Do They Stay Or Do They Leave?

A compilation of student sketches written to represent common subgroups within the SCSU student population, their characteristics, barriers, likelihood of success, and chances of retention.
Do They Stay Or Do They Leave?

We know where students go when they leave, but we currently lack a full understanding of who is likely to stay, who is likely to leave, and why they may leave. Past examinations of retention at Southern have revealed four categories of students who leave. It has been found that some students leave SCSU and transfer to a local 4-year institution (e.g., UConn, Quinnipiac, or Yale) and other students transfer from Southern to a 2-year college. It has also been observed that a small group of students leave Southern and “pop-up in Colorado” (i.e., their transfer institution is not a common choice for students who transfer out of SCSU). A final group of students will transfer out of Southern, and leave higher education altogether. These four categories are quite clear and account for a large majority of students who leave Southern.

The study of retention at SCSU has begun to focus on identifying important factors that may help or hinder student success and retention in hopes that efforts to increase retention may be expended efficiently.

This report provides several student sketches, which aim to mirror the quantitative report prepared by the Office of Assessment and Planning for the Student Success Task Force. These sketches are not meant to provide additional information, but are intended to supplement the results of the quantitative analyses, and to present this information in a different (and, perhaps slightly more entertaining) manner. It is also important to note that these sketches are not based upon real events, or actual students. Instead, the students in these sketches are archetypes that exemplify different subgroups on campus.

For example, the first featured sketch illustrates the background and experiences of a student who is thriving at SCSU, but who originally wanted to go elsewhere for school. In order to portray this group, data analyses were performed on students who had a GPA of 3.50 or above, and who had indicated that Southern was not their first-choice college on the New Student Orientation Survey. Results of data analyses conducted on this type of student were used as the basis for the sketch.

Throughout the sketches, you will find that many academic and social characteristics of each student are discussed. It is important to note that reported academic habits and traits for each character are based on various computed variables (see Appendix A), which have been used in the Office of Assessment and Planning’s study of retention. If a character is described as managing his or her time well, for example, this is representative of the fact that the subgroup scored high on the computed variable, Time Management.

You will also encounter the term “thriving” throughout these sketches. For the purposes of this report, thriving refers to students who are successful at SCSU in all domains (e.g., academically, socially, and emotionally).

Overall, we hope these sketches will be used as a tool in understanding the reported statistics, numbers, tables, and data as they apply to some student subgroups and their experiences at SCSU.
TOMMY

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on students from the incoming class of 2010 with a current GPA of 3.50 or above, and who reported on their New Student Orientation surveys that SCSU was not their first-choice college.

Tommy never struggled with academics. In high school, he always did his work, passed all his exams, came to class on time, and rarely missed a day of school. His SAT scores were also excellent. Though Tommy always took great pride in doing what was needed to succeed academically, his true passion was the outdoors. He started boy scouts at a young age and recently graduated to an eagle scout. Since he has been old enough to do so, Tommy has worked as a park ranger at a local Connecticut state park during his summers off from school. He has always loved to go hiking, mountain biking and camping.

Both of Tommy’s parents went to college, and his older sister attended college out of state in Utah, because she loved to ski. Tommy never questioned that he would go to college, and in his senior year of high school, he decided to apply to several schools in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming so that he could enjoy the many hiking trails and natural sites these states have to offer. His mother urged him to pick a safety school, and Tommy filled out a last-minute application for Southern as well.

Tommy was accepted to most of his schools, and had decided on the University of Colorado. He was thrilled to be headed west for school and his parents had agreed to pay most of his expenses, given that Tommy had done so well in high school, and had spent much of his time doing community service with the boy scouts, or working at the park.

A month before Tommy’s high school graduation, his father was unexpectedly laid off from work, and the family took a huge financial hit. Because of this, Tommy had no choice but to attend SCSU in the fall, work a part-time job, and take out some student loans.

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1 over 70% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice are not first-generation college students
2 62% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice report being involved in community service in high school
3 about 50% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice report that half or more of their college expenses are covered by student loans
Tommy was quite disheartened by the whole situation. He felt terrible for his father, and was far less enthusiastic about heading off to college in what he considered to be “his own backyard”\(^4\). The only aspects of Southern that appealed to Tommy were that a few of his close friends from boy scouts would also be attending, and his girlfriend had been accepted to SCSU as well.

Tommy entered SCSU in the fall as a native\(^5\) student\(^6\) and lives on-campus\(^7\). He also works part-time at a Staples close to the campus, and usually puts in between 6 and 15 hours a week\(^8\).

He found all of his high school math courses to be interesting, and decided to declare as a math major in his sophomore year. Tommy does not really want to teach, but he is working towards a teacher’s certification because he does not know what else he can do with a math degree, and has never discussed these possibilities with his advisor. He wishes he knew where to look, and does not know that SCSU offers online career resources. He joined the Extreme Wilderness Survival Club\(^9\), and the few, quality relationships he has formed with students at SCSU have come from this group\(^10\).

Despite working, participating in the Extreme Wilderness Survival Club, and maintaining a solid relationship with his girlfriend, Tommy is able to set aside appropriate study time each week, and he is always certain to take the time needed to do his assignments thoroughly. Tommy does not attribute his ability to successfully complete academic tasks to FYE, as he has always been determined to produce quality work\(^11\). Though he struggles a bit with writing, he makes frequent visits to the writing center, and often meets with his professors to go over his draft before handing in a final copy.

