

April 2005
Number 11

SPOTLIGHT ON OU

New Community College Transfer Students' Retention and Graduation

Students who originally entered Oakland University as transfer students made up 41% of all undergraduates enrolled in fall 2004. Although this is down compared to what it was ten years ago –about 50% - it is still a substantial portion of Oakland’s undergraduate population. About 60% of the transfer students who entered this fall came from community colleges, 44% from Oakland Community College (OCC) and Macomb County Community College (MCCC). Even though transferring from community colleges to 4-year schools is a major educational activity in this country, relatively little is known about how well these students do once they get to our campuses. Oakland University is a member of the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE), which has now begun to address this lack of information.

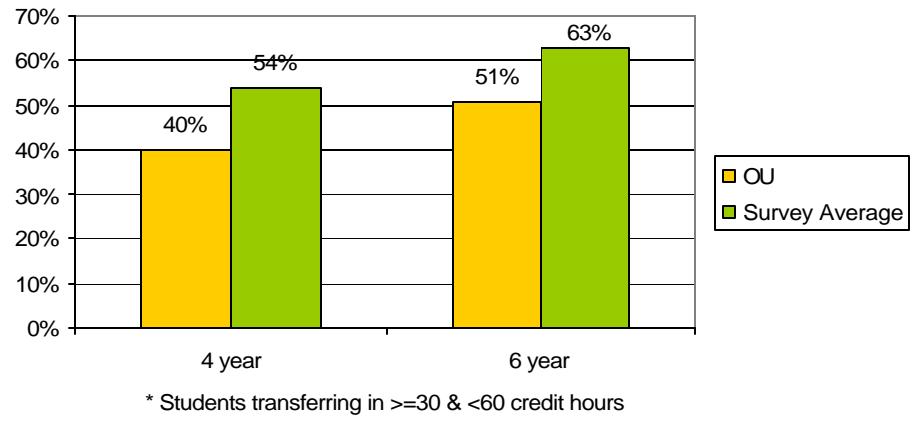
The CSRDE is a voluntary data sharing consortium sponsored by the University of Oklahoma with 473 members*. In 2002, CSRDE began the collection of data about the retention and graduation of community college students who transferred to four-year institutions between 1995 and 2001. One hundred and one colleges and universities, including Oakland University (OU), participated in the Community College Transfer Survey (beta study). In this study, “community college transfers were defined as degree-seeking students entering the reporting institution for the first time, known to have only attended community college(s) or 2-year institution(s) and transferring in at least 30 semester hours but less than 60 semester hours (in a 120-hour program).” (2002-03 CSRDE Community College Transfer Report, September 2003). The CSRDE included data on 367,507 students, including 376 from OU. Both full-time and part-time students were included in this survey.

* the members list may be viewed at <http://tel.occe.ou.edu/csrde/carnegie.html>

This paper summarizes some of the key findings of that study and compares the outcomes of OU's community college transfer students to the national averages reported by CSRDE.

1. According to the CSRDE survey report, "**54% of community college transfers graduate within four years after first enrollment in the 4-year institution.**" At OU, the average was 40%, 14% less than the survey average. At six years, the OU graduation rate was still only 51%. Community college transfer students with 30 to 60 credit hours have completed one to two years of college and are sophomores or juniors, so the expected graduation rate would be roughly comparable to the six-year graduation rates of students who entered the university as new freshmen (FTIACs).
The average six-year graduation rate for FTIACs who entered OU between 1995 and 2000 was about 41%. OU's four-year transfer graduation rate of 40% was only slightly lower than the FTIAC six-year average, although it is lower than the average graduation rates for transfer students in the study.

