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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine what effect the utilization of a penalty or no-penalty drop policy would have on retention of students at Pasadena City College. It was found that there was a significant difference both in grades received and the retention of students as a result of the adoption of a 16 week no-penalty drop policy at the college. The attrition rate increased, but withdrawal from classes was gradual and distributed throughout the semester, rather than being all at the end of the semester. (SW)

PENALTY - NO PENALTY DROP POLICY

APPLIED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

AND

EVALUATION

by

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DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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TITLE

What effect does the utilization of a penalty or no penalty drop policy have on retention of students in classes at Pasadena City College?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recent years enrollment at Pasadena City College has been steadily climbing but the increased rate of attrition is of continuing concern to faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees.

Many theories have been proposed to explain the situation. One that persists and is voiced repeatedly is class drop policy. Between the years 1966-68 the following policy was in effect:

> A student in good standing may arrange with his counselor to drop officially a course or courses without penalty up to the last day of the sixth week of the semester. Any course or courses dropped after the close of the sixth week will be recorded with a grade of F.

In 1968-70 the policy read as follows:.

Date Class Dropped	Grade
During first three weeks (either voluntarily or by administrative action)	No entry on permanent record
During fourth, fifth and sixth weeks	W
From the seventh week to final three weeks	
a. If teacher reports student passing	W
b. If teacher reports student failing	F
Last three weeks of semester	No drops permitted

Since 1970 the policy was changed to read as follows:

> During the first three weeks of a semester a student may drop by filing an appropriate form. The class will not be recorded on the students transcript. Beginning with the fourth and extending through Friday of the sixteenth week, if the clerical procedures are followed a grade of W will be recorded on the permanent record. Failure to follow formal drop procedures will result in an F being recorded.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between the % of drops during 1966-68 and 1969-72 in the retention of students at Pasadena City College

2. There is no significant change in the distribution of grades prior to and after 1968.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

This drop policy alteration brought forth significant reaction from the faculty after the first year of operation. Generally the questions centered in two areas:

1. The philosophical desirability of such a practice
2. The effect on student retentioh

In the first instance the question of stated school objectives as published in the College Bulletin come to the fore. One primary objective is to provide an educational experience that emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and skills,

and the development of constructive attitudes that lead to growth and development of the students so that, among other things, he can take his place as an able and responsible citizen in the society.

A question posed by this objective is whether a policy that permits a student to remain in a class sixteen weeks, then drop without penalty, develops responsibility and teaches one to make choices. Making choices is an essential part of the educational process. According to Ruitenbeek,[1] "In contemporary mass society, individuals have not been reared along lines that develop their powers of choice and independence."

Many professors on the faculty contend that the necessity to make a commitment and to pay some price for failing to live up to such a commitment is valuable to ones' intellectual development and the maturation process. (The assumption is that those in the class are capable to succeed if they apply themselves.) On the other hand, if it is not required of the student to make a commitment, they may lack motivation to stick to a task. The result can be a deteriorating classroom atmosphere.

Secondly, classroom retention of students is affected

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[1] Ruitenbeek, Hendrick M., The Individual and the Crowd. Thomas Nelsons and Sons, N.Y. N.Y. 1964.

unfavorably by such a policy because if one can drop at his leisure a "so-what" attitude develops toward the class. Students sometimes contend that the time spent is enough of a price to pay but for many this is no price at all.

An exhaustive survey of the current educational literature was carried out at the extensive library facilities of the University of Southern California. The researchers were rather disappointed that little material was found that vaguely resembled the hypotheses under study. Apparently, the policy of the sixteenth week drop date is relatively new and it may not have been the topic of a systematic investigation.

In March of 1972, Boris Blai, Jr. of Harcum J.C. Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania investigated the dropout rates of two year colleges with the dropout rate of four year colleges. The general conclusions formulated as a result of this study was that small enrollment schools (250-750) whether two year or four year schools enjoyed high retention of students. Although the literature surveyed for this report was not consistent, it was generally concluded that the high dropout rate in two-year colleges is attributed primarily to the low level of motivation and poorer academic preparation of the student.

