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ABSTRACT

This study examined the reasons why students enrolled at Boise State University (BSU) in Idaho during the Fall 1995 semester did not return for the Spring semester. A total of 443 students who did not return for the Spring semester were surveyed. The study found that BSU leavers were more likely than a national sample of college leavers to indicate that they left because of conflicts between the demands of a job and college (47 percent versus 31 percent), more likely to experience class scheduling problems (37 percent versus 18 percent), and less likely to leave because they decided to attend a different college (16 percent versus 30 percent). About 40 percent of the respondents indicated that they planned to return to BSU the following year, while almost 60 percent indicated that they planned to re-enroll at some point in time. The most often cited reasons for leaving BSU were conflict between demands of job and college (47 percent), inability to afford tuition and fees (35 percent), wanting a break from college studies (40 percent), class scheduling problems (37 percent), and unexpected expenses (32 percent). An appendix includes a copy of the student survey. (MDM)

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# Why STUDENTS LEAVE BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH REPORT 97-03

by:  
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AND  
THE RETENTION COMMITTEE

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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY  
April 1997

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**ABSTRACT**  
**Why Students Leave Boise State University**

Why do students leave Boise State University? In order to answer that question, students who were enrolled in the Fall but not in the spring (and who did not graduate or were dismissed) were surveyed using an instrument developed by ACT.

At least 20% of the respondents indicated that the following were either major or minor reasons for not returning. The responses are ordered by means and the percent agreeing is listed in parentheses.

- Conflict between demands of job and college (47%)
- Tuition and fees were more than I could afford (35%)
- Wanted a break from my college studies (40%)
- Experienced class scheduling problems (37%)
- Encountered unexpected expenses (32%)
- Accepted a full-time job (28%)
- Family responsibilities were too great (31%)
- Disappointed with the quality of instruction at this college (26%)
- Dissatisfied with my grades (25%)
- Academic advising was inadequate (24%)
- Inadequate study habits (23%)

Results from other colleges who had used the ACT survey were also available for comparison. The three biggest differences between Boise State University students and others were in the areas of job conflicts, scheduling, and transfer. Boise State University leavers were:

- more likely to indicate that they left because of conflicts between the demands of job and college (47% vs. 31%)
- more likely to experience class scheduling problems (37% vs. 18%)
- less likely to leave because they decided to attend a different college (16% vs. 30%).

About 40% of the respondents planned to return to Boise State University this year, while almost 60% planned to re-enroll again at some point in time. Compared to all fall-term enrollees, respondents were more likely to be older and had not yet reached their senior year. There were no differences by gender or by full-time enrollment status.

## Why Students Leave Boise State University

Why do students leave Boise State University? That was the question facing the Retention Committee. In order to answer it, 1,183 degree-seeking students enrolled in Fall 1995 but not in the spring (and who did not graduate or were dismissed) were randomly selected and surveyed using an instrument developed by ACT. Useable surveys were received from 443 or 37% of the group. The purpose of this report is to share the results of that survey. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Students who responded to the survey were mainly young (63% under 30), female, enrolled full-time, and either in their freshman or sophomore year. As shown by the table below, this is generally reflective of the University's degree-seekers, except that the general student body is younger (69% under 30) and has more seniors and graduate students. This may indicate that older students who are in the early stages of their college career are more likely to leave.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Survey Respondents**  
**and Fall 1996 Degree-seeking Enrollees**

		Fall 1996 Enrollment	ACT Survey
Age	Under 20	16.9	11.3
	20 - 29	52.1	51.7
	30 - 39	16.8	19.3
	40 and up	14.2	17.7
Gender	Female	57.8	58.2
	Male	42.2	40.0
Enrollment	Full-time	58.4	58.2
	Part-time	41.6	41.8
Class Level	Freshman	27.2	29.3
	Sophomore	20.2	23.8
	Junior	15.3	19.0
	Senior	23.0	14.6
	Graduates/Prof	14.3	10.3
	Other/Unclassified	--	2.9

Certainly the survey results indicate that students have more than just academics on their minds. When asked to rate each of 48 items as a major reason for leaving (coded as a 3), a minor reason (coded as a 2), or not a reason (coded 1), students indicated they mainly left because of conflicts between the demands of job and college. Almost half (47%) of students indicated that this was a major or minor reason for leaving. A second reason was that students left because tuition and fees were more than they could afford. This outranked the reasons in third and fourth place—wanting a break from college studies and experiencing class scheduling problems—because of the number of students indicating this was a major reason for leaving. Further details can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons for Leaving College**

