THE INFLUENCE OF A POLICY CHANGE ON THE WITHDRAWAL
OF JUNIORS AND SENIORS AT A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

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Carol Anna Slabinski

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Abstract

of

THE INFLUENCE OF A POLICY CHANGE ON THE WITHDRAWAL
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Each semester, students withdraw from one or more of their classes, increasing their time to degree and impeding the progress of other students who might have been able to complete courses if the seats were available. In the literature on retention and persistence, juniors and seniors are not studied as frequently as freshmen and sophomores. Withdrawal has economic consequences that extend past the individual student to the institution and beyond. The purpose of this research is to investigate the rate of withdrawal for this population at a four-year, public university and determine if the rate of withdrawal decreases as a result of the implementation of a system wide policy that restricts the number of units from which students can withdraw. Student level enrollment data from the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of the University Registrar and financial aid data from the Office of Analytics are used to examine the rate of withdrawal over time and any changes that coincide with the implementation of the policy. Using linear, probit, and logit regressions, this study finds that the incidence of withdrawal for juniors and seniors is decreasing and the magnitude of the effect is increasing over time since the implementation of the policy, but the
policy may be only part of the explanation of the drop in withdrawals. Based on the literature review, other factors considered were gender, age, major, ethnicity, admit status, units attempted, and grade point average. The 18-unit limit for withdrawal does not appear to be binding. Future research on the interaction between variables is planned.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Kristin Kiesel

_______________________
Date
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My family and friends still can’t understand why I wanted to study economics. No matter. They supported me, and sometimes even pretended to know what I was talking about. I’m not exactly sure how interested they were . . .

Beth Merritt Miller and Kristin van Gaasbeck started me on this path. My life is forever changed.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2008, Chancellor Charles Reed approved Executive Order 1037, “Grading Symbols, Minimum Standards Governing the Assignment of Grades, Policies on the Repetition of Courses, Policies on Academic Renewal, and Grade Appeals.” This executive order applies to the twenty-three campuses in the California State University system. Among the provisions of this executive order are changes to the policies on course withdrawals and course repeats “designed to facilitate a student’s graduation.” Effective Fall 2010, undergraduate students at Sacramento State are now limited to 18 semester units of withdrawal for their academic careers.¹

The implementation of EO 1037 could be viewed as a less permissive withdrawal policy for Sac State, encouraging students to persist to graduation. This research focuses on the impact of the executive order on withdrawals, both course withdrawals and semester withdrawals, for undergraduate juniors and seniors, a population that has not been widely discussed in the literature on student departure. Much of the research looks at withdrawal for traditional first year and sophomore students, who have more options and opportunities available, in terms of institutions, transfer, and majors. Juniors and seniors have already invested resources, economic and psychic, toward their educational goals, and may be reluctant or unable to change

¹ A copy of Executive Order 1037 is found in Appendix A.
direction. For this research, withdrawal is considered to be different from dropping out or stopping out, and represents a conscious choice made by the student during the semester.

Utilizing data from the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Analytics, linear regression, probit and logit models were used to empirically estimate if EO 1037 had an effect on the likelihood of withdrawal for juniors and seniors enrolled at Sacramento State during the study period. Results suggest that the rate of withdrawal has been decreasing compared to the rate during the Fall 2008 semester, and has continued to decrease since implementation in Fall 2010. The time effect is statistically significant and increasing in magnitude for the study period. Other factors were included in the regressions as controls, including gender, age, ethnicity, major, admit status, enrollment intensity, and financial aid offered.

Gender is not a significant factor in withdrawal for juniors and seniors, but age is. Compared to White students, Black and Pacific Islander students are more likely to withdraw while students who are American Indian or Filipino are less likely. Regression results suggest that compared to students majoring in Criminal Justice, students majoring in fields that have clearly defined career paths, such as Interior Design, Nursing and Mechanical Engineering, are less likely to withdraw.

Chapter two discusses in more detail some of the economic implications of student withdrawal which motivated this research. Chapter three looks at the literature on student withdrawal and related topics including college completion rates, student swirl, transfer, and the role played by financial aid. Chapter four looks at the
econometric methodology chosen to evaluate the research question. Chapter five presents and discusses results. Chapter six presents conclusions, limitations, and areas for further investigation. If the intent of Executive Order 1037 is “to facilitate a student’s graduation,” the purpose of this research is to investigate changes in the rate of withdrawal for juniors and seniors and determine if the policy is having an effect. This population of students is not as widely studied as freshman and sophomores and has a greater investment at stake in terms of time, money, and academic progress toward degree.
Chapter 2

ECONOMIC MOTIVATION

A college education represents an investment in and development of human capital. Becker views education and the acquisition of additional knowledge and skills as a way for the individual to increase human capital and productivity in exchange for higher earnings (1962). Students who attend college face economic and opportunity costs for their education and must weigh the benefits of achieving a bachelor’s degree and future earnings against these costs. On an individual basis, students who attend but fail to complete their college degrees are often burdened with more than their lack of a credential. In many cases they have substantial student debt. At www.finaid.org, the student loan debt clock is over $1,000,000,000,000 (one trillion!) and student loan debt in the United States now exceeds consumer credit card debt.

Using research data from NLS72 (National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972), Altonji (1993) models the relationships between aptitude, preparation, and the probability of completion in a particular major in the individual student’s decision to complete a degree. For the time period studied, payoffs to education after the fact explain gender differences, raising the return to college for men relative to women. Choice of major is important - men are more likely to complete degrees in math and science compared to women who tend to major in arts and humanities. Arcidiacono (2004), also using NLS72 data, studies college and major choice and finds that individual students make choices based first on what they want to do as a career, then adjust those choices based on information gained from course
grades. The information confirms the choice of major or results in either a change of major or leaving college to join the workforce. Math ability and college quality affect the choice, and degrees in natural sciences and business result in higher earnings. The preference for these majors rather than the jobs associated with the majors, however, is found to be more important for ability sorting. Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2012), using longitudinal and survey data, find that 40% of dropout can be explained by students learning via grades about their academic abilities. Using data from the NLSY 79 (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth), Arcidiacono et al. (2010), find that college graduation functions as a direct signal of ability to employers, compared to high school graduates who demonstrate their abilities over time on the job. Oreopoulous & Petronijevic (2013) find, in addition to the gains from completing college, graduates who major in fields that emphasize abstract thinking also receive larger earnings.

