



# SP20 & FA20 Academic Policy Adjustments

During the pandemic CSU implemented a couple of academic policy adjustments to increase flexibility for students during these challenging times. In SP20 and FA20, students could switch their grade(s) to S/U grading after grades posted, and students are permitted to withdraw from a course up until the last day of classes. This report summarizes the correlations between these adjustments and our student success metrics as well as describing the students that utilize the S/U grading.

A prior [report](#) indicated that in SP20 utilization of these policies is much more common for on-campus (compared to CSU online) and undergraduate students (compared to graduation students). Additionally, the S/U grade option was limited to only main campus undergraduates in FA20 (graduate and CSU online students were eligible to use the S/U in SP20). The population in the current analysis is limited to main campus undergraduates.

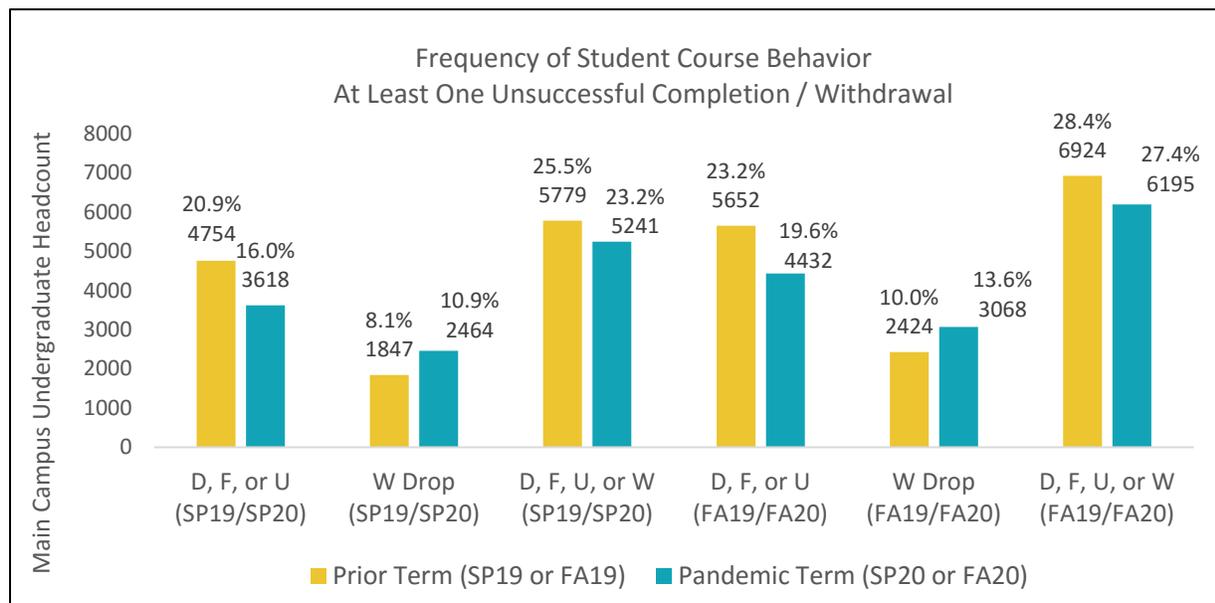
## Summary

Nearly 1 out of 5 main campus undergraduates utilize the S/U option in at least one of their courses in either SP20 or FA20, and there is a 30% increase in the students that withdraw from at least one course compared with prior terms. However, there are *not* negative correlations between these behaviors and shorter-term student success metrics. For instance, nearly all the students that utilize the S/U option increase their term GPA by an average of 0.6 of a grade point, and their persistence to subsequent terms are not significantly different compared to peers who do not use the S/U option. Additionally, course withdrawals increase, but the percent of students that failed a course decreases (and overall DFU and W rates trend downwards).

## Unsuccessful Course Completion (D, F, U grades and course withdrawal)

Figure 1 displays the headcount of students that earned at least one D, F or U grade and the headcount count of students that withdrew (W) from at least one course during a policy-adjusted period compared to the prior term (SP20 compared to SP19 on the left, and FA20 compared to FA19 on the right).

Figure 1.





Generally, the number (and percent) of main campus undergraduates with at least one unsuccessful course completion (earned a D, F, or U grade) decreases in pandemic terms compared to the prior term, but the number of W dropped courses increases in pandemic terms compared to the prior term. About a quarter (25.5% in SP19 and 23.2% in SP20) of main campus undergraduates have at least one unsuccessful course completion or a W drop in a spring semester and almost one third (28.4% in FA19 and 27.4% in FA20) have a D, F, U, or W in the fall. The decrease in unsuccessful course completions is associated with an increase in W drops, but the number of students with at least one of these course experiences appears to be slightly lower in pandemic terms compared to prior terms by about 1 to 2 percentage points.

