



Research Brief

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Relationship Between Units Enrolled and Term GPA for Probationary and Disqualified Status Students

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Introduction

The Academic Senate Joint Student Affairs Committee requested a study to assess the impact of a district policy placing unit enrollment limitations for [students on progress and/or academic probation or disqualification status](#). Currently, the policy limits students to enroll in a maximum of 9 units each Spring and Fall semesters and a maximum of 5 units for the Winter and Spring intersessions for probationary students. The maximum unit limitations for disqualified students are 6 and 3 for the Spring/Fall semesters and Winter/Summer intersessions, respectively.

In addition, the Student Affairs Committee requested data to evaluate the impact of the Back to Success program and academic counseling on probationary and disqualified students' ability to obtain good academic standing (remove probationary/disqualified status) and earn a GPA of 2.0 or greater in the subsequent semester.

The study excluded international (F-1 status) students as this population is required to enroll in a minimum of 12 units each semester to maintain their student visa.

Probationary and Disqualified Student Sample

Table 1 describes the number and percentage of credit students who were on probation or were disqualified in the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters.

Table 1. Number of Students with Probationary/Disqualified Status by Type

	Fall 2019	% of Total	Spring 2020	% of Total
Good Academic Standing	24,197	86.6%	23,573	89.7%
Progress Probation	921	3.3%	475	1.8%
Academic Probation	1,598	5.7%	1,522	5.8%
Both Progress & Academic Probation	202	0.7%	184	0.7%
Progress Disqualification	667	2.4%	484	1.8%
Academic Disqualification	314	1.1%	34	0.1%
Both Progress & Academic Disqualif.	33	0.1%	4	0.0%
Total	27,932	100%	26,276	100%

Of the over 25,000 students enrolled in credit courses each semester, a large majority completed the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters on good academic standing. Approximately 13% and 10% of the population were on probation or were disqualified during the fall and spring semesters, respectively. Among those with probation/disqualified status, the largest proportion of students were on academic probation (less than 2.0 cumulative GPA).

The study examined the outcomes of students who met all the following criteria:

- On probation or disqualified in the observed semesters;
- A U.S. resident (not an international student);
- Enrolled in at least one credit course in both the observed semesters and subsequent semester (i.e., Fall 2019 students enrolled in Spring 2020); and,
- Enrolled in at least one course in the subsequent semester that resulted in a letter grade A, B, C, D, or F.

Charts 2 and 3 describe the probationary and disqualified sample, respectively, by the number of units enrolled in the subsequent semester (Fall 2019 students in the sample who enrolled in Spring 2020, Spring 2020 students the sample who enrolled in Fall 2020). Students who are on probation or disqualified can petition to enroll in more than the policy's maximum units in the subsequent semester.

Chart 2. Percentage of Probation Sample Students by Units Enrolled in Subsequent Semester

