



Course Withdrawal Deadline Extension

During the pandemic, CSU implemented S/U grades and an extended course withdrawal date to increase flexibility for students. The institution has ended the S/U option, but is considering maintaining the course withdrawal extension. This report explores the timing of course withdrawals as well as correlations between later withdrawals and persistence to help inform this decision.

A prior [report](#) indicates that in SP20 utilization of these policies is much more common for on-campus (compared to CSU online) and undergraduate students (compared to graduate students); therefore, the population in the current analysis is limited to main campus undergraduates. A [report](#) completed in SP21 indicates that persistence of students with many (defined as 4 or more) course withdrawals is higher than the persistence among students who do a full university withdrawal. The current report adds to understanding of the timing of W drops by including the week a student withdrew from a course. These data were not included in the prior SP21 report.

Summary

Starting in SP20 the course withdrawal (W grade) deadline was extended until the end of the semester. Previously this deadline was set at the 8th week of courses for courses that start at the beginning of the semester. CSU is considering making the extension permanent. This analysis compares the timing of course withdrawals pre-extension (FA18, SP19, and FA19) to post-extension (SP20, FA20, SP21, and FA21).

Generally, the occurrence of course withdrawals increases considerably after the extension (this is consistent with [prior findings](#)). Additionally, regardless of the extensions policy, students withdrew from courses close to the deadline. However, this much more evident when the course withdrawal deadline is extended. For instance, about 45% of course withdrawals occur at the 8th week deadline for the pre-extension semesters and over half of the course withdrawals occur after the 11th week of the semester for post-extension semesters (see figures 1 and 2).

There are no meaningful differences in persistence (1st spring, 2nd fall, or 3rd fall) for students that utilize a timely withdrawal (prior to the 8th week of classes) compared to those that utilize a late withdrawal (after the 8th week of classes). However, persistence rates of students with any course withdrawals (regardless of timing) during the first year are higher compared to students with no W drops and at least one D, F or U grade in the first year. Students without course withdrawals and no unsuccessful courses completions in their first year have the highest persistence rates. This association appears strongest during the first fall semester and decreases in magnitude as students gain more time at the university.



Course Withdrawal Timing

Figures 1 and 2 display the frequency distribution of all course withdrawals by week across the pre-extension / post-extension fall and spring semesters. Data in these figures include all main campus undergraduates in FA18 through FA21.

Figure 1. Fall Course Withdrawal Timing Distribution by Week

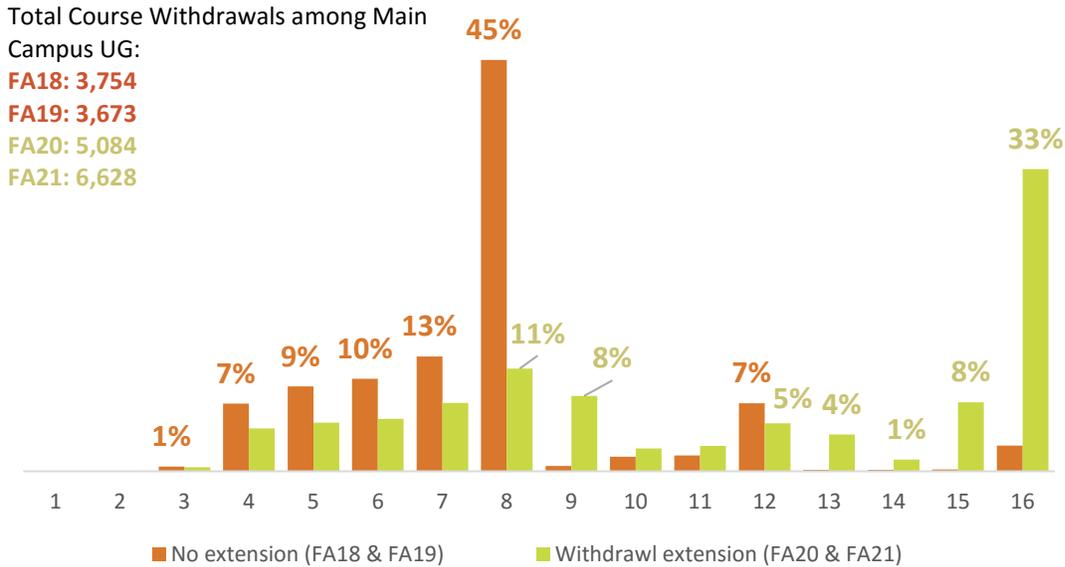
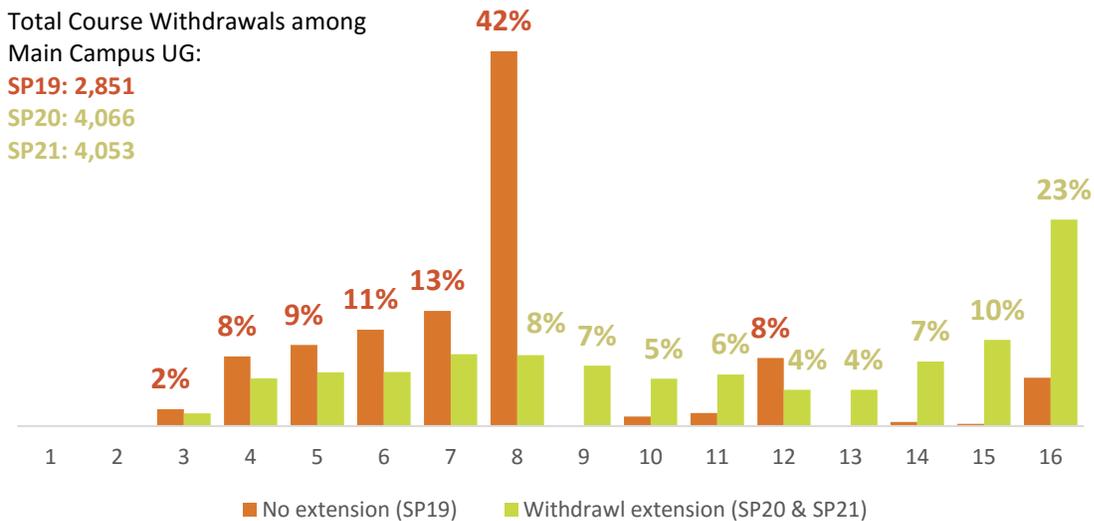


