

Student Retention at Eastern Shore Community College

Fall to Fall retention at Eastern Shore Community College has recently fallen below the VCCS average in both the total student category and the first-time curricular student category (see Table 1). In Fall to Spring retention, ESCC has consistently reenrolled a higher percentage of students than the VCCS average in the total students category, while first-time curricular students have reenrolled at ESCC at a slightly lower rate than the VCCS average (see Table 2 below). Figures 1-4 on pages 9 and 10 illustrate these relationships graphically.

Table 1 - Fall to Fall Retention, ESCC versus VCCS

| Year | ESCC Fall to Fall Retention Total Students | VCCS Fall to Fall Retention Total Students | Difference between ESCC and VCCS | ESCC First-Time Curricular Fall to Fall Retention | VCCS First-Time Curricular Fall to Fall Retention | Difference between ESCC and VCCS |
|---------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Fall 1999-Fall 2000 | 37.40% | 38.00% | -0.60% | 38.70% | 49.50% | -10.80% |
| Fall 2000-Fall 2001 | 37.60% | 39.60% | -2.00% | 46.30% | 51.70% | -5.40% |
| Fall 2001-Fall 2002 | 36.50% | 40.10% | -3.60% | 53.60% | 51.80% | 1.80% |
| Fall 2002-Fall 2003 | 36.70% | 40.30% | -3.60% | 45.30% | 51.20% | -5.90% |
| Fall 2003-Fall 2004 | 37.90% | 39.80% | -1.90% | 36.20% | 50.40% | -14.20% |
| Fall 2004-Fall 2005 | 31.40% | 39.90% | -8.50% | 48.90% | 50.70% | -1.80% |

Table 2 - Fall to Spring Retention, ESCC versus VCCS

| Year | ESCC Fall to Spring Retention Total Students | VCCS Fall to Spring Retention Total Students | Difference between ESCC and VCCS | ESCC First-Time Curricular Fall to Spring Retention | VCCS First-Time Curricular Fall to Spring Retention | Difference between ESCC and VCCS |
|-----------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Fall 1999-Spring 2000 | 65.50% | 61.30% | 4.20% | 68.90% | 70.60% | -1.70% |
| Fall 2000-Spring 2001 | 65.50% | 62.10% | 3.40% | 70.90% | 70.40% | 0.50% |
| Fall 2001-Spring 2002 | 62.80% | 63.10% | -0.30% | 77.70% | 72.00% | 5.70% |
| Fall 2002-Spring 2003 | 69.00% | 64.00% | 5.00% | 68.30% | 72.00% | -3.70% |
| Fall 2003-Spring 2004 | 67.80% | 63.90% | 3.90% | 66.20% | 71.70% | -5.50% |
| Fall 2004-Spring 2005 | 68.90% | 64.20% | 4.70% | 68.30% | 70.90% | -2.60% |
| Fall 2005-Spring 2006 | 64.60% | 64.00% | 0.60% | 67.70% | 69.70% | -2.00% |

Student persistence (the progressive reenrollment in college) and an understanding of the factors that influence it are important to colleges nationwide, as evidenced by the large body of research on the subject. Early studies focused on the characteristics of the individual as predictors of retention in college. Characteristics studied include educational accomplishments prior to college entry, expectations concerning future educational attainments, race, sex, and measures of socioeconomic status. These studies found that measures of academic ability were the best predictors of retention. Past grade performance (GPA) and rank in class were found to be the most consistent predictors, followed by scores on standardized tests (Astin, 1972; Tinto, 1975). In fact, probably no other variable's relation to persistence has received more attention than academic performance as measured by grades. Studies consistently show that first-year grades especially, but also measures of subsequent trends in grades are positive predictors of both student retention and graduation, even when controlling for a wide range of background characteristics and college

experiences. Stampen and Cabrera (1988) found that grades in high school were the single most powerful predictor of retention, followed by ethnic group. This finding supported Peng's (1977) conclusion that high school grades are more important than test scores, and that ethnic group is also important after controlling for socioeconomic status and sex.

