



## Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

- Gurkan Akalin
- Cindy Boyer
- Dagni Bredesen
- Mona Davenport
- Joe Eichman, secretary
- Jacquelyn Frank
- Jennifer Hedges
- Shelley James
- Alexis Jones
- Josh Norman
- Karla Sanders, chair
- Jody Stone
- Ed Treadwell
- Tanya Willard
- Melody Wollan
- Jie Zou

For other retention information, go to our web site at <http://castle.eiu.edu/~core>

## Retention Increases for FA18 Cohort

CORE's retention data indicates that 73.6% of the FA18 cohort returned and were enrolled at 10th day FA19. This is an increase of 3.35% from the retention for the FA17 cohort of new freshmen.

In addition to looking at the class as a whole, CORE also analyzes retention by the eight risk factors indicated as the most predominant factors relating to retention. The chart below shows those risk factors by order of importance for retention. With the exception of the factor of 60% or less of need met, students with each factor had a lower retention rate than the class overall with financial aid verification having the lowest retention rate. This risk factor is very important because students not cleared to receive financial aid

part in their decision to stay at EIU. The later they are admitted, the less likely first-time students are to return for their second year. This factor indicates their level of commitment to Eastern as well as to college in general.

Academic preparedness as signaled by ACT composite score and high school grade point average is the third factor that seems the most significant to retention.

While still lower than the overall population's retention rate, the retention rate for ethnic minorities rose this year as well from 63.1% for the FA17 cohort to 66.8% for the FA18 freshmen.

CORE's retention analysis also includes examining the retention of student groups by admission status,

FA18 Freshmen Retained to FA19	
Variable	% Retained
Financial Need Gap \$7000 or more	64.12%
% Financial Need Met 60% or less	73.70%
Financial Aid Verification	40.54%
Academic Index (ACT Composite & HS GPA combined)	60.84%
HS GPA 2.9 or lower	60.73%
Admit Month March or later	58.52%
Ethnicity (Hispanic, African-Am, Multi-racial, International)	66.84%
Chicago Public School	61.32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73.67%</b>

have a difficult time paying for college, and last year because of issues at the federal level, more students were pulled for verification than usual.

We are also seeing the month students are admitted as playing a

first generation, and where they reside. The chart on the next page offers three years of retention data for several cohorts of new freshmen.

During the budget crisis, Eastern's retention rates dipped as even

## FA18 to FA19 retention cont.

current students decided to leave the state for college.

Provisional admit students include students in the Gateway Program, review admits, and SAGA students. These students are our most at-risk because they do not meet our standard admittance criteria; these students often also have

students who may need academic help. We can encourage students to get academic help at the Academic Success Center through its workshops and one-on-one meetings with students.

Faculty members can use the Early Alert System and direct students to tutoring services in their departments. Students with lower high school gpas

are not bringing the skills with them to college to help them be successful; these students often relied on family members or teachers to remind them of deadlines and prod them to study and do their work on time. Those supports do not come with them at college, and these students struggle with recognizing they need to reach out for help or support to do well.

Although retention for most groups was up a few percentages points from the prior year's freshman to sophomore retention rate,

3 Years of Retention by Population			
Cohort	FA16	FA17	FA18
All new freshmen	73.87%	70.32%	73.67%
Provisional admit students	59.30%	51.50%	55.80%
First generation	66.88%	68.40%	71.16%
HS gpa below 2.5	54.55%	49.48%	54.55%
HS gpa below 2.9	63.64%	55.11%	60.73%
Honors	93.51%	95.83%	87.88%
Commuters	78.95%	65.22%	78.95%
Ethnic minorities	67.45%	63.16%	66.84%
3 or more risk factors	60.34%	60.88%	62.94%
2 or fewer risk factors	82.22%	88.32%	84.79%

the other at-risk factors that help predict who will persist and succeed and who will leave (see the list of variables on the front page in the chart). The retention rate for this group of students rose 4% this year.

The first generation status is very close to the overall retention rate and shows an increase from the FA17 cohort. In FA18, 40% of the freshman class were first generation college students, which is defined as not having a parent who completed a four-year degree. Forty percent is the average for first generation students in our undergraduate population.

As is evidenced by our retention numbers, high school grade point average can be a good predictor of student success. As of FA19, this group of students had an average of 1.87 cumulative gpa at EIU; 39% of this group currently have a gpa at EIU over a 2.0.

Encouraging students to seek help from their faculty members in office hours and to use the academic resources available through tutoring and the writing center are things we can all do for

one group did drop: honors students. This group still had a retention rate well above the overall rate for the class. Only 13% of this group had more than 1 risk factor; 38% had the % of need met at less than 60%.

Commuter students had an increase of 13% from the previous year. Students living on-campus had a retention rate of 73.3%, which coincides with the overall retention since 92.9% of the class lived on-campus. CORE has shared retention information with Housing, which has noted that the halls where more class levels are integrated to live together the higher the retention rates. Lincoln Hall had the highest retention rate at 88.89% followed closely by Weller Hall at 87.04%. Pemberton, Lawson, and Ford had the lowest rates at 61.5%, 61.7%, and 62.5% respectively.

For its retention numbers CORE includes first-time students who start in the summer as well as fall terms, so the official data that is reported to IPEDS from the Office of Planning and Institutional Research may differ slightly.

## A Look at the FA19 Freshmen

This year there are 925 students who began as new freshmen in the summer or fall. CORE has analyzed this group of students in terms of our risk factors, and the news is largely positive.

The table below compares the percentage of each class with each of the risk factors that we track as predictors of persistence.

The lower the percentage of students with each variable the less risk overall for attrition and the greater the potential to increase the retention rate.