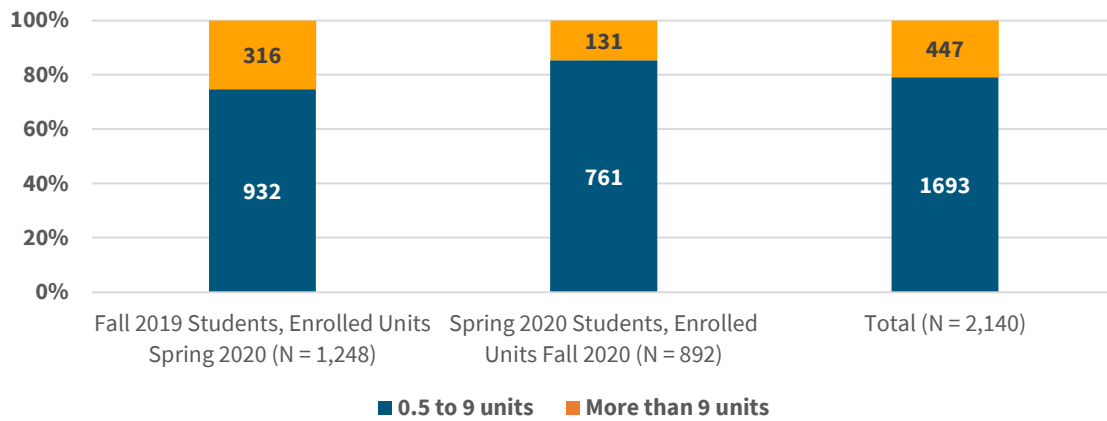
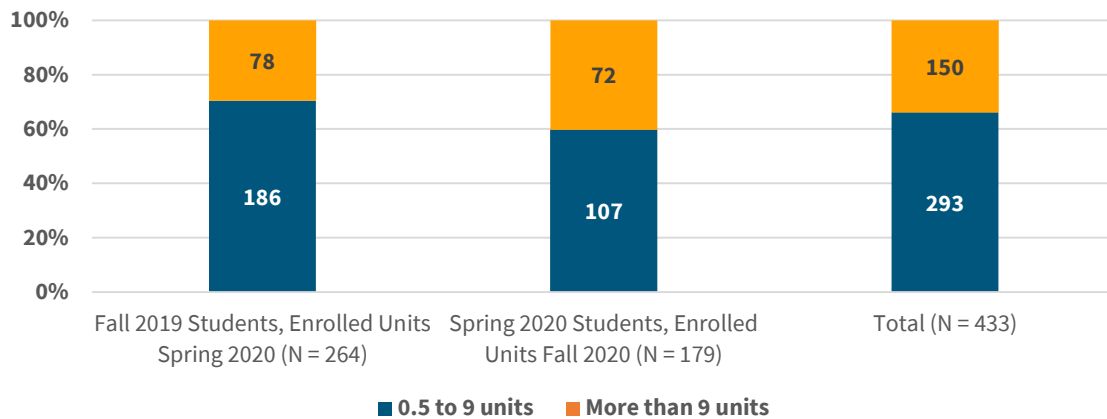


Chart 3. Percentage of Disqualified Sample Students by Units Enrolled in Subsequent Semester



Overall, about 2 in 10 students in the probationary study sample enrolled in more than the policy's unit limitations (9 for probationary; 6 for disqualified) in the subsequent semester. Disproportionately more disqualified students (35%) enrolled in more than the unit limitation in the subsequent semester when compared to probationary students.

Removed from Probationary/Disqualification Status

Tables 4 and 5 describe the percentage of probationary and disqualified students in the sample, respectively, who, at the end of the subsequent term, were removed from probationary or disqualification status and were in good academic standing by units enrolled in the subsequent semester.

Table 4. Number and Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample Removed from Probation in the Subsequent Semester by Unit Category

		(Within Unit Limit) Enrolled in 0.5 to 9 Units	(Beyond Unit Limit) Enrolled in More than 9 Units	Total
Fall 2019	Number of Students	932	316	1,248
	Removed from Probation	329	162	491
	% Removed from Probation	35.3%	51.3%	39.3%
Spring 2020	Number of Students	761	131	892
	Removed from Probation	196	55	251
	% Removed from Probation	25.8%	42.0%	28.1%
Total	Number of Students	1,693	447	2,140
	Removed from Probation	525	217	742
	% Removed from Probation	31.0%	48.5%	34.7%

Table 5. Number and Percentage of Disqualified Students in Sample Removed from Disqualification Status in the Subsequent Semester by Unit Category

		(Within Unit Limit) Enrolled in 0.5 to 6 Units	(Beyond Unit Limit) Enrolled in More than 6 Units	Total
Fall 2019	Number of Students	186	78	264
	Removed from Disqual.	30	19	49
	% Removed from Disqual.	16.1%	24.4%	18.6%
Spring 2020	Number of Students	107	72	179
	Removed from Disqual.	13	10	23
	% Removed from Disqual.	12.1%	13.9%	12.8%
Total	Number of Students	293	150	443
	Removed from Disqual.	43	29	72
	% Removed from Disqual.	14.7%	19.3%	16.3%

On average, nearly half (48.5%) of students who were on probation in Fall 2019 or Spring 2020 and enrolled in more than 9 units in the subsequent semester were removed from probationary status. Disproportionately fewer (31.0%) probationary students enrolled in fewer than 9 units in the subsequent semester were taken off probation when compared to those who enrolled in more, for a difference of 17.5%.

