

Why Students Take More Than Four Years to Graduate

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Abstract

One issue that has always been a concern on college campuses is graduation rates. Due to state mandates and accountability measures, this issue is becoming more of a concern. Little research has been published which addresses why students take longer than four years to graduate. This presentation will present the results of a survey of Extender students, those students who have been enrolled more than four years previously. It will present some characteristics of Extender Students, as well as reasons why these students take longer than four years to graduate. Implications of the results will be discussed.

Introduction

One issue that has always been a concern on college campuses is graduation rates. Due to state mandates and accountability measures, this issue is becoming more of a concern. Traditionally, the baccalaureate degree has been viewed as a four-year degree. Legislatures and the public believe that students should be graduating within four years; if they are not doing so then there is a perception that the university is doing something wrong, and not meeting the needs of the students. Several states including Louisiana, South Carolina and Florida have or are planning to institute graduation rates as part of performance funding. Two years ago graduation rates became a part of the federally-mandated IPEDS reports. The IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey allows reporting of students who graduate up to six years after starting. However, six years is considered to be 150% of the normal time required to complete a baccalaureate degree.

One of the realities of increasing the time-to-degree is the financial burden to both students (or parents) and the state. The state of Texas has estimated that the cost to students (or parents) for a degree, completed in four years, is \$41,636, while the cost jumps to \$60,264 if the degree takes six years. Similarly, the cost to the state jumps from \$24,948 to \$31,752 per student (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1996).

As an open admissions institution, Southeastern Louisiana University has traditionally had a low graduation rate, and in 1995 adopted as one of its strategic goals to increase the four-year graduation rate. In order to do this, a better understanding as to why students do not graduate in four years was needed. Thus, a survey of extender students, those students who take more than four years to graduate, was undertaken.

This paper will present the results of the Extender Student Survey. It will also provide a brief demographic comparison of extender students and other students. The implications of the survey results will also be discussed. It is acknowledged that some items, and therefore, the results of the survey are specific to this institution. However, the majority of the survey results are applicable to most universities, particularly public universities.

Research on Time-to-Degree

Most of the research done in this area has focused on persistence and dropouts, i.e., why students stay at or leave the university. For example, Tinto's (1993) model of student integration has been well researched and documented. However, Tinto's model focuses on the students fit with university culture as a predictor of whether or not the student will stay at the university. It does not address the time-to-degree of those students who are retained.

Little research has been published which addresses why students take longer than four years to graduate. Of the research published, most look at student characteristics that are readily available in university databases. DUBY and Scharman (1997) found that students who initially take lower course loads tend to take longer than four years to graduate. Texas has published 10 strategies for reducing time-to-degree, but these strategies are based on suggested causes for longer degree completion times, not the results of research into the problem (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1996) .

While research on the relationship between course load and other readily available demographics and time-to-degree is invaluable, it does not fully address the reasons why students take longer than four years to complete their degrees. Noxel & Katunich (1998) took the research a step further, and incorporated data from the Cooperative Institutional Research

Program (CIRP) Fall Freshmen Survey, which was given to entering freshmen during orientation, into their graduation research. They applied the Investment Theory of Job Commitment to degree progress. They found that greater initial student commitment was one of the most important factors in time-to-degree.

To more fully understand the reasons why students take more than four years to graduate and hence what universities can do to ameliorate problems, the students themselves must be contacted and asked. One of the few published articles that does this (Volkwein & Lorang, 1996) found that one of the largest groups of students who take longer than four years to graduate is those students who took less than 15 hours per semester because they wanted more free time. However, the article did not indicate why these students wanted more free time. Was it because they had family responsibilities to attend to, did they have a full time job, or was there some other reason for wanting free time? They also found that students took fewer credits in order to protect their GPA. This finding may very well be institution specific and not generalizable to other institutions. This article acknowledges the need for more research in this area to help determine if these results are university specific or are applicable to a broader group of students.

It is unlikely that students who stop-out for one or more semesters will graduate in four years. One area of research that might offer some insight into extender students is research on stop-outs, especially those who return. Ahson & Phelps (1996) found that women are more likely to return than men, and they were more likely to live closer to campus than did non-returners. Gentemann, Ahson & Phelps (1998) found that external forces, such as need to work,

dependent children, and hours spent commuting, played a key role in whether or not stop-outs returned, especially for freshmen stop-outs.

