

First Year Student Retention Survey, Class of 2009-10

Office of Planning and Institutional Research

University of the West Indies, Mona

March 25, 2011

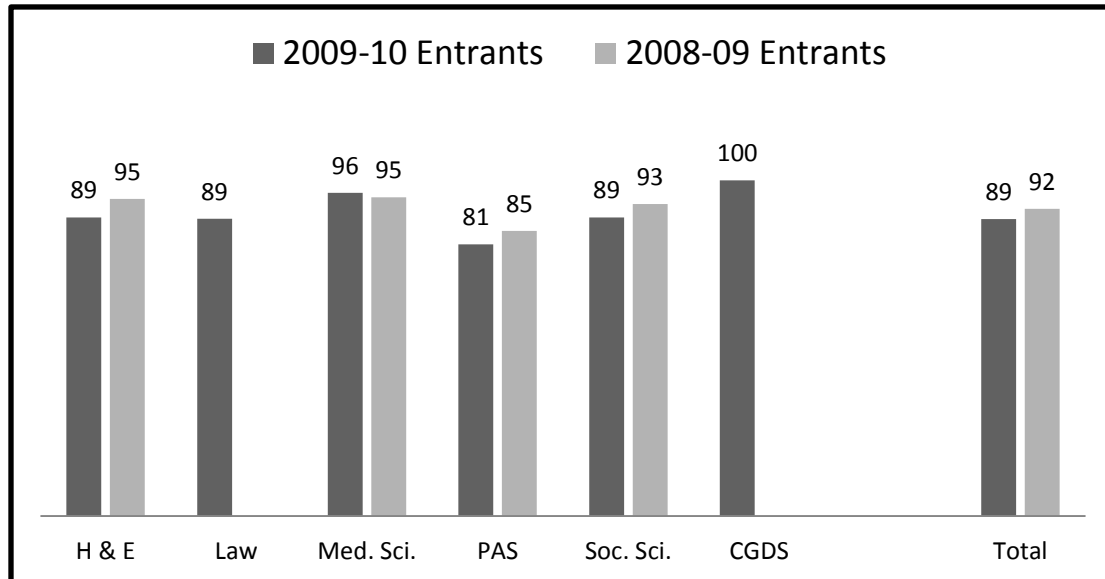
Introduction

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research examined first year retention rates for the second year in a row. This exercise was conducted as part of a university-wide initiative to monitor the trajectory of students from their first to their second year of study, and to identify and address any deviations in enrolment.

Methodology

The target population consisted of First degree entrants who began their programme in Semester 1 of the 2009-2010 academic year. Students taking level one courses were captured in a database and information on their enrolment status, programme of study and academic performance was included. These students were then traced in their second year to determine the percentage who was still enrolled. As Figure 1 shows, of the 3,684 first year students, 89% returned for their second year of study, which was three percentage points lower than the return rate (92%) for the cohort in 2008-09.

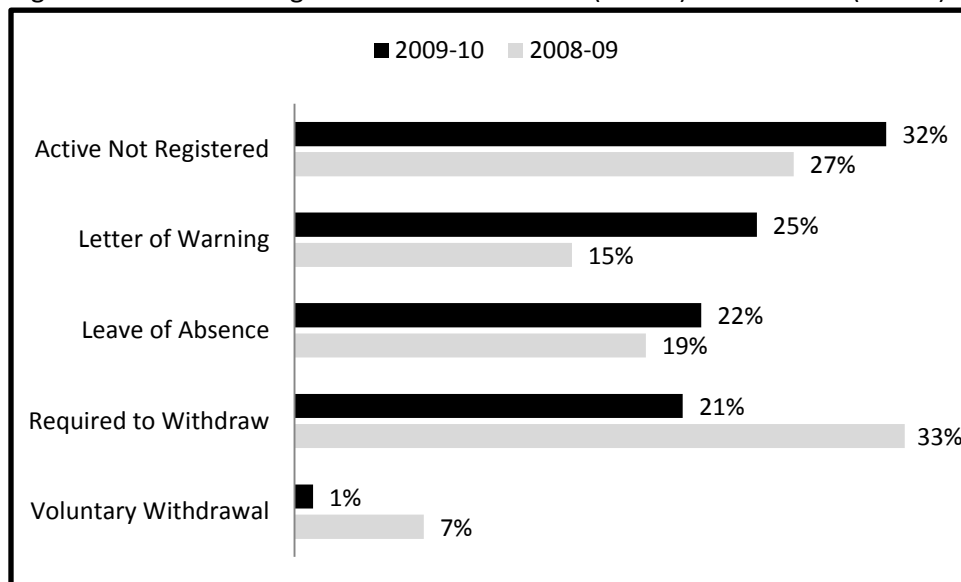
Figure 1. First Year Retention Rates by Faculty among 2009-10 Entrants and 2008-09 Entrants



