



EAB

Student Success Collaborative™

Identifying Opportunities for Action Using the Institution Reports

Toolkit



Summary

Overview:

This toolkit is designed to help members understand how to use the Institution Reports in order to make decisions and changes that positively impact student success. It provides resources and tools that help users

- Decide where to start looking for opportunities
- Generate high-impact insights through responsible interpretation
- Understand potential actions and next steps based on data analysis

Types of tools provided:

Instructions, report-specific resource guides, worksheets

Toolkit contents and intended audience:

This toolkit is intended for any user with access to the Institution Reports section of the SSC platform. Exact users will depend on institution-specific permissions settings, but often include central academic administrators, deans, department chairs, and advising directors.

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Before You Begin...

Guidelines for Responsible Analytics Interpretation

Data analysis can be a powerful tool for improving decision-making and achieving better student outcomes on campus. However, it's not easy, and to make good decisions you need to interpret the analytics in the SSC platform correctly.

If you are new to data analysis and interpretation, start by reviewing the five basic guidelines below. They will help you avoid some of the most common pitfalls that people make and put you on the path toward high-impact decisions and actions.

1. Mind your n-values

N-values (or the sample size of an analysis) are crucial to understanding whether your observation is significant and reliable. Results based on small numbers of students shouldn't be ignored, but signal that you must proceed with caution. In most cases, trends that you spot should be considered "signals." You may need to investigate further by corroborating your insight with other data or with anecdotal evidence.

2. Avoid relying on a single metric

By itself, you might not know what a number really means. It could be misleading or lack context. Finding that 70% of students retained in a particular major is much more meaningful if you know that the university-wide retention rate is 85%. When you think you spot a pattern or an interesting statistic, try to put it in context by looking at related metrics.

3. Be careful with averages

Averages can be extremely helpful, but cannot tell the entire story of the data. Since averages describe where the center of the data is located, they often obscure interesting variations and exceptions. Averages can also be skewed by outlying data points or exceptional subpopulations. If Warren Buffett graduated from your school, your "average" salary for graduates could be a million dollars! Drilling down by major or student group can help you figure out if subpopulations are skewing the average or driving a change over time. Additionally, understanding variations among subpopulations can help you more efficiently allocate resources or make other changes.

4. Don't confuse correlation for causation

Confusing correlation for causation is a tempting data pitfall. A classic example is major choice. If you find that math majors graduate at higher rates than psychology majors, it doesn't necessarily mean that all students should be math majors. That statistic likely reflects an underlying difference in the student populations: only highly-prepared students tend to choose a major in mathematics. When you identify a correlation, remember to think through whether there is an underlying factor (technically, a "confounding variable") that might be driving the difference.

5. Leverage your experiences for context

It's important to keep the big picture in mind, and to know that data is only one part of that picture. The best data analysis is paired with compelling supporting examples from your experiences. Decisions should be *informed* by your institutional data, not *driven* by it!

Tool #1: Where to Look First

Top Ten Analyses Where Members Most Often Find Opportunities for Action

▶ Tool Overview

With five reports, various dropdowns, and the ability to slice data by major, the Institution Reports have so many possible analyses that figuring out where to start can be a challenge.

Some members look to their own experiences and use the institution reports for hypothesis testing. They collect ideas for student success issues or opportunities and then use the Institution Reports data to validate what people have observed.

For those looking for best practices, the following ten analyses represent the collective experience of the SSC Consulting team, and where they have seen members most often focus their energy and find success. If you're looking to narrow your search to areas with proven potential, then start with these.

REPORT | **Grad Rate by Student Attribute (p. 7)**

1

First and Second Year GPA Indicators for Early Intervention

Students that earn below 2.0 GPAs in their first few years are typically identified through probation processes. However, there are often GPA bands just above 2.0 that also signal low likelihood of graduation. Members frequently look for these "overlooked" student groups for early-career proactive intervention.

How to Look for this Trend:

- Navigate to the Grad Rate by Student Attribute report and examine the graphs for Grad Rate by "1st Term GPA," "1st Year GPA," and "2nd Year GPA". These can be examined for the institution as a whole, or for each program. Look for GPA bands above 2.0 where grad rates are low.

2

Minimum Credit Thresholds for Success Policies and Interventions

"15 to Finish" has become a common mantra at many institutions. When most institutions examine their SSC data, they find that students who attempt and earn a minimum number of credits in the first year have higher overall graduation rates than their peers who do not meet those minimum thresholds. Members then design policies, advice, and interventions around these patterns of success.

How to Look for this Trend:

- Navigate to the Grad Rate by Student Attribute report and examine the graphs for Grad Rate by "1st Term Attempted Credits at Institution," "1st Term Earned Credits at Institution," "1st Year Attempted Credits at Institution," and "1st Year Earned Credits at Institution." Look for credit thresholds above which students generally graduate at a higher rate.

3

High Flyer Identification for Proactive Engagement and Relationship-Building

Many institutions find that they have programs where students with high 1st and 2nd year GPAs are graduating at rates lower than they should, suggesting that successful students may be transferring away from the university or leaving due to non-academic issues. The Institution Reports can reveal groups where this might be happening for further investigation or proactive engagement.