Research also indicates that students from lower socioeconomic status families exhibit lower rates of retention than do students from higher status families, even when intelligence is controlled for (Sewell & Shah, 1967; Porter, 1990). Students who drop out of college come from families whose parents are less educated (Chase, 1970); less urban (Tinto, 1975); less affluent (Eckland, 1965); and who have lower expectations for their children's further education (Hackman & Dysinger, 1970).

Research also shows significant personality and attitudinal differences between college drop outs and graduates. Students who drop out of college tend to be more impulsive, less committed to education, and less able to profit from past experiences (Vaughan, 1968); less flexible in dealing with changing circumstances (Lavin, 1965); less stable and more restless than those who graduate (Grande & Simmons, 1967). Additionally, studies show that the lower the level of the individuals educational or career expectations, the more likely the individual is to drop out (Tinto, 1975).

Early studies correlating gender with retention found a higher proportion of men completing degree programs than women (Cope, 1971), but more recent studies are finding the reverse (Eagle & Carroll, 1988). Studies indicate that women are more likely to drop out when they are attending institutions with a high ratio of men to women (Pantanges & Creedon, 1978).

The drop out rate of African-American students attending predominantly White institutions has been shown to be substantially higher than that of White students. Suen (1983) reports a system wide attrition rate of 49.5% for African-Americans attending predominately White institutions, as compared to a 41.4% attrition rate for White men and 30.9% for White women. Cortina (1980) found a freshmen attrition rate of 73.4% for African-American students compared to an overall student population attrition of 47.7%. Porter (1990) found that White students were almost twice as likely to receive a degree from a four year institution as were African-American students.

Not surprisingly, the variables that appear to influence retention for all students have considerable overlap with those that influence minority subgroups. Much of the difference in rates of retention between African-Americans and Whites has been attributed to differences in measures of tested ability and socioeconomic status (Pantanges & Creedon, 1978; Porter, 1990). Porter (1990) found that over half of the difference in rates of retention can be attributed to differences in average test scores of ability and socioeconomic status. This supported an earlier study by Astin (1973), who found no significant differences between

African-American and White students when controlling for high school rank and scholastic aptitude test scores.

Now knowing that race, measured ability and social status relate to the probability of student retention, scholars turned to the task of increasing their understanding of how these attributes affect the process of retention. These later studies developed and tested theoretical models that explain the processes of interaction between the individual and the institutional environment that lead to student retention. Although several factors are theorized to influence retention, a number of researchers have described the importance of positive interactional experiences with the social and academic communities of the institution, which they refer to as institutional integration (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980), as an important determinant of retention and eventual graduation or attrition. Institutional integration is an interactional outcome reflecting an individual's experiences within an institution that result in feelings of congruency and collective affiliation with the prevailing value patterns of the institution. It entails the incorporation of the individual as a competent member in the social and intellectual communities of the institution (Tinto, 1993).

The lack of integration, according to Tinto, may result when individuals perceive themselves as not fitting into and/or being substantially at odds with the social and intellectual fabric of the institution. This may occur when there is a lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution. Individuals discern institutional preferences through a wide range of formal and informal interactions with other members of the institution, including faculty, staff, and students. However they are discerned, what is important is the view of the individual. That they perceive themselves as being incompatible with the institution, not whether other observers would agree with that assessment, is what matters (Pervin & Rubin, 1967). Poor institutional integration may also occur when there is a lack of sufficient interactions whereby integration may be achieved. The degree and quality of personal interaction with other community members are critical elements in the process of institutional integration. What matters, again, is the individual's perception of the character of those interactions as rewarding or unrewarding.

Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto's (1975) models of student retention describe the importance of institutional integration, both academic and social, on the retention process. These models posit that institutional integration is influenced by pre-enrollment attributes of the individual combined with his or her experiences within the institutional environment. The student comes to a particular institution with background characteristics which partially determine how the student will relate to the institution's social and academic environment. The more positive the relations, the greater the integration. The greater the integration, the less likely the student is to drop out.

