



# Institutional Research Reports

University of Kentucky

Retention and Graduation Rates

January 2001

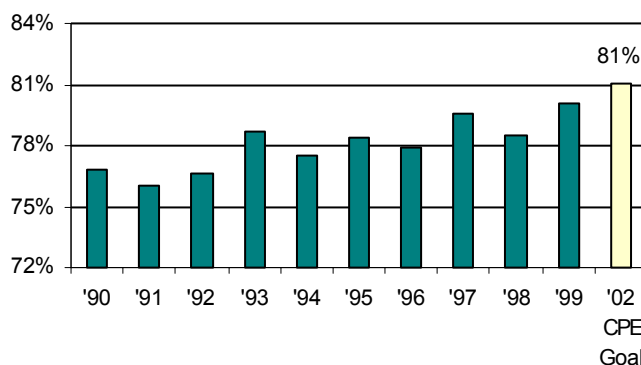
This report is the first in a series of periodic bulletins designed to update the UK community on important trends and statistics pertaining to the Lexington Campus. The Office of Assessment and Institutional Data is committed to analyzing and reporting data on issues of interest to faculty and administrators. Future reports will profile the most recent freshman class, present the results of student and alumni surveys, and reveal the latest information on enrollments.

Most students in Kentucky leave college without earning a degree. The social and financial costs to the Commonwealth and to the students who drop out of college should not be underestimated. Over a year ago, the Council on Postsecondary Education worked with colleges and universities in the state to set retention and graduation rate goals for the year 2002. This report examines the progress made by UK toward the Council's goals and explores current retention and graduation rates of selected student groups. Graduation rates also are presented for twelve colleges at the University. Finally, UK's retention and graduation rates are put into context by placing them side by side with comparable data from our benchmark institutions.

Students are most likely to drop out during their first year in college. Adjusting to the demands of the adult world is difficult for some, particularly new students who have never been away from home for a significant period of time. Other students—despite impressive high school GPA's—are not academically prepared to meet the demands of undergraduate coursework. To increase the number of students who eventually graduate, institutions must make significant efforts to improve their retention rate, the percentage of freshmen who return one year later.

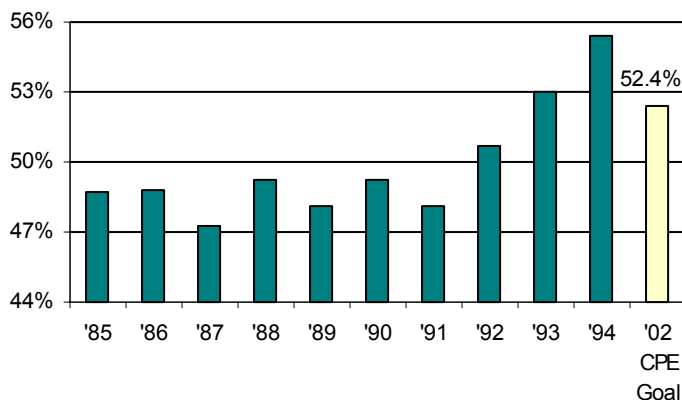
The retention and graduation rates in this report were calculated by tracking cohorts—classes of first-time, degree-seeking freshmen. Retention rates indicate the percentage of part-time and full-time students in the cohort who returned to college for a second fall semester. Graduation rates reflect the percentage of full-time students in the cohort who earned a bachelor's degree within six years.

## First-Year Retention Rates



- The freshman-to-sophomore year retention rate for the 1999 cohort is 80.1 percent, the highest in UK's history.
- The 1999 retention rate is only nine-tenths of a percentage point below the 2002 goal established by the Council on Postsecondary Education for UK.

## Six-Year Graduation Rates



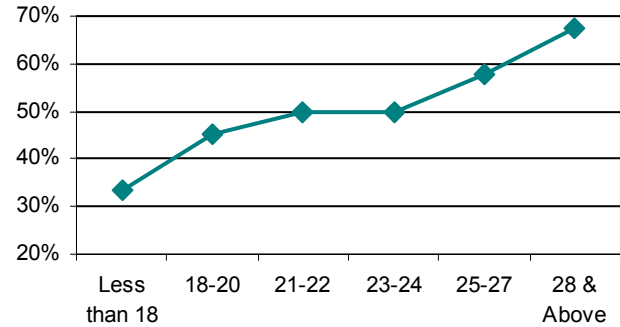
- UK's six-year graduation rate increased for the third year in a row.
- The graduation rate for the 1994 cohort, 55.3 percent, sets a UK record.
- UK's latest graduation rate exceeds by nearly three percentage points the 2002 goal set by the Council on Postsecondary Education.

### Retention and Graduation Rates of Selected Student Groups

Student Group	Retention Rate (Fall '99 Cohort)	Graduation Rate (Fall '94 Cohort)
Female	82.5%	58.6%
Male	77.2%	51.8%
White	80.5%	57.1%
African American	76.8%	35.4%
KY Resident	80.8%	55.4%
Out-of-State	76.9%	56.1%
All Students	80.1%	55.3%

