

Retention of Undergraduates Entering Cal State Northridge During the 1999-2008 Period

The following pages briefly consider the one-year continuation rates and three- or six-year graduation rates of selected cohorts of undergraduates entering Cal State Northridge in Fall terms during the 1999-2008 period. After a brief overview of major findings, five figures and three tables are summarized in more detail. The figures examine the reasons for the decline in the one-year continuation rate of first time freshmen entering the university during the Fall 2004-08 period, with Table 1 summarizing six-year graduation rates for freshman cohorts entering in the preceding Fall terms. Tables 2 and 3 present comparable continuation and graduation rates for undergraduates entering as transfer students. Tables 4 and 5, at the end of the report, summarize the data on which the figures are based, and thus, are not discussed in the text.

Taken together, the five figures reviewed below suggest that the recent downturn in the one-year continuation rate of CSUN's first time freshmen (from 77% to 71%) is a consequence of several factors. One key factor is the 55% increase in the size of the freshman class. This increase in cohort size is important because of the relative stability of faculty size during the 2004-08 period. As a result, at least some of the entering freshmen inevitably failed to get the attention they needed to thrive. The challenges posed by increasing cohort size were compounded by the increase in the percentage of freshmen needing remediation in mathematics at entry, which resulted in larger numbers of students unable to become proficient within one year of entry. This, in turn, is what led to steady reduction in the one-year continuation rate. Moreover, since freshmen from traditionally underserved groups, whose representation grew during recent years, in keeping with CSU policy, are disproportionately likely to need remediation in mathematics at entry, they have been disproportionately likely to be unable to enroll at CSUN one year after entry.

Like the freshman cohorts entering during the 2004-08 period, those entering during the five preceding years (1999-2003) increased their size by a considerable amount. Since at least six years have elapsed since the students in these earlier cohorts entered the university, their graduation rates can be meaningfully examined. Despite the growth in cohort size, the six-year graduation rates of these students increased fairly steadily, rising from 36% to 43%. The gain in the percentage of likely graduates is more modest¹ -- it has hovered around 50% -- suggesting that the university has been able to reduce students' time to degree, while holding the percentage of eventual graduates steady.

Transfer students typically display higher one-year continuation rates than those entering as first time freshmen. With the exception of the Fall 2005 entry cohort, there has been relatively little change in the number of transfer students entering Cal State Northridge during the Fall terms in the 2004-08 period. Thus, it is not surprising that the one-year continuation rate hovered around 83%-84% during most of this period. It dropped to 80.5% for the Fall 2008 entry cohort, possibly as a result of the new, more stringent, policies just implemented for disqualified students.

Recent three-year graduation rates for transfer students have fluctuated with the size of the entry cohorts. Thus, they have hovered around 54% for the smaller Fall 2003 and Fall 2004 cohorts, but have been closer to 50% for the larger earlier and more recent cohorts. If one ignores the two smaller cohorts, the graduation rate has held fairly steady during the period under study, as has the percentage of transfer students likely to graduate eventually.

Although the steady downturn in the one-year continuation rates of recent freshman cohorts is clearly the greatest challenge facing the university in the area of retention, there are several reasons to think that it has reached its nadir. First, the Fall 2009 freshman cohort is significantly smaller than its predecessor (4,200 heads vs. 4,600 in 2008). Second, thanks to the impact criteria applied for the first time this

¹ Likely graduates are those who have completed their studies during a certain period (i.e., six years for freshmen and three years for transfer students) or are still enrolled at the university.

year, there has been a noticeable increase in the percentage of students who were able to demonstrate proficiency in mathematics at entry (44% for the Fall 2009 cohort vs. 41.5% for the Fall 2008 cohort). Third, the math emporium being created this Fall at the Satellite Student Union may well have a significant impact on the ability of our freshmen to successfully address their remedial needs at entry in this area. Fourth, and finally, the new “stretch” program set to begin in Fall 2010 should assist the many incoming freshmen who need remediation in English. And, since students from traditionally underserved groups are disproportionately likely to need remediation at entry, they are likely to benefit disproportionately from these new initiatives.

