

A Case Study for the Successful Development and Assessment of a University-Wide Academic Recovery Program for First-Year Students

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Abstract: Coastal Carolina University was experiencing increasingly low retention rates for students after their first year. University leadership issued a call to action to address these alarming trends and increase first-year student retention. The Student Success Team, composed of student support practitioners, data analysts, faculty partners, and academic affairs leadership, undertook a data-driven, collaborative approach to identify and address underlying retention barriers. The multifaceted approach ultimately yielded successful results. An academic recovery program was implemented in Fall 2018 for students on academic probation with increasingly positive results over six semesters. Eligible students successfully completing the program in Spring 2020 were retained at 66.0% versus those who did not at 39.7%. This paper provides a roadmap to develop, implement, and assess a successful university-wide academic recovery program for first-year students, including updating an outdated probation policy, creating course curriculum, developing a comprehensive academic recovery program, and creating an academic coaching department to support students reactively and proactively through meaningful intervention. This has also led to investing in predictive analysis tools to further our success.

keywords: probation; academic recovery; academic support; academic coaching; retention

Introduction

Coastal Carolina University was experiencing increasingly low retention rates for first-year students. Although first-year college students embody a unique set of challenges in successfully navigating the rigor of a college classroom and campus, researchers have reported many first-year college students enter college confident they have the skill set to be successful academically (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). However, despite their confidence, as many as one fourth of undergraduate college students will be placed on academic probation at least one time in their college careers (Burke Leon et al., 2019). University leadership issued a call to action to address these alarming trends and increase first-year retention and academic success. Surveys of non-retained students identified financial concerns as a major reason for leaving the institution along with personal reasons. Data showed that a high percentage of students were experiencing loss of financial aid due to being placed on academic probation and failing to complete required credit hours in their first year. Recent national data has shown that three quarters of students entering college have expressed concern regarding their finances and how they will pay for college (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). The need to construct a university-wide academic recovery program was necessary and seemed to address an easily identified population for intervention.

The development of a multifaceted academic recovery program required purposeful planning to include new curriculum addressing academic skill development as a key intervention, updating the university probation policy, creating an academic coaching department, and procuring an early alert system to track student academic needs. It is evident that colleges, and most importantly students, benefit from having courses and programming designed to support first-year students (Romo & Jacobo, 2020), especially those lacking academic skills. The academic recovery program included both the required enrollment in an academic skill development course and academic coaching appointments. The theoretical basis for these components being part of our intervention stemmed from Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012) and Baxter-Magolda's self-authorship theory (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2004). This paper aims to provide practitioners with a template for designing, implementing, and assessing meaningful academic recovery programming grounded in institutional data and current literature.

Literature Review

A review of the literature shows that many incoming freshman students enter college with expectations of performing well academically. Researchers have found that many first-year students are entering college assured that they have what it takes to be successful academically. Eagan et al. found that 92.3% of surveyed students earned at least a B average in high school (2015, p. 31). Yet, 55.2% reported spending 5 hours or less studying or doing homework each week (p. 48). Even more interestingly, 73.5% rated their academic abilities as "above average" or in the "highest 10%" of their peers (p. 51). Yet, despite incoming students' confidence, there appears to be a serious discrepancy between students' and professors' expectations regarding the level of effort that is required to be a successful learner at the college level. Researchers and practitioners are seeing an overwhelming deficit in the metacognitive skills of college students (Gruenbaum, 2012; Nash-Ditzel, 2010), and assert that students are entering college with incorrect assumptions about what it means to learn (McGuire & McGuire, 2015). They are expecting to have a transformative experience in class and to leave lectures having learned all of the course material (McGuire & McGuire, 2015). According to a study conducted by Skyfactor Mapworks (2017) on students at Ball State University, "less than 1% of first-year students expect to receive a grade low enough to be placed on academic probation following their first term. Of those reported, only 34% earned a high enough GPA to be removed from academic probation during their spring term" (p. 2).

Respondents of the *2019 Your First College Year Survey* through the Higher Education Research Institute, found "about half (49.4%) of respondents found it somewhat or very difficult to manage their time effectively, 35.7% of students had difficulty developing effective study skills, and 37.9% of students had difficulty adjusting to the academic demands of college" (Romo & Jacobo, 2020, p. 4). Additionally, Renzulli (2015) writes, "Qualitative findings demonstrate that students were unready for completing basic tasks that predict success in their postsecondary lives, such as attending class regularly, communicating with their professors, completing required reading, and employing minimal study, self-regulation, and time management skills" (p. 34).

Recent literature further suggests that curricular interventions including study skills along with other services like academic coaching and career counseling are successful in supporting students who are experiencing academic difficulties in college (Burke Leon et al., 2019). There has been sufficient evidence including Renzulli (2015) where it has been determined that students on academic probation need specific interventions and support that can be provided with a combination of curricular interventions and more specifically coaching or advising.

Background

Call to Action

Prior to the creation and implementation of the Student Opportunity for Academic Recovery (SOAR) program, a university-wide, academic recovery program did not exist at Coastal Carolina University. The administration worked for several years prior to 2017 reviewing student data and information to identify clear action items to support student retention and academic success. From Fall 2015 to Fall 2017, the 2018 Coastal Carolina University Fact Book reported an average incoming freshman class of 2,336 (Coastal Carolina University, 2018). Incoming freshman student cohorts from that time period earning academic probation status by the beginning of their first spring term averaged 6.0% (142 students) with an average retention rate of 23.9% (34 students) returning for their second year and 18.3% (26 students) returning their third year.

The university announced in September 2017 a new funding opportunity supporting the university strategic plan specifically targeted for high impact engagement. Areas providing academic instruction, student support services, academic support services, or institutional support were encouraged to apply. The creation of programs to increase student success, student achievement, or student success could be funded for up to three years by meeting specific benchmarks outlined in the proposal. In January 2018, a Student Achievement Funding (SAF) proposal was created by the student success team and accepted, providing the financial support needed to create the Coastal Student Success Center, which included creating an academic coaching department with a director and academic coaching specialists. Several key partnerships were created with other areas including Institutional Research, Assessment and Analysis; Student Affairs; faculty; and key individuals in academic affairs.

