

# **Persistence in Community Colleges**

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**Why Underrepresented Students  
(and others) Leave & Why they Stay**

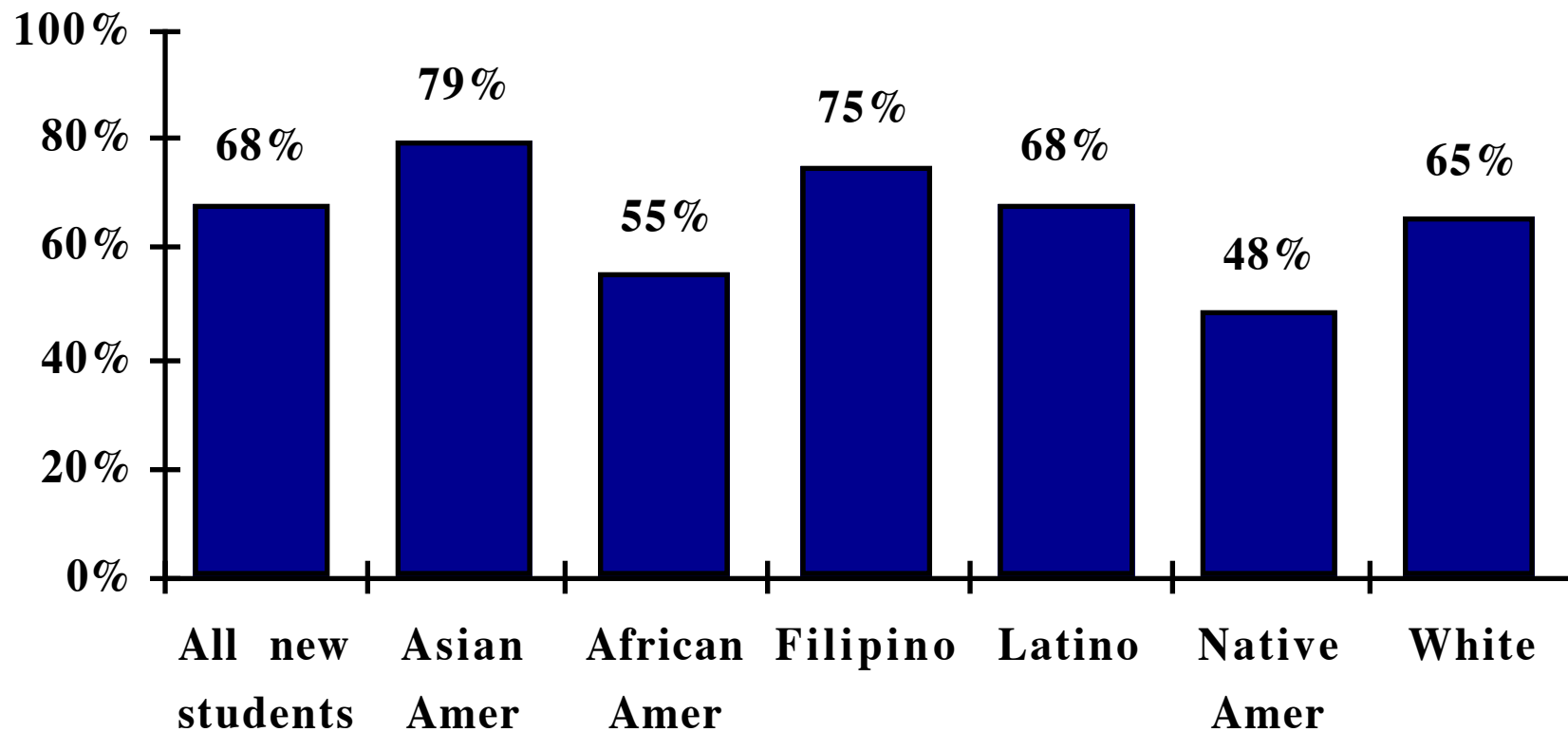
**A quantitative & qualitative exploration**

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# Persistence rates by race-ethnicity

