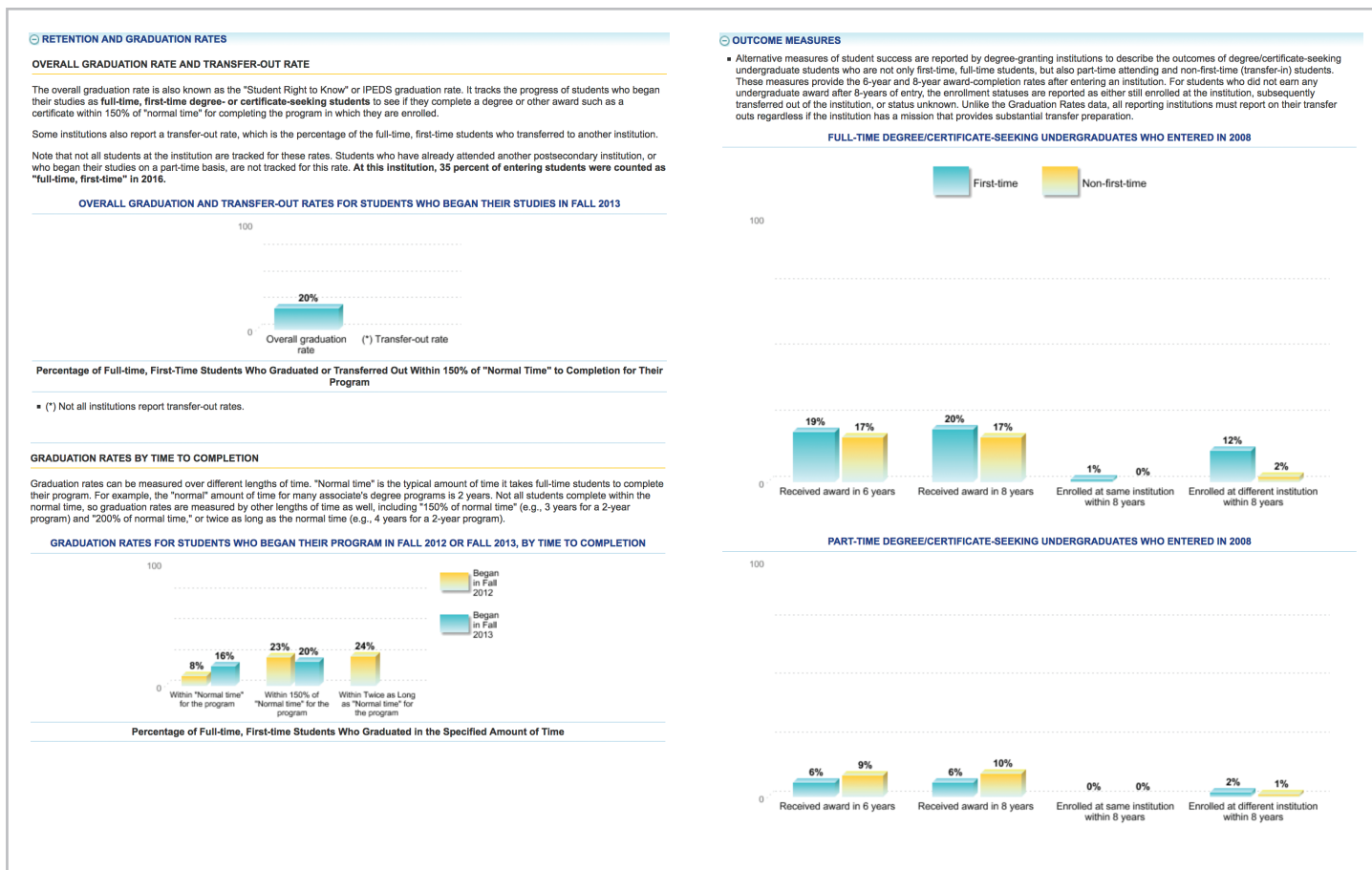


An Evolution of Measuring Student Outcomes in IPEDS

For the first time, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) includes information on graduation and transfer rates for part-time and non-first-time students, and completion rates for low-income students, painting the most comprehensive picture yet of student outcomes at colleges nationwide. Accurate and complete postsecondary outcomes metrics are crucial to consumer information and good policy-making because they provide important insight into whether and where undergraduate students successfully complete their postsecondary education. Institution-level outcomes data allow students to make wise choices about where to enroll, help institutions benchmark their own effectiveness in helping students earn a postsecondary credential, and can inform state and federal policymaking efforts.