The Department of Health Education and Welfare sponsored a study by J. William Wenrich of San Mateo College of San Mateo, California entitled "Keeping Dropouts In, Retention of Students Identified as High Probability Dropouts." This study was to determine whether active participation in an individualized instructional program such as the "Learning Center" would be related to a lower dropout rate for freshmen, who were identified as high probability dropouts. The study indicated that a one to one relationship at the "Learning Center" was definitely helpful in retaining students who otherwise would have been dropouts.

A study by J. Robert Thompson of McComb County Community College in Michigan entitled, "Why Students Drop Courses" was conducted by the use of questionaires sent to 3568 students who had dropped a total of 6081 courses. The 1434 respondents (40.19%) answered questions about 2190 courses they had dropped and gave their reasons for doing so. The courses were dropped because of:

1. Job conflict
2. Lack of interest
3. Wrong program
4. Academic difficulty
5. Teacher conflict

The study recommended early identification of the problem and immediate counseling.

In 1967 John E. Rouesche of the University of California at Los Angeles conducted a study of junior college dropouts. Institutional research materials from sixteen schools was used in the study. The findings showed little relationship between attrition and ability as shown by grade point average or entrance examination scores. A relationship appeared to exist between dropouts and non-intellective factors such as job conflict, family relationships, and transportation problems.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Drop - officially terminate a class or classes but remain in school

Withdrawal - termination of all classes at the college; either voluntarily or through faculty initiated dismissal

Retention - receiving a letter grade (A through F) (WF represents a drop or withdrawal)

Late-dropping - drops recorded between the sixth and sixteenth weeks inclusive

Load - number of units in which a student is enrolled

Penalty Policy - period in which an F is recorded for dropping a course

No penalty policy - dropping a class permitted any time through Friday of the sixteenth week with the recording of a W for a grade regardless of his performance up to that time

LIMITATIONS

The study of drops and withdrawals is a very complex subject. The authors are limiting their research to one facet of the problem; penalty vs. no penalty drop policy to see if it contributes to lack of retention of students.

Specific limitations which may have bearing on the results of this study are as follows:

1. 20% of the student body is economically deprived; thus, they might opt for employment and drop any time opportunity beckons

2. 85.5% of the students were working or desired work with 52% employed. These figures were consistent over the seven year period of this study. This increases chances for class and job conflicts leading to drops and withdrawals

3. Prior to 1970 students may have withdrawn from all classes rather than drop a class or classes in which they were doing poorly

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

For purposes of this study we have assumed:

1. There is no relationship on retention rates due to race, ethnic, or national origin

2. Attrition rates affect all departments in the college but are not equally distributed

3. Time of day has little or no effect on drops

4. Drops are related to load carried

5. The vast majority of those in class are capable of success if they put forth the effort

PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTING THE DATA

All data was collected from computer printouts and institutional research files at Pasadena City College. The research was done during the months of October and November 1973.

The following data was collected:

1. All drops and withdrawals for the years 1966-72
2. All grades for the years 1966-72

This data was divided into two groups:

a. Grades between the years 1966-68, when the penalty drop policy was in effect

b. Grades between the years 1968-72, when a no-penalty policy was in effect

PROCEDURES FOR TESTING THE DATA

Chi square (X^2) for two independent samples was utilized.

RESULTS

Hypothesis #1

There is no significant difference between the % of drops during 1966-68 and 1969-72 in the retention of students at Pasadena City College.

Chi square $X^2 = \sum \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$

	A	B
1966-68	42,577 (43,452)	35,584 (34,708)
1969-72	49,417 (48.541)	37,897 (38,772)

A = represents beginning enrollment

B = represents ending enrollment

A X^2 value larger than 3.8 with 1df is significant at the .05 level.

$X^2 = 75.26$

Therefore we reject the null hypothesis and establish that there is a significant difference between the % of drops during 1966-68 and 1969-72 in the retention of students.

Hypothesis #2

There is no significant change in the distribution of grades prior to and after 1968.

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

66-68	12.7 (13.52)	25.1 (19.93)	29.3 (18.72)	8.5 (4.94)	5.9 (4.44)	33.1 (21.02)
69-72	19.6 (18.77)	22.5 (27.66)	15.4 (25.97)	3.3 (6.85)	4.7 (6.16)	17.1 (29.17)

$X^2 = 27.252$

X^2 greater than 11.1 at 5df at .05 level represents a significant difference therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant change in the distribution of grades prior to and after 1968.

