An Examination of Subject to Dismissal Status at UC Merced

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
MERCED

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

Summary of Key Take Home Messages

- What proportion of students are subject to dismissal and has this changed over time?
  - About one in ten UC Merced students are subject to dismissal for at least one semester, which has not changed over time. (Fig 1)
- When are students typically subject to dismissal?
  - For students who are subject to dismissal, this most often occurs for the first time in matriculation semester one or two (Fig 2) and when students have frosh or sophomore standing (Fig 3).
  - Students with majors in the School of Engineering (SOE) and Natural Sciences (SNS) are at greatest risk of being subject to dismissal; followed by those in Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA) and Undeclared students. (Fig 4)
  - Students who are frosh and who are Undeclared are at particularly high risk of subject to dismissal status. (Fig 5)
- How long are students typically subject to dismissal?
  - Most students are only subject to dismissal for one semester (Fig 6), and this does not vary by School of major (Fig 7).
- Is the timing of being subject to dismissal important for normal academic progress for those who graduate? For students who do not graduate, how is subject to dismissal 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 (semester at UC Merced) of when students are first subject to dismissal is not consistently related to normal academic progress (earning 15 credits each term). That is, the median credits earned during the first subject to dismissal term tends to be within one class or slightly below what is expected for normal progress. (Fig 8)
  - Students who do not graduate are most likely to leave UC Merced within one to two semesters of being subject to dismissal. Not surprisingly, the later a student is first subject to dismissal, the more credits earned before leaving – though it is rare for a student to have achieved more than sophomore status before leaving. (Figs 9a and 9b).
- Is being subject to dismissal related to changing majors?
  - Students never subject to dismissal and those subject to dismissal for at least one term are similarly likely to change majors one time; but the latter are more likely to change majors two or three times. (Fig 10)
  - Students are most likely to change majors the semester after their first subject to dismissal term. This pattern is especially clear for students who are first subject to dismissal in semester one – they are very likely to change majors in semester two. (Fig 11)
- Is being subject to dismissal related to repeating courses?
  - Students who are subject to dismissal are more likely to repeat courses, and more courses, than those who are never subject to dismissal. (Fig 12)
- Is the timing of being subject to dismissal important for graduation rates?
  - Four-year and five-year graduation rates are highest for students never subject to dismissal. For subject to dismissal students, four-year graduation rates do not appear to be impacted by the timing of the first subject to dismissal term. However, five-year graduation rates are impacted by the timing of the first subject to dismissal term – students first subject to dismissal in semester two have the lowest likelihood of graduating in five years. (Fig 14)
- Is being subject to dismissal important for retention and persistence?
  - Students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term have lower retention, persistence, and graduation rates compared to those never subject to dismissal. (Fig 15) Additionally, students who are first subject to dismissal in earlier terms, particularly the first semester, are less likely to be retained than those first subject to dismissal in later terms, so the timing is important. (Fig 16)

- Is subject to dismissal status linked with the degree granting School?
  - In general, students who graduate in 4 or 5 years are most likely to earn a degree from SSHA, followed by SNS, and finally SOE. For students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term, this pattern is particularly pronounced with the vast majority (almost 9 in 10) earning a degree from SSHA.
- How is subject to dismissal status linked with academic probation status and academic dismissal?
  - For students who are first subject to dismissal in semester one, they are rarely placed on academic probation (Fig 18). However, this is likely due to the fact that this group tends to be academically dismissed in semester two (Fig 19).
  - For students subject to dismissal in semester two or later, this status was often preceded by academic probation – this means that academic probation in early terms is a risk factor for subject to dismissal status. (Fig 18)
  - Students who are academically dismissed tend to be dismissed the semester after their first subject to dismissal term – this means that subject to dismissal status is a risk factor for 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. 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)[i] standing, which is the focus of this report. 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. 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. Prior to spring 2014, the Schools handled SAD status differently (e.g., some students were approved to remain enrolled without submitting an appeal petition). Outreach to students who are subject to dismissal is at the discretion of the School, but generally the student meets with an academic advisor and is required to develop a plan for returning to good academic standing with his/her advisor.

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

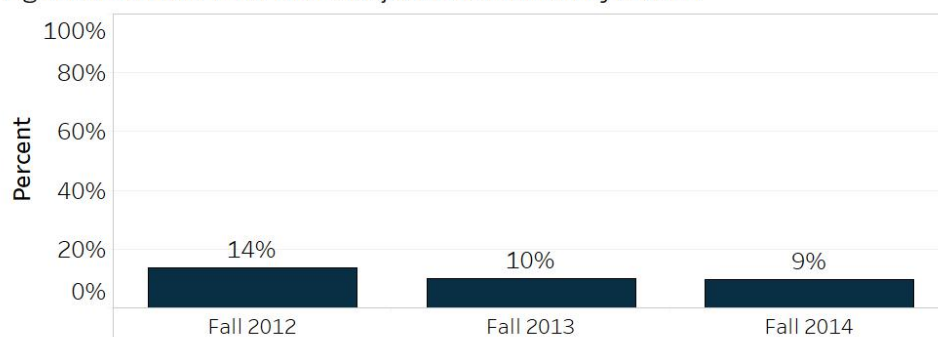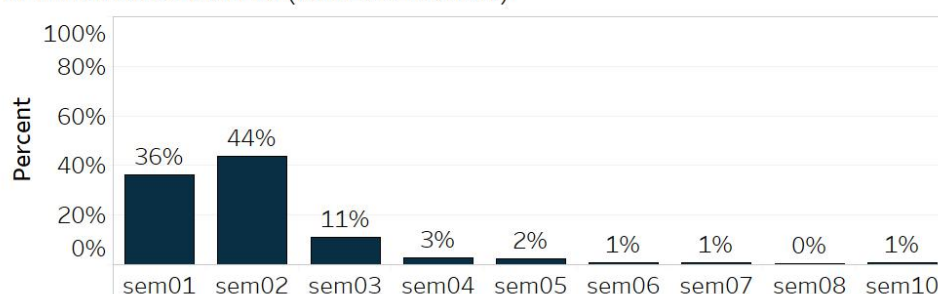Fig 1. Percent of Frosh Ever Subject to Dismissal by Cohort

Fig 2. Percent of Students Who Were Subject to Dismissal by First Semester in Which this Occurred (Fall 2012 Cohort)

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 Subject to Dismissal

What proportion of students are subject to dismissal 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 one in ten students have been subject to dismissal for at least one semester during their time at UC Merced. This pattern is quite consistent over time, ranging from 9-14%.

When are students typically subject to dismissal? From Fig 2, for students who are subject to dismissal, this most often happens for the first time in their first (36%) or second (44%) semester enrolled at UC Merced.

From Fig 3, students who are subject to dismissal for the first time most often have frosh standing (62%; 0-29 credits), followed by students with sophomore (32%; 30-59 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.