Figure 2. Spring Course Withdrawal Timing Distribution by Week



The change in course withdrawal deadline appears to be correlated with changes in student course dropping behavior. Course withdrawals increase by 58% in fall semesters and 42% in spring semesters after the extension. Course withdrawals also tend to be more frequent as the deadline approaches. About 45% (42% in spring semesters) of the course withdrawals occur at the latest possible point (i.e., 8th week) pre-extension. The pattern is similar but to a lesser degree after the extension, more than 40% of post-extension withdrawals occur in weeks 14, 15, and 16. The higher rate of course withdrawals at the 12th week in pre-extension time period is due to withdrawals from courses that start after the beginning of the semester (i.e., credit recovery courses).



Persistence and Timing of Withdrawal

Table 1 explores the associations between timing of course withdrawal and persistence.

This analysis includes only students with the option of withdrawing from a course after the 8th week of classes (extension period of SP20, FA20, SP21, and FA21) during a student's first fall or spring or a student's second fall (FTFT undergraduates in the FA19, FA20 and FA21 cohorts). The correlation between course withdrawal timing and persistence is measured in successive semesters (e.g., first spring, SP20 or SP21, course withdrawal among the FA19 and FA20 cohorts and their persistence to FA20 or FA21). Persistence rates are measured only among students that persist to the end of the previous semester (e.g., persistence to 2nd fall for those who persisted to the end of their first spring) so these rates are higher than our traditional published methodology.

Grouping of students are mutually exclusive. Late course withdrawal includes students with one or more course withdrawals after the 8th week while early course withdrawal includes only students that dropped courses in the 8th week or prior. Additionally, the students with no course withdrawals are grouped into two categories by unsuccessful completion (students that earned one or more D, F, or U grades and students with successful course completions).

Table 1. Persistence Rates by Previous Semester Course Behavior

	Late Course Withdrawal ⁵	Early Course Withdrawal ⁵	No Course Withdrawal w Unsuccessful Course ⁶	No Course Withdrawal w NO Unsuccessful Courses
First Spring Persistence (FA20 & FA21) ¹	92% (962)	91% (882)	85% (1366)	97% (6146)
Second Fall Persistence (FA19 & FA20) ²	82.8% (750)	83.5% (564)	80.7% (1318)	93.9% (6290)
Second Spring Persistence (FA19 & FA20) ³	94.4% (763)	90.8% (567)	91.3% (1011)	96.7% (5691)
Third Fall Persistence (FA19) ⁴	91.8% (280)	90.8% (163)	91.4% (580)	94.4% (3118)

¹First spring persistence is measured among students that persist to the end of their first fall semester and course withdrawal timing/unsuccessful course completion is measured in the first fall

²Second fall persistence is measured among students that persist to the end of their first spring semester and course withdrawal timing/unsuccessful course completion is measured in the first spring

³Second spring persistence is measured among students that persist to the end of their second fall semester and course withdrawal timing/unsuccessful course completion is measured in the second fall

⁴Third fall persistence is measured among students that persist to the end of their second spring semester and course withdrawal timing/unsuccessful course completion is measured in the second spring

⁵Late course withdrawal is defined as a student dropping a course after the 8th week of the semester (early withdrawal is the 8th or prior); course withdrawal is measured the semester directly prior to the persistence time point (e.g., first fall course withdrawal timing for first spring persistence)

⁶Unsuccessful courses are defined as a student earning a D, F, or U grade

Persistence rates are generally similar among students that withdrew from a course regardless of timing. Persistence rates are lowest for students with no course withdrawals and at least one unsuccessful course completion while rates are highest for students with no withdrawals and no unsuccessful completions. The magnitude of this association is strongest for academic behaviors in the first year. For instance, first spring persistence (first fall academic behaviors) is about 92% for students with a course withdrawal but it is 7 percentage points (PP) lower (85%) for students with no withdrawals and an unsuccessful completion and 5 PP higher (97%) for students with no withdrawals and only successful completions. Similarly, second fall persistence (first spring academic behaviors) is about 83% for students with a course withdrawal, but it is about 2 PP lower for students with no withdrawals and an unsuccessful completion and 10 PP higher for students with no withdrawals and only successful completions. The pattern deviates slightly for second spring persistence by second fall behaviors as the late withdrawal group has a persistence rate that is about 3 PP higher than early withdrawal group. The differences are negligible for second spring course behaviors and third fall persistence.



Conclusion

Overall, extending the course withdrawal period is associated with an increase in course withdrawals. The timing of course withdrawals is correlated with weeks closer to the course withdrawal deadline. Although the cluster of course withdrawals in the week prior to the deadline is much more pronounced when the deadline is at the 8th week (for courses that start at the beginning of the semester). From a student success perspective this increase in course withdrawals is concerning because withdrawing from a course in the first year is correlated with lower persistence rates. However, there is an even stronger magnitude of a negative association with earning a D, F, or U in the first year and subsequent persistence. Therefore, from a policy perspective, providing students an option to do a course withdrawal at the end of the semester rather than earn a D, F, or U grade is correlated with stronger persistence rates.