Performance Funding Metrics
Retention and Graduation Rates

OVERVIEW
OF METHODOLOGY
AND PROCEDURES

STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM *of* FLORIDA
Board of Governors

Background

The national standard graduation rate was created by the Student Right to Know Act of 1990, which required institutions of higher education receiving federal financial assistance to report graduation rates to current and prospective students via the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This act established the graduation rate for first-time in college (FTIC) students based on 150% of the normal time for completion from the program - which is six years for a four-year program.

In 2011, the Board of Governors included retention and graduation rate metrics in its 2012-2025 System Strategic Plan. In 2014, the importance of the retention and graduation rate data was further elevated by their inclusion in a new Performance-Based Funding (PBF) Model. In 2018, the Florida Legislature changed the graduation rate metric included in PBF from a six-year to a four-year measure. This document provides details on the methodology and procedures used by Board of Governors staff during the analysis of the retention and graduation rate data as reported in the annual Accountability Plan and used in the Performance Based Funding model.

1. ## Overview of Data Sources & Procedure

   The State University System of Florida Board of Governors maintains a student unit record database titled the State University Database System (SUDS). This database contains over 400 data elements about students, faculty and programs at SUS institutions. Retention and graduation rate data are finalized using the Retention submission. The Board's Office of Data & Analytics (ODA) unit builds the Retention file annually using data from the Admission (ADM), Student Instruction File (SIF) and the Degrees Awarded (SIFD) submissions that have been previously submitted by Institutional Data Administrators. Once Retention has been built, each Institutional Data Administrator reviews the Retention data and works with ODA staff to make edits before Institutional Data Administrators approve and submit the final data to ODA. After universities have approved the Retention submission, the Board's ODA staff analyze the number of students in a cohort (which serves as the denominator) and the number of those same students who are retained or graduated by a specified year (which serves as the numerator). ODA staff then provide the results of the retention and graduation rate data analysis to each Institutional Data Administrator for their review and approval prior to the data being shared with, and approved by, each university Board of Trustee and the Board of Governors as part of the Accountability Plan process.

2. ## Defining the Cohort

   A cohort is a group of people used in a study who have something in common. In this case, a cohort is composed of students who were all admitted to the university during the same year. The number of students who are assigned to a cohort serves as the denominator in the calculation of retention and graduation rates. Institutional Data Administrators classify students based on the following components which Board staff use to determine student cohorts:

   a. ### Student Level:

   Only the students who meet the following criteria are included in the cohort.
   - STUDENT CLASS LEVEL [#1060] is either L (lower division undergraduate) or U (upper division undergraduate).
   - DEGREE HIGHEST HELD [#1112] must be less than a Bachelor's.
   - FEE CLASSIFICATION KIND [#1107] must equal 'G' (general instruction).

   b. ### Cohort Year:

   A retention cohort year is defined as the summer, fall, and spring terms when DATE MOST RECENT ADMISSION [#1420] equals REPORTING TIME FRAME [#2001].

COHORTS	RECENT ADMIT DATE		
	SUMMER	FALL	SPRING
2016-2017	201605	201608	201701
2017-2018	201705	201708	201801
2018-2019	201805	201808	201801

Cohort Types:

The COHORT TYPE [#1429] is a derived element that is built by ODA staff and is based on the TYPE OF STUDENT AT TIME OF MOST RECENT ADMISSION [#1413] as assigned by the institution.

- First-Time in College Students include two types of students:
  - o Students who are admitted into a university for the first time and who have earned less than 12 credit hours after high school graduation [#1413= 'B'].
  - o Students who are considered 'Early Admits' because they have been officially admitted and are seeking a degree at the university prior to their high school graduation [#1413= 'E'].

- AA Transfer Students who have transferred from the Florida College System with an Associate in Arts Degree. This value is based on the three following elements:
  - o TYPE OF STUDENT AT DATE OF ENTRY [#1068] or TYPE OF STUDENT AT TIME OF MOST RECENT ADMISSION [#1413] equals 'J'.
  - o DEGREE HIGHEST HELD [#1112] equals 'A' (Associates).
  - o LAST INSTITUTIONAL CODE [#1067] or INSTITUTION GRANTING HIGHEST DEGREE [#1411] must equal a Florida Public Community College.

- Other Transfer Students include all other undergraduate transfer students.

c. Student Right to Know Flag:

The STUDENT RIGHT TO KNOW (SRK) FLAG [#1437] is an entry status indicator that is a 'Yes/No' flag based on the term (Summer, Fall, or Spring) that a student is first admitted.

- YES: If a student enters the institution in the fall term the SRK flag will be set to 'Yes'. If a student enters the institution in the summer term and progresses to fall term, the SRK flag will be set to 'Yes'.

