

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

XYZ College (XYZ CC) hired Sandra Golden & Associates to design, conduct, and analyze a retention study for the college. In February and March 20xx, Direct Opinions of Beachwood, Ohio -- working for SGA -- conducted 350 telephone interviews with former students of XYZ CC who dropped out of the college and whose names and phone numbers were provided by XYZ CC. Names provided were of students who attended the college within the past three years. Lawrence Golden, Executive Vice-President and Director of Research for Sandra Golden & Associates, provided leadership and primary analysis for this project.

The sample size and methodology achieved a confidence level of 95% +/- 5%.

Throughout this report we will be providing recommended retention strategies. Although we have reviewed college promotional materials, the college did not ask us to conduct an internal retention audit with on-site interviews with XYZ CC personnel to determine the details of current retention activities; therefore, it is quite likely – even quite probable – that some suggestions will already be in practice at XYZ CC and we are simply not aware of them.

Furthermore, as part of our work for this study, we have provided an extensive Appendix of successful retention activities at a variety of colleges.

OBJECTIVES OF A STUDENT RETENTION SURVEY

1. To identify those reasons that might cause an individual to drop out of college or not return to college to achieve his or her original objectives;
2. To relate those reasons to drop-outs and stop-outs at XYZ;
3. To identify those college services that are most important to college students;
4. To identify the usage rate of those services among XYZ drop-outs and stop-outs;
and
5. To identify those obstacles that might prevent a person from returning to the college and to suggest ways to overcome those obstacles.

ANALYSIS

Success In Achieving Objectives

The most important thing that a college can do for its students is to help them meet their college objectives, whatever they may be. While four-year institutions are more likely to be “degree oriented,” this is not the case with two-year institutions – as shown by the responses from the respondents. Only 23.71% of them were seeking a degree, while over 62% of them were there to take courses. At a two-year college – including XYZ College – many “dropouts” have succeeded.

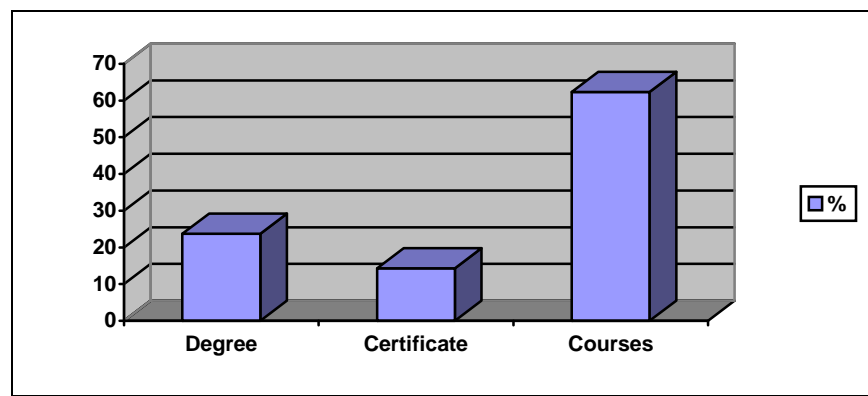


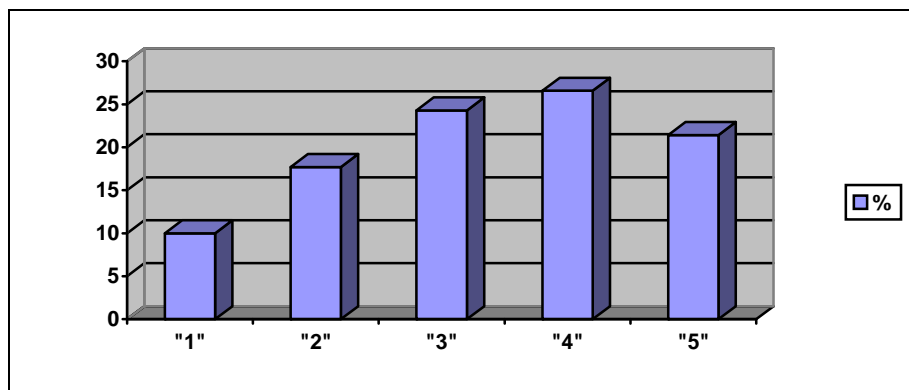
Figure 1 - Why They Were There

It is also important to look at the goals the students had in mind and whether or not they felt that they had achieved them. Table I, examines the possible goals for attending XYZ College.

TABLE I: GOALS FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE

GOAL	% RESPONSES
Prepare for transfer to 4-year	25.71
Improve work skills in current career	19.14
Take classes for personal interest	15.71
Learn skills for change in career	14.57
Explore academic/career areas	12.86
Learn skills for first job or career	8.57
Improve basic skills, e.g. language	1.43

Figure 2 shows that a significant percentage of the respondents achieved a level of success in reaching their goals. A response of “1” indicated that they “Did not achieve their goal at all” and a response of “5” indicated that they had “Completely achieved their goal.” 21.43% completely achieved their goal and another 26.57% nearly achieved it. However, 10% did not achieve their goal at all and another 17.71% did not do much better. This indicates that over one-fourth of those who dropped out did not come close to achieving their primary goals and nearly another quarter of the sample achieved only a fair (“3”) level of achievement and these are the people that XYZ College needs to study in more detail to see if they can help them succeed.

**Figure 2 – Success in Achieving Primary Goal**

It is also clear that those who achieved a level of success, achieved it in a variety of ways, as Table II indicates.

TABLE II: WHAT DID CLASSES HELP YOU ACHIEVE?

<u>ACHIEVEMENT</u>	<u>% RESPONSES*</u>
Improve performance in current job	39.80
Get a new job	27.04
Acceptance to 4-year institution	22.45
Change in responsibility at current job	19.90
An increase in salary	10.20
Promotion from current employer	9.69

*Respondents could check more than one response.

When the respondents dropped out of XYZ CC, the vast majority either went to work – or continued to work – full-time, as shown in Table III.

TABLE III: WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN YOU STOPPED TAKING CLASSES?

<u>RESPONSES</u>	<u>%</u>
Went to work/continued to work full-time	61.14
Went to another college	17.14
Nothing – took classes for personal enrich.	6.86
Homemaker	6.00
Went to work/continued to work part-time	5.71
Looked for a job	5.14

Causes for Dropping Out

A number of different factors cause people to drop out of college. Table IV examines how important these factors were to the respondents. The column headed “1 or 2” means

that the percentage shown was “Not Important” or only “Slightly Important” to the respondents. The column headed “4 or 5” indicated that the factor was “Important” or “Very Important” to the respondents. Furthermore, the Table is split into two portions. The top portion deals with factors with which XYZ CC can assist or influence. The bottom portion deals with those factors over which the college has no control.

For example, 44% of the respondents indicated that “money or financial concerns” were “Important” or “Very Important” to them as a reason for not returning to college. The availability of financial aid, the amount of aid available and making the information about that aid available to XYZ CC students is something that the college can do something about.

For example, one very successful program showing the difference that significant financial aid can make is the *Rising Stars* scholarship program at Dallas County Community College. Using major corporate donations through the college foundation, the college was able to create a *Rising Stars* program that makes full costs for tuition and books available to qualifying area high school grads. The program also includes counseling, mentoring, tutoring and other services. They indicated that students showed a significantly higher retention rate in the last two years than the national average. (A sample flyer from this program is attached in the Appendix.)

Financial issues and returning to work are typical dropout factors nationally as well. A recent report by the National Center for Education Statistics (article in Appendix) points out “the most common reason given for leaving college by students from all types of institutions was a need to work or other financial reasons.” Students at two-year colleges were more likely than students at four-year colleges to say they left because they had completed their coursework, or needed to work. Further, the most common reason nationally that students beginning at two-year colleges gave for enrolling was to transfer to a four-year college. And those who indicated that as a goal were less likely to leave school within three years and not return.

The same is true with regard to scheduling of classes and counseling and advising, which would be of importance in relation to a number of the factors shown in Table IV.