Overview of Major Findings

One-Year Continuation Rates for Recent Cohorts of First Time Freshmen

In trying to understand the recent downward trend in the one-year continuation rates for CSUN’s first time freshmen, it is informative to begin by considering recent changes in the size and composition of the freshman cohorts entering during the 2004-08 period. Thus, the figures included in this brief report begin there.

- During the period under consideration, the number of freshmen entering CSUN increased noticeably (see Figure 1), as did the number needing remediation in mathematics at entry and the number stemming from traditionally underserved groups (i.e., American Indian, Pacific Islander, African American, and Latina/o). Cohort size affects continuation – and graduation – rates because, in the face of a relatively stable faculty (its FTE numbers grew by only 11% during the 2004-08 period), students in smaller cohorts, especially those needing remediation at entry, are more likely to get the individualized attention they need than those in larger cohorts.

- The percentage increase in the overall size of the freshman group during the period under consideration is smaller than the growth in the number of incoming students needing remediation in mathematics and in the number stemming from traditionally underserved groups (55% vs. 67% and 85%). The disproportionate increase in the last is in keeping with recent CSU initiatives designed to increase minority access to the university system.

- Along with the increase in the size of the freshman class, a comparison of the cohorts entering during the 2004-08 period reveals a consistent drop in the one-year continuation rate (see Figure 2). Year by year, the continuation rate has been lower among students from traditionally underserved groups than

among all freshmen, with the overall decline during the 2004-08 period somewhat greater among the former (7% vs. 6%).

- The increase in the size of the freshman class has been coupled with an increase in the percentage of students needing remediation in mathematics at entry (see Figure 3). The percentage has risen fairly steadily throughout the period under consideration, with the percentage needing remediation generally 20% higher than for the CSU as a whole (54% - 58% vs. 36% - 38% for regularly admitted students).

- Although the percentage of CSUN freshmen needing remediation in English at entry has remained fairly steady during the period under consideration, it is also disproportionately higher than for the CSU as a whole (60% - 63% vs. 45% - 47%). Becoming proficient in mathematics generally represents a greater challenge to CSUN's incoming students, however, than becoming proficient in English, which is why the current report focuses on math.

- The increase in the size of freshman cohorts entering during the 2004-08 period has been coupled with growth in the percentage of students from traditionally underserved groups among all students in a cohort and among those needing remediation in mathematics at entry (see Figure 4). Moreover, a comparison of Figures 3 and 4 indicates that the percentage of traditionally underserved students needing such remediation has risen more sharply during the period under consideration than has been the case for all freshmen (a gain of 9% vs. a gain of 4%). Because of these students' disproportionate need for remediation at entry, efforts to implement CSU policies design to increase minority representation may result in a lower one-year continuation rate.

- Throughout the period under consideration, the percentage of students from traditionally underserved groups is consistently lower than it was initially among those still enrolled one year after entry (see Figure 5). Put somewhat differently, the percentage of students from traditionally underserved groups is disproportionately high among the freshmen no longer enrolled one year after entry.

Six-Year Graduation Rates for Recent Cohorts of First Time Freshmen (see Table 1)

- All freshman cohorts first enrolling at CSUN during the 1999-2003 period began their college careers at least six years ago. During this period, the size of the cohort grew fairly steadily, with a 38% increase in its size between the beginning and end of the period.

- Despite this growth, the six-year graduation rate of the freshman cohorts under consideration has grown fairly steadily throughout the period, with the rate rising 7% overall.

- The percentage of likely graduates has risen modestly,² if at all, during the period under consideration.

- These findings suggest that time to degree has been reduced among recent freshman cohorts, thereby increasing the six-year graduation rate, while leaving the percentage of eventual graduates largely unchanged.

² Likely graduates are those who have either graduated within six years of entry or who are still enrolled at the university at the beginning of their thirteenth semester since entry.

One-Year Continuation Rates for Recent Cohorts of Transfer Students (see Table 2)

- Although the number of transfer students entering CSUN between Fall 2004 and Fall 2005 increased by 44%, it remained largely unchanged during the following four Fall terms.
- Among transfer students entering during the 2004-07 period, the one-year continuation increased modestly.
- The one-year continuation has dropped fairly sharply for the most recent transfer cohort (from 84% to 80.5%). This decline may reflect a recent policy change that requires all disqualified students to sit out at least one term prior to continuing their studies. In the past, students were given a grace semester to improve their grades before being prevented from enrolling.

