

The overall retention rate at the University of Kansas (KU) for full-time, freshman students after their first year has consistently been between 75 – 80% since 1994. After looking at the data from KU's Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP), it is evident there is a problem with retention rates at KU for minority students and students with low composite ACT scores. Minority students include American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island, Black and Hispanic students. Low ACT composite scores are scores below 21. (OIRP, 2012).

When comparing the retention rates in 2010 of students after their first year, minority students and students with low composite ACT scores have a significantly higher drop off rate than other students. The minority first-time, full time freshmen retention rate was 72%. Although there are significantly fewer minority students at KU, this is still a substantial drop in retention rates. Students with low ACT composite scores also have lower than average retention rates at KU. Students who scored between a 17-20 composite on the ACT had a retention rate of 66% after the first year. Students who score a 16 and lower had only a 57% retention rate after the first year. Both populations average 8% -12 % below the overall retention rate when compared to the overall rates in 2010 (OIRP, 2012).

In Rossi's (2004) Chapter 4, *Assessing the Need for a Program*, he says social problems are social constructions. They generate conditions, which create a problem requiring a program to improve the situation. The data indicates minority students and academically underprepared students have lower than normal retention rates when comparing to the overall KU freshmen student body. In this case, KU is creating

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conditions that are driving students to leave the university. The problem lies within the institution and the resources it provides to these students. KU admits minority students and students with low ACT scores, but once these students arrive on campus, they do not have access to the resources and information they need to be successful at the university. For the students who are not prepared academically, they are still choosing to pursue a post-secondary education even with lower test scores. If KU is going to continue to recruit and admit students with ACT scores under 21, it is their responsibility to provide students with resources such as tutoring, remedial courses, and supplemental instruction to ensure these students are retained. Minority students may leave because of a lack of connection with the university. When these students arrive on campus, there are few students of color with whom they can connect. There are also a small number of faculty members of color who can serve as mentors. KU provides diversity programming and initiatives, but the university must improve its efforts so the minority student population does not continue to decrease.

There are indirect and direct target populations that can be focused on when trying to improve the resources for these students at KU. The target populations are students from minority groups and students with ACT scores under 21. These students are a population at risk meaning there is a high probability they will not persist on to their 2nd year at KU and on to graduation due to their race and ethnicity or test scores (Rossi, 2004). Indirect targets are minority faculty members, advisors, tutors, parents of the target population and administrators who oversee academic tutoring and diversity programming. Additional information that may be important to know about both

Then find out how they experience the environment at Univ.

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populations is the students' residency status. A combination of a lack of resources on campus and being far from home may result in a higher dropout rate. It is also important to assess what resources the students had or did not have in high school, their socioeconomic status, and the parents' educational levels. This information could be found in college applications or data from financial aid applications. All of these factors are indicators in students' success pursuing a post-secondary education. Also looking at the students' involvement levels including living on campus and membership to campus organizations will help give a better idea if the student is trying to make connections on campus. Information regarding the student's involvement levels would have to be retrieved from surveys or focus groups.

In order to determine how the target population experiences the problem, it is important to obtain information directly from the target population and indirect population. Information to retrieve from the target population is what other universities they applied to and why they chose KU, what resources they have accessed on campus during their first and second semester, and how they are involved on campus. It may also be important to ask them to rate the resources on campus and opportunities to get involved. To collect the information, it is helpful to begin with a survey for the students who stayed at KU after their first year that fall into the target population. Both the minority students and the low ACT score students have a small population of fewer than 500. When collecting the data, it may be discovered that there is overlap with the populations. After looking at the surveys, specific focus group can be put together so more specific information is obtained. With the indirect target population it is also

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important to collect information regarding both target populations. Focus groups of advisors from the Undergraduate Advising Center can provide information on how they are training to reach out to struggling students and what resources the advisors have access to help these students succeed. A survey could be created for parents and guardians of the target population to see what support they provide their student during their first year of school. Other programs and offices for first-year students may also be surveyed on what type of student is accessing their resources. After comparing the data from the target population and the indirect population, connections can be made on what type of outreach is needed, what resources need to be updated for these students and how we can better train staff and faculty to provide assistance to underrepresented students and students who are struggling academically.

This is one of those assignments in which you seem to have gotten off on the wrong foot from the get-go.

- 1) What is the nature & scope of the issue
- 2) What is the focus/problem based on your sense of data
- 3) What more do you need to know about this target group
- 4) How would you find out about their experiences with K12/dropout.

(B)