## Chabot College: F95 to S96



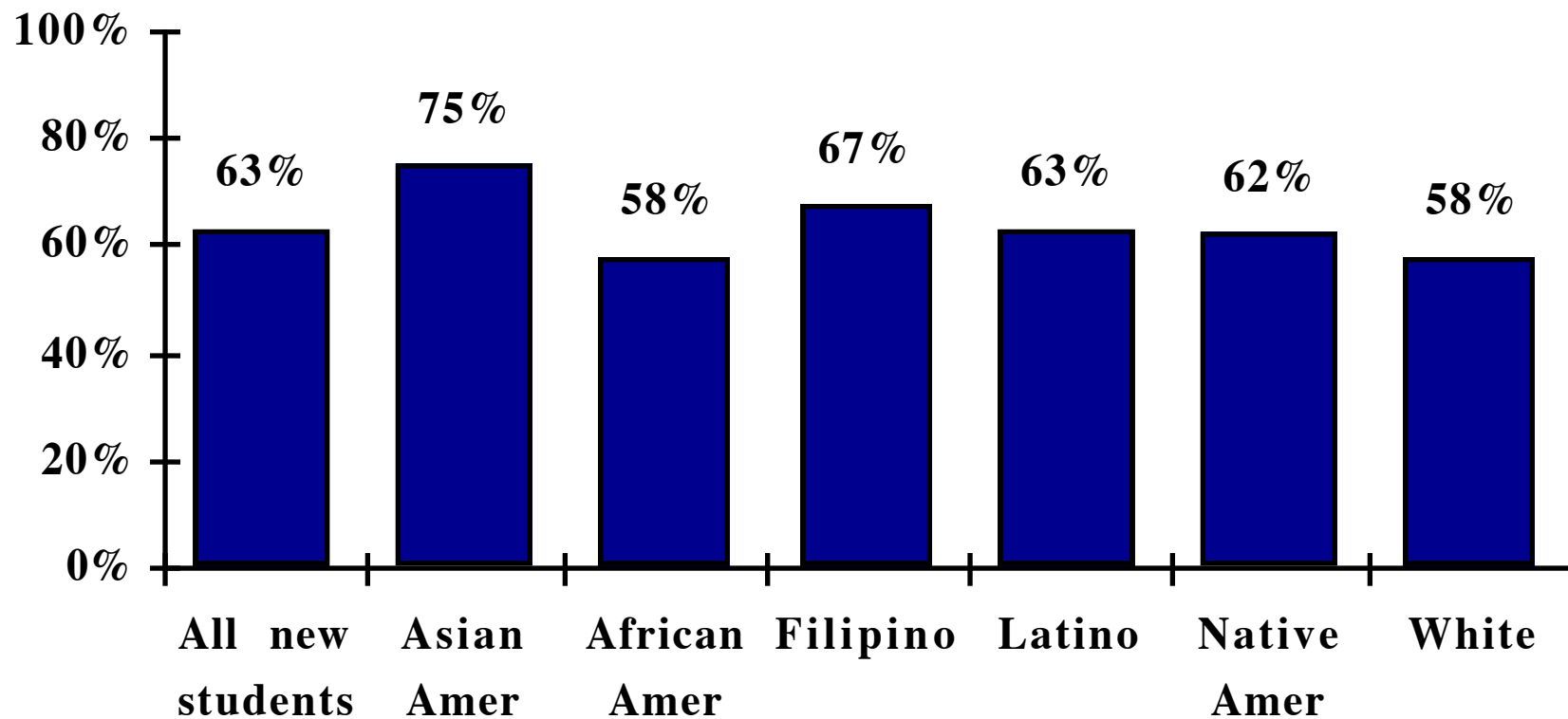
# **Underrepresented Students Special Projects (USSP) grant from CCC Chancellor's Office**

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- **Why do students leave or stay?**
  - to study underrepresented students,  
—> need to study all students
- **Do the reasons vary by race-ethnicity?**
- **What can community colleges do to increase persistence for all?**
- **(Persistence=term to term persistence)**