How to Look for this Trend:

- Institution-wide: navigate to the Grad Rate by Student Attribute report for students across all programs. Select the "1st year GPA" and "2nd Year GPA" dropdowns and examine the grad rate pattern for high-performing students.
- For each program: Select a specific program then complete the steps above. Look for high-performing GPA buckets where the program grad rate is below the institution-wide rate.

4

Pre-Enrollment Indicators of Success for Subpopulation Support

Members sometimes find unusual indicators of risk in the graduation patterns of their students based on various pre-enrollment data points (e.g., HS GPA, gender). Identification of specific subpopulations that underperform is the first step toward early intervention and tailored support.



How to Look for this Trend:

- Navigate to the Grad Rate by Student Attribute report. Over time, SSC will be adding custom attributes to the drop-down selections for this report. If your institution provides pre-enrollment data points, you should be able to select one of them (e.g., HS GPA, gender) and visualize grad rates by this attribute.

REPORT | **Course Analysis (p. 9)**

5

Top Enrolled and Top Predictor Courses for Additional Support Resources

Not all courses are created equal, and while members often have a sense for which ones have the greatest impact on student success they also frequently find that the list of ten most predictive courses for each program contains a couple surprises. Members use these lists to evaluate whether support resources (e.g., supplemental instruction, office hours, tutoring) are appropriately allocated to areas of greatest need.



How to Look for this Trend:

- Navigate to the Course Analysis report and select students within a particular major. View "Grad Rate" by "Ten Most Predictive Courses" to see which courses are most predictive for students in that major.

6

Progression Barrier Courses for Redesign

At many institutions, a few foundational, lower-level courses seem to generate large numbers of attempts because students do not pass the course on the first try. This can delay or even prevent degree progression, especially in sequence-initiating courses. Members identify these courses for potential redesign efforts.



How to Look for this Trend:

- For each program, examine the Course Analysis report, selecting "%D/F", "%W", or "Average Credits Earned" for the "Ten Most Attempted Courses." Look for courses with the highest DFW rates and lowest earned credit rates.
- Alternatively, if there are lower-enrollment courses you think may be tripping students up, navigate to the Grad Rate by Grade Earned or Credit Range report and select "Grade Earned" for the specific course. Examine the course's %D/F and %W rates in the Addt'l Course Information table at the bottom of the page.

7

Optimal Course Timing for Sequencing Advice and Degree Mapping

Members frequently find that there are “optimal windows” for taking particular courses, especially foundational courses for the major. By looking at overall graduation rates by credits earned at enrollment in a course, members can inform the sequencing advice that advisors provide and compare historical trends with prescriptive degree maps.



Where to Look:

- Navigate to the Grad Rate by Grade Earned or Credit Range report. Select to analyze the grad rate by “Credit Range” and select a course of interest to examine.

8

Grade Distributions and Predictive Cutoffs in Potential Success Marker Courses

While departments have a good sense for what strong performance looks like and the relationships between courses in their majors, the predictive power (or lack thereof) for certain courses can be surprising. Many institutions generate a list of potential success marker courses from faculty experience or existing degree maps and then use data from this report to make final selections, determine grade cutoffs, and select appropriate enrollment timing.



How to Look for this Trend:

- After selecting a major, navigate to the Grade Rate by Grade Earned or Credit Range report. Choose a course to examine and analyze the grad rate by “Grade Earned” and “Credit Range” graphs. Also look at the Additional Course Information table at the bottom of the report for predictive course rank, predictive cutoff grade, and average grade.

9

Course Completion by Placement Exam Score

Placement exam policies do not always ensure that students are adequately prepared for foundational coursework. Examining course completion by exam score enables members to identify places where there is misalignment between the placement standards and the rigor of coursework.



How to Look for this Trend:

- Navigate to the Course & Exam Performance report. Select a course and placement exam combination you would like to analyze. The exams available will be based on which data points are provided by your institution.

10

Smart Alternatives for Selective Programs

The selective admissions cliff is a difficult reality for many students, but students that fail to gain admittance to a selective program can still successfully graduate if they find the right second-choice program. Members often examine major switching patterns, and the switches that most often lead to success, to inform parallel planning and major switching conversations.



How to Look for this Trend:

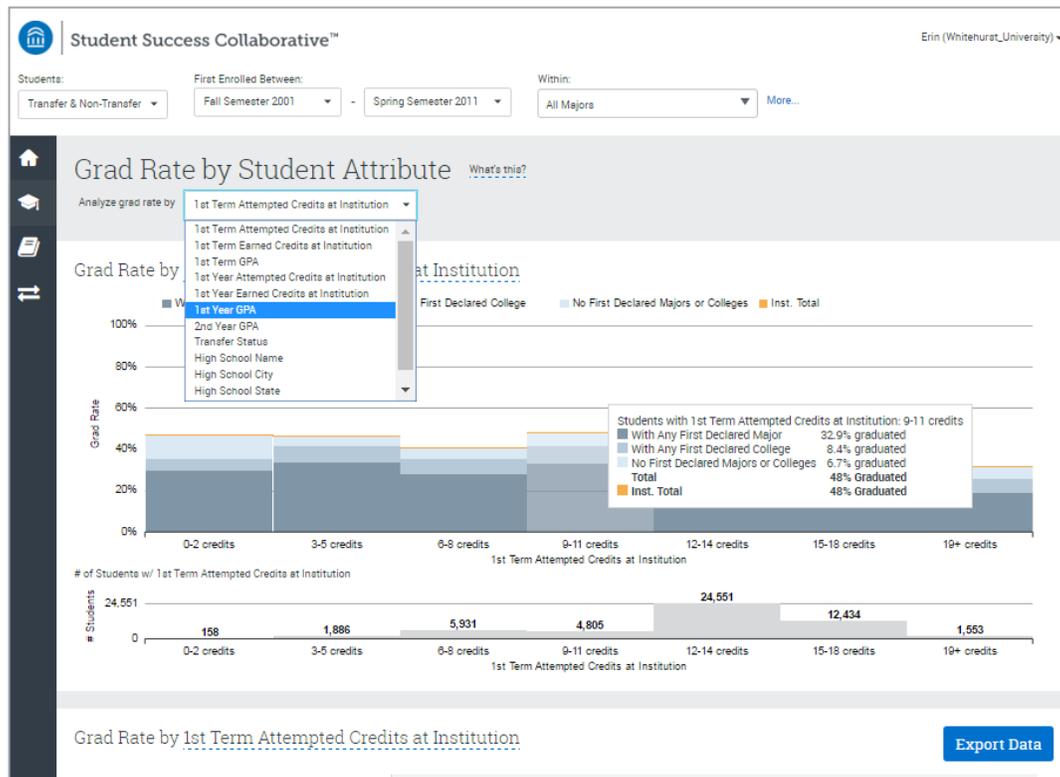
- Navigate to the Major Change Analysis report and view “Grad Rate in Next Major” for a program with selective admissions.

Tool #2: Analyzing the Institution Reports

Report-by-Report Use and Interpretation Walkthrough

REPORT | Grad Rate by Student Attribute

Sample Visual



What Can This Report Help Me Do?

Top Use Cases

- ✓ Identify programs and subpopulations within programs where students are under- or over-performing compared to the institution-wide graduation rate
- ✓ Identify patterns of early-career academic performance (e.g., attempted credits, earned credits, GPAs) that indicate a student is less likely to graduate
- ✓ Evaluate current credit and GPA policies or standards (e.g., credit accumulation policy, selective program admission GPA standard)
- ✓ Compare graduation rates for students in different programs and from specific subpopulations (e.g., transfers)

Grad Rate by Student Attribute (Continued)

? Interpreting These Graphs

Questions to Ask Yourself

- How do grad rates (for all bands or buckets) for this program compare to the institution-wide rate?
 - Are there specific bands or buckets where there are significant differences between the program and institution-wide grad rates?
 - Where along the x-axis do you see big changes in grad rates?
- Are there specific bands or buckets where many students are successfully graduating but from other programs?
 - Are there specific bands or buckets where a disproportionately low number of students are graduating in this program?
- How do student performance patterns compare to existing institutional credit and GPA policies (e.g., major declaration cutoff, program admission standards, scholarship requirements)?
- Are high-performing students in this program graduating at or above the institution-wide graduation rate?
 - Are they graduating at a lower rate than expected, maybe due to transfer out of the program or out of the institution?
- How do transfer students perform compared to native students in this program?

Targeted Campaign Ideas

1. Transfer student engagement for degree planning and time-to-degree conversations
2. Students that attempted fewer than 15 credits in the previous term to encourage a full load in upcoming registration
3. Students in first-year GPA bands that correlate with lower graduation rates than the university average
4. “Keep it up” outreach for high performing students where transfer away is a risk

