Evaluating Student Success Among Traditional and Non-Traditional Students & Strategies to Implement to Increase Retention and Academic Success

Prepared by Taichi Murata and Diana Vaichis

Purpose of Brief

To examine student success among traditional & non-traditional students enrolled in specific Crafton Hills College's Sociology course sections during Spring, Summer, & Fall 2021 semesters. Strategies based on research findings to implement in classroom settings to improve student success are discussed.

Key Findings

- During Spring, Summer, and Fall 2021 semesters: 151 students enrolled in six Sociology course sections at CHC. 129 students successfully completed the courses.
- Across all seven age groups, 85% of students during Spring, Summer, and Fall 2021 successfully completed the specific Sociology courses of interest.
- Among students aged 25 and older, 86% successfully completed the specific Sociology courses of interest.
- Across all age groups that enrolled, 23% were 25 years and older.
- 23% of students 25 years and older successfully completed the Sociology courses of interest when compared with other age groups.

Overview

A Crafton Hills College (CHC) Sociology professor reached out to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research & Planning (OIERP) with a research request to examine course completion data on traditional & nontraditional adult learners (age 25+, family responsibilities, work full-time, returning after gap years between high school and college). By analyzing course completion data, this would allow us to answer the ultimate research questions regarding course completion rates among both traditional and non-traditional learners at CHC. In addition, our team at OIERP performed in-depth research on nontraditional students' background, challenges faced, and needs that could provide valuable insight on various strategies faculty across numerous fields of study could implement in the classroom setting to improve retention and student success.

Background

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the characteristics of nontraditional students has been a source of debate and discussion in recent years. Characteristics of nontraditional students include family responsibilities, working full-time, had numerous gap years between high school and enrolling into college [Bean and Metzner, 1985, Cleveland-Innes, 1994 & Hurtado, 1996]. In addition, many nontraditional students comprise of women, ethnic minorities, older-aged adults, and part-time students [James & Watson, 1990]. Other factors include military deployment, financial limitations, or learning disabilities that hinder academic success [Leggins, 2021]. One of many challenges nontraditional students often face includes difficulty with adjusting to traditional format of course scheduling, semester calendars that may or may not align with their work schedule. If courses happen to be in-person; getting to campus, find parking, and on-time attendance from work in a timely manner could be burdensome. Another real-life challenge that a full-time worker can face: if their work schedule requires extensive and unpredictable travel, this would be a challenge for nontraditional students to make a Monday-Wednesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday course meeting schedule formats [Pelletier, 2010]. Other challenges nontraditional students face includes role strain. That would be the situation when the student has a tough time meeting multiple obligations all at once such as maintaining their roles as a spouse, parent, employee in addition to being a student dedicating their efforts to class attendance, assignments, and examination preparation [Sieber, 1974]. Taking into consideration that many nontraditional students have been outside of the education system for many years, a certain degree of role preparation would be needed to meet multiple role obligations as a nontraditional student.

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu

These elements include the development of efficient study methods, previous academic background, and confidence [Horton and Hunt, 1984]. Role overload for nontraditional students involves number of responsibilities that increase and places constraint on the available time and energy that they can devote to activities that would help them integrate socially and academically at the campuses they attend. In addition, nontraditional students contribute by bringing a wide variety of life and work experiences to the learning environment. Due to this context, nontraditional learners may or may not grant faculty the authority that younger aged students would. This could result in hurdles for nontraditional students in being able to establish effective professional student-faculty relationships in the learning environment [Bradley, M., & Cleveland-Innes, 1992 and Jarvis, 1985].

In a study performed by Bradley and Cleveland-Innes, 233 students were surveyed to further understand the needs of adult students at college institutions they discovered aspects of student life and services that nontraditional students would likely focus on. This study discovered that a large number of respondents to the survey indicated that going to university has been most satisfying at this point of life and that they needed advice, information, and support in adjusting to student life. However, the majority of nontraditional students in this survey study did not feel isolated or feel lonely on campus and often do not feel as comfortable discussing matters of personal interest with a professor [Bradley, M., & Cleveland-Innes, 1992]. There were open-ended comments from this study's survey that indicated academic environment issues such as systemic barriers, lack of understanding and support from college professors, interaction with their classmate peers that may or may not be within similar age groups or phases of their lives [Bradley, M., & Cleveland-Innes, 1992]. These factors could potentially impact nontraditional students' academic performance and retention; therefore, it is important that we examine student performance metrics to observe patterns in nontraditional students' enrollment and success at Crafton Hills College to inform potential strategies that could be implemented in classroom settings to increase retention and success.

