

Changes in Retention and Persistence to the Third Year for the 2000 to 2008 Cohorts for UMass Boston and Selected Peers

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Executive Summary

We have been using information from the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) to examine retention, persistence towards the degree, and graduation rates over time and in comparison to similar institutions.

The key finding is that after years of stagnation with a retention rate of about 70%, the retention rates increased to about 75% for the 2006 and 2007 cohorts and to about 77% for the 2008 cohort.

However, the rise in the retention rate that we saw first with the 2006 cohort appears to be directly related to academic policy changes instituted by the Faculty Council in the spring of 2007 that first affected the 2006 cohort. The improved retention of the 2006, 2007 and 2008 cohorts did not result in any improvement in persistence to the third year. Persistence to the third year has not improved at all since the 2004 cohort achieved a third year persistence rate of 61%.

Details of the changes in retention and persistence rates along with some comparison data are presented in the body of this report.

Detailed Narrative

UMass Boston has participated in the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) for several years. CSRDE collects retention, persistence, and degree attainment data on first-time, full-time students from participating members. It currently tracks students out to graduating in the ninth year or continuing to the tenth year at the same school. The information it provides is for the cohort as a whole, by gender, and by race/ethnicity. CSRDE is currently reporting on cohorts from fall 2000 to fall 2008.

Recently, CSRDE has given members the ability to create a peer group of up to 20 participants online and to receive the same level of detail on these peers as the school supplies data on its own students. However, the data for each school is confidential and cannot be reported in an identifiable way. The exception is for retention and 6-year graduation rates for the total cohorts which are available to anyone through the federal Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS). This year, a total of 408 institutions participated in the CSRDE including 138 public Doctoral/Research Extensive and Doctoral/Research Intensive institutions (using the 2000 Carnegie classifications).

We selected our 20 CSRDE peers based on several criteria. First, all were public institutions. Then we selected all current peers and all of the Provost's aspirational peers

who had participated in the 2010 CSRDE. Current peers who participated included Cleveland State University, the University of Illinois-Chicago, the University of Louisville, the University of Memphis, the University of Missouri - Kansas City, and the University of Nevada-Reno. Provost's aspirational peers who participated included George Mason University, Georgia State University, Temple University, the University of Houston, and the University of Memphis.

We also selected members of the Urban 13/21 and of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU). UMass Boston is a founding member of both of these groups. Their commonality is based on the idea of having an urban mission and being of service to and fully integrated within the urban communities in which they reside. We gave priority to the several institutions that, like UMass Boston, belonged to both groups. Then we selected from those who belonged to only one of the groups. The decision regarding those members was based primarily on the student mix looking at the percentage of under-served minority students and the percentage of students receiving federal grant aid.

UMass Boston's Improvement in Retention to the Second Year

UMass Boston has maintained a focus on improving retention, persistence, and graduation rates since at least 2001. For the earliest cohort for which data is available, fall 2000, UMass Boston ranked 17th among the 21 institutions making up the peer group for retention to the second year, but for the most recent cohort reported, fall 2008, UMass Boston improved its rank to 9th. Sixteen of the 21 institutions had improved retention rates from the 2000 to the 2008 cohorts with two, Indiana University/Purdue University Indianapolis and the University of Alabama, Birmingham, having improvements of more than 10%. UMass Boston's improvement of 8.2% was the 4th largest improvement among the 21 institutions.

Changes in Retention by Gender and by Race/Ethnicity

IPEDS does not report retention to the second year by gender or by race/ethnicity. Therefore, we cannot identify the retention rates for the peer institutions by gender or by race/ethnicity. However, in Table 3 on the following page we report our own retention rates for the different groups for fall 2000 and fall 2008 and how those rates ranked among the 21 institutions. We also report the change in our retention rate from the 2000 to the 2008 cohorts and how that change ranked among the peer institutions.

Most of the subgroups improved over the period. The sole exception was the Asian and Pacific Islander (Asian P/I) group where the retention rate dropped from 83.2% to 81.7% and the ranking dropped from 13th to 16th. UMass Boston women were ranked 12th in both years, but improved their retention rate by 3.3% over that period. Every other group improved on both its retention rate and its relative ranking within the group.

