



**Time to Degree Study:
Spring 2009 Graduating Cohort**

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Fall 2010

This study explored factors related to bachelor's degree attainment at the University of Georgia. Demographic and graduation characteristics were studied for their effects on the time-to-degree for the spring 2009 graduating class.

Overall Findings

The spring 2009 graduating cohort includes 3,238 students. Twenty-nine of them (0.9%) were first enrolled before summer 1998, which rendered their years-elapsed as the indicator of time-to-degree more than 4 times the standard deviation away from the cohort mean. They were therefore excluded, leaving 3,209 students in the cohort for study.

- Overall, 81.4% of the graduating cohort earned their degree in 4 or less years, and only 2.6% of the students in this graduating cohort hadn't finished their degree in 6 years. Three quarters of first-time students graduated in four years, while 79.5% of transfers finished in three years.
- Higher SAT scores or higher transfer GPA were not necessarily good indicators of faster graduation.
- Those who finished sooner had usually earned higher GPAs upon graduation.
- Changing major more than once noticeably slowed the students' progress toward graduation.
- 11.3% of the students graduated with more than just one degree / one major. Earning a dual degree or double major only added on average one term to the students' time-to-degree.
- A similar study was conducted in 2006 on the spring 2005 graduating cohort. Comparable analyses of each cohort produced similar findings.

Demographics and Initial Status

This graduating cohort was composed of 57.4% female and 42.6% male. Only 25 were international students (0.8%). Of domestic students, the vast majority were in-state students (89.1%). The race/ethnicity breakdown of the cohort is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Race/Ethnicity.

	N	Percentage
White	2756	85.9
Asian	208	6.5
Black	173	5.4
Hispanic	61	1.9
American Indian	6	.2
Multi-Racial	4	.1
Haw./Pacific Is.	1	.0
Total	3209	100.0

In the graduating cohort, there were 839 students (26.1%) who initially came into UGA as transfer students, while 2,365 (73.7%) applied as first-time students.

The percentage of male students in the transfer group (49.5%) was higher than in the first-time student group (40.2%). The transfer group also had more in-state students than the first-time student group (94.8% vs. 86.3%).

SAT scores were gathered either by the SAT score reported by students or converted from the ACT scores by using the standard concordance table. SAT scores were not available for about half of the transfer students. The mean of SAT combined score was significantly ($p < .000$) higher for first-time students (1245.12) than for transfers (1121.30).

Few transfer students brought in advanced placement (AP) credits. 9.2% of transfers brought in on average 7.4 AP credits. For first-time students, 1,729 (73.1%) students brought in on average 12.2 AP credits.

42.6% of transfer students came in at sophomore status, 51.4% as juniors and 5.8% as seniors. Transfer students brought in an average of 62 credit hours with an average transfer GPA of 3.40.

454 students (14.1%) were in UGA's Honors program at some point during their enrollment, but only 6 were transfer students. Honor students took a median of 122 UGA credit hours as compared to 116 for non-honors students.

Graduation Status

Upon graduation, the overall average GPA for the graduating cohort was 3.33. First-time students had significantly higher ($p < .000$) average graduating GPA (3.38) than transfers (3.19).

Aside from AP or transfer hours initially brought in upon enrollment, 349 (10.9%) students transferred on average 8.73 credit hours from other institutions during their stay in UGA. Of those who later brought in transfer hours, 120 initially came in as first-time students, and 227 were initially transfer students. There was no significant difference in the average number of credit hours brought in by the two groups (8.81 vs. 8.64). Upon graduation, first-time students earned a median of 122 credit hours at UGA, while transfer students' median earned credit hours was 74.

The following tables show that about a quarter of first-time students persisted in one major, 44.5% changed major once, 21.8% changed major twice, and 9.1% changed three times or more. The intended major, if consistent with the formally declared major, was not counted separately. Changing major was less frequent for transfer students. Half of them (53.5%) never changed their major, 35.9% changed once, and 10.6% changed twice or more. As expected, the number of credit hours taken at UGA increased with more major changes.

