



SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

A Data Walk on Student Retention @ SU

Hosted by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

December 2024

WHAT IS A DATA WALK?

A data walk is a tool that shares data with stakeholders in an accessible, purposeful way to encourage understanding and discussion of data relevant to their lives.

Sharing data with the Southwestern community can:

- Empower stakeholders with information about Southwestern
- Help the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness use stakeholder feedback from the data to improve their analysis and methods for future data collection
- Inspire further discussion or action around areas of concern to inform practices and improvement

THINGS TO KNOW

Common definitions are important since words can have multiple meanings in different contexts. These are the definitions used in the Data Walk:

A **First-Year Retention Rate** measures the percentage of first-year students who have persisted in their educational program a year later (fall to fall semesters).

- This rate has been collected by the National Center for Education Statistics since 2003.
- This is a common and important metric for all baccalaureate programs.
- This metric is also used by accreditors, US News, and others as an early student success indicator and measure of institutional quality.
- The metric can be disaggregated to identify disparities by student demographic characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity.

FY = Abbreviation of First-Year (freshmen year)

FY Cohort = A group of students who started at Southwestern at the same time. The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) tracks their persistence through to graduation. IRE tracks transfer student retention rates and graduation rates separately.

Institutional Cohort = Southwestern has selected groups of colleges to make comparisons to our own data. Some are selected due to similarities with Southwestern (peers) and others are good examples of best practices that we want to work towards (aspirational).

Why focus on the first-year retention rate?

Nationally, the majority of students who leave their institutions (either to transfer or stop out) do so in their first year.

Southwestern's 5-Year Average Attrition Rate

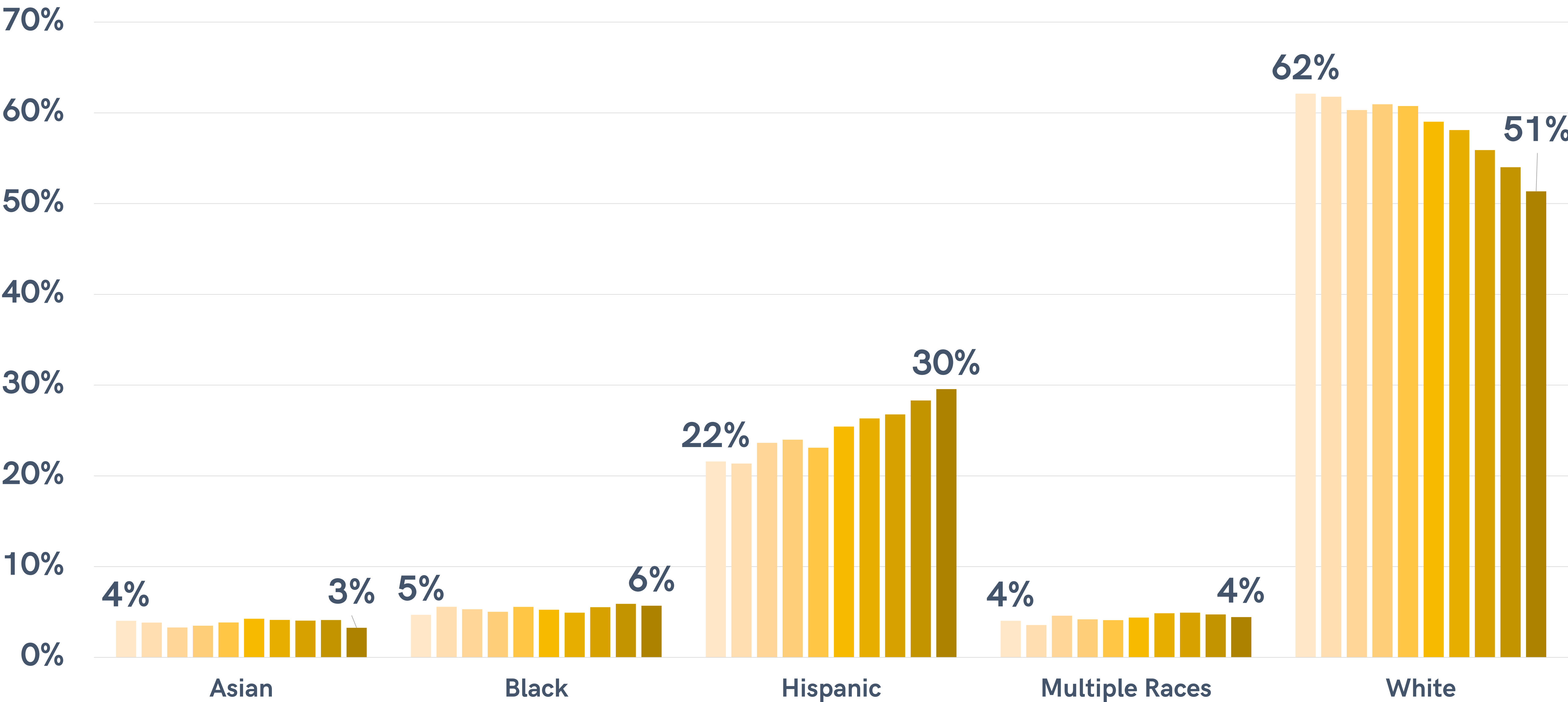
% of students leaving between Year 1 and 2:	18%
% of students leaving between Year 2 and 3:	8%
% of students leaving between Year 3 and 4:	6%

Student Demographics

Population Trends, 2015-2024

According to The Texas Tribune, recent estimates show over 49% of Texans under the age of 18 are Hispanic. Hispanic students make up a majority of Texas public school students. 89% of Southwestern students are from Texas.

