



January 2011

Higher Education Accountability Report, 2009-10

Executive Summary

In 2004, the Washington Legislature passed HB 3103, which required the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to annually review—and biennially report—the achievements of public higher education. This is the third Accountability Report published by the HECB. Data are collected every year, but reports are produced for the Legislature every two years.

Data in this 2009-10 report are compared to previous years, going back to a baseline period of five years (1997–2002), and are provided in Appendices 1 and 2 at the end of this report. Results are reported for seven public baccalaureate institution measures, the community and technical college system's six Student Achievement Initiative measures (in place of their previous metrics), and three new measures developed for the Governor's Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) program.

Summary level analysis since the five-year reporting baseline (1997–2002) for the seven measures show that public higher education in Washington has improved on all seven measures.

- Annual bachelor's degree production in Academic Year (AY) 2009-10 is 4,633 degrees – or 26 percent higher than the number of degrees awarded in the baseline years. Washington's public baccalaureate institutions awarded nearly 22,800 degrees in AY 2009-10.
- High-demand degree production has increased 48 percent over the baseline years. In AY 2009-10, more than 3,600 high-demand degrees were awarded.
- The number of advanced degrees awarded has increased by 29 percent over the baseline. More than 6,700 advanced degrees were awarded in AY 2009-10.
- The six-year graduation rate for first-time full-time freshmen has increased by 13 percent. In AY 2009-10 the average graduation rate was 69 percent compared to 61 percent for the baseline years.
- The AY 2009-10 three-year graduation rate for students who transfer to a public baccalaureate institution with an associate's degree is 72 percent, a 15 percent increase over the baseline of 63 percent.
- Freshmen retention rates at the public baccalaureate institutions have always been high, especially when compared to their peers in other states. The freshmen retention rates reported in the AY 2009-10 reports result in a state average of 88 percent, compared to 83 percent for the baseline years.

- Bachelor's degree efficiency, or the percent of bachelor's degree recipients who complete no more than 125 percent of the number of credits required, has also been high. In AY 2009-10, 93 percent of bachelor's degree recipients met this criterion; in the baseline years, 90 percent of recipients met the criteria.
- On all measures, Pell grant recipients perform at rates that are only slightly lower than the rates for all students. For example, the six-year graduation rate for Pell recipients is 66 percent, compared to 69 percent for all students. Their performance has also improved since AY 2006-07 on all measures. (AY 2006-07 was the first year in which complete data was available from all institutions). The largest increase appeared in the number of Pell recipients receiving high-demand bachelor's degrees. This measure increased 10 percent from AY 2006-07 to AY 2009-10.
- Washington's community and technical colleges are also reporting improvements in their Student Achievement Initiative measures, which are now included in the accountability report in place of their original measures. Between the AY 2006-07 baseline year and AY 2008-09, the first performance year, the colleges served 4 percent more students but increased student achievement by 19 percent overall with gains in each category. The largest increase appeared in basic and college-ready skills. In AY 2009-10, achievement gains again grew at a much faster rate than the number of students enrolled.
- New performance measures were requested by the Governor as part of the Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) Initiative in May 2010. These measures show that most bachelor's degree recipients actually complete their degree in only about 4½ years.

Interest in accountability measures that clearly communicate higher education's performance to external stakeholders has increased since HB 3103 was passed. In June 2010, the National Governors Association announced its *Complete to Compete* initiative, with common metrics to monitor progress and outcomes in all 50 states.

Governor Chris Gregoire also addressed accountability for higher education through two major efforts in 2010:

- the Education GMAP forums; and
- the Higher Education Funding Task Force, which met from June through November.

The alignment of the HECB Accountability Report with national and statewide activities will be addressed more fully in the final section of this report, "Next Steps."



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Higher Education Accountability Report, 2009-2010

Introduction

In 2004, the Legislature directed the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to “establish an accountability monitoring and reporting system” (RCW 28B.76.270). Under this law, the HECB is required to review actual achievements of the institutions annually and report progress each biennium.

In 2004, the Legislature passed HB 3103 directing the HECB to establish an accountability monitoring and reporting system (RCW 28B.76.270). The law requires the HECB to annually review and biennially report the achievements of public higher education. A year later, in 2005, the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) umbrella agency published a report entitled “Accountability for Better Results: A National Imperative for Higher Education.”¹

The SHEEO report called for the states to adopt new, agreed-on accountability measurements focused on a few, explicit goals—measures to help guide performance improvement and answer key questions about higher education. The authors decried the use of cumbersome, over-designed, confusing, and inefficient accountability measures. New measures would help higher education and states to make better informed policy and budgetary decisions, close achievement gaps, and promote greater equity in allocating resources, the report asserted.

Interest in accountability reports that clearly communicate higher education’s performance to stakeholders has grown since the SHEEO report was published in 2005. For example, Washington’s State Board for Community and Technical Colleges’ (SBCTC) Student Achievement Initiative has gained considerable national attention, with other states adopting similar accountability initiatives for both the two-year and baccalaureate sectors.

Performance and outcomes-based funding systems like those used in Tennessee and Ohio also have gained national attention. In 2010, a new national effort to develop a set of streamlined, consistent measures to monitor higher education’s progress was developed by the National Governors’ Association through its Complete to Compete initiative.²

¹ The National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education. (March 2005). “Accountability for Better Results: A National Imperative for Higher Education.” Denver: State Higher Education Executive Officers. Retrieved Dec. 28, 2010 from www.sheeo.org/account/accountability.pdf

² More information about the National Governor’s Association Complete to Compete Initiative is available at: www.subnet.nga.org/ci/1011.

Governor Chris Gregoire also addressed accountability for higher education through two major efforts in 2010: 1) the Education Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) Initiative³; and 2) the Higher Education Funding Task Force⁴, which met from June through November.