Figure 1: Graduation Rate of Sophomore* Transfer Students



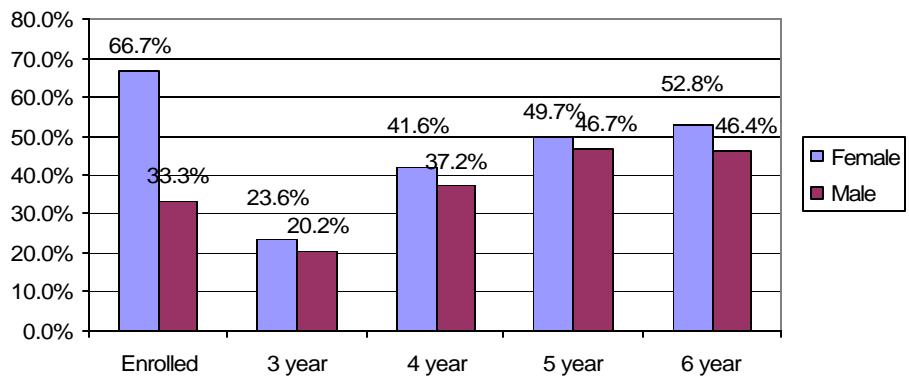
Looking specifically at transfers from OU's primary feeder schools, students who transferred from MCCC had higher rates in both graduation and retention than those from OCC. The average four-year graduation rate of the MCCC students was 50% vs. 39% for the OCC students, while the six-year graduation rate was 58% vs. 49%. The first-year retention rate was also higher for MCCC students, averaging 80% vs. 71%.

2. **“First-year and second-year retention are issues for community college transfers.”** Nationally 20% of transfer students did not return to the four year institutions in the fall of the second year and an additional 23% did not return for the third year. 27% of OU transfer students did not return for the second year, but only 7% more did not return the third year, giving OU a better overall result for retention to the third year; 66% of the OU transfer students were still enrolled in the third year, compared to 57% in the survey. However, by the end of the survey period, 5.4% of the national cohort who had departed re-enrolled, with about half graduating and half continuing on to the 7th year. At OU, 10% more transfer students left between the 3rd year and 7th year, while none re-enrolled. At OU, the low retention of transfer students to the second year should be a major cause for concern.

3. **“Women: more enroll; more graduate earlier; more graduate within 6 years of transferring from community colleges to 4-yr institutions.”** This finding of the CSRDE survey holds at OU as well (see Figure 2). Nationally, 8% more females were enrolled than males. At OU, twice as many transfer students were female.

53% of women transfers graduated in six years, compared to 46% of men. Female transfer students from both MCCC and OCC

Figure 2: OU Transfer Students' Enrollment and Graduation Rates by Gender



graduated at higher rates than their male counterparts in four, five, and six years. About 62% of females who transferred from MCCC graduated in six years, which is 10% higher than the graduation rate of female students from OCC and 16% higher than male OCC students. This higher female graduation rate followed a first year retention rate that was 2% lower than the MCCC males. The MCCC females have consistently had higher retention and graduation rates than their counterparts.

4. Nationally “from 1995 to 2001 the retention rates showed slow continuous improvement for all race and gender

subgroups.” Figure 3 shows that the first year retention rate for transfer students has been improving at OU as well. The national first year retention rate was 82% in 2001. At OU, both female and male first year retention rates show improvement, although they fluctuate from year and year, from 68% to 74% for female and 71% to 80% for male between 1995 and 2001. OU’s percent of minority transfer students is quite small, so the retention rates are highly variable and do not show the slight upward tendency that is seen for white students in Figure 4.