Chen (2008) looks at student dropout and the impact of financial aid for students from different ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. He suggests three economic concepts – liquidity constraints, price elasticity of demand, and debt aversion – as explanations for different responses to financial aid. Increases in grants may offset borrowing constraints faced by lower-income students. Lower-income students spend a greater percentage of their income on education and experience greater price elasticity of demand than their wealthier peers, making them more sensitive to tuition increases. Lower-income students and their families can also be more uncomfortable with debt, making grants and scholarships more attractive. Oreopoulous & Petronijevic (2013) find that students and parents can overestimate the costs of college and are not as savvy
about the nuances of financial aid, which can negatively influence college choice
decisions.

At the institutional level, course and major planning requires the financial
commitment to offer sections of classes for students, based on enrollment projections
and demand for courses to satisfy major and elective requirements. Every student who
withdraws from the semester after census is vacating a seat in a course that might have
been filled by another student. Thus, the impact of withdrawal has real financial
consequences for the student withdrawing who is delayed in her graduation, but this
withdrawal might be influencing the graduation of another student as well, who was
unable to enroll in a required course because the course was at capacity. Withdrawal
affects retention and graduation rates, and could affect future funding, already on the
decline at the state and federal levels.

According to the Office of Institutional Research at Sacramento State, over the
past two decades the median 6-year graduation rate for students who enter as first-time
freshman is 40.4%; the median 4-year rate for students who enter as transfers is 57.6%. 
Withdrawal extends time to degree, and for some students, makes graduation
impossible.

The implementation of Executive Order 1037 has the potential to positively
impact withdrawal and graduation rates. At Sac State, students can withdraw from
individual courses or their entire semester up through the first two weeks of classes
without academic penalty. Beginning with the third week through the twelfth week of
the semester, dropping individual courses requires varying approvals – from the
instructor, the department chair, and the college dean; withdrawing from all courses requires the signature of an academic advisor in the Academic Advising and Career Center. After the fourth week, through the twelfth week of the semester, dropping or withdrawing, for whatever reason, results in the assignment of a “W” grade on the student’s transcript and these units count toward the 18-unit limit of Executive Order 1037. During the final three weeks of the semester, dropping and withdrawing is more restricted, but “W” grades no longer count toward the unit maximum. Students who withdraw from two consecutive semesters or from three non-consecutive semesters are subject to administrative probation and may be administratively disqualified or dismissed for additional semester withdrawals, determined on a case-by-case basis by the University Registrar. Students who repeatedly withdraw are considered “non-degree seeking.” In all cases, students who withdraw from courses are not making forward progress and may be impeding the progress of fellow students.

Until the sixty percent point in the semester, students receive a prorated refund of tuition and fees paid. For a student receiving financial aid, this can result in a repayment situation that might prevent him from continuing to graduation. At the institutional level, for a department planning course offerings with a limited budget, withdrawal results in inefficient course allocations.

From a national perspective, Baum et al. (2013) find college completion is associated with a healthier, wealthier, and better informed citizenry. The unemployment rate in 2012 for those 25-34 with a bachelor’s degree was 7.1 percentage points below the rate for high school graduates; 34 percent of adults between the ages of 25-34 hold a
bachelor’s degree or higher. As a policy aimed at increasing the graduation rate, Executive Order 10137 has the potential to be a win-win on all levels – personal, institutional, and national. This research seeks to determine whether the policy is having an impact on the rate of withdrawal for juniors and seniors, which has a direct effect on whether students make timely progress to degree.
Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student withdrawal can be approached from many different angles, and has received significant attention in the existing literature. This review discusses the existing literature focusing on student departure, college completion/graduation rates, student mobility and transfer issues, and financial aid.

3.1 Student Departure

To begin to understand voluntary student withdrawal, we travel back through the extensive literature on student departure to the 1970’s and the work of Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975). Spady (1971) studied a sample of freshman students attending the University of Chicago and developed an empirical model of the student dropout process based on family background, academic potential, normative congruence (i.e., how well the student’s values match the institution’s values), structural relations/friendship support, grades, intellectual development, social integration, satisfaction, and institutional commitment and their influences on the dropout decision. His findings indicate grades are the most important reason for dropout among men, while for women dropout is based on a lack of commitment to the university primarily and because of grades secondarily. For both sexes, however, those who graduated earned better grades during their early academic careers compared to students who were early dropouts.

Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1975) characterizes student behavior based on the student’s academic attributes and intentions, family background, integration into the educational institution through informal peer and formal extracurricular activities,
and how well these factors mesh. Tinto finds that voluntary withdrawal occurs when the student lacks an educational and institutional commitment and tends to decrease as a student gets closer to graduation.

Other frequently cited models of student behavior relevant to withdrawal include Bean’s Student Attrition Model (1980), Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda’s Integrated Student Retention Model (1993), and St. John, Paulsen, and Starkey’s College Choice Nexus Model (1996).

Bean’s Student Attrition Model (1980) focuses on student background, organizational determinants such as institutional quality, major field of study, and university grade point average, intervening variables of satisfaction and institutional commitment, and the effects of these variables on student dropout. To test the model, a survey was administered to students enrolled in a freshman composition program at a Midwestern university during the fall semester of 1977. To control for heterogeneity, only students who were Caucasian, not Hispanic, U.S. citizens, under 22 years of age, and single were included. Only first-time, full-time freshmen were included; transfer students were excluded. Dropout was determined by registration information for the fall semester of 1978. In Bean’s causal model, adapted from a model of turnover in the workplace, lack of institutional commitment was the top factor for dropout for both men and women, supporting the findings of Spady and Tinto.

In an exploration of the effects of class level on college student dropout syndrome, which includes intention to leave and discussing leaving compared to actual attrition data, Bean (1985) finds that social life influences institutional fit and students
have a greater effect on attitudes of other students than faculty. Another finding is that college GPA is not statistically significant at \( p \leq .01 \) for dropout syndrome at any class level, but Bean suggests these survey results might be affected by sampling bias, which was limited to white, U.S. citizens, 23 years or younger, single, enrolled in 10 or more units, attending a major Midwestern research university.

