

March, 2019

This report examines impacts of UC Merced's [Academic Standing Policy](#), and in particular academic probation status, on undergraduate student success. We provide basic information, including the number of students affected by the academic probation policy as well as when in their academic careers and for how long students tend to be affected. We examine how being on academic probation is related to academic success outcomes including retention, progress to degree, and graduation rates. We also examine associations between academic probation status, major changing, course repeats, and degree granting School. Finally, we consider associations between academic probation and other academic standing statuses, specifically subject to dismissal status and academic dismissal. The goal of this report is to provide information needed by the campus to improve student success, particularly for students placed on academic probation. The key take home messages from the report are summarized below.

Summary of Key Take Home Messages

- What proportion of students are placed on academic probation?
 - About two in five UC Merced students are placed on academic probation for at least one semester. (Fig 1)
- When are students typically placed on academic probation?
 - For students placed on academic probation, this most often occurs in matriculation semester one, three, or four. (Fig 2)
 - Students with a major in the School of Natural Sciences (SNS) are at greatest risk of academic probation; followed by the School of Engineering (SOE); School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA); and Undeclared. (Fig 4)
- How long are students typically placed on academic probation?
 - Most students are only placed on academic probation for one semester (Fig 6), particularly those in SSHA or Undeclared students (Fig 7).
- Is the timing of being placed on academic probation important for normal academic progress for those who graduate? For students who do not graduate, how is academic probation status related to enrollment patterns – when these students leave UC Merced – and how many credits earned when they leave?
 - For UC Merced students who graduate, the timing (matriculation semester) of when students first go on academic probation appears to have little impact on normal academic progress (earning 15 credits each term). (Fig 8)
 - Students who do not graduate are most likely to leave UC Merced within one to two semesters of being placed on academic probation, particularly if first placed on academic probation in semester one. Students first placed on academic probation in semester four or later tend to leave with only 10 or fewer credits less than the 120 required to graduate (Figs 9a and 9b).
- Is being placed on academic probation related to changing majors?
 - Students on academic probation for at least one term are somewhat more likely to change majors than students who are never on academic probation. (Fig 10)
- Is being placed on academic probation related to repeating courses?
 - Students on academic probation are more likely to repeat courses than those who are never on academic probation. (Fig 12)
- Is the timing of being placed on academic probation important for graduation rates?
 - Four-year graduation rates are highest for students never placed on academic probation. For academic probation students, four-year graduation rates do not appear to be impacted by the timing of the first academic probation term. However, five-year graduation rates are impacted by the timing of the first academic probation term - the earlier a student is placed on academic probation, the lower the likelihood of graduating in five years. (Fig 14)
- Is being placed on academic probation important for retention and persistence?
 - Interestingly, students placed on academic probation for at least one term have higher retention rates than those never placed on academic probation, possibly indicating that academic probation is effective for helping struggling students make corrections. (Fig 15) However, students who are first placed on academic probation in earlier terms, particularly the first semester, are less likely to be retained than those first placed on academic probation in later terms, so the timing is important. (Fig 16)
- How is academic probation status linked with subject to dismissal status and academic dismissal?
 - Being placed on academic probation in an earlier term, particularly semester one, is a risk factor for both subject to dismissal status (Fig 18) and academic dismissal (Fig 19).

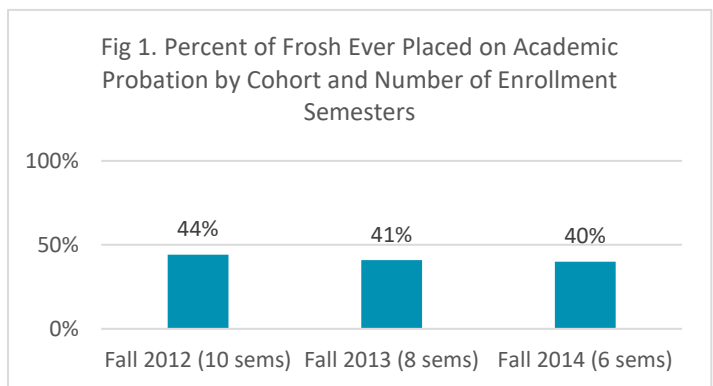
Background

UC Merced 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. Outreach to students on academic probation is at the discretion of the School. For any student previously in poor standing, once the student has achieved a semester and cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher, s/he is returned to good standing (see Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses section of this report for more information).

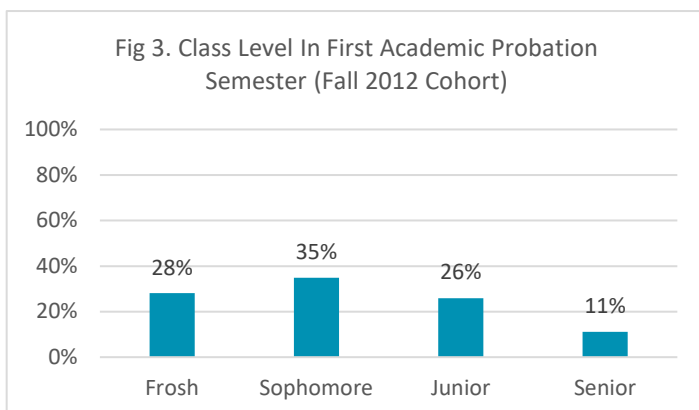
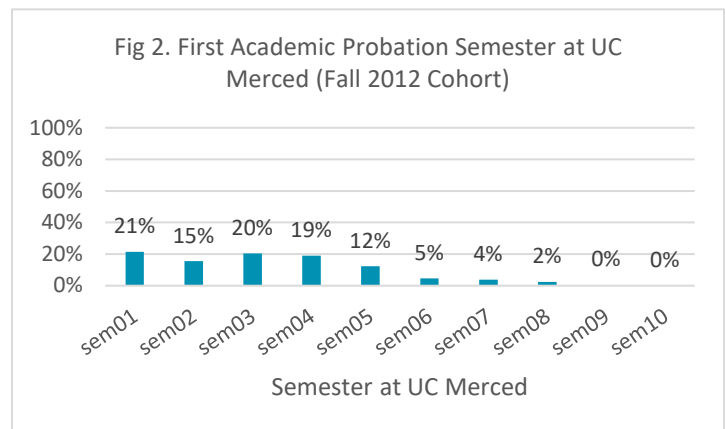
Analysis sample and institutional context. This analysis focused on the fall 2012 entering frosh cohort (n = 1495), with exceptions noted in the report. Four- and five-year graduation rate data was available for this cohort, which is important given that the School of Engineering (SOE) students are permitted five years to graduate (in contrast to the School of Natural Sciences – SNS – and the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts – SSHA – which have four-year graduation expectations). For additional context, the campus started enforcing its [normal progress policy](#) in spring 2014. Additionally, the students in this fall 2012 cohort went through the [JumpStart program](#) – students are required to meet with an academic advisor in the spring of their sophomore year to ensure they have developed a timely graduation plan. Mandatory advising for all first year students was not introduced until fall 2018, though there was mandatory first year advising in some Schools prior to that time.

Characteristics of Students on Academic Probation

What proportion of students are placed on academic probation and has this changed over time? From Fig 1, for the recent cohorts of students that had been enrolled for at least six semesters (fall 2012 to fall 2014) at the time of this analysis, about two in five students have been placed on academic probation for at least one semester during their time at UC Merced. This pattern is consistent over time, ranging from 40-44%.



When are students typically placed on academic probation? From Fig 2, for students placed on academic probation, this most often happens for the first time in their first semester (21%), third semester (20%), or fourth semester (19%) enrolled at UC Merced.



From Fig 3, students placed on academic probation for the first time most often have sophomore standing (35%; 30-59 credits), closely followed by students who have frosh (28%; 0-29 credits) or junior (26%; 60-89 credits) standing. Though Fig 3 is consistent with Fig 2, note that class standing is determined by number of credits earned and not the semesters enrolled at the University.

