



University of Washington  
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**Factors Contributing to Undergraduate Attrition  
at the University of Washington**

Nana Lowell and Lauren Basson

August, 1994

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## INTRODUCTION

The past few years has seen a decrease in the percentage of undergraduate students who withdraw from the University of Washington prior to completing their degrees, yet student attrition remains a serious concern. Over the past ten years, an average of 33 percent of all undergraduates left the University within five years without completing a degree.<sup>1</sup> The overall rate of attrition is the same for freshmen who enter directly from high school and students who transfer from other post-secondary institutions, but the pattern of leaving is different. Fewer freshmen than transfer students leave after the first year (11% vs. 23%, respectively), but a higher percentage of freshmen withdraw subsequently such that the five-year cumulative attrition rate is essentially equivalent for the two groups (34% for freshmen, and 31% for transfer students).

The present study was a preliminary attempt to identify factors which might contribute to undergraduate attrition at the University of Washington by surveying student opinions and relating the information obtained to academic records. A secondary focus was a comparison of two commonly used survey modalities: mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews. For reasons of simplicity, the population was limited to a single entering class of freshmen, and another of undergraduate transfer students. Surveys were undertaken with freshmen entrants who withdrew after two years at the University, and transfer students who left after one year. One-half of the students in each group were surveyed by mailed questionnaire, and one-half by telephone interview. Additional information was obtained on each student from the computerized student record system maintained by the University.

## METHOD

### Population

Freshmen entrants (N=149) were those who enrolled at the University directly from high school in autumn quarter, 1991, were enrolled spring quarter, 1993, and were not enrolled either autumn quarter, 1993, or winter quarter, 1994.

Transfer students (N=180) were undergraduates who entered the University from 2-year or 4-year colleges in autumn quarter, 1992, were enrolled spring quarter, 1993, and were not enrolled either autumn quarter, 1993, or winter quarter, 1994.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Washington Office of Admissions and Records, *University of Washington Graduation and Attrition Rates for Freshmen Entering from High School, Autumn Term 1981 - Autumn Term 1993*, and *University of Washington Graduation and Attrition Rates for Transfer Students Entering from Four Year Schools, Autumn Term 1981 - Autumn Term 1993*, May 26, 1994.

## Procedures

Computerized student records were obtained on all students in each of the above groups. These data were drawn from the central student database maintained by the University, and included addresses and phone numbers for each student, and demographic variables such as sex and ethnicity.

Questionnaires were sent to one-half of the students in the freshmen and transfer groups, and contained questions about students' expectations before entering the University, their experiences while enrolled, and their current plans and activities. Questionnaires were sent to each student's permanent address as listed in University records. (This was often the address of his or her parents.) A cover letter and stamped, return envelope were included with each questionnaire, and a second questionnaire, cover letter and return envelope were sent to each student two weeks later to increase the response rate. Nevertheless, completed questionnaires were returned by only 28 (37.3%) of the freshmen, and 23 (24.5%) of the transfer students. Sample cover letters and a questionnaire can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Telephone interviews were attempted with the remaining half of the freshmen and transfer students. Interviewing services were contracted from an on-campus office with trained staff and a computerized telephone survey system. Interview protocol were modeled as closely as possible on the mailed questionnaires. The telephone numbers used were those listed with the students' permanent addresses in the University records. Each number was called as many times as was necessary either to make contact or to determine that we had an incorrect number, and yet the completion rate was still very low. Completed interviews were obtained from only fifteen (20.3%) of the freshmen, and ten (11.6%) of the transfer students.

Calls placed to students were sometimes answered by a parent. If the student wasn't home, the parent was asked when the student would be available, or to provide another number where he or she might be reached. Parents were also asked to respond to a reduced set of questions taken from the student protocol, not as a replacement for student response, but as a secondary data set interesting in its own right. Parent interviews were completed with parents of 13 (17.6%) of the freshmen and 9 (10.5%) of the transfer students.

## RESULTS

### Response Rate

A notable result of the present study is the extremely low response rate. The rates as given above are in sharp contrast to the 50 to 70 percent rate of return typically obtained by the Office of Educational Assessment for mailed questionnaires. Table 1 shows rates of response for various groups. As can be seen, the overall rate of return for mailed questionnaires was 30.2 percent, compared to a 15.6 percent completion rate for telephone interviews, freshmen responded at a higher rate than did transfer students, and females were twice as likely to respond as were males. Differences in response rates by ethnicity and class standing were not interpretable because of small frequencies in many categories.

The low response rate for telephone interviews was largely due to the difficulty in finding respondents at home. Telephone interviews were completed with twenty-five former students, yet "call-backs" were requested for nearly that same number when the student was not immediately available to take the phone. Each telephone number was called at least ten times at various times of the day and week, but these students were not contacted.

**Table 1. Response Rates by Group (Percents)**

GROUP	RESPONSE RATE
Mailed questionnaires	30.2
Telephone interviews	15.6
Freshmen entrants	28.8
Transfer students	18.3
Female	30.6
Male	16.0

### Demographic Information

Because of the extremely low response rate, results of the survey cannot be considered representative of student leavers as a group, but merely as indicative of possible trends. Three demographic variables were examined to determine the degree to which respondents were similar to the total group surveyed.

As noted above, respondents were found to be dissimilar to the total group with respect to gender in that females were over-represented. Additional detail is provided in Table 2 which shows the proportion of females and males within each group (freshmen versus transfers) by mode (questionnaire versus telephone interview) categories. There are at least twice as many females as males in each group with the exception of freshmen who responded to telephone interviews. In this case the proportions are reversed, but the total number of respondents to telephone interviews (whether freshmen or transfer students) is so low that variation in these categories may be largely a function of chance.

Ethnicity and class standing were also investigated. Table 3 shows the percentage of students within each ethnic classification for the total group of student leavers, and for respondents. As shown in the table, the ethnic distribution of freshmen respondents and of transfer students who responded to telephone interviews corresponded to that of the original population. However there was a disproportionate number of non-minorities among transfer students who responded to the mailed questionnaire.

Table 4 shows the class standing of the total group and of respondents. Freshmen students were primarily classified as sophomores or juniors, and the distribution of questionnaire respondents matched that of the original population. However, telephone respondents included a higher proportion of sophomores than would be expected, and a lower proportion of juniors. A wider range of classes was found among transfer students than among freshmen entrants, but here too, younger students (juniors) were more likely to respond than were older students (seniors).

