



Student Success 2.0

Faculty of Public Affairs FPA Student Success Committee

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Overview

Student success is core to the enterprise of any university. What is meant by “student success” is complex and nuanced, but a key measure is provided by student retention rates: the proportion of students who continue with their studies and complete their degrees.

Carleton has made remarkable progress in improving its retention rates. For the 1992 cohort of undergraduates, only 56.5 per cent remained at the University two years after first enrolling. For the 2004 cohort, that figure had risen to 81.1 per cent. Much of this improvement can be attributed to the increase in the high school averages of students entering Carleton, as well as to internal measures taken to encourage student success.

However, various indicators remain troubling and underscore the need to redouble our efforts in this regard.

The two-year retention rate of 81.1 per cent was a peak for Carleton. Since then, retention rates have declined across the University and in most degree programs offered by the Faculty of Public Affairs. For the 2006 cohort, the two-year retention rate was 78.3 per cent, placing us 11th of 17 Ontario universities. Measured by graduation rates after six years, Carleton places 14th out of 17.

Further, although we have made excellent progress in retaining students with entrance averages in the 70s, there has been almost no change since 1992 in our ability to retain students with incoming averages of greater than 80 per cent. *As the incoming averages of Carleton students rise, it is vital that the University improve its capacity to retain high achieving students.*

This report reviews the myriad factors that contribute to, or impede, student success. It considers Carleton’s performance relative to other universities according to a number of benchmarks. It outlines the profile of Carleton undergraduates, and how they distinguish themselves from students at other universities. It recounts current initiatives taken to promote student success and compiles best practices from the various units comprising the Faculty of Public Affairs.

The report concludes that there is no “magic bullet” to improving retention rates and other indicators of student success. Rather, what is required is concerted action at all levels, and the report concludes with a series of recommendations to that effect.

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I. Introduction

As an institution, we are called upon to do all within our power to foster student success. It's not an easy task, but it is one that is core to the University's mission. Students come to the University from a diversity of backgrounds, with a diversity of skills and knowledge, and a diversity of goals and motivations. It is often difficult to determine why students don't succeed, and it is even more difficult to accurately predict which students are going to have problems. Nor is success easy to define, and it is hard to figure out what actions contribute to or act as barriers to success. Yet Carleton University has committed itself to this task, and over the years has made significant progress. It has engaged in numerous efforts, involving deep and critical reflection on what we do and how we do it, leading to curricular reform, modification of academic rules, expansion of student services, support for teaching development, and many other initiatives. Yet there is much to be done. It is time for Student Success 2.0.

A Faculty of Public Affairs Student Success Committee was established to reflect more specifically on what can be done at the Faculty level to further contribute to the success of our students. This report wrestles with the question of what student success means and how we measure student success. It seeks to understand some of the research on determinants of student success, and to recount what our academic units are doing, or would like to do to promote student success. The Committee realizes that the efforts at the Faculty and academic unit levels are only a part of what must be an integrated and concerted effort by the whole University to keep student success firmly in the forefront of our aspirations and actions. It is in this spirit that the Committee offers this report.

The tremendous progress made by Carleton is most evident if we examine two-year retention rates – the percentage of students starting their studies in a particular year who are continuing to study at Carleton two years later. We have increased the percentage from 56.5% for the 1992 cohort to 78.3% for the 2006 cohort, an impressive transformation by any measure. Much of that improvement can be attributed to significant increases in the high school average of students entering Carleton. Part of it may be attributed to adjustments to progression and other academic rules that are designed to ensure that we do not place undue barriers in the way of students. Part is also attributable to the increased attention to student success, especially through the resources devoted to student support initiatives, ranging from the Student Experience Office to the Student Academic Success Centre to Learning Support Services.

Yet, we cannot be complacent. Our two-year retention rate places us 11th of 17 Ontario universities. Moreover, in the past two years we appear to be regressing from our peak performance. In 2004, we had a two-year retention rate of 81.1%. For the 2006 cohort, it was at 78.3%. The University-wide decline in the past two years is generally mirrored across most degree programs offered in the Faculty of Public Affairs. In addition to the student-centred reasons for committing to the promotion of student success, we have other strong institutional interests in improvement. Losing students costs the University money. Graduation rates are not only linked to provincial funding, they affect our reputation and our ability to attract the best students, with consequences for research, graduate studies, and our attractiveness to the very best young scholars who we want with us to teach and to do research.

So it is time to recommit to making strenuous efforts to improving student success. It can be done! But it requires a tremendous coordinated effort by all. It requires continual monitoring and assessment of our

curriculum to remain attractive to the best students. It requires continual monitoring and assessment of the impact of our student services. It requires continual monitoring and improvement in our teaching, to ensure that students are fully engaged in their learning. It requires continual monitoring of the campus environment, ensuring that we are catering to the whole student, providing the opportunities for enriching non-curricular as well as curricular experiences.

The key recommendation of this report is that we dedicate ourselves to rigorous and ongoing consideration of student success in every aspect of what we do. We need to establish processes whereby we set student success goals, put in place frameworks for monitoring student success, and take student success into account as we design our programs, our courses, our teaching initiatives, and our research programs. We need to create a culture in which everybody sees student success as their responsibility. This is not to say that we need to deny the agency of students in creating the conditions for their own success. But we must be attentive to the multitude of ways in which we can facilitate that process.

II. Student Success

A. Defining Student Success

We all share the goal of promoting student success. An earlier report on goals for the BA program articulated a desire to ensure that students

- achieve "an awareness and understanding of intellectual life and its values";
- develop "those essential abilities that grow from an engagement with intellectual life, have enduring value, and prepare them for citizenship, professional life and graduate study"; and
- engage "in courses of studies with clearly focused, clearly stated and clearly understood objectives."

And yet student success is much more complicated than this. Student success at university can be measured across a range of dimensions, including intellectual and academic competence, effectiveness in interpersonal relationships, identity development including development of career goals, awareness and appreciation of diversity, and commitment to community and civic responsibility (Goldman, "Fostering Student Success: Enriching the experience inside and outside the classroom", *News at the University of Toronto* 15 January 2008).

B. Factors Influencing Student Success

One of the most influential thinkers about student success, V. Tinto, posits that a significant barrier to student success is the difficulty of transition itself – students are challenged by the transition from home to college with a resulting inability to immerse themselves in the academic environment. (*Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (2nd. edition). Chicago, The University of Chicago Press). The following discussion, from an article by John Bean in the *Encyclopedia of Education*, provides a typology of variables that have an impact on student success and student retention ("College Student Retention", *Encyclopedia of Education*. The Gale Group, Inc, 2002. *Answers.com* 25 Feb. 2009.

<http://www.answers.com/topic/college-student-retention>). Although it is oriented to U.S.

colleges and universities (note the reference to Greek organizations), it also usefully emphasizes some of the special challenges faced by minority and non-traditional students.