Cabrera et al.’s (1993) Integrated Student Retention Model combines elements from Tinto’s Student Integration Model and Bean’s Student Attrition Model to develop a more nuanced understanding of student persistence. In this model, environmental variables including encouragement from friends and family and attitudes about financial support are added to the mix of individual and institutional variables important in the persistence process. The largest effects on persistence were Intent to Persist, GPA, Institutional Commitment, Encouragement from Friends and Family, Goal Commitment, Academic Integration, Finance Attitudes, and Social Integration. As in Tinto’s and Bean’s models, the students for this research were considered traditional students.

St. John et al.’s College Choice Nexus Model (1996) incorporates the concept of college pricing and examines the relationship between a student’s choice of college and the decision to stay at the college of choice, and finds a nexus between college costs (financial choice variables) and persistence and graduation. College choice research focuses on the choices students make – choosing a college, choosing a major, choosing courses, choosing to complete college and graduate. In the model, seven factors are considered: student background, college choice, college experiences, aspirations, prices
and price subsidies, housing costs, and other living costs. For students, choosing a college affects their persistence. Financial constraints are part of this choice; college costs have a direct effect on persistence.

Bean and Metzner (1985) define nontraditional students as having at least one of the following characteristics: part-time, commuter, older than 24, and “distinguished by the lessened intensity and duration of their interaction with the primary agents of socialization (faculty, peers)” where they attend (p. 488). These students do not necessarily experience the social integration found in other models based on traditional college students.

In more recent research, Chen and DesJardins (2008) use an event history approach to look at the longitudinal effects of Pell grants and other financial aid on dropout rates for students from different income groups and find that lower income students are more responsive to Pell grants and less likely to dropout. Also using longitudinal data, Stratton, O’Toole, and Wetzel (2008) distinguish between stopout (non-continuous enrollment) and dropout behavior among students enrolled full- and part-time during their first year of college. DesJardins, Ahlburg, and McCall (2006) examine “spells” of stopout behavior using a multiple spells-competing risk model and suggest that institutions attempting to increase graduation rates should create policies to reduce stopout.

Oseguera and Rhee (2009) find that campus climate, including peer and faculty interactions, plays a role in controlling students’ stopout intentions. Faculty create the norms for student behavior and set the academic expectations for the institution, which
influence the retention climate of a campus. The researchers use aggregated faculty opinions gathered from the Higher Education Research Institute’s (HERI) Faculty Surveys for information related to the institutional climate, including how the campus demonstrates its value for teaching versus research. Woosley (2003) looks at students who withdrew from a residential university in the Midwest and their intentions to re-enroll. Of the 613 students who withdrew during the 1999 academic year, 34% re-enrolled. Freshmen were significantly less likely to re-enroll.

Because student problems – the reasons students give for withdrawing – may not accurately reflect the true reasons for withdrawing, attempts to develop strategies to improve retention and persistence to graduation are complicated (Braxton, Brier, & Hossler, 1988; Ishitani, 2006). Traditional students attending residential colleges and universities who leave after their first year of college are the focus of much of the research (Braxton, 2000; Seidman, 2006).

Underrepresented in the extensive literature on student persistence and retention are longitudinal studies that include demographics and academic characteristics for students who withdraw later in their academic careers, when they have achieved upper division status and are in striking distance of earning their baccalaureate degrees. Identifying students with risk factors for withdrawal at this stage of their academic careers and designing effective interventions that increase the probability of their retention, persistence, and ultimately, their graduation could reduce inefficiencies at all levels. This research attempts to bridge the gap at the individual and institutional level for college juniors and seniors.
3.2 College Completion/Graduation Rates

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) collects graduation rate information using data reported to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Graduation Rate Survey (GRS). Information is reported for full-time, first-time, degree-seeking students in a cohort, by race/ethnicity and gender. Completion is based on students completing their programs within 150% of “normal time to completion,” with normal time considered four years (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The requirement to report these graduation rates is mandatory for institutions receiving Title IV federal funds. As part of the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act, campuses are required to provide this information for current and potential students. NCES is also required to make information about graduation rates available to students through its College Navigator website, including rates of completion up to 200% of normal time.²

Much of the research on degree completion and time-to-degree has an individual and institutional focus, with emphasis on traditional students who begin at one institution and graduate from that same institution, generally within six years for first-time freshmen at four-year colleges and universities, and three years for students attending community colleges. In Minnesota, IPEDS data are used to create models to predict graduation rates at the institutional level for two- and four-year colleges and universities (Bailey, 2006). These predicted rates are then used to provide supporting information for required Student Right-to-Know reporting. Johnson (2006) finds that

² Information available at https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/.
using institutional data rather than national data to study attrition helps colleges and universities identify and address specific problems on their individual campuses.

The most obvious consequence of withdrawal is its impact on the academic progress of the individual student who withdraws. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, NELS 88:2000, Adelman (2006) observes that undergraduate students who are allowed to withdraw from or repeat 20% or more of their course work over their academic career are less likely to graduate. Less obvious is the impact on the student who could have been enrolled in the course if the seat was available.

Offenstein, Moore, and Shulock (2010) present research on college completion which outlines milestones and on-track indicators, including completing remediation, completing college-level math and English courses, and other student behaviors such as enrolling full-time, completing 20-30 units in the first year, registering on time, and having an “adequate” grade point average. These behaviors increase the likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree, however, the focus remains on lower division students rather than juniors or seniors.

Attewell et al. (2011) examine theories of non-completion and variables including student demographics (race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), nontraditional status), high school preparation, financial aid, work hours, integration, institutional selectivity, and remediation. Using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS96/01), findings indicate that for moderately selective four-year institutions, parent SES, preparation, nontraditional status, financial aid,
integration, and hours of work are statistically significant in explaining non-completion, while race, gender and remediation are not.

Using BPS96/01 and IPEDS data, Cragg (2009) finds that an institution’s cost of attendance coupled with a student’s SAT score can be used to determine the probability of a student’s graduation. Students with SAT scores 200 points above or below the campus mean are less likely to graduate, reflecting the influence of an institution’s selectivity as a factor for student retention. Students who are poorly matched are less likely to persist at a college where they are underprepared or, on the flip side, under challenged in their courses. Whalen et al. (2010), in a longitudinal study of students attending a mid-Western university, find that gender, academic preparation, in-state residence, and the number of years living on campus were among the predictors for six year retention and graduation.

