

INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

American Enterprise Institute

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The collected papers from this conference are
available online at www.aei.org/event/100134.



Student Unit Record Systems and Postsecondary Accountability: Exploiting Emerging Data Resources

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State-Level “Unit Record” Databases in Higher Education: The Context

- Established and Maintained by Public University System and SHEEO Offices
- Several Decades of Experience at this Point
- Originally Designed to Drive State Funding Formulas for Public University Systems
- Used More Recently to Calculate Student Retention and Graduation Rates for Accountability Purposes (“Student Right to Know”), and to Track Students from One Institution to Another (“Enrollment Swirl”)





Features of Current SURs

- 48 Systems in 42 States
- 12 Contain Data on non-Public Institutions
- All Contain Requisite Data for Longitudinal Tracking (and Half Contain Detailed Data on Courses Taken and Developmental Study)
- Growing Experience in Linking Data with Other Databases (e.g. High School, Workforce, Military, DMV, Social Services)

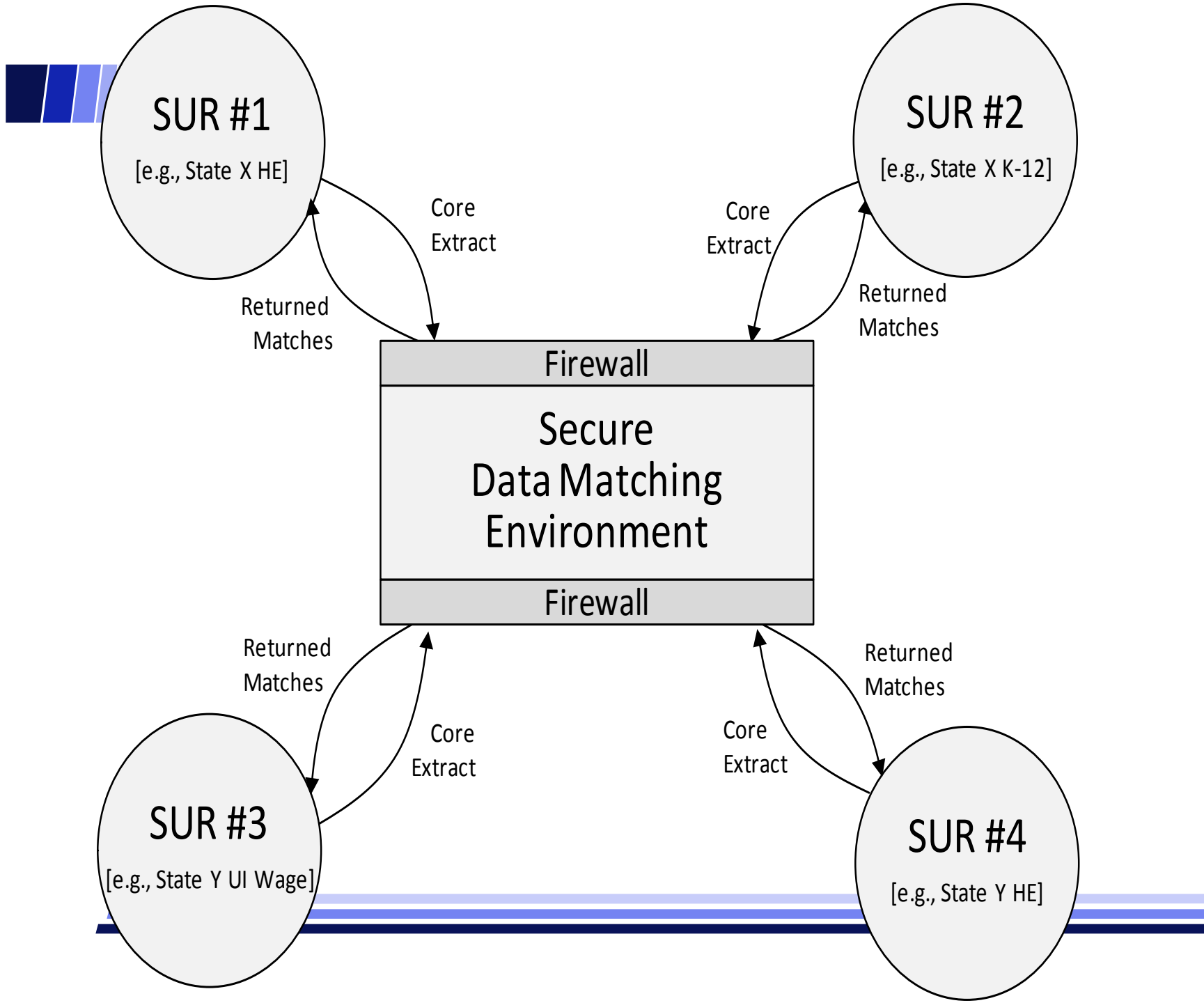




SURs and Postsecondary Accountability

- Begins with Graduation Rates, Standardized through “Student Right-to-Know”
- Recently Stimulated by NCLB and State Data System Development through Federal Dollars
- Some Recent State Examples of Performance Reporting and Performance Funding
- Potential Use in Informing the Marketplace (Indirect Accountability)







