

Student Summer Course-Taking Patterns

March 4, 2020

This analysis was produced by OPEIR in response to a request by Provost Jerold Hale. Results are not necessarily generalizable and attempts to use results outside the scope of this project should be avoided.

Overall Trend in Summer Enrollment

Undergraduate Summer enrollment dropped in 2019 after a modest increase over the previous six years (Table 1), but the drop was mostly among students in their second year and beyond (Table 2). The number of students in their first year taking Summer courses held steady in the case of freshmen and increased substantially in the case of new transfers. Since 2013, new Freshmen and Transfers have increased from 15 percent to 22 percent of Summer enrollees.

Table 1: Summer Term Undergraduate Enrollment Headcount, 2013-2019

| Student Group | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| New Freshmen—1 st Summer* | 140 | 177 | 141 | 173 | 214 | 250 | 244 |
| New Transfers—1 st Summer* | 282 | 199 | 171 | 219 | 266 | 272 | 346 |
| All Others | 2,383 | 2,459 | 2,509 | 2,532 | 2,392 | 2,448 | 2,077 |
| Total | 2,805 | 2,835 | 2,821 | 2,924 | 2,872 | 2,970 | 2,667 |

* These students were part of the previous Summer/Fall incoming cohort; Spring entrants are included in "All Others."

Table 2: Summer Term Undergraduate Enrollment Headcount by Class*, 2013-2019

| Student Class | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Freshman | 67 | 103 | 70 | 85 | 95 | 118 | 103 |
| Sophomore | 278 | 301 | 256 | 292 | 302 | 337 | 352 |
| Junior | 588 | 624 | 617 | 649 | 624 | 654 | 583 |
| Senior | 1680 | 1651 | 1739 | 1749 | 1667 | 1724 | 1500 |
| Undergraduate Special** | 192 | 156 | 139 | 149 | 184 | 137 | 129 |
| Total | 2,805 | 2,835 | 2,821 | 2,924 | 2,872 | 2,970 | 2,667 |

* Defined by the cumulative number credit hours earned

** Non-degree-seeking undergraduate students

As Table 2 shows, Summer enrollment has been highest among Juniors and Seniors throughout the period, and most of the 2019 drop in enrollment is seen in these upper classes. The number of Freshmen and Sophomores (many of whom are still in their first year but have earned enough hours to be classified as Sophomores) enrolled in Summer has increased considerably since 2013.

Academic History of First-Year Summer Students

The academic history of new freshmen and transfers taking courses in their first Summer at UTC hasn't changed drastically in recent years despite the substantial increase in their Summer enrollment. On average, Fall 2018 First-Time Freshman cohort members enrolled in Summer 2019 had attempted 45 credit hours and earned 41 hours prior to Summer, a modest increase over freshmen enrolled in Summer 2013. Fall 2018 new Transfer cohort members enrolled in Summer 2019 had attempted 116 and earned 99 after fluctuating quite a bit since 2013. For both groups, cumulative GPA was very consistent, hovering around 3.15 for freshmen and 3.05 for transfers. See Figures 1 and 2

Figure 1: Cumulative Earned Hours, Attempted Hours, and GPA of New Freshmen Taking Courses in Their First Summer

