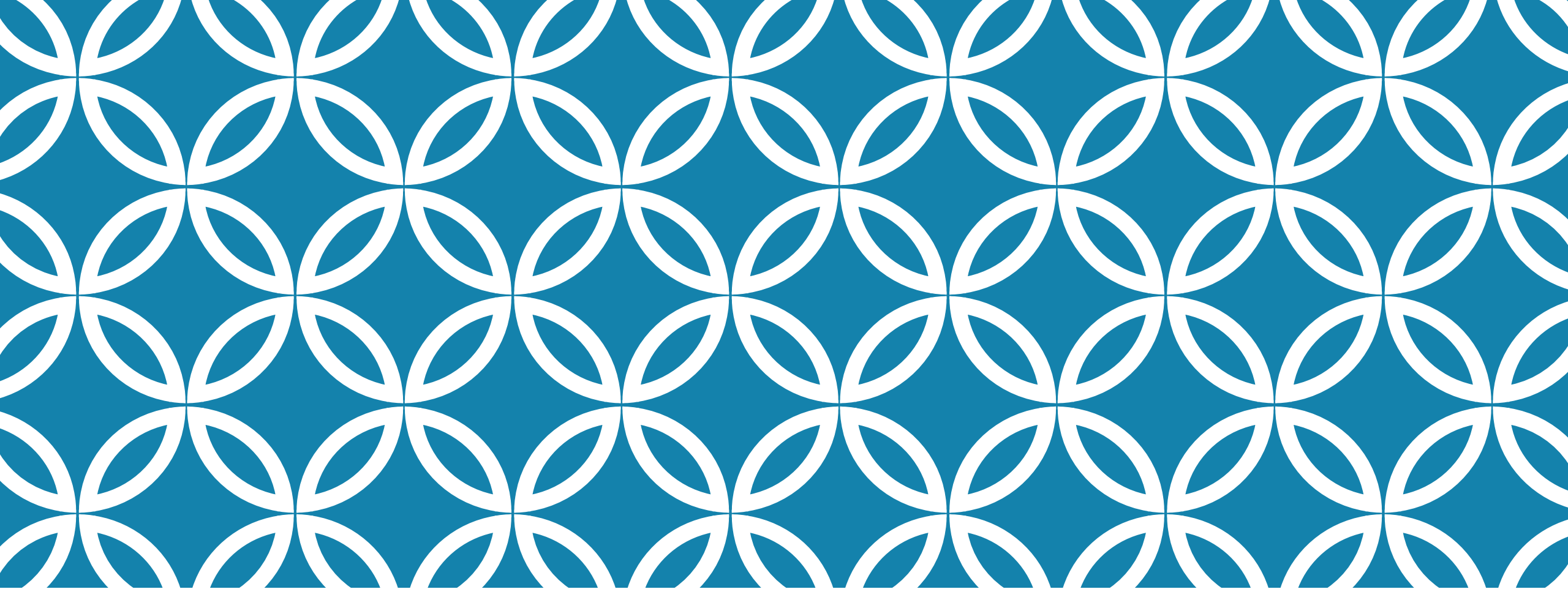


Two approaches to examining the relationship between counseling center utilization and student success

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TWO APPROACHES TO EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNSELING CENTER UTILIZATION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Sharon Mitchell, University at
Buffalo

Lynn Braun, SUNY Oswego

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

*THE PRESENTERS HAVE NO ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN RELATION TO THIS
PROGRAM.*



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will describe 3 research findings regarding the relationship between college student mental health and academic success.

2. Participants will describe two methods of conducting retention studies using counseling center data.

3. Participants will explain how retention data can be used to advocate for mental health resources on their campuses.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

38% of college students screened positive for overall depression, 19% for major depression, 34% screened positive for anxiety (Healthy Minds Network, 2024).

