



By the Numbers

Focus on the Facts

Office of Institutional
Research
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Persistence & Degree Attainment for Students who Transfer

There is often considerable speculation on what happens to students who transfer from one institute of higher education to another. These students, by virtue of changing institutions, “fall out” of traditional persistence and degree attainment measures, which are based on an entering cohort of first-time degree-seeking new freshmen.

There is little data available to benchmark persistence and degree attainment for students who leave their first institution, though success rates for transfer students are starting to garner more attention.

The Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (BPS), coordinated and funded by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), is a large-sample survey administered to a cohort of

students who were selected to participate in the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). Students from the NPSAS are contacted after completing their second year of college and again five years after matriculation “to find out about their undergraduate experiences, persistence in school, degree completion, and employment following enrollment. “ To date, there have been three BPS cohorts: the first started college in 1990; the second in 1996; and the third started in 2004.

Because the BPS tracks *students* (as opposed to institutions, or students enrolled at institutions), it is possible to follow students through several institutions in order to create benchmarks for transfer student success and degree attainment. Using simple analysis made possible through publicly available tools

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Undergraduate Transfer Students at UW-L

Fall 2006

New Transfer Students:
364

Average GPA at Prior Institutions: 3.14

Demographics:

- 48.9% Female
- 7.4% Students of Color
- 18.1% Non-resident
- 10.2% NonTraditional

Distribution by College:

- 42% in Science & Health
- 37% in Liberal Studies
- 21% in Business Administration

Distribution by Class Standing:

- 29.7% Freshmen
- 40.9% Sophomores
- 28.8% Juniors
- 3.8% Seniors

Editor’s Note

Over the summer, I was granted one of about 50 national fellowships to attend the Association for Institutional Research / National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Summer Data Policy Institute. The Institute is

designed to familiarize higher education professionals with the various large databases maintained by NCES and the National Science Foundation. During the Institute, each participant completes a short

presentation using data from at least one of the national databases; this issue of *By the Numbers* is based on my findings.

Teri Thill

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**Information & Resources
Related to Students in
Transition**

National Resource Center for
the First Year Experience &
Students in Transition
<http://www.sc.edu/fye/>

National Survey of Student
Engagement
<http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm>

Transfer Student Persistence & Degree Attainment (cont.)

through NCES, it is possible, for instance, to begin exploring the persistence of transfer students.

The data in the table below show outcomes for students in the BPS:96/98/01 survey who indicated they were interested in pursuing at least a bachelor's degree and whose first institution attended was a 4-year public institution. Not surprisingly, students who never transfer have the highest 6-year bachelor's attainment rate.

Among students who transfer, however, the data displays some interesting trends. Notably, the "stop-out" rate (the percentage of students who have not attained a bachelor's degree and are not still enrolled in postsecondary education) is remarkably similar between students who transfer and those who don't. In fact, for students who transfer more than once, the stop out rate is lower than it is for

Bachelor's degree attainment rates for students starting at 4-year public institutions

6-year bachelor's degree attainment	Attained less than bachelor's	Attained bachelor's	Never attained, enrolled	Never attained, not enrolled
Total starting at Public 4-year	6.09 %	55.43 %	17.5 %	20.98 %
Never transferred	2.86 %	65.34 %	11.62 %	20.18 %
One transfer	14.37 %	29.08 %	30.97 %	25.58 %
Two or more transfers	16.04 %	28.13 %	41.61 %	14.22 %

Data referenced in this issue is from the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study, (BPS) 1996 beginning cohort. Additional information about the BPS is available on the NCES web site: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/bps/>

Information about the NCES & NSF national databases, including tools to access them, is available on their web sites:

<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/>
<http://webcaspar.nsf.gov/>

students who don't transfer. While the 6-year degree attainment rate for students who transfer is lower, considerably larger proportions of these students are still enrolled and working toward completing their degree.

This brief evidence points to possibly greater resiliency for transfer students. As student transitions are believed to be disruptive in progress toward degree completion, this potentially greater resiliency shows that the disruption of transition may only slow progress, not stop it altogether.

As graduation rates are typically reported as the percent of students graduating within 150% of expected time, the additional time added by student postsecondary transfer appears to be significant. The BPS does not follow students after their expected 6-year completion date, making it impossible to determine how much additional time each transition might add to the expected degree completion time for transfer students. Additional research in this area may help establish such benchmarks and demystify transfer student success data.