

GRADUATION RATE SURVEY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Please refer to the 2nd column for information about which institutions a particular question refers to.

ALL means 4-yr institutions and 2-yr institutions and <2-yr institutions.

4+2 means both 4-yr institutions and 2-yr institutions.

<4-yr means both 2-yr institutions and <2-yr institutions.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- QUESTION: ALL **My institution has programs that operate on both a term basis AND a clock hour (continuing enrollment) basis. How do I choose my cohort?**
ANSWER: If most programs operate on a term basis (semester, quarter or trimester), you must use a fall cohort; otherwise, you must use a full-year cohort. The cohort method you must use has been pre-determined by your answer to the Calendar System question on the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics survey.
- QUESTION: 4-yr **Why do 4-year institutions need to separate their entering cohort into two groups?**
ANSWER: NCES is asking 4-year schools that offer undergraduate awards other than the bachelor's degree to define two subcohorts: (1) students who enter with the intent to complete a bachelor's degree, and (2) students who intend to complete other than a bachelor's degree program. Students whose intent is unknown are to be placed in the subcohort with those seeking a bachelor's degree. By separating the cohort this way, the graduation and transfer rates of the first group can be compared to those at like institutions as well as those at institutions offering only a bachelor's degree. Likewise, the rates of the second group can also be compared to rates at 2-year institutions.
- QUESTION: ALL **My institution does not have any information on the cohort you are requesting. Do I have to do anything this year?**
ANSWER: Student Right-to-Know legislation states that reporting is mandatory for institutions that did enroll full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students during the cohort year. If you did not enroll this type of student or your institution was not in operation during the cohort year, please report this information on the Institutional Characteristics survey. Also, if you offer athletically-related student aid, you must complete Section V every year.
- QUESTION: ALL **When can I revise or adjust my cohort?**
ANSWER: There is a difference between revising and adjusting a cohort. **Revising** a cohort means to change the cohort by taking into consideration better information that has become available since you first reported your cohort on the Fall Enrollment survey (e.g., you may now have more complete racial/ethnic information on the cohort). You can **revise** a fall cohort by entering new data in the Revised Cohort column on the data collection screen. **Adjusting** a cohort means to subtract the Exclusions from the Revised Cohort to establish a denominator for rate calculation. Both fall and full-year cohorts will be **adjusted** for you on the worksheet screens when graduation and transfer-out rates are calculated.
- QUESTION: ALL **Do I need to track students every term?**
ANSWER: No, you can set up your system to identify your cohort upon entry and then, at the end of 150% of normal time for the longest program, look back to see what happened to those in the cohort. You will need to know when they completed, but it is not necessary to compare or track from term-to-term.

