University Advising Center

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ACADEMIC ADVISORS DRIVING ENROLLMENT
THE IMPACT OF USC'S NON-REGISTERED INITIATIVE

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Academic Advisors Driving Enrollment:

The Impact of USC's Non-Registered Initiative

Executive Summary

The Non-Registered Initiative (NRI) at the University of South Carolina is a strategic effort aimed at increasing student retention by addressing barriers to registration through personalized outreach. The NRI leverages the relationships between students and their academic advisors to encourage timely enrollment and provide necessary support. The program operates during critical intervention periods each year, with advisors reaching out via email, text, and calls to non-registered students, offering assistance and resolving issues such as registration holds and course availability. Since its inception, the NRI has significantly reduced the percentage of eligible students not enrolled.

Key Findings

- From December 2021 to August 2024, academic advisors responded to 8,285 instances of eligible students (6,454 unique) who were not registered for the upcoming semester.

- Significant numbers of first-generation and transfer students have been contacted for reenrollment.

- The NRI has successfully reduced the percentage of eligible students who are not registered, from an average of 8.71% to 3.53% each semester, representing a 59.47% decrease.

- Registration holds are a recurring barrier to reenrollment. During the most recent NRI 241 students had a hold on their account preventing them from registering for classes. Of these the majority were for Alcohol Edu/SAPU and financial holds. 31% of students had two or more holds preventing them from registration.

- Financial concerns, lack of sense of belonging, and mental health concerns are the top reasons students decide not to return to USC.

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Introduction

Engaging students who are eligible to enroll for the upcoming semester but have not yet done so can be a highly effective light-touch intervention (Dial & McKeown, 2021). The NRI at USC is based on a simple nudge intervention first detailed at Kennesaw State University (Hutt, 2017). The initiative leverages the established relationships between students and their academic advisors to encourage registration and provide comprehensive support for those facing barriers to continuing their education. The goal of the NRI is to increase student retention and persistence by addressing barriers to registration and providing targeted support to students in need. Additionally, the initiative aims to gather valuable insights into why students choose not to return to USC, informing future policies and support programs. Since its inception, the NRI has significantly reduced the percentage of eligible students who are not enrolled, demonstrating the effectiveness of personalized, data-driven strategies.

The Approach

The NRI operates through a structured timeline with interventions occurring during two critical periods each year:

- Fall-to-Spring NRI: Early December to the spring add/drop date
- Spring-to-Fall NRI: Mid-May to the fall add/drop date

To initiate the NRI, the University Advising Center (UAC) generates a list of all eligible students who are not enrolled for the upcoming term and creates a case in the advising customer relationship management (CRM) system for each student, assigning it to the student's academic advisor of record.

Advisors facilitate outreach to their non-registered students through multiple communication channels, including email, text messages, and calls. The key components of this intervention are its timing, brevity of outreach, and open-ended nature. Upon notification, academic advisors send out a concise message, easily readable on one screen, ensuring it grabs the student's attention without overwhelming them. The message's open-ended nature—"I see that you're not registered. Is there anything I can do to help with that?"—invites students to share their concerns or barriers, facilitating a supportive dialogue. This approach not only prompts responses but also fosters a sense of care and personalized attention. Throughout the intervention, advisors document their efforts and outcomes in the CRM, allowing for thorough tracking and analysis of the initiative's effectiveness.

Advisor outreach efforts not only support individual students but also provide the university with valuable insights into why some students choose not to return to campus. Throughout the semester and as part of the NRI, advisors who learn that students do not plan to return to USC are asked to share the Non-Returners Survey with them. This survey is designed to gather feedback from students who have decided not to return to USC. Respondents are prompted to select from a range of reasons for their departure. Additionally, at the conclusion of the NRI, the UAC also distributes this survey to all non-returning students. Students who have already completed the survey do not receive another invitation to complete it.

Results/Data

Demographics

Since December 2021, academic advisors have responded to 8,285 NRI cases for 6,454 unique students. The demographic breakdown of supported students (Figure 1) in the NRI from December 2021 to May 2024 shows a majority of White (4,435) and Black or African American (1,000) students, with a

balanced gender distribution slightly favoring males (55%). Significant numbers of first-generation and transfer students are supported as well (Figure 2).

