ITEM 3 ■ DRAFT

California Postsecondary Education Commission

California Higher Education Accountability: Goal - Student Success

Measure: Time-to-Degree

December 2006

This report examines time-to-degree performance for students enrolled at the University of California and California State University and discusses campus efforts to improve.

It also compares California campuses with similar institutions nationwide.

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The Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

Draft Commission Report

Background

This report is one in a series examining performance measures adopted by the Commission as part of an accountability framework for higher education in California. All measures correspond to one of four goals: Student Preparation for College, Affordability and Access, Student Success in Progressing through College, and Public Benefits of Postsecondary Education. Measuring time to degree, as gauged by four and five-year graduation rates[1] of students at public universities is a component of determining how well students are progressing through the postsecondary education system. In addition to the measure discussed in this report, student persistence rates, degrees conferred for transfer students, and the impact of full-time and part-time enrollment on degree completion will also contribute to determining how well California is doing with regard to student success in completing educational goals.

Methodology and Data Used for This Report

Two types of data sets were used in the preparation of this report.

For the purpose of comparing California's public universities with institutions on a nationwide basis, the Commission used data available from the

[1] "Graduation Rates" refer to the proportion of entering undergraduates who earned a degree in a specified number of years. In studies reporting graduation rates there are generally three types of rates that are calculated; 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation rates. For the current study, Commission data date back to fall 2000, allowing 4-year and 5-year rate measures to be assessed in this analysis.

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), a national database of information about colleges and universities.[2] The *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* was used to identify comparable campuses nationwide that share the following criteria with the University of California or the California State University campuses: Basic Classification, Undergraduate Programs Offerings, Graduate Program Offerings, Undergraduate Student Profile, Enrollment Profile, and Size and Setting (see Appendix A). All universities used in the comparison are four-year public institutions. A detailed list of the criteria can be found in Appendix A. While IPEDS data are useful for comparing the performance of students who **enroll** as full time students, the database does not include the number of students who **complete** a full course load during the academic year.

The Commission has another source of data that it receives directly from CSU and UC. Based on those data, this report also examines the experience of first-time freshmen between the ages of 17-19, who completed a full-time student schedule for the duration of their first year at UC and CSU campuses.

These data also allow the Commission to evaluate graduation rates for different subsections of the population based on their enrollment patterns during their second and third years. First-time, full-time freshmen were chosen for this analysis because, as a younger population who enrolls on a full-time schedule, these students would be less likely to have family or employment obligations that would interfere with their ability to complete degree requirements on a full-time basis. Naturally there are exceptions to this assumption; some young, full-time students are encumbered by family and work obligations as they progress through school and might need to reduce their course load. This population is also important to the study because it offers insight into the intention of students to attend full-time, and presumably finish in the expected four- to five-year timeframe.

In future assessments of time-to-degree, questions to address include whether or not graduation rates are improving, as well as the fiscal impact to the state when students do not complete a degree. An accountability framework must be flexible and evolve from one year to the next in order to respond to changing issues and concerns. Further, data refining, including synchronization of variables from one system to another, and possibly even among different states, will contribute to a more sophisticated assessment from year to year.

Why This Measure is Important and What it Tells Us

The time it takes a student to obtain a degree is a vital indicator of student success. If students fail to graduate in a timely manner or at all, it may be the result of a number of factors, such as: inadequate student preparation, cost issues that make college increasingly unaffordable or changing educational goals.

Although studies indicate that some level of postsecondary education, whether resulting in a degree or not, is beneficial to students, it can be a costly endeavor for the individual and for the State when educational goals are not met. The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education emphasized the importance of students successfully completing higher education programs, stating "the quality of an institution and that of a system of higher education are determined to a considerable extent by the abilities of those it admits and retains as students." The Master Plan urged campuses and systems to apply "standards rigid enough

[2] The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), managed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), calculates graduation rates by using the first-time, full-time freshman enrollment data for each fall cohort. In addition to collecting data on California public universities from IPEDS, Commission staff conducted a separate analysis from the Commission's unique student database for both UC and CSU.

to guarantee that taxpayers' money is not wasted on individuals who lack capacity or the will to succeed in their studies."

The Higher Education Compact, agreed to by the Governor and the UC and CSU systems in 2004, promotes efficiency in graduating students. Among the requirements of the compact are annual measures of time-to-degree for undergraduates.

