

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF
PHILADELPHIA

*Reasons for Traditionally and Non-traditionally
Aged Student Attrition
at
Community College of Philadelphia*

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Sapna Doshi
Jane Grosset

Report # 138

April 2004

Introduction

As described in Institutional Research (IR) Report # 137, titled *Reasons for Student Attrition at Community College of Philadelphia*, the College routinely monitors student persistence patterns and documents these findings in several annual reports¹. IR Report # 137 also presents a literature review of CCP persistence research and the conceptual underpinnings that have informed this research. Like the preceding report, the present report focuses on the reasons students discontinue their enrollment at the College. While IR Report #137 explored student persistence based on student educational objectives, the analyses in the present report are based on the following four age groups: 1) 18 to 22 years; 2) 23 to 29 years; 3) 30 to 39 years; and 4) 40 years and older.

Former Student Survey

All Former Students Regardless of Age

The questionnaire that was used to survey recent former students² requested that respondents indicate their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with 23 aspects of the College's academic and social environment. For analytical purposes, these items were clustered into four categories: 1) academic services; 2) student services; 3) support services; and 4) campus culture. Average satisfaction levels (mean values) were

¹ All of these reports are available at the Institutional Research web site <http://www.ccp.edu/VPFIN-PL/ir/index.HTM>

² Students who did not graduate from CCP and earned at least 12 CCP credits prior to leaving.

calculated for each of the 23 experiences³ and the cluster as a whole. In each case, higher mean values indicate a greater satisfaction with the experience.

Given the individual nature of students' educational objectives, a question on the survey asked students: "Did you accomplish the educational objectives you set for yourself at CCP?" The responses associated with this question defined three groups of former students who were compared in subsequent analyses. These groups were: 1) students who completed their objectives fully; 2) students who completed their objectives partly; and 3) students who reported that they did not complete their objectives at CCP.

Table 1 contains the mean values for the three student groups for each of the 23 CCP experiences and an overall average for the four broader categories. Additionally, analysis of variance statistics were calculated to determine if there were significant differences across the three groups defined by level of completion of educational objectives. A significance (Sig.) of 0.05 or less indicates the presence of significant group differences.

This information clearly points to the relevance of the relationship between college experiences and student persistence. The most striking finding in Table 1 is the consistency of the relationship between increased satisfaction level and accomplishment of educational objectives. Former students who completed their educational objectives were more satisfied with all 23 aspects of their CCP experience than were the other two former student groups. In turn, former students who made partial progress on the completion of their educational objectives were more satisfied with all 23 aspects of their

³ The means were calculated based on the following responses to each question: 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = somewhat unsatisfied, 1 = very unsatisfied.

CCP experience than were former students who did not report progress on their educational objectives while enrolled at CCP.

As a group, the most significant differences were related to academic service experiences suggesting that academic integration/engagement is strongly associated with student goal completion.

As a group, aspects of the campus culture were second in importance to goal accomplishment. The most important experiences in this category were feelings of being respected and the diversity on campus. The adequacy of facilities to rest and relax between classes was also important to accomplishment of goals.

Student services that appear to make a difference in student persistence to goal completion are the quality of campus cultural and co-curricular activities, good counseling, and registration processes.

As a group, support services were not as uniformly important as the other types of experiences explored by the survey. The exceptions were learning lab services, access to computers, and assessment services.

Table 1
Mean Levels of Satisfaction With CCP Experiences
by Accomplishment of Educational Objectives
All Former Students

