



AVC-CFO – Office of
Planning & Analysis

The Profile & Experiences of New UC Berkeley Undergraduates on Academic Probation

Overview

Overall, UC Berkeley students perform well academically and have low probation rates, averaging a first-year grade point average of 3.3 and graduating at record-high rates of over 90%. This success is seen for both freshmen and transfer entrants and across a number of student demographics. However, despite these overall positive trends a subset of students are placed on academic probation early on in their academic careers at UC Berkeley. While the numbers represent only a fraction of new students (~5%), among those entering in Fall 2010, just under 200 freshmen and 150 transfers were placed on academic probation as a result of either their first- or second- term cumulative UC Berkeley grade point average (GPA).

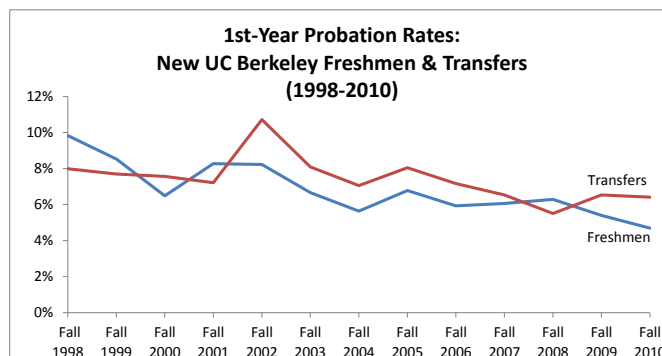
This paper will focus on what we know about new students who are placed on academic probation, how they fare over time with respect to graduation rates, and what obstacles they reported in the UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) during their transition into Berkeley.

Defining Academic Probation

Although the criteria for academic probation vary somewhat between the six undergraduate colleges, in most of the colleges, students are placed on academic probation if their cumulative UC GPA falls below a 2.0 (C average). Further, students may be placed on term probation if their UC GPA for a given semester falls below 1.5 (College of Environmental Design, College of Letters & Science, and the Haas School of Business), or 2.0 (College of Chemistry, and College of Natural Resources). Within the College of Engineering, students are actually subject to dismissal if either their cumulative or term GPA falls below a 2.0. If not dismissed, students may then be placed on probation. Highlighted here are statistics for students placed on academic probation as a result of either their cumulative or term UC GPA during their first-year transition into UC Berkeley.

Historical Probation Data: 1st-Year Probation Rates Have Steadily Declined for New Freshmen and Transfer Students Alike

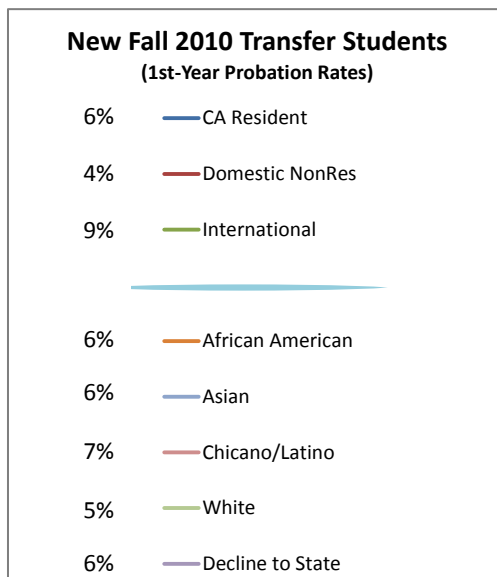
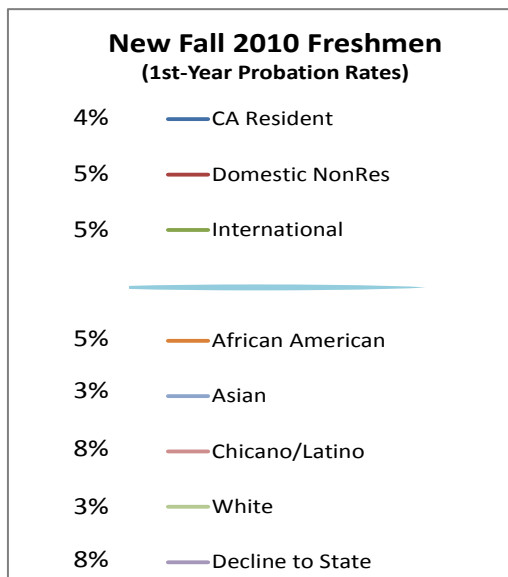
The chart below depicts the decline in probation rates among new students entering UC Berkeley in a given Fall term. For the Fall 1998 group of new freshmen, we see that approximately 10% were flagged for 1st-year probation, meaning that they were placed on academic probation as a result of either their 1st-term or 2nd-term cumulative UCB GPA. New transfers entering in that same term in 1998 had a comparable probation rate of about 8%. Despite the noticeable peaks and valleys, data for the Fall 2010 new students reflect the overall trend of declining probation rates at 5% for freshmen and 6% for transfers.



