

**THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR INCREASING UNDERGRADUATE
RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES
Final Report: January 2003**

Executive Summary

This report represents the work of the Joint Administration/Faculty Senate Committee on Retention of Undergraduates at GW. The Committee was charged with reviewing the 1998 Strategic Plan and reaffirming the progress made on the original recommendations, reviewing those recommendations that have not been fully accomplished and assessing the timetable for their completion, defining new goals and developing strategies to meet those goals, and determining budgetary impact of these goals.

A first-to-second year retention rate of 92% was achieved for the class entering in 1998, and the retention rate has remained constant since then.

There are no easily identifiable reasons why students choose to leave GW. Each student who leaves before graduation has a unique explanation. Analysis of previous reports, current accomplishments of retention-related activities, demographic and academic information about entering students, and reviews of current literature uncovered the following:

- On average, those students with the strongest high school academic profiles are more likely to remain at GW compared to those with the weakest academic profiles.
- Students from GW's primary recruitment market (Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) are more likely to remain at GW than those who are not from those states.
- Receiving merit- or need-based financial aid does not, in and of itself, have any bearing on retention. However, there are differences in family income and amount of aid received between those who remain and those who leave. Those who remain at GW report higher family incomes and receive, on average, larger need-based and/or merit-based packages compared to those who leave.
- Contrary to popular belief, living in Thurston Hall does not increase the likelihood of students leaving GW. A higher percentage of those who live in Thurston, HOVA, and Lafayette Residence Halls remain at GW compared to those living in other Foggy Bottom residences.
- Being involved as freshmen in a living and learning community, regardless of whether or not the community is linked to a course, has a positive impact on retention.
- None of the reasons freshmen give for choosing GW (e.g., academic reputation, location, opportunities for internships), except the availability of merit- or need-based aid, made a difference in retention.

Many of the programs recommended by the 1998 Retention Review have become part of GW's culture and have met with success. The freshmen advising programs in all the schools provide a good introduction to GW, and the identification of and intervention with at-risk students has helped improve retention. However, the Committee noted that the tracking of students and their advisors should be improved.

The following is a summary of the recommendations of the 2002-2003 Retention Review Committee:

- Activities related to BANNER degree audits and other student tracking should be completed.
- The associate deans in each school should review the processes for inter-school communication about interdisciplinary programs.

- Create an atmosphere of academic challenge and engagement. Among the suggested programs are realistic recruitment and admissions plans, more academically focused programming during CI, improved faculty-student interaction, a reputation for and delivery of a strong academic/intellectual experience, development of a school attachment or sense of community, well defined scope and sequence of advising, discussion of the economic realities for financing a GW education, and review of the concept of retention at the school level.

Based on the recommendations of the Committee, the total cost for the programs and initiatives outlined above is \$177,400 each year with an additional \$50,000 for the first year. The cost associated with specific initiatives is as follows:

- Materials and workshops for faculty development: \$15,000 per year.
- A half-time position for CIDD to continue activities for faculty that would otherwise be suspended during the conversion from Prometheus to Blackboard: \$42,000 per year (Salary, fringe benefits, operating expenses).
- Replicating SBPM's community-establishing efforts in other schools: \$10,000 per school (\$50,000 for startup support with the schools absorbing the cost in the future).
- One FTE manager/coordinator for University advisors: \$58,800 per year, including support of a listserv.
- The cost for implementing CAPP is already included in the university budget; however, a FTE position would facilitate testing and maintenance of BANNER data: \$61,600 per year.