

# Freshman Graduation Rates: Elapsed versus Enrolled Time

FACT SHEET

**Berkeley**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

## BACKGROUND

There has been an increased focus on measuring and improving the normative graduation rate for undergraduates at UC Berkeley. In response to inquiries from the UC Regents, the UC Office of the President continues to monitor undergraduate outcomes for each campus, while encouraging institutional research staff and campus leadership to engage in local research that might inform improvement efforts.

Although a number of metrics can be used to track student success and through-put, the normative graduation rate of 4 years from entry (for freshmen) has been the primary focus at the state, system, and campus levels. However, the graduation rate metric does not stop the clock, so to speak, for students who take time off from being enrolled at UC Berkeley. Thus, to get a better sense of how much “seat time” at UC Berkeley students are occupying, it is necessary to measure enrolled time.

Focusing on the 2008 and 2009 Fall entering freshman cohorts, multiple analyses have been conducted at UC Berkeley to better understand the correlates of various graduation rate timeframes (see OPA Website: [Analyses and Reports](#)).

## THE CURRENT ANALYSIS

The current analysis compared graduation rates (an elapsed time metric) to enrolled time at UC Berkeley, so as to determine the prevalence of stopping-out, or taking time off prior to completing an undergraduate degree. This analysis particularly focused on students who completed their degrees after the normative graduation rate timeframe.

The metric used to determine enrolled time at UC Berkeley counts any regular semester (i.e., Spring or Fall) for which a given student was enrolled during (1) the time of the official census and/or (2) the end of the term. If students participated in UC Education Abroad during a Fall or Spring term, those semesters abroad were also counted as “enrolled time” at UC Berkeley. Finally, if a student withdrew prior to the official census of a given semester, that semester was not counted. Cal

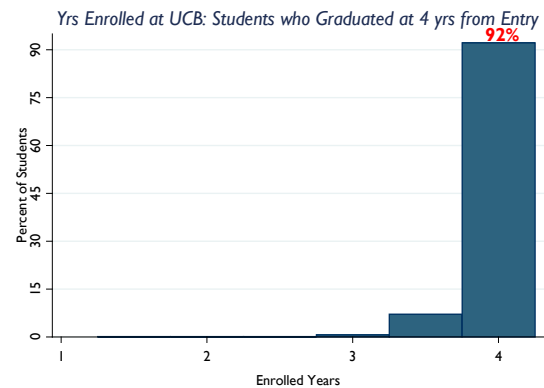
Answers was the data source for this analysis of the 2008 & 2009 Fall freshman cohorts (N = 8,618).

## GRADUATION RATES

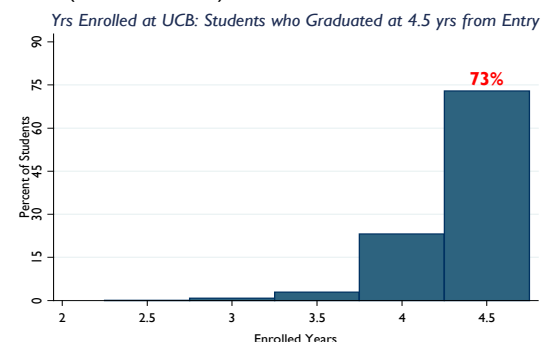
Seventy-two percent of students (n = 6,241) from the cohorts examined graduated *within* 4 years of entry, with 5,474 graduating in exactly 4 years from entry. An additional 10% (n = 820) graduated in exactly 4.5 years after entry, and another 7% (n = 565) in exactly 5 years after entry. Much smaller proportions graduated in exactly 5.5 years (1%, n = 109), or in exactly 6 years (1%, n = 113).

## ENROLLED TIME AT UC BERKELEY

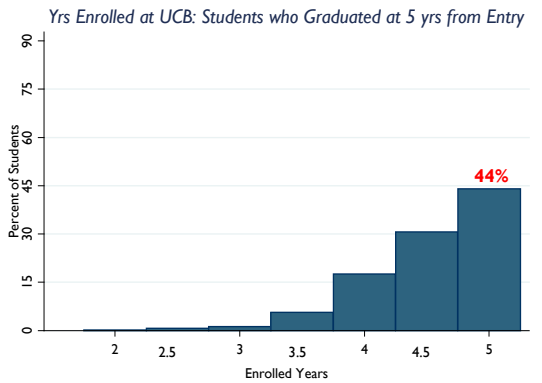
For students who graduated in exactly 4 years after entry (n = 5,474), 92% of them (n = 5,044) were actually enrolled in 4 years (8 regular academic semesters, excluding summers) at UC Berkeley. Only 8% (n = 430) were not enrolled for every semester during the 4-year period.