The pattern is similar for disqualified students; disproportionately more students who enrolled in more than 6 units in the subsequent semester were taken off disqualification status in the next term (19.3%) when compared to those enrolled in 6 or fewer units (14.7%). The difference in removal from disqualification rate between the two unit-groups is larger in the Fall 2019 semester than in Spring 2020.

These findings should be interpreted with care as the data do not indicate a causal relationship between whether a student enrolled in more than the unit limitation and the rate of removal from probationary or disqualification status. However, the evidence does support the conclusion that students who petition to enroll in more units than restricted by the current policy get off probation/disqualification status at higher rates.

Tables 6 and 7 describe the rate of probationary/disqualification status removal by race/ethnicity and unit group (enrolled within limits of policy, enrolled in more units than in policy in subsequent semester) for the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 sample combined.

The data suggest that for all racial/ethnic groups, a larger percentage of probationary students enrolled in more than 9 units in the subsequent semester obtained good academic standing in the next semester when compared to those enrolled in 9 or fewer units. The largest difference between the >9 units group and <=9 units group were observed for Asian (+41.8%) and Black (+28.3%) students.

The pattern is opposite among most disqualified students; for Asian (-23.5%), Black (-13.9%), multi-racial (-6.7%) and White (-5.6%) groups, those who enrolled in more than 6 units in the next semester got off disqualification status at lower rates than their counterparts who enrolled in 6 or fewer units. Latinx students, on the other hand, had higher rates of disqualification removal among those enrolled in more units than the policy limit than those enrolled within the unit limitation (+14.4%).

The findings disaggregated by race/ethnicity should be analyzed with caution as the numbers of students in each non-Latinx racial/ethnic group are small, particularly among those enrolled in more than policy unit limitation threshold.

Table 6. Number and Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample Removed from Probation in the Subsequent Semester by Ethnicity/Race and Unit Category, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

Enrolled in Subsequent Semester		Asian	Black	Latinx	Two or More	White	Unknown	Total*
<=9 Units	# of Stu	93	181	1058	80	217	60	1,693
	Removed from Prob	27	41	314	28	90	23	525
	% Removed	29.0%	22.7%	29.7%	35.0%	41.5%	38.3%	31.0%
>9 Units	# of Stu	24	53	250	15	53	48	447
	Removed from Prob	17	27	112	6	31	22	217
	% Removed	70.8%	50.9%	44.8%	40.0%	58.5%	45.8%	48.5%
Difference (>9 units) – (<=9 units)		+41.8%	+28.3%	+15.1%	+5.0%	+17.0%	+7.5%	+17.5%

*Includes students in the Native American/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian groups which were each smaller than 10

Table 7. Number and Percentage of Disqualified Students in Sample Removed from Disqualification Status in the Subsequent Semester by Ethnicity/Race and Unit Category, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

Enrolled in Subsequent Semester		Asian	Black	Latinx	Two or More	White	Total*
<=6 Units	# of Stu	17	28	203	15	30	293
	Removed from Disq	4	5	29	1	4	43
	% Removed	23.5%	17.9%	14.3%	6.7%	13.3%	14.7%
>6 Units	# of Stu	3	25	94	7	13	150
	Removed from Disq	0	1	27	0	1	29
	% Removed	0.0%	4.0%	28.7%	0.0%	7.7%	19.3%
Difference (>6 units) – (<=6 units)		-23.5%	-13.9%	+14.4%	-6.7%	-5.6%	+4.7%

*Includes students in the Native American/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian, and unreported ethnicity/race groups which were each smaller than 10

Term GPA in Subsequent Semester by Units Enrolled

Tables 8 and 9 describe the percentage of probationary and disqualified students in the sample, respectively, who, earned a term GPA of 2.0 or greater in the subsequent term by subsequent term units enrolled.

