



California
Community
Colleges



Multiple Measures
Assessment Project
TheRPGroup

Exploring Enrollment Drop Data to Understand AB 705/1705 Impact: A QUICK GUIDE FOR FACULTY AND INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS

Introduction

With emerging interest in enrollment drop data to better understand the impact of [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 705 and 1705](#) implementation, this resource provides guidance for faculty and institutional researchers on sourcing, analyzing, and making meaning from this information. It offers the following:

Enrollment drop data reflect students' departure from a course before the census date.

- Background information on drop data purpose and utility.
- Tips on using drop data effectively.
- Guidance on how to explore the reasons students drop, including survey strategies.

Strong partnerships between instructors, department leads, and institutional researchers are essential for exploring drop data. This resource can help these constituents understand the types of drop data and information available; co-design research questions; collectively examine which students drop courses, which courses they drop, when drops occur, and the reasons behind them; and create a plan for using this information to improve equitable assessment and placement.

Drop Data Background

AB 705 seeks to improve students' completion of the transfer-level English and math required for their program by reducing rates of attrition that students—especially historically marginalized groups—have traditionally experienced in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system. Based on this goal, the course completion rate is used to track how many students fulfill their English and math requirements within a given period following their start in the sequence. This *lagging* indicator provides critical information for colleges to determine whether their students are making effective progress toward their educational goals by reaching these important milestones in their degree or transfer pathways.¹

¹ Read more about leading and lagging indicators in [Why Is It Better to Lead than Lag?](#) (Horowitz, 2018).

To assess progress towards this lagging indicator, colleges may also consider using *leading* or *progress* indicators to help them identify earlier signs of success as well as barriers that would affect student completion of transfer-level English and math courses. Enrollment drop data represent one among many potential leading indicators.

Enrollment drop data reflect students' departure from a course before the census date (i.e., the date before students receive a letter grade for their progress or performance in the course). At present, information on enrollment drops is not systematically collected by or reported to the system office for two practical reasons:

- Enrollment drops in a course before the census date are not recorded in students' transcripts; therefore, they have no official academic bearing on students' academic histories.
- Enrollment drops do not have financial consequences for the institution in that colleges do not receive institutional apportionment or funding for students who leave a class before the census date.

At the same time, the [Academic Senate for California Community Colleges \(ASCCC\)](#) has advocated for the inclusion of information on enrollment drops from the start of the course as an additional data source for determining the overall impact of developmental education reforms in the state.

Using Drop Data

Drop data can provide useful insights into the enrollment patterns of students across courses and departments. This information can be paired with student characteristics to explore whether there are notable patterns or differences between student groups. This type of analysis can help answer “what,” “when,” “who,” and “how many” questions, such as the following:

- When do students drop?
- What do students do after leaving a particular class? When they drop the class, do they enroll in other classes as a substitute course (e.g., take another section for the same course, enroll in a different course)? Or do they stop attending classes altogether and leave the college?
- Who drops? Do certain student subgroups depart their classes at a higher rate than others?
- How does the drop rate in a given course section compare to the drop rates in other course sections or across the department or college?

Key Terms

Course drop: Includes students who (a) dropped a course between the first day of registration or the first day of the term and the census date, and (b) who received no grade of record. May also include drops initiated by the instructor in line with the college's no-show policy.

Drop rate: The number of students who dropped the course without re-enrolling, divided by the total number of students who were enrolled in the course at the census date, plus the students who dropped the course.

- For all these questions above, how do these results look over the last five years? What trends emerge?

Tips for Working With Student Enrollment Records

When accessing and using student enrollment records to understand drop patterns, faculty and institutional researchers should keep the following considerations in mind.

- Students may enroll in and drop the same course multiple times (by changing course sections); as a rule of thumb, it is best to use the last drop date of the course when analyzing drop patterns.
- It is best practice that drop data should include a time stamp to allow researchers to determine when the drop took place (e.g., after registration and before the term start; after the term start, but before census). Since each timeframe will likely show a different pattern, clearly identify which approach your college currently uses when analyzing this data.
- Drop data may not be stored or may be cleared out regularly at an institution. Work with your Information Technology (IT) and/or Admissions and Records (A&R) colleagues as needed to understand how drop data are kept and what (if anything) needs to change to make this information accessible.
- Colleges often assign *reason codes* for why a student drops. Each college has different reason codes. There are many reasons why a student may drop a course that should be taken into consideration (see Exploring Why Students Drop below). Review your college's codes to ensure they reflect the full array of possibilities.
- Exploring various comparisons can reveal differences in drop patterns and highlight key factors affecting these indicators. Possible comparisons include the following:
 - Timeframes, such as before AB 705, the year AB 705 launched, and the period following AB 705 implementation; or in pre- versus post-COVID pandemic years.
 - Student characteristics, such as students' race/ethnicity or gender, which can uncover potential equity gaps.
 - Course instructor, to understand if faculty teaching the same course have different drop patterns.

