

Freshmen Retention Study

Webster University
Fall 2005 Freshmen



Overview

- Retention Rate for 2005 Freshmen
- Trends & Benchmarking
- Financial & Qualitative Impact of Attrition
- Methodology
- Academic Data
- Differential Persistence Rates
- Reasons for Leaving
- Conclusions
- Recommendations



Why Focus on Freshmen?

- First year of college is most critical stage of vulnerability for student attrition*
- More than half of those who withdraw from college
- Universities lose half of the students who will eventually leave, by end of 1st semester**
 - Physically or psychologically

*Learning Slope. (November, 1991). *Policy Perspectives*. Philadelphia: Institute for Research on Higher Education.

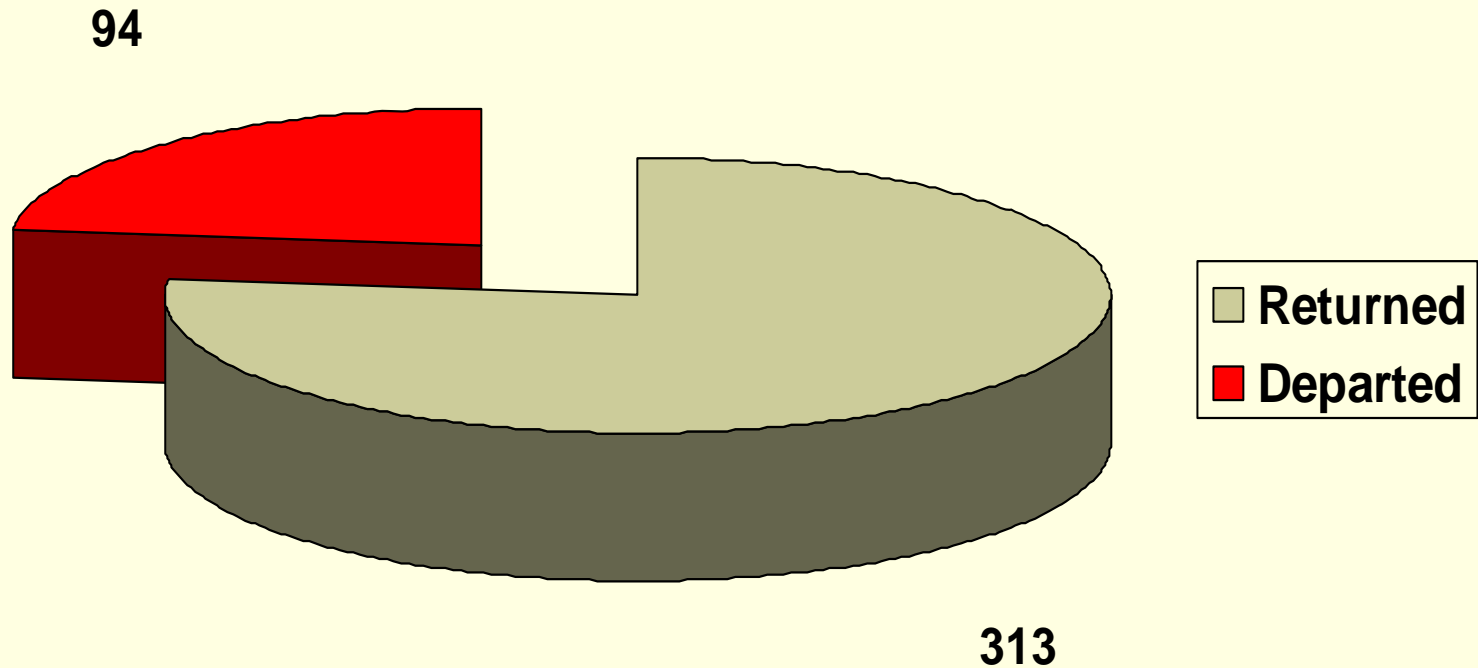
**Ewell, Peter. Expert on higher education assessment and VP of NCHEMS

