Welcome to our sixth Focusing on the First Year Conference.

Laura Coffin Koch

In the early 1990s, the University of Minnesota, along with many other colleges and universities nationwide, began addressing the need to strengthen the undergraduate experience and increase retention and graduation rates. As part of this effort, the First-Year Experience Project was initiated in 1995. The project team consisted of administrators, faculty, student development professionals, students and representatives from other campuses.

The goals of the FYE Project were to:

• increase retention and graduation rates.
• increase student satisfaction with college experience.
• coordinate and expand initiatives related to the first-year experiences.
• develop a sense of community and belonging for first-year students.
• enhance communication among students and between faculty and students.

From this project came a number of initiatives: Freshman Seminars, a two-day orientation program, the establishment of Student Excellence in Academics and Multiculturalism (SEAM), the reintroduction of a New Student Convocation, Living/Learning Communities in Housing and Residential Life, the Leadership Minor Program, and special collegiate programming for first-year students such as the Nature of Life course in the College of Biological Sciences; peer mentoring in the Institute of Technology (now the College of Science and Engineering); and student communities in the College of Liberal Arts.

This was only the beginning. Since then, programs and opportunities have developed all around campus. Both the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Science and Engineering have recently instituted required first-year courses for all their students, and in 2008, we began the campus-wide required Welcome Week program for all incoming first-year students.

This conference was also part of the vision. As the campus began to develop more and more high-quality programs for first-year students and collect data on those programs, we believed that the entire campus would benefit from learning about what various units on campus were doing with respect to first-year students. We also wanted to bring to campus new ideas by inviting renowned speakers to share with us their research and projects:

• 2002 - Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University
• 2004 – Richard Light, Harvard University
• 2006 – Mary Howard-Hamilton, Indiana State University
• 2008 – George Kuh, Indiana University
• 2011 – Shane Lopez, The Clifton Strengths School and Senior Scientist in Residence, Gallup

This year we are thrilled to have Jennifer Keup, Director of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.

We have certainly appreciated their words and inspiration over the years, but we have also been greatly rewarded by our own colleagues from across the campus. This year we were overwhelmed by the quality and quantity of the proposals for today’s program. You are all doing amazing work on behalf of our students and it shows: Our retention rate for first to second year is now at an all-time high of 91%!

In 1995, when we began our first-year efforts, many believed that the University of Minnesota could not change, but we did! It was not the result of a single person, but the efforts of many who have made this dramatic transformation happen.

Enjoy the conference!

Laura Coffin Koch serves as the Associate Dean in the Office of Undergraduate Education

WHAT’S INSIDE...

• The Class of 2016
• OFYP Mission Statement
• CIRP Freshman Survey Trends
• Examining Results from 2012 CIRP Survey
• Parent and Family Factors
• Welcome Week: Sense of Belonging and Retention Rates
• Transfer Students: What Factors Magnify Success?
The University of Minnesota has a mission to provide a distinctive, transformative educational experience of the highest quality in an urban environment, within a research University that cares deeply about the quality of teaching and learning, to prepare students for challenging and productive careers, positions of leadership in our society, graduate or professional education and lifelong learning. A major priority for the University is to improve our retention and graduation rates. In particular, we have managed to improve significantly our first-year retention rate to 91%, our four-year graduation rate to 58% and our six-year rate to 73%. Our goal is to increase the 4-year rate to 60%. We attribute some of this success to the quality and innovativeness of our first-year programs.

The University of Minnesota continues to increase the academic qualification of their Freshman classes. For fall 2012 the university received over 38,000 applications, made nearly 19,000 offers, and matriculated 5,514 students. The growth in applications over a six-year period has been remarkable with nearly a 100% increase.

While these metrics reveal our students are entering the University with increased likelihood of success, measures of student participation and engagement in campus life are also headed in positive directions. We have increased both the percent of students living on campus (87%) and those in living and learning communities (17%). The recent Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey indicates increasing satisfaction with the University of Minnesota experience. Eighty-six percent of our students are satisfied with their experience, with nearly 15% being very satisfied. Eighty-eight percent of our students feel that they belong on the campus with 26% strongly agreeing (that they belong). The percent of students who feel they are “self-aware” has increased from 77% to 95% during their time at the U of M, thus indicting exposure to one of our key developmental outcomes. Since 2005 we have seen significant increases in the number of students who participate in fraternity/sorority life (up 50%), study abroad (up 13%), and registered student groups (up 20%).

