

DOCTORAL BENCHMARKING ALLIANCE

SUMMARY

The Doctoral Benchmarking Alliance (DBA) allows member institutions to benchmark critical doctoral student data against similar institutions and programs while preserving the data confidentiality for each individual institution. In its inaugural year in 2017, Founding Member institutions represented a broad array of doctoral programs making the DBA project meaningful for critical institution and program level comparisons.

DATA SHARING AND CONFIDENTIALITY: THE HUB AND SPOKE MODEL

The basic model of the alliance is a hub with many spokes. NORC at the University of Chicago, an independent non-profit research organization that is not a part of the university, serves as the hub, and the participating institutions serve as the spokes. Each year, alliance members securely send their data to NORC, and NORC returns to each alliance member a report that benchmarks their data against a selected group of institutions and programs serving similar students. At no time will any institution's data be shared with any other institution, and NORC's standard procedures include state-of-the-art data security protections.

The exhibits below illustrate the process for an example member institution. In Exhibit 1, which shows a portion of the hub-and-spoke model of the alliance, the member institution sends data on its students to NORC, and several other member universities also (separately) send their own student data to NORC. Exhibit 2 shows an example of part of the report that the member institution would receive from NORC, which includes a comparison of their results to those of three other selected member universities – note that the member only receives aggregated benchmark data on the other universities and not student data. The universities used for benchmarks are not labeled; no institution can identify any other institution's results.

EXHIBIT 1. ALLIANCE MEMBERS SEND STUDENT DATA SECURELY TO NORC

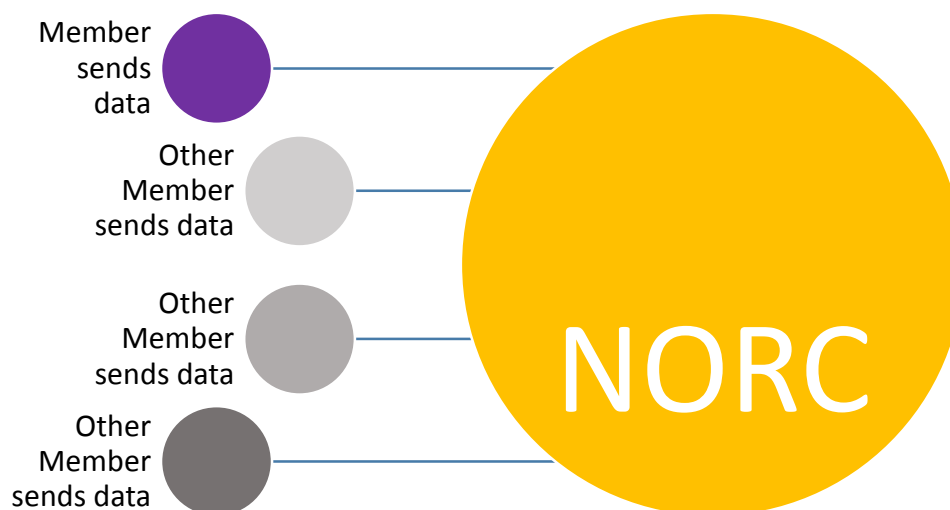
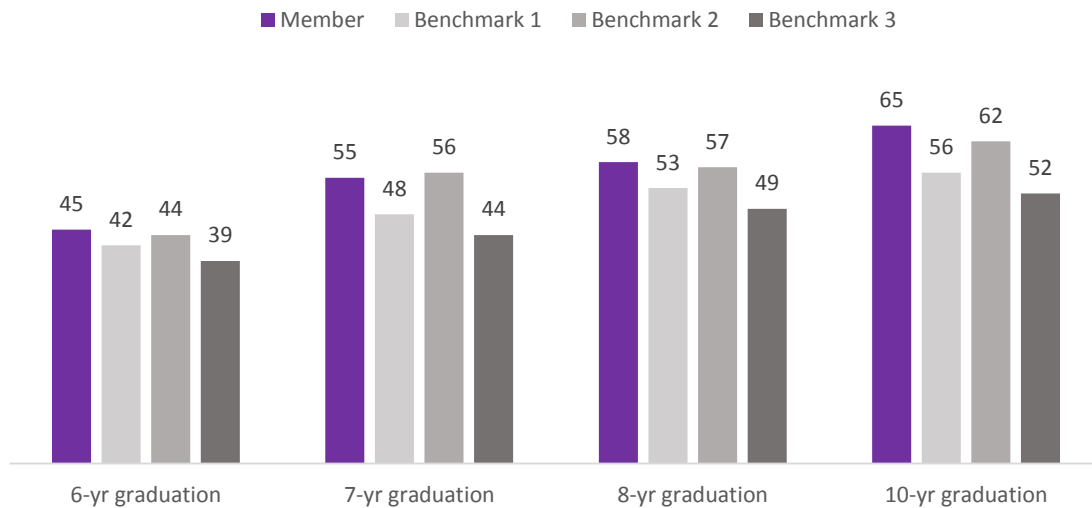