**Table 2. Gender Distribution (Percents)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	All	Ques Resp	Tele Resp	All	Ques Resp	Tele Resp
Female	51.0	75.0	33.3	46.7	69.6	70.0
Male	49.9	25.0	66.7	53.3	30.4	30.0
TOTAL N	149	28	15	180	23	10

**Table 3. Ethnic Distribution (Percents)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	All	Ques Resp	Tele Resp	All	Ques Resp	Tele Resp
American Indian	.7	3.6	0	3.3	8.7	10.0
Asian	18.8	17.8	20.0	13.9	13.0	10.0
Caucasian	71.7	78.6	73.3	55.6	73.9	50.0
African American	4.0	0.0	6.7	5.0	4.3	10.0
Eskimo/Aleut	.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hispanic	.7	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
Combination	0.0	0.0	0.0	.6	0.0	0.0
Not Indicated	4.0	0.0	0.0	20.6	0.0	20.0
TOTAL N	149	28	15	180	23	10

**Table 4. Class Standing (Percents)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	All	Ques Resp	Tele Resp	All	Ques Resp	Tele Resp
Freshman	4.0	3.6	0.0	11.7	0.0	10.0
Sophomore	56.4	57.1	73.3	8.3	4.3	10.0
Junior	38.9	39.3	26.7	48.9	60.9	60.0
Senior	.7	0.0	0.0	22.2	17.4	10.0
5th-year	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.9	17.4	10.0
TOTAL N	149	28	15	180	23	10

### Satisfaction with the University of Washington

Questions within the survey were grouped into three general content areas. Students were asked to describe their 1) level of satisfaction with the University of Washington, 2) current situation and plans, and 3) particular experiences at the University. This section summarizes responses to the first of these, and includes comparisons between freshmen entrants and transfer students for both open-ended and closed questions. Additional comparisons between questionnaire and telephone interview respondents are provided for closed questions.

Satisfaction with the University of Washington may be, at least in part, a function of the degree to which experiences at the University correspond to initial expectations. Table 5 shows the main reasons given for attending college. A total of 76 respondents provided 93 responses. Forty-two freshmen entrants provided 52 responses, and 34 transfer students provided 41 responses.

**Table 5. What was the main reason you decided to go to college?**

	FRESHMEN		TRANSFERS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Knowledge / Degree	26	50.0	12	29.3	38	40.9
Career goals	15	28.8	14	34.1	29	31.2
Self-enrichment	2	3.8	7	17.0	9	9.7
Financial goals	5	9.6	1	2.4	6	6.5
Preparation for further study	1	1.9	4	9.7	5	5.4
Other	3	5.7	2	4.8	5	5.4
TOTAL	52	100.0	41	100.0	93	100.0

The most common reason respondents gave for attending college was to *acquire knowledge or obtain a degree* (40.9% of total). A much greater percentage of freshmen responses fell into this category than did transfer responses (50.0% versus 29.3%). While some respondents focused primarily on the degree they hoped to receive, others emphasized their interest in education for its own sake. Some sample comments are:

*If you want to get anywhere in the world today, you need a college degree. At the very least! Education. Not a degree, per se, but an intellectual broadening.*

*To get a Bachelor's degree in the arts -- I want to learn as much as possible about literature, art, and related fields. To be able to learn from peers as well as instructors.*

Attainment of *career goals* was the second most frequently mentioned reason for going to college (31.2% of total). This category received the greatest percentage of responses from transfers (34.1%), and the second largest percentage of responses from freshmen entrants (28.8%). While some respondents simply indicated that they felt going to college would enable them to find better jobs later on, others had very specific career goals as the following comments indicate.

*To get a good job.*

*For a career in a field that I would enjoy and be able to support myself and possibly a family on.*

*To complete dental school prerequisites for admission to UW dental school.*

*I went to college to try and earn a degree that would enable me to become a dietitian.*

Respondents were also asked why they specifically chose to attend the University of Washington. Their responses are summarized in Table 6. A total of 76 respondents provided 121 reasons. Forty-two freshmen entrants provided 72 reasons, and 34 transfer students provided 49 reasons.

**Table 6. Why did you choose UW?**

	FRESHMEN		TRANSFERS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Location	23	31.9	13	26.5	36	29.7
Reputation	18	25.0	6	12.2	24	19.8
Course offerings / Acad prog's	6	8.3	15	30.6	21	17.3
Scholarship / Financial aid	9	12.5	4	8.2	13	8.3
Convenience	3	4.2	5	10.2	8	6.6
Friends / Family	7	9.7	0	0.0	7	5.7
Campus	2	2.8	3	6.2	5	4.1
Extracurricular programs	2	2.8	0	0.0	2	1.6
Size	2	2.8	0	0.0	2	1.6
Other	0	0.0	3	6.2	3	2.5
TOTAL	72	100.0	49	100.0	121	100.0

Clearly, many respondents listed multiple reasons for their decision to attend the University of Washington. *Location* and *reputation* were the most common reasons overall that respondents gave for their choice of the UW (29.7% and 19.8% of total, respectively). In both cases, more freshmen entrants than transfer students listed these as their main reasons for choosing UW (31.9% of freshmen versus 26.5% of transfer responses listed location while 25.0% of freshmen versus 12.2% of transfer responses listed reputation).

*At the time I thought a prestigious school was the way to go. It was close to home, was hard to get into out-of-state, and had a good reputation.*

*It has a wonderful reputation, Seattle was an ideal location, and I liked its large size.*

The *course offerings and academic programs* available at the University of Washington was the main reason listed by transfer students for attending the University.

*UW has a good reputation. Tuition was reasonable and I was looking for a program like Comparative History of Ideas.*

*Because I am interested in the health care field and the UW has excellent programs as well as it being a local college and well-respected over-all.*

*One of the only universities with my interest -- Scandinavian Studies.*

Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which their goals for going to college had been met at UW. Ratings were obtained on a five-point scale (1=*not at all*, 5=*extremely well*), and average ratings are shown in Table 7. Although the ratings by transfer students were somewhat higher than those by freshmen entrants (3.2 versus 2.7, respectively), this difference was not statistically significant. Ratings by each group were toward the mid-point of the scale, indicating that students' goals in going to college had been met only *fairly well* at the University. This might reasonably constitute a major factor in students' decisions to leave. There were no differences in ratings obtained by questionnaire versus telephone interview.

**Table 7. How well did UW help you meet your goals for going to college? (Means)**

	Freshmen			Transfers		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Mean	2.7	2.7	2.7	3.1	3.2	3.2
N	28	15	43	23	10	33

A recent study of UW seniors provides supporting evidence of the importance of goal attainment. Using a five-point scale, Gillmore<sup>2</sup> asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement, *I have accomplished my educational goals at UW*. Ratings by these students (3.8 for both freshmen entrants and transfer students) who were close to graduation were considerably higher than those reported above for students who had left the University without graduating.

