

## Facts about Undergraduate Students who Withdraw

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In spring 2010 a subcommittee of Crossroads was formed to examine issues related to undergraduate withdrawals. This subcommittee is sponsored by the Registrar's Office and the Division of Student Life with the charge of developing recommendations regarding the withdrawal process and related policies. Before making any recommendations, the committee needs baseline information about the number of students who withdraw, types of students who withdraw, and the currently processes that students follow to withdraw. This document provides these baseline data.

Research conducted by Academic Planning and Analysis on undergraduates shows that withdrawing from school has a negative effect on both likelihood of graduation and on time-to-degree for those that do graduate (see [http://apa.wisc.edu/JLM/TTD2006Sept\\_Cover\\_plus\\_Study.pdf](http://apa.wisc.edu/JLM/TTD2006Sept_Cover_plus_Study.pdf) for more information). Issues related to student withdrawals are timely, given the increased pressure to graduate more students in a shorter time.

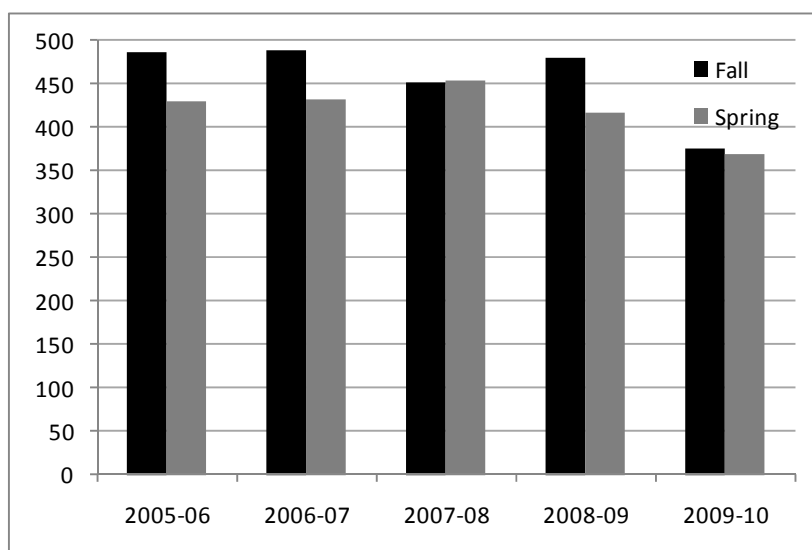
For the purposes of this report, the definition of a withdrawn student is as follows: an undergraduate student who started the semester (had at least one credit on the first day of classes) and did not complete, or ask for longer time to complete, any courses. Undergraduates who meet this definition fall into two subcategories: students who were deemed ineligible to continue with their courses (for example in the case of academic or disciplinary misconduct) and students who were eligible to continue but who "chose" not to (for example in the case of illness). Readers of this report should keep in mind that these two types of undergraduates are combined in the data.

### Trends

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Over the past five years, an average of 456 undergraduates withdrew during the fall term and 420 withdrew during the spring term. In 2009-10 the number of undergraduates who withdrew is lower than average in both the fall and spring.

**Chart 1: Number of Undergraduates Withdrawn**



Because the number of undergraduates has fluctuated slightly over the past five years (and is typically higher in the fall than in the spring) we also examined the number of undergraduates who withdraw as a percentage of total enrolled undergraduates. Each fall and spring term, an average of 1.6% of undergraduates withdrew. The percentage of students who withdrew in 2009-10 was lower than average.

