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# A Study of Opinions of Returning & Non-Returning Freshmen at Western Kentucky University Regarding Academic Advisors & Selected Student Personnel Services

Mary Higgins

*Western Kentucky University*

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Mary H.

1981

A STUDY OF OPINIONS OF RETURNING AND NON-RETURNING  
FRESHMEN AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY REGARDING  
ACADEMIC ADVISORS AND SELECTED STUDENT  
PERSONNEL SERVICES

A Thesis

Presented to

the Department of Educational Leadership

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Specialist in Education

by

Mary H. Higgins

June, 1981

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FRESHMEN AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY REGARDING  
ACADEMIC ADVISORS AND SELECTED STUDENT  
PERSONNEL SERVICES

Recommended June 29, 1981  
(Date)

Wayne Ashbery  
Director of Thesis

Rich M. Dree

Carl W. Keiser

Approved July 17, 1981  
(Date)

Elmer Gray  
Dean of the Graduate College

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A STUDY OF OPINIONS OF RETURNING AND NON-RETURNING  
FRESHMEN AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY REGARDING  
ACADEMIC ADVISORS AND SELECTED STUDENT  
PERSONNEL SERVICES

Mary H. Higgins

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Directed by: Wayne Ashley, Richard Greer, and Carl Kreisler

Department of Educational Leadership, Western Kentucky University

Three-hundred ten non-returning and two-hundred nineteen returning Western Kentucky University freshmen were surveyed regarding contact with academic advisors, availability of advisors, and quality of advisement, as well as awareness, use of, and value of selected student personnel services.

One-hundred eighteen (53%) returning and one-hundred fifteen (37%) non-returning students responded.

Returning and non-returning students differed significantly regarding number of contacts with advisor and perceptions of advisor availability. Returners reported more contacts with their advisor than did non-returners, and returners were more likely to find their advisor readily available than non-returners.

More non-returners used counseling services and developmental studies while returners used the recreational facilities more.

Returning students evidenced higher levels of social support. They reported being associated with a close-knit group of friends, being in clubs or organizations, living on campus and perceiving their instructors as being personally interested in them as individuals.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

The reasons for students dropping out of college have been a much researched topic, but conclusive answers regarding why dropouts occur, and more importantly how they may be prevented, remain elusive. In an era of declining enrollments and fiscal constraints, universities have a vested interest in gaining a better understanding of the factors influencing dropouts (Astin, 1975).

The proportion of dropouts has been relatively constant since the 1930's when research indicated that approximately sixty percent of entering Freshmen did not receive a baccalaureate degree in four years (Cope, 1975). In a report based on a national survey, Astin (1972) found a smaller attrition rate, about 40 percent of the entering Freshmen nationwide never achieve baccalaureate degrees.

It has been predicted that one-half of the fifteen million men and women who enter some 3,000 American colleges and universities during the 1970's are likely to graduate on schedule. Between five and six million of these men and women will never earn degrees (Cope, 1975).

At the national level, data indicate that there are many factors responsible for students dropping out of college. Students leave for academic, motivational, personal,

environmental, financial, or emotional/psychological reasons (Marshall & George, 1971).

Western Kentucky University's attrition rate exceeds the national average. The Office of Academic Affairs began a study (Sutton, 1973) of its entering full-time Freshmen in the Fall of 1967. The findings reported that during the Fall of 1967-Spring 1968 period, 34 percent of the students withdrew. An additional 17 percent dropped out the following year, 6 percent the next year and another 2 percent the next two years. Overall, a total of 58 percent of these 1967 entering Freshmen withdrew from Western Kentucky University by 1971-1972.

The findings of another study (Kowalski, 1973) at Western Kentucky University indicated that personal/emotional factors were the major reasons for students dropping out. This researcher recommended that the University should attempt to help students who come to college with personal, emotional, and home problems since such problems are often the cause of students withdrawing from college, that the University should provide a strong program of personal counseling conjoint with other student personnel programs, and that academic advisement for students should be improved. However, there are limitations upon the ability of a university to deal with problems of this nature; and it is important to determine whether factors more directly under university control are related to dropouts.

From the viewpoint of the University, the attrition problem is exacerbated due to the decline in college enrollments. A recent survey conducted by the Kentucky Council on Higher Education (1979) reports that out of the regional universities in Kentucky only 3 institutions experienced an increase in full-time enrollment for the 1979 Fall semester.

Attrition as well as enrollment decline has a heavy impact on institutional operations and finance. The current economic climate is characterized by high inflation and high unemployment. For universities, high inflation results in reduced purchasing power, higher wage demands from faculty and staff, pressure to increase tuition and decrease scholarship support and increased competition for scarce federal and state funds.

Today many universities face grim alternatives. State governments usually base university budgets on enrollment levels. As enrollment falls the budget contracts. Simultaneously, the cost of operating and maintaining facilities and paying faculty and staff is increasing. To reduce assistantships or raise tuition will further reduce enrollment thus creating a vicious cycle which will result in greatly reduced growth for fortunate institutions and a painful contraction for the less fortunate. David Breneman (in Margarrell, 1980) reports the future of many private colleges is, at best, uncertain. According to The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education (1980), the private

sector of higher education will be decimated because of the inability to compete in the "tuition" market.

