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Implementing a Satisfactory Academic Progress Standard

by Robert W. Evans

In the spring of 1981, the Office of Student Financial Assistance at Kansas State University began a review of its policy on satisfactory academic progress for its students receiving financial assistance under the Title IV program. Not unlike many other educational institutions, the University's policy on satisfactory progress was not clearly defined. The Office of the Assistant Provost, to which the Office of Student Financial Assistance reports, appointed an ad hoc committee from the General Scholarship and Financial Aid Committees of the University to review the current satisfactory progress procedures; to gather from other institutions their policies; and to propose an effective policy.

The committee was composed of the Director of Student Financial Assistance, the Director of Admissions, a representative from the Office of Minority Affairs under the Division of Student Affairs, two student representatives, and two members at large from the general faculty. The committee's charge was to develop a policy of satisfactory progress standards that could be used for determining eligibility requirements for all federal and state programs. The policy which was in effect at the time the committee began its review is reflected in Table 1.

Following a review of the policies of similar institutions, the ad hoc committee began to develop a policy which not only quantitatively reviewed the academic work that a student was doing, but also assessed the quality of work which was being completed. In essence, the committee was not only concerned with the academic performance, i.e. grades and specifically grade point average, but was also concerned that the student was making measurable progress toward a degree in one fashion or another.¹ The committee rejected outright the consideration that the dismissal standards of the University should be used as the benchmark for determining satisfactory progress. To have accepted this premise would have meant that a student could have continued to receive student financial assistance regardless of academic performance, and in essence would only have been excluded from receiving financial aid after dismissal from the University. The committee raised the cumulative grade point average that would be required, assuming the normal completion of 12 hours each semester. The committee agreed that while most students at the University carry a minimum of 15 hours as a full time student, the committee could not reasonably expect all of those to be completed in all circumstances. As a result, the committee agreed that 12 hours should be completed during an academic term. Twelve hours were used each semester because the average student could complete 30 hours in an academic year but the minimum full time load for a student was 12 semester hours. At the same time the committee was concerned about the quantity of work a student would complete in the normal academic year. The figures in Table 2 were agreed upon as the initial cumulative grade point average requirements.

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Table 1
Scholastic Deficiencies Chart

Grade Points			Grade Points			Grade Points		
Hours Completed	Probation Less than	Dismissal Less than	Hours Completed	Probation Less than	Dismissal Less than	Hours Completed	Probation Less than	Dismissal Less than
3	1		43	81	68	82	2.0 GPA	146
4	3		44	83	70	83	2.0 GPA	148
5	5		45	85	72	84	2.0 GPA	150
6	7		46	87	74	85	2.0 GPA	152
7	9		47	89	76	86	2.0 GPA	154
8	11		48	91	78	87	2.0 GPA	156
9	13		49	93	80	88	2.0 GPA	158
10	15		50	95	82	89	2.0 GPA	160
11	17		51	97	84	90	2.0 GPA	162
12	19		52	99	86	91	2.0 GPA	164
13	21		53	101	88	92	2.0 GPA	166
14	23		54	103	90	93	2.0 GPA	168
15	25		55	105	92	94	2.0 GPA	170
16	27		56	107	94	95	2.0 GPA	172
17	29		57	109	96	96	2.0 GPA	174
18	31		58	111	98	97	2.0 GPA	176
19	33		59	113	100	98	2.0 GPA	178
20	35	22	60	2.0 GPA	102	99	2.0 GPA	180
21	37	24	61	2.0 GPA	104	100	2.0 GPA	182
22	39	26	62	2.0 GPA	106	101	2.0 GPA	184
23	41	28	63	2.0 GPA	108	102	2.0 GPA	186
24	43	30	64	2.0 GPA	110	103	2.0 GPA	188
25	45	32	65	2.0 GPA	112	104	2.0 GPA	190
26	47	34	66	2.0 GPA	114	105	2.0 GPA	192
27	49	36	67	2.0 GPA	116	106	2.0 GPA	194
28	51	38	68	2.0 GPA	118	107	2.0 GPA	196
29	53	40	69	2.0 GPA	120	108	2.0 GPA	198
30	55	42	70	2.0 GPA	122	109	2.0 GPA	200
31	57	44	71	2.0 GPA	124	110	2.0 GPA	202
32	59	46	72	2.0 GPA	126	111	2.0 GPA	204
33	61	48	73	2.0 GPA	128	112	2.0 GPA	206
34	63	50	74	2.0 GPA	130	113	2.0 GPA	208
35	65	52	75	2.0 GPA	132	114	2.0 GPA	210
36	67	54	76	2.0 GPA	134	115	2.0 GPA	212
37	69	56	77	2.0 GPA	136	116	2.0 GPA	214
38	71	58	78	2.0 GPA	138	117	2.0 GPA	216
39	73	60	79	2.0 GPA	140	118	2.0 GPA	218
40	75	62	80	2.0 GPA	142	119	2.0 GPA	220
41	77	64	81	2.0 GPA	144	120 or	2.0 GPA ... 1.85 GPA	
42	79	66						

