

## Forecasting Student Retention Rates in Accounting and Business Programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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## ABSTRACT

Retention rates are the most critical factor to the economic survival and continuing success of all (HBCUs). The retention rate of students in historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) is considerably less as compared to other national universities' graduation average. Several factors have played a significant role in this disparity including personal, social, and economic, affect the retention rate of students. These factors are utilized to provide a basis for the retention of business college students in HBCU. In this paper, our results show institutional factors have been the most important in retention at this (HBCU). The analysis presented in the paper sheds light on the fact that curriculum, assessment, classroom, and student services are the four areas in which all ten most important factors were found. Acknowledging there is a retention problem at a university is just the beginning of the efforts to remedy it.

Keywords: Accounting education; accountancy students, Attritions, Retentions  
JEL Classification: I20; I21

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are academic institutions that were established in the United States before the Civil Rights movement with the intent to provide higher education to African Americans. These colleges/universities are committed to offering low-cost education to first-generation and lower-income families, particularly those, identify as African American. Consequently, tuition rates at HBCU's are significantly lower than those of their predominantly white counterparts (Patterson, Dunston & Daniels, 2013). In recent years, low tuition rates have begun to take a toll on the institutions, negatively affecting the operating budgets and overall quality of education offered by HBCUs.

Graduation rate and retention rate are the most important measures of the academic institution's performance. FAFSA defined the retention rate as, "the percentage of a school's first-time, first- year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year" while retention rate means Students that study full-time in the fall semester and continue their studies the following fall semester are calculated in the retention rate. Retention rates determine how much money a state- supported school is eligible to receive; schools with high retention rates receive more funding than schools with low rates. Retention rates directly relate to institutional revenue and affect students, faculty, and the university/college as a whole.

Low retention rates reveal a greater problem for HBCUs in the United States. As Lau (2003) states, "The loss of students returning to campus for another year usually results in a greater financial loss, and a lower graduation rate for the

institution, and might also affect the way that stakeholder, legislators, parents, and students view the institution." Low retention rates trigger several problems by discouraging potential freshmen from applying, causing outside entities to view the institution in a negative light and/or be reluctant to become involved in the school as they may see no benefit. As higher education costs rise, high retention rates are critical to the economic survival and long-term success of any university or college.

The students' enrollment in HBCUs has been increased in the last decade, and the number of black students who completed a degree in higher education is increased. However, the six-year graduation rate in 2013 remains at 32% for black students, which is 20% less than the graduation rates for white students for other four-year public and private, nonprofit colleges and universities, which is 52%. Savannah State University (SSU) is an example of HBCUs. In 2014, the graduation rate was only 32%. The purpose of this research is to identify the factors that impact the retention rate HBCU.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Bettinger and colleagues (2021) investigated national data in the US and discovered a marked decline in college enrollment rates during the pandemic, notably affecting community college attendees and students from low-income backgrounds. Some students postponed enrollment, while others discontinued entirely, underscoring the necessity for tailored support initiatives.

Xu et al. (2022) scrutinized online learning in China and observed that students with lower academic performance and weaker self-regulation abilities were more prone to reduced engagement and motivation during the pandemic, potentially leading to increased dropout rates.

Regarding the role of technology in retention, Chang et al. (2020) explored the use of chatbots for academic advising, revealing that students engaging with chatbots felt more connected to their university and content with their academic assistance, suggesting chatbots' potential in boosting student engagement and curbing attrition. Huang et al. (2021) analyzed data from a sizable university and found a correlation between students' utilization of learning analytics tools, such as progress and performance tracking, and improved retention rates, proposing these tools empower students to take charge of their learning and pinpoint areas for enhancement.

In terms of personalized support and early intervention, Zepeda et al. (2020) developed a tailored intervention program for first-generation college students, incorporating academic coaching, mentoring, and workshops on self-efficacy and study skills, resulting in higher persistence rates among participants compared to the control group. Carmona et al. (2022) assessed the effectiveness of early intervention programs across multiple universities, identifying those interventions providing academic and social support, especially when administered early in the semester, were most effective in reducing student dropout rates.