Currently, after 6 semesters at SCSU, Tommy holds an overall GPA of 3.70\(^12\), and has enjoyed much success at Southern. He feels confident in his ability to complete his degree and expects that he will graduate from Southern\(^13\). Tommy feels fortunate to be succeeding in college, and to be well on his way to a math degree, but he constantly compares his current situation with the way things could have been if he had been able to go to the University of Colorado.

*Students who did not indicate that SCSU was their first-choice college on the NSO survey, but who thrive at Southern, and would probably thrive at most colleges, make up about 5% of*

\[^4\] 85% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice live within 50 miles of the school

\[^5\] Native refers to entering SCSU as a full-time freshman in the fall semester of the incoming year.

\[^6\] 100% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice entered as native students

\[^7\] close to 80% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice are on-campus residents

\[^8\] of thriving students who work, a majority work 15 hours or less per week

\[^9\] Yes. This is a real club at SCSU

\[^10\] 50% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice report strong relationships with other students

\[^11\] students with higher high school GPAs tend to disagree more frequently that FYE enhanced their ability to handle college-level work

\[^12\] the mean GPA of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice

\[^13\] about 65% of thriving students who did not pick SCSU as their first choice expect to graduate from Southern
native students. Though Tommy may not be completely satisfied with his experience here, it is very likely that he will graduate from SCSU (approximately 75% of thriving students from the incoming class of 2010 who did not pick SCSU as their first choice are still registered as of the Spring 2013 semester). Tommy is thriving at Southern and will not struggle to complete his degree in a timely manner. Of students from the incoming class of 2007 who also held GPAs over 3.50 after 6 semesters and who did not report SCSU as their first choice, 93% graduated within 6 years.

TED

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on students from the incoming class of 2010 with a GPA above 3.00, who are still currently enrolled at SCSU after six semesters.

Ted was very successful in high school, and he was well-liked by his peers and teachers. He will enter college with a high school GPA of 3.39\(^{14}\), and was a highly involved student. During high school, he took AP courses\(^{15}\), and participated in community service\(^{16}\), where he acted as a mentor for young African-American students who hoped to go to college. Ted was part of this program when he was younger and felt it made a real difference in his life.

Ted grew up in Connecticut less than 50 miles from Southern\(^{17}\), in a middle-class suburb of New Haven. Ted’s mother graduated from college\(^{18}\), and his father went to vocational school, and then apprenticed as an electrician before beginning work at UI.

Ted applied to several of the state schools and to a few other schools in Massachusetts, and New Hampshire as well. He was accepted into most of the schools to which he applied and had narrowed his choices down to Southern, the University of New Hampshire, and UMass Lowell. Although he really loved the area around UNH, he knew that he could avoid a sufficient amount

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14 the mean HS GPA for thriving/retained SCSU students
15 more than 50% of thriving/retained SCSU students report taking at least one AP course during high school
16 only 5% of thriving/retained SCSU students report not participating in community service during high school
17 nearly 80% of thriving students who remain at SCSU report their home to be 50 miles or less from campus
18 60.5% of thriving/retained SCSU students are not first-generation college students
of student debt if he chose to remain in-state and attend SCSU. Although his parents agreed to help him financially, Ted believes that the location is not as important as the effort he puts into making his education worthwhile. He was also confident that he could make the best of any college he chose and, even though Southern was quite close to home, he knew that he would be living on-campus and that this would allow him just enough of the independence he felt he needed to learn.

Ted began his career at Southern as a first-year student\(^{19}\), and lives on campus\(^{20}\). Ted’s parents always supported his decision to attend SCSU\(^{21}\), and are helping him to pay his college expenses\(^{22}\).

Ted does not have to work\(^{23}\) and can focus his full attention on his academics and social life.

Although, he admits that SCSU was not his first-choice school\(^{24}\), Ted expects that he will graduate from Southern\(^{25}\), and he reports that if he could start over again, he would make the same decision to attend\(^ {26}\).

Currently, after six semesters at Southern, Ted is still enrolled as a full-time student\(^{27}\), holds a GPA above 3.50, and has started working 15 hours per week\(^{28}\). He also participates in co-curricular activities\(^{29}\), and reports that Southern has provided the support he needs to thrive socially\(^ {30}\).

Ted feels that his experience at SCSU has been invaluable, and that he is receiving a high-quality education. He is confident in his ability to engage in the research and writing processes, and is very diligent in his work. He tends not to make the same mistake twice, and when he does poorly on an assignment or test, he is able to stay positive, and view it as an opportunity for improvement. He often brags to his classmates that he has not had to pull an “all-nighter” since his freshman year, and encourages them to start assignments early as well.

\(^{19}\) 62.6% of thriving/retained SCSU students are native (i.e., started as freshmen in the fall semester)

\(^{20}\) 58.1% of thriving/retained SCSU students live on campus

\(^{21}\) 95% of thriving/retained SCSU students report that their family support their decision to attend SCSU

\(^{22}\) about 60% of thriving/retained SCSU students report that their family will pay half or more of their college expenses

\(^{23}\) 65.5% of thriving/retained SCSU students report having to work 0 hours per week

\(^{24}\) 50% of thriving/retained SCSU students report that SCSU was not their first choice

\(^{25}\) 80% of thriving/retained students expect to graduate from SCSU

\(^{26}\) 80% of thriving/retained SCSU students report they would attend SCSU if they could start over again

\(^{27}\) 58.5% of thriving/retained students from the incoming class of 2010 are still registered as full-time students after 6 semesters at SCSU

\(^{28}\) 35% of thriving/retained students work for pay off-campus

\(^{29}\) 57% of thriving/retained SCSU students report participating in co-curricular activities for at least one hour per week

\(^{30}\) 56% of thriving/retained SCSU students report that SCSU provides the support they need to thrive socially
Ted enjoys socializing, as well, but even when several friends ask Ted to go out, he has no problem staying in the dorm to study or do work when it needs to get done. Perhaps his most defining characteristic is the degree to which Ted participates in class. His peers and instructors always know his name, because he is an active participant in classroom discussions and enjoys presenting his point of view and listening to the perspectives of others.

