

Th'Ink Well

Quarterly Newsletter from the Center for Teaching Excellence

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As Fall 2010 progresses and first-year students complete their first college term, some of us wonder, how are our freshmen doing? Has the new college cohort retained its initial enthusiasm? Have students succeeded academically and be able/willing to return?

In this issue we present an overview of retention trends across the nation and within our college campus. We highlight practices that appear to increase retention, share faculty impressions about WPU students and concerns WPU students express about professors.

We know that US college success rates are falling behind those of other nations, and that the upcoming student generations share expectations and habits different from our own. What can we do to prepare our students for the new millennium? And equally important, what can we do to prepare ourselves to deal with the challenges presented by the “new” college students?

1st to 2nd Year Retention Rates Across the Nation

What Works in Student Retention National Survey (ACT)

The ACT collects institutional data on first-to-second year retention and on degree completion rates through its Institutional Data Questionnaire, which is an annual survey of 2,500-2,800 college and universities in the U.S. Below are the 2010 findings on the **first**-to-second year retention rates based on responses to their survey.

First-Year Retention Rates	Community College	Private Four-Year	Public Four-Year
Colleges Surveyed	282	421	256
Mean Retention Rate	56.0%	73.4%	74.3%
Median Retention	56.0%	75.0%	74.8%

Full-Time First-Year Student Retention Rate at WPUNJ in 2008 was 77.7%

Please visit this link for the full report:

<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/AllInstitutions.pdf>

For WPUNJ IR&A data visit:

<http://cms.wpunj.edu/ira/FACTBOOKS/FB09/T4.8.pdf>

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We are located in Cheng Library,
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Please visit our website:
<http://www.wpunj.edu/academics/cte>

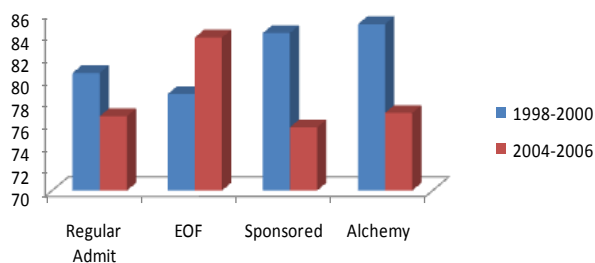
Retention Rates at WPUNJ

Data provided by IR&A & Admissions Office

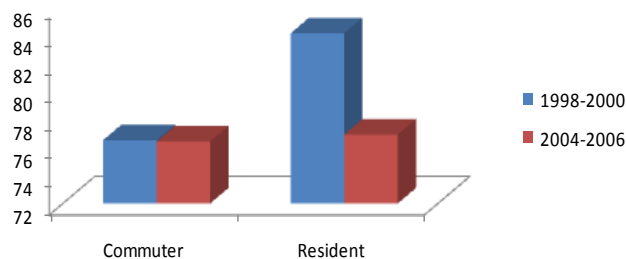
The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment duplicated a study from 2002 about the retention and academic performance of full-time, first-time, first-year students. This was done in 2008 with the Fall 2004, 2005, and 2006 data. Below are some of the findings:

- ◆ The mean one-year retention rates for regular admit students, sponsored students and non-contracted sponsored students (Alchemy) declined since the first study, while the retention rate of EOF students improved.

One Year Retention Rates of FT-FY Students by Admittance Type (3 Year Average)



One Year Retention Rates of FT-FY Students by Residence Status (3 Year Average)