<i>Item</i>	<i>BSU</i>		<i>National</i>	
	<i>Average</i>	<i>% Selecting as Reason</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>% Selecting as Reason</i>
<i>Conflict between demands of job and college</i>	1.72	47%	1.50	31%
<i>Tuition and fees were more than I could afford</i>	1.55	35%	1.36	23%
<i>Wanted a break from my college studies</i>	1.52	40%	1.36	27%
<i>Experienced class scheduling problems</i>	1.51	37%	1.25	18%
Encountered unexpected expenses	1.46	32%	1.36	25%
Accepted a Full-time job	1.45	28%	1.35	21%
Family responsibilities were too great	1.43	31%	1.38	25%
<i>Disappointed with the quality of instruction at this college</i>	1.36	26%	1.22	16%
Dissatisfied with my grades	1.35	25%	1.34	24%
Academic advising was inadequate	1.33	24%	1.23	16%
<i>Health-related problem (family or personal)</i>	1.29	17%	1.41	24%
<i>Decided to attend a different college</i>	1.28	16%	1.52	30%
Inadequate study habits	1.28	23%	1.26	20%
<i>Impersonal attitudes of college faculty or staff</i>	1.26	17%	1.15	11%
Experienced emotional problems	1.25	18%	1.30	21%
Applied for financial aid, but did not receive it	1.23	15%	1.17	11%
<i>Wanted to move to (or was transferred to) a new location</i>	1.20	12%	1.35	21%
Desired major was not offered by this college	1.20	14%	1.24	15%
Uncertain about the value of a college education	1.19	15%	1.11	9%

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Item	BSU		National	
	Average	% Selecting as Reason	Average	% Selecting as Reason
Desired major was offered, but course content was unsatisfactory	1.19	13%	1.13	10%
<i>Dissatisfied with the academic reputation of this college</i>	<i>1.18</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>1.07</i>	<i>6%</i>
Marital situation changed my educational plans	1.18	12%	1.15	10%
Wanted to get work experience	1.18	14%	1.20	14%
Did not budget my money correctly	1.17	14%	1.16	12%
Cost of living was too high in this community	1.17	13%	1.09	6%
Financial aid received was inadequate	1.16	11%	1.16	11%
Unhappy with college rules and regulations	1.15	11%	1.10	8%
Too many required courses	1.15	12%	1.13	10%
Felt alone or isolated	1.15	11%	1.14	11%
Commuting distance to this college was too great	1.14	11%	1.16	11%
My chosen occupation did not require more college	1.14	9%	1.10	7%
Learned all I wanted to learn at this time	1.13	9%	1.16	10%
Wanted to travel	1.13	10%	1.11	8%
Courses were too difficult	1.12	10%	1.12	9%
Child care was not available or was too costly	1.11	7%	1.08	6%
Dissatisfied with the social life at this college	1.10	8%	1.15	11%
Did not like the size of this college	1.10	7%	1.11	9%
Was suspended or placed on probation	1.09	5%	1.07	5%
Courses were not challenging	1.09	7%	1.10	8%
Wanted to live nearer to my parents or love ones	1.07	5%	1.17	12%
Difficulty in obtaining transportation to this college	1.07	5%	1.12	9%
Influenced by parents or relatives	1.06	4%	1.11	9%
Had conflicts with my roommate(s)	1.06	4%	1.06	5%
Could not find part-time work at this college	1.05	4%	1.08	6%
Could not obtain summer employment	1.04	2%	1.04	3%
Could not find housing I liked	1.03	2%	1.05	4%
Felt racial/ethnic tension	1.03	2%	1.04	3%
Inadequate facilities for physically handicapped students	1.01	1%	1.02	1%

Note: Items where a difference of more than 0.1 in BSU and National average occur have been italicized and bolded.

Are these results similar to those received by other institutions who have given the survey to non-returning students? Findings suggest that Boise State University has some different issues

compared to these other institutions. For the top four reasons listed by Boise State University students, only 18-31% of other students selected these as reasons for leaving compared to 35-47% of BSU students. While conflicts between the demands of job and college was ranked second by students nationally, the number one reason for leaving was that students decided to attend a different college. At Boise State, this reason had a mean rank of 12<sup>th</sup>, probably because our students are place-bound and lack the choices that students in more populated areas have. Other reasons included in the top four nationally were leaving because of health related problems and/or because family responsibilities became too great, reasons which had ranks of 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively at BSU.

