

## THE MORTALITY RATE IN OUR FRESHMAN CLASSES

By Hugh H. Caldwell,  
Registrar, Georgia School of Technology

I have never experienced any profound delight in compiling or devouring statistics, and as for questionnaires I have answered many but asked few. However, in a study of this kind, it is necessary to deal to some extent with figures, and for these figures I am indebted to the fellow registrars who kindly answered my two questions. These questions were: First, "What percent of your Freshmen remain in college more than one year?" and, second, "What is the average number of Freshmen enrolled for the past three years?"

The term, "freshman mortality rate," refers to the percent of college Freshmen who remain in the institution for only one year or less. The discussion of this topic may not bring out anything that is particularly new, but it deals with a condition which for many of us is a serious problem, and one which we have evidently made little progress in solving. The figures which I here present were obtained from the registrars or deans of 107 institutions. Since they come from all sections and all important types, they may be considered as an accurate representation of conditions in the higher institutions of America as a whole. The following results are shown:

	<b><i>Freshman Enrollment</i></b>	<b><i>Freshman Mortality Rate</i></b>
(a) 32 State universities	26,986	33.3%
(b) 18 State colleges	9,272	31.4%
(c) 43 Privately supported universities and colleges	15,187	28.0%
(d) 22 Schools of technology	10,745	34.4%
(e) 6 Miscellaneous	3,636	30.5%
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Net total 107 institutions	57,891	32.0%

*Excluding duplicates in (b) and (d).*

It will readily be observed from the above that in the course of one year these 107 institutions lose 18,570 Freshmen. Furthermore, when we include the collegiate institutions of America as a whole, which are admitting annually over 100,000 Freshmen, we find, on the same basis that the Freshman mortality amounts to at least 32,000 students. In the light of what this annual loss means to the institution and to the students concerned, is it not worth our while to devote more attention to its causes, and as far as possible to remove them?

Objection may reasonably be made that all of these students are not lost to the colleges, since some of them transfer to another institution and others re-enter after a period of absence. Let us, therefore, in the absence of accurate data, assume that the 32% loss in the average college may be divided as follows: 20% lost on account of partial or absolute failure in studies, 12% lost on account of transfers, illness, lack of funds, etc. The only criticism which could be made of this division is that it is too conservative, since it assumes that only five out of eight of the lost Freshmen are our on account of failures.

On the above basis we have 20,000 Freshmen per year who fail in their studies so badly that they voluntarily or involuntarily withdraw. Those members of our Faculties who regard the Freshman year as primarily a time for weeding out the unfit will not regard these figures with any great concern, but the less hardened ones of our number, who are conscious of what a failure at the outset of his course may mean in the life of the student, will agree that in this annual loss on 20,000 Freshmen we have a condition which demands our most serious attention. If this large element represents only those who are unfit for a college education, then it would be better for them and for the colleges if they were all debarred from registration. The student's time and money and the instructor's labor have been spent, and there is little, if anything, to show for these expenditures. It is doubtless true that in every large Freshman class there are some who are hopelessly unfitted by nature for college training. These we may perhaps be able to eliminate by some method similar to the intelligence tests which are now being tried out. But are there not many others going into the discard each year, who, if they were properly handled before and after entering college, might complete their courses with credit?

The chief reasons for these failures are so well known that we need not discuss them at length. The colleges are disposed to shift most of the guilt to the secondary schools, and the schools are often satisfied that the fault lies chiefly with the colleges. Without attempting to weigh the blame on either side

let us see if there is not enough for both. It is too obvious for argument that the schools are sending us many applicants who, irrespective of all other factors, are doomed to failure on account of poor preparation. These students do not know the fundamentals, and many of them do not even know how to study. The certificate system of admission, as it is generally practiced, is subject to serious abuses. There are still too many school principals who either do not know the facts about their graduates or else they do not feel free to state them. But let me not give any one the impression that I am condemning the certificate system. It may have serious faults, but it has certainly earned its right to live.

We of the colleges, on the other hand, cannot afford to assume that our responsibility begins only when the Freshman matriculates. Our interest in his success and our co-operation toward that end must go back into the secondary schools. The principals and teachers of these schools are just as anxious for their graduates to make good in college as we are. They welcome the right sort of criticism, and if we can establish a more direct contact with them and can give them more frequent and more definite information as to where they are failing to reach the mark, we will at least be on the road toward an improvement in the preparation of our Freshmen.

For that considerable number of Freshmen who enter with satisfactory preparation and fail, the colleges must assume responsibility. It is useless to dodge the issue by saying that these students had every opportunity to make good, and the fault, therefore, is entirely their own. They are usually well meaning but irresponsible boys and girls, with many of the attributes of children, and we treat them as mature men and women. At this crisis in their lives when they need supervision, helpful advice and guidance, we are disposed to neglect them and to bestow upon them more freedom than they can bear. Is it any wonder that such Freshmen develop early in their careers a false sense of values—of what is worth while? Can we condemn them because they fall victims to a scheme of things prevailing on many a campus, which makes prominence in social and athletic organizations of more importance than scholastic attainment? And in this tendency on the part of our students to set up a false standard of values—to magnify things of lesser importance above those which are greater, we have one of the real reasons not only for the failure of our Freshmen, but also for the indifferent work of our other classes.

And there are yet other ways in which the colleges are falling short in their duties to these failing Freshmen. Shall I dare say that in many cases they are receiving indifferent and uninspiring instruction? The Freshmen need the very best treatment the institutions can offer, and they often get the poorest. Sections are usually too large and instructors are often inexperienced, or they are of the type who take charge of a section with the deliberate expectation that twenty percent of them will fail, and they do. Our Freshmen are worthy of better treatment at our hands. It should be our constant effort to give them encouragement and personal interest, to stir their ambition and to incite them to their best efforts.

I am reminded that I have a time limit, and may I, therefore, in conclusion, give the following summary of the remedies which may be suggested for lessening our Freshmen failures.

**First.** Improve the preparation of our applicants by a more systematic co-operation with secondary schools.

**Second.** Endeavor to secure more definite and frank information from the principals in their certificates.

**Third.** Give the Freshmen more careful supervision and systematic guidance.

**Fourth.** Give them a better type of instruction.

**Fifth.** Devise some means of making high scholastic standing of more importance in the eyes of the students.

In a paper as brief as this, it has not been possible to touch upon many of the phases of the subject in hand. It is hoped, however, that what has been said will serve to enlist the interest of others in our organization, and that we may at some future time make a more exhaustive study of the problem.