

## **Rationale for Acceptable Thresholds of Student Success at NOBTS and Leavell College**

### ***Student Success in Graduation Rates and Retention/Persistence Rates***

*Rationale for Student Success in Graduation Rates and Retention/Persistence Rates from the NOBTS and Leavell College Mission Statement* – The Mission Statement of NOBTS and Leavell College, revised in 2019, is to “prepare servants to walk with Christ, proclaim His truth, and fulfill His mission.” We are convinced that trained, well-equipped ministers are more effective than those who lack this training. Students who complete their degree requirements are better equipped than those who take just a few credit hours. Also, those with complete degrees become eligible to take advanced degrees, to become better prepared to “proclaim His truth.”

*Rationale for the Criteria/Threshold for Student Success in Graduation Rates and Retention/Persistence Rates* -- Student retention and graduation rates are more complex at NOBTS than at a typical undergraduate or graduate institution.

- (a) First of all, most degrees at NOBTS do not have high academic admission requirements. The main requirements are a statement of call to ministry and a church endorsement, along with the prerequisite academic degrees. We do not require ACT or SATS scores for undergraduate admission, or anything more than a minimal GPA for graduate admission. Particularly in Leavell College, we have a number of post-traditional students who felt a call to ministry later in life, and thus have not been in an academic institution for many years. Many of them are from oral culture traditions in which they are the first person in their family to go to college, including many of our undergraduates in prison programs. This lack of preparation obviously impacts their retention rate. However, we do have higher admission standards in a few more academically focused master’s and doctoral degrees, and the retention rate is higher for those degrees.
- (b) Second, the majority of our students are part-time students because they are already working at least one job. Unlike many church traditions, Baptist churches do not require an academic degree for ordination. Therefore, the majority of our students are already serving in a ministry position and/or a secular work position. Time is their greatest challenge. This is particularly a challenge for bivocational ministers, who

comprise at least 25% of all Southern Baptist pastors. These students serve in both a secular position and a ministry position. NOBTS's Caskey Center for Church Excellence specifically targets these students for scholarships. Even with a full scholarship, these students do not have time to take a full-time load. Also, each of our extension centers have a limited offering of courses each semester, typically just 9 hours per semester.

- (c) Likewise, online students tend to take fewer credit hours due to the higher cost. Some students are delayed by life situations or financial limitations requiring them to sit out a semester or two occasionally. In a typical academic year, undergraduate students averaged about 14 credit hours for the year. The 121 hour B.A. degree, then, would take over 8.5 years to complete at that rate. Graduate students averaged taking just 11.5 credit hours per year. Since our standard Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree requires 84 credit hours, it would take the average graduate student over 7 years to complete the degree, long after full-time students would complete it. Some take as long as a dozen years to complete the degree.

Graduation Rate Thresholds – In general, the thresholds for each category are developed to be consistent with our mission statement, to reflect on our historical patterns in this area, and when possible to compare our results with national benchmarks. The thresholds are initially recommended by the Institutional Assessment staff in consultation with the academic leaders who have oversight over that area. These recommendations are presented to the NOBTS Assessment Oversight Committee for approval.

NOBTS has historically used the 150% length from the standard IPEDS graduation rates (allowing 6 years for a 4 year degree). However, NOBTS has chosen to utilize the IPEDS Contours graduation rates since its 200% length (allowing 8 years for a 4 year degree) are more reasonable and realistic to our student population. We are undergoing a transition because we are implementing a new student information system in Summer 2020. This move is going to facilitate the use of the 200% length that we prefer. However, our historical data is based on the 150% figure, so we will use it in determining these thresholds.

A recent IPEDS survey (as reported at a SACSCOC presentation by Alexei Matveev in 2018) is 23% for the associated degree and 47% for the baccalaureate degree. Several factors

lead us to anticipate that NOBTS and Leavell College students will have a lower graduation rate than the national average:

- (a) Most students are part-time students, working in a ministry or secular job.
- (b) Our two standard degrees are 84 credit hours and 121 hours, which are challenging for part-time students.
- (c) Most of our degrees do not require high GPAs or standardized test scores for admission.

However, the shorter, more academically focused degrees with higher admissions standards tend to have higher graduation rates.

