December 13, 1988

TO: Dan Jaksen

FROM: Michele Genthon

SUBJECT: Retention Study by J. J. Berry (12/87)

This is a very useful study. Is it being used by the administration for marketing, resource allocation, or policy decisions?

I would suggest that some of the data be given more emphasis than given in the report. Berry classifies the majority of the students who did not return (51%) as subject to life circumstances. These students are then dismissed as if the college has no control over these life circumstances, and perhaps for some of them it does not. However, I believe some consideration should be given to the problems students listed. Job conflict was listed by 23% of the students as the reason for not returning. In this sample alone that represents 125 students. Perhaps there is some intervention on the part of the college that would be helpful. Establishing a liaison with the employer of some kind, or counseling for the student might alleviate some of these problems.

Another area that could be addressed with counseling and assistance is that of finances. If 38% of the students do not return and 11% of these say it is for financial reasons, was there some way in which OCC could have assisted these students? For those students who listed family and home as the reason for leaving, would counseling have made a difference. Access to a support network, or better babysitting arrangements, especially in the case of women, could mean that someone might be able to continue studying.

Interesting research questions raised:

Some of the students did not return because they moved. Did these students transfer to another community college when they moved? If so, I would call this a measure of success.

Less than six students stated that transportation was a problem, but, if this was mentioned at all, I wonder how many students never even start for this reason.

Student Retention Study

The base sample of 545 non-returning students came from a file of 800 randomly selected students who met the following criteria: (1) Oakland County resident; (2) attempted at least 3 credits; (3) earned a Fall GPA of at least .50. Eleven respondents refused to be interviewed. The remaining group (N=244) either had inaccurate file records or could not be contacted. In addition, a comparison sample was constructed of returning students (N=200) who met the same criteria of the non-returning group.

Based on formulas developed by Les Kish, of the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, for a sample size of 545, the following are the average sampling errors at the 95% confidence level:

If reported percentage is:	Sampling Error
50	4.9
30 or 70	4.5
20 or 80	3.9
10 or 90	2.9
5 or 95	2.1

Note: The figures in this table represent two standard errors. Hence, for most items the chances are 95 in 100 that the value being estimated lies within a range equal to the reported percentages, plus or minus the sampling error.

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(2/104)
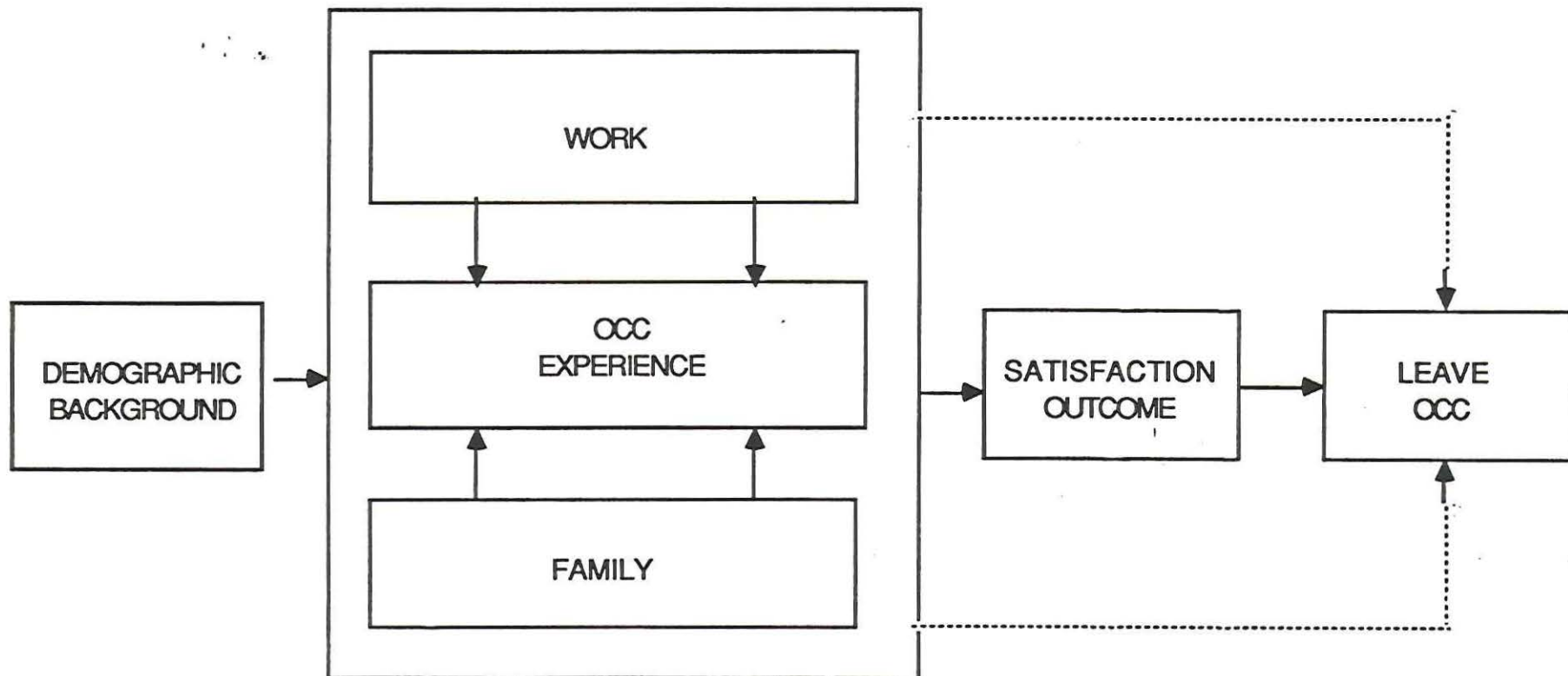6/2/87

