

Low Achieving General College Students

Who Drop Out After One Quarter:

A Follow-Up Study

by

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The retention of students has become an increasing concern of collegiate institutions during recent years. As colleges and universities have admitted broader segments of the general population to their classrooms, traditional programs and methods have often not served the needs of the newcomers to higher education. In addition, as enrollments in universities and colleges continue to decline, institutions are seeking ways to retain individuals once they are admitted. The purpose of this study was to identify low achieving freshmen after their first quarter in college and determine why they did not register for the next quarter. By identifying reasons for student attrition, colleges will then be better able to provide needed services or instructional methods to help alleviate the problems which cause students to drop out.

#### Method

The study took place in the General College (GC) at the University of Minnesota. GC is the open door unit to the University and as such admits anyone who shows promise of benefiting from higher education.

At the end of Fall Quarter, 1977, GC freshmen students with no prior collegiate history, who either did not complete at least 50% of their Fall credits (not including withdrawals - W's) or had a numerical grade point average (NPA) of less than C- (C5), and who did not register for classes Winter Quarter were identified. A total of 101 students met these criteria. During the beginning of February, 1978 they were sent a questionnaire asking them about their present activities, reasons for not registering Winter Quarter, and their experience in GC (see Appendix A for the questionnaire and cover letter). Follow-up postcards were mailed to students who did not respond to the questionnaire at approximately one week intervals for two weeks (see Appendix B). Students who still had not responded by the beginning of March

were telephoned. If these students could be reached, they answered the questionnaire over the phone.

From the initial 101 mailed questionnaires, 13 were undeliverable, and six students said they were enrolled in GC Winter Quarter. Therefore, 82 students received the questionnaire and were eligible for the study. A total of 35 eligible students returned the questionnaire by mail (23) or over the telephone (three of the 12 telephone responses were made by a person other than the student). Therefore, responses were received from 43% of those who received the questionnaire and were eligible. Also noteworthy, 33 nonrespondents could not be reached by telephone either because the phone was disconnected, the number unlisted, or the person had moved.

### Results

Only three students were presently enrolled in any post-secondary institution when they completed the questionnaire. Two students were enrolled at metropolitan community colleges, and one student was attending a beautician school in St. Cloud. Twenty-one students indicated that they were presently working, mainly at skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Others were at home (2), in the hospital (2), and in the Army (1). Six students said they were doing nothing.

Fifteen students were planning to return to GC in the near future (seven indicated Spring Quarter and three Fall Quarter). Nine students were not sure if they would return, and 10 students were not planning to return to GC.

When asked why they did not return to GC Winter Quarter, 14 students indicated that lack of money was the reason, and seven attributed their leaving to emotional or family problems. Four students simply said that they did not like school. Others gave reasons related to physical health, lack of goals, etc. Table 1 presents a summary of the students' reasons for not returning to GC.

Insert Table 1 about here

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Eleven students gave responses to the question about how GC could have better served them. Three students would have preferred a better orientation/registration process, three students said better counseling and advising was needed, and one student each indicated more friendly teachers and the bigness of the University. Three students commented positively to the question.

In a final question asking for any other statements about GC, the University or the student, eight students made positive statements about GC and the University, and four students made negative statements. Three of the negative statements were related to the bigness of the University and one to the problems of commuting to the campus.

#### Discussion and Summary

Colleges and universities need to explore reasons why students drop out or withdraw from college. In a nationwide study, Astin (1975) found that the most "drop out-prone" freshmen are those with poor academic records in high school, low aspirations, poor study habits, relatively uneducated parents, and small town backgrounds." Except for the latter characteristic, many GC students possess these characteristics (Romano, 1977).

The results of the present study, while admittedly a select group of students, show that the primary reasons for student attrition are associated with financial and personal problems. Only one of the responding students indicated a reason directly related to the College. No one indicated poor academic progress as a reason for withdrawal. These findings suggest that an active intensive counseling intervention during the students' first quarter on campus may prevent students from dropping out. This study did not research

the extent to which these students utilized University and College resources to help them manage their problems. However, since they were new to higher education, it is likely that they did not search for or find the services that could help them during their first quarter on campus. New students generally need time to become accustomed to their campus. For some, personal and financial problems may be upon them before they are aware of helpful resources. Discouragement and low motivation sets in and the students drop out. It would be interesting to know how many of these students used the Financial Aid Office, HELP Center, or various counseling offices throughout the University.

This study suggests that for most students, problems not directly related to their academic performance causes withdrawal from college. Most of them do not attend, at least immediately, another post-secondary institution. Some students believed that GC could offer better registration, advising and counseling services, but the majority were positive about the College. The results indicate that improved methods to communicate to students the availability of College and University counseling services may reduce student attrition.

Finally, although follow-up research represents a considerable investment of both time and money, its value in determining why students drop out is considerable. Colleges and universities need to conduct this type of research so that services and programs can better meet the needs of students and perhaps reduce the number who leave college prematurely.

Table 1  
Reasons Why Students Did Not Return  
To GC Winter Quarter, 1978

<u>Reason</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Lack of money	14	39
Emotional or family problems	7	19
Did not like school	4	11
Physical illness	3	8
Lack of goals	3	8
Found a job	2	5
Problems with babysitting, transportation	2	5
Impersonal nature of University	1	3
Poor class selection and advising	1	3
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<sup>a</sup>The total is more than 35 because some individuals indicated more than one reason.

References

Astin, A.W. Preventing students from dropping out. San Francisco:

Jossey Bass, 1975.

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
TWIN CITIES

Office of the Dean

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General College  
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February 3, 1978

Dear Former General College Student:

I want to ask your assistance in helping us better serve present and future students in the General College. According to our records, you registered for classes during the Fall, 1977 Quarter in General College, but did not register for the Winter, 1978 Quarter. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions on the enclosed questionnaire and mail it to me in the stamped envelope enclosed. Be assured that your questionnaire will be confidential. The number in the right-hand corner will be used only to facilitate following up on those questionnaires not returned.

I thank you for your cooperation and look forward to receiving your returned questionnaire.

Sincerely yours,

John L. Romano, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Counseling and Student Development

Phone (612) 373-4400

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Follow-Up Questionnaire  
Former General College Students

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1. Are you presently enrolled in any classes at the University of Minnesota? (Circle one)
    - (a) Yes, Day school. What college? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify)
    - (b) Yes, Extension (evening)
    - (c) No
  
  2. Are you presently enrolled in any post-secondary educational institution? (Circle one)
    - (a) Yes. Name? \_\_\_\_\_ Where located? \_\_\_\_\_
    - (b) No
  
  3. Did you register for classes in the General College during the Fall, 1977 Quarter? (Circle one)
    - (a) Yes
    - (b) No
  
  4. Do you plan to return to the General College in the near future? (Circle one)
    - (a) Yes. When? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify)
    - (b) No
    - (c) Not sure
  
  5. Why did you not return to the General College for the Winter Quarter? Be very specific.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  6. What are you currently doing now since you are not attending the General College? Be very specific. For example, if you are working, state where and at what you are working.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  7. In what ways could the General College have better served you during the Fall, 1977 Quarter? Be very specific.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  8. Any other statements you would like to make about the General College, the University of Minnesota, or yourself?

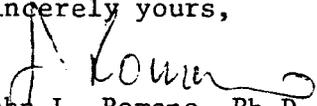
## Appendix B

Dear Former General College Student:

Recently you received a short questionnaire asking for your reactions to the General College, and also your plans. As yet I have not received your questionnaire. I am very interested in your answers, and I strongly urge you to respond. Your answers to the questions can help us better serve present and future General College students.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

  
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