



By the Numbers

Focus on the Facts

Office of Institutional
Research
University of Wisconsin—La Crosse

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Staying Put: Exploring the Retention Perspective

Retention refers to continued attendance from one year to the next and/or to completion of degrees. Retention can also refer to other measures of continued progress toward degrees (for example, completion rates for students in foundational/general education courses, retention rates for students according to program type, and profile of non-returning students).

The Equity Scorecard campus evidence team at UW-L began exploring the Retention perspective by examining first-to-second year retention and 6-year graduation rate data. This led to further exploration to try to uncover what happens between the first year and graduation, which resulted in 5 equity measures, each disaggregated by race/ethnicity:

- The composition of students returning in the Fall of their second year who started at UW-L as new freshmen (3 groups of 3 cohorts combined, spanning cohorts starting Fall 1997/Fall 1998/Fall 1999, Fall 2000/Fall 2001/Fall 2002, and Fall 2003/Fall 2004/Fall 2005) relative to the starting cohort composition;
- The composition of students graduating from UW-L within 6 years

of their first term who started as new freshmen at UW-L (2 groups of 3 cohorts combined, spanning cohorts starting Fall 1994/Fall 1995/Fall 1996 and Fall 1997/Fall 1998/Fall 1999) relative to the starting cohort composition;

- The pre-college preparation (as measured by ACT Composite scores) of students who are retained at UW-L from their first to second year of undergraduate study;
- The pre-college preparation (as measured by ACT Composite score) of students who start their undergraduate study at UW-L and receive their degree within 6 years of their first term; and
- The composition of students receiving passing grades in several groupings of General Education (now University Core Curriculum) courses (Academic years 2003-04/2004-05/2005-06) relative to the composition of students who register for the courses (Academic years 2003-04/2004-05/2005-06).

Findings

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse enjoys high overall first-to-second year retention, and retention rates have increased for all student groups over the

Inside this issue:

Staying Put	1
Editor's Note	1
EqS Evidence Team Needs YOU	1

The EqS Evidence Team Needs YOU!

Input and reaction to the data collected and presented as part of the Equity Scorecard is necessary to the success of the project. Please come learn more about the project and dialogue with others about what this data means for UW-L:

ACCESS Perspective Open Forums:

Monday, February 5

- 12 noon to 1 p.m.
- 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

RETENTION Perspective Open Forums:

Wednesday, February 28

- 12 noon to 1 p.m.
- 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Please feel free to attend either forum for each perspective!

See the EqS website for locations and additional information.

Editor's Note

This issue is one of a series of issues on the Equity Scorecard Pilot project. You can find earlier issues discussing the pilot project within UW System, describing the Equity Scorecard framework and perspectives,

and detailing the results of the first preliminary report on the Access perspective on the Provost's website (<http://www.uwlax.edu/Provost/universitydata/numbers.htm>).

With the Retention

perspective complete, the EqS team has moved on to the next perspective: Excellence.

Teri Thill

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For more information on the Equity Scorecard at UW-L, please visit:

<http://www.uwlax.edu/campusclimate/htm/EquityScorecard.html>

For more information on the development of the Equity Scorecard process, please visit the Center for Urban Education at USC:

<http://www.usc.edu/CUE>

Staying Put: Exploring the Retention Perspective (cont.)

time periods examined by the EqS team except for Asian American students. While this finding is heartening, it is only part of the story.

While graduation rates for all student groups increased between the two time periods studied with the exception of the graduation rate for Asian/Pacific Islander students, all student of color groups are below equity. While the large increase in graduation rates for many students of color indicate movement in the right direction, there is very clearly something happening after a student's first year at UW-L that is causing students of color to leave – either for another institution or to drop out entirely – before completing their baccalaureate degree.

The EqS team conducted analysis to rule out the possibility that the inequity seen in graduation rates might be related to different levels of pre-college preparation by students and found that graduation rate inequities persist even when controlling for incoming ACT scores. This finding led the team to examine possible gatekeeper areas for students once they begin their undergraduate education by looking at grade distributions for several clusters of General Education courses. While students of color are performing equally well to white students in literature and history, students of color do not perform as well in the social sciences, lab sciences, and math courses. It is in the best interest of the university to investigate ways to help all students be more successful in general education courses the first time they enroll in a course. Advising and proper course placements are two areas in which the university might most easily and effectively influence student success in general education courses.

Summary

- First to second year retention rates increased for ALL student groups except for Asian American students and all students were either at or approaching equity during the most recent three 3-year time frames.
- While graduation rates increased during the two most recent 3-year time frames for ALL groups, with the exception of Asian/Pacific Islander students, the graduation rates for students of color groups are BELOW equity.
- Students of color admitted with ACT Composite scores less than 23 are all at or approaching equity in terms of first to second year retention. In fact, students of color with lower ACT scores appear to be more likely to return to UW-L for their second year of instruction than students of color with higher ACT Composite scores.
- Students of color admitted with ACT Composite scores of 23 or above are still not graduating at the same rate as white students.
- In regard to General Education courses, students of color are performing equally well to white students in literature and history; students of color do not perform as well in the social sciences, lab sciences, and math courses.

To read the preliminary draft of the Retention Perspective portion of the Equity Scorecard, please download a copy from the Equity Scorecard website. Don't forget to attend a forum (see first page for dates & times) or send your feedback about the report to the Evidence Team!

- Barbara Stewart & Bruce Riley, authors for the Retention perspective