



Second-Term Behavior of Students on Academic Probation

Skyfactor Research Note

Second-Term Behavior of Students on Academic Probation

First year students don't always perform as well as hoped, which in turn can contribute to reduced retention. Students who are placed on academic probation at the end of first term make up a unique subset of the student population that are particularly prone to problems and who are especially in need of intervention. What happens during their second term can be critical to their academic performance and whether or not they remain in their institution.

This note explores the characteristics, behaviors and outcomes of students who are on academic probation following their first term, using a national dataset of 54,485 first-year students from 100 colleges and universities in the United States.

Key Points:

- Students start the term with high academic expectations.
- However, behaviors and actions do not meet these high expectations.
- Students on probation after fall term who are able to improve their attendance and academic behaviors are more likely to improve their grades during the spring term.

Key Questions:

1. How do expectations of outcomes for first-year students relate to reality?
2. How many students on fall probation improve their performance during the spring term and continue on to the next academic year?
3. For those students who do make it out of probation during the spring term, what differences in behaviors do we see?

Expected Outcomes versus Actual Outcomes

The vast majority of first-year students enter their institution with high hopes for their academic performance and with great intentions for returning for later semesters. However, reality often does not match up to these expectations for both performance and retention. Less than 1% of first-year students expect to receive a grade low enough to be placed on academic probation following the fall term. Yet, approximately one out of every six students ends up on probation following their first term.

Spring-Term GPA

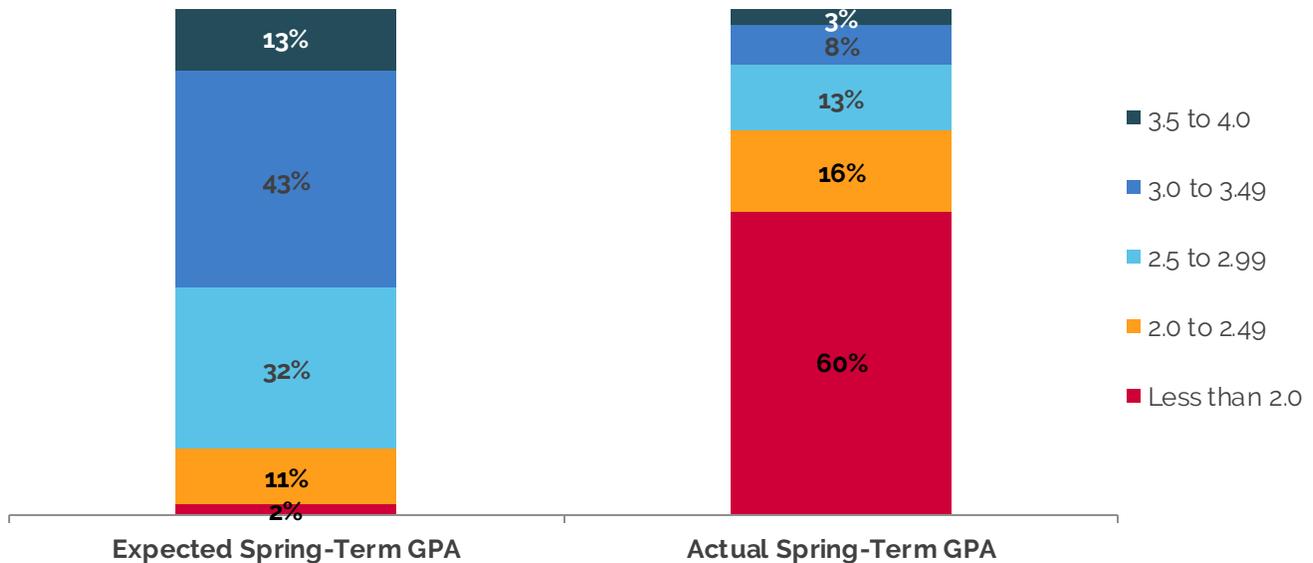
While students appear to be slightly more realistic in their expectations during their second term, they continue to be far more optimistic about their potential performance than the data shows is warranted, with only 34% receiving a high enough GPA to be removed from academic probation during their spring term.

