



After 3 Years of College, Why Leave *Without* a Degree?

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This is the big question we still have after conducting the analysis in this report. In the context of the Graduation Rate Initiative, the Fresno State Student Success Task Force and our office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning are looking at various ways to help students progress in college and graduate. As described in the brief "On Track to Meet Our Graduation Target," we are examining the fall 2004 cohort and comparing it to the progress of the first-time full-time fall 2009 freshman cohort to project their success and potential at-risk points along the way.

This brief presents an analysis of students from the fall 2004 cohort who left Fresno State without completing a degree or persisting into their seventh year. These students were divided into three groups: students who left after the first year, after the second year, and after the third up through the sixth year. Of the total cohort (N=2243), 12% of the students left after the first year; 11% after the second year, and 15% after the third or consecutive years.

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Students Who Dropped Out or Transferred Out Without Completing a Degree

| | 4yr college | 2yr college | Dropouts | Total Leavers |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------|------------------|
| Count of Students | 166 | 439 | 249 | 854 |
| Percent of Total Leavers | 20% | 51% | 29% | 100% |
| Avg. Cum GPA at Leaving | 2.79 | 1.69 | 2.00 | 2.00 |
| Eligibility Index* | 3634 | 3428 | 3481 | 3484 |
| Fresno Service Area, % | 38% | 60% | 67% | 58% |
| PELL Grant Eligible, % | 39% | 51% | 55% | 50% |
| First Generation, % | 56% | 74% | 75% | 71% |
| Male, % | 39% | 43% | 53% | 45% |
| White, % | 54% | 32% | 29% | 36% |

*Eligibility Index = HSGPA * 800 + SAT Combined Score (Verb and Math)

Most (71%) of the students who left Fresno State transferred to another college or university (Table 1). According to the National Student Clearinghouse database, overall, slightly more than half (51%) of those who left transferred to a two-year college, 20% transferred to a four-year college, while 29% dropped out without enrolling elsewhere.

SENIOR COLLEGE TRANSFERS

Those who transferred to a four-year college were better prepared and performing better academically than those students who continued at a two-year college or dropped out. This group was also less likely to need financial aid, had the largest proportion of white students (54%) and students who came from outside of the Fresno Service Area (62%), and were less likely to be first generation college students.

Students who transferred to a two-year college had similar preparation characteristics as the dropout group. Both groups were likely to leave in academic difficulty. Their average cumulative GPA at the time of leaving was in the probation or disqualification range. Those who transferred to a two-year college had the lowest cumulative GPA (1.69) (Table 1). At the same time, dropouts were more likely to be male (53%) and come from our service area.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFERS & DROPOUTS

There were differences in students' characteristics based on the amount of time they were enrolled before leaving Fresno State (Table 2). Over eighty percent of students who left after the first year transferred out. They were three times more likely to continue at a two-year college than at a four-year university. On average, this group had the lowest cumulative GPA at the point of leaving (1.63) compared to students who

left after the second, third, or subsequent years. This average GPA puts them in academic probation.

TABLE 2

**Leavers by Length of Enrollment at Fresno State
(Fall 2004 Cohort)**

| | Left After 1st Year | Left After 2nd Year | Left After 3rd Plus Year |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Count of Students | 261 | 243 | 350 |
| Percent of Total Leavers | 31% | 28% | 41% |
| Avg. Cum GPA at Leaving | 1.63 | 2.03 | 2.22 |
| Eligibility Index* | 3485 | 3524 | 3457 |
| Fresno Service Area, % | 55% | 51% | 65% |
| PELL Grant Eligible, % | 47% | 48% | 53% |
| First Generation, % | 75% | 63% | 73% |
| Male, % | 48% | 42% | 45% |
| White, % | 38% | 43% | 29% |
| Transferred to 2-yr College, % | 62% | 57% | 40% |
| Transferred to 4-yr College, % | 20% | 26% | 15% |
| Dropped out | 18% | 18% | 45% |

*Eligibility Index = HSGPA * 800 + SAT Combined Score (Verb and Math)

SECOND YEAR LEAVERS

Students who left after their second year were also likely to transfer to another school; 82% did so. However, compared to the first year leavers. A slightly higher percentage transferred to a four-year college (26%) and their average cumulative GPA was higher (2.03). Also, this group had a smaller proportion of first generation students than the other two groups of leavers.

THIRD YEAR PLUS LEAVERS

Students leaving Fresno State after the third or subsequent year were less likely to transfer to another school than those who left after the first or second year. 45% of the "third plus" leavers dropped out. On average, these students were likely to leave in good academic standing (average cumulative GPA 2.22). This group included a larger proportion of students from the Fresno Service Area (65%) and a smaller percentage of white students (29%).

BY MAJOR

Analysis of the majors with at least 25 leavers during the six year period showed that there are some differences by major. Table 3 compares transferring status and time of leaving of the students based on the majors they had when entering Fresno State. The largest number to leave were undeclared students. They transferred to another four-year college at higher rates than the other majors. Pre-Nursing, Pre-Business, Liberal Studies, Mechanical Engineering, and Biology-Physiology & Anatomy majors were more likely to leave later than sooner.

One hundred fifty-eight (158) students who enrolled for at least three years, dropped out. And 104 of these were in good academic standing. Why after that amount of invested time, effort, and money, would they leave without earning their degree? The only other characteristic that we examined that distinguishes this group is that 59% were Pell-eligible (low-income) compared to 50% of leavers overall. If you have possible answers, let us know.

TABLE 3

**Leavers by Major at the Time They Entered Fresno State*
(Fall 2004 Cohort)**

| Major at Entering Fresno State | Total Leavers | Transferring Status | | | Length of Enrollment | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | Transfer 4 year college | Transfer 2 year college | Dropouts | Left After 1st Year | Left After 2nd Year | Left After 3rd Plus Year |
| Undeclared | 149 | 30% | 45% | 26% | 35% | 30% | 36% |
| Pre-Nursing | 87 | 18% | 59% | 23% | 23% | 36% | 41% |
| Pre-Business | 82 | 23% | 45% | 32% | 30% | 23% | 46% |
| Liberal Studies | 47 | 17% | 47% | 36% | 26% | 34% | 40% |
| Pre-Psychology | 40 | 15% | 60% | 25% | 40% | 23% | 38% |
| Criminology- Law | 35 | 11% | 60% | 29% | 40% | 31% | 29% |
| Mechanical Engineering | 28 | 4% | 71% | 25% | 29% | 25% | 46% |
| Biology- Physiology & Anatomy | 26 | 12% | 69% | 19% | 31% | 27% | 42% |

*The table shows only majors with 25 or more students who left from the entering cohort.