An Examination of Academic Probation Status at UC Merced

From Fig 4, for students placed on academic probation, the School of their first major during the semester when they were first placed on probation is most often the School of Natural Sciences (SNS; 38%) followed by the School of Engineering (SOE; 28%); the School of Social Sciences Humanities, and Arts (SSHA; 19%); and undeclared (15%).

From Fig 5, for students placed on academic probation, their class standing in the semester during which they first go on academic probation varies somewhat by School. But this is largely due to the fact that for undeclared students, being placed on academic probation is much more likely to happen when students are frosh or sophomores. However, given that students are expected to declare a major by their junior year, this pattern is to be expected, as it is rare for a student to be without a declared major in the junior or senior year.

How long are students typically on academic probation?ⁱ From Fig 6, for students placed on academic probation, for one in two (48%) this is only for one semester. For one in four (27%) this is for two semesters. Being placed on academic probation for three or more semesters is rare. Note that this does not take into account students who were later subject to academic dismissal. Later in this report we include information about the relationship between academic probation and other academic standings (see Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses section of this report).

Fig 4. School of First Major in First Academic Probation Semester (Fall 2012 Cohort)

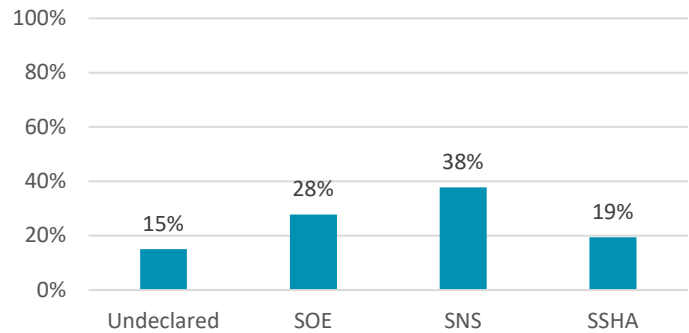


Fig 5. School and Class Level During First Academic Probation Semester (Fall 2012 cohort)

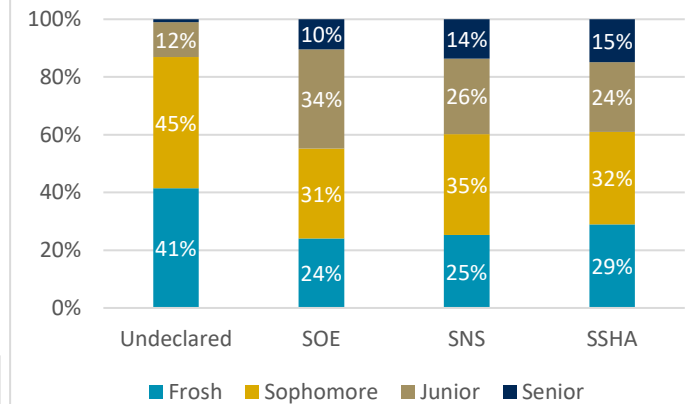
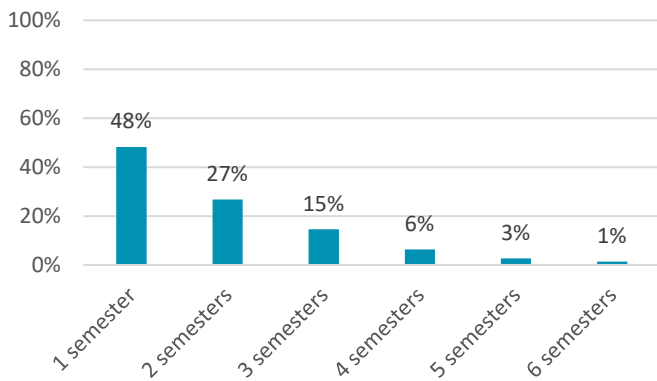
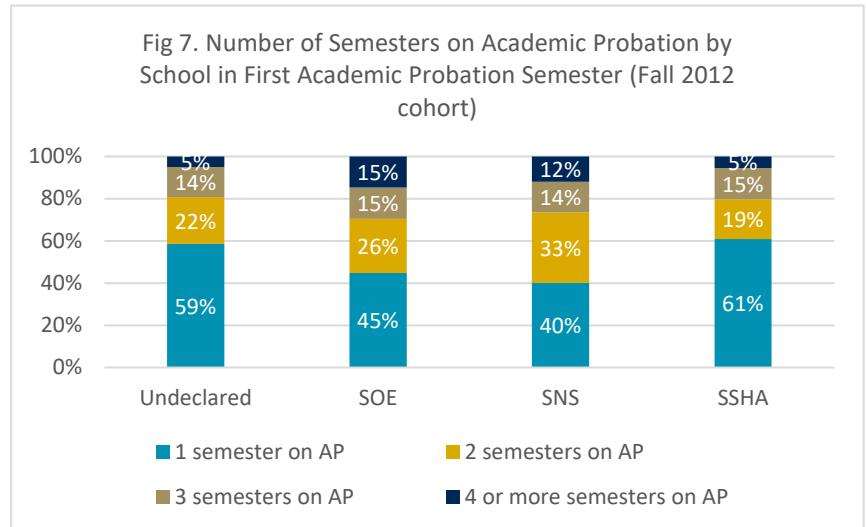


Fig 6. Number of Semesters on Academic Probation (Fall 2012 cohort)



From Fig 7, the number of semesters on academic probation does vary by School of first major. Students in SSHA and undeclared students are most likely to only be on academic probation for one semester (61% and 59%, respectively). However, for students in SOE and SNS, there is a more even split between being on probation for one semester or two semesters, though for all groups, one semester is most likely. Note that this only takes into account the School the student was in during his/her first academic probation semester. It is possible that some students later changed to majors in a different School.



Relationship between Academic Probation and Academic Success Outcomes

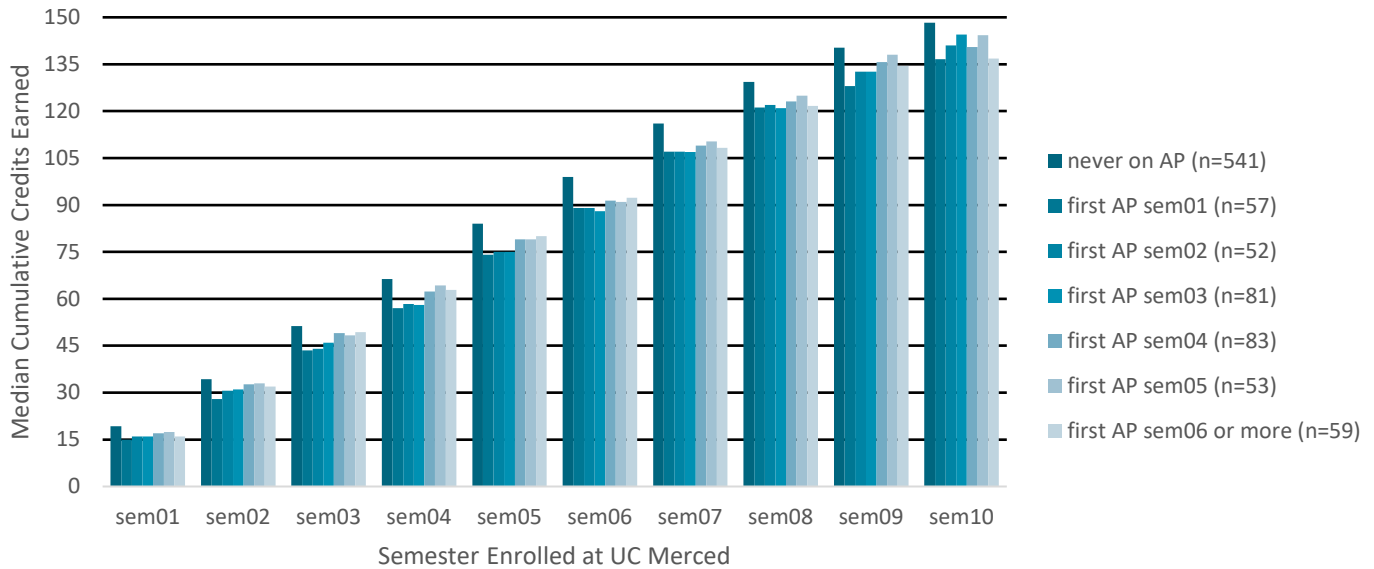
For this report, we examine how being on academic probation is related to the academic success outcomes of retention, progress to degree, and graduation rates.