Southeastern

Southeastern is a public, comprehensive, regional university. It offers associate, baccalaureate and masters degrees. Southeastern is an open-admissions university, i.e., all undergraduates who complete the enrollment process are admitted. In the Fall of 1998, 84% of the students who were admitted subsequently enrolled. The Fall 1998 enrollment was 15,334, with 13,591 undergraduates. More than 95% of the enrollment is from Louisiana, with the majority of the students coming from the surrounding parishes. In the late 80's and early 90's, Southeastern experienced phenomenal growth, with enrollment almost doubling between 1987 and 1997. In the last few years, the rate of growth has stabilized and leveled off. Southeastern typically enrolls commuter students, and offers residential facilities for only 1,874 students. Southeastern also has a large nontraditional student population with more than 23% of the undergraduates 25 years of age and older. As is typical for an open-admissions institution, Southeastern also has a relatively low graduation rate, with a six-year graduation rate of 20% and a four-year graduation rate of 3%, based on the 1991 cohort.

Methodology

The participants for this survey were 401 baccalaureate degree seeking students, enrolled in the Fall of 1998 who had first started at the university five, six, seven or eight years previously. The sample was stratified by race, gender, and age (traditional vs. non-traditional), so that the sample mirrored the student body on these characteristics. Sixty-four percent (64%, n=258) of the respondents were female, and 36% (n=143) were male. Approximately 11% of the

respondents were minorities, with the remaining 89% white, non-hispanics. Twenty-seven percent (27%, n=110) were enrolled as part-time students, and 73% (n=110) were enrolled as full-time students. On average, the respondents were enrolled for 12.5 hours in Fall 1998. The average cumulative GPA was 2.56 and the average ACT composite score was 19.3. The majority of the respondents (72%, n=289) were over the age of 23, with the average age being 25.6. The majority of respondents (67%) were seniors, 17% were juniors, 11% were sophomores, and 4% were freshmen. On average, the respondents had earned 103 credit hours, ranging from 7 to 108 credit hours (s.d. = 38.4).

Sugarman and Kelly (1997) found that average number of credit hours attempted per semester explained the largest proportion of their model to predict number of semesters needed to graduate. The number of changes in majors explained the next largest amount of variance. To determine the number of times the respondents had changed majors, they were tracked from the semester they entered the university through and including the Fall 1998 semester. The largest percentage (37%) had changed majors once in that time. However, 29% had not changed majors after starting the university. Twenty-six percent (26%) had changed majors twice, 7% had changed majors three times, 1% had changed majors four times and one student (0.2%) had changed majors five times.

The survey was administered by phone, using student interviewers who had been previously trained and had worked as interviewers for previous surveys. The survey was conducted Monday-Thursday evenings from 5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Some phone calls were attempted during the day; however very few interviews were completed during this time, because the students in the sample could not be reached. The refusal rate was approximately 8%

(about 35 of the 436 students contacted refused to respond to the survey, or discontinued in the middle).

The survey contained four sections. The first section dealt with student satisfaction with the university and asked students their satisfaction with areas like the friendliness of faculty and staff and their sense of community. The second section dealt with reasons why a student might take longer than four years to graduate. This section included items such as having to drop courses because of dissatisfaction with the teachers and taking classes unrelated to the major because of general interest. The third section asked about how students spend their time. Students were asked to indicate how much time they spend on activities such as studying/homework and commuting in a typical week. The final section asked about demographics that are not collected as part of the application or registration process, such as the number of children a student has and how far they have to travel to campus. The entire survey can be found in Appendix A.

Results

Who are Extender Students?

A portion of the survey asked participants for demographic information that is not readily available as part of the student record system. Answers to these questions can help give a better understanding as to what type of student will take more than four years to graduate.

Approximately 61% of the respondents had never been married, and 74% did not have children under the age of 18. Slightly more than 50% of the respondents travel more than 30 miles (one way) to Southeastern's main campus, while only 1.5% live on campus. Approximately 75% of the respondents work off campus, with an additional 2% working both on and off campus, and

6% working on campus. Thirty percent (30%) spend more than 30 hours a week working, with an additional 19% spending 21-30 hours a week working. The majority of extender students (63.1%) receive some form of financial aid, with the average award being \$2,258 per semester. Most of the financial aid is in the form of loans and Pell grants, with 86.2% receiving a loan and 65.6% receiving a Pell Grant. Also, 11.5% receive a scholarship, 18.6% receive a grant other than a Pell, and 12.3% receive tuition and fee waivers. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents are first-generation college students, which according to Terenzini et al (1996) is a student who has no parent with any college or university experience.