Updating Academic Policies

According to Astin (1985), student involvement consists of five basic postulates, the fifth stating “the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice was directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (Astin, 1985, p. 136). Institutions can contribute by offering activities or programs that enhance student involvement (Seidman, 2012, p. 75). In early February 2018, a sub-committee created within the Associate Dean Council, facilitated by the assistant provost of student success initiatives, began work updating the current academic probation policy in coordination with the registrar and director of financial aid. At the same time, the ACED 101 Academic Strategy Development course was presented by the assistant provost of student success initiatives to the Academic Affairs Committee and Faculty Senate for approval.

Revisions proposed by the committee included the following major points: no student can be placed on academic suspension without first serving a semester on academic probation; students who have earned less than 30 credits and are placed on probation must be enrolled in a designated section of ACED 101 and assigned an academic coach along with four required individual meetings; requirements imposed on students by an individual college should be enforceable in some way and should therefore be explained in detail at the beginning of each college’s section of the catalog; a new status called “Academic Advisory” will be applied to students who are on the borderline of reaching academic probation, in an effort to steer them in the right direction without imposing any major penalties; and an academic coaching department will be created to work with students on probation who have earned fewer than 30 credits. The updated academic probation policy was approved to be included in the 2018-2019 University Catalog (see Appendix A).

Implementation

With the funding provided by the SAF grant, work started with ensuring all key policies and academic areas were on board with the creation of a new program. Passing an updated version of the Probation and Suspension policy, obtaining approval for the ACED 101 course through Academic Affairs Committee and Faculty Senate were also key steps in the foundational process described above.

Collaboration and support were essential with campus partners, which included college deans, associate deans, faculty, faculty senators and committee chairs, and the Provost's Office. These elements were crucial in providing the infrastructure to create and support a university-wide academic probation recovery program.

SOAR Program Design

The multifaceted academic recovery program, SOAR, was designed to help students on academic probation develop skills and strategies necessary to return to good academic standing with the institution and recover from past academic difficulties to maintain progress toward academic success. Based on best practices of programs like the Phoenix Program at Indiana University of Bloomington (Burke Leon et al., 2019), SOAR program participants are paired with an academic coaching specialist and required to attend four one-on-one academic coaching appointments during the semester they are in the program. Students develop an academic success plan with their academic coach to guide in goal setting and continue to track their progress toward attainment of good academic standing with the support of their academic coach. Developing personal goals related to their academic success aligns with Baxter-Magolda's self-authorship theory (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2004) with the goal of helping empower the student to set goals and take responsibility for his or her academic future and develop strategies to hold themselves accountable for meeting academic goals and requirements.

Additionally, SOAR participants are enrolled in ACED 101, a zero-credit hour course taught by the academic coaching specialists that meets approximately 2.5 hours each week. SOAR participants also meet with their academic advisor at the start of the semester to discuss any needed semester adjustments and to understand how to benefit from pertinent academic policies that could improve their GPA, such as course repeat forgiveness.

SOAR Program Objectives

The main objectives of the academic recovery program are to aid in academically supporting and retaining traditionally high-risk student populations, to include students on academic probation and students who have appealed suspension. Major components of the SOAR program include the ACED 101 course and one-on-one academic coaching appointments. The main focuses of both components are to help students understand personal areas of strength and challenge; identify personal academic goals and support needs; understand their role as a college student and develop a personal strategy for success; and develop critical thinking, metacognitive skills, and positive relational behaviors. This aligns with both Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012) and Baxter-Magolda's self-authorship theory (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2004), as well as best practices for academic support (Nilson, 2013).

Benchmarks focusing on student learning outcomes, GPA, academic standing, credits earned, retention, and broader academic reflections were developed prior to the implementation of the academic recovery program. Benchmarks related to student learning outcomes included students demonstrating an understanding of personal academic goals and identifying support needs through completion of an Individualized Action Plan worksheet. Research has found that students need support identifying strategies that lead to true comprehension (Nash-Ditzel, 2010), understanding how to practically use these strategies, and understanding which strategies are most effective for different cognitive tasks (Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Borkowski & Muthukrishna, 1992). Through the completion of an end of the semester reflective assessment, students are able to demonstrate an understanding of academic success strategies such as identifying professor expectations and defining class preparedness as well as demonstrating development of critical thinking and metacognitive skills and behaviors. Students reflect on their active note taking, active reading and test preparation abilities, their learning experiences, tracking their outcomes, and knowledge of how to make necessary adjustments. Adjustments in these benchmarks continue to be updated to align with the assessment of the academic recovery program, the ACED 101 course, and the academic coaching staff.

Academic Strategy Development Course

The ACED 101 course objectives are to assist students with identifying areas of strengths and challenges, setting appropriate academic goals, recognizing support needs, implementing strategies to allow them to successfully achieve their goals, as well as assist in developing critical thinking and metacognitive skills (Pintrich, 2002) and behaviors based on students' course goals (DeVilbiss, 2014). Over the course of the semester, students receive assistance identifying personal barriers to success, setting appropriate academic goals, and developing and implementing metacognitive strategies in their courses (Pintrich et al., 1987). Students practice reflecting on their academic experiences, and learn to track their outcomes and make necessary adjustments to their academic approaches.

In addition to daily group work, the course centers on four main assignments designed to support students in building stronger planning, reflecting, and self-monitoring skills. The academic plan, midterm grade audit, and strategy assignments were adapted from a variety of sources, including Steiner (2016), the University of South Carolina (2018), and Humphrey (2012).

Academic Plan Assignment

The academic plan assignment sets the foundation for the course. Students are guided in creating a semester action plan outlining their goals and the steps they plan to take toward achieving them. They are asked to reflect on their previous academic experiences, and explain factors impacting their success both positively and negatively. Students are guided to consider their areas of academic strengths and challenges, identify support needs, and discuss their goals in detail. Next, students develop an action plan addressing areas of strengths and challenges, personal barriers, goals, opportunities for growth, and strategies that will aid in their success. Students receive feedback from their academic coach and instructor on their semester action plans and are encouraged to refer back to these plans and make regular adjustments. Students are also asked to set goals for academic coaching at the start of the semester and discuss these goals with their academic coach.