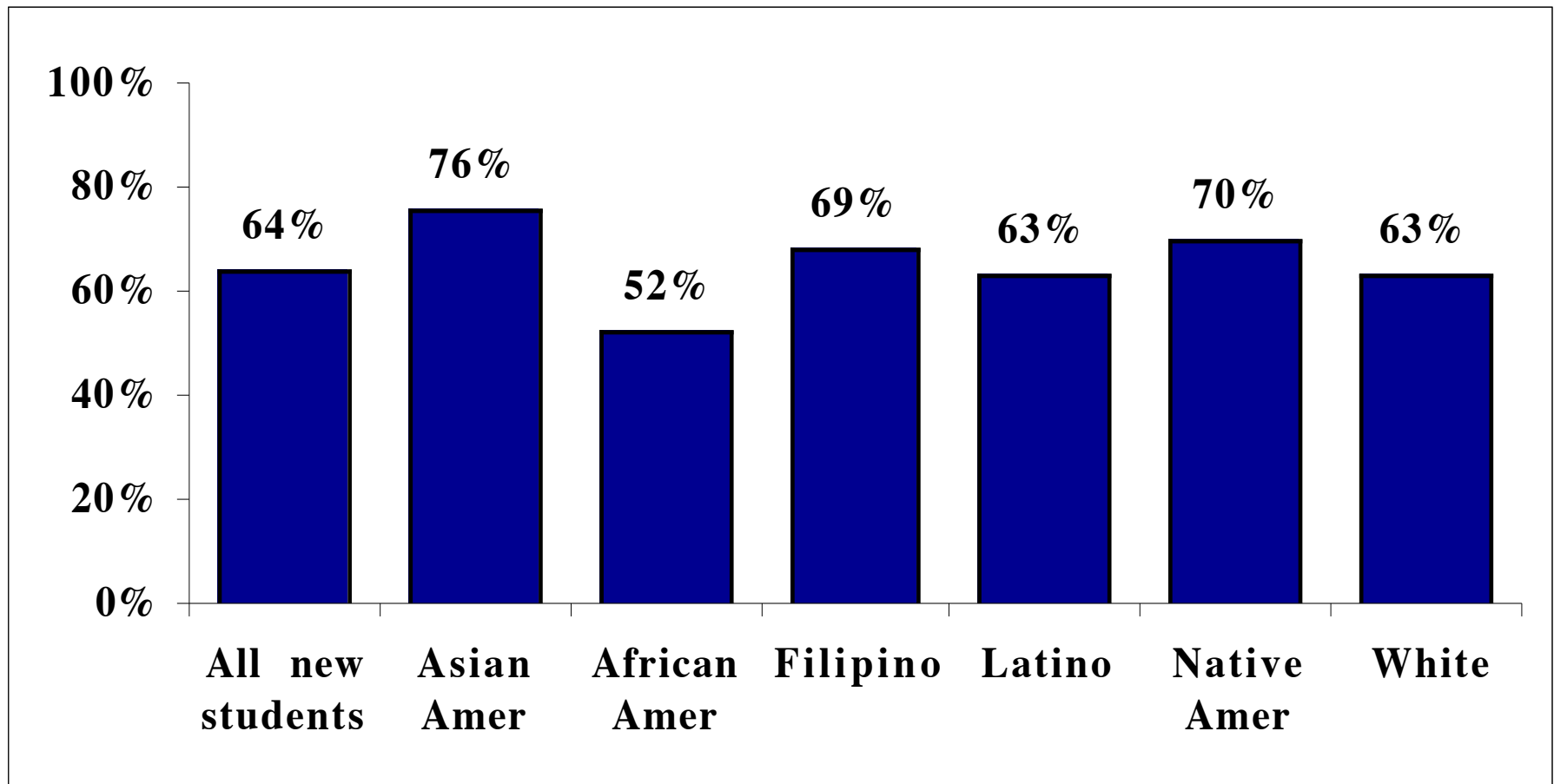
# Persistence rates by race-ethnicity

## Chabot College: F97 to S98



# Persistence rates by race-ethnicity

## Chabot College: F2000 to S2001



# **Why do students persist?**

## **Research theories**

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- **Persistence positively related to**
  - **educational goal & commitment to institution**
  - **social and academic integration in college**
  - **emotional and financial support from family**
  - **lack of external/financial obstacles**
- **Exploratory study**
  - **use these variables**
  - **allow for other variables particular to CCC's**

# Who Persists?

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- **Persistence varies by educational goal**
- **Transfer            71%**
- **AA/AS degree   67%**
- **Job training     54%**
- **Undecided        58%**

# Who Persists?

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- **Persistence varies by student type**
- **New 63%**
- **Continuing 70%**
- **Returning 48%**
- **New transfer 50%**



# Who Persists?

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- **Persistence of continuing students increases with more cumulative units**
- **1-5 units            67%**
- **6-11 units            70%**
- **12-17 units           72%**
- **18-23 units           78%**
- **24-29 units           80%**

# **Exploratory Research Questions**

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- **Why do students *say* they leave or stay?**
- **Which reasons are due to the college, outside forces, or students themselves?**
- **Do these reasons vary by race-ethnicity?**
- **Which reasons can community colleges influence?**

# What USSP grant supported

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- **Student research assistants**
  - reflected gender/ethnic diversity of college
  - acted as student advisory group
  - got trained in interviewing skills
  - conducted peer interviews:
    - phone, in-person, assisted with focus groups
- **Nine students for total of \$2,000/semester**

