

# Undergraduate Academic Probation Policies in U.S. Universities: A Policy Discourse Analysis

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*This paper explores undergraduate academic probation policies in United States universities from a policy discourse analysis perspective. Academic probation policies from 32 institutions were characterized by normalization and regulation. These encompassed classification, exclusion, and sanctions of students in order to produce retention. Consideration needs to be given to existing academic probation policies as discourse, their origins, the social identities, and particular realities that are being constructed by them. Institutions should question if academic probation policies are truly aligned with student retention to avoid these policies being an obstacle itself to student retention.*

*Cet article explore les politiques de probation académique des étudiants de premier cycle dans les universités américaines dans une perspective d'analyse du discours politique. Les politiques de probation académique de 32 institutions sont caractérisées par la normalisation et la régulation. Elles englobent la classification, l'exclusion et les sanctions des étudiants afin de favoriser la rétention. Il est nécessaire de prendre en considération les politiques de probation académique existantes en tant que discours, leurs origines, ainsi que les identités sociales et les réalités particulières qu'elles construisent. Les institutions devraient se demander si les politiques de probation académique sont réellement alignées sur la rétention des étudiants afin d'éviter que ces politiques ne soient elles-mêmes un obstacle à la rétention des étudiants.*

## Background

Student probation has been present in United States (U.S.) undergraduate higher education for more than a century. In history, probation was a part of the college admission process, with some institutions admitting students based on examination or certification (probation) (Ramsay, 1900), or a combination of both (Huling, 1892). Both of these approaches were intended to assess the qualification of college candidates (Waterhouse, 1892).

The first method consisted of admitting students to colleges based on examination by faculty. Colleges would set standards for secondary schools and later hold them accountable through admission examinations (Waterhouse, 1892). The second method, certification, consisted of presenting certificates to those who were academically prepared, which the principal of the secondary school presented either alone or with other teachers (Waterhouse, 1892). Students who were admitted based on certification were on probation for a period (Ramsay, 1900). The overall idea behind the certification method (probation) was as follows:

If students do their work well in their first year at college, it is proof that they have been well trained at school; and the schools whence they come, if on the list of certifying schools, are to be kept on, and, if not on, are to be regarded as having strong claims to be put on. On the other hand, if students do their work ill during the first year, it is equally good proof that they have been ill trained in the schools whence they come; and such schools, if off the list, will be instructed that they are not to be put on, and, if on the list, will be given to understand that they are in danger of being put off, unless they bestir themselves and do better. (Waterhouse, 1892, p. 528)

In 1872, probation was documented with the certification method and was viewed as a “deficiency” in students for some institutions (Intelligence, 1872). This meant that these students were seen as lacking capabilities, and probation was used to better examine their abilities during the first part of their freshman year (Lord, 1879; “The Organization and Curricula of the College of Education”, 1903). In addition to probation’s role in student admission to higher education, it was used to depict groups of students as irregular, special (Babbitt, 1902; Hall, 1905), or deficient (“The Organization and Curricula of the College of Education,” 1903).

Clancy (1913) described students on probation as those weak in college courses, not at the same level as regular students, inefficient and not embarrassed by it since they were associated with other “incapables”, unwilling to do more work, even under threat of penalty. Clancy suggests additional class time for students on probation, rather than providing only remedial instruction, “since attendance upon the special section is an added burden and not a substituted one, there is a constant incentive to keep out of it, or being in, to *get out*.” (Clancy, 1913, p. 239).

Students on probation were often portrayed and treated differently. For example, they were viewed as not fit to represent the college (Hall, 1905). They were also denied the privileges given to regular students, such as joining fraternities and playing on athletic teams (Babbitt, 1902).

By the 1920s, probation policy had shifted in the literature in the sense that students in some universities would be placed on academic probation throughout their programs of study, not just as part of the admission process (Bridges, 1920; Freeman, 1931; Griffiths, 1945). The concept of probation was now being referred to as scholastic probation in some cases (Griffiths, 1945) and as academic probation in other cases (Osborne & Sanders, 1948). The latter is still used today and is more common. In addition, probation started to be seen as a space in which to intervene and retain students from admissions until graduation. This shift corresponded to the rise of the idea of student retention, which initially took place in the 1930s, then further developed through the 1950s and 1970s (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Nevertheless, academic probation’s characteristics remained the same by portraying students that did not meet academic expectations as probationers (Freeman, 1931; Reeder, 1942), below the average (Held, 1941) or non-achievers (Osborne & Sanders, 1948). Academic probation was also associated with grade measurements. For instance, in the 1920s, some institutions used a point-hour ratio of 1.00 to indicate that a student was of average academic standing, and anything below that signified probationary status (Bridges, 1920). Others used a point-hour-ratio of less than 05 (scholastic probation) (Griffiths, 1945), a 1.8 ratio (below the satisfactory) (Reeder, 1942) or a 2.0 grade point average (probation) (Moore, 1958). Additionally, these groups of students that maintained a probationary status would be dismissed and, in some cases, denied readmission.