The extent to which declining enrollments will translate into fiscal crisis for universities and their faculties will depend in part on the success of efforts to offset the shortfall through improved retention. High dropout rates suggest dissatisfaction with the product of higher education by a significant number of consumers. Universities and colleges are human service institutions. They should strive to improve the services which they offer. The implicit criticism of dropouts should be addressed in the interest of improving the academic environment.

Recently there has been a shift in attention from prediction to the prevention of attrition. Each university must design and implement an effective intervention program (Pantages & Creedon, 1978).

Institutions of higher learning seek to assist students to maximize their individual potential (Brown, 1972). The interaction of the student and the university involves much more than academic factors. The full spectrum of student needs must be considered in developing programs to improve college life (Penney, 1978).

Limited resources have traditionally forced universities to target most counseling and advisement services at academic rather than personal needs of students. A trend toward personalizing university services has now emerged. Counseling and other personnel professions are adopting a more proactive

role, using their skills more efficiently in outreach functions aimed at identifying and working with potential dropouts (Tollefson, 1975). The focus now seems to be more on total lifestyle rather than on more narrow academic aspects of the university experience.

Western Kentucky University is concerned with its attrition rate and has developed a variety of programs to prevent or intervene at an early stage in the process of withdrawal.

The Office of Academic Affairs offers a program designed to aid students who are experiencing academic difficulties. The goal of Western Kentucky University's Developmental Studies program is to help students attain their academic and career goals. The experiences offered include courses, laboratories, career counseling, tutoring, and self-instructional material. These are designed to help the student succeed in college.

In the Fall of 1979, the Office of Student Affairs initiated a program targeted at counseling freshmen dormitory residents. The hall directors and assistant hall directors were to spend a portion of their time in conference with freshmen residents. This was intended to help freshmen feel that someone was concerned about them as individuals and was available to them in their residence hall. Another function of this program was to provide adequate referral information for students who need further assistance. The effectiveness of this program and any other effort for

emphasis on the individual will depend on an understanding of the unique needs of dropouts which can be met by individual attention. A necessary step in gaining this knowledge is understanding the differences and similarities in attitudes of dropouts and persisters toward student personnel services and their effectiveness at providing an emphasis on the individual.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of retention programs and other student personnel services, it is important to better understand the interface between these services and the student population and relevant attitudes of student consumers of these services. In identifying the aspects of the environment that create dissatisfaction, which in turn increases the likelihood of dropping out, the university is better prepared to confront the attrition problem.

#### Purpose

More information is needed in evaluation of areas where the university can impact individual student needs through academic and interpersonal advisement. A program evaluation and usage survey is a necessary component of the efforts of the student personnel services at Western Kentucky University to evolve a program to reduce dropouts. Ultimately the success, or lack of it, of the program must be measured in terms of changes in the attrition rate. To determine with confidence that a significant change has occurred, however, will require several years and, even then, establishing a causal relationship with a specific program will be difficult. An important,



intermediate measure of the services' performance is student perception. It is important to ascertain student opinions of the activities of the student personnel services from both returning and non-returning students. This form of evaluation is advantageous in that it provides information over the shorter term and can prove helpful by suggesting changes as the services evolve. Its weakness is that it is impossible to be sure that student attitudes toward the program will be reflected in changes in attrition.

#### Statement of the Problem

The specific purpose of the study is to examine the similarities and differences of returning and non-returning freshmen relating to the use of academic advisors and selected student personnel services. Academic advisors' areas to be studied include use by students, availability of advisor, worth of information provided by advisor, and personal interest in the student demonstrated by the advisor. The selected student personnel services to be studied include:

- Counseling Services
- Free Time Recreational Facilities
- Financial Aid
- Career Planning and Placement
- Residence Hall Personnel
- Developmental Studies
- Office of Academic Advisement
- Food Services
- Admissions/Registrar's Office
- Entertainment/Concerts
- Health Services

In addition to extent of use, the study also includes an examination of students' reported opinions relating to

the value of the above services. Specific questions to be answered include:

Is there a difference in returning and non-returning freshmen relating to use of faculty advisors?

Is there a difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to availability, worth of information provided and personal interest shown by the advisor?

Is there a difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to awareness and use of selected student personnel services?

Is there a difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to the value of selected student personnel services?

To provide answers to the above questions the following hypotheses are stated in the null form:

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen regarding the use of academic advisors.

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to availability, worth of information provided and personal interest shown by the advisor.

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to awareness and use of selected student personnel services.

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to the value of selected student personnel services.

In addition, the questionnaire gathered basic demographic data and information from students regarding their involvement in various degrees of social support experienced at the university.

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

There is a large body of literature devoted to determining attrition from the reasons that students themselves offer. Almost all of the problems reported are shared by a large number of students who do not choose to withdraw. A review of the literature indicates the following reasons as most predominant (Chicering & Hannah, 1969, Astin, 1965, Marks, 1967). The most frequently cited reason that students give concerns academic matters. Financial difficulties are cited almost as often. A wide range of motivational problems (i.e. uncertainty about educational or occupational goals, lack of interest, unwillingness to study) is given next. Personal considerations are mentioned next. Following this category are marriage, student or family illness, followed by dissatisfaction with college and military service and dropping out for a full-time job. Attrition does appear to occur mainly during the first year and before the beginning of the second year according to Summerskill (1962). Johansson and Rossman (1973) show that women offer personal reasons for dropping out while men more frequently offer curricular reasons.

