

**First-Year Student Attrition at Ohio University 2003-04 to 2004-05:**

**A Comprehensive Analysis of Reasons for First-Year**

**(Freshman) Student Withdrawal at Ohio University**

- **Survey of Leavers**
- **Freshmen Involvement Study**
- **National Survey of Student Engagement**

**Office of Institutional Research**

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## First-Year Student Attrition at Ohio University Executive Summary

- Annual first-year (freshman) student retention studies done at Ohio University identify characteristics of students who return for their second year (stayers) and students who leave Ohio University (leavers). Although these studies identify characteristics of students who are more likely to either stay or leave, they do not address the reasons students leave Ohio University before their second year. In fall quarter 2004 the Office of Institutional Research conducted a survey of the fall 2003 freshmen who did not return for fall 2004. Also, stayers and leavers are compared from responses to the Freshmen Involvement Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement.
- Of the 563 leavers surveyed, 32 percent responded to a questionnaire sent to their last known address. The questionnaire asked respondents to report their current status, select their major and minor reasons for not returning to Ohio University. Also, in open-ended questions, respondents were asked to report reasons in their own words for their leaving Ohio University.
- Personal adjustment reasons, cost and financial aid, and negative campus experiences were identified from a list of 48 potential reasons, as the reasons that influenced their decision to leave Ohio University.
- Respondents were asked what they are currently doing. Eighty-two percent said they were attending college elsewhere. Ohio State University, Kent State University and Wright State University were mentioned most frequently.
- The National Survey of Student Engagement was administered to a sample of first-year students in the winter/spring 2004 to assess the academic, social and personal engagement of students. Twenty-five percent of the students responded. Comparisons were made between students who returned to Ohio University the next fall 2004 (stayers) and non-returning students (leavers).
- The Student Involvement Survey of all first-year students living in the residence halls in spring quarter 2004 was done to assess students' academic involvement, social involvement, and goal commitment. Eighty-two percent of the students responded. As was done with the 2004 NSSE results, comparisons were also made with Involvement results between stayers and leavers.
- Stayers reported having more engagement and more frequent academically-oriented contacts with faculty than leavers. Stayers also reported having more frequent career-related contacts with faculty and also reported spending more time studying.
- Stayers reported more social involvement on campus than leavers, such as outings with friends, attending cultural events, participating in extracurricular activities, and spending more weekends on campus.
- Stayers reported stronger goal commitment and satisfaction than leavers did.

Findings from Ohio University's retention studies, "Factors Associated with First-Year (Freshman) Student Withdrawal at Ohio University," showed that campus-wide retention has decreased about 1% per year over the last three years. Annual first-year student retention studies done at Ohio University identify characteristics of groups of first-year students who return for their second year (stayers) and students who do not return (leavers). These studies do not address the question of why students leave Ohio University before their second year. In fall quarter 2004, the Office of Institutional Research conducted a survey to assess why the fall 2003 first-year students did not return for fall 2004. In addition, these students' responses to the First-Year Involvement study and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) are presented. Comparisons in student involvement and engagement between stayers and leavers are made to help better understand retention and attrition.

Different methods are employed in this report. One disadvantage of doing a survey of leavers is that the students who leave may be disenfranchised with the institution, and therefore low responses rates leading to low validity of the responses can be an issue. Despite the disadvantages of non-returning student surveys, they can provide valuable information, after the fact and when combined with other information obtained from surveying students while they are still enrolled (e.g. Student Involvement Study and National Survey of Student Engagement), it can provide a way to converge sources of information so that we can better understand the complexities of student attrition and retention. For this reason the Office of Institutional Research presents the findings of both the Non-Returning Student Survey as well as comparisons in Student Involvement Study and NSSE responses between stayers and leavers in this report.

### **NonReturning Student Survey**

A new questionnaire was developed to identify factors that influenced students' decisions to leave Ohio University. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. First, respondents were asked to select their current status, i.e. whether they left the university temporarily or permanently and if they permanently transferred to another institution, they were also asked to name that institution. Second, respondents were asked to identify the major and minor reasons that influenced their decision to leave Ohio University. Third, in open-ended questions, respondents were asked about other factors related to their leaving Ohio University. A copy of the questionnaire is at the end of this report.

A total of 3,672 new first-year (freshman) students entered Ohio University's Athens campus as degree-seeking students in fall quarter 2003. As of fall quarter 2004, 649 or 18 percent of these students did not return to Ohio University. Eighty-six (13%) of the 649 nonreturning students were not sent surveys as these students were suspended from the university for either disciplinary or academic reasons. There were 20 suspended for judicial reasons and 66 dismissed for academic reasons, combined for 2.3% of the total class. Of the 563 leavers surveyed, 32 percent responded to a questionnaire sent to their last known address. Although slightly more females than males responded, the responses were generally representative of the population in the major and minor reasons for leaving Ohio University.

#### **Current Status of Nonreturning Students**

When asked what they were doing after leaving Ohio University, 82 percent said they were attending college elsewhere, while 18 percent said they had only left the university temporarily. Ohio State University, Kent State University and Wright State University were

mentioned most frequently as the other institution. These institutions were also identified by data received from the National Student Clearinghouse “Enrollment Search.”

### Reasons for Leaving Ohio University

Students were asked to select from a list of 48 possible reasons, the major and minor reasons for leaving Ohio University. The results of the reasons for leaving Ohio University are presented in Figure 1. The major and minor reasons for leaving Ohio University were combined to create a "total reason" percentage for each potential reason item. Figure 1 shows the distribution of these reasons for the respondents. Of the top six (major and minor combined) reasons for leaving Ohio University four were personal adjustment-related reasons. The third highest reason was the cost of attending OU, while the fifth reason was the disappointment with the rural/small town location of OU. Insufficient financial aid or student employment, drug/alcohol abuse and excessive social life, and disappointment with residence hall, social life, and quality of instruction, academic program, and advising were also frequently selected.

### Students' Major Reasons Leaving Ohio University

The list of potential reason items by just the major reason percentage produced a slightly different ordering of the potential reason items. While the top five reasons for leaving OU remained in the top five, the order was slightly shuffled. For example, the top major reason for leaving OU was the disappointment with the rural/small town location of OU, while that was only the fifth highest total reason for leaving OU.