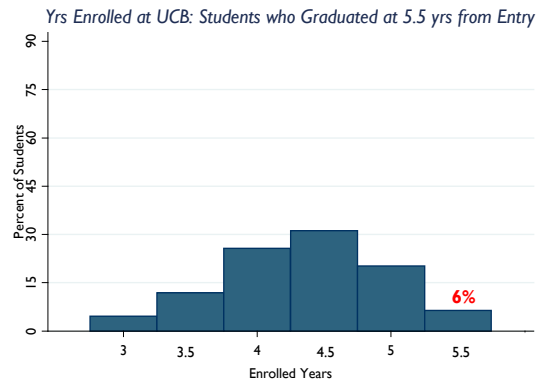
However, of the 820 students who graduated in 4.5 years after entry, 27% stopped-out for at least one semester (n = 222), with the remaining 73% (n = 598) being enrolled at UC Berkeley for 4.5 years (9 semesters).



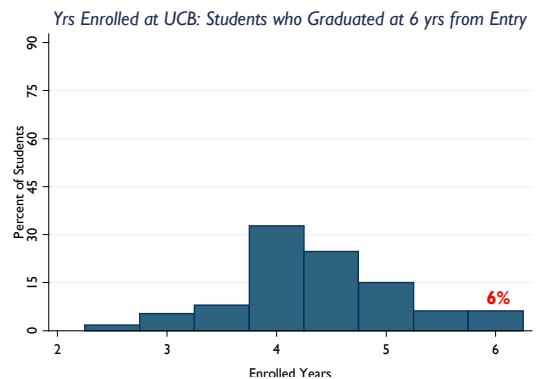
There is an even lower correspondence between elapsed time and enrolled “seat” time for later graduation rate periods. For example, only 44% (n = 249) of students who graduated in exactly 5 elapsed years were actually enrolled for all 5 years (or 10 semesters). Conversely, 56% (n = 316) were enrolled at UC Berkeley for fewer than 5 years.



As shown below, of those students who graduated in 5.5 years, only 6% (n = 7) were enrolled at UC Berkeley for a total of 5.5 years (11 semesters); 94% (n = 102) were therefore enrolled for fewer than 5.5 years. Indeed, the mode for enrolled years for this group was 4.5 (31%, n = 34), followed by 4 enrolled years (26%, n = 28).



Finally, only 6% (n = 7) of the 113 students who graduated in exactly 6 years elapsed time from entry were enrolled at UC Berkeley for a total of 6 years.



Further, 33% (n = 37) of students who graduated at exactly 6 years from entry were enrolled at UC Berkeley for only 4 years. An additional 15% (n = 17) were actually enrolled for less than 4 years.

### SUMMARY

Importantly, graduation rate metrics on their own do not provide complete information about how many semesters students were actually enrolled in. The current analysis therefore compared graduation rate timeframes with enrolled time at UC Berkeley.

Results indicated that stopping-out is more common for students who graduate at least one year after the normative graduation timeframe than it is for students who graduated sooner. Indeed, 92% of students who graduated 4 years from entry were enrolled at UC Berkeley for every semester during that timeframe. Similarly, most students who graduated in exactly 4.5 years (73%) were enrolled in all of the 9 semesters in that time. Conversely, only 44% of students who graduated in exactly 5 years from entry were actually enrolled for 5 years. Further, the greater the graduation rate timeframe, the higher the likelihood of students stopping-out.

Given that most students who graduated after 4.5 elapsed years did not actually occupy “seat time” for each semester that passed after they entered, it is presumably not the case that they displaced other students in the classroom during their time off. However, this possibility of displacement had been raised as a concern in this time of limited resources. This topic can benefit from additional analysis about why students stop-out and where they go during that time.

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