Background Variables. *These include parental support, parents' education, parents' income, educational goals, precollege academic success (high class rank, grade point average, standardized test scores), college preparatory curriculum, and friends attending college. For minority students, background variables include extended family support, church and community support, and previous positive interracial/intercultural contact, and for nontraditional students they include spouse support and employer support.*

Organizational Factors. *These include financial aid, orientation programs, rules and regulations, memberships in campus organizations, involvement in decision-making, housing policies, counseling, the bursars office, ease of registration, and staff attitudes toward students. For minority students, organizational factors include role models in staff and faculty, a supportive environment, at least 20 percent minority enrollment, and not viewing rules as oppressive. For nontraditional students, parking, child care, campus safety, availability of services after hours, evening/weekend scheduling, and cost per credit hour are factors.*

Academic Factors. *These include courses offered, positive faculty interaction (both in class and out of class), advising, general skills programs (e.g., basic skills, study skills, math, and English tutoring/help centers), campus resources (e.g., computer, library, athletic, college union), absenteeism, certainty of major, and academic integration. Factors affecting minority students include warm classroom climate and faculty role models, and those affecting nontraditional students include the expectation for individual faculty member attention.*

Social Factors. *Among the social factors affecting retention are close friends on campus, peer culture, social involvement (e.g., service learning, Greek organizations), informal contact with faculty, identification with a group on campus, and social integration. For minority students, social factors also include a positive intercultural/interracial environment and at least 20 percent minority enrollment.*

Environmental Factors. *These include continued parental support, little opportunity to transfer, financial resources, significant other elsewhere, family responsibilities, getting married, and a job off campus more than twenty hours per week. Factors affecting minority students also include the availability of grants.*

Attitudes, Intentions, and Psychological Processes. *These include self-efficacy as a student, sense of self-development and self-confidence, internal locus of control, strategies of approach, motivation to study, need for achievement, satisfaction, practical value of one's education, stress, alienation, loyalty, sense of fitting it, and intention to stay enrolled. For minority students, self-validation is also a factor.*

What is clear from this analysis is that improvements in student success require a comprehensive strategy. It is not something that can be left to student support services alone, nor is it something

that academic units are capable of doing without extensive coordination and support from all other sectors of the University.

C. Profiling Carleton Students

So it is clearly important to know something about the demographic profile of students who come to Carleton. Some of that information is available in databases maintained by the Office of Institutional Research (e.g. gender, geographic origin, age, citizenship) while other information may not easily be available (for example, socio-economic status).

Data posted on the University's OIR website shows, for instance, that in 2008, of the 5109 full-time students enrolled in first year, 53.6% were males and 46.4 % were females. Of 2640 full-time first year BA students, 44.6% were males and 55.4% were females. Even higher percentages of female students are found in the B.J., B.P.A.P.M., and B.S.W. programs offered in our Faculty.

In 2008, 1843 (11.3%) full-time undergraduate Carleton students identified a country other than Canada as their country of origin, compared to 14490 (88.7%) from Canada. 812 (7.7%) full-time students in BA programs come from outside Canada, compared to 9742 (92.3%) from within Canada. Over 90% of Canadian students come from Ontario, and just over half of those in full-time undergraduate programs come from the Ottawa-Carleton region.

Another useful source of data comes from the Canadian University Survey Consortium's survey of undergraduate students, in which Carleton participates. These data allow benchmarking in comparison with some other universities sharing characteristics similar to those of Carleton. The following data are drawn from the 2008 Report:

Table 1: Proportional Profile of Respondents				
	Carleton	Comparable Institutions		
		Average	Low	High
Female **	52 %	63 %	59 %	69%
20 years of age or younger	53	51	30	72
Studying in Canada on a Student Visa **	9	6	1	13
Visible minority **	32	26	9	59
Aboriginal	3	2	1	5
Students with a disability **	11	8	5	9
Living in rental accommodations **	48	43	21	58
Living with parents	36	37	22	71
Living in on-campus housing **	11	14	2	25
Came from a community of 300,000+ **	42	29	7	62
Students who work while studying **	56	50	41	59
Average number of hours worked per week ** (all respondents who worked)	19	17	14	21
Median grade (self-reported) so far at university	B+	B+	B	B+

** Denotes statistically significant difference between Carleton and the average for comparable institutions

Source: 2008 [CUSC Report](#)

To summarize, if the profile of the students responding to the survey matched the Carleton profile overall, it means that in comparison to a selection of other universities, we have statistically significant differences in the proportion of:

- female students (lower)
- international students (higher)
- visible minorities (higher)
- students with disability (higher)
- students living in rented accommodations (higher)
- students living in campus residences (lower)
- students coming from large (>300,000) urban communities (higher)
- students who work while studying (higher)
- average number of hours worked by students (higher)

Another set of data allows demographic comparisons across Carleton faculties. It derives from the National Survey on Student Engagement.

Table 2: Proportional Profile of First-Year Respondents

	Faculty					All Faculties
	Arts & Social Sciences	Public Affairs	Business	Science	Engineering and Design	
Female	70%	69%	54%	42%	21%	57%
19 years of age or younger	79	85	86	86	76	82
Canadian citizen	92	86	75	84	69	84
Full-time	97	97	98	96	96	97
First-gen student (no post-sec)	14	11	10	12	12	12
First-gen student (no university)	39	33	28	32	27	33
Lived in on-campus housing	39	56	51	39	43	47
Lived with parents/relatives	34	25	25	37	31	30
Lived in a rented home/apt.	20	12	16	16	15	16
Worked during semester	50	38	44	37	32	41
Participated on a school athletic team (varsity)	4	5	4	6	5	5

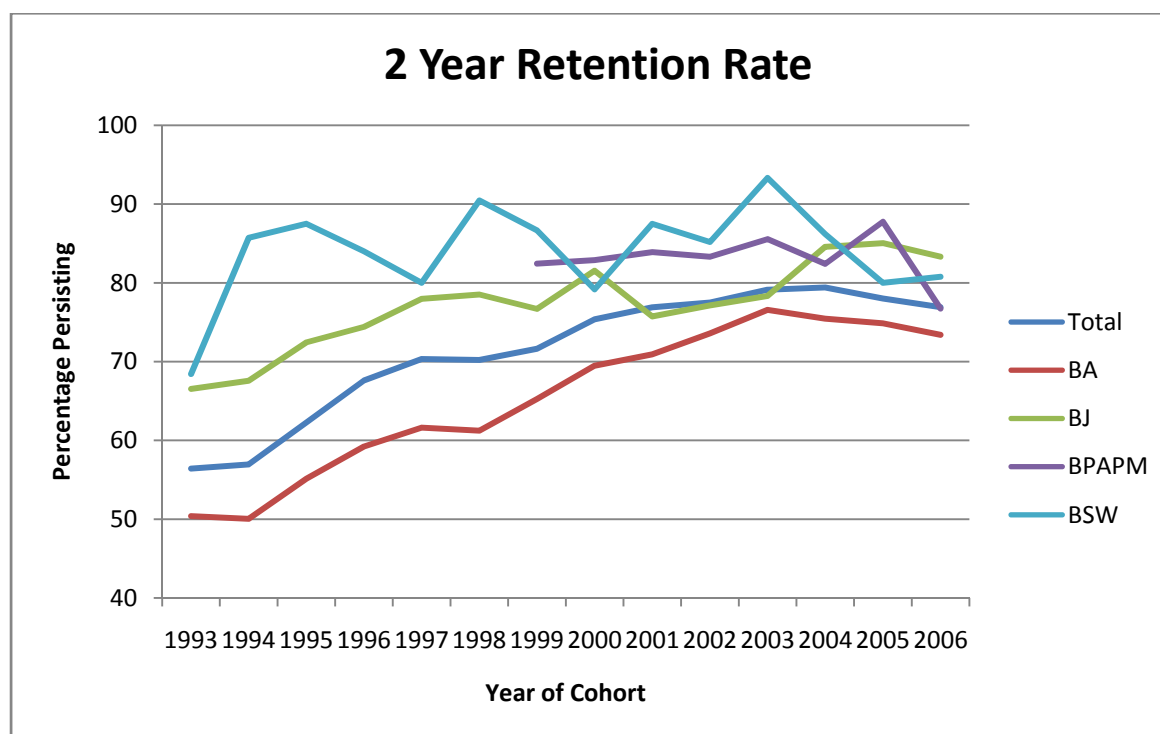
These data show that Faculty of Public Affairs students differ from the Carleton-wide cohort completing the survey in several respects. A larger percentage of FPA students are female (although female respondents are over-represented in the survey as a whole), and more of the FPA respondents lived in on-campus residences than the norm. These data also show that a significant proportion of Carleton and FPA students are labeled as first-generation, in the sense of having parents who either did not do any post-secondary education, or who did not do any university-level studies. In *Defining Dreams*, the University's Strategic Plan, it is stated that one third of Carleton students are first-generation students. While this may attest to an important part of the University's mission in extending opportunities and access to post-secondary education, it may also indicate a group of students to whom we should pay particular attention as they make the transition to university studies.

