

# Humphreys College

## NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT

SUMMER QUARTER

SEPTEMBER 2007

### FROM THE DESK OF THE DEAN OF INSTRUCTION

## WHAT IS A GOOD RETENTION RATE?

By Jess Bonds

### THREE MAJOR QUESTIONS

*Retention in the context of a college means retaining, or keeping, students enrolled.* All colleges keep track of their retention rates because they want to know if their students are staying in school and working toward graduation. I've been to three national retention conventions where colleges from across the country gather to talk about how to increase retention rates. In the center of their attention are the following issues:

- ⇒ What is a good retention rate?
- ⇒ Why do students leave college?
- ⇒ What can be done to keep them once they choose to attend a college?

These are also the three primary questions under continual discussion at college campuses. Humphreys is no different. We, too, are interested in keep our students enrolled. This article addresses the first question.

### HOW TO MEASURE THE RETENTION RATE

Generally, colleges have agreed on how to measure retention. The higher the rate, the more a college can say it is doing a good job at educating students. If colleges were not doing a good job, then, presumably, students would leave. And they would more than likely leave sometime during their first year.

For this reason, college retention rates are measured by examining the enrollment patterns of *first-year students*. A college will identify all new students for a fall term and see how many of them register the next fall term. If half the students register the next fall term, then the college's retention rate is 50% for that year.

### HUMPHREYS... AND THE OTHERS

The American College Testing Program (ACT), an independent, not-for-profit organization that provides numerous assessment and research services, publishes national retention rate averages each year. The data are categorized by types of institutions. Humphreys is a private, open-admission college. *Nationally, the average retention rate for colleges like Humphreys was 54% in 2005, when two- and four-year rates are averaged – we offer both associate and bachelor degrees. Humphreys' rate for 2005 was 58%.* The 2005 data are the most recent available; 2006 data will be available in fall 2007.



The national rate is pretty stable since it is a composite of hundreds of college rates, but our number is subject to greater ups and downs because it reflects just our number, and we're a small college to boot.

To stabilize our number it helps look at a running five-year average. *Our five-year average is 63%, which, for example, is a clear improvement over the previous five years when the aver-*

*(Continued on page 2)*

(Continued from page 1)

age was 57%. In any event, compared to national averages, we have a very respectable retention rate and it has been trending upward over the last five years.

### WHY DO HUMPHREYS STUDENTS STAY?

There are a number of reasons Humphreys students stick around:

- ⇒ They are focused on a particular major related to a career they want.
- ⇒ They understand what a diploma will mean to them and their families.
- ⇒ They are not just a number; they are known by name.
- ⇒ They have easy access to professors because class sizes are small and professors and deans have open-door policies. Students can meet with their professor/advisor each quarter to select courses.

In other words, there is a lot of *contact* between students and teachers – this is a key to retention nationwide.

*Quality education* is another key. Humphreys maintains its regional accreditation and has instituted a system of measuring student learning. Part-time professors who work by day and teach at night bring valuable insights to the classroom. Professors are constantly updating course and degree requirements and linking them to learning objectives. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to keep a program active, current, and meaningful.

## COLLEGE RETENTION AND ATTRITION, SELECTED RESOURCES

- ⇒ Altbach, Philip G., Robert O. Berdahl, and Patricia J. Gumpert, Eds. *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- ⇒ Astin, Alexander W. *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited*. Jossey-Bass, 1997.
- ⇒ Bok, Derek. *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More*. Princeton University Press, 2005.
- ⇒ Bonds, Jess, Anthony Johnston, Stanislav Perkner, and Jason Wolins. *Humphreys College Retention Plan, June 2007*. (Internal Document.) Humphreys College, 2007.
- ⇒ Braxton, John M., ed. *Reworking the Student Puzzle*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.
- ⇒ Kuh, George, et al. *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*. Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- ⇒ Moxley, David, et al. *Keeping Students in Higher Education: Successful Practices and Strategies for Retention*. RoutledgeFalmer, 2004.
- ⇒ Pascarella, Ernest T., and Patrick T. Terenzini. *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*. Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- ⇒ Perkner, Stanislav. *Enrollment Management Plan of Student Recruitment and Retention, 2006-2009*. (Internal Document.) Humphreys College, Laurence Drivon School of Law, 2006.
- ⇒ Seidman, Alan, Ed. *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success*. Praeger, 2005.
- ⇒ Seidman, Alan, Ed. *Minority Student Retention, the Best of the Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice*. Baywood, 2007.
- ⇒ Simpson, Ormond. *Student Retention in Online, Open, and Distance Learning*. RoutledgeFalmer, 2003.
- ⇒ Snyder, Vivian. "College Student Retention: National Trends and Implementation Strategies." An Interview with Stanislav Perkner. *Humphreys College Newsletter – Supplement*, November 2004.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

- ⇒ Tinto, Vincent. *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- ⇒ Upcraft, M. Lee, John N. Gardner, and Betsy O. Barefoot, Eds. *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student*. Jossey-Bass, 2004.

#### Periodical and Web Resources

- ⇒ The Center for the Study of the College Student Retention. Website at <[www.cscsr.org](http://www.cscsr.org)>.
- ⇒ *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. Website at <<http://www.baywood.com/journals/PreviewJournals.asp?Id=1521-0251>>.