**Chart 2: Withdrawn Undergraduates as a Percent of Total Undergraduates**

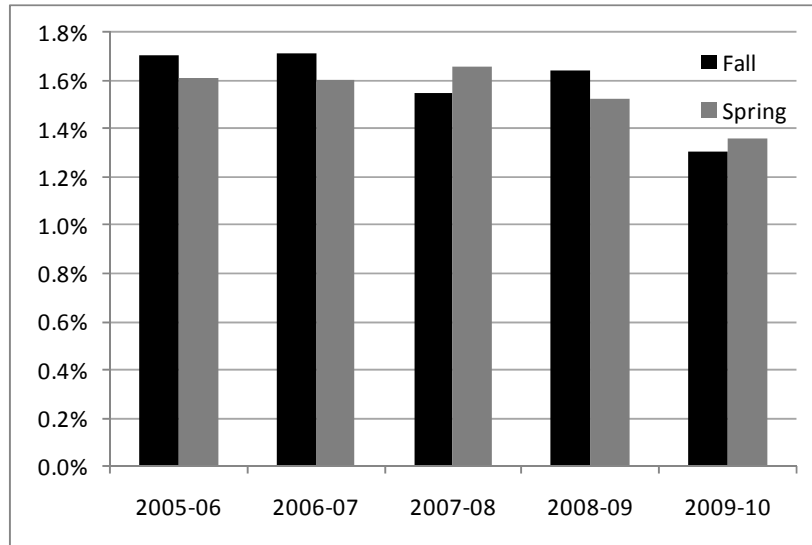
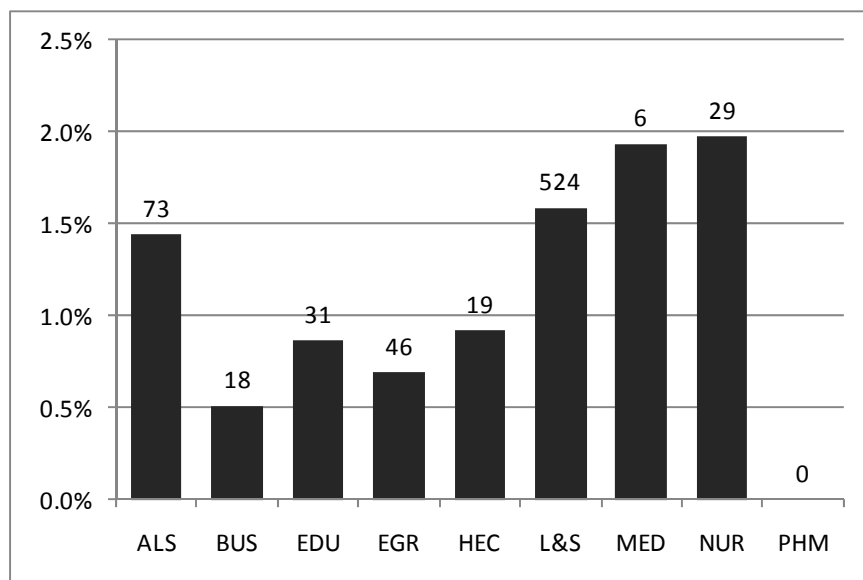


Chart 3 shows the 2009-10 academic year withdrawals in more detail by school/college. In 2009-10, 1.3% of undergraduates withdrew. The withdrawal rates range from 0% in Pharmacy to 2.0% in Nursing. The number of students withdrawn is shown above each school/college column.

**Chart 3: Withdrawn Undergraduates in 2009-10 by School College as a Percent of Total Undergraduates by School College**