It is critically important to examine how various student populations are progressing toward timely graduation so that policy or program measures can be implemented to assist students falling behind in completing their education. In this report, the Commission analyzes the entering freshman class of 2000, not only by enrollment status, but also by ethnicity and gender. Historically, Latino and African American populations have not experienced graduation rates as high as those of Asian and White students. One goal of this report is to highlight campuses that are producing above-average results with regard to the graduation rates of Latino and African American students and to discuss programmatic efforts that may be contributing to success.

What the Data Show

Graduation rates for UC:

- The average four-year graduation rate for students who began their first term with a full-time course load was slightly higher at UC (46%) than at comparative institutions (45%) nationwide.
- The average five-year graduation rate for students who began their first term with a full-time course load was 8% higher at UC (74%) than at comparative institutions (66%) nationwide.
- The average four-year graduation rate for UC students who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first year was 46%; the four-year rate for students who maintain a full-time course load for their first, second, and third years was 65%.
- The average five-year graduation rate for UC students who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first year was 79%; the five-year rate for students who maintain a full-time course load for their first, second, and third years was 89%.
- Five-year graduation rates at UC vary by ethnicity. For students who maintained a full-time course load their first year, the rates were: White – 80%, Asian – 79%, Latino – 72%, Black – 67%.
- There was a five-point gender gap between males and females who graduated from UC in five years (males - 76%, females - 81%); comparable universities nationwide have a six-point gap (males - 67%, females - 73%).

Three Methodologies for Examining Graduation Rates

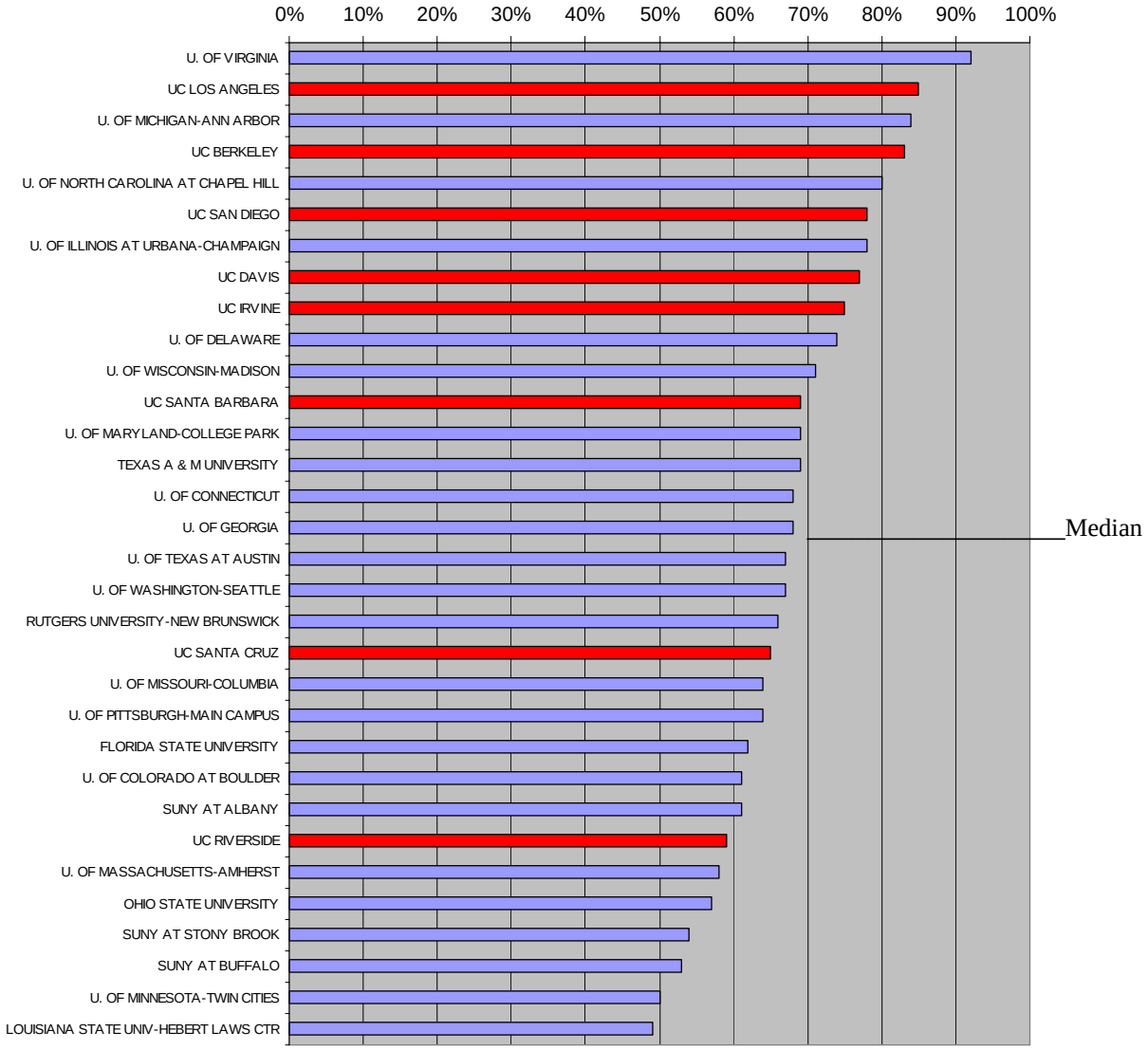
METHOD 1: Nationwide Campus Performance Comparison
Using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data system (IPEDS) data, CPEC examined the graduation rates of California universities in comparison to the rates of other universities across the nation that have similar characteristics with regard to research capabilities, student selectivity, and program offerings. In calculating graduation rates, IPEDS uses a cohort of students who began their first term as full-time freshman.