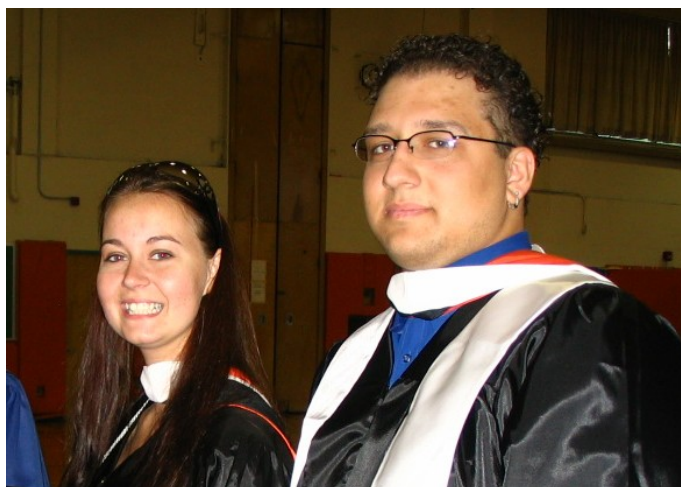


- ◆ Retention rates for first-time, full-time, first-year students living on campus are no longer higher than commuter students. Commuter students have begun to surpass residence hall students academically.
- ◆ Part-time, first-time, first-year students perform at significantly lower levels than full-time, first-time, first-year students and have lower retention rates.
- ◆ The gap between male and female retention and possibly academic performance is widening.

- T
- * *What is the explanation for the decline in retention rates?*
 - * *Who are we losing?*

According to an IR&A study conducted in 2002, the majority of students who leave by the end of their first & second semester, do so due to poor academic standing. See <http://cms.wpunj.edu/>

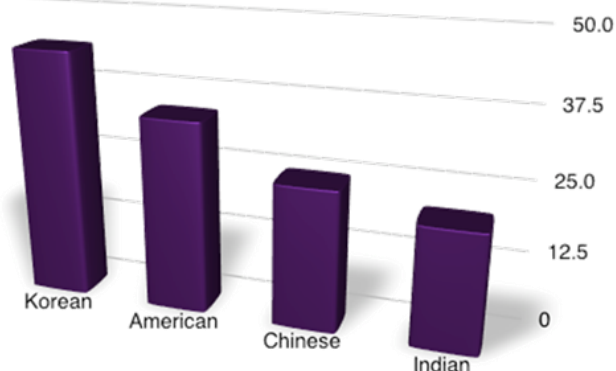
- ◆ All (first-year full-time) admission categories experienced an increase in the percent of students who start their second year in good academic standing. EOF students made the greatest improvement.
 - * *Why are EOF students doing better than others?*
 - * *What impact do student attributes (academic skills, interest, motivation) and institutional (faculty, administrative) support & guidance play in first-year students academic performance?*



Please visit this link for the full IR&A report:
<http://cms.wpunj.edu/dotAsset/200370.pdf>

Practices that Increase Student Retention Rates across the Nation

Drop-Out Rates in Top American Universities, 1985-2007



http://change-production.s3.amazonaws.com/photos/wordpress_copies/education/2009/03/kim-research.png

Reports from the National Center for Education Statistics suggest that dropout rates from college are particularly high for African American and Hispanic students. First-generation college students, students with limited English proficiency, and non-traditional students, such as returning adult students, are also at greater risk of dropping out from college.

Among the practices that appear to be highly effective in increasing student retention are first-year programs, academic advising, and learning support programs (tutoring; learning centers) [lab](#). Mandated course placement testing programs also seems to have a positive impact on student retention. For more details, see the ACT Retention Study Survey 2010 at <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/>

Recent issues of the Chronicle of Higher Education suggest some of the reasons why retention rates are an issue across the country, and practices that might help address faltering retention rates.

- ◆ According to David Glenn, student attitude seems to matter most for retention. According to a research study at the University of Maryland at College Park, enrollment patterns at this institution are strongly predicted by how much students like their college by the eighth week of their first semester. If the student's attitude toward the university is strongly positive, they tend to stay over a six-semester period; if it is strongly negative, they tend to leave at some point during this time period. These findings suggest that students are able to detect very early whether a campus is a good fit for them. For further information, please visit <http://chronicle.com/article/In-Student-Retention-Attitude/65756/>

A study conducted by economists in a major Canadian university suggests that a mix of academic support and merit aid improves student retention rates among women. Among male students, however, neither academic support nor the prospect of a scholarship (nor the combination of both) improves course completion or dropout rates. For details, please visit <http://chronicle.com/article/Study-Finds-Mix-of-Academic/12129/>

- ◆ According to Tao Pang, the main reasons found in most surveys for students leaving college without a degree are financial hardship and academic performance. These usually go hand in hand. Math and science courses are some of the most challenging for many students because many lack skills in mathematics. Although many colleges have set up advising centers and tutoring centers to improve retention, the results have often been dismal, partly because the staff members who provide these services do not have thorough knowledge of the subject. Remedial classes have created additional financial burdens and time commitments for students. Pang believes that the only way to retain these students is to address their math deficiencies before they advance to more-demanding courses; resources destined for remedial courses should be redirected to strengthening math education. For further discussion, please visit: <http://chronicle.com/article/Strengthen-Math-Education/63536/>

First-Year Faculty Impressions of WPUNJ Students

We asked first-year professors to share their impressions about WPUNJ students at the beginning of the Fall 2010 semester. Several responded to our request and shared with us their first insights.