Further information was obtained about student satisfaction with specific aspects of their experiences at UW. Table 8 shows the coding of responses to an open-ended question regarding students' MOST satisfying experiences at UW along with the number of responses given for each category. A total of 69 respondents provided 90 responses. Forty freshmen provided 51 responses and 29 transfers provided 39 responses.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald M. Gillmore *The Spring, 1994, University of Washington Senior Survey*, Office of Educational Assessment, University of Washington, Report No. 94-8, August, 1994.

Table 8. What did you find most satisfying about your experiences at UW? Why?

	FRESHMEN		TRANSFERS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Quality of instruction	10	19.6	15	38.4	25	27.7
Student community	10	19.6	3	7.7	13	14.4
Course offerings & availability	6	11.7	3	7.7	9	10.0
Atmosphere	5	9.8	4	10.2	9	10.0
Campus setting / Location	5	9.8	3	7.7	8	8.8
Extracurricular activities	6	11.7	1	2.6	7	7.8
Advising	0	0.0	5	12.8	5	5.5
Diversity of student body	4	7.8	0	0.0	4	4.4
Tuition	2	3.9	1	2.6	3	3.3
Other	3	5.9	1	2.6	4	4.4
TOTAL	51	100.0	39	100.0	90	100.0

*Quality of instruction* received the greatest number of responses as the most positive aspect of respondents' experience at UW. This category captured approximately twice as many transfer responses as freshmen responses (38.4% versus 19.6%) and far more transfer responses fell into this category than into any other.

*For the most part, the instructors were great. The classes were stimulating and challenging and it was great meeting the other students and working with them.*

*The professors, teachers, and student assistants were very nice and helpful*

The UW social life and student community received the same percentage of responses as quality of instruction among freshmen as the most positive aspect of their UW experience (19.6%). It received a much smaller percentage of responses among transfers (7.7%).

*The students are friendly, the food is pretty good, and there's a lot of places to associate with people. (sic)*

*Good classes, good social atmosphere -- 1st year expenses were well arranged -- could concentrate on being a student.*

The LEAST satisfying aspects mentioned by respondents about their UW experience are provided in Table 9 below with the number and percentage of responses for each category. A total of 70 respondents provided 84 responses. Forty freshmen provided 47 responses and 29 transfers provided 37 responses.

*Large class sizes* (17.9% of total) and an *impersonal atmosphere* (15.4% of total) led the list as the least satisfying aspects of the UW experience for respondents. Roughly the same percentage of freshmen and transfer responses mentioned large class size (17% versus 18.9%). A much larger percentage of freshmen responses than transfer responses cited an impersonal atmosphere as the least satisfying aspect of the UW experience, however.

*The large undergraduate classes -- very hard to be motivated when you're just a face in the crowd.*

*Lack of personal attention -- lost in the large number of students*

*Too big and unfriendly*



Student services and advising received the third largest percentage of total responses to this question (14.3%). Seventeen percent of freshmen responses versus 10.8 percent of transfer responses fell into this category. It is interesting to note, by contrast, that 12.8 percent of transfer responses listed student services or advising as the most positive aspect of their UW experience while no freshmen responses listed it as a positive aspect.

*Administration is very impersonal. They don't seem to be very helpful with how to solve problems, where to go, who to talk to.*

*I was repulsed by the bloated, hideous bureaucracy. It was almost an exercise in futility to get anything done or changed.*

**Table 9. What did you find least satisfying about your experiences at UW? Why?**

	FRESHMEN		TRANSFERS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Large class size	8	17.0	7	18.9	15	17.9
Impersonal atmosphere	9	19.1	4	10.8	13	15.4
Student services and advising	8	17.0	4	10.8	12	14.3
Quality of instructors	5	10.6	4	10.8	9	10.7
Quality of courses	5	10.6	1	2.7	6	7.1
Quality of TA's	3	6.4	3	8.1	6	7.1
Scheduling conflicts	1	2.1	5	13.5	6	7.1
Financial	3	6.4	3	8.1	6	7.1
Parking	0	0.0	1	2.7	1	1.4
Other	5	10.6	5	13.5	10	11.9
TOTAL	47	100.0	37	100.0	84	100.0

Respondents were asked the main reason and any additional reasons they had for leaving the UW. Their combined responses to these questions are indicated in Table 10. A total of 73 respondents provided 119 responses. Forty-one freshmen provided 62 responses and 32 transfers provided 57 responses.

**Table 10. What was your main reason for leaving UW?**

	FRESHMEN		TRANSFERS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Financial	12	19.4	11	19.3	23	19.3
Unable to get into program	11	17.7	6	10.5	17	14.3
Personal	8	12.9	7	12.3	15	12.6
Quality of education	8	12.9	5	8.8	13	10.9
Administrative problems	4	6.5	6	10.5	10	8.4
UW environment	3	6.5	4	7.0	8	6.7
Pursue education elsewhere	4	6.5	3	5.3	7	5.9
Pursue work	1	1.6	5	8.8	6	5.0
Poor academic performance	1	1.6	2	3.5	3	2.5
Other	9	14.5	8	14.0	17	14.3
TOTAL	62	100.0	57	100.0	119	100.0
UW-related reasons		45.1		40.4		42.9

### Reasons relating to UW experience

Close to half of all reasons for leaving UW cited by respondents related directly to their experience at the University (42.9%). There was little variation between the percentage of freshmen responses relating to UW (45.1%) and the corresponding percentage of transfer responses (40.4%). The specific aspects of the UW experience which prompted respondents to leave did vary between freshmen and transfers, however.

*The inability to get into one's major of choice or the unavailability of one's preferred program of study was the category which received the largest percentage of responses among UW-related reasons for leaving and the second largest percentage of responses overall (14.3%). A larger percentage of freshmen responses (17.7%) than transfer responses (10.3%) fell into this category.*

*I decided to change my major, and it was not offered.*

*I was not accepted into the School of Nursing. My decision to leave was logical -- there were no other courses I could really take to help my ability to get into the Nursing School.*

*No degree offered in my field of Physical Education.*

The general quality of education at UW received the second largest percentage of UW-related responses (10.9% of total). Again, more freshmen than transfer responses fell into this category (12.9% versus 8.8%). On the other hand, *scheduling and administrative concerns* received a larger percentage of responses among transfers than among freshmen (10.5% versus 6.5%). Only 2.5 percent of the total responses referred to leaving UW due to *poor academic performance*.

### Non-UW-related reasons

*Financial* reasons made up the largest single category of responses to these questions (19.3% of total). There was almost no variation between the percentages of freshmen and transfer responses on this issue. Financial issues mentioned in the category ranged from the loss of scholarships or financial aid to personal financial difficulties or simple displeasure with the high cost of education at UW.

