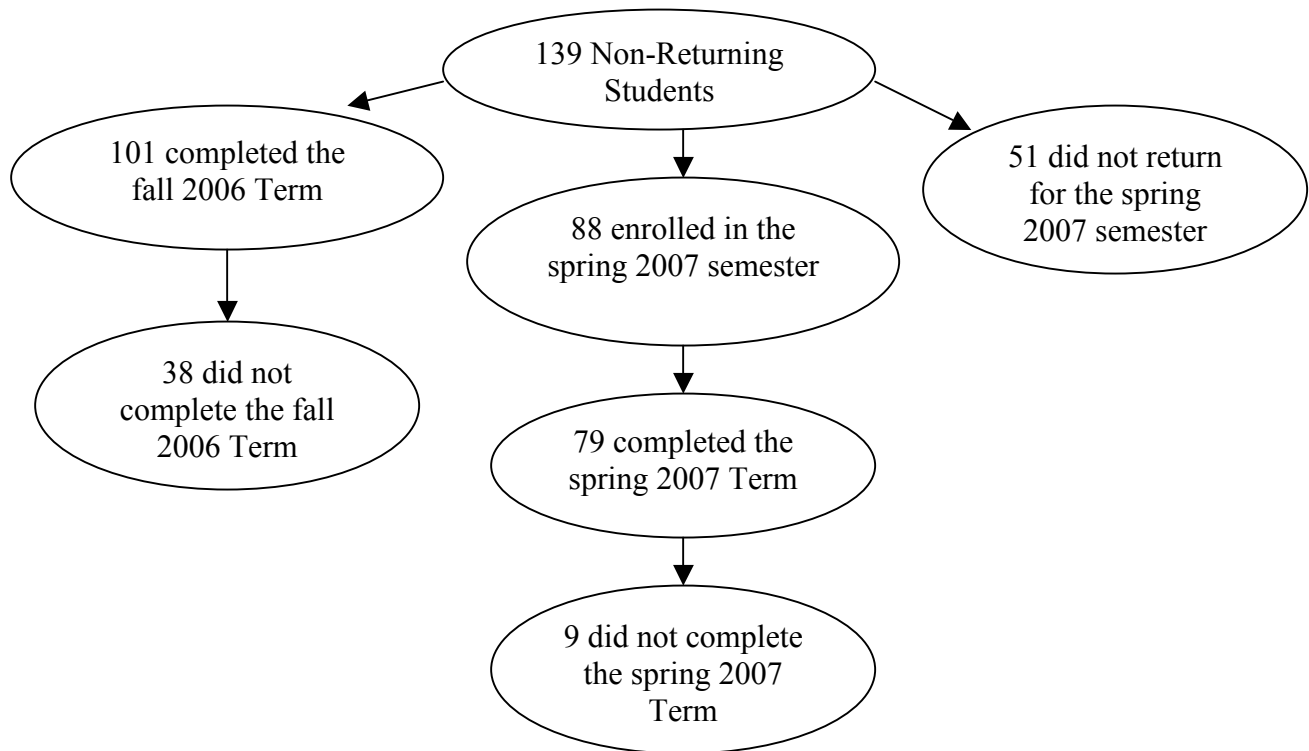


Memorandum

To: Members of the Saint Mary's College Community
From: Mark Figueroa, Director of Institutional Research
Date: October 11, 2007
Subject: Undergraduate First-Year Student Attrition Report, fall 2006 to fall 2007

Retention of first year students from initial enrollment to the beginning of the second year is increasingly used by institutions of higher education and other interested parties (government, college guidebooks, the public) as a key measure of institutional effectiveness. The most recent results for Saint Mary's follow. Of 611 new first-year students (NFYS) who enrolled for the fall 2006 semester, 139 have not enrolled for the fall 2007 term, yielding an attrition rate of 23% or conversely a 77% retention rate. This compares with a first year attrition rate of 15.6% for the fall 2005 class and an average rate of 15% for the classes entering fall 1997-2004. Note that attrition from the fall 2006 class occurred at a higher rate from the beginning of the term with fall to spring attrition of 8.3% more than double the historic average for this point (4.0%).

A breakdown of the 139 non-returning students follows.



Of the 139 non-returning students, 101 completed the fall 2006 term. In the spring 2007 term, 88 of those 139 enrolled, 51 did not. Of those 88 who enrolled in the spring 2007 term, 79 completed the term.

OVERALL CHARACTERISTICS

The chart below contrasts background characteristics of non-returning students to the entering class as a whole.

