



Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

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Semester Start Factors into Success

Each Spring and Summer, New Student and Family Programs welcomes the newest transfer students and first-time freshmen, including new international students, to campus during Orientation. These newest community members include veterans and active duty military members, 18-year-old recent high school graduates, and non-traditional aged students with families of their own. Their majors span across all of the colleges, and include everything from Accounting to World Languages and Cultures, and everything in between.

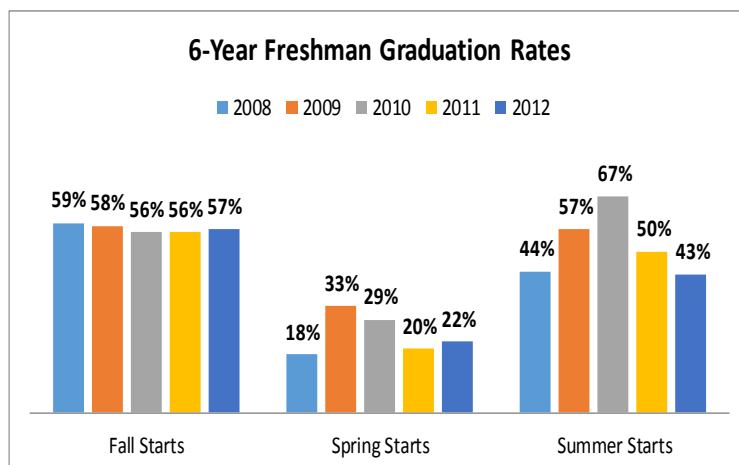
CORE recently reviewed success rates for those students starting in the Spring and Summer and compared that data to those who start in the Fall. The data showed that retention and graduation rates are significantly lower for students starting in Spring and Summer.

The chart above shows the most recent graduation data for freshman cohorts, and the spring starts have significantly lower graduation rates than the fall starts. Summer starts are more erratic. While the average number of freshmen who begin college in the spring is very small (23 on average at EIU), this is a disturbing finding. Summer starts averaged 13 students until 2012 when the Summer Institute began.

There is also a difference when we examine retention rates. Fall start

students during a 10-year time span (2007-2017) had on average a 79% retention rate compared to spring starts with a 57% retention rate and summer starts with a 69% retention rate.

Approximately, 90% of summer start students are juniors, seniors, or graduate students, and 80% are taking all classes online. These statistics show that summer start students pose additional challenges to campus involvement, retention, and graduation.



Once the differences in retention and graduation rates were discovered, we also examined other factors that might tell us more about these students. We found a difference in the average high school grade point average among the semester starts. The high school gpa average for fall starts was 3.07 compared to 2.93 for spring starts and 2.73 for summer starts. ACT composite averages were very similar with 21.28 for fall, 21.55 for spring, and 21.92 for summer.

Minority students who begin in a fall semester had a 47% 6-year

Semester Start cont.

graduation rate compared to those minority students who began in a spring term (17%) or summer semester (39%).

CORE also examined the retention and graduation rates of transfer students by start term. Again, fall starts were above the spring and summer starts with fall transfer retention at 85% with spring at 79% and summer at 78%.

Additionally, while transfer students show less difference in their graduation rates by term start, fall starts are still consistently higher than spring and summer (see the chart to the left). The overall graduation rate for transfer fall starts is 68% compared to 63% for spring and 60% for summer. Transfer students who are minorities had less of a difference in graduation rates by term started with 59% for fall and summer and 51% for spring.

Transfer students who begin in fall semester had a 3.16 average incoming grade point average compared to 3.26 for spring and 3.45 for summer. This trend is the reverse of freshman averages.

International students had an average of 81% graduation rate for fall starts, and 24% for spring starts and 20% for summer beginning students. This suggests that it is critical to bring new international students in at the beginning of a school year.

The average number of transfer students who start at Eastern in the spring is 341 for this time period; the average number of summer starts for transfers is 77 compared to 1000 fall start averages for these cohorts.