Students who did not return for their second year of study were identified as non-returnees¹ and were further classified based on their student records.

¹ Among the 2009-10 entrants, 73 first year Law students transferred to the Cave Hill campus for their second year of study, and one student from Humanities and Education registered at a foreign university for her second year of study as an exchange student. These students were not counted among the non-returning students.

Figure 2. Non-Returning Students from 2009-10 (N=423) and 2008-09 (N=254) by Status



A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was mailed to non-returning students to learn the reasons for not returning. Non-returning students were also contacted by email and telephone in an effort to boost the response rate.

Profile of First Degree Entrants

Of the nearly 3,700 first year students, the majority of non-returnees were from two main faculties: the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences (157) and the Faculty of Social Sciences (150). For the second year, the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences recorded the highest number of non-returning students.

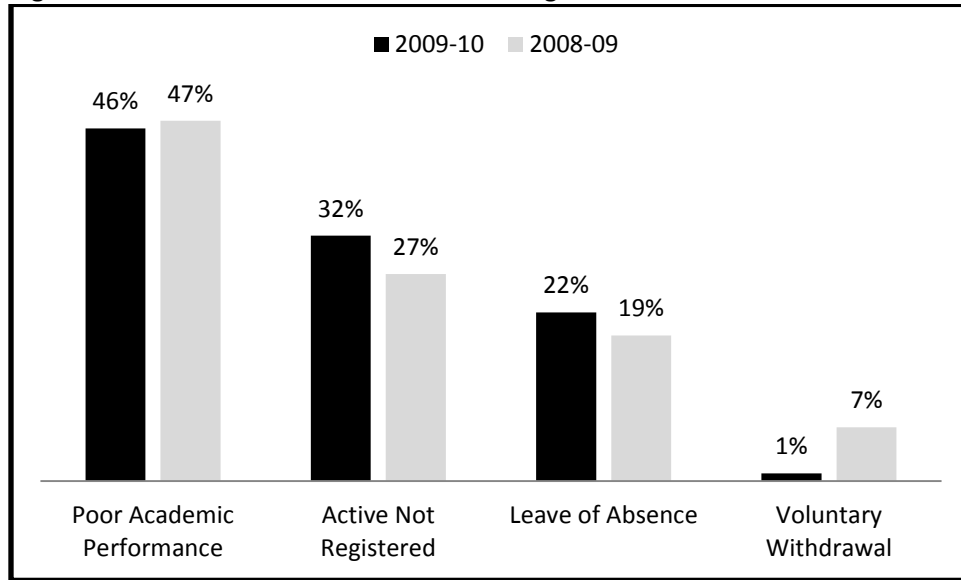
Table 1. Retention Rate of First Degree Entrants in 2009-10 and 2008-09

Faculty	N	Number of Non-Returning Students	1st Year Retention Rate 2009-10	1 st Year Retention Rate 2008-09
Humanities and Education	629	69	89%	94%
Law	192	22	89%	n/a
Medical Sciences	674	25	96%	95%
Pure and Applied Sciences	831	157	81%	85%
Social Sciences	1349	150	89%	93%
Gender and Development Studies	9	0	100%	n/a
Total	3684	423	89%	92%