An Example of Linking Files from Many Sources

[Florida FETPIP]

2001-02 QUICK RESPONSE FLORIDA COMMUNITY COLLEGES - FALL 2002 FINDINGS

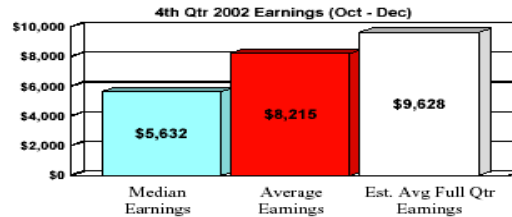
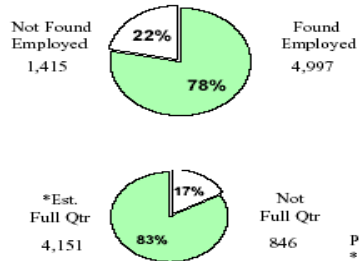
0102373

Total Individuals: 6,412

Total with Outcome Data: 5,317

83%

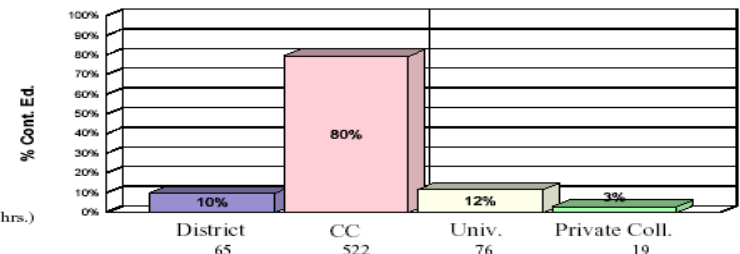
EMPLOYMENT DATA (4th QTR)



Percent working full qtr is of those employed.
* Est. Avg Full Qtr = earnings of at least \$2,678 per qtr (min. wage x 13 wks. x 40 hrs.)

FLORIDA CONTINUING EDUCATION DATA

Total Cont. their Education (Unduplicated): 656 10%



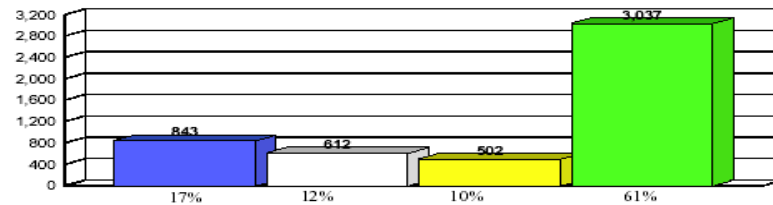
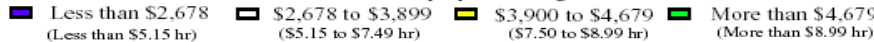
Students may be in multiple settings, therefore, sum of detail may exceed total unduplicated count.

Found Employed of those Cont. Ed.: 516 79%

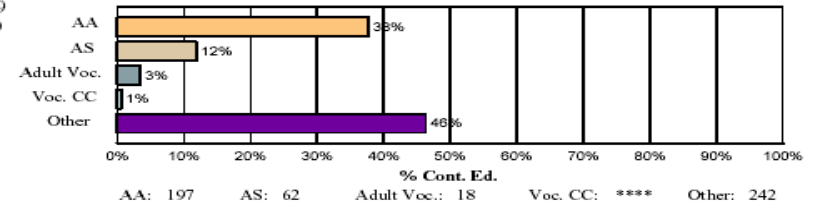
EARNINGS BY LEVEL*

*Levels determined by qtrly wage / 520 hrs. (40hrs. x 13 wks.)

Number of employed earning:



Community College Cont. Ed. Details



FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT DATA

CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT: (U.S. Post Office, U.S. Civil Service)	22	0%
FOUND IN THE MILITARY:	25	0%

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS DATA

INCARCERATED:	****	****
COMMUNITY SUPERVISION:	108	2%

RECEIVING PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

(Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps)

RECEIVING TANF: ... & EMPLOYED	51	1%
RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS: ... & EMPLOYED	310	5%
RECEIVING TANF &or FOOD STAMPS: & EMPLOYED	172	55%
	323	5%
	181	28%



Database Linking: Basic Requirements

- Multiple Agency SURs Maintained Independently
- Common Unique Identifiers in Each SUR
- Aligned Data Element Definitions and Code Structures
- A Secure Data Environment to Make the Match
- A Standard Input Protocol and Output File Specifications
- All Governed by One or More Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)





Good Practice in Database Linking and Design

- Begins with Careful Consideration of the Kinds of Questions that Potential Users Need to Answer
- Should Proceed Incrementally, Respecting the Integrity of Parent Databases
- Requires the Establishment of Transparent Governance Structures
- Demands a Good Deal of Inter-Agency Trust





