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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with the Northern Michigan University entering freshman class of 1963 and their progress toward graduation. Findings are presented on (1) the status of these freshmen in the Spring of 1969; (2) their persistence in college; and persistence by (3) sex and residence, and (4) academic qualifications. (AF)

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PERSISTENCE IN COLLEGE: THE FRESHMAN CLASS OF 1963

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INTRODUCTION

A sizeable number of students who enter colleges and universities fail to complete a baccalaureate degree. It has been estimated that nationwide about 40 percent of the freshmen who enter a four year institution graduate approximately four years later and that an additional 20 percent graduate at some time from some college.

The study reported here was concerned with the Northern Michigan University entering freshmen class of 1963 and their progress towards graduation. Only those students who were U. S. citizens and who were first-time freshmen in the fall of 1963 were included;¹ data on their progress at Northern up to the spring semester of 1969 were obtained from University records. The entering class of 1963 was selected in part because a sufficient period of time had elapsed since entrance (more than five years) to insure that most members would have graduated or left Northern. Although the 1964 class would also have adequately met this requirement, the 1963 class was used because a considerable amount of background information was already available for that class in machine processible form.

The study was initiated cooperatively by the Office of Institutional Research and the subcommittee on student retention² of the Task Force on the Future of the University. Because of the late date at which the study was begun and the limited amount of time that members of the subcommittee and the author of this report could devote to the study, only a small amount of information was available at the time of issuance of the Task Force report.

FINDINGS

Status of 1963 Freshmen in the Spring of 1969

Of the 851 freshmen who entered Northern in 1963, 345 (41%) had graduated by the end of the 1968 fall semester, 32 (4%) were enrolled in the 1969 spring semester, 405 (48%) had voluntarily left Northern and 69 (8%) had been suspended. About 43 percent of those who had voluntarily withdrawn were in good academic standing at the time of withdrawal;

¹A few of the students included had attended the 1963 summer session but were classified as first-time freshmen in the fall semester.

²The chairman of the subcommittee was Dr. George Carnahan, Head, Department of Commerce and Industry.

the remaining 57 percent were on probation. Two hundred and seventeen of the students who had dropped out of Northern had had a transcript sent to one or more colleges or technical schools. If it is assumed that these students had transferred, we find that 44 percent (377) of the entering class had graduated or were still enrolled, 26 percent (217) had transferred and 30 percent (257) had dropped out of college. Of the 257 students who dropped out 70 or 27 percent were in good standing academically at the time they left college. It should be noted that the actual number of dropouts and transfers was undoubtedly somewhat different from that reported here because of the definition of transfer applied; that is, issuance of a transcript to one or more institutions. It is thought, however, that this definition is adequate for the analyses reported below, even though some of the students classified as transfers probably dropped out of college.

Table 1. Educational Status of the Fall 1963 Freshmen in the Spring Semester, 1969.

<u>Educational Status</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Graduated	345	41
Enrolled in Good Standing	14	2
Enrolled on Probation	18	2
Voluntarily Withdrew (Good Standing)	176	21
Voluntarily Withdrew (Probation)	229	27
Suspended	69	8

Note: Percents in all tables may not add to 100 due to rounding error.

Persistence In College

The number of semesters of attendance at Northern for the 1963 freshmen students is summarized in Table 2. For purposes of this description attendance for a summer session was counted as a full semester, and the term "semester" is used throughout this report to designate an enrollment period of either a semester or summer session.

Slightly less than 40 percent of the students who had graduated had attended eight or less semesters at Northern; thus, about 60 percent of the graduates had attended more than eight semesters. Only about one-third of the graduates followed what is often thought to be the normal pattern, that is completion of a bachelors degree upon enrollment in eight semesters of four consecutive years. It is apparent that the commonly accepted belief that most students who enter college graduate eight semesters later did not hold for this class. This tendency for students to take more than eight semesters to graduate is probably not substantially different from the experiences of students at many other colleges; for example in a

study of the June 1967 baccalaureate graduates of the California state colleges it was found that about two thirds had taken more than four years (elapsed time) to graduate.³

Table 2. Distribution of Students by Number of Semesters Attended at Northern and Educational Status.

Number of Semesters*	Graduated		Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
13	1	0						
12	13	4	3	9				
11	23	7	3	9			2	1
10	52	15	6	19			2	1
9	119	34	2	6	4	2	3	1
8	122	35	5	16	2	1	7	3
7	10**	3	4	13	4	2	7	3
6	5**	1	3	9	17	8	15	6
5			5	16	17	8	17	7
4			1	3	45	21	34	13
3					23	11	31	12
2					76	35	71	28
1					29	13	68	26
TOTAL	345	99	32	100	217	101	257	101

* Summer Session counted as a semester.

**All but two students received some credits from another institution; semesters at other colleges are not included.

Of the students who transferred, about 80 percent did so within their first two years, although a small number transferred after as many as nine semesters at Northern. Similarly, about 80 percent of those who had dropped out of college had attended four semesters or less, although a few had attended eight semesters or more.