ENROLLMENT AT OCC

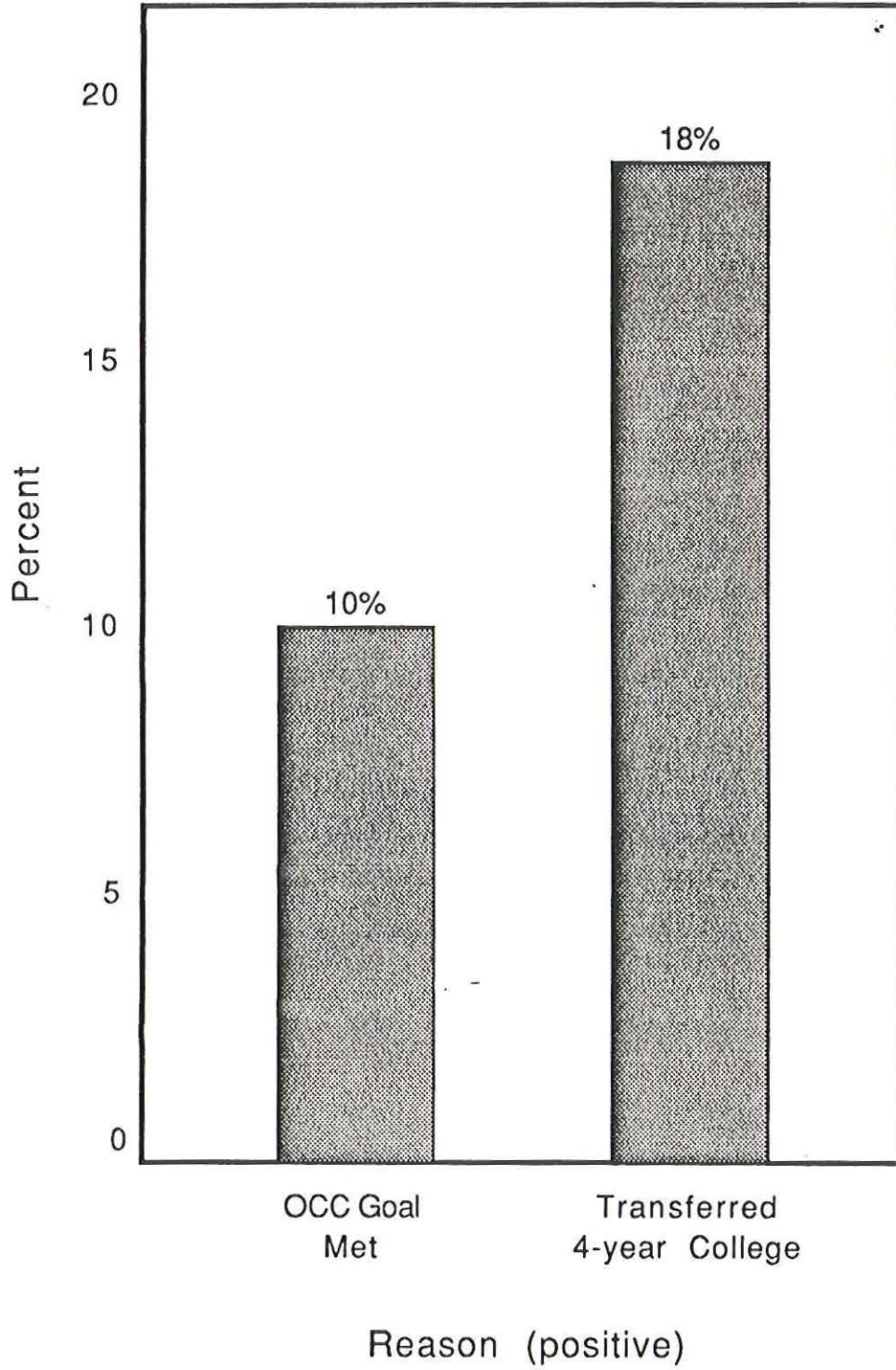**FALL, 1986 =**

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

WINTER, 1987 =

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

