

Impact on Retention from Temporary Changes to Academic Policy

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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.

Key Findings

- The undergraduate academic standing policy freeze contributed to an increase in one-year retention for all GPA levels which was sustained over two years. Underperforming students (<2.0 overall GPA) benefited the most from the policy freeze resulting in a seven percent increase in on-year retention and a four percent increase in two-year retention.
- The retention boost was not isolated to one college. All colleges saw at least a two percent increase in one-year retention for students with GPA less than 2.0. The Rollins College of Business retained a much higher percentage of underperforming students than any other college while the retention rate for students above 2.0 remained stable. In fact, 14 percent more underperforming RCOB 2019 undergraduates were retained after one year than 2018 undergraduates in the same span of time. A similar pattern was also found for two-year retention.
- Students opting for at least one grade of NC were roughly three times as likely to leave UTC between Spring 2020 and Spring 2022 compared to students opting only for grades of S and those who retained original grades for all courses.

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 (Table 2). 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 Table 1 while full details are in Appendix II.a.

Table 1. Median GPA Pre- and Post-Pandemic by Retained Term

Median GPA	1 st Fall – 1 st Spring		1 st Fall – 2 nd Fall		1 st Fall – 3 rd Fall	
	All UG	FTFTF	All UG	FTFTF	All UG	FTFTF
Fall 2018	3.01	2.83	3.05	3.04	3.14	3.24
Fall 2019	3.12	3.17	3.15	3.17	3.19	3.84

Table 2. One and Two-Year Retention and Graduation Rates for Undergraduates by GPA Group¹

Fall 2018			
GPA Breakpoints	N	One-Year Retention/Graduation	Two-Year Retention/Graduation
All Undergraduates	10,239	78.3%	73.8%
3.51 - 4.0	2,517	91.2%	89.6%
3.01 - 3.5	2,819	86.1%	84.6%
2.51 - 3.0	2,532	80.5%	75.7%
2.01 - 2.5	1,415	68.7%	59.1%
1.51 - 2.0	523	38.8%	25.4%
1.01 - 1.5	156	18.6%	9.0%
0.51 - 1.0	78	19.2%	6.4%
0.0 - 0.5	199	18.1%	7.5%
Fall 2019			
All Undergraduates	10,508	81.1%	76.2%
3.51 - 4.0	2,759	92.6%	90.4%
3.01 - 3.5	3,041	87.3%	84.1%
2.51 - 3.0	2,545	81.1%	76.9%
2.01 - 2.5	1,324	71.5%	60.5%
1.51 - 2.0	485	46.0%	32.4%
1.01 - 1.5	122	33.6%	13.9%
0.51 - 1.0	80	27.5%	12.5%
0.0 - 0.5	152	14.5%	6.6%

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 (Table 3). After two years, Arts and Sciences and Engineering and Computer Science’s retention and graduation rates even out between 2018

¹ Retention/Graduation columns are the proportion of students that were either retained or graduated over the period.

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 (Appendix III). 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.

Table 3. One and Two-year Retention and Graduation Rates for Undergraduates by College and GPA Range

One Year Combined Retention and Graduation	Fall 2018 - Fall 2019		Fall 2019 - Fall 2020	
	0.0 - 1.99	2.0 - 4.0	0.0 - 1.99	2.0 - 4.0
All Undergraduates	27.1%	83.2%	33.9%	84.8%
College of Arts and Sciences	28.2%	84.8%	32.3%	85.2%
College of Engineering and Computer Science	25.4%	86.2%	37.0%	87.9%
College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies	23.6%	81.0%	26.4%	82.4%
Rollins College of Business	25.9%	84.5%	40.1%	85.7%
Pre-Major (Undecided)	27.2%	69.5%	34.2%	80.6%
Two Year Combined Retention and Graduation	Fall 2018 - Fall 2020		Fall 2019 - Fall 2021	
	0.0 - 1.99	2.0 - 4.0	0.0 - 1.99	2.0 - 4.0
All Undergraduates	16.3%	79.4%	20.7%	80.5%
College of Arts and Sciences	18.6%	81.9%	19.0%	81.1%
College of Engineering and Computer Science	18.8%	81.3%	19.7%	82.9%
College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies	12.7%	77.3%	19.0%	78.5%
Rollins College of Business	13.5%	80.7%	27.2%	82.5%
Pre-Major (Undecided)	13.6%	58.2%	19.2%	66.5%

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.

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 (Table 4). 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 (Appendix IV).

Table 4. Status of Spring 2020 Undergraduates in Spring 2022 by Optional Selection of S/NC Grading

Grade Group	Graduated		Still Enrolled		Left UTC	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Opted for 1 or more S Grades	160	40.1%	182	45.6%	57	14.3%
Opted for 1 or more NC Grades	27	10.9%	84	33.9%	137	55.2%
Opted for Both	19	14.5%	49	37.4%	63	48.1%
Opted for Neither	3,721	43.9%	3,137	37.0%	1,611	19.0%
All	3,927	42.5%	3,452	37.3%	1,868	20.2%

Conclusion

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 (see Appendix II for additional term comparisons). 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.