

The Murky Middle

Profiling campus segments based on early academic performance to determine which students succeed, which fail, and where schools should focus their efforts

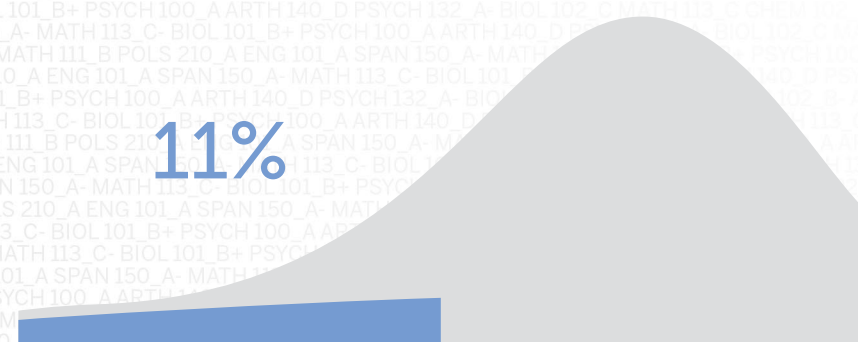
Most student success initiatives target freshman students, but 52% of attrition occurs after the first year. And of these late stage departures, over half are within the “Murky Middle.”

Where are you focusing your student success efforts?



Phoenixes

Despite facing early challenges, these students are able to course correct and ultimately graduate. Unfortunately, fewer than one in ten students who finish their first year below a 2.0 GPA will eventually right the ship, despite considerable investment from their institutions.



Failed to Launch

These students fail to hit the ground running and struggle in the initial phase of college. More than three-fifths of the students who finish their first year with a GPA below 2.0 don't make it back as sophomores despite extensive investments and efforts on their behalf. Schools may want to consider re-allocating energy toward a group of students more likely to complete, like the Murky Middle.



The Ones That Got Away

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the vast majority of these students are transferring to and graduating from other institutions after the first year. Most institutions would love to retain these high-performing students and don't want to see them enroll with a competitor. Though many in this group leave due to fit, the question remains whether more customized support could help retain a portion of these strong students.



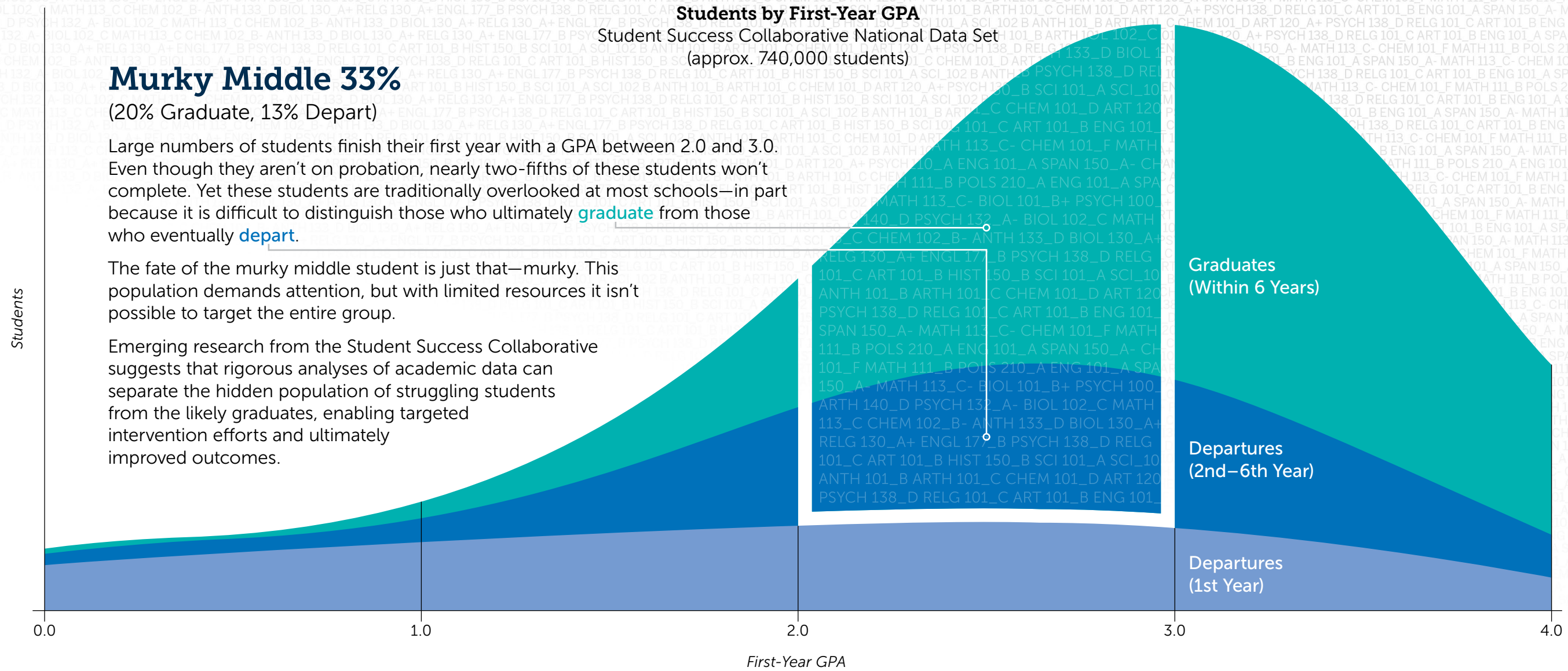
Unsolved Mysteries

Sometimes even the best students won't complete. It can be hard to isolate the cause of attrition for this group of delayed departures. Perhaps they decide to transfer, encounter personal hardship, or are unable to persist due to finances. Whatever the reason, it isn't showing up in their academics, leaving many institutions wondering how they can be reached and whether this group's attrition is ultimately outside of their control.



All-Stars

Three-fourths of students who make it to their second year with above a 3.0 GPA go on to graduate. While anecdotally we know these students aren't at risk, they tend to consume considerable advising resources through voluntary self-improvement efforts. This has prompted a national dialogue about understanding student self-direction.



Note: All references to graduation are for a six-year graduation time frame. Not included in this graph are the 4% of students who persist past their sixth year (outcome undetermined). The above graph is a kernel density estimation using the Student Success Collaborative National Data Set of approximately 740,000 students.