Race/Ethnicity of the Student Population, 2015 to 2024



Alaskan/American Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and international students comprise 0%-2% of the population each year. These students are not represented above.

Student Demographics

Population Trends, 2015-2024

WHEN YOU SEE THE DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF THE STUDENT BODY, WHAT OBSERVATIONS COME TO MIND ABOUT THE DIVERSITY OF OUR STUDENT BODY? WHAT STUDENT NEEDS MAY CHANGE WITH SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS?

PLEASE TELL US YOUR THOUGHTS...

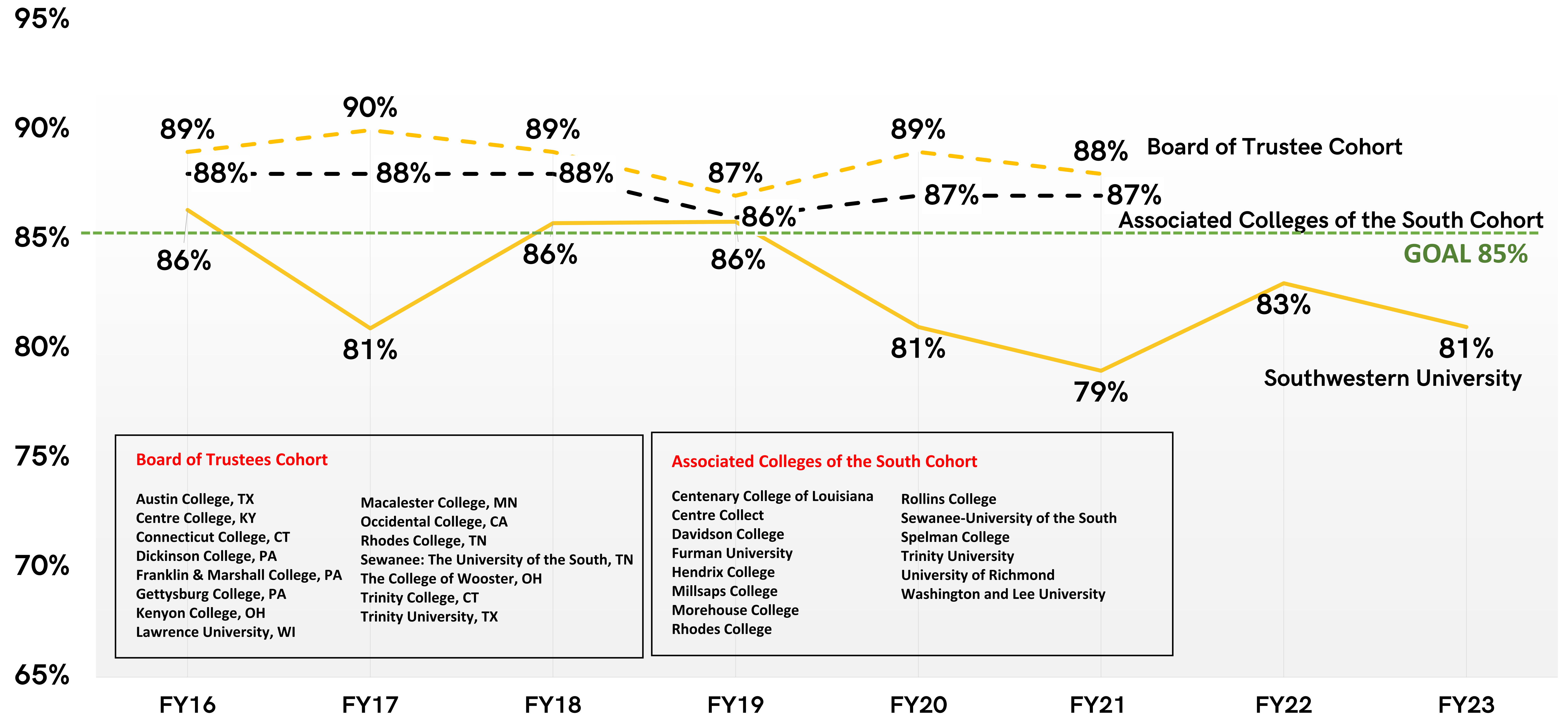
1st to 2nd Year Retention

Retention by First-Year Cohorts

GOAL: Achieve a consistent 1st to 2nd year retention rate of **85%**

National average of all institutions is **76.7%**

National average of private, nonprofit institutions is **81.2%**