Methodology

Data for this research brief was obtained using the Equity Report: Course Success Rate by Section and Age from CHC's Informer database. Course success is defined as earning a grade of A, B, C, or CR/P divided by the total number of grades on record (GOR): A, B, C, D, F, CR/P, NC/NP, I. or W. The range of data obtained comprised of Spring 2021, Summer 2021, and Fall 2021 Sociology course sections taught by an instructor (i.e., requestor). The course sections included into the data tables were those that included a diverse range of age groups (i.e., 19 years or younger, 20-24 years old, 25-29 years old, 30-34 years old, 35-39 years old, 40-49 years old, 50 or older, and a combined 25 years and older group). However, if any of the Sociology course sections during Spring, Summer, and Fall 2021 did not include students age groups 25 years and above, these course sections were excluded from analysis. Ultimately, six course sections were included as part of our analysis. Data visualizations including pie graphs and bar graphs were created in both RStudio and MATLAB programming software systems.

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu

Page 2 of 8

Results/Findings:

Table 1. Three Sociology Course Enrollment & Success: Spring, Summer, & Fall 2021

Descriptive Statistics Spring 2021 - Fall 2021 for Three Sociology Course Enrollments	Enrolled	Success	% Success[2]
Total Sociology Course Enrollment for 6 Sections	151	129	85.4
Enrollment by Age Groups			
19 or younger	59	50	84.7
20-24 Years Old	57	49	86.0
25-29 Years Old	13	10	76.9
30-34 Years Old	10	8	80.0
35-39 Years Old	6	6	100.0
40-49 Years Old	2	2	100.0
50 or Older	4	4	100.0
25 Years and Older[1]	35	30	85.7
Spring 2021 Sociology Course Enrollment for 2 Sections	80	79	90.8
19 or younger	31	29	93.5
20-24 Years Old	34	30	88.2
25-29 Years Old	9	8	88.9
30-34 Years Old	3	2	66.7
35-39 Years Old	5	5	100.0
40-49 Years Old	2	2	100.0
50 or Older	3	3	100.0
25 Years and Older[1]	22	20	90.9
Summer 2021 Sociology Course Enrollment for 1 Section	15	14	93.3
19 or younger	6	6	100.0
20-24 Years Old	2	2	100.0
25-29 Years Old	1	1	100.0
30-34 Years Old	5	4	80.0
35-39 Years Old	---	---	---
50 or Older	1	1	100.0
25 Years and Older[1]	7	6	85.7
Fall 2021 Sociology Course Enrollment for 3 Sections	49	36	73.5
19 or younger	22	15	68.2
20-24 Years Old	21	17	81.0
25-29 Years Old	3	1	33.3
30-34 Years Old	2	2	100.0
35-39 Years Old	1	1	100.0
50 or Older	---	---	--
25 Years and Older[1]	6	4	66.7

[1]Included age groups 25-29 years old, 30-34 years old, 35 – 39 years old, 40-49 years old, 50 or older
[2]Sociology success percentages are within individual age groups