- 56% of students on probation expected to improve their grade enough to be able to achieve a 3.00 during the spring term while only 11% actually did.
- Overall, only 2% of students on probation anticipated receiving less than a 2.00 GPA again while 60% ultimately did.

- 34% of students on fall probation were able to achieve a cumulative GPA of over 2.00 allowing them to be removed from academic probation, while 66% of students on fall probation were not.

Figure 1: Spring-Term GPA and Expectations

Percentage of students on probation during the spring term who expect to receive certain grades compared to the actual percent of students on probation during the spring term who receive those grades during the spring term.



Retention

While some students drop out immediately after being placed on probation, most of those who do continue for another term still expect to return for the following academic year. Fewer students return than intend to, but when looking at the fall retention rate of those who indicated a strong intention of returning, we see that intention is less predictive of retention among students on academic probation than it is for students overall.

Figure 2 on the next page displays the results when students were asked at the beginning of spring term if they intended to return for their second academic year, comparing all students to those who were on academic probation after their first term. Figure 3 on the next pages compares those two groups (all students versus probation students) on their actual one-year retention rate.

- 97% of students express high or moderate intent to continue to their second academic year.
- 72% of students return for the second academic year.
- 93% of all first year students who strongly intend to return actually do.
- Only 70% of students on probation who strongly intend to return do.

Figure 2: Intent to Return for Next Academic Year

Percentage of students responding not at all (1-2), moderately (3-5), or absolutely (6-7) to questions about intention to return for the following academic year.

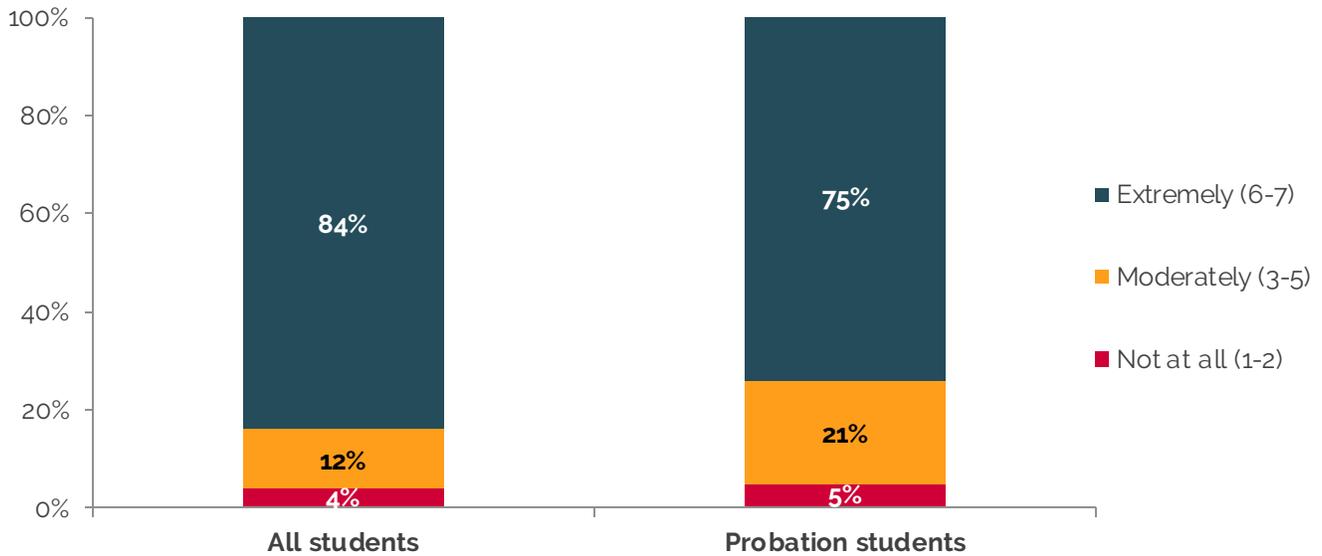
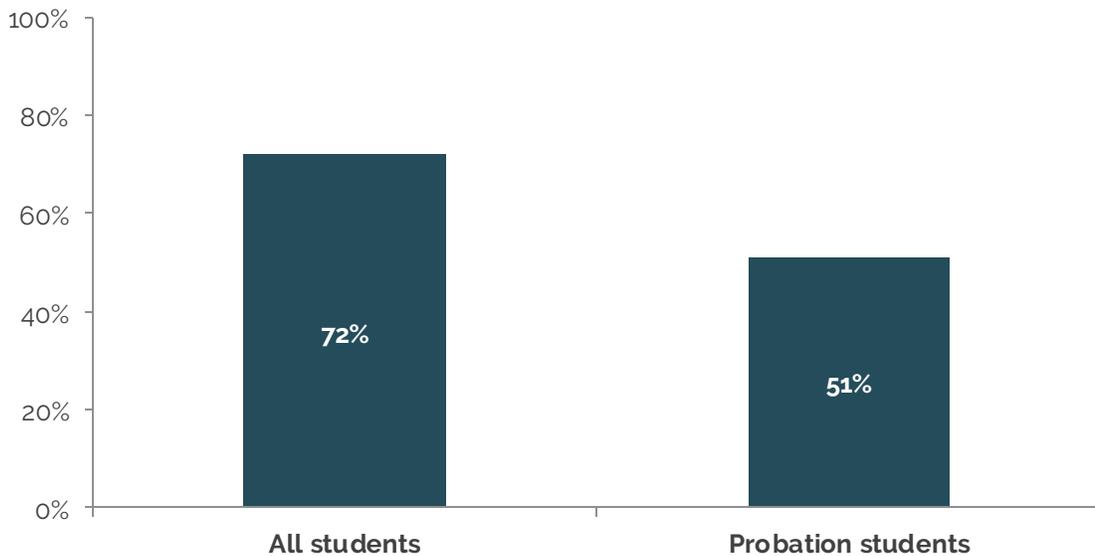


