Topic in Brief

The Profile and Graduation Outcomes of New Freshmen placed on 1st Year Probation

This briefing note highlights the correlates of 1st year academic probation for freshman entrants. Normative graduation rates are also reported for this group and for students not placed on 1st year probation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although policies vary across colleges, and may change slightly over time, in most cases undergraduates are flagged as being placed on 1st year academic probation if:

(1) their cumulative UC GPA, as of the end of the first academic year, was below 2.0 (C average);

(2) their UC GPA for either the first or second term was below 1.5, even if their cumulative GPA was over 2.0; or

(3) they were on first-term probation.

Important exceptions to the above include the College of Engineering whose students are subject to dismissal if either their cumulative or term GPA falls below 2.0. If not dismissed, these students may then be placed on probation. Also of note is that the College of Chemistry has a more stringent "term probation" threshold of 2.0, rather than the 1.5 described above.

This brief highlights select factors associated with being placed on probation as well as the relationship between 1st year probation and normative graduation. Data were sourced almost exclusively from Cal Answers and the analysis includes freshmen who entered during Fall 2008 (n = 4,263) and Fall 2009 (n = 4,355). These cohorts were chosen to allow for additional analysis of graduation rates beyond the 4-year normative graduation rate timeframe. From this group of 8,618 freshmen, 6% (n = 503) were placed on 1st year probation.

With regard to entry college, 1st year probation rates for Fall 2008 and 2009 new freshmen were highest in Chemistry (11%) and Engineering (10%), and lowest in Natural Resources (4%), Environmental Design (4%), and Letters & Science (5%). Probation rates also varied by demographic and admissions factors. For example, students who were athletes at the time of entry (12%), underrepresented minority (URM) students (11%), first generation college students (10%), men (8%), and Pell Grant recipients (8%) had higher rates than their counterparts. Finally, those with lower high school GPAs and SAT scores were also more likely to be placed on probation.
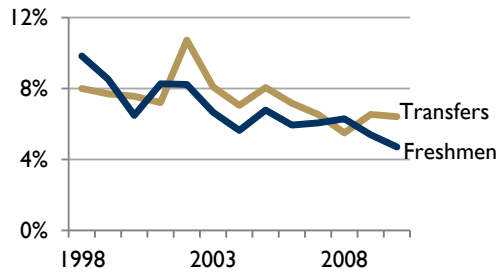
Athletes, URMs, and 1st Generation College Students Have Among the Highest 1st Year Probation Rates

The outcomes of these students show that those on 1st year probation had lower graduation rates than their peers. Only 32% of the 503 students on 1st year probation graduated within four years of entry. This compares to a 4-year normative graduation rate of 75% for the 8,115 students not placed on 1st year probation. The 4.5-year graduation rates also differed significantly (43% vs. 84%), as did the percentage of students graduating within 5 years (56% vs. 91%). Importantly, this relationship between 1st year probation and graduation rates is consistent with past findings for other entry cohorts.

AVC-CFO

HISTORICAL PROBATION DATA

The chart below depicts the decline in probation rates among new students entering UC Berkeley in a given Fall term.

1st Year Probation Rates: Freshman and Transfer Entrants, 1998-2011 Fall Cohorts

Approximately 10% of the Fall 1998 entering freshmen were on 1st year probation, compared to 6% for the combined Fall 2008 and 2009 freshman cohorts. Despite noticeable fluctuations, probation rates are trending downward.

1st Year Probation Rates at UC Berkeley Have Steadily Declined

PROBATION RATES BY COLLEGE

Probation rates differ across the five undergraduate colleges into which freshmen directly enter as new students. More specifically, students in the colleges of Engineering and Chemistry had more than twice the rate of 1st year probation relative to students in other colleges. However, given its large size, most students on 1st year probation were in Letters & Science.

1st Year Probation by Entry College, 2008 & 2009 Fall Entering Freshman Cohorts

	% on Probation	# on Probation
College of Chemistry	11%	41
College of Engineering	10%	128
College of Letters & Science	5%	297
College of Natural Resources	4%	29
College of Environ. Design	4%	8

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

At 8%, men had higher 1st year probation rates than women (4%). Demographic differences also included higher rates for URM freshmen relative to their White and Asian peers.

1st Year Probation by Demographics, 2008 & 2009 Fall Entering Freshman Cohorts

	% on Probation	# on Probation
URM	11%	137
International	6%	37
Asian/Pacific Islander	5%	201
White/Other	4%	128
Men	8%	296
Women	4%	207

In addition, each residency group (i.e., CA resident, out-of-state domestic, international) had a probation rate of 6%. Finally, students who were athletes at entry had a higher 1st year probation rate (12%) than their counterparts (5%).

ADDITIONAL PRE-UCB FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PROBATION

Fall 2008 & 2009 entering freshmen placed on 1st year probation had average unweighted and weighted HS GPAs that were lower than for students not placed on 1st year probation. Similarly, SAT composite and sub-scores were also correlated with academic probation.

