University has small, steady improvement in first-year retention rate

More freshmen who enroll at the University are coming back for their sophomore years here. But members of the University Retention Committee (URC) still have their work cut out for them.

"There has been a small but steady improvement in the retention rate for the past three years," says Susan B. Hannah, assistant vice president for academic affairs and chairperson of the committee. "The overall first-year retention rate increased from 74.6 percent in 1984-85 to 78.9 percent in 1987-88 (see Chart I)."

For the past five years, the committee has monitored freshmen retention rates along several demographic, academic performance and academic program dimensions. The data is used to develop activities across the University designed to improve freshmen retention.

"The URC targets freshman retention because research here and at other institutions shows that more students drop out of college after the first year than at any other time," Hannah says. Only about half the freshmen who begin at the University each fall actually graduate from Western.

Hannah notes that differences persist among first-year retention rates by sex and race (see Charts II and III). The higher retention rate for women and the lower retention rate for minority students fit the national pattern.

Explanations, according to Hannah, for the higher attrition of minority students include: financial difficulties; a sense of cultural and personal isolation and, in some cases, hostility; weak high school preparation and study skills; and a variety of non-cognitive factors such as the lack of a support person and unwarranted expectations.

Information on overall freshman retention rates and American College Test scores shows that students who leave look a lot like students who stay. The distribution of ACT scores for those who persist is similar to the distribution for those who drop out (see Chart IV).

"It's not just the kids with low ACT scores that are dropping out," Hannah says. "More students leave the University for non-academic reasons than leave because they are in academic difficulty."

She says it's also important to note that the explanation for academic difficulty is often personal, and often beyond the ability of the University to affect.

"The challenge for the University is to identify where we can make a difference," Hannah says. Mail and telephone surveys and analysis of the demographic, curriculum and academic performance data at the University and at other campuses have compared students who persist with those who drop out.

"This information helps us to better understand these differences more thoroughly and thus suggest programs the University could establish to improve retention," Hannah says. "We know, for example, that living on campus, having a job, belonging to a student organization, being successful academically, finding friends, developing positive faculty-student relationships and experiencing cooperative dealings with University staff can affect the decision to stay or leave."

During the past three years, the URC and other University groups have initiated a number of efforts aimed at helping new students develop academic, social and personal "connections" that will integrate them into the intellectual and social life of the University.

Some of those efforts include: the University Curriculum and Advising for students; the National Scholarship Program and the Associated Student Government; the First Semester Campaign; the First Semester Seminar Program; University 101; and the College Support Services Offices.

Hannah says the major focus for the coming year will be faculty-student interaction, advising, minority retention and school spirit. The theme will continue to be "connections" - connecting the new student to the intellectual and social life of the University.

"We're putting together a videotape on multicultural communication in the classroom," she said, "we're also working with a faculty who teach large classes to see how we can make their courses more effective."

Continued efforts will be channeled into the College Support Services Program, which provides for academic counseling services for minority students in six of the University's colleges.

"The strategy we continue to be University-wide, involving faculty, staff and students, Hannah says.

"The improvements we've seen so far are only because people from all areas at the University are participating," she says. "Raising the retention rate has to do with improving the whole atmosphere on campus and everybody, not just the committee, needs to share in that responsibility."

Persons with suggestions for the URC should contact Hannah at 7-2381.

AIDS brochure distributed to WMU community

Though it seems that information about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome has continually appeared in the media, surveys indicate that many Americans are still uncertain about how AIDS is transmitted.

As part of an on-going campuswide AIDS education commitment, the WMU AIDS Task Force and the University Wellness Committee have developed an AIDS brochure for Western that is being mailed to the home of every student, faculty and staff member this week.

"We want to make sure all students have this information," says Christine G. Zimmer, University Wellness Program director, who helped write the brochure and talk about the message it carries with your family members, co-workers and friends. We must all be clear about behaviors that are risky and those causal contacts that pose no risk at all."

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that more than a quarter of a million Americans will be diagnosed as having AIDS some time in the next four years.

"That means that AIDS probably will touch all our lives in one way or another, whether we experience it personally, or through a family member, friend, classmate or co-worker," Zimmer said. "Knowing the facts about AIDS can help us protect ourselves by avoiding high-risk behaviors that increase our chances of becoming infected."

"It can also help us sort through our feelings and fears so that we can -- with compassion, understanding and support -- live and work with others who have AIDS," she continued.

"We feel that the University community needs to make the most of opportunities to provide information to others that can protect it from AIDS and from "unfounded fears that breed panic and cruelty."

"AIDS education and prevention is everyone's responsibility," she said. "All of us need to confront our fears and prejudices about AIDS and to begin dealing with them in an open, supportive atmosphere."

DENNISON TO ADDRESS PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS

Provost George M. Dennison will give the address at the eighth annual Presidential Scholars Convocation February 12. The convocation will begin with a reception at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and the program.