From Fig 4, for students who are subject to

Fig 3. Percent of Students by Class Level In First Subject to Dismissal Semester (Fall 2012 Cohort)
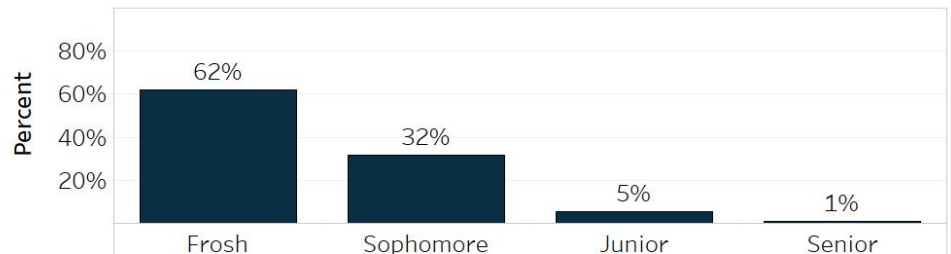

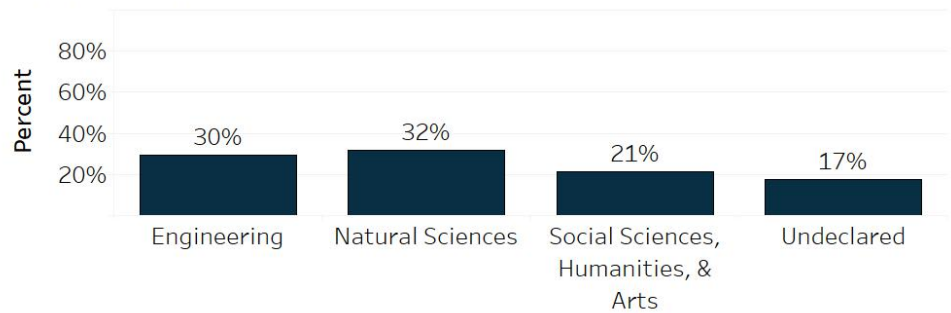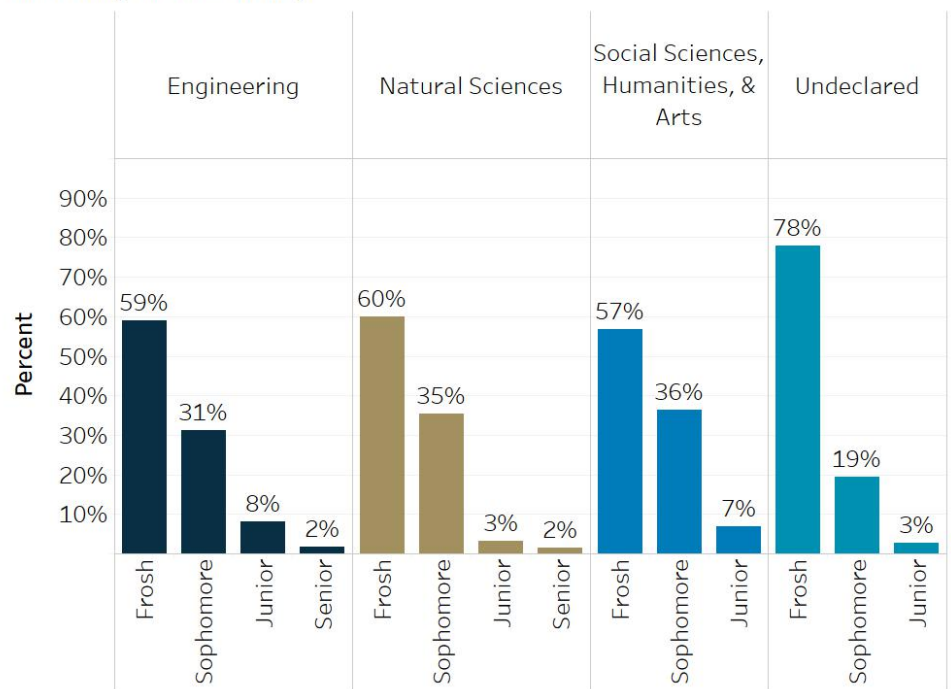Fig 4. Percent of Students by School of First Major in First Subject to Dismissal Semester (Fall 2012 Cohort)

Fig 5. Percent of Students by School and Class Level During First Subject to Dismissal Semester (Fall 2012 Cohort)

dismissal, the School of their first major during the semester in which this first occurs is most often the School of Natural Sciences (32%); followed by the School of Engineering (30%); the School of Social Sciences Humanities, and Arts (21%); and Undeclared (17%).

From Fig 5, for students who are subject to dismissal, their class standing in the semester during which this first occurs is consistent across Schools. Specifically, most students are first subject to dismissal when they are frosh (about 1 in 2) or sophomores (about 1 in 3). However, for Undeclared students, this is much more likely to happen when students are frosh (2 in 5) and only somewhat as sophomores (1 in 5), likely because students transition into a School when they declare a major. This pattern suggests that students who are frosh and Undeclared are at a particularly high risk of subject to dismissal status; though all frosh are at high risk in general.

Fig 6. Percent of Students by Number of Semesters on Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)
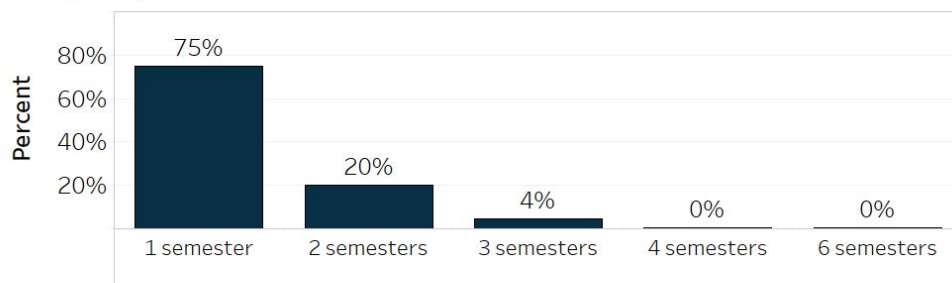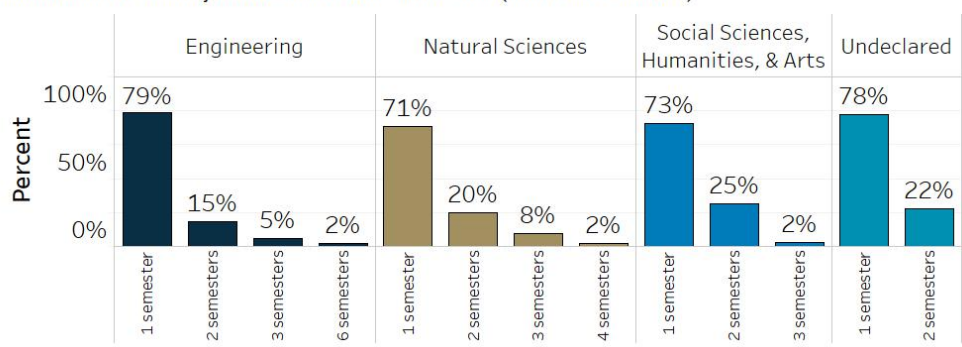

Fig 7. Percent of Students by Number of Semesters on Subject to Dismissal Status and School in First Subject to Dismissal Semester (Fall 2012 Cohort)

How long are students typically subject to dismissal?[ii] From Fig 6, for students who are subject to dismissal, for three in four (75%) this is only for one semester. For one in five (20%) this is for two semesters. Being subject to dismissal for three or more semesters is rare. Note that this does not take into account students who were later academically dismissed. Later in this report we include information about the relationship between subject to dismissal status and other academic standings (see Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses section of this report).