A growing body of research suggests that certain college environmental conditions which college faculty and administrators have some control over exert

a positive influence on student retention. These generally involve the notions of academic and social engagement or the extent to which students become involved in or integrated into their college's academic and social systems. These variables include a cohesive peer environment, frequent participation in college-sponsored activities, interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom, and a perception that the institution is concerned with students as individuals. Some have speculated that these environmental factors are especially important at community colleges where many students may be clarifying aspirations or plans that are still undeveloped.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) developed an Institutional Integration Scale in order to access the various dimensions of social and academic integration described by Spady and Tinto, and tested its effectiveness in predicting retention among college freshmen. Their questionnaire contains five scales which measure peer group interactions, interactions with faculty, faculty concerns for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, and institutional and goal commitments. They found that with preenrollment variables such as sex, race, parents income and education, and SAT and GPA scores held constant, each of the five scales had a significant impact on discriminating between dropouts and persisters. In general, dropouts had lower scores on all five scales than did persisters. The five scales alone correctly identified 78.9 percent of the persisters and 75.8 percent of the dropouts. On the other hand, none of the preenrollment variables were statistically significant in discriminating between students that reenrolled and those that did not.

Spady (1971) conducted a similar study, in which he combined measures of student interpersonal relationships with their peers and their interactions with faculty to evaluate their ability to predict various educational outcomes. He found that with a number of preenrollment variables held constant, student interpersonal relationships with their peers and their interactions with faculty were significantly correlated with reenrollment in college.

Research which measures the effects of peer group interactions and/or student interactions with faculty on retention (Tinto 1975; Terenzini and Pascarella, 1991) has demonstrated that the degree and quality of personal interaction with other members of the institution are critical elements in the process of student retention. Conversely, the absence of sufficient interaction with other members of the institution proves to be the single most important predictor of attrition when controlling for the effects of socioeconomic background, personality, and academic performance (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979). This body of research lends support to Pascarella and Terenzini's assertion that retention is as much a reflection of what occurs after entry into the institution as of what occurred before. Additionally, it indicates the importance of institutional integration in explaining student retention.

Concerning minority integration, Tinto (1993) explained that individuals who come from communities whose norms and behaviors are very different from

those of the community in which they seek membership face greater challenges. He contends that in the college setting, persons of minority origins are faced with greater challenges than are majority students. Research has shown that retention among African-American students, as with White students, reflects both issues of social and academic integration. African-American attrition has been shown to be a reflection of their greater academic difficulties (Sedlacek and Webster, 1978; Donovan 1984). Tracey and Sedlacek (1987), however, found that poor academic integration is related not only to academic ability, but also to noncognitive factors such as positive academic self concept, realistic self-appraisal, and familiarity with the academic requirements of the institution. These scholars consider noncognitive factors more important to African-American student retention than to White student retention. Research also shows that social integration is particularly difficult for African-American students in predominantly White institutions (Loo and Rolison, 1986).

Several researchers have shown that developmental programs are effective in helping students overcome deficiencies in their pre-college academic preparation and other disadvantages. Recent research indicates that developmental programs increase student retention over both the short term (semester-to-semester) and the longer term. Developmental programs have been found to be particularly effective in the first semester for academically under-prepared students. Student orientation programs that introduce students to their institution and to academic life have also been shown to promote both persistence and degree completion, even when other pre-entry factors are controlled for. In "historically difficult" subjects, supplemental instruction that stresses interactive learning in groups with frequent sessions devoted to basic study skills and learning strategies is also producing higher retention rates in recent studies.

First-year seminars are another approach used to improve retention. These seminars vary widely by institution, but all have the goal of promoting academic performance, persistence, and degree completion, and research indicates that first-year seminars appear to improve retention in all categories of students.

Research consistently indicates that academic advising can play an important role in student retention. One study found that students who received both pre- and post admissions advising, including meeting with an adviser to determine a course schedule, discussions about how to become academically and socially involved in campus life, and meeting with the adviser two subsequent times in the first semester to discuss progress and adjustment, were retained at a rate 20 percentage points higher than their peers in the non-advised control group. Other studies show a strong relation between retention and number of personal counseling sessions. Low quality advising is thought to be better than no advising at all, and sooner is probably better than later.

