

Conclusion

Institutional effectiveness can be measured in many ways. One of the most fundamental of these measures is the success an institution has in contributing to the achievement of their students' goals. Asking students about their goals and the role the institution has played in achieving these goals is perhaps the most direct way of evaluating goal achievement. Two critical periods for asking undergraduates about goal achievement are when students begin and successfully complete their academic studies. At Rutgers, entering students are asked to complete the Cooperative Institutional Research Program. This nationally administered survey asks students about their reasons for attending Rutgers, their attitudes and opinions, and their expectations and goals. Graduation offers a time for undergraduates to reflect upon their undergraduate careers and assess their academic experience. Rutgers seeks this feedback from graduating students through the administration of the Graduating Student Opinion Survey.

The responses of students to these surveys contain a rich repository of information regarding students' expectations, goals, experiences, opinions, activities, and perceptions. (Detailed results from these surveys can be obtained from the website of the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning: <http://oirap.rutgers.edu/report.html>). In particular, results from these surveys provide insight into how students perceive the university and whether it is helping them or has helped them to achieve their goals.

Students indicate many reasons for attending Rutgers, but three reasons clearly stand out: its academic quality, its relative low cost, and the availability of financial aid. Students enter Rutgers believing that they will be successful in earning their baccalaureate degree. While graduation rates vary across campuses, between 50 and 75 percent of students who enroll on any the university's regional campuses as first-time full-time students obtain their degrees in six years. These rates exceed comparable rates, on average, of respective peer institutions.

Various reasons for going to college are cited by students entering Rutgers for the first time. These reasons include career (to obtain a job or earn more money), personal (to learn about things that are interesting), or academic (to gain a broad-based education) considerations. Regardless of the reasons for attending college cited by students, responses from graduating seniors clearly indicate that many feel Rutgers is helping them or has helped them to achieve many of these goals.