- NO: If a student enters in the summer term and does not progress to the fall term; or, if a student enters in the spring term the SRK flag will be set to 'No'.

d. Full-Time / Part-Time Indicator:

The FULL-TIME / PART-TIME INDICATOR [#1433] is an indicator based on the number of credit hours attempted (not earned) during their first fall term. A student entering in the fall and taking 12 or more credit hours will remain in the full-time category regardless of the number of credits taken in subsequent terms.

- This indicator is based on the CURRENT TERM COURSE LOAD [#1063] which is the number of hours enrolled/attempted during a term. This excludes courses that are audited and all credits awarded during the term through 'Credit by Examination'. Students completing prior term incompletes are not included unless they have registered and paid fees for the credits they are completing.

- This indicator is used in reporting retention and graduation data to the federal government - to IPEDS.

e. Cohort Revisions and Adjustments:

The US Congress and the US Dept. of Education allow institutions to make revisions and adjustments to their student cohorts. There is a difference between revising and adjusting a cohort. Revising a cohort means modifying the cohort data to reflect better information that has become available since the cohort was first reported. Adjusting a cohort means subtracting any allowable exclusions from the revised cohort to establish a denominator for graduation rate calculation. These cohort revisions and adjustments are typically the cause of the differences between historical and updated retention and graduation rates.

- Cohort Adjustment Flag [#1442] is a data element on the Retention Cohort Changes (RETC) table that is used by Institutional Data Administrators to indicate that a retention file record has been modified

based on a change in status of the student at the institution. Historically, this field was usually only populated for students for the six year cohort, but with the switch to the four year graduation rate, several institutions have started identifying cohort adjustments for multiple cohorts in a single retention submission.

- o Institutional Data Administrators identify the students who have died, suffered a permanent disability, left to serve in the Armed Services, left to serve in with Foreign Aid Service of the federal government (such as the Peace Corps), or left to serve on an Official Church Mission. These students are removed from the cohort and are not included in the retention and graduation rates.
- o Institutional Data Administrators also identify students who are officially admitted to an Advanced Graduate program (classified as 'P' or 'T') without earning a bachelor's degree. It is important to stress that this code cannot be used for students who are just seeking an Advanced Graduate degree – only students who have been formally admitted to the program and will not be earning a bachelor's degree can have this designation. Since these students will not earn a bachelor's degree, they can be removed from the FTIC cohort for the calculation of graduation rates.
  - ▪ When the 2018 Legislature changed the PBF graduation rate from six to four years effective immediately, the institutions did not have time to identify which students in their four-year cohorts had been officially accepted into advanced graduate programs, so the Board's Office of Data & Analytics made a temporary, one-year emergency methodological change to also exclude those students whose Degree Level Sought (#01053), during their fourth year, was identified as seeking a Pharmacy Degree ('W'). The graduation rates reported in the 2018 Accountability Plans used the temporary fix. The graduation rates reported in the 2019 Accountability Plans no longer used the temporary fix, which is why the historical rates for some institutions were revised in the 2019 Accountability Plans.
  - ▪ Finally, it is important to note that these Advanced Graduate students will not be removed from the Academic Progress Rate or Retention Rate calculations, as there is no reason why entry into an accelerated program would prohibit enrollment during the second fall term.
- o Information Adjusted by Correction (I) is used to revise the cohort type, SRK flag, or full/part-time indicator based on newly confirmed information (e.g., SSN change, new transcription info, etc…).

COHORT ADJUSTMENTS USED IN PBF METRICS

CATEGORIES	APR/RETENTION	GRAD RATES
Death (A)	Used	Used
Registered but never attended (B)	Used	Used
Totally/Permanently Disabled (D)	Used	Used
Serve in Armed Forces (F)	Used	Used
Federal Foreign Aid Service (eg, Peace Corps) (G)	Used	Used
Natural Disaster (K)	Used	Used
Official Church Mission (M)	Used	Used
Multiple Cohorts/Illegally Enrolled (Q)	Used	Used
Information Adjusted by Correction (I)	Used	Used
Pharmacy doctoral program (P)	Not used	Used
Advanced Graduate Program (T)	Not used	Used
Transfers (1, 2, 4)	Not used	Not used

3. Calculating the Number Retained or Graduated

a. Second Year Retention Rates

- **Cohorts**: The number of students in the cohort serves as the denominator for the retention rate, and is based on the following rules: Cohort Type= 'FTIC'; Student Right to Know (SRK)= 'Yes'; FT/PT Indicator= 'Full-time'.
  - o The methodology used for the Retention Rate in the annual Accountability Plans is different from what is reported to the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The primary difference is due to timing – the retention rate that is reported to IPEDS is based on preliminary enrollment data; whereas the retention rate in the annual Accountability Plan is based on final enrollment data.

