

Non-Returning Student Survey Fall 2025

Introduction

The Non-Returning Student Survey is administered annually by the Essex County College (ECC) Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) each fall semester. The survey was sent to students that were enrolled in ECC during the Spring 2025 semester but did not re-enroll in the Fall 2025 semester. The goal of the survey is to understand why a student decides to pause or end their pursuit of an associate's degree at ECC. The survey was sent out to 3,823 students and 300 responses were received yielding an 7.8% response rate. It was sent out on November 5th 2025 and closed on January 8th 2026. Women were overrepresented in this sample when compared to the general ECC population, and men were underrepresented. Black participants were also overrepresented in this sample while the other race groups were represented relatively accurately.

Survey Results

The majority of respondents were first-year students when they applied to ECC (79.0%). Participants were asked to categorize their current academic plans: 57.8% reported that they are planning on resuming their education at ECC, 20.4% reported that they were enrolled at another institution, 9.8% reported that they were unsure, 7.6% reported that they are planning to continue their education at another institution, and 4.4% reported that they do not plan on returning to college.

Participants were asked about the personal and institutional reasons they did not return to ECC. See Table 1 below:

	2024		2025	
	n	%	n	%
Personal reasons:				
Health-related issue	42	18.1%	26	14.8%
Military service	4	1.7%	5	2.8%
Financial difficulties	147	63.4%	104	59.1%
Work responsibilities	65	28.0%	61	34.7%
Family obligations	55	23.7%	58	33.0%
Transportation issue	21	9.1%	18	10.2%
Housing problem	33	14.2%	24	13.6%
Relocation	34	14.7%	28	15.9%
Institutional Reasons:				
Disappointed with quality of instruction	45	25.4%	32	23.9%
Difficulty with advisement and course registration	25	14.1%	28	20.9%
Course time offerings were inconvenient	41	23.2%	20	14.9%
Course requirements and prerequisites were unattainable	14	7.9%	9	6.7%
Unable to do well in courses	40	22.6%	35	26.1%
Lost financial aid	73	41.2%	39	29.1%

Lack of support from ECC	52	29.4%	34	25.4%
ECC did not offer the major I wanted	17	9.6%	15	11.2%

Participants were asked to explain in their own words what led them to not return to ECC for both personal and institutional reasons. 193 of the respondents left a comment in at least one of the open-comment text boxes. The largest reason left in the comments was an explanation of financial difficulties (34.2%), including losing financial aid mid-semester, issues with an unpaid balance, and personal financial hardship. The next largest reason was varying personal reasons (28.0%) that include health issues, grief/loss, and difficulty on prioritizing school work. About a fifth of respondents stated that they either moved or decided to attend a different university (19.2%). Other small themes that arose were problems with the communications at the college (14.0%), needing classes at different times or with different modalities (7.8%), and the rest were explaining that they were waiting to begin in the nursing program (5.2%).

National Student Clearing House Data

An analysis was done using the National Student Clearing House Data that tracks where students enroll when they leave ECC. For the 2-year colleges that 81 students transferred to, see the table below:

Institution Name	n
UNION COLLEGE OF UNION COUNTY NEW JERSEY	31
BERGEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE	9
COUNTY COLLEGE OF MORRIS	5
MIDDLESEX COLLEGE	4
PASSAIC COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE	4
HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE	3
CUNY BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE	2
NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE	2
SUNY WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE	2

The school who received the most amount of transfer students from ECC was Union College of Union County New Jersey (UCNJ). 15 of the 31 students transferred to the Health Science program which can be taken completely online at UCNJ. ECC had only 11 Health Science students in Spring 2026. For Essex County residents, it would cost them an extra \$2,456 to be a full-time student at UCNJ. For a Union County resident, it would cost them \$2,640 to pay the full-time in-county tuition for UCNJ, but it would only cost them an extra \$338 to attend ECC full-time as a fully online student. Therefore, ECC should consider offering Health Science completely online to reduce the loss of these students.

There were 349 former ECC students that transferred to a 4-year university. See the table below for the top 15 schools that students transferred to:

Institution Name	Type	n
NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY	Public	54
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY	Public	34
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY - NEWARK	Public	34
KEAN UNIVERSITY	Public	25
RUTGERS -THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NJ -NEW BRUNSWICK	Public	14
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY	Private	13
NEW JERSEY CITY UNIVERSITY	Public	8
WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY	Public	8
FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY - TEANECK	Private	7
STOCKTON UNIVERSITY	Public	6
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY	Public	5
FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY - MADISON	Private	5
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY- BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE	Private	5
SAINT PETER'S UNIVERSITY	Private	5
SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE- 09WEEK	Private	5

The majors that students transferred to, at the other four-year colleges were Nursing (n=25), Psychology (n=16), Criminal Justice (n=15), Computer Science (n=10), and Biology (n=9). There were also 31 students that were in an undeclared path of study, 15 dual enrollment high school students that transfer to a four year instead of ECC, and 11 pursued an unspecified, non-matriculating path. The majority of these colleges are in North New Jersey and public. It is also important to note that ECC lost 15 former dual-enrollment students to NJIT. This suggests that ECC should look for ways to incentivize enrollment for these students.

Conclusion

The majority of the non-returned students plan to re-enroll in ECC. Therefore, ECC should continue its efforts to reach out to these students to see how they can help them re-enroll. There should also be further education on the regulations of financial aid so that less students lose their financial aid mid-semester. It would also benefit the college to make the Health Science major fully online and to add more online classes in general. There should also be a larger effort in having the dual enrollment high school students enroll in ECC instead of NJIT.