Is the timing of being placed on academic probation important for normal academic progress for UC Merced graduates? In short, the timing of being placed on academic probation is not important for normal academic progress for graduates. The general expectation for normal academic progress at UC Merced is that students earn 15 credits during each semester resulting in 120 total credits and a four-year graduation. So, for example, at the end of the third enrolled semester, we would expect a student to have earned 45 credits to be making timely progress toward a four-year graduation. Fig 8 shows the median number of cumulative credits earned (y-axis) for each semester enrolled at UC Merced (x-axis), with breakouts for the students' first academic probation term (bars) so that we can best see the impacts of the timing of academic probation. The darkened figure gridlines represent 15 credit increments – the number of credits one must earn each term for normal progress.

From Fig 8, students never placed on academic probation (n = 541) tend to earn more credits at the end of each term and typically more than what is required for normal progress compared to students who are placed on academic probation, regardless of the term in which this first happens (sample size for each group in legend parentheses). However, for students placed on academic probation, the timing of academic probation does not appear to have much of an impact on normal progress. For example, if we consider semester two in Fig 8, regardless of which semester students first go on academic probation, all earn between 28-33 credits, with 30 credits being the expectation for normal progress. That is, overall, considering the term in which students first go on academic probation, the median number of credits earned for that term tends to be near or above what is expected for normal progress in that term.

Importantly, beyond eight semesters (four years), fewer students are enrolled because some had graduated. Thus, the median credits earned beyond eight semesters is based on fewer students and so should be interpreted with caution. However, it is important to note that the figure clearly shows that there are some students who are enrolled for nine or ten semesters who have the 120 units to graduate. There are several reasons why this might be the case. For example, a student who changes majors may have credits that apply to satisfying the requirements of an old major but not the new major such that there are excess credits. However, as a whole and as an institution, it would be important for improving student time to degree and four-year graduation rates to minimize the number of excess credits accrued by students.

Fig 8. Median Cumulative Credits Earned at End of Enrollment Term for UC Merced Graduates by First Academic Probation Term (Fall 2012 cohort)



For students who do not graduate, how is academic probation status related to enrollment patterns – when these students leave UC Merced – and how many credits earned when they leave?

First, from Fig 9a, for students never on academic probation ($n = 295$), there is a steep decline from semester one and two (37%) in the percent enrolled indicating that these students are most likely to leave after semester one. Though reasons for leaving can be complex, some of these students may have left UC Merced to transfer to another institution or may have decided that UC Merced was not a good fit for them. It is also possible that some were academically dismissed (see Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses section of this report for more information). For students first placed on academic probation in semester one ($n = 84$), there is a steep decline from semester two to three (40%) in the percent enrolled indicating that these students are most likely to leave after semester two. For students first placed on academic probation in later semesters (semester two or later), the pattern is less clear. However, in many cases, students are most likely to leave within one to two semesters of being placed on academic probation.

Second, from Fig 9b, students never on academic probation typically earn 28 cumulative credits (the median number of credits) at the end of their last enrollment term. When read in conjunction with Fig 9a, this is consistent with the fact that this group of students is most likely to leave shortly after semester one. For students placed on academic probation, not surprisingly, the later the student is placed on probation, the more credits earned before leaving without graduating from UC Merced. Of note, the students placed on academic probation in semester four or later are generally 10 or fewer credits from the 120 credits needed for graduation, meaning that they invest substantial time and money into earning a degree without earning one and that UC Merced invests in them as well without producing a graduate. However, it should be noted that because this is the median total credits earned, it cannot distinguish between the credits earned overall and toward a particular major. For example and as noted previously, students who change majors may earn excess credits as some courses may meet the requirements for an old major but not a new one.

Fig 9a. Percent of Non-Graduates Still Enrolled at end of Term by Academic Probation Status (Fall 2012 cohort)

