

Oakland Community College College Wide Student Outcomes Assessment Summary Analysis of Cohort I

Overview

We received an attrition rate of 84% on the fourth follow-up study of the students in the original Fall 1994 cohort. A total response rate of only 16% was achieved, thus concluding the tracking analysis on this group of students. What follows is a longitudinal inquiry of these students over a two-year period (from Fall 1995 to Fall 1996). It should be noted that because of the low response rates from respondents in the Fall of 1997, comparison analyses is suspect and is not included in the overall summary. In addition, the initial assessment (Fall 1994) is provided in the inaugural study. Since there was no segmentation of continuing, returning, and departing/non-returning students in the initial study, juxtaposition of data and analyses of responses given is also not included in this summary.

Continuing Students

The response rate from the original 800 students is as follows:

1995 – 35% 1996 – 19%

Reasons for being at OCC

The most important reason for these students attending OCC varies according to the years they were assessed. In 1995, 53% (n=143) of the students surveyed stated that their reasons for being at this institution was to obtain transfer credit and 33% (n=89) noted they wanted to obtain an associates degree. In 1996, these students' reasons for enrolling had reversed; 48% (n=71) wanted to obtain an associates degree while 43% (n=64) wanted to gain transfer credits. Unfortunately, the survey does not capture the reasons why students may have changed their minds. For instance, why did the important reason for attending OCC in 1995 (to obtain transfer credits) differ in 1996 (to obtain an associates degree). Is the reversal due to students changing their goals during their tenure at OCC or could it be that lower the response rate may have affected the distribution of these answers? Or did those who wanted to transfer do so, thereby decreasing their number and hence the percentage?

Outcome One—Students will identify their long-term educational goal

Educational Goal

In 1995, 40% (n=104) of continuing students stated that they wanted to obtain a bachelor's degree, while 34% (n=90) noted they wanted to acquire a professional, masters, or doctoral degree. The choice remained the same in 1996, however the percentage of students choosing the bachelor's degree increased to 53% (n=72) while those who wanted a professional, masters, or doctorate remained consistent (33%—n=45). When asked how sure they were about their

educational goal, 56% (n=147) in 1995 were very sure while 69% (n=93) were very sure in the Fall of 1996. This may suggest that students are more clearly identifying their long-term educational goals.

Outcome Four—Students will perceive that they have made progress toward achieving their career goals

Progress towards career goal

In 1995, 54% (n=144) suggested that they had made some progress in their career goals and 38% (n=100) stated that they had made significant progress. In 1996, those numbers had changed to show that 50% (n=73) had made significant progress and 44% (n=64) had made some progress. When asked in what ways they had made progress toward their goal, an equal percentage in both years (56%) stated they had gained some of the skills necessary for their goals. Because of the low response rates from 1996, construing too much from the analysis would be erroneous. However the data does seem to suggest that students are making incremental progress toward their stated career goal.

Outcome Five—Students will be retained at OCC for their expected length of stay

Expected Enrollment

When asked how long they intended to stay at OCC, the students' responses differed from 1995 to 1996. In the Fall of 1995, 28% (n=74) of the students suggested they would stay at OCC for one year and 22% (n=58) stated they would remain for two years. However, in 1996, the continuing students contacted suggested that they would either remain for one semester (24%—n=36) or two semesters (22%—n=33). In both years, the majority of students (83% in 1995 and 1996) stated that they would continuously enroll at OCC.

Again there is a reversal in students' choices from one year to the next. In 1995, the top two responses in the year indicated that students would stay for one or two years. Yet, in 1996, these students suggested they would stay for a duration of one or two semesters. Did their interaction with the institution affect their decision? Were they closer to their goal of graduating, transferring, or completing their coursework, or was it the low response rate which may have influenced the results to these sets of questions? Another possible reason for the difference may have been the methodology selected (i.e., cohort analysis) in which to assess the outcome.

Outcome Eight—Students intending to transfer will successfully do so

Transfer Intentions

When asked if they intended to transfer, students surveyed in both years overwhelmingly suggested that they would transfer to a four year institution. In addition, they remained consistent about their four year educational goals. This seems to suggest that students are making progress in certain areas.

Outcome Nine—Students intending to take state licensing exams will be certified

Licensing

The number of students responding to this question was very small. In 1995, only 9 students took any exam for a state license and 7 passed the exam. In 1996, 9 students also took the exam and 8 passed.

Outcome Ten—Students who seek employment will obtain job placement in a training related area

Employment

The majority of the continuing students were either employed full-time or part-time in each year they were surveyed. In 1996, 55% (n=70) noted that their jobs were not related to their studies at OCC. No information was available from 1995 because of coding irregularities.

A majority of students do not believe their jobs are associated with their academic work. It may be that students are looking for jobs outside of their current employment area or the majority of the students are looking to transfer, thus their current jobs may not be their career choices but jobs they took to obtain a paycheck for school or other personal reasons. In addition, the fact that they are at OCC learning skills needed for employment, for which they do not currently qualify, may affect the results.