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Demographic Profile: International Transfer Students and Underrepresented Minorities Have Higher Probation Rates than their Counterparts

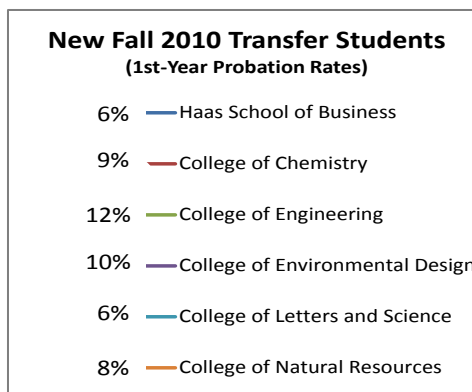
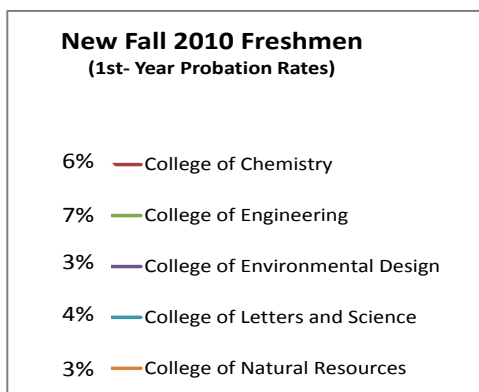
Below we see how the demographic-specific probation rates compare to the overall 1st- year probation rates of 5% for freshmen and 6% for transfers. We see little difference in the probation rates of freshmen entrants based on residency status, with a rate of 4% for CA residents and 5% for both domestic nonresidents and international students. For new transfer students, however, we see that international students have a higher probation rate (9%) than their domestic counterparts. Other noticeable demographic differences include higher rates for underrepresented minority freshmen relative to their White and Asian freshmen admitted peers.



Note: the rate for each respective group above does not include student athletes whose 1st- year probation rate was 9%

Probation Rate Profile by College: Transfer Students Tend to Have Higher 1st-Year Probation Rates than Freshmen, Particularly in the Colleges of Natural Resources and Engineering

Probation rates for the 2010 cohort were highest for the Colleges of Engineering (7%) and Chemistry (6%) on the freshmen side, and the Colleges of Engineering (12%) and Environmental Design (10%) for new transfer students.



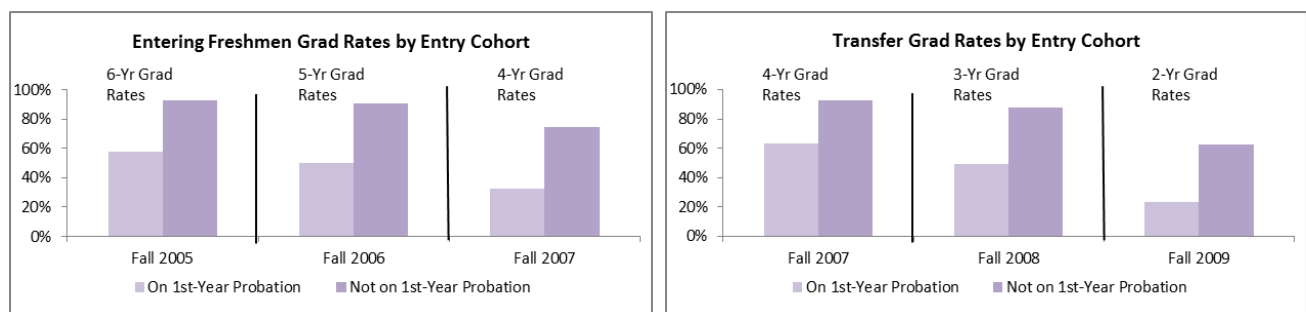
Note, however, that the numbers of new transfer students in most of the colleges are relatively small, with the Colleges of Environmental Design (CED) and Chemistry having between 60 and 70 new transfers each for the cohort above. Thus, the seemingly high percentages for each of these colleges represent only about 6 transfer students. Relatedly, there has been fluctuation in the 1st- year probation rates for the CED and the Haas School of Business, with the rate being < 2% for the two prior cohorts of new transfers in each of these Colleges/Schools.

Graduation Rates of Students Experiencing Early Probation

Six-year graduation rates for entering freshmen and four-year graduation rates for transfers are equally high, at around 91%. However, when looking at graduation rates based on students' early experience with being on academic probation at Berkeley, we find much lower graduation rates for the students placed on probation relative to their peers.

The charts below display graduation rates by probation status, for freshmen and transfer entrants separately. For freshmen, 6-year-, 5-year, and 4-year graduation rates are shown to coincide with standard metrics for assessing persistence to degree, whereas for transfer students 4-year, 3-year, and 2-year graduation rates are shown.

We see from the freshmen chart that the 6-year graduation rate for students on 1st-year probation is low, at less than 60%. This compares with a graduation rate of over 90% for the students who did not have early experiences with being on academic probation. The difference between the two groups is more pronounced when examining the 5-year graduation rate; 91% of the Fall 2006 entering cohort of freshmen, not on 1st-year probation, graduated by Spring 2011—compared to only 50% of their Fall 2006 cohort peers who were on probation early on in their UC Berkeley careers. For transfers we find similar patterns with 4-year graduation rates that exceed 90% for those not on 1st-year probation and a rate just above 60% for those on 1st-year probation. Again, these differences are more visible when looking at the middle of the chart where we see 3-year graduation rates of 88% versus 50%.



