

Confidential Draft - Not for Distribution

Graduation, Retention and Attrition among
Comprehensive Studies Program Students
Who Entered College in 1989, 1990, and 1991.

by

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The Comprehensive Studies Program (CSP) is an academic support program at The University of Michigan with a mission to promote the academic development and graduation of its students, almost all of whom are from ethnic backgrounds which historically have been underrepresented in American higher education. About 2,000 students are designated as CSP in a given academic year. Students are served in varying degrees by CSP activities, programs and services which include a Summer Bridge Program, intensive sections of introductory courses, academic advising, mentoring programs, and tutoring programs among other activities. CSP, in its current organizational structure, has been at U-M since 1983, but its predecessors include the Coalition for the Use of Learning Skills and the Opportunity Award Program, which date back to 1970 and 1963, respectively, and which were combined to form CSP in 1983. Thousands of students have participated in CSP over the years, but no full-scale retention study of these students has been done. This study examines the academic progress of CSP students who entered the University in 1989, 1990, and 1991.

According to the United States Department of Education, over 8.7 million students were enrolled in four-year colleges and universities in the United States in 1994. These students generally have as their goal the attainment of a bachelor's degree. How many of them actually earn a bachelor's degree and how long does it take them to do so? Perhaps the best answers to these questions are provided by analyses of two longitudinal studies: the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NCES, 1994) and the High School and Beyond Study (NCES, 1995), the latter of which examined the national high school class of 1982. Adelman (1995) examined the data from both classes through the year 1993 and found that for the class of 1972, 48.3% had earned a bachelor's degree, while for the class of 1982, 44.6% had earned a bachelor's degree. The mean time required to earn a bachelor's degree was 4.51 years for the class of 1972 and 4.84 years for the class of 1982. Furthermore, Adelman reported:

“In fact, for both generations of students, approximately 90 percent of those who earned a bachelor's degree by age 30 (an anchor point that is not wholly accurate, but is rhetorically convenient), did so within 6.5 calendar years of high school graduation.”

Numerous less comprehensive studies have reported graduation rates ranging from about 36% at public universities to over 80% at highly selective universities (Lenning, et al, 1980). El-Khawas and Bisconti found a graduation rate of 77% after ten years from first matriculation and including graduation from any institution, not just the one entered. The national average graduation rate is broadly accepted as being about 50% within five years of matriculation. Thus, terminology becomes an important issue when reporting graduation, retention and attrition data. When the term "graduation" is used does it refer only to graduation from the specific program entered at a specific institution or is it to be more broadly interpreted? Does retention imply time-limited progress toward degree completion or progress at whatever pace the student can maintain? Does the term attrition apply to any student who departs from an institution or only to those who leave for failure to meet academic standards? Before reporting the findings from this study, some space is devoted to terminology so that the data reported may be interpreted properly.

Terms used in the study.

A wide variety of pathways exist for graduation or withdrawal from The University of Michigan. In general a student must complete a certain number of credits at a given level of proficiency and distributed in specified ways in order to be conferred a degree. For example, a student in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts must complete 120 credits (Credits Toward Program or CTP) with a cumulative grade-point average (GPA) of 2.0 (i.e., C). In addition, the student must distribute the required credits across disciplines such as in the natural sciences, in the social sciences, and in the humanities. Numerous other specific requirements must be met as well. A student may leave the university without having earned a degree for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to such reasons as of one's own volition, as a result of academic discipline, or due to exceptional circumstances such as insufficient financial resources, family-related matters, displeasure with the institution, or what is intended as a temporary interruption. For purposes of this study, following will be a set of terms used to assign students to categories; a student might fit more than a single category, but is assigned to only one category, thus some discretion was used in making the assignment. For example, a student could be an "Enrollee" as well as a "Persister."

