RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES AT PURDUE-WEST LAFAYETTE

This issue examines the fall-to-fall retention and graduation rates for Purdue students who enter the university as first-year full-time enrollees. These are important metrics for Purdue’s student success since 86% of the undergraduate population enters the university as first-time full-time students.

RECORD HIGH 1-YEAR AND 2-YEAR RETENTION RATES

Retention rates of the new first-time students at Purdue-West Lafayette have been on the rise for the last several years. The most recent one-year retention rate (freshman to sophomore) is at a record historical high for Purdue at 90.2%. The one-year rate has increased 7.3 percentage points since the 1998 cohort. As the one-year retention rate continues to increase, the two-year retention rate (freshman to junior) continues to rise as well. The most recent two-year retention rate is also at a record historical high of 82.5%. Starting with the 1998 cohort, the two-year retention rates have increased 9.3 percentage points (see chart 1).

2-YEAR RETENTION AS HIGH AS 1-YEAR RETENTION A DECADE AGO

The recent two-year retention rate of 82.5% is at the same mark as the one-year rate 12 years ago. Purdue retained 82.9% of students who began in the 1998 cohort to their sophomore year, and only 73.2% to their junior year. The latest data show that now nearly the same percentage, 82.5%, of students are retained to their junior year (see chart 1). Given that 77% of students who leave do so within their first two years, the University is positioned to see large future gains in graduation rates.

Chart 1. One-Year and Two-Year Retention Percentage by Cohort

- 1 Yr Retention
- 2 Yr Retention
CLOSING THE RETENTION GAP: UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES

One of the components to Purdue-West Lafayette’s historic gains in retention rates is that in the last two years, the gap in retention rates between underrepresented minority students and the remaining student body has narrowed. For the 2006 cohort, underrepresented minorities were retained at a 8.3 percentage points lower than the overall student body; as of the 2010 cohort, the difference had narrowed to 2.9 percentage points (see chart 2).

African American students’ one-year retention rates have increased 13.1 percentage points over the last five years, and Hispanic/Latino students’ one-year retention rates have increased 9.1 percentage points over the same time period. The one-year retention for African-Americans in the 2006 cohort was 11.1 percentage points lower than the Caucasian students. With the 2010 cohort, the difference had narrowed to 2.8 percentage points (see chart 3: green and red lines). Over the same time period, the gap between Hispanic/Latino students and Caucasian students has decreased from 5.7 percentage points to only 1.4 percentage points (see chart 3: red and teal lines).
CORRELATION BETWEEN 1-YEAR RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

One-year retention rates and graduation rates are highly related because the majority of attrition from Purdue occurs during the first two years of enrollment. The most recent six-year graduation rates have been on a decline, but this was an anticipated drop because the one-year retention rates for those same cohorts (2003, 2004, 2005) demonstrated similar declines (chart 4: green and orange lines). With the recent historical highs in Purdue’s retention rates, we predict the graduation rates will increase as well. This can already be seen in the recent increases of the four-year graduation rates (chart 4: blue line).

For questions, comments and suggestions please contact: enrollmentmanagement@purdue.edu