

Discussion of:
Retention and Graduation Metrics
for
USG institutions by sector?

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USG Regents' Administrative Committee on Institutional Research and Planning

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Need to:

- Identify appropriate cohort definition
- IF program/major, how/when defined?
- Document definitions for readers

Below extractions from emails detail various discussion items and interpretations from USG AC IRP colleagues on the USG AC IRP listserv.

From: Institutional Research and Planning [mailto:IRP-REPS@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU]
Sent: Monday, March 07, 2011 10:09 AM
To: IRP-REPS@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU
Subject: Question on RPG Data for Academic Department/Division Units

- wondering if any other USG institution has been able to produce some meaningful retention and graduation rates at the program/major level. I have a number of reasons for (my institution) as to why such an analysis is flawed.

The USG RPG recommendations (<http://www.usg.edu/strategicplan/projects/rpgr.pdf>) indicate that "Each academic department (or division) must have an action plan for improving student retention which addresses target areas for improvement as delineated in this report". On the same page, it further explains that this can be done "...using information to routinely evaluate existing programs..." I would interpret this to mean that the methodology does not necessarily equate to calculating a retention rate at the program/major level as my Academic Affairs colleagues at (my institution) believe, but could imply the use of recurring program review (CPR) techniques.

I would appreciate any input as to the data/reporting you are providing to your academic units for meeting the RPG committee's recommendation above. If you have successfully produced retention and graduation rates at the program/major level, I would be interested in speaking to you about the institutional controls in place to calculate a meaningful rate!

From: Institutional Research and Planning [mailto:IRP-REPS@listserv.uga.edu]
Sent: Monday, March 07, 2011 1:43 PM
To: IRP-REPS@listserv.uga.edu
Subject: Re: Question on RPG Data for Academic Department/Division Units

We are having these discussions at (my institution) as well. The key seems to be determining an appropriate starting point for these analyses. Most of our deans propose calculating graduation rates based on acceptance to the discipline, which often occurs at around 60 earned hours or after a specific "gateway" has been crossed like passing the GACE I for ed students. Nursing and business both have entry requirements for the discipline.

That still begs the question regarding retention, which needs to be calculated from day one. I find that many of our deans don't want to "claim" new freshmen until they've successfully navigated college to the point that they are acceptable as new majors based on specific standards. Any approaches that you all are finding effective would be very helpful!

Sent: Monday, March 07, 2011 2:47 PM
To: IRP-REPS@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU
Subject: Re: Question on RPG Data for Academic Department/Division Units

We have received many requests for program-level retention and graduation rates to track RPG on our campus, but I have argued that the normal procedure for calculating both rates would not meaningfully be relevant at disaggregated level.

The fact that many students change their majors one or more times during the course of their studies makes intra-institutional computation of retention and graduation a problematic process. If a student initially was admitted into a business program and later crossed to education, that student will reduce the retention and graduation rates for the business cohort and will neither count as part of education's retention and graduation rates. Should the transfer from business to education be regarded as a loss and no gain to anyone, albeit that student eventually received an education degree? To which cohort does the "major changer" belong? How would education be credited for the "major changer" receiving their degree?

This problem makes such analysis a futile exercise in my own mind, unless it is acceptable to stigmatize changing major as a failure or loss. In addition, when does one begin to count the retention and graduation rates of a large number of students with undeclared major? I have suggested using grades analysis instead of retention and graduation rates to monitor academic progress.

To: IRP-REPS@listserv.uga.edu

Date: Mon, Mar 7, 2011 at 3:48 PM

subject: Question on RPG Data for Academic Department/Division Units

Colleagues:

This is a tricky issue that I believe should be deliberated on by the institution's academic administration & faculty governance, not just an IRP staff. I believe it should be a collegial decision that institution is comfortable living with.

But, here are four alternatives possibilities:

1. Institution **enrolls all students in "general ed" as a major until they complete their core breadth requirements**; only then formally admit students into a major program for upper division work and use the number "admitted" into the major as the denominator. In most cases, the formal admission coincides with promotion to Junior status. (Much of the major "switching" behavior in many places takes place before the Junior year).
2. A variation on #1 is to **include only students of junior or senior status declaring the major as the denominator**. It is not as clean but it will miss all the students who go away or switch majors as a result of interacting mainly with the lower division core curriculum (thus, in many settings most of the generalized attrition)—who should not be counted as attrition against a particular major.
3. Forget about real "graduation rates" and instead calculate "graduate production rates" where the denominator is the **number of seniors** claiming the major AND enrolled in courses in the major in the year and the numerator is the number actually graduated from the major in the same academic year.
4. In place of graduate production rates, try calculating "program efficiency rates" where the denominator is the total **number of students** claiming the major AND enrolled in courses in the major for a given academic year and the numerator is the total number of graduates from the major for the same academic year.

In item 3 & 4, do not include in the counts students claiming the major unless they are also taking courses in the major—in some settings there may be a fairly large number who claim a major but are taking courses only outside the major.

Things to avoid:

Don't count attrition against a program when a student is not actually being exposed to the program's courses.

Don't count attrition against a program for student taking courses in the program but not actually majoring in it.

Don't include "undeclared" majors in any of these calculations until they declare a major.

Also noted at meeting:

-retention-track initial major to 1st year using Fall Census major

-graduation-track last major when last enrolled OR graduated using Census major

-using Census data can inform advisors on process to declare a major and timing that impacts USG data collections