A Deep Dive into DFW Rates
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Objective
To more fully understand the myriad of reasons why students earn D’s and F’s and withdraw from my 100-level online courses
• COMM 104 Film and Culture
• COMM 110 Introduction to Communication

Background
Many institutions track drop, fail, and withdrawal (DFW) rates and hold instructors accountable for improvement. This approach implies that instructors are responsible for students not passing or withdrawing. Students choose to withdraw. Students earn D’s and F’s by not completing course requirements. Why don’t students do the work? Why do they leave?

Methods
Information collected from
• Registrar
• E-Hive
• Email
• Canvas

128 students registered in 6 Distance Learning classes during the 2019-2020 school year
• 3 sections of COMM 104
• 3 Sections of COMM 110

Results and Considerations
It is easier to see clusters and trends by organizing the data by when students left – not by grade earned.

Term GPA may be an indicator for likelihood of leaving.
• Of the 8 students still at UWS and 2 who graduated, only 3 had a term GPA below 2.0.
• Only 1 of the 20 students not retained had a GPA above 2.0.
  o 17 had a GPA 1.0 or below.

Possible reasons gleaned from student correspondence
• 6 Health - “Mono,” “chronic health problems,” “pregnant,” “TBI,” and “severely sick and bed ridden”
• 3 Stress - “Severe debilitating stress,” “overwhelmed,” and “shut down”
• 3 Life - “Unexpected life circumstances,” “death of a friend,” and “family issue”
• 5 Employment - “New job,” “1st shift,” “busy life with two jobs,” and “working so much”
• 3 Time management school and family balance
• 7 Online readiness – motivation, organization, procrastination, and time management
• 5 Speech apprehension
• 2 Internet issues
• 2 Living overseas

At least
• 14 Parents
• 11 Working
• 6 First online class
• 8 First semester at UWS
• 20 Experienced taking classes online
• 7 Requested and given opportunity to submit missed work

Conclusion and Questions
To help students succeed and to improve retention, we need to consider the specific reasons that keep students from passing classes and staying in school.
• More students than not, have online experience. Online readiness is still an issue, though, and can be addressed.
• If speech apprehension is keeping COMM 110 students from progressing, what accommodation may be made without compromising the course learning goals?
• What is the best approach for students stressed from falling behind, self-shaming, and shutting down?
• How may UWS help students with health, stress, life circumstances, and balancing school with family and/or employment? When students leave for these reasons, how should UWS maintain contact to foster their return?

Gratitude
Fay Akindes
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Maria Cuzzo
Shanna Nifoussi
Thora Papineau
Heather Pelzel
Nicholle Schuelke
Alison Staudinger
Jamie White-Farnham
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