Factors Behind Student Attrition: The Student Records Database

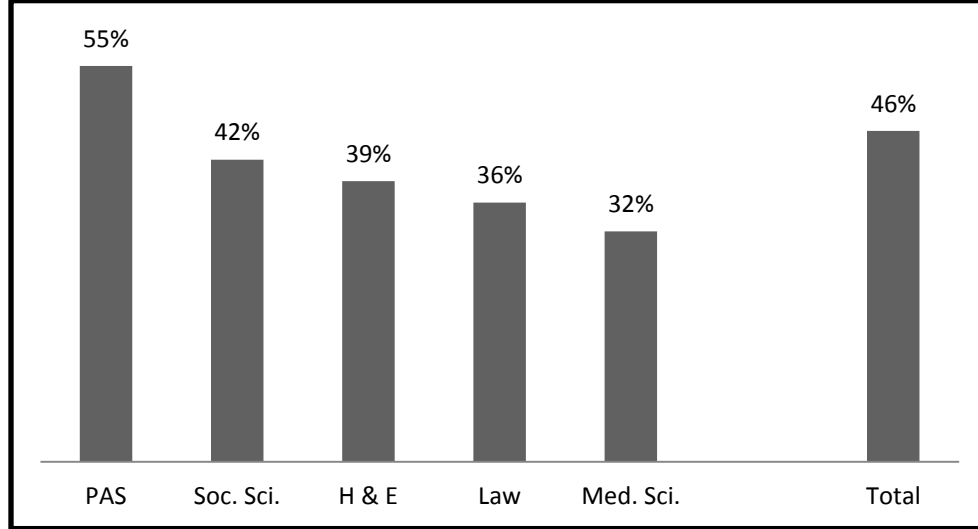
An examination of the student records database suggested that almost half of the students who did not return for their second year of study did so for academic reasons. These students either received a letter of warning or were required to withdraw from their programme. One-third of students did not register for unknown reasons while another twenty percent (20%) did not register due to a leave of absence. Less than 10% of students did not register because they voluntarily withdrew from their programme.

Figure 3. End of Year Status of Non-Returning Students



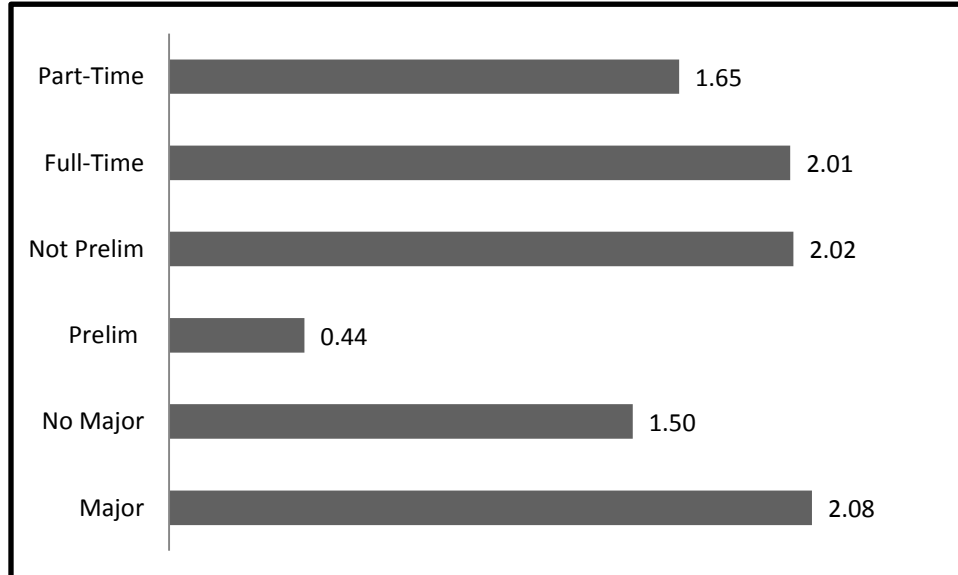
Students who did not return for their second year of study for academic reasons were noticeably higher in the faculties of Pure and Applied Sciences and Social Sciences (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage of Non-Returning Students by Faculty Who Received a Letter of Warning or Who were Required to Withdraw, 2009-10 Cohort



Further analyses revealed that students who did not declare a major, or who were in their preliminary year of study, or who studied part-time did not perform as well as students who had declared a major, who were not in their preliminary year, or who studied full-time. This pattern was evident for both returning and non-returning students.