Course Strategy Assignment

The course strategy assignment requires students to set more specific goals for each course in which they are enrolled and identify course-specific strategies. Students analyze their syllabi to identify faculty priorities, graded opportunities, and course policies, and use this information to set grade goals, identify appropriate supports, and create action plans detailing specific steps they plan to take to achieve their goals. Students are asked to consider the specific actions they need to take to prepare for class and to reflect on how to achieve full participation in class. Students receive feedback from their academic coach and instructor on their course strategy worksheets and course preparation plans and are encouraged to refer back to these plans and make regular adjustments as course preparation strategies are introduced and discussed in class.

Midterm Grade Audit Assignment

At the midpoint of the semester, students complete a midterm grade audit assignment for each class, identifying their current grade, remaining assignments and exams, and a final grade goal. The midterm grade audit assignment includes an opportunity for students to reflect on their approach to the course and to assess what strategies are working (and why), which strategies are unsuccessful (and why), and adjustments they think they should make to their approach. Finally, students are asked to develop an action plan for the second half of the semester that aligns with the class and student's goals, and addresses the challenges and information that the student identified earlier in the worksheet. The assignment helps students with self-assessment and monitoring by setting the expectation that they should be checking their grades, and helps them calculate their current grade and likely final grade. Students unsure of their grades are prompted to investigate further, and the ACED 101 instructor helps these students prepare for subsequent meetings with their faculty to discuss their grades.

Strategy Project Assignment

The strategy project assignment encompasses the entire semester. Students have an opportunity to apply the metacognitive skills and behaviors they are learning in ACED 101 to another course and reflect on the experience. Students are required to meet with their professor to discuss their previous test or paper performance and request feedback from the instructor about ways to improve their approach for the next exam or assignment. Students are asked to reflect on their test taking/paper writing experience as well, and to delve into which questions they answered incorrectly and why (or areas of the paper that the professor indicated needed improvement). Students then select a metacognitive study/writing strategy they believe will be most appropriate for their specific exam/paper, and create a study/writing plan detailing how they will prepare for their upcoming test/paper. Students reflect on their experiences through a series of written reflections and an oral presentation.

Academic Coaching

Research has found that assistance must be consistent and frequent in order for it to be effective (Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Simpson & Nist, 2003). Therefore, four academic coaching appointments are required of students participating in the SOAR program. The appointments aim to supplement the ACED 101 course by providing personalized support to the student. After participating in self-assessment, reflection, and academic goal setting in class, SOAR students work with their academic coach to develop a personalized academic success plan specifically designed to address the factors that have previously impacted their academic success.

Schlossberg's transition model supports the approach used by the academic coaching specialists, using the three steps of "1) Approaching Transitions: Transition Identification and Transition Process; 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System; and 3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38). The academic coaching specialists facilitate meaningful, reflective conversations; provide constructive feedback; and challenge and support each student in strategically approaching their semester. The final step of the transition model, the 4 S System of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies, is sufficiently integrated in the philosophy of the approach used in the academic coaching appointments in assessing how a student copes with their academic situation. Anderson et al. (2012) explains these "variables as potential assets and liabilities" (p. 63) in that a student's assets may outweigh the liability of making adjustments suggested by academic coaches, or the liabilities may now outweigh the assets, in that following through on the suggestions of the academic coaches may tend to be more difficult for the student. Research suggests that we must teach students to "acquire self-regulation skills and assume responsibility for their learning" (Nilson, 2013, p. 4; see also Zimmerman, 2002).

Appointments are strategically spaced throughout the semester to provide support at critical points. The first appointment, which takes place during the first two weeks of the semester, centers on rapport building, communicating expectations of the SOAR program, explaining the probation policy, understanding the GPA requirement needed to return to good standing, and assisting the student with setting an appropriate semester GPA goal setting and revising their action plan created in the ACED 101 course to align with their semester GPA goal. Additionally, academic coaching specialists assist students in identifying academic skill needs for the semester and discuss their plan for developing these skills.

The second appointment takes place approximately one month into the semester. Academic coaching specialists ask students to reflect on their academic progress and discuss their courses in greater detail, including faculty expectations and how they are meeting their academic goals. Students are also asked to reflect on current or expected challenges that may impact their GPA goal attainment and discuss the action-oriented safeguards they are creating to ensure identified challenges do not encumber their academic success. Conversations center on strategy assessment, adjustment, and action. The second appointment is intended to encourage students to build on the course strategy worksheet assignment from the ACED 101 course and reflect on how they can be more active or strategic in a particular course.

Appointment three occurs around the midpoint of the semester and provides an opportunity for students to gain a realistic understanding of their midterm grades and likely academic outcomes if they maintain their current approaches and behaviors. Academic coaching specialists encourage students to

continue in their self-assessment and self-monitoring skills, reflect meaningfully on their current academic progress, and identify and make needed adjustments at this critical time of the semester. Students review their ACED 101 midterm grade audit assignments with their academic coach, and are provided with direct feedback on their reflections and resulting action plans. When needed, academic coaching specialists assist students with gathering and analyzing grading information, making meaning of faculty feedback, and preparing for subsequent meetings with faculty.

The final appointment occurs during the last month of semester, and is designed to support students in the final quarter of the semester including revisiting end-of-semester outcomes and likely consequences. Students discuss remaining graded opportunities and likely academic outcomes with their academic coaching specialist. Students on track to meet their GPA goal are encouraged to consider how they will maintain their motivation and academic approach through the end of the semester and to consider actions they could take to earn higher grades than originally targeted. Students not on track to meet their GPA goal in one or more courses are assisted with developing an action plan for improving their outcomes wherever possible. Academic coaching specialists also provide feedback on students' final exam or project preparation plans for each course. Additionally, students are asked to reflect on their skill development from the semester and identify areas of growth and improvement. SOAR participants are also supported in creating a plan for the following semester that includes maintaining strong academic behaviors and identifying continued opportunities for growth in the context of their upcoming courses.