Table 8. Number and Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample with GPA 2.0 or Higher in Subsequent Term by Unit Category

		(Within Unit Limit) Enrolled in 0.5 to 9 Units	(Beyond Unit Limit) Enrolled in More than 9 Units	Total
Fall 2019	Number of Students	932	316	1,248
	GPA >=2.0 in Next Semester	643	212	855
	% GPA>=2.0	69.0%	67.1%	68.5%
Spring 2020	Number of Students	761	131	892
	GPA >=2.0 in Next Semester	414	71	485
	% GPA>=2.0	54.4%	54.2%	54.4%
Total	Number of Students	1,693	447	2,140
	GPA >=2.0 in Next Semester	1,057	283	1,340
	% GPA>=2.0	62.4%	63.3%	62.6%

Table 9. Number and Percentage of Disqualified Students in Sample with GPA 2.0 or Higher in Subsequent Term by Unit Category

		(Within Unit Limit) Enrolled in 0.5 to 6 Units	(Beyond Unit Limit) Enrolled in More than 6 Units	Total
Fall 2019	Number of Students	186	78	264
	GPA >=2.0 in Next Semester	138	51	189
	% GPA>=2.0	74.2%	65.4%	71.6%
Spring 2020	Number of Students	107	72	179
	GPA >=2.0 in Next Semester	51	30	81
	% GPA>=2.0	47.7%	41.7%	45.3%
Total	Number of Students	293	150	443
	GPA >=2.0 in Next Semester	189	81	270
	% GPA>=2.0	64.5%	54.0%	60.9%

Over two-thirds of probationary students and over 60% of disqualified students in the sample earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher in their subsequent semester. The percentages of students with a GPA of 2.0 or higher by unit category (enrolled within unit limitation vs. enrolled in more than the maximum units) for probationary students is similar. For disqualified students, however, students who enrolled in 6 or fewer units in the subsequent semester earned a GPA of 2.0 or greater at *higher* rates than those who enrolled in more than 6 units. Overall, the rates of GPA ≥ 2.0 is higher in Fall 2019 than in Spring 2020 for both probationary and disqualified students which may be the result, in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data suggest that for probationary students, there is no difference in academic performance in the subsequent semester between students who enroll in 9 or fewer units and those who enroll in more than 9 units. However, whether students enrolled within the unit limitation or more than the maximum appears to be related to academic performance for disqualified students.

Tables 10 and 11 describe the percentage of students who earned a semester GPA of 2.0 or higher by race/ethnicity and unit group (enrolled within limits of policy, enrolled in more units than in policy in subsequent semester) for the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 sample combined.

For Asian and Black probationary students, a larger percentage of those who enrolled in more than the policy's maximum units earned a GPA of 2.0 or greater in the subsequent than those who enrolled in fewer units in the next semester (+19.8% and +5.7, respectively). The pattern is opposite for multi-racial students (-23.8%), and there is little to no difference observed in percentage of GPAs 2.0 or greater between the two-unit categories for the other racial ethnic groups on probation. The number of multi-racial probationary students enrolled in more than 9 units is small, therefore, the data should be interpreted with caution.

For all racial ethnic students who were disqualified, the percentage of students who earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher was lower among those who enrolled in more than the maximum units than those who enrolled within the policy's unit limitations.

The findings disaggregated by race/ethnicity should be analyzed with caution as the numbers of students in each non-Latinx racial/ethnic group are small, particularly among those enrolled in more than policy unit limitation threshold.

Table 10. Number and Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample with GPA 2.0 or Higher in the Subsequent Semester by Ethnicity/Race and Unit Category, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

Enrolled in Subsequent Semester		Asian	Black	Latinx	Two or More	White	Unknown	Total*
<=9 Units	# of Stu	93	181	1058	80	217	60	1,693
	GPA >=2.0	63	99	640	51	161	41	1,057
	% GPA>=2.0	67.7%	54.7%	60.5%	63.8%	74.2%	68.3%	62.4%
>9 Units	# of Stu	24	53	250	15	53	48	447
	GPA >=2.0	21	32	149	6	39	33	283
	% GPA>=2.0	87.5%	60.4%	59.6%	40.0%	73.6%	68.8%	63.3%
Difference (>9 units) – (<=9 units)		+19.8%	+5.7%	-0.9%	-23.8%	-0.6%	+0.4%	+0.9%

*Includes students in the Native American/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian groups which were each smaller than 10

