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**A comparative study of freshmen entering the University of Northern Iowa in the fall 1975 who received a first semester grade point average below 2.00 and who completed a baccalaureate degree by summer 1981**

Margaret Rolfe  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## **A comparative study of freshmen entering the University of Northern Iowa in the fall 1975 who received a first semester grade point average below 2.00 and who completed a baccalaureate degree by summer 1981**

### **Abstract**

For the past decade educators in institutions of higher learning have begun to open their doors to a diverse population of students and to design programs that would help them to best "fit" into the college environmental milieu. This diverse student group has brought along with it a multitude of values, cultures, needs and interests that have been totally different from those of the traditional middle-class college-going population. These two groups differ in terms of academic abilities, educational aspirations, career goals, and usually grade point averages. This is not always the case, but oftentimes some students form the diverse population who are "low academic achievers" and earn below a 2.00 grade index during their first semester of college.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FRESHMAN ENTERING THE  
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A FIRST SEMESTER GRADE POINT AVERAGE BELOW 2.00 AND  
WHO COMPLETED A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE BY SUMMER 1981

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Department of School Administration  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts in Education

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by  
Margaret Rolfe  
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This Research Paper by: Margaret Rolfe

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Who Received a First Semester Grade Point  
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Jack F. Kimball

July 18, 1982  
Date Approved

Director of Research Paper

Robert T. Lembke

July 12, 1982  
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Robert L. Frank

July 12, 1982  
Date Received

Graduate Faculty Advisor

Robert Krajewski

July 19, 1982  
Date Received

Head, Department of School  
Administration and Personnel  
Services

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

For the past decade educators in institutions of higher learning have begun to open their doors to a diverse population of students and to design programs that would help them to best "fit" into the college environmental milieu. This diverse student group has brought along with it a multitude of values, cultures, needs and interests that have been totally different from those of the traditional middle-class college-going population. These two groups differ in terms of academic abilities, educational aspirations, career goals, and usually grade point averages. This is not always the case, but oftentimes some students form the diverse population who are "low academic achievers" and earn below a 2.00 grade index during their first semester of college.

At many institutions any student who earns below a 2.00 grade point average during his/her first semester of college will automatically be placed on probation, and if there has been no improvement by the following semester, s/he will usually be suspended from the university.



The main purpose of this research is to study the students at the University of Northern Iowa that earned below a 2.00 grade point average during their first semester of enrollment, and later graduated with a baccalaureate degree. Thus they have increased their overall grade point average to a 2.00 or above.

Within this study, the variables that are examined are: the area that each student majored in, i.e., teaching or non-teaching, the number of semesters required for each student to earn a degree, the gender of each student, and whether each student was an Educational Opportunity Program student, or a non-Educational Opportunity Program student. This study in its attempt to address each of these concerns, will analyze the group of students that earned below a 2.00 their first semester of enrollment in terms of the variables listed in the preceding sentence.

#### Statement of the Problem

This research attempts to investigate two concerns regarding the freshman enrollment at the University of Northern Iowa during the fall of 1975 who earned below a 2.00 grade point average during their first semester of enrollment and graduated by the summer of 1981.

The first concern is the total number of semesters that were required for each student to earn a baccalaureate degree. In this, the researcher is interested in finding out the characteristics of students who actually earned the

baccalaureate degree within the "traditional" four year period.

The second concern is to examine the gender of each student to determine if each has a bearing on the decision to declare a major in a teaching or non-teaching field. By studying this data, the researcher was able to characterize students at the University of Northern Iowa who enrolled during the fall of 1975, earned below a 2.00 initial grade point average, and later earned a baccalaureate degree from this institution.

#### Importance of the Problem

This study is significant because there is a need to investigate the characteristics of students at the University of Northern Iowa that earn below a 2.00 grade point average their first semester and persist until they earn a baccalaureate degree.

Most research has been concerned with students who earn above a 2.00, because often those who earn below a 2.00 do not persist until they graduate.

This research will study the retention rate of students who earn below an initial 2.00 grade point average at the University of Northern Iowa.

#### Assumptions

(1) It is assumed that undergraduate students that are "low academic achievers" earn below a 2.00 grade point

average and usually drop out or are suspended from the University.

(2) It is assumed that most students that earn below a 2.00 their first semester are males.

(3) It is assumed that students that earn below 2.00 cannot major in a teaching field.

