



UW Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Study

Office of Educational Assessment

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“Leaving was weird. Nobody noticed.” —Former UW student

Although the UW has an excellent graduation rate (81%) compared with public institutions across the U.S., we recognize that improving completion rates is valuable to both local and national economies, to families and individuals seeking knowledge and upward mobility, and to students who have been admitted to the UW. For this reason, the UW Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Study (UW RGS) was conducted on behalf of the UW Provost’s Office with the purposes of 1) learning which groups of students are more likely to leave the UW than others, 2) understanding more about why those students leave from their own point of view, and 3) identifying strategies for intervening in future students’ decisions to leave. The study’s focus was limited to the UW’s Seattle campus.

Using mixed-methods, the study found that, regarding who leaves the UW before graduating: 1) the six-year graduation rates for Native American, African American, and Pacific Islander students lag behind those of students in other ethnic groups by up to thirteen percentage points; 2) students from all demographic groups who do not graduate have significantly lower first-year UW GPAs than students who graduate; and 3) Pell grant recipients and part-time students have significantly lower graduation rates than do others. In terms of why students leave, we found that students’ reasons for leaving were multiple and complex, as were the reasons given by students who considered leaving but decided to stay. Furthermore the reasons of students who left before graduation and those who considered leaving but stayed were nearly identical. The following reasons were mentioned most frequently by both groups: financial issues, dissatisfaction with the quality of the academic experience, depression and emotional distress, not doing well academically, social isolation, issues related to the major, and feeling unwelcome/ having a bad experience. Students who considered leaving but stayed reported: 1) a sense of being supported in their push to complete their undergraduate degrees, 2) the ability to wait out the hard times, and 3) perhaps the ability to weigh the trouble it might be to leave against how hard it is to stay.

Based on results of the study, we made four recommendations including hiring an individual who would be centrally responsible for retention and creating a task force to work with that individual on strategies for improving retention at UW, especially in areas identified as significant by this study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I struggled to stay motivated. Had really bad study habits. Lived in a horrible environment. Was alone, no support group, friends or family. Didn't feel like I fit in anywhere. Academic struggles. Depression for about one year.” —Former UW student

College retention and graduation rates are both national and philanthropic priorities, as U.S. and local economies continue to call for college-educated employees and as research continues to show the power of a college education in individuals' lives. Four years ago, for example, the federal government, set a goal for U.S. colleges and universities to graduate five million more college students by 2020 than they graduated in 2010, and college completion has been a priority for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other foundations for several years (Lewin, 2010).

According to national data, the six-year undergraduate completion rate for public colleges and universities in the U.S. averaged 59% in 2011 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). In Washington State, the average six-year completion rate has been about 69% for several years (Long, 2014), and, according to UW Budgeting and Planning records, the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle has had a strong six-year graduation rate, averaging 81% since 2005.¹

Both Washington State and national completion rates vary dramatically by type of academic institution, with completion rates for students who begin in community colleges with the intent to transfer being the lowest overall and completion rates at highly selective private institutions the highest. The more selective the academic institution is, the higher the completion rate will be (American College Testing, 2013). In addition, recent research (Bowen et al., 2009; Chingas and McPherson, 2011) has shown that students who enroll in the most selective university that will accept them have higher completion rates and graduate sooner than do students who are equally capable but enroll in institutions that are less selective. Although not among the most selective colleges and universities in the U.S., the UW has a freshman-year retention rate (the percentage of entering freshmen who return to UW the following fall) and a six-year completion rate comparable to those of more highly selective institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; American College Testing, 2013).

Although we can be proud that the UW's completion rate is higher than the national average for public colleges and universities and the highest among the state's public universities (Long, 2014), it is important to remember that retention and graduation are not just economic issues. They are personal issues, as well. The UW's six-year attrition rate means that every year hundreds of young people, who were admitted to the UW because they were among the most academically gifted in the region and beyond it, had to delay, alter, or give up their dreams for their own futures, sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently. For nearly all of those students, even if they transferred to other institutions to complete their degrees, the act of leaving college is a painful experience. Therefore, leaving the UW signifies not only a loss for our region, but it often signifies a loss in students' sense of themselves and in their own capabilities for years.

Purpose

The UW Retention and Graduation Study (UW RGS) was conducted on behalf of the Provost's Office by the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) in Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA). The study's focus

¹ UW Budgeting and Planning records https://bitools.uw.edu/views/18-UndergraduateGraduationRatesandTimetoDegree_0/18-Dashboard#1

was limited to the UW's Seattle campus, but UW Tacoma is also planning a study on retention. The purposes of the study were 1) to learn which groups of students are more likely to leave the UW than others, 2) to understand more about why those students leave from their own point of view, and 3) to identify strategies for intervening in future students' decisions to leave.

The UW has studied retention and attrition previously. In 2006, OEA and the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMA&D) jointly conducted a study focused on retention of underrepresented minority students. The study used mixed methods to learn why underrepresented minority students leave the UW at higher rates than Asian American and White students do. Results from that study showed that no single cause compelled students to leave the UW; rather, many reasons coming together contributed to students' leaving. The most significant reasons were: a campus climate in which students of color felt isolated and unwelcome, financial issues, differences between academic needs and family/community expectations or needs, pre-college and first-year academic experience, waiting or being embarrassed to ask for help, work-related issues, and not getting into one's major of choice (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 2006).

In addition, also in 2006, OEA conducted an email survey of freshmen who had requested that their transcripts be sent to other academic institutions in their first year at the UW. A small study, only 22 (15.4%) of the 143 freshmen contacted responded. As was the case with the study of underrepresented minority student attrition, freshmen who were considering transferring usually mentioned more than one reason for thinking about leaving. The most frequently mentioned reasons were: out-of-state costs vs. students' perceived quality of education, the size of the UW and UW classes, concerns about majors, and dissatisfaction with housing (Office of Educational Assessment, 2006b).

Finally, in 1994, OEA conducted a survey and a telephone interview study of students who had left the UW. The 1994 study reported that former students found large class sizes, the impersonal atmosphere at the UW, student services, and advising to be the least satisfying aspects of the UW. They identified financial problems and inability to get into their program of choice as their primary reasons for leaving the UW (Office of Educational Assessment, 1994). The findings of the present study of retention and graduation echo those of these three earlier studies.

Theory Informing the Study

The UW RGS study design and our understanding of results were informed by the literature on undergraduate retention, particularly Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) who argue that how well students are integrated into the academic and social lives of institutions of higher education strongly influences whether they decide to stay or leave those institutions. According to Tinto (1993), when students have a personal connection with even one faculty or staff member at their colleges or universities, they are more likely to be retained there. As have numerous studies before it, the UW's own Study of Undergraduate Learning (UW SOUL) confirmed this view, showing that the retention and graduation rates for students interacting with UW staff members about their college experience were significantly higher than those for students who were not in the study (Beyer, et al., 2007). Furthermore, recent research suggests that meaningful connections with faculty members may continue to influence students' success after they leave college (Ray and Kafka, 2014).

Our research was also informed by Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Like Tinto's model, Bean and Metzner emphasizes the importance of students' interaction with the campus communities they join. However, Bean and Metzner also examine environmental factors leading to attrition and their interaction with academic variables, such as grades. Bean and Metzner argue that "for nontraditional students, environmental support compensates for weak academic support, but academic support will not compensate for weak environmental support"

(p. 492). We found Bean and Metzner’s discussion of the significance of environmental support for students useful, particularly in the light of 2006 study findings (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity) on the importance of climate in underrepresented minority student retention.

Astin’s theory on retention (1984, 1985) is also informative. Astin argues that student involvement—the energy and time students give to their college experience—increases students’ commitment to the institution, which, in turn, leads to greater student retention. Although Astin’s theory has merit, it focuses primarily on what students do, such as joining clubs or devoting time to studying, and it is important to note that access to joining organizations, to studying abroad, or to other activities that may influence students’ commitment to an institution may not be equally available to all students. Furthermore, commitment can be shaped by climate, as well as by students’ initiative. Research by Hurtado and others (1998, 1999) shows that for students of color, campus climate at predominantly white institutions of higher education is a significant factor in the retention of underrepresented minority students, suggesting that there are structural and historical barriers to the involvement of some students in campus academic and social life.

Along with Hurtado’s work, Solorzano et al.’s (2000) illuminating research on racial microaggression and the college experiences of African American students also informed this study. As Tinto (1987) suggested, an unwelcoming climate is a barrier to students’ sense of connection to the academic and social lives of universities. Furthermore, whether it comes from fellow students, faculty, administration, staff, or policies on campus, the experience of racial microaggression strengthens that barrier.

There are other barriers to college involvement as well, particularly those created by the current economic climate, the corresponding rise in college tuition, and, therefore, the need for and rise in student debt. As shown by Bowen et al. (2009), a significant rise in college costs leads to a significant rise in the attrition rates of low income students. However, it is likely that these economic concerns have multiple effects on the time and energy all students have for college involvement, as well as on their sense of commitment to the UW. Indeed, a new report by the ASUW Student Debt Reduction Working Group (2014) shows that economic concerns have negative effects on many areas of students’ college lives.

Methods

The UW RGS gathered and analyzed data from four sources: conversations with 63 staff members and administrators about retention efforts on campus, demographic and academic data from the UW student database, a survey of students who had left the UW without graduating since 2004, and preliminary results from three questions on retention placed on an all-student survey conducted at the UW in April 2014.

Community Conversations

Conversations with 63 staff members and administrators were conducted early in 2014, and those with whom we spoke were selected based on what we already knew about their retention work and on the recommendations of others. Our goals in these conversations were to inform the greater UW community about the retention study, to gather information about the range of retention strategies already in place on the Seattle campus, and to identify areas that community members believed were important to an understanding of retention and graduation.

Conversations were not recorded. OEA researchers took notes and analyzed them, using an inductive process of constant comparison (Merriam, 2001). This process allows themes to emerge from what individuals said, rather than imposing ready-made “expected” themes on participants’ comments.

Analysis of Existing Data

We explored relationships between demographic and academic characteristics of UW undergraduates and students’ yearly retention and graduation status. The undergraduate graduation and retention tables from the Office of Budgeting and Planning (OPB) database served as the starting point for defining the population. Using these tables, OEA researchers identified 56,271 students who entered UW Seattle as undergraduates between Spring 2005 and Winter 2012, inclusive. The OPB database provided students’ yearly enrollment and graduation status, and we obtained additional demographic and academic information for each student from the UW student database as shown in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1. Student variables

Demographic variables	Academic variables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex • Race/ethnicity • First in family to attend college² • Residency/citizenship • Entry type: First-time, first-year vs. transfer • Entry status: Full-time vs. part-time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Aid Status (Pell Grant eligibility) • High school GPA • Transfer GPA • First year UW GPA • SAT scores

Data were analyzed using analysis of variance and logistic regression techniques. The influence of predictors was examined both individually and, where feasible, in connection with other predictors.

Survey of Students Who Left

OEA conducted an online survey of all undergraduate students who left the UW between 2006 and 2013 without graduating. In February 2014, we sent an email message to 10,555 former students requesting their participation in a brief survey (see Appendix A for email and survey text). We anticipated a low participation rate for two reasons. First, students are increasingly mobile, and it is often impossible to reach them at the email addresses that the UW has on record for them. Second, unlike students who have graduated from the UW, many who left the UW before graduation are unhappy with their experiences here and may have little incentive to participate. To increase the response rate, we emphasized the importance of former students’ experience to current and future students and entered participants in a drawing for one of twelve \$200 gift cards. A total of 1,763 (17%) participated in the survey.

The survey instrument included both fixed-response and open-ended questions. We used standard descriptive and comparative analyses to examine numeric responses, and analyzed responses to the open-ended questions using the constant comparison method described previously.³

Survey of Students Who Stayed

In April, the UW participated in a national survey, the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU). We were able to add some of our own “wild card” questions to the survey, so we included three

² Students were classified as first-generation using the narrow definition of neither parent/guardian having attained a two- or four-year college degree. Educational data about both parents/guardians were available for 91% of the population.

³ In addition to the survey, we had planned to conduct interviews with 50 of the students who completed the survey, but staffing changes and time constraints made that step impossible.

questions on retention, asking students whether they had considered leaving the UW, why they had considered leaving, and why they decided to stay.

We retrieved responses to the retention questions on April 23, 2014, after the survey had been “open” for three weeks. A total of 6,134 current UW students had responded to the survey, with 1,621 (26.4%) providing information on why they considered leaving and why they stayed.

Study Limitations

This study was constrained by time limitations, challenges within the data, and the complexity of the retention and graduation question itself. Regarding the first, the study was requested close to the end of the academic year with a short turnaround for study design and completion.

We also encountered issues concerning data on UW students. For example, some UW student database codes and coding schemes had changed during the period under study (e.g., the inclusion of certain pre-major counts under different colleges), and participation in co-curricular, extra-curricular, and high impact programs are not recorded centrally. Sometimes local databases (such as disabled student services or departmental databases that contain information on application and rejection from academic majors) were not linked with UW-wide databases, so we could not capture that information. If those data were available and easy to access, these sources of information could shape what we know about student retention and completion. Data concerns included problems with connecting local databases (such as data on students registered as disabled), so we were unable to track some groups in data from the UW student database. Also, data that could be helpful, such as students’ participation in clubs or UW-affiliated organizations are not centrally recorded.

A final study limitation concerns the complexity of students’ reasons for leaving. OEA’s previous studies of retention and graduation (1994, 2006, 2006b), as well as the national conversation about college completion (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014) have found that students’ decisions to leave college before graduation are informed by a wide range of individual considerations. Understanding the interaction of factors that contribute to students’ leaving may be essential to helping students decide to stay at the UW or to bring them back once they have left. Yet, often students, themselves, have difficulty explaining these interactions. Did a student’s depression lead to a drop in her grades or did a fall in GPA amplify feelings of unhappiness? Did constant worries about meeting financial obligations make a student’s sense of being unwelcome at the UW worse and failure to get into a desired major push him out? Or might the student have navigated through the unwelcoming climate if he were on a full scholarship and had gotten into his major of choice—two signs that he “belongs” at the UW? It is difficult to understand fully how the interactions among students’ reasons for leaving operate; however, we have noted that such interactions occur throughout the report.

Report Organization

The purpose of this report is to present findings from the four methods of study, drawing relationships between them when possible. We begin with a summary of the conversations conducted with staff and administrators, followed by an analysis of existing demographic and academic data. We move from this analysis to a discussion of the results of the survey of students who left the UW without graduating between 2004 and 2013, and student response to the three questions on retention added to the SERU survey in 2014. Throughout the report we use quotations from students’ surveys and from community members to illustrate results. The report concludes with a summary of findings and a set of recommendations.

2. COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

“Wouldn’t it be awesome if every single year, we give 50 students the chance to give their stories? We should be doing non-completer contacts every year.” —Ellen Taylor, Counseling Center

Nearly everyone at the UW contributes to student retention and graduation. Every day, faculty members engage students in ideas and fields of study, speaking with students about their academic work and their futures. Graduate students often sit side-by-side with students for hours, helping them learn how to think and write in an academic discipline. In offices all across campus, advisers ask students about their experiences and help students make choices that will take them down the paths of their own dreams and goals. Staff members offer students experiences that allow them to link the world of learning inside academia with the world outside it. Gardeners and custodians create spaces so beautiful they honor the people in them. Cashiers in the HUB and By George offer sympathetic ears and encouragement to students whose names they will never know. Students introduce themselves to each other, ask classmates to join study groups, and make efforts to include peers in their social activities. Research on retention (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993) shows that a meaningful connection with even one of these people can make a difference in a student’s decision to stay in college.

Because the line between “retention efforts” and “normal operations” is blurred, attempts to identify all retention efforts on campus are guaranteed to fall short. Nevertheless, in order to learn more about retention efforts at the UW and to gather insights into the information on retention that may be important to consider, we conducted a series of conversations with 63 Vice Provosts, Deans, directors, program leaders, staff, and one student leader, sometimes singly and sometimes in groups. We gave them information about the retention study, asked what they and their programs were doing to retain students and help them complete degrees, and asked if there were areas in retention and graduation that they would like to know more about.

Retention Efforts

A table of the retention efforts that were reported in our conversations with campus community members is included in Appendix B. As this table shows, units at the UW attempt to retain students both directly, in accordance with their stated missions, and indirectly. Many of the groups listed engage in outreach to students who have shown signs that they are at risk for leaving the UW, such as a drop in GPA.

Although this list is incomplete, even as a partial catalogue of efforts to retain UW students, Appendix B makes clear that many individuals and organizations are reaching out to students who may be considering leaving the UW and that retention efforts at the UW are both broad and targeted. As that list also shows, like the UW, itself, those efforts are not centralized.

It is important to remember that even though multiple organizations and people at UW are engaged in retention work, help for students who are not signaling that they are in trouble may come too late. Furthermore, it is more likely that students who are experiencing difficulty will not signal that they need help than that they will. This is especially true among incoming freshmen, who have often graduated from their high schools with honors and who often believe that they should already know how to navigate college demands by the time they get here (Beyer et al., 2007). The 2006 UW retention study (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity) showed that for underrepresented minority students who enter as freshmen, this unwillingness to signal that they need help is exacerbated by students’ fear that “asking a question or asking for help outside class—i.e., not

knowing the answer already—might reflect badly on their ethnic communities, reinforcing the idea that they do not belong at the UW” (p. vi).

Therefore, while retention efforts at the UW are significant and likely contribute to the UW’s high completion rate, they cannot prevent all students from leaving UW.

What We Need to Know

Appendix C lists topics suggested by UW community members as important to our understanding of the retention and graduation picture at the UW. We grouped as many of the suggestions as we could into themes and listed them according to whether they might be informed by the present study (Table 2-1). As the table shows, this study provides information on the importance of understanding the interaction of reasons for students’ decisions to leave the UW and some information on resilience. In addition, the extensive use of student quotations about why they left the UW and why, after considering leaving, they stayed, offer insights into the student experience. These quotations also address the issue of expectations raised by community members. Finally, we were able to identify financial issues that related to students’ decisions to leave, as well as their ability to stay at the UW. The information this report provides on these topics is by no means exhaustive. We touch on them, but we were not able to explore the topics deeply in this study.

Table 2-1 also lists topics that were identified as important but that were outside the scope of this study. We did not investigate the ways that UW policies affect retention, the effects of working on and off campus on retention, or the role of mentors in students’ persistence. Finally, the study focused on undergraduate retention, so we did not examine the retention of graduate students at UW.

Table 2-1. Topics important to our understanding of UW undergraduate retention and graduation

Areas of Concern Informed by Present Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to understand ways that interactions between causes lead students to withdraw.• We need to know more about resilience and persistence. Why do some students who are dealing with the same difficulties that students who drop out are carrying complete their degrees?• We need to gather more information on our students and what happens to them here. We need a better understanding of the student experience.• We need to consider how we talk to incoming students about high demand/competitive majors, such as nursing, engineering, and business.• We need to help students have more reasonable expectations about what it means and takes to be successful at the UW, and we need to know what their expectations are coming in.• We need to pay attention to the complexity of financial difficulties and how to address them. As OMA&D noted: According to national research, 30% of all students who could come back to complete degrees cannot do so because of financial holds on registration. Some of those students get into trouble by taking out short-term loans to cover expenses until financial aid comes in and then paying off those short term loans with financial aid, so they don't have enough to live on. Eventually, that process catches up with them. When debt gets turned over to a collection agency, fees escalate. TRIO does financial advising on campus, but are there others?
Areas of Concern Outside the Scope of the Present Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to know how UW policies affect student retention and graduation. Policies noted include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Financial holds on registration○ Course withdrawal policy○ Credit and quarter limit rules○ Emergency loan pay-back policy○ Hardship withdrawal• We need to learn more about the effects of working on and off campus on student success.• We need to understand the role of mentors in persistence. How many programs at the UW offer mentorships of one kind or another?• We need to understand retention and graduation of graduate students, as well as of undergraduates.

In addition, we reviewed the community conversations to identify the groups of students that community members felt the UW needed to know more about in terms of retention and graduation. These groups are listed in in Table 2-2. Unfortunately, the UW student database does not include codes for many of group variables identified, so it is difficult to study them. Many of the community members with whom we spoke said that the UW needs to develop ways of collecting information about the experiences of students in these groups. Staff in units that serve some of these groups—for example, the Q Center and the Disabled Student Resources center—are working hard to gather information about the student experience in the populations they serve. However, as staff in centers serving particular populations of students pointed out, they need to be able to link data from their centers to UW student database information in order to maximize the help they provide their student populations.

Table 2-2. Students about whom we need more information relating to retention and graduation

• Disengaged students	• Part-time students
• International students	• Students with disabilities
• LGBTQ students	• Students who are undocumented
• Military veterans	• Students denied admission to certain majors (engineering, nursing, business, STEM)
• Running Start students	• Students who participate in clubs, organizations, and community

Summary

As Appendix B shows, retention efforts at the UW are decentralized and extensive across the Seattle campus. Furthermore, the questions individuals and groups have about retention are complex, reflecting not just their own experience with students but a broad awareness of the major issues involved in retention. Those with whom we spoke pointed out that the information we have about students, particularly for some groups of students, is limited, and they would like better ways of gathering information on student populations and linking it to the student database. Furthermore, they suggested that the UW continue to explore aspects of retention that were not within the scope of this current study.

3. ANALYSIS OF EXISTING DATA

“[I left the UW because] I could not afford tuition without help from parents or financial aid. I did not want to take out \$12,000 in loans per year.” —Former student

To improve our understanding of how we might better support student progress toward a degree, we explored relationships between yearly retention and graduation status of UW undergraduates and various demographic and academic characteristics. The population studied consisted of the 56,271⁴ students who entered UW Seattle as undergraduates between Spring 2005 and Winter 2012, inclusive.

Entering cohorts were specified by the Office of Planning and Budgeting (OPB) Graduation and Retention tables; data were collected after the Winter 2014 update. These tables included information about students' yearly enrollment and graduation status. Yearly retention was recorded on census day of the student's anniversary quarter, and yearly graduation status was recorded at the quarter prior (e.g., summer quarter for autumn quarter entrants). Students who entered in summer quarter were classified as autumn quarter entrants. Thus, we collected eight years of graduation and retention data for the Spring 2005 entering cohort and two years of data for the Winter 2012 cohort.

Additional demographic and academic information for these students was gathered from the UW student database, including student sex and ethnicity; whether the student was a first-generation college student (defined strictly as neither parent having earned a postsecondary degree); residency status at entry; whether the student entered as a first-time, first-year (FTFY) or transfer student; full-time/part-time enrollment; PELL eligibility status at entry; grade-point average in high school (HSGPA) or at another postsecondary institution (transfer GPA); SAT scores; and first-year UW GPA. The distribution of students across each of the analytic variables is shown in Table 3-1.

We employed both analysis of variance and logistic regression⁵ analyses to investigate the effects of demographic and academic variables on student retention and graduation. The large number of these variables precluded a full-factorial model (and examination of all possible interactions) in the analyses of variance. For all regression analyses, independent variables were entered as a set. We included entry cohort as an independent variable in each analysis. However, there were relatively few instances in which entry cohort significantly interacted with the demographic predictor. Therefore, in the following sections entry cohort is mentioned only when its effect was significantly significant.

⁴ The OPB Graduation and Retention tables identified a total of 56,305 undergraduate students, of whom 34 had died prior to degree completion.

⁵ Logistic regression analysis explores the relative contribution of each of several variables when predicting a categorical outcome.

Table 3-1. Demographics of study population

	Entry Type		Total N (%)
	First-Time First-Year N (%)	Transfer N (%)	
Total	37,502 (100.0)	18,769 (100.0)	56,271 (100.0)
Graduate	21,466 (57.2)	14,338 (76.4)	35,804 (63.6)
Non-graduate	16,036 (42.8)	4,431 (23.6)	20,467 (36.4)
Women	20,139 (53.7)	9,494 (50.6)	29,633 (52.7)
Men	17,341 (46.2)	9,259 (49.3)	26,600 (47.3)
African American	1,120 (3.0)	783 (4.2)	1,903 (3.4)
Asian American	10,679 (28.5)	3,475 (18.5)	14,154 (25.2)
Hispanic American	2,215 (5.9)	1,224 (6.5)	3,439 (6.1)
Native American	523 (1.4)	314 (1.7)	837 (1.5)
Pacific Islander	288 (0.8)	138 (0.7)	426 (0.8)
White	18,535 (49.4)	10,290 (54.8)	28,825 (51.2)
Other/Unknown	1,247 (3.3)	1,308 (7.0)	2,555 (4.5)
First-generation	10,864 (29.0)	6,658 (35.5)	17,522 (31.1)
Not first-generation	25,496 (68.0)	8,410 (44.8)	33,906 (60.3)
WA Resident	28,235 (75.3)	16,205 (86.3)	44,440 (79.0)
Domestic non-Resident	6,372 (17.0)	1,327 (7.1)	7,699 (13.7)
International	2,895 (7.7)	1,237 (6.6)	4,132 (7.3)
Full-time at entry	36,787 (98.1)	15,335 (81.7)	52,122 (92.6)
Part-time at entry	715 (1.9)	3,434 (18.3)	4,149 (7.4)
PELL eligible	7,681 (20.5)	5,915 (31.5)	13,596 (24.2)
Not PELL eligible	29,821 (79.5)	1,2854 (68.5)	42,675 (75.8)

Retention

To examine patterns of retention, we reviewed information for all students who entered the UW at least six full years prior to the time of this study (SP05-WI08 cohorts) and who had not earned a degree by Autumn 2013 ($N = 4,168$). This group of students comprised 17% of the 23,842 entrants. We considered these students to be unlikely to earn a degree and, thus, to offer a clear picture of when stop outs are likely to occur. Student retention was recorded at the first quarter after entry and subsequently at every anniversary quarter.

