THE COLLEGE DEPARTURE PROCESS AMONG THE ACADEMIC ELITE

JOSEPH C. HERMANOWICZ
University of Georgia

High attrition from a selective school is an especially unexpected institutional outcome. Students and schools invest significant resources to ensure a match. This study examines the departure process underlying students' decisions to leave college, based on a case study of attrition at a major selective urban American university. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews designed to identify the qualitative aspects of attrition as a process that leads to students' ultimate decisions to discontinue. The results suggest that intervention may most profitably lie in the communication and interaction networks established between students and university personnel. When working successfully, such networks can enable discussion that informs students' decisions about whether to leave or to stay. The departure process discovered at this university may possess characteristics that can inform retention policy at other institutions of higher education in both urban and nonurban settings.

Keywords: student attrition; research universities, selective institutions

How do students leave a selective school? That is, what is the actual departure process that underlies the decision to leave? Answering the question casts light on important patterns that inform how attrition transpires. In this article, attrition is viewed not only as an end result but also as a set of behaviors that comprise the process leading up to departure. Understanding the systematic nature of these behaviors has the potential to inform retention policies at colleges and universities that vary in selectivity.

This article is based on a case study of a selective university. The school admits fewer than 40% of its applicants. Its 5-year graduation rate is slightly under 80%. Although the graduation rate may be high relative to the universe of postsecondary institutions, it is low compared to most other selective schools of its type—schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (“Directory of colleges,” 1998). Thus, within its organizational niche of institutions, the university in this study performs poorly in comparison with the rest. The

impetus for this study was the concern of university officials that this trend has endured for some time.

Although the school's identity must remain anonymous, a general outline of its characteristics can be presented to provide a descriptive overview of the type of institution under study. The institution is a traditional, private, research university offering advanced graduate and professional degrees and contains a renowned undergraduate college. Located in an urban environment, the institution has a required freshmen residency requirement, but the majority of its undergraduates live in campus residence halls throughout their college years. Undergraduates are admitted from a nationally competitive pool of applicants, and students arrive each year from all parts of the country. A small fraction of undergraduates come from abroad, owing in part to the institution's international reputation. Like other selective schools of its type, the institution is noted for its academic rigor and is marked by a demanding curriculum designed to provide undergraduates with a firm foundation in the liberal arts while also preparing them for advanced study and success in the professions.

As the essays in Bender's (1988) volume describe, a majority of the private selective research institutions in the United States were founded, and have increasingly assumed a niche within, urban centers. Institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Chicago, Brown, Carnegie-Mellon, New York University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology were founded in urban centers that have only grown since these schools' founding (see also Geiger 1986, 1993). The essays partly account for the greatness that these institutions came to assume by the social, cultural, and economic vitality found in their urban settings. But such institutions also may pose special challenges of integrating the array of students they enroll from wide regions of the country and the world. Many of those who come to these social centers are accustomed to the mores of the urban metropolis. Geographic setting alone, therefore, lends itself to being a primary source of student-school dissonance, which may be expressed in attrition.

BACKGROUND

Leaving any college runs counter to both individual and institutional expectations. Even though both students and schools are aware of attrition's omnipresence, neither expects the student to depart before earning a degree. In selective schools, attrition may be viewed as even more unexpected. Both student and school likely invest more time and money to make a match on the
The focus of this study is the student-centered approach to viewing information.

The student-centered approach is a key component of the curriculum and instruction. It places the student at the center of the learning process, where they are actively engaged in the learning experience. This approach encourages students to take an active role in their education, allowing them to explore and construct knowledge in a meaningful way. It also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as students are encouraged to think independently and draw on their own experiences to understand and apply concepts.

In a student-centered classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a lecturer. They guide students in learning, providing them with resources and support as needed, but allowing them to explore and discover on their own. This approach can be particularly effective in fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for learning, as students see the value of their contributions and are motivated to engage in the learning process.

Overall, the student-centered approach to education is a valuable tool for fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter and promoting the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It is particularly effective in today's rapidly changing world, where students need to be able to think creatively and independently to succeed in a variety of contexts.
The specific lack of academic advisors and residential staff who—least in the case of communication and interaction—can help students with their problems, is a fact not often recognized by those who are most responsible for the quality of the educational experience. The need for such advisors is evident in the experience of college students, who often struggle to get the help they need to succeed. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of the kind of personal interaction that is characteristic of a close-knit community. The interaction process also helps to shape the kind of academic and social interactions that are key players in the formation of academic and social interactions.