Related Research and Resources

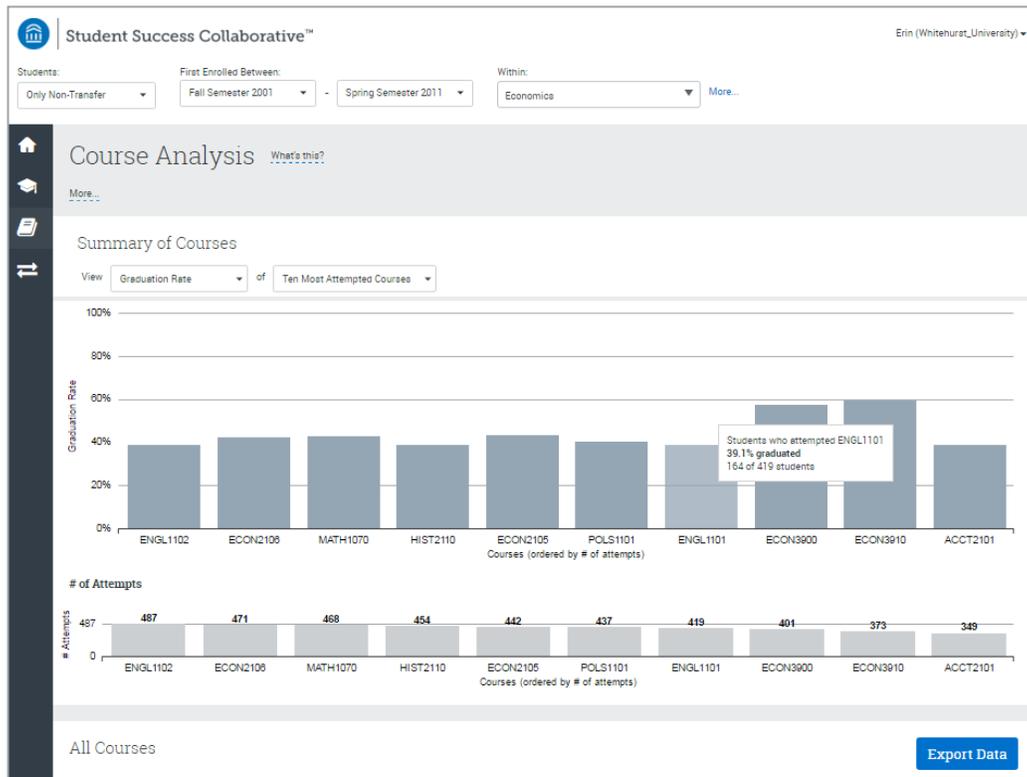
SSC Resources

- [61 Campaign Ideas Infographic](#)
- [Targeted Advising Campaign Toolkit](#)

EAB Research Briefs

- [“Building Pathways for New Student Segments”](#)
- [“Transfer Student Orientation and Integration”](#)
- [“Academic Policy as a Tool to Increase Student Retention”](#)
- [“Organization and Implementation of Pre-Built First-Year Schedules”](#)
- [“Effective Strategies for Supporting Students on Academic Probation”](#)
- [“Nudge Students Toward Better Academic Choices”](#)

Sample Visual



What Can This Report Help Me Do?

Top Use Cases

- Identify the ten courses most predictive of graduation for students in particular programs
- Understand which courses students in a program most frequently attempt
- Out of the ten most predictive and ten most attempted courses, identify which courses students in a program typically succeed in and which they struggle the most to successfully complete
- Examine patterns of grades earned in top attempted and predictive courses
- Identify “stumbling block” courses that may be preventing many students from progressing through the major in a timely fashion
- Evaluate course requirements for a program by examining patterns of student performance in highly attempted and highly predictive courses

? Interpreting These Graphs

Questions to Ask Yourself

- How do the lists of ten most attempted courses and ten most predictive courses compare to what you would expect to see? Are there courses on the lists that surprise you? Are there courses you think should be on the lists but are not?
- How does the list of top ten most-attempted courses compare to the top ten most-predictive courses? Are there courses that appear in both?
 - Why might some courses appear in one list but not the other?
- Which of the most attempted and most predictive courses have the highest and lowest values for each of the drop downs (i.e., Average Course Grade, Average Credits Earned, Graduation Rate, %D/F, and %W)?
- Are there courses where the Average Credits Earned, %D/F, and %W rates are very high, suggesting that students need repeat attempts at completion?
 - Are these courses required for the major?
 - Are these courses prerequisites for other required coursework, and therefore could be protracting degree completion?
- What do the overall grad rates for students that attempt these courses look like? Do average course grade or average credits earned seem to strongly correlate with eventual graduation?
- What do current support services (e.g., tutoring, supplemental instruction) and resources (e.g., degree maps) look like for top courses? Are they sufficient to the demonstrated need?



Targeted Campaign Ideas

1. Students enrolled for the upcoming term in top predictor courses to connect with tutoring services
2. Students that received low grades in predictor courses for conversations about academic performance and major fit
3. Students in top enrolled or top predictor courses to encourage them to take advantage of available support resources (e.g., supplemental instruction)