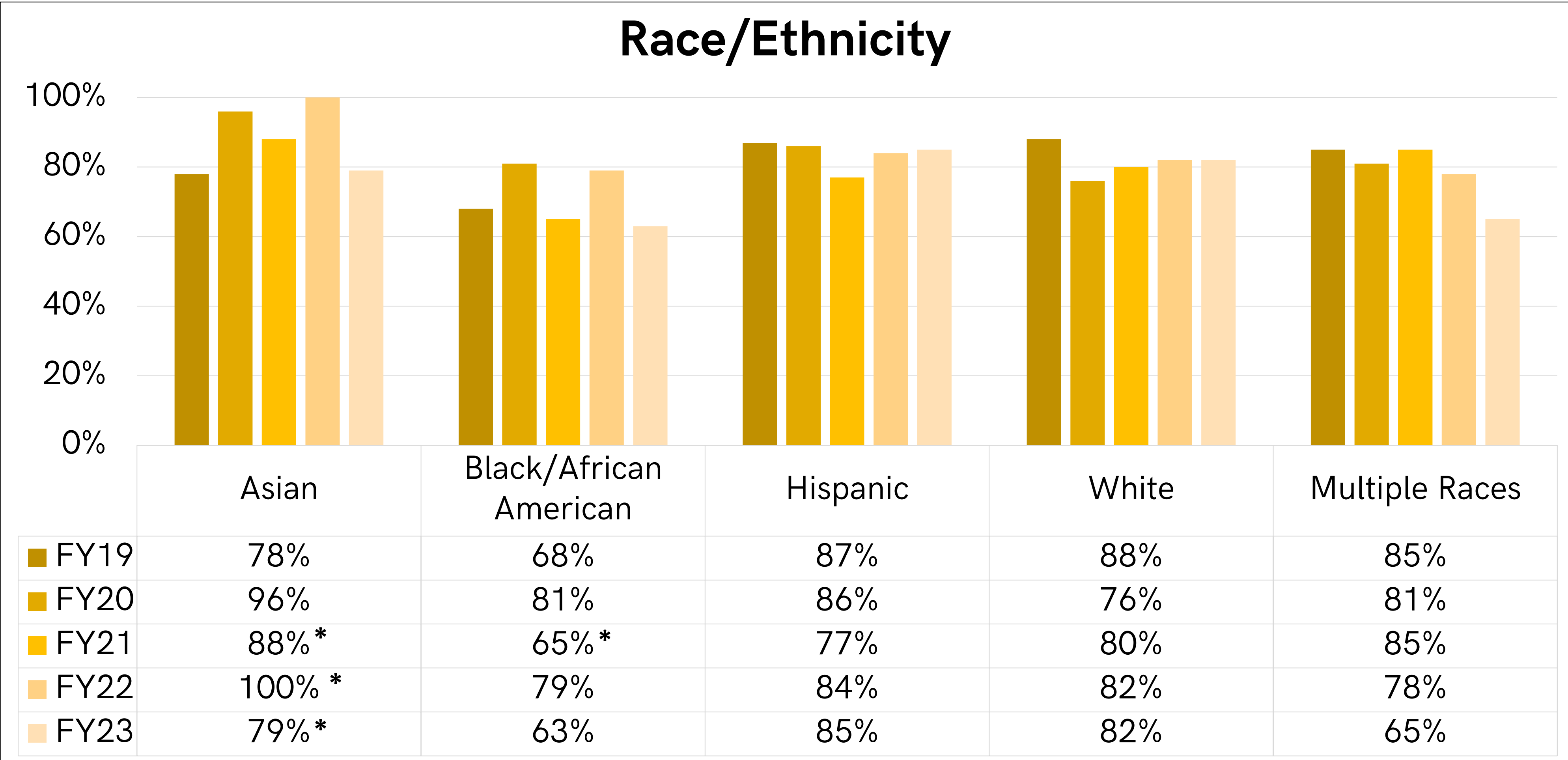


Disaggregated Retention

First-Year Retention by First-Year (FY) Cohorts

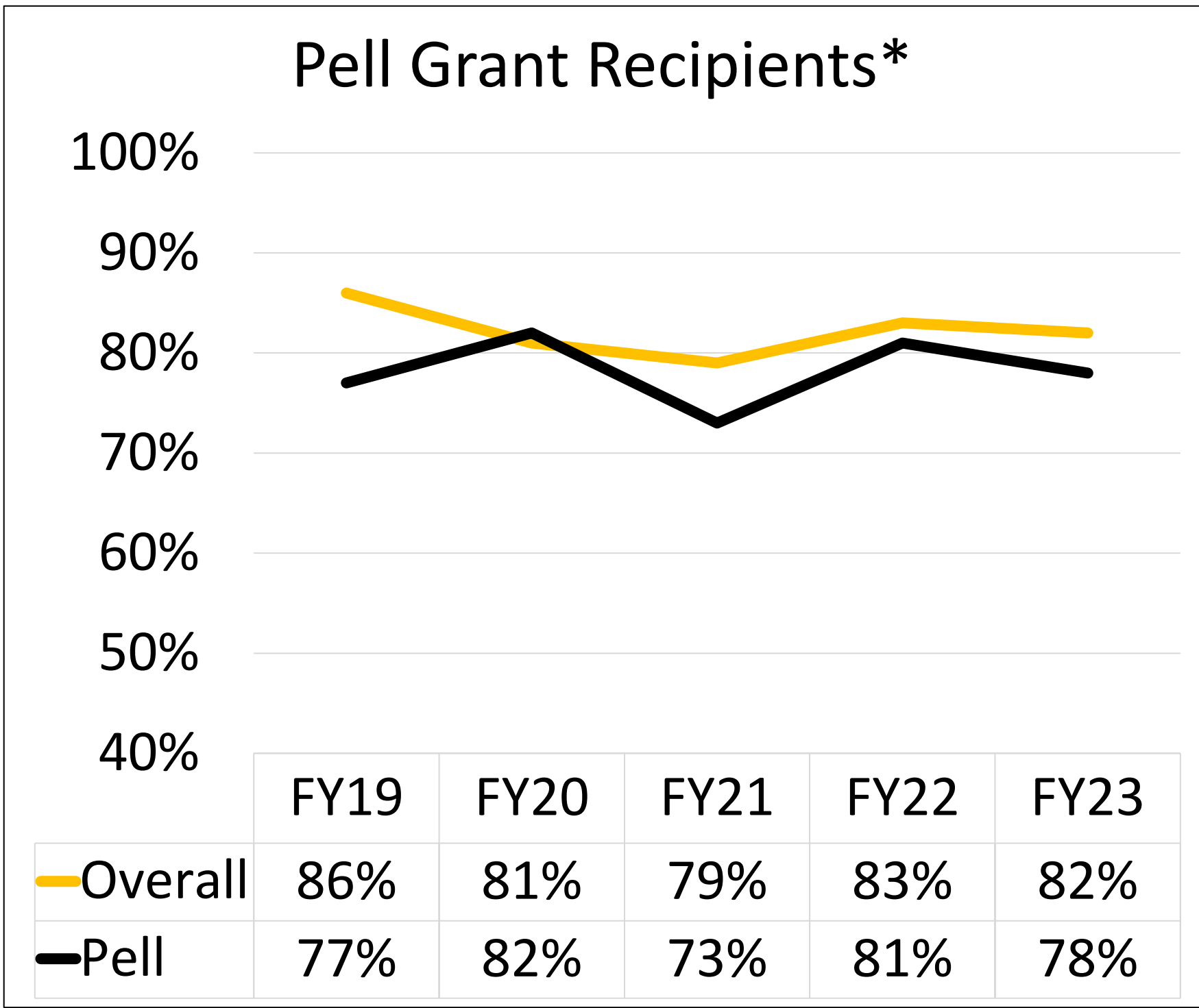
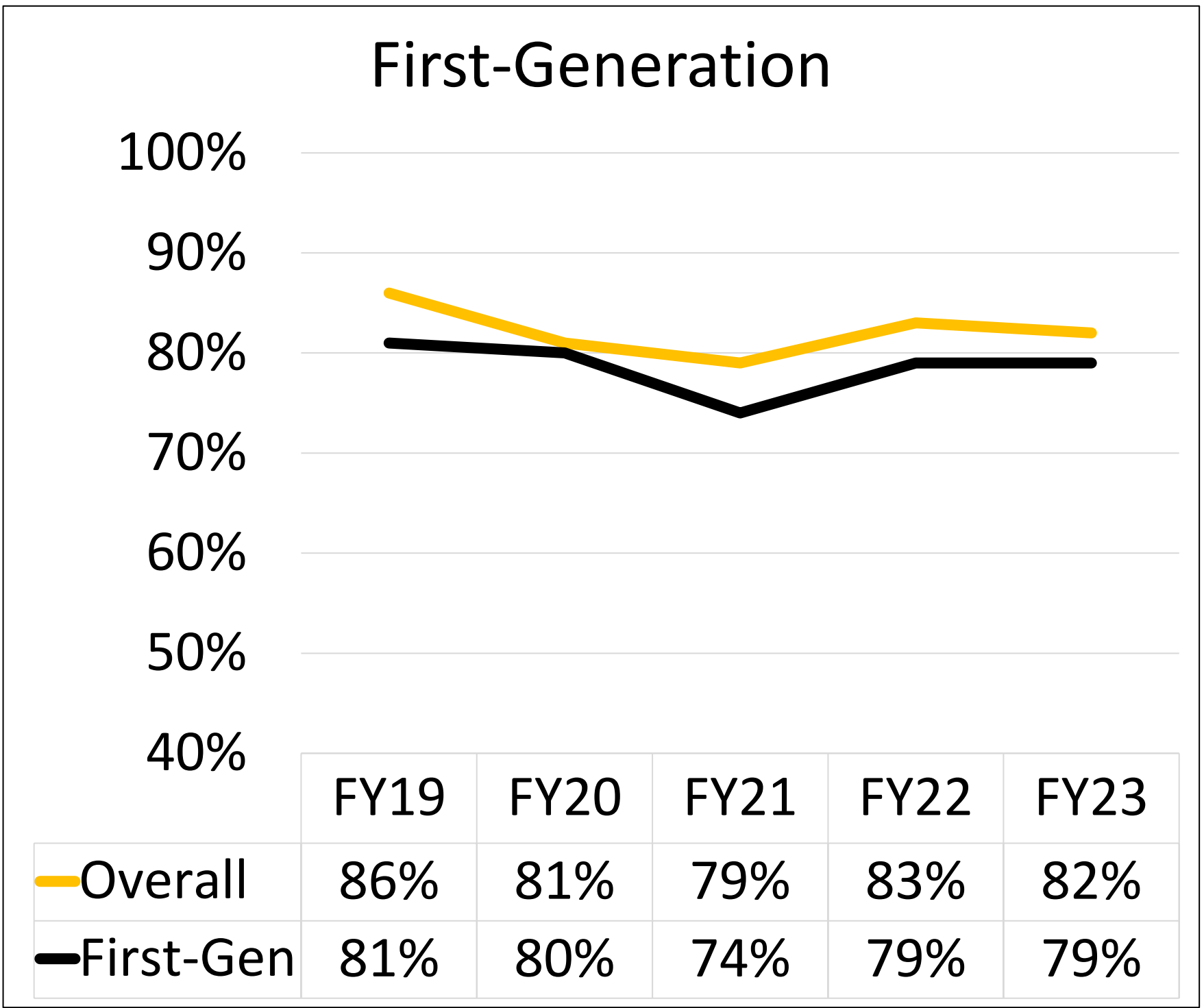
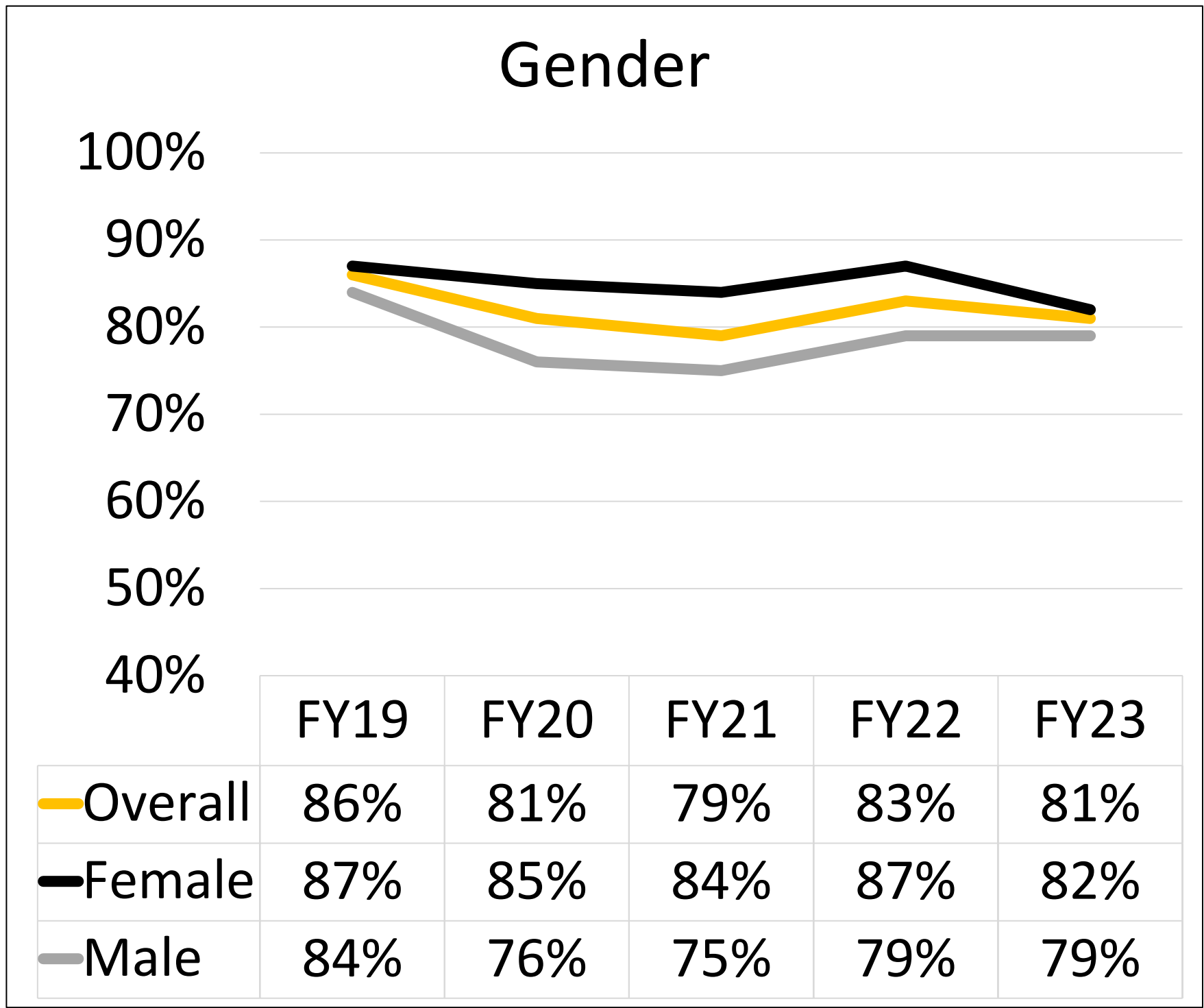
How does the government define race/ethnicity?