COHORT QUESTIONS

- QUESTION: ALL **What is a "first-time" student?**
ANSWER: According to the IPEDS Glossary, a first-time student is *"A student attending any institution for the first time at the level enrolled."* By this we mean at the undergraduate level, graduate level, or first-professional level. Since the GRS is only interested in undergraduates, it means that the student is first time in postsecondary education (or the student is not known to have attended another postsecondary institution). There are two exceptions: (1) students who attended any institution the summer prior to entering your institution in the fall term are to be counted as "first-time," as are (2) students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school).
- QUESTION: ALL **I have a very small cohort, sometimes only 4 or 5 students. Do I need to report on the GRS?**
ANSWER: Yes. You need to **report** the data to NCES regardless of the cohort size. See the questions on disclosure for further information.
- QUESTION: ALL **How do I count a student who started in my original cohort, transferred to another institution (for which I have a confirmation of transfer), and then returned to my institution and is still enrolled?**
ANSWER: You should report the student as a transfer-out.
- QUESTION: ALL **Where do I place transfers INTO my institution?**
ANSWER: The IPEDS GRS does NOT collect information on transfers in. THESE STUDENTS SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN ANY COHORT.
- QUESTION: ALL **How do I report students who are taking ESL (English as a Second Language) or developmental courses?**
ANSWER: These students are not included in the cohort if their courses are not part of a program of study that leads to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award and if they are not eligible for Title IV Federal financial aid.
- QUESTION: ALL **Are students in remedial courses included in the cohort?**
ANSWER: Use the same reasoning here that you use to determine who to report as degree/certificate-seeking on your IPEDS Fall Enrollment report. If they are degree/certificate-seeking for purposes of qualifying for student financial aid, then they **must** be included in the cohort.
- QUESTION: ALL **If a student took only remedial courses last year and applies as a full-time degree-seeking student this fall, can I count the student as "first-time"?**
ANSWER: No. The student does not qualify as "first-time" because they are known to have previously attended a postsecondary institution (yours or another school) even though they enter with no credit.
- QUESTION: ALL **What about non-credit enrollment, or students taking CEUs?**
ANSWER: Neither should be included in your cohort.
- QUESTION: ALL **Are non-degree/certificate-seekers included?**
ANSWER: Even though these students are enrolled for credit, if they are not seeking a degree/certificate, they are not to be included in your cohort according to the SRK regulations. Be sure to carefully read the definition of degree-seeking in the Glossary.
- QUESTION: 4+2 **How do I treat new entrants that get credit for life experience?**

ANSWER: If the student has never enrolled in a postsecondary institution, they are to be counted as "first-time."

QUESTION: ALL **Do I count students who have acquired credits through distance learning or correspondence as "first-time"?**

ANSWER: Since these students must have been enrolled in an institution in order to obtain credit through correspondence or distance learning, they are not "first-time."

QUESTION: 4+2 **Many of our students take courses during the summer at other schools; should these be considered transfers out?**

ANSWER: No. Keep the students in your cohort since they return in the fall and continue their programs of study.

QUESTION: 4+2 **My initial cohort includes all full-time, first-time degree-seeking undergraduates enrolled as of October 15 - the same as on my IPEDS Fall Enrollment report. Now what happens to: stop outs, drop outs, students who enroll part time next semester, or students who switch to another program?**

ANSWER: It looks like your cohort is defined correctly. Remember YOUR COHORT NEVER CHANGES. Students who stop out or drop out do not change the cohort number. They remain in the count; if they complete within 150% please report them as such. Students who switch to part time or to another program are not given extra time to complete, nor are they removed from the cohort. Report their status as requested.

QUESTION: 4-yr **If a student in my cohort obtains two undergraduate level degrees (AA and BA) within the 6-year period, can I count both completions?**

ANSWER: No, you may only count one. NCES recommends that you report the highest degree attained, but it is your decision as to which one you prefer to report.

QUESTION: 2-yr **If a student in my cohort obtains two undergraduate level degree/awards (certificate in cosmetology and an AA) within the 3-year period, can I count both completions?**

ANSWER: No, you may only count one. NCES recommends that you report the highest degree attained, but it is your decision as to which one you prefer to report.

QUESTION: <2-yr **If a student in my cohort obtains two awards (certificate in cosmetology and certificate in word processing) within the 150% of normal time for the longest program (cosmetology), can I count both completions?**

ANSWER: No, you may only count one. NCES recommends that you report the highest degree attained, but it is your decision as to which one you prefer to report.

QUESTION: 4-yr **I have a student that intends to get a bachelor's degree so he is in my Section II cohort. He does not complete his BA within the 6-year period BUT he did get an associate's degree along the way and it was completed within 3 years. Where do I report him?**

ANSWER: By all means count him as a completer of the associate's degree (2- but less than 4-year program) since that degree was completed within 150% of normal time. Remember, intent is not important when reporting your completers...what is important is whether or not they finished any program within 150% of normal time.

