



TRANSPARENCY BY DESIGN LEARNER PROGRESS METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Rationale for the Need for Learner Progress Metrics

Leaders from Transparency by Design's (TBD) institutions believe that it is important to re-shape the language surrounding collegiate graduation rates, particularly for adult students. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey measures its "graduation rate" based only on students who are first-time college attendees and are attending full-time. This definition ignores the experiences of returning adults and represents less than 10 percent of the students at many TBD institutions.

TBD sought to create measures that are more reflective of the experience of adult learners. Two "learner progress" metrics were created:

- **Learner Retention** – the percentage of students who remain enrolled or completed a degree/certificate after one year.
- **Learner Completion** – the percentage of students who completed a degree or transferred to another institution after a set amount of time.

These measures are designed to inform users of the *College Choices for Adults* site whether students at an institution are still enrolled, transferred, or completed a credential over time. Groups (or cohorts) of students who enter during the same time period are identified by the degree level (associates, bachelor's, master's, doctoral) that they are seeking. When a student earns a given degree and reenrolls for a subsequent degree at the institution, they enter a new cohort as they earn credits toward that subsequent degree. (ex. If a student earns an associate's degree and subsequently reenrolls for a bachelors degree, the 'clock restarts' for that student and they are placed in the new cohort.)

Philosophy

While the U.S. Department of Education's IPEDS "[graduation rate](#)" has flaws, it is still the most-recognized measure in use today. Recognizing that fact, TBD used the following two philosophical cornerstones in creating its measures of "learner progress":

- **Use IPEDS definitions whenever possible.** Doing so adds face validity for users who already use these definitions, as well as easing the reporting burden on institutions.
- **Diverge from IPEDS definitions only when necessary.** To meet the needs of measuring the progress of adult learners, TBD expanded the group of students measured beyond just "first-time, full-time" students.

Methodology

Creating Student Cohorts

To measure 'learner progress', TBD institutions identify a set (or 'cohort') of students that are chosen because they possess a common set of characteristics. Note that this methodology is based on a consistently drawn sample of students and might not include the entire student population at an institution.

1. Cohort Period Covered:

- a. Transparency by Design will utilize the IPEDS [Graduation Rate Survey \(GRS\) definition](#) for the timeframe for student enrolled either:
 - i. As of October 15 of the cohort year, or
 - ii. During the period between September 1 of the cohort year and August 31 of the following year.
- b. TBD institutions will utilize the above definition based on what they *currently use or would use* (if they do not report the GRS to IPEDS) to report the GRS to IPEDS. If the TBD institution has an official IPEDS-approved alternate census date for the GRS, they may use that census date and must report it in the methodology section of this data item.
- c. TBD institutions will identify which of the above timeframes it used in creating its cohort in the methodology section of this data item on the *College Choices for Adults* website.
- d. TBD Cohorts will be collected in the fall of even numbered years (i.e., 2000, 2002, 2004, etc.).

2. Who to Include:

- a. Adapted from the IPEDS [Graduation Rate Survey definition](#) (italics indicates changes from the original text, which can be found in the footnotes):
 - i. Include *full-time and part-time* degree -seeking students entering the *institution or the degree-level* for the first time (including both true first-

time students and transfer-in students) either during the fall term or during the 12-month period as described above¹.

- ii. Include students enrolled in the fall term who *were new to the institution or the degree-level* for the prior summer term².
- iii. *Students sitting for their first competency assessment.*
- iv. *Students assembling, submitting, and receiving a final assessment of a prior learning portfolio for the first time at this institution or degree-level.*

b. Unchanged from IPEDS [Graduation Rate Survey definition](#):

- i. Students must be enrolled in courses creditable toward a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award.
- ii. Include students enrolled in courses that are part of a vocational or occupational program, INCLUDING those enrolled in off-campus centers and those enrolled in distance learning/home study programs.
- iii. Be sure to include full-time students taking remedial courses if the student is considered degree-seeking for the purpose of student financial aid determination.
- iv. A student who is designated as a member of the cohort remains in the cohort, even if the student:
 - Becomes a part-time student.
 - Transfers to another institution.
 - Drops out of the institution.³

¹ This replaces the IPEDS definition of “include all full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates students entering the institution either during the fall term or during the 12-month period as described above.”

² This replaces the IPEDS definition of “include students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term.”

³ A student who withdraws from the institution PRIOR to the institutions’ 100% refund period does NOT count in this category. This category only counts students who remain enrolled AFTER the 100% refund period and subsequently withdraw before the close of the term or cohort period.

- Stops out of the institution.
- Has not fulfilled the institution's requirements to receive a degree or certificate.