Figure 3-1 shows the frequency distribution for the number of quarters of persistence. The vast majority of these students who did not earn degrees (“non-graduates”) were retained into the second quarter (88%). The major stopping points were after three quarters (26%), between four to seven quarters (24%), and after sixteen quarters (16%).

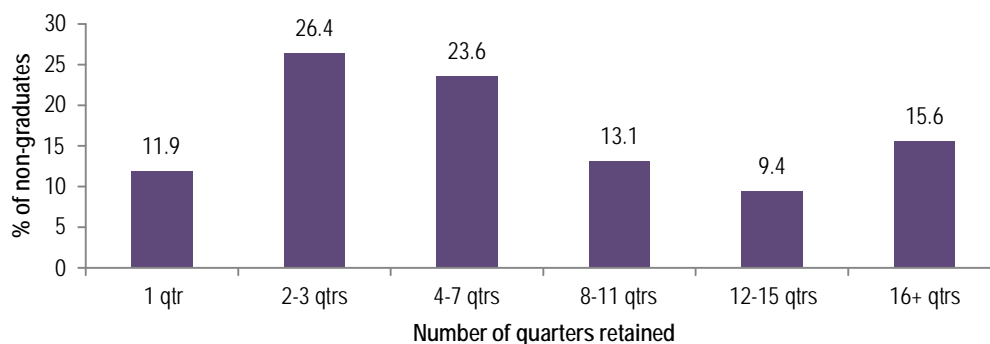


Figure 3-1. Length of retention among non-graduates (Spring 2005 - Winter 2008 entrants)

Demographic Differences

Figure 3-2 shows the percentage of non-graduates persisting at each anniversary by demographic group. This provides a more detailed view of when students from various demographic subgroups were likely to stop out. Altogether, 62% of non-graduates were retained at least four quarters.

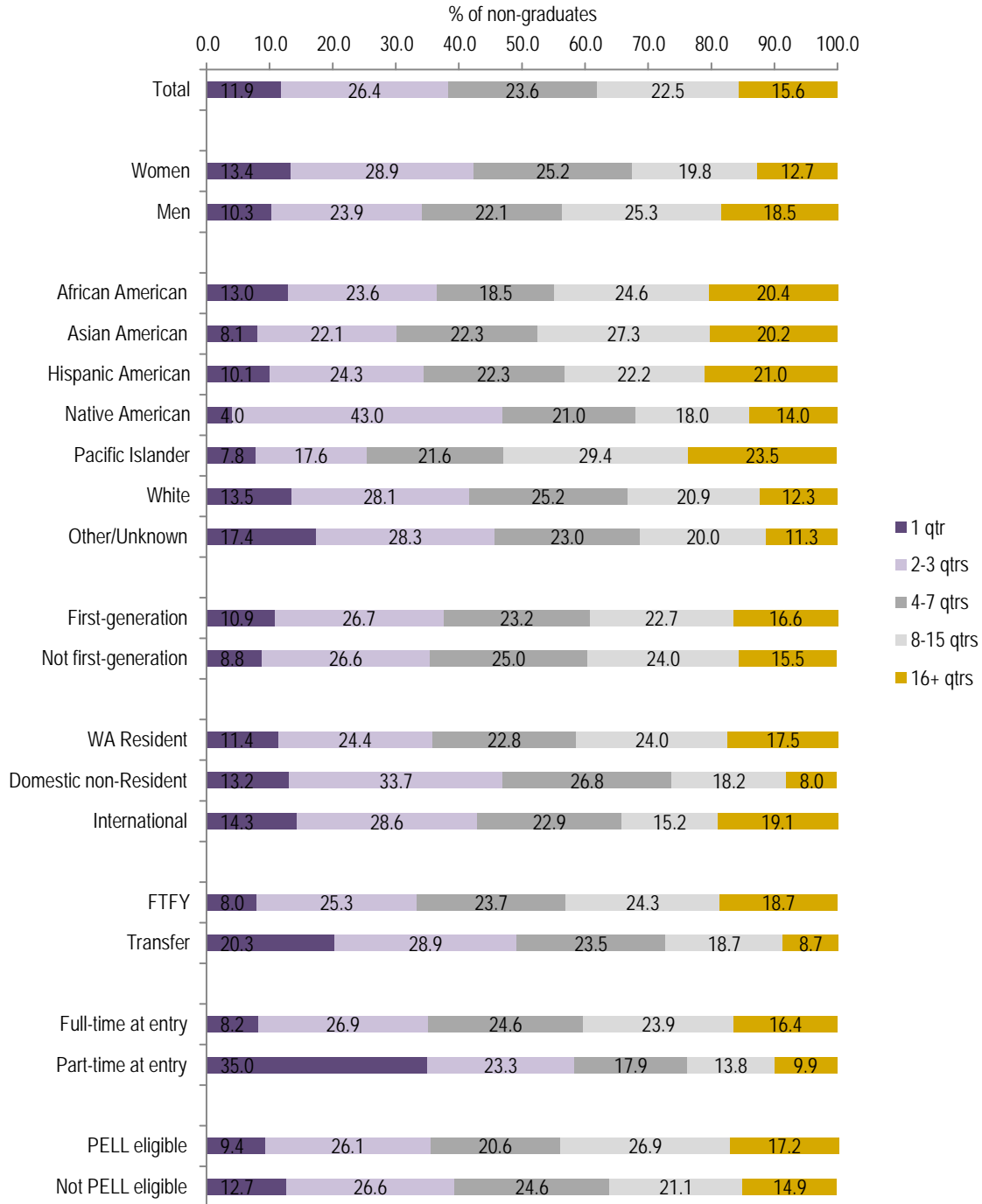


Figure 3-2. Length of retention of non-six-year-graduates by demographic group (Spring 2005 - Winter 2008 entrants)

To identify statistically significant differences within the complex pattern shown above, we carried out a logistic regression analysis. The following were significant predictors of total length of retention: sex, Asian American ethnicity, Pacific Islander ethnicity, first generation status, and part-time first quarter enrollment. Women who did not complete degrees tended to stop earlier than did men: more than two-thirds of non-graduate women (68%) did not enroll at the third anniversary or later, but only 56% of non-graduate men had stopped by that point. Asian American non-graduates were both less likely to drop before the second quarter (8% vs. 13% among non-Asian Americans) and more likely to enroll at the fourth anniversary and beyond (20% vs. 14%). Only one quarter (25%) of Pacific Islander non-graduates did not enroll at the first anniversary or beyond, compared to 38% of other students. First-generation students had a higher likelihood of staying for only one quarter (11%) than their peers (9%), and more than one-third (35%) of part-time entrants stopped after the first quarter, compared to 8% of full-time entrants.

In addition, HSGPA was modestly yet significantly related to length of retention among FTFY students ($r_s = -.10, p < .001$). This relationship was driven solely by the result that those who left after one quarter tended to have higher GPAs than those who left later (Figure 3-3).

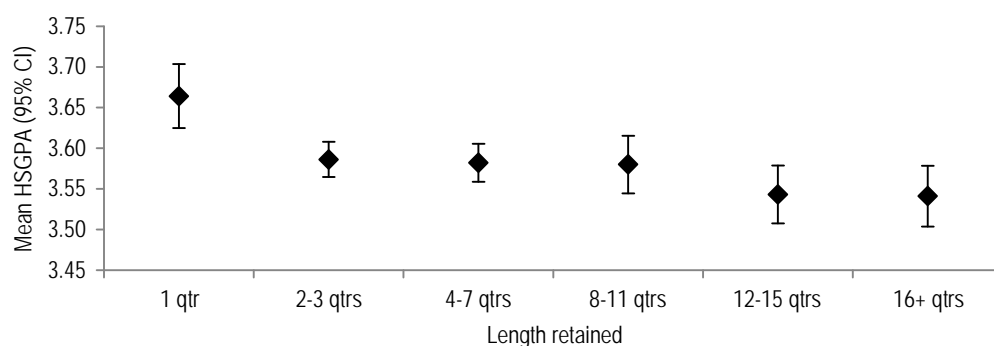


Figure 3-3. Mean HSGPA by length of retention (Spring 2005 - Winter 2008 entrants)

We employed four additional logistic regression analyses to clarify patterns of retention for non-graduates through two quarters, one year, two years, and four years after entry. As shown in Tables 3-2 and 3-3, the four regression analyses supported the findings presented above, and also identified other correlates.

The strongest predictors of retention *across all four time-points* were sex, entry as FTFY, and residency. Men and FTFY entrants persisted toward a degree longer than did women and transfer entrants, respectively. Washington State residency was associated with longer persistence early on, but out-of-state residents were the least likely to stay into the fourth year. In addition, White students tended to stop earlier than non-Whites: 12% stayed until at least the fourth anniversary, compared to 19% of all other domestic students. Finally, having controlled for the effects of other demographic variables, PELL eligibility emerged as a significant predictor at two years. PELL recipients were less likely than their peers to have stopped before the second anniversary (56% vs. 64%).

Table 3-2. Multiple logistic regression equations predicting retention at two quarters and one year

Input variable	Retained only one quarter				Retained less than one year			
	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p
Sex: Female	.45	.12	14.29	***	.33	.07	22.26	***
Ethnicity: African American								
Ethnicity: Asian American	-.49	.15	10.59	**	-.29	.11	7.22	**
Ethnicity: Hispanic American								
Ethnicity: Native American	-1.40	.60	5.41	*				
Ethnicity: Pacific Islander								
Ethnicity: White					.21	.09	5.63	*
First-generation	.29	.12	5.96	*	.20	.07	7.39	**
WA Resident	-.62	.13	21.37	***	-.69	.08	67.60	***
Domestic non-Resident								
First-time first-year at entry	-.73	.13	31.07	***	-.56	.08	45.16	***
Full-time at entry	-1.14	.15	58.23	***	-.39	.12	10.91	**
PELL eligible								
Constant	.27	.24	1.26		1.06	.18	34.90	***
Nagelkerke R ²	.106				.070			

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3-3. Multiple logistic regression equations predicting retention at two years and four years

Input variable	Retained less than two years				Retained less than four years			
	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p
Sex: Female	.50	.07	50.07	***	.45	.09	23.03	***
Ethnicity: African American								
Ethnicity: Asian American	-.25	.10	6.01	*				
Ethnicity: Hispanic American								
Ethnicity: Native American								
Ethnicity: Pacific Islander								
Ethnicity: White	.35	.09	14.36	***	.50	.09	29.37	***
First-generation	.21	.08	7.79	**				
WA Resident	-.90	.09	96.66	***				
Domestic non-Resident					1.04	.14	56.83	***
First-time first-year at entry	-.78	.08	88.37	***	-.96	.12	62.55	***
Full-time at entry								
PELL eligible	-.27	.09	9.68	**				
Constant	2.31	.17	184.72	***	2.65	.19	199.66	***
Nagelkerke R ²	.103				.081			

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Graduation

Of the 56,271 students in the original entering population, 35,804 (64%) had earned a degree by the end of Autumn 2013. We computed four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates for SP05-WI10, SP05-WI09, and SP05-WI08 cohorts, respectively. Although the majority (65%) of students obtained their degrees after four years, there was a large increase in the percentage of graduates after five years (79%), and 81% of the students had completed their degrees after six years.

The average time-to-graduation was 39.2 months. As expected, transfer students took significantly fewer months ($M = 28.3$) than did FTFY students ($M = 46.5$), $F(1, 35801) = 31,529, p < .001$. Graduation rates did not equalize until the eight-year mark when (among those entering in Winter 2006 or earlier) 84% of transfer students and 82% of FTFY had attained a degree by Autumn 2013.

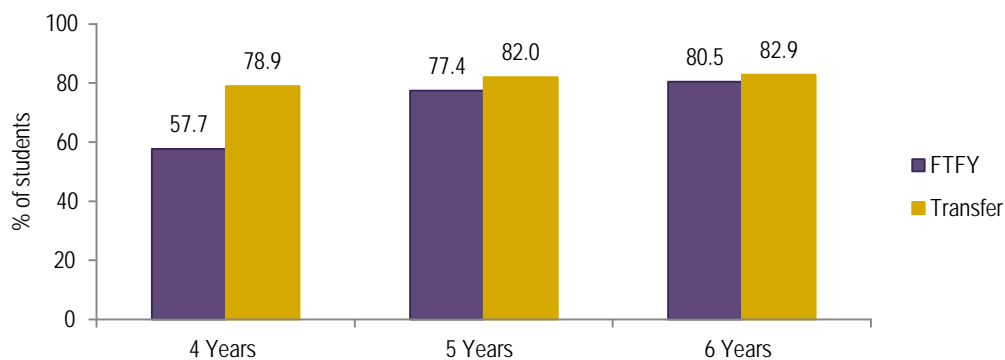


Figure 3-4. Average four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates by entry type

Table 3-4 shows the graduation rates for five cohorts (SP05-WI06 through SP09-WI10) by entry type. Entry type and cohort were both significantly related to graduation status; however, effect of entry type decreased over time as FTFY graduation rates increased. Among FTFY students, four-year graduation rates increased from 53% to 62%. The corresponding time-to-degree decreased from 49.0 to 43.6 months, $F(4,29125) = 210, p < .001$. Among transfer students four-year graduation rates ($M = 80%$) and time-to-degree ($M = 29.6$ months) remained steady over the time period. These trends are shown in Figure 3-5.

Table 3-4. Four-year graduation rates over time

	First-time First-Year		Transfer	
	Rate (%)	Count	Rate (%)	Count
SP05-WI06	53.3	4957	77.9	2732
SP06-WI07	54.9	5431	78.4	2683
SP07-WI08	57.0	5288	78.0	2751
SP08-WI09	60.8	5484	79.7	2716
SP09-WI10	62.5	5190	80.9	2529

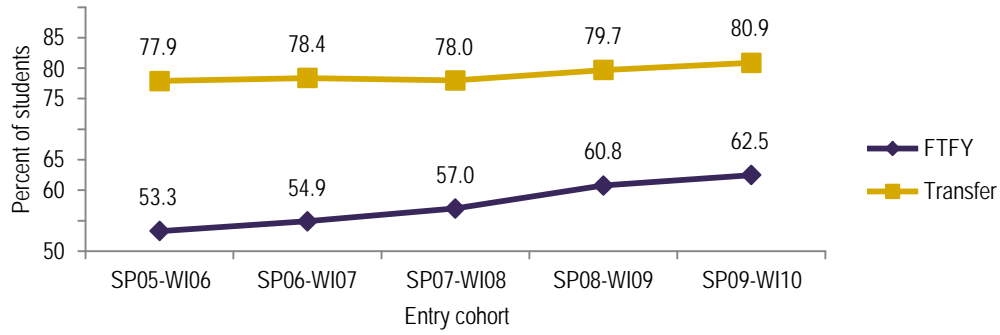


Figure 3-5. Four-year graduation rates over time by entry status (FTFY vs. Transfer)

Demographic Differences

The overall graduation rates for the SP05-WI12 cohorts are displayed in Figure 3-6 for each demographic group.

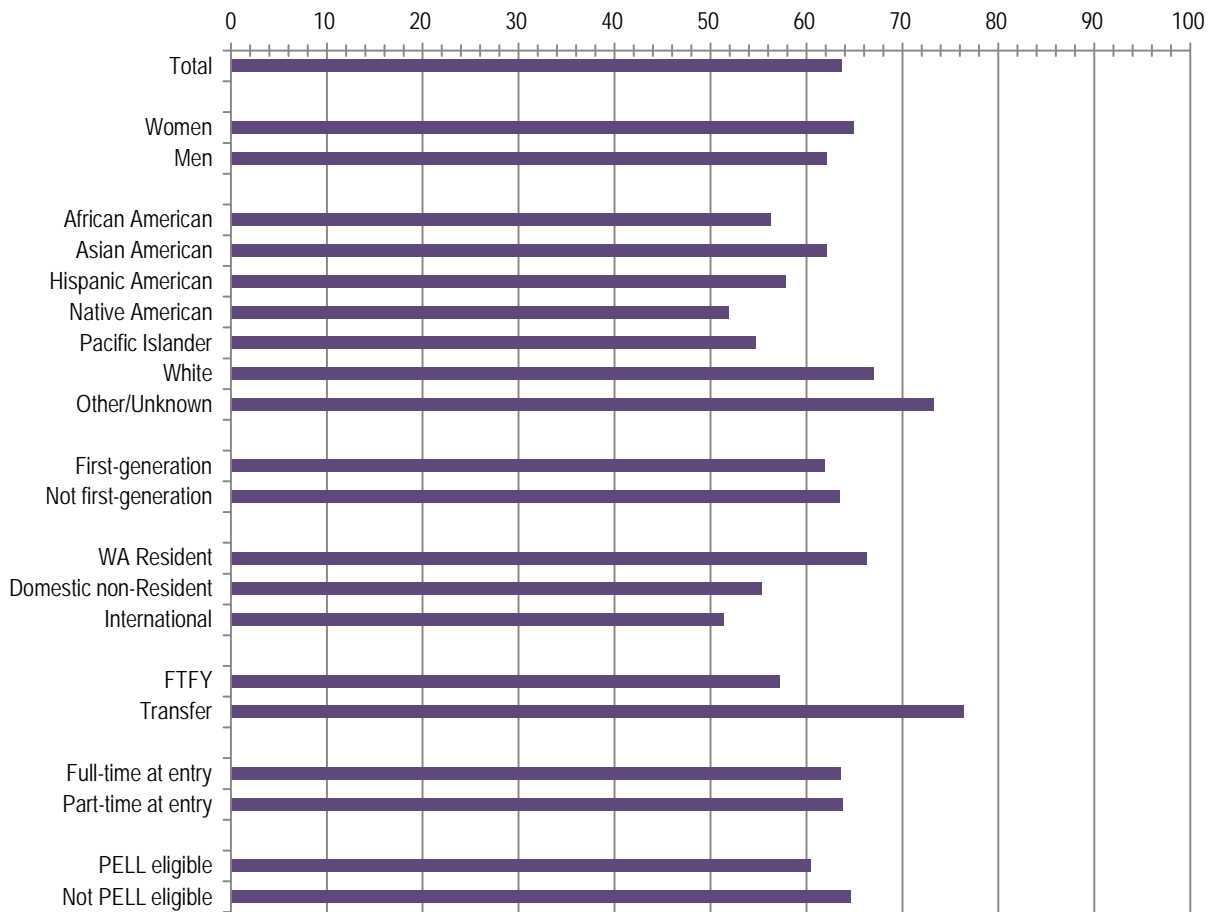


Figure 3-6. Percentage of students who graduated by Autumn 2013 (Spring 2005 - Winter 2012 Entrants)

We investigated whether there were significant differences in time-to-degree and four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates for all demographic variables with the exception of entry type (FTFY vs. transfer) which has been previously discussed. We included entry cohort as a factor in the graduation rate analyses to check for changes in group differences over time. The results of those analyses are shown in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5. Time-to-degree and graduation rates by demographic group

	Time-to-degree (mos.)			Graduation Rate (%)		
Total	39.2	13.0	35,804	64.9	78.9	81.3
Women	38.7	12.7	19,242	68.5	80.7	82.1
Men	39.8	13.4	16,529	60.8	76.9	80.5
African American	39.7	14.1	1,071	52.1	68.3	71.4
Asian American	42.3	12.3	8,782	60.1	79.1	82.4
Hispanic American	38.9	13.7	1,988	57.8	74.2	76.6
Native American	39.7	14.1	434	52.9	64.8	68.9
Pacific Islander	39.4	12.9	233	54.6	70.0	68.3
White	38.6	12.8	19,303	68.4	80.3	82.1
Other/Unknown	37.1	14.1	1,871	66.1	78.2	81.5
First-generation	38.4	13.4	1,0851	61.4	76.0	78.1
Not first-generation	41.1	12.1	21,502	66.2	81.3	84.0
WA Resident	39.2	13.1	29,424	65.3	80.0	82.6
Domestic non-Resident	42.2	11.5	4,258	59.8	71.5	72.4
International	34.6	12.9	2,122	72.0	82.3	86.6
FTFY	46.5	8.7	21,466	57.7	77.4	80.5
Transfer	28.3	10.6	14,338	78.9	82.0	82.9
Full-time at entry	39.8	12.9	33,156	65.2	79.9	82.4
Part-time at entry	32.7	13.1	2,648	61.5	67.8	69.1
PELL eligible	37.1	13.8	8,220	61.4	76.4	79.2
Not PELL eligible	39.9	12.7	27,584	65.9	79.6	81.9

Sex. Overall, 65% of women and 62% of men in the population had graduated. Women took less time than men to graduate (38.7 months vs. 39.8 months), $F(2, 35769) = 65, p < .001$. Among those who entered by the end of Winter 2010, women were more likely than men to have graduated within four years (68% vs. 61%), $\chi^2(1, N = 39,731) = 255, p < .001$. Among those who entered by the end of Winter 2008, women were more likely than men to have graduated within six years (82% vs. 80%), $\chi^2(1, N = 23,823) = 10.02, p < .001$.

Ethnicity. Among all graduates in the population, there were significant differences by ethnicity in time-to-degree, $F(6, 33675) = 99.6, p < .001$. Asian American students took the longest to graduate ($M = 42.3$ months) and Other/Unknown students took the shortest ($M = 37.0$ months). Among those who entered by the end of Winter 2010, four-year graduation rates varied significantly by student ethnicity, $\chi^2(6, N = 37,711) = 406, p < .001$. The highest four-year graduation rates were among White students (68%) and students of Other/Unknown ethnicity (66%). The lowest four-year graduation rates were among African American (52%), Native American (53%), and Pacific Islander American (55%) students. At six years, this pattern of differences persisted, except that the graduation rate among Asian American students (82%) equaled that of White (82%) and Other/Unknown students (82%), $\chi^2(6, N = 22,949) = 132, p < .001$. Women graduated at a higher rate than did men, with the exception of Hispanic and Other/Unknown students, as shown in Figure 3-7.

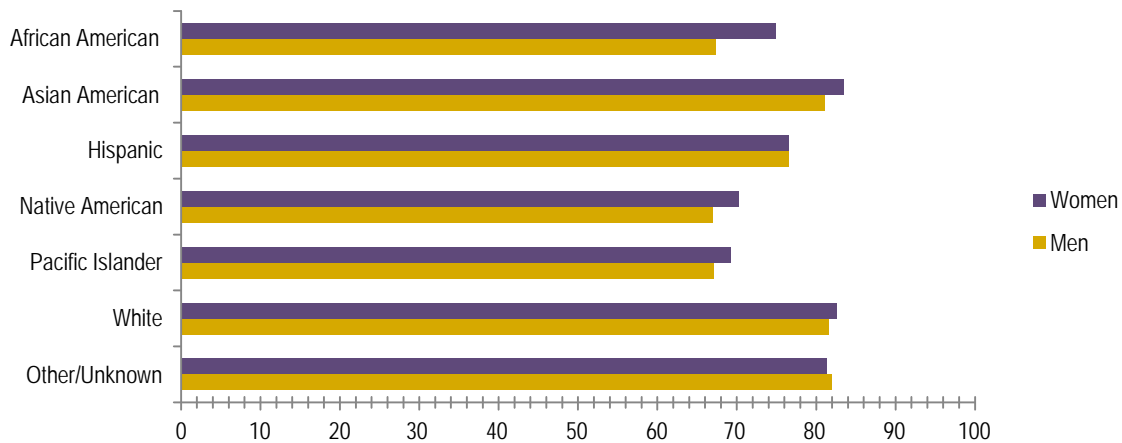


Figure 3-7. Six-year graduation rates by sex and ethnicity

First-generation college student. First-generation status showed a significant relationship with time-to-degree, $F(1, 32351) = 327, p < .001$. On average, first-generation college students took 38.4 months to attain a degree, compared to 41.1 months for other students. Actual graduation rates once again showed the opposite pattern. The four-year graduation rates were 61% and 66%, $\chi^2(1, N = 36,174) = 80.2, p < .001$. The discrepancy widened at six years where 78% of first-generation students and 84% of non-first generation students had earned degrees, $\chi^2(1, N = 21,790) = 114, p < .001$.

