Tackling graduate time to degree and other graduate student outcomes

Zane Kratzer, Strategic Analytics Manager, Lehigh University
Caroline Seguin, Business Intelligence Analyst, Lehigh University
Office of Institutional Research and Strategic Analytics (OIRSA)

- Office of Institutional Research expanded in 2017 as a result of Lehigh’s Strategic Analytics Initiative
- 9 full-time staff members
- Specializing in 3 areas:
  - Institutional Research
  - Data Governance
  - Strategic Analytics
Located in Bethlehem, PA
Around 7,000 total students
  - 5,000+ Undergraduate
  - <2,000 Graduate
Five colleges:
  - Arts & Sciences
  - Business
  - Engineering & Applied Science
  - Education
  - Health
Founded by railroad pioneer Asa Packer in 1865
Adjacent to the former Bethlehem Steel Corporation
Strategic Plan about to be launched (June 2023)
Agenda - What are we going to discuss?

- Graduate Time to Degree and why this is important data?
- The context of our graduate data and why this task was a challenge
- The methodology - technical details on what we did
- How we are using the data? Dashboard review
- What we learned from the process - adjustments/improvements
- Next steps - annual processing, tracking progress for strategic plan, what steps can we still improve, etc.
Project Goals

1. Gather Time To Degree data for all masters and doctorate degrees obtained since 2015 graduating class up to most recent class (2022).

2. Build an efficient, explainable, repeatable process, that could then be applied every year to each new graduating class.

3. Store the data in our data warehouse so that it be easily used for any reporting purpose. Final data is at the completion level (i.e. attribute of a degree obtained)
Why is graduate data important?

**Students**
- Transparency in selecting programs - Will I be successful?
- Understand the commitment expected to complete a degree relative to other institutions - How long will it take me?

**Program Managers**
- Academic planning, funding models, program reviews
- Monitoring the progress and success of students (retention and leave of absences)
- College and program-level needs: grant applications, marketing materials, etc.

**University Leadership**
- Institutional goal to grow the graduate student body while applications and enrollment have been trending downward
- Reduce disparities in Graduate Time to Degree (DI&E Strategic Plan)
- Data driven Deputy Provost for Graduate Education

“Doubling MS/grad certificate student enrollment in five years!”
Graduate Data Challenges Faced Across Higher Education

- Reporting standards
  - IPEDS reporting requirements - focus on Undergraduate data
  - Data prep for college rankings - popularity of Undergraduate rankings

- Graduate metrics pushed to back burner due to lack of data transparency and the urgency of reporting on Undergraduate metrics

- Historical program-level data tracking and reporting processes no longer sufficient for University and College-level strategic analytics
Lehigh’s Graduate Programs

What specific challenges we face at Lehigh?

- Grad programs are very decentralized
- Colleges make different curriculum policy decisions
- Very flexible curriculum - a lot of major/degree switching
- Resources - Registrar’s Office
- Degree audit software is a black box
- Individual program-level reviews required for degree completions
- Varying levels of curriculum expertise and institutional knowledge between the colleges
How do data issues impact Time to Degree?

- Graduate data not structured as cleanly as Undergraduate data
  - Admit cohorts - makes it hard to identify official starting points
  - Student type - are some students already enrolled in other programs?
  - Class standing, Expected Grad Date, other UG progress measures

- Lack of transparent degree auditing makes it hard to understand what coursework applies to the degree being pursued, especially in situations where students have switched programs or are dual enrolled in multiple programs

- No official designation or classification of what constitutes a substantially related program. Which programs will accept credits from other programs?
Example of Lehigh’s Graduate Admissions Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATRIC_TERM</th>
<th>ADMIT_CHRT</th>
<th>COLLEGE</th>
<th>DEGREE</th>
<th>MAJOR</th>
<th>ENRL_STUTYP_CODE</th>
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<td>BU</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>BSAD</td>
<td>B</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

Let’s get to the fun stuff!
Research and establishing definitions

1. Research: AAU, CGS (PhD completion project), NCES (Survey of Earned Doctorates), etc.

2. Compare information shared by institutions who reported their data: how did they define time to degree and time of entry? how did they report the data?
   a. Time elapsed vs time enrolled/registered
   b. Time of entry: many possibilities
   c. Report by exiting (graduating) cohort vs entering cohort

3. Create definitions that reflect our institutional policies and realities of our data.
Definitions

Time to degree (TTD):
Time elapsed (in years) between the time of entry and time of completion. If student took some time off (approved leave of absence or not) during their program, that time is included in their time to degree.
Definitions

**Time of completion - Clock ends:**
Date that the degree is conferred - graduation date.

**Time of entry - Clock starts:**
Start of first semester enrolled in the graduate program they graduated in, or in a substantially related program. If the student continued straight from masters to the doctorate at Lehigh, the time of entry for the doctorate is the start of the masters program. If they had an interruption of at least one semester (*stopout*) since earning their masters, the time of entry is the start of the doctorate program.

