
First Year Attrition of Master's Students: A Springboard to Understanding the Larger Problem?

CGS Panel on Master's Completion, Retention and
Time to Degree

Ken Tokuno, University of Hawaii

Why focus on the first year?

- Based on PhD study, most attrition occurs early.
 - Master's degree programs are short.
 - Acting to prevent attrition in within the first year is the most logical.
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First Year Attrition in 2004

- Survey via CGS list serve
 - 7 Campuses responded
 - Range of first year attrition: 6.9% to 26.2%
 - Difficulty of comparisons across campuses
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Table 1: 2004 Survey of Master's Attrition after the First Year

	2003 class	loss	%
Professional School	162	13	8.0%
Research University A	2497	653	26.2%
Graduate Only Campus	847	64	7.6%
Research University B	1066	145	13.6%
Urban Branch Campus	3066	622	20.3%
Public Comprehensive A	1538	286	18.6%
Public Comprehensive B	1380	322	23.3%
Public Comprehensive C	290	20	6.9%
Totals	10846	2125	19.6%

Is It Fair to Compare?

- Master's only campuses differ from those that also award the PhD.
 - One campus awarded only professional degrees.
 - Are there regional differences?
 - Are there differences between public and private schools?
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First Year Attrition in 2010

- Cross sectional study at the University of Hawai'i, 1999-2009 cohorts.
 - First year attrition across years varied from 8.9% to 13.3%
 - Great variation across programs, from 0% to 23.3% (cumulative 1999-2009)
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Table 2: First Year Attrition, University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Matriculation. Year	Enrolled	Drop	%	Drop first year	%
1999	1,081.00	212	19.61%	121	11.20%
2000	1,162.00	210	18.07%	121	10.40%
2001	1,177.00	202	17.16%	113	9.60%
2002	1,356.00	222	16.37%	125	9.20%
2003	1,470.00	255	17.35%	153	10.40%
2004	1,385.00	289	20.87%	177	12.80%
2005	1,368.00	274	20.03%	178	13.00%
2006	1,325.00	235	17.74%	146	11.00%
2007	1,329.00	205	15.43%	118	8.90%
2008	1,453.00	221	15.21%	141	9.70%
2009	1,403.00	187	13.33%	187	13.30%
Total	14,509.00	2,512.00	17.31%	1,580.00	10.89%

Questions

- How do we define and measure attrition?
 - What accounts for variability across programs?
 - What accounts for variability across time?
 - What are the correlates of attrition?
 - What causes attrition and how do we intervene?
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How do we define and measure attrition?

- First semester enrollment is not necessarily a baseline. What constitutes matriculation?
 - Some students graduate in one year.
 - Are students who are dismissed for any reason part of an attrition calculation?
 - Students stop out.
 - Students change programs
 - At doctoral institutions, some students may move to the PhD in one year bypassing the master's
 - Students transfer
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A Definition of First Year Attrition

- A matriculated student is one who must be enrolled in at least one course by the nationally established census date of the tenth day of the full fall term. The total number of these students is the Matriculated Cohort.
 - Students who graduate, change degrees within the campus, are dismissed by the institution for any reason, or are given a leave of absence should be subtracted from the Matriculated Cohort. The result is the Adjusted Matriculated Cohort (AMC)
 - A retained student is one who is enrolled in at least one course by the nationally established census date of the tenth day of the fall term following one full year after the Matriculated Cohort. The total number of these students is the Retained Cohort (RC).
 - The Attrition Rate is the percentage of the AMC minus the RC divided by the AMC.
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What accounts for variability across programs?

- STEM fields may lose students to high paying jobs.
 - Efforts to retain by programs
 - Quality of advising
 - Availability of financial support
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What accounts for variability across time?

- Broader social conditions such as the economy?
 - Changing perceptions of the value of a graduate degree?
 - More data needed?
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What are the correlates of attrition?

- Lack of financial support
 - Threshold qualifications for admissions
 - Type of program
 - Age of student
 - Marital/Family status
 - Gender
 - Minority status
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What causes attrition and how do we intervene?

- External commitments
 - Difficulties with faculty
 - Unanticipated financial conditions
 - Lack of fit with program
 - Lack of motivation
 - Better career opportunities
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