

Institutional Analysis, Assessment & Reporting

Course Repeats and Progress Toward Graduation

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A prior study entitled “Progress Toward Graduation for Fall 2005 First-Time Full-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen” introduced a model for looking at progress toward graduation for our first-time full-time freshmen cohorts. Using the model, students were assigned to an outcome at the start of each semester between fall 2005 and fall 2011. The potential outcomes were:

- **On-track:** the student is enrolled, has a cumulative GPA of at least 2.0, and has completed at least the total number of credits defined as sufficient to reach graduation within six years (i.e., 12 credits after fall 2005, 24 credits after spring 2006, 36 credits after fall 2006, etc.).
- **Low GPA:** the student is enrolled but their cumulative GPA is currently below 2.0. The student’s cumulative credits also are probably low, but low GPA is the defining characteristic.
- **Low Credits:** the student is enrolled and cumulative GPA is 2.0 or better but the student is below the cumulative number of credits they should have accumulated by that semester.
- **Returned After an Absence:** the student is enrolled for the current semester but was NOT enrolled for at least the prior semester, and perhaps more semesters prior to that
- **Not enrolled:** the student is not enrolled this semester and has not received a degree
- **Graduated:** the student received a bachelor’s degree at the end of one of the prior semesters. A student who graduated will be counted as “graduated” from the semester of graduation forward.

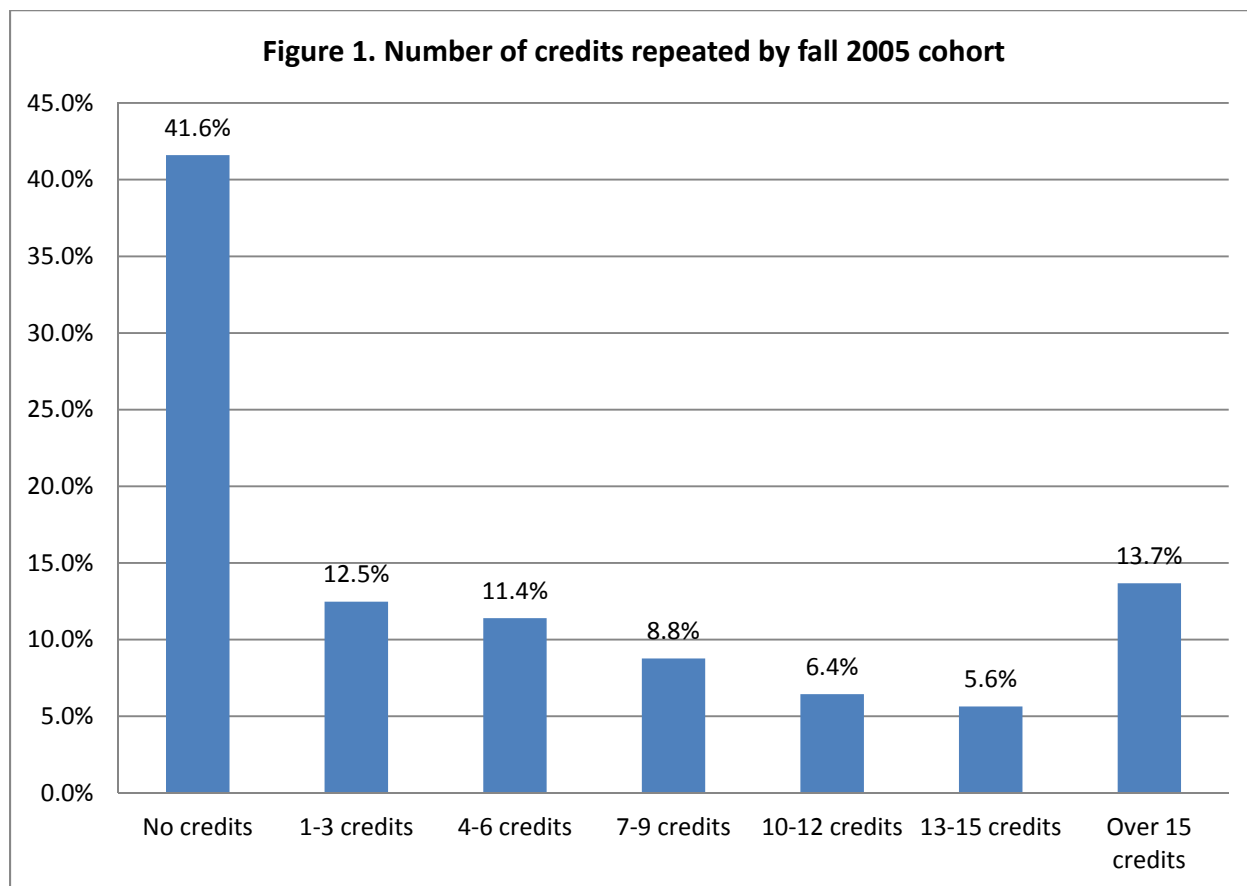
One finding of the study was that only 51% of the group was on-track after only one semester, 21% were not on-track because of low credits, 15% did not return, and 13% had low GPAs in addition to low credits. Of particular interest were the 21% who were not on-track because of low credits, even though their GPAs were satisfactory. Further analysis indicated that many were assigned to the low-credit group because they subsequently repeated courses from their first semester, so the credits from their first semester were reduced.

