First Year Students’ Reasons for Leaving: A survey of voluntary withdrawals

Survey Sample:
Voluntary Leavers from the
Fall 1997 Cohort and Fall 2003 Cohort

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## Cohort Comparisons: Entering Characteristics

Table Two.
1997 and 2003 Cohort Comparisons: Academic Preparation and Retention Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohort Size</strong></td>
<td>4077</td>
<td>3737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math SAT (Mean)</strong></td>
<td>576</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal SAT (Mean)</strong></td>
<td>561</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS GPA (Weighted)</strong></td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Dismissed</strong></td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Voluntary Withdrawal</strong></td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total One Year Attrition</strong></td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eight Clusters of Reasons:


- **Personal Attention** (treated like a number, classes too big, too little faculty contact, inadequate academic advising).
- **Personal Constraints** (Be closer to home, family responsibilities, personal illness, roommate problems)
- **Social Life** (residence hall life, didn’t fit in)
- **Cost** (too expensive, not enough value for money)
- **Student Effort** (not enough effort, poor study skills, too much partying, academic ally too difficult)
- **Quality** (instructor quality, academic reputation, not challenging, poor facilities)
- **Access** (couldn’t get into classes, major of choice)
- **Climate** (Experienced harassment, felt racial/ethnic tension)
Survey Sample and Response Rates

Phone survey was administered by SAREO in the Fall following initial enrollment. 1997 Cohort (Fall 1998), 2003 Cohort (Fall 2004)

Table One: Final Disposition of the One-Year Non-Returner Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003 Cohort Survey</th>
<th>1997 Cohort Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In and cooperated</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In, but would not cooperate</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to Contact</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were no statistically significant differences in entering characteristics (i.e., SATs, HS GPA, race/ethnicity, or gender) between respondents and non respondents.
2003 Cohort: Most Commonly Mentioned Factors Related to Leaving UMass Amherst
("Not a reason" not shown)

- **Personal Attention**
  - Treated like a number, not a person: 32% (Major Reason)
  - Classes were too big: 23% (Major Reason)
  - Too little contact with faculty: 18% (Major Reason)
  - Academic advising was inadequate: 14% (Major Reason)

- **Personal Constraints**
  - Wanted to be closer to home: 33% (Major Reason)
  - Family responsibilities: 12% (Major Reason)
  - Personal illness/psychological problems: 14% (Major Reason)
  - Had problems with roommates: 11% (Major Reason)

- **Social Life**
  - Didn't like residence hall life: 19% (Major Reason)
  - Didn't fit in at UMass: 14% (Major Reason)
  - Dissatisfied with the social life: 12% (Major Reason)

- **Cost**
  - UMass too expensive: 19% (Major Reason)
  - UMA not a good enough value for the money: 9% (Major Reason)
Reasons sorted by Mean “Major Reason” Percent for Items in Cluster

2003 Cohort: Additional Factors Related to Leaving UMass Amherst
("Not a reason" not shown)

- Effort
  - Didn't put in enough effort: 13%
  - Had poor study skills: 10%
  - Spent too much time partying: 11%
  - Academically, too difficult: 1%

- Quality
  - Dissatisfied with instructor quality: 7%
  - Dissatisfied with academic reputation: 6%
  - Courses were not challenging: 7%
  - Dissatisfied with classrooms/labs: 6%
  - Dissatisfied with athletic/rec facilities: 4%

- Access
  - Could not get into classes: 5%
  - Could not get into major: 10%

- Climate
  - Experienced harassment: 1%
  - Felt racial/ethnic tension: 2%
Comparison of 1997 and 2003 Cohorts
(Percentages are only shown for differences of ≥ 5%)

Personal Attention

- Wanted a smaller school ('97) 56% 2003: A Reason
- Treated like a number, not a person ('03) 53%
- Classes were too big ('03) 47%
- Too little contact with faculty 40% 29%
- Academic advising was inadequate 44% 35%

Personal Constraints

- Wanted to be closer to home 56%
- Family responsibilities 20%
- Personal illness/psychological problems 35%
- Had problems with roommates 25% 20%

Social Life

- Didn't like residence hall life ('03) 35%
- Didn't fit in at UMass 28%
- Dissatisfied with the social life 34%

Cost

- UMass too expensive 40%

UMA not a good enough value for the money (03) 40%

Item Reworded from 1997 Survey
- 97: "Faculty were unapproachable"
- 97: "Quality of Social Life"
Additional Comparisons of 1997 and 2003 Cohorts
(Percentages are only shown for differences of > 5%)

- **Effort**
  - Didn't put in enough effort
  - Had poor study skills
  - Spent too much time partying
  - Academically, too difficult (03)

- **Quality**
  - Dissatisfied with instructor quality
  - Dissatisfied with academic reputation
  - Courses were not challenging
  - Dissatisfied with classrooms/labs (03)
  - Dissatisfied with athletic/rec facilities (03)

- **Access**
  - Could not get into classes
  - Could not get into major

- **Climate**
  - Experienced harassment
  - Felt racial/ethnic tension

Item Reworded from 1997 Survey
97: "Trouble managing social life"
97: "Dissatisfied with quality of instruction"