

Special Report from the Accrediting Commission

DEAC Graduation Rate Benchmarks Will Remain in Effect

December 15, 2017

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) has announced that it will continue to utilize the graduation and program completion rate benchmarks that were established by the Commission in October 2016. The benchmarks, developed in conjunction with independent statisticians retained by the Commission, have already proven to be of great value to both the Commission and its institutions. The annual report data and analytics supported by the benchmarking process have enabled both DEAC and its members to gain greater insights into enrollment patterns, program performance, and student learning.

As announced last year, the Commission has initiated a multi-year process to improve the quality and usability of data submitted by accredited institutions in the DEAC Institutional Annual Report.¹ This initiative included examining and refining existing definitions, standards, and practices used in the Annual Report in connection with institutional performance metrics. In addition, by moving to a web-based reporting portal, expected to be operational in early 2018, DEAC hopes to further streamline the reporting process for institutions as well as boost data quality and enhance the analytics capabilities of both institutions and DEAC staff. One area of focus for the Commission next year will be on the reporting of exemption and exclusion categories. The Commission expects that greater consistency in the defined scope of those categories, both across institutions and within institutional offerings, will support enhanced institutional assessment by the Commission as well as its ability to work with individual institutions to implement their continuous mandate of self-improvement.

The past year has also seen a number of changes to the composition of DEAC's membership, with new institutions receiving DEAC accreditation, additional institutions initiating applications for accreditation for the first time, and certain other institutions withdrawing from accreditation, engaging in teach-out programs, or otherwise closing their operations. These activities, which DEAC expects to continue at least over the next year, are likely to affect statistical aggregates and comparative results within different program categories. By retaining the current benchmarks through at least the next year, DEAC will provide a valuable consistency in metrics, reporting, and assessments.

DEAC will continue to work with its outside experts to further refine and enhance the methodology it uses to capture and analyze graduation and completion data submitted by institutions in their Annual Reports. Thus far, the Commission has been pleased with how the improvement in the quality and scope of the data collected over the first two years of its strategic enhanced reporting initiative has already enabled greater insight into institutional and program performance. Focus groups of institution representatives that met with our outside

¹ See October 3, 2016 Special Report from the Commission.

experts during the October 2017 Accreditation Workshop offered further valuable insights and institutional perspectives into DEAC’s improvement strategies for 2018 and beyond.

At the heart of DEAC’s mission is the integrity of the accreditation process. By improving institutional data reporting and expanding its analytics capabilities, the Commission strives to continue to provide meaningful assurance to the public of the quality and effectiveness in both degree and non-degree post-secondary educational programs accredited by the DEAC.

DEAC welcomes input from its accredited institutions, members of the public and other organizations or individuals interested in higher education. Please direct any questions or comments to DEAC staff.

DEAC Graduation and Completion Rate Benchmarks

	Average Graduation Rate	Graduation Rate Benchmark
Associate Degree Programs		
<i>Distance Education</i>	47%	32%
<i>Correspondence/Competency-Based</i>	28%	*
Bachelor Degree Programs	58%	43%
Master’s Degree Programs	69%	54%
First Professional Degree Programs	88%	73%
Doctorate Degree Programs	55%	40%

**The Commission does not set a benchmark at 15 points below the average for correspondence/competency based associate degrees. However, it recognizes that different factors could fairly account for an institution reporting a rate below the 28% average. Accordingly, with respect to schools reporting lower rates, the Commission will conduct a secondary analysis of individual course completion rates, measures of student learning, and other information that would reasonably demonstrate institutional effectiveness.*

	Average Completion Rate	Completion Rate Benchmark
Non-degree Programs	80%	60%