

Predicting Student Dropout and Academic Success

Exploratory Data Analysis

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Introduction

This analysis examines data from a Portuguese higher education institution to identify factors that contribute to student dropout and academic success. The dataset contains information on 4,424 students enrolled across various undergraduate programs.

Data Loading

Dataset shape: (4424, 37)

Variable Selection

We selected 35 relevant variables for analysis:

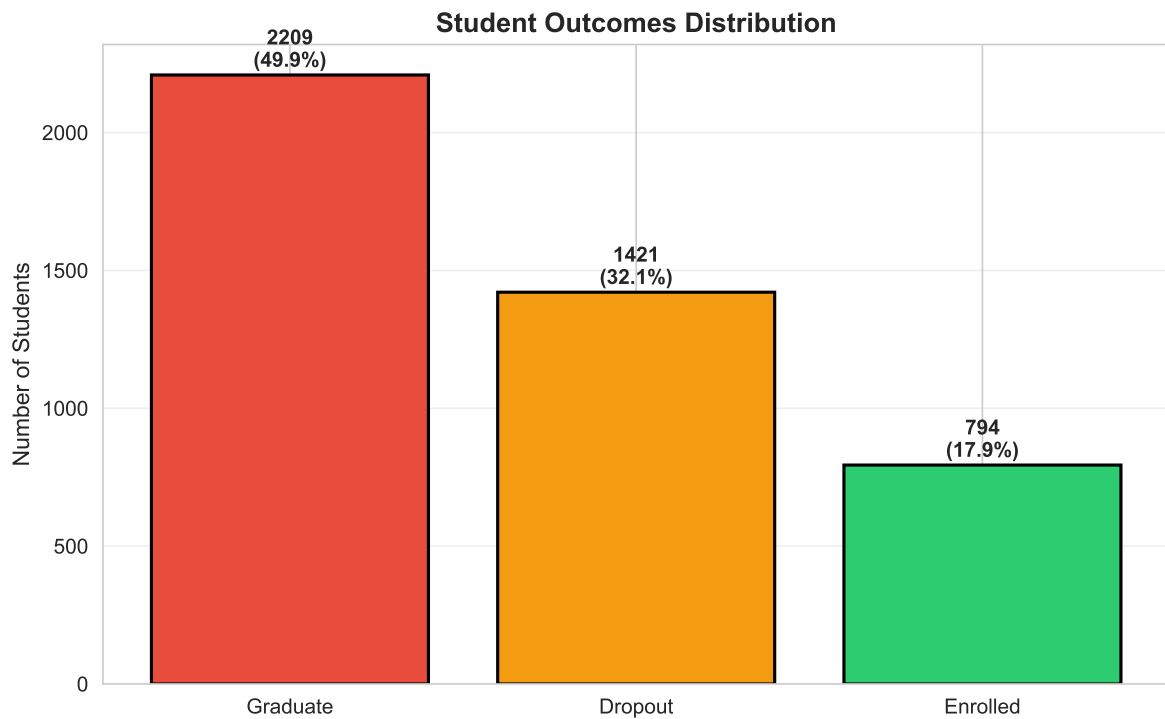
Selected 35 variables

Data Cleaning

Shape after cleaning: (4424, 35)

Missing values: 0

Target Variable



Descriptive Statistics

	count	mean	std	min	25%	50%	75%
name							
Marital Status	4424.0	1.18	0.61	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Application order	4424.0	1.73	1.31	0.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Course	4424.0	8856.64	2063.57	33.00	9085.00	9238.00	9556.00

