‘Why do student dropout’ student survey

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Gavilan College
Summer 2011
Introduction
At Gavilan College and throughout the state, discussions have focused on student success. While success can mean different things to different students, a common measure of success is course and program completion. One major obstacle in a student’s path towards success is repeated course drops. The current study was designed to increase understanding on the reasons why students fail to complete their classes. Additionally, the study was designed to better understand how that drop occurred.

Methods
A draft of the current survey was developed by the Office of Institutional Research in Spring 11. The survey was then sent out to two faculty and an administrator for their input. The survey was modified based on their input (See survey Appendix A).

The completed survey was administered at the close of the term via email to a sample of students who had dropped at least one course during the Spring 11 term. The survey was sent to only those students who had submitted an email into the Banner database system. The total number of students invited was 832. One hundred and fourteen students completed the survey. This amount represented approximately 7.3% of the 1,550 student who dropped a course in the Spring 11 term.

Of the students who completed the survey, 33.3% reported having taken a basic skills course and 35.7% reported having children, and 68.1% reported having a job. Sixty-two percent of the respondents reported completing over 24 units. The number of units completed suggested that this may be a sample that has completed at least one term. These distributions are consistent with the overall student population.

Findings
The first item asked students to select the reason(s) that they dropped a course(s). Respondents reported work/school scheduling most frequently (34.1%) as the reason for dropping a course (See Table 1). The second most reported reason was other (29.5%), while the third was did not like the instructor (27.3%).

These findings were compared using the background variables, unit completion, job status, basic skills status, and whether a respondent reported having a child. When differing groups were compared on the reasons they dropped a course, only a few significant differences were found. Firstly, those who reported having a job more frequently reported work/school conflict as a reason they dropped a course (46.7% to 7.1%), while they reported Did not like the instructor at lower levels (23.3% to 35.7%). Additionally, those who reported having a job selected enrolling in too many courses at higher levels (23.3% to 7.1%).
Another pattern of differences was found between those who reported having children and those who did not. Those who reported having children selected *Did not like the instructor* at lower levels as compared to those who did not report having children (3.2% to 41.1%). Those respondents with children also selected *did not like the course* at lower levels (6.5% to 25.0%).

A group of particular interest was those students who dropped the course after the drop deadline. Of those students who dropped after the deadline, the most frequently reported reason for dropping was *did not like the instructor* (30.0%) and *family/medical emergency* (30.0%).

### Table 1: Reported reason for dropping a course(s), all students (n=88).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work/school scheduling conflict</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in too many courses and dropped course(s)</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not like the instructor</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not like the course</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had family emergency</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not have the skills to do well</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to move</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got too far behind</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical/health issue</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got too far behind</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had child care issue</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another item asked students to list who they might have talked with prior to dropping a course(s). Most students (52.3%) reported that they did not talk with anyone prior to dropping a course. The next most frequent selection (22.1%) was that they talked with their friends. The most frequent college staff talked with prior to dropping a course was counselors at 20.9%.

When background groups’ responses were compared, those who had reported having taken a *basic skills* course reported higher levels of communication with college staff. For example, basic skills students reported talking with counselors (37.1%) and their instructors (31.0%) at significantly higher levels. Other groups did not differ significantly on their responses to this item.
Table 2: Talking with anyone prior to dropping the course, all students (n=87).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t talk with anyone about it</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor or lab staff</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments
The following are the themes from the individual comments (See actual comments Appendix B).

What are the reasons you dropped out?
- Work scheduling changed;
- Transportation costs;
- Was able to get into alternative course;
- Family emergency;
- Lost interest.

What might have helped you complete the course?
- Nothing, just a matter of circumstances;
- Have counselor provide more useful information;
- More clear explanations and communication from the instructor;
- More individualized assistance from the instructor;
- More evening classes or non-Gilroy classes to fit with schedule;
- Classes are difficult to get into so it necessitates enrolling in more classes than needed.

Summary
Prior to any discussion of the results of this survey, the limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation was the size of the sample (114). Only a small proportion of the total number of students who dropped a course completed a survey (7%). Moreover, those who responded had shared their emails and had computer access. Either of these sampling weaknesses may have shaped the results and makes groups comparison less reliable.

Additionally, closed-ended responses may not have captured the multiple factors that contribute to a student dropping a course. Indeed, one of the most frequent reasons...
respondents reported for dropping a course was other (29.5%). The comments provided more information about the reasons and the sequence of events, but even these comments provide an incomplete picture.