Recent attempts to explain the reasons for the decline in college completion point to reductions in student preparation for college, reductions in institutional resources, and changes in where students attend college as factors (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2010). Looking at the supply side of the higher education equation, they find decreases in college completion for less selective public institutions facing resource limitations, and attribute three-quarters of the decline to students beginning at community colleges.

Adams and Becker (1990) look at individual course withdrawal behavior and find that students are less likely to withdraw from required courses; the closer a student is to graduating and the higher the student’s grade point average, the less likely they are
to withdraw. However, previous withdrawals are a good predictor for future withdrawals. Dechter (2009) suggests that poor course planning can result in increased time to degree and proposes a scheduling model using optimization technology along with additional study of the effect of graduation requirements on persistence and degree completion.

Donhardt (2012), looking at factors that affect degree completion for students enrolled in a major urban university, finds that students who are enrolled full-time and maintaining a GPA of 2.0 or higher are more likely to complete a degree. Volkwein and Lorang (1996) identify students they classify as “extenders,” who take fewer courses than a full-time load or drop courses they find too difficult, thus extending their time to degree. In the case of extenders, taking longer to graduate is the result of financial need, the desire to earn higher grade point averages, and completing fewer than 15 units per semester. Students withdraw from courses when they are not earning their desired grades, creating delays in their graduation.

This study incorporates institutional data at the student level for units attempted and completed as well as term grade point average and cumulative grade point average to determine if these factors play a statistically significant role in withdrawal for upper division students.
3.3 Student Mobility and Transfer Issues

What may be interpreted as dropout behavior in the graduation rate data may actually be student swirl in which a student attends multiple institutions during his/her academic career (McCormick, 2003). For students receiving baccalaureate degrees in 1992-93, over half attended more than one institution and one fifth attended at least three. In research conducted at a large research university, students who enrolled at another institution after leaving were less likely to return to the study institution (Johnson & Muse, 2012). Once a student leaves her starting campus, even if she subsequently graduates from another institution, she is not counted as a success at either institution.

In addition to swirl between institutions, there can be swirl within an institution, especially among urban student populations (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009). Students suspended for poor academic performance were studied to determine factors that impacted term grade point average (GPA) and course completion. Variables include student background, learning issues, previous academic performance, life challenges, commitment to success, and participation in a retention program. Among the factors affecting GPA in a positive way upon re-entry: fewer life challenges, longer time at the institution, fewer learning issues, higher GPA for the term prior to suspension, completing an 8-week basic skills course that included math and reading as well as time and crisis management skills, and having dependent children.

Hossler et al. (2013) find that one third of all students transfer, and half of all students who transfer from four-year institutions do so in reverse, back to public
community colleges. The first transfer frequently happens during the student’s second year, part-time and full-time students transfer at comparable rates, and more than one quarter of transfers cross state lines. Student-specific data, rather than institutional data, would be useful to more accurately account for the institutions that play roles in the student’s success.

For students transferring vertically from a community college, Roksa (2010) finds a positive relationship between the size of a state’s community college system and baccalaureate degree attainment. However, other studies find enrollment in a community college does not increase the likelihood of earning a bachelor’s degree. Pascarella et al. find that “. . . initial attendance at a two-year (versus a four-year) institution reduced the likelihood of bachelor’s degree completion by 15 to 20 percent” (2005, p. 376).

For students who transfer horizontally to other four-year institutions, Li (2010) reports that reasons for transfer versus stopout were different, based on data from the BPS96/01. Students who stopped out indicated financial and personal reasons for doing so; students who transferred did so for academic reasons, including changes in major.

Data was not available to follow students who transferred out of the institution for this study, however a variable identifying whether a student entered as a freshman or transfer student was included in the analyses to partially address this area of the literature.
3.4 Financial Aid

Financial aid plays a role in student withdrawal. As mentioned earlier, Chen (2008) finds the economic concepts of liquidity constraints, debt aversion, and price elasticity of demand, offer some explanatory value in student withdrawal decisions. Chen and DesJardins (2008) find that lower income students are more responsive to Pell grants and less likely to dropout. Research by DesJardins and McCall (2010) recommends the strategic use of financial aid, especially in the form of grants and scholarships, rather than loans, to reduce stopout behavior. Oreopoulos and Petronijevic (2013) find that financial aid information can be difficult to understand and thus, incorporate into the college choice process.

Once enrolled, students have an incentive to be enrolled full-time, regardless of their progress to degree, in order to maintain maximum financial aid eligibility. The institutional data used for this research included financial aid offered, but an analysis of the use of financial aid and progress to degree is beyond the scope of this research, and would be a subject for future investigation.
Chapter 4
DATA AND ECONOMETRIC METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to determine if Executive Order 1037, implemented at California State University, Sacramento in Fall 2010, affected the incidence of withdrawal for juniors and seniors. Data from the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Analytics were used to construct a database for juniors and seniors enrolled beginning Fall 2008 – Spring 2013. The data from Institutional Research includes a student identifier, enrollment term, and descriptive demographic and enrollment variables. The data from Analytics includes variables for types of financial aid. Data were merged by student identifier and enrollment term, creating information about 45,681 unique students enrolled for one or more terms for the ten semesters of the study. A focus on juniors and seniors was chosen because this group appears to be underrepresented in the research literature. Data for individual students, rather than cohorts of students, were selected in order to look at more of the individual factors relating to withdrawal found in the literature.

This study does not rely on self-reported data from survey responses, but uses a unique institutional data set, with variables selected to provide a range of data for each student enrolled during the study period. The data covers ten semesters, beginning in Fall 2008 through Spring 2013, with 165,699 total observations for 45,581 unique students enrolled during the study period. The data were focused on factors essential to academic success and progress toward degree as indicated in the literature, including
units attempted and completed, major, term grade point average and cumulative grade point average, and types of financial aid offered.

4.1 Variable Selection

The dependent variable in the research is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether a student was assigned any “W” units for any of the semesters in the study. Based on a comprehensive literature review, explanatory variables were selected. The effect of the policy is captured in two alternate specifications. The first specification included a variable for time using the semester enrolled and the second used a policy indicator variable that measures time before EO 1037 was implemented (pol_ind = 0) or after (pol_ind = 1). Student demographic variables include age, accounting for possible non-linear effects, whether a student is a California resident, the student’s ethnicity (reference case = White), and gender (1 = female).

