

The overall retention rate at the University of Kansas (KU) for full-time, freshman students after their first year has consistently hovered around 80%. 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 underrepresented minority students and students with low composite ACT scores. Underrepresented 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, underrepresented minority students and students with low composite ACT scores have a significantly higher drop off rate than other students. The underrepresented 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. Looking at the data from 2005 gives a better idea of when the students are leaving. After three semesters, the retention rate for underrepresented minority students was 66% and that number steadily declined until 2010, with the exception of 2009. After the third semester, these students are leaving at higher percentages than the overall freshmen class, which has an average retention rate of 75% after the third semester.

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 in 2010 and students who scored a 16 and lower had only a 57% retention rate after the first year. These students, similar to underrepresented minority students, leave in high numbers after the third semester. Looking at the data

from 2005, students with a 17 – 20 on their ACT had a retention rate of 58% and students with a 16 and lower ACT score had retention rate of 38%. The students are returning for their second year, but are not persisting after the first semester of their second year (OIRP, 2012).

There are indirect and direct target populations that can be focused on when trying to identify the source of the problem 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 after their third semester at KU and on to graduation (Rossi, 2004). Indirect targets are minority faculty members, advisors, tutors, parents of the target population and administrators who oversee academic tutoring and diversity programming.

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. In order to identify the problem, both the direct and indirect populations need to be interviewed. The data indicate the target population, underrepresented minority students and academically underprepared students, have lower than normal retention rates when comparing to the overall KU freshmen student body. To identify the problem of why these students are leaving after their third semester, various demographic and background information must be collected. Also, information on how the students experience life on campus is important to determine how the problem is experienced. The questions should focus on the readiness, motivation, and campus knowledge of the students. The following questions could be asked:



### **Demographic and Background Informa**

- What is the students' socioeconomic status?
- What are their parents' educational levels?
- How many AP or IB courses did they take in high school?
- How many hours a week did they study in high school/ in college?

### **What are their experiences like at KU?**

- Are they living on or off campus?
- How many hours a week are they working – is it on or off campus?
- Are they seeking out resources on campus – if so, what resources?
- How many and what extracurricular activities are they involved in?
- How often do they interact with their faculty members?

These questions begin with the students' socioeconomic and family backgrounds, which impact a student's success in college. For example, if a student's parents do not have any post-secondary educational background, it has a larger negative impact on college success than any other background factors (Inkelas, et al, 2007). Also, looking at the students' high school preparation can indicate the level of readiness for college and motivation to be successful. Examining their behavior while they were on campus can indicate how they experienced college, socially and academically. If students are not seeking out resources, working and living off campus, and not spending enough time studying it can negatively impact their success in college. It can affect the level of connections and whether or not they have a strong support system. Students who are not involved on campus are less likely to adapt successfully. Additional information that may

be important to know about both populatio

combination of a lack of resources on campus and being far from home may result in a higher dropout rate. All of this data can start to distinguish where the problem lies, so solutions can began to be identified.

With the indirect target population it is also important to collect information regarding both target populations. Focus groups of advisors from the Undergraduate Advising Center can provide information on how they are trained 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.

**REMOVED SOLUTIONS AND CAUSES FOR PROBLEM IDENTIFIED**

**References:**

Inkelas, K., Daver, Z., Vogt, K., & Leonard, J. (2007). Living-Learning Programs and First-Generation College Students' Academic and Social Transition to College. *Research in Higher Education*, 48 (4), 403 – 434.

Office of Institutional Research and Planning. (2012). *The University of Kansas*. Retrieved on Friday, September 28, 2012 from [www2.ku.edu/~oirp/attendance/index.shtml](http://www2.ku.edu/~oirp/attendance/index.shtml)

Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. San Francisco: Sage Publications