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Exploring IPEDS Outcome Measures in the WICHE Region

Background

The first round of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System's (IPEDS) newest survey component, Outcome Measures (OM), was released to the public in Fall 2017. The OM data provide a more nuanced, detailed alternative suite of information about student outcomes than do the long-standing IPEDS graduation rates, and better coverage of the diverse student populations that have been historically overlooked in traditional graduation rate calculations.¹ Importantly, the IPEDS OM survey begins to address some of the limitations of the prevailing Graduation Rate (GR) component data.²

In this brief, WICHE summarizes and describes these data so that users can become familiar with them. The sections to follow explain the differences between the long-standing GR data and these new OM data; they also illustrate the additional progression and completion information the OM data provide about public postsecondary institutions in the WICHE region (representing 16 states and territories in the Western United States) and their undergraduate populations.³ The final section of this brief details additional changes to be incorporated in the next wave of OM data, and the Technical Glossary provides cohort and element definitions.

OM Data Cover 60 Percent More Public College Students in the West

Within the 2016 OM survey data, institutions reported the number of students who were conferred a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award for the first time at that institution (hereafter, "credential"), and enrollment status if they did not receive one of these credentials in the time period tracked, for the cohort of degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates who started at the institution in Fall 2008.⁴

Key Takeaways

Recently released IPEDS Outcome Measures data begin to address known limitations with official college graduation rates. These rates have only included "traditional" college outcomes of first-time students, leaving out part-time students and many types of non-first-time students. Now that the wider diversity of students is represented, WICHE observes important and even surprising trends about student outcomes.

- A majority of public college undergraduates in the WICHE region were left out of those official graduation rate measures—including the overwhelming majority of students at public community colleges.
- Students in this first cohort who were not first-time at the tracking institution were more likely to achieve credentials than first-time students.

These and other key findings for researchers and policymakers are explored within this *WICHE Insights* brief.

The outcomes are reported for four student groupings:

- First-time, full-time
- First-time, part-time
- Non-first-time, full-time
- Non-first-time, part-time

Institutions reported credential and enrollment status for entering Fall 2008 undergraduates at two points in time: after six years (by August 31, 2014) and after

eight years (by August 31, 2016).⁵ Table 1 summarizes these entering Fall 2008 undergraduates at WICHE-region public institutions. Only the category of first-time, full-time undergraduates had previously been covered by the federally reported GR graduation rates data. **The OM data, however, cover three additional categories of students comprising about 60 percent of entering Fall 2008 undergraduates in the region.** For example, at public four-year institutions in the WICHE region, there were about 200,600 students (after adjustments) in the Fall 2008 GR graduation rate cohort of students comprised only of first-time, full-time students. Subtle differences exist between the OM and GR cohort definitions and adjustments, but roughly the same number of first-time, full-time students were tracked for the OM results (204,810).⁶ And the OM data also provide outcomes information for 129,470 more Fall 2008 undergraduates at public four-year WICHE-region institutions (39 percent).

An even more consequential number of undergraduates were captured by OM data but not by the GR cohort definition at public two-year WICHE-region institutions—448,500 students—as 71 percent of entering undergraduates in Fall 2008 at

WICHE-region public two-year institutions were either part-time or non-first-time students.⁷ This additional, more comprehensive accounting of different types of students provides important information about postsecondary progression and completion for all types of students and institutions—information that was previously unavailable through IPEDS.

Public Four-Year Student Populations in the West

One of the key enhancements of the OM data is the more comprehensive coverage of student outcomes. For example, in addition to data about credential attainment, it provides information about transfer outcomes.