### Principal Components Analysis

A principal components analysis was performed on the data to identify commonalities in the reasons non-returning students indicated they left. This analysis did identify four common themes. The first component was personal-adjustment reasons including homesick, didn't fit in

at OU, had trouble adjusting personally to OU, etc. A second component was financial reasons which included items such as cost of attending OU, financial aid in general was insufficient, school conflicted with employment, etc. Atmosphere was a third theme and consisted of items including disappointed in the quality of the residence halls, drug and alcohol abuse on campus, and other students were not friendly or supportive. A fourth component was academic reasons and consisted of items such as academic advising was inadequate, closed out of courses I wanted/needed, and disappointed in the quality of the program in my major.

### **Engagement of Stayers and Leavers**

Recent studies have shown that student engagement is related to attrition and retention. The following is a summary of first-year students' responses to the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Comparisons are made between stayers and leavers. In Winter and Spring 2004, a sample of first-year students were given the NSSE. Twenty-five percent of the students responded. The questionnaire collected information about the students' academic and intellectual experiences, mental activities, enriching educational experiences, quality of relationships, time usage, institutional environment, educational and personal growth, academic advising and satisfaction. Stayers and leavers were identified by whether or not they returned in fall 2004. Most NSSE questions ask students how frequently they do these attitudes, and item means are produced. A higher item mean indicates more engagement.

Table 1 provides mean comparisons of stayers and leavers on all 60 items from the 2004 NSSE questionnaire. With one exception, the means of the returning students were greater than the means of the leavers on 59 of the 60 items.

Figure 1

**2003-04 NonReturning Freshmen Survey  
Major & Minor Reasons for Leaving OU**

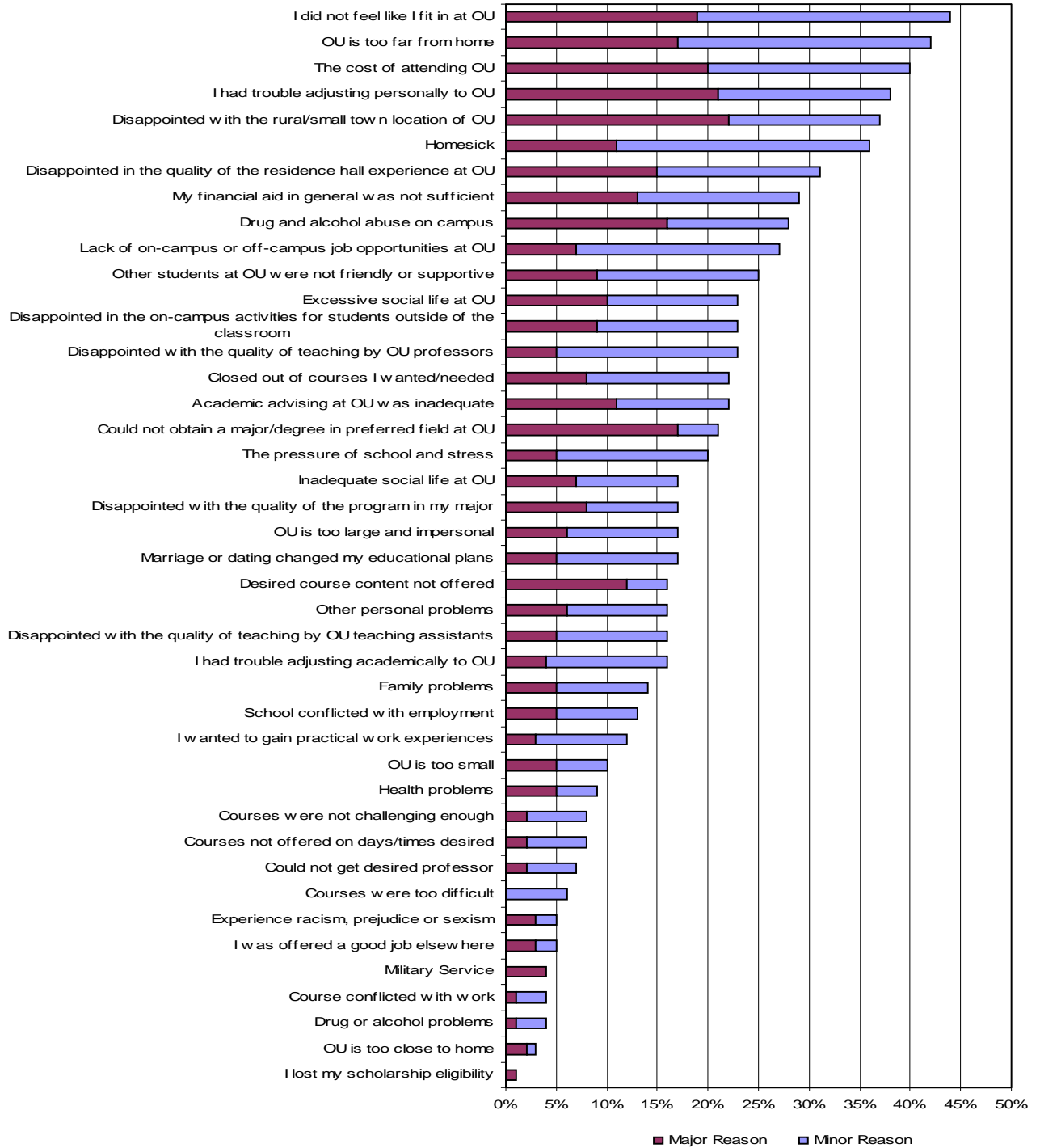


Table 1  
Ohio University National Survey of Student Engagement Study 2003-04  
Stayers and Leavers Compared

	Enrolled		Not Enrolled		Mean Diff.
	N	Mean	N	Mean	
	<i>1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often (scale for questions 1a through 1o)</i>				
1a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	446	2.59	47	2.38	0.20
1b. Made a class presentation	446	2.00	47	1.89	0.11
1c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	446	2.56	47	2.53	0.02
1d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	446	2.83	47	2.60	0.23
1e. Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	446	2.57	47	2.30	0.28
1f. Come to class without completing readings or assignments	445	2.05	47	2.11	(0.06)
1g. Worked with other students on projects DURING CLASS	445	2.20	47	2.09	0.11
1h. Worked with classmates OUTSIDE OF CLASS to prepare class assignments	445	2.22	47	2.15	0.07
1i. Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions	445	2.36	47	2.15	0.22
1j. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	445	1.53	47	1.49	0.04
1k. Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course	444	1.31	47	1.32	(0.01)
1l. Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment	444	2.71	47	2.49	0.22
1m. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	444	3.08	47	2.94	0.14
1n. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	444	2.43	47	2.26	0.17
1o. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	444	2.10	47	1.94	0.16
	<i>1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often (scale for questions 1p through 1v)</i>				
1p. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	444	1.68	47	1.66	0.02
1q. Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)	444	2.55	47	2.40	0.15

Table 1 (cont.)