METHOD 2: Students Completing Full-Time Freshman Courseloads
Using data from the 2000 cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen, CPEC calculated four- and five-year graduation rates using a population of students who attended college on a full-time basis for at least the entirety of their freshman year.

METHOD 3: Students Completing Full-Time Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior Year Courseloads
Using data from the 2000 cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen, CPEC calculated four- and five-year graduation rates using a population of students who attended college on a full-time basis consecutively for at least their entire freshman, sophomore, and junior years.

As Display 1 shows, UC schools (shown in red) are graduating a higher rate of students than similar universities nationwide. Only two campuses, UC Santa Cruz and UC Riverside, are below the median five-year graduation rate of 68%.

DISPLAY 1 IPEDS Five-Year Graduation Rates – UC and Comparative Institutions



Graduation rates for CSU:

- The average four-year graduation rate for students who began their first term with a full-time course load was the same as for comparative institutions nationwide (12%).
- The average five-year graduation rate for students who began their first term with a full-time course load was 5% higher at CSU (33%) than at comparative institutions nationwide (28%).
- The average four-year graduation rate for CSU students who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first year was 16% and the four-year rate for students who maintained a full-time course load for their first, second, and third years was 29%.
- The average five-year graduation rate for CSU students who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first year was 39%; the five-year rate for students who maintained a full-time course load for their first, second, and third years was 61%.
- Five-year graduation rates at CSU vary by ethnicity. For students who maintained a full-time course load their first year, the rates were: White – 47%, Asian – 38%, Latino – 33%, Black – 22%.
- There was a nine-point gender gap between males and females who graduate from CSU in five years (males - 38%, females - 47%); comparable universities nationwide had a ten-point gap (males - 27%, females - 37%).

CSU campuses, shown in red in Display 2 on page 6, are graduating a higher rate of students than similar institutions nationwide. Thirteen of the 21 CSU campuses included in the analysis of the IPEDS data fall at or above the median five-year graduation rate of 30%.