20% met the criteria for severe psychological distress (National College Health Assessment, 2024)

Mental health struggles have been associated with poor academic performance and increased likelihood of stopping out or dropping out of college (Arria et al., 2013; Boyraz et al., 2016; De Luca et al., 2016; DeRoma et al., 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2009; Gallup, 2023; Thomas et al., 2021)

Failure to complete their education may have a lasting impact lifetime earning potential, ability to repay college loans, and health outcomes (Marcotte, 2019; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Wei & Horn, 2013; Zajacova & Lawrence, 2021)



POOR STUDENT RETENTION HURTS COLLEGES



Higher education institutions do not fulfill their academic mission to educate, may have diminished reputations and are certain to suffer economically due to lost tuition revenue (Johnson, 2012; Raisman, 2013).



Daniel Eisenberg, economist and Director of the Healthy Minds study developed a return on investment calculator that can determine the amount of tuition dollars an institution retains as a result of averting mental health-related drop outs. (Eisenberg, 2019)

ENROLLMENT FORECAST

Undergraduate student enrollment increased from 1970-2010, peaking at around 18 million students.

But between 2010 and 2022, undergraduate enrollment fell by almost 15%.

Experts predict a steep enrollment decline in 2025, due to a shrinking college-aged population.



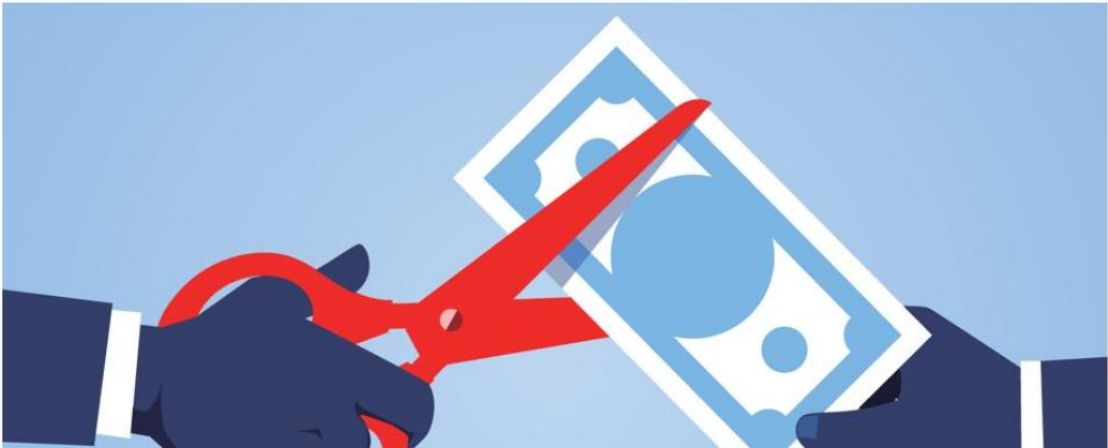
LEADERSHIP > EDUCATION

Facing \$16.5 Million Deficit, Buffalo State University To Cut 37 Academic Programs

By [Michael T. Nietzel](#), Senior Contributor. © Michael Nietzel, former college p... [Follow Author](#)

Published May 24, 2024, 06:00am EDT

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Canisius looks to cut \$15 million as enrollment drops faster than expenses

EDITOR'S PICK


Janet Gramza Oct 9, 2024 7




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Medaille University to close amid falling enrollment and layoffs

Published May 15, 2023

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ENROLLMENT = FIERCE COMPETITION

Is your campus enrollment increasing, declining, or holding steady?

Is retention a concern or hot topic on your campus right now?

How is your enrollment situation impacting your counseling center?

IT IS IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT THE NUMBERS

Local Data

- Clinical Utilization
- Outreach
- Consultation
- On call contacts
- Hospitalizations
- Online mental health screenings & other online tools (Togetherall, TAO)
- What other local data do you have?

National Data - Benchmarking

- Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Survey
- Center for Collegiate Mental Health
 - Clinical Load Index
- Healthy Minds Study
- National College Health Assessment
- Peer reviewed research studies

HOWEVER....

...ASSESSING
COUNSELING
CENTER IMPACT
ON RETENTION
ISN'T ALWAYS
EASY TO DO

How many of you are
doing retention studies on
your campus?

What challenges have
made it difficult to conduct
a retention study on your
campus?

ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UTILIZATION OF COUNSELING SERVICES AND STUDENT SUCCESS

A Small/Medium School Approach

VIEW FROM A SMALL & A MEDIUM SIZE CAMPUS

Defiance College (700-1100 students)

- Started in an Excel spreadsheet (no EHR)
 - Tracking the number of times students attended
- Calculated retention numbers for 11 years
 - Students who persist to the next school year
 - Students who graduate during the current academic year

SUNY Oswego (7500 students)

- Started calculating retention in 2022-23

Retention numbers have been the most impactful data points I've been able to present to my campuses

HOW I CALCULATE RETENTION

Get information from Institutional Research

- List of all students who return the next year
- List of all students who graduate during the examination year

Create a spreadsheet

- Student name/ID
- 3 columns
 - Returned
 - Graduated
 - Did not return

2022-23 DATA SET — STUDENTS IN ACTIVE TREATMENT

Client Name	ID #	Returned	Graduated	Did Not Return
		X		
				X
		X		
			X	
		X		
		X		
		X		
		X		
			X	
				X
				X
		X		
				X
		X		
Total (n)		401	88	131
Retention		64.8%	14.2%	21.2%
Retention (grads excluded)		75.4%		24.6%
Total Persistence		79.0%		21.2%

2023-24 DATA SET — ALL STUDENTS ACCESSING SERVICES

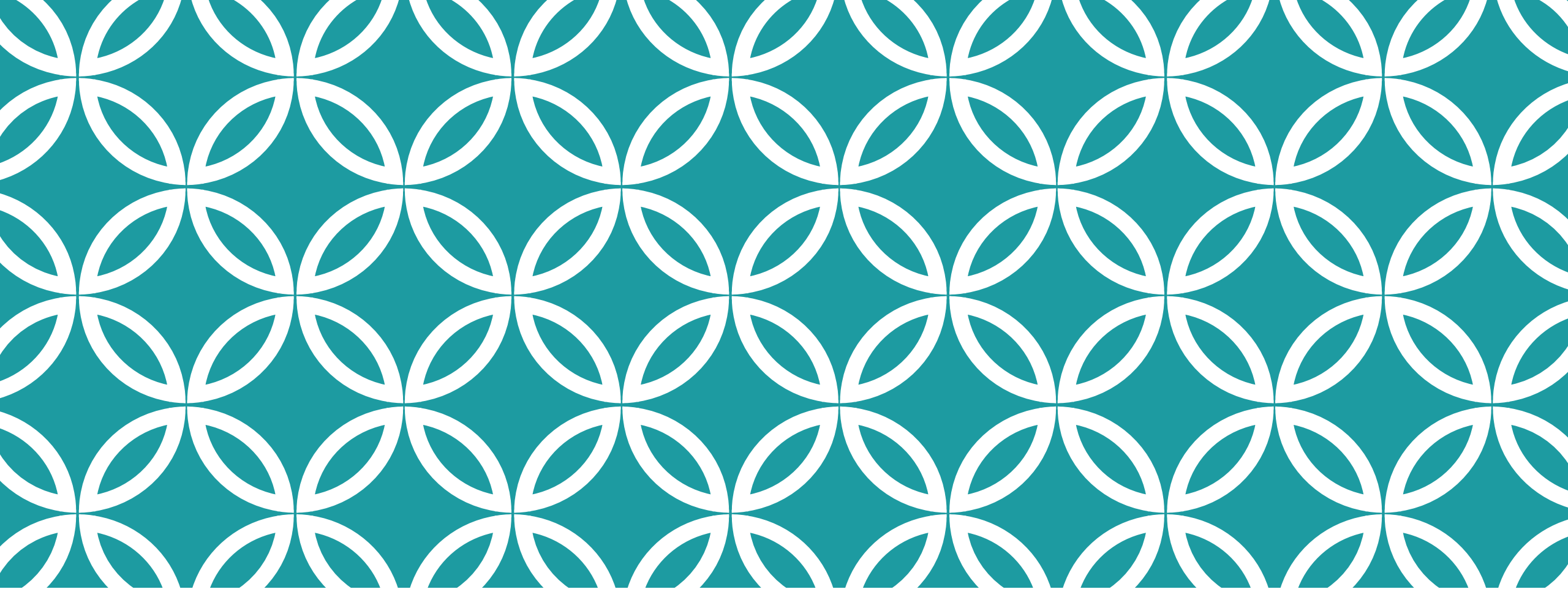
First Name	Last Name	Student ID#	Returned	Graduated	Did Not Return	Admitted Status
				X		Freshman
			X			Freshman
			X			Freshman
				X		Transfer
			X			NMU
				X		Freshman
				X		Freshman
			X			Freshman
			X			Transfer
			X			Freshman
			X			Freshman
			X			Freshman
			X			Transfer
			X			Transfer
					X	
					X	
Total (n)			524	110	178	
Retention			64.22%	13.48%	21.81%	
Retention (grads excluded)			74.64%		25.36%	
Total Persistence			77.70%		21.81%	

