

Graduation Rate and Changing Major

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In a study suggested by Bartholomew Grachan, I set fairly rigorous conditions for inclusion in a cohort graduation rate study of major changes:

- 1) Students had to be from a fall cohort long enough ago to allow a nine semester (4.5 year—for computational reasons) graduation rate. Five cohorts were necessary to give sufficient numbers of graduates for analysis (except for one, rare, pattern of major change): Fall 2008, Fall 2009, Fall 2010, Fall 2011 and Fall 2012.
- 2) Students had to be first-time and full-time in that first semester and not bring in more than three credits (from College Now, for example).
- 3) Students had to attend their next three semesters without a break.
- 4) Students could not change major after the third semester. Their major in their third semester had to be the same as it is in their last semester.

After eliminating students from the cohorts who did not fit the above criteria, 4,895 remained. Of those, 1,784 graduated within the nine semesters allowed.

Findings

Table 1 shows graduation rates by pattern of major change. The lowest grad rate belongs to those who began in one major, changed for the second semester and then changed back (A-B-A). With only 29 students in the group, however, the grad rate should not be accepted as accurate.

The next lowest graduation rate, 33.9%, belongs to those who didn't change major (A-A-A). Those who changed major three times (A-B-C) had the highest grad rate, 49.0%.

Those who changed major once, either after the first (A-B-B) or second (A-A-B) semester had a middle-range graduation rate of around 40%.

Major Pattern	Count	9 Semester Grad Rate	Graduates
A-A-A	3,136	33.9%	1,064
A-B-B	808	41.6%	336
A-A-B	779	39.2%	305
A-B-C	143	49.0%	70
A-B-A	29	31.0%	9
All	4,895	36.4%	1,784

Students from Fall first-time, full-time cohorts of 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012.

All these students attended their first three semesters.

No students who changed major after their third semester were included.

Table 1