NOBTS established its thresholds by noting the graduation rates in IPEDS and other Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accredited institutions, and by a careful look at our own patterns of graduation rates. In light of this data, the graduation rates are recommended by the Institutional Assessment staff in consultation with the Provost and relevant program Dean, and approved by the Assessment Oversight Committee. The following chart tracks graduation rates in master's and professional doctoral degree programs in institutions accredited by ATS over five years (2014-2019), figured at 150% of the time of the degree. NOBTS is comparable to graduation rates at other Evangelical seminaries in the MA and DMin degrees, but much lower in the longer MDiv degree. The NOBTS MDiv graduation rate was 21% below fellow Evangelical schools in ATS; the MA degrees were 2% above the average Evangelical school; and the DMin was 5% below the average at Evangelical Schools:

### Graduation Rates in Comparable Theological Schools\*

	MDiv in 6 years	MA in 4 years	DMin in 6 years
NOBTS (18-19)	29%	45%	41%
All ATS schools	58%	48%	52%
Evangelical	50%	43%	46%
Mainline	73%	66%	65%
Catholic/Orthodox	63%	54%	33%

\* Taken from the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) for 2018-19.

Therefore, although our aspirational goals are higher, taking into account our historic patterns of graduation rates and comparing ourselves with sister institutions as a baseline, our realistic thresholds for graduation rates based on prior performance are:

- 15% in the associate degree program (Leavell College)
- 25% in the baccalaureate program (Leavell College)
- 30% in the 84 hour MDiv graduate program
- 40% in the shorter master’s degrees.

The threshold is higher for our doctoral programs, because admission is academically selective, unlike many of our degrees. Therefore, gauged by the pattern of previous years and in comparison with sister institutions, the graduation rate thresholds for the doctoral degrees are:

- 40% for the professional doctoral degrees
- 40% percent for research doctoral degrees.

Student Persistence Rate Thresholds – As noted earlier, the majority of NOBTS and Leavell College students are essentially part-time students, particularly those at extension centers or those taking online classes. Therefore, it is not unusual for active students to be going beyond 200% for the length of their degrees. Enrolled students typically are about half of the total graduates for that student class and degree. NOBTS has addressed this with a “Plus 3” initiative, encouraging students to take 3 more hours per semester so they can graduate earlier. However,

credit hours taken by distance students (extension centers and online) still remain rather low per semester. Therefore, in addition to moving to the 200% graduation rates, NOBTS is beginning to track student persistence – that is, 200% plus the students who continue to be actively enrolled in the program, because it seems misleading to discount students who are currently enrolled.

In light of the available data, the persistence rates are recommended by the Institutional Assessment staff in consultation with the Provost and relevant program Dean, and approved by the Assessment Oversight Committee. The persistence rate thresholds approved for these programs range from 5%-20% higher than the graduation rate thresholds:

- 35% persistence rate for the associate degree (Leavell College)
- 40% persistence rate for the baccalaureate degree (Leavell College)
- 40% persistence rate for the MDiv graduate degree
- 50% persistence rate for shorter non-MDiv graduate degrees
- 60% persistence rate for the professional doctoral programs
- 60% persistence rate for the research doctoral programs.

*Results in Student Achievement in Graduation Rates and Retention/Persistence Rates –*

Degree Level	Grad Rate	Grad Thresh	+/- Thresh	Currently Enrolled	Persistence Rate	Persistence Threshold	+/- Threshold	Dropped Out
Assoc	5%	15%	-10%	32%	37%	35%	+10%	63%
BA	24%	25%	-1%	18%	42%	40%	+2%	58%
MDiv	29%	30%	-1%	15%	44%	40%	+4%	56%
Non-MDiv Master's degrees	45%	40%	+5%	19%	64%	50%	+14%	36%
DEdM	43%	40%	+3%	28%	71%	60%	+11%	29%
DMin	41%	40%	+1%	30%	71%	60%	+11%	29%
PhD	48%	40%	+8%	22%	70%	60%	+10%	30%

The associate degree dropout rate in 2017-19 was exceptionally high, at 63%. The associate graduation rate was just 5%, although the persistence rate was 37%. The IPEDS average was 23%. We believe this is due to at least these four factors:

- (a) Associate students tend to be non-traditional, part-time students, some of whom just take one course per semester, and thus do not graduate at the prescribed times;
- (b) those in our prison programs do not receive their diploma until they receive their BA degree, so their graduation is delayed at least two years;
- (b) associate degree students at extension centers or online are part-time students who make slow progress toward their degrees; and
- (c) some students enter as associate degree students but decide to pursue the BA degree instead, so they never formally graduate with the associate degree.

The baccalaureate degree dropout rate was also high, about 58%, but just fractionally above the Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree dropout rate of 56%. The BA degree had a 25% graduation rate, but a 42% persistence rate, which was 1% less than the graduation rate threshold and 2% over the persistence rate. However, the graduation rate was 22% below the IPEDS average, though just 4% less than the persistence rate. The MDiv degree had a 30% graduation rate and a 44% persistence rate, which was 1% below the graduation rate threshold and 4% over the persistence rate threshold. Both of these degrees are rather long, 121 hours for the BA and 84 hours for the MDiv. Therefore, the 42% persistence rate in the BA degree and the 44% persistence rate in the MDiv seems reasonable for mostly part-time students. While this level of student achievement is far from ideal, it is reasonable for this makeup of students.

