



Your First Year in College: Make it or Break it

You are about to start your most important year of college. This is the year that can set the stage for how long it will take to earn your degree—indeed, whether you graduate at all.

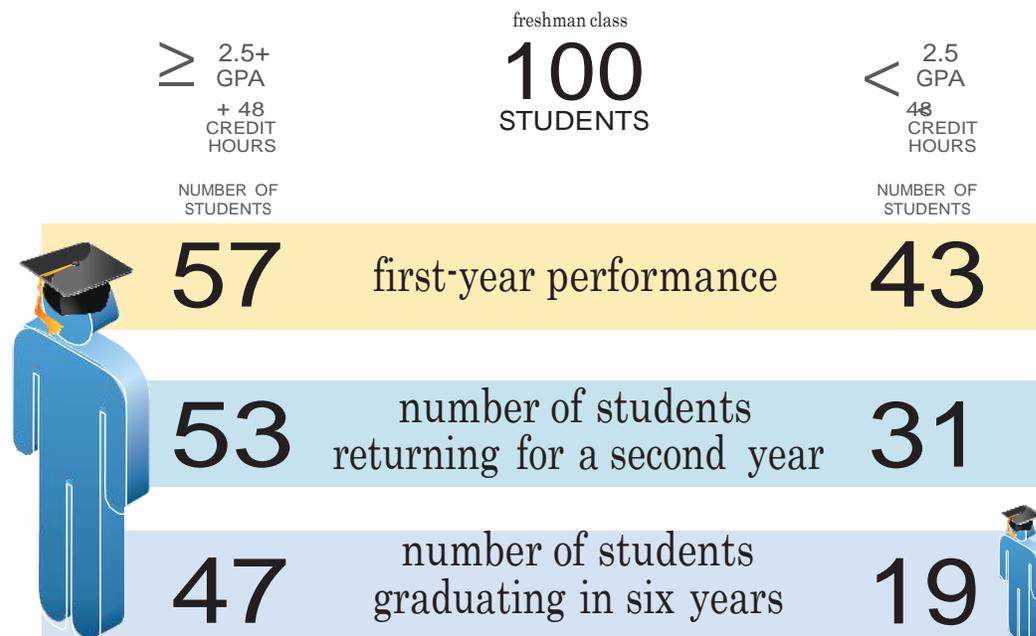
How do we know this? Researchers at DePaul studied the graduation rates of first-year students entering the university from 2000 through 2010. They examined how a variety of factors predicted students' eventual graduation—ACT scores, high school and college GPAs, family income, demographic characteristics, college majors, etc. What they learned might surprise you.

You can dramatically increase your likelihood of graduation if you do two things:

Earn a GPA of at least 2.5 and complete at least 48 credit hours by the end of the first year.

impact of first-year achievement on graduation

In a typical sample of 100 DePaul first-year students, 57 are likely to achieve a GPA of 2.5 or more and complete at least 48 credit hours in the first year. Of that 57, 53 will stay at DePaul and 47 will graduate in six years, an impressive 82% graduation rate. Of the 43 students who did not achieve that first-year target, it's likely that only 31 will remain at DePaul and just 19 will graduate in six years. That's a 45% graduation rate.



That's right. It's not your ACT score, your high school GPA or where your family lives that makes the difference. It's the investment you make in your first year of college.

This makes your first year critical. If you've been a strong student, you can quickly get off track if you start cutting classes or failing to complete homework. Because DePaul is on the quarter system, it can be difficult to catch up if you get behind on assignments or preparing for tests.

On the other hand, even if you struggled in high school, you can turn your academic fortunes around by studying hard, completing all assignments and taking advantage of informal and formal support. Follow the suggestions provided to maximize your opportunities for success.

This research does not suggest that you should take easy classes or do just the bare minimum. Indeed, this could hurt your performance in later years. Instead, it shows that the effort you put into your first-year classes pays off throughout your college career. You are learning what it takes to do college-level work, from study habits and attendance to the use of university resources.

What can you do?

Make academic success your top priority. This means working hard on assignments and studying regularly for exams even when you would rather be doing something else. It also means adjusting the number of hours you work at a job so that you can devote time and energy to your studies. Students with good study habits have higher GPAs and fail fewer courses than classmates who don't make coursework a priority.

Go to class and complete your assignments.

You may think it doesn't matter if you blow off a class or an occasional assignment, but it does. Skipping class and assignments both lead to dramatically lower grades. Dropping classes guarantees that you will add time and expense to earning your degree.

Ask your professors for help. Your professors are in the best position to help you with any questions you have about the content of your courses. They are there to guide you. National research shows that students who establish relationships with their professors are more engaged in their studies and more likely to succeed than students who try to go it alone. And, professors at DePaul consider teaching their top priority; they're committed to your success.

Meet regularly with your academic advisor. In addition to keeping you on track toward your degree, your academic advisor can help you discover areas of study you may not have considered. He or she also can direct you to support services, such as The Writing Center or math tutors, and to opportunities such as study abroad and internships that help you make the most of your college years.

To find your academic advisor, along with other information about your current program of study, login to Campus Connection, and select the "Student Center" tab.