Retention

Freshmen-to-Sophomore



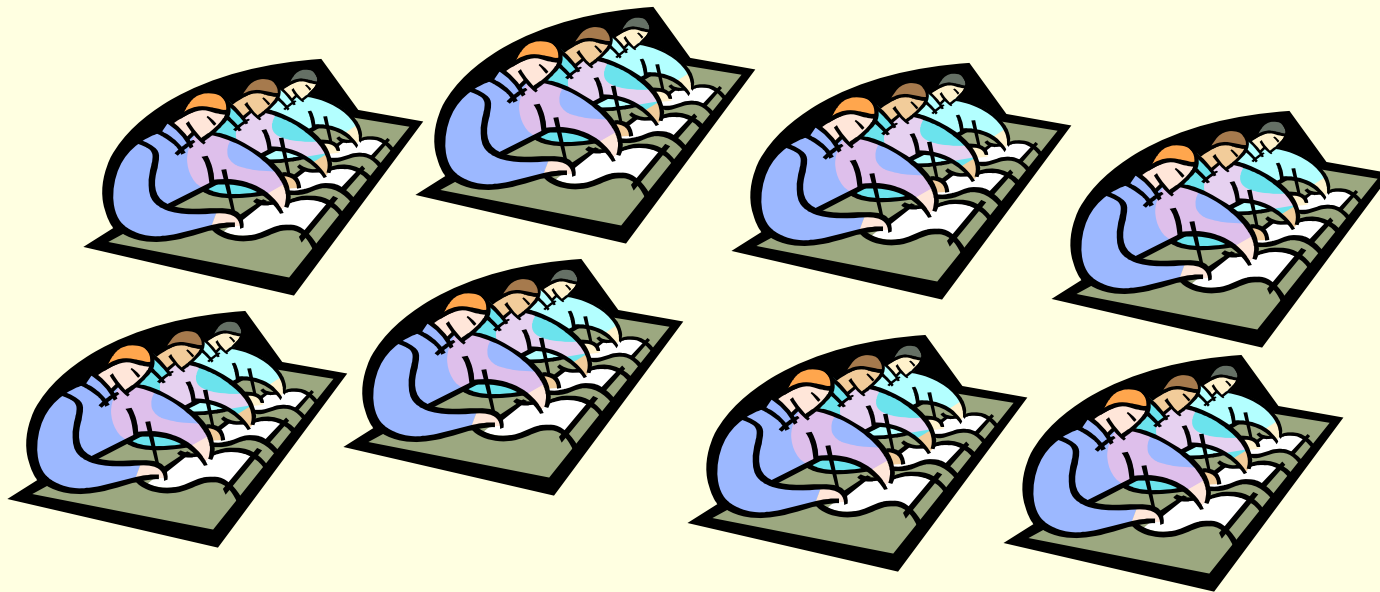
76.9% of the Fall '05 Freshmen returned in Fall '06



Retention Rate

Freshmen-to-Sophomore

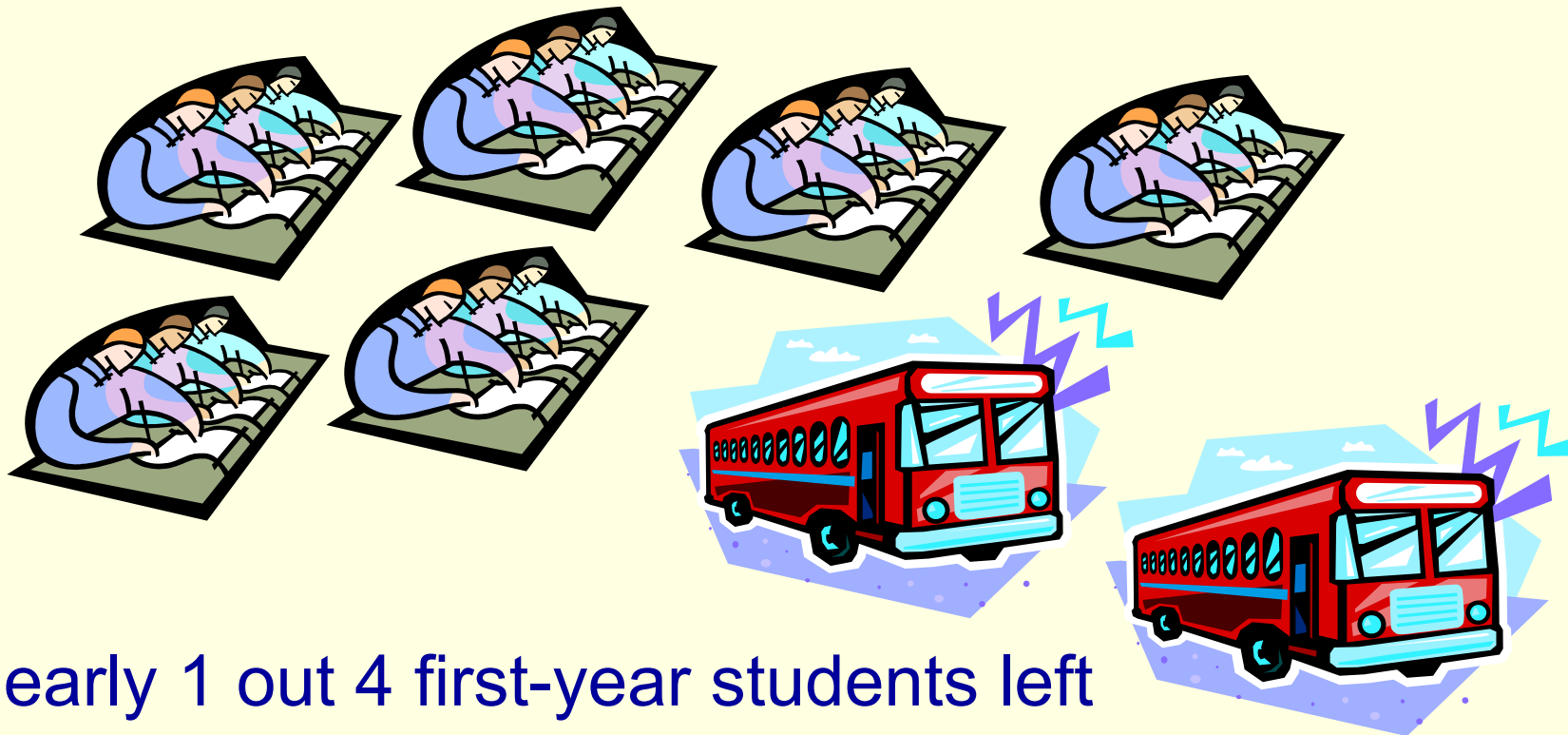
407 Freshmen began classes in August 2005



