

## Factors of Students' Academic Probation in an American Degree Transfer Program (ADP) in Malaysia

Dr. Mohd Faizal Fauzan <sup>1\*</sup>, Kalarani Vellasamy <sup>2</sup>, Sonya Prabha <sup>3</sup>, Eshodha Ann Gurusamy <sup>4</sup>  
and Amirah Alias <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Department of Engineering and Applied Sciences, American Degree Transfer Program, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>4</sup>Department of Language, American Degree Transfer Program, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>5</sup>Department of Recreation and Ecotourism, Faculty of Forestry, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

**\*Corresponding Author.**

Email: [MohdFaizal.Fauzan@Taylors.edu.my](mailto:MohdFaizal.Fauzan@Taylors.edu.my)/ [drfaizalfauzan@gmail.com](mailto:drfaizalfauzan@gmail.com);

### ABSTRACT

*There are many factors that cause students in higher learning institutions to be placed under an academic probation program. In this study, students under probation for the American Degree Program had completed a survey to determine the factors that lead to their poor academic performance. Time management and procrastination were found to be significant factors that contributed to their dismal academic performance. Apart from that, facing difficulties with certain requisite subjects, such as math, also adversely affected their grades. Therefore, the factors identified are useful for the institution to manage the students' academic performance so that they will no longer be under probation.*

**Keywords:** Academic Probation, American Degree Transfer Program, Education

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

American Degree Transfer Program (ADP) is a credit – transfer program catering to students to further their studies in the U.S. This program was started in 1996 in Taylor’s College in Malaysia. In Taylor’s, the ADP Program offers courses in the fields of engineering, actuarial science, computer science, applied sciences, business and liberal arts. Students complete approximately two years in Malaysia and two years in the U.S. While the majority of students transfer to U.S. universities, some also transfer to Canadian and Australian universities. ADP is tailored to the American learning style and the program prepares students for transition to the holistic American education system. In the first two years of the program, students are required to take a wide range of subjects where they are continuously assessed throughout the semester.

The more flexible and holistic education system in the ADP program can be challenging to Malaysian students who are more used to a traditional, exam-oriented school system. Consequently, some of them cannot cope with the change and end up with poor academic performance. Moreover, the first year is a very important year for students to transition themselves. According to the American College of Testing Program [1], attrition is at its’ greatest during the freshmen year whereby more than 35% of students drop out of public universities and colleges annually. Failing to adjust and adapt to a new system from the first year will demoralize the students leading to poor performance and eventually contribute to withdrawal [2]. Therefore, a lot of studies related to first year experience of higher education students have been conducted and well documented by Harvey and Drew [3]. Faizal, Kalarani [4] specifically conducted a study of the students’ first year experience of an American Degree Transfer Program in Malaysia. Their findings concurred with existing literature where the poor performance of university students can be attributed to a wide range of factors including personality, intelligence, previous academic achievements and demographic data [5-10]. Although the literature shows that poor academic performance is dependent on one or more of these factors, there is no consistent agreement among different studies. Therefore, this paper aims to ascertain factors of poor academic performance specific to students under “academic probation” in the American Degree Transfer Program at a private university in Malaysia.

## 2.0 THE STUDY

### *Data Collection Methods*

The survey was administered to students under academic probation from two different semesters namely the spring and summer semester. Students were required to complete a self-administrated questionnaire which was distributed and supervised by their academic advisors. The questionnaire contained two sections: section A and section B. The survey questions were obtained from Duffy [11] and modified to suit the program-specific needs of this institution’s ADP. In total, 36 students responded to the survey with the response rate at 52.1%.

### *Data Analysis*

Participants of this survey responded to the questions using the Likert-scale ranging from 1 to 4 with 1 being strongly agree, 2 being agree, 3 being disagree and 4 being strongly disagree. The responses were analyzed using SPSS v.21. Descriptive analysis was used to determine factors of students’ academic probation.

