Summary of Findings
2000 to 2005

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Metropolitan Community College
Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment
MCC Student Retention Patterns: 2000-01 to 2004-05

Summary of Findings

Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment
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Preface

This is a summary of findings based on the technical report *MCC Student Retention Patterns 2000-2005* produced by the Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Office. This report shows how student retention influences MCC enrollment. Retention figures are presented in 3 formats: from fall to spring, fall to fall, and spring to fall. Retention rates are broken down by demographic characteristics and by several enrollment characteristics. In addition, the academic success of those students retained versus those not retained is examined.

Additional copies of this report can be obtained from our website:


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Executive Summary

The following information represents an overview of student retention for the MCC district based on demographic, attendance, and performance variables. This information is helpful because it provides the reader with a view of the mosaic that represents the MCC student. Student retention patterns may vary slightly according to individual campuses. See the MCC Student Retention Patterns technical report for individual campus data.

♦ In general, females and white students were retained at a higher rate than their counterparts (e.g., male students and minority students, respectively). However, when looking at spring to fall retention patterns, minority students have had the highest retention rates for the past two years (2004-05).

♦ Traditional aged students (aged 24 or less), typically, have the highest retention rates. A shift can be seen in the spring to fall retention rates where non-traditional students have had the highest rates of retention for the past three years (2003-05).

♦ Full-time students had considerably higher retention rates than those enrolled part-time. For instance, full-time students have fall-to-spring rates of retention that are 22 to 25 percentage points higher than part-time students. Spring-to-fall and fall-to-fall rates of retention vary from 15 to 22 percentage points when comparing full-time to part-time student retention.

♦ Students enrolled in day courses exclusively had higher retention rates than those enrolled only during the evening. Fall to spring rates of retention for students enrolled in day courses were 9 to 16 percentage points higher than for students enrolled exclusively in the evening. Spring to fall and fall to fall rates of retention had less variability when comparing day to evening course enrollment.
♦ Students enrolled in at least one developmental course tended to have higher retention rates than those not enrolled in a developmental course for the fall to spring, although there was no discernable pattern when examining fall to fall and spring to fall retention rates.

♦ An examination of semester GPA’s showed that students earning a GPA of 2.0 or greater had considerably higher retention rates. Fall to spring rates of retention for students earning a GPA of 2.0 or greater were 17 to 21 percentage points higher than for students earning a GPA less than 2.0. Spring to fall and fall to fall rates of retention vary from 14 to 20 percentage points when comparing GPA.

♦ The detailed analysis comparing ethnicity by age shows that students retained at the highest rate were in the “Other” category for ethnicity and were under the age of 25 years old. White students under the age of 25 had the next highest rates of retention.

♦ When comparing ethnicity to gender it shows that the students with the highest retention rates are female and fall into the “Other” category for ethnicity. White females had the next highest rates of retention.

♦ A comparison between age and gender shows that females under the age of 25 have the highest retention rates. However, for the spring to fall rates, a shift shows that since 2002 females over the age of 34 have the highest retention rates.

♦ An examination of age between retained and not retained students for the three retention cohorts (i.e., fall to spring, fall to fall, and spring to fall) shows that the average age of retained students is around 27 years old regardless of retention.
cohort. The average age for students not retained is around 29 for both the fall to spring and fall to fall retention cohorts. For the spring to fall cohort the average age of the students not retained is around 27.

♦ A comparison of attempted hours and retention status was examined for the three retention cohorts. This shows that the average attempted hours of retained students is around 9 regardless of retention cohort. The average attempted hours for students not retained varied from 6.7 for the fall to spring cohort to 7.9 for the fall to fall cohort.

♦ A comparison of semester GPA and retention status was examined for the three retention cohorts. This shows that the average semester GPA of retained students is close to 3.0 regardless of retention cohort. The average semester GPA for students not retained varied from 2.64 to 2.83.
A Summary of Findings

MCC Student Retention Patterns:
AY2000-01 to AY2004-05

Summary of Findings

Why Provide a Report about Student Retention?

