



## Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

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For other retention information, go to our web site at <http://castle.eiu.edu/~core>

## Lower % of Risk Factors in Freshman Class

Each fall CORE examines the make-up of the freshman class to look for potential risk factors that might prevent students from returning the next year and proceeding through to graduation.

CORE has been following the current retention prediction model since 2016.

This model indicates 8 risk factors:

- Need Gap of \$7,000 or more
- % of Need Met at 60% or less
- Financial Aid Verification
- Academic Index (Act & HS GPA combined scale)
- Admit Month of March or later
- Ethnicity (Hispanic, African-American, international, multi-ethnic)
- Chicago Public Schools

The FA17 freshman class had higher percentages of students with risk factors than the FA16 class for each of these factors; however, this year's freshman class has decreased in the percentages for 6 of these 8 factors. The table below shows the risk factors and the percentage of students in the freshman cohort that had each factor.

The percentage of the class with the risk factors of need gap and the financial aid verification both increased. The percentage of the students with a need gap of \$7000 or more went from 19.7% of the freshman class to 21.6%, and financial aid verification went from 3% of the freshman class to 4.7%. These two factors are inter-related because a need

gap will not be accurate until students receive their financial aid, and that cannot be complete until they are through the verification process.

However, the other risk factors that we are tracking have dropped in percentage points. The percentage of the class with a high school gpa at a 2.9 or lower dropped 6.22% from last fall. This indicates that this year's class earned higher grades in high school. Likewise, the academic index dropped from 48.6% to 42.4% of the class. The academic index is a combination of ACT composite score and high school gpa; students in the 2 lowest of levels on the five-level scale have this risk factor. Students with higher academic indexes are retained at higher rates and are more successful overall.

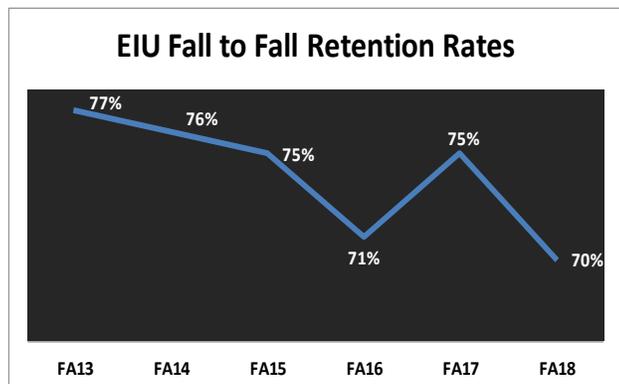
The percentage of students admitted through a special admission program also decreased from 25.8% of the class to 21.5% this fall. Gateway and review admit students have lower retention rates; these students do not meet our standard admission criteria and are in programs designed to help them succeed.

The percentage of the class who are first-generation college students has remained steady with 40.6% of this year's class being the first in their family to attend college compared to 41.4% of last year's class. The retention rates for FA17 to FA18 are given on page 2 of this newsletter.

Variable	FA16	FA17	FA18
Need Gap \$7000 or more	16.9%	19.7%	21.6%
% Need Met 60% or less	36.2%	39.2%	38.8%
Financial Aid Verification	2.3%	3.0%	4.7%
Academic Index	41.7%	48.6%	42.4%
HS GPA 2.9 or lower	39.8%	41.3%	35.2%
Admit Month March or later	18.4%	24.2%	16.9%
Ethnicity (Hispanic, Af-Am, Multi, Internat'l)	44.1%	50.3%	48.3%
Chicago Public School	13.2%	16.2%	13.8%

## FA17 to FA18 Retention Rate Drops

As indicated on the first page story, the FA17 freshman class had a higher percentage of the class with risk factors than we have had before. And, at 634 students, this class was also the smallest in the last few years. Because of these issues, the fall 2017 retention rate fell to 70%. Below is a chart of Eastern's fall to fall retention rates for the last six years.



While this is the lowest retention rate Eastern has had in a number of years, it is still on par with the national average for public, master's granting institutions, which is 69.9% (ACT Institutional Data File 2017). CORE has been looking at the risk factors in the retention model to determine what issues most impact students' attrition to try to bring our overall retention rate up.

Students with multiple risk factors, not surprisingly, are the most at risk. For example, for the FA17 to FA18 cohort, students with one risk factor had an 87.8% retention rate while students with 3 factors were at 68.8%, and those with 5 factors were at 53.4%. In recent years, the number of students with several risk factors has been between a third and half of the class. In FA17 56% of the freshman class had 3 or more risk factors compared to 38.1% of the FA16 cohort.

This year like the past two years, University Foundations instructors and freshman advisors were given a list of their students and were asked to give special attention to those with three or more risk factors. This included helping students complete the FAFSA, finding academic resources, connecting to campus, and discussing major choices.

Students coming in under our special admission standards (Gateway, SAGA, and review admits) were retained at 51.5%. This population's FA16 to FA17 retention rate was 61.6%. Twenty-nine percent of the special admission students left the University after only

one semester of attendance. Thirty-eight percent of the special admission students who entered in FA17 and were not retained to FA18 had a cum gpa below 2.0 at Eastern, so the majority left in good standing.