An important question for consideration is whether the differing student profiles identified above may explain differences in Carleton's measures of student success and persistence. A second is whether there are any specific kinds of programs that are or should be implemented at Carleton generally and in our Faculty in particular to address these differences. We are not yet at the point of being able to answer these questions, but we recognize that part of the ongoing work in encouraging student success within the faculty will require paying continued attention to these issues.

D. Measuring Student Success

One of the most frequently used measures of student success is the extent to which students persist with their University studies. Universities closely track persistence using the retention rates of students and the percentage of students who graduate within some defined period after commencing their studies. A commonly used measure of student retention is the percentage of students who are still studying at the university two years after their initial registration (regardless of whether they are still in the same program or have switched to a program different from the one in which they were originally registered). Carleton University has not traditionally

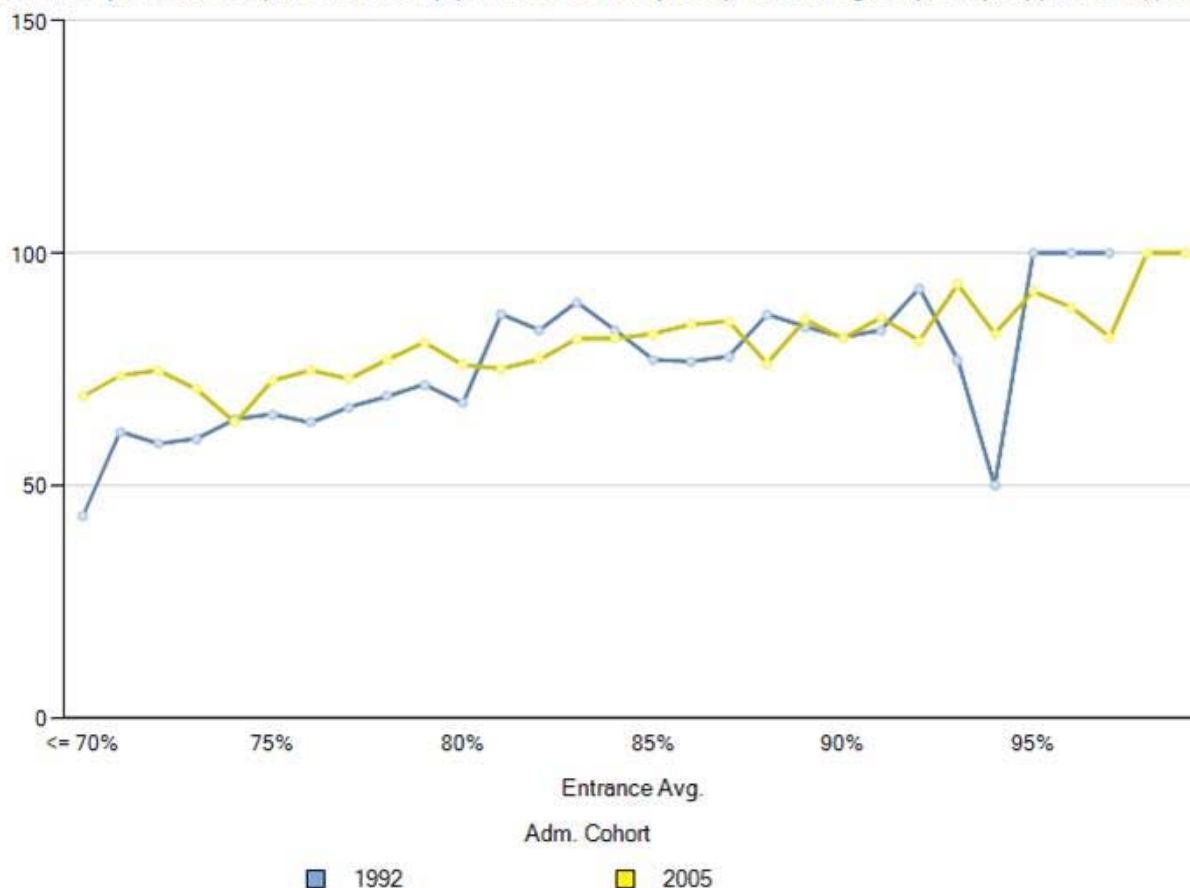
done well by this measure, compared to other universities, although there has been significant improvement over the past fifteen years.



