



Understanding the Undecided: Exploring the Myths and Realities of Students who Enroll in an Unspecified Letters and Sciences Major

Michelle Appel
University of Maryland



Letters and Sciences (LTSC)

- 11 colleges offering undergraduate degrees
- Letters and Sciences program under purview of Dean for Undergraduate Studies, not part of another college
- No general interdisciplinary degree – Letters and Sciences limited to first two years or 60 credits
- Almost 40% of new freshmen begin in Letters and Sciences
- Students may enter LTSC upon entry to the University or from another major



Project Background

- Project developed to address anecdotal concerns about performance of Letters and Sciences students
 - Belief that these were “weaker” students than those who start in a major/college
 - Effectiveness of course selection and advising questioned
- Initially seen as a project about LTSC freshmen
- Need to understand current situation outside of anecdotes



Who are LTSC students?

- ↳ Freshmen and transfers who elect to begin undecided
- ↳ Freshmen and transfers who cannot enter a selective admissions Limited Enrollment Program (LEP)
- ↳ Students who transfer internally from another major (frequently an LEP)

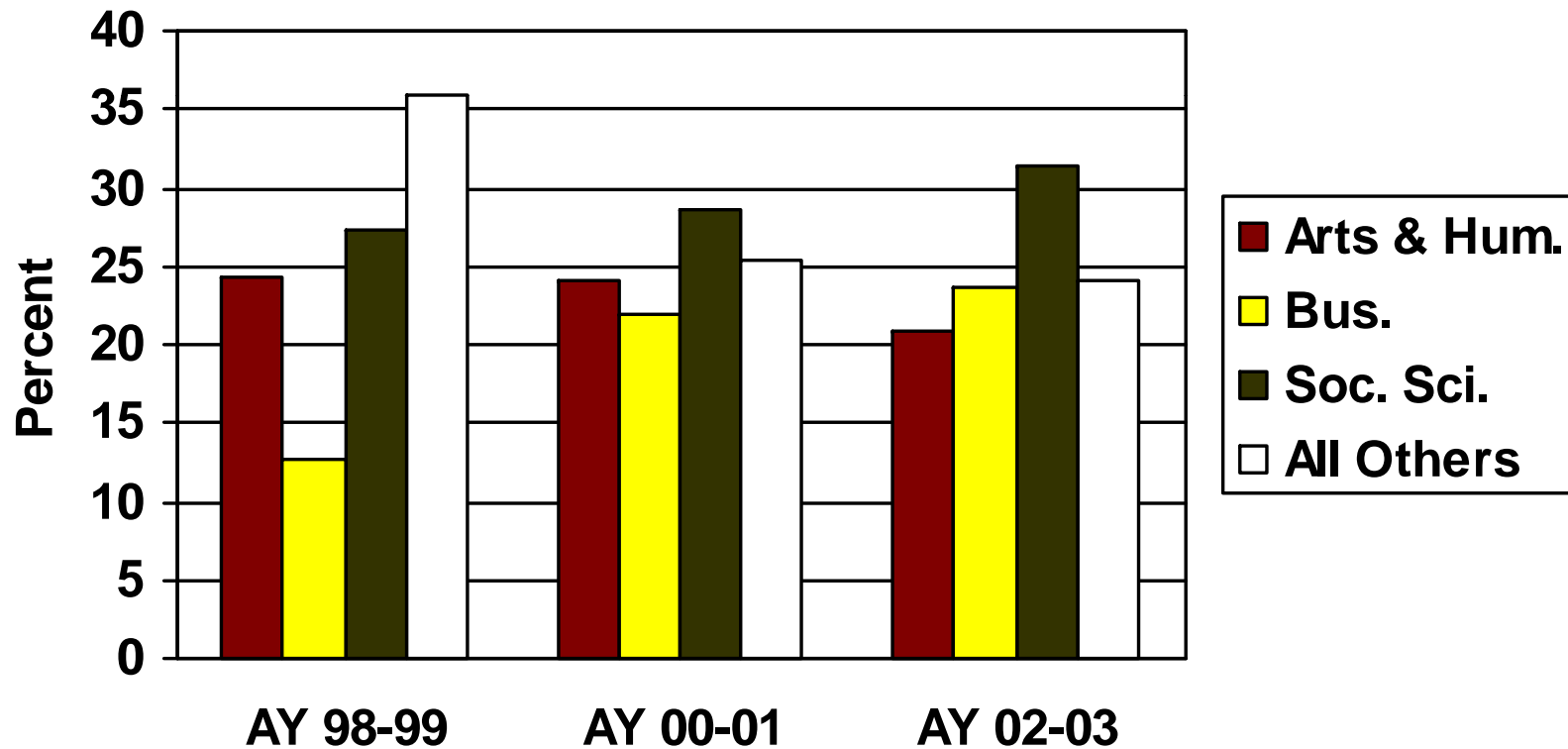


Project Design

- ☞ Focus groups to identify concerns
- ☞ Examination of incoming student characteristics
- ☞ Characteristics of “Major Changers” – GPA, credit accumulation, receiver colleges
- ☞ Graduation rate trends and characteristics of graduates by time to degree
- ☞ Descriptive, not inferential