	<b>Enrolled</b>		<b>Not Enrolled</b>		<b>Mean Diff.</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
1r. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	444	2.47	47	2.28	0.19
1s. Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	443	1.39	47	1.26	0.14
1t. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	444	2.65	47	2.34	0.31
1u. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	443	2.30	47	2.11	0.19
1v. Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	442	2.78	47	2.53	0.25
<i>1=Very little, 2=Some, 3=Quite a bit, 4=Very Much (Scale for questions 2a through 2e)</i>					
2a. Coursework emphasized: MEMORIZING facts, ideas or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	444	3.06	47	2.91	0.15
2b. Coursework emphasized: ANALYZING the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	444	3.10	47	2.70	0.40
2c. Coursework emphasized: SYNTHESIZING and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	444	2.74	47	2.45	0.30
2d. Coursework emphasized: MAKING JUDGMENTS about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	444	2.76	47	2.47	0.29
2e. Coursework emphasized: APPLYING theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	444	3.05	47	2.66	0.39
<i>1=very little to 7=very much (Scale for question 3)</i>					
3. Mark the box that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year challenged you to do your best work.	418	5.56	45	5.13	0.42
<i>1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often (Scale for questions 6a through 6c)</i>					
6a. Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance	423	2.10	44	2.07	0.03
6b. Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities	423	2.98	44	2.82	0.16
6c. Participated in activities to enhance your spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.)	423	1.78	44	1.70	0.07
<i>1=unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation to 7=friendly, supportive, sense of belonging (Scale for question 8a)</i>					
8a. Quality: Your relationships with other students	423	5.82	44	4.77	1.04

Table 1 (cont.)

	<b>Enrolled</b>		<b>Not Enrolled</b>		<b>Mean Diff.</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
8b. Quality: Your relationships with faculty members	423	5.30	44	4.80	0.51
	<i>1=unavailable, unhelpful, unsympathetic to 7=available, helpful, sympathetic (Scale for question 8b)</i>				
8c. Quality: Your relationships with administrative personnel and offices	423	4.90	44	4.52	0.38
	<i>1=unhelpful, inconsiderate, rigid to 7=helpful, considerate, flexible (Scale for question 8c)</i>				
10a. Institutional emphasis: Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	401	3.01	42	2.93	0.08
	<i>1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much (Scale for questions 10a and 10g)</i>				
10b. Institutional emphasis: Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	401	2.95	42	2.48	0.47
10c. Institutional emphasis: Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	401	2.46	41	1.83	0.63
10d. Institutional emphasis: Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	401	1.94	41	1.44	0.50
10e. Institutional emphasis: Providing the support you need to thrive socially	401	2.37	41	1.83	0.54
10f. Institutional emphasis: Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)	401	2.75	41	2.12	0.63
10g. Institutional emphasis: Using computers in academic work	401	3.39	41	3.10	0.29
	<i>1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much (Scale for questions 11a and 11p)</i>				
11a. Institutional contribution: Acquiring a broad general education	401	3.13	41	2.63	0.50
11b. Institutional contribution: Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	401	2.57	41	2.17	0.40
11c. Institutional contribution: Writing clearly and effectively	401	2.85	41	2.37	0.48
11d. Institutional contribution: Speaking clearly and effectively	401	2.62	41	2.20	0.42
11e. Institutional contribution: Thinking critically and analytically	401	3.16	41	2.71	0.45
11f. Institutional contribution: Analyzing quantitative problems	401	2.59	41	2.24	0.35
11g. Institutional contribution: Using computing and information technology	401	2.87	41	2.24	0.62
11h. Institutional contribution: Working effectively with others	401	2.74	41	2.24	0.50
11i. Institutional contribution: Voting in local, state, or national elections	401	2.08	41	1.61	0.47
11j. Institutional contribution: Learning effectively on your own	401	2.96	41	2.63	0.33
11k. Institutional contribution: Understanding yourself	401	2.76	41	2.41	0.35

Table 1 (cont.)

	<b>Enrolled</b>		<b>Not Enrolled</b>		<b>Mean Diff.</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
11l. Institutional contribution: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	401	2.37	41	1.73	0.63
11m. Institutional contribution: Solving complex real-world problems	401	2.46	41	1.83	0.63
11n. Institutional contribution: Developing a personal code of values and ethics	401	2.52	41	1.93	0.60
11o. Institutional contribution: Contributing to the welfare of your community	401	2.10	41	1.80	0.29
11p. Institutional contribution: Developing a deepened sense of spirituality	401	1.86	41	1.44	0.42
	<i>1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent (Scale for questions 12 and 13)</i>				
12. Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?	402	2.92	41	2.61	0.31
13. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?	402	3.27	41	2.68	0.59
	<i>1=definitely no, 2=probably no, 3=probably yes, 4=definitely yes (Scale for question 14)</i>				
14. If you could start over again, would you go to the SAME INSTITUTION you are now attending?	402	3.45	41	2.46	0.99