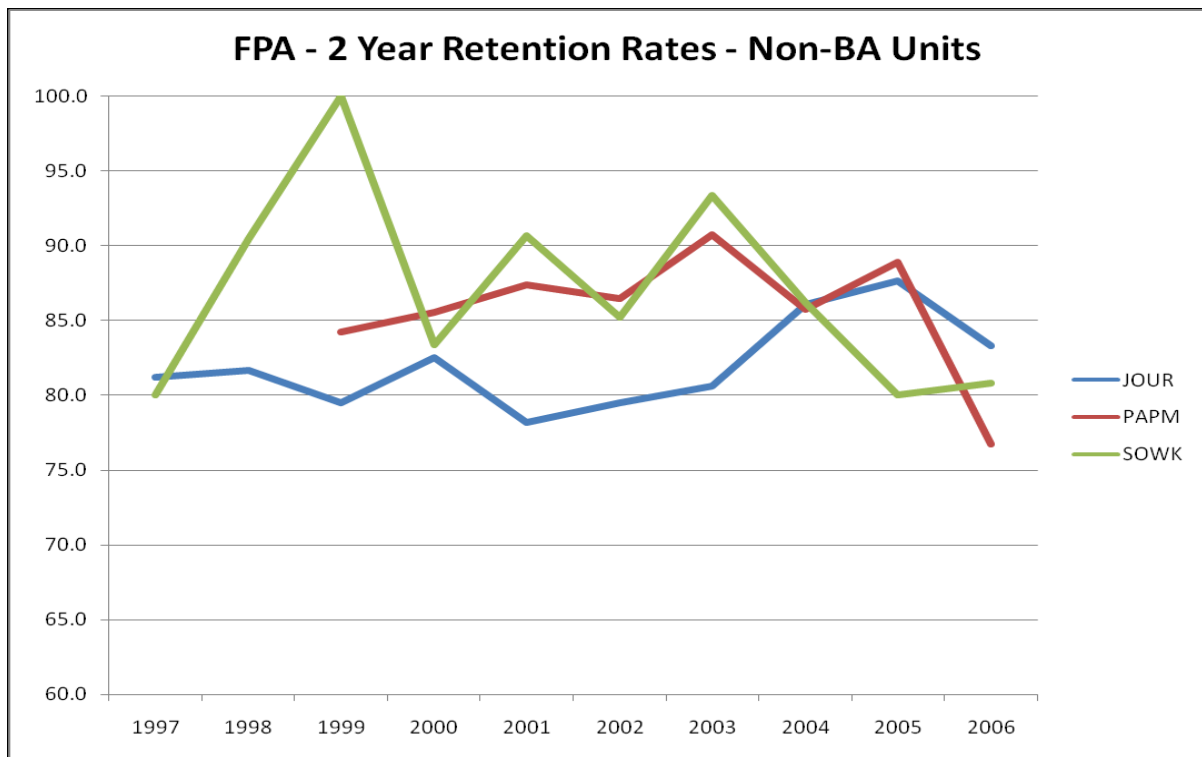
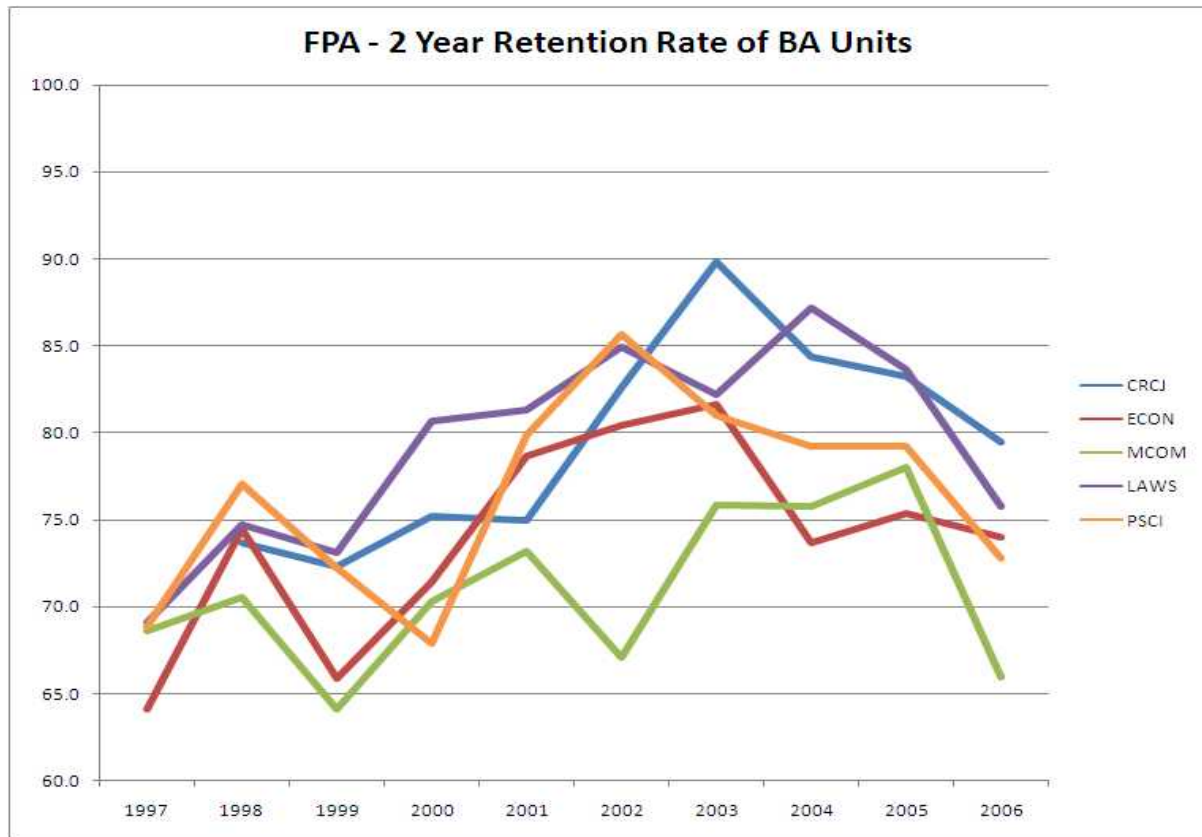
Carleton is still not where it wants to be in terms of promoting student success, especially as measured by student retention and graduation rates. If we look at the cohort of new first year students entering Carleton from high school in 2005, 87% were enrolled at Carleton one year later, and 80% were enrolled two years later. Carleton ranks 11th of 17 Ontario universities on this measure. If one uses graduation rates after six years, Carleton's rate of 69% (for the 2001 cohort) ranks 14th. It is worth noting, however, that these figures are a significant improvement from the situation in 1992, when we had only 56.5% continuing after two years, and 46.6% graduating after six years. Much of the improvement from 1992 can be attributed to the higher high school entrance averages of students now coming to Carleton. We are now approaching the Ontario average on this measure. We know that typically there is a positive correlation between high school average and student persistence. With a much higher proportion of students now coming to Carleton with an entrance average above 80, it is not surprising that there has been a corresponding improvement in the overall persistence rate.

One telling analysis completed by the University's Office of Institutional Research compares the retention rates of students with comparable high school averages in 1992 and 2005. It shows that for students with entrance averages in the 70s, we are doing a better job of retaining them two years later, but the retention rate has not changed much since 1992 for students with a high school entrance average over 80.

Retention - Cohort, Years After, Initial Degree, Initial Acadunit, Application Type,
Measures (% Cont/Grad), Years After (2), First Acadunit (Total), Initial Degree (Total), Applicant Type (Tc



It is also important to take note of the retention rates among the academic units in the Faculty of Public Affairs. The following two charts show improvement in retention rates over time, especially in BA units, but they also make it obvious that we appear to have stalled or even slid back to some extent in the last three years. The first chart provides the trend lines for units with undergraduate BA programs, while the second chart provides the trends for our three non-BA academic programs: Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Public Affairs and Policy Management, and the Bachelor of Social Work.



Two programs in FPA stand out in terms of having non-standard progression rules and perhaps worrying retention rates, in light of their students' high school entrance average. For Journalism, which takes in 200 students per year, but allows only 100-125 students to continue in the program to second year, there are about 30 students who are not at Carleton 2 years later. The students who leave have entrance averages around 89, and their GPA for their studies at Carleton is typically in the B range. The BPAPM program also has a higher-than-normal continuation standard, although not tied to any kind of quota. We lose between 11 and 20 of these students, whose entrance averages are around 86. The GPA of the students who leave varies considerably from year to year, but unlike the BJ students, they typically have quite high DFW rates, although given the small numbers, there is still considerable variability from year to year.

In addition to measuring student success in terms of persistence, graduation rates, and employment rates, we also try to track student experience by asking them the extent to which they are satisfied with their university experience. Several different survey instruments are commonly used to measure student satisfaction and student engagement. For example, Carleton University participates regularly in a survey developed by the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) that is designed to assess student satisfaction with their university experience. It also participates regularly in the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), designed to assess student engagement at university, based on the assumption that there is a close connection between student success and student engagement. These surveys enable some comparisons with other Universities, as well as providing a breakdown by faculty within Carleton that may help to identify particular concerns that are limiting student satisfaction or contributing to less-than-optimal levels of student engagement.

Analyses of NSSE survey results establish five benchmarks for comparison. These are:

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

The following chart summarizes the scores for various benchmarks, comparing first- and final-year students, comparing 2006 and 2008 Carleton results, and comparing Carleton results to responses at other Ontario universities.

Table 2: Summary of Statistically Significant Differences

	First-Year				Final-Year		
	CU 2008	CU 2006	Ont 2008		CU 2008	CU 2006	Ont 2008
Level of Academic Challenge	50.3	Similar	51.4		57.3	55.5	55.8
Active and Collaborative Learning	34.8	Similar	Similar		42.6	Similar	44.1
Student Faculty Interaction	24.1	Similar	Similar		32.4	30.2	Similar
Enriching Educational Experiences	25.1	Similar	Similar		33.3	Similar	34.9
Supportive Campus Environment	56.8	Similar	55.9		53.3	50.2	51.4

Legend: Benchmark is statistically significantly higher than Carleton's 2008 results
 Benchmark is statistically significantly lower than Carleton's 2008 results

The good news is that Carleton is improving on some of the benchmarks over time, and in a few areas, we compare favourably with other Ontario universities. For some other benchmarks, such as active and collaborative learning and enriching educational experiences, our scores derived from the responses of final year students are lagging behind those of other Ontario universities.

