



# The National Dialog on Student Retention

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Where Have All The Students Gone: A Comparative Study of Factors Related to Persistence and Attrition in Online and Campus-based Master's Degree Programs

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# Background of Study

## ▶ Purpose

- To determine the effect of the instructional delivery mode, online vs. face-to-face, relative to academic and demographic characteristics, on persistence and dropout in master's degree programs
- To identify demographic and academic variables significantly related to persistence or withdrawal from online and campus-based formats of programs

## ▶ Significance

- To add to limited existing data on nature of student attrition in entire online degree programs
- To test Student Integration's Theory concept of influence of academic and social integration on persistence/ dropout in online environment
- To expand current research on student attrition in online programs by comparing attrition in online vs. face-to-face tracks from the same degree programs taught by the same professors at a single institution thereby offering some degree of control of intervening instructional and institutional variables

# Research Questions

- ▶ To what extent does the dropout rate vary by instructional delivery mode, online versus campus face-to-face, for master's degree programs?
- ▶ What are the demographic and academic characteristics significantly associated with student persistence or dropout in master's degree programs?
- ▶ How do the variables significantly associated with student dropout differ between the two delivery modes, online versus campus face-to-face?

# Research Methodology

## ▶ Study Population

## ▶ Research Design

- Criterion Variable: Persistence/Dropout
- Predictor Variables
  - Demographic: Age, gender, ethnicity
  - Academic: Undergraduate GPA, Admission test score

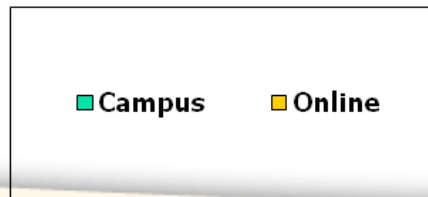
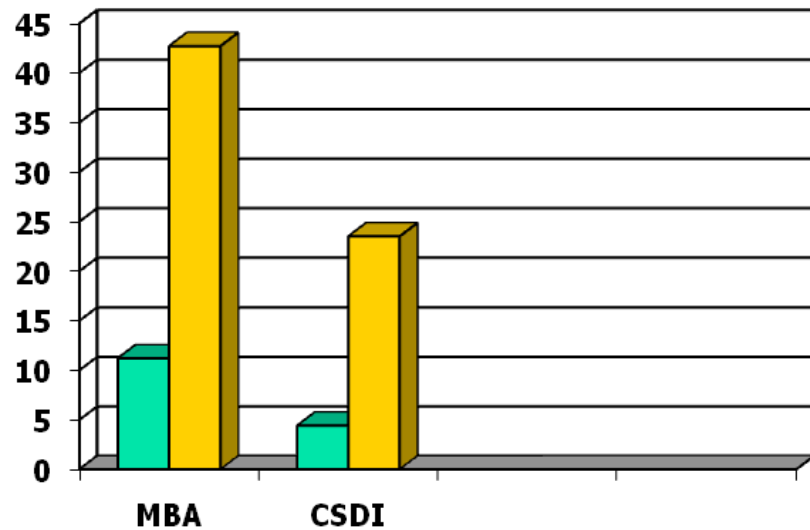
# Research Methodology (cont'd.)

- ▶ Data Collection
- ▶ Data Analysis
  - Descriptive Statistics
  - Inferential Statistics
    - Bivariate Analysis
    - Logistic Regression

# Study Limitations

- ▶ Study sample from single site
- ▶ Students self-selected in type of program delivery format
- ▶ Students not randomly selected
- ▶ Survival time/right censored data

# Findings



## Research Question 1

**The dropout rate was significantly higher for the online groups than the campus groups of the two degree programs**

Campus: MBA -11.22%    CSDI – 4.4 %  
Online:    MBA - 42.7%    CSDI - 23.5%

Online MBA students were about 6 times more likely to drop out than campus MBA students

Online CSDI students were about seven times more likely to drop out than campus CSDI students.

# Findings (Cont'd.)

## ▶ Research Question 2

Variables significantly associated with dropout for master's degree programs differed by program

- Entire MBA Sample
  - **Bivariate Analysis: age & delivery format significant at 0.05 level**
  - **Logistic Regression: Age & delivery format have significant unique effects**
- Entire CSDI Sample
  - **Bivariate Analysis: Age, GPA, ethnicity, and delivery format significant at 0.05 level**
  - **Logistic Regression: Age and GPA have significant unique effects**

# Findings (cont'd)

## ▶ Question 3

**Variables significantly associated with student dropout differed between the two delivery modes.**

No significant association found between variables and dropout in online groups.

- **Campus Groups**
  - MBA - Age & GMAT score
  - CSDI – Undergraduate GPA and GRE score
- **Online Groups**
  - MBA- No significant association found between dropout and predictor variables
  - CSDI-No significant association found between dropout and predictor variables

# Conclusions

- ▶ High attrition rates in online programs remain an issue and challenge for educational leaders.
- ▶ The academic and social integration of students as defined by traditional persistence theories and measures may not influence dropout in the online environment to the same degree or in the same way as in the campus learning environment.
- ▶ Often viewed as an indicator of program quality, high dropout rates may be better explained by other factors, such as student career motivations, requirements of the profession, and program specific characteristics at the graduate level. For example, the difference in the dropout rates between the two online groups could possibly be attributed to particular differences in program characteristics. The online CSDI program has a required face-to-face orientation and students are admitted in cohorts whereas the MBA's orientation is not required and there is a rolling admissions policy in place. In addition, CSDI students are pursuing licensure/certification for entry into the profession.
- ▶ Dropout seems to result from the interaction of many complex student, program, and instructional characteristics making one comprehensive theory or explanation of dropout difficult for all delivery formats and different degree programs.

# Implications for Practice

- ▶ Continuous assessment of dropout by educational leaders at course, program, and institutional level through exit surveys and interviews needed
- ▶ Further development of support mechanisms for online students in areas besides instruction, such as orientation programs, admission cohorts, and student buddy systems
- ▶ Attention to learning styles and needs of older students in program and instructional development
- ▶ Strong faculty development program in online teaching pedagogies