

ACADEMIC PROBATION: POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND INTERVENTIONS

by

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, increasing student success and completion rates has become a goal of every institution of higher education in the United States. Both two- and four-year institutions are enhancing their policies and procedures to keep students in college, improve their chances for success, and increase completion rates. One element that contributes to this goal is the institution's academic probation policies, practices, and interventions. The purpose of this study is to examine academic probation policies, practices, interventions, and outcomes at four Michigan community colleges and recommend best practices for institutions to consider adopting to enhance student success.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION PROBLEM: NATIONAL**

Community colleges are being brought to the forefront of our national discussion as to the significant role they play in education and the economic stability of our country. This role became more imperative when President Barack Obama suggested that community colleges take up the challenge of having five million more students with degrees and certificates by the year 2020 so that America can become the most educated country and meet its future manpower needs (White House Summit on Community Colleges, 2010). Increasing globalization has led to a world where economic and social changes result in dynamic shifts within current and emerging workforce needs, making it more difficult for community colleges to align their programs with the evolving needs of employers. While many community colleges are expanding their partnerships with local employers and businesses, developing new academic curricula and working more closely with workforce development agencies to identify skills and certifications needed for specific occupations, more work still needs to be done.

The reality for many community colleges is that they lack adequate resources, financial support, and systematic planning to meet the target of 50% more qualified students by 2020. In the U.S., only about 40% of the 25 to 34 years age group has an associate's or higher degree (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC], n.d., p. 3). Some of the chief reasons for

academic failure are lack of college readiness, need for remedial education, increased tuition costs, first-generation in college, family responsibilities, or employment. The inability to complete a certificate or degree program has adverse effects, not just on the student's morale but also financial status. Students who drop out of college may find themselves in a constant struggle financially as they leave with no money, no college degree, and few job prospects. Further, the outcomes may result in them getting trapped in a vicious cycle of accepting low paying jobs and struggling with college debt which prevents them from returning back to school to earn a credential. By 2018, 63% of jobs will require postsecondary skills — a target that seems difficult to achieve, given current conditions. Of those students who enroll in occupational certificate programs, 38% do not manage to earn any credentials within 6 years, and 58% of those who enroll in occupational associate degree programs also do not manage to earn a credential. There is likely to be a shortage of at least 3 million graduates by 2018, if the current trend persists (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC], n.d., p. 6).

A critical dialogue at the national level addressing these issues began in 2010 with the first-ever community college summit held at the White House under the direction of Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden and an accomplished community college educator. This summit brought community college leaders together from across the nation to examine the challenges collectively faced by their institutions with the goal of identifying real solutions. Some of the key areas discussed during the summit were (1) providing affordable education at community colleges by facilitating the first two years of study of a baccalaureate degree and allowing smooth transfer through simultaneous admission in community college and university as well as transparency regarding fees, costs and provision for internships; (2) increasing

completion rates by providing strong student support, collaboration with industry, accelerated learning and remedial education; (3) streamlining the process of financial aid to cover more students — apart from Pell Grants, other federal aid, emergency grants, and extension of American Opportunity tax credit; (4) preparing to meet the needs of 21st century students from diverse backgrounds, different age groups, with different personal goals; (5) offering opportunities to military officers, their families and veterans, since community colleges are their preferred institutions and offer flexible schedules, choice of programs, reasonable costs and convenience; and (6) promoting connections with industry, labor, employers and allow the colleges to train students to meet industry requirements so that they can be gainfully employed (White House Summit on Community Colleges, 2010).

At the national level, other organizations have also been engaged in this dialogue about community college work. The 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges focused on the important role of community colleges in providing higher education to millions of students thus paving the way to a bright future for the nation. In their analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by community colleges to meet national and institutional goals, clear vision, and innovative strategies were noted by the Commission Report. The report, *Reclaiming the American Dream* (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2012) was based on two phases. Phase 1 depicted a listening tour where opinions were sought from more than 1,300 stakeholders on a range of issues such as student access, budget problems, accountability, etc. Phase 2 dealt with the responsibilities and challenges faced by the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges and included global competitiveness, student completion rates, institutional accountability, and job worthiness

(America Association of Community Colleges [AACC] 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012, p. 7).

Although community colleges have been responsible for helping millions of students attain higher education and employment, the Commission recognized the need for community colleges to implement initiatives that directly address the issues of low success rate of students, lack of preparation for the job market, and transitions between high school, college, and baccalaureate institutions (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC] 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012, p. 10). The Commission further offered suggestions based on “Three Rs”: *redesign* students’ educational experiences (improve completion rates, college readiness, and reduce skills gap); *reinvent* institutional roles (clear vision for education and employment, partnership with government, private organizations and institutions); and *reset* the system to create incentives for student and institutional success (more investment and policies which foster transparency and accountability (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC] 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012, p. 12).

Additional recommendations from the 21st Century Commission include emphasizing student success rather than access; changing low rates of student success into high rates; clearing educational pathways rather than offering random courses; shifting the focus from teaching to learning, from isolation to cooperation, from individual faculty success to collective responsibility for success of students, as well as providing adequate support structures (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC] 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012, p. 11). In conclusion, for community colleges to remain an asset for

the nation and further contribute to the economic growth and meet the needs of the 21st century, they will need to raise the bar dramatically to improve results.

### **THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION PROBLEM: MICHIGAN**

Community colleges have often been called the “backbone of our nation’s educational and workforce system” and, in Michigan, 28 community colleges offer education to a vast number of students. Unfortunately, not all students attending Michigan community colleges successfully complete a certificate or degree program. Many students unable to meet the minimum academic standards of the college are placed on academic probation and fail to matriculate through their academic program and graduate. Unfortunately, due to the lack of data it is difficult to establish how prevalent academic probation is within community colleges in Michigan.

Academic probation is a major factor in non-completion and the initial phase begins with an official message from the college declaring that the student’s performance is below the minimum academic requirement of the institution. It is often expressed in terms of GPA but may also be determined by credits obtained or overall academic progress. In most cases, a student on academic probation has a cumulative GPA of below 2.0 or “C” grade for two consecutive terms. A warning is given, the student notified and his/her progress is carefully monitored. If the student manages to subsequently obtain a GPA of at least 2.0, he/she is removed from probation. If not, the student may be dismissed or suspended. Students may be placed on academic probation as a result of unclear educational or career goals, being academically unprepared for college, having low motivation, lacking study/time management

skills as well as external factors such as family responsibility or financial difficulties (Tovar & Simon, 2006, p. 4).

To meet changing student needs, Michigan community colleges have begun to incorporate the use of high impact practices recommended by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE, 2013). The Center's research demonstrates how high-impact practices such as "structured group learning which includes orientation, accelerated or fast-track developmental education, first-year experience, student success course, and learning community affect student outcomes positively" (CCCSE, 2013., p. 6). Other proven practices include experiential learning, extra tutoring, academic planning, and supplemental instruction.

To increase the number of students progressing through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs, a select group of Michigan community colleges have been awarded TRIO grants such as Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and Educational Opportunity Centers which target low-income students, first generation students, and individuals with disabilities. These programs include services such as academic tutoring, counseling, cultural events, mentoring, and financial assistance.

In the face of these challenges, Michigan community colleges have an important task in assessing their role and efficacy regarding students at their institutions. Adopting best practices and programs that could prove beneficial to all their students has been out of reach for Michigan community colleges due to the absence of a support network at the state level. However, this changed for Michigan in 2007 when the Michigan Community College Association established the Michigan Center for Student Success. This organization provides all 28 Michigan community colleges state-level support to improve persistence and completion by developing

and implementing a collective student success agenda. Within this agenda, there is an array of current and emerging initiatives focusing on (1) Access & Alignment, (2) Entry & Intake, (3) Teaching & Learning, (4) Acceleration & Progress, and (5) Completion & Success to help improve student outcomes at Michigan Community Colleges (Michigan Community College Association, 2014). The majority of Michigan community colleges have participated in Achieving the Dream, Accelerated Learning Program, Project Win-Win, and/or Credentials that Work.

The 17 Michigan community colleges that participate in Achieving the Dream (AtD) are supported by this national nonprofit to implement strategies designed to help more students, particularly low-income students and students of color, earn degrees, complete certificates, or transfer to other institutions to continue their studies. Achieving the Dream emphasizes a culture of evidence, in which colleges use data to identify effective practices, improve student success rates, and close achievement gaps (Michigan Community College Association, 2015). One of the participating schools, Wayne County Community College, joined AtD in 2008 and was recognized in 2011 as the first AtD Leader College in Michigan based on raising persistence and graduation rates and closing achievement gaps. This institution implemented an early alert system intervention strategy providing intrusive advising to students in developmental English and math as well as students in learning communities resulting in an increase of first-year fall-to-winter retention from 49% in 2006-07 to 64% in 2009-10. This intervention has been scaled to reach 15% of all students (Wayne County Community College District, n.d.)

Nineteen Michigan community colleges have also implemented an *Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)*. This program is a co-requisite model for delivery of developmental writing instruction concurrently with a college-level course that attempts to combine the strongest

features of earlier mainstreaming approaches and to raise the success rates and lower the attrition rates for students placed in developmental writing (Michigan Community College Association, 2015). The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) newly implemented at Henry Ford Community College reported that during the 2015-2016 academic year it improved the success rate of students from 54% to 77% for students participating in the program (“Accelerated Learning Program Increases Student Success,” 2015).

Twenty-one Michigan community colleges, broken up over two rounds, were involved with *Project Win-Win* in which institutions focused on identifying former students that completed a significant number of credits but did not earn a degree. Students who were either eligible to receive a degree or had the potential to earn a degree within 12 credits were contacted by the institution to assist them with completing requirements to receive their degree (Michigan Community College Association, 2015). In 2011, the 9 institutions involved in Round 1 identified 6,935 potential students but 2,682 students were unable to be contacted. Further, of those who were contacted 1,666 were missing a math requirement and 1,026 missing an English requirement resulting in only 1,087 total degrees being awarded (Michigan Community College Association, 2014). In 2014, 12 additional institutions joined Round 2 of Project Win-Win awarding more than 2,000 associate degrees as of Spring 2016 (Michigan Community College Association, 2014).