**Clock restart event:**
Event with the potential to reset the time of entry:

- Student switched to an unrelated graduate program
- Student left for more than a semester after completing their master’s and before coming back for the doctoral program
- Student completed a prior master’s or doctorate in a different field of study
Definitions

Program Curriculum:

Instructional program leading to a degree, with unique completion requirements. It is usually designated as a combination of degree code and major (e.g.: PhD in Chemistry, MEng in Mechanical Engineering) but can be independent from the major (e.g. Flex-MBA). It is an attribute of each enrollment record and of completion records. *Manually calculated because no equivalent field in our Student Information System; Is the level at which most of the reporting of time to degree will be done.*

Substantially related programs

Academic programs that share most of their curriculum requirements. A student who switches from a program to a substantially related program would be able to transfer all or most of their coursework. We will say that substantially related programs belong to the same program group, or that their majors belong to the same major group.

In practice, how should we identify those?

Programs/majors offered by the same department. Supplemented with a manually maintained list of programs in different departments that can be considered substantially related.
Developing the methodology

Data Sources
- Graduate completion data
- Graduate enrollment history
- Prior graduate degrees obtained

Extract and join data

Prepared data
Enrollment level
- Identify changes in enrollment, stopouts, degree completions, etc

Prepared data
Degree Completion level
- Aggregate

Prepared data
Enrolled program level - for review purposes

Completion records with automated TTD (no clock restart event)

Completion records needing manual review (enrollment pathway includes clock restart event)

Meet with graduate programs experts in each college to discuss these “manual review” records and any changes in the methodology.
Phases of the project

Phase 1

Pilot Project. We don’t know what we don’t know.
May-October 2022.

Phase 2

Pilot extension. Test the initial logic and see if it holds. Explore a larger amount of records to identify more complex situations.

Phase 3

Finalize the methodology
Scope: 8 graduating classes (2015-22). ~5,500 records. April 2023-current
An iterative process

1. Run methodology against new set of data
2. Analyze the results and identify new situations (paths to completion) not considered in current methodology
3. Adjust methodology
4. Run this new methodology against the same set of data
5. Use the learnings from those meetings to adjust the methodology
6. Meet with graduate programs experts in each college to discuss the methodology and the manual review records (TTD not automatically calculated).

An iterative process
Graduate completions record

Graduate degree-seeking enrollment data

Prior graduate completions data

Timeline

Legend for next slides:
- Masters
- Doctorate

Comparing majors
- Same major as graduating major
- Substantially related major
- Unrelated major

Types of completion records
- Completion record analyzed
- Prior graduate completion record
### Example case 1

#### Program Curriculum Pursued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Curriculum Pursued</th>
<th>First Term</th>
<th>Last Term</th>
<th>Compare to graduating program</th>
<th>Prior GR Completion</th>
<th>Clock Restart Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master_MENG_Energy Systems Engineering</td>
<td>201920</td>
<td>202010</td>
<td>Unrelated program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master_1-MBA</td>
<td>202020</td>
<td>202110</td>
<td>Same program</td>
<td>202010-Master_MENG_Energy Systems</td>
<td>Prior completion: 202010 - Master_MENG_Energy Systems Engineering and change from unrelated program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Timeline

- **Time of entry**: Summer 2019 - Spring 2020
- **Time of completion**: Summer 2020 - Spring 2021
- **Clock restart event**: Summer 2020 - Spring 2021

**Degree obtained**: Master_1-MBA

**Time to degree**:
Example case 2

Graduate completions record

Graduate degree-seeking enrollment data

Prior graduate completions data

Join on student id and enrollment term <= grad term

Join on student id and prior grad term <= enrollment term

Time of completion

Degree obtained: Master_MS_Learning Sciences & Technology

Time to degree

Doctorate_PHD_Learning Sciences & Technology
Fall 2009 - Fall 2011

Master_MS_Learning Sciences & Technology
Spring 2016

Doctorate_PHD_Teaching Learning & Technology
Fall 2012 - Fall 2015

Degree obtained: Doctorate_PHD_Teaching Learning & Technology

Time of entry

Timeline
Enrollment pathways and TTD calculation

A: Same major and degree level throughout all enrollment records
B: Same major throughout, but change in degree type
C: Stayed within same major group, but changed major and potentially also degree type
D: Changed to unrelated major
E: Two graduate degrees obtained in same class