### Programs to Reduce Attrition

The majority of the recommendations for reducing attrition have been concerned with enlarging the role and scope of counseling services (Davis, 1962). Many students reported dissatisfaction with the colleges' counseling facilities and suggested that improvement of those services could have influenced their decision to drop out (Hannah, 1968).

A study (Osborne, 1968) at Ohio State University concluded that students identified as potential social and emotional "dysfunctioners" who received one or more interviews in the college's Mental Hygiene Clinic stayed in college longer than those who did not.

It has been strongly recommended that the college spend more effort in publicizing the counseling services to the student body (Carlson & Wagner, 1965). It has also been recommended that colleges have active "how to study" programs that do not rely on the student's initiative to seek help (Russell, 1968).

Deitroff (1974) revealed that requiring an exit interview with a counselor significantly increased the number of students who reenrolled one semester later.

Students trained as peer counselors have been found to be quite effective in reducing attrition. They can also disseminate information about where to get professional assistance (Millick & Leon, 1974). Brown, Haslan, Wehe, and Zunker, (1971) proposed, "students can be quite effective in study habit counseling, competent in leading groups of

freshmen with only a small amount of training."

Stern (1970) recommends that environmental assessment techniques be used at regular intervals to discover those particular facets of the institution's environment and policies which contribute to attrition.

It has been suggested that a more comprehensive, thorough and ongoing orientation will better integrate new students into the college environment (Demitroff, 1974).

Davis (1962) suggests that the attrition trends in higher education could be arrested if colleges and universities could show interest in the total needs of the students.

#### Factors Associated with Attrition

Much attention has been devoted to determining why students withdraw from college before graduation. Reasons associated with attrition may be divided into the following: academic, motivational, personal, environmental, and demographic.

#### Academic

"Academic variables are the strongest single variable predictors presently available in the study of persistence and attrition" (Demitroff, 1974). Summerskill (1962) reported that on measures of scholastic aptitude and ability (as measured by SAT and ACT) there is a significant difference between dropouts and non-dropouts. Summerskill found an unequivocal relationship between attrition and first semester grades at college. This data supports the interpretation

that academic success is an extremely effective reinforcer that maintains and strengthens a student's commitment and decreases the chance of dropping out. Beal and Noel (1980) also reported that low academic achievement was the leading characteristic of dropouts surveyed in a study conducted jointly by ACT and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

If the student's study habits are poor, the student will more likely withdraw either voluntarily or involuntarily because of poor scholastic performance (Demitroff, 1974). Tinto (1975) concluded that if students with unsatisfactory grades are excluded, those who withdraw "generally show both higher grade performance and higher levels of intellectual development than do the average persister." Eggleton (1979) found that in her study of Western Kentucky University freshmen (1977-1978) that of those who dropped out, less than one-half of those students had a GPA of 2.00 on a 4-point scale.

#### Motivational

Summerskill (1962) has documented that motivational factors are the most prominent reasons expressed by dropouts in reaching their decision to drop out. Marks (1967) concluded that students who have a personal conflict with regard to whether or not they wish to attend college are more likely to drop out. Noel (1980) reported these factors as significant to the loss of students: feelings of isolation, dissonance, academic boredom and irrelevancy.

Parental influence is a significant variable affecting the student's achievement, motivation and aspiration (Sexton, 1965). Morrissey (1971) discovered that the degree of a student's emotional dependence upon his or her parents affected the student's persistence.

Johansson and Rossman (1973) suggested that if the "fit" between the student and college is a good one, if the needs and goals of the student are highly congruent with the demands and resources of the college, the amount of commitment becomes insignificant. If, however, there is a poor fit, the student level of commitment can be the deciding factor: "High commitment tends to make such a student persist and low commitment leads a student to drop out." Noel (1980) also reports that students who leave the college environment are generally not fulfilling the requirements of that environment, and conversely the college environment is not meeting the needs of the students.

There is general agreement that the peer group forms the most significant external influence upon the college student and is second only to personal characteristics of the student in the formation of the "final college product." Newcomb (1962) believed that "peer group experiences form the attitudes that a student will develop about college, educational and occupational goals, and life in general."

#### College Environment

Research of the past fifteen years has provided considerable evidence that the college environment plays a major



role in determining persistence or withdrawal. Savicki, et al., (1970) support the college fit theory which states "the more congruence there is between a student's values, goals, and attitudes and those of the college, the more likely it is that a student will persist at that college." The first six weeks of college are particularly crucial according to the data published by the American College Testing Corporation (Beal & Noel, 1980). Approximately 50 percent of first year college students who do drop out do so in the first six weeks of campus life.

Although participation in extracurricular activities has not been found to be a primary factor in attrition, Sexton (1965) concluded that extracurricular activities are an important part of the socialization process that enhances a student's reward at college and therefore increases persistence.

