

Confidence and Barriers to Graduation Identified by Graduate and Non-Graduate
Participants in the General College Transferred Student Survey: Executive Summary
Cathrine Wambach, Jennifer Franko and Jennifer Connor: General College Office for
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In the spring of 2001, the General College Office for Research and Evaluation surveyed 420 former GC students who were enrolled at that time in other University of Minnesota colleges. The students were asked to report their satisfaction with GC, satisfaction with their current college, confidence in a variety of skills, and any barriers they perceived that could prevent their earning degrees. The academic records of the respondents to the survey were obtained from the U of M data warehouse. Information included term of graduation, college, major, GPAs for each term after transfer, credits at transfer, and demographic data. This information was merged with the results of the survey. As of summer 2004, 305 (73%) of the respondents had earned degrees. Degree earners were found to have expressed more confidence in their skills and to have perceived fewer barriers toward earning a degree than did students who had not yet earned degrees. The results suggest that interventions related to student time management, academic planning skills and financial management may help improve graduation rates.

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Abstract

Responses to a 2001 satisfaction survey were used to make predictions about which former GC students were likely to have graduated by summer 2004. Of the 420 survey respondents, 304 had earned at least one degree. Graduates were found to have expressed more confidence in their skills and to have reported fewer barriers to graduation on the 2001 survey.

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In the spring of 2001, the General College Office for Research and Evaluation surveyed former GC students who were enrolled at the time in other University of Minnesota colleges. The population of students included 1329 students who first enrolled in GC between 1995 and 2000. The surveys were delivered on-line. Four hundred twenty students responded to the survey, a response rate of 32%. The results of the survey were reported by Wambach, Hatfield, Merabella and Franko (2001).

While the main purpose of the survey was to assess students satisfaction with various aspects of their GC experience there were also questions asking students to rate their confidence in various skills and any perceived barriers to their continuing in college. This report investigates the extent to which students' confidence in their skills and perceived barriers to graduation predicted actual graduation three years later.

Method

The academic records of the 420 respondents to the Transferred Student Survey (TSS) were obtained from the U of M data warehouse. Information included term of graduation, college, major, GPAs for each term after transfer, credits at transfer, and demographic data. This information was merged with the results of the TSS.

Questions 49 through 60 on the TSS (see Appendix A for the complete survey) asked student to describe their current level of skill in tasks such as reading and using the library. Students generally rated their skill levels as medium to high. We hypothesized that students' ratings in skills such as reading, taking tests, and writing papers, areas that influence outcomes in most courses, would be related to eventual graduation. We also

hypothesized that skill in managing time and choosing courses/planning programs, two important indicators of motivation, would be related to graduation.

Questions 61 through 74 on the TSS asked students to rate the extent to which a variety of factors might be barriers to their eventual graduation. Overall, students did not perceive many barriers to graduation. However, the most frequently identified potential barriers were, access to desired or necessary classes, lack of financial aid, personal debt, transportation issues, problems passing classes, and opportunities to work full time. We hypothesized that students who perceived fewer barriers to graduation would be more likely to have graduated.

Results

Characteristics of Graduates and Non-Graduates

Of the survey respondents, 305 (73%) earned at least one degree and 115 (27%) had not earned a degree as of summer 2004. Graduate and non-graduate responders were compared on several demographic variables. Women were more likely than men to graduate. Of the 226 female survey respondents for whom data on sex was available, 174 (77%) had graduated. Of the 184 male survey respondents for whom data on sex was available, 122 (66%) had graduated. Data on gender was missing for 10 respondents. The graduation rates for White women ($n = 179$) and Asian women ($n = 20$) were 80%. The rate for White men ($n = 149$) was next at 70%. The rate for Black, Hispanic and American Indian men ($n = 15$) was 53%, and the rate for Black, Hispanic and American Indian women ($n = 27$) was 52%. Asian men who responded to the survey ($n = 20$) had a 50% graduation rate.

Table 1 lists the colleges where students were last registered. For both the graduate and non-graduate respondents 55% were enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts and the rest were distributed over the other U of M colleges. The lowest enrollments were in the colleges of Nursing, Dentistry and Medicine.

Table 1: Last College for TSS Respondents

COLLEGE	GRADUATES	NON-GRADUATES
Architecture and Landscape Architecture	5	0
Biological Science	5	4
Continuing Education (Intercollege program)	23	15
Liberal Arts	168	64
Human Ecology	23	4
Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science	13	5
College of Natural Resources	3	6
Carlson School of Management	12	0
Dentistry	4	0
Education and Human Development	34	6
Institute of Technology	19	11
Medicine	4	0
Nursing	1	0
U of M Duluth	1	

Survey Responses of Graduates and Non-Graduates

Graduates and non-graduates responses to items on the TSS reflecting confidence in skills and perceived barriers to graduation were compared. Several scales were created from items on the original survey. For the confidence items students were asked to describe their current levels of skill in the area. The confidence scales and their reliabilities are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Reliability of Confidence Scales