Impact and Results

A comparison between participants and non-participants is used to support program effectiveness by reporting student GPA, retention, and academic standing. The university-wide academic recovery program began Fall 2018 with promising results; however, it continued to face challenges with academic campus partners concerned about its long-term potential for success. During Fall 2018, 84 (79.2%) of the 106 students eligible to participate in the academic recovery program earned good academic standing, 16.7% maintained probation status, and 23.8% earned suspension status. Of the students who earned good academic standing, the increase in term GPA from prior term to the end of Fall 2018 was 0.97 grade points and the increase in cumulative GPA was 0.48 grade points. The students who maintained probation saw a term GPA increase of 1.35 grade points and cumulative GPA increase of 0.34 grade points. Furthermore, students who earned suspension even saw an increase in term GPA of 0.58 grade points and an increase in cumulative GPA of 0.30 grade points. Overall, students who participated and completed the program increased their term GPA an average 1.05 grade points and cumulative GPA 0.45 grade points. Of the 22 students who did not participate, nine dropped or withdrew from the program, two earned indefinite suspension, six earned first suspension, two earned probation, and three earned good academic standing.

At the end of the Fall 2018 semester, student reflection data was taken directly from both the ACED 101 course assignments and end-of-semester survey. The end-of-semester survey response rate was 72.8% and qualitative survey data suggested this student population felt a sense of urgency and motivation to do well in the program. Students believed that this mandatory program was beneficial to them, and they would recommend it to other students. Of the survey respondents, 89.8% indicated that they felt they had accomplished at least 75.0% of the skill goals (time management, note taking, etc.) through academic coaching and the ACED 101 course, and also felt academic coaching assisted them this term. In addition, 82.5% of survey respondents indicated they would recommend academic coaching to other students. SOAR students also felt that the program contributed to their self-efficacy and confidence. As a result of participation in the academic recovery program, 88.1% indicated they felt that they could be successful at Coastal Carolina University and 78.0% indicated they are a more confident student.

Anonymous SOAR participant reflections were collected at the end of the Fall 2018 semester. One student reflected:

My study strategies have changed tremendously since last year. The two previous semesters, I did not bother studying until the day before the test. I only used textbooks and the unorganized notes that I took in class (if I took any)... I now; visit my professors, utilize math help, take notes every day, keep a planner, create flashcards and outlines, and more. I am now more motivated to jump out of my comfort zone and push myself to achieve good grades. I was never confident in academics, and I proved that to everyone my freshman year. This year, I not only wanted to prove to everyone else that I can earn good grades, but I wanted to prove it to myself. I now reach out to other classmates and have study groups for each class. I am not afraid to email my teachers with any questions that I have, and I am not afraid to email them when I make a mistake. I have learned a lot from my ACED course because it gave me many organizing and study tools to use in my everyday school life. I have applied those tools into my academic life, and it has worked out for me so far. I feel more organized, prepared, and confident about upcoming tests, quizzes, and projects.

A second student shared the following reflection:

I want to start by stating, last semester there is no possible way that I would have taken so much time to prepare for a test or exam. I honestly would have just skimmed the information right out of the book about an hour before the test actually took place. I really feel as though this project and the methods I used really helped me get rid of some bad habits I had developed last year and put me on the right path to efficiently and effectively study.

A third student acknowledged:

My study strategies have changed over the semester by me actually trying to get a good grade and learn the material. I am now taking more time to study, create notecards, and fill out the study guide. I will definitely be using these study strategies that I learned in this class for my spring semester classes.

Since the launch of SOAR in Fall 2018, data have been collected comparing the term and cumulative GPAs, retention, and academic standing results of students on academic probation three years prior to the implementation of the SOAR program (Fall 2015 to Fall 2017) and three years after implementation (Fall 2018 to Fall 2020). Academic probation for this population is defined as students with less than 30 credit hours with a GPA below 2.00. Successful completion of the SOAR program is defined as earning a Satisfactory (S) grade in the ACED 101 course and participating in academic coaching appointments. Also, it should be noted that students eligible to participate in the SOAR program during the fall semester are typically students that have completed, at minimum, one full year of college and are beginning their third semester. These students have more than likely lost their financial aid and if a South Carolina resident, a state scholarship. Contrastingly, most students eligible to participate in the SOAR program during the spring semester are typically in their second full semester and have yet to experience the consequences of losing financial aid or, if a South Carolina resident, their state scholarship. Thus far, data supports the program's overall positive impact on students eligible to participate in SOAR who successfully complete the program.

Term and Cumulative GPA Results

Figure 1 provides term GPA comparisons from Fall 2015 to Fall 2020 based on ACED 101 results. The data show that students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a term GPA 1.09 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade, and a term GPA 1.47 grade points higher than students who did not enroll. Figure 2 provides term GPA comparisons from Spring 2016 to Spring 2021 based on ACED 101 results. Much like the fall results, the spring results show students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a term GPA 1.29 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade, and a term GPA 1.55 grade points higher than students who did not enroll. It should be noted that during the Spring 2020 semester, students transitioned to online learning from March until the end of the semester. Also, during the 2020-2021 academic year,

students took all courses mainly online and/or streaming due to the implementation of campus safety protocol, reductions in class sizes, and social distancing as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Figure 3 provides cumulative GPA comparisons from Fall 2015 to Fall 2020 based on ACED 101 results. Similar to the term GPA results, students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a cumulative GPA 0.55 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade, and a cumulative GPA 0.68 grade points higher than students who did not enroll. Figure 4 provides cumulative GPA comparisons from Spring 2016 to Spring 2021 based on ACED 101 results. Again, the results are positive: students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a cumulative GPA 0.89 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade and students who did not enroll.

Student Retention Results

Table 1 presents retention data of Fall 2015 to Fall 2019 first-time, full-time freshman cohorts on probation by their first spring term. Retention results from Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 are prior to the start of the SOAR Program and show an average of 23.9% of students were retained to their second year and 18.3% of students were retained to their third year. Retention results from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 are after implementation of the SOAR program. Retention of those students to their second year who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged 71.0%. In addition, retention of students to their second year who earned an Unsatisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged 37.4% and students who did not enroll in ACED 101 averaged 25.0%. Students in Table 1 are defined as first-time, full-time freshmen earning less than 30 institutional credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

Academic Standing Results

Table 2 provides the ACED 101 grade results and academic standing earned at the end of the spring term of the first-time, full-time Fall 2015 to Fall 2020 freshmen cohorts on probation by the beginning of their first spring term. Results from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 cohorts are prior to the implementation of SOAR and the results from the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts are after the implementation of the SOAR program. Prior to the implementation of the SOAR program, good academic standing earned from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 student cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen on probation by the first spring term was 16.3% compared to the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts of 35.8%. Also, prior to the implementation of the SOAR program, students earning continued probation from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 student cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen on probation by the first spring term was 18.3% compared to the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts of 27.7%. Additionally, prior to the implementation of the SOAR program, students earning suspension from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 student cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen on probation by the first spring term was 65.3% compared to the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts of 36.5%.