CCP is trying to create a welcoming and supportive environment. The following are characteristics of such an environment. Please rate how satisfied you have been at CCP with the following ⁴ :		Did you accomplish the educational objectives you set for yourself at CCP?			
		No	Yes, Partly	Yes, Fully	Sig.
Academic Services					
a	Availability of information about requirements in my major program of study	2.57	3.11	3.36	0.000
b	Information instructors give regarding course requirements	3.09	3.35	3.56	0.000
c	Availability of courses at times convenient for my schedule	2.73	2.88	3.52	0.000
d	Quality of courses with respect to my major program of study	2.87	3.24	3.59	0.000
e	Overall quality of classroom instruction	3.01	3.29	3.58	0.000
f	Availability of faculty outside of class	2.96	3.13	3.39	0.001
g	Information and assistance provided by Academic Advising for course planning	2.44	2.84	3.24	0.000
Overall Score		2.85	3.15	3.50	0.000
Student Services					
h	Quality of campus cultural/co-curricular events and activities	2.86	3.20	3.38	0.000
i	Quality of athletic programs and facilities	2.90	3.05	3.11	0.507
j	Information and assistance provided by Student Counseling Services	2.38	2.87	3.18	0.000
k	Information and assistance provided by the Student Records and Registration Office	2.51	2.78	2.96	0.010
l	Information and assistance provided by the Financial Aid Office	2.31	2.56	2.72	0.086
Overall Score		2.70	2.95	3.13	0.078
Support Services					
m	Use of technology in the classroom	3.07	3.08	3.21	0.284
n	Availability of computers for student use	3.10	3.31	3.44	0.022
o	Information and services provided by the college learning labs	2.95	3.18	3.44	0.000
p	Assistance in the development of library usage skills	2.98	3.11	3.22	0.236
q	Information and assistance provided by Assessment/Testing Center Office	2.81	3.12	3.18	0.045
r	Responsiveness of College staff to safety issues	3.03	3.16	3.27	0.294
Overall Score		3.07	3.20	3.32	0.206
Campus Culture					
s	Opportunity to interact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds	3.08	3.45	3.58	0.000
t	Being respected and valued as an individual	2.57	3.22	3.42	0.000

⁴ The mean values were calculated based on responses given to each question where a score of 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = somewhat unsatisfied, 1 = very unsatisfied.

u	Adequacy of places to rest and relax between classes	2.79	3.08	3.15	0.020
v	Facility cleanliness	2.85	3.01	3.08	0.166
w	Physical attractiveness of campus	3.00	3.13	3.19	0.230
	Overall Score	2.91	3.22	3.28	0.000

Former Students – 18 to 22 Years of Age

In the next level of analysis, survey respondents were divided into groups based on age at time of departure from CCP: 18 to 22 years; 23 to 29 years; 30 to 39 years; and 40 years and older.

The information in Table 2 is based on the 18-22 year old age group. Experiences within Academic Services were strongly related to student goal completion for this traditionally-aged group of former students. Former students who fully completed their educational objectives were more satisfied with each of the seven Academic Service experiences than were former students who partly fulfilled their objectives or those who did not accomplish their goals. All but one of the seven Academic Service experiences were statistically significant across groups. The most important of these were availability of information about requirements in a major program of study; availability of courses at times convenient for a student's schedule; and the quality of courses.

Experiences within Campus Culture were also significantly related to student goal completion. Again, students between the ages of 18 and 22 who fully completed their objectives at CCP were most satisfied with Campus Culture experiences. In turn, former students in this age group who partly fulfilled their objectives were more satisfied than those who did not fulfill their goals. Areas within the Campus Culture that were of most importance were being respected and valued as an individual; opportunities to interact with students with diverse cultural backgrounds; and the physical attractiveness of the college campus.

Student services that were significantly related to goal completion included the information and assistance provided by the Financial Aid Office and Student Counseling Services. In the area of Support Services, information and assistance provided by the college learning labs; technology in the classroom; access to computers; and assessment information were significantly related to goal completion.

Table 2
Mean Levels of Satisfaction with CCP Experiences
By Accomplishment of Educational Objectives
Former Students - Ages 18-22 yrs old.

