

To: Pat Huglin

From: Bill Miller

Re: Attrition concerns

This note is generated in response to Bob Carman's thought-provoking letter on the study of attrition. It is a great letter and, as you can see, it stimulates thought.

I suggest that one of the issues concerning attrition is what to do about attrition. I suggest that attrition can not be stopped without making policies that would negate our function as a junior college. What does make sense is how to live with attrition.

For instance, my experience with Physics courses is that Physics One has a low attrition rate and Physics Five has a high attrition rate when all other variables like the teacher, the time of day, the price of books, and others have been compensated for. Physics One is a general education course with an Algebra pre-requisite, Physics Five is more intense and has a Trigonometry prerequisite. One way to reduce attrition would be to require a test in trig before registering but this would also cut enrollments.

It is hard for anyone but a Physics teacher to relate to the problem described above, but I would say that what we could work on attrition in cases like these by having a flexible class-ticket policy. We have been using the 10% rule-of-thumb for years. If you have 80 chairs, put out 88 cards; if you have 24 lab spaces, put out 27 cards; etc. I suggest that we could have Burt do a simple study of class attrition rates and that the actual attrition rate at the fourth week be the class ticket policy for each course. What I am saying is that some courses just have high attrition rates as a property of the course and that we operate the school so that this is an integral part of a planning.

The idea that is really exciting because of its potential is Bob's suggestion for shorter-module scheduling. As an example, when a student "bombs out" in the first couple of weeks of physics now we have lost him for a whole year. If the course went in 8 week or 4 week bits, he could regroup after 4 weeks and start over so that the school only lost the student for 8 weeks instead of 32. That's the selfish view from our pinnacle; from the student's viewpoint he had a full schedule for 7/8 of a year instead of just 1/2.

Please convey my thanks to Bob for starting the ball rolling. It is imaginative efforts like that from the professionals on our staff that will help us to solve the problems.

cc Bob Carman

Bill

January 30, 1981

SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE
CLUSTER LEADER COUNCIL

The Cluster Leader Council met on December 10, 17, 1980 and January 12, 19 and 28, 1981 for purposes of considering the Instruction Departmental requests for certificated personnel for 1981-82. Attending some or all of the meetings were the following members:

1. Dwight Anderson (Counseling)
2. Harold P. Fairly (Physical Education and Health Technology)
3. Pope Freeman (Fine Arts and Ethnic Studies)
4. Karl Halbach (Life Science, Geology and Marine Technology)
5. Myrna Harker (Business Education)
6. Elizabeth Hodes/Interim (Physical Science, Math, Chemistry and Foreign Language)
7. Maurie Ryan (Applied Science and Technology)
8. Curtis Solberg (Social Science and Library)
9. Jinny Webber (English and Journalism)
10. Pat Huglin, Chairman
11. Shirley Conklin, Mel Elkins, John Romo and Richard Sanchez (Resource)

The requests were placed in three categories:

I. Replacement Positions (Resignation, Death or Retirement)

1. Chemistry (Larsen)
2. Director, Reading & Study Skills Center (Romo)
3. Health Technology/A.D.N. (Whiting)
4. Library (Annable)
5. Life Science (Trimble)
6. Physical Education, Dance/½ (Simons)
7. Math (Traughber)
8. Music (Bowman)

II. Positions in Impacted/Growth Areas

1. Drafting
2. Computer Science
3. Computer Science
4. Landscape Horticulture
5. Mktg, Management & Supervision
6. Mathematics

III. Other/Desirable

1. Art
2. Art
3. A.D.N.
4. A.D.N.
5. Physical Education (Athletic Trainer, Conversion of trainer from classified to certificated)
6. Theatre Arts/Drama (Costume/Make-up)

IV. Data and Information Used In Consideration of Requests

1. Departmental requests and rationale for request
2. Departmental projections (Educational plan and enrollments)
3. Enrollment Data, fourth week
4. Summary of Recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee for Contingency Planning, Spring, 1980
5. Presentations by Department Chairpersons and/or Representatives
6. Availability of qualified part-time or temporary replacements.
7. Make up (ratio) of hourly and contract personnel within a department.

