EXAMINING THE FIRST-TERM EXPERIENCES OF NEW FRESHMEN
AN IR APPROACH

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
MDAIR CONFERENCE
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ABOUT US

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Acknowledgements

- Amanda Bowsher, IRPA Graduate Assistant
- CAWG Beginnings
AGENDA

Approach: How the project was developed
First Semester Experience: Why is this important?
About the data
First Semester Experiences: Key Findings
  • Entry
  • Enrollment
  • Performance
  • Perceptions
Challenges, Outcomes, Recommendations
Discussion / Q&A
APPROACH: HOW THE PROJECT WAS DEVELOPED

• Brainstormed research projects for the summer during team retreat
• Inspired by Beloit College’s “Mindset List” to provide additional data on incoming freshmen
  • Reviews the “cultural touchstones” that shaped the lives of first-year students
  • Excerpts from the Class of 2015 Mindset List:
    – Ferris Bueller and Sloane Peterson could be their parents
    – Refer to LBJ, and they might assume you’re talking about LeBron James
• Decided to develop digestible data points on the first-semester experience that would be useful to the broader campus community based on strategic goals (e.g., STEM, General Education, Time-to-Degree)


APPROACH: HOW THE PROJECT WAS DEVELOPED

Created a list of data elements to include in the study, which served as a “to-do” list for the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Facts</td>
<td>What major houses the majority of first-semester students? What percentage are in STEM? What percent of students declare a double major in their first term?</td>
<td>Warehouse: Um Student Facts, Um Student Org, Sec Major Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requested Major Enrollment</td>
<td>Distribution of students who enrolled in preferred major (LEP) and those &quot;in limbo&quot;</td>
<td>Warehouse: Um Ugrad Applicant Facts, Sis Ugrad Admissions, Um Ugrad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Size</td>
<td>Distribution of students' courses by class size; e.g. X% of students are in 2+ courses with 100+ students</td>
<td>Warehouse: Um Fac Course, Um Course Facts, Um Stu Sch Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits AtTEMned</td>
<td>Average attempted credits for first-semester students; what percentage of students finish with less than 10 credits?</td>
<td>End of Term Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits Earned</td>
<td>Average earned credits for first-semester students; what percentage of students finish with less than 10 credits?</td>
<td>Warehouse: Sis Term Stu Status, Sis End of Term Performance, Um Progressions2 Base Facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Average GPA for first-semester students</td>
<td>Warehouse: Sis End of Term Performance, Um Progressions2 Base Facts</td>
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</table>
FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCE: WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Ensure students are on the path to success from day one

- Provide points of reference about what freshmen experience on campus in their first term

- Understand how data can provide a portrait of student experiences, supporting and contextualizing anecdotal evidence

- Highlight successes and opportunities within the first-semester experiences of new freshmen
ABOUT THE DATA: SOURCES

IRPA DATABASE
• Aggregated student enrollment data from the Fall 2009, 2010 and 2011 freshman cohorts
• Provides information on student demographics, registration, and course attributes
• Data include all new freshmen, including part-time and non-degree seeking students

BEGINNING STUDENT SURVEY, 2010 & 2011
• Survey of freshmen taken 8-10 weeks into their first term
• 2010 survey gauges student perceptions of the academic and social experiences on campus; \( n = 1869 \)
• 2011 survey assesses students’ degree completion expectations; \( n = 1498 \)
FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCES:
ENTRY
70% of freshmen enroll with college credit

- 65% enter with AP credit
- 10% enter with credit from another institution
- 3% enter with IB credit

Average number of accepted pre-college credits is 17

Source: IRPA database
The overwhelming majority of freshmen enter with freshman class standing; however, 10% enter with enough credits to reach sophomore class standing.

- Students entering as sophomores have an average of 40 pre-enrollment credits.