## TEN MINUTES WITH PROFESSOR ROWENA WALKER TALKING AND THINKING ABOUT BOOKS

### Everybody at Humphreys knows that you are not only a devoted teacher but also an avid reader.

“Yes, I love to read. If there were no books—if computers replaced them—I would be in deep trouble. I grew up around books and watched my father spend all his evenings reading. Of course, we had no television until after I went away to college—just a radio. However, even after he bought the first television set, my father watched only a few special programs and spent the rest of the evening with his beloved books. Of course, he didn’t just read and ignore the rest of us. Our conversations at the dinner table were stimulating and were often related to books or to the world at large. I especially remember one evening when I was out in the kitchen finishing the dishes. He came in with a surprised, yet pleased, smile on his face and declared: ‘I never cease to be amazed; I have read Huckleberry Finn almost every winter for the last ten years, and I still find—every single time—something profound and rich that I had not found before.’ No wonder, I thought many years later, why so many great literary critics see Twain’s masterpiece as the greatest novel ever written. My father would have agreed.”

### During your childhood, did your father recognize the future reader in you?

“I am sure he thought I would never be a reader since I was really more excited about cheerleading—and boys, of course. But, because I absolutely adored him, I listened to him more than he thought.”

### When did you discover your own interest in reading?

“It came on strong in 1949, when I was a freshman at the University of Washington. In those days we were required to read

two, three, or more books for most courses; the curriculum then was reading oriented, and it worked for me subsequently for my entire life.”

**Generations of your students are well aware of your insistence on studying good literature. Not so long ago, you even developed a new course, “Biographies: Great Figures in Humanities,” which requires proactive reading of various current and historic sources. In your lectures on history, philosophy, religion, arts, law, and politics, you frequently share your fresh reading experiences. As a reader, do you prefer fiction or nonfiction?**

“I read much more non-fiction than I do fiction because as a teacher I can never learn enough to keep ahead of students! On the other hand, I probably would do that anyway. I have an insatiable curiosity about what is going on around us—and why. I always have been that way. I love history, for example, because of all subjects it tells us about the human race, what we’ve been, and where we might be headed. Further, my university degrees are in Political Science—which is dependent on history—and my specialties in that area were Political Philosophy and International Relations. However, I have never been quite as interested in all the politics and campaigns as have many political scientists. But anything that enlightens me or satisfies the wonder I feel for mankind’s activities – I can’t get enough of.”

**Your office bookcases are full of interesting volumes about famous artists, writers, and politicians.**

“Perhaps my favorite non-fiction reading is biography—especially biographies of those who have made great contribu-

(Continued on page 4)

*“No wonder, I thought many years later, why so many great literary critics see Twain’s masterpiece as the greatest novel ever written. My father would have agreed.”*

(Continued from page 3)

tions to history. My very favorite book to pick up and just open up to any page is Jean Edward Smith's biography of Justice John Marshall. I like the recent Ron Chernow book on Alexander Hamilton too. These were real people, both who had unusual lives; sometimes their stories are real page-turners, believe it or not. David McCullough's biography of John Adams made me put Adams ahead of Thomas Jefferson on my admiration list. I honestly believe reading history and biographies would give most people the pleasure they give me, if they just gave them a try!"



**Tell us something about your favorite fiction writers.**

"Once in a while, I read a novel. However, in all likelihood it will be one that I have read over and over. I especially like the English 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and a few others. With them, I feel as though I am reading history as well as wonderful stories. Besides, they were great observers of human beings—as was William Shakespeare, of course. One is constantly amazed at their ability to have seen what makes all of us alike, basically. I am also touched by the beauty of the language – especially by the English writers."

**So far, you are confessing your admiration for the classics. What do you think of the contemporary literary scene?**

"I am not good at understanding modern novels. So many have a psychological orientation, and frankly, although I hate to admit it, I just don't 'get' them. Sometimes I don't understand the symbolism. Sometimes I don't identify with the nature of their problems, I should say. Sometimes they are too graphic for me. I am not proud of all this, but there is just so much more that I want to read before it's all over for me. I think I will be all right if I don't read what I don't want to read! I truly believe that reading gives insights into this one life that we have that no other medium can possibly do. It allows us to reflect. It isn't instant gratification. It gives us the time and opportunity to think about the grand scheme of things in life, its purpose, and our part in it. And, as I said earlier, I just can't get enough of it."

~ Stanislav Perkner



*Humphreys*  
COLLEGE

[www.humphreys.edu](http://www.humphreys.edu)

***Main Campus***

6650 Inglewood Avenue  
Stockton, CA 95207  
209.478.0800  
Fax 209.478.8721

***Branch Campus***

3600 Sisk Road, Suite 3-A  
Modesto, CA 95356  
209.543.9411  
Fax 209.543.9413

**Humphreys College Newsletter *Supplement*, September 2007**

Stanislav Perkner, Editor, [sparkner@humphreys.edu](mailto:sparkner@humphreys.edu)

Cynthia Becerra, Co-Editor, [cbecerra@humphreys.edu](mailto:cbecerra@humphreys.edu)

Leslie Walton, Executive Editor, [lwalton@humphreys.edu](mailto:lwalton@humphreys.edu)