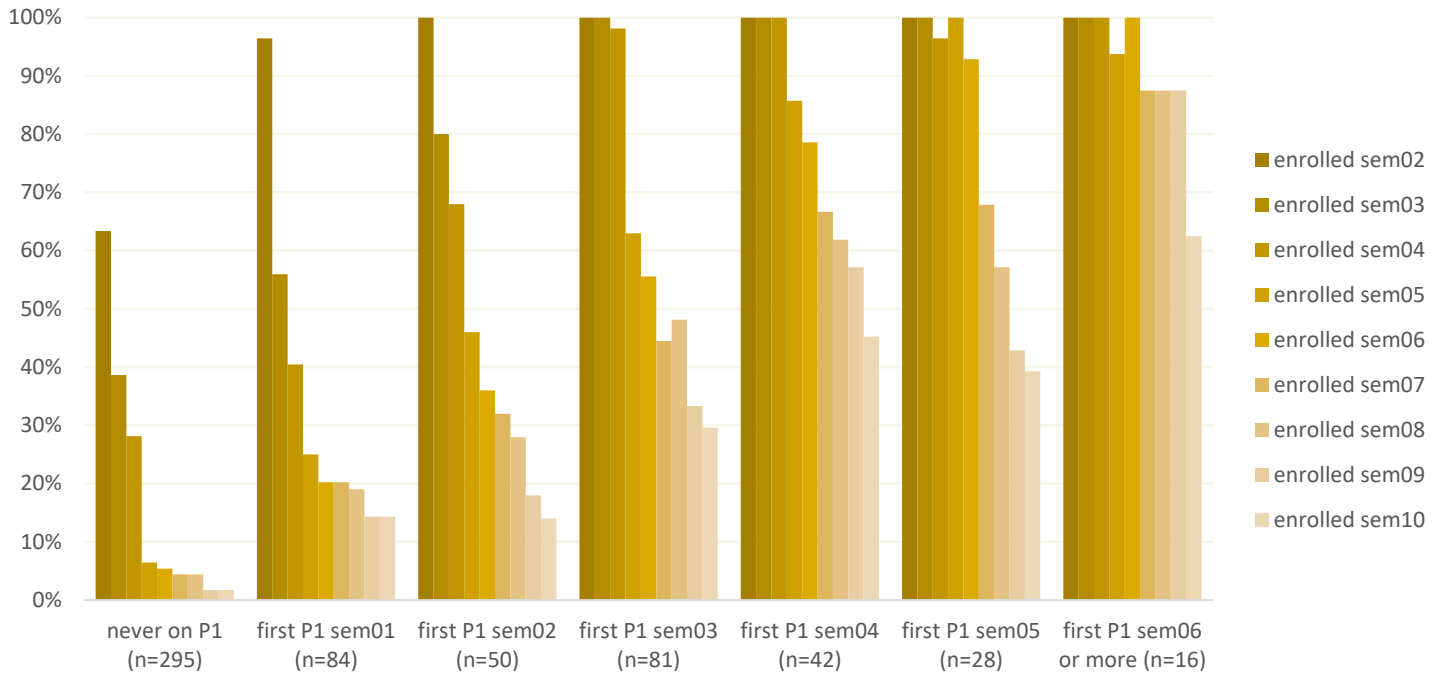
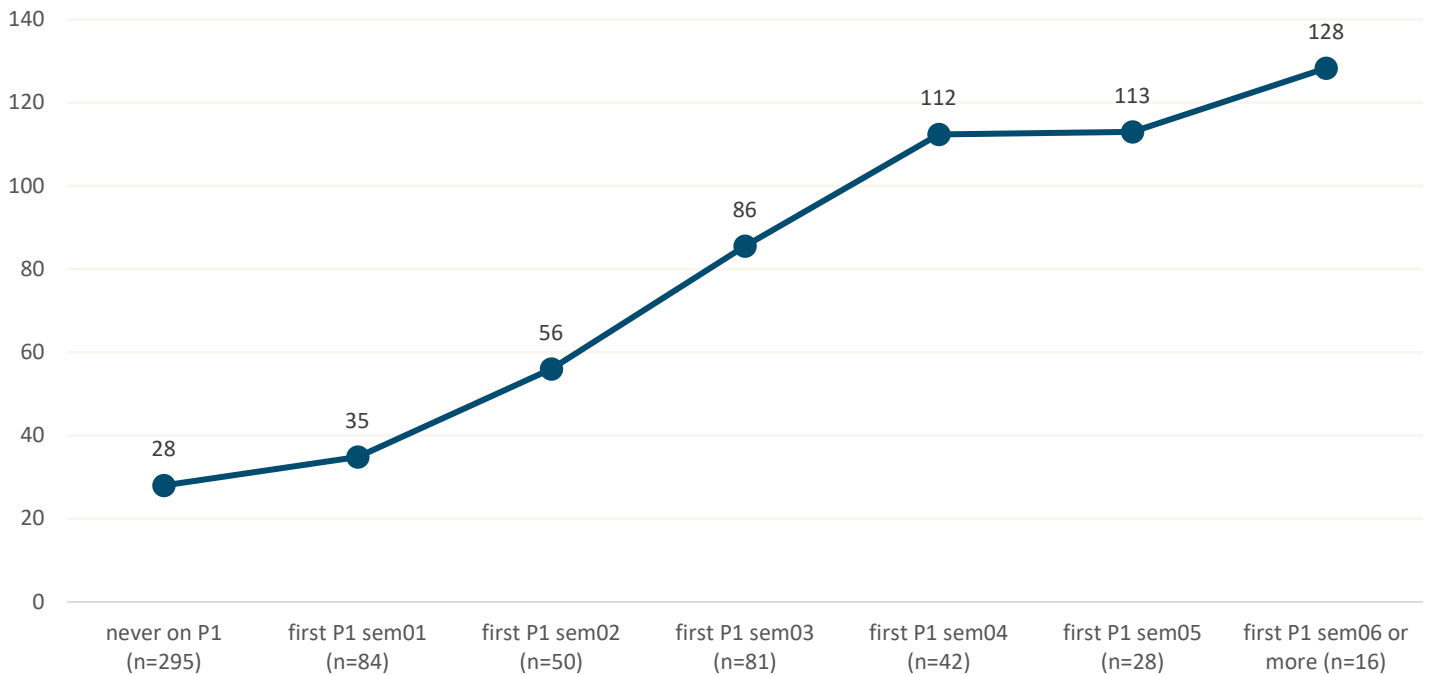


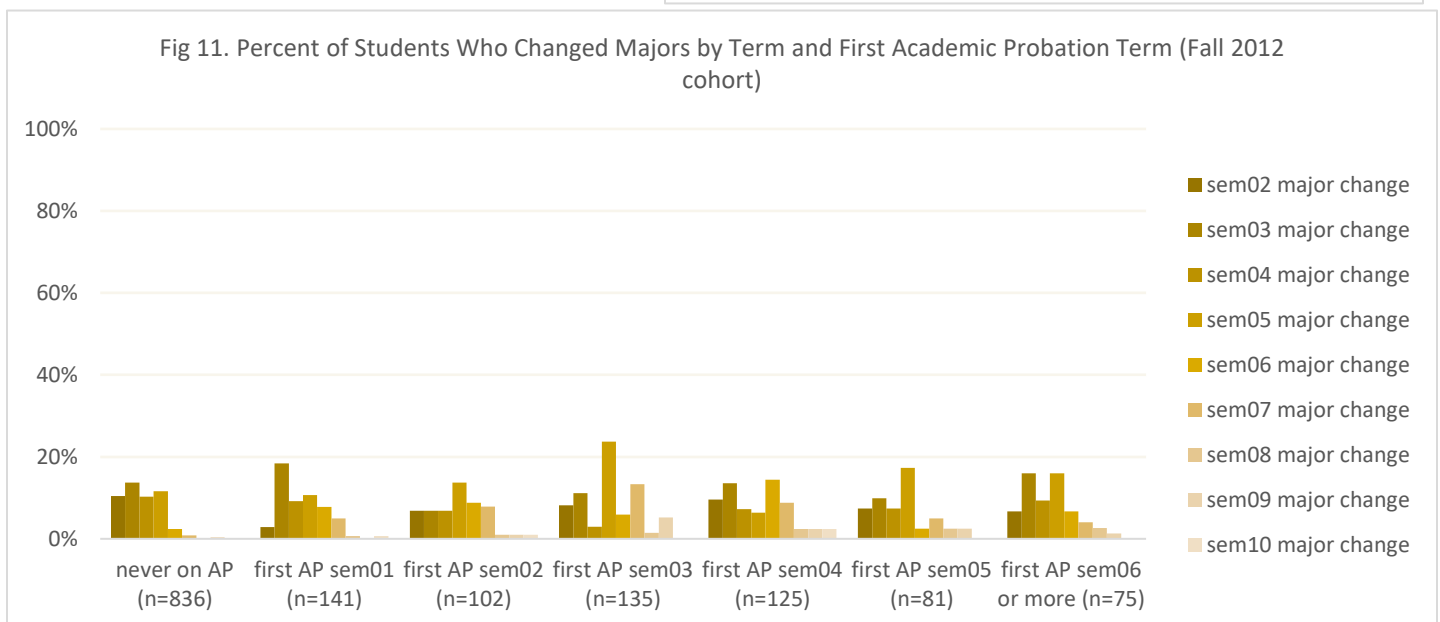
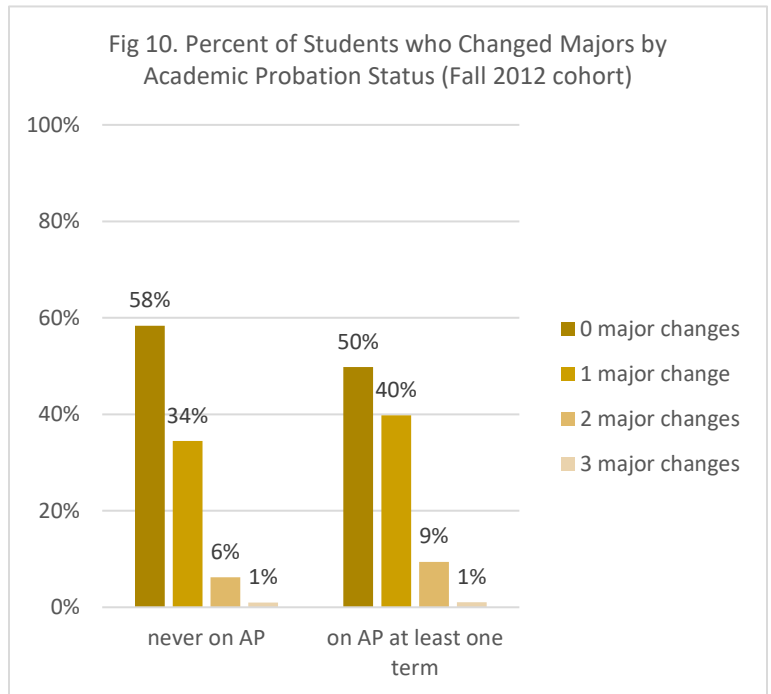
Fig 9b. Median Credits Earned in Last Enrolled Semester for Non-Graduates by Academic Probation Status (Fall 2012 cohort)



