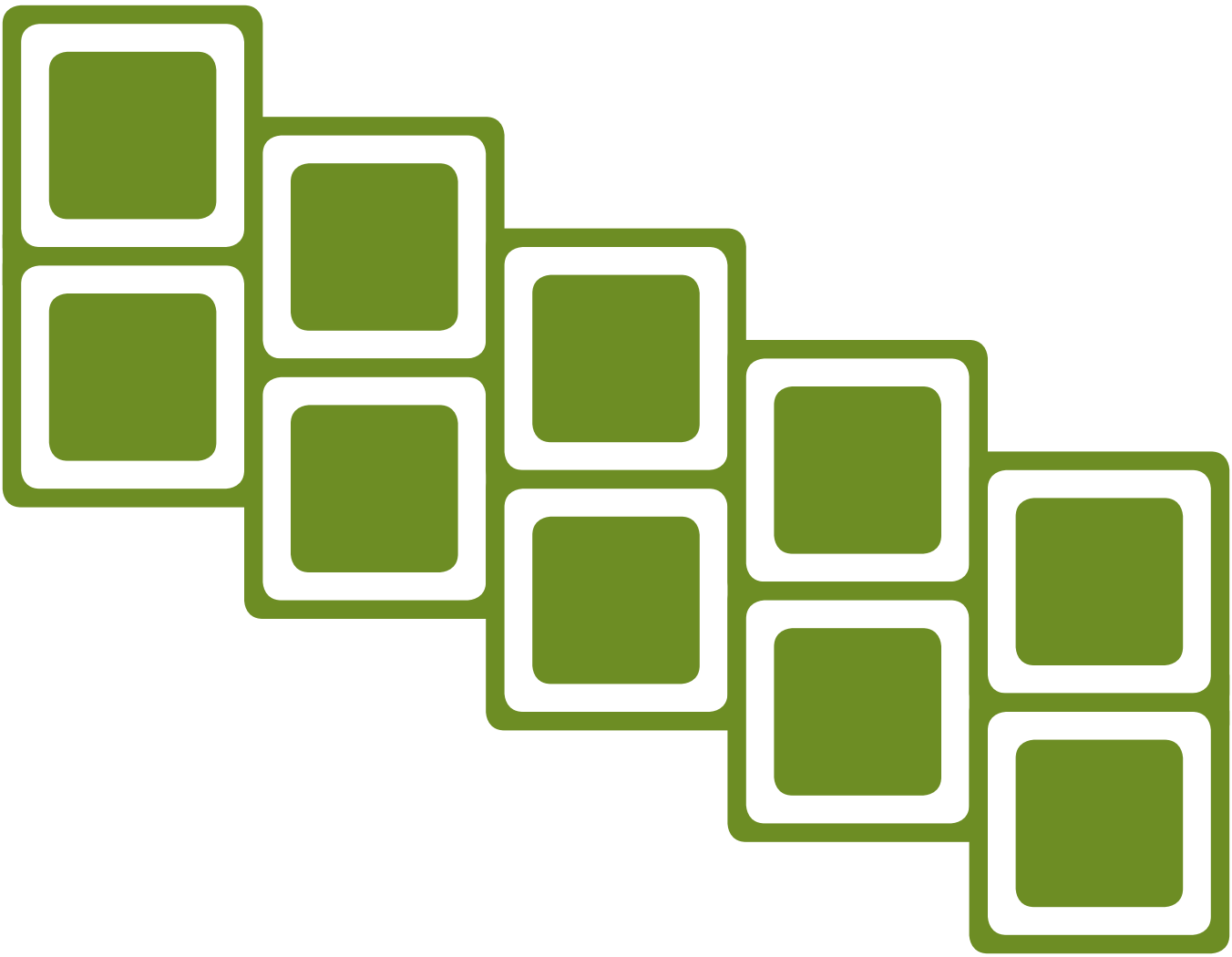
Summer Academe

Research Papers

Fall 2015



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2014 Joint Statistical Report Summary

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Abstract

The Association of University Summer Sessions (AUSS), the North American Association of Summer Sessions (NAASS), the North Central Conference on Summer Schools (NCCSS), and the Western Association of Summer Session Administrators (WASSA), using the 2014 Joint Statistical Survey and Report (JSR), worked together to gather and report data for the purpose of improving summer session programming. The 33-item survey instrument queried members of the above associations regarding various aspects of summer session from an institutional control perspective; fixed elements (outside the administrators' direct control) and flexible elements (potentially within the control of administrators) were also explored. Key findings, data generated, and future plans for the 2014 survey are described.