*Cost -- I could only take one class at a time, but even so, \$422 is ridiculous.*

*Money was only reason. I am 1/4 Native American from single-parent household. When my finances started to fall apart, I began to question if the long-term benefits would be there for me. I attended a whole quarter without getting credit due to a student aid misunderstanding. Also, I owe \$2,000 to housing and \$4,000 in federal loans without much to show for it.*

*I was on full out-of-state tuition scholarship from the (funding source). When I did not meet the GPA requirements in the spring of my sophomore year, I had to transfer because I could not afford to pay out-of-state tuition.*

*Personal* reasons for leaving UW also accounted for a fairly large percentage of responses (12.6% of total). Again, there was little variation between the percentages of freshmen and transfer responses that fell into this category. Finally, a significant percentage of responses (14.3% of total) appear in the "other" category, reflecting the many, diverse reasons that cause people to leave UW.

Respondents were asked to rate each of several aspects of their UW experiences on a five-point scale ranging from 1=very unsatisfactory to 5=very satisfactory. As can be seen in Table 11, the highest ratings for both freshmen entrants and transfers were given to *sports events* and *sports facilities*.

### Factors Contributing to Undergraduate Attrition

Freshmen gave the lowest ratings to *ability to get into major of choice* and *opportunity to interact with faculty*. For transfers, the least satisfactory aspects of their experience were *quality of university housing*, *academic advising*, and *availability of financial aid*. Ratings by transfer students were significantly higher than those of freshmen for *ability to get into major of choice*, *opportunity to interact with faculty*, and *university-sponsored social events*. Freshmen gave significantly higher ratings to *sports facilities* and *quality of university housing*.

Ratings given by respondents to their overall experience at UW are shown in Table 12. These means fall between *neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory* and *somewhat satisfactory*. No differences were found between ratings by freshmen and transfers, or between questionnaire and telephone respondents.

**Table 11. Please rate each of the following aspects of your experience at UW from 1=*very unsatisfactory* to 5=*very satisfactory*. (Means)<sup>1</sup>**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Quality of instruction	3.9	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8
Instructional facilities	4.1	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.8
Quality of distribution courses	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.7	4.1	3.8
Availability of classes <sup>3</sup>	2.7	3.2	2.8	3.1	4.0	3.4
Ability to get into major of choice <sup>2</sup>	2.1	2.6	2.2	3.6	4.1	3.7
Opportunity to interact with faculty <sup>2</sup>	2.4	2.8	2.5	3.2	3.7	3.4
Academic advising	2.5	3.2	2.8	2.9	3.5	3.1
Availability of financial aid	2.9	2.6	2.8	3.2	2.7	3.1
Student social life	3.8	4.1	3.9	3.5	4.4	3.7
Univ.-sponsored social events <sup>2</sup>	3.5	3.8	3.6	3.9	4.0	3.9
Sports events	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.1	4.6	4.2
Sports facilities <sup>2</sup>	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.0	3.8	4.0
Quality of university housing <sup>2</sup>	4.1	3.8	4.0	2.8	3.5	3.0

<sup>1</sup> The number of students responding varied across items.

<sup>2</sup> Ratings by freshman and transfer students were significantly different for this item.

<sup>3</sup> Ratings by questionnaire and telephone respondents were significantly different for this item.

**Table 12. Please rate your overall experience at the University of Washington. (Means, 1=*very unsatisfactory* to 5=*very satisfactory*)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Mean	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.6
N	28	15	43	23	10	33

## Current Situation and Plans

The questionnaire included a set of items relating to students' plans and activities since leaving the University. Nearly all respondents, both freshmen entrants and transfer students, indicated that they intend to continue their education (see Table 13). A somewhat higher percentage of freshmen planned to pursue a bachelor's degree than did transfer students (85.4% versus 74.2%, Table 14). Transfers were more likely than freshmen to seek "*other*" types of degrees, including primarily professional or graduate degrees. Both freshmen and transfer students were more likely to state that they were planning to obtain a bachelor's degree in telephone interviews than on written questionnaires, indicating a strong social desirability response bias. Intended institutions were primarily in-state,

although institutions such as Harvard, Cornell, and the Universities of Alaska, Colorado and New Mexico were also cited.

Table 13. Do you plan to continue your education? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	96.3	100.0	97.6	95.5	100.0	96.9
N	27	15	42	22	10	32

Table 14. If YES, what degree are you planning to obtain? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
AA	0.0	6.7	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
BA/BS	80.8	93.3	85.4	71.4	80.0	74.2
Vocational certificate	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0	3.2
Other	19.2	0.0	12.2	23.8	20.0	22.6
N	26	15	41	21	10	31

As shown in Table 15, freshmen were much more likely to state that their primary activity was attending school than were transfer students (71.4% versus 34.4%, respectively), whereas transfer students were more likely to be working or looking for work (46.9%) than were freshmen (16.7%). "Other" activities were cited by 11.9 percent of the freshmen and 18.8 percent of the transfer students, and included military service and homemaking. The percentage of freshmen students who were currently enrolled (69.8%, Table 16) was approximately equal to the percentage who listed going to school as their primary activity. This reflects the very high percentage who were attending school full-time (93.9%, Table 17). Transfer students were less likely than freshmen to be attending full-time (55.6%), and so a greater percentage were currently enrolled (56.3%) than considered this their primary activity. Institutions in which students were currently enrolled were often those at which students intended to obtain a degree, as named above. Table 18 shows that freshmen and transfer students who were attending school were equally likely to be enrolled in a degree program (84.0% versus 82.4%). A large percentage of students who were not currently enrolled were intending to apply for admission (80.0% for freshmen, and 81.8% for transfers, Table 19), consistent with their stated intent to continue their education.

Table 15. What is your current primary activity? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Going to school or preparing to go to school	75.0	64.3	71.4	30.4	44.4	34.4
Working or looking for work	10.7	28.6	16.7	47.8	44.4	46.9
Other	14.3	7.1	11.9	21.7	11.1	18.8
N	28	14	42	23	9	32

Table 16. Are you currently enrolled in school? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	71.4	66.7	69.8	56.5	55.6	56.3
N	28	15	43	23	9	32

Table 17. If YES, what is your enrollment status? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Part-time	5.0	10.0	6.7	53.8	20.0	44.4
Full-time	95.0	90.0	93.9	46.2	80.0	55.6
N	20	10	30	13	5	18

Table 18. If YES, are you enrolled in a degree program? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	90.0	60.0	84.0	76.9	100.0	82.4
N	20	5	25	13	4	17

Table 19. If NO, are you intending to apply for admission? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	100.0	71.4	80.0	85.7	75.0	81.8
N	3	7	10	7	4	11

Transfer students were somewhat more likely than freshmen entrants to be currently working (71.9% versus 63.4%, respectively, Table 20), but there was no difference in the number of hours worked (26.8 hours per week for freshmen, and 25.1 hours for transfers, Table 21). However, transfer students were more likely than were freshmen to hold a job related to their desired career (50.0% of the transfer students, compared to 29.6% of the freshmen), as shown in Table 22.