An Examination of Academic Probation Status at UC Merced

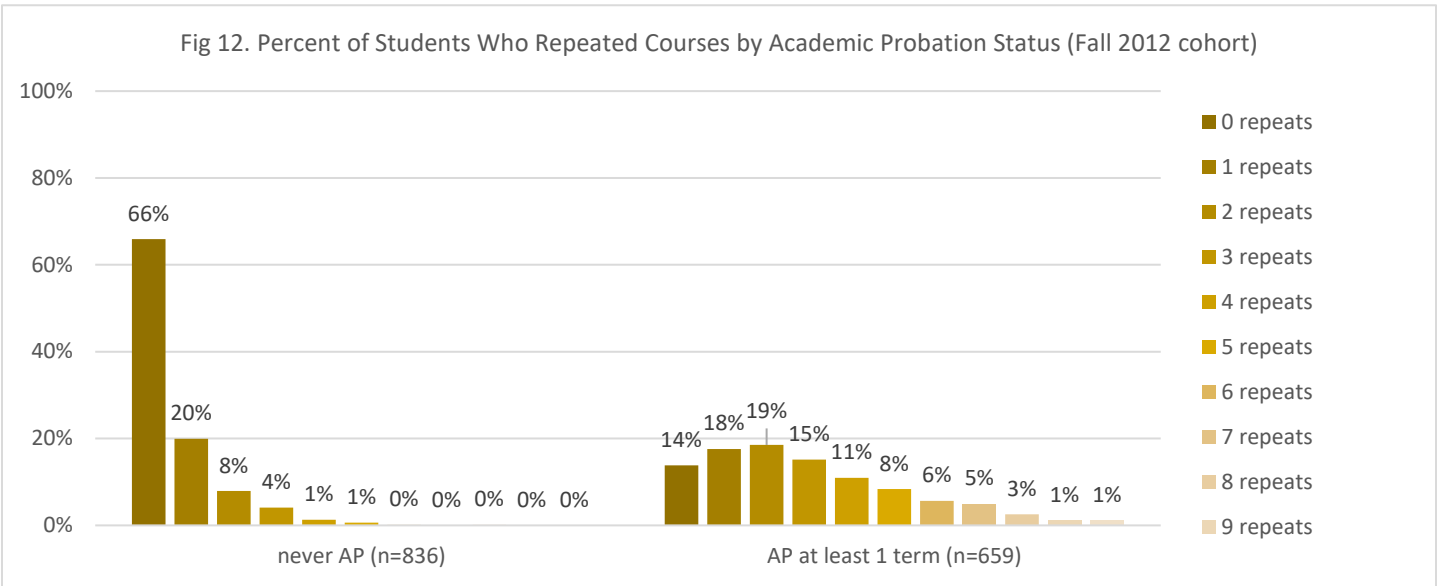
Is being placed on academic probation related to changing majors? From Fig 10, regardless of probation status, 50% or more of students do not change majors. However, students who are on academic probation for at least one term are somewhat more likely to change majors one time (40%) or two times (9%) compared to students never on academic probation (34% and 6%, respectively).

From Fig 11, there is also no clear relationship between the semester a student first goes on academic probation and semesters in which a major change occurs. For instance, students who first go on academic probation in their first semester are most likely to change majors in semester three (18%). However, students who first go on academic probation in semester two are most likely to change majors in semester five (14%). The largest spike in major changing behavior (24%) occurs in semester five for students who first went on academic probation in semester three. It may be that when a student goes on academic probation, for some this is early evidence of poor major fit that is not resolved until several semesters later.



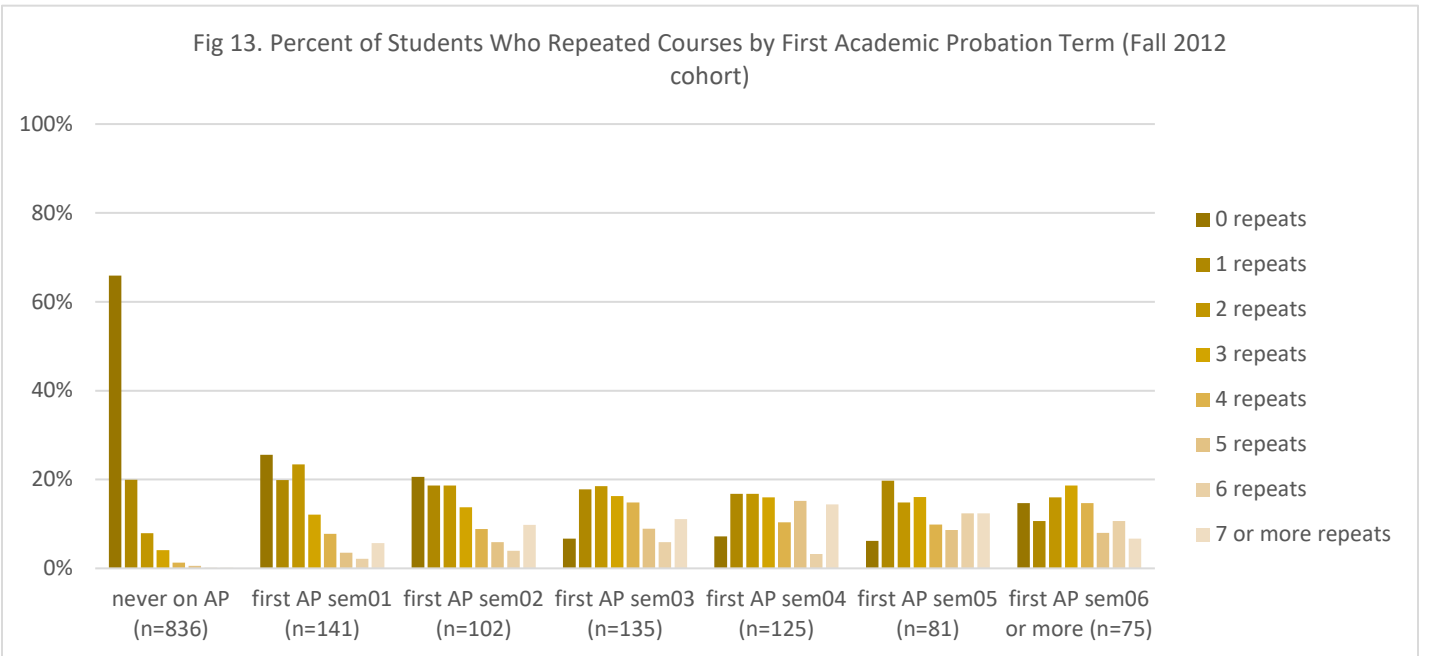
Is being placed on academic probation related to repeating courses? From Fig 12, overall, students placed on academic probation for at least one semester are more likely to repeat courses – and more courses – than those never placed on probation. Note that this includes all repeats (e.g., repeating the same course twice counts as two repeats). Students never placed on academic probation are most likely to have zero course repeats (66% versus 14% for academic probation students). Students placed on academic probation for at least one semester are most likely to have repeated one (18%), two (19%), or three (15%) courses, with some repeating four courses or more (35%).