HOW DO YOU TELL THE STORY OF YOUR DATA?

The numbers are positive but our ability to highlight them is crucial

Understand your institutions retention/graduation numbers

Help people understand what your numbers mean in context



ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UTILIZATION OF COUNSELING SERVICES AND STUDENT SUCCESS

One Large
School's
Approach

SNAPSHOT OF THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO

30,446 students on U.S. campus*

35% graduate and professional students

24% international students; UB is ranked No. 24 in the U.S. for hosting international students.

35% BIPOC (excludes international students)

1937 students attended 12,729 counseling sessions in 2024-2025

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To investigate whether college students who utilize counseling services are more likely to remain enrolled (retention) and graduate compared to those who do not access such services.

To compare the demographics and success rates of students who receive counseling to those who do not.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Counseling centers are uniquely positioned to contribute to students' academic success and emotional well-being.

They also exist to support the academic mission of the campus and increasingly, the economic health of the campus helping students stay in school

However, protecting student confidentiality makes it difficult to assess such services' impact on retention.

Thanks to a formula created by Penn State, we were able to share data with Student Life Assessment and Research while maintaining the anonymity of students served UB Counseling Services

VARIABLES OF INTEREST

Success rates for Fall 2017 and Fall 2018 first-year degree seeking undergraduate student cohorts

- Success was looked at in four parts: fall year one to fall year two retention, graduation, time to graduation, and last GPA on record at the university,

Demographic variables: gender, race/ethnicity, *Pell grant eligibility*, first generation status, *student athlete status*, domestic/international, and *decanal unit*, length of counseling treatment, *timing of first appointment*

METHODOLOGY

Not practical to conduct a retention study with only counseling center staff given the number of clients and size of the institution

Retention studies usually look at 6-year periods

Only included students who had at least one counseling appointment beyond the needs assessment/intake from Fall 2017 – Spring 2024

CC used Penn State Excel formula to anonymize student ID numbers (Total of 1,212 counseling clients fit the criteria)

