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ABSTRACT

This study compared the progress of 3,300 undergraduate students at Nova Southeastern University (Florida), of whom 2,410 were campus-based and 890 were distance education students. The study population consisted of all Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students, differentiating between campus-based and distance education students. Successful matriculation was defined as graduated and/or still enrolled five years later (Fall 1998). The study found that distance education students had a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful matriculation by Fall 1998 than their campus-based counterparts. Breakout analyses, comparing the matriculation of students at individual distance education sites to that of campus-based students, are annexed. (DB)

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**MATRICULATION STATUS OF FALL TERM 1993 FARQUHAR CENTER FOR
UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES STUDENTS BY THE BEGINNING
OF FALL TERM 1998: CAMPUS-BASED STUDENTS
AND DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS
BY SITE**

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Report 99-06

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nova Southeastern University was established in 1964 and classes were first offered at the University in 1967. The University's first classes were all campus-based. In 1972 the University first offered courses through the use of distance education. With nearly 30 years of experience in this area, distance education now accounts for approximately 55 percent of all 16,921 Fall Term 1998 students at the University.

As an institution accredited by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the University must demonstrate the efficacy of its distance education activities and the comparability of courses offered through distance education to campus-based courses. To address this issue, the University recently completed a series of research activities related to comparisons between distance education students and campus-based students. As a general summary to these studies, the University determined that distance education students were certainly in parity with their campus-based counterparts, and distance education students often had success that exceeded the level of success experienced by campus-based students.

These studies were limited in site-specific use since all distance education students were placed into one common collapsed grouping. The purpose of this current study was to provide a more finite examination of the matriculation status of Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students, focusing specifically on individual sites and comparing students at these distance education sites to their campus-based counterparts.

The population for this study consisted of all Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students at the beginning of Fall Term 1998, differentiating between campus-based students and distance education students. Based on Fall Term 1993 enrollment statistics and operational definitions established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding *campus-based* students and *distance education* students, this population included:

| | | |
|---|---|-------|
| ■ | Campus-based students | 2,410 |
| | All students enrolled in courses offered in either Broward County or Miami-Dade County were considered campus-based students. | |
| ■ | Distance education students | 890 |
| | All students enrolled in courses offered at other locations were considered distance education students. | |
| | TOTAL | 3,300 |

Based on an analysis of all 3,300 Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students, it was determined that:

Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education (N = 890 students) had a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful matriculation than their campus-based counterparts (N = 2,410 students) by the beginning of Fall Term 1998 ($p \leq .05$).

Breakout analyses, comparing the matriculation of students at individual distance education sites to the matriculation of campus-based students, are attached to this report.

This current study provides another set of evidence that distance education students are not at a disadvantage when compared to their campus-based counterparts. By tracking the progress of over 3,000 undergraduate students over a five-year period, it is now possible to state that distance education students exceeded their campus-based counterparts in terms of successful matriculation.

By using the outcomes of this study as a starting point, it may be desirable to further investigate the inconsistencies in matriculation between these two groups of undergraduate students. Further overall and *by site* analyses, possibly by age, gender, race/ethnicity, or academic program, may possibly reveal areas where the University can address concerns to further increase levels of student achievement for both groups of students.

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BACKGROUND

Distance Education at Nova Southeastern University

Nova Southeastern University was established in 1964 and classes were first offered at the University in 1967. The University's early classes were campus-based and focused on graduate studies in behavioral science, physics and physical chemistry, and oceanography. From a 1967 charter class of 17 students, in four years the Fall Term 1971 enrollment had only grown to 198 students (*Nova Southeastern University Fact Book*; 1995, p. 38).

The University first offered distance education courses in 1972 (*Nova Southeastern University Fact Book*; 1998, p. 12), largely in an effort to increase outreach to specific markets and to also enhance the University's fiscal stability. The first distance education courses offered by the University were for students in the Ed.D. Program in Educational Leadership. The use of distance education for students in the Ed.D. Program for Community College Faculty and Administrators (the precursor to the University's current Programs for Higher Education) came soon after. Distance education had a major impact on the University's growth, with Fall Term 1975 enrollment reaching 2,867 students.

Although distance education is currently gaining attention from the public and other post-secondary institutions, the University has nearly 30 years of experience in this area. Specifically, the use of distance education is central to the University's Mission Statement and currently, approximately 55 percent of all 16,921 Fall Term 1998 students at the University attended class through the use of some form of distance education modality (memorandum from Tom MacFarland to John Losak; October 22, 1998).

