

# Research Briefs

## KEY FINDINGS

- For part-time students taking 6-11 hours, the likelihood of being retained decreased by 40% over the 6-8 hour students.
- Additionally, the risk increased by 20% for each additional developmental course the students were taking.
- Policy changes to decrease the developmental course requirements were followed by an 11% increase in retention.

## IMPLICATIONS

### For Practice:

- Continue development of interventions targeting developmental student retention.

### For Policy:

- Initiatives and policy should be based on systematic information and research and should be reviewed and updated regularly.

### For Research:

- The assessment of retention practices and their attribution of causality will need to be assessed.

## Longitudinal Study of First-Time-in-College (FTIC) Student Retention (Re-enrollment) by Remediation Status

Through Achieving the Dream, South Texas College learned to disaggregate data in order to address critical performance gaps in student retention. In 2003 the College implemented policies intended to mandate student completion of developmental requirements. In 2005 the data indicated that time to completion by students who survived those “tough love” policies had been reduced. However, in 2007 through more detailed analyses of disaggregated data, the 6-11 hour students in remediation were identified as not returning to the College at alarming rates with the most probable cause a heavy or entire course load of remedial courses. Immediate policy changes to decrease the requirement to a single remedial course were followed by an 11% increase in Fall to Spring retention.

### Background

Community colleges like South Texas College are proud to be open-door institutions and are seen to play a crucial role in providing access to college. South Texas College cares just as much about student retention since researchers have found that there are three levels of community impact when students leave before completing their educational goals: personal, institutional, and societal. Students are personally impacted with the experience of failure to attain personal goals and furthermore their own financial success. The institution is impacted according to Bean, 1990, in that the failure to retain students “represents a direct loss of tuition income and failure to accomplish educational mission.” DeBerard, 2004 found that “each student that leaves before completion costs. . . thousands of dollars in unrealized tuition, fees, and . . . contributions” back to the institution for future generations. As a matter of fact, he believed that “retention is a matter of economic survival.” Regarding societal impact, Watts, 2001, mentions a host of areas impacted by educational success that will not be realized if educational goals are not attained: “decreased reliance on public assistance, increased tax reve-

nues, lower demands on criminal justice system, greater civic participation, better health through improved lifestyle choices, improved parenting skills, and increased entrepreneurial activity.” STC has included retention as an institutional performance indicator of critical importance since the College’s inception in 1993.

### Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to present an initial overview of the findings in a way that is understandable to a broad audience and to provide a basis for wide engagement of faculty, administrators, and even students in discussion of policies and practices targeting student persistence of FTIC students. The intent of this study is to show the impact of timely, purposeful interventions as illustrated by the results of a concerted effort by the entire institution to close the gaps in retention rates.

### Methodology

FTIC students were tracked because they are homogeneous cohorts that start college at the same point in time. The rationale for FTIC cohort tracking is that it isolates the value-added by this college toward the attainment of outcomes. For data integrity the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) certi-

fied enrollment file, CBM001, was used as the data source to extrapolate the FTIC cohorts included in both retention reports. Retention rates were calculated by matching the Fall degree seeking (including Undeclared Degree-Seeking Majors) FTIC cohort against the subsequent Spring and Fall enrollment to determine retention (re-enrollment) from Fall to Spring and Fall to Fall. Non-degree seeking students were not included in alignment with the national data (IPEDS) definition of FTIC which includes students on each Fall CBM001 who a) never attended college before, or b) enrolled for the first time during the prior Summer term at STC. Students that received remediation include FTIC students who enrolled in any remediation courses. The sub-levels of FTIC’s are categorized by semester credit hours (SCH) or student course load: Full-Time were enrolled in 12 or more SCH, Part-Time was broken into two levels, 6 to 11, and 5 or less SCH. Students that graduated before the subsequent Spring or Fall and did not return as well as student majoring in programs requiring only one semester were excluded from the retention study. Logistic regression was used to determine

factors related to retention.

**Research Questions**

The research questions asked in this study were: What percent of fall term FTIC students re-enroll the next spring or the next fall? Does it make any difference if they are enrolled in remedial studies? Are their differences based on the number of SCH in which they enroll? Are there any trends or patterns depicted in the data? If so, are the trends or patterns related to the timing of related policy changes? Are there barriers to retention that can be identified and removed?

**Key Findings**

A preliminary review of the retention rates led the research to focus on part-time students enrolled in developmental studies. Logistic regression analyses yielded several useful findings for action. For part-time students taking 6-11 hours, the likelihood of being retained decreased by 40% over the 6-8 hour students. Additionally, the risk increased by 20% for each additional developmental course the students were taking. This was alarming since 85% of these students were taking 2 or more developmental courses. Also, the males in this group were 90% less likely to re-enroll than females. Furthermore the students in this group who were receiving financial aid were nearly 3 times as likely to leave than non-financial aid recipients.