Table 2. Number of major pursuit by student application type.

Number of Majors Pursued		N	Percentage	Median Credit Hours
First-Time Students	1	605	25.6	119
	2	1053	44.5	121
	3	515	21.8	125
	4	156	6.6	131
	5 or more	36	1.5	141
	Total	2365	100.0	
Transfer Students	1	449	53.5	70
	2	301	35.9	79
	3	78	9.3	90
	4	9	1.1	111
	5 or more	2	.2	117
	Total	839	100.0	

Dual Degree / Double Major

88.7% of the cohort (2,843) graduated with only one degree (one major), 5.3% (172) graduated with a dual degree (two degrees, one major under each degree), 5.7% (185) graduated with a double major (two majors for the same one degree), and another 9 (0.3%) students graduated with three degrees/majors. Overall, 11.3% (N=366) students graduated with more than just one degree / one major. Students who graduated with a dual degree or double major took slightly more credit hours.

Students who applied as first time were significantly more likely to earn a dual degree (6.7% vs. 1.7%) or double major (7.0% vs. 2.0%) than transfer students ($p < 0.000$). No differences were found by gender, ethnicity, or residency. Honor students were much more likely to earn a dual degree (14.5% vs. 4.9%) or double major (16.0% vs. 5.0%).

Of first-time students, those who earned a dual degree or double major came to UGA with significantly ($p < .000$) higher SAT scores than those who finished with one major. This group also brought in significantly more AP credits (18 vs. 11, $p < .000$).

First-year students who earned a dual degree or double major had a significantly higher graduating GPA (3.55 vs. 3.35, $p < 0.000$), even after controlling for SAT scores by ANCOVA analysis. No difference in graduating GPA was found for the transfer student group.

Time-to-Degree

The time-to-degree statistics were calculated in terms of years elapsed and number of terms enrolled. Overall, 81.4% of the graduating cohort earned their degree in 4 or less years, and only 2.6% of the students in this graduating cohort hadn't finished their degree in 6 years.

Table 3 below shows the time-to-degree of first-time students and transfer students separately. Three quarters of first-time students graduated in four years, while a total of 93.9% graduated in five years, and 97.2% in six years.

Since the vast majority of transfers (94.2%) graduated within four years, table 4 further shows a further breakdown of their time-to-degree. In two years, 31.9% of transfers had finished their degree. A total of 79.5% of transfers finished in three years, while 94.2% graduated within four years.

Table 3. Time to degree as years elapsed by student application type.

	First-Time Students		Transfer Students	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Year-Elapsed <= 4	1817	76.8	790	94.2
4 < Year-Elapsed <= 5	405	17.1	23	2.7
5 < Year-Elapsed <= 6	77	3.3	10	1.2
6 < Year-Elapsed	66	2.8	16	1.9
Total	2365	100.0	839	100.0

Table 4. Time to degree of the transfer students as years elapsed.

		N	Percentage
Transfer Students	Year-Elapsed <=2	268	31.9
	2 < Year-Elapsed <= 3	399	47.6
	3 < Year-Elapsed <= 4	123	14.7
	Year-Elapsed >4	49	5.8
	Total	839	100.0

The time-to-degree as terms (summer, fall, or spring semesters) enrolled is shown in Table 5. The mean time-to-degree for first-years was 9.77 terms and for transfers was 6.55 terms. Half of the first-time students graduated after 9 semesters' enrollment, and half of transfer students took 6 semesters to graduate.

Table 5. Time to degree as terms enrolled by student application type.

		Overall	First-Time	Transfer
N		3209	2365	839
Mean		8.93	9.77	6.55
Median		9.00	9.00	6.00
Percentiles	25	8.00	9.00	5.00
	50	9.00	9.00	6.00
	75	10.00	10.00	7.00

Factors Influencing Time-to-Degree

Different factors were explored to find any relationships with students' time-to-degree. For this analysis, first-time students and transfer students were examined as two separate groups.