# Methodology Plan

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- **Quantitative**
  - **Analysis of persistence rates**
  - **Surveys of leavers and persisters**
    - **telephone, mail, classroom**
- **Qualitative**
  - **Interviews of leavers**
    - **telephone and in-person**
  - **Focus groups of persisters**

# Methodology: Leavers

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- **Telephone Survey F97-> Sp98 leavers**
  - **Response rate: 31% (n=485)**
  - **Follow-up phone and in-person interviews**
- **Mail Survey of Sp98 -> F98 leavers**
  - **Response rate:13% (n=252)**
  - **Follow-up phone interviews**

# Phone & Mail Leaver Surveys F97->F98

## Results

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- **Plans to return to Chabot:**

	<u>fall to spr</u>	<u>spr to fall</u>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Maybe</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>15%</b>

# Leaver Surveys F97-F98

## Major reasons for leaving

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	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Mail</u>
• <b>Outside factors</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>68%</b>
• <b>College factors</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>37%</b>
• <b>Individual factors</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>25%</b>
• <b>Met goal _____</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Total (duplicated)</b>	<b>108%</b>	<b>155%</b>

# Detailed reasons for leaving: all students

## Outside Factors

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- **Job conflicts** 32%
- **Financial problems** 24%
- **Family responsibilities** 20%
- **Overall time pressure** 12%
- **Childcare** 11%
- **Health/personal problems** 8%
- **Transportation** 6%



# **Interviews: Outside Factors**

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- **Financial/time pressure/personal**
  - Working full-time, 2 classes, problems at home. Could not afford school, in energy or funds. Will return in Fall.
- **Family responsibilities/childcare**
  - Had to stay home with children when husband's job changed to evening shift. Intends to return.
- **Transportation/financial**
  - Did not have a way to get to Chabot so chose to work to buy a car. Intends to return.

# Detailed reasons for leaving: cont. students

## College Factors

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- **Course not available** 19%
- **Inadequate support services** 8%
- **Course content** 8%
- **Instructional methods** 7%
- **Found other training program** 6%

# **Interviews:**

## **College/Outside Factors**

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- **Financial/job pressure/course availability**
  - **Advised to take course related to AutoTech course; course not available. Could not have afforded books. Working to pay for car and move out. Will return.**
- **Family responsibilities/childcare/other training**
  - **Got pregnant and needed a faster training program. Now attending Heald for AA in Business. Heald promises jobs and pay above minimum wage after graduation. May return if she wants to transfer.**

# Detailed reasons for leaving: all students

## Individual Factors

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- **Low academic success** **12%**
- **Low study skills** **9%**
- **Changed educational goal** **7%**
- **Taking a break/lost interest** **5%**

# **Interviews: Individual Factors**

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- **Low academics/finances**
  - Left to go to other CCC due to finances and low grades. Then talked to Chabot athletic coach and will return to Chabot and be on team. Same goal. (*AA/AS degree*)
- **Not ready for college/outside forces**
  - Not prepared for amount of dedication Chabot required. Family problems, low mid-term grades, & unreliable transportation led him to drop out mid-semester. Liked Chabot. Intends to return when older & more mature.

# **Race-ethnicity differences in major reasons for leaving**

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- **Higher for all other race-ethnicity groups (combined) than for Whites:**
  - **Outside factors**
  - **Individual factors**

# **Leaver Study Results:**

## **Follow-up questions for persisters**

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- **What makes other students persist?**
- **How do persisters cope with same obstacles that made the leavers leave?**
  - **What are their obstacles?**
  - **What support have they had?**

# **Methodology: Persisters**

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- **Focus groups in classrooms: September 98**
- **Classroom survey: October 98**



# **Focus groups of persisters**

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- **Classes of “research-friendly” faculty**
- **Majority continuing/returning students**
- **15 classes: transfer and vocational depts.**
- **Led by Researcher or Counselor**
  - **Student research assistants were notetakers**
- **Structure: all students asked each question**

# **Persisters: Focus Group Questions**

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- **Educational goal/major/work/demos**
- **Why have you persisted in college?**
- **What obstacles have you had to overcome?**
- **What support have you had?**
- **How has your cultural/family background and values influenced your choices?**

# **Persisters:**

## **Focus Group Impressions**

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- **Faith in education (immigrants/non-immig.)**
- **Community college as step up or step down**
  - **Both motivated to transfer**
- **Role of inner motivation and goals**
- **Returning students: time is now**
- **Technical vocational students: felt lucky**
- **Athletics and drama: what keeps them here**