The alignment of the HECB Accountability Report with these national and statewide activities will be addressed more fully in the final section of this report, “Next Steps.”

Performance Measures

This is the third Accountability Report published by the HECB. This report fulfills the biennial requirement that the HECB inform the higher education and fiscal committees of the legislature of the system’s progress toward goals. This report also fulfills an additional legislative requirement that calls for a six-year retrospective analysis of the data.

This report summarizes progress made by the public baccalaureate institutions on seven accountability measures. Detailed data tables are provided in Appendices 1 and 2. It also includes a new set of six accountability measures (momentum points) for the state’s community and technical colleges. And it includes three additional accountability measures sets on graduate rates and time-to-degree that arose from the Governor’s GMAP process.

The six ‘momentum points’ reported by the SBCTC are those of the Student Achievement Initiative. They replace measures previously used to assess performance at the two-year institutions. These were approved for inclusion in the Accountability Report to minimize reporting requirements for SBCTC staff.

The following performance measures are included in this report:

- Bachelor’s degree production
- High-demand bachelor’s degree production
- Graduate and professional degree production
- Freshman retention
- Six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time freshmen
- Three-year graduation rates for transfer students with associate’s degrees
- Bachelor’s degree recipients who did not accumulate excess credits
- *New for community and technical colleges: Student Achievement Initiative’s six momentum points*
- *New GMAP measures for public baccalaureate institutions: baccalaureate graduation rate; five-year graduation rate; and time-to-degree for native and transfer students*

³ Information about the Governor’s Education GMAP Initiative is available at <http://www.accountability.wa.gov/reports/education/default.asp>

⁴ The Higher Education Funding Task Force report is available at: <http://www.hecb.wa.gov/research/budgets/HEFTpage.asp>

Results

A summary-level analysis of performance since the five-year reporting baseline (1997-2002) for the seven measures show that public higher education in Washington has improved on all seven measures. Degree production has increased substantially over the baseline years. Retention and graduation rates have historically been high and they have improved even more over time. The community and technical colleges also have demonstrated substantial improvement in their new measures from the Student Achievement Initiative after only two years of performance-based funding.

It is important to monitor year-to-year progress, especially in a poor economic climate, so that any potential negative impacts can be addressed as they arise. However, a one-year increase or decrease does not denote a trend. Although HECB staff will continue to closely monitor short-term changes, this report primarily focuses on overall trends and comparisons to the baseline years almost a decade ago.

Overall results in this third Accountability Report show the productivity of Washington's public baccalaureate institutions has improved at all levels—number of bachelor's and advanced degrees awarded, degrees awarded in high demand fields, graduation rates for native and transfer students, and the percentage of students graduating without excess credit hours (more than 125 percent of required credits).

Washington's public baccalaureate institutions do very well in graduating students successfully and efficiently once they are admitted. But the state needs to improve the number of students who enroll directly in four-year institutions and transfer into them.

The community and technical college system's Student Achievement Initiative is beginning to document⁵ systemic improvements in persistence and retention in each of four "momentum points" that document student progress and success:

- Building toward college-level skills (basic skills gains, passing precollege writing or math)
- First year retention (earning 15 then 30 college-level credits)
- Completing college-level math (passing math courses required for either technical or academic associate's degrees)
- Completions (degrees, certificates, apprenticeship training)

⁵ SBCTC, Student Achievement Initiative Momentum Point Calculation. Retrieved January 24, 2011 from http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/education/momentum_point_calculation_mar07.pdf

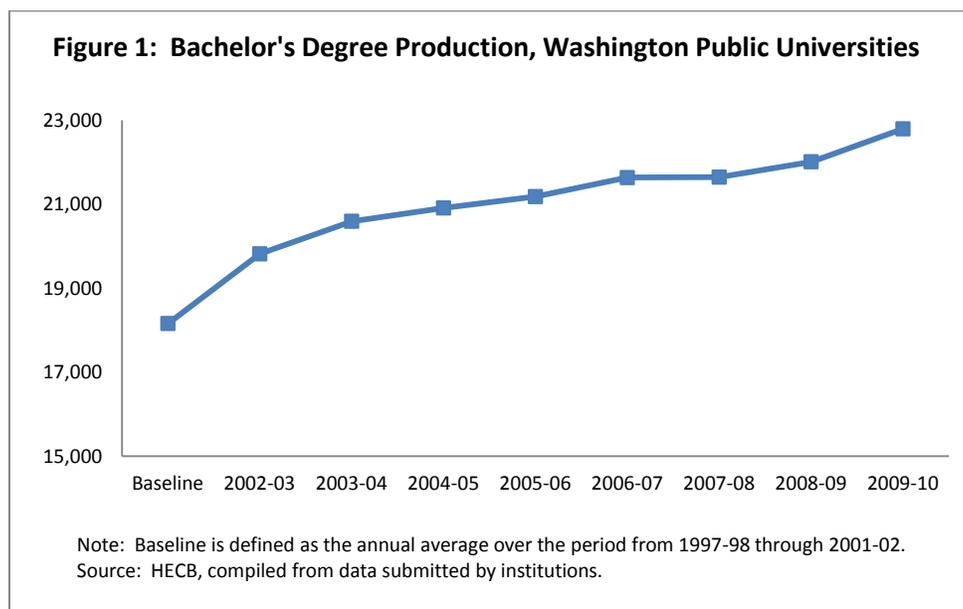
Bachelor's Degree Production

As shown in Figure 1, the six public baccalaureate institutions combined have increased bachelor's degree production 4 percent over the past year, 11 percent over the past six years, and 26 percent since the five-year baseline period (AY 1997-98 to AY 2001-02). The real difference in numbers is more than 4,600 annual degrees awarded in AY 2009-10 over the baseline period.