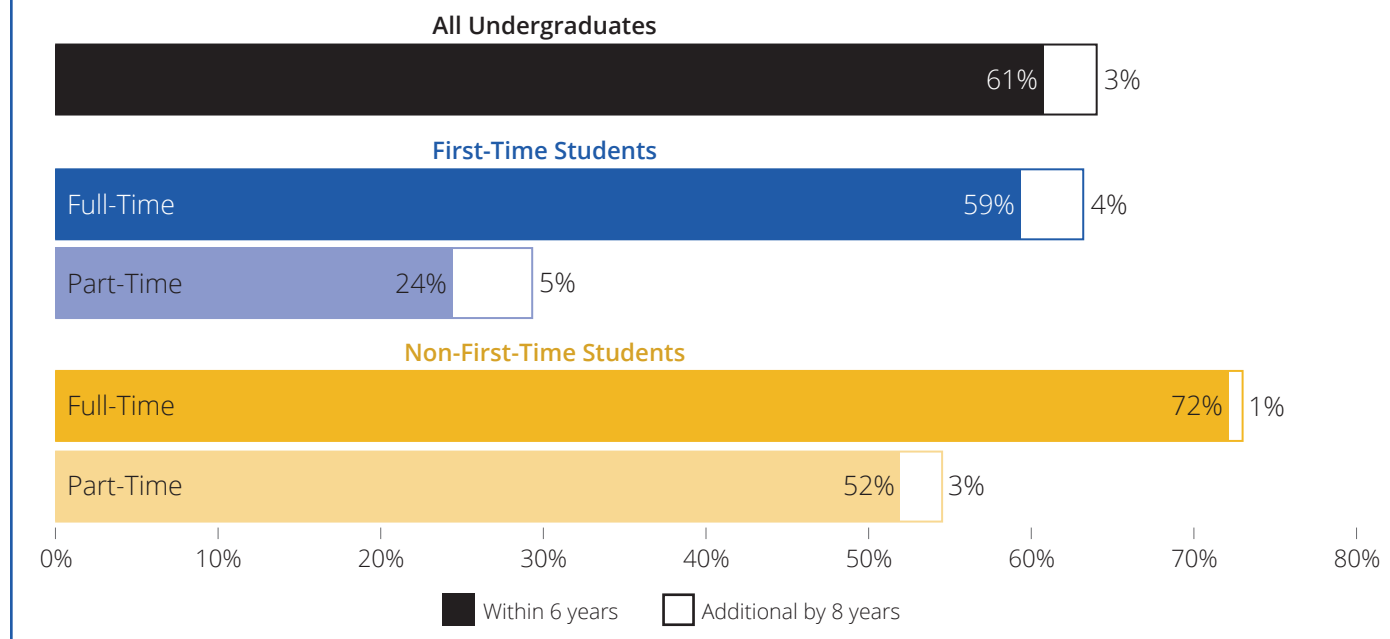
Part-Time and Non-First-Time Students: Figure 1 illustrates outcomes for the additional student populations tracked in the OM data but not the GR graduation rate data—only the students covered by the dark blue bar are common between the OM and GR data. Perhaps the most substantial new piece of information reflected in the OM data about public four-year institutions in the WICHE region is for non-first-time and part-time undergraduates. Including this

Table 1. Undergraduates Who Started in Fall 2008 at Public Institutions in the WICHE Region

	Students in the Fall 2008 Cohort		Completed at Starting Institution		Did Not Complete at Starting Institution Within 8 Years		
	Number	Percent of Total	Within 6 Years	Additional Within 8 Years	Transferred	Still Enrolled	Unknown
Public 4-Year All Undergraduates	334,280		61%	3%	19%	1%	16%
First-Time							
Full-Time	204,810	61%	59%	4%	20%	2%	15%
Part-Time	13,400	4%	24%	5%	30%	3%	37%
Non-First-Time							
Full-Time	89,580	27%	72%	1%	13%	1%	13%
Part-Time	26,490	8%	52%	3%	20%	1%	24%
Public 2-Year All Undergraduates	634,110		23%	2%	43%	2%	31%
First-Time							
Full-Time	185,610	29%	37%	2%	36%	2%	23%
Part-Time	197,380	31%	13%	2%	40%	3%	42%
Non-First-Time							
Full-Time	73,800	12%	35%	2%	40%	1%	22%
Part-Time	177,320	28%	13%	1%	54%	1%	29%

Source: WICHE calculations of IPEDS Outcome Measures data, 2016.

