Persistence and Graduation Update 2017
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As part of a continuing effort to monitor the success of undergraduates at WSU Vancouver, the following short summary represents significant developments over the past academic year:

- Academic qualifications of incoming students remain at or near 10-year highs for all student groups. The average high-school GPA for incoming freshmen was 3.43. The average transfer student GPA for incoming transfer students was 3.20.
- First-year persistence rates dipped for all major new student groups this fall as compared to a year ago (Freshman 74.8%, Early Transfer 69.7%, Late Transfer 81.7%, All rates include full and part-time students). However, persistence levels remain within the normal range of fluctuations historically seen by the campus (See Figure 1).
- The Six-year graduation rate remained near its historical average for students entering as Freshmen (2017 rate: 57.1. Five-year average: 58.8%). Three-year graduation rates for late-transfer students held near averages as well (2017 rate: 67.7. Five-year average: 68.4%). Early transfer graduation rates have followed recent improvements in retention and are up considerably over the long-term average (2017 three-year rate: 42.4%. Five-year average: 33.1%) It is worth noting that graduation rates continue to increase across all categories for longer career milestones. For instance, the average six-year graduation rate for late transfer students is 78.7%.
- Noticeable improvements have occurred with regard to persistence of freshmen with lower academic history. In 2012, the lowest quadrant of incoming freshmen, those with a high-school GPA below 3.1, showed 1st year persistence rates of just 52% (48% were leaving in the first year). After four years of gains, this group of students showed a 1st-year persistence rate of 64%. While the gap between the most and least academically prepared students has narrowed, academic history remains the most predictive factor in a student’s persistence. For comparison, students in the top quadrant, those with a high school GPA greater than 3.7, persisted at a rate of 92%.
- Differences in graduation rates tied to race/ethnicity widened somewhat this past year. The past few years had seen sustained narrowing of these gaps. Looking at 3-year averages, there remains a 3 percentage point difference between underrepresented minority and white students in the 3-year transfer student graduation rate. There was an 8 percentage point difference in the 6-year freshman graduation rate (See Figure 2). While small populations are particularly prone to statistical fluctuations, the persistent gap between groups remains the focus of effort identified in the WSU Vancouver strategic plan and by campus leadership.
- An ongoing associated difference between race/ethnicity groups remains financial need, especially for students admitted as freshmen. Students identifying from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups demonstrated almost $5000 in average greater financial need than white students admitted as freshmen over the past five years. While financial aid erased some of this gap, much of it remained and resulted in an average difference of over $3000 dollars per year between the groups in unmet need (financial need – financial aid). A gap exists for transfer students as well but it is considerably smaller (under $2000 for need and just over $300 for unmet need).
- Differences in graduation rates tied to gender narrowed this past year. Looking at 3-year averages, there remains a five percentage point advantage for female over male students in the 3-year transfer graduation rate. There was a 13 percentage point difference in the 6-year freshman graduation rate (See Figure 3).
- The population of students admitted directly from high school with significant earned college credit through the Running Start program continues to grow at WSU Vancouver. 29% of the Fall 2017 freshman
class (98 students) brought in 30 or more transferable credits, thus beginning their career with sophomore or junior status. These students have been significantly more successful than their peers. 6-year graduation rates have averaged 20 percentage points higher for these students than non-running start freshmen (75% vs 55%) over the past four years.

- This past year saw a surge in the number of students granted degrees at WSU Vancouver. 851 bachelor’s degrees were awarded during FY 2017, up 9% from the preceding year. Partly explaining the surge, this year saw an all-time high number of transfer students (35) receiving a diploma in their first year of study.

Figure 1 | 1st year persistence rates for freshmen, early transfer (<60 credits) and late transfer students (>59 credits). Persisting is here defined as retained or graduated by the student’s second fall at WSU Vancouver.

Figure 2 | Graduation rates for students identifying from underrepresented race/ethnicity groups (African American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) vs. identifying as white.

Figure 3 | Graduation rates for female vs. male students.