**Reasons for dropping**
One of the most important reasons students drop was a scheduling conflict. This suggests, as echoed in individual comments, that scheduling options at off-sites and in the evening should be made available. Nevertheless, many of these conflicts are unavoidable as students have to juggle work and family commitments.

Another frequent reason, particularly with those students who did not have children and who dropped after the deadline, was that they did not like the instructor. The comments section provided some clues as to what they might have not liked. Some students suggested that instructors needed to provide more clear explanations and individual assistance. The comments made by students are instructive and should remind the college community about the importance of professional development and having continued dialogue about improving instructional methods.

**Prior to dropping**
Most students do not talk with anyone prior to dropping a course. With some students this may be appropriate, others, however, may benefit from talking with an instructor, counselor, or other staff. For example, only 17% of student talked with their instructors prior to dropping the course. Again, for many students unavoidable events happen that prompt a student to drop a course. Nevertheless, if a student talks with an instructor first, there may be opportunities to make up work or take an incomplete prior to dropping the course.

**Summary**
This survey questioned a small ($n=114$) sample of students on the reasons why they dropped out. The small sample may not represent the overall population of students who drop courses. Nevertheless, some findings are particular noteworthy. The most frequent reason students reported that they dropped was scheduling conflicts. This finding combined with the comments made by students confirmed the need for diverse course scheduling options. Students also suggested that not liking an instructor was an important reason for dropping a course. Students’ suggestions about what would have helped them complete the course are a reminder of the need for increased professional development and continued dialogue regarding teaching and learning. In sum, the survey suggested that most students experience scheduling conflicts which cause them to drop a course. Nevertheless, there is the potential for the college to improve its services to help those with avoidable reasons to complete and succeed at out college.
Appendix A: Survey

Course Drop Survey

In order for us to better understand students and help us improve our courses and services, we are conducting a study. This survey will ask you about the reason(s) you dropped a course during this last term. The survey is anonymous (no names) and will only take 3 minutes. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not affect your status as a student at Gavilan College.

Thanks for your opinions.

1. Do you choose to participate in this survey?
   - Yes
   - No

1. As of this term, how many units have you completed at Gavilan College?
   - 0 units
   - 1-6 units
   - 7-24 units
   - Over 24 units

2. Have you ever taken a Basic Skills course (ENGL and/or Math 200 or 400 level or any ESL course)
   - Yes
   - No

3. Do you have any children?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Do you have a job?
   - Yes
   - No
## Course Drop Survey

5. When did you drop your course(s):

- [ ] Before drop date deadline (April 27th)
- [ ] After the drop deadline (April 27th)

6. Please mark what influenced your decision to drop a course(s) during the past term (Check all that apply):

- [ ] Work/school scheduling conflict
- [ ] Enrolled in too many courses and dropped course(s)
- [ ] Did not like the instructor
- [ ] Did not like the course
- [ ] Had family emergency
- [ ] Did not have the skills to do well
- [ ] Had to move
- [ ] Got too far behind
- [ ] Medical/health issue
- [ ] Got too far behind
- [ ] Had child care issue
- [ ] Other

   Other (please specify) 

7. When you dropped the course(s), who did you talk with before you dropped (Check all that apply)?

- [ ] I didn’t talk with anyone about it
- [ ] Counselor
- [ ] Instructor
- [ ] Friends
- [ ] Family
- [ ] Tutor or lab staff

   Other (please specify) 

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Drop Survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. What might have helped you stay in the course?</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thanks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your time.</td>
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</table>

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Appendix B: Comments

Reasons for Dropping Course Comments:

- working, school, and having a toddler is a lot to handle. i was too overwhelmed and constantly stressed. i dropped the class i knew i could easily make up.
- What? I didn't drop any courses. Why did I get an email asking me to fill this survey out?
- Was not aware i was enrolled in the course. It was an online library course I think.
- Unemployed. Gas prices increased which limited my ability to drive to Gilroy.
- Travel
- There was only room for 28 students: the k-8 instructors teach 40 kids!
- The class was never specified or scheduled. The time was TBA until the end of the semester.
- The class was a bit confusing, i dropped it hoping to take it in the fall with no other classes. Work load seemed like a lot when i finally figured out what i needed to do.
- Switched my general ed courses
- online course, was WAY too complicated
- one of the courses was wsy too hard snd to much work when enrolled full time
- Not enough money to travel to school
- need to take math 205 in two parts. Not available in evening.
- My interests changed
- My father was diagnosed with cancer and have/had to help take care of him
- lack of interest
- instructors dont care if you have a family emergency although you have a doctors note, they stil mark you absent and they wont explain things again
- Illness in family
- I was placed in a low class that i did not have to take which was English 250 when I had to take English 1A not English 250.
- i was dropped by admin because they failed to bill me the $1 ASB fee prior to my registration due date
- Hybrid class.
- Got in to a course I wanted to take more than this one
- Forgot about class
- Dropped corse waiting for other prefferd course to open
- dropped classes several years ago
- Didn't have the means to buy Photoshop at the moment
- Did not have time to make it to class from my earlier class
- Childlike relationship issues, delt-with through Plutonicsizm, still to this day , an ongoing ,non-resolved issue
- Activities and obligations interfered with attendance
What might have helped you stay in the course?