For every 10 students who attend in the fall, only
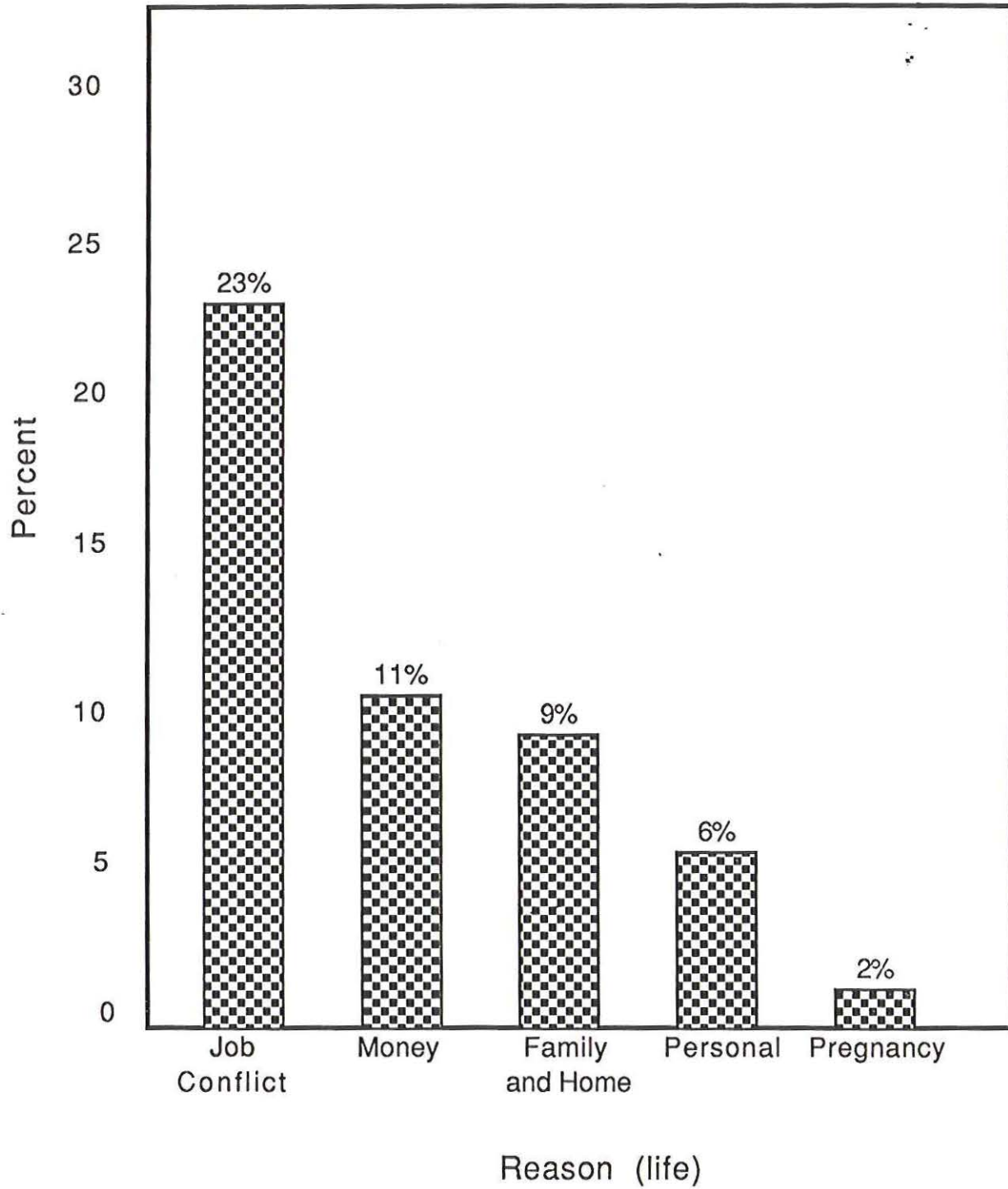6 will return in the winter. This means a non-return
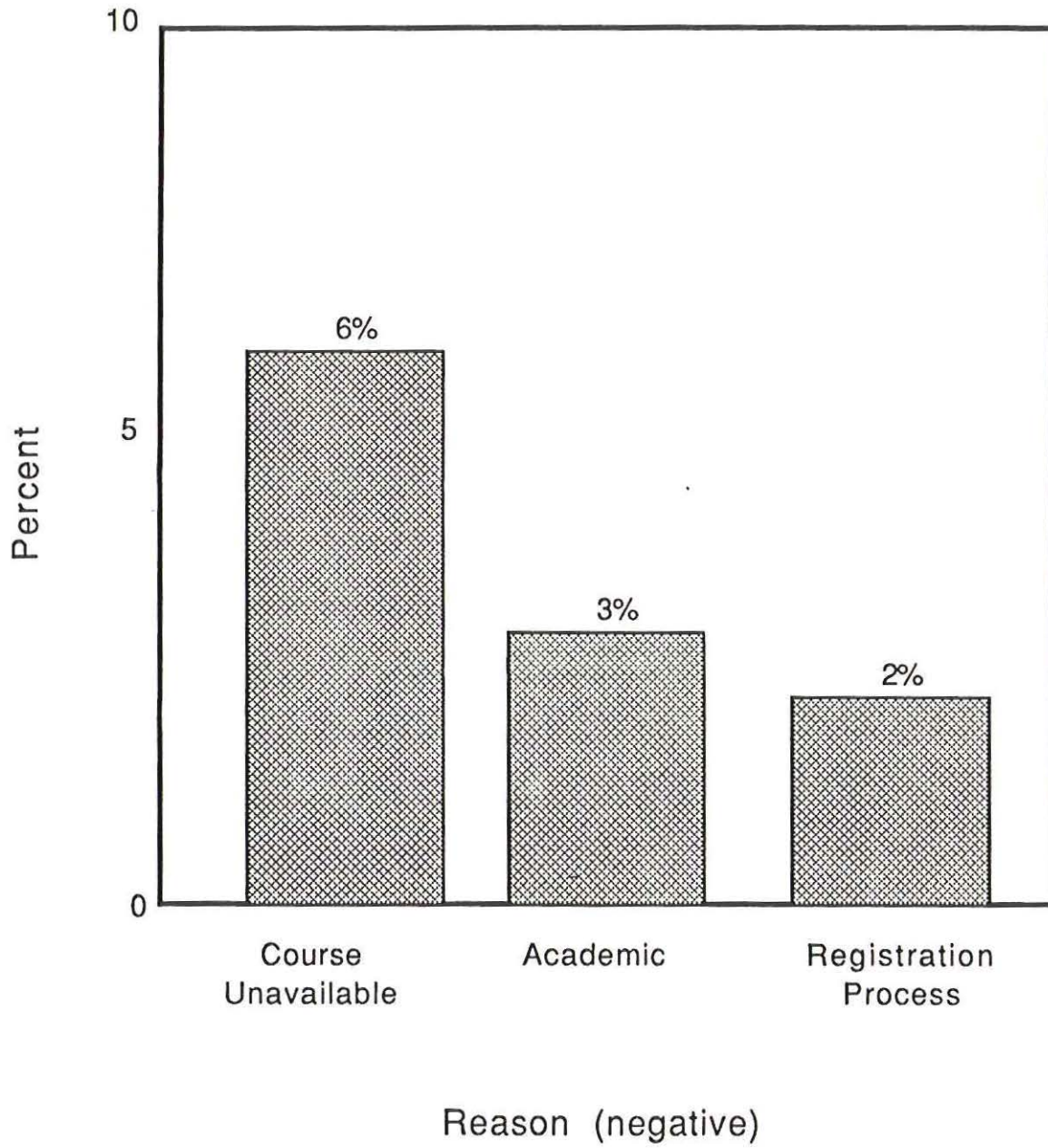rate of 40%!