Counting such students in both categories would make some of the findings meaningless and would complicate interpretation of the data. Consequently, students were assigned to categories hierarchically according to the list below. That is, students were assigned to the first category in which they fit according to the listed hierarchy. It could be argued that the hierarchy should be different than the one listed, for example, that Persisters should have a higher rank than Enrollees. The author acknowledges that the rank order could be different. The term definitions provide the logical basis for the rankings and no other defense of them is offered. Finally, with the exception of the term “graduate,” the terms used here were invented for the purpose of this study and do not necessarily reflect any official designation or even action taken by a university office. Thus, the label “Stop-Out” does not mean that college action has been taken to designate the student as a “Stop-Out,” nor does the term “Withdrawer” mean that the student has officially withdrawn from the University; rather, such labels are descriptors of student status.

Variable Definitions (Listed in rank order of exclusive assignment to category.)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
1	Graduate	student record reflects that a bachelor’s , master’s, or doctoral degree was conferred by The University of Michigan. In some (rare) cases students earned an advanced degree without having been conferred a bachelor’s degree (e.g., Doctor of Pharmacy degree).
2	Enrollee	student has enrolled within the last academic year
3	Persister	student has achieved senior status in good standing; for purposes of this study such status is defined as having earned at least 90 Credits Toward Program (CTP) and having a cumulative Grade-Point Average of at least 2.0. Includes students designated as Degree Candidate -- a designation given by the Registrar’s office to students who

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
		normally would be expected to complete the degree in the next term. Only those Persisters who have not been enrolled in the last academic year are included in this designation.
4	Struggler	a student who has earned at least 90 CTP, but who has a cumulative GPA < 2.0
5	Stop-Out	student has a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher and has earned less than 90 CTP, but has not enrolled for at least a full academic year
6	Withdrawer	student has less than 90 CTP and a cumulative GPA < 2.0 and has not enrolled for at least one full academic year; generally such a student is prohibited from enrolling without special action by the College.

Subjects

This study examined the Academic Report maintained by the Registrar's Office of students designated as CSP. There are two ways a student can be designated as CSP:

1) a student can be designated as CSP at the time of Admission by action of the University Admissions Office staff

or

2) a student can be designated as CSP by formal request by completing a CSP Affiliate Application after enrollment. Such applications are reviewed by CSP staff; students requesting affiliation may or may not be accepted as a result. Typically, about 100 students are accepted through the Affiliate Application process each year.

Method

The computerized Academic Report was reviewed for each student designated as CSP who entered in any term in the academic years 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92. Notations were made concerning each student's status as reflected in the Academic Report, such as whether or not a degree had been conferred, the student's GPA, number of CTP earned, or whether academic action (i.e., discipline) was taken. These data were tallied and summarized.

Results

Table 1.0 shows graduation statistics resulting from the review of student Academic Reports. A total of 1,469 Academic Reports were reviewed, of which 957 had been conferred degrees by the University of Michigan through July of 1996.

Table 1.0 About Here

Closer examination of Table 2.0 shows that students who entered in 1989 and who had had the most opportunities (i.e., semesters) to enroll and work toward a degree had the highest graduation rate of 75.5% (360 graduates out of 477 students). Similarly, those who entered in the Fall term had a higher graduation rate than students who entered in terms other than the fall. This pattern holds true for the other years examined as well. That is, the number of graduates increases as a function of time since initial enrollment and students who enter in the fall term have a higher graduation rate than students who enter in other terms.

Table 2.0 About Here

Table 3.0 aggregates the data from a different perspective. It examines student progress and reports the number of students in such categories as "Enrollee" or "Persister" as described previously. Table 3.0 shows that a substantial number of non-graduates, 201 of them, either enrolled in the last academic year or had made sufficient academic progress to qualify, at the least, for "senior" standing. Table 4.0

collapses Enrollees, Persisters and Strugglers into a single group of “Probable Graduates” and it collapses Stop-outs and Withdrawers into a single group of “probable non-graduates” or “Attriters.” (Theoretically, however, many of the students in this latter group of Attriters could petition to re-enroll.) Thus, Table 4.0 reveals that in addition to those who have already graduated, 201 students continue to have some reasonable probability of ultimately graduating, while 311 have little likelihood of graduating.