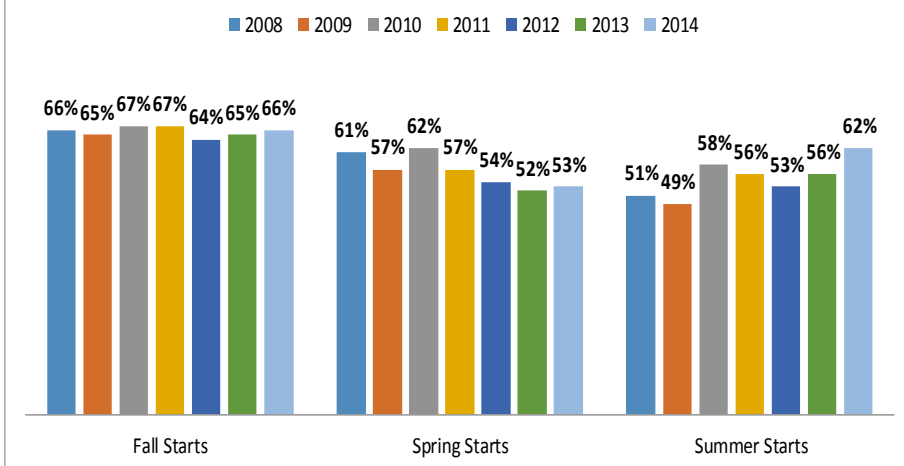
Research has consistently shown that the first six weeks of a semester are a time of tremendous transition for new students. During that time, students typically experience the first ups and downs of life at college, away from the familiarity of friends and family, and with unfamiliar academic expectations.

The first six weeks can look quite a bit different for students starting in the Spring and Summer in comparison to those starting in the Fall. Social constructs are different, offered experiences are

different, it's not the beginning of a new academic year, but the start of a new semester.

Because of these differences, new students may need extra help to connect with their peers, faculty, community and additional resources. In response to this potential need, CORE has created a new

4-Year Transfer Graduation Rates



notification to provide a list for instructors during the first week of Spring and Summer classes of those students who are new to campus with relevant information for each student in their assigned section. The communication encourages instructors to reach out to their new students and get a sense of how their transition is going. It also lists campus resources that might be helpful.

Ultimately, we hope that these new email communications result in additional support for these new students, when they need it. CORE encourages departments also to consider ways to invite students to join departmental groups and organizations each semester.

We are continuing to brainstorm other ways to support these students including additional contact from New Student and Family Programs, as well as the Office of Inclusion and Academic Engagement. If you have any great ideas on how to bolster the success of students starting their education in the Spring or Summer, please feel free to share them with any CORE member.

Need-Based Awards to Help with Retention

CORE has known for some time that financial factors can have an impact on student attrition. Some students simply cannot afford to stay in school—even taking into account Eastern's affordability and financial aid packages.

Our retention prediction model shows that the top three risk factors for EIU new freshmen are financial: a need gap of \$7,000 or more; a percentage of need met at 60% or less, and verification. This year because of some issues at the federal level with verification, more students than ever were selected for verification.

In FA17 to FA18 the overall retention rate was 70%, but for students with a \$7,000 need gap or more it was 64%. Likewise, students who remained in verification had a 21% retention rate to the next year. Surprisingly,

students with a 60% or less of need met were retained at 73%, indicating that the percentage of this factor may have shifted since the predictor was created.

This year, thanks to President Glassman and the EIU Foundation, monies have been made available to ease the burden of new freshmen with financial need.

The Foundation has raised \$40,000 to help new freshman this academic year. Forty \$1,000 awards will be given to students with an account balance and a large gap between expected family contribution and their financial aid package.

At its most recent meeting in March, CORE members discussed how best to employ the \$40,000 earmarked for this endeavor. Students who were

on track to make satisfactory academic progress were the first cut for the awards; that is, students who will earn 30 credits in their first year and who are in good academic standing. The next cut was for students who owe at least \$1000. The next criteria was based on financial need and the package itself; students had to be able to accept more aid.

The Office of Financial Aid will have individual counseling meetings with the students given the awards to help them understand aid and how to maximize their awards, including tips on FAFSA filing and aid refunds.

