



The UW Flexible Option: Looking for early warning indicators

Early warning indicators provide timely opportunities to intervene with students at risk of dropping out. To find measures specific to the direct assessment, competency-based UW Flexible Option, our research staff designed a survey testing 27 measures to determine which best distinguished graduates from non-returning students (those who stop out for six months or more). (In prior research, we found that students who stop out for six months or more are significantly more likely not to complete their degree. See Mayeshiba & Brower, “[Student success and retention using new definitions created for non-term, direct assessment CBE](#),” *Journal of Competency-Based Education*, vol 2, issue 1.)

The survey was piloted with students who left UW Flex between January 2014 and February 2017. Response rates—85.7% of graduates and 44.6% of non-returning students—were well above industry norms for the type of survey and population.

Surveys covered demographics, educational goals, and perceptions of various attributes of the UW Flexible Option. Preliminary findings indicate that demographics and educational goals are not predictive of attrition.

Two measures of student perceptions of UW Flexible Option powerfully distinguished graduates from non-returning students. Students who agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements were far more likely to persist through to graduation than those who were either neutral or disagreed with the statements:

- “I was able to complete the competency sets within the 3-month time limit.”
- “The assessments accurately evaluated my knowledge and skills.”

As a result of our research, we will begin to intervene with students who answer in the neutral to negative range on the above two items.

Analysis on responses to survey open-ended questions continues.