

Making Rational Reinstatement Decisions

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A study of 187 students reinstated to the College of Education at Iowa State University from 1981-1987 showed that a student's previous academic deficit in college and classification (grade level) in school are characteristics significantly related to success on re-entry.

The student seated in front of the academic standards committee begins to cry. "I got off to a really lousy start at the university because I didn't know how to handle freedom and I never had to study in high school. To top it all off, my dad got sick last spring, and I tried to get home every weekend. I'm positive I can make it if you'll just give me another chance."

In that common, emotional scene, five adults question whether to allow the student to return. Has the student really solved the problems that appear to have led to previous academic difficulty? Does the student have the ability to succeed at this university or college? Does the committee have the right to deny a sincere person a second chance?

Review of Literature

Every day college and university academic standards committees are asked to decide which students should be reinstated following academic dismissal. Each committee bases its decisions on standards set by its department, college, or university. Two reasons for setting standards are fairness to students and wise use of university resources. No useful service is rendered by allowing an inadequately prepared, poorly motivated, or incompetent person to enter an institution of high scholastic standards (Slocum, 1956). A student whose capabilities do not match the institution will suffer frustration, disappointment, and exploded aspirations. In addition, students dismissed for academic reasons represent a great cost to the university (Chase, 1970).

But what criteria predict academic success? Much of the research on academic success in college is based on studies of students admitted directly from high school. In those cases, researchers overwhelmingly agree that high school performance is a strong predictor of academic success in college. Bertrand (1955) re-

ports that high school grade point average is the best single predictor available. Astin (1973) agrees, suggesting that high school grades are even more important than academic ability. The Iowa Board of Regents study (1972) suggests that high school percentile rank (HSPR) is more important than grades; the Regents attest that HSPR is the only variable that can be defended as the basis for admissions decisions. Merante (1983) recommends that HSPR and ACT be considered together for better prediction of success.

Studies of the academic success of reinstated students are less numerous and less conclusive. Two studies show a strong inverse relationship between quality point deficiency (academic deficit) and academic success. (Quality point deficiency is defined as how far a student is below a 2.0 grade point average. Student A has ten credits of "C"—20 quality points. Student B has ten credits of "D"—10 quality points. Student B is 10 quality points deficient.)

In a study by Russell (1984/1985), the academic dean at Northern Illinois University granted permission for students facing academic dismissal to continue for one more semester. At the end of that semester, Russell compared characteristics of the successful and unsuccessful students. He found a high negative correlation between success and quality point deficiency (QPD). This was in agreement with Schuster (1971) who found that a low QPD was a good predictor of success for the reinstated student.

Caldwell (1980) suggests that the student who changes majors is more likely to succeed on reinstatement than the student who continues to pursue an inappropriate major. Other studies of reinstated students have examined community college attendance (Meadows & Ingle, 1968); gender (Ryujin & Herold, 1985; Johansson & Rossmann, 1973); time out between dismissal and reinstatement (Caldwell, 1980; Kersch, 1966). The results of these studies were inconclusive.

Purpose of the Study

Making rational reinstatement decisions is critical for academic standards committees. In this decade of litigation, academic institutions

need to be clear about policies and consistent in their application. It is important to the institution; it is important to the student.

Previous research focused primarily on the academic success in college of students admitted directly from high school. This research identified ACT, high school grades, and HSPR as important predictors of academic success. Many academic standards committees today assume that those same criteria are valid for making reinstatement decisions. This study questioned that assumption and attempted to discover which characteristics of reinstated students are related to academic success.

Subjects

One hundred eighty-seven Iowa State University students (143 males and 44 females) participated in the study. All were students reinstated to the College of Education, majoring in elementary education, industrial education and technology, physical education, leisure studies, or community health education.

Two thirds of the students had originally entered the university directly from high school; one third were transfers from either two- or four-year colleges. The average ACT was 21.08, although scores ranged from 8 to 33 and were not available for transfer students. The average high school percentile rank was 36.03 (first percentile = highest rank), with rank not available for transfer students. Eighty percent of those entering directly from high school had graduated in the upper half of their class.

The average QPD of the subjects was 16.14, with the range from 0 to 55. (The 0 QPD is explained by the fact that the engineering college at Iowa State dismisses students with no QPD if their term grade point average is below 2.0 for two semesters.)

Seventy percent of the subjects had been dismissed just once prior to their seeking reinstatement. At the other extreme, three students were reinstated though they had been dropped four times. Fifty percent were reinstated prior to having completed the recommended time out (one semester after drop #1; one year after subsequent drops). Fifty-eight percent had changed majors just prior to or at the time of reinstatement.

Of the reinstated students, 30% were seniors, 34% juniors, 22% sophomores, and 14% freshmen. The subjects of this study were more like the total university population in gender (pre-

dominantly male) than like the College of Education (predominantly female). This is due to the number of diverted engineers entering the Industrial Education and Technology option.

Procedure

The variables were selected on the basis of the literature review and the likelihood that information on the variable would be available to academic standards committees who deal with reinstatement decisions. Selected variables were quality point deficiency (QPD), classification (grade level), change of major, times dropped, time out, community college attendance during the interim, transfer or direct admission from high school, ACT, HSPR, and gender.

Academic advising in this study was treated as a constant. The reinstatement "routine" was assumed to be similar for all students. All subjects were reinstated to the same college and assigned to one of six full-time, professional advisors. Each received an individualized letter and met with his or her advisor to select classes. Each was asked to be in contact with the advisor at least twice during the initial reinstatement term. Because advising was relatively consistent, the other characteristics studied could be seen as independent of advising.

