



Have they Finished? Time-to-degree of Freshmen Entering UC and CSU in Fall 2000

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The time taken for students to complete their degrees is a persistent concern. A bachelor's degree is often thought of as being a four-year program, but many students take well over four years to graduate. Slow progress toward graduation is costly to students, who often have to take out loans for tuition and living costs. In addition, prolonged enrollment by students who are already working on their degrees may limit the number of new students that can be admitted to the university systems.

This paper examines the time-to-degree of freshmen entering the California State University and the University of California in fall 2000. This analysis focuses on full-time students who are entering university shortly after high school. The main findings are as follows:

- **Most freshmen enter soon after high school.** Over 98% of freshmen entering UC and CSU were aged under 20. Both systems had more 17-year-old entrants than 19-year-old entrants.
- **Most students start full time.** About 82% of UC freshmen and 71% of CSU freshmen took a full-time course load in their first year.
- **Over half of full-time UC freshmen graduate in four years.** At UC, 56% of the freshmen aged 17–19 who took a full-time load in their first year graduated in their fourth year. A further 24% graduated in the fifth year, giving a 5-year graduation rate of 80%.
- **CSU's graduation rates are lower.** At CSU, 17% of the freshmen aged 17–19 who took a full-time load in their first year graduated in their fourth year. The 5-year graduation rate for these students was 40%.
- **Most full-time UC freshmen continue as full-time students.** Over 70% of full-time freshmen continued with a full-time load in their second and third years. The graduation rate of these students was 65% for graduation in the fourth year and 89% for graduation in the fifth year.
- **Fewer full-time CSU freshmen continue full-time.** Only 47% of the students who took a full-time load in their first year at CSU continued with a full-time load in their second and third years. When the base for graduation rates is limited to these students, CSU graduation rates are 30% for graduation in the fourth year and 62% for graduation in the fifth year.

This analysis uses the Commission's Longitudinal Student Data System. The data includes student identifiers provided in accordance with AB 1570 (Ch. 916, Statutes of 1999). With the identifiers, the analysis can follow students' enrollment history and distinguish between students who continuously enroll full time and students who take a part-time load, or who enroll intermittently. Time-to-degree averaged over all students is not a good performance indicator for a university system that makes itself accessible to part-time students, or students who cannot afford to enroll continuously.

The figures in this report raise many questions about the progress and retention of students. The Commission’s next step will be to use the longitudinal data to take a closer look at student progress. One issue is the number of units that students take before graduation. There may be legitimate reasons for a student to take a large number of units over many years. Students may change majors, or take remedial courses before beginning work on degree courses. However, there seem to be many cases where students have been enrolled full time for well over four years without completing a degree.

Another issue is persistence of students, particularly those who start as full-time freshmen, but do not continue full time. The identified enrollment data can show how many of these freshmen enroll intermittently in later years, how many drop down to a part-time load, and how many drop out entirely. This analysis can help identify obstacles that students face in moving forward to complete their degrees and see if these obstacles are more serious for different ethnic groups or students from lower-performing high schools.

Progress of freshmen entering in fall 2000

In the fall term of 2000, about 28,000 freshmen entered UC and 37,000 freshmen entered CSU. Nearly all of these were aged between 17 and 19 and most started with a full-time course load. The Commission used the Longitudinal Student Data System to calculate two types of graduation rates for these students. The first is the graduation rate for freshmen aged 17–19 who took a full-time load in

their first year. The second is the graduation rate for freshmen who continued to take a full-time load throughout their first three years.

Entering freshmen, fall 2000

	University of California	California State University
Total	27,590	36,840
16 & under	120	90
17	5,810	6,890
18	20,320	26,660
19	1,220	2,610
20–21	80	350
22–29	20	190
30 & over	<10	60
Freshmen aged 17–19		
Total	27,350	36,160
Full time in freshman year	82%	71%
Full time throughout first 3 years	58%	33%

There are many other ways of calculating graduation rates. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics publishes statistics where full-time students are defined based on enrollment in the first term, rather than over the first full year. The 6-year graduation rate and the median time to degree are often used as measures of student progress. However, it is not possible to give these figures for fall 2000 freshmen because data after 2005 is not yet available.

Freshmen starting full time. Graduation rates for freshmen taking a full-time load in their first year measure the progress of students who enter UC or CSU soon after high school and are at least setting out to study full time toward a degree. Some may need to work to support themselves, but generally these students are starting their university education with the intention of postponing full-time work until they have completed their degrees.

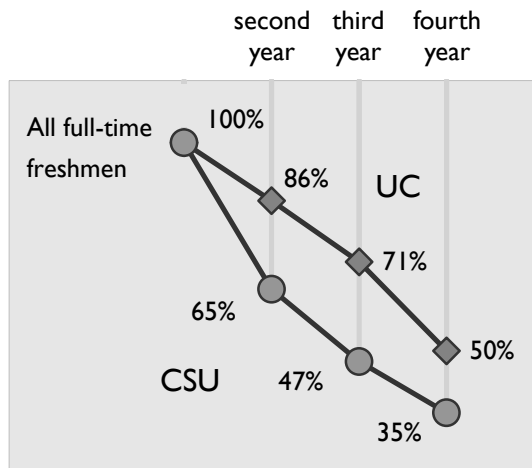
Data from the Commission’s Longitudinal Student Data System.