Resident status. The length of time to graduate varied significantly with Washington State residency status at entry, $F(2, 35801) = 248, p < .001$. International students took the least amount of time to graduate ($M = 34.6$ months); domestic non-residents took the most ($M = 42.2$), and Washington residents were intermediate ($M = 39.2$). At the four-year mark, 72% of international students had graduated versus only 60% of domestic non-residents, $\chi^2(2, N = 39,761) = 110, p < .001$. At six years, only 72% of non-residents had graduated, in stark contrast to 83% of residents and 87% of international students, $\chi^2(2, N = 23,842) = 213, p < .001$.

The differences among the residency groups in four-year graduation rate decreased over time, with later cohorts showing smaller differences. For Washington residents, the rate increased from 63% to 69%. For out-of-state students, the rate increased from 56% to 66%, and for international students, the rates held steady at 69%.

Full-time vs. part-time at entry. There was a relationship between time-to-degree and full-time/part-time enrollment at entry, $F(1, 35802) = 742, p < .001$. Graduates who were enrolled part-time their first quarter took an average of 32.7 months to graduate, while full-time students took an average of 39.8 months. The opposite pattern emerged when looking at graduation rates. At four years, only 62% of part-time entrants had graduated compared to 65% of full-time entrants, $\chi^2(1, N = 39,761) = 17.4, p < .001$. The gap widened at six years, when 82% of full-time entrants vs. 69% of part-time entrants had graduated, $\chi^2(1, N = 23,842) = 208, p < .001$. Follow-up analyses revealed that 89% of the 2,648 part-time entrants were transfer students, and 76% started UW as juniors or seniors.

PELL eligibility at entry. Eligibility for PELL grant assistance was associated with time-to-degree among graduates, $F(1, 35802) = 303, p < .001$. Graduates who had been eligible for PELL assistance took 37.1 months to attain their degrees, on average, while those who had not been eligible took 39.9 months. On the other hand, examination of four-year graduation rates showed that PELL eligibility was associated with a worse outcome: 61% of those eligible had graduated compared to 65% of those who had not been found eligible, $\chi^2(1, N = 39,761) = 60.6, p < .001$. Similar results were found at the six-year mark (79% vs. 82%), $\chi^2(1, N = 23,842) = 20.4, p < .001$. As above, follow-up analyses revealed that 47%

of PELL eligible graduates entered as juniors or seniors, whereas 61% of the ineligible graduates had entered with class rank of freshman.

It should be noted that differences in four year graduation rates by PELL eligibility have been increasing over time. Among the SP05-WI06 cohort, the rates were 60% for PELL vs. 62% otherwise, but by SP09-WI10 they were 65% and 69%, respectively.

Predicting Graduation Outcomes from Demographic Variables

We constructed four additional multiple logistic regression models predicting degree attainment at four and six years. Models were derived separately for FTFY and transfer entrants. The FTFY models also included high school GPA (HSGPA) and SAT total score (SAT Critical Reading plus SAT Math). The transfer student models included average transfer GPA.

Among FTFY students, graduation was predicted at both time points by HSGPA, SAT, full-time enrollment during one's first quarter, and first-generation status (a negative predictor). At four years, a positive outcome also was associated with female sex, White ethnicity, and no PELL eligibility; in other words, those who completed their degrees fastest tended to be women, White, and not PELL eligible. At six years, Asian American ethnicity entered as a positive predictor, while Native American ethnicity, Pacific Islander ethnicity, out-of-state residence status entered as negative predictors (see Table 3-6).

Table 3-6. Multiple logistic regression equations predicting degree completion in four and six years (first-time, first-year students)

Input variable	Four-year graduation (n = 15,961)				Six-year graduation (n = 7,857)			
	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p
Sex: Female	.54	.04	239.55	***				
Ethnicity: African American								
Ethnicity: Asian American					.29	.07	17.56	***
Ethnicity: Hispanic								
Ethnicity: Native American					-.43	.21	4.21	*
Ethnicity: Pacific Islander					-.71	.28	6.35	*
Ethnicity: White	.21	.03	37.91	***				
First-generation	-.20	.04	26.60	***	-.44	.07	40.85	***
WA Resident								
Domestic non-Resident					-.66	.08	76.07	***
Full-time at entry	.75	.14	27.15	***	1.12	.21	29.36	***
PELL eligible	-.25	.04	31.41	***				
HSGPA	.99	.07	200.38	***	1.28	.11	129.09	***
SAT Total	.00087	.00013	47.84	***	.00079	.00022	13.03	***
Constant	-4.22	.31	187	***	-4.95	.49	101.94	***
Nagelkerke R ²	.072				.078			

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The two models for transfer students were very similar to one another because most transfer graduates obtained their degrees within four years. At both time points, transfer GPA and full-time enrollment at entry were positive predictors of degree attainment. The following were negative predictors: African American ethnicity, out-of-state residence status, PELL eligibility, and first-generation status. In addition, at four years Native American ethnicity and in-state residency were also negative predictors (see Table 3-7).

Table 3-7. Multiple logistic regression equations predicting degree completion in four and six years (transfer students)

Sex: Female								
Ethnicity: African American	-.54	.12	20.10	***	-.58	.15	14.36	***
Ethnicity: Asian American								
Ethnicity: Hispanic								
Ethnicity: Native American	-.51	.20	6.80	**				
Ethnicity: Pacific Islander								
Ethnicity: White								
First-generation	-.13	.06	5.51	*	-.28	.08	13.58	***
WA Resident	-.49	.19	7.03	**				
Domestic non-Resident	-.82	.21	15.91	***	-.61	.12	24.59	***
Full-time at entry	.71	.06	125.12	***	.75	.08	82.46	***
PELL eligible	-.20	.06	10.30	**	-.21	.08	6.33	*
Transfer GPA	.63	.07	81.34	***	.60	.09	44.06	***
Constant	-.48	.32	2.30		-.52	.30	2.86	
Nagelkerke R^2	.054				.056			

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

First-year UW GPA

We examined the relationship between first-year UW GPA and graduation status among students who entered in Winter 2008 or earlier ($N = 23,842$). The vast majority (82%) of these students graduated, and graduation status was significantly related to first-year UW GPA, $r_s = .30$, $p < .001$. The average first-year UW GPA among graduates ($M = 3.24$) was significantly greater than the average GPA ($M = 2.61$) among non-graduates, $F(1,23832) = 4093$, $p < .001$. Follow-up analyses which controlled for HSGPA or Transfer GPA and the other demographic variables (listed above) showed that relationship between first-year UW GPA and outcome remained intact and was not moderated by other factors. That is, first-year UW GPA predicted graduation status even after controlling for a student's incoming GPA, and there was a significant difference between the average UW GPA of graduates and non-graduates among all demographic groups.

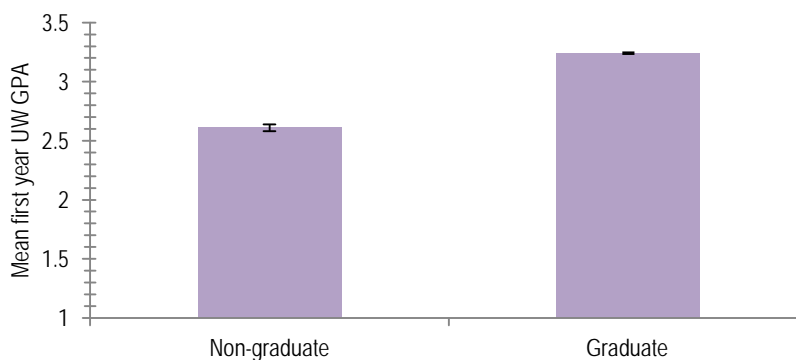


Figure 3-8. Mean first-year UW GPA by outcome (Spring 2005 - Winter 2008 entrants)

Summary

Overall, UW Seattle retention rates are excellent. Four of every five undergraduates attain a degree within five years, the most recent four-year graduation rate among first-time first-year students is 60%, and only 18% of all entrants do not earn a degree within six years. However, there are many opportunities for improvement, and several results raise questions, such as the five results that follow.

The six-year graduation rates for Native American, African American, and Pacific Islander students lag behind those of other ethnicity groups by up to 13 percentage points.

There has been a widening gap between the graduation rates of PELL recipients and their peers that is unrelated to other factors such as ethnicity or first-generation status.

Part-time enrollment has been shown to affect not only the likelihood of graduation, but also the likelihood of persisting. It would appear there is a threshold of investment necessary for a successful outcome. Students who cannot make that investment, for whatever reason, are at great risk for stopping out.

The finding that differences in retention rates by first-generation status are not apparent until other demographic variables are controlled suggests that there are complex mechanisms underlying the relationship between first-generation status and college outcome.

Finally, first-year UW GPA predicted graduation even after controlling for a student's incoming GPA. The average first-year UW GPA of graduates was 3.24, compared with 2.61 for non-graduates. This difference was significant and held true for all demographic groups.

4. SURVEY OF STUDENTS WHO LEFT

“I felt my obligations to pay my debt and couldn’t juggle paying my bills and doing well in class. I felt that I was rushing to pick a major and graduate. I was overwhelmed with my inadequacy and felt I didn’t have the tools to improve my grades. I was intimidated by my professors and felt embarrassed to ask for help. I still feel ashamed that I didn’t do everything I could.” —Former UW Student

In February, 2014 we conducted an online survey of 10,555 students who had left the UW between 2004 and 2013 without graduating. The text of the invitation email and questionnaire are shown in Appendix A. A total of 1,763 (17%) former students completed the survey. This response rate was lower than that obtained for OEA’s alumni survey (22% for undergraduates), as expected, because students who leave without graduating may have less positive feelings about the UW and be less interested in helping to improve our programs than those who receive a degree.

Survey Respondents

Table 4-1 shows the gender and ethnicity of the survey respondents. As the table shows, female students comprised 58% and male students 42% of the survey respondents. Most of the respondents were White (54%), and close to one in four (23%) were Asian Americans. African American respondents comprised 3% of the survey takers, followed by American Indian (3%) and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%) respondents. Approximately 8% of the respondents chose not to indicate ethnicity. These numbers are close to those for overall gender and ethnicity at UW between 2004-13.

Table 4-1. Gender and ethnicity of survey respondents

Race/Ethnicity	Males N (%)		Females N (%)		Total N (%)
White	405	(42.7)	543	(57.3)	948 (53.8)
Asian American	164	(41.4)	232	(58.6)	396 (22.5)
Hispanic/Latino	53	(36.8)	91	(63.2)	144 (8.2)
African American	23	(39.7)	35	(60.3)	58 (3.3)
American Indian	20	(37.7)	33	(62.3)	53 (3.0)
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	7	(41.2)	10	(58.8)	17 (1.0)
Not indicated	73	(49.7)	74	(50.3)	147 (8.3)
Total	745	(42.3)	1,018	(57.7)	1,763 (100.0)

In addition to gathering information on gender and ethnicity, we asked students about other aspects of their status while at the UW. As Figure 4-1 shows, about 38% of the survey respondents were receiving financial aid when they attended the UW and 26% were the first generation in their families to go to college. About 29% entered the UW as transfer students, 18% were out-of-state residents, and 4% were international students. Relatively few of the survey respondents entered the UW as part-time students (about 3%), or were disabled (3%) or military veterans (2%).

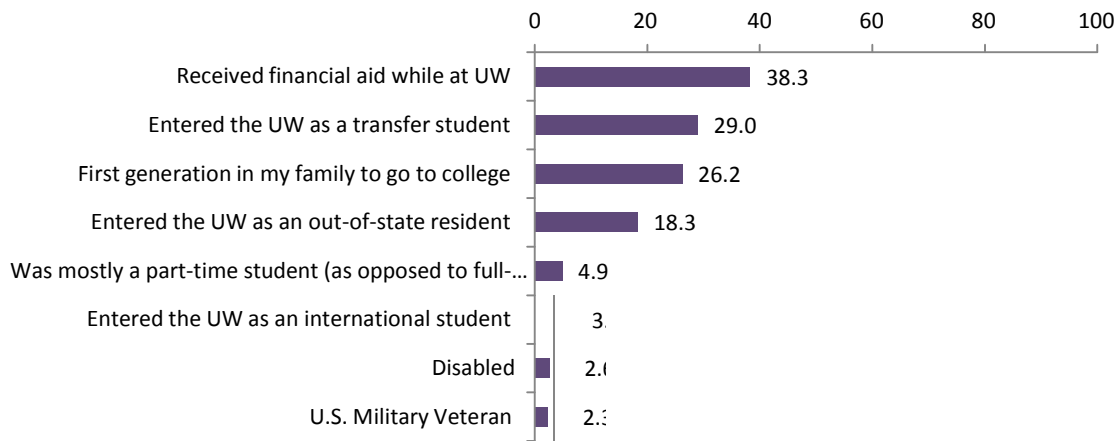


Figure 4-1. Student status while at UW

Fixed-Response Questions

The questionnaire included fixed-response questions asking students to identify whether each in a list of reasons for leaving was “not a reason,” “a minor reason,” or “a major reason” for their decision to leave. Questions were organized into three groups: financial, academic, and personal or family reasons.

Financial Reasons

As Table 4-2 shows, in the “financial” category of reasons for leaving, the most frequently given reason—selected as a major or a minor reason by about 36% of the respondents—was “other,” so the list of financial reasons we provided students did not fully address the financial issues experienced by a significant number of respondents. The next most frequently selected financial reason, identified as a major or a minor reason for leaving by 35% of the survey respondents, was being worried about taking out loans. In addition, about 26% of the respondents noted that getting into debt and needing to drop out to pay it off was a major or minor reason for leaving, and almost the same number (about 25%) selected loss of parental contribution to education as a major or a minor financial reason for leaving the UW.

Table 4-2. Financial reasons for leaving (percentage)

Reason	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason	A minor or major reason	n
I was worried about taking out loans.	65.0	17.3	17.8	35.1	1729
I got into debt and needed to drop out to pay it off.	73.9	13.8	12.3	26.1	1735
My parent/guardian could/would no longer contribute to my educational costs.	75.1	11.2	13.7	24.9	1731
Scholarship funds ran out or were not renewed.	85.7	7.3	6.9	14.2	1728
I lost my job or hours in my job and could no longer afford college costs.	87.4	7.8	4.8	12.6	1733
I took out a short term loan and couldn't pay it back.	88.7	5.3	6.0	11.3	1728
The UW would not let me register because of money I owe.	91.0	2.8	6.2	9.0	1727
My parent/guardian lost his/her job, and I needed to drop out to help support her/him.	91.8	4.2	3.9	8.1	1723
Other financial reason.	64.5	16.0	19.5	35.5	1722

Academic Reasons

The academic reasons for leaving that respondents selected are shown in Table 4-3. As the table shows, students' sense that they were not doing well academically was the most frequently-given academic reason for leaving, identified by about 44% of the respondents as a major or minor reason for leaving. The second most-frequently given academic reason was that the UW classes were too big, selected as a major or minor reason by close to 44% of the respondents. About 40% of the respondents noted as major or minor reasons for leaving that they were interested in education or training elsewhere, and, as the table shows, more than 39% identified the feeling that they were not getting their money's worth at the UW as a major or minor reason for leaving. A third of the respondents identified not knowing what they wanted to major in as a major or minor reason for leaving, and about 29% had other academic reasons for leaving. Interestingly, close to 23% said that not getting into their majors of choice was a major or minor reason for leaving the UW. Only 9% of the respondents noted that they were not allowed to register because of their academic standing as an academic reason for leaving.

These results suggest that when students leave the UW for academic reasons, those reasons are primarily centered around how students experience the academic realities at the UW, rather than around the UW's perception of students' academic performance.

Table 4-3. Academic reasons for leaving (percentage)

Reason	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason	A minor or major reason	n
I was not doing well academically.	55.7	23.4	20.8	44.2	1742
UW Classes were too big.	56.3	25.2	18.5	43.7	1744
I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere.	59.5	17.6	22.9	40.5	1734
I did not feel that I was getting my money's worth.	60.6	20.3	19.1	39.4	1729
I could not figure out what I wanted to major in.	66.7	18.0	15.3	33.3	1735
I did not get into my first major of choice.	77.4	8.0	14.5	22.5	1732
I did not like the major I got into.	84.2	9.8	6.1	15.9	1723
The UW would not let me register because of low GPA.	90.6	3.9	5.5	9.4	1739
Other academic reason.	70.6	14.3	15.2	29.5	1708

Personal or Family Reasons

Table 4-4 shows the results of students' responses to questions about personal or family reasons for leaving. As the table shows, more than half (close to 52%) of the respondents selected "I was emotionally depressed or distressed" as a major or minor reason for leaving the UW. Feeling socially alone was selected as a major or minor reason for leaving by about 41% of the survey respondents, and being unable to motivate themselves was identified as a major or minor reason for leaving by 40% of the survey respondents. Other items identified as major or minor reasons for leaving were feeling unwelcome at the UW (29%), having a bad personal experience at the UW (27%), and "other" (23%).

Table 4-4. Personal or family reasons for leaving (percentage)

Reason	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason	A minor or major reason	n
I was emotionally depressed or distressed.	48.1	21.8	30.1	51.9	1744
I felt socially alone.	58.8	23.3	17.9	41.2	1745
I couldn't motivate myself to work hard in my classes.	59.9	21.3	18.9	40.2	1739
I felt unwelcome here.	71.1	17.7	11.3	29.0	1739
I had a bad personal experience here.	72.6	14.6	12.8	27.4	1729
I had a bad experience with roommate(s)	80.6	11.8	7.5	19.3	1736
My family needed me.	83.7	7.7	8.6	16.3	1732
I was homesick.	84.2	11.1	4.7	15.8	1741
I had physical health-related issues.	85.7	7.1	7.2	14.3	1731
A family member died or got sick.	88.6	4.6	6.8	11.4	1744
I had challenges related to a disability.	91.7	3.2	5.1	8.3	1729
Parenting needs caused me to leave.	93.6	2.8	3.6	6.4	1737
I felt discriminated against at the UW based on my identity.	94.9	3.1	2.0	5.1	1732
I experienced sexual assault or violence.	96.4	1.7	2.0	3.7	1738
I was a victim of a crime.	97.3	1.5	1.2	2.7	1728
Other personal or family reason.	76.7	8.7	14.6	23.3	1731

Top Reasons for Leaving in All Categories

Across the financial, academic, and personal or family categories, those reasons identified by a third or more of the respondents as either minor or major reasons for leaving are shown in Figure 4-2. As the figure shows, emotional depression or distress was the most frequently-noted reason for leaving overall, followed by students' sense that they were not doing well academically, by their feeling that UW classes were too big, and by their feelings of loneliness.

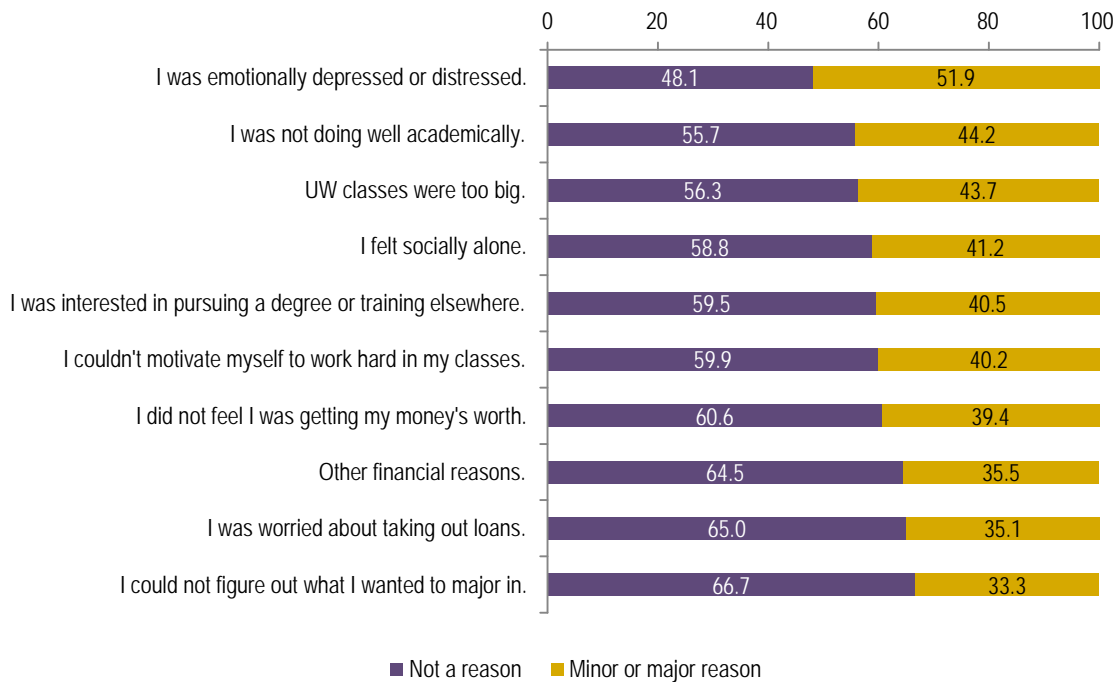


Figure 4-2. Top ten reasons to leave the UW (percentage)

What Have You Been Doing Since You Left UW?

In addition to asking former students questions about why they left the UW, we asked them what they had been doing since they left the UW. Figure 4-3 shows their responses. Nearly three out of five of the respondents said that they had attended another college, university, or school, with about 23% noting that they had completed an undergraduate degree. In addition, close to 59% said that they had worked full time since leaving the UW, and about 41% said that they had worked part-time. About a third of the students who left the UW before graduating said that they had travelled.

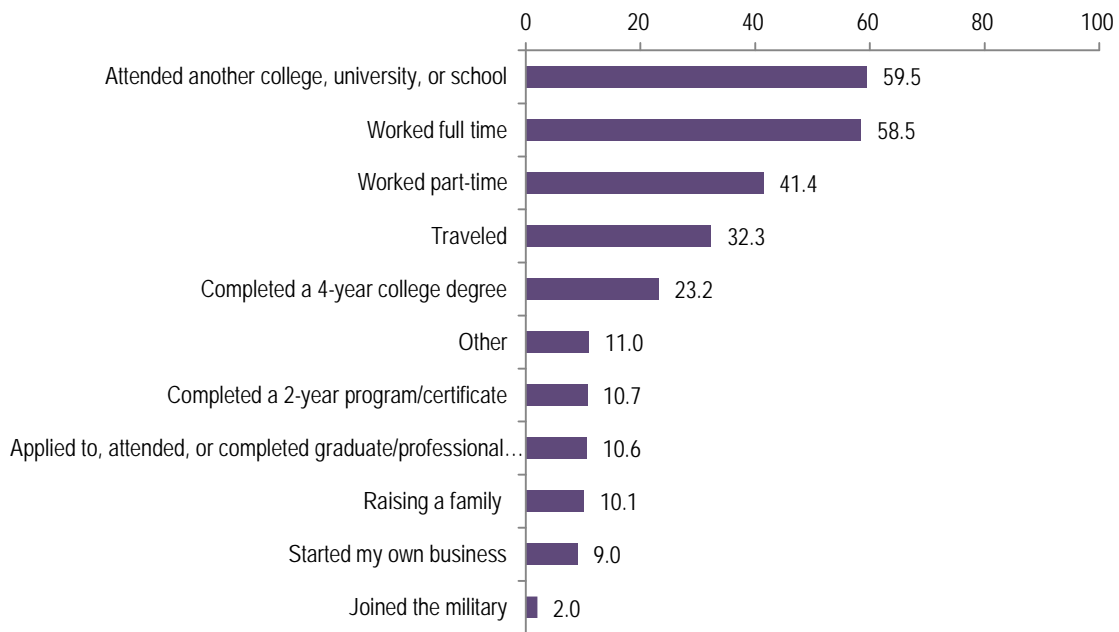


Figure 4-3. What students have done since leaving the UW (percentage)

Comparison of Responses by Gender

We compared responses by gender using Pearson's chi-square analysis to determine statistically significant differences between male and female responses to fixed-response survey questions.

We found that **females** were more likely than males to cite the following as reasons for leaving, listed in order of significance⁶:

- I was homesick. ($p < .001$)
- I was emotionally depressed or distressed. ($p < .01$)
- UW classes were too big. ($p < .01$)
- I felt socially alone. ($p < .01$)
- I experienced sexual assault or violence. ($p < .01$)
- I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere. ($p < .05$)
- I was worried about taking out loans. ($p < .05$)
- Parenting needs caused me to leave. ($p < .05$)
- I had physical health related issues. ($p < .05$)
- Other personal or family reason. ($p < .05$)

In addition, **males** were more likely than females to cite the following as reasons for leaving

- I did not get into my first choice of major. ($p < .01$)
- The UW would not let me register because of low GPA. ($p < .01$)
- I couldn't motivate myself to work hard in my classes. ($p < .05$)

These differences suggest that academic reasons more strongly influence males' decisions to leave the UW than females' decisions. Also, these differences suggest that female students more than their male counterparts may have several types of influences on their decisions to leave—personal, financial, familial, and academic.