Table 20. Are you currently working? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	77.8	35.7	63.4	72.7	70.0	71.9
N	27	14	41	22	10	32

Table 21. If YES, how many hours do you work each week? (Means)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Hours	26.8	26.8	26.8	23.7	28.0	25.1
N	21	5	26	15	7	22

Table 22. If YES, is this job related to the career you'd like to be in? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	31.8	20.0	29.6	35.3	85.7	50.0
N	22	5	27	17	7	24

## Experiences While at the University of Washington

Higher percentages of students reported that they had worked while attending the University than were currently working (68.3% versus 63.4% for freshmen, and 78.8% versus 71.9% for transfer students, Tables 23 and 20), and the average hours worked per week was only slightly less while they were enrolled (20.2 hours versus 26.8 hours for freshmen, and 21.8 hours versus 25.1 hours for transfers, Tables 24 and 21). The reported number of hours worked each week while enrolled is approximately twice as high as a comparable estimate obtained from current seniors by Gillmore,<sup>3</sup> and may represent either a response or sampling bias. Table 25 shows that a slightly higher percentage of freshmen entrants worked on-campus (37.9%) than did transfer students (30.8%), but both groups were twice as likely to work off-campus as on-campus.

Table 23. Did you work while you were attending UW? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Yes	77.8	50.0	68.3	78.3	80.0	78.8
N	27	14	41	23	10	33

Table 24. If YES, how many hours did you work each week? (Means)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Hours	20.4	19.7	20.2	19.8	25.9	21.8
N	21	7	28	16	8	24

Table 25. If YES, where did you work? (Percents)

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
On-campus	45.5	14.3	37.9	38.9	12.5	30.8
Off-campus	54.5	85.7	62.1	61.1	87.5	69.2
N	22	7	29	18	8	26

Table 26 lists the types of residences in which students lived while at the University. Freshmen entrants most commonly reported that they lived in on-campus residence halls (44.2%) or off-campus with acquaintances (34.9%), whereas transfer students tended to live off-campus either with their partner and/or children (30.3%) or with acquaintances (30.3%). Freshmen students were fairly likely to have lived in a fraternity or sorority (23.2%) but this was not the case for any of the transfers. The differences in residence patterns between freshmen entrants and transfer students is similar to those reported by Gillmore<sup>4</sup> between freshmen and transfers, and by Lowell and Gillmore<sup>5</sup> between all undergraduates and older than average students, and probably reflects age differences between the two groups.

Among students who lived off-campus, transfer students tended to live farther from campus than did freshmen entrants as shown by their average commute times (Table 27). Freshmen commuted an

<sup>3</sup> Gillmore, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Gillmore, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Nana Lowell and Gerald M. Gillmore *Survey of Older Than Average Students at the University of Washington*, Office of Educational Assessment, University of Washington, Report No. 90-4, August, 1990.

average of approximately 25 minutes in contrast to the approximate average of 40 minutes for transfers.

**Table 26. Where did you live while attending UW? (Percents)<sup>1</sup>**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
On-campus residence halls	46.4	40.0	44.2	8.7	10.0	9.1
On-campus other	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.7	0.0	6.1
Fraternity or sorority	17.8	33.3	23.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Off-campus w/parents	28.6	13.3	23.2	8.7	10.0	9.1
Off-campus w/partner	3.6	0.0	2.3	26.1	40.0	30.3
Off-campus w/acquaint.	42.8	20.0	34.9	30.4	30.0	30.3
Off-campus alone	10.7	0.0	7.0	17.4	10.0	15.2
N	28	15	43	23	10	33

<sup>1</sup> Percentages do not sum to 100% because respondents may have selected more than one option.

**Table 27. If you lived off-campus, how long did it take you to commute each way? (Means)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Minutes	25.0	22.0	24.4	47.9	20.6	39.8
N	21	5	26	19	8	27

Students were asked to what extent they felt part of the university student community during the time they were enrolled. The scale used ranged from 1=*I felt very much a part of the university student community* to 5=*I often felt isolated from the student community*. As shown in Table 28, freshmen felt significantly more a part of the student community than did transfer students. The average rating for freshmen (2.8) corresponds roughly to the scale value of 3 (*I feel neutral about this question*), and the average for transfer students (3.4) falls midway between this value and a value of 4 (*I sometimes felt isolated from the student community*).

This question was also included in the previously mentioned study of older than average students.<sup>6</sup> The average rating for freshmen in the present study was similar to that of all undergraduates (2.6), and the rating by transfer students matched that of older than average students (3.4). A similar pattern was found among current seniors who were asked to use a five-point scale to rate their agreement with the statement, *I have felt a part of the university community* (freshmen mean=2.7 and transfer mean=3.0).<sup>7</sup>

**Table 28. While you were enrolled at UW, to what extent did you feel you were a part of the university student community? (Means, 1=*I felt very much a part of the university student community*, 5=*I often felt isolated from the student community*)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Mean <sup>1</sup>	3.0	2.5	2.8	3.4	3.3	3.4
N	27	15	42	23	10	33

<sup>1</sup> Ratings by freshman and transfer students were significantly different for this item.

<sup>6</sup> Lowell and Gillmore, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Gillmore, 1994.

Although freshmen entrants and transfer students differed in the degree to which they felt part of the university student community, they were equally satisfied with their degree of involvement. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction of a five-point scale, where 1=*very unsatisfied*, and 5=*very satisfied*. The average for each group fell near the mid-point of the scale: *neither satisfied nor unsatisfied* (3.2 for freshmen, and 3.0 for transfer students).

**Table 29. To what extent were you satisfied with the degree to which you felt part of the student community? (Means, 1=*very unsatisfied*, 5=*very satisfied*)**

	FRESHMEN			TRANSFERS		
	Ques	Tele	Total	Ques	Tele	Total
Mean	3.0	3.7	3.2	2.9	3.3	3.0
N	28	15	43	22	10	32

### Parent Responses

As telephone interviews were conducted, if a parent answered the phone and the student was currently unavailable, the parent was asked to respond to a set of questions taken from the student protocol. Interviews were completed with 22 parents, of whom thirteen had a son or daughter who had entered the University as a freshman, and nine had a son or daughter who transferred from another institution. Because of the small number of respondents, responses are not broken down by entering group.

Parents were asked why their son or daughter had chosen to attend the University of Washington. A total of 17 parents provided 22 responses to this question as shown in Table 30. The two primary reasons identified by parents were *location* and *course offerings and academic programs*, whereas for students the two most important reasons were *location* and *reputation*, as noted above (Table 6).