Fourteen of the 28 Michigan community colleges also utilize *Credentials that Work* by collecting and using real-time labor market information to better align investments in education and training with the needs of the economy (Michigan Community College Association, 2015). This is an emerging, web-based approach to track the extent and nature of employer

demand for skilled staff by gathering online job postings and sorting them by location, industry, occupation, and skill and certification requirement. Some challenges community colleges have faced with implementing this initiative are:

- Lack of funding to purchase LMI services and to create suggested new offerings.
- Staff who are skilled at using LMI to support new program development, curricula redesign, or student career guidance.
- Faculty and staff reluctance to changing and updating courses.
- Acquiring and maintaining software, equipment, and facilities quickly enough to support new programs. (Jobs for the Future, n.d.)

Even though the current and emerging initiatives at Michigan community colleges are all designed to help improve student success by focusing on access/alignment, entry/intake, teaching/learning, acceleration/progress, and completion success, none of the initiatives address institutional policy or practices related to academic probation, a significant factor in non-completion. Consequently, when community college students face difficulties and are unable to meet the academic standards of their institution and find themselves on academic probation, they may eventually drop out of college. Institutional policies, procedures, and programs related to academic probation, therefore, require continuous improvement to be effective for students to improve their academic standing and completion of certificate or degree programs.

### **MUSKEGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE: SHIFTING FROM ACCESS TO SUCCESS**

For many years, Muskegon Community College faced difficulty in determining what changes in programs, services, policies, or practices improved student success without centralized assessment efforts. Despite the lack of evidence to prove changes in broad success

rates, student experiences appeared to have improved through initiatives noted in the *Achieving the Dream Proposal* (Muskegon Community College, 2010), such as (1) the newly renovated College Success Center with its own testing room and which offers one-on-one assistance to struggling students; (2) expanded face-to-face tutoring at the Tutoring Center that includes online tutoring; (3) a COMPASS placement test that more accurately assesses students' potential for success at various levels; (4) the Student Life Office that caters to the needs of adult, nontraditional students, and oversees the rapidly expanding list of active student clubs; (5) Phi Theta Kappa, the two-year college honor society, that involves its members in community service; and (6) orientation sessions that are offered more frequently for new incoming students.

Muskegon Community College, like many other Michigan colleges, joined *Achieving the Dream* and in the Spring of 2010 began the journey of developing a culture of evidence — to develop and implement data-informed strategies to improve student success and then to evaluate whether the strategies work. In 2011, the groundwork was laid for planning and implementing strategies by collecting and organizing information about students, classes, certificates and degrees, policies and procedures. Through the collection of data, MCC was now able to develop an overall picture of students' academic progression over the previous years, draw comparisons from other AtD schools, and monitor the effectiveness of student success strategies. The institution's initial key strategies for student success focused on new student orientation, college success seminar course, new developmental education requirements and academic goal setting and planning. The college continued these efforts in 2012 with the design of the Student Success and Completion Agenda which outlined 3 major goals:

1. Every MCC student will *complete* with a postsecondary degree or certificate enabling them to be successful in a 21st century global economy.
2. MCC will *support* programs, develop networks and target high impact solutions to help our students succeed.
3. MCC will constantly *evaluate* its student success initiatives and report the results of these evaluations to our students and community.

To support these goals, multiple activities are developed around college readiness, early engagement and AtD, with only one major reference to a review of college policies and procedures, which is stated as follows (Muskegon Community College, 2013):

1. Present update on policy/practice review to faculty and staff
2. Examine CCSSE and SENSE results for information related to MCC policies and procedures that impede student engagement
3. Review research for best practices at community colleges
4. Present summary of above three times to various groups on campus (administration, faculty, Board, Student Services, staff, etc.)
5. Determine which, if any, policies and procedures should be discontinued, implemented, or changed
6. Evaluate any changes through qualitative and/or quantitative data
7. Monitor changes in policies/procedures for impact on retention

In alignment with the Student Success and Completion Agenda, a new policy was proposed and approved in 2015 to address the school's achievement gap. This policy requires all new students placed into two developmental courses to attend new student orientation before or during the first semester, schedule an appointment with a counselor for a goal setting and planning session, enroll in a minimum of one required developmental course during the first semester, and enroll in a college success seminar during the first or second semester.

The overall effectiveness of this policy and its impact on retention for Hispanic, African-American, male, and part-time students will need to be further assessed by monitoring the student cohort in comparison to the school's achievement gap from 2010-2014 as reflected in the following data:

- Hispanic students persist to the second semester or second year at significantly lower rates than the total cohort ranging from 4.9% lower in 2010-2011 to 19.6% lower in 2013-2014.
- African American students persist to the second semester or second year at significantly lower rates than the total cohort ranging from 12.5% lower in 2010-2011 to 6.2% lower in 2013-2014.
- Male students persist to the second semester or second year at slightly lower rates than female students ranging from 2.7% higher in 2010-2011 to 5.9 % lower in 2013-2014.
- Part-time students persist to the second semester or second year at significantly lower rates than full-time students ranging from 26.1% lower in 2010-2011 to 14.1% lower in 2013-2014.

None of the initiatives implemented by the school directly address academic probation.

In consideration of future policy changes at the college, it is important that the institution begin to access academic research about best practices for community colleges, implement approved policies, and monitor the impact on retention as proposed in this study.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Every institution of higher learning has its share of students struggling to meet the standards and facing academic difficulties. The reasons are diverse and include lack of preparedness for college, unrealistic aspirations, inability to adjust, family problems, financial difficulties, health issues, or the student being from an ethnic minority group. Whatever the reason, academic probation policies, guidelines/procedures, and strategies are designed to help

students who stumble understand the challenges and find relevant solutions to achieve academic success. Additional research needs to be conducted to understand how to implement effective policies, procedures, and programs to reduce the number of students on academic probation, particularly in community colleges, as they enroll a sizeable proportion of students opting for higher education, and a high proportion of those students fit the profile of academic risk.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

To meet the challenge set for community colleges by President Obama to produce 5 million more degree holders by 2020, community colleges need to invest significantly in restructuring their programs and removing obstacles to implement best practices needed for student success. To this end, there is a need for further research regarding policies, programs, and guidelines to help reduce the number of probationary students. When deciding a policy for academic probation in community colleges, it is imperative to take into account factors which lead to a student being placed on academic probation. Research should concentrate on the underlying problems as well as methods to deal with them. Some barriers probationary students face are lack of study skills and inability to meet academic challenges; choice of a subject or course for which they have no real interest or aptitude; lack of motivation and commitment in pursuing studies; and lack of adjustment to college life and other personal reasons, which may be ill health, financial problems, or family responsibilities. Regardless if a student is on academic probation due to a single factor or a combination of them, once the root cause is dealt with, the student should be able to improve his/her academic standing. Further

research can be conducted in this area to find innovative strategies which will improve the college retention rate. There is ample opportunity identifying information, collecting data, and conducting research on programs for students on academic probation in community colleges.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Academic probation policies are standard at most institutions and are designed to distinguish probation students from those in good standing; however, many institutions, including Muskegon Community College, have collected institutional data of students on probation but are only in the beginning stages of exploring how best the institution can address this issue. Typically, academic probation at Muskegon Community College, which is defined as any student who receives a cumulative grade point average less than 2.0 (“C”) for 12 or more semester hours of credit, averages between 5-10% for the total student population.

Creating and implementing successful academic probation programs at community colleges that help students move from probation to good standing to graduation requires more extensive research on academic probation that will facilitate community colleges continual work towards a more comprehensive understanding of at-risk populations by identifying (1) policies and programs currently being used at selected community colleges, (2) what outcomes/strategies are utilized for probationary students, (3) best practices for a comprehensive academic probation model to facilitate students placed on academic probation to be successful in community colleges, and (4) outcomes of implemented strategies.

The following research questions will be explored in this study:

1. How is academic probation *defined* at the selected community colleges?

2. What academic probation *policies* are in place at these community colleges?
3. What are these institutions' *procedures and guidelines* regarding academic probation?
4. What *criteria* must be met for continued enrollment? How is this monitored/enforced?
5. What are the *strategies* used to support probationary students at selected institutions?
6. What are the outcomes of those *strategies*?

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Special language is frequently referenced throughout the study so this glossary is meant as a quick guide to define the most commonly used academic terms:

*Academic Dismissal Policy:* A policy that requires dismissal from the college if students do not show steady academic progress or remain in academic difficulty for an extended period of time.

*Academic Probation Policy:* The policy of notifying students that have not met the academic standards of the institution and are restricted in their academic or social activities for a specified period of time or until they raise their GPA to a specific level. Academic probation is most likely to occur if a student's overall grade point average falls below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale (Gehrke, 2006).

*Academic Standing Policy:* An academic policy that all students are required to make satisfactory academic progress according to the institutional standards and compliance is checked at the end of each semester for all enrolled students.

*Community College/Junior College:* Two-year institutions that grant certificate and associate degrees.

*GPA:* The computation of an average of all the grades a student earns within a certain semester. A cumulative GPA is the average computation of all the grades a student earns during the entire time the student is at a specific college.

*High Impact Practices:* Teaching and learning activities that have been widely tested and shown to be beneficial for college students such as first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, student success course, and accelerated or fast track developmental education (CCCSE, 2013).

*Intervention:* Policies and programs intentionally designed to increase student success as defined by persistence, retention, and completion.

*Persistence:* The act of the student staying in higher education from entry into college until graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

*Retention:* The institution's ability to keep a student enrolled from admission through graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

## **SUMMARY**

The Obama Administration has put the challenge and responsibility of providing an educated and skilled future workforce on the broad shoulders of community colleges. The call to increase completion rates recognizes the importance of these open access institutions offering postsecondary education opportunities to any student interested in higher education,

and eradicating attainment gaps associated with income, race, ethnicity, and gender (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2015, p. 4).

As per “Democracy’s Colleges Call to Action” pledge signed in 2010 by six national community college organizations, the colleges have taken up the challenge to increase student completion by 50% by the year 2020.

In the 2009-10 academic year, public community colleges conferred slightly less than 920,000 degrees and certificates. Projecting the same number of degrees per year out to 2020 would represent 9,200,000 certificates and degrees. To increase student completion as it relates to certificates and degrees by 50% would require approximately 4,600,000 additional awards totaling 13,800,000 awards over the ten-year period. (America Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2015, p. 8)

A steady increase was also noted over the next few years as seen by 1,000,000 degrees and certificates conferred during 2010-11 academic year, and 1,200,000 during 2013-14 academic year. Overall, the initial statistics are favorable, but they provide little insight on how future substantial gains can be made towards meeting the targeted goal.