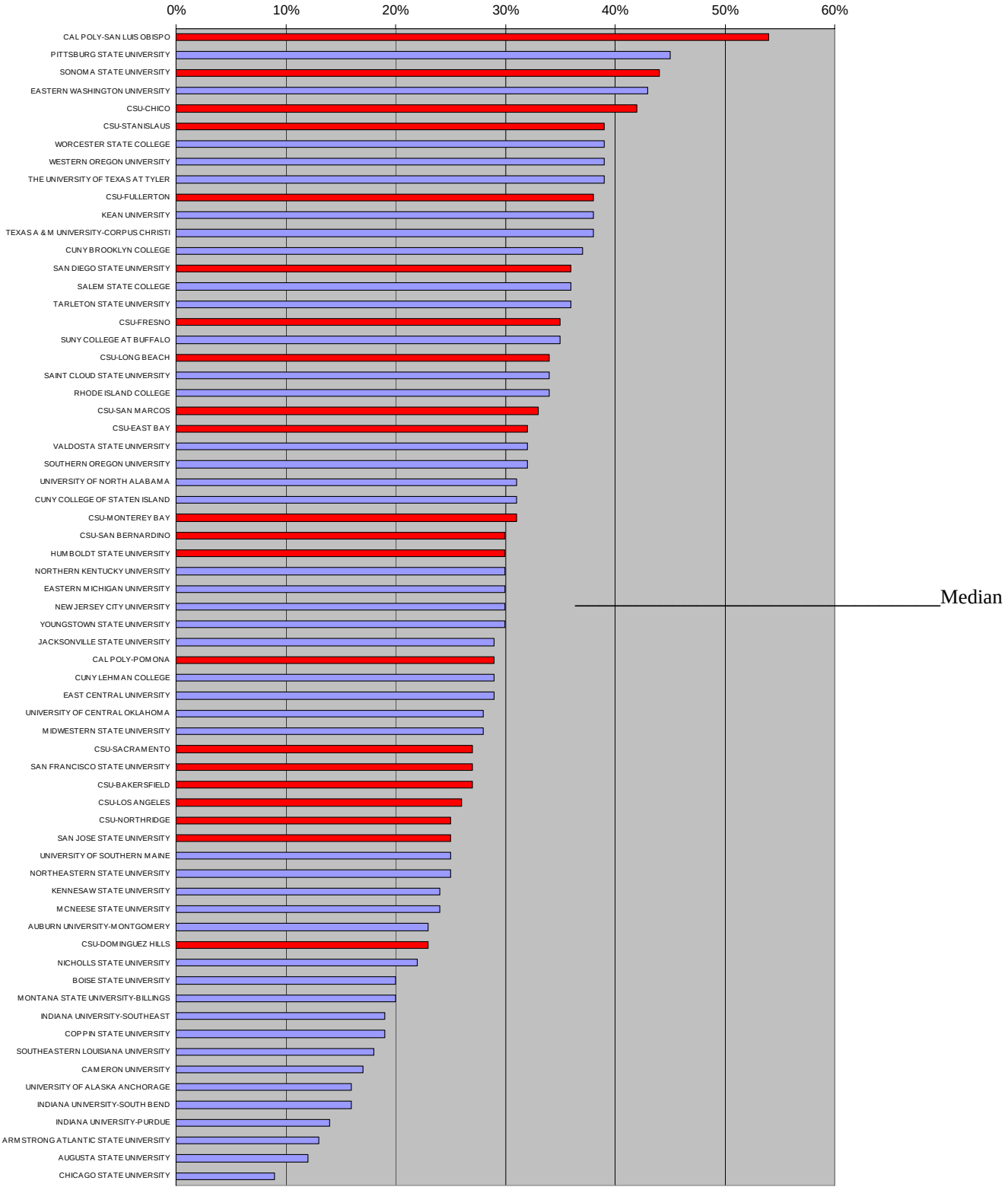
Campus Efforts to Improve Time-to-Degree

Both UC and CSU have campuses that are working to help students graduate in a more timely manner. Some campuses have outreach programs that target assistance to student populations with historically lower persistence and graduation rates.

Implementation of these campus-based programs is a contributing force behind increased graduation and student persistence rates. At UC Santa Barbara, for example, campus administrators attribute improvements in their campus-based Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) with improving access and retention of low-income and educationally disadvantaged students. EOP, which is available on most college campuses, provides admission, academic, and financial assistance to eligible undergraduate students. EOP eligibility is determined by family income, but campus EOP programs work to provide assistance to all students seeking help. UC Santa Barbara now has among the highest graduating rates for Latino and African American students, the two ethnic groups with the lowest UC graduation rates systemwide.

The EOP Summer Transitional Enrichment Program ("Summer Bridge") at UC Santa Barbara was originally conducted solely by EOP counselors. A few years ago, EOP organizers began recruiting faculty and staff outside EOP to assist in the Summer Bridge program. As a result of this change, teaching faculty and support staff from other student service departments, such as Health Education and Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS), are more familiar with the needs of students, better understand the challenges students face, and have developed a sense of ownership for the success of these students. Additionally, opportunities for new students to meet faculty and access student support programs have increased.