### University Withdrawals

Full university withdrawals decreased significantly in SP20 compared to SP19, but this trend did not hold for FA20 compared to FA19. For instance, the number of students doing a full university withdrawals is 30% lower in SP20 compared to SP19. There are 222 students in SP20 that do a full university withdrawal (0.9% of the main campus undergraduates enrolled at SP20 census) and in SP19 there are 318 full university withdrawals (1.3% of main campus undergraduates enrolled at SP19 census). However, the headcount of full university withdrawals is only down 3% in FA20 compared to FA19. There are 411 main campus undergraduates that complete a full university withdrawal in FA20 (1.7% of the FA20 population at census), which is only 12 students less than the 423 students in FA19 (also 1.7% of the FA19 population at census).

### Demographic and Academic Attributes among Students that Utilize S/U

Table 1 displays the headcount and percent of students that use the S/U grade option in at least one of their courses.

Table 1. Headcount and Percent of Main Campus UG that Utilize the S/U Option

	SP20	FA20	Overall
EOT Headcount	23,092	22,791	45,883
S/U Headcount	4,377	4,107	8,484
S/U Percent	19.0%	18.0%	18.5%

The frequency of utilizing the S/U grade option is higher in SP20 compared to FA20 by 270 students or approximately a percentage point (19% in SP20 compared to 18% in FA20). About 37% of the students that utilize the S/U option in FA20 also used it in SP20.

Table 2 displays the percent of main campus undergraduates that utilize S/U by their length of time at CSU.

Table 2. Percent of Main Campus UG Utilizing S/U by Length of Time at CSU

	SP20	FA20	Overall
First Year at CSU (New or Transfer)	21.7%	13.9%	18.1%
Continuing Student	17.8%	19.4%	18.6%

In SP20, 21.7% of first year undergraduates (i.e., came as a first-time or transfer student in SM19, FA19, or SP20) utilize the S/U option compared to 17.8% of continuing students who utilize the S/U option. However, for FA20 students only 13.9% of first-time or transfer students that started in SM20 or FA20 utilize S/U grading compared to 19.4% of continuing students.



Table 3 displays the percent of main campus undergraduates that utilize S/U by their class level.

**Table 3. Percent of Main Campus UG Utilizing S/U by Class Level**

	SP20	FA20	Overall
Freshman	22.9%	17.1%	19.6%
Sophomore	21.6%	22.3%	21.9%
Junior	20.3%	19.4%	19.9%
Senior	14.4%	14.9%	14.6%
Post Bachelors	9.4%	6.4%	7.9%

Overall, sophomores are the class level with the highest rates of utilizing S/U grading; however, in SP20 freshmen have the highest rate (22.9%). Though, freshmen also have the largest percentage point change in S/U utilization between SP20 and FA20, where it drops to 17.1%. This could be related to the shift seen in Table 2 (i.e., the large decrease in the S/U utilization rate for first year CSU students in FA20 compared to SP20).

Table 4 displays the percent of main campus undergraduates by their primary major college.

**Table 4. Percent of Main Campus UG Utilizing S/U by Primary Major College**

	SP20	FA20	Overall
Agricultural Sciences	12.6%	13.6%	13.1%
Business	21.2%	17.8%	19.5%
Health and Human Sciences	16.6%	15.4%	16.0%
Intra-University	21.4%	22.7%	22.0%
Liberal Arts	14.2%	15.5%	14.8%
Natural Sciences	23.9%	19.4%	21.6%
Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences	13.6%	13.0%	13.3%
Walter Scott Jr College of Engineering	23.9%	26.5%	25.2%
Warner College of Natural Resources	18.4%	15.7%	17.1%

S/U usage is highest in WSCOE in both semesters (25.2% overall). Students with a major in Intra-University (mostly undeclared) also utilize the S/U grade at a relatively higher rate in both semesters (22.0% overall). Students in CNS and COB have higher S/U usage rates in SP20, but utilize the S/U option at much lower rates (4.5 PP and 3.4 PP decrease in S/U usage for the respective colleges) in FA20.

Tables 5, 6, and 7 display the representation of structurally underserved identities in both SP20 and FA20 by S/U status.