The Joint Statistical Survey and Report (JSR) of Summer Sessions is sponsored by the Association of University Summer Sessions (AUSS), the North American Association of Summer Sessions (NAASS), the North Central Conference on Summer Schools (NCCSS), and the Western Association of Summer Session Administrators (WASSA) in an effort to provide usable data for the overall advancement of summer session programming and its importance to the instruction of students and successful operation of higher education enterprises. Specifically, the goal of the project is to collect and provide comparative information on college and university summer sessions that is useful to summer session administrators for benchmarking, evaluating, and improving summer session programming. The information also provides researchers with a better understanding of summer session as a higher education phenomenon.

The JSR was reinstated in the summer of 2013 after a five-year period of inactivity (Fanjoy, 2008). In 2013, the survey instrument was updated and administered, and a report was published online for association members (North American Association of Summer Sessions, 2013). Based on a review of the 2013 responses and feedback from participants, the JSR survey was significantly revised and administered again in September 2014. Plans are in place for future annual administration. This paper summarizes key findings of the 2014 administration (Quality and Research Committee / Center for Survey Research at Virginia Tech, 2015) and future plans for the survey.

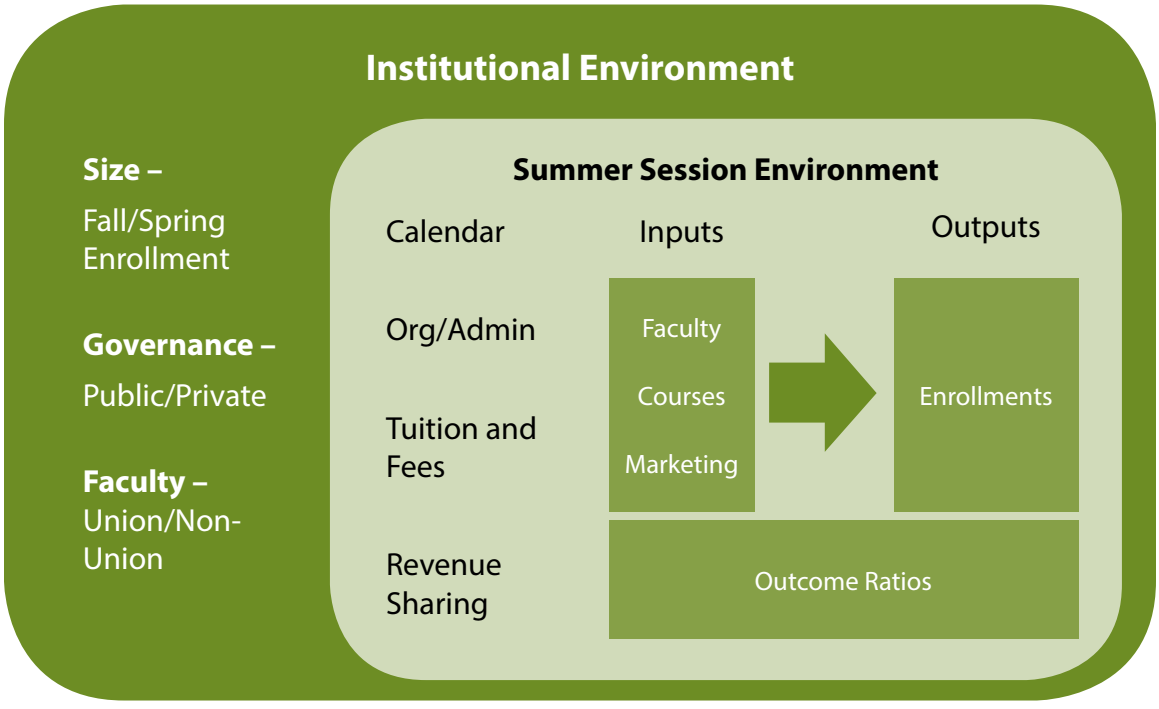

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

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A conceptual framework (Figure 1) considers the variables under study within this project from an institutional control perspective. Size (fall and spring enrollment), governance (public and private), and faculty employment factors (e.g., union, nonunion, tenure track or instructor, salary or contract, etc.) are considered fixed institutional aspects and outside the summer session administrators' direct control. Elements viewed as flexible, potentially within the control of summer session administrators, are the summer session calendar, organizational placement and administration, and financial components (tuition, fees, and revenue sharing). Both the fixed and flexible institutional variables impact the core inputs (faculty, courses, and marketing) and thus, the outcomes (enrollment) under investigation. By relating inputs to outputs to create outcome ratios, one can begin to link and examine the degree to which the fixed and flexible variables may influence inputs and outcomes.