	Non-returning NFYS Characteristics (N=139)	Overall NFYS Class Characteristics (N=611)
% Residing on campus	89%	95%
% Female	70%	64%
% Male	30%	36%
Average High School GPA	3.20	3.33
Average Combined SAT Score	1055	1080
% from Northern California	74%	66%
% from Southern California	10.8%	18%
% from out-of-state	13%	15%
% of “first-generation” college students	37%	39%
% Pell Grant Recipients	17.3%	20.5%
% admitted as Presidential Scholars	1.4%	3.4%
% admitted with Honors	4.3%	10.3%
% admitted as High Potential students	4.3%	6.9%

Ethnicity	Non-returning NFYS Characteristics (N=139)	Overall NFYS Class Characteristics (N=611)
African American	5.8%	7.5 %
Native American	1.4%	1.3 %
Asian-American/Pacific Islander	17.3%	14.3 %
Latino	16.5%	21.0%
White	51.8%	50.3 %
International	1.4%	1.0%
Unknown	5.8%	4.6%

SAT Score Comparisons					
	Non-Returners			Overall Class	
	SAT CR	SATM		SAT CR	SATM
300-400	1.5%	1.5%		1.0%	1.4%
401-500	34.6%	36.2%		30.9%	29.7%
501-600	46.9%	42.3%		44.3%	41.8%
601-700	15.4%	18.5%		19.3%	22.2%
701-800	1.5%	1.5%		4.5%	4.9%
SAT CR = Critical Reading Section					
SATM = Mathematics Section					

RESIDENCY and DISCIPLINE

During both the fall 2006 and spring 2007 semesters, 89% of the 139 students lived in on-campus housing. Below is a breakdown of residence hall occupancy for the Fall 06 and Spring 07 semester for those who lived in on-campus housing.

	Ground/1 st , Fall	2 nd , Fall	3 rd , Fall	4 th , Fall	Ground/1 st , Spring	2 nd , Spring	3 rd , Spring	4 th , Spring
Aquinas	9	10	2		7	8	1	
Assumption	4	3			3	2		
Augustine	5	15	11	4	5	9	2	3
DeLaSalle		7	11	2		2	7	1
Justin	10	8			4	2		
Mitty	5	12			4	9		

Note that some students who were residing in on-campus housing left campus prior to the completion of the term and may not be reflected in the disaggregated data above.

Twenty five of the 139 students were found in violation of the disciplinary code during the fall and/or spring terms. 16 were found in violation one time. Four students were found in violation of the disciplinary code two times. One student each was found in violation of the code 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 times, respectively.

WITHDRAWING STUDENT SURVEY

During the 2006-2007 academic year, in addition to individual interviews with the VP for Enrollment, a standardized withdrawing student survey was utilized to capture information about why students were deciding to leave Saint Mary's College. During the course of the year, sixty-four students, 52 females and 12 males, completed the survey, representing 46% of the 139 non-returning students. The following were the top 5 reasons students gave for their decision to withdraw from SMC:

1. Decided to attend a different college
2. Wanted to move to a new location
3. Did not like the size of the college
4. Dissatisfied with the social life of the college
5. Wanted to live nearer to my parents

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At the end of the fall 2006 term, 38 of the 101 students that completed the term were on academic probation (37.6%). Of those 38, 36 lived on-campus and 14 were found in violation of the disciplinary code. At the end of the spring 2007 term, 25 of the 79 students that completed the term were on academic probation (31.6%). Of those 25, 20 lived on-campus and 9 were found in violation of the disciplinary code.

Additionally, 21 students were on academic probation for both the fall and spring terms, of which 18 lived on-campus and 9 were found in violation of the disciplinary code.

OBSERVATIONS

The following observations arise from the preceding data:

- Attrition was slightly higher among female students
- The students who left had slightly lower average SAT scores and High School GPA
- Attrition was slightly higher among students from Northern California
- Proportionately fewer Pell Grants recipients, presidential scholars/honors, and High Potential program students left
- Proportionately more Asian-American/Pacific Islander and White students left
- Proportionately more students with SAT scores in the 401-500 range left
- Students on probation were much more likely to leave the College
- Students with disciplinary violations were much more likely to leave the College.
- Students with 3 or more disciplinary violations were more likely to be on probation for both terms
- Information from the standardized withdrawing student survey is too generic to provide the level of detail we are seeking. As such, the Institutional Research Office will work to develop an instrument that is tailored and focused to SMC in order to yield more useful results.

While this analysis of the characteristics and behaviors of withdrawing students provides some indicators of their differences with those that persist at SMC, these differences – beyond probation and disciplinary status – are modest. Prior analysis of probationary status students have highlighted the difficulty of identifying a “standard” student type for those who end up on probation. A similar analysis of students with troubled disciplinary records is needed and in process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unfortunately this analysis does not reveal a standard profile or type of student that is more likely to leave the College during the first year. Similarly, it does not suggest that a single or simple intervention will address the issue of student attrition; rather, it calls for attention to the overall student experience (academic, social, extracurricular) as we search for solutions or craft interventions to reduce our attrition level for first-year students.