The student-professor relationship is an important determinant of student satisfaction with the institution. Hannah (1969) has shown that the dropouts are more dissatisfied in their relationship with professors. Robin and Johnson (1969) determined that many students left the academic environment because they had not received the proper attention and guidance from an understanding faculty member. Noel (1980) suggests too many faculty members and administrators view students as enrollment statistics rather than human beings who have needs, feelings and emotions.

Astin (1964) concluded that students are more likely to select a college that corresponds with their personal characteristics, a decision facilitated in part by the image of the institution.

Feldman and Newcomb (1969) reported "large institutions (a) reduce the students' confidence in themselves in terms of their social acceptability and scholastic development, (b) are less likely to be regarded by the students as friendly and cohesive communities and (c) promote less contact between students and faculty. These factors contribute to increasing student dissatisfaction with the institution, thus making dropping out more probable." Another study has shown that merely the physical size of a large institution is a factor in influencing attrition, the more time it takes to get from one place to another, the greater the rate of attrition. (Panos, and Astin, 1968). Research has shown that less selective institutions have the highest rates of attrition, and attrition rates are generally higher at public supported institutions (Cope, 1975).

Research has conclusively shown that students living off campus are much more likely to drop out than those who live on campus (Astin, 1973). It has also been determined that the presence of fraternities and sororities at an institution will decrease the overall attrition rate (Iffert, 1957). It may be hypothesized that "on campus housing generally serves as a valuable and positive socialization function that facilitates a student's adjustment and

consequent satisfaction with the institution" (Pantages & Creedon, 1978).

### Personality

A review of the literature suggests no significant difference between persisters and non-persisters as identified by measures of personality (Pantages & Creedon, 1978). The problem in this area may be the adequacy of personality measurement techniques. Sexton (1965) suggests that although personality variables should be included in any analysis of persistence or withdrawal from college, they cannot be regarded as predictive factors.

Kowalski (1973), in a study at Western Kentucky University, indicated that students with personal, health, and emotional problems can be identified as potential dropouts.

### Demographic

Although age is not a primary factor in causing attrition, Sturtz (1971) concluded that older students are more satisfied than younger students with the college experience. The sex of the student is not a significant variable in determining persistence or attrition; although women tend to drop out for non-academic reasons and men tend to do so for scholastic reasons (Bayer, 1968). Astin (1972) reported that more women graduate in four years but that more men will persist in college over the next several years.

Research offers very little agreement as to the effects and significance of socio-economic factors on rates of

attrition. Family income is not a direct factor in attrition. There is no difference in the percentage of family income spent on college education of dropouts and persisters as reported by Astin (1973).

Although not considered a major factor in determining persistence or attrition, Chase (1970) concluded that if the student comes from a family background where educational and intellectual achievement is valued, the student is more inclined to absorb these values and complete college.

Anderson's (1974) study found some evidence that graduates of very small high schools are more likely to drop out than graduates of larger high schools.

CHAPTER III  
DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Discussion of previous research and identification of questions relating to purpose of the study point out the need for information relating to why students drop out from college. There is a recurring need to assist students to adjust to a university setting, to more clearly determine reasons why dropouts are occurring, and to obtain information for use in modifying or improving existing services.

This study was designed to study the awareness, utilization and opinions of students relating to academic advisors and selected student personnel services. Additional information was obtained relating to social support on campus regarding free time activities and residence. Student comments relating to reasons for not returning to Western Kentucky University and what Western could have done for them were also requested.

The study utilized a sample randomly selected from freshmen entering during the Fall of 1979 and re-enrolling in the Spring 1980 and the total number of first time entering students who did not re-enroll in Spring 1980.

A two page questionnaire was mailed to returning and non-returning freshmen during March, 1980. A second mailing followed three weeks later. The results were analyzed to

determine if the sample was representative and to statistically test the difference between returners and non-returners.

#### Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire used in the study was developed from a similar questionnaire used at Murray State University and previously used by the Office of Student Affairs at Western. Additional questions were designed to gather information regarding academic advisement and selected student personnel services.

The questionnaire was reviewed by three staff members of the Department of Educational Leadership and the Office of Student Affairs. Recommendations from staff members were incorporated in the final instrument.

The questionnaire contained eight general items relating to living arrangements, summer orientation, friends, organizations, faculty, and staff. Four items pertaining to academic advisement were included to determine the number of times a student visited an advisor, the availability of the advisor, and the advisor's informativeness. Eleven questions were related to awareness, use and opinions of students toward selected student personnel services.

The final four questions were open-ended requesting students to comment on both the positive and negative experiences at Western. Two of these questions pertained only to the non-returners and were prefaced by "If you withdrew . . . ." Comments were requested on their reasons for leaving Western and what could have been done to prevent withdrawal. The

completed questionnaire is found in Appendix A.

The revised questionnaire was used in a pilot study of six randomly selected returning and six non-returning students to determine if students would experience difficulties in completing the questionnaire. The twelve questionnaires were mailed on March 1, 1980. Five (41%) returning and three (25%) non-returning students responded to the questionnaire. No changes were made in the questionnaire as a result of the pilot study.