Table 3.0 and Table 4.0 About Here

Table 5.0 shows the graduation rates and academic achievement for students who entered in the Summer and Fall terms, while Table 6.0 shows graduations and academic achievement data for those who entered in Winter or Spring terms. The distinction is reported because some CSP students are admitted as transfer students from other institutions. About one percent of the CSP students who enter in the Summer or Fall terms are transfer students, while about fifty percent of those who enter in the Winter or Spring terms are transfers. For all three classes studied, students who enter in the Fall term have a higher graduation rate than those who entered in other terms. The difference averages about ten percentage points more than the next highest graduation rate which was obtained by students who entered in the Summer term. Students who entered in the Spring term, particularly in recent years, were determined to have a low graduation rate.

Discussion

The completion of a college degree has long been viewed as a means of bettering one’s self both economically and personally. Over 14 million students at all levels of postsecondary education in the USA attest to this promise of higher education. In recent years efforts have been made to improve the access of minority and disadvantaged groups to higher education and its benefits. Many of these efforts can be described as affirmative action programs as they seek to identify, enroll, and support students in college who might otherwise never attend. The Comprehensive

Studies Program is such an effort. This study of the educational attainment of CSP students reveals that between 75 and 80 percent of these students can be expected to graduate Michigan. For the class that entered in 1989, 76% have already graduated and an additional 8% have some reasonable chance of graduating. For those who entered in the Fall of 1989 the graduation rate was 79%. Many of those students who entered in Winter or Spring terms and who were noted to have a lower graduation rate, were transfer students. Whether transfer or new admit, students who enter in Winter or Spring terms are likely to have a more difficult time finding their niche within the large university community and this may affect their academic adjustment as well. Reports prepared by Briske (1996) of the University Registrar's Office which examined graduation rates for successive classes of entering students over a ten year period, showed that the ten-year mean graduation rate for Blacks after six years of enrollment was 63%; for whites the ten-year mean graduation rate after six years of enrollment was 83%. Thus the graduation rate for CSP students was slightly better than for blacks in general at Michigan. In addition, a sizeable number of the remaining CSP class cohort were expected to graduate. That is, those students categorized as Enrollees, Persisters, and Strugglers continue to be in a position to graduate and generally need only to fulfill minor requirements. If all 201 such students graduated, then the overall graduation rate for the three classes studied would increase to about 79%. Some, in fact, have already fulfilled all their requirements, but have not been conferred a degree. Therefore, some discussion of the Enrollees, Persisters, and Strugglers seems in order.

The group labelled Enrollees clearly continue their efforts towards graduation. This group gets smaller as each year passes, presumably because they ultimately complete their requirements for graduation. The group labelled Strugglers is a small group (about 1% of the total sample) and they have experienced variable success as students. That is, almost all of them have a GPA of about 1.9. In some semesters they perform above the 2.0 "good standing" marker, and other semesters they perform below it. They are noteworthy principally because of their sheer tenacity; they do not give up and they keep coming back if given the chance. It is likely that some number of this small group will graduate.

The Persisters are perhaps the most interesting group. There were 88 such students in the study. They all had achieved senior status (at least 90 CTP) and they all had a cumulative GPA above 2.0. In fact, as a group the mean number of credits earned towards graduation was 113.9 and their mean GPA was 2.46. Why have these students not enrolled during the last academic year? A definitive answer to this question is beyond the scope of the current investigation, but one may speculate about plausible answers. Some Persisters were internal transfers from one Michigan school to another; some were enrolled in dual degree programs; some were in programs requiring more than four years to graduate (such as Pharmacy). Some apparently suffered a case of "senioritis" and did not progress as would be expected. But as a group, there is no serious academic impediment to their continued enrollment. In fact, some were known to be enrolled in professional school even though they had not been conferred the bachelor's degree. One likely explanation is that a number of Persisters faced financial difficulty at the end of their college careers. A "financial hold" would prevent one from registering for a final semester. And if the student has enrolled for ten semesters already, then perhaps all financial aid eligibility has been used. The debt burden such students face could make them reluctant to incur more debt, even if doing so is the only means remaining to support continued enrollment. If students are able to secure employment based on their current status, then perhaps this serves as an added incentive to leave Michigan without a degree.