Figure 1. Credential Completion Rates for Undergraduates at Public Four-Year Institutions in the WICHE Region, Fall 2008 Cohort



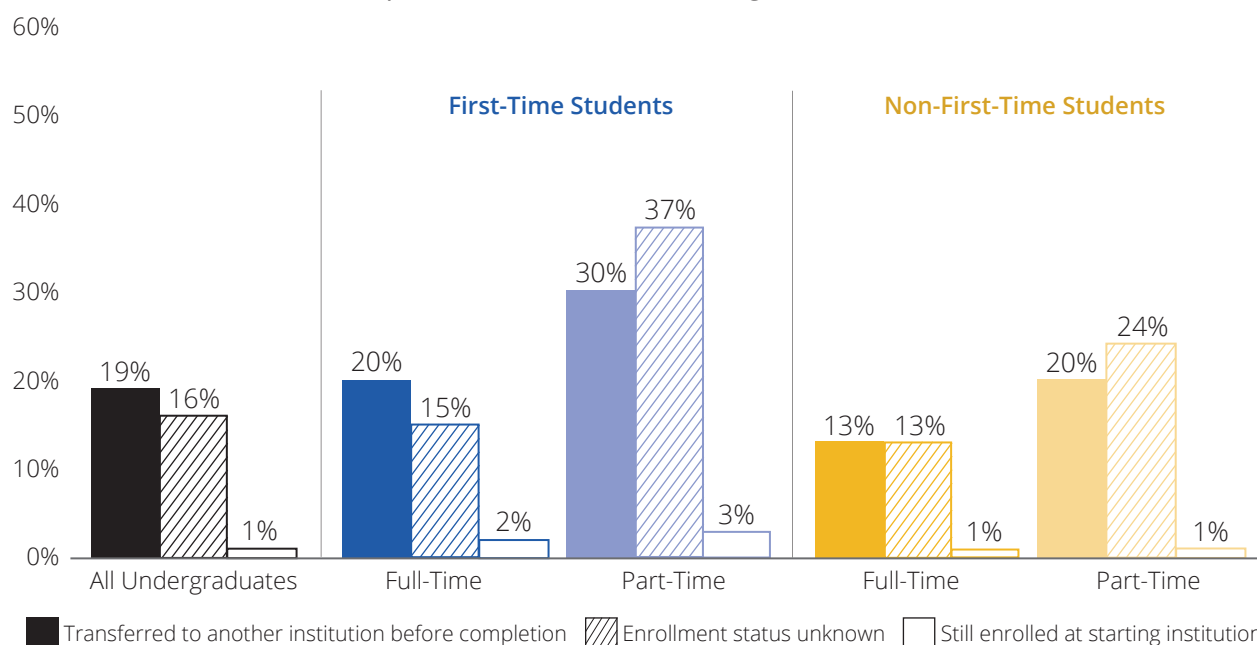
39 percent of entering Fall 2008 students increased the overall six-year completion rate at public four-year institutions to 61 percent, compared to 59 percent for first-time, full-time students only.⁸

And overall, *non-first-time* undergraduates completed a credential within six years at higher rates than *first-time* students. **The rate (72 percent) at which non-first-time, full-time students completed a credential within six years exceeded that rate (59 percent) for their first-time peers by 13 percentage points.** And the rate for non-first-time, *part-time* students (52 percent) was 28 percentage points higher than for their first-time peers (24 percent). While it is not possible to isolate the circumstances of non-first-time students in the OM data, some may, for example, be returning after a stop-out or lapse while others may be recent

transfers captured when the cohort was set; both should be captured in the OM cohort.

