



Closing the Student Information Gap at Brigham Young University

One of the questions frequently asked by collegiate administrators is: “Where did our students go after they left our institution?” Unfortunately, the answer has never been easy to find, until StudentTracker. StudentTracker enables researchers to query the Clearinghouse’s database, which contains more than 80 million enrollment and degree records.

Brigham Young University, working on a graduation research report, turned to StudentTracker as an alternative source for the enrollment and graduation data it sought. Previously, BYU’s Office of Institutional Assessment and Analysis had mailed out as many as 30,000 surveys over a period of several years to collect data for similar studies, but found the information was frequently incomplete and the samples they collected were often very small.

For its study, BYU decided to examine three cohort groups:

- **Entering Freshmen:** Freshmen who began at BYU during the 1992-1996 summer terms or fall semesters
- **Admitted, But Did Not Enroll:** Applicants who were denied or declined admission for the 1992-1996 fall semesters
- **Visiting Students:** Students from other institutions who participated in BYU’s visiting student program during the 2000-2002 spring and summer terms

For the “Entering Freshmen” cohort, BYU sent the Clearinghouse 30,852 records. The Clearinghouse used this information to search its database and was able to account for 29,988 records, or 97.1% of the cohort. With the addition of Clearinghouse data, BYU determined that, on average, 73% of the entering freshmen graduated from BYU and 4% transferred and graduated from another institution. In addition to undergraduate completion rates, Clearinghouse data was useful in discovering that 9% of the 1992 freshmen cohort had also completed a graduate degree. For each record where the student had enrolled after his or her BYU experience, BYU received the name(s) of the transfer institution, the student’s enrollment status, applicable attendance term start date and, if available, graduation achievement.

“For us, using StudentTracker is a way to augment data we’ve been continuously looking at as well as obtain previously unobtainable data, which can help us gain more complete insights into varying issues,” said Danny Olsen, director of Institutional Assessment and Analysis, “Initially, we investigated Clearinghouse data pertinent to visiting students and concurrent enrollments, as well as entering freshmen. [This] study included data specific to students’ college experiences beyond BYU, including where, when and whether or not they completed a degree.” BYU also praised the Clearinghouse’s response time, which never exceeded 48 hours.

Among the university’s findings:

- Half of the applicants who declined BYU’s offer of admission attended another institution within Utah
- The number of declined applicants who chose not to attend college anywhere decreased threefold between 1992 and 1996
- More than half of the students who participated in BYU’s visiting student program attended college elsewhere in Utah. The next largest groups attended colleges in California and Idaho, respectively.

“This data has allowed us to pursue additional research,” said Joseph Curtin, the research team’s assessment specialist, “For example, currently we are looking at cohorts of BYU bachelor degree recipients to determine how many have gone on to graduate school, what they are studying, and where they are studying.” The BYU research team anticipates using StudentTracker for other research projects, such as studying the enrollment and graduation trends of NCAA athletes and married students as well as conducting gender studies.

To learn how your institution can benefit from StudentTracker, contact your regional director or service@studentclearinghouse.org.