QUESTIONS ON NORMAL TIME AND CALCULATION OF 150% OF NORMAL TIME

QUESTION: ALL **How do I calculate 150% of normal time to completion?**

ANSWER: In order to calculate this, we must first define "normal time to completion." IPEDS has adopted the definition developed by the Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting (JCAR) as a definition of normal time. Normal time is defined as "*the time necessary for*

a student to complete all requirements for a degree or certificate according to an institution's catalog. This is typically 4 years (8 semesters or trimesters, or 12 quarters, excluding summer terms) for a bachelor's degree, 2 years (4 semesters or trimesters, or 6 quarters, excluding summer terms) for an associate's degree, and the scheduled times for certificate programs." Let's look at some examples:

Many bachelor's degree programs are outlined as 4-year programs - 8 semesters – usually fall and spring. Extending this to 150% (1.5 x 8) would take 12 semesters or **through the end of the spring term of the sixth year.**

Similarly, an associate's degree that is advertised as a 2-year program - 6 quarters (fall, winter, spring, with no scheduled summer quarter), would extend to (1.5 x 6) or 9 quarters **through the end of the spring quarter of the third year.**

However, the Technical Amendments that redefine the cohort year allow you to count completers through August 31 of the summer following the sixth year of a 4-year program (or the third year for 2-year programs).

Certificate programs must be handled somewhat differently. If a 900 contact hour course is advertised as taking 30 weeks to complete, the calculation of 1.5 x 30 equals 45 weeks **after the start date.** If the student completes within that 45-week period, they are within 150% of normal time.

QUESTION: 4-yr **According to the Technical Amendment, I can count students who complete their program through August 31 of the 6th year, but what if the student does not receive the degree until our December graduation? Does this mean I cannot count them as completers?**

ANSWER: Technically you cannot count the completion until the degree has been conferred. If you "award" the degree upon completion (i.e., an award date of, or prior to, August 31 is noted in the student's record) and just allow the student to "pick it up" at the December ceremony, then you should be able to count the student in your completions.

QUESTION: <4-yr **According to the Technical Amendment, I can count students who complete their program through August 31 of the 3rd year, but what if the student does not receive the degree until our December graduation? Does this mean I cannot count them as completers?**

ANSWER: Technically you cannot count the completion until the degree has been conferred. If you "award" the degree upon completion (i.e., an award date of, or prior to, August 31 is noted on the student's record), and just allow the student to "pick it up" at the December ceremony, then you should be able to count the student in your completions.

QUESTION: ALL **How do I calculate 150% for students who stop out, or drop out, and then return and complete the program?**

ANSWER: There is no difference in the calculation. The 150% of normal time is applied to the start date and is the same regardless of stop-out time. Some students may stop out for a term or two and still complete within 150% of normal time.

TRANSFER-OUT QUESTIONS

QUESTION: ALL **Does my institution need to report transfers out?**

ANSWER: The November 1, 1999 regulations state that "An institution that determines that its mission includes providing substantial preparation for students to enroll in another eligible institution" must report transfers out so that a transfer out rate can be calculated. The students to be reported as transfers are those who have NOT completed a degree,

certificate, or transfer preparatory program, so they cannot be counted as completers. If the institution does not have such a mission, reporting of transfers out is optional.

QUESTION: ALL **What kind of verification must I have to report a student as a transfer out?**
ANSWER: None. All verification requirements were dropped from the November 1, 1999 regulations.

QUESTION: ALL **My school does not track transfers out and our limited budget does not allow us to set up a system to do this. Am I still in compliance with the requirements of SRK and am I still responsive to the GRS if I don't report transfers out?**
ANSWER: As long as your institution does not include the substantial preparation of students to enroll in another eligible institution as part of its mission, you do not need to set up a system to track transfers out. However, if your institution does have such a mission, you need to be able to track transfers out and report them.

QUESTIONS ON STUDENTS WITH ATHLETICALLY-RELATED AID

QUESTION: 4+2 **What do I do with students who receive athletically-related student aid to play more than one sport?**
ANSWER: IPEDS has adopted the hierarchy established by the NCAA for reporting these students, which is as follows: football, basketball, baseball, cross-country/track, and finally all other sports combined. Please be sure to count each student athlete only once.