Financial aid data provided by the Office of Analytics was transformed into the following indicator variables: InstitutionalAidOffered, FederalAidOffered, StateAidOffered, PrivateAidOffered, OtherAidOffered, VetAidOffered, Grant_Federal_Pell, Loan_Federal_SubsidizedLoan, Loan_Federal_UnsubsidizedLoan, TotalFinAidOffered, TotalAthlAidOffered, TotalGrantAidOffered, TotalLoanAidOffered, TotalWaiverAidOffered, TotalWorkStudyAidOffered. These variables were also aggregated into a single indicator for financial aid offered. Using financial aid offered rather than financial aid awarded data is based on research by DesJardins et al. (2003), suggesting selection bias may be present when including financial aid awarded data.
University variables related to student status include native admit (1 if student was admitted as a freshman, 0 if student transferred from another institution), regular admit (1 if student was a regular admit, 0 if an exception), first term enrolled (1 if semester was student’s first semester enrolled, otherwise 0), whether the student was classified as a junior (60-89 semester units completed) or senior (90 or more semester units completed), and major, with the base case, Criminal Justice, chosen as the most popular major. University variables related to educational achievement include term grade point average, cumulative grade point average, and units attempted and completed for the term enrolled. If the student earned a degree, the degree term, degree units, degree grade point average, and degree major are available.

Two assumptions were made about the juniors and seniors in the study. First, by nature of their completion of 60 or more semester units and their enrollments at a four-year institution, they are demonstrating their goal commitment and intent to earn bachelor’s degrees. Second, they have demonstrated their abilities to do college-level work, so variables found in other studies, including high school performance, test scores, and parents educational level were not included.

4.2 Econometric Specification

To more accurately investigate the effect of the policy and factors influencing the likelihood of withdrawal, a qualitative choice model was used. Because withdrawals during weeks five through twelve of the semester are considered a conscious decision made by the student (without regards to the reasons given by the student for withdrawal), the dependent variable, withdrawal, is represented by a variable that takes
on the values of 1 if the student withdraws from any units, and 0 otherwise. In economic terms, this choice is the outcome of a student’s optimization problem and reflects the outcome that maximizes his or her utility, $U$. If a student chooses to withdraw, $U_1$, the utility of withdrawal, is greater than $U_0$, the utility of staying enrolled. While utility cannot be directly measured and depends on the individual student, it is assumed to be influenced by observable variables.

The variables included in this research come from the literature review of previous studies, which suggests that gender, age, admit status, enrollment intensity, term and cumulative grade point average, major, ethnicity, and financial aid offered are factors in student withdrawal. Admit status, whether regular or by exception, serves as a proxy for student preparation. Enrollment intensity, whether a student enrolls full- or part-time, tells us something about other demands on a student’s time, perhaps employment or family responsibilities, which affect student momentum. Term and cumulative grade point average tell us about the student’s academic ability, as does the choice of major. Ethnicity gives us information about the student’s support system and financial aid offered provides information about the student’s ability to pay tuition and living expenses during enrollment. Together, all these variables are potential factors in explaining utility differences and thus student withdrawal.

The student’s utility function can be expressed as: $U_{ij} = V_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}$ for all $j$, where the individual student, $i$, has $j$ alternatives (withdraw, don’t withdraw) that depend on observable variables, and unobservable (or omitted) variables that are represented in the error term, $\varepsilon$. The assumption about the distribution of the error term results in either the
logit model or the probit model. The logistic distribution gives fatter tails than the standard normal distribution resulting in the probit model, thus allowing for more extreme values (Train, 2009).

The probability of withdrawal can be written as:

\[
\text{Prob}(j=w) = \text{Prob}(U_{i1} > U_{i0}) = \text{Prob}(V_{i1} + \varepsilon_{i1} > V_{i0} + \varepsilon_{i0}) = \text{Prob}(\varepsilon_{i0} - \varepsilon_{i1} < V_{i1} - V_{i0}).
\]

If the error term is assumed to be independently, identically extreme value distributed (type I extreme value distribution), the following choice probability for withdrawal can be derived for the logit model:

\[
\Pr(j = w) = \frac{e^{V_{i1}}}{(e^{V_{i1}} + e^{V_{i0}})}.
\]

A linear regression model was used as a starting point to investigate the probability of withdrawal during the period of the study, fall semester 2008 through spring semester 2013. Ordinary least squares (OLS) attempts to estimate the relationship between the dependent variable, in our case the probability of withdrawal, and our independent variables as a linear probability model. However, OLS does not result in the best linear unbiased estimator (BLUE) when the dependent variable is categorical. The predicted value of the dependent variable can take on any real value, not just 0 or 1, and the error term is not normally distributed. Dey and Astin (1993) report little difference between the techniques of OLS, probit, and logistic regressions, however, and OLS results are more easily understood and interpreted. The OLS results reported here serve as a reference point for the nonlinear logit and probit regression models.
Allison (1984) recommends logistic regression for a dichotomous dependent variable. Here, probit regressions are included as well to serve as an additional robustness check.

Model 1 represents the linear probability model as constructed using variables describing semester enrolled, ethnicity, major, demographics, units attempted, cumulative GPA, financial aid, and graduation status. As each explanatory variable was added to the model, the coefficients were examined for significance. Model 1 represents:

\[ w_{it} = \alpha + \beta T_{it} + \gamma D_i + \delta F_{it} + \rho U_{it} + \epsilon_{it}, \]

where the probability of withdrawal, \( w_{it} \), depends on \( T \), time variables, \( D \), student demographic variables, \( F \), financial aid variables, \( U \), university variables, and \( \epsilon_{it} \) is an error term. The error term captures the effect of omitted variables and is clustered by student. The same explanatory variables and approach was used in the logit and probit regressions. The estimated coefficients were transformed into marginal effects post estimation to allow comparison of the estimates across the three model specifications.

Results of the regressions follow in the next chapter, Table 4.
Chapter 5

RESULTS

Selective summary statistics are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 indicates that the average age of students who withdrew is slightly older than the average for those enrolled; the percentage of students admitted as freshman who withdrew as juniors or seniors was lower. While blacks represent six percent of the population of juniors and seniors during the time of the study, they represent nine percent of the population of juniors and seniors who withdrew, and approximately fifteen percent of the black juniors and seniors enrolled.