Although this information helps to better understand extender students, it does not answer the question as to whether the extender students are different from the rest of the student population. Every year the University's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment conducts a Survey of Current Students which asks the same set of demographic questions as the Extender Student Survey. The most recently available data is from the Fall 1997 Survey of Current Students. The Current Student Survey was mailed out to 650 currently enrolled students, who are representative of the entire student body. The return rate for the Fall 1997 survey was approximately 35%.

Comparing information from the Current Student Survey to information from the Extender Student Survey does indicate some areas of differences. Fewer extender students have never been married (60% vs. 68%), and more extender students have children under the age of 18 (26% vs. 19%). More extender students work off campus (75% vs. 64%). Of those who do work either on or off campus, more extender students work more than 30 hours a week (37% vs. 30%). Approximately the same percentage of extender students and overall students commute

more than 30 miles one way. However, fewer extender students live on campus (2% vs. 9%). There is no difference in the highest level of parental education. Unfortunately, the Survey of Current Students did not ask about financial aid, so there is no comparative financial aid information. Table 1 provides the collected demographic information for the Extender Student Survey and the Fall 1997 Survey of Current Students.

Table 1

Characteristics of Fall 1998 Extender Students and Fall 1997 Currently Enrolled Students

	Fall 1998 Extender Student Survey	Fall 1997 Survey of Current Students
Sample Size	401	222
Marital Status		
Never Married	60.8%	68.2%
Married	32.7%	27.2%
Previously Married	2.7%	4.6%
Children Under the Age of 18		
None	74.3%	80.9%
One	16.0%	7.0%
Two	7.0%	8.4%
Three	2.7%	2.8%
Four or More	0.0%	0.9%
Distance Traveled (one way) to Southeastern's Main Campus		
Live on Campus	1.5%	8.5%
Less than 5 Miles	11.2%	17.0%
Between 5 and 10 Miles	10.2%	6.6%
Between 11 and 20 Miles	12.0%	5.7%
Between 21 and 30 Miles	14.5%	11.8%
More than 30 Miles	50.6%	50.5%

Table 1 Cont.		
	Fall 1998 Extender Student Survey	Fall 1997 Survey of Current Students
Where Students Work		
Do Not Work	17.5%	24.5%
Work On Campus	5.5%	8.6%
Work Off Campus	75.1%	64.1%
Work Both On and Off Campus	2.0%	2.7%
Number of Hours Per Week Worked (Only for those who work)		
1-10 Hours	12.7%	8.3%
11-20 Hours	23.3%	29.0%
21-30 Hours	23.0%	32.5%
More Than 30 Hours	36.9%	30.2%
Highest Level of Parental Education		
No High School Diploma	2.5%	5.0%
High School Diploma/GED	32.4%	30.3%
Some College	24.2%	22.0%
Associate Degree	7.0%	6.0%
Bachelor's Degree	19.5%	22.5%
Graduate/Professional Degree	14.2%	14.2%

Student Satisfaction

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with fourteen aspects of the University, on a 5-point scale, where 1 was Very Dissatisfied and 5 was Very Satisfied. Overall, the participants expressed satisfaction with the various aspects of Southeastern. Participants expressed the most satisfaction with Library Resources ($\bar{x} = 4.26$, $sd. = 0.95$) and the least

satisfaction with the Availability of Courses Needed for Graduation ($\bar{x} = 3.41$, $sd. = 1.21$). Table 2 presents the frequencies, means and standard deviations for each of the satisfaction items.