### 3.0 FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the socio-demographics of students under the ADP probation program. It is important to identify these factors since probation students have a variety of demographic characteristics and cultural backgrounds[6, 12]. In this study the majority of respondents (88%) are male students, with only 12% comprising female students. 86% of these students are aged between 15 to 20 years old, while the remaining are above 20 years old (14%). Malaysian students comprised of 69%, whereas 21% are international students (from various nationalities).

**Table 1: Socio Demographic of Students**

<b>Socio Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>(no of respondents, n=36)</b>
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	32
Female	4
<u>Age</u>	
Below 21 (15-20 years old)	31
Above 20	5
<u>Nationality</u>	
Malaysian	25
International students	11

As shown in Table 2, 39% of probation students are currently in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester, while 19% of them are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester. Only a handful of students are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester (14%), 11% in 5<sup>th</sup> semester, and 8% are already in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> semester of their study. Several factors can contribute to the percentage of students in different semesters as a variety of subjects are offered by the school according to current semester.

**Table 2: Academic Information of Students**

<b>Academic information of students</b>	<b>(no of respondents, n=36)</b>
<u>No. of semester(s)</u>	
Semester 1	0
Semester 2	5
Semester 3	7
Semester 4	14
Semester 5	4
Semester 6	3
Semester 7	3
<u>Academic background</u>	
A levels	3
O levels	10
IB Diploma	2
*SPM	19
Others	2

Major

Business	4
Liberal Arts	5
Engineering	10
Computer Science	3
Applied Science	3
Mass Communication	1

Level of Probation

Red flag (AP1)	16
Academic Probation 2 (AP2)	9
Academic Probation 3 (AP3)	4

\*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), is a standardized examinations for government secondary schools in Malaysia. SPM is equivalent to O levels.

The academic background of students consist of 53% are SPM holders, 27% with O level certificates, 8% with A level certificates, while 6% have an IB Diploma and another 6% have other academic qualifications. Coming from different academic backgrounds could also contribute to the students' differing performance. Some students might have difficulty in adjusting to the new teaching and learning methodology. For instance, the SPM holders are more used to an examination-oriented approach which is based on text books and is largely teacher-centered, whereas the ADP program consists of continuous assessments, is student-centered and emphasizes holistic learning.

The students who are the Engineering majors comprise of 28% of the sample population, while Liberal Arts majors come in second at 14%. Business majors constitute about 11%, both Computer Science and Applied Science are 8% respectively, and finally Mass Communication majors are only 3%.

The levels of probation at this institution's ADP are divided into three: first is the Red Flag (AP1), followed by AP2 and lastly AP3. The majority of these probation students are under Red Flag (AP1) with a percentage of 44%. Meanwhile 25% of them are in AP2 and 11% are in AP3.

**Table 3: Self-Administrated Study Behaviour**

**Hours spent studying, doing homework, (no of respondents, n=36)  
assignments and revision (per week)**

Hours spent

0 (never study)	0
1-5 hours	20
6-10 hours	10
11-15 hours	6
>20 hours	0

Table 3 shows the number of hours spent weekly on studying, completing homework, doing assignments and revision by the probation students. Most of them (56%) spent between 1 to 5 hours per week for academic purposes, 28% of them spent 6 to 10 hours weekly and only 17% spent between 11 to 15 hours. None spent more than 20 hours weekly on their studies. Incidentally, it is unknown how effective were these hours spent weekly and the effect on their performance. This is because the study sessions may happen during the student's free hours and is managed by them.

**Table 4: Students' type of accommodation and travel behaviour**

<b>Students' accommodations and hours spent to commute to campus</b>	<b>(no of respondents, n=36)</b>
<i>Type of accommodations</i>	
On-campus residence	3
Off-campus residence; without family	17
Off-campus; with family	16
<i>Hours spent to commute</i>	
Less than 30 minutes	24
30 minutes- 1 hour	8
1-2 hours	3

In Table 4, it is found that 47% of students live at off-campus residences with no presence of family members, whereas another 44% live at off-campus residences with their family. The remaining 9% utilise the on-campus accommodation. This 91% living off-campus is significant as research has shown that "retention is significantly higher for on-campus students regardless of race, gender or admission type" [13] while "off-campus living works to the detriment of retention" [14].