Credentials Within Six and Eight Years: Figure 1 also indicates the percentage of credential completions that occur between six and eight years at public four-year institutions in the WICHE region. An additional 4 percent of entering Fall 2008 first-time, full-time undergraduates received a credential when tracked at eight years. The greatest gain from tracking at eight years was for first-time, part-time students; the credential completion rate went up by five percentage points at eight years for this group. This is not surprising, since part-time students typically take more time to complete, and first-time, part-time students might need more time to complete more credits than non-first-time, part-time students, who may enroll requiring fewer credits for completion.

Figure 2. Status of Undergraduates at Four-Year Institutions in the WICHE Region Who Didn't Complete a Credential Within Eight Years, Fall 2008 Cohort



Students Who Haven't Completed a Credential at the Institution Within Eight Years: On average, 36 percent of entering Fall 2008 undergraduates at public four-year institutions in the WICHE region did not complete a credential at the institution that started tracking them within eight years (Figure 2). About half of these students—19 percent of the beginning total—instead transferred to another institution during this time. First-time, part-time students were the most likely to have transferred (30 percent). All part-time students showed substantially higher rates of “enrollment status unknown” when tracking concluded.⁹

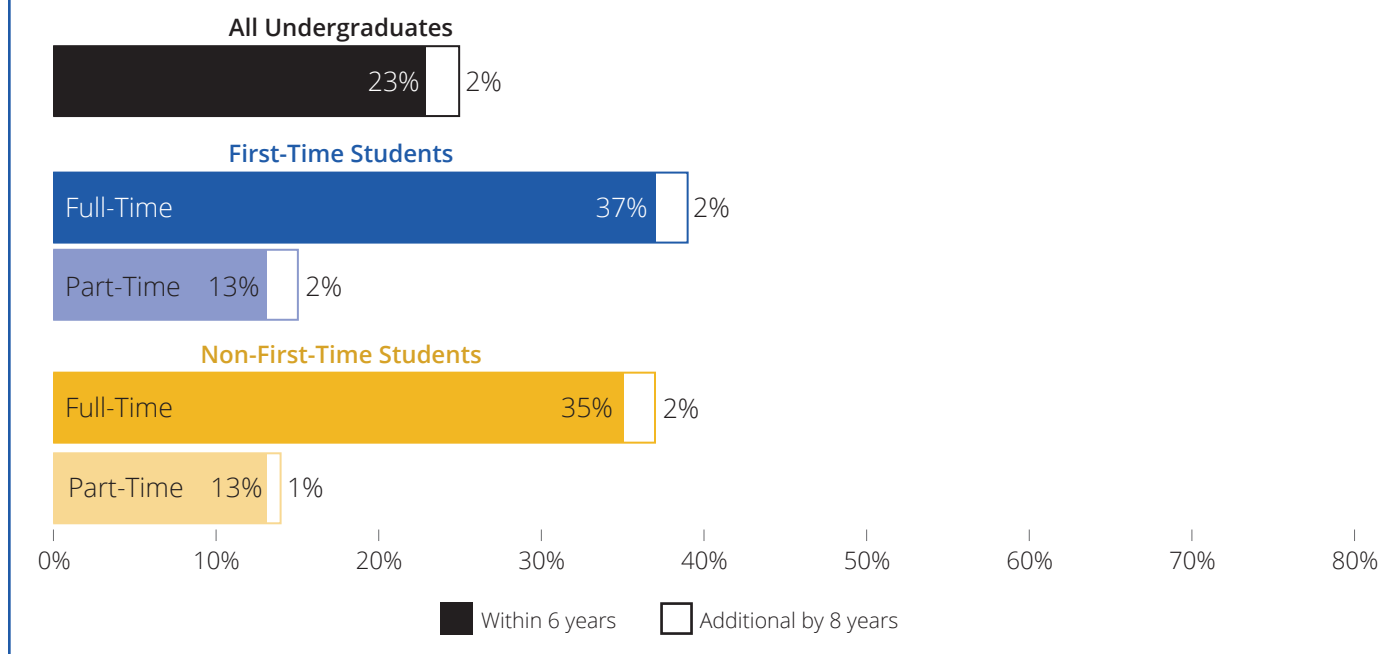
Public Two-Year Student Populations in the West

Two-year institutional leaders have legitimately critiqued official graduation rates from the IPEDS GR component for not capturing a substantial subset of their student populations—non-first-time students and those enrolled part-time. The OM data describe outcomes with these student populations, and the data reveal the importance of developing and interpreting outcomes for students at two-year colleges differently than for those at four-year institutions.