### **Involvement of Stayers and Leavers**

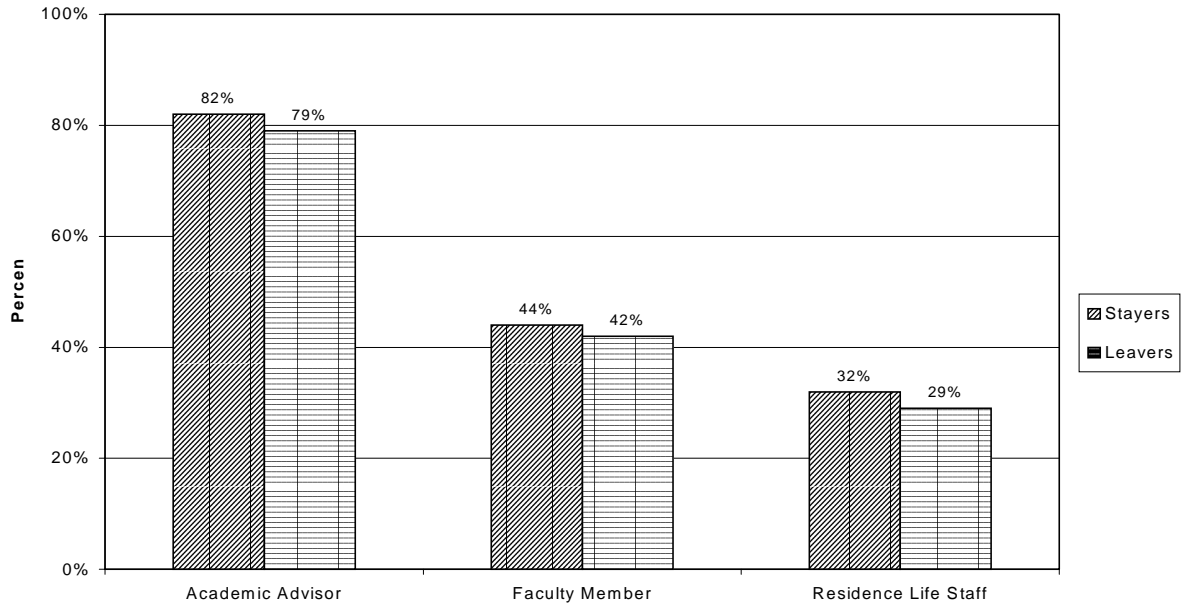
Many studies have shown that student involvement is related to attrition and retention. The following is a summary of fall 2003 first-year students' responses to Ohio University's Involvement Study. Comparisons are made between stayers and leavers. In Winter 2004, all new first-year students living in the residence halls were given the Student Involvement Questionnaire. Eighty-two percent of the students responded. The questionnaire collected information about the students' academic involvement (contacts with faculty and staff and participation in academic activities), social involvement (social-peer involvement and participation in activities), and student satisfaction and goal commitment. Stayers and leavers were identified by whether or not they returned in fall 2004.

#### **Academic Involvement**

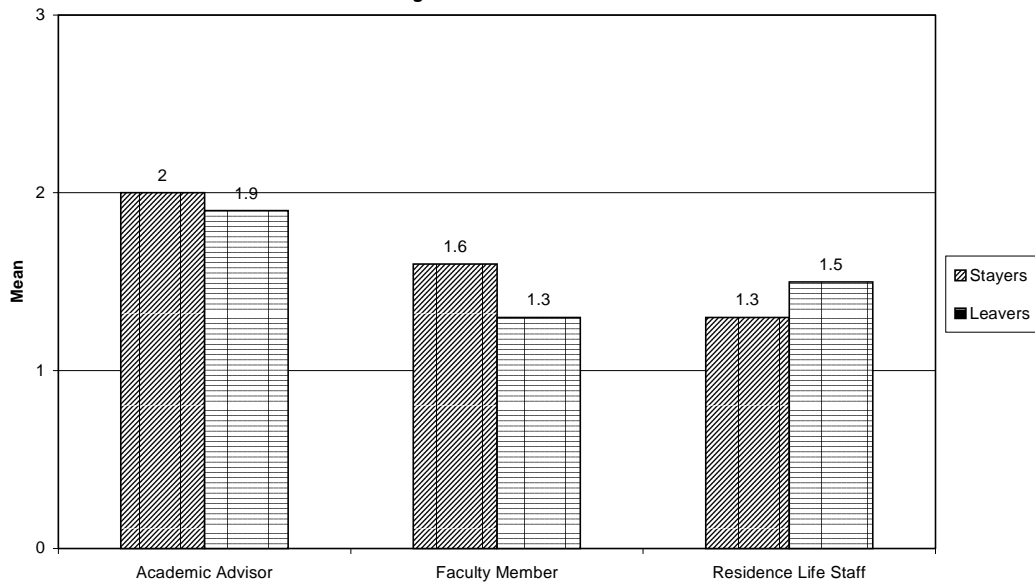
Students were asked to indicate how many conversations about educational plans, problems, or progress they had with their academic advisor, faculty, and Residence Life staff during the academic year. Figure 3 shows the percentages of stayers and leavers who said they had any of these contacts. Figure 4 shows the average numbers of contacts for stayers and leavers. The large number of contacts by Residence Life Staff for leavers may be due to the early involvement intervention, which targeted some of these students as high risk for attrition.

Students were also asked how many social contacts with faculty they had during the academic year and how many times they talked with a career advisor or attended a career program. Figure 5 shows the percentages of stayers and leavers who said they had any social or career contacts. The average numbers of contacts for stayers and leavers are presented in Figure 6.

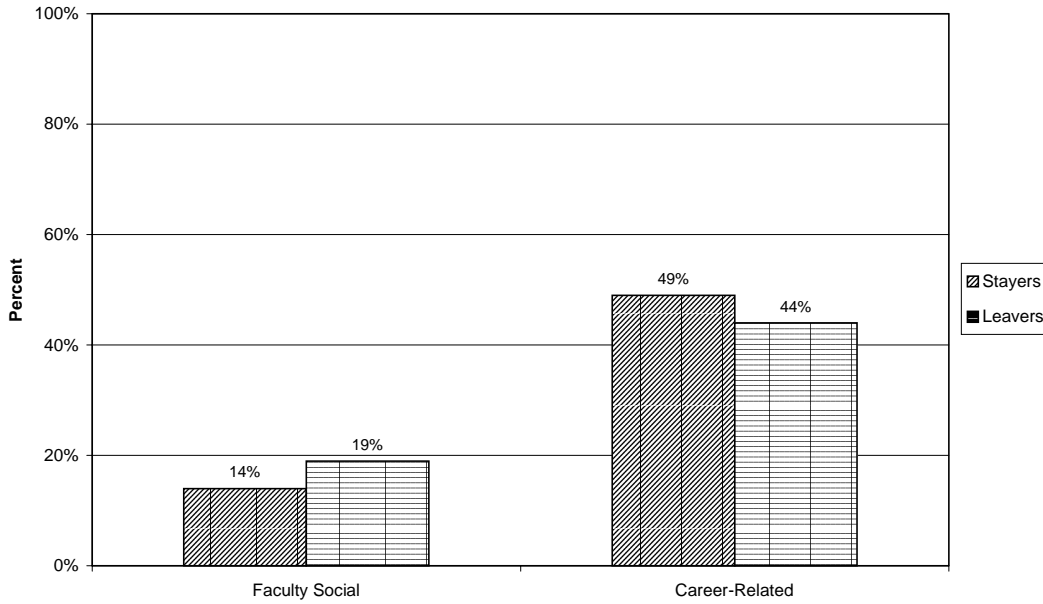
**Figure 3**  
**Conversations Per Year**  
**Percent Responding Positively**