(4) It is assumed that minority students are "low achievers" and that they usually earn a grade point average of below a 2.00 more often than non-EOP students.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to freshmen undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Northern Iowa during the fall semester of 1975. No student who enrolled as unclassified or transfer was included. Only students that earned below a 2.00 grade point average their first semester were studied. This study is further limited to students that were freshmen during the fall of 1975 and graduated by the summer of 1981.

Although UNI does provide remedial programs for "low" achieving students, such as tutorial services and a learning skills center, they will not be discussed in this research.

University of Northern Iowa students are not necessarily representative of all college and university students, so generalizations will be based upon students studied at this institution only.

These limitations offer direction for future research, which is much needed in this area of student development.

### Definition of Terms

Undergraduate - College or university student in various subject areas who has not yet received an official degree from that institution.

University of Northern Iowa - Abbreviated UNI. A medium scope public university located in Cedar Falls, Iowa, with an enrollment of approximately 10,500 undergraduate and graduate students.

EOP student - Educational Opportunity Program student; any student that is recruited to UNI via the EOP program whose mission is to enhance the success of disadvantaged students by providing them with financial aid, tutorial assistance, academic advising, and counseling.

Non-EOP student - Any student that earned below a 2.00 that is not a member of the EOP program.

Persister - A student who remains at the same university until completion of a degree.

Non-persister - A student who leaves the university before completion of a degree.

Retention - The holding power of a university to retain its students from the time they enroll until the time of their graduation.

Low academic achiever - Any student that earns below a 2.00 grade point average.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Far too much talent is wasted when students abandon their educational goals and fail to avail themselves of the necessary learning that takes place over a period of time at an institution of higher education. Hence, institutions must continue to explore the problems confronting college withdrawals (Kowalski, 1977).

The purpose of this section is to review the literature which relates to students that earn below a 2.00 grade point average their first semester of enrollment, yet persist to complete a baccalaureate degree. In that these students complete the requirements for this degree, they have also increased their overall grade point average to above a 2.00. The literature relative to this study is not extensive because research regarding "low achievers" has not been done to any major extent. However, an understanding of the characteristics of students that earn above a 2.00 "high ability achievers" has contributed a great deal of information to this investigation. Also, literature to the retention rate of students by race and gender has been useful to the researcher.

Most universities such as the University of Iowa and Iowa State University have curriculums which consist of five year programs. Therefore, the majority of their students do not graduate within the "traditional" four year period that society has established for them to complete the degree in. On the average, students require four years and at least one summer session in order to achieve a degree (Kelso, 1982).

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding the persistence rate for first semester freshmen. Summerskill (1962) found a highly significant relationship between attrition and first semester grades. He cautioned that poor grades are far more stable predictors of attrition than are good grades a predictor of retention, because successful students drop out in larger numbers than would be expected. In accordance with Summerskill, Holmes (1959) stated that good grades are extremely effective reinforcers that maintain and strengthen a students' academic performance and decrease the chances of his/her dropping out. He further asserted that poor grades may precede rather than follow ones' decision to drop out of school.

Tinto (1975) reported that students who persist in college generally show lower grade performance and lower levels of intellectual development than do those who withdraw from the institution. In contrast to this report, Lenning (1980) found that although the majority of drop-

outs have satisfactory grades, they tend to have lower grades than persisters.

The ability to predict who will not finish college because of failing grades is limited, because no matter what the students' grades are in high school, or what the scores on admissions tests, college grades will have a major bearing on whether or not the student completes his/her undergraduate work (Astin, 1975).

About two students in three is a persister (65 percent), and 24.3 percent become dropouts. More than half of the students actually finish their undergraduate work within four years after entering college. In confirmation of the previous statement, Iffert (1958) found that slightly fewer than 40 percent of the students entering the higher educational institutions in his study graduated from the institution of original registration in normal progression, i.e., within a four year period.

Since there is such a high dropout rate among successful students, it is difficult to predict which students will persevere in college (Fulmer, 1956). In support of this finding, Prediger (1965) stated that even though many low academic ability students are dropped from institutions due to low grades, some of them make acceptable grades and persist in their studies to ultimate graduation.

The most important entering characteristics of students are high school grades, degree of aspiration, and religious backgrounds. Students with good grades, plans for post-graduate degrees, Jewish parents, and Jewish religious preferences tend to have the best chances for finishing college. For students, the degree to which they "fit" into the college also affects persistence (Astin, 1975).