About 13% of students at SCSU hold an overall GPA of 3.50 or above. Like Ted, over 66% of these thriving students remain at Southern 6 semesters after they begin. It is likely that Ted will graduate from Southern in 4 – 6 years from the time he entered SCSU (95.2% of thriving/retained students from the incoming class of 2007 graduated by the Spring of 2013-after 6 years - and more than half graduated in 4 years).

Maria

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on students from the incoming class of 2010 with a GPA above 3.00, who reported on their FYE surveys that they did not expect to graduate from SCSU, or that they were uncertain if they would graduate from SCSU.

Maria attended the same high school as Ted and was just as academically successful and involved. Much like Ted, Maria’s parents went to college and earn enough to pay more than half of her college expenses. Maria also entered SCSU as a first-year, native student, lives on campus, and attends full-time.

Despite their many similarities as thriving students on SCSU’s campus, a vast division between Ted and Maria is that Maria never had any intention of graduating from SCSU. While Maria’s family agreed to pay for more than half of her college expenses at SCSU, Maria has always wanted to attend UConn. Southern always felt like it was too close to home, and, while Maria did not want to venture too far from her family, she wanted to feel like she was truly away at college.

31 the mean gross parental income of thriving students who report that they do not expect to graduate from SCSU on their FYE survey is $105,648.22
32 100% of thriving students with the intent to leave are native
33 76.9% of thriving students with the intent to leave live on-campus
34 less than 1% of thriving students with the intent to leave are registered part-time
35 approximately 57% of thriving students with the intent to leave report that SCSU was not their first-choice college
college. She thought that SCSU would feel too much like high school, as many of her classmates from high school were also attending Southern.

Towards the end of her senior year of high school, Maria and her parents came to an agreement that she would attend Southern for two years in order to complete her general education courses, and that she could transfer to UConn after that. Maria also intends to be a nursing major\(^{36}\). Maria understands that SCSU offers a competitive nursing program, and while she is a good candidate, she worries she may not be accepted. She knows that her chances may be better applying to UConn’s nursing program, and has always had her heart set on a larger school.

After her two years at SCSU, Maria holds a GPA of 3.40\(^{37}\). She is engaged in her classes, and agrees that SCSU provides the support she needs to succeed academically\(^{38}\). She is currently a member of the SCSU Service team\(^{39}\). She is happy at Southern, but she is excited to finally achieve her goal of attending a big school like UConn, and thinks that her solid GPA, and high degree of involvement at SCSU\(^{40}\) make her a quality candidate for acceptance, especially since she has demonstrated her ability to handle college-level work.

Furthermore, much like Ted, Maria has always been meticulous in her studies and diligent in her work. Her instructors know her name, and the quality of work she produces is excellent. Maria often writes 2 or 3 drafts of a paper, and reads it aloud to her roommate before she hands in a final copy. In high school, Maria tended to be shy about expressing her position in class, but she has gained much confidence in her ability to defend her position, and now enjoys engaging in classroom discussion. She feels confident that she will have exceptional letters of recommendation for her application to UConn, and feels very fortunate to have found such wonderful mentors at Southern who are able to help her fulfill her college and career goals.

\textit{Students who enter SCSU, that hold a quality GPA two years after enrolling, and who did not report that they expected to graduate from SCSU on their FYE surveys make up about 12\% of the SCSU student population. Based on Maria’s major (40\% of students from the incoming class of 2010 who intended to be Nursing majors are no longer registered as of the Spring 2013 semester), goals, and family-supported college plans, it is likely that she will leave SCSU, but her departure is not certain. Of thriving students with the intent to leave, who entered in the fall of 2010, 45\% are no longer registered. It is noteworthy that a majority (54.4\%) are still registered full-time as of the Spring 2013 semester, but it will be interesting to see how many of these students ultimately graduate from SCSU.}

\(^{36}\) 26.3\% of thriving students with the intent to leave report nursing as their intended major on BCSSE  
\(^{37}\) the mean GPA for thriving students with the intent to leave Southern  
\(^{38}\) 68\% of thriving students with the intent to leave SCSU report that Southern provides much support for academic success  
\(^{39}\) 1/3 of thriving students with the intent to leave are part of an on-campus club/organization  
\(^{40}\) about 74\% of thriving students with the intent to leave SCSU reported that they planned to participate in co-curricular activities for 6-10 hours or more per week on their BCSSE surveys
SAMUEL

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted students from the incoming class of 2010 who are residents of urban areas in Connecticut. New Haven residents were used as a convenience sample for analyses.41

Samuel was born and raised in an urban section of Connecticut42. He attended high school there, and by his senior year he had improved in his academics. His final GPA was still less than he had hoped, and he was uncertain if college was the right choice for him43. Samuel felt that he faced many barriers to academic success, such as comprehending class-related material, and being able to organize his thoughts in writing44. Before his senior year, he had never even considered the possibility of attending college, and wondered if he would fit in with the other students.

For these reasons, Samuel decided to take some time to work after high school in order to help out with finances at home45. Samuel also decided to enroll at Gateway Community College in order to get a feel for college-level work, and to see if it was something he could handle.