Table 11. Number and Percentage of Disqualified Students in Sample with GPA 2.0 or Higher in the Subsequent Semester by Ethnicity/Race and Unit Category, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

Enrolled in Subsequent Semester		Asian	Black	Latinx	Two or More	White	Total*
<=6 Units	# of Stu	17	28	203	15	30	293
	GPA >=2.0	12	18	136	6	17	189
	% GPA>=2.0	70.6%	64.3%	67.0%	40.0%	56.7%	64.5%
>6 Units	# of Stu	3	25	94	7	13	150
	GPA >=2.0	2	12	57	1	6	81
	% GPA>=2.0	66.7%	48.0%	60.6%	14.3%	46.2%	54.0%
Difference (>6 units) – (<=6 units)		-3.9%	-16.3%	-6.4%	-25.7%	-10.5%	-10.5%

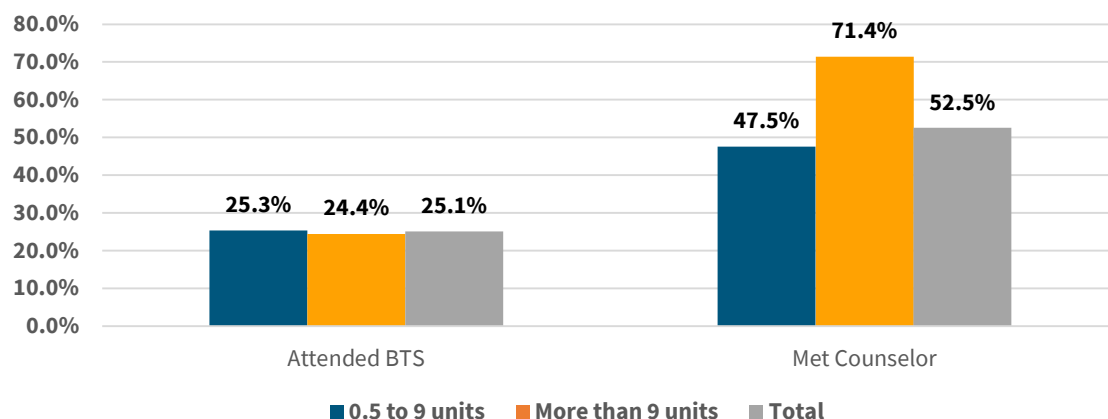
*Includes students in the Native American/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian, and unreported ethnicity/race groups which were each smaller than 10

Term GPA by Back to Success and Counseling Participation

Students who are on probation are required to participate in an intervention, Back to Success (BTS), a workshop designed to provide key information about academic and progress probation policies at SMC as well as the various support services available to students. Students who participate in the BTS program complete an individualized Action Plan for Success.

The chart below describes the percentage of probationary students in the sample who participated in BTS and those who met with a counselor in the subsequent semester by unit category.

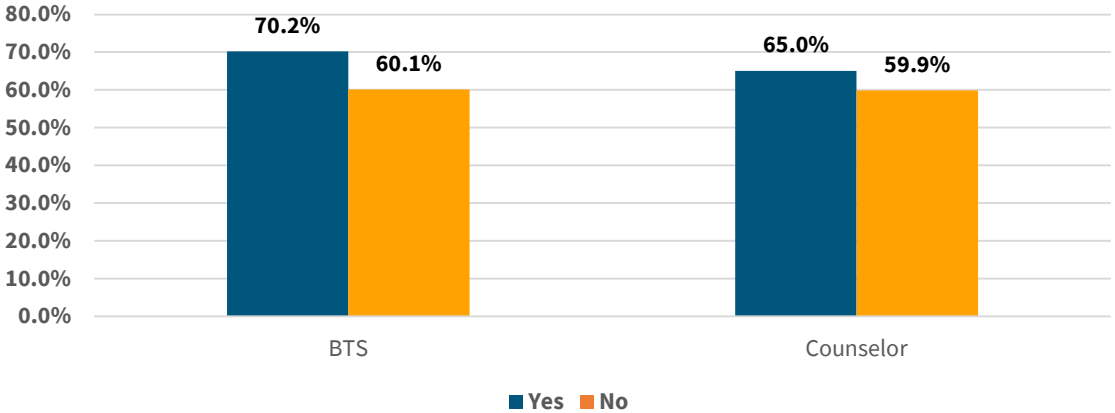
Chart 12. Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample Who Participated in BTS and/or Met with a Counselor by Unit Category