3. Who to Exclude⁴:

a. Adapted from the IPEDS [Graduation Rate Survey definition](#) (italics indicates changes from the original text):

i. Do NOT exclude students who are part-time or have transferred into the institution.

b. Unchanged from IPEDS [Graduation Rate Survey definition](#):

- Enrolled exclusively in courses not creditable toward a formal award or the completion of a vocational program (i.e., nondegree seeking).
- Taking CEUs unless they are also enrolled full time in courses creditable toward a degree or other formal award.
- Exclusively auditing classes.
- Studying abroad (e.g., at a foreign university) if their enrollment at this institution is only an administrative record and the fee is only nominal.
- In any branch campus located in a foreign country.

4. Degree Level:

⁴ **The original IPEDS definition: Who to Exclude from the Cohort**

DO NOT include students in the cohort who are:

- Enrolled exclusively in courses not creditable toward a formal award or the completion of a vocational program (i.e., nondegree seeking).
- Taking CEUs unless they are also enrolled full time in courses creditable toward a degree or other formal award.
- Exclusively auditing classes.
- Studying abroad (e.g., at a foreign university) if their enrollment at this institution is only an administrative record and the fee is only nominal.
- In any branch campus located in a foreign country.
- Part time.
- Transfers into the institution.

- a. Student Learner Progress rates will be reported by degree level. Students will be identified into one of the following four degree levels:
 - i. Associate's degree
 - ii. Bachelor's degree
 - iii. Master's degree
 - iv. Doctoral degree
 - b. Institutions that are not able to report by degree level will report the results for all eligible students from all degree levels in one combined "Institution-wide" category. These institutions will be required to report in the methodology section for this data item how they gathered their cohort and why it is different from other institutions in the appropriate section.
5. IPEDS Definitions. Unless otherwise specified, use the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey definitions appropriate to your institution.

Learner Progress Reports

Using the cohorts of student identified above, TBD institutions will report ‘learner progress’ for the following categories:

6. Learner Retention – *Learner retention is a measure designed to inform prospective learners and others about the percentage of learners who return to the institution from their first year of enrollment to their second year of enrollment, or who have completed their program during their first year of enrollment.*

- a. Who and When to Report. Each institution will report the percentage of students for each identified cohort year by each degree level that has either:
 - i. Enrolled during the fall following entrance in the cohort (that is, Cohort Year +1, with “fall” defined as above), or
 - ii. Completed a credential or degree between entering the cohort and the following fall (that is, Cohort Year +1, with “fall” defined as above).
 - iii. Each institution will report in their methodology section on *College Choices for Adults* when the determination of enrollment for the second year was made.

7. Learner Completion – *Learner Completion is a measure designed to inform prospective learners and others about the percentage of learners who persist to completion/graduation at an institution after a designated amount of time.*

- a. Time to Completion. Completions will be reported at 150% and 200% of “Normal Time to Completion as defined in the following chart.

	Percent of Normal Time to Completion	
	150%	200%
Associate’s Degree	3 years	4 years
Bachelor’s Degree	6 years	8 years
Master’s Degree	3 years	4 years
Doctoral Degree	6 years	8 years

- b. Who to Count as a Completer.
 - i. Changed From the Graduation Rate Survey: “Count completers only once at either the undergraduate or graduate level. For those entering at the undergraduate level, indicate the highest undergraduate degree attained. For those entering at the graduate level, indicate the highest graduate degree attained.
 - ii. From the Graduation Rate Survey: “Institutions can count as completers only those students who received their degree/certificate (or completed a transfer-preparatory program) within 150% of normal program time...Do not count as completers students who get their degree from another institution.”
 - iii. Allowable Exclusions from the Cohort. From the Graduation Rate Survey: “Indicate the total number of students who left your institution (and have neither graduated nor transferred to another institution) because of one of the following documented reasons:
 - 1. The student is deceased or is totally and permanently disabled and thus unable to return to school.
 - 2. The student left school to serve in the armed forces or was called to active duty. (DO NOT include students already in the military who transfer to another duty station.)
 - 3. The student left school to serve with a foreign aid service of the Federal Government, such as the Peace Corps.
 - 4. The student left school to serve on an official church mission.
- c. Reporting Date. Report the status of each cohort degree-seeking students **as of August 31** of the reporting year. Example: For the cohort of bachelor’s degree-seeking students that is created or begins in fall 2004, completers will be reported as of August 31, 2010.
- d. Reporting Transfers. From the Graduation Rate Survey: “If the mission of your institution includes providing substantial preparation for students to enroll in

another eligible institution without having completed their program, report the total number of students who transferred out of your institution (without a degree/award) within 150% of normal time to completion. Include students who transferred out of your institution and subsequently re-enrolled. If it is not part of your mission, you may still report transfer-out data if you wish.” Transfer-out percentage will be reported in a separate line from the percentage of completers for the cohort as an element of the overall learner completion.

- e. “Too few” students. If there are fewer than 25 students in a reporting cell, the institution may elect not to report the percentages in that cell. If no value is entered, a standard symbol with the definition of ‘too few students to report’ will appear in that data item. Institutions electing not to report, may include additional description of the reason for not reporting in the “Methodology” and “Why We’re Different” sections if they wish.

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