Table 2
Frequencies, Means and Standard Deviations for Satisfaction Items

Item	1 - Very Dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 - Very Satisfied	Mean	Standard Deviation
Library resources	2.2%	4.0%	9.7%	33.4%	50.6%	4.26	0.95
Clarity of rules governing student conduct	2.0%	3.2%	16.5%	30.7%	47.6%	4.19	0.96
Friendliness of faculty and staff	1.5%	3.2%	13.2%	40.9%	41.1%	4.17	.88
Diversity of the campus community	1.0%	3.5%	20.4%	35.2%	39.9%	4.09	.91
Technology resources for student use	2.2%	5.5%	16.2%	33.9%	42.1%	4.08	1.00
Campus response to crime	1.2%	4.0%	20.9%	39.2%	34.7%	4.02	.91
Sense of community	2.0%	6.7%	19.0%	31.9%	40.4%	4.02	1.02
Opportunities available for personal improvement	1.0%	5.7%	21.9%	38.7%	32.7%	3.96	.93
Resources available to help deal with personal problems	4.7%	5.0%	26.4%	29.7%	34.2%	3.84	1.10
Amount of information received on academic policies	3.2%	9.2%	23.2%	32.2%	32.2%	3.81	1.09
Academic advising	8.2%	9.7%	22.9%	26.7%	32.4%	3.65	1.25
Students' voice in campus policies	3.7%	10.0%	32.4%	33.7%	20.2%	3.57	1.04
Condition of buildings	3.0%	8.0%	36.9%	37.4%	14.7%	3.53	0.94
Availability of courses needed for graduation	7.0%	16.0%	30.4%	22.7%	23.9%	3.41	1.21

Do Students Perceive Taking More than Four Years to Graduate as a Problem?

Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means Not at all a Problem and 5 means Major Problem, how much of a problem it is for them to take more than four years to graduate. Twenty percent (20%) indicated taking more than four years to graduate rated a 5, a Major Problem. Nineteen percent (19%) rated it a 4, 25% rated it a 3 and 13% rated it a 2. Twenty-three percent (23%) rated it a 1, Not at all a Problem.

Reasons Why Students Take More Than Four Years to Graduate

In the second section, students were asked to indicate whether each of 34 items was a Major Reason, a Minor Reason or Not a Reason in their taking more than four years to graduate. There are two simple ways to look at this data, and the results vary depending on the approach used. One method is to rank the items in terms of the highest percentages of participants indicating that it was a Major Reason in taking more than four years to graduate. If this approach is used, then the item “Work did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis” is the highest ranked item, with just over 40% of the respondents indicating it was a Major Reason. Along the same lines, the item “You had religious obligations that caused you to take time off” was the lowest ranked item, with only 3.7% of the respondents indicating it was a Major Reason.

However, if you rank the items in terms of the highest percentages of participants indicating it was a reason (major or minor), a different set of results emerges. In this approach, the item “You had to drop courses because you were dissatisfied with the teachers” emerges as the highest ranked item, with 66% of the respondents indicating that this was a reason. This item was not even in the top five items if ranked using the other method. Items that were ranked in

the top five reasons, despite the approach used were “Work did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis” (Major Reason=40.1%, Reason=62.0%), “You changed majors” (Major Reason=37.4%, Reason=61.1%), “You had to commute which took time away from studying or working” (Major Reason=28.7%, Reason=63.4), and “You had trouble completing all you major field courses because of scheduling conflict” (Major Reason=27.7%, Reason=57.9%).

Table 3 provides the percentage of endorsement for Major Reason, Minor Reason and Not a Reason for each item.

Table 3

Percentage of Endorsement for Major Reason, Minor Reason, and Not a Reason

	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason
Work did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis.	40.1%	21.9%	37.9%
You changed majors.	37.4%	23.7%	38.9%
Family responsibilities did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis.	31.7%	20.7%	47.6%
You had trouble completing all of you major field courses because some of them are/were not offered during the semesters you needed them.	29.4%	26.9%	43.6%
You had to commute which took time away from studying or work.	28.7%	34.7%	36.7%
You had trouble completing all of your major field courses because of scheduling conflicts.	27.7%	30.2%	42.1%
You decided not to take classes for one or more semesters.	27.7%	26.9%	45.4%
You did not know what to major in when you started at Southeastern.	26.4%	26.9%	46.6%

