

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Regents
From: Board Office
Subject: First-Year (Non-Persistence) Student Survey Report
Date: March 3, 2003

Recommended Action: Receive the report.

Executive Summary: Each year, the Board's governance report on Graduation and Retention Rates describes the one-year retention rates for first-time, full-time freshmen. During the past 14 years, the average one-year retention rate for the universities has been approximately 82%. However, there have not been any formal, on-going attempts to collect information that describes why students do not persist to graduation.

Non-Persistence Study At its November 2000 meeting, the Board of Regents directed the Board Office and the Regent universities to collaborate on designing a non-persistence study to collect information regarding students' decisions to withdraw from the Regent universities prior to graduation.

Number of Respondents A first-year (non-persistence) student survey was conducted in October 2002. After two mailings, there were 506 (38.3%) non-returnees who responded to the survey.

- At the University of Iowa, there were 133 (29.8%) respondents.
- At Iowa State University, there were 247 (39.4%) respondents.
- At the University of Northern Iowa, there were 126 (50.6%) respondents.

Major Findings –
All Respondents
(Table 8, pg. 43)

Each institution reported its results using four groups – Iowa residents not on academic probation¹; Iowa residents on academic probation; non-residents not on academic probation; and non-residents on academic probation. For each reason listed on the questionnaire, respondents had an opportunity to indicate if each reason had been a major, minor, or no reason for not returning.

The three most frequently occurring major reasons cited by the respondents were increases in tuition and fees (148), transferred to a lower cost institution (133), and did not achieve a feeling of belonging (102). However, most of the reasons listed were not chosen as either a major or minor reason for leaving by the respondents.

- At the University of Iowa, the same three major reasons were cited although in slightly different order – transferred to a lower cost institution (43), increases in tuition and fees (42), and did not achieve a feeling of belonging (30).
- At Iowa State University, the three most frequently occurring major reasons were increases in tuition and fees (74), transferred to a lower cost institution (62), and classes too large (54). The fourth most frequently occurring major reason was did not achieve a feeling of belonging (53).
- At the University of Northern Iowa, the most frequently occurring major reasons were increases in tuition and fees (32), desired program was not available (30), transferred to a lower cost institution (28), and needed courses not available (28).

Link to Strategic Plan:

This report addresses the following strategy and action step in the Board's Strategic Plan:

Strategy 2.1.1.0 Analyze and, where appropriate, make recommendations to increase access and retention at Regent institutions.

Action Step 2.1.1.2 Develop and implement effective strategies for retention of students.

Background:

According to John Gardner, executive director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College, the first-year experience is the key factor in a student's success in college. In his book, Leaving College, Vincent Tinto describes the factors affecting non-persistence as either individual or institutional. He also characterizes departures as institutional (leaving the school) or systems (leaving education).

¹ Students are placed on probation as a warning that their academic progress is not satisfactory and that their academic performance must be improved to avoid dismissal from the university.

Tinto uses the terms “adjustment,” “difficulty,” “incongruence,” and “isolation” to describe the major institutional causes of student departure. Furthermore, he indicates that “the ability of institutions to retain students lies less in the formal programs they devise than it does in the underlying orientation toward students which directs their activities.”

Purpose of Report This report describes the reasons identified by former students for not returning to their entering university. The purpose of this report is to enable the Board of Regents to monitor the accomplishment of goals contained in the Board’s Strategic Plan and to evaluate the need for new policy development in specific areas.

Analysis:

One-Year Retention Rates The one-year retention rates for the entering classes of 2001 were 82.5% at SUI, 83.4% at ISU, and 81.4% at UNI.

Understanding Attrition According to Tinto, “institutions must assess the character of student retention” by determining the reasons why students leave. Institutions need to assess the “character of student experiences within the institution to determine how those experiences are linked to different forms of student progression and departure.”

Design of First-Year Student Survey Between Fall 2000 and Spring 2002, the Board Office and the Regent universities worked collaboratively to design a process, including a common survey instrument and cover letter, and methodology for collecting, analyzing, and reporting non-persistence data. The survey instrument had three major categories of reasons for not returning – academic, financial, and personal.

