

Proposal: Support students on Academic Warning by modifying the Academic Standing and Dismissal Policy

YSU retention data shows first-time freshmen who complete their first term with a GPA of 2.0 or higher persist to the second year at far higher rate than their peers who complete their first term with a GPA below 2.0. In response, YSU has implemented strategies to help students in their first semester succeed academically. These include requiring all regularly admitted students to take YSU 1500 in their first semester, requiring conditionally admitted freshmen to take Strong Start 1500 in their first semester and participate in individual coaching, and lowering advising loads for advisors who work with first year students to increase individual attention and strengthen alert outreach efforts. These strategies have resulted in a greater percent of students who complete their first semester in good academic standing, up from 84.7% in Fall 2020 to 86.6% in Fall 2022,

Despite YSU’s progress in improving first-semester grade outcomes, a significant number of students complete their first semester on academic warning with a CUM GPA below 2.0. On average over the past three years, over 13% of students in each cohort (an average of 220 each fall) failed to achieve good academic standing after their first semester. About half, still hopeful and committed, returned for the second semester.

Table 1. First term CUM GPA < 2.0

	CUM < 2.0 end of First term	Returned Spring	Did not return Spring
Fall 2020	271	131	140
Fall 2021	178	89	89
Fall 2022	213	118	95
Total	662	338	324

Yet, YSU lacks a strategic approach to helping these students get back on track and persist. The need for such a strategy is underscored by the fact that the majority of these students have the ability to succeed academically. In 2020 and 2021, for example, more than half of the freshmen placed on academic warning following their first semester earned a HS GPA of at least a 3.0.

Table 2. First semester cumulative GPA below 2.0 by HS GPA

	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
HS GPA < 2.0	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
HS GPA 2.0 - 2.49	30 (11.1%)	22(12.4%)	37 (17.4%)
HS GPA 2.5 - 2.99	76 (28%)	57 (32%)	77 (36.2%)
HS GPA 3.0 - 3.49	109 (40.2%)	64 (36%)	69 (32.4%)
HS GPA 3.5 +	55 (20.3%)	35 (19.7%)	30 (14.1%)

For the students who return, improved academic performance in the second semester is key to their ability to persist. Students who showed academic improvement while on academic warning, as measured by a spring term GPA of a 2.0 or higher, were far more likely to persist to the second year than those students who did not. Improvements in second semester academic performance can help improve the longer-term outlook for these students as well. That data in the table below compare retention to the third year for those who rebound academically in their second semester with those who don’t.

Table 3. Persistence by Spring Term GPA				
	Returned Spring	Spring Term GPA 2.0 +	Returned YR 2	Returned YR 3
Fall 2020	131	54	41 (80%)	29 (53.7%)
Fall 2021	89	30	28 (93%)	18 (60%)
Fall 2022	118	33	24 (73%)	
	Returned Spring	Spring Term GPA < 2.0	Returned YR 2	Returned YR 3
Fall 2020	131	71	28 (39%)	9 (12.7%)
Fall 2021	89	54	22 (41%)	8 (14.8%)
Fall 2022	118	79	33 (42%)	

Those who don't rebound face the tough decision of whether or not to return the following semester with their warning status elevated to probation; for those who previously qualified for financial aid, they face the loss of their aid eligibility as well.

YSU needs to be more deliberate in designing an academic success environment for students on academic warning, much the way it has for first-semester freshmen. Historical data shows that when decisions regarding academic recovery are left up to students, few voluntarily seek adequate support. Of the 118 Fall 2022 cohort students who returned for their second semester on academic warning, only 12 participated in academic coaching. Of the 89 Fall 2021 cohort freshmen who returned for their second semester on warning, only 9 participated in coaching. Only 10 of the 158 students in the 2020 cohort on academic warning in the spring sought coaching.

With the modifications proposed below, YSU's Academic Standing and Dismissal Policy can provide the framework within which to implement the needed academic recovery strategy.

Modification 1. Reconceptualize and rename “Academic Warning” as “Academic Recovery” to communicate to students that YSU continues to believe in their potential to succeed. In his Introduction to *Academic Recovery: Supporting Students on Academic Probation*, Michael T. Dial cautions, “[Students on probation] may feel disengaged from the university community that welcomed them at the point of admission, but is now warning them that they may not be cut out for success.” (Dial, 2022, pp 7-8).ⁱ This modification seeks to change the “lived experience of students on probation,” often characterized by shame and embarrassment, by replacing the punitive connotation of “warning” with an affirming a sense of agency connotated by “recovery.”

Modification 2. Require students placed on academic recovery status to participate in individual academic coaching.

Mandatory individual academic coaching is an intrusive intervention. Mandating coaching allows the University to ensure the frequency, consistency, and duration of the intervention, while coaching students individually allows coaches to better understand each student's academic journey, habits, strengths, the unique circumstances that led to poor performance, and any persisting barriers or challenges when determining and implementing a recovery strategy. This strategy also ensures more opportunities for students to connect with a concerned and supportive advocate at a time they are likely to feel discouraged and unsure of their ability to reach their goals. Coaches and students will determine strategies, which may include any combination of tutoring, time management, study strategy and test preparation coaching, mental health counseling, and/or financial counseling, and may or may not guide students to talk to their academic advisor about repeating classes, changing their major and petitioning for academic reassessment, etc.

If YSU's coaching capacity in the Academic Success Center remains the same as it currently is, mandating coaching would require no new resources. If this modification is implemented, the majority of coaching would take place in the spring semester, when coaches in the ASC have the lightest coaching loads.

Modification 3. Institute a cross-institutional academic reinstatement committee to standardize the reinstatement process. In *Counseling students in academic difficulty*, Robert DeBard asserts that the worst possible approach to supporting students on probation is a "fractionalized" approach, in which "different units of the institution respond to the student on probation with little or no effort to coordinate services." (DeBard, 1987, p. 59).ⁱⁱ This modification seeks to standardize the reinstatement process, not only to ensure all students are given equal consideration according to a set of criteria, but that students who are granted immediate reinstatement will be given a coordinated academic recovery plan agreed upon by a broadly representative Academic Reinstatement Committee. The committee will be comprised of one representative from each academic college, the Associate Provost for Student Success, and one representative each from the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, the Resch Academic Success Center, the Registrar's Office, and the Office of Career Exploration and Development. College representatives will determine if a reinstated student may continue in their same college or if they must change their major to Exploratory Undecided. If reinstated, the student will again be required to attend mandatory coaching. The plan may recommend a combination of strategies, including change of major and academic reassessment, YSU summer term enrollment, repeating classes, tutoring, individual coaching, or mental health counseling; students would again be required to participate in coaching. The plan will be sent to both the student's coach and academic advisor.

ⁱ Dial, M.T. (2022). What we know about students on probation and supporting them. In Dial, M.T. *Academic recovery: supporting students on academic probation* (pp. 7-8). University of South Carolina, National Resource Center on the First Year Experience & Students in Transition.

ⁱⁱ DeBard, R. (1987). Counseling students in academic difficulty. *College and University: the Journal of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars*, 63(1), 57-63.