Table 3 cont.			
	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason
You had to drop courses because you were dissatisfied with the teachers.	24.9%	41.1%	33.9%
You only attended part-time (less than 12 hours per semester) when you started at Southeastern.	20.0%	19.5%	60.6%
You took classes which were unrelated to your major because you were interested in them.	19.0%	37.4%	43.6%
You changed catalogs.	18.5%	30.9%	50.6%
You had problems with your math proficiency.	18.2%	20.4%	61.3%
You had trouble registering for general education courses, for example, math, science, history, English, because sections were closed.	17.2%	26.4%	56.4%
You did not spend enough time studying.	14.0%	30.4%	55.6%
You had problems with your financial aid.	14.0%	18.7%	67.3%
It took you more than one semester to complete developmental courses.	13.0%	23.4%	63.6%
You had trouble getting your GPA up to the level required for graduation.	13.0%	20.7%	66.3%
You had to drop courses because you were not academically ready to take them.	12.7%	31.7%	55.6%
You were misinformed about your General Education requirements.	11.2%	19.5%	69.3%
You were misinformed concerning the graduation requirements for your degree program.	10.5%	19.7%	69.8%
You lost credits because you transferred to Southeastern.	10.5%	13.5%	76.1%
You were suspended or dismissed for one or more semesters.	10.0%	12.5%	77.6%
You had trouble with the requirements for entering your senior college.	9.7%	15.7%	74.6%
You are completing a double major.	9.7%	10.5%	79.8%
You have a disability.	9.5%	9.7%	80.8%
Table 3 cont.			

	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason
You did not have the personal support of your family.	9.2%	18.5%	72.3%
You had military obligations that caused you to take time off.	8.5%	9.2%	82.3%
You frequently skipped class.	7.5%	19.5%	73.1%
You had problems with your English proficiency.	6.2%	14.2%	79.6%
You had governmental obligations, such as Peace Corps, that caused you to take time off.	5.5%	9.0%	85.5%
You could not contact faculty when you needed to.	4.7%	25.9%	69.3%
You did not intend to get a degree when you started at Southeastern.	4.2%	13.0%	82.8%
You had religious obligations that caused you to take time off.	3.7%	11.5%	84.8%

How Students Spend Their Time

Respondents were asked to indicate in a typical week how much time they spend on various activities. Almost 50% of the respondents indicated that they spend more than 20 hours a week working, with 30% indicating they spend more than 30 hours a week working. Almost 60% spend 11-20 hours a week in classes or labs. It should be noted that 49 respondents (12%) indicated that they spend more than 20 hours in classes or labs; however only 2 of the respondents were actually enrolled for 21 or more hours. Five of the respondents indicated they spend no time in classes or labs during the week. Three of the five were enrolled in student teaching or internships, while the other two had withdrawn from all their classes by the end of the semester.

Respondents also spend much of their week interacting with their families, with 41% indicating they spend more than 20 hours a week in this activity. The majority of students spend between 1 and 20 hours a week studying or doing homework, 47% spent 1-10 hours and 35%

spend 11-20 hours. The majority of students (68%) spent 1-10 hours a week commuting, with an additional 17% spending 11-20 hours commuting. Table 4 provides the responses to the items asking how students spend their time.

Table 4
How Students Spend Their Time in a Typical Week

	None	1-10 Hours	11-20 Hours	21-30 Hours	More than 30 Hours
Classes/Labs	1.2%	28.9%	57.6%	7.5%	4.7%
Working for pay	19.5%	11.7%	19.5%	19.0%	30.4%
Studying/Homework	0.7%	47.4%	35.4%	9.7%	6.7%
Commuting	12.0%	67.8%	16.5%	2.0%	1.7%
Volunteer Work	59.6%	36.2%	3.0%	0.2%	1.0%
Socializing with friends	9.2%	70.6%	16.5%	2.5%	1.2%
Clubs or other groups	55.9%	40.9%	3.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Watching TV	13.7%	70.6%	11.7%	3.0%	1.0%
Exercising/Sports	22.2%	67.1%	8.2%	1.7%	0.7%
Interacting with and caring for your family	6.5%	29.9%	22.9%	13.0%	27.7%

Working Students

Extender students tend to work at least part-time, and this contributes to their taking more than four years to graduate. Therefore, further investigation into the relationship between hours worked and reasons for taking more than four years to graduate is warranted. Students were grouped based on the number of hours a week they work, one group was those who did not work, one group was those who work 1-20 hours, and a third group was those who worked more than 20 hours. A chi-square analysis was done for each of the reasons for taking longer than

four years to graduate and the grouped variable for number of hours worked a week. Some of the results were as expected, for example, there was a significant relationship between the number of hours worked and work not allowing participants to take more than 12 hours on a regular basis. One of the surprising results was that there was a significant relationship between hours worked and knowing what to major in when starting at Southeastern ($\chi^2(4)=13.93, p<.01$), with a higher proportion of those working more than 20 hours per week indicating not knowing what to major in as a reason for taking longer than four years to graduate. Table 5 presents the results of the chi-square analyses for those analyses that were significant.