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu
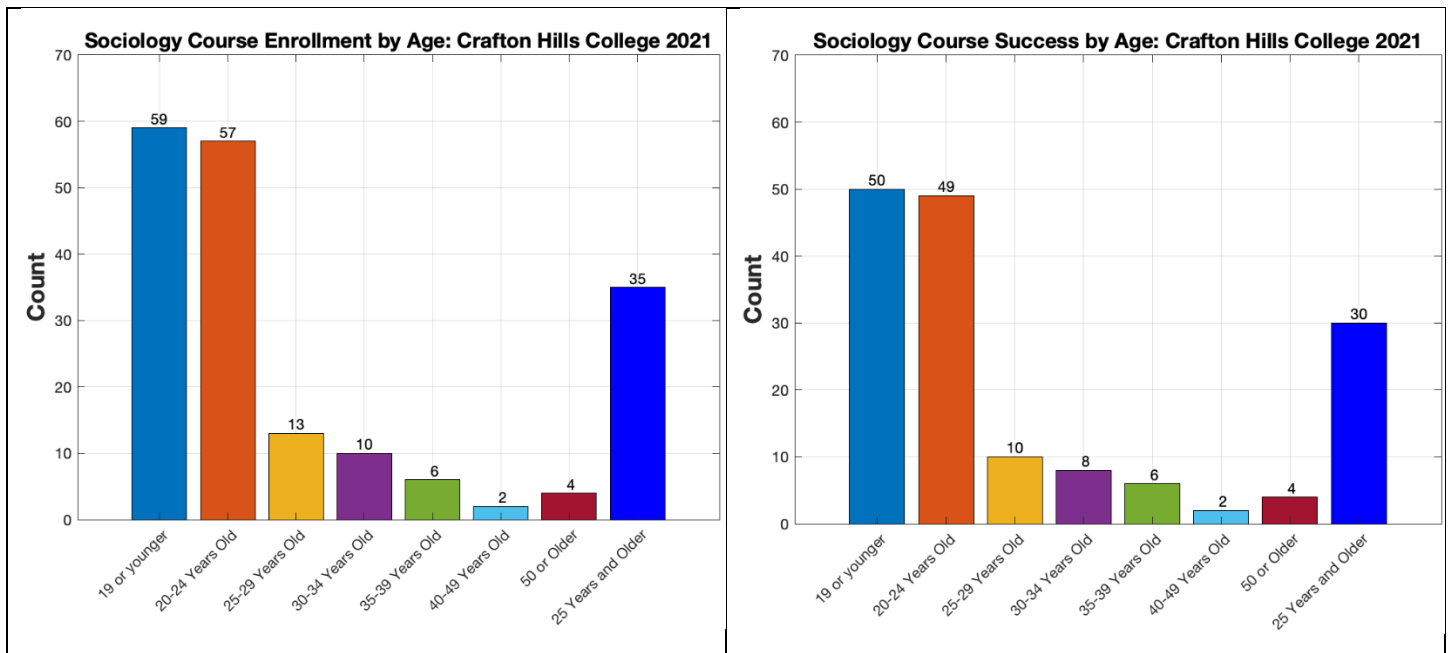
Figure 1. Side by side comparison of students across age groups that enrolled in and succeeded in three selected Sociology courses throughout Spring, Summer, and Fall 2021 Semesters at Crafton Hills College. Across most age groups, enrollment and success were relatively consistent.
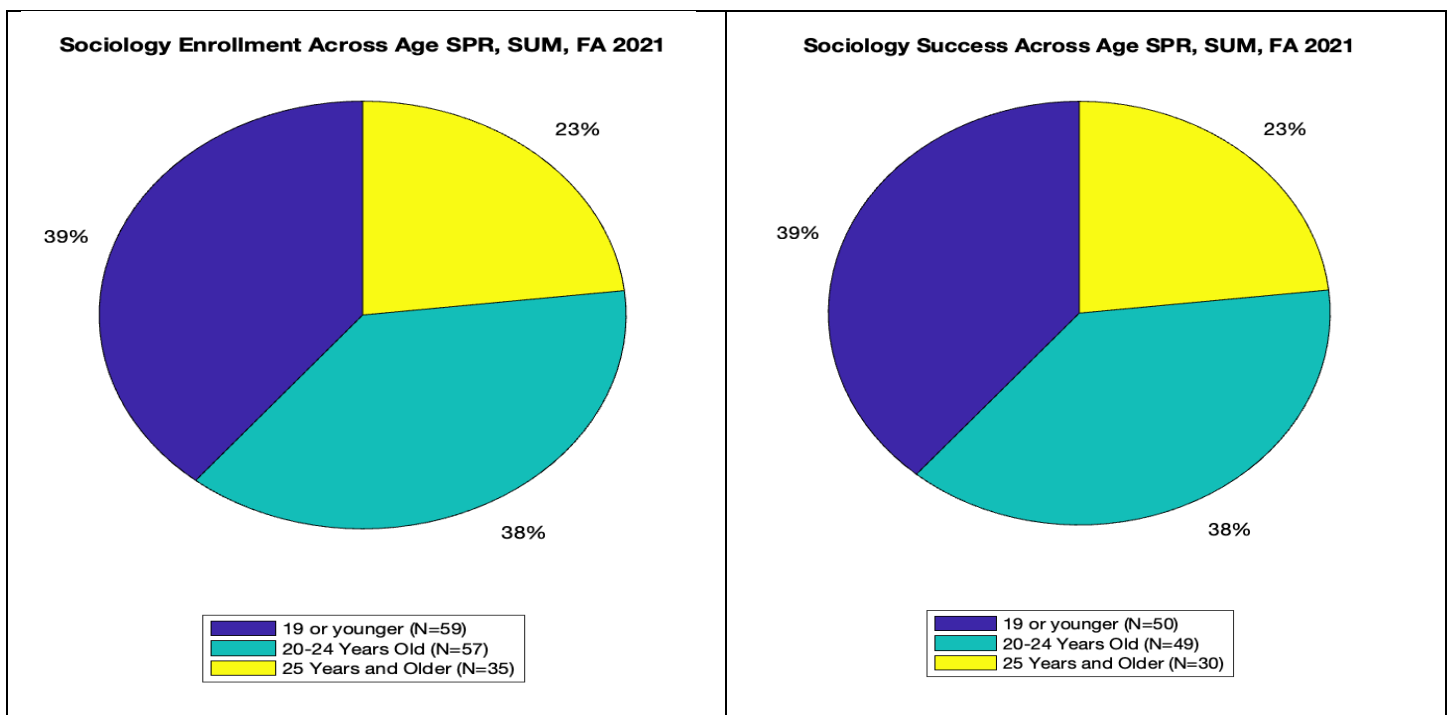