**Table 30. Why did your son/daughter choose to attend the University of Washington?**

	N	%
Location	5	22.7
Reputation	2	9.0
Course offerings / Acad prog's	4	18.2
Scholarship / Financial aid	1	4.5
Convenience	1	4.5
Friends / Family	2	9.0
Campus	3	13.6
Extracurricular programs	2	9.0
Other	2	9.0
TOTAL	22	100.0

Parents rated their son's or daughter's experiences at the University of Washington on the same five-point scale as used by the students, where 1=*very unsatisfactory*, and 5=*very satisfactory*. The mean rating given by parents (2.9) is shown in Table 31 and corresponds to a scale value of *neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory*. This was considerably lower than the ratings given by students (3.5 for freshmen entrants and 3.6 for transfers) indicating that parents' evaluations of student experiences were more negative than those by the students themselves.



**Table 31. Please rate your son's/daughter's overall experience at the University of Washington.**  
(Mean, 1=*very unsatisfied*, 5=*very satisfied*)

Mean	2.9
N	22

When parents were asked why their son or daughter had left the University, they emphasized the *quality of education* and *personal* factors much more than did the students (33.3% of parents versus 10.9% of the students listed *quality of education* as a contributing factor, and 22.2% of the parents versus 12.6% of the students mentioned *personal* reasons). On the other hand, parents were much less likely than students to cite *financial* reasons in explaining the students' decision to leave (7.4% of parents versus 19.3% of the students).

**Table 32. What was his/her main reason for leaving UW?**

	N	%
Financial	2	7.4
Unable to get into program	3	11.1
Personal	6	22.2
Quality of education	9	33.3
UW environment	3	11.1
Pursue education elsewhere	2	7.4
Poor academic performance	1	3.7
Other	1	3.7
TOTAL	27	100.0
UW-related reasons	17	63.0

Parents were less certain their sons and daughters would continue their education than were the students themselves, although the percentage who indicated plans to continue was still very high. As shown in Table 33, over ninety percent of the parents stated that their son or daughter planned to continue their education, whereas all of the students interviewed by phone said they intended to continue (Table 13).

Of the parents who indicated that their sons or daughters planned to continue their education, 83.3 percent stated that they would pursue a bachelor's degree. This percentage was somewhat higher than the percentage of transfer students who stated in telephone interviews that they would seek a bachelor's, and quite a bit lower than the percentage obtained for freshmen (80.0% and 93.3%, respectively, Table 14).

**Table 33. Does he/she plan to continue his/her education? (Percent)**

Yes	90.9
N	22

**Table 34. If YES, what degree is he/she planning to obtain? (Percents)**

BA/BS	83.3
Other	16.6
N	18

Parents were almost evenly split in stating that their son's or daughter's current primary activity was *going to school or preparing to go to school* (42.8%), or *working or looking for work* (47.6%). (See Table 35.) This pattern matched the responses given by transfer students in telephone interviews (Table 15), but contained fewer school-bound and more working students than found in freshmen interviews above (64.3% and 28.6%, respectively).

**Table 35. What is his/her current primary activity? (Percents)**

Going to school or preparing to go to school	42.8
Working or looking for work	47.6
Other	9.5
N	21

Proportionately fewer parents indicated that their children were currently enrolled (47.6%, Table 36) than did the students who were contacted by telephone (66.7% of the freshmen, and 55.6% of the transfer students, Table 16). All parents whose children were enrolled indicated that their son or daughter was enrolled full-time (Table 37), and the majority were enrolled in a degree program (88.8%, Table 38). The majority of parents whose children were not currently enrolled indicated that their son or daughter was intending to apply for admission (72.7%, Table 39).

**Table 36. Is he/she currently enrolled in school? (Percent)**

Yes	47.6
N	21

**Table 37. If YES, what is his/her enrollment status? (Percents)**

Part-time	0.0
Full-time	100.0
N	10

**Table 38. If YES, is he/she enrolled in a degree program? (Percent)**

Yes	88.8
N	9

**Table 39. If NO, is he/she intending to apply for admission? (Percent)**

Yes	72.7
N	11

The percentage of parents who stated that their children were currently working (68.2%, Table 40) was similar to the percentage of working transfer students (70.0%, Table 20), but considerably higher than the percentage of freshmen entrants (35.7%). The average number of hours worked each week (28.3) as shown in Table 41, corresponded closely to the number cited by the students themselves, and 35.7 percent of the parents stated that their children were in jobs related to their career field (Table 42).

**Table 40. Is he/she currently working? (Percent)**

Yes	68.2
N	22

**Table 41. If YES, how many hours does he/she work each week? (Mean)**

Hours	28.3
N	14

**Table 42. If YES, is this job related to the career he/she would like to be in? (Percent)**

Yes	35.7
N	14

According to parents, more than half of the students worked while attending the University (63.6%, Table 43), which was midway between the percentages of freshmen (50.0%) and transfers (80.0%) who indicated that they worked (Table 23). The number of hours a week cited by parents (18.6) was similar to that given by freshmen respondents but lower than that of transfers (19.7 and 25.9 hours, respectively, Table 24). The percentage of parents who stated that their children worked on-campus (20.0%, Table 45) was somewhat higher than the responses of either freshmen or transfers (14.3% and 12.5%, respectively, Table 25).

**Table 43. Did he/she work while he/she was attending UW? (Percent)**

Yes	63.6
N	22

**Table 44. If YES, how many hours did he/she work each week? (Mean)**

Hours	18.6
N	13

**Table 45. If YES, where did he/she work? (Percents)**

On-campus	20.0
Off-campus	80.0
N	15

In part, parent responses regarding their son's or daughter's residence during their enrollment at the University reflected the mix of freshmen entrants and transfer students. As shown in Table 46, the percentages of students living in on-campus residence halls (31.8%) or in fraternities or sororities (18.2%) were midway between responses given by freshmen and transfer students. However, the percentages of students reported by parents to have lived at home (36.4%) was considerably higher than the percentage of either freshmen or transfer students self reports (13.3% and 10.0%, respectively, Table 26), and probably reflects a response bias in the parents who responded to the survey. The average commuting time (18.3 minutes, Table 47) was similar to that reported by students.

**Table 46. Where did he/she live while attending UW? (Percents)<sup>1</sup>**

On-campus residence halls	31.8
On-campus other	4.5
Fraternity or sorority	18.2
Off-campus w/parents	36.4
Off-campus w/acquaint.	22.7
Off-campus alone	4.5
N	22

<sup>1</sup> Percentages do not sum to 100% because respondents may have selected more than one option.