Retention Rate

Freshmen-to-Sophomore

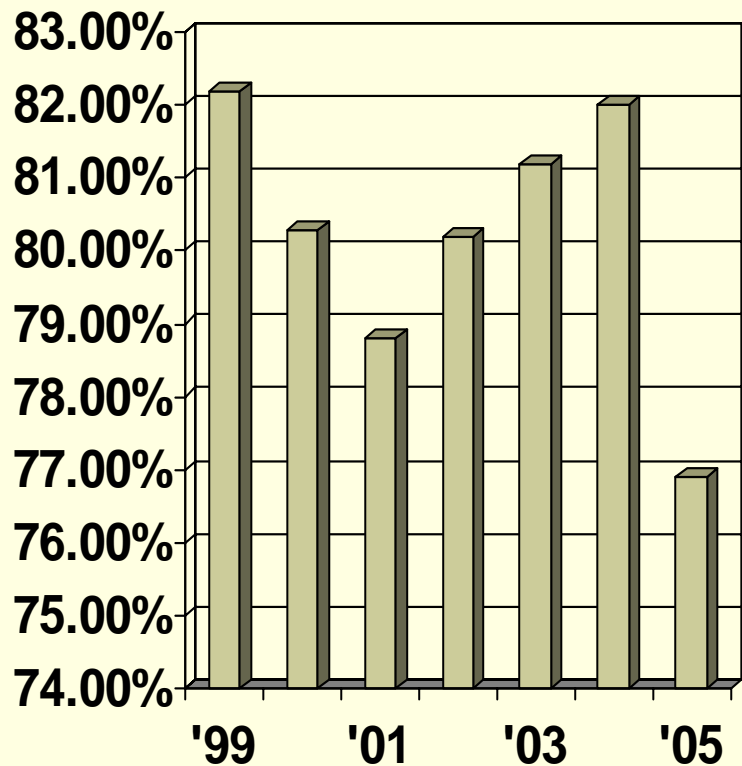
Retention Rate = 76.9%



Nearly 1 out 4 first-year students left

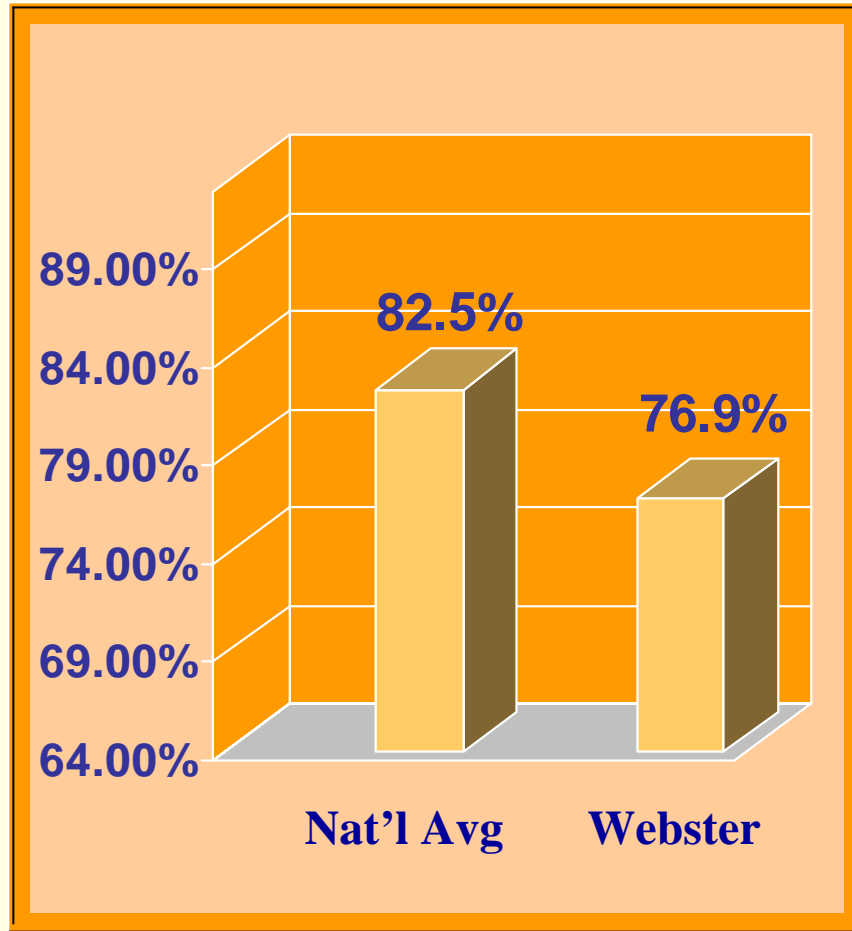
Retention Rate Trend

Freshmen-to-Sophomore



- 1999 Freshmen **82.2%**
- 2000 Freshmen **80.3%**
- 2001 Freshmen **78.8%**
- 2002 Freshmen **80.2%**
- 2003 Freshmen **81.2%**
- 2004 Freshmen **82.0%**
- 2005 Freshmen **76.9%**

Benchmarking



■ **National Average**
for Selective Private
Institutions

82.5%

Source = ACT

■ **Webster University**

76.9%

Financial Impact of Attrition

- 94 students left
 - Represents \$1.05 million in lost net revenue this year
 - Over \$3.15 million from 2006-2009
 - \$62,000 in unpaid balances
- For each student we can retain until graduation...
 - Over \$33,500 in net revenue



