

Research & Analysis

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VALIDATING THE ACCURACY OF THE STUDENT SUCCESS RATE

The purpose of this study is to verify the accuracy of the student success rate reported by the Florida Department of Education. The success rate is calculated from performance of a First Time In College (FTIC) cohort four years following entry for associate degree-seeking students (e.g. 2006 for the 2002 cohort) and two years later for certificate-seeking students (e.g. 2004 for the 2002 cohort). The rate is one of several so-called "accountability measures" reported for all Florida community colleges. The most recent rate reported by the state reflects performance of the fall 2002 FTIC pool and it will be the primary focus of this study.

The FTIC cohort is identified every fall term. Determination of an FTIC starts with self-identification by the student on the application form. The rationale for FTIC cohort tracking is that it isolates the value-added by this college toward the attainment of outcomes.

The success rate is the percentage of students from a given cohort (i.e. 2002) that, for the year examined (2004 or 2006), have

1. Graduated; or
2. Have been retained in good academic standing (GPA \geq 2.0) with 18 college credit hours for associate degree seekers or 9 credit hours for those seeking a certificate; or
3. Have left the college in good academic standing with 18 college credit hours for associate degree seekers or 9 credit hours for those seeking a certificate.

Two research questions are posed:

1. Is the fall 2002 cohort, submitted to the state, a true record of those enrolling as FTIC?
2. Is the *success rate* true?

Method

To identify a "true" FTIC, the following procedures were used:

1. Applicable credit and clock hour course activity from Fall 2006 back to Spring 1989 was assembled resulting in 2,451,736 records. Spring 1989 is the first term of activity recorded in the data warehouse of the Department of Institutional Research (IR).
2. These data were unduplicated by student to the earliest term the student had credit or clock hour activity (265,439 students). Each fall term from 2002 through 2006 was matched against these data to determine if the student, with an FTIC designation, had been enrolled in a prior term. If no such enrollment occurred, they were designated a "true" FTIC in the sense that they had no prior enrollment at Hillsborough Community College (HCC).
3. Students were also checked for a college entrance term that predated spring 1989. If this occurred, they were not counted as "true."

4. Finally, it was verified that a student designated as an FTIC for a given fall was actually enrolled during that term.

Note that the intent of the FTIC designation is one in which the student has never attended any postsecondary institution for credit. Students will sometimes identify themselves as FTIC on the application form, interpreting the question as *First Time at HCC*, when, in fact, they have attended other colleges. Although opportunities to correct this designation occur when transcripts are received from the other colleges, this is beyond the point in which the data have been certified for state submission. Therefore it is important that the college enforce its requirement to have transcripts per college policy.

Findings

1. *Is the fall 2002 cohort, submitted to the state, a true record of those enrolling as FTIC?*

The table below displays the size of the stated-reported FTIC cohort; the “true” cohort; the difference in the two labeled as “not true;” and the percentage of the state-reported cohort verified as true.

Table 1. Comparisons of the State-Reported FTIC to a True FTIC, Fall Terms 2002-2006

Fall Term	State FTIC	True	Not True	% True
2002	3292	3016	276	92%
2003	3594	3235	359	90%
2004	5229	4066	1163	78%
2005	4640	4163	477	90%
2006	3680	3655	25	99%

The cohort submitted in fall 2002 was verified as being 92% true. However, the disparities greatly increase with the 2004 and 2005 cohorts. In fall 2004, only 78% of the cohort is true. Otherwise stated – 1,163 students were reported as an FTIC that were not.

The effect of this inflated cohort will swell any denominator upon which a rate of performance is based. It will be especially necessary in the reporting years of 2008 and 2009 (using the 2004 and 2005 cohorts) to internally replicate the measures to know true performance.

Why did this happen? It has been determined that official state data submissions were continuing to designate students as FTIC beyond their term of entry. This matter has been successfully addressed as evidenced by the fall 2006 submission in which over 99% of the FTIC cohort was determined to be accurate.

What is not known is why the “True” cohort increased by almost 26% from fall 2003 to 2004 and then returned to a level expected in 2006. Perhaps other correlated programming issues were present.

2. *Is the HCC success rate true?*

It was determined that the success rate reported by the state is largely accurate. The table below compares state-reported vs. “true” success rates for students in the Associate of Arts program. The actual numbers supporting the percentages are in parentheses. The success rate data for other credentials is appended to this report.

Table 2. Comparisons of the State-Reported and “True” Student Success Rate, Associate of Arts Students Tracked from Fall 2002 through Spring 2006

	State Reported FTIC	“True” FTIC	State Rank
Cohort Population	1687	1605	---
% Graduated *	15.6% (263)	15.5% (248)	28th
% Enrolled in Good Standing	29.4% (496)	29.0% (466)	---
% Enrolled Not in Good Standing	6.8% (114)	6.9% (110)	---
% Left in Good Standing	31.6% (533)	31.7% (509)	---
% Left in Bad Standing	16.7% (281)	16.9% (272)	---
Retention Rate: (# graduates + # enrollments)/cohort	51.75%	51.34%	26th
Success Rate: (# graduates + # enrollment in good standing + # leavers in good standing)/cohort	76.59%	76.20%	26th

* Improvement of this rate is a 2007-09 Strategic Initiative of the College.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to address two research questions:

1. Is the fall 2002 cohort, as submitted to the state, a true record of those enrolling as an FTIC? Ninety-two percent (92%) of the fall 2002 FTIC cohort could be validated using internal data. However, the fall 2004 and 2005 cohorts have wide variations from a true cohort.

2. Is the HCC *success rate* true?

The success rates and their components were found to be relatively accurate.

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Accountability Outcome Measure 1 - Part 2

Retention and Success Report

AA, AS and AAS Students Tracked from Fall 2002 Through Spring 2006

PSVC and ATD Students Tracked from Fall 2002 Through Summer 2004

	Cohort Population	Graduated	Enrolled in Good Standing	Enrolled Not in Good Standing	Left in Good Standing	Left Not in Good Standing	Retention Rate	Success Rate
AA	1687	263	496	114	533	281	51.75%	76.59%
AA "True FTIC"	1605	248	466	110	509	272	51.34%	76.20%
	Cohort Population	Graduated	Enrolled in Good Standing	Enrolled Not in Good Standing	Left in Good Standing	Left Not in Good Standing	Retention Rate	Success Rate
AS/AAS	226	27	80	4	80	35	49.12%	82.74%
AS/AAS "True FTIC"	211	27	74	4	74	32	49.76%	82.94%
	Cohort Population	Graduated	Enrolled in Good Standing	Enrolled Not in Good Standing	Left in Good Standing	Left Not in Good Standing	Retention Rate	Success Rate
PSVC/ ATD	82	64	8	2	5	3	90.24%	93.90%
PSVC/ ATD "True FTIC"	77	59	8	2	5	3	89.61%	93.51%
	Cohort Population	Graduated	Enrolled in Good Standing	Enrolled Not in Good Standing	Left in Good Standing	Left Not in Good Standing	Retention Rate	Success Rate
Total	1995	354	584	120	618	319	53.03%	77.99%
Total "True FTIC"	1893	334	548	116	588	307	52.72%	77.65%