#### Identification of the Sample

The population of the study consisted of 310 students attending Western Kentucky University as first time enrollees in the Fall of 1979 who did not return in the Spring of 1980 and a random sample of the 1,904 first time enrollees who did return for the Spring semester. Table 1 provides information relating to the sample size.

Table 1

Distribution of the 1979 Fall Semester Western Kentucky University Freshman Population: Returning and Non-Returning

	Number in Target Population	Number in Sample	Percent
Returning	1,904	219	10.5%
Non-Returning	310	310	100.0%

Student information (names, addresses, GPA, sex, marital status, race) was obtained from the Office of the Registrar.

A 10.5 percent random sample was selected from the returning students.

#### Procedure

Two cover letters (Appendix B) were utilized to explain the need for the study. On March 27, 1980, the questionnaire, the appropriate cover letter and an addressed, stamped envelope were mailed under the auspices of the Office of Student Affairs to 310 non-returning and 219 returning students.

For the second mailing, a follow-up message was added to the cover letter (Appendix C). On April 20, 1980, approximately three weeks after the first mailout, a second questionnaire, revised cover letter, and addressed, stamped envelope were mailed to each of the non-responders. Each questionnaire was numbered to facilitate identification of responders and to compile the second mailout list.

#### Treatment of the Data

Thirty-seven percent (115) of the 310 non-returning students and 53 percent (118) of the 219 returning students responded to the questionnaire. The data were encoded on computer cards and subjected to statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), (1975). The specific analyses and results are presented in tabular form in the following chapter. All statistical tests were conducted at the five percent level of probability using chi-square to test for significance.



CHAPTER IV  
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (1975) was used to calculate all descriptive and statistical information using chi-square to test for significance. Results were marked "significant at the .05 level," on the grounds that divergence of observed from expected results is too unlikely of an occurrence to be accounted for by chance fluctuations. Specific attention was given to an examination of the differences in opinions of returning and non-returning freshmen with regard to academic advisors and selected student personnel services.

Response Rate

Of the 310 non-returning students mailed a questionnaire, 115 (37%) responded. Two-hundred nineteen returning students were mailed a questionnaire, 118 (53%) were returned. This information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2  
Number and Percent of Respondents in the Sample

	Sample	Respondents	Percent
Non-Returning	310	115	37
Returning	219	118	53
Total	529	233	44

Comparison of Responders and Non-Responders

Responding and non-responding students were compared with regard to sex, race, and grade point average (GPA). Among returning students, no significant differences were observed. There is no reason to assume that the random sample is not representative of the total population of returning students. This data is presented in Table 3.

Table 3  
Comparison of Responding and Non-Responding Students:  
Returning Students

		Responders (N = 143)		Non-Responders (N = 76)	
		n	%	n	%
Sex:	Male	86	60	33	43
	Female	57	40	43	57
Race:	White	134	93	67	88
	Black	8	6	8	11
	Foreign	1	1	1	1
GPA		$\bar{X}$	2.56	$\bar{X}$	2.18

Non-responding, non-returning students differed significantly from responding, non-returning students with regard to GPA. The GPA of non-responding non-returners was significantly lower than that of responding non-returners (GPA-- 1.20 vs. 1.74). There were no significant differences observed with regard to sex or race. This data is presented in Table 4.

Table 4  
Comparison of Responding and Non-Responding,  
Non-Returning Students

		Responders (N = 118)		Non-Responders (N = 192)	
		n	%	n	%
Sex:	Male	46	39	84	44
	Female	72	61	108	56
Race:	White	110	93	169	61
	Black	8	7	20	10
	Foreign	0	0	2	1
GPA		$\bar{X}$	1.74	$\bar{X}$	1.20

#### Description of the Responders

Returning students evidenced greater academic success during their first semester than did non-returners. The mean grade point average of returning students was 2.56, while the mean GPA for non-returners was 1.74. Females had a higher average GPA than males in both groups. The mean GPA of female non-returners was higher than the mean GPA for non-returning males (1.80 vs. 1.65). Likewise, the mean GPA of returning females was 2.66 while the mean GPA

for returning males was 2.40. Table 5 presents this comparison.

Table 5  
Comparison of GPA of Returning and Non-Returning  
Males and Females

	Non-Returning (N = 118)	Returning (N = 115)
Males	1.65	2.40
Females	1.80	2.66
$\bar{X}$	1.74	2.56

Further demographic information on the returning and non-returning students is presented in Table 6. Blacks comprised only 6% of non-returning students and 5% of returning. The majority of the responders were single.

Table 6  
Demographic Information Comparing Returning and  
Non-Returning Students

		Non-Returning (N = 115)		Returning (N = 118)	
		n	%	n	%
Sex:	Male	46	40	43	36
	Female	69	60	75	64
Race:	White	108	94	111	94
	Black	7	6	6	5
	Foreign	0	0	1	1
Marital Status:	Married	4	4	3	3
	Single	111	96	115	97

Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen regarding the use of academic advisors.

Returning and non-returning students differed significantly in the number of contacts with their advisor. Returning students reported more contact with their academic advisor during the previous semester than did non-returning students. This data is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Comparison Between Returning and Non-Returning Students  
With Regard to the Number of Contacts With Advisors

Number of Contacts With Advisor	Non-Returning (N = 114)		Returning (N = 116)	
	n	%	n	%
0	55	48	33	28
1	29	25	43	37
2	18	16	23	20
3 or more	12	11	17	15

$$\chi^2 = 9.678, \quad df = 3, \quad p < .05$$

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to availability, worth of information provided and personal interest shown by the advisor.

