

**THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PROBATION PROGRAM
FOR STUDENTS IN VIOLATION OF THE FINANCIAL
AID SATISFACTORY PROGRESS GUIDELINES**

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An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Tami Fraley
May 1987

ABSTRACT

This study examines the appropriateness of the program at Austin Peay State University to monitor students on financial aid who have violated the federal regulations for satisfactory progress. The probation program consists of academic counseling and attendance at study skill workshops.

The Study-Habits Inventory and Group Embedded Figures Test were administered to 24 of the 168 students in violation for the fall quarter of 1987. ACT scores and grade point averages for all students were obtained. The historical records of the program were reviewed. The results indicate that students placed on probation frequently do not comply with the stipulations of their reinstatement. Further, the results suggest that a majority of the students would benefit from participation in a program to improve academic skills. It also appears that a large percentage of the students may have problems other than academic difficulty that contribute to the violation of the guidelines.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Tami Fraley entitled "The Appropriateness of the Probation Program for Students in Violation of the Financial Aid Satisfactory Progress Guidelines." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in psychology.

Garland E. Blair
Major Professor

We have read this Thesis and
recommend its acceptance:

Robert M. Freely
Second Committee Member

John D. Martin
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and
Research Council:

William H. Ellis
Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Austin Peay State University has developed a program to monitor students receiving financial assistance that adheres to the federal regulations set forth by the Department of Education in the Federal Register (1983). The program guidelines include a quarterly evaluation of all students receiving Title IV financial assistance (Pell Grant, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, College Work-Study, National Direct Student Loan, Guaranteed Student/PLUS Loan, and State Student Incentive Grant). The student is required to meet the scholastic standards of the university as specified in the school's catalog. All students must have attempted less than the total number of hours required for a degree and have earned 66% of the hours attempted.

To determine a student's rate of progression, the total number of hours earned is divided by the total number of hours a student has attempted. The hours attempted are defined as hours that the student registers for on the day of registration. If a student withdraws from a class, the hours will be maintained on the student's financial aid records as attempted hours. A student is considered to be maintaining satisfactory progress if he or she successfully completes 66% of all hours registered for each quarter.

To successfully complete a class, the student must earn an A, B, C, D, or P in the course. Grades of F, XF, I, IP, PR, and W are considered hours attempted but not earned. This implies that a student may have a satisfactory academic record but have grades of incomplete (I) or withdrawals (W) that will lower the percentage of cumulative hours earned within the financial aid guidelines. For example, a student who has a grade point average of 3.0 and consistently withdraws from classes may violate the guidelines and be suspended from the Title IV financial aid program.

A suspended student may be reinstated when he/she provides proof that he/she has complied with all requirements. The requirements consist of:

1. The student files an appeal.
2. The student attends one quarter on at least half time status and is not suspended at the conclusion of the quarter.
3. The student attends, without financial aid, and earns the necessary grades set forth in the hearing with the financial aid committee.

A student has two ways to appeal. The student who is in violation of the guidelines for the first time must go to the Counseling and Testing Center. A student who has repeatedly been in violation and does not comply with the conditions of reinstatement appears before the Financial Aid Committee for a review of the case. The following circumstances are valid

reasons for appeal:

1. Serious illness or accident occurring to the student.
2. Death or serious illness in the immediate family.
3. Discontinuance of a course by the university.
4. Personal complications.

Students who are referred to the Counseling and Testing Center first meet with a counselor. After hearing the circumstances leading to the violation, the counselor evaluates whether the situation was out of the student's control. If the counselor deems the circumstances beyond the student's control, then a recommendation is made to Financial Aid that the student be reinstated. With the recommendation, the counselor explains to the student the conditions for reinstatement as they have been agreed upon by Financial Aid and the Counseling and Testing Center. The student is required to participate in the Academic Success Program which consists of four academic workshops offered by the Counseling and Testing Center and three academic counseling sessions during the quarter. The workshops required include work on study skills, time management, note and test taking, and test anxiety. A student who is in violation of satisfactory progress guidelines is mandated to attend these workshops without regard

to the past academic record of the student or the events leading to the violation.

To complete the process, the student signs an agreement that outlines the requirements for reinstatement. A copy of the agreement and a list of workshop dates are given to the student. The student then returns to the Financial Aid Office to file the appeal.

