

DEAC Annual Report: Guidance on Cohorts and Exclusions

Annual reporting for DEAC purposes requires a structured approach that accounts for the fluid nature of entry points. This includes accurately determining annual cohorts and accurate determination of exclusions. To ensure accurate reporting it is important for all DEAC institutions to adhere as closely as possible to these guidelines. This is essential for maintaining data integrity, ensuring compliance with accreditation standards, and supporting institutional improvement efforts.

Determining a Cohort

An annual cohort refers to a group of students who begin their academic program within a defined 12-month period. Institutions should be using 150% median time to complete a program to identify and report on their cohorts. Median time to completion acknowledges the unique enrollment pattern of DEAC institutions, and accounts for program specific enrollment. A well-defined cohort allows institutions and accreditation agencies to track student progress over time and compare outcomes. This ensures that only eligible students are included and avoids misleading completion rates. It also standardizes reporting across all DEAC institutions. Cohorts should only include:

- First-time enrollees in the program, not returning or re-admitted students unless they are starting a new program at a new level.
- Individuals who can be matriculated into the program, i.e., they have met all requirements for the program, have signed an enrollment agreement, have passed the cancellation period and add/drop period, had substantial interaction with the course, and all of their enrollment documents have been received by the institution.
- Students who started a program should remain in their initial cohort regardless of how many times they stop out or take a leave of absence.
- Students who transfer into a program with advanced standing should be counted in the cohort as of the date they transferred in rather than as of the date the cohort started.

Cohorts should NOT include:

- Students only enrolling in a course, but not an entire program.
- Students who are not taking the program for credit, such as auditing.
- Students who enroll but are administratively withdrawn for failure to start

Adjustments to cohorts:

- Students who transfer from one program to another program within the same institution. In this case, the student is transferred from the initial program to the cohort for the new program. They are not considered an exclusion.

Exclusions from a Cohort

Exclusions are students who were initially part of a cohort but can be excluded from completion rate calculations due to valid reasons. Each DEAC institution should report the number of

students in their cohort without removing exclusions, and then report exclusions separately as part of their annual reports. Proper documentation and reporting of exclusions ensure that completion rates reflect actual institutional performance, not external factors beyond the institution's control. Misreporting or failing to exclude appropriately can lead to compliance issues and can affect completion rates. It is essential that all DEAC institutions uniformly report their data. DEAC will calculate completion rates by removing exclusions from the cohort for you. The calculation will also remove students who are still attending but not yet completed within their 150% time to completion. Valid exclusions include:

- Military deployment
- Medical leave of absence
- Death
- Permanent disability
- Transfer to another institution (if tracked and verified, otherwise it is a withdrawal and not an exclusion)
- Incarcerated students

DEAC may require institutions to document and justify reported exclusions.

The following are NOT considered exclusions:

- Withdrawals.
- Non-starters
- Leave of absence or students given extensions.
- Active students, such as those still studying but not completed by the 150% time to completion date. *DEAC takes this into account when calculating completion rates.*
- Program transfers *These individuals should be removed from the cohort and transferred to the new program with the same start date as the original program. Students who re-enroll, transfer between programs, or restart after withdrawal should not be double-counted in multiple cohorts unless they begin a new, distinct program.*
- Students on academic hold.
- Students not seeking credit, such as auditors, or those only seeking professional development. *These individuals should not be added to the cohort in the first place.*
- Students not seeking a credential. *These are individual enrollments, but not part of a cohort.*
- Work conflicts.
- Medical issues, other than permanent disability.
- Family caretaking, car accidents, divorce, death of family member, pregnancy, etc.
- Part-time students. *These students are still part of the cohort.*
- Academic misconduct.
- Withdrawal due to financial reasons.

Barriers to Completion

While not grounds for exclusion, DEAC encourages institutions to track and address barriers to student success. Barriers are factors that negatively impact a student's ability to complete their program, but do not qualify as exclusions. Institutions tracking of these barriers are used to

inform institutional effectiveness plans, and support continuous improvement. Barriers can include anything that is NOT an exclusion, in addition to financial hardship, academic challenges, personal or family responsibilities, lack of support services, technology or connectivity issues, etc.

Best Practices for Tracking Cohorts

- Use a Student Information System (SIS) to tag cohort members by entry term and program.
- Establish a cut-off date for each cohort, DEAC considers December 31 of each year to be the cut-off date for cohorts.
- Maintain documentation for exclusions and barriers.
- Track enrollments that are not part of a specific program separately from cohort enrollments.
- Avoid double counting students in separate categories. Each student gets one and only one start date at a specific level.