QUESTION: 4+2 **If a student enrolls with the promise of athletic aid the second semester (provided they maintain good grades the first semester) should they be included in my cohort of students receiving athletic aid? What if they receive athletically-related student aid the second semester?**
ANSWER: Students who receive athletically-related student aid at any time during their first-year are to be included in the cohort for purposes of calculating graduation rates.

OTHER QUESTIONS

QUESTION: 4-yr **My institution belongs to the NCAA; do I have to report GRS data to IPEDS? Do I also need to report to the Secretary of Education?**
ANSWER: Completing the IPEDS GRS form through the web-based data collection system satisfies all your reporting requirements to the Secretary of Education. However, the NCAA is now collecting their own data on graduation rates themselves, separately from IPEDS. You will still need to report data to the NCAA. If you have any questions, you should contact the NCAA directly.

QUESTION: ALL **The number of students who could be considered for the adjustment to cohort (exclusions) is very small in my school. Do I need to try to track these "leavers"?**
ANSWER: No. The allowable exclusions are provided for those institutions that may have a significant number of students who require longer to (or cannot) complete their programs for the reasons stated.

QUESTION: <4-yr **What is a "transfer-preparatory program"?**
ANSWER: This term is defined in 34 CFR Student Assistance General Provisions, Section 668.8(b)(1)(ii) as *"the successful completion of at least a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward a bachelor's degree and qualifies a student for admission into the third year of a bachelor's degree program."* The Secretary considers this the equivalent of an associate's degree, thus completers of transfer-preparatory programs (although they do not receive a "formal award") are to be counted as completers.

- QUESTION: 4-yr **How do I deal with "3/2" programs? My institution provides the first 3 years of an engineering program and our students go on to another university for the last 2 years of study to attain their degree. Can we count them as completers when they get their degree from the second institution?**
- ANSWER: No, you should NEVER count a student as a completer when they get their degree from **another** institution. Your job is done when they leave your school. If the student completed the first 3 years of a 3/2 program (within 150% of normal time) so that they are now ready to "transfer" in order to complete the remaining 2 years at another institution, then you should count the student as a completer of a "2- but less than 4-year program." This works the same way as the "transfer-preparatory program" described above.
- QUESTION: 4-yr **My institution offers pre-med and pre-vet programs, but formal awards are not given. What happens to these students?**
- ANSWER: Assuming these are 2- or 3-year programs, count the students as completers of a "2- but less than 4-year program" if they complete within 150% of normal time.
- QUESTION: 4-yr **My institution offers a PharmD program where a student is accepted into the program after completing a 2 or 3 year program of undergraduate studies. What happens to these students?**
- ANSWER: Students who complete the undergraduate portion within 150% of normal time should be counted in the other degree/certificate-seeking subcohort (Section III) as completers of a "2- but less than 4-year program". However, do not track their progress any further towards the PharmD, since it is a first-professional degree, and thus is not part of the Graduation Rates Survey.
- QUESTION: <2-yr **Can I report students as completers if they left the institution to get a job in their field of study, but did not finish their program?**
- ANSWER: No, you may not report these students as completers, since they left the institution prior to completion of their program.
- QUESTION: <4-yr **My school enrolls students on a monthly basis so we will be using a full-year cohort. If my longest program is 9 months, how do I calculate 150% of normal time and which cohort do I use?**
- ANSWER: Let's look at this one step at a time. First, schools with programs of less than 4 years are to report on a 2001 cohort; therefore, you should look at those students who entered your institution between September 1, 2001 and August 31, 2002. Next, assuming the latest possible enrollment date would be August 31, 2002, 150% of 9 months following this date would extend to October 15, 2003 (13 1/2 months later). In order to complete the IPEDS GRS, the first status date following this is August 31, 2004 and the report is due in the Spring 2005 data collection, so you are on track for reporting on this cohort.
- QUESTION: ALL **There is a provision for excluding students who leave the institution to join the Armed Forces. Is there a similar provision for excluding students who are already in the military but are transferred to another duty station?**
- ANSWER: No, there is no such provision.
- QUESTION: 4-yr **My school has mostly 5-year programs. According to the Student Right-to-Know (SRK) regulations, I need not disclose graduation rates until 7 1/2 years after the start of my fall 1998 cohort. Do I still need to respond to the IPEDS GRS after 6 years?**
- ANSWER: Yes. IPEDS is mandated by a different law and must be completed by institutions that have Program Participation Agreements (PPA's) with the Department of Education for Federal student financial assistance.