We believe the initiation of Welcome Week and other initiatives and the work that has gone into enhancing the student learning experience will produce measurable improvements in these areas. We look forward to reviewing the results of the Spring 2013 Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey to gain a better perspective on these efforts.

Robert McMaster serves as the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education

Jerry Rinehart serves as the Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students

(Endnotes)
1: Student Experiences Survey Trend Report, Office of Institutional Research, University of Minnesota. Data reflect weighted averages per survey year.

ORIENTATION & FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMS MISSION AND CORE VALUES

The mission of Orientation & First-Year Programs is to provide quality transitional experiences, in collaboration with other University departments, that maximize students’ potential for personal and academic success and assist them in adjusting to the challenges presented by collegiate life.

We deliver our mission, programs, and services by placing our core values at the center of our work.

Student Success
Dedicated to the success of each individual

Building Community
Celebrating diversity, encouraging responsibility and creating a sense of belonging

Collaboration
Strengthening our work by building internal and external relationships

Leadership
Developing the leader within us all

Commitment to Excellence
Pursuing our work with professionalism, innovation, scholarship, and integrity
Looking Back and Going Forward: Analysis of CIRP Freshman Survey Trends Data for the University of Minnesota

Jennifer R. Keup

The University of Minnesota has been administering the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey to new cohorts of entering college students since 1988, which predates the birth year of many of the current freshmen by more than five years. Such a long-standing commitment to collecting data from incoming students illustrates a historic and ongoing dedication to data-based decision-making, accountability, student development, and excellence in the first-year experience. Each year these data were collected (1988, biennially from 1989-2009, and 2012—denoted by an asterisk in Figure 1), they served as a valuable resource to understand the needs of the incoming cohort of first-year students and as a baseline for their learning, development, and success in subsequent years of college. However, when they are connected by way of a trends analysis, the CIRP Freshman Survey data provide an empirical history of change; can validate the long-range effects of programmatic and policy decisions; illustrate the character and personality of different generations of first-year students; and test the acuity of our institutional hindsight.

After so many years of data collection via the Freshman Survey, there is a mother lode of empirical information that must be carefully mined for themes and patterns that provide new insight into the institution and the students it serves. Certain trends, such as major, demographic data, and background characteristics, are better collected via other institutional research outlets rather than through the self-report function of the CIRP Freshman Survey. Other trends are not as valuable because they merely reflect prevalent and widely-accepted social trends (e.g., a 53.1% increase in the proportion of students reporting frequent computer use between 1988 and 2005) or are artifacts of shifts in institutional edict (e.g., a 36.8% increase between 1988 and 2012 in the percent of students who plan to live in a college residence hall when guaranteed student housing was introduced for first-year students in the mid-1990s). However, trends on student beliefs, background, actions, and expectations that can be triangulated by multiple survey items over the years are ones that are especially worthy of note and consideration. I have selected four themes to highlight in the current analysis of Freshman Survey trends data for the University of Minnesota: finances, academics, social and civic engagement, and health behaviors.

Finances. It is no secret that the economic landscape for both higher education and society at large has changed over the past 25 years. However, trends identified among Freshman Survey responses from students at the U of M provide a picture of their financial background as well as their perceptions about their financial position. One of the largest shifts in all of the data points of the survey for students at the U of M was the major increase in the percent of students whose parents make more than $100,000 annually (+32.6%) and the decline in the proportion of students whose families make less than $50,000 annually (-14.2%). While this may be partially explained by inflation and cost-of-living increases in wages, it also is likely due to a true increase in collective socio-economic position of new students at the University of Minnesota. Current cohorts of students are coming from more educated households—student reports indicate a 15.3 percentage-point increase between 1988 and 2012 in the proportion of students who plan to live in a college residence hall when guaranteed student housing was introduced for first-year students in the mid-1990s. However, trends on student beliefs, background, actions, and expectations that can be triangulated by multiple survey items over the years are ones that are especially worthy of note and consideration. I have selected four themes to highlight in the current analysis of Freshman Survey trends data for the University of Minnesota: finances, academics, social and civic engagement, and health behaviors.