The NSSE results have also been broken down by faculty, leading naturally to the question of whether there is any way in which the Faculty of Public Affairs stands out in terms of the benchmarks.

The following tables show the 2008 mean benchmark scores for each faculty, in addition to the 2006 scores where deemed statistically different. For the Faculty of Public Affairs, they show that there has been statistically significant improvement with respect to the student-faculty interaction benchmark among first year students and with respect to the supportive campus environment among fourth year students.

Table 9A: First-Year Benchmarks by Faculty
with Statistically Significant Differences from 2006 Results

	Arts and Social Sciences		Public Affairs		Business		Science		Engineering and Design	
	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006
Level of Academic Challenge	49.8	similar	51.5	similar	46.0	similar	49.6	52.3	52.9	similar
Active and Collaborative Learning	33.0	similar	33.3	similar	38.8	similar	31.7	35.6	39.3	similar
Student Faculty Interaction	23.7	similar	24.9	21.9	25.4	similar	22.7	similar	23.1	similar
Enriching Educational Experiences	24.8	similar	26.2	similar	25.2	similar	23.5	similar	25.3	similar
Supportive Campus Environment	56.0	similar	57.0	similar	61.6	56.5	56.9	similar	56.3	similar

Legend ■ Benchmark is statistically significantly higher in 2008

■ Benchmark is statistically significantly lower in 2008

Table 9B: Fourth-Year Benchmarks by Faculty
with Statistically Significant Differences from 2006 Results

	Arts and Social Sciences		Public Affairs		Business		Science		Engineering and Design	
	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006
Level of Academic Challenge	58.5	similar	58.4	similar	61.8	similar	58.3	52.3	59.7	similar
Active and Collaborative Learning	42.3	similar	44.0	similar	52.8	similar	43.2	similar	47.3	similar
Student Faculty Interaction	35.6	similar	33.7	similar	32.7	28.3	37.2	similar	31.6	similar
Enriching Educational Experiences	33.9	similar	35.7	similar	35.9	similar	37.2	similar	37.8	34.5
Supportive Campus Environment	54.3	50.9	53.0	49.7	53.3	similar	57.3	50.5	56.0	51.6

The following table breaks down the results for the two benchmarks where the Faculty of Public Affairs had statistically significant improvements in 2008 compared to 2006. The point in reporting these data is that they indicate ways in which we can use the NSSE data to help understand the extent to which students are engaged in their university studies, across a number of measures. To the extent that addressing student engagement is a means of promoting student success, these data may provide some ideas about where we can make further improvements. For example, the student perception of relatively low levels of prompt feedback on academic performance among first-year students may suggest that we need to be more conscientious in promoting systems of early feedback. This links to other studies showing that early feedback, monitoring, and intervention are proven strategies in improving student persistence rates. A NSSE Advisory Committee with Faculty representation now provides support to the Office of Institutional Research in identifying useful analysis that should be carried out on NSSE data. It will be an important element of a systemic approach to continually mine these data for insights on student engagement that might be useful in designing student success strategies.

First-Year: Student Faculty Interaction		
Talked about career plans with faculty member or advisor		
	2006	2008
Never	63%	54%
Sometimes	28%	33%
Often	7%	9%
Very Often	2%	3%
Discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class		
	2006	2008
Never	53%	45%
Sometimes	33%	36%
Often	11%	12%
Very Often	3%	6%
Received prompt feedback from faculty on academic performance		
	2006	2008
Never	18%	13%
Sometimes	47%	43%
Often	26%	34%
Very Often	9%	9%
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, etc.)		
	2006	2008
Never	80%	70%
Sometimes	14%	20%
Often	5%	7%
Very Often	1%	2%

Fourth-Year: Supportive Campus Environment		
Institutional emphasis: providing support needed to succeed academically		
	2006	2008
Very little	5%	5%
Some	39%	30%
Quite a bit	45%	44%
Very much	11%	20%
Institutional emphasis: providing support needed to cope with non-academic responsibilities		
	2006	2008
Very little	54%	42%
Some	35%	39%
Quite a bit	11%	15%
Very much	0%	5%
Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices		
	2006	2008
1 (unhelpful, inconsiderate, rigid)	11%	4%
2	9%	9%
3	17%	16%
4	21%	21%
5	22%	20%
6	9%	19%
7 (helpful, considerate, flexible)	10%	11%

III. Promoting Student Success

A. Some Current Initiatives

Carleton has undertaken a wide variety of measures over the past ten years to try to improve the student experience and promote student success. These measures range from the reorganization of advising services, with the introduction of a centralized Student Academic Success Centre (SASC), a revision of the registration and timetabling process to improve the ability of students to access the courses they need for their program and in which they wish to enroll in for reasons of personal development, the creation of a First Year Experience Office which has taken extensive responsibility for orienting new students to Carleton University and for assisting them in the transition to university studies, the creation of a Learning Commons providing a wide range of academic support services, including the Writing Tutorial Service and Learning Support Services offering a diverse selection of enrichment courses to assist students with such matters as time management, study skills, exam writing techniques and promotion of academic integrity. Major academic programming initiatives, such as the introduction of First Year Seminars and the Arts One program within the Bachelor of Arts have also been targeted at promotion of student success by working on skills development and promoting learning communities.

1. Carleton Complete

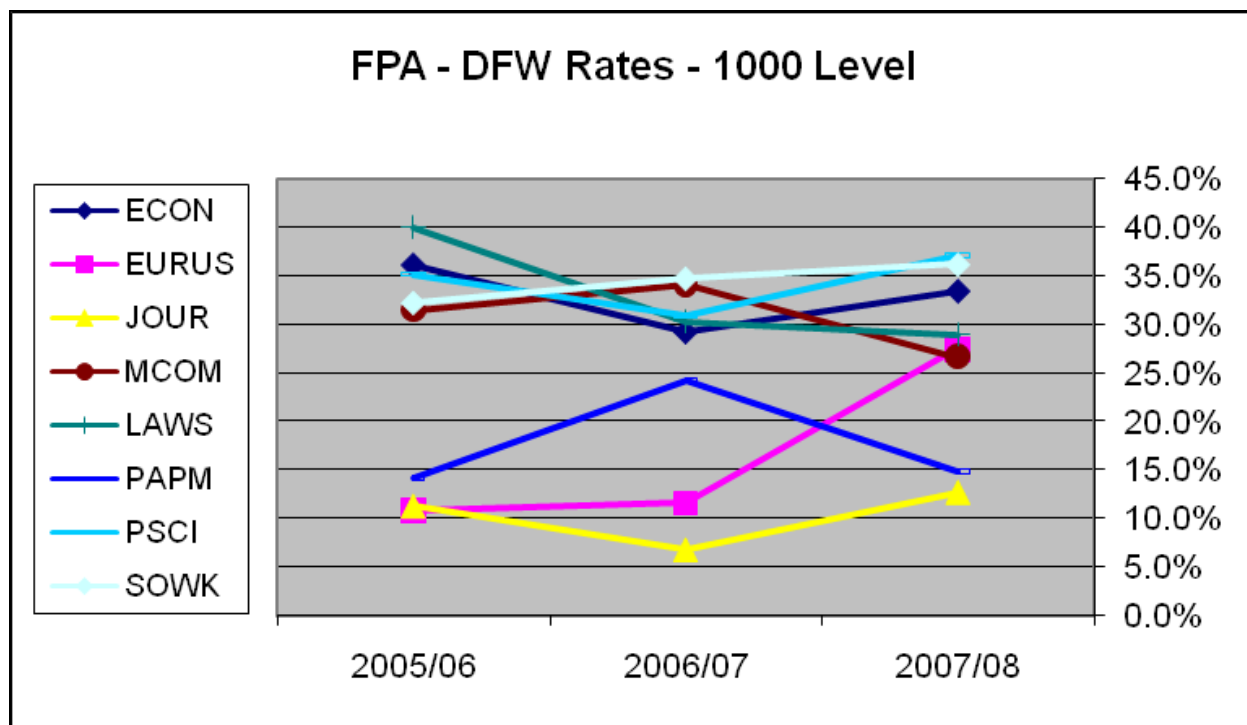
In early March, 2009 the University announced a comprehensive initiative to improve student success and program completion rates. Named *Carleton Complete*, it builds on the activities described above, and adds a number of new programs. For example, it emphasizes new advising initiatives, especially ones that aim to identify as early as possible students who may be in trouble, to provide advising and assistance. For this project to work, instructor cooperation is required in providing early feedback to students on performance in their courses, and participation in a system of gathering mid-term grades. There are plans to introduce a co-curricular transcript in the fall of 2009, by which student engagement in a wide variety of activities can be recognized officially. The new transcript encourages greater student participation in activities that can help to develop their relationships and skills in working with other students and with the larger community. The transcript can be a useful tool for students seeking employment or exploring scholarship opportunities where community involvement may be a qualifying condition. The First Year Experience Office will be renamed the Student Experience Office, so that the programming it provides can reach out to all levels of students. This programming includes peer mentoring programs, leadership development programs, and the offering of co-curricular community service learning opportunities, including the very successful Alternative Spring Break program. Enhancements are planned in career counselling and support, and in registration processes that ensure students get access to courses required for their program. Finally, the *Carleton Complete* initiative includes the establishment of a Student Mental Health and Well-being Advisory Committee with responsibility for developing policies aimed at supporting student mental health.