During a recent VCCS Retention Workshop at Germanna Community College on April 1, 2005, the following information was presented:

- Within the VCCS, there is a 50% dropout rate between the freshman and sophomore year.
- Mr. Thomas Brown, the keynote speaker, stated that the decision to drop out of college is usually made over an extended period of time and results from a variety of factors.
- Every intervention with a student is critical for retention. Excellent teaching, effective support programs and student centered developmental advising programs will all contribute to this goal.
- Effective interventions include strong advising (particularly during the first year), support for learning (tutoring), effective assessment programs, learning communities (cohorts, honors programs), strong instruction in basic reading, writing and math, and focusing on students at risk.
- A strong advising program is considered critical for retention. The new definition of advising focuses on a developmental process characterized by a strong student/advisor relationship. This relationship has both an intellectual and personal basis.
- Among the best practices discussed were:
 - Reducing the student's sense of isolation by sharing more with them.
 - Helping students who need to drop out temporarily.
 - Encouraging students to seek help when needed and to develop a realistic sense of college life.
 - Providing students with referral information relevant to the College and the community.
 - Helping students accept criticism of their work and overcome their fear of college. Encourage an enthusiastic and hopeful college experience.
 - Assisting students assess where they are on the academic achievement path and helping them navigate the educational process.
 - Helping students find a sense of community. This is especially important for students in hybrid or extended learning courses to connect with the institution.
- It was noted that there is a need to distinguish the individual needs of the students. Some examples of specific needs are adult and re-entry learners, first generation learners, students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are undecided or under-prepared. An intensive advising program reflects a personal interest in each student, continuous contact with the advisee, early outreach, and referral to appropriate support groups.

Table 3 - Fall to Spring Retention at ESCC, 2000-2006

| Year | Fall Headcount | Returning Spring Headcount | Rate of Retention | First-Time Curricular Headcount | Returned Spring Headcount | Rate of Retention |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Fall 1999-Spring 2000 | 765 | 501 | 65.50% | 119 | 82 | 68.90% |
| Fall 2000-Spring 2001 | 773 | 506 | 65.50% | 134 | 95 | 70.90% |
| Fall 2001-Spring 2002 | 884 | 555 | 62.80% | 112 | 87 | 77.70% |
| Fall 2002-Spring 2003 | 880 | 607 | 69.00% | 139 | 95 | 68.30% |
| Fall 2003-Spring 2004 | 807 | 547 | 67.80% | 130 | 86 | 66.20% |
| Fall 2004-Spring 2005 | 1017 | 701 | 68.90% | 139 | 95 | 68.30% |
| Fall 2005-Spring 2006 | 769 | 497 | 64.60% | 124 | 84 | 67.70% |

Table 4 - ESCC Fall to Fall Retention

| Year | Total Students Fall Headcount | Returned Fall Headcount | Percent | First-Time Curricular Fall Headcount | Returned Fall Headcount | Percent |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Fall 1999-Fall 2000 | 765 | 286 | 37.40% | 119 | 46 | 38.70% |
| Fall 2000-Fall 2001 | 773 | 291 | 37.60% | 134 | 62 | 46.30% |
| Fall 2001-Fall 2002 | 884 | 323 | 36.50% | 112 | 60 | 53.60% |
| Fall 2002-Fall 2003 | 880 | 323 | 36.70% | 139 | 63 | 45.30% |
| Fall 2003-Fall 2004 | 807 | 306 | 37.90% | 130 | 47 | 36.20% |
| Fall 2004-Fall 2005 | 1,017 | 319 | 31.40% | 139 | 68 | 48.90% |

