

## Why do students drop classes: Summary of a pilot study

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During Fall Semester 2007 a group of CRC faculty from Humanities, English, Math, and Physical Education worked with CASSL on a pilot study of why students drop classes. From week 4 to week 12 of the semester, students who dropped the classes in the pilot study were called and asked if they would explain why they dropped the class, if they had talked to a teacher, counselor or coach before dropping, if they planned to take the class again, and if there was anything CRC could have done to help them stay in the class. A total of 112 students were called and 44 students were contacted and responded.

The following table summarizes the reasons that students gave for dropping a class (*Note: Percents add to more than 100% as some students listed multiple reasons for dropping*):

%	Reason for dropping the class
2	financial problems
2	time needed for a social life
2	cost of school (fees, books, etc.)
2	didn't have the prerequisites for the class
9	schedule wasn't convenient
11	transportation problems
11	class didn't fit educational goals
14	health issues
16	family responsibilities
16	class was too hard
18	overall class workload was too large
18	teaching methods were not effective
32	work responsibilities

These reasons for dropping were widely distributed over the entire period of the pilot study. For example, work responsibilities impacted students in each of the 8 weeks of the study period. The following reasons occurred in at least 5 of the 8 weeks: work responsibilities, teaching methods, overall class workload, health issues, and transportation problems. Only one factor reported by at least 5 students showed a different pattern; students for whom the class did not fit their educational goals dropped before week 6 of the semester.

These results, showing that work responsibilities is the most common factor for students dropping classes, are similar to some that have been reported previously. For example, in a study at Schoolcraft College in Michigan Sigworth (1995) reported that the main reasons for students dropping included personal or family reasons, working too many hours, job schedule changes and dissatisfaction with instruction. Work conflicts and personal problems were the most frequently cited reasons for dropping classes at Johnson Community College in Kansas (Conklin 1997, Summer 2001). City College of San Francisco reports that the most common reason given for dropping classes was work schedule conflict (Mery, 2001)

A relatively low percentage (16-18%) of the respondents reported class-related reasons for dropping (class too hard, overall class workload for the semester too large, or teaching methods not effective). Another 11% dropped because the class didn't fit their educational goals. Only 25% of the student respondents indicated that they had spoken with a teacher, counselor or coach before dropping the class. No respondent indicated that the college could have definitely done something to prevent the drop, and only three respondents indicated that "maybe" the college could have done something to help. Approximately 57% of the respondents indicated that they planned to take the class again within the next year.

### A summary of some student comments (paraphrased to protect identifying information):

- Class was too early in the morning; had only had 10 minutes between classes; that wasn't enough time to clean up and relax before next class.
- Teacher didn't teach the way he learned; but "not a bad teacher".
- Didn't want to take public bus that late in the evening. May not need to take the class again
- Work schedule changed - works in retail. Has to choose between work and school; has had to drop all classes 4 times
- Respiratory problem, doctor wouldn't clear student for class
- "Great teacher" but couldn't retain info; loud students were distracting. Sad that it didn't work out.
- Death in the family; had to move out of Sacramento
- Took this class as a second choice, but was able to get into the class that was a first choice for student's interests
- Late signing up for classes, class didn't fit schedule, was too early - couldn't wake up
- Realized this class was too much, too physical; class was a lot of fun
- Had enough PE units so didn't need the class
- Sick for a couple of weeks tried to email teacher, but email seemed to be down
- Didn't have the prerequisite; talked to counselor and everything was worked out
- Just move to area and still adjusting; had time management issue.
- Working full time and school full time. Had the feeling the class was going to be too much.
- Didn't need the class; signed up for it by mistake
- Spouse took lower paying job, had to go back to work. Dropped all classes
- Couldn't understand the professor, the way professor talked and words used.
- Job takes up time frame.
- Car accident left student with transport problem. Parents separating so needed to work full time to help mother with household finances
- Thought that could juggle work and school but not able to, time issue
- Got the flu and got too far behind
- Works full time and had to drop classes "situations always pop up" at student's house
- Time issues
- Couldn't afford all the books, had to drop 3 classes
- Took Math and English in same semester and it was too much
- Student was promoted at work and is now working 12 hour days.
- Bookstore ran out of book. Was falling behind from the beginning. Homework was excessive.
- Student was behind; 3 hours is too long
- Commute was too long
- Had to leave the state
- Falling behind
- Commuting a problem; unfair pop quizzes; a lot of homework
- Stressed out, couldn't keep up. Financial Aid issues
- Didn't like teacher; didn't think the grading was fair.
- Wasn't ready
- Construction going on in house, family had to move to a motel that was far away.
- Teacher would teach "two lessons per class"; too much, very rusty in math.
- Turned in two papers and got bad grades on them; didn't see the point of continuing.
- Didn't like the class, too much reading

### References

- Conklin, K. A. 1997. Course Attrition: A 5-year perspective on why students drop classes. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 21 (8): 753-759.
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- Sigworth, D. 1995. Student Withdrawal Study, Schoolcraft College. Schoolcraft College Research Report.
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