Outcome Eleven—Students who have met OCC general education requirements will perceive they have made progress towards achieving the college's core competencies.

Educational Progress

Continuing students were asked a series of questions related to their progress at OCC. In particular they were asked to rate their development on a set of measures based on the College's core competencies. Table 1 reflects those responses given in each year. It should be noted that the "Progress" variable has been collapsed and calculated from scales of "significant progress" and "some progress."

In the core competencies, students showed increases in eight out of nine categories. The only category which indicated a decrease was their ability to solve complex problems which decreased by one percentage point. Although some competencies increased by double digits, one must be cautious in inferring too much from the numbers. The limited number of students who responded in 1996 makes the data suspect. Yet, it is encouraging to observe that the majority of the students seem to have made progress in these areas from one year to the next.

Table 1
Progress of Students in Core Competencies*

	1995		1996	
	<u>Progress</u>	<u>No Progress</u>	<u>Progress</u>	<u>No Progress</u>
Independent learning skills	94	6	97	3
Communication skills	91	9	95	5
Solve complex problems	91	9	90	10
Attain personal goals	96	4	97	3
Mathematical skills	68	32	76	24
Interpersonal skills	92	8	93	7
Knowledge of world problems	76	24	79	21
Usage of technology	76	24	84	16
Scientific methods	66	34	77	23

* percentages

Non-returning/Departing Students

The response rate from the original 800 students is as follows:

1995--28% 1996--10-%

Completion of Educational Goal

When these students were asked if they had completed their educational goals, each years' respondents noted that they had not completed their goal (70% in 1995 and 52% in 1996). In 1995, fifty-nine percent (n=31) suggested that their goal was to complete courses, yet in 1996 that goal had changed to transfer to another college (57%-n=20).

As with the continuing students, the analysis on non-returning students must be understood within a cautious analytical context because of the diminishing response rates from year to year. One result from the analysis indicated that in 1995, students' goals were to complete their coursework, yet in 1996 their goals changed to transferring to another college. Although we may have data that indicate these students changed their goals, we don't know why they altered their responses. It should also be noted that this is a different group of students who were assessed. That is, the

non-returning students from 1995 are different than those that did not return in 1996. Thus, this may be one reason why the responses are different from year to year.

Reasons students chose not to return to OCC

Students were asked why they chose not to re-enroll at OCC. They were given three choices: financial, personal, and/or academic reasons. Each of these categories had subquestions which are listed below if deemed significant by the student.

In both years, respondents suggested that the reason they did not return to OCC was due to financial reasons. In 1995, 56% (n=70) and in 1996, 60% (n=24) noted that their reasons were not financial. However of those students who did say finances were salient, the reasons given most were that they could not earn enough money while being enrolled and that they did not have enough money at registration.

When asked if their decision not to return was personal, the majority of students in both years stated that it was. In 1995, 63% of the students (n=80) stated that there were personal reasons they did not return, while those assessed in 1996 (65%—n=26) also noted that there were personal reasons for not returning.

Finally, we asked if their reason for not re-enrolling was academic. In both years, an overwhelming percentage stated that their decision not to return was not academically related. There are two caveats of this section's analysis. First there was a very low number of students in 1996 responding to the "other reasons" question, thus any meaningful analysis is unlikely. Second, a year-by-year comparison is not possible because the scales used to assess their responses differed from one year to the next (i.e., in 1995 responses were "yes" or "no." In 1996, responses were, "very important," "somewhat important," and "not important.") Thus, no comparison analyses can be made.

When we assessed why these students had chosen not to return, only two factors from the financial variable seemed to be salient: "could not earn enough money while being enrolled" and "not having enough money at registration." This may suggest that certain financial processes or policies may need to be reexamined to counter affect students' reasons for not continuing their studies at OCC.

What is also interesting to note is that of all the options given to assess students' personal reasons for not continuing, none of the choices received a majority of answers. Thus, the current survey may not be capturing the salient personal arguments of these students. Even with the open coded "other" choice available to them, students seemed not to provide cogent answers. It may be that students were not comfortable divulging private matters to our telephone interviewers.

Plans to return to OCC

In each year, the majority of students who left OCC stated that they planned on returning. However, in 1996 there was less than a 50% affirmation for their re-enrollment. In 1996, only 49% percent stated that they would return, whereas in 1995, 66% suggested they would re-enroll.

Why the decrease? Personal? Institutional? Combination? Again, one cannot draw too many conclusions from the data but it does provide an area of further inquiry.

Outcome Four—Students will perceive that they have made progress toward achieving their career goals

Progress toward career goals

In 1995, 62% (n=109) stated that they had made progress toward their career goal. The percentage increased in 1996 as 89% suggested they were making progress. When asked in what ways they were making progress toward their goal, a majority (69%—n=75) in 1995 argued that they had gained skills. In 1996 the percentage of those who stated that they had gained skills was lower (41%—n=26). While 30% (n=19) suggested that they had defined their goals more clearly.

