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“Reverse Transfer” College Students Becoming the “New Normal”

Herndon, Virginia, July 24, 2012 – Of those college students who transferred from a four-year institution to a two-year institution outside of summer months, more than half did not return to any four-year institution by the end of the study period, according to the latest Signature Report™, [“Reverse Transfer: A National View of Student Mobility from Four-Year to Two-Year Institutions”](#) from the [National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™](#).

As a follow-up to the second Signature Report, [“Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions,”](#) the third report sheds more light on an understudied type of student mobility: reverse transfer behavior. The study focuses on first-time-in-college students who entered four-year colleges and universities in fall 2005 and follows their college enrollments for six years through the summer of 2011. The report examined the prevalence of reverse transfer to two-year colleges, with contextual information on summer session course taking behavior in two-year institutions as well.

Findings from the new report include:

- Within six years, 14.4 percent of the first-time students who started at a four-year institution in the fall of 2005 subsequently enrolled at a two-year institution outside of the summer months.
- Only 16.6 percent of these reverse transfer students later returned to the four-year institutions where they began.
- 28.3 percent of the reverse transfer students returned to the four-year sector, but to a different institution.
- The majority of reverse transfer students (71.1 percent) stayed in two-year institutions for more than one term.
- By the end of the six-year study period, two-thirds of reverse transfer students neither had a credential from nor were still enrolled at a four-year institution.
- Only one in 10 of the students who left their original four-year institution to enroll at a two-year institution in nonsummer months completed a degree or was still enrolled at the original four-year institution by the end of the six-year study period.

There are various roles of two-year enrollment in four-year students’ academic trajectories. For example, 77.5 percent of the students who started at a four-year institution, then enrolled in a two-year institution for the summer, and subsequently returned to the original four-year institution successfully completed a degree. By contrast, of those students who started in a four-year institution and did not go

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to a two-year institution, only 58.4 percent completed a degree at their institution of origin. Additionally, depending on the length of stay in a two-year institution, only 33 to 40 percent of the students who started at a four-year institution, enrolled in a two-year institution in non-summer months, and then returned to their original four-year institution successfully completed their college careers.

“The findings from this study have implications for policy at the institutional, state, and national levels,” stated Dr. Doug Shapiro, Executive Research Director, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. “Institutions can use this information to craft policies that help them reach enrollment goals. Students will be able to make better decisions about their educational pathways. Both institutions and public policymakers will have more comprehensive measures of student success, and better indicators for institutional accountability.”

“Our latest Signature Report continues to provide a unique student-level look at student mobility,” stated Rick Torres, President and CEO of the Clearinghouse. “By showing the prevalence of reverse transfer behavior, we count a large group of students who may previously have been ignored as stop-outs or drop-outs. The fact that these findings from our studies reflect the latest and most current view of enrollment trends means that they can contribute to a more informed understanding and substantive discussions surrounding student educational pathways and college completion. Without tracking students beyond their institution of origin provided in our studies, policymakers risk missing key information on an often uncounted segment of students.”

The Signature Report series, which is supported by a grant from the Lumina Foundation, serves as a national resource for the continued study of student pathways and college enrollment patterns and has immediate relevance for institutional, state, and federal policy. Written specifically for public and institutional policymakers, the Signature Reports provide comparison data that reveal patterns and valuable insights on students’ postsecondary access, persistence, and other success outcomes. Later in 2012, the Clearinghouse will release a fourth Signature Report focusing on college completion rates nationwide.

About the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center is the research arm of the National Student Clearinghouse. The Research Center collaborates with higher education institutions, states, school districts, high schools, and educational organizations as part of a national effort to better inform education leaders and policymakers. Through accurate longitudinal data outcomes reporting, the Research Center enables better educational policy decisions leading to improved student outcomes.

To learn more, visit <http://research.studentclearinghouse.org>.

About the National Student Clearinghouse

The National Student Clearinghouse (a nonprofit formed in 1993) is the unique and trusted source for higher education enrollment and degree verifications. The Clearinghouse serves as a single point of contact for the collection and timely exchange of accurate and comprehensive enrollment, degree, and certificate records on behalf of its more than 3,300 participating higher education institutions, which represent 96 percent of all students in public and private U.S. institutions. The Clearinghouse also provides thousands of high schools and districts with continuing collegiate enrollment, progression, and completion statistics on their alumni.

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Through its verification and reporting services, the Clearinghouse saves the education community cumulatively nearly four hundred million dollars annually. Most Clearinghouse services are provided to colleges and universities at little or no charge, including enhanced transcript and research services, enabling institutions to redistribute limited staff and budget resources to more important student service efforts. Clearinghouse services are designed to facilitate an institution's compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, The Higher Education Act, and other applicable laws.

In addition, the Clearinghouse provides accurate, timely enrollment and degree verifications to student loan providers, employers, student credit issuers, the U.S. Department of Education, and others who access its registry more than half a billion times annually.

For more information, visit www.studentclearinghouse.org.

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