Every public baccalaureate institution, except for The Evergreen State College, showed double-digit increases in bachelor's degree production, ranging from 17 percent to 30 percent. The Evergreen State College has consistently awarded 1,000 to 1,200 bachelor's degrees each year since AY 1997-98.

In 2010, the number of bachelor's degree awards at the University of Washington increased by 828 – more than 10 percent over the previous year – the biggest one-year jump since the HECB first began the accountability report. A University official⁶ cited likely explanations as a large increase in incoming seniors in Fall 2009, coupled with the fact that some students appeared to be delaying graduation slightly. The corresponding jump in degree awards for AY 2009-10 also fits with the lower-than-expected degree awards in AY 2008-09.

Monitoring year-to-year progress is important – especially in a poor economic climate – so that any potential negative impacts can be addressed as they arise. It also is important to keep in mind that a one-year increase or decrease does not denote a trend. Washington State University and Western Washington University awarded considerably fewer bachelor's degrees this year, although both experienced an increase in awards the preceding year. How the recession is affecting Washington's degree production will need to be continually monitored to determine if a downward slide in degrees awarded is occurring.



⁶ Personal communication, Carol Diem, Office of Planning and Budgeting, University of Washington, December 21, 2010.

The longer-term overall take-away, however, is this: Public baccalaureate institutions have consistently increased the number of annual degrees awarded, resulting in a statewide increase of 26 percent.

According to a recent national report, Washington was first among all 50 states in the efficient production of baccalaureate degrees among students already enrolled.⁷ The vast majority of students who enroll in our public four-year baccalaureate institutions graduate.

The real concern, however, is about the *number* of students who go to college in Washington. Washington ranks in the bottom quartile of degrees produced per 1,000 population, age 20-34.⁸ To reach *Master Plan* goals to 2018, we will need to increase degree production even more — 5,800 more bachelor's degrees *each year* than we are currently producing.

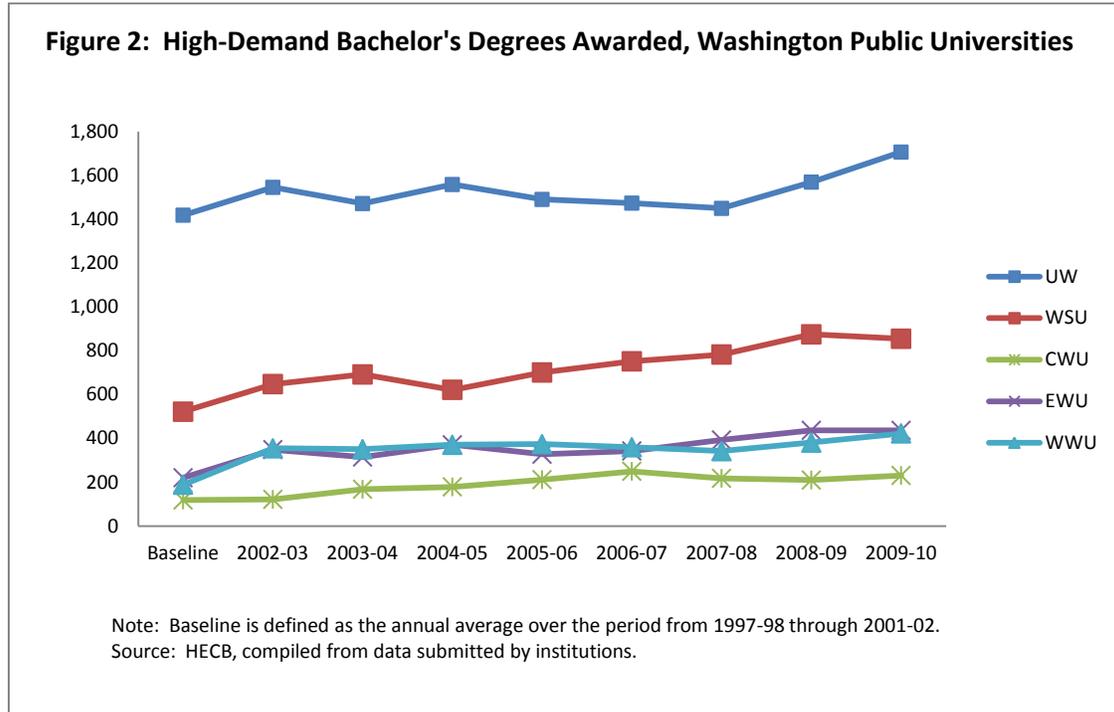
High Demand Bachelor's Degrees

More than 3,600 high-demand bachelor's degrees were awarded by the public baccalaureate institutions in AY 2009-10. High-demand bachelor's degree production has increased 5 percent over the past year, 22 percent over the past six years, and 48 percent since the five-year baseline (Figure 2). The University of Washington and Washington State University have consistently produced the greatest number of high-demand bachelor's degrees — 1,707 and 855 respectively in AY 2009-10.

Of note, however, is that each of the comprehensive universities also has doubled the production of high-demand degrees since the baseline period. Western Washington University, in particular, has more than doubled the number of these degrees from 189 in the baseline period to 423 last year.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. Fall 2007.

⁸ National Center for Education Statistics. (2008). *Digest of Education Statistics*. U.S. Census Bureau.