Historically, IPEDS graduation data were limited in two ways: They only counted cohorts of first-time, full-time students (about 47 percent of new undergraduates each fall), and then only those students who graduated from the same institution where they first enrolled (omitting any who transferred to and later graduated from a different institution). Those restrictions prompted ongoing critiques of the existing Graduation Rates (GR) and Graduation Rates 200 (GR200) survey components from policymakers, advocates, and institutions about their representativeness.¹ Fortunately, the new Outcome Measures (OM) survey introduced for 2015–16, attempts to count more students and more outcomes than GR and GR200. Data for both are now available on the College Navigator website (see Box 1).

Box 1. Screenshots from College Navigator of Graduation Rates and Graduation Rates 200 data for a two-year institution (disaggregates not shown) and Outcome Measures data for the same institution.



The GR, GR200, and OM survey components differ by cohort, timeframe for completion, and disaggregates (see **Table 1**). Additionally, NCES incorporated further feedback from higher education experts on the specifications of the OM metrics, and refined their definitions for 2017–18 and beyond (also noted in Table 1).

Graduation Rates and Graduation Rates 200

- The GR and GR200 data only include first-time, full-time undergraduates.
- The GR component measures completion rates at 100 and 150 percent of time, relative to the normal length of the specified program (i.e., two and three years for a two-year associate's degree, four and six years for a four-year bachelor's degree). The GR200 component measures completion at 200 percent of program time. Institutions can report the number of students who transfer out at 150 percent of time, but this transfer reporting is optional.
- The 100 percent and 150 percent graduation rates are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender, allowing policymakers and the public to better understand how students with different backgrounds and experiences

successfully complete a course of study at a given institution, overall, or within a particular sector of higher education.

Outcome Measures

- As an alternative to GR/GR200, the OM survey was designed to record credential completion for often-overlooked part-time and non-first-time undergraduates. Students in OM are divided into four sub-cohorts: first-time, full-time (FTFT); first-time, part-time (FTPT); non-first-time, full-time (NFTFT); non-first-time, part-time (NFTPT).
- The OM component measures the highest credential awarded any student after six and eight years (regardless of credential sought, level of institution, or type of credential earned), and requires reporting on transfer-out rates at the eight-year mark.
- The OM data are not disaggregated by race/ethnicity or gender.

New Additions

The most recent graduation and outcome data from IPEDS

Table 1. Comparison of Graduation Rates, Graduation Rates 200, and Outcome Measures metrics.

	Cohort specifications	Outcomes measured			Disaggregates
		Completed at first institution	Did not complete at first institution		
			Transferred to another institution	Still enrolled at first institution	
GR	Defined using 12-month or fall enrollments* for students who attend: • First-time, full-time At four-year institutions: • Bachelor's/equivalent-seeking cohort • Other credential-seeking cohort	Completed a: • Bachelor's • Two-to-four-year program • Less-than-two-year program within: • 100 percent of program time • 150 percent of program time	Optional at 150 percent of program time	Collected at 150 percent of program time	• Race/ethnicity and gender • Pell Grant recipient, non-Pell Subsidized Stafford recipient, or neither (only reported at 150 percent of program time)***
GR200	Defined using 12-month or fall enrollments* for students who attend: • First-time, full-time	Completed a: • Bachelor's (for four-year institutions) • Degree/certificate (at non-four-year institutions) within: • 200 percent of program time	Omitted	Collected at 200 percent of program time	None
OM	Defined using 12-month enrollments** for students who attend: • First-time, full-time • First-time, part-time • Non-first-time, full-time • Non-first-time, part-time	Completed a: • Bachelor's • Associate's • Certificate within: • Four years after entry** • Six years after entry • Eight years after entry	Collected at eight years after entry	Collected at eight years after entry	Pell Grant recipient or non-recipient**

* Institutions primarily using a standard academic calendar (semesters, quarters, or trimesters) establish cohorts based solely on students who enrolled during the fall semester. Other institutions report on a 12-month cohort.