Approximately one-quarter of probationary students participated in BTS. More students, about half, met with a counselor in the subsequent semester. Students in the “met counselor” category could have also included those who attended BTS. There is no difference in terms of percentage of students who participated in BTS by unit category. However, disproportionately more students who enrolled in more than 9 units (the policy’s maximum) met with a counselor in the subsequent semester (71.4%) than those who were within the policy’s unit limitations (47.5%), for a difference of 23.9%. The difference may be attributed to the fact that students need to petition to enroll in more than the maximum units with a counselor.

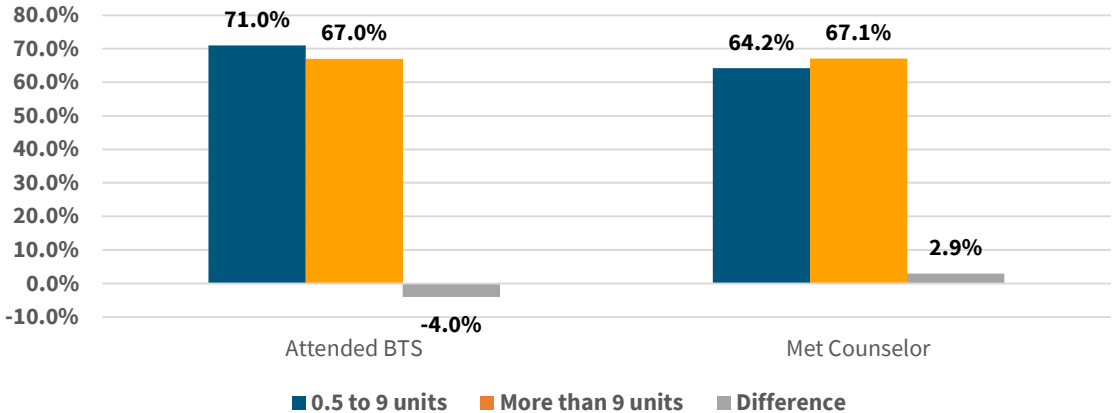
Chart 13 compares the percentage of probationary students who earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher by BTS completion and counseling contact in subsequent semester status. Chart 14 compares the percentage of students who completed BTS and/or met with a counselor who earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher by unit category.

Chart 13. Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample Who Earned a GPA of 2.0 or Higher in Subsequent Semester by BTS and Counseling Completion



Overall, a large majority of probationary students who persisted to the subsequent semester earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher in the next semester. Over 70% of probationary students who completed BTS earned a GPA of 2.0 or greater in the subsequent semester, 10% more than those who did not complete BTS (60.1%). The pattern is similar for those who met with a counselor versus those who did not, but the difference between the two group is smaller; 65% of probationary students who met with a counselor in the subsequent semester earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher in the next semester, 5% more than those who did not meet with a counselor (60%).

Chart 14. Percentage of Probationary Students in Sample Who Earned a GPA of 2.0 or Higher in Subsequent Semester by Unit Category, BTS and Counseling



Among students who attended BTS, disproportionately more probationary students who enrolled in 0.5 to 9 units (within unit limitation) earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher in the next semester (71%) when compared to those who enrolled in more than the policy’s maximum 9 units (67%) in the next semester, for a difference of 4%. Still, even among those who enrolled in more than 9 units, a large majority of this group earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher.

The pattern is opposite when comparing students who met with a counselor with those who did not. Among these probationary students, disproportionately more students who enrolled in more than 9 units earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher in the subsequent semester (67.1%) when compared to those who enrolled in fewer units (64.2%), but the difference is small (2.9%).

Correlation Between Subsequent Semester GPA and Number of Units Enrolled

A correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a statistical relationship between the number of units enrolled in a subsequent semester and the semester GPA among probationary and disqualified students.

