

Tracking Retention and Graduation Rates for Transfer Students

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Main Goals

1. Describe ways to **internally** improve reporting of transfer student graduation rates in support of productive dialog.
2. Demonstrate a possible way to compare new and transfer student retention and graduation rates **within** an institution.
3. Identify implications for national reporting initiatives.

Context: National push to report transfer-in graduation statistics

- Voluntary initiatives (e.g., College Portrait, Student Achievement Measure “SAM”).
- Federal proposal (IPEDS).

The initiatives calculate graduation statistics without a breakdown by number of prior credits.

Alverno Longitudinal Tracking System

- Educational Research and Evaluation created a Longitudinal Tracking System containing records of the college’s undergraduate students.
- The SPSS-based file tracks students each semester from entry to 10 years after entrance, or until they graduate.
- The records include background characteristics, enrollment information, major, number of credits achieved, and selected other information.

Retention and Graduation Rates: Presenting Information Internally

- Many times, we present student retention and graduation rates **internally** with a focus on first-time, full-time students.
- We do this because first-time, full-time students have an equal starting point in calculating time to degree. It also aligns with current IPEDS reporting.
- **But**, this often leads to questions about transfer students and how their retention and graduation rates compare to first-time students.

Issues with retention and graduation rates for *Non*-first-time, full-time students

- Many of our students do not fit into the category of first-time, full-time, fall entrants.
- Those new students who enter part-time and/or in the spring have comparable *prior* educational attainment but are relatively small populations.
- Transfer students are a large population but are less directly comparable because they enter with a **head start** in college credits.

What percent of undergraduate students entered by various admission categories?

Entrance Admit Status	Fall Entrance 2012		Spring Entrance 2013	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
New High School (First-time)	35%	0%	3%	0%
New Adult (First-time)	1%	1%	1%	0%
Transfer Direct	18%	0%	9%	1%
Transfer Not Direct	14%	5%	10%	3%

Included in FAFSA and College Navigator Included in College Navigator Total N = 525

Improving the Dialog: Transfer Student Persistence

- Generally, we have reported persistence information separately for New and Transfer students.
- For example, we have provided separate regression modeling for predicting new and transfer student persistence.

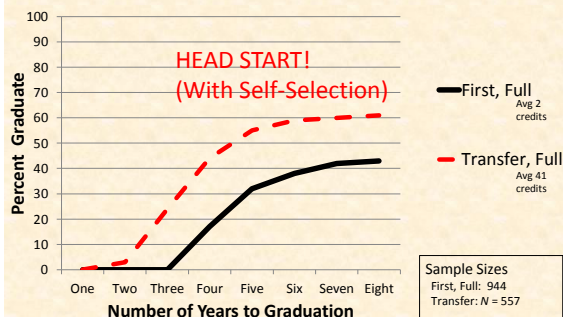
Improving the Dialog: Transfer Student Persistence and Graduation Rates

- However, the predictive regression modeling does not address the graduation rates and comparisons of rates.
- Such rates are more intuitively representative of degree of success.

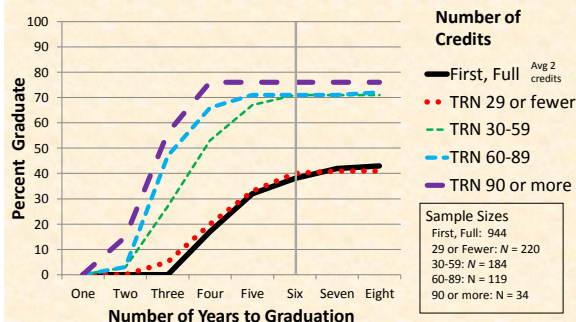
Improving the Dialog: Transfer Student Persistence and Graduation Rates

- How can we develop a meaningful persistence and graduation rate that will represent our transfer students?
- Can this rate for transfer persistence and graduation be compared to the rate of first-time students?

What happens if we directly compare graduation rates of transfer and first-time, full-time students?



What happens if we examine the effect of credits on transfer student graduation rates?



What are persistence and graduation rates for **transfer** students?

How do we create “fair” comparisons of when transfer students have a head start?



How do we create “fair” comparisons?

Transfer students have a “head start.”

- They enter our college with *43 credits* on average (vs. 2 credits for NEW students)
- They are a *self-selected* group who have already shown a commitment to continuing their college education

Therefore, to create a fair comparison of new and transfer students for persistence and graduation, we created a “**transfer-centered entrance**” to eliminate the head start.