Addressing systemic challenges, Pascarella et al. (2021) examined the influence of financial aid on student retention, particularly among underrepresented groups, revealing that increased financial aid correlated with higher graduation rates, emphasizing the necessity for policies mitigating financial barriers to college success. Jones et al. (2022) investigated the connection between student debt and attrition, finding that students burdened with higher debt were more likely to drop out, advocating for initiatives to alleviate student debt and enhance financial literacy among college students.

Focusing on specific student populations, Museus et al. (2020) delved into the experiences of Black male college students, identifying factors like a sense of alienation and negative campus climate as contributors to attrition, stressing the importance of culturally responsive support programs and initiatives to cultivate a more inclusive campus atmosphere. Fernandez et al. (2022) examined the retention of community college students, pinpointing factors such as academic readiness, financial constraints, and childcare responsibilities as significant determinants of student success, underscoring the necessity for targeted support services and resources tailored to the needs of community college students.

These studies offer glimpses into recent research on college student retention and attrition. It's essential to acknowledge that research findings may vary depending on the specific context and population studied. Nevertheless, this overview offers insights into current trends and promising strategies for enhancing college student retention rates.

Natriello et al. (1987) observed the lack of consensus in defining "dropout" and noted its association with student withdrawal from an institution. The term emerged in the early twentieth century (Dorn, 1993) and encompasses various meanings, including not-retained, less maintenance, poor maintenance, not-finished, not-graduated, non-industrious, and parting (Johnes, 1997). Tannenbaum suggests that student dropouts are often labeled as sluggish, troubled youth with low motivation and an inability to meet educators' set goals.

Dekkers, Hetty, and Adrie (2001) emphasize that school attrition has become a global concern and a significant issue in tertiary education. Early school withdrawal diminishes job opportunities, increasing the likelihood of unemployment for those who leave before obtaining a qualification (Kahn, 2010). Dropouts face challenges securing well-paid jobs, leading to a negative societal perception (Rumberger, 1987).

Mayo, Helms, and Codjoe (2004) assert that higher education institutions regularly confront student dropout issues, resulting in adverse consequences such as financial strain and reduced government funding. Factors contributing to college dropouts include unfocused students, academic derailment, and engagement in juvenile behavior.

Conversely, research establishes a connection between the retention of minority students in higher education and their disadvantaged status (Tinto, 1975; Beal and Noel, 1980; Bean, 1986). Swail (1995) developed a conceptual framework, including five retention components: student services, academic services, curriculum and instruction, financial aid, and recruitment and

admission. Galloway and Swail (1999) highlighted the positive impact of specialized orientation programs and tutoring services on student retention.

Thomas, Farrow, and Martinez (1998) found that comprehensive support programs, including financial and social assistance, faculty support, and mentorship, increased graduation rates. Cox et al. (2005) identified four key components affecting retention rates: interaction with faculty, staff, and peers; clearly communicated academic expectations and requirements; learning opportunities that increase involvement with other students; and academic, social, and personal support. Osman et al. (2019) categorized factors influencing attrition into three groups: external, internal, and demographic.

Previous studies conducted Behr et al. (2021) conducted an in-depth analysis of various reasons for dropout, aiming to identify distinct categories of students who leave using cluster analysis. They discovered that the decision to drop out was influenced by a range of factors, with financial implications being one of them. bSt. John, Paulsen, and Carter, (2005), Mendez, Horton, and Mendez (2012) and Bharath (2009) and Clark (2012) demonstrated the importance of financial factors in the admission of students belonging to mid to lower socio-economic classes to higher education and without the college assistance programs to pay for the admission the students from the disadvantaged group tended to drop out at a greater rate.