10,616 students in non-counseling cohort

METHODOLOGY

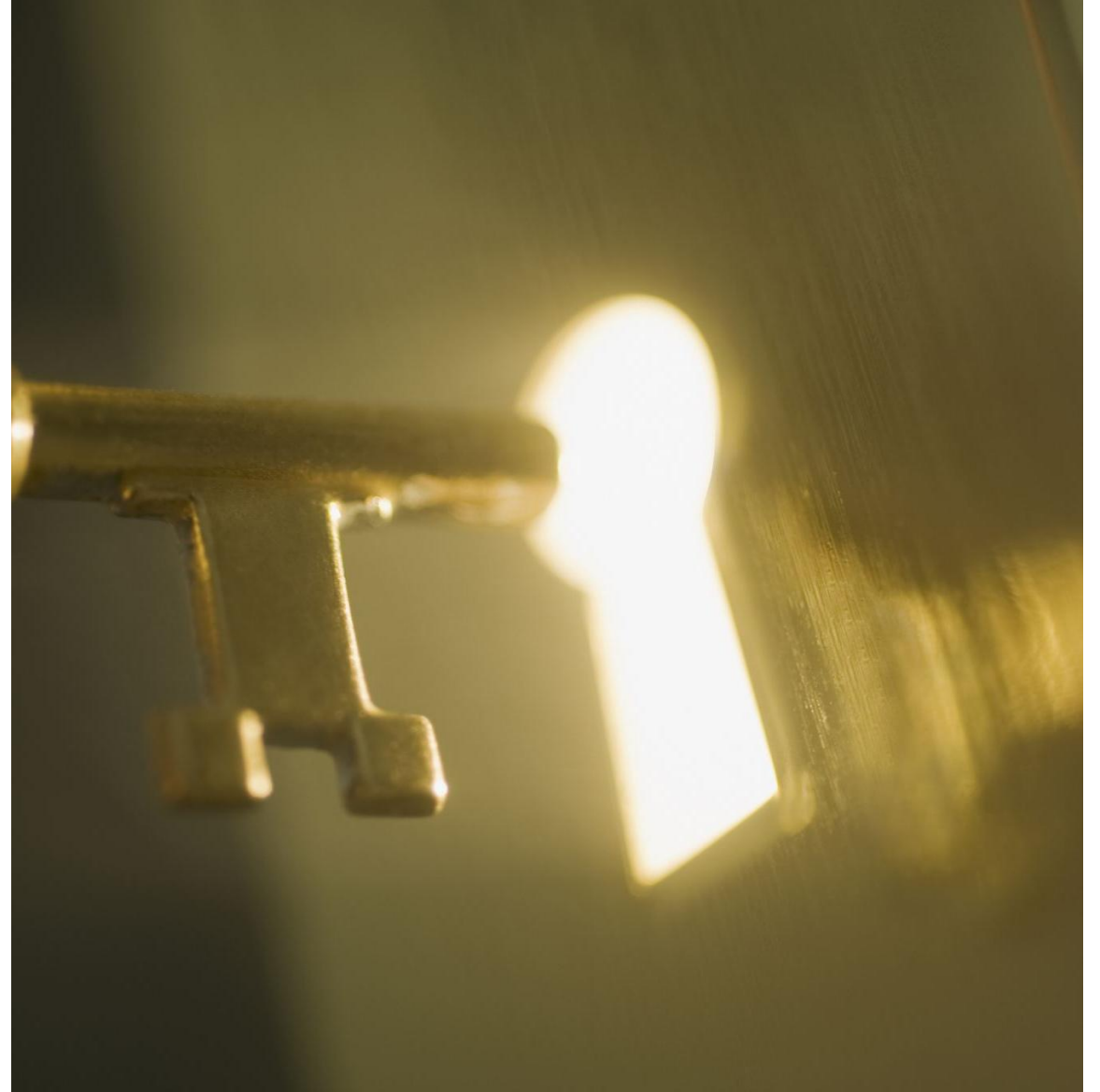
CC provided anonymized ID numbers, number of sessions attended, date of first contact to Data Analyst #1 in Student Life Assessment office.

Data Analyst #1 did not have the formula.

Data Analyst #2 used the formula to identify and anonymize ALL the students in the two cohorts of interest (was a first-year student in Fall 2017 or Fall 2018) and gave the demographic data Analyst #1

Data Analyst #1 matched anonymized IDs to determine clients and nonclients in the cohort and then conducted all analyses.

KEY STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS



ONE-YEAR RETENTION RATES: COUNSELING VS. NON-COUNSELING

Table 1

		Percent of Students Retained	Number of Students Not Retained	Percent of Students Not Retained	Total Students	χ^2 Test Results
Counseling	470	91.1%	46	8.9%	516	$\chi^2 =$ 17.78***; $p < 0.001$
No Counseling	9513	84.1%	1799	15.9%	11312	

GRADUATION RATES: COUNSELING VS. NON-COUNSELING

Table 2

	Number of Students Graduated	Percent of Students Graduated	Number of Students Not Graduated	Percent of Students Not Graduated	Total Students	χ^2 Test Results
Counseling	767	63.3%	445	36.7%	1212	$\chi^2 =$ 63.93***; $p < 0.001$
No Counseling	5428	51.1%	5188	48.9%	10616	