Table 2
Cumulative GPA Requirements

Semester	Hours Earned	Cumulative GPA
1	12	1.00
2	24	1.25
3	36	1.50
4	48	1.62
5	60	1.80
6	72	1.85
7	84	1.90
8	96	1.95
9	108	2.00
10	120	2.00

Discussions were held with various constituencies on campus. One of the primary concerns which the ad hoc committee identified was the concern of how minority students would be affected by this new policy. In addition, the constituent groups were concerned about those students who might be identified early in the satisfactory progress policy as having potential deficiencies, and what the institution could do to assist these students. It was a guiding principle of the ad hoc committee that any policy on satisfactory academic progress must be coupled with an emphasis on

assisting students who are having academic difficulty, and provision of the services of the University to those students. In addition, offices providing special services (i.e. academic advising, counseling, etc.) on campus should be made aware of the students who are potentially going to lose their financial aid, so that they might target their services toward these students. The proposed policy should seek to identify those students who may be excluded from receiving financial assistance because of their academic performance; but most importantly, will identify those students who are in need of special services.

Conducting Research on the Proposal

The success of implementing a new policy on the campus and having it approved by the Faculty Senate and the General Scholarship and Financial Aid Committee of the University rested upon the analysis of how the proposed policy actually would affect students. The Office of Student Financial Assistance, in conjunction with the Academic Assistance Center, identified a research method to review this proposed plan.

Students included in the study were those undergraduates who were awarded one or more types of aid under Title IV funds for the Fall, 1981 semester. This number was further restricted, in that the study examined only those students whose eligibility data contained the previous two semesters performance. The study examined the Fall, 1981 eligibility status of primarily sophomores, juniors, and seniors. With respect to the analysis of the information of credit hours, the study required that the student successfully complete at least 12 hours each semester (meaning that a grade of A, B, C, D, Pass or Credit would have been issued). Those students receiving incompletes were considered not to have completed their course work. Because at the time of the study, freshmen had not had sufficient experience at the University, the study did not seek to identify those freshmen who had just enrolled at the institution.

Table 3 provides a summarization of four possible assistance eligibility categories for Fall, 1981. It reports the number and percent of Fall, 1981 recipients in each category according to the GPA standard only, the credit hour earned only, and both standards combined. This latter grouping provides the overall picture of what the Fall, 1981 recipients would have looked like if the proposed policy had been in effect. With both standards in effect, between 9% and 16% of Fall, 1981 recipients would have been ineligible, depending upon the type of assistance. An additional 5% to 13%, depending upon the type of aid, would have been on probation for the Fall, 1981 semester, with half proceeding to lose their eligibility for the spring semester, 1982.

A second point to be noted with respect to Table 3 is that most of the ineligibility results from students failing to "successfully" complete 12 hours each semester. The impact of the GPA standard is much less. It is important to understand how the study defined the credit hours standard, namely twelve hours successfully completed each semester. Therefore, unless the student had two consecutive semesters of less than 12 hours completed, the student remained eligible. An alternative interpretation of the hour requirement would be to require a student earning less than 12 hours in one semester to make up the shortfall the following semester. This would require the 12 hours plus those needed to equal 24 hours in two consecutive semesters. If this second interpretation were utilized, it was estimated overall ineligibility to increase by at least another 5% to 10%, possibly more. It is also believed that the GPA standard would become more of a factor as well.

