



Fall 2007 Cohort Freshman Seminar Report

Overview

The following report summarizes retention of first-time freshman students in the University of South Alabama (USA) Fall 2007 freshman student cohort (freshman students who enrolled in Summer 2007 or Fall 2007) who also took the Freshman Seminar during the Fall 2007 or the Spring 2008 semester. Retention for this report is defined as whether or not the freshman student persisted and enrolled in Fall 2008. While it is now a requirement for all USA freshmen to take the Freshman Seminar course, not all of the 1,529 students in the Fall 2007 freshman cohort took this course during the 2007-2008 academic year. Also, some students who took Freshman Seminar during those two semesters were not freshman. After removing students who were not freshman and duplicate enrollments, the final number of freshman students who took Freshman Seminar during the Fall 2007 or the Spring 2008 semester was 1,376 students.

Results

Of the 1,376 freshman students who took Freshman Seminar, 949 students (69%) returned in Fall 2008 (see Table 1: Student Returned). The retention rates of students of different ethnicities ranged from a low of 56% (138) for African-Americans to a high of 81% (42) for Asian-Americans. Other retention rates by category include: Whites 71% (682), Hispanic-Americans 75% (15), and Native-Americans 67% (8) (see Table 2: Ethnicity * Student Returned).

Whether or not the freshman student was attending full-time or part-time and the age of a student also impacted retention. Of 1,336 full-time freshman students, 927 returned resulting in a 69% retention rate. On the other hand, 55% (22) of the 40 part-

time students persisted (see Table 3: Full-Time or Part-Time * Student Returned). Freshman students who were 17 or 18 years old¹ at the beginning of the Fall 2007 semester persisted at a 70% retention rate or higher, 19 year old freshman persisted at a 61% retention rate, 20 year old freshman persisted at a 42% retention rate, and freshman students who were at least 21 years old persisted at a 53% retention rate² (see Table 4: Age * Student Returned).

Unsurprisingly, the high school GPA and composite ACT Score of students impacted student retention. Students with a high school GPA of 3.0 or below had retention rates less than 57%. Students with a high school GPA greater than 3.0 persisted at a 71% retention rate while students with a high school GPA greater than 3.5 persisted at an 82% retention rate³ (see Table 5: High School GPA * Student Returned). Students with a composite ACT score of 18 or below had retention rates less than 57%. Students with a composite ACT score of 23 or higher had retention rates greater than 70% while students with a ACT score greater than 30 persisted at a 93% rate or higher⁴ (see Table 6: ACT Composite Score * Student Returned).

Retention rates varied by the college housing the degree program the student selected when initially enrolling at USA. The number of freshman students from each college varied greatly with a low of 40 Computer Science students to a high of 566 Arts & Sciences students. The retention rates based on the home college of the freshman student ranged from a low of 63% for both Nursing and Computer Science to a high of 76% in Allied Health⁵ (see Table 7: College * Student Returned).

Retention rates also varied based on which Freshman Seminar course the student took. The retention rates based on the Freshman Seminar course ranged from a low of 33% for CP101 (Career Planning) taught in Spring 2008 to a high of 97% for HON101 (Honors) taught in Fall 2007. However, it should be noted that the curriculum for the Freshman Seminar was not standardized and the course curriculum was different

¹ 17 year olds (80) returned at a 70% return rate while 18 year olds (1,036) returned at a 72% rate.

² 169 students were 19 years old, 36 students were 20 years old, and 55 students were 21 years old or older.

³ 181 students did not have a high school GPA on record in Banner.

⁴ 48 students in this group did not have a composite ACT score.

⁵ Both students from Continuing Education & Special Programs who took Freshman Seminar returned.

depending on which college offered the course (see Table 8: Freshman Seminar Course * Student Returned). Also, students taking honors courses would generally be expected to return at higher rates than the rest of the student body.

Implications

The retention rate for the 1,376 students (69%) who took Freshman Seminar was higher than the retention rate of the first-time full-time baccalaureate seeking students (67%) in this Fall 2007 freshman cohort. When comparing students who took Freshman Seminar in this cohort to students who did not take Freshman Seminar, the mean difference was statistically significant at the .000 p level. In short, taking Freshman Seminar positively impacted retention for this freshman cohort.

The retention rates varied widely based on which college offered and taught Freshman Seminar. Currently, the Freshman Seminar curriculum is decentralized and not standardized. Discussion related to this issue and how to enhance the Freshman Seminar source would seem to be in order, particularly with Freshman Seminar being used as a course to promote retention. Additionally, other efforts to increase student engagement and success on campus should be explored. In George Kuh's role as director of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for the past decade, he has visited hundreds of campuses to meet with faculty and administration and the most asked question is, "What is the one thing we should do to increase student engagement and success on our campus?"