Figure 1

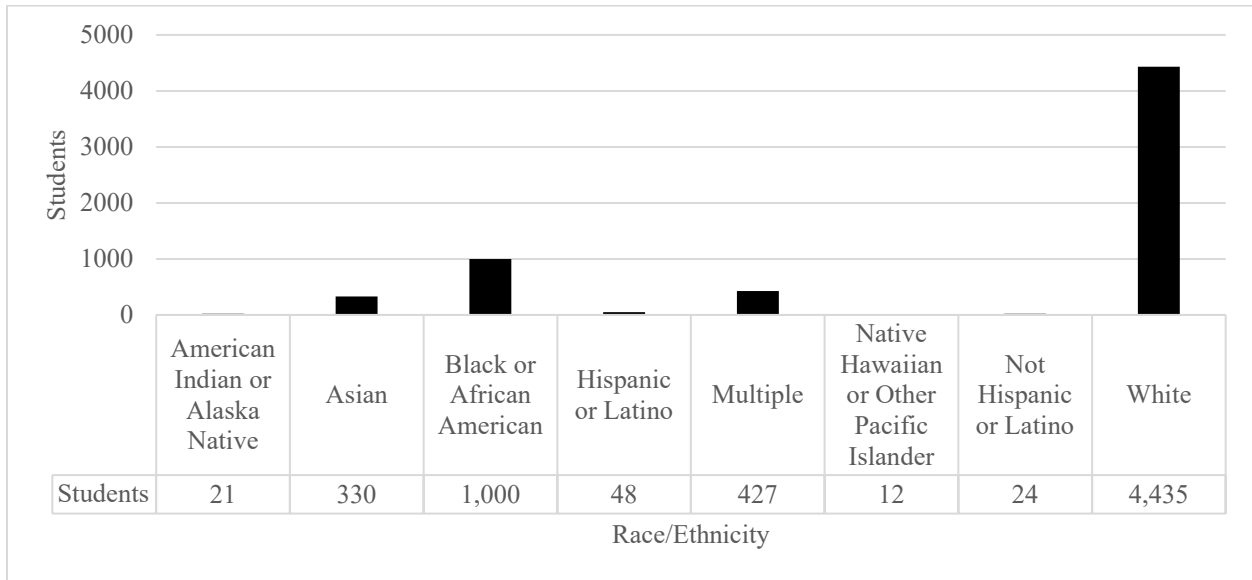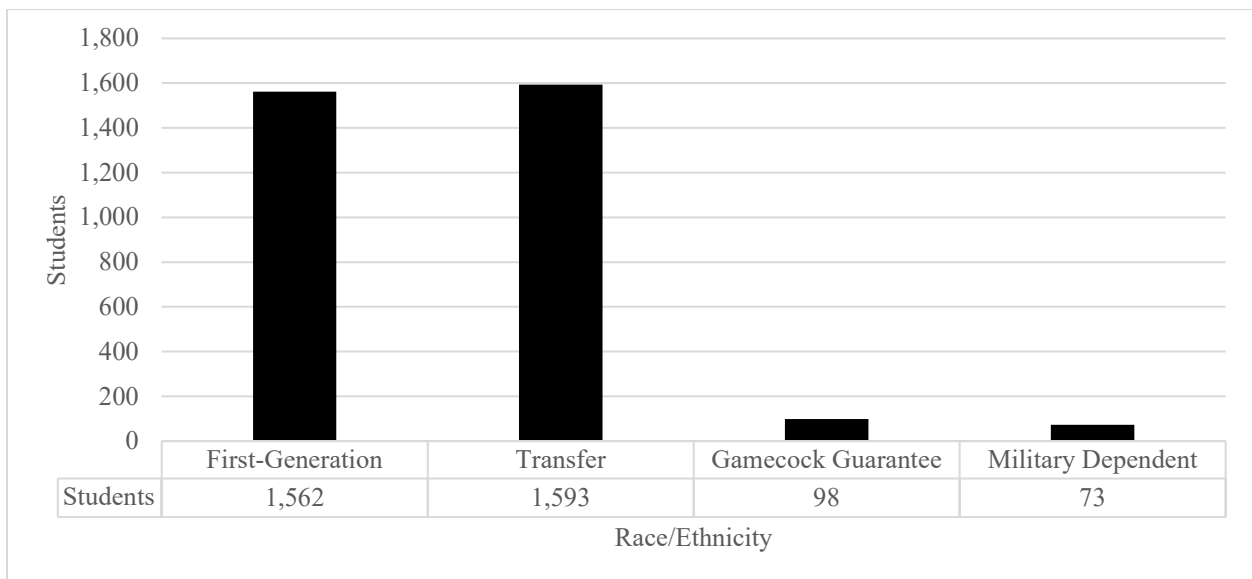*Race/Ethnicity Breakdown of Student Supported by the NRI (December 2021 – May 2024)*