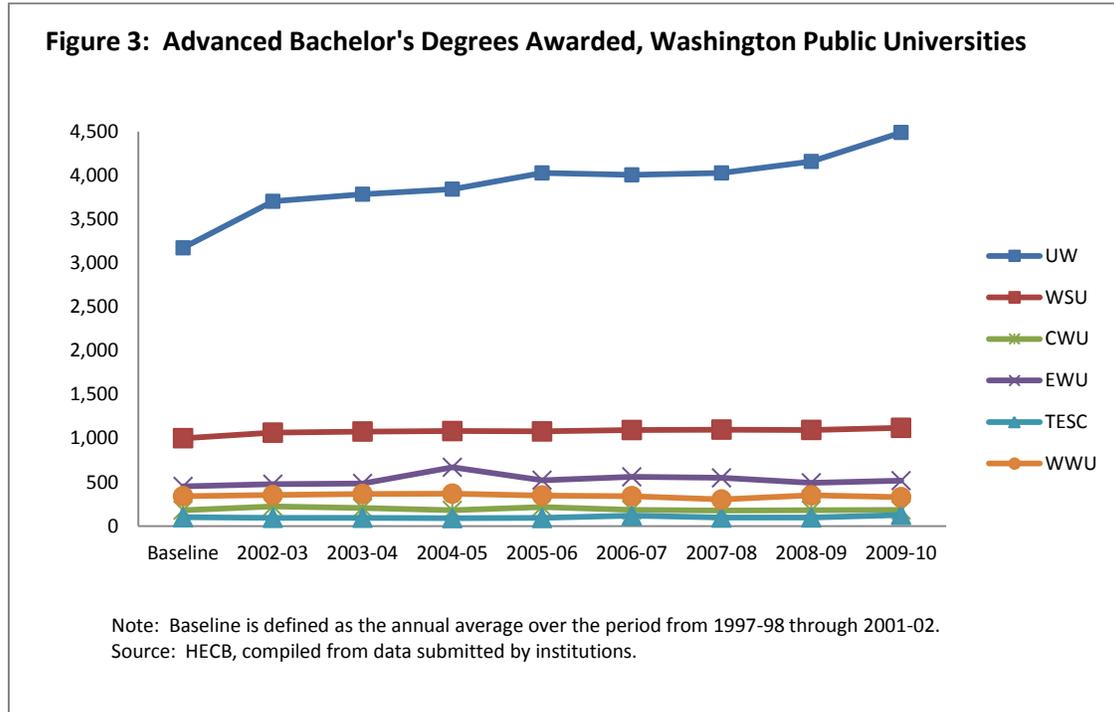
Advanced Degree Production

The number of advanced degrees awarded by the public baccalaureate institutions has increased modestly over time (Figure 3). The 6,772 degrees awarded in AY 2009-10 represent a 6 percent increase over AY 2008-09, a 12 percent increase over the past six years, and a 22 percent increase over the baseline years. All institutions have increased or nearly maintained the number of advanced degrees awarded since the baseline years. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of advanced degrees (83 percent) are awarded by the state's two research universities.

The HECB's 10-year Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington (2008) set ambitious goals for producing graduate degrees as well as bachelor's degrees. Graduate degree production, however, falls far short of the annual production needed by 2018. More graduate degrees will need to be produced by both public and private institutions in Washington if the state is to reach the 2108 graduate degree goals.

Private institutions can certainly help in advanced degree production; they produce half of the state's masters and first professional degrees. But the public institutions will need to significantly increase advanced degree production as well.

To reach the 50th percentile of the Global Challenge States' advanced degree production, Washington's public and private institutions will need to raise advanced degree production to 19,800 per year – 7,900 from the private institutions and 11,900 from the public institutions, an increase of 5,000 more from the public institutions alone than they produced this year.



Persistence and Completion

Three of the performance measures in the accountability framework focus on how well students stay on track and demonstrate the tenacity needed to complete a bachelor's degree within a defined timeframe. These three measures—freshman retention, six-year graduation rates, and three-year transfer student graduation rates—are described separately below. Combined, these three measures monitor retention and completion for a substantial portion of the undergraduate population. These measures also provide insight on where the education pipeline may have a tendency to leak.

Freshman retention looks at whether first-time full-time freshmen return for the sophomore year. This is a key educational transition point at which the risk of students leaving can be high. The other two measures focus on graduation within a defined timeframe for two specific groups of students. The first is students who enroll for the first time as full-time freshmen at a baccalaureate institution. While this definition excludes part-time students and returning students, it is used nationally and permits comparisons among institutions nationwide. The second group consists of transfer students who enter the baccalaureate institution with an associate's degree from a Washington community college already completed.

One limitation of these measures is the focus on enrollment and completion patterns within a single institution. Many students who begin college full-time at a baccalaureate institution eventually complete a degree at a different institution or leave the institution for one or more terms before returning.

Students who transfer to a different baccalaureate institution to begin their sophomore year are considered as not retained for this measure, even though the student remained in the higher education system. Students who graduate within six years but earn their degrees at an institution other than the one in which they initially enrolled also are not reported in the measures reported here.

HECB staff plan to undertake a study in partnership with staff from the Education Research and Data Center during spring 2011 to better understand student enrollment patterns and thereby assess the success of more students in the higher education system.

Freshman Retention

Overall, freshmen retention rates at the public baccalaureate institutions are high, ranging from 72 percent at Eastern Washington University, to 92 percent at the University of Washington. The statewide rate of 87 percent is about 4 percent above the five-year baseline. The state rate originally rose to 88 percent in AY 2004-05 and has stayed close to that rate since. With rates already this high, year-to-year changes are not expected to be large.

Washington's freshman retention rate also is high compared to retention rates in other states. According to *Measuring Up 2008*, "Washington performs extremely well in the percentage of freshmen at baccalaureate colleges and universities who return for their sophomore year."