Returning and non-returning students differed significantly in their opinions regarding advisor availability. Returning students reported they were more likely to find their advisor readily available than non-returners (82% vs. 57%) ( $p = 0.01$ ). This data is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Freshmen Reported Opinions Regarding Availability of Advisors

Availability of Advisors	Non-Returning (N = 56)		Returning (N = 82)	
	n	%	n	%
Very Available	13	23	23	28
Available	19	34	46	56
Very Unavailable	14	25	10	12
Unavailable	10	18	3	4

$$\chi^2 = 14.03, \text{ df} = 3, \text{ p} < .05$$

The informativeness of the advisor and the interest shown by the advisor were not items that were statistically significant.

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to awareness and use of selected student personnel services.

Tables 9, 10, 11, and 12 present the information relevant to the third null hypothesis. Slightly more non-returning students used university counseling services which assist students in both personal and academic/vocational matters (29% vs. 21%).

Table 9  
Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students'  
Reported Opinions Relating to the Awareness and  
Use of Counseling Services

Awareness and Use of Counseling Services	Non-Returning (N = 101)		Returning (N = 112)	
	n	%	n	%
Aware and Did Use	29	29	24	21
Aware and Did Not Use	72	71	88	79

$$\chi^2 = 1.14, \quad df = 1, \quad p < .05$$

Significantly more non-returners utilized developmental studies services (18% vs. 6%) ( $p = 0.01$ ). Only seventeen of the ninety-five non-returning students who responded to this question reported using the services--a small number in light of the low GPA of the non-returning group.

Table 10  
 Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students'  
 Reported Opinions Relating to the Awareness and  
 Use of Developmental Studies

Awareness and Use of Developmental Studies	Non-Returning (N = 95)		Returning (N = 104)	
	n	%	n	%
Aware and Did Use	17	18	6	6
Aware and Did Not Use	78	82	98	94

$$\chi^2 = 6.01, \quad df = 1, \quad p < .05$$

Returning students were significantly more likely to utilize campus recreational facilities. Eighty-seven percent of the returning students reported using university-sponsored recreational facilities while only 75% of non-returners reported using the facilities ( $p = 0.02$ ).

Table 11  
 Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students'  
 Reported Opinions Regarding Awareness and Use  
 of Recreational Facilities

Awareness and Use of Recreational Facilities	Non-Returning (N = 106)		Returning (N = 114)	
	n	%	n	%
Aware and Did Use	79	75	99	87
Aware and Did Not Use	27	26	15	13

$$\chi^2 = 4.62, \quad df = 1, \quad p < .05$$



One type of campus recreation which held equal appeal for both non-returners and returners was university-sponsored entertainment/concerts. Sixty-seven percent of both returning and non-returning students reported attending entertainment/concerts.

Table 12

Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students'  
Reported Opinions Regarding Awareness and Use  
of Entertainment/Concerts

Awareness and Use of Entertainment/Concerts	Non-Returning (N = 103)		Returning (N = 114)	
	n	%	n	%
Aware and Did Use	69	67	76	67
Aware and Did Not Use	34	33	38	33

$$\chi^2 = 0.0, \quad df = 1, \quad p < .05$$

There is no significant difference in returning and non-returning freshmen reported opinions relating to the value of selected student personnel services.

Among the group who reported using the counseling services, returning students were significantly more likely to rate the services either satisfactory or very satisfactory (88% vs. 62%) ( $p = 0.0470$ ). This information is presented in Table 13.

Table 13  
 Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students'  
 Reported Opinions Regarding Value of  
 Counseling Services

Value of Counseling Services	Non-Returning (N = 20)		Returning (N = 24)	
	n	%	n	%
Satisfactory	7	24	6	25
Very Satisfactory	11	38	15	63
Unsatisfactory	1	4	1	4
Very Unsatisfactory	1	3	2	8

$$\chi^2 = 9.64, \quad df = 4, \quad p < .05$$

Other student personnel services that were not relevant statistically dealt with awareness, use of, and rating of the following: Financial Aid, Career Planning and Placement, Office of Academic Advisement, Residence Hall Personnel, Food Services, Admissions/Registrar's Office, and Health Services.

Returning students evidenced higher levels of social support at school. Table 14 summarizes this data. Significantly more returning students reported being associated with a close-knit group of friends (80% vs. 67%) ( $p = 0.0288$ ). Of the returning students, 36% reported being involved in clubs or student organizations while only 30% of non-returning students reported such involvement. Relatively few (31) responders reported involvement with fraternities

Table 14  
 Comparison of Returning and Non-Returning Students  
 Regarding Social Support

Item	Non-Returning		Returning	
	Yes n %	No n %	Yes n %	No n %
*Associated with a close-knit group of friends	74 67 (N = 111)	37 33	93 80 (N = 117)	24 20
Involved with clubs or organizations	33 30 (N = 111)	78 70	43 36 (N = 118)	75 64
Pledged a fraternity/ sorority	16 14 (N = 114)	98 86	15 13 (N = 118)	103 87
**Instructors personally interested in them	60 55 (N = 109)	49 45	79 70 (N = 113)	34 30

\* $\chi^2 = 4.5$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$

\*\* $\chi^2 = 5.24$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$

and sororities, and these were almost equally divided between returning and non-returning. Related to group affiliation was the observation that significantly more returning students reported living on campus (90% vs. 80%) ( $p = 0.0367$ ).