The improvement in the overall UMass Boston retention rate was primarily driven by the improvement in the retention of men. Their retention rate improved from 64.3% in 2000 to 78.5% for the 2008 cohort. The 14.2% change was the largest improvement in men's retention among the 21 institutions. Their retention rank among the 21 institutions improved from 19th to 7th.

Black non-Hispanic retention improved by over 10% and the retention rate for the 2008 cohort was 2nd among the 21 institutions. Hispanic retention also improved by more than 10% to move into the top half of the 21 institutions. International student retention improved by almost 17%, and their ranking improved from 13th to 3rd among the institutions.

Among the racial/ethnic groups at UMass Boston, White non-Hispanics were the least likely to return for the second year in both cohorts. However, their rate improved by over 8% which was the 4th highest improvement among the 21 institutions, and their rank improved from last in 2000 to 14th in 2008.

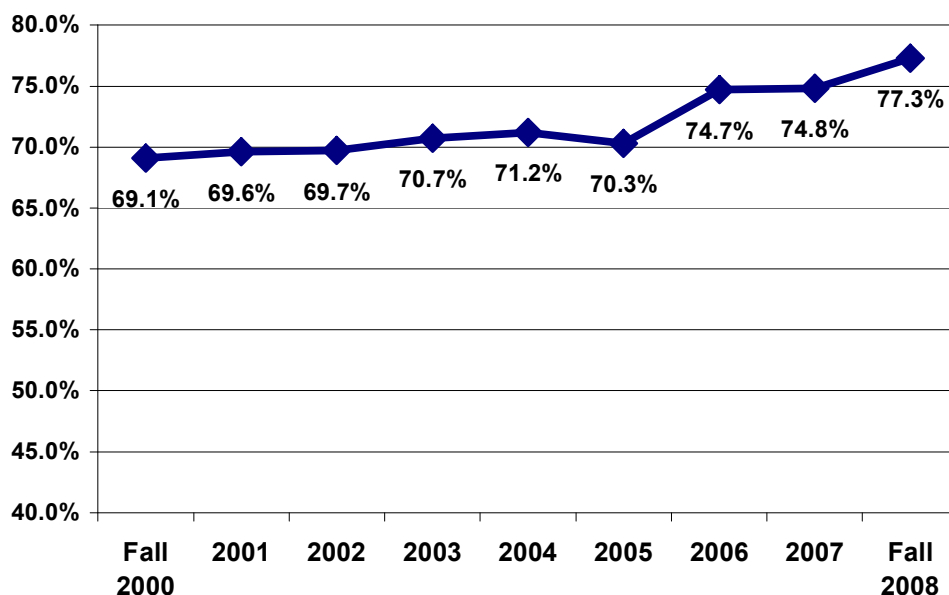
For each racial/ethnic group and by gender, Table 1 below, reports the 2000 retention rate, what rank that rate was among the 21 institutions, the 2008 retention rate and what rank that was in the group, the differences in the retention rates over time, and how the amount of change ranked in the group.

Table 1: UMass Boston Changes in Retention by Gender and by Race/Ethnicity With Rankings within the Overall Group

Cohort	2000 Retention	2000 Retention Rank	2008 Retention	2008 Retention Rank	Retention Difference	Change in Retention Rate Rank
Women	73.0%	12	76.3%	12	3.3%	7
Men	64.3%	19	78.5%	7	14.2%	1
Asian P/I	83.2%	13	81.7%	16	-1.5%	17
Black non-Hispanic	77.3%	8	87.6%	2	10.3%	3
Hispanic	64.3%	15	76.0%	10	11.7%	6
International Student	73.3%	13	90.2%	3	16.9%	5
Unknown Race/Ethnicity	71.6%	7 of 14	84.6%	2 of 16	13.0%	1 of 14
White non-Hispanic	61.8%	21	70.5%	14	8.7%	4
All students	69.1%	17	77.3%	9	8.2%	4

The changes were not steady over the 2000 to 2008 period. When we looked at changes in retention on a year to year basis, we could see that the rate was relatively stagnant from 2000 to 2005, but that it improved markedly with the 2006 cohort. The details for the cohorts are presented in Figure1, which follows.

