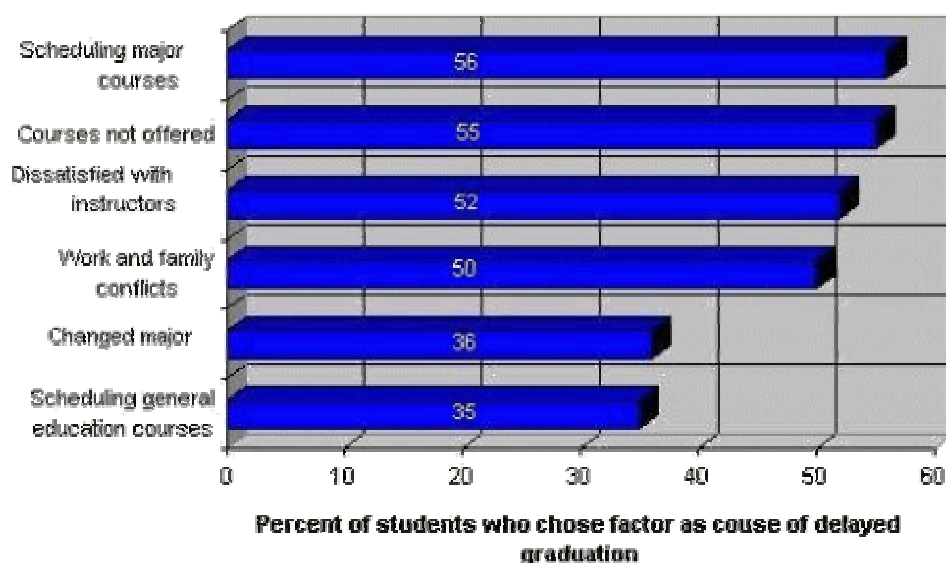


Why do Students Take Longer to Graduate?

Longitudinal studies indicate that of the SLU undergraduate students who successfully complete the requirements for graduation, less than 20% do so in four years. Another 40 - 50% graduate in five years, and approximately 30 - 40% take six or more years to complete their degrees.

From 1993 through Spring 1996, 2675 graduating seniors participated in the Senior Exit Survey. 2128 (about 80%) responded to 16 items describing factors that were potential obstacles to graduating in four years.

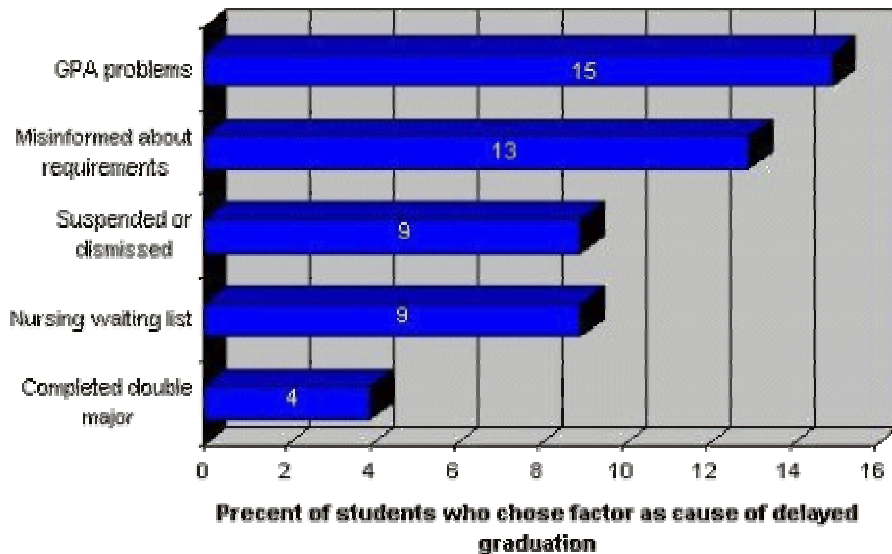
What do students most frequently say are the main reasons why their graduation is delayed?



- The factor most often indicated by students as being a cause for delayed graduation: scheduling courses in the major field. 56% (n=1193) of students responded that they experienced some delay or a major delay in response to the statement "I had trouble completing all of the courses required in my major field because of scheduling conflicts."
- An almost equal proportion of students (n=1172, 55%) indicated that they had trouble completing the courses required for their majors because the courses were not offered in the semesters when they needed them.
- 52% of students (n=1096) indicated that they had to drop courses because they were dissatisfied with the instructors and that this caused a delay in their progress towards graduation.
- Work and/or family responsibilities prevented students from taking heavier course loads on a regular basis. 50% of students (n=1058) reported that this was a factor causing some delays toward graduation.

- 35% of students (n=735) responded affirmatively to the statement "I had trouble registering for general education courses because sections were closed."

What factors do students cite as being least problematic in delaying graduation?



- Only 15 percent (n=328) of the graduating seniors indicated that getting their GPA up to the level required for graduation presented a problem and delayed their progress.
- In responding to the statement "I was misinformed concerning the graduation requirements for my degree program," 13% (n=281) replied that misinformation caused a delay in graduating.
- Other less problematic reasons given for graduation delay: being suspended or dismissed for one or more semesters (n=201, 9%), being on the waiting list for the Nursing degree program (n=198, 9%), and completing a double major (n=78, 4%).
- Moderate numbers of students indicated a variety of problems interfered with their graduation progress. These factors included attending only part time when first starting at SLU (n=482, 23%), losing credits because they transferred to Southeastern (n=493, 23%), dropping courses because they were not academically ready (n=510, 24%), taking more than one semester to get their developmental courses out of the way (n=580, 27%), and deciding to sit out for one or more semesters (n=589, 28%).
- The numbers reported in this policy brief only reflect the opinions of students who successfully met the requirements for graduation. Less than 30% of entering SLU beginning freshmen eventually graduate. While the factors reported need to be addressed to optimize progress toward graduation, it is likely that some of these same factors prevent students from ever reaching their degree goals.

This Policy Brief presents issues addressed in Goal 7 of the University's Strategic Plan: *To increase the proportion of students graduating in four years.* For more information about Southeastern Louisiana University, check the web site of the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment at <http://www.selu.edu/Administration/Inst-Research/>.