As community colleges begin to explore better ways to increase student completion they should strongly consider incorporating aspects of practices implemented at the national level: “Despite years of effort, institutions have yet to develop a coherent framework to guide their thinking about which actions matter most and how they should be organized and successfully implemented” (Tinto,2012). Additionally:

To improve retention and graduation, each community college must begin focusing on its own behavior and establishing conditions within its walls to promote those outcomes. This does not preclude efforts beyond the campus to enhance the likelihood of success for its current and future students. Nor does it preclude efforts to recruit students who are themselves more likely to stay and graduate. (Tinto, 2012)

In summary, to meet the challenge set for community colleges by President Obama to produce 5 million more degree holders by 2020, community colleges need to invest significantly

in restructuring their programs and removing obstacles to implement best practices needed for student success. To this end, there is a need for further research regarding policies, programs, and guidelines to help reduce the number of probationary students. Community colleges' ability to achieve the target set by the Obama Administration will remain difficult if these institutions of higher education continue to overlook academic probation as a factor in non-completion.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature, it has been noted that (1) admission and (2) enrollment are critical steps toward achieving a degree. However, a third issue is that, after enrollment, students are mandated to achieve particular standards. Students have choices and actions that they have to take in order to achieve acceptable academic progress. It is also well known that, along the way, many students experience difficulties in relation to their academics. These challenges further limit student ability to achieve the mandated standards and require the institution to warn students and, in some cases, place them on academic probation or suspension. This chapter explores the selected literature which addresses the issue of academic probation. The literature review covers various aspects of academic probation including policies, procedures, and guidelines, and strategies for supporting students on academic probation.

### **ACADEMIC PROBATION: DEFINITION, POLICY, GPA REQUIREMENTS**

#### Academic Probation Policies in Postsecondary Education

According to academic standing policies at most community colleges and universities, students are categorized three ways including good standing, probation, or suspension.

Academic standing is one measure of academic achievement and it helps students determine whether they are eligible to continue their studies and qualify for graduation. Postsecondary

institutions expect students to meet certain requirements to remain in good standing which is met once a student maintains a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0. However, when a student does not maintain the minimum GPA requirement established for good academic standing and graduation, he/she is placed on academic probation. Further, a student with an academic probation status must demonstrate improved academic achievement at the end of the probation semester. Consequently, failure to adhere to the rules or limitations imposed by the institution as a condition of probation can result in academic suspension.

Overall, the calculation of a college student's grade point average (GPA) is one of the general measures of academic achievement. A student is assessed by the institution on how well he/she has done in every course within a given semester and for all semesters reflected in the cumulative GPA. In calculating the GPA, a point value is assigned to each letter of the alphabet from A to E. In this scoring system, E has the lowest score which is 0 while A has the highest score which is 4. The student's average is then calculated to determine the GPA.

#### Academic Probation in Universities

Policies related to academic good standing for most universities require a 2.0 cumulative grade point average for graduation; however, academic probation policies vary among four-year institutions. Brawner, Frillman, and Ohland (2010) benchmarked academic policies for nine public universities and found in many cases that as a student attempted more credit hours, the required cumulative grade point average for good standing increased. Further, some university students remain in good standing throughout their enrollment at the institution with lower cumulative grade point averages without being placed on academic

probation and could potentially remain in school without graduating. Brawner et al. also observed that some universities changed their academic policies over time to address this issue. North Carolina State and Virginia Tech were two universities that, over an extensive period of time, made substantive changes to their policies for students whose cumulative grade point average was below 2.0 allowing one semester for students on probation to improve their grades or face suspension if they did not improve their academic standing.

#### Academic Probation in Community Colleges

Good academic standing policies in most community colleges dictate that a student should achieve a cumulative 2.0 grade point average (GPA) or higher for continuous enrollment and eligibility for graduation. Based on the academic probation policy, a student who falls below a cumulative 2.0 grade point average is given a warning by being placed on academic probation. In other cases, academic probation policies for some community colleges use a developmental GPA based on number of credits completed (Barthlow, n.d.). For this policy, a student who fails to attain or maintain the appropriate level of academic performance is automatically placed on probation.

### **ACADEMIC PROBATION PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES**

#### Written Notification in Universities

For most universities, immediately after semester grades are calculated, the institution notifies students of their academic probation status if they have below a 2.0 cumulative grade point average. In many cases, the written notification states that the student's overall academic progress at the university is not satisfactory and makes recommendations as to what steps the

student should take to return to good academic standing. Students are also made aware of the academic suspension policy which may come as a result of a student not meeting the conditions of probation. Depending on the institution, copies of the written notification may be sent to both the student and his/her advisor.

#### Written Notification in Community Colleges

For community colleges, the most common approach to informing students on academic probation is also through written notification (Academic Probation Study, 2002). This notification is often sent out by the registrar and serves as a formal notice that a student cumulative grade point average falls below 2.0. This written notification describes the circumstances that led to the action, the requirements necessary to be removed from this status, and the conditions that may lead to suspension or dismissal. The registrar of the institution is usually responsible for distributing a list of student names to the counseling or academic advising staff for additional follow-up.

### **ACADEMIC AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR RESTRICTIONS**

#### Restrictions in Universities

Restricting activities for students on academic probation is commonly used at universities. Hoover (2014) noted the restricted extra-curricular activities for academic probation students in his study of a small, liberal arts college. These activities included restricted participation in theater and musical performances, intercollegiate activities, student publications, elected or appointed positions in student government, and/or other leadership positions on campus. Additionally, students on academic probation may also face academic

restrictions by the institution, requiring them to take a reduced course load. Unfortunately, research about the effectiveness of academic restrictions is very limited in the literature but can be referenced in most university catalogs.

### Restrictions in Community Colleges

For colleges, students on probation are typically limited as to the number of credits they can enroll in and may also be restricted from enrolling in particular courses depending on the respective college policies. In many cases, students on probation cannot register for courses on their own but require signed approval from either the instructor or academic counselor in order to apply or register for particular courses (Academic Probation Study, 2002). Registration for courses is generally determined by the course options listed on a student's academic plan. Other restrictions imposed on students may include mandatory meetings with an advisor, changing academic program, concurrent enrollment in a success course, or participating in an academic workshop designed for students on academic probation. Further, a student's participation in extracurricular activities may be restricted due to academic probation status; therefore, it is always advisable for students to become familiar with the institutions rules, policies, and standards.

## **CONDITIONS FOR RE-ENROLLMENT**

### Conditions for Re-Enrollment in Universities

Academic probation students who fail to meet the institution's conditions for good academic standing are generally suspended from the university. Most institutions have policies for readmission of suspended students and academic suspension appeals. According to

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE, 2000), students suspended from the institution are allowed to re-enroll in the university on a probationary status for fall or spring semester and required to maintain 2.0 GPA each semester. Any students suspended a second time will not be allowed to re-enroll at the university until they attend another institution and demonstrate the ability to be academically successful. Further, students appealing academic suspension are required to submit documentation referencing personal circumstances such as serious illness, severe financial distress, death of an immediate loved one, significant work conflicts, personal crisis, or unexpected, substantial family obligations that contributed to their academic deficiencies (OSRHE, 2000). Review of student appeals at most universities are conducted by an appeals committee consisting of faculty, students, and administrators.

#### Conditions for Re-Enrollment in Community Colleges

According to Akridge and Ross (1987), when a student is academically dismissed from the institution, there is a readmission process in place. Students are required to meet with the Director of Admission and Records to review their academic history and future academic goals. The director will recommend the student complete a readmission petition with a counselor depending on his/her cumulative GPA. The readmission petition requires a student to identify what factors led to his/her dismissal and indicate what steps he/she will take to be successful academically. Further, each quarter the Academic Appeals Board meets to review readmission petitions and require limitations on credits hours a student can register, in addition to a counselor approving class schedules, if the readmission appeal is approved. For some students,

the Academic Appeal Board requires enrollment in the General Studies College Survival Skills course and/or participation in a Student Support Group facilitate by a counselor.

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC PROBATION**

It has been highlighted across the different research work that students who remain enrolled on academic probation need support to improve academically. The work of Preuss and Switalski (2008), Miller and Sonner (1996), and Seirup and Rose (2011) highlighted that, in most cases, students who fail their courses are affected psychologically and require support to avoid desperation which might lead to them giving up on their education. Therefore, a need for strategies including counseling and advising, college success courses, hope-based interventions, academic skills workshop, or institutional academic probation programs to support students on academic probation has been emphasized in the literature.

## **COUNSELING AND ADVISING**

### **Counseling and Advising in Universities**

It has been noted across different works that universities extend counseling and advising services to students on academic probation in order to offer them a chance to improve their academic standing. In universities, students faced with more challenging issues often times are also placed on academic probation. Among these issues are confusion about major selections and complexity of studies. Further, the use of student retention specialists to assist students with support services in attaining academic achievement has been considered as being important for university students who are on probation (Cruise, 2002).

The use of counseling is extensively reviewed in the literature in relation to how effective it is in managing and supporting students on probation. Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2001) summarize the use of counseling in institutions as establishing supportive retention practices among the students. In their research, the use of counseling helped students cope effectively with personal, emotional, and situational barriers to learning by providing both emotional support and informational support. Student development integrated within counseling services helps in advocating for behavioral change among students as they learn what is expected of them, how to achieve successful outcomes, and manage their own learning experience which increases persistence.

Sharkin (2004), reporting on the work of Turner and Berry (2000), cited the value of psychological counseling in helping students remain in school and improve their academic performance. The study highlighted that students reporting personal problems that impeded their academic performance found counseling helpful and impacted their decision to not withdraw from school despite facing those issues. When counseling students, Sharkin also reported on the work of Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994), who observed that social and emotional adjustment difficulties when addressed had a very positive effect on student attrition. Further, student development of stress-related coping strategies had a direct effect on their intent to continue enrollment. Measuring the impact of psychological counseling on student retention is more difficult than academic counseling so consequently academic counseling is generally perceived as having a direct impact on retention since that is the goal.