**TABLE IV: IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS TO RESPONDENTS
IN THEIR DROPPING OUT**

FACTOR	1 or 2	4 or 5
Money/financial concerns	40.00	44.00
Change in personal schedule	45.15	36.00
Change in work schedule	52.57	32.29
Took too much time from other things	67.71	17.43
Not sure what I wanted to take	68.29	16.86
Not prepared for college level courses	74.28	14.00
Didn't have the courses I wanted to take	81.14	12.86
Courses offered at the wrong time	76.86	12.00
Not doing well academically/poor grades	78.00	11.14
Courses not at convenient locations	78.28	10.57
Lack of career guidance	83.72	10.28
Child care problems	86.57	9.43
Courses/program not what I expected	81.71	8.86
Didn't like being a student/needed break	85.43	6.00
Bad experience with teacher(s)	89.43	6.00
Too easy/not challenging enough	96.29	1.14
Took courses needed and finished	54.86	34.28
Transferred to 4-year institution	75.43	22.86
Other personal problems	66.86	20.00
Change in marital status	80.28	14.86
Personal health issues	81.71	14.57
Immediate family health issues	84.29	12.85

Table V shows the relative importance of college services to the respondents. As before, the column headed "1 or 2" means that the percentage shown was "Not Important" or only "Slightly Important" to the respondents. The column headed "4 or 5" indicated that the service was "Important" or "Very Important" to the respondents.

The most important services – at least one-third or more of the respondents ranked them "Very Important" or "Important" – were financial aid (50%), counseling/advising (43.43%), schedule books mailed to the home (42.86%), career guidance (41.72%), and pre-testing for program placement (36%).

TABLE V: IMPORTANCE OF SERVICES TO RESPONDENTS

FACTOR	1 or 2	4 or 5
Financial aid	36.57	50.00
Counseling/ advising	36.28	43.43
Schedule books mailed home	42.57	42.86
Career guidance	40.57	41.72
Pre-testing for program placement	46.00	36.00
Career planning	49.72	31.43
Job placement	55.71	30.00
Distance learning (TV or Internet)	62.00	28.00
Tutoring	59.43	26.86
College information sessions	44.85	24.86
Co-op or internships	70.00	18.29
Orientation	61.14	18.28
Developmental education classes	71.14	15.71
Day care	81.14	13.15
Student activities	78.85	10.86

It is clear from Table VI, however, that student awareness of a service that is available to them and use of that service are two entirely different things. The only service where the awareness and usage percentages approximated each other was counseling/advising (where 78.74% of the respondents were aware of the service and 66.4% made use of the service). This analysis shows some important contradictions. For example, the most important factor relating to a respondent dropping out was “money/financial concerns” with 44% identifying it as a reason for their dropping out. Furthermore, 50% identified “Financial aid” as either an “Important” or “Very Important” service – more than any other service – and 88.51% of the respondents were aware of the service. Yet only 43.32% made use of the service!

While we cannot know for sure the cause of this discrepancy, we speculate that two factors may contribute to this. First of all, many students are part-time and there is simply not as much financial aid available to part-time students. Furthermore, we would speculate that some people don’t like to do that which may be uncomfortable and potentially embarrassing. Just as many people put off going to a doctor, some people who need financial aid may be reluctant to go to strangers and ask for it. XYZ CC

obviously does a good job in informing its students about the availability of financial aid and this they must continue to do. We would also recommend that they let people know how easy and confidential the service is and how many of people are already taking advantage of this service.

TABLE VI: IMPORTANCE, AWARENESS AND USE OF SERVICES

SERVICE	4 or 5	AWARE	USED
Financial aid	50.00	88.51	43.32
Counseling/ advising	43.43	78.74	66.40
Career planning	31.43	69.25	18.62
Job placement	30.00	61.21	7.29
Distance learning (TV or Internet)	28.00	64.66	14.98
Tutoring	26.86	71.84	16.60
Co-op or internships	18.29	40.23	1.21
Orientation	18.28	62.07	19.84
Developmental education classes	15.71	45.11	6.48
Student activities	10.86	77.87	16.60

Obstacles to Returning

When asked in an unaided question what is the biggest obstacle that would prevent them from returning to classes, the response is what we have seen in other surveys we have done. Twice as many respondents mentioned “Too busy/not enough time” (34%) as the next closest obstacle – “Finances/affordability/cost” with 17.14%. Another 12 respondents gave variations of the “time/work” issue in the “Other category, which would further increase this percentage. Finances and affordability – already seen as being an important retention factor – is the second biggest obstacle, with over 17% identifying it. The entire list of obstacles is presented in Table VII.

TABLE VII: OBSTACLES TO RETURNING TO CLASS

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>%</u>
Too busy/not enough time	34.00
Finances/affordability/cost	17.14
No interest in taking classes	11.14
Not offering the right classes	6.57
Classes not offered at the right time	3.14
Takes too long to get certificate or degree	1.71
Inconvenient	1.71
Don't know what's available	1.43
Can't find a job to pay for the cost of college	1.14
Won't fit in with the other students	1.14

When asked in an unaided question what were the two most important things XYZ CC could do to make it easier to return to college, the results – given in Table VIII – show that affordability, scheduling and counseling are critical retention issues.

The first five suggestions in Table VIII relate to course offerings and scheduling and 48.86% of the respondents mentioned these as either a first or second choice of things to do to make it easier to return.

The next three items listed in the Table all relate to the affordability of college and 33.71% of the respondents mentioned this as either their first or second suggestion of things to do to make it easier to return to college.

Finally, the next four items in the Table relate to counseling and advising and 15.43% mentioned these things as first or second choices.

TABLE VIII: THINGS XYZ CC COULD DO TO HELP STUDENTS RETURN TO CLASS

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>1st Choice</u>	<u>2nd Choice</u>
Make the length of courses shorter	0.86	0.83
Offer more evening classes	18.29	3.72
Offer classes at more convenient times	4.57	4.55
Offer more convenient locations	2.00	0.41
Offer a greater variety of classes	11.14	7.85
Lower the tuition costs	11.14	9.09
Lower expenses like the cost of texts	2.29	11.16
Offer more financial aid	3.71	3.72
Pre-testing for program placement	2.57	3.31
Re-entry counseling	2.57	3.31
Better counseling and advising	0.29	1.24
Offer real career planning	1.14	4.96
Better faculty	0.86	0.83
Offer day care	2.29	2.48

[There are comments in the “Other” section and in some related follow-up questions (e.g. “What do you mean by more convenient?”). The responses are not statistically significant and are generally not included in the percentages given in the Tables, however, they are interesting, are provided in the survey data, and should be reviewed.]

Taking Classes Again

36.29% of the respondents indicated that there was “Little” or “No Likelihood” that they would be interested in taking classes in the next year or two, but 45.14% said that they would be “Likely” or “Very Likely” to take classes in that time period. This is a significant percentage, and indicates that the college should keep in touch with dropouts through mailings, email or phone calls, since many of these dropouts may return. For those who said they would not be taking courses, 37.8% – by far the largest segment – said that the main reason was that they had “no interest” in doing so. The next highest

percentage was 13.39% for “Change in their work schedule” followed by 11.02% who cited “Money or financial concerns.”

Image of XYZ College

Even though the 350 respondents in this survey had all dropped out of XYZ CC for one reason or another, their impressions of the college were overwhelming positive. 71.72% described their experience at XYZ as “Very Positive” or “Positive,” and only 4% said their experience was “Very Negative” or “Negative.” When asked if they would recommend the college to friends or family, 82.57% said that they would do so without hesitation and another 15.71% said that they would do so with some reservations. Only 1.71% (6 respondents) said that they would not do so.