1. Students' SAT score does not have a significant correlation with time-to-degree for either first-time or transfer students. Post-hoc analysis of ANOVA tests showed that only the first-time students who graduated within 4 years had significantly different (higher) average SAT scores. Therefore, for both first-time students and transfer students, a higher SAT score was not necessarily a good predictor of faster graduation.

Table 6. Average SAT scores by time-to-degree.

		N	Avg. SAT *
First-Time Students	Year-Elapsed <= 4	1815	1257.52 ¹
	4 < Year-Elapsed <= 5	404	1211.76 ²
	5 < Year-Elapsed <= 6	77	1185.84 ²
	6 < Year-Elapsed	66	1177.58 ²
	Total	2362	1245.12
Transfer Students	Year-Elapsed <= 2	125	1123.84 ¹
	2 < Year-Elapsed <= 3	228	1130.79 ¹
	3 < Year-Elapsed <= 4	68	1101.91 ¹
	4 < Year-Elapsed	26	1076.54 ¹
	Total	447	1121.30

*Superscript indicates grouping of post-hoc test of ANOVA.

2. As seen in the following table, transfer students who took more than four years to finish had a noticeably lower (but not significant) average transfer GPA.

Table 7. Average transfer GPA of transfer students by time-to-degree.

	Transfer Students	
	N	Avg. GPA *
Year-Elapsed <= 2	268	3.40 ¹
2 < Year-Elapsed <= 3	399	3.44 ¹
3 < Year-Elapsed <= 4	123	3.36 ¹
4 < Year-Elapsed	49	3.25 ¹
Total	839	3.40

3. For the first-time student group, females had a higher percentage graduating in 4 years or less than males (82.0% vs. 69.2%, chi-square < .000). For the transfer group, females also had a higher percentage graduating within two years (35.1% vs. 28.7%, chi-square < .05).
4. In-state vs. out-of-state status has no effect on time-to-degree for both first-time students and transfer students.
5. Ethnicity has no effect on time-to-degree for neither group.
6. For first-time students, more honor students graduated in 4 years or less than non-honor students (84.4% vs.75.1%, chi-square < .000).
7. More AP hours brought in by first-time students contributed positively to a faster graduation (Pearson's r correlation = -.177, p < .000). More transfer hours brought in by transfer students led to a faster graduation (Pearson's r correlation = -.304, p < .000).
8. A higher graduating GPA is significantly (p < 0.000) correlated to a shorter time-to-degree for both first-time students and transfer students. That is, students who graduated sooner usually earned higher GPA. Post-hoc tests showed that for first-time students, the average graduating GPAs of the four categories of years-elapsed as time-to-degree were all significantly different from one another (see Table 8). For transfer students, higher graduating GPA was also related to faster graduation. The difference between those who finished within two years and those who took more than 4 years was significant.

Table 8. Average graduating GPA by time-to-degree.

		N	Avg. GPA*
First-Time Student	Year-Elapsed <= 4	1817	3.4710 ¹
	4 < Year-Elapsed <= 5	405	3.1821 ²
	5 < Year-Elapsed <= 6	77	2.9110 ³
	6 < Year-Elapsed	66	2.7232 ⁴
	Total	2365	3.3824
Transfer Student	Year-Elapsed <= 2	268	3.2979 ¹
	2 < Year-Elapsed <= 3	399	3.1949 ²
	3 < Year-Elapsed <= 4	123	3.0446 ²
	4 < Year-Elapsed	49	2.8710 ³
	Total	839	3.1869

9. Earning a dual degree or double major did not make first-time students take much more time to graduate. As stated earlier, this is a group better prepared for college study with higher SAT scores and more AP credits. During their study at UGA, they took on average 4 more credit hours than those who didn't earn a dual degree / double major. And their median number of terms enrolled was one term more. Few transfer students earned dual degrees or double majors.