Ultimately, he hoped to improve his GPA, and eventually transfer to another local institution46. He felt like this was a more realistic path to college for him, and that he would be taken more seriously as a student if he entered a state school with some college experience.47

Samuel was nervous to begin, as no one in his family had ever attended college before48, but after a few semesters he began to feel a bit more confident in his ability to complete college-level work.

41 although New Haven residents are used here, it is assumed that students from all urban areas would have some academic similarities
42 about 7% of SCSU students are residents of New Haven
43 approximately 40% of New Haven residents who enter SCSU report a High school GPA of less than 2.70
44 between 17% and 23% of incoming freshman report a high degree of awareness that they have faced barriers to academic success in the past
45 the mean gross parental income for New Haven residents is $56,623.66
46 of New Haven residents at SCSU, 26% transferred from a community college
47 these analyses have revealed that FYE may be more beneficial than taking credits at a community college for academic preparedness at SCSU
48 62% of New Haven residents at SCSU are first-generation college students
After three semesters at Gateway, Samuel transferred to SCSU with 36 credits\(^{49}\). He wondered if the nature of the work would be the same at SCSU, but was hopeful that he could do it.

Currently, Samuel commutes to Southern\(^{50}\) and has enrolled as a full-time student\(^{51}\). He was disappointed that his math course from Gateway did not transfer, and that he was placed into a remedial math course. Samuel knows that he struggles with math, but he also understands that remedial placement will probably lengthen his path to graduation.

He still works part-time at a local retail store\(^{52}\), and holds a GPA of just 2.17\(^{53}\). He worries that he should have simply continued taking courses at Gateway and that transferring was the wrong decision, but he does not feel comfortable enough with any faculty members to ask them their opinions on the matter. Because he commutes and works, he has not established any close relationships with students on-campus, and he figures his family would not understand as no one else has gone to college.

Academically, Samuel struggles with managing his time effectively. He often finds himself rushing to complete large projects at the last minute, or scrambling to cram before an exam. He knows that SCSU offers academic support services, like the writing center, but he does not think that it will be worth his time, and he is busy with work and family commitments. Samuel does not feel that he has gained study skills since coming to SCSU. He finds that he tends to make the same mistakes over and over again in his studies, and worries that he will not be able to handle higher-level courses.

Samuel does not know where to turn for help, as he does not feel that his academic advisor has been available to him\(^{54}\). During their few meetings together, Samuel also sensed that his academic advisor could not relate to him, and does not feel that he has ever received quality academic advising\(^{55}\). Samuel wants to complete his degree at SCSU, but is starting to believe that he cannot be successful here.

Samuel is not thriving at SCSU and it is more likely that Samuel will not graduate from Southern, than it is that he will complete a degree, here. Of New Haven residents who transferred to SCSU from a community college sometime during or after the Spring of 2011, 59.6% were no longer registered for classes by the Spring 2013 semester. Because Samuel transferred from Gateway, he would not be required to take FYE, though he may have greatly benefited from it (New Haven residents tend to report...

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\(^{49}\) students who transfer to Southern with less than 45 credits from a community college have an average GPA of 2.37 after 6 semesters at SCSU

\(^{50}\) 79.7% of New Haven residents do not live on-campus

\(^{51}\) Only 2.9% of New Haven residents are enrolled part-time

\(^{52}\) about 54% of New Haven residents at SCSU work at least 11 hours per week

\(^{53}\) the mean GPA for New Haven Residents who transferred to SCSU from a community college

\(^{54}\) retained students report significantly higher levels of agreement that their academic advisor has been available when needed than non-retained students

\(^{55}\) retained students evaluate the quality of their academic advising as being significantly better than non-retained students
significantly higher levels of agreement that INQ 100 enhanced their academic ability than students who are not residents of New Haven).

**PENNY THE PITCHER**

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on students from the incoming class of 2010 who self-reported being student-athletes on the NSSE survey.

Penny started playing softball at a high level from a young age and always knew that she wanted to play in college. The recruiting process allowed for her to explore several options for college and to make an extremely informed decision, as she was able to take an official visit and truly experience what her life would be like at each of her top 5 schools.

In the end, she chose SCSU because it offered the athletic training major she wanted, and it was close enough to home for her parents to come watch her play. Penny’s aunt and sister attended SCSU, and Penny always loved visiting her sister on campus.

She was also offered a partial scholarship to play softball at SCSU, and her proud parents agreed to pay her remaining college expenses.

Penny entered Southern with a high school GPA of 2.96, and is confident that she will be able to succeed in school, based on the academic support available to student-athletes at SCSU (first-year student athletes at SCSU are required to do a minimum of 5 hours of supervised study table sessions per week). She must also meet the NCAA eligibility requirements. Although she was slightly annoyed that she had to take a math course her senior year of high school (while most high schools only require 3 years of math for graduation, the NCAA requires 4 years of math to

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56 34% of student-athletes at SCSU are EXS majors
57 about 74% of SCSU student-athletes’ homes are 50 miles or less from the school
58 around 30% of SCSU student-athletes report that a sibling or other family member also attended Southern
59 about 50% of SCSU student-athletes report having at least some athletic aid
60 close to 100% of SCSU student-athletes report that their family supports their decision to attend Southern
61 the mean gross parental income of SCSU student athletes is $104,209.76, and about 49% of SCSU student-athletes report that their family pays at least half of their college expenses
62 the mean HS GPA of SCSU student-athletes
63 the NCAA requires all student-athletes to maintain an increasingly stringent GPA each year in order to be eligible to compete, and requires that a certain number of credits be completed each year. Further, the student-athlete must declare a major by the end of her/his sophomore year.
be eligible to play college sports), Penny knows this will help her be successful in her college math course.