THEORETICAL MODEL


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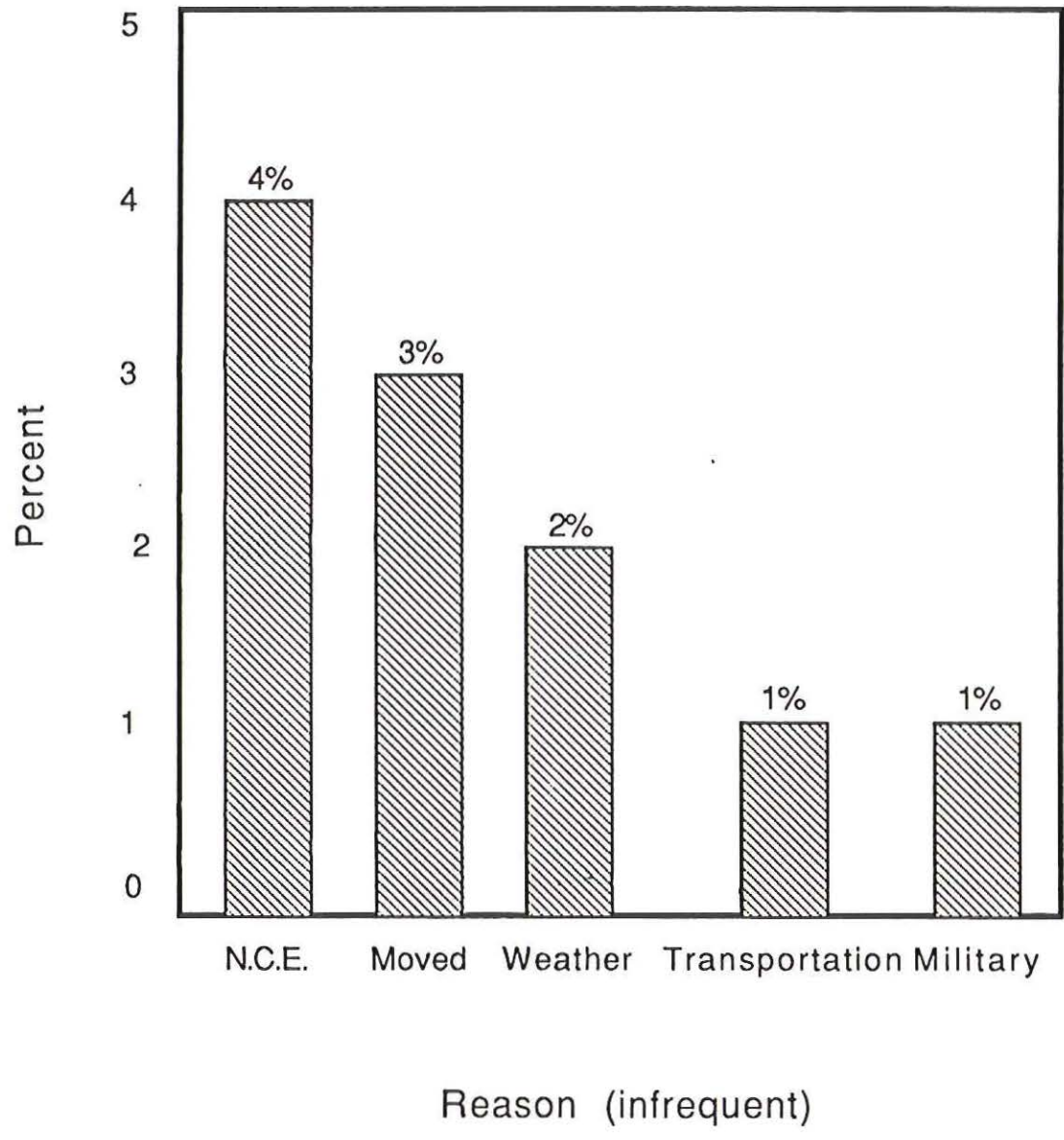(TIME) ⟶ (FALL TERM) ⟶

REASON FOR NOT RETURNING

REASON FOR NOT RETURNING

REASON FOR NOT RETURNING

REASON FOR NOT RETURNING

STvDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Non-Returning	Returning
Female	58.0%	61.0%
Age	30	29
High School G.P.A.	2.4	2.5
Receives Financial Aid	4.0%	12.0%
English 151	68.0%	72.0%
Credit Hours Attempted	5.1	7.1
Credit Hours Earned	4.1	7.0
Fall G.P.A	3.1	3.3