Table 5

Chi-Square Analyses Between Reasons for Taking More than Four Years to Graduate and Number of Hours Worked per Week

(Note: Percentages are Column Percentages)

	Number of Hours Worked Per Week		
	None (n=78)	1-20 Hours (n=125)	More Than 20 Hours (n=198)
You only attended part-time (less than 12 hours per semester) when you started at Southeastern. ($\chi^2(4)=13.17, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	18 (23.1%)	24 (19.2%)	38 (19.2%)
Minor Reason	7 (9.0%)	19 (15.2%)	52 (26.3%)
Not a Reason	53 (67.9%)	82 (65.6%)	108 (54.5%)

Table 5 cont.			
	Number of Hours Worked Per Week		
	None (n=78)	1-20 Hours (n=125)	More Than 20 Hours (n=198)
You decided not to take classes for one or more semesters. ($\chi^2(4)=17.01, p<.01$)			
Major Reason	27 (34.6%)	23 (18.4%)	61 (30.8%)
Minor Reason	16 (20.5%)	29 (23.2%)	63 (31.8%)
Not a Reason	35 (44.9%)	73 (58.4%)	74 (37.4%)
Work did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis. ($\chi^2(4)=49.10, p<.01$)			
Major Reason	17 (21.8%)	34 (27.2%)	110 (55.6%)
Minor Reason	18 (23.1%)	26 (20.8%)	44 (22.2%)
Not a Reason	43 (55.1%)	65 (52.0%)	44 (22.2%)
You changed majors. ($\chi^2(4)=10.36, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	25 (32.1%)	42 (33.6%)	83 (41.9%)
Minor Reason	13 (16.7%)	30 (24.0%)	52 (26.3%)
Not a Reason	40 (51.3%)	53 (42.4%)	63 (31.8%)
You are completing a double major. ($\chi^2(4)=10.01, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	14 (17.9%)	8 (6.4%)	17 (8.6%)
Minor Reason	4 (5.1%)	14 (11.2%)	24 (12.1%)
Not a Reason	60 (76.9%)	103 (82.4%)	157 (79.3%)
You did not know what to major in when you started at Southeastern. ($\chi^2(4)=13.93, p<.01$)			
Major Reason	13 (16.7%)	30 (24.0%)	63 (31.8%)
Minor Reason	16 (20.5%)	34 (27.2%)	58 (29.3%)
Not a Reason	49 (62.8%)	61 (48.8%)	77 (28.9%)
You did not spend enough time studying. ($\chi^2(4)=12.34, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	8 (10.3%)	13 (10.4%)	35 (17.7%)
Minor Reason	19 (24.4%)	33 (26.4%)	70 (35.4%)
Not a Reason	51 (65.4%)	79 (63.2%)	93 (47.0%)

Table 5 cont.			
	Number of Hours Worked Per Week		
	None (n=78)	1-20 Hours (n=125)	More Than 20 Hours (n=198)
You frequently skipped class. ($\chi^2(4)=12.26, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	4 (5.1%)	5 (4.0%)	21 (10.6%)
Minor Reason	10 (12.8%)	21 (16.8%)	47 (23.7%)
Not a Reason	64 (82.1%)	99 (79.2%)	130 (65.7%)
You changed catalogs. ($\chi^2(4)=9.61, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	9 (11.5%)	20 (16.0%)	45 (22.7%)
Minor Reason	26 (33.3%)	32 (25.6%)	66 (33.3%)
Not a Reason	43 (55.1%)	73 (58.4%)	87 (43.9%)
You had to commute which took time away from studying or work. ($\chi^2(4)=10.73, p<.05$)			
Major Reason	19 (24.4%)	38 (30.4%)	58 (29.3%)
Minor Reason	28 (35.9%)	31 (24.8%)	80 (40.4%)
Not a Reason	31 (39.7%)	56 (44.8%)	60 (30.3%)

