

MCLA

Planning Peer Group Methodology Outline

Research was done on which institutions we align with to develop a set of peers MCLA can use for program benchmarking and planning. No two colleges are the same, but by looking at common data, we can find institutions with some characteristics that would make them peers.

For this process, we looked at both public and private institutions. As a small college, a public-only peer group would be tough to find. Additionally, many small private institutions with a mix of liberal arts and science programs are more like us than middle-sized public institutions.

We can access comparable institutional data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). IPEDS data is the only national data collection system using common definitions and standards. This makes IPEDS data key when comparing institutions to understand how two institutions align with each other. IPEDS data gives us a baseline from which to set a standard factor to shrink down possible institutions to a set of relevant peers. As with any data, a judgment is made in determining which variables we use to create a list of peer institutions.

This document walks through the steps taken to determine both current and aspirational peers for MCLA to use for comparison as we work to develop and implement MCLA's next strategic plan.

Master List Selection

The list started with the following criteria for its selection:

Control	4-year public or 4-year private
Institutional Size	Under 1,000 1,000 – 4,999
States/Location	50 USA states and Washington DC
Land Grant	No
HSBC	No
Tribal College	No
Carnegie Classification	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields (22) Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus (21)

The decision was made to cut the institutional size category 1,000-4,999 in half by identifying schools with under 2,500 students. We used the baccalaureate Carnegie Classification to help hone the list, as MCLA does not have the same mix of graduate programs as the Master Small Institution Carnegie Classification. This created a list of 152 institutions, which included 127 private institutions and 25 public institutions.

Steps for Removing Schools from the List

- Step One: We removed any specialized institutions (maritime, military, agriculture, and technology) -- 24 institutions removed
- Step Two: We removed schools with retention rates above 95% -- 28 institutions removed
- Step Three: We removed schools with an enrollment of over 2000 undergraduate students – 34 institutions removed

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After these steps, we were left with 66 institutions.

A review of each school was done to limit the list to about half; identifying schools committed to the liberal arts was vital to being a peer of MCLA. We reviewed the remaining institutions and found that many small institutions did not focus on liberal arts and science. We also wanted a mix of institutions, so we looked at the remaining institutions, grouping them by state. We decided to select a maximum of two institutions per state. A review of these 66 institutions found 32 with a mix of academic programs closely aligned with MCLA.

We then examined 15 variables to determine which identified institutions should be current peers and which should be aspirational. We took the past three years of IPEDS data for all these variables and created a three-year average. We generated percentages using raw counts to limit spikes by using percentage averages.

We used the three-year average of the MCLA's rates for the items below to identify peers. We then looked to see if the peer's rate fell within 5% above or below MCLA's rates for all variables other than the student-to-faculty ratio. We looked to see if the student-to-faculty ratio was one student higher or lower than MCLA's rate for this variable.

- eight that highlight the student population
 - Percent of undergraduates with documented disabilities
 - Percent of undergraduates that received grant aid
 - Percent of undergraduates that received a Pell Grant
 - Percent of total enrollment of students of color
 - Percent of undergraduates of students of color
 - Percent of total enrollment female
 - Percent of undergraduates female
 - Student-to-Faculty Ratio

- seven that highlight the results of the students
 - Percent of Liberal Arts graduates (bachelor's degrees)
 - Average first-time freshmen graduation rate
 - Average first-time freshmen Female graduation rate
 - Average first-time freshmen students of color graduation rate
 - Average first-time freshmen white student graduation rate
 - Average first-time freshmen Pell Grant student graduation rate
 - Average first-time freshmen retention rate

Selection

This process yielded schools that fell in the above ranges on as many as ten items and as few as one. You will see from the attached peer listing sheet that the current peer group consists of institutions with graduation and retention rates, like MCLA, along with other student population factors. The aspirational peers are like MCLA when we look at the student population items but have higher graduation and retention rates. Eight schools were selected for each group.

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June/July Data Additions

After the first meeting to review the proposed peers, additional items were selected to let us understand more about the chosen institutions. The below items were added:

- Offers Distance Education Programs
- Instructions Expenses per FTE
- Student Service Expenses per FTE
- Net Price
- US News Ranking

To better understand the peers we are trying to identify, we took the past three years of IPEDS data for all these variables and created a three-year average. We used raw counts to generate a percentage to limit spikes by using percentage averages.

We then again compared it to the three-year average for MCLA on these items. We then looked to see if the peer's rate fell within the given range. These ranges were:

- Distance Education Programs = No
- Instructions Expenses per FTE, Student Service Expenses per FTE, and Net Price = 15% above or below MCLA's rates

The above additions did not modify the selection of peers from the data reviewed in April but helped reinforce the selection of peers.

Questions

There is much to consider as we consider who our peers should be. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

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IPEDS Definition

Instruction - A functional expense category that includes expenses of the institution's colleges, schools, departments, and other instructional divisions and expenses for departmental research and public service that are not separately budgeted. Includes general academic instruction, occupational and vocational instruction, community education, preparatory and adult basic education, and regular, special, and extension sessions. Also includes expenses for both credit and non-credit activities. Excludes expenses for academic administration where the primary function is administration (e.g., academic deans). Information technology expenses related to instructional activities if the institution separately budgets and expenses information technology resources are included (otherwise these expenses are included in academic support). FASB institutions include actual or allocated costs for operation and maintenance of plant, interest, and depreciation. GASB institutions do not include operation and maintenance of plant or interest, but may, as an option, distribute depreciation expense.

Student services (expenses) - A functional expense category that includes expenses for admissions, registrar activities, and activities whose primary purpose is to contribute to students emotional and physical well-being and to their intellectual, cultural, and social development outside the context of the formal instructional program. Examples include student activities, cultural events, student newspapers, intramural athletics, student organizations, supplemental instruction outside the normal administration, and student records. Intercollegiate athletics and student health services may also be included except when operated as self-supporting auxiliary enterprises. Also may include information technology expenses related to student service activities if the institution separately budgets and expenses information technology resources (otherwise these expenses are included in institutional support.) FASB institutions include actual or allocated costs for operation and maintenance of plant, interest, and depreciation. GASB institutions do not include operation and maintenance of plant or interest but may, as an option, distribute depreciation expense.