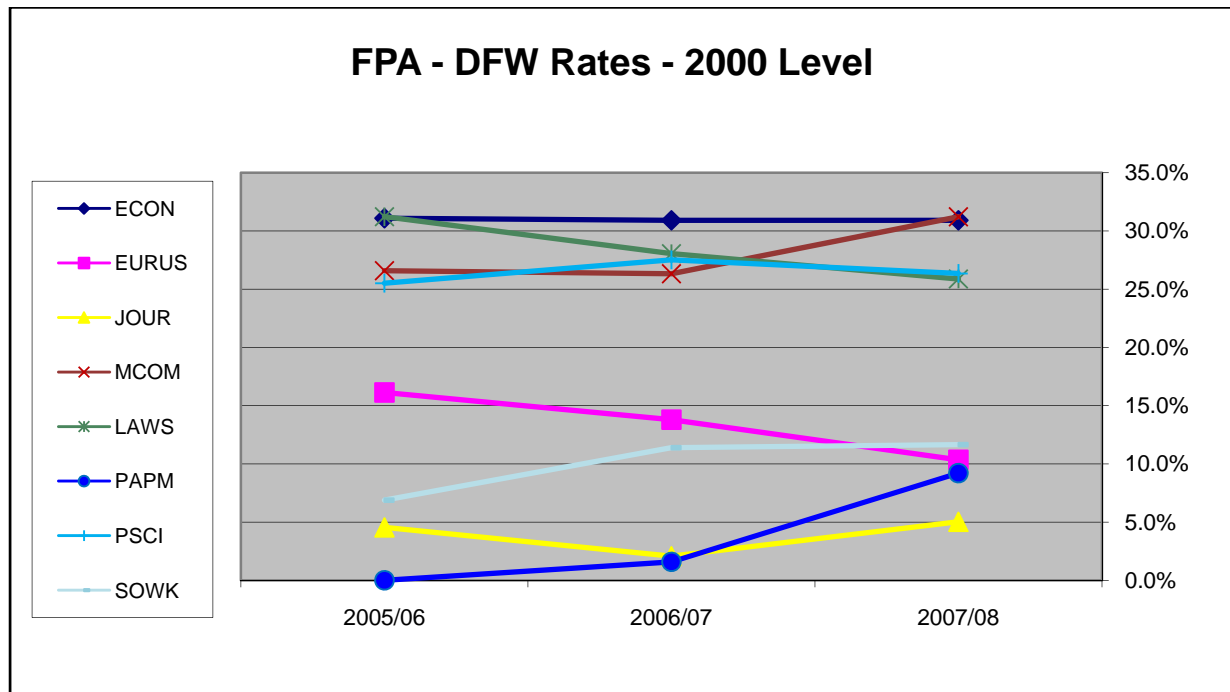
Undoubtedly, the most significant change having an impact on retention rates has been the increase in the high school entrance average of students studying at Carleton. In 1992, the high school entrance average of new first year students enrolling at Carleton was 72.5. For the 2008

cohort, the average was 82.5. There is considerable evidence that students with higher entrance averages tend to perform better, and that students who perform better at university are more likely to persist. Other factors are likely to affect retention rates as well. Over the past several years, Carleton has engaged in an extensive review of its academic regulations, based on a concern that regulations sometimes pose a barrier to students' ability to move forward. By ensuring that appropriate continuation rules are in place, by providing appropriate academic warning standards, and by facilitating the ability of students who are not achieving at the level expected for their particular program to move seamlessly to another program for which they are qualified, we are striving to ensure that the rules themselves do not become unnecessary barriers to success while we continue to maintain high academic standards.

2. Monitoring DFW Rates

Another indicator that is now monitored closely across the University is the rate of D, F, and WDN grades (the DFW rate) in courses. The following two tables show, for example, the DFW rate by academic unit for 1000- and 2000-level courses in our Faculty.





There is a strong correlation between non-persistence and students' academic performance. In particular, first-year students who obtain a D or F grade or who withdraw from two or more courses are significantly more likely to desist in their studies. In our Faculty grading guidelines, we indicate that where there are courses with a DFW rate greater than 30%, “units should consider steps that might be taken to promote greater student engagement and improvement of student performance.” This monitoring and response to DFW rates should be an ongoing element of any comprehensive strategy to promote student success.

3. Student Engagement and Strategic Planning

The FPA Student Success Committee is not the first Faculty of Public Affairs committee to consider issues of student engagement. A Working Group on Student Engagement, chaired by Associate Dean Edward Jackson, produced a report in 2008 that contributed to the development of the Faculty's Strategic Plan. The report provided a very helpful overview of the wide variety of measures undertaken by academic units in the Faculty to engage students more fully. These ranged over experiential learning opportunities, exchanges, orientation, career advising, student-oriented activities, research and employment opportunities for students, and student participation in governance. It also identified Faculty-wide initiatives, such as the offering of First Year Seminars and participation in ArtsOne clusters, and work on the Initiative on Community-University Engagement (ICUE). The report notes the desirability for a fuller inventory of good practices and innovations, especially in the area of classroom strategies and techniques for student engagement. It calls on the Faculty to put student engagement at the centre of our academic enterprise, to become a source of expertise within the University on student engagement, to provide necessary incentives to encourage student engagement, to provide appropriate facilities to help build a sense of community on campus and to increase in scale and diversity offerings in the area of community service-learning and experiential learning. It also provided some specific recommendations for achieving these goals, including documenting best

practices, more research, and much more extensive support for community service-learning and community-based research.