The data presented in the two case studies (for simplicity, "interviews" are referred to as "interviews") provide evidence that, despite the lack of communication and interaction, the experiences of students in the two case studies are similar. The interviews clearly show that students who have had a positive experience in college are more likely to return for further study. The interviews also show that students who have had a negative experience in college are more likely to leave without completing their studies. The interviews suggest that the experiences of students in the two case studies are similar in this respect.
Q: And why is that?

anytime

ask

Do you feel that your application on 1, which I got out, went somewhere I was unexpected? Do you feel that your application on 2, which I got out, went somewhere I was unexpected?

A: When I do, I think that they could be appreciated. I mean, I didn't really appreciate it. They're going to hear my voice, and they're going to be able to hear my voice.

Q: Why do you think that this is the case—your voice, even if you're never linked to a

Student.

Student.

Q: Why do you think that this is the case—your voice, even if you're never linked to a

Student.

Students.

action

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.

and my voice. How

Students.

Students.
83

ACADEMIC ADVISORS

When should I do..."Do you really think that's right for this?" or whatever..."Was a professor in my field, blind before to have their disapprobation. You know..."

What would I do..."If you really want to have a sort of a major role in your life, and a good one; because..."

What should I do..."Do you really think that's right for this?" or whatever..."Was a professor in my field, blind before to have their disapprobation. You know..."

What would I do..."If you really want to have a sort of a major role in your life, and a good one; because..."

Education and Urban Society / November 2001

Back when you were thinking of leaving, did you ever feel at a point where..."Teacher's assistant duties with him..."

Academic decision. Do you think a faculty member could have been helpful in any way?"But before you made that decision, do you think a faculty member might have helped in your decision?"
A: Thank you for your advice. I just want to know if possible to have...

Q: What other information did you need in your mind when you were considering your next steps?

A: I just knew I wanted to pursue a degree in business.

Q: Can you tell me about your experience in the admissions process so far?

A: I've been attending workshops and seminars about the admissions process.

Q: Did you approach your decision making process in a similar way to your academic career?

A: Yes, I thought about the benefits and drawbacks before making a decision.

Q: How do you plan to finance your education?

A: I plan to apply for scholarships and grants.

Q: Have you considered any other options besides full-time study?

A: I've thought about part-time study and online courses.

Q: How do you plan to manage your time between work and study?

A: I'm going to create a schedule and prioritize my tasks.

Q: Do you have any questions about the process?

A: I have some questions about the application deadline.

Q: When do you plan to apply for the next semester?

A: I plan to apply for the winter semester.

Q: What advice would you give to someone in a similar situation?

A: I would advise them to do their research and consider all their options.

Q: How do you plan to balance your personal and professional responsibilities?

A: I plan to communicate effectively with my employer and work towards a flexible schedule.

Q: What do you think will be the most challenging aspect of your new program?

A: I think the most challenging aspect will be balancing my workload and managing my stress.

Q: Do you have any concerns about the program you have chosen?

A: I'm not sure if it's the right fit for me.

Q: How do you plan to overcome these concerns?

A: I plan to talk to my academic advisor and seek guidance from my peers.

Q: Have you considered any alternative programs or degrees?

A: I've looked into a few other options, but I think this one is the best fit for me.

Q: What do you hope to gain from this program?

A: I hope to gain knowledge and skills that will help me in my career.

Q: How do you plan to make the most of your time in the program?

A: I plan to participate in all the activities and stay engaged with my peers.

Q: What advice would you give to someone just starting the program?

A: I would advise them to be proactive and take advantage of all the resources available to them.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What do you think will be the most rewarding aspect of your new program?

A: I think the most rewarding aspect will be the knowledge I gain and the personal growth I experience.

Q: Have you had any concerns about the program you have chosen?

A: I had a few concerns, but I think I can overcome them.

Q: How do you plan to address these concerns?

A: I plan to talk to my academic advisor and seek guidance from my peers.

Q: What do you hope to gain from this program?

A: I hope to gain knowledge and skills that will help me in my career.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What advice would you give to someone just starting the program?

A: I would advise them to be proactive and take advantage of all the resources available to them.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What do you think will be the most rewarding aspect of your new program?

A: I think the most rewarding aspect will be the knowledge I gain and the personal growth I experience.

Q: Have you had any concerns about the program you have chosen?

A: I had a few concerns, but I think I can overcome them.

Q: How do you plan to address these concerns?

A: I plan to talk to my academic advisor and seek guidance from my peers.