Students who are not permanent residents of the US do not have their race/ethnicity reported and are classified as *International*. *Hispanic* ethnic origins overrides any race(s) reported. Non-Hispanic students who report more than one racial identity are classified as having *multiple races*. The remaining students are classified in the one racial category they report: *Alaskan Native/Native American*, *Asian*, *Black/African American*, *Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander*, or *White*.



* Cohort N is less than 20

**Native American, Hawaii/Pacific Islander, International, and Unknown are not shown due to small group sizes

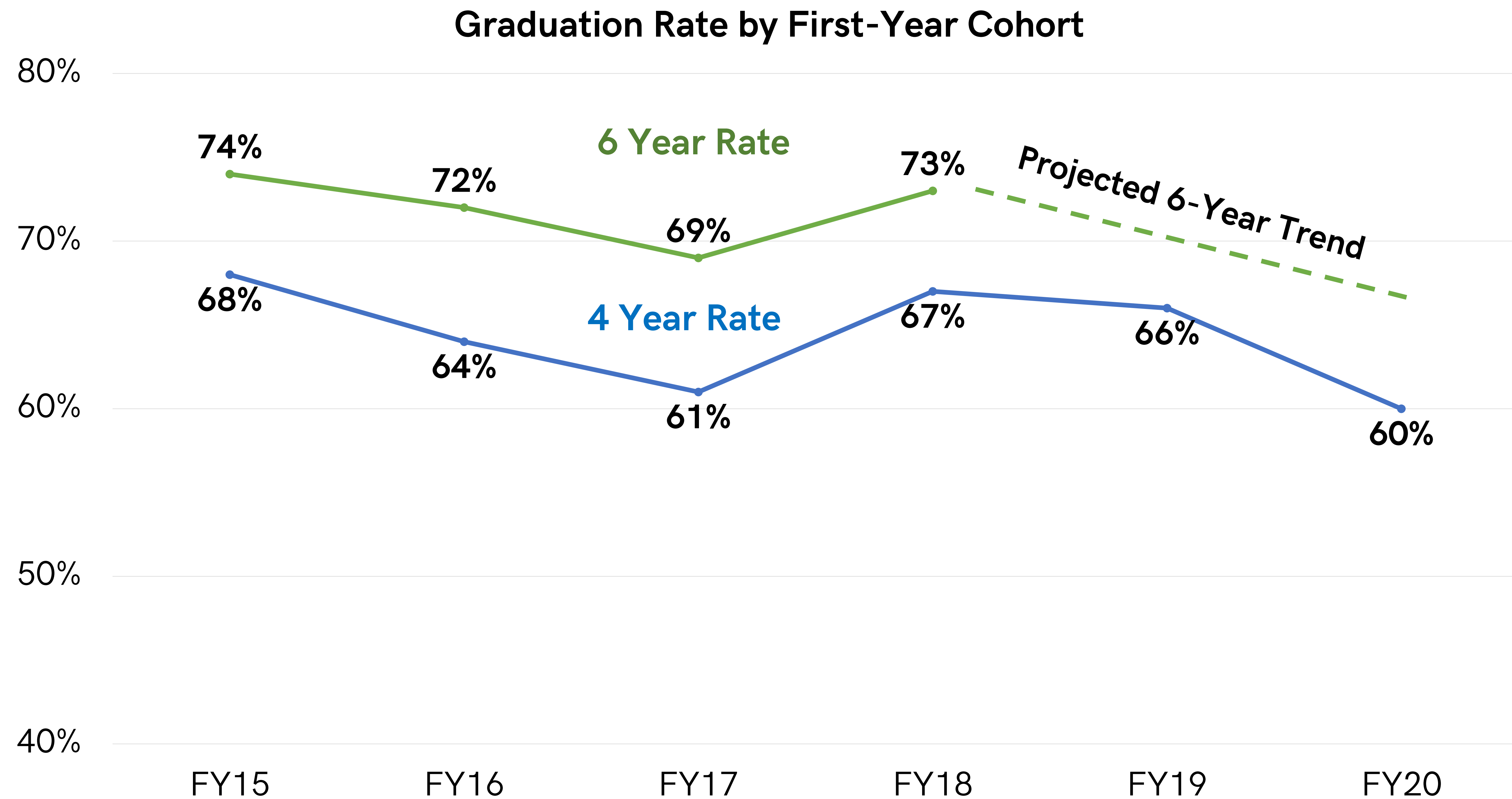


*Received a Pell Grant in their first year

Graduation Rate

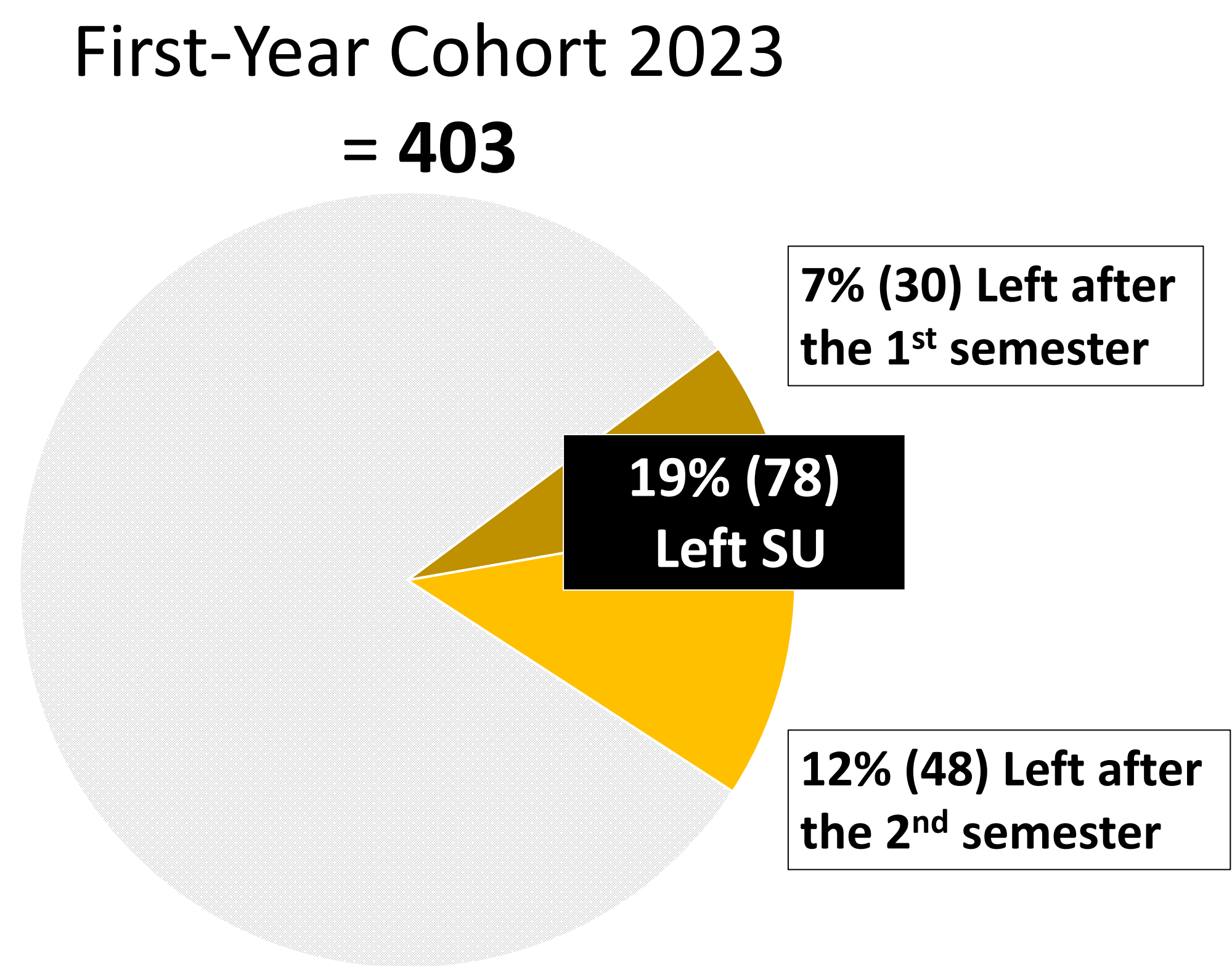
*Key Performance Indicator for Institutions-
Graduation Rates Depend on Retention*

The six-year graduation rate is an important measure of student success. This metric is reported to SACSCOC and the U.S. Department of Education as a key performance indicator for Southwestern. It also comprises 37% of the US News World Report ranking.



Profile of Students that Left SU