CCP is trying to create a welcoming and supportive environment. The following are characteristics of such an environment. Please rate how satisfied you have been at CCP with the following ⁵ :		Did you accomplish the educational objectives you set for yourself at CCP?			
		No	Yes, Partly	Yes, Fully	Sig.
Academic Services					
a	Availability of information about requirements in my major program of study	2.19	3.20	3.32	0.000
b	Information instructors give regarding course requirements	2.94	3.31	3.48	0.083
c	Availability of courses at times convenient for my schedule	2.31	3.00	3.63	0.000
d	Quality of courses with respect to my major program of study	2.50	3.13	3.63	0.000
e	Overall quality of classroom instruction	2.80	3.07	3.56	0.003
f	Availability of faculty outside of class	2.57	2.96	3.44	0.004
g	Information and assistance provided by Academic Advising for course planning	2.00	2.88	3.04	0.008
Overall Score		2.52	3.03	3.46	0.000
Student Services					
h	Quality of campus cultural/co-curricular events and activities	2.54	3.04	3.24	0.063
i	Quality of athletic programs and facilities	2.13	3.00	2.80	0.023
j	Information and assistance provided by Student Counseling Services	2.07	2.95	3.12	0.007
k	Information and assistance provided by the Student Records and Registration Office	1.94	2.59	2.67	0.050
l	Information and assistance provided by the Financial Aid Office	1.50	2.42	2.63	0.005
Overall Score		2.20	3.01	2.88	0.058
Support Services					
m	Use of technology in the classroom	2.93	2.75	3.23	0.021
n	Availability of computers for student use	3.00	3.41	3.60	0.034
o	Information and services provided by the college learning labs	2.85	3.15	3.65	0.008
p	Assistance in the development of library usage skills	2.77	3.07	3.18	0.369
q	Information and assistance provided by Assessment/Testing Center Office	2.36	3.13	3.00	0.044
r	Responsiveness of College staff to safety issues	2.56	3.00	3.20	0.154
Overall Score		2.95	3.06	3.41	0.084
Campus Culture					
s	Opportunity to interact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds	2.83	3.47	3.56	0.012
t	Being respected and valued as an individual	2.19	3.27	3.30	0.000
u	Adequacy of places to rest and relax between classes	2.60	3.00	3.08	0.271
v	Facility cleanliness	2.73	2.97	3.26	0.067
w	Physical attractiveness of campus	2.43	3.10	3.31	0.001
Overall Score		2.45	3.16	3.29	0.000

⁵ The mean values were calculated based on responses given to each question where a score of 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = somewhat unsatisfied, 1 = very unsatisfied.

Former Students – 23 to 29 Years of Age

Slightly different results emerged when analyzing responses of former students aged 23 to 29 (Table 3). Former students who accomplished or made progress towards accomplishing their educational goals were more satisfied with academic experiences at CCP. Availability of courses at times convenient for one's schedule; availability of information concerning requirements for courses and major; and overall quality of classroom instruction were most important.

The only other factor that was statistically significant for this age group was being respected and valued as an individual.

Table 3
Mean Levels of Satisfaction with CCP Experiences
By Accomplishment of Educational Objectives
Former Students - Ages 23-29 yrs old.

CCP is trying to create a welcoming and supportive environment. The following are characteristics of such an environment. Please rate how satisfied you have been at CCP with the following ⁶ :		Did you accomplish the educational objectives you set for yourself at CCP?			
		No	Yes, Partly	Yes, Fully	Sig.
Academic Services					
a	Availability of information about requirements in my major program of study	2.68	3.09	3.34	0.043
b	Information instructors give regarding course requirements	3.00	3.17	3.53	0.030
c	Availability of courses at times convenient for my schedule	2.45	2.89	3.50	0.000
d	Quality of courses with respect to my major program of study	3.13	3.22	3.45	0.301
e	Overall quality of classroom instruction	2.60	3.24	3.47	0.001
f	Availability of faculty outside of class	3.06	3.14	3.29	0.526
g	Information and assistance provided by Academic Advising for course planning	2.58	2.88	3.24	0.069
Overall Score		2.79	3.14	3.45	0.004
Student Services					
h	Quality of campus cultural/co-curricular events and activities	2.75	3.10	3.19	0.179
i	Quality of athletic programs and facilities	3.00	3.13	3.29	0.616
j	Information and assistance provided by Student Counseling Services	2.45	3.03	3.17	0.090
k	Information and assistance provided by the Student Records and Registration Office	2.29	2.77	2.77	0.231
l	Information and assistance provided by the Financial Aid Office	2.06	2.46	2.35	0.469
Overall Score		2.67	3.02	3.09	0.441
Support Services					
m	Use of technology in the classroom	3.18	3.15	3.16	0.992
n	Availability of computers for student use	3.05	3.26	3.35	0.406
o	Information and services provided by the college learning labs	3.07	3.21	3.23	0.806
p	Assistance in the development of library usage skills	3.20	3.14	3.14	0.958
q	Information and assistance provided by Assessment/Testing Center Office	2.79	3.15	3.22	0.266
r	Responsiveness of College staff to safety issues	3.10	3.17	3.24	0.867
Overall Score		3.06	3.17	3.33	0.488
Campus Culture					
s	Opportunity to interact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds	3.12	3.44	3.47	0.241
t	Being respected and valued as an individual	2.65	3.11	3.25	0.050
u	Adequacy of places to rest and relax between classes	3.00	3.03	3.11	0.886
v	Facility cleanliness	2.80	2.83	2.92	0.872
w	Physical attractiveness of campus	2.95	3.06	3.06	0.834
Overall Score		3.04	3.15	3.17	0.733

⁶ The mean values were calculated based on responses given to each question where a score of 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = somewhat unsatisfied, 1 = very unsatisfied.