Survey Administration

The 2014 JSR survey instrument consisted of 33 items that collected information on both the overall institutional environment and the structures and operations specific to summer session function. The survey asked about inputs to summer session functions, including faculty, courses offered, and marketing. It was assumed that these inputs were expected to generate a variety of instructional outcomes. For reporting purposes, the primary outcome of summer session was enrollment, measured in both headcount and student-credit hours. Institutional profile information was not included in the survey but was drawn from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for U.S. institutions and from institutional websites for non-U.S. participants.

All members of the four sponsoring summer session associations (NAASS, AUSS, NCCSS, and WASSA) received the survey electronically. While many institutions belong to more than one of these associations, each institution was administered the survey only once. Each of the 241 institutions surveyed received a personalized survey link so that user identification numbers and passwords were unnecessary and follow-ups could be made with all nonrespondents throughout the survey administration period. Five reminders were provided to each institution prior to the close of the survey in January 2015. Of the 241 surveys distributed, 110 responses were received for an overall response rate of 46%.

Key Findings of the 2014 Survey

Purpose

Institutions were asked about the importance of various purposes for summer session. The most frequently cited purposes rated as "very important" were to generate revenue, provide seats for high-demand courses, allow students to make up credits, and improve graduation and retention rates (Figure 2). In response to an open-ended inquiry, other purposes listed by respondents included providing opportunities for internships and second majors, experimenting with the pedagogy and curriculum, providing remedial courses for incoming freshmen, and increasing student and faculty engagement with smaller classes.

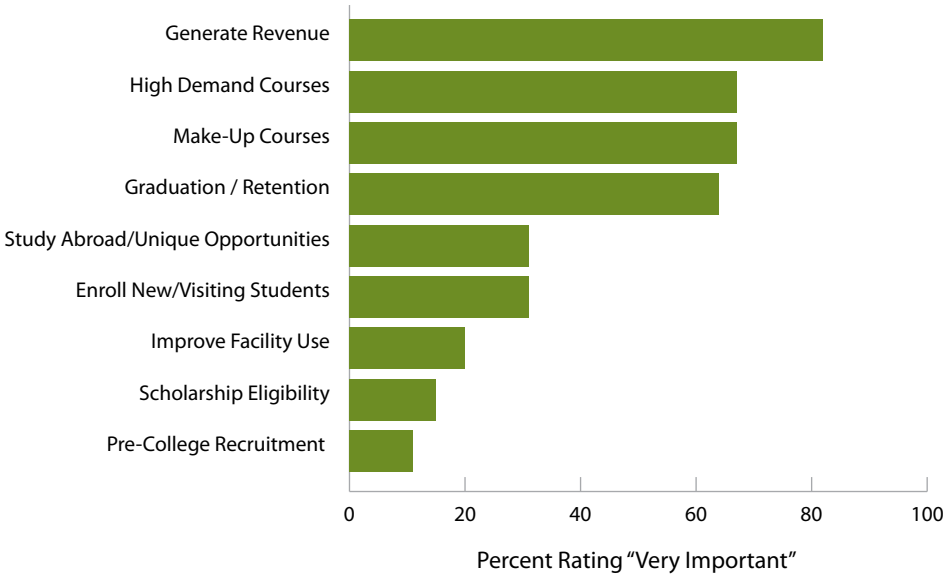

Figure 2
Summer Session Purposes Rated "Very Important"