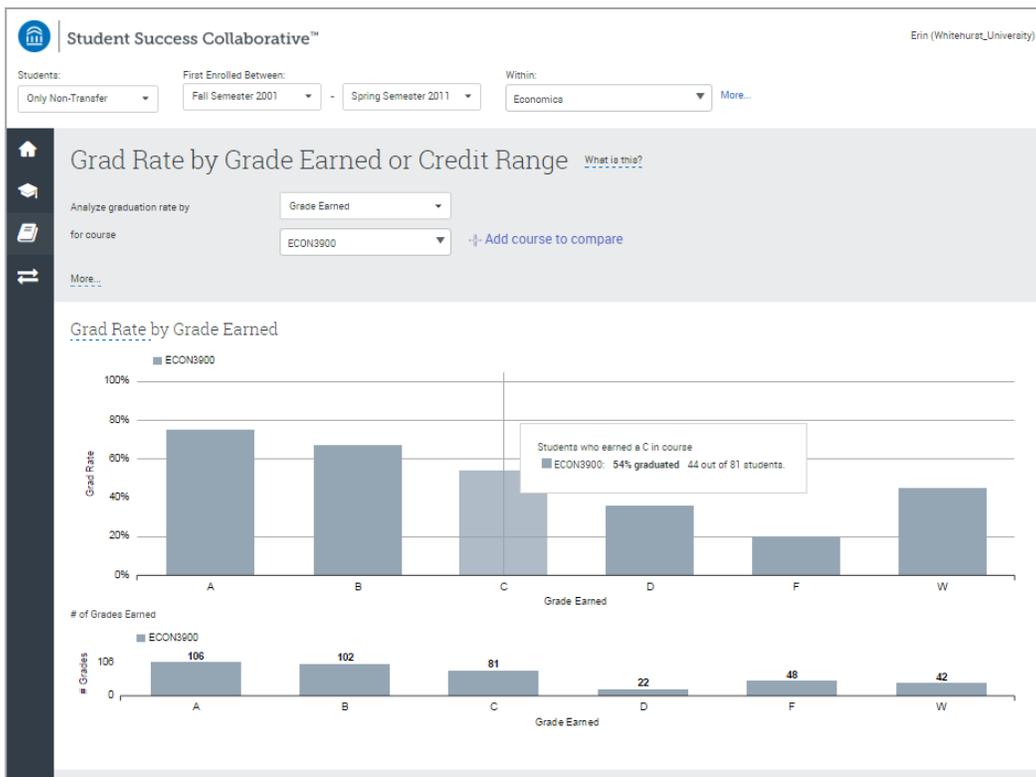


Related Research and Resources

EAB Research Briefs

- [“Strategies to Improve Course Completion Rates”](#)
- [“Examining Course Withdrawal Timelines”](#)
- [“Course Development and Redesign Policies and Initiatives”](#)
- [“Engaging Faculty in Redesigning Courses for Active Learning”](#)
- [“Course Redesign: Minimizing Drop, Fail, and Withdrawal Rates”](#)
- [“General Education Curriculum Structure”](#)
- [“Withdrawal Redirect Courses”](#)
- [“Bottleneck Course Redesign”](#)

Sample Visual



What Can This Report Help Me Do?

Top Use Cases

- Determine success marker grade thresholds and timing parameters for incorporation into the SSC platform
- Examine grade distribution for program students in a particular course
- Examine trends in overall graduation based on enrollment timing and grade earned in a particular course
- Understand the predictive power of a particular course and identify what grades earned correlate most strongly with overall graduation
- Compare trends in course performance between two courses

Grad Rate by Grade Earned or Credit Range (Continued)

? Interpreting These Graphs

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What does the grade distribution for this course look like? How many attempts fall into each grade category?
 - Are students generally completing attempts of this course with a passing grade? What percent of total attempts resulted in a D, F, or W for this course?
- How does grade earned in this course impact overall graduation rate?
 - For which grades do students appear to graduate at significantly lower rates? Is there a sharp drop-off in grad rate between two grades?
- In which credit ranges do students most frequently attempt this course?
 - How does timing of attempting this course impact overall graduation rate? Are there credit ranges that appear to correlate with particularly high or particularly low graduation rates?
 - How does this “optimal timing” data compare to when students are typically recommended to take this course (either by advisors based on experience or explicitly through degree plans)?
- Would this course make a good success marker, based on the grade distribution and impact of grade earned on overall graduation rate?
- If you look at the Additional Course Information table at the bottom of the page, what is the predictive ranking of this course for students in the selected major?
 - What is the predictive cutoff grade for this course?
 - How does the predictive cutoff grade compare to the average course grade? Are most students exceeding the predictive cutoff grade?
- If you chose to compare two courses, how do the grade distribution and course timing compare for these two courses?
 - Which course has the higher predicted ranking? Does this conform to your expectations?

Tip: When comparing, select two courses that are

- Sequential courses in a required series (i.e., a course and its prerequisite)
- Options between which students often choose (e.g., two courses that could fulfill the same major requirement, two common general education courses, two electives)
- Related lecture and lab courses



Targeted Campaign Ideas

1. Students that need to complete a required course and are approaching the optimal timing window
2. Students that have missed multiple success marker courses and may need additional support
3. Students that performed below the predictive cutoff on a sequence-initiating course
4. Students with outstanding major requirements that can be filled with multiple courses and may need help making selections