Figure 5. Semester 1 GPA of First Degree Entrants by Enrolment Status, 2009-10 Cohort



These academically weaker students were concentrated in the faculties of Pure and Applied Sciences and Social Sciences. First year students are not required to declare a major in Pure and Applied Sciences and almost all preliminary year students are attached to this faculty. The Faculty of Social Sciences had the highest percentage (34%) of part-time students followed by Humanities and Education (25%).

Special programmes may need to be instituted to provide tutoring or mentorship to first year students in Pure and Applied Sciences especially given the importance of mathematics courses to this faculty. In addition, an Office of Student Advising may provide much needed support to students in terms of academic preparation, selection of majors, and time-management.

A Profile of Non-Returning Students who Responded to the Survey

Students who did not return for their second year of study were invited to participate in a survey. More than 30% of non-returnees responded from each faculty, and 38% of non-returning students responded overall.

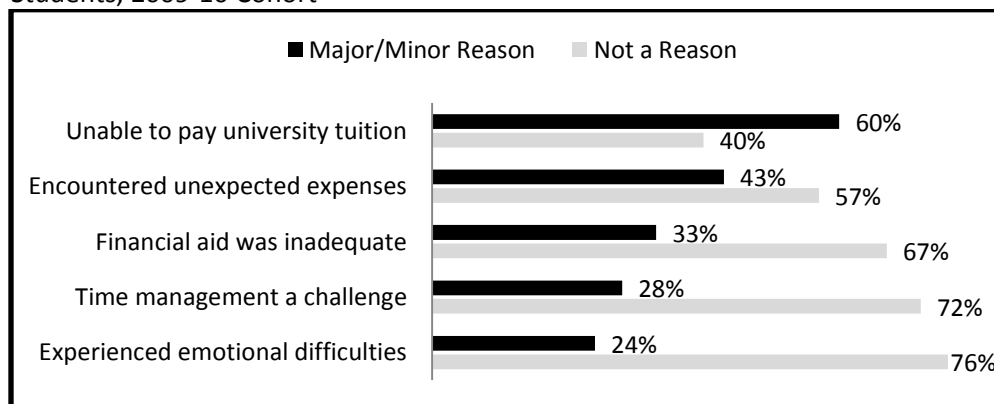
Table 2. Non-Returning Students by Faculty and the Percentage Responding to the Survey, 2009-10 Cohort

Faculty/School	Number of Non-Returning Students	Percentage Responding to Survey
Humanities & Education	69	32%
Law	22	36%
Medical Sciences	25	40%
Pure & Applied Sciences	157	37%
Social Sciences	150	43%
Total	423	38%

Findings from the Survey

Among the reasons for not returning, students identified finances followed to a lesser extent by time management and emotional difficulties.

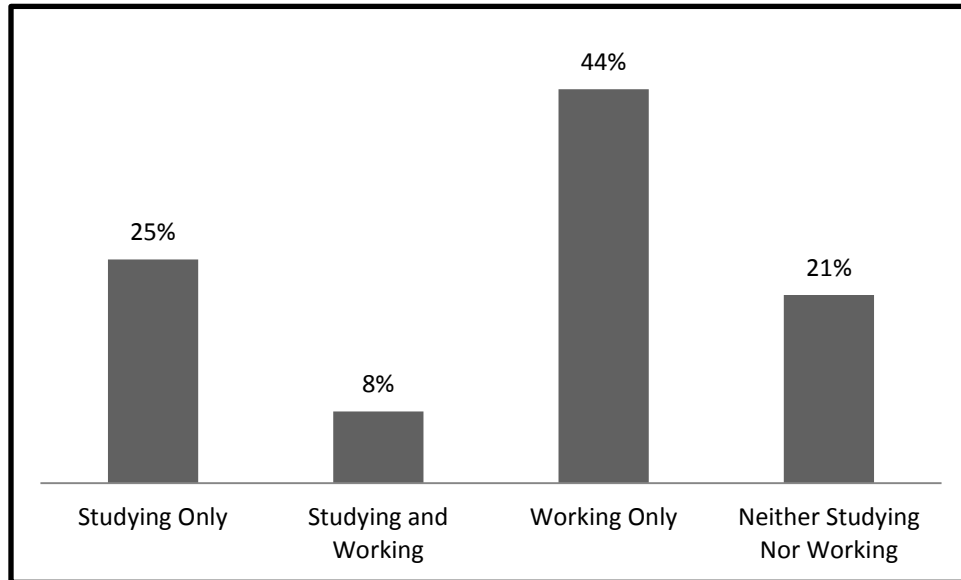
Figure 6. Reasons for not Returning for a Second Year of Study among Non-Returning Students, 2009-10 Cohort