	count	mean	std	min	25%	50%	75%
name							
Daytime/evening attendance	4424.0	0.89	0.31	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Previous qualification	4424.0	4.58	10.22	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Previous qualification (grade)	4424.0	132.61	13.19	95.00	125.00	133.10	140.00
Nacionality	4424.0	1.87	6.91	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Mother's qualification	4424.0	19.56	15.60	1.00	2.00	19.00	37.00
Father's qualification	4424.0	22.28	15.34	1.00	3.00	19.00	37.00
Mother's occupation	4424.0	10.96	26.42	0.00	4.00	5.00	9.00
Father's occupation	4424.0	11.03	25.26	0.00	4.00	7.00	9.00
Admission grade	4424.0	126.98	14.48	95.00	117.90	126.10	134.80
Educational special needs	4424.0	0.01	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender	4424.0	0.35	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
Scholarship holder	4424.0	0.25	0.43	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age at enrollment	4424.0	23.27	7.59	17.00	19.00	20.00	25.00
Displaced	4424.0	0.55	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Debtor	4424.0	0.11	0.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
International	4424.0	0.02	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Curricular units 1st sem (credited)	4424.0	0.71	2.36	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Curricular units 1st sem (enrolled)	4424.0	6.27	2.48	0.00	5.00	6.00	7.00
Curricular units 1st sem (evaluations)	4424.0	8.30	4.18	0.00	6.00	8.00	10.00
Curricular units 1st sem (approved)	4424.0	4.71	3.09	0.00	3.00	5.00	6.00
Curricular units 1st sem (grade)	4424.0	10.64	4.84	0.00	11.00	12.29	13.40
Curricular units 1st sem (without evaluations)	4424.0	0.14	0.69	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Curricular units 2nd sem (credited)	4424.0	0.54	1.92	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Curricular units 2nd sem (enrolled)	4424.0	6.23	2.20	0.00	5.00	6.00	7.00
Curricular units 2nd sem (evaluations)	4424.0	8.06	3.95	0.00	6.00	8.00	10.00
Curricular units 2nd sem (approved)	4424.0	4.44	3.01	0.00	2.00	5.00	6.00
Curricular units 2nd sem (grade)	4424.0	10.23	5.21	0.00	10.75	12.20	13.30
Curricular units 2nd sem (without evaluations)	4424.0	0.15	0.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Unemployment rate	4424.0	11.57	2.66	7.60	9.40	11.10	13.90
Inflation rate	4424.0	1.23	1.38	-0.80	0.30	1.40	2.60
GDP	4424.0	0.00	2.27	-4.06	-1.70	0.32	1.79

Correlation Analysis



Based on this correlation analysis, we identified several highly correlated variable pairs that suggest multicollinearity. We excluded 8 redundant semester variables that were highly correlated with other metrics.

Feature Selection

Removed 8 highly correlated variables

Remaining variables: 27

Outlier Detection

We implemented a type-aware outlier detection strategy that applies different methods based on the nature of each variable:

Binary variables (e.g., Gender, Scholarship holder): Outlier detection was skipped entirely, as these variables only contain two valid values (0/1).

Nominal categorical variables (e.g., Course, Nationality): No outlier detection applied, as these represent distinct categories without natural ordering. We only reported the number of unique categories present.

Ordinal categorical variables (e.g., qualifications, occupations): We reported the number of levels but did not apply outlier detection, as these represent ordered categories rather than continuous measurements.

Grade variables (0-200 scale): We checked for values outside the valid range (0-200). According to the dataset documentation, grades in the Portuguese system can range from 0 to 200.

Count variables (e.g., enrolled courses): We used a more lenient threshold of $3 \times \text{IQR}$ (Interquartile Range) rather than the standard $1.5 \times \text{IQR}$, as count variables naturally exhibit right-skewed distributions where high values may represent legitimate cases (e.g., students enrolling in many courses).

Continuous variables (e.g., Age, GDP, Unemployment rate): We applied the standard Tukey method with $1.5 \times \text{IQR}$ threshold to identify potential outliers: values below $Q1 - 1.5 \times \text{IQR}$ or above $Q3 + 1.5 \times \text{IQR}$.

This approach ensures that outlier detection is contextually appropriate for each variable type, reducing false positives while identifying genuine data quality issues.