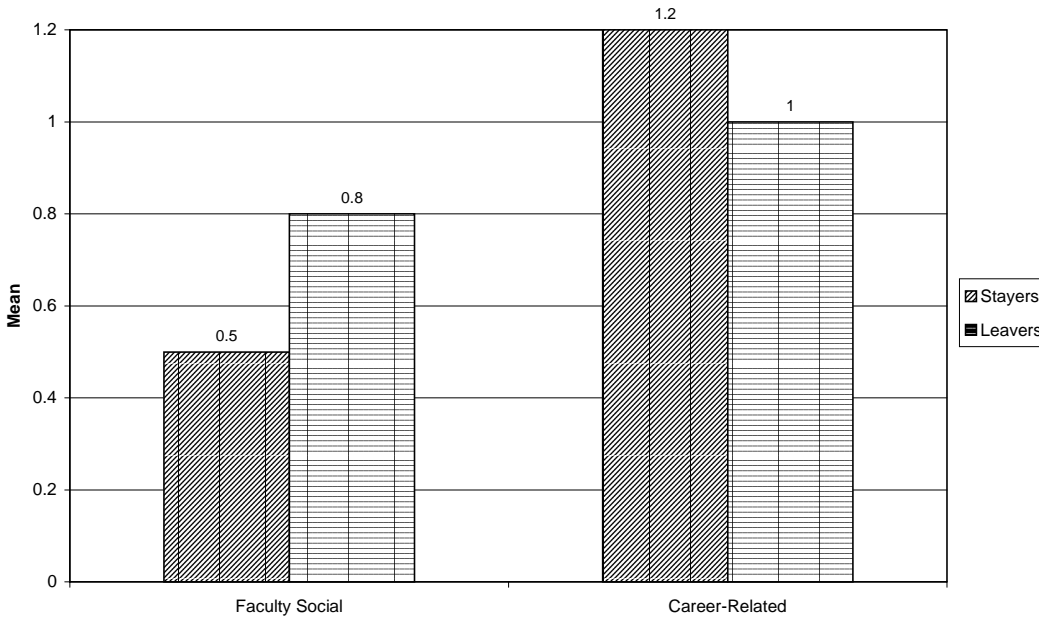
**Figure 4**  
**Conversations Per Year**  
**Average Number of Conversations**



**Figure 5**  
**Contacts Per Year**  
**Percent Reporting Any Contacts**



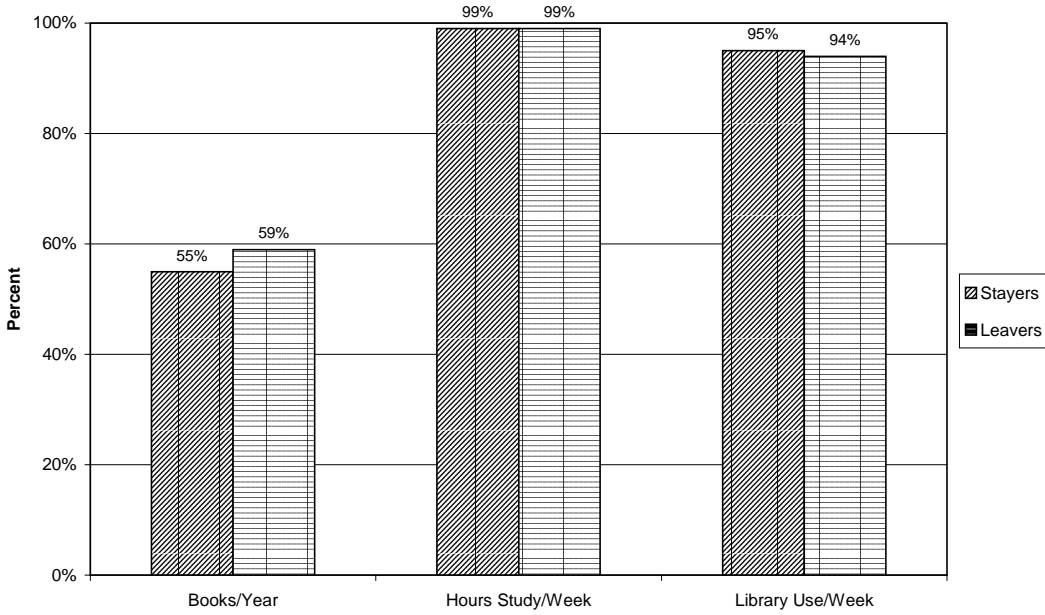
**Figure 6**  
**Contacts Per Year**  
**Average Number of Contacts**



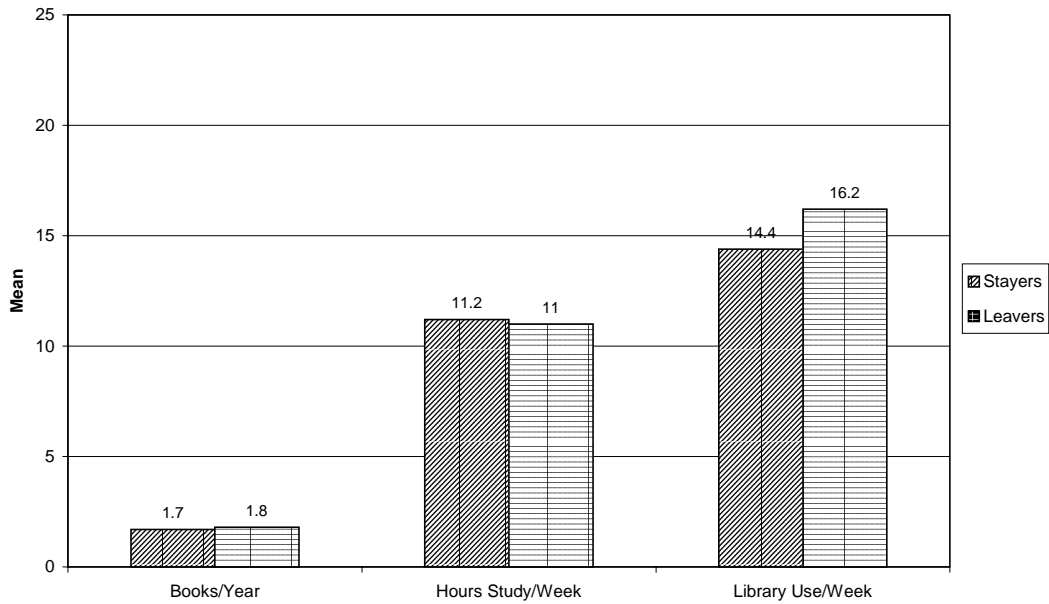
Students were asked how many books outside of class they read per year, how many hours per week they spent studying, and how many times they had been to the library during the academic year. Figure 7 shows the number of stayers and leavers who said they read any books,

studied at all, and made any trips to the library. Figure 8 shows the average numbers of books