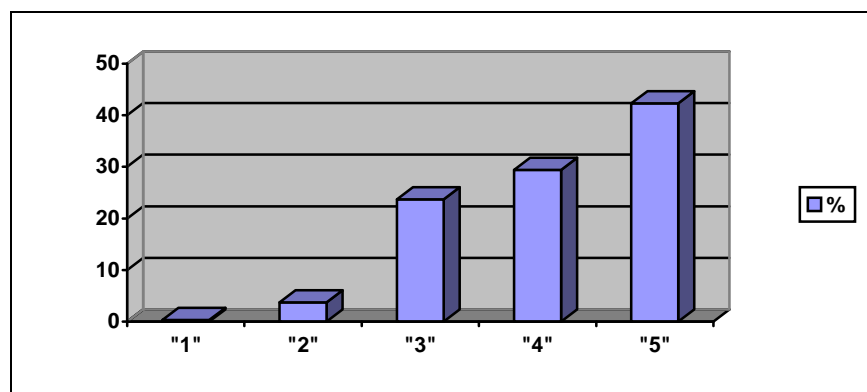


Figure 3 - Level of Personal Experience

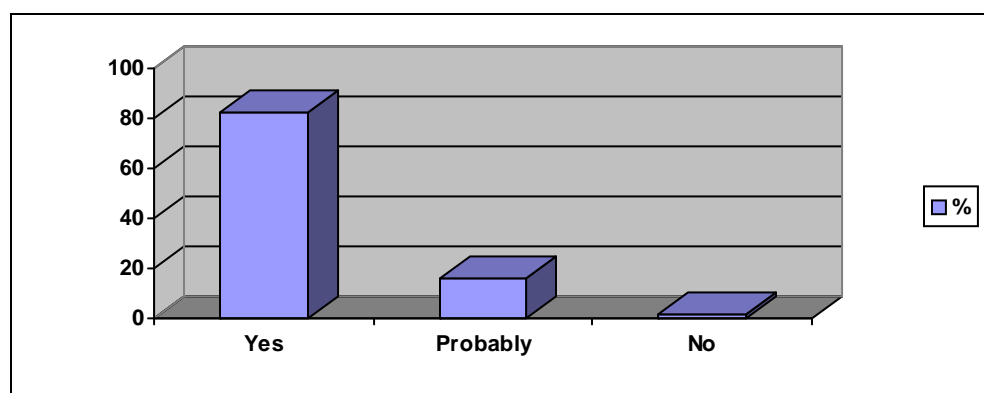


Figure 4 - Would You Recommend XYZ CC?

CROSS-TABULATION ANALYSES

Declared Major

It was mentioned near the start of this report that over two-thirds of the respondents (69.43%) had not declared a major. Furthermore, while 40.74% of these respondents who had no major had spoken with a counselor, only 8.64% had talked about career planning and 8.23% had participated in orientation.

Figure 5 shows that those respondents who did not have a major were more likely to take fewer semesters before they dropped out; i.e. they dropped out sooner than those who had a declared major.

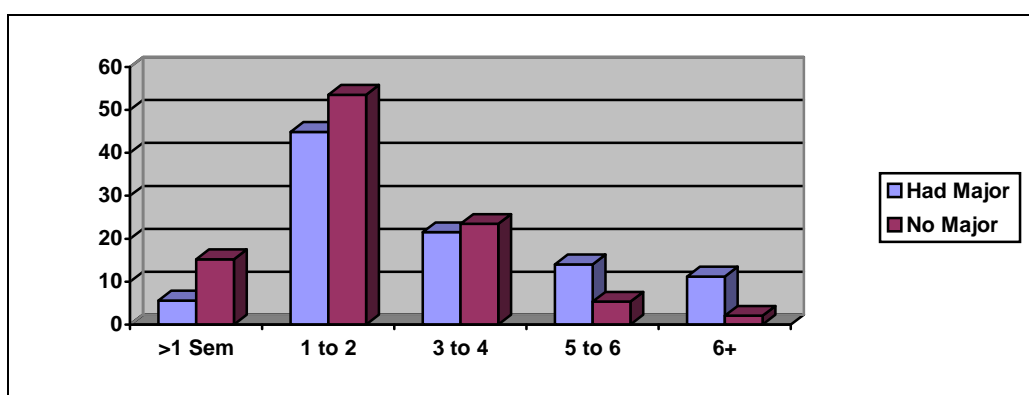


Figure 5 - Major vs. Number of Semesters

We should also point out, however, that those respondents who did not have a declared major were also more likely to be at XYZ CC just to take classes, as shown in Figure 6.

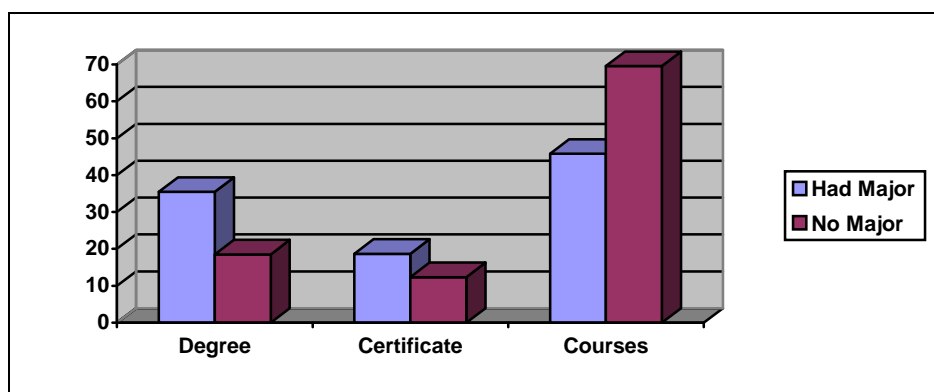


Figure 6 - Major vs. Purpose

This may explain why, when analyzing the issue of a major by the level of goal achievement, there doesn't seem to be a significant difference between achievement and non-achievement of goals when compared with those who did or did not have a declared major. About half as many respondents who did not have a major made use of career planning when compared with those who had a major (13.64% versus 26.88%). Those who did not have a major are less likely to take courses again in the next two years by 41.98% versus 23.37% -- primarily because they have "No interest" in doing so (45.1%). Those without a major were somewhat less enthusiastic about XYZ CC. 67.08% said their experience was "Positive" or "Very positive" compared to 82.24% for those who had a major.

Full-time versus Part-time

One important point to notice with this cross-tab is that part-time students were considerably less likely to have a major and, as pointed out above, those students without a major seemed more likely to drop out. Additional counseling for part-time students to help them find a career choice (i.e. a major) might prove to be quite useful.

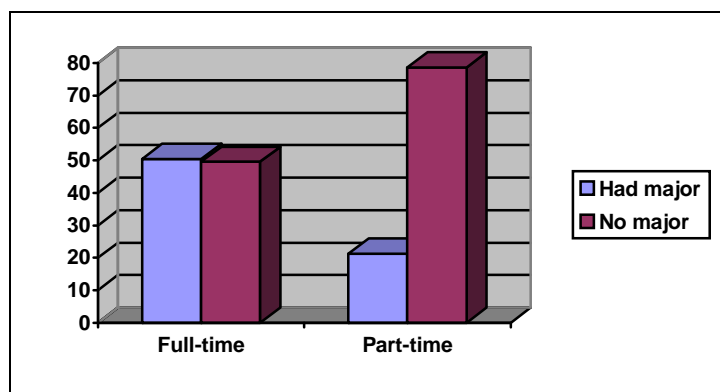


Figure 7 - Full-time/Part-time versus Major

Part-time students were somewhat more interested in a certificate than a degree than were full-time students (by 17.15% compared to 8.11%), but the percentages of those who listed taking a course as an objective were similar for both groups.

With regard to use of college services in general, part-time students were less aware of every service except for financial aid – and in some cases they were significantly less aware; e.g. tutoring service (66.67% versus 82.88%) and orientation (58.23% versus 70.27% for full-time students). Furthermore, they were less likely to use every service except distance learning on TV or Internet.

As might be expected, part-time students were more likely to cite "Too busy" as a reason for not taking classes again, by 37.66% versus 26.13%. They were also much less likely to be interested in taking classes for transfer to a 4-year institution by 12.97% versus

53.15% for full-time students. They were considerably more interested in taking classes to improve work skill or training in their current jobs by 24.27% versus 8.11%.

Level of Goal Achievement

Table IX is a combination of several questions asked of the respondents and has a lot going on in it. The factors listed on the left side of the table are reasons that people leave a college. The middle column is the response from those individual who said the factor was an “Important (4)” or “Very Important (5)” reason for their leaving *and* who had a low level of goal achievement (“1” or “2”). Finally, the right hand column is the response from those individual who said the factor was an “Important (4)” or “Very Important (5)” reason for their leaving *and* who had a high level of goal achievement (“4” or “5”). For example, 54.64% of those respondents who had a low level of goal achievement indicated that “Money/financial concerns” was either an “Important” or “Very Important” reason for their dropping out and similarly “35.12% of those people who had a high level of goal achievement indicated the same thing.