Students on academic probation not only benefit from psychological counseling but their academic achievement and retention can be impacted by their level of hope. The work of

Seirup and Rose (2011) examined student perceptions of success as measured by the Hope Scale and its impact on student achievement for academic probation students. The results of this study indicated that students enrolled in an academic intervention course, UNIV 01, with higher levels of hope showed a significant increase in their semester GPA. "Students who are more hopeful are more likely to engage in self-regulatory behaviors and internalize strategies to obtain their goals of success" (Seirup & Rose, 2011, p. 13). Although strategies such as time management, attending class, improving study skills, and building support systems are incorporated in the academic intervention course, students benefit only when they value the information and believe it to be useful in improving their academic standing.

The overall concerns among different scholars is that university students on probation are initially affected by different issues which result in them performing poorly in their courses; therefore, when counseling university students, emphasis must be placed on the need for early identification and provide student support both academic and non-academic during this transition period.

### Counseling and Advising in Community Colleges

In community colleges, students on probation are in need of mentoring and are at a stage in life where they need advisors to support them as they face challenges in making life decisions. Wlazelek and Coulter (1999) highlighted the role of counseling services to provide supportive services for college students on academic probation. In the study, data were collected on 414 undergraduate students who had been issued a warning or probation in their respective academic unit. The counselor's primary role was to assess the problems facing the

students in their academics, initiate a plan to help them, and follow-up on the implementation of the plan. Through counseling, college students can be better prepared psychologically about knowing what is expected of them which is important in improving their academic achievement. In cases where counselors cannot handle particular issues among students, referrals were made. It was observed from the study that participants in counseling demonstrated significantly greater increase in grade point average than did students who had not received counseling. Overall, the study findings support previous research that found the need for professional counselors in academic institutions.

The work of Crookston (1972), as reported by Heisserer and Parette (2002), addressed intrusive advising and attrition for college students on probation. The main argument was if advising is selected as the main approach, it is necessary to get the student involved in the decision-making process which affects the quality and success of advising. Frost (1991), as reported by Heisserer and Parette, also stated their concerns that some advising models may not address student needs adequately because the focus is primarily on the advisor providing academic information to the student while overlooking other important student needs. It was further highlighted that although probation students may have a similar problem of having a GPA below 2.0, their backgrounds are vastly different. Therefore when handling these students individually, there is a need for the counselor to understand that students have different behaviors and may respond differently when on academic probation.

A similar perspective on advising by Cruise (2002), reporting on the work of Molina and Abelman (2000), was that it is more effective for college students on academic probation, when counselors use a more personal and less professional approach. The study highlighted that

college students on probation require intrusive advising and it was observed that when handling students on probation, it is important that counselors initiate direct contact by personally learning about the student and the reasons leading to the probation status. The counseling process should also include planning an action for recovery which should be personalized to ensure that students relate to the activities or procedures aimed at improving their academic achievements. Further, counselors also need to learn more about the student in order to understand career interests/exploration and find solutions to problems facing him or her. Meeting students regularly on a weekly basis was also recommended as a good counseling approach. Additionally, it is important counselors stay positive in relating with these students in order to motivate them towards improving their grades.

## **STRUCTURED GROUP INTERVENTIONS**

### Structured Groups in Universities

In universities, structured groups are considered very effective in supporting students on probation. At a large Midwestern university, Coleman and Freedman (1996) conducted a study on structured group intervention on 78 male and 71 female students on probation. The study aimed at evaluating the impact of student enrollment to the groups on their probation status. Coleman and Freedman proposed to engage different theoretical backgrounds to evaluate social competence, problem solving skills, and goal attainment objectives among the students under probation. The study highlighted that increased intervention among the students resulted in significant results in different academic areas as compared to the control

group. The major areas of improvement highlighted in the study include removal of students from probation status, higher grades, and higher credits completed.

The major conclusion from the study, similar to previous research studies, was academically at-risk undergraduates can benefit from being engaged in structured group interventions. However, the study's major limitation was that the different effects of various interventions within the structured groups were not adequately measured. The study failed to identify the overall success rate of the program in supporting the students on probation. It was a major limitation of the study that no long-term results of the interventions were documented that could be used to adequately support the argument. However, overall, the study findings reflected the positive benefits of goal attainment, interpersonal problem solving and social competence for structured group intervention when used to support students on probation status.

### Structured Groups in Community Colleges

In evaluating the different strategies, the work of DeBard (1987) looked at grouping as one major and effective approach to supporting college students on probation. Grouping in this case is referred to as the use of academic groups to include students in discussions and support them in going through the probation. De Bard highlighted that in using groups or forums of students who have been on probation, the individual students are encouraged that they are not encountering this alone. The strategy works in deriving consolation and psychological support among the college students on probation. These students are less likely to have thoughts that they are abnormal or may be lacking something which others have. It is therefore more of

psychological support for the students to feel appreciated and welcomed by others who shared similar experiences.

## **ACADEMIC SKILLS WORKSHOP**

### University Workshops/Seminars

In supporting university students on probation, the work of Newton (1990) focused on Kansas State University academic support seminar. The 10-week seminar, coordinated through the Counseling Service, the Dean's Office, and the College of Architecture and Design is offered to students on academic probation. These seminars are conducted by graduate students from the College of Architecture and Counselor Education and consist of 8-12 students. The seminars address issues such as student involvement, students' personal issues, peer influences, problem solving, and behavior change. Low self-esteem and poor motivation are two key issues that interfere with students' ability to produce quality academic work so they are addressed through discussion and group activities.

Although university workshops are not frequently referenced in the literature, they do focus primarily on academic support services for academic probation students. The work of Grillo and Leist (2013) examined the long-term use of academic support services such as tutoring, learning assistance, and supplemental instruction and retention to graduation. The authors used six years of data from the University of Louisville's Resources for Academic Achievement (REACH) to test the hypothesis that a larger quantity of time spent engaged in academic support services is associated with a higher likelihood of graduation and that cumulative GPA mediates the relationship between hours spend using academic support and

graduation. The study's findings support this hypothesis, suggesting a relationship between academic support and retention to graduation that should be given serious consideration by scholars and administrators.

#### Community College Workshops/Seminars

The work of Maple (2002) further identified the engagement of student groups in academic skill workshops within colleges as important in supporting students on probation. The academic skill workshops in this case are structured to focus on the needs of students on probation. The institution serves a major role in structuring and facilitating academic skill workshops. During these workshops, the respective groups of college students as categorized are addressed according to their needs. The work of Maple examined (1) the changes in demographics of students with academic problems, (2) the procedures used with students on academic probation, and (3) the experiences and attitudes of students enrolled in the Academic CPR Workshops. In the study, students were interviewed and asked questions about their satisfaction with the workshop, experience with counseling services, concerns about barriers to student success, and recommendations about ways the institution could facilitate student success. Overall, students were satisfied with the workshop reporting that time management was the most useful. Students identified lack of test taking skills and limited tutoring and counseling services as barriers to success. Further, students accepted full responsibility for being on academic probation and identified poor attendance, lack of discipline, and motivation as being critical areas they would have to address on a personal level.

## **SUCCESS COURSES**

### Success Courses in Universities

Success courses have been highlighted as important for supporting students on probation but the literature does not reflect any research focusing on the use of success courses in universities. However, there is extensive literature in this area for community colleges which can be further examined to determine whether it is applicable to other institutions (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007).

### Success Courses in Community Colleges

As community colleges address the challenge of serving students who are underprepared, institutions are increasingly offering student success courses to respond to the needs of students may also be appropriate in supporting students on academic probation. These courses are designed to teach students how to write notes, take tests, and manage their time; explore their learning styles; and encourage students to develop plans for college and careers (Zeidenberg et al., 2007). According to Zeidenberg et al. (2007), Student Life Skills (SLS) is open to all students attending any of the 28 Florida community colleges. However, all but 13 colleges require enrollment in the SLS course when students place into developmental courses. The authors examined whether enrollment in student success courses appears to be related to positive student outcomes for 34,427 students in the Florida community college system when controlling for student characteristics to include gender, race, age, citizenship status, limited English proficiency, and regular high school completion. Math, reading, and writing scores were also controlled since students with higher test scores generally earn credentials at higher rates.

The study findings were that student enrollment in as SLS course had a positive effect on a student's chances of earning a credential, persistence in college, or transferring to a four-year college in the Florida state university system (Zeidenberg et al., 2007)

Similar to the study on Florida community colleges, Cho and Karp (2012) focused on Virginia community colleges and examined whether enrollment in a student success course had positive student outcomes such as credit accumulation within the first year and persistence into the second year. The study consisted of 14,807 students who were enrolled in at least one success course —to include College Success Skills, Discipline Specific Orientation, and/or College Survival Skills — which oriented students toward college, helped with study skills, provided information on the institution, and offered general academic advising. The study findings showed students enrolled in the Virginia Community College System were more likely to earn college level credits within the first year and persist to the second year when they enrolled in a student success course in the first semester. The benefits gained by these students from taking the success course should be taken into consideration when colleges look for ways to address the needs of student on academic probation.

## **ACADEMIC PROBATION PROGRAMS**

### University Programs

It is appropriate to note that some researchers have addressed the support of students from the perspective of engaging them in specific university programs. These scholars understand that programs are not usually effective if they are not initiated by the respective institutions. These works emphasize the need for universities and colleges to develop their own

programs and avoid duplication of programs whose results are not adequately known in terms of their impact on student's probation status.

Retention strategies for at-risk university students have been reviewed by Garnett (1990), who described the "Students in Retention" practiced at Henderson State University. Based on this intrusive model, Garnett highlighted the relevance of the Students in Retention program within the institution. According to the discussion in the study, it was observed that all students on probation are mandated to enroll in this program and sign a contract to adhere to the requirements of the program, or they may be suspended or dismissed from the institution. Additionally, the Students in Retention program engaged students in a high level of counseling through the semester on a weekly basis in which the advisor evaluates the students' progress in improving their academic achievements. Garnett observed that the Students in Retention program has been effective because it targets different aspects of student development and builds on discipline and responsibility of the students.

A study by Hutson (2006) engaged 279 participants from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Hutson emphasized the need for self-initiated programs to support students on probation. In this study, Hutson observed that such programs allow institutions to effectively manage their own student probation status. The study evaluated "Strategies for Academic Success" (SAS 100) program which had been initiated within the institution to support students on probation. From the study, it was observed that the SAS 100 program had been structured and implemented in the institution after a thorough research and evaluation of probation statuses in the different academic fields. From the study findings, it was observed that the students improved their social behavior and academic preparedness as a result of

continued participation in the program. The study findings also revealed that students' dedication, self-knowledge, and confidence were also improved through their participation. Therefore, it was concluded from the study that the SAS 100 program had a positive effect on the students on probation within the institution. However, no adequate information was provided in the study on the replication of the programs at other institutions. The contents of the program were also not well evaluated and documented to help in later facilitation of a study to assess its capacity to be replicated.

