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.
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
### Table 1: 2004 Survey of Master’s Attrition after the First Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>2003 class</th>
<th>loss</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional School</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research University A</td>
<td>2497</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Only Campus</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research University B</td>
<td>1066</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Branch Campus</td>
<td>3066</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Comprehensive A</td>
<td>1538</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Comprehensive B</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Comprehensive C</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>10846</td>
<td>2125</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?
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)
## Table 2: First Year Attrition, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa

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