

FACTORS LEADING TO WITHDRAWAL
PRIOR TO THE SECOND YEAR OF COLLEGE

by

Elizabeth Alice Yates

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY STUDIES

Joan B. Hirt, Chairperson

Gerard J. Kowalski

John A. Muffo

March 29, 2005

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: First-Year Students, Retention, Withdrawal

Copyright 2005, Elizabeth Alice Yates

FACTORS LEADING TO WITHDRAWAL PRIOR TO THE SOPHOMORE YEAR OF COLLEGE

Elizabeth Alice Yates

ABSTRACT

Persistence and withdrawal have been issues throughout the 368 years of higher education in the United States. As higher education shifted from a privilege of the elite to an expectation of the masses, conversations surrounding persistence and withdrawal have become more prevalent (Trow, 1979 as cited in Somers, 1995). Approximately 60% of entering college students leave higher education without obtaining a degree, and most do so during the first two years of college (Porter, 1990 as cited in Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000). Research illustrates that reasons leading to withdrawal in the early stages of the college experience are very different from those that influence withdrawal in the later years (Daubman, Williams, Johnson, & Crump; 1985; Pickering, Calliotte, & McAuliffe, 1992; St. John, 1990; Tinto, 1987).

Models have emerged to explain attrition (Hossler & Galligher, 1987; Bean, 1980; 1985; Tinto, 1975; 1982; 1987; 1993). These models examine the relationship between persistence and background characteristics (Milville & Sedlacek, 1992; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986; Pickering et. al 1992), high school profile (Pickering et. al 1992; Richardson & Sullivan, 1994), and the college decision process (Brower, 1997). These factors, however, have been studied in isolation.

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing Year 1 to Year 2 (Y1Y2) retention among students. Specific factors included demographic characteristics, high school profile, and the college decision process. Sex, ethnicity, parents' educational level, and concern regarding financial capability were included in demographic characteristics. High school profile encompassed high school GPA, standardized test scores, and time spent during senior year in selected activities. Reasons to attend college and reasons to attend the particular institution at which the study was conducted defined the college decision process factor.

The sample consisted of students at a large public, land-grant institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Data from 2,214 first-year students who completed the Annual Freshman Survey (AFS) sponsored by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) were analyzed. All participants completed the AFS in the summer of 2003 at the

institution's orientation program. The participants were assigned to one of two groups: those who returned for their second year of college in the fall of 2004 and those who did not.

Results revealed statistically significant differences on 15 out of 51 total chi-square tests conducted on responses to 10 items on the AFS. Those who did not return were more likely to be males and students with B or C averages in high school. In addition, Non-Returners were more likely to have some or major concern regarding their ability to finance their education and felt that low tuition was a very important factor in deciding to attend a particular institution. Non-Returners were more likely to spend five or fewer hours per week studying; six or less, or more than 15 hours per week socializing; and less than an hour or more than 15 hours per week on household and childcare duties during their senior year of high school. Non-Returners were more likely to feel that gaining a general education and preparing for graduate or professional school were not important reasons to attend higher education. This group felt that graduates getting good jobs, being admitted through early action/decision, and a visit to campus were also not important reasons to attend a particular institution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support and guidance of several individuals. First, I would like to sincerely thank my thesis committee chair, Joan Hirt. I truly appreciate your guidance, feedback, and expertise. I also am thankful for your motivating words throughout this process.

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to my committee members, Gerry Kowalski and John Muffo. Thank you for your time, support, and guidance. Your contributions played a significant role in the completion and success of this project.

It is also important to acknowledge and thank the faculty and students of the HESA program for providing me with an invaluable experience that has prepared me for a successful career in student affairs. I am honored to work with a distinguished and respected group of professionals that are concerned with my development as both a professional and a person.

I would also like to thank my family and my friends, especially my parents, for the endless love and support. Mom & Dad, you have both continuously encouraged me to pursue my goals and have let me just be myself since I was a little girl. You have instilled in me a love for life and a motivation to always do my best. I cannot thank you enough for everything you have done to help me make it to this point and I love you both.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Appendices	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Significance of the Study	6
Delimitations	7
Organization of the Study	8
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	9
Demographic Characteristics	9
High School Profile	11
College Decision Process	13
Chapter Three: Methodology	17
Sample Selection	17
Instrumentation	18
Reliability and Validity	22
Data Collection Procedure	22
Data Analysis Procedure	22

Chapter Four: Results	30
Description of the Sample	30
Results of the Study	30
Chapter Five: Discussion	44
Discussion of the Results	44
Relationship of Results to Prior Research	51
Implications for Practice, Policy, & Research	53
Limitations of the Study	57
References	59
Appendices	62
Vita	69

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Selected CIRP Items and Coded Response Options 20

Table 2: Assignment of CIRP Items to Categories 24

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Sample 31

Table 4: Results of Chi Squares on Demographic Characteristics of Returners (Rs) v. Non-
Returners (NRs) 33

Table 5: Results of Chi Squares on High School Profile of Returners (Rs) v. Non-Returners
(NRs) 34

Table 6: Results of Chi Squares on College Decision Process of Returners (Rs) v. Non-
Returners (NRs) 38

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: 2003 Edition of Annual Freshman Survey (AFS) by Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)	62
Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Exempt Approval	67