

Frequently Asked Questions About the VLDS and Wage Outcomes Reports

What is the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS)?

The VLDS is a collaborative effort among the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Employment Commission, the Virginia Community College System, and the Virginia Information Technologies Agency. Other partners are expected to join in 2013 and beyond.

Through the VLDS each agency makes available individual-level, de-identified data that allows us to securely track outcomes of students across the state without violating privacy or confidentiality.

What are the limitations of these data?

These data do not tell the entire story of what choices graduates of a given program make. The data to which we have access is limited to graduates employed in Virginia in positions subject to protection by unemployment insurance. (This is fully described on each page of the reports.)

Further, we do not have information on graduates who pursue additional education outside of Virginia, or at proprietary or out-of-state institutions offering programs in Virginia. We also do not know why graduates choose specific enrollment or employment options. Reviewers of the data should be mindful that local economies may have a profound impact on wage outcomes.

What do these data tell us?

These data only reflect post-graduation experiences of alumni who remain in the Commonwealth and enter its workforce. Initially we expect the data will be used to develop a clearer understanding of the outcomes of graduates at specific points in time (18 months and five years) after certificate or degree completion. We believe the wage data will add to the discussions regarding college affordability and perhaps guide the state to defining affordability.

Additionally, these data confirm national findings regarding the differences in earning based on levels of degree attainment. They also confirm the expected differences in wages based on program of study. Those differences are more likely to reflect the results of a variety of choices made by the graduate rather than the characteristics of the program itself. These data also provide evidence of the likely ability of a graduate with student loans to be able to begin repaying those loans after graduation.

What conclusions should NOT be drawn from these data?

Reviewers of this data must take into consideration the following caveats regarding the VLDS and Wage Outcome Reports: the data only reflect post-graduation experiences of alumni who remain in the Commonwealth and enter its workforce; local economies may have a profound impact on wage outcomes; the relationship between a specific area of study and the career one pursues is not always clear; and the decisions of graduates are highly individual and varied. Because of these limitations, SCHEV strongly cautions reviewers not to use the short-term wage outcomes of recent graduates to measure the quality or long-term effectiveness of any of Virginia's individual institutions.



What factors could influence the reported wages?

Many factors affect how much an individual graduate earns. Such influences go well beyond either the institution or academic program, and could include the mission and nature of the employing organization, cost of living differences between communities, and graduates' individual preferences. The decisions of graduates are highly individual and varied; not everyone chooses to maximize wages over all other considerations, such as proximity to family or a particular lifestyle.

Do the wage reports reflect the entire Virginia workforce?

No. As the footnotes on the report pages explain, the wage data are restricted to individuals who work in Virginia in positions subject to reporting to the Virginia Employment Commission.

Which employers are subject to reporting to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)?

According to the VEC, employers are subject to the Unemployment Tax if they meet one of the following criteria:

- ✓ One or more employees (ten employees if your operation is agricultural) for some portion of a day during any 20 different weeks in a calendar year
- ✓ A \$1,500 or more total gross quarterly payroll (\$20,000 if your business is agricultural; \$1,000 if domestic labor)
- ✓ Acquired a business subject to this tax
- ✓ Been subject to the Federal Unemployment Tax
- ✓ You are a governmental operation or political subdivision
- ✓ A nonprofit organization under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and had four or more employees for some portion of a day during any 20 different weeks in a calendar year

(For additional information: www.tax.virginia.gov/site.cfm?alias=onlineservicesfaq#vec)

These criteria mean that individuals working as consultants or independent contractors (including many psychologists, counselors, barbers, and cosmetologists) may be excluded from the VLDS, as are a list of others that may be found [here](#).

What percentage of graduates is captured in these reports?

All graduates from all public and private, nonprofit colleges and universities are captured in the reports. However, not all graduates have wage records and this percentage varies greatly across institutions, degree levels, and programs. Further, the wage calculations exclude graduates with part-time wages and those enrolled in higher level programs following completion.

What are the primary reasons why a graduate would be missing in this report?

Graduates will be missing from the wage calculations of the report (and are thus reported in the category of "No Information") if they show no enrollment in Virginia at a higher level or do not have a wage record in the VEC data. The reasons for this include enrolling in institutions outside of Virginia, working for employers that do not report to the Virginia Employment Commission (federal government, military), working in positions not subject to reporting to the Virginia Employment Commission, being self-employed or an entrepreneur, or being unemployed.



Are programs with the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes comparable across institutions in terms of course content and other factors that employers consider?

CIP is a taxonomy of programs developed by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to create a standard method of describing programs. While the classification scheme is fairly robust after several decades of use, there can still be a great deal of difference across programs. The basic content may be nearly identical and follow the same textbooks, for example, but one program may emphasize a much different aspect of the topic than another. Further, when comparing bachelor-level programs, it is possible that the general education component of the degree may add a different set of values than another.

Can student incomes be tracked outside Virginia?

Unfortunately, this is not possible at this point as SCHEV currently lacks the funds to acquire data from the National Student Clearinghouse to track enrollment outside Virginia. SCHEV will begin working in late 2012 to gain access to federal wage and employment datasets.

Why aren't for-profit institutions included in the report?

Currently for-profit institutions are not included as they are not required by state law to provide student-level data to SCHEV.

Are multiple degrees by the same graduate considered multiple times?

These reports address the highest level of credential or degree attained by a student in the relevant timeframe.

When will wage data be available for the graduates of years 2010 and 2011?

Typically the wage data for a given calendar year is finalized in late June of the following year. Thus the wage data for 18 months post-completion of the graduates of 2010-11 will be reported in August or September of 2013.

Can I export a wage report to Excel or in PDF format?

While it is not possible to export the entire report or data set to MS Excel, it is possible to export individual tables simply by clicking on the Excel icon above the data table.

Can I sort a wage report by dollars?

Some tables allow sorting by individual columns. In those cases, the column header contains a hyperlink for sorting.

Can we track Virginia graduates through other state's wage systems?

Not at this time. However, more than 40 states have received grants for similar projects and the potential exists for future tracking of graduates across state lines.

What other state-held data will be added in the future?

By August 2013, SCHEV will obtain data regarding the known education-related debt of graduates. We hope to add student enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse to provide information about the numbers of students pursuing higher level credentials outside Virginia. We also hope to add employment data for federal employees to expand the wage analyses.

SCHEV further plans to add research performed by institutional faculty using the underlying data to study student outcomes at various transition points in their educational pathways (such as high



school to college, community college to university) to find ways to increase student success. We'll also use VLDS data to examine the relationships between various aspects of a college education and long-term wage outcomes beyond the five-year mark.

