

2000 BC Universities Early Leavers Survey Highlights

In the Survey Highlights

- *What does the survey reveal?*
- *What is an early leaver?*
- *Why do they leave university?*
- *Why do “true leavers” depart university?*
- *What do “true leavers” gain from university?*
- *What more can universities do to help?*
- *What are “true leavers” doing now?*

ISBN 0-7726-4565-5

What does the survey reveal?

Two survey findings challenge the traditional notion of university attrition as unplanned and permanent departures from studies. First, 40 percent of all reported university departures were either planned or temporary, and second, 59 percent of all leavers enrolled at another post-secondary institution within 24 months. These results suggest a new perspective on attrition is required.

What is an early leaver?

Early leavers are those students who discontinue their university studies before earning a degree. For every 100 students who start undergraduate studies, between 30 and 50 will leave prior to degree completion. Not all departures, however, will be unplanned and permanent. Based on the survey results, early leavers were classified into seven categories:

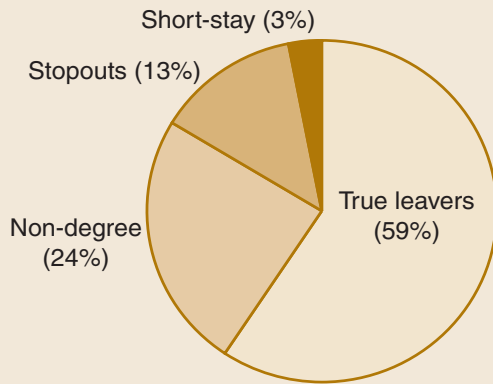
- *Stopouts*: those planning to return to university soon.
- *Pre-planned transfers*: those planning to transfer to another institution to complete a degree.
- *Students preparing for a graduate program*: those preparing for graduate studies by taking undergraduate courses.
- *Students pursuing professional upgrade studies*: those taking courses for professional accreditation or upgrading.
- *Students pursuing other non-degree study*: those not pursuing degree study and not preparing for a graduate program or pursuing professionally-oriented studies.
- *Short-stay students*: those who departed within a very short time.
- *True leavers*: all degree-focused respondents who did not initially plan to withdraw or transfer and who had no expectation of returning to their university.

About the 2000 BC Universities Early Leavers Survey

The 2000 British Columbia Universities Early Leavers Survey was undertaken to explore university early leaver behaviour within the British Columbia context. The survey asked early leavers why they attended university and why they left, what they thought of their university experience, and what their educational and employment outcomes were.

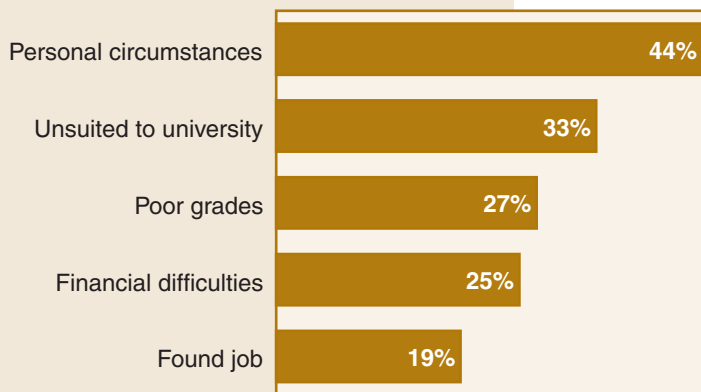
For the purposes of the survey, early leavers were defined specifically as those non-graduating undergraduate students who last registered for classes at one of the four participating universities in either winter 1997/98, summer 1998, or winter 1998/99 and who had not since re-registered in the winter 1999/00 session as of November 1, 1999. The four universities that provided data for the survey were University of Northern British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, and University of Victoria. Former students were contacted by telephone between January and March 2000—in all, 5,991 early leavers were surveyed, resulting in a response rate of 63 percent.

What is an early leaver (continued)?



