

Three bright green apples are arranged on a white background. One apple is in the foreground, slightly to the right, and is the largest. Two other apples are behind it, one to the left and one to the right, both slightly smaller and partially obscured. The apples have a smooth, glossy texture and a small brown stem at the top. The text 'Freshmen Exit Interview Study' is overlaid in white with a black outline across the middle of the image.

Freshmen Exit Interview Study

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Presentation Plan

- Research initiative and survey protocol design
- Exit Phone interview: Method, Results, Recommendations
- Closing the loop: data Sharing, program improvement, and continuing study



Learning Outcomes

- Process of conducting a phone exit interview study and instrument used
- Themes of and other findings:
 - why students leave
 - when and how they make the decision
- Full assessment cycle:
 - research initiative->research design
 - >qualitative data analysis->data sharing strategies->resulting campus impact
 - > continuous study and continuous improvement



Research Initiative and the purpose of the Study

- Administrators wanted to know experiences of students who decided to leave Edgewood
 - freshmen cohort students who didn't register in the first semester of the second year
- Provide data and analysis to support the college's strategic retention plan:
 - Determine the point at which students first think of leaving (when to implement early intervention) and issues that prompt students to leave (How to implement early intervention).
 - Compare results for 2007 and 2009 exit interview study to determine if we are effective and on the "right track".



Prepare to conduct interviews

- Student Contact List (who should we interview)
- Interview Protocol Design (what questions to ask)



Student Contact List

- The Director of IR generated a list of first-year students who failed to register for the fall 2009 semester.
- Sharing the list with the Dean of Students and the Director of Advising to identify students who separated from Edgewood due to academic dismissal and /or personal mental or physical health reasons.
- Final interview list: 60 students.



Interview Protocol Design

- The first draft is based on:
 - 1) A similar interview protocol created in the IR office in 2007
 - 2) Research papers in first year retention
 - 3) Meetings with Edgewood administrators and staff
- We sent the interview protocol to administrators for feedback, and developed the second draft.
- Conducted pilot interviews to three IR work-study students. Changes were made to finalize the interview protocol.



Interview Questions

- Based on earlier survey (2007)
- Standard Intro
 - Contact contingency if student needs assistance
 - Confidentiality and Anonymity
 - Permission to record
- Interview questions
 - Modeled after previous study
 - Specific administrator interest



Conducting the Interviews

- Effective contacts
 - Cell phone numbers and home phone numbers
 - Time of day
 - Role of institutional commitment
 - Social exchange theory
- Interview strategy
 - Semi-structured
 - Took notes after each interview
 - Transcribed segments later



Interview Response Rate

- 60 students did not register for fall classes
- 16 were unreachable due to inaccurate contact (phone) information
- 12 were unreachable despite multiple calls at different times over 14 days
- 5 declined interview request
- 1 unavailable during data collection window
- 26 students interviewed for 59% response rate, excluding the unreachable students.



Data Analysis

- Multiple data resources
- Qualitative methodology
- Key findings



Data sources for analysis

- Telephone Interviews
- Administrative Records
- Institutional Reports
 - Jimenez Soffa, S., Smalley, D. (2007). Analysis of students who withdrew fall 2006-spring 2007. Madison, WI: Edgewood College, Institutional Research Office.
 - Zhang, Y. (2008). Meet the Freshman Cohort. Madison, WI: Edgewood College, Institutional Research Office.



Where did they go?

- All interviewees enrolled in fall semester 2009

12 Where do you plan to transfer?

Carroll College	2	Rock Valley CC	1	UW-Platteville	1
Carthage College	1	Upper Iowa Univ	1	UW-Stevens Point	1
Community College	1	UW-Green Bay	1	UW-Whitwater	3
Edgewood College	2	UW-Madison	1	Winona State	2
International College	1	UW-Milwaukee	3	Institution Unknown	1
Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design	1	UW-Oshkosh	3	Total	26

- 13 (50%) of students transferred to a regional UW system school



Five themes emerged

- Limited campus experiences
- Personal Reasons
- Academic or Classroom Experiences
- Financial Concerns
- Interpersonal Conflicts



1. Many students who transferred to another four-year institution (n=19 or 86%) wanted a larger campus, with bigger class sizes, more opportunities to meet others, and more on-campus activities.