The registrar of the university provided transcripts of all students in the study. Each student was categorized as successful or unsuccessful. A student was classified as academically successful if at the time of the study he or she had graduated from the university, was currently enrolled, or had left the university in good standing.

Chi-square analysis was run on each of the variables vs. success, using the SPSSX statistical program.

Results

The academic success of reinstated students was found to be significantly related to quality point deficiency (chi-square = 18.664, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). In computing the chi-square value, QPD was divided into three groups: 0-9 QPD (the student would not be on temporary enrollment according to the university unless that student were a senior), 10-19 QPD (the student would be on temporary enrollment), and 20+ QPD (the student has more than twice the QPD for being placed on temporary enrollment).

Academic success was found to be significantly related to classification at the time of

reinstatement ($\chi^2 = 14.87$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). For purposes of this analysis, students were divided into freshmen (0-29 credits), sophomores (30-59 credits), juniors (60-89 credits), and seniors (90+ credits).

For all other variables studied, no significant relationship was found to academic success.

Discussion

Quality Point Deficiency

Consistent with the literature, QPD was found to be significantly related to academic success for the reinstated student. The smaller the QPD, the greater the likelihood the student will be successful. In this study, 62% of those with a QPD of less than 20 were successful. With a QPD of greater than 20, the success rate was just 41.8%. Individuals vary, however. A senior with no QPD did not succeed; a senior with 43 QPD did succeed.

Classification (Grade Level)

That success varied by grade level was expected. However, the grade levels that were most successful were unexpected. Only 34.6 percent of the freshmen were successful. However, this particular freshman group had a very high QPD, and their failure may have been related more to a poor academic record than to grade level. Seniors were less successful than sophomores and juniors. In some cases, this may have been due to their changing majors late and having a discouraging number of credits to complete for graduation. Sophomores and juniors were the most successful, possibly because they had enough time left to be successful, given potential and motivation.

Other Variables

Change of major did not show a significant relationship to academic success, except in the case of diverted engineers. When just the students who had been dropped by the College of Engineering and who sought to enroll in Industrial Education and Technology were analyzed, a significant relationship to academic success was found. This is consistent with Caldwell (1980), who suggests that the student who changes majors because he or she has become more realistic (about self or major) is more likely to succeed on reinstatement than a student who continues to pursue an inappropriate major.

It was expected that a student who began at

the university as a transfer student might be at a disadvantage when competing at the university. However, this study did not support that expectation. Whether the student began as a transfer or as a student directly from high school did not seem to make a difference in success on reinstatement.

The number of times a student had been dismissed from the university was not significantly related to success on reinstatement. Students returning after drop #2 were even more successful than those who returned after drop #1; however, none of those returning after drop #4 was successful.

Whether a student was reinstated after the recommended time out or reinstated early had no relationship to academic success. The purpose of time out between dismissal and reinstatement is to give students a chance to reassess career goals or other causes of academic failure. The literature suggested that time out is not related to subsequent success, and this study supported that finding.

Some studies have found that attendance at a community college during a person's time out is a positive influence on academic performance when the student returns to a four-year college. In this study, however, not enough students attended community college between dismissal and reinstatement to be able to analyze the data.

In this study, males outnumbered females by a ratio of 3:1, due in large part to the number of engineers (traditionally male) who transfer to the Industrial Education and Technology department. Following the suggestion of Ryujin and Herold (1985), the investigator analyzed all variables by gender. The results of the analysis are not included because it was apparent that the groups of males and females were too dissimilar on factors other than gender, specifically majors and classification.

Because of the high predictive value of ACT and HSPR in students admitted to college directly from high school, it was surprising that no significant relationship was found between these variables and success of the reinstated student. However, in combination with other variables, ACT and HSPR might be an indication of a student's ability to compete in a particular curriculum and could be useful information.

Use of This Information

The criterion of QPD was applied to a group of students reinstated in 1987 and 1988. Had

only those students been readmitted with less than a 20 QPD, the committee would have been correct in 34 out of 51 cases. As it was, the committee based its decisions on ACT, HSPR, and subjective information and was correct in only 24 out of 51 cases.

This is not to suggest that one criterion be used nor that academic standards committees should operate only on facts. Each case must be treated individually. However, there is strong evidence that the size of a student's academic deficit has a great influence on likelihood of success for the reinstated student.

Based on this study and on the review of literature, the percent of reinstated students who are successful academically may increase by:

1. Having the academic standards committee examine and focus on:

a. *Quality point deficiency* According to this study, students with a QPD greater than 20 were less likely to succeed than students with a QPD less than 20. When a high QPD is noted, it would be appropriate to look at ACT (an indicator of ability) and HSPR (sometimes an indicator of effort). In all cases of either high or low QPD, it would also be helpful to relate QPD to the number of credits a student has earned. A high QPD/credit ratio may alert the committee to a pattern of behavior or a lack of academic ability that will make it difficult for the person to achieve academic success.

b. *Number of credits earned* It is important to know how much time is left in the student's program and what level of academic performance would be needed for the student to be successful in that amount of time. Is academic success probable, given the student's ability, past performance, and time remaining?

2. Having the academic standards committee, in cooperation with academic advisors, inform students about what it will take to be successful. This may include:

a. *A graduation plan*, including names of courses, course content, and approximate date of graduation.

b. *Statistics about success rates* and the requirements to be successful. Computer programs are available that allow a student to enter data related to his or her current situation and project what will happen based on various levels of performance.

c. *A contract* in which the student agrees to a certain level of performance — number

of credits, grade point, number of consultations with advisor, study skills help, number of drops or incompletes allowed, and any other stipulations set by the committee.

3. Having the academic standards committee keep longitudinal records of reinstated students to provide guidance in revising reinstatement policies.

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