Retention and attrition result from the interaction between persons and institutions. The characteristics of the interaction, not the student or institution alone, affect a student's decision to stay or drop out (Lenning, 1980). In conjunction with Lenning's findings, Pantages and Creedon (1978) reported that the extent to which the student can meet the demands of the college and derive satisfaction from doing so is the degree to which the student may be expected to persist at the college.

Among students that originally plan to complete their academic program, the reasons for dropping out are often complex and overlapping. Among the nonacademic reasons may be boredom, a "sense of wasting time", moderate financial hardship, lack of motivation, and psychiatric problems. Several factors may be involved simultaneously in withdrawal from college. Therefore, a neat definition for dropout is difficult, perhaps impossible (Cope and Hannah, 1975).



Academic grades represent an extrinsic form of reward for the person participating in the college. Grade performance reflects the notion that the student is also being evaluated and judged by that system (Tinto, 1975). He further states that students with poor academic qualifications but moderately high commitment tended to persist in college until completion or until forced to withdraw for academic reasons. Students with both low commitment to college completion and moderately low academic competence tended to withdraw from college and not transfer to another institution or reenroll at a later date.

For every student who enters college in the U.S. only four will graduate from that college within four years. For every five students that drop out of the college altogether, four will reenroll at a different college, and of those four reenrolees, only two will graduate. Of the six students who dropped out, three did so during the first year. Two more dropped out during the second year. Three of the ten students who originally entered college will never obtain a college degree (Creedon and Pantages, 1978).

Another factor that plays a significant role in college student persistence is dormitory living. Alfert (1966) found that it enhances college persistence and Kramer and Kramer (1968) found that among students that lived off campus, only 59 percent persisted in comparison

to 71.6 percent for those that lived on campus. Kramer also found a statistically significant difference in library usage between persisting and nonpersisting students. Of those freshmen who frequently used the library and took out at least one book, only 26 percent withdrew. Of those that failed to use the library, 43 percent did not return the following year.

Zaccaria (1971) reported that students who persist until graduation have somewhat different personal needs than those students of similar needs who choose to withdraw.

Chickering (1969) stated that emotional stress and turmoil frequently accompany the student who leaves before graduating. For many, the process is painful, feelings of failure, anxiety about the future, depression, anger or rebellion predominate. For some it is a positive step, taken with conviction, satisfying not only to the person, but to parents, friends, and college officials.

According to Morrissey (1971) persistence is reliably associated with first semester grade point average. He found twenty-eight percent of the low first semester grade point average group (1.517 and below) persisted, while 63 percent of the first semester grade average group (1.518 and above) did so.

In relation to gender, Hill (1966) reported that among high aptitude students, about three times as many women are dismissed for academic failure as men. There are clear sex differences in the creativity factors associated with success in college.

Cope (1969) related that males most frequently dropout due to experiencing academic difficulty, however, females dropout because of social and religious problems. When students are placed on academic probation, Astin (1975) revealed that it has a negative effect on men and a positive effect on women.

Although there is a tendency for most studies to find more men withdrawing from college than women, in answer to the question "do more men or women drop out of college?" the answer is no according to (Cope and Hannah, 1975). In support of this finding, Iffert (1957) indicated that he found no significant differences in the overall attrition rate of women during their first semester. Lenning (1980) reported similar findings in that he stated that sex is not significantly related as a primary variable to retention or attrition.

Within many institutions the number of minority students other than blacks account for only a very small percentage of the population (Kelso, 1982; Astin, 1975). In a study that he conducted, Astin (1975) analyzed 38,703

students based on ACT and SAT scores to determine characteristics that they had in common that were related to persistence in college. The data revealed that although it might be informative to perform a separate analysis for minorities other than blacks, the numbers are too small to produce stable results.

Relative to characteristics that have been reported concerning black students, Williams (1969) suggested that scholastic motivation, adequate study skills, and a supportive social environment are the major factors that determine academic success, but these are the very conditions that are missing in the background of the disadvantaged students.

In a comparison of students that smoke to those who do not, Astin (1975) reported that 20 percent greater probability of dropping out of college is expected for black students that smoke frequently than for those that do not smoke at all. For white men, the difference is 5 percent, and for white women, about 7 percent.

Males with lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to dropout of college when confronted with the prospect of academic failure and dismissed than are higher status males with comparable ability (Zaccaria, 1971).

In most instances, the academic mortality rate for disadvantaged students in special programs has been

no higher than for "regular" students (Williams, 1969). In addition, he reports that data from the dropout/"flunk-out" rate is much higher for the control group than for those in the high risk program. In contrast to these findings, Centra (1968) reported that many minority students are from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and are thus less likely to complete college due to academic difficulties experienced in college.

