Toward Convergence:

A Technical Guide for the Postsecondary Metrics Framework

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Executive Summary

The evidence is abundantly clear that a college degree is essential to economic success and social mobility in the 21st century, especially for low-income students and students of color, who historically have been left out of our higher education system.[1] However, many speculate about the value and outcomes of specific programs and institutions—in terms of both supporting students through to graduation and providing them with sufficient economic and noneconomic payoff. The information available today is inadequate and simply leaves the public wondering about answers to key questions about college access, progression, completion, cost, and outcomes.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy has partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop a Metrics Framework (see Table ES1) built on a decade of research and experimentation by the field.[2] Recognizing the pressing need for better data, institutional and state initiatives have implemented a series of voluntary data collections to fill the gaps left by federal data systems in particular. We analyzed the metrics and definitions these voluntary initiatives use, along with data specifications in national and state data collections, to identify points of consensus in the field. The resulting key metrics fall into three major categories:

- **Performance** metrics measuring institutional performance related to student access, progress, completion, cost, and post-college outcomes
- **Efficiency** measures considering how resources impact college completion, driven by increased interest in college costs and affordability
- **Equity** metrics seeking to include all students and accurately represent the higher education experience of populations that are underserved and may be "invisible" in other data collections

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The field needs a core set of comprehensive and comparable metrics to answer critical questions about who attends college, who succeeds in and after college, and how college is financed. Importantly, to advance goals of social mobility and equity, the metrics must provide information specifically on how low-income and other underserved students fare. The metrics selected for the framework aim to measure each element as accurately and comprehensively as possible while balancing field convergence and data availability and feasibility.

We should no longer rely on the fortitude, creativity, and willingness of a select set of institutions and states to produce this information, but rather should incorporate these metrics into federal and state data systems. Doing so will make the data available for all students in *all* institutions, not only those that voluntarily collect and report it. These government data systems can make the results widely available to and usable by the public and policymakers, not to mention institutions themselves, thereby creating a transparent postsecondary system that facilitates effective policy and practice, and informed choices.

1 Carnevale, A., Rose, S., & Cheah, B. (2011). *The college payoff*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from https://cew.georgetown.edu/report/the-college-payoff/; Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). Education pays 2013. Washington, D.C.: The College Board. Retrieved from http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report-022714.pdf

2 Engle, J. (2016, February). *Answering the call: Institutions and states lead the movement for better metrics to measure postsecondary performance and progress*. Washington, D.C.: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from http://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/AnsweringtheCall.pdf

Table ES1: Recommended Metrics and Definitions Along With Availability in Federal Data Sources (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS] and National Student Loan Data System [NSLDS])

	Key Performance Indicator	Key Performance Indicator Definition
PERFORMANCE	Enrollment	Twelve-month headcount that includes all undergraduate students who enroll at any point during the calendar year
	Credit Accumulation	The percentage of students earning sufficient credits toward on-time completion in their first year
	Credit Completion Ratio	The number of credits completed, divided by the number of credits attempted by first-year students
	Gateway Course Completion	The percentage of students completing college-level, introductory math and English courses tracked separately in their first year
	Program of Study Selection	The percentage of students in a cohort who demonstrate a program of study selection by taking nine credits (or three courses) in a meta-major in the first year
	Retention Rate	The percentage of students in a cohort who are either enrolled at their initial institution or transfer to a longer program at the initial or subsequent institution, calculated annually up to 200% of program length
	Persistence Rate	The percentage of students in a cohort remaining enrolled or earning a credential at their initial or subsequent institution, measured annually up to 200% of program length
	Transfer Rate	The percentage of students in a cohort who transfer into longer programs at the initial or subsequent institution(s), up to 200% of program length
	Graduation Rate	The percentage of students in a cohort who earn the credential sought at their initial institution, up to 200% of program length
	Success Rate	The percentage of students in a cohort who either graduate with the credential initially sought at the initial institution or transfer to a longer program at the initial or subsequent institution(s), up to 200% of program length
	Completers	The number of students who complete a credential in a given year
	Net Price	The average cost of attendance for an institution less all grant aid in a given year
	Unmet Need	The average net price for an institution less the average expected family contribution (EFC) in a given year
	Cumulative Debt	The median amount of debt student borrowers incur while attending an institution or program
	Loan Repayment Rate	The percentage of borrowers in a cohort who make at least $1 of progress on their loan principal in a fiscal year, measured at one, three, five, and 10 years into repayment
	Cohort Default Rate	The percentage of borrowers who enter repayment in a fiscal year and default within three fiscal years
	Graduate Education Rate	The number and percentage of bachelor's recipients enrolling in post-baccalaureate or graduate programs within one, five, and 10 (optional) years of completion
	Learning Outcomes	Public display of student learning goals, assessments, and outcomes using the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) Transparency Framework
	Employment Rate	The percentage of former students with any reported earnings at one, five, and 10 years after exit from the institution
	Median Earnings	The median annual earnings of former students one, five, and 10 years after exit from the institution (excludes zeros)
	Earnings Threshold	The percentage of former students earning more than the median high school graduate salary ($25,000 in 2014; includes zeros) at one, five and 10 years after exit from the institution
EFFICIENCY	Expenditures per Student	Education and related expenditures per full-time equivalent (FTE) student based on 12-month enrollment
	Cost for Credits Not Completed	The per-student expenditures for credits attempted but not completed by first-year students
	Cost for Completing Gateway Courses	For all gateway course completers in a given year, the per-student expenditures associated with all developmental and gateway courses attempted before gateway completion, tracking English and math courses separately
	Time to Credential	The average time accumulated from first date of entry to the institution to date of completion for all completers in a given year
	Credits to Credential	The average credits accumulated from the first date of entry to the institution to date of completion for all completers in a given year
	Change in Revenue from Change in Retention	The impact of changes in first-year retention rates from one cohort to another on tuition revenue available to the institution
	Cost of Excess Credits to Credential	The per-student expenditures for excess credits to credential for all completers with excess credits in a given year
	Completions per Student	The number of completions divided by the number of FTE students (based on 12-month enrollment) in a given year expressed as completions per 100 FTE
	Student Share of Cost	The percentage of education and related expenditures covered by net student tuition revenue versus public subsidies in a fiscal year
	Expenditures per Completion	Education and related expenditures divided by the number of completions in a fiscal year
EQUITY	Enrollment Status	First-time, transfer-in, or continuing students
	Attendance Intensity	Full time and part time, determined by the institution based on the number of credit hours taken
	Credential-Seeking Status	Certificate-, associate's-, bachelor's-, or noncredential-seeking students
	Program of Study	Six-digit Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes and reported for seven meta-majors
	Academic Preparation	Institutions classify students as "not college ready" and "college ready" in math and English as defined by institutional standards
	Economic Status	Pell Grant receipt as proxy for low-income or economic status
	Race/ethnicity	Current IPEDS categories: Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African-American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Two or more races, Nonresident alien, and Race/ethnicity unknown
	Age	Collected by date of birth, if available; otherwise reported by three categories: 19 and under, 20–24, 25 and over
	Gender	Male, female, or other
	First-Generation Status	Students whose parents' highest education level is some college but no degree or below (e.g., some college, no degree; vocational or technical training; high school diploma or equivalent; did not complete high school)

Note: These metrics measure undergraduate populations only.

Key: ■ Available with minor modifications needed   ■ Available with moderate modifications needed   ■ Available with major modifications needed   ■ Not available