Comparisons by Ethnicity

We used Pearson's chi-square analysis and Cramer's V post-test to identify statistically significant differences among the responses from different ethnic groups. For this analysis, we grouped underrepresented minority students (African American, American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) together to give us enough statistical power to observe meaningful differences between those groups and their White and Asian American counterparts. This grouping of underrepresented minority students blurs differences in reasons for leaving that may be unique to particular underrepresented groups, some of which were noted in the 2006 UW Study of Retention and Attrition (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 2006).

Our analysis showed that **underrepresented minority** students were more likely than White and Asian American students to note the following as reasons for leaving the UW:

- I got into debt and needed to drop out to pay it off. ($p < .001$)
- I took out a short term loan and couldn't pay it back. ($p < .001$)
- I was worried about taking out loans. ($p < .001$)
- Scholarship funds ran out or were not renewed. ($p < .001$)
- My family needed me. ($p < .001$)
- The UW would not let me register because of money I owed. ($p < .01$)
- Other financial reasons ($p < .01$)

⁶ The lower the p-value, the less likely that the differences were arrived at by chance: $p < .05$ = the probability of this result occurring by chance is less than five times out of 100; $p < .01$ = the probability of this result occurring by chance is less than one time out of 100; $p < .001$ = the probability of this result occurring by chance is less than one time out of 1,000.

- Other or personal reason ($p < .01$)
- I had physical health related issues ($p < .05$)
- Parenting needs caused me to leave. ($p < .05$)

Asian American students were more likely to cite the following as reason for leaving:

- My parent/guardian could/would no longer contribute to my educational costs. ($p < .001$)
- My parent/guardian lost his/her job, and I needed to drop out to help support him/her ($p < .001$)
- I was not doing well academically ($p < .001$)
- I could not figure out what I wanted to major in ($p < .001$)
- I did not get into my first choice of major ($p < .001$)
- The UW would not let me register because of low GPA ($p < .001$)
- I did not like the major I got into. ($p < .01$)
- A family member died or got sick. ($p < .05$)

Finally, **White** respondents were more likely than Asian American or underrepresented minority students to select the following as reasons for leaving:

- I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere. ($p < .05$)
- I felt socially alone. ($p < .05$)
- I had a bad experience with roommates. ($p < .05$)

These differences in response by ethnicity are striking. Clearly, financial reasons dominated the reasons for leaving of underrepresented minority students at the UW in ways they did not for White and Asian American students. This finding is important because of the consistently lower retention rates for underrepresented minority students than for Asian American or White students at the UW, shown in the “Analysis of Existing Data” section of this report.

Although important, this finding is not surprising. Previous UW research on the retention of underrepresented minority students (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 2006), showed that financial issues were significant in underrepresented students’ decisions to leave college, both at the UW and nationally. Interviews with faculty, staff, and students in the 2006 UW study identified a number of ways finances might influence underrepresented students’ decisions, including:

The need to increase work hours to pay for the relatively high cost of living in Seattle and/or to balance what students said was a decline in financial aid available to them after the first two years and the effect such increases have on time for academic work;

The fear of being in debt upon graduation, especially with few employment possibilities for liberal arts graduates.

Cultural definitions of what debt means, which may differ in low, middle, and high-income families.

The fact that many underrepresented minority students provide financial support to their families—either directly, by sending a portion of their financial resources home to parents, or indirectly, by babysitting or providing other time-demanding services to families. (p. 32)

In addition to their importance to underrepresented minority students, financial issues are reasons for leaving for students from all ethnic groups who are less affluent than others. Research by Bowen et al. (2009) and reiterated by Chingas and McPherson (2011) showed that disparities in educational attainment by economic status are pervasive and are not explained by differences in academic preparation. A recent study conducted by Public Agenda for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2011) found that most young people who had not graduated from college were economically disadvantaged even as children. They had poorer, less well educated families, and they were less likely

to believe that borrowing money to go to college was a good idea, compared with those who had completed college. Consistent with the UW's 2006 findings, Public Agenda researchers learned that decisions about borrowing money were more complex for groups that were less affluent growing up. As the Public Agenda study noted:

...decisions about borrowing are more pointed for high school grads. Many seem to come to the issue [of borrowing money] with fears and concerns that young people from more affluent families simply don't have to face. After all, young people in this group are more likely to come from low-income families. About 1 in 5 recall serious financial struggles when they were growing up. (p. 14)

In contrast to the focus on financial issues among underrepresented students, academic issues and family needs were more powerful influences on the decisions of Asian Americans to leave the UW than on the decisions of others. Finally, social issues were more significant reasons for leaving for White students than they were for others.

These findings suggest that policies and practices designed to retain UW students need to be multifaceted because practices that retain one group of students may not offer much help for other groups.

Comparisons by Year of Entry

Because of economic changes that caused increases in UW tuition beginning in 2009, we compared the responses of two cohorts of leavers: an early cohort, comprised of students who entered the UW between 2004 and 2008 and a late cohort, those entering between 2009 and 2012. We used Pearson's chi-square analysis to determine statistically significant differences between the two cohorts.

Early cohort students were more likely than late cohort students to cite the following as reasons for leaving:

- The UW would not let me register because of money I owed. ($p < .01$)
- I got into debt and needed to drop out to pay it off. ($p < .05$)
- I took out a short term loan and couldn't pay it back. ($p < .05$)

Late cohort students were more likely than those in the early cohort to cite the following as a reason for leaving:

- I did not get into my first choice of major. ($p < .001$)
- UW classes were too big. ($p < .01$)
- I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere. ($p < .01$)
- I did not feel I was getting my money's worth. ($p < .01$)
- I felt unwelcome here. ($p < .01$)
- I had a bad personal experience here. ($p < .05$)
- I was homesick. ($p < .05$)

This result was surprising. Respondents in the early cohort were more likely than those in the late cohort—those presumably harder hit financially than earlier students—to note financial reasons for leaving the UW. Students in the late cohort were more likely than were those in the earlier cohort to note issues related to the major, quality of the academic experience, and other factors unrelated to financial issues.

Open-Ended Questions

We asked two open-ended questions at the end of the survey:

Question 5. What else (if anything) contributed to your decision to leave the UW?

Question 6. What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving?

From the 1,763 survey respondents, we selected a sample of 1,083 (about 61%) for analysis and analyzed them using the inductive process described previously in this report. After generating specific categories of responses, we grouped those categories with other like-categories into themes, for ease of reporting. We were careful to preserve the subcategories in the larger theme so that details were not lost. This process means that students could be counted more than once within subcategories and themes and that percentages do not add up to 100%. Using this analytical approach gives us a more detailed picture of students' experiences than can be obtained with predetermined response categories, and it also helps us understand the strength of the themes.

“What else (if anything) contributed to your decision to leave the UW?”

Of the 1,083 respondents selected for analysis, 825 (76%) provided additional information about why they decided to leave the UW without graduating.

Three aspects of this response rate and of students' responses were unexpected. First, the percentage of respondents who offered additional comments was unexpectedly high. Students often leave comment boxes empty in surveys and, further, students who leave before graduation are often more reluctant than others to talk about their university experience.

Second, the length and depth of students' responses to this question were surprising. Students' responses were often complex and rich with detail. Typically, students' responses to open-ended questions are no longer than a sentence or two, but many students wrote paragraphs describing what had happened to them and some wrote more than a page. In addition, most of those (56%) who wrote a response to this question identified more than one factor as contributing to their decisions to leave the UW, and those reasons most often fell into more than one theme. Those who wrote about more than one reason for leaving often emphasized the interaction between the reasons they listed, which strongly suggests that most often students' reasons for leaving the UW cannot be traced to a single cause. Rather, it is the interaction among experiences and events that causes them to leave, as these three students' quotations illustrate:

- *Because I couldn't find solace in my peer group I looked to teachers, financial aid advisors and others. More often than not teachers would pass the buck to their TA's, I understand that classes are large and it is impossible to give each student their time, but it made me feel uncared for. Some TA's were extremely helpful and others preoccupied with their own agenda. When I was getting to a point where I was not doing well and went to financial aid advisors to get help, different people told me different information, which made it more difficult to move forward. I respect that I am the master of my own happiness and success, but pursuing nursing I think I was operating under the assumption that people would be filled with compassion (I was never looking for a shortcut or special treatment) and I personally couldn't find this in the community. Some individuals yes, but not the environment at UW. Instead I found a community based on hierarchy and a road paved to success for those who did not have personal struggles or need of extra help.*
- *Lack of my previous social safety net mixed with life in an uncaring, big city, combined with large class sizes made me feel alone. I had a terrible roommate who openly had sex with his girlfriend while I was in the room (he put a curtain over the bed, but that was it). My friends from high school fell naturally into other social circles while I didn't. All this combined caused a resurgence in my suicidal depression which I had thought I had gotten over through therapy when I was 16. I was able to get back on therapy, but not before my depression decimated my GPA, forbidding me from ever achieving my lifelong dream of getting into the*

engineering program (which caused another resurgence in my depression). I sucked it up, changed my major, and thought the nightmare was over. Then the next quarter I got a triple diagnosis of mono, strep throat, and hepatitis. Was in the hospital for three days and out of school for two months. Had to drop the quarter. I took that as a final “fuck you” from the universe that UW was not for me. I know it’s hard with so many thousands of students, but maybe just spreading more awareness about the signs of depression. UW is so big that a student has to reach out themselves to make any kind of connection, but sometimes it’s possible for a student to fall so deep into an emotional hole they *can’t* reach out, or just feel like reaching out would be pointless. I know it’s hard in such a big school, but just having anything that reaches out to these students would be a big help.

- There was nothing that could have been done. It was an unforeseen issue. I was bed-ridden for nearly a year and a half. I couldn’t afford decent health insurance so all costs came out of my savings. It was a matter of life and death, therefore my medical expenses and health took priority. Now that I am finally healthy again, I don’t have the money to pay tuition at this moment as my savings was drained. In this current economy, and job market situation, racking up student loan debt is not a wise option. I’ve seen what a majority of my peers with 4 year degrees are going through right now—they’re struggling to find jobs, and are often unable to pay down their debts in a timely manner; their credit is completely ruined. That is just not the future I wish to create for myself.

The third surprising aspect of students’ responses to Question 5 was that they were not necessarily answering the question asked. Instead of identifying factors that led to their leaving that we had not covered in the fixed-response questions preceding Question 5, students most often provided details about the boxes they had checked. Thus, they were usually not adding new information but explaining information they had already given.

These “surprises”—the number of students who added comments, the multiple reasons students included in their comments, and the elaboration on causes already provided—suggest that students who leave the UW want someone at UW to know the details of their stories.

Seventeen strong themes, many of them with compelling multiple subcategories, emerged from students’ responses. These themes are shown in order of frequency in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5. Main themes: “What else contributed to your decision to leave the UW?”

1. Quality of the academic experience	9. Pursuit of a job or job-related skills
2. Financial reasons	10. Social isolation
3. Issues related to the major	11. Problems with housing and commuting
4. Not enough support provided at the UW	12. Lacking a direction or motivation
5. Transferred elsewhere to get into the desired major, take courses, and/or complete the degree	13. A traumatic or bad personal experience
6. Health and well-being issues	14. Did not leave UW before completion
7. Family or partner needs, changes, or issues	15. Regardless of reason for leaving, thinking about returning to UW
8. Problems with grades or credits	16. Problems completing requirements
	17. Hated Seattle, Washington, and/or the weather

The percentage of students identifying these themes and the subcategories associated with them are provided in Table 4-6. The table also includes an “other” category—responses from fewer than 17 but more than one student, as well as a “singles” category of responses that only one student gave. In addition, the table includes quotations from students that illustrate the theme and subcategories of response.

Most-frequently Given Causes for Leaving. As Table 4-6 shows, the most frequent response given was that students left because of their sense that **the quality of the academic experience** was low, especially the class size and interaction with instructors, both of which students characterized as “uncaring.” More than one out of four of the students who responded to Question 5 noted the poor quality of their

academic experience as a reason for leaving. The following quotations from two former students illustrate this category of response, along with the quotations provided in the table:

- *The class sizes were too large and there was no support or places to get help. TA's were not as knowledgeable as assumed to be and teachers were inaccessible. There are not many ways for those who live off campus to meet people.*
- *I never felt welcomed there by instructors, they had the attitude of doing me a favor by instructing me. I never felt that they were teaching for the right reasons or to encourage students to succeed. From my first class to the last, I didn't feel like this was the right school for me. Going to the University of Washington was my dream since I was a little girl. When I was accepted, I was ecstatic at the opportunities ahead. Unfortunately, it was not that dream I had heard about.*

The second most frequent response given, also noted by close to 25% of the students who responded to the question, were **financial issues** and concerns. Many of these students spoke of the cost of the UW in general terms, and many of the students identifying financial issues were students from out-of-state. For example:

- *The annual tuition cost for an out of state person was astronomical. I could not allow myself to pay \$40k+ a year for undergraduate studies when my in-state tuition is a fifth of that. There were also no scholarships available for out of state students.*

In addition to these two frequently-given responses, close to one out of five of the students who responded to this question identified **issues related to the major** as reasons for leaving. The main issue that former students described was not getting accepted (or knowing that they would not be accepted if they applied) into their majors of choice, with many of them identifying engineering and nursing as those majors that rejected them. Often these students had completed a year or two of credits toward their major of choice before they were rejected. The following quotation serves as an example for this group of responses:

- *I sat down with a professor of my first choice major after being denied acceptance to the major. I had worked closely with this professor throughout the year on a student club where I repeatedly demonstrated my capability in the area of academia where this club focused. After looking at my transcript, the professor deemed me "not capable" of the major regardless of an above average GPA. After this experience, I transferred to a school where the undergrads were more than just a means of research funding. I am happy to say that I got my first choice in majors and am happily employed in my field of expertise. The UW guidance counsellors were one of the highlights of my experience at the UW. They were the ones who pointed me in the direction of the program I transferred to and I would not be in the position I am without them.*

The fourth most-frequently given reason for leaving, noted by 17% of the respondents, was **lack of support** at UW. Many of these students said that they needed better, more helpful, or more personally-focused advising, both general advising and at the departmental level. A number of students also spoke of needing better academic help from faculty, TAs, and study centers. Some students noted that because of work schedules or illnesses, a greater selection of online or night courses would have helped them. Finally, a few students spoke of being actively discouraged from continuing at UW by TAs or advisers. The following example illustrates this category of response:

- *In retrospect, a few meetings with a caring adviser might have done a lot for me. I realize these advisers exist, but as a transfer student, they just weren't on my radar, and I didn't connect with anyone who might have helped guide me there.*

The fifth most frequently-given response was that students **transferred elsewhere**. In students' descriptions, the decision to transfer to another institution was primarily a result of their leaving, rather than a cause. For example, students transferred to other institutions because they did not get into their majors of choice, because they had decided they did not want to continue to pay for out-of-state

tuition, or because they could find classes they needed at less-expensive community colleges nearer their homes.

Finally, **mental and physical health and well-being** concerns was given as a reason for leaving by about 14% of the respondents. Eighty of those respondents (close to 10%) spoke of depression, extreme anxiety, or both as a primary cause of leaving, as the following quotation illustrates:

- *My low GPA forced me out of UW. The reasons behind so was due to extreme suicidal depression and anxiety to go to class from lack of motivation and humiliation of my overbearing negative self-consciousness.*

Complexity of Multiple Reasons for Leaving. As stated previously, most (56%) of the former students who provided additional comments on why they left the UW gave more than one reason for leaving, as the quotations in this section illustrate. When students gave multiple reasons, only 8% of them gave reasons that fell within the same theme—for example, saying that they left because classes were too big and because their professors were impersonal, two subcategories within theme 1 (quality of the undergraduate experience). Most of the students giving more than one reason for leaving—more than 91%—gave reasons that crossed the major themes—for example, saying that they left because classes were too big and because they could not afford out-of-state tuition, themes 1 (quality of the academic experience) and 2 (financial issues).

In order to identify whether any of the major themes in Table 4-5 frequently occurred together in the responses of students giving multiple reasons, we calculated the correlation of the student and theme matrix, using the 17 major themes⁷ that emerged from our analysis of Question 5. This analysis showed weak (less than 0.25) correlations between themes. However, two of these weak correlations were interesting. “Issues related to the major” (theme 3) was weakly linked with “transferred elsewhere” (theme 5), and “health and well-being” (theme 6) was weakly correlated with “problems with grades” (theme 8). The former suggests that when students’ majors of choice were not available to them—either because they were not accepted into that major or because the UW did not offer it—students often transferred elsewhere. The latter suggests that problems with mental and physical health affected grades, and problems with grades may also have affected one’s mental and physical well-being.

The percentage of students whose reasons for leaving fell in multiple themes and the independence of those themes illustrate that the decision to leave is complex and multi-faceted for most students who leave the UW before they graduate. This finding is consistent with previous UW studies (1994, 2006, 2006b) and with national research on retention and graduation.

⁷ We eliminated the themes “Other” and “Singles” from this analysis because they were idiosyncratic.

Table 4-6. “What else contributed to your decision to leave the UW?”

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 1. Quality of the academic experience n=212 (25.7%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UW and UW classes are too big, impersonal, and uncaring, including 11 students who said they felt like “just a number” and 11 students who said they wanted more attention from professors (100) 2. Professors are intimidating, inaccessible, uncaring, impersonal, abusive (49) 3. I was paying too much for the quality of education I was receiving, including 7 students who said that the evening program was too limited in choices and/or quality (23) 4. Classes were focused on the wrong things: weeding out students or memorization and not on creativity, collaboration, and challenge (22) 5. TAs were not knowledgeable or didn’t care about student learning (7) 6. Difficulty with non-English speaking instructors (7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A student cannot learn when they’re on a balcony and only are identified by a “student ID number”.</i> • <i>“Weed out” classes I couldn’t get through... especially the sciences. Needed them for my major, so had to move elsewhere to get them done, so I can come back and complete my major, which offers smaller class sizes...Once you get stuck in classes of 400, you don’t get unstuck. It’s up to you.... I felt alone and that there was no help. Professors tell you they don’t want to talk to you and it’s a question for the TA’s. The TA’s tell you that you should understand this, and they don’t explain/make it more confusing....</i> • <i>At UW I really felt intimidated by the professors. They seemed much too busy for me to bother them during their office hours, and I never felt comfortable approaching them after class.</i>
<p>Theme 2. Financial Reasons n=199 (24.1%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UW too expensive/financial problems (118) 2. Out of state tuition too expensive/couldn’t get in-state residency (46) 3. Needed to work so many hours to pay for school that I had no to time study, do group work outside class time, get to classes at times offered (20) 4. Lost or ran out of scholarship money or financial aid (10) 5. Got into trouble with short term loans (5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I couldn’t justify the cost as an out of state student, and began to feel guilty and selfish spending my family’s money on such incredible tuition and related expenses.</i> • <i>Watching all those fancy buildings get built with your tuition while you get packed into enormous classes taught by inferior instructors is a big “F you!” to students. If I ever, at any point, got the impression that I was getting my money’s worth educationally I would not have left.</i>
<p>Theme 3. Issues Related to the Major n=155 (18.8%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not getting accepted into the major of choice or knowing I would not be accepted into it, with nursing mentioned by 31 students, engineering by 25, and business by 7 (90) 2. The major I wanted was unsatisfactory or was not offered, with undergraduate teaching, digital art and game design, film, kinesiology, and nutrition mentioned by more than one student (41) 3. Couldn’t get the classes required for my degree (24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The dean of Mechanical Engineering told me that there was not enough room for me in the ME program at UW. Thanks to him, I graduated with my bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering and honors from Washington State University and now work for Boeing.</i> • <i>I decided to major in psychology, but I felt that the range of experiences and opportunities the department of psychology at UW offered was relatively limited.</i>

Table 4-6. “What else contributed to your decision to leave the UW?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 4. Not enough support provided at the UW n=143 (17.3%)</p> <p>Needed more or better:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advising (general and departmental) (41) 2. Academic help, including better instructional help at chemistry and math study centers (20) 3. Online or night classes (19) 4. Encouragement; was actively discouraged by a TA or adviser; told I wasn't college material (15) 5. Financial aid help (11) 6. Support for disability (6) 7. Outreach from someone when I began to flounder (8) 8. Access to mental health/counseling (6) 9. Support as a first-generation or returning student (4) 10. Support for residence hall problems (3) 11. Information on admissions and returning (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expensive housing rates near campus. Lack of support from academic counselors. Upsetting e-mail from a professor.</i> • <i>I went to the Chemistry help center many times for when i was struggling. I would literally sit there for at least an hour before it was my turn with a tutor, and even then i was only allowed to ask one question and it was usually a quick answer like “read the textbook” even though i had and was still struggling. It was like no one cared if I sank.</i> • <i>In retrospect, a few meetings with a caring adviser might have done a lot for me. I realize these advisers exist, but as a transfer student, they just weren't on my radar, and I didn't connect with anyone who might have helped guide me there.</i> • <i>The unwillingness of the financial aid office to help me and offer me some guidance</i>
<p>Theme 5. Transferred elsewhere to get desired major, take courses, and/or complete the degree n=132 (16.0%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I was heavily discouraged by an academic coordinator in my major from attempting the path I wanted to go down when I tried to return several years later. I was told I would likely be given last preference to get into some of the elective classes vital to my hopeful career. I already had enough on my plate and opted to finish a degree at a local school with less competition.</i> • <i>Opportunity to complete education at a different 4-year institution without the need to complete STP [Student Transition Program]. Graduated President's Honor Roll (3.75+ GPA).</i>
<p>Theme 6. Health and well-being issues n=116 (14.1%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mental health, with half of those respondents indicating depression as the mental health issue (80) 2. Physical health issues (25) 3. Addiction issues (drugs, alcohol, gambling) (11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I was depressed and felt unmotivated and uninspired by my classes and felt like reaching out for help would be seen as an excuse.</i> • <i>I had a major stroke in June of 2009. I endured months of physical rehabilitation, speech therapy and occupational therapy. I was forced to withdraw from the institution.</i>
<p>Theme 7. Family or partner needs, changes or issues n=77 (9.3%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I had no family to help me take care of my children [or] the money needed for a caregiver. My husband and I were struggling financially and with 2 small children, really had no options to continue what I wanted to do.</i> • <i>I had to take care of my brother after my dad passed away.</i> • <i>My younger sisters, ages 15 and 17, weren't doing very well. They were getting into a lot of serious drugs and then they both got pregnant at the same time and didn't have steady homes. My sister told me a couple months after I left that I must have been the glue in the family because everything fell apart when I left. So I transferred to WSU in Vancouver, my home city.</i>
<p>Theme 8. Problems with grades or credits n=72 (8.7%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grades were lower than I expected or they fell (47) 2. Dropped from the UW/program because of low grades (13) 3. Took too many credits (8) 4. UW would not transfer credits (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>One of my family members was sick and I had to take care of them. Due to that reason my GPA fell and I was dropped from the program.</i> • <i>This survey covered most of the issues that contributing to my leaving UW. Bad roommate situation, lack of funds, and a drop in grades all coupled together to make me returning to UW an impossibility.</i>

Table 4-6. “What else contributed to your decision to leave the UW?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 9. Pursuit of a job or job-related skills n=64 (7.9%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Left to take a job (50) 2. Had to return to active military duty (6) 3. Did not think a degree was necessary for the work I wanted to do (6) 4. Work (unspecified) (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I realized I didn't need a college degree to make it in this day and age, and thousands in debt would only make it harder. For the record, I'm now the Creative Director of a multi-billion dollar tech company, so the academic world can suck on that.</i> • <i>I left to tour with Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. I wanted to pursue a more practical and lucrative application of skills....</i>
<p>Theme 10. Social isolation n=59 (7.2%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Felt socially isolated (54) 2. Did not fit in here (5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of community. Didn't connect with any individuals to make me feel welcome.</i> • <i>Felt alone there. Everything was too large, and often it felt impossible to find my place there.</i>
<p>Theme 11. Problems with housing and commuting n=53 (6.4%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problems with dorms/roommates (21) 2. Commute is too far (19) 3. Can't afford housing or homeless (10) 4. Problems with sorority housing (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My roommates were also professional Starcraft players from China and competed on Chinese circuits between the hours of 1am and 6am nearly every day and would not be quiet. I either didn't sleep, slept in lounges until I was kicked out, or slept outside as the Housing folks never moved me despite many requests.</i> • <i>It wasn't just one particular experience that made me want to leave, the atmosphere in the dorms in general just wasn't for me. The students in my McMahon cluster were extremely anti-social and had little interest in trying to make friends, which was especially bad for me because it was my first quarter at college and I didn't know anyone at the school. My RA tried her best to make people socialize but it was a lost cause. After visiting some friends who attended WWU and seeing how welcoming the people there were, I decided within an hour of returning to Seattle that I wanted to transfer out.</i>
<p>Theme 12. Lacking a direction or motivation n=42 (5.1%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unsure of academic direction, so staying was a waste of time and money (30) 2. Was not taking college seriously/unmotivated (12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>UW felt like a waste of my time. I didn't have much direction and I wasn't going to waste money while figuring that out.</i> • <i>I spent so much time all through high school focused on getting to UW that once I was there, I didn't know what I wanted to do. So I wasn't very motivated to work hard because I didn't know where I wanted to go.</i>
<p>Theme 13. Traumatic or bad personal experience n=28 (3.4%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bad experiences in the Greek system, including 13 students who identified sororities (15) 2. Bad experiences in college athletics (5) 3. Sexual assault/abuse and/or no action taken (5) 4. Felt discriminated against for race (1), religion (1), weight (1) (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Behavior of staff in non-academic departments. Lack of accountability for staff misconduct towards students. Structure and nature of institution fosters generalized loathing of undergraduates among faculty and staff. UW does not want people of color to succeed.</i> • <i>I joined a sorority and despite the good reputation that is put out, the girls were extremely unkind to me for wanting to focus on my academics versus partying. They treated me rudely and because of this I became depressed and started to suffer academically. There was no support for me in this situation as a UW student. I was bullied by sorority members and there was nothing done to stop or help the situation.</i>
<p>Theme 14. Did not leave UW before completion n=27 (3.3%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Completed program/certificate (15) 2. Got into a professional program (pharmacy, dental) that didn't require an undergraduate degree (12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I completed my MEDEX Northwest certification program to become a Physician Assistant.</i>

Table 4-6. “What else contributed to your decision to leave the UW?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)		Quotations
Theme 15. Regardless of reason for leaving, thinking about returning None		n=27 (3.3%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I took the year off to pursue a career related to the nursing field to gain more experience and hopefully become accepted in the UW nursing program this year.
Theme 16. Problems completing requirements		n=20 (2.4%)
1. Difficulty completing foreign language requirement (16)	2. Requirements too rigid for older students (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a problem with some of my transfer credits that I needed for a language requirement. While I was more than happy to take any written or oral test to prove my proficiency, the admissions and advisement offices were completely unwilling to explore options or to help me find any possible solution. I set up a meeting with a UW Chinese professor and demonstrated my command over the Mandarin language and together we were unable to secure any kind of positive response from either office. I later transferred to Harvard College and have since earned my degree.
Theme 17. Hated city, state, and/or weather None		n=17 (2.1%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I found that I hated the city and the weather. It made me get depressed and not do well in my classes.
Other (fewer than 17 students)		n=60 (7.3%)
1. Visa issues and fewer opportunities for international students (7)	2. Wanted to go somewhere not close to home/someplace new (6)	3. Response was unclear (6)
4. Too many non-English speaking students and too much emphasis on international students (5)	5. Didn't want to go to UW from the start (3)	6. Embarrassed, too shy to ask for help (4)
7. UW's worldview is different from mine (4)	8. Kicked out of the UW because of conduct or jail (4)	9. Did not feel safe in the University District (3)
10. Students in the Greek system having access to previous exams and others do not seemed unfair (3)	11. Found what I needed to learn online (3)	12. No attention given to career paths (3)
	13. Fiscal cuts in departments (3)	14. Advisers/counselors were very helpful (2)
	15. Did not know that they had not graduated (2)	16. Singles (provided by one student):
	17. Too old to return (1)	18. Needed small group work to be encouraged (1)
	19. Did not register, so dropped by UW after two quarters (1)	20. Wasn't prepared for college (1)

*Percentages add to more than 100% because students sometimes gave more than one response.