Six-Year Graduation Rates for Recent Cohorts of Transfer Students (see Table 3)

- The size of the transfer cohorts entering CSUN during the 2002-06 period has fluctuated, with significantly smaller numbers entering during the 2003-04 period.
- The three year graduation rate has shifted in keeping with the changes in cohort size. Thus, the rate is higher for the two smaller entry cohorts than for the larger earlier and more recent ones, at least in part because a faculty, whose size has been relatively stable, is better able to deal with the needs of smaller cohorts.
- A similar pattern is evident among the likely graduates.³ The percentage of these is higher for cohorts entering in Fall 2003 or Fall 2004 than it is for the larger cohorts entering earlier or later.
- If one excludes the two smaller cohorts from consideration, the three-year graduation rate is somewhat higher for the Fall 2006 cohort than for the Fall 2002 cohort, even though the most recent cohort is considerably larger than the earliest one.

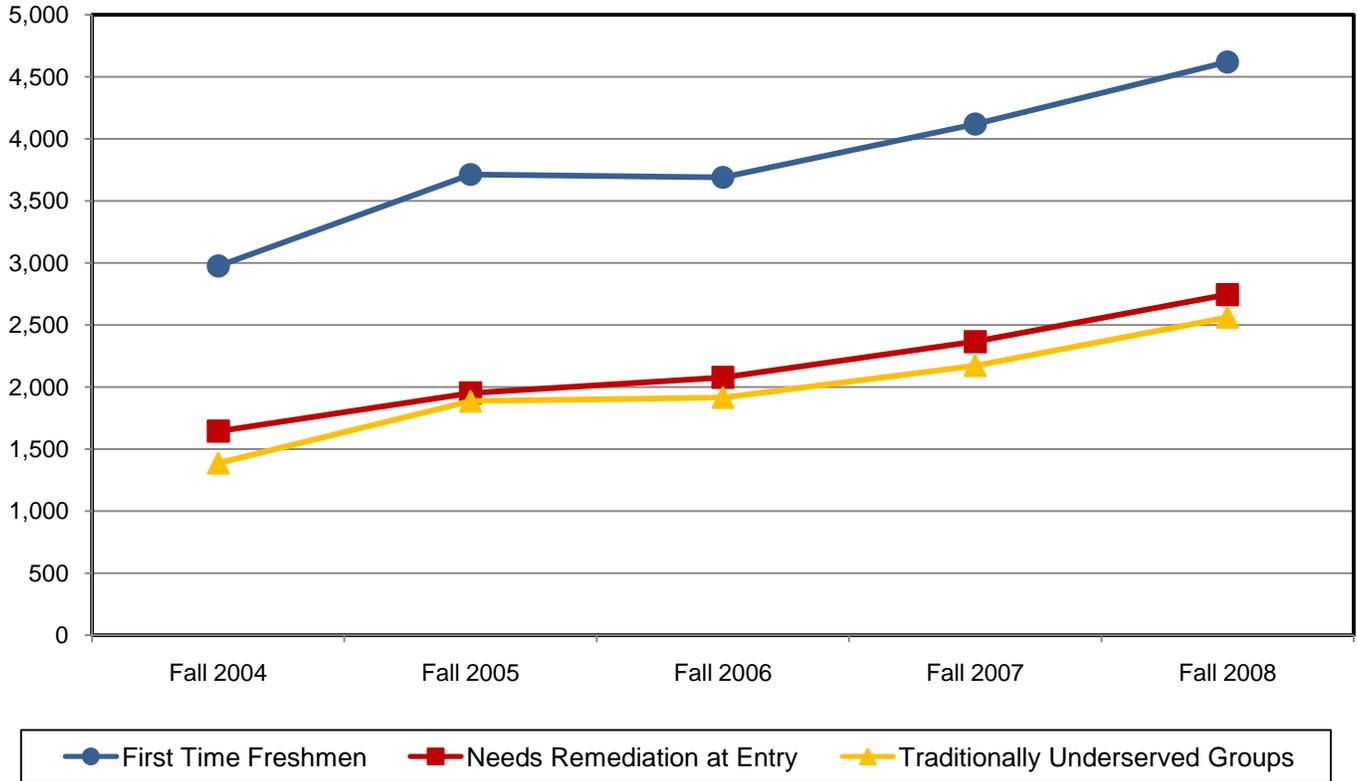
In addition to the information on continuation and graduation rates summarized in this brief report, the retention data posted on the Institutional Research Web site may be of interest. The displays shown there combine campus data with additional information from the National Student Clearinghouse. As a result, the graphs and data summaries show the percentages of students persisting both here and elsewhere.⁴

October 25, 2009

³ Among transfer students, likely graduates are those who have either graduated within three years of entry or who are still enrolled at the university at the beginning of their seventh semester since entry.