Race/Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Multiple	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Not Hispanic or Latino	White
Students	21	330	1,000	48	427	12	24	4,435

Figure 2

Special Populations Supported by the NRI (December 2021 – May 2024)

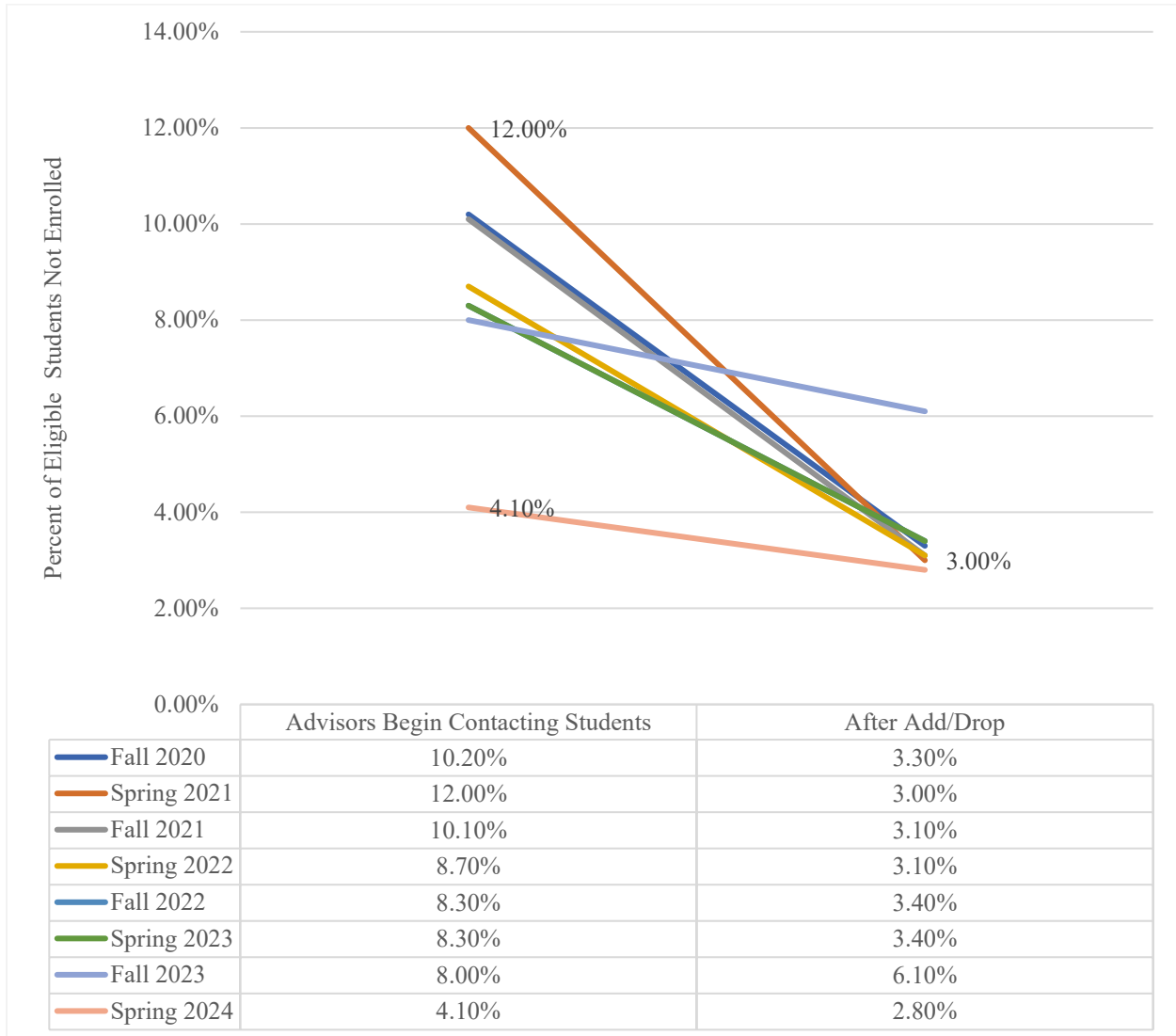| Race/Ethnicity	First-Generation	Transfer	Gamecock Guarantee	Military Dependent
Students	1,562	1,593	98	73