“What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving?”

Of the 1,083 respondents selected for analysis, 832 (about 77%) suggested actions UW could have taken to keep them from leaving in response to Question 6 on the survey.

As was the case with Question 5, the response rate to Question 6 was quite high and former students often provided more than one action that the UW could have taken to keep them from leaving. Both aspects of students’ responses to this question confirm that leaving the university is a significant experience for students, and they want their voices heard on that experience.

Ten strong themes, many of them with multiple subcategories, emerged from students’ responses. These themes are shown in order of frequency in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7. Main themes: “What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving?”

1. Provide more support	6. Improve living situations
2. Offer financial help	7. Changes in status (e.g., already graduated)
3. Provide a better academic experience	8. Review requirements
4. There was nothing that the UW could have done	9. Simplify the registration process
5. Improve entry into the majors	10. Simplify and standardize credit transfer

The percentage of students identifying these themes and the subcategories associated with them are provided in Table 4-8. In addition, the table includes quotations from students that illustrate the theme and subcategories of response.

Most-frequently Given Actions that Could Have Prevented Students from Leaving. The most frequently-given response was that the UW could have provided **more support** for students in trouble. Close to 29% of all respondents identified areas of support that, if such support had been provided, would have helped them stay. The subcategories in this theme identify specific kinds of support that students felt were needed, as Table 4-8 shows. The five most frequently-noted areas of needed support were:

- High quality, consistent advising
- Outreach to students who are struggling
- High quality counseling services and better access to those services
- More flexible ways of completing requirements (e.g., online and evening classes)
- More support for non-traditional students, such as students with children

In addition, other students mentioned the need for more tutoring options; better support for students with disabilities, victims of sexual assault or harassment, and victims of psychological abuse or harassment; and support for transfer students. The following quotation illustrates this category of response:

- *If UW had (or I had been aware of) a counseling program about dealing with the question of leaving/dropping out, I think I would have benefited greatly from some type of information or counseling in that regard.*

The second most frequently-given suggestion for what the UW could have done to prevent students from leaving was to offer **financial help**. More than one in four of the students responding to Question 6 spoke about the need for more financial assistance. Both in- and out-of-state students had problems paying for college. The following quotation is an example of this category of response:

- *Provided better scholarship or funding option for the “middle class”. So many people have little-to-no financial support from their families that “make too much money”, yet they are still disqualified from most forms of aid due to this financial bracket.*

Another prominent theme in students’ responses was the UW’s need to provide a **better quality academic experience**. As Table 4-8 shows, former students giving this response often recommended that the UW:

- Offer a more personalized education (e.g., smaller classes, a more caring atmosphere)
- Offer more diverse degree options/More interesting courses
- More student-focused faculty/Faculty interested in undergraduate education
- Encourage a greater sense of community

This student’s comment illustrates this group of responses:

- *Class sizes were massive and impersonal. The campus orientations were gigantic and felt artificial and forced, leaving me with little sense of community. Overall, the campus seems too large—I felt unable to*

establish a group of friends because every class had over 100 strangers. Even in my major, I would never see the same person twice.

The fourth most-frequently given response—noted by 18% of the students who responded to the question—was that there was **nothing** the UW could have done or respondents weren’t sure what the UW could have done to prevent them from leaving. For example:

- *I am not sure what UW could have done. I left for a combination of financial, academic, and personal reasons. In the end, perhaps UW was just not right for me at that stage in my life.*

Finally, 11% of the students responding to Question 6 suggested that the UW improve **entry into the majors**. These students suggested that the UW either make it easier to get into some majors or expand the number of students admitted to high-demand majors, with many of these students noting nursing and engineering majors. A few students suggested that the pre-major status be eliminated and that students be provided options when they do not get into their majors of choice. In the words of one of the students whose response fell into this category:

- *Could not get in the EE Major, because some of my initial prerequisite grades were too low. I applied to the EE major several times and was taking EE classes by petitioning. In those classes I was getting grades in the top 10% of the classes who were all EE Majors. Yet I still could not get into the EE program. Went on to another 4 year institution, graduated in the top 10% of my class, led my senior project team to place in the top 10 in a national competition. UW could have accepted me into the EE program.*

Table 4-8. “What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving?”

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
Theme 1. Provide more support	n=238 (28.6%)
1. Provide high quality, consistent advising, including 6 students who specified better advising regarding potential majors (71)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I was unable to find the support I needed from the UW. Staff and students were not welcoming or interpersonal, but more closed off and cold. Being welcomed as a person and truly cared about by at least one person, having any sort of support system, would have helped.</i> • <i>Better access to more extensive mental health care and more understanding of failing grades when going through a mental health crisis and guidance with hardship withdrawal process.</i> • <i>I was so excited and happy when I got into the program, but I felt as though there was no support for students with kids. It would have been nice to have some kind of support for parent students, and I felt like I had to manage all of that on my own. Very difficult to do.</i> • <i>More focused advising, including spending time with department advisers as a freshman, would have greatly influenced my class choices, and how much effort I put into my classes. I did not properly engage with the departments I was interested in, and spent two and a half years in an unfocused environment. By the time I spoke to specific departments my grades were low and I had almost no shot of getting into the majors I thought I was interested in.</i>
2. Reach out proactively to those students who are struggling (65)	
3. Offer better counseling services/make sure students are aware of services and how to access them (35)	
4. Offer more flexible ways of completing requirements (e.g., online, evening classes), including 2 students who mentioned additional satellite campuses (31)	
5. Offer more support for non-traditional students (e.g., older students, students with children) (13)	
6. Offer more tutoring options (5)	
7. Provide better accommodations/support for students with disabilities (4)	
8. Offer more support for teacher-student issues (4)	
9. Provide more support for victims of sexual harassment/assault (4)	
10. Offer more support for victims of harassment/psychological abuse (3)	
11. Offer more support for transfer students (3)	

Table 4-8. “What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 2. Offer financial help n=187 (22.5%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer more financial support (e.g., scholarships, financial aid) (75) 2. Make tuition more affordable/stop raising tuition (44) 3. Offer scholarships for out-of-state students/Lower out-of-state tuition (41) 4. Provide financial counseling (9) 5. Make better use of student tuition money (e.g., spend it on education vs. fancy dorms) (4) 6. Decrease/eliminate the amount of out-of-class group work because students who need to work cannot keep up (2) 7. Other financial issues (12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>More scholarship opportunities for out-of-state students. Work study opportunities were limited and the process based on financial need was not entirely accurate in selecting students on circumstance.</i> • <i>It would be great if they had an info session or something for students to learn about student loans/grants etc. I may have been able to create a better plan for myself.</i> • <i>I wish that UW had more financial options for people in my situation. Maybe even allowing us to make monthly payments spread out throughout our time enrolled and not just within the quarter. That would have helped me tremendously.</i>
<p>Theme 3. Provide a better academic experience n=178 (21.4%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer a more personalized education (e.g., smaller classes, more caring atmosphere) (59) 2. Offer more diverse degree options/More interesting courses (39) 3. More student-focused faculty/Faculty interested in undergraduate education (37) 4. Encourage a greater sense of community (19) 5. More competent professors (9) 6. Don't let TA's teach upper level classes and/or more competent TA's (8) 7. Offer better quality education for the money (4) 8. Change academic grading rules (e.g., eliminate curving) (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Smaller class sizes. More accessible professors. Less focus on learning from TA's as they often were not approachable and did not seem to care about the students' learning.</i> • <i>Professors who wish all their students to succeed, not just the top of the class. I had one professor who actually was interested in how well I did in his class, my dynamic teacher. It was a smaller class size, and it was his first time teaching yet his efforts had more of an impact than any other teacher.</i> • <i>Made further attempts to make the university seem smaller than it is. It was easy to get lost.</i>
<p>Theme 4. There was nothing that the UW could have done n=150 (18.0%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nothing. At the time, I just felt the need to explore New York City and the East Coast for the first time. It has been a great experience, but UW is truly a wonderful school.</i> • <i>Nothing. I loved my classes and teachers, I just couldn't fit in socially in such a huge school.</i>
<p>Theme 5. Improve entry into majors n=88 (10.6%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make it easier to get into major of choice/expand high-demand majors (e.g., Nursing, Engineering) (66) 2. Eliminate the pre-major status (5) 3. Provide other options when students don't get into major of choice (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Let me into my desired major. One that I graduated in with a great GPA and with a dozen job offers at a different university</i> • <i>The UW could have a better system set up for engineers. That would do away with the “Pre-engineering” major designation. Also have pre-req courses that have grades that reflect knowledge gained in the classes better.</i>
<p>Theme 6. Improve living situations n=27 (3.2%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide more adequate student housing (e.g., housing is too crowded, gloomy) (11) 2. Address issues in the Greek system (e.g., don't admit freshman, alcohol awareness) (6) 3. Offer more social activities in the dorms (5) 4. Provide education regarding housing options (5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Another suggestion involves living in the dorm. I think too many freshman students were living in one place with limited room (Lander/Terry). It was difficult to find peace of mind studying because so many students were in one place and I felt like it was difficult for the RA's to control situations of distraction.</i> • <i>...the residence halls are very gloomy, particularly McMahan, McCarty, and the other one on that row. Liven them up.</i> • <i>I think people should move into the Greek system after freshman year to prevent the divide between Greek people and non Greek people.</i>

Table 4-8. “What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
Theme 7. Changes in status n=23 (2.8%) 1. I plan to return (9) 2. Currently attending/did graduate (5) 3. Let me re-enroll/Give me another chance (5) 4. Enrolled as a professional student (e.g., dentistry, pharmacy) (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>UW has been very welcoming regardless of my circumstances and I will soon attempt to clear my short term debts to register and finish up.</i> • <i>Allow me to reenroll at the University to complete my degree.</i> • <i>I am attending pharmacy school at UW, which does not require a 4 year degree for admittance. It was financially responsible to enter school a year before completing my 4 year degree.</i>
Theme 8. Review requirements n=18 (2.2%) 1. Drop foreign language requirement/Make language classes more accessible (12) 2. Allow experience/other qualifications to override requirements (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not require any foreign language. Seriously, it's a joke. I'm extremely bitter about this experience. The quality of the class was laughable and overpriced. The curriculum and instructors are the EXACT same as a community college, but four times the price. The times that were offered were inflexible (there was a limited number of classes, and they were every day. Not easy for a senior who's trying to go to real classes).</i> • <i>UW should REALLY look at people's credentials and not just their transcript, Yes, transcript is a good measure for most of the students since they have no experience. But the ones with experience should not be compared with same scale.</i>
Theme 9. Simplify the registration process n=14 (1.7%) None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Understanding what is going on with degrees and holds etc is often very confusing and convoluted. With work/home obligations it is often hard to fit in time with advisers. A more clear communication line around registration etc would be amazingly helpful.</i>
Theme 10. Simplify and standardize credit transfer 7 (.8%) 1. Credit limits should apply only to credits taken at the UW (4) 2. UW should have accepted transfer credits (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The UW could have made the credit limits apply only to credits taken and earned at UW. I transferred in with two years' worth of credits from a community college that counted against me.</i>

*Percentages add to more than 100% because students sometimes gave more than one response.

Combined Responses

Table 4-9 combines responses to Questions 5 and 6, linking former students’ suggestions for what the UW could have done to prevent their leaving to the reasons they discussed for leaving. As the table shows there were several reasons for which students offered no suggestions for UW’s help, including family or partner needs, changes, or issues; pursuit of job or job-related skills; lacking a direction or motivation; and hated city, state, or weather. These were presumably areas that students felt were outside UW control.

In contrast, as the table shows, former students provided specific actions that the UW could take for the top four reasons they reported for leaving —the quality of the academic program, financial issues, issues related to the major, and not enough support. It is possible that in addressing those areas that the UW *can* address (for example, by providing more support for students), those areas that seem beyond the UW’s control (for example, family or partner needs, changes, or issues) might also be ameliorated for some students. Again, it is important to remember that students often report multiple reasons for leaving. A student who is having trouble paying for college is also likely to be having trouble with grades or with managing to approach a faculty member. A student who is feeling academically lost in the size of the UW campus and classes may also be feeling socially isolated and depressed because of it. Therefore, addressing only one of the reasons for leaving and the suggestions around that reason that students gave will have a smaller effect on retention and graduation than addressing several points at once.

Table 4-9. Reasons for Leaving and What the UW Could Do to Prevent Leaving

Reasons for Leaving (n)	What UW Could Do to Prevent Leaving (n)
Quality of the academic experience	Provide a better academic experience
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UW and UW classes are too big, impersonal, and uncaring, including 11 students who said they felt like “just a number” and 11 students who said they wanted more attention from professors (100) 2. Professors are intimidating, inaccessible, uncaring, impersonal, abusive (49) 3. I was paying too much for the quality of education I was receiving, including 7 students who said that the evening program was too limited in choices and/or quality (23) 4. Classes were focused on the wrong things: weeding out students or memorization and not on creativity, collaboration, and challenge (22) 5. TAs were not knowledgeable or didn’t care about student learning (7) 6. Difficulty with non-English speaking instructors (7) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer a more personalized education (e.g., smaller classes, more caring atmosphere) (59) 2. Offer more diverse degree options/More interesting courses (39) 3. More student-focused faculty/Faculty interested in undergraduate education (37) 4. Encourage a greater sense of community (19) 5. More competent professors (9) 6. Don’t let TA’s teach upper level classes and/or more competent TA’s (8) 7. Offer better quality education for the money (4) 8. Change academic grading rules (e.g., eliminate curving) (3)
Financial reasons	Offer financial help
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UW too expensive/financial problems (118) 2. Out of state tuition too expensive/couldn’t get in-state residency (46) 3. Needed to work so many hours to pay for school that I had no time study, do group work outside class time, get to classes at times offered (20) 4. Lost or ran out of scholarship money or financial aid (10) 5. Got into trouble with short term loans (5) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer more financial support (e.g., scholarships, financial aid) (75) 2. Make tuition more affordable/stop raising tuition (44) 3. Offer scholarships for out-of-state students/Lower out-of-state tuition (41) 4. Provide financial counseling (9) 5. Make better use of student tuition money (e.g., spend it on education vs. fancy dorms) (4) 6. Decrease/eliminate the amount of out-of-class group work (2) 7. Other financial issues (12)
Issues related to the major	Improve entry into majors
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not getting accepted into the major of choice or knowing I would not be accepted into it, with nursing mentioned specifically by 31 students, engineering by 25, and business by 7 (90) 2. The major I wanted was unsatisfactory or was not offered, with undergraduate teaching, digital art and game design, film, kinesiology, and nutrition mentioned by more than one student (41) 3. Couldn’t get the classes required for my degree (24) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make it easier to get into major of choice/expand high-demand majors (e.g., nursing, engineering) (66) 2. Eliminate the pre-major status (5) 3. Provide other options when students don’t get into major of choice (3)
Not enough support provided at the UW	Provide more support
<p>Needed more or better:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advising (general and departmental) (41) 2. Academic help, including better instructional help at chemistry and math study centers (20) 3. Online or night classes (19) 4. Encouragement; was actively discouraged by a TA or adviser; told I wasn’t college material (15) 5. Financial aid help (11) 6. Support for disability (6) 7. Outreach from someone when I began to flounder (8) 8. Access to mental health/counseling (6) 9. Support as a first-generation or returning student (4) 10. Support for residence hall problems (3) 11. Information on admissions and returning (3) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide high quality, consistent advising, including 6 students who specified better advising regarding potential majors (71) 2. Reach out proactively to those students who are struggling (65) 3. Offer better counseling services/make sure students are aware of services and how to access them (35) 4. Offer more flexible ways of completing requirements (e.g., online, evening classes), including 2 students who mentioned additional satellite campuses (31) 5. Offer more support for non-traditional students (e.g., older students, students with children) (13) 6. Offer more tutoring options (5) 7. Provide better accommodations/support for students with disabilities (4) 8. Offer more support for teacher-student issues (4) 9. Provide more support for victims of sexual harassment/assault (4) 10. Offer more support for victims of harassment/psychological abuse (3) 11. Offer more support for transfer students (3)

Table 4-9. Reasons for Leaving and What the UW Could Do to Prevent Leaving (continued)

Reasons for Leaving (n)	What UW Could Do to Prevent Leaving (n)
Health and well-being issues	See suggestions 3, 9, and 10 under Provide more support
1. Mental health, with half of those respondents indicating depression as the mental health issue (80)	
2. Physical health issues (25)	
3. Addiction issues (drugs, alcohol, gambling) (11)	
Family or partner needs, changes, or issues	No suggestions given
Problems with grades or credits	Simplify and standardize credit transfer
1. Grades were lower than I expected or they fell (47)	1. Credit limits should apply only to credits taken at the UW (4)
2. Dropped from the UW/program because of low grades (13)	2. UW should have accepted transfer credits (3)
3. Took too many credits (8)	
4. UW would not transfer credits (4)	Also see 8 under Provide a better academic experience
Pursuit of a job or job-related skills	No suggestions given
1. Left to take a job (50)	
2. Had to return to active military duty (6)	
3. Did not think a degree was necessary for the work I wanted to do (6)	
4. Work (unspecified) (3)	
Social isolation	See 1 and 4 under Provide a better academic experience , 3 under Improve living situations , and Provide More Support
1. Felt socially isolated (54)	
2. Did not fit in here (5)	
Problems with housing and commuting	Improve living situations
1. Problems with dorms/roommates (21)	1. Provide more adequate student housing (e.g., housing is too crowded, gloomy) (11)
2. Commute is too far (19)	2. Address issues in the Greek system (e.g., don't admit freshman, alcohol awareness) (6)
3. Can't afford housing or homeless(10)	3. Offer more social activities in the dorms (5)
4. Problems with sorority housing (3)	4. Provide education regarding housing options (5)
Lacking a direction or motivation	No suggestions given
1. Unsure of academic direction, so staying was a waste of time and money (30)	
2. Was not taking college seriously/unmotivated (12)	
Traumatic or bad personal experience	See suggestions 8, 9, and 10 under Provide more support
1. Bad experiences in the Greek system, including 13 students who identified sororities (15)	
2. Bad experiences in college athletics (5)	
3. Sexual assault/abuse and no action (5)	
4. Felt discriminated against for race (1), religion (1), weight (1) (3)	
Thinking about returning	Changes in status
	Let me re-enroll/Give me another chance (5)
Problems completing requirements	Review requirements
1. Difficulty completing foreign language requirement (16)	1. Drop foreign language requirement/Make language classes more accessible (12)
2. Requirements too rigid for older students (4)	2. Allow experience/ qualifications to override requirements (6)
Hated city, state, and/or weather	No suggestions given

Summary

The survey responses of former students clearly show the complexity of the leaving process. Students most often reported more than one reason for leaving, and often two or three reasons interacting with each other brought about students' decisions to leave. Five of the reasons students gave for leaving warrant some final comments: depression and emotional distress, financial issues, quality of the academic experience, the need for more support, and problems with academic performance.

Depression and Emotional Distress

Depression and emotional distress was noted as a partial or major reason for leaving by 51% of the respondents to the fixed-response questions in the survey. Furthermore, health and well-being issues—which include depression—were discussed by about 14% of those completing the open-ended questions, with 80 of those students specifically mentioning depression as a problem. Depression can be both the cause of students' other reasons for leaving and their effect. It can bring students to the door of leaving, and it can also be the result of them looking at that door. Feeling socially isolated from peers at an age when peers are all-important and feeling alienated from faculty who seem too far away in large classrooms to care about students can make it difficult for students suffering anxiety or depression to seek help, as well as exacerbate the feelings they may already be having.

Furthermore, not knowing about support staff or programs on campus make seeking help impossible, as students completing the retention survey described and as a national study on college students' mental health (Gruttadaro and Crudo, 2012) confirms. Therefore, the suggestions to “offer better counseling services/make sure students are aware of services and how to access them” that students who left the UW identified is important.

Finally, it bears noting that we do not know how many students who never consider leaving the UW may also be experiencing some kind of depression, anxiety, or distress in their time in college. As incoming students tell us (Office of Educational Assessment, 2010), the level of challenge at the UW is the aspect of their experience that surprises them the most, and many students experience stress and anxiety around those academic challenges (Beyer et al., 2007). Most students are also concerned about social isolation (Office of Educational Assessment, 2010; Beyer et al., 2007) and may experience depression and anxiety around social issues, as well. Therefore, providing more information to students about counseling help and expanding the counseling services available to them may raise the quality of the undergraduate experience for all students, as well as prevent students from leaving the UW.

Financial Needs and Issues

Students' fixed- and open-ended responses confirmed research showing that financial needs and issues are a strong force in students' decisions to leave, and particularly in the decisions of underrepresented minority students. Indeed, financial concerns were found to be a major reason for underrepresented minority student attrition in the UW's previous studies of retention (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 2006, Office of Educational Assessment, 1994), and this current study shows that financial issues are concerns for all students whose families are not fully paying the college bill. A recent study supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Johnson et al., 2014) notes that often students who leave college for financial reasons are paying for college costs themselves, rather than receiving help from family members for college. A study by our own ASUW students (2014) shows that it is almost impossible to pay for college costs by working year-round without supplementing that work with loans. However, even students whose parents were fully supporting college costs reported leaving the UW because of the burden of those costs on their parents.

Students' open-ended comments about financial problems make it clear that financial aid, as much as it is a gift to students, can also present difficulties. It often covers enough of the costs of college, for instance, to bring students into the UW, but the high costs of being in school and living in Seattle often overwhelm that gift. Furthermore, research suggests that financial aid is paying less of the cost of a college education than it used to. According to Caralee Adams of *Education Week* (2013), the maximum Pell grant covered about 77% of the costs at a public four-year college in 1979; by 2010, it supported only 36% of those costs. This shift may explain results in the "Analysis of Existing Data" section of this report, which showed that the four- and six-year graduation rates for Pell eligible students was lower than those for non-Pell eligible students (61% vs. 65% and 79% vs. 82% respectively), and, further, that the gap is widening over the years.