As for black students in predominantly white colleges, they are far less likely to drop out than are either their black peers in black colleges or their white peers in white colleges. However, both black women in black and white institutions are more likely to dropout after one year of college than are men (Bayer and Boruch, 1969).

Among women, the attrition rate of black students in white colleges is substantially higher than that of their white peers in the same type of college. More than one-fifth of black women students in predominantly white colleges drop out in comparison to 13.9 percent of black women in predominantly black colleges (Bayer and Boruch, 1969).

Even though the prediction of academic success for college students has been the subject of a considerable body of research, there is far less evidence available regarding the prediction of academic success for black students (Sampel, 1971).

Between the sexes, differences in persistence rates of students with different college majors only suggest that there are different goal and personality orientations among students who may choose one major over another and consequently find particular departments or schools at different institutions whether satisfying or not meeting their individual, social, personality, and intellectual needs. There is no consistent evidence to suggest retention rates are better in any field (Cope and Hannah, 1975).

Iffert (1958) found that in comparison to the percentages of men and women that remained in the subject major of their initial selection upon enrolling at a particular institution, the largest number of college women reported a first interest in education and that 62 percent of them persisted in their interest; however, among men, he found that engineering was the major area most often chosen, and 60.5 percent of them persisted in that area.

Angle and Wissman (1981) reported that men and women tend to take different fields of study. Men are concentrated in natural sciences and technical fields and business; women are in humanities and education. Social sciences are about evenly split between the two sexes.

Despite the very extensive literature on dropout from higher education, much remains unknown about the nature of the dropout process (Tinto, 1975).

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter will present the data which was gathered by reviewing the academic records of students that enrolled at UNI as freshmen during the fall of 1975. Students that were EOP students and those which entered through regular admissions criteria and achieved a grade point average of below 2.00 their first semester of enrollment were compared, using the variables of gender, college major (teaching or non-teaching) and total number of semesters required to obtain a baccalaureate degree.

When the two groups were compared on the basis of the first semester grade point average, the results were as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. First Semester Grade Point Averages

Grades	MALES		FEMALES		Totals
	Non-EOP	EOP	Non-EOP	EOP	
1.50 - 1.99	30	0	26	1	57
1.00 - 1.49	10	1	6	0	17
0.50 - 0.99	1	0	2	0	3
0.00 - 0.49	0	0	0	0	0
Total	41	1	34	1	77

Out of the total 300 students, Table 1 indicates that forty-two males and only thirty-five females who earned a first semester grade point average of below 2.00 graduated. This finding suggests that only six females in comparison to eleven males received between 1.00 and 1.49; 56 Non-EOP students and only one EOP student received between 1.50 and 1.99; only one EOP and two Non-EOP students received between .50 and .99; and no student earned below .50.

The fact that women tend to choose a major in the areas of teaching and social sciences while men tend to choose a major in areas such as business and technical fields is illustrated by the data in Table 2.

Table 2. Field in which students declared a major (teaching or non teaching)

	MALES		FEMALES		TOTALS
	NON	EOP	NON	EOP	
TEACHING	13	0	17	0	30
NONTEACHING	28	1	17	1	47
TOTALS	41	1	34	1	77



Table 2 illustrates that although eighteen females (fifty-one percent) chose to declare a major in a non-teaching field, they were still out-numbered by a total of twentieth-nine men (sixty-nine percent) who decided that teaching was not the area in which to pursue a career.

Out of a total of 300 students that achieved below a 2.00, seventy-seven of them persisted in college until they obtained a baccalaureate degree. Out of a total of twenty-three EOP students that earned below a 2.00, two of them earned degrees (8.7 percent). Of the 277 non-EOP students that enrolled, seventy-five of them persisted until they earned a degree (twenty-seven percent). In total, of the 300 students that initially were enrolled with below a 2.00 grade point average, seventy-seven of them persisted (twenty-six percent) to complete an undergraduate degree. Table 3 will illustrate these findings.

TABLE 3. Final Semester Grade point average

Grades	MALES		FEMALES		Totals
	Non-EOP	EOP	Non-EOP	EOP	
3.20 and up	1	0	0	0	1
3.00 - 3.20	0	0	0	0	0
2.20 - 3.00	34	1	32	0	67
2.00 - 2.20	6	0	2	1	9
TOTALS	41	1	34	1	77

Table 3 shows the total number of semesters that each student required in order to achieve a degree from UNI. More men earned a degree than women, but as a whole, it took women fewer semesters to graduate.

