![SAM student achievement measure logo]

SAM Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Student Achievement Measure (SAM)?

The **Student Achievement Measure (SAM) Project** is a collaborative effort by six leading higher education associations to enhance transparency and provide the public with a more comprehensive measure of college student progress and completion. SAM tracks student movement across postsecondary institutions to provide a more complete picture of undergraduate student progress and completion within the higher education system. SAM is voluntary, but hundreds of institutions participate to increase transparency and to deliver a more complete picture of student progress to completion. SAM provides a common measure for student achievement for nearly all types of institutions: public and private, nonprofit universities, colleges, and community colleges.

What organizations support SAM?

The SAM Project is a joint initiative of the six national higher education presidential associations: the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the American Council on Education (ACE), the Association of American Universities (AAU), the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU).

What are the components of the Student Achievement Measure?

Three models are included in SAM, one for bachelor's degree programs, one stacked credentials (which combines the 2-year and 4-year credentials into one model), and one for associate degree and certificate programs.

Cohorts

Each model reports outcomes for cohorts, of students who begin at an institution at the same time. Students are tracked for 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10 years depending on the model.

The **bachelor's degree model** reports outcomes for:

    (1) First-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students

(2) Transfer-in, full-time, bachelor's degree-seeking students
(3) First-time, part-time bachelor's degree-seeking students
(4) Transfer, part-time, bachelor's degree-seeking students

The **associate and certificate program model** reports outcomes for:

(1) all associate degree or certificate-seeking students who are new to the reporting institution (first-time and transfer-in students)
(2) full-time associate degree or certificate-seeking students who are new to the reporting institution (first-time and transfer-in students)
(3) part-time associate degree or certificate-seeking students who are new to the reporting institution (first-time and transfer-in students)

Outcomes Reported

The **bachelor's degree model** reports on the percentage of students who:
- Graduated from the reporting institution
- Are still enrolled at the reporting institution
- Transferred and graduated from another institution
- Transferred and still enrolled at another institution
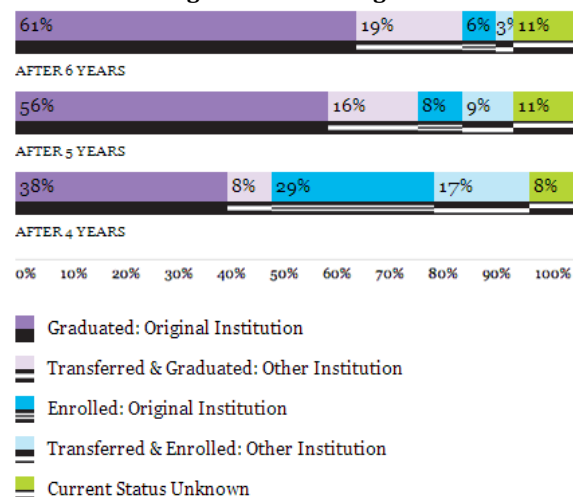- Have unknown status

The **associate and certificate program model** reports on the percentage of students who:
- Graduated from the reporting institution
- Are still enrolled at the reporting institution
- Transferred to another institution
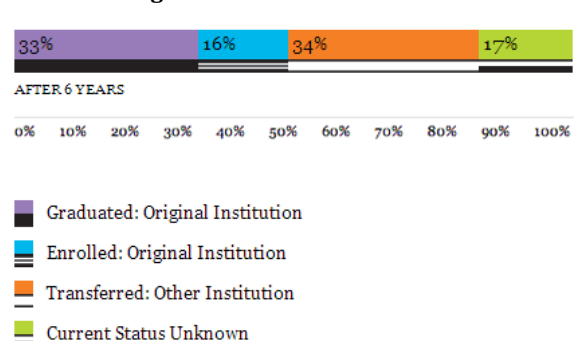- Have unknown status

SAM Chart Examples

SAM models will report multiple student outcomes using a horizontal, stacked bar chart.

SAM Institution Example: Full-time, First- time Students Seeking a Bachelor's Degree

SAM Institution Example: Students Seeking an Associate Degree or Certificate

How is the metric calculated?

Bachelor's degree-seeking model

The data to build the Student Achievement Measure can be obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse using the Cohort Query available through StudentTracker. The use of this query helps ensure that the underlying calculation methodology is applied in a consistent manner and greatly increases the reliability of the metric.

- Institutions submit data for each of their cohorts through StudentTracker. NSC will match to their enrollment and completion data. The institutions receive back a set of files from the Clearinghouse that will be directly uploaded by the institution to the SAM website that will automatically create the graphic display for the appropriate time period.

- If the institution wishes to report the Student Achievement Measure for the bachelor's model and has not submitted enrollment and graduation data to the Clearinghouse, it is strongly recommended that the institution submit back-files from at least the previous six years (for full- time cohort reporting) or the previous ten years (for part-time cohort reporting) up to the present to allow reporting within one year of joining SAM.

More information on the Cohort Query can be found on the National Student Clearinghouse's website - StudentTracker_Cohort_Query_Guide.pdf. *Note that for institutions that participate in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), this is the same query and process used to create the VSA Success & Progress Rate.*

Associate degree- and certificate-seeking model.