The use of a probation program within universities is also reported in the works of Mann, Hunt, and Alford (2003), who conducted a study at Lamar University in Texas. In this study, the Monitored Probation (MP) program facilitated at Lamar University in Texas was evaluated in terms of supporting students on probation and the rates of retention and suspension among the students on probation were measured. Mann et al. engaged 92 freshman students in the program that aimed at improving the GPA scores among the students and the satisfaction of these students with their college experience. The major findings presented from the study by Mann et al. were that the MP program had high success rates as an intervention program for students on probation. The study showed that involvement in the program improved the academic achievement of students and reduced the risk of failure and suspension of the students. Overall the study highlighted an improved level of satisfaction among the students with the college environment and their experiences after being engaged in the academic probation intervention. Students who were enrolled with lower mean composite GPAs were observed as highly motivated to improve their grades. However, the major limitation of the study was the lack of follow-up to record the final grade point average of the

respective students. It was clear that to argue the effectiveness of the program, a better approach would be to evaluate the different GPAs after program involvement. Therefore, the study left a huge gap of knowledge that requires further study to help emphasize on the relevance of MP program in improving students' achievements at Lamar University in Texas.

### Community College Programs

The literature lacks information about academic probation programs available at community colleges and focus solely on the characteristics of students on academic probation at these institutions which this information could provide insight as to what aspects are necessary in developing academic probation programs.

### **PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Royal and Tabor (2008) recognized that most of the literature on academic probation focused on the need and rationale of intervention strategies such as peer mentoring, counseling, first-year seminars, and curriculum development but lacked in the evaluation of them. They further stress the importance of accountability and strengthening educational policies and programs by incorporating institutional research. Without monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of academic probation programs, institutions cannot ensure that they have an impact on retention and student success.

Despite the lack of literature in this area, the work of Humphrey (2006) solely focused on evaluating the use of academic probation program in colleges to support students on probation. From the study, the effectiveness of such programs was compared to other universal programs adopted across different colleges. Humphrey conducted a study at Virginia

Polytechnic Institute evaluating the Project Success (PS) program. The study aimed at addressing how successful the program was in helping college students move out of probation status. The study monitored the program's performance over a lengthy period of time in order to develop adequate results.

From the study conducted by Humphrey (2006), it was noted that the program's performance was built on student weekly meetings with faculty and other staff which was purely academic oriented. Humphrey observed that in a group of 10 to 14 probationary students, a high success rate was achieved in changing the probation status of the students. From the weekly meetings, the study highlighted that close monitoring was conducted on student class attendance, relationship with the respective faculty, time management, goal setting among students, and the reflective journal. The study findings also indicated that Virginia Tech had proposed to retain the Project Success program based on the results acquired from it. The fact that the institution aimed at retaining the program indicated a high success rate of the college programs (Arola, 2007). In concluding the study, Humphrey emphasized that the success of this program could not be guaranteed if it was replicated at other institutions but that the development of similar college programs is important for both students and institutions.

## **SUMMARY**

Overall, academic probation is widespread at colleges and universities but how it is addressed by institution varies in its design. Academic standing policies across institutions are designed to measure academic achievement and help students determine whether they are

eligible to continue their studies and qualify for graduation; however, institutions vary in what criteria determines academic probation. All institutions, whether a university or college, have established academic policies that students must meet to remain in good academic standing; however, academic probation policies range from narrow GPA restrictions to a sliding GPA based on completed credits. Regardless of the policy, the literature shows that institutions are obligated to determine the overall impact on student outcomes.

Academic probation status is communicated to students through written communication by institutions and offer a variety of options for students to consider to help them establish good academic standing. When notifying students of their academic probation status, institutions may offer recommendations in terms of what resources are available to students or will identify specific steps that a student must take to remain enrolled at the institution.

Community colleges are more likely than universities to use counseling and/or academic advising as an intervention for students on academic probation. This involves working with students to help them (1) clarify their purpose for attending college; (2) affirm their abilities, self-work, uniqueness; (3) identify and overcome obstacles to achieve their goals; (4) resolve personal problems and interpersonal conflicts; and (5) foster a supportive environment. Counseling and advising students on academic probation is a successful retention strategy for community colleges impacting their high percentage of students who are underrepresented, first generation, low-income, and academically under-prepared.

Universities are more likely than community colleges to offer academic workshops or seminars, but they are not required by the institution for academic probation students to

attend. Counseling centers offer a variety of academic skill workshops highlighting topics such as time management, strategies for stress management, active listening and note-taking, improving memory and concentration, test anxiety, self-esteem, and overcoming procrastination. Although these topics highlight many of the key factors that academic researchers indicate as barriers to student success, they have not been adequately measured to determine their impact on student outcomes.

Student success courses are trending at community colleges to address student deficiencies in non-academic skills and behaviors such as study habits and time management. Community colleges are implementing this type of first-year curriculum to help students develop good study habits, explore learning styles, form goals for college and careers, and learn about campus resources. Although student success courses are not offered by community colleges to meet a general education requirement, some institutions are requiring enrollment for first-year students and/or students placed in developmental education courses due to the positive impact on student outcomes. Further, institutions can benefit from saving staff time, generating tuition to cover costs of extra support, and delivering services efficiently.

Institutional academic probation programs are more prevalent at universities than community colleges. These programs are developed by the institution to help integrate academic probation students academically and socially within the context of the institution. These programs provide a range of services such as career exploration, academic advising, and academic monitoring and include activities such as self-assessment and reflective journaling.

Overall, academic probation students are offered multiple options by institutions to assist them from moving from academic probation to good academic standing. These options

include counseling and advising, academic skill workshops/seminars, college success courses, and academic probation programs. Although these programs appear to be effective for students on academic probation, institutions are unable to replicate interventions because they often fail to (1) monitor and evaluate them making it difficult to determine what factors lend themselves in helping students navigate through the process of being removed from academic probation to good standing; and (2) collect and analyze data to determine which policies, procedures, and programs lead to better student outcomes.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### OVERVIEW

In recent years, increasing student success and completion rates are now a goal of every institution of higher education in the United States. Both two- and four-year institutions are enhancing their policies and procedures to keep students in college, improve their chances for success, and increase completion rates. One element that contributes to this goal is the institution's academic probation policy, procedures, and programs. The effect of institutional academic probation policies/procedures/programs on completion rates has not been studied or examined in detail, nor has an examination of successful policies/procedures been completed through 2015.

### QUALITATIVE MULTI-CASE STUDY DESIGN

For this study, a qualitative multi-case study design was conducted across four Michigan community colleges to identify their academic policies, procedures, and programs: "Multiple-case designs, or collective case designs, refer to case study research in which several instrumental bounded cases are selected to develop a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena than a single case can provide" (Merriam, 1998). The sources used in data collection for a multi-case design consists primarily of documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009).

Data on academic probation were collected from each institution's website, catalog, student handbook, and college administrators. This design provided direct access to multiple data sources facilitating a more in-depth look at academic probation. By including several community colleges, the researcher was also able to gain a broader understanding of how institutions varied in their approach to academic probation.

### **CASE STUDY STRENGTHS/LIMITATIONS**

It appears that community colleges have gained little insight on how to improve their academic probation policies, processes, and programs based on a limited body of research. As community colleges continue to face low completion rates, they fail to recognize academic probation as a major factor of non-completion and could greatly benefit from academic probation research using multi-case studies. Use of this type of research would provide an avenue to evaluate current academic probation policy and programs, improve institutional practices, and inform other institutions about the complexity of academic probation. However, the available literature about the case study method shows both strengths and limitations.

Merriam (1998), as reported by Ilahm (n.d.), explains the strengths as follows:

1. Case study is the best plan for answering the research question; its strengths outweigh its limitation. The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon.
2. Case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education. Educational process, problems and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice.
3. It is useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy.

Despite the many strengths of case study, Guba and Lincoln (1981, p. 577), as reported by Ilham (n.d.), note the following limitations of case study:

1. Case study can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs.
2. Qualitative study is limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis. The investigator is left to rely on his or her own instinct and abilities throughout most of this research effort.
3. Case study evaluation refers to unusual problems of ethics. An unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated (p. 378). Both the readers of case studies and the authors themselves need to be aware of biases that can affect the final product.
4. The issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability. As Hamel (1993, p. 23) observes . . . the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of representativeness . . . and its lack of rigor in the collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials that give rise to the study.

Based upon that critique, the researcher took additional steps to minimize the weaknesses in the selected research methodology:

- The researcher reported any available institutional data provided by each of the case studies to address potential issues of oversimplifying and exaggerating the case study topic.
- The data collection primarily focused on physical artifacts, documentation and archival records which existed prior to the case study which minimized researcher bias. Further, the interviews conducted by the researcher focused on the case study topic and were used to supplement the primary sources of evidence.
- The researcher used multiple sources of evidence including websites, documents and interviews to ensure validity. The validity of the documents was carefully reviewed by the researcher to avoid incorrect data usage.
- The researcher conducted interviews to corroborate previously gathered data which strengthens the reliability of the case study. Further, the interviews followed a structured format of which respondents were asked specific questions from the case study protocol.

In summary, the selection process for the four case studies, a group of comparison institutions within Michigan, includes both small and large community colleges with student populations ranging from 4,173 to 14,785 students. All the institutions are also members of Achieving the Dream, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed through initiatives in research, public engagement, and public policy while emphasizing the use of data to drive change. As a member of Achieving the Dream, each of the institutions has signified their commitment to improving student success, closing achievement gaps, and increasing retention and completion rates. Further, some institutions are designated as a Leader College as they have shown three years of sustained student success improvement and demonstrated commitment and progress on the five principles of (1) committed leadership, (2) use of evidence to improve programs, (3) broad engagement, (4) systematic institutional improvement, and (5) equity (Achieving the Dream, 2016).

## **STUDY'S RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research for this study was conducted in two phases. The initial phase of the study involved researching and collecting information about academic probation policies, procedures, and programs from websites of four Michigan community colleges: Muskegon Community College, Mott Community College, Grand Rapids Community College, and Delta College. The purpose of searching the school websites was to find a definition of academic probation, conditions of academic probation policy, notification process for students on academic probation, rules of re-enrollment, rules used to enforce academic probation, conditions

students are required to meet to be removed from academic probation, and outcomes from the strategies used.

