

Institutional Analysis, Assessment & Reporting

Progress Toward Graduation for Fall 2005 First-Time Full-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen

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Much effort is currently being expended on trying to better understand the low six-year graduation rate of first-time full-time degree-seeking freshmen and to devise ways to improve this graduation rate. The purpose of this report is to share a way of looking at the progress of new freshmen over time to better understand the impediments to reaching graduation.

The Model

In order to progress and reach graduation, students need to:

- Continue to enroll semester after semester
- Accumulate a sufficient number of credits toward graduation. If a student enrolls for both fall and spring semesters, over six years (or 12 semesters) the student will need to complete an average of 10.75 credits each semester in order to reach the required minimum of 128 credits. For purposes of this model, we looked to see if a student had 12 cumulative credits at the end of their first semester, 24 cumulative credits after their second semester, 36 cumulative credits after three semesters, etc.
- Maintain an adequate cumulative GPA, defined as a minimum GPA of 2.0 for purposes of this study.

To follow progress over time, at the beginning of each semester, the model looks at whether each student was enrolled and if so, whether their cumulative credits and GPA met the minimum requirements for that semester. For each term, students were assigned to one of the following outcomes:

- **On-track:** the student is enrolled, has a cumulative GPA of at least 2.0, and has completed at least the total number of credits defined as sufficient to reach graduation within six years (see the definition of “sufficient credits” above)
- **Low GPA:** the student is enrolled but their cumulative GPA is currently below 2.0. Their cumulative credits may or may not also be low.
- **Low Credits:** the student is enrolled and cumulative GPA is 2.0 or better but the student is below the cumulative number of credits they should have accumulated by that semester. Note that there are several ways that a student may not accumulate sufficient credits over time, including stopping out, switching to part-time enrollment, failing or withdrawing from courses, taking courses that do not count toward graduation (ENGL 90, MATH 15 and 25), or re-taking courses so that credits from their prior enrollment are removed from that semester’s accumulation of credits.

- **Returned After an Absence:** the student is enrolled for the current semester but was NOT enrolled for at least the prior semester, and perhaps more semesters prior to that
- **Not enrolled:** the student is not enrolled this semester and has not received a degree
- **Graduated:** the student received a bachelor's degree at the end of one of the prior semesters. A student who graduated will be counted as "graduated" from the semester of graduation forward.