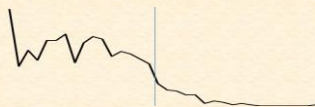
“Transfer-Centered Entrance” Cohort Defined

New Students

Transfer-centered entrance = **Continuing** new students **one year** after entrance (thus, dropouts in first year excluded). Controls for self-selection

Transfer Students

Transfer-centered entrance = Entrance (**but, limited to those with fewer than 75 credits**)

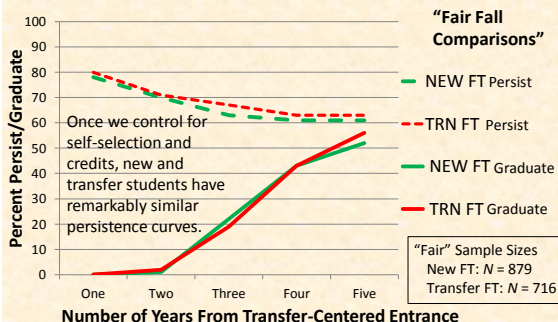


Mean Credits at “Transfer-Centered Entrance”

New = 31 credits
Transfer = 34 credits

What are persistence and graduation rates for transfer students in a “fair comparison” with new, full-time students?

Transfer, Full-Time vs. New, Full-Time Students



How does the IPEDs six-year graduation rate relate to the transfer-centered five-year graduation rate?

We are not replacing current IPEDS

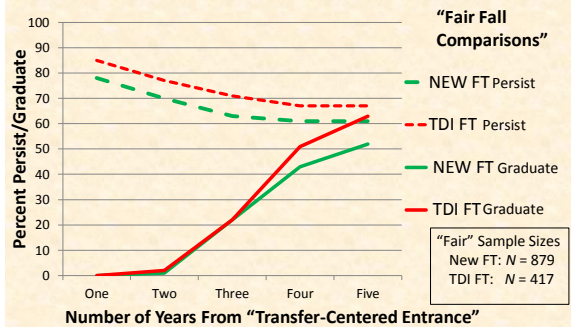
Entrance Admit Status	Transfer-Centered Five-Year Grad Rate	Current Federal Six-Year Grad Rate
Fall, New, Full-Time Rate	52%	39%
entrants in category represented in rate	73% of sample	100% of sample
Fall, Transfer, Full-Time Rate	56%	---
entrants in category represented in rate	87% of sample	0% of sample

Note: The transfer-centered rate is higher than the federal six-year rate because first-year drop-outs are excluded.

Graduation Rates for Subgroups of Transfer Students

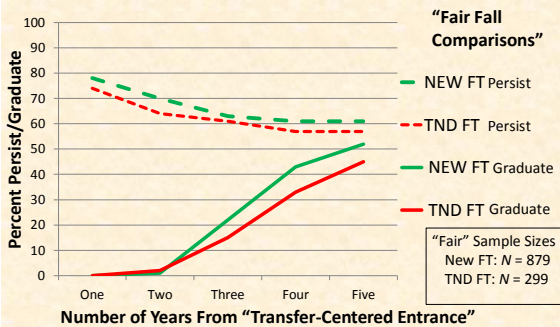
What are persistence and graduation rates for transfer students in a "fair comparison" with new, full-time students?

Transfer Direct (TDI), Full-Time vs. New, Full-Time



What are persistence and graduation rates for transfer students in a "fair" comparison with new, full-time students?

Transfer NOT Direct (TND), Full-Time vs. New, Full-Time



The purposes of the transfer-centered metric

- To enable internal dialog on persistence and graduation rates
 - That includes more students
 - That is readily interpretable in these contexts
 - That enables comparison of new and transfer students

Transfer-Centered Metric Purpose

- It is Not intended to create a national metric of transfer student "graduation rates"

Some Dynamics Behind the Push to Report Graduation Statistics for Transfer Students

Legitimate Concerns

Federal Policy Makers

- Interest in leveraging change in higher education.
- Providing information to prospective students and their parents.

Higher Education

- Wants credit for their part in students' eventual graduation:
 - "We graduate more of our transfer students."
 - "Our students who leave graduate elsewhere."

However, can we compare transfer graduation statistics across institutions?

In general, students who transfer more credits will graduate more quickly:

- They have more credits toward the degree.
- They have shown a greater commitment to achieving success in college than those with fewer credits.

The national initiatives do not address variation in the number of transfer credits. **Can we assume that transfer credits are similar across institutions?**

Discussion

- What opportunities and concerns do you have regarding possible reporting of transfer-centered graduation rates within your institution?
- Any concerns about the transfer-centered approach? (**Handout**)
- What other approaches do you have to represent transfer student graduation rates in support of dialog within your institution?

Questions?

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