**Automated TTD calculation**
- 81.8% of all records
- 6.5%
- 6.7%
- 4.3%
- 0.3%
- 0.2%
- 0.3%

**Manual TTD calculation**
- 95% of records
- 5% of records
- Any break in enrollment
- Substantially related major
- Unrelated major

These situations are reviewed manually.
Identifying “non-standard” time to degree

**Longer TTD**

Student completed more requirements between time of entry and time of completion than required for the degree they obtained

- Student started at the doctoral level and then switched to masters (non-primary)
- Exit with masters in lieu of doctorate or masters obtained en route to doctorate (non-primary)
- Most of the credits were earned in a prior program and transferred over. (Transferred coursework - non-primary)
- Student pursuing two graduate degrees at the same time (dual degree)

**Shorter TTD**

Student completed fewer requirements between time of entry and time of completion than required for the degree they obtained

- Student had completed the masters at Lehigh and left for at least a semester before coming back for doctorate (Transferred coursework)
- Some credits were earned in prior program and were transferred over. (Transferred coursework)
## Storing the TTD data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT_ID</th>
<th>DEGREE_ID</th>
<th>GRADUATING_PROGRAM_CURRICULUM</th>
<th>GRAD_CLASS</th>
<th>GRAD_DATE</th>
<th>ENRL_PATHWAY_CODE</th>
<th>TTD_CALCULATION</th>
<th>TTD_CATEGORY</th>
<th>ENTRY_DATE</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1 Master_1-MBA</td>
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<td>Standard</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2016-05-23</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Automated</td>
<td>Non-Primary</td>
<td>2009-09-01</td>
<td>6.73</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sharing the data

Building charts, reports and dashboards
Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Strategic Plan

DI&E Goals and Progress Measures

We will use the following initial metrics to track progress towards our goals of enhancing our culture, diversifying faculty and staff, improving institutional infrastructure, and expanding student access and support.

Timeline

The original progress measures were adopted and shared with the campus community in late Spring 2022 and will be updated on an annual basis. We aim for:

- Movement by Spring 2025
- Substantial progress toward goals by Spring 2027
- Goals achieved by Spring 2032
Sharing the Data - University Leadership

Longitudinal view, by college, for a selected degree type.

All years combined, by college.

All years combined, by demographic group.

Time to degree (median and interquartile range), by college and degree level based on graduating classes 2016-22. Count of degrees awarded provided in parentheses.

Time to degree (median and interquartile range), by demographic group, for selected degree level based on graduating classes 2016-22.
Sharing the Data - Students & Program Managers

Longitudinal view, selected program (e.g. Masters Flex-MBA)

All programs in a given department, all years combined

Time to degree (median and interquartile range), by program. Selected department: Biological Sciences; Selected degree type: Doctorate
Graduating classes 2015-22.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Curriculum</th>
<th>Count of Degrees Awarded</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate_PHD_Biochemistry (CAS)</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate_PHD_Biology</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate_PHD_Cell &amp; Molecular Biology</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate_PHD_Integrative Biology</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coming soon: Dashboard for internal use by graduate program managers where a single program can be selected and user can access program-specific time to degree information.
What we learned & next steps

No project is ever finished!
What we learned

● More complex task than anticipated. Need to keep decreasing the % of records requiring manual review
● Constantly evolving data infrastructure and curriculum policies - TTD methodology will need to keep evolving as well
● Forced into becoming the experts for time to degree at our institution
● Built partnership with graduate program managers
● Built partnership with Registrar’s Office
Next Steps

• Yearly process of calculating TTD for each new graduating class
• Improve graduate data definitions and data governance in general
• Other graduate metrics we are planning on tackling (more forward looking - student success prediction)
  • Identifying students at risk of timing out
  • Graduate leave of absence
  • Graduate completion/attrition rates
Thank you for joining us!
Any additional questions?
Contact us at oir@lehigh.edu
Links and external resources

- Lehigh’s DI&E Strategic Plan Progress Measures: [https://www2.lehigh.edu/diversity-inclusion-equity/plan-progress](https://www2.lehigh.edu/diversity-inclusion-equity/plan-progress)

- AAU: Great resource to find lists of individual institutions sharing their TTD data or multi-institution initiatives
  [https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/PhD/09.23.19_Institutional_Efforts.pdf](https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/PhD/09.23.19_Institutional_Efforts.pdf)
  [https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/PhD/10.18.18_Multi-Institutional_Efforts.pdf](https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/PhD/10.18.18_Multi-Institutional_Efforts.pdf)

- CGS: PhD Completion Project, Master’s Completion Project
  [https://www.phdcompletion.org/](https://www.phdcompletion.org/)

- NSF -National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, Survey of Earned Doctorates