Figure 1 - Fall to Fall Retention, Total Students, 2000-2005, ESCC versus VCCS

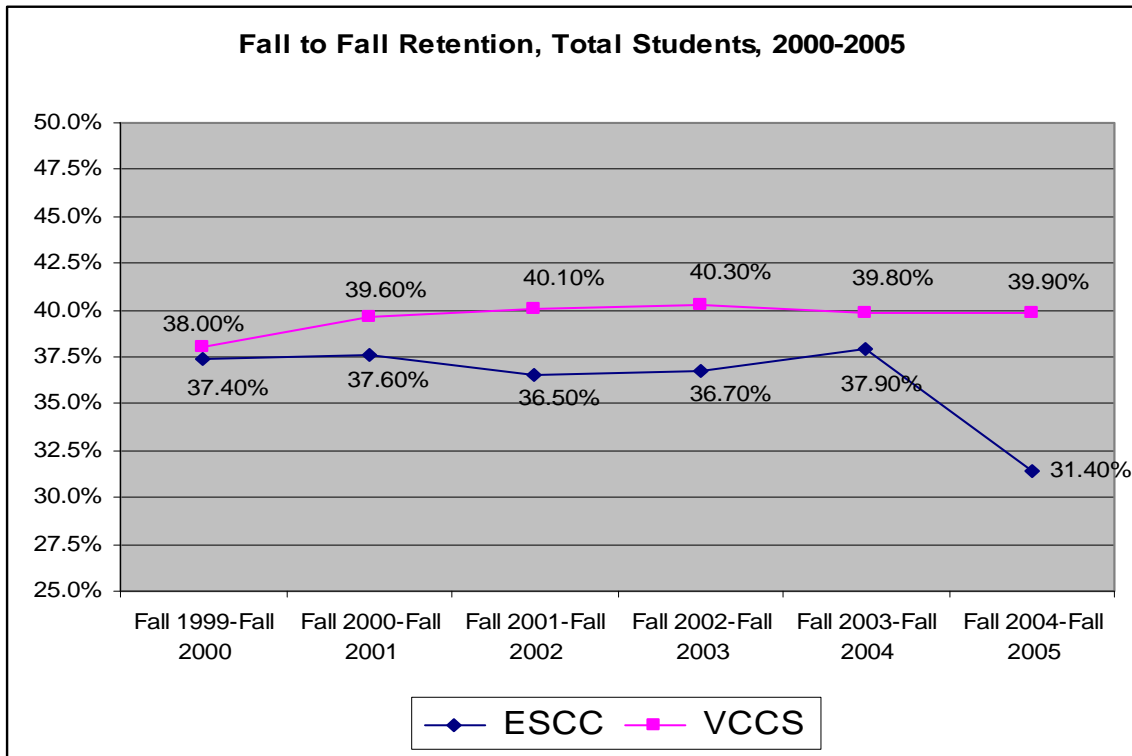


Figure 2 - Fall to Spring Retention, Total Students, 2000-2005, ESCC versus VCCS

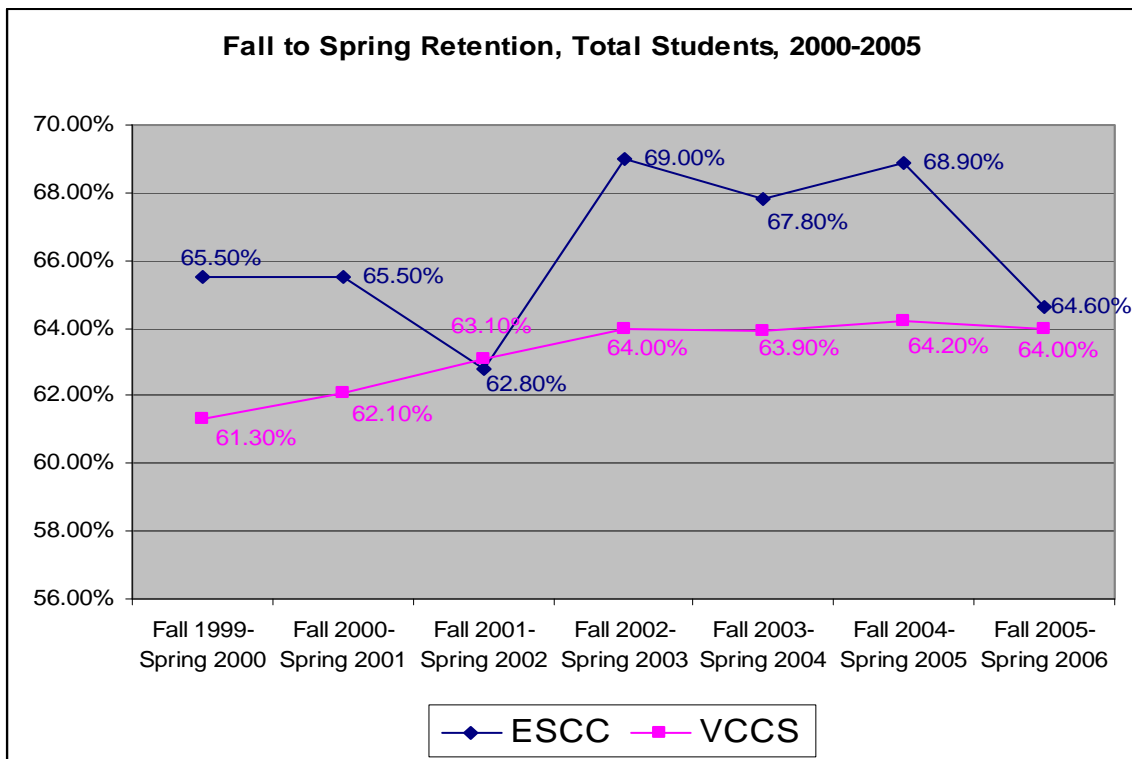