We have italicized those factors for dropping out that we believe the college can influence, either through additional financial aid, counseling/advising or scheduling – and additional communication with students on the availability of these resources.

Finally, we have highlighted in yellow those factors where there are what we believe to be significant statistical variations between the “high goal achievers” and the “low goal achievers.” As one would expect, the “high goal achievers” were more likely to have transferred to a 4-year institution or to have taken the courses that they needed. It also seems to us that the “low goal achievers” were less able to adapt changes in scheduling to changes in their lives. This is certainly an issue with which counseling and advising could provide assistance.

**TABLE IX: FACTORS FOR LEAVING COLLEGE VS.
LEVEL OF ACHIEVING GOALS –
IMPORTANCE LEVEL OF “4” or “5”**

FACTOR	Low Goal Achievement*	High Goal Achievement**
<i>Money/financial concerns</i>	54.64	35.12
<i>Change in personal schedule</i>	48.45	29.76
<i>Personal problems</i>	32.99	15.48
<i>Change in work schedule</i>	31.96	29.16
<i>Too much time from other things</i>	30.93	9.52
<i>Not sure what I wanted to take</i>	21.65	16.07
<i>Change in marital status</i>	20.62	14.28
<i>Not prepared for college level courses</i>	19.59	14.29
<i>Not doing well academically</i>	16.50	10.12
<i>Transferred to 4-year college</i>	14.43	32.15
<i>Personal health issues</i>	13.40	19.05
<i>Took the courses I needed</i>	12.37	51.79
<i>Family health issues</i>	11.34	14.28
<i>Wrong courses offered</i>	10.31	16.07
<i>Courses not at convenient locations</i>	10.31	11.31
<i>Child care problems</i>	10.31	9.52
<i>Lack of career guidance</i>	9.28	14.28
<i>Bad experience with teacher(s)</i>	9.28	4.76
<i>Courses/program not what I expected</i>	8.24	11.31
<i>Courses offered at wrong time</i>	6.18	13.09
<i>Too easy – not challenging enough</i>	1.03	0.60

* Rated achievement level at “1” or “2”

** Rated achievement level at “4” or “5”

Primary Goal at College

As shown in Figure 8, the highest level of goal achievement came for those respondents who were taking courses for personal interest, taking courses to improve their current occupation or taking courses to transfer. It is interesting to note that those respondents who were taking courses to learn skills for a first career or who were exploring career areas actually had higher percentages of non-achievement of their goals than of

achievement of their goals. These are likely goals of younger respondents and, as will be shown shortly, younger respondents were less likely to achieve their goals.

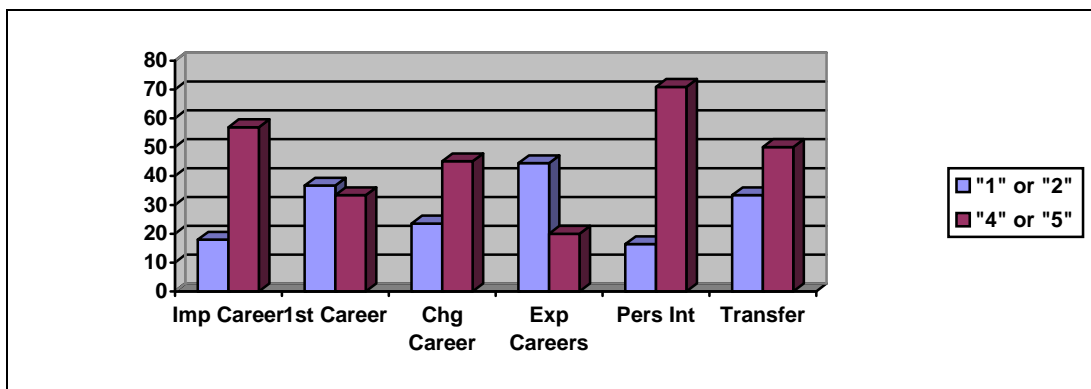


Figure 8 - Goals and Level of Goal Achievement

Those interested in changing career, taking classes to get their first job or taking classes for transfer were most likely to seek additional course work in the next few years.

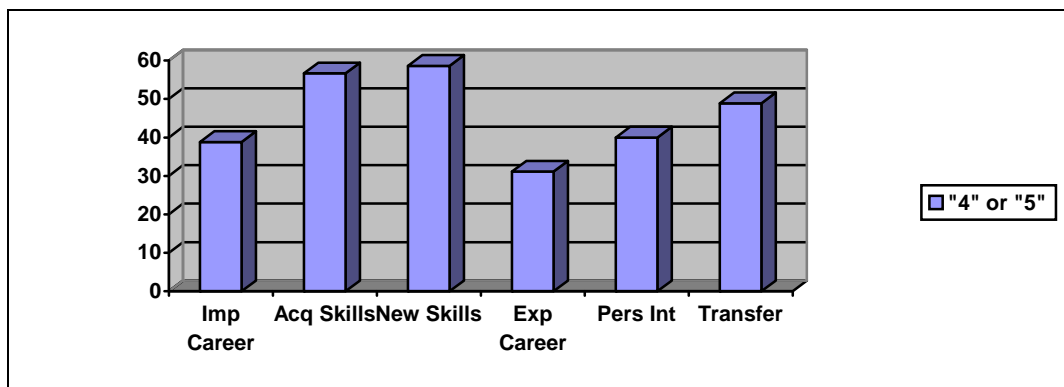


Figure 9 - Goals and Interest in Taking Future Classes

Age

As indicated earlier, the predominant age segments were young, 17-24 (32%) and 25-35 (36.57%). As might be expected, the largest segment of full-time students was the youngest segment (57.14%) and it decreased with age, while the percentage of part-time students increased with age (Figure 10).

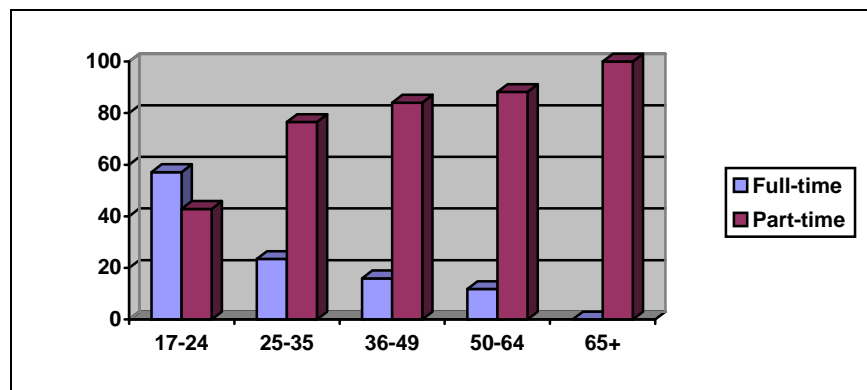


Figure 10 - Age vs. Full-time and Part-time

The youngest students were there to take courses for transfer or to learn skills to get a first job, while the percentage taking classes for personal interest increased with age.

Achievement of desired goals increased with age, as shown in Figure 11.

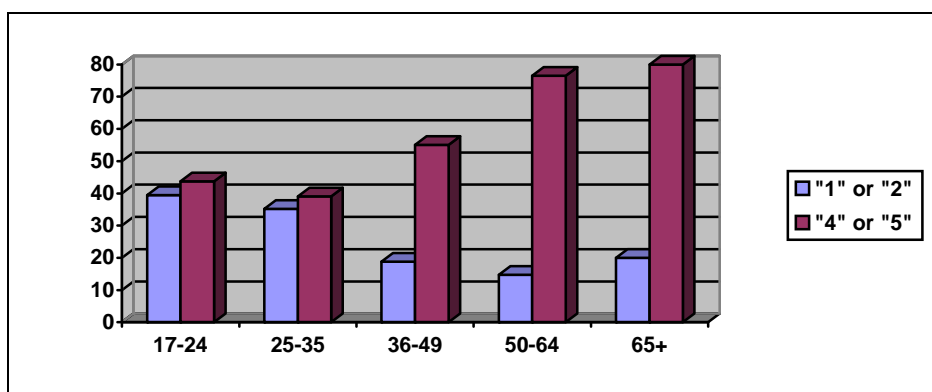


Figure 11 - Level of Goal Achievement by Age

Table X shows the most important reasons for dropping out for each of the age segments (although the 65 and over segment only had 5 respondents, so no comments are made about this group). The percentages in each column are the percents of either a “4” or “5” for that reason and age segment. We have highlighted the top 4 reason for each segment and, as you can see from the table, there is a great deal of similarity. The notable exceptions are: the youngest segment was the only one with a significant percentage who dropped out to continue at a 4-year institution, the 25-35 segment had more personal problems to deal with, and the 50-64 segment had too many other things to do and not enough time. Interestingly, this percentage was similar for the 25-35 and 36-49 segments as well, but they had other, more important reasons for dropping out.