As seen in Figure 6, 60% of respondents identified university tuition as a reason for not returning. Fifty-three percent (53%) of respondents said it was a major reason, while 7% of respondents said it was a minor reason for not returning.

When asked about their current activities, 44% of respondents were employed while 25% were enrolled elsewhere. Approximately 8% of respondents were both studying and working while 21% were neither studying nor working.

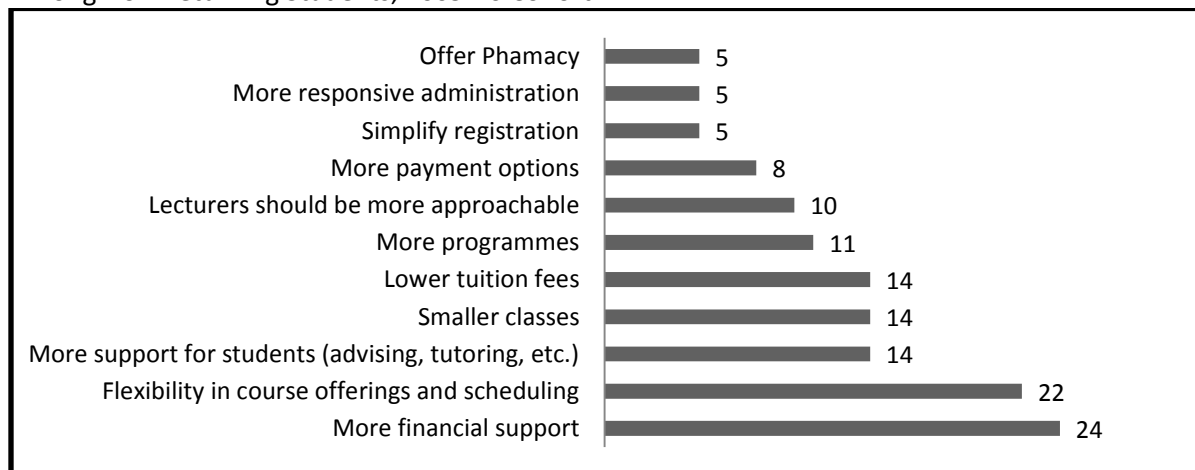
Figure 7. How Non-Returning Students were Spending their Time, 2009-10 Cohort



These findings suggest that the ability to finance one’s education was a major concern for students who interrupted their studies. Of the 162 respondents to the survey, 44% were currently working while 8% were both studying and working. A further 21% of respondents were neither studying nor working.

When asked to provide their comments on how the University could provide a better educational experience, finances were among the most frequent responses. Three of eleven items receiving five or more “hits” concerned finances (Figure 8). These items included *more payment options* (8 hits),

Figure 8. Top Responses to “How the University Could Provide a Better Educational Experience” Among Non-Returning Students, 2009-10 Cohort



lowering of tuition fees (14 hits), and *more financial support to students* (24 hits) in terms of scholarships, financial aid, and subsidized housing.

A second area of concern among non-returning students was programme offerings. Students suggested that Pharmacy (5 hits) be offered at the Mona Campus as well as more programmes generally (11 hits) especially at the Western Jamaica Campus. Calls were also made for more *flexibility in course offerings and scheduling* (22 hits) which should be directed at part-time and working students and online course delivery.