Source: IRPA database
PRE-ENROLLMENT CREDITS

Why freshmen took AP/IB/College-level courses

- To receive college credit: 71% (Very much a reason), 24% (Somewhat a reason), 5% (Not a reason)
- To compete with my peers for college admission: 57% (Very much a reason), 24% (Somewhat a reason), 20% (Not a reason)
- To provide more flexibility during my college career: 38% (Very much a reason), 38% (Somewhat a reason), 23% (Not a reason)
- To graduate from college in less than four years: 7% (Very much a reason), 22% (Somewhat a reason), 71% (Not a reason)

Source: BSS11; responses may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCE:
ENROLLMENT
MAJORS: BY COLLEGE AND STEM

Source: IRPA database

Note: Percentages may not sum correctly due to rounding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Engineering-Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Business-Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Government and Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Physiology/Neurobiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bioengineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But…25% of freshmen are undecided

Note: STEM majors are shown in red.  
Source: IRPA database
REQUESTED MAJOR / LEP ENROLLMENT

Requested LEP Admission
- Did not request LEP: 37%
- Requested LEP: 63%
- Enrolled in Requested LEP: 70%
- Did not enroll in Requested LEP: 30%

First-Semester Major Enrollment
- Non-LEP: 52%
- LEP*: 48%

*Includes students who were admitted to their requested LEP as well as those who switched to another LEP at orientation.

Source: IRPA database
Most freshmen have at least 2 courses taught by a tenured/tenure-track faculty member.

Freshmen Taught by T/TTK Faculty

- 28% taught 0 courses
- 28% taught 1 course
- 32% taught 2 courses
- 12% taught 3+ courses

Note: Only data for lead lecture courses are shown.  
Source: IRPA database
COURSES: CLASS SIZE

Note: Only data for lead lecture courses are shown. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: IRPA database
FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCE: PERFORMANCE
5% of freshmen are placed on academic probation at the end of their first term.

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: IRPA database
FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCE: PERCEPTIONS
At present, my general attitude towards the University of Maryland is:

- Positive or Very Positive: 89%
- Neutral: 9%
- Negative or Very Negative: 2%

When I entered this institution, it was my:

- 1st choice: 57%
- 2nd choice: 26%
- 3rd choice or lower: 17%

Source: BSS10
ACADEMIC LIFE

Percentage of freshmen who “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” …

Overall, my courses are intellectually stimulating. 82%
I'm adjusting to the academic work of college. 81%
I understand the purpose of the CORE (general education) program. 76%
I feel adequately prepared for the academic demands here. 75%
I am earning the grades I want. 44%

Source: BSS10
FUTURE INVOLVEMENT

Percentage of freshmen who reported they are currently participating in or would like to participate in the following experiences:

- **Living-learning programs**: 31% currently participating, 25% would like to participate.
- **Research**: 6% currently participating, 63% would like to participate.
- **International Experiences**: 2% currently participating, 77% would like to participate.
- **Internships**: 3% currently participating, 92% would like to participate.

*Source: BSS11*
Percentage of freshmen who “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed”...

- Faculty are available outside class time if I have questions.  
  - 86%

- I've asked a faculty member for help.  
  - 71%

- I am interested in working with a faculty member on a research project.  
  - 47%

- Faculty provide timely feedback about my progress in my courses.  
  - 45%

Source: BSS10
CHALLENGES, OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS
CHALLENGES AND OUTCOMES

DATA CHALLENGES

Managing nuances in the data
- Identifying limited enrollment program applicants
- Linking students’ courses to class size and faculty data

Working within the bounds of available data
- Annual changes to BSS
- Unable to query CourseEval data

Interpreting and translating technical data for audiences with varied technical fluency

BROADER OUTCOMES

Improvements to the IRPA data warehouse
- Discovered that there are duplicate courses in database that will have to be corrected
- Added a field to the warehouse to flag LEP applicants

Targeted dissemination of accessible and relevant information to key campus constituents
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Evaluate your data and determine which questions you can answer
• Utilize existing campus surveys to complement IR data
• Leverage campus surveys to inform the institution’s strategic goals
• Share your findings in a format that is easy to comprehend for non-data/technical audiences
• Anticipate the needs of your campus and conduct proactive analyses

  *A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them.* – Steve Jobs
QUESTIONS?

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