During the Spring 2020 semester, the Coastal Carolina University Provost Office implemented a Grading Policy Adjustment in effect for that semester only. This policy adjustment impacted the academic standing results of students at the end of the Spring 2020 semester and going into the Fall 2021 semester. Per the Provost's Office, effective for the Spring 2020 semester only, the following academic policy adjustments were implemented, "(1) Students may elect to change their final course grading method from traditional grading (A, B, C, etc.) to Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) for each course they are taking in Spring 2020, (2) The Last Day to Withdraw from an Individual Course(s) with a "W" is changed from April 1, 2020 to April 29, 2020, (3) No student will be placed on Academic Suspension for the Fall 2020 semester, and (4) All other academic policies remain in force" (D. Ennis, personal communication, March 24, 2020). The temporary policy adjustment made by administration potentially affected the outcome of the data results from Spring 2020 and concurrent semesters to include Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

Conclusion

Researchers have found that many first-year students are entering college assured that they have what it takes to be successful academically. These common assumptions are problematic in that learning does not happen accidentally. Meaningful learning requires effort (Brown et al., 2014), strategy, and intention (Nilson, 2013). It requires motivation (Ambrose et al., 2010) and reflection (Lovett, 2013). The creation of a university-wide academic probation program—encompassing interventions of academic coaching, an academic skill development course, student self-assessment and reflection—has proven to support students in their academic success and retention. The implementation of an early alert system has allowed the university the ability to offer these resources purposefully to students prior to academic probation. As faculty and other campus partners have seen the success of the program, their desire to support students through the early alert system and direct referral has allowed students to participate voluntarily in academic coaching and ACED 101 prior to finding themselves on academic probation. The program has continued to gain momentum and the positive impact and results have allowed for continued growth in supporting students. Based on the success of the program, funding has been added to the operating budget.

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Tables

Table 1: Retention of Fall 2015 to Fall 2019 First-time, Full-time Freshman Cohorts on Probation by First Spring Term

Cohort	ACED 101 Spring grade ¹			Total # on probation ²		^a Returned 2nd yr		^b Returned 3rd yr	
	S	U	Not enrolled			N	%	N	%
Fall 2015				125		35	28.0	30	24.0
Fall 2016				183		45	24.6	30	16.4
Fall 2017				118		22	18.6	18	15.3
Fall 2018	96					60	62.5	45	46.9
		96				16	16.7	18	18.8
			62			12	19.4	8	12.9
				254					
Fall 2019	77					63	81.8		
		107				60	56.1		
			62			19	30.6		
				156					

¹The ACED 101 course was first offered Fall 2018.

²Students in this table are defined as first-time, full-time freshmen earning less than 30 credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

^aRetention of students to their second year prior to implementation of the SOAR program from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 cohorts averaged 23.9%. Retention of students to their second year after implementation of the SOAR program from the Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 cohorts who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged 71.0%, students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade averaged 37.4% and students who did not enroll averaged 25.0%.

^bRetention of students to their third year prior to implementation of the SOAR program from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 cohorts averaged 18.3%.

Table 2: ACED 101 Grade and Academic Standing Earned at the End of Spring Term of the First-time, Full-time Fall 2015 to Fall 2020 Freshmen Cohorts on Probation by the Beginning of First Spring Term

Academic Standing at End of Spring Term										
Probation term	Total # on probation ¹	ACED 101 Grade ²			^a Good academic standing		^b Probation		^c Suspension	
		S	U	N/A or did not enroll	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spring 2016	153			153	29	18.95	34	22.20	90	58.80
Spring 2017	209			209	35	16.75	38	18.20	136	65.00
Spring 2018	140			140	18	12.86	20	14.30	102	72.90
Spring 2019		108			63	58.30	15	13.90	30	27.80
			108		19	17.60	7	6.50	82	75.90
				73	31	42.50	3	4.10	39	53.40
Spring 2019	289				113	39.10	25	8.70	151	52.20
Spring 2020	286				123	43.00	163	57.00	0	0.00
		91			67	73.62	24	26.37	0	0.00
			123		30	24.40	93	75.60	0	0.00
				72	26	36.11	46	63.88	0	0.00
Spring 2021	328				87	26.50	62	19.00	179	54.60
		49			30	61.22	15	30.61	4	8.16
			199		26	13.00	35	17.58	138	69.34
				80	31	38.75	12	15.00	37	46.25

¹Students in this table are defined as first-time, full-time freshmen earning less than 30 credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

²The ACED 101 course was first offered Fall 2018.

³Per University administrative decision due to the COVID-19 outbreak, no students earned suspension status Spring 2020.

