THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANT DISTANCE EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT
An Analysis of the 2016-17 Award Year
OVERVIEW

Distance education continues to experience tremendous growth across Pennsylvania and the nation as a major access point and delivery tool for higher education. Today, more than 74 percent of degree-granting institutions in the United States offer some type of distance education.¹ Nationally, more than 4.8 million degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates took at least one online course in 2016, and nearly 138,000 of those students were enrolled at a Pennsylvania institution.²

To study the effects of extending Pennsylvania State Grant Program eligibility to the growing population of distance education students, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) introduced a five-year State Grant Distance Education Pilot Program (SGDEPP) in 2013. The Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted SGDEPP through Act 59 of 2013, for purposes of providing State Grant awards to online students at participating institutions while gathering vital data concerning the number of Pennsylvania residents receiving postsecondary education through online learning. PHEAA has funded the program with $10 million each year from its business earnings.³

Following the positive outcomes of the first several years of SGDEPP, the Pennsylvania General Assembly introduced legislation to incorporate distance education into the Pennsylvania State Grant Program by expanding eligibility to students who take more than 50 percent of their credits online or who are enrolled in programs that are structured to be more than 50 percent online. Such students are currently eligible for SGDEPP but not for the State Grant Program.

In February 2018, this legislation – Pennsylvania House Bill 1653 – passed and was signed into law by the Governor to become Act 5 of 2018. As a result, beginning with the fall semester of the 2018-19 Academic Year, students who meet the current SGDEPP eligibility requirements will be eligible under the State Grant Program. The legislation included a modification of existing institutional participation parameters to prevent out-of-state distance education providers from unduly benefiting from State Grant funding. Specifically, if a school is not headquartered in Pennsylvania, but has a physical location here, students would continue to qualify for a State Grant as they currently do without the expanded online participation.

Since online coursework is an established and growing part of the fabric of higher education today, PHEAA supports this expansion of student access to the State Grant Program and looks forward to its implementation. SGDEPP’s enabling legislation will lapse on June 30, 2018, and the pilot will end after the spring term of the 2017-18 Academic Year.

This annual report provides statistics from SGDEPP’s fourth year, which includes the 2016-17 Academic Year and 2017 Summer Term. This information comes from mandatory reporting received from the 84 participating SGDEPP institutions.⁴

KEY FINDINGS

2016-17 Award Year

• In the 2016-17 award year, 7,840 unique recipients received SGDEPP awards totaling $12.66 million.
• The program provided grants to recipients in 317 different programs of study.
• The “typical” SGDEPP recipient was an independent, 28-year-old female enrolled part time.
• The average cumulative grade point average for SGDEPP recipients was 2.98.
• Approximately 66 percent of SGDEPP recipients were enrolled 100 percent online, while the remaining recipients took a combination of online and classroom courses.
• SGDEPP recipients completed more than 90 percent of all attempted course credits.

PHEAA thanks SGDEPP schools for reporting the data used in this report. Their commitment enables PHEAA to take a closer look at distance education in Pennsylvania.

This report includes data as of March 5, 2018.
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In the program’s fourth year, 100 institutions – including branch campuses – applied and were approved to participate in SGDEPP. Of these approved institutions, only 84 schools had recipients for whom reporting was required. Overall, 7,840 unique recipients received SGDEPP awards totaling $12.66 million in the 2016-17 award year (academic year and summer). In comparison, more than 6,730 unique recipients at 77 schools received SGDEPP awards totaling $10.36 million in the 2015-16 award year, more than 5,900 unique recipients at 66 schools received SGDEPP awards totaling $8.52 million in the 2014-15 award year, and nearly 4,500 unique recipients at 62 schools received SGDEPP awards totaling $6.89 million in the 2013-14 award year.

- In the 2016-17 Academic Year, 6,737 SGDEPP recipients across 83 different institutions received approximately $11.00 million in awards.
- In the 2017 Summer Term, 1,616 SGDEPP recipients across 71 different institutions received nearly $1.66 million in awards.