The Results

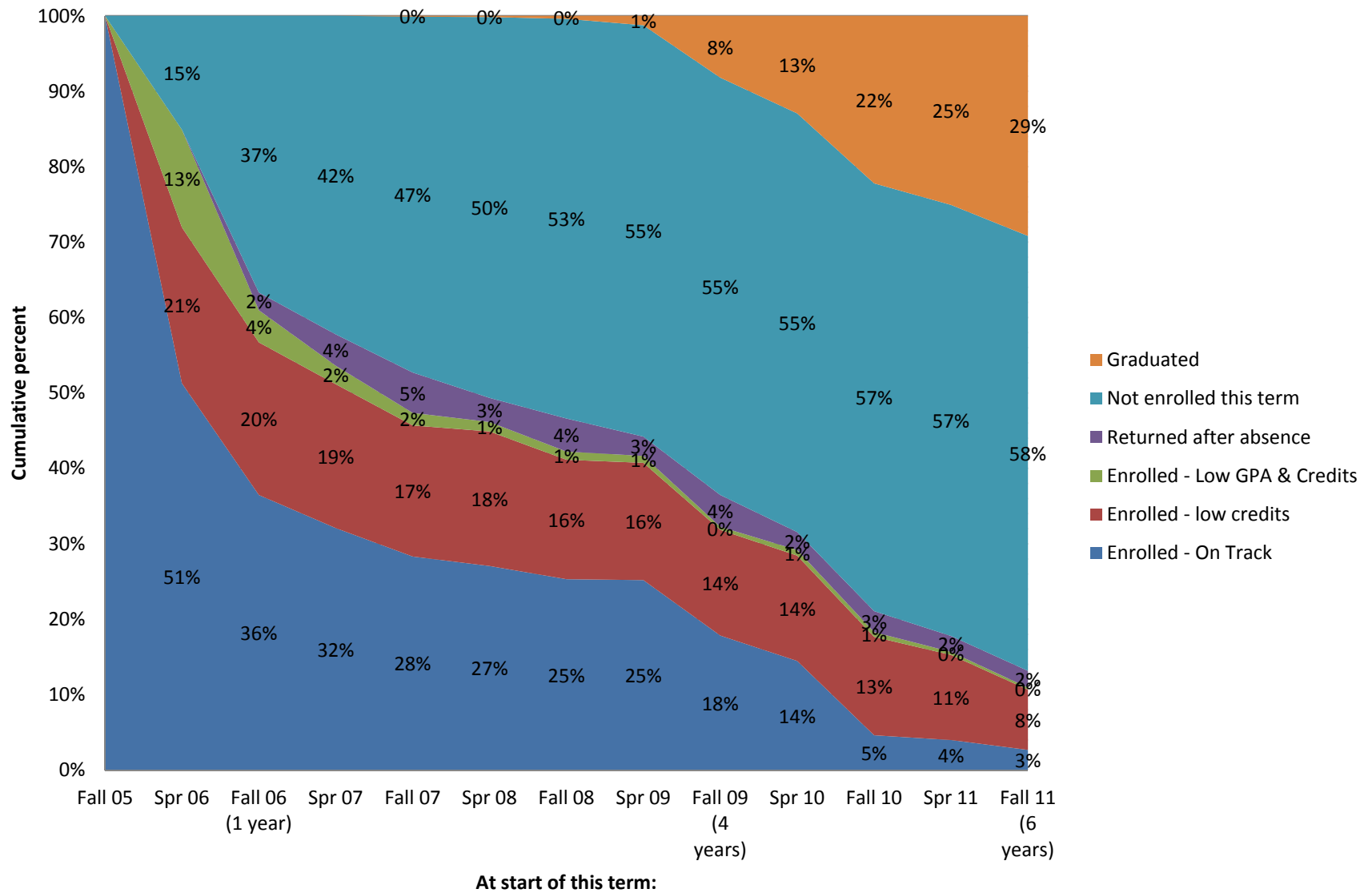
As shown by Figure 1 below, after one semester at Boise State, 51% were considered to be "on-track" using a *retrospective*¹ look at their GPA and accumulated credits. An additional 21% lacked 12 credits toward graduation but their GPA was 2.0 or better (enrolled – low credits), 13% had a GPA below 2.0, and 15% did not re-enroll for the spring term. After one year, 63% were retained. The percentage who were on-track dropped to 36%, and the low GPA group also dropped from 13% to 4%. The percentage in the low-credit group remained stable at about 20%. A small number of students (2% of the total) returned after not enrolling in the spring.

As shown by Figure 2, after four years, 8% of the Fall 2005 cohort had graduated, while 29% had graduated after six years. However, for students who were classified as "on-track" the graduation percentages were greatly elevated, showing a 47% six-year graduation rate for those who were on-track after one semester and a 60% six-year rate for those who were on-track after one year. All other groups showed lower graduation rates compared to the average. The finding highlights the importance of early student success.

¹ The term "retrospective" is used to indicate that the GPA and credits for that term may subsequently have been altered if the student re-took a course. In particular, the number of completed credits would be reduced for the term when the course was previously taken if the student re-took at course. For example, if a student took ART 100 their first semester and received a "C" then re-took it a year later, the credits from their first enrollment would be deducted (e.g., total credits would now be 9 instead of the previous 12 credits) and the GPA would be re-calculated.

Figure 1. Progress of fall 2005 first-time full-time cohort to graduation by term

Note: Numbers based on looking back at the prior semester



**Figure 2. Percentage graduating in 4 and 6 years based on status after one semester and one year
Fall 2005 first-time full-time cohort**

