

**Research Brief:**  
**The Drop/Add/Withdraw Transaction Spike**  
**October 25-29, 2013**  
 Prepared by the Office of Student Success

In the days preceding the last day to drop a class or to withdraw with no grade, student transactions of these types spike. The Office of Student Success conducted a study of such transactions between October 24 and October 28, 2013 with the intent of identifying what it might reveal not only about student academic circumstances, but of university processes embedded within the teaching and advising enterprise. A strong impetus for the analysis was recent state financial aid policy changes that link state aid to the completion of 30 credit hours per year, a core component of the state’s college completion agenda.

**Results**

There were 905 drop/withdrawal/course add transactions involving approximately 545 students during this period. The proportional breakdown by class year was as follows: 54% freshmen, 21% sophomores, 13% juniors, 10% seniors, and 2% grads. Table 1 provides a summary of the transaction types and credit hour impact by class year.

Table 1  
 Transaction Types and Credit Hour Impact by Class Year

Class Year	Number of Transactions	No. students still enrolled	AVG credit hours after transactions for those still enrolled	Credit hour range after transactions for those still enrolled	No. students in CR ranges: <12 hours / 12-14 hours / 15+ hours
FR	369 drops; 93 withd.; 47 registr.	277	11.4	1-18	89 / 177 / 11
SO	137 drops; 36 withd.; 13 registr.	106	11.3	3-16	36 / 58 / 12
JR	81 drops; 25 withd.; 5 registr.	69	10.9	2-18	29 / 30 / 10
SR	61 drops; 12 withd.; 8 registr.	52	10.7	11-24	22 / 24 / 6
Grad	11 drops; 6 withd.; 1 registr.	12	5.3		

As might be expected, the number of transactions in this five day period was the highest for freshmen and progressively declined up through the class years (column 2). To better understand the impact of these transactions on students, column 4 shows the average credit hours carried after the transactions among those students that did not withdraw. The average credit hour load for all undergraduate classes was below the federal full-time definition of 12 hours. The range for each class year is shown in column 5. Column 6 shows the number of students from this 5 day window by total credit hour enrollment range.

By way of a window into the impact of this 5 day period of enrollment related transactions on the achievement gap, Figure 1 shows the proportional enrollment of U.S. White students, U.S. minority students<sup>1</sup>, and international students in each of the credit hour enrollment categories.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as per IR definition, namely, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and multiracial, the majority subgroup being African American.

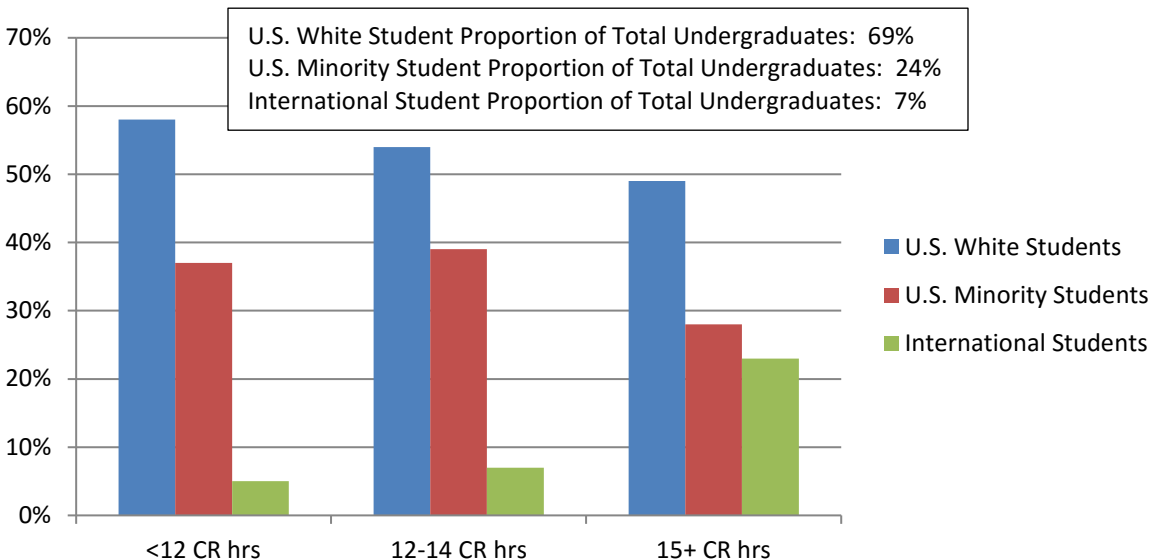


Figure 1: Proportional Enrollment in Credit Hour Category

As can be seen in Figure 1, U.S. minority students are overrepresented in the two lower credit hour enrollment categories vis-à-vis their proportion in the student body, U.S. White students are underrepresented, and international students approximately representative. In the 15+ credit hour category, U.S. White students are underrepresented, U.S. Minority students slightly overrepresented, and international students substantially overrepresented.

### Discussion

Questions worthy of discussion emerge from this study. First, given the volume of drops, ostensibly the majority for grade concern reasons, forming even closer linkages between faculty and campus academic support services appears warranted. Second, given that there were comparatively fewer course adds than drops, it also raises the question as to whether attention is needed to having more partial semester course options beyond what is primarily physical education activity courses. Yet, carefully planning would be needed to ensure that they are the right courses that students can handle and if more weeks would be needed for them than where the drop deadline falls in the semester. Third, with new state financial aid policy requiring 30 hours completed per year to maintain full aid, expansion of summer offerings and incentives for students to take them, including via cost affordability, appears necessary. Fourth, targeted programming to further support minority student success is needed. Finally, colleges would benefit from a deeper analysis of the dataset that informed this research brief and that could inform targeted teaching and advisor policy/development activities. Some possibilities include:

- Investigate why 21 students had no assigned advisor.
- Contact the students with 4 or fewer enrolled hours to confirm that they had intended this or if they really were thinking they withdrew from the University.
- Are freshmen without the UC attribute, particularly those without a UC advisor, receiving sufficient advising support?
- Are there patterns in the data that could inform course revision, curricular sequencing, and/or faculty professional development opportunities based on (1) magnitude of drops/withdrawals, (2) distance delivery or time-of-day course drop/withdrawal patterns, (3) advising assignments?
- Are there sufficient early assessments in courses that alert to potential challenges for students?