Penny was a native student\textsuperscript{64} and lives on-campus\textsuperscript{65}. She loves being at Southern and takes great pride in being an Owl. Her Facebook page is covered with pictures of her and her teammates, and she recommends Southern to all of her high school teammates.

Although her schedule is quite busy as a student-athlete\textsuperscript{66}, she currently holds an overall GPA of 3.10\textsuperscript{67}, and speaks highly of her educational experience at Southern\textsuperscript{68}.

Penny prides herself on her ability to manage her time, and even feels that she does better in her classes when she is in-season. Her coach encourages the team to sit in the front row of their classes, and to find a friend in each class, from whom they can get notes when they have to miss for games. Penny is proactive in communicating with her professors about her game schedule, and about scheduling make-up exams if she will be away. She always makes sure to hand in her assignments early if she is going to be away at a softball game when they are due, and packs all of her books and her laptop for her trips in order to make the most of her time spent traveling.

When she has time off from practice and school work, Penny loves cheering on her fellow SCSU athletes and friends. She feels extremely fortunate to be constantly surrounded by teammates, coaches, and athletic staff members who want her to succeed.

\textit{It is very likely that Penny will graduate from SCSU in 6 years or less (of student-athletes from the incoming class of 2007, who graduated from SCSU, 100\% finished before the Fall of 2012). Although student-athletes make up only about 6\% of the total student population, 71\% of student-athletes from the incoming class of 2010 are still currently enrolled at Southern (6 semesters later). They are typically highly involved on-campus (all student-athletes are required to complete a minimum of 2 hours of community service per week during the off-season), and as members of various teams, they have a great sense of belonging (70\% of SCSU student-athletes report friendly, supportive relationships and a sense of belonging on NSSE).}

\textsuperscript{64} 95.8\% of student-athletes at SCSU enrolled as native students
\textsuperscript{65} 95\% of SCSU student-athletes live on-campus
\textsuperscript{66} 73\% of SCSU student-athletes report committing a minimum of 11-15 hours per week to their sport, and 87\% of student-athletes have done or will do community service while at SCSU
\textsuperscript{67} the mean overall GPA of SCSU student-athletes after 6 semesters
\textsuperscript{68} 77\% of SCSU student-athletes rate their entire educational experience at Southern as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’
Gary did fairly well in high school and finished with an overall GPA of 2.79. He was never certain whether he wanted to go to college, and had no idea what kind of career he might want to pursue, but decided to give it a try for his parents, who really pushed him to apply.

Gary’s family was hopeful that he would decide to go to college, and that he would be the first person in his family to do so. Although Gary’s parents agreed to pay for half of his college expenses, they cannot afford to pay everything, and expect that Gary will work in order to pay the rest.

Although he really wanted to live on-campus, Gary decided he would live at home so that he would not have to pay room and board, and because his house is close to his job, and to campus. Gary had secured a job as a package handler with a local shipping company, which allowed him to work night shifts and early-morning hours so that he could take classes during the day.

Gary enjoyed New Student Orientation. He loved the idea of being involved on-campus and feeling like a part of the SCSU community. Most of the other first-year students he met were new and interesting, and he started to believe that he had made the right choice in deciding to go to college. When classes started, Gary tried to keep up this sense of enthusiasm, but found that

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on students from the incoming class of 2010, who reported commuting, working 16-20 hours or more per week, and who left SCSU within their first year.

69 the mean HS GPA of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year
70 over 90% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year report that their family supports their decision to attend SCSU
71 about 56% of working commuters who leave SCSU report that they are first-generation college students
72 about 62% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year report that their family will pay at least half of their college expenses
73 the mean gross parental income of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year is $73,375.15
74 73% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year reported having to pay some of their college expenses
75 94% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year report living less than 50 miles from campus
working and commuting were not conducive to being an engaged student, or an involved member of the campus.

Although Gary loved his first-year critical thinking course and really wanted to major in Philosophy, his father convinced him to declare as a Business major so that he would be in a better position to make more money.  

Gary found that his work schedule did not allow for him to be involved on-campus, and that he was only on-campus when he had class. He felt frustrated that most other students did not seem to have the same demands on their time, and that they could eat at the dining hall or go to their rooms to take a nap between classes.

When Gary did have down-time at SCSU, he would typically walk around with headphones in his ears, or rush over to Wintergreen for various necessary errands. Gary has always had difficulty dealing with the administration at Wintergreen because they never seemed to be understanding of the fact that he commutes, works, and has very little spare time. In fact, some of the only “bonding” he has done with other commuters has consisted of exchanging “Wintergreen run-around stories.”

Gary has maintained many of his high school friendships and has always had a strong support network as an active member in his local church, but he has remained highly disengaged at SCSU. It is not that Gary does not like to socialize or to meet new people, he simply feels that he does not have time to form relationships on-campus. On a few occasions, Gary has found himself without any friends to contact when he had questions on class assignments. He has only added a handful of SCSU students to his Facebook account, and most of these students were people he met at orientation.

Whereas many of his friends have come home from college expressing how much they have enjoyed getting to know new people, working with faculty, and the “college experience,” Gary feels that college has been no different from high school, and that his social life exists mostly off-campus. He worries that if he had a serious problem on-campus, he would have no one to turn to for help. He still wonders if he made the right decision in attending school and feels that he has no sense of direction, as it was his parents who pushed him to apply to school, and his father who picked his major. Gary does not really see the point in attending college because he believes that he is as smart as he is ever going to be.

