First Semester Enrollment Trends and Patterns: Who Stays? and Who leaves the Institution?

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Overview

Even though Binghamton University maintains higher than average undergraduate freshmen retention rates—90% compared to the 73% national average—the administration continues to play a proactive role by seeking ways to improve student retention.

While some or most of the students who did not come back for their second semester might have dropped out, there was no data to prove it. Accordingly, from the total of students who did not return, some might be stop-outs, transfers, or actual dropouts.

The ultimate goal of this research is to identify small sub-groups of students who do not return to the university for their second semester to develop interventions that can be used to retain them.

Research Objectives

This capstone project was conducted and guided by the following set of research questions:

1. Are there any trends and/or patterns in student enrollment that help explain student retention?
2. Are there common characteristics that define students who do not return for their second semester to the university?
3. Are there common characteristics that define students who are retained for their second semester?

Findings

Students who stay at the university are more likely to:

- live on-campus residence halls (97.5%)
- Have GPAs < 2.133
- take gateway courses on their first semester

Students who leave the institution are more likely to:

- live off-campus (2.5%)
- are out-of-state (50%)
- have low GPAs
- do not take gateway courses

Discussion

Given that there is a lot of research showing that a low GPA is one of the main indicators of students who leave institutions of higher education, there was no surprise to find that students at Binghamton University having a low GPA (<2.133) are more likely to not return for their next semester.

What was not expected was to find that out-of-state students who live off-campus have a 50-50 chance of not returning for their next semester. This should be a red flag to the administration who needs to conduct additional research to identify the reasons for this low figures.

Additionally, this research supports and aligns with other studies which have found that enrolling in gateway courses increase the retention rate of freshmen students.

Methods

This research project analyzed a large data set (N=14856) of first-time freshmen students that included demographics, high school and college academic performance, among others. IBM SPSS was used to conduct descriptive and statistical analysis, such as the decision tree above, which segregates the data using Chi-Squares.

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