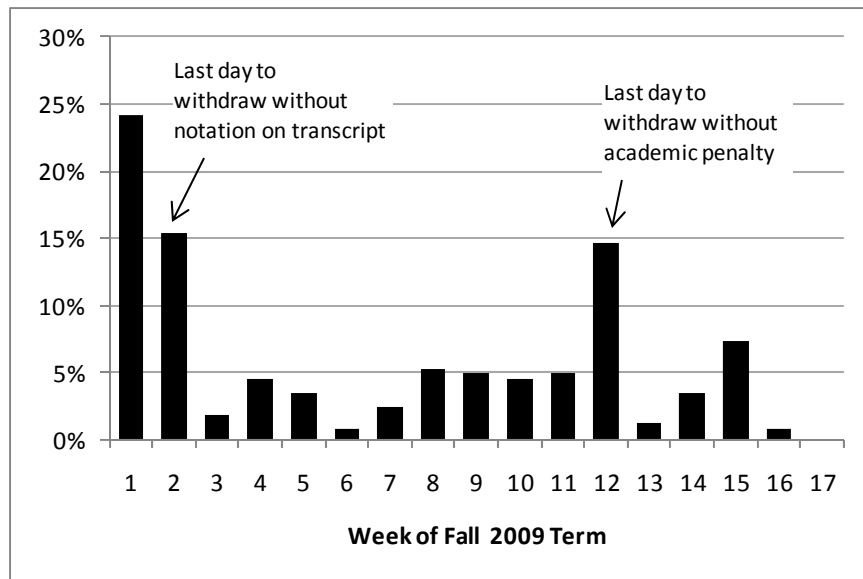


## Timing

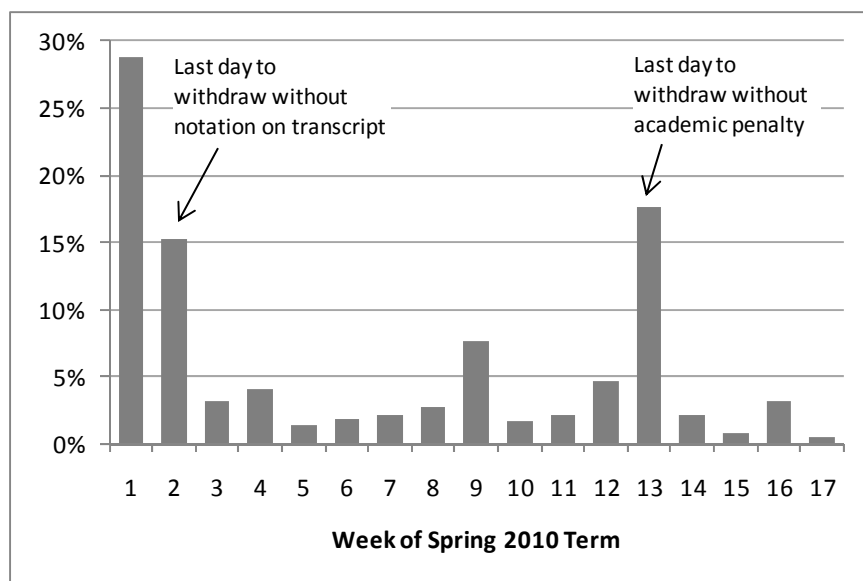
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Charts 4 and 5 show the undergraduate withdrawal activity by week of the term in 2009-10. In both terms, the highest volume of activity is in the first, at or shortly before the deadline to withdraw without notation on the student's transcript. Withdrawals during the first week account for almost 25% of withdrawals in the fall term and almost 30% of withdrawals in the spring term. Another spike with withdrawals occurs in the 12<sup>th</sup> week of the semester, at or shortly before the deadline to withdraw without academic penalty.

**Chart 4: Distribution of Undergraduate Withdraws by Week (Fall 2009)**



**Chart 5: Distribution of Undergraduate Withdraws by Week (Spring 2010)**



## Demographics

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In the 2009-10 academic year, 1.3% of enrolled undergraduates (744 students) withdrew during either the fall or spring term. We observe several differences in the demographic characteristics of students who withdraw, including:

- Targeted minority undergraduates are more likely to withdraw than non-targeted undergraduates – 2.7% of targeted minorities withdrew in 2009-10 compared to 1.2% of non-targeted students. Half of the targeted minority students who withdrew are affiliated with one or more of the following programs: Center for Educational Opportunity (CeO), PEOPLE, POSSE or the Academic Advancement Program (AAP).
- Wisconsin resident undergraduates are more likely to withdraw than non-residents or students attending under the Minnesota tuition reciprocity agreement – 1.5% of Wisconsin resident undergraduates withdrew compared to 1.2% of non-residents and 0.8% of Minnesota reciprocity undergraduates.
- Male undergraduates are more likely to withdraw than female undergraduates – 1.5% of male undergraduates withdrew compared to 1.2% of female undergraduates.
- Undergraduates who receive Pell Grants (a proxy for students from low income families) are more likely to withdraw than other undergraduates – 1.9% of undergraduate Pell Grant recipients withdrew compared to 1.2% of other undergraduates.
- First-generation undergraduates (those whose parents do not have bachelor’s degrees) are more likely to withdraw than non first-generation undergraduates – 1.8% of first-generation undergraduates withdrew compared to 1.2% of other undergraduates.