This year Gateway has placed study table hours in students' schedules to try to encourage students to consider these hours part of their course schedule. Students who miss five or more meetings with advisors and/or study tables have a special meeting with the ASC Executive Director to try to curb self-destructive behaviors that lead to attrition.

Financial factors also have an impact on retention. Students with a need gap of \$7,000 or more were retained at 64.8%. However, this year students who had 60% or less of their need met were still retained at 73.8%. Students in financial aid verification have a retention rate of 21%. In FY18, more students were tagged for verification by the federal government than ever before. Eastern increased messages to incoming students about how to respond to verification, provided help during orientation for these students, and are working with advisors and UF instructors to complete forms this fall.

In FA17, 49.9% of the freshman class indicated they were Hispanic, African-American, international, or of multi-ethnicities. Students from these ethnic groups have historically had lower retention rates than other ethnicities at Eastern. This group's retention rate was 63.1% for this year.

The Office of Inclusion and Academic Engagement offers the STRONG MENToring program for men of color to help with their attrition. OIAE is also working to reach out to all students of color "to make sure they are engaged and knowledgeable about the campus's available resources," said Mona Davenport, Director.

Academic preparation and motivation play a pivotal role in student retention. Honors students were retained at 95.8%, and students whose high school gpa is above 3.0 were retained at 82.4%. Students whose ACT composite scores were at 26 or higher had a 91.8% retention rate.

First-year students who live on-campus were retained at 70.7% compared to commuters whose retention rate was 65.2%. Students who live on-campus can become involved with campus life more easily than those who live at home their first year, and are thus more connected to the University and to being successful here.

With a higher percentage of the FA17 freshman class having multiple factors that put them at risk of attrition, the decrease in freshman to sophomore retention was not surprising.

## Changes to the Early Alert System

Eastern's Early Alert System started in FA11. Faculty are encouraged to submit students in their courses who are missing classes, who are failing tests, papers, and assignments, or who have failed to complete or submit papers or assignments.

Students who are submitted to the EAS are then contacted by their RA if they live on-campus or by a GA in the Academic Success Center if they live off-campus. In these contacts, students are encouraged to attend class, to talk to their professors, and to seek help for classes in which they are struggling.

On average about a third of the students eventually drop the course for which an alert was submitted, about a third pass the course, and another third receive a D, F, or NC for that course.

Although faculty received an email when an alert was received, they could not track what happened after the alert was submitted. Over

summer 2018, Nate Atkinson in Web Services along with his student worker, Lucas Lower, re-vamped the system in order to allow faculty and advisors to track the alert and how students had been contacted.

Julie Dietz, Health Promotion Chair and Advisor, said "What I LOVE about the new system, both as a faculty person and an academic advisor, is that it tracks every contact with the student. I know who has made contact, when, and what happened as a result. I can also add my own notes based on my interactions with the student."

Shelley James, Director of Academic Advising, concurs. "I check it daily and make a note in my student's folder, so I can discuss the issue with them when we meet. If I don't have an upcoming appointment scheduled, I send them an email and hope they are concerned enough to come in and see me. It is very helpful to see any

responses that get added to an alert. Knowing the steps that have been taken to help the students allows me to have more candid conversations with them."

Early in the new process advisors were concerned about being inundated with emails related to the alerts, so tweaks were made that allow faculty and advisors to set up email preferences. James adds, "I set up a folder in my email that any early alerts I receive automatically go in. I check it each day to see if new alerts have been added. The folder keeps the early alerts organized and makes them easier to manage."

Faculty are encouraged to submit students through the EAS who could use extra assistance—especially early in the semester. Faculty may access the EAS through PAWS just as they would their rosters.

## AIM HIGH Scholarships & Retention Potential

As previously noted, students being able to afford college is part of the retention work CORE routinely examines. In the spring 2018 edition of this newsletter we reported on changes to the merit scholarship that have the potential to improve retention by attracting students with the motivation and academic acumen for University work.

Enrollment Management has recently announced 3 new AIM HIGH scholarships to add to these financial boosters. AVP Josh Norman states, "The Aim HIGH Scholarships were designed to create greater accessibility, curb college bound outmigration, and ultimately attract more students that we know can be

successful at Eastern. If we market the scholarships effectively, they have the potential to propel significant enrollment gains. Those gains will be realized by attracting more prospective students, and by influencing more of our prospective students who apply and are admitted to attend."

In the **EIU Promise**, students whose families have an annual income of \$61,000 or less will have their full cost of tuition and fees covered.

In the **EIU Cost Match**, Eastern will match out-of-pocket cost of attendance at most public universities in Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, and

Wisconsin.

The **Merit Scholarship Bonus** offers students an extra \$500 a year if they qualify for a merit scholarship and are an Illinois resident. Merit Scholarships require students to have a 20 ACT and a 3.0 high school gpa.

Norman adds, "Our top retention indicators are financial. Introducing new funding courses to support future students creates an opportunity to diminish those financial risk factors and ultimately increase our rates of retention and student success."

These new scholarships are renewable for four years as long as students meet the renewal criteria.