

Memorandum

To: Members of the Saint Mary's College Community

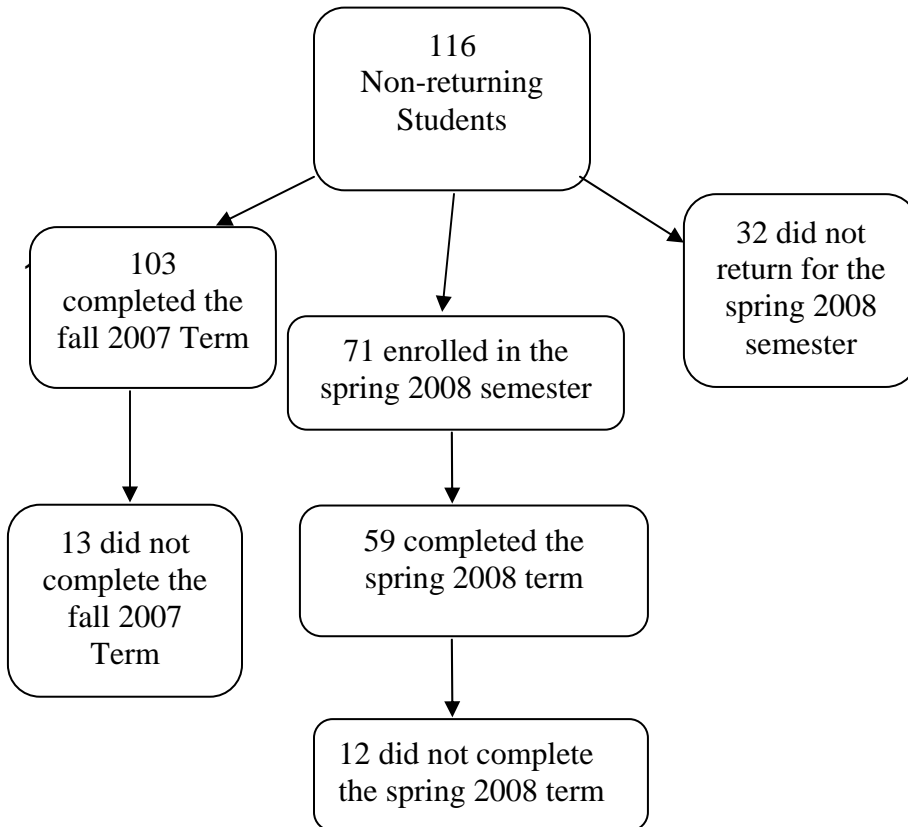
From: Mary McCall, Interim Director of Institutional Research

Date: October 27, 2008

Subject: Undergraduate First-Year Student Attrition Report, fall 2007 to fall 2008

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 2007 semester, 116 have not enrolled for the fall 2008 term, yielding an attrition rate of 19% or conversely an 81% retention rate. This compares with a first year attrition 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 116 non-returning students follows.



Of the 116 non-returning students, 103 completed the fall 2007 term. Of those, 13 who did not complete the fall term, 5 never attended courses at all, 6 withdrew and 2 students took a leave). In the spring 2008 term, 71 of those 103 enrolled, 32 did not (20 withdrew, 7 were academically disqualified and 5 students took a leave). Of those 71 who enrolled in the spring 2008 term, 59 completed the term. At the end of the spring term, 8 students had been academically disqualified.

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	58%	90%
% Female	60%	61.2%
% Male	41%	38.7%
Average High School GPA	3.23	3.33
Avg. Combined SAT Score	1060	1079
% from Northern California	65.5%	66%
% from Southern California	16.4%	16%
% from out-of-state	18.1%	18%
% of "first-generation" college students	37%	40.6%
% Pell Grant Recipients	22%	24.5%
% admitted as Presidential Scholars	0%	4.3%
% admitted with Honors	3.4%	11.2%
% admitted as High Potential students	4.3%	6.5%

ETHNICITY	Non-returning NFYS Characteristics (N=116)	Overall NFYS Class Characteristics (N=611)
African-American	3.4%	4.7%
Native American	.08%	1.2%
Asian-American/Pacific Islander	12.1%	11.0%
Latino	25.9%	21.1%
White	50.9%	56.3%
International	1.7%	1.9%
Unknown	5.2%	3.8%

SAT Score Comparisons				
	Non-returners – excl. HP (including all)		Overall Class – excl. HP & others * (including all)	
	SATCR	SATM	SATCR	SATM
300-390	2.8% (3.6)	4.6% (6.2)	0.4% (2.5)	1.2% (4.2)
400-490	34.3% (33.9)	34.3% (33.9)	31.2% (36.8)	30.8%(34.9)
500-590	43.5% (43.8)	39.8% (39.3)	44.4% (41.5)	46.2%(43.0)
600-690	18.5% (17.9)	16.7% (16.1)	20.2% (16.4)	18.6%(15.5)
700-800	0.9% (0.9)	4.6% (4.5)	4.0% (2.8%)	3.2% (2.5)
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 the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters, 58% of the 116 students lived in on-campus housing. Seventeen of the 116 students were found in violation of the disciplinary code during the fall and/or spring terms. Sixteen were found in violation one time. One student was found in violation of the disciplinary code two times.

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 choosing to leave Saint Mary's. For those students who did not return in Fall, 2008, 44 students completed the written survey. The most frequent reasons stated for leaving were deciding to attend a different college, wanting to move to a different location, dissatisfaction with the size of the college, experiencing emotional problems, unhappiness with the social life, and the high tuition.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At the beginning of the fall 2007 term, there were 5 students who had enrolled but did not actually attend classes. Two students had taken a leave for the fall. Over the course of the fall term, 6 students withdrew. At the end of the fall 2007 term, 13 of the 103 students that completed the term were on academic probation (12.6%). Of those 13, 11 lived on-campus and 4 were found in violation of the disciplinary code. Twenty students withdrew before spring term began and 5 students took a leave for spring. At the end of the spring 2008 term, 8 of the 71 students that completed the term had been academically disqualified (11.3%) and 6 students were on academic probation (8.5%), but not disqualified. Of those 14, 11 lived on-campus and 1 was found in violation of the disciplinary code. Additionally, 11 students were on academic probation for both the fall and spring terms, of which 9 lived on-campus for both semesters, 1 lived on campus for fall

only and 1 did not live on campus at all, and 3 were found in violation of the disciplinary code.

OBSERVATIONS

The following observations arise from the preceding data:

- Attrition was higher among students who lived off-campus
- The students who left had slightly lower average SAT scores and High School GPA
- Proportionately fewer Pell Grants recipients, presidential scholars/honors, and High Potential program students left
- Proportionately more Latino students left and proportionately fewer African-American and White students left
- Proportionately more students with SAT scores in the 300-500 range left
- Students on probation were not more likely to leave the College
- Students with disciplinary violations were not more likely to leave the College.

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. It does seem that on-campus residence may be a factor in retaining students. However, it does not suggest that a single or simple intervention will address the issue of student attrition. While there was a decrease in the overall attrition rate from the previous year, we continue to explore ways in which to understand more clearly the factors that impact our students' decisions to remain at Saint Mary's.