



2005-01-01

# Why are Students Leaving and What can we do to Stop Them?

Ann Conway

*Dublin Institute of Technology*, [ann.conway@dit.ie](mailto:ann.conway@dit.ie)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.dit.ie/tfschhmtcon>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Conway, A. (2005) Why are Students Leaving and What can we do to Stop Them? Paper presented at the Learning and Teaching Showcase, Dublin Institute of Technology, Kevin Street, February 2005.

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism at ARROW@DIT. It has been accepted for inclusion in Other resources by an authorized administrator of ARROW@DIT. For more information, please contact [yvonne.desmond@dit.ie](mailto:yvonne.desmond@dit.ie), [arrow.admin@dit.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@dit.ie), [brian.widdis@dit.ie](mailto:brian.widdis@dit.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)



# Why are students leaving and what can we do to stop them?

A case study of dropout students and current students of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, Dublin Institute of Technology

Presented by Ann Conway, DIT, Kevin Street, Dublin, 2005

# Research

---

- ▶ Literature search
- ▶ Talked to personnel in the Retention Office, DIT
- ▶ Talked to tutor of the Diploma course
- ▶ Approached class rep for assistance
- ▶ Interviews with ex students (individual cases)
- ▶ Interviews with current students (focus groups)



# Background to Retention/ Dropout

---

## ▶ Yorke

- ▶ Poor quality of the student experience
- ▶ Inability to cope
- ▶ Unhappy with college/ university and its environment
- ▶ Wrong choice
- ▶ Financial difficulties
- ▶ Unhappy with support within the institute



# Background cont.....

---

- ▶ Meyer and Shanahan, APU Research, Griffith University, Australia
  - ▶ Students misperceive the amount of work involved
  - ▶ Wrong course choice
  - ▶ New learning strategies (i.e. independent learning)
  - ▶ Culture shock
  - ▶ Self image



# Background cont....

---

- ▶ **Costello and other DIT Retention Reports**
  - ▶ Lack of motivation and commitment
  - ▶ Wrong course choice
  - ▶ 85% of those who failed to complete or withdrew did so during their first year
  - ▶ More time spent working meant less time involved with learning
  - ▶ Poor attendance record related to work and non-involvement
  - ▶ Poor academic ability
  - ▶ Need for support networks



# Student Dropout and Retention

---

- ▶ *Retention is the process of helping students to meet their needs so they will persist in their education toward the achievement of educational aims they value.*
- ▶ *Retention can achieve this through the assembling of supports that enable students to be successful and the lowering or elimination of those factors that can disrupt the students' education and that can ultimately result in their failure to achieve these educational aims they want.*
- ▶ *(Moxley, Anwar and Dumbrigue, 2001; 37).*



# Transition to HE needs support....

---

- ▶ **At induction time** – including teaching staff, student supports services etc.
- ▶ **With the proper support network** – retention office, chaplaincy, careers service, student officers.
- ▶ **With the right academic ability and preconceptions having chosen the right course** – requires proper marketing and networking with second level colleges and PLC's.



# Understanding why students leave is important because .....

---

- ▶ Dropping out or leaving causes stress, financial loss, feelings of underachievement and failure
- ▶ Loss of students affects the economic viability of courses, jobs and institutes
- ▶ It will happen!



# Research was carried out through....

---

- ▶ Initial focus group interviews to understand the state of the retention issue in the Diploma
- ▶ Individual case studies of students who left
- ▶ Focus group interviews of students who were left on the course.



---

## **So why do students leave?**

(the following findings follow a FEDA report outline by Martinez and Munday, 1998)





Pre-entry guidance &  
admissions procedures



# Student responses....

---

- ▶ *I didn't really know much about the course, but I put it down on the CAO [application form] and then I got it. The prospectus has to be more detailed.*
- ▶ *Well I had no 'push'. It was all left up to yourself. I guess I was a bit immature and I had no motivation.*
- ▶ *It [CAO form] was filled out too early in school and I hadn't a clue what I was going to do.*





# Curriculum, teaching and learning



## Student responses .....

---

- ▶ *I was really looking forward to starting college and meeting new friends and people. The first couple of weeks are important. The first year can be tough.*
  
- ▶ *The induction days were really good...and the event that was great fun, but no the reason I've left was because when I got in to the subjects I just really didn't like it,*





# Student supports



# Student responses ....

---

- ▶ *....this was helped in a big way with the student union and their social events. This was really good in 2001-2002. It was crap in 2002-2003.*
- ▶ *Oh yeah, that would have been a much better option if I had been more financially secure. If I didn't need my salary every month, if I could have survived on half of it then absolutely I'd still be here.*



# Some insights into the “case studies”

---

- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> year dropout student from an urban area
- ▶ 2<sup>nd</sup> year deferral who eventually left, from an urban area
- ▶ 3<sup>rd</sup> year transferral, from a rural area; 1<sup>st</sup> year in the part time course who eventually left
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> year progression student having left another course, from a rural area
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> year dropout student from an urban area who ended up getting a place on her desired course
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> year dropout student from an urban area who got a place on a different course
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> year dropout student from an urban area who never attended classes



# So what can we do to help?

---

1. **Getting to know** our students is important and this is assisted through induction
2. Study programs and **'Buddy'** systems can help prevent isolation and stress developing
3. Becoming **motivated ourselves** helps students feel they are in the right place
4. **Student-lecturer interaction** outside of the classroom through social networks
5. **Student support networks** need to be more obvious and open to the student.



## So what can we do to help? Cont .....

---

6. Liaising with secondary schools is important
7. Allocation of lecturers as tutors can help alleviate problems before they start
8. Attendance and tracking of students can highlight a problem before it starts
9. Recognition of the individual needs of students
10. Course information must improve as a lot of the students indicated that they expected something different from what they received from the course.



# Some research recommendations

---

- ▶ Surveys could be staggered throughout the year to pinpoint what happens to students that triggers their choice of staying or leaving
- ▶ Retention studies must be focused on a course-by-course basis
- ▶ It must be noted that a move to make this course a degree from September 2004 may impact on the retention, dropout or progression rate of this course from now on and therefore this study should continue.



# Conclusions

---

- ▶ In 2003 32% of the Diploma course had withdrawn or not completed by September of that year (Costello and Russell, 2003)
- ▶ In 2004 19% of the Diploma course had withdrawn or not completed by June (figures obtained from the exams office)
- ▶ Both years the registered figures were 71 students
- ▶ Retention research is ongoing in the Retention Office  
DIT