A full-time load is 27 semester units or 39 quarter units in an academic year. See also notes on page 6.

The 4-year graduation rates for freshmen starting full time are 56% at UC and 17% at CSU. The corresponding 5-year graduation rates are 80% at UC and 40% at CSU.

Persistence rates for full-time freshmen

Percentage of freshmen who took a full-time load in their first year and continued to take a full-time load through their ...

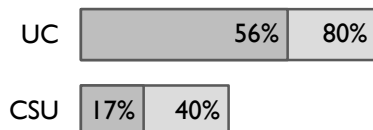


Freshmen aged 17–19 entering in Fall 2000.

Four-year and five-year graduation rates

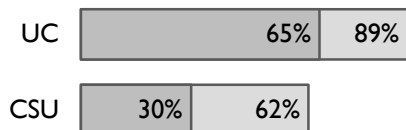
Freshmen starting full time

Freshmen aged 17–19 who took a full-time load in their first year



Students continuing full time

Freshmen aged 17–19 who took a full-time load throughout their first, second, and third years



Not all students taking a full-time load in their freshman year continue full time. Some may enroll intermittently in following years or take a part-time course load. These students may have careers away from their university education, so including them in the base for graduation rates may give figures that do not reflect progress of students who are fully occupied with their studies.

Students continuing full time. The second definition of graduation rates restricts the base to students who continued taking a full-time load throughout their first, second, and third years. These students have made a sustained commitment to their education. They have had all the costs of a full-time university education—tuition, books, and forgone earnings—for at least three years, and are likely to be fully occupied with their university education until they graduate. Fourth-year enrollment is not included as part of the definition of a long-term full-time student, because students nearing graduation may reduce their course load as they complete the requirements for their degree.

At UC, 86% of the students who took a full-time load in their first year continue with a full-time load in their second year. Some of these cut back their enrollment in the following year, with the result that 71% of the students who took a full-time load in their first year took full time loads for three years. The graduation rate of these students was 65% for graduation in the fourth year and 89% for graduation in the fifth year.

At CSU, a lower proportion of freshmen starting full time continue as full-time students. Only 65% of CSU freshmen starting full time took a full-time load in their second year. Again, some of these cut back in the following year, so only 47% of the students who took a full-time load in their first year at CSU continued with a full-time load for three years. When the base for graduation rates is limited to these students, CSU graduation rates are much higher. The 4-year graduation rate for full-time CSU students is 30% and the 5-year graduation rate is 62%.

Differences between campuses

Enrollment and graduation patterns vary greatly between campuses. Full details are on page 6. UC Berkeley had the highest percentage of freshmen starting full time, with 94% taking a full-time load in their first year. Of these, 63% graduated in their fourth year and 86% graduated in their fifth year. At the other UC campuses, 4-year graduation rates ranged between 56% and 64%. The 5-year graduation rate exceeded 70% for all campuses.

Graduation Rates by Campus

Freshmen aged 17–19 who took a full-time course load throughout their first, second, and third years

UC Berkeley	69%	92%
UC Davis	62%	91%
UC Los Angeles	63%	90%
UC Santa Barbara	75%	89%
UC Riverside	70%	89%
UC San Diego	64%	88%
UC Irvine	57%	87%
UC Santa Cruz	64%	84%
Sonoma State	42%	74%
San Diego State	37%	74%
CSU Chico	33%	67%
CSU San Bernardino	33%	65%
Cal Poly, SLO	30%	64%
Cal Poly, Pomona	27%	64%
CSU Fullerton	37%	64%
San Francisco State	28%	62%
CSU Long Beach	28%	61%
CSU Fresno	23%	58%
CSU Sacramento	21%	56%
CSU Northridge	25%	55%
San José State	18%	54%
CSU Los Angeles	29%	45%

- Five-year graduation rate for full-time students
- Four-year graduation rate for full-time students

Rates shown for campuses with more than 1,000 entering freshmen in Fall 2000

When the base for graduation rates is limited to students who took a full-time load for three years, graduation rates are naturally higher. The 4-year graduation rates for UC campuses ranged from 57% to 70% and the 5-year graduation rates ranged from 84% to 92%.

At CSU, the four-year graduation rates for full-time freshmen tend to be low, partly because many full-time freshmen cut back their enrollments after the freshman year. At most campuses, the 4-year graduation rate for full-time freshmen runs between 10 and 25%. The 5-year graduation rate is much higher—typically twice or even three times the 4-year rate.

When the base for graduation rates is limited to students who took a full-time load for three years, CSU’s 4-year graduation rates generally ranged from 20% to 40%. The California Maritime Academy was an exception with a 4-year graduation rate of 68%.