- Students stated they initially wanted a small college, but subsequently felt environment too limited.
 - Class sizes
 - The campus was vacant on weekends
 - Sought greater study body diversity



2. Several students who departed Edgewood cited personal reasons such as Edgewood was too far from home, they had not originally planned to attend Edgewood for entire undergraduate career, and experienced personal growth that led to an incompatibility with Edgewood.

- In aggregate these students were not socially or academically integrated and hadn't developed institutional commitment.



3. Even when their reasons for leaving were not related to academics, almost every student commented on their academic experience.

Two common positive and two common negative experiences frequently cited.

● Positive:

- Small class sizes facilitated good relationships with faculty
- Instructors caring, friendly, nice, helpful. In fact, six students stated that they felt most connected with a faculty member while on campus.

● Negative:

- Curriculum limitations (major field of study)
- Classes too small or lacking some amount of academic challenge, which was reported differently for different students



4. Financial Concerns: Of the eight students citing financial concerns, five were generally related to the cost of attending Edgewood College and three were more specifically related to the current national economic climate

- General:
 - Major choice wouldn't repay high salary
 - Lack of financial aid for middle-income households
 - Costs of sending multiple children (siblings) to college
- Recession-specific:
 - Parental job loss
 - Employment in jeopardy
- Other Financial:
 - Choice to live at home or with friends
 - More control over money management
 - Lack of scholarships



5. Interpersonal Conflicts

- **Social Integration and Sense of Community or Belonging seemed at issue**
- **Of five students reported that interpersonal conflicts led to their departure—three with roommates and two with professional staff**



Selected Additional Important Findings

- 15 of 26 students began thinking of leaving during first semester. 20% of cited finances as the primary reason.
- 10 students began thinking of leaving during spring semester. 50% attributed reason for leaving to finances.
 - Important information for financial aid and business services outreach



Additional Important Findings

- Some students expressed concerns about cost of Edgewood relative to quality of instruction
- Other students expressed concerns about courses that don't relate to their major
- These students appeared to lack understanding for course purpose
 - Quality of instruction came up in Edgewood's 2007 report on student retention
 - Possible gap between students' understanding of what it means to attend a liberal arts college and the institutional mission



Additional Important Findings

- A similar study, conducted by the IR Office in 2007, found that most students DID NOT talk with a professional staff person about leaving.
- The 2009 study found that 58% of the students interviewed (n=15) spoke with a professional staff person at Edgewood about leaving.
- This indicates that the advising program is working.



What's next

- Make recommendations
- Share data and initiate meaningful discussion on retention
- Campus impacts
- Continuous research



Selected Recommendations

- Students did not mention parts of the Edgewood mission such as life-long learning or ethical service and leadership. How well is liberal arts mission understood by students?
- Do students choose Edgewood because it is a small school or do they choose it because it is a liberal arts school that happens to be small?



Selected Recommendations

- Several students referred to Edgewood as a transition step between high school and “college.”
 - Student life on campus and, specifically, on weekends
 - Enhanced classroom experiences
 - “Small Campus, Big World”



Selected Recommendations

- Small class size was an issue for many students.
 - Although they liked the benefits of small classes, they also felt like they missed out on opportunities to meet new people and have broader discussions about academic topics.
 - Freshman forum seemed really popular, but would it be possible to introduce some blended classes or encourage sections of similar classes to share certain readings, topics, etc. and meet for discussions.



Study Result Sharing

- Findings were shared with a variety of groups on campus, and triggered meaningful discussions on retention across campus.
 - the College's cabinet members, the Dean's Council, the Advising group, the Early Intervention Group, the Strategic Retention Management Council, the Student Development Division, and more.
- Selected findings were shared with Edgewood Community through the August College Assembly.



Linking to Retention

- This study provides robust findings to support the institution's strategic retention plan.
 - Provide evidence to show that we are on the right track (advising).
 - Inform future strategies (weekend programming, finance literacy program, and faculty involvement in retention efforts).
- Findings will be used to build a new retention management data system
 - Determine what data to gather and when to collect information.



Conclusion and Continuous Study

- Conclusion
- Continuous Study
 - The college is planning to expand the study to interview freshmen who did not return after the first semester, and students who did not enroll after spending two years at Edgewood.



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