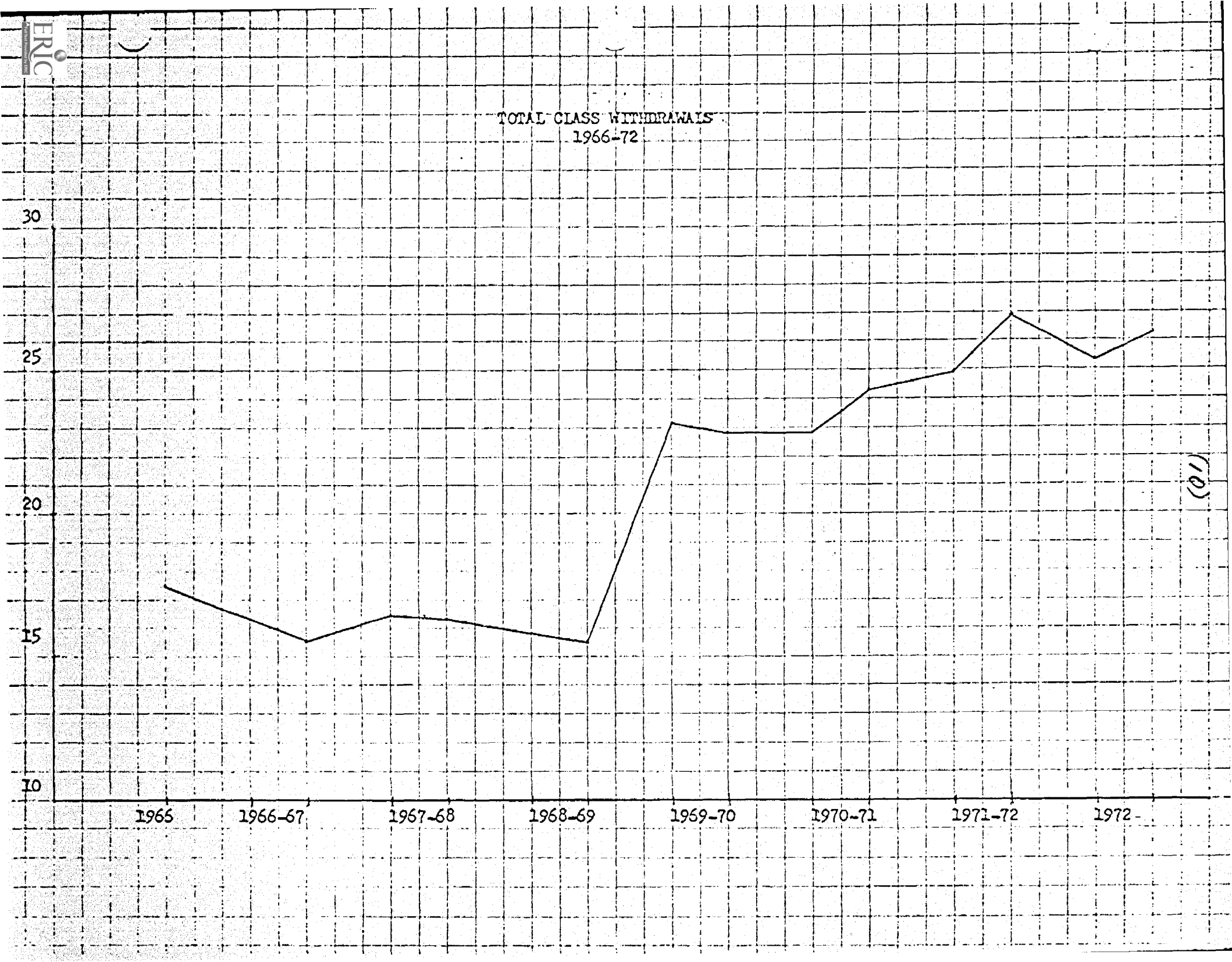