In this report, SGDEPP institutions were divided into six different sectors: Four-Year Private colleges and universities; Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) universities; State-Related universities; Two-Year Private colleges; Community Colleges; and Business, Trade, and Technical (BTT) schools.

It should be noted that the 2016-17 Pennsylvania State Grant Program awarded more than $378.6 million in grants to 137,179 students across 260 in-state institutions. Thus, in terms of the total award dollars and recipient counts, SGDEPP is much smaller in scale. In fact, the total dollar value awarded through SGDEPP is roughly one-thirtieth of the amount awarded through the State Grant Program.

### SGDEPP SCHOOL PARTICIPATION BY PHEAA SECTOR*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>2016-17 Academic Year</th>
<th>2017 Summer</th>
<th>2016-17 Academic Year &amp; 2017 Summer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approved Schools</td>
<td>Schools with Recipients</td>
<td>Award Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>$4,229,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASSHE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$1,561,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Related</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$3,389,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$99,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$1,685,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$34,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Sectors</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>$10,999,596</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Throughout the report, school counts include branch campuses.

- Four-Year Private institutions and State-Related universities had the highest number of participating schools in the program’s fourth year.
- SGDEPP recipients at four-year institutions received 84.64 percent of all 2016-17 SGDEPP award dollars, while recipients at two-year institutions received 15.36 percent.
- The highest percentages of 2016-17 SGDEPP award dollars went to recipients at Four-Year Private and State-Related schools with 39.71 percent and 29.80 percent, respectively.
The overall award year values represent unduplicated recipient counts. It is possible for students to receive a SGDEPP award in both the academic year and summer.

- Four-Year Private institutions and Community Colleges had the most 2016-17 SGDEPP recipients with 2,587 and 2,195, respectively.
- Community Colleges averaged 220 recipients per participating school – the highest average among all sectors. PASSHE institutions had the second highest average with 114 recipients per participating school.
- Four-Year Private and State-Related institutions had the most students who received a SGDEPP award during both the academic year and summer with 329 and 92 recipients, respectively.
CREDITS, COURSES, & COSTS

Under SGDEPP, award recipients must be students who take more than 50 percent of their credits online during the individual term in which an award is received or who are enrolled in a program of study that is structured to be more than 50 percent online. SGDEPP institutions are required to report student-level data on the number of course credits attempted and earned for each participant, as well as how many credits were attempted online or in the classroom.¹

In the 2016-17 award year, the majority of SGDEPP recipients were enrolled exclusively online. In fact, 4,981 or 63.53 percent of the 7,840 SGDEPP recipients were enrolled 100 percent online, while the remaining recipients took a combination of online and classroom courses. In comparison, 61.96 percent, 66.66 percent, and 67.35 percent of 2015-16, 2014-15, and 2013-14 SGDEPP recipients, respectively, were enrolled 100 percent online. As a point of reference, approximately one in every eight undergraduates enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities during Fall 2016 studied exclusively online.²

Credits Attempted

- Overall, SGDEPP recipients attempted 130,589 individual credits in the 2016-17 award year. They attempted 109,675 or 83.98 percent of these credits online.
- On average, each SGDEPP recipient attempted a total of 16.66 credits during the entire award year, taking 2.67 in the classroom and 13.99 online.

Credits Earned

- Of the 7,840 SGDEPP recipients, 74.66 percent of recipients completed 100 percent of their attempted credits.
- Collectively, at the credit level, SGDEPP recipients completed 90.18 percent of all 130,589 attempted credits. In comparison, 2015-16, 2014-15, and 2013-14 SGDEPP recipients completed 89.84 percent, 91.10 percent, and 91.49 percent of all attempted credits, respectively.
- SGDEPP recipients completed 90.19 percent of attempted online credits, compared to 90.16 percent of attempted classroom credits.