Attrition of 2023 First-Year Cohort from Freshman to Sophomore Year



	Attrition Rates	
	After 1 st semester	After 2 nd semester
FY22	4% (18)	13% (56)
FY21	8% (28)	13% (46)
FY20	5% (19)	14% (51)

WHO LEFT FROM THE FY23 COHORT?

Overall	78	100%
Female	40	51%
Male	38	49%
Asian	3	4%
Black	11	14%
Hispanic	18	23%
White	37	47%
Multiple Races	7	9%
First-Generation	20	26%
Athletes	45	58%
GPA below 2.0	23	29%

WHERE DID THEY GO?

Community College Only	27%
Community C. then University	4%
Public University	5%
Private University	9%
Unknown	60%

WHY DID THE 78 STUDENTS LEAVE?

63%	Financial difficulties
52%	Personal problems
48%	Want to be closer to family or friends
34%	Unsure of goals/feeling unmotivated
32%	Received a better aid package at another school
29%	Experiencing academic difficulty
23%	Living in residence hall
21%	Influenced by family or friends to leave
20%	Health-related issue
18%	Lack of support from SU staff/faculty
9%	Change in relationship status
4%	Did not receive financial aid

73% of the departing students completed the exit survey.

Q: Please indicate if any of the following reasons played a role in your decision to leave SU. Three financial aid responses were combined into one.



Why students LEAVE Southwestern?

