


A Data Walk on Student Retention @ Southwestern

Hosted by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

December 4, 2024, 11:30 am - 2:00 pm

Posters presented at the Data Walk:	Comments left by community members:
<div> SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY</div> <div><hr/></div> <div><h2>A Data Walk on Student Retention @ SU</h2><p>Hosted by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness</p><p>December 2024</p></div>	

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.

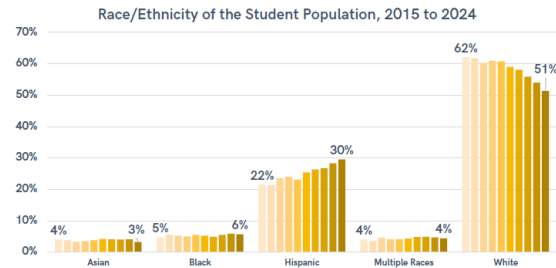
Southwestern's 5-Year Average Attrition Rate

% 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 48% 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.



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

“Is this data for the State of Texas or for Southwestern?”

IRE: We apologize for the confusion. This chart explains the 10-year demographic trends of Southwestern’s student body.

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...

“We must change our image of the normative “Southwestern student” to decenter Whiteness legacy.”

“Hispanic Student Success Coordinator needs to be institutionalized and a model used for other minority demographics.”

“After we gain the level of diversity desired, what unites all of Southwestern? What is our core purpose?”

“Focus on multiracial students?”

“More programming and support for Hispanic students and families”

“Read *Revenge of Tipping Point* about the need to reach 25% for real change to occur”

“Be more outward facing regarding Hispanic college awards/affiliations”

“Is there data on International students? Do we report that data to NCES?”

IRE: Yes, we have data on our small international student population. They are reported to NCES. Native American, Hawaii/Pacific Islander,

[Continued]

International, and Unknown race/ethnicities were not shown here due to small sub-population numbers.

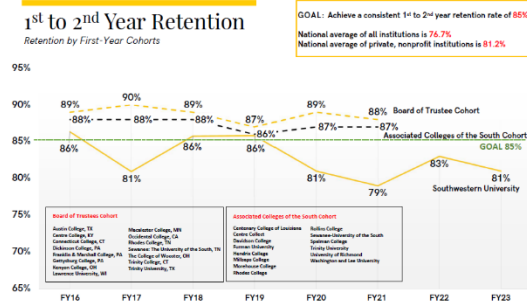
“Good gains on HSI. Other races not high enough. Pell eligible-finances make a difference. Men—focus on retention”

“How might we attract and retain more black students?”

“Better, more positive campus image of Greek Life. Very “stereotypical”

“How do we attract and retain non-White students?”

“Attract more minority groups”

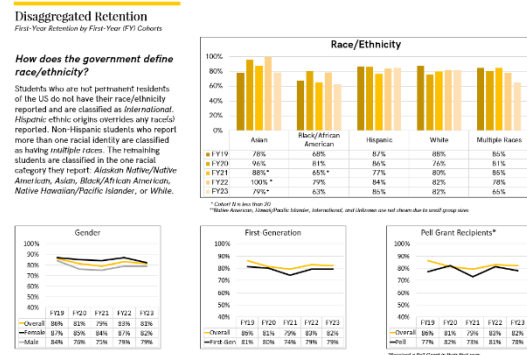


“Where is the Strategic Planning Cohort group? Why is it different?”

IRE: The SPC group is not represented here, but they can be added in the future. Thanks for the suggestion.

Is the BOT cohort the aspirant group?

IRE: The BOT cohort is a combination of peer and aspirant institutions chosen by the Southwestern Board of Trustees.



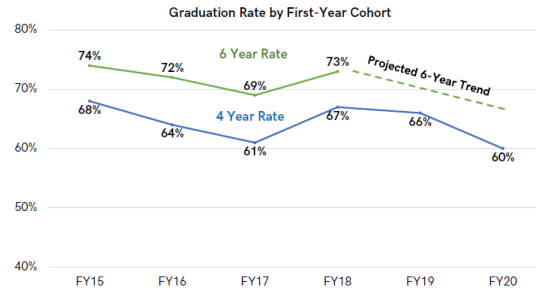
“Disaggregate the 79% number more”

“Multivariate analysis would be helpful for internal planning”

Graduation Rate

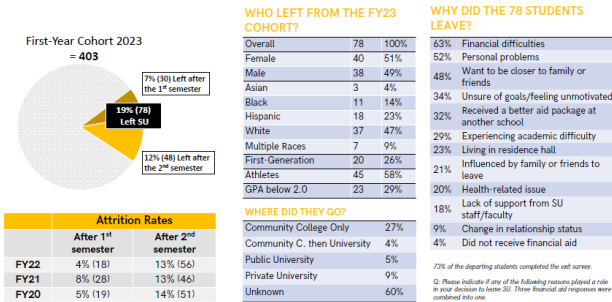
Key Performance Indicator for Institutions-
Graduation Rates Depend on Retention

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



“Can we change exit survey to rank reasons why they are leaving when choosing multiple reasons?”

IRE: Sure! We will work with the advising office to revise this portion of student exit surveys.

Why students LEAVE Southwestern?

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

ACADEMIC	CO-CURRICULAR
FINANCIAL	OTHER

ACADEMIC:

“Agreed”

“Lack of initiation from students”

“Don’t have major they want”

CO-CURRICULAR:

FINANCIAL:

“Agreed”

“Agreed, no 4-year fixed # [tuition] and discount rate changing”

“Changing tuition, unable to pay changing rates without debt”
“\$”

“\$\$, increasing tuition”

“Tuition is expensive and it increases yearly”

OTHER:

“Social climate”

“Health (mental/physical)”

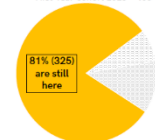
“Social alienation”

“I wonder if the stress of academics and financial pressures are both contributing factors”

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	42%
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 equity interactions were significantly higher when compared with other peer, private, liberal arts institutions on the 2024 NSSI survey.

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

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.

“What is the comparison data from peer and aspirant cohorts?”

IRE: Great question! While our peers don’t always publicly publish the profiles of students that have left or stayed at their institutions after the first year, we do have access to their first-year retention rates. These comparisons are located on the 6th slide.

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

ACADEMIC:

"Academic/research potential (professional development)"

"Kinesiology"

"Specific academic plans"

MISSION & VISION OF SOUTHWESTERN:

"Relationships with professors and friends—small school, (fostering a liberal arts community)"

"High impact experiences"

"Paideia and flexible graduation plans—I'm not required to take things not applicable to me and I can take things I want to take!"

CO-CURRICULAR:

"Greek Life! ♥"

"Great student organizations"

"Engagement in activities"

"Sports and Greek Life"

OTHER:

"Connections with faculty/staff"

Ways to Improve Retention

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

PLEASE TELL US YOUR THOUGHTS...

“Less strict IFC”

“Admissions is easiest outcome/silver bullet (if you want one item)”

“CONSISTENT tuition rates/more financial aid!”

“Encourage students to develop college habits, that are ‘collegie’ in quality—taking the lead on your own education”