Graduation rates – Does a point matter?

The Division I Graduation Success Rate (GSR) has risen by 16 percentage points in the past 21 years. That sounds impressive, but what does it actually mean?

Since the average size of recent GSR cohorts is about 25,000 student-athletes, an increase of 1% equates to approximately 250 additional graduates. The 16-point gap between the current year’s GSR and 2002’s means that there are over 4,200 additional graduates this year than would have been the case without that increase.

The accompanying graph shows the number of graduates added each year since the NCAA started collecting GSR data.

The blue shading represents the number of graduates we would have seen had the GSR stayed at the 2002-level across that entire time period (the height of the blue area increases over time because the number of student-athletes in Division I has been increasing).

The yellow shading represents the actual number of annual Division I graduates. If you add the blue-yellow differences across each year, you will see that GSR increases over this span have led to over 41,655 additional graduates than would have been the case if the GSR observed in 2002 had not changed.

Given what we know about the significant advantages that accrue to college graduates, the lives of those 41,655 new graduates were likely impacted in very positive ways.

Notes: A graduation year of 2022 refers to the reporting year associated with the 6-year federally-defined window for graduation calculations for a student entering college in fall 2015. These data were released in November 2022 and represent the most current NCAA data available.

(Originally published October 2013. Updated November 2022.)