Discussion and Conclusions

The first question to answer is, “Do extender students represent a specific portion of baccalaureate students?” To answer this question, specific demographic characteristics of the Fall 1998 undergraduate enrollment were analyzed to see if there was a difference between those who started prior to Fall 1994 and those who started after Fall 1994. Some significant differences were discovered. Significantly more students who started prior to Fall 1994 are enrolled as part-time students than those who started later (31.1% vs. 9.7%). The average number of hours enrolled for those who started prior to Fall 1994 was 12.2, while those who started later were enrolled in 14.1 hours on average. Those who started prior to Fall 1994 had a

slightly lower ACT composite score (18.9), but a higher cumulative GPA (2.50) than those who started later (19.2, 2.37). There were also fewer minority students who started prior to Fall 1994 (12.3%) than started later (16%). However, this could be due to the university's successful attempts to recruit more minority students over the past few years. Finally, a higher percentage of those who started prior to Fall 1994 had an identified disability (4.1%) than did those who started later (2.2%).

The major finding here is that extender students enroll for fewer hours than do those baccalaureate students who are in their first four years of college. This could be explained by the fact that as the comparison with the Fall 1997 Survey of Current Students revealed, extender students tend to work more and are more likely to have families.

Further analyses of working extender students revealed some surprising findings. While working many hours itself contributes to taking more than four years to graduate, the problem is compounded because these students tend to not know what they want to major in when they begin their college curriculum. The students are also more likely to change majors which causes further delays. One implication of this is that students need more support and advisement when they begin at the university. Those students who are undecided as to majors need to be targeted and encouraged to receive career counseling or advising.

Another finding is that over half the extender students indicated that stopping out for one or more semesters is also a problem. In the Summer of 1997 a phone survey of students who did not return to Southeastern in the Spring or Summer of 1997 was conducted. This survey revealed that the students who identified themselves as stop-outs did so mainly because of family

and financial considerations. This reinforces the idea that the major impediment to graduating in four years is work-related.

In addition to working, not being able to complete major courses in a timely fashion because of scheduling conflicts or courses not being offered is also problematic to graduating in four years. This coupled with the low satisfaction with availability of courses needed for graduation indicates that departments need to get a better grasp of the needs of their majors and offer classes accordingly.

One area the University is currently studying is course availability and how the University can better provide the courses students need at the times they need them. The results of this research indicate that it is the availability of major courses is a more serious problem than the availability of general education courses. Providing more flexible scheduling may help students graduate in four years.

One surprising finding is that students having to drop classes due to dissatisfaction with the instructor is perceived as a serious impediment to graduating in four years. This result warrants further investigation and may have implications for university policies, procedures and the role of professional development for faculty.

The current research helps to provide a better understanding of extender students at Southeastern. It indicates that more effort needs to be focused on finding ways of helping working students complete their course work in a timely manner. One possible area to investigate is financial aid. While the majority of extender students receive financial aid, it is not known at this point whether extender students receive the same amount of financial aid as other baccalaureate students or if they receive less.

This research provides a start in better understanding at Southeastern as to who are extender students, and what their needs are. However, more research is warranted both at Southeastern and at other universities. Changes are taking place at Southeastern, such as the leveling off of enrollment increases and the change to a screened admissions process. These changes may lead to a different type of student taking more than four years to graduate, and for different reasons.

Research needs to be done at other institutions to discover if the results obtained here are institutional specific, or if they are more generalizable.

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Appendix A
Extender Student Survey

Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling from the Florida Parishes Social Science Research Center at Southeastern Louisiana University. May I please speak with _____. We are conducting a survey for the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment here at Southeastern. We need to get opinions from students who started school before 1995. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to not answer any question, and you may quit at any time. Your opinion is very important to us, and your answers will be completely confidential. This survey will only take a few minutes of your time. I will begin the survey now.

My supervisor may call once our interview is completed to insure that I am conducting it properly.

On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means Very Dissatisfied and 5 means Very Satisfied, please indicate how satisfied you are with the following aspects of Southeastern.

- A. Condition of buildings
- B. Students' voice in campus policies
- C. Library resources
- D. Academic advising
- E. Technology resources fro student use
- F. Diversity of the campus community
- G. Friendliness of faculty and staff
- H. Campus response to crime
- I. Availability of courses needed for graduation
- J. Clarity of rules governing student conduct
- K. Amount of information received on academic policies
- L. Sense of community
- M. Opportunities available for personal improvement
- N. Resources available to help deal with personal problems

There are many reasons why a student might take longer than four years to graduate. For each of the following reasons, please tell me whether it was a major reason, a minor reason or not a reason for you to take longer than four years to graduate.