Statement of the Problem

The guidelines for the progression of students receiving Title IV financial assistance at Austin Peay State University complies with federal and state guidelines. However, the success of the program in assisting the student has not been determined.

This study was originally designed to examine the study habits and field dependence-independence of students who appeal their violation through the Counseling and Testing Center. However, as the study progressed, the focus had to be changed because of the low rate of compliance by students with unsatisfactory progress. In an effort to understand the lack of compliance with the conditions of the program, the ACT scores and grade point averages will be examined and a review of the Counseling and Testing records will be conducted. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the appropriateness of the current probation program for students on probation.

Hypotheses

1. Students who are in violation of the guidelines

for satisfactory progress have poor study habits.

2. Students in violation of the guidelines are field dependent.

3. Students who appeal their violation through the Counseling and Testing Center do not comply with the requirement imposed for the reinstatement of their financial assistance.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

In the past decade, the quality of academic achievement has been the focus of many educators in postsecondary institutions. Specifically, the study skills and learning styles of students have been examined in an effort to understand and assist students who experience academic difficulty. The research indicates that sources of academic difficulty include poor basic skills, lack of motivation, lack of time management skills, poor self concept, long work hours, developmental issues of college age adults, learning styles, and the method of processing information.

Before a student can grow intellectually, the basic foundation must be strong. This foundation is composed of basic skills such as reading (Yellott, Dilks, Dick & Ware, 1984). A student's reading ability will affect comprehension of directions, the ability to study, and the ability to organize information (Rogers, 1984). Christen and Murphy's (1985) research indicates that 50% of the high school students read less than 50 pages of text a week. Only 30% read between 50 and 100 pages a week. The implication, as cited by Spring (1985), is that a poor reader's study strategies are insufficient.

Another factor in a student's success is the motivational level of the individual. Motivation has

been associated with the individual differences found in learning ability and success (Haywood, 1982; Yellott et al., 1984). Pauk (1974) defines motivation as "the will" to learn and concludes that it is the most important aspect of education. This "will" may be a natural curiosity and love of learning or it may be the result of succeeding academically in the past. However the "will" is acquired, Pauk views it as the basis of learning, assisting the student in internalizing information and developing a knowledge base.

Martin and Martin (1980), Haywood (1982), and Ross and Bailey (1983) all conclude that a student's ethnic group may influence the educational experience. The social environment in which a student has been raised is seen as determining the individual's motivation and foundation when entering a postsecondary institution.

Skill in time management is necessary for success in the academic setting. With all the demands placed on a student, the ability to manage time is basic to survival in the university setting. However, research indicates that this skill is not possessed by a majority of college students (Christen & Murphy, 1985; Swanson, 1985; Main, 1980; Gudan & Sudik, 1984; Schuman, Walsh, Olson & Etheridge, 1985). Students have been found to lack the ability to define tasks, organize their long-term projects, monitor their progress, establish priorities, and evaluate the outcome of their work. Christen and Murphy (1985) report 70% of the high school

students in their research had no specific training in time management. Forty-three percent of the students felt "rushed" to complete projects in school.

Another issue is the student's self-evaluation of worth and skill (Main, 1980; Beck, 1980, Bruch, Pearl & Giordano, 1986; Blai, 1982). This evaluation of worth involves the student's assessment of cognitive ability and the "worry" that results. If a student's "worry" about his or her ability to complete the work required becomes overwhelming, the student may not be able to function academically. Watts (1985) recognizes the "perfectionist" as a student who struggles with personal worth and ability. If the student is syllabus-bound, then anxiety will be intensified by the open-ended environment of a university. It behooves counselors when working with students who are experiencing academic difficulty to address this stress (Bruch, Pearl & Giordano, 1986). Reducing general or specific anxiety about a student's ability to perform the work will enable the student to maximize academic performance.

Simpson-Kirland (1983) recognizes the effect that the normal developmental issues of young adults have upon academic success. A student dealing with separation from home, sexual development, occupational decisions, or the influence of peers may neglect academic commitments. This also may be the student's first attempt to be financially independent. Rogers-Stephen (1984) found

that a student who works may invest "too many hours" in the job to devote the adequate amount of time required to succeed academically.

In connection with these environmental influences upon an individual's academic work, research is also examining the basic cognitive styles of students and the influence of individual styles upon academic performance. Goldstein and Blackman (1978) define cognitive style as "a hypothetical construct that has been developed to explain the process of mediation between stimuli and responses" (p. 2); in other words, the individual's way of organizing the environment. A person's style is considered consistent, but it appears that people do have the ability to alter their style.