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76 over 10% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year report being business majors – it is the most common major among this group
77 only 32% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year report participating in a club or organization
78 74% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year agreed that they tended to be on campus only when they had class
79 commuters report significantly higher levels of agreement that their social life exists mostly off-campus than residents
After 1 year at SCSU, Gary holds a GPA of 2.01. He has never been certain whether he will actually graduate from SCSU.

For this reason, he recently decided to pick up more hours at work, as he feels that earning money is a higher priority right now than earning high grades. His interest in academics has greatly dwindled since declaring the major his father suggested. He takes notes, but usually only writes down the information on the slides and never raises his hand even when he knows the answer. Although he is highly enthusiastic and friendly at work, with members of his church or family, and with his friends, Gary sits towards the back of the room in every class and rarely speaks with his classmates.

Between 3% and 5% of the SCSU student population works more than 16-20 hours per week and commutes to campus. Although analyses were based upon students who did leave after one year, it is unlikely that Gary would actually leave within his first two semesters (only 22.1% of working commuters did not register one year later), and it is far more likely that Gary will leave sometime within his first 3 years at SCSU (45.2% of working commuters from the incoming class of 2010 were no longer registered after 6 semesters). However, over 50% of commuters from the incoming class of 2010, who worked at least 16-20 hours per week, are still registered full-time students and 1% are still registered as part-time students as of the Spring 2013 semester (of working commuters, the only significant difference between those who are still registered and those who are no longer registered was found to be overall GPA). If Gary opts to stay, it is likely he will graduate within 6 years (of retained working commuters from the incoming class of 2007, 51% graduated in 4 years and 90.4% graduated in 6 years).

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80 The mean Spring 2011 GPA of working commuters who entered in the Fall of 2010 and who left within 1 year.
81 55% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year are uncertain or disagree that they expect to graduate from Southern.
82 30% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year report working 21 hours or more per week.
83 Over 58% of working commuters who leave SCSU within 1 year agree that at the end of a class period, after closing their notebooks, they don’t think about the material until they have to.
STELLA

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on incoming students from the class of 2007 who are commuting, at least 24 years old, and who are still currently registered for classes part-time at SCSU (as of the Spring 2013 semester).

In terms of grades, Stella was an average student in high school. Her work ethic, however, was far above average. No matter how difficult she found a class to be, she was willing to put in the extra effort to ensure that she passed. Even in high school, Stella was sure to speak with her teachers and check on her progress frequently, and she did not hesitate to ask for extra help with assignments.

Graduating from high school and being accepted to college were Stella’s proudest accomplishments. She was extremely excited to go to Southern in the fall, and felt confident that she could continue to put forth the effort required of college-level work. A few of Stella’s friends would also be attending SCSU, and her boyfriend of 3 years was in his senior year at Southern, living off-campus in New Haven.

Stella was further encouraged by her New Student Orientation experience, where she met several interesting people and learned all about how she could get involved on-campus. Stella pictured herself as an active member of the SCSU community and could not wait to start in the fall.

She enrolled at Southern as a full-time, native student\(^\text{84}\), and after spending one semester in a dorm room, she decided to move in with her boyfriend. Stella did well her first year, and knew that she made the right decision in coming to Southern. Watching her boyfriend graduate, she realized that she would be getting her diploma in a few years, and that made her very happy. Later that summer, Stella’s boyfriend proposed and she happily accepted without hesitation.

Her boyfriend found a decent job after graduation, but the two decided that Stella should take some time off from school to work. This way, they would be able to buy a small place together and save up money for Stella to go back to school. They bought a small condo in Hamden and began their life together. A few months after the wedding, Stella became pregnant, and had a child. She was quite happy with her life and family, but she knew that she wanted to start working towards her degree again, and decided to begin again as soon as possible.

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\(^{84}\) about 58% of part-time commuters over 24 began as native students
Once the child was old enough, Stella registered for classes at SCSU, and began chipping away at her Public Health degree. She was a part-time commuter now and because of her, and her husband’s work schedules, Stella could only take 2 or 3 night courses per semester. Despite her busy schedule, Stella was thrilled to be back in school and has felt really connected with her classmates, as many are also working, married, mothers or fathers.

After three semesters, Stella’s husband was promoted at his job. This was excellent news in that he would be making more money, but he would also be required to put in overtime hours for the next few months in order to train. Stella and he decided that she would take another semester off from school so that she could tend to their child during her husband’s training period.

When Stella returned to SCSU one year later, she picked up right where she left off. She continued to take a class or two each semester that she was able, and never seemed to be frustrated with the amount of time this degree would take her to complete. She often joked with her classmates that she was a professional student and it was her goal to never leave college.

One semester, Stella’s mother suddenly passed away. Stella was devastated and knew that she was not fully focused on her classes. She did not hesitate to e-mail one of her professors, who she also considered to be her mentor, to set-up a meeting before class. Stella explained her situation to her professor, who suggested that Stella should take some time off from school. Stella was well into her two classes this semester and did not want to let the work she had already completed go to waste. The two were able to work out an arrangement, and Stella and her mentor communicated with Stella’s second professor, who also agreed to work with their arrangement.

Stella made it through that semester and continues to enroll in a class or two whenever she can. She understands that it may be years before she graduates, but she feels that earning her degree in Public Health is well worth the effort and patience. Although there is often much going on in her life, Stella considers her degree to be one of her top priorities and has never contemplated giving up on her goal.

Stella has never had any problems with time management and continues to do well in her classes. It has been six years since she was first accepted to SCSU, and she currently has a GPA of 2.78.