Currently, and similar to its origins, academic probation is a policy (Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001) that categorizes students (Blaney, 2014; Newhouse & Cerniak, 2016; Ziter, 2018) based on a threshold measured by grade point average, usually between 1.0 and 1.99 out of 4.0 (Hamman,

2014; McDermott, 2008; Mosier, 2018; Renteria, 2020; Reynolds, 2013; Suchan, 2016), and includes actions such as academic dismissal from the institution itself. Some studies have suggested that academic probation policies are punitive, which often reduces the persistence of students who are on probation (Blaney, 2014; Casey et al., 2018; Hensley et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019).

Students' experiences frequently contradict the current purpose of academic probation policies—retention. Probationary students have described academic probation as having a detrimental effect on their self-beliefs (Rivera, 2019), creating feelings of shame and embarrassment (Versalle, 2018). For instance, McPherson (2019) concluded that academic probation had emotional consequences for students, such as shame and feeling isolated and sad. Rodriguez (2019) shared how the concept of probation reminded students of other terms, such as “prison,” “offender,” or “the justice system,” and was seen as a punishment. The deficit language used creates negative identities for students, affecting their academic self-perceptions (Rodriguez, 2019).

In terms of studies that have approached academic probation policies, some have described how these policies are considered to be penalties among probationary students and administrators, rather than interventions for students (Hoover, 2014). Other studies have emphasized how academic probation policies are formulated without a clear understanding of the implications it has for students and with an emphasis on self-protection (Renteria, 2020). Furthermore, because the consequences can be implemented during the first year of college, students may be deprived of a college experience (Rodriguez, 2019).

Studies that have explored undergraduate academic-probation policies in other countries through critical discourse analysis have highlighted these policies' brevity and focus on disciplinary actions (Barouch-Gilbert, 2019). In the context of U.S. institutions, research that employs discourse analysis to examine academic-probation policies is absent. For these reasons, and considering academic probation policies as part of retention, the purpose of this study was to analyze the discourse (text) of undergraduate academic-probation policies at U.S. universities to better understand what realities are constructed for students.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Power**

According to Foucault (1995), power is an intentional, non-subjective, as it is not guided by individuals, productive force that causes new behaviors to emerge. Power works by distributing individuals and controlling activities (Foucault, 1979). Power, consequentially, constructs social identities and produces particular realities for individuals (Iverson, 2010). Power establishes and or strengthens institutional values, norms, and hierarchies through policies as discursive practices (Allan et al., 2010). Power is also transmitted through knowledge and discourse at the macro level via examining ideologies, structures, institutions, and at the micro level through discursive practices (Iverson, 2010). For this study, academic probation policies are micro level discursive practices, which are intended to produce student retention.

Power is exercised through the use of surveillance, regulation, normalization, and classification (Iverson, 2010). Surveillance is the use of experts to monitor and increase efficiency (Gore, 1998).

The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible. (Foucault, 1995, pp. 170–171)

Regulation is control by rules; subject to restrictions; adapts to requirements; and is the act of invoking a rule, including a sanction, reward, punishment (Gore, 1998). Regarding punishment, “disciplinary punishment has the function of reducing gaps. It must therefore be essentially corrective” (Foucault, 1995, p. 179).

Normalization is the use of comparisons to invoke conformity based on a standard, or the process of defining what is normal (Gore, 1998). According to Foucault (1995), normalization “measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the nature of individuals. It introduces, through the 'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved” (Foucault, 1995, p. 183).

Classification is the differentiation of groups or individuals from one another through sorting and the ranking of identity statuses (Gore, 1998; Iverson, 2010).

## **Method**

Policy discourse analysis was used to investigate academic-probation policies as part of retention. The purpose was to provide an understanding of what reality these policies create for undergraduate student populations at U.S. universities. The aforementioned approach integrates a critical perspective and considers how the text under study is given meaning by examining the assumptions of the solutions to the problem but does not recognize their implications (Iverson, 2010).