This study provides a more in-depth look at the role that repeating course credits have on progress toward graduation. The study is based on the same group of first-time full-time fall 2005 bachelor’s degree-seeking freshmen (N=1,755) as the prior study. The study addresses the following questions:

- How many students repeat credits? How many credits do they repeat?
- What is the relationship between number of repeated credits and on-time graduation?
- How does first semester GPA change for those repeating credits from their first semester?
- When students repeated courses, are they typically successful? What are their grades?
- How does lack of success in repeated courses relate to continued enrollment and graduation?

Number of credits repeated

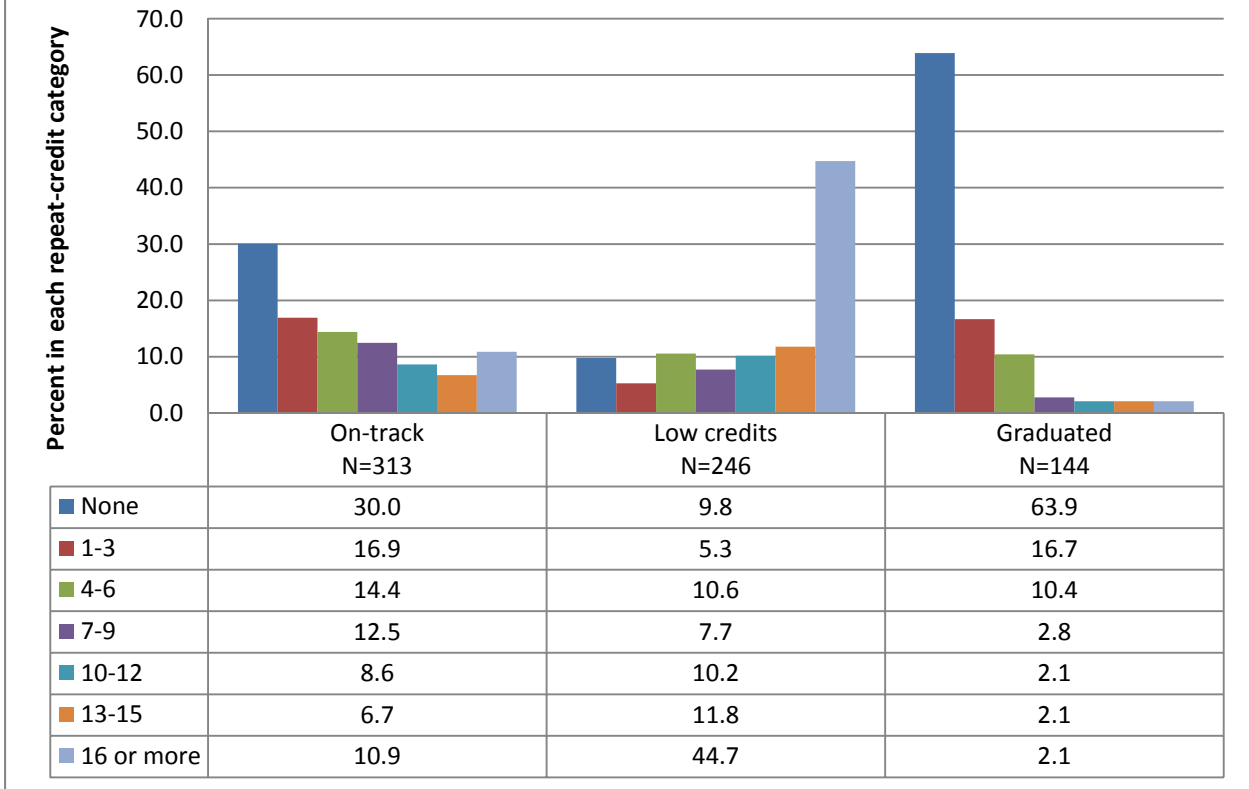
Of this cohort of 1,755 students, 58% had repeated course credits by the 2011-12 academic year. Figure 1 below shows how many credits were repeated. The average number of credits repeated across all students was 6.7—or about two courses over a six year time period.