SATISFACTION - OUTCOME

Degree of Satisfaction
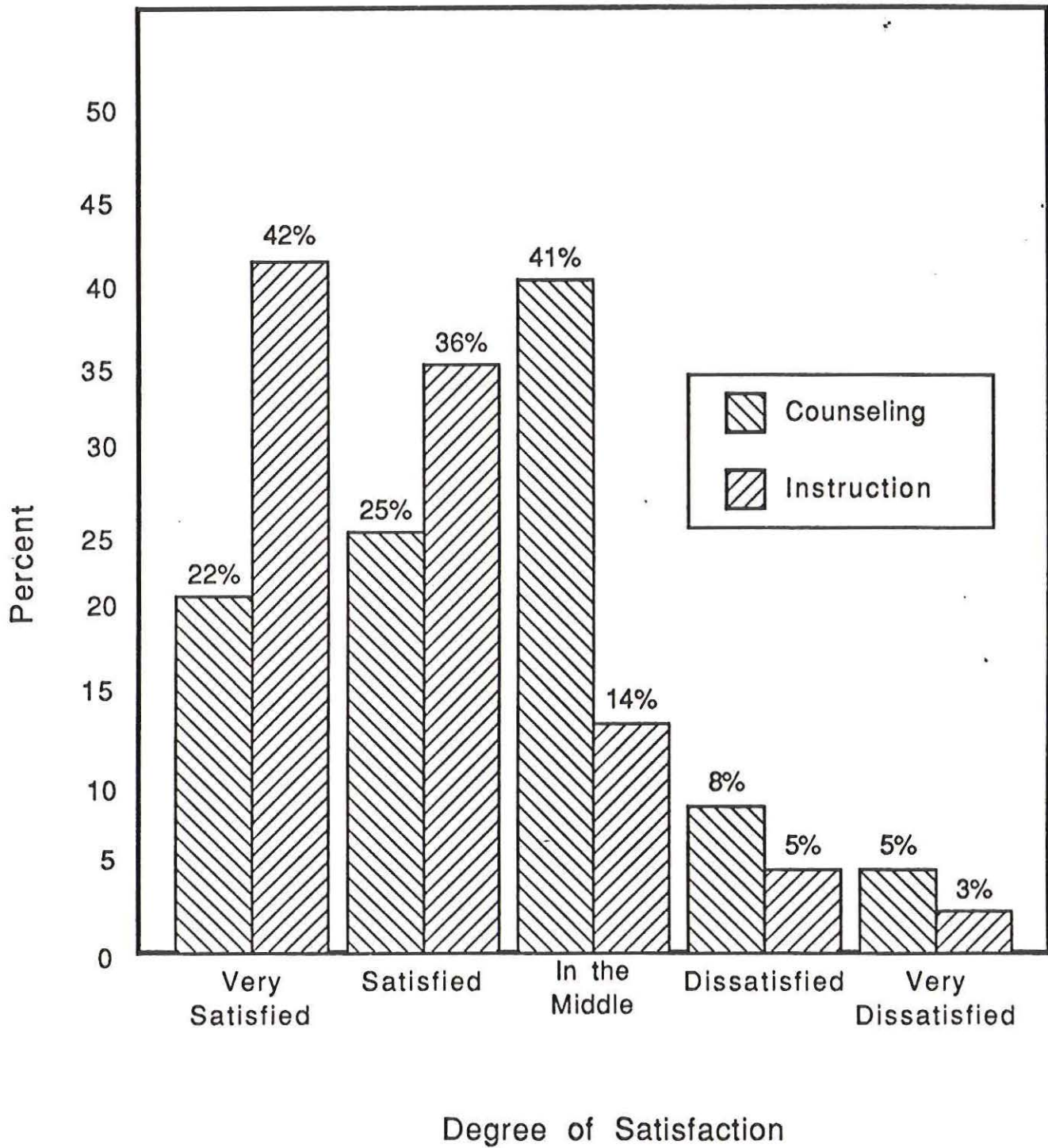
SATISFACTION - OCC