Stella is determined to complete her degree for herself, but she also wants to set a good example for her child and demonstrate that a college degree is obtainable at any age. Stella continues to work hard, and to reach out to her classmates or professors when she does not understand, or when she needs help arranging her course work around her family and her life. She also believes that she understands how much work it takes to be a good student, and to succeed in college.

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85 part-time, commuters over the age of 24 average 7.5 credits per semester
86 about 97% of part-time commuters over 24 are in good academic standing as of Spring 2012
87 the mean GPA of part-time commuters over 24
Although she commutes, and greatly values the time she has at home with her family, she is still willing to come to campus for extra help, or to stay after class to discuss course material with her professors and peers. Her professors constantly commend her persistence and admire her sense of true grit.

Although it certainly will not happen in 6 years or less, it is very likely that Stella will eventually graduate from SCSU. Over 95% of part-time commuters over 24 are in good academic standing each semester. These students make up a small percent of the total student population (ranging from 5% to 10%, and varying each semester), but they are typically a highly retained group. Like Stella, for many of these students a college degree was always a realistic goal; and then life got in the way. Though it will take them longer than most students to complete their degree, there is a high rate of persistence. These students would be unaccounted for in a predictive model, as many never took FYE, did not attend NSO, and did not take BCSSE or NSSE\textsuperscript{88}.

**MARISSA**

*Reported statistics are based upon analyses conducted on students from the incoming class of 2010 who transferred to Southern from another 4-year institution, and who did not transfer from a community college.*

Marissa grew up in Milford, Connecticut. She was very active and loved running, playing beach volleyball, swimming, and jet-skiing. She formed a few very close bonds during high school, and felt that she had a good experience overall. She even had great relationships with her high school teachers and enjoyed the time she spent discussing assignments and readings with them after class, but she also hated that there was not a lot to do in Milford, or in Connecticut for that matter. She could not wait to get out and live somewhere new and exciting.

Marissa had two older brothers, both of whom played football through high school. Her whole family loved football and it was Marissa’s favorite sport to watch. Along with getting out of Connecticut, Marissa really hoped to get accepted to a big-name football school so that she could

\textsuperscript{88} Stella is less based on statistics than the other sketches...but, admit it, you know a Stella!
attend, and enjoy college games. The idea of being part of a large student population with a great sense of school pride truly excited her!

Although Marissa’s parents urged her to consider a few closer options, she insisted that getting away was the best option for her. She applied to several universities in the South and Midwest and was accepted to a few of the schools. Ultimately, she decided to attend Michigan State in the fall. She could not wait to go and as soon as she had made her decision, she bought a Michigan State hoodie and wore it proudly.

Marissa graduated from high school with a 2.87 GPA. She enjoyed the summer with her high school friends, but her move-in date at Michigan State could not come soon enough. By the end of June, Marissa had already organized her clothes and belongings to determine what she would and would not bring with her.

Marissa had a great time her first semester at Michigan State. The football games were just as fun as she imagined them to be, and she met some really nice people. After three semesters, she was doing well academically, and she still liked the school, but being away from home had lost its luster. Having to schedule flights had become a nuisance, and every once in a while Marissa did wish that she could spend the weekend at home with her family. Most of all, the amount of student loans she had to take felt overwhelming, and she worried about whether she would be able to pay off what she had borrowed.

Towards the end of her second year, she decided she needed to go home. As much as she did not want to admit it to her parents, she missed being home and felt that the out-of-state cost was not worth it. She had experienced the big-name, football school, and was grateful for her time at Michigan State, but she knew that she was ready to go back home. She called her parents, and they were thrilled with her decision.

Marissa applied to Central, Southern, and UConn, but chose Southern because her aunt owns a popular restaurant in New Haven, and offered Marissa a part-time job to help her pay for school. One of Marissa’s high school friends also offered her an on-campus living option in North, and Marissa was very relieved to be able to live with someone she knew and trusted.

At first, SCSU was simply the most convenient choice, but when Marissa attended Transfer Student Orientation, she met the coordinator of her program and absolutely adored her. Marissa became excited about her decision to attend SCSU, and she was even more thrilled that she had found a major. She began to feel that SCSU would add a sense of direction to her studies.

Marissa was also ecstatic that nearly all of her credits from Michigan State transferred to Southern. However, when she printed out her degree evaluation, she realized that almost all of her transfer credit had come in as electives. According to her evaluation, she needed ENG 111

89 The mean HS GPA of students who transfer to SCSU from schools other than community colleges
and 112, three semesters of Spanish (despite having taken 4 years of Spanish in high school and 2 semesters at Michigan State), a physical education requirement, writing intensive courses, and a number of other classes she thought had been fulfilled by her transfer credits. She could not understand why her Philosophy course did not transfer in as a critical thinking course.

At first, Marissa felt defeated and overwhelmed, but she remembered that she had the contact information for the program coordinator. She set up a meeting, and the two discussed course equivalency and went over what Marissa might be able to get waived. The coordinator was extremely helpful. After the coordinator made a few phone calls, Marissa was relieved to find out that she only had to take ENG 112, one semester of Spanish or the STAMP test\(^90\), two writing-intensive courses, and one critical thinking course. While she was there, the coordinator also went over the courses Marissa should take, and other courses that would be helpful if she intended to apply to graduate school.

Currently, Marissa is doing well at Southern, and is on-track to graduate just one or two semesters later than she would have if she had stayed at Michigan State. Now that she has had several courses, she is certain that she wants to pursue her Master’s degree SCSU and has no intention of leaving Southern. She is happy to be here, and feels that she made the right decision to come home.