**Figure 7**  
Academic Activities  
Percent Reporting Any Activities



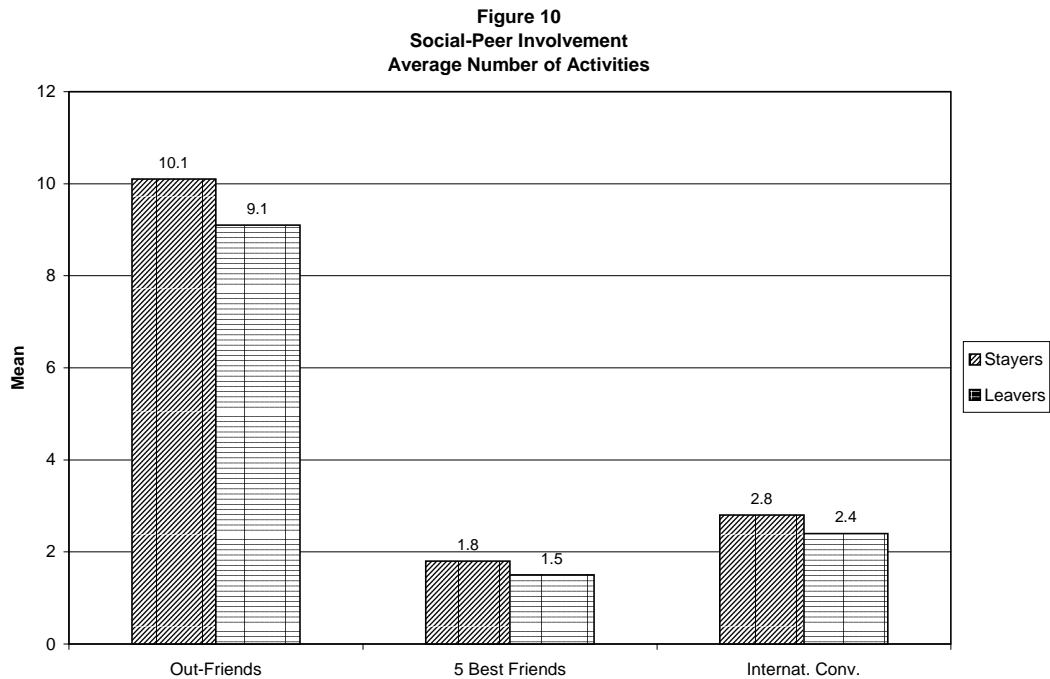
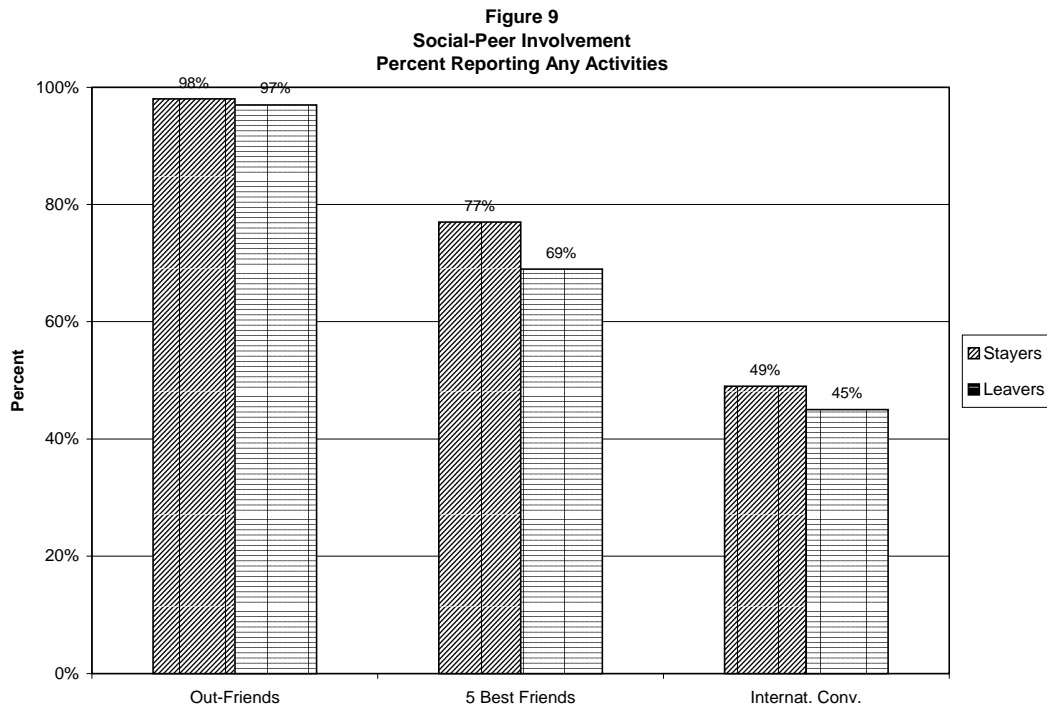
**Figure 8**  
Academic Activities  
Average Number of Activities



read, hours spent studying, and trips to the library for stayers and leavers.