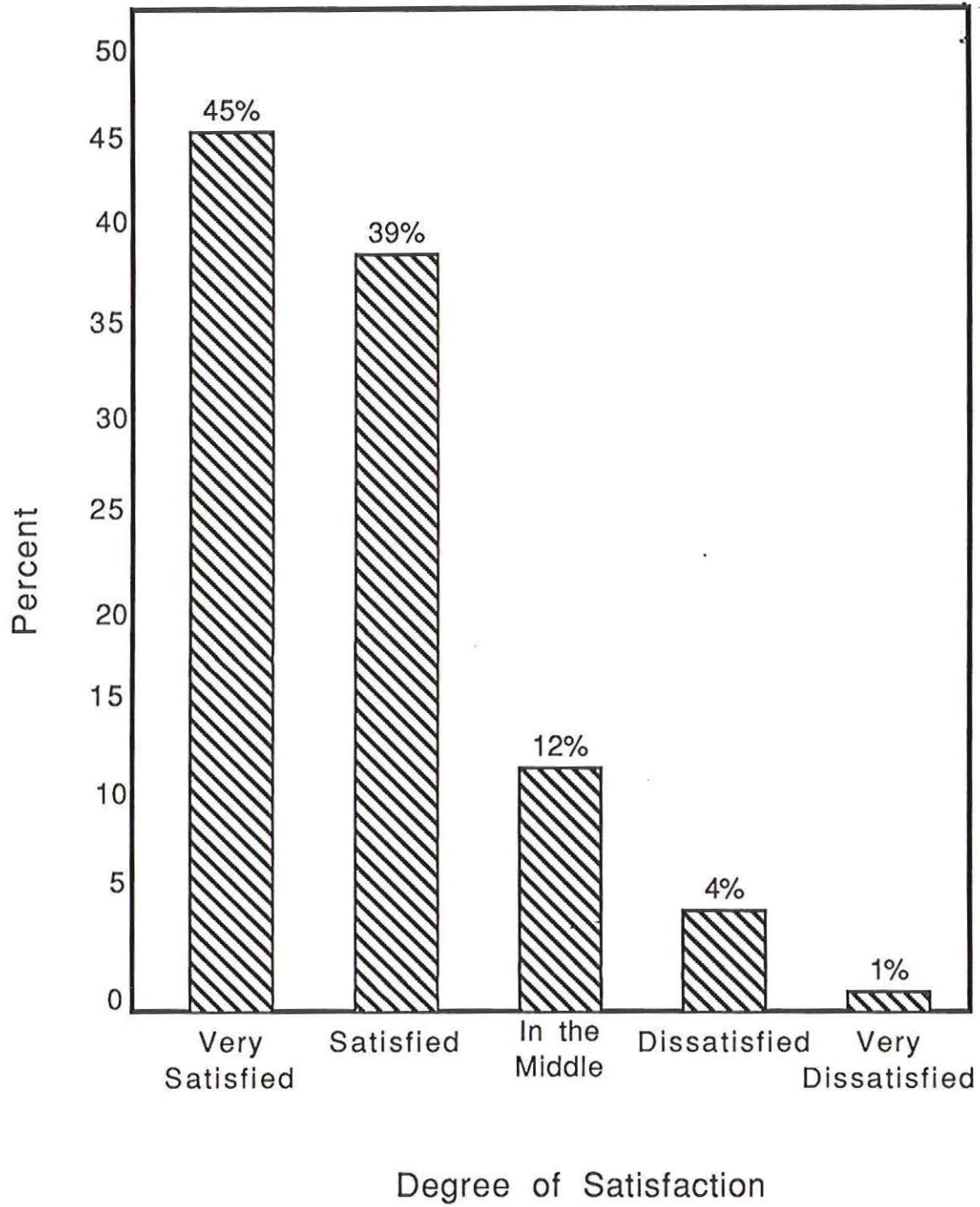
Patterns of
Academic and Social Integration of Non-Returning Students

