Impact on Retention from Temporary Changes to Academic Policy.

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

Effect of Temporary Suspension of Academic Probation and Dismissal

Students at all GPA levels benefited from the temporary suspension of the academic probation and dismissal policy. Overall, 64 percent of undergraduate students in Fall 2019 returned in Fall 2020, compared to 62 percent from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019. As expected, for students who earned above a 2.0, retention rates over the two years are nearly equal at 80.5% for Fall 2019 and 79.4% for Fall 2018. Additionally, Fall 2019 undergraduates who had less than a 2.0 GPA were retained up to two years at a higher rate than Fall 2018 students (20.7% versus 16.3%). Seven percent more undergraduates with a GPA less than 2.0 were retained Fall to Fall in 2019-2020 than in 2018-2019; the difference decreases to four percent after two years. A 15 percent increase in one-year retention was found for those who earned between 1.0 and 1.5. While the two-year retention decreases for this group, it is still five percent higher when compared to pre-pandemic retention.

Retention was not the only success metric impacted by the policy freeze. Average GPA for each term after Fall 2019 was higher for both all undergraduate students as well as first-time, full-time freshmen compared. Summary GPA by term for each group can be found in the first table to the right.

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2 Retention/Graduation columns are the proportion of students that were either retained or graduated over the period.
Effect of Temporary Suspension of Academic Probation and Dismissal Continued

The difference in retention for underperforming (<2.0 GPA) students is evident across all four colleges. Each college shows at least a two percent increase in one-year retention when compared to 2018 undergraduates. After two years, Arts and Sciences and Engineering and Computer Science’s retention and graduation rates even out between 2018 and 2019 but show a decrease in overall GPA (Appendix III). Two-year rates for Health, Education, and Professional Studies show a six percent increase in retention and graduation and a slight decrease in GPA. Less than one percent of the remaining 2019 population left between Spring 2021 and Fall 2021, while four percent of the 2018 group left UTC in the same timeframe. The most notable differences in retention fall under the Rollins College of Business. The 2019 group of students with a GPA under the 2.0 threshold is retained 14 percent higher one-year retention compared to 2018; the same difference was found after two years.

Impact on Academic Standing

As part of UTC’s initiatives to reduce the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, changes to academic standing were suspended for Spring and Fall 2020. In a normal term, students who had a cumulative GPA of less than 2.0 would be placed in academic probation and those already on probation who did not bring up GPA, would be suspended or dismissed. Thus, no students were placed on academic probation or suspended based on GPA in those two terms.

The number of Fall 2019 undergraduates who would have been placed on academic probation or suspended if the policy had not been suspended totaled 414 unique students: 315 in Spring 2020 and 215 in Fall 2020.
Satisfactory and No Credit Grade Policy

Effect of Satisfactory/No Credit Grade Option

In review of undergraduates who opted for an alternative grade in Spring 2020 (i.e., final grade of S-Satisfactory, or NC-No Credit), there is an upward trend for retention and graduation based on the grade option selected. While only 8 percent of students took advantage of grade options, it had a large impact. Nearly half of the students who opted for an S grade are still enrolled through Spring 2022, and 40 percent have graduated. Over half of the undergraduates who choose an NC grade left UTC without graduating, including those who opted for an S grade in another course. This trend is shared across all colleges except for Arts and Sciences, where more students with at least one of both grades were retained to UTC.

Going Forward

The academic freeze caused a rise in retention rates for underperforming students, especially undergraduates in the Rollins College of Business. Likewise, the option to select an S grade as an alternative encouraged students to stay after Spring 2020 or graduate shortly after. Although overall academic performance in GPA did not have a significant difference in growth, the large increase in retention suggests that more students were kept and reached a good academic standing in the same span of time. With the policy back in place, retention remains higher than the previous cohort, but is also showing indications of leveling out. We will continue monitoring if retention remains a higher rate or equalizes to match previous cohorts due to the remaining underperforming students now entering academic suspension or dismissal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Group</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Still Enrolled</th>
<th>Left UTC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opted for 1 or more S Grades</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opted for 1 or more NC Grades</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opted for Both</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opted for Neither</td>
<td>3,721</td>
<td>3,137</td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
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<td>3,452</td>
<td>1,868</td>
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