

Relationship between First Term General Education Courses & Retention

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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.

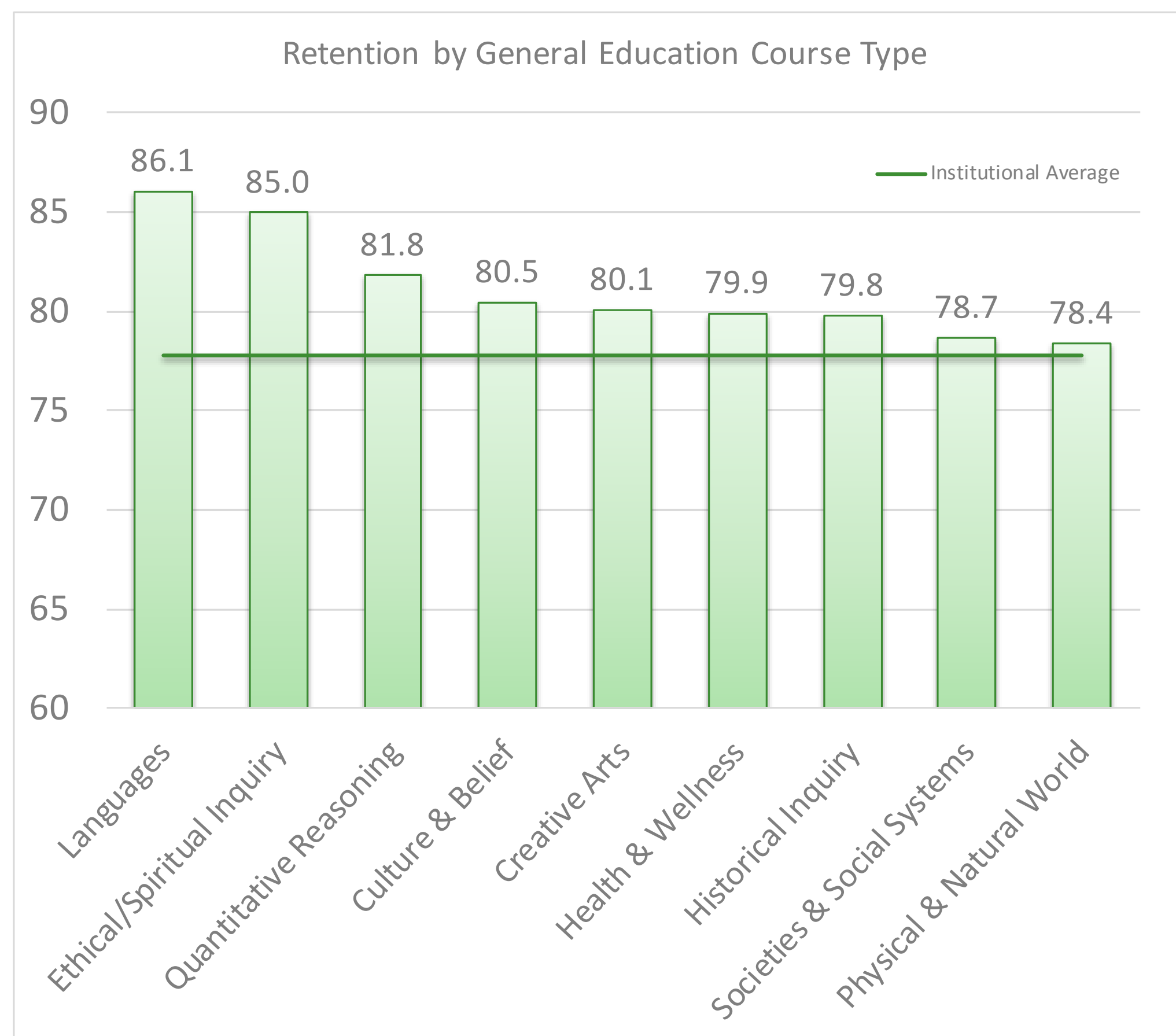
Results

One First Term General Education Course

Findings

Largest gains were found when students enrolled in:

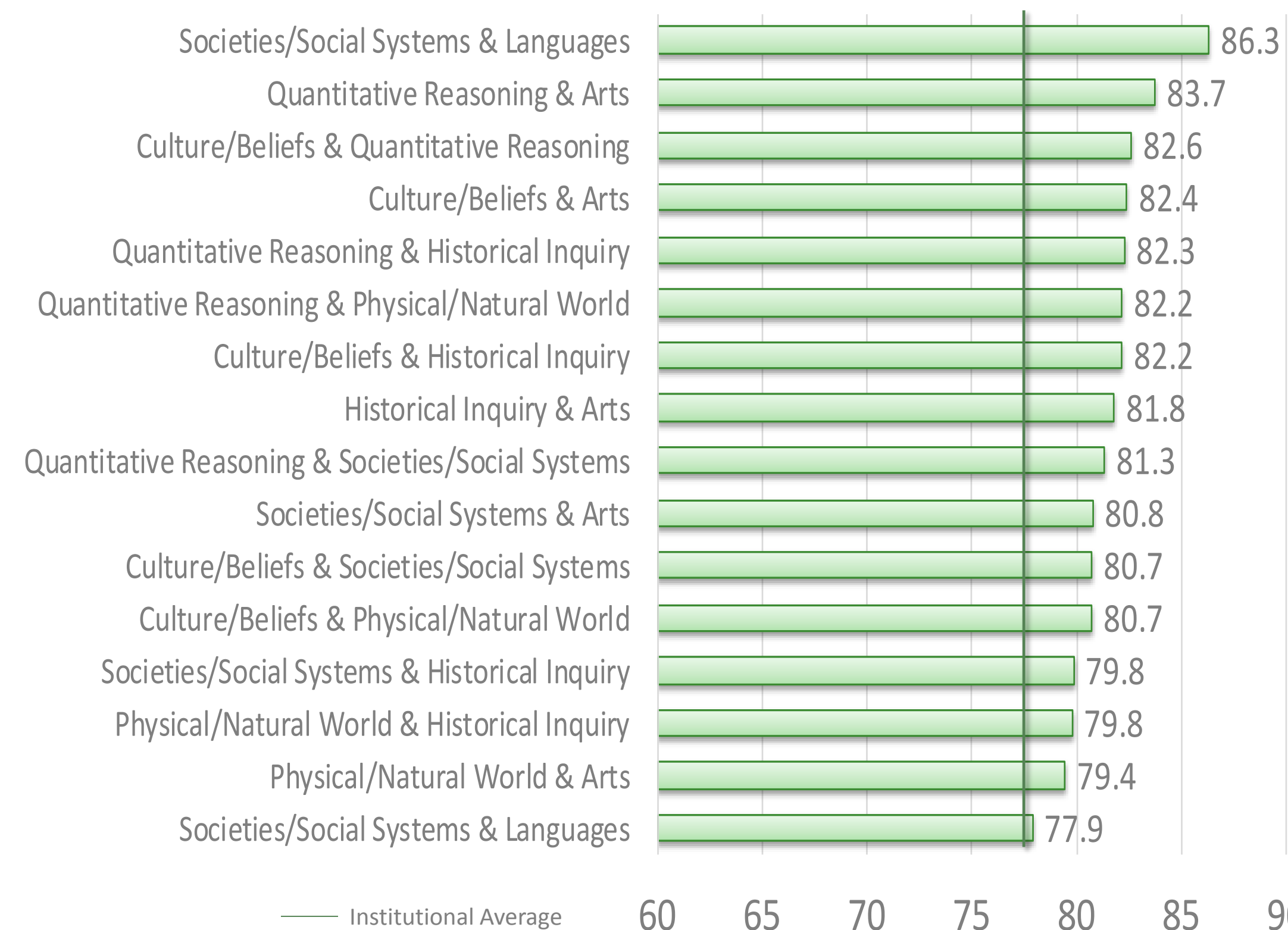
- Languages
- Ethical/Spiritual Inquiry
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Culture & Belief



General Education Area	% Students Enrolled
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

Two First Term General Education Courses

Retention by Combination of General Education Course Types



Findings

Largest gains occurred when students enrolled in a combination of courses in:

- Societies/Social Systems and Languages
- Quantitative Reasoning and Arts
- Culture & Belief and Quantitative Reasoning
- Culture & Belief and Arts

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.