

Links between Grades and Retention in FYE Courses

Data from FYE-Enrolled Students in Fall 2018

December 11, 2019

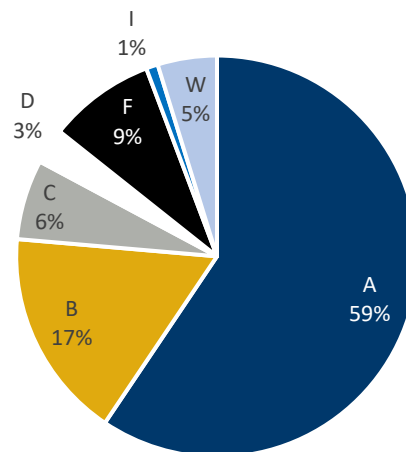
This analysis was produced by OPEIR in response to a request by the UTC Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. Results are not necessarily generalizable and attempts to use results outside the scope of this project should be avoided.

This information is presented as an addendum to the original report on FYE student outcomes prepared in October 2019 in response to a request regarding retention outcomes by grades in the FYE course.

Grade Distribution

Grades in FYE courses (USTU 1250) follow the distribution depicted in Figure 1. Overall, grades in FYE courses skew higher than in other courses at UTC with about 60% of students earning an A – as a point of comparison, 28% of students participating in behavioral and social science general education courses since 2011 earned an A.

Figure 1: Grade Distribution For Students Enrolled in FYE Courses in Fall 2018 Term



There are also differences in grade distribution by FYE course type depicted in Table 1; students taking learning community FYE courses were much more likely to earn As than students taking traditional FYE courses. No students in learning community FYE courses earned I grades. Students taking traditional FYE courses were more likely to earn B or C grades, but the extent to which learning community students receive As is so great that even with the larger proportion of traditional FYE students earning B grades, 82% of learning community students earned an A or B and only 71% of traditional FYE students did the same.

Table 1: Grade Distribution in FYE Courses by Course Type for Fall 2018 Term

Grade	All FYE Courses	Traditional FYE Courses	Learning Community FYE Courses
A	59%	50%	69%
B	17%	13%	21%
C	6%	10%	3%
D	3%	2%	4%
F	9%	9%	8%
I	1%	2%	0%
W	5%	4%	5%

As noted in the original FYE analysis, students who participate in learning communities differ from students in traditional FYE experiences in ways that may affect grades in the first college term. For example, students in learning communities are more likely to have started college with earned credits and had higher high school GPAs and ACT scores. These differences in student incoming characteristics also likely influence retention outcomes in the next section.

Grades and Retention Outcomes

The overall Fall-Fall retention rate for students enrolled in FYE courses in Fall 2018 was 68% and students in learning community FYE courses were slightly more likely to be retained (71%). There was great variance by FYE section – some sections had very high retention rates (as high as 95%) while others had very low retention rates (as low as 43%). As might be expected, retention rates were higher for students with higher grades in the FYE course as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Retention Rate by Grade in FYE Course

Grade	Number of Students in Group	Fall-Fall Retention Rate
All	419	68%
A	249	80%
B	71	79%
C	27	59%
D	12	33%
F	36	11%
I	4	25%
W	20	30%

This data indicates that students can be targeted for interventions based on their grade in FYE courses; while about 80% of students earning As and Bs are retained, only 21% of students who earned a D, F, I or W did the same. However, an intervention focused only on students who earned D, F, I or W in the FYE course would miss the majority of students who are not retained to the following fall; 57% of students who are not retained earned A, B, or C grades in the FYE class. There are some differences in retention by course grade when looked at through the additional layer of FYE course type (Table 3).

Table 3: Retention Outcomes by Grade in FYE Course and FYE Type

Grade	Retention All FYE	Retention Traditional FYE	Retention Learning Community FYE
All	68%	65%	71%
A	80%	75%	84%
B	79%	80%	77%
C	59%	62%	50%
D	33%	38%	25%
F	11%	20%	0%
I	25%	25%	n/a
W	30%	33%	27%

Discussion and Conclusions

It is interesting that, while students who earned higher grades were retained at higher rates across the board, students earning high grades in traditional FYE classes were less likely to be retained than students earning the same grades in learning community FYE courses. One in four students who earns an A in a traditional FYE course is not retained. Students earning As and Bs in FYE courses are retained at a rate of 76% in traditional courses and 83% in learning community courses. However, the high proportion of students earning As suggests that using grades in FYE classes to predict retention or select students for intervention services may not be as useful as other measures like overall credit hour accumulation, which was discussed in the original report.

Conversely, more students who struggle in the FYE class are retained in traditional FYE courses than learning community courses. Only 13% of students who earn a D, F, I, or W in a learning community FYE course are retained the following fall; the retention rate for these students in traditional FYE courses is more than twice as high at 27%. None of the students who earned an F in the learning community FYE course were retained. Helping students who experience failure at the outset of college to find their way and persist is important and traditional FYE classes appear to be more successful at doing so.

Although referenced earlier in the report it is worth underscoring again that the populations participating in traditional FYEs and learning community FYEs differ slightly across dimensions that research indicates are likely to affect retention. In addition to the higher incoming academic indicators referenced earlier, learning community students are also more likely to be female and white and less likely to be first generation. Some of the same factors that lead to increased retention rates for learning community students probably contributed to these students' decisions to participate in learning communities in the first place. For example, students who have previously earned college credit, particularly through experiences like dual enrollment, may be more confident in their major and/or career plans than students who have not and therefore would be attracted to a learning community aligned to those plans.

As UTC continues to explore the learning community model, data from additional cohorts may be helpful in exploring some of these factors further. In particular, examining self-selection into learning community courses may be worth further exploration.