

2018

Research Brief: University Studies and Retention

Portland State University. University Studies Program

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UNIVERSITY STUDIES AND RETENTION

University Studies is designed to facilitate the kind of academic relationships and experiences that support retentionⁱ. Relationships with peers, including peer mentors, and faculty as well as academic engagement are particularly important for the student population that attends PSU. PSU's entering freshman class is increasing in racial and ethnic diversity, is half first-generation college students, and has a high level of financial need.

This brief summary of retention data and research related to University Studies highlights:

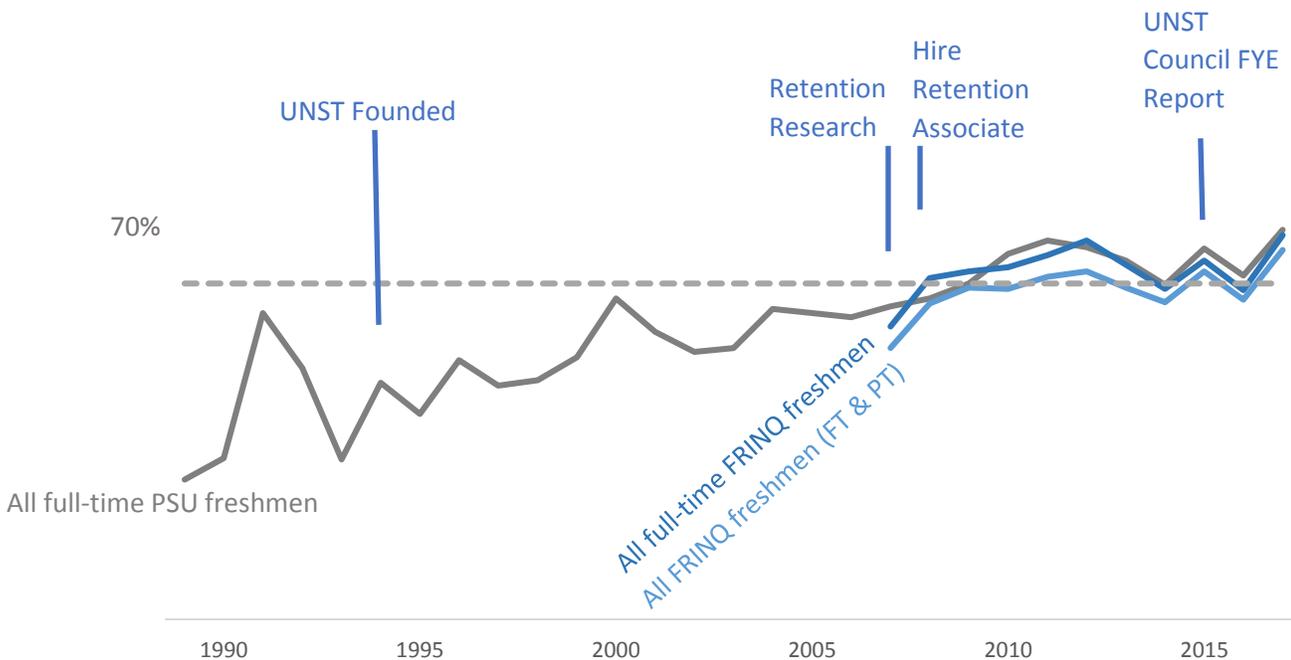
- FRINQ & Freshman Retention
- Transfer Sophomore Retention
- Retention by Demographic Subgroup

The report concludes with current initiatives, challenges and opportunities.

FRINQ and Freshman Retention

When UNST was founded in 1994, it [reflected the best research](#)ⁱⁱ regarding student learning and retention at the time. Following UNST's founding, fall-to-fall retention for first-time full-time freshman increased from 62% in 1994 to 68% in 2006. In 2007, as part of UNST's assessment and student success efforts, student GPA and retention information were connected with survey information to explore student success and retention in more depth and those data have [informed retention projects](#)ⁱⁱⁱ. Between 2008 and 2015, UNST funded a full-time retention associate who was instrumental in coordinating freshman retention projects campus wide. PSU saw increases in freshman retention as a result of her efforts followed by fluctuation over the last few years. In 2015, the UNST Council released its [FYE report](#)^{iv} which included research into and recommendations for improving the first year experience at PSU.

Note that between 1994 and 2017, the number of first-time full-time freshmen almost tripled from just over 600 to over 1700. That increase in numbers was accompanied by an increase in diversity. White students have gone from making up 63% of the freshman class to 46%. The Hispanic/Latino population has grown from 5% in 1994 to 20% in 2017. For as long as we have been tracking retention, approximately half of the freshman class each year have been first-generation college students. Approximately 1/3 of FRINQ students each year report that they speak a language other than English in their home, only a small percent of whom are international students. The rest are immigrants, refugees, or children of immigrants and refugees.



FRINQ Retention Practices

Mentoring

All FRINQ students have the support of a course-embedded undergraduate (junior or senior) peer mentor.

Financial Support

UNST research identified student financial concern as a retention issue resulting in training and partnerships with financial aid. We are piloting an adaptive financial literacy module.