Outcome Nine—Students intending to take state licensing exams will be certified

Licensing

In 1995, 11 students took a state license exam and 8 passed. In 1996, only one student stated they had took the exam and that student also passed.

Outcome Ten—Students who seek employment will obtain job placement in a training related area

Employment

As in the continuing student assessment, the majority of students suggested that they were employed either full or part-time. When asked if their job was related to their studies at OCC, the majority of students in 1996 stated that there was no relationship between their academic work at OCC and career. No information was available from 1995 because of coding irregularities.

A majority of students do not believe their jobs are associated with their academic work. It may be that students are looking for jobs outside of their current employment area or the majority of the students are looking to transfer. Thus, students' current jobs may not be their career choices but jobs they took to obtain a paycheck for school or other personal reasons or they have not yet qualified for positions in their chosen careers.

Student Outcome Eleven—Students who have met OCC general education requirements will perceive they have made progress towards achieving the college’s core competencies.
Educational Progress

Non-returning students were asked a series of questions related to their progress at OCC. In particular they were asked to rate their progress on a set of measures based on the College’s core competencies. Table 2 reflects those responses given in each year. It should be noted that the “Progress” variable has been collapsed and computed from the items of “significant progress” and “some progress.”

Table 2
 Progress of Students in Core Competencies*

	1995		1996	
	<u>Progress</u>	<u>No Progress</u>	<u>Progress</u>	<u>No Progress</u>
Independent learning skills	84	16	93	7
Communication skills	75	25	87	13
Solve complex problems	73	27	83	17
Attain personal goals	78	22	88	12
Mathematical skills	45	55	43	47
Interpersonal skills	76	24	84	16
Knowledge of world problems	65	35	69	31
Usage of technology	63	37	70	30
Scientific methods	48	52	65	35

* percentages

As with the continuing students, there were marked increases in the core competencies of non-returning students. There were increases in eight out of nine categories; four showed double digit increases. The only decrease was in mathematical skills which dropped two percentage points from 1995 to 1996. The limited number of students who responded in 1996 makes the data suspect. Yet, it is encouraging to observe that the majority of these students seem to have made progress in these areas from one year to the next.

Returning Students

The response rate from the original 800 students is as follows:

1996 – 6 % 1997 – 1%

Because of the low response rate received in the Fall of 1997, there can be no comparison of this group of students. Even the Fall of 1996 response rate is exceedingly low. For information on those students who returned to OCC after not being enrolled for at least one term, refer to the “1996 Outcomes Assessment Cohort One Follow-Up Study.”

Conclusion

The juxtaposition of the 1995 and 1996 data reveals that in most instances, students’ progress increased in most of the college outcomes. There were also certain changes in their decisions from one year to the next (e.g., reasons for attending OCC, enrollment patterns, educational goals, and their reasons for re-enrolling). The analysis also revealed that non-returning students deemed personal and financial concerns as reasons for their withdrawal from the institution.

To truly discern whether a student who attended OCC has accomplished certain goals will require further study. For instance, students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution will need to be followed-up by assessing whether they actually did transfer. The same argument is also salient for those students whose goal it is to obtain a bachelor’s or professional degree. Asking what their educational goal is only one part of the process. Discerning if they have obtained it is the true outcome.

Two shortcomings of this report need to be contextually understood. First is the fact that although there were improvements in students’ self reported scores from one year to the next, one must be cautious of inferring too much from the analysis. Because of the low response rates in 1996, it is difficult to accurately assess whether meaningful changes, for better or worse, truly transpired. Thus, the response rates from each of the three student categories have made the analysis inconclusive. There will need to be marked improvements in the response rates of each category or a change in the methodology before the data can provide significant results.

Finally, the response rates from each year may actually be higher than what has been indicated earlier in the report. The response rates listed above are calculated on the original 800 students in the cohort. However, the true response rates should be calculated on those students who were inaccessible (i.e., phone number disconnected, moved, no phone, etc.). These students should have been subtracted out of the original 800 cohort and the rate of response calculated on how many students completed the survey.

Thus future recommendations before beginning the analysis of Cohort III could be as follows:

- Increase the cohort size from 800 to 1000 or 1200 to ensure we are able to contact more students than in previous years.
- Meticulously track respondents from non-respondents in order to more accurately project the response rates from each group. In other words better enrollment tracking of the students.
- Track students in the cohort to assess if they did complete career and/or educational goals.
- Redesign surveys to capture the “why” on certain questions. In addition, the majority of the questions need to have multiple measures in order to more accurately assess the items. A single question may be interpreted differently among students, thus skewing the results.
- Stratify certain segments of the various student populations (e.g., part-time vs. full-time, day vs. evening, transfer vs. developmental vs. occ ed. vs. general).
- A possible redesign of the methodology in order to accurately assess student outcomes.
- Determine which outcomes are appropriate and should be assessed for the different groups of students. Not all eleven outcomes are measured in the different studies.