

Graduation and Retention Rate Comparison of Fall vs. Spring Start New Freshmen

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Highlights:

New freshmen who start in the fall are retained and graduate at higher rates than their peers who start in the spring.

On average, fall starts are retained to their first year at a rate 12 percentage points higher and graduate in 6 years at a rate 18 percentage points higher than spring starts.

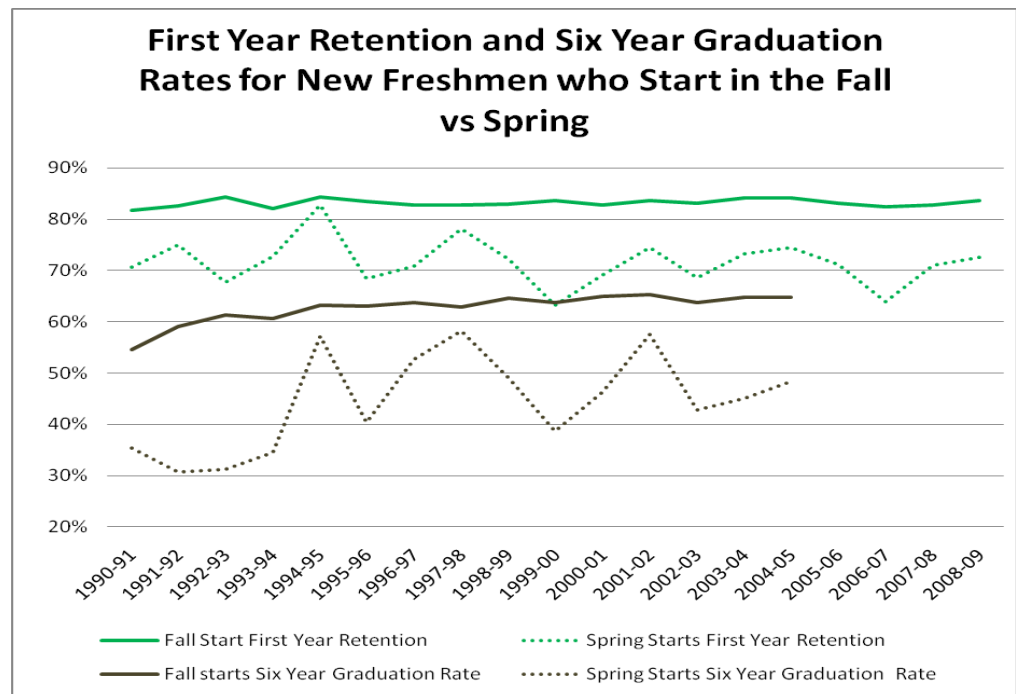
Retention and graduation rates are relatively stable for fall starts and are volatile for spring starts.

Although spring start freshmen only count for about 2% of the new freshmen in an academic year, the population is important to understand because they are demographically different than the fall start cohorts. On average, freshmen who start in the spring are about a year older and have index scores that are about two points lower; however, the percent of the cohort that is a minority is about the same for fall and spring start freshmen.

Overall the fall cohorts of new freshmen have a first-year retention rate of 83% and a six year graduation rate of 63%. Freshmen who start in the spring have lower rates: 71% first-year retention and 45% six year graduation. Figure 1 displays this disparity between the groups.

The graduation and retention rates of freshmen who start in the spring are volatile from year to year. This is apparent in figure 1 by the sharp increases and decreases across time. This volatility is most likely due to the small cohort size.

Chart 1.



Actual cohort size, graduation, and retention rates by fall and spring starts are displayed in table 1.

Table 1.

Academic Year	Cohort Size		First Year Retention		Six Year Graduation Rate	
	Fall Start	Spring Start	Fall Start	Spring Start	Fall Start	Spring Start
1990-91	2,057	82	81.7%	70.7%	54.5%	35.4%
1991-92	2,143	52	82.6%	75.0%	59.0%	30.8%
1992-93	2,194	64	84.4%	67.2%	61.4%	31.3%
1993-94	2,156	55	82.1%	72.7%	60.7%	34.5%
1994-95	2,252	35	84.4%	82.9%	63.2%	57.1%
1995-96	2,530	57	83.5%	68.4%	63.1%	40.4%
1996-97	2,687	55	82.8%	70.9%	63.8%	52.7%
1997-98	2,599	55	82.7%	78.2%	62.9%	58.2%
1998-99	3,005	55	83.0%	70.9%	64.6%	49.1%
1999-00	3,067	57	83.7%	63.2%	63.7%	38.6%
2000-01	3,208	68	82.8%	69.1%	64.9%	46.3%
2001-02	3,631	47	83.7%	74.5%	65.3%	57.4%
2002-03	3,735	70	83.2%	68.6%	63.8%	42.9%
2003-04	3,724	60	84.2%	73.3%	64.8%	45.0%
2004-05	3,996	87	84.1%	74.7%	64.7%	48.3%
2005-06	3,807	73	83.1%	71.2%		
2006-07	3,971	75	82.5%	64.0%		
2007-08	4,288	62	82.8%	71.0%		
2008-09	4,308	80	83.6%	72.5%		

Future research should explore if other variables, such as: residency, first generation status, and Pell grant recipient status offer any insight into why these two groups differ by these standard measures of student success. Future research could also explore why some cohorts of spring starts do relatively well compared to the other spring cohorts.

It is relatively easy to identify the students in a spring start group, making outreach feasible. If successful, outreach and intervention may increase the numbers of students graduating, with accompanying increases in student success rates and tuition and fee revenue. Intervention may also provide the means for developing a better understanding of the reasons behind the lower retention and graduation rates and determining whether adjustments in existing university policies or programs could facilitate greater success with less need for specialized intervention. Due to the importance of understanding students who start in the spring, Institutional Research will report on both fall and spring start transfer students in this year's transfer retention report and plans to include spring cohorts in future freshmen retention books.