FINAL GPA: COUNSELING VS NON-COUNSELING

Table 3

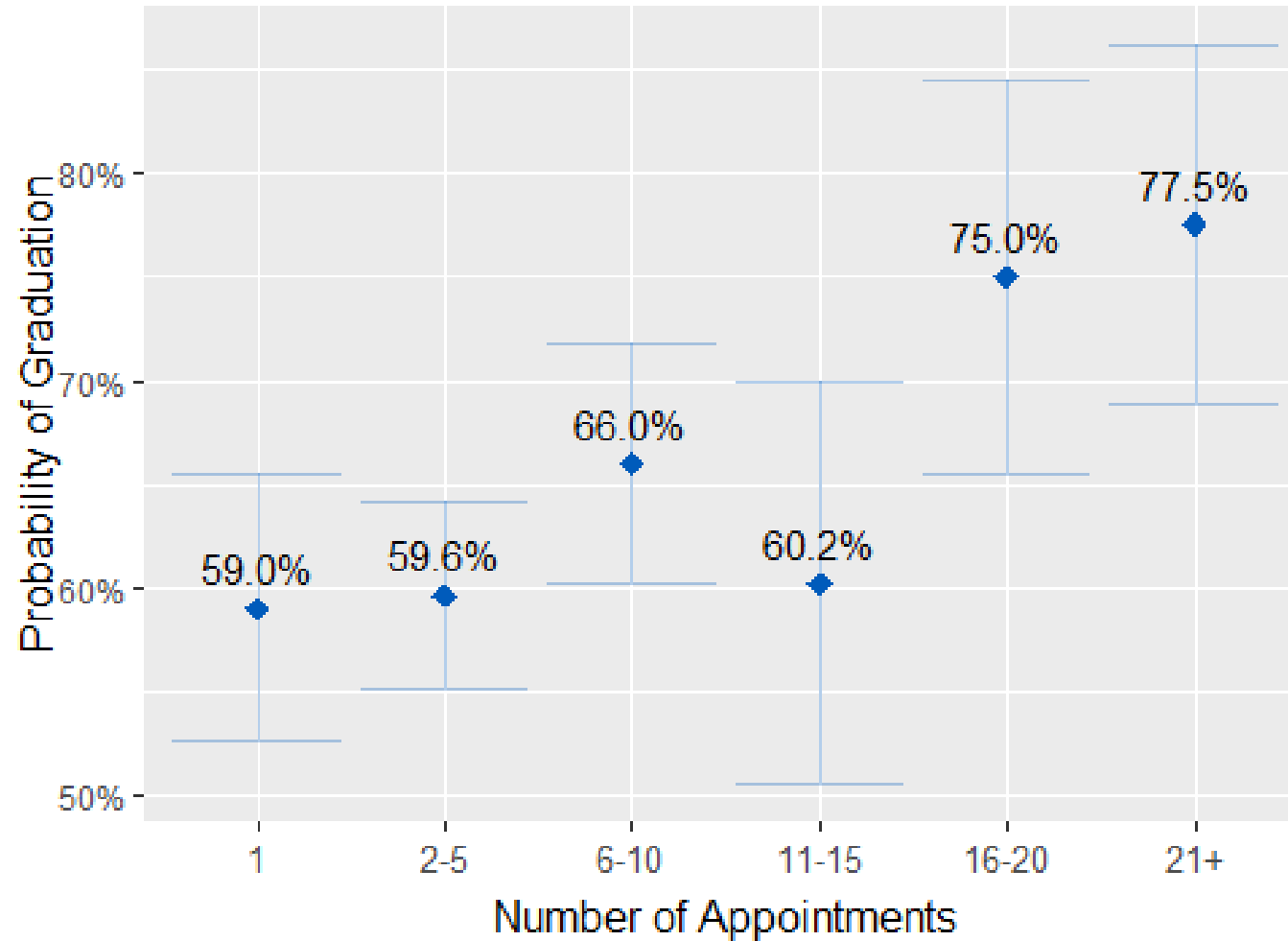
Average Final GPA of Counseling Students	Average Final GPA of Non-Counseling Students	t-test Results
3.10	2.93	$t=7.06^{***}; p<0.001$

AVERAGE YEARS TO GRADUATION: COUNSELING VS. NON-COUNSELING

Table 4

Average Years to Graduation of Counseling Students	Average Years to Graduation of Non- Counseling Students	t-test Results
4.40	4.30	t=3.24***; p=0.001

**Graph 1: Likelihood of Graduation
Based on Length of Treatment**



Students who did not seek counseling had a 51.1% graduation rate, compared to a graduation rate of 59% of students who had just one counseling appointment. This rate of graduation continued to increase the more appointments students had.