- **Retained or Graduated:** The numerator for the retention rate includes two components: (1) the number of students in the cohort who are still enrolled during the second fall term, and (2) those students who graduated in their first year - prior to the start of the second fall term.

- **Grade Point Average:** A GPA criterion was added to the standard retention rate metric to gain a sense of how well students who were retained were actually doing in their courses. Board staff decided to use a cumulative GPA (at the end of the first year - before the second fall term) of at least 2.0 as a threshold because 2.0 is a commonly referenced measure of satisfactory academic progress that is a common eligibility threshold for financial aid eligibility. It is also important to know that FTICs who return for their 2nd fall with a first-year GPA above 2.0 are 8 times more likely to graduate within six years than students who begin their second Fall with a GPA of less than 2.0.
  - o The University GPA [#1801] element is included on the Enrollments table and provides a student's GPA for a given term as well as the cumulative GPA. Originally, the end of the first year cumulative GPA was based on data that was submitted <u>prior</u> to the second fall term. This process was complicated by timing issues due in large part to the fact that many grades were still incomplete during the summer term before the second fall term (usually due in mid-September). In order to create a smoother procedural flow, and fix timing issues caused by incomplete grades, the Board's Office of Data & Analytics worked with the Council of Data Administrators to revise the methodology to instead use the beginning of term data as reported in the second fall enrollment table (due late January). This new methodology was first implemented for the 2019 Accountability Plan, and was applied to the 2016-17 and 2017-18 cohorts to have a consistent year-over-year methodology for determining PBF 'Improvement points'. The revised GPA calculation is a simpler, more streamlined process that provides more accurate data. The detailed formulas used for calculating GPA are provided below:

  - o **ORIGINAL END-OF-YEAR1 METHODOLOGY**

$$\frac{(\text{GPA\_INST\_GRADE\_PTS [\#1086]} + \text{GPA\_TERM\_GRADE\_PTS [\#1090]})}{(\text{GPA\_INST\_HRS [\#1085]} + \text{GPA\_TERM\_CREDIT\_HRS [\#1088]})}$$

  - o **NEW BEGINNING-OF-YEAR2 METHODOLOGY**

$$\frac{\text{GPA\_INST\_GRADE\_PTS [\#1086]}}{\text{GPA\_INST\_HRS [\#1085]}}$$

b. **Four Year FTIC Graduation Rates**
- **Cohorts**: The number of students in the cohort serves as the denominator for the graduation rate. The denominator used in the calculation of the four-year FTIC graduation rate is based on the following: Cohort Type= 'FTIC' ('B' and 'E'), SRK= 'Yes', FT/PT Indicator= 'Full-time' only, and Cohort Adjustments.
- **Graduated**: The number of students in the cohort who graduated within four years (by the fourth summer term after entry) from the same institution serves as the numerator for the graduation rate. It is important to note that a small number of degrees are reported to SUDS after the degree was awarded – these are called 'late degrees'. The methodology for four-year graduation rates include these 'late degrees'; however, late degrees that haven't already been submitted on the SIFD must be submitted on the Retention submission to be included in the graduation rates.
- **Note about historic rates that change**. The table below provides a visualization showing the difference in reporting degrees awarded for graduation rates and academic year degree counts. The '+' symbol indicates when degrees are reported by institutions to the Board office by degree term (rows) and rept_time_frame (columns). Deg_Term indictes when the degree was awarded and rept_time_frame indicates when the institution reported that degree to the Board office. Degrees can be reported for previous terms, which is why each rept_time_frame reports degrees for multiple deg_terms.
  o The red box provides the logic on which degrees are counted for degrees reported in academic year 2016-17. The logic for reporting degrees in an academic year includes three degree terms (summer, fall, and spring) that is based on a 'summer to summer' rept_time_frame rule that excludes degrees if they are reported too late based on rept_time_frame.
  o Alternatively, graduation rates do not exclude 'late late' degrees, so each year historical graduation rates can change as 'late late' degrees are reported. In the table below, the blue horizontal line is the only criteria restricting degrees awarded for purposes of calculating a graduation rate that ends by summer 2017 (or, deg_term=201705).
  o The highlighted cells indicate which degrees were available for the 2016-17 Retention submission that were included in the 2013-17 graduation rate calculation – the yellow highlights would extend all the way back to the 201305 term if calculating the 2013-17 graduation rate.   However, the 2017-18 Retention submission would also include any degrees awarded above the blue line that were not shaded yellow. These 'late late' degrees are not a large number but can change rates reported into the decimals.

| | REPT_TIME_FRAME | | | | | | |
DEG_TERM	201605	201608	201701	201705	201708	201801	201805
201505	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
201508	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
201601	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
201605	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
201608	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
201701	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
201705	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
201708	-	-	-	-	+	+	+
201801	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
201805	-	-	-	-	-	-	+