Organizational Placement

The survey asked where primary responsibility for summer session resided in the institution (Figure 3). Overall, the most common response was the provost's office, with public institutions more likely to report the provost's office than private institutions. The second most common area was continuing education.

Of interest to the summer session administrator is how these placements might reflect either the institutional intention for summer session, or how an organizational placement might affect the priorities for summer session and its direction to internal versus external student audiences. It would seem best that organizational placement should match the institutional mission and goals for summer session.

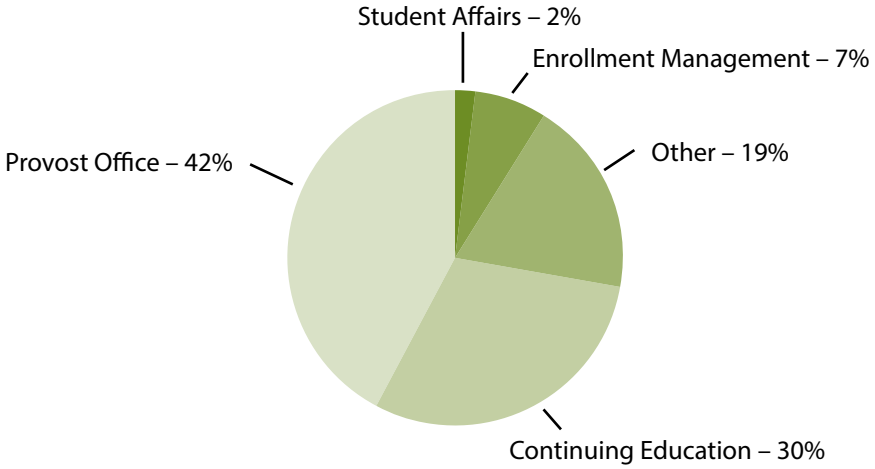

Figure 3
Organizational Placement of Primary Responsibility for Summer Session

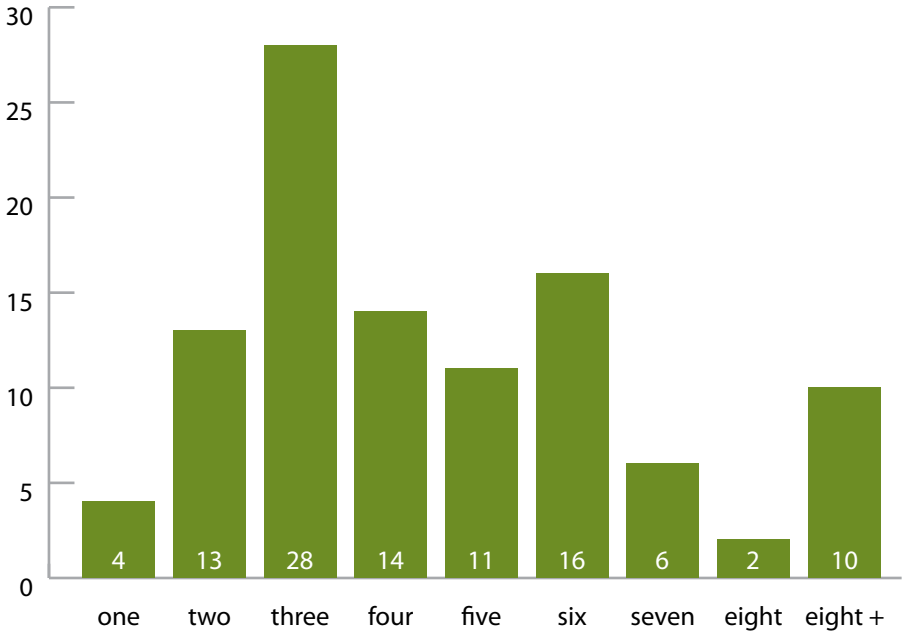

Figure 4
Number of Terms Offered Within Summer Session

Calendar

Based on institutions responding, the most common number of terms, or sessions, offered were three or six terms (Figure 4, previous page). A fairly even distribution was seen between two, four, five, and more than eight terms. The variety shown within the number of summer session terms suggests that many institutions customize their summer session calendars to accommodate student and faculty needs, offset capacity restraints, and provide flexibility in special-session instruction.