Almost 60 percent of the early leavers surveyed (the *true leavers*) conformed to the traditional notion of attrition as unplanned and permanent departure. However, 24 percent of leavers (the *non-degree leavers*) planned for early departure. Their intentions were to transfer to another institution, to prepare for graduate school, to get professional upgrading, or to pursue non-degree studies. Thirteen percent of respondents planned to return to their university soon, while 3 percent enrolled but did not stay long.

categories of leavers



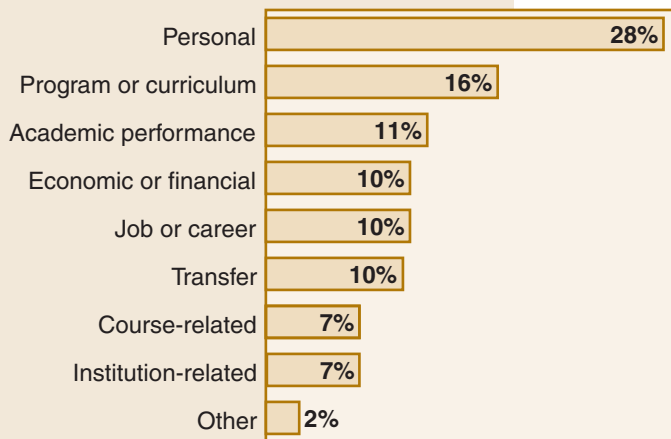
Why do they leave university?

When asked to give their main reason for leaving university, respondents provided multiple reasons for their departures, such as poor academic performance, financial constraints, changed goals, personal factors, employment issues, and course or program dissatisfaction. When asked to respond to a list of specific reasons for leaving, 44 percent said they left due to family or personal circumstances.

Overall, 72 percent of early leavers felt positive or very positive about university at the time of their departure.

reasons for leaving

Why do *true leavers* depart university?



As the *true leavers* category comprises 60 percent of the early leavers surveyed, and reflects unplanned departures by degree-seeking students who do not intend to return to their university, it is the leaver group of greatest interest.

The 3,556 *true leavers* were asked the question “What was your main reason for leaving?” When the responses were grouped (see the graph on the left), *personal* reasons comprised the largest category.

The most frequently mentioned individual reasons for departure were the requirement to withdraw (9%), shortage of financial resources (8%), the decision—arrived at after initial entry—to transfer (7%), unspecified personal reasons (6%), and illness or health factors (5%).

true leavers' reasons for leaving

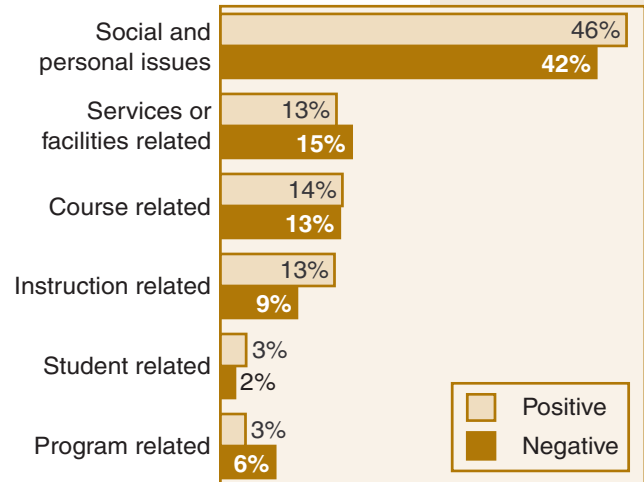
What do *true leavers* gain from university?

True leavers' responses to the question “What did you get from your university experience?” grouped around several key categories. Social and personal development responses comprised almost 37 percent of the answers and academic development was cited by 29 percent. Over three-quarters reported that university contributed to their personal growth either to a great extent (30%) or to some extent (46%).

True leavers reported that university contributed to personal growth.

True leavers were also asked about the positive or negative aspects of their first month at university. Interestingly, the aspects that some students found most positive were the ones that others found most negative. Responses relating to social and personal issues were cited most often.

In terms of course and program availability, 82 percent of *true leavers* reported that they successfully registered in all or most of their desired program, and 72 percent were able to enroll all or most of the courses they selected.