TABLE X: FACTORS FOR LEAVING COLLEGE VS. AGE
IMPORTANCE LEVEL OF “4” or “5”

Reason	17-24	25-35	36-49	50-64	65+
Money/financial concerns	45.53	52.34	39.13	20.59	9.09
Change in personal schedule	25.89	49.22	37.68	20.58	0.00
Personal problems	16.97	29.69	16.50	5.88	0.00
Change in work schedule	23.21	38.28	47.83	11.76	0.00
Too much time from other things	6.25	25.78	20.29	20.59	0.00
Not sure what I wanted to take	21.43	17.19	14.50	2.94	0.00
Change in marital status	10.71	22.60	11.60	5.88	0.00
Not prepared for college level courses	13.39	16.41	13.04	5.88	0.00
Not doing well academically	14.28	12.50	8.70	2.94	0.00
Transferred to 4-year college	32.14	21.03	17.39	8.82	9.09
Personal health issues	14.29	17.19	10.14	11.76	9.09
Took the courses I needed	26.79	29.69	44.93	47.05	27.27
Family health issues	12.50	16.41	10.14	2.94	9.09
Wrong courses offered	19.65	10.94	4.35	11.76	0.00
Courses not at convenient locations	10.71	10.16	10.15	8.82	9.09
Child care problems	7.14	13.29	5.80	5.88	9.09
Lack of career guidance	12.50	7.82	8.70	11.76	9.09
Bad experience with teacher(s)	8.93	7.04	2.90	0.00	0.00
Courses/program not what I expected	9.82	9.38	5.80	8.82	9.09
Courses offered at wrong time	14.29	10.15	11.60	11.76	0.00
Too easy – not challenging enough	2.68	0.00	0.00	2.94	0.00

With regard to the obstacles for returning to classes, the issue of “not enough time” was more important to the older segments. While 19.64% of the 17-24 segment cited this reason, the percentages for the 25-35 and 36-49 segments were 43.75% and 44.93% respectively.

Miscellaneous Cross-tabulations

Interestingly, although lack of time was the biggest obstacle to returning for those respondents who were working either full- or part-time and they were most interested in the college offering more evening classes as something that might make it easier for them to return, 46.27% of the “working full-time” respondents and 37.71% of the “working part-time respondents” indicated that it was “likely” or “Very likely” that they would take additional classes in the next 1 to 2 years.

Although there were only 48 African-American respondents, as indicated earlier this is a larger percentage (13.71%) than was seen in the community perception survey. The number is too small for great statistical significance, but results – if taken as results of a focus group – seem to indicate that African-Americans are significantly more interested in exploring academic or career areas. More importantly, they were also significantly less likely to achieve their goals, as seen in Figure 12.

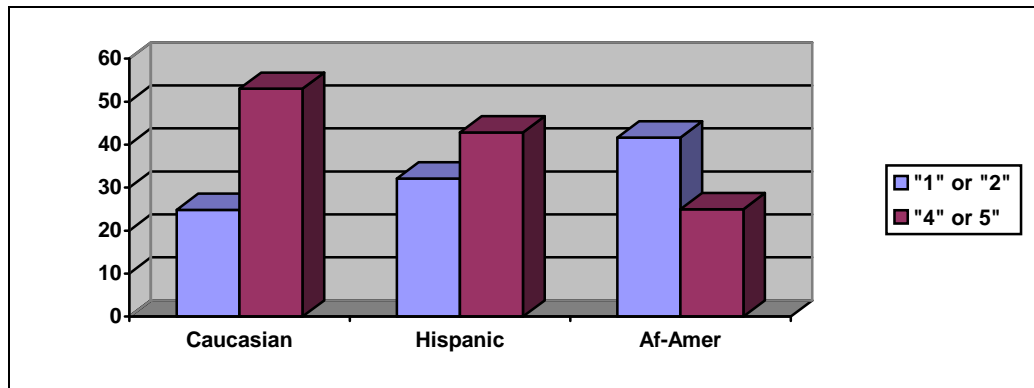


Figure 12 - Ethnicity vs. Level of Goal Achievement

African-Americans were less aware of tutoring services than were Caucasians (75.76% versus 50%) but those who were aware of the service were more likely to make use of it (26.92% versus 15.46%) – although as the percentage indicates, nearly three-fourths of the African-Americans who knew about the service failed to make use of it. The biggest obstacles for returning for African-American students were the same as for the total sample – “too busy” (47.92%) and “financial concerns” (27.08%). Unfortunately, one of the largest discrepancies between the two ethnic groups was whether or not they thought they might return to take classes in the next two years. While 54.14% of the Caucasians thought that it was “Likely” or “Very likely” that they would do so, only 4.17% of the African-Americans thought so and 72.92% of them thought that it was “Unlikely” or “Very unlikely.” Finally, although 80.45% of the Caucasian respondents described their experience with XYZ CC as “Positive” or “Very positive,” only 29.16% of the African-American respondents did so. Interestingly, however, most of the others in this segment were “Neutral” (i.e. 62.5% gave a response of “3”). While this is a small segment, the differences are so dramatic that we believe that this is an issue that the college must examine in more detail.

Women were somewhat more likely to achieve their goals than were men by 51.52% versus 43.42%.

The more credit hours respondents completed, the more likely they were to have achieved their goals – which makes sense. If they had completed less than 3 credit hours, 21.06% gave a “4” or “5” to the “goal achievement level” question, but if they completed 36 or more hours 83.33% gave a “4” or “5.” The more credit hours they had completed, the more likely they were to make use of counseling/advising services and orientation. Those with more credit hours were also somewhat more likely to give an indication that they would take additional classes in the next

year or two. Finally, the more credit hours a student had before dropping out, the higher he or she ranked the college experience.

Day students were much more likely to be taking classes to prepare for transfer to a 4-year institution by 43.48% versus 11.49% for evening students and 8.82% for weekend students. Day students were also much more likely to have made use of financial aid services than were evening students, by 53.08% versus 29.29%. Evening and weekend students were much more likely to indicate that the biggest obstacle to returning was that they were too busy by 42.57% for evening, 47.06% for weekend and 23.22% for daytime. Finally, although there were only 7 respondents who took classes primarily on the Internet or television, 6 of the 7 indicated they would probably take more classes within the next two years compared to 8.82% for weekend students, 45.95% for evening students and 50.31% for daytime students.

Married respondents were almost twice as likely to cite “too busy” as a reason for not returning to classes as were single respondents by 41.76% versus 23.19%.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above report represents a detailed investigation into the retention attitudes of 350 former XYZ College students who have all dropped out of the college. As seen in the analyses of the data, they did so for a wide variety of reasons. It should be noted from the outset, that 62% of the respondents indicated that they were just there to take courses and 25.71% of the respondents had as an objective a desire to take courses for transfer to a 4-year institution. Many, in fact, achieved – or nearly achieved – their desired objectives. Having said this, it should also be noted that 27.71% did not achieve their objectives at all, 25% only somewhat achieved their objectives and another 24.29% had lukewarm success.

We realize that in times of tight budgets not all of the things recommended are possible. They are presented for strategic consideration, however, with the understanding that budget issues are very much a part of the process. As a result of this study, we believe that there are several areas of activities that would prove most helpful in increasing the retention rate for XYZ College.