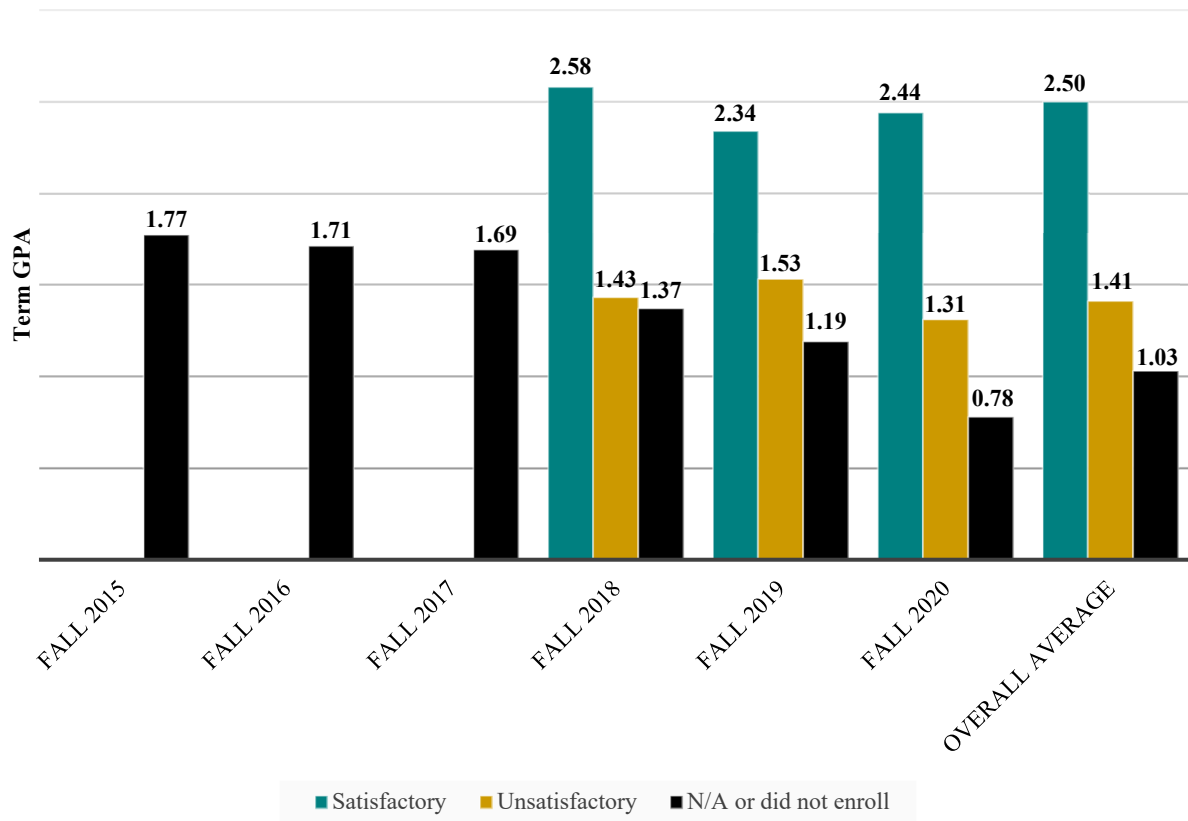
^aGood academic standing earned from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen on probation by the first spring term prior to the implementation of the SOAR program was 16.3% compared to 35.8% from the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts after implementation of the SOAR program.

^bContinued probation earned from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen on probation by the first spring term prior to the implementation of the SOAR program was 18.3% compared to 27.7% from the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts after implementation of the SOAR program.

^cSuspension earned from the Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen on probation by the first spring term prior to implementation of the SOAR program was 65.3% compared to 36.5% from the Fall 2018 to Fall 2020 cohorts after implementation of the SOAR program.

Figures

Figure 1: *SOAR Program Fall 2015 to Fall 2020 Term GPA Comparisons Based on ACED 101 Results*



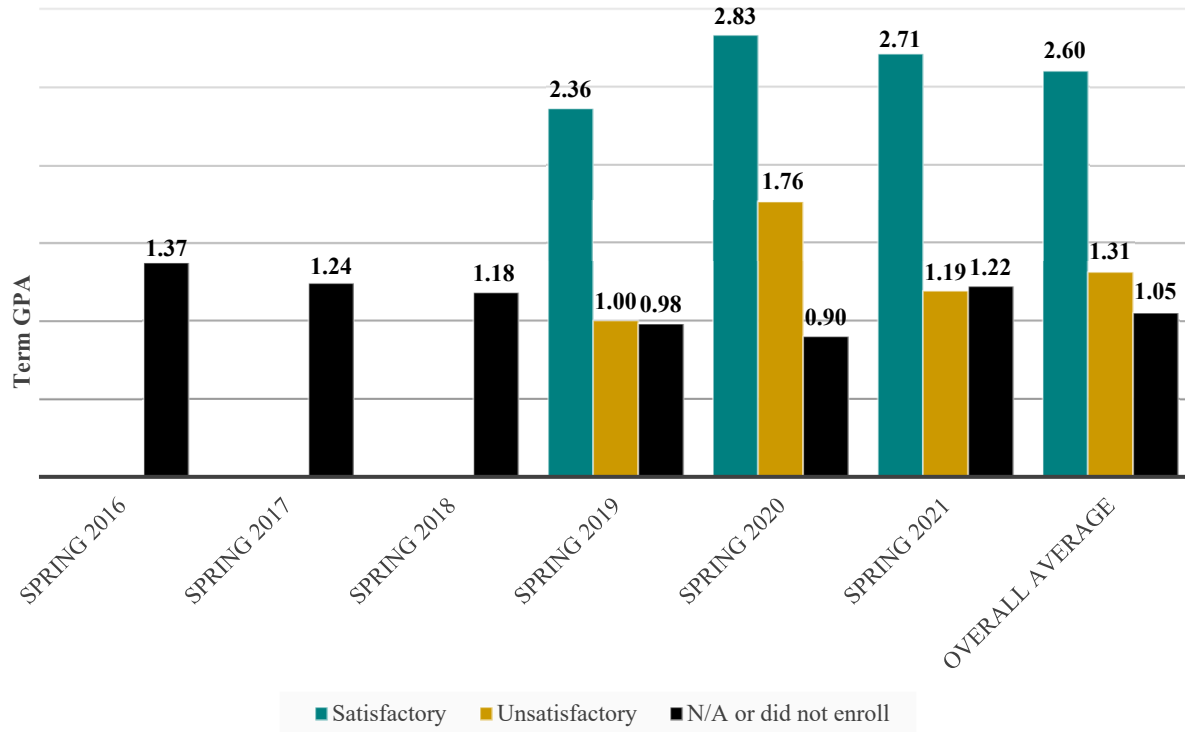
Note. Students eligible to participate in the academic recovery program, SOAR, are defined as students earning less than 30 credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

Note. The ACED 101 course was first offered Fall 2018.

Note. Students who participate in the SOAR program during the fall semester have typically completed, at minimum, one full year of college and are entering their third semester, have lost their financial aid, and if a South Carolina resident, their state scholarship.

Note. Students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a term GPA 1.09 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade in ACED 101 and a term GPA 1.47 grade points higher than students who did not enroll.