**Table 47. If he/she lived off-campus, how long did it take him/her to commute each way? (Mean)**

Minutes	18.3
N	16

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study provided information concerning a variety of factors related to student attrition at the University of Washington. Undergraduate students who left the University without graduating were surveyed by mailed questionnaire or by telephone interview. Included in the study were freshmen who entered from high school and left after two years, and students who transferred from other post-secondary institutions and left after one year. Questions were directed at students' goals in attending college, how well their goals had been met while at the University of Washington, their current activities and plans, and some of their specific experiences while at the University.

Outcomes of the study are presented with strong qualifications due to a very low response rate. Whereas mailed surveys conducted by the Office of Educational Assessment typically result in a 50 to 70 percent return rate, the current study showed an overall return of about 30 percent for the randomly chosen sample to whom questionnaires were mailed, and 15 percent for the randomly chosen sample who were telephoned. Informal communications with other research offices suggest that this level of return is not uncommon in surveys of students who have left post-secondary institutions without graduating, and may constitute a major obstacle in research on student attrition. Responses cannot be said to be representative of all students who leave prior to graduation. Additionally, a higher percentage of students responded to the mailed questionnaires than to telephone interviews, and students who entered as freshmen responded at a higher rate than did transfer students. Respondents included more females and fewer males, and a somewhat younger age range than did the original group surveyed. No clear bias was found with respect to ethnicity.

### General Outcomes

Factors leading to student attrition were to some extent personal, and beyond the control of the University, and to some extent indigenous to large universities. Slightly less than half of the respondents stated that their primary reason for attending college was to acquire knowledge or obtain a degree, and about one-third attended in order to attain career goals. Location, reputation and academic programs were the most common reasons that students chose the University of Washington.

### Factors Contributing to Undergraduate Attrition

(specified by one-fifth to one-quarter of all respondents). Respondents indicated that their goals in attending college had been met only *fairly well* at UW; their ratings contrasted with a higher level of goal attainment among UW seniors reported in a recently completed study. When asked identify the most satisfying aspect of their experiences at UW, the largest number of students named the quality of instruction (specified by approximately one-quarter of the respondents) and the social life and student community (specified by about fifteen percent of the respondents) at the University. When asked what they found least satisfying, the highest number identified large class sizes, the impersonal atmosphere, and student services and advising (specified by about fifteen to eighteen percent of the respondents). The most common reason identified for leaving the University was financial (about one-fifth of the respondents), followed by the inability to get into their program of choice (about fourteen percent). The most highly rated items with respect to student satisfaction were sports events and facilities, followed by quality of instruction and instructional facilities. Students rated their overall experience at the University as *neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory*.

Nearly all respondents indicated that they intended to continue their education, and most intended to seek bachelor's degrees. More than half were currently enrolled in school. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were currently working, and the average respondent worked somewhat more than half-time. A higher proportion of students had worked while attending the University (about three-quarters), with only slightly fewer hours per week than they were currently working. The reported number of hours worked per week was much higher than a similar estimate obtained from currently enrolled seniors and may represent a response or sampling bias. Of those who worked while attending school, about one-third worked on-campus. Type of residence while at UW differed for freshmen and transfer students, as noted below, and those students who lived off-campus commuted an average of half-an-hour each way. Respondents felt neutral, on average, about the degree to which they felt part of the university student community, and also about their level of satisfaction with their degree of involvement. The degree to which they felt part of the student community was similar to that reported by enrolled seniors.

### **Freshmen Entrants versus Transfer Students**

As noted in the introduction, the overall five-year attrition rate is very similar for students who enter the University of Washington from high school (freshmen entrants) and those who transfer from other post-secondary institutions, but the patterns of attrition vary. Freshmen show a fairly constant rate of attrition each year (5-10%), whereas a relatively high percentage of transfer students leave after the first year and fewer thereafter. After five years, both groups show an overall rate of slightly more than 30 percent.

Freshmen entrants and transfer students are clearly different in their educational background, and can be presumed to differ with respect to age and age-related variables such as residence patterns, outside commitments, and diversity of personal values and goals. Comparisons between the present study and past surveys showed that freshmen respondents tended to resemble the general undergraduate population, whereas transfer students were similar to older than average students, with respect to residence patterns (higher percentages of freshmen entrants lived on-campus or in fraternities or sororities, and higher percentages of transfer lived off-campus), and the degree to which the students felt they were part of the university student community (freshmen tended to feel more a part of the student community than did transfer students). Several additional differences were observed between freshmen and transfer students.

Transfer students had more diverse goals in attending college than did freshmen entrants. Freshmen were much more likely than were transfer students to state that their primary goal was to acquire knowledge or obtain a degree (one-half of the freshmen versus one-third of the transfers), and transfer students were somewhat more likely to identify attainment of career goals as their primary goal (about one-third of the transfer students versus one-quarter of the freshmen). Freshmen were more likely to choose the University of Washington because of its location and reputation, whereas course offerings and academic programs were most important for transfer students.

Freshmen entrants and transfer students differed in how they described their areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the University. Transfer students were most satisfied with the quality of instruction they received, while freshmen especially liked the UW social life and student community. Both groups were most dissatisfied with large class size and the impersonal atmosphere, but freshmen were much less satisfied with student services and advising, and quality of courses than were transfer students. Similar findings were obtained when respondents were asked to rate various aspects of their university experience. Although both groups were most satisfied with sports events and facilities, freshmen entrants were significantly less satisfied than were transfers with their ability to get into the major of their choice, their opportunity to interact with faculty, and university-sponsored social events, and significantly more satisfied with the sports facilities and quality of university housing. When asked why they left the University, reasons cited were evenly split between personal reasons (including financial employment needs), and University-related reasons. Freshmen were more likely than were transfers to cite their inability to get into their preferred major or program of study, or the general quality of education at the University.

In terms of their current activities and plans, freshmen entrants were twice as likely as transfer students to say that attending school was their primary activity, whereas transfer students were much more likely than freshmen to be working or looking for work. This was consistent with the finding that nearly all enrolled freshmen were attending school full-time, compared to only half of the enrolled transfer students. Concomitantly, transfer students were more likely to be employed (although there was no difference in the average number of hours worked each week), and to hold a job in their desired career field. Transfer students were only slightly more likely than freshmen to have worked while enrolled at the University.

Transfer students tended to have more interests and commitments outside the University than did freshmen students. Transfer students were more likely to have lived off-campus, whereas freshmen were more likely to have lived in on-campus dorms or in fraternities or sororities. Transfers felt significantly less a part of the university student community than did freshmen, but the two groups were equally satisfied with their respective levels of involvement.