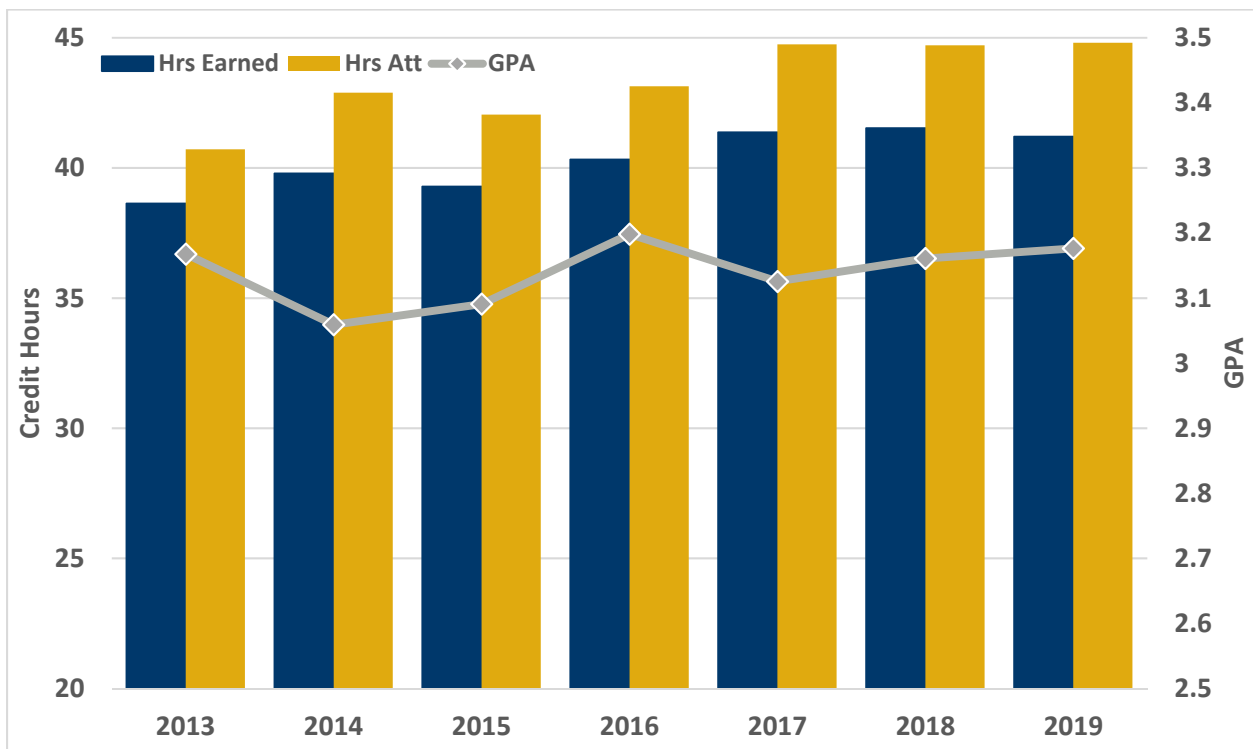
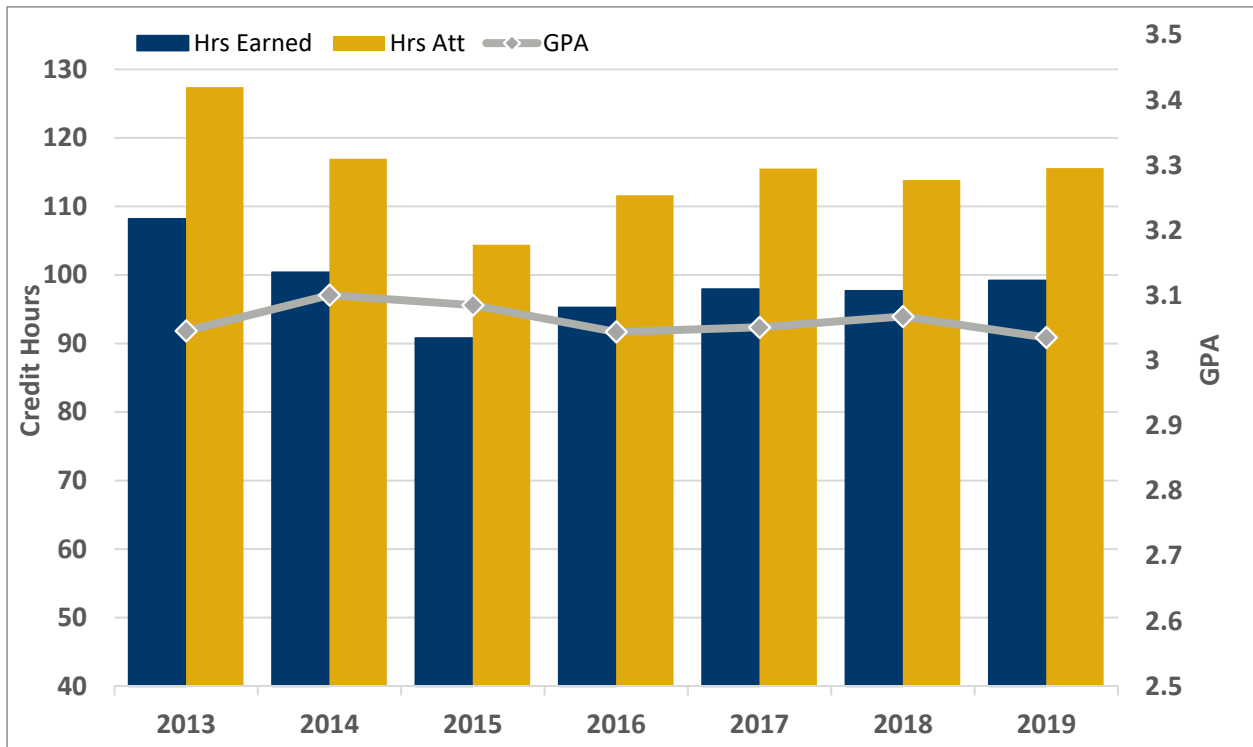