Figure 2. Across all Spring, Summer, and Fall Semesters for the three Sociology courses of interest: the % of enrollment and % of success were consistent across 19 and younger, 20 – 24 years old, and 25 years and older age groups.

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu
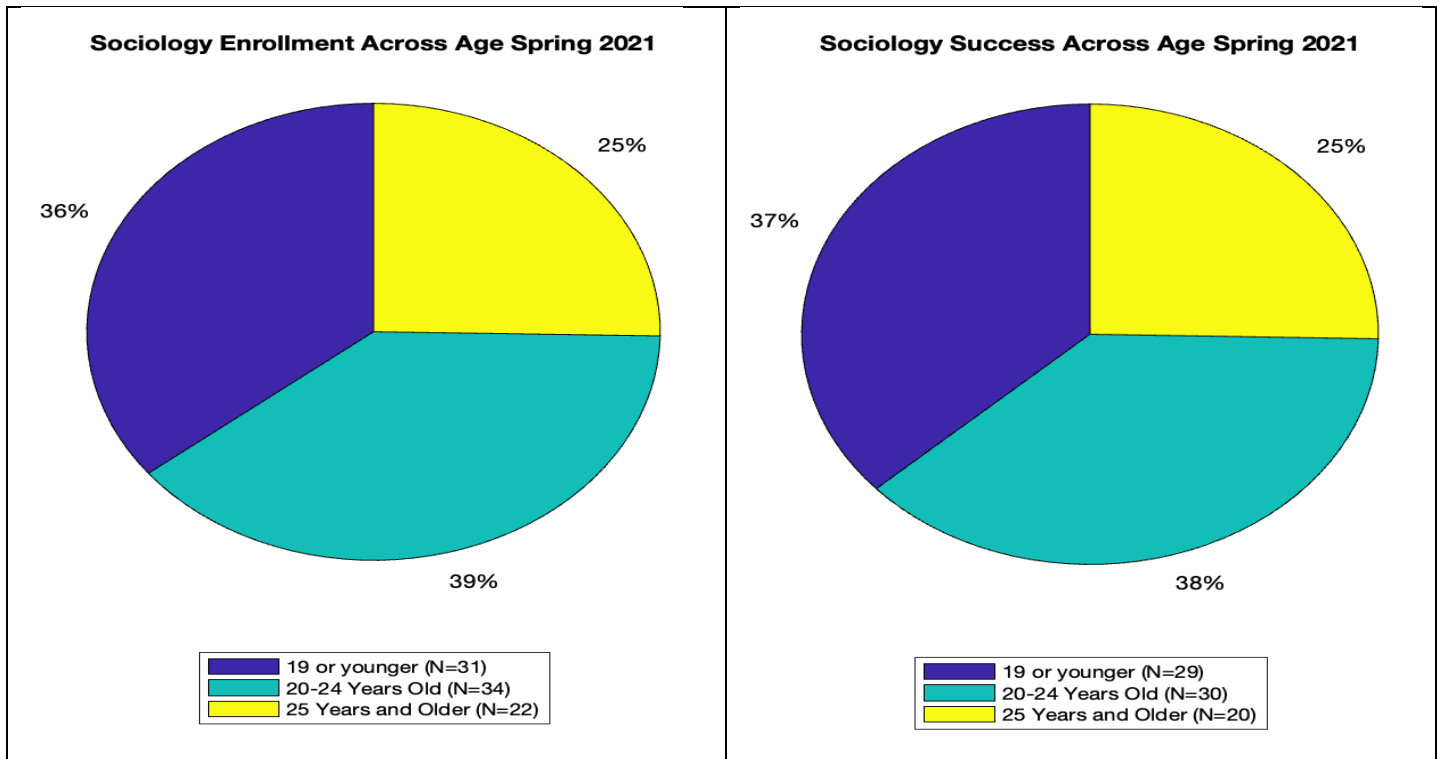