In addition, getting into academic trouble, having family members suddenly need help of their own, or contracting a serious illness can turn that gift on its head, putting students who need to drop a class or attend UW part-time into immediate financial trouble. If students do drop out, they are still responsible for repaying their loans, but without a college degree, they have fewer and less lucrative job opportunities as they pay it back. Indeed, a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (Biemiller, 2012) cited a study that showed that students who dropped out of college were four times as likely to default on federal student loans as students who earned degrees.

The kind of financial aid students receive is also important. A recent study (Stratton et al., 2008) on college stopouts and dropouts showed that "the probability of dropping out, relative to stopping out or to remaining continuously enrolled, is higher for those receiving loans and lower for those receiving work study aid, as compared to those receiving no aid" (p. 327). Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) would argue that work study aid often connects students with peers, faculty, and staff, so it accomplishes two things: provides students with financial assistance and connects them with the life of the university.

In their responses to the open-ended questions in the survey, students often linked financial reasons for leaving with other issues, such as their sense that they were not getting their money's worth academically or their feeling that they did not have enough support to navigate the large, decentralized institution that the UW is. Students also reported the ways financial need interacted with academic success, noting that such need caused them to work long hours that kept them from their studies, from participating in UW events or organizations, from living close to campus, and from having time to work with peers in study groups or on projects. Students' comments about what the UW could have done to have kept them from leaving include more financial support:

- Offer more financial support (e.g., scholarships, financial aid)
- Make tuition more affordable/stop raising tuition
- Offer scholarships for out-of-state students/Lower out-of-state tuition
- Provide financial counseling

The recent ASUW report (2014) also provides suggestions for improving the financial picture for UW students.

Quality of the Academic Experience

Students' dissatisfaction with their academic experience at the UW is the third theme in students' fixed- and open-ended responses that bears revisiting. Students' dissatisfaction with "big classes" has been reported in other research on the undergraduate experience (Office of Educational Assessment, 1994; Beyer et al., 2007). In their responses to this survey, students who had left the UW for reasons related to their academic experience characterized classes as too big, impersonal, and aimed at "weeding out" students more than at teaching them. They often specifically pointed to introductory science and math classes as problematic—the entry-ways into the very fields the U.S. is trying to populate. They saw the faculty, who were often those teaching large classes, as impersonal and uncaring. Some students, many

of them out-of-state students, said that the quality of the academic experience was not worth the high price they were paying for it, a comment that echoes a small retention study conducted with freshman who sent transcripts to other academic institutions at the end of the 2006 freshman year (Office of Educational Assessment, 2006b).

As was true of all categories of response, dissatisfaction with the quality of the academic experience was often coupled with other reasons, such as depression, financial concerns, a drop in students' GPA, and the lack of institutional support. Except for students who are still taking mostly large-lecture courses as juniors and seniors, students' satisfaction with the quality of their academic experience likely improves as they enter their majors, although we did not collect evidence for that in this study.

Administrators, staff, and faculty at the UW have invested a great deal of time, effort, thought, money, and heart into the improvement of instruction in large lecture classes since the mid-1990s, so this response for why students leave the UW is especially disheartening. Furthermore, we have evidence that UW faculty have taken apart classes and put them back together as they integrate active learning strategies into those classrooms, working to make classes feel smaller and more personal to students and seeking ways to know what students are learning, so they can respond quickly to that evidence quickly (Beyer et al., 2013). It is hard to know what specific changes the UW could realistically make that would challenge the negative message that large classes seem to send to many students.

Interestingly, students' suggestions for what the UW could do to improve the quality of the academic experience were somewhat general, falling into the "do it better" category of suggestion more than providing clear direction for change. They noted that the UW should:

- Offer a more personalized education (e.g., smaller classes, more caring atmosphere)
- Offer more diverse degree options/More interesting courses
- More student-focused faculty/Faculty interested in undergraduate education

However, we should note that two of those suggestions have to do with the size of the classroom experience—offering a more "personalized" education with more "student-focused" faculty.

Support

Both in their descriptions of their reasons for leaving and in their suggestions for UW action, students asserted that the UW could have given them more support, which is the fourth theme that is important to revisit. More than 17% of the students gave not having enough support as a reason for leaving the UW, and close to 29% said that providing more support was the most important action the UW could have taken to have kept them here. They offered very specific suggestions for support, as well:

- Provide high quality, consistent advising, including better advising regarding potential majors
- Reach out proactively to those students who are struggling
- Offer better counseling services/make sure students are aware of services and how to access them
- Offer more flexible ways of completing requirements (e.g., online, evening classes)
- Offer more support for non-traditional students (e.g., older students, students with children)
- Offer more tutoring options
- Provide better accommodations/support for students with disabilities
- Offer more support for teacher-student issues
- Provide more support for victims of sexual harassment/assault
- Offer more support for victims of harassment/psychological abuse
- Offer more support for transfer students

Academic Performance

More than 44% of the students who completed the survey noted that “not doing well academically” was a reason for leaving the UW in the fixed-response section of the survey. It was the second most-frequently given reason among all the fixed-responses. In addition, about 9% of the open-ended comments students provided about why they had left the UW directly addressed problems they were having with grades; however, these problems could have been embedded in other reasons students gave, such as issues related to the major, not getting enough support, and the desire to transfer to another institution. Research (Stratton et al., 2008) suggests that the effects of grades on students’ decisions to stopout or dropout are significant, noting that those with low grades were three times more likely to leave college than others. Furthermore, they noted that low grades were influences in dropping out across income levels: “...tests interacting income with GPA did not indicate that independent students or those from less privileged households were more sensitive to grade reports” (p. 325).

Our own analysis supports these findings. As the “Analysis of Existing Data” section of this report shows, the average first-year UW GPA among graduates was significantly higher than for students who did not graduate—3.24 compared with 2.61. Furthermore, students’ first-year UW GPA predicted graduation even after controlling for students’ incoming GPAs and students’ demographic groups. Indeed, the 2006 UW retention study (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity) showed that a 1.0 drop between high school and college GPA in the first year placed students in all demographic groups at risk for leaving.

The results of this study and the 2006 study are supported by the UW Study of Undergraduate Learning (Beyer et al., 2007), which showed that both freshmen and transfer students felt that they had done badly in a class in their first year at UW, and their definitions of “badly” related to grades. The grades those students listed as “bad” averaged a 2.6. However, the range of “bad grades” students reported was 0.8 to 3.9. This range reminds us that in students’ minds, a bad grade may be relative to students’ goals or expectations—realistic or not—for their own performance.

Nevertheless, in designing a retention strategy for all students, it seems wise to consider intervening with students at any point in the first year if their GPAs drop to 1.0 or more lower than their entering GPAs.

These themes in students’ reasons for leaving and in their sense of what the UW could have done to prevent them should inform the UW’s consideration of ways to improve its retention and graduation rates.

5. SURVEY OF STUDENTS WHO STAYED

“I have had amazing support from family, friends and strangers who believe in me. I could not have done this without them. I wanted to quit plenty of times but there was always someone there who I could go talk to and just let out my frustrations. I realized that I wasn't the only one going to college--all those who believe in me are on this journey as well. If I fail, I let all those people down and I am not willing to do that.” —Current UW student

In April 2014, the UW administered the national Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) questionnaire to all undergraduates. SERU administrators, centered at the University of Minnesota, allow individual universities to include a few of their own “wild card” questions on the survey, so we added three questions on retention, as follows:

- Have you ever seriously considered leaving the UW?
- If yes, why were you thinking of leaving? We gave students a list of 14 academic, financial, and personal or familial reasons, and for each one, students could select “not a reason,” “a partial reason,” or “a major reason.”
- If yes, what made you decide not to leave?

Of the 6,134 students who had responded to the survey by April 23, 2014, 1,621—about 26%—answered “yes” to this question. Interestingly, the attrition rate for UW has been about 19% for the past few years, so the percentage of students indicating that they had seriously considered leaving the UW on the SERU suggests that more students consider leaving each year than actually leave.

Reasons for Considering Leaving the UW

Nineteen (about 1%) of those who indicated that they had considered leaving selected none of the reasons offered in the questionnaire as “not a reason,” “a partial reason,” or “a major reason” for thinking about leaving. Of the remaining respondents who said they had considered leaving, only 107 (7%) identified just one reason for leaving. The rest (about 92%) of those students who said they had considered leaving the UW selected more than one reason for considering leaving. This result confirms the findings in our 2014 survey of students who left the UW between 2004-2013, as well as findings in our previous studies on retention (Office of Educational Assessment, 1994; Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 2006; Office of Educational Assessment, 2006b), which showed that students usually have more than one reason for leaving the UW. Furthermore, with those previous studies, this result suggests that those reasons are complex and interconnected.

Table 5-1 shows the results of students’ responses to the question of why they had considered leaving the UW. As the table shows, when we combine partial and major reasons for considering leaving, emotional depression/distress was a reason for considering leaving for more than three out of every five students who responded to the questions. Financial worries/difficulties were a reason for close to the same number, as was feeling socially alone and not doing well academically. More than two out of five considered leaving because of the size of their classes and because they did not know what they wanted to major in, and close to two out of five indicated that they did not feel welcome at the UW. In addition, more than a third of the students who had considered leaving reported feeling as though they were not learning much and having had a bad personal experience at UW.

Table 5-1. SERU reasons for leaving (percentage)

Reason	Not a reason	A partial reason	A major reason	Partial or major reason	n
I was emotionally depressed or distressed.	38.6	32.6	28.8	61.4	1,599
Financial worries/difficulties.	42.0	33.1	24.9	58.0	1,604
I felt socially alone.	42.6	31.4	26.0	57.4	1,602
I was not doing well academically.	44.8	29.8	25.4	55.2	1,595
My classes were too big.	55.1	31.4	13.5	44.9	1,602
I could not figure out what I wanted to major in.	59.9	25.8	14.3	40.1	1,600
I felt unwelcome here.	60.5	25.1	14.4	39.5	1,599
I did not feel that I was learning much.	63.3	24.6	12.1	36.7	1,596
I had a bad personal experience here.	65.7	20.6	13.7	34.3	1,596
Other	68.7	13.3	18.0	31.3	1,169
I did not get into my first choice of major.	69.2	12.9	17.9	30.8	1,596
I was homesick.	75.7	15.5	8.8	24.3	1,603
I had a bad experience with roommate(s).	77.3	14.4	8.3	22.3	1,600
I did not like the major I got into.	81.1	12.5	6.4	18.9	1,599
My family needed me.	81.4	12.8	5.8	18.6	1,598

How consistent were SERU students' responses with the responses of students who actually left the UW? Table 5-2 shows the most frequently-given reasons that students who left the UW provided in fixed- and open-ended responses along with the fixed-responses of students completing the SERU who considered leaving. As the table shows, there is a great deal of consistency among the reasons given. In fact, the only reasons current students who considered leaving identified that were not frequently selected by students who actually left the UW were feeling unwelcome at the UW and having a bad personal experience. (Only about 3% of the students who left gave a traumatic or bad experience as a reason for leaving, shown in Table 5-2.)

As Table 5-2 indicates, three reasons that students who left the UW gave for leaving that students who stayed did not give as reasons for thinking about leaving were not enough support provided at UW, pursuit of a job or job-related skills, or family and partner needs, changes, or issues. These three reasons emerged from former students' open-ended responses.

The similarity across responses of students who left the UW and students who considered leaving but stayed strongly suggests that both groups have similar negative experiences. They get depressed, have problems with the quality of their academic experience, need more financial support than they are getting, feel socially isolated, have trouble finding an academic direction or a major, and get grades that are lower than they hoped to earn. Those who leave often transfer to other institutions to get the major they want, and often that major is either engineering or nursing.

Table 5-2. Reasons for leaving and reasons for considering leaving

Survey of leavers: Fixed-response responses	Survey of leavers: Open-ended responses	SERU, current students: Fixed-response responses
I was emotionally depressed or distressed	Health and well-being issues	I was emotionally depressed or distressed
Other financial reasons; I was worried about taking out loans	Financial reasons	Financial worries/difficulties
UW classes were too big; I did not feel that I was getting my money's worth	Quality of the academic experience	My classes were too big; I did not feel that I was learning much
I was not doing well academically; I couldn't motivate myself to work hard in my classes	Problems with grades or credits	I was not doing well academically
I felt socially alone	Social isolation	I felt socially alone
I could not figure out what I wanted to major in	Issues related to the major	I could not figure out what I wanted to major in
		I felt unwelcome here
		I had a bad personal experience here
I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere	Transferred elsewhere to get desired major, take courses, and/or complete the degree Not enough support provided at the UW Pursuit of a job or job-related skills Family or partner needs, changes, or issues	

Reasons for Staying

We asked the SERU survey takers who had indicated that they had considered leaving the UW to respond to an open-ended question, asking them why they had stayed at the UW. We randomly selected and analyzed 1,257 (about 78%) of the 1,621 respondents' answers to this question, using the constant comparison method described previously in this report. Of the group we selected for analysis, about 27% did not include reasons for why they had stayed at the UW, and 73% provided reasons. As was the case for the responses to the open-ended question in the survey of students who had left the UW, this was a strong response rate.

Of those answering the open-ended question, 72% gave single reasons for staying at the UW, and 28% provided more than one reason, a reversal of the open-ended responses of students who left the UW, where more than half of the respondents gave multiple reasons for leaving. This difference suggests that the path students move along to decide to stay may be less complex than the path to leaving.

Also in a reversal of the open-ended responses of students who had left the UW, the explanations from students who stayed were shorter and less detailed. The comments of those who stayed were about the length and level of detail of responses typically found in open-ended survey questions. This difference suggests that students who considered leaving but decided to stay cared less about the UW understanding their stories than did students who left the UW.

Interestingly, 35 (about 4%) of the SERU students who responded to the question of why they had stayed at the UW noted that they had left but had come back. The longest reported time away was 10 years, and the shortest was one quarter. The reasons that these students who had returned noted for leaving were consistent with the open-ended responses of the former students who also left. In the words of three of the SERU students who had left the UW and returned:

- *I was not financially or emotionally ready to pursue a degree when I first started.*
- *I did leave in the middle of my sophomore year to help my family financially.*
- *I did leave, but returned later. The official reason for my departure was academic suspension, due to low scholarship, but that was a cumulative result of financial hardship and subsequent emotional distress.*

Sixteen themes, several with multiple subcategories, emerged from students' responses to the question of why they stayed at the UW instead of leaving. These themes are shown in order of frequency in Table 5-3.

Table 5-3. Main themes: "What made you decide not to leave?"

1. Decided to stick it out, do what I could to help it get better; I never quit	7. There are friends, people, classes and other things I love here
2. People gave advice/ helped me with my decision (especially family members)	8. Completing my degree/education matters to me
3. Majors: Found one, got into one, switched, helped me thrive (also given as a reason for coming back by students completing the survey who had left the UW and then returned)	9. Prestige: UW or my major has a good reputation
4. Things started getting better (e.g., grades, depression, interactions with faculty, classes)	10. I am still considering leaving
5. It was harder/more costly to try to transfer than to stay	11. UW was more affordable than other options
6. Too much time and money invested in UW already /too far along to leave now	12. The job or future I want makes a degree necessary
	13. Unclear response/answered why s/he wanted to leave
	14. Did not have good options
	15. Organization or group I was part of or joined helped me
	16. Got additional money to pay for tuition and expenses

The percentage of students identifying these themes and the subcategories associated with them are provided in Table 5-4. In addition, the table includes quotations from students that illustrate the theme and subcategories of response.

The top five reasons that students gave for staying. The most frequently-given reason for students' staying at the UW after they had considered leaving was that they just **decided to keep going**, even though they were experiencing problems. About 16% of the respondents gave deciding to "stick with it" as a reason for staying. Some of the students described this decision as linked to their own identity, as these two students did:

- *I was almost done with my degree and I'm not a quitter.*
- *To leave is to quit. To quit is to die.*

Others who were grouped in this theme of responses spoke about just thinking about the decision or just waiting out the problems they were having, as these three quotations illustrate:

- *I knew I would regret leaving if I did and that if I just toughed it out I would be able to get out of my funk.*
- *Waited it out and everything worked out.*
- *I thought about it.*

The second most frequently-given reason for leaving was **advice from or consideration of family, friends, and others**. Students spoke primarily of family members when speaking about getting advice or direction from others, but they also mentioned others, as the following examples illustrate:

- *My family strongly encouraged me to stay. I eventually decided to take a quarter off instead of leaving altogether.*
- *Encouragement from my friends and girlfriend. They helped me get back up.*
- *My parents convinced me to wait a little longer before making such a big decision. After switching majors, I felt much better about the quality of academics at UW and my opportunities here. Previously, I was very emotionally distressed due to feeling that I could not achieve the grades I wanted no matter how hard I worked.*
- *I could not get in Medical technology (MT) program. I wanted to leave to study at technical school. However, my adviser told me get in Microbiology program which related to MT program and reapply. Finally, I can get in the MT program*

Sometimes students spoke not of advice but of consideration of what they believed their families would desire, as this student did:

- *Family. I am the first generation to go to college, and I want to make them proud.*

Changes around **academic majors** and **improvement in the aspects of their UW experience** that made them consider leaving were the next two most frequently-given reasons for staying, each given by close to 12% of the respondents whose comments we analyzed. Regarding the major, the changes students noted were that they found a major they wanted to pursue; they got into a major that they had chosen; they switched out of a problematic major into one they liked better; or the major they were in helped them thrive. The following four examples illustrate this category of response:

- *The classes in my major made the academics better.*
- *After I told my family I was going to drop out, they convinced me to stay for a while longer. I continued to assume I would eventually drop out until I got into the Comparative History of Ideas major, at which point I began really enjoying school. My major dramatically changed my life for the better and has provided me with two extremely engaging years. The teachers are very interactive, interesting, and encouraging. I cannot thank the CHID major enough for what it's done for me.*
- *I got into my major.*
- *I found a major that I loved and I focused on bettering myself as a person and I made more of a commitment to learning... finally found a focus in my career here at UW with Political Economics and LSJ.*

The same number of students also spoke about other improvements in their UW experience. In addition to speaking of a general improvement or resolution to issues, these students spoke about specific improvements in their grades, their mental health, their living situations, the classes they were taking, and their social circles. The following quotations serve as examples of this category of response:

- *Making new friends, and getting back on my feet to improve my academic knowledge.*
- *Everything worked out alright. Not the money part but everything else.*
- *I slowly started to make more friends, I got more comfortable on campus, I talked to people about the issues I was having and explored some solutions, I got more involved, I planned for the future with the expectation that the UW was going to be a part of that, I opened up to my family about my worries.*
- *I came out of a depression and harmful relationship and stopped spending so much time intoxicated. At that point I was able to see clearly that I needed to stay.*

These two categories of response—finding/getting into a major and improvement in other areas of their experience--were nearly identical to the aspects of their experience that the former students we surveyed said had caused them to leave (Table 4-4). This result again confirms our sense that students who leave the UW and students who think about leaving but stay here have similar experiences. For the students who stay, those experiences often resolve themselves.

The fourth most frequently given reason for students staying at the UW was that it was **harder or more costly (in terms of time and money) to try to transfer than it was to stay**, a reason given by about 11% of the respondents. For example:

- *I did not want to have to deal with transferring. I've heard from people who've done it that it can get messy.*
- *It would have been a lot of work and effort to leave.*
- *Too much work to transfer.*

Already **having invested too much time and money** into the UW was the fifth most-frequently given reason for leaving, given by 9% of the respondents. Many of these students spoke of being “too far

along” in college to consider transferring or dropping out. The following quotations illustrate this category of response:

- *I had worked hard at what I was already pursuing and it wasn't worth it to me to throw in the towel and give up on two years' worth of money and effort.*
- *I'm too close to completing my degree. It would be a waste of the last few years if I left now.*
- *I had already invested so much in education at the UW that it would be unwise not to finish my studies. I came to terms with the fact that many of the most coveted majors are not distributed justly.*

Table 5-4. “What made you decide not to leave?”

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 1. Decided to stick it out, do what I could to help it get better; I never quit. n=147 (16.1%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decided to wait it out/see it through (106) 2. I never give up (33) 3. Other related (8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I wanted to stay because I wanted to prove to myself that I could make it till the end. It was a decision to continue down the path I chose and not get discouraged by anyone else's standards.</i> • <i>I am still a first year and I recognized that I was just going through a rough patch. I struggle with realizing that college is harder and it is okay that my GPA has dropped. Even though I haven't failed any classes, I feel like a failure for not pushing myself harder. However, I changed and decided to take the challenge and push through because dropping out will create more problems for me in the future.</i> • <i>It was more of a realization that I had already paid for the courses, that things (academically with my lessons) couldn't get any worse, and there were plenty of things I could do to make my time at the UW easier, like cutting working hours at my job and getting used to a new schedule of attending a university.</i> • <i>I do not quit. I face my challenges. It is an honor to study here, and I highly value higher education and academia regardless of any personal hardship.</i>
<p>Theme 2. People (mostly family/friends) gave advice/ helped me with my decision n=111 (12.1%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family and friends advised, supported, believed in, and helped me/did not want to disappoint family (86) 2. UW advisers helped me, including four departmental advisers and one from TRIO (12) 3. UW faculty advised me or made it worthwhile for me to stay (8) 4. Mentors or others helped (5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My mom told me to stick it out. These are trying times and the strong persevere due to their ability to make the most of their situations and to their ability to keep moving forward despite how much they want to quit. If it ever became too much that I honestly couldn't handle it anymore, then I'll leave, but thinking of my mom makes me stay. I'm doing this for me and for her. .</i> • <i>I did not earn enough credits to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress and I had to file an appeal for my financial aid. After, I met with an academic advisor and enrolled in a general studies class for struggling students. I also made a plan for getting into my major and things got better from there on out. I gained a new motivation to finish my time at UW.</i> • <i>My father told me that I had to stay and finish even if he had to put himself into debt to pay for school.</i> • <i>Peer and family pressure to finish my degree.</i>
<p>Theme 3. Majors – Found one, got into one, switched, helped me thrive (also given as a reason for coming back by students completing the survey who had left the UW and then returned) n=107 (11.7%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Figured out what I wanted to major in/got into the major I chose (75) 2. Switched majors (18) 3. My major helped me thrive, including 2 in Dance and 2 in CHID (14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I got into the social work major. The interactions that I had with students and faculty in the Social Work building made the awful experiences that I have with most science professors more bearable.</i> • <i>I found the design program, which was inspiring and challenging and intellectually and creatively stimulating</i> • <i>I did leave in 2007, almost 2 years after beginning courses at UW in Fall 2005. It took 4 years for me to realize what I wanted to major in, so I came back to UW fall of 2012.</i> • <i>I didn't want to drop out of school and UW was the only 4 year college I could afford to go to. Also, once I became active in the dance department, I found faculty and friends who were much more welcoming than general campus or than biology (my other major)</i> • <i>Got into my major</i>

Table 5-4. “What made you decide not to leave?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 4. Things started getting better (e.g., grades, depression, interactions with faculty, classes, social contact) n=107 (11.7%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Had more social contact/found community (56) 2. I am recovering//hard issues are clearing up (17) 3. Getting help for depression/anxiety (12) 4. Moved into a better living situation (10) 5. Grades started improving (8) 6. Other related (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Family issues cleared up.</i> • <i>The bad personal situation came to an end, and I was able to move on and enjoy classes again.</i> • <i>I didn't want to give up on what I knew would be a great education and experience, just had to get through that first year and move on to a different living situation with more compatible people.</i> • <i>I received counseling and medical help to alleviate my depression and anxiety problems.</i> • <i>I chose a new course load in the following academic year and worked very hard to raise my grades.</i>
<p>Theme 5. It was harder/more costly to try to transfer than to stay n=101 (11.1%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I did leave in the middle of my sophomore year to help my family financially. When I came back, I didn't leave because I was almost done with my education here and did not want to deal with the hassle of figuring out how to leave, go to a community college, and come back (if I needed to).</i> • <i>It would be too expensive and too much of a hassle to start again at a new institution. There were also some redeeming professors who made it worthwhile to stay.</i> • <i>It was easier to stay.</i>
<p>Theme 6. Too much time and money invested in UW already/ too far along to leave now n=84 (9.2%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Felt that I had already invested too much time and money to just quit. Better to get a degree, even in a field I am not passionate about, than to have completely wasted my time here.</i> • <i>I had put a lot of time and money into being at UW already, and leaving would cost more money and I'd probably lose credits while transferring.</i> • <i>I was close to graduating. I needed a school that was better equipped for my disability. Professors are not required to follow DRS accommodations and a lot wouldn't. Every quarter was a battle. As much as I wanted to get a better education elsewhere, I was close to graduating, and a degree from UW looks better than a degree from an online school.</i>
<p>Theme 7. There are friends, people, classes and other things I love here n=73 (8.0%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Friends, people, atmosphere, campus (51) 2. Courses and academic opportunities (22) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I received a great education here, and that's what kept me here, but the classes were huge, the teachers don't care if you succeed, and in such a competitive major it's almost impossible to make friends or form study groups.</i> • <i>I was so far in that I did not want to quit. I actually had some classes that I enjoyed and friends that went here. The organization I was a part of was good support.</i> • <i>I decided to minor in what truly held my interest, and came to the conclusion that I would regret not completing my degree and would feel emotionally worse away from college social groups.</i> • <i>I like people, food, and environment here.</i>
<p>Theme 8. Completing my degree/ education matters to me n=69 (7.5%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Want to get my degree (52) 2. Education matters to me/is important (17) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Despite everything academically and social that I had experienced here, the main reason I stay is because I came to UW for me, didn't come because of family or to make friend. And I am not a quitter. I will finish my degree and proudly call myself a Husky. Furthering my education comes before anything. I might not feel welcomed, but I love my classes even tho they are extremely challenging to handle all alone.</i> • <i>I felt my education was valuable.</i> • <i>I wanted a degree and was close to finishing.</i>