Part-Time and Non-First-Time Students: The OM data reveal that graduation rates from the IPEDS GR component portray only about one-third of all students at public two-year institutions in the WICHE region, since **only 29 percent of the entering Fall 2008 cohort enrolled full-time as first-time students (See Table 1). The OM data, importantly, reflected the other 71 percent of students at public two-year students in the WICHE region in Fall 2008.** Among these were the almost 60 percent of the entering Fall 2008 students at two-year institutions who started part-time, and the 40 percent of all students who were non-first-time students. The results, however, from tracking this first OM cohort illustrate the variation in student trajectories and how outcomes for which the definition of success is limited to credentials or “graduation rates” may not always be the most meaningful for this sector.

In the WICHE region, completion rates that accounted for all types of students at public two-year institutions were considerably lower than those that included only first-time, full-time students. Just 23 percent of Fall 2008 public two-year students received a credential by six years, compared to 37 percent of first-time, full-time students (Figure 3).¹⁰ And only 13 percent of students in both part-time categories (first-time and non-first-time) completed a credential within six years.

Figure 3. Credential Completion Rates for Students at Public Two-Year Institutions in the WICHE Region, Fall 2008 Cohort



As discussed below, much of this difference may be attributable to the share of students who transfer, and therefore are not reported as “completed.”

GR and OM data both reflect degree/certificate-seeking students, but the non-first-time category may have a different meaning and different implications for two-year colleges than for four-year institutions.¹¹ While circumstances of students considered “non-first-time” cannot be known with certainty, it is plausible that the non-first-time category in OM data at a four-year institution reflects transfer-in students that were not covered by GR graduation rate data, as well as students simply returning after a stop-out or for an additional degree (among other circumstances). It is also plausible that there is wider variety of credentials and transfer intentions among students returning to a two-year institution as non-first-time than those who return as non-first-time to a four-year institution. To that point, as discussed below, part-time students returning to two-year institutions had the highest transfer rate (54 percent) of all student categories in Table 1.

Regarding enrollment intensity in the region, completion trends of part-time students at public two-year institutions were similar to those at public four-year institutions. Overall, *full-time* two-year students who entered in Fall 2008 completed at higher rates than *part-time* students. However, there was slight difference in completion rates between *first-time* and *non-first-time* students at two-year institutions (37 and 35 percent, respectively), compared to the greater difference between these student groups at four-year institutions.

Credentials Within Six and Eight Years: As with students at public four-year institutions in the WICHE region, a relatively small percentage of completions (2 percent more, on average) occurred between the six- and eight-year thresholds. This especially makes sense in the case of two-year students, since eight years is 400 percent or more of expected completion time for most two-year credentials.¹²

