

Academic probation hits college guys harder

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Jason M. Lindo, assistant professor of economics at the University of Oregon, has found that academic probation at the end of their freshman year increases the probability that men will drop out of college. Credit: Photo by Jim Barlow

Male college students, especially those who had done well in their high-school classes, are much more likely than females to drop out when placed on academic probation after their first year in school, according to a researcher now at the University of Oregon.

College students who bounce back from academic probation subsequently do improve their grades and improve their graduation prospects, the study found.

The study -- published in April in the *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 2* -- was based on data collected by a three-campus Canadian university from 1996 to 2005. Using a regression discontinuity

design, researchers focused on 12,530 first-year students whose grade point averages put them just above or just below the grade point that triggered academic probation. Researchers then followed these students as they proceeded or dropped out.

"By focusing on students within a narrow range of GPAs around the probationary cutoff, all of the students in the study were very similar in how well they performed in their classes, but those with slightly lower GPAs found themselves on academic probation," said Jason M. Lindo, a professor of economics. "Before this paper, we knew almost nothing about how students actually respond to being placed on academic probation. Everything that we did know had come from broad comparisons of outcomes of students placed on probation to outcomes of all students who were not placed on it."

The new study removed all students who were well above or well below the threshold of academic probation from consideration, allowing more intense scrutiny of outcomes.

"Placing students on probation increases the probability that they will drop out," Lindo said. "For those students who return to school, their GPA goes up by about 0.2 grade points." The real impact, he added, is seen in what happens to young men.

For men, academic probation doubles the likelihood that they will drop out of school -- from a 3 percent probability to a 6 percent probability, Lindo said.

Male students who had done above average work in high school but whose work triggered academic probation after their first year of college saw their probability of graduation drop by 14.5 percentage points, Lindo and colleagues found.

The study found no statistically significant effects on women or on male [college students](#) who had experienced lower-than-average grades in high school.

"Those with a history of greater success are more discouraged when they get placed on probation in college," Lindo said, adding that he was surprised by the discovery. "This may just be that it comes as a greater shock to students who been successful throughout their high-school careers."

Placing [students](#) on probation involves a tradeoff in terms of encouragement and discouragement, said Lindo, who began the study while a doctoral student at the University of California, Davis. He teamed with fellow UC-Davis doctoral student Nicholas J. Sanders and Philip Oreopoulos, professor of economics at the University of British Columbia who already had student data.

Provided by University of Oregon

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