John Brown University

TUG Retention Report
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Prepared by
Calvin Piston
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness
INTRODUCTION

Retention is a key issue facing John Brown University. In our Strategic Plan we have set a goal of a 70% graduation rate in the traditional undergraduate program. The first step to accomplishing this would be to have at least 82% of the freshman cohort retain to the second year. We have recently fallen short of these goals. The Fall 2013 cohort was the third since 2002 to hit the 82% retention mark—and was the highest ever. This gives us three consecutive cohorts reaching this threshold. We need to build on these past three years by continuing programs that help our students to be successful and graduate.

The purpose of this document is to show our retention and graduation rates for students with various characteristics. It is hoped that this data can help inform us on intervention strategies with students to help improve their connection to JBU and, hence, their learning and persistence.

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To achieve a graduation rate of 70%, the first to second year retention will need to be at about 82% (achieved in the 2011, 2012 and 2013 cohorts!). There is not a consistent difference in retention of males and females, and the graduation rates follow comparable trends.
While transfer students are not included in the official retention and graduation rates, the number of transfer students makes a significant impact on enrollments. The past three years have seen rates which are much lower than the freshman rate. We need to continue to be proactive in helping transfer students feel welcome at JBU and perhaps become more flexible in some of the graduation requirements for transfer students.
We would expect greater retention for students with higher ACT and SAT scores, and the data bears that out. The data suggests that initiatives directed at students with low to mid scores (ACT 20-25 and SAT 900-1100) could help with retention. And the lowest scorers are much less likely to graduate even if they do continue for the second year. The data from the last two years show promise of more success with these groups.
Notice here that more students with lower ACT and SAT scores generally fail to graduate, even though they may retain to the 2nd or 3rd year.
Data by Application date and geography

Clearly students matriculating as first time freshman persist and a higher rate if they get into the application process early. This has become increasingly true also for transfer students. It would be wise to look at strategies to engage students who enter the process late in a deeper understanding of the JBU community. Another factor to look at would be how campus visits affect retention – both how many visits and timing of visits.

Graduation rates are not included because the first cohort with available data is the 2008 cohort. This will be added in the future.
The data seems to indicate that students from further away (California, Colorado, Other, International) have generally persisted at a greater rate than those who are close. Perhaps, easy access to going home and having more friends in the region play into that. We should look into strategies of encouraging students to be part of something at JBU that is important to them – we have these opportunities academically, spiritually, and socially. One question is how to get students to take advantage of these.
One area that is often cited as a major factor in retention is finances. The data confirms that students are generally more likely to retain and graduate if they have lower loan amounts and/or higher scholarship amounts. Perhaps a stronger emphasis on the value of a JBU education will help in this area. Interventions with students receiving less than $5000 in institutional aid should be considered.
Data by type of high school attended

There does not appear to be any consistent difference in persistence based on the type of secondary education the student had.
The cohort size for off-campus freshmen is small – averaging less than 5% of the total cohort. It is clear, however that our freshmen commuters are missing out on something that helps connect them to the institution. This has become increasingly applicable to transfers, as well.
On the whole, our athletes persist at rates similar to those of the student body. There is great year-to-year variation within individual sports. The cohort sizes of most sports and for transfers by sport are too small to be treated separately.
CONCLUSIONS

Since the formation of the Student Success Team (SST) in 2010, our retention rates have increased. Each of the past three cohorts have retained at 82% or higher. There are still groups of students whom we may be able to serve better. We have built a predictive model to identify matriculating students who are at risk of not returning. The model is being refined each year and this year will include a mid semester revision. Use of the early alert system and the response of the SST seems to have had a positive impact.

The areas where intervention might have the biggest impact are:
   Students who apply to JBU in late spring
   Students from Arkansas and Oklahoma
   Students living off-campus during their first year, both first year students and transfers
   Students with average ACT scores (22 – 26) continue to retain at lower than expected rates.

Other factors
Suggestions for other factors to research are welcome.