

Student Swirling

The general perception of a traditional college career goes as follows: upon high school graduation, a student immediately enrolls the following year in a college or university, attends full-time, and soon thereafter graduates from the same college or university two to four years later. However, recent analysis by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education indicates the traditionally accepted route of a college student is actually the exception: only 1 in 5 USHE students enrolls and completes at the same institution, in the same major, *and* at the originally-intended award level (e.g. associate, bachelor, etc.). Students are more likely than not to change majors and transfer institutions. With recent emphasis on timely degree completion, changes to educational intent can contribute to prolonged time-to-completion of a degree or certificate, and stand to simply earn some credit with no degree as life events occur and the challenge to complete increases.

METHOD

This brief examines student enrollments to understand how many students entered into post-secondary education in 2007-08 and earned a degree or certificate by 2014-15, while monitoring how many of those students stayed enrolled at their original or “native” institution, completed in their originally-intended area of study, *and* remained with their originally-intnded attainment level.

The study uses 2007 entering freshman class enrollment patterns and type of degree earned compared to their stated intent at entry (not including high school concurrently enrolled high school students). The fall 2007 entering freshman class is defined based on the fall 2007 third-week enrollment reports. Student enrollments were tracked through the fall 2015 semester (2015-16 academic year) to check for changes in the institution enrolled. Completion data is based on associate and bachelor degree recipients during the 2014-15 academic year compared to the specified degree intent at entry into an institutions in the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE).

FINDINGS

The analysis of the data collected is broken down into two categories: 1) Enrollments and 2) Completions.

Enrollments:

While the majority of students (70%) still enter and attend only one institution, a significant number of students attend more than one institution (30%). At the extreme, one student in the cohort enrolled at seven of the nine possible USHE schools between 2007 and 2015 (table 1).

Table 1 - Number of USHE institutions attended by enrollment of 1st Institution

First Institution	Number of USHE Schools Attended						Grand Total
	1	2	3	4	5	7	
UU	1,921	596	85	9			2,611
USU	2,278	703	154	15	1		3,151
USUE*	281	222	66	5	3		577
WSU	1,810	420	58	8			2,296

SUU	891	450	114	9	3		1,467
SNOW	504	498	149	19	4		1,174
DSU	783	380	92	7	2		1,264
UVU	2,588	619	100	11	1	1	3,320
SLCC	2,706	962	118	11			3,797
Grand Total	13,762	4,850	936	94	14	1	19,657
Percent	70.0%	24.7%	4.8%	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%

*USUE (Utah State University Eastern was previously a wholly separate institution, the College of Eastern Utah. CEU was merged as part of Utah State University in 2009.

The pattern of subsequent enrollments and most frequent transfer destination is illustrated below. The subsequent institution identified as having the most additional enrollments is highlighted in yellow and red. Salt Lake Community College represented the most popular destination for three of the other eight possible destinations (table 2).

Table 2 - Additional attendance patterns of USHE students

	ENTERING SCHOOL	ALSO ATTENDED - COUNTS								
		UU	USU	USUE	WSU	SUU	SNOW	DSU	UVU	SLCC
UU	2,611	2,611	70	2	108	23	3	31	122	434
USU	3,151	274	3,151	2	259	32	10	33	205	245
USUE	577	44	141	577	47	31	5	20	51	42
WSU	2,296	147	114	2	2,296	7	8	22	90	170
SUU	1,467	132	86	6	85	1,467	22	83	175	128
SNOW	1,174	79	202	11	101	103	1,174	52	196	125
DSU	1,264	83	74	2	65	77	11	1,264	162	119
UVU	3,320	190	126	6	92	31	29	52	3,320	336
SLCC	3,797	585	150	7	146	36	28	33	246	3,797

	ENTERING SCHOOL	ALSO ATTENDED - PERCENTAGE								
		UU	USU	USUE	WSU	SUU	SNOW	DSU	UVU	SLCC
UU	2,611	100.0%	2.7%	0.1%	4.1%	0.9%	0.1%	1.2%	4.7%	16.6%
USU	3,151	8.7%	100.0%	0.1%	8.2%	1.0%	0.3%	1.0%	6.5%	7.8%
USUE	577	7.6%	24.4%	100.0%	8.1%	5.4%	0.9%	3.5%	8.8%	7.3%
WSU	2,296	6.4%	5.0%	0.1%	100.0%	0.3%	0.3%	1.0%	3.9%	7.4%
SUU	1,467	9.0%	5.9%	0.4%	5.8%	100.0%	1.5%	5.7%	11.9%	8.7%
SNOW	1,174	6.7%	17.2%	0.9%	8.6%	8.8%	100.0%	4.4%	16.7%	10.6%
DSU	1,264	6.6%	5.9%	0.2%	5.1%	6.1%	0.9%	100.0%	12.8%	9.4%
UVU	3,320	5.7%	3.8%	0.2%	2.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.6%	100.0%	10.1%
SLCC	3,797	15.4%	4.0%	0.2%	3.8%	0.9%	0.7%	0.9%	6.5%	100.0%