CORE hopes that this additional aid will help students afford school and enable them to return for FA19.

Alumni Satisfaction with EIU Strong

This summer/fall Eastern conducted an alumni survey with people who had graduated in 2017 (1 year out), 2013 (5 years out), and 2008 (10 years from graduation). These years follow prior alumni surveys that had been mandated by the state to occur each year on a 1-year, 5-year, 9-year rotating basis.

Alums were first contacted via email and asked to complete the survey, and then surveys were mailed to the homes of people who did not respond via email. We had a 17% overall return rate with 666 former students

responding.

Overall, 96.4% of respondents indicated having a positive attitude toward EIU. Forty-five percent had gone on to pursue or complete an additional degree. Of those alums, 95.7% felt that Eastern prepared them well or adequately to continue their education.

Ninety-four percent of respondents indicated they were employed full- or part-time, and 90.2% were satisfied with their current job. Nearly 75% secured their first job within 6 months of graduation.

Alumni were given the chance to comment on their experience

at Eastern as well. Here's a small sample of what they had to say:

- ♦ "I made so many meaningful connections with the people in my classes and my professors. We didn't just go to classes together. We learned, leaned on, supported, and encouraged each other. Eastern created the atmosphere for us to do that" (2017 alum).
- ♦ "I loved everything about EIU. I especially loved the small town feel, but the many opportunities that were available to be involved" (2008 alum).

Alumni cont.

- ♦ “Eastern helped prepare me for not only the content of what I needed to know but also the interpersonal skills I would need for my working life” (2013 alum).
- ♦ “Eastern was a place that catalyzed my innate desire to live an adventure and make a difference. I still bleed blue” (2013 alum).
- ♦ “EIU was a tight-knit community where I felt like I could go to any professor or student for help/advice. My peers and professors had a passion for what they were doing, and it helped instill in me a drive to work” (2017 alum)
- ♦ “The most positive impact on my experience at EIU was the people. Every student, staff, and administrator cares about everyone. On multiple occasions, I remember being in professors’ offices or talking after class just about life and what I would be doing next after graduating. It was those moments that I am truly thankful that I came to Eastern Illinois University, where professors don’t just teach and leave. They are actively trying to help you grow and develop into the best person you can possibly be. If you are at Eastern, you don’t just have a campus community, you have a family” (2017 alum).

Fall to Spring Retention

While fall-to-fall retention is what is reported to IPEDS and used to compare institutions, CORE also analyzes fall to spring retention to spot trends and try to act on them to decrease attrition. When Eastern’s retention held steady at 80%, approximately 11-12% of the class left after that first semester, indicating how important those first few weeks of college can be.

However, the number of students that leave after the second semester has grown, so CORE recently compared retention patterns fall to spring.

The FA16 and FA17 freshmen cohorts showed lower retention rates from fall to spring for nearly all of the risk factors. For those two classes, only the % of need met students were above the average retention rate, and then, only for FA16. This year’s class had only three factors whose retention rate was below the overall: the need gap of \$7000 or more, the academic index (high school gpa and ACT), and ethnicity. And, even those factors were within 1-2% of the overate rate. These data, shown in the chart below, provide hopeful signs that our fall -to-fall rate will increase for the FA18 class.

Students admitted through one of our conditional admission programs also saw an increase in their

fall to spring retention with Gateway at 85% for FA18 compared to 70% for FA17 and 81% for FA16. Review admit students had a 78% retention rate compared to 75% FA17 and 89% FA16.

FA18 students who were the first in their family to attend college had an 85% retention rate compared to 83% FA17 and 84% FA16, so the first generation students were only 1% below all students.

The only group below whose retention was lower for FA18 were the honors students, who still have a high rate at 89%

Variable	FA16	FA17	FA18
Need Gap	81%	47%	84%
% Need Met	92%	64%	86%
Verification	77%	75%	89%
Academic Index	83%	77%	85%
HS GPA 2.9	84%	70%	86%
Admit Month	82%	79%	89%
Ethnicity	85%	84%	85%
Overall	88%	86%	86%