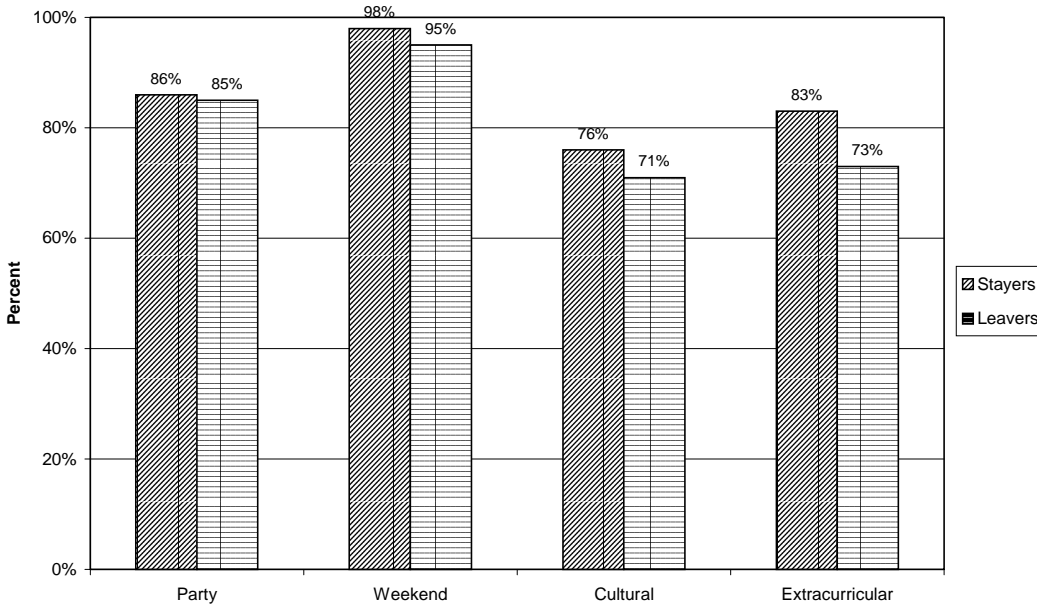
Social Involvement

Students were asked how many outings with friends they had per month, how many of their five best friends attend Ohio University, and how many conversations with international students they had per month. Figure 9 shows the number of stayers and leavers who said they had any of these contacts. Figure 10 shows the average numbers of these contacts.

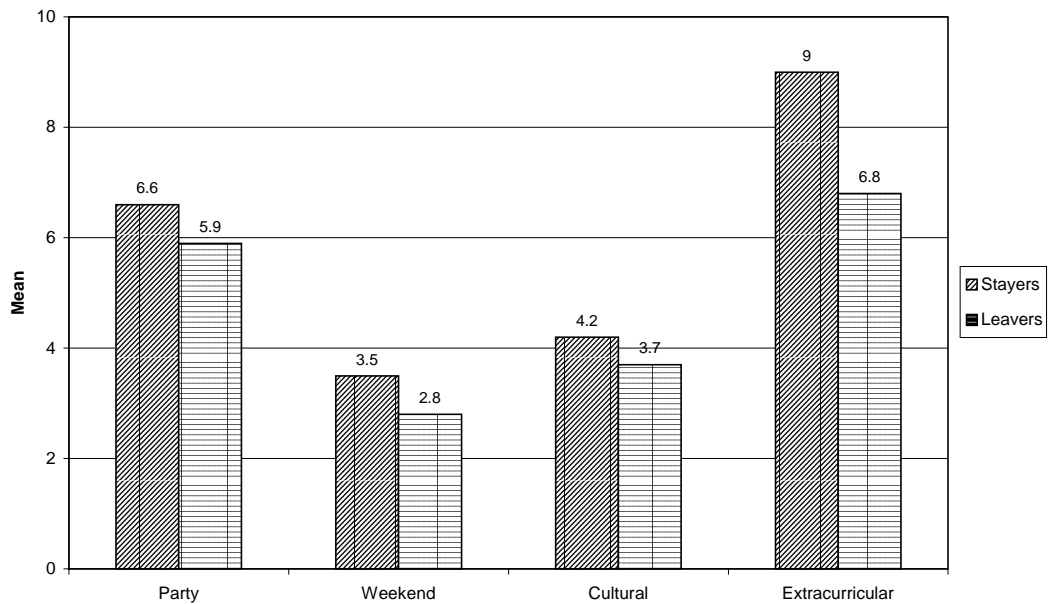


Students were asked how many parties per month they attended, how many weekends per month they spent on campus, how many cultural events per year they attended, and how many extracurricular activities they participated in. Figure 11 shows the number of students who said they participated in any social activities. Figure 12 shows the average number of activities.

**Figure 11**  
**Social Activities**  
**Percent Reporting Any Activities**



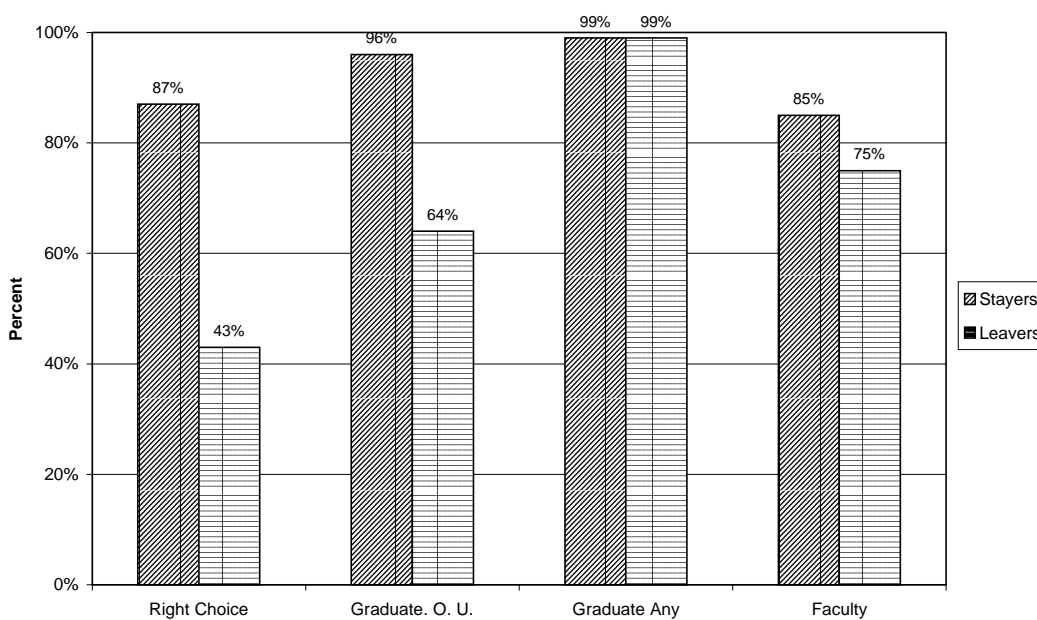
**Figure 12**  
**Social Activities**  
**Percent Reporting Any Activities**



### Satisfaction and Goal Commitment

Students were asked how sure they were that they made the right choice in attending Ohio University, how important it was for them to graduate from Ohio University, and how important it was for them to graduate from any university. Students were also asked to rate the quality of instruction at Ohio University. Figure 13 shows the percentages of stayers and leavers

**Figure 13**  
**Satisfaction and Commitment**  
**Percent Responding Positively**



who responded positively to each of these four questions.

