



Pathways to Graduation

How do students get from “start” to “finish” on the path to graduation? At many traditional institutions of higher education, everyone starts as a freshman just out of high school, and most progress through their chosen major over the next four to six years to arrive at graduation day. Boise State University, like many other institutions, has many students who do not follow such a direct path.

The purpose of this study was to look at the paths that students take to graduation and to identify how the 2013-14 baccalaureate graduates reached graduation day. For this study, the path involves three main points of differentiation:

1. Was the student a Boise State native or was she or he a transfer student? A student was defined as a Boise State “native” if she or he had less than 14 transfer credits at the point of graduation. Everyone else was defined as a transfer.
2. Did the student know what he or she wanted to major in upon arrival and stick with it? A student was defined as staying in the major if his or her first major matched the major of their degree. Other students were defined as “switchers.”
3. Did the student graduate within six years (defined as 150% of time of degree for federal IPEDS reporting)? The starting point for measuring elapsed time was the point that the student was first enrolled as a bachelor’s degree-seeking undergraduate. Students whose elapsed time was six years or less were assigned to the “graduated on time” category. All other students did not graduate in six years.

Figure 1 displays the number of students who received their first bachelor’s degree in the 2013-14 academic year (N=2,649) who took each of the eight potential paths to graduation. At the first fork in the path, slightly more than half (51%) were Boise State natives, and 49% were transfers. At the second fork in the path, only 28% overall stayed with the major they declared when they arrived at Boise State. Boise State natives were less likely to remain in the same major compared to transfers (18% vs. 37%). The third point in the path measures how swiftly students got to the point of graduation. Almost three-quarters (74%) reached the point of graduation within six years. Probably because they already had more credits, transfer students were more likely to reach graduation within six years than were native students (80% vs. 68%).

The box in the lower left-hand corner of the figure shows the number of “traditional” Boise State graduates (i.e., students who started at Boise State, remained in their original major, and graduated within six years). That number is only 178 students out of 2,649 graduates or 7% of the total graduates. This small number also makes it difficult to project the number of graduates based on the number of new freshman.

In order for departments to see the paths their graduates took to reach graduation, data have been provided on the IR website. If you are interested in your group of graduates go to <http://ir.boisestate.edu/research-reports-presentations/>.

Figure 1. Paths to Graduation for 2013-14 Baccalaureate Graduates