From Fig 7, the number of semesters on subject to dismissal status generally does not vary by School of first major. Regardless of School, about four in five (71-79%) students are most likely to only be subject to dismissal for one semester followed by 15-25% for two semesters. Note that this only takes into account the School the student was in during his/her first subject to dismissal semester. It is possible that some students later changed majors and transitioned into a different School.

Relationship between Subject to Dismissal Status and Academic Success Outcomes

For this report, we examine how being subject to dismissal is related to the academic success outcomes of retention, progress to degree, and graduation rates. Importantly, Table 1

Table 1. Analysis Sample by First Subject to Dismissal Term and Graduation Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)

		Number of Records	Percent of Total Number of Records
Never SD	Did not graduate	423	28%
	Graduated	866	58%
First SD sem01	Did not graduate	52	3%
	Graduated	23	2%
First SD sem02	Did not graduate	67	4%
	Graduated	23	2%
First SD sem03 or later	Did not graduate	27	2%
	Graduated	14	1%
Grand Total		**1,495**	**100%**

shows that very few students from this cohort who were subject to dismissal (SD), regardless of the term in which this first occurred, graduated from UC Merced.

Is the timing of subject to dismissal status important for normal academic progress for UC Merced graduates? In short, the timing of first being subject to dismissal is <u>not</u> consistently related to 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 subject to dismissal term (bars) so that we can best see the impacts of the timing of subject to dismissal status. 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 subject to dismissal 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 subject to dismissal, regardless of the term in which this first happens. However, for students who are subject to dismissal, the timing of their first subject to dismissal status does not appear to have a clear relationship with normal progress. For example, if we consider semester two (Median Credit Hrs End Sem02 pane) in Fig 8, regardless of which semester students first go on subject to dismissal status, all earn between 25-29 credits, with 30 credits being the expectation for normal progress. That is, overall, considering the term in which students first go on subject to dismissal status, the median number of credits earned for that term tends to be within about one class or only slightly below what is expected for normal progress in that term.

Fig 8. Median Cumulative Credits Earned at End of Enrollment Term for UC Merced Graduates by First Subject to Dismissal Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)
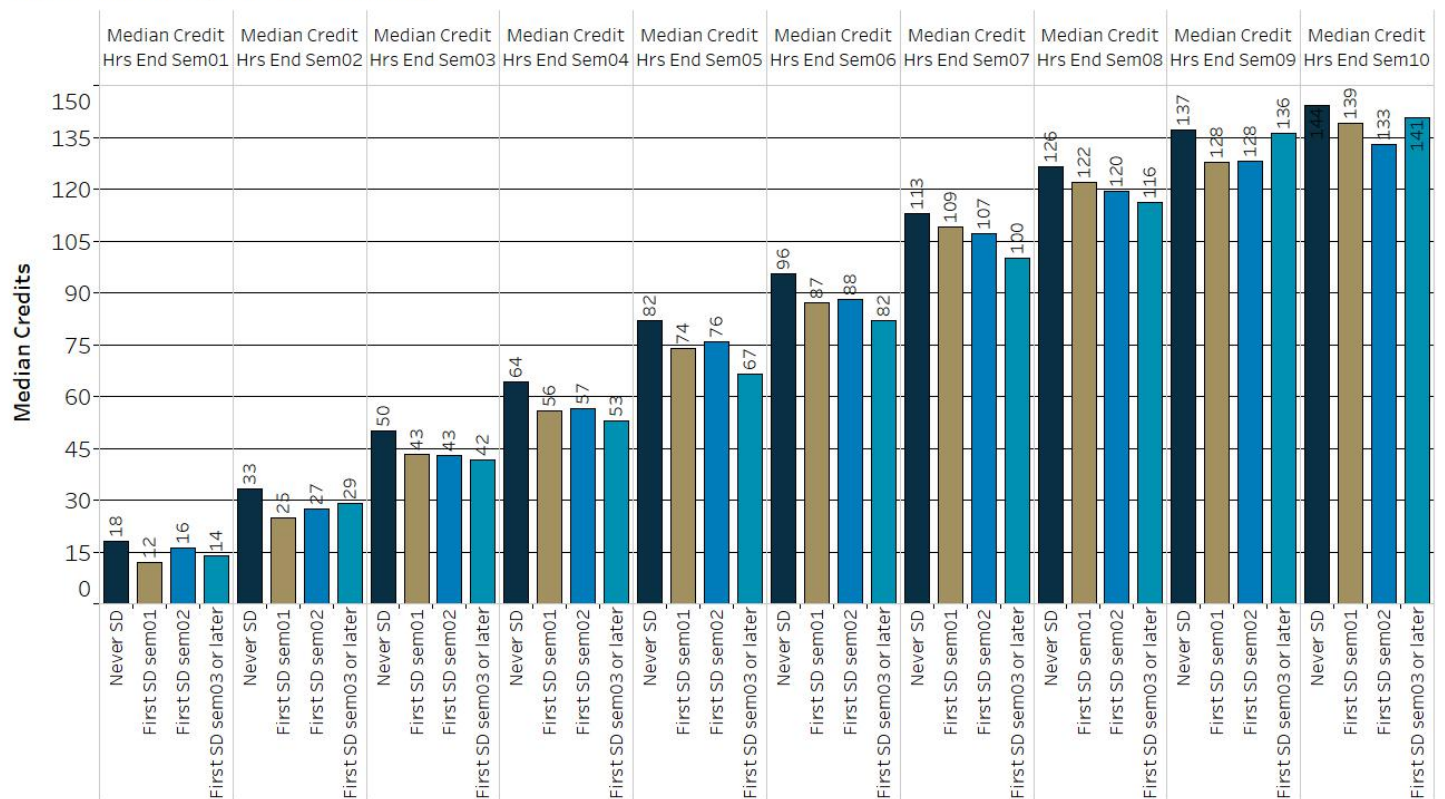
Importantly, beyond eight semesters (four years), fewer students are enrolled because some had graduated. Thus, the median credits earned beyond eight semesters is based on fewer students and so should be interpreted with caution. However, the figure clearly shows that there are some students who are enrolled for nine or ten semesters who have the 120 units needed to graduate. This can occur for several reasons. For example, a student who changes majors may have credits that apply to satisfying the requirements of their old major but not their new major such that they have excess credits overall. As an institution, minimizing the number of excess credits accrued by students is important for improving student time to degree and four-year graduation rates.

