

The student departure puzzle:

Do some faculties and programs have answers?



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Seminar Objective

Interactive session exploring
student attrition and variation
within CQU



SeminarOutline

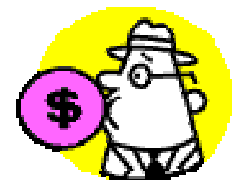
- Setting the scene
- What is student attrition?
- Current theories on Student Attrition
- Current evidence on factors affecting it
- Variations across disciplines
- Faculties/schools/programs as sub-cultures

It is a game of money, honour and patronage.

The publication of the first set of teaching and learning rankings for Australia's universities has coincided with an analysis of Australian Research Council grants that shows – surprise, surprise – that men in traditional subjects in the older universities do better. That mixture of grievance and defensiveness characteristic of higher education came quickly to the fore....



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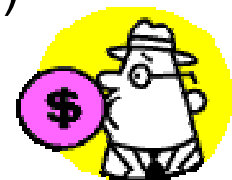
It is a game (Cont'd)

All those who think the teaching and learning outcomes (prepared by the federal education department) were “flawed” or “misleading”, or just plain wrong, need to come up with a better measure. ...

(Aitkin, 2005, p. 33; emphasis in original)



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It is a game (Cont'd)

My guess is that there will usually be as much within-university variation as across-university variation, so that a single index figure for each university will conceal as much as it reveals...

(Aitkin, 2005, p. 33; emphasis in original)



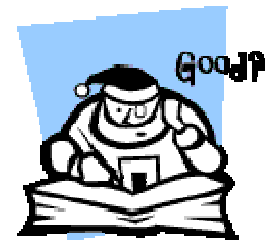
What is student attrition?

- Student leaves without graduating
- Not course pass rates
- Converse of retention
- Similar to Progression
- Related to completion
- Churners and program attrition
- Moving to a different institution
- First year rate highest



Is student attrition BAD?

A case can be made that attrition is not necessarily bad or not necessarily always bad.





Is student attrition BAD?

- Survival of the fittest
- Improves graduate outcomes
- Fills quota
- Concentrates resources on ablest students
- Partial study not a loss
- Informed choice
- Bill Gates



Current theories

...the broad dimensions of a theory of student retention are starting to emerge. Among other things, we can say with a good deal of confidence that

- Academic preparation
- Commitments and
- Involvement

matter.

(Tinto, 2005; structure modified)



Braxton's classification of Theories

- Economic
- Organizational
- Psychological
- Sociological
- Interactionalist (integrated, Tinto)

(Braxton, 2000)



Dichotomous models

- Residential Vs Commuter institutions(U.S.) (Braxton and Hirschy,2005)
- Survivalist Vs Remedialist (U.K.) (Simpson,2003)



Astin and Oseguera

50 ,000 students across 262 U.S. institutions. Multivariate regression analysis of 47 factors.

Most important factors for completions:

- Selectivity of institution
- School grades



Institutional Drift

Queensland Studies Authority (2004)

	Urban	Rural	Total
Continue	85	80	83
Exit	7	10	8
Move	8	10	9

(from Table 12)



Learning and Teaching Performance Fund

**Gives bi-variate regression r^2 (%) values
for 17 factors. Examples:**

Gender	0.00	
Age	0.73	
Indigenous	0.16	
Socio-economic status	0.01	
Location (rural/isolated)	0.25	
Full-time/part-time	2.27	
External/internal	1.10	(DEST, 2005)

Australian Predicted Completion rates

Female 67.1

Male 60.5

External 39.5

Full-time 69.5

Part-time 52.1

Non-TER 62.2

TER 66.9

Urban 64.1

Rural 65.1

Isolated 61.5

\$ Most advantaged 66.2

\$ Most disadvantaged 62.2



(Commenced 1993)

(Martin et al, 2001) ¹⁶

Completion rates by Discipline

Science	58.3
Arts, Humanities, Soc. Science	58.4
Engineering, Surveying	59.4
Agric., Animal husbandry	62.4
Bus., Admin., Econ.	62.5
Architecture, Building	64.7
Education	71.4
Law, Legal studies	72.0
Nursing	75.2
Health	78.5
Veterinary Science	89.8

