

When Do Students Who Drop Out Leave Our University?

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The largest number of new freshmen who leave, do so after their first year. The next most likely time periods are the first semester and after their second year.

At what points do new freshmen leave the university?

Fall Cohort	Cohort	Didn't return after													
		1st Semester		2nd Semester		3rd Semester		4th Semester		5th Semester		6th Semester		7th Semester	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2002	1971	155	7.9%	324	16.4%	123	6.2%	145	7.4%	69	3.5%	95	4.8%	95	4.8%
2003	2160	172	8.0%	307	14.2%	118	5.5%	199	9.2%	91	4.2%	122	5.6%	122	5.6%

The largest portion of new transfers who leave, do so after their first year, or after their first semester.

At what points do new transfers leave the university?

Fall Cohort	Cohort	Didn't return after													
		1st Semester		2nd Semester		3rd Semester		4th Semester		5th Semester		6th Semester		7th Semester	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2002	2312	136	5.9%	189	8.2%	90	3.9%	79	3.4%	43	1.9%	60	2.6%	25	1.1%
2003	2616	181	6.9%	220	8.4%	114	4.4%	100	3.8%	64	2.4%	99	3.8%	138	5.3%

Both new freshmen and new transfers are substantially more likely to drop out than to stop out (i.e., return after leaving the university for some period of time). Once students leave, more than 70% don't return. ([Data tables and methodological notes.](#))

These findings are based on the Fall 2002 and 2003 cohorts. We chose these cohorts because they are recent enough to consider the patterns to be current but far enough back that we could track them across several semesters. We tracked them through Spring 2007.

Improving first-year retention and graduation rates is a national higher education priority. On our campus, the Student Success Task Force (SSTF) has worked for five years, developing and implementing initiatives designed to help students stay in school and graduate. This year, President Welty is launching the Retention Oversight Group to investigate factors that affect first and second year student retention. As we conduct our studies, we will make the results available to the campus community.

Suggested Reading

The literature on student retention and graduation is vast. For a quick overview, read the newspaper article by a university president entitled "[Why Do Students Drop Out of College Before Graduating?](#)" For a more in-depth literature review see ACT's article "[Review of Retention Literature](#)". An easy, interesting read that includes student suggestions is *Making the Most of College* by Richard J. Light, 2001, Harvard University Press.