Further 67% of the ADP students spend less than 30 minutes to commute to the campus. 22% take between 30 minutes to an hour and only 8% need 1 to 2 hours to travel to the campus. These factors need to be taken into consideration as it could affect students' time since classes have been arranged prior to every beginning of semester. In fact, much of the existing literature portrays commuter students as being disadvantaged [15]. Moreover, Astin [16] expounds that according to the theory of student involvement, the time and energy that the student invests in various activities represent a reduction in the time and energy the student has to devote to educational development.

**Table 5: First generation: first person in the family to attend university**

<b>First person in family to attend university</b>	<b>(no of respondents, n=36)</b>
Yes	12
No	24

Table 5 illustrates that 67% of the students under the probation program are not the first person in their family to attend university, whereas 33% of them are the first person in the family to study in university. This might contribute to the latter's lack of knowledge about the university environment, education system and its rules and regulations.

### 3.1 Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Performance

The findings on students' academic experience are shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Students' Academic Experience**

	1	2	3	4	Mean score
1. I spent too much time studying for one very difficult course and fell behind in everything else I felt as if I were always behind the rest of the class.	6	17	7	6	9
2. I didn't understand what the instructor/professor was talking about.	13	18	5	0	9
3. I had difficulty doing well on exams, even though I thought I knew the material.	3	14	13	6	9
4. I needed a tutor, but didn't know how to get one.	12	17	6	1	9
5. I managed my time poorly; I procrastinated, and then I didn't have time to finish things.	7	19	8	2	<b>11.7</b>
6. I have a hard time writing my assignments. I didn't keep up with the assigned readings.	7	19	8	2	9.7
7. English is my second language and I had problems studying/understanding my lecturers.	20	13	3	0	5.3
8. I did not see my course lecturer for consultation.	4	13	17	2	<b>10.7</b>
9. I have a difficult time with math.	3	15	13	5	<b>11.0</b>
10. I took too many courses. I missed too many classes.	14	13	6	3	7.3
11. I didn't take notes.	13	14	9	0	7.7
12. The notes I took didn't help when I studied.	11	19	3	1	7.7
13. I didn't really study.	5	12	18	1	<b>10.3</b>
14. I was experiencing personal problems that interfered with my ability to concentrate and complete my work/or study effectively.	2	19	7	8	<b>10.3</b>
15. I felt isolated, anxious, tired, depressed, and unable to focus on anything for sustained periods of time.	6	17	11	0	9.3
16. I had little or no motivation to complete assignments or even attend class.	7	20	9	0	9.7
17. I had a crisis and/or death in the family (or someone I felt very close to).	22	11	2	1	7.7
18. I went out a lot and partied a lot with my friends to the extent that I couldn't always focus on my schoolwork, or missed classes because I was sleeping off a late night.	14	15	6	1	7.3
19. I wasn't motivated because I don't know why I am here, or what I will do with a college degree.	16	13	6	1	6.7
20. I am having financial difficulties.	22	11	3	0	4.7
21. I am not coping well with my chosen major.	15	15	5	1	7.0
22. I am facing issues with alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs.	26	7	2	0	3.0

23. I am facing medical / health-related issues.	23	11	0	2	4.3
24. I spend too much of time on extra-curricular activities.	11	15	8	2	8.3
25. I have trouble juggling between family and university/university responsibilities.	21	11	4	0	5.0
26. I do not have a strong support system around me.	12	19	3	2	8.0
27. I used tutors/tuition teachers in school so I cannot cope with my studies now.	13	17	5	1	7.7
28. I find it hard to adapt from the school to the university systems (coursework and continuous assessments, cannot study last minute for exams, etc)	11	20	4	5	8.3
29. I am unsure of university policies/procedures such as adding/dropping courses, pre-registration, withdrawal/repeating courses, etc.	13	14	6	3	7.7

Note: Scale strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 4

The mean score for each statement have been obtained and the five statements with significant score (see Table 7) have been taken into consideration and discussed as follows.

