



# Talking About Leaving: Why Undergraduates Leave The Sciences

*Elaine Seymour*

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# Talking About Leaving: Why Undergraduates Leave The Sciences

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## **Talking About Leaving: Why Undergraduates Leave The Sciences** Elaine Seymour

This intriguing book explores the reasons that lead undergraduates of above-average ability to switch from science, mathematics, and engineering majors into nonscience majors. Based on a three-year, seven-campus study, the volume takes up the ongoing national debate about the quality of undergraduate education in these fields, offering explanations for net losses of students to non-science majors. Data show that approximately 40 percent of undergraduate students leave engineering programs, 50 percent leave the physical and biological sciences, and 60 percent leave mathematics. Concern about this waste of talent is heightened because these losses occur among the most highly qualified college entrants and are disproportionately greater among women and students of color, despite a serious national effort to improve their recruitment and retention. The authors' findings, culled from over 600 hours of ethnographic interviews and focus group discussions with undergraduates, explain the intended and unintended consequences of some traditional teaching practices and attitudes. *Talking about Leaving* is richly illustrated with students' accounts of their own experiences in the sciences. This is a landmark study-an essential source book for all those concerned with changing the ways that we teach science, mathematics, and engineering education, and with opening these fields to a more diverse student body.

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