Finances, Tuition, and Fees

Several items in the survey addressed summer session finances. Summer session office operating budgets varied by size of institution. Excluding the costs associated with instructional expenses, the most common budget range cited was between $100,001 and $400,000. Institutions were asked to describe their tuition and fee charges for a three-credit-hour summer session course. There was considerable variability among public institutions with a mean in-state tuition of $687 per course and a mean out-of-state tuition of $1,714 for a course. The mean private institution tuition cost was $2,641 for a three-credit-hour summer session course.

Thirty-three percent of responding institutions offered tuition discounts for summer session (Figure 5) and 16% of institutions discounted other fees during summer session. Both tuition and fee discounts were reported more frequently by private institutions than by public institutions.

About half (51%) of the institutions reported using internal revenue sharing for summer session as shown in Figure 6. Public institutions reported the use of revenue sharing in a higher percentage than did private institutions.

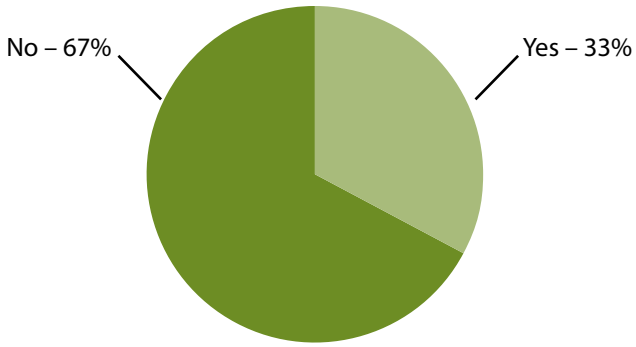

Figure 5
Institutions Reporting Use of Tuition Discounts

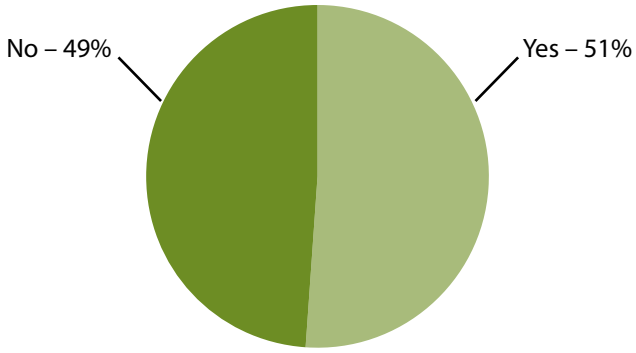

Figure 6
Institutions Reporting Internal Revenue Sharing

Faculty

Institutions reported on faculty who teach in summer session in terms of number and type, courses taught, and credit-hours delivered. In total, tenure-track faculty represented about 55% of the total summer instructional faculty (Figure 7), about 52% of the total courses taught (Figure 8), and about 49% of the total-credit-hours delivered (Figure 9). About 37% of the summer session faculty were professional or adjunct instructors who taught about 43% of the courses and 47% of the credit hours. These findings indicate broad participation of both tenure and tenure-track faculty and non-tenure-track instructional faculty in the summer session.