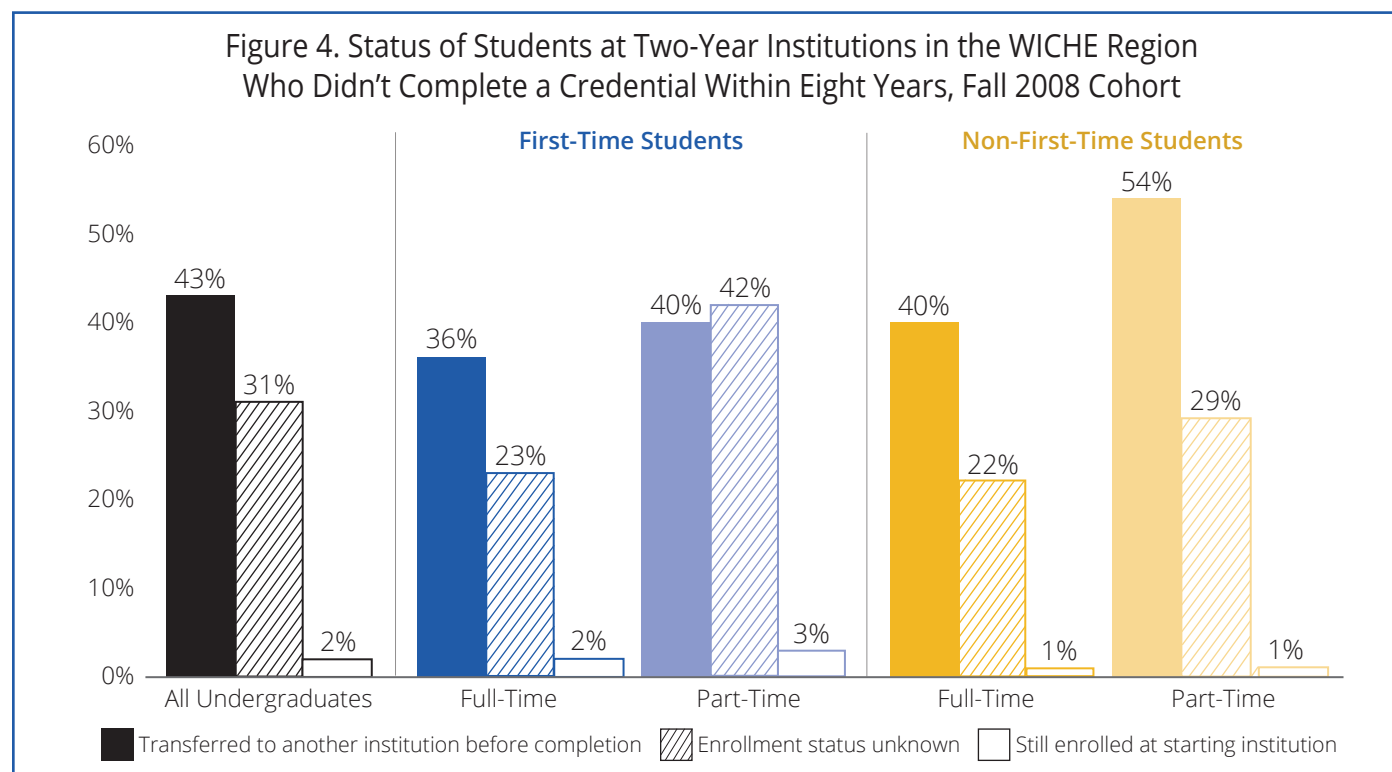
Students Who Haven't Completed a Credential at the Institution Within Eight Years: Seventy-six percent of entering Fall 2008 students at public two-year institutions in the region did not receive a credential within eight years at the institution that started tracking them (Figure 4). Among those non-completers, 57 percent transferred to another institution within eight years. **Part-time students at public two-year colleges were more likely to have transferred than full-time students. And almost half of those who transferred were non-first-time students (46 percent).** Ultimately in the WICHE region in Fall 2008, four out of 10 of all the two-year students transferred (43 percent), and more than five out of 10 of those who started as non-first-time, part-time students (54 percent) transferred instead of completing a credential in the time in which they were tracked.

As expected, the OM data suggest that a bulk of two-year institutions' work is with students who transfer, but leave unanswered questions about the circumstances, enrollment patterns, and completion rates of these often more multifaceted student populations than can be answered by even the very detailed OM data. For example, some Fall 2008 cohort students who transferred will likely be captured at their new institution in a subsequent OM

cohort, but it will not be possible to isolate them. And among students who had not transferred, a very low percentage were still enrolled (not surprising after eight years), with a substantially higher percentage of two-year students with unknown enrollment status than among public four-year institutions.

