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ABSTRACT

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Over the past half century, student attendance rates at the University of Minnesota have remained surprisingly stable (Hendricks, 1970) in spite of a marked change in the nature of students and the mission of the University in society. Attempts to systematically follow student attrition (or conversely persistence) rates at the University of Minnesota in the last half century have been hampered by the lack of truly comparable data.

The computerization of student records during the past decade, however, has allowed for a much closer monitoring of many measurable student characteristics including attendance patterns. One annual report generated by the Office of Admissions and Records examines attendance patterns of entering cohorts of freshmen over a five year span of time. The attached tables are a reordering and assemblage of these A & R reports over the past decade. They demonstrate the remarkable stability of attendance which other studies with less than total information have also indicated (see Table 2). Individual life histories cannot be accounted for in such conglomerate statistics, thus this information does not refute the claim that this generation of students tend to drop in and out of school with more frequency than previously.

However, in aggregate form the attendance pattern shown here does not indicate this.

The reader can see, for instance, that in the fall of 1964, 9081 new freshmen enrolled at all schools within the University of Minnesota system. Winter Quarter (the second registration of this cohort) eight percent did not return while one percent changed their colleges of registration. Spring Quarter of that first year 16% did not re-register (we have no way of determining from the data if some staying out the previous quarter did return and took the place of others staying out Spring Quarter). The beginning of the second (sophomore) year (fall of 1965), 30% of the original cohort did not attend, while 6% of those re-registering did so in a different college than the one originally chosen. The sorting out by students of their academic interests and choices has begun.

At the beginning of the third academic year, 46% did not return - at least for that quarter. By the beginning of year four in the fall of 1967 (nominally as seniors) 55% did not return and of the 45% re-registering, a different college has been chosen by 17%. This shift in college of registration usually represents a distinct change of academic choice. However, significant numbers have made changes of major within the original college (from psychology to economics, for example, all within CLA), changes which do not appear in the data. Five years later (fall 1969) after originally entering the University in what is usually

pecially designated as a four year program, 22% of the original cohorts were still actively participating within the University system as a registered undergraduate student.

While data is available for all colleges within the system, we have selected to present only the four largest units. All figures represent percentages of the total individuals registering fall quarter of the years 1964 through 1973. Scanning the bottom line of each time unit, it is possible to see the rates of non-return at a similar point in a cohort's University career over this past decade.

Of great interest is the fact that 25% of the entrants are still registered at the beginning of the fifth year. Public decision makers, whether they be curriculum planners, financial aid givers or selective service officials, who would insist that a student undergraduate career is typically only of four years duration must become aware of the significant number who, for whatever reason, have a longer span of time in an undergraduate career.

A change of even a single percentage point in these data, as well as the dramatic drop in the total number of entering freshmen each year has for certain purposes significant implications for the institution. We do not purpose to denigrate the importance of such information. However, with a longer perspective and converting absolute numbers to relative percentages one detects what appears to be some homeostatic operation at work.

During the decade these figures cover, significant social, economic and political events took place which have been used at various times to explain differing attendance patterns in higher education. While they may be significant factors in shifts in percentage points at a particular period of time, these events seem to have only short run affects on the overall systemic rates.

This data is limited to the careers of those who remain within the University system as undergraduates. We have no way of knowing, for instance, how many of those listed as "not attending" have in reality transferred to other institutions. This table also does not indicate the number of those receiving baccalaureate degrees continuing as graduate or professional school registrants at the U of M or elsewhere.

In recent years a considerable number of students enter the University system as transfer students. An interesting and important piece of information would be a comparison of entering freshmen attrition rates with those of other than U of M tertiary school experience.

The University's computerized record system did not, until a few years ago, enter information of graduation into the computerized student record systems. Thus we do not know from existing computer data the attrition is due to graduation and that which is simply dropping out of the system.

Bibliography

Hendricks, Glenn L. Study of U of M registration procedures.