The shorter master's degrees have a significantly lower dropout rate of 37%. They have a graduation rate of 45% and a persistence rate of 64%. This was 5% over the graduation rate threshold and 14% above the persistence rate threshold.

In our professional doctoral programs (DEdMin and DMin), the graduation rates were 43% and 41%, respectively, which was 3% (DEdMin) and 1% (DMin) above the anticipated threshold. Student persistence in both of these degrees was 71%, which was 11% above the threshold. In the research doctoral programs, the graduation rate was 48%, which was 8% above the threshold, and the persistence rate 70%, which was 10% above the threshold. The doctoral degrees have our best-prepared students, and thus have the highest graduation and persistence rates.

### ***Student Success in Employment***

#### ***Rationale for Student Success in Employment from the NOBTS and Leavell College***

***Mission Statement*** – The purpose of training at NOBTS and Leavell College is to “prepare servants walk with Christ, proclaim His truth, and fulfill His mission.” This mission, however, is not limited to full-time vocational ministers. As was mentioned earlier, NOBTS has programs that attract bivocational ministers – those who are serving in both a ministry position and a secular job. Many of our students, particularly in certificate programs, are lay ministers in churches or ministries who have no interest in full-time vocational service. Therefore, our goal is for successful graduates to serve in some way in a local church or ministry.

***Rationale for the Criteria/Threshold for Student Success in Employment*** -- Having theological training generally makes ministry candidates more attractive to churches. Because NOBTS has numerous extension centers across the five Southeastern states, in addition to internet course accessibility wherever our students are, NOBTS students can already serve in ministry positions wherever they are without having to move to the main campus. Therefore, the majority of our students are already serving in some ministry position even before graduation. Many students (particularly certificate students) are serving in volunteer positions. They came to

Seminary simply to improve their service in these lay minister positions. Therefore, both paid positions and volunteer positions are taken into account in measuring student success.

In addition to measuring employment of students at the time of graduation, we also survey their employment a year after graduation to discover if they have continued in ministry. It is not unusual for graduates to be offered larger church opportunities after graduation, so this survey is a better gauge of their full-time employment after graduation. Of course, sometimes graduates find that ministry is not for them, and they go into a different vocation.

Having examined the employment patterns of recent graduates, we set the threshold for students at graduation serving in a full-time or part-time paid position at severing in some ministry position at graduation at 50%, and those serving in some ministry position at 80%. A year after graduation, our threshold for student employment is 80% of students serving in some ministry position, and 55% serving in a full-time position.

Results in Achievement in Employment –

**Results of Student Success in Employment in Ministry at Graduation**

Semester	Paid Full-or Part-Time Ministry at Graduation	Threshold	+/- Threshold	Volunteer Ministry at Graduation	Total Serving in Ministry	Threshold	+/- Threshold
Spring 2016	62%	50%	+12%	26%	88%	80%	+8%
Fall 2016	60%		+10%	23%	83%		+3%
Spring 2017	42%		-8%	39%	81%		+1%
Fall 2017	50%		0	33%	83%		+3%
Spring 2018	77%		+27%	11%	88%		+8%
Fall 2018	67%		+17%	18%	85%		+5%
Spring 2019	56%		+6%	27%	83%		+3%
Fall 2019	65%		+15%	26%	91%		+11%
Average	60%		+10%	25%	85%		+5%



Employment and church service of our graduates is comparatively high. In the last four years of graduation classes, about 60% of the graduates were already serving in a full-time or part-time ministry position, and over 85% were serving in some church leadership role. Based on this track record, the thresholds have been determined to be at least 50% serving in a paid (full-time or part-time) ministry position, and at least 80% serving in some ministry position, as noted in the above chart. NOBTS also monitors two other figures regarding employment. The first is the employment of alumni one year post-graduation, which is drawn from a report to ATS each year; the second is employment by PhD graduates, as tracked by our Research Doctoral Degrees office.