Graduation Rates

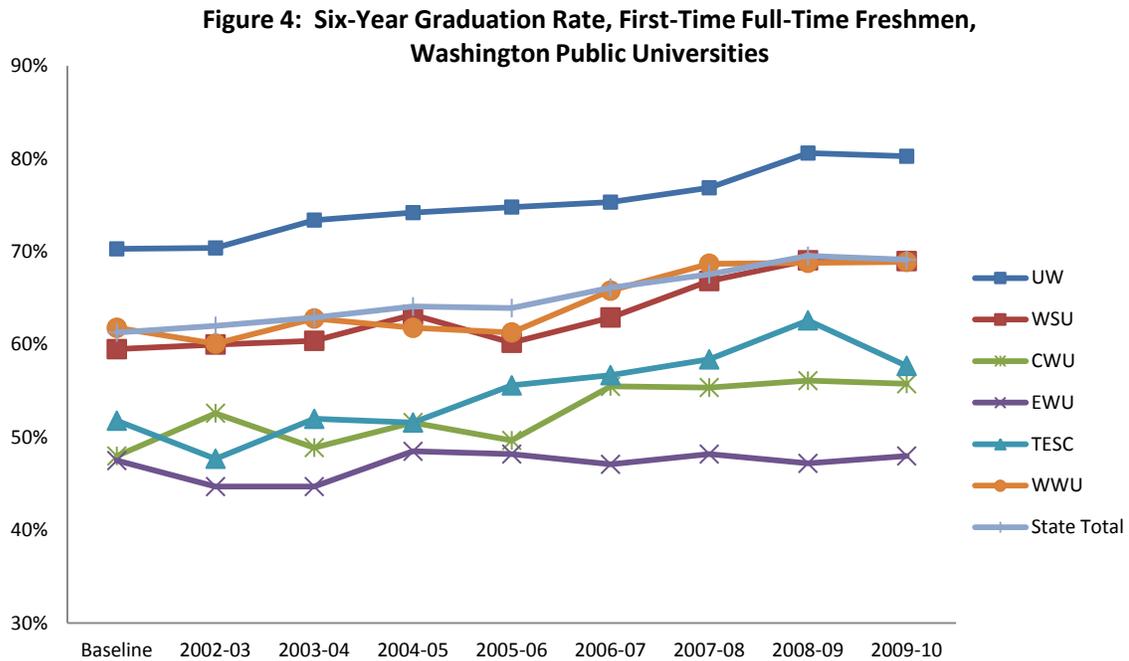
In monitoring graduation for the system, this Accountability Report collects both six-year graduation rates for "native" students, those who begin their college careers at a four-year public university, and transfer students.

Six-Year Graduation Rate for First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen

The state six-year graduation rate for first-time full-time freshmen has improved from 61 percent from the baseline average to 69 percent in AY 2009-10 (Figure 4). The state rate for AY 2009-10 increased 10 percent over the last six years, but dipped slightly (less than 1 percent) between AYs 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Central Washington University and Washington State University reported the largest increases over their respective baselines by improving six-year graduation rates by 16 percent.

Nationally, Washington's public baccalaureate institutions report consistently high rates, as noted in *Measuring Up 2008*: "A very high percentage of first-time, full-time college students complete a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling."



Note: Baseline is defined as the annual average over the period from 1997-98 through 2001-02.

Source: HECB, compiled from data submitted by institutions.

Three-Year Graduation Rates for Transfer Students

Three-year graduation rates for transfer students who complete an associate's degree before entering a baccalaureate public institution have also improved considerably compared to the baseline average (Figure 5). The state rate for AY 2009-10, 72 percent, represents a 15 percent increase over the baseline, a 5 percent increase over the last six years, and a less than 1 percent increase over AY 2008-09.

Western Washington University reported the largest one-year gain (74 percent, up from 68 percent) likely due to improved academic preparedness of transfer students and increases in the number of credits transferred compared to prior cohorts⁹.

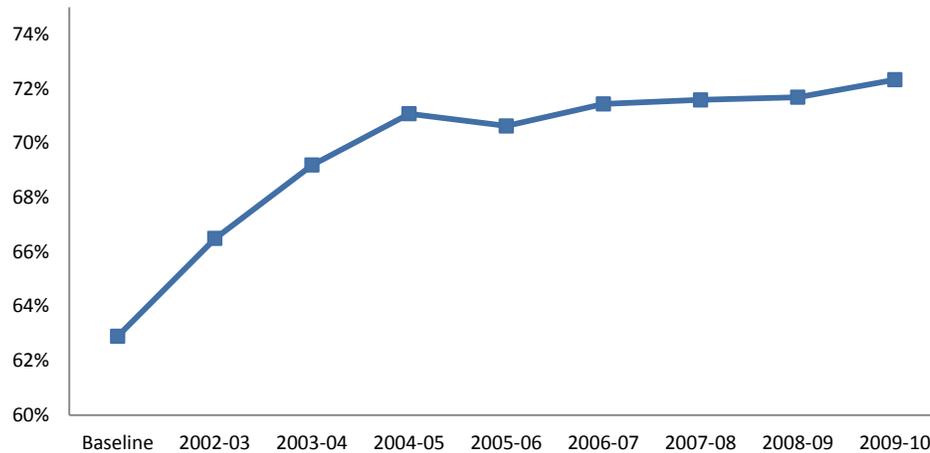
The Evergreen State College reported the largest single-year decrease (66 percent, down from 73 percent) as a result of students temporarily stopping out for work or family, taking fewer courses, or delaying entry into the job market because of the economy¹⁰.

Again, one-year changes do not constitute a trend, but the economy appears to be impacting student behavior and it will be important to monitor year-to-year changes in the years ahead.

⁹ Personal Communication, Ming Zhang, Director of Institutional Research, Western Washington University, December 15, 2010

¹⁰ Personal Communication, Laura Coghlan, Director of Institutional Research, The Evergreen State College, December 20, 2010

Figure 5: State Total Three-Year Graduation Rate, Associate Degree Transfer Students Washington Public Universities



Note: Baseline is defined as the annual average over the period from 1997-98 through 2001-02.
Source: HECB, compiled from data submitted by institutions.