DISPLAY 2 IPEDS Five-Year Graduation Rates – CSU and Comparative Institutions



In addition to academic support, EOP also helps students deal with personal challenges that can undermine the ability of students to earn timely degrees. Three common examples of psychological hurdles that many first-time students face are: guilt because they are attending school rather than contributing to the family's income; student perceptions that asking for help with academics equates to failure; and being far from home. Successful campus-based initiatives are comprehensive, helping students overcome degree-earning obstacles, academic and non-academic, that stand in the way of success.

Displays 3 and 4 show the campuses from both public systems that are producing the highest graduation rates for Latino and African American students.

DISPLAY 3	
UC Campuses with Highest Latino 5-Year Graduate Rates	
UC Santa Barbara	76%
UC Los Angeles	75%
UC Riverside	71%
UC Campuses with Highest African American 5-Year Graduate Rates	
UC Los Angeles	71%
UC Santa Barbara	71%
UC Berkeley	70%

DISPLAY 4	
CSU Campuses with Highest Latino 5-Year Graduate Rates	
CSU Stanislaus	44%
CSU Monterey Bay	40%
CSU San Bernardino	37%
CSU Fullerton	33%
CSU Bakersfield	30%
CSU Campuses with Highest African American 5-Year Graduate Rates	
CSU East Bay	24%
CSU Dominguez Hills	23%
CSU San Bernardino	22%
CSU Northridge	20%

Conclusion

Examining time to degree performance is one measure that answers the question "Are students succeeding in getting through college?" Accountability language in the higher education compact, CPEC's accountability framework, and the on-going interest demonstrated by state and national policymakers and educational leaders emphasize the importance of helping students to earn degrees in a timely manner.

California's public universities compare well with their counterparts across the country. However, the graduation rate for some minority student populations needs improvement. Lawmakers and education leaders should encourage campuses to share successful program models and best practices, such as the EOP program cited in this brief, as approaches that assist students to graduate in a reasonable time-frame.

Appendix A Carnegie Foundation Criteria Used to Deteremine UC and CSU Comparable Public Schools

All UC comparative schools meet the following criteria:

Basic Classification

RU/VH: Research Universities (very high research activity)

Undergrad Program Classification

A&S-F/HGC: Arts & sciences focus, high graduate coexistence
A&S+Prof/HGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, high graduate coexistence
Bal/HGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence

Graduate Program Classification

CompDoc/MedVet: Comprehensive doctoral with medical/veterinary
CompDoc/NMedVet: Comprehensive doctoral (no medical/veterinary)

Undergraduate Profile Classification

FT4/S/LTI: Full-time four-year, selective, lower transfer-in
FT4/MS/LTI: Full-time four-year, more selective, lower transfer-in
FT4/MS/HTI: Full-time four-year, more selective, higher transfer-in

Enrollment Profile Classification

HU: High undergraduate
MU: Majority undergraduate

Size and Setting Classification

L4/R: Large four-year, primarily residential
L4/HR: Large four-year, highly residential

All CSU comparative schools meet the following criteria:

Basic Classification

Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
Master's M: Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)

Undergrad Program Classification

A&S+Prof/NGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, no graduate coexistence
A&S+Prof/SGC: Arts & sciences plus professions, some graduate coexistence
Bal/SGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, some graduate coexistence
Bal/HGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence
Prof+A&S/SGC: Professions plus arts & sciences, some graduate coexistence
Prof+A&S/HGC: Professions plus arts & sciences, high graduate coexistence

Graduate Program Classification

Postbac-Comp: Postbaccalaureate comprehensive
Postbac-A&S/Ed: Postbaccalaureate with arts & sciences (education dominant)
S-Doc/Ed: Single doctoral (education)

Undergraduate Profile Classification

MFT4/I: Medium full-time four-year, inclusive
MFT4/S/HTI: Medium full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in
FT4/I: Full-time four-year, inclusive
FT4/S/HTI: Full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in

Enrollment Profile Classification

VHU: Very high undergraduate
HU: High undergraduate

Size and Setting Classification

M4/NR: Medium four-year, primarily nonresidential
L4/NR: Large four-year, primarily nonresidential