

Academic probation, public praise both improve performance, study finds

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College students who receive dean's list recognition and those put on academic probation both improve their academic performance in subsequent semesters, according to a working paper by Georgia State University economist Nicholas Wright.

Using the confidential administrative records of a large, publicly funded university, Wright examined the extent to which [college students](#) are incentivized to change their behavior when they receive administrative feedback that either reprimands or rewards their [academic performance](#).

"Many colleges use these programs to encourage students," said Wright, a Ph.D. candidate in Georgia State's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. "But this is the first paper to examine the impact of the dean's list policy in the economics literature."

The observed increase in grade point average, however, may not be indicative of improvements in [student](#) learning. Students rewarded with inclusion on a dean's list were 15 percent more likely to select instructors that awarded the highest number of A's and B's in the past and were 21 percent more likely to choose instructors that have the highest pass rate.

"Students were able to successfully pick up on signals about the level of difficulty of courses and instructors based on past grading history," Wright said. "They used these signals to engage in strategic course-taking behaviors that could partially account for improved performance in future semesters."

Similarly, students who were exposed to the academic probation [policy](#) were 9 percent more likely to switch their major, making a strategic change to their program of study to raise their academic performance.

"The results suggest both policies have a positive effect on academic performance," he said.

Wright believes the conclusions outlined in the research may apply in most contexts where a person's [performance](#) is used as a basis for reprimand or recognition.

"In the service industry, for example, those performing exceptionally well are often publicly recognized," he said, "an approach that may influence an employee's decision-making. In an academic setting, these results offer many insights policymakers should consider when designing interventions that reward or reprimand students."

More information: Nicholas Wright. Perform Better, or Else: Academic Probation, Public Praise and Students Decision-Making, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.3142416](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3142416)

Provided by Georgia State University

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