Academics. Mirroring national trends (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007), current students are entering college with much higher grades than previous generations. More specifically, the percent of students who report earning an A-/A/A+ grade point average in high school increased from 28.7% in 1988 to 77.1% in 2012. This 48.4 percentage-point increase may be due to students entering the U with a higher academic profile, which is supported by
the 25.4 percentage-point increase in the proportion of students who say that the college’s academic reputation was a “very important” reason in their decision to come to the University of Minnesota. However, this trend may also be attributed to grade-inflation at the high school level. Perhaps due to their impressive grades at the secondary school level, more recent cohorts of new students at the U of M tend to rate themselves higher than their predecessors in 1988 with respect to their skills, including academic ability, writing ability, and mathematical ability as well as their intellectual self-confidence (Table 1). Further, they have higher expectations that a high level of academic performance will persist into their college years: trends revealed a 20.4 percentage-point increase in students who say that there is a “very good chance” that they will make at least a B average in college. While one hopes that this goal will be met, students with such lofty expectations and a history of high grades may have difficulty navigating the transition to college-level work.

(See Table 1)

Other data points over the years reveal some encouraging evidence of engagement that may assist in U of M students’ academic adjustment. More students are reporting that they “frequently” studied with other students in high school (+10.9%) and even tutored a fellow student at least occasionally (+15.7%). Further, U of M Freshman Survey trends reveal a small increase over the years (+5.0%) in the proportion of students reporting that they studied at least ten hours per week in high school. They also have a history of interacting with their teachers that they intend to continue during college with a 10.3 percentage-point increase among those first-year students reporting that there is a “very good chance” that they will communicate regularly with their professors. Finally, current U of M students report an interest in various high-impact practices at a higher rate than their counterparts from earlier decades, including the 13.9 percentage-point increase in students who indicate that there is a “very good chance” that they will study abroad.

Social and Civic Engagement. In addition to academic endeavors, Freshman Survey responses reveal important trends about the way that students are engaging socially and civically. Analyses of the data reveal an 18.1 percentage-point decrease between 1988 and 2012 in the proportion of students engaged in casual socializing with friends more than 10 hours per week during the last year of high school. However, there was a 12.9 percentage-point increase in the percent of students who participated in student/clubs on a weekly basis during the last year of high school and a 14.0 percentage-point increase in students reporting that they engaged in volunteer work at least three hours per week during the academic year prior to college. These results suggest a greater student commitment to formal structures that facilitate cocurricular involvement than to informal social channels. Students entering the U of M anticipate continuing this type of engagement with a 10.5 percentage-point increase over the past 24 years in the proportion who state that there is a very good chance that they will participate in student clubs and groups in college (except social sororities and fraternities, which declined during this time period) and a 17.5 percentage-point increase in students who report that there is a similarly high probability that they will engage in volunteer or community service work while in college.

Patterns of volunteerism may be related to students’ political and civic views since there also was a 14.7 percentage-point increase in the proportion of students reporting that they discussed politics “frequently” during their last year of high school. The political profile of new students at the U has become more liberal over the years with a 9.0 percentage-point increase in those students who affiliate with “liberal” or “far left” views. Further, student support of specific issues such as gay marriage, which has increased 19.4 percentage-points and reached a historic high in 2012, and the abolishment of the death penalty (+20.3%) indicate a move toward more liberal socio-political views among students entering the University of Minnesota.

Health Behaviors. Trends with respect to students’ history and expectations of physical health and mental well-being have moved in a positive direction over the past 24 years at the University of Minnesota. There have been drastic declines in the proportion of students who reported drinking beer (-38.5%), drinking wine or liquor (-33.4%), and smoking cigarettes (-19.8%) during their last year of high school (Figure 2). New students at the U also enter the institution with healthier habits as indicated by how they spend their time. There was
a 24.4 percentage-point decline in the proportion of students reporting that they spent any time each week “partying” during their last year of high school. Over the years, there has been a great deal of fluctuation in the proportion of students reporting that they spent five or more hours per week engaged in exercise or sports during their final year of high school. However, the 53.6% of new U of M students reporting this level of physical activity in 2012 represents a rebound from the all-time low of 45.9% reporting on this item in 2009 and is a return to the historic high response on this item of 54.6% in 1988.

