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Policies regarding Georgia Southern University commencement ceremonies

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Policies regarding Georgia Southern University commencement ceremonies

Submitted by Mark Hanna

8/20/2014

Question:

1. For each of the ten most recent GSU graduation ceremonies (i.e., since December 2009), what number of participants and what proportion of participants failed to complete their degree requirements in the semester of the ceremony? (Please provide data for each ceremony, not just in aggregate.)
2. For the five most recent May graduation ceremonies, what number of participants and what proportion of participants failed to complete their degree requirements in the subsequent summer term? (Please provide data for each ceremony, not just in aggregate.)
3. How many of the individuals who have participated in a commencement exercise during the last five years have not yet completed the degree requirements for which they were recognized? (Please provide data for each ceremony, not just in aggregate.)
4. What is the dollar amount levied as a graduation fee and has this changed in the last five years?
5. How much revenue has been collected through the graduation fee in the last five years and how has this revenue been expended? (Please provide data by fiscal year and not just in aggregate.)
6. Is there a policy basis for scheduling graduation ceremonies prior to the due date for submission of semester grades and prior to determination of which students have actually completed the requirements for their degree?

Rationale: Recent changes to the BOR funding formula place greater emphasis on student progression and graduation. The most immediate improvement to graduation rates is likely to be achieved by targeting any policies that influence the motivation of, or address roadblocks faced by, those students who are closest to completing their degree requirements. Commencement ceremony participation policies clearly fall within this category.

During GSU commencement exercises, after asking degree candidates to stand, college deans proceed to announce that “these candidates have completed the requirements” for their degree. We know this statement is incorrect for a proportion of the participating students due to two practices: 1) The inclusion of “summer graduates” in the Spring commencement exercises, and 2) scheduling of ceremonies prior to grade submission deadlines, which may result in the inclusion of students who fail a course in the term during which the commencement exercise is held.

While there may be financial and administrative reasons for the current practices regarding participation in commencement exercises, there are also potential negative effects that should be periodically considered in order to determine whether continuation of the practice is justified. Among the potential negative outcomes associated with including candidates who have not completed the requirements of their degree are:

1. Devaluing the commencement exercise for the candidates who have completed the requirements for their degree.
2. Reducing the incentive for a candidate to actually complete their degree requirements by prior to the date of the ceremony in which they wish to participate.
3. Reducing the incentive for a student who has already participated in a commencement exercise to actually complete their degree requirements.
4. Increasing the number and proportion of students who do not ever complete their degree requirements.
5. Increasing the risk that a former student will represent themselves as having “graduated” from Georgia Southern University, when in fact they have not completed the requirements of their degree program. This representation may be to internal parties (such as Department Chairs in a request for special treatment in enrollment processes) and/or external parties such as family and employers. In either case, allowing participation in commencement ceremonies prior to completion of degree requirements, along with the student’s perception of the meaning of such participation, may lead students to misrepresent their academic record and to suffer negative consequences due to this misrepresentation.

The questions regarding the graduation fee are relevant because one justification for the current practice may be the perceived cost of more quickly auditing the grades of degree candidates prior to a commencement ceremony and/or the cost of holding a summer commencement exercise. It is reasonable, therefore, to determine if the fee is adequate and to consider whether it is being used effectively.

Response: Accepted, and referred to Velma Burden, Registrar

9/8/2014: Response from Registrar Velma Burden, attached.

4/14/2015: Response from Jayne Perkins Brown, PhD:

Pat,

I am submitting the information below as responses to the recent Faculty Senate RFI on Commencement participants; as you know, additional information on Internships and students needing 3 hours to graduate was requested.

Internships: Fall 2013 was reviewed for the number of internships in which Graduation participants were enrolled. Of the 1404 enrolled Graduation participants, 250 of those participants were in 259 internships. There were 3 students in COOPs that carried no credit; they are not included in the table.

YSC_BILL_HR	CountOfYSC_CRN
credit hours	# of students
1	25
2	44
3	108
4	1
5	1
6	4
9	4
12	72

The table includes all credit bearing experiences: internships, practicums, precepts, field experiences, residencies

Students needing 3 hours to complete their degree: These data are not available. The varying numbers of academic degree requirements/ hours at all degree levels require

that a manual review of all participants would need to be conducted.. Additionally it cannot be assumed that a particular number of hours completes a student's degree requirement as students have extra credit hours, dual majors, transfer courses, etc. As example, undergraduate participant hours in Fall 2013 ranged from 108 to 201. Dr. Jayne Perkins Brown can provide more specifics if needed.

This information was not requested, but we are providing to ensure the discussion is more informed.

Commencement ceremony revised data: Attached is a revised response on Tables 1 and 2 from the September 2014 RFI response/information. These data were revised to reflect more accurately on the participant focus of Dr. Hanna's request in Tables 1 and 2. Altho the initial response footnoted that "in absentia" students were included, the calculations were not discussed with that detail in the forefront. Note the columns highlighted in yellow.

FYI, the Office of the Registrar reports to me, thus my involvement w/ this request. Dr. Burden and her team provided these source data, same as for the September response.

Please let me know if you have any questions or wish to discuss these responses.

Jayne

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R. Jayne Perkins Brown, PhD

Sr Associate VP, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management
and Director, Strategic Research and Analysis

(2nd attachment below)