### **Questionnaires versus Telephone Interviews**

The single, most notable difference in the response to mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews was in the overall response rate. The rate of response to questionnaires was twice that of the interviews (about 30 percent versus 15 percent), and several students contacted by phone did not wish to be interviewed, but said they would be willing to respond to a mailed questionnaire. Mailed questionnaires may be more convenient (they can be filled out piecemeal over time), and less intrusive (consideration can be given to each question and responses can be changed) than interviews. Questionnaires may also seem somewhat more anonymous.

Although some differences were observed between responses to mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews, the patterns generally were not consistent or interpretable, particularly in light of the small number of respondents. A single consistent difference was observed in that a higher percentage of both freshmen entrants and transfer students indicated that they were planning to obtain a bachelor's degree in responding to telephone interviews than on the questionnaire. This may represent a tendency to give a more socially desirable response when speaking with someone than when responding to the more anonymous questionnaire, or it may represent a chance consistency analogous to chance differences.

### **Parent versus Student Responses**

There were various areas of difference between parent perceptions and the students' self-reports. For both parents and students, location was an important factor in the decision to attend the University of Washington, but parents were also concerned with course offerings and academic programs, whereas students considered reputation. Parents were much less satisfied with their son's or daughter's overall experience at the University than were the students themselves. In describing the reasons students left the University, parents were more likely to identify the quality of education and personal factors, and less likely to name financial reasons than were students. Because parents are generally responsible for financing their children's education, they may be uncomfortable mentioning difficulties in this area. Parents were also less certain that their sons or daughters would continue their education than were the students themselves, and were less likely to state that their sons or daughters were currently enrolled. It is not clear how many of these differences are due to actual differences in perception, and how many reflect chance differences due to the small number of both parents and students. If feasible, a future study might include interviews with students and, independently, their parents to examine the extent to which perceptions differ.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Cover Letters**



«STUDENT\_ID»

«FirstName» «LastName»  
«ADDR1»  
«ADDR2»  
«CITY», «STATE» «ZIP»

April 5, 1994

Dear Mr. «LastName»:

Each year, a number of students leave the University of Washington prior to completing their degree programs. We are interested in learning about the experiences of these students in order to improve University student services and academic programs.

We would like to ask you to participate in a survey of students who attended the University for one or two years and have not re-enrolled. We have not included very many students in our survey, so each response is very important to us. The enclosed questionnaire will take only about ten minutes to complete, and you can return it in the postage-paid envelope. Each questionnaire has been coded so we can combine your answers with demographic, academic and financial aid information from the University student database. What you tell us on the questionnaire, and the student database information, will be confidential and will be used only for this research. All results will be reported only as part of a group summary, except for selected comments which will be used anonymously to illustrate issues raised by you and others. In fact, all identifying information will be removed from the study database once it is completely constructed.

We would like very much to hear about your experiences, and hope you will take this opportunity to participate in our study by returning the questionnaire. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have, if you would like to call me at 543-1170.

Sincerely,



Nana Lowell  
Assistant Director

Encls.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
Seattle, Washington 98195

«STUDENT\_ID»

*Office of Educational Assessment*

«FirstName» «LastName»  
«ADDR1»  
«ADDR2»  
«CITY», «STATE» «ZIP»

April 18, 1994

Dear Mr. «LastName»:

We recently sent you a survey asking about your experiences at the University of Washington. If you have returned it, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your help.

If you haven't been able to return the questionnaire as yet, we'd like to encourage you to do so. Because we only selected a small group of students to survey, your response is very important. We are interested in learning what you have to say as we consider how to improve the educational programs at the University.

I've included another questionnaire and return envelope for your convenience. If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please feel free to call me at 543-1170.

Sincerely,



Nana Lowell  
Assistant Director

Encls.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Questionnaire**

## Student Attrition Survey

Please respond to each of the following questions by circling the letter or number of your answer, or by writing your answer in the space provided.

1. What was the main reason you decided to go to college?
2. Why did you choose UW?
3. How well did UW help you meet your goals for going to college? (Mark one.)
  1. not at all
  2. somewhat
  3. fairly well
  4. very well
  5. extremely well
4. What did you find most satisfying about your experiences at UW? Why?
5. What did you find least satisfying about your experiences at UW? Why?
6. What was your main reason for leaving UW?
7. Were there additional reasons?

8. Please rate each of the following aspects of your experience at UW from unsatisfactory to satisfactory. (Circle one number for each aspect.)

	<u>unsatisfactory</u>		neither	<u>satisfactory</u>		not applicable
	very	somewhat		somewhat	very	
a. quality of instruction	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. instructional facilities (classrooms, labs, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. quality of distribution courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. availability of classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. ability to get into major of your choice	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. opportunity to interact with faculty	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. academic advising	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. availability of financial aid	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. student social life	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. university-sponsored social events	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. sports events	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. sports facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. quality of university housing	1	2	3	4	5	6
n. other: _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. Please rate your overall experience at the University of Washington. (Mark one.)

1. very unsatisfactory
2. somewhat unsatisfactory
3. neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory
4. somewhat satisfactory
5. very satisfactory

10. Do you plan to continue your education?

1. yes

2. no

If yes, what degree are you planning to obtain?

1. AA

2. BA/BS

3. vocational certificate

4. other: \_\_\_\_\_

At which institution do you plan to obtain this degree? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What is your current primary activity?

1. going to school or preparing to go to school

2. working or looking for work

3. other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Are you currently enrolled in school?

1. yes

2. no

If yes, what is your enrollment status?

1. part-time

2. full-time

Where are you enrolled? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you enrolled in a degree program?

1. yes

2. no

If no, are you intending to apply for admission?

1. yes

2. no

13. Are you currently working?

1. yes

2. no

If yes, how many hours do you work each week? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this job related to the career you'd like to be in?

1. yes

2. no

14. Did you work while you were attending UW?

1. yes

2. no

If yes, how many hours did you work each week? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you work?

1. on-campus

2. off-campus

15. Where did you live while attending UW? (Mark one or more.)

- a. on-campus residence halls
- b. on-campus in other university housing
- c. fraternity or sorority
- d. off-campus with parents
- e. off-campus with partner and/or children
- f. off-campus with acquaintances
- g. off-campus alone

If you lived off-campus, how long did it take you to commute each way?

16. While you were enrolled at UW, to what extent did you feel you were a part of the university student community? (Mark one.)

- 1. I felt very much a part of the university student community.
- 2. I felt more a part of the student community than not.
- 3. I feel neutral about this question.
- 4. I sometimes felt isolated from the student community.
- 5. I often felt isolated from the student community.

17. To what extent were you satisfied with the degree to which you felt part of the student community? (Mark one.)

- 1. very unsatisfied
- 2. somewhat unsatisfied
- 3. neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- 4. somewhat satisfied
- 5. very satisfied

18. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences at UW and how they relate to your decision to leave?