

When Do Students Who Drop Out Leave Our University?

The largest number of new freshmen who leave, do so after their first year. The next most likely time periods are the first semester and after their second year.

At what points do new freshmen leave the university?

Fall cohort	Cohort*	Didn't return after															
		1st semester		2nd semester		3rd semester		4th semester		5th semester		6th semester		7th semester		8th semester	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2002	2,312	154	6.7%	317	13.7%	123	5.3%	145	6.3%	68	2.9%	88	3.8%	64	2.8%	57	2.5%
2003	2,616	171	6.5%	306	11.7%	119	4.5%	199	7.6%	90	3.4%	116	4.4%	62	2.4%	79	3.0%
2004	2,329	125	5.4%	229	9.8%	121	5.2%	179	7.7%	86	3.7%	87	3.7%	44	1.9%	68	2.9%
2005	2,447	117	4.8%	348	14.2%	111	4.5%	162	6.6%	85	3.5%	107	4.4%	48	2.0%	85	3.5%

* Includes all first-time freshmen.

The largest portion of new transfers who leave, do so after their first year, or after their first semester.

At what points do new transfers leave the university?

Fall cohort	Cohort*	Didn't return after															
		1st semester		2nd semester		3rd semester		4th semester		5th semester		6th semester		7th semester		8th semester	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2002	1971	147	7.5%	204	10.4%	109	5.5%	102	5.2%	53	2.7%	76	3.9%	26	1.3%	28	1.4%
2003	2160	198	9.2%	225	10.4%	117	5.4%	106	4.9%	66	3.1%	90	4.2%	30	1.4%	31	1.4%
2004	1673	106	6.3%	185	11.1%	70	4.2%	89	5.3%	45	2.7%	46	2.7%	28	1.7%	17	1.0%
2005	1637	112	6.8%	202	12.3%	91	5.6%	66	4.0%	42	2.6%	50	3.1%	12	0.7%	25	1.5%

* Includes all new undergraduate transfer students.

Both new freshmen and new transfers are substantially more likely to drop out than to stop out (i.e., return after leaving the university for some period of time). Once students leave, more than 70% don't return. ([Data tables and methodological notes.](#))

These findings are based on the Fall 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 cohorts. We chose these cohorts because they are recent enough to consider the patterns to be current but far enough back that we could track them across several semesters. We tracked them through Fall 2009.

Improving first-year retention and graduation rates is a national higher education priority. On our campus, the Student Success Task Force (SSTF) has worked for eight years, developing and implementing initiatives designed to help students stay in school and graduate. In 2007, President Welty launched the Retention Oversight Group to investigate factors that affect first and second year student retention. [The results of the study can be found at this link.](#) In Fall 2009, the CSU Chancellor's Office launched [The Graduation Initiative](#) designed to improve graduation rates at all CSU campuses.

Suggested Reading

The literature on student retention and graduation is vast. For a quick overview, read the newspaper article by a university president entitled "[Why Do Students Drop Out of College Before Graduating?](#)" For a more in-depth literature review see ACT's article "[Review of Retention Literature.](#)" An easy, interesting read that includes student suggestions is *Making the Most of College* by Richard J. Light, 2001, Harvard University Press.