

Department of Student Life Studies
Four and a Half Year Graduation Study
Fall 2015 and Fall 2016

Background

In a 2015 article for *USA Today College*, Anschuetz reported that students do not graduate on time because of students transferring to a different institution, lacking a plan/not using an academic advisor, and taking extra credits. In addition, students who delay graduation spend more money.

To understand Texas A&M's place in *USA Today College's* article, Student Life Studies surveyed students in their ninth semester or the semester after their traditional senior year. One survey has been distributed to 'super seniors' in November of 2015, and 2016. The 2015 pilot was sent to 181 students with 90 responses (50% response rate). A 2016 survey was sent to a large population of 795 students with 216 (27%) responding.

Results

Respondents are a sound representation of the population. No demographic dimension is disproportionately represented in the summative data below.

Employment

A large portion of respondents *worked for pay during the semester* in 2016-51% compared to 2015-22%. The students who are working during the semester were also *working more hours on average*. In 2015, over all semesters, a student worked an average of 13 hours per week, while in 2016 they averaged 16 hours per week.

While more students were working more hours during the semester, the same cannot be said about those *working for pay during the summer* both years are 64%.

Involvement

Over three-fourths (77-85%) of the students were *involved in one or more student organization* during their first four years, with that ratio decreasing to 60% their final fall semester (ninth semester). Involvement peaked during their sophomore and junior years.

A smaller portion of students were *leaders of their organization*. As few as 16% their first year, peaking their junior and senior years (52% and 48% respectively). Leadership takes a steep decline in their ninth semester, at only 20%.

Academics

Students' *academic experiences* were varied. 77% enrolled in one or more summer semesters. 75% completed an internship or co-op (many related to degree requirements according to comments). Over 50% changed their major. Registering for classes became easier the longer a student was enrolled, but their interaction with academic support (tutors, supplemental instruction, or academic success center) decreased over time.

Comments

Feedback followed a few key themes relating to their (1) academic experience, (2) campus involvement outside the classroom, and (3) personal choices.

- (1) In decreasing order of frequency - The majority of issues that stalled students is related to changing majors and losing credits, or adding minors that resulted in credits exceeding the minimum necessary to graduate. Additional comments are related to choosing a slower pace/course load often as a result of the perceived difficulty of their selected major, retaking credits to improve their GPA or due to failure, internships –primarily those associated with degree requirements, and difficulty enrolling in courses due to poor advising or limited availability.
- (2) A student's involvement in an on-campus organization was frequently tied with a desire to take a lower course load throughout their time on campus. In no instance was it the stated reason to delay graduation.
- (3) Other reasons to delay graduation was due to personal choices such as working, dealing with a significant life event, a lack of motivation at any point in their college career, or simply not ready to leave Texas A&M University.

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