Financial aid/affordability

The study clearly shows that many of the dropouts are concerned about financial issues and the affordability of a college education. The vast majority of the respondents are working either full- or part-time – often to help pay for the cost of college. This leads to additional problems of not having enough time to go to college and, due to a work schedule, not having the right courses available at convenient hours – an issue which will be discussed shortly. In order to deal with the financial concerns there are several things that the college might do. In reading XYZ CC materials, we are aware that much is already available and prominently publicized, e.g. the financial aid information. Nonetheless, consideration should be given to enhancing this awareness since this issue showed up so significantly among the respondents' replies. We realize that in tight budgets not all of these things are possible; however, we believe that all avenues should be considered.

1. Increase the amount of financial aid available to full- and part-time students either through increased scholarships, loans, work/study programs, etc.
2. Increase the awareness of the availability of financial aid.
3. Increase the knowledge of who, how and why people seek financial aid, so that those eligible are more likely to take advantage of the aid that is available.

Scheduling

Whether they were indicating that they were too busy to take classes, the classes were not available at the right times or places, that their work schedule had changed or other similar messages, the research clearly shows that many of the respondents dropped out

because they could not handle the changes in their lives and take classes at the same time. We would recommend that the college look at several things in this regard.

1. Examine the possibility of adding classes – especially evening classes – as budgets allow. We realize that this is a very general suggestion, but it is clear that scheduling of classes is a major sticking point with dropouts.
2. Examine expanding a variety of existing alternative scheduling to fit in with busy lifestyles. This would include short semesters (e.g. 2-week and 5-week class sessions), inter-session classes, open entry/open exit scheduling, etc.
3. Examine extending service office hours to cover evening and weekend students, especially during peak registration periods.

Counseling/advising

Over two-thirds (69.43%) of the respondents had not declared a major (something that we have seen in other retention studies nationally), 30.75% were not aware that career planning was available (and while 69.25% were aware of it, only 18.62% made use of it). Finally, 21.26% were not even aware that there were counseling and advising services. Furthermore, as indicated above, many of the respondents were not able to handle changes in their lives and classes at the same time. Clearly there is the need for continued counseling and advising and we would recommend several activities in this regard. Again, from XYZ College literature, we realize a broad program of support services exists, but the college should review how to enhance the services and promotions with these considerations.

1. Identify “at risk” groups and seek early counseling with them. These would include younger students (right out of high school), minority students, and those showing early signs of scholastic problems. Ongoing data analysis could identify these and other important factors as well.
2. Mandatory skills assessment for placement for identified students (e.g. degree or certificate students, transfer, full-time, taking math, English etc.) should be considered. This is typical at most two-year colleges with which we have worked and is a useful retention tool.
3. Faculty should be solicited to help identify those students in danger of failing at the mid-point in a semester. These students should then be contacted for consultation regarding the services that are available to help them.
4. An increase in career planning counseling. Studies nationally have shown that those who declare a major early are less likely to drop out.
5. An increase in the use of time management counseling to help students deal with the often conflicting demands of work, schooling and family.
6. Establishment of “Lucy Booths” in convenient locations on the campuses. A Lucy Booth – which gets its name from the Peanuts character – would be staffed during certain hours at the beginning and end of the semesters by counseling/advising personnel – usually in high traffic areas or courtyards – and would allow students to meet counselors without appointments in an informal and relaxed

- atmosphere for brief advising conversations. Where they have been used, these have shown to be helpful in getting students involved in the counseling process.
7. Use of phone calls, direct mail cards and email as appropriate to advise students of the various counseling and advising services that are available at the college.
 8. Increased attention to orientation including stronger recommendation for new students – including part-time students – to participate. Some colleges with which we have worked require orientation and even give one credit to this program.
 9. The use of mentoring – particularly with minority students.

Analyze data

XYZ College is to be commended for doing this study to assist in improving college retention. There are several other things that we would recommend the college do with regard to this type of research.

1. Continue and expand as appropriate internal data collection and analysis of dropouts, including analysis of rates by such factors as fulltime/part-time, majors, age, new/continuing/returning/hours completed, and participation in such activities as orientation, counseling etc.
2. Use this information to identify marketing implications and risk factors for dropouts and the success of programs initiated to address these risks.
3. Monitor persistence rates broken down by factors. (A sample report is attached in the Appendix as an example of collecting and analyzing such data.)

Learning communities

One of the most important things to improve retention at colleges is simply – and not so simply – effective teaching. One of the things that the college should examine – if it is not already doing so – is the creation of “learning communities/linked courses” as appropriate. Several of the programs described for colleges in the Retention Comparisons section on page 35, including Skagit Valley College (where learning communities are required) and Frederick Community College, use this kind of educational approach. Research by national learning/retention expert Dr. Vincent Tinto shows significant increase in retention when students are involved in such approaches. (See Appendix.) [We realize that this issue is a major curriculum consideration and is something that will require extensive internal consideration. We present it, however, for the reasons cited.]

Promotional considerations

A number of colleges have created post cards/letters/calls to former students who have not returned or re-registered at a point during the registration process. Some samples of these cards are included in the Appendix. Furthermore, awareness of services, class

schedules, financial aid, and many of the issues mentioned above all have a promotional component and decisions must be made in coordination with the marketing department.

Develop model strategies and programs

Review and adapt model programs

1. We would recommend that the college examine, enhance and apply where appropriate programs building on basic tenants in retention literature. Among points for retention issues that are consistently found in this literature are:

- Principles of community - Effective programs integrate students into the academic and social environment of the college.
- The greatest proportion of leaving occurs the first year.

Therefore, early attention and intervention, and programs such as orientation and mentoring, (among others described in the report and Retention Comparisons) are typically valuable approaches.

2. Review and apply as appropriate successful retention programs described in the Retention Comparisons section that follows and in the Appendix materials.

ADDENDUM: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS/ STATISTICS

As one would expect considering the age of the respondents for this type of survey, the majority of the respondents were employed full-time (57.43%) or part-time (17.43%).

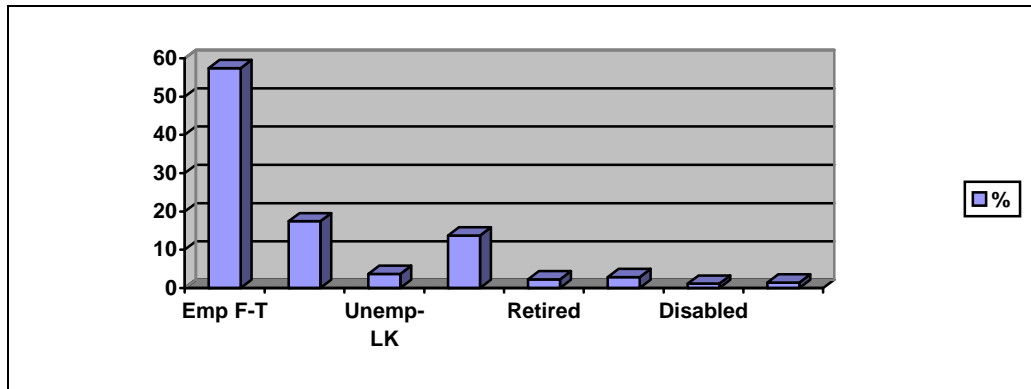


Figure 13 - Employment

The majority of the respondents were married (52%) although 39.43% were single.

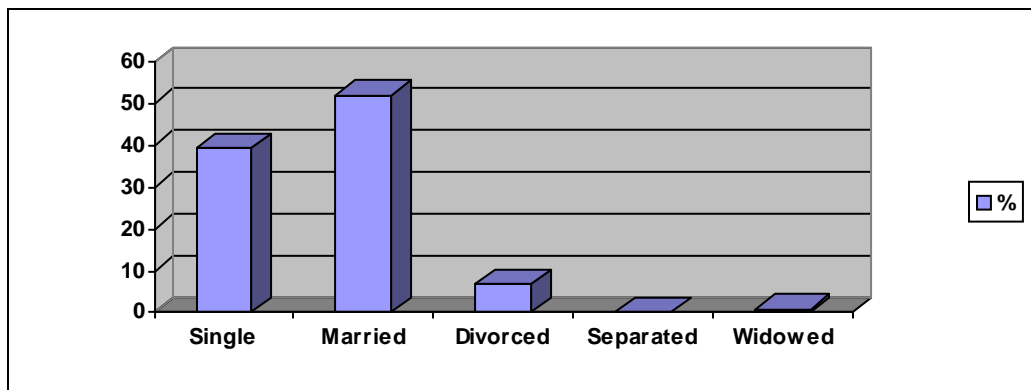


Figure 14 - Marital Status

By ethnicity, Caucasians were predominant (76%), but there was an important shift in the African-American segment. In the community perception survey, which SGA did for the college in December, 1.49% of the respondents were African-American. In this survey of dropouts, the percentage increased to 13.71%. This indicates to us that special attention may be needed to assist African-American students in their college experience.