4. Current Practices in FPA Units

As noted in the Student Engagement Working Group, academic units have extensive experience in promoting student success through practices that attempt to engage students more fully in the academic life of the University and in the community. The call to document these practices led the Committee to develop a template to help gather more information on these practices. The template categorized activities along a number of dimensions that have been shown to be effective in promoting student success. These include systemic approaches, promotion of active and collaborative learning, use of supplemental instruction, advising, motivation of students, and student-faculty interaction. The chair of the Committee met with the chair or director, administrator, and undergraduate supervisor of most units to discuss what kinds of activities units are engaged in currently, or the kinds of activities that they would like to engage in if there were more resources available. These offer an additional step to developing a set of best practices that units might want to consider as they move forward with programs of promoting student success. A summary of the information gathered from academic units is set out in Appendix A.

IV. Options for Action

As discussed above, any plan for improving student success must take into account a wide range of factors. It requires the commitment of the University as a whole to embrace the associated goals. Students arrive at Carleton from a wide variety of backgrounds and face widely differing challenges in adapting to university expectations and finding paths to success. They may be challenged by financial concerns, or by psychological and social barriers that hinder success in university studies. They may have varying levels of academic preparedness, and some may need a variety of external motivations in order to supplement their personal goals in starting their university studies.

Swail in *The Art of Student Retention* (Educational Policy Institute, 2004, online: www.educationalpolicy.org) suggests that there are five key components to a student retention framework. These are recruitment and admissions, financial aid, student services, academic services, and curriculum and instruction. University units must work together on these components. Moreover, there needs to be close monitoring of what is being done and whether it is being effective in order to ensure we are undertaking measures that respond to student needs.

For example, given that we know that attracting high-achieving students has been a key element in improving student success rates at Carleton, we would want to encourage recruiting and admission practices that are designed to achieve that aim. However, in order to succeed in that mission, academic units must be in a position to offer programs that will be attractive to the students that we want to have with us. So the kinds of programming done through curriculum and instructional design, in concert with other activities such as research, community engagement, and enhancements to the campus environment, must be directed at attracting the very best potential students. Of course, this is a challenging objective in the face of stiff competition among universities for top students, but by enhancing Carleton's reputation as the

premier institution for a wide range of programs, we greatly improve the likelihood of improving student retention and graduation rates.

This report described already some of the activities that are taking place at the university level, including the newly released *Carleton Complete* suite of student support activities. We must undertake that the Faculty of Public Affairs and its constituent academic units, faculty, and administrative staff place the promotion of student success at the centre of their concerns. All units should have in place a systematic means of setting and reviewing student success goals. Data from surveys on student engagement and student satisfaction, student retention, graduation and employment rates of graduates should be reviewed regularly and shared with all faculty members. Grading practices should be reviewed regularly, and grading profiles regularly shared among faculty. Each unit should have a student success plan that specifies actions that are being taken to improve the student experience, along with monitoring systems for soliciting feedback from students about the usefulness of those measures. There should be extensive sharing among academic units of best practices, in terms of measures that units have undertaken to improve student success. The Faculty should create a mechanism for providing data to units, and sharing data and best practices among units. As a first step in moving in that direction, this report describes a variety of areas on which student success initiatives might focus, with a variety of options for action. This menu draws upon the research literature on student success, as well as local knowledge from our own academic units in addressing student success.

A. Student Success 2.0

The term Web 2.0 has commonly been used to refer to enhancements to the World Wide Web that facilitate greater communication, information sharing, inter-operability and collaboration (Wikipedia, “Web 2.0”, online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0, 21 April 2009)

Correspondingly, it is time for a Student Success 2.0 initiative that is also designed to foster greater communication, information sharing, inter-operability, and collaboration. There is no single blueprint for success. In Kuh et al, *Student Success in College*, the authors conducted a study of twenty U.S. universities that were doing better than might be expected in promoting student success. The study showed that different universities used different strategies in encouraging their students, whether it is by focusing on curriculum design, or out-of-class experiences aimed to connect students to their learning and their university. Nevertheless, the authors identified (p. 24) six features shared by the institutions they studied:

- *A “living” mission and “lived” educational philosophy*
- *An unshakeable focus on student learning*
- *Environments adapted for educational enrichment*
- *Clearly marked pathways to student success*
- *An improvement oriented ethos*
- *Shared responsibility for educational quality and student success.*

Carleton has already articulated clearly its dedication to the promotion of student learning and student success. The belief that this is a shared responsibility lies at the heart of the Committee’s recommendations. The steps that have taken already by the University are important, but it is imperative that we remain committed to continuous improvement of our efforts.

B. Recommendations

- 1) The University should implement appropriate institutional arrangements, building on existing initiatives, to ensure continuing improvement to the University's student success efforts. These include:
 - a) The creation of a University student success committee, with representatives from all faculties, whose task is to monitor student success, assess initiatives to determine whether and the extent to which they are contributing to student success, and advise on new University-wide initiatives that should be undertaken.
 - b) Filling the position of Associate Vice President (Student Affairs) on a permanent basis to ensure that there is a champion for student success issues in the senior management of the University.
- 2) The Faculty of Public Affairs should ensure that the encouragement of student success is at the core of Faculty activities. It should do this by:
 - a) Emphasizing the need to take student success into account in the many activities that we engage in from curriculum design to classroom teaching to research activity to community engagement to creating a supportive campus environment.
 - b) Committing to the idea that student success is a shared responsibility of everybody in the Faculty, including the students themselves, faculty, teaching assistants, contract instructors, and administrative staff.
 - c) The creation of an ongoing Faculty Student Success Committee, with representatives from the units offering undergraduate programs in the Faculty. The Committee would have the task of sharing data, reviewing and monitoring initiatives for success, advising new initiatives, setting goals, and sharing best practices among academic units. It could also take responsibility for coordinating Faculty-wide student success initiatives such as a Faculty teaching day that provides training in active and collaborative learning or community-engaged pedagogy.
 - d) Creation of a student success plan that sets concrete goals for the Faculty.
 - e) The creation of a position in the Dean's Office (possibly an assistant dean) whose primary responsibility is the promotion of student success. The person in this position would be responsible for chairing the Faculty Student Success Committee, liaison with the office of institutional research, representing the Faculty on University student success committees, sharing data on student success, engaging in research on student success initiatives, and assisting academic units in the implementation of student success activities.
- 3) Academic units in the Faculty of Public Affairs should become more systematic in their encouragement of student success. Among other things, they should consider:
 - a) Systemic approaches to promoting student success, including:
 - i) creating a student success plan;
 - ii) setting student success goals;
 - iii) consideration of student success in curriculum design;
 - iv) sharing of data about retention and graduation rates;
 - v) regular review of grading data and practices, with close attention to DFW rates;
 - vi) promotion of strategies known to be effective in promoting student success, including:
 - (1) active and collaborative learning;

- (2) advising strategies that facilitate early warning and intervention for students experiencing academic difficulty and problems of transition to university study;
- (3) supplemental instruction, including the extension of PASS program to most first- and second-year course sections, encouragement of peer mentoring, and mechanisms of ensuring that students take full advantage of existing University resources such as the Writing Tutorial Service and Learning Support Services;
- (4) activities designed to motivate students, including more extensive orientation throughout first year, more career related advising, extensive experiential learning opportunities and extensive non-curricular opportunities through student clubs and other departmental activities;
- (5) more faculty-student interaction, including:
 - (a) consideration of the role of faculty in advising and mentoring students;
 - (b) encouragement of student engagement in faculty research activities;
 - (c) fourth year research seminars; and
 - (d) creating better spaces for faculty-student interaction within academic units.

