

Implementing a Course Repeat Policy and Updating the Withdrawal Policy to Improve Graduation Pathways

Updating the University of Arkansas policies and procedures on how students can repeat and withdraw from classes can help guide students towards academic success. When the deadline to drop a single class is set three weeks earlier than the deadline to withdraw from the semester or university, students may exploit the system. Some withdraw from the semester or university because they are failing most of their classes, even though they are still passing others. As a result, they lose credits unnecessarily. In addition, the current academic policies do not place a limit on the number of times a student can retake a course after failing or withdrawing from the course—allowing students to enter an endless loop of retaking and failing/withdrawing delaying their academic progress. Current data and best practices suggest we should change this approach.

Repeating Courses

In studying the University of Arkansas incoming first-year students from the 2015-2019 cohorts (n=24,380), the following were identified:

- 4,587 (18.8%) who received 2 or more DFWs in at least one UAF course,
- 2,041 (8.4%) who received 2 or more DFWs and 3 or more grades in at least one UAF course,
- 1,211 (5.0%) who received 3 or more DFWs in at least one UAF course,
- 622 (2.6%) who received 3 or more DFWs and 4 or more grades in at least one UAF course,
- 410 (1.7%) who received 4 or more DFWs in at least one UAF course,
- 219 (0.9%) who received 4 or more DFWs and 5 or more grades in at least one UAF course,
- 157 (0.6%) who received 5 or more DFWs in at least one UAF course, and
- 72 (0.3%) who received 5 or more DFWs and 6 or more grades in at least one UAF course.

In addition, it was discovered that students who repeat a course two or more times (n=4,587) have a six-year UA graduation rate of 49.0% vs 90.6% of students without 2 or more DFWs. Students who repeat a course three or more times (n=1,211) have a six-year UA graduation rate of 32.4% vs 85.8% for students without 3 or more DFWs.

The Education Advisory Board, ([EAB](#)) [Student Completion Policy Audit](#) 2017 outlined the rationale to limit the amount of time students can repeat a course:

Students who repeat a course two or more times are significantly less likely to graduate than their peers, because they are kept from progressing on to more advanced courses, and must spend multiple terms on the same material. These students are often overlooked by advisors if institutional policy allows them to indefinitely repeat courses. However, with appropriate intervention, students may be able to achieve passing grades in high failure courses through use of tutoring and academic support resources. Advisors can also support students in revising degree maps to avoid excessive repeats, either by switching majors or substituting a different course.

EAB outlines the best practice as “Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat. Advisors can ensure that students are aware of academic support resources. Advisors could suggest a different course or major as an alternative, but not mandatory.” Since our advising centers are overwhelmed by student appointments already, the Student Success Steering Committee recommends that students who want to repeat a course for a third attempt complete an approved individual academic student success consultation overseen by the Central Student Success (the CORD). The thought is that in addition to mapping a success plan for the repeated course, students would explore parallel plans and how academic plans align with aspirational career goals.

Any request for a fourth or subsequent attempt of the same course requires the student to submit a formal petition to the Academic Standards Committee. The petition should include documentation of prior attempts, evidence of academic support engagement, and a plan for success.

Withdrawal

EAB also recommends “Institute late drop policy to reduce unnecessary repeats. Allowing students to withdraw from one course at any time in the term can reduce unnecessary repeats to repair GPA after a failed course.”

Currently, the last day to withdraw from a course at the University is the Friday of the Thirteenth week while the last day to withdraw from the semester or University is the last day of class. This current structure of academic deadlines creates unintended consequences. Because the deadline to drop an individual class occurs three weeks before the deadline to withdraw from the university, students are incentivized to

withdraw entirely when they are failing most of their courses, even if they are still passing some. This results in unnecessary credit loss and discourages persistence.

To reduce this problem, the Student Success Steering Committee recommends that the university should align the deadline to drop a single class with the deadline to withdraw from the semester or university, the last day of class. This change would:

- Allow students to make more informed decisions based on their overall academic performance.
- Prevent unnecessary loss of credits for students who are still succeeding in some courses.
- Encourage retention by giving students a fairer chance to salvage part of their semester.

Revising these policies will better align academic procedures with student success. By synchronizing the deadlines for dropping individual classes and withdrawing from the university, students can make more thoughtful decisions that preserve earned credits. Likewise, setting reasonable limits on course repetitions will encourage accountability and prevent students from falling into cycles of failure and withdrawal. Together, these changes will create a fairer, more supportive academic environment that promotes persistence, progress, and ultimately, graduation.

Implementation Timeline

If approved, the new course repeat policy will go into place in fall 2026. During fall 2026, any student enrolled in a course for a second, third, etc. time will be contacted by the Registrar's Office with information on the new course repeat policy. A hold will be placed on all students who are currently enrolled in a course for the second time notifying the student if they attempt to enroll in a 3+ time, the student must first complete an approved student success consultation to review academic strategies, available support services, and degree planning prior to registering for the course for Spring 2027. In Spring 2027, the policy will be fully in place requiring the success consultations and Academic Standards Committee petitions.