The committee examined the impact of the proposed policy (assuming both GPA and hours in effect) upon various demographic categories of students. There are

some consistent trends. First, the impact of the proposal in terms of students becoming ineligible for various types of aid will be significantly greater for virtually all categories of minority students. The *percentage* of minority students declared ineligible is often four or five times that of majority students.

TABLE 3
Fall 1981 Assistance Eligibility Status by Eligibility Standard
and Type of Assistance

Standard/Program	Total	Ineligible ^a		Recovered ^b		Probation ^c		Good Stnd. ^d	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
GPA + HRS									
BEOG (Pell)	2647	370	14	324	12	268	10	1685	64
GSL	4362	633	14	518	12	480	11	2731	63
NDSL	1120	115	10	132	12	90	8	783	70
SEOG1	63	7	11	6	10	8	13	42	67
SEOG2	313	36	12	48	15	30	10	199	64
WORK STUDY	539	49	9	71	13	42	8	377	70
GPA only									
BEOG (Pell)	2647	72	3	49	2	86	3	2440	92
GSL	4362	138	3	88	2	114	3	4022	92
NDSL	1120	23	2	16	1	22	2	1059	95
SEOG1	63	1	2	1	2	-	-	61	97
SEOG2	313	9	3	7	2	5	2	292	93
WORK STUDY	539	16	3	6	1	7	1	510	95
HRS only									
BEOG (Pell)	2647	316	12	350	13	271	10	1710	65
GSL	4362	551	13	543	12	485	11	2783	64
NDSL	1120	93	8	142	13	91	8	794	71
SEOG1	63	7	11	6	10	8	13	42	67
SEOG2	313	27	9	51	16	32	10	203	65
WORK STUDY	539	35	6	77	14	44	8	383	71

^a Students failing to meet eligibility standards during both Fall 1980 and Spring 1981 semesters and, therefore, ineligible for Fall 1981.

^b Students failing to meet eligibility standards during Fall 1980 semester, but meeting standards during Spring 1981 and, thereby, retaining eligibility.

^c Students meeting eligibility standards during Fall 1980 but failing to meet standards in Spring 1981 and, thereby, retaining eligibility for Fall 1981 with probationary status.

^d Students meeting eligibility standards during both Fall 1980 and Spring 1981 semesters, thereby retaining eligibility in good standing.

A second category of student to be strongly affected will be those students 25 and older. Their ineligibility rate is often two to three times that of students aged 24 and under. The credit hour requirement appeared to be the primary cause of this tendency due to the fact that a disproportionate number of students aged 25 and older are part-time students. If they completed less than 12 hours, regardless of grade point average, they were declared ineligible. A high number of ineligibilities for minority students is attributed to both the hours and GPA requirement. Further, the failure to satisfy the hours requirement results not as much from the students carrying "part-time" loads as it does from their failing to satisfactorily complete at least 12 hours of their "full-time" load. The percent of freshmen declared ineligible is also quite large and this results from the fact that a second year classification of "1" (designating freshman) is often the result of having failed to complete a "full-load" or 30 semester credit hours.

Finally, there is a noticeable tendency for greater *percentages* of married students to be declared ineligible. It is believed that this is related to the hours standard, in that there is a tendency for a greater proportion of married students to be "part-time."

Table 4 summarizes what would have been the Fall, 1981 and Spring, 1982 assistance eligibilities had the proposed standards (both GPA and hours) been in effect.

Implications of Research

Following the analysis from the research; the ad hoc committee made the following alterations in the proposed policy:

- Part-time students will be expected to complete the number of hours they start each term (i.e. if they enroll in 9 semester hours, then they will be expected to complete 9 hours).
- Students will be reviewed each semester. If during the previous semester they did not complete at least 12 hours, they will be placed on Financial Aid Warning and be given the next semester to eliminate the deficiencies. As a result, students will be excluded from receiving aid if they have failed to remove their deficiency *after* being placed on warning.
- A cumulative grade point average chart for graduate students was developed.
- The administrative handling of graduate students will have to be tailored to the graduate student who receives "incompletes" in research hours. The ad hoc committee recognizes that students in Masters' or Ph.D. programs often receive incompletes for research.