Financial Impact of Decline

- 21 more students left than expected
 - 94 students did not return (76.9%)
 - 73 students expected not to return (82.0%)
 - 21 students
- Net tuition revenue for 21 students
 - \$231,000 (1-year)
 - \$693,000 (3-year)



Additional Financial Impact

- Investment in those 21 students
 - Cost of recruitment
 - If \$2,000 per student
 - Then \$42,000 down the drain
 - Cost of instruction and services



Qualitative Impact of Attrition

Freshmen start with the same dreams



But within one year that dream is dashed for 1 out of 4

Qualitative Impact of Attrition

- Lost → the contributions of these students
 - Student community
 - Involvement
 - Learning from one another
 - Faculty
 - Teaching and learning
 - Alumni
 - Volunteers
 - Contributions (\$\$)
 - Contributions to their field (reputation)

Methodology for Retention Study

- Data drawn from student database, including:
 - HSGPA, HS rank, test scores
 - Webster GPA & credits completed
 - Financial information
 - Demographics
- Data collected from campus sources
 - Academic advisors
 - Freshman Seminar instructors
 - Financial Aid & Collections
 - Admissions
 - Student Affairs departments
 - Student Success Committee records

Information Collection

- 42 advisors received request for information
 - 31 advisors responded
 - For 22 students, advisor responded but had no idea why they left because of no contact with them (23%)
- Students without an advisor -- 12
- Exit Interviews
 - Only 6 exit interviews conducted
 - Very little useful information

Academic Data for Those Who Left

- Average GPA at Webster = 2.54
 - Retained student GPA = 3.27
 - 24 had a GPA < 2.0
 - only 9 were dismissed (~10%)
- Average ACT = 22.6 (24 overall average)
- Average HSGPA = 3.23 (3.44 overall average)
- Only eleven (11) were admitted on probation
 - 87% retention rate for 85 students admitted on probation

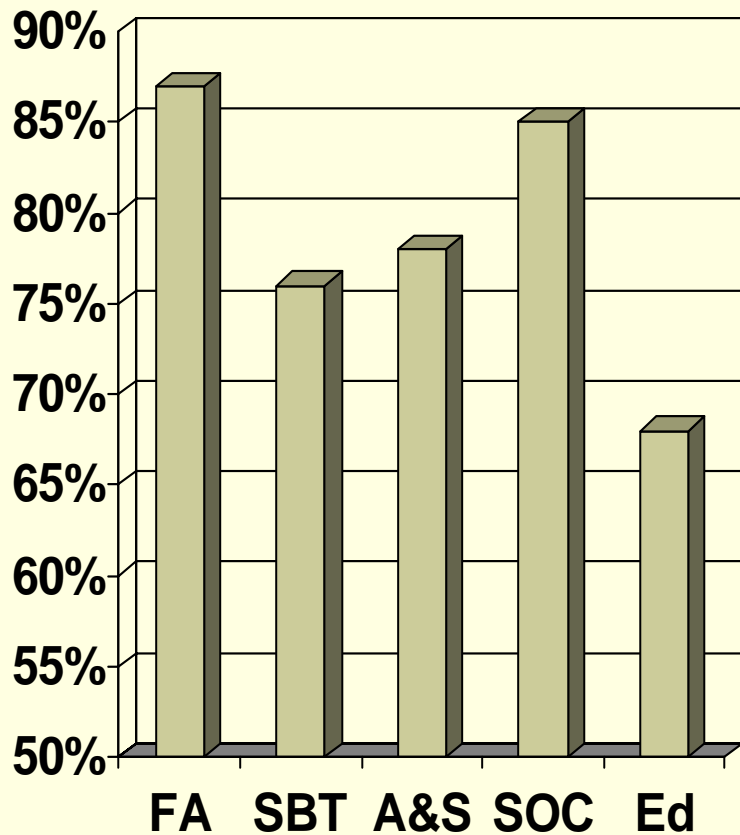
GPA of First-Year Dropouts

GPA	National	Webster
< 2.00	46.1%	25.5%
2.00 – 2.49	16.6%	11.7%
2.50 – 2.99	17.1%	20.8%
3.00 – 4.00	20.1%	42.0%

More Academic Data

- 21 were undeclared
 - 50% retention rate
- 18 majored in communications
- 21 majored in arts and sciences
- 14 majored in fine arts
- 13 majored in business and technology
- 6 majored in education

Schools and Colleges



Retention Rates

■ Fine Arts	82%
	14 of 76
■ Busn & Tech	76%
	13 of 54
■ Arts & Sciences	78%
	21 of 95
■ Communication	85%
	18 of 121
■ Education	68%
	6 of 19

Retention by Major

■ Arts & Sciences

- Biology (30) 70%
- English (13) 69%
- History (18) 94%
- Int'l Rel (10) 80%
- Int'l Studies (10) 90%
- Poli Sci (4) 75%
- Psychology (12) 83%
- Soc. Science (3) 67%

■ Fine Arts

- Art (11) 82%
- Music (24) 88%
- Music Ed (6) 50%
- Musical Th (13) 85%
- Theatre (25) 88%
- Dance (2) 100%
- Directing (3) 67%

(total # of freshmen majors)

Retention by Major

■ Business & Tech

■ Accounting (6)	83%
■ Bus. Admin (15)	81%
■ Computer Sci (11)	64%
■ Finance (2)	50%
■ Management (16)	88%
■ Math (3)	67%