Completions:

Data for the completion portions is based on a retrospective look the associate and bachelor degree recipients of the 2014 -15 academic year and how their earned degree and school attended compares to the intended degree attainment and institution at the time of entry into the USHE post-secondary system. The majority of the bachelor's degree-seeking students obtain the desired degree (77.8%). However, many of those initially seeking a degree of lesser length – certificate or associate degree – or did not specify a degree attainment goal, actually went on to complete a degree higher than originally indicated at enrollment (table 3). For example, over half of students who didn't originally declare an intended degree attainment goal earned a bachelor's degree.

Table 3 - Outcome of degree intent by USHE completers 2014-15

Initial Degree Intent	Degree Earned			Grand Total
	Graduates	Associate	Bachelor	
Non-Degree	7,543	44.3%	55.7%	100%
Certificate	199	54.3%	45.7%	100%
Associate	9,723	53.7%	46.3%	100%
Bachelor	8,847	22.2%	77.8%	100%
Total	26,312	40.4%	59.6%	100%

When tracking bachelor's degree completers by degree granting institutions and first institution, a significant proportion of an institution's graduating class actually began at another institution. Only Dixie State University (DSU) had a "native" bachelor's graduating class over 70% (table 4). Almost half of University of Utah graduates originally enrolled at SLCC.

Table 4 - Bachelor degree completers by "native" institution compared against their completing institution

First Institution	INSTITUTION AT GRADUATION						
	UU	USU	WSU	SUU	SNOW	DSU	UVU
UU	9.7%	0.2%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.3%
USU	7.5%	40.0%	12.0%	10.9%	0.0%	4.0%	3.9%
USUE	1.1%	4.2%	1.3%	7.0%	14.3%	2.0%	1.0%
WSU	10.9%	13.5%	58.1%	4.8%	28.6%	3.8%	3.0%
SUU	0.6%	1.0%	0.5%	25.9%	0.0%	1.8%	0.5%
SNOW	2.6%	7.2%	3.7%	9.8%	57.1%	3.5%	5.2%
DSU	5.3%	3.9%	3.1%	14.6%	0.0%	71.5%	6.0%
UVU	12.4%	12.0%	6.7%	16.1%	0.0%	6.9%	65.7%
SLCC	49.9%	17.9%	14.2%	10.9%	0.0%	6.2%	14.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When considering both associate and bachelor’s degree recipients, their initial degree intent, and their initial institution, only 21.1% of students complete their intended degree at entry at the institution at entry (table 5). In fact, most students transferred institutions, changed their major, *and* attained a different degree level than they originally declared at entry to college.

Table 5 - Percent completers of initial intent, at institution, at entry

Same institution	Same Major*	Same Award Level	
%	%	%	21.1%
%	X	X	20.1%
%	%	X	6.6%
X	%	%	2.3%
X	X	%	4.2%
%	X	%	18.4%
X	%	X	3.8%
X	X	X	23.5%
			100%

*Same Major = Area of study within the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)

CONCLUSION

Students tend to be comparatively mobile with respect to both institution attending (30% of students attending more than 1 USHE institution) and degree attainment (54% completing a degree other than what they indicated at the time of entry). While this movement between institutions and degree outcomes may prompt concerns, some of this swirling is by design. For example, the comparatively high level of student transfer between Salt Lake Community College and the University of Utah is both a positive and intentional outcome that is a cost-effective, flexible opportunity for students, and is due to the high level of system-based collaboration in specific areas of study. Most student who completed a degree other than what was stated at entry actually complete higher awards e.g. certificate seekers completed associate degrees and associate degree seekers completed bachelor’s degrees. Understanding the enrollment and degree completion patterns within USHE can aid in making the transfer pathways between institutions and degree programs more efficient, especially as institutions are now collaborating to ensure even greater stackability of college awards. Being able to adjust and facilitate the movement between institutions and degree programs could be essential factors that will lead to improved timely degree completions.