Investigating OU's Rise in Retention

This year's retention rate for the 2012 class is 8% higher than last year's official rate. This report briefly examines some underlying patterns within the data in an attempt to understand why rates are so much higher this year.

Retention rates this year have improved over last year's rates for each school and the college. (Note that 'UP' is University Programs, which consists mostly of undecided students). Some of these improvements look very large, but readers should be cautioned that individual schools can sometimes have small sample sizes.

Perhaps the most important question is not how much retention rates have improved, but why they have improved.

First, it is relevant to note two important caveats. The 2012 class had higher academic credentials than the 2011 class did. All things being equal, we would expect the 2012 class to have a slightly higher retention rate. Also, 2011 seemed to be an especially bad year for retention, as 70.3% was two percentage points below OU's historical average.

Full-Time FTIAC Retention Rates by School & College

School/College	2011	2012
Total	70.3%	78.1%
CAS	75.9%	79.5%
SBA	66.4%	75.7%
SEHS	74.3%	85.9%
SECS	70.6%	78.9%
SHS	73.0%	78.7%
SON	63.8%	78.2%
UP	62.3%	74.0%

Rough estimates based on the historical relationship between retention and academic preparation suggests that the 2012 FTIAC cohort should have had a retention rate of approximately 74.6%. This leaves a large portion (more than 3%) of the improvement in retention rates unexplained.

OIRA continues to investigate why retention rates have improved more than expected. However, it seems likely that the FYAC center, and the resulting discussions and collaborations across departments and divisions its creation fostered, is partially or wholly responsible for the remaining unexplained portion.

Many questions yet remain. Which students saw the most improvement in retention rates? Can we be sure that the improved retention rate is not due to improvements in academic preparation and a return to historical norms?

Further Investigations ⟶

Prepared by the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment. Visit us at: www.oakland.edu/OIRA

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Further Investigations

Figure 1 shows the retention rates, by ACT composite score, for full-time FTIACs from the following groups: 2012, 2011, and a historical composite of students from 2000 through 2010. By graphing the data this way, clear patterns emerge.

Figure 1 clearly shows that 2012 students are doing better than 2011 students, for every single ACT score. That is to say, the improvement in academic preparation for the 2012 cohort is not a sufficient explanation for the improvement in retention rates. Additionally, the comparison with historical rates suggests that there is real and significant improvement in retention rates, especially for well-prepared students, over historical averages. This, in turn, suggests that the improvements in retention rates is more than just a 'return to normal rates', as our current rate is well above historical averages.

(Caution should be used when generalizing from the extreme tail-ends of the ACT range, as the sample size here tends to be low, and the resulting interpolation line is inherently unstable).
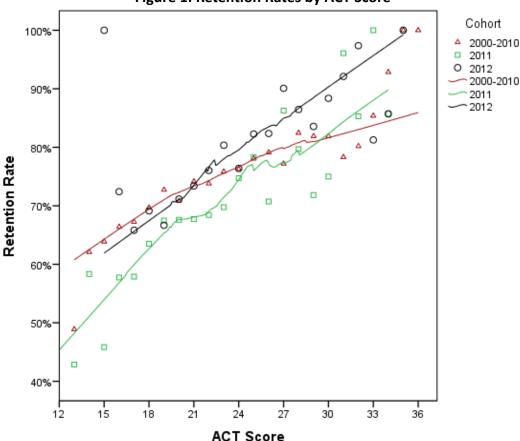
Figure 1: Retention Rates by ACT Score