Figure 3: One-Year Retention Rates

Percentage of students returning for their second academic year, comparing rates of all students to just those who were on academic probation following their first term.



Characteristics of Students Who Improve Their Academic Performance

What made the difference between the students who were able to make it out of probation and those who remained on probation? To answer this question, we explored data from the spring transition survey to determine whether behaviors and skills reported during the spring semester are different between the students who improved their academic performance and those who did not.

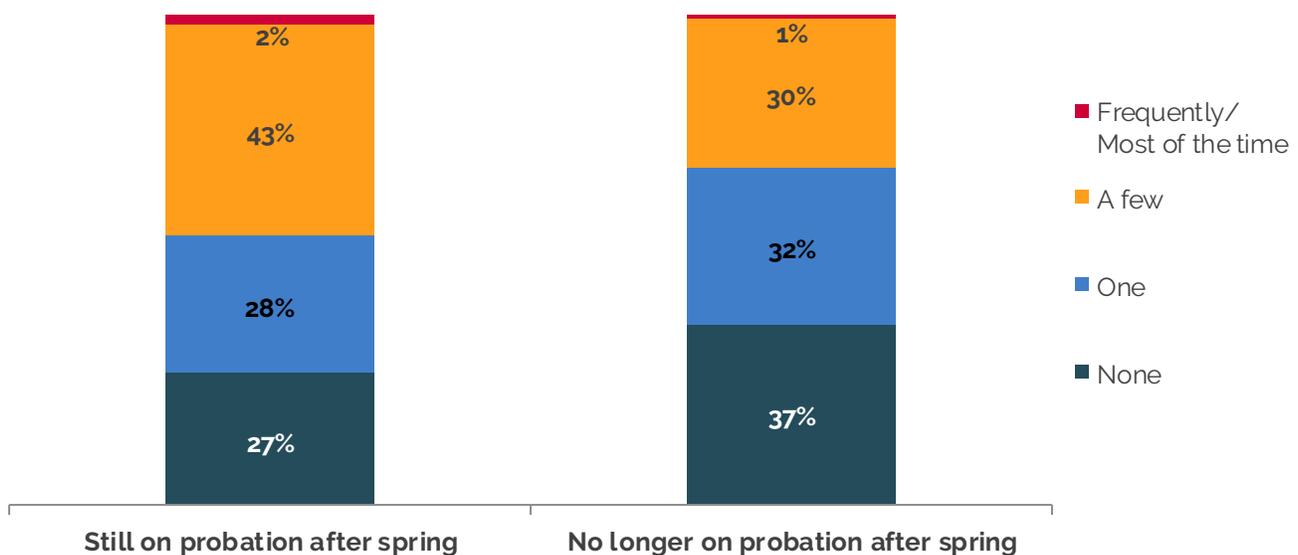
Class Attendance

Nearly two-thirds of students on academic probation following their first term reported early in that term that they had missed at least one class. On the other hand, just one-third of students who earned at least a 2.0 GPA in their first term reported missing at least one class early in the term. In When asked the same question at the beginning of the spring term (approximately 3-4 weeks into the term), there is a difference in spring class attendance between the students who ultimately improved their performance at the end of spring and those who did not.