SGDEPP Recipients’ Credit Completion Rate by Attempted Credit Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Earned Credits</th>
<th>Unearned Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>90.16%</td>
<td>9.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>90.19%</td>
<td>9.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90.18%</td>
<td>9.82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SGDEPP recipients completed more than 90% of all attempted course credits.
Programs of Study

Eligible SGDEPP programs of study must meet the same program guidelines regarding length of program and credential awarded currently applicable to the traditional State Grant Program. In short, programs of study must be at least two academic years in length and offered over a period of at least 15 months (no less than 60 weeks of instruction). All eligible programs must lead to a recognized certificate, diploma, or degree.

- SGDEPP provided grants to recipients enrolled in 317 unique programs of study during the 2016-17 award year. Of those 317 programs of study, 220 or 69.40 percent had less than 10 recipients. The number of unique programs of study represented in the pilot program increased from 290, 272, and 254 programs during the 2015-16, 2014-15, and 2013-14 award years, respectively.
- The top 10 programs of study by number of recipients are listed in the table immediately below. Together, these programs represented 53.86 percent of all SGDEPP recipients. In comparison, a recent nationwide survey of online college students found the top three undergraduate programs of study reported by respondents were Business, Health & Medicine, and Arts & Humanities, which in total, accounted for 57 percent of all respondents.

### TOP 10 PROGRAMS OF STUDY BY NUMBER OF SGDEPP RECIPIENTS

**2016-17 AWARD YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>% of Total Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration and Management</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>12.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>8.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>6.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Studies</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>5.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Commerce, General</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>5.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice/Safety Studies</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology, General</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>3.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Administration/Management</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Science/Studies</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2.18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among programs of study with 30 or more SGDEPP recipients:

- Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences, followed by Information Technology, had the highest credit completion rates at 100 percent and 98.43 percent, respectively.
- Accounting Technology/Technician and Bookkeeping had the lowest credit completion rate with 80.46 percent of all attempted credits earned.

### TOP 5 PROGRAMS OF STUDY BY SGDEPP RECIPIENTS’ ANNUAL CREDIT COMPLETION RATE*

**2016-17 AWARD YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>% of Classroom Credits Earned</th>
<th>% of Online Credits Earned</th>
<th>% of All Annual Credits Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>98.32%</td>
<td>98.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language and Literature, General</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>96.42%</td>
<td>97.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing/Marketing Management, General</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>98.04%</td>
<td>94.17%</td>
<td>95.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>96.15%</td>
<td>94.69%</td>
<td>94.85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For programs of study with 30 or more SGDEPP recipients.
### Tuition & Fees

Institutions that participate in the State Grant Program and SGDEPP are required to report tuition and fees, which are used in the award calculation process. A comparison of the full-time, full-year tuition and fees used in the 2016-17 awarding process reveals differences between SGDEPP recipients and State Grant recipients at the SGDEPP schools.

- The average 2016-17 tuition and fees at State-Related institutions and Community Colleges were higher for SGDEPP recipients than for State Grant recipients.
- The average 2016-17 tuition and fees at Four-Year Private, PASSHE, Two-Year Private, and BTT institutions were lower for SGDEPP recipients than for State Grant recipients. Most notably, the average cost of tuition and fees for SGDEPP recipients at Four-Year Private schools was $16,892, compared to $29,589 for State Grant recipients.

#### SGDEPP & STATE GRANT RECIPIENTS’ AVERAGE TUITION & FEES BY PHEAA SECTOR*

**2016-17 AWARD YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHEAA Sector</th>
<th>SGDEPP Recipients</th>
<th>State Grant Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Private</td>
<td>$16,892</td>
<td>$29,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASSHE</td>
<td>$10,284</td>
<td>$10,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Related</td>
<td>$17,716</td>
<td>$16,705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Year Private</td>
<td>$16,353</td>
<td>$18,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>$5,503</td>
<td>$5,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTT</td>
<td>$11,743</td>
<td>$15,383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The comparable State Grant recipients’ average tuition and fees are based only on State Grant recipients who attended the 2016-17 SGDEPP schools. All tuition and fees are based on full-time, full-year students.
A recent national survey of distance education undergraduates reveals that, while not a homogeneous group, online undergraduates tend to be predominately female and older than campus-based students. According to the survey, approximately 75 percent were female, 64 percent were enrolled full time, and the largest percentile of students fell between the ages of 25 and 29 years. SGDEPP recipients for the 2016-17 award year bear some similarities to, as well as differences from, these national findings.