The analysis found a weak, positive correlation of $r = .034$ ($N = 2,140$) between number of units enrolled and GPA in the subsequent semester, which suggests that as the number of units enrolled goes up, the GPA goes up as well. However, the correlation is *not* statistically significant. We conclude that there is not direct link between number of units enrolled and semester GPA.

Predictive Values of Units Enrolled, BTS Participation, Counseling, and Demographics on Term GPA

A multiple regression was conducted to determine the predictive value of five variables, when taken together, on probationary and disqualified students' subsequent semester GPA:

- 1) Units enrolled in subsequent semester (number, not category)
- 2) BTS participation (yes or no)
- 3) Met with counselor in subsequent semester (yes or no)
- 4) Identified as Black or Latinx (yes or no)
- 5) Identified as male (yes or no)

Table 15. Beta and Statistical Significance Values of Variables in Regression Model on Subsequent Semester GPA Among Probationary and Disqualified Students in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	p-value
Units enrolled in subsequent semester	-.005	.938
BTS participation (yes or no)	.277	.000
Met with counselor in subsequent semester (yes or no)	.055	.317
Identified as Black or Latinx (yes or no)	-.294	.000
Identified as male (yes or no)	-.094	.089

Among the five predictor variables in the model, only two were found to predict probationary and disqualified students' (N = 2,140) subsequent term GPAs (p -values were less than .05): BTS participation and whether students were Black or Latinx. The other variables did not significantly predict GPA, including units enrolled.

The B value (unstandardized coefficient) describes the relationship between the variable and the GPA. The positive B value for BTS participation suggests that students who complete BTS are predicted to have a GPA 0.277 higher than those who did not participate in GPA. The negative B value for the Latinx/Black variable suggests that Latinx and Black students are predicted to have a GPA 0.294 lower than those who do not identify as Latinx or Black.

Summary

The following bullet points provide a high-level summary of the study findings:

- About 20% of probationary students enrolled in more than the maximum units (more than 9 units) in the subsequent semester. Disproportionately more disqualified students did the same (35%; more than 6 units).
- Overall, 35% of probationary students got off probation in the subsequent semester. Disproportionately more probationary students who enrolled in more than the maximum units got off probation (49%) when compared to those who enrolled within the unit limitation (31%).
 - The pattern is similar for all racial/ethnic groups.
- Overall, fewer disqualified students were removed from disqualification status (16%) when compared with probationary students (35%). However, the pattern between units enrolled and rate of removal of status is similar – disproportionately more of those who enrolled in more than the maximum units were removed from disqualification status than those who enrolled in fewer units.
 - The data disaggregated by race/ethnicity show that only for all non-Latinx groups, those who enrolled in *within the unit limitations* were removed from disqualification status at *higher* rates than those who enrolled in more than the maximum units. However, this data should be interpreted with care due to small sample sizes.
- Overall, a large majority or 63% of probationary students earned a semester GPA of 2.0 or higher in the subsequent semester. There is no difference in percentage of students with a GPA of 2.0 or higher between unit groups (enrolled within unit limitations versus enrolled in more than maximum units).
 - The data disaggregated by race/ethnicity show that for Asian and Black probationary students, a larger percentage of those who enrolled in more than 9 units in the subsequent semester earned a GPA of 2.0 or greater than those who enrolled in fewer units. The pattern is opposite among multi-racial students. There is no difference in percentage of >GPA 2.0 amongst Latinx and White students.

- About 61% of disqualified students earned a semester GPA of 2.0 or higher in the subsequent semester. Unlike probationary students where no difference was found, a smaller percentage of students who enrolled in more than the maximum units (more than 6) earned a GPA of 2.0 or greater (54%) when compared to those who enrolled in 6 or fewer units (65%).
 - The data disaggregated by race/ethnicity show this pattern is the same for all racial/ethnic groups.
- Disproportionately more probationary students who attended BTS earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher (70%) than those who did not complete BTS (60%).
- Disproportionately more probationary students who met with a counselor in the subsequent semester earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher (65%) than those who did not (60%), however, the difference is smaller than when compared to BTS participation (5% difference vs. 10% difference).
- In a statistical model, units enrolled *does not significantly* predict subsequent semester GPA among probationary and disqualified students. However, BTS participation positively predicts GPA.