Bachelor's Degree Efficiency

Bachelor's degree efficiency assesses the number of students who were able to complete their degree without earning more than 125 percent of the number of credits required for the degree. The definition excludes those students who double-major. The state average has remained fairly constant over time.

Ranging from 90 to 93 percent in any given year, this measurement shows that students at the public baccalaureate institutions are able to graduate without accumulating an unreasonable number of credits. Considering half of bachelor's degree recipients change their major at least once,¹¹ it is reasonable to expect that most students will complete more credits than their program requires. However, this measure clearly shows that a majority of bachelor's degree recipients are not accruing an excessive number of credits.

Community and Technical College System Measures

In 2010, the SBCTC requested permission to substitute their original Accountability Report measures with the measures they were collecting as part of their system-wide Student Achievement Initiative. The new measures are intended to be meaningful for all students across demographic characteristics, academic program or entering skill levels, intensity of enrollment, and type and location of institution attended.

¹¹ Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths from degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

There are four categories of measures:

1. **Building towards college level skills** (basic skills gains, passing pre-college writing or math)
2. **First year retention** (earning 15 then 30 college level credits)
3. **Completing college level math** (passing math courses required for either technical or academic associate's degrees)
4. **Completions** (degrees, certificates, apprenticeship training)

These measures focus on short-term, intermediate outcomes that provide meaningful momentum towards degree and certificate completion for all students no matter where they start. In addition to these progress metrics, a completion metric for certificates and degrees is also included.

The college system showed gains in student achievement starting in the first performance year. Between the AY 2006-07 baseline year and AY 2008-09, the first performance year, the colleges served 4 percent more students but increased student achievement by 19 percent overall with gains in each category. The largest increase appeared in basic and college-ready skills.

In AY 2009-10, achievement gains again grew at a much faster rate than the number of students enrolled. Total achievement increased by 12 percent compared to student population growth of 1 percent. Again, the largest increases were reported in basic and college-ready skills, which are critical areas for improvement if Washington is to increase degree production at all levels.

Table 2
Achievement Measures
Points That Build Momentum

| | Total Headcount | Basic Skills | College Readiness | 1 st 15 Credits | 1 st 30 Credits | Quantitative Computation | Certificate, Degree, Apprentices | Total Points |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 2006-07 (Baseline) | 467,809 | 70,950 | 61,581 | 60,422 | 45,385 | 33,989 | 22,932 | 295,259 |
| 2008-09 | 486,927 | 94,796 | 73,652 | 70,127 | 52,300 | 36,000 | 25,544 | 352,419 |
| % Change (from 06-07) | 4% | 34% | 20% | 16% | 15% | 6% | 11% | 19% |
| 2009-10 | 489,932 | 108,219 | 87,713 | 73,846 | 57,132 | 39,486 | 27,949 | 394,645 |
| % Change (from 08-09) | 1% | 14% | 19% | 5% | 9% | 10% | 9% | 12% |

Source: Student Achievement Initiative (November 2010), State Board for Community & Technical Colleges

Performance of Federal Pell Grant Recipients

The Federal Pell Grant program provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate students. Each year, the public four-year institutions provide data on the seven accountability measures for Federal Pell Grant recipients. Following is an overview of their performance compared to performance of all students as described above. Data from AY 2009-10 is compared to AY 2006-07 since that is the first year in which complete data for each institution is available. Detailed data are provided in Appendix 2.

In general, Pell Grant recipients perform at rates comparable or only slightly slower than all students, although their retention and graduation rates may vary somewhat from year to year within individual institutions largely due to the small numbers of students in these cohorts. It is important to ensure these students continue to perform well in the public baccalaureate institutions and that institutions continue to ensure they have the support necessary to be successful.

Information for Pell recipients on each of the seven measures is provided below:

- **Bachelor's Degrees Awarded:** Pell recipients represent about a third of all bachelor's degree recipients in any given year. The number of Pell recipients has increased 2 percent since AY 2006-07, from 7,322 to 7,503.
- **High-Demand Bachelor's Degrees Awarded:** Again, Pell recipients represent about a third of all bachelor's degree recipients in any given year. The number of Pell recipients has increased 10 percent since AY 2006-07, from 1,071 to 1,183.
- **Advanced Degrees Awarded:** The Federal Pell Grant is not available to students in most post-baccalaureate degree programs.
- **Freshmen Retention Rate for First-Time Full-Time Freshmen:** About 20 percent of first-time full-time freshmen receive Pell grants. The overall freshmen retention rate for Pell Grant recipients has remained stable over time at 82 or 83 percent. These rates are comparable or somewhat lower than the rate for all first-time full-time freshmen, which tend to range between 85 and 88 percent.
- **Six-Year Graduation Rates for First-Time Full-Time Freshmen:** As previously noted, Pell recipients make up about 20 percent of first-time full-time freshmen. The overall six-year graduation rate for Pell recipients has increased from 64 percent in AY 2006-07 to 66 percent in AY 2009-10. These rates are comparable or slightly lower than the rate for all first-time full-time freshmen, which tend to range between 66 and 70 percent. Within institutions, this rate varies somewhat from year-to-year. Institutional experts say this is likely due to the small numbers of students in the cohorts¹².
- **Three-Year Graduation Rates for Transfer Students with Associate's Degrees:** About a third of transfer students with associate's degrees receive Pell grants. The overall three-year graduation rate for students who transfer to a public baccalaureate institution with an associate's degree has also increased over time, from 67 percent in AY 2006-07 to 70 percent in AY 2009-10. These rates are comparable or slightly lower than the rate for all transfer students with associate's degrees, which tend to be about 72 percent.
- **Bachelor's Degree Efficiency:** As noted above, about a third of bachelor's degree recipients receive Pell grants. This measure tends to remain constant from year to year for Pell Grant recipients, just as it does for all students. In general, 89 percent of Pell Grant recipients who complete a bachelor's degree do not accumulate more than 125 percent of the number of credits required for their degree programs. This compares to 93 percent for all students.