Fig 12. Percent of Students Who Repeated Courses by Academic Probation Status (Fall 2012 cohort)



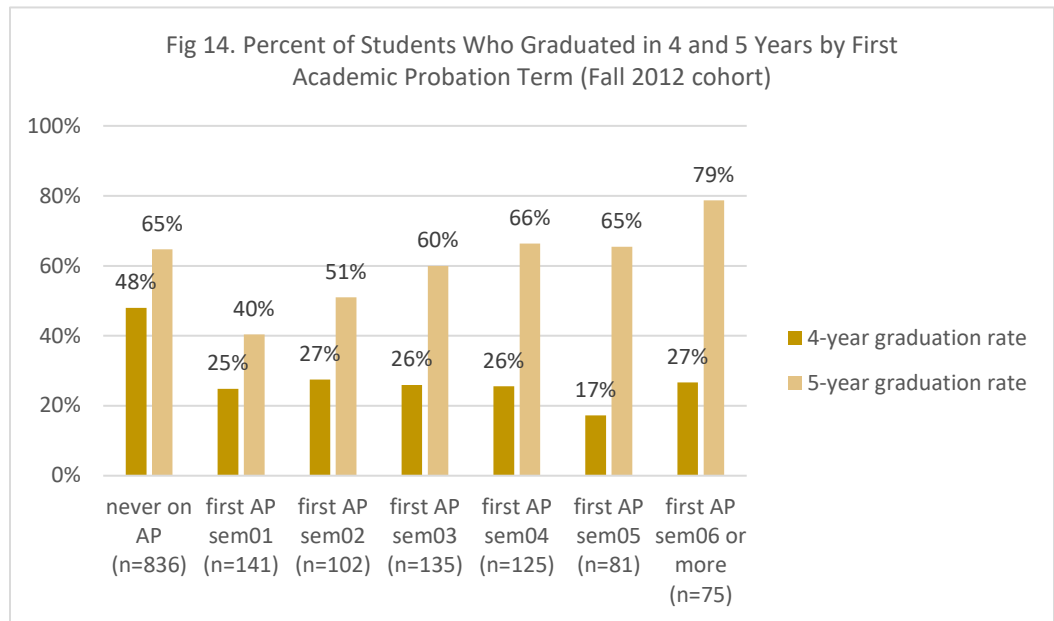
From Fig 13, considering the semester that students first go on academic probation, there appears to be somewhat of a relationship with the number course of repeats. Students who first go on probation in earlier semesters tend to have fewer repeats (zero, one, or two repeats are most common), whereas students who go on probation in later semesters tend to have more repeats (e.g., three or more repeats becomes more common). UC Merced has a [repeat policy](#) where the student's GPA is not impacted by a D or F grade within the first 16 repeated course units – this is approximately four repeats. This data could indicate that some students who go on probation later in their academic careers struggle for a while but do well enough to stay off of academic probation.

Fig 13. Percent of Students Who Repeated Courses by First Academic Probation Term (Fall 2012 cohort)



An Examination of Academic Probation Status at UC Merced

Is the timing of being placed on academic probation important for graduation rates? From Fig 14, the timing of academic probation does appear to be somewhat related to five-year graduation rates, but not to four-year graduation rates. Regarding four-year graduation rates, the rate is relatively consistent between 25-27% regardless of the first academic probation term (with the exception of 17% for semester five probation students). However, five-year graduation rates increase as the timing of the first probation semester becomes later. For example, for students who go on probation in semester one, their

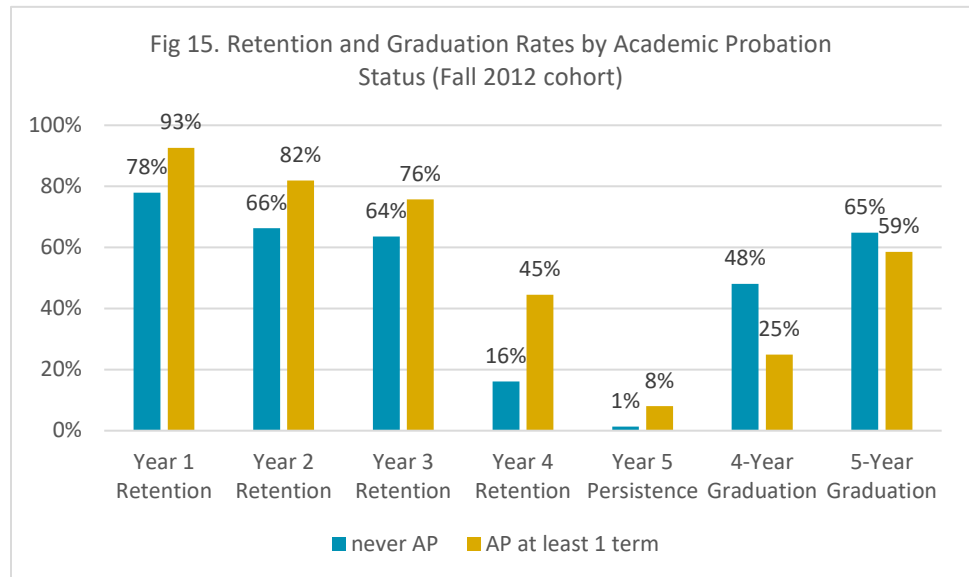


five-year graduation rate is 40% compared to 66% for students who first go on probation in semester four. This suggests that students who go on academic probation in earlier semesters are at a greater risk for not graduating in five years. Thus, if we can reduce the number of students who go on academic probation early on, then we may improve five-year graduation rates overall.

Is being placed on academic probation important for retention and persistence?

Note that retention refers to enrollment at the institution up to and including year three. Persistence refers to enrollment at the institution to year four or later. Persistence rates should be read in conjunction with graduation rates to determine the percentage of the original cohort who have either graduated or are still enrolled.

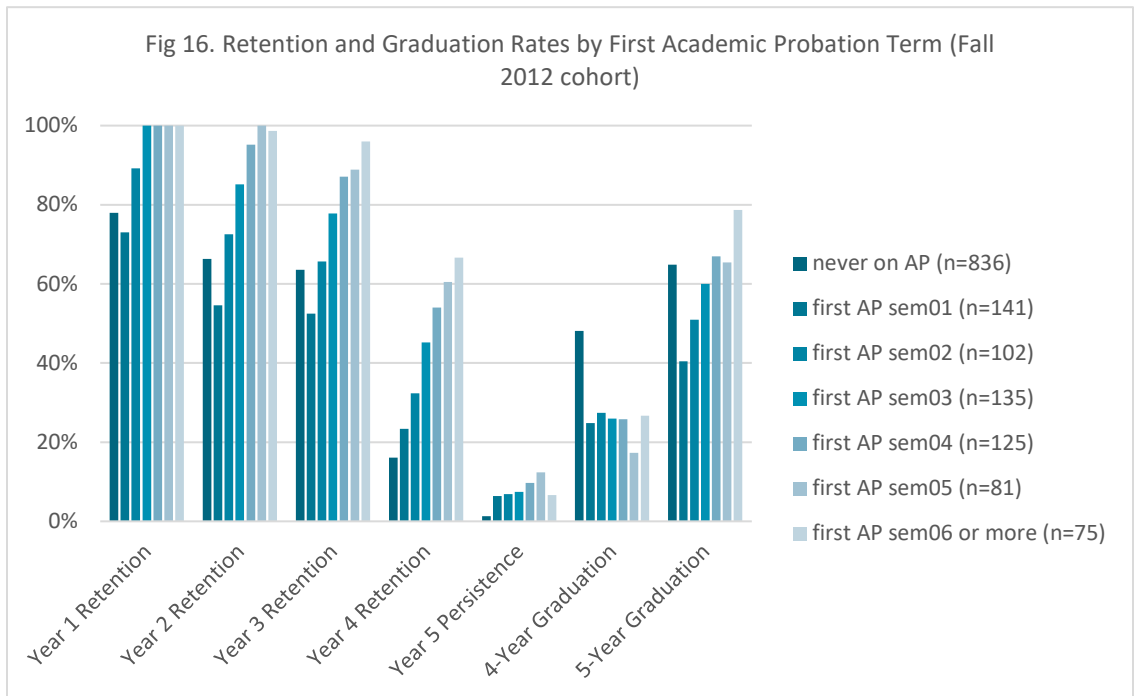
From Fig 15, interestingly, students placed on academic probation for at least one term have higher retention rates compared to those never placed on probation. However, students never placed on probation have higher four- and five-year graduation rates compared to students placed on probation. Note that the overall



pattern of data does not change when academically dismissed students are removed (see Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses section of this report for more information). There are several possible reasons for this pattern. Importantly, we know that there is a small though consistent proportion of academically successful students (likely never on probation) who choose to leave UC Merced to transfer to other institutions, which could reduce overall retention rates for this group. It is also possible that being placed on academic probation is helpful for letting students know when they are struggling and with directing them to resources to help them be successful, such that retention is improved for this group relative to those who do not receive such messages or direction to resources. Additionally, students who are on academic probation are unable to transfer to another institution.

