high school more than five years before college matriculation.
- C **Unclassified Traditional/Non-Traditional** - Students with an unknown high school graduation date.
- C **Institution-Specific Rates** - Only students who are enrolled at the institution in which they matriculated in the Fall term following the matriculation Fall term are counted in the retention rate calculation.
- C **System-Wide Rates** - Students who are enrolled at any USG institution in the Fall term following the matriculation Fall term are counted in the retention rate calculation.

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