¹² Personal Communication, Sharon Schmidt, Assistant Director, Institutional Research, Western Washington University, January 24, 2011

New Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) Measures

The HECB is required to report various education and economic vitality-related performance measures to the Governor on a quarterly basis as part of the GMAP initiative.

Three new measures are being included in the GMAP initiative as part of the next Education Forum this spring:

1. Four-year graduation rates
2. Five-year graduation rates
3. Time-to-degree

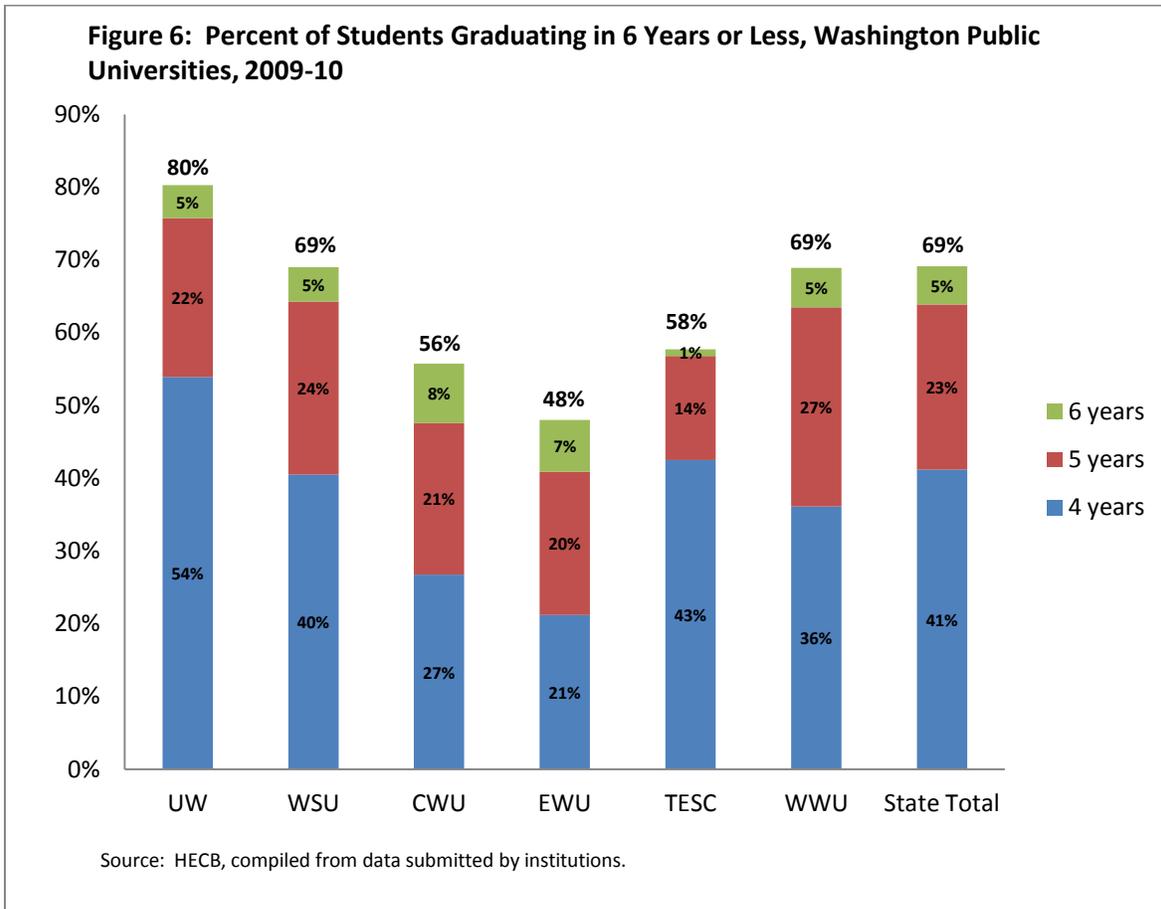
The Governor thinks that six-year graduation rates, by themselves, do not do a good job of demonstrating higher education's performance. These new measures were developed for GMAP in collaboration with the Council of Presidents, the Office of Financial Management, and the Governor's GMAP staff.

To minimize the reporting burden for institutions, HECB staff requested institutions submit these new measures as part of the Accountability Report since they are directly related to the measures already provided. Results from the new measures are summarized below. Detailed data for academic years 2005-06 through 2009-10 are provided in the Appendices 3 and 4.

Four-Year and Five-Year Graduation Rates

As shown in Figure 6, the four-year and five-year graduation rates more accurately represent the rate at which first-time, full-time freshmen complete their bachelor's degrees. On average, of the students in the cohort (e.g. students who graduate in six years or less), most do so after only four or five years.

This finding is confirmed by the third new GMAP measure, time-to-degree, described in the following section. Extending the graduation rate to six years only adds an additional 5 percent to the overall rate. By institution, the sixth year only increases the graduation rate by 1 to 8 percent.



Time-to-Degree

The new time-to-degree measure is designed to determine the average length of time (in years) a student takes to complete a bachelor’s degree. Institutional research staff reviewed every degree recipient in a given academic year to determine how many total years and months elapsed from the first date of entry to the date of completion. This measure was calculated for native students (e.g., those who enrolled as first-time freshman), for transfer students who entered with an associate’s degree, and for transfer students who entered with at least 45 credits but without an associate’s degree.

