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First-Year Retention Rate of Students Attending Institutions of Higher Education via a TPSID Program

By Meg Grigal, Clare Papay, and Frank A. Smith

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Education defines the first-year retention rate in higher education as the percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year. Retention rate can be seen as an indication of how happy and supported college students are, as students who return are satisfied both academically and socially. Often, retention rates are used during the college search process to compare colleges (see <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>).

Students with intellectual disability are attending higher education in greater numbers than ever before. However, this group of students is not typically reflected in publicly available retention data. In this Fast Fact, we examine recent retention data on students attending Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs), and make comparisons to retention rates of undergraduate students from a national data source.

As retention has been found to differ between 2-year and 4-year institutions and between residential and non-residential campuses (Tinto, 2006–2007), we make these comparisons with the TPSID data.

METHODS

The National Coordinating Center (NCC) at Think College provides support, coordination, training, and evaluation for TPSID model demonstration project grantees. These TPSID grantees were tasked with creating, expanding, or enhancing high-quality, inclusive postsecondary education programs to support positive outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability (e.g., educational attainment, employment, and community inclusion).

The NCC has collected data on student enrollment, academic and employment experiences, and exit outcomes. Data reported here were collected from program staff of the 27 grantees implementing TPSIDs at 54 institutions of higher education (IHEs) between 2010 and 2015. These 27 grantees were the first cohort of TPSIDs funded by the U.S. Department of Education. A second cohort of TPSIDs was funded from 2015–2020.

Retention was defined as students who returned to their institution of higher education to continue their studies in the TPSID the following year. To compare with national

data on retention rates available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016), we focus on retention of first-year students into their second year.

The majority of students who attended TPSIDs between 2010 and 2015 attended programs that take 2 years to complete. Unlike the students in the NCES data, students enrolled in TPSIDs were not degree-seeking students.

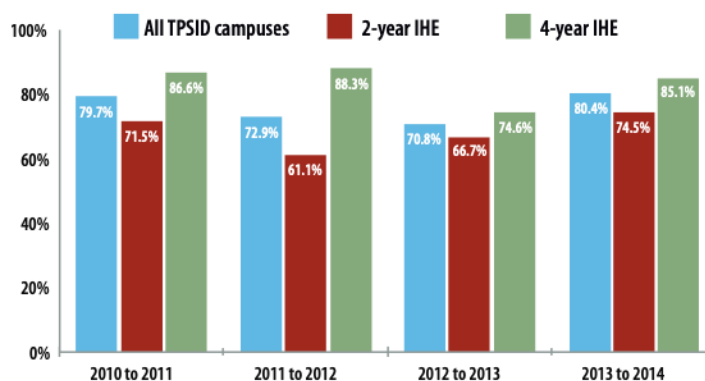
To calculate first-year retention rate for students who attended TPSIDs, we first identified the students who enrolled at a TPSID for a given academic year and, of those, the students who were still enrolled at the school in the following academic year. We then removed those students who entered and completed a TPSID in a single academic year.

Finally, we divided the number of students enrolled in their second year by the number of students who enrolled in the first year for a program that was greater than one year in length. The result of this calculation was the first-year retention rate. Retention rate was calculated for 4 years (Fall 2010–Fall 2011, Fall 2011–Fall 2012, Fall 2012–Fall 2013, and Fall 2013–Fall 2014).

KEY FINDINGS

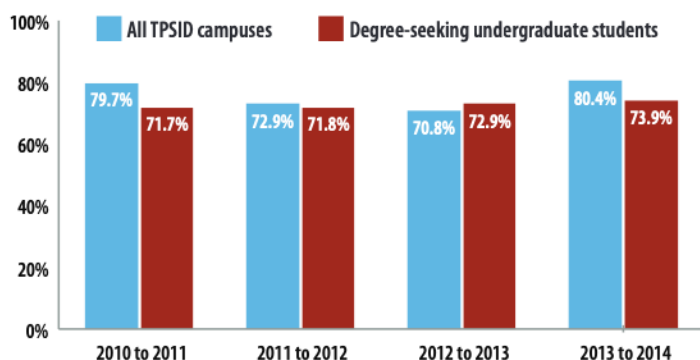
The retention rate (i.e., the percentage of students returning the following year) among first-year students who enrolled at TPSIDs from 2010 to 2014 was between 70% and 80% for each of the 4 years (see Figure 1). Retention rates were higher at 4-year institutions than at 2-year institutions for each of the 4 years.

Figure 1. First-Year Retention Rate of Students Attending Institutions of Higher Education via a TPSID Program



In terms of first-year student retention, TPSIDs compare favorably to all first-time degree-seeking undergraduate students in the U.S. in 3 of the 4 years for which first-year retention was calculated (see Figure 2). However, because students attending TPSIDs are not degree-seeking, a comparison with national data on retention rates of undergraduate students seeking a certificate would be desirable (although not possible with publicly available NCES data).

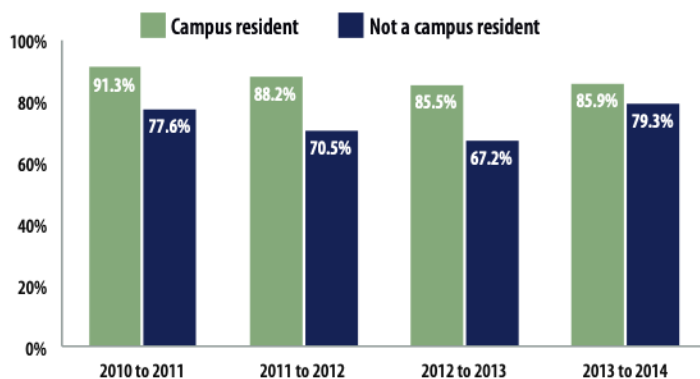
Figure 2. Retention rate of first-year students (TPSID vs. all U.S. first-time degree-seeking undergraduate students)



*Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_326.30.asp

Retention was higher for students who lived in housing provided by the IHE or TPSID in their first year than for those who lived elsewhere (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Retention rate of campus residents in first year vs. students who did not live on campus in their first year



IMPLICATIONS

Institutions of higher education hosting TPSIDs have demonstrated a strong first-year retention rate, averaging 75% across the 5 years in which the Cohort 1 grants operated. The data presented here suggest that patterns of retention for students attending TPSIDs are comparable to national data reflecting the experience of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students.

Retention was higher at 4-year than 2-year institutions, and higher for students who lived in campus housing than for those who lived elsewhere. Comparisons of retention of students with intellectual disability with undergraduate students with other disabilities are not possible with the publicly available NCES data and remain to be made through future research. Future research should also explore comparisons between retention rate of students attending TPSIDs and college students attending other kinds of certificate programs, as these programs may be more parallel in terms of program length and provision of credentials.

Four factors key to student retention include expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and engagement (Tinto, 2012). As TPSID programs evolve, continued attention must be paid to retention rates, as well as to the key factors that impact those rates, to ensure academic persistence and program completion of students with intellectual disability.

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