In terms of similarities, 74.15 percent of SGDEPP recipients were female, and the average age of recipients was 28 years. Unlike the national findings, however, only 43.28 percent of SGDEPP recipients were enrolled full time.

Compared to the 2016-17 State Grant population at participating SGDEPP schools, similarities and differences also exist. Among these State Grant recipients, 58.64 percent were female, but the average age was 21 years. Additionally, a much higher percentage of State Grant students – 85.21 percent – were enrolled full time.

Among SGDEPP recipients, the median annual family income was $29,091, compared to $34,010 for State Grant recipients. A higher percentage of SGDEPP recipients – 66.05 percent – were financially independent from their parents, compared to 20.08 percent of State Grant recipients.

Interestingly, the average distance from school for all SGDEPP recipients was nearly 37 miles, compared to more than 43 miles for State Grant recipients attending SGDEPP-approved schools. For those SGDEPP recipients enrolled exclusively online, the average distance from school was roughly 43 miles. Nationally, 54 percent of online undergraduate students enrolled exclusively online enroll in online programs within 50 miles of their residence. Thus, online students, including SGDEPP recipients, tend to enroll in online programs offered by local providers.

From the first year of the pilot to its fourth year, the SGDEPP recipient profile remained consistent. In all four award years, the typical SGDEPP recipient was an independent, 28- to 29-year-old female enrolled part time.

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**2016-17 SGDEPP Recipient Profile**

- 28 = Average Age
- $29,091 = Median Household Income
- $12,871 = Average Tuition & Fees**
- 36.53 = Average Miles from School
- 74.15% Female†
- 66.05% Independent
- 43.28% Full-Time Enrollment

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**2016-17 Pennsylvania State Grant Recipient Profile**

- 21 = Average Age
- $34,010 = Median Household Income
- $16,068 = Average Tuition & Fees**
- 43.43 = Average Miles from School
- 58.64% Female†
- 20.08% Independent
- 85.21% Full-Time Enrollment

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* The comparable State Grant Recipient profile is based only on State Grant recipients who attended the 2016-17 SGDEPP schools.
** Tuition and Fees are based on full-time, full-year students.
† Gender is not reported for all students.
The “typical” 2016-17 SGDEPP recipient was an independent, 28-year-old female enrolled part time.
OUTCOME MEASURES

In order to gather data about distance learners, participating SGDEPP schools have had more in-depth reporting requirements for their SGDEPP recipients than for regular State Grant recipients. Credit completion rates, cumulative grade point average (GPA) statistics, and first-year retention rates for SGDEPP recipients have been examined throughout the pilot program. Credit completion rates were presented earlier in this report. As previously mentioned, SGDEPP recipients completed 90.18 percent of all attempted credits, which is a strong measure of student success toward degree attainment. Below are additional outcomes related to student grades and retention.

Cumulative GPA
Typically, cumulative GPA is calculated as the average of all final course grades that a student earns across multiple terms. Most often, it is measured on a 0.00 to 4.00 scale, with 4.00 being the highest achievable GPA.

- Overall, 2016-17 SGDEPP recipients earned a 2.98 average cumulative GPA. In comparison, the collective average cumulative GPAs for 2015-16, 2014-15, and 2013-14 SGDEPP recipients were 2.98, 2.98, and 2.97, respectively.
- Among recipients who attempted 100 percent of their credits online, the average cumulative GPA was 2.95, compared to 3.04 for recipients who attempted a combination of both classroom and online credits.
- The average cumulative GPA across all sectors was higher for SGDEPP recipients who attempted a combination of both classroom and online credits as opposed to recipients who attempted 100 percent of their credits online. It should be noted, however, that these differences are not statistically significant due to the small sample sizes on which they are based.