The majority of the students reported leaving campus 9 or more weekends during the Fall semester. Absence was fairly evenly divided between returners and non-returners. The most frequently reported reason for leaving campus was to see family and friends at home.

Returning and non-returning students differed in their views of the faculty. Seventy percent of returning students said that their instructors were interested in them as individuals while only 55% of non-returning students shared this opinion ( $p = 0.0221$ ).

The questionnaire requested elaboration on various questions. A number of write-in comments were received. These comments were equally divided between returners and non-returners, and the majority of the comments were positive. Examples of the positive comments included "high quality instruction," "staff and instructors personally interested in me," "very friendly people" and "excellent recreational facilities." Examples of negative comments included "professors are not interested in the students" and "nothing to do on weekends: so Western Kentucky University is a suitcase college." The majority of students reported they left Western Kentucky University because of personal or financial reasons.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although some research into the causes of students dropping out of college has been conducted at Western Kentucky University (Sutton, 1973, Kowalski, 1973, Eggleton, 1979), more information was needed to support a rationale for modification or addition of programs to reduce attrition. Information was reported regarding social support on campus, the utilization of academic advisors and opinions regarding advisors and faculty. Information was also reported regarding the awareness, use of, and opinions toward selected student personnel services.

Non-returning students held more negative views toward faculty, advisors and counselors. Their opinions may be colored by the students' overall college experience. Non-returners reported seeing their academic advisor less frequently, which could reflect a lack of interest in potential dropouts on the part of the advisors or it may reveal an unwillingness to seek advice, assistance, etc. on the part of the students. The fact that non-returners found their advisors less available than did returners is congruent with a study done by Beal & Noel (1980) in which inadequate academic advising received the highest negative ranking in a survey of 858 institutions. Further investigations into

the origins of negative attitudes toward faculty and advisors will be needed before specific recommendations can be made, but relatively simple administrative changes could assure greater contact between students and academic advisors. University policies requiring a minimum number of advisement contacts per semester, especially during the critical freshman year, would seem worth considering. Also, more intense training sessions for faculty on effective advisement and incentives to encourage faculty to advise could enhance retention.

The Developmental Studies program was not reaching significant numbers of high risk students, which may, in part, reflect a lack of university resources, but numbers suggest that failure to utilize existing resources may be suspect. An automatic referral system whereby instructors refer poorly performing freshmen for tutorial assistance may prove more successful than self-referral.

Affiliation and social support appear to be important factors in the decision to persist. A possible reason for this may be the consideration that many college freshmen are living away from home for the first time. Involvement in organized group activities may provide a degree of social support as well as an opportunity to develop a close group of friends. Programs which provide opportunities for social contact among freshmen should be considered.

### Limitations of the Study

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It is difficult to determine the extent to which dropping out of college has influenced the responses of non-returning students, which is an important limitation of retrospective surveys and constitutes a major weakness of the student opinion studies. This study is limited from a relatively low response rate, particularly among non-returning students and from underrepresentation of non-returners with a very low GPA. Despite these weaknesses, the study suggests important implications for retention efforts and future research. In retrospect, the use of the term "academic advisor" may have led to some confusion on the part of the students. Western Kentucky University has an Office of Academic Advisement which serves undecided majors. These advisors experience more extensive training than the department/faculty advisors.

Successful retention programs will require research to identify the major risk factors in particular student bodies. Prospective studies in which all or a sample of a freshman class is surveyed toward the middle of the first semester may avoid the major limitations of this study: low response rate and opinions being influenced by the students dropping out. The data collected in these surveys could form the basis for a predictive model which could help institutions identify high risk individuals. Intervention strategies could be provided for use during the critical first semester.

### Conclusions

It is important to identify potential dropouts if universities are to maximize the effect of their limited retention resources and develop more effective responses to the attrition problem.

Recommendations for identifying potential dropouts and developing programs to reduce attrition are as follows:

1. An administrative requirement for a minimum number of advisement contacts per semester, especially during the crucial first semester.

2. More intense training sessions for faculty on effective advisement and incentive to encourage faculty to advise.

3. An automatic referral system whereby instructors refer poorly performing freshmen for tutorial assistance.

4. Programs which provide opportunities for social contact among freshmen should be considered.

This institutional level research could provide the information upon which to base a retention program or ideas for further research.