Binary variables (skipping outlier detection):

- Daytime/evening attendance: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]
- Educational special needs: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]
- Gender: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]
- Scholarship holder: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]
- Displaced: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]
- Debtor: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]
- International: values = [np.float64(0.0), np.float64(1.0)]

Nominal Categorical (no natural order):

- Course: 17 categories
- Nationality: 21 categories

Ordinal Categorical (meaningful order):

- Marital Status: 6 levels
- Application order: 8 levels
- Previous qualification: 17 levels
- Mother's qualification: 29 levels
- Father's qualification: 34 levels
- Mother's occupation: 32 levels
- Father's occupation: 46 levels

Grade variables (0-200 scale):

- Previous qualification (grade): range=[95.0, 190.0], invalid: 0 (0.0%)
- Admission grade: range=[95.0, 190.0], invalid: 0 (0.0%)
- Curricular units 1st sem (grade): range=[0.0, 18.9], invalid: 0 (0.0%)
- Curricular units 2nd sem (grade): range=[0.0, 18.6], invalid: 0 (0.0%)

Count variables (3×IQR threshold):

- Curricular units 1st sem (enrolled): extreme outliers: 106 (2.4%)
- Curricular units 2nd sem (enrolled): extreme outliers: 45 (1.0%)

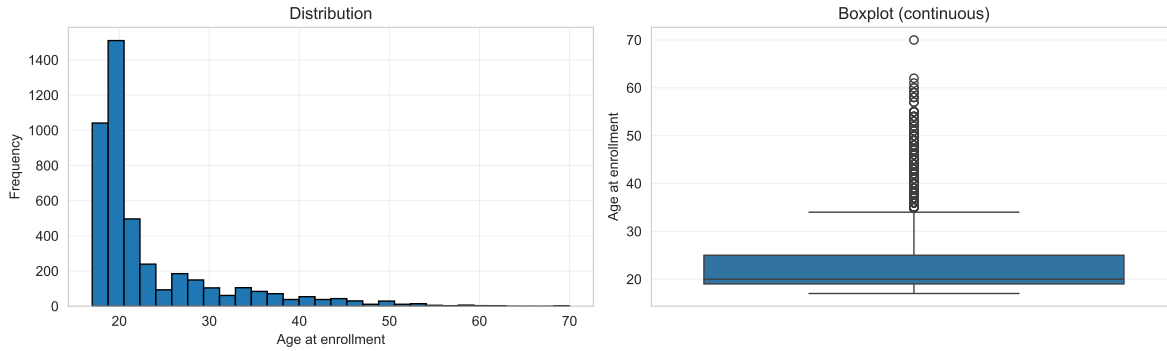
Continuous variables (1.5×IQR threshold):

- Age at enrollment: outliers: 441 (10.0%)
- Unemployment rate: outliers: 0 (0.0%)
- Inflation rate: outliers: 0 (0.0%)
- GDP: outliers: 0 (0.0%)

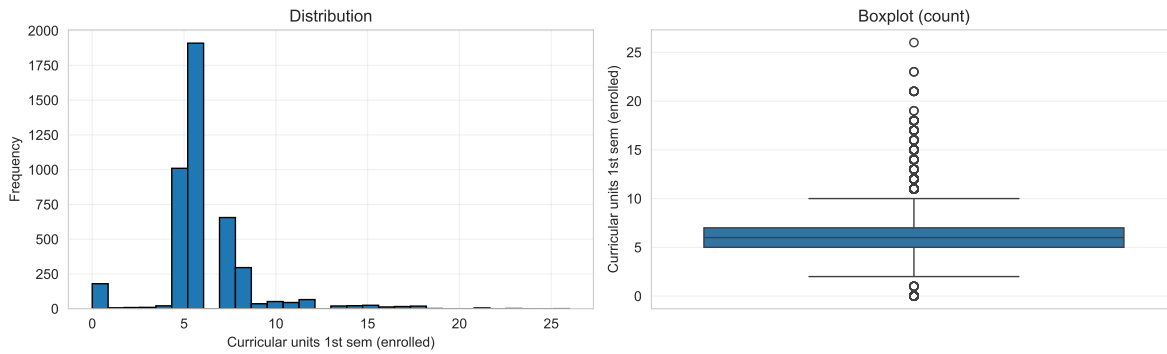
Outlier Summary

Detected Issues:

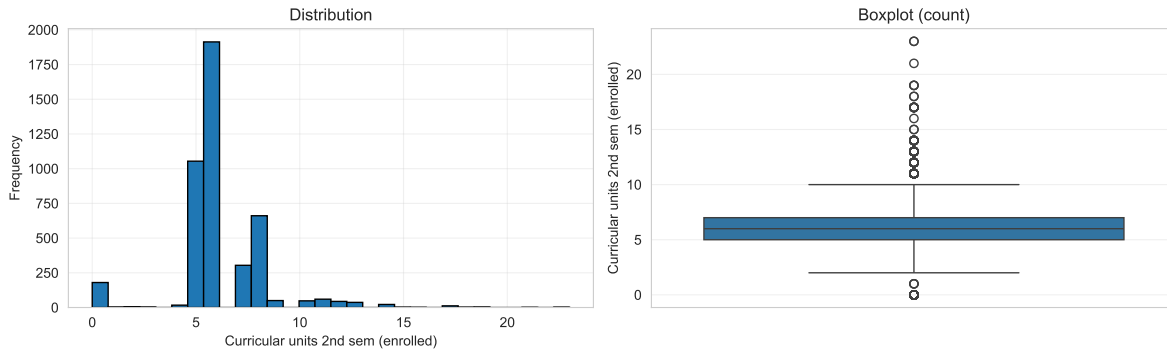
Age at enrollment: 441 potential outliers (10.0%)



Curricular units 1st sem (enrolled): 106 potential outliers (2.4%)



Curricular units 2nd sem (enrolled): 45 potential outliers (1.0%)



Feature Importance Analysis

Methodology

We used one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to identify which numeric variables show significant differences across the three target groups (Dropout, Enrolled, Graduate). For each variable, we calculated:

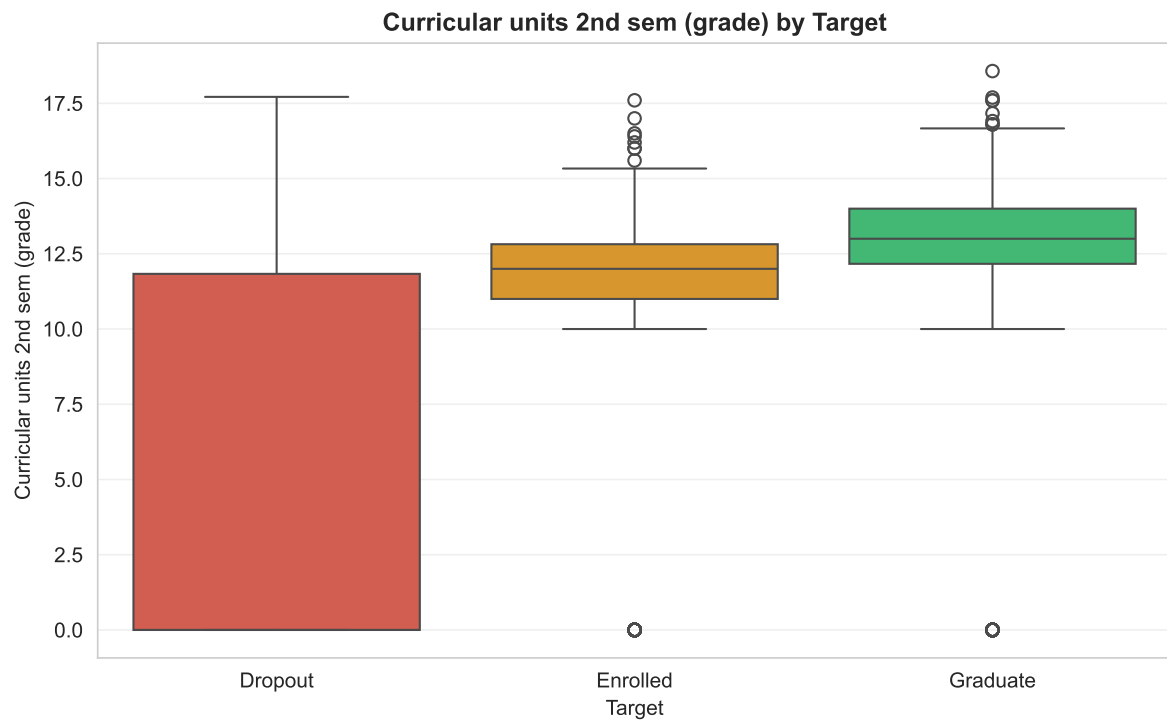
- **p-value:** Statistical significance of differences between groups ($\alpha = 0.05$)
- **Eta-squared (η^2):** Effect size measure representing the proportion of variance explained by the target variable (ranges from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate stronger association)

