Brief Report: Academic Standing at UC Merced

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MERCED

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In spring 2019, Institutional Research and Decision Support examined UC Merced's Academic Standing Policy, and in particular, academic probation and subject to dismissal statuses[1] – collectively referred to as poor academic standing. We provide basic information regarding the characteristics of students placed on poor academic standing. We examine how being placed on poor academic standing is related to academic success outcomes including retention, progress to degree, and graduation rates. We also examine associations between being placed on poor academic standing, major changing, course repeats, and degree granting School. Finally, we consider associations among academic standing statuses. The goal of the analyses is to provide information needed by the campus to improve student success, particularly as it relates to our Academic Standing Policy. To that end, this brief summarizes the report findings and makes some general recommendations regarding how to improve student success at UC Merced.

Background

Analysis sample. This analysis focused on the fall 2012 entering frosh cohort (n = 1495) for which four- and five-year graduation rate data was available at the time of this analysis.

UC Merced's Academic Standing Policy. Any student who has a semester or cumulative GPA below 2.0 is placed on academic probation (AP), which is one type of poor academic standing. However, a more serious consequence applies to students who also fall into one of the following categories:

1. The student has been on academic probation for two or more semesters and his/her cumulative grade point average is less than 2.0, or
2. The student's semester grade point average is less than 1.5 and the student's cumulative grade point average is less than 2.0.

If the student falls into one of the above categories, s/he is considered subject to academic dismissal (SAD). Students who are SAD are offered the opportunity to appeal this standing. If they submit an appeal and the appeal is approved, they are allowed to continue their attendance at the University in a subject to dismissal (SD)[2] standing. If they fail to appeal or submit an appeal and the appeal is denied, they are academically dismissed (AD) from the University and their enrollment is cancelled. They only way for a student who was AD to return is to be reinstated upon submission of a reinstatement application approved by the School Dean. For any student previously in poor standing (AP or SD), once the student has achieved a semester and cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher, s/he is returned to good standing.

Characteristics of Students in Poor Academic Standing

Students are more likely to be placed on academic probation (about 2 in 5) than subject to academic dismissal (about 1 in 10), and this has not changed over time. Both statuses are likely to occur in the first matriculation semester – though academic probation status is also likely in semesters three and four and subject to dismissal status in semester two. Students with a major in the School of Natural Sciences (SNS) or School of Engineering (SOE) are generally at higher risk of poor academic standing compared to students in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA) or Undeclared students. Most students are only in poor academic standing for one semester – though it's important to note that for some this is because they are academically dismissed.

Interventions that target students in their first matriculation semester and/or who have majors in SNS or SOE have the greatest likelihood of reducing the overall number of students in poor academic standing.

Associations among Poor Academic Standing Statuses and Student Success Outcomes

Normal Academic Progress. For graduates, the timing (i.e., matriculation semester) of when they are first placed on poor

academic standing is not consistently related to normal academic progress. That is, they generally earn around 15 credits each term, which is the goal if one is to graduate in four years without taking summer courses, regardless of whether they were placed on poor academic standing that term.

> Being placed on poor academic standing is a risk factor for leaving the University within 1-2 semesters.

For non-graduates, enrollment patterns – when they leave UC Merced and how many credits they earn before leaving – are key. Non-graduates who are placed on poor academic standing are most likely to leave UC Merced within one to two semesters. This is particularly problematic for students first placed on poor academic standing in later matriculation terms – they accumulate more credits toward a degree without earning one, representing a substantial lost investment in resources by both the student and the University.

Major Changing and Course Repeats. Students who are placed in poor academic standing are more likely to change majors and to repeat courses than those in good standing.

> Course repeats and major changes are more likely for students placed on poor academic standing than those who are not.

Retention Rates. Students who are placed on poor academic standing in earlier semesters, particularly the first semester, are less likely to be retained in general – so the timing of poor standing matters. However, if we only consider ever being placed on poor academic standing, regardless of the timing, then the type of poor standing matters. Students placed on academic probation for at least one term have higher retention rates than those never placed on academic probation, which may indicate that academic probation is effective for helping struggling students make corrections. Conversely,

students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term have lower retention rates compared to those never subject to dismissal.

Graduation Rates. First, we considered whether graduation rates were impacted by the timing of being placed on poor academic standing (i.e., matriculation semester when the student was first placed on poor academic standing). Four-year graduation rates do not appear to be impacted by the timing of being placed in poor academic standing. However, five-year graduation rates are impacted by timing - students placed on poor academic standing in earlier semesters are less likely to graduate in five years compared to students first placed on poor academic standing in later years. Next we considered whether graduation rates were impacted by ever being placed on poor academic standing, regardless of the timing of when this happened. Four-year graduation rates are highest for students never placed on poor academic standing. Five-year graduation rates are similar regardless of academic probation status, but are lower for students subject to academic dismissal compared to those who are not subject to academic dismissal.

> We could improve 4 and 5-year graduation rates by reducing the number of students placed on poor academic standing.

Overall, and regardless of academic probation status, students who graduate in four or five years are most likely to earn a degree from SSHA (5 in 10), followed by SNS (3 in 10), and finally SOE (2 in 100). Conversely, students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term are very unlikely to earn a degree from SOE (less than 1 in 10) or SNS (1 in 10) versus SSHA (9 in 10).

Associations among Academic Standing Statuses

Being placed on academic probation in an earlier term, particularly semester one, is a risk factor for both subject to dismissal status and academic dismissal. Subject to dismissal status is a risk factor for academic dismissal, particularly the following term.

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Academic probation is a risk factor for subject to dismissal status – both academic probation and subject to dismissal status are risk factors for academic dismissal.

Conclusion

The key take home message from this report is that being placed on poor academic standing – academic probation and particularly subject to dismissal status – and particularly in earlier matriculation semesters, is a risk factor for poor student success outcomes. Thus, a key recommendation to improve student success at UC Merced is to reduce the number of students placed on poor academic standing in early semesters.

Not only do our students invest time and money in UC Merced, but UC Merced invests time and resources in our students. UC Merced has already implemented a number of programs (e.g., Fiat Lux, Living Learning Communities) and practices (e.g., mid-semester grade interventions) that particularly target new students with the goal of helping them develop effective study habits, form relationships with faculty and other students, and engage with resources intended to help them succeed academically. It will be important for the campus to continually engage in efforts to intentionally deploy programs and services to help our students be successful, evaluate the effectiveness of our programs and practices, and make improvements where we can to ensure we are effectively serving our students.

Contact Us

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ENDNOTES

1. Please follow these hyperlinks to view the full Academic Probation and Subject to Dismissal reports on the IRDS webpage.

2. Note that subject to dismissal (SD) status was previously referred to as special probation (SP) status.