Scale Name	Items from the TSS	Reliability
Language	reading, taking tests, writing papers	.68
Computers	using computers for course work, using computers for communication	.86
Planning	using the library, managing time, choosing courses planning a program, contacting faculty and staff	.72
All Skills	all of the above items and solving mathematical problems, working in groups, making presentations in class	.78

An analysis of variance was used to compare mean scale scores of graduates and non-graduates. The groups were significantly different in planning ($F = 24.191$, $p = .001$) and all skills ($F = 8.471$, $p = .004$). For both scales graduates rated their skills higher than did non-graduates. Means and standard deviations for the scales are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for Confidence Scales

Scale	Group	Number	Mean	Std Deviation
Language (range = 3-15)	non-graduates	115	11.49	1.96
	graduates	304	11.63	1.97
Computers (range = 3-10)	non-graduates	115	8.87	1.35
	graduates	304	8.78	1.43
Planning (range = 4-20)	non-graduates	115	14.57	2.90
	graduates	303	16.01	2.58
All Skills range = 12-60)	non-graduates	114	46.01	5.43
	graduates	303	47.83	5.79

Graduates and non-graduates were also compared on their perceptions of barriers to graduation. Fourteen possible barriers were listed on the TSS and students were asked to rate each item regarding the degree to which it may affect graduation from the U of M. The barriers were: lack of financial aid, availability of /access to desired major, access to desired or necessary classes, personal debt, transportation/parking issues, problems passing required classes, lack of study space, opportunities to work full time, need to support children or family members, health related issues, personal problems other than health, college doesn't fit lifestyle, desire to pursue other educational opportunities, and lack of accommodations for disabilities. Responses to the items were highly correlated (.87) so they were combined into a Barriers scale. The range of the scale was 14 (low perception of barriers) to 70 (high perception of barriers). The mean for graduates was 24.59 (n = 288, sd = 9.21) and the mean for non-graduates was 27.95 (n = 103, sd =

8.69). The graduates perceived significantly lower barriers than the non-graduates ($F = 10.42, p = .001$). Analysis of individual items suggested differences between graduates and non-graduates on personal debt and problems passing required classes were significant at the .01 level.

Conclusions

Analysis of the responses of graduates and non-graduates to the Transferred Student Survey suggests that student perceptions of skills and barriers did have some ability to predict who would and would not graduate. Students who were more confident in their skills and perceived fewer obstacles to graduation were more likely to graduate. Students who transferred with less confidence in their ability to manage their time, plan a program, and use university resources seem to be more vulnerable to dropping out. These students also reported less confidence in their ability to pass future courses and were concerned about barriers to graduation such as personal debt. The results suggest that providing ongoing support around issues of time management, program planning, and financial management for students may increase the graduation rates.

The results of this study are also consistent with past ORE transfer studies which have found that Black, Hispanic and Native American students are somewhat less likely to transfer and graduate than are Asian and White students. The extent to which confidence and barriers contribute to this discrepancy are questions worthy of future research.

References

Wambach, C., Hatfield, J., & Mirabella, M. (2001). *A survey of former GC students*.

Minneapolis: General College, University of Minnesota.

Appendix A: The Transferred Student Survey

Statement of consent: I have read the consent information, had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to participate in this study. The submission of my student ID represents my consent to participate in this study.

Please enter your ID (emplid) and initials in the appropriate box below.

ID (Emplid):	Initials:
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GC EXPERIENCE

Please answer the following questions about your General College experience.

1. When you applied to the University did you:

<input type="radio"/> apply directly to General College?
<input type="radio"/> apply to another college at the U of MN and get accepted by GC?
<input type="radio"/> I don't remember how I applied.

2. Were you accepted into any other four-year colleges besides the University of Minnesota prior to your enrollment in GC?

<input type="radio"/> Yes, I was accepted into at least one other four-year college.
<input type="radio"/> No, I applied to another four-year college but was not accepted.
<input type="radio"/> No, I did not apply to any other four-year colleges.

3. Were you accepted into a community college prior to your enrollment in GC?

<input type="radio"/> Yes, I was accepted into at least one other community college.
<input type="radio"/> No, I applied to a community college but was not accepted.
<input type="radio"/> No, I did not apply to a community college.