Among programs of study with 30 or more recipients:
- Business Administration, Management and Operations had the highest average cumulative GPA at 3.28.
- Sport and Fitness Administration/Management had the lowest average cumulative GPA at 2.62.
TOP 5 PROGRAMS OF STUDY BY HIGHEST AVERAGE CUMULATIVE GPA FOR SGDEPP RECIPIENTS*
2016-17 AWARD YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>Average Cumulative GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration, Management and Operations</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language and Literature, General</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, General</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For programs of study with 30 or more recipients.

PHEAA was able to compare the average cumulative GPA for SGDEPP recipients in certain programs of study to the average cumulative GPA for all non-SGDEPP, Pennsylvania-resident undergraduates enrolled in the same programs of study at the participating schools. PHEAA was not able to compare all programs of study since some institutions only offer certain programs of study online, which means a general undergraduate population was unavailable for comparison. Additionally, PHEAA was not able to compare programs where the degree type (i.e., bachelor’s, associate, diploma, or certificate) differed depending on whether the program was offered online or in the classroom. Finally, the low volume of recipients in certain programs of study decreased the statistical significance, which limited analysis on further subdivisions of the data. The comparisons that follow are based solely on data that were directly comparable.

- The 3.00 average cumulative GPA among SGDEPP recipients was higher than the 2.92 average cumulative GPA for the comparable general undergraduate population.
- The 3.06 average cumulative GPA among SGDEPP recipients pursuing a bachelor’s degree was the same as the 3.06 average cumulative GPA for the comparable general undergraduate population pursuing a bachelor’s degree.\(^{13}\)
- The 2.78 average cumulative GPA among SGDEPP recipients pursuing an associate degree was higher than the 2.66 average cumulative GPA for the comparable general undergraduate population pursuing an associate degree.\(^{14}\)

Additionally, PHEAA was able to compare the average cumulative GPA for SGDEPP recipients in certain programs of study to the average cumulative GPA of an even smaller subset of the general undergraduate population. This subset includes only non-SGDEPP, Pennsylvania-resident undergraduates who were enrolled in the same program of study but in a 100-percent classroom setting.

AVERAGE CUMULATIVE GPA FOR SGDEPP RECIPIENTS & CLASSROOM STUDENTS FOR THE TOP 5 SGDEPP PROGRAMS OF STUDY BY NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS
2016-17 AWARD YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>SGDEPP Recipients</th>
<th>100% Classroom Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration and Management</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Studies</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Commerce, General</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, 2016-17 SGDEPP recipients earned an average cumulative GPA of 2.98.
First-Year Retention Rates

First-year retention rates are usually measured as the percentage of first-year students who return to the same institution for their second year. In this report, first-year retention rate calculations only include SGDEPP recipients who are part of a school’s first-year, first-time Fall 2016 cohort. Among all 2016-17 SGDEPP recipients, only 301 students – roughly 3.84 percent – were first-year, first-time students in Fall 2016. Due to the small sample size, the rates reported below for recipients who returned in Fall 2017 should be interpreted with caution.

**FIRST-YEAR, FIRST-TIME SGDEPP RECIPIENTS’ RETENTION RATES BY PHEAA SECTOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Full-Time Recipients</th>
<th>Part-Time Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Private</td>
<td>70.00%</td>
<td>58.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASSHE</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Related</td>
<td>76.67%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Year Private*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>51.76%</td>
<td>44.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTT*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Sectors</td>
<td><strong>59.54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number of first-year, first-time SGDEPP recipients who were enrolled was too small for statistical analysis.*

Among first-year, first-time SGDEPP recipients enrolled full time:

- The retention rate for all sectors combined was 59.54 percent.
- State-Related institutions had the highest retention rate at 76.67 percent.