- 37% of students who made it out of probation following the spring semester report never missing a class, 32% report missing one class, 30% report missing a few, while 1% report missing frequently or most of the time.
- 27% of students who continued to be on probation following the spring semester report never missing a class, while 28% report missing one class, 43% report missing a few classes, and 3% report missing class frequently or most of the time.

Figure 3: Class Attendance in Spring Semester

Percentage of students reporting missing class frequently or most of the time, a few classes, one class, or not at all by whether they made it out of probation at the end of the spring term.



Academic Behaviors

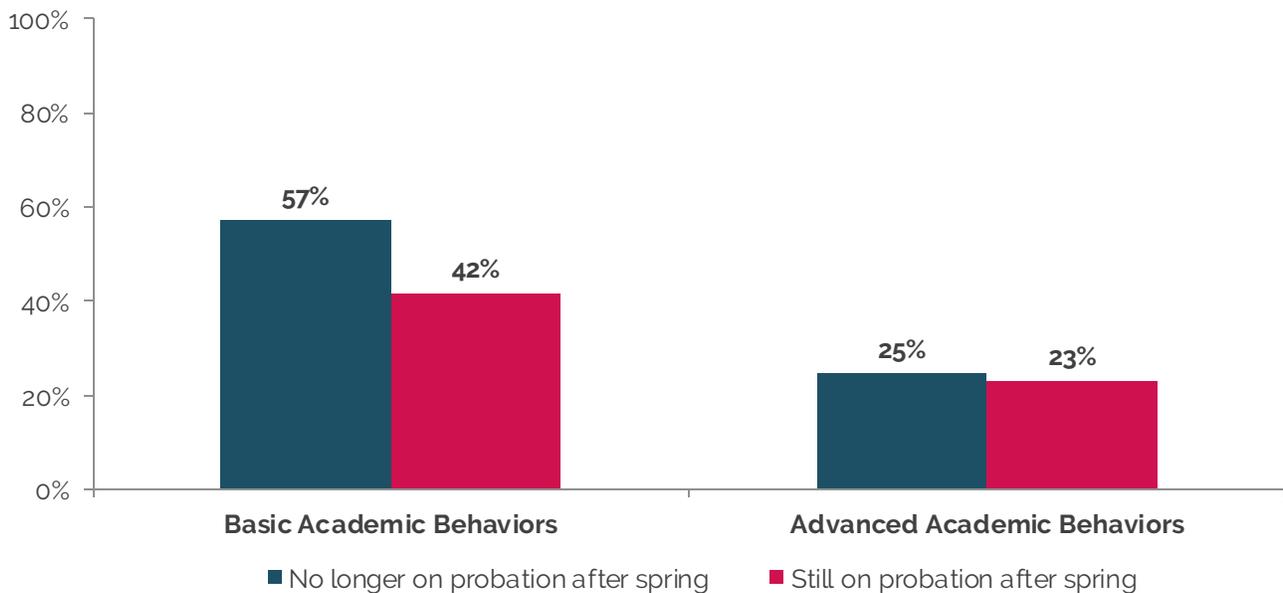
When asked during the fall term about basic academic behaviors such as attending in class, 79-96% of non-probation and 69-84% of probation students (depending on the specific question) reported being the type of person who engages in these behaviors. When asked during the fall term about more advanced academic behaviors such as working on large projects in advance, 35-63% of non-probation and 29-54% of probation students reported being the type of person who engages in these behaviors.