Related Research and Resources

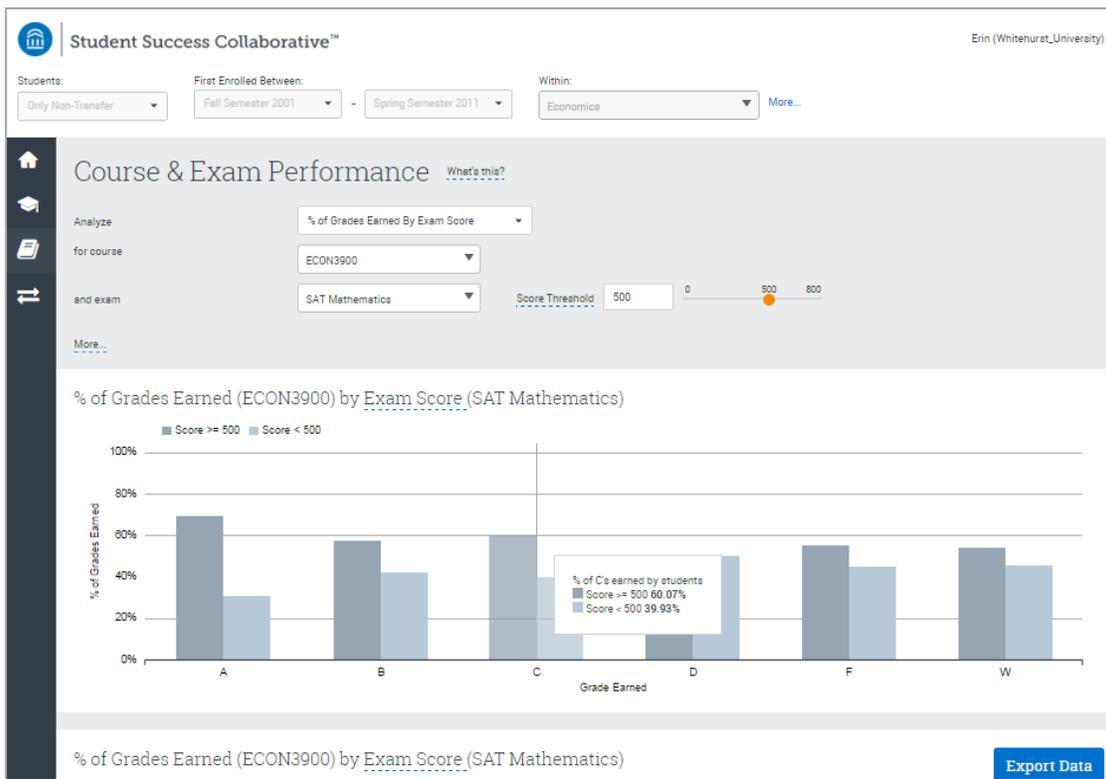
SSC Resources

- [“Understanding Success Progress and Notifications”](#)

EAB Research Briefs

- [“Degree Map Milestones”](#)
- [“Alternative Course Placement Methods”](#)
- [“Determining, Evaluating, and Modifying Course Prerequisites”](#)
- [“Improving Institutional Communication with At-Risk Students”](#)
- [“Academic Advising for Exploratory Students”](#)
- [“Using Data to Find and Eliminate Section Bottlenecks”](#)

Sample Visual



What Can This Report Help Me Do?

Top Use Cases

- Evaluate the efficacy of institutional, program, and course-level exam and placement score requirements
- Target course-level support resources to students who may lack preparation
- Create support pathways for incoming students based on entrance exam performance
- Identify courses that are misaligned with pre-college preparation for redesign

Course & Exam Performance (Continued)

Tip: This report allows you to drill down into the relationships between pre-enrollment performance, course performance, and graduation. With thousands of course-exam combinations to choose from, it's not efficient to work your way through all of the options.

First, **examine courses that have the greatest impact on students in your major.** We recommend that you prioritize evaluation of the following types of courses:

- Most attempted courses
- Most predictive courses
- Foundational first-year courses

For those courses, **use your knowledge of the curriculum to determine which exams are most relevant to which courses.** For example, a student's performance on the SAT II for U.S. History isn't likely to have a strong correlation with their performance in introductory-level English coursework.

Finally, **start off by examining score thresholds that reflect university or program requirements.** Then, you can explore score thresholds that reflect "good academic preparation" for the specific course you are looking at.



Targeted Campaign Ideas

1. Students whose exam scores indicate high risk of attrition
2. Students whose exam scores indicate low probability of success in a particular course for targeted course support
3. Students whose course performance indicates low likelihood of success on future exams (e.g., praxis, GRE)



Related Research and Resources

EAB Research Briefs

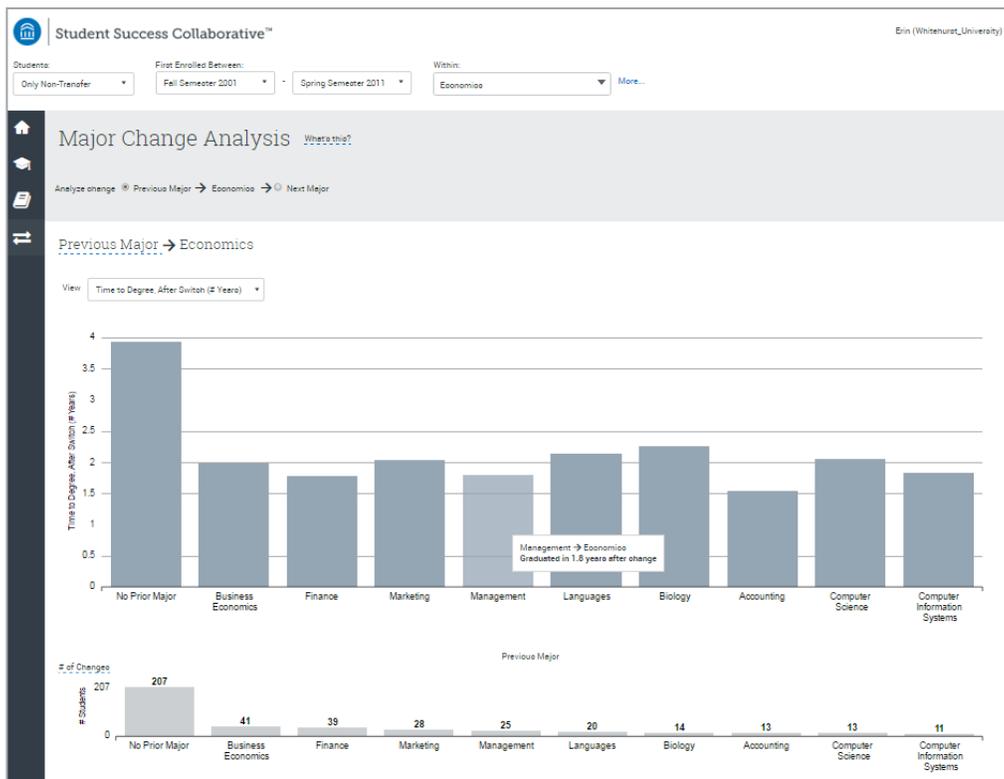
- ["Language Proficiency Requirements and Support Services for International Students"](#)
- ["Course Redesign: Minimizing Drop, Fail, and Withdrawal Rates"](#)

? Interpreting These Graphs

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What percent of students that received a particular grade had above and below your score threshold?
- What percent of students graduated who had high exam scores and earned high course grades?
 - What percent of students graduated who had low exam scores but managed to earn high course grades?
- What score threshold creates the biggest difference in graduation rates between groups for a particular grade?
 - What score threshold creates the smallest difference?
- In which courses do exam score and grade earned appear to be most highly correlated?