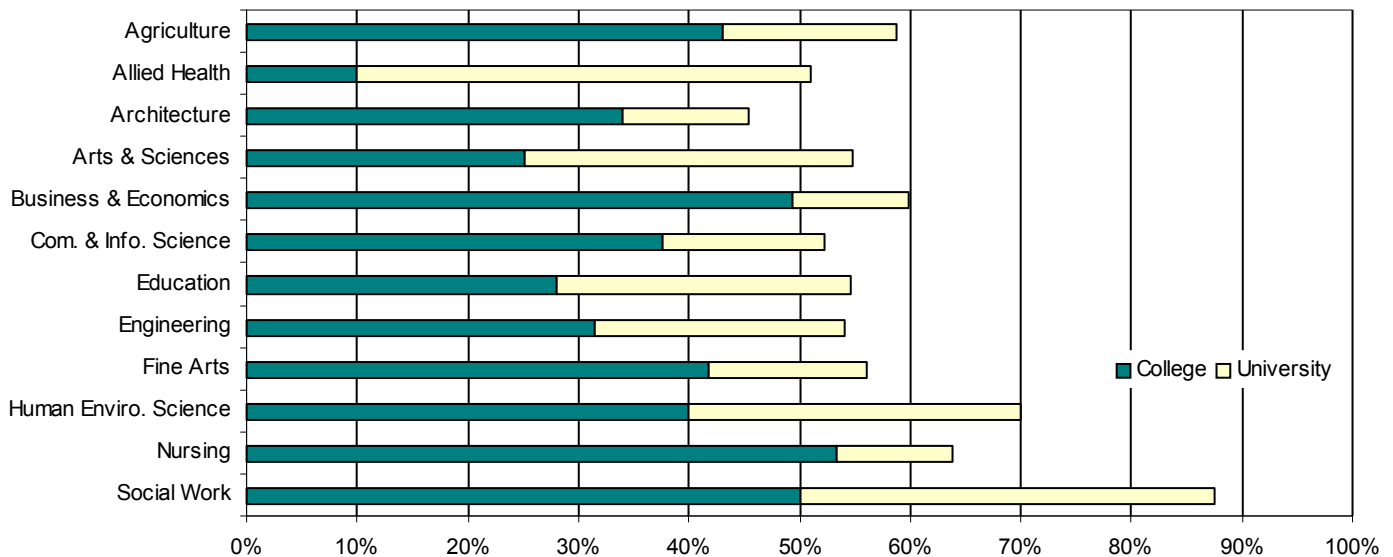
- Female students have significantly higher retention and graduation rates than male students.
- The retention rate of African American students is slightly below that for white students, but the gap in graduation rates between white and black students is very large—over 20 percentage points.
- Resident students have slightly lower graduation rates than out-of-state students, despite their relatively higher retention rates.

### Graduation Rates by ACT Score Ranges Fall 1994 Cohort



There is a clear relationship between students' academic preparation and the likelihood that they will graduate within six years. Students who arrive at UK with ACT Composite scores of '28 & above' are twice as likely to graduate as students who have earned Composite scores below 18. Recent research undertaken by the U.S. Department of Education reveals that the best predictor of whether students eventually graduate from college is the rigor and intensity of the coursework they take in high school.

### Graduation Rates by Initially Declared College: Fall 1994 Cohort



The above graph depicts graduation rates for the 12 colleges enrolling undergraduate students at UK. The "College" portion of each bar represents the percentage of students who graduated from the college in which they had initially enrolled. The "University" portion of each bar shows the percentage of students who graduated from UK outside of their initial college.

- Most graduates earned degrees from the college in which they initially enrolled.

- Over half (53.4%) of the students who began their studies in the College of Nursing eventually graduated in six years—the highest rate of students graduating from their initial college.
- Of the students initially enrolled in Allied Health, 10% graduated from that college, while over half (51.3%) graduated from somewhere within the University System.

## University of Kentucky and Benchmark Institutions Retention and Graduation Rates

Institution	One-Year Ret. Rate 1996 Cohort	Six-Year Grad. Rate 1993 Cohort
<b>University of Kentucky</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>53%</b>
North Carolina State University	88%	65%
Ohio State University	79%	56%
Pennsylvania State University	92%	80%
Purdue University	87%	64%
Texas A&M University	88%	71%
University of Arizona	77%	52%
University of California (L.A.)	95%	79%
University of Florida	NR*	67%
University of Georgia	87%	63%
University of Illinois	92%	75%
University of Iowa	84%	62%
University of Maryland	87%	64%
University of Michigan	94%	82%
University of Minnesota	NR*	51%
University of North Carolina	94%	80%
University of Texas	88%	65%
University of Virginia	NR*	91%
University of Washington	91%	72%
University of Wisconsin	NR*	74%

Source 1: Percent of Fall 1996 First-time, bachelor's degree-seeking students enrolled in Fall 1997 – College Board (1998)

Source 2: Percent of Fall 1993 First-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who graduated before Fall 1999 – NCAA (2000)

\*NR - Institutions not reporting retention data

The University of Kentucky can feel proud of the progress it has made in retaining students over the past decade. The current retention and graduation rates are the highest in the university's history. But considerable work is needed to boost these rates to the level associated with many Research I institutions. The accompanying chart lists the retention and graduation rates of UK and its benchmark institutions. Current data from the benchmarks were not available from either the College Board or the NCAA. The chart reveals that retention rates from UK's recent past ranked second from last when compared to the benchmark institutions reporting data. UK's graduation rates ranked third from last.

## Where do we go from here?

We know from the literature that the students who are most likely to graduate are actively engaged in academic life and maintain close ties with their peers. To this end, many institutions have reported improved student retention by developing freshman orientation programs, engaging undergraduates in challenging research, forming learning communities of like-minded students, and strengthening academic advising.

Certainly, further research can play a significant role in keeping students on a trajectory toward degree completion. We can learn better ways to identify students at risk of dropping out. We also can begin to evaluate the effectiveness of programs to enhance the quality of the undergraduate experience. But it is clear that we already know a lot about why some students stay in school and others leave. The UK community can continue to improve student retention by implementing and refining the types of programs and services that we already know work well.



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