Persisters can be contrasted with the group labelled Stop-Outs. The Stop-Outs in the study totalled 136 students. They had earned an average of 53.6 credits towards graduation and a mean GPA of 2.47. Almost all the Stop-Outs left within two years of first matriculation at Michigan. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Stop-outs left due to disenchantment on some level. If so, it is unlikely that they will return to continue work towards a degree even though theoretically it is possible for them to do so.

Persisters accounted for about 6% of the whole sample, while Stop-Outs accounted for about 9%. Thus, about 15% of the students examined seemed to be academically capable and made substantial progress towards graduation, but had not graduated at the time of this study. Combining those students who enrolled during the last academic year with those who are Persisters and Strugglers yields a group equal

to about 14% of the sample studied. This is the group most likely to join the 65% who have already graduated and who have some reasonable likelihood of eventually graduating themselves. It should be noted that the business of dealing with students who face academic action is itself quite an inexact enterprise. As a result, even some of those in the Withdrawers group will re-enroll and continue work towards graduation and many of those who do so are likely to succeed. Thus, except for those who are categorized as "Graduates" there will be some continued fluctuations among the numbers as those who are Enrollees, Persisters and Strugglers complete requirements and graduate and as those who are Withdrawers seek to re-enroll in order to continue their quest for a college degree.

Saterfield (1996) of the American College Testing Program reported that nationally the college drop-out rate was at an all-time high, with a 27 percent attrition from first-year to sophomore year. Moreover, he reported a national five-year graduation rate of 53.3% and attributed these findings to an increase in underprepared students, costs versus ability to pay for college, poor course selections, and transfers from one school to another. The American Council on Education (1996) has reported that nationwide the gap between black and white student college graduation rates is more than 20 percent. The data reported by Briske shows that at Michigan, although the overall graduation rates for both blacks and whites is much higher than national averages, essentially the same gap exists (63% and 83%, respectively). Yet, the gap between the graduation rate for CSP students and white students at Michigan was found by this study to be less than seven percentage points and likely to be reduced further as perseverant students continue to work towards their degrees. In fact, those CSP students who entered in the fall term were no more than four percentage points off the average graduation rate for white students over the last ten years. It should be noted that upon entry, CSP students as a group are not as fully prepared academically for the challenges of the competitive university community as their white counterparts, and many CSP students require opportunities for academic development during the first year. This, in large measure, accounts for the additional time needed to graduate for many students in this group. Despite these differences, the ultimate graduation rate for CSP students, notably those who enter in the fall term, approaches parity with that of white students. This suggests that the model of offering

comprehensive academic support to underprepared students early in their college careers as well as appropriate advice and encouragement later can do much to erase the gap in postsecondary attainment between the races in particular and economically disadvantaged students generally. Although the findings of this study are generally favorable, particularly when considering the ultimate graduation rate of CSP students, there still exist areas of concern. For example, the four-year graduation rate is lower than desired and the gap between blacks and whites, both upon entry and after four-years, is troubling. CSP students admitted through the Summer Bridge Program in particular have substantially lower academic credentials than others, yet they have a very respectable graduation rate in comparison to national standards (see, Table 7.0). What is promising about this study's findings is that students with marginal credentials have been shown to succeed in large numbers in the attainment of a college education with all the benefits, rights, and privileges that doing so bestows.

References

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Table 1.0 Overall Graduation Rates for CSP students by Term of Entry.

Term of Entry	Number Entering	Number Graduates	Graduation rate
Summer '89	80	53	66.2
Fall '89	351	278	79.2
Winter '90	38	24	63.2
Spring '90	8	5	62.5
total	477	360	75.5
Summer '90	84	47	56.0
Fall '90	404	265	65.6
Winter '90	14	7	50.0
Spring '90	6	2	33.3
total	508	321	63.2
Summer '91	71	36	50.7
Fall '91	392	231	58.9
Winter '91	14	7	50.0
Spring '91	7	2	28.6
total	484	276	57.0
Overall	1469	957	65.1

Table 2.0 Number of CSP Students Graduating within 4, 5, 6, or 7 years of entering.