Impact of the NRI

Data reveals that advisor contact reduces non-registered rates significantly (Figure 3). On average, since December 2021, academic advisors have reduced the percentage of eligible students who are not enrolled from 8.71% to 3.53%, a decrease of approximately 59.47%.

Figure 3

Percent of Eligible Students Not Registered at the Beginning and Conclusion of the NRI by Term

	Advisors Begin Contacting Students	After Add/Drop
Fall 2020	10.20%	3.30%
Spring 2021	12.00%	3.00%
Fall 2021	10.10%	3.10%
Spring 2022	8.70%	3.10%
Fall 2022	8.30%	3.40%
Spring 2023	8.30%	3.40%
Fall 2023	8.00%	6.10%
Spring 2024	4.10%	2.80%

Registration Holds

Registration holds present a recurring challenge to student reenrollment. At the launch of the most recent NRI, 241 students had a hold on their account preventing them from registering for classes. The most frequent holds were for Alcohol EDU/SAPU (required community education modules) and financial issues (Figure 4). Of the non-registered students with holds, 69% had only one hold at the launch of the initiative. However, 31% of non-registered students with holds had two or more holds preventing them from enrolling for the upcoming term (Figure 5).

Figure 4

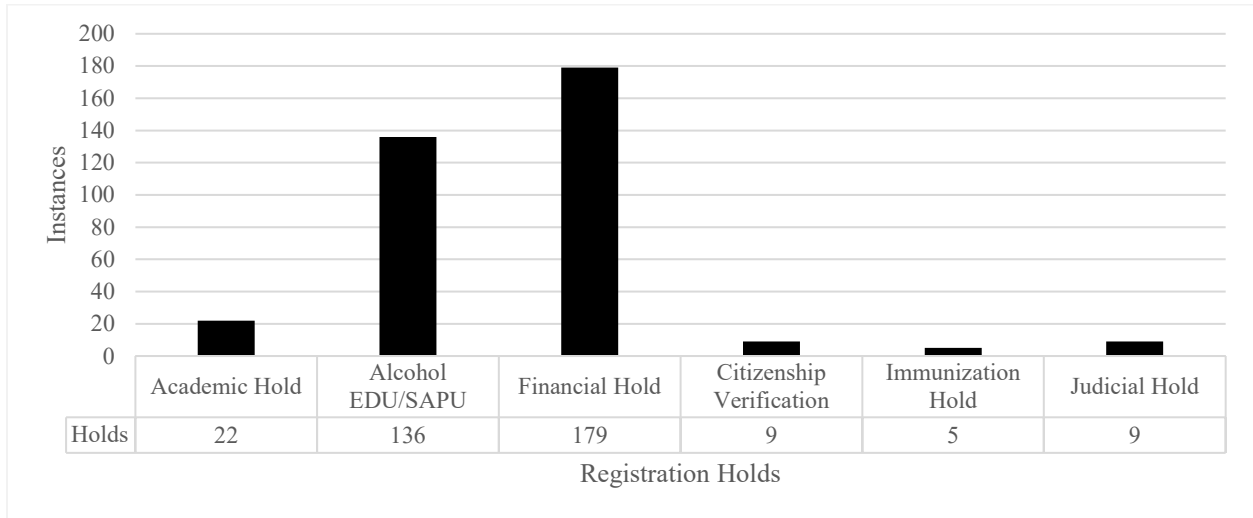*Registration Holds on Non-Registered Students Accounts at the Start of the NRI (May 2024)*

	Academic Hold	Alcohol EDU/SAPU	Financial Hold	Citizenship Verification	Immunization Hold	Judicial Hold
Holds	22	136	179	9	5	9

