

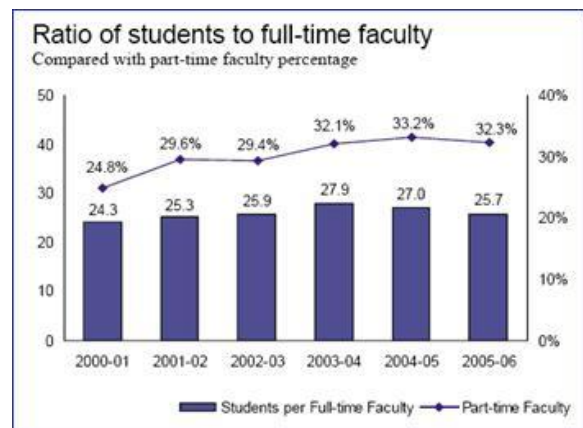


Student/Faculty Ratios and the Learning Environment

As a result of low state investment and increasing enrollments over the last several biennia, the capacity of OUS institutions to fully support the success of students has declined. The student-faculty ratio—a measure of faculty capacity to provide both classroom and out-of-class instructional support for students—has been worsening since 1992, and is now one of the highest in the fifty states and among OUS peer institutions. Consequently, students may not receive the level of faculty interaction and support they need to achieve their academic goals and that faculty would like to provide. This imbalance almost certainly has an effect on student retention, particularly in the critical first year.

A Related Issue

A related component to these ratios, faculty salaries are at such comparatively low levels that OUS's ability to recruit and retain regular rank, full-time faculty has been diminished, resulting in an increase in the use of part-time and adjunct faculty to meet teaching loads. Although these part-time and adjunct faculty may be excellent instructors, they do not provide the student advising, curriculum development, and other instructional functions carried out by regular rank faculty.



Learning Benefits of Greater Student/Faculty Interaction

Those who study good teaching practices characterize the best as those which:

- Encourage active learning
- Provide more time on each task and facilitate cooperation among students
- Give prompt feedback
- Communicate high expectations
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.¹

Overall, the more interaction between students and faculty, both in the formal classroom setting and outside of the classroom in advising and study sessions, the more the student will develop academically.²

The ratio of **students to full-time faculty** has decreased since 2003-04. While the downtrend is a welcomed improvement, OUS student-faculty ratios remain one of the highest among comparator institutions. Due to growing enrollments and continuing funding constraints, campuses rely heavily on part-time faculty to meet instructional demands. Between 2000-01 and 2005-06, the percentage of part-time faculty grew from one-quarter to approximately one-third.

More recently, this belief in the importance of such interaction has led to the creation of living-learning centers, such as the one recently opened at the University of Oregon. These centers promote learning communities in which faculty members interact more frequently with students about subjects covered in class, and about other issues of interest to students, such as advising on graduate school opportunities, career paths, and the like. Education outcomes, such as course completion, high GPAs, student persistence to the next grade level, graduation rates, and ultimately, employment, are positively

¹ Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson, *Seven Principles for Good Practices in Undergraduate Teaching* (1991).

² A.W. Austin, *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited* (1993).

affected by the amount and quality of student-faculty contact. Students feel like they “belong” and are helped in succeeding academically; this leads to higher retention and graduation rates.³

These findings reinforce the need to maintain low student/faculty ratios to achieve successful student outcomes.

The Risks We Face in OUS

Graduates of OUS universities value their academic experience and rate highly the quality of instruction they received, giving high marks to the accessibility and effectiveness of faculty, according to the biennial OUS survey of recent bachelor’s recipients.⁴

Nevertheless, the consequences of high student/faculty ratios, as well as cuts in academic support resources, are beginning to show up in how satisfied OUS graduates are with the advising and tutoring they received: only two-thirds of recent graduates were satisfied with the level of academic advising in their major.

A Needed Investment

The investment of \$6.9 million in the 2007-2009 Governor’s Recommended Budget for reduction of student/faculty ratios at some OUS institutions would be used to:

- Add faculty to rebalance the student/faculty ratio at those institutions with the highest ratios
- Target new faculty investments in areas that advance institution and System goals and build excellence
- Approach student advising and instruction in different ways that help student retention and success in college

With increased resources for improved student/faculty ratios, we should see greater satisfaction on the advising and academic support measure in the future.

2005-06 Student/Faculty Ratios *		
University	OUS	Comparator Institution Average **
EOU*	26.0	22.0
OIT	18.8	24.2
OSU	25.4	19.4
PSU	28.9	23.3
SOU*	21.3	22.0
UO	25.6	19.3
WOU*	24.4	22.0

* The ratio of fall FTE enrollment per full-time instructional faculty headcount, as reported through IPEDS to the National Center for Education Statistics.

** EOU, SOU, and WOU comparator institutions’ list is shared by all 3 regional universities. Reported averages exclude OUS institutions.

³ Vincent Tinto, *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (1993).

⁴ Oregon University System, Office of Strategic Programs and Planning, *One Year Later: The Status of the Class of 2005 Bachelor’s Degree Recipients*. February 2007.



Oregon University System