

Retention and Student Success 2009 Legislative Session

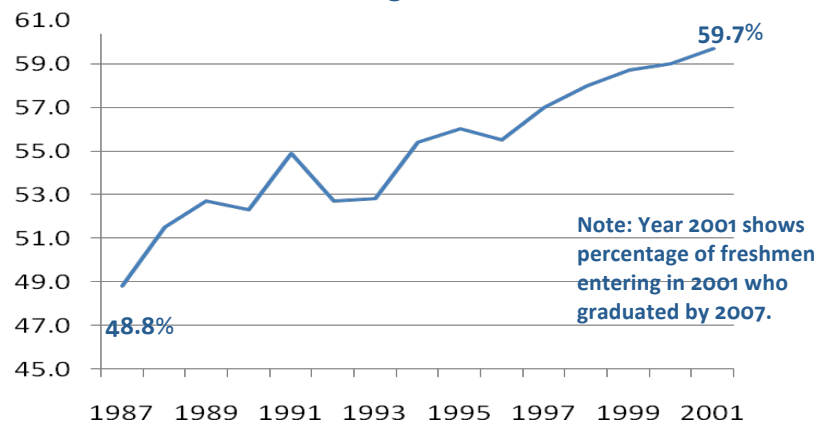
Oregon's public universities are committed to helping their students persist in school and earn their college degrees. As the state has shifted toward a knowledge-based economy, the Oregon University System has directed much effort to improving Oregonians' access to college. College access is vital to Oregon's changing population and changing economy. However, OUS universities also recognize that it is equally vital to ensure the success of students who already have entered through their doors. Because there are far more continuing than new students, **a small improvement in their rate of completion helps more students attain a degree than does enrolling a larger percentage of new students.**

Retention and Graduation in OUS

A menu of methods to improve retention is essential for campuses to address their varied populations, which include high-achieving as well as underprepared first-time freshmen, first-generation college students, and returning adults. The menu includes new student cohort programs, living and learning communities, enhanced academic and career advising, academic tracking and intervention, mentoring by upper-division students, and summer bridge programs, among many targeted and proven strategies. **Increased emphasis on retention by OUS campuses, including the creation of a senior-level enrollment manager**

position at each university, has led to significant improvement in average six-year graduation rates for entering OUS freshmen (see Chart A). The graduation rate for the freshman cohort entering in 2001 and graduating within six years is 59.7%, while for freshmen entering in 1993 it was 52.8%, and in 1987, 48.8%.

**Chart A: 6-year Graduation Rate
OUS Entering Freshman Cohort**



1st Year Persistence

Persisting through the critical first year is the most important indication that a student is on track to complete a degree. While the overall six-year graduation rate for OUS students entering as freshmen is 59.7%, students who persist through the first year complete at a rate of 71.4%. For students persisting through two years, the graduation rate is 81.5%.

About half (51.3%) of OUS entering freshmen who complete a bachelor's degree finish in four years, and nearly nine-tenths (88.7%) finish within five years.¹ Students who persist and graduate in a timely manner pay and borrow less for their education, start careers and earn higher salaries earlier, and begin contributing sooner to Oregon's economic and community well-being.

Table B: OUS Persistence Rate (Freshman Retention to Second Year)

Institution	Percent who returned the following fall to any OUS campus, by year of entrance:						
	Fall	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007
EOU		67.1	68.6	68.0	69.2	68.7	58.0
OIT		77.0	66.2	73.7	75.4	70.6	72.0
OSU		82.3	81.1	82.5	83.9	83.3	83.7
PSU		66.5	70.1	71.3	69.5	70.3	71.3
SOU		70.4	73.1	74.1	71.2	71.7	71.7
UO		82.5	82.8	85.2	87.5	85.4	84.8
WOU		74.1	73.3	79.1	70.7	71.2	76.7
OUS Average		77.7	77.9	80.3	79.8	79.5	79.8

Chart A and Table B sources: OUS Institutional Research

¹ Transfer students make up an increasing number of 'first-time' OUS students. A growing body of research indicates that these students graduate from an OUS institution at relatively high rates. For example, 78% of Oregon community college transfers who entered OUS with an associate's degree in 2001 graduated within four years (Source: OUS 2008 *Fact Book*, p. 45).

Governor’s Recommended Budget and Student Success

The 2009-2011 Governor’s Recommended Budget (GRB) for OUS includes student success as one of four priorities, in recognition of the importance to Oregon’s economy of a skilled and highly educated workforce. The GRB includes support for instruction and academic support, need-based financial aid, and targeted investments to build on the successes OUS has achieved for Oregonians.

Steps That Improve Retention

Key to student retention is **adequate funding of student enrollment**, including costs for faculty instruction and academic support staff for teaching, mentoring, and advising students to help them navigate barriers and succeed.

Academic Preparation Numerous studies have documented the **positive relationship between solid academic preparation prior to college and persistence to a degree**. Adequate student preparation affects retention, completion, and learning, and ultimately graduates’ success in jobs and advanced education. Using the high school grade point average (GPA) as an indicator of high school academic preparation, OUS retention studies confirm this: just over 80% of entering freshmen with a high school GPA of 3.75 or greater complete their degree within six years, compared to less than 40% of students with a high school GPA below 3.00. Strong linkages and partnerships between the work of the K-12, community college, and university systems is critical to ensuring this preparation.

National surveys of college faculty and high school teachers reveal a significant disparity between how well high school teachers believe their students are prepared for college and how well college faculty find students to be prepared (Table C). OUS institutions offer strong pre-college academic preparation programs in their communities to ensure that more students are prepared for the rigors of college-level work.

Affordability College affordability plays a critical role in a student’s ability to continue with his or her college education. OUS is committed to making college affordable through a balance of tuition increase controls and full funding of the Oregon Opportunity Grant, Shared Responsibility Model.

Board Focus on Underserved Students In addition to OUS campus strategies that are showing positive results for student graduation rates, the State Board of Higher Education has made student success a priority through the creation in 2007 of the Student Participation and Completion Committee. The committee has worked for the last two years to identify barriers and strategies to improve participation and completion rates, particularly for underserved student populations, such as first-generation, low-income, rural, and ethnic minorities. This focus arises from the Board’s Strategic Plan to 2025 (completed in 2007), *An Investment in Oregonians for Our Future*, which showed that as Oregon’s demographics diversify, an increasing proportion of Oregon’s K-12 pipeline is from populations that have not traditionally attended and succeeded in college. **Strategies that serve the needs of first-generation and underserved student groups are important to close gaps in student success, and ultimately to raise the educational attainment rate of all Oregonians.** Some effective strategies the committee has identified for underserved students include: K-12 partnering for pre-college academic preparation; affordability efforts; academic support and mentoring; connections made to careers and internships; broad and inclusive teaching strategies; welcoming campus environments for all populations; community and family partnerships; and campus cultural centers.

Table C. National Surveys of College Faculty and High School Teachers

What they said	Who said it	
	College Faculty	High School Teachers
Students are well-prepared for college level writing	6%	36%
Students are not well-prepared for college level writing	44%	10%
Students are well-prepared in math	4%	37%
Students are not well-prepared in math	32%	9%

Source: “What Professors and Teachers Think: A Perception Gap Over Students’ Preparation.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 10, 2006.



Oregon University System