There has been a 38.0 percentage-point decline in the proportion of entering U of M students who report feeling depressed during their senior year of high school at least occasionally, if not frequently (Figure 2). Yet, since 1988 there has been a 16.9 percentage-point increase in the proportion of students who say that there is “some chance” or a “very good chance” that they will seek personal counseling while in college. Whether this is due to an increase in need or enhanced awareness of this service on campus is unclear. However, the fact that a growing number of students enter college with an understanding and acceptance of the need for counseling represents a positive shift in the removal of stigma around tending to emotional health and well-being.

(See Figure 2)

The analysis of trends is best done with an objective perspective. In order for themes and patterns to emerge from the data, it is important to be free of institutional history, campus culture, the political climate, strategic vision, and values. Such bias will often cause a retrospective view of student trends data to validate current assumptions, support previous decisions, or represent recognized institutional shifts or priorities. Yet, once the analysis phase of the work is over, interpretation of the findings from trends analyses, understanding their implications, and using them as cues for future directions is a process that benefits greatly from the consideration of institutional context. In other words, while trends analysis requires objectivity, interpretation of trends results needs a healthy dose of subjectivity. Therefore, I offer the following questions to help guide the discussion of these trends findings and their implications among members of the University of Minnesota FYE community:

• What are your initial reactions to these findings?
• What institutional policies, pedagogies, and practices help explain these trends?
• Which findings do not fit with your understanding of institutional history over the past 25 years?
• How do you think that the interpretation of these themes and trends would differ by campus constituency (e.g., students, faculty, student support staff, or administration) or by discipline?
• Based both upon these findings and your understanding of the University of Minnesota, what trends do you expect student survey responses will reveal over the next 10 years?

In the best of circumstances, research fuels an iterative inquiry process. Therefore, it is my hope that these trends data provide the foundation for rich conversations, serve as a background for program and policy decisions, and generate new research ideas with respect to the first-year experience at the University of Minnesota.

Jennifer Keup is the Keynote Speaker for the First Year Conference

References cited:
Examining Results from the 2012 CIRP Survey
Krista M. Soria
Christopher Pleasants
Ronald Huesman

In summer 2012, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities administered the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman survey to first-year students who attended orientation sessions. We achieved a response rate of 95% of the 2012 freshman class (n = 5,239). In this article, we highlight some of the more interesting findings from the 2012 CIRP survey.

Close to 90% of freshmen reported that UMNTC was either their first or second choice university, slightly beating out comparative institutions, among which 86-87% of freshmen reported their respective institutions were their first or second choice. At the same time, 89% of freshmen reported applying to more than one institution, following a steeply upward trend since the 1980s (only 53% of UMNTC freshmen in 1988 applied to more than one institution).

Additionally, compared to other institutions, UMNTC freshmen indicated that they spent more time working for pay while in high school and were much more likely to expect that they would have a job while in college to help pay for college expenses. Despite the fact that UMNTC freshmen were much more likely to find their own resources to pay for college (compared to students at comparable institutions), this is becoming less common here.

UMNTC freshmen indicated that their top priorities in life included being well off financially, helping others who are in difficulty, improving their understanding of other countries and cultures, adopting “green” practices to protect the environment, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life. Close to 75% of freshmen stated that there was some chance that they would participate in volunteer or community service work while in college and 88.6% believed there was a chance they would participate in student clubs/groups while in college.

Freshmen also indicated the academic and social reputation of the university, the cost of attendance, and financial assistance were important factors that influenced their decision to attend UMNTC. Personal motivational factors for attending college included to obtain a better job, to learn more about things that interest them, and to be able to make more money.

Politically, UMNTC freshmen are equally likely to consider themselves “middle of the road” or “liberal” (about 40% each), with less than a quarter who consider themselves “conservative.” However, the majority of freshmen align with liberal views on common contentious issues such as same-sex marriage, taxing the rich, abortion, and a national health care plan to cover everybody’s medical costs. This makes 2012 UMNTC freshmen slightly more liberal than their counterparts in other highly selective public universities.

Since the CIRP was first offered to UMNTC freshmen in 1988, students have become much less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, fail to complete a homework assignment, or feel depressed in the past year. Furthermore, freshmen have become much more likely to have volunteered or completed community service as a part of a class in the previous year.