Relationship between repeated credits and on-time graduation

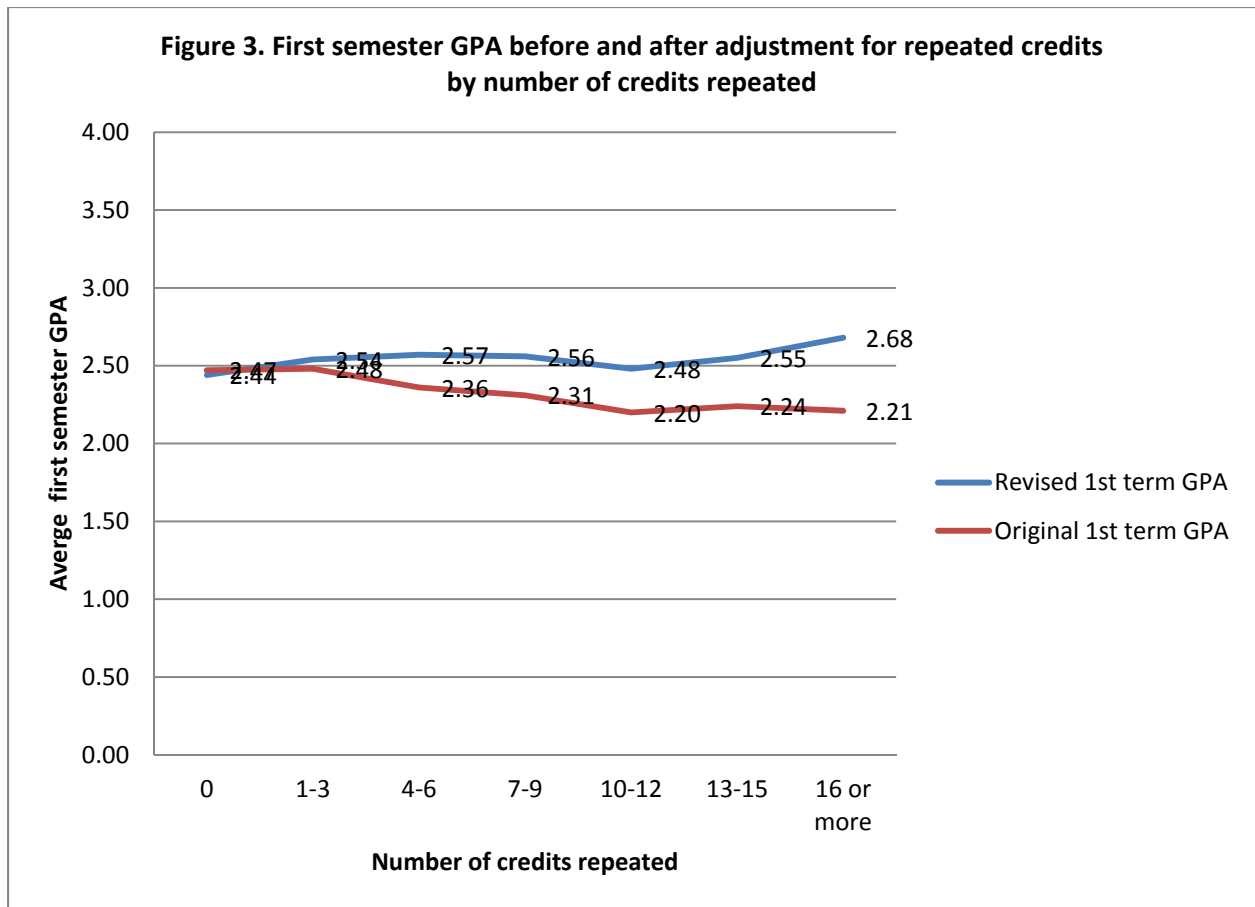
Figure 2 shows the differences in the number of repeated credits based on what each student's status was after four years. For those who had graduated after four years, 64% had NO repeat credits, and 90% had repeated six credits or less. This can be contrasted with students who were still on track to graduate and those who currently had accrued too few credits to easily graduate in six years. For the on-track group, 30% had NO repeat credits and 61% had six repeat credits or less. For the low-credit group, only 10% had NO repeat credits and only 26% had repeated six credits or less. The courses with the greatest number of repeated credits were MATH 108 (1124 credits), MATH 143 (606 credits), PSYC 101 (579 credits), MATH 25 (546 credits), ENGL 102 (510 credits), MATH 147 (430 credits), ENGL 101 (321 credits), MATH 160 (312 credits), BIOL 227 (272 credits), MATH 170 (240 credits), and BIOL 100 (208 credits).