These OM results for two-year students likely reflect a wide range of possible circumstances, including students who are working, have children, and/or may be pursuing education but not necessarily a degree. And many of the non-first-time undergraduates at two-year institutions who are now being tracked by OM may, by definition, be returning to a previously attended institution or even enrolling in their third (or more) postsecondary institution. At the very least, these non-completion data highlight the importance of constructing and interpreting two-year colleges' "success" rates differently from those of four-year institutions.

The WCET *Frontiers* blog (wcetfrontiers.org), from the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), discusses institution-level Outcome Measures results to encourage its 370-plus institutional members to analyze the new data.



Summary and Implications

This first wave of OM data is an important first step in better understanding student postsecondary progress as seen through varied student cohort lenses. Though the first round of any new dataset often has some limitations, many of the implications from these data quantify trends that heretofore have not been widely tracked. The next wave of data from the 2017-18 IPEDS collection cycle (2009-10 OM cohort) is due for release later this year. These and subsequent waves of data will include further new detail, including:

- Outcomes by Pell Grant and non-Pell Grant recipients
- Full-year enrollments (OM 2016 was limited to Fall 2008 enrollees at institutions who report to IPEDS as an “academic year”)
- Awards made within four years since entry (in addition to the current six- and eight-year intervals)
- Whereas credentials reported for this first wave of OM are the first award made to the student at the institution during the relevant time interval, future cohorts/cycles will reflect the highest credential conferred to the student, and the results will be detailed by level (certificate, associate’s, bachelor’s).¹³

Relying on graduation rate data that are limited to first-time, full-time undergraduates provides institutional leaders, policymakers, students, and families with incomplete outcomes data. The OM data survey is a welcome step forward. While these data cannot represent all possible variations or all student intentions or circumstances, they describe a substantial portion of formerly unknown student outcomes. The additional detail and coverage are particularly relevant for two-year institutions that serve multiple missions within the higher education enterprise. WICHE will continue to analyze and provide information about the OM data as they become available.

There are important distinctions between the credential rate from Outcome Measures data and the Graduation Rate data, as described throughout this brief.

Users should clearly distinguish between these data as they are not synonymous.

Endnotes

¹ Federally calculated graduation rates have been reported using the IPEDS Graduation Rate (GR) component data since the passage of the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. These official GR graduation rates are limited to first-time, full-time undergraduates. The Outcome Measures (OM) survey component originated at the recommendation of the Committee on Measures of Student Success, and the OM survey component and measures were developed through two IPEDS Technical Review Panels. See Association of Institutional Research (AIR), IPEDS Training. Outcome Measures, accessed Jan. 18, 2018 from <https://www.airweb.org/EducationAndEvents/IPEDSTraining/Tutorials/Pages/OutcomeMeasures.aspx>.

² A detailed comparison between the Graduation Rates and Outcome Measures surveys is available from the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), An Evolution of Measuring Student Outcomes in IPEDS, December 2017, accessed Jan. 18, 2018 from http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/postsecdata/docs/data-at-work/postsecdata_gr-om_explainer.pdf.

³ As with most IPEDS components, the OM data also cover private non-profit and for-profit institutions. This brief focuses on public postsecondary institutions, which in Fall 2016 enrolled about 90 percent of students in the WICHE region.

⁴ Ninety-seven percent of the 2008 OM cohort in the WICHE region were reported by institutions that report as an academic year, and 3 percent started at a program/hybrid institution.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Outcome Measures Survey Form, 2016-17, accessed Jan. 17, 2018 from https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/surveys/2016/pdf/package_13_101.pdf.

⁶ WICHE calculations from IPEDS 2014 Graduation Rates Survey data.

⁷ There were about 180,000 first-time, full-time students tracked by two-year institutions for the GR Fall 2008 cohort, roughly the same number as tracked by OM, but likely reflecting slight differences in cohort definition and adjustment.