The Committee determined, early on, that they would scrutinize all requests "across the board," i.e., a replacement position might not necessarily stand up to a new position in a growth area in meeting total college needs. Accordingly, in a time of diminishing resources, a new position might well be prioritized at a higher level than a replacement category. Indeed, this did occur!

V. Recommendations

- A. The Committee unanimously recommended that the following positions be forwarded to the Superintendent/President as being essential for approval in recruiting for permanent positions.

1. Computer Science/1st position (New)
2. Library (Replacement)
3. A.D.N./Psychiatric Nursing (Replacement)
4. Director, Reading & Study Skills Center (Replacement)
6. Landscape Horticulture (New, but temporary contract for current year)
7. Math (Replacement, actually 1.5 FTE....early replacement)

Note: These seven positions basically represent no increase in staffing over the current year)

- B. The Committee prioritized the remaining requests as follows:

1. Music (Replacement)
2. Chemistry (Replacement)
3. Marketing/Management/Supervision (New)
4. Theatre Arts: Costume and Make-up (New)

5. Art/1st position (New)
6. P.E.: .5 Dance (Replacement)
7. Computer Sciences/2nd position (New)
8. Life Sciences (Replacement)
9. Math/2nd position (New)
10. Art/2nd position (New)

(Note: All of the requests in the above category have merit, hopefully funding will be such that approval, at a later date, could be given to those positions in the higher priority category.)

C. Other

1. The 2 additional A.D.N. positions were "tabled" pending a possible contribution (Matching monies) from the local hospitals.
2. The Physical Education Trainer position (Conversion from classified to certificated) was "tabled" pending a study by the Instruction and Personnel Offices.

The CLC will meet next on February 25, 1981 at which time they take up the following order of business:

1. Consideration of Classified Personnel (Instruction)
2. Review of status of Instructional Departments identified as low enrollment programs by the Ad Hoc Committee on Contingency Planning.

PH/m1

cc: Dr. Mertes
Administrative Deans
Mr. Oroz
Conklin, Elkins, Romo, Sanchez
Department Chairpersons
Representative Council

To: Pat Huglin

Form: Bob Carman

Re: Comments on STUDIES OF COLLEGE ATTRITION: 1950-1975

Part 1 discusses methodological problems. In a nutshell, determining the causes of attrition with any certainty is difficult if not impossible. There are few long-term studies, many studies lack control groups, and most focus on only a few possible causative factors.

Part 2 quibbles over how one measures attrition.

Part 3 skims over the theoretical models that might be useful if we had a decent amount of concrete data.

Part 4 presents information on rates of attrition before 1975 in four-year colleges. I doubt if much of this applies directly to California Community Colleges in general or to SBCC in particular. Most of these studies make no distinction between permanent withdrawal from college and temporary withdrawal. They tell us very little about what happens to dropouts or why they drop, especially in a community college.

The only useful part of this section is the obvious suggestion of where SBCC is lacking: Why do we not have information of this kind on our students? At SBCC we are and have been operating by "flying by the seat of our pants"--without the sort of institutional research that is needed to answer these questions.

Part 5 looks at some of the demographic factors associated with attrition: age, sex, socioeconomic status, and so on. Again, it is very unlikely that the findings cited apply to community college students. Age is not a factor if all students are within a narrow range. Sex is an important variable only for some colleges. The subsection on effect of socioeconomic factors is interesting, but predictable: father's occupation, family income, and parental education all influence the probability that a student will drop out, but are of limited predictive value.

Section 6, on academic factors relating to attrition, again reveals the obvious. High school grade point average and class rank are the strongest single variable predictors of attrition presently available, but they are certainly not the only variables that contribute to the problem. SAT and ACE scores are also good predictors and first semester college grades seem to be an excellent predictor of attrition, at least in four-year colleges. Good grades in the early stages of college, or in tests in the early weeks of a course, seem to be associated with reduced attrition. (However, this may be just another way of saying that the good students tend not to drop out!)

One interesting finding(p.65) is that students who report spending more time studying during their senior year in high school tend to persist in their freshman year in college. (Again, this may be saying only that the good one stay.)