- 1. If the student have a doctors note, teachers shouldn't make them absent because absentces takes points away! 2. Some teachers direction are not very clear, example: the you have to read more then big think books with summary+ a research paper, well in this class we don't have exams but we do have 2 final papers and they are worth a lot of points. The teacher is very unfair because you read all the books and write all the summaries and you try your best to understand the teachers confusing directions to write your 2 finals but she just doesn't like your paper because you miss something! I tried tutoring for this 2 finals and the tutor didn't understand the directions ether. We students asked her about her directions and she confused us more. I'm unhappy with my grade because I went to bed late several times and I put so much effort to this class for nothing! And think teacher should recognized your hard work, and they should give a good grades to the students that are consistent and who knows and talk and demonstrate what they learn in class. This teacher only care if whether the 2 finals are right or wrong!

- a better pace. Go over through every thing done including assignments. Be more clear.

- A better selection of classes offered in the evening would have resolved all of my scheduling problems.

- A easier grading system  A different course  A different website the school used. I'm against american meterology society

- a more flexible study session

- a reminder of some sort that i had work due, no as much reading and writing, more teacher availability.

- Administrations office doing there job correctly would probably have helped a LOT.

- Availability of a course is the only reason I would drop course

- better study habits

- Better support to be able to get through the semester

- Better teacher

- Competent instructors. seriously needs to be evaluated as an English professor.

- Different teacher

- Different times for the class an some closer classes to where i live

- Easier class.

- Either having the course in Hollister, employment, or any type of income.

- Extra Credit

- First of all the class I dropped was and it was more of a research/English class. I expected the class to be different (learning more about the ) and honestly for none of my English classes (last English class I took was Engl 1C) that I've taken I have never gotten as much reading, writing, and research like I did in that class. Unfortunately there is no other instructor that teaches that history class(it helps to have more than one instructor teaching a course) therefore I might just take it at a different college as it is a class that I need to transfer. One last thing that I do want to point out, I know other people/students that have taken that same history class and I've heard negative comments on how much reading,writing, and research that instructor gives out and like I mentioned before in my opinion it is way more than what I've had to do for my English classes. I know it's College but if people including writing tutors have dropped that class it must say a lot about the assignments given by that instructor in particular, she should probably be an English instructor.

