



RESEARCH NOTES

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INCREASE IN THE FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE

James Madison University has a distinguished history of high retention and graduation rates. Within its group of 24 peers, JMU's one-year retention rate ranks in a tie for third at 91 percent. The median one-year retention rate for the peer group is 82 percent. JMU's six-year graduation rate also ranks in a tie for third at 80 percent. The peer group's median six-year graduation rate is 61 percent.

The one-year retention rate and the six-year graduation rate are probably the most frequently used measures of undergraduate success. Generally, these two statistics do not change much from one year to the next. Even the significant growth in JMU undergraduate students, around 50 percent over the past twelve years, has not had a significant impact on the overall rates.

However, there is some very good news between the first-year retention and six-year graduation rates. The percentage of JMU students graduating in four-years has increased for the past six freshman classes.

The four-year graduation rate has increased from 58.3 percent for the fall 1994 freshman cohort to 62.7 percent for the fall 2000 freshman cohort. Inversely, the percentage continuing into their fifth year to complete the undergraduate degree has declined from 21.3 percent to 15.6 percent. Each percentage point represents about 30 students.

Some national data also reveal the same good news about four-year graduation rates, although JMU continues to have higher rates overall. Data from the Center for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) show that the collective four-year graduation rate for 97 highly-selective institutions has increased from 38.8 percent for the fall 1994 freshman class to 43.9 percent for the class of 1999. Again, the fifth-year continuation rate has declined from 31.8 percent to 30.2 percent across the same freshman cohorts.

Table 1 on the next page shows the complete detail of continuation and graduation rates for JMU freshman cohorts from 1992 to 2003. The sum of a cohort's four-year graduation rate and fifth-year continuation rate is historically very close to the cohort's six-year graduation rate. Although the six-year graduation rate for the class of 2000 is likely to dip below 79 percent, the increase in continuation rates for the next three cohorts is likely to return JMU's six-year graduation rate to 80 percent.

Note about the calculations. Retention and graduation measures result from a cohort analysis in which the progress of a class of first-time, full-time freshmen is tracked over time. The rates are calculated by dividing the number who continue to their second year (or graduate within six years) by the original number in the cohort.

Retention and graduation rates are published annually in tables 2-25 and 2-26 of the annual *Statistical Summary*: <http://www.jmu.edu/instrsrch/statsum.shtml>.

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Table 1
 James Madison University
 First-time, Full-time, Degree-seeking Freshmen
 Graduation and Continuation Rates

Cohort Year	Head Count	%Continued		----- Cumulative Graduation Rates and Continuation Rates -----					
		To 2 nd Yr	To 3 rd Yr	%Graduated In 4 Yrs	%Continued To 5 th Yr	%Graduated In 5 Yrs	%Continued To 6 th Yr	%Graduated In 6 Yrs	%Continued To 7 th Yr
1992	2,042	91.7%	86.0%	61.6%	19.5%	78.8%	2.3%	80.3%	0.7%
1993	2,082	91.8%	84.6%	59.6%	19.5%	76.9%	2.1%	78.6%	0.8%
1994	2,290	91.8%	85.7%	58.3%	21.3%	77.6%	2.4%	79.7%	1.0%
1995	2,537	90.2%	84.9%	59.2%	20.6%	77.7%	2.6%	79.8%	1.0%
1996	3,258	90.1%	83.9%	59.3%	19.1%	76.2%	2.4%	78.3%	1.0%
1997	3,059	91.1%	84.4%	59.8%	19.8%	77.5%	2.6%	79.9%	1.0%
1998	2,971	90.4%	84.5%	60.9%	19.4%	78.3%	2.0%	80.3%	1.0%
1999	3,039	90.5%	84.8%	61.7%	18.2%	77.4%	2.7%		
2000	3,223	90.7%	84.5%	62.7%	15.6%				
2001	3,244	91.9%	86.0%						
2002	3,283	92.0%	86.1%						
2003	3,386	91.5%							