Examining the First Semester Experiences of New Freshmen: An IR Approach

**Purpose**
Moving Beyond the Freshman Profile

Our inspiration for this project was Beloit College’s “Mindset List,” which frames the incoming freshman class within cultural references their professors understand, e.g., from the Class of 2015 Mindset List: “Ferris Bueller and Sloane could be their parents.”

We sought to provide digestible data points on the first-semester experience that would be useful not only for prospective freshmen, but also the broader campus and the University's strategic goals, such as STEM and Time-to-Degree.

**Key Findings**

- **Entry**
  - 70% of freshmen enter with college credit...
  - ...and 1 in 10 freshmen enter with enough credit for sophomore standing...
  - but freshmen reported graduating in less than 4 years was not a major reason for earning credit.

- **Enrollment**
  - Contrary to campus lore, many freshmen desiring a limited enrollment program* (LEP) enroll in the major of their choice
  - Overall, nearly half of freshmen enroll in a LEP major...
  - While most freshmen take at least two courses with 100 or more students, 83% take a course with fewer than 50
  - Nearly 90% of surveyed freshmen reported feeling positive about UMD in their first semester

- **Academics & Involvement**
  - 70% of freshmen earn at least a 3.0 GPA at the end of their first semester
  - Likewise, the majority of surveyed freshmen reported feeling adjusted to and prepared for college work, but less than half were happy with their grades

**Data Constraints and Outcomes**

Completing this project required overcoming a few data challenges:
- **Challenges in our warehouse**
  - No flag for limited enrollment program applicants
  - Compartmentalization of student course data made it difficult to link to class size
- **Assessment Data Challenges**
  - Survey data is not longitudinal
  - Unable to query students’ course evaluations

These challenges yielded two positive outcomes:
- Uncovered course data issues
- Led to warehouse improvements

**Recommendations**

- Evaluate your data and determine which questions you can answer
- Utilize existing campus surveys to complement IR data
- Leverage campus surveys to inform your institution’s strategic goals
- Share your findings in a digestible 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

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