■ Communications

■ Adv/Mktg (8)	75%
■ Audio (20)	75%
■ Brdcst Journ. (8)	100%
■ Film (21)	86%
■ Interactive (8)	63%
■ Journalism (13)	77%
■ Media Comm (20)	100%
■ Photography (9)	78%
■ Pub. Relations (13)	100%
■ Video Prod. (11)	100%

(total # of freshmen majors)

Differential Persistence Rates

■ Residents	85%	→ Commuters	65%
■ NSO attendee	83%	→ No orientation	61%
■ ACT 24+	82%	→ ACT<24	71%
■ HS Rank 50+	80%	→ HS Rank<50	64%
■ Work on campus	83%	→ No WU work	72%
■ Declared major	80%	→ Undeclared	50%
■ Men*	81%	→ Women	74%
■ Student Athletes*	74%	→ Non-athletes	77%

* One year anomaly: typically Men are more likely to leave and Student Athletes usually have a higher retention rate. Turnover in women's basketball coaching position was a major contributing factor (81% without women's basketball).

Persistence Rates

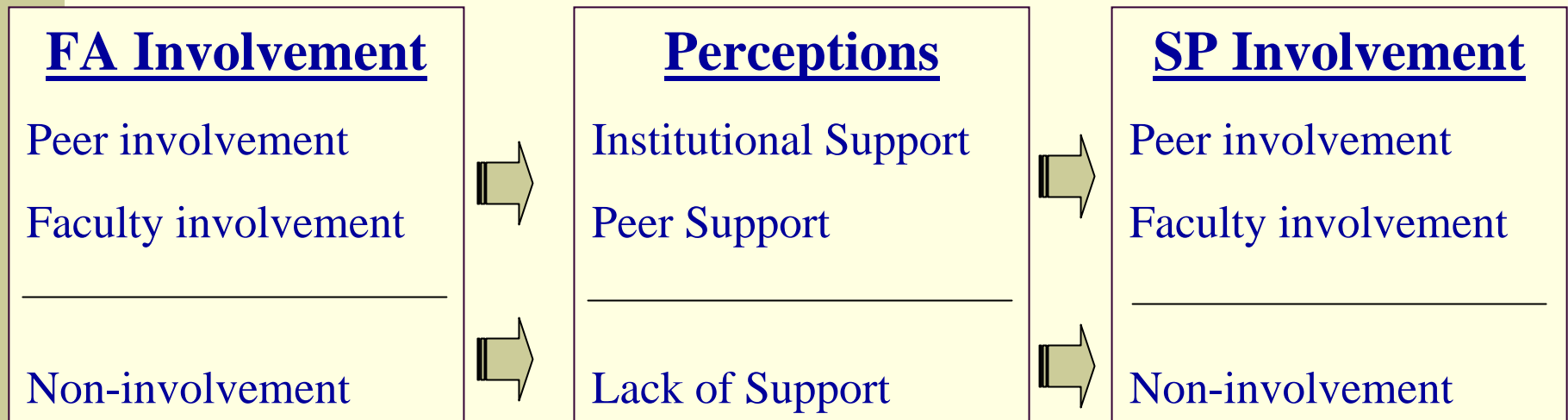
Racial/Ethnic Background of Students

■ Caucasian	77%
■ African American	68%
■ Hispanic	100%
■ Asian American	75%
■ American Indian	NA
■ Unknown	81%
■ International	75%



Persistence Theory

Behavior-Perception-Behavior Cycle



Early involvement in Fall positively predicts spring involvement and has significant effects on social integration, academic integration, and persistence.

Source: Berger, J.B., & Milem, J.R. (1999). The role of student involvement and perceptions of integration in a causal model of student persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(6): 641-666.

Student Persistence Theory

- Persistence is a function of...
 - Entering Student Variables (e.g., HSGPA)
 - Student Motivation Variables
 - Student Integration Variables
 - Academic integration
 - Social integration
 - Satisfaction with the University

Source: Noel-Levitz, based on leading researchers

Reasons for Leaving Webster

■ Multiple reasons	60.0%	(56)
■ Single reason	31.5%	(30)
■ We don't know	8.5%	(8)

Why Did They Leave?

	One of Multiple Reasons	Single Reason
Financial	64%	13%
Personal Issues medical mental health drugs/alcohol family health relationships low motivation ADA issues (not reg) disciplinary	46%	11%
Academics	39%	3%
Changing Majors or major rejecting them	15%	5%
Unknown Reason	NA	8%

Reasons for Attrition -- Nationally

- Top 6 from ACT Survey
 - Inadequate financial resources
 - Lack of motivation to succeed
 - Inadequate preparation for college level work
 - Poor study skills
 - Inadequate personal coping skills
 - Lack of educational goals and aspirations

Contributing Factor at Webster

■ Disconnection

- Retained students faced same challenges
- Students who left were more likely to be disconnected from Webster
- 37% of students were not connected
 - Commuters
 - Did not work on campus
 - Not involved in meaningful ways
 - Not enrolled in Univ 101

ACT found social connection to be predictive of retention in selective institutions. →



Velcro

Student Ratings of Assistance

NSSE Results for this Freshman Class

- Helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
 - Very little: 41% Webster v. 25% peer institutions

- Providing the support students need to thrive socially
 - Very little: 29% Webster v. 17% peer institutions

