Introduction
The primary objective of this study is to understand the ways in which student attempt and completion of General Education courses within the first year may affect the probability of student retention.

Research Questions
- Are certain General Education courses positively or negatively associated with first-year retention?
- Does the timing/sequence of these courses affect retention?

Methodology
- Based on 3 consecutive cohorts of first time in college students (n = 2,385)
- Student attempt and completion of General Education courses was studied by semester.
- Dichotomous variables representing the attempt and completion respectively of a General Education course within the first, second, and both semesters were computed.
- These variables were then studied for associations with student retention rates through frequency cross tabulation and mean comparison tests.
- Market Basket Analysis was employed, looking at a student’s course history as a sequence of market baskets, to search for patterns in courses and first-year retention outcomes.

Results

Findings
Largest gains were found when students enrolled in:
- Languages
- Ethical/Spiritual Inquiry
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Culture & Belief

General Education Area | % Students Enrolled
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Societies & Social Systems | 64.75
Culture & Belief | 46.20
Historical Inquiry | 45.91
Creative Arts | 37.94
Quantitative Reasoning | 37.18
Physical & Natural World | 37.10
Languages | 24.09
Ethical/Spiritual Inquiry | 13.97
Health & Wellness | 11.08

Implications
- While all general education courses are associated with a benefit on student retention to some extent, certain types of courses have different effects.
- During the first term, students deal with changes in work ethic, psychology, and values as a result of adapting to the University environment. Certain courses within the first term may help the student make sense of these changes; for example, courses which enrich knowledge of different cultures and belief systems may help students cope with the university culture.
- Courses which are familiar to students, such as continuation of a language studied in high school, may be highly beneficial in the first term.