A copy of the questionnaire and cover letter is included on pages 72-73.

Study Cohort The study cohort included all first-time, full-time students who enrolled at one of the Regent universities in Fall 2001 and did not return to the same university in Fall 2002. Students who were not eligible to return to the university in Fall 2002 were not included in the study. International students and students who could not be contacted (e.g., due to incorrect addresses) were also excluded from the study.

Data Collection	<p>In October 2002, each Regent university mailed the survey instrument and a cover letter signed by its president to the survey cohort. The total number of non-returnees in Fall 2002 was 1,854; 1,322 non-returnees were contacted; 532 non-returnees were not included in the study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The University of Iowa had 711 non-returnees in Fall 2002 and 446 were contacted; 265 non-returnees were not included in the study.• Iowa State University had 760 non-returnees in Fall 2002 and 627 were contacted; 133 non-returnees were not included in the study.• The University of Northern Iowa had 383 non-returnees in Fall 2002 and 249 were contacted; 134 non-returnees were not included in the study. <hr/>
Number of Respondents	<p>After two mailings, there were 506 (38.3%) non-returnees who responded to the survey. There were 348 (68.8%) respondents who were residents and 158 (31.2%) respondents who were non-residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At the University of Iowa, there were 133 (29.8%) respondents. Seventy-one respondents (53.4%) were residents; 62 (46.6%) were non-residents.• At Iowa State University, there were 247 (39.4%) respondents. One hundred and sixty-one respondents (65.2%) were residents; 86 (34.8%) were non-residents.• At the University of Northern Iowa, there were 126 (50.6%) respondents. One hundred and sixteen (92.1%) were residents; 10 (7.9%) were non-residents. <hr/>
Study Limitations	<p>The following limitations apply to this study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The response rate was lower than preferred. UNI is to be commended for achieving a response rate greater than 50%.• The responses do not necessarily represent the choices of all non-respondents; therefore, it would not be possible to generalize the results to the total population.• The results are limited to the study participants who responded to specific items. In most cases, study participants either did not identify a major or minor reason for leaving or did not respond at all to specific items. Therefore, it was not possible to understand the “real” reasons why those students did not return.• While the survey was administered within a relatively short time after non-reenrollment, the responses could be tainted by elapsed time. <hr/>

**TABLE A
SUMMARY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**

	Resident	Non-Resident	Total
Number in Fall 2001 Cohort			
University of Iowa	2,356	1,649	4,005
Iowa State University	3,297	1,300	4,597
University of Northern Iowa	1,945	119	2,064
Regent Total	7,598	3,068	10,666
Number of Cohort Non-Returnees in Fall 2002			
University of Iowa	406	308	714
Iowa State University	526	234	760
University of Northern Iowa	343	40	383
Regent Total	1,275	582	1,857
Number of Cohort Non-Returnees Ineligible to Return			
University of Iowa	157	85	242
Iowa State University	92	36	128
University of Northern Iowa	117	12	129
Regent Total	366	133	499
Number of Cohort Non-Returnees Not Available for Contact			
University of Iowa	9	14	23
Iowa State University	0	5	5
University of Northern Iowa	3	2	5
Regent Total	12	21	33
Number of Cohort Non-Returnees Contacted			
University of Iowa	237	209	446
Iowa State University	434	193	627
University of Northern Iowa	223	26	249
Regent Total	894	428	1,322
Number of Respondents			
University of Iowa	71	62	133
Iowa State University	161	86	247
University of Northern Iowa	116	10	126
Regent Total	348	158	506

Table B
(pg. 6)

Table B describes the characteristics of the respondents, including their current employment status, their student status, their current educational goals, and plans to re-enroll at the first university. The majority of the respondents (424/83.8%) are currently enrolled as students. Resident students are enrolled either in an Iowa community college or another Regent university. Non-resident students are enrolled in an out-of-state institution. The majority of non-returnees (449/88.7%) did not plan to re-enroll in the same institution.