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

To answer the first part of this question, Fig 9a shows the percent of non-graduates (y-axis) who were still enrolled at UC Merced by semester (x-axis) and the timing of their first subject to dismissal term (panes). For students never subject to dismissal (Never SD), each semester there is a decline in enrollments, with the decline in semester two (25%) and between semesters four and five (21%) being the steepest. 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. Some may have also been academically dismissed (see Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses section of this report for more information). For those first subject to dismissal in semester one or two, the steepest decline is from semester two to three (66 and 40%, respectively). For students first subject to dismissal in semester three, the steepest decline is from semester four to five (49%). In sum, regardless of the timing of the first subject to dismissal term, students are most likely to leave within one to two semesters.

To answer the second part of this question, Fig 9b shows the cumulative credits non-graduates had earned (y-axis) during their last enrollment term at UC Merced by the timing of their first subject to dismissal term (x-axis). Students never subject to dismissal typically earn 53 cumulative credits at the

Fig 9a. Percent of Non-Graduates Still Enrolled by Term and Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)
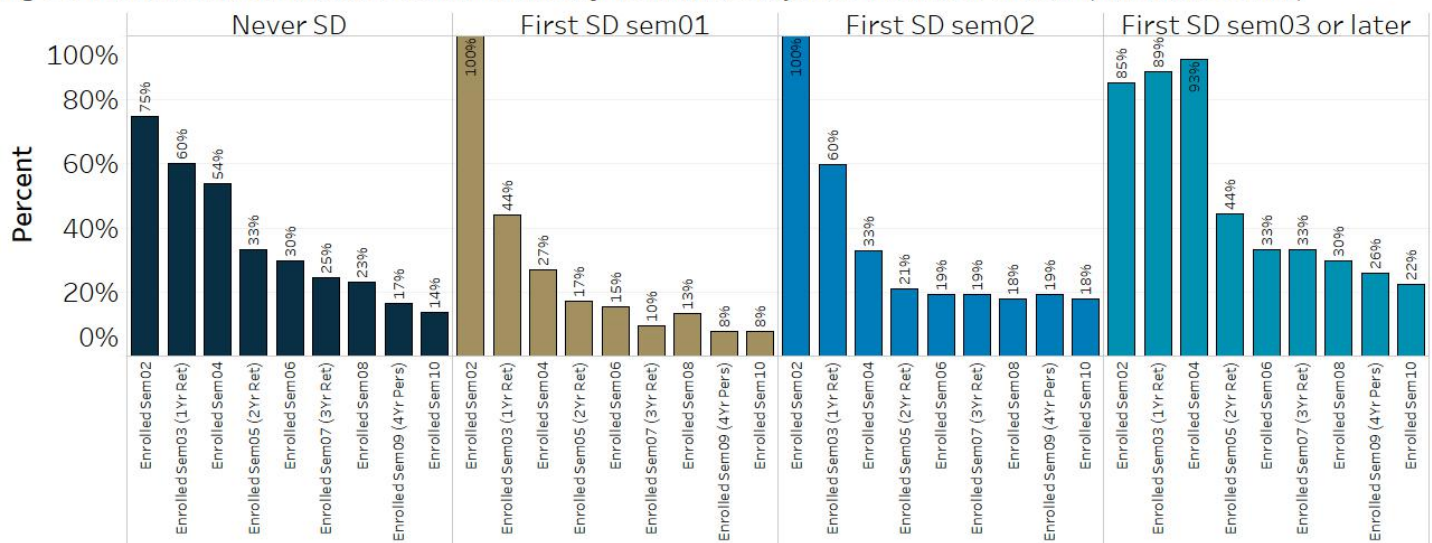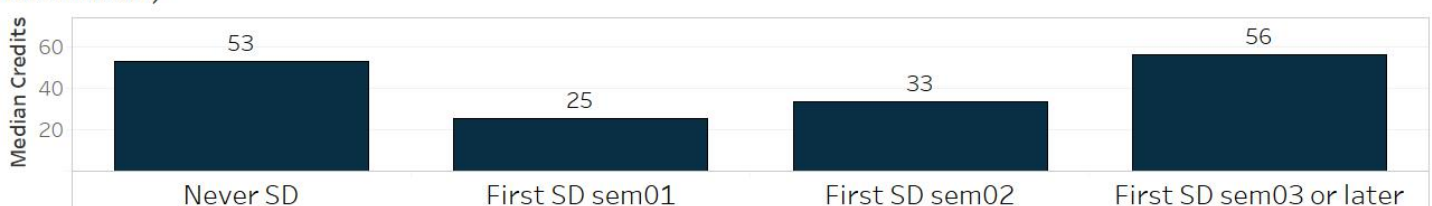
Fig 9b. Median Credits Earned in Last Enrolled Semester for Non-Graduates by Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)

end of their last enrollment term, which is sophomore standing. For students subject to dismissal, not surprisingly, the later the student is subject to dismissal, the more credits earned before leaving without graduating from UC Merced. Though it is rare for a student to have achieved more than sophomore status before leaving, these students have invested time and money into earning a degree without earning one, and UC Merced invests in them as well without producing a graduate.

Is being subject to dismissal related to changing majors? From Fig 10, regardless of probation status, 47% or more of students do not change majors and only 36-37% of students change majors one time. However, students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term are somewhat more likely to change majors two times (13%) or three times (4%) compared to students never subject to dismissal (7% and 1%, respectively).

From Fig 11, there is somewhat of a relationship between the semester a student is first subject to dismissal and semesters in which a major change occurs. Specifically, students are more likely to change majors the semester after their first subject to dismissal term. This is most pronounced for students who are first subject to dismissal in semester one – 48% of them change majors in semester two. This could indicate that there is a clear lack of major fit that the student attempts to address in the next term or that the student is struggling in general given that the first few semesters of coursework are aimed at satisfying lower division and general education requirements.