Table 9. Terms enrolled of first-time students graduated by dual degree/double major.

		Dual Degree /Double Major	
		No	Yes
N		2043	322
Mean		9.76	9.85
Median		9.00	10.00
Percentiles	25	9.00	9.00
	50	9.00	10.00
	75	10.00	11.00

Table 10. Distribution of time-to-degree of first-time students graduated by dual degree/double major.

	Dual Degree/Double Major		Total
	No	Yes	
Year-Elapsed <= 4	1564 76.6%	253 78.6%	1817 76.8%
4 < Year-Elapsed <= 5	350 17.1%	55 17.1%	405 17.1%
5 < Year-Elapsed <= 6	70 3.4%	7 2.2%	77 3.3%
6 < Year-Elapsed	59 2.9%	7 2.2%	66 2.8%
Total	2043 100.0%	322 100.0%	2365 100.0%

10. Changing major did have some negative effect on students' time-to-degree. Only one-fourth of first-time students pursued just one major during their study at UGA, and 87.3% of them finished within four years (as shown in Table 11). Students who changed their major once counted for 44.5% of the first-time group, and the percentage who graduated within four years dropped 6 points compared to those who never changed their major. The percentage of those finishing within four years sharply declined to 65.6% for first-time students who had changed major twice, 54.5% for those who changed three times and 37.9% for those who changed four times, while at the same time the percentage of those taking more than six years increased from 4.1% to 10.3% to 17.2%.

Also, for first-time students, frequent changing of the major was also related to lower graduating GPA even after their incoming SAT score was controlled—the more major changes, the lower graduating GPA (as shown in Table 12).

Transfer students are less likely to change their major (53.5% never changed). 44.3% of them finished within two years, while 42.8% percent finished in the third year. Thirty-six percent of transfer students made one major change and that prolonged their graduation. Only 19.3% of them graduated within two years, while 56.1% graduated in three years and 18.3% in four years. About ten percent of the transfers changed major twice or more, and as Table 13 shows they took much more time to graduate.

Table 11. Time-to-degree of first-time students by number of majors pursued.

	Majors Pursued					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Year-Elapsed <= 4	528	853	338	85	11	1815
	87.3%	81.0%	65.6%	54.5%	37.9%	77.0%
4 < Year-Elapsed <= 5	67	153	131	40	11	402
	11.1%	14.5%	25.4%	25.6%	37.9%	17.0%
5 < Year-Elapsed <= 6	5	30	25	15	2	77
	.8%	2.8%	4.9%	9.6%	6.9%	3.3%
6 < Year-Elapsed	5	17	21	16	5	64
	.8%	1.6%	4.1%	10.3%	17.2%	2.7%
Total	605	1053	515	156	29	2358
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 12. Average graduating GPA of first-time students by number of major pursued.

Major Pursued	Mean	Controlled Mean
1	3.495	3.482 ^a
2	3.386	3.382 ^a
3	3.309	3.319 ^a
4	3.196	3.221 ^a
5	3.230	3.319 ^a

a.Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: SAT_COMBINE = 1245.24.

Table 13. Time-to-degree of transfer students by number of majors pursued.

	Majors Pursued					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Year-Elapsed <= 2	199	58	11	0	0	268
	44.3%	19.3%	14.1%	.0%	.0%	31.9%
2 < Year-Elapsed <= 3	192	169	35	3	0	399
	42.8%	56.1%	44.9%	33.3%	.0%	47.6%
3 < Year-Elapsed <= 4	47	55	20	1	0	123
	10.5%	18.3%	25.6%	11.1%	.0%	14.7%
4 < Year-Elapsed	11	19	12	5	2	49
	2.4%	6.3%	15.4%	55.6%	100.0%	5.8%
Total	449	301	78	9	2	839
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%