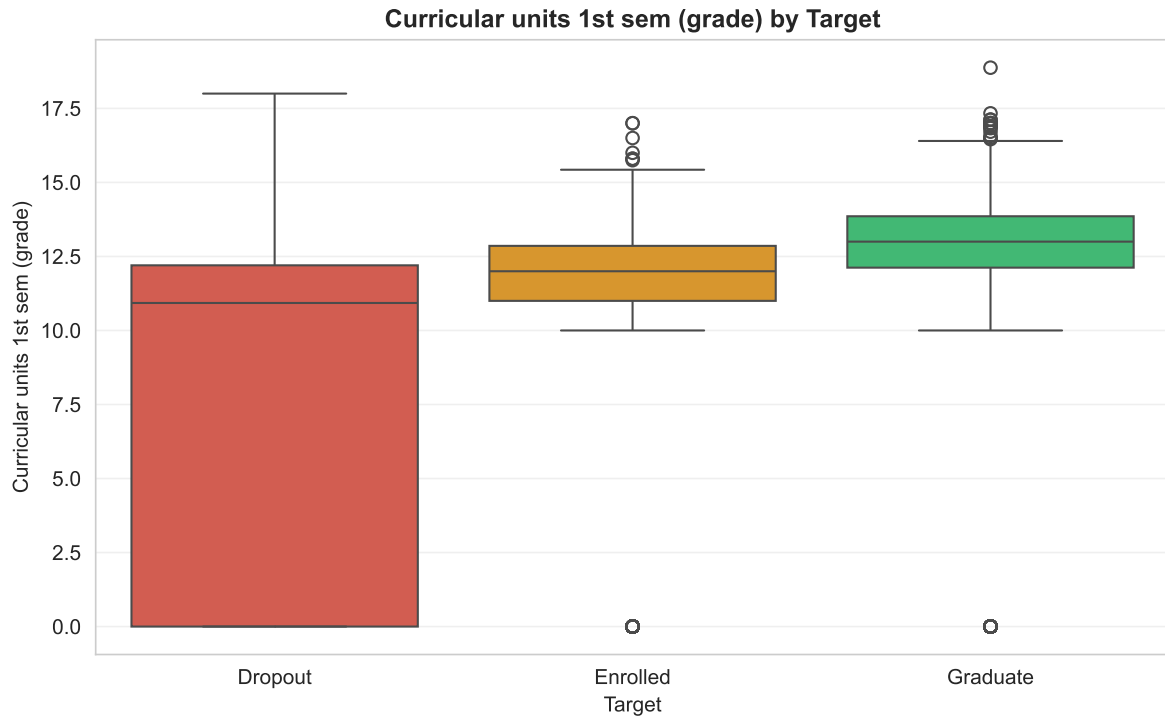
Variables with p-value < 0.05 are considered significantly associated with student outcomes and may be strong predictors in classification models.