To ascertain whether persistence at Northern was related to several demographic and academic variables, students were classified as (1) graduated or enrolled at Northern at the time of the study, (2) transferred (see prior explanation of assumption made) or (3) dropped out of college. The remainder of this report is primarily concerned with describing some of the characteristics of students in each of these three groups.

Persistence by Sex and Residence

Persistence in college is shown in Tables 3 and 4 by sex and residence. Women tended to more often graduate from Northern than men, but men more frequently trans-

³Those Who Made It: Selected Characteristics of the 1967 California State College Baccalaureate Graduates. Division of Institutional Research, Office of the Chancellor, California State Colleges, 1969

ferred to another college or university. Students from Upper Michigan more frequently graduated than did those from Lower Michigan or other states. Upper Michigan students who did not graduate tended to drop out more often than transfer, whereas the converse was true for students from Lower Michigan and other states. This relationship corroborates similar findings in an earlier study of student withdrawal from Northern.⁴ At least a partial explanation of this relationship appears to be that students who leave prior to graduation tend to migrate closer to rather than farther from their home.

Table 3. Persistence of Men and Women

Sex	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped		Total*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Men	209	41	152	30	145	29	506	59
Women	168	49	65	19	112	33	345	41

Chi square = 13.60 P < .01

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*Percents add down, all others add across.

Table 4. Persistence by Residence

Residence	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped		Total*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Upper Michigan	264	53	61	12	169	34	494	58
Lower Michigan	79	30	120	45	68	26	267	31
Other States	34	38	36	40	20	22	90	11

Chi square = 110.25 P < .001

*Percents add down, all others add across.

Persistence and Academic Qualifications

Is academic performance in high school related to persistence in college? As can be seen from Tables 5 and 6 persistence is, as one would expect, significantly related to both high school rank and grade point average. More than 60 percent of those who graduated in the upper quarter of their high school class had graduated from Northern or were enrolled at the time of the study, whereas only about 20 percent of those who had graduated in the lower quarter of their class had completed a baccalaureate degree. Similarly, about two thirds of those students who had a B average or better in high school had graduated, whereas

⁴Student Perceptions of Their Voluntary Withdrawal From Northern: Office of Institutional Research, 1967.

only about a quarter of those who had high school averages of less than C had graduated. At the same time, however, the relationship of high school performance to persistence in college was far from perfect. As shown in Tables 5 and 6, 19 percent of the students who had graduated in the top quarter of their high school class and 16 percent of those with B averages or better had dropped out of college. Conversely, at the lower end of the continuum a number of students whose high school performance indicated that they were very poor college risks had successfully completed their baccalaureate degree.

Table 5. Persistence by Rank in High School Class.

Rank in Class	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped		Total*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Upper Quarter	124	63	36	18	37	19	197	24
Second Quarter	136	49	60	22	82	30	278	34
Third Quarter	81	33	82	33	85	34	248	30
Lowest Quarter	23	22	32	31	49	47	104	13

Chi square = 68.08 P < .001

*Percents add down, all others add across. N's vary slightly from table to table as complete data were not available for all students.

Table 6. Persistence by High School Grade Point Average.

H.S. G.P.A.	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped		Total*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3.00 - 4.00	109	66	30	18	27	16	166	20
2.00 - 2.99	219	45	116	24	149	31	484	57
0.00 - 1.99	46	24	68	35	78	41	192	23

Chi square = 64.17 P < .001

*Percents add down, all others add across.

As can be seen in Table 7 there was also a positive relationship between persistence and total score on the College Qualification Tests, the entrance tests used in 1963. Again, as with the measures of high school performance there was a significantly positive but far from perfect relationship with persistence in college. About 84 percent of the students who had CQT scores of 120 or better (approximately the 50th percentile or above on national norms) had graduated or transferred, whereas substantially smaller numbers with scores in the lower ranges had graduated or remained in college. Looking at the same data from a different perspective, table 7 shows that a significant number of students with very high

tested ability dropped out of college, and conversely some students with very low scores had achieved sufficiently well to have been awarded a baccalaureate degree.⁵

Table 7. Persistence by Total Score on the College Qualification Tests.

CQT Score	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped		Total*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
140 -	60	58	31	30	13	12	104	12
120 - 139	84	55	41	27	28	18	153	18
100 - 119	114	45	60	24	80	31	254	30
80 - 99	83	40	57	27	68	33	208	25
60 - 79	31	30	24	23	49	47	104	12
0 - 59	4	21	3	16	12	63	19	2

Chi square = 54.22 P < .001

*Percents add down, all others add across.

Another way of estimating a student's academic promise at the time of admission is the judgement of his high school principal or counselor. The relationship of persistence in college to high school principals' or counselors' ratings of academic potential is summarized in Table 8. Similar ratings of motivation, personal adjustment, and health are shown in Tables 9 and 10. As can be seen from these tables, counselor's or principal's ratings of these variables tended to be positively related to persistence in college; this was particularly true for ratings of academic promise and motivation. At the same time, however, their predictions were far from perfectly related to performance. For example, of those students who had been admitted even though admission was not recommended, about one-fourth had graduated. On the other hand, more than half of those recommended without reservation had graduated. In general, counselor and principal evaluations appear to have some but not outstanding validity in estimating persistence in college.