The recognition of a person's cognitive style may be an asset in educational settings (Witkin, Dyk, Faterson, Goodenough, & Karp, 1974). There are various approaches to the study of cognitive style. One approach is field dependence-independence. This concept assesses how an individual's perception influences thinking and problem solving.

The Rod and Frame Test, the Body-adjustment Situation, and the Embedded Figures Test are designed to measure the extent in which the surrounding organization of the field influences a person's perception of the item within (Witkin, et al., 1974). When a person is able to perceive an item as discrete from the background when the field is organized or is able to impose structure

on a field that has relatively little inherent structure, he/she is considered to be field independent. An individual who follows the field as it is presented is considered to be field dependent.

A field dependent person has been described as operating in a social orientation, describing feelings and attitudes more often and using an external frame of reference. The field independent individual, however, tends to have a more impersonal orientation, interested in the abstract and theoretical and possessing an internal frame of reference (Witkin et al., 1974; Caliste, 1985). The implication for a career decision is that a field dependent person will favor vocational areas that involve more human contact and a field independent person will prefer more solitary areas of work.

Students who are field dependent usually perform better on tasks that have social implications while students who are field independent usually perform better on more abstract, theoretical tasks (Witkin et al., 1974; Thompson, 1984; Caliste, 1985). MacLeod, Jackson, and Palmer (1986) link field dependence to the construct of spatial ability. Their findings suggest that there is one common underlying dimension which is measured by the Embedded Figures Test, the Rod and Frame Test, the Spatial Relations subtests of the Multiple Aptitude Test and the Blocks Design subtest of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS).

Kiewra and Frank (1986) examined the relationship of field dependence-independence to note and test taking. They found that students who were field dependent performed better on recall exams when the notetaking was structured and recall was cued or when the notetaking was unstructured and recall was uncued. Field independent students performed better when notetaking was structured and recall was uncued or when the notetaking was unstructured and recall was cued.

In other studies within the educational setting, Thompson (1984) found that field independent people were more suited for correspondence study. Collins-Eiland, Dansereau, Brooks, and Holley (1986) examined the effect of conversational noise on students in relation to their style. There were no significant differences between groups; however, a slight difference did occur with both groups when the conversation was deemed personally relevant to the student, such as hearing a familiar name mentioned. McDonald (1984) investigated the matching of students and faculty by their preferred style. He discovered that such a pairing would be beneficial for the academic success of only a small proportion of the students.

Recognizing that students have various problems that affect their academic performance, postsecondary

institutions have sought to develop programs outside of the classroom that address these needs. The key components of these programs have included emphasis upon one-to-one academic counseling (Rogers-Stephen, 1984) and workshops on test anxiety, study habits, self-concept (Lyons, 1985; Rogers, 1984; Behrman, Dark, & Paul, 1984; Beck, 1980), decision making (Kline, 1986; Rogers, 1984), and time management (Behrman et al., 1984). The results of participation in such programs have been found to have a positive short and long term effect on performance (Behrman et al., 1984; Lyons, 1985) and provide a positive approach to self development (Beck, 1980).

The difficulty of such programs is that the student, in most cases, must already have experienced academic difficulty to become involved in the program (Lyons, 1985).. It further complicates the program if a student does not voluntarily seek out assistance. Newton and Mathews (1985) contend that a student may not utilize the advice of study skill "experts" or may fail to identify a purpose for their learning. Further, students may even feel threatened when presented with study skills because of their own insecurity and a lack of initiative in changing study techniques.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Procedure

The subjects for this study were 168 students receiving financial aid who were on probation during the winter quarter of 1987. A letter was sent to these students explaining the nature of the study. To encourage participation, students were tested in the last required counseling session. ACT scores, grade point averages, and records of the past participation in the Academic Success Series were obtained.

Students participating in the testing were asked to sign a release of information form to obtain their academic records and to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix). The Study-Habits Inventory and the Group Embedded Figures Test were then administered.

Instrumentation

The Study-Habits Inventory by C. Gilbert Wrenn was chosen primarily for its ease of administration and its availability to the Counseling and Testing Center staff for retesting. The inventory is a weighted checklist composed of items that distinguished between habits and attitudes of students of high academic achievement and students with low academic achievement.