The second phase of the study included follow-up phone calls or emails with the appropriate community college administrator (the Dean of Student Success, or equivalent) at the target institutions to (1) gather any information not available on the website, (2) confirm the details of this information, and (3) obtain additional information related to the institution success rates for academic probation programs. This research design integrating phase 1 and phase 2 was selected because college websites are a primary source of information about admission, registration, financial aid, student services, academic programs, and college policies. Navigating college websites is a difficult task when looking for information about academic probation so additional information that was not available in the college catalog or student handbook was further explored by contacting a college administrator. As a secondary source, college administrators provided additional information in the form of interpretation, clarification, and documentation of academic probation policy, procedures, and programs for their institution that was not readily available on the institution's website.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions about academic probation policy, procedures and programs which guided this study include the following:

- What is the college academic standing policy?
- What is the college academic probation policy?
- How are students notified that they are on academic probation?

- email
- letter
- notification through online student information system
- Is a registration hold put on student accounts?
- Are students on academic probation required or encouraged to complete any academic interventions?
  - enroll in an academic success course
  - meet with an academic counselor and/or advisor
  - attend an academic skill building workshop
  - develop an academic plan
  - complete a career assessment
  - declare major
- What other conditions do students have to meet to be removed from academic probation?
- Are these conditions monitored? If yes, who is responsible for monitoring?
- Does the institution collect student data on academic interventions to determine the impact on student academic success and retention? If so, what were those results?

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter outlined the research methodology used in this dissertation to examine academic probation policies, procedures and programs at four Michigan community colleges. In Chapter 4, the researcher will report information about academic probation policies, procedures, and programs; the objectives for these policies, procedures, and programs; and program outcomes from four Michigan community colleges. These institutional case studies will also provide an overview of each institution and address the aforementioned research

questions. In Chapter 5, the institutional case studies will be further examined by identifying the differences and similarities in how each college addresses academic probation. This chapter will also include an academic probation model to facilitate student success among community college students on academic probation based on the institutional case study findings and relevant academic research on academic probation.

## CHAPTER 4: FOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASE STUDIES

This chapter explores academic probation policies, procedures, and programs at four Michigan community colleges. The researcher specifically looked at Muskegon Community College, Mott Community College, Grand Rapids Community College, and Delta College.

The four community college case studies were designed to provide an in-depth look at institutional academic probation policies, procedures, and programs. These case studies are based on a review of websites, online catalogs, and handbooks from each institution for 2015-2016. The researcher asked campus administrators for clarification when the website, catalog, or handbook information was unclear. The following key questions were considered in each case study:

1. How is academic probation defined at the selected community college?
2. What academic probation policies are in place at the community college?
3. What are the institution's procedures and guidelines regarding academic probation?
4. What criteria must be met for continued enrollment? How is this monitored/enforced?
5. What strategies are used to support students on academic probation at the institution?
6. What are the outcomes of those strategies?

## MUSKEGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### Academic Probation Policy

Any student attending Muskegon Community College who completes a minimum of 12 credit hours and receives a cumulative 2.0 grade point average is considered to be in good standing, according to the Academic Standing Policy. However, any student who falls below a cumulative 2.0 grade point average is placed on academic probation (see “Academic Probation” in *College Catalog*; Muskegon Community College, 2015-2016).

### Institutional Procedures and Guidelines

Students who fail to meet the cumulative 2.0 grade point average required for good standing are notified by the registrar of their academic probation status (J. Roberts, personal communication, April 6, 2016). This notification is communicated to the students via their college email address and generally occurs three to four weeks after the end of the semester when the majority of grade changes are entered in the student management system. Students placed on academic probation are prevented from adding courses and/or dropping any currently enrolled courses until they meet with a counselor. Further, it is the responsibility of the students to drop any future courses if they have not yet met the prerequisite.

According to the Academic Dismissal Policy, students on academic probation for two consecutive semesters are academically dismissed from the college but given the opportunity to enroll in classes for the summer session to help correct any academic deficiencies (see “Academic Dismissal” in *College Catalog*; Muskegon Community College, 2015-2016). During the summer session, students who have completed a minimum of three credit hours with a

semester 2.0 grade point average are permitted to re-enroll in the fall semester on a probationary status. Consequently, students who fail to meet the required semester grade point average are dropped from all their pending classes (J. Roberts, personal communication, April 6, 2016).

Students who have been academically dismissed from the college and want to be considered for re-enrollment are advised to submit a written appeal to the Petitions Committee. This committee is responsible for reviewing individual student progress and determines if a student can re-enroll based on whether he/she has a reasonable chance for success in a subsequent semester (J. Roberts, personal communication, April 6, 2016). In most cases, it rarely occurs that students are academically dismissed from the college and seeking to re-enroll (J. Roberts, personal communication, April 6, 2016).

#### Academic Probation Strategies

Students on academic probation have a registration hold placed on their account, prior to the upcoming semester registration period, which restricts them from registering for future semesters or dropping currently enrolled classes (J. Roberts, personal communication, April 6, 2016). Notification by the registrar via college email address instructs students to meet with a counselor before an academic hold can be lifted from their record. Further, students are encouraged to discuss with a counselor ways to eliminate any problems that resulted in their academic probation status (J. Roberts, personal communication, April 6, 2016).

## Outcomes for Academic Probation Strategies

The institution does collect data on academic probation as indicated by the tables in Appendix A. These tables indicate that about 5% of all students enrolled in fall semester wind up on probation. This probation rate has generally declined since 2008. After winter semester, about 7% of all students are on probation. This probation rate also seems to be improving.

Declining enrollment and tracking data of high impact practices such as attending mandatory new student orientation, meeting with a counselor for academic planning and goal setting, and completing a college success course may be contributing factors in fewer students being put on academic probation.

## **MOTT COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

### Academic Probation Policy

Any student attending Mott Community College who has completed a minimum of 12 credit hours and received a cumulative 2.0 grade point average is considered to be in good standing, according to the Academic Status Policy (Mott Community College, 2016). However, any student who falls below a cumulative 2.0 grade point average is placed on academic probation.

### Institutional Procedures and Guidelines

Students placed on academic probation are notified by the registrar via their college email address of their academic standing which is generally sent during the beginning of each semester pending a review of transcripts (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Students placed on academic probation is prevented from registering for future semesters until

they meet with a counselor or advisor and complete a Class Schedule Worksheet which must be submitted to the Registration Office (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Due to a hold placed on student accounts, after the date of record or census date, the registrar or his/her designee will drop students from courses for which they have not yet met the prerequisite (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

Students on academic probation are required to earn a 2.0 grade point average each subsequent semester or session and are monitored by the registrar (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016) until the GPA is a cumulative 2.0 grade point average at which point he/she is removed from academic probation.

Students on academic probation for two consecutive semesters are flagged in the student management system for pending dismissal by the registrar (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Consequently, students who have been academically dismissed are ineligible for re-enrollment until one 15-week semester has lapsed and can apply for re-enrollment once they have met this condition, according to the Academic Dismissal Policy (Mott Community College, 2016). The re-enrollment process for academically dismissed students includes a credit restriction and is enforced by the registrar or his/her designee who also assists students wanting to return to the institution (see Academic Dismissal Policy; Mott Community College, 2016). As stated in the Academic Dismissal Policy, the process for students to re-enroll after being academically dismissal includes the following steps:

- Notice of academic dismissal received by the student;
- 15-week semester in which the student is ineligible to enroll;
- Application to the registrar for re-enrollment;

- Record review by registrar and credit restriction is imposed;
- Referral to Counseling and Student Development for reenrollment; or
- Referral to the review board if the registrar questions the advisability of re-enrollment;
- Decision by the review board will be final.

Further, students are ineligible to enroll until one calendar year has lapsed if they have been academically dismissed twice.

### Academic Probation Strategies

Students on academic probation are required to meet with a counselor before a probation hold can be lifted from their record to allow for registration (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Further, students on academic probation are advised to take a maximum of 12 credits in a semester or six credits during the spring or summer semester but are prevented from enrolling in e-Learning courses (see “Academic Probation”; Mott Community College, 2016). In some cases, students may be allowed to take a maximum of 13-15 credits pending the approval of a counselor, advisor or dean as stated in the Academic Probation Policy (Mott Community College, 2016).

### Outcomes for Academic Probation Strategies

The institution was not able to share data regarding academic probation or about outcomes from strategies. However, it was noted that the number of students on academic dismissal has declined (A. Milostan, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

## GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### Academic Probation Policy

Any student attending Grand Rapids Community College who has completed a minimum of 12 credit hours and met the required cumulative grade point average based on the number of credit hours attempted is considered in good standing, according to the Academic Standing Policy. Those students who fall below the designated cumulative grade point average are placed on academic probation according to the standards presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Standards of Academic Progress*

CREDIT HOURS ATTEMPTED	MINIMUM CUMULATIVE GPA REQUIRED
12-14	1.50
15-28	1.75
29 and above	2.00

("Academic Probation"; Grand Rapids Community College, 2016)

### Institutional Procedures and Guidelines

Students placed on academic probation are identified by the Student Records/Registrar's Office but written notification is sent from the Counseling and Career Center (D. Patrick, personal communication, April 22, 2016). This academic probation letter is mailed to students at the end of the semester when the majority of grade changes are entered in the student management system. A student placed on academic probation is then prevented from registering, through the online student portal system, for future semesters (D. Patrick, personal communication, April 22, 2016).

Students are academically suspended after two consecutive semesters of being on academic probation, according to the Academic Suspension Policy (Grand Rapids Community College, 2016). During this timeframe, a student is prohibited from enrolling in courses for two consecutive semesters. However, students academically suspended due to extenuating circumstance may appeal to the Academic Suspension Appeal Committee to return to the institution without sitting out two consecutive semesters (“Academic Suspension”; Grand Rapids Community College, 2016). Further, students who request an early return after one semester of non-attendance are required to meet with a counselor, restricted to no more than eight credit hours and must enroll in a mandatory college success course (“Early Return from Academic Suspension”; Grand Rapids Community College, 2016).

Students who are academically suspended from the college and have met the two-semester non-attendance requirement can request re-enrollment. However, prior to re-enrollment students are required to meet with a counselor and are placed on academic probation with the expectation to maintain a semester 2.0 grade point average in subsequent semesters/sessions (D. Patrick, personal communication, April 22, 2016).