CSU campuses tend to graduate most of their full-time students in their fifth year, so there is much more of a jump in graduation rates between the fourth and fifth year than there is for UC. The 5-year graduation rates for CSU’s general campuses ranged up to 74% and exceeded 60% at most campus.

Full-time students versus all entrants

Although the graduation rates of continuing full time students are much higher than graduation rates for all full-time freshmen, it must be remembered these figures apply to smaller proportion of entrants. Only half of full-time freshmen at CSU stayed full time for three years and overall, these represent only about one third of fall 2000 freshmen. Even at CSU Chico and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, which are destination schools, taking a high proportion of their students from

outside the area, only about half of entering freshmen take a full-time load for three years. At San Diego State, the 900 students who took a full-time load for three years are only one quarter of the 3,650 freshmen who entered in fall 2000.

The focus of this paper is full-time students, but it is also important to assess the progress of students who enroll part time or intermittently. In some cases, part-time or intermittent enrollment is a student choice—for example, when students have family commitments or careers outside of their university education. But many students drop down to part-time loads because of obstacles to full-time study. Some students may need to take a temporary job to cover living expenses, or may be unable to take classes they need to graduate. The Longitudinal Data System can be used for a broader examination of enrollment patterns that will help identify the obstacles to continued enrollment and progress toward a degree.

Graduation rates of full-time students entering in fall 2000

	Entering freshmen, fall 2000	Freshmen starting full time (a)			Students continuing full time (b)		
		Number	Graduation rate		Number	Graduation rate	
			4-year	5-year		4-year	5-year
University of California							
All UC campuses	27,570	22,590 (82%)	56%	80%	16,070 (58%)	65%	89%
UC Berkeley	3,670	3,440 (94%)	63	86	2,710 (74%)	69	92
UC Davis	4,310	2,960 (69%)	52	81	2,180 (51%)	62	91
UC Los Angeles	3,700	2,990 (81%)	60	85	1,960 (53%)	63	90
UC Santa Barbara	3,400	2,980 (88%)	64	80	2,040 (60%)	75	89
UC Riverside	3,090	1,720 (56%)	51	71	1,110 (36%)	70	89
UC San Diego	2,930	2,680 (91%)	57	81	1,980 (68%)	64	88
UC Irvine	3,550	3,150 (89%)	47	76	2,410 (68%)	57	87
UC Santa Cruz	2,920	2,690 (92%)	52	71	1,680 (58%)	64	84
California State University							
All CSU campuses	36,840	26,140 (71%)	17%	40%	12,290 (33%)	30%	62%
Maritime Academy	100	90 (90%)	48	56	60 (60%)	68	80
Sonoma State	1,090	940 (86%)	27	53	540 (50%)	42	74
San Diego State	3,650	1,990 (55%)	23	54	900 (25%)	37	74
CSU Chico	1,980	1,650 (83%)	21	49	940 (47%)	33	67
CSU Stanislaus	620	500 (81%)	25	46	290 (47%)	40	66
CSU San Bernardino	1,190	740 (62%)	18	41	370 (31%)	33	65
Cal Poly, SLO	2,980	2,580 (87%)	22	52	1,650 (55%)	30	64
Cal Poly, Pomona	2,760	1,790 (65%)	14	40	890 (32%)	27	64
CSU Fullerton	2,770	1,700 (61%)	20	40	730 (26%)	37	64
San Francisco State	2,030	1,320 (65%)	15	39	550 (27%)	28	62
CSU Long Beach	3,340	2,320 (69%)	15	38	1,010 (30%)	28	61
Humboldt State	780	660 (85%)	16	39	340 (44%)	25	60
CSU East Bay	710	590 (83%)	18	40	310 (44%)	32	60
CSU San Marcos	570	190 (33%)	13	40	70 (12%)	30	59
CSU Fresno	1,940	1,660 (86%)	13	37	840 (43%)	23	58
CSU Bakersfield	560	480 (86%)	17	36	270 (48%)	29	57
CSU Monterey Bay	440	380 (86%)	13	38	210 (48%)	20	57
CSU Sacramento	2,150	1,650 (77%)	10	31	610 (28%)	21	56
CSU Northridge	2,840	1,880 (66%)	12	30	590 (21%)	25	55
San José State	2,580	1,790 (69%)	9	32	730 (28%)	18	54
CSU Dominguez Hills	530	340 (64%)	9	26	120 (23%)	20	50
CSU Los Angeles	1,230	890 (72%)	14	25	270 (22%)	29	45

a—All freshmen taking a full-time load in their first year.

b—Students taking a full-time load throughout their first, second, and third years.

A full-time load is 27 semester units or 39 quarter units in an academic year.

Count of freshmen entering who are identified with unique student IDs in the Commission's Longitudinal Student Data System. Data for freshmen aged 17–19 entering in Fall 2000. Excludes approximately 40 entering freshmen reported at more than one campus and 20 freshmen reported as graduating in their first or second year.

