Why We Get Around

A Mixed Methods Study of College Student Enrollment Mobility

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Context & Purpose

- U.S. to lead world in college graduates by 2020 despite decrease in state funding

- Broad access institutions have lower retention and graduation rates

- At least 60% of all college students attend multiple institutions

- Not all multi-institution enrollment advances degree attainment

- To identify factors measuring students' reasons for enrollment mobility in diverse learning environments, mixed methods

Enrollment Mobility Widens Educational Gaps

Lower SES, Less Academically Prepared

- Single-institution stop-out

- Multi-institution stop-out

- Reverse transfer

- Swirling

- Increases elapsed time to degree

- Perceive fewer academic opportunities / lack specific degree objectives

Middle SES, Average Academic Preparation

- Continuous single-institution enrollment

- Continuous multi-institution enrollment

- Lateral transfer

- Four-year drop-ins

- Decreases elapsed time-to-degree

- Enroll to fulfill specific degree / major requirements

Conceptual Framework

Number of Institutions Attended

Continuity of Enrollment	One	Two or More
Continuous	*Continuous Single-Institution Enrollment* *n* = 2585 (51.6%)	*Continuous Multi-Institution Enrollment* *n* = 991 (19.8%)
Discontinuous	*Single-Institution Stop-Out* *n* = 388 (7.7%)	*Multi-Institution Stop-Out* *n* = 1040 (20.8%)

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Figure adapted from Goldrick-Rab (2006)

Mixed Methods: Multi-Phase Design

DLE Pilot Survey Data (2010)

- 13 institutions

- N = 5,004
  - 39.7% Community College
  - 60.3% Four-Year Institutions

- Exploratory & Confirmatory Factor Analysis

- Crosstabs, ANOVA, Games-Howell Post-hoc

DLE Student Focus Groups

- 7 institutions, 151 students

- Inductive & Deductive analysis

- Limitations
  - No transcript data
  - Online administration only
  - 24 units or more at CC's

A Normative Culture of Enrollment Mobility

- **48.3%** have already stopped-out or attended multiple institutions

- **61.1%** of students who had not yet done so have considered it

- *"I've actually left [this university] twice. I feel like a lot of people leave [this university]. I don't know if it's just [this university] specifically, but I've been to two different schools"*

Multi-Institution Enrollment Reason: Cost/Convenience $\alpha = .808$

- Tuition is less expensive

- The location is more convenient

- To have a more convenient class schedule

- To lower my living expenses

- To complete my degree quicker

- Courses that I need to graduate are easier at another institution

- To fulfill course requirements

- *"They're mainly coming to this school just… and treating like community college basically and just coming here for the two years and then transferring out because this was cheaper than most of the other schools we got into."*

- *"…they changed to other colleges because they say it's easier over there."*

Multi-Institution Enrollment Reason:
Academic Opportunities $\alpha = .837$

- To have a wider selection of courses

- Programs I am interested in are not offered here

- To take extra classes to explore my interests

- To earn a degree or certificate that is not offered here

- To challenge myself academically

- *"… because… some majors weren't offered here, … and people didn't find out until after their first semester…."*

- *"…they weren't up to par to start out in college chemistry, they needed a little bit more math background or basic science background, so they would stop going to school here but not stop going to school altogether."*

Stop-Out Reason:
Life Circumstances $\alpha = .815$

- Had a good job offer

- Had family responsibilities

- Wanted to be closer to home

- Was placed on academic probation

- Had money problems and could no longer afford to attend college

- Was tired of being a student

- *"…people who go into my major just don't finish because they can be offered a job opportunity at a much earlier stage than they would graduate… a full-time position…"*

- *"My friend was gone last year; he said he has to work…. He doesn't qualify for fellowships, so he has… to survive."*

- *"I took eight years off of school just because I couldn't work and I couldn't handle taking care of my grandparents and school… I couldn't handle all of that…."*

Stop-Out Reason:
Career Considerations $\alpha = .807$

- Changed my career plans

- Wanted to reconsider my goals and interests

- Wanted practical experience

- *"I am re-careering. The economy has put [sic] an impact on my life two years ago .... When I first came here, it wasn't with any focus, it was just to get some more information in a field that I was interested in. I was not looking for a degree."*

Stop-Out Reason:
Perceived Mismatch α = .816

- Felt like I didn't 'fit in' at my previous college

- Wanted to go to a school with a better academic reputation

- Wanted a better social life

- Was bored with my coursework

- "[T]he reason he left was because it's not a big party school, kind of, so that's why he left, 'cause it's like, he's really a party person, so he kind of missed that, so he went back home, but then he missed it, because it's a small campus and people know each other, so he came back."

Emergent Theme:
Institutional Support

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- "I went to [another institution], and due to lack of accessibility and any sort of support at that school, I did not continue. I [...] came out here to [this state] to study at school here five years later with more direction and more drive."

Mean Differences: Cost/Convenience

Group 1	Group 2

- *Continuous Single-Institution Enrollment*

  $<$

- *Continuous Multi-Institution Enrollment (p < .01)*

- *Multi-Institution Stop-Out (p < .001)*

Mean Differences: Academic Opportunities

Group 1	Group 2

- *Continuous Single-Institution Enrollment* **<**
  - *Single-Institution Stop-Out ($p < .001$)*
  - *Multi-Institution Stop-Out ($p < .05$)*

- *Continuous Multi-Institution Enrollment* **<**
  - *Single-Institution Stop-Out ($p < .001$)*
  - *Multi-Institution Stop-Out ($p < .001$)*

Mean Differences: Life Circumstances

Group 1	Group 2

- *Continuous Single-Institution Enrollment* < - *Single-Institution Stop-Out (p < .001)*

  - *Continuous Multi-Institution Enrollment (p < .05)*

  - *Multi-Institution Stop-Out (p < .001)*

- *Continuous Multi-Institution Enrollment* < - *Multi-Institution Stop-Out (p < .001)*

Mean Differences:
Career Considerations

Group 1	Group 2

- *Continuous Single-Institution Enrollment*   <   - *Multi-Institution Stop-Out (p < .001)*

Mean Differences: Perceived Mismatch

Group 1	Group 2

- *Single-Institution Stop-Out*

$<$

- *Continuous Single-Institution Enrollment ($p < .001$)*

- *Continuous Multi-Institution Enrollment ($p < .001$)*

- *Multi-Institution Stop-Out ($p < .001$)*

Implications & Conclusion

- Mixed methods shows a normative culture of mobility amongst currently enrolled students

- Focus on institution's efforts

- Identifies areas for intervention (e.g. academic and career advising, social and academic match)

- Case by case advising is key

- IR can monitor mobility – transcripts, focus groups, surveys

Questions?

- Are these trends noticeable in your institution?

- How are you tracking mobility?

- Examples of collaborating with other institutions?

- How are you targeting students who have stopped out near completion, or adult learners and re-entry students?

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