Each of the financial predictors shows a decrease of the population with each variable.

Only 18% of this year's freshmen have a need gap of \$7,000 or more; this is a decrease of 3.4% from the previous fall. While a little over a third have the percentage of need met at 60% or less, this is down 2.8% from FA18. And, the percentage of the class that still had financial aid verification at 10th day in the fall was down to 1.1%, which is the lowest it has been since we started tracking this variable. This 1% makes up 10 students. Ten percent of the class had more than one financial risk factor compared to 16.4% of FA18 new freshmen, so that is a decrease of 6%.

In addition to the lower percentage of the class with the financial risk factors, we also see some improvement in the

academic profile of this class. Less than a third of the class—29.9%—had a high school GPA of 2.9 or lower; this shows a decrease of 4.9% from FA18 and a decrease of 11.4% from the FA17 cohort. Even more positive is the percentage of the class with a high school GPA above a 3.0. This year 62.1% of the class

from 11.7% in FA18.

With the number of standard admit students falling during the years of the budget impasse, the percentage of the provisional admission students in the class grew to 25.8% in FA16 and FA17; this percentage dropped to 21.5% in FA18 and 19.2% this fall.

**Freshman Cohorts & % of Class with Each Factor**

Variable	FA16	FA17	FA18	FA19
Need Gap of \$7,000 or more	16.9%	19.7%	21.5%	18.1%
% of Need Met at 60% or less	36.2%	39.2%	39.0%	36.2%
Financial Aid Verification	2.3%	3.0%	4.7%	1.1%
Academic Index	41.7%	48.6%	42.0%	45.5%
HS GPA 2.9 or lower	39.8%	41.3%	34.8%	29.9%
Admit Month March or later	18.4%	24.2%	17.1%	15.7%
Ethnicity (Hispanic, African-American, Multi-ethnic, International)	44.1%	50.3%	48.1%	48.1%
Chicago Public Schools	13.2%	16.2%	13.4%	16.1%
Total Number of Students	773	656	790	925

is in this range. CORE data indicate that high school GPA is a bigger indicator of student persistence and success than ACT or SAT scores, so this increase in the number of students with a B average or higher in high school is very promising for the success of this year's class.

The class ACT profile also looks better with this class. Twenty-five percent of this fall's freshman class had an ACT composite below 20 compared to 33.4% in FA18. The FA19 freshmen also have a higher percentage of the class in the 23-25 ACT composite range. However, the percentage of the class with an ACT of 26 or higher has dropped slightly to 10.2%

The numbers of students in these programs—Gateway, review admit, and SAGA—has remained relatively stable. When our retention rate was routinely 80%, this population was approximately 15% of the freshman class. These students come in at-risk because of their ACT scores and high school academic records.

The percentage of students who matriculated with a March or later admit month also dropped by 1.4%. Our data indicates that students who apply to the University earlier tend to be committed and stay—even when they have other risk factors.

## Retention Scholarship Trial Successful

While students drop out of college for a myriad of reasons, we know that financial factors often play an important role in the final decision to leave college without a degree. In fact, three of Eastern's 8 risk factors are financial.

In SP19, the President and the EIU Foundation gave CORE funds to provide \$1,000 grants to new freshmen who still had an unpaid balance at the end of March.

These students were not going to be able to register with their class because of business office holds and were at-risk of attrition because of these balances.

Students who were new freshmen in FA18 who had a balance of \$1000 or more, were in good standing, were on target to earn 30 credits their first year, and who could accept more aid were

in this pool. CORE had \$50,000 to award with the help of the Financial Aid Office.

Students were notified of this grant via email and were asked to meet with staff members in the Office of Financial Aid in order to have a financial counseling session and to accept the one time grant.

Several students replied with thank you notes. Here is what one said, "Thanks to your support, I will be able to enjoy another semester here at Eastern Illinois University. When I visited EIU for the first time, I immediately felt as if I was at home. During my campus visit, everyone was so friendly and welcoming. My positive experience led me to make the decision that EIU was the place that I wanted to call my home

away from home while taking the next step in my life to work towards my career."

As of census day in FA19, these students had a 90% retention rate from spring to fall. Seventy-six percent of these students had at least one financial risk factor compared to 46% of the freshman cohort. On average, this group of students had 3.4 risk factors compared to 2.7 for the whole class.

Despite having more risk factors, the extra grant money seems to have made a difference in this group of students' ability to pay their tuition and stay in school.

Ninety-three percent of the students who received the grant and are enrolled this fall are in good standing with the University.

## Social Belonging Pilot

This summer Eastern was contacted by the Partnership for College Completion, which was partnering with the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Poverty Lab at the University of Chicago to conduct a pilot of a "research-based, video-based social belonging intervention program targeting new college freshmen." Eastern was invited to be part of the second pilot of this program. The first year research was conducted at Northern Illinois University, Robert Morris University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The researchers are seeking to determine if a "video-based intervention can have a significant positive impact on first-year students' retention." They are particularly interested in targeting traditionally underrepresented populations who might experience "belonging uncertainty." Students may think that common transition issues are signals that they do not belong in college. These things may include homesickness, roommate conflict, or

struggles with courses or professors that many students encounter.

This program posits that helping students understand that such experiences are normal in the college transition and will get better with time can aid in their sense of belonging in college. The goal is to help increase persistence and graduation with developing a sense of belonging.

University Foundations students participated in a video and classroom discussion or a video and a self-guided program to help determine the best intervention related to a sense of belonging. Our UF instructors were trained at the beginning of the semester in how to lead these discussions. Students watched videos produced last year in which students at UIC talked about their own transitions—being the first in their family to attend college, struggling with loneliness, and academic difficulties.