Kaffenberger, Sobol, & Spindelman (2023) discovered that making the choice of early marriage and exiting education to enter the workforce is often driven by families seeking the most beneficial long-term provisions for their children, Millar (2010) indicated that marital status is one other factor impacting students' attrition, particularly for female students.

Long & Noor (2023). Find that some college students discontinued their studies due to busy work schedules, it was determined that 31% cited financial constraints as the reason for their busy work commitments, while 69% struggled with time management issues.

Also, Salisbury et al., (2012) found that the students who were working full-time have higher attrition rates than the students who were not working.

Lorenzo, Lopez, and Turon (2023) discovered that reasons such as low self-esteem, frustration, pregnancy, and others underscore the significance of their education for future improvement., Similarly, Sydow and Sandel (1998) reported about 32% dropout of students because of personal and family sickness. Gonzalez et al. (2023) , Their finding that students with poor English skills are more likely to drop-out from college , also Bynum (2010) noted that in the US, English proficiency programs had influenced students' decisions to stay in college.

Edwards (2023) finds out that high percentage of African Americans who enrolled in higher education institutions dropped-out due to race issue. Pender (2010) found that students from minority communities in the US (namely African American, Latinos, and American Indians) have higher dropout rates than other racial groups (i.e., white, and Asian students). CUNHA et al. (2023), find that high number of students who enrolled in the pharmacy degree at northeastern Brazil dropped out from the program due to the lack of Transportation. Roberts, McGill,

and Hyland (2012) indicated that the commute to the university has an impact on student attrition rate, specifically for female students.

López, Desmond, and Bruch (2010) suggested that in the US the parents' involvement in their children's education resulted in good reward which was found to have a positive effect on retention rate.

Thies, and Falk (2024) find that there is a relationship between university registration system and student drop-out, another findings by Hale and Bray (2011) Andrews, (2003) and Angelo (1990) demonstrated that the college registration unit strongly impacts retention and attrition rates. Douglas, McClelland & Davies (2008) noted that the communication with students about a modification to the course schedule and exams has a significant impact on student satisfaction and attrition.

The study from Bailey (2009) and Bailey, Jeong, & Cho (2010) supported that course assessment impacts college attrition. The research findings of Hale & Bray (2011) Andrews, (2003) and Angelo (1990) demonstrated that the college registration unit strongly impacts retention and attrition rates.

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Pascarella & Terenzini (2005 p. 394) found that the instructors and the teaching have a very high impact on retention rate of the students. The study of Green and Gilbert (1995) suggested that the use of information technology in academics helps students to improve students' which results in better retention rates. Blackmore, Douglas, and Barnes (2006) found that student's satisfaction with college services including a library, employment, and IT services, help students in continuing at the college.

Xenos, Pierrakeas, and Pintelas (2002) found in their study that the older students tend to drop out more than the younger students. Jacobs and King (2002) studied the relationship between marital status and graduation rates and noted that unmarried students without any children graduated at a higher rate than married students. Grebennikov and Shah (2012) found that international students had better retention rates than local students. Bradburn (2002) demonstrated that the students' dropout rate is higher (23%) in the first year and decreases in the following years (14 and 8 % in the second and third years respectively). Research by Lim (2001) found that students' computer skills have a positive impact on students' retention rate.

The research study conducted by Ezeala-Harrison, F. (2014) indicated that even though personal and family factors have an impact on students' retention rate, their impact is less as compared to the institutional factors. The study showed that more than 90% of the students who were included in the study expressed that the institutional factors (school's ability to provide supportive educational facilities, seriously engaged and well-qualified faculty, meaningful curricula, and others) have more impact on the retention rate.

### 3. Research Methodology

We sampled students from the four colleges that make up Savannah State University: The College of Business Administration, Alcorn State University College of Business Administration, Mississippi Valley State University Department of Business, and Jackson State University College of Business Administration. Out of an undergraduate population of approximately 1,900 students, we randomly selected 231 students to voluntarily complete a survey during their regular class time. The total sample population in this study accounts for approximately 12% of the total undergraduate population at the four institutions. A survey with a five-point Likert scale was administered to the students and they were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements listed on the survey.