In the first few years of NSSE, Kuh avoided answering this question because he didn't feel like he could be confident about whether certain educational programs and activities were more important to student success than others. However, now Kuh states⁶ that there is growing evidence that when done well, a handful of selected programs and activities appear to engage participants at levels that boost their performance across a variety of educational activities and desired outcomes such as persistence. Kuh recommended that higher education institutions looking for ideas about how to increase student engagement and persistence read the Association of American Colleges and

⁶ National Survey of Student Engagement Experiences That Matter: Enhancing Student Learning and Success Annual Report 2007.

Universities 2007 report, *College Learning for a New Global Century*, which listed ten of the more promising “high impact” practices, one of which was First-Year Freshman Seminars. Common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, service or community based learning, undergraduate research, study abroad and other experiences with diversity, internships, and capstone courses and projects were also listed.

Future Retention Related Research

Analysis of the upcoming NSSE survey data will provide an opportunity to explore the issue of retention and persistence at USA in much greater depth in 2009. However, other opportunities to explore retention at USA are available with current campus data. A student scholarship and financial aid study is currently under way and other retention related studies will also be conducted by the Office of Institutional Research during the course of the Fall 2008 semester.

IRPA/gem

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Tables

Table 1: Student Returned

	Frequency	%
Did Not Return	427	31
Returned	949	69
Total	1376	100

Table 2: Ethnicity * Student Returned

Count						
		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
Ethnicity	White	274	29%	682	71%	956
	African-American	107	44%	138	56%	245
	Asian-American	10	19%	42	81%	52
	Non-Res. Alien	16	32%	34	68%	50
	Hispanic-American	5	25%	15	75%	20
	Native-American	4	33%	8	67%	12
	Unknown	11	27%	30	73%	41
	Total	427	31%	949	69%	1376

Table 3: Full-Time or Part-Time * Student Returned

Count						
		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
Full-Time or Part-Time	Part-Time	18	45%	22	55%	40
	Full-Time	409	31%	927	69%	1336
	Total	427	31%	949	69%	1376

Table 4: Age * Student Returned

Count						
		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
Age	17	24	30%	56	70%	80
	18	290	28%	746	72%	1036
	19	66	39%	103	61%	169
	20	21	58%	15	42%	36
	21	7	47%	8	53%	15
	>=22	19	48%	21	53%	40
	Total	427	31%	949	69%	1376

Table 5: High School GPA * Student Returned

Count						
		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
High School GPA	2.0 or below	8	53%	7	47%	15
	2.01-2.5	44	44%	57	56%	101
	2.51-3.0	125	45%	154	55%	279
	3.01-3.5	102	29%	253	71%	355
	3.51-4.0	78	18%	367	82%	445
	Total	357	30%	838	70%	1195

Table 6: ACT Composite Score * Student Returned

Count		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
ACT Composite Score	15	13	57%	10	43%	23
	16	18	41%	26	59%	44
	17	30	44%	38	56%	68
	18	48	44%	60	56%	108
	19	41	31%	90	69%	131
	20	35	27%	93	73%	128
	21	50	36%	89	64%	139
	22	33	33%	67	67%	100
	23	23	25%	69	75%	92
	24	30	29%	74	71%	104
	25	15	18%	70	82%	85
	26	17	28%	43	72%	60
	27	9	15%	52	85%	61
	28	8	24%	26	76%	34
	29	1	7%	13	93%	14
	30	7	26%	20	74%	27
	31	1	7%	13	93%	14
	32	0	0%	10	100%	10
	33	0	0%	5	100%	5
	34	0	0%	1	100%	1
	No Score	48	38%	80	63%	128
	Total	427	31%	949	69%	1376

Table 7: College * Student Returned

Count		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
College	Allied Health	48	24%	155	76%	203
	Arts & Sciences	175	31%	391	69%	566
	Business	50	29%	123	71%	173
	Continuing Education	0	0%	2	100%	2
	Computer Science	15	38%	25	63%	40
	Education	34	36%	61	64%	95
	Engineering	46	33%	93	67%	139
	Nursing	59	37%	99	63%	158
	Total	427	31%	949	69%	1376

Table 8: Freshman Seminar Course * Student Returned

Count		Student Returned				
		Did Not Return	%	Returned	%	Total
		Freshman Seminar Course	200810 AHP101	46	23%	154
	200810 BUS101	44	28%	112	72%	156
	200810 CAS100	135	30%	314	70%	449
	200810 CIS101	15	39%	23	61%	38
	200810 CP101	54	46%	63	54%	117
	200810 EG101	31	29%	76	71%	107
	200810 HON101	1	3%	29	97%	30
	200810 IDE101	22	33%	45	67%	67
	200810 NU101	56	36%	99	64%	155
	200820 CAS100	7	24%	22	76%	29
	200820 CIS101	1	33%	2	67%	3
	200820 CP101	12	67%	6	33%	18
	200820 EG101	3	43%	4	57%	7
	Total	427	31%	949	69%	1376