

On Track to Meet Our Graduation Rate Target, *But Will We?*

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One of our University strategic planning goals is to raise the six-year graduation rate of full-time first-time freshmen to 51% by 2015. In fall 2009, the CSU Chancellor's Office launched the Graduation Rate Initiative, which further reinforced that goal. The Student Success Task Force and the office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning are tracking the progress of the fall 2009 freshmen cohort towards achieving this goal, since it is the group that will graduate in 2015.

In order to project the likelihood of reaching our target, we are comparing the progress of the fall 2009 cohort to that of the fall 2004 cohort. This cohort was chosen as a comparison group because 1) it is the most recent cohort with the six-year graduation rate available, and 2) this cohort had the highest graduation rate in recent years (50.6%). This rate is very close to the target rate we are trying to achieve with the fall 2009 cohort.

The table on page 2 displays the progression of the fall 2009 and fall 2004 cohorts. It shows the number and percent of retained and graduated students, as well as progress measures. Progress measures include term GPA, cumulative GPA, cumulative units earned at the end of each term, percent of students enrolled full-time, percent of students in good academic standing, proportion of those with term GPA of 2.7 or higher, and percent of students who are staying on track. Staying on track means a student reached sophomore or higher status during the second year, junior or higher during the third year, and senior level during the fourth, fifth or six years based on total units earned. All of these progress measures are significant indicators for predicting retention and graduation of our students.

The fall 2009 cohort is moving towards graduation at a slightly higher rate than the fall 2004 cohort. The first-year retention of the fall 2009 cohort is running ahead of the benchmark cohort by almost one percentage point and was also higher than the first-year retention target rate that was predicted to be necessary (85.2%) to hit the 6-year graduation target.

The fall 2009 cohort is also performing better academically. Their average term GPA stayed consistent during the first three semesters, while the average term GPA of the fall 2004 cohort declined during the corresponding period. The proportion of the 2009 cohort in good academic standing increased and was higher in the third semester compared to the benchmark cohort. This is likely due to the new Academic Success Course that was implemented in spring 2010 for low performing students. Also, the fall 2009 cohort has a higher percentage of students who are staying on track. According to our research, staying on track is more predictive of six-year graduation than first or second term GPA. Sixty-seven percent of students who reached sophomore status at the beginning or the end of the third semester graduated in 6 years versus only 8% of those who did not reach that level.

As shown in the table, about 26% of the fall 2004 cohort left Fresno State during their first two years. About 12% left later in their academic career without completing a degree. They invested a lot of time and effort in their education, so why did they leave? We are analyzing this group of students further to see who they are, their academic progress, and whether they dropped out or transferred to another school. This may offer some ideas about how and whether the university can intervene to retain those students and help them graduate. This will be the subject of a separate brief.

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Tracking Progress of Fall 2009 First-Time Full-Time Freshman Cohort and Comparison to Fall 2004 Cohort

Fall 2009 Cohort	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Year 5		Year 6	
	Fall 09	Spring 10	Fall 10	Spring 11	Fall 11	Spring 12	Fall 12	Spring 13	Fall 13	Spring 14	Fall 14	Spring 15
Retained #*	2,620	2,535	2,270	2,204								
Retained %*		96.8%	86.6%	84.1%								
% didn't return from previous term		3.2%	10.1%	2.5%								
Target (needed to meet graduation rate goal)	N		2,232									
	%		85.2%									
Graduated #**												
Graduated %												
Target #												1,334
Target %												50.9%
Progress Measures												
Avg. Term GPA	2.76	2.71	2.76									
Avg. Cum. GPA - End of Term		2.77	2.88									
Avg. Cum. Units - End of Term	15	28	43									
% of students on Track***			41%	93%								
% in Good Standing	82%	84%	92%									
% with term GPA 2.7 or more ¹	59%	58%	59%									
% Full-Time	100%	98%	97%	97%								

Fall 2004 Cohort	Fall 04	Spring 05	Fall 05	Spring 06	Fall 06	Spring 07	Fall 07	Spring 08	Fall 08	Spring 09	Fall 09	Spring 10
Retained %*	(N=2243) 100%	95.1%	85.7%	81.0%	73.9%	70.2%	66.4%	51.7%	40.5%	25.9%	18.5%	11.5%
Graduated %**		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	2.1%	16.9%	25.1%	39.5%	43.7%	50.6%
Left %		4.9%	14.3%	18.9%	26.0%	29.2%	31.4%	31.5%	34.4%	34.6%	37.7%	37.9%
% didn't return from previous term		4.9%	9.4%	4.6%	7.1%	3.2%	2.2%	0.0%	2.9%	0.1%	3.2%	0.2%
Progress Measures												
Avg. Term GPA	2.86	2.7	2.67	2.72	2.76	2.87	2.87	2.86	2.87	2.85	2.87	2.92
Avg. Cum. GPA - End of Term		2.81	2.84	2.86	2.9	2.92	2.94	2.94	2.92	2.93	2.95	2.98
Avg. Cum. Units - End of Term	15	28	42	55	69	83	97	110	109	114	103	107
% of students on Track***			39%	89%	36%	74%	37%	65%	78%	86%	88%	93%
% in Good Standing	85%	84%	86%	87%	90%	92%	93%	95%	94%	96%	95%	96%
% with term GPA 2.7 or more ¹	65%	57%	56%	57%	59%	65%	64%	63%	63%	63%	62%	64%
% Full-Time	100%	98%	98%	97%	96%	95%	95%	93%	88%	85%	74%	69%

* Excludes students who graduated

** Cumulative number and percent of graduates. Spring data includes students graduated in the following Summer

*** % of enrolled students at the corresponding level or higher: sophomores during second year, juniors during third year, and seniors during 4, 5, and 6 years. Student Level as of beginning of term

¹ Previous research showed students with at least 2.7 first-term GPA graduated at substantially higher rates than those with lower first-term GPA