- Evaluation of the quality of academic advising
 - Fair or Poor: 33% Webster v. 20% peer institutions
 - Yet, seniors rate Webster far ahead of peers

Financial Reasons



- 60 students (51% partially & 13% fully due to \$\$\$)
- Average EFC = \$10,602 (\$13,883 for retained)
- Average Webster Aid = \$6,759 (\$7,572 for retained)
- Average Total Aid = \$19,322
- All but 3 applied for financial aid
- Average GPA = 2.46
- 17 of them still owe \$\$\$ (avg. = \$3,650)
 - Average GPA = 1.88
 - 13 below 2.00
 - Most were commuters (11)

Freshmen Concerns re: Finances

CIRP 2005 Results

- Major concerns about financing college
 - 20% Webster
 - 14% Peer institutions
 - 15% Webster in Fall 2006

Financial Reasons

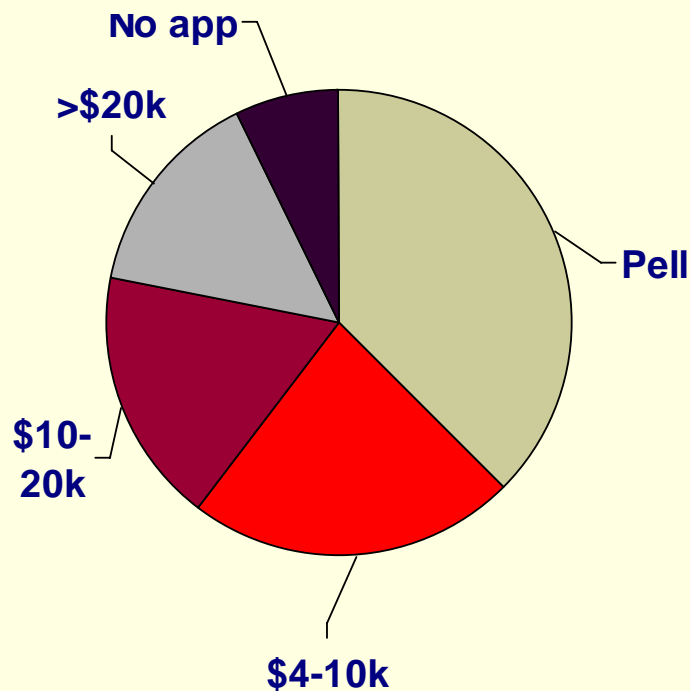
Students Characteristics

- 86% of African Americans who left
- 78% of Biology majors who left
- 77% of SBT students who left



Ability to Pay

Compared to Retained Students



Left v Retained

■ Pell Eligible	36% v 24%
■ EFC < \$4000	
■ EFC \$4-10k	22% v 20%
■ EFC \$10-20k	17% v 21%
■ EFC >\$20k	14% v 24%
■ No app for aid	7% v 10%

Personal Issues

- 43 students (35% multiple and 11% single reason)
- Included issues such as:
 - Medical or mental health
 - Drugs and/or alcohol
 - Family health
 - Relationships
 - Low motivation
 - ADA issues but not registered with ARC
 - Disciplinary issues



Academic Reasons

- 37 students (36% combined and 3% single reason)
 - 52% of males who left
 - 57% of African Americans who left
 - 33% of Caucasians who left
 - 67% of Biology majors who left
 - 62% of SBT students who left
 - Only 28% of Undeclared students who left
 - Only 28% of SOC students who left



Academic Reasons

- Mostly commuters (65%)
- Nearly half -- disconnected (46%)
- 9 dismissed, 16 on probation
- HSGPA = 3.07
- HS rank > 50 percentile = 71%
- Average ACT = 22
- Only 22% were admitted on probation
- Only 4 registered with ARC