## **Data**

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research was used to select U.S. higher education institutions. Focus was placed on institutions that typically serve undergraduate students. The selection criteria for the institutions were as follows: a large, four-year-or-above, public, land-grant institution with very high and high undergraduate fulltime enrollment, primarily residential. Although all institutions are unique in terms of their structures, data were gathered from consistent institutional types, resulting in a total of 32 institutions.

The data consisted of documents that encompassed academic probation policies (e.g., catalogues, academic regulations, academic policies, university and student handbooks) that were available online from the institution’s webpages. All 32 higher-education institutions had information available online. In addition, each of the institution’s webpages was searched to ensure the inclusion of all academic-probation policies (see Table 1).

## **Data Analysis**

After the documents containing the academic probation policies were gathered, they were input into the Atlas.ti software program. A single project file was created, which allowed for the organization of the information.

Table 1

*Undergraduate Academic Probation Policies and Institutions*

Institution	Institutional Document (s)
Institution 1	Undergraduate Catalog (2021)
Institution 2	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 3	University Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 4	Undergraduate Catalog (2019-2020)
Institution 5	Academic Program Catalog- Undergraduate Education (2019-2020)
Institution 6	Undergraduate Catalog (2019-2020)
Institution 7	Undergraduate Catalog (2018-2019)
Institution 8	Student Handbook (2019-2020)
Institution 9	Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletin (2020-2021)
Institution 10	Academic Policies Guide (2019-2020)
Institution 11	University Catalog (2018-2019)
Institution 12	Undergraduate Bulletin (2019-2020)
Institution 13	University Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 14	Undergraduate Catalog (2017-2019)
Institution 15	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 16	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 17	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 18	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 19	General Catalog (2019-2020)
Institution 20	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 21	Bulletin 2020-2021
Institution 22	Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 23	Undergraduate Bulletin 2019-2020
Institution 24	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 25	Academic Regulations (2019-2020)
Institution 26	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 27	Undergraduate Academic Catalog (2019-2020)
Institution 28	Undergraduate / Graduate Academic Catalog (2019-2020)
Institution 29	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 30	University Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 31	Undergraduate Catalog (2020-2021)
Institution 32	Student Handbook/ Academic Regulations (2020)

In general, data analysis consisted of coding, categorization, and identifying the predominant themes of the academic-probation policies (Miles et al., 2014). More specifically, this process entailed a first and second cycle of coding. During the first cycle, a list of codes was generated based on the theoretical framework of power and the study's guiding question. Line-by-line analysis was conducted for each document to identify power strategies (e.g., surveillance, self-regulation, normalization, and classification). Data was then analyzed in a second cycle by identifying common themes across documents.

## **Results**

The undergraduate academic probation policies of the 32 U.S. universities described techniques of power. Academic probation policies embedded in academic catalogues, academic regulations, academic policies, and university and student handbooks were predominantly characterized by regulation and normalization. Furthermore, aspects of institutional academic forgiveness, academic clemency, and providing a fresh start were also present.

### **Normalization and Classification**

Generally speaking, all institutions established academic standards to which students could conform, thus achieving normality. Classification practices followed, differentiating one student from another and also differentiating among groups of students. Hence, normalization and classification are often intertwined.

“A cumulative grade point average of 2.0 is the minimal acceptable level for undergraduate work” (Institution 27). Students complying with the “normal” standard would be classified as being in good academic standing. “A student must have a cumulative grade-point average of 2.00 or higher to be considered in good standing” (Institution 12).

Institution 17 considered “a student in good standing when both the student's term and cumulative GPAs are 2.0 or higher” (Institution 17). Furthermore, to “remain in good academic standing, a student must maintain a GPA of at least 2.00” (Institution 19).

Similarly, Institution 18 stated the following:

Upon initial admission and during a student's first term of enrollment, except for students conditionally admitted on academic probation, the student is in good status. A student remains in, or returns to, good academic status at the end of any regular term (spring, summer, fall) when the cumulative GPA is at or above the required minimum of 2.0.

Institutional grade measurement systems enabled a standard of who a normal student is, and those below are positioned differently—on academic probation. “A student is on probation if during the most recent previous semester in attendance, the student had been in good standing, but at the end of that semester the cumulative grade-point average was below 2.00” (Institution 5).

At Institution 6, “students whose cumulative GPA is less than 2.00 at the end of any term will enter the next term on academic probation and will remain on probation until the GPA reaches 2.00 or higher” (Institution 6).