Purpose of This Study

When considering the academic integrity of distance education, an individual post-secondary institution in any one of the 11 states affiliated with The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) regional accrediting association must regularly demonstrate:

the same systematic analysis of the effectiveness of distance learning programs in carrying out the purpose of the institution and in complying with the *Criteria for Accreditation* as it does with other aspects of the institution's efforts (*Guidelines for Planning Distance Learning Activities*; 1992, p. 4).

As an institution accredited by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the University must also demonstrate that "[] its distance learning programs are effective and comply with all applicable *Criteria*" (*Criteria for Accreditation*; 1998, p. 40). Going beyond

the broad requirements of specific criteria, the leadership of The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has additionally charged the University to "Provide documentation that all distance learning courses are comparable to the on-campus courses and that the goals for each off-campus site are clear and explicit and are assessed regularly" (personal communication from J. T. Rogers; July 2, 1998).

With an emphasis on the measurement of learning outcomes of distance education participants, the University recently completed a series of research activities related to comparisons between distance education students and campus-based students. As summarized in *A Comparison of Final Grades in Courses When Faculty Concurrently Taught the Same Course to Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students: Winter Term 1997* (1998, p. 4), the University has demonstrated that "[] distance education students have consistently been in parity with campus-based students in terms of the relative frequency of successful grades awarded."

The University further examined comparability between campus-based students and distance education students in *Matriculation Status of Nova Southeastern University's Fall Term 1993 Cohort at the Beginning of Fall Term 1998: Breakout Analyses for Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students* (1999). The population for this study consisted of 10,187 Fall Term 1993 students enrolled in the four academic centers that offered programs to both campus-based students as well as distance education students. This study was structured to follow the matriculation status of distance education students and their campus-based counterparts over a five-year period (Fall Term 1993 to the beginning of Fall Term 1998). This study of student progress over a five-year period provided finite evidence that Fall Term 1993 students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education had a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful matriculation than their campus-based counterparts by the beginning of Fall Term 1998 ($p \leq .05$).

The overall finding of this study was that distance education students had a greater frequency of successful matriculation than their campus-based counterparts. However, a limitation of this prior study was that all distance education students were placed into one common collapsed grouping. Although the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies provides undergraduate instruction at sites throughout Florida and at selected international locations, findings were not presented on a *by site* basis. The purpose of this current study was to provide a more finite examination of the matriculation status of Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students, focusing specifically on individual sites and comparing the matriculation status of distance education students at these many individual sites to the matriculation status of campus-based students.

METHODOLOGY

Definition of the Population

This study addressed the matriculation status of all Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students by the beginning of Fall Term 1998, differentiating between campus-based students and distance education students. Based on Fall Term 1993 enrollment statistics and operational definitions established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding *campus-based* students and *distance education* students, this population included:

| | |
|---|-------|
| ▪ Campus-based students | 2,410 |
| All students enrolled in courses offered in either Broward County or Miami-Dade County were considered campus-based students. | |
| ▪ Distance education students | 890 |
| All students enrolled in courses offered at other locations were considered distance education students. | |
| TOTAL | 3,300 |

Off-Campus Directory (1993) was a useful resource for identifying specific distance education sites used by the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies in 1993. Information in this resource was supplemented by an initial audit of all five-column cluster codes maintained in 1993 by the University's Student Information System (memorandum from Tom MacFarland to Richard Ronay, December 3, 1998).

Preparation of Extract Files

The University's Computing Center was asked to prepare for this study during Summer 1998 (memorandum from Tom MacFarland to Mary Harward; July 20, 1998). The final extract files were prepared by January 28, 1999, with the matriculation status of the population segmented into *Successful Matriculation* and *Other*:

- *Successful Matriculation* refers to Fall Term 1993 students who were either Graduated, Still Enrolled, or Graduated and Still Enrolled by the beginning of Fall Term 1998.

- The term *Other* is used to reflect students who left the University before graduating.

Data were coded by Academic Center, Degree Level, and Cluster Code. Using these three codes for selection and organization purposes, SPSS-X™ was used to conduct the many separate breakout analyses associated with this study.

RESULTS

Based on an analysis of all 3,300 Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students, it was determined that:

Fall Term 1993 Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education (N = 890 students) had a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful matriculation than their campus-based counterparts (N = 2,410 students) by the beginning of Fall Term 1998 ($p \leq .05$).

This overall finding is summarized in Table 1. Going beyond this broad summary, breakout analyses by individual sites are presented in Table 2.

SUMMARY

This study provides another set of evidence that distance education students are not at a disadvantage when compared to their campus-based counterparts. By tracking the progress of over 3,000 undergraduate students over a five-year period provided, it is now possible to state that distance education students exceeded their campus-based counterparts in terms of successful matriculation.