Figure 3 - Fall to Fall Retention, Full Time Curricular Students, 2000-2005, ESCC versus VCCS

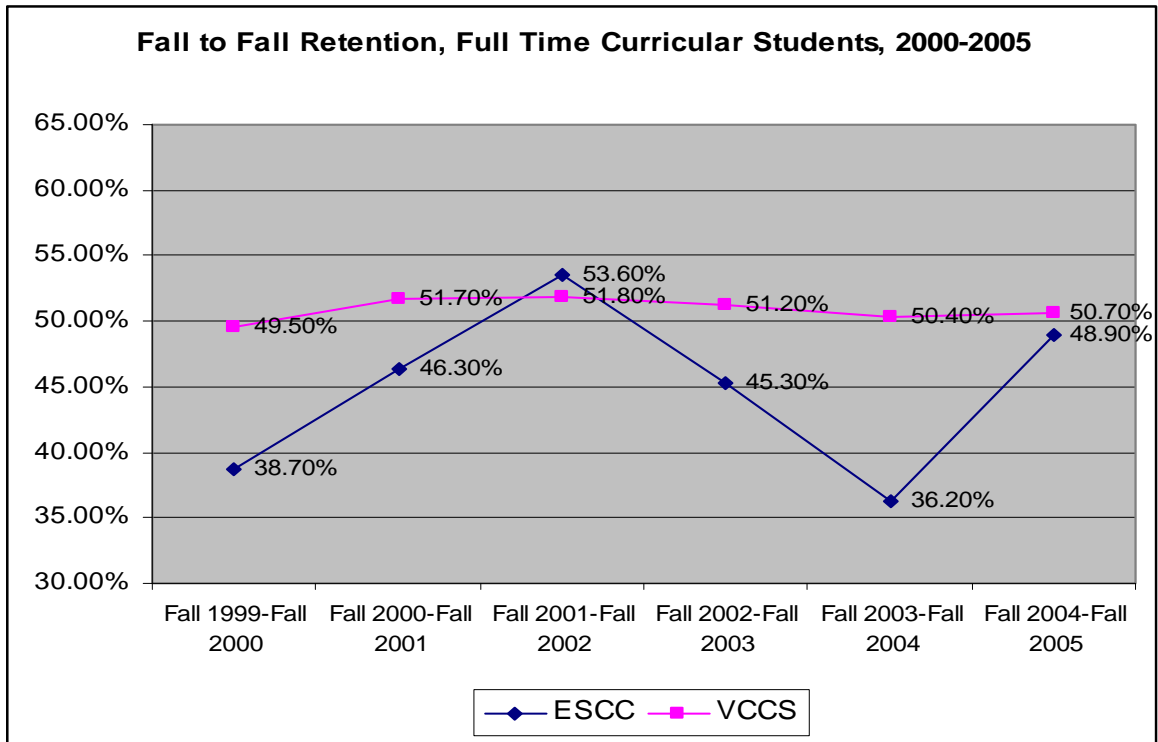


Figure 4 - Fall to Spring Retention, Full-Time Curricular, 2000-2005, ESCC versus VCCS