Similar to classification that stems from who a normal student is (minimum of a 2.0 grade point average), being on academic probation (below a 2.0 grade point average) also fosters these

classifying schemes. “Undergraduate students are in good academic standing if both their current semester and cumulative grade point averages are 2.00 or above, and/or they are eligible to be enrolled. Students not meeting the criteria above are considered academically deficient” (Institution 32).

At Institution 16, “any GPA below 2.0 is considered academically deficient; this applies to term GPA, major GPA, and cumulative GPA. At the conclusion of each academic term, all students with a deficient GPA will be reviewed”.

Other institutional classifications of students on academic probation are scholastically deficient.

Placement on probation means that the student is scholastically deficient and is continuing his or her education with the understanding that he or she must improve the level of work and must meet any conditions of probation set by the Scholastic Standing Committee and approved by the school faculty. (Institution 14)

At risk, “first-year freshmen who have less than a 2.00 cumulative grade-point average at the end of their first semester of enrollment are considered at risk” (Institution 18), and probationary (Institution 11). One institution, when referring to academic probation and dismissal, described delinquent students as those:

... who cannot or does not *maintain the required standard of scholarship* or whose continuance in the University would be detrimental to his or her health, or the health of others, or whose conduct is not satisfactory to the authorities of the university. (Institution 24)

Institutional academic standards differentiated among groups of students in this study. Students on academic probation were considered to be below normal, which usually was measured by having less than a 2.0 grade point average. These were also classified by the institution differentiating more between students. Furthermore, surveillance and regulations were part of institutional efforts to retain students.

### **Surveillance and Regulation**

The institutions mentioned that expert supervision of students on academic probation was part of their retention strategy. Programs were set in place to gather students in need of help and to provide strategies for integrating and being academically successful. Additionally, regulations were implemented to further control student’s self through sanctions, punishment, and rewards.

Most institutions included advisers or courses that these retention specialists led. “Students who are placed on academic probation immediately should seek assistance in academic improvement from such sources as academic advisers, instructors, the Academic Success Center, and the University Tutoring Office” (Institution 3). Institution 31 and Institution 18 alike stated the following:

A student on probation: may be required (at the discretion of individual colleges) to consult with an academic advisor regularly and to sign an academic contract acknowledging their performance is not meeting university standards and stating what actions they are committed to taking to improve academic performance.

Regarding students on probation at Institution 18, “these at-risk students must, at a minimum, consult with an academic adviser to develop a plan to get off of probation” (Institution 18).

Both Institution 5 and Institution 10 stated the following. “Students on probation may be required to see an academic advisor. If they do not, a hold may be placed on their registration” (Institution 5). In addition, “immediately following being placed on academic probation, students are blocked from self-registration, so they should plan to meet with an advisor before their registration appointment begins to discuss course selection and strategies for academic success” (Institution 10).

At Institution 1, the supervision of students on academic probation was to be performed through programs in which these students were grouped. “Students on academic probation are encouraged to participate in the Academic Recovery Program offered by the Academic Success Center” (Institution 1). Meanwhile, Institution 14 indicated the following:

Students placed on academic probation may be required to participate in programs designed to help them return to good academic standing. Failure to comply with the conditions of probation may result in further restrictions on registration or academic suspension or dismissal.

Institution 28, Institution 16, and Institution 6 alike confirmed in their processes: “Students placed on probation will receive official notification of their academic status and are required to attend a probation meeting early in the next semester” (Institution 28). In addition, “terms include full completion of the Academic Coaching and Success program, as well as remediation as deemed appropriate by the academic department” (Institution 16). Furthermore, “a first semester freshman with a GPA below 2.0 will be monitored by the Center for Student Success and/or required to take an academic support course” (Institution 6).

Rules, sanctions, punishment, and rewards were also implemented. Some of the most common forms across institutions were academic suspension, academic dismissal, a reduction in the credit hour limit, and ineligibility for financial aid or graduation. Furthermore, for students who were dismissed from an institution long term, the institution could pardon them in terms of their grade point averages and grant them the opportunity to re-enroll to finish their degree programs. In terms of suspension, Institution 9 stated:

Academic suspension is issued when a student enters the term on either probation or continued probation and earns both a term GPA and institutional cumulative GPA below the minimum 2.00 for good standing. An academic suspension appears on the student's official academic transcript. A suspension hold is placed on the student's record by the Office of Registration and Record which prevents all future registration.