Figure 2. Number of credits repeated and status at four years for on-track, low-credit, and graduated groups



Relationship of repeated credits to first semester GPA

When a student repeats a course at Boise State, the credits and GPA are adjusted for the semesters prior to the semester when the course is being repeated to eliminate the prior grade from GPA calculations and prior credits (if any) from cumulative credits earned. Thus, the prior GPA usually improves because the low grade is eliminated and the number of cumulative credits is reduced since the credits for the repeated course are now the ones that will be counted. As shown by Figure 3 below, the more credits that a student repeats, the greater the difference between their original first semester GPA and what it became after courses were repeated. Note also that students who repeated more credits originally had lower first semester GPAs.



Grades in repeated courses and continued enrollment and graduation

Repeating a course does not guarantee improved performance. As shown by Figure 4, almost 25% of grades in repeated courses were “F’s” and an additional 10% were “D’s.”

To better understand the impact low grades in repeated courses had on progress toward graduation, the percentage of grades that were D,F, or W for each student who had courses that were repeated was calculated. As shown in Figure 5, students who repeated courses and obtained a “C” or better in all of them (i.e., 0% were D, F, or W) had a six-year graduation rate of about 50%. However, as the percentage of repeated credits where a D, F, or W was obtained increases, the graduation rate falls dramatically. The percentage who left without a degree rises to 94% when over 30% of the credits repeated were D, F, or W (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Grades earned in repeated courses