When asked the same questions during the spring, however, students were either more realistic than they had been initially, or their engagement in these behaviors diminished. Comparing the students who improved their performance enough to have a cumulative GPA higher than 2.00 to those who did not, we see that there is a difference in reported engagement in basic academic behaviors, but not as much of a difference in reporting of advanced academic behaviors.

- 15% more students who improved their performance during the spring semester reported strong agreement (% 6 or 7) that they were the type of person to engage in basic academic behaviors.
- 2% more students who improved their performance during the spring semester reported strong agreement (% 6 or 7) that they were the type of person to engage in advanced academic behaviors.

Figure 12: Academic Behaviors

Percentage of students on fall probation averaging 6 or higher (Extremely) on questions related to academic behaviors during the spring term divided by whether they made it out of probation at the end of the spring term or not.



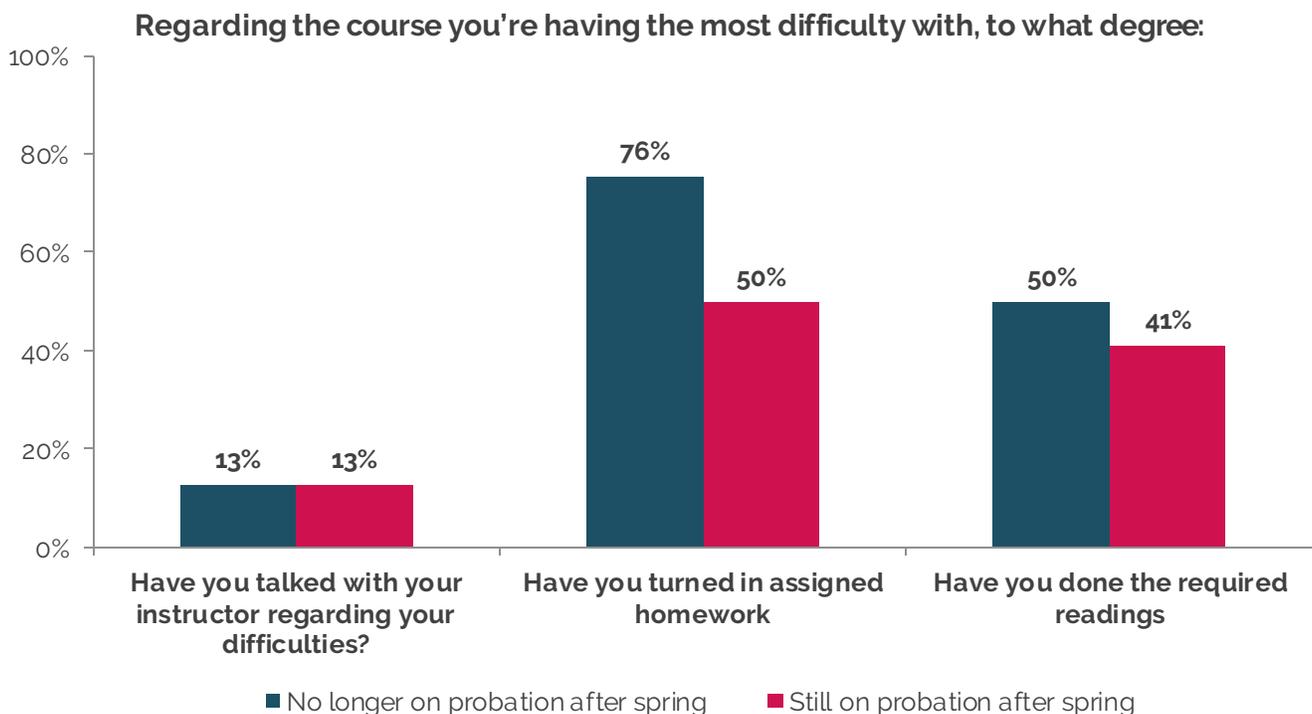
Course Struggles in Spring Term

When students on probation struggle with a class during the spring semester, we see a difference in behavior between those who improve their performance enough to be removed from probation following the completion of the spring term and those who do not.

