Understanding the Undecided: Exploring the Myths and Realities of Students who Enroll in an Unspecified Letters and Sciences Major

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Letters and Sciences (LTSC)

- 11 colleges offering undergraduate degrees
- Letters and Sciences program under purview of Dean for Undergraduate Studies, not part of another college
- No general interdisciplinary degree – Letters and Sciences limited to first two years or 60 credits
- Almost 40% of new freshmen begin in Letters and Sciences
- Students may enter LTSC upon entry to the University or from another major
Project Background

- Project developed to address anecdotal concerns about performance of Letters and Sciences students
  - Belief that these were “weaker” students than those who start in a major/college
  - Effectiveness of course selection and advising questioned
- Initially seen as a project about LTSC freshmen
- Need to understand current situation outside of anecdotes
Who are LTSC students?

- Freshmen and transfers who elect to begin undecided
- Freshmen and transfers who cannot enter a selective admissions Limited Enrollment Program (LEP)
- Students who transfer internally from another major (frequently an LEP)
Project Design

- Focus groups to identify concerns
- Examination of incoming student characteristics
- Characteristics of “Major Changers” – GPA, credit accumulation, receiver colleges
- Graduation rate trends and characteristics of graduates by time to degree
- Descriptive, not inferential
Colleges Receiving LTSC
Major Changers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AY 98-99</th>
<th>AY 00-01</th>
<th>AY 02-03</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Hum.</td>
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<td>Bus.</td>
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<td>Soc. Sci.</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Others</td>
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Percent
Major Changers by Entry to LTSC

- Chose LTSC: 48%
- Wanted LEP: 18%
- LTSC Later: 6%
- Transfer: 28%
Average GPAs of LTSC
Major Changers

Academic Year

Average GPA
0 1 2 3

Chose LTSC
Wanted LEP
LTSC Later
Transfer
Comparison
Credit Accumulation by Major Changers

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chose LTSC</th>
<th>Wanted LEP</th>
<th>LTSC Later</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avg. Degree Credits</td>
<td>% with 60+</td>
<td>Avg. Degree Credits</td>
<td>% with 60+</td>
<td>Avg. Degree Credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chose LTSC</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avg. Degree Credits</td>
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<td>48.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with 60+</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
<td>23.90%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
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Findings

- LTSC students not homogeneous
- Students entering LTSC as freshmen, by choice or because they could not enter LEP, typically leave LTSC in a timely fashion with sound academic foundation
- Though LTSC graduation rates for 1992 cohort lagged behind university overall, gap has closed and LTSC now exceeds overall
- Students who begin at the University outside of LTSC and subsequently enter LTSC appear at highest risk of excessive credit accumulation and poor GPA
- Career development and academic goal setting issues of major concern campus constituencies