The data, of necessity, comes from a variety of sources in the short term–the National Student Clearinghouse, state longitudinal data systems, system data, and/or institutional data. Currently, no single source provides all the data necessary to track the completion of certificates and degrees and subsequent enrollment. Therefore, data to create the associate/certificate model is collected and entered by participating institutions into the web interface and the graphic display will be automatically created. *Note that for institutions that participate in the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), the data can be aggregated to report the Student Progress and Outcomes measures.*

My institution only enrolls transfer students; can I participate in SAM?

Yes. Institutions may participate by posting data for only one of the required cohorts for either model. Please contact SAM Support (support@studentachievementmeasure.org) for more information.

Is an institution required to report both full-time and part-time cohorts?

For institutions reporting the Associate/Certificate model, both full-time and part-time cohorts are required. For institutions reporting the Bachelor's model, only full-time cohorts are required. However, because the number of part-time students has been increasing, we strongly encourage institutions to report part-time cohorts as well.

Are International Students included in NSC's StudentTracker Cohort Query?

Yes. NSC collects enrollment data on both domestic and international students. When institutions report the enrollment records of international students to NSC, it is true that these records are generally reported without a social security number. However, this does not matter for the StudentTracker Cohort Query, because it does not use SSN for matching purposes for any student, international or domestic.

Rather, it uses the complete name and date of birth provided in the Cohort Query request file. If a definitive match cannot be made by the system, nor by a human analyst, then the student in the request file would not be matched. However, this should be a relatively rare scenario. If a school believes its

results are missing large numbers of international students, we encourage it to contact StudentTracker Support at studenttracker@studentclearinghouse.org for further investigation.

How will data for the metrics be collected and reported?

Data necessary to display the metric will be collected through a web-based data collection site. Each participating institution will have its own online account that can be used to log into the site to either upload a data file with the required information or enter the data manually. The institution's data is displayed as a horizontal, stack bar chart on the SAM website.

Does the SAM Project collect student unit level records?

No. There is no student unit level record data collection by the SAM project. Only institution level data are collected and reported.

Which institutions can participate in SAM?

Postsecondary institutions that meet either of the following criteria are eligible to participate in the SAM project:

(1) an accredited, nonprofit university or college offering baccalaureate or associate degrees
(2) a member of one of the six partnership organizations (AACC, AASCU, AAU, ACE, APLU, NAICU)

How does an institution sign up to participate in SAM?

Eligible institutions can sign up to participate in the SAM project through an online form on the SAM website (www.studentachievementmeasure.org/sign_up).

What is required to participate?

SAM participants will create a profile, including basic information about the institution (name, address, institutional contacts). Each institution will create its SAM metric(s) using the tools provided and upload the SAM data to the website.

Most institutions use the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker Cohort Query – which is included in fees paid to the Clearinghouse. Additional information on StudentTracker is available from the Clearinghouse website: https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/solutions/ed-insights/studenttracker/.

Is participation in VSA required?

The VSA has evolved into VSA Analytics. VSA Analytics is now a benchmarking tool that is only available to institutions. It helps institutions use data to position themselves strategically to increase institutional effectiveness and improve student success by combining publicly available data from multiple sources (IPEDS, NSF, the College Scorecard, and the Student Achievement Measure) allowing institutions to benchmark their performance against a select group of peers for strategic planning. It contains 10 years of data from over 4,400 institutions. You can access metrics on admissions, enrollment, retention, completions, financial aid, institutional cost, and R&D expenditures.

Can VFA participants enter data for both the VFA and SAM?

The data used within the SAM model for associate degrees and certificate programs is the same as used within the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA). Community colleges and two-year colleges can post their data for SAM anytime.

When can institutions sign up to participate?

Institutions may sign up to participate through the SAM website at any time.

When can institutions begin to upload or enter their data?

Institutions are encouraged to upload their data to the SAM website as early as possible. Institutions will update their data to the most recent cohort in January when collection for the new cohort opens.

When can institutions submit their Cohort Queries to the National Student Clearinghouse?

Institutions reporting data for the bachelor's model should submit their Cohort Queries to the National Student Clearinghouse after September 15 to allow for sufficient time for summer degrees and enrollment to be reported. All Cohort Queries should be submitted using a search data of 9/15 of the year the cohort began.

Can an institution provide data for both the bachelor's degree-seeking and the associate/certificate seeking models?

Yes. Some institutions offer degree and certificate programs that fall into both models and they will be welcome and encouraged to report data for both models.

Can a system sign up for SAM on behalf of its member institutions?

Yes. If a formal system of institutions wishes to participate as a group, each institution identified at the time of sign-up will be expected to adhere to the participation agreement. A senior official of the system must be authorized through the central system office to enroll its institutions in the SAM Project. The senior official will provide, at the time of sign-up, a list of all required information for each institution within the system that will participate in SAM. Any institution that wishes to withdraw from the SAM Project may do so at any time. Systems also have the opportunity to upload data for all participating institutions within their system. However, each institution's data will need to be reported separately.

How is the SAM Project funded?

Funding for SAM Project is provided in large part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with additional funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.