Reception planned for Kenz

A retirement reception for Herbert W. Kenz, student financial aid and scholarships, is scheduled for 2 to 5 p.m. Thursday, April 12, at the Oaklands. The University community is invited to attend.
Dick Gregory to address mentoring conference

The idea for the gathering was conceived by the Office of International Affairs/Special Programs because of the numerous requests for information and assistance in establishing a Minority Mentor/Mentee Program. Now, the conference, called the "WMU faculty and staff mentors with students. Its goal is to retain minority freshmen who might otherwise drop out of school.

Grisselda Daniel, academic affairs/special programs coordinator, will present the opening address. He will speak on "Being Your Own Mentor" in the East Ballroom of the student center.

The conference will begin at 10:30 a.m. Monday, April 18, with a welcome by Provost George M. Dennison, Larry Brewster, founder of the national mentoring strategy firm of L.S. Brewster & Co., will present the opening address. He will speak on "Being Your Own Mentor" in the East Ballroom of the student center.

Four faculty members will receive the award at a luncheon at noon, Thursday, April 14, in the Red Room of the student center. Seven nominees for the award also will be honored. The speaker will be Faith Gabelnick, Honors College.

Demetrakopoulos, a member of the Department of English since 1971, has a distinguished record as both a teacher and scholar in her field. She has taught numerous courses that examine women's place in literature.

She is also the editor of "Listening to Our Bodies: The Rebirth of Feminine Wisdom" and other publications. In 1987, she co-authored with Kathy F. Holloway, a former Department of English professor, "Women's Dimensions in Spirituality: Bi-Racial Readings of Toni Morrison's Novels." Her current work in progress is titled "Empowered Spirits: Women in the Black Experience." 

Donald, sociology; Eryvah T. Deearin, associate dean of the College of Education; Elissa L. Gustin, Director of the Career Planning and Placement Services; and Robert H. Peterson, residence hall director, will present awards.

Mail to students

University departments may need to change the way they're trying to reach students in the residence halls by mail. The reason: students on the last day or two of the semester have departed.

Peterson suggests that departments should submit names to the Office of Public Information, 8-207 Ellsworth Hall, or call 3-7-1414 from I to 3 p.m. Thursdays. The names will be available in Career Planning and Placement Services on the first floor of the student center.

International Night

The spring semester is coming to a close and the spring quarter is almost over. The University has a large number of faculty and staff members continued on to various countries, information on travel, study and employment abroad, ethnic entertainment and an international tasting tea will be featured in this free program.

The night is sponsored by the Foreign Students Association and the International Office.

More than 300 persons will serve as consultants at culture and travel display tables. Free information will be given away in such topics as passports, modeling, international studies, exchange programs and high school foreign exchange programs.

Many of Western's international students will attend, dressed in their native costumes and displaying items related to their cultures.

For those who would rather eat their way around the world, there's the international tasting tea sponsored by the Bernard Student Center Board. Tea and various "finger foods" from many regions of the world will be available for the tasting.

The conference also will include 34 sessions presented by individuals from 37 institutions across the country. Topics will range from "Development of a Monitoring Program in Response to the Need for One," "Evidence-Based Career Mentoring Process to Benefit the Nontraditional Student."
Asian Security Issues will be the focus of an April 8-9 forum at Western that will draw experts from around the globe to the Bernhard Student Center.
The Asian Forum, the second such gathering held at Western, is being organized by the Asian Studies Committee and the Institute of Government and Politics. It will include panel discussions and presentations by guest speakers on topics covering a wide spectrum of issues concerning Southeast Asia, Japan, the Persian Gulf, India and Pakistan.

Among forum highlights will be a noon Friday, April 8, luncheon address by Yu V. Gankovsky of the Academy of Sciences in the Soviet Union, who will speak on "Continuity and Change in the Soviet Union's Asian Policy." Gankovsky is a member of the academy's Middle East Department in the Institute of Oriental Studies.

Discussing the issues in four panel presentations will be speakers representing the four countries, as well as the U.S., the Philippines and Japan. Each panel discussion will be chaired by a WMU faculty member and will feature talks by three Asian scholars, with commentary from WMU and Kalamazoo College faculty members.

The forum will open at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, April 8, in 208 with an introduction by Lawrence theuring. "Asian Security Issues," he will take as his theme the political science and Institute of Government and Politics. Following a welcome address by Judy Walters, the support staff for the ombudsman's office, she also screens the employment office for assistance in securing these positions.

The listing below is currently being posted by the WMU Employment office.

"The Populist Dictators and Traditional Power Holders: A Case Study from Argentina," will be the topic of a lecture by Terry Hoops, assistant professor of political science, on Tuesday, April 5, in 3760 Knau Hall.

Hoops is a Latin America specialist who teaches courses on Argentina and the Western Hemisphere. Through his research and teaching, he hopes to influence policy in Argentina.

Hoops says some people believe that "national security" is the only important issue in the U.S. foreign policy.

"Sometimes it helps them for just to have somebody to talk to." She says that the employment office has conducted extensive research on employment opportunities application during the posting period.

For more information on employment opportunities application during the posting period, call 7-2175.

Did you know?