Section 7 examines motivational factors, the reasons most often given by students for dropping out of college. Some interesting findings are reported: (a) Students who expect to drop out actually are more likely to do so. (b) There is no correlation between the expectation of dropping out and scholastic ability. (c) Those most likely to drop were the least committed college, had low aspirations and educational values, were more concerned with their parent's attitudes and expectations than with their own.

Persistence seems to be best predicted by a combination of competence and commitment to college. (p.66) Persisting students seem to be those who "fit" the college--or vice versa. If a college can design its programs and resources to fit the competence/commitment profile of its entering students, it may be able to improve retention.

Section 8 explores personality factors associated with attrition. Again, there are no surprises here. In the four-year institution the mature, non-rebellious, conforming and self-sufficient students stay. The impulsive, impetuous, non-conforming leave. This is not likely to be the case in the community college.

Section 9, beginning on page 75, reviews research on the college environment as a factor in attrition. The college milieu itself plays a major role in determining the persistence or withdrawal of students. At the very start, the college serves as a selective device to determine the kind of students (attitudes, values, socioeconomic level, intellectual disposition, etc.) that enroll. The greater the congruence between the image of the college and the student's values, goals, and attitudes, the more likely it is that the student will persist at that college. Particularly important in this "image" is the reinforcement structure of the college --the mechanisms by which the college environment rewards student behavior and influences student motivation levels.

The quality of the student-faculty relationships is of crucial importance in determining student satisfaction with the institution. Several studies show that dropouts were more dissatisfied than persisters with their relationships with their instructors. Bob Carman's long-term studies of tutoring at SBCC indicated strongly that developing a personal relationship with a tutor led to significant reduction in attrition, not only from tutored classes, but from other classes and from college generally.

Studies relating financial factors to persistence of community college students are not reported, even though financial considerations quite obviously play a major role in determining our student's performance in college.

Section 10, starting on page 86, describes the process of dropping out and reenrolling in a typical university or four-year college setting. No similar studies have been done for the two-year colleges in general or SBCC in particular. It would be valuable to know how students decide to drop, who they talk to, when they drop out, when and if they return, and so on. For example, the four-year college studies reported here reveal that discussions were with the student's same-sex friends first, then with parents, finally with friends of the opposite sex. Communication with faculty or counselors takes place much later in the process, well after the decision to drop has been made.

The college can attack this part of the problem by (a) devising programs that enable college personnel (Teachers, counselors, tutors, peer counselors) to get involved earlier in the withdrawal process, and (b) once contact has been made, create interactions that show the student that the college has an active, on-going interest in him or her. This second part of the process may encourage and facilitate the student's later reenrollment in the college.

Most of the studies reported are designed to increase our understanding of the withdrawing student and the attrition process. However, the immediate human payoff is in the design of programs to reduce attrition. This report briefly reviews such programs on pages 89-92. Unfortunately, it provides no advice for teachers attempting to reduce attrition by redesigning instructional activities.

Some suggestions: (a) Accept as a college philosophy that "once the college has accepted a student for admission, it should become actively responsible for the fate of that student." (b) Place more emphasis on the pre-admission interview with the aim of acquiring information on the student, both academic and motivational. (c) Improve the delivery and publicizing of counseling services to assure that every student receives adequate attention early in his or her college career. (d) Make easily and widely available assistance in basic skills, both in formal general programs and in specific course-related assistance. (e) Use peer counselors as a first line of assistance to students contemplating withdrawal from college or from individual courses. This would be particularly effective if interviews or testing early in the semester could identify students with high dropout potential. (f) Set up end-of-term "exit" interviews or questionnaires designed to identify students who are considering dropping out. Students should be given special opportunities to talk with instructors, counselors, or peer counselors about their anxieties and frustrations, and helped to resolve the problems in other ways than by dropping out. (g) Attempt to identify those procedures and policies in the college that tend to increase attrition, including strategies of instruction. (h) Because parental attitudes, or the attitudes of "significant others," have a strong effect on attrition, an orientation program for parents, spouses, and similar others could have a positive impact on attrition.