**Table 7: Five most significant factors**

		Mean score
1.	I managed my time poorly; I procrastinated, and then I didn't have time to finish things.	11.7
2.	I have a difficult time with math.	11.0
3.	I did not see my course lecturer for consultation.	10.7
4.	I didn't really study.	10.3
5.	I was experiencing personal problems that interfered with my ability to concentrate and complete my work/or study effectively.	10.3

The statement "I managed my time poorly; I procrastinated, and then I didn't have time to finish things" is found to have the highest mean score. This findings concurs with Dipboye and Phillips [12] that poor time management behaviour are the cause of not only stress but also poor academic performance. In addition to that, Zimmerman [17] stated that students who do not manage their study time and learning have a disadvantage in higher education as compared to students who do manage their time well. Apart from that, other factors that may lead to poor time management are affective stress whereby the students who perform poorly in their studies are not satisfied with their current circumstances this results in accompanying stress. Subsequently, they may be less able to manage and control their time.

Next, in the findings the statement "I have a difficult time with math", has the second highest mean score. This is probably because the engineering majors under probation comprised 28% of the respondents. Engineering majors have to take mathematical-based subjects such as Algebra I & II, Geometry, Trigonometry, Probability & Statistics, Calculus I & II. Thus the students' CGPA could be

affected as they face difficulties with these higher-level math subjects. The two factors may be connected to each other; difficulty with math and dissatisfaction that leads to poor time management.

Meanwhile, the statement “I did not see my course lecturer for consultation” has the third highest mean score. This is not surprising as studies underscore that “a student’s relationship with the academic advisor and faculty can be the single biggest factor in increasing student retention”[18].

Finally, the statement “I didn’t really study” and “I was experiencing personal problems that interfered with my ability to concentrate and complete my work/study effectively” shares the same mean score, which is 10.3. This finding is similar to results of an empirical study [19] that highlights lack of seriousness in studies, family problems and personal problems as factors contributing to academic probation.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This study to determine the factors that cause students to perform poorly, resulting in attrition, furnishes insights into the different challenges that are faced by ADP students. The findings besides providing a good academic reference also provides opportunities at a managerial level, to intervene and implement retention/student success strategies where appropriate via a two-pronged approach from the perspective of the students and the institution working symbiotically. These intervention strategies could help motivate and instill the requisite skills in poor performing students in hopes that they will successfully come out of the probation program to regain good academic standing.

Firstly, the attributes identified may be related to intrinsic/psychological factors such as the students’ personality, motivation and perception. Many studies echo that the students need to be resilient, have clear academic goals, and cultivate a sense of belonging and involvement with their program and learning community. Gray, Vitak [20]found that being well-integrated into university life, having a supportive network and good relationships with staff are vital for academic success. Thus, probation students must be made aware of and be encouraged to leverage on supportive activities such as meeting their academic advisor/faculty regularly for consultation, tapping on campus support like counselling services to help them cope with personal problems, utilizing peer support and tutoring programs like PASS / P2P, and maximizing opportunities to engage in the campus life.

Besides that, attributes related to academic management must be customized to the student’s needs. Since the students who are struggling academically have poor time management, grapple with higher level math, lack study skills and motivation, interventions in the form of study skills workshops and supplemental math classes could be employed.

From the institution’s perspective, interventions need to be reviewed and intensified. Despite the requirement that students on academic probation must meet with their advisor to develop their academic success plan, these students usually miss their regular consultations. While the institution has placed registration holds on students’ account if they do not comply with probation requirements, perhaps more drastic interventions need to be targeted by the program to capture these disengaged students. First, a further study would need to be conducted to ascertain why students lack motivation to study and are struggling with their academics. Next, some possible interventions include:

- Creating an online platform to disseminate crucial information to “at risk” students as well as equip them with digital tools (like planning apps, etc. to manage their time)
- Making it mandatory for probation students to enroll in skill-building workshops to improve study habits, time management skills and personal motivation.