Former Students – 30 to 39 Years of Age

Consistent with the younger age groups presented in previous tables, goal accomplishment for the 30 to 39 age group was most impacted by Academic Services (Table 4). Similar to the two younger age groups, an important factor within Academic Services is the availability of courses at times convenient to students' schedules.

The most important Student Services experience was information and assistance provided by the Student Records and Registration Office. The only other statistically significant factor was being respected and valued as an individual.

Table 4
Mean Levels of Satisfaction with CCP Experiences
By Accomplishment of Educational Objectives
Former Students - Ages 30-39 yrs old.

CCP is trying to create a welcoming and supportive environment. The following are characteristics of such an environment. Please rate how satisfied you have been at CCP with the following ⁷ :		Did you accomplish the educational objectives you set for yourself at CCP?			
		No	Yes, Partly	Yes, Fully	Sig.
Academic Services					
a	Availability of information about requirements in my major program of study	3.00	3.20	3.38	0.375
b	Information instructors give regarding course requirements	3.53	3.53	3.56	0.982
c	Availability of courses at times convenient for my schedule	3.27	2.70	3.50	0.001
d	Quality of courses with respect to my major program of study	3.33	3.33	3.58	0.262
e	Overall quality of classroom instruction	3.53	3.38	3.52	0.630
f	Availability of faculty outside of class	3.46	3.23	3.28	0.677
g	Information and assistance provided by Academic Advising for course planning	2.86	2.79	3.35	0.081
Overall Score		3.38	3.19	3.55	0.059
Student Services					
h	Quality of campus cultural/co-curricular events and activities	3.27	3.33	3.63	0.141
i	Quality of athletic programs and facilities	3.29	3.19	3.25	0.956
j	Information and assistance provided by Student Counseling Services	2.83	2.86	3.35	0.143
k	Information and assistance provided by the Student Records and Registration Office	3.07	2.73	3.29	0.053
l	Information and assistance provided by the Financial Aid Office	3.10	2.54	3.04	0.184
Overall Score		3.23	3.00	3.46	0.193
Support Services					
m	Use of technology in the classroom	3.38	3.16	3.13	0.663
n	Availability of computers for student use	3.75	3.34	3.45	0.416
o	Information and services provided by the college learning labs	3.18	3.21	3.54	0.187
p	Assistance in the development of library usage skills	3.10	3.00	3.27	0.547
q	Information and assistance provided by Assessment/Testing Center Office	3.25	3.19	3.27	0.955
r	Responsiveness of College staff to safety issues	3.25	3.05	3.19	0.866
Overall Score		3.30	3.40	3.32	0.948
Campus Culture					
s	Opportunity to interact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds	3.14	3.44	3.58	0.105
t	Being respected and valued as an individual	2.67	3.22	3.47	0.019
u	Adequacy of places to rest and relax between classes	3.00	3.20	3.03	0.654
v	Facility cleanliness	3.07	3.07	3.00	0.945
w	Physical attractiveness of campus	3.20	3.17	3.03	0.718
Overall Score		3.13	3.26	3.25	0.831

⁷ The mean values were calculated based on responses given to each question where a score of 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = somewhat unsatisfied, 1 = very unsatisfied.

Former Students – 40 Years of Age and Older

The remaining age group consists of former students who were 40 years or older at departure from CCP (Table 5). Like all the preceding age groups, Academic Services were most important to student goal persistence. All seven of these experiences were statistically significant for this age group.

Campus culture was second in importance to this age group. Being respected and valued as an individual; places to rest and relax between classes; and opportunities to interact with students different from themselves were of great importance to former students.

The only other statistically significant factor for these former students was the quality of campus cultural and co-curricular events and activities.