(Commenced 1993)

(Martin et al, 2001)



What students who leave say

Financial problems	56%
Lack of motivation	51%
Lack of interest in that program	46%
Work commitments	44%
Not clear what career opportunities exist	39%
Family responsibilities	35%
Unexpected events	34%

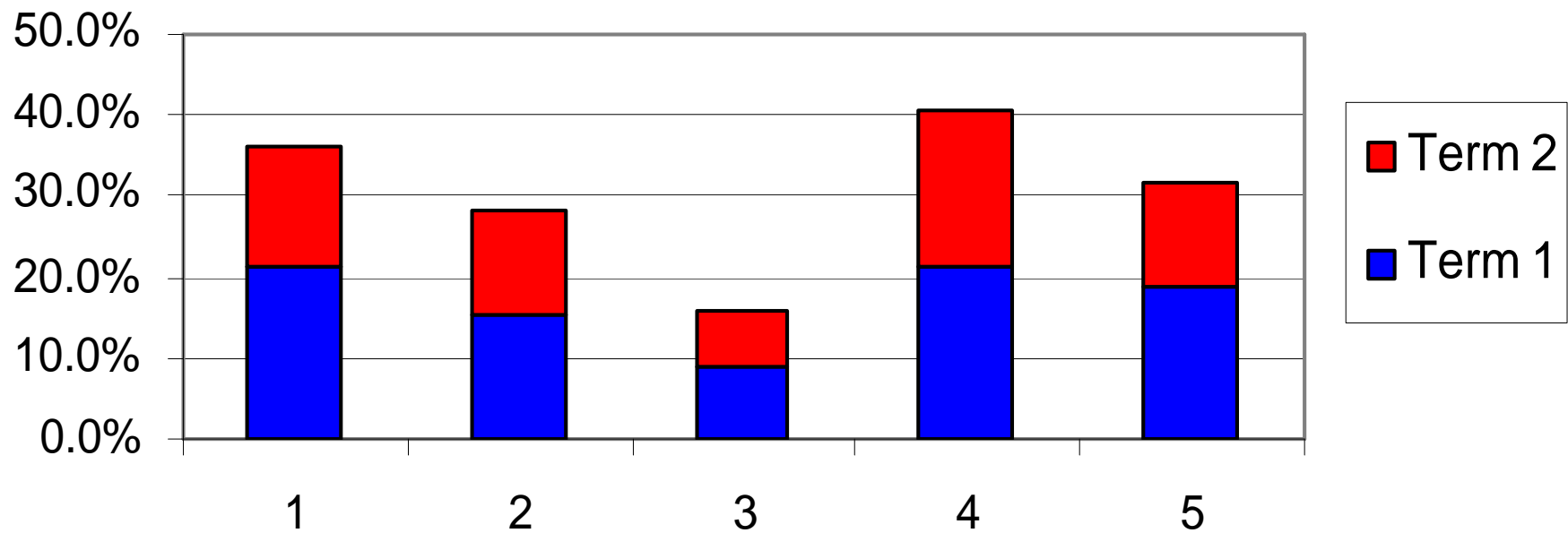


What students say.....

Loneliness and isolation	28%
Poor academic performance	23%
Health problems	22%
Transport problems	21%
Lack of support from partner/family	12%
Inadequate computer skills	6%
Inadequate literacy/numeracy skills	5%

