Methodology for Calculating the Stacked Credentials Metric

The SAM project provides a common measure for student achievement for nearly all types of postsecondary institutions: public and private, nonprofit universities, colleges, and community colleges. There are three models included in SAM, one for associate degree and certificate programs, one for bachelor's degree programs, and one for students seeking any undergraduate credential. This document describes the methodology for calculating the **stacked credentials model** used for students seeking any undergraduate credential.

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

(1) undergraduate credential-seeking students attending college for the first time attending either full- or part-time; and

(2) undergraduate credential-seeking students who transferred in to the reporting institution (transfer-in students) attending either full- or part-time.

Additional Cohort Reporting. SAM institutions have the option to report outcomes for Pell students, students who receive veterans' benefits, and students of color to all models. These additional disaggregated cohorts help institutions publicly and visible demonstrate their commitment to closing achievement gaps and ensuring all our students succeed. To report additional cohorts, you will need data for students who meet the criteria for inclusion in the Bachelor's Model **and** the criteria listed below:

- **Pell student cohort**: Students who received a Pell Grant in their first term of enrollment at the institution.
- **Students who receive veterans' benefits**: 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** will report on the percentage of students who started at the reporting institution who:

- Graduated with a 2-year credential from any institution (total, from the reporting institution, from a subsequent institution);
- Graduated with a 4-year credential from any institution(total, from the reporting institution, from a subsequent institution);
- Are still enrolled at any institution(total, at the reporting institution, at a subsequent 2-year institution, at a subsequent 4-year institution); and
- Have unknown current enrollment or graduation status (includes students who transferred but whose enrollment or graduation status is unknown).
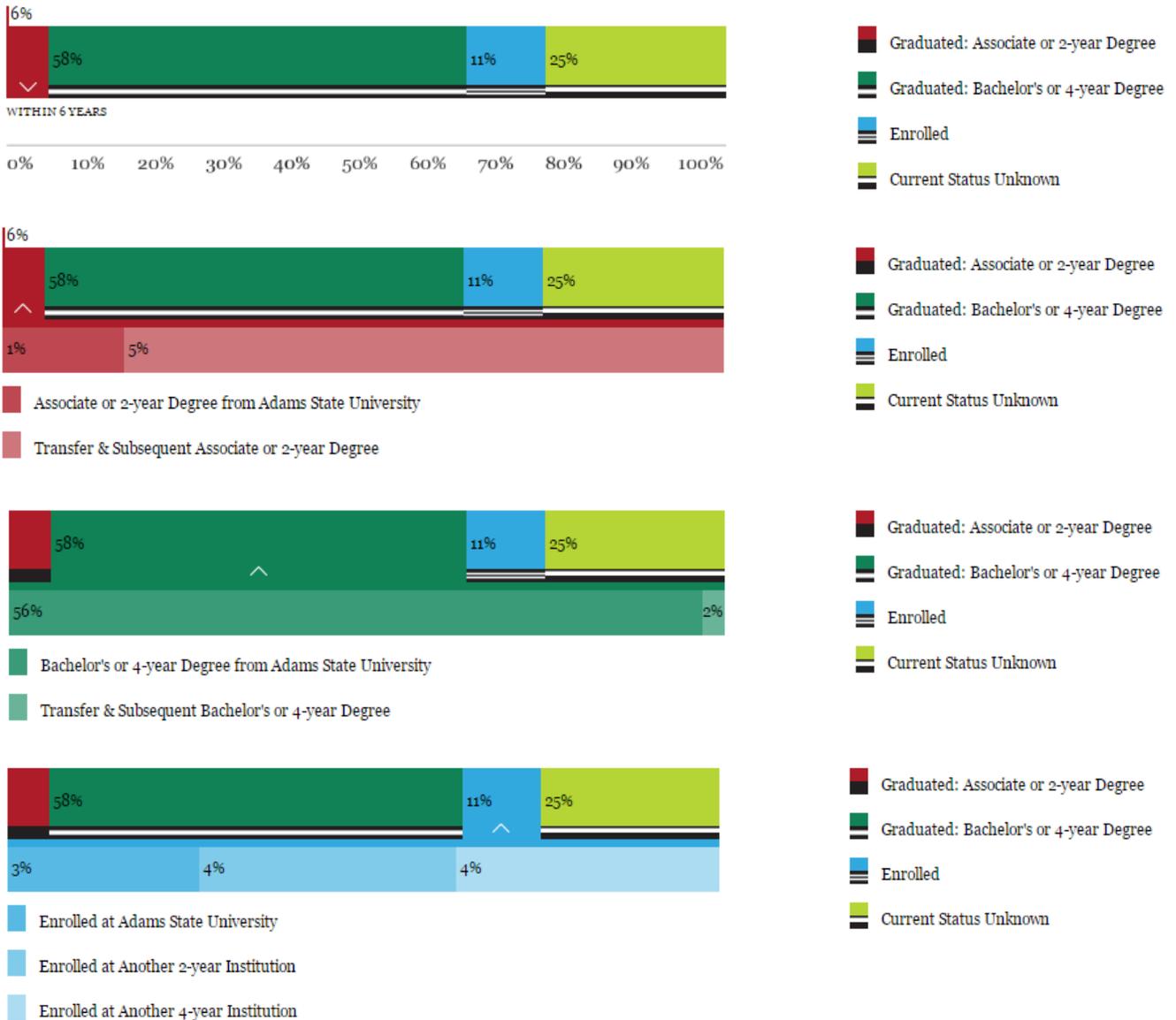
The **bachelor's degree-seeking model** will report charted outcomes for one time period for each group of students:

- Within 6 years of their start term.

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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

6%
58%   11%   25%

WITHIN 6 YEARS

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

- Graduated: Associate or 2-year Degree
- Graduated: Bachelor's or 4-year Degree
- Enrolled
- Current Status Unknown

6%
58%   11%   25%
1%   5%

- Associate or 2-year Degree from Adams State University
- Transfer & Subsequent Associate or 2-year Degree

- Graduated: Associate or 2-year Degree
- Graduated: Bachelor's or 4-year Degree
- Enrolled
- Current Status Unknown

58%   11%   25%
56%   2%

- Bachelor's or 4-year Degree from Adams State University
- Transfer & Subsequent Bachelor's or 4-year Degree

- Graduated: Associate or 2-year Degree
- Graduated: Bachelor's or 4-year Degree
- Enrolled
- Current Status Unknown

58%   11%   25%
3%   4%   4%

- Enrolled at Adams State University
- Enrolled at Another 2-year Institution
- Enrolled at Another 4-year Institution

- Graduated: Associate or 2-year Degree
- Graduated: Bachelor's or 4-year Degree
- Enrolled
- Current Status Unknown

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 on the NSC website at http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/studenttracker/vsa.php.

This document outlines the methodology that is used to calculate the SAM stacked credentials model. Key definitions and calculations are included below.

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Students

The National Student Clearinghouse collects enrollment data on both domestic and international students. When institutions report the enrollment records of international students to NSC, 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.

Retention/Enrollment Rates

- The SAM stacked credentials model retention/enrollment rates are calculated for an academic year versus a fall or spring term. The SAM stacked credentials model methodology counts a student if the student is enrolled in one or more terms during the academic year. Enrollment at the end of the 6-year period does not necessarily imply continuous enrollment throughout the reporting period.

- The SAM stacked credentials model calculations are based on "end of term" data rather than "census point" or "20th day" data. (It is not possible to select a mid-term census point that would work for all institutions and all types of terms – semester, trimester, quarters, etc). Therefore, a student who withdraws before the end of the term will not be counted, but a student that enrolls after the typical census point date and successfully completes the term will be counted.

- The SAM stacked credentials model enrollment rates include students from the cohort who are enrolled in other 2-year and other 4-year institutions during a particular academic year.

Graduation/Completion Rates

- The stacked credentials model reports the highest undergraduate degree earned by students within six year of their initial enrollment at your institution. 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 at your institution and those students who may transfer and earn a degree elsewhere.

- The denominator used in the SAM stacked credentials model rates will include only the students from the cohort who have a matching record at the Clearinghouse (e.g., it will exclude students not matched either by the Clearinghouse algorithm or a human analyst). For the vast majority of institutions the percent of the cohort that can be matched to the Clearinghouse data is very high, typically greater than 95%. However, institutions will not be "penalized" because of nonmatching 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 subsequently re-enroll will be included in the 2-year degree counts until and unless they achieve graduation with a 4-year degree. The 4-year degree will replace the 2-year degree. (Students will not be double-counted in the graduation/completion rates.)

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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.