Academic Integration

Mean number of faculty conferences 1.9

Percent with "zero" faculty conferences 49.0%

Percent who used the library 45.0%

Percent who used ICC/tutoring lab 10.0%

Mean number of counseling conferences 0.6

Percent with "zero" counseling conferences 63.0%

Social Integration

Mean number of close friends at OCC 1.9

Percent with "zero" close friends at OCC 44.0%

Percent who used physical activities building 13.0%

Percent who participated in student activities 3.0%

ANOTHER VIEW OF RETENTION

AT

OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

A crucial stage in educational planning and problem solving is that point where the decision maker defines what kind of problem he/she is dealing with. How are problems correctly defined? Is it a "knowledge problem"? Is it a problem of "values"? Does resolution of the problem require data? Does the problem involve decision makers disagreeing about "values", "image of the future" or "goals"? Consider the following example: An eight ounce glass contains 4 ounces of water; Is it half empty? Is it half full? The answer to a great extent depends on one's values.

The above discussion is relevant when one examines retention at Oakland Community College. In general colleges have a tendency to discuss retention in terms of whether or not students complete degrees or programs or return from one semester to the next. Defined this way, retention at community colleges is typically lower than that at four colleges and universities. This decade, as educational budgets come under closer scrutiny, retention data has become more carefully examined in terms of rates of attrition and its causes. Attrition often is viewed in terms of unmet students' needs, unsatisfactory educational experiences, and lost tuition.

However, attrition at community colleges should be viewed in terms of the goals of the students. Without information concerning their educational goals, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether or not the colleges are meeting the needs of the students.

The real question may be, "Is retention actually a problem?" Viewed in terms of the students' educational goals and the factors that are associated with attrition that an institution has no control

over, it may not. It may be that much of the attrition (defined as not completing a degree program, not returning form one semester to the next, etc.) is really a potential indicator that the community college is successful in one of its goals -- that of meeting the educational needs and goals of the community, which for many may be something other than a degree or certificate. On the other hand, if a significant number of students who leave, drop out or stop out, intended to obtain a degree or certificate or a course, and were unable to do so for reasons under the control of the college, then this information can provide a basis for improving services.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a re-thinking of the retention issue. Part one will provide a brief review of the retention literature. The second part will propose a model that may be useful for the Oakland Community College District.

Literature on Retention.

The following summary of the research literature on community college students is drawn from Bean and Metzner (1985), Friedlander (1981), Pascarella and Chapman (1983), Pezzullo (1978), and Rouche (1967).

1. Age: The classic reviews of the literature suggest that "age per se" is not a major factor, although some correlates of student's age such as "family responsibility" and "hours of employment" might be significantly associated with attrition. Of 9 studies reviewed 6 report a significant positive association between age and attrition.

2. Enrollment Status: Several studies (7) have found strong evidence that students who were enrolled on a part-time as opposed to a full-time basis were more likely to drop out. Studies that used "credits attempted", also, report the same trend. In California, a State study found that for part time students, those with more credits

attempted had a higher probability of returning.

3. Education Goals: A students initial educational goals may contain motivational influences that influence persistence at a community college. Three studies reviewed clearly indicated that pre-enrollment goals influenced persistence. In addition, 3 studies reveal that community college students with "short-term goals" show different enrollment patterns than students with "degree seeking goals".