#### Academic Probation Strategies

Students on academic probation are required to meet the following conditions:

- Attend an Academic Success Workshop sponsored by the Counseling and Career Center where they will meet with an academic counselor/advisor prior to the fourth week of the semester/session following placement on Academic Probation.
- A registration hold will be placed on his/her account until he/she has met with a counselor/advisor.

- In collaboration with the Counselor/Advisor, the student will develop a written Success Plan. The plan may include limitations on enrollment and other forms of academic assistance.
- A minimum semester GPA of 2.0 is required for every semester/session.

(“Academic Probation”; Grand Rapids Community College, 2016)

Students who have been academically suspended are required to meet the following conditions:

- Mandatory CLS 102 Practicing Strategies for Academic Success (or PY 97 Strategies for college and Life Success if previously taken and not passed).
- Enrollment limit of 8 total credits for the return semester.
- Meet with an academic counselor/advisor.

(“Early Return from Academic Suspension”; Grand Rapids Community College, 2016)

#### Outcomes for Academic Probation Interventions

The institution does collect data for both academic probation and academic suspension as indicated by the tables in Appendix B. These tables indicate that about 10% of all students enrolled in fall semester wind up on probation and 2% on suspension. The probation rate has generally declined since 2011 but the suspension rate has slightly increased. After winter semester, about 9% of all students are on probation, and 4% are on suspension. Both the probation and suspension rates seem to be improving.

Declining enrollment and tracking data for outcomes of academic probation strategies such as developing a success plan with a counselor, limiting the number of credits allowed for registration, and completing a mandatory college success workshop may be contributing factors in fewer students being put on academic probation.

The institution also tracks data regarding their academic probation strategies to determine the impact on students. These interventions include attending Academic Success Workshop (AWS), meeting with an Academic Advisor/Counselor, and enrolling in Strategies for College and Life Success (CLS 102) or Practicing Strategies for Academic Success (PY097). Due to limited access and time constraints, research data on academic probation intervention outcomes was retrieved from a 2012 dissertation study titled *Exploring Variables and Factors That Students Perceive Contributed To Persistence After Being Placed on Academic Probation* that examined the differences and similarities between persistent and non-persistent student probation groups for Winter 2012 or Summer 2012 semesters (Hoxie, 2015, p. 62). Persistence was measured in terms of students registering for either Fall 2012 or Winter 2012; non-persisters were those who did not enroll in either Fall 2012 or Winter 2013 semester (Hoxie, 2015, p. 62).

The study's sample of 1,337 probation students included 285 in the persistence group and 1,052 in the non-persistence group and concluded that "the persistence group (70.5%) was more likely to have attended the mandatory intervention workshop than the non-persistence group (13.1%)" (Hoxie, 2015, p. 77). The "persistence group also had a higher percentage for making advisor/counselor contact for one or more appointments and voluntarily attending orientation than the non-persistence group" (Hoxie, 2015, p. 77). In contrast, the non-persistence group had a higher percentage of enrollment in the optional PY 097 course and/or FYE course than the persistence group.

When examining student resources utilized by probation students in this study, it was noted that the persistence group engaged more frequently with tutoring, help from instructors and student life involvement (Hoxie, 2015).

## DELTA COLLEGE

### Academic Probation Policy

Any student attending Delta College who has made satisfactory academic progress based on the number of credit hours attempted and minimum cumulative grade point average is considered in good standing, according to the Academic Status Scale (see “Academic Achievement Standards” in *College Catalog*; Delta College, 2015-2016). Students who fall below the designated cumulative grade point average are placed on academic caution, probation, or suspension according to the standards presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Academic Status GPA Scale*

CREDIT HOURS ATTEMPTED	SATISFACTORY PROGRESS	UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS	UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS
	NO CONDITIONS	CAUTION	PROBATION
0 – 12.9	1.50 – 4.0	0.00 – 1.49	
13.0 – 23.9	1.75 – 4.0	1.50 – 1.74	0.00 – 1.49
24.0 – 44.9	2.00 – 4.0	1.75 – 1.99	0.00 – 1.74
45.0 or more	2.00 – 4.0		0.00 – 1.99

(“Academic Status Scale”; Delta College, 2015-2016)

## Institutional Procedures and Guidelines

Students who fail to meet satisfactory academic progress are identified by the Registrar's Office but written notification of student's academic status for academic caution, academic probation or academic suspension is mailed out from the Counseling Office (see "Academic Achievement Standards"; Delta College, 2015-2016).

## Academic Probation Strategies

Students on academic caution are required to meet with a counselor or academic advisor to discuss their academic status. Students on academic probation are assigned a specific counselor to help them develop an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) which may include any of the following:

- Specific course selection that will provide for maximum success;
- Number of credits to attempt that semester (based on data presented by student) and approved by their counselor;
- Assistance: e.g., tutoring, selecting peer mentored classes, meeting with instructor;
- Time management strategies;
- Other services as appropriate, including Disability Support Services, Counseling, Career Services, etc.

("Academic Achievement Standards"; Delta College, 2015-2016)

Further, students on academic probation are only allowed to register once an approved AIP monitored by the Registrar's Office is on file in the Registration Office ("Academic Achievement Standards"; Delta College, 2015-2016).

Students who have failed to meet the conditions of their AIP during two semesters of being on academic probation status are placed on academic suspension, denied enrollment for

two consecutive semesters, and de-enrolled from classes registered for upcoming semesters (“Academic Achievement Standards”; Delta College, 2015-2016).

Students who have been academically suspended from the college due to mitigating circumstances can appeal their suspension by submitting a written appeal to the Dean of Student & Educational Services or his/her designee (“Academic Achievement Standards”; Delta College, 2015-2016). Consequently, any appeal approved by the Dean of Student & Educational Services for re-enrollment requires a student to meet with a counselor to develop an Academic Improvement Plan prior to registration.

#### Outcomes for Academic Probation Strategies

The institution was not able to share data regarding academic probation or about outcomes from strategies.

### **SUMMARY**

This examination of academic probation policies, procedures, and programs of the four Michigan community colleges allowed the researcher to answer the six research questions listed at the beginning of the chapter.

First, when comparing how academic probation is defined among the selected community colleges, the policies at Mott and MCC for good academic standing required a cumulative 2.0 grade point average for graduation and any student below that standard was placed on probation. In contrast, GRCC and Delta’s policies used a sliding scale GPA based on number of credits completed, so as a student attempted more credit hours, the required cumulative grade point average for good standing increased.

Second, most of the institutions' procedures and guidelines regarding academic probation were similar, in that after semester grades are calculated, the institution (the registrar) notified students of their academic probation status. However in two cases, Delta and GRCC, notifications are mailed directly to students from the Counseling Office with the assistance of the Registrar Office to identify the targeted students.

Third, all four polices indicated that students who fail to attain or maintain the appropriate level of academic performance are placed on academic probation within the institution's student management system. Consequently, a registration hold is put on student accounts to block any change of registration until they met with a counselor/advisor to discuss factors that led to probation and identify support services.

Fourth, the criteria set by each institution for continued enrollment primarily required students to earn a 2.0 grade point average each semester as monitored by the registrar. In some instances, students had to adhere to other requirements outlined in an academic success plan such as limited course enrollment and/or meeting with a counselor/advisor which was either monitored by the counseling department or a dean within Student Affairs.

Fifth, each institution has its own strategies to support students on academic probation ranging from limiting the number of credits to register, completing a class schedule worksheet, or enrolling in a success workshop/course and meeting with a counselor to develop an academic success plan that articulates strategies and resources a student can use to improve their academic standing.

Sixth, the impact of academic probation strategies on students' success and retention was typically anecdotal since most institutions only tracked the number of students on

academic probation but did not measure outcomes for students on academic probation and/or suspension.

## CHAPTER 5: ACADEMIC PROBATION PRACTICES

Academic probation policies adopted by community colleges outline the standards that each student must adhere to in order to maintain enrollment within the institution.

Unfortunately, without conducting a thorough examination of the policies, institutions lack a clear understanding of whether or not their adopted policies are contributing factors to low student completion rates, or if the purpose of probation to help students to get on and stay on track to completion isn't working. Using a case study approach, this dissertation was an effort to weigh the value of such policies with regards to student success at four Michigan community colleges.

The four case studies reflect the reality that the two most common academic probation policies adopted by community colleges include either the standard requirement of falling below a 2.0 cumulative grade point average with 12 credits or the use of a sliding scale GPA which increases as the number of credits a student attempts increases. When comparing the two policies, the standard requirement is very restrictive and does not take into consideration significant barriers such as poor academic preparation, unclear educational goals, lack of time management skills and low motivation that community college students encounter as they begin their academic studies. In contrast, the sliding scale GPA model is more aligned with a student success approach which would indicate that over time students may be equipped with

the academic skills needed to be successful as they participate in orientation, first year experience, accelerated developmental education and student success courses.

## **NOTIFYING STUDENTS**

Student notification is critical when an institution wants to communicate to students about their academic probation status. As a common practice, notification from an institution to a student is most often made through the use of the college's email system. Although this may be less expensive, most students do not make it a practice to access their college assigned emails, a practice which contributes to its ineffectiveness. As a best practice, some institutions send out a written letter to supplement the email communication; this may be the best mode of communication for students and one that institutions may have to consider despite increased financial cost. When further examining the process of how email or written notification is communicated to students, it is important that an institution determines who is responsible for initiating contact with students. For many institutions, the Registrar's Office communicates with students regarding their academic probation status, which, depending on the size of the institution, may have limited resources to coordinate these efforts. Further, students may be unfamiliar with the Registrar's Office as opposed to other departments on campus, a deficiency which may delay student response to any type of communication issued from the departments regarding academic probation. While most of the institutions in this study direct students to meet with a counselor or advisor regarding academic probation, it may be more beneficial for the institution to have the Counseling department issue the communication once the Registrar's Office has identified these students.