Initial performance in college is sometimes used as an indication of a student's likely subsequent achievement. First semester academic performance and subsequent persistence at Northern for the 1963 freshmen is shown in Table 11. About 56 percent of the class had achieved a 2.00 or better average during the first semester. More than two-thirds of those with a B or better average graduated from Northern, but as can be seen from Table 11, at least a small number whose achievement was at this level dropped out

⁵A probable but unverified explanation for some of the very low scores is error in marking or scoring of test answer sheets.

of college. At the low end of the achievement scale, at least three-fourths of the students who had less than a C average for their first semester had dropped out of college, although a small proportion, about 6 percent had graduated or were enrolled at the time of the study. Again, as with high school achievement, first semester grades were significantly but imperfectly predictive of persistence in college.

Table 8. Persistence and High School Counselor's or Principal's Ratings of Academic Promise.

Counselor's or Principal's Rating	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
(1) Estimate of College Success						
Superior	53	66	13	16	14	17
Average	213	51	97	23	105	25
Have Difficulty	63	33	49	25	82	42
(2) Admissions Recommendation						
Recommended	283	52	110	20	151	28
Conditional	40	28	48	34	53	38
Not Recommended	10	23	22	51	11	26

Chi square values: (1) 35.61 $P < .001$ (2) 44.21 $P < .001$

Percents add across, not down.

Table 9. Persistence and High School Counselor's or Principal's Ratings of Motivation.

Counselor's or Principal's Ratings	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
(1) Seriousness of Purpose						
Above Average	174	56	62	20	74	24
Average	156	38	122	29	136	33
Below Average	17	39	13	29	14	32
(2) Achievement Related to Ability						
Above Average	92	62	24	16	32	22
Average	221	43	136	27	155	30
Below Average	33	32	35	34	36	35

Chi square values: (1) 25.27 $P < .001$, (2) 26.11 $P < .001$

Percents add across not down.

Table 10. Persistence and High School Counselor's or Principal's Ratings of Personal Adjustment and Health.

Counselor's or Principal's Rating	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
(1) Emotional Adjustment						
Above Average	133	53	58	23	60	24
Average	214	43	132	26	155	31
Below Average	4	20	5	25	11	55
(2) Social Adjustment						
Above Average	126	51	65	26	58	23
Average	218	43	124	25	159	32
Below Average	6	32	5	26	8	42
(3) Maturity						
Above Average	123	53	55	24	54	23
Average	222	42	136	26	165	32
Below Average	5	28	6	33	7	39
(4) Citizenship						
Above Average	205	54	84	22	92	24
Average	143	38	111	29	126	33
Below Average	2	17	2	17	8	66
(5) Health						
Above Average	156	48	87	27	82	25
Average	189	44	105	25	132	31
Below Average	1	9	3	27	7	64

Chi square values: (1) 14.96 $P < .01$ (2) 7.99 $P > .05$ (3) 10.34 $P < .05$ (4) 28.52 $P < .001$
 (5) 11.72 $P < .05$

Percents add across not down.

Table 11. Persistence by First Semester Grade Point Average.

First Semester GPA	Graduated or Enrolled		Transferred		Dropped		Total*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3.00 - 4.00	76	68	24	21	12	11	112	13
2.00 - 2.99	196	54	94	26	72	20	362	43
1.00 - 1.99	101	36	80	28	102	36	283	33
0.00 - 0.99	4	6	13	20	49	74	66	8
Withdrew (no grades)			6	21	22	79	28	3

Chi square = 125.74 $P < .001$

*Percents add down, all others across.

SUMMARY

About 41 percent of the freshmen who enrolled at Northern in the fall of 1963 had graduated by the end of the fall semester 1968, that is, about five years after their initial matriculation. An additional four percent were still enrolled and the remaining 55 percent had dropped out of college or transferred to another institution.

About 60 percent of the students who had graduated had attended more than eight semesters. Only about one-third of the graduates had followed the "normal" enrollment pattern of eight semesters in four consecutive years. More than three-fourths of those who transferred or dropped out of college did so within their first two years of college work, although a small number of both transfers and dropouts had been enrolled for eight semesters or more.

A somewhat larger proportion of the women (49 percent) than men (41 percent) had graduated or were still enrolled at the time of the study. More than half of the students from Upper Michigan but less than a third of those from Lower Michigan and other states had graduated. Students from Upper Michigan who withdrew prior to graduation more frequently dropped out than transferred, whereas those from Lower Michigan and other states more often transferred to another institution. It is likely that this relationship is due at least in part to the proximity of Upper Michigan students to the University.

As would be expected, students who had good academic qualifications as measured by high school performance, entrance test scores, and judgements of high school counselors or principals were more persistent in college than those with poor qualifications. On the other hand, some students with excellent academic backgrounds dropped out of college, whereas others who were seemingly very poor college risks had succeeded in completing a baccalaureate degree. Similarly, students with high grades during their first semester at Northern were much more likely to continue in college than those with low grades, although some students with excellent first semester performance had dropped out of college and others who had done very poorly during their first semester had graduated.