Figure 1: Percent of FT/FT Students Returning for the Second Year



Persistence to the Third Year

We also have comparison data for UMass Boston and the selected peers for the total cohort, by gender, and by race/ethnicity for persistence to the third year. As with the retention rate, we examined the changes in persistence to the third year by comparing the 2000 cohort to the most recent cohort with breakouts by gender and race/ethnicity.

When we looked at persistence to the third year by comparing the earliest year, 2000, to the most recent year, 2007, we found an overall improvement from 54.3% to 59.1%, an increase of almost 5 points. However, we only improved our ranking from 18th to 14th for persistence to the third year for the Total cohort. The 4.8% improvement ranked 10th out of the 21 for the amount of improvement.

Here also, the improvement was driven by the improvement in the male persistence rate. Females declined slightly from 60.7% for 2000 to 60.4% for 2007. The males in the 2000 cohort persisted at only a 46.5 % rate compared to 60.7% for females, a gap of 14.2%. For 2007 cohort, the male persistence rate had improved by 10.8% and was only 3.1% lower than females. The improvement for males was the 4th best of the 21 institutions.

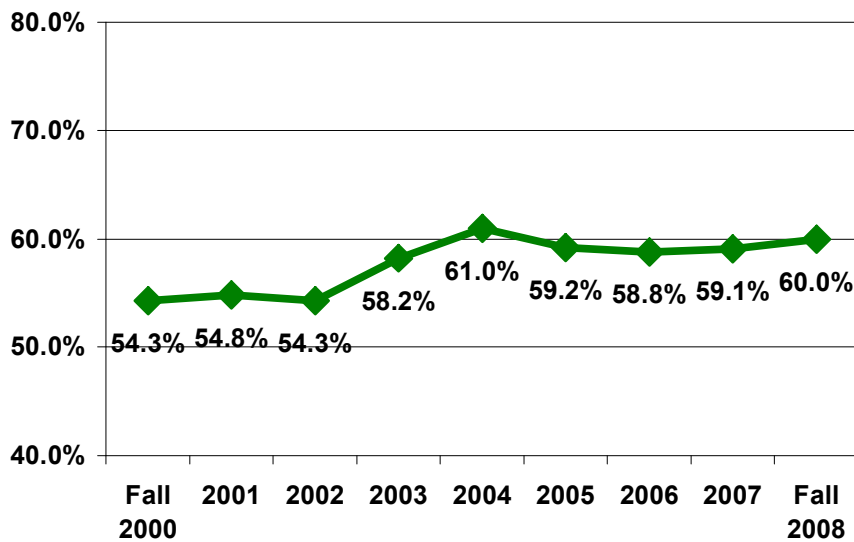
The next largest improvement was for White non-Hispanics whose persistence rate rose from 48.5% to 56%. Their improvement was also 4th best among the 21. Asians improved by 7.2% which was the second highest improvement among the 21. The biggest drop in persistence was for International students whose rate dropped from 60% to 56.4%. Details of the changes in persistence to the third year rates from 2000 to 2007 are presented in Table 2 which follows.

Table 2: UMass Boston Changes in Persistence to the Third Year by Gender and by Race/Ethnicity with Rankings within the Overall Group

Cohort	2000 Persist to the 3rd Year	2000 Persist to the 3rd Year Rank	2007 Persist to the 3rd Year	2007 Persist to the 3rd Year Rank	Persist to the 3rd Year Difference	Rank of Change in Persist Rate
Women	60.7%	13	60.4%	16	-0.3%	14
Men	46.5%	21	57.3%	17	10.8%	4
Asian P/I	66.3%	17	73.5%	11	7.2%	2
Black non-Hispanic	59.1%	9	61.3%	8	2.2%	9
Hispanic	52.4%	13	53.0%	18	0.6%	17
International Student	60.0%	13	56.4%	17	-3.6%	16
Unknown Race/Ethnicity	53.7%	11 of 14	53.5%	13 of 14	-0.2%	11 of 14
White non-Hispanic	48.5%	21	56.0%	19	7.5%	4
All Students	54.3%	18	59.1%	14	4.8%	10

We decided to look at the changes in persistence year by year and found that unlike the retention rate the change in persistence was not stable in the earlier years followed by relatively recent marked improvement. In fact the persistence rate had risen from below 55% in 2000, 2001, and 2002 to a peak of 61% for the 2004 cohort. However, no cohort since the 2004 cohort has had a higher third year persistence rate. Details can be seen in Figure 2, which follows.