Sample Visual



What Can This Report Help Me Do?

Top Use Cases

- Identify the most common pathways for students into and out of academic programs
- Understand how different major switches affect measures of student success (e.g., graduation rate, time to degree)
- Improve transition conversations between students and advisors by providing improved advice based on historical success rates
- Optimize program promotion/recruitment to students that may need to switch programs
- Identify students whose switching pattern indicates they may require additional support to retain
- Identify counter-intuitive program clusters for advisor training
- Inform parallel planning recommendations and resources

Major Change Analysis (Continued)

? Interpreting These Graphs

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Which are the most common programs that students were in before switching to your program (i.e., donor programs)?
 - Which are the most common programs that students go to when they switch out of your program (i.e., acceptor programs)?
 - How frequently do students make these switches?
 - Are these the switches that you expected?
- Which switches correspond to greater student success?
 - Which switches have the highest and lowest associated grad rates?
 - Which switches have the highest and lowest associated time to degree?
 - Are there switches that result in high graduation rate but long time to degree?
- When are students making these common switches? What is the average # of years at switch?
 - Does timing appear to correlate with either successful or unsuccessful switches?
- Which students are making certain switches?
 - Which pathways do higher-performing students (i.e., students with higher GPA's) choose?
 - Which pathways do lower-performing students (i.e., students with lower GPA's) choose?
 - Could this be caused by failure to meet selective admissions or graduation requirements?
 - How does the behavior of transfer students differ from that of non-transfer students?



Targeted Campaign Ideas

1. Students in undeclared or competitive pre-majors for declaration conversations
2. Students that are unlikely to meet selective admissions or graduation requirements to discuss best-fit major switches
3. Students that recently transitioned from a pathway with historically poor success rates for targeted support
4. Students in high-transfer majors for parallel planning conversations



Related Research and Resources

SSC Resources

- ["Navigating the Selective Admissions Cliff"](#)

EAB Research Briefs

- ["Academic Advising for Exploratory Students"](#)
- ["Next-Generation Advising: Pre-Major Exploratory Clusters"](#)
- ["Four Components of Effective Sophomore Retention Efforts"](#)

Tool #3: Institution Reports Analysis Worksheet

Data Insight <i>What is the data “saying” about student success?</i>	Possible Root Cause <i>Why might this trend be happening?</i>	Action Steps <i>What could you or someone else at your institution do to act on this insight?</i>
College of Arts & Sciences students who have between a 3.2 and 3.39 GPA at the end of their first year graduate at a lower rate than the institution-wide rate	These students are doing well, but not high enough to make the Dean’s List so they probably don’t receive much attention. Maybe they transfer?	Work with CAS advisors to run a targeted advising campaign for students in this GPA range early in the sophomore year. Suggest engagement activities (e.g., undergraduate research, TA positions, study abroad) that build relationships and university affinity.

Action Steps to Consider

- Proactive student communication
- Targeted campaign/intervention
- Academic policy change
- Advising policy change (e.g., mandatory advising)
- Curriculum/course sequencing redesign
- Course redesign
- Changes to advising practice
- New or modified support services, resources, and support allocation
- New or modified academic planning resources (e.g., four-year plans, parallel plans)
- Changes to advising structure

Data Insight <i>What is the data “saying” about student success?</i>	Possible Root Cause <i>Why might this trend be happening?</i>	Action Steps <i>What could you or someone else at your institution do to act on this insight?</i>

Tool #4: Sizing the Opportunity

Two Ways to Identify Issues that Impact the Most Students

Insight Identified



Once you have identified a pattern that you think indicates a student success barrier or opportunity for action, it's good practice to consider how frequently this trend is happening to inform whether your institution should take action. Size of the opportunity is not the only factor to consider when prioritizing potential initiatives, but it can help identify initiatives with high return on effort.



A

Use N Values from the Institution Reports to Estimate the Number of Historical Students that Have Exhibited the Trend

Below each graph in the Institution Reports is a visual representation of the number of students used in generating the analysis (i.e., n-values). For example, the visual below shows the number of students in each GPA bucket for a graph of Grad Rate by 1st Year GPA. You can use these n-values to estimate how many historical students—or what percentage of historical students—exhibited a particular pattern.