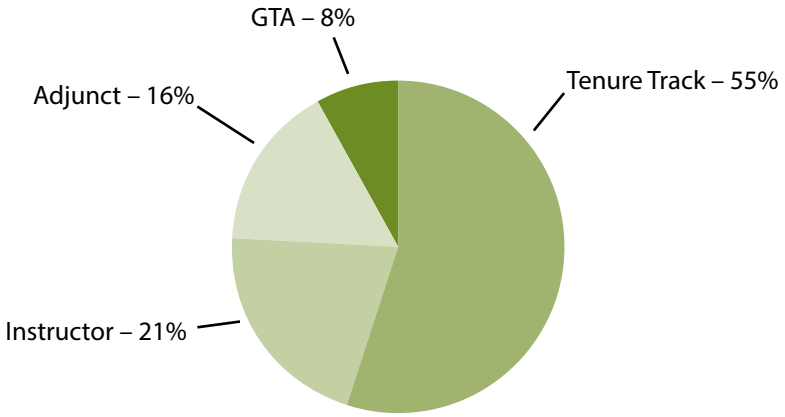

Figure 7
Summer Session Instructional Faculty

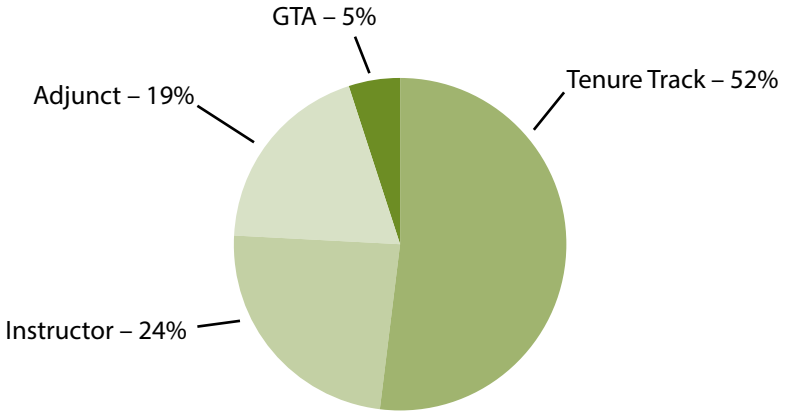

Figure 8
Courses Taught by Faculty Type

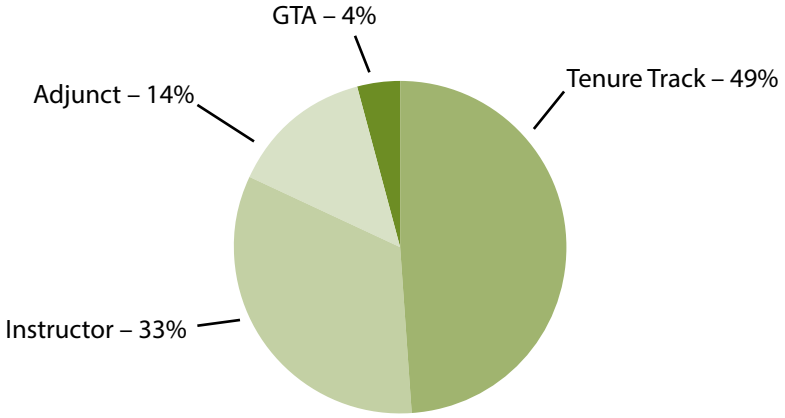

Figure 9
Credit Hours Taught by Faculty Type

Courses Offered

The number and type of courses offered in the summer session were also examined. Not surprisingly, the number and types of courses varied by size of institution, with an overall average of 627[1] courses offered per summer. Institutions in the 20,001–30,000 student range had the highest mean for distance learning (938) and hybrid (93) course offerings. Institutions in the 10,001–20,000 student range reported the highest mean for study-abroad courses (255).

1 Data from one institution was removed from the calculation as an extreme outlier.

Marketing Efforts

Overall, 28% of institutions cited a marketing budget of $10,000 or less. However, both the $25,001–$50,000 and >$50,000 categories were also cited by 25% of responding institutions. The most frequently used marketing methods were websites (96%), tangible items such as posters, door hangers, table tents, and mailbox flyers (81%), college newspapers (71%), Facebook (69%), online catalogs (67%), and direct mailings (64%). Approximately 75% of institutions reported that they routinely evaluated marketing efforts with student surveys and web-based analytics were cited as common methods of evaluation.

