



# Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute Redefines Mission with StudentTracker®



Located in northwest Albuquerque, in the heart of Indian Country and New Mexico's high-tech corridor, **Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI)**

serves a defined subset of higher education. Part of the Bureau of Indian Education, under the U.S. Department of the Interior, SIPI, a land grant institution, was founded as a place of individualized learning for American Indian students. As a national community college that caters to a student population who are all part of nationally recognized American Indian tribes, SIPI receives students from Alaska to New York and everywhere in between.

## Students Not Graduating

Historically, SIPI's graduation and transfer rates appeared to be problematic based solely on data the institution held. Graduation rates appeared below 15 percent, and the institution had no reliable system for tracking transfers. Upon establishing an institutional research office in 2011, questions as to why this polytechnic institute's graduation rates were low became a priority. As a polytechnic institution with a strong technical/occupational orientation, graduation rates were assumed to be the primary measure of institutional success. For the new Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning, it didn't take long to get a sense as to what might be happening. Many of SIPI's programs were transferable programs, including its largest degree program. The Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning examined the data more closely and felt that it was highly likely that SIPI's overall success needed to be redefined, to place greater emphasis on transfer outcomes. Unfortunately, SIPI had no system for accurately measuring and reporting transfer outcomes.

## StudentTracker® Provides Answer for Troubling Question

"There wasn't a system in place to track transfer students," describes Edward Hummingbird, SIPI's Director of Institutional Research. "The school was collecting data, but we needed to ask ourselves was it the right data to collect." To regain accreditation, it was important that SIPI knew how their students were moving through the institution.

After implementing StudentTracker, they had their answer. SIPI used StudentTracker to look at five years of IPEDs cohorts, previously reported as low as 0 percent, and discovered that the actual IPEDs transfer rates were as high as 30 percent, and were averaging approximately 27 percent over time. Going beyond the IPEDs restrictions more to include a wider spectrum of SIPI students, transfer rates of some cohorts neared 50 percent. "We found the

degree to which transfer was important at this institution. Transfer had been overlooked here for years, but it's coming into focus now because we have data," explained Hummingbird. "It was critical that we had this information to make a case for our accreditation efforts. The question became, how does that change the way we operate?"

When writing a self-study for accreditation, it was important SIPI had a grasp of institutional effectiveness. It became apparent that SIPI was transferring more students than were graduating. As an institution that caters to a lot of "swirlers", those who make multiple transfers among two or more postsecondary institutions, dual enrollment students, and students coming to earn credits before transferring, it was important SIPI reevaluated the mission of the school to better determine who they serve and how they serve them.

"We had to make the case to the Higher Learning Commission that we really, truly understand the mission of our school, what our students want, and how we're providing them with that," said Hummingbird. Using data provided by StudentTracker, SIPI instituted four performance indicators to measure institutional effectiveness: graduation, transfer, retention, and job placement. These indicators created from National Student Clearinghouse data allowed SIPI, for the first time, to benchmark different data points.

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*Edward Hummingbird,  
Director of Institutional  
Research, SIPI*

Hummingbird realized, "Our students aren't necessarily only our students," he recounts. "We don't play the whole role in student's higher education ambitions, we play a partial role. But it is an important role since we are usually their first experience in college. We're getting them through the tricky first year or core curriculum or major course work."

## Moving Forward with Data-Driven Decisions

New data from the Clearinghouse provided the framework for performance indicators and data-driven decision making processes that changed SIPI's understanding of the student lifecycle, what it looks like, and how the institution aligns student services and academic

advising with student progression that ultimately led to re-accreditation.

When students leave an institution they can become very transient. Many pass through multiple mailing addresses in the year after leaving one school while they then move on to wherever is next. The student lifecycle has become more complex than arriving at a college or university, completing courses, then graduating and getting a job; many of those steps are bypassed.

“It’s difficult in the absence of StudentTracker to actually track students,” said Hummingbird. “We’re a different institution in a lot of respects and for us the greatest benefit of using the Clearinghouse’s StudentTracker is knowing where our students are transferring. This has

been one of the more important moves the school has made and we’re a better institution because of it.”

StudentTracker allowed SIPI to start leveraging data, providing them with a better understand of what it means for student success and how the definition of student success is changing at community colleges.

“I didn’t see any alternative than StudentTracker to track transfers. I believe Clearinghouse services are the only reliable way,” added Hummingbird.



Visit [www.studenttracker.org](http://www.studenttracker.org) to learn more or contact us at [studenttracker@studentclearinghouse.org](mailto:studenttracker@studentclearinghouse.org).

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