As part of suspension, some institutions placed students on academic leave for periods of time. Institution 12 stated the following:

Academic suspension is an official notification that a student has earned a semester grade-point average of less than 2.00 while on academic warning. A student who has been academically suspended may not schedule courses at the University for a minimum of two consecutive semesters.

Institution 1 and Institution 18 alike stated the following. “Suspension is for one semester” (Institution 1). In addition, Institution 18 stated:



A student on academic probation who does not earn the minimum required term GPA will be academically suspended. A student on academic suspension will be on academic leave from the university for one major semester (spring or fall) and all contiguous summer and intersessions from the close of the term which resulted in the academic suspension.

Other aspects of regulation, such as student dismissal, both short and long term, were also present at these institutions. “Students will be dismissed after two successive terms of probation if their cumulative average is below 2.00” (Institution 21). Also, Institution 29 stated:

A student who does not satisfy the condition of probation, or who earns a semester grade-point average of 1.00 or lower, or who earns failing grades in one-half of the semester credit hours attempted will be dismissed for low scholarship. The period of dismissal is for one year.

Similarly, Institution 26 specified: “Students who have been dismissed will be denied enrollment privileges for at least two consecutive semesters (the four summer sessions count as one semester). Any courses for which you were registered will be canceled”. Institution 22 affirmed:

Students who have been suspended and who subsequently fail to maintain the minimum academic requirements of their college, school, or program or fail to meet the terms of probation may be dismissed. Once dismissed, a student is not eligible for readmission for a minimum of one academic year (fall and spring semester).

An additional regulation was the loss of financial aid, which was set at the institutional and the federal level. For instance: “Satisfactory Academic Progress Standard for Financial Aid Recipients Federal financial aid regulations require that financial aid recipients maintain satisfactory academic progress in order to remain eligible for financial aid (over a 2.0 GPA)” (Institution 29). Institution 8 said the following:

Students must maintain satisfactory academic progress to continue receipt of financial aid. Students who fail to meet the satisfactory academic progress standards are encouraged to attend summer school to remove their deficiencies. Students not meeting the minimum standards [2.0 cumulative grade point average] will be placed on financial aid suspension.

Institution 23, Institution 17, and Institution 20 alike stated the following. “Students who have failed to meet one or more of the Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements are not eligible for financial aid” (Institution 23). Also, “if after the warning term you are still not meeting all of the above criteria [Cumulative GPA of at least 2.0], your financial aid eligibility will be suspended beginning with the next semester you attend” (Institution 17). Furthermore, “students who do not meet the terms of financial aid probation are not eligible for aid in any subsequent semester” (Institution 20).

Other regulations across institutions were related to graduation requirements. For instance, Institution 25 stated: “All students must achieve an overall average of at least C (2.00). All students must also achieve a cumulative average of at least C (2.00) in their major”.

Institution 5 and Institution 20 described the following in their policies. “The university requires a cumulative grade-point average (GPA) of 2.00 or above for graduation” (Institution 5). Institution 20 also stated:

Each student must satisfy the following general requirements for graduation in addition to the academic requirements, including minimum total credit hours of the particular college and curriculum chosen: A scholastic average of C (GPA of 2.0) in all work taken at the University.

Institution 17 said it requires a “minimum grade point average of 2.0 for graduation”. Meanwhile, Institution 8 and Institution 28 both stated that to graduate, a student must earn a 2.0 grade point average.

For students who were on academic probation and later dismissed, institutions had established added regulations to change the impact of prior academic performance on their grade point averages. This would allow them to adjust to the norm and earn their degrees. As a form of incentive, these regulations were often described as academic renewal, academic forgiveness, second opportunity, academic reprieve, and clemency. For instance, Institution 21 stated the following:

The Academic Renewal Policy allows degree-seeking students who had experienced earlier academic difficulty (probation, continued probation, or dismissal) to make a fresh start and have one final opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree. If approved, Academic Renewal will initiate a new grade point average that will be used in the determination of a student's academic standing. Readmitted students must be absent from the University for five (5) years, the required period of absence.

Some institutions described academic forgiveness programs for those students not enrolled for three years prior to readmission. For instance, Institution 4 stated the following:

The Academic Fresh Start and Academic Forgiveness Policies enable an undergraduate student to neutralize, in part, the grade impact of prior academic performance. Academic Fresh Start and Academic Forgiveness provide for the computation of an alternative GPA and for the use of that GPA in most academic situations.