In fact, if a difference between means of more than 0.1 is taken as significant, there are differences between Boise State University and the national group on 10 items. These items have been placed in bold and italicized on Table 2. In addition to the reasons already mentioned, Boise State University respondents were more likely to indicate the following were reasons for leaving: disappointment with the quality of instruction, impersonal attitudes of college faculty or staff, and dissatisfaction with the University's academic reputation. They were less likely to mention moving as a reason for leaving. It should be recognized, however, that the national data is not necessarily reflective of the "average" institution nationally. Rather, it is simply a grouping of data from institutions ranging from public to private and from community college to research university. Perusal of the institutions included in the data set also indicate that many are located in the mid-West rather than the western portions of the country.

So what's next for Boise State University leavers? About 40% of the students indicated that within the next year they planned to either enroll again in college or obtain a job and enroll in college. Most of the remainder either planned just to work (37%) or care for their home and family (8%). Almost 60% planned to return to Boise State University at some point in time; only 15% were sure they would return. See Table 3 for further details.



**Table 3  
Future Plans**

<b>Plans for the coming year</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Work full time/part time	159	37.1
Enroll in college	80	18.6
Obtain a job and enroll in college	92	21.4
Care for a home/family	33	7.7
Other	25	5.8
Undecided	40	9.3
Blank	14	N/A
<b>Plan to re-enroll at this college?</b>		
Yes	256	58.3
Undecided	116	26.4
No	67	15.3
Blank	4	N/A

These findings show that students leave Boise State for many reasons, and some of them are beyond the control of the University. In addition, most former students believe they are likely to return to the University at some future point in time. Despite this, however, there are areas where the University could take some steps that might lead to improved retention. These include attention to issues such as class scheduling, quality of instruction, academic advising, and a campus climate described by some as too impersonal. Efforts are already underway in some areas (e.g., academic advising), but further attention could only benefit Boise State University and the students it serves.

## APPENDIX A

# WITHDRAWING/NONRETURNING STUDENT SURVEY (SHORT FORM)

**DIRECTIONS:** The information you supply on this questionnaire will be kept completely confidential. However, if any item requests information that you do not wish to provide, please feel free to omit it. Your Social Security number is requested for research purposes only and will not be listed on any report.

use a ball-point pen, nylon-tip or felt-tip pen, fountain pen, marker, or colored pencil. Some items may not be applicable to you or to this college. If this is the case, skip the item or mark the "Does Not Apply" option. If you wish to change your response to an item, erase your first mark completely and then blacken the correct oval. Select only ONE response to each item.

Please use a soft (No. 1 or 2) lead pencil to fill in the oval indicating your response. DO NOT

## SECTION I—BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Begin by writing your Social Security number in the large boxes at the top of Block A. Then, in the column below each box, blacken the appropriate oval. Complete the remaining blocks by blackening the single most appropriate oval in each case.

remaining blocks by blackening the single most appropriate oval in each case.

**A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER**  
(Identification Number)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

**B AGE**

18 or under  
 19  
 20  
 21  
 22  
 23 to 25  
 26 to 29  
 30 to 39  
 40 to 61  
 62 or over

**C RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP**

Afro-American or Black  
 Native American (Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian)  
 Caucasian or White  
 Mexican-American, Mexican Origin  
 Asian American, Oriental, Pacific Islander  
 Puerto Rican, Cuban, Other Latino or Hispanic  
 Other  
 I prefer not to respond

**D WHAT WAS YOUR FINAL CLASS LEVEL AT THIS COLLEGE?**

Freshman  
 Sophomore  
 Junior  
 Senior  
 Graduate or Professional Student  
 Special Student  
 Other/Unclassified  
 Does Not Apply to This College

**E FOR WHAT PURPOSE DID YOU ENTER THIS COLLEGE? (Select Only One)**

No Definite Purpose in Mind  
 To Take a Few Job-Related Courses  
 To Take a Few Courses for Self-Improvement  
 To Take Courses Necessary for Transferring to Another College  
 To Obtain or Maintain a Certification  
 To Complete a Vocational/Technical Program  
 To Obtain an Associate Degree  
 To Obtain a Bachelor's Degree  
 To Obtain a Master's Degree  
 To Obtain a Doctorate or a Professional Degree

**F WHAT WAS YOUR PRIMARY ENROLLMENT STATUS AT THIS COLLEGE?**

Full-Time Student  
 Part-Time Student

**G WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL DID YOU ATTEND JUST PRIOR TO ENTERING THIS COLLEGE?**

High School  
 Vocational/Technical School  
 2-Year College  
 4-Year College or University  
 Graduate/Professional College  
 Other

**H SEX**

Male  
 Female

**I MARITAL STATUS**

Unmarried (Including Single, Divorced, and Widowed)  
 Married  
 Separated  
 Prefer Not to Respond