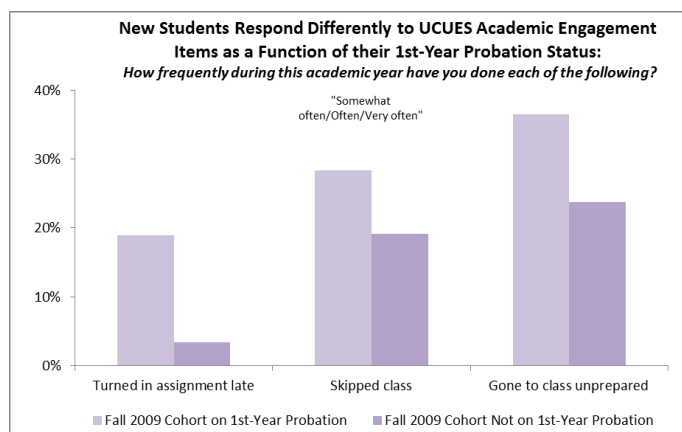
Not shown above, when we examine graduation rates over a longer time period for students who were on 1st-year probation, we find that an additional 7% of freshmen graduate after the standard graduation rate window, as do an additional 8 to 9% of transfers—a positive finding. Further, these figures are much higher than what we find for students not on 1st-year probation (< 2% freshmen; < 3% transfers).

What Does UCUES Tell Us About the Experience of Students on Probation?

To complement our understanding of students on academic probation, we can look to survey data to provide insight into the behaviors and obstacles to success these students reported having precisely at the time that they would have been experiencing challenges in their early academic careers at Berkeley.

Tapping into their academic experiences, the UC Undergraduate Experience Survey has been administered to all UC Berkeley undergraduates, each Spring term, for more than a decade. Of interest here are two subsets of UCUES questions that ask students about their academic behaviors and experiences with obstacles to academic success. In Spring 2010, ~50% of undergraduates responded to UCUES. Similarly, the UCUES response rate was 40% for the group of Fall 2009 new students who were either already on academic probation or would soon be placed on probation. On the page that follows are selected 2010 results for these new students (freshmen and transfers combined), by 1st-year probation status.

On UCUES, students are asked to report how frequently during that particular academic year they engaged in a number of behaviors that are considered to be indicators of academic engagement. Presented to the right are the three behaviors from the group of engagement items that differed based on probation status. Based on these results, we find that students having academic difficulty are more likely than their new student counterparts who were not on probation to report that they turned in a course assignment late (19% vs. 3%), skipped class (28% vs. 19%), or went to class unprepared (36% vs. 24%).



When asked to identify how often they encountered a variety of obstacles to their “school work or academic success” during that particular academic year, new students on probation were more likely than their counterparts to report that the five challenges shown to the right were obstacles to their success.

Frequent Obstacles to Academic Success	On 1st-Yr Probation	Not on 1st-Yr Probation
Poor study behaviors	82%	68%
Feeling depressed, stressed, or upset	82%	63%
Competing family responsibilities	49%	43%
Physical illness or condition	49%	29%
Weak math skills	35%	22%

(As reported on the 2010 UCUES; Frequent = "Occasionally/Frequently/All the time")

Importantly, there were no differences found for other UCUES items that respondents could rate as obstacles impacting their academic success. These other obstacles for which there were no group differences included inadequate study skills and bad study environment—both frequent obstacles for more than 50% of all new students, irrespective of probation status. Also, paid employment and having weak English skills was identified by fewer than 1 out of 5 new students in each group.

Thus, from UCUES data we are provided a glimpse into some of the academic behaviors of students who go on probation soon after starting at Berkeley, while also getting an idea of their perceived obstacles to success. Combined with institutional data, this information may prove useful in informing strategies to better support these students throughout their transition into Berkeley and persistence to degree.

Future Areas of Investigation

This paper, which was created as part of a presentation and panel discussion of College representatives, increases our understanding about students on academic probation, what their longer-term outcomes are with respect to persistence to degree, and how we might go about continuing to support their academic success. Additional questions raised by these analyses that warrant further exploration include:

- How have academic probation policies changed, if at all, over the last ten to fifteen years? How have policy changes impacted the decline in probation rates? Further, what role does grade inflation play in the discussion of probation rate decline?
- What is the relationship between students’ past academic performance, either in high school or at community college, and their experiences with academic probation once at UC Berkeley?
- Are graduation rates better or worse for students who are placed on probation later on in their Berkeley experience as opposed to during, or as a result of, their 1st- year transition?
- What are the dismissal rates and, conversely, the “clear” rates for students who are on academic probation early on in their UC Berkeley career?
- Finally, what strategies do staff within the Colleges as well as other academic support units on campus, employ to influence the experience of students on probation as they work toward good academic standing?