⁴ To examine the displays on the Web, click on: <http://www.csun.edu/~instrsch/index.html>. Once the IR Web site appears, click on "CSUN by the Numbers" in the lower left of the screen and then click on "Retention Rates" in the upper left of the screen. This will take you to a screen that allows you to choose between continuation and graduation rates.

Figure 1. As the Number of First Time Freshmen Entering CSUN Has Grown, So Have the Number and Percentage of Students Needing Remediation in Mathematics at Entry and Who Stem From Traditionally Underserved Groups



Percentage Increase During the 2004-08 Period in the

Size of the First Time Freshman Cohort	55.3%
Students Needing Remediation in Mathematics at Entry	67.0%
Students From Traditionally Underserved Groups *	84.7%

* The "Traditionally Under-Served" grouping includes students stemming from African American, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Latina/o backgrounds.

Figure 2. As the Number of First Time Freshmen Entering CSUN Has Grown, the One Year Continuation Rate Has Declined, With the Drop-Off Somewhat Greater Among the Traditionally Underserved

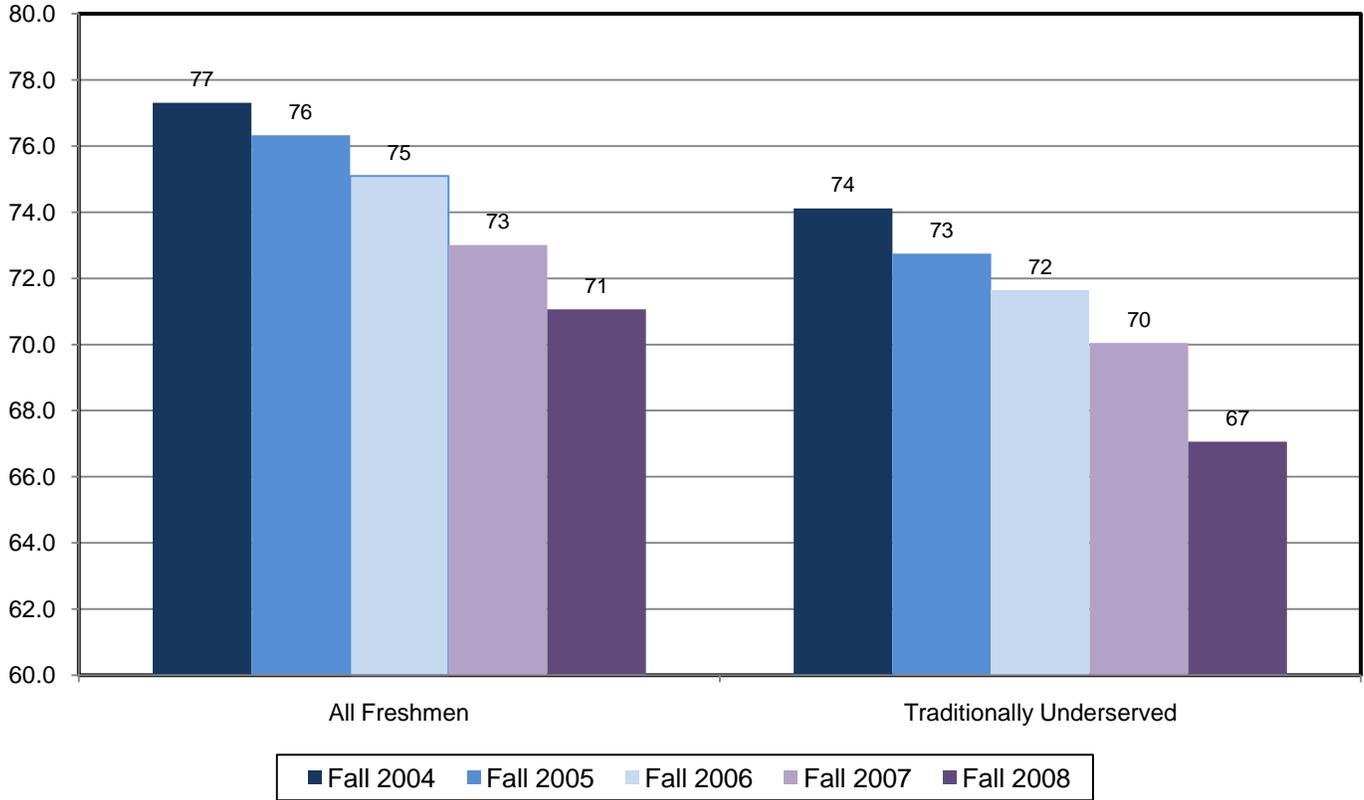


Figure 3. As the Number of First Time Freshmen Entering CSUN Has Grown, So Has the Percentage Needing Remediation in Mathematics at Entry