Figure 2: SOAR Program Spring 2016 to Spring 2021 Term GPA Comparisons Based on ACED 101 Results



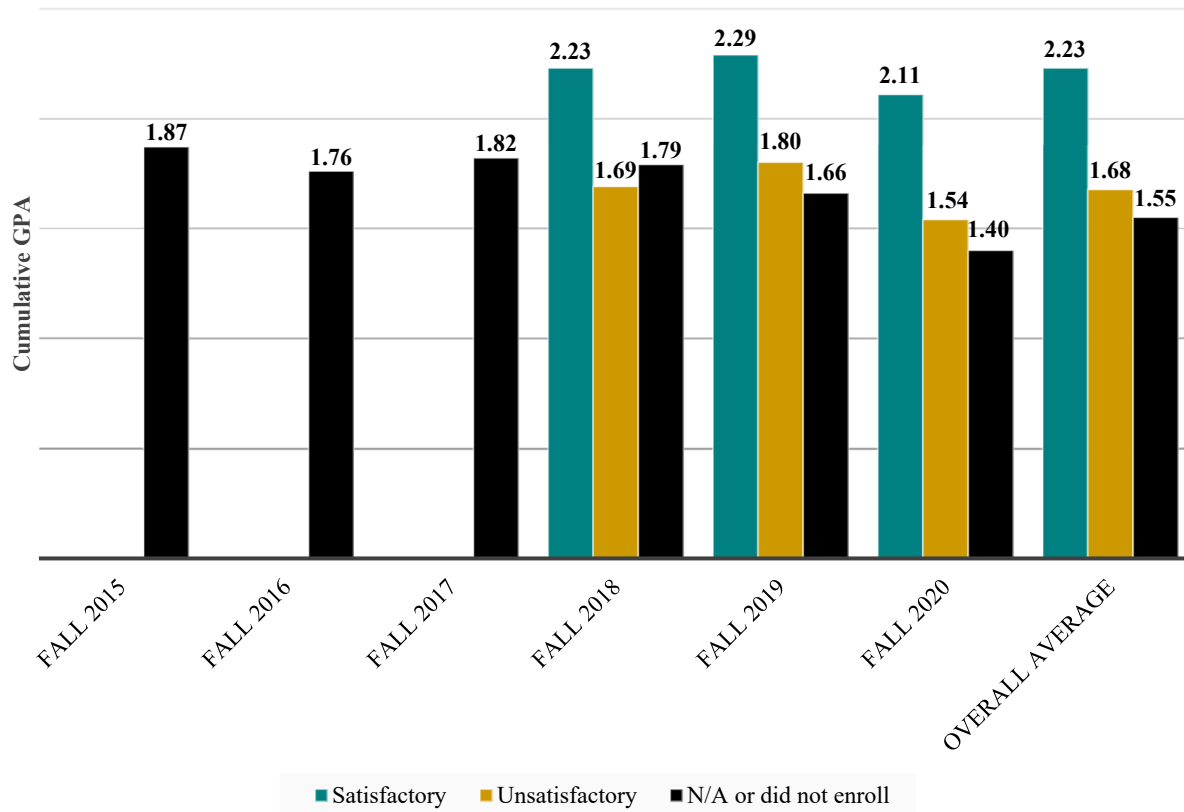
Note. Students eligible to participate in the academic recovery program, SOAR, are defined as students earning less than 30 credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

Note. The ACED 101 course was first offered Fall 2018.

Note. Students who participate in the SOAR program during the spring semester are typically in their second full semester and have yet to experience the consequences of losing financial aid, and if a South Carolina resident, their state scholarship.

Note. Students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a term GPA 1.29 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade and a term GPA 1.55 grade points higher than students who did not enroll.

Figure 3: SOAR Program Fall 2015 to Fall 2020 Cumulative GPA Comparisons Based on ACED 101 Results



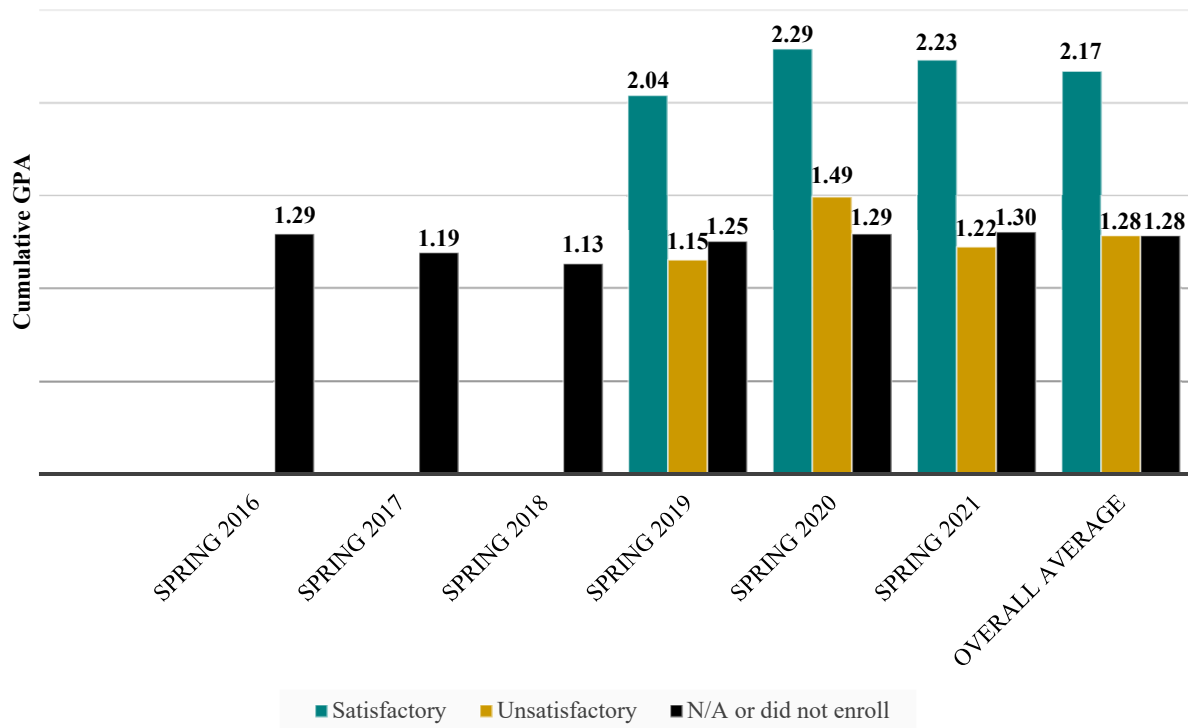
Note. Students eligible to participate in the academic recovery program, SOAR, are defined as students earning less than 30 credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

Note. The ACED 101 course was first offered Fall 2018.