Figure 3. Spring 2021 enrollment and success data for the two Sociology sections selected. The Spring 2021 term had the highest number of enrollments and students succeeding for the three Sociology courses of interest.
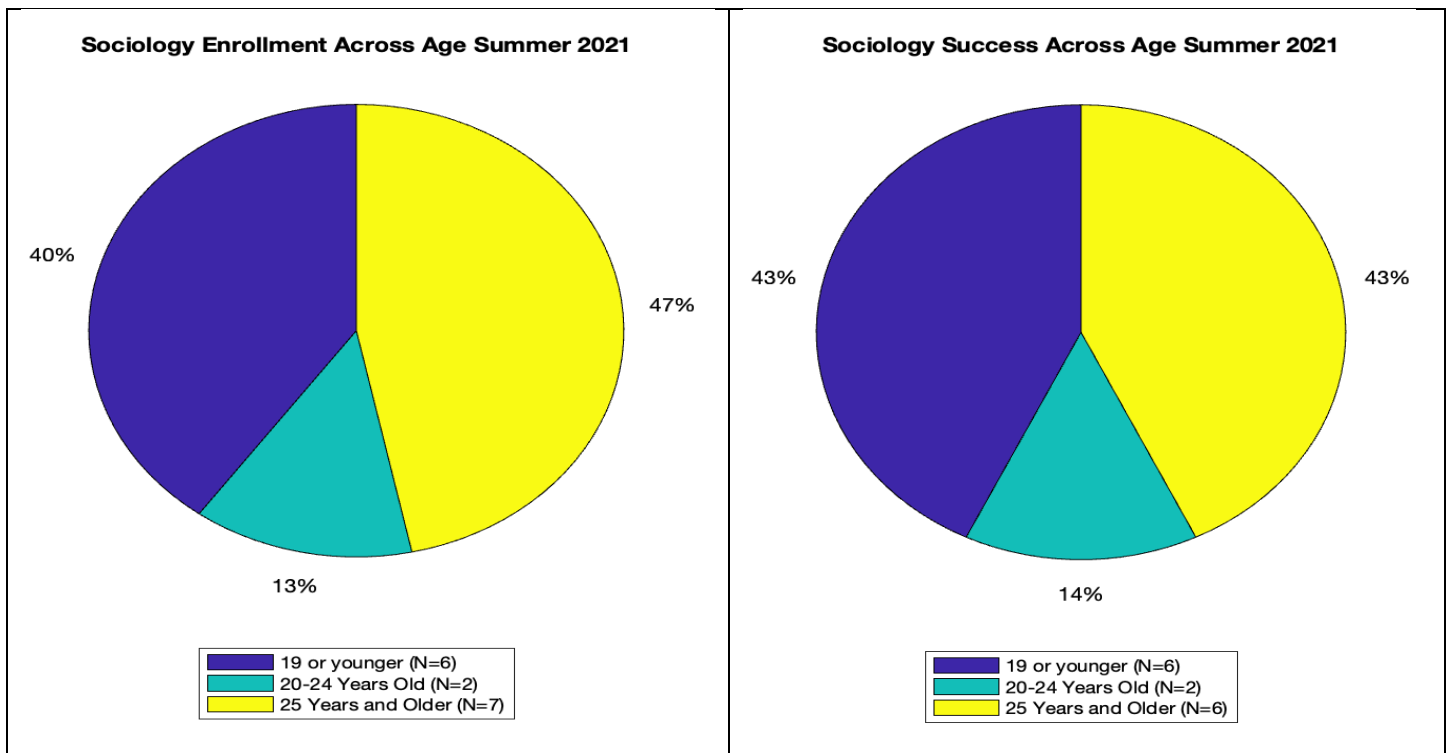

Figure 4. Summer 2021 enrollment and success data for one Sociology section of interest. Summer term is shorter.

