

Calculating the Stacked Credentials Metric

SAM provides a common measure for student achievement for nearly all types of postsecondary institutions: public and private, nonprofit universities, colleges, and community colleges. This document describes the methodology for calculating the **stacked credentials model** used for students seeking any undergraduate credential. This model combines the 2-year and the 4-year credentials into one model.

The SAM stacked credentials model outcomes are calculated using data from the National Student Clearinghouse to StudentTracker Cohort Query, which was created in 2008. More details about the Cohort Query can be found at [StudentTracker Cohort Query Guide.pdf](#).

Retention/Enrollment Rates

- The SAM stacked credentials model retention/enrollment rates are based on enrollment in any term during the academic year.
- The SAM stacked credentials model calculations are based on “end of term” data rather than “census” data.
- The SAM stacked credentials model enrollment rates include students from the cohort who are enrolled in other institutions during the academic year.

Graduation/Completion Rates

- The stacked credentials model reports the highest undergraduate degree earned by students after 6 years. Rather than placing emphasis on the institution, the SAM stacked credentials model instead prioritizes the outcomes achieved by students. The stacked credentials model will report outcomes for students who earn their highest undergraduate degree regardless of where they earned their degree.
- The denominator used in the SAM stacked credentials model graduation rate will include only the students from the cohort who have a matching record at the Clearinghouse. For most institutions about 95% of the cohort that can be matched. However, institutions are not “penalized” for unmatched records.
- The SAM stacked credentials model counts and displays both 2-year and 4-year degrees as completions.
- Students who graduate with a 2-year degree and re-enroll will be counted in the enrollment rate until graduation with a 4-year degree.

The **stacked credentials model** reports outcomes for two groups of students:

- First-time undergraduate credential-seeking students attending full- or part-time
- Transfer undergraduate credential-seeking students attending full- or part-time.

The **stacked credentials model** will report the following outcomes:

- Graduated with a 2-year credential from any institution
- Graduated with a 4-year credential from any institution
- Are still enrolled at any institution
- Have unknown status

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Additional Cohort Reporting. SAM institutions have the option to report outcomes for Pell students, Veteran students, and students of color. These sub cohorts help institutions demonstrate their commitment to closing achievement gaps and ensuring all students succeed. Using the cohort defined by the model, students must also meet the criteria listed below to be included in any of these 3 sub cohorts.

- **Pell students:** Students who received a Pell Grant in their first term of enrollment at the institution.
- **Veteran Students:** Students who reported to the institution that they received veterans' benefits at any point during their enrollment at the institution.
- **Students of color:** Students who identify all or in part with a race and/or ethnicity that is non-white. Students who are international/nonresident aliens or for whom race/ethnicity is unknown should not be included in the cohort.

The **stacked credentials model** reports outcomes after 6 years.

A Note on the Differences Between the SAM Bachelor's Model and the Stacked Credentials Model

Because students included in the Bachelor's model entered college seeking a Bachelor's degree, the SAM calculations for the Bachelor's model is set to preference continued enrollment in pursuit of a Bachelor's degree above receipt of a lower credential or degree. In the Bachelor's model, if a student earns an Associate degree and subsequently re-enrolls for continued study, they will be shown as "Still Enrolled" instead of "Graduated." If they stop out prior to receiving a Bachelor's degree, they will show as "Graduated,, and listed having received a 2-year degree in the SAM Detail Table.

In the Stacked Model, completion of any degree is prioritized over continued enrollment, so a student who earns an Associate degree and subsequently re-enrolls for continued study will be shown as "Graduated: 2-year Degree." Their status will only change if they subsequently earn a Bachelor's Degree.

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Details for all groups of students will be reported for each year in the SAM Detail Table.

SAM Institution Example: Stacked Credentials Model