**Table 5. Racially Minoritized Representation by S/U Status**

	SP20	FA20
Did Not Use S/U	24.4%	25.1%
Used S/U	28.2%	30.9%

**Table 6. First Generation Representation by S/U Status**

	SP20	FA20
Did Not Use S/U	23.1%	23.5%
Used S/U	25.6%	25.3%

**Table 7. Pell Recipient<sup>1</sup> Representation by S/U Status**

	SP20	FA20
Did Not use S/U	20.8%	19.5%
Used S/U	23.2%	21.8%

<sup>1</sup>FA20 Pell data are preliminary

Students with identities that are structurally underserved have slightly greater representation (a 2 to 6 PP difference) among the undergraduates that utilize the S/U grade compared to those that did not. For instance in Table 5, about 30% (28.2% in SP20 and 30.9% in FA20) of the students that utilize the S/U option identify as racially minoritized (RM), while about 25% (24.4% in SP20 and 25.1% in FA20) of the students that did not use the S/U grade option identify as RM.

The average number of S/U credits (and percent of total credits) of students who use the S/U option are displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8. S/U as a Percent of Total Credits**

	SP20	FA20
Average S/U Credits	5.8	5.8
S/U Percent of Total Credits	43%	45%

Among the students that utilize the S/U grade option, undergraduates took the S/U grade for an average of 5.8 credits or for about 44% of their total credits. The average number of S/U credits or the percent of total credits that used the S/U option did not differ by student type, demographics or class level.

Table 9 displays the percent of students with an unadjusted term GPA that is below 2.0 by S/U status. These are the term GPAs that would have been earned if the S/U option is not available.

**Table 9. Percent of Students with a (unadjusted) term GPA below 2.0**

	SP20	FA20	Overall
Did Not use S/U	4.8%	6.7%	5.8%
Used S/U	21.7%	28.0%	24.8%

About 22% of S/U students in SP20 and 28% of S/U students in FA20 earn an unadjusted term GPA that is under 2.0. This is much higher than the percent of the students that did not use S/U. Nearly all the students (98% across both terms) that utilize the S/U program increase their term GPA. On average, students that utilize the S/U option increase their term GPA by 0.6 of a grade point. In terms of headcounts, there are 950 S/U students in SP20 and 1,152 in FA20 that earn a GPA below 2.0 prior to the S/U adjustment and about 85% (821 in SP20 and 974 in FA20) of these students have a term GPA that is above 2.0 after the S/U adjustment.

## S/U Correlations with Persistence

Table 10 displays the subsequent semester persistence the semester after a cohort has the option to use the SP20 or FA20 S/U program. The persistence rates presented here are considerably higher than our published numbers because persistence is measured only among students that persist to the end of the prior term (to ensure that both groups have equal opportunity to utilize the S/U grading). These persistence rates have little meaning in an absolute sense; however, understanding the relative difference by S/U usage is a primary purpose of the analysis. The headcounts of eligible students are displayed in parentheses next to the rate.

**Table 10. Subsequent Semester Persistence<sup>1</sup> by S/U Utilization**

	Used S/U	Did Not Use S/U	PP Diff (S/U minus non S/U)
First Spring (FA20 Cohort)	94.0% (616)	94.5% (3770)	-0.46
Second Fall (FA19 Cohort)	91.3% (1048)	89.9% (3760)	1.42
Second Spring (FA19 Cohort)	95.6% (958)	95.1% (3355)	2.40
Third Fall (FA18 Cohort)	95.2% (882)	92.7% (3361)	2.56
Third Spring (FA18 Cohort)	96.6% (798)	96.2% (3173)	0.46
Fourth Fall (FA17 Cohort)	96.8% (691)	96.5% (2924)	0.27
Fourth Spring (FA17 Cohort)	97.0% (574)	96.9% (2824)	0.12

<sup>1</sup>Persistence is measured in the subsequent term after the S/U option among all students that persist to EOT (have the opportunity to use the S/U option). For instance, second fall persistence measures persistence to FA20 by S/U usage, among students in the FA19 cohort who persist to the end of their first spring (SP20). Similarly, fourth spring persistence measures the persistence to SP21 by S/U usage, among students in the FA17 cohort who persist to the end of their fourth fall (FA20).

Persistence is very similar regardless if a student utilizes the S/U grade option. On average, there is a 1 percentage point positive difference for S/U students compared to their cohort peers who do not utilize the S/U option. However, considering a much larger percent of S/U students are struggling academically (term GPA is under 2.0) it is worthwhile to make similar comparisons among students with a GPA below this threshold. Table 11 displays the subsequent semester persistence (same methodology as prior table) only among students that earned a GPA below 2.0 the semesters they have the option to use S/U.