Table 1. Summary Statistics: Gender, Age, Admit Status and Graduation

|                | Juniors/Seniors Enrolled  
|                | n = 45681 | Juniors/Seniors Withdrawing  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>n = 4794</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26128</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19553</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>24.97</td>
<td>25.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>16-91</td>
<td>18-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Admit</td>
<td>44421</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exception Admit</td>
<td>1460</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Admit</td>
<td>11312</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>34369</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>22279</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Graduated</td>
<td>23402</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled Spring 2013</td>
<td>1298</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The starting point for this research was an examination of the number of units attempted compared to the number of withdrawal units. Unauthorized withdrawal units are also included here because restrictions on the number of units from which a student can withdraw might affect this alternative. The overall numbers suggest the rate of withdrawal compared to units attempted for juniors and seniors is not a major issue for enrollment:
Table 3. Withdrawal vs. Unauthorized Withdrawal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Total Units Attempted</th>
<th>Withdrawal Units</th>
<th>Withdrawal Unauthorized (WU) Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>197231</td>
<td>3560</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>202636</td>
<td>3276</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2009</td>
<td>207712</td>
<td>3245</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>190890</td>
<td>2590</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>191769</td>
<td>2418</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>208282</td>
<td>2389</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>213106</td>
<td>2547</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>215171</td>
<td>2187</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>214226</td>
<td>2182</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>205920</td>
<td>2189</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>2046943</td>
<td>26583</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For juniors and seniors, withdrawal units compared to total units attempted appears to be trending downward beginning with the semester before implementation of EO 1037, Spring 2010, and maintaining at a rate of approximately 1% per semester.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of withdrawal by number of units before and after implementation of Executive Order 1037 during the period of our study.
For the period of our student, the incidence of withdrawal for juniors and seniors is relatively small at approximately 1% per semester per units attempted. Most juniors and seniors are withdrawing from 1-3 units, and not from 18 or more units, the maximum allowed by the policy. A slight downward trend is observed that could be the result of the policy. Our graphs show a slight decrease in withdrawal frequency for 1-9 units and a slight increase in withdrawals from 10-15 units after EO 1037 was implemented. Students could also be substituting unauthorized withdrawals (WUs).

Figure 2 shows the frequency of unauthorized withdrawals during the same period. Again, more students received WU’s for 1-3 units than any other category, but we observe a slight increase in unauthorized withdrawal after the implementation of the policy. This could be a result of substitution by students for whom the policy is binding.

Source: Office of Institutional Research, California State University, Sacramento
in terms of the 18-unit maximum, or for students who fear that the limit might be binding in the future.

Figure 2. Frequency of Unauthorized Withdrawal Before and After Implementation of EO 1037

Source: Office of Institutional Research, California State University, Sacramento

The next objective was to determine if a regression model adding additional data could provide further insight into the student’s decision to withdraw.

In addition to the time effect of the policy, the regression analysis adds demographic variables to investigate other potential factors for withdrawal. Table 4 reports the results of the final linear, probit, and logit regressions with coefficients for probit and logit transformed into marginal effects. Standard errors reported here are heteroskedasticity robust, and clustered at the student level, since observations for individual students are not independent over time.
Table 4. Model 1 Regression Results for Withdrawal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>(1) OLS</th>
<th>(2) Probit (dy/dx)</th>
<th>(3) Logit (dy/dx)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEMESTER (Base semester = Fall 2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>-0.00406**</td>
<td>-0.0488*</td>
<td>-0.113**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00200)</td>
<td>(0.0255)</td>
<td>(0.0536)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2009</td>
<td>-0.00409**</td>
<td>-0.0463*</td>
<td>-0.0992*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00198)</td>
<td>(0.0254)</td>
<td>(0.0541)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>-0.0113***</td>
<td>-0.132***</td>
<td>-0.298***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00204)</td>
<td>(0.0270)</td>
<td>(0.0586)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>-0.0148***</td>
<td>-0.188***</td>
<td>-0.414***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00201)</td>
<td>(0.0275)</td>
<td>(0.0612)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>-0.0184***</td>
<td>-0.234***</td>
<td>-0.520***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00199)</td>
<td>(0.0270)</td>
<td>(0.0599)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>-0.0198***</td>
<td>-0.247***</td>
<td>-0.545***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00199)</td>
<td>(0.0269)</td>
<td>(0.0599)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>-0.0270***</td>
<td>-0.352***</td>
<td>-0.786***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00201)</td>
<td>(0.0278)</td>
<td>(0.0627)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>-0.0305***</td>
<td>-0.390***</td>
<td>-0.875***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00203)</td>
<td>(0.0282)</td>
<td>(0.0643)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>-0.0343***</td>
<td>-0.432***</td>
<td>-0.966***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00211)</td>
<td>(0.0291)</td>
<td>(0.0662)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETHNICITY (Base ethnicity = White)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmInd</td>
<td>-0.00845*</td>
<td>-0.118*</td>
<td>-0.287*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00466)</td>
<td>(0.0673)</td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.00254</td>
<td>0.0369</td>
<td>0.0865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00161)</td>
<td>(0.0226)</td>
<td>(0.0561)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.00681***</td>
<td>0.0738***</td>
<td>0.154***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00193)</td>
<td>(0.0249)</td>
<td>(0.0579)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filip</td>
<td>-0.00453**</td>
<td>-0.0677**</td>
<td>-0.152*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00216)</td>
<td>(0.0325)</td>
<td>(0.0809)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>0.00213</td>
<td>0.0138</td>
<td>0.0814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00542)</td>
<td>(0.0795)</td>
<td>(0.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>-7.94e-05</td>
<td>0.00372</td>
<td>0.00695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00133)</td>
<td>(0.0188)</td>
<td>(0.0462)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi</td>
<td>0.00342</td>
<td>0.0456</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00248)</td>
<td>(0.0350)</td>
<td>(0.0825)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.00257</td>
<td>0.0319</td>
<td>0.0762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00167)</td>
<td>(0.0229)</td>
<td>(0.0548)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PacIsl</td>
<td>0.00854**</td>
<td>0.110**</td>
<td>0.253*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00423)</td>
<td>(0.0556)</td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAsian</td>
<td>0.00160</td>
<td>0.0219</td>
<td>0.0532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00215)</td>
<td>(0.0298)</td>
<td>(0.0715)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to the base semester, Fall 2008, juniors and seniors were less likely to withdraw from courses, and this was significant at p<0.01, beginning Spring 2010, the semester before the policy was implemented on campus. On the campus, the change in policy was announced in Fall 2009, and publicity increased during the Spring 2010 semester as implementation approached. Results suggest the policy is having an effect