This is a summary of the findings found in the technical report written for the district community to show how retention influences MCC enrollment. Retention is about students, their enrollment patterns, selection of courses and use of campus services. The term retention is always seen as a number or percentage that is compared with other numbers and percentages from like-institutions often called "peers." Institutional leaders are concerned about retention, especially if "the number" or "percentage" of students "carried over" from one reporting period to another does not meet a requisite percentage. Admissions personnel have always known that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to "out recruit retention." What they are saying is that as students leave the institution, a like number should be entering so as to create a harmonious cycle of student entry and exit. Institutions that are "open admissions" have greater difficulty understanding the concern, especially when employees see long lines during semester registration. Open admissions institutions also have the benefit of returning "stop-outs," or those students that may have attended a fall semester but did not return for the spring. Several semesters later they appear for enrollment and lessen the financial burden of leaving students by their infusion of tuition dollars. On the other hand, private institutions understand very well the importance of retention because the loss of a student is reflected in monetary terms, such as reduced tuition income. Institutions that are selective either through their admissions policy or cost do not have the benefit of large numbers of students who return after "stopping-out." Their enrollment must be "managed" so as to insure those students they admit and receive institutional funds for are comfortable with their institution; in other words the students have institutional "fit."

What is Retention and How is it Defined and Reported?

Retention is a means of showing student commitment to a college as well as implied course, program, service, and institutional satisfaction. Students show commitment to an institution by spending their dollars for tuition, books, fees, and other activities associated with college learning; in other words, students are educational consumers and in our community they have many choices.
Retention is generally reported using three measures: fall-to-spring retention, spring-to-fall retention and fall-to-fall retention. Each measure has a definite way of presenting how the figures were developed and reported. For instance, fall-to-spring retention refers to the number of students enrolled during the fall semester that re-enrolled for the subsequent spring semester. The figure to calculate the retention excludes any students that completed an award. Excluding students who earned an award provides what is called the "adjusted retention rate." A similar calculation is used to determine both spring-to-fall and fall-to-fall rates of retention. Retention is always reported as a percentage; such as, the adjusted fall-to-spring rate of retention for the college was 67 percent.

Why Use only Three Retention Rates?
Although retention is a term that is used universally within higher education there are only three established enrollment patterns that are used to measure retention rates: fall-to-spring, spring-to-fall and fall-to-fall. Additional patterns of attendance are normally seen through longitudinal studies or studies of student persistence. For instance, the Graduation Rate Survey (GRS) is a federally mandated survey that reports the number of first-time, full-time students that have either graduated, transferred, continue to be enrolled, or are not enrolled after six consecutive semesters. The GRS differs from this report in that it [GRS] is a report based on the persistence of a cohort of first-time, full-time students rather than retention. Other studies have examined specific characteristics that are associated with a student's propensity to remain enrolled; such as, studies of departure, conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate attrition, and student engagement, to name a few.

Why is Retention Important for a College?
As has been stated, retention is measured through the tendency of students to continually enroll at a college or university. The goal of any retention effort is to insure that once a student makes a financial, personal and temporal commitment to attend, an institution will do everything it can to insure that student continues to enroll. The continuous enrollment is important on several levels: first, it keeps students enrolled in courses and programs; second, it provides an indication of the recruitment efforts to maintain current enrollment patterns; and third, it reflects the time-to-completion patterns of students. A favorable rate of retention speaks to institutional viability by creating an atmosphere of engagement that encourages students to stay enrolled and complete programs. Favorable retention rates also enable the institution to maintain or expand its current staffing of both instructional and support personnel. It should be noted that a high retention number might suggest a commitment to the institution but does not speak to student ability or motivation. Student motivation is an essential ingredient for student persistence and courses and programs are
strengthened by a student's commitment to "stay the course" and complete a program of study. However, open admissions institutions must also deal with retention rates and the perplexities of dealing with a student population of which 60-70 percent are part-time students. Part-time students pose considerable challenges because in addition to the academic rigor required, there are other issues such as, they are older, work while attending, have the complications of young children and access to affordable daycare, to name a few.

**MCC Retention:**

As mentioned previously, retention rates are measured several different ways; fall-to-spring, spring-to-fall, and fall-to-fall retention. Fall-to-spring retention is calculated by finding all students who enrolled for the fall semester and re-enrolled for the spring semester. The percent enrolling in spring represents the proportion (or percent) that are continuing their education experience; thus, the fall-to-spring retention rate. However, a more precise figure would be to count the students returning in the spring less graduates; this figure becomes the "adjusted retention rate".