Mean GPA and SAT by 1st Year Probation

	On Probation	Not on Probation
HS GPA (unweighted)	3.66	3.83
HS GPA (weighted)	4.07	4.27
SAT Composite Score	1846	1989
SAT Math Score	648	684
SAT Verbal Score	595	647

Weighted High School GPA

The scale for weighted HS GPAs has an upper limit of 5.0 and allows for one additional grade-equivalent to be received for Advanced Placement (AP) courses completed (e.g., a grade of B equals 4.0 rather than the usual 3.0). The majority of freshmen entering in Fall 2008 and 2009 had a weighted HS GPA that was 4.0 or above (86%). However, there was variation in these GPAs, which correlated with 1st year probation. As shown below, higher GPA was associated with lower probation rates.
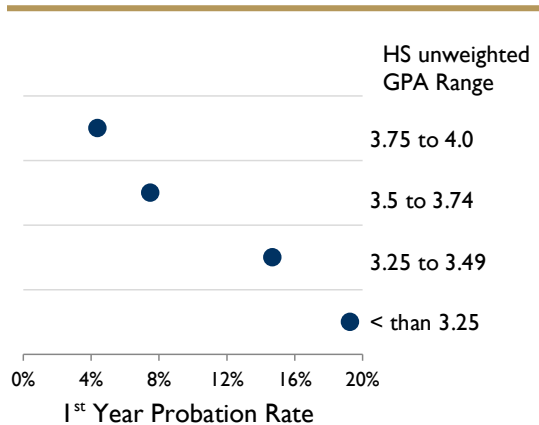
1st Year Probation Rates by Weighted High School GPA, 2008 & 2009 Fall Entering Freshman Cohorts

	% on Probation	# on Probation
4.50 or higher	3%	65
4.25 to 4.49	5%	161
4.0 to 4.24	7%	142
Below 4.0	11%	130

Unweighted High School GPA

Similarly, a linear relationship was found between unweighted HS GPA and probation (see chart below). For example, the 1st year probation rate ranged from 4% for unweighted HS GPAs of 3.75 to 4.0, to 19% for unweighted GPAs below 3.25.

1st Year Probation Rates by Unweighted High School GPA, 2008 & 2009 Fall Entering Freshman Cohorts

AVC-CFO

Parent Education and Household Income

Analysis was also done to determine the relationship between 1st year probation and important socioeconomic factors (i.e., parental education and household income). The metric used for parental education was first generation college status, defined here as a student who reported that neither parent had a 4-year degree. Pell Grant recipient status was used as a proxy for household income given that U.S. residents and eligible non-citizens at lower annual income levels (typically below $45,000) are eligible to receive Pell Grants. Importantly, students from these entry cohorts were considered Pell Grant recipients if they *ever* received a Pell Grant at UC Berkeley.

As seen in the table below, first generation college students were more likely to be on 1st year probation than students who had at least one parent with a 4-year degree (10% probation rate vs. 4%). The probation rate gap between Pell Grant recipients and those who did not receive a Pell Grant was narrower (8% vs. 5%).

1st Year Probation Rates by Pell Grant & First Generation College Status , 2008 & 2009 Fall Entering Freshman Cohorts

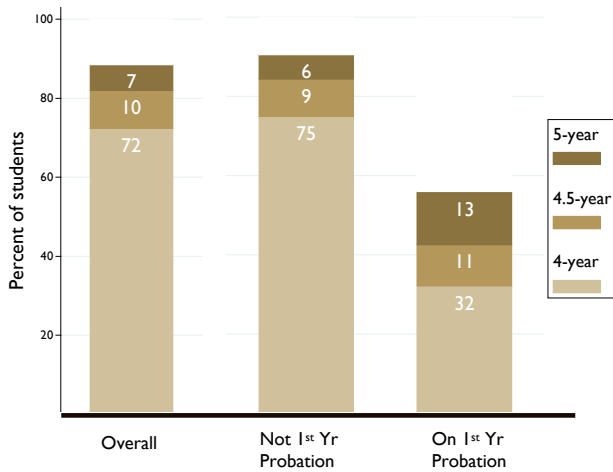|	% on Probation	# on Probation
First generation	10%	210
Not first generation	4%	263
Pell Grant recipient	8%	235
Not Pell recipient	5%	268

NORMATIVE GRADUATION RATES

Normative graduation is the timeframe within which most freshman entrants are expected to graduate (i.e., within four years of entry). At UC Berkeley, most freshman entrants graduate within normative time. For the Fall 2008 & 2009 cohorts, the overall normative graduation rate was 72%. Further, an additional 10% took one extra semester (i.e., Fall or Spring) for a 4.5-year rate of 82%. The 5-year graduation rate for these cohorts was 88%.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 1ST YEAR ACADEMIC PROBATION AND GRADUATION RATES

The chart below displays graduation rates by probation status for the Fall 2008 and Fall 2009 entering freshman cohorts. As shown, the normative graduation rate of 32% for freshmen who were placed on 1st year probation is significantly lower than the 75% normative graduation rate for those not placed on probation.

Graduation Rates by 1st Year Probation Status for 2008 & 2009 Fall Entering Freshman Cohorts

Legend:
- 5-year
- 4.5-year
- 4-year

Overall: 7 / 10 / 72
Not 1st Yr Probation: 6 / 9 / 75
On 1st Yr Probation: 13 / 11 / 32

Note: Due to rounding, percentages in the chart may not sum to the rates reported in the text

Further, students on 1st year probation continued to lag their peers at each graduation rate marker. Only 43% of those placed on 1st year probation graduated within 4.5 years of entry, compared to 84% of those not placed on 1st year probation.

The Normative Graduation Rate of Students on 1st Year Probation (32%) is Less Than Half the Rate of their Peers (75%)

A similar pattern of lagging graduation rates was found when considering the percentage who graduated within 5-years of entry (56% vs. 91%).

Importantly, given that students on 1st year probation make up a small percentage of all entering freshmen, the outcomes of these students have a marginal effect on the overall graduation rates—as seen in the chart above. Thus, although this is a population that the campus can aim to support for the purpose of increasing their individual student success, the overall campus graduation rates would remain largely unchanged.

Photo Courtesy of the University of California

Further analysis and discussion of graduation rates can be found in the briefing note, "Opportunities to increase normative graduate rate: Freshman entrants" (January 2017) and the report, "Factors related to graduation rates: Freshman entrants" (January 2017).