Table 5-4. “What made you decide not to leave?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 9. Prestige – UW or my major of choice has a good reputation n=58 (6.3%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My sorority and pride of going to a prestige university</i> • <i>I got into the major of my choice. I applied to other schools with the intent of leaving UW if I was not accepted into my major here. I chose to stay here because of the highly ranked major that I was accepted into.</i> • <i>I had already completed several courses and did not want to start over. Also, UW is prestigious.</i> • <i>I just decided it was not in my best interest. Even though I don't feel like the UW is the right school for me it is a great school and I will be proud to have a degree from the UW. I didn't want to sacrifice the prestige of going to UW for going to some small unknown school. I mainly wanted to go to the other school for the smaller classes and more personal relationships with the professors and decided it wasn't worth the complication as well.</i>
<p>Theme 10. I am still considering leaving n=54 (5.9%)</p> <p>1. I am still considering leaving (41) 2. I will leave the UW if I don't get into my major of choice (13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm still in the process of deciding. I am strongly considering transferring next year if I cannot get into the major I want.</i> • <i>I haven't been rejected from the major i want to get into yet so I still have a chance. I really like it here and don't want to leave but if I can't get into the major I want, I will be forced to switch to a school that will accept me.</i> • <i>I still am contemplating leaving but would be scared to leave with this much debt already.</i> • <i>I still am considering leaving because of the large atmosphere and geographic location</i>
<p>Theme 11. UW was more affordable than other options n=52 (5.7%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Other schools would cost much more financially, and transfer would not have necessarily solved problems.</i> • <i>UW was more affordable</i> • <i>Financially, UW was a better option than other schools. Also, it was most convenient to remain in Seattle than to try and transfer schools halfway through my degree.</i> • <i>Could not afford to go anywhere else because UW offered me the most financial aid.</i> • <i>I can't afford to pay for college elsewhere.</i>
<p>Theme 12. The job or future I want makes a degree necessary n=44 (4.8%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I need a degree!! I need to get a better paying job to support myself and my son, and I need a degree to do that!</i> • <i>I'm not going to become what I want (career wise) if I quit now.</i> • <i>Getting that paper saying I did the socially acceptable thing to get a better job.</i> • <i>I need to get into the business school and graduate and get a job that will pay generously.</i>
<p>Theme 13. Unclear response/ answered why s/he wanted to leave n=43 (4.7%)</p> <p>None</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cost of living alone</i> • <i>I did leave but was forced to come back.</i> • <i>Social anxiety and not being able to find classes in my major without a strong discussion component. Plus, fear that I was not spending my life the way I should because I was too busy with studies to practice drawing and painting.</i>

Table 5-4. “What made you decide not to leave?” (continued)

Themes and Subcategories (n)	Quotations
<p>Theme 14. Did not have good options n=39 (4.3 %)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No better options/GPA now too low to transfer (27) 2. Did not/probably could not get into other/better schools (12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I didn't see any alternatives.</i> • <i>Could not get a recommendation letter from faculty to transfer to another college because it was very difficult to get to know professors well enough to ask them for recommendations especially in the 1st and 2nd year classes where the class sizes were huge.</i> • <i>Couldn't come up with somewhere better.</i> • <i>I did not get into the schools I applied to.</i>
<p>Theme 15. Organization or group I was part of or joined helped me n=27 (3.0%)</p> <p>Organizations/groups mentioned included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASUW • Becoming a Resident Adviser • Engineering sorority • Filipino American Student Association • Intramural basketball • Q Center • Registered Student Organizations (unspecified) • ROTC • Seattle music community • Sorority or fraternity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Studying abroad! It helped me remove myself from the bad situation with bad roommates and make new friends at UW. Also joining a sorority helped me to gain really great friends who encouraged me to stay.</i> • <i>Simply speaking, I found a support group that was able to console and comfort me. The major crisis about me wanting to leave UW was financial problems, I was going to work full time instead. When I've made enough money I was going to attend community college. The support group was found by going around campus and finding clubs, the club I'm speaking of is called FASA (Filipino American Student Association).</i> • <i>The winter quarter changed dramatically, I actually did well in classes and made many new friends and played on intramural basketball teams. I actually tried to put myself out there in a social environment.</i>
<p>Theme 16. Got additional money to pay for tuition and expenses n=21 (2.3%)</p> <p>Sources of additional funding included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gambling • Got a job (or a second job) • Joined military • Moved back home • Parents/other family members gave more • Received emergency funding from academic department • Received financial aid • Received scholarship • Took out loans • Was granted in-state residency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I won 5 thousand dollars at a casino and was able to afford tuition.</i> • <i>I received financial help and made the somewhat tough decision to move home. This was hard because I was already lacking a sense of community at UW, but eventually found it through a club my junior year.</i> • <i>I got an extra job that helped me pay for school, living costs.</i> • <i>I value my education and earning a higher degree has been and is a big goal of mine. I also received financial help from family and friends to help keep me enrolled at UW.</i>
<p>Other (10 or fewer students) n=49 (5.4%)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wanted to be close to home (10) 2. Studied elsewhere, 7 abroad; 1 via NSE; 1 at Friday Harbor (9) 3. I wish I had left (5) 4. Got involved in research (4) 5. Started to feel more like I belonged (4) 6. Changes in family/partner plans or needs (3) 7. It was paid for (3) 8. Taking specific classes to see if that improves things (3) 9. Religious faith/reasons:(2) 10. Decided to put the other thing I wanted to do on hold (2) 11. I took an Academic Support Program course (1) 12. Sports (1) 13. I took fewer credits (1) 14. I wanted to stay in the US (1) 	

*Percentages add to more than 100% because students sometimes gave more than one response.

Summary

More students think about leaving the UW than actually leave, and their reasons for wanting to leave are nearly identical to the reasons students gave for leaving. In their book (1997) on why college students who were initially interested in majoring in the sciences decided to leave those majors, Seymour and Hewitt note that “the most common reasons for switching arose from a set of problems which, to varying degrees, were shared by switchers and non-switchers alike” (p. 30). SERU findings indicate that the same can be said about students who leave and students who stay.

Both the students who left and the students who stayed were unhappy with the large classes and the impersonal feel of the UW, and this unhappiness was probably the deepest in students’ first two years of college. Both students who stayed and students who left also experienced financial problems that put them in tough situations in relation to their academic lives, including the need to work, sometimes many hours, to support themselves in college; the need to take out loans that may be more than their parents earn in a year; the fear of leaving the UW in deep debt; and the concern that they are placing too great a financial burden on their families. As noted previously, financial issues concerned all, but they were an especially deep concern for underrepresented minority students at the UW. In addition, the difficulty students had in making new friends and finding a sense of belonging in a community here, their worries about getting into a major or finding a major they wanted to pursue, problems they had with roommates and living situations, and the drop in GPA that most students experienced in their first two years at the UW propelled students to think about leaving the UW, just as they actually caused students to leave.

Furthermore, both the students who left the UW and those who stayed reported high levels of depression and mental health issues. Close to 52% of those who left the UW reported “depression or emotional distress” as a partial or major reason for leaving; more than 61% of the students who stayed reported “depression or emotional distress” as a partial or major reason for thinking about leaving. These numbers indicate that thinking about leaving is frequently associated with depression or emotional distress and that any of the other reasons for students to consider leaving is likely to be accompanied by distress and unhappiness.

The differences between those who stay and those who leave appear to be that students who stay have 1) a sense of being supported, especially by family, in their push to complete their undergraduate degrees, 2) the ability to wait the hard time out and/or take some small steps to help resolve the issue, and 3) perhaps the ability to conduct a cost-benefit analysis, weighing how much trouble it might be to leave against how hard it is to stay. Again in the words of Seymour and Hewitt (1997): “What distinguished survivors from those who left was the development of particular attitudes or coping strategies—both legitimate and illegitimate. Serendipity also played a part in persistence” (p. 30).

Sense of Support

Students who left the UW reported not having enough support as one of their major reasons for leaving and one of their major recommendations for UW was to provide more support for students. When students spoke of a lack of support, they were speaking of support from the UW.

The students who considered leaving but stayed spoke of a different kind of support. Although several of those students reported seeking and getting help from advisers and other UW staff and faculty members, most of them reported getting advice and support from their parents and friends. Many also reported a strong sense of obligation to stay because of the expectations of parents and friends. It seems likely that the students who stayed had more support from others in their lives for staying than did the students who left.

The difference between these two kinds of support—one coming from inside the UW and the other primarily coming from outside it—perhaps gives the UW a two-directional approach to supporting students who are thinking of leaving. Bolstering the internal support that the UW already provides, such as advising, academic tutoring, counseling, financial aid assistance and helping families and friends encourage students to stay may be equally important retention strategies.

Furthermore, providing families with help in encouraging their UW students to stay in school in spite of adversity may be the more important of these two approaches. Citing multiple research studies that show the importance of parental encouragement to student persistence, Bean and Metzner (1985) state, “Students who are encouraged to remain in school by family and employers will probably do so despite poor academic advising or uncertainty of major” (p. 492). In the same study, Bean and Metzner also note that such encouragement may be more important for non-traditional college students than for others.

However, it may be easier for parents who have completed college themselves to encourage students to stay in college in spite of a bad grade or social isolation than for parents who have not completed college to do so. Because we know that almost every student undergoes some problems in college, particularly academic (Beyer et al., 2007; Tough, 2014), it is likely that parents who completed college had to move through difficulties themselves. Therefore, they know not only what to say to their sons and daughters about ways to seek help, but they also know that their sons and daughters can expect things to improve in college over time.

In contrast, parents who have not completed college may not know what kinds of bumps are normal experiences for college students, so they may be less sure of what to advise. This might, in part, explain, why first-generation students tend to leave college more frequently than students whose parents completed college degrees. An interesting example of this idea can be found in the case that begins Paul Tough’s (2014) recent *New York Times Magazine* article, “Who Gets to Graduate?” A student who has had an academic failure in a class contacts her mother for reassurance, and her mother, who has not graduated from college herself, tells her: “Maybe you just weren’t meant to be there. Maybe we should have sent you to a junior college first.” The daughter told the reporter, “I died inside when she said that. I didn’t want to leave. But it felt like that was maybe the reality of the situation. You know, moms are usually right. I just started questioning everything: Am I supposed to be here? Am I good enough?”

Because of higher dropout rates of first generation students than for students whose parents completed college, the UW might need to consider ways to help parents support their UW students, as well as strengthening UW supports.

Ability to “Wait It Out,” Not Be a “Quitter,” and the Question of “Grit”

Assuming that the students who stayed had less need for support also makes sense in light of their first (decided to stick with it), third (found or got into a major they liked), and fourth (things got better) reasons for staying, as well. Deciding to remain at the UW and do what they could to persevere in hard times is likely more possible when students are experiencing one or two hardships—for example, depression and a drop in GPA—than when the hardships are multiple and intertwined—for example, depression, a drop in GPA, not enough money to pay for housing, and microaggression. Getting support might also help alleviate the depression and distress, allowing students to take a few steps to help improve their situation, such as seeing an adviser, joining a study group, or reaching out to peers socially.

The importance of students entering a major, especially a major they choose and especially one that they feel great about—students’ third most frequently given reason for staying at the UW—is closely related to students’ decisions to “stick with” the UW. Entering a major often clears up the problems

students were experiencing with the quality of the academic experience, particularly the large class sizes and the impersonal feel of the UW. It also often connects students to other students with like interests, giving them social communities that also serve as sources of study groups, thereby, improving students' sense of social isolation and their grades. Issues around the major—not getting into one of their choice, not finding what they wanted at the UW, and so on—were the third reason students' gave for leaving the UW. Close to one in five of the students who left (about 19%) reported that issues in the major were a reason they left the UW, and 16% said that they had transferred to get the majors and courses they wanted and needed elsewhere.

A number of the students who stayed noted that they stayed because things got better. The sense that those areas of one's life that were causing difficulty are improving reinforces a "stick with it and wait it out" approach to problems. Perhaps for students who left the UW, there was no sense of improvement but just the experience of things getting worse or more complicated because of the waiting. This might be especially true of students experiencing financial difficulties or the sense—communicated by low grades, by social isolation, or by racial microaggression—that they do not belong on campus. However, research (Walton and Cohen, 2011; Tough, 2014) suggests that institutions can design interventions that define difficulties in college as short-lived, which motivate students to "wait out" the hard times they are experiencing, allowing space for improvement.

Some of the students who waited it out linked that decision to their identities as people who "never quit," which raises the question of the role of "grit" in students' decisions to stay in college even as they are considering leaving. Much has been written in the past few years about the role of "grit" in perseverance. Angela Duckworth and her colleagues (2007, 2009) define grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p. 1087) and developed a survey to measure grit, administering it to students, West Point cadets, and spelling bee participants. Duckworth et al. (2007) discovered that students who completed college were higher on the grit scale than others, and participants with a two-year degree were higher on that scale than those with less education. Furthermore, Duckworth et al. found that grit was not positively related to IQ and that it increased over one's lifetime. They also learned that undergraduates at an elite university who scored higher on the grit scale had higher GPAs than their peers, even though their entering SAT scores were lower. Duckworth et al. conclude: "To the extent that the temptation to give up is greater for individuals of modest ability, grit may matter more, not less" (p. 1099).

Researchers, such as Strayhorn (2013), have tested Duckworth's grit scale on specific populations with the same result. Strayhorn found, for instance, that grit was positively associated with academic outcomes such as grades in college for African American males at predominantly white institutions (2013).

Although Duckworth's studies on grit have captured the imaginations of many, earning her a MacArthur Award and a TED talk, others have argued the critical importance of non-cognitive variables in student success before her, notably Sedlacek (2004). Sedlacek began researching the effects of non-cognitive variables on student success in the 1980s, beginning with a focus on predicting the success of African American students and later extending that work, with a variety of colleagues, to a many groups of students. In every study, scores on instruments such as the Noncognitive Questionnaire predicted grades, retention, and college completion better than SAT scores or high school GPAs (Sedlacek, 2004).

Accepting that personal characteristics, values, habits of mind, and qualities of character, such as grit, may play key roles in students' decisions to either "stick with it" or leave the UW does not give us much information about how to foster those variables. Furthermore, we have no way of knowing what happens to "grit" when it interacts with multiple hardships, such as the combination of financial difficulty, a parent who has just been diagnosed with cancer, an environment that feels hostile, and a failing grade in chemistry.

In addition, it is likely that students' ability to "wait it out" or their "grit" is affected by their assumptions about learning. Research (Blackwell et al., 2007, Kimball and Smith, 2013; Levy et al., 1998) has shown that students who believe that their brains are malleable and that, therefore, they can change how intelligent they are do better in school than students who believe that people are born with a certain amount of intelligence and they can do little to change that. In other words, thinking that students "either get it or they don't" is both inaccurate and harmful to intellectual development and student success. Students who know that their academic efforts are likely to result in understanding, then, are more likely to demonstrate "grit" than students who believe or are taught otherwise.

Obviously, what causes students to wait out their hardships or persist in the face of them is complex and requires further study. However, the evidence suggests that no student would be harmed by knowing about brain plasticity and the importance of noncognitive variables in students' success. Furthermore the research by Walton and Cohen (2011) on interventions designed to reframe students' assumptions about failure and belonging is promising.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Many of the students who had considered leaving the UW but decided to stay went through a kind of cost-benefit analysis for leaving. The vast majority of these students were considering leaving to transfer somewhere else, rather than leaving to become employed full-time. These students reported that they believed that it would be harder to leave the UW than to stay. They did not want to take the time and money to apply to transfer; they learned that they could not get into institutions where they might want to enroll; they felt that they had put in too much time, effort, and money into their UW educations already; and they realized that the UW was both more prestigious than many other institutions and that, especially compared with small private or out-of-state schools, it was more affordable than institutions they may have wanted to transfer into.

It seems as though this kind of cost-benefit analysis would be more successful for students who had already committed at least two years to the UW than for first- or second-year students. However, as the "Analysis of Existing Data" section of this report shows, some students leave the UW further along in their time here. Therefore, it is important to know the costs and benefits this population of students is considering when they decide to leave and especially the roles of climate and financial issues in that analysis.

Financial Issues and Students Who Leave

Both students who left and students who stayed at the UW reported having problems with finances. More than a third of the students who left the UW indicated that financial reasons were a partial or major cause of their leaving, and close to one in four of those students who left described financial concerns in their open-ended responses to a question about why they had left the UW. In comparison, more than half (58%) of those who considered leaving but stayed at the UW noted that financial reasons were a partial or a major reason for why they had considered leaving. These results show that for students who leave and for students who think about leaving but stay, money matters are a pressing concern.

Our analysis also showed that for students who left the UW, financial concerns were stronger reasons for the underrepresented minority students who left the UW than for Asian American or White students who left. Emile Pitre, Associate Vice President of OMA&D and the person in OMA&D primarily responsible for assessment, predicted this finding, noting that the national research confirms it. Indeed, research (Adams, 2013) showing that Pell grants now cover about a third of the costs of a four-year public university education indicates the gravity of students' financial need.

In addition to causing their own problems for students, it is important to consider here that financial problems may be “stickier” than other reasons for leaving the UW. Financial problems often cannot be resolved by having supportive people in one’s life, by a decision to “wait things out,” by an “I don’t quit” identity, or by a cost-benefit analysis about transferring to another institution. Therefore, identifying ways to help all students find support, manage expectations and exhibit patience with themselves and the university, and consider the costs of leaving may benefit many, but the UW will also need to identify ways to help students address the costs of college. This challenge is not unique to the UW but is, in fact, a national concern.

6. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“I was unable to find the support I needed from the UW. Staff and students were not welcoming or interpersonal, but more closed off and cold. Being welcomed as a person and truly cared about by at least one person, having any sort of support system, would have helped.” —Former UW Student

The University of Washington has excellent retention and completion rates. Over the years, the UW’s first-to-second year retention rate has been 91-93%, and the average four-, five-, and six-year retention rates tracked in this study were 64%, 79%, and 81% respectively. Nevertheless, there are areas in the retention/completion picture that the UW could improve.

As noted previously in this report, the purposes of this study were to address the following questions:

- Which groups of students, if any, are more likely than others to leave the UW before graduating?
- Why do they leave?
- How might we intervene in future students’ decisions to leave before graduating?

Who Leaves?

Both our analysis of existing data and our surveys on students who left the UW and students who stayed gave us insights into who might leave the UW.

The overall six-year graduation rate for freshman entrants is 81% and for transfer entrants 83%. The following groups of students have significantly lower six-year graduation rates, as follows:

- Pacific Islanders (68% compared with 82% for White and Asian American students)
- Native American students (69% compared with 82% for White and Asian American students)
- Students who are part-time at entry (69% compared with 82% for full-time students)
- African American students (71% compared with 82% for White and Asian American students)
- Out-of-state U.S. residents (72% compared with 83% for WA residents and 87% for international students)
- Hispanic students (77% compared with 82% for White and Asian American students)
- First-generation students (78% compared with those who are 84% of not first generation students)
- Students who are PELL eligible (79% compared with 82% of students who are not Pell eligible)
- Students whose average first-year GPA was 2.6 or lower.
- Students seeking but not accepted into nursing, engineering, and (possibly) business majors

Please note that these groups are not discrete; one student may be a member of several groups.

Information on retention shows that of the students who leave the UW:

- More than two-thirds (about 68%) of the women who left were gone by their third anniversary compared with 56% of the men who left before graduating.
- Close to half (47%) of Native American students who did not graduate left before their first anniversary (compared with 38% of non-Native American students).
- Fewer Asian American non-graduates than other non-graduates dropped before the second quarter (about 8% vs. 13%) and were more likely to continue through their fourth anniversary and beyond (20% vs. 14%).
- More than one-third (35%) of the part-time entrants who left the UW stopped after their first quarter, compared with 8% of those students who entered full-time and then dropped.

- Students who left the UW after one quarter tended to have higher high school GPAs than those who left later.

Why Do Students Leave?

As our previous studies (Office of Educational Assessment and Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 2006; Office of Educational Assessment, 2006b; Office of Educational Assessment, 1994) noted, this current retention study also found that students rarely have only one reason for leaving the UW. Rather, they have a variety of reasons that interact with each other, and that interaction causes them to leave. The most-frequently given reasons for leaving offered by those who left and those who considered leaving but stayed were as follows:

- Emotional distress/depression; health and well-being
- Financial reasons
- Quality of the academic experience (classes too big, not learning much, not getting money's worth)
- Not doing well academically; problems with grades or credits
- Social isolation
- Issues related to major (couldn't get into engineering or nursing; didn't have the major I wanted at UW)
- Felt unwelcome here/bad personal experience here

How Might the UW Intervene?

We offer the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Disseminate findings from this study widely throughout UW Seattle, particularly to the individuals and groups who participated in the community conversations and others engaged in retention efforts. Our hope is to inform ongoing work and to generate questions for further analysis and future study.

Recommendation 2: Hire an individual with the responsibility for coordinating retention efforts campus-wide and leading efforts to identify and resolve issues that relate to baccalaureate completion at UW Seattle. According to an ACT (2010) survey completed by chief academic affairs officers at 1,107 colleges and universities, including 258 public four-year universities, most (69.4%) of the public four-year institutions reported that there was a person on their campuses responsible for the coordination of retention programs. The individual with the responsibility of centrally coordinating retention efforts would conduct or coordinate interventions with students who are identified by this study as at risk for leaving and to design interventions such as those described in Walton and Cohen (2011) and Tough (2014).

Recommendation 3: Convene a task force to work with the individual responsible for coordinating retention to review findings from this report and construct a strategic plan for retention at UW-Seattle. The explicitly stated goal of the task force would be to increase the six-year graduation rate beyond 81% and to identify clear, evidence-based objectives that may be established and pursued with that goal in mind. Based on the findings of this study, the task force should consider the following:

- The effects of all forms of financial aid on retention and ways to increase work-study opportunities
- Ways to provide students with additional information about depression and anxiety and to ensure that timely access to counseling is available for students seeking help for both major and minor depression

- Methods for improving the retention of underrepresented minority students, part-time students, and out-of-state students, whose retention rates are lower than those of others
- Methods for identifying and intervening with undergraduates whose UW GPAs fall below 2.6 in the first year
- Ways to help students have realistic expectations about typical academic experiences at UW and to enlist their parents in helping them in times of academic difficulty
- Approaches to ease students' feelings of social isolation, especially in their first two years at UW
- Ways to help those monitoring and assisting special populations track those populations
- The effects of current UW policies on retention, including financial holds on registration, course withdrawal policy, credit and quarter limit rules, emergency loan pay-back policy, hardship withdrawal

Recommendation 4: Consider retention issues related to graduate and professional students at UW Seattle, and collaborate with UW Bothell and Tacoma on retention matters in ways that are useful to them.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the big and small, direct and indirect ways everyone who works at the UW is working to help students complete their degrees. The effort noted in the table in Appendix B, which represents only a portion of the retention work on campus, is laudable and contributes significantly to the UW having excellent first-year retention and six-year completion rates.

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APPENDIX A. SURVEY OF STUDENTS WHO LEFT

Introductory Email

Dear Former UW Student,

The University of Washington is conducting a study on why students leave the UW before they graduate and what the UW might do in the future to help students complete their degrees here. You have been identified as a student who left the UW before graduating. We hope that you'll complete this survey to give us more information about that decision. Your perspective is valuable to the UW, and it may be extremely valuable to future UW students. **For your help in this project, you will be entered into a drawing for one of twelve \$200 Visa gift cards.** All students who complete the survey by the Friday, March 21st deadline will be entered in our March 24th drawing.

The following questionnaire should take you about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Please note that close to the end of the questionnaire, we provide you with the opportunity to indicate your willingness to participate in an optional follow-up phone interview in case you'd like to tell us more about your experience.

Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary and completely confidential. You may choose to skip questions if you don't want to answer them. Survey results will be reported only as group summaries, and if quotations from student responses to open-ended questions are used to illustrate points in reports, quotations will never be linked to students' identities. The OEA has a 40-year history of protecting the confidentiality of UW participants.