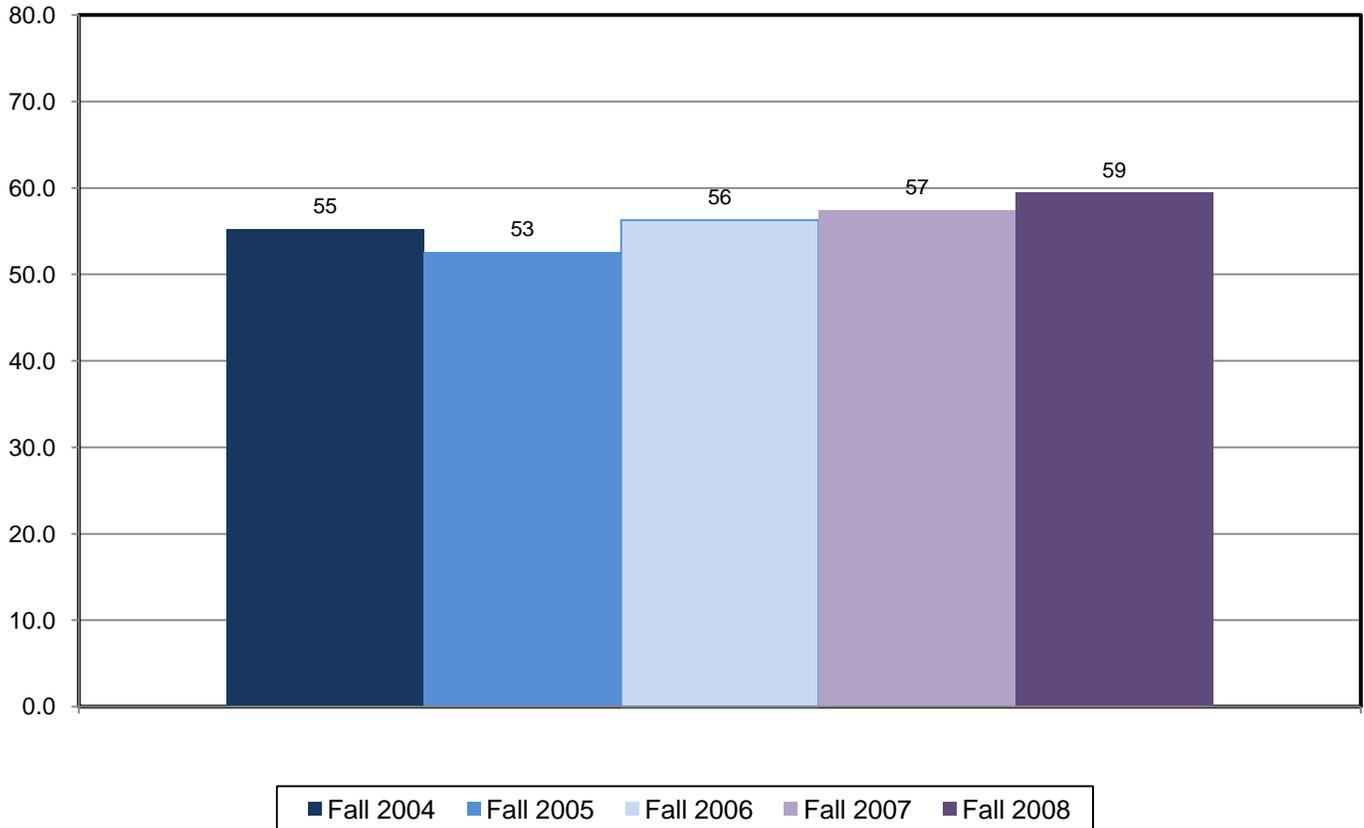


Figure 4. As the Number of First Time Freshmen Entering CSUN Has Grown, the Percentage of Traditionally Underserved Students Has Increased, As Has Their Representation Among Students Needing Remediation in Mathematics at Entry