- Having more time in the day. I took on too much. I know school pushes you but having physical symptoms of stress is no good. My well being is first and of course family is next. If I'm not okay there's no way I will do well in life.
• Having my books when the semester started, a teacher with better communication skills, and less online work.
• Having Photoshop at home.
• Having the counselors tell me again again or even once that I needed to apply for a transfer a year in advanced!!! I have been a Gavilan College since 2004 and never did a counselor state that I needed to that: apply for transfer a year ahead of time!
• I dropped because I had 18 units. The nursing department CNA class filled up in 6 minnets. Because FA requires 12 units for assistance, ROP classes dont count, we have to add classes we dont need to fulfill FA unit requirement
• I had too many courses that were intense and with my new position at work and my seasonal jobs I didn't feel I could give this class the attention I needed to do well and benefit from the class the way I wanted too. One of the classes I did take were alot more intense that one would have thought for a 3 unit class.
• I have taken many online classes and this class seemed a bit confusing on what was due and what needed to be done. I would have stayed in the class if I could have figured out the work load out sooner. There is a lot of work to do in this class. Now that I know and understand the way the teacher has put the information up, I hope to take the class in the fall by itself or with one other class.
• I needed time to study, because of work I was not able to do so.
• I schedule too many courses for full-time work schedule
• I think that this being my first college course and the fact that this was a super hard course, led me to fall behind and it just got to overwhelming with 3 other classes. Yes the instructor was great and knew his/her stuff, but I couldn't handle his/her type of teaching and how the class was ran.
• I was a returning student and needed to take Beginning Algebra in two sections A & B since it had been so long since I had taken an Algebra course, I needed a course that went a little slower so that I could grasp everything.
• If I had not of been able to add a class that I really did need on the first day of classes. By being able to add this class, I dropped the course I did not need to take, but had enrolled in just to be considered a full time student.
• If I had one on one help with the instructor in reviewing part I was stuck in before going on or even after.
• If my english class which i did not drop would have been an hour later.
• If the class was only 1 hour 10 min long like the classes that I did not drop. I cannot sit for longer than that in those TERRIBLE school chairs. Also why I never consider taking Summer Classes.
• If the instructor would have given me a little more insite on what I seemed to be doing wrong even after following his instructions to a T instead of telling me to "read the instructions and you'll do well on my assignments" I would have stayed...
• If the online assignments were not due Sunday at 6. And if the class was what I expected.
• I'm retired and was taking Digital Media to work on Gilroy Historical Society film project, but other projects and activities occupied my time. When time allows, I will complete my work through CMAP and consultation with [redacted]. The only thing Gavilan could have done is to train me in how to say "No" to requests to do the projects I love.
• Information. I don't even know if it ever started! I looked at it every week and there was never any new information.
• It was my fault and I didn't expect my full time work to conflict so much with my classes. I chose to drop my art class because I didn't really need it for a GED. It was just a bad judgement.
• I've dropped 2 different semesters. Once in Spring 1995 because going through a divorce with
3 small children and was not ready for a life change at that time. A second time in Spring 2002 because my Father was very ill and I could not handle so many classes and also help care for my Father. However, I did pass the courses I did not drop even though my Father passed away during finals week. Just circumstances and there's nothing the college could have done.

- Less home destractions and/or involvement with my studies.
- Maybe attending some office hours. I am not real great with computers.
- More available time.
- not sure
- Not sure... life happens
- Nothing
- Nothing college could have done. I dropped in the fall for a purely personal reason due to an illness with my daughter. I dropped a course this spring because my husband was diagnosed with cancer; both life events out of anyone’s control.
- Nothing I only needed the 2 classes I stayed in because I was graduating
- Nothing my father is very ill and when he goes through treatment he needs me. It will be a bit easier now since we know all that goes on. So if he has future treatments my step mom has more knowledge now. But, both English is their second language and though I don’t speak much spanish, for them to under terms aren’t as easy as people think, even when the doctor’s explain it to you.
- Nothing, I chose to take the class with a different instructor based on what other people said about the teacher as well as reviews from ratemyprofessor.com
- nothing, I was disenchanted with school. I had used that semester to try and branch out, look at other options.
- Nothing. I dropped the classes because I had discovered what I really wanted to do with my life.
- Nothing. I was not aware I was enrolled in it and did not know I was dropped from it until today.
- The course was optional (did not need it for graduation requirements) and my work schedule picked up. The class required more study time than I could make for it and I decided to focus on my other required courses. Less work hours, fewer additional courses, and the course being required would have kept myself enrolled.
- The fact that there was no set schedule for that class and I forgot I even signed up for it
- the online courses should be more streamlined.
- The tests to not be on so many chapters
- The way I sign up for classes, I often drop before the NRS date. It is mostly because classes fill up so fast, and when I sign up for classes, I rarely have time to ask about the instructor or difficulty of the class. If there were more classes available, they would fill up less quickly, and students like me would not feel as much of a rush to sign up for a class they may or may not even be interested in taking.
- this course there was no option to stay, I am caring for my grandparents (who are 91 and housebound) and was unable to be away that much, plus I have a daughter in high school who needs my attention. I would like to mention that the previous semester I had to drop a class (Marine Bio) because the teacher suddenly required that over 75% of our class time be spent in Moss Landing and I could not afford to drive that distance each week...this was not detailed in the catalog so it was a surprise to me...I lost a lot of money on this class as I had rented my text book so I want to make sure someone knows about it. Students in my situation cannot afford to just give up $60. for nothing...it left a really bitter taste in my mouth and put me over the edge as far as eligibility for financial aid.
- Unfortunately, not too much. This wasn’t a subject I was struggling with or had fallen behind in, sometimes life just gets in the way. When it comes to completing you class this semester, or picking up more hours at work so you can pay your bills, there is no choice.
• Using my time wisely.
• What would help me is if I can stay healthier meaning not get as many colds. This caused me to miss too many classes and got behind in my classes.