This examination of student achievement over a long-term tracking period provides an additional measure of Institutional Effectiveness at the University (*Criteria for Accreditation*; 1998, p. 21). By using the outcomes of this study as a starting point, it may be desirable to further investigate the inconsistencies in matriculation between these two groups of undergraduate students. Further analyses, possibly by age, gender, race/ethnicity, or academic program, may possibly reveal areas where the University can address concerns to further increase levels of student achievement for both groups of students.

It may also be helpful to more closely examine the inconsistency in matriculation between individual distance education sites. As an example, Tampa (Fall Term 1993 N = 251 students) and Orlando (Fall Term 1993 N = 130 students) were the two largest distance

education sites in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies during Fall Term 1993. A closer *by site* examination of possible influences, such as differences by age, gender, race/ethnicity, or differences in predominant academic programs may help the University better account for these observed inconsistencies in program outcomes. This issue of consistency is critical to the University since it is central to the Institutional Effectiveness process.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students from Fall Term 1993 and Their Status at the Beginning of Fall Term 1998: All Students in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies

| Course Location | Total | Successful Matriculation | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|----|----------------|----|------------------------------|----|----------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| | | Graduated | | Still Enrolled | | Graduated and Still Enrolled | | Subtotal | | Other | | |
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| Campus-Based | 2,410 | 1,514 | 63 | 37 | 2 | <1 | 22 | <1 | 1,573 | 65 | 837 | 35 |
| Distance Education | 890 | 667 | 75 | 3 | <1 | 0 | 0 | 670 | 75 | 220 | 25 | |
| Total | 3,300 | 2,181 | 66 | 40 | 1 | <1 | 22 | <1 | 2,243 | 68 | 1,057 | 32 |

Null Hypothesis

There is no statistically significant difference between Fall Term 1993 campus-based students and Fall Term 1993 distance education students regarding their frequency of successful matriculation (Graduated, Still Enrolled, Graduated and Still Enrolled) by the beginning of Fall Term 1998 ($p \leq .05$).

Finding

Chi-square = 29.92 and the Null Hypothesis is rejected ($p = .001$). Fall Term 1993 students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education had a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful matriculation than their campus-based counterparts by the beginning of Fall Term 1998.

Table 2

Matriculation Status of Fall Term 1993 Students and Their Status at the Beginning of Fall Term 1998:
All Students in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies by Site

| State and Site ² | Enrolled 1993 | | | | Successful Matriculation | | | | Comparison to Campus-Based ¹ | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---|-------|----|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|----------|---|------|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | Graduated | Still Enrolled | Graduated and Still Enrolled | Subtotal | Other | N | % | p |
| Florida | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Campus-Based | 2,410 | | 1,514 | 37 | 22 | 1,573 | 65 | 837 | 35 | n/a | | |
| Fort Myers | 17 | | 15 | 1 | 0 | 16 | 94 | 1 | 6 | .013 | * | |
| Fort Pierce | 43 | | 35 | 0 | 0 | 35 | 81 | 8 | 19 | .027 | * | |
| Gainesville | 58 | | 54 | 0 | 0 | 54 | 93 | 4 | 7 | .001 | * | |
| Jacksonville | 61 | | 38 | 0 | 0 | 38 | 62 | 23 | 38 | .630 | | |
| Key West | 12 | | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 92 | 1 | 8 | .055 | | |
| Melbourne | 30 | | 23 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 77 | 7 | 23 | .192 | | |
| Orlando | 130 | | 92 | 0 | 0 | 92 | 71 | 38 | 29 | .198 | | |

¹ A * indicates that Fall Term 1993 students at this site had a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful matriculation than their campus-based counterparts by the beginning of Fall Term 1998 ($p \leq .05$).

² Low enrollment sites (10 or fewer students) are excluded from this summary.

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|---|---|-----|----|-----|----|------|---|
| Saint Augustine . . . | 22 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 91 | 2 | 9 | .012 | * |
| Sarasota | 35 | 23 | 1 | 0 | 24 | 69 | 11 | 31 | .683 | |
| Tallahassee | 25 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 80 | 5 | 20 | .123 | |
| Tampa | 251 | 196 | 1 | 0 | 197 | 78 | 54 | 22 | .001 | * |
| West Palm Beach . . | 90 | 62 | 0 | 0 | 62 | 69 | 28 | 31 | .479 | |
| Bahamas | | | | | | | | | | |
| Freeport | 44 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 37 | 84 | 7 | 16 | .009 | * |
| Jamaica | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kingston | 35 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 31 | 89 | 4 | 11 | .004 | * |
| All Site-Based Students | 890 | 667 | 3 | 0 | 670 | 75 | 220 | 25 | .001 | * |

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