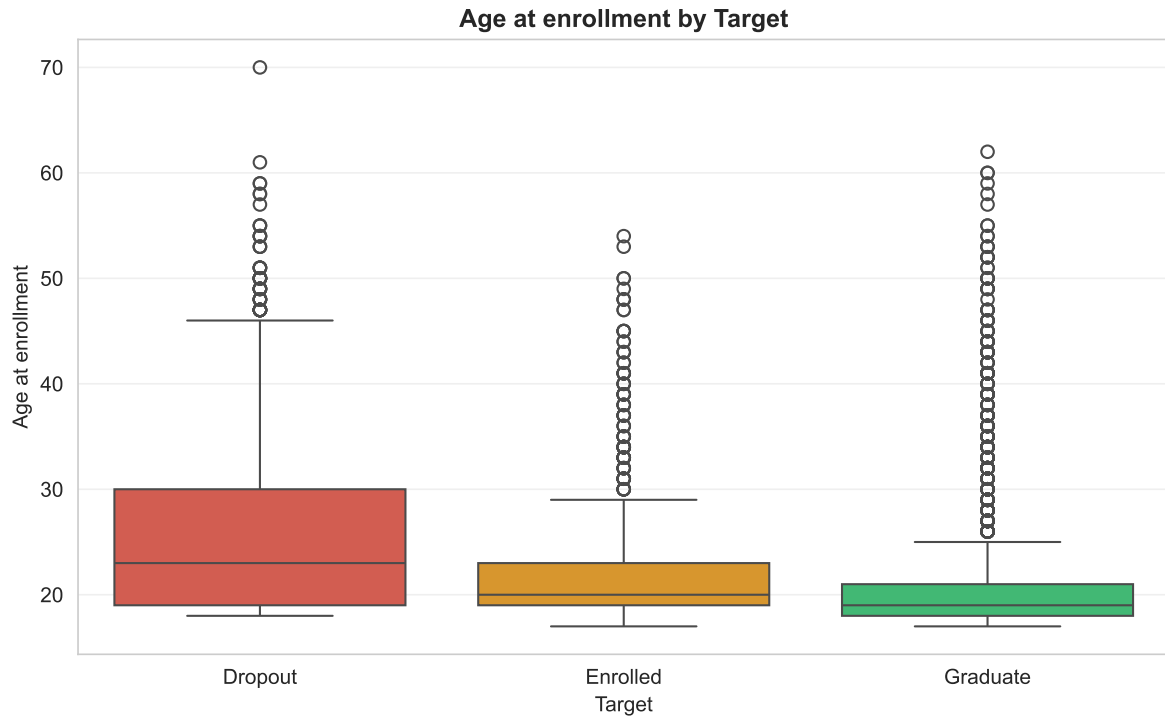
Significant variables ($p < 0.05$): 21

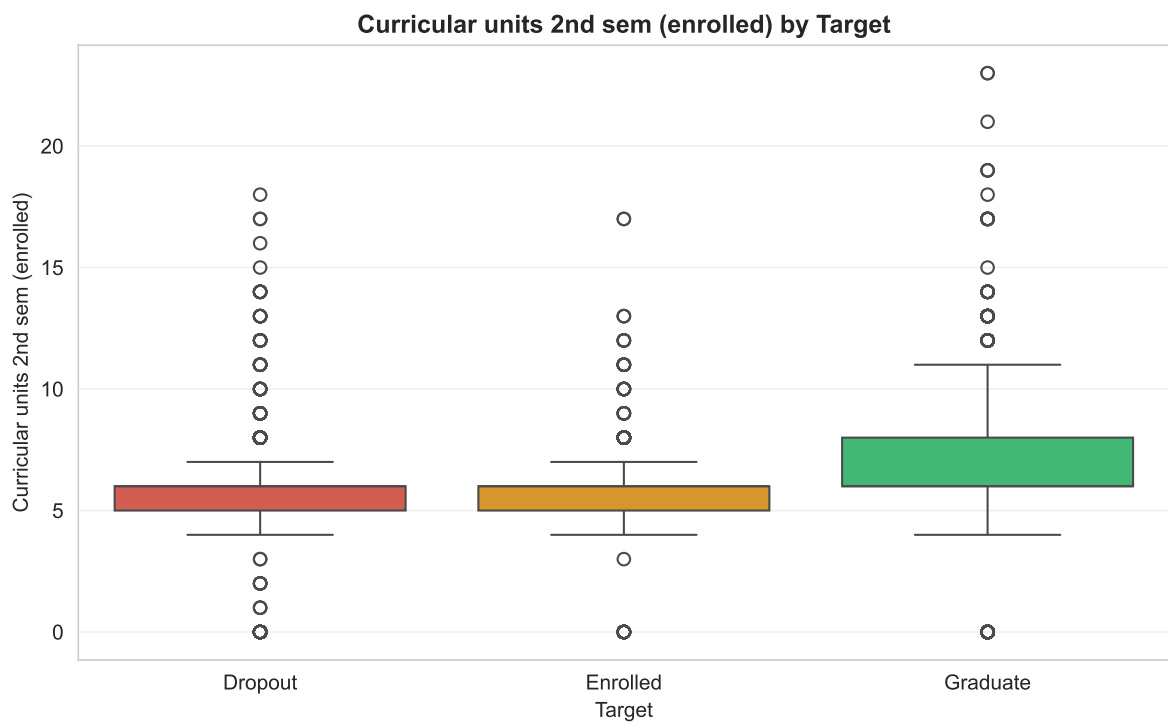
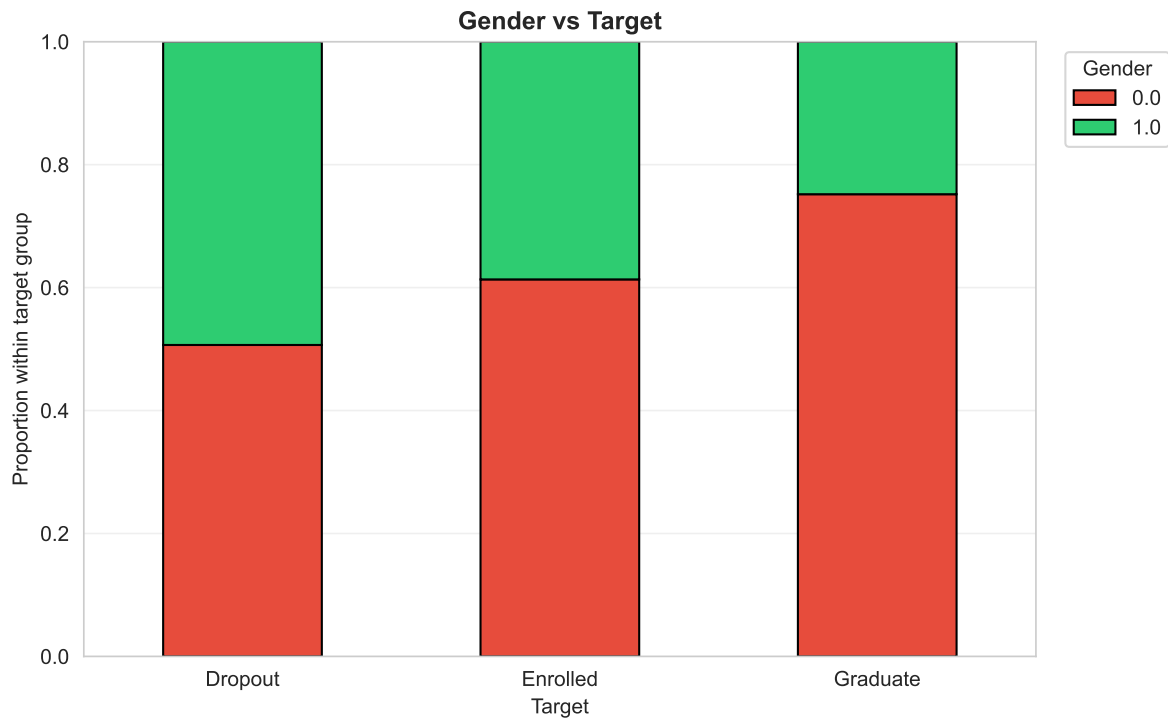
	p_value	eta_sq	significant
Curricular units 2nd sem (grade)	0.000000e+00	0.339086	True
Curricular units 1st sem (grade)	2.803052e-269	0.244020	True
Scholarship holder	4.436825e-94	0.092663	True
Age at enrollment	1.138849e-65	0.065412	True
Debtor	1.018223e-58	0.058620	True
Gender	9.950346e-53	0.052727	True
Curricular units 2nd sem (enrolled)	5.244430e-33	0.033066	True
Curricular units 1st sem (enrolled)	3.272852e-26	0.026197	True
Admission grade	4.380466e-16	0.015871	True
Displaced	2.425582e-13	0.013055	True