Transfer students make up approximately 33% of the total student population (SCSU Factbook, 23 July 2013). Of all transfer students, about 66% transfer to SCSU from an institution other than a community college. Many of these students enter Southern after having attended Central, Eastern, Western, or UConn, but there are also several students who go out-of-state for college initially, and want or need to return home for school. It is difficult to determine retention rates for transfer students. For example, students from the incoming class of 2010 are projected to graduate between 2014 and 2016. However, transfer students from institutions other than a community college enter with an average of 43.90 credits, and may finish before these projected graduation years. In an analysis, an earlier graduation looks like a case of non-retention, and we have no way of distinguishing between the two. It is likely, however, that Marissa will stay, as she has formed a valuable connection with a faculty member (which has been found to be an important predictor for the retention of female students) and SCSU is part of her plan for the future.

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\(^{90}\) The STAMP test assesses students’ abilities to read, write and speak efficiently in a foreign language. Obtaining a certain score fulfills students’ foreign language requirement at the university.
OVERVIEW

We hope that these stories have supplemented the quantitative report by providing applied examples of statistical findings.

These sketches aimed to highlight several predictors found to be important in the most current model of student retention at SCSU (see the companion quantitative report). The presented archetypes certainly do not cover the entire spectrum of students at Southern, but they do exemplify a few common student subtypes and some of their experiences at this university.

These sketches demonstrate how various predictors may present in certain groups of students. They also illustrate some of the challenges associated with studying retention, which are important to keep in mind when considering these results. In evaluating Ted and Maria, for example, it may appear that these two students are almost identical based on survey results, but their retention and graduation statuses will likely differ in the end.

Finally, we hope that these supplemental stories will serve as a reminder that the study of student retention is complex and it may be beneficial to examine this issue using a variety of sources and viewpoints.
APPENDIX A: Computed Variables

Diligence:

- FYE1_2.70: I write all the small steps that I have to take over time in order to complete long-term assignments and/or class projects.
- FYE1_2.90: I plan appropriate amounts of time for study.
- FYE1_2.42: When I am searching online for a specific fact, I typically take the time to check out other links, even if they do not appear to be immediately relevant to the question I need to answer at that moment.
- FYE1_2.43: Sometimes when I don't understand something in my textbook, I will go to the library or search online for another book or resource that may explain the same point in a different way.
- FYE1_2.46: When reading my textbooks, if there is a word that I don't know, I look it up.
- FYE1_2.47: If I make a mistake in class or on a homework assignment, I re-study the material so that I'll never make the same mistake again.
- FYE1_2.50: I apply the skills that I am learning in my INQUIRY seminar or Honors courses to other courses I am also taking this semester.
- FYE2_2.60: In general, I study at least two hours for every one hour of class.
- FYE2_2.70: When I have a large project to complete, I begin it early and complete it in steps.
- FYE2_2.12: When I am studying or doing my homework, I take the time to get it right.
- FYE2_2.15: I study regularly and enough to be successful in college.

Information Literacy:

- FYE2_2.29: For the most part, the content of my classes has been interesting.
- FYE2_2.30: My experience at SCSU has met my expectations.
- FYE2_2.31: I expect that I will graduate from SCSU.
- FYE2_2.33: I am learning which SCSU online databases to use and how to search them.
- FYE2_2.24: I am being taught how to effectively read and comment on the work of my fellow students.
- FYE2_2.34: I am aware that SCSU librarians can help me plan and structure a research project.
- FYE2_2.35: I am aware that I can set up an appointment and meet with a librarian one on one.
- FYE2_2.36: It is easy to navigate the library's website (I can find books, online databases, etc.)
- FYE2_2.37: I am being provided with appropriate training and support to make effective use of library and information resources.
- FYE2_2.45: I learn better through writing assignments.
- FYE2_2.47: I am being taught step-by-step how to complete a writing assignment.

Academic Habits of Mind:

- FYE2_2.38: I effectively express my position during classroom discussions.
- FYE2_2.39: I examine all sides of an argument before reaching a conclusion.
- FYE2_2.40: I now have a clearer sense of my most preferred learning style.
- FYE2_2.41: I have a fairly clear idea of what I need to study now in order to have the career that I want.
- FYE2_2.42: I have developed effective strategies for managing my time.
- FYE2_2.43: I have gained confidence in my ability to defend my position on an issue.
- FYE2_2.44: I am prepared for more advanced coursework.

Time Management:

- FYE2_2.70: When I have a large project to complete, I begin it early and complete it in steps.
- FYE2_2.11: I am able to spread out the work on a long assignment and not wait until the last minute to complete it.
- FYE2_2.12: When I am studying or doing my homework, I take the time to get it right.
• FYE2_2.15: I study regularly and enough to be successful in college.
• FYE2_2.19: When I have an assignment due, I complete a draft ahead of time so I have the time to ask my professor questions about it or utilize campus resources (e.g., the writing or tutorial center) well before it is due

Self-Efficacy:
• FYE2_2.20: Financial concerns keep me from fully enjoying my college experience.
• FYE2_2.23: The University does not offer enough academic support for first-year students.
• FYE2_2.25: At the end of a class period, after I close my notebook, I don’t think about the material until I have to
• FYE2_2.26: General education requirements get in the way of the classes I really want to take

Gains:
• FYE2_2.10: It is important for professors to formally teach study skills to first-year students
• FYE2_2.16: Compared to the start of the semester, I now have a clearer sense of what I need to do in order to succeed academically.
• FYE2_2.17: I am gaining the knowledge to understand the research process and to use the academic resources available to me.