For a more in-depth look at the 2012 CIRP data, as well as data from several other years, please visit http://www.oir.umn.edu/surveys/cirp.

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Parental and Family Factors Associated with Freshman Student Outcomes: Evidence from UMNTC CIRP Data
Krista M. Soria
Ronald Huesman

Over the last several decades, parental involvement in the college experience has been on the rise, with some scholars suggesting that the average amount of contact between students and parents reaches to over 13 times per week (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Many of these contacts were initiated by students, not parents, and this level of contact appears to be relatively sustained over students’ college careers (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Some practitioners are wary of parental involvement—especially when it comes to popular conceptions of “helicopter parents” who hover over their children and do not provide them with room to develop on their own or face their own challenges (Hoover, 2008). In this study, we used 2007 University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (UMNTC) Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman survey data to examine whether parental and family factors are associated with freshman students’ successful outcomes.

The 2007 CIRP survey was administered to the majority of incoming freshman during their orientation. One of the challenges with administering a paper-and-pencil survey to students during orientation is that many students did not correctly write their student identification number on their surveys; therefore, out of approximately 5,100 student responses, we were able to retain approximately 4,800 that could be matched to institutional data. Those respondents were nearly identical to the racial and gender composition of the 2007 freshman class.

We first began by examining the importance of parental legacy in students’ retention, first-year grade point average, and graduation within five years. Students who had one or both parents who had attended UMNTC were more likely to re-enroll for their second year than students who had no parents attend UMNTC (90.7% compared with 87.1%). After four years, students who had one or both parents attend UMNTC were more likely to have graduated (59.7%) than students who had no parents attend UMNTC (of whom 53.1% graduated). Students whose parents had attended UMNTC also had slightly higher grade point averages in their first year (3.18) compared with their peers (3.12).

In the CIRP survey, students were asked to indicate how involved their parents were in helping them to make decisions to attend college; working with college officials; and choosing college courses. After developing a factor (composite score) from these items, we explored the association between parental involvement and students’ first-year retention. Controlling for demographics, first-term grade point average, ACT/ SAT scores, college of enrollment, and other environmental factors, we found that parental involvement in the college decision process was positively associated with students’ retention to their second year. Parental involvement was also positively predictive of students’ graduation in four or five years.

Finally, we discovered that family composition has an impact on students’ success. Students from divorced or separated families or those who had experienced the death of a parent were also much more likely, on average, to have lower cumulative grade point averages in their first year. All of these findings persisted in models controlling for demographics, ACT/SAT scores, college of enrollment, parental influence, and other environmental factors.

Overall, the findings suggest the importance of family structure, parental legacy, and parental involvement in promoting freshman students’ success at UMNTC and where needed, the potential for institutional support. Future researchers are encouraged to continue exploring these factors and whether parental involvement and family structure continue to influence students’ success as they progress through higher education. Additional variables could be explored that may shed some light on whether parents’ continued support, family structure, or frequency of family contact may yield different findings when predicting additional outcomes.

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References cited:

Welcome Week Contributes to Increased Sense of Belonging and First-Year Retention Rates

Jenny Porter
Analysis Provided by: Krista Soria

"Do I have to go to Welcome Week?" This is a question frequently asked by new students when they call the front desk in Orientation & First-Year Programs (OFYP) each August. The student office assistants simply respond “Yes, it is an expectation that you attend Welcome Week.” The student then inevitably follows up with a second question “What will happen to me if I don’t attend?” This question can be frustrating and challenging to answer because there is no concrete answer to give the new student.

The reality is that no hold will be placed on the student’s account and their graduation will not be withheld. Students are asked to follow up with their academic advisor or instructor, depending on the college. There is no punishment for not attending. Instead, students are told the program is designed to get them connected to the people, places, and resources that will aid in their personal and academic success at the U. This can be a complicated and ambiguous answer for new students. Through research efforts, fortunately there is now more concrete data demonstrating the positive effect Welcome Week has on the student experience, and more specifically students’ sense of belonging and first-year retention (Soria, Lingren Clark, & Coffin Koch, 2013).