Office for Student Affairs Research Bulletin, University of Minnesota, 1974, 14 (13)

Student Attendance

Table 1

		ATHL.					GENERAL					ALL UNIVERSITY				
		1964	65	66	67	68	1964	65	66	67	68	1964	65	66	67	68
		574	629	576	506	481	524	560	451	456	444	1648	1661	1369	1243	1086
		574	629	576	506	481	524	560	451	456	444	1648	1661	1369	1243	1086
		574	629	576	506	481	524	560	451	456	444	1648	1661	1369	1243	1086
		574	629	576	506	481	524	560	451	456	444	1648	1661	1369	1243	1086
Freshman		92	92	92	91	90	89	93	90	91	91	89	91	91	89	87
Fall (total number)		2	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	3
Winter (percentages)		7	6	7	7	7	9	6	9	6	6	13	11	14	17	19
Same College		87	86	88	86	82	81	79	80	83	8P	85	90	91	91	89
Another		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	3
Not Attend		13	11	17	14	17	19	21	19	17	12	6	5	5	5	4
Spring		77	81	84	87	83	80	86	82	77	77	71	76	80	83	82
Same College		1	1	2	2	4	2	3	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1
Another		21	16	13	11	13	18	11	17	12	13	25	23	23	27	28
Not Attend		64	68	70	73	71	71	71	73	73	77	71	70	69	75	77
Fall (2nd year)		5	4	5	6	7	6	5	4	8	3	5	3	4	5	7
Same College		31	28	25	21	22	25	22	29	25	22	40	38	35	33	37
Another		67	61	60	56	50	51	52	50	52	26	24	27	22	23	23
Not Attend		10	9	11	14	9	10	10	16	14	8	11	14	18	16	17
Fall (3rd year)		43	41	40	36	36	40	38	40	32	66	63	59	60	61	59
Same College		40	40	41	43	44	40	38	39	4	4	4	7	9	7	6
Another		11	12	11	12	13	14	17	17	10	10	16	17	14	15	14
Not Attend		43	48	48	45	41	47	48	43	86	82	79	75	73	74	74
Fall (4th year)		20	17	14	15	15	15	15	15	3	3	3	3	4	3	4
Same College		10	10	10	9	10	12	12	7	9	11	11	11	14	14	14
Another		70	74	75	74	75	75	73	90	88	86	85	84	83	82	82
Not Attend		12	14	15	15	15	15	15	12	14	16	16	16	16	16	17
Fall (5th year)		12	14	15	15	15	15	15	12	14	16	16	16	16	16	17
Same College		22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Another		44	43	43	39	33	34	37	36	37	36	37	36	37	36	37
Not Attend		34	38	40	40	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
Fall (6th year)		41	43	48	52	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Same College		27	19	23	20	17	22	19	15	13	13	22	19	15	13	13
Another		37	38	30	32	39	34	37	36	37	36	37	36	37	36	37
Not Attend		41	43	48	52	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Fall (7th year)		12	14	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
Same College		15	14	13	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Another		73	72	71	66	70	73	65	73	72	71	66	70	73	65	65
Not Attend		12	14	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16

Same College: registration in same college unit
Another: registration in another college of " of M
Not Attend: no registration at U of M, registration at some other institution possible
CLA: College of Liberal Arts
AFRE: College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics
General: General College
IT: Institute of Technology

Table 2

Variation in Graduation Rates According to
Selectivity of Institutions

Type of Institution	Percentage of students graduating within 4 years at initial institution	Percentage graduating within 10 years at some institution	Percentage of all 1st time, full-time enrollees, fall 1969
Fifteen most selective private universities	80-85	90-95	1
Large state universities	35-45	60-70	15
State colleges	15-25	35-50	21*

* a number of other categories, i.e. "less selective private", and junior colleges have been omitted from this table.

Source: Newman, Frank et al.

Report on Higher Education
U.S. Office of Education, 1971

TABLE II

Entering U of M Freshmen

Number	In all Colleges		In SLA	In (IT,SLA,Ag.Ed)	(Ag.Ed,IT,SLA)	(CLA	IT	AFHE	Gen.)*	Total
	Fall 1920	Fall 1932	Fall 1936	Fall 1937	Fall 1952	Fall 1966				U of M
	1657	1662	1608	2144	2450	4483	766	574	1369	9101
Entering Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1st yr Q2						92	95	93	88	92
Q3						85	89	86	77	85
Fall year II	63.5	69.5	79.3	67.2		74	79	75	65	73
Fall year III	51.4	59.6	59.6	55.9		59	71	60	43	57
Fall year IV	47.0	51.9		46.3		51	61	52	20	47
Percentage granted degrees in 4 yrs or completion of 4 yrs of college in 4 yrs	24.6	27.3	23.1	27.8		*These figures represent total number remaining in the university system although they may have transferred to other colleges.				
Enrolled end yr IV but not completing 4 yrs work	19.9	19.0								
Graduated or continuing at end of 4 yrs	44.5	46.3			50.9					
% granted degrees end of 6 yrs			30.2	37.1						
Fall year V						25	29	24	14	23

Sources: Keller and Eckert (1950);
Darley, J. G. (1962);
U of M Office of Records and Admissions (n.d.)