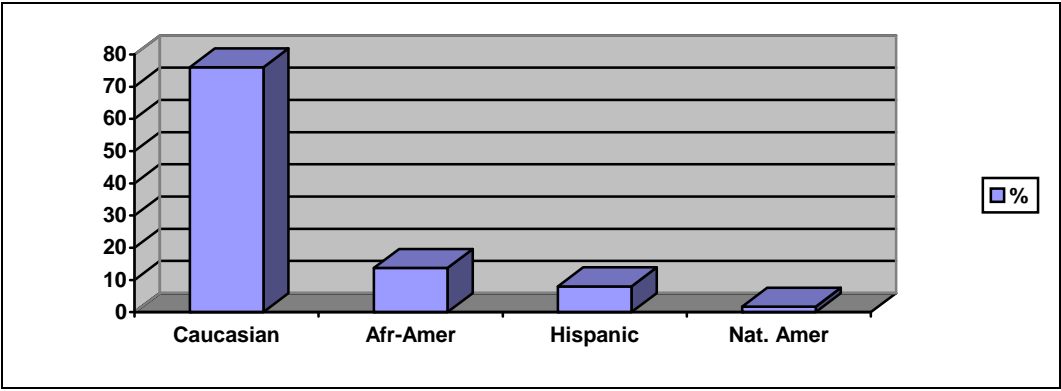


Figure 15 - Ethnicity

The respondents were predominately younger, with 32% under 25 years of age and 36.57% between the ages of 25 and 35.

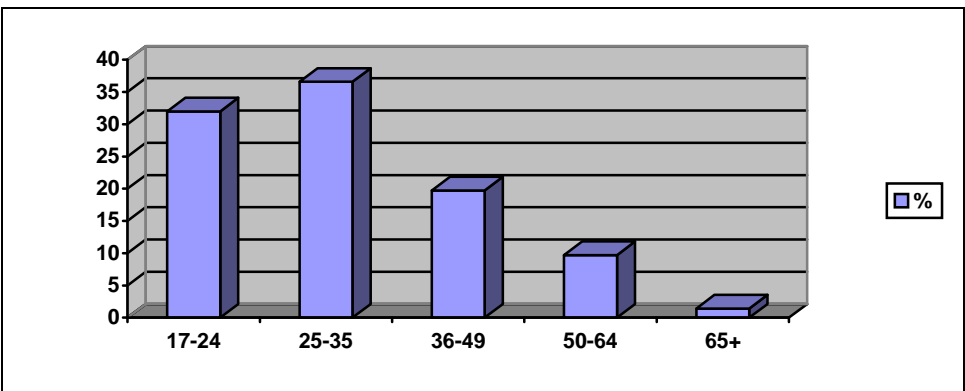


Figure 16 - Age

Somewhat more women than men took part in the survey by 56.57% to 43.43%.

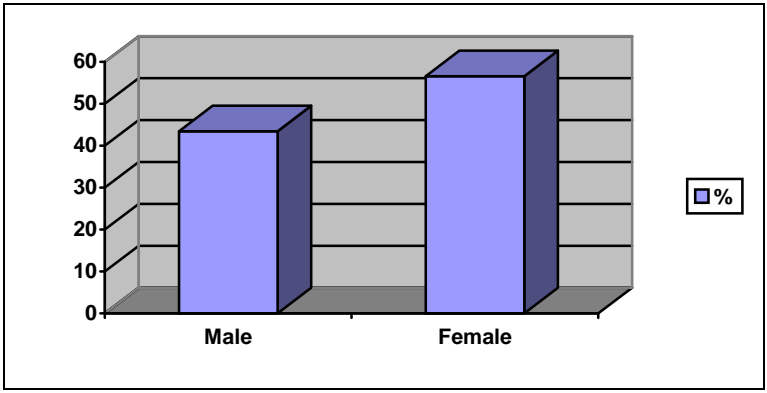


Figure 17 - Gender

The largest single group of respondents last took classes at XYZ CC in Spring 2002 (27.71%). The lowest percentage was from the Summer 2001 group (2.57%).

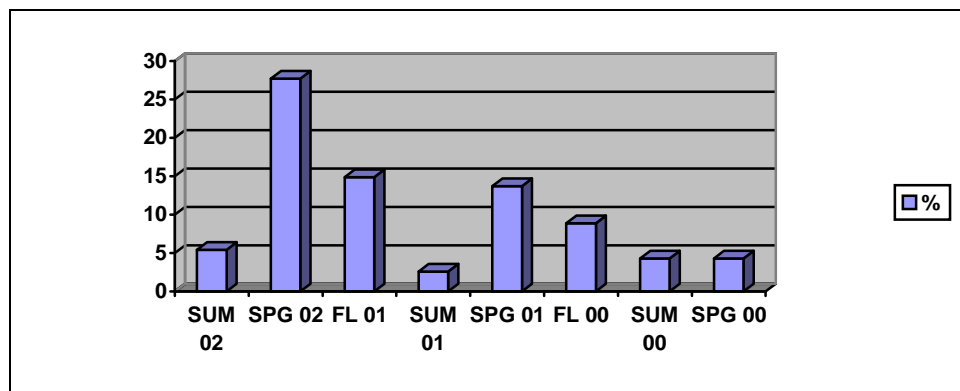


Figure 18 – Last Semester When Classes Taken

Roughly 2/3 were part-time students (68.29%)

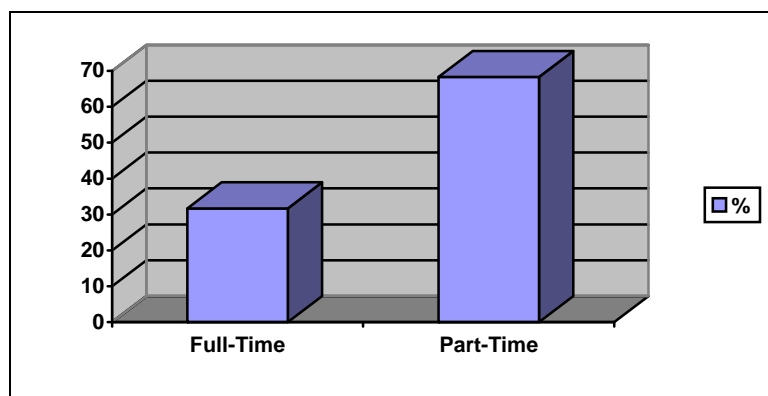


Figure 19 – Full-time or Part-time

The vast majority of students took classes either in the day or evening. Only 9.71% took weekend classes.

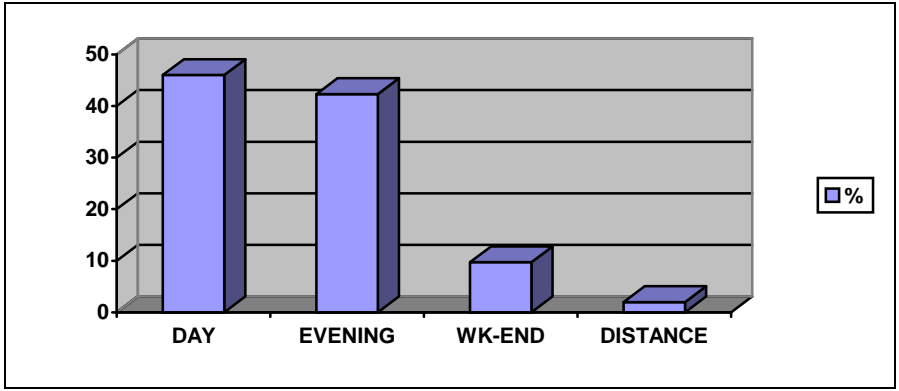


Figure 20 – When Classes Taken

Most of the respondents attended only 1 or 2 semesters before dropping out.