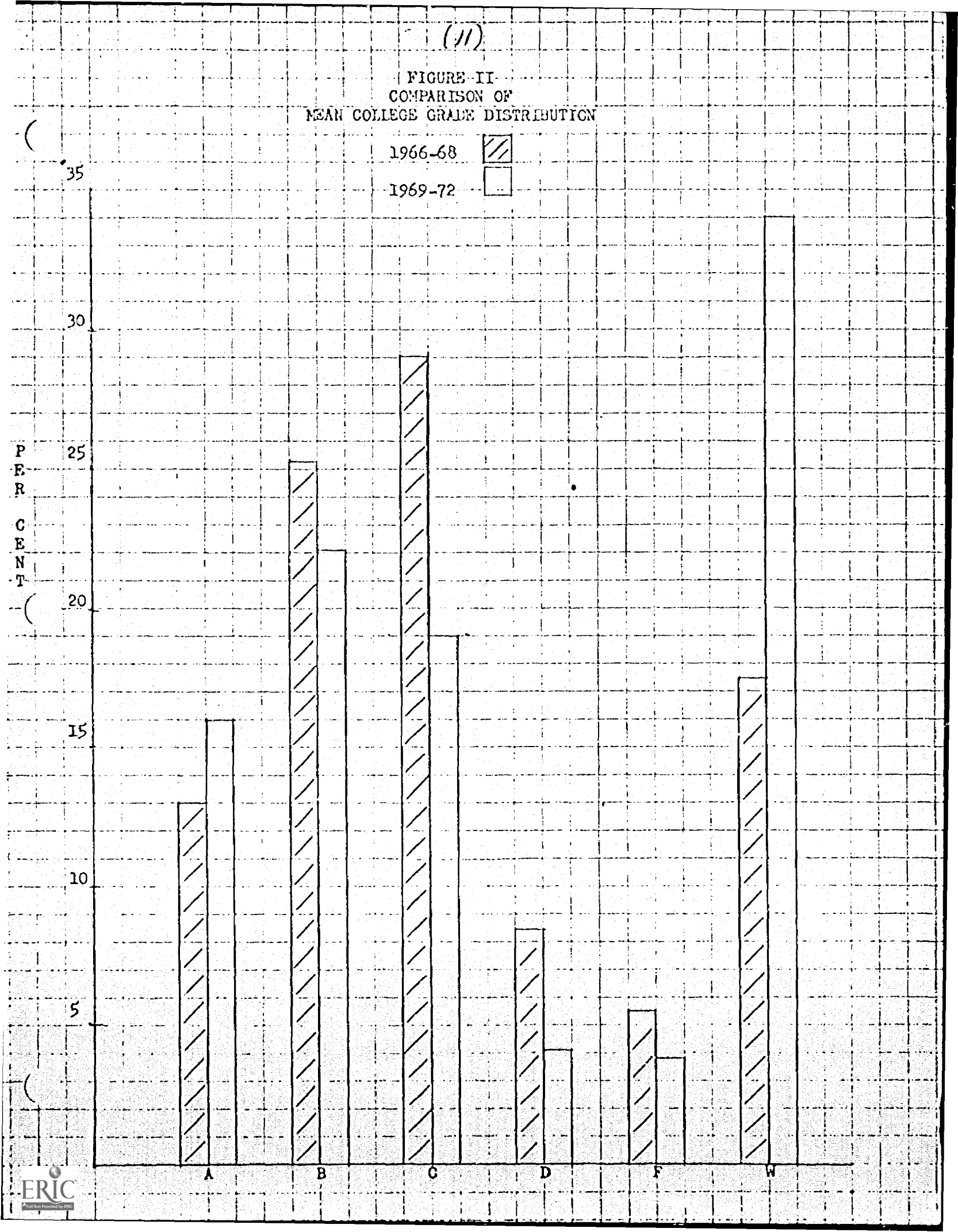