![Figure 1. Fall-to-Spring Retention](image)

Source: Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment.
Fall-to-spring adjusted retention rates for MCC as a whole increased slightly over the past 5 years, ranging from 63% to 67%. Figure 1 provides an overview of the adjusted retention rates for the district and its five colleges. The district-wide adjusted retention rate average is 65 percent, which is typical of an urban community college. Please note that the Business and Technology College only have retention rates for the past three years. Notice that the adjusted retention rates for MCC and its colleges range from 61 to 69 percent and generally follow a similar pattern over the years. There appears to be a drop in retention rates for Penn Valley in 2002. The drop, which falls out of the normal pattern, reflects a 3% change between 2001 and 2002, and is subsequently followed by a 2% increase for 2003. This anomaly is the result of the following two factors specific to the fall 2002 semester; an increase in enrollment and a higher number of non-returning students less graduates.

Figure 2 shows the adjusted rate of retention for spring-to-fall students from 2001 to 2005. Spring to fall adjusted retention rates for MCC as a district were stable over the past five years, ranging from 50% to 52%. The spring-to-fall rate of retention for the majority of the colleges, all exhibit the same pattern rate for the five years noted. Readers should use caution however, when making comparisons between the Business & Technology College and other MCC campuses due to the unique programs it provides and the specific student population that it serves.

Source: Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment
Figure 3 shows the adjusted rate of retention patterns for fall-to-fall for the district and its colleges. Fall to fall adjusted retention rates for MCC ranged from 44 to 47 percent. This figure refers to the number of students that were enrolled for the fall semester and returned for the subsequent fall semester. The overall retention rates for the colleges had greater variability and ranged from 41 to 53 percent. Note that the Business & Technology College was only included in the past three years.

![Figure 3. Fall-to-Fall Retention](image)

Source: Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment

**Impact of Retention**

To describe the impact of this retention study in practical terms the following illustration may be helpful. From an enrollment management point of view, the analysis of each semester's enrollment needs to include data about several groups: first-time students, returning students, graduates, transfer students and stop-outs. First-time students are as their name implies, a first semester student at MCC. A returning student would be a student who attended the previous semester and elected to enroll in the current or subsequent semester. A transfer student is as the name implies, a student who attended another institution prior to attending MCC. The last group, the "stop-outs" are the most elusive attendance group at any college. Stop-outs are students that have attended MCC and have exited the institution and did not return for the subsequent semester. In fact, many stop-outs do not return for several semesters or years; but fortunately, there are enough MCC stop-outs returning to make significant contributions to each semester's enrollment. As an example, during fall 2004 the MCC
student enrollment could be divided into three very basic groups: first-time students, all other students and graduates. Figure 4 shows the disposition of the fall 2004 semester by student enrollment groups.

![Pie chart showing the disposition of Fall 2004 enrollment]  
**Figure 4**  
*Disposition of Fall 2004 Enrollment*  
\(N = 17,427\)

All Other \(86\%\)

Graduate \(3\%\)

First-Time \(11\%\)

Source: Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment.

The total Fall 2004 enrollment highlights the contribution of the three enrollment groups. As can be seen from the graph, first-time students represent 11 percent (1,971 students) of the Fall 2004 enrollment, all other students represent 86 percent (14,998 students), and graduates (458 students) are 3 percent of the total. However, when one takes into account the non-returning students from fall to the spring semester (6,000 to 7,000 students) MCC must look to other student sources to populate our courses. The loss of the graduates and the number of students who choose not to enroll for the spring semester present a challenge to colleges to meet the "gap" realized by student stop-outs.
Figure 5 illustrates how Spring 2005 enrollment would look as a result of Fall 2004. Notice that of the headcount enrollment that was reported for Spring 2005 (18,470), returning and entering first-time students will only represent 12,881 students or 70 percent of the number of students needed to meet spring enrollment expectations. The remaining number of students (5,589) needed to meet spring enrollment expectations will be a combination of stop-outs and reverse transfers. This number is close to the approximately 6,000 to 7,000 students our analysis shows that are non-returning from fall-to-spring over the years. Bridging the gap to meet enrollment expectations is a bigger challenge than may be perceived.

![Figure 5](Image)

Source: Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment.

It is not surprising that at the current rate of retention for spring-to-fall and fall-to-fall, the number of non-returners will increase accordingly; 8,000 to 9,000 for spring-to-fall and 9,000 to 10,000 for fall-to-fall. As has been stated previously, to make up the headcount difference between continuing and first-time students, it is necessary to focus on those student enrollment groups that historically are the most unpredictable: stop-outs and reverse transfers. The challenge to maintain student enrollment is significant and it is our hope that this report provides some insight into MCC retention patterns.