**J WHAT TYPE OF TUITION DID YOU PAY AT THIS COLLEGE?**

In-State Tuition  
 Out-of-State Tuition  
 Does Not Apply to This College

**K WHAT WAS YOUR RESIDENCE CLASSIFICATION AT THIS COLLEGE?**

In-State Student  
 Out-of-State Student  
 International Student (Not U.S. Citizen)

**L WHAT ONE RESPONSE BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PLANS FOR THIS COMING YEAR?**

Work Full Time or Part Time  
 Enroll in College  
 Obtain a Job and Enroll in College  
 Care for a Home and/or Family  
 Other  
 Undecided

**M INDICATE YOUR MOST RECENT COLLEGE RESIDENCE**

College Residence Hall  
 Fraternity or Sorority House  
 College Married Student Housing  
 Off-Campus Room or Apartment  
 Home of Parents or Relative  
 Own Home  
 Other

**N DO YOU PLAN TO RE-ENROLL AT THIS COLLEGE?**

Yes  
 Undecided  
 No

**SECTION II—ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

IF AN ADDITIONAL SET OF MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS IS INCLUDED WITH THIS FORM, PLEASE USE THIS SECTION TO RECORD YOUR RESPONSES.

TWELVE OVALS ARE PROVIDED FOR EACH QUESTION, BUT FEW QUESTIONS REQUIRE THAT MANY CHOICES. SIMPLY IGNORE THE EXTRA OVALS.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

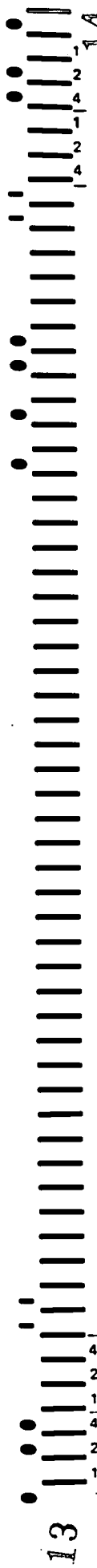
### SECTION III—REASONS FOR LEAVING THIS COLLEGE

Listed below are a number of reasons why a student might leave college. Please blacken the oval indicating whether each of the reasons listed was a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason that you decided to leave this college.

	MAJOR REASON	MINOR REASON	NOT A REASON
(1) Learned all I wanted to learn at this time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(2) Decided to attend a different college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(3) Health-related problem (family or personal)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(4) Wanted a break from my college studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(5) Wanted to move to (or was transferred to) a new location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(6) Marital situation changed my educational plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(7) Difficulty in obtaining transportation to this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(8) Uncertain about the value of a college education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(9) Commuting distance to this college was too great	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(10) Child care was not available or was too costly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(11) Family responsibilities were too great	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(12) Did not like the size of this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(13) Experienced emotional problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(14) Felt racial/ethnic tension	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(15) Felt alone or isolated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(16) Influenced by parents or relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(17) Had conflicts with my roommate(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(18) Wanted to live nearer to my parents or loved ones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(19) Wanted to travel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(20) Dissatisfied with my grades	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(21) Was suspended or placed on probation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(22) Courses were too difficult	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(23) Courses were not challenging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(24) Inadequate study habits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(25) Too many required courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(26) Disappointed with the quality of instruction at this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(27) Desired major was not offered by this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(28) Desired major was offered, but course content was unsatisfactory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(29) Academic advising was inadequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(30) Experienced class scheduling problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(31) Dissatisfied with the academic reputation of this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(32) Could not find housing I liked	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(33) Unhappy with college rules and regulations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(34) Impersonal attitudes of college faculty or staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(35) Dissatisfied with the social life at this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(36) Inadequate facilities for physically handicapped students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(37) Did not budget my money correctly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(38) Encountered unexpected expenses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(39) Applied for financial aid, but did not receive it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(40) Financial aid received was inadequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(41) Tuition and fees were more than I could afford	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(42) Could not find part-time work at this college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(43) Could not obtain summer employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(44) Cost of living was too high in this community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(45) Wanted to get work experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(46) Accepted a full-time job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(47) Conflict between demands of job and college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(48) My chosen occupation did not require more college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please reexamine your major reasons for leaving this college, and indicate the single most important reason by completely blackening the circle containing the number of that reason. For example, if your most important reason for leaving college was "19 Wanted to travel," you would blacken the circle containing the number "19" as illustrated below. (Blacken only one circle.)

(19) Wanted to travel	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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