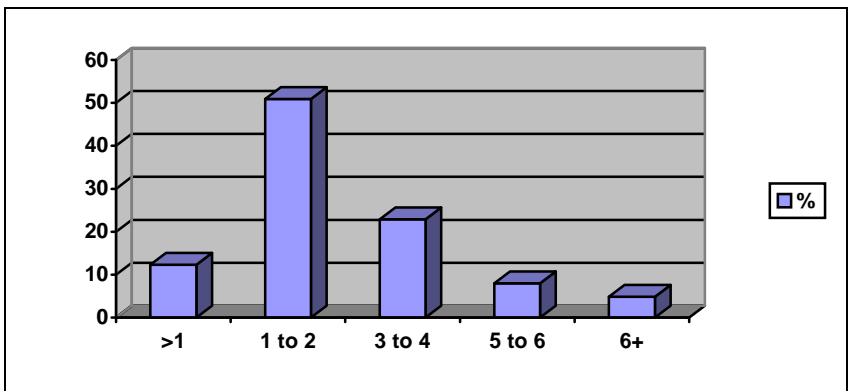


Figure 21 – Number of Semesters Before Dropping Out

A wide variety of credit hours were taken before dropping out.

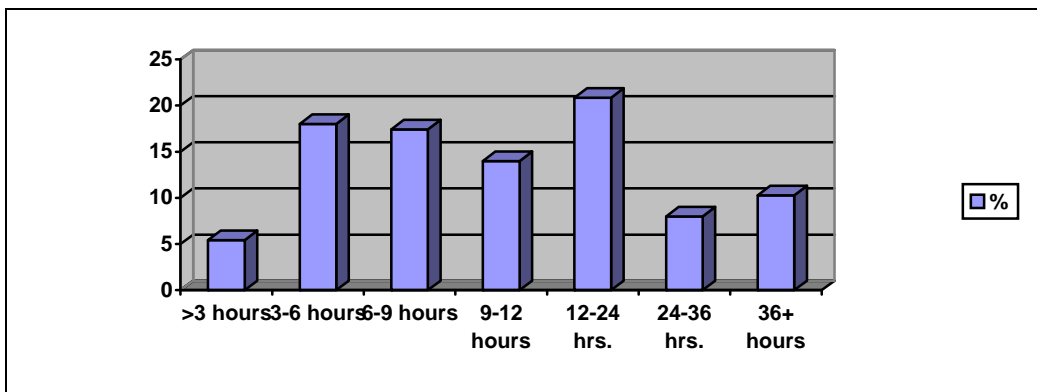


Figure 22 - Number of Credit Hours Before Dropping Out

Over two-thirds of the respondents had not picked a major. More will be said about this point later.

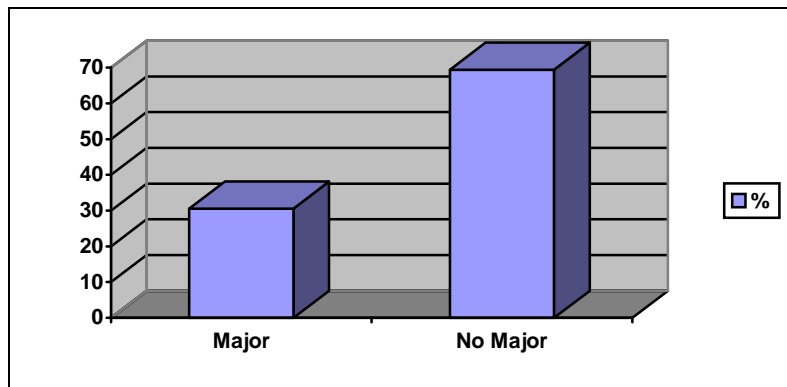


Figure 23 - % Declaring a Major

Almost half of the respondents had taken the majority of their classes at the Prescott campus.

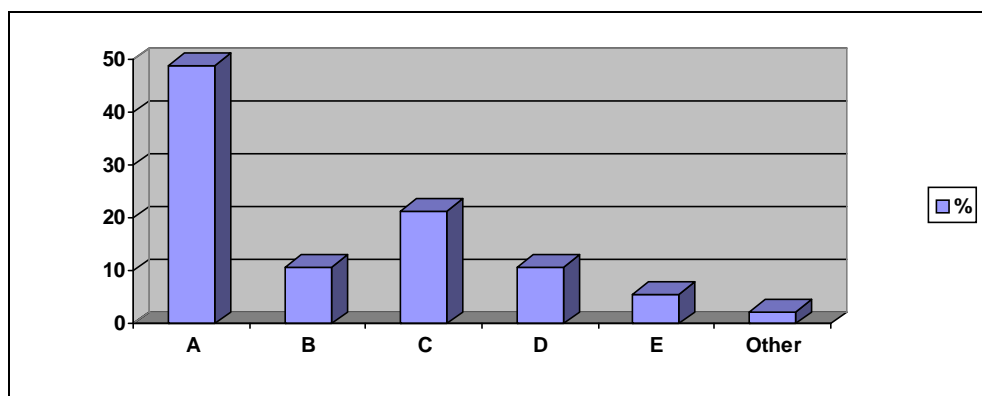


Figure 24 - Where Classes Taken

XYZ College does a good job of informing their students of the start of the semester, as shown in Figure 8.

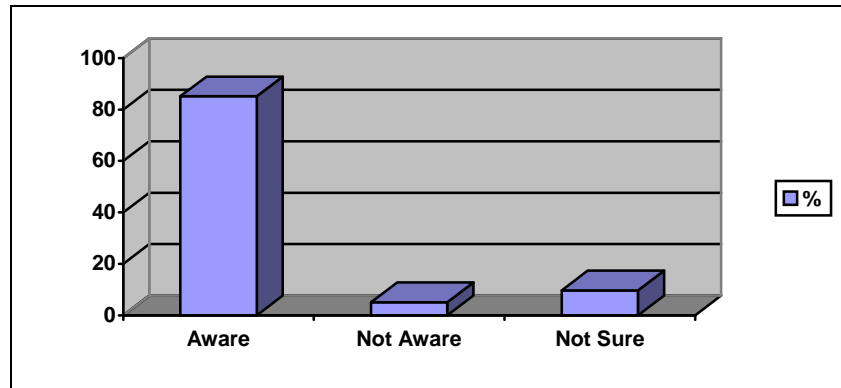


Figure 25 - Awareness of Semester Start

The two most effective methods of informing students were direct mail and the schedule book.

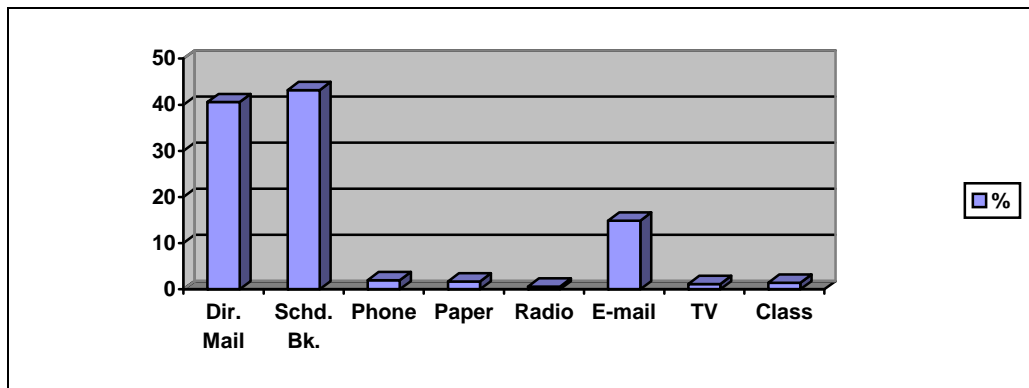


Figure 26 - Effective Media for Informing Students