What Can Alumni Tell Us About Retention?

JENNIFER L. BROWN, PHD
COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

Revised Theory of Student Departure in Commuter College and Universities (Braxton et al., 2004)

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study was to determine the difference between the pre-college characteristics of the alumni who graduated with their undergraduate degrees from the College and incoming freshmen who declared a major within the College.

Participants
- **Alumni participants** included 3 (5.6%) males and 51 (94.4%) females.
- Racial classifications were 40 (74.1%) Whites, 11 (20.4%) Blacks, 2 (3.7%) Hispanics, and 1 (1.9%) multiracial.
- **Incoming freshman participants** included 11 (19.0%) males and 47 (81.0%) females.
- Racial classifications were 18 (31.0%) Whites, 36 (62.1%) Blacks, 1 (1.7%) Hispanics, and 3 (5.2%) multiracial.

Exponential Decay Retention Model
1 out of 3 students will leave each year.

Cohort Data: Students who Graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th year</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th year</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>25.86%</td>
<td>28.17%</td>
<td>22.26%</td>
<td>17.41%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection
• Freshman Orientation Survey (10 scales)
• Alumni participants were invited to participate via email.
• Incoming freshman participants completed the survey at 1 of 5 summer orientation sessions.

Results
• The incoming freshmen had statistically significant scores for Environmental Commitment, College Basis Decision, Goal Commitment, and Peer Relations.
• The alumni had statistically significant scores for Individual Aptitude ($F(1, 111) = 55.41; p < .001; \eta^2 = .34$). The alumni tended to have higher high school grade point averages and overall standard test scores.

Results
• Institutional Commitment and Family Attributes, such as highest level of education and primary occupation, were similar across both groups; however, more incoming freshmen intended to pay for their college education using employment and student loans compared to the alumni.

Future Research
• Future research includes building a predictive model for first-year grade point average using the alumni data and subsequent data gathered from future administrations of the Freshman Orientation Survey.
• This study was part of a longitudinal retention study, which gathers archival and survey data on an annual basis from each freshman fall cohort within the College.

Any Question?