Each year, you are asked to report on the requested cohort after 6 years on the GRS survey form for 4-year institutions. There is a specific question where you are asked to

report the number of students still enrolled in 5-year programs. In addition, you will be asked to report **on this same cohort** after 7 ½ years has elapsed (150% of normal time) so that you can calculate the graduation rate and transfer out rate for Student Right-to-Know disclosure. This additional information will be reported in a supplemental data collection within the web-based system.

For example:

<u>Survey Year</u>	<u>Report after 6 years on</u>	<u>Report after 7 1/2 years on</u>
2003	1997 cohort	1995 cohort
2004	1998 cohort	1996 cohort
2005	1999 cohort	1997 cohort

QUESTION: 2-yr **My school has mostly 3-year programs. According to the Student Right-to-Know (SRK) regulations, I need not disclose graduation rates until 4 1/2 years after the start of my fall 2001 cohort. Do I still need to respond to the IPEDS GRS after 3 years?**

ANSWER: Yes. IPEDS is mandated by a different law and must be completed by institutions that have Program Participation Agreements (PPA's) with the Department of Education for Federal student financial assistance.

Each year, you are asked to report on the requested cohort after 3 years on the GRS survey form for 2-year institutions. There is a specific question in Part C where you are asked to report the number of students still enrolled in 3-year programs. In addition, institutions will be asked to report on this same cohort after 6 years has elapsed. At that time you can also calculate the graduation rate and transfer out rate for Student Right-to-Know disclosure. This additional information will be reported in a supplemental data collection within the web-based system.

For example:

<u>Survey Year</u>	<u>Report after 3 years on</u>	<u>Report after 6 years on</u>
2003	2000 cohort	1997 cohort
2004	2001 cohort	1998 cohort
2005	2002 cohort	1999 cohort

QUESTION: ALL **Will the GRS satisfy all my requirements for SRK?**

ANSWER: NO! NO! and NO! The GRS provides institutions with instructions, definitions, and a format for calculating graduation rates and transfer-out rates. It also provides institutions with a methodology so that there is some consistency in the way the rates are calculated. SRK requires disclosure of these rates to students and prospective students. By completing the GRS, you now have the rates you need to disclose. But you need to make them available. For schools that offer athletically-related student aid, there are additional disclosure and reporting requirements. The GRS satisfies the reporting requirements only.

QUESTION: ALL **Exactly what must be disclosed in order to be in compliance with SRK?**

ANSWER: The regulations state that beginning with the group of students who enter the institution between September 1, 1998 and August 31, 1999, an institution shall disclose its completion or graduation rate and transfer-out rate information no later than the July 1 immediately following the point in time that 150% of the normal time for completion or graduation has elapsed for all of the students in the groups on which the institution bases its completion or graduation rate and transfer-out rate calculations.

Therefore, at a minimum, you must disclose (July 1) your graduation and transfer-out rates (as of August 31 of the prior year). In addition, institutions for which transfer out is an important part of their mission must also disclose a transfer-out rate. The Secretary urges institutions to disclose as much additional information as warranted to help consumers understand institutional mission, etc. Thus you should consider additional rates as well, such as rates for part-time students and possibly rates 8 or 10 years out, if your students take longer to complete. The SRK regulations state that if a category of students within an athletic subcohort contains 5 or fewer students, institutions need not disclose information on the category of students.