- Requiring students to attend tutoring sessions, document study hours, and meet with peer and faculty advisors.
- Maintaining a low advisor-advisee ratio and training staff to be able to handle probation students (for a more structured consultation session with advisors as it varies currently)
- Harnessing professional advisors (from the student success team) to assist students with their academic success plan and ongoing monitoring, as well as to serve as a resource for faculty advisors.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of probation support services by analyzing students' grades and participation in support programs (via learning analytics)

Some of the above recommendations are adapted from the Education Advisory Board's "Effective strategies for supporting students on academic probation" [21]

In conclusion, regardless of the intervention program that the school/institution formulates, ultimately the decision depends on the probation students themselves who must be motivated to work with the program to be reinstated into good academic standing.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge all Lecturers and Academic Advisors in ADP for their effort in ensuring that probation students participated in the survey.

#### References

1. *Reading between the lines: What the ACT reading test reveals about college readiness*, A.C.T. PROGRAM, Editor 2006: Iowa City.
2. Wilcox, P., S. Winn, and M. Fyvie-Gauld, '*It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people*': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 2005. **30**(6): p. 707-722.
3. Harvey, L. and S. Drew, *The first-year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*. The Higher Education Academy, ed. M. Smith 2006: HEA, York.
4. Faizal, M., V. Kalarani, and A. Amirah, *Student's First Year Experience of American Degree Transfer Program in Malaysia*. *International Educational Scientific Research Journal*, 2016. **2**(11): p. 91 - 94.
5. Seidman, A., *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* 2005, USA: American Council on Education. PRAEGER Series on Higher Education.
6. Bryan, E. and L.A. Simmons, *Family involvement: impacts on post-secondary educational success for first-generation Appalachian college students*. *Journal of College Student Development*, 2009. **50**(4): p. 391-405.

7. McKenzie, K. and R. Schweitzer, *Who Succeeds at University? Factors Predicting Academic Performance in First Year Australian University Students*. Higher Education Research and Development, 2001. **20**(1): p. 21-33.
8. Peterson, C. and L. Barrett, *Explanatory Style and Academic Performance among University Freshmen*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1987. **53**(3): p. 603-607.
9. Ozga, J. and L. Sukhnandan, *Undergraduate non-completion: developing an explanatory model*. Higher Education Quarterly, 1998. **52**(3): p. 316–333.
10. Gerdes, H. and B. Mallinckrodt, *Emotional, Social, and Academic Adjustment of College Students: a longitudinal study of retention*. Journal of Counselling and Development, 1994. **72**(3): p. 281-288.
11. Duffy, K.D., *A Mixed Methods Study of Community College Students on Academic Probation: The Limiting Effect of Academic Doublespeak.*, in Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. *School of Education* 2010, St. John Fisher College. p. 179.
12. Dipboye, R.L. and A.P. Phillips, *College Students' Time Management: Correlations With Academic Performance and Stress*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1990. **82**(4): p. 760-768.
13. Thompson, J., V. Samiratedu, and J. Rafter, *The Effects of On-Campus Residence on First-Time College Students* NASPA Journal, 1993. **31**(1): p. 41-47.
14. Lowther, S. and J. Langley, *First year retention: Is it housing or affiliation that matters?*, in *ALAIR Annual Conference* 2005: Fairhope, Alabama.
15. Bloomquist, E.S., *Developing a Sense of Belonging for Commuter Students: A Mixed Methods Study*, in *Educational Administration* 2014, University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
16. Astin, A.W., *Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education*. Journal of College Student Development, 1994. **40**(5): p. 518–529.
17. Zimmerman, B.J., *A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1989. **81**(3).
18. Fowler, P.R. and H.R. Boylan, *Increasing student success and retention: A multidimensional approach*. Journal of Developmental Education, 2010. **34**(2): p. 2-10.
19. Ahmed, J.U., et al., *Academic Probation: An Empirical Study of Private University Students*. Research in Education, 2014. **92**: p. 1-17.

20. Gray, R., et al., *Examining Social Adjustment to College in the Age of Social Media: Factors Influencing Successful Transitions and Persistence*. *Computers & Education*, 2013. **67**: p. 193-207.
21. *Effective strategies for supporting students on academic probation. [Custom Research Brief]*, E.A. BOARD, Editor 2012, The Advisory Board Company: Washington, DC.