We used factor analysis to analyze the collected data and identify the most important factors that can impact students' decisions to drop out from accounting and business studies at the four HBCUs institutions.

### 4. RESULTS

The initial results show that the college programs and curriculum, the courses content, instructors, and approachability of instructors and the academic support are the most important factors that impact the retention rate. While the marriage relationship, poor English language, racial tension, absence of clear policy, and employment are the least important factors that impact the retention rate.

**Table 1: Demographic Factors**

Age	31+ (3.4%)	25-30 (2.6%)	21-25 (29.3%)	17-20 (64.7%)
Marital Status	Single	(94.8%)	Married	(5.2%)
Gender	Male	(47.4%)	Female	(52.6%)
Nationality	Domestic	(91.4%)	International	(8.6%)
Year of Study	1 <sup>st</sup> yr. (35.3)	2 <sup>nd</sup> yr. (31.9%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> yr. (24.2%)	4 <sup>th</sup> yr. (8.6%)
Computer knowledge	Very good (36.2%)	Good (58.6%)	Beginner (3.4%)	No Knowledge (1.7%)
Recommend Your major to friend & family?	Yes	(71.5%)	No.	(28.5%)

Table 1 shows that 94.8% of the sample were single, and 91.4% were domestic students. Additionally, the responses regarding computer knowledge indicated that almost

95% felt they had very good or at least good knowledge in this critical ability. However, our results obtained from fourth year (senior) students comprised only 8.6% of our sample. Therefore, future research should focus on increasing the sample size of fourth-year students, aiming for a more consistent percentage across the years of study.

**Table 2: Factors Force students to Leave**

<b>Factors that would force you to leave your major before completing your degree</b>		Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Financial Problems	3.16	1.39
2	Marriage /Relationship	1.57	0.70
3	Employment -started a new job	2.00	1.02
4	Personal/family illness	3.17	1.18
5	Poor English Level	1.67	0,98
6	Racial Tension	1.90	1.12
7	Lack of transportation/car	2.15	1.14
8	Conflict with college authorities (Teachers/ Administration)	2.36	1.27
9	Absence of clear policies/ rules (Too much freedom)	2.01	1.13
10	Poor attendance/Poor Grades (failure in one or more courses)	2.58	1.40
11	Loss of interest in my major	3.20	1.46
12	Loss of seeking prestige status	2.28	1.26
13	Decrease of family involvement	3.24	1.30
14	Some other reasons for leaving the college before completing Diploma	3.11	1.34

**Table 3: Registration/ Administration factors**

<b>Registration/Admin System: I am satisfied with</b>		Mean	Standard Deviation
15	Process of Registration and Pre-Registration	3.20	1.02
16	Being able to register for courses of my own choice Being able to register without delays and without paying penalty or late registration	3.66	1.10
17	Student’s warning system	2.93	1.23
18	Announcements: Changes in course and teaching have been communicated effectively by Admin and Registration office	2.98	1.16
19	<b>Overall functionality of Registration/ Administration System</b>	3.10	1.06
21	Flexibility of timetables. (Timetable can be changed by Registrar when required i.e. individual timetables)	3.10	1.02
22	Lack of conflict between courses (have two lectures on same time of the day)	3.13	1.24

23	Lack of conflict between exams (have more than one exam on same day/ time)	3.14	1.09
24	<b>Overall Process of Scheduling/Timetables</b>	3.29	.96

**Table 4: Curriculum Factors**

<b>Curriculum Satisfaction: Course evaluation Survey (CES) I am satisfied with:</b>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
25	The program offered (matches my expectations and industry job opportunities)	3.64	1.06
26	My major has enabled me to develop transferable skills, such as communication, group work and IT.	3.74	0.92
27	My major courses are interesting	3.91	0.92
28	Courses content (are up to date subjects, texts, handouts, etc....)	3.91	0.93
29	<b>Overall, the college program and Curriculum</b>	3.73	0.94