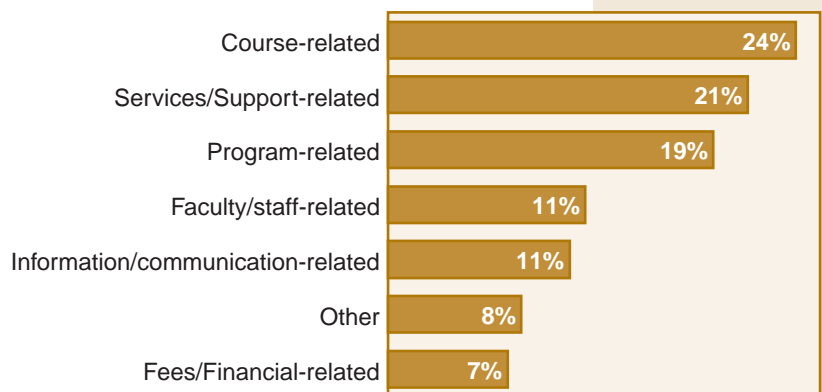
positive and negative aspects of university (first month)

What more can universities do to help?

True leavers' opinions about the actions the university might have taken before their departure were concentrated around course-, service-, and program-related themes. The most frequently mentioned

True leavers think that universities could make improvements in courses, services, and programs.

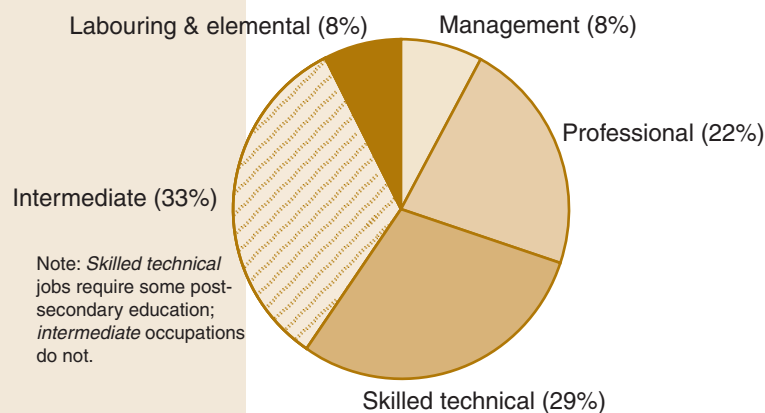
individual responses referred to course availability or waitlists (6%). Both “flexible schedule or location for working or part-time students” and “offer program content students want” were mentioned by 5 percent of respondents. Four percent specified better quality academic advising and 4 percent wanted “more or quicker access to academic advising.”



true leavers' suggestions for improvement

What are *true leavers* doing now?

Despite their permanent and unplanned departure from university, the majority of *true leavers* (60%) subsequently attended another institution. Although more than half of these enrolments were at BC colleges, almost 17 percent enrolled again in a BC university. Slightly less than 20 percent attended another Canadian post-secondary institution. One third of the *true leavers* who subsequently enrolled in post-secondary programs after leaving their 'home' university took the same or similar program of study at their new institution.



skill level of occupations

At the time of the survey, 43 percent of *true leavers* were attending school. Forty percent were employed full-time, 5 percent were working part-time, and 3 percent were seeking work. Although 22 percent of employed *true leavers* were in occupations classified as professional, the majority were in occupations that did not require university graduation. The annualized salaries for employed *true leavers* averaged \$34,000.

Most employed true leavers had jobs that did not require university graduation.

University Student Outcomes

The report of findings from the 2000 survey of British Columbia universities' early leavers was prepared for The University Presidents' Council of British Columbia by Chris Conway, former director of Institutional Research, University of Victoria.

This survey was conducted by the University Student Outcomes Project, which is a long-term research project dedicated to gathering student outcomes information for universities and the Province of British Columbia. The University Presidents' Council and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology established the project. It is directed by the University Outcomes Working Committee and is managed by the Centre for Education Information.

This summary, the *2000 British Columbia Universities Early Leavers Survey Highlights*, and the report, the *2000 British Columbia Universities Early Leavers Survey*, are available on the Internet from The University Presidents' Council of BC: <http://www.tupc.bc.ca>.

Limited quantities of print copies are available by e-mailing: publications@ceiss.org.