# **Focus Group Results:**

## **Types of reasons to persist**

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- **Preparing for future: better job or pay**
- **Preparing for future: following dream**
- **Improving self; Enjoying education/activities**
- **Role modeling and teaching**
- **Parents: expectations or obligations**
- **Proving to friends, family, or self**
- **Own determination and perseverance**

# **Classroom surveys of persisters**

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- **Role of classroom surveys**
  - **To provide valid measures of focus group results**
- **Target population**
  - **Persisters = continuing/returning students**
- **Sampling frame**
  - **All sections with 80+ % persisters & 20+ students**
  - **Systematic stratified random sample (40 sections)**
  - **Obtained sample of n=740 persisters**

# **Persister Survey Results: Top 6 reasons to persist**

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**(Important to over 85%)**

- **To improve myself; be more knowledgeable**
- **I have to do this for myself**
- **For a job to support myself or family**
- **To have a satisfying career; not a job**
- **To finish what I started; don't want to quit**
- **I am following my dream to be: \_\_\_\_\_**

# **Race-ethnicity differences in reasons to persist**

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- **Primary reasons to persist did not vary**
  - All groups agreed on top 14 out of 28 reasons
  - important to 60% or more of each group
- **Secondary motivations vary by cultural group**
  - next 11 reasons important to 26-84% of each group

# **Race-ethnicity differences in reasons to persist**

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- **Asian/Pacific Islanders & Filipinos**  
**highest on:**
  - **Parents expect me to obtain higher education**
  - **To make parents proud, not disappointed**
  - **Owe it to my parents; feel obligated to them**
  - **To prove to friends/family that I can succeed**
  - **Do better than or as well as friends**



# **Race-ethnicity differences in reasons to persist**

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- **African Americans, Latinos & Filipinos highest on:**
  - **Am a role model for younger people**
  - **To teach/give back to my community**
  - **Enjoy my activities here (athletes, clubs)**
- **All groups except Whites highest on:**
  - **To do better than my parents**

# **Persister Survey Results: Top 5 obstacles to persisting**

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**(A problem for 68-88%)**

- **Overall time pressure**
- **Job pressures (time/schedule conflicts)**
- **Financial problems**
- **Family pressure or responsibilities**
- **Hard to study at home**

# **Race-ethnicity differences in obstacles to persisting**

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- **10-20% more of all other races than Whites experienced the following obstacles:**
  - **General education courses irrelevant**
  - **Too much to go through to get services**
  - **Not enough information about classes/majors/etc.**
  - **Counselors: poor or conflicting advice**
  - **Financial aid too hard or slow to get**
  - **Not enough staff**

# **Persister Survey Results:**

## **Top 7 sources of support**

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*(79-97% received help from)*

- **Having a goal or own self motivation**
- **Emotional support/pressure from family**
- **Emotional support/pressure from friends**
- **Flexible job hours that fit around courses**
- **Encouragement or support from instructor**
- **Support from other students**
- **Encouragement or support from counselor**

# **Race-ethnicity differences in support for persisting**

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- **African Americans highest on:**
  - Student activities I do
- **Asian/Pacific Islanders, Filipinos, & Latinos highest on:**
  - Study skills testing, classes, or workshops
  - Tutoring
  - Encouragement from a counselor

# **Race-ethnicity differences in support for persisting**

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- **10-15% more of all other races than Whites received the following support:**
  - **Study skills testing, classes, or workshops**
  - **Supportive atmosphere in my department**
  - **Tutoring**
  - **A job on campus**
  - **Student activities I do**

# Summary

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- **Comparing leavers and persisters**
- **Comparing underrepresented students and all others**
- **How community colleges can help all students persist**

# Comparing leavers and persisters

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- **Each group had similar outside obstacles**
  - More college obstacles for persisters
- **Each group had own goals & motivations**
  - Goals made them want to persist or return
- **Support made the difference**
  - Persisters had support to overcome obstacles so persistence towards their goals was possible



# **Comparing underrepresented students and all others**

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## **Underrepresented students:**

- **have the same major reasons to persist**
- **are more likely to leave for ‘outside’ reasons**
- **are more likely to experience college obstacles**
- **are more likely to benefit from student support services and student activities**

# **How community colleges can help all students persist**

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- **Provide assistance with outside obstacles**
  - **Financial aid; jobs on campus**
  - **Childcare and transportation**
- **Evaluate and decrease college obstacles**
  - **Course scheduling; accurate information**
- **Enhance student services and activities**
  - **All students benefit**
  - **Especially underrepresented students**