

Why Students Leave Southern Utah University–2002 Summary Survey

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Office of Institutional Research

After applying, enrolling, finding housing, and paying tuition and fees, why do students leave SUU? The University's ad hoc assessment committee recommended that withdrawing or non-returning students be regularly surveyed to find the answer. This element became part of the University's assessment plan in 1999.

At the end of Fall semester 2001, students enrolled in the first-year experience program and not returning to SUU Spring semester 2002 were asked to complete ACT's short-form instrument for withdrawing or non-returning students. The results of the summary survey were intended to (1) validate in fiscally hard times results of the larger survey completed in March 2000, and (2) determine what affect completion of the first-year experience had on attitudes of withdrawing students. The suspicion was that the summary survey data would largely be unchanged from the 2000 survey. Hence, the pool of students for the summary survey was 21, 18 freshmen and 3 transfer students. Table 1 provides a response summary.

Table 1
Summary of Survey Responses

	Freshmen	Transfer	Total
Number of surveys sent	18	3	21
Number of survey completions	18	3	21

Students who responded to the survey were young (100.0% under 20), male (66.7%), single (100.0%), enrolled full-time (95.2%) and in their freshman year (90.5%) or sophomore year (9.5%). Nationally, 36.6% are freshmen, 21.9% sophomores, 8.4% juniors and 5.9% seniors. The primary purpose given for entering SUU was to obtain a bachelor's degree (81.0%).

Targeted sample size in a survey such as this is limited as to what can be concluded because of the small number of responses. Thus, conclusions are limited.

In 2000, among all students surveyed, major reasons for leaving were neither academic nor institutional. When asked to rate each of 48 items as a major reason for leaving, students indicated they mainly left because they decided to attend a different college or they wanted to move to (or were transferred to) a new location. Both were personal reasons.

Comparatively, respondents in 2000 and 2002 indicated that the following were major reasons for not returning. The responses are ordered by percentages of major reasons in 2002.

Table 2
Summary of Reasons for Leaving, 2000 and 2002

Reasons for Leaving	2000 Survey	2002 Survey
Wanted to move to (or was transferred to) a new location	21.7%	33.3%
Wanted to travel	<10%	33.3%
Decided to attend a different college	21.7%	23.8%
Marital situation changed my educational plans	11.7%	9.5%
Health-related problem (family or personal)	10.8%	0.0%
Desired major was not offered by this college	10.8%	9.5%
Accepted a full-time job	10.8%	9.5%
Could not find part-time work at this college	<10%	9.5%

“Wanting to move to a new location” or “deciding to attend a different college” remained among the top three reasons for leaving, but “wanting to travel” was added in the 2002 survey—again, as in 2000, the top reasons were personal.

At national public colleges, the major reasons for leaving an institution are as follows:

1. Decided to attend a different college (20.7%)
2. Health-related problem (family or personal) (15.8%)
3. Conflict between demands of job and college (15.6%)
4. Accepted a full-time job (12.2%)
5. Family responsibilities were too great (11.7%)
6. Want to move to (or was transferred to) a new location (11.7%)

Respondents were less likely to mention academic reputation, inadequate study habits, courses were too difficult, feelings of ethnic or racial tension, commuting distance, availability of child care, or size as main reasons for leaving. In fact, some reasons were not selected by any student as a main reason for leaving: transportation difficulties, uncertainty about the value of college, housing, college rules and regulations, and inadequate facilities for the physically handicapped. About 47.6% of the respondents planned to return to SUU; nationally, 41.8% of respondents plan to return.

It should be noted that the national data are not necessarily reflective of the “average” institution nationally. Rather it is a grouping of data from institutions enrolling 4,000 to 9,999 students. Reviewing the list of institutions in the data set reveals that 50.5% are located in the south and 27.4% are in the mid-west. Only 8.4% are in the west.

What do the results mean for SUU?

- Reasons students give for withdrawing do not change significantly, and the top reasons are personal—not so much academic, institutional, financial or related to employment.
- The top reasons SUU students are giving for withdrawing are substantially higher than nationally normed standards for the same reasons.
- There appears to be little difference in the reasons for leaving between students who complete the first-year experience and the general student population.