Fig 10. Percent of Students by Number of Major Changes and Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)
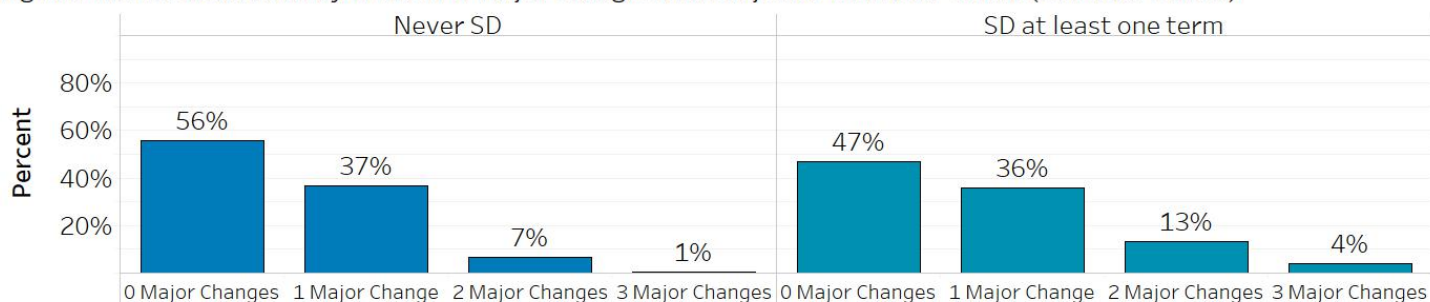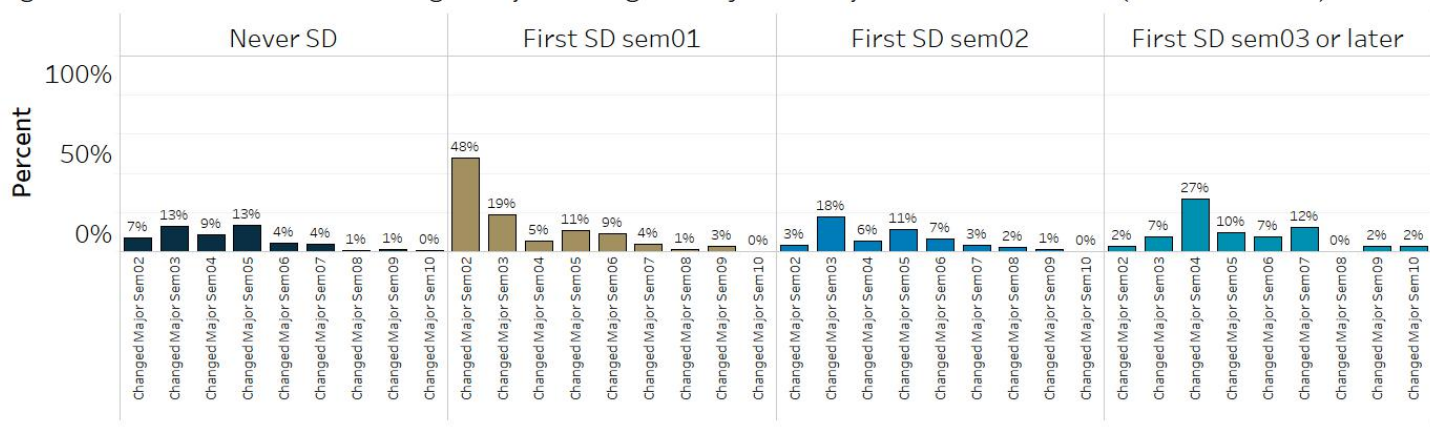

Fig 11. Percent of Students Who Changed Majors During Term by First Subject to Dismissal Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)

Is being subject to dismissal related to repeating courses? From Fig 12, overall, students subject to dismissal for at least one semester are more likely to repeat courses – and more courses – than those never subject to dismissal. Note that this includes all repeats (e.g., repeating the same course twice counts as two repeats). Students never subject to dismissal are most likely to have zero course repeats (46% versus 24% for subject to dismissal students). Students subject to dismissal for at least one semester are most likely to have repeated one (23%) course.

From Fig 13, considering the semester that students are first subject to dismissal, there does not appear to be a clear relationship with the number course of

Fig 12. Percent of Students by Number of Course Repeats and Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)
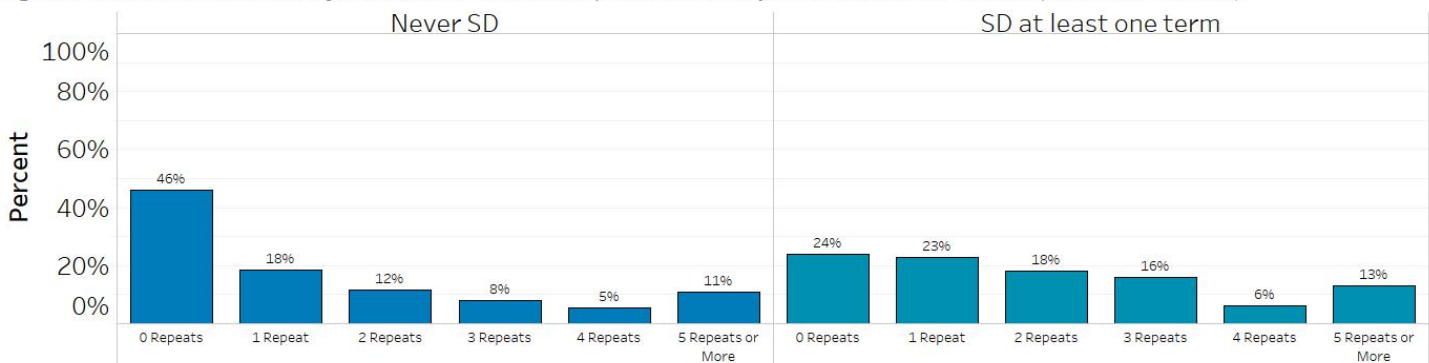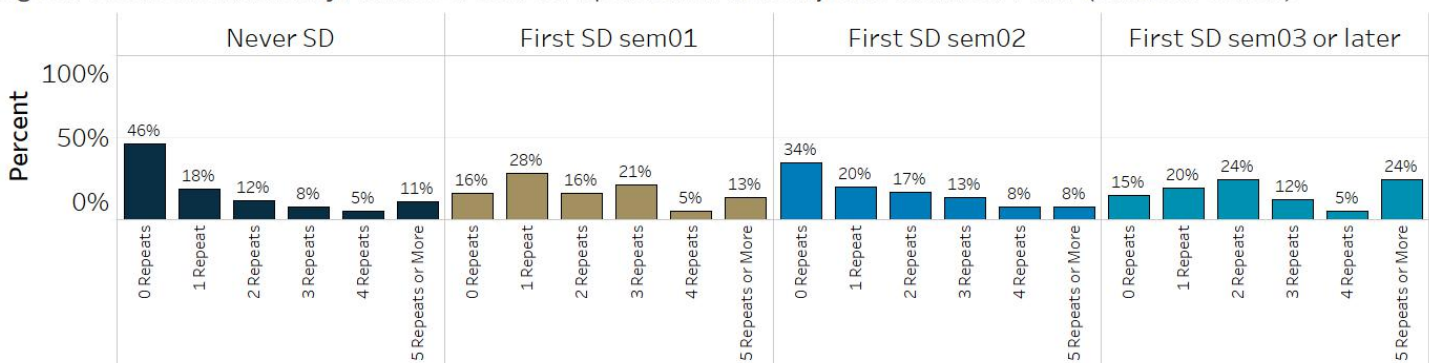

Fig 13. Percent of Students by Number of Course Repeats and First Subject to Dismissal Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)

repeats. For example, students who are first subject to dismissal in semester one are most likely to have one (28%) or three (21%) repeats, whereas students who are first subject to dismissal in semester two are most likely to have zero repeats (34%). It should be noted that 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.