Figure 2: Cumulative Earned Hours, Attempted Hours, and GPA of New Transfers Taking Courses in Their First Summer



The cumulative GPA of all other students taking summer courses was also fairly high, at around 3.0 over the period. The high average GPA across all groups suggests that a large number of academically successful students have been taking Summer courses. This calls into question the idea that students enroll in Summer because they failed courses in Fall and Spring and have gotten behind; at the very least it seems clear that many of them enroll for other reasons.

For new freshmen this is clear from Summer 2019, when the average student brought in more than 41 earned hours, ahead of pace to reach the hours required to graduate; 89 percent had at least 30 earned hours; 40 percent entered the Summer term with a GPA above 3.5 after their first Fall and Spring terms; and 95 percent were in good academic standing. It seems likely that many of these students are taking Summer courses to get ahead, or for course-sequencing purposes, rather than to try to catch up or make up for failed Fall and Spring courses.

Summer Course Load

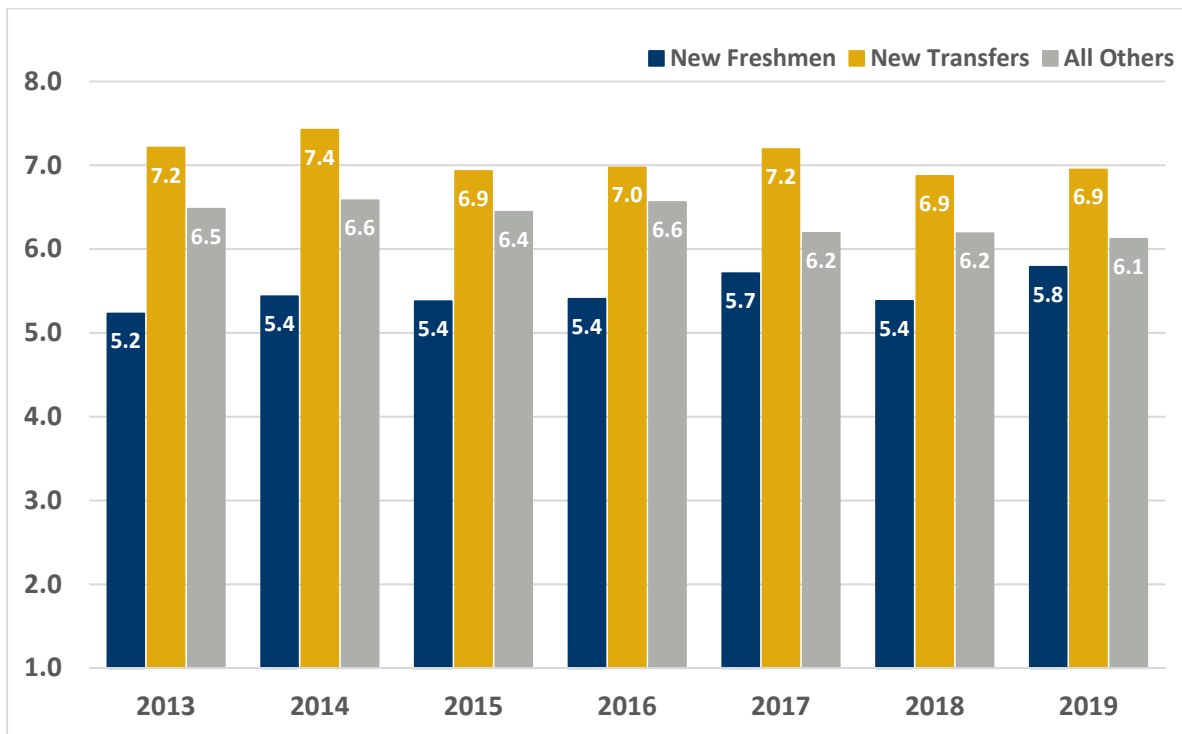
On average, Summer students take about two courses for six credit hours, and 62 percent of students take multiple courses. However, all three of these metrics have declined over the time period (see Table 3).