**Table 11. Subsequent Semester Persistence<sup>1</sup> by S/U Utilization among Students with a CSU GPA<sup>2</sup> below 2.0 in the S/U Semester**

	Used S/U	Did Not Use S/U	PP Diff (S/U minus non S/U)
First Spring (FA20 Cohort)	86.0% (200)	68.2% (327)	17.80
Second Fall (FA19 Cohort)	73.1% (160)	53.6% (194)	19.52
Second Spring (FA19 Cohort)	77.4% (93)	62.2% (127)	15.21
Third Fall (FA18 Cohort)	88.3% (60)	52.4% (103)	35.91
Third Spring (FA18 Cohort)	85.2% (54)	55.4% (65)	29.80
Fourth Fall (FA17 Cohort)	89.7% (39)	68.9% (61)	20.89
Fourth Spring (FA17 Cohort)	81.0% (21)	59.2% (49)	21.77

<sup>1</sup>See prior table's methodology notes

<sup>2</sup>GPA is not adjusted for S/U grading (what the students would have earned without the option)

Among students with a GPA below 2.0 there is a substantial positive correlation between subsequent semester persistence and S/U usage. On average, there is a 23 percentage point positive difference for S/U students compared to their cohort peers who do not utilize the S/U option. It should be noted that the headcounts do get small (21 students) for the fourth spring measures among the S/U group. Utilizing the S/U option could be an early indicator of a student's motivation to continue at CSU despite having a low GPA.

Longer-term impacts of S/U grading policies are a concern; however, due to the newness of the S/U option the longest persistence outcome that can be tracked is two semesters after the SP20 policy adjustment (persistence to SP21). Table 12 displays the persistence to SP21 for the FA19 (second spring persistence), FA18 (third spring persistence) and FA17 (fourth spring persistence) cohorts by whether students utilized S/U grading in SP20.

**Table 12. Persistence<sup>1</sup> to SP21 by SP20 S/U Utilization**

	Used S/U	Did Not Use S/U	PP Diff (S/U minus non S/U)
Second Spring (FA19 Cohort)	85.6% (1948)	86.0% (3766)	-0.38
Third Spring (FA18 Cohort)	89.8% (882)	90.3% (3361)	-0.53
Fourth Spring (FA17 Cohort)	94.3% (691)	94.4% (2924)	-0.01

<sup>1</sup>Persistence is measured two terms after the S/U option among all students that persist to EOT (have the opportunity to use the S/U option). For instance, second spring persistence measures persistence to SP21 by SP20 S/U usage, among students in the FA19 cohort who persist to the end of their first spring (SP20). Similarly, fourth spring persistence measures the persistence to SP21 by SP20 S/U usage, among students in the FA17 cohort who persist to the end of their third spring (SP20).

Longer-term persistence rates are very similar regardless if the student utilizes the S/U option (the average difference is .3 of a percentage point *lower* for the S/U group compared to the non-S/U group). Table 13 displays this same analysis for students that have a term GPA below 2.0 in SP20.

**Table 13. Persistence<sup>1</sup> to SP21 by SP20 S/U Utilization among Students with a CSU GPA<sup>2</sup> below 2.0 in the S/U Semester**

	Used S/U	Did Not Use S/U	PP Diff (S/U minus non S/U)
Second Spring (FA19 Cohort)	57.5% (160)	30.9% (194)	26.57
Third Spring (FA18 Cohort)	63.3% (63)	33.9% (183)	29.35
Fourth Spring (FA17 Cohort)	74.4% (39)	50.8% (61)	23.54

<sup>1</sup>See prior table's methodology notes

<sup>2</sup>GPA is not adjusted for S/U grading (what the students would have earned without the option)

Similar to the results from Table 11, there is a substantial positive correlation between persistence to SP21 and S/U usage among students with low SP20 GPAs. On average, there is a 26 percentage point positive difference for S/U students compared to their cohort peers who do not utilize the S/U option. There is some evidence that utilizing the S/U grade option is an indicator of a motivation to continue at CSU despite having a low GPA.

## Course Withdrawal Correlations with Persistence

The second fall persistence rate for students who do a full university withdrawal in their first spring semester is around 32% (FA16-FA18). The second fall persistence rate for FA19 students that withdrew from four or more courses in SP20 is considerably higher at 73%. (Note that this comparison assumes that these students with four or more withdrawals would have to do a full university withdrawal if they did not have the option of dropping nearly all their courses late). Similarly, second spring persistence for students in the FA19 cohort that withdrew from 4 or more courses in SP20 is about 60%, which is considerably higher than the 38% second spring persistence rate among (FA16-FA18) students that do a full university withdrawal in their second fall semester.

## Conclusion

Overall, the academic policy adjustments provide additional academic flexibility for main campus undergraduates during these unprecedented times. Generally, there are not negative correlations between these policies and shorter-term student success metrics and the S/U option appears to be positively correlated with persistence among students with GPAs below 2.0. However, longer-term impacts, such as impact on graduate school readiness, are unknown. The impact of these policies needs to continue to be tracked, but currently these data suggest that CSU should continue to offer these academic policies at least through the SP21 semester.