Validity studies indicate a correlation between the inventory scores and grade point averages of .42

(Wrenn, 1941, p. 6). Wrenn recognized that several factors enter into a student's scholastic achievement. He suggested that the inventory is an instrument that will assist counselors in locating particular habits or attitudes that may hinder students from obtaining their best scholastic performance.

The Group Embedded Figures Test is a perceptual test. The task is to locate a previously seen simple figure within a larger complex figure. The test was constructed to provide a practical method to test groups of people for field dependence-independence. It contains 18 complex figures, 17 of which were adopted from the Embedded Figures Test. The items were selected by an item analysis. The previously cited literature indicates that scores on this test are related to a wide range of educationally relevant variables.

The American College Test (ACT) is a battery of four academic tests: English Usage, Mathematics Usage, Social Studies Reading, and Natural Sciences Reading. Standard scores ranging from one to 36 are reported for each test and as a composite score. The ACT has been found to correlate (.50) with college grades and is a standard test accepted for entrance to a university (ACT, 1986).

CHAPTER 4

Results

The Study-Habits Inventory and the Group Embedded Figures Test could be administered to only 24 (16%) of the 147 students on probation. Fifteen females and nine males participated in the testing. Sixteen of the students were between the ages of 18 and 21, seven were 22 to 25 years of age, and one was over 30. There were 11 freshmen, seven sophomores, four juniors and two seniors. Seventeen of the students reported working. Four reported working up to ten hours a week, seven worked 11 to 19 hours a week, four worked 20 to 30 hours a week, and two worked 31 to 40 hours each week.

The mean cumulative grade point average (GPA) of the participants was 1.93, with a standard deviation of .526. The mean GPA for the winter quarter was 1.84, with a standard deviation of .849. The mean ACT score of the sample was 16.9. Seven students did not have an ACT score.

Scores on the Study-Habits Inventory indicate that 17 students were experiencing difficulty reading course material. These students reported re-reading assignments several times, pronouncing the words they read aloud, and difficulty in the location of the important points of the material. Fourteen students

indicated that they missed the relevant points in a lecture when taking notes. Difficulty with day-dreaming and beginning a task was reported by 16 of the students. Dissatisfaction with the distribution of time when studying and a feeling of being "under pressure" was expressed by 14 students. Fifteen students reported experiencing an inability to communicate their knowledge of a subject on an examination.

The mean score of the 15 women who took the Group Embedded Figures Test was significantly lower than the mean of the norm group, $t(14) = 2.784$, $p < .01$. However, the mean for the nine men in the group was not significantly different, $t(8) = 0.30$, $p > .05$.

Table 1

Group Embedded Figures Test

Subjects	Norm	Sample
Men		
N	155	9
Mean	12.0	11.7
Standard Deviation	4.1	5.578
Women		
N	242	15
Mean	10.8	7.2
Standard Deviation	4.2	5.009

There were 168 students on probation in the winter quarter. Twenty-one of these did not complete the quarter. The mean cumulative GPA for the remaining 147 students was 1.915, with a standard deviation of .698. ACT scores were obtained for only 106 students, since 41 did not have an ACT score. The mean score was 15.415, with a standard deviation of 6.031. The mean GPA for the 41 students without an ACT score was 2.059, with a standard deviation of .702. The GPA for students with an ACT score was 1.859. The standard deviation was .688.

Fifty-seven percent of the students had GPA's of less than a 2.0, 28.3% of the students had an ACT score of 20 or above, 22.64% had scores between 15 to 19, and 49.06% had scores below 15.

Table 2 summarizes the relationship between ACT scores and grade point average for this sample. Twenty-seven (26%) students had ACT scores above 15 and GPA's below a 2.0; 35 (34%) students had ACT scores below 15 and GPA's below 2.0. Sixteen (15%) of the students had ACT scores below 15 and GPA's above a 2.0, and 26 (25%) of the students had ACT scores above 15 and GPA's above a 2.0.

Relationship of ACT Scores and Grade Point Averages

GPA	ACT Score	
	0 - 14	15 - 36
4.0 - 2.0	17 (15%)	26 (25%)
1.999 - 0.0	35 (34%)	27 (26%)

Table 3 summarizes the participation of the students in violation of satisfactory progress since the Counseling and Testing Center first began to work with the program. A total of 570 students have appealed their violation through the center. Of these, 34% made an initial contact with a counselor and did not return to complete any of the other requirements. Only 5% of the students completed all the requirements of their probation.

