

Transfer shock and resilience: How transfer-related GPA drop and rebound predict student departure from a flagship university campus

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Introduction

Over half of college students attend two or more institutions on their way to a bachelor's degree. As they navigate the social and academic expectations of a new college, transfer students commonly suffer "transfer shock," or a sudden drop in GPA. While it is a known phenomenon, little is known about how different types of transfer students are affected and why some rebound.

Objective

This study examined the predictors, extent, and consequences of GPA drop among three types of transfer students at a large research university.

Methods

We examined the administrative data of N = 25,565 transfer/campus change students who first entered the flagship campus between Autumn 2012 and Spring 2019 and were enrolled at least two terms.

Results

Most transfer students do experience transfer shock with an average GPA drop of -0.30 points in their first term. While incoming GPA is a significant predictor, the extent of the initial drop and a student's ability to rebound are also critical to transfer success. Steeper drops meant a student was more likely to depart; however, if a rebound occurred in their second term, they were less likely to depart. Receiving institutions can support transfer students by providing proactive outreach and connecting students to academic supports.

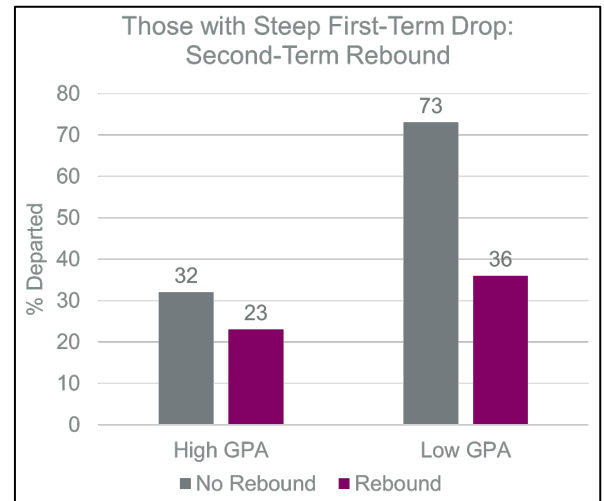
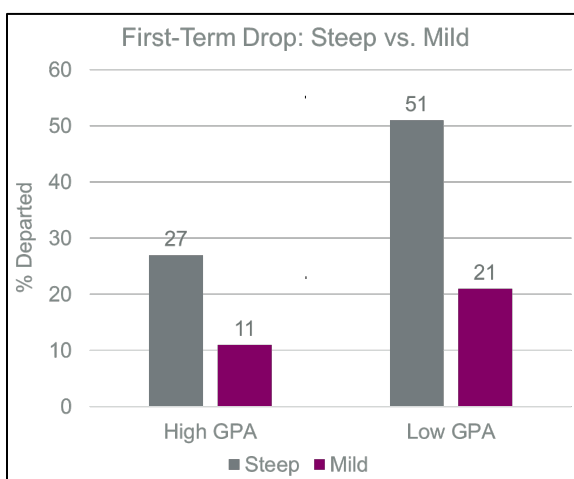


Figure 2: If students with steep drops rebound, do they depart less?

Recommendations

- Reduce stigma or shame around GPA drop by reframing it as typical and temporary.
- Encourage students to practice self-compassion to build resiliency and encourage help-seeking behaviors.
- Host pre-transfer events to highlight transfer student experiences, including those who experienced GPA drops and rebounds.
- Reach out to incoming low-GPA students to head off potentially disastrous GPA drops by inviting them to utilize academic services.
- Flag and reach out to those with a GPA drop of greater than 0.5 at the end of their first term.

Read more

Jaggars, S. S., Rivera, M. D., & Buelow, M. T. (2023). Transfer Shock and Resilience: How Transfer-Related GPA Drop and Rebound Predict Student Departure from a Flagship University Campus. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, Online before print). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15210251231163837>

Figure 1: Does initial GPA drop affect departure?