Table 3: Student Course Load Metrics, Summer 2013 - Summer 2019

| Year | Avg # Courses | Avg # Credit Hours | % students taking multiple courses |
|------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2013 | 2.3 | 6.5 | 69.0% |
| 2014 | 2.2 | 6.6 | 67.3% |
| 2015 | 2.1 | 6.4 | 66.7% |
| 2016 | 2.2 | 6.5 | 67.6% |
| 2017 | 2.1 | 6.2 | 62.2% |
| 2018 | 2.1 | 6.2 | 61.6% |
| 2019 | 2.1 | 6.2 | 61.7% |

The change over time is not the same among all student groups, however. The average course load among new freshmen in their first Summer term has increased over the time period, while it has decreased for all other students, including new transfers (see Figure 3).

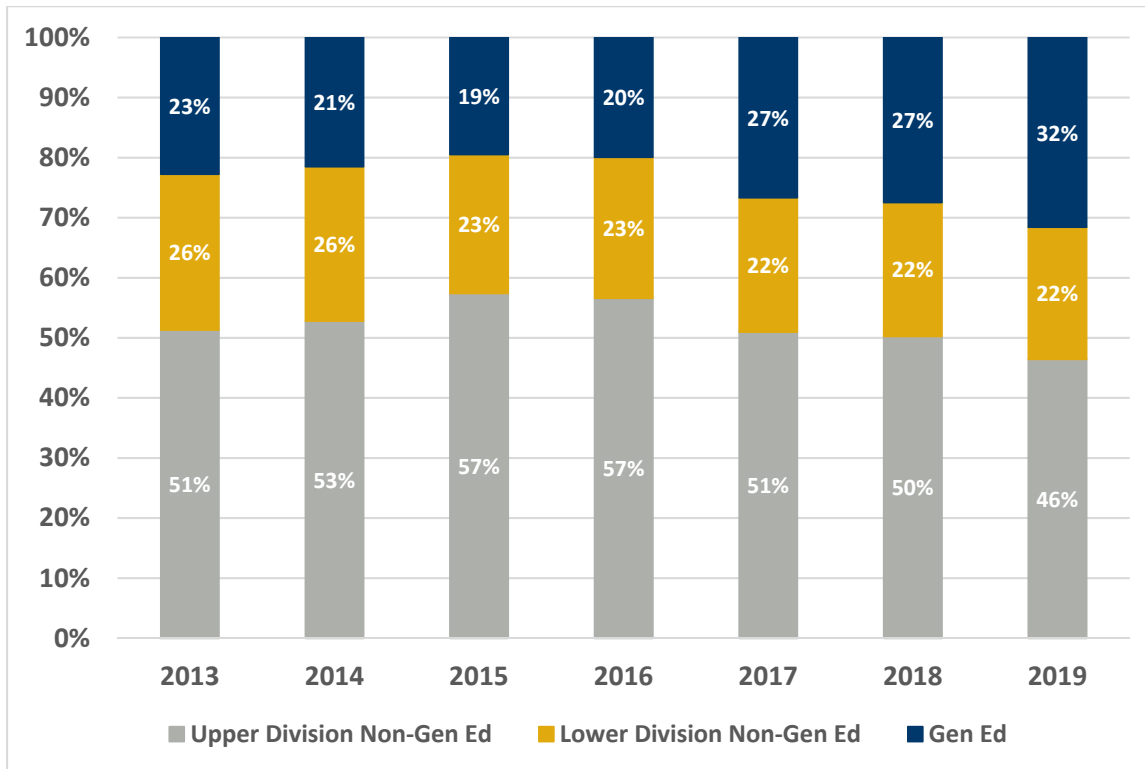
Figure 3: Average Credit Hours Attempted by Student Group