Advising

Partnered with Advising and Career Services in Exploratory Studies, serving undecided freshmen and improving their retention.

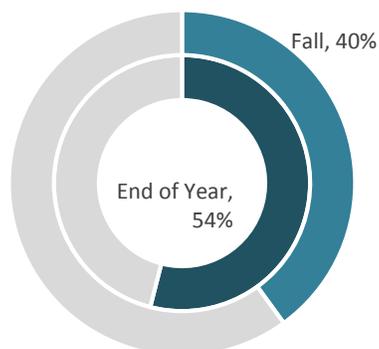
Engagement

All FRINQ courses are inquiry based active learning courses and most incorporate community-based learning.

New Transfer Sophomore Retention

UNST's Director of Assessment collaborated on a [recent study](#) of sophomore fall-to-fall retention at PSU which identified that transfer sophomores are at greater risk of non-retention than sophomores who began at PSU. Looking specifically at new transfer sophomores (Fall 15 and 16), UNST identified that only 54% enroll in a SINO (their required general education course) by the end of their sophomore year and that failure to enroll in SINO during their first year was associated with lower retention.

54% of new SO transfers enroll in SINO by the end of the year.



New SO transfers who enroll in SINO have a fall-to-fall retention rate 7-10% higher than transfers who did not.



SINO Retention Practices

Mentoring

All SINO students have the support of a course-embedded graduate peer mentor.

On-line Mentoring

All online SINO students have a course-embedded graduate mentor who is trained to support online students.

High Impact Practices

SINOs are writing intensive and employ inquiry-based active learning pedagogies.

Retention by Student Subgroups

There are few differences in retention across demographic groups for FRINQ and SINQ students. Retention rates for Fall 16 to Fall 17 are below, but they reflect consistent patterns across several years. It is a notable and consistent pattern for FRINQ and SINQ students that students of color persist at similar or higher rates than white students and that first-generation students persist at similar rates to students whose parent(s) have graduated from college.

	FRINQ	SINQ
Gender		
Male	69.7%	77.3%
Female	69.3%	81.0%
Race/Ethnicity/Intl		
Asian	86.3%	80.0%
Black/African American	69.4%	78.1%
Hispanic/Latino	69.0%	78.7%
International Student	73.5%	90.3%
Multiple races	74.2%	82.9%
White	65.1%	78.05%
Parents/Guardians Ed. Level		
Neither grad college	71.7%	78.9%
1 or both grad. college	70.1%	78.2%

Impact of UNST Retention Research

The research conducted in UNST has had a wide impact on student success initiatives on campus. Our research into specific factors related to retention and success has resulted in campus-wide conversation and action.

- After identifying online SINQ courses as high DFWXI courses, UNST implemented messaging and orientation, faculty support, and mentor training and we have seen DFWXI rates decrease appreciably over the last three years.
- UNST research identified financial concern as a factor in student retention and we have seen financial topics incorporated into advisor training and FRINQ courses. Financial aid professionals have become a more systematic part of the conversation about student retention on campus.

- UNST analyses into the experience and profile of multi-lingual FRINQ students contributed to a white paper on the needs of immigrant and refugee students at PSU and a partnership with the Intensive English Language Program to offer a Multi-lingual FRINQ lab.
- Research into the success rates for students who enter PSU with low high school GPAs raised awareness of the prevalence of the issue and informed admission policy and practice.

Current Initiatives, Challenges and Opportunities

Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice Learning Goal

The revision of one of our learning goals into Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice provides a lens through which to examine our curriculum, pedagogy, and administrative practices to be sure we are meeting the needs of our increasingly diverse students. This goal calls us not only to continue our research and action related to student retention but to do so in ways that look more deeply into the experiences of our students.

Connections with Academic Advising

University Studies does not have an academic advisor or official advising liaison at the moment, which is a challenge. However, we have a long history of engaging with the advising community on campus and look forward to working with the redesigned advising pathways to find ways to collaborate and serve PSU students. We have begun regular meetings with pathway directors.

Mentor Support for SINQ Students

Current budget challenges strain University Studies' capacity to maintain the SINQ peer mentor program in its current structure. We are committed to providing support for SINQ students, particularly those who may be transitioning into PSU and those who are taking online courses. We are also committed to providing writing support for SINQs, which meet a student's writing requirement.

Conclusion. The mentor relationships, year-long first-year experience, small class sizes, and engaging teaching philosophy of University Studies help create the climate to maximize student retention. The Program has invested in research to better understand the challenges faced by the student population at our urban access institution. We look forward to continuing to develop new approaches and collaborations aimed at improving the foundation of support UNST has created for PSU students.

ⁱ Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T.M.; Shoup, R.; Kinzie, J.; Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the effects of engagement on first year grades and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 79(5), 540-563.

ⁱⁱ https://www.jstor.org/stable/27797226?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.pdx.edu/unst/sites/www.pdx.edu.unst/files/FreshmenRetentionProject2011-2012Report.pdf>

^{iv} https://www.pdx.edu/unst/sites/www.pdx.edu.unst/files/FYE_Report_andExecSum012915.pdf

^v <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1521025117726048>