Note. Students who participate in the SOAR program during the fall semester have typically completed, at minimum, one full year of college and are entering their third semester, have lost their financial aid, and if a South Carolina resident, their state scholarship.

Note. Students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a cumulative GPA 0.55 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade and a cumulative GPA 0.68 grade points higher than students who did not enroll.

Figure 4: SOAR Program Spring 2016 to Spring 2021 Cumulative GPA Comparisons Based on ACED 101 Results



Note. Students eligible to participate in the academic recovery program, SOAR, are defined as students earning less than 30 credit hours with a GPA less than 2.00.

Note. The ACED 101 course was first offered Fall 2018.

Note. Students who participate in the SOAR program during the spring semester are typically in their second full semester and have yet to experience the consequences of losing financial aid, and if a South Carolina resident, their state scholarship.

Note. Students who earned a Satisfactory grade in ACED 101 averaged a cumulative GPA 0.89 grade points higher than students who earned an Unsatisfactory grade and students who did not enroll.

Appendix A

2018-2019 University Undergraduate Catalog - online

Academic Status

The following standards regarding scholastic eligibility, probation, and academic suspension are applicable to all degree-seeking undergraduate students. Administration of these regulations is the responsibility of the Provost.

Good Academic Standing

Continued enrollment in Coastal Carolina University is a privilege that is granted to a student who is making satisfactory academic progress toward a degree. A degree-seeking student enrolled at Coastal Carolina University is in **good academic standing** unless placed on academic suspension.

Academic Advisory, Probation and Suspension Status

Academic Advisory

Students are placed on academic advisory when their academic performance indicates that there is a high risk that they will be placed on academic probation in a future semester.

A student is placed on academic advisory if:

1. The student earns a semester GPA of less than a 2.0 on graded hours at Coastal Carolina University; and
2. The student has a cumulative GPA of greater than or equal to 2.0 and less than 2.5 on graded hours at Coastal Carolina University.

Academic advisory appears on a student's academic record at the end of the regular semesters (fall and spring). Students on academic advisory must complete a set of requirements to help them succeed academically, as outlined by their college; see academic policy College Requirements for Academic Advisory.

Academic Probation

Students are placed on probation when their academic performance is endangering their opportunity to earn a degree from the university. When a student's academic level of achievement falls below a 2.0 cumulative grade point average on graded hours at Coastal Carolina University, the student is placed on probation. Probation appears on a student's academic record at the end of the regular semesters (fall and spring).

Students who are on academic probation:

1. May not enroll in more than 16 credits per semester. (Students who pre-registered for more than 16 credits must drop to 16 credits. Should the student fail to drop to 16 credits, the University may adjust the student's course schedule to 16 credits);
2. Are required to have their course schedules and credits reviewed and approved by their academic advisers at the beginning of each semester;
3. Are required to meet at least two times per semester with their academic adviser;

4. Are required to attend a one-day Dean's Academic Counseling Seminar at the beginning of each semester; and
5. Complete any additional requirements for academic probation as outlined by their college; see academic policy College Requirements for Academic Probation.

In addition to the requirements listed above, students who have earned less than 30 credits and are placed on probation will be enrolled in a designated section of ACED 101 and assigned an academic coach during any semester that they are on probation. They are required to meet at least four times with their academic coach as well as successfully complete ACED 101.

A student who enrolls while on probation must demonstrate progress toward the attainment of a degree by earning at least a 2.0 semester grade point average in each subsequent regular semester to be allowed continued enrollment and to avoid academic suspension. Once the student has earned at least a 2.0 cumulative grade point average in a regular semester, the student is considered to be making satisfactory academic progress and is no longer subject to the rules of probation.

Academic Suspension

Students are suspended from Coastal Carolina University at the end of the fall or spring semesters if, while on probation, the student fails to earn a minimum 2.0 semester grade point average in the regular semester (fall or spring).

The first academic suspension means a required separation from Coastal Carolina University for the regular semester (fall or spring) immediately following the semester in which the suspension occurs. After the first suspension is served, a student must be readmitted to the University through the Office of Admissions.

A subsequent, or indefinite, suspension means a required separation from Coastal Carolina University for a minimum of one calendar year. Students who have served an indefinite academic suspension must seek readmission through the Academic Suspension Petitions Committee and be readmitted to the University through the Office of Admissions. Admission is not automatic or guaranteed. Students on academic suspension may not attend summer courses at Coastal Carolina University except by action of the Academic Suspension Petitions Committee. Suspended students who are granted permission to take summer courses will be admitted to those courses through the Office of the Registrar.

Suspension, including reinstatement by petition or administrative action, remains on the academic record and is considered as a suspension for subsequent decisions.

Students who enroll after academic suspension are admitted under the status of probation. Students are required to earn at least a 2.0 grade point average each regular semester (fall or spring) to avoid a subsequent suspension, until their cumulative GPA on graded hours at Coastal Carolina University reaches 2.0 or higher. Students who are readmitted after suspension are subjected to all the rules of academic probation, which are previously outlined.

Under extenuating circumstances, appeals for readmission or other exceptions to academic policies may be presented to the Academic Suspension Petitions Committee. Students must contact the Office of the Dean in the college of their major for information and deadlines for submitting an appeal. Students on academic suspension may not be admitted to, or continue in, any program at Coastal Carolina University for credit or grade point average purposes. Suspension does not extend the time allowed to make up an I (incomplete) grade. Credits earned at other institutions while a student is on academic suspension from Coastal may be applied towards a degree from Coastal Carolina University, provided the coursework meets all transfer eligibility and degree program requirements. Credits earned at other institutions cannot be used to improve the Coastal Carolina University grade point average. Students are reminded that these

rules are for suspension from Coastal Carolina University. Some degree programs may impose more stringent requirements for retention in the program. Students suspended by this policy have the right to petition the Coastal Carolina University Academic Suspension Petitions Committee to waive the application of the suspension rule. Any such request must be received before the beginning of the semester in question in order for the committee to have adequate time to process the request. Requests for petitions, specific deadlines and other information should be directed to the Office of the Dean in the college of the student's major.

