



Graduation rates for first-time-in-college students in State University System (SUS) institutions are significantly above the national average for public four-year colleges, based on early release data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Of first-time students who entered fall 1996, 57% of those attending SUS institutions completed their bachelor degree at the same institution by 2001-2002, compared to 52% of students at public institutions nationwide.

Florida ranked 12th among the states in overall graduation rates, with graduation rates for Hispanic and black students ranked 6th and 7th respectively.

The national numbers understate the chances that a student who enters the SUS will graduate from the system. The estimated eventual graduation rate for students entering in 1996 is 69%, if those who transfer from one SUS institution to another or who take longer than six years are included.

As a resource for national comparisons, DCU staff has made available an online query tool for the NCES early release graduation data at

www.institutiondata.com.

State University System Graduation Rates: How Are We Doing?

National Graduation Rate Data

Four factors contribute to Florida's overall high graduation rates in public four-year institutions:

1) Graduation rates for the largest race/ethnic groups were higher than for the nation as a whole. The rates for white, black, and Hispanic students were 60%, 48%, and 52% respectively, compared to 54%, 37%, and 42% in the nation as a whole. Among the 41 states with more than 100 black first-time students in the cohort, Florida's public institution graduation rate ranked 4th (7th among all states), behind South Carolina, Washington, and North Carolina. Among the 34 states with more than 100 Hispanic students in the cohort, Florida's rate ranked 3rd (6th among all states), behind Maryland and Washington.

2) The gaps between racial/ethnic groups were smaller

than in the nation as a whole.

The gaps between the public institution graduation rate for white students and the rate for black and Hispanic students were 12 points and 8 points, respectively, compared to 18 points and 12 points in the nation as a whole.

3) Florida's largest institutions compared well with their peers. The University of Florida's graduation rate of 77% ranks it 11th out of 101 public *Doctoral-Extensive* institutions nationwide, which had a collective graduation rate of 63%. University of Central Florida's rate of 50% ranks it 14th among 62 public *Doctoral-Intensive* institutions, which had a collective graduation rate of 45%. Florida A&M

University's rate of 43% ranks it 6th among the 39 public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the country, which had a collective rate of 34%. FAMU's rate also ranks it in the top 40% of the 235 *Master's / Colleges* in the country, most of which are not HBCUs.

Florida ranks 4th in graduation rates for black students among the 41 states with significant numbers

4) Florida's students are more likely to attend institutions with high graduation rates. More of Florida's students attend the types of institutions that typically have high graduation rates.

Doctoral-Extensive institutions tend to have some of the best graduation rates nationally. While Florida's four Doctoral-Extensive institutions collectively had a graduation rate of 63%, which was also the national average for all public Doctoral-Extensive institutions, 66% of students included in the Graduation Rate Survey attended these institutions, compared to only 43% nationwide.

State Graduation Rates

The graduation rates calculated based on data reported to the National Center for Education Statistics provide a national basis for peer comparisons, but do not include as much information as individual states and institutions have available.

They do not include, for example, students who start at one public four-year institution but graduate from another. In Florida, adding

those graduates to the national data would raise the system's six-year graduation rate by five percentage points, to 62%.

The national data do not include students who start as part-time students or who take longer than six years to graduate. A small but significant number of students take longer than six years. (The number is larger at some types of institutions—such as urban commuter universities with many older or working students—than at others.)

Based on past experience, we estimate that 88% of students who are still enrolled but who have not graduated after six years will eventually graduate. This produces an eventual graduation rate of 69% for 1996 freshmen (the same year as the national data).

Trends

Although national comparisons

are not yet available, preliminary state data indicate that graduation rates for the 1997 cohort will be even higher. Using the same criteria as the national data, the six-year graduation rate for 1997 students is up from 57% to 58%. Including transfer students, the rate is up from 62% to 63% and the estimated eventual graduation rate is up from 69% to 70%.

This is the third annual increase after two years of declines.

Questions about Graduation Rates

What factors affect graduation rates?

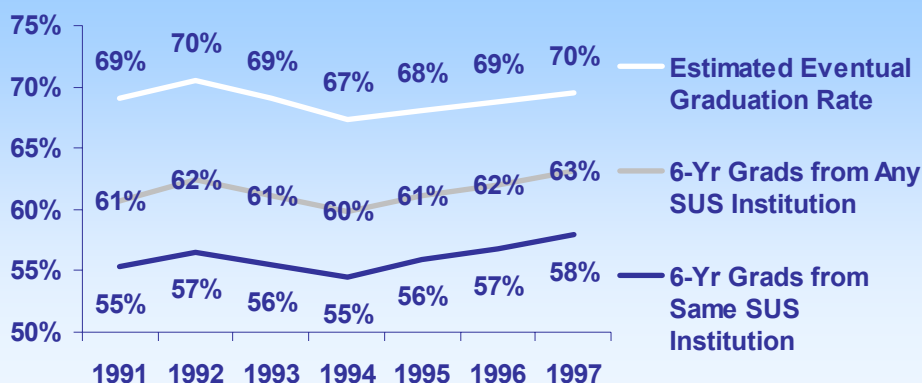
The six-year graduation rate is reduced both by students who leave—either by transferring or dropping out of education altogether—and by students who take longer than six years.

Many students who leave the State University System finish elsewhere, either at private institutions or out of state (just as many transfer into the system from those institutions).