OTHER NOTABLE FINDINGS

With very few exception, regardless of demographics, students who used counseling services had higher graduation rates. (At $p \leq 0.05$)

- **2 or more races, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, White, Female, Male, Domestic, , International (Not-Resident Alien), Not First Generation, Pell Grant Eligible, Not Pell Grant Eligible, Non-Student Athletes**

No statistically significant difference in graduation rates for:

- **American Indian or Alaskan Native**
- **Native Hawaiian**
- **Unknown race**
- **Student Athlete**

This may be due to very small sample size or in the case of student athletes overall high graduation rates

SHARING YOUR RETENTION DATA

Senior leadership (VP, President's Cabinet)

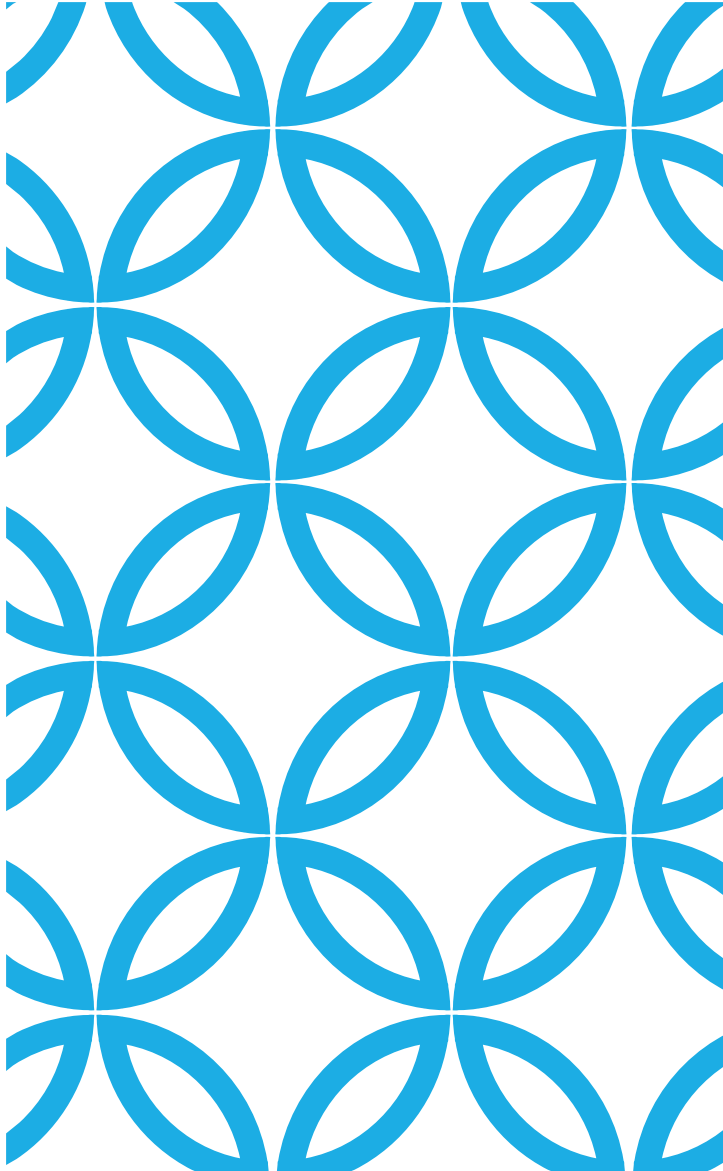
Student Life Colleagues

Enrollment managers

Student social norming messages

Publishing results in referred journal

Professional presentations to share
methodology with peers



ENGAGED DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

Two approaches to examining the relationship between counseling center utilization and student success

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