Table 4. Model 1 Regression Results for Withdrawal, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>(1) OLS</th>
<th>(2) Probit (dy/dx)</th>
<th>(3) Logit (dy/dx)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADDITIONAL INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>-0.00113</td>
<td>-0.0316**</td>
<td>-0.0736**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00102)</td>
<td>(0.0140)</td>
<td>(0.0322)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Admit</td>
<td>-0.00274</td>
<td>-0.0426</td>
<td>-0.0924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00246)</td>
<td>(0.0331)</td>
<td>(0.0836)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Admit</td>
<td>-0.0102***</td>
<td>-0.162***</td>
<td>-0.374***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00118)</td>
<td>(0.0179)</td>
<td>(0.0444)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA Resident</td>
<td>0.00933</td>
<td>0.173*</td>
<td>0.442*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00588)</td>
<td>(0.0924)</td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Term Enrolled</td>
<td>-0.00681***</td>
<td>-0.0904***</td>
<td>-0.206***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00148)</td>
<td>(0.0205)</td>
<td>(0.0463)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00197***</td>
<td>0.0311***</td>
<td>0.0707***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000425)</td>
<td>(0.00529)</td>
<td>(0.0116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Squared</td>
<td>-9.47e-06</td>
<td>-0.000229***</td>
<td>-0.000533***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.94e-06)</td>
<td>(7.21e-05)</td>
<td>(0.000156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.00112</td>
<td>0.0117</td>
<td>0.0270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000993)</td>
<td>(0.0138)</td>
<td>(0.0340)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>0.0147***</td>
<td>0.193***</td>
<td>0.410***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00170)</td>
<td>(0.0231)</td>
<td>(0.0499)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Units Attempted</td>
<td>0.00375***</td>
<td>0.0489***</td>
<td>0.106***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000212)</td>
<td>(0.00283)</td>
<td>(0.00588)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative GPA</td>
<td>-0.0180***</td>
<td>-0.242***</td>
<td>-0.537***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00108)</td>
<td>(0.0148)</td>
<td>(0.0364)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered Financial Aid</td>
<td>0.00204**</td>
<td>0.0328**</td>
<td>0.0824**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000979)</td>
<td>(0.0139)</td>
<td>(0.0334)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>-0.0273***</td>
<td>-0.356***</td>
<td>-0.798***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00105)</td>
<td>(0.0144)</td>
<td>(0.0359)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0193*</td>
<td>-2.172***</td>
<td>-4.182***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0105)</td>
<td>(0.145)</td>
<td>(0.357)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F (9, 165597) = 57.98  
\( \chi^2(9) = 452.41 \)  
\( \chi^2(9) = 419.25 \)
on the incidence of withdrawal for juniors and seniors. During the period studied, withdrawal for juniors and seniors is decreasing and the magnitude of the effect is increasing over time since the implementation of the policy. Compared to Fall 2008, the likelihood of withdrawal for juniors and seniors in Fall 2010 was reduced by 41%. In Spring 2010, the semester the policy was announced and publicized, the reduction in the likelihood of withdrawal of 30% was significant at the p<0.01 level. This reduction in the likelihood of withdrawal has continued at an increasing rate over the time of our study, and the results remain significant at the p<0.01 level. Additionally, the 18-unit limit imposed by the policy does not seem to be binding for most students, and the magnitude of the effect suggests that the policy may be only part of the explanation for the drop in withdrawals. And though the decreases in the probability of withdrawal are sizeable, the overall probability of withdrawal for juniors and seniors represents only about 1% of the units enrolled compared to units attempted.

Compared to white students, American Indian and Filipinos students were less likely to withdraw. This may be the result of the smaller number of students, and cohesiveness among these ethnic groups. Blacks, representing 6% of our upper division students, were more likely to withdraw. This is consistent with research by DesJardins et al. (1999) that finds Black students are more likely to withdraw during the third and fourth years of enrollment. Pacific Islanders were also more likely to withdraw, but the numbers are small.

Seniors and students admitted as freshmen were less likely to withdraw. This finding is consistent with the literature which finds that seniors are less likely to
withdraw as graduation approaches. The results for students who enter as freshmen and maintain enrollment provide confirmation of Tinto’s student integration theory. Achieving upper division status for these students suggests a drop in the likelihood of withdrawal over 37%. Transfer students enrolled in their first terms were over 20% less likely to withdraw, which suggests transfer shock was not a factor in withdrawal. Older students were more likely to withdraw, but at a decreasing rate. Part-time students were more likely to withdraw, perhaps evidence of their lack of institutional connection. Students offered financial aid withdrew more frequently than students who were not offered (or did not apply for) financial aid, which could be an indication that financial aid is not keeping up with tuition increases for students who depend on financial aid to finance their education.

Regression results for majors are presented separately in Table 5. They were consistent across all models and are not included in the regression results due to space considerations. Only the majors where differences were significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% level are included here. Our base case major, Criminal Justice, was chosen because this major has the highest student enrollment. Compared to students majoring in Criminal Justice, students majoring in Accounting Information Systems, Art (Teaching), Computer Engineering, Dance, Economics, Finance, French, History, Math, Philosophy, Physics, Recreation Management, and Theatre were more likely to withdraw. There are two possible reasons that the probability of students withdrawing from these majors is higher: 1) Accounting Information Systems, Computer Engineering, Economics, Finance, Math, and Physics could be considered “harder” or
more abstract majors that involve more mathematical concepts; and 2) students may
have difficulty linking the major with a career path, especially in liberal arts majors, for
instance. Students majoring in Interior Design, Nursing, Recreation, Mechanical
Engineering, Parks and Tourism, and Speech Pathology were less likely to withdraw. It
could be that students who choose these majors see a more direct link between the
major and employment after graduation and are better prepared and motivated in these
majors. The likelihood of withdrawal for students majoring in Mechanical Engineering
could be interpreted as an exception, if the major is considered to be one of the abstract
majors requiring stronger math skills.