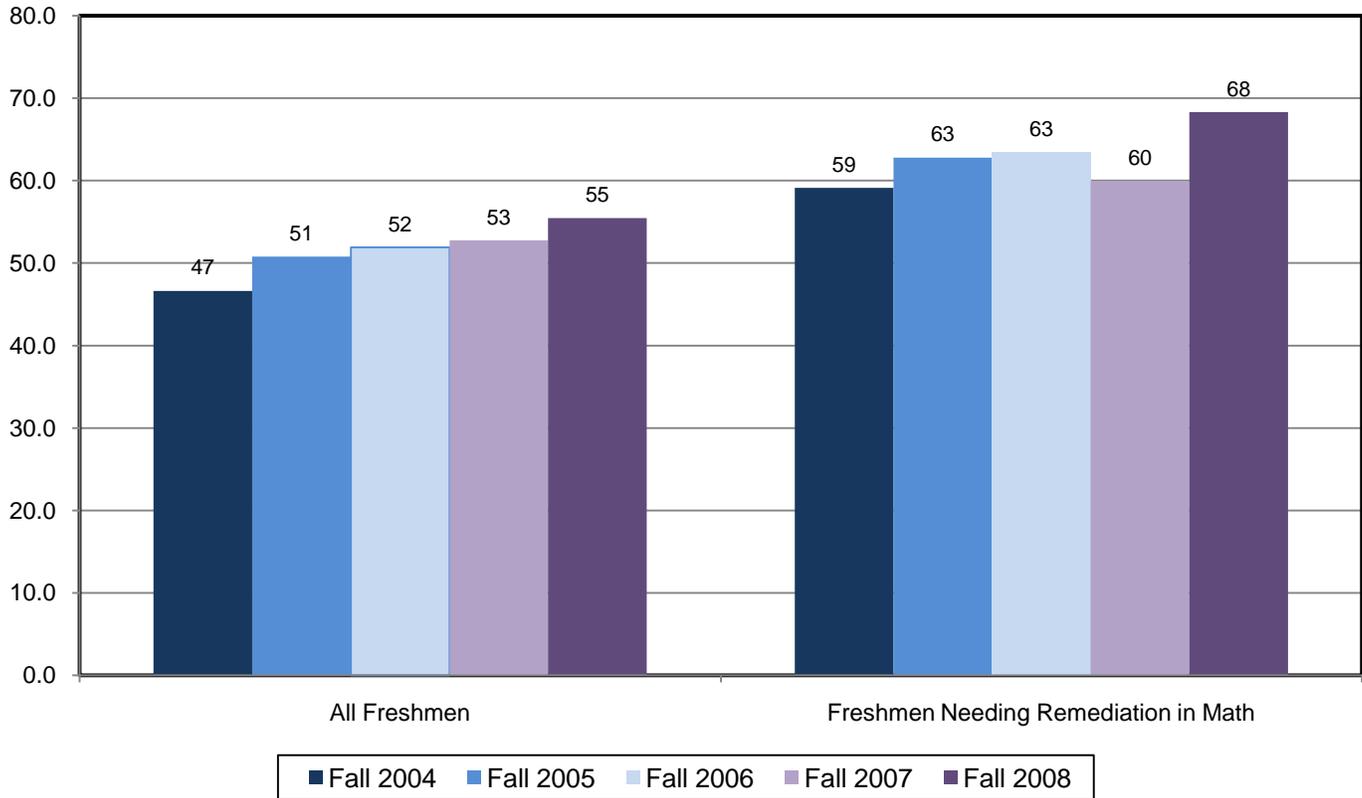


Figure 5. Among the First Time Freshmen Entering During the 2004-08 Period, the Percentage of Traditionally Underserved Students Is Lower Among Those Enrolled One Year Later Than It Was at Entry, But Is Higher Than Initially Among Those No Longer Enrolled