**Results of Student Success in Employment in Ministry  
among Recent Graduate Program Alumni\***

<b>Year/ Degree Graduated</b>	<b>Paid Full-Time Ministry Employment</b>	<b>Paid Part-Time Ministry Employment</b>	<b>Total Ministry Employment</b>	<b>Pursuing an Advanced Degree</b>	<b>Seeking Placement</b>	<b>No Longer in Ministry</b>
2013-14 master's degree alumni	59%	17%	76%	9%	5%	2%
2013-14 doctoral degree alumni	79%	11%	90%	0%	2%	5%
014-15 master's degree alumni	56.5%	14.5%	71%	12%	6%	1%
2014-15 doctoral degree alumni	80%	4%	84%	0%	0%	1%
2015-16 master's degree alumni	55%	12%	67%	8%	9%	2%
2015-16 doctoral degree alumni	90%	7%	97%	0%	0%	0%
2016-17 master's degree alumni	53%	16%	69%	10%	6%	4%
2016-17 doctoral degree alumni	77%	9%	86%	0%	5%	2%
2017-18 master's degree alumni	59%	13%	72%	10%	5%	3%
2017-18 doctoral degree alumni	73%	15%	88%	0%	4%	0%

*\*Data is drawn from a report to ATS about our alumni each year.*

Over a year after graduation a year ago, about 72% of master’s degree alumni and 88% of doctoral graduates are serving in full-time or part-time ministry positions. Just 5% of master’s degree graduates and 4% of doctoral graduates are still seeking employment.

**Employment of Ph.D. Graduates from 2005-2019\***

PhD graduates responding to survey	Serving in an academic position	Serving in a ministry position	Other	Percent employed
189	77 (41%)	108 (57%)	4 (2%)	99%

*\*This chart represents a longitudinal study of Ph.D. program graduates over 13 years from 2005-2019.*

Among Ph.D. graduates from 2005-2019, 99 % are employed, 98% of them in an academic or ministry position.

***Student Success in Licensure Track Counseling Students and Graduates***

*Rationale for Student Success in Counseling Licensure from the NOBTS and Leavell*

*College Mission Statement* -- In keeping with the NOBTS and Leavell College mission statement to prepare servants to walk with Christ, proclaim His truth, and fulfill His mission,” and consistent with the NOBTS core value of Characteristic Excellence and NOBTS key competency of Interpersonal Skills, we desire our Counseling graduates to be well-equipped and effective. Therefore, since licensure is required for many ministry positions, we desire a high “pass” rate on licensure tests, i.e., above the regional or national average.

*Rationale for Criteria/Threshold for Student Success in Licensure* – NOBTS licensure track Counseling students take the CPCE (Counseling Preparation Comprehensive Examination), which is preparatory for licensing tests. One baseline that was considered in establishing the threshold for success was that the national mean was 85.6% in 2017, 87.87% in 2018, and

84.66% in 2019, which is required for a “pass.” The threshold was proposed by the Institutional Effectiveness staff in consultation with the Counseling department, and approved by the NOBTS Assessment Oversight Committee. In keeping with the NOBTS mission statement to fulfill Christ’s mission (including love for others), and consistent with the NOBTS core value of Characteristic Excellence and NOBTS key competency of Interpersonal Skills, NOBTS seeks the threshold of our students to average scoring in the 90 percentile of those passing, since these Counseling programs are intended to lead to licensure.

The NCE (National Counselor’s Exam) is required for LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) licensure. The national passing score rate has never been over 65% correct answers, with about 90% of the persons who take the NCE each year achieving a passing score. In keeping with the NOBTS mission statement to prepare servant leaders to fulfill Christ's mission (including love for others), and expressing the NOBTS core value of Characteristic Excellence and NOBTS key competency of Interpersonal Skills, the threshold sought by NOBTS is 95% of graduates passing the NCE, since these Counseling programs are designed to lead to licensure

*Results of NOBTS Student Success in Counseling Licensure –*

**Results of Student Success in Counseling Graduate Licensure Exams (2017-2020)**

	NOBTS students	National average	NOBTS threshold	NOBTS students above national average	NOBTS students above threshold
CPCE* test	100% successful	84.66% successful	90 %	+ 16.4%	+ 10 %
NCE* exam	100% successful	90% successful	95 %	+ 10 %	+ 5 %

*Both tests had the same 100% pass results since 2017.*

*\* The CPCE is the Counseling Preparation Comprehensive Examination, which is designed to assist students in preparing for Counseling licensure.*

*\* The NCE is the National Counselor’s Examination, which is required nationwide for Licensed Professional Counselor licensure.*

Among recent NOBTS licensure track Counseling students, 100% of the students nearing graduation passed the CPCE exam their senior year, surpassing the national mean by 16.4%, and the NOBTS threshold by 10%. Each year the Counseling faculty does an assessment after the tests are completed to discover and select at least one area for "focus in learning" in order to improve the scores. Among recent licensure track Counseling graduates who reported taking the NCE exam for licensure, 100% who attempted the NCE successfully passed the exam. This result is 10% above the national average and 5% above the NOBTS threshold.

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