Few empirical studies have attempted to address orientation programs and their influence on college students (Mayhew, Stipeck, & Dorow, 2011). In fact, this was one of the reasons Welcome Week was not implemented in 2005 as originally planned. It was difficult to prove an extended orientation program would lead to increased student satisfaction and higher first-year retention rates because of the lack of research in the field. When conversations about creating Welcome Week resurfaced, one of the first committees developed was charged with how to assess the program. The First-Year Assessment plan (http://www.ofyp.umn.edu/en/survey-results.html) created by the assessment committee continually informs decisions and programmatic efforts for many OFYP initiatives. For instance, the goals of Welcome Week (see Figure 1) were mapped to each major event within the program to ensure the intentional implementation of the program. In addition, OFYP tracks over 5,000 students through 13 different events in the six-day Welcome Week program. This data on student participation is used to determine patterns of behavior among various cohorts of students (i.e. commuter students, student athletes, honors students, students of color, etc.) that inform change to the program each year. This data was also critical in demonstrating that Welcome Week increases a student’s sense of belonging and increases the likeliness of them returning for a second year.

The study conducted by OFYP and the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) examines the academic and social benefits for an extended orientation (i.e. Welcome Week) program and is a significant contribution to the field of orientation, retention and transition. Using attendance records collected by OFYP and data from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Survey, OIR conducted an analysis to determine what effect Welcome Week had on the student experience. The specific question explored was: Do first-year students who participated in an extended new student orientation/Welcome Week program (compared to students who did not participate) have a greater sense of belonging and higher first to second year retention rates? For the cohort that entered in Fall 2009, students who attended Welcome Week (using College Day attendance data) had statistically significant (p<.05) differences as it related to sense of belonging (survey factor in SERU related to the affiliation one feels to the institution) and first to second year retention rates (see Table 1).

Welcome Week intentionally creates this sense of belonging in a number of ways. The program was designed to assist students in navigating their transition to college as a member of the University of Minnesota community, while enhancing their opportunities for personal development and academic success (Welcome Week Vision Statement, 2008). This vision is achieved through connecting students to the diverse communities they belong to upon becoming a University student: their Welcome Week small group, their college of enrollment, the university community, the U of M Community, the Twin Cities Community, and the College Community. The specific question explored was: Do first-year students who participated in an extended new student orientation/Welcome Week program (compared to students who did not participate) have a greater sense of belonging and higher first to second year retention rates? For the cohort that entered in Fall 2009, students who attended Welcome Week (using College Day attendance data) had statistically significant (p<.05) differences as it related to sense of belonging (survey factor in SERU related to the affiliation one feels to the institution) and first to second year retention rates (see Table 1).

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Figure 1
Welcome Week is designed to begin to build a sense of community by...

- Encouraging a first-year class identity.
- Fostering institutional pride and respect.
- Acknowledging individual responsibility to the community.
- Taking ownership and responsibility for college experience.
- Assisting in adjustment to the campus environment.
- Enhancing the capacity of students to lead and work among students from diverse backgrounds.
- Maintaining meaningful relationships with students, faculty, staff and surrounding community.
- Discovering and accessing the multitude of resources and opportunities available at the University.

Figure 2
Twin Cities Community
U of M Community
College Community
Small Group Community
itself, and the Twin Cities (see Figure 2). The program is designed to introduce and build upon each of these communities to create a sense of belonging (for the students) to their new environment.

Welcome Week Small Group Community
new students are assigned to groups of 25-30 of their peers with two Welcome Week leaders based on where they live/commute. This allows them to build connections with those they are living with or nearby and will continue to see throughout the year. They begin to share their individual experiences, talents and skills with others in the group while having accountability for participation to them. Students navigate the program in these small groups so they can continue to build relationships with other new students, upper-class student leaders (i.e. Welcome Week Leaders, Community Advisors, etc.).

College Community
A strong sense of community within a student’s college is seen during New Student Convocation, the first large event at Welcome Week. Colleges provide new students with college specific shirts and students are seated by college in Mariucci Arena. The chants and cheers that develop during breaks in the program demonstrate the energy that students have for their college of enrollment. In addition, four colleges (CLA, CSE, CFANS, and CEHD) require a first-year course during first semester and students in these colleges meet for the first time during Welcome Week. This helps alleviate anxiety prior to the first day of class and allows students to build relationships with their faculty/instructor and peers in their class.