4. High School Performance: Substantial positive relationships exist between high school grade point average and grade point average at the community college. However, when persistence is examined high school grade point average only exhibits a small relationship, if any. Of the 8 studies reviewed 4 found a relationship and 4 did not.

5. Gender: Gender of the student does not appear to have a direct association with attrition. Gender may be related to other variables such as age, and goals of community college attendance.

6. Academic Advising: Little research has been done in this area. The few studies in this area give inconsistent and equivocal results. No generalization can be made at this time.

7. Course Availability: Four studies demonstrated that students' inability to take desired courses is related to dropping out. Four studies report that course unavailability is related to student attrition. In addition, 1 study found that "courses not offered" was a major reason for withdrawal for part-time but not full-time students.

8. Environmental Variables: The positive relation between "financial difficulty" and attrition has been found in 11 studies. Also, 1 study reported that "financial difficulty" was included among the two reasons most frequently mentioned among part-time as well as

full time students for their withdrawal from a community college. Numerous empirical studies have found that the more hours a student works the higher the attrition rate. It would be expected that encouragement from significant others would influence retention. However, studies on this variable could not be located. Over 17 studies have reported family pressure and obligations as a major reason for withdrawal by students. Also, 11 studies have demonstrated that student transfer to a four-year college is a frequent reason for not returning.

9. <u>Social Integration Variables</u>: Social integration refers to the extent and quality of student' interaction with the social system of the college. The literature suggests the chief difference between the attrition process of traditional and nontraditional students is that nontraditional students are influenced by the external environment more than by the social integration variables influencing traditional student attrition. However, studies clearly indicate that social integration at community colleges is even lower than that found at 4 year commuter colleges!!

10. <u>Academic Outcomes</u>: Studies tend to find a "small" but negative association between first-term grade point average and persistence. However, studies often report that part-time students who "drop-out" often have higher grade point averages than full-time students who drop-out.

11. <u>Satisfaction</u>: Student's enjoyment and compatibility in the role of a student is negatively related to attrition. In addition, studies more often than not, <u>fail</u> to find significant differences in satisfaction between drop-outs and persisters with satisfaction at the community college.

<u>Oakland Community College Data</u>

OCC institutional data reveals that 38 percent of the students enrolled in the fall - 1986 did not return to take classes in the winter - 1987. A random sample of 545 of these students were interviewed. The stated primary reasons for not returning can be organized into four general categories: (1) goals achieved (transfer and non-transfer) were reported by 28 percent of the non-returning students; (2) 51 percent did not return because of life circumstances (e.g., job related, lack of finances, family, home responsibilities, personal reasons, and pregnancy); (3) 11 percent did not return because of a negative experience (courses not available, academic discouragement, registration process); (4) 10 percent of them fall into the "other" category (e.g., moved from area, transportation, weather, etc). The non-returning student tended to enroll in night courses only - 63 percent. In terms of their satisfaction with aspects of OCC 49 percent were satisfied with counseling, 79 percent were satisfied with instruction, and 83 percent were satisfied with the educational experience at OCC. On the other hand the social integration of non-returning students is low (e.g., 44 percent reported "zero" close friends at OCC) and the academic integration of the non-returning students is low (e.g., 63 percent reported "zero" counseling their last semester at OCC; 49 percent reported "zero" faculty conferences at OCC their last semester). Also, non-returning students attempted and earned less credits than returning students and non-returning students worked on average of 40 hours.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The literature and OCC data reveal that the majority of students who do not return from one semester to the next are those who either had their "own goals" met or did not return because of life circumstances that are outside the control of the institution. Thus,

when "retention" is viewed or judged in terms of the students' reasons for attending and life related factors, then it is possible that Oakland Community College does not have a "retention" problem of a large magnitude resulting from low quality instruction and other services. The generally observed enrollment pattern appears to be the "natural" pattern found at open admission non-selective colleges. It would appear, at this point in time, given current programs, that efforts to increase student retention at Oakland Community College should focus on activities that increase the integration of students into college life. As studies have shown for twenty years, the greater the students' integration or involvement in college, with faculty, counselors, other students, etc., the greater the educational learning and personal development. Human development results from interaction with other human beings.

Recommendation One: Oakland Community College should define a "dropout" as a student who comes to the college with a goal but is unable to achieve it and the reason is not a life circumstance outside the control of the college.

Recommendation Two: The college, given existing academic and social systems, should increase the academic and social integration of the students. Increased academic and social integration would take many forms: student activities, increased interaction with faculty and counselors, interaction with other institutional personnel, and so forth.

Recommendation Three: The reporting of enrollments should reflect the mix of students at Oakland Community College. For example:

SEMESTER X

Student Type	No. Return from W	No. New Student FT-OCC	FT-OI	No of Former OCC Students
Traditional (17-24)				
Adult (25+)				

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Educational Research</u>, <u>55</u>, 485-540.

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