

Suspended Students: An Analysis of Suspension Length and Returning Semester GPA

Deana C. Meadows, Middle Tennessee State University

Terri J. Tharp, Middle Tennessee State University

The purpose of the study is to determine if length of suspension is related to academic success upon a student's return to college. This research stems from opposing views of members of a university academic appeals committee concerned about whether a suspended student should serve a suspension term of one semester, one year, or be granted immediate reentry. Academic records of 765 students who were suspended between the fall 1991 and the summer 1993 semesters and then were allowed to reenter the university within one year were examined. The results reveal that suspension length is unrelated to subsequent academic success.

In higher education, opposing viewpoints exist on whether length of suspension affects a student's academic success. However, there is very little research to support either opinion. The present research stemmed from the opposing views of members of Middle Tennessee State University's Academic Appeals Committee concerning whether a student is best served by receiving a one-semester suspension, a one-year suspension, or approval for immediate reentry. Some feel that maturity increases while a student is away from the university which positively affects academic success upon reentry. Others contend that a suspension term decreases a student's motivation to return.

Only a handful of published studies within the last 10 years concentrate on the performance of students who are reinstated after academic suspension (Hall & Gahn, 1994; Garnett, 1990; Shelhamer & Waters, 1988; Taylor, Powers, Lindstrom, & Gibson, 1987; Woodard & Suddick, 1988). Hall & Gahn (1994) report that most of the studies conducted to identify reliable predictors of success after student readmission are each inconclusive or when combined, show conflicting results.

While Hall & Gahn (1994) report that the length of time out of school after dismissal is not a predictor of success, Woodard and Suddick (1988) report different findings; they found that almost 60% of academically suspended students performed successfully upon immediate return to the univer-

sity. Of the students who were allowed to continue their education in less than one year, 66% succeeded academically. The academic achievement of students who were absent from the university for at least one year was lower than the other two groups.

Further examination of the suspended student population is warranted for several reasons. First, the challenge ahead for academic institutions is the retention of students (Noel, Levitz, & Saluri, 1985). Research can determine the factors that predict success for this population. Second, at a time when resources are increasingly scarce in higher education, colleges and universities should have readmission policies that efficiently distinguish academic potential and make the best use of university resources (Hall & Gahn, 1994). Finally, the contradictory nature of the previously cited research is sufficient reason for educators to examine their suspension and readmission policies and to insure that suspended students are being served appropriately. Educators must also determine when a student should return to the university. For educators addressing these issues, this study focused on the progress of suspended students as related to length of suspension.

Method

The research focused on the length of suspension as it related to the academic progress of suspended students for their reentering terms. Student progress was measured by semester grade point average (GPA) for the reentered term. The data set consisted of academic records of 765 first-time suspended, undergraduate students at Middle Tennessee State University who were suspended between the fall 1991 and the summer 1993 semesters.

Suspension length varied from one semester, one year, or was suspended upon Academic Appeals Committee approval for immediate reentry.

Students who do not attain (1.) a 2.00 GPA for a current semester or (2.) a cumulative GPA of 1.50 for 0–39 hours attempted, 1.80 for 40–59 hours attempted, or a 2.00 for 60 or more

hours attempted are placed on academic probation. Students on academic probation who fail to meet one of the above standards during the next enrolled term will be suspended and are not eligible for probationary status for the remainder of their college career. Students who fail to attain a grade of C or better on the second attempt of a basic or developmental course are placed on academic suspension for one calendar year without regard to current or cumulative grade point average (Clark, 1991, p. 43).

An appeals process has been established to allow academically suspended students to gain readmission provided they can each present evidence of ability to complete college-level work and of motivation to succeed. Appeals are reviewed by the Academic Appeals Committee, which consists of faculty members representing each college. Many students (37%), upon winning their appeals case, do not serve a suspension term and are readmitted immediately to the university.

Results

The academic records of 765 undergraduate students who were suspended during the fall 1991 through the summer 1993 semesters were examined, and the data are presented in Table 1. There was no significant relationship between reentering term GPA and length of suspension $\chi^2(8, N = 765) = 9.14$, $p > .05$.

Approximately 37% of the suspended students were immediately readmitted upon Academic Appeals Committee approval. Nearly 29% served a one-semester suspension term and 34% served a one-year suspension term. Nearly 53% of the readmitted students were successful (semester GPA ≥ 2.00) upon their return, regardless of suspension length.

Discussion

Because this study only examined the relationship between length of suspension and student GPA upon readmission, there are limitations to the study. First, this study only focused on one variable (length of suspension) as a predictor of success. Variables such as class status, GPA prior to suspension, and number of hours taken after being readmitted were not taken into account. Second, only first-time, student suspensions were examined. Provided these limitations are taken into consideration, the results help to provide a more in-depth understanding of the academic progress of suspended students.

Although the results of our study indicate that there is no relationship between the semester GPAs of reentering students and length of student suspensions, there is evidence that academically suspended students can be successful upon returning to the university. Over one-half of the suspended students in this study each were able to achieve a semester GPA of 2.00 or higher. Further research needs to be conducted to examine which variables lead to this population's academic success.

References

- Clark, S. (Ed.). (1991). *Middle Tennessee State University 1991-93 Undergraduate Catalog*. Nashville: Rich Printing Company.
- Garnett, D. T. (1990). Retention strategies for high-risk students at a four-year university. *NACADA Journal*, 10(1), 22-25.
- Hall, K. M. & Gahn, S. W. (1994). Predictors of success for academically dismissed students following readmission. *NACADA Journal*, 14(1), 8-12.
- Noel, L., Levitz, R., & Saluri, D. (1985). *Increasing student retention: Effective programs and practices for reducing the dropout rate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Table 1
Returning Semester GPA by Length of Suspension

Length of Suspension	0.00-0.99	1.00-1.99	2.00-2.99	3.00-3.99	4.00	TOTAL
N/A (Immediate Reentry)	70	50	119	35	8	282
1 Semester	62	46	76	33	3	220
1 Year	67	66	95	31	4	263
TOTAL	199	162	290	99	15	765
%	26	21	38	13	2	

- Shelhamer, V. C. & Waters, R. (1988). *Self-concept: A tool for retention of college students*. Bozeman, MT: Montana State University (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 304 074)
- Taylor, D. V., Powers, S. M., Lindstrom, W. A., & Gibson, T. S. (1987). Academically deficient readmitted students: Are they really a high risk? *NACADA Journal*, 7(1), 41-47.
- Woodard, P. G. & Suddick, D. E. (1988). *An evaluation of the success of counseled reentry students with prior history of poor academic performance*. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for Counseling and development, Chicago. IL.
- Write, T. (1984). *Analysis of academic suspension, 1978 through 1984*. (Report No. 85-20). Miami, FL: Miami-Dade Community College, Office of Institutional Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 267 878)