Issues with Major

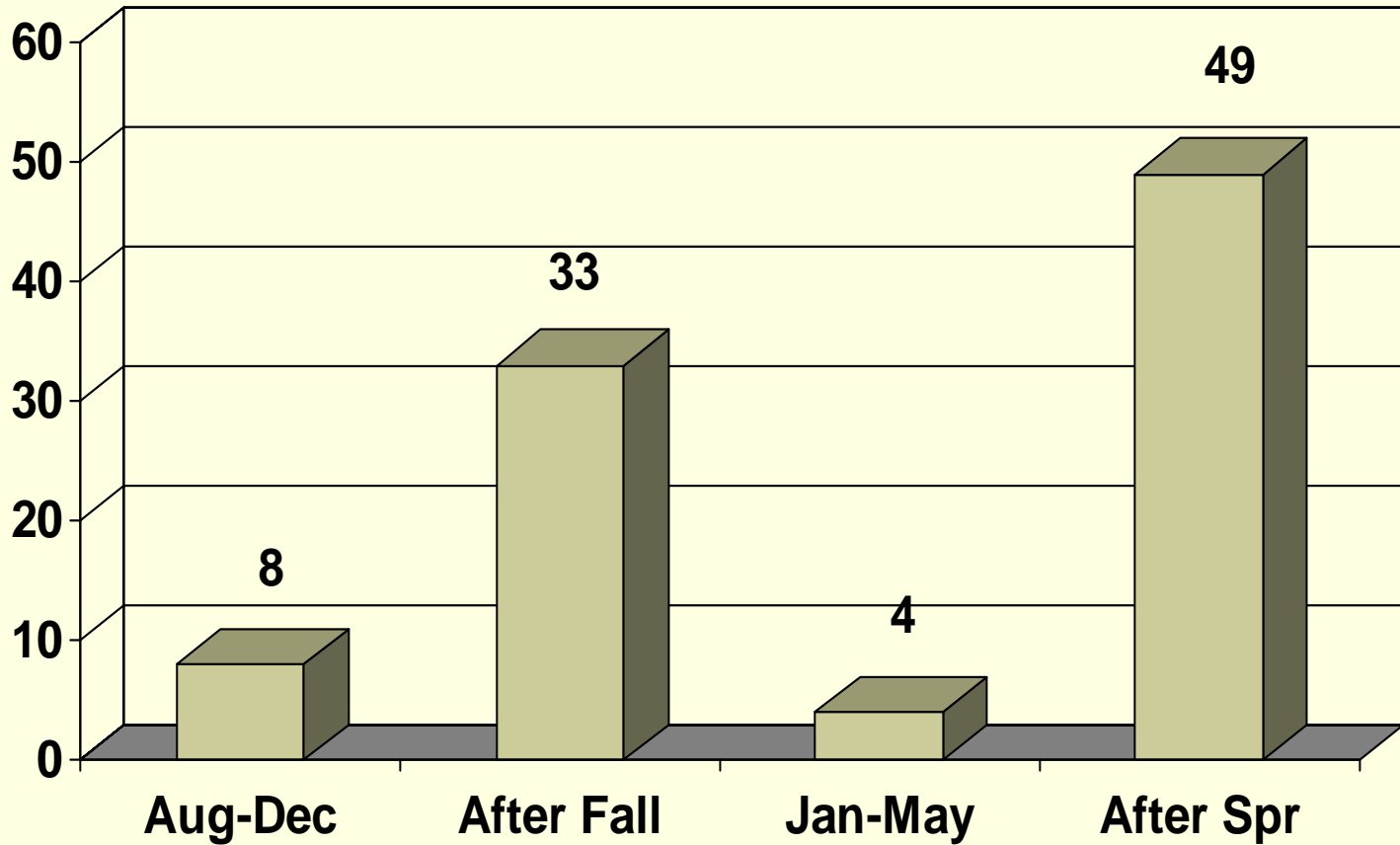
- 14 students (10% multiple and 5% single reason)
 - Changed major to something we don't have
 - Rejected for major they wanted
- Most had a GPA above 3.00
- Nearly all had zero balances



Unexpected Drop in GPA

- Noel-Levitz suggests -- students with a college GPA that is 1.0 or more lower than HSGPA are twice as likely to leave because they are not meeting their own expectations
 - Webster = 25% of those who left (24)
 - 11 of these had < 2.00 at Webster
 - 13 were not on probation
 - could have continued

Timing of Departure



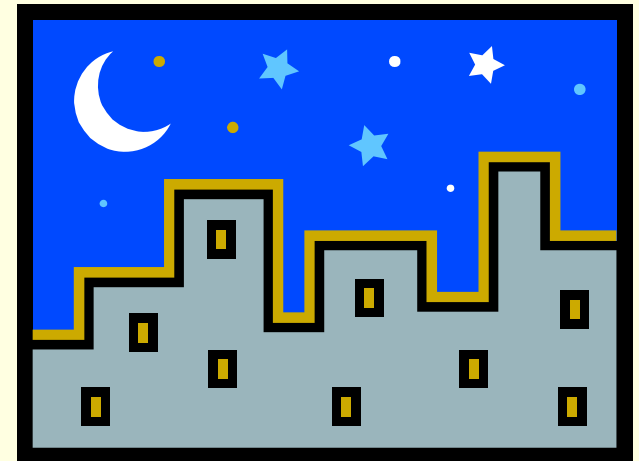
Access to FT Faculty

- Most had one or fewer FT faculty
 - 37% had only one FT faculty (32% for retained)
 - 16% had no full-time faculty (8% for retained)
- 29% of classes were taught by FT faculty
 - 35% for retained students
- Average of 1.5 classes taught by FT faculty
 - 1.8 for retained students

Study at Florida Atlantic University found that students taught by a majority of adjuncts were less likely to persist.

Night Classes

- 21% had night classes (8% of retained)
 - 16 had one night class
 - 3 had two night classes
 - 1 had three night classes



Early Warning

- Student Success Committee meets monthly to discuss students who have been identified.
- Less than half (43%) of the students who left were discussed in the committee.
 - Despite frequent reminders
 - On-line form and emails

Current Retention Initiatives

- University 101
 - One-credit college survival course
 - At-risk freshman advised to enroll
 - Retention Rate
 - 35 of 48 enrollees retained = 73%
 - Better than predicted for this group
 - Additional sections offered in 2006-07

Conclusions From The Data

- Retention rate is below average
 - National comparison
 - Compared to previous years at Webster
- Webster is losing freshmen with good GPAs
- Higher attrition was costly (\$221,000)
- Getting students connected in meaningful ways makes a difference
 - Some are falling through the cracks
- Financial issues played a major role

What Works in Student Retention

■ Results of ACT Survey

- 64% of campuses have identified **an individual responsible** for coordinating retention strategies
- 59% of campuses have set a **goal for improving retention** from first to second year
- Greatest impact for 4-year private colleges
 - First-year programs – learning communities, extended orientation/University 101, integration of advising with FYE
 - Advising interventions (increased advising staff)
 - Comprehensive learning assistance center
 - Summer bridge program
 - Program for honors students