Table 4. Total number of semesters required by each student to graduate

SEMESTERS	MALES		FEMALES		TOTALS
	NON EOP	EOP	NON EOP	EOP	
12.0 - 12.5	0	1	1	0	2
11.5 - 12.0	2	0	1	0	3
11.0 - 11.5	3	0	2	1	6
10.5 - 11.0	5	0	2	0	7
10.0 - 10.5	9	0	3	0	12
9.5 - 10.0	3	0	1	0	4
9.0 - 9.5	8	0	6	0	14
8.5 - 9.0	7	0	9	0	16
8.0 - 8.5	4	0	9	0	13
TOTALS	41	1	34	1	77

When comparing the sexes, the students that graduated in between 8.0 and 8.5 semesters were nine females and four males; however, this study reveals that non EOP females and EOP males were more determined to obtain the baccalaureate degree, in that it took them longer to obtain the degree, but they did persist until graduation.

## Results and Discussion

The findings do not necessarily suggest that students that earn below a 2.00 during their first semester of enrollment have a lower persistence rate than students that earn above a 2.00 average.

There seems to be no significant difference between the retention rates for EOP and Non-EOP students, since among both groups less than fifty percent of the students graduated. Also, the data reveals that among the 277 Non-EOP students only twenty-seven percent persisted, and among the twenty-three EOP students, only 8.6 percent persisted. Although when a comparison of these two groups was made on the basis of percentages, it appeared that more Non-EOP students graduated, however, neither group had a graduation rate that was equivalent to UNI's average rate for graduating classes.

Since EOP students represent a minority of the total UNI student population, and are usually recruited onto campus, their low retention rate might be a more serious problem than for Non-EOP students; therefore, EOP students might experience special problems in adjusting to college life at this institution which might possibly be a major contributor to the low grade point averages that they often receive during their first semester of enrollment.

Prior to conducting this study, the writer was of the opinion that retention was only a major problem among

EOP students, however, based on these findings of this present study, student retention appears to be a concern among both EOP and Non-EOP students at UNI who receive below a 2.00 their first semester of enrollment.

The fact that Non-EOP students fared better than EOP students in terms of numbers may possibly be due to their educational development, which may have originated from a higher socioeconomic background. However, in view of the fact that as a group these students did not persist at a significantly higher rate than did the EOP students, it may be that they were experiencing problems that were equally as unique to them as are the concerns faced by the EOP students.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was designed to study the characteristics of freshmen students at UNI who received a 2.00 grade point average during their first semester of enrollment and later completed a baccalaureate degree by the summer of 1981. The results from an analysis of the data reveal that 26 percent of these students persisted until graduation in comparison to the overall UNI student population persistence rate of 50 percent.

The review of literature has indicated that approximately 40 percent of students who enroll in American colleges and universities complete a baccalaureate degree within four years, and that approximately 40 percent withdraw from college and fail to graduate altogether. Students that withdraw from college usually do so because of academic, personal, and environmental, and/or psychological reasons (Astin, 1975); seldom is there a single reason indicated for leaving.

The review of literature has also supported the notion that the majority of students that earn below a 2.00 grade point average are dismissed from the university after a probationary semester; however, black males will withdraw more frequently if placed on academic probation

than will white males. Females seem to improve their grade point average if they are placed on probation.

Of the total 300 students that earned below a 2.00 grade point average their first semester, seventy-four percent did not persist until graduation. There was a total of seventy-seven students that actually earned a degree. From the total group, two were EOP students, which means that .06 percent of them obtained an undergraduate degree; seventy-five were non-EOP, which means that thirty-five percent of them achieved a degree. Some of these students even obtained grade point averages that were higher than a 3.00.

This study illustrated that students who earned a first semester grade point average of below a 2.00 were not necessarily destined to be university dropouts.

### Recommendations

Student personnel workers must work closely with administrators to seek means to reducing the attrition rate among our "potentially successful youth". Since research has shown that academics is often times not the reason for students dropping out of college, they must devise a means of identifying student concerns which are not academically related, i.e., social, emotional, and personal problems.

After these concerns have been identified, programs must be implemented which will aid student personnel workers in facilitating positive student development.

Further research is needed in this area of student development, but, perhaps this study will be useful in gathering research related to future investigations relative to persistence rates for "low academic achievers".

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