

# One out of three: COVID's affect on retention

By Nia Daniels  
Staff Writer

The COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the retention rate at Langston University. Retention is a term used by the university to track where students start at the university and then see if they stay in their program or at the institution for graduation. A student is considered retained if they come back as a sophomore the following year. Langston is required to report the number of students who graduate within six years and students who are freshmen that return the next year. If the retention rate is low, then the graduation rate will be low.

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) revealed that from 2018 to 2020 all first-time, full-time freshmen from the school of agriculture and applied sciences dropped from 62% to 41%. School of business student retention dropped from 62% to 40%, and the school of nursing and health declined 72% to 53%. There was also a 5% decrease overall for first-time full-time bachelor seeking students from 2018

to 2019.

According to Dr. Albright, acting chair of the department of psychology, "The incoming cohort for the fall of 2019 were especially hit because of COVID-19, more so than the years prior and subsequent. We lost a lot of freshmen and sophomores, and the class of '23 is smaller by about a one-third compared to prior years. I expect the subsequent years will be back to normal. Part of the reason that we lost students then was because even the faculty and staff were trying to figure things out, and their lives were totally shifting and collectively everyone was struggling."

Some factors that contribute to students not returning to campus are students who don't feel connected to their school, finances, the need for students to have to pay down their bill in order to enroll, being away from home and adjusting to schoolwork. Also, a sizable number of Langston students are first-generation college students who don't necessarily have the proper support to continue.

Albright believes that "making connections and

building relationships with students is one of the biggest factors, because when students have a positive relationship with somebody on campus they often will ask that instructor or staff member when they have an issue on who to talk to if they have a problem."

Albright advises everyone to know they impact the retention rate in some way or another. She suggests that advertising more appropriately and conveniently could make students aware of the resources that are offered on campus, like the food bank, counseling center, financial aid resource and the 15 to finish graduation implementation.

According to the Langston University website, the 15 to finish program aims toward helping students register for a minimum of 15 credits per semester, allowing them to follow a routine schedule and commitment towards finishing college. Research has shown that the payoffs for taking 15 credits per semester make a significant impact, such as reduced student loan debt, saving on tuition, housing and fees, followed by better academic

outcomes and earlier entry into careers.

Students provide their own perspectives as to why some of them drop out. Cornelious Florence, a junior organizational leadership major, said, "While Langston does a good job of catering to the students that are vocal and who have leadership roles, so many students go under the radar and feel unseen and unheard. And as we know Langston is not an easy place to be with all the things we go through, such as water being unusual-able for weeks and the simple fact that we aren't surrounded by anything can be a bit depressing. I have noticed most people I know who left and haven't returned was because their experience here at Langston was depressing. If Langston honestly wants to raise the retention rate they need to not only take better care of their living facilities but harp on the family aspect that Langston can provide, so they can actually be a part of the fostering process to help alleviate the notion of elitism."

"I know that students are not coming back due to their academic records," said

Imani Spearman, a sophomore animal science major. "They are writing appeals for this but some departments are not accepting them back. It's a money game. Some of these students didn't have the money to begin with and then they are being faced with academic challenges in a pandemic. If it's not academically related or financially related, it has a lot to do with the living conditions that the school provides us. The dorms are outdated and students would rather be in the comfort of their own homes. LUPD is constantly ticketing them for parking and 'speeding' violations as well which is another reason for them to stay home."

Elija Weaver, Langston University SGA president, said "One of the top reasons for low retention rate not only at Langston but all universities across the state is the absence of in-person instruction and a new verge of 'virtual/zoom fatigue.'"

The Langston University public relations team was not available for comment.

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