1. Did you know that the University's average postal expenditures are:
   - Daily -- $2,550
   - Weekly -- $17,752
   - Monthly -- $51,008

2. Did you know that the average number of pieces of mail handled by the University's postal service is:
   - Daily -- 12,377
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   - Monthly -- 2,970,860

Media

Lawrence Schlafl, educational leadership, discussed a multiple intelligence curriculum for the 21st century on "Focus," a five-minute radio program produced by the Office of Public Information.

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The Research Policies Council of the Faculty Senate will meet at 3 p.m. Thursday, April 7, in Conference Room A on the third floor of the Siebert Administration Building. Agenda items will include a discussion of the Intellectual Property Policy and a report from the RENA Committee.

The listing below is currently being posted by the University employment office.

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"Employment Procedures." The fourth part of the Business Principles and Practices series, will be offered from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m. Tuesday, April 5, and Wednesday, April 6, in the Red Rooms of the Bernhard Student Center. Sue Rodia, employment manager, will outline the employment process from the requirements for employment to filling the position.

To reserve a seat in these classes, call Bea Valentine at 7-3620.

New applications not accepted for food service and maintenance jobs.

The employment office has announced that beginning Friday, April 1, it will not be accepting new applications for food service and maintenance jobs. This situation will continue throughout the summer off period when students are not in the residence halls.

Staff training seminars offered.

Because of the continued growth in human interaction, and effective skills in this area involve more just stringing words together, the series will be offered in "Business Writing with Style and Purpose," a two-part workshop set for 6:30 to 11:30 a.m. Tuesdays, April 5 and 12, in 204 Bernhard Student Center.

"Business writing--you can force a reader to read," A. Renshaw, business information systems, will discuss how to write and when writing.

"Face-to-face communication is most apt to please the results you want. There is a $25 fee for this workshop.

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Judy Walters, administrative secretary in the ombudsman's office, says the best part of her joy is seeing the difference in people when they come into her office and when they leave.

"Often, when people come into this office, they don't know what to do," she says. "They're upset, cynical and ready to give up," she says. Their outlook is totally different when they leave with a job.

From her office on the second floor of the Bernhard Student Center, Walters is the support staff for the ombudsman--an intervention agent and impartial person who helps students, faculty and staff resolve academic and non-academic problems. In addition, Walters provides secretarial support for the nearby Office of Faculty Development. In the ombudsman's office, she also screens people who make appointments with librarians, "I make sure Dr. Biston is the person they need to see and find out if they have seen anyone else before coming to our office," she says.

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Get the 'dirt' on your dirt at soil laboratory

Greenhouse operators and home gardeners preparing for the upcoming growing season can now quickly get the information they need to help improve their yields.

Western is offering a service to supply them with "the dirt" on their dirt.

WMU's Horticultural Economic Development Center has opened a soil analysis laboratory. The center is accepting soil samples to be analyzed for pH, soluble salts and elements such as calcium, magnesium, nitrates, phosphorus and potassium. The turnaround time is three days, so that growers can quickly correct any problems.

Michael E. Byrne, co-director of the center, says that maintaining the proper balance of ingredients in the soil can have a big effect on growing potential, both in the commercial greenhouse and the backyard garden.

"Not only is testing soil of benefit if there are problems, but a regular testing program can help maintain a balanced level of nutrients for optimum yield, plant growth and productivity -- whether in an artificial or natural environment," he says.

The center also is offering water sample testing through WMU's New World Sciences Institute. Knowing what's in the water irrigating the plants also is important, according to center co-director Gina M. Antoniotti.

"The water analysis may dictate some adjustments to chemical use, and prevent too little or too much of certain ingredients," she says.

The services have been set up primarily to help the area horticultural industries. Byrne and Antoniotti say that Southwest Michigan growers rank first in the nation in the production of bedding plants. They add that those growers have an urgent need for, comprehensive testing of soil and water.

However, home gardeners also are invited to take advantage of the analyses. There is a nominal charge for the services.

For a rate schedule and information on how to submit to the center, persons should call 7-2841.

C/TO spring luncheon set

Reservations are due Friday, April 1, for the Clerical/Technical Organization's annual spring luncheon. The event is scheduled for noon to 1:15 p.m. Wednesday, April 6, in the North Ballroom of the Bernhard Student Center.

The speaker will be Donald E. Thompson, assistant vice president for academic affairs and chief research officer. C/TO officer nominees for the 2000-01 academic year will be announced and door prizes will be given away.

Reservations are $6 and should be made with the Clerical/Technical Organization's office, 7-0888.

Two win history awards

Students from the Department of History captured awards in three of five undergraduate categories at the annual History conference presented at the March 26 regional meeting of Phi Alpha Theta, the international honor society for history.

The award for outstanding paper by an undergraduate went to Alex J. Molar, a sophomore from Parchment, for his paper on "The Mystery of Kalamazoo". The piece, titled "The Mystery of the Meneming Air Raid 18 July, 1944: An Historian's Search for the Missing Pieces," also won best paper in the category of 20th century United States and European history.