Big Goals

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education’s new master plan, *Colorado Competes*, is centered on the bold goal of increasing the proportion of the state’s adults with a college degree to 66% by 2025. As part of that plan, each system or institution has established a new performance contract with the commission outlining its responsibilities and contributions in pursuit of that goal.

Metropolitan State University’s performance contract calls for a 1% increase in the number of undergraduate credentials awarded annually (based on a rolling three-year average), and MSU has further committed to increasing the number of credentials awarded to underserved minority students by 2% annually. On the ground, this means finding ways to ensure that more students are retained, reach critical milestones like passing gatekeeper courses and making timely progress in credit accumulation, and graduate within six years after first enrolling.

**Metropolitan State University**

**Performance Contract Indicators**

- Increase undergraduate credentials by 1 percentage point annually
- Annually increase the graduation rate of transfer students
- Increase the number of undergraduate credentials awarded to resident underserved students by 2% per year
- Annually increase the successful completion (C or better) of introductory gtPathways courses in English and Math
- Annually increase the proportion of students who accumulate at least 24 credit hours
- Annually increase retention rates across all student levels
- Annually reduce disparities in graduation rates between resident underserved and resident non-underserved students
- Annually increase the number of resident underserved students who earn postsecondary credentials in STEM disciplines
- Meet annual projections of increased Latino/Hispanic enrollment by 8.25% per year (base year 2007)

**Equity Scorecard Data**

- On-time credit accumulation and completion (5 cohorts)
- Fall to Fall retention and completion (5 cohorts)
- Enrollment and success in gateway math and English courses (1 cohort)
- Admissions pipeline: applicants, accepted, enrolled
- Cohort outcomes: BA earned w/in 4, 5, or 6 years, transferred, still enrolled, left <2.0 GPA, left >2.0 GPA (5 cohorts)
- College-level credits attempted, passed, and failed in the first academic year (5 cohorts)
- Student referred out to community college to receive basic skills math or English
For the most recent cohort for which 6-year graduation rates are available (those starting in 2006), African American students experience average success rates below the average of 25%.

Looking at trends in success rates over time provides context for the most recent data. Where do we see improvement, consistency, or decline?

Figure 2. **Trends in six-year graduation rates (2002-2006 cohorts)**
Retention rates

Figure 3. Fall-to-fall cumulative retention rates—at least part-time continued enrollment (2006 cohort)

Where do the most students get lost? Where do gaps start to emerge by race and ethnicity?
Around 70% of all first-time, full-time students continued to enroll at least part-time one year after first enrolling. But African-American students were retained at a lower rate than other groups throughout the first four years and were almost 20 percentage points below the average by the fourth year.

Retention is an important practice-relevant indicator, because each additional year that students are retained at least part-time, their chance of continuing to the following year grows—and gaps between groups begin to narrow. For example, African American students that were retained through the third year are only slightly less likely than other groups to continue on to a fourth year.

Figure 4. Retention rates from year to year—at least part-time continued enrollment (2002-2006 cohorts)

Metropolitan State University
Why do we see these outcomes and equity gaps?

Looking at patterns of success rates and gaps in outcomes between racial and ethnic groups typically raises more questions than it answers. As practitioners committed to working with students and helping them succeed, we have hunches about why we see low success rates in certain milestones or why certain groups of students do better than others. The Equity Scorecard is a process for testing those hunches and developing a plan of systematic, equity-minded inquiry into patterns of student success.

The following Vital Signs are resources that can help “test our hunches” about students’ outcomes. These data provide answers to some of the common questions we have when we see low overall rates of success or big gaps between certain groups. These data will help refine the areas on which your Evidence Team will focus and develop clear goals for your inquiry.

Common hunches...

Some students aren’t as prepared academically and so enroll in fewer college-level courses during their first year.

Some students wait longer to take critical math and English courses, so it takes them longer to graduate.

Some students are more likely to go part-time, or to transfer to another institution.

Look at Vital Signs on...

- College-level credits attempted, dropped, passed, and failed during the first academic year
- Gatekeeper and remedial course enrollment and success in the first academic year
- Credit accumulation patterns over time