

## **Varsity Athletics at Cal State Northridge: Does Participation Foster Persistence?**

During the last year, CSUN's Office of Institutional Research has been examining the one-year continuation rates of various groups of first time freshmen because the transition from the first to the second year of college is such a critical one. This brief report takes a look at the continuation rates for the campus's three most recent cohorts of freshmen athletes and examines a few of their entry characteristics. The data reviewed below suggest that students participating in varsity athletics are more likely than other groups of freshmen to return to CSUN for a second year of study.

The top part of Table 1 indicates that, in recent years, at least four in ten of the newly enrolled freshmen athletes stemmed from minority backgrounds, with African American and Latina/o students the most numerous. Another one-third to two-fifths of the freshmen athletes are white. Their intended majors are diverse, as the second section of Table 1 indicates, with close to a third undecided about their majors at entry. Among the newly enrolled athletes expressing a preference, majors in Business and Economics or Health and Human Development are popular choices.

The number of freshmen athletes entering CSUN during the last three Fall terms has increased by 30% , at least in part as a function of a 25% increase in the size of the freshmen class. This increase has been accompanied by a shift in the pattern of majors favored by the incoming athletes. As Table 1 shows, the preference for Business majors has declined noticeably, while the number of students planning majors in three other Colleges has at least doubled: Arts, Media, and Communication, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Science and Mathematics. The growth in the last is particularly striking.<sup>1</sup> The backgrounds of the athletes has shifted as well, with the number and proportion of white and Latina/o athletes increasing. Whether these shifts are temporary or permanent remains to be seen.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the numbers remain small, interest in Engineering and Computer Science fields has also increased substantially.

Table 2 shows the one-year continuation rates for various groups of freshmen athletes entering in Fall 2004 or Fall 2005, along with the comparable continuation rates for the larger groups to which they belong. Overall, the one-year continuation rates for the two cohorts of athletes exceed those for all first time freshmen by 4 – 9 points. The athletes' advantage is evident for all but two of the racial and ethnic groups, with the advantage of the athletes among African American freshmen particularly striking. Even the exceptions to the general pattern (i.e., the Fall 2005 Asian athletes and the Fall 2004 athletes whose racial and ethnic background is unknown) appear for only one of the two cohorts under study.

The bottom section of Table 2 shows that, with one exception, athletes planning majors in any given College are more likely to return for a second year of study than other freshmen planning similar majors. Once again, the single exception – Fall 2004 athletes planning Business majors – is evident for only one cohort. In short, participation in varsity athletics clearly fosters persistence in college.

**Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Newly Enrolled Freshman Athletes by Entry Term**

Characteristic	Fall 2004		Fall 2005		Fall 2006	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
<b>Racial and Ethnic Background</b>						
Minority	42.7	35	49.5	50	41.1	44
<i>African American</i>	19.5	16	28.7	29	13.1	14
<i>Asian</i>	8.5	7	5.0	5	8.4	9
<i>Latina/o</i>	14.6	12	15.8	16	18.7	20
<i>Native American</i>	--	0	--	0	0.9	1
White	36.6	30	37.6	38	44.9	48
Unknown (includes other)	15.9	13	9.9	10	10.3	11
International	4.9	4	3.0	3	3.7	4
Total	100.0	82	100.0	101	100.0	107
<b>College Housing Likely Major at Entry</b>						
Business & Economics	28.0	23	19.8	20	10.3	11
Health & Human Development	19.5	16	13.9	14	20.6	22
Arts, Media, & Communication	7.3	6	5.0	5	11.2	12
Science & Mathematics	1.2	1	5.9	6	13.1	14
Social & Behavioral Science	6.1	5	6.9	7	9.3	10
Engineering & Computer Science	1.2	1	6.9	7	3.7	4
Humanities	2.4	2	3.0	3	1.9	2
Education	1.2	1	1.0	1	0.9	1
Undeclared	32.9	27	37.6	38	29.0	31
Total	100.0	82	100.0	101	100.0	107

Source: Student database maintained by the Office of Institutional Research; CSUN

**Table 2. One-Year Continuation Rates of Freshman Athletes and All First Time Freshmen by Fall Entry Term, College of Likely Major at Entry, and Racial and Ethnic Background**

Characteristic	Athletes				All First Time Freshmen			
	Fall 2004 entrants		Fall 2005 entrants		Fall 2004 entrants		Fall 2005 entrants	
	Continuation Rate	Cohort Size	Continuation Rate	Cohort Size	Continuation Rate	Cohort Size	Continuation Rate	Cohort Size
<b>Racial and Ethnic Background</b>								
Minority	85.7	35	84.0	50	75.8	1,789	74.4	2,309
<i>African American</i>	<i>87.5</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>86.2</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>68.5</i>	<i>324</i>	<i>68.2</i>	<i>494</i>
<i>Asian</i>	<i>85.7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>60.0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>80.3</i>	<i>432</i>	<i>79.5</i>	<i>488</i>
<i>Latina/o</i>	<i>83.3</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>87.5</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>76.2</i>	<i>1,024</i>	<i>74.7</i>	<i>1,314</i>
White	83.3	30	86.8	38	80.4	709	78.8	883
Unknown (includes other)	69.2	13	80.0	10	78.8	396	81.3	406
International	75.0	4	100.0	3	87.1	85	77.0	122
Total	81.7	82	85.1	101	77.6	2,979	76.3	3,720
<b>College Housing Likely Major at Entry</b>								
Business & Economics	73.9	23	90.0	20	76.7	536	77.4	656
Health & Human Development	81.3	16	92.9	14	75.6	262	70.4	331
Arts, Media, & Communication	100.0	6	80.0	5	77.7	364	73.8	519
Social & Behavioral Science	80.0	5	100.0	7	75.8	318	75.2	432
Humanities	100.0	2	100.0	3	76.9	186	79.8	258
Engineering & Computer Science	100.0	1	85.7	7	76.8	220	75.7	247
Science & Mathematics	100.0	1	83.3	6	79.1	201	82.4	278
Undeclared	81.5	27	76.3	38	78.3	871	76.8	961
Total	81.7	82	85.1	101	77.6	2,979	76.3	3,720

Source: Student database maintained by the Office of Institutional Research; CSUN