Enrollment Outcomes

A key component of the JSR is reporting on the enrollment outcomes of summer session for participating institutions. Enrollment can be viewed in three ways:

1. *Unduplicated headcount:* the total number of students enrolled for credit with each student counted only once
2. *Duplicated headcount:* the total number of students enrolled for credit counted once for each course in which they enroll
3. *Student credit hours:* the total number of credit hours produced during summer session

For the institutions responding to these questions, the mean summer session unduplicated headcount was 5,058 students, generating 26,782 student-credit hours (Table 1). For institutions reporting both unduplicated headcount and credit hours, the data indicate that summer session enrollment was about 32% of the Fall headcount enrollment (as reported to IPEDS) and students took, on average, 5.3 credit hours of classes.

Table 1: Enrollment

	Overall	0–5,000	5,001–10,000	10,001–20,000	20,001–30,000	>30,000
N	72	9	13	25	22	3
Mean Unduplicated Headcount	5,058	849	2,260	5,065	7,526	11,654
Mean Duplicated Headcount	7,731	1,434	4,068	7,620	13,095	14,393
Duplicated/ Unduplicated (Courses Per Student)	1.53	1.69	1.80	1.50	1.74	1.24
Mean Student Credit Hours	26,782	4,367	11,569	28,027	40,882	62,552
SCH / Unduplicated (Credit Hours Per Student)	5.29	5.14	5.12	5.53	5.43	5.37

Enrollment outcome data can also be used to enable benchmarking activities by member institutions. For example, for institutions that reported credit hours and faculty, on average 61.5 credit hours were generated for every faculty member who participated in summer session.

Discussion and Conclusions

This restart of JSR has been well-received by member institutions of the four participating associations. The findings should allow summer session administrators to view their institution within a context of other institutions of similar size and governance.

Initial challenges in restarting JSR included the complexity of asking about enrollment and faculty, and challenges summarizing scaled and open-ended response items. The complexity of these questions appeared to contribute to a high "break-off" or drop-out rate in the 2013 administration of the survey for a total response rate of 41%. Significant modifications were made for the 2014 survey to address these issues. Specifically, more definition and guidance regarding enrollment and faculty were provided, relying heavily on IPEDS definitions that would be familiar to institutional staff who may be asked to complete the survey. With regard to open-ended responses and scaled responses, the survey was simplified by using 2013 findings to create ranges for several questions and adding "Decline to Respond" and "Do Not Know" response choices. These changes reduced break-off and resulted in a greater completion rate in 2014 (46%).

Further efforts are needed to increase the response rate to the survey. The Quality and Research Committee anticipates that the identification and reporting of effective summer session functions through the analysis of outcomes ratios could prompt more institutions to participate. Participation in the survey will continue to be highlighted at the national meetings of the associations.

With an improved and stable survey instrument and higher participation, repeated administration of JSR should provide reliable and valid data that can be used to explore trends. The opportunity to explore trends expands the utility of the survey from summer administrators to higher education researchers, allowing for examination of various questions about summer session. To enable this type of research, as well as greater manipulation of the data by summer session administrators, the Quality and Research Committee of NAASS is developing a structure and procedures to make the data more widely available to all members of the associations.

Ultimately, it is hoped the database can be used to develop web-based reports that could support roll-up and drill-down capability for custom querying. A full, multiyear data set and codebook may also be developed for higher education researchers. Access to this data will be subject to application and approval through the Quality and Research Committee of NAASS and will include guidelines for the use and publication of results.

JSR has a long history of service to members of the associations. The revised JSR is expected to continue to support decision making and enhance the administration of summer sessions as an important function of higher education.

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Biographies

Kenneth S. Smith is vice provost for resource management and institutional effectiveness in the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost at Virginia Tech. He provides institutional leadership on issues related to academic budgets, strategic planning, academic space management, university instructional space, and academic capital outlay planning. He also serves as the institution's accreditation liaison to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and is an affiliated professor in the School of Education.

C. Noel Byrd is a project director in the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost at Virginia Tech. She provides support for many administration functions related to academic strategic planning, academic space management, university policies and procedures, and institutional accreditation.