

Research Update

Office of Institutional Research and Planning

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Outcomes for Freshmen Non-Returners 2001-2005

The fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time full-time freshmen at Portland State University has remained steady over the past several years at approximately 67% (See Table 1), indicating that of a cohort of full-time freshmen who begin at PSU in a given fall term, approximately two-thirds of them enroll at PSU the following fall. When compared with peer urban institutions, PSU's retention rate is below average. In response to survey questions, many PSU freshmen indicate that they intend to transfer to another institution. A question has been raised whether freshmen who are not retained do in fact transfer. To study this question, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning investigated the enrollment patterns of five cohorts of first-time full-time freshmen (2001 – 2005) who did not enroll at PSU for the fall following their first enrollment at PSU. For these students, we identified three possible outcomes: 1) enroll elsewhere; 2) return to PSU at a later time; 3) drop out altogether. After the non-returners were identified, OIRP staff used PSU student warehouse data to determine whether those students returned to PSU and National Student Clearinghouse data to determine whether they enrolled at another institution. The next sections discuss the findings of this study.

What's Inside

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Table 1. First-time Full-time Freshmen

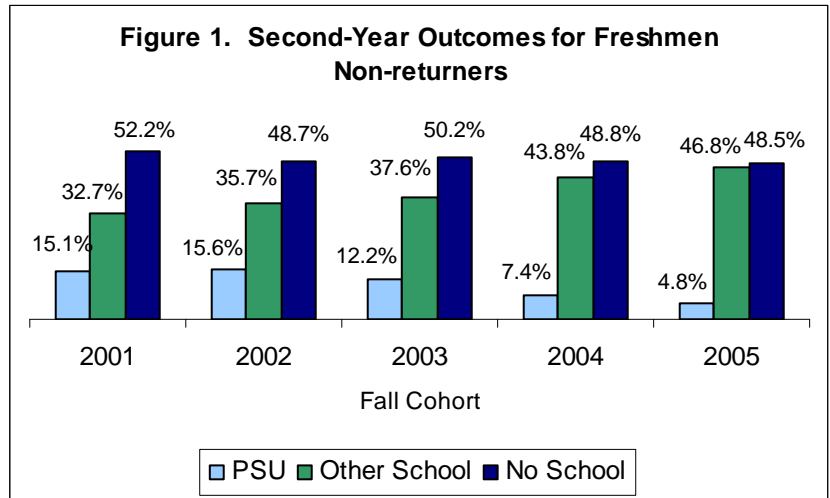
Fall-to-fall Retention Rates

Fall Cohort	Total N	Returned	Retention Rate	Not Retained	% Not Retained
2001	939	627	66.8%	312	33.2%
2002	1096	712	64.9%	384	35.0%
2003	1195	777	65.0%	418	35.0%
2004	1079	739	68.5%	340	31.5%
2005	1104	747	67.6%	357	32.3%

Second Year Outcomes

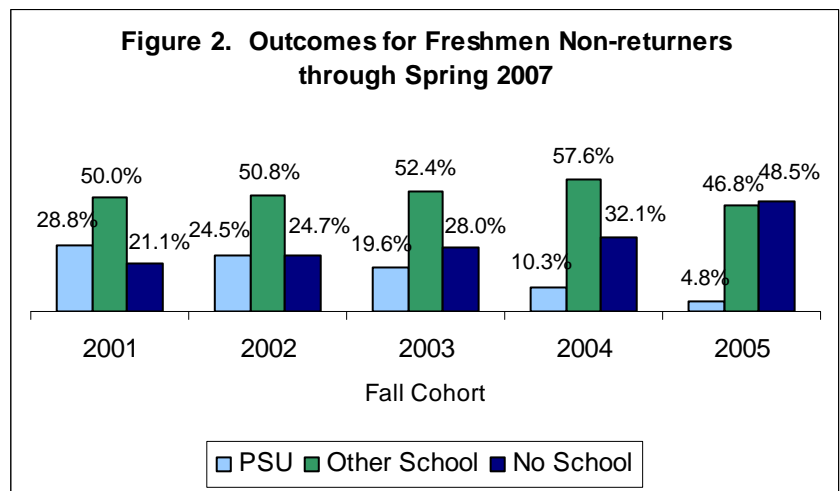
First-time full-time freshmen who were identified as non-returned in the second fall term were tracked for an additional academic year. Based on their enrollment data in the second year, these students were classified as either: 1) having returned to PSU, 2) transferred to another institution, or 3) were not enrolled (See Figure 1). Approximately half of the first-time full-time freshmen who did not return to PSU for a second fall did not enroll in any institution by the end of the second academic year. The proportion of non-returned who were not enrolled in any institution by the end of the second academic year remained relatively stable across the five cohorts.

The other half of non-returned returned to higher education within a year of the 2nd fall term. As shown in Figure 1, the proportion returning to PSU decreased over 5 years whereas the proportion enrolling at other institutions has increased. For the 2001 cohort, 15% re-enrolled at PSU and 33% enrolled at other institutions. By 2005, only 5% re-enrolled at PSU and 47% enrolled at other institutions.



Outcomes Through Spring 2007

In order to provide a more comprehensive view of first-time full-time freshmen retention, we also examined student outcomes through Spring 2007 (See Figure 2). Again, student outcomes were classified as: 1) returned to PSU; 2) transferred to another institution; 3) not enrolled at any institution. Students who returned to PSU at any point, even if they enrolled at other institutions in between episodes of PSU enrollment were categorized as PSU enrollees. An examination of student enrollment over this longer time frame reveals that students tend to return to higher education. For the 2001 cohort, after 6 years, only 21% had never enrolled at another institution, 29% had returned to PSU at some point and half had enrolled at another institution. This stands in contrast with the findings represented in Figure 1, which show half of the students from the 2001 cohort had not re-enrolled in higher education after two years. The other cohorts examined here exhibit similar results. The more time a student has had to re-enroll in an institution of higher education, the more likely it is that they will re-enroll. For subsequent cohorts, the proportion of non-enrolled students is higher and the proportion that return to PSU is lower.



Conclusion

While PSU's first-time full-time freshmen fall-to-fall retention rate has remained around 67% over the last several years, non-returned do not leave higher education entirely. Over time, many return to PSU and others enroll in other institutions of higher education. While these data were not matched to the survey data about academic intent, it is clear that a large proportion of first-time full-time freshmen who do not return to PSU for a second fall do enroll in other institutions.