B

Use Advanced Search in the SSC Platform to Estimate the Number of Current Students an Intervention or Change Would Impact

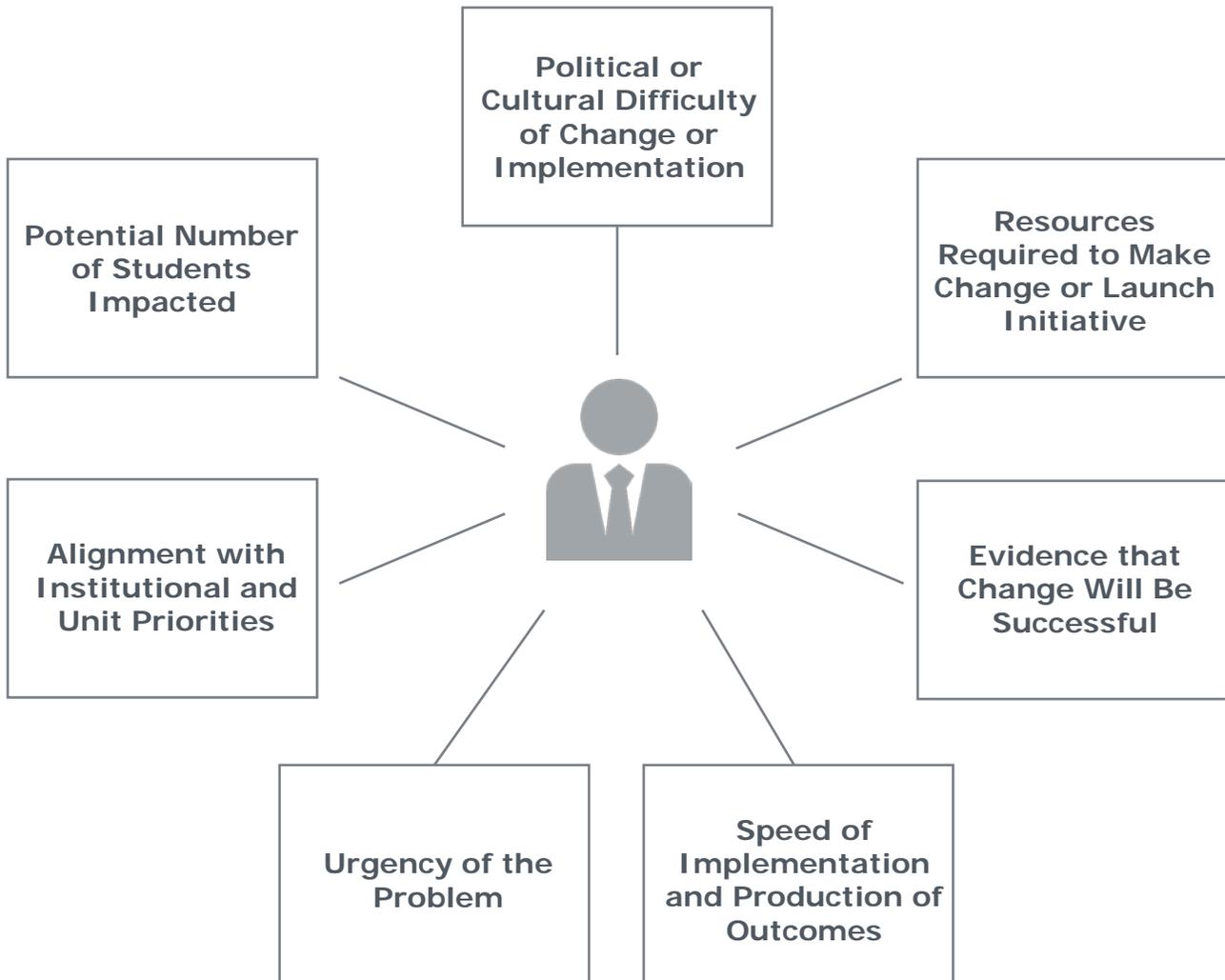
When you identify a pattern in the Institution Reports and a potential action you might take based on that insight, you can often use the SSC platform to generate a list of students that would be impacted by a change. Knowing how many students there are currently at your institution that would benefit from a change can be extremely compelling and motivate people to take action.

1. Identify the characteristics of students that would be impacted by the change (e.g., sophomores in the College of Arts & Sciences with GPAs between 3.2 and 3.39)
2. Navigate to the Advanced Search tab in the SSC platform
3. Use your identified characteristics as advanced filters and hit "Search"
4. Scroll down to evaluate how many students are on the list

ALL	NAME	ID	WATCH LIST
133	Vanconant, Lacey	586567819	
134	Vantol, Shaniqua	491645356	
135	Veltin, Jenaya	565475324	
136	Verburg, Krisalyn	058545821	
137	Walland, Tivona	158978643	
138	Wimpol, Nijole	894653462	
139	Watis, Khadijah	692259641	

Tool #5: Prioritizing Potential Initiatives

Factors to Consider in Choosing Where to Start Taking Action



Relationship Between SSC Analyses and Institutional Research Analyses

The analyses housed within SSC's Institution Reports are not designed to replace the analyses developed by the IR office at your institution. In general, the analyses within the Institution Reports may use data definitions, configurations, or sources that differ from those used by your Institutional Research office. For example, the Institution Reports center around analyses of student success (specifically defining success as graduation from the institution), which requires the student cohorts within the analyses to have had sufficient time to graduate; this may contrast from Institutional Research analyses designed to officially report on recent student cohorts. Additionally, Institution Reports are not intended to replace the wide variety of data sources and analytical scopes that may be available through your Institutional Research office.



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