Recommendations

- Make persistence a priority and hire a Director of Retention to:
 - coordinate retention initiatives
 - conduct further assessment
 - follow-up with students who may be at risk
 - reinstitute the CSI Freshmen Survey to gather data to predict those students most at-risk of leaving before their 2nd year
 - Administer during summer registration
 - For those who score high on At-Risk scale
 - University 101
 - Special advising and counseling

Recommendations

- Director of Retention - Duties
 - Contact the freshmen who have not yet registered for the next semester
 - Troubleshoot and deal with any problem issues
 - Better information on why students leave
 - Timing:
 - December for Spring
 - May for Fall

Recommendations

- Director of Retention - Duties
 - Identify students likely to be “at-risk” based on predictors and initiate weekly contact via peer mentors
 - ACT <21
 - HS Rank < 50
 - Undeclared
 - Lack of Connections
 - Commuters
 - Not working on campus
 - No orientation
 - Less than 2 FT faculty on their class schedule

Director of Retention (examples)

- Maryville University
 - also - assistant director of retention initiatives
- Greenville College
- Roger Williams University
- Culver Stockton
- North Central College
- Alfred University
- Florida Atlantic University
- Marywood University
- Xavier University
- University of South Carolina
- Syracuse University
- Indiana University
- University of Colorado
- Canisius College
- Rutgers University
- Creighton University
- Saint Joseph's University
- Suffolk University
- Transylvania University
- Lock Haven University
- Drexel University

Case Study – Director of Retention

- Maryville University
 - Director of Retention Initiatives
 - Increased retention rate 4 points (81%)
 - Increased retention of undeclared
 - 61% to 79%

Recommendations

- Research shows first-generation students are more likely to drop out
 - 35% Webster v. 13% nationally (private colleges)
 - Lower income, lower HSGPA
 - 2x as likely – major concerns re: financing
 - More likely to choose commuter school
 - Actions to take
 - Add data to CARS
 - Use to identify at-risk students
 - Design appropriate interventions

Recommendations

- Make sure financial aid packages are appropriate
- Increase financial counseling for students and their families



Recommendations

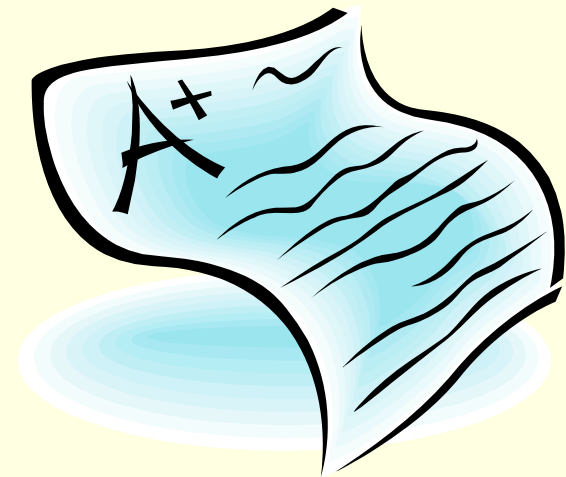
- Academic Advising
 - More intentional efforts to link new students with their advisors
 - Provide training
 - Earlier in the fall semester
 - Greater frequency
 - What's needed to make this happen
 - Retention seen as an institutional priority
 - Encouragement from the deans

Recommendations

- At end of Fall semester identify all those students with a college GPA 1.0 or more points below their HSGPA.
 - Data run by schools/colleges
 - Reasonable -- 13 students in 2005
 - Opportunity for advisor to have a discussion about possible unmet expectations (i.e., the student not performing up to the level they thought they should be at)

Recommendations

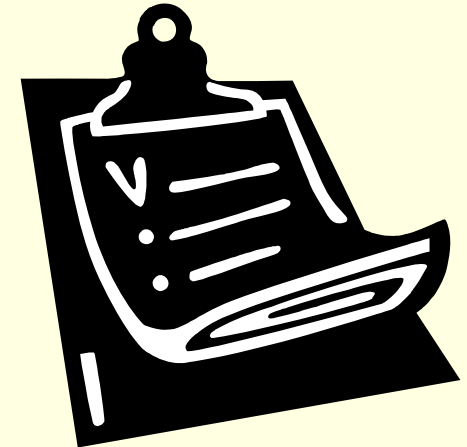
- Explore academic initiatives to engage talented students
 - Learning communities
 - Honors college



- Use National Student Clearinghouse database to track where students transfer

Recommendations

- Create checklist for students to complete when they withdraw from all their courses
 - Offices to visit:
 - Financial Aid
 - Bursar
 - Dean of Students
 - Academic Advising
 - Housing and Residential Life
- Implement ACT Survey of Withdrawing/Nonreturning students (\$400)



Retention Study Summary

What's Different This Year

- Lower retention rate 82%→76.9%
- More students left due to financial reasons
- Changes in persistence rates for:
 - Student athletes
 - Female students
 - Education majors
 - Undeclared
- Wider data collection

Summary

- 76.9% freshmen retention rate
 - Lower than in past years
 - 5 points lower than peers
- Significant financial & qualitative impact
- Room for improvement
- Persistence should be made an institutional imperative
 - It's worth the investment!