Institution 32 also stated the following in relation to academic forgiveness: “If you were dismissed under any academic deficiency rule and have not been enrolled for four or more years, you may request at that time that you apply for readmission and reinstatement that all previous work be disregarded.” Institution 17 stated the following in its academic second-opportunity-for-undergraduate policy:

Second Opportunity is designed to assist the student who was not successful in progressing toward a degree during a previous attendance at the University. The student has re-enrolled following an absence of at least three full calendar years. The student's previous record at the university was unsatisfactory (normally, below a C average).

Similarly, Institution 11 described an academic reprieve, and Institution 24 mentioned academic clemency.

A student who has had poor academic performance in the past to request that one semester or two consecutive semesters be “reprieved” and not included in the calculation of the overall GPA. At least three years have passed between the semester(s) in question and the reprieve request.

Also, the following was stated by Institution 24:

Undergraduate degree-seeking students who have re-enrolled at the University in pursuit of their initial baccalaureate degree are eligible, after a separation of at least five calendar years from the University (determined by the last day of the last attended semester), for academic clemency. Academic clemency is granted one time only, and subsequent requests will be denied. Clemency will be recorded on the student's record following the completion of the student's first semester of re-enrollment. Under clemency, up to 16 attempted credits of D+, D, D-, and F grades from courses previously completed at the University will be removed from the calculation of the student's cumulative grade point average (GPA).

Academic probation policies described surveillance of students who were on academic probation. The monitoring of these students had the purpose of increasing retention among them. Nonetheless, regulations comprised of sanction, punishment, and reward, were evident and the most relevant within the policies across institutions.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Academic probation has existed since the early years of higher education in the United States. Originally part of the admission process, it granted students probationary enrollment—hence the “probation” concept. It meant that students had deficiencies or weaknesses in college courses and labeled them as unfit or incapable of representing the college. Over time, academic probation appeared throughout academic programs as an opportunity to assist students, corresponding to higher education's emerging perspective on retention.

Similar to its origins, students' experiences confirm that today's academic probation policies are punitive (Casey et al., 2018), which contradicts the purpose of student retention. Some studies have approached academic probation policies through critical discourse analysis and found them characterized by their brevity and their focus on disciplinary actions. Research that employs discourse analysis to examine academic-probation policies in U.S. institutions remains absent. Thus, this study aimed to—through the lens of power—analyze the discourse (text) of undergraduate academic probation policies at U.S. universities to understand the realities constructed for these students.

The realities constructed to retain students at these U.S. universities on academic probation included realities of normalization, classification, monitoring, sanctions, blame, and forgiveness. Specifically, all institutions normalized students by setting academic standards to conform to, usually measured by the grade point average. These standards created a hierarchy of students in terms of their academic performance. Those below certain standards had to correct their behaviors to conform to the norm.

Normalization intertwined with the sorting and ranking of students on probation. Classifications served to confirm student grouping and to speak to their character. Students conforming to the standard appeared as good or normal according to academic standing. Those below the standard appeared as academically deficient, scholastically deficient, at risk, probationary, or delinquent.

Academic probation policies have experts supervise students to increase institutions' retention. Monitoring comprised assisting students individually or in groups. In some cases, students were required or encouraged to attend to meetings with these specialists. The expert

interventions aimed to integrate students into the institution to change their academic standing (e.g., improve their academic performance, provide strategies for academic success, and return to good academic standing). Students who failed to comply with retention specialists' conditions received further restrictions on registration or even academic suspension or dismissal.

Regarding self-control via rules to "correct" probationary students' behavior and retain the students, probation policies included institutional actions (sanctions, punishments, and rewards) at different points during probation. These actions include suspension, dismissal, reduced credit-hour limits, and ineligibility for financial aid and graduation. Furthermore, institutional programs would counter the actions of previous academics to help retain students. These actions, considered acts of institutional forgiveness, implied the student had done something wrong (e.g., academic forgiveness, academic clemency, academic renewal, fresh starts, and academic reprieves).

Institutions should better recognize existing academic probation policies and their origins and question if their discourse create realities that truly align with student retention. This understanding would help avoid academic probation policies being an obstacle to student retention. More specifically, institutions should question if classifying students will help retention in these populations or if depicting students in such a way will create a negative understanding of them. Similarly, institutions should question monitoring and sanctioning students who do not comply with supervision. Furthermore, does sanctioning students throughout their academic probation enable them to come out of probation or make it impossible because of the restrictions? When clearing the students' academic history, institutional program descriptions confirm that they did something wrong. Lastly, this study aims not to diminish the importance of institutional retention but rather to examine unquestioned assumptions of academic probation policies as discursive practices that aim to produce student retention.

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