A Conversation with First-Year Students who Left

STUDY GOALS
- Identify common factors contributing to first-year students not retaining.
- Increase awareness of these factors.
- Address factors (as possible) to reduce the loss of our first-year students.

METHODOLOGY
- A 12-item telephone survey was developed.
- Peer transition mentors were trained on data collection protocol & importance of tone of care.
- Students were called three times. A follow-up email was distributed to all non-responders.
- Data were successfully collected for 285 students- a 30% response rate.

BACKGROUND
- Approximately 1 in 5 first-year students leave San Francisco State University within their first-year.
- Of the 4,323 fall 2017 first-year students, a total of 939 did not return for the start of their second year (22%).
- In this study, we were seeking to uncover why these 939 students left SF State.

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KEY FINDINGS
- 55% of students were not planning to return to SF State
- 45% of students were planning to return or were undecided

Top reasons students indicated they were not planning to return to SF State:
- Financial reasons: 39%
- Wanting to be closer to home: 24%
- SF State did not feel like their campus: 22%
- Personal issues: 18%
- Lack of social connections: 15%

Top reasons students indicated they were taking a break from SF State:
- Financial reasons: 44%
- Wanting to be closer to home: 25%
- Personal issues: 12%
- Family responsibilities: 10%
- Commuting/transportation: 8%

Students reported on what SF State could have done differently that would have impacted their decision to leave or take a break. Top themes expressed were:

"I didn’t receive any scholarships and was really hoping that I could have received some to help me financially."
"I was on the waitlist for housing and I did not have a plan to stay by the time classes started."
"I wish there was more unity on campus, and that people were more social."

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Improve financial literacy through educational workshops & trainings.
- Explore innovative housing partnerships and first-year engagement opportunities.
- Create a first-year lounge to provide a space for studying, resting, and connecting with peers.