APPENDIX A

Western Kentucky University  
Freshmen Questionnaire

I. 10. Your residence while attending Western (please check one)

- (1) Commute
- (2) Off Campus - Local
- (3) On Campus      Name of Dorm \_\_\_\_\_

11. How many weekends did you leave campus during the Fall Semester?  
 (1) 0-4 weekends       (2) 5-8 weekends       (3) 9 or more weekends

12. If you did leave for the weekend, what was the main reason for doing so?  
 (1) To see family / friends at home  
 (2) Part-time job  
 (3) Bored with the campus life  
 (4) Other

- 13. Did you attend one of the summer orientation programs (OAR)?
- 14. Were you involved in any clubs or student organizations?
- 15. Did you pledge a fraternity / sorority?
- 16. Was there a close-knit group of friends with which you associated?
- 17. Did you feel your instructors were personally interested in your development?
- 18. Did you feel the campus staff showed a personal interest in you?

	(1) Yes	(2) No

II. 19. How many times did you meet with your academic advisor during the Fall semester? \_\_\_\_\_

If you did not see your advisor, please go on to Part III.  
 If you did see your advisor, please rate your ACADEMIC ADVISOR on the following by placing a check in the appropriate box outlined below.

20. AVAILABILITY - had specific office hours, kept appointments

(1) Very available	(2) Available	(3) No Opinion	(4) Unavailable	(5) Very unavailable

21. INFORMATION - such a provided accurate information regarding course selection and how to drop/add a course, repeat a course, and about CAREER PLANNING

(1) Very informative	(2) Informative	(3) No Opinion	(4) Uninformative	(5) Very uninformative

22. INTEREST - showed personal interest in my questions and academic and career goals.

(1) Very interested	(2) Interested	(3) No Opinion	(4) Little Interest	(5) No Interest

III. Listed below are services available to university students.  
 In Section A, check awareness and use of each service.

In Section B, IF YOU USED the service, then please RATE each service on its' effectiveness by checking the appropriate box according to the following scale:

- 1 Very Satisfactory
- 2 Satisfactory
- 3 No Opinion
- 4 Unsatisfactory
- 5 Very unsatisfactory

	A	B					
	Aware of the Service, but DID NOT USE	Aware of the Service and DID USE	1	2	3	4	5
23-24. Counseling Services							
25-26. Free Time Recreational Facilities							
27-28. Financial Aid							
29-30. Career Planning & Placement							
31-32. Residence Hall Personnel							
33-34. Developmental Studies							
35-36. Office of Academic Advisement							
37-38. Food Services							
39-40. Admissions / Registrar's Office							
41-42. Entertainment / Concerts							
43-44. Health Services							

IV. Please comment on anything that was positive about your experiences at Western.

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(b) Please comment on anything that was negative about your experiences at Western.

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(c) If you withdrew from Western, what was/were the main reason(s) for doing so?

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(d) What could Western have done to prevent your withdrawal?

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APPENDIX B



WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

43

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY 42101

Office of the Dean of Student Affairs

Dear Western Student:

Each semester a number of undergraduate students leave school without graduating. This is a matter of great concern for Western as it is for most universities.

Very little information exists explaining why students leave school. We know that some students leave for academic, financial, or medical reasons, but this explains only a portion of the many reasons why students leave.

Western is dedicated to doing everything possible to ensure that all students receive the help they need during their academic career. For this reason we are asking your help. We are surveying both returning and non-returning WKU students to assess their opinions of student personnel services. The purpose of this study is to determine how these programs are viewed by students and hopefully, show us how we can better serve the needs of our students.

Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed envelope AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. All replies will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

*Mary Higgins*

Mary Higgins  
Student Affairs Office

*Scott Taylor*

Scott Taylor  
Student Affairs Office



WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

44

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY 42101

Office of the Dean of Student Affairs

Dear Former Western Student:

Each semester a number of undergraduate students leave school without graduating. This is a matter of great concern for Western as it is for most universities.

Very little information exists explaining why students leave school. We know that some students leave for academic, financial or medical reasons, but this explains only a portion of the many reasons why students like yourself leave school.

Western is dedicated to doing everything possible to ensure that all students receive the help they need in their academic career. For this reason we are asking your help. We ask that you take five minutes (or less) of your time and complete the enclosed questionnaire. We believe that this information will help us develop more helpful student personnel services by better understanding student needs.

Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. All replies will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

*Mary Higgins*

Mary Higgins  
Student Affairs Office

APPENDIX C



WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

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Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

*Mary Higgins*

Mary Higgins  
Student Affairs Office

*Scott Taylor*

Scott Taylor  
Student Affairs Office

THIS IS THE 2nd MAILING OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. A number of responses have been received and the data has been received and understood factors relating to student satisfaction with college life. WE NEED YOUR INPUT and would greatly appreciate your help in answering this questionnaire. THANKS.  
MH *MH*





WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY 42101

Office of the Dean of Student Affairs

Dear Former Western Student:

Each semester a number of undergraduate students leave school without graduating. This is a matter of great concern for Western as it is for most universities.

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Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed addresses, stamped envelope AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. All replies will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

*Mary Higgins*

Mary Higgins  
Student Affairs Office

*Scott Taylor*

Scott Taylor  
Student Affairs Office

THIS IS THE 2nd MAILING OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. A NUMBER OF RESPONSES HAVE BEEN RECEIVED AND THE DATA HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL IN UNDERSTANDING FACTORS RELATING TO STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH COLLEGE LIFE.  
WE NEED YOUR INPUT AND WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE YOUR HELP IN ANSWERING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.  
THANKS.  
MH *MH*

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