Thank you for helping us improve the experience of undergraduates at the UW!

Sincerely,
Jon Peterson
UW Study of Retention and Completion
Office of Educational Assessment

P.S. If you are indeed still enrolled at the UW we apologize for our oversight -- sometimes institutional records aren't exactly correct.

P.P.S. If you receive this invitation at multiple e-mail addresses please complete the survey only once.
Thank you!

APPENDIX A. SURVEY OF STUDENTS WHO LEFT (CONTINUED)

Survey

Question 1

What follows is a list of financial, academic, and personal reasons that students who have left the UW have given for why they left. Please indicate which of the following reasons, if any, contributed to your decision to leave the UW.

Financial reasons	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason
a. I got into debt and needed to drop out to pay it off.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. I lost my job or hours in my job and could no longer afford college costs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. I took out a short term loan and couldn't pay it back.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. I was worried about taking out loans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. My parent/guardian could/would no longer contribute to my educational costs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. My parent/guardian lost his/her job, and I needed to drop out to help support him/her.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Scholarship funds ran out or were not renewed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. The UW would not let me register because of money I owed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Other financial reason	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 2

Please indicate which of the following reasons, if any, contributed to your decision to leave the UW.

Academic reasons	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason
a. UW classes were too big.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. I was not doing well academically.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. I could not figure out what I wanted to major in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. I did not get into my first choice of major.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. I did not like the major I got into.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. I was interested in pursuing a degree or training elsewhere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. I did not feel that I was getting my money's worth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. The UW would not let me register because of low GPA.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Other academic reason	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 3

Please indicate which of the following reasons, if any, contributed to your decision to leave the UW.

Personal or family reasons	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason
a. I felt socially alone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. I felt unwelcome here.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. I couldn't motivate myself to work hard in my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. I had a bad experience with roommate(s).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. I was emotionally depressed or distressed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. I had a bad personal experience here.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. I had challenges related to my disability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. I had physical health-related issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX A. SURVEY OF STUDENTS WHO LEFT (CONTINUED)

Question 4

Please indicate which of the following reasons, if any, contributed to your decision to leave the UW.

Personal or family reasons (continued)	Not a reason	A minor reason	A major reason
a. I was homesick.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. My family needed me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. A family member died or got sick.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Parenting needs caused me to leave.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. I experienced sexual assault or violence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. I was a victim of a crime.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. I felt discriminated against at the UW based on my identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Other personal or family reason	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 5

Besides the reasons already suggested by this survey, what else (if anything) contributed to your decision to leave the UW? (open-ended)

Question 6

What, if anything, could the UW have done to keep you from leaving? (open-ended)

Question 7

What have you done since you left the UW? Please check all that apply to you:

<input type="checkbox"/>	a. Attended another college, university, or school
<input type="checkbox"/>	b. Completed a four-year college degree
<input type="checkbox"/>	c. Completed a 2-year program/certificate
<input type="checkbox"/>	d. Worked full-time
<input type="checkbox"/>	e. Worked part-time
<input type="checkbox"/>	f. Traveled
<input type="checkbox"/>	g. Raising a family
<input type="checkbox"/>	h. Joined the military
<input type="checkbox"/>	i. Applied to, attended, or completed graduate/ professional school
<input type="checkbox"/>	j. Started my own business
<input type="checkbox"/>	k. Other (specify): <input style="width: 200px;" type="text"/>

Question 8

We will be contacting a sample of students who have left the UW to gather more detailed information about their experiences. If you provide a phone number that works best for you here, we will make every effort to call you for a 15-20 minute interview. Please note that the identities of all interviewees will be kept anonymous and that we may not be able to contact everyone who provides a contact number below. Those who participate in a phone interview will be awarded a \$25 Visa gift card for their help.

Demographic Information. We often analyze responses by students' demographic information in order to know if the experience of students in some groups differs from that of students in others. Your responses to these questions are entirely **optional**.

APPENDIX A. SURVEY OF STUDENTS WHO LEFT (CONTINUED)

Question 9

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other:

Question 10

What is your race/ethnicity? (Please check all that apply)

- Asian
- Black/African American
- Filipino
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Caucasian/White
- Other:

Question 11

Do any of the following also describe your status while a student at the UW?

- Disabled
- Entered the UW as a transfer student
- Entered the UW as an international student
- Entered the UW as an out-of-state resident
- First generation in my family to go to college
- Received financial aid while at UW
- U. S. Military Veteran
- Was mostly a part-time student (as opposed to full-time)

APPENDIX B. UW CONVERSATIONS: RETENTION EFFORTS

Unit: Academic Support Programs – UAA

Anne Browning (Academic Support Programs also include CLUE, see separate entry)

- Offers Academic Achievement Courses, General Studies 101, seminars that integrate challenging course content with academic skills acquisition for students, who are struggling with their transition into the university. Work primarily with first generation, athletes, non-traditional freshmen, sophomores, transfers, under-represented populations, and international students who are referred to the program by departmental or UAA advisers, or are recruited based on GPA (those just above and below the 2.0 mark) and enrollment in large classes. ASP also collaborates with the UAA Advisers Reinstatement committee for referrals. Courses encourage students to engage in academics through interesting course content and through addressing essential study skills necessary for independent learning, such as note-taking, writing, test-taking, university resources, meeting with professors, etc. Students attend a two-hour weekly seminar and also are required to attend three hours of one-on-one tutoring with their tutor-mentors every week.
- Tutors and mentors students in the Academic Achievement Courses. Juniors and seniors, many of whom took an Academic Achievement course early in their UW experience, work with students while enrolled in EDUC 401, Tutoring and Mentoring in Higher Education, course to learn about the holistic pedagogical approach to cultivating independent learning for General Studies students.
- Academic Achievement Courses are always filled beyond capacity; and the program has to turn away many students who want to be tutor-mentors

Unit: Admissions

Philip Ballinger, Emily Leggio

Uses holistic admissions practice to bring in students most likely to succeed at UW

Unit: Advising – Academic/Departmental

Responses to email query from academic advisers representing 27% of the undergrad majors at UW and all colleges

- Works one-on-one with students on progress to degree
- Help students identify alternate routes through college “when changing life circumstances create difficulty”
- Reaches out to students with low grades in major or other satisfactory progress issues
- Reaches out to students who applied to graduate but did not do so
- Holds skills workshops about careers and job search
- Proactively contacts seniors so they can get the classes they’re missing or don’t know about
- Sends students an updated copy of their course list completion a few times a year
- Helps students find emergency funding
- Tracks students about to hit 165 and 210 credits and ask them to come in
- Contacts students who have not enrolled for two quarters or more
- Tries to build sense of community

Unit: Advising – Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity (OMA&D)

Sheila Edwards Lange

- Offers one-to-one advising and assistance to UW students, particularly students from low-income families, students who will be the first in their family to graduate from a four-year college, underrepresented minority students, and EOP students.
- Conducts outreach with students.
- Conducts new student orientation for students of color.
- Hosts an annual spring recognition ceremony to honor students’ academic achievement.
- Houses CAMP (seen entry) and TRIO SSS.
- Provides financial advising via TRIO SSS.
- Offers students a confidential, online form for feedback on advising visits or other issues.

APPENDIX B. UW CONVERSATIONS: RETENTION EFFORTS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Advising – Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA)

Kurt Xyst, Michaelann Jundt

- Assigns an adviser to each entering student, with whom students will work until they declare/seek a major.
- Conducts quarterly outreach to assigned students.
- Operates on shared learning goals for students across advisers, as follows:
 - Cultivate an appreciation of socially relevant questions, problems, and responsibilities
 - Communicate a critical, individual interpretation of the Areas of Knowledge
 - Find meaning in their choice of major
 - Effectively manage academic resources
 - “Low Scholarship” team of advisers works with students whose academic progress is not robust.
 - Provides individual outreach (and an invitation to meet with an adviser) for all students on academic probation
 - Requires advising meetings for all students seeking reinstatement to the UW (after being dropped for low scholarship)
 - Members of the Reinstatement Committee and low scholarship team devise ways of connecting students with other academic resources, including programs through Academic Support Programs (CLUE or academic achievement courses), other academic support centers, or college and departmental resources and advisers

Unit: Career Center

Susan Terry

- Staff have made an organized effort to reach out to students who were turned down by majors, although it is hard to get them into a room with others who were turned down.
- Offers workshops on career counseling for departmental advisers

Unit: Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment (CLUE) - Academic Support Programs – UAA

Anne Browning

- Provides late night subject-specific tutoring for a wide range of challenging courses divided into drop-in tutoring for sciences, writing center and foreign languages, as well as discussion and exam review sessions for large lecture courses.
- Works primarily with first generation, athletes, non-traditional and traditional freshmen, sophomores, transfers, under-represented populations, and international students
- Seeks to empower learners by meeting them at their current skill levels while encouraging them to take risks and accept challenges
- Brings together students who might not otherwise interact academically and socially into vibrant learning communities with shared academic goals.
- CLUE records more than 40,000 student visits per year.

Unit: Center for Teaching and Learning

Beth Kalikoff

- Helps faculty to improve the quality of the academic experience for students
- Helps faculty understand the ways students experience the university.
- Supports UW learning initiatives with faculty training (e.g., diversity requirement)
- Puts faculty in conversation with one another about their teaching experiences.
- Encourages use of student and faculty self-reflection as tools for understanding teaching and learning.

APPENDIX B. UW CONVERSATIONS: RETENTION EFFORTS (CONTINUED)

Unit: College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)

Luz M. Iniguez

- Provides seasonal or migrant farm workers or their dependents with intensive advising, tutoring, and mentoring (see TRIO)
- Conducts outreach to students
- Offers financial support to students
- Assists students in finding jobs, financial aid, and scholarships
- Provides continuing support to students beyond their first year at UW
- Requires students to participate in monthly advising, mentoring, seminar, and study tables
- Conducts exit survey
- Creates community
- Had 100% retention in 2013

Unit: College of Engineering See also Advising – Academic entry

Scott Winter, Dan Feetham

- Runs the Engineering Academic Center (EAC) where engineering students can get academic help
- Focuses on retention of underrepresented and women engineering majors. Offers Minority Scholars Engineering Program (MSEP), a recruitment and retention program for underrepresented students in engineering and computer science.
- Offers Women in Science and Engineering program (WiSE), supporting women of all ethnic backgrounds in science and engineering.
- Advising attempts to intervene with students having trouble with GPA and works with pre-engineering majors who are not accepted into engineering programs to help them find programs at other institutions or alternative majors at UW.

Unit: Counseling Center

Ellen Taylor

- Offers students help with psychological/stress-related issues. Depression seems to be a serious problem for many students.
- Reaches out to students who have been hospitalized, are victims of crime, and other things at UW than previously (Sexual Assault & Relationship Violence-SARIS).

Unit: Disability Resource Services

Bree Callahan, Jon McGough, Krista Greear

- Offers accommodations to students with disabilities, including reduced-course accommodations linked to financial aid.
- Helps students with appeal process for 12 quarters, financial aid, general academic progress, and other policies
- DRS is serving 60% more students than they were four years ago.
- Conducted a survey in 2008 of students who used services and linked to services offered.

Unit: Foundation for International Understanding Through Students (FIUTS)

Era Schrepfer

- Supports retention by connecting university students with local and global communities through programs that build intercultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, and informed leadership.
- Coordinates International Student Orientation, social events, and community-building activities, short-term homestays, student leadership development, and K-12 education outreach.

APPENDIX B. UW CONVERSATIONS: RETENTION EFFORTS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Graduate School

Dave Eaton, Becky Aanarud, Kelly Edwards, Gino Aisenberg, Cynthia Morales

- Go-Map works to recruit and retain under-represented minority students in UW graduate programs.

Unit: International Student Services (ISS)

Paoline Ferrese

- Supports the retention of international students by providing information and advising on the restrictions imposed and benefits accorded by their immigration status.
- Assists international students in resolving academic, financial and personal difficulties in coordination with faculty, department advisers, and other University resources.

Unit: LSAMP

Gabriel Gallardo

- Program's goal is to increase the number of students who complete bachelor's degrees in STEM fields. National literature "drives our work": 50% of underrepresented students in STEM fields drop out of those fields.
- Prioritizes students for instructional support at the IC
- Helps students identify internship and research possibilities

Unit: Office of Educational Assessment

Nana Lowell

- Conducts studies on the undergraduate experience, including this retention study and the 2006 retention study.
- Provides course evaluations so students have a voice in their classroom experience.
- Makes recommendations to faculty, staff, and administrators regarding improving the quality of academic experience, climate, and co-curricular programming for undergraduates.
- Works with departments on assessing learning in the major.

Unit: Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMA&D)

Sheila Edwards Lange, Emile Pitre, Gabe Gallardo

- OMA&D is dedicated to the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority students, as well as to the improvement of campus climate for all students. The office conducts extensive research on persistence and completion and offers a wide range of programs for underrepresented students. Some of the programs and services affiliated with OMA&D that have direct and indirect impacts on retention include:
 - Champions Program
 - College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) (see separate entry)
 - Diversity Scholars program
 - Early Identification Program for Graduate and Professional Studies
 - Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center/Theater
 - Initiative for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD) in the health sciences
 - Instructional Center (IC) providing academic tutoring, skills development workshops, test preparation, review sessions, and study packets (see Study Centers entry)
 - Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) (see separate entry)
 - OMA&D Counseling Services (see separate entry)
 - OMA&D High School Tutor/Mentor Program
 - ROAR (Reach Out and Reconnect) re-entry program
 - Study Abroad Initiatives
 - TRIO Student Support Services (see separate entry)

APPENDIX B. UW CONVERSATIONS: RETENTION EFFORTS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Q Center

Jennifer Self, Jaimee Marsh

- Works with resident halls, OMA&D, counseling to get information out about themselves.
- Works on establishing safe spaces/safe zones.
- Surveys students served by the center, including a report where 15 transsexual students discuss their experience.
- Mentorship program is both a retention strategy and “identity development”
- Provides crisis intervention for students who do not feel safe elsewhere.
- Working to get a gender/sexual orientation question on the new acceptance survey in Admissions.
- Trying to build a preferred name choice in student dbase.
- Big part of work: undoing the oppression students are feeling.
- Offers advising that provides both academic and social support, as well as identity support.
- Offers celebratory programming.

Unit: Resident Halls

Pam Schreiber, Deborah Costar

- Resident Advisers (RAs) are a safety net for students, linking them to other resources – if the student speaks about issues. Every RA meets one-on-one with each student each quarter.
- Offers activities and programs to introduce students to clubs and opportunities; create community through the residence hall
- National research shows that living in a residence hall is a retention strategy because it increases student satisfaction and sense of connection.
- Offers 10 living-learning communities – academic and interest-based, which should help retention.
- Conducts exit surveys and use results to improve service.
- Asks students to evaluate RAs.

Unit: Student-Athlete Academic Services

Kim Durand

- Tracks all aspects of student athletes’ academic performance and intervene when students are having difficulties.
- Offers advising, counseling, and academic help to student athletes.
- Assists student athletes with post-college career planning.

Unit: Student Life

Denzil Suite, Lincoln Johnson

- All programs and organizations in student life focus on student engagement, which research suggests is directly linked to retention. See also separate entries for:
 - Career Center
 - Counseling Center
 - Disability Services Center
 - Q Center
 - Resident Halls
 - Student Life – Assessment
 - Veteran’s Center (see separate entry)

APPENDIX B. UW CONVERSATIONS: RETENTION EFFORTS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Student Life - Assessment

Glenna Chang

- Assists programs in student life with assessment of their work with students.

Unit: TRiO Student Support

Kristian Wiles

- Program to retain and support incoming low-income students, first-generation students, students with a defined academic need, and/or students with disabilities each year.
- Provides holistic and comprehensive advising.
- Provides instructional support.
- Offers workshops and seminars on financial planning, writing, graduate school applications, and financial aid applications.
- Offers workshops and cultural events for students.
- Offers social connections for students.

Unit: Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Ed Taylor, Jason Johnson, Janice DeCosmo, Michaelann Jundt, Jim Clauss, Suzanne Mercier, Judi Gray

- UAA offers a range of programs that are both directly and indirectly aimed at retention and graduation including:
- Academic Support Programs (see separate entry)
- Carlson Leadership and Public Service Center
- Center for Experiential Learning and Diversity
- Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment (CLUE) (see separate entry)
- Center for Teaching and Learning (see separate entry)
- Dream Project
- Freshman Interest Groups
- Freshman Seminars
- Office of Educational Assessment (see separate entry)
- Student-Athlete Academic Services (see separate entry)
- UAA Advising (see separate entry)

Unit: Veterans Center

Tim Wold

- Offers information and refers students to resources especially to the Counseling Center, Disability Resources for Students, Health and Wellness, and undergraduate advising
- Works with financial aid for vets, giving waivers, benefits, and assistance navigating financial aid.
- Collaborates with Career Center to put on workshops for vets. Transition to the workforce is a big issue for vets.
- Works on veteran appreciation week.

APPENDIX C. UW CONVERSATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS

Unit: Admissions

Philip Ballinger, Emily Leggio

"We need to..."

- Understand how our policies—such as financial holds on registration, course withdrawal policy, major admission policies, and course credit holds on registration--affect student outcomes.
- Understand what leavers have in common.
- Know how many students could apply to graduate but don't.
- Understand the difference between back-up majors (economics instead of business for example) and majors for which there are no UW back-ups (nursing and engineering, for example)—and how we talk about those majors to students.
- Examine the success of direct admits to majors.

Unit: Advising – Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA)

Kurt Xyst, Michaelann Jundt

"We need to..."

- Understand changes in UW student demographics and what needs those changes signal.
- Track how changes in policy (e.g., allocation of quarters policy) might affect retention.

Unit: Career Center

Susan Terry

"We need to..."

- Have more information on students and what happens to them here.
- Have a combined effort between career counseling and academic advising to reach out to departments.
- Understand more about the internship experience for students. At present there is no centralized internship center, no centralized way of knowing about them.

Unit: Center for Teaching and Learning

Beth Kalikoff

"We need to..."

- Know more about the experience of students with disabilities.
- Understand more about the impact of needing to work on student success.
- Help students have more realistic expectations about what success means.
- Understand what research says about retention; implement what has been shown to be successful, such as participation in learning communities, deep connections with faculty/staff on campus who ask about students' experience (e.g., UW SOUL).

Unit: College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)

Luz M. Iñiguez

"We need to..."

- Develop tools to gather data consistently across programs

APPENDIX C. UW CONVERSATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Counseling Center

Ellen Taylor

"We need to..."

- Contact non-completers every year. "Wouldn't it be awesome if every single year, we give 50 students the chance to give their stories
- Develop one-on-one relationships with students who are struggling but not necessarily academically; the average GPA of counseling center users is 3.4.
- Interested in the effects of outreach on retention.

Unit: Disability Resource Services

Bree Callahan, Jon McGough, Krista Greear

"We need to..."

- Study the ways interactions between causes lead to withdrawal. For example, the same financial and family issues other students face affects DRS students but also health flare-ups and changes in medical conditions also influence their students' completion rates.
- Look at students' retention by college.
- Gather more data on students with disabilities, including those who do not use DRS. Disabilities at UW may be under-reported. Only 2.5% of UW students in the student database say they are disabled, and, based on national statistics, the true number is likely closer to 11%.
- Understand climate for students with disabilities, as well as for faculty/staff with disabilities.
- Identify and consider the needs of the "hidden" disabled—such as those with chronic health issues.

Unit: Graduate School

Dave Eaton, Becky Aanarud, Kelly Edwards, Gino Aisenberg, Cynthia Morales

"We need to..."

- Understand both microaggression and micro-resistance.
- Be aware of both institutional and departmental climate; both are important to retention.
- Understand why students stay, as well as why they leave. What is already working?
- Identify ways that graduate students might connect with undergraduates who are at risk of leaving.
- Understand graduate student retention and graduation, as well as undergraduate retention.

Unit: LSAMP

Gabriel Gallardo

"We need to..."

- Understand climate for students in STEM fields.
- Study the ways interactions between causes lead to withdrawal.
- Understand the ways that habits, emotional management, and cultural capital contribute to retention.
- Think about the ways the UW matches what it says it values with resources.

Unit: Office of Educational Assessment

Nana Lowell

"We need to..."

- Study the ways interactions between causes lead to withdrawal so we can better understand what interventions will be useful.
- Understand persistence—what makes students stay at the UW when they are at risk of leaving.

APPENDIX C. UW CONVERSATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMA&D)

Sheila Edwards Lange, Emile Pitre, Gabe Gallard

"We need to..."

- Identify ways to address depression, institutional climate, and financial problems –three causes of attrition noted in national research on retention.
- Examine the complexity of financial problems and how to address them. According to national research, 30% of all students who could come back to complete degrees cannot do so because of financial holds on registration. Some of those students get into trouble by taking out short-term loans to cover expenses until financial aid comes in and then paying off those short term loans with financial aid, so they don't have enough to live on. Eventually, that process catches up with them. When debt gets turned over to a collection agency, fees escalate. TRIO is the only group that does financial advising on campus.
- Contact students not enrolled and have one-two years before reaching the 6-year limit. If they have 90 or more credits at the end of their 4th year or 135 or more credits at the end of their 5th year, get them to return to school.
- Create an early warning system that lets us know when students get a 2.5 or lower GPA in a quarter or when they fail certain key courses (such as CSE 142, Biology 180), so we can intervene with advising.
- Focus on the first year.
- Understand what happens to undocumented students.
- Know more about the effects of running start.
- Focus on bringing back students with good academic standing first.
- Understand the impact of a climate that feels "too big and unfriendly" on students leaving the UW.
- Consider the role of mentors on persistence.
- Determine what proportion of those students who leave the university in good academic standing do so because they were denied admission into competitive majors such as engineering, computer science, business, and nursing.
- Determine whether students who get admitted to the School of Pharmacy without earning a bachelor's degree are counted in the attrition stats.
- Determine the proportion of students not enrolled who lose their financial aid because they did not earn at least 36 credits during an academic year.
- Determine the proportion of students with intended STEM majors leave the institution when they decide that they no longer wish to pursue a STEM major.

Unit: Q Center

Jennifer Self, Jaimee Marsh

"We need to..."

- Consider multiply-marginalized students.

Unit: Resident Halls

Pam Schreiber, Deborah Costar

"We need to..."

- Study the ways interactions between causes lead to withdrawal.
- Be aware that leaving is so embarrassing that students may provide "acceptable answers" for why they left.
- Do a better job all around of managing students' expectations so it is important to understand those expectations—to know what students wanted coming in.

Unit: Student-Athlete Academic Services

Kim Durand

"We need to..."

- Help students think about the unintended consequences of choices, such as planning to enter nursing, pre-med, and engineering fields, taking three English classes in one quarter, double majoring in unrelated fields, and so on.

APPENDIX C. UW CONVERSATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

Unit: Student Life

Denzil Suite, Lincoln Johnson

"We need to..."

- Know something about the disengaged students at UW.
- Have more information about the ways sexual orientation influences retention and graduation.
- Understand how work on and off campus affects retention/completion.
- Understand how quarter of entry may affect completion and retention.
- Understand how part-time status affects completion and retention.
- Understand the ways institutional policies affect retention.
- Connect SERU results to retention/completion data.
- Know how our peers work with retention and graduation.
- Track student participation in UW organizations, clubs, and events.

Unit: Student Regent

Kiana Scott

"We need to..."

- Learn whether students feel that their reasons for leaving were good reasons.
- Understand whether students were forced to make the decision to leave or did so because they wanted to.
- Understand whether extracurricular involvement on campus—things that would lead to good engagement—help retain students.
- Understand retention and graduation for graduate students.

Unit: Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Ed Taylor, Jason Johnson, Janice DeCosmo, Michaelann Jundt, Jim Clauss, Suzanne Mercier, Judi Gray

"We need to..."

- Study the ways interactions between causes lead to withdrawal.
- Understand more about current students' financial issues.
- Know more about issues for students who are non-US citizens.
- Understand whether this generation of students is unique in terms of retention and graduation
- Know more about students who transfer to other state institutions
- Gather data on whether programs, such as the Social Science Online Degree Completion Program, are bringing students back to finish their degrees
- Know where we are losing people along the way, to identify the critical points
- Understand the ways institutional policies affect retention and graduation, such as the new limits on number of quarters allowed (along with the credit limitation).
- Understand the ways departmental requirements affect retention and graduation.

Unit: Veterans Center

Tim Wold

"We need to..."

- Study the ways interactions between causes lead to withdrawal. Finances and academic issues are complex issues for vets, often including family, and struggling with transition from military to civilian life.
- Gather data on vets. In the past, information on vets was aggregated with information on children of vets, so past data is not that helpful for tracking vets. Interested in veteran students feeling that the UW was not offering quite what they wanted, how to cope with their military service, not feeling supported on campus, and wondering if they perceive the campus as friendly.
- Consider that veteran students say they don't want to be identified as vets.