

William Adams

When most consider college, they think of a four-year experience. For most Morehead State University students, graduating in four years is a long shot.

For students seeking a bachelor's degree in the traditional four years, the graduation rate is just 24.1 percent. In six years, over half of Morehead State University students still fail to obtain a bachelor's degree at MSU. For comparison, the national average six-year graduation rate at public universities was 58 percent during this same period, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). MSU came in at 46.2 percent.

These rates are based on students entering in the fall of 2008. The six-year rate spans the 2008-2009 school year through the 2013-2014 school year, as reported in the 2014-2015 MSU Profile.

Graduating in four years may no longer be the norm nationwide, as most universities base their advertised graduation rates on a six-year plan.

"I think MSU has a lot of unconventional students," said Katie Cade, who graduated with her masters from MSU in 2016. "It's often difficult to complete a degree on time when you have other responsibilities."

For many students, those responsibilities involve working to pay tuition. The ability to be a full-time student without worrying about tuition might play a role in how long it takes to graduate.

"I graduated in four years," said Abbie Crowe, a 2016 MSU graduate, "but I also had school paid for and was able to be a full-time student every semester."

Others take advantage of opportunities offered in high school, where students can take free MSU classes.

"I [will graduate] a semester early because I took a few [MSU] classes in high school," says MSU junior Taylor Everman.

MSU recognizes tuition price as an issue. In 2014 the university launched the ASPIRE Program. One of the goals of this program is to increase the graduation rate, along with retention, by reviewing "scholarship opportunities and/or tuition discounting strategies to encourage retention and timely completion of degrees."

Unfortunately for students, MSU increased tuition by 4.9 percent the same year ASPIRE began. MSU also increased President Wayne Andrews' salary by 28 percent that year.

"I think that above everything else, education is a business," said former MSU student Johnny Bush, "a profit is going to trump whatever benefits the students."

Parents are also concerned.

"Our children expect to get through school as quickly as possible to start paying off an insane amount of debt," says Michael Rogers, a parent of an MSU student, "how can they if they're in school for two more years?"

"People come here with the intention of graduating in four years. Just sometimes stuff happens..." says MSU enrollment counselor Pamela Wright.

More "stuff" continues to happen at MSU, as the university recently announced a new mandatory \$100 Flex program. This requires all full-time students to load \$100 dollars towards Flex meals, in yet another example of the university adding to the cost of attending MSU and possibly extending graduation even further into the future.