Many First-Year Faculty respondents were positively impressed with WPU students at the beginning of the term. They found that students showed dedication and an enthusiasm toward learning. One professor noted that different students brought different dimensions to the classes: "The challenge is to be consistent with lectures and assignments while bringing out the best in each student...What has been most rewarding is how quickly relationships have formed with my students."

There were also positive impressions regarding students' involvement in classes and their seriousness of purpose. The students have been participatory and interactive in classes, though some face challenges to open up, particularly in undergraduate courses. Many struggle with materials such as statistics, graphics literacy and computers, but they seem to care about their work/grades and take time to seek extra help. One professor noted, "Although it is frustrating to see them struggle, I feel like they are a hard working bunch and that makes me happy to spend extra time helping them learn the challenging course material."

There have been experiences among first-year faculty that have been more disappointing. Texting in class and the lack of respect in addressing professors (via e-mail) have been some common issues. Taking good notes is also an area of concern. But, first-year professors believe that if students realize that the faculty desires to assist them, they will make the necessary effort.

Senior Faculty Impressions of WPUNJ Students

Dr. Carole Sheffield, Professor of Political Science

I have found a steady decline in the performance of students in their written work at WPU. Too many students come unprepared to do university-level work and do not read thoughtfully and critically. Several (10-15) years ago I worried that I was contributing to grade inflation, as the majority of my students were getting grades of B and above. Recently, the trend has been sharply downward and many of my students barely earn a passing grade. The commonality that looms large in this downward slide is the inability of students to follow instructions. Are students unable to follow directions because they don't read the carefully crafted and detailed handouts I provide or is it because they don't listen when I review them in class? Do they lack the ability to concentrate due to the distractions of a multi-tasking media culture?

I don't know the reasons behind their inability to follow instructions but it is notable in evaluating their coursework as well as in academic advising. At the onset of the advisement period, I send my advisees an email informing them of the days I am on campus, my office hours, and other important information for a successful advisement experience. Invariably, I get emails asking for an appointment on a day that I am not on campus. I write back: "Please re-read my email and locate the answer to your question in it." This problem, I believe, is widespread and the consequences alarm me. How will students navigate an increasingly complex world without the ability to follow basic instructions? How will they perform in the careers they expect to have with a university degree without having mastered this basic skill? Perhaps the First-Year Seminar folks will think about this necessary skill-set when discussing how to meet the needs of the future cohorts of university students.

Student Voice * *Christina DeFresco, Senior Student*

I believe that some professors' expectations are realistic, while others are not. Some GE professors think the students should be experts in their field. All lower level General Education courses do not have the same expectations; this depends on the professor. I do not understand why if a certain class fits your schedule, this can determine which professor you will take and how serious the class will be. I pay the same, get the same three credits, and show up the same amount of time as students in other sections of the course which are much less demanding. I do not think that is fair.

The role of a professor should be to facilitate class discussions, lead the class, answer questions, and be a source of knowledge for students. Professors annoy me the most when they cancel classes at the last minute or do not show up at all. I am putting my time in and coming to class prepared, so they should as well. Disorganization also annoys me because I try to follow the syllabus and be as organized as possible. Professors who think their opinion is the only opinion irritate me because one should respect everyone's opinion and it benefits students to hear other points of view.

Students should come to class prepared and be alert, ready to learn and participate. Students should not fall into the background as another face in the crowd, but contribute positively to class. From my experience, students do not read before class because they feel that they get the same information by going to class. They do not take notes because they think they can remember it all or are just lazy. They do not participate in class discussions because they did not do the readings or took proper notes and thus have nothing to say.

I can only speak for myself, but what motivates me to study is getting good grades, graduating from college, finding a good job, and being successful. I set one goal at a time and success is my ultimate goal.



*The "new" generation of students
First-Year Seminar Class, Fall 2010*