Persistence in Community Colleges

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

A quantitative & qualitative exploration

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Chabot College, Hayward, California
Persistence rates by race-ethnicity
Chabot College: F95 to S96

- All new students: 68%
- Asian Amer: 79%
- African Amer: 55%
- Filipino: 75%
- Latino: 68%
- Native Amer: 48%
- White: 65%
Underrepresented Students Special Projects (USSP) grant from CCC Chancellor’s Office

• 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

- All new students: 63%
- Asian Amer: 75%
- African Amer: 58%
- Filipino: 67%
- Latino: 63%
- Native Amer: 62%
- White: 58%
Persistence rates by race-ethnicity
Chabot College: F2000 to S2001

- All new students: 64%
- Asian Amer: 76%
- African Amer: 52%
- Filipino: 69%
- Latino: 63%
- Native Amer: 70%
- White: 63%
Why do students persist?
Research theories

• 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?

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

- Persistence varies by student type
  - New 63%
  - Continuing 70%
  - Returning 48%
  - New transfer 50%
Who Persists?

• 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

- 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

• 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

• 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

- **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

- Plans to return to Chabot:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall to Spr</th>
<th>Spr to Fall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Leaver Surveys F97-F98

### Major reasons for leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside factors</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College factors</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual factors</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met goal</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total (duplicated)** 108% 155%
**Detailed reasons for leaving: all students**

**Outside Factors**

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

- **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

- Course not available 19%
- Inadequate support services 8%
- Course content 8%
- Instructional methods 7%
- Found other training program 6%
Interviews:
College/Outside Factors

• 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**

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

• 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

- Higher for all other race-ethnicity groups (combined) than for Whites:
  - Outside factors
  - Individual factors
Leaver Study Results:
Follow-up questions for persisters

• 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

- Focus groups in classrooms: September 98
- Classroom survey: October 98
Focus groups of persisters

- 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

• 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

- 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

• 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

• 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

(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

• 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

• 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

• 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

(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

• 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
(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

- 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

• 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

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

- 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

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

• 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