Types of Courses Taken

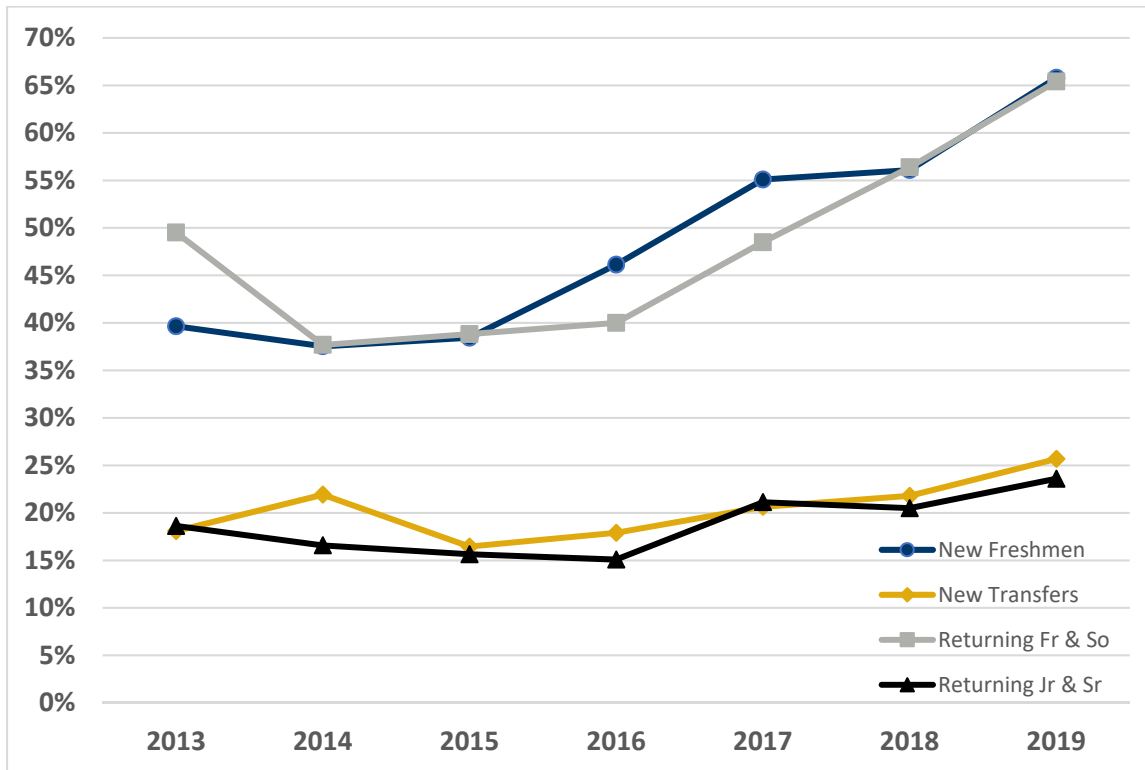
With more new freshmen enrolling in summer courses and their average course load increasing, we might expect to see General Education enrollment also rising and that is precisely what we see in the data (Figure 4). Until 2019, more than half of Summer course enrollment was in upper division courses, but over time enrollment in Gen Ed Courses has made up a larger portion of the total, with both lower division and upper division making up less of the course Summer enrollment.

Figure 4: Percentage of Course Enrollment by General Education Status, Level



It is not only freshmen who are taking more General Education courses, however. It appears that Gen Ed course enrollment has increased among all groups—new freshmen, new transfers, returning lower-class students, and returning upper-class students (Figure 5).

Figure 5: General Education Course Enrollment as a Percentage of Total Course Enrollment, by Student Type and Level



This suggests a question that underlies much of student course-taking behavior. Presumably, the changes we observe in who takes Summer courses (Table 1), the course load they take (Figure 3), and what type of courses they take (Figures 4 and 5) are closely linked to changes in course offerings as decided by departments and colleges. Have those changes in offerings been driven by changes in student demand, or have they been made for other reasons? The Summer term, in prior years largely driven by upper class students taking upper division courses, is increasingly catering to students wanting or needing to take Gen Ed courses. Absent an understanding of the motivating factors for changes in course offerings, it is difficult to see what the impact of future changes to the Summer term would be.

Key Takeaways and Avenues for Further Exploration

Summer enrollment is still highest among returning upper-class students, but over the past seven years that has been slowly changing. Now, more than in past years, we are seeing new freshmen and new transfers enrolling in courses, and the enrolled freshmen are taking heavier course loads. Students across the board are taking more Gen Ed courses and fewer Upper Division courses. What does this mean for future Summer enrollment? What does it suggest for changes in Summer course offerings or policy changes? With the many factors at play and course offering decisions being made largely at the department level, these questions are difficult to answer.

Additional exploration could shed additional light on the reasons behind Summer course-taking patterns and the trends we observe in recent years. This additional exploration might include the following:

- How do students taking summer courses differ in terms of graduation rates and time-to-degree measures?
- How does socioeconomic status come into play in a student's ability or decision to take Summer courses?
- Are students pursuing minors or additional majors more likely to take large course loads in Summer terms?
- Are students largely taking courses to fulfill major and Gen Ed requirements, or do we see students (and in particular, upper-class students) taking other courses, possibly to prepare for graduate programs or professional certifications?
- Do athletes, or other students heavily engaged in campus activities, take Summer courses to remain engaged in their activities year-round?