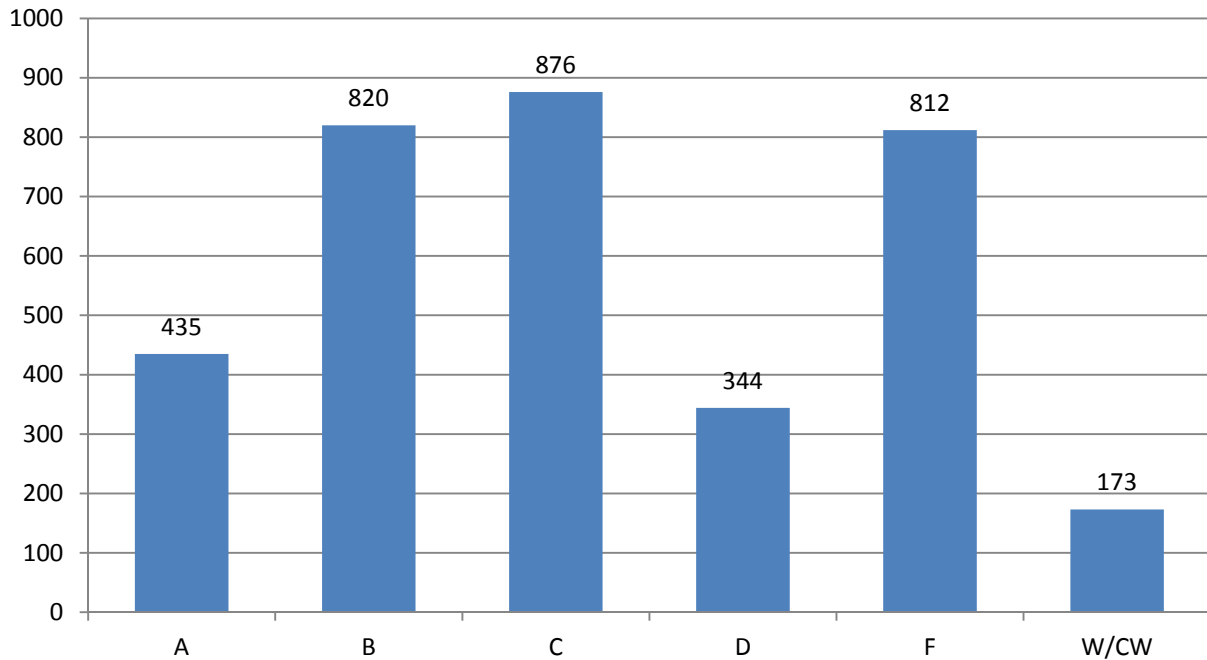
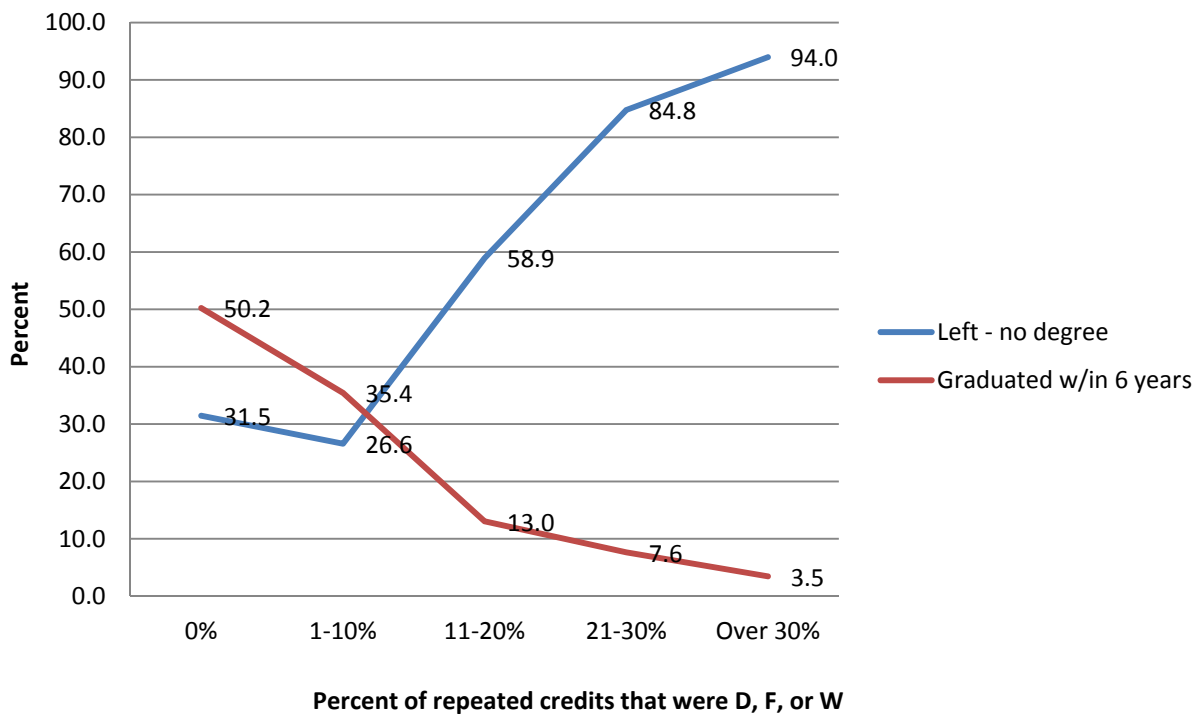


Figure 5. Status after six years based on percent of repeated credits that were D, F, or W
Based on Fall 2005 students who repeated courses



Summary

Repeating courses is a very common among Boise State freshmen, with almost 60% repeating at least some credits within a six-year timeframe. This percentage would undoubtedly be even higher if students who were not retained (and therefore did not repeat courses) were removed from the group. The average number of repeated credits was 6.7, or about two courses. Math 108 was most frequently repeated, followed by Math 143, Psych 101, Math 25, and English 102. Students who graduated within a four- and six-year timeframe had many fewer repeated credits compared to those who were still continuing to enroll.

Repeating courses improved student GPAs, even though almost 40% of the grades received were D, F, or W. As the percentage of repeat credits that earned a D, F, or W increased, the percentage who left the institution with no degree also increased greatly, providing an additional indicator of whether a student is likely to continue or leave. It appears that a modest amount of repeating courses, however, can help graduation rates.

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