TABLE B
CHARACTERISTICS OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SURVEY RESPONDENTS

	RESIDENT				NON-RESIDENT			
	Not Probation		Probation		Not Probation		Probation	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Number of cohort non-returnees contacted	691		203		360		68	
Number of respondents	306	44.3%	42	20.7%	145	40.3%	13	19.1%
Question 1. Current Employment Status								
Number employed full-time	49	16.0%	11	26.2%	10	6.9%	0	0.0%
Number employed part-time	157	51.3%	23	54.8%	68	46.9%	3	23.1%
Number not employed and not seeking employment	64	20.9%	4	9.5%	52	35.9%	8	61.5%
Number not employed and seeking employment	21	6.9%	2	4.8%	12	8.3%	2	15.4%
Number in the Armed Forces	8	2.6%	2	4.8%	2	1.4%	0	0.0%
Total	299	97.7%	42	100.0%	144	99.3%	13	100.0%
Question 2. Student Status								
Number enrolled as a student	249	81.4%	27	64.3%	136	93.8%	12	92.3%
Number not enrolled as a student	50	16.3%	15	35.7%	8	5.5%	1	7.7%
Total	299	97.7%	42	100.0%	144	99.3%	13	100.0%
Type of institution enrolled in:								
Number in another Regent university	69	22.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Number in an Iowa community college	98	32.0%	12	28.6%	5	3.4%	0	0.0%
Number in an Iowa private college/university	35	11.4%	7	16.7%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Number in an out of state institution	48	15.7%	5	11.9%	131	90.3%	12	92.3%
Number can't determine type of institution	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	251	82.0%	24	57.1%	137	94.5%	12	92.3%
Question 3. Current Educational Goal								
Number who chose associate's degree	43	14.1%	10	23.8%	3	2.1%	1	7.7%
Number who chose bachelor's degree	167	54.6%	10	23.8%	98	67.6%	6	46.2%
Number who chose graduate or professional degree	54	17.6%	8	19.0%	30	20.7%	4	30.8%
Number who said unsure	23	7.5%	12	28.6%	11	7.6%	1	7.7%
Number who said other	9	2.9%	2	4.8%	2	1.4%	0	0.0%
Total	296	96.7%	42	100.0%	144	99.3%	12	92.3%
Question 4. Plans to Re-Enroll								
Number who plan to re-enroll in same institution	30	9.8%	5	11.9%	7	4.8%	1	7.7%
Number who do not plan to re-enroll in same institution	266	86.9%	34	81.0%	137	94.5%	12	92.3%
Total	296	96.7%	39	92.9%	144	99.3%	13	100.0%

Residents Not
on Probation
(Tables 4-4C,
pgs. 21-26)

For the 306 residents not on probation who responded to the survey, the most frequently occurring major reasons for leaving included:

- ▣ increases in tuition and fees (65);
 - ▣ classes too large (63);
 - ▣ desired program was not available (61); and
 - ▣ did not achieve a feeling of belonging (57).
- At the University of Iowa, the most frequent major reasons for leaving cited by residents not on probation included the following:
 - ▣ classes too large (15);
 - ▣ transferred to a lower cost institution (15);
 - ▣ quality of instruction did not meet my expectations (13);
 - ▣ increases in tuition and fees (13); and
 - ▣ did not achieve a feeling of belonging (13).
 - At Iowa State University, the most frequent major reasons for leaving cited by residents not on probation included:
 - ▣ classes too large (36);
 - ▣ desired program not available (27);
 - ▣ increases in tuition and fees (27);and
 - ▣ did not achieve a feeling of belonging (26).
 - At the University of Northern Iowa, the most frequent major reasons for leaving cited by residents not on probation included:
 - ▣ desired program not available (25);
 - ▣ increases in tuition and fees (25); and
 - ▣ needed courses not available (23).
-

Non-Residents
Not on Probation
(Tables 6-6C,
pgs. 33-38)

For the 145 non-residents not on probation who responded to the survey, the most frequently occurring major reasons for leaving included:

- ▣ transferred to lower cost institution (66); and
- ▣ increases in tuition and fees (66).

Non-residents not on probation who were non-returnees at SUI, ISU, and UNI identified the same two major reasons for leaving.