Registration Holds

Figure 5

Percent of Students with One or More Registration Holds at the Start of the NRI (May 2024)

4 holds, 3%   5 holds, 1%
3 holds, 10%
2 holds, 17%
1 hold, 69%
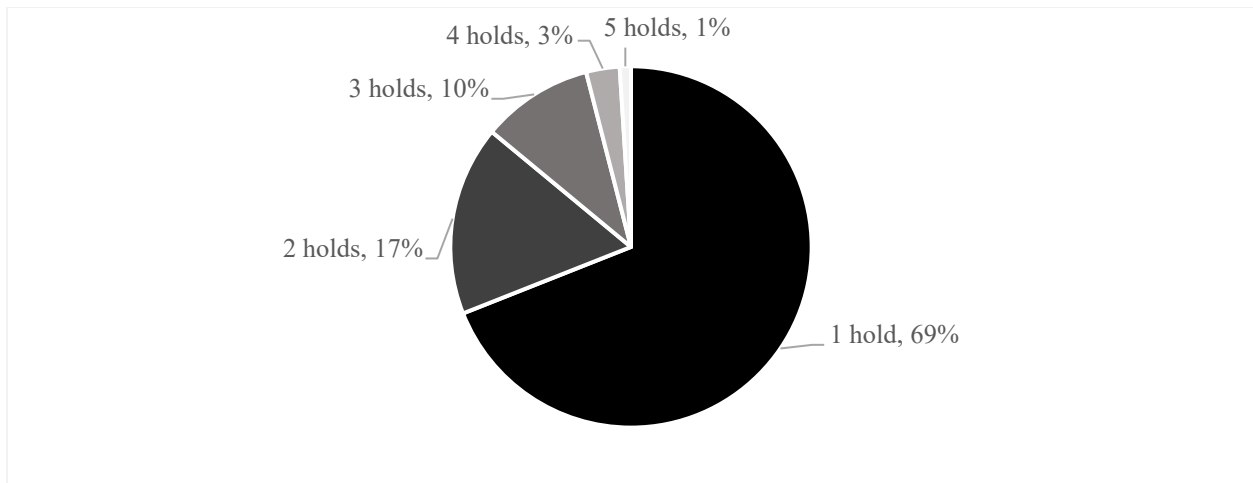
Reasons for Student Departure

Since October 2022, the current iteration of the Non-Returners Survey has collected responses from 462 students who decided not to continue their education at USC. The top three identified reasons for student departure are financial concerns, a lack of sense of belonging, and mental health concerns (Figure 6). These reasons have been consistent across all iterations of the Non-Returners Survey. Figure 6 presents a breakdown of the self-selected reasons students shared for their departure, offering a clear picture of the primary reasons behind student attrition at USC. Figure 7 showcases a breakdown of themed responses from students who selected "Other."