An Examination of Academic Probation Status at UC Merced

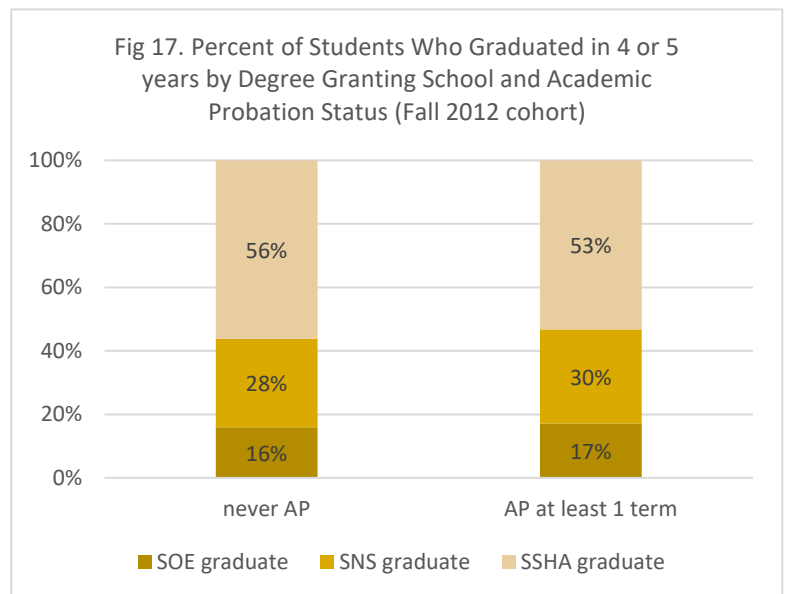
Though complex, Fig 16 explores the relationship between the timing of the first academic probation term and retention and graduation rates. Regarding retention rates, students who are placed on probation in earlier semesters are at greater risk of not being retained. This is most pronounced for students who are placed on probation in their first semester – this group has the lowest retention rates of all groups. In fact, for all other probation groups (i.e., first academic probation term was semester two or later), retention rates are actually higher than those of students never placed on probation.



Regarding four-year graduation

rates, they are similar regardless of the first academic probation term; however, students placed on academic probation at any time have lower rates than those never on probation. Some thoughts about why this might be the case are in the preceding paragraph. Regarding five-year graduation rates, the earlier a student is placed on probation the lower the five-year graduation rate. Interestingly, five-year year graduation rates for students placed on probation in semester four or later are similar or higher than students never placed on probation. This analysis supports the finding that being placed on academic probation in earlier semesters has a negative impact on retention and graduation rates overall.

Is academic probation status linked with the degree granting School? From Fig 17, considering students who graduate in four or five years, overall, students are more likely to get a degree from SSHA, followed by SNS and SOE. However, the rates of students earning degrees from each School do not vary by academic probation status. For example, students who earn a degree in SOE are just as likely to never be placed on academic probation (16%) as they are to be placed on academic probation (17%). This means that for four- and five-year graduates, being placed on academic probation does not appear to place them at a disadvantage for graduating from a particular School. Though it's important to note that this figure does not capture major changing behaviors across Schools and how that may be related to academic probation status or degree granting School.



Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses

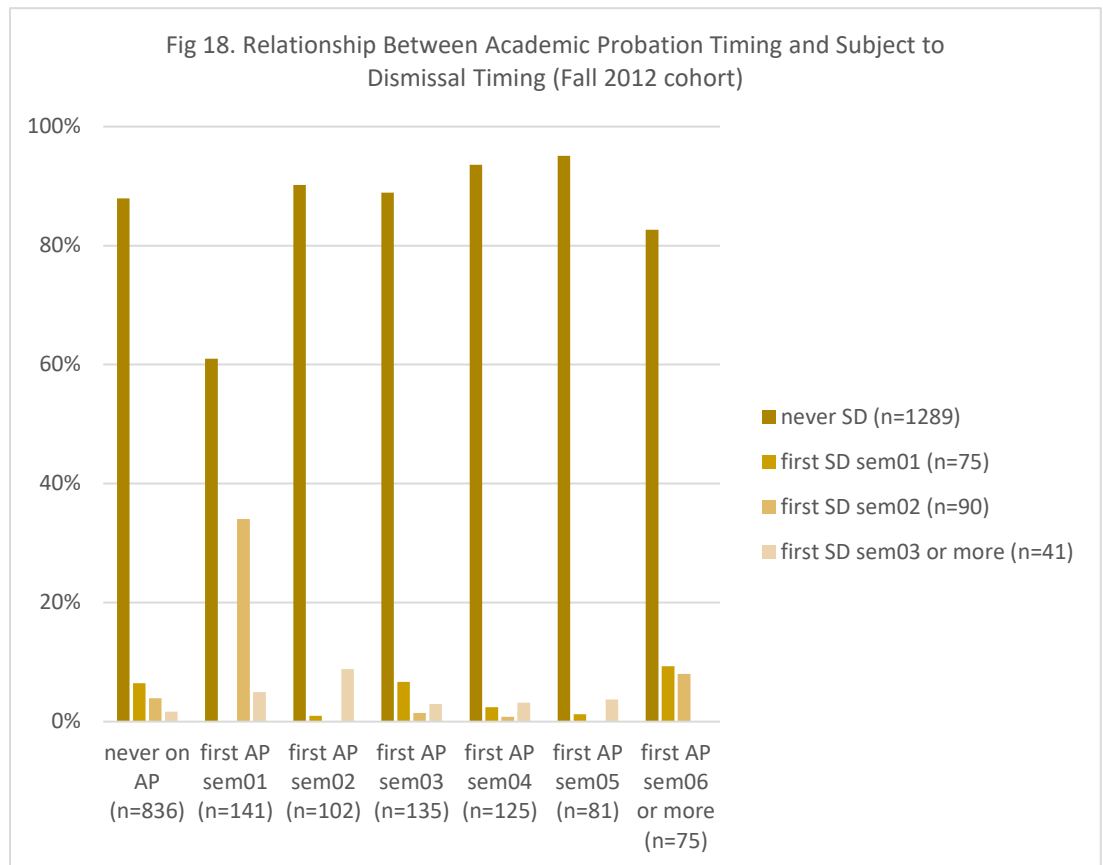
How is academic probation status linked with subject to dismissal status?

As noted in the introduction, any student who has a semester or cumulative GPA below 2.0 is placed on academic probation (AP). 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.

