

Memorandum

To: Members of the Saint Mary's College Community

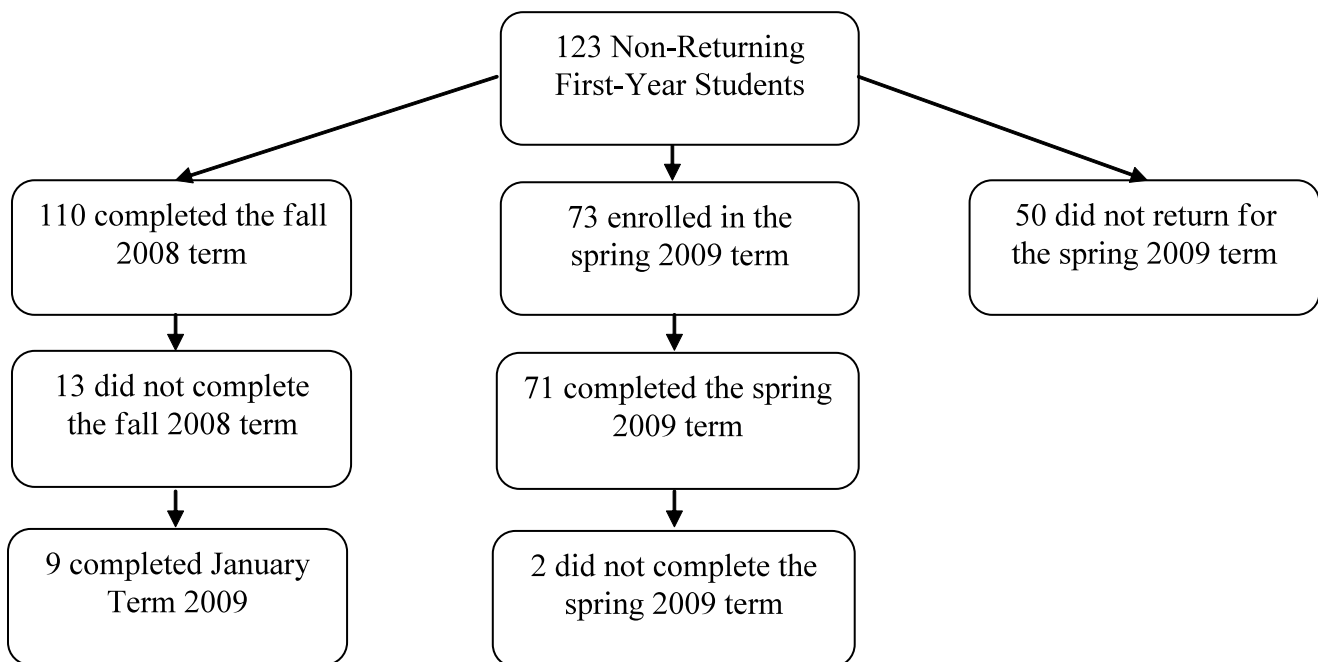
From: Mary McCall, Interim Director of Institutional Research

Date: December 7, 2009

Subject: Undergraduate First-Year Student Attrition Report, Fall, 2008 to Fall, 2009

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, and the public) as a key measure of institutional effectiveness. Most recently, of 675 new first-year students (NFYS) who enrolled for the fall 2008 semester, 123 have not enrolled for the fall 2009 term, yielding an attrition rate of 18% or conversely an 82% retention rate. This compares with a first year attrition rate of 19% for the fall, 2007; a rate of 23% for the fall 2006 class; a rate of 15.6% for the fall 2005 class; and an average rate of 15% for the classes entering fall 1997-2004.

A breakdown of the 123 non-returning NFYS from fall 2008 follows:



Of the 123 non-returning students, 110 completed the fall 2008 term. Of the remaining thirteen, 5 did not attend classes at all, 7 withdrew from the College and 1 passed away mid-term.

Seventy-three (73) students of the 110 who had completed the fall term enrolled in spring 2009 courses; 37 did not enroll in spring 2009 courses. Nine students completed January Term, but did not return in the spring term. Of those 73 who enrolled in the spring 2009 term, 71 completed the term. At the end of the spring term, six students had been academically disqualified; eight were on Special Academic Probation; 11 were on Academic Probation; 2 had withdrawn; and 1 had taken a leave of absence.