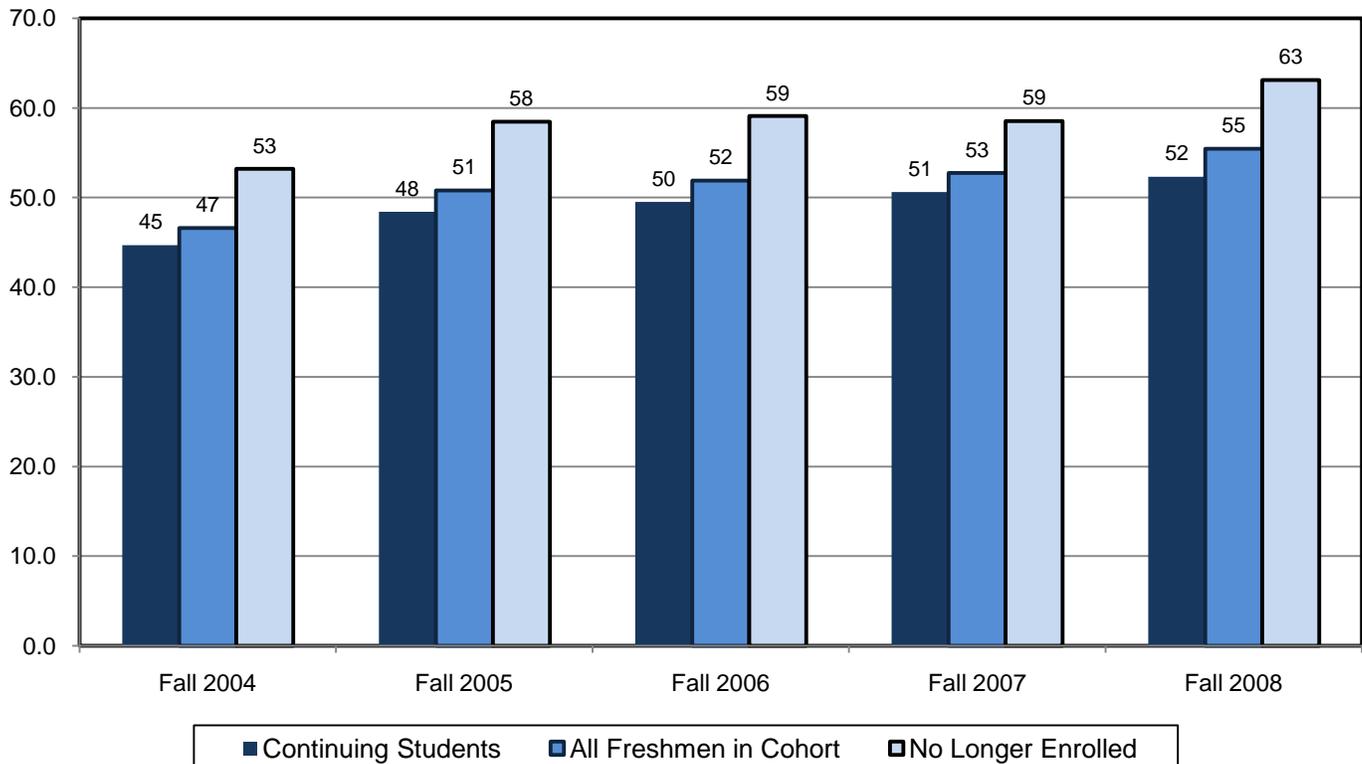


Table 1. Six-Year Graduation Rates of Students Entering Cal State Northridge as First Time Freshmen by Fall Entry Term

Entry Term	Cohort Size	Graduation Rate	Likely Graduates *	<u>At beginning of thirteenth term since entry:</u>		
				Graduated	Still Enrolled	No Longer Enrolled
Fall 2003	3,595	42.9%	51.7%	1,544	316	1,735
Fall 2002	3,661	39.2%	50.3%	1,434	406	1,821
Fall 2001	3,270	39.1%	50.9%	1,280	385	1,605
Fall 2000	2,821	38.9%	51.3%	1,097	350	1,374
Fall 1999	2,602	36.0%	48.7%	936	331	1,335

* The "Likely Graduates" category includes all students who, at three/six years after CSUN entry, have graduated or are still enrolled at the university.