Term of Entry	Total # Entering	Number graduating within:				Total # Graduates	Total # Non-graduates
		4 Years	5 Years	6 Years	7 Years		
Sum '89	80	26	20	4	3	53	27
Fall '89	351	160	79	27	12	278	73
Win '90	38	18	4	1	1	24	14
Spr '90	8	3	1	1	0	5	3
total	477	207	104	33	16	360	117
<i>rate</i>		<i>43.4</i>	<i>21.8</i>	<i>6.9</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>75.5</i>	<i>24.5</i>
Sum '90	84	34	9	4		47	37
Fall '90	404	151	88	26		265	139
Win '91	14	5	2	0		7	7
Spr '91	6	2	0	0		2	4
total	508	192	99	30		321	187
<i>rate</i>		<i>37.8</i>	<i>19.5</i>	<i>5.9</i>		<i>63.2</i>	<i>36.8</i>
Sum '91	71	18	18			36	35
Fall '91	392	143	88			231	161
Win '92	14	6	1			7	7
Spr '92	7	0	2			2	5
total	484	167	109			276	208
<i>rate</i>		<i>34.5</i>	<i>22.5</i>			<i>57.0</i>	<i>43.0</i>
TOTAL	1469	566	312	63	16	957	512
<i>rate</i>		<i>38.5</i>	<i>21.2</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>65.1</i>	<i>34.9</i>

Legend

Rate = total divided by Total # Entering

Table 3.0 CSP Retention and Attrition Data for students entering in 1989, 1990, 1991.

Term of Entry	Graduates	Enrollees	Persisters	Strugglers	Stop-Outs	Withdrawers	Total
Sum '89	53	3	8	2	6	8	80
Fall '89	278	5	13	1	22	32	351
Win '90	24	0	7	1	2	4	38
Spr '90	5	0	0	0	0	3	8
total	360	8	28	4	30	47	477
%	75.5	1.7	5.9	1.0	6.3	9.9	100
Sum '90	47	3	10	2	9	13	84
Fall '90	265	19	28	6	42	44	404
Win '91	7	0	3	0	3	1	14
Spr '91	2	0	0	0	1	3	6
total	321	22	41	8	55	61	508
%	63.2	4.3	8.1	1.6	10.8	11.5	100
Sum '91	36	9	3	1	9	13	71
Fall '91	231	55	16	2	38	50	392
Win '92	7	2	0	0	4	1	14
Spr '92	2	2	0	0	0	3	7
total	276	68	19	3	51	67	484
%	57.0	14.0	3.9	0.6	10.5	13.8	100
TOTAL	957	98	88	15	136	175	1469
%	65.1	6.7	6.0	1.0	9.3	11.9	100

Legend

Graduate: record reflects a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from University of Michigan

Enrollee: record reflects that student has been enrolled at U-M during the last academic year

Persister: student has achieved "senior status" defined as a GPA of 2.0 with at least 90 CTP

Struggler: student has 90 CTP, but a GPA <2.0 or an Academic Hold

Stop-Out: student has a GPA >2.0 and is in good standing, but has not enrolled in last academic year

Withdrawer: student has GPA <2.0, is not in good standing and has not enrolled in last academic year

Table 4.0 Aggregated Graduation, Retention, and Attrition Data for CSP Students

Year of Entry	Graduates	Retainees	Attriters	Total
1989-90	360	40	77	477
1990-91	321	71	116	508
1991-92	276	90	118	484
<i>Total</i>	<i>957</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>311</i>	<i>1469</i>