OVERALL CHARACTERISTICS

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

	Non-returning NFYS Characteristics (N=123)	Overall NFYS Class Characteristics (N=675)
Residing on campus	87%	95%
Female	57%	65.2%
Male	43%	34.8%
Average High School GPA	3.18	3.33
Avg. Combined SAT Score	1060	1081
from Northern California	50.0%	62%
from Southern California	20.0%	19%
from out-of-state	30.0%	16%
“first-generation” college students	27.0%	34.6%
Pell Grant Recipients	22%	26.0%
admitted as Presidential Scholars	3.3%	3.0%
admitted with Honors	1.6%	11.6%
admitted as High Potential students	3.3%	5.6%

ETHNICITY	Non-returning NFYS Characteristics (N=123)	Overall NFYS Class Characteristics (N=675)
African-American	1.6%	6.4%
Native American	1.6%	1.6%
Asian-American/Pacific Islander	11.0%	12.0%
Latino	20.0%	23.4%
White	50.0%	48.9%
International	5.6%	3.0%
Unknown	10.0%	4.7%

SAT Score Comparisons				
	Non-returners (n=100**)		Overall Class **	
	SATCR	SATM	SATCR	SATM
300 - 390	3%	3%	0.4%	0.9%
400 - 490	35%	36%	32.1%	29.6%
500 - 590	45%	46%	44.0%	47.1%
600 - 690	13%	11%	20.1%	19.8%
700 - 800	4%	4%	3.4%	2.7%
SAT CR = Critical Reading Section				
SAT M = Mathematics Section				

** As noted in the Fact Book, these scores exclude scores of students admitted through the High Potential Program, international students admitted on the basis of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and/or students admitted on the basis of American College Test (ACT) scores.

RESIDENCY and DISCIPLINE

During both fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters, 87% of the 123 students lived on-campus. Fourteen of the 123 students (11%) were found in violation of the disciplinary code during the fall and/or spring terms. Thirteen were found in violation one time. Three students were found in violation of the disciplinary code twice each.

WITHDRAWING STUDENT SURVEY

In past years, many students have completed an exit survey for students who leave the college in order to provide us with some insight as to the reasons for their leaving Saint Mary's. For those students who did not return in fall 2009, only 34 NFYS students completed the survey. The most frequent reasons stated for not returning were: deciding to attend a different college, unhappiness with the social life at the college, wanting to move to a different location, dissatisfaction with the size of the college, experiencing emotional problems, and not receiving enough financial aid.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Over the course of the fall term, 12 students withdrew and 1 passed away. At the end of the fall 2008 or January Term, 50 of these students did not return for spring 2009. Of those 73 who did return, 7 were on Special Academic Probation from the fall term.

At the end of spring, 2009 term, 5 of those students that completed the term were on Special Academic Probation, and 7 had been academically disqualified. Of those 7, 5 also had had disciplinary problems in the residence halls at some point over the course of the year.

OBSERVATIONS

The following observations arise from the preceding data:

- Attrition was slightly higher among male students
- The students who left had slightly lower average SAT scores and High School GPAs, though there were also a higher proportion of students in the highest SAT category who left, compared to their proportion of the overall entering class
- Attrition was slightly higher among students from out of state
- Proportionately fewer Pell Grants recipients, first-generation students, those admitted with honors, and High Potential program students left, while slightly more Presidential Scholars left compared to their overall proportion of the total class
- Proportionately fewer African-American, Asian-American/Pacific Islander and Latino students left, while more international students and those who did not disclose their ethnicity did not return
- Proportionately more students with SAT scores in the 300-500 range left as did those in the 700-800 range
- Students on academic probation were not more likely to leave the College
- Students with disciplinary violations were not more likely to leave the College.
- Data from the standardized Withdrawing Student Survey provided similar types of information that we have collected in the past about reasons for not returning – the most common reasons being the social life/size of the campus, wanting to be somewhere else, or financial reasons. Institutional efforts in the areas of social life and financial support continue to be a priority for the College.

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 ultimately decide not to return to Saint Mary’s.

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.

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