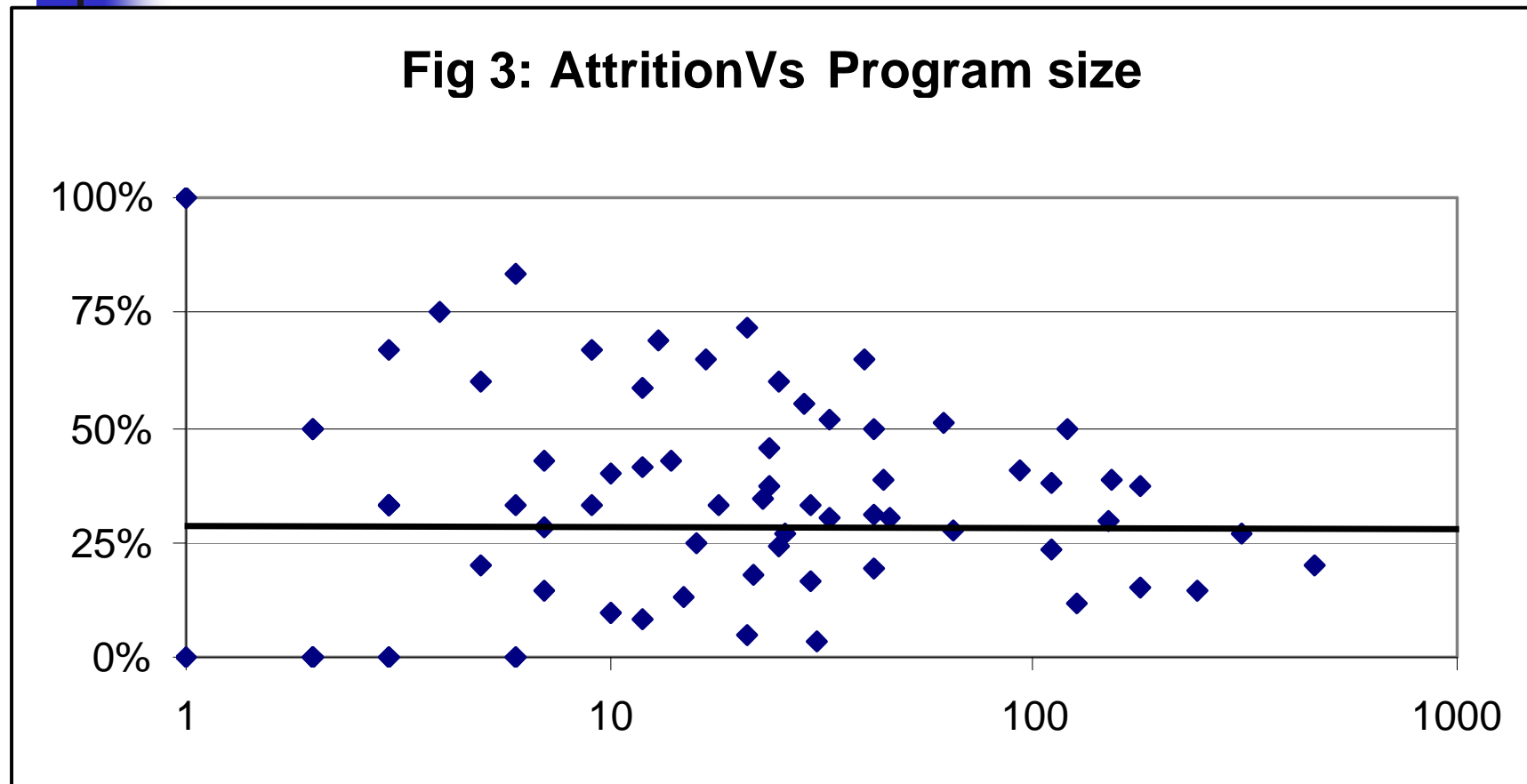
CQU Variation by Faculty

Fig 1: Attrition rate by Faculties



(Danaher, Bowser and Somasundaram, 2005)

CQU Variation by Program



(Danaher, Bowser and Somasundaram, 2005)



Some Questions

- Should we worry about or celebrate cross-program/cross-discipline student attrition?
- What should we focus on – Faculties, schools, programs or courses?
- Should we tighten recruitment? – How?
- Are student characteristics across faculties different? How?



Conclusion

We suggest that both conceptually informed and methodologically framed dialogue and multi-variate analysis of data are necessary next steps in understanding why progression rates vary so much within institutions and across disciplines, in order to extend our collective understanding and management of the departure puzzle.



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