**Table 6: Number and Percentage of Withdrawn Undergraduates in 2009-10 by Selected Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic Category	Number Withdrawn	Percent Withdrawn
Targeted Minority	141	2.7%
Non-Targeted	601	1.2%
Male	397	1.5%
Female	345	1.2%
Non-resident	161	1.2%
Minnesota resident	49	0.8%
Wisconsin resident	532	1.5%
Pell Grant Recipient	158	1.9%
Non Recipient	584	1.2%
First Generation	229	1.8%
Not First Generation	514	1.2%

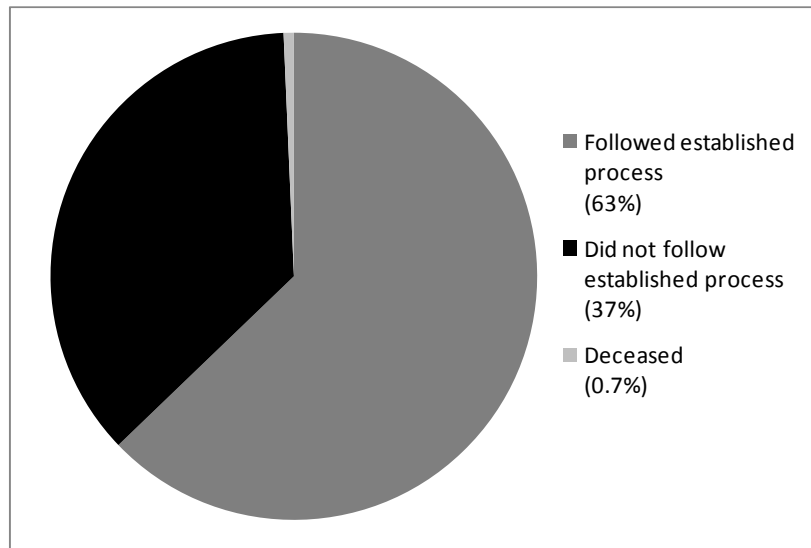
Note: Undergraduates who withdrew in both fall and spring terms are counted twice.

## Process

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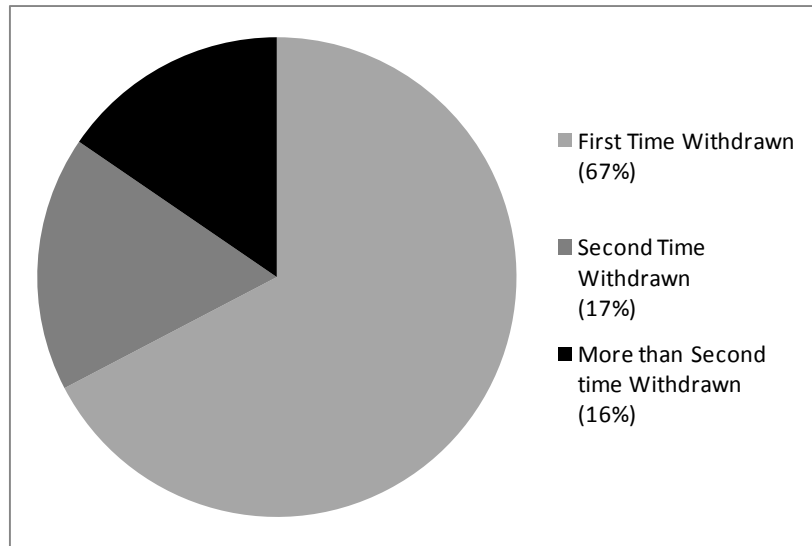
Each school or college has its own procedures for withdrawing in the middle of a term. These procedures typically involve completing a form and submitting the form to the academic dean's office. Almost two thirds of undergraduates who withdraw follow the established withdrawal process. But, more than one third (37%) of undergraduates **do not** follow the established withdraw process for their school or college. Some of these students complete part of the withdraw process (i.e dropping all classes) but don't complete the withdrawal form. Others don't drop their classes or complete the form. These students come to the attention of their academic dean's office, often well after the day they "left" UW-Madison. In these cases, the dean's office must attempt to reconstruct the date the student withdrew and pass on this information to the Registrar's Office. Establishing a specific withdrawal date is critical to other university functions such as financial aid, tuition refunds, and University Housing billing.