Appendix A: Student Success Initiatives in FPA Academic Units

A Brief Summary

Student Success as a Focus of Concern

Most units reported that they do not have a systematic means of setting student success goals, although one unit noted that the Chair has specific goals for the number of Honours students that will graduate annually. Units were quick to ask what we meant by student success in this context. Several units noted that progression rules serve the function of alerting students to what is required to succeed and progress in the program. One unit noted that it would welcome feedback on ideas about how this should be done, and noted that curriculum revision is partly designed with student success in mind. Several noted the linkage between the learning goals project and the promotion of student success.

There was some diversity in the sharing of information among faculty and staff on retention rates, graduation rates, grading profiles, and student surveys. Journalism indicated that it spends considerable time thinking about grading issues. Other units said that it is done to some extent in multi-section courses. We may need to do a better job of communicating normal grading practices. There were *ad hoc* responses by chairs and directors when particular problems arise. One unit has indicated that it plans to undertake a project to create a web site for faculty to share information on different grading practices at various year levels, as well as to distribute possible grading rubrics. In one unit, students carry out their own survey of themselves on a range of issues including those that affect student success.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Many units noted that there is no unit-based initiatives to promote active and collaborative learning, although the Journalism program noted that much of the work in its upper-year courses tends to have a large element of collaboration because the class as a whole is responsible for producing a defined product (a radio show, an online “newspaper”, etc.). Units noted that individual faculty members are doing some interesting things, and most units were quick to point out courses that have an experiential component. For example, the CCJ Field Placement option is a very important part of the program (for the 80 students a year who are able to participate) and the attached seminars provide space in which to talk about career development, professionalism, and other issues that students find relevant and helpful. Several units try to highlight student research (e.g., Social Work Research Day, CCJ Honours Essays with poster displays for community partners). Some units have fourth-year courses that serve to integrate student learning; e.g. Economics, Social Work, and the capstone seminars in the BPAPM program. A few individual faculty members have done some innovative things such as conducting small tutorials for Honours students they are supervising.

Units do not generally have formal mentoring programs for their faculty, although Journalism noted that the close coordination of its Workshop courses leads naturally to an element of mentoring. Much mentoring is done informally, although it is not clear that this is directed particularly at the promotion of active and collaborative learning. All units have individual

faculty who make use of the EDC, but few have a formal process of engagement with the EDC. Social Work noted that it used to do a skills workshop for third-year students who have transferred into the program before they do a Field Placement, but that it is difficult to do with current resources (hard to find a day, given coordinated timetabling.)

Supplemental Instruction

The Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) program is used by a number of units as a form of supplemental instruction, and there was a general appetite for expanding the number of course-sections for which PASS is available. Beyond that, there are relatively few unit-based initiatives in this area. Individual faculty members also refer their students to the Writing Tutorial Service and Learning Support Services, sometimes even having presentations done in large first-year lectures. Faculty members know about this possibility through communications coming from EDC, SASC, and the Faculty Teaching Regulations document. Some units have formal peer tutoring arrangements, with associated information on their web sites or provided through student societies. In units where students have their own space (e.g., Kroeger College) this often happens quite naturally. Social Work used to have MSW students working in their resource room who could provide some peer support, but cutbacks have made such support less viable. As well, when some advisors see students with problems they are able to direct them to other students who may be able to help.

Advising

In most units, the core advising function is done by administrative staff. They deal with questions relating to program requirements, course availability, registration issues, etc. Undergraduate supervisors take responsibility for a variety of advising tasks, usually including assessing course equivalencies for courses taken elsewhere and some career advising. Most units were concerned about faculty members playing a more extensive advising function because of a concern that they are insufficiently familiar with the rules and may provide incorrect advice for students. To date, most units have relied upon central communication about mid-term grading initiatives and early warning systems. Social Work has a regular process of faculty meetings to identify students needing more extensive advising, with a particular faculty member appointed to intervene. Most units noted the facts of faculty participation in first-year orientation activities, and in provision of advice to student clubs and societies.

Student Motivation

Units noted a variety of activities designed to motivate students. Orientations for first-year students are a good place to start the motivating process, but units acknowledge that there may be a need for more follow-up activities. Some examples of motivating strategies include the efforts made by Kroeger College to support a variety of student activities such as Model UN, North American Triumvirate, and Model NATO. Students invited to conferences will normally have the conference fee covered (within reason). In Social Work, efforts are made to have students connect to the community and the profession through events on campus, although it was noted that this is made more difficult by University policies requiring the use of Aramark, which increases substantially the cost of food, and prevents the School from contracting with community members who would be able to provide ethnic food specialties. Many units make a

point of inviting students to talks and seminars featuring external speakers. Social Work also noted extensive student participation in governance structures in the School. CCJ commented that the third-year field placements are a significant motivator, as students work towards meeting the eligibility requirements and because the internships provide exciting opportunities for students to be able to put theory into practice, and get better insights into where their studies can lead them in potential careers. CCJ has also developed a list of volunteer opportunities that it shares with Field Placement students, and is considering making available to all students. Journalism also finds that internships are a significant motivator for its students. For Journalism, as well, a key to motivation is for students to see that they are working on stories that put them ahead of the curve – they are extremely motivated when they see the mainstream media picking up on issues they have already covered in their workshops. Many units noted the role of student societies in putting on events for students, but they also noted that the societies are sporadic in their activities, and dependent upon strong student leaders. Most units have a faculty advisor for societies, but the contact can sometimes be intermittent. Many units note the lack of space as a problem, making it difficult for students to gather together and create a sense of community. One exception is Kroeger College, where the computer lab becomes a place where students at all year levels tend to mingle. Social Work notes that whereas in the past it could schedule agency fairs related to Field Placements in 2017 DT, it is now required to pay for the use of that room. Political Science pointed to its Art of Politics event as the kind of motivating activity this year that proved to be successful in getting students engaged.

It was suggested that there were a variety of activities that might help to better motivate students. Several units suggested that having a list of best practices would be helpful for them in developing a student motivation program. More Faculty-level initiatives on student success would be welcomed. It might make sense to have a student success liaison person with resources who would take the lead in each unit. More involvement of alumni in events for students was suggested as a possible student motivation tactic, although it was noted that it is difficult working with Alumni and Development in tracking alumni, and that staff support would be needed for these sorts of things. It was also suggested that it might be desirable to reward student society leaders with small honoraria for their activities. (This might mirror or build on the Peer Leadership program sponsored by the Student Experience Office.) There was considerable emphasis on the need for better student space in the units to allow the kind of student-to-student relationships that motivate students in their programs. More extensive student involvement in orientation activities can act as a key motivator, both for the new students being oriented as well as for the students who take on a peer mentoring role through the orientation process.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Generally, units do not have extensive programs to encourage student-faculty interaction outside the classroom, although a significant amount of such interaction takes place on an informal basis. It was noted that there are often insufficient incentives for faculty to do this, given the huge emphasis on research output for purposes of tenure and promotion. Most units noted the increasing use of technology as a communication tool outside the regular classroom, and more and more faculty are using WebCT in particular. It was noted that space in units was not conducive to student-faculty interaction, and it was also noted that even if space were available for students in units, it is not likely that faculty would use the same space as well. A big issue for many units is that the reliance on large numbers of contract instructors means that the

student-faculty ratio is so high that it is difficult to maintain meaningful contact with a large proportion of students in a program. For some small interdisciplinary programs, the dispersal of students among courses offered by several different units leaves the program with little ability to influence the faculty-student interaction. It was suggested that we have to do a better job of reminding faculty of their obligation to be available in their offices on a regular basis, and even provide some monitoring to ensure that this is happening. Such action might include clear signage, posting of office hours on voicemail messages and email signatures, and then ensuring that the faculty member is actually available during these times. We need to continually remind students of the importance of their taking actions to get to know faculty members, especially in advance of needing reference letters for job applications and graduate school applications.