(1=Major Reason, 2=Minor Reason, 3=Not a Reason)

- A. You only attended part-time (less than 12 hours per semester) when you started at Southeastern.
- B. It took you more than one semester to complete developmental courses.
- C. You had trouble registering for general education courses, for example, math, science, history, English, because sections were closed.
- D. You had trouble completing all of your major field courses because of scheduling conflicts.
- E. You had trouble completing all of you major field courses because some of them are/were not offered during the semesters you needed them.

- F. You were suspended or dismissed for one or more semesters.
- G. You decided not to take classes for one or more semesters.
- H. Family responsibilities did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis.
- I. Work did not allow you to take more than 12 hours per semester on a regular basis.
- J. You had to drop courses because you were dissatisfied with the teachers.
- K. You had to drop courses because you were not academically ready to take them.
- L. You had trouble getting your GPA up to the level required for graduation.
- M. You changed majors.
- N. You lost credits because you transferred to Southeastern.
- O. You are completing a double major.
- P. You were misinformed concerning the graduation requirements for your degree program.
- Q. You did not know what to major in when you started at Southeastern.
- R. You did not intend to get a degree when you started at Southeastern.
- S. You did not spend enough time studying.
- T. You took classes which were unrelated to your major because you were interested in them.
- U. You had problems with your financial aid.
- V. You frequently skipped class.
- W. You did not have the personal support of your family.
- X. You were misinformed about your General Education requirements.
- Y. You have a disability.
- Z. You had problems with your math proficiency.
- AA. You had problems with your English proficiency.
- BB. You had military obligations that caused you to take time off.
- CC. You had religious obligations that caused you to take time off.
- DD. You had governmental obligations, such as Peace Corps, that caused you to take time off.
- EE. You changed catalogs.
- FF. You could not contact faculty when you needed to.
- GG. You had trouble with the requirements for entering your senior college.
- HH. You had to commute which took time away from studying or work.

On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means not at all a problem and 5 means a major problem, how much of a problem is it for you to take more than 4 years to graduate?

For each of the following activities, please tell me how much time you spend on them in a typical week. Do you spend no hours, 1-10 hours, 11-20 hours, 21-30 hours, or more than 30 hours?

(None=1, 1-10=2, 11-20=3, 21-30=4, more than 30=5)

- A. Classes/Labs
- B. Working for pay
- C. Studying/Homework
- D. Commuting
- E. Volunteer work
- F. Socializing with friends
- G. Clubs or other groups
- H. Watching TV
- I. Exercising/Sports
- J. Interacting with and caring for your family

SLU is looking for ways to help students graduate more quickly. The following information may help us better meet the needs of students like yourself.

What is your marital status?

- 1-Never Married**
- 2-Married**
- 3-Previously Married**
- 4-Separated**
- 5-Widowed**
- 6-Refused**

How many children under the age of 18 do you have?

- 1-None**
- 2-One**
- 3-Two**
- 4-Three**
- 5-Four or more**

How far do you have to travel (one way) to Southeastern's main campus?

- 1-Live on campus**
- 2-Less than 5 miles**
- 3-Between 5 and 10 miles**
- 4-Between 11 and 20 miles**
- 5-Between 21 and 30 miles**
- 6-More than 30 miles**

Do you work on or off campus?

- 1-Do not work**
- 2-Work on campus**
- 3-Work off campus**
- 4-Work both on and off campus**

Do you receive any financial aid?

- 1-No (Skip next two questions)**
- 2-Yes**

For each of the following types of Financial Aid, please tell me whether or not you receive it.
(1=No, 2=Yes)

- A. Scholarship
- B. Loan
- C. Pell Grant
- D. Grant other than Pell Grant
- E. Tuition and Fee Waivers

On average, how much financial aid do you receive per semester?

What was your Mother's highest level of education?

- 1-No high school diploma**
- 2-High school diploma/GED**
- 3-Some college**
- 4-Associate Degree**
- 5-Bachelor's Degree**
- 6-Graduate or Professional Degree**
- 7-Unknown or refused**

What was your Father's highest level of education?

- 1-No high school diploma**
- 2-High school diploma/GED**
- 3-Some college**
- 4-Associate Degree**
- 5-Bachelor's Degree**
- 6-Graduate or Professional Degree**
- 7-Unknown or refused**

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact: Dr. Michelle Hall in the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (504)549-3639.