## **CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUED ENROLLMENT**

The conditions that students on academic probation must meet for continued enrollment varied by institution in this study. The most common practice among institutions for continued enrollment is students meeting with a counselor or advisor, which may involve either completing an approved class schedule, developing a success plan, and/or reducing the number of credits for enrollment. For many institutions, counseling offices are not staffed with enough counselors or advisors to manage the high student caseload of meeting with every student, a practice which results in institutions merely recommending but not making it mandatory for students to meet a counselor. With the lack in consistency of counselors meeting with students, it is difficult for institutions to measure the impact on student success. To somewhat alleviate this issue, some institutions have transitioned their counselors and advisors from working individually with students to utilizing the same resources in a group setting, either through a workshop or course format. In terms of a workshop format, students are able to access a counselor or advisor over multiple sessions while addressing barriers to learning, developing a success plan, and learning about skills for academic success; however, students may find it challenging to make the necessary arrangements to register and complete the workshop in accordance with the college policies. In contrast, a course format may run multiple weeks — requiring additional time from students — but cover many of the same objectives addressed in a workshop format. The potential benefits gained by the student from either format are primarily based on the student's perception on the value of the information presented.

## **ACADEMIC DISMISSAL/SUSPENSION**

Students who want to avoid being placed on academic dismissal are allowed to maintain enrollment as long as they continue to meet the conditions of 2.0 semester grade point average. This policy is reasonable in that it gives students the ability to determine the best course of action to achieve their short-term goal of 2.0 semester grade point average while targeting their long-term goal of raising the cumulative grade point average to 2.0. It is important during this stage that students are reminded to repeat any failed courses and or take fewer courses to avoid being placed on academic dismissal.

## **RE-ENROLLMENT PROCESS**

At the four case study colleges, students seeking to re-enroll at the institution are either required to complete a specified number of credits with 2.0 semester grade point average or return after two semesters of non-attendance. In most cases, students who have been academically dismissed from the institution may have also lost their financial aid, limiting their ability to cover the necessary costs to continue enrollment. The experience of students being unable to attend school for a minimum of two semesters may provide them with the opportunity to address barriers such personal crisis, significant work conflicts, transportation issues, and unexpected family or financial obligations contributing to their academic deficiencies. Students who are working through the process of appealing for re-enrollment have the ability to provide a written statement of the circumstances that lead to their dismissal and the steps they have taken to overcome those circumstances.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Failure of the institutions in this study to systematically collect data about students on academic probation contributes to their inability to determine the extent of the problem and is a barrier to understanding whether any current strategies used to support students on academic probation have an impact on student outcomes.

At a minimum, institutions should be identifying the percentage of students on academic probation for a given semester and determine what demographics are more significantly impacted. This information should be collected for both Fall and Winter semesters to provide a baseline for the institution and help determine if academic probation is a serious problem prevalent on their campus. In a few cases, the Michigan institutions studied here have collected data for academic probation, reporting rates lower than 11%. But, very little is done with the information other than communicating it to a few administrators on campus. This information should be more thoroughly examined, similar to graduation rates, at an institutional level, state level, and national level. For example, none of the data made available focused on first semester students, arguably the most vulnerable group.

As Michigan community colleges implement high impact practices and adopt student success strategies, their data collection process must also include academic probation statistics. At the institutional level, each of the 28 Michigan community colleges can collectively identify which schools have processes in place to collect data on academic probation and then make recommendations as to how this can be implemented statewide. All the colleges would then have the ability to identify a baseline and/or benchmark against other schools. Further, institutions that have lower rates of students on academic probation could identify their

academic probation strategies and report the impact on student outcomes. Throughout the state, effective strategies supporting students on academic probation can then be adopted by any of the community colleges.

## **ACADEMIC PROBATION BEST PRACTICES**

In order to accomplish the goal of minimizing the effects of probation on student success outcomes, the following best practices were identified.

### **Messaging Students**

In trying to relay messages to students about academic probation it is important how and when the message is communicated. An email should be sent to students close to mid-term week, and this email should reference the academic standards including academic probation policy so students are aware of the academic standards for continuing their studies. This email would be best addressed from the Records Office and communicate the importance of students being successful. In addition, this email can highlight the importance of accessing campus resources which is introduced in new student orientation and include webpage links identifying departments and providing their contact information.

All new students enrolled should also receive a letter from the college president at the end of the first semester congratulating them on this initial milestone. This letter could be addressed from the President's Office relaying the importance of students being successful and the role the institution can play in that process (Muskegon Community College, 2016).

## Academic Probation Levels

For students who did not meet the college academic standards upon completion of end of semester grades processing, an academic probation letter should be sent from the Counseling Office indicating next steps/intervention that will need to be taken to maintain enrollment. The academic probation process will be outlined by four levels as indicated in

### Appendix C:

- Level 1 probation – Hold on registration
  - Online academic probation workshop
- Level 2 probation – Hold on registration
  - Meet with a counselor for academic planning and goal setting to complete an academic success plan
- Level 3 probation – Lose priority registration and limit registration to 6-9 credits and require 2.0 semester GPA
- Level 4 probation – Academic dismissal

Overall, each academic probation level is progressive to help students address the complexity of trying to meet the academic standards of the institution. Level 1 informs students of the academic probation policy requirements and conditions. Level 2 addresses the need for academic planning and goal setting that are necessary for students to complete the appropriate courses and identify strategies for them to be successful in their chosen pathway. Level 3 restricts registration and helps provide students the opportunity to reduce their course load in attempts to improve their academic standing. Level 4 requires students to be academically dismissed from the institution.

## Monitor Interventions

At each academic probation level, the intervention will need to be monitored by the appropriate personnel within either the counseling, registration, or records department or office. Registration holds on student accounts will be applied by the registrar office but lifted by the Counseling Department each semester by staff once the conditions for Level 1 have been met. Meeting with a counselor and completing an academic success plan will need to be documented on a student account for Level 2. Course registration that exceeds the maximum allowed credits for Level 3 will need to be monitored by the Registration Office and coordinated with the Counseling Office, if any scheduling adjustments were needed. Further, the Registration Office would have to indicate which students needed to wait to register for classes once priority registration ends.

## Measure Student Outcomes

Any student meeting the conditions for academic probation should be included in a formal reporting process to include the percentage of students for total population. This data will help the institution determine which segments of students are most affected by academic probation. It is important to categorize which students are first semester freshman within the overall statistics for academic probation.

For each academic probation level, the data that are collected should include total credit accumulation, cumulative GPA, continued enrollment, and indication of any certificate or degree completion. All of the data points collectively will help guide the institution in

determining whether students are achieving long-term success as a result of the academic probation interventions.

## **SUMMARY**

The institutions included in this study averaged 10% of their students on academic probation, a significant problem that should be address on every campus. Many students will continue to fail to meet the academic standards of their institution if student long-term outcomes don't improve when participating in student success workshops, meeting with counselor or advisor, creating a success plan, or limiting course enrollment. Improving students' academic progress and/or completion will require extensive measurement of persistence, credit accumulation, and attainment of a degree or certificate.

Overall, academic probation policies, practices, and interventions when adopted by community colleges should be imbedded in best practices and not common practices so that students are well-supported in being academically successful. By conducting a thorough examination of internal processes, community colleges can explore different modes of effective communication for messaging students on academic probation, restructure their strategies to align with student success, and identify student outcomes to measures whether students are achieving long-term success.

As this study was designed to weigh the value of academic probation policies, practices, and interventions with regards to student success at four Michigan community colleges, further research is needed to explore effective methods for online academic probation workshops, examine the effectiveness of face-to-face and online academic probation workshops on student

outcomes, and measure student outcomes of community colleges with sliding scale and/or standard scale within their academic probation policy.

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APPENDIX A: MCC ACADEMIC PROBATION DATA

Table A1

*The Number of Students on Probation at Muskegon Community College 2008-2014 Fall Semesters*

<b>Fall Semesters</b>	<b>Students on Probation</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of Students on Probation</b>
2014	193	4694	4.10%
2013	255	4894	5.20 %
2012	486	5110	9.51 %
2011	261	5326	4.90%
2010	298	5503	5.42%
2009	297	5246	5.67%
2008	330	4868	6.78%

Table A2

*The Number of Students on Probation at Muskegon Community College 2008-2012 Winter Semesters*

<b>Winter Semesters</b>	<b>Students on Probation</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of Students on Probation</b>
2012	307	5065	6.06%
2011	372	5234	7.10%
2010	372	5151	7.22%
2009	396	4652	8.51%
2008	482	4448	10.83%

APPENDIX B: GRCC ACADEMIC PROBATION DATA

Table B1

*The Number of Students on Probation at Grand Rapids Community College 2010-2015 Fall Semesters*

<b>Fall Semesters</b>	<b>Students on Probation</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of Students on Probation</b>
2015	1,078	11,513	10.7%
2014	1,222	12,333	9.9%
2013	1,388	13,254	10.5%
2012	1,389	14,103	9.8%
2011	1,475	14,207	10.4%
2010	1,406	14,622	9.6%

Table B2

*The Number of Students on Probation at Grand Rapids Community College 2011-2015 Winter Semesters*

<b>Winter Semesters</b>	<b>Students on Probation</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of Students on Probation</b>
2015	1,116	12,575	8.9%
2014	1,277	13,533	9.4%
2013	1,294	14,615	8.9%
2012	1,429	15,016	9.5%
2011	1,486	15,568	9.5%

Table B3

*The Number of Students on Suspension at Grand Rapids Community College 2010-2015 Fall Semesters*

<b>Fall Semesters</b>	<b>Students on Suspension</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of students on Suspension</b>
2015	312	11,513	2.7%
2014	316	12,333	2.6%
2013	306	13,254	2.3%
2012	249	14,103	1.8%
2011	279	14,207	2.0%
2010	289	14,622	2.0%

Table B4

*The Number of Students on Suspension at Grand Rapids Community College 2011-2015 Winter Semesters*

<b>Winter Semesters</b>	<b>Students on Suspension</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of Students on Suspension</b>
2015	512	12,575	4.1%
2014	550	13,533	4.1%
2013	535	14,615	3.7%
2012	657	15,016	4.4%
2011	655	15,568	4.2%

## APPENDIX C: ACADEMIC PROBATION LEVELS

# ACADEMIC PROBATION

After attempting 12 credits at MCC with cumulative GPA below 2.0

What's next?

Academic Probation letter from Counseling & Advising Center



## Level 1: Academic Probation

Complete online academic probation workshop

Lift registration hold



## Level 2: Academic Probation

Schedule to meet with academic counselor and complete an academic plan

Lift registration hold



## Level 3: Academic Probation

Lose priority registration

Credit restrictions of 6-9 credits



## Level 4: Academic Probation

Academic Dismissal for 2 consecutive semesters