Effect of Registering Late on Student Retention

Douglas Ducharme Ed.D., Associate Director

The purpose of this report is to present the results from analysis of the effect, if any, that students registering late will have on retention and success.

This analysis focused on all undergraduate degree-seeking students that registered for classes in the fall 2014 semester ($N = 11,995$). New students were considered as a *late register* if they registered after August 1, 2014. Continuing students were considered as a *late register* if they registered after June 1, 2014.

New Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Students

For new undergraduate degree-seeking students (N = 3166), 1,137 registered late, accounting for 35.9% of the group. New transfer students were more likely to register late than first-time freshmen, 47% versus 24% respectively. Of the new transfer students, freshmen transfers (having less than 30 credits) were the most likely to register late at a 60% rate. Table 1 depicts the retention rate for this cohort across different student types. The retention rate is defined as the student returning for the fall 2015 semester.

Table 1: New Undergraduate Student Retention across Student Types, Fall 2014 to 2015

Student Type	N	Late Register n	Late Register Ret Rate	On-time Register n	On-time Register Ret Rate	p	Sig Diff
All New Students	3,166	1,137	72%	2,029	79%	0.000	Yes
Full-time Students	2,641	842	74%	1,799	80%	0.000	Yes
Part-time Students	525	295	69%	230	71%	0.612	No
First-time Freshmen	1,518	363	74%	1,155	79%	0.037	Yes
All Transfer Students	1,648	774	72%	874	79%	0.000	Yes
Freshmen Transfer	307	185	69%	122	75%	0.307	No
Sophomore Transfer	680	304	72%	376	83%	0.001	Yes
Upper Division Transfer	661	285	74%	376	78%	0.271	No

Note. Freshmen Transfer are students that transfer with less than 30 credits; Sophomore Transfer are students that transfer with 30-59.9 credits; Upper Division Transfer are students that transfer with 60 or more credits.

For some student groups, late registration clearly represents an indicator of attrition. Whether late registration is a cause or an outcome of some other causal variable remains unknown. However, a few other measures may provide further insight to the effect of late registration and student retention. For those new students that returned for fall 2015 semester, Table 2 depicts the returning grade point average (GPA) and credits earned during academic year 2015 with *t*-test results between those that were *late* and *on-time* registers for the fall 2014 semester. Among all student types, returning GPA was higher for those that registered on-time compared to those that registered late.

Table 2: New Undergraduate Student Performance for Returning Students across Student Types, Fall 2014 to 2015

Student Type	N	Late Register			On-time Register			t-test Results
		n	GPA	Credits	n	GPA	Credits	
All New Students	2,426	823	2.88	24.8	1,603	3.02	26.0	Note 1 & 4
Full-time Students	2,060	620	2.82	25.7	1,440	3.00	26.9	Note 1 & 2
Part-time Students	366	203	3.07	22.2	163	3.19	18.1	Note 4
First-time Freshmen	1,177	267	2.78	25.3	910	2.91	26.3	Note 5
All Transfer Students	1,249	556	2.93	24.6	693	3.16	25.8	Note 1 & 6
Freshmen Transfer	119	128	2.71	25.5	91	3.02	27.2	Note 3
Sophomore Transfer	529	218	2.90	26.6	311	3.00	26.0	
Upper Division Transfer	501	210	3.09	22.5	291	3.36	25.1	Note 1 & 4

Note 1 = Significant difference between GPAs at $\alpha < .001$

Note 2 = Significant difference between Credits Earned at $\alpha < .001$

Note 3 = Significant difference between GPAs at $\alpha < .01$

Note 4 = Significant difference between Credits Earned at $\alpha < .01$

Note 5 = Significant difference between GPAs at $\alpha < .05$

Note 6 = Significant difference between Credits Earned at $\alpha < .05$

The academic backgrounds of incoming students were also analyzed. For new first-time freshmen, there was a significant difference ($p = .01$) in the high school GPA between late registers ($n = 361$, $M = 3.13$, $SD = .54$) and on-time registers ($n = 1153$, $M = 3.21$, $SD = .52$). However, there was no significant difference among combined SAT scores based on registration status. For new transfer students, there were no significant differences in combined SAT scores or high school GPA based on registration status. However, there was a significant difference ($p = .000$) in the transfer GPA between late registers ($n = 768$, $M = 3.05$, $SD = .41$) and on-time registers ($n = 861$, $M = 3.19$, $SD = .42$).

Other differences in new undergraduate students associated with registration status involve gender and ethnicity attributes. Male students (39%) were more likely to register late than female students (33%), a significant difference ($p = .002$). Moreover, those students that self-reported as non-resident aliens were more likely to register late (77%) than students of all other ethnic groups (29%).

Continuing Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Students

For continuing undergraduate degree-seeking students (N = 8729), 2,286 registered late, accounting for 26.2% of the group. Table 3 depicts the difference between late registers and on-time registers for this cohort. The retention rate is defined as the student returning for or graduated by the fall 2015 semester. Continuing students that register on-time had a significantly higher GPA than later registers when the fall 2014 semester started. The retention rate was significantly different between the late registers and on-time registers. Late registers were nearly twice as likely as on-time registers to attrite before the fall 2015 semester. For those students that did return, on-time registers tended to have earned more credits during AY 2015 and attained a higher GPA at the start of fall 2015 semester.

Table 3: Continuing Undergraduate Student Measures according to Registration Status, Fall 2014 to 2015

Measure	Late Register	On-time Register	*t*-test Results p	Sig Dif
Amount (*n*)	2,286	6,443		
Percentage	26.2%	73.8%		
GPA at Fall 2014 Start	2.64	3.07	0.000	Yes
Number Retained/Graduated	1,544	5,268		
Retention Rate	67.5%	81.8%	0.000	Yes
For those that returned for Fall 2015				
Credits Earned, AY2015	19.6	25.1	0.000	Yes
GPA at Fall 2015 Start	2.81	3.07	0.000	Yes

Again, male students (31%) were more likely to register late than female students (23%), a significant difference (*p* = .000). However, there were no major differences among ethnic groups associated with registration status.

For continuing undergraduate students, there was a significant correlation (*r* = .174, *p* = .000) between the registration time and retention/graduation. That is, the more days before the fall 2014 semester that a student registered, the more likely they would return for or graduate by the fall 2015.

Conclusion

This analysis suggests that late registration is a predictor of retention and academic performance for both new and continuing students. However, the effect on continuing students is greater. The factors that may influence a student to register late may also be the factors that influence academic performance, such as financial stress, lack of motivation, poor organizational skills, or high extracurricular time commitments of employment or family care. Therefore, late registration status may be used as an indicator for other factors that risk retention and graduation, presenting opportunities to provide suitable interventions as necessary. For example, addressing the high late registration tendencies of international students may prevent international students from falling behind non-international students in terms of academic success.