Overall, students complete their degrees in a timely manner. Data provided for AY 2009-10 degree recipients show that native students complete their bachelor’s degrees in about 4 ½ years (4.49 years). Students who transfer to a baccalaureate public institution with an associate’s degree complete their bachelor’s degrees in just over 2 ½ years (2.67 years). Students who transfer to a baccalaureate public institution with 45 or more credits but without an associate’s degree complete their bachelor’s degrees in just over three years (3.11 years).

Summary of Results

Overall, students at Washington's public baccalaureate institutions continue to perform well and demonstrate improvements, especially compared to the baseline years and the last six years. Pell Grant recipients also perform well as demonstrated by rates that are only slightly lower than the rates for all students. Since AY 2006-07, Pell recipients have improved on all measures.

The state's community and technical colleges are also experiencing considerable success in student achievement. In addition, the new GMAP measures confirm what the six-year graduation rate and the bachelor's degree efficiency measures have long indicated – most undergraduates at the public baccalaureate institutions graduate within a reasonable amount of time and with a reasonable number of credits.

As part of the Accountability Report, the HECB is supposed to develop new targets for degree awards for each public baccalaureate institution after this six-year review period. These targets, however, are not included as part of this report because staff recommend waiting until after the 2011 legislative session is completed. By the end of April 2011, it is likely we will know if some or all of the Governor's Higher Education Task Force have been adopted and whether there is continued funding to support additional enrollments.

However, current economic conditions appear to have contributed to several short-term changes identified in comparing changes from AY 2008-09 to AY 2009-10. Some institutions are seeing increases in degrees because students are delaying graduation to avoid entering a dismal job market or because they must stop out temporarily or take fewer classes due to financial or family challenges.

These same students also are contributing to the slight declines in graduation rates because students are taking longer to finish their degree. As previously noted, one-year changes do not constitute a trend. However, the current and ongoing economic challenges facing Washington's citizens and higher education system warrant close monitoring of these measures over the next several years.

Next Steps

Early sections of this report described several recent state and national initiatives focusing on accountability – the National Governor's Association (NGA's) Complete to Compete Initiative, the Governor's Education GMAP Forums, and the Governor's Higher Education Funding Task Force. The good news is that all of the HECB's current performance measures, collected annually and reported biennially, already align with each of them.

As demonstrated in the Results section above, the new GMAP measures are directly related to the long-standing measures used to monitor student outcomes at the public baccalaureate institutions. As part of the Education GMAP forums, the HECB is responsible for reporting on participation rates, financial aid programs, retention and graduation rates, and degree production. The GMAP measures for degree production, retention, and graduation rates are drawn directly from this report.

The Higher Education Funding Task Force does not actually recommend the use of any new metrics, but rather recommends implementation of NGA's Complete to Compete metrics described below.

Implementing Complete to Compete

The Complete to Compete measures were developed by the NGA in summer 2010. Although the Complete to Compete metrics comprise all of the measures in this accountability report and the Education GMAP reports, the difference lies in the way the measures are defined. The NGA's definitions attempt to be more comprehensive than traditional definitions. For example, part-time and transfer students are often left out of current reports on freshmen retention rates and six-year graduation rates. The Complete to Compete metrics include them.

The Complete to Compete metrics focus on progress, outcomes, and context metrics. The progress metrics include enrollment in remedial education, success in first-year college-level courses, credit accumulation, and retention. The outcome metrics include degrees and certificates awarded, graduation rates, transfer rates, and time-to-degree.

The context metrics are particularly important for policymakers because they provide a check to ensure that access to higher education is not sacrificed in favor of completion; a system wide snapshot of higher education productivity; and a method to track the growth in the overall level of education in the state.

The additional measures that NGA recommends states should track include:

- **Enrollment:** total first-time undergraduate students enrolled in an institution of higher education;
- **Completion ratio:** annual ratio of certificates and degrees awarded per 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate students; and
- **Market penetration:** annual ratio of certificates and degrees awarded relative to the state's
- **Population with a high school diploma.**

A HECB staff analysis of the Complete to Compete metrics and their non-traditional definitions indicate that with assistance from the ERDC, it will be possible to calculate most of these metrics within the next year (Appendix 5). In fact, staff from ERDC are currently investigating data sources and working to design a web interface to integrate most of the Complete to Compete metrics in a comprehensive postsecondary education reporting environment that would be available on the ERDC website. Over time, the site would provide longitudinal statistics on admissions, enrollment, finances, academic progress, degree completions, and transitions to employment.

It is time that the U.S. – and Washington State – do whatever they can to truly capture student behavior more accurately than current national and state measures allow. The Complete to Compete metrics represent a definite improvement in capturing more of today’s part-time and transfer student populations. Staff recommend supporting ERDC’s efforts to develop a web-site based on the Complete to Compete metrics.

Aligning All Accountability Reports

HECB staff also plan to work towards aligning the measures in this report, the Education GMAP report, and other current and future initiatives as appropriate. Switching accountability metrics too frequently is not advisable because it causes confusion among users of the data and makes comparisons difficult – as does using different measures for different reports. Too many measures can also dilute the primary message – that Washington’s higher education system is strong and efficient. Multiple reports and measures also may create unnecessary duplication of effort on the part of institution and HECB staff. Policymakers, the general public, institutions, and students will benefit when the various reports and initiatives in use today are aligned to present consistent, unified information.

A summit for staff from the public baccalaureate institutions and the SBCTC will be held during summer 2011 to begin aligning data collection efforts with the needs of the accountability reports and related initiatives. Some measures, such as those included in this Accountability Report, are timely in that the report is based on the prior academic year. Data derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) lags by 12 to 18 months. Degree completion data from the Public Centralized Higher Education Enrollment System has a two-year time lag. The primary goals of the summit is to identify ways in which data collection and reporting can be streamlined for both the institutions and HECB staff so that policy makers and other stakeholders are provided with timely information for all measures.