Fig. 1 CSP Graduation, Retention & Attrition

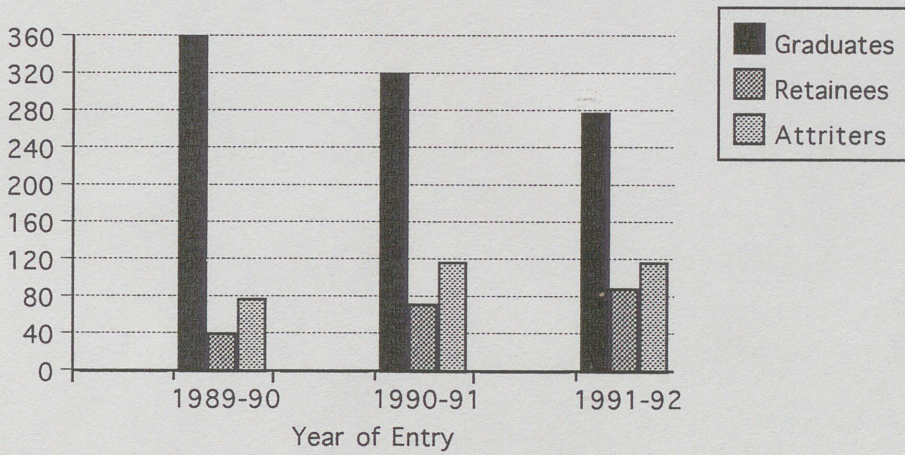


Fig. 2 CSP Student Academic Progress

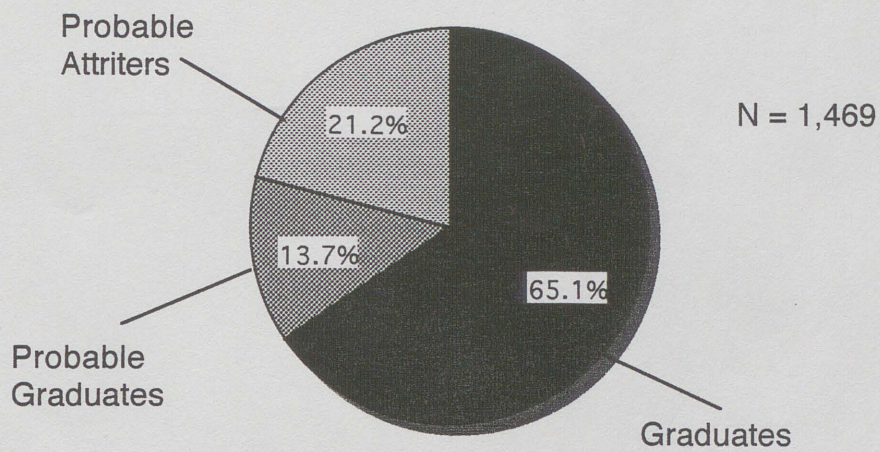
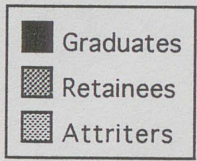
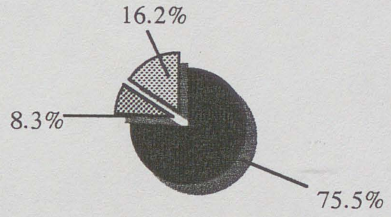


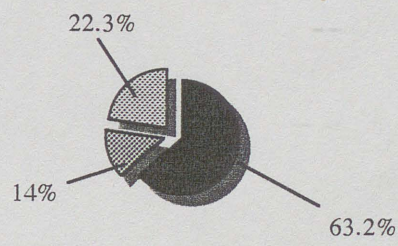
Fig 3. CSP Academic Achievement by Year



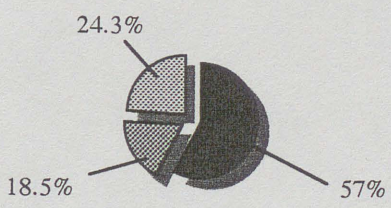
N = 1,469



1989-90 (n = 477)



1990-91 (n = 508)



1991-92 (n = 484)

Table 5.0 CSP Retention Data for students entering in Summer and Fall terms 1989, 1990, 1991