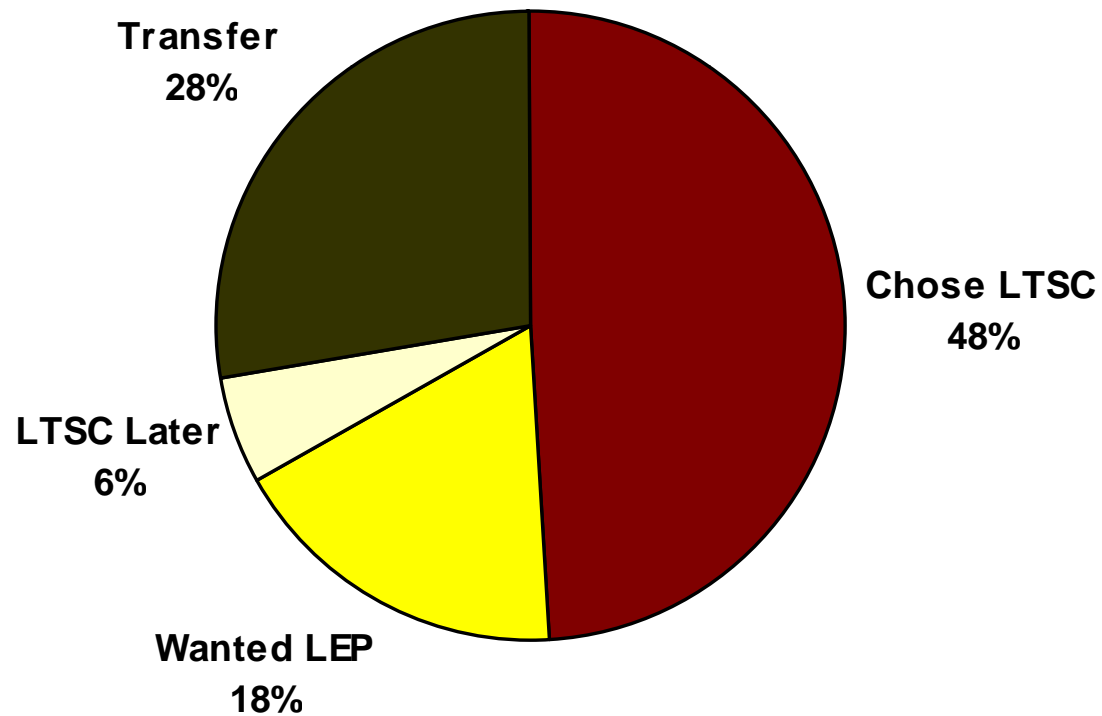


Colleges Receiving LTSC Major Changers



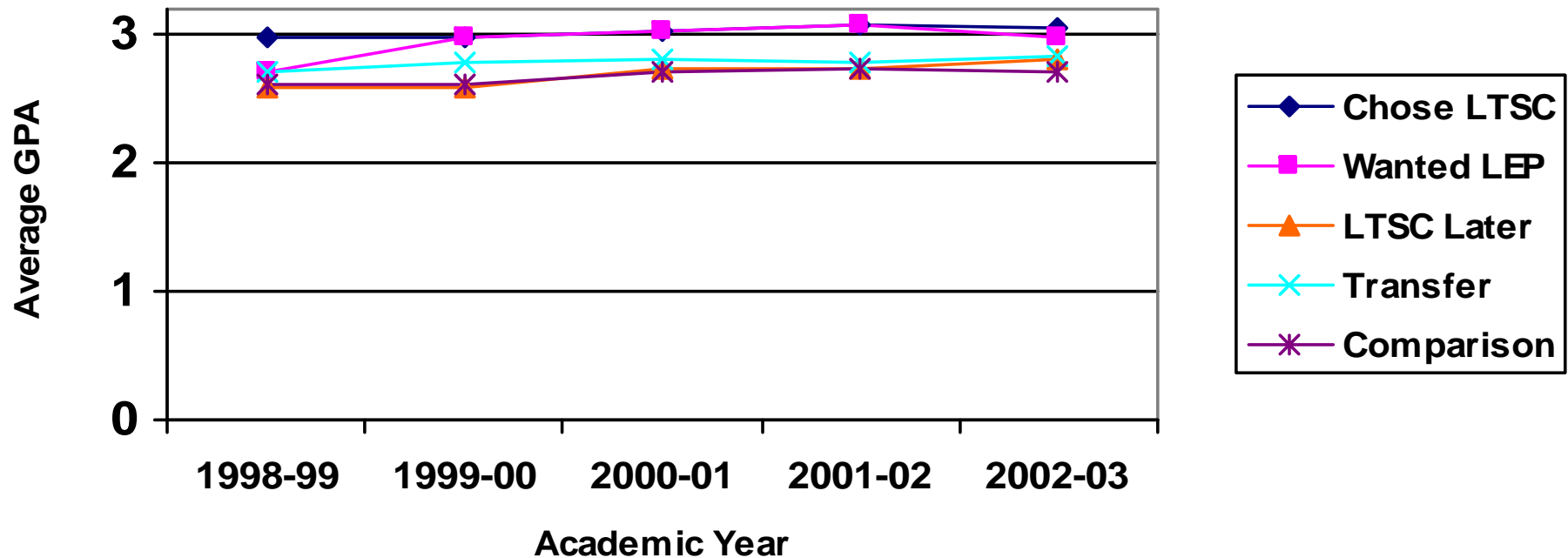


Major Changers by Entry to LTSC





Average GPAs of LTSC Major Changers





Credit Accumulation by Major Changers

	Academic Year			
	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Chose LTSC				
Avg. Degree Credits	49.5	49.5	47.5	48.2
% with 60+	27.30%	24.00%	23.90%	25.00%
Wanted LEP				
Avg. Degree Credits	46.6	48.3	48.7	51.2
% with 60+	16.10%	18.60%	16.60%	22.40%
LTSC Later				
Avg. Degree Credits	56.1	51.3	53.2	53.6
% with 60+	41.80%	29.50%	38.50%	38.30%
Transfer				
Avg. Degree Credits	58.5	56.1	55.5	56.9
% with 60+	42.70%	39.40%	36.80%	44.80%
Comparison				
Avg. Degree Credits	63.9	62.7	63.4	63.5
% with 60+	52.40%	49.30%	50.60%	52.40%



Findings

- Ⓜ LTSC students not homogeneous
- Ⓜ Students entering LTSC as freshmen, by choice or because they could not enter LEP, typically leave LTSC in a timely fashion with sound academic foundation
- Ⓜ Though LTSC graduation rates for 1992 cohort lagged behind university overall, gap has closed and LTSC now exceeds overall
- Ⓜ Students who begin at the University outside of LTSC and subsequently enter LTSC appear at highest risk of excessive credit accumulation and poor GPA
- Ⓜ Career development and academic goal setting issues of major concern campus constituencies