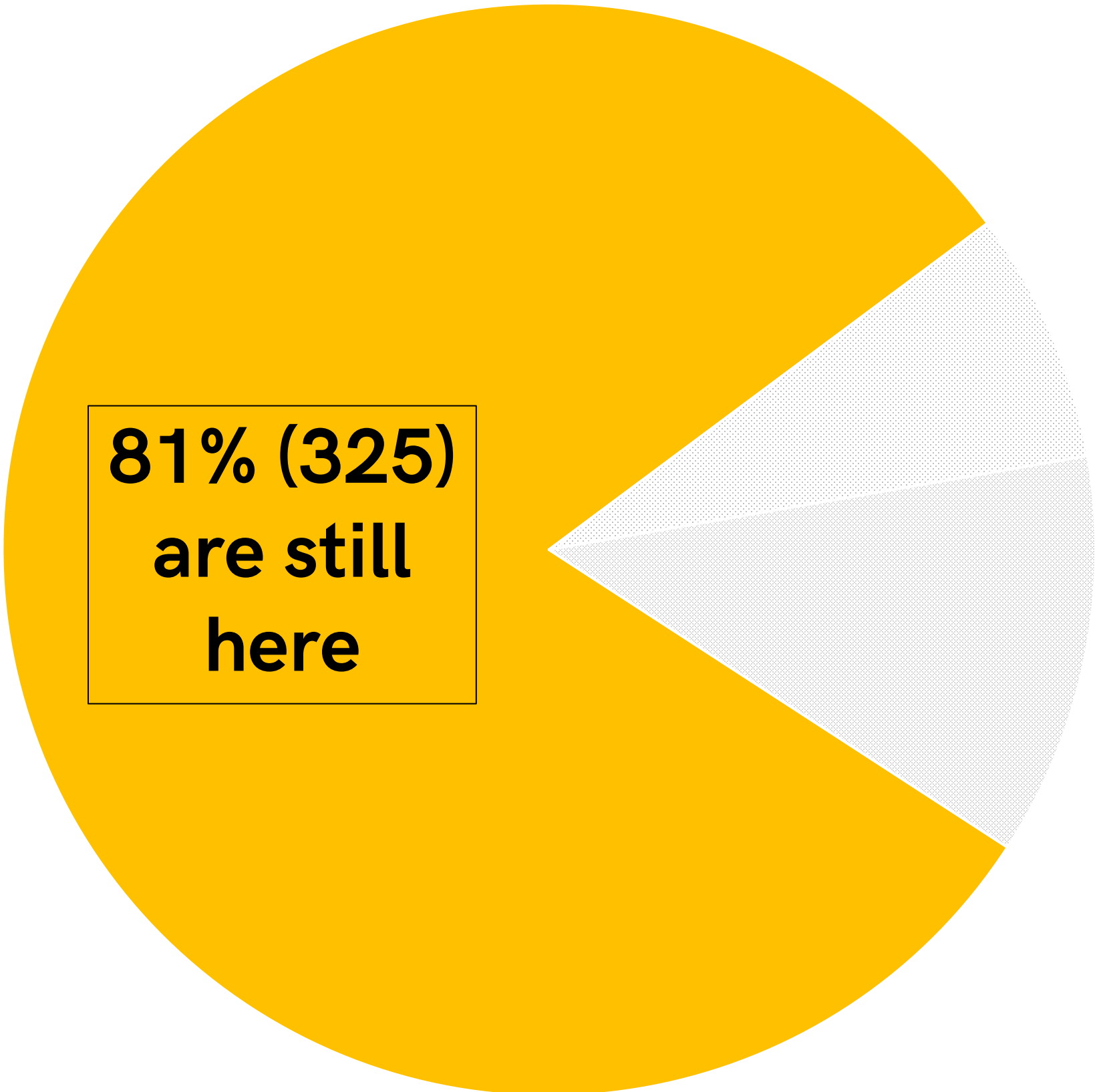
WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY REASONS WHY YOU THINK STUDENTS LEAVE BEFORE GRADUATION?

ACADEMIC	CO-CURRICULAR
FINANCIAL	OTHER

Profile of Students that Stayed at SU

Retention of 2023 First-Year Cohort from Freshman to Sophomore Year

First-Year Cohort 2023 = **403**



Retention Rate	
FY22	83% (362)
FY21	79% (281)
FY20	81% (291)

WHO PERSISTED AFTER THE 1ST YEAR?

Overall	325	100%
Female	186	57%
Male	139	43%
Asian	11	3%
Black	19	6%
Hispanic	105	32%
White	169	52%
Multiple Races	13	4%
First-Generation	77	24%
Athletes	120	37%
GPA below 2.0	29	9%

Southwestern first-year student perspectives of collaborative learning, student-faculty practices, and quality interactions were significantly higher when compared with other peer, private, liberal arts institutions on the 2024 NSSE survey.

FIRST-YEAR PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE)

On a scale of 1 (Poor) to 7 (Excellent), FY students rated their Southwestern interactions:	
Academic Advisors	6.1
Faculty	6.0
Student Services Staff	5.7
Other Staff	5.7
Students	5.5
81% rated their educational experience at SU as “good” or “excellent”	
93% planned to return to Southwestern	
85% said SU substantially emphasized the use of learning support services	
76% rated the quality of their interactions with faculty and advisors as high	
FY students scored the quality of interactions with faculty and advisors the highest in ten years.	

Why students STAY at Southwestern?

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY REASONS WHY YOU THINK STUDENTS STAY AT SOUTHWESTERN UNTIL GRADUATION? WHAT ARE OUR STRENGTHS IN RETAINING STUDENTS?

ACADEMIC	CO-CURRICULAR
MISSION & VISION OF SOUTHWESTERN	OTHER

Ways to Improve Retention

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS ON HOW SOUTHWESTERN CAN INCREASE RETENTION RATES?

PLEASE TELL US YOUR THOUGHTS...