**Table 5: Assessment and feedback**

<b>Assessments (Exams) and feedback: I am satisfied with:</b>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
30	Criteria used in marking (Grading System) are fair and clear in advance.	3.39	1.02
31	Feedback on my (Tests/Homework (received on time)	3.09	1.23
32	<b>Overall exam arrangement (time, location, exam facilities) at my college</b>	3.45	0.93
33	Instructor's knowledge and preparation.	3.86	1.11
34	Teachers approachability/availability during office hours	3.89	0.91
35	My major instructors (they care about my progress and are very helpful )	3.82	1.05
36	The learning and teaching styles, and methods used in my degree are appropriate.	3.79	1.05
37	<b>Overall, major instructors, and teaching methods</b>	3.81	0.91

**Table 6: Technology Factor**

<b>Class Room/Lab: I am satisfied with</b>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
38	Computer facilities in labs (Required programs, computers, mouse, keyboard, printers have no problems)	3.24	1.06
39	Teaching facilities in class room (PC-Projectors, Smart Class rooms)	3.66	1.06
40	Class-room size (Classes are not over crowded)	3.76	0.93

41	<b>Overall Classroom/Labs Facilities</b>	3.74	0.89
<b>Technology : I am satisfied with:</b>			
42	User-Account and E-mail services at College Network	3.72	1.08
43	Technical support(Help desk/ IT) in case of problems	3.50	1.11
44	Any other Technological facility:	3.55	1.08
45	<b>Overall College-Computer-System (Computers, Labs, Internet , IT, Tech support)</b>	3.64	1.06

**Table 7: Service, Resources factor**

<b>Service/Resources: I am satisfied with</b>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
46	Learning Resources: Library resources and services	3.73	0.90
47	Bookstore: Bookstore Services	3.72	0.99
48	Extracurricular / Recreational Services Gym / Health facilities/Social Clubs	3.77	0.90
49	Academic Support Services Sufficient advice and support on my studies (Counseling, Advising and Career Services )	3.70	0.97
50	<b>Careers Services:</b> Good advice from college has improved my career prospects	3.63	0.96
51	<b>Overall services/ resources provided</b>	3.60	0.84

**Table 8: Important Factors**

Most	Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Course contents (are up to date subjects, texts, handouts, etc....)	3.97	0.95
2	My major courses are interesting.	3.91	0.93
3	Teachers approachability/ availability during office hours	3.89	0.91
4	Instructor’s knowledge and preparation	3.86	1.11

5	My instructor cares about my progress and very helpful	3.79	1.10
6	Overall, instructor, teaching methods	3.81	0.91
7	The learning and teaching styles and methods used are appropriate	3.79	1.10
8	My major has enabled me to develop transferable skills: such as communication, group work, and IT skill	3.78	1.03
9	Extracurricular / recreational services/gym/ health facilities/ Social clubs	3.77	0.90
10	Classroom size (classes are not over crowded)	3,76	0/93

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We find that there are five external factors that can force students to drop out of the accounting program. These factors are financial problems, personal/family illness, loss of interest in the accounting major due to a wrong perception of accounting studies, lack of family involvement—this was anticipated since most of the students enrolled in the accounting program are first-generation college students—and other miscellaneous factors.

When it comes to internal factors, most of the students stated that they are satisfied with the Registration/Admin System. They stated that the only two factors they are not satisfied with regarding the Registration/ADM system are the student warning system and the announcement system. Additionally, students stated that the only two technical factors they are not satisfied with are the teaching facility and technical support. As for the accounting curriculum, university services and resources, and course instruction and teaching, these were unexpected due to the strong economy in the US.

Finally, we found that most of the students who are more likely to drop from the accounting program are single African American males in their first and second years of study.

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