Figure 6

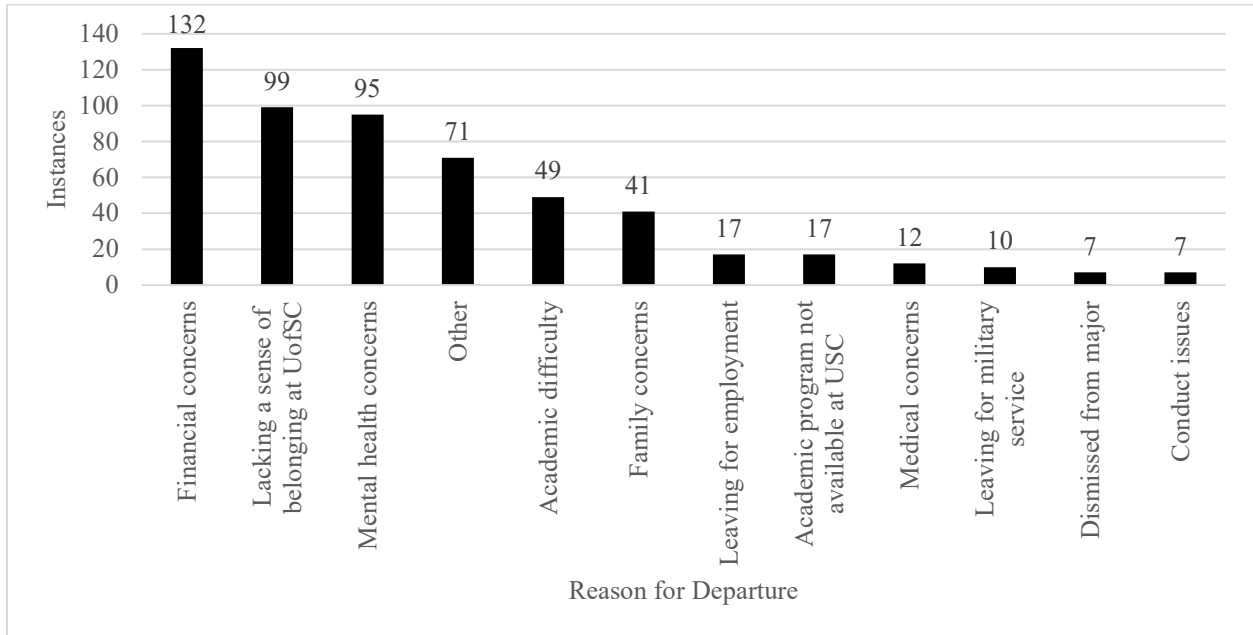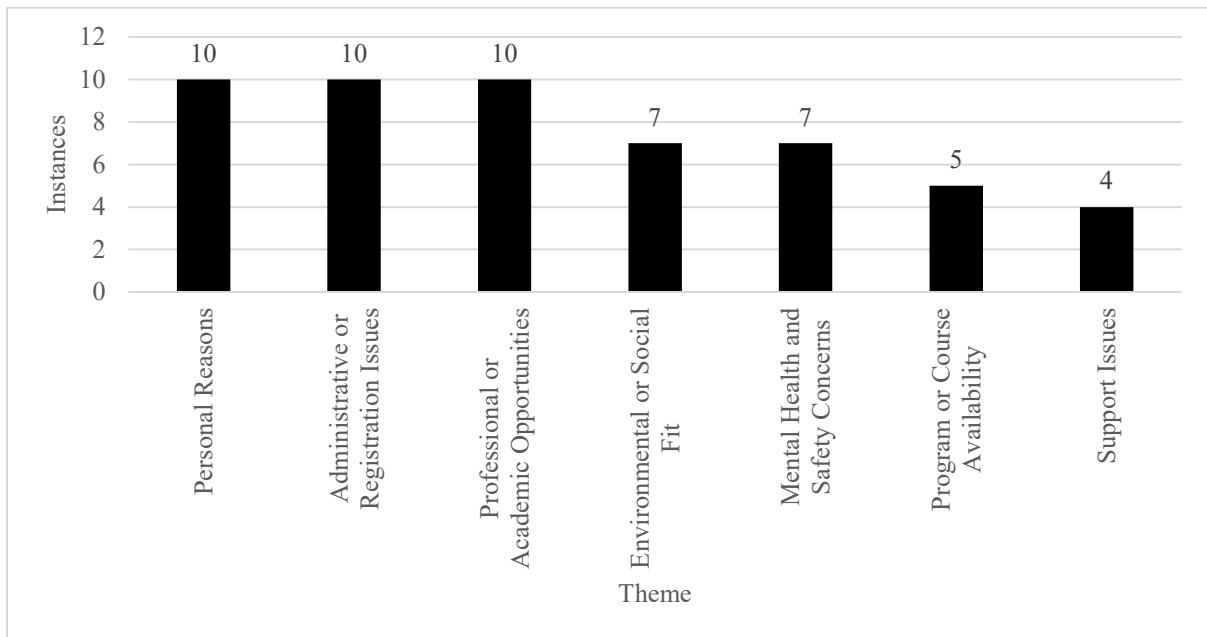*Student Selected Reasons for Departure (October 2022 – June 2024)*

Figure 7

Themed Responses from Open Text Following Student Selection of "Other"

References:

Dial, M. T. & McKeown, P. (2022). Early alert and academic intervention. In M. T. Dial (Ed). *Academic Recovery: Supporting Students on Academic Probation* (pp. 83-102). University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.

Hutt, C. (2017, November 24). Breaking down barriers to retaining students. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/Breaking-Down-Barriers-to/241814