Following review of this information, the subcommittee on satisfactory academic progress and the General Scholarship Committee of the University considered the proposed policy. The Committee accepted the proposed draft by the subcommittee and expressed concern about the low cumulative grade point average that was being recommended. The subcommittee had recommended this as a compromise proposal since there were varying opinions on what cumulative grade point average should be attached to a semester's worth of work. During discussion, the General Scholarship Committee approved the proposal, inserting new cumulative grade point averages for undergraduate students, and formally acknowledging the standard for graduate students. Table 5 reflects the revised standard.

Following the adoption by the General Scholarship Committee, the proposed policy was forwarded to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate, approved after a second reading at the committee, and then forwarded to the General Faculty Senate. Upon the request of the graduate faculty, a change in the total hours

TABLE 4

Fall 1981 and Spring 1982 Assistance Eligibility Status for Fall 1981 Recipients
Had Proposed GPA and Credit Hrs. Standards Been in Effect

Type of Assistance	Total ^a	F'81 = Yes ^b		F'81 = Yes ^c		F'81 = No ^d		F'82 = No ^e	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
BEOG (Pell)	2647	2156	81	121	5	88	3	282	11
GISL	4362	3517	80	212	5	187	4	446	11
GISL 1									
GSL									
NDSL	1120	966	86	39	3	30	3	85	8
SEOG1	63	53	84	3	5	5	8	2	3
SEOG2	313	264	84	13	4	9	3	27	9
Wk. Study	539	474	88	16	3	17	3	32	6

^aIndicates number of students awarded indicated type of aid for Fall 1981.

^bIndicates number and percent of students eligible both Fall 1981 and Spring 1982 semester.

^cIndicates number and percent of students eligible Fall 1981 but not for Spring 1982.

^dIndicates number and percent of students not eligible Fall 1981 but who were eligible for Spring 1982.

^eIndicates number and per cent of students not eligible for either Fall 1981 or Spring 1982.

NOTE: b + c equals number and percent eligible for Fall 1981.

b + d equals number and percent eligible for Spring 1982.

TABLE 5
Revised Standard on Satisfactory Academic Progress

	Undergraduate*		Graduate*	
	Hours Earned	Cumulative GPA	Hours Earned	Cumulative GPA
1st Semester	12-	1.00	9-	2.65
2nd Semester	24-	1.50	18-	2.65
3rd Semester	36-	1.67	27-	3.00
4th Semester	48-	1.75	36-	3.00
5th Semester	60-	1.80	45-	3.00
6th Semester	72-	1.85	54-	3.00
7th Semester	84-	1.90	63-	3.00
8th Semester	96-	1.95	72-	3.00
9th Semester	108-	2.00	81-	3.00
10th Semester	120-	2.00	90-	3.00

* This schedule of credits completed will be proportionately adjusted for recipients enrolling for less than full time ($\frac{3}{4}$ for 9-11 credits; $\frac{1}{2}$ for 6-8 credits).

earned by graduate students in a given semester would include incompletes if they were in research hours. The ad hoc committee on satisfactory progress and the General Scholarship Committee had been aware that many graduate students who received incompletes in research would have to be treated as an exception and the faculty felt it was necessary to specify this to insure the policy statement was clear. Following extensive discussion on the merits of the program, the Faculty Senate voted to accept the proposed policy and to implement it with the fall semester 1983.

It was interesting to note during the course of the many discussions on satisfactory academic progress, that all the constituencies agreed on the need to strengthen the policy on satisfactory progress, and to hold students accountable for completing academic work when they are receiving student financial assistance. It was recognized by all constituencies that the appeal process which will consider unusual circumstances, should be flexible to meet the individual needs of students and types of students represented in the student body, but also should place great emphasis upon the student and their academic advisor to work closely with each other to resolve academic deficiencies.

Implementation of New Policy

Following the adoption of the policy by the Faculty Senate, the Office of Student Financial Assistance began immediately in the fall of 1982 to advertise the new policy. Major coverage by the student newspaper on campus was given to the new policy, which included an editorial endorsement to strengthen both the academic, and student financial assistance policy of the institution. This endorsement, though not sought after, certainly was welcomed as the implementation of the policy began. During the check disbursement procedure at enrollment during the spring term, 1983, all students who were receiving student financial assistance were provided a copy of the new brochure on satisfactory progress. In addition, in all award letters that were sent to students during the late spring, 1983, for the 1983-84 academic year, a copy of the brochure and a special letter were used to notify all students of the new requirement which began during the fall semester, 1983.