### Importance and Satisfaction

Questions 22 through 58 of the involvement questionnaire has two parts. First, students were asked to rate how important each item listed was to them here at Ohio University. The scale ranged from 1 (very important) to 5 (not at all important). Second, students were asked to rate how satisfied they were with each item. The scale ranged from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (not at all satisfied). The responses were collapsed according to very important (1) and somewhat important (2) and very satisfied (1) and somewhat satisfied (2) to give a total importance and

satisfaction percentage for each item. In addition, the percent differences in importance and satisfaction between stayers and leavers are presented.

These items are presented below in Table 2 according to stayers' and leavers' responses.

Table 2  
2003-04 First-Year (Freshman) Involvement Study  
Stayers and Leavers Compared

	%	%	%	%	%	%
	Important	Important	% Satisfied	% Satisfied	Difference	Difference
<b>Social Involvement</b>	Stayers	Leavers	Stayers	Leavers	In Important	In Satisfied
Peer Relationships	93%	88%	82%	68%	5%	14%
Close Friends	93%	84%	82%	67%	9%	15%
Student Organizations	59%	39%	46%	27%	20%	19%
Campus Activities	55%	42%	44%	29%	13%	15%
Cultural Events	35%	26%	34%	27%	9%	7%
International Students	31%	23%	28%	26%	8%	2%
Different Races	55%	46%	43%	37%	9%	6%
Religious Activities	36%	27%	34%	30%	9%	4%
Having a Job	40%	46%	31%	30%	-6%	1%
<b>Academic Involvement</b>						
Major Course	91%	84%	71%	58%	7%	13%
Non-Major Course	83%	82%	67%	58%	1%	9%
Faculty Availability	82%	77%	66%	57%	5%	9%
Faculty Social Contacts	55%	48%	43%	33%	7%	10%
Academic Advising	84%	74%	60%	44%	10%	16%
<b>Campus Atmosphere</b>						
Personal Security	87%	85%	81%	72%	2%	9%
Physical Environment	88%	82%	82%	70%	6%	12%
Social Atmosphere	89%	84%	80%	62%	5%	18%
Academic Atmosphere	88%	81%	77%	63%	7%	14%
Fit into Community	85%	76%	75%	53%	9%	22%
<b>Personal Goals</b>						
Personal Goals	94%	90%	83%	67%	4%	16%
Academic Goals	93%	90%	80%	67%	3%	13%
Career Goals	92%	89%	74%	60%	3%	14%
Adjust Academically	92%	88%	78%	63%	4%	15%
Adjust Socially	90%	85%	78%	60%	5%	18%
Adjust Emotionally	88%	84%	76%	57%	4%	19%
Managing Stress	88%	84%	66%	56%	4%	10%
Develop Self-Esteem	84%	79%	70%	58%	5%	12%
Develop Values/Beliefs	83%	78%	73%	61%	5%	12%
Develop Life Philosophy	73%	69%	62%	50%	4%	12%
Develop Spiritually	63%	57%	56%	42%	6%	14%
Academic Motivation	88%	83%	74%	62%	5%	12%
Academic Achievement	89%	85%	75%	63%	4%	12%
Interested in Studies	90%	87%	72%	60%	3%	12%

## Discussion

Ohio University's campus wide retention has decreased about 1% per year over the last three years from 85% in 2000 to 82% in 2003. Annual first-year student retention studies done at Ohio University identify characteristics of groups of first-year students who return for their second year (stayers) and students who do not return (leavers). Because these studies do not address the question of why students leave Ohio University before their second year, the Office of Institutional Research designed a comprehensive study to assess why some students decide not to return. In this study the results of the 2004 Non-Returning Survey are presented as well as a comparison between stayers' and leavers' responses to the First-Year Involvement study and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In order to better understand the complexities of student attrition and retention, therefore, this study both assesses student opinions while they were still enrolled at OU as well as their opinions after making the decision to not return.

Findings from this study indicate that students who leave and those who return have very different perceptions about what Ohio University's institutional environment emphasizes, how students' educational experiences have contributed to their personal and educational development and then how these contributed to their inability to adjust to college at Ohio University. Understanding the complexity in this finding begins with a more detailed look at the results in Table 1 – NSSE Stayers and Leavers Compared. Mean differences in the institutional emphasis section of the NSSE (items 10a. through 10f.) were all significant. Leavers reported that OU placed less emphasis than stayers on all items, suggesting that OU was not providing them with an environment that was supportive of their needs. Furthermore, the mean differences in the institutional contribution to educational and personal growth (items 11a. through 11p.)

section were all significant. Compared to the stayers, leavers were reporting more personal and educational growth. Looking at Table 2 – First Year (Freshmen) Involvement Study Stayers and Leavers Compared in more detail presents similar results as were found with the NSSE data. With the exception of “Having a Job,” leavers reported less satisfaction with their social involvement, academic involvement, campus atmosphere and personal goals at OU than the stayers.

Results from both NSSE and the First-Year (Freshmen) Involvement Study indicated that leavers are not as satisfied as stayers with the institutional environment or institutional contribution to their educational and personal development. The results from the 2004 Non-Returning Student Survey further illustrate this point. Of the top ten reported major and minor reasons for leaving Ohio University, six (I did not feel like I fit in at OU, I had trouble adjusting personally to OU, disappointed with the rural/small town location of OU, homesick, disappointed in the quality of the residence hall experience at OU, drug and alcohol abuse on campus and lack of on-campus or off-campus job opportunities) were either adjustment or environmental issues.

Ohio University is not meeting the academic and social needs of students who leave within the first year. Evidence to support this conclusion can be found from both the results of surveys of currently enrolled students (NSSE and First-Year Involvement) and the results of the Non-returning Survey. Ways to better meet the needs of our students to assist in increasing campus wide retention rates may include early intervention of at-risk students, increasing services to larger classes of freshmen, developing more learning communities, focusing more on student socialization and adjustment, and providing more student support.