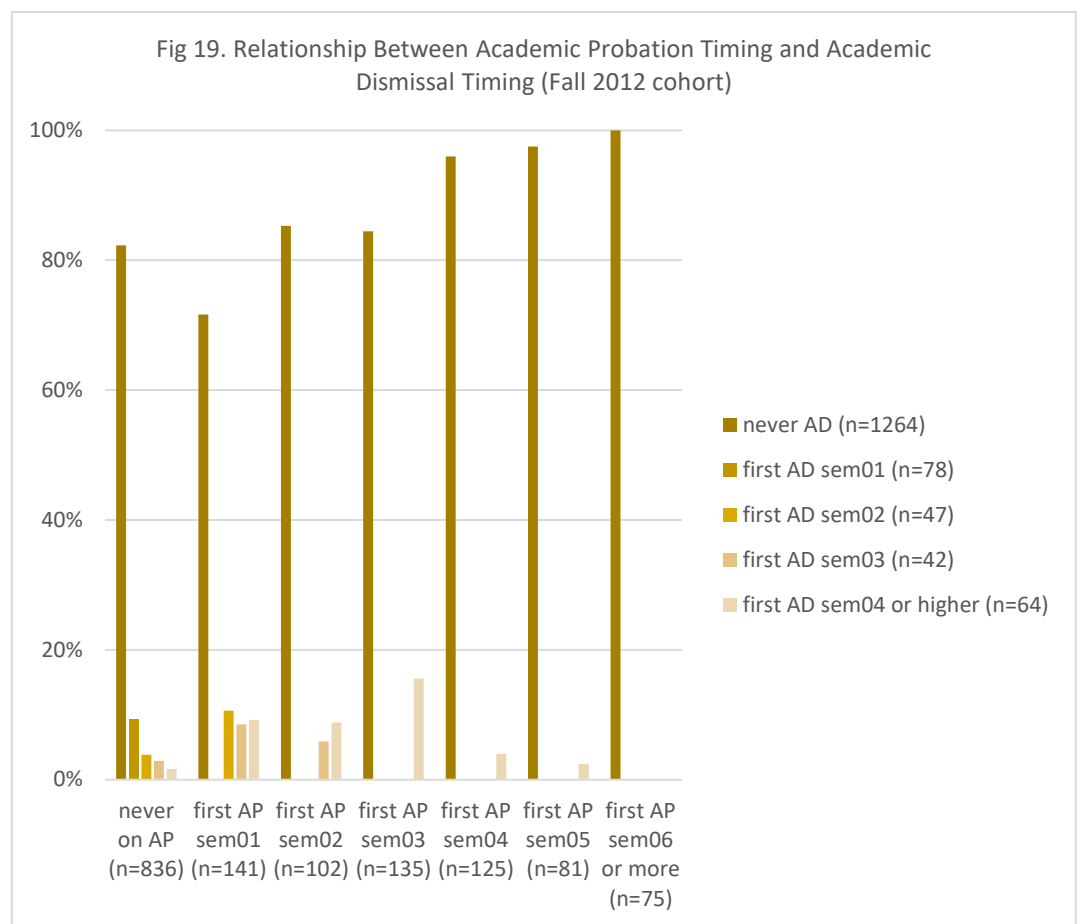
If the student falls into one of the above categories, s/he is considered subject to academic dismissal (SAD). Students who are SAD are required to appeal this standing. If they submit an appeal and the appeal is approved, they are allowed to continue their attendance at the University in a subject to dismissal (SD) standing. If they fail to appeal or they submit an appeal and the appeal is denied, they are academically dismissed (AD) from the University and their enrollment is cancelled. The 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. Prior to spring 2014, the Schools handled SAD status differently (e.g., some students were approved to remain enrolled without submitting an appeal petition).

Fortunately, the majority of students (86%) are never subject to dismissal (SD) regardless of special probation status (not in figure). From Fig 18, for students never placed on academic probation, 88% are also never subject to dismissal; but for those that are, this most often occurs in semester one (6%). Students first placed on academic probation in semester one are at the greatest risk of being subject to dismissal, and this most often happens in semester two (34%). Students placed on academic probation in semester two or later are very rarely subject to dismissal, and there is no clear relationship between the timing of these events for this group. Overall, the data suggests that being placed on academic probation in earlier semesters, particularly semester one, is a risk factor for subject to dismissal status.



How is academic probation status linked with academic dismissal?

Similar to subject to dismissal (SD) status, the majority of students (85%) are never academically dismissed (AD) regardless of academic probation status. From Fig 19, for students never placed on academic probation, 82% are never academically dismissed; but for those that are, this most often occurs in semester one (9%). Students first placed on academic probation in semester one are at the greatest risk of being academically dismissed, and this most often happens in semester two (11%); though dismissal also occurs in semesters three and four at similar rates (both 9%). Students placed on academic probation in semester two or later are very rarely dismissed, and there is no clear relationship between the timing of these events for this group. Overall, the data suggests that being placed on academic probation in earlier semesters, particularly semester one, is a risk factor for dismissal.



Conclusions

There are several key take home points from this analysis that could be helpful for improving student success at UC Merced. These are reiterated from the Summary of Key Take Home Messages on the first page of this report.

- What proportion of students are placed on academic probation?
 - About two in five UC Merced students are placed on academic probation for at least one semester. (Fig 1)
- When are students typically placed on academic probation?
 - For students placed on academic probation, this most often occurs in matriculation semester one, three, or four. (Fig 2)
 - Students with a major in the School of Natural Sciences (SNS) are at greatest risk of academic probation; followed by the School of Engineering (SOE); School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA); and Undeclared. (Fig 4)
- How long are students typically placed on academic probation?
 - Most students are only placed on academic probation for one semester (Fig 6), particularly those in SSHA or Undeclared students (Fig 7).
- Is the timing of being placed on academic probation important for normal academic progress for those who graduate? For students who do not graduate, how is academic probation status related to enrollment patterns – when these students leave UC Merced – and how many credits earned when they leave?
 - For UC Merced students who graduate, the timing (matriculation semester) of when students first go on academic probation appears to have little impact on normal academic progress (earning 15 credits each term). (Fig 8)

- Students who do not graduate are most likely to leave UC Merced within one to two semesters of being placed on academic probation, particularly if first placed on academic probation in semester one. Students first placed on academic probation in semester four or later tend to leave with only 10 or fewer credits less than the 120 required to graduate (Figs 9a and 9b).
- Is being placed on academic probation related to changing majors?
 - Students on academic probation for at least one term are somewhat more likely to change majors than students who are never on academic probation. (Fig 10)
- Is being placed on academic probation related to repeating courses?
 - Students on academic probation are more likely to repeat courses than those who are never on academic probation. (Fig 12)
- Is the timing of being placed on academic probation important for graduation rates?
 - Four-year graduation rates are highest for students never placed on academic probation. For academic probation students, four-year graduation rates do not appear to be impacted by the timing of the first academic probation term. However, five-year graduation rates are impacted by the timing of the first academic probation term - the earlier a student is placed on academic probation, the lower the likelihood of graduating in five years. (Fig 14)
- Is being placed on academic probation important for retention and persistence?
 - Interestingly, students placed on academic probation for at least one term have higher retention rates than those never placed on academic probation, possibly indicating that academic probation is effective for helping struggling students make corrections. (Fig 15) However, students who are first placed on academic probation in earlier terms, particularly the first semester, are less likely to be retained than those first placed on academic probation in later terms, so the timing is important. (Fig 16)
- How is academic probation status linked with subject to dismissal status and academic dismissal?
 - Being placed on academic probation in an earlier term, particularly semester one, is a risk factor for both subject to dismissal status (Fig 18) and academic dismissal (Fig 19).

Contact Us

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ENDNOTES

¹Note that this analysis method cannot speak to how often students may change statuses (e.g., moving on and off of academic probation) or how many continuous semesters a student is on academic probation. To answer such questions, IRDS is currently putting together a dashboard as a companion piece to this report. If you are interested in viewing the dashboard, please reach out to IRDS.