EXHIBIT 2. EXAMPLE PARTIAL BENCHMARK REPORT FOR ALLIANCE MEMBER



Other member universities have a similar experience; they send their student data to NORC, and receive in return a benchmarking report comparing their results to a selected group of similar universities or programs. Student data flows only one way – to NORC – and no institution’s student data will ever be shared with any other institution in the alliance. Furthermore, there is no need for universities to send NORC any personally identifiable information (PII) within their data – we have no need for names, birthdates, email addresses, or other potentially sensitive information.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Each participating institution sends to NORC, via secure transfer protocol (established by NORC), their student data in a pre-defined format. The schedule is arranged so that the yearly data pull can occur over the summer, as we understand this is the time with the least competing priorities for most IR/IE offices. NORC provides an Excel shell with instructions and example data for institutions to fill in, or can accommodate many other data formats as long as the list of variables and their definitions conform to alliance standards.

As noted above, the data elements that universities send to NORC do not include any PII – simply one row per student with all relevant data points included, excluding identifying information.

POPULATION DEFINITION

In its first year, the DBA focused on institutions with doctoral programs that tend to serve non-traditional students. As such, the population was largely comprised of doctoral students who

work full- or part-time during their studies, as well as part-time students or those who drift between full- and part-time status. With the success of year one in providing the participating institutions with critical benchmarked data on vital metrics, we are hoping to expand our population of institutions to include a variety of doctoral programs that serve both traditional and non-traditional students.

BENCHMARKING ANALYSES

Founding Members of the DBA helped shape the initial list of measures and their definitions. The current working list is as follows:

- Working definitions of retention rates
 - First year retention: Retention from census of first term to end of first calendar year
 - Retention to end of coursework: Retention from census of first term to end of coursework phase of program
 - Retention to comprehensive/qualifying exams pass: Retention from census of first term to successful pass of comprehensive exams
 - Retention to dissertation proposal pass: Retention from census of first term to successful pass of dissertation proposal
- Working definitions of graduation rates
 - 6-year graduation rate: Graduation from census of first term to end of six calendar years
 - 7-year graduation rate: Graduation from census of first term to end of seven calendar years
 - 8-year graduation rate: Graduation from census of first term to end of eight calendar years
 - 10-year graduation rate: Graduation from census of first term to end of ten calendar years

Covariates included (but were not limited to): degree program, gender, race/ethnicity, age bracket, First generation college status, incoming financial aid debt, and mode of instruction (primarily online vs. primarily face-to-face).

FUTURE CHANGES TO THE ALLIANCE

The inaugural year of the alliance was shaped by the priorities of the Founding Members, with the primary focus on non-traditional doctoral students (definitions of the analyses and population are above). Part of the success of year 1 has been attributed to the collaboration between NORC and the Founding Members in establishing these measures and how they were to be operationalized. If alliance members desire, the scope of the alliance may be expanded in future years to include additional analyses, student populations, and/or functionality. There will be regular formal opportunities for members to submit requests for additional functionality to be added to the alliance.

ADDITIONAL BENCHMARKING

In addition to the standard benchmarking analyses agreed to by the membership, institutions that would like additional benchmarking analyses, pending availability of data, can contract with NORC for these on an hourly basis with costs determined upon request.

NEXT STEPS

Please contact Tafaya Ransom, Research Scientist, with any inquiries about joining the Doctoral Benchmarking Alliance.

Tafaya Ransom
Ransom-Tafaya@norc.org

301-634-9421