A special profile of minority students and their projected eligibility, based upon the preliminary study that had been done, was provided to the Office of Minority Affairs for special follow up during the spring enrollment period, 1983. Students were routinely notified during the application process in the spring semester 1983, particularly as they completed Guaranteed Student Loans, and applications, and were counseled regarding their potential eligibility or ineligibility based upon the new policy for satisfactory academic progress. Following this intensive public relations campaign, staff in the Office of Student Financial Assistance noted a high increase of student awareness of the number of hours they were completing, and in general, an awareness of their overall academic performance. Again, during the

TABLE 6
ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS PLACED ON
FINANCIAL AID WARNING
FOR SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS
1983-84 and 1984-85 Academic Years

Students placed on Financial Aid Warning at the close of the 1983 fall semester	<u>1934</u>
Students cleared (students who have finished incompletes or who have enrolled in hours and made up their deficiency).	359
Students who did not return for 1984 spring semester after 1983 fall term.	524
Students who withdrew during 1983 fall or 1984 spring term.	59
Students dismissed at close of 1983 fall or 1984 spring terms.	165
Students who graduated, and therefore did not return to the University.	152
Students on Financial Aid Exclusion who enrolled for 1984 fall term with no aid.	484
Students on Financial Aid Exclusion who did not enroll for the 1984 fall term	191

ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS WHO ENTERED
FALL 1984 SEMESTER

Students entering fall, 1984 on Financial Aid Warning.	<u>207</u>
Students who made up their deficiencies.	17
Students who were excluded from receiving aid for spring 1985 because their performance did not meet standard.	92
Students whose records improved enough for the Academic Standards Committee to permit them to receive aid for spring, 1985.	98

ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS WHO ENTERED
SPRING 1985 SEMESTER

Students who were placed on Financial Aid Warning at the close of the fall, 1984 semester for the spring, 1985 semester. (Note: Further information about the academic progress of these students was not available at the time this article was written.)	<u>1889</u>
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enrollment and check dis-bursement procedures for the fall semester 1983, the same brochure on satisfactory academic progress was handed to each student as they received their student aid. The student newspaper continued to provide routine coverage to the new policy on satisfactory academic progress, and the Office of Student Financial Assistance provided special information when the University Registrar published the schedule for the dropping and adding of courses during the term. Again, though this particular approach was not sought by the Office of Student Financial Assistance, it welcomed the interest of the newspaper staff in covering all sides of this new policy.

Results of New Policy

At the close of the 1983 fall semester, 1934 students were placed on financial aid warning (see Table 6). These students had failed to complete at least 12 hours, or the respective amount for part time students. At the time these students were placed on financial aid warning, individual lists were provided to each college on the campus, and those particular colleges were encouraged to use their advising sessions during the spring semester to continue to work with these students who had not completed the number of hours in order to gain financial aid eligibility. Many colleges on the campus use peer counselor programs, and in many other cases academic advisors were notified of these deficiencies so that they could discuss these circumstances with their advisees when they met from time to time. An intensive effort was placed on working with a group of Assistant and Associate Deans in the respective colleges who were responsible for academic advising and enrollment. Many of the colleges on the campus individually called students in to discuss their financial aid warning status, while others corresponded directly with them, and often tagged their enrollment files so they would be required to see a special counselor before proceeding in the enrollment process. Though there is no statistical information relevant in the study to support the conclusion that many students who received intervention early corrected their problem, the study does reflect that a significant number of students were able to remove their deficiencies before the close of the fall semester for 1984.

The approach the University used to review and implement a revised policy for satisfactory academic progress recognized that the policy itself had significant political implications, and was an academic related issue. As a result, a committee representing various groups on campus could serve to provide important input and support as the policy was reviewed. The inclusion of a significant number of people provided the necessary "special interest representation" that assisted the committee in formulating a policy which could gain broad support.

The need to know how the policy would affect students, and the potential impact on enrollment, was a concern that lead the group to use a considerable amount of their time in researching the impact of the policy. This approach provided some additional information to adjust the policy for part-time students, to evaluate the effect of the grade point average and hours earned on our students, and finally it provided detailed information for use to defend the new policy, and answer the large number of questions from academic and student services staff.

¹A separate study by the University's Academic Assistance Center dealt with the length of time allowed students to complete their program.

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