Term of Entry	Graduates	Enrollees	Persisters	Strugglers	Stop-Outs	Withdrawers	Total
S '89	53	3	8	2	6	8	80
F '89	278	5	13	1	22	32	351
total	331	8	21	3	28	40	431
%	76.8	1.9	4.9	1.0	6.5	9.3	100
S '90	47	3	10	2	9	13	84
F '90	265	19	28	6	42	44	404
total	312	22	38	8	51	57	488
%	63.9	4.5	7.8	1.6	10.5	11.5	100
S '91	36	9	3	1	9	13	71
F '91	231	55	16	2	38	50	392
total	267	64	19	3	47	63	463
%	57.7	13.8	4.1	0.6	10.2	13.6	100
TOTAL	910	94	78	14	126	160	1382
%	65.8	6.8	5.6	1.0	9.1	11.6	100

Legend

Graduate: record reflects a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from University of Michigan

Enrollee: record reflects that student has been enrolled at U-M during the last academic year

Persister: student has achieved "senior status" defined as a GPA of 2.0 with at least 90 CTP

Struggler: student has 90 CTP, but a GPA <2.0 or an Academic Hold

Stop-Out: student has a GPA >2.0 and is in good standing, but has not enrolled in last academic year

Withdrawer: student has GPA <2.0, is not in good standing and has not enrolled in last academic year

N.B.: Transfer students account for about one percent of CSP students entering in Summer or Fall terms.

Table 6.0 CSP Retention Data for students entering in Winter and Spring terms 1990, 1991, 1992

Term of Entry	Graduates	Enrollees	Persisters	Strugglers	Stop-Outs	Withdrawers	Total
Wi '90	24	0	7	1	2	4	38
Spr '90	5	0	0	0	0	3	8
total	29	0	7	1	2	7	46
%	63.0	0.0	15.2	2.2	4.3	15.2	100
Wi '91	7	0	3	0	3	1	14
Spr '91	2	0	0	0	1	3	6
total	9	0	3	0	4	4	20
%	45.0	0.0	15.0	0.0	20.0	20.0	100
Wi '92	7	2	0	0	4	1	14
Spr '92	2	2	0	0	0	3	7
total	9	4	0	0	4	4	21
%	42.9	19.0	0.0	0.0	19.0	19.0	100
TOTAL	47	4	10	1	10	15	87
%	54.0	4.6	11.5	1.1	11.5	17.2	100

Legend

Graduate: record reflects a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from University of Michigan

Enrollee: record reflects that student has been enrolled at U-M during the last academic year

Persister: student has achieved "senior status" defined as a GPA of 2.0 with at least 90 CTP

Struggler: student has 90 CTP, but a GPA <2.0 or an Academic Hold

Stop-Out: student has a GPA >2.0 and is in good standing, but has not enrolled in last academic year

Withdrawer: student has GPA <2.0, is not in good standing and has not enrolled in last academic year

N.B.: Transfer students account for about 50 percent of CSP students entering in Winter and Spring terms.

Fig. 4 Status of CSP Students who entered in Summer/Fall vs. Winter/Spring

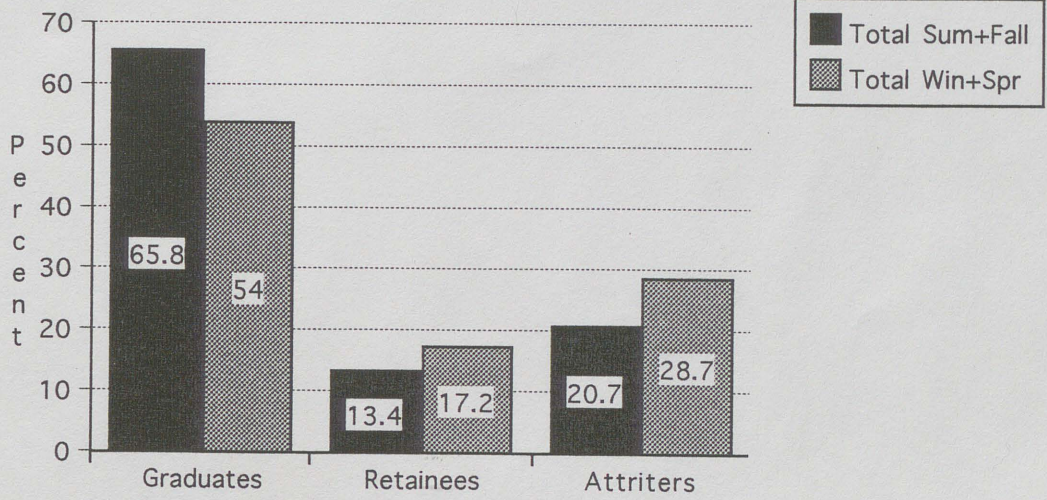


Fig. 5 Status based on term of enrollment by year.