U of M Community
Introducing students to the full U of M community includes connecting them as a class. Each first-year class is branded as the Class of 20xx and this message is reinforced through the shirt the Class of 20xx shirt they receive upon check-in for the program and a Class of 20xx tassel at Convocation. At Pride & Spirit students learn chants and cheers and take a class photo in the shape of the M. The photo is then shared with them via posters, postcards and a display on the ground floor of Coffman Memorial Union. In addition to building a class identity, learning to navigate the physical layout of campus is crucial. Students quickly appreciate how much walking is involved in a typical day of class: They learn how to ride the Campus Connector as they attend sessions across the East Bank, West Bank and St. Paul Campus.

Twin Cities Community
The scope of community introduced at Welcome Week includes engaging students with social issues, introducing them to local businesses and showing them different areas of the Twin Cities. Students connect with non-profit organizations in the community to learn about ways they can connect their academic interests to the goals of organizations in the area. They begin to see how they can be a part of the local community and student group community on campus. On their exploration trips they experience getting off-campus, learning bus stops and excursions they can take during the academic year.

With the increased sense of belonging students feel during Welcome Week, it is no surprise that those who participated in the program were retained at a higher rate than those who did not participate (see Table 1). In addition, the overall retention rate has increased over the time Welcome Week has been in existence (see Table 2). It can be challenging to communicate to students all the ways they will benefit from attending Welcome Week, especially when many of the reasons are not tangible items they experience right away. Fortunately, now when a student calls and asks “What will happen to me if I don’t attend Welcome Week?” this data can be shared. We can tell them some of the many ways in which Welcome Week will help them become more connected to their new communities and begin their college journey on the right foot. Additionally, this research is contributing to the field of orientation, transition, and retention.


Jenny Porter is the Associate Director of Orientation & First-Year Programs

Krista Soria is a Research Analyst for the Office of Institutional Research

References cited:


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Table 1
In fall 2009, 5,400 non-transfer, first-year students enrolled at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Of these students, 4,629 (85.7%) participated in College Day of Welcome Week. The SERU survey response rate was 34.5% (n = 1,865).

Table 2
First-Year Retention Rates
http://www.oir.umn.edu/student/grad_retention/historic

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<td>90.7%</td>
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Transfer Students: What Factors Magnify Success?
Beth Lingren Clark
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In January of 2011, Orientation & First-Year Programs was awarded a research grant from the National Institute on the Study of Transfer Students. The grant was entitled: Recipe for Success: Identifying the Impact of Incoming Characteristics on Transfer Student Transition, Retention and Graduation. Below are the details of the grant followed by several significant findings.

Profile of U of M Transfer Students:
In 2012, 26.8% of all new students at the University of MN – Twin Cities are transfer students.

Overview of Cohorts beginning in Fall 2007, 2008, and 2009
• 93% attended full-time
• Median age: 21
• 74% are below the age of 24
• 76.5% were in-state residents
• 50.2% Female
• Race/Ethnicity: 72.9% White
  • 7.1% International (of any race)
  • 5.7% Asian
  • 9.5% Under-Represented Minorities
• 4.9% Not Specified
• 41.5% are first-generation
• 25.5% are Pell Grant recipients
• 37.1% transferred from community colleges
• 59.7% transferred from four-year colleges
• 18.7% transferred with MN Transfer Curriculum
• Median # transfer credits: 57

Abstract
Based on a sample of approximately 7,000 fall-enrolling transfer students at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMNTC) between 2007-2009, the study examined the relationship between specific student characteristics and student success. The characteristics examined include age, gender, ethnic background, home location, admitted major, declared major, GPA, number of credit hours transferred, and transfer institution type. The goal of the study was to identify whether certain characteristics are positively and/or negatively associated with transfer student success as defined by first to second year retention, grade point average, and overall satisfaction with UMNTC.

Method
The sample for the study included three cohorts of transfer students enrolling in fall 2007, 2008, and 2009 at UMNTC, totaling approximately 7,000 students. The data was compiled in coordination with UMNTC’s Office of Institutional Research from various student information databases and sources, including institutional data (logistic regression), the Student Experience at a Research University survey (independent sample t-tests), the National Survey on the Student Experience survey (qualitative), and first-year assessment surveys (descriptive statistics and qualitative). We looked at demographics, pre-college characteristics and experiences, transfer credits, college experiences, successes, and anxieties/concerns.