**Chart 7: Withdrawn Undergraduates in 2009-010 by Withdraw Process Followed**



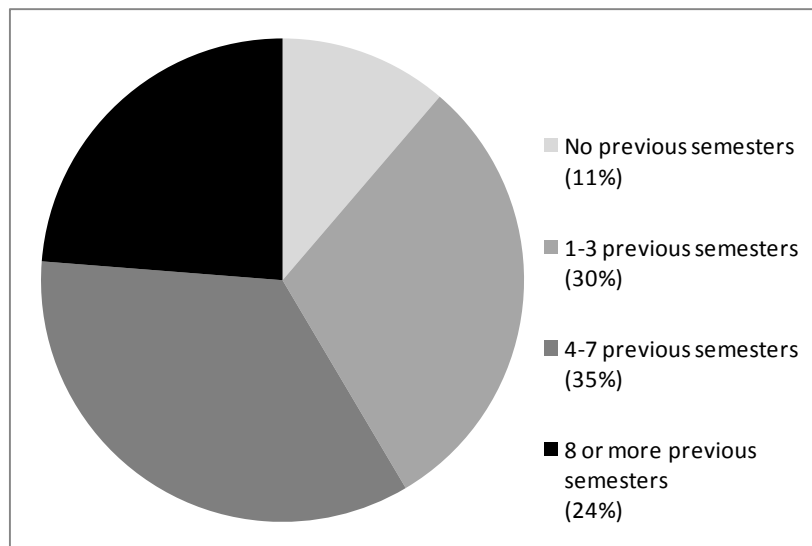
Two thirds of undergraduates who withdrew in the 2009-10 academic year were withdrawing for the first time (67%). Seventeen percent of undergraduates who withdrew were withdrawing for the second time and 16% were withdrawing for the third time or more. Digging deeper into the enrollment records of the few student who have excessive number of semesters withdrawn revealed several students who have withdrawn almost every term that they have been enrolled, including nine students who have withdrawn from 10 or more terms.

**Chart 8: Withdrawn Undergraduates in 2009-10 by Number of Semesters Withdrawn**



Eleven percent (11%) of the undergraduates who withdrew in 2009-10 were in their first terms at UW-Madison (either as a new freshman or a new transfer student). Almost one quarter of the undergraduates who withdrew in 2009-10 had eight or more previous semesters of enrollment.

**Chart 9: Withdrawn Undergraduates in 2009-10 by Number of Previous Semesters Enrolled**



Having academic difficulty is one reason why some students withdraw. Of all the undergraduates enrolled in the 2009-10 academic year, 11% had one or more previous terms where they were on academic probation. Chart 10 shows the undergraduates who withdrew in 2009-10 by the number of previous terms they had on academic probation. Compared to the 11% of undergraduates who have ever been on academic probation, 61% of undergraduates who withdrew had one or more previous terms on academic probation. Seventeen percent (17%) had three or more previous probation terms.

**Chart 10: Withdrawn Undergraduates in 2009-10  
by Number of Previous Terms on Academic Probation**

