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INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Volume 5, Issue 3

December 12, 2005

ASSESSMENT NEWS

Helping Students in 30 Minutes

by Dr. Jack Williamsen
OIE Data Analyst/Retention Coordinator

A quip attributed to Mark Twain notes that "It is better to stay out than to get out." Research on student attrition supports this assertion. Helping students to stay out of serious academic difficulty leads to better retention than helping these same students get out of academic trouble at a later date.

That's the idea behind the "Thirty Minute Group," one of a number of recommendations generated by former Dean of Admissions and Enrollment Management, Dan Meyer, and his SNC colleagues enlisted to study ways to improve retention of St. Norbert students. That study occurred in fall, 2004-05. The Thirty Minute Group began operations in the second semester of last year.

The Thirty Minute Group derives its name from the manner of its function. The Group meets weekly for approximately thirty minutes to discuss the situations of students deemed "at risk" for premature departure from St. Norbert. The discussions typically lead to some sort of contact with the student(s) and—if appropriate—offers of assistance.

Students leave St. Norbert for a variety of (preventable) reasons, so membership in the Thirty Minute Group is correspondingly diverse. Chaired by Jeff Ritter, Director of Academic Advisement, the Group is comprised of members with expertise in academic support, financial aid, money management, residential living, mental and physical health, and student life.

Early identification is key to effectiveness for the Group. It relies on information from the Midterm Evaluation Program (see accompanying article) and on direct contacts from concerned advisors, instructors, and staff. This semester the Group has met about eight times, usually discussing the situations of three or four students believed to be in academic jeopardy at each meeting and determining what supportive actions, if any, would be appropriate.

Is this effort to improve student retention at St. Norbert effective? It is too early to tell for sure. Anecdotal reports from students, parents, instructors, and others suggest the Group has had some success, but the "hard data" needed to draw firm conclusions is not yet available. Time, as they say, will tell.

In the interim, it is worthwhile keeping in mind that a single freshman who is retained to graduation provides the College *net* tuition of almost \$37,000 during his/her additional three years. That would seem enough reason to continue the efforts of the Thirty Minute Group.

If you have concerns about a student, you are encouraged to discuss them with Jeff Ritter at extension 3234.

Midterms by the Numbers

by Dr. Jack Williamsen
OIE Data Analyst/Retention Coordinator

Every semester instructors send midterm evaluations (MTEs) to a significant number of their students. Is all this effort worthwhile? Do MTEs really tell us anything mean? The answers are "yes" and "yes."

The table on page 2 provides some basic information about midterm evaluations given to students in the academic year 2004-2005 (MTE data from this semester won't be compiled until final grades are in, but results are likely to be similar to those from last year). There are some useful and important findings buried in all those numbers. Let's take a closer look. (Continued on Page 2)

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Midterms by the Numbers

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Assessment Conference Possibilities

92nd Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities "Demanding Excellence" January 25-28, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Assessment Conference at Texas A&M University: Putting Assessment to Work, February 23-25, 2006, Hilton Hotel, College Station, TX.

Association of American Colleges and Universities, General Education and Outcomes That Matter in a Changing World, March 9-11, 2006, Phoenix, Arizona.

Higher Learning Commission, The Future-Focused Organization: 2016—Ready or Not? March 31-April 4, 2006, Hyatt Regency, Chicago, IL.

AIR 2006 Forum: Effectiveness through Diversity, May 14-18, 2006, Sheraton Chicago Hotel, Chicago, IL.



ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

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2004-05 Midterm Evaluations

Number of Students with...	Semester I, 2004-05	Semester II, 2004-05
at least 1 Midterm	516	412
at least 2 Midterms	172 (33%)	122 (30%)
at least 3 Midterms	44 (8%)	25 (6%)
at least 4 Midterms	5 (1%)	7 (2%)
at least 1 Marginal Midterm	357 (69%)	271 (66%)
at least 1 Failing Midterm	159 (31%)	141 (34%)
at least 2 Marginal Midterms	63 (12%)	40 (10%)
at least 2 Failing Midterms	26 (5%)	23 (6%)
at least 1 Marginal & 1 Failing Midterm	83 (16%)	59 (14%)
Percent Students w/ 1 "M" w/ < 2.00	5% (12 of 250)	3% (6 of 203)
Percent Students w/ 1 "F" w/ < 2.00	11% (11 of 94)	10% (9 of 87)
Percent Students w/ 2 "M"s w/ < 2.00	16% (10 of 63)	15% (6 of 40)
Percent Students w/ 2 "F"s w/ < 2.00	35% (9 of 26)	30% (7 of 23)
Percent Students w/ 1 "F" & 1 "M" w/ < 2.00	40% (33 of 83)	22% (13 of 59)
Percent Freshmen w/ 1 "M" w/ <2.00	8% (7 of 93)	6% (5 of 79)
Percent Freshmen w/ 1 "F" w/ <2.00	4% (4 of 22)	17% (7 of 42)
Percent Freshmen w/ 2 "M"s w/ <2.00	23% (6 of 26)	17% (2 of 12)
Percent Freshmen w/ 2 "F"s w/ <2.00	44% (4 of 9)	60% (3 of 5)
Percent Freshmen w/ 1 "F" & 1 "M" w/ <2.00	48% (11 of 23)	26% (5 of 19)
Number of Students w/ MTEs who are...	Semester I, 2004-05	Semester II, 2004-05
Freshmen	197 (38%)	164 (40%)
Sophomores	128 (25%)	101 (24%)
Juniors	102 (20%)	82 (20%)
Seniors	89 (17%)	65 (16%)

Table based on data compiled by Chris Sarkis

Note first that more students receive midterms in the first semester (N=516, roughly about one out of four enrolled students) than in the second. This has been a very consistent finding since the midterm program began about 1971. About one-third of the students who receive a midterm evaluation actually receive at least two of them (33% in the first semester, 30% in the second).

The majority (about two-thirds) of midterms are "marginal," with the remainder "failing". This distinction is meaningful. As can be seen from the middle part of the table, only about 5% of students who receive one "marginal" midterm fail to achieve at least a 2.00 GPA at the end of the semester. But the percentage doubles for students receiving a "failing" midterm.

This ratio holds true for students who receive *two* midterm evaluations as well. About 15% of students with two "Ms" failed to achieve an end-of-term GPA 2.00. Thirty percent or so of students with two "Fs" found themselves in academic jeopardy. (Although not shown in the above table, about 85% of those students had final grades of less than "C" in courses for which they obtained "F" midterms; none had final grades higher than "BC" in those courses.)

Perhaps not surprisingly, freshmen are especially vulnerable. With the unusual exception of freshmen who received one "F" midterm in the first semester, their corresponding percentages for end-of-term GPAs less than 2.00 are higher in all categories than those of

their upper-class counterparts. Note, too, that freshmen constitute the largest number of recipients of midterms.

What practical conclusions can be drawn from these findings? There seem to be at least two. *First*, a "marginal" midterm is less detrimental to overall academic achievement than a "failing" one. *Second*, receiving two (or more) midterms is clearly hazardous to one's GPA, most particularly if those midterms are not both "marginal." Students with 2 "Fs," or an "F" and an "M," have about a 25% -- 35% chance of failing to meet the College's standard for appropriate progress.

That percentage is certainly high enough to suggest that someone, somehow, should be doing something to reduce that risk. Fortunately, the College has recently taken formal steps to do just that (to find out what, read the companion article (*Helping Students in Thirty Minutes*) in this issue of the *Assessment News*).

It's important to recognize that midterm evaluations do not always lead to negative consequences for students. On the contrary, they support and encourage positive corrective actions by those who receive them. Nine out of ten students with a midterm of "F" have satisfactory GPAs at the end of term, for example—a number that is even higher for recipients of a "Marginal" midterm. For these and other recipients, midterms are a gentle reminder that learning is their primary reason for attending college.