Table 3

Participation in Probation Program--Fall 1985 to Winter 1987

Workshops Attended	Counseling Sessions Attended		
	1	2	3
0	196	41	14
1	117	11	5
2	21	9	9
3	26	7	12
4	19	9	26

A total of 570 students were on probation.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The Counseling and Testing Center offers a variety of workshops each quarter. In the workshops, students are instructed in how to listen and record key points of a lecture, how to organize their study time, and how to make the most of the time they study. Students are instructed in relaxation techniques and a discussion is presented in how to minimize distractions when studying.

It appears that a large percentage of the students who are on probation are in need of the kinds of experiences provided by the Counseling Center. A large percentage of this sample would appear to have the ability to obtain a passing grade but are not doing so. This is supported by the responses of the small sample to the Study-Habits Inventory where students reported an inability to read material effectively, difficulty concentrating, difficulty in notetaking, a lack of control over their time, and anxiety on examinations.

The Group Embedded Figures Test indicates that the sample of women was significantly more field dependent. This tendency toward field dependency suggests that these females may need more structure. This structure may be provided through the academic workshops.

The mean ACT score (15.415) for the violators

was lower than the mean ACT score of incoming freshmen in 1985 (17.11) and 1986 (17.84). This implies that students who are in violation of the guidelines are entering the university less prepared to do the work. It is interesting to note that the 41 students who did not have an ACT score have maintained a higher cumulative GPA (2.059) than students who entered Austin Peay having taken the ACT (1.859). This suggests that nontraditional students may have problems in addition to academic difficulties that contribute to their inability to maintain the required rate of progression.

Fifty-seven percent of the students have a cumulative grade point average below a C level. Forty-nine percent were admitted to the university with ACT scores below 15. This suggests that a majority of these students would benefit from the Academic Success Program.

The comparison of GPA and ACT scores indicates that 40% of the students have GPA's above a 2.0 regardless of their ACT score. This suggests that the students may have other problems that result in the violation of satisfactory progress. For example, the two students who have grade point averages of 3.5 or better and an ACT score of 20 or above may not be considered students with academic difficulty. Thus, the reason for violating the required 66% rate of progression may not be addressed in the current program.

Students who are not experiencing academic difficulty may feel that the current program is an insult or a

waste of time, and, thus, do not comply with the conditions for their reinstatement. However, the data in this study suggest that a majority of the students would benefit from an academic skills program. The records of the Counseling and Testing Center indicate that only five percent of the students have completed the present program in the past. This suggests that even when students are experiencing academic difficulty, they may not take advantage of the assistance offered. These data support the hypothesis that students required to participate in the Academic Success Program will not comply with the stipulations of the program.

Limitations of the Study

The small sample size in the testing discourages generalizations. However, the implications of the testing may form the foundation for future study and may assist a counselor in an initial session with a student who is having academic difficulty.

The program is relatively new and no other historical data were available. Thus, no norm group has been developed to compare students in violation of satisfactory progress guidelines from this year to a past year or past group.

The data collected were descriptive data only. Thus, there are limitations on the statistical conclusions that may be drawn. However, the data do provide a foundation for future studies.

Suggestions for Further Study

As has been implied, the reasons for violation of the guidelines may involve more than study habits or ability for some students. An examination of the reasons given by students when filing the appeal may be of value to the counselor in structuring a program that meets the needs of the student. These data may also assist the Counseling Center in locating areas that need to be addressed in future workshops.

A longitudinal study following students who violate the satisfactory progress guidelines their freshman year may provide information that will assist in the retention of other students. An examination of the problems that concern the nontraditional student who is in violation of the guidelines may provide suggestions for expansion of the current program.

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APPENDIX

AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Pursuant to federal guidelines concerning my right to confidentiality I
_____ authorize Admissions and Records to release
my current grade point average, my cumulative grade point average, my
ACT score and hours attempted and hours earned to Tami Fraley, a graduate
student under the supervision of Dr. Garland Blair, Dr. John Martin, and
Dr. Bob Nevels.

I understand that this release of information is for research purposes only.

Student's signature

Date

SURVEY

AGE _____

SEX _____

CLASSIFICATION: Freshman _____

Sophomore _____

Junior _____

Senior _____

Are you currently employed? _____

If so, how many hours do you work a week? _____