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu
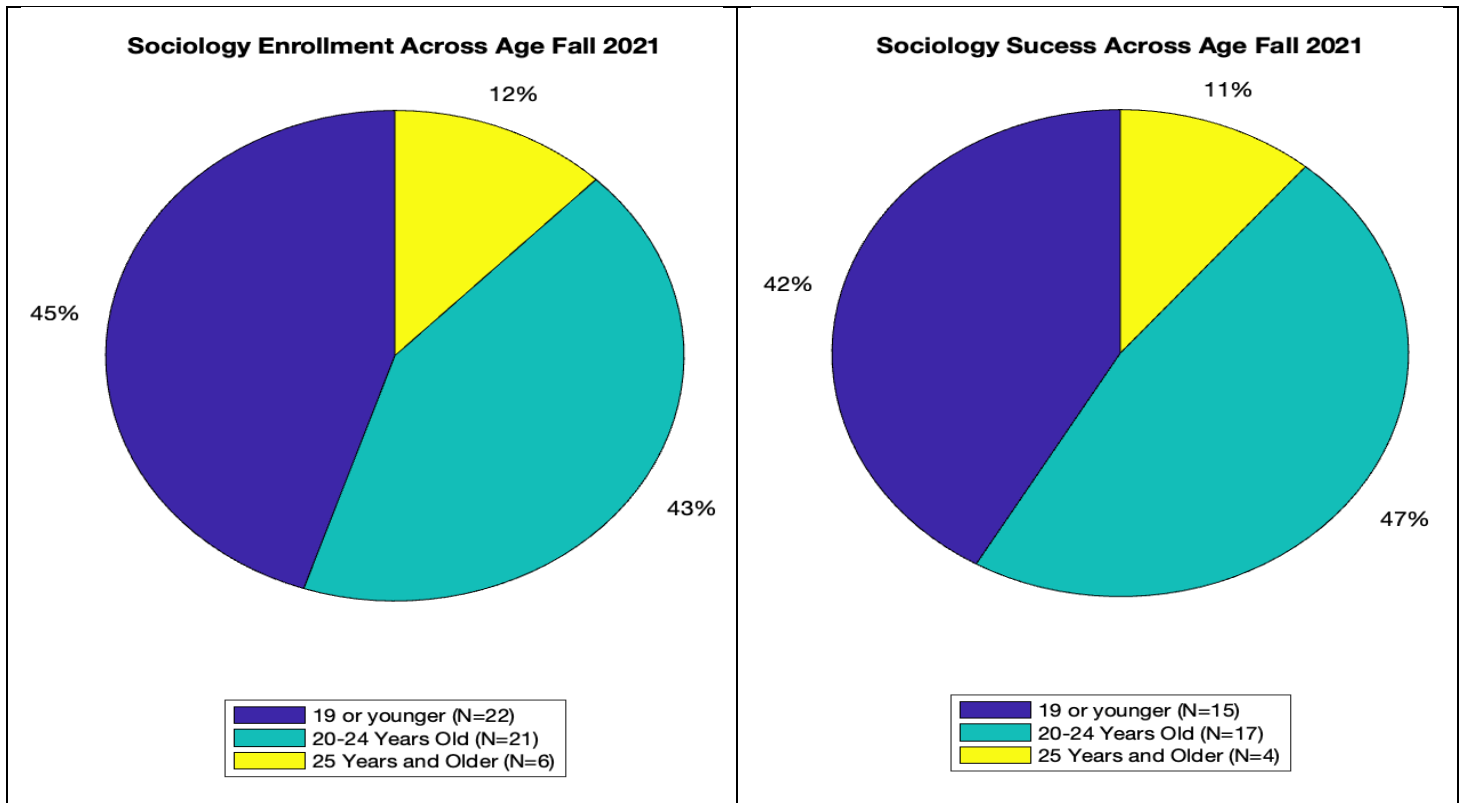
Figure 5. During Fall of 2021 and in the three Sociology sections of interest, the number of students that enrolled and successfully completed the course substantially decreased. There could be multiple factors behind enrollment and success decreasing across all age groups (e.g., continued impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic).