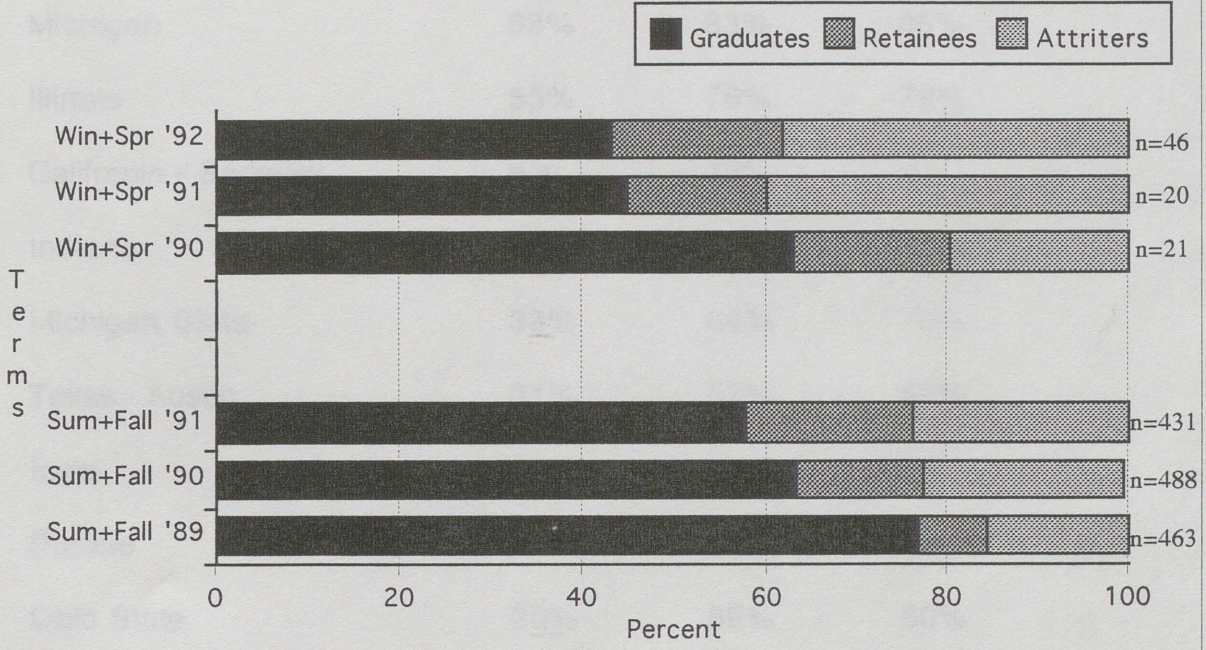


Table 7.0 Graduation Rates of Selective Public Universities and for U-M Ethnic Groups.

School	Graduation Rate		
	<u>4 Yrs</u>	<u>5 Yrs</u>	<u>6 Yrs</u>
Wisconsin	71%	77%	85%
North Carolina- Chapel Hill	65%	83%	85%
Michigan	63%	83%	85%
Illinois	55%	76%	79%
California - Berkeley	n.a.	73%	n.a.
Indiana	48%	69%	73%
Michigan State	33%	64%	70%
Texas - Austin	31%	57%	63%
Iowa	30%	54%	n.a.
Purdue	30%	61%	n.a.
Ohio State	20%	52%	60%
U-M - Asian	63%	82%	86%
U-M - White	61%	84%	86%
U-M - Native American	49%	70%	87%
U-M - Latino	44%	74%	80%
U-M - African American	32%	55%	70%

source: Peterson's Guide to Four Year Colleges - 1996