

4.C. The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

4.C.1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.

Defining goals for student retention, persistence, and completion were not priorities prior to this accreditation cycle, but [2023 data collected by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems \(IPEDS\)](#) offers insights on future goals. First, 2% of enrolled students are American Indian/Indigenous by race/ethnicity, but WSC shows no graduates from this demographic from the 2019 cohort; WSC plans to address this concern. Second, retention of part-time students at WSC is lower than comparable schools, and the college plans to investigate this retention issue further. Students who receive Pell grants are comparable or higher than peer institutions, and those students who are non-Pell grant recipients (i.e. those students who qualify for the regional scholarship through the WSC Foundation) are trending higher in graduation rates compared to peers; this also presents insightful information to guide future goals for WSC.

## 4.C.2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.

This was not an area of priority in this accreditation cycle, but WSC is investigating this area of the college to collect information and strategize on the best way to move forward. Toward this goal, WSC plans to augment its retention services abilities by hiring academic advisors who would serve as retention specialists after the term starts. In the latest IPEDS report, [Figure 14](#) shows that WSC's full-time retention was on par with peer institutions (60% vs. 61%), but part-time student retention was lower (31% vs. 40%). Similarly, [Figure 15](#) shows that WSC's graduation rate was at 33% compared to 29%, whereas the transfer-out rate was on par at 13% vs. 14% in peer institutions.

## 4.C.3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

This was not an area of priority in this accreditation cycle, but WSC is investigating this area of the college to collect information and strategize on the best way to move forward.

4.C.4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Currently, one WSC employee handles student retention and counseling. In the 2026 fiscal year, which starts July 1, 2025, the college will explore expanding personnel in this area.

On the fifth class day of each semester, WSC faculty receive a notification from the Registrar's Office that the "no show" reporting survey is open in the Starfish system. By the tenth class day of the semester, faculty report those students who have not yet attended or engaged in classes. The day after, two more reporting surveys are available in Starfish: "excessive absence" and "in danger of failing." Faculty are directed to flag those students who fall into one or both categories. The retention counselor reminds faculty during the fourth week of the semester, at the semester midterm, and prior to the last day for withdrawal from a course (before a grade is automatically changed to "F").

When faculty flag students in Starfish, those flags are received and addressed by the Retention Counselor, who contacts each student by text, phone call, and email. The Retention Counselor works with the student to understand the causes of concern raised by the faculty and propose possible solutions while linking students to social service resources, guiding them to receive tutoring, teaching them study skills, and more. Additionally, the student receives additional follow-up from the Retention Counselor.

This is an area of further growth for WSC. In July 2024, Academic Affairs and Student Services identified next steps to enhance abilities. First, Starfish must be integrated into the Blackboard Ultra learning management system to create a single sign-on to facilitate access to students and faculty. Second, students must be linked with all services in Starfish to reduce the bottleneck effect of having to rely on the Retention Counselor, which should decrease the response time to the flagging system; furthermore, this allows support team members to follow through and document interventions with students.

Finally, the scheduling function in Starfish will be activated to allow students and intervention providers to initiate and maintain services and document support services.

## Sources

- IPEDS 2023.pdf
- IPEDS Figure 14.jpg
- IPEDS Figure 15.jpg