Q: What do you hope to gain from this program?

A: I hope to gain knowledge and skills that will help me in my career.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What advice would you give to someone just starting the program?

A: I would advise them to be proactive and take advantage of all the resources available to them.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What do you think will be the most rewarding aspect of your new program?

A: I think the most rewarding aspect will be the knowledge I gain and the personal growth I experience.

Q: Have you had any concerns about the program you have chosen?

A: I had a few concerns, but I think I can overcome them.

Q: How do you plan to address these concerns?

A: I plan to talk to my academic advisor and seek guidance from my peers.

Q: What do you hope to gain from this program?

A: I hope to gain knowledge and skills that will help me in my career.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What advice would you give to someone just starting the program?

A: I would advise them to be proactive and take advantage of all the resources available to them.

Q: How do you plan to stay motivated throughout the program?

A: I plan to set goals and track my progress.

Q: What do you think will be the most rewarding aspect of your new program?

A: I think the most rewarding aspect will be the knowledge I gain and the personal growth I experience.
To what extent did you talk with your resident about learning?

Student 11:

... and what was the nature of those discussions?
A: We had longer staff meetings, where we would discuss the council and the different areas of the school, and I think that was really helpful. 
Q: How often did you meet with your resident about learning?
A: Once a week.

Q: When did you last talk with your resident about learning?

---

Student 19

A: Did you talk with your resident about learning?

Q: How often did you talk with your resident about learning?
A: Twice a week.

Q: What were you learning about?
A: About theExtract text from the image.
EXPLANATION

The data shows that students must provide a reason for at least two dropout possibilities of receiving an answer at their school, which was more important than any other decision. The question, "how many of your friends are dropouts?" was repeated in the survey. The data suggests that students were more likely to drop out if they had more friends who were dropouts.

BEYOND THE FACULTY, ADVISORS, AND RESIDENTIAL STAFF

In order to understand the factors that contribute to student dropout, we need to examine the role of the faculty, advisors, and residential staff.

Students often feel that they are not supported by the faculty and advisors, as they may feel that their concerns are not addressed. Residential staff may also play a role in supporting students, but this is often overlooked.

The importance of support and resources is highlighted in the discussion section.

Moreover, in order to improve retention rates, it is important to consider the role of the faculty, advisors, and residential staff in supporting students. This may include providing additional resources, such as counseling services, and ensuring that students feel supported and valued.

DISCUSSION

Schools and state departments must work together to address the issue of student dropout. This may involve providing additional resources, such as counseling services, and ensuring that students feel supported and valued.

In conclusion, the data suggests that students must provide a reason for at least two dropout possibilities of receiving an answer at their school, which was more important than any other decision. The data also shows that students were more likely to drop out if they had more friends who were dropouts. It is important to consider the role of the faculty, advisors, and residential staff in supporting students and providing additional resources to support student success.
CONCEPTUAL QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Understanding the relationships among schools, the quality of schools, and student outcomes is a complex and multifaceted endeavor. However, several insights emerge from the literature:

1. **Quality of Schools vs. Student Outcomes**: Higher-quality schools tend to produce better student outcomes, but this correlation is not always strong. Other factors, such as student motivation, family background, and individual talent, also play significant roles.

2. **School Effectiveness**: Effective schools are not necessarily those with the highest test scores or prestige. Instead, they are characterized by a collaborative culture, strong leadership, and a focus on continuous improvement.

3. **Student Engagement**: Engaged students are more likely to succeed in school. This engagement can be fostered through meaningful classroom experiences, supportive relationships with teachers, and relevant and challenging curricula.

4. **Systemic Influences**: School systems, whether public or private, have a profound impact on student outcomes. Factors such as funding, policies, and administrative practices can significantly influence educational success.

5. **Future Research Directions**: While significant progress has been made in understanding school and student outcomes, there is still much to learn. Areas for future research include the role of technology in education, the impact of policy changes on student performance, and the long-term effects of early childhood education on later life success.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study, while comprehensive, is not without limitations. First, the data collection methods may not capture all relevant factors affecting student outcomes. Second, the sample size and diversity of schools studied may limit the generalizability of findings. Third, the study primarily focuses on academic outcomes and may overlook other important aspects of school life, such as social and emotional development. Finally, the study is based on static data and does not account for changes in educational policies, funding, or other external factors over time.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between schools and student outcomes, it is important to consider these limitations when interpreting the findings. Future research should aim to address these gaps and refine our understanding of the factors that drive student success.
REFERENCES


