

Only 45% of Humber’s domestic students graduate on time from their degree program, and almost one-third do not obtain their degree within seven years of entering. While some students will fare well and find satisfying employment, for others, leaving prior to completing their credential is a missed opportunity and a lost investment. This report quantifies the cost of attrition for degree students.

Methodology

This study focused on the 2014 cohort of full-time degree students where 361 students left the college prior to completing their credential. Among the 361 students, 107 left at one year or earlier, 175 left between their first and second year, 53 left between the second and third year, and 25 left between their third and fourth year. The second column in Table 1 below outlines the number of students that left their programs (“leavers”) at each point in time.

The cost of attrition to students is estimated to be the sum of the average program fees levied to degree students for each of the semesters that they were enrolled and the loss of income that the student may have earned during the time in which they were enrolled. The third column in Table 2 below outlines the average fees paid by students while they were enrolled in a Humber degree program.

The figures used for the calculation of loss in potential annual income are based on the 2011 and 2016 Census for individuals aged 15-24 working full-time in Toronto with a high-school diploma as their highest credential. The annual income loss for students who were enrolled during 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 was \$23,599. The annual loss of income for students who were enrolled in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 was \$26,597. The fourth column shows the total amount of income a student could have earned had they been employed full time during the period in which they were enrolled in a degree program.

Table 1. Cost of Attrition to Leavers from the 2014 Degree Cohort by Years of Study Completed

Years of study Completed	# of Leavers	Average Program Fees per Leaver	Average Loss in Potential Income per Leaver	Average Total Cost Attrition per Leaver
1 or less	107	\$6,980	\$23,599	\$30,579
1-2	176	\$14,312	\$47,198	\$61,510
2-3	53	\$21,915	\$73,795	\$95,710
3-4	25	\$29,307	\$100,392	\$129,699
Total	361	\$14,293	\$61,246	\$75,539

The fifth column of Table 1 estimates the total loss to students who completed less than one year of their program (\$30,579), between one and two years of their program (\$61,510), between two and three years of their program (\$95,710) and between three and four years of their program (\$129,699). On average, the students from the 2014 cohort who left their program before completing their credential, lost \$75,539 in program fees and potential income.

Student attrition has significant implications for students, their institutions and the public. Students have devoted time and money to an unsuccessful effort and research has shown that those who do complete college or university credentials have higher lifetime earnings and are in better health than high school graduates. This report should be of interest to institutional leaders who are best positioned to implement effective strategies for reducing attrition.