Initiatives to improve retention and graduation, including a new advising and student tracking system at the University of Florida, are due credit for much of the improvement. Of the 0.9 percentage point improvement in the statewide graduation rate from the 1995 to the 1996 cohort, 0.7 points could be attributed to University of Florida alone, which had a 6 point increase, primarily as a result of its new advising system. The statewide increase from the 1996 to the 1997 cohort, however, appears to be broader based, with smaller improvements at multiple institutions.

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GRADUATION RATES FOR FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE STUDENTS BY YEAR OF ENTRY



Other factors to consider include the relatively low tuition rates in Florida, which, combined with increases in private and out-of-state institution tuition rates, may be reducing the number of students who transfer out.

Some students who leave or who attend part-time may be successfully employed without a degree. In an economic downturn, there may be fewer opportunities for students who don't have degrees, leading to higher persistence and graduation rates. The resulting higher levels of current education and training may help drive economic growth in the next cycle.

Still others may have personal reasons—illness, changes in family status, etc.—for leaving. Further research is being conducted to produce estimates of outcomes for the 30% of students who do not complete their degrees.

When do students leave?

The first two years—especially the first year—are when most students leave. Of the 1996 beginning college students who left, 37% left before their second year and 61% left before their third year.

The beginning students had an average of 43 credits when they left. About 44% were technically freshmen (fewer than 30 credits) and another 29% were sophomores.

Why do some students take longer than four years?

Students take longer than four years either because they take fewer credits per year than they would need to graduate—usually 30 credits per year for a 120-

credit program—or because they take more than the minimum number of credits required to graduate.

How long does it usually take students to finish?

The average time 2002-2003 graduates (excluding transfer students) took to complete their degrees was 4.4 years. 46% took four years or less and 84% took five years or less. These rates include students who attended part-time or who took time off from college.

What are the limitations of graduation rates?

Graduation rates are not, by themselves, indicators of institutional quality or efficiency. They are best viewed in a broader context.

Different institutions and state systems serve different populations of students and graduation rates by themselves say nothing about the quality of education or the reasons why

students might leave. Some smaller institutions that offer a limited number of bachelor degrees also have many students who transfer after a year or two. Some institutions and state systems

intentionally place very few restrictions on who can attend, an approach that offers broad opportunity but cannot be expected to lead to the highest graduation rates.

How are graduation rates calculated?

Rates are based on students who enter in the fall of each year as first-time-in-college students

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Table 1: Same-Institution Graduation Rates for Public Four-Year Institutions, by State, Fall 1996 Full-Time, First-Time-In-College Students

State	% Graduated in 6 Years	Number in Cohort
DE	66%	3,834
IA	65%	9,029
VA	64%	23,522
WA	62%	10,361
NH	62%	4,129
NJ	62%	13,267
VT	60%	2,610
MD	59%	11,965
CA	58%	51,683
MI	57%	29,830
NC	57%	21,912
FL	57%	20,115
SC	56%	11,831
PA	56%	34,513
IL	56%	21,775
WI	56%	21,270
WY	54%	1,203
RI	53%	2,756
NY	52%	28,403
KS	52%	9,438
OH	52%	31,715
AZ	52%	10,274
CO	52%	15,499
CT	51%	6,240
MO	51%	15,286
MA	50%	11,141
MS	50%	7,450
HI	49%	1,690
ME	48%	2,849
IN	48%	25,517
OR	48%	7,251
AL	47%	13,578
MN	47%	12,895
NE	47%	7,118
UT	46%	4,376
TX	46%	44,133
SD	45%	3,743
TN	44%	13,713
ND	44%	3,461
KY	44%	10,817
WV	43%	7,594
OK	42%	9,908
PR	42%	12,081
NV	42%	2,632
GA	41%	20,517
NM	40%	4,388
MT	38%	4,453
AK	36%	573
AR	35%	8,655
GU	35%	357
VI	34%	183
LA	34%	20,467
ID	33%	3,576
DC	13%	246
NATION	52%	677,822

Source: IPEDS GRS Survey.

(students with fewer than 12 college credits accumulated after high school graduation). Students who start in the preceding summer and continue in the fall are also included. Students who enter in the spring or who enter in the summer and do not continue in the fall (many of these are taking summer courses between high school graduation and enrollment at another institution) are not included. Only students who are full-time in the fall (taking 12 or more credits) are included.

The number who have graduated by the summer following the sixth year (e.g., summer 2003 for the 1997 cohort) is divided by the number in the original cohort, less a very small number of allowable exclusions (students who died, for example).

State totals were produced by adding the total adjusted cohorts and number of graduates within six years for all public four-year and above institutions.

Students who transfer in are not included in the cohort, although Florida reports separate graduation rate data for students who transfer from in-state community colleges with AA degrees.

Because of small definitional differences and because of a procedure the National Center for Education Statistics uses to ensure that data cannot be tied to individual students, there may be very small (less than 1%) differences between numbers reported by institutions or the Florida Division of Colleges and Universities and data reported as part of the national Graduation Rate Survey.

Where can I learn more?

Data on State University System institutions, including graduation rates, are available through the Fact Book and Quick Facts links at:

<http://www.fldcu.org/>

National Center for Education Statistics "College Opportunities On-Line" has individual institution data, including graduation rates:

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool/>

The National Information Center for Public Policymaking and Analysis has easy-to-use state-level higher education data:

<http://www.higheredinfo.org>

National Center for Education Statistics Documentation for the Graduation Rate Survey and other Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) surveys:

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

State Higher Education Executive Officers information on the limitations of graduation rates as accountability measures and current accountability initiatives:

<http://www.sheeo.org/>

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