Residents on
Probation
(Tables 5-5C,
pgs. 27-32)

Interestingly, the major reasons identified by residents on probation were academic reasons – student:

- ▣ poor academic performance (17);
- ▣ academically unprepared for courses (14);
- ▣ inadequate study techniques or habits (14); and
- ▣ undecided about my major or vocation (14).

- At the University of Iowa, the major reasons most frequently cited for leaving by residents on probation included:
 - ▣ undecided about my major or vocation (4);
 - ▣ academically unprepared for courses (3);
 - ▣ inadequate study techniques or habits (3); and
 - ▣ desired program was not available (3).
- At Iowa State University, a major reason for leaving cited by residents on probation was poor academic performance (11). Other major reasons included:
 - ▣ academically unprepared for courses (7);
 - ▣ undecided about my major or vocation (7);
 - ▣ did not have enough money to continue (7);
 - ▣ increases in tuition and fees (7); and
 - ▣ unmotivated or tired of school (7).
- At the University of Northern Iowa, a major reason for leaving cited by residents on probation was inadequate study techniques or habits (5). Other major reasons included:
 - ▣ academically unprepared for courses (4);
 - ▣ poor academic performance (4);
 - ▣ increases in tuition and fees (4);
 - ▣ unmotivated or tired of school (4); and
 - ▣ too much social life (4).

Non-Residents
on Probation
(Tables 7-7C,
pgs. 39-43)

For the 13 non-residents on probation who responded to the survey, the major reasons for leaving were a combination of academic and financial:


- ▣ transferred to a lower cost institution (7);
- ▣ poor academic performance (6);
- ▣ quality of instruction did not meet my expectations (5);
- ▣ classes too large (5); and
- ▣ increases in tuition and fees (5).
- At the University of Iowa, there were only four respondents who were non-residents on probation. Half of them identified the following:
 - ▣ poor academic performance (2);
 - ▣ courses were not interesting (2);
 - ▣ quality of instruction did not meet my expectations (2);
 - ▣ increases in tuition and fees (2); and
 - ▣ emotional (2).
- At Iowa State University, the most frequent major reasons for leaving cited by non-residents on probation included:
 - ▣ transferred to a lower cost institution (5);
 - ▣ classes too large (4); and
 - ▣ did not achieve a feeling of belonging (4).

- At the University of Northern Iowa, there was only one respondent who was a non-resident on probation. The major reasons cited by this respondent included:
 - ▣ poor academic performance;
 - ▣ courses were not interesting; and
 - ▣ a number of financial reasons.

Implications of
Study

Because of the limitations cited earlier, it would be difficult to base institutional change solely on these results. However, the results can be used in combination with other institutional data collection efforts to understand the myriad reasons why students do not persist to graduation at the entering institution and to develop appropriate intervention strategies.

While a variety of reasons for leaving are personal and probably cannot be dealt with by the institutions, there are others, such as not achieving a feeling of belonging and classes too large, that the institutions might develop intervention strategies to assist students in their transition from high school to college life


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Approved: 
Gregory S. Nichols

The following tables are provided on the pages indicated:

	<u>Page</u>
Tables 1 – 1C: Unduplicated Responses by Category	11-14
Table 2: Summary of First Year Student Survey	15
Tables 3 – 3C: Summary of First Year Student Survey	16-20
Tables 4 – 4C: Residents Not on Probation Reasons for Not Returning	21-26
Tables 5 – 5C: Residents on Probation Reasons for Not Returning	27-32
Tables 6 – 6C: Non-Residents Not on Probation Reasons for Not Returning	33-38
Tables 7 – 7C: Non-Residents on Probation Reasons for Not Returning	39-43
Tables 8 – 8D: Regent Total Reasons for Not Returning	44-48
Tables 9 – 9D: SUI Reasons for Not Returning	49-58
Tables 10 – 10D: ISU Reasons for Not Returning	59-63
Tables 11 – 11D: UNI Reasons for Not Returning	64-71
First Year Student Survey Sample Questionnaire	72
First Year Student Survey Sample Cover Letter	73