Figure 2: Percent of FT/FT Students Persisting to the Third Year



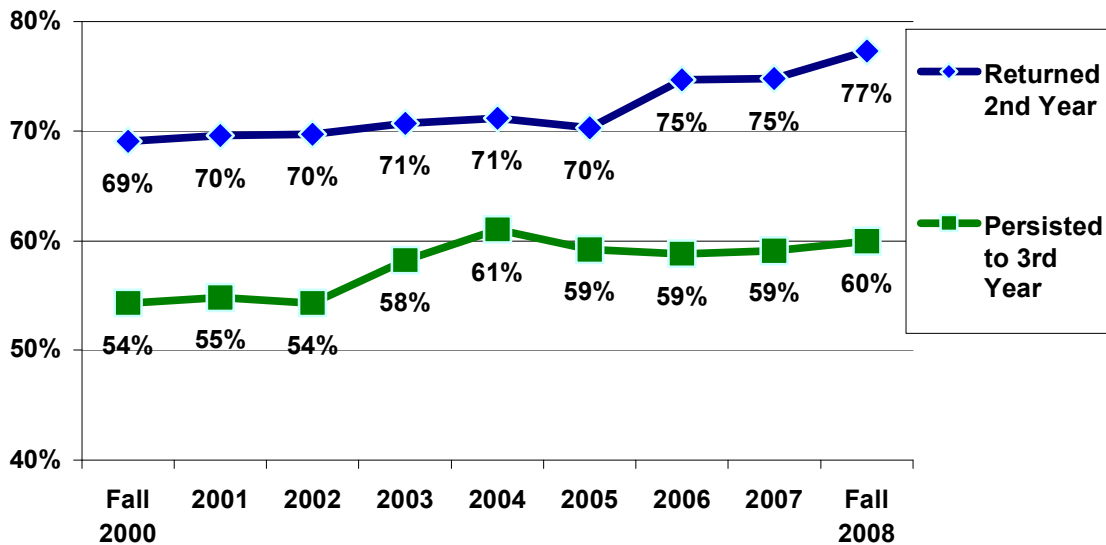
The almost 5% improvement in retention over earlier levels for the 2006 and 2007 cohorts over previous levels did not result in any change in the third year persistence rate for the same cohorts. Further, preliminary figures indicate that about 60% of the 2008 cohort has returned for its third year. This means that while we reduced attrition from the first to the second year by 6.2% between 2004 and 2008, attrition from the second to the third year increased by 7.1% from 10.2% for the 2004 cohort to 17.3% for the 2008 cohort.

The improvement in retention to the second year is completely canceled out by increased attrition from the second to the third year. Professor Marietta Schwartz was the Director of Undergraduate Studies in spring 2007. She has reported that at its March 2007 meeting the Faculty Council approved a motion to insert an “Academic Alert” as a new step in the series of notifications students receive before suspensions, and that at its April 2007 meeting the Faculty Council approved a new category called “Extended Probation”.

These changes would have improved the fall 2006 cohort’s ability to return for fall 2007 with sub-optimal grades while avoiding suspension for at least another semester. The lack of change in persistence to the third year suggests that the new regulations simply moved the attrition behavior back without accomplishing any improvement in progress towards the degree.

The widening gap between retention and persistence to the third year can be seen in Figure 3 which follows.

Figure 3: Retention to the Second Year and Persistence to the Third Year for the Fall 2000 to Fall 2008 Cohorts of FT/FT Students



It appears that the changes in academic regulations in the spring of 2007 allowed students from the 2006 and subsequent cohorts who otherwise would have faced suspension to enroll at UMass Boston for their second year. This resulted in inflation of our retention rate.

The retention to the second year rate is used as a measure of progress towards the degree. However, when we look at persistence to the third year, we see no improvement since 2004. Although we increased our reportable retention rate, we made no progress in improving progress towards the degree which is the ultimate goal.