4. How would you describe your interactions with the staff in General College offices?

very negative	somewhat negative	neither negative or positive	somewhat positive	very positive
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

5. How satisfied are you with the advising you received while you were attending GC?

very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	moderately satisfied	very satisfied
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

6. How satisfied are you with the advising you are presently receiving?

very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	moderately satisfied	very satisfied
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

7. If you could still receive some on-going advising from your GC adviser, would you?

definitely no	probably no	maybe	probably yes	definitely yes
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

8. How well informed were you about your major before you transferred?

not at all informed	slightly informed	somewhat informed	well informed	very well informed
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

9. How satisfied are you now with the GC courses you took?

very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	moderately satisfied	very satisfied
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

10. How satisfied are you with the non-GC courses you have taken since transferring?

very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	moderately satisfied	very satisfied
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

11. When you began your GC experience was it what you expected college to be like or was it different?

very different	different	somewhat the same	close to what I expected	very much what I expected
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

12. Currently non-GC students can enroll in GC classes. Did the presence of non-GC students in those classes enhance or detract from your experience in those courses?

distracted	made no difference	enhanced
O 1	O 2	O 3

13. Considering the options available to you when you entered GC, would you enroll again?

definitely no	probably no	maybe	probably yes	definitely yes
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

14. How do you feel GC is perceived by non-GC students?

<input type="radio"/> Most non-GC students know very little about GC.
<input type="radio"/> Negatively when compared to other colleges in the University.
<input type="radio"/> The same as other colleges in the University.
<input type="radio"/> Positively when compared to other colleges in the University.

15. In your estimation, what proportion of your GC classmates took their education seriously?

very few	few	some	many	most
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

16. How challenging was your academic experience in GC?

not at all challenging	somewhat challenging	moderately challenging	challenging	very challenging
O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

17. What is the likelihood that you will graduate from the University of Minnesota?

<input type="radio"/> 0%	<input type="radio"/> 25%	<input type="radio"/> 50%	<input type="radio"/> 75%	<input type="radio"/> 100%
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18. What is the likelihood that you will transfer from the U of MN to another college to complete your degree?

<input type="radio"/> 0%	<input type="radio"/> 25%	<input type="radio"/> 50%	<input type="radio"/> 75%	<input type="radio"/> 100%
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GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

The following is a list of goals we hope students will achieve through their experience in GC. Rate the extent to which your GC experience helped you achieve these goals.

Goal	not at all	very little	somewhat	very much	a great deal
19. Clarify my educational goals.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
20. Become a better reader.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
21. Become a better writer.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
22. Become better at oral communication.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
23. Develop a better understanding of mathematics.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
24. Develop better computer skills.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
25. Become involved with college and university organizations and activities.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
26. Appreciate diversity.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Goal	not at all	very little	somewhat	very much	a great deal
27. Learn to achieve in a variety of course structures.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
28. Learn about careers.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
29. Meet new people and make new friends.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
30. Become a better test taker.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
31. Understand myself better as a learner.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
32. Understand the systems and programs at the U of MN.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
33. Make a good transfer and major	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

decision.					
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GC CLASSES

In retrospect, please rate the following as they apply to GC classes.

	Very poor				Exceptional
34. Overall teaching ability of the instructors.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
35. Instructors' overall knowledge of the subject matter.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
36. Instructors' overall respect and concern for the students.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
37. Overall physical environment of the classrooms.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
38. Academic preparation for classes taken after transfer.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

GC CHARACTERISTICS

The following are characteristics of GC. Rate the extent to which you liked these characteristics. If you believe that a statement is not a characteristic of GC, check not applicable.

Characteristic	did not like	liked a little	liked somewhat	moderately liked	liked a great deal	not applicable
39. Frequent contact with advisors.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
40. Small classes.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
41. Having many classes in the same building.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
42. Taking courses which required a lot of writing.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
43. Use of instructional technology and multimedia by the instructors.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
44. Opportunities to interact with	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a

other GC students.						
Characteristic	did not like	liked a little	liked somewhat	moderately liked	liked a great deal	not applicable
45. Emphasis on cultural diversity.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
46. Sensitivity to students with disabilities.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
47. Access to tutoring in math and writing.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a
48. Receiving mid-term grade reports.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5	O n/a

ACADEMIC SKILLS

How would you describe your current level of skill in each of the following areas?

Skills	very low	low	medium	high	very high
49. Reading	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
50. Taking tests	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
51. Writing papers	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
52. Solving mathematical problems	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
53. Working in groups	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
54. Making presentations in class	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
55. Using computers for course work	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
56. Using computers for communication	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
57. Using the library	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
58. Managing time	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
59. Choosing courses, planning a program	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
60. Contacting faculty and staff	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

GRADUATION

Below is a list of some items that could potentially be barriers to graduating. Please rate each item regarding the degree to which it may affect your graduating from the University of Minnesota.

Barrier	very low	low	medium	high	very high
61. Lack of financial aid.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
62. Availability/access to desired major.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
63. Access to desired and/or necessary classes.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
64. Personal debt.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
65. Transportation/parking issues.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
66. Problems passing required classes.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
Barrier	very low	low	medium	high	very high
67. Lack of study space.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
68. Opportunities to work full time.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
69. Need to support children or family members.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
70. Health related issues.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
71. Personal problems (not including health).	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
72. College doesn't fit current goals/lifestyle.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
73. Desire to pursue other educational opportunities.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
74. Lack of accommodations for disabilities.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

75. What is your major?

76. What was your best experience in GC?

77. What was your worst experience in GC?