Figure 3: Transfer Student 1st Yr Retention Rates - Total

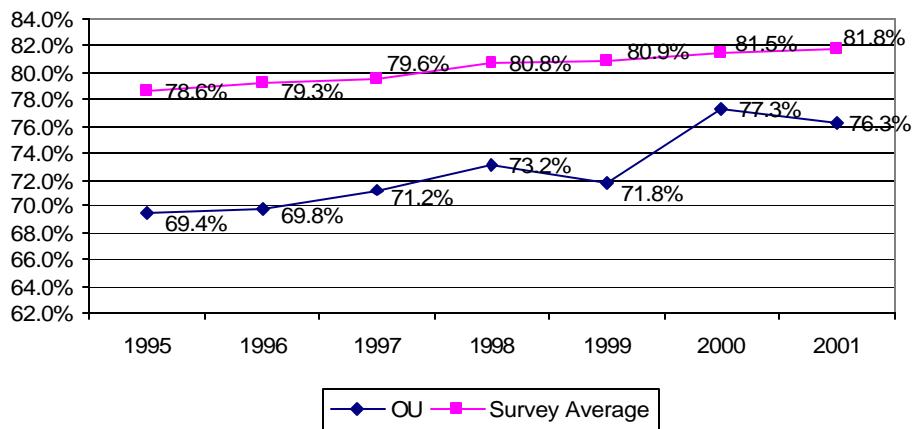
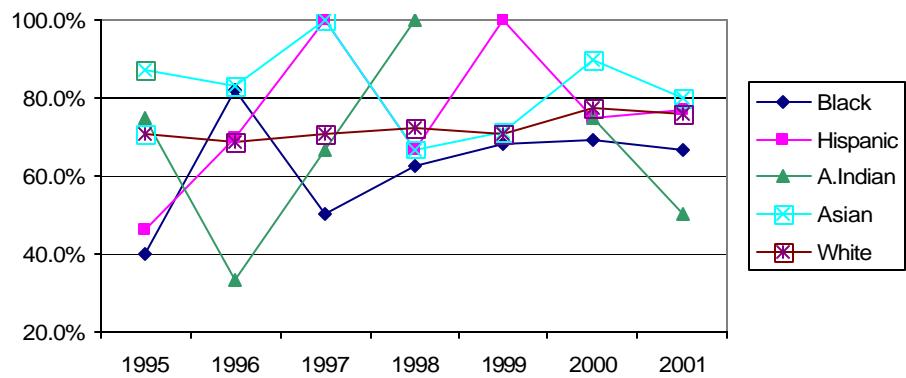


Figure 4: Transfer Student 1st Yr Retention Rates by Ethnicity



5. OU transfer students who entered as majors in the School of Education and Human Services had higher rates of retention and graduation. The CSRDE study did not take programs of study into account, but that data is available for the OU transfer students. About one third of transfer students who entered in 1995 and 1996 enrolled in majors in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). 20% enrolled in the School of Education and Human Services (SEHS), 14% in the School of Business

Administration (SBA), 11% in the School of Nursing (SON), 9% in the School of Engineering and Computer Science (SECS), and 7% each in the School of Health Sciences (SHS) and University Programs (UP).

The number and proportion of transfer students in each unit varied by year, so the retention rates varied as well e.g. SBA enrolled only 10% of transfers in 1995 vs. 19% in 1996. 70% of first-year transfers in SBA were retained in 1995 vs. 67% in 1996. The table below shows the average rates for the combined years. The SEHS transfer students had the highest rate of retention and graduation, with an average 80% first-year retention rate and 59% six-year graduation rate (although graduation was not necessarily from SEHS). The graduation rate in CAS and SECS were just slightly below SEHS, while at about 48% SBA was 10% lower. The graduation rates in SHS and SON were more than 20% lower than SEHS.

Retention & Graduation Rates of 1995 & 1996 Transfer Students by School/College

	CAS	SBA	SEHS	SECS	SHS	SON	UP
First-year Retention	71.2%	68.7%	79.9%	72.9%	59.1%	51.9%	66.7%
Six-year Graduation	55.5%	48.1%	58.9%	55.1%	33.5%	35.2%	43.2%
First Term GPA	2.60	2.23	2.76	2.22	2.44	2.60	2.17
% of Total N	32.0%	14.3%	20.1%	9.3%	6.6%	10.6%	7.0%

The findings by school are consistent with earlier analyses done by OIRA. One possible explanation for the lower rates in some areas is that students who transfer in to certain majors may not be adequately informed about requirements to be admitted to and/or graduate from specific programs. If they have unrealistic expectations when they enter, that could result in them leaving OU. Clearly, more study is necessary to better understand what factors contribute to transfer students' departure from OU.