Possible Standard Accountability Measures

- Calculated on a Longitudinal Basis
- Defined in Terms of Relationships Between Defined Events in a Student Enrollment History
- Two Sets of Measures:
 - > “Set A” – Can be Generated by All States with SURs
 - > “Set B” – Can be Generated by States with Course Data

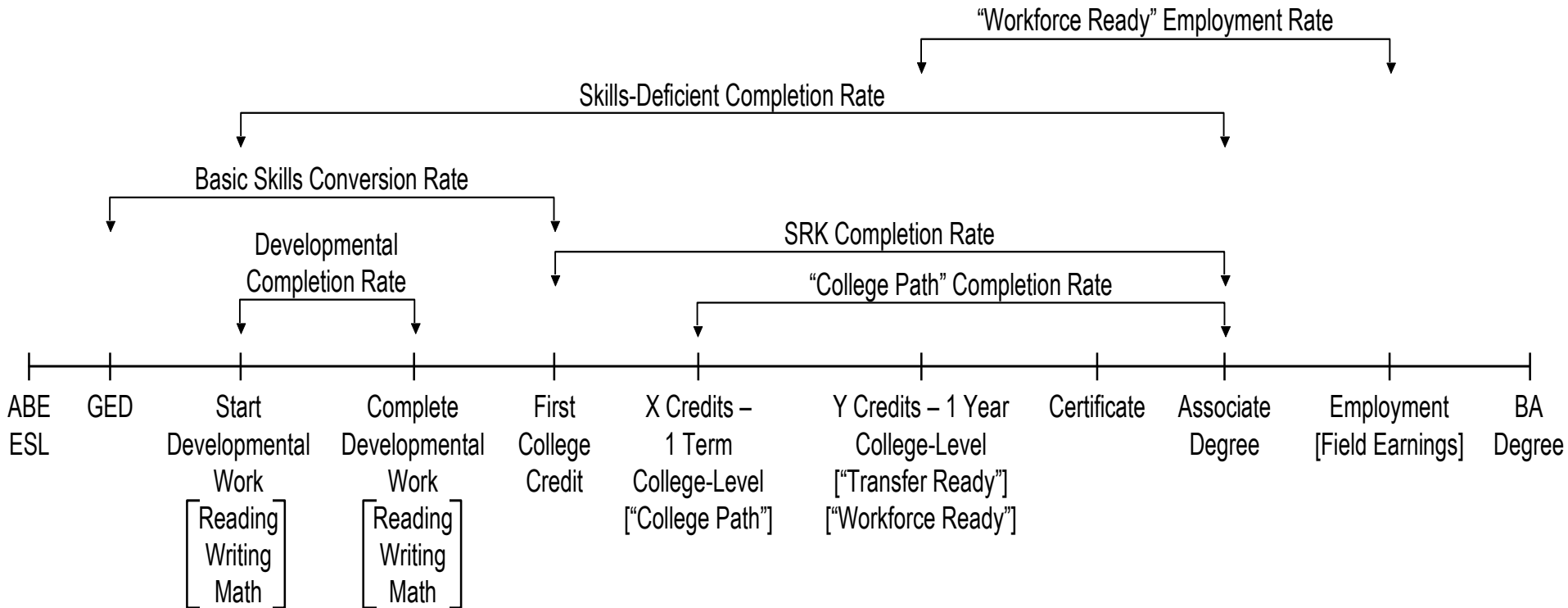




“Milestone Events” in Student History

Figure 2

“Milestone Events” in a Student Enrollment Pathway





Measure Set A (Requires Term Data Only)

- Completion Rates (Credentials and Degrees)
- Annual Persistence Rates
- Developmental Success Rates
- Inter-Institutional Transfer Rates





Measure Set B (Requires Course Data)

- More Sophisticated Developmental Success Rates
- Achievement of Designated Credit Thresholds
- “Transfer-Ready” and “Workforce Ready” Achievement Rates
- Non-Credit Conversion Rate
- Basic Employment Rates [and Earnings Differential]
- Individual Return on Investment





Recommended Sub-Populations

- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Part-time Status
- Financial Status
- Transfer Status





Main Purposes of Such Statistics

- Accountability Reporting
- Performance Funding
- Consumer Choice





Some Challenges

- Defining the Base Population (Denominator)
- Adjusting for Contextual Variation that is Unrelated to Performance
- Accounting for Student Mobility
- Establishing Appropriate Points of Comparison
- Handling Random Variation
- Building/Preserving Analytic Capacity





In Sum...

- State SURs Can Support Powerful Tools for Postsecondary Accountability; But Harnessing their Potential Requires:
 - Filling in Missing Coverage (States, Institutions, Data)
 - Linking Data Across Systems and States
 - Rationalizing Unique Identifiers and Core Definitions
 - Respecting and What has Already Been Done



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