TOTAL CLASS WITHDRAWALS
1966-72
30
25
20
15
10
1965
1966-67
1967-68
1968-69
1969-70
1970-71
1971-72
1972-

FIGURE II
COMPARISON OF
MEAN COLLEGE GRADE DISTRIBUTION



This research indicates that the policy of extending the withdrawal date to the end of the sixteenth week, without a grade penalty, had a significant effect upon increasing the attrition rate. In addition, the study showed that grades differed to a significant degree. While the statistical analyses indicated in both instances a significant relationship between policy and withdrawal and policy and grades, it does not answer why.

Some increased withdrawals and grade changes were expected when the policy was inaugurated. One could have predicted a reduction in D and F grades. It is logical for students preparing to enter finals week with a grade of F to withdraw when there is no penalty. We still have nearly 4% who are either eternal optimists, those unaware of policy, or careless; otherwise, F grades should be reduced to near zero. In the case of D grades many students are willing to accept a D and others are hopeful of receiving a C. The 3% drop in B grades is difficult to account for but may be unrelated to policy. It is in the C grade area with a 10% drop that raises questions, which at this point, only speculation could attempt to answer. Further research in this area is indicated.

The overall withdrawal rate is probably subject to many complex individual and societal factors in addition to school policy. Some of these are discussed in one of the sections on Recommendations - Conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS - RECOMMENDATIONS

Joseph G. Muha

The conclusion to be drawn from this research project is that there is a significant difference both in grades received and the retention of students due to the adoption of a sixteen week no-penalty drop policy at Pasadena City College. As stated in the study, this sixteen week no-penalty policy is a factor in a very complex problem.

Community college students are commuters and as such are affected by other factors in their efforts to acquire their lower division or terminal education. Further study in the areas of student economics, academic preparation, size of school, and peer group pressures as they relate to grades and student retention would contribute much to clarify this complex dropout problem.

Recommendations:

1. Re-examine the original premise for the sixteen week no-penalty drop policy.

   The rationale for extending the drop period was to enable students to broaden the base of their education. This permitted a Business Major to take courses in other areas without jeopardizing his grade point average in his major. This premise may have had merit, but the eventual outcome of the policy significantly affected

all grades and lowered the final college enrollment.

2. Consider re-instituting the six-week penalty drop policy. The desirability of making a commitment and making a effort to fulfill that commitment should be strongly emphasized as a major educational goal.

3. Coordinated efforts by teachers and counselors to identify students with problems.

   Student attendance and grade sheets can be duplicated and sent to counselors periodically for scanning to pick up impending difficulties.

4. Establishment of "Learning Centers"

   Tutoring on a student to student basis has been found to be a very effective technique for alleviating many academic problems. Locating such centers in very prominent places on campus would be highly desirable.

CONCLUSIONS - RECOMMENDATIONS

John H. Snyder

In the process of making this study, all information assimilated, whether directly part of the investigation, influences to some extent conclusions and recommendations.

Clearly, the extension to the sixteenth week of dropping classes without grade penalty, affects attrition and grades, with attrition the major area of concern. This may not be as serious as it first appears. Several purposes may be served by this policy, which the attrition rate should not be allowed to dominate, to wit:

1. Since the college has no system of auditing, because of the nature of funding, the withdrawal without penalty may serve an educational purpose for some who have no interest in grades, tests, or credits.
2. Many students may now withdraw in greater numbers from classes after the sixth week for excellent reasons. In the past this option was not available to them and if circumstances forced withdrawal, they received F grades. They didn't fail the course, they failed because of health, economics, death in the family, the draft, the family moved, etc.
3. Presently, many students may withdraw completely from school, when circumstances arise necessitating such action, without the penalty of several F grades that often proved academically disastrous in the past.

4. The community college is often a place of "last resort" in salvaging previous academic failures. This has remained one of our great and distinguishing traits. The current policy will prevent excessive penalties to those who attend and for a variety of reasons do not achieve. They may leave, find themselves, and return years later. Then, they will not be confronted with almost insurmountable low grade point averages because the F penalty grades for withdrawing after a certain arbitrary date will no longer be operative.

The attrition in classes is gradual and distributed throughout the semester and does not represent a sudden "bailing out" of large numbers of students near the end of the semester. Granted there is a problem of commitment that may be lacking, but the reasons stated above tend to outweigh serious alteration of the current policy.

Considering all the complexities related to attrition in a large comprehensive commuter community college, we might turn our attention to further research that is oriented toward changes in student populations -- Who is going to college? For what reasons? What do they hope to achieve? How soon? etc. We may also need to recognize that larger less personal colleges in

areas of highly mobile populations are going to have higher attrition rates than in the past for many obvious reasons.

If funding policies change (which is a virtual certainty in California in the next two years) we will need to weigh with extreme care a change of policy related to withdrawals.