Table 5. Model 1 Regression Results for Majors

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<tr>
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<th>AISY (+)**</th>
<th>FINC (+)*</th>
<th>MECH (-)***</th>
<th>RPTA (-)*</th>
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<td>SPHP (-)***</td>
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<td>CMPE (+)***</td>
<td>HIST (+)**</td>
<td>PHIL (+)*</td>
<td>THEA (+)***</td>
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<td>INTD (-)***</td>
<td>PHYS (+)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECON (+)***</td>
<td>MATH (+)***</td>
<td>RMGT (+)*</td>
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</table>

+ majors more likely to withdraw/- majors less likely to withdraw

A number of alternative specifications of the regression models for student
withdrawal were explored. For instance, a second specification, using the variable
policy_ind in place of the semester variables, produced very similar results. The
semester fixed effects model is reported here, because it allows us to split up the effect
over time.

Another specification added variables for actual financial aid offered instead of
the binary variable for financial aid, but only showed a significant positive relationship
between loan aid offered and withdrawal among the financial aid variables.
Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to determine if the implementation of Executive Order 1037 is having an effect on withdrawals after census for juniors and seniors attending a public university. Enrollment, demographic, and financial aid data covering ten semesters, beginning in Fall 2008 through Spring 2013, with 165,699 total observations for 45,581 unique students enrolled during the study period, were used to investigate the influence of the executive order on withdrawal rates. Based on our analyses, it would appear that on the Sac State campus the rate of withdrawal for this population of students has decreased from 2% at the beginning of the study period to a rate of 1% of units attempted in recent semesters. This may represent a natural rate of withdrawal. Given that most juniors and seniors do not withdraw, or if they do withdraw, they are not reaching the 18-unit maximum of the policy, results suggest the policy is only partially responsible for this reduction over time. Other factors that significantly affect the probability of withdrawal include admission as a freshman, enrollment intensity, major, ethnicity, and whether financial aid was offered.

One limitation of our research is that cohort data were not used for this research because the intent was to provide an overview of the incidence of withdrawal based on individual students. A comparison of two cohorts, one that was not affected by the policy and another enrolled during the time frame of the policy, was considered and would be an approach for future research.
There are many other factors that play a role in withdrawal that could not be isolated in the data requested. Another limitation of the data is that student characteristics extend beyond the demographic and institutional data available and are impossible to control. For example, a death in the family for Student A might be interpreted as a minor setback and result in no loss of time to degree, while for Student B, the same event might be devastating and result in withdrawal and non-completion. Further study incorporating student survey data is recommended.

Adding course level data might make it possible to capture the impact on students who were unable to enroll in required courses because the seats were filled with students that subsequently withdrew. This might support evidence of a cascading effect, if students are then enrolling in unnecessary courses to meet the full-time enrollment status necessary for maximum financial aid. Assigning a cost to these decisions could be the basis of additional research.

Beyond the scope of the current research is an examination of differences across majors by average grades as a proxy for academic rigor in the major, which could have an effect on withdrawal rates not captured in the current model. Another area for research would focus on student mobility, because it is possible that students withdraw as the result of a mismatch between the University and/or major, and enroll at (and graduate from) other institutions with a better fit for their academic and career goals.

This research took place on a public, four-year state university in one of the largest higher education systems in the United States. Looking at withdrawal data system wide could offer another possible extension of this research.
Juniors and seniors are underrepresented in the literature on student retention, persistence, and graduation. They have a significant investment and fewer options for changing academic course, compared to freshmen and sophomores. On the campus of this public, four-year state university, it is heartening to determine that the withdrawal rate of approximately 1% for juniors and seniors suggests that withdrawal does not represent a major problem in student progress to degree completion. Nevertheless, this research has contributed to the literature by utilizing a unique data set and investigating factors affecting withdrawal beyond the implementation of the policy for this population of college students by examining the effects of this policy intended to improve graduation rates.
Appendix A: The California State University Executive Order 1037

THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the Chancellor

September 8, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: CSU Presidents
FROM: Charles B. Reed
Chancellor
SUBJECT: Grading Symbols, Minimum Standards
Governing the Assignment of Grades,
Policies on the Repetition of Courses,
Policies on Academic Renewal, and
Grade Appeals — Executive Order No. 1037

Attached is a copy of Executive Order No. 1037 including policies on
grading symbols, minimum standards governing the assignment of grades,
academic renewal, and grade appeals; modifications to the policies on
course withdrawals; and new policies on the repetition of courses.

Consolidating policies that were earlier detailed in three executive orders
(792, 320, and 213), the new executive order is designed to facilitate a
student’s graduation through changes in policies on course withdrawals
and course repeats.

In accordance with policy of the California State University, the campus
president has the responsibility for implementing executive orders where
applicable and for maintaining the campus repository and index for all
executive orders.

If you have questions regarding this executive order, please call Dr. James
Blackburn, Director of Enrollment Management Services at 562-951-
4726, or Dr. Lorie Roth, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Programs,
at 562-951-4779.

CBR/mw

Attachment

cc: Executive Staff, Office of the Chancellor
    Provosts/Vice Presidents, Academic Affairs
    Vice Presidents, Student Affairs
Executive Order No. 1037

THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the Chancellor
401 Golden Shore
Long Beach, California 90802-4210
(562) 951-4726

Executive Order: 1037
Effective Date: August 1, 2009
Supersedes: Executive Order Nos. 792, 320, and 213
Title: Grading Symbols, Minimum Standards
Governing the Assignment of Grades,
Policies on the Repetition of Courses,
Policies on Academic Renewal, and Grade Appeals

This executive order is issued pursuant to Sections 40104 and 40104.1 of Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations and Chapter III, Sections 1 and 2 of the Standing Orders of the Board of Trustees of The California State University and is effective with the Fall 2009 academic term (semester or quarter).

This executive order establishes administrative grading symbols, minimum standards governing the assignment of grades, policies on the repetition of courses, policies on academic renewal, and provisions for appeal to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students are properly recognized and protected.

A. Administrative Grading Symbols

The administrative grading symbols AU, I, IC, RD, RP, W, and WU along with the definitions, rules, and procedures governing their application shall be utilized as circumstances require on all California State University campuses. Use of the symbols AU and RD are optional with each campus, except that where utilized, the definition and circumstances of application shall be as provided herein. No other grading symbols except the traditional grades of A, B, C, D, or F; or the non-traditional grades of A, B, C, NC; or CR-NC (where specifically authorized) shall be employed without the express prior approval of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer. To the