Results
This study examined three key areas: retention from year one to year two, graduation in year three, and having a GPA of at least a 2.5 at the end of the first year.

• After the first year, over 86% of the transfer students were retained.
• After three years, 58% graduated, 20% were retained and 22% dropped out.
• Female students were more likely to graduate in 3 years.
• Female students were more likely to have a GPA of at least 2.5.
• Students who transferred from a community college were 1.25 times less likely to have a GPA of at least 2.5 compared with students from four-year or other types of institutions controlling for other factors in our models.
• Students who are Minnesota residents are almost two times more likely to persist than non-residents.
• Students who have a prior degree are significantly less likely to be retained and graduate.
• Students who enroll having completed the MN Transfer Curriculum are two times more likely to be retained (compared with students who did not complete this curriculum) and are more likely to graduate within three years.
Students with at 26-52 transfer credits are more than two times more likely to graduate in three years compared with students who enrolled with less than 26 credits.

Students with 52-78 transfer credits are almost five times more likely to graduate in three years compared with students who enrolled with less than 26 credits.

Students with more than 78 transfer credits are over seven times more likely to graduate in three years compared with students who enrolled with less than 26 credits.

Undecided students are less likely to be retained and graduate in three years.

Students who are enrolled full-time are almost three times more likely to persist and 3.5 times more likely to graduate in three years than students who enrolled part-time.

During the first days/weeks of the semester, transfer students prefer more opportunities to socialize, more information on campus libraries, assistance finding a job, training on academic and personal skills, and increased interactions with faculty and academic advisers.

Overall, compared with non-transfer students, transfer students:
- are less satisfied with educational experience
- are less satisfied with access/availability of courses
- are challenged by the size of the University
- are frustrated with focus on research over teaching
- have a lower sense of belonging
- have fewer experiences working with faculty on research & creative projects
- have felt unsuccessful at getting to know faculty
- are less likely to work with classmates on class projects outside of class
- feel anonymous and find it hard to get involved on campus
- want to have more interaction with academic advisors
- perceive a less friendly campus climate for their personal beliefs and an unsupportive atmosphere for their needs
- share concerns about the quality of academic advising
- found it difficult to get appointments with advisors
- are troubled by high advisor turnover
- feel their advisors are unsympathetic to their unique needs
- find it difficult to talk to their advisors

Implications for Practice
As early as 2003, the University began to take a greater interest in the transfer student experience. Surveys were conducted to assess the needs of these students in 2004. Colleges enhanced their focus on these students – some creating transfer student advisory boards to assist in guiding practices. OFYP created online orientation in addition to on-campus orientation in order to meet the diverse needs of these students. More recently, new student checklists have been implemented and communications to transfer students have been enhanced. Policies have also been influenced and new enrollment management processes have been discussed creating meaningful targets for transfer students. Additional programming is also being offered including Leaders in Transition Living Learning Community, transfer online monthly newsletters, transfer student portal content, a Facebook page, integration of transfer students in @ Home in MN programming, and Transfer Welcome Day. The University has recently hired a Coordinator for Transfer Student Initiatives to centrally facilitate the enhancement of the transfer student experience.

The research study, although conducted on previous cohorts, demonstrates the different needs of incoming transfer students from that of new freshmen. There are plans to look at the same data with recent cohorts of transfer students who have entered the University. UMNTC is committed to acknowledging those needs and issues in order to enhance the student experience, retain and graduate more transfer students.

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Survey Reporting Tool

The Office of Institutional Research compiles many publicly available reports which are pertinent to first-year programs. These reports are considered the official source for enrollment and student characteristics for the University. Our New Freshman Characteristics report contains freshman ACT, SAT, high school rank statistics as well as freshman only enrollment data broken by various demographics. The Fall Enrollment by Home Location Map matches up the University student’s home location with Google maps and provides a unique tool for viewing the U’s global population. Our office recently released a University-wide Student Aid Profile, which contains information regarding student financial aid including PELL grants, work study, and loans.

Visit www.oir.umn.edu/student, to see all of the student data we provide. In addition, the 2012 CIRP Freshmen Survey on-line interactive results are available to the University of Minnesota community at: http://www.oir.umn.edu/surveys/cirp