Among first-year, first-time SGDEPP recipients enrolled part time:

- The retention rate for all sectors combined was 50.00 percent.
- State-Related institutions had the highest retention rate at 62.50 percent.

It should be noted that these retention rates are underestimated. PHEAA could confirm retention from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017 only for students who reenrolled, had a current year’s FAFSA® on file, and were fully processed by the institution for SGDEPP or the State Grant Program. Additionally, unlike student persistence rates, retention rates do not capture students who transfer between institutions.
LOOKING AHEAD

Data collected from SGDEPP’s first four years yielded valuable information on Pennsylvania’s online student population, changing student demographics in postsecondary education, and performance outcomes for online students. Specifically, the data have shown that SGDEPP helped expand access to a new, previously unserved need-based segment of the student population. Reported outcomes also provided evidence that SGDEPP recipients earned high marks in credit completion, as well as a higher average cumulative GPA than the comparable general undergraduate population in the same programs of study at SGDEPP schools.

Currently, SGDEPP is in its fifth and final year. While PHEAA will continue to report on outcomes from the pilot program’s last year, the agency is currently working to implement the State Grant Program distance education eligibility changes enabled by Act 5 of 2018. Moving forward, PHEAA will report to the General Assembly and higher education stakeholders on the impact that expanding access to online students has on the State Grant Program.
In its fourth year, SGDEPP accomplished its goal of extending State Grant eligibility to distance education students while simultaneously gathering data on this growing segment of the undergraduate population.
NOTES


3. PHEAA allocates SGDEPP $10 million annually from its business earnings, subject to approval by PHEAA’s Board of Directors. Per academic year, any funds that remain unallocated are transferred into the summer term. Following the summer term, any additional funds remaining are carried forward to the next academic year, pending PHEAA Board approval.

4. SGDEPP reporting requirements include 1) term-by-term reporting for all SGDEPP-nominated students and 2) institutional reporting for matriculated, Pennsylvania-resident undergraduate students. For more information on the SGDEPP reporting requirements, please reference the SGDEPP School Guidelines, Student Term-by-Term Data Dictionary, and Institutional Reporting Data Dictionary at PHEAA.org/SGDEPP.

5. The State Grant Program generally reports the academic year and the summer prior to that academic year as part of an award year cycle. Since SGDEPP reporting includes the academic year and the following summer as an award year cycle, the State Grant Program values used in this report are for the 2016-17 Academic Year and 2017 Summer Term.

6. The student-level credit data provided by reporting institutions are only used for research purposes and are not used to determine student eligibility. Data must be provided for each student during all terms of enrollment for which a FAFSA® is on file until graduation or until the student leaves the institution even if the student is no longer eligible for a State Grant award of any type.


8. Two academic years is defined as the equivalent of a minimum of 60 semester credits or 90 quarter credits for a degree program or at least 1,800 clock hours for a non-degree program. Programs leading to an associate degree in Specialized Technology or an associate degree in Specialized Business must have a minimum of 1,500 clock hours.

9. For more details on eligible programs of study for the State Grant Program, refer to the latest version of the Pennsylvania State Grant Program Handbook.


13. Statistics include programs of study with five or more recipients.

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Created in 1963 by the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) has evolved into one of the nation’s leading student aid organizations. Today, PHEAA is a national provider of student financial aid services, serving millions of students and thousands of schools through its loan guaranty, loan servicing, grant administration, outreach, and other student aid programs.

PHEAA’s earnings are used to support its public service mission and to pay its operating costs, including the administration of the Pennsylvania State Grant and other state-funded student aid programs. PHEAA continues to devote its energy, resources and imagination to developing innovative ways to ease the financial burden of higher education for students, families, schools, and taxpayers.

PHEAA conducts its student loan servicing activities nationally as FedLoan Servicing and American Education Services (AES). For more information, visit PHEAA.org.

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