Table 5
Mean Levels of Satisfaction with CCP Experiences
By Accomplishment of Educational Objectives
Former Students - Ages 40+ yrs old.

CCP is trying to create a welcoming and supportive environment. The following are characteristics of such an environment. Please rate how satisfied you have been at CCP with the following ⁸ :		Did you accomplish the educational objectives you set for yourself at CCP?			
		No	Yes, Partly	Yes, Fully	Sig.
Academic Services					
a	Availability of information about requirements in my major program of study	2.43	3.05	3.39	0.001
b	Information instructors give regarding course requirements	2.96	3.38	3.69	0.002
c	Availability of courses at times convenient for my schedule	2.91	2.95	3.47	0.011
d	Quality of courses with respect to my major program of study	2.64	3.28	3.72	0.000
e	Overall quality of classroom instruction	3.13	3.38	3.81	0.001
f	Availability of faculty outside of class	2.87	3.19	3.57	0.008
g	Information and assistance provided by Academic Advising for course planning	2.32	2.90	3.33	0.005
Overall Score		2.77	3.23	3.58	0.000
Student Services					
h	Quality of campus cultural/co-curricular events and activities	2.95	3.31	3.50	0.044
i	Quality of athletic programs and facilities	3.29	3.00	3.22	0.689
j	Information and assistance provided by Student Counseling Services	2.29	2.80	3.00	0.166
k	Information and assistance provided by the Student Records and Registration Office	2.71	2.96	3.18	0.199
l	Information and assistance provided by the Financial Aid Office	2.76	2.89	2.95	0.884
Overall Score		2.95	2.96	3.00	0.993
Support Services					
m	Use of technology in the classroom	2.91	3.15	3.39	0.066
n	Availability of computers for student use	2.95	3.30	3.42	0.181
o	Information and services provided by the college learning labs	2.79	3.19	3.39	0.065
p	Assistance in the development of library usage skills	2.79	3.24	3.32	0.154
q	Information and assistance provided by Assessment/Testing Center Office	2.85	3.06	3.24	0.474
r	Responsiveness of College staff to safety issues	3.17	3.31	3.44	0.572
Overall Score		3.03	3.23	3.24	0.828
Campus Culture					
s	Opportunity to interact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds	3.10	3.50	3.70	0.006
t	Being respected and valued as an individual	2.64	3.31	3.66	0.000
u	Adequacy of places to rest and relax between classes	2.64	3.07	3.41	0.004
v	Facility cleanliness	2.83	3.08	3.25	0.185
w	Physical attractiveness of campus	3.21	3.16	3.47	0.181
Overall Score		2.91	3.29	3.50	0.002

⁸ The mean values were calculated based on responses given to each question where a score of 4 = very satisfied, 3 = somewhat satisfied, 2 = somewhat unsatisfied, 1 = very unsatisfied.

Implications

A persistent institutional challenge to encourage all students to persist to goal completion, regardless of age, occurs within the classroom; the academic integration of the student into the mainstream educational experiences offered by the College. All students are interested in the quality of classroom instruction, course content, intellectual stimulation, and interactions with faculty. Additionally, students want easy access to unambiguous course and program requirements. Course scheduling continues to be an important consideration for students of all ages.

Another characteristic of the campus culture that was universally important to students was feeling as though they were respected and valued as an individual. This underscores the importance associated with institutional policies, procedures, interactions, and communications between faculty, staff and students that stress a student-centered environment.

While enhancing the aforementioned academic experiences for students would likely encourage greater levels of all students to persist to goal completion, the persistence of traditionally-aged students (18 to 22 years) appears to be tied to a broader set of experiences that are also associated with Student Services, Campus Culture, and Support Services. To address these diverse expectations, the classroom can be used as a vehicle for social engagement by enhancing interaction in this setting. The role of other students in the learning process should be encouraged through group projects and study groups. Faculty should also build bridges between the classroom and out-of-classroom support for students who experience academic or personal difficulties. Referrals to counseling or other student support services should be routine.

Educational planning should be improved by providing all new students early in the enrollment process with information related to program possibilities, course selection, registration procedures and available support services. Beyond this, individual counseling and advising sessions should focus on helping students define short- and long-term educational goals. Students should be provided with advising that translates their educational goals into programs of study where coursework and desired outcomes are clearly linked.