Table 2. One-Year Continuation Rates for Transfer Students Enrolling at Cal State Northridge by Fall Entry Term

Entry Term	Cohort Size	Continuation Rate	At beginning of third term since entry:	
			Enrolled at CSUN	No Longer Enrolled
Fall 2008	3,642	80.5	2,932	710
Fall 2007	3,975	84.1	3,343	632
Fall 2006	3,808	84.1	3,202	606
Fall 2005	3,755	83.4	3,131	624
Fall 2004	2,610	82.8	2,160	450

Table 3. Three-Year Graduation Rates of Students Entering Cal State Northridge as Transfer Students by Fall Entry Term

Entry Term	Cohort Size	Graduation Rate	Likely Graduates *	At beginning of seventh term since entry:		
				Graduated	Still Enrolled	No Longer Enrolled
Transfer Students (three-year graduation rates)						
Fall 2006	3,808	51.1%	69.4%	1,947	695	1,166
Fall 2005	3,755	51.2%	71.6%	1,922	768	1,065
Fall 2004	2,610	55.5%	72.8%	1,449	452	709
Fall 2003	2,713	53.7%	72.5%	1,457	511	745
Fall 2002	3,115	49.8%	68.9%	1,551	596	968

* The "Likely Graduates" category includes all students who, at three/six years after CSUN entry, have graduated or are still enrolled at the university.

Table 4. Number and Percentage of First Time Freshmen and Traditionally Underserved Students Needing Remediation in Mathematics at Entry by Fall Entry Term

	Percent Needing Remediation	Cohort Size	Number Needing Remediation
All First Time Freshmen			
Fall 2008	59.4	4,620	2,745
Fall 2007	57.4	4,119	2,366
Fall 2006	56.3	3,690	2,077
Fall 2005	52.6	3,713	1,952
Fall 2004	55.3	2,975	1,644
Traditionally Underserved Students *			
Remediation Rate			
Fall 2008	73.2	2,562	1,875
Fall 2007	65.3	2,173	1,418
Fall 2006	68.8	1,915	1,318
Fall 2005	65.0	1,886	1,226
Fall 2004	70.1	1,387	972
Percentage of Total			
Fall 2008	--	55.5	68.3
Fall 2007	--	52.8	59.9
Fall 2006	--	51.9	63.5
Fall 2005	--	50.8	62.8
Fall 2004	--	46.6	59.1

* The "Traditionally Under-Served" grouping includes students stemming from African American, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Latina/o backgrounds.

Table 5. One-Year Continuation Rates for First Time Freshmen and Traditionally Underserved Students Enrolling at Cal State Northridge by Fall Entry Term

Entry Term	Cohort Size	Continuation Rate	At beginning of third term since entry:	
			Enrolled at CSUN	No Longer Enrolled
All First Time Freshmen				
Fall 2008	4,620	71.1	3,283	1,337
Fall 2007	4,119	73.0	3,007	1,112
Fall 2006	3,690	75.1	2,771	919
Fall 2005	3,713	76.3	2,834	879
Fall 2004	2,975	77.3	2,300	675
Traditionally Underserved Students *				
<i>Continuation Rates</i>				
Fall 2008	2,562	67.1	1,718	844
Fall 2007	2,173	70.0	1,522	651
Fall 2006	1,915	71.6	1,372	543
Fall 2005	1,886	72.7	1,372	514
Fall 2004	1,387	74.1	1,028	359
<i>Percentage of Total</i>				
Fall 2008	55.5	--	52.3	63.1
Fall 2007	52.8	--	50.6	58.5
Fall 2006	51.9	--	49.5	59.1
Fall 2005	50.8	--	48.4	58.5
Fall 2004	46.6	--	44.7	53.2

* The "Traditionally Under-Served" grouping includes students stemming from African American, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Latina/o backgrounds.