Is the timing of being subject to dismissal important for graduation rates? From Fig 14, the timing of the first subject to dismissal term 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 14-16% regardless of the first subject to dismissal term. However, five-year graduation rates appear higher for students first subject to dismissal in semester one (31%) or semester three or later (34%) compared to

Fig 14. Percent of Students Who Graduated in 4 and 5 Years by First Subject to Dismissal Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)
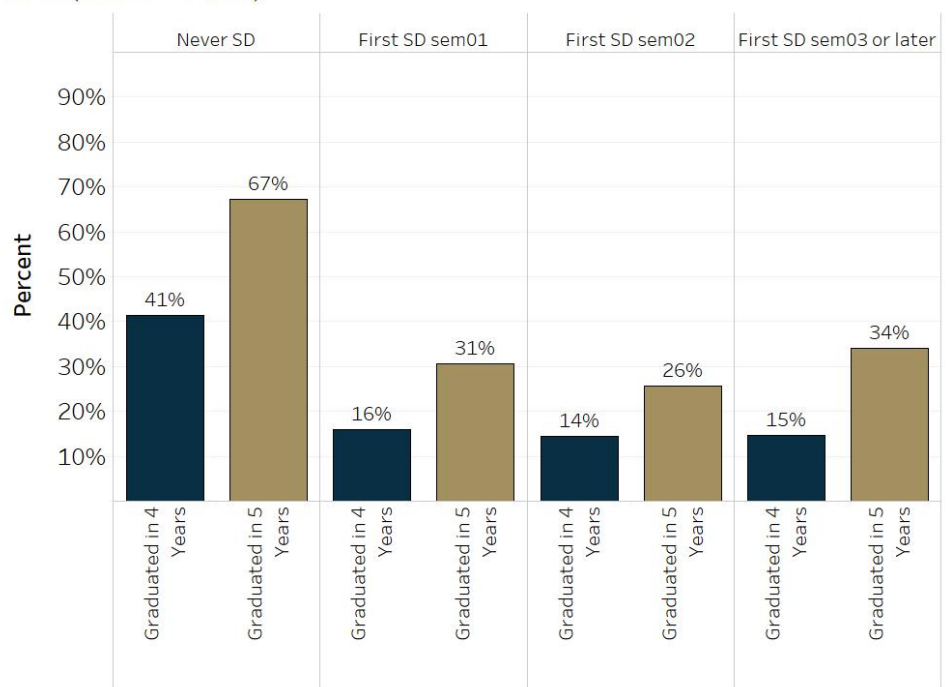
semester two (26%). This suggests that students who are subject to dismissal in semester two are at the greatest risk of not graduating in five years. In general, if we can reduce the number of students who are subject to dismissal, particularly early on, then we may improve five-year graduation rates overall.

Is being subject to dismissal 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, students subject to dismissal for at least one term have lower retention, persistence, and graduation rates compared to those never subject to dismissal. Though complex, Fig 16 explores the relationship between the timing of the first subject to dismissal term and retention and graduation rates. Regarding retention rates, students who are subject to dismissal in earlier semesters are at greater risk of not being retained. This is most pronounced for students who are subject to dismissal in their first semester – this group has the lowest retention rates. See Fig 14 for a graduation rate discussion.

Fig 15. Retention and Graduation Rates by Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)
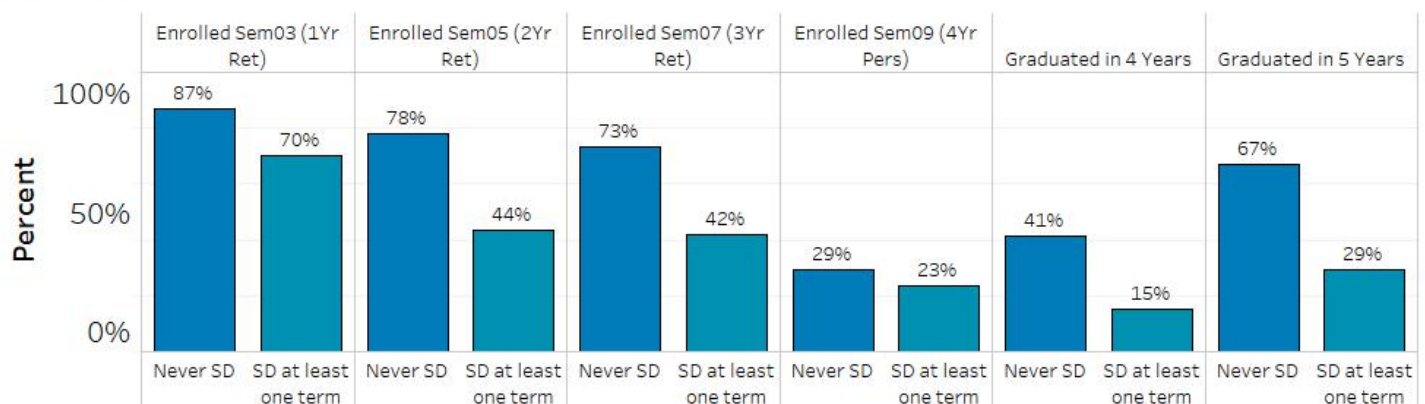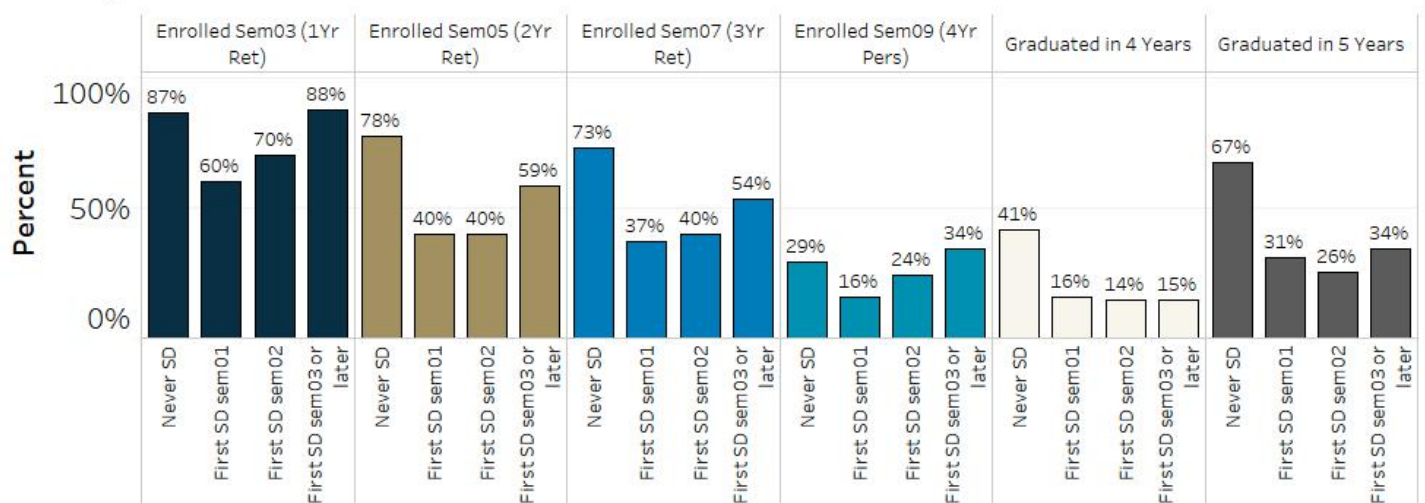

Fig 16. Retention and Graduation Rates by First Subject to Dismissal Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)

It is clear and unsurprising that being subject to dismissal is a signal that students are struggling. This analysis supports the finding that being subject to dismissal in earlier semesters has a negative impact on retention and graduation rates overall. What is not clear is whether the institution's current intervention strategies are or can be effective for this group of students.