Exploring Why Students Drop

While drop data can provide useful insights into the enrollment patterns of students across courses and departments, it cannot reveal *why* students drop a course. Students may drop a course for many reasons, such as schedule challenges; teaching/learning incompatibility; changes in their priorities, motivations, or confidence in continuing the class; class cancellation; non-payment issues; or insufficient prerequisite completion. Here, the primary questions are as follows:

- What are the main reasons students drop a transfer-level English or math course and when do they drop?
- How do students' reasons for dropping these courses differ from their reasons for dropping other classes at the college?

Tips for Conducting Surveys on Why Students Drop Courses

Systematically and strategically gathering student voices can help identify common reasons for enrollment drops. While a range of options exists for exploring students' experiences, a brief survey can provide an efficient way to quickly source a wealth of insight on the factors impacting students' decisions to drop transfer-level English or math courses.

Formats for Student Drop Surveys

Faculty and institutional researchers can choose from two formats to inquire about drop reasons:

- **Open-ended:** This approach provides students a prompt, and they freewrite a response. Consider putting parameters on these responses to help students calibrate length/depth and to assist in your analysis (e.g., "Share the main reason you dropped your course in 1–2 sentences.>").
- **Fixed-choice:** This approach provides students with a specific set of options to choose from. When using this approach, consider the framing and response options used. For example, allowing students to select multiple reasons for dropping a course without prioritizing them presents challenges in data interpretation. While "select all that apply" provides a broad overview, it fails to pinpoint the most significant factor driving the student's decision and leads to a misunderstanding of the main reasons for drops. Alternatives include "choose 1 main reason," "select your top 3," or "rank the following from X to Y, with X being the top reason."

In addition, consider providing separate categories for drop reasons to help organize and categorize various reasons into the most intuitive order for students. See sample survey questions used by some colleges at the end of this guide.

Administering Student Drop Surveys

Faculty and institutional researchers will likely need to partner with their IT and/or A&R colleagues to systematically implement a student drop survey. Keep the following in mind when designing and implementing your approach:

- Honestly assess your college's capacity to conduct, analyze, and communicate the results. Work as a team to set realistic goals for gathering data that can inform ongoing support for students.

For example, internal resources may only allow for survey administration in one term per year, or every term, but only for a short window. Similarly, collecting open-ended responses can provide richer data with more context; however, the analysis is more labor intensive and requires coding experience. Depending on your college's context and resources, a fixed-format approach may be more attainable.

- Identify the best way to practically engage students with the survey for the highest response rate.
 - Leverage your student information system (e.g., Banner); learning management system (e.g., Canvas); or survey administration tool (e.g., Survey Monkey).
 - Some colleges may have the capacity to implement an individual pop-up survey that asks students why they are dropping *each* time they drop a course. Ensure the survey is sent every time a student drops a course, so you are able to identify the specific reasons for each course that was dropped.
 - Keep the survey short to improve response rates.
 - Offer an incentive for filling out the survey (e.g., provide \$5 vouchers for a campus cafeteria, ask for donations from the bookstore of unsold items). Work with your college foundation to identify potential funding sources for other options.

Sample Fixed-Choice Survey Questions

Find below a sample survey for fixed-choice questions asking students' top reasons for dropping their English or math course. Colleges can customize this template for their local context and needs.

Student Drop Survey

Please select the top 3 reasons you are dropping this course to help us provide support to other students in the future. Your responses are anonymous and will only be shared in combination with information provided by other students. Thank you for your participation.

Course-Related Reasons

- Time of the class did not work for me.
- Day of the class did not work for me.
- I decided to take a different section of the same course.
- I decided to take a different course.
- The pace of the course was too fast or slow.
- I did not relate to the instructor.
- The course was too difficult.
- The course was too easy.
- I dropped to avoid an undesirable grade.
- I did not feel welcomed or like I belonged in the class.
- I felt unsafe in the course.
- I did not feel academically supported in the course.

College-Related Reasons

- I experienced accessibility (ADA) issues.
- I did not feel welcomed or like I belonged on campus.
- I felt unsafe on campus.
- I did not feel supported on campus.

Technology-Related Reasons

- I did not have access to the internet or fast enough internet.
- I did not have access to a computer or to the necessary software.
- I lacked the technical skills needed.

Personal Reasons

- I did not need the course to complete my educational goal.
- I decided to change my major.
- I had work responsibilities.
- I had caregiving and/or personal responsibilities.
- I experienced financial challenges (e.g., couldn't pay for tuition, fees, books).
- My transportation was unreliable.
- I lacked family support.
- I had to prioritize my mental health.
- I had to prioritize my physical health.
- I was having challenges getting my basic needs met (e.g., housing, food, childcare).

Other Reasons (write in additional information here):