

**Date:** December 3, 2012

**Subject:** Hot Off the Press: the Expanded Statewide Public Four-Year Dashboard

Today, the Office of Financial Management (OFM) released the new version of the [Statewide Public Four-Year Dashboard](#). The Dashboard displays institution- and state-level data on student enrollment, progress, and degree production. The OFM intends for the Dashboard to become the main source of information for legislators on the state of the Washington four-year public institutions.

This brief describes and contextualizes the data presented on the Dashboard, since it may differ from the information usually communicated by the University of Washington.<sup>1</sup>

### *What information does the Dashboard display?*

Drawing on data all public four-year institutions provide to the Public Centralized Higher Education Enrollment System (PCHEES),<sup>2</sup> the Dashboard reports on **all students enrolled for credit at any institution in any quarter in a given academic year, from 2007-08 to 2010-11** and displays, for the state and for each institution:

- The trend in unduplicated annual student enrollment, and
  - o for each academic year, undergraduate and graduate unduplicated annual enrollment, broken out by the “standard demographics”:
    - Age group (24 and under, 25-29, 30+)
    - Gender
    - Race/Ethnicity
    - Residency (resident/non-resident)
    - Entering Status (direct from high school/transfer/unknown)
    - Pell Grant status (recipient or not)
    - State Need Grant status (recipient or not)
- Annual trends in undergraduate student progress, where “undergraduate student progress” is measured by:
  - o the proportion of students who complete either a full-time or part-time load of credits within their first academic year,
  - o the percentage of credit hours completed out of those attempted by all students, and
  - o the percentage of students entering directly from high school who complete college-level Math and English courses within the first two consecutive academic years;and can be broken out by the “standard demographics”.
- The graduation/continuation rates by year (through 2011), and by
  - o Entering status (direct from high school or transfer),

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the “[University Statistics](#)” section of the website of the Office of Planning and Budgeting.

<sup>2</sup> See our [companion brief](#) for more background about the PCHEES data system.

- Pell or State Need Grant status (recipient or not), and
- Full/Part Time status (as of the fall term of each year).
  
- Annual trends in undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded, broken out by
  - Standard demographics,
  - STEM status,<sup>3</sup> and
  - High Demand status.<sup>4</sup>
  
- Annual trends in average and median undergraduate time to degree and credits earned, broken out by
  - Standard demographics,
  - STEM status, and
  - High Demand status.
  
- Annual trend in the “completion ratio”: the ratio of undergraduate degrees awarded per 100 undergraduate FTE<sup>5</sup> in the fall quarter.

### *Why do the Dashboard numbers not match the numbers UW publishes elsewhere?*

The data presented in the Dashboard may differ from data published by UW Offices for four main reasons:

- **The student population referenced is different:** The Dashboard only includes students who take credit; unless otherwise specified, the UW commonly reports on all its students, including auditors. Many auditors are senior citizens or state employees benefiting from tuition exemptions and not seeking a degree.<sup>6</sup>
  
- **The period referenced is different:** The Dashboard student cohort is composed of all students who attended an institution during an academic year. The UW commonly reports only on its Fall cohort.
  
- **The “snapshot date” is different:** The Dashboard uses “end of the quarter” information, while the UW reports on “census day” snapshots.<sup>7</sup>
  
- **Dashboard Race/Ethnicity breakouts include international students; the UW’s do not:** When reporting race and ethnicity, the Dashboard includes international students in the “Other” category. The UW usually only

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<sup>3</sup> Science, technology, mathematics and engineering. See <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/stem-list.pdf> for the most up-to-date listing.

<sup>4</sup> High employer demand programs are identified by each institution, in consultation with the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board and the Washington Student Achievement Council, based on the needs of the state. A list of these programs will be available on the Dashboard website in the future.

<sup>5</sup> Full Time Equivalent. One quarterly undergraduate FTE unit represents 15 undergraduate credits.

<sup>6</sup> See RCW 28B.15.540 for senior citizen waivers and RCW 28B.15.558 for state employee or higher education employee waivers.

<sup>7</sup> Census day is usually the Friday of the second week of the quarter.

reports on the race and ethnicity of its residents and domestic non-residents. Since the reference populations are different, the percentages reported will also be different.

*Does the Dashboard provide an answer to “life, the universe, and everything”<sup>8</sup>?*

Unfortunately, no. In its [FAQ Section](#), the OFM warns that “[w]hile dashboards can never provide a solution for a particular “issue,” they can be used to determine what direction a decision-maker may go to gather more information.”

With this in mind, we highlight one significant limitation: the current version of the Dashboard does not allow for multiple breakdowns. For example, full-time students and part-time students, *by definition*, are not expected to graduate at the same speed. Yet, full-time and part-time status is not a global filter on the time-to-degree report. So, when we see that those over 30 years of age take an average of 9.11 years to graduate, can we conclude that they are particularly “slow”? *Not at all – unless we know how many of those over 30 attended part-time*. And the Dashboard does not provide this information. Thus, when using the Dashboard, it is **extremely important** to become familiar with the data definitions and limitations (explained in some detail on the [Dashboard website](#)), and – above all – not to draw conclusions without more thorough examination of the data, which requires communication with data analysts at each four-year public institution.

As use of the Dashboard becomes more prevalent, we will track and report any common misconceptions in order to help clarify the situations in which the Dashboard can be most useful as well as those where it can be misleading.

For more information, please contact Nevena Lalic: [nlalic@uw.edu](mailto:nlalic@uw.edu) or 206.543.7466

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<sup>8</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Hitchhiker's\\_Guide\\_to\\_the\\_Galaxy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hitchhiker's_Guide_to_the_Galaxy).