

HLC Criterion 4.C.

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student **retention**, **persistence**, and **completion** that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student **retention**, **persistence**, and **completion** of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student **retention**, **persistence**, and **completion** of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student **retention**, **persistence**, and **completion** of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Definitions derived from – Institutional Research in Tertiary Education

On-line module taught by Hamish Coates and Victor Borden through the L.H. Martin Institute, University of Melbourne

HLC Terms

retention – (institution focus) the continued enrollment of students from one specified timepoint to the next.

persistence – (student focus) desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through goal completion.

Possible guidance provisions

- Level of tracking - can be tracked within single institution, single system, or higher education broadly, depending on context
- Can be disaggregated by student types (demographics, SES, race/ethnicity, first generation, trad/non-trad, full-time/part-time)
- Can distinguish different types of students whose rates should not be aggregated (first-time in college v. transfer; degree-level)

completion – (student or institution focus) attainment of target objective, most usually applied to degree or other credential, but also can be applied to other student/institutional objectives or milestones.

Possible guidance provisions

- Articulation of completion objectives related to credentials, transfer, non-credential “completions” (e.g., industry certifications, employment/career development, etc.)

Other, Related Concepts/Metrics

progress rate – Student-centered measure generally defined as the proportion of annual on-track completion units (e.g., credits) that the student has passed. In standard US semester system, it would be cumulative credits passed divided by 30/32 (45 for trimester) after year 1; 60/64 (90 for trimester) after year 2, and so on

success rate – (Australia) – units (e.g., credits) passed divided by credits attempted

transfer rate – U.S. primarily; proportion of initially enrolled students (cohort) enrolled elsewhere than at the originating institution. Included as primary objective as some Community College programs, especially since transfer more often occurs before two-year degree completion than after.

graduation rate – students who completed within a specified number of years divided number initially enrolled. In US, the specified time is 150% of nominal time to completion (e.g., 6 years for bachelor’s degree, 3 for associate’s degree)

on-time graduation rate – percent of initially enrolled students who graduate in nominal length of program (e.g., 4 years for bachelor’s degree in US)

education progression – percent of graduating students at a degree-level who enroll in programs at the next degree level after 1 years or sometimes within 3 or 5 years.

graduate outcomes – post graduate destinations, including workforce, further education, military, self-employment, etc., in contrast to non-productive engagement (unable to find work). Within the work component is an “underemployed” concept as related to whether employment required level of training completed.

Other Success Related Metrics

Progression/graduate outcomes/alumni outcomes

Progression is useful as a measure of how many people advance their knowledge and skills acquisition. Graduate progression can include progression to higher-level study, as well as further study at the same or higher level as the qualification just completed. New Zealand, for instance, uses two types of progression measures:

- tertiary progression measures the percentage of tertiary students who go on to higher-level study; and
- graduate progression reports on the percentage of tertiary graduates who go on to any further study.

Similarly, Australia measures progression in terms of graduate outcomes of further study and employment. The information is collected from alumni through the Graduate Destination Survey, four months after completion of their course. Other examples of graduate/alumni outcome measures include

the course/college experience and financial success. There is difficulty in comparing outcomes across systems due to the different time horizons employed. In North America for instance, institutions have employed graduate surveys at one and five years after graduation. Some universities, such as University of Pennsylvania, also survey alumni ten and fifteen years after graduation.

Involvement metrics

Involvement metrics measure student activities following enrolment in a course/program through to graduation. Forms of involvement metrics include student engagement and student experience measures. These metrics are most commonly measured using surveys, or via time diaries or data collected from management systems (Coates, 2010). An example includes the United States National Survey of Student Engagement <http://nsse.iub.edu>. Increasingly, institutions are also using focus groups and interviews, and analytics collected from social media applications such as the Inigral School App and learning systems such as Blackboard and Learning Management System (LMS).

Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is an attempt to measure students' reaction to the unit or course of study or broader experience, which then provides information about the effectiveness of the unit/course. Evaluation through student satisfaction, if it focuses upon student behaviour, provides a basis for modelling the interactions between what students expect, what is delivered, performance and outcomes (Postema & Markham, 2001).

Return on investment

Investing in higher (tertiary) education is one of the more significant decisions a person can take. In some countries, such as Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, and the United States, the direct costs of higher education can be large, often requiring a significant investment of an individual's personal funds, either in up-front payments or loan repayments later on. Even in countries where the direct costs of higher education to an individual are much lower, such as Finland, Norway, and Turkey, the time invested in pursuing a degree – and the opportunity cost of foregone earnings while an individual is in school – can be a major factor (OECD, 2012). The OECD measures the private net present value of higher education as an estimate of the net economic benefits to an individual who completes higher education, over his or her working life, expressed in the value of money today. It is calculated by estimating the economic benefits that an individual with higher education receives compared to a person with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education only, and then subtracting the costs to that individual that are associated with having a tertiary degree.

Not included in this section: employment/wage outcomes; community engagement/contributions; character development;

For each term, need: parameters for operational definitions; basis for relevance;

References

Coates, H. (2010). Defining and monitoring academic standards in Australian higher education, *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 22(1), 1-17

Postema, M. & Markham, S. (2001). A methodology for subject evaluation: Defining student satisfaction. http://cerg.csse.monash.edu.au/reports/satisfaction_2203.htm
Seidman, A. (2005). *Minority student retention: Resources for practitioners*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ccsr.org/docs/MinorityStudentRetentionResourcesforPractitioners2006.pdf>
http://www.ksbe.edu/spi/pdfs/retention_brief.pdf

Coates, H., Kelly, P., Naylor, R., & Borden, V. (2016). Innovative approaches for enhancing the 21st Century student experience. *AlterNation* 23(1), 62-89.

Student Outcomes

- Discovery
- Achievement
- Connection
- Opportunity

Student formations

- Value
- Belonging
- Identify formation

Student Supports

- Enabling
- Personalized