This information was used immediately in Fall 2007 to make changes to "tough love" developmental policies that had been implemented in Fall 2003 requiring students who were not college-ready in more than one area to be enrolled in more than one developmental course. It also required these same students to take a college success course. The policies basically mandated a full-load of developmental courses. The policy was changed to only require continuous enrollment in developmental studies as long as the student had not met the state college-readiness standards (TSI). It did not force the student to take more than one course at a time even if they were deficient in all three areas. In addition, the college had adopted a philosophy to encourage students to reduce their hours to less than full-time if they were

struggling to be successful in the courses. That philosophy was also changed in response to more recent literature that demonstrated that full-time students tended to persist at higher rates. Subsequently, the retention rates have increased incrementally for all groups and remarkably for the 6-11 hour population that was targeted by the policy changes. ([See Fact Book Online](#))

*Total*

In the last five reported academic years the retention rate of All FTIC students has increased by 2% from Fall to Spring and 10% from Fall to Fall. The Fall to Spring retention rate increased by 2% for remediated students while that of students without remediation remained static. The Fall to Fall retention rates increased 12% and 6% for students with and without remediation respectively. For the first time in Spring 2009 the Fall to Spring retention rate for Total FTIC With Remediation (83%) equaled that of their peers without

*Part-Time (6-11 SCH)*

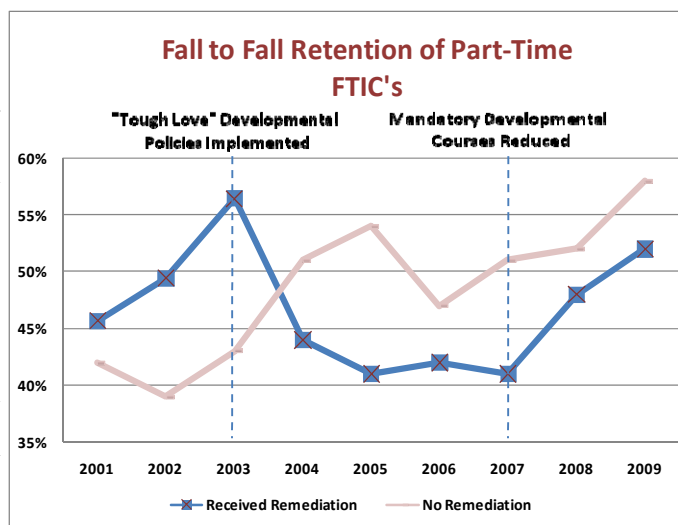
Part-Time with remediation student retention jumped by five percent in both Fall to Spring 2008 and Fall to Fall 2009. The Fall to Spring rate with remediation (77%) surpassed that of the non-remediated (76%). The Fall to Fall rates are increasing for both groups and although getting smaller, a gap remains between the remediated group at 52% and non-remediated group at 58%.

*Part-Time (1-5 SCH)*

Part-Time students taking 1 to 5 SCH rate of retention fluctuates due to the small number of students (<100) in this sub-level making them unviable for comparison.

*Academic and Technical Majors*

Similar to the other sub-levels Academic and Technical Majors have had an increase in Fall to Spring retention and also in Fall to Fall with regard to the remediated group. The gaps in retention between Academic and Technical Majors who are also in remediation have been closed. For those without remediation, Academic majors are retained at 4% higher than Technical majors.



**Implications**

The increase in All FTIC retention, whether fall to spring or fall to fall, suggests that the efforts of all programs at STC, such as Advising, Counseling, Developmental Education Retention Specialists, Learning Communities, Beacon Mentoring, and other unmentioned entities, are contributing to the reduction in attrition. The increase in the Fall to Spring retention rates for both Full and Part-Time FTIC is also an implication that this concerted effort is a success. On the other hand, the retention rates are still not high enough. For example, in the Fall to Fall retention rates of Part-Time students the gap remains between those with and without remediation and still needs to be addressed further. Also, even with Fall to Fall retention rates of over 60%, there are another 40% who are not being retained. Definite progress is being made and the momentum should be continued with the development of creative and innovative interventions toward student success. Continuing to develop initiatives and policy changes based on systematic information and research is working!

remediation. In Fall 2008, as in 2007, there was a significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) difference between the Fall to Fall retention rate of remediated students (53%) and non-remediated (63%). This Fall (2009), there was no statistical difference between these two groups with remediated student retention (61%) coming within two percentage points of equaling that of non-remediated students (63%).

*Full-Time (12+ SCH)*

For both groups of Full-Time students, there has been little change in five years with roughly a 2% increase in their Fall to Spring retention rates. For the 2006 and 2007 academic years, the Fall to Fall rates for students with and those without remediation had been significantly different ( $p \leq .05$ ), but this Fall (2009) there was no such disparity. The retention rate for both cohorts was within one percentage point (with 65% and without 66%).