

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE®

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College Completion Exceeds 75% for Full-Time Students Addition of Previously “Invisible” Students Provides More Complete Enrollment Picture

Herndon, Virginia, November 15, 2012 – A new [National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™](#) study shows a dramatic increase in the U.S. college completion rate when nontraditional student pathways are included, driving the completion rate from 42 percent to 54 percent. In addition, the results show that over 75 percent of full-time students complete college within six years, which is higher than what has been reported in previous studies. These findings are from the latest report in the Clearinghouse’s series of [Signature Reports](#).

The report is based on student-level data made available to the Clearinghouse by its more than 3,300 participating colleges and universities, including nearly 97 percent of students attending public and private nonprofit postsecondary institutions. Typically, the data used in graduation rate calculations are institution based and reflect institutional retention and not student persistence. Examining student-level data gives a more accurate picture of actual student behavior.

Additionally, most college completion studies focus only on first-time full-time students, who graduate from the same institution at which they started. The Clearinghouse study demonstrates that this may no longer be the most relevant way to measure completion rates.

Today’s students follow diverse educational pathways. This Signature Report goes beyond the conventional graduation rate calculations by examining completions beyond the starting institution and including part-time students, mixed enrollment students (those who change their enrollment status from full time to part time or vice versa), and adult learners. The report’s use of student-level data closes the information gap on students who follow all but the most traditional of postsecondary pathways and enables more exact measures needed for better informing policy.

“With this new look at college completion rates, the Clearinghouse can inform the accountability discussion by shifting the traditional focus from the institution to the student in order to include all educational pathways, and, as a result, change the national conversation on completion,” stated President and CEO Rick Torres.

“Our report reveals the full range of pathways that today’s college students take. We counted student completions anywhere, beyond institutional boundaries, across state lines, and over time,” stated Dr. Doug Shapiro, Executive Research Director of the Research Center. “Findings from this report show that only measures that count all completions can adequately facilitate both accountability and improvement efforts.”

Findings include:

- Within six years, 12 percent of the first-time students completed a degree or certificate at an institution other than the one where they started, raising the overall completion rate from 42 to 54 percent.
- More than one in five students who completed a degree did so at an institution other than the one where they started – students whose successful outcomes are invisible to traditional graduation rate

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calculations. The number is closer to one in four for traditional-age students and more than one in three for those who started at public two-year institutions.

- Out of the full starting cohort, 3.5 percent received a degree within six years in a state different from where they started, representing 6.5 percent of all completions.
- Overall, 15 percent of two-year starters completed a degree at a four-year institution within six years, and nearly two-thirds of those did so without first obtaining a two-year degree. Community colleges do not receive any credit for the success of these students under traditional graduation rate measures.
- Gains from completions elsewhere were greater for traditional-age students (age 24 or younger at first entry) than for older students (age over 24 at first entry). Overall, there was a large gap between the completion rates of younger and older students, with the latter group having a much lower six-year completion rate (57 percent vs. 42 percent).
- Disaggregating (or breaking apart) the outcomes by age and enrollment intensity showed that older students who enrolled exclusively part time actually had a higher completion rate than traditional-age part-time students. However, overall, two-thirds of all exclusively part-time students, a group that made up only 7 percent of the cohort, stopped out without receiving any postsecondary credential in the final year of the study.

The study follows college enrollment behaviors starting in the fall of 2006 through the spring of 2012, focusing on first-time degree-seeking students. In addition to the national-level results reported in this fourth Signature Report, the Clearinghouse will release state-level college completion rates in early 2013.

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.

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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