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National study of non-first-time students shows that full-time enrollment may not be appropriate for all

The latest findings from the nation's first effort to benchmark the persistence patterns of non-first-time (NFT) college students indicate that NFT students are more likely to complete an associate degree and less likely to drop out if they combine full-time and part-time enrollment. The findings could renew discussions about the efficacy of mandatory "15 credit per semester" policies at 2-year programs.

"Returning students are typically balancing work, family and other commitments that ebb and flow in intensity over the course of their academic career," says Dave Jarrat, vice president of marketing at InsideTrack. "Mixing part-time and full-time enrollment enables these students to persist through the inevitable fluctuations in their life obligations."

The benchmarking initiative is a cooperative effort between the American Council on Education (ACE), InsideTrack, NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA), and the National Student Clearinghouse. It was designed to begin addressing the lack of publicly available data on the success of adults returning to college.

"Higher education policy is almost entirely driven by memories of the four-year, residential college experience most policymakers had," says Robert Hansen, CEO of UPCEA. "A small minority of students still experience higher education that way, but it's time to arm higher education leaders with data on the students they are now serving," Hansen adds.

The new results, which will be presented today at the Summit for Online Leadership & Strategy being hosted by UPCEA and ACE also show some interesting shifts in state-level completion rates and enrollment patterns for NFT students. For instance, Delaware, Iowa, Idaho, New Hampshire and Utah saw a decline in relative outcomes, but Washington DC saw the biggest loss (+20.8 percent above to -0.2 percent). Arkansas, Arizona, California, Illinois, Nevada and Oregon improved relative outcomes; but only Arizona and Illinois improved AND are above average (AZ went from +2.5 percent to +5.6 percent; IL went from -7.0 percent to +1.8 percent).

The results also revealed interesting trend lines in market share of adult students across states. For instance, Arizona also gained the most market share among NFT students enrolled since Aug. 15, 2008 (1.4 percent to 2.4 percent of total NFT enrollment), while California lost the most market share (18.9 percent to 16.9 percent of total NFT enrollment).

The findings are based on analysis of two cohorts of data from the National Student Clearinghouse. The first cohort consists of 4.5 million students who re-enrolled in college

between Aug. 15, 2005 and Aug. 14, 2008 after at least one year away from higher education. The second cohort consists of 7 million students who re-enrolled between Aug. 15, 2008 and Aug. 14, 2013. Both data sets include results segmented by level of institution, age, gender, geographic location, enrollment intensity and the type of degree being pursued.

“The data raise many important issues – for example, why institutions and states serving similar populations have substantially different outcomes,” notes NASPA President Kevin Kruger. “We need to look deeper at the underlying causes and understand what we can do to improve support for returning students.”

The data also show that:

- Private institutions gain market share among returning students, at the expense of their public counterparts.
- Male and female NFT students have the same completion rate for bachelor’s degree and higher after six years.

The four organizations that launched this initiative will continue their analysis of the data through February 2015, and then release the entire dataset to the public.

“Improving our higher education system is in everyone’s interest, and we are looking forward to sharing further findings and all of the data with the entire higher education community and the general public,” said Deborah Seymour, assistant vice president of ACE’s Center for Education Attainment and Innovation. “We collectively invested in this project so that students, institutions, and other critical stakeholders might benefit from its outputs.”

The group will release the dataset via the members’ websites in early March and hold discussions on the data and its implications at the following events:

- ACE Annual Meeting, March 14-17, Washington DC
- NASPA Annual Conference, March 21-25, New Orleans LA
- UPCEA 100th Annual Conference, March 30-April 1, Washington DC

About ACE

Founded in 1918, ACE is the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions, representing more than 1,600 college and university presidents, and more than 200 related associations, nationwide. It provides leadership on key higher education issues and influences public policy through advocacy. For more information, please visit www.acenet.edu or follow ACE on Twitter @ACEducation.

About InsideTrack

Society thrives when students succeed. Since 2001, InsideTrack has used a proven combination of coaching, analytics, consulting and technology to unlock potential in millions of students and the institutions they attend. We invite you to join the leading colleges, universities, foundations and others working with us to enhance the transformative power of higher education. Please visit us at www.insidetrack.com and follow us on Twitter @InsideTrack.

About NASPA's Research and Policy Institute

NASPA's Research and Policy Institute (RPI) intentionally links research, policy, and effective student affairs practice in support of student success and the strategic priorities of the association. The RPI generates scholarship and conducts policy analysis to articulate student affairs contributions to student success, learning, and development; interprets information to advance practice and policy conversations; and connects the research and policy activities of NASPA members to increase reach and impact. To learn more and access publications, blog postings, and data resources, please visit www.naspa.org/rpi.

About UPCEA

UPCEA is the association for professional, continuing, and online education. Founded in 1915, UPCEA now serves most of the leading public and private colleges and universities in North America. With innovative conferences and specialty seminars, research and benchmarking information, professional networking opportunities and timely publications, we support our members' service of contemporary learners and commitment to quality online education and student success. Based in Washington, D.C., UPCEA builds greater awareness of the vital link between adult learners and public policy issues. Visit www.upcea.edu.

About the National Student Clearinghouse

The National Student Clearinghouse (a nonprofit formed in 1993) is the trusted source for and leading provider of higher education verifications and electronic education record exchanges, handling more than 700 million verification requests and 250 million education record exchanges annually. The Clearinghouse serves as a single point of contact for the collection and timely exchange of accurate and comprehensive enrollment, degree, and certificate records on behalf of its more than 3,600 participating higher education institutions, which represent 98 percent of all students in public and private U.S. institutions. The Clearinghouse also provides thousands of high schools and districts with continuing collegiate enrollment, progression, and completion statistics on their alumni. Visit www.studentclearinghouse.org.