** Indicates new features or changes for 2016–17 (GR) and 2017–18 (OM) collection years.

*** Disaggregated by Pell Grant recipient, non-Pell Stafford recipient, or neither (new for 2016–17) as well as—but separately from—race/ethnicity and gender disaggregates.

feature a series of changes designed to improve completion measures. These changes were made in response to calls from higher education experts:

- **Disaggregating by economic status:** College access advocates and higher education experts have long advocated for data that would measure college success for low-income students.² IPEDS has responded to these calls for better data by disaggregating completion outcomes by students' economic status, as proxied by student receipt of the need-based Pell Grant.³ Based on public input and a series of meetings with education leaders and postsecondary data experts,⁴ IPEDS began collecting these important data disaggregates beginning with the 2016–17 GR survey (for 150 percent graduation rates) and will do more with the 2017–18 OM survey. The Pell disaggregates in the GR survey are consistent with existing disclosure requirements.⁵ Having Pell recipient outcomes data in IPEDS will better show how well institutions are serving low-income students.
- **Fall vs. 12-month reporting:** The 2017–18 OM collection eliminates the option for institutions to report metrics based solely on the incoming fall cohort of undergraduates—shifting instead to a full-year cohort that will measure outcomes for more students.
- **Reporting timeframe and type of credential:** The 2017–18 OM collection adds a reporting benchmark at four years—in addition to the six- and eight-year benchmarks, which will make the data more comprehensive and more timely—and distinguishes by credential (i.e., certificates, associates, and bachelors).

These new data represent an important step forward in the quality of data on student outcomes and are the result of substantial effort by NCES to respond to demands for better data. The information these improved outcome metrics provide will ultimately help even more students make good choices about where to attend college, they will better support education leaders to make data-driven decisions that promote equity in higher education, and they will inform policymaker efforts to steward taxpayer dollars. However, the data do leave some important questions unanswered—questions that could be answered if metrics were generated from a secure, privacy protected student-level data network. For example, OM does not answer questions like:

- **Are there racial/ethnic or gender gaps in transfer rates or completion outcomes for part-time and transfer students?** While GR data are disaggregated by race/

ethnicity and gender, the OM data are not, so completion rates for part-time and transfer rates will not be disaggregated by these important student characteristics.

- **What type of institutions do students transfer to?** The new OM transfer data only measure whether a student transferred without distinguishing between students who transfer to a two-year institution or a four-year institution.
- **Do students complete credentials after they transfer?** The OM data measure whether a student enrolled at another institution, but not whether the student ultimately completed a credential at that institution.

Gaps remain, in part because these two surveys capture slightly different information. The GR survey measures completions based on the credential sought and disaggregates those data by race/ethnicity and gender—and receipt of Pell, Stafford, or neither—but is limited to FTFT students. The OM survey records different awards earned by all students but does not distinguish by credential sought, nor are its disaggregates as comprehensive as those in GR.

The GR/GR200 and OM surveys share some limitations, as well. For example, policymakers and institutional leaders cannot assume that students reflected in the data from either survey as “still enrolled” will eventually complete their credential. The IPEDS data are simply not equipped to address such individualized issues, although the implementation of a student-level data network could bring us closer to answering the question of whether students graduate from another institution after they leave their first one.⁶ Until those reforms are in place, however, IPEDS will continue to provide the most comprehensive data on postsecondary outcomes available to the public.

Endnotes

- 1 Empowering students and families to make informed decisions on higher education: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training, 115th Cong. (2017) (testimony of Mamie Voight). Retrieved from https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/voight_written_testimony_final.pdf
- 2 Voight, M. (2015, September 11). Comments before the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved from http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/docs/press/ihep_-_acsfa_written_testimony_sept_2015.pdf
- 3 Janice, A. & Voight, M. (2016). *Toward convergence: A technical guide for the Postsecondary Metrics Framework*. Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/postsecdata/mapping-data-landscape/metrics-framework-technical-guide>
- 4 U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2016–19, OMB Control Number 1850-0582 v.18, Supporting Statement Part A [Federal Register Notice, Docket ID ED-2016-ICCD-0020-0069]. Retrieved from <https://www.regulations.gov/contentStream?documentId=ED-2016-ICCD-0020-0069&attachmentNumber=1&contentType=pdf>
- 5 Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, Pub. L. 110-315, 122 Stat. 3078, codified as amended at 20 USC §1092.
- 6 Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2017, May 23). Postsecondary Data Collaborative and Workforce Data Quality Campaign applaud bipartisan, bicameral College Transparency Act. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/press/opinions-and-statements/postsecondary-data-collaborative-and-workforce-data-quality-campaign>



INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY
1825 K Street, NW, Suite 720
Washington, DC 20006

202 861 8223 TELEPHONE
202 861 9307 FACSIMILE
www.ihep.org WEB