⁸ The “official” graduation rate for the corresponding four-year GR cohort (which includes only first-time, full-time undergraduates) was also 59 percent, despite slight differences in the cohort definition and the difference in what the percent completion represents—150 percent of program time for GR and any award by six years after starting for OM.

⁹ There is substantial variation in the rate of students coded as status “unknown” by the conclusion of the tracking period. Since this is the first round of OM, some colleges may still be adjusting to this new level of tracking and these rates may decrease in newer rounds of OM. It is also possible that some categories of students have more indeterminate outcomes, relative to whether and how intensely they considered themselves “degree/certificate-seeking” when they entered the cohort.

¹⁰ Whereas we presented information about the corresponding GR rate for first-time, full-time undergraduates at four-year institutions (endnote 8), we do not compare it here for students at two-year institutions, because there are more consequential impacts for the two-year sector from the differences in cohort definition and adjustment and between what the “official” graduation rate and OM completion rates represent.

¹¹ In GR rates data, only the overall category of degree/certificate-seeking students is delineated for two-year institutions, but two categories are delineated for four-year institutions: seeking bachelor’s-equivalent degrees or seeking other degrees. OM data delineate only one overall category of degree/certificate-seeking students.

¹² On the other hand, with an increasing number of two-year colleges offering four-year degrees, one might expect increases in future years in the information captured by the longer tracking period; however, it will not be possible to isolate two- and four-year degree/certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges in the OM data.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Outcome Measures Survey Form, 2017-18, accessed Jan. 17, 2018 from https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/downloads/forms/package_13_101.pdf.

OM Data Technical Glossary

2008 Cohort	All undergraduate students who began at the reporting institution in 2008—Fall 2008 enrollment counts for institutions that report as an academic year, and 2008-09 full-year enrollment counts for program/hybrid reporting institutions.
Adjusted Cohort	At six and eight years, the 2008 cohort is adjusted to reflect exclusions to the cohort. Exclusions to the cohort include students who are deceased or permanently disabled and unable to return, left to serve in the armed forces, left to serve with a foreign aid service of the Federal Government, or left to serve on an official church mission.
Credential	Completion data at six and eight years reflect the count of all students receiving a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award from the reporting institution (referred to throughout as “credential,” also called “award” in IPEDS documentation). All credentials in the 2016 survey are the first credential conferred and students are only reported once regardless of additional credentials later received.
Degree/certificate-seeking	Institutions only include degree/certificate-seeking students in the OM cohort, which includes students who are: enrolled in courses for credit who are seeking a degree, certificate, or other formal award; all students who have received any financial aid or received state or local financial aid based on eligibility requirements that state that student must be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or transfer-seeking program; all students who obtained a student visa to attend a U.S. postsecondary institution.
Eight-Year Completion Rate	The percentage of students from the adjusted 2008 cohort who received their first credential by August 31, 2016.
Enrolled in Another Institution	Students who left the reporting institution prior to receiving a credential and subsequently enrolled in another institution. This only includes those students whose subsequent enrollment has been confirmed.
Enrollment Status Unknown	A value calculated by subtracting those who have received a credential, are still enrolled, or have transferred to another institution, from the adjusted 2008 cohort.
First-time	A student with no prior postsecondary experience who is attending the reporting institution for the first time as an undergraduate. This includes those enrolled in occupational or academic programs, those enrolled in the fall term who attended for the first time in the prior summer term, and those entering with advanced standing (i.e., college credits earned during high school)
Full-time	Student enrolled for 12 or more semester or quarter credits, or 24 or more contact hours a week each term.
Non-First-Time	Student with postsecondary experience prior to attending the reporting institution.
Part-Time	Student enrolled for less than 12 credits per semester or quarter, or less than 24 contact hours per week.
Six-Year Completion Rate	The percentage of students from the adjusted 2008 cohort who received their first credential by August 31, 2014.
Still Enrolled	Students who have not received a credential and are still enrolled in the reporting institution.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2016-17 Survey Materials: Glossary, accessed March 16, 2018 from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data/annual-survey-forms-packages-archived>.

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