- An equal number of students who remain on probation and those who improve their performance talk to their instructor regarding their difficulties. This number is up 5% for both groups from the 8% seen in the fall to 13% in the spring.
- Students who improve their GPA in spring are far more likely to report having turned in assigned homework compared to those who continue to be on probation following the spring term. This number, when compared to fall, is 20% higher for the students who make it off of probation and 6% lower for those students who continue to be on probation.
- Students with improved performance in spring are more likely to report having done the required readings compared to those who continue to be on probation. This is still not up to the level of the non-probation students during the fall term (63%), but the students who improve are 6% more likely to than they had been during the fall, and those who do not improve are 3% less likely.

Figure 13: Course Struggles During Spring Term

Percentage of students on fall probation responding extremely (6-7) on questions related to courses they are struggling in during the spring term by whether they made it out of probation at the end of the spring term.



Conclusion

Students who were placed on probation following their first term continue to hold unrealistic expectations for their performance, but 34% do manage to gain a high enough GPA during their second term to be able to be removed from academic probation.

When looking at the differences in reported behaviors between those who do improve and those who do not, we see differences in most of the same things that were also related to their first term performance. Those who improve their performance are less likely to miss classes during their second term than they were during their first term while those who do not improve miss even more than they had originally. Students who improved their performance were also much more likely to report a high basic academic behaviors factor score than those who did not improve; however, both are down substantially from their first term which could imply either an actual decrease in the behaviors or, more likely considering the performance improvement, a better knowledge of their own habits. There was little difference between groups when comparing advanced academic behavior factor scores, with the improved group only being slightly more likely to report a high score.

Lastly, we see the biggest impact when students responded regarding behaviors in their most difficult course. While there is no difference between the two groups, all students on fall probation were 5% more likely to talk with their instructor about course difficulty. The students who improved their performance were 20% more likely during the spring to turn in their homework in their most difficult course than they had been during the fall, and 26% more likely than were those who didn't improve. Those who did not improve saw a 6% drop in turning in homework compared to their first term. Lastly, those who improved were 6% more likely during the spring to complete the required readings than they had been during their first semester while those who did not improve their performance were 3% less likely.

About the Data

The data used in this research note is from the 2014-2015 Mapworks Spring Transition Survey. The survey was jointly designed by the survey development team at Skyfactor and researchers at Ball State University. The Transition Survey measures the behaviors and expectations of students entering a college or university. Data is typically collected beginning three to four weeks into the spring term via Skyfactor's online survey system. The data in this note is from 54,485 first-year college students from 100 two and four-year institutions in the United States. The note also used student profile data uploaded by participating institutions during the 2014-2015 academic year, including but not limited to term GPA and retention.

About Skyfactor

Skyfactor (formerly EBI MAP-Works) and Ball State University partnered to create Mapworks. Mapworks capitalizes on Ball State's 20 years of experience with the original MAP (Making Achievement Possible) and Skyfactor's 14 years of experience with national benchmarking assessments.

Mapworks® is a research-based, comprehensive, student retention and success platform created through a partnership between Skyfactor and Ball State University. It capitalizes on Ball State's 20+ years of experience with the original Making Achievement Possible (MAP) program and Skyfactor's expertise in national benchmarking assessments. Mapworks leverages predictive analytics to identify at-risk students. It presents that information in a format that makes it easy for an institution's faculty and staff to focus on the needs of students early in the term and to have a positive impact on student success and retention.



For more information about Skyfactor Mapworks and services, to schedule a demonstration, or to sign up for a webinar, please write to us at info@Skyfactor.com or visit Skyfactor.com