Is subject to dismissal 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. Additionally, the rates of students earning degrees from each School do vary by subject to dismissal status. Students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term are much more likely to earn degrees from SSHA (87%) compared to either SOE (5%) or SNS (8%). When considered with Fig 4, this pattern may indicate that students who initially start with a major in SOE or SNS change majors to SSHA after being subject to dismissal. Additionally, for four- and five-year graduates, being subject to dismissal does appear to place students at a disadvantage for graduating from SOE and SNS.

Fig 17. Percent of Students Who Graduated in 4 or 5 Years by Degree Granting School and Subject to Dismissal Status (Fall 2012 Cohort)
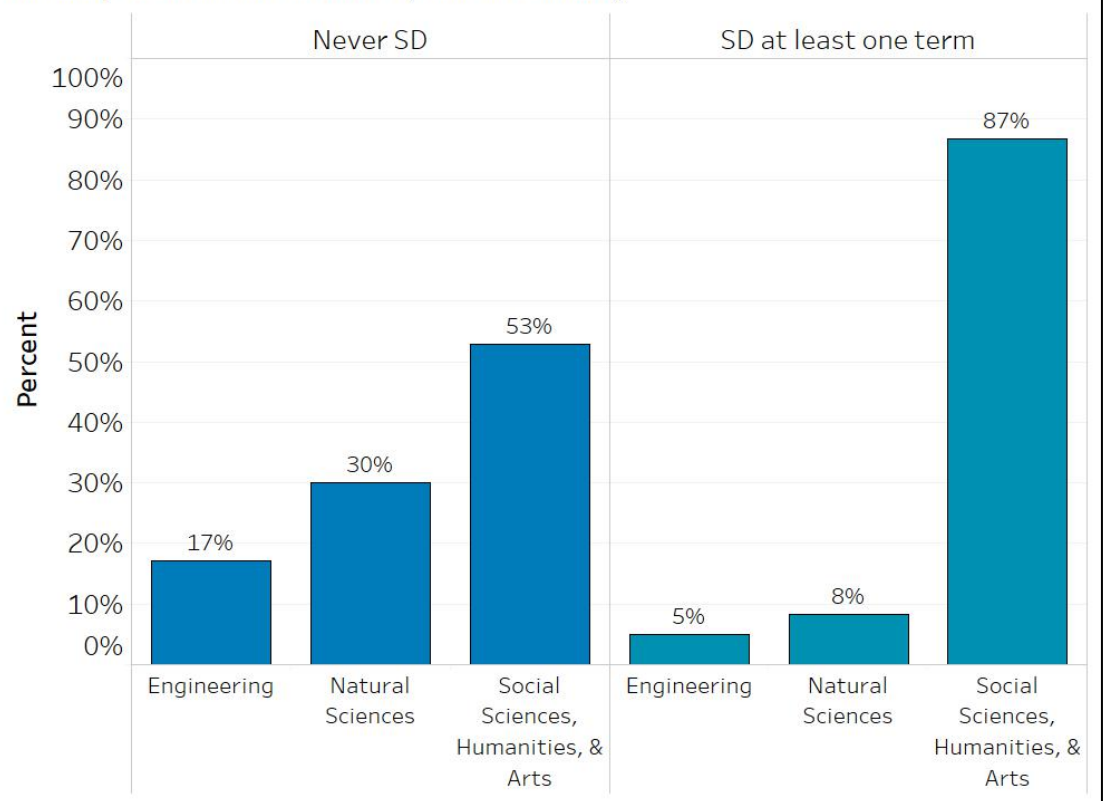
Relationship with Other Poor Academic Standing Statuses

How is subject to dismissal status linked with academic probation status? From Fig 18, for students never subject to dismissal, 57% are also never placed on academic probation; but for those that are, this most often occurs in semester three or four (both 9%). Students first subject to dismissal in semester one are also most likely to never be placed on academic probation (72%), but for those who are this most often occurs in semester three (12%). For students first subject to dismissal in later terms (semester two or later), it is clear that being subject to dismissal was often preceded by being placed on academic probation for one or more semesters. In these cases, being placed on academic probation did serve as a warning for the institution that the student was struggling.

How is subject to dismissal status linked with academic dismissal? From Fig 19, for students never subject to dismissal, 88% are never academically dismissed; but for those that are, this most often occurs in semester one (6%). In general, students who are academically dismissed tend to be dismissed the semester after their first subject to dismissal term. This indicates, not surprisingly, that being subject to dismissal is a risk factor for academic dismissal. For instance, students first subject to dismissal in semester one are at the greatest risk of being academically dismissed, and this most often happens in semester two (29%).