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu

Possible Strategies to Implement within the Classroom Setting

While CHC might have already implemented certain strategies to expand options for a diverse range of learners, possible creative strategies are offered that could be utilized to increase retention and academic success among nontraditional students.

- Continue to provide ample remote course offerings.
  - Make courses accessible for all students who could otherwise have other constraints, making the courses remote allows wider range of students' opportunities to obtain an education while being able to prioritize families and their work obligations [Leggins, 2021].
- Consider implementing strategies utilized by other institutions.
  - Several other institutions designed and implemented strategies to support adult learner success including:
    - Smaller class sizes
    - Flexible/rolling enrollment periods
    - Evening and weekend courses
    - Online/hybrid course options
    - Shorter course time that's efficient (e.g. 8 weeks instead of 16 weeks)
- Provide supportive faculty and staff that are understanding and dedicated to the needs of nontraditional students to promote a sense of community [Person, 2020].
  - Consider offering professional development opportunities to faculty and staff on specific needs of nontraditional students.
- Offer educational credits from working experience so the students could advance to obtain their AA/AS/certificates or put this towards a bachelor's degree [Leggins, 2021].
  - University of Kentucky awards up to 48 credits for previous work experiences
- Continue to provide financial aid/emergency assistance opportunities to cover substantial amount of tuition costs, books, lab resources, childcare assistance, and transportation [Person, 2020].
- Continue offering accommodations to students with learning disabilities [Leggins, 2021].
  - Consider continuing to offer professional development opportunities to faculty and staff on how to request/offer to have accommodations for students with learning disabilities.
- Offer numerous course section offerings for early morning and evening to accommodate all groups of students (e.g., students who prefer 100% online, hybrid blended learning, or in-person)
- Class audio recordings of both in-person, hybrid, online lecture, and lab material in case students must miss class due to external family responsibilities, obligations, or unexpected emergencies.
  - If the class is 100% online, students could always refer to lecture content material and recordings through the Canvas or Google Drive access

Limitations

A limitation to these findings includes the analysis for the three Sociology courses and six sections requested, findings reported focused on course success by age only. Although this is a good place to start to identify differences in course success by age groups and our focus was based on students 25 years and older which was informed by research, additional nontraditional student characteristics such as family responsibilities, work schedule (e.g., full/part-time), gap years, gender, ethnicity, military service, learning disabilities, and financial limitations should be considered at the individual student level when analyzing data.

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu

References

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Review of educational Research, 55(4), 485-540.

Bradley, M., & Cleveland-Innes, M. F. (1992). Exploring the Needs of Adult Students in Post-Secondary Institutions: A Use of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods. PUB TYPE, 25. 25-31.
Direct link: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED349467.pdf#page=37

Cleveland-Innes, M. (1994). Adult student drop-out at post-secondary institutions. The Review of Higher Education, 17(4), 423-445.

Horton, P.B. and Hunt, C.L. (1984). Sociology (6th Edition). Toronto: McGraw-Hill.

Hurtado, S., Kurotsuchi, K., & Sharp, S. (1996). College entry by age groups: Paths of traditional, delayed-entry, and nontraditional students. In Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Jarvis, P. (1987). Adult Learning in the Social Context. New York: Groom Helm.

Jones, D. J., & Watson, B. C. (1990). High-Risk Students and Higher Education: Future Trends. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 3. ASHE/ERIC Higher Education Reports, The George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183. Direct link:
https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED321726.pdf

Leggins, S. (2021). The 'New' Nontraditional Students. Journal of College Admission, 251, 34-39.

Pelletier, S. G. (2010). Success for adult students. Public Purpose, 12, 2-6.

Person, A., Bruch, J., Goble, L., Severn, V., & Hong, A. (2020). Supporting Adult Learners from Enrollment to Completion: Implementation Findings from the Adult Promise Evaluation. Mathematica.

Sieber, S.D. (1974). "Toward a theory of role accumulation." America Sociological Review, 39(August), 567-578.

Questions? Please contact Taichi Murata at tmurata@craftonhills.edu or Diana Vaichis at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu

Page 8 of 8