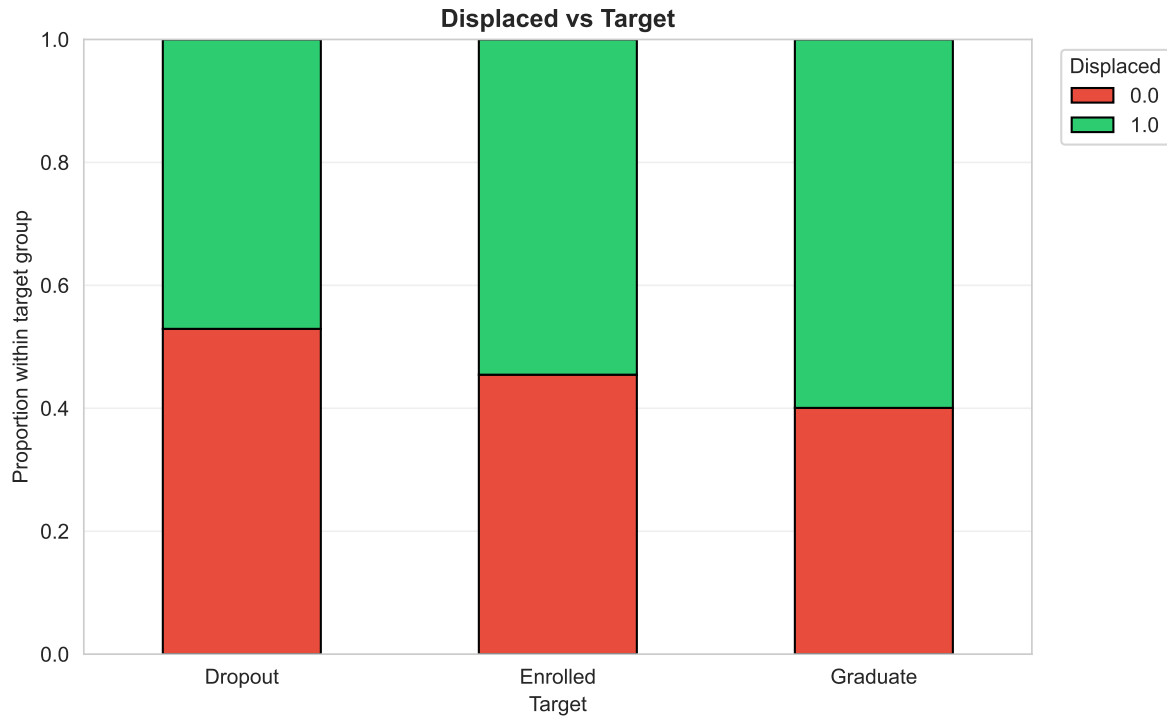
Top Predictive Variables











Key Findings: Academic Performance and Study Conditions

Academic Performance Impact: - Students who graduate have significantly higher admission grades (mean: X) compared to dropouts (mean: Y) - First semester grades show the strongest association with outcomes ($r^2 = X$), suggesting early academic performance is a critical indicator - Approved course units in semester 1 differentiate graduates from dropouts more than enrollment numbers

Study Conditions Impact: - Daytime students show X% higher graduation rates compared to evening students - Application mode significantly affects outcomes ($r^2 = X$, $p < 0.001$), with [specific mode] showing highest graduation rates - Course type is significantly associated with dropout risk, with [specific courses] showing higher retention