Fig 18. Relationship Between First Subject to Dismissal Term and First Academic Probation Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)
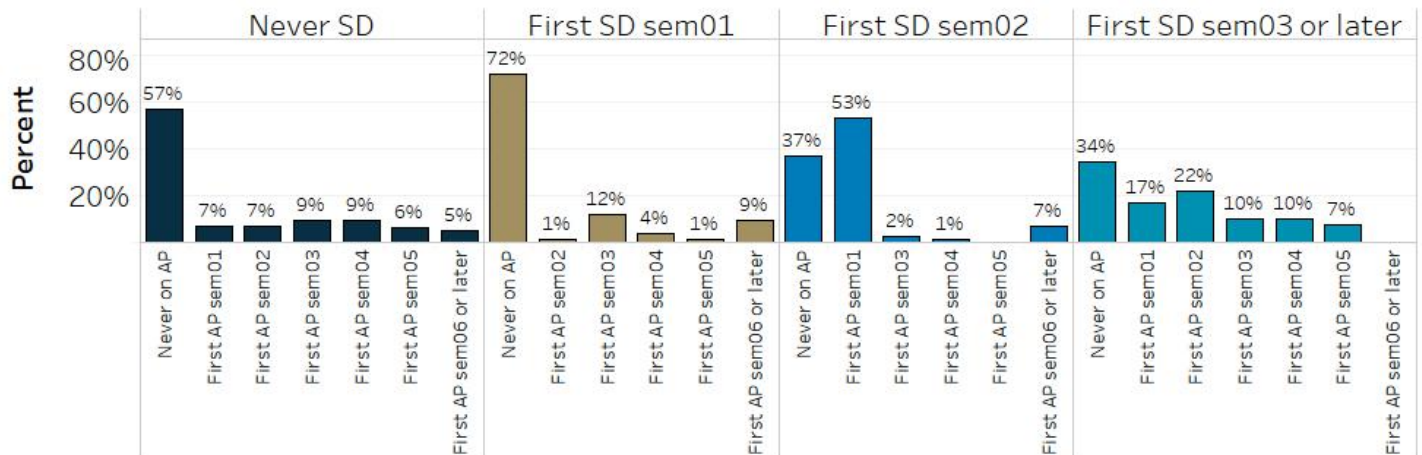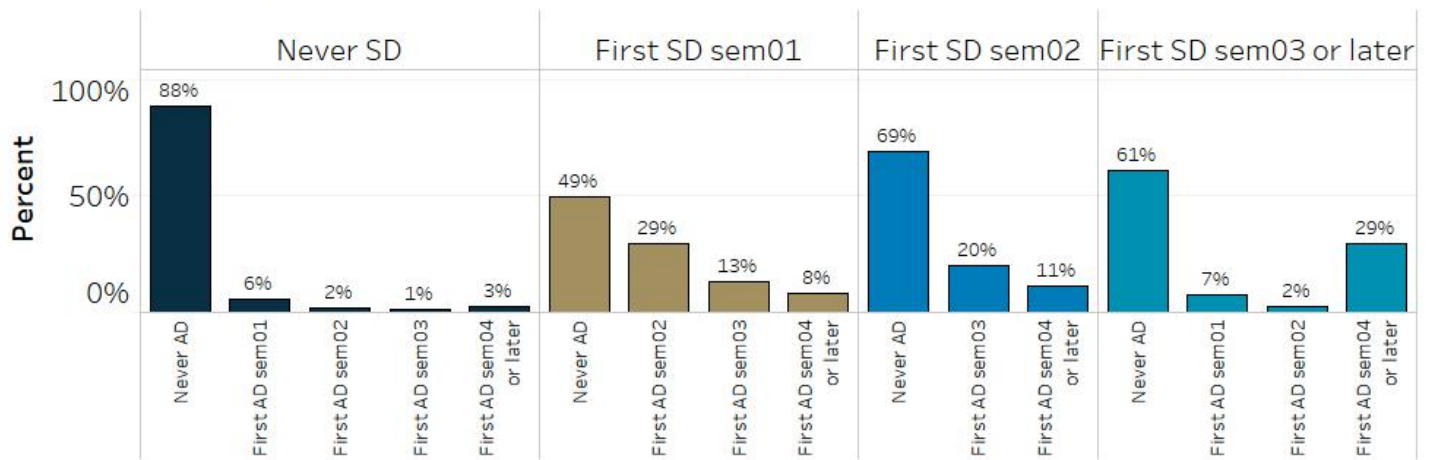

Fig 19. Relationship Between First Subject to Dismissal Term and First Academic Dismissal Term (Fall 2012 Cohort)

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 subject to dismissal and has this changed over time?
  - About one in ten UC Merced students are subject to dismissal for at least one semester, which has not changed over time. (Fig 1)
- When are students typically subject to dismissal?
  - For students who are subject to dismissal, this most often occurs for the first time in matriculation semester one or two (Fig 2) and when students have frosh or sophomore standing (Fig 3).
  - Students with majors in the School of Engineering (SOE) and Natural Sciences (SNS) are at greatest risk of being subject to dismissal; followed by those in Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA) and Undeclared students. (Fig 4)
  - Students who are frosh and who are Undeclared are at particularly high risk of subject to dismissal status. (Fig 5)

- How long are students typically subject to dismissal?
  - Most students are only subject to dismissal for one semester (Fig 6), and this does not vary by School of major (Fig 7).
- Is the timing of being subject to dismissal important for normal academic progress for those who graduate? For students who do not graduate, how is subject to dismissal 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 (semester at UC Merced) of when students are first subject to dismissal is not consistently related to normal academic progress (earning 15 credits each term). That is, the median credits earned during the first subject to dismissal term tends to be within one class or slightly below what is expected for normal progress. (Fig 8)
  - Students who do not graduate are most likely to leave UC Merced within one to two semesters of being subject to dismissal. Not surprisingly, the later a student is first subject to dismissal, the more credits earned before leaving – though it is rare for a student to have achieved more than sophomore status before leaving. (Figs 9a and 9b).
- Is being subject to dismissal related to changing majors?
  - Students never subject to dismissal and those subject to dismissal for at least one term are similarly likely to change majors one time; but the latter are more likely to change majors two or three times. (Fig 10)
  - Students are most likely to change majors the semester after their first subject to dismissal term. This pattern is especially clear for students who are first subject to dismissal in semester one – they are very likely to change majors in semester two. (Fig 11)
- Is being subject to dismissal related to repeating courses?
  - Students who are subject to dismissal are more likely to repeat courses, and more courses, than those who are never subject to dismissal. (Fig 12)
- Is the timing of being subject to dismissal important for graduation rates?
  - Four-year and five-year graduation rates are highest for students never subject to dismissal. For subject to dismissal students, four-year graduation rates do not appear to be impacted by the timing of the first subject to dismissal term. However, five-year graduation rates are impacted by the timing of the first subject to dismissal term – students first subject to dismissal in semester two have the lowest likelihood of graduating in five years. (Fig 14)
- Is being subject to dismissal important for retention and persistence?
  - Students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term have lower retention, persistence, and graduation rates compared to those never subject to dismissal. (Fig 15) Additionally, students who are first subject to dismissal in earlier terms, particularly the first semester, are less likely to be retained than those first subject to dismissal in later terms, so the timing is important. (Fig 16)
- Is subject to dismissal status linked with the degree granting School?
  - In general, students who graduate in 4 or 5 years are most likely to earn a degree from SSHA, followed by SNS, and finally SOE. For students who are subject to dismissal for at least one term, this pattern is particularly pronounced with the vast majority (almost 9 in 10) earning a degree from SSHA.
- How is subject to dismissal status linked with academic probation status and academic dismissal?
  - For students who are first subject to dismissal in semester one, they are rarely placed on academic probation (Fig 18). However, this is likely due to the fact that this group tends to be academically dismissed in semester two (Fig 19).
  - For students subject to dismissal in semester two or later, this status was often preceded by academic probation – this means that academic probation in early terms is a risk factor for subject to dismissal status. (Fig 18)
  - Students who are academically dismissed tend to be dismissed the semester after their first subject to dismissal term – this means that subject to dismissal status is a risk factor for academic dismissal. (Fig 19)

An Examination of Subject to Dismissal Status at UC Merced

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ENDNOTES

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

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