While some students were working to possibly finance their education, 55 or 33% of respondents were enrolled elsewhere (Table 3). Fifty-eight percent (58%) of enrolled students were from the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences and 25% were from the Faculty of Social Sciences. Less than 10% were from the remaining faculties at Mona.

Table 3. Faculty Distribution of Non-Returning Students Who Were Enrolled Elsewhere, 2009-10 Cohort

Faculty	N	%
Humanities and Education	5	9
Law	2	4
Medical Sciences	2	4
Pure and Applied Sciences	32	58
Social Sciences	14	25
Total	55	100

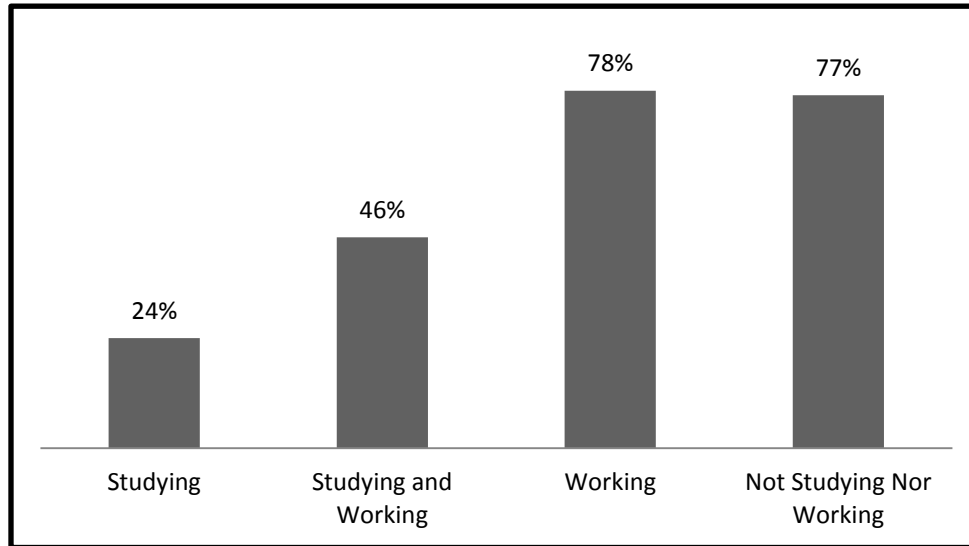
Just about all of the students attached to the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences remained in the Sciences or Health Sciences. Thirty-four percent (34%) were enrolled in Pharmacy while the remaining students were enrolled in various disciplines covering engineering, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and nursing.

Students previously enrolled in the Social Sciences also remained within the discipline with many enrolled in business, finance, and banking.

While these students did not return to UWI for their second year of study, their persistence elsewhere is a positive outcome in terms of society's larger goals. These students will not only graduate from another institution but many may return to UWI for a second degree or for postgraduate studies.

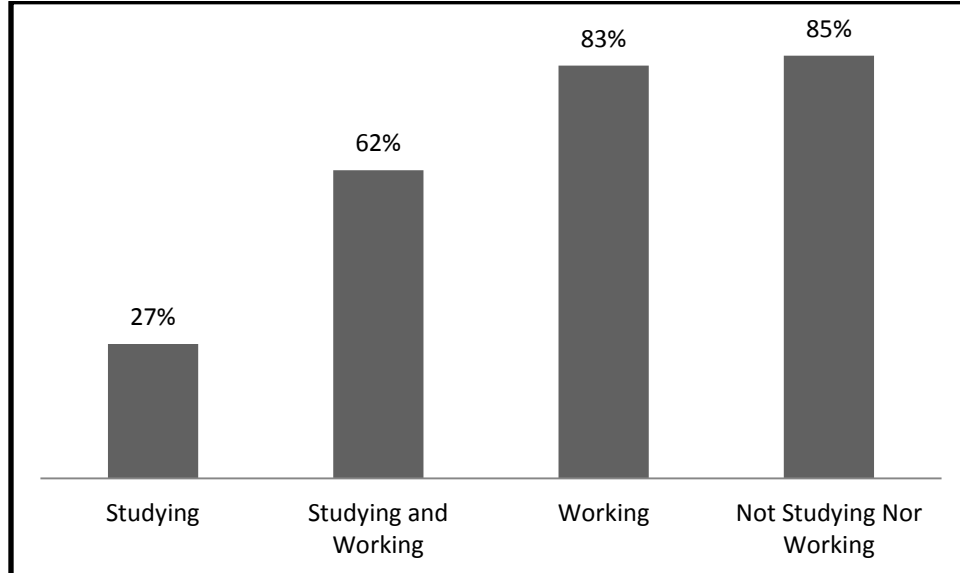
When respondents were asked about returning to UWI, many indicated a desire to return especially among those currently employed or unemployed (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Percentage of Respondents Who Plan to Re-Enrol at UWI, 2009-10 Cohort



The same pattern emerged when respondents were asked whether or not they would like a University advisor to contact them about returning to UWI (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Percentage of Respondents Who Would Like a University Advisor to Contact Them About Returning to UWI, 2009-10 Cohort



Over eighty percent (80%) of students who were currently employed or unemployed said they would like an advisor to contact them about returning to UWI. The majority of students (62%) who were juggling school and work also reported that they would like an advisor to contact them. And among those who were studying only, 27% said they would like to speak with an advisor from UWI. The

expressed interest among non-returning students in returning to UWI suggests that attrition is a temporary phenomenon for many students, especially for those who apply for leave, or voluntarily withdraw, or do not return for unknown reasons. While approximately one-third of respondents were enrolled elsewhere, 24% expressed an interest in returning to UWI and 27% were interested in speaking with an advisor about returning to UWI.

Conclusion

The findings of the First Year Retention Study has uncovered that the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus has a high retention rate among First degree entrants. Despite a three percentage point decline in the rate over the previous year, the first year retention rate among 2009-10 entrants stood at 89%. This compares favourably to a national rate of 77% among four year public institutions in the United States in 2007.²

For the second year, the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences had the highest number of non-returning students, followed by the Faculty of Social Sciences. Students who were “at risk” academically were also predominant in these faculties. These “at risk” students were students in their preliminary year of study or who had not declared a major or who studied part-time. The former two groups were concentrated in the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences while the latter group was highest in the Social Sciences.

Special programmes may need to be instituted to provide tutoring or mentorship to first year students in Pure and Applied Sciences especially given the importance of mathematics courses to this faculty. In addition, an Office of Student Advising may provide much needed support to students in terms of academic preparation, selection of majors, and time-management.

When non-returning students were asked to identify the reason(s) for not returning, 60% indicated the inability to pay tuition. The financial difficulty reported by non-returning students was a recurring theme in the survey. The majority (44%) of non-returning students were employed and approximately 8% were both enrolled and employed. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of employed students said they planned to re-enrol at UWI and over 80% of employed students wanted to speak with an advisor about returning to UWI. It appears that many students who interrupt their studies do so for financial reasons to finance their education. For how long will these students have to wait before the opportunity arises to re-enrol? It may be possible that these students did not avail themselves of the services offered by the Office of Student Financing at the Mona Campus. As an intervention strategy, an Office of Student Advising could also offer financial counselling to students.

In spite of the financial difficulties experienced by many students, approximately one-third of respondents were enrolled at another institution. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of enrolled students were from the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences while 25% were from the Faculty of Social Sciences.

² The National Centre for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) using data from the National Centre for Education Statistics, IPEDS Enrollment Survey. Accessed March 28, 2011.
<http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/?level=nation&mode=data&state=0&submeasure=224>

These students were enrolled within the same faculties at the other institutions. The persistence of these students is a positive outcome for UWI. While many may not have been able to remain in their programme at UWI for academic reasons, these students were presented with opportunities at other institutions to obtain a degree. Alternatively, that some of these students were studying pharmacy, engineering, and veterinary medicine speaks to the lack of programme offerings at the Mona Campus. This was an area which received a number of hits in terms of improving the educational experience of students.



FIRST YEAR

Retention Survey

RESPONDENT #: _____

Section 1 - STUDENT PROFILE

1. Campus attended while at the UWI

- Cave Hill
- Mona
- St. Augustine

2. To which Faculty did you belong?

- Humanities & Education
- Law
- Medical Sciences
- Pure & Applied Sciences
- Social Sciences

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

4. Please state your age in years as of December 1st 2010

5. Marital Status

- Single
- Married
- Common Law relationship
- Separated
- Divorced

6. Ethnicity

- Indian descent
 - African descent
 - Mixed descent
 - Other, please specify
-

7. Status while at UWI

- Full-time
- Part-time

8. Where did you live in your first year at the University?

- University Hall of Residence
 - Off Campus Room or Apartment
 - At Home with Parents or Relatives
 - Other, please specify
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9. Sources of financing when you attended the UWI

- Personal loan
 - Scholarship
 - Government Sponsored /Free tuition
 - Self-financed
 - Parents and/or relatives
 - Other, please specify
-

10. Did you participate in the University orientation programme / activities during your first semester?

- Yes
- No

11. Main reason for not registering for the 2010/11 academic year at UWI

- Leave of Absence
- Transferred to another UWI campus
- Transferred to another university, college or tertiary learning institution
- Required to Withdraw
- Voluntary Withdrawal

Section 2 - FACTORS INFLUENCING DECISION NOT TO REGISTER

Listed below are a number of reasons that may have influenced your decision not to register at the UWI for the 2010/11 academic year. Please indicate whether each of the reasons was a **Major** reason, **Minor** reason, or **Not** a reason that that influenced your decision not to register.

Teaching & Courses

	Not a Reason	Minor Reason	Major Reason
a) The courses were too difficult	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) The courses weren't relevant to my major	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) Course content was unsatisfactory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) The lecturers were not approachable / supportive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) Disappointed with the quality of instruction at the UWI	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) Dissatisfied with my grades	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Programme & Registration

	Not a Reason	Minor Reason	Major Reason
g) I couldn't get into the courses / programme I wanted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h) Class sizes were too large	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i) Desired major not offered at the UWI	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j) Experienced class scheduling problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k) Academic advising was inadequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Student Financial

	Not a Reason	Minor Reason	Major Reason
l) Unable to pay University tuition and fees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m) Encountered unexpected expenses during attendance at the UWI	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n) Financial aid received was inadequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Personal Situation

	Not a Reason	Minor Reason	Major Reason
o) Experienced health related problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p) Marital situation changed my educational goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
q) Experienced emotional and/or mental difficulties (depression, stress, anxiety, emotional problems etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
r) Family responsibilities were too great	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
s) Time management and adjustment to the increased responsibility of attending the University was a challenge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Career

	Not a Reason	Minor Reason	Major Reason
t) Accepted a full-time job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
u) I have changed my career and/or educational goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
v) Conflict between demands of job and the University	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
w) Wanted a break from my studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 3 - LIFE AFTER UWI

1. When you applied to the University, was it your first choice of institutions?

- Yes
- No

2. If No, what institution was your first choice?

3. We'd like to know about your current activities. Did you transfer or are you currently enrolled in another university, college or tertiary learning institution?

- Yes
- No

4. If Yes, is your current institution located in

- Trinidad
- Barbados
- Jamaica
- Canada
- USA
- UK
- Other, please specify

5. What programme of study are you pursuing there?

6. Are you currently working?

- Yes
- No

7. If Yes, is it a full-time job?

- Yes
- No

8. Is your current job in:

- The Private sector
- The Public sector
- A family owned business

9. What is the highest level of education completed **either** by your father **or** your mother?

- Primary school level
- Secondary school level
- University or tertiary level

10. Do you plan to re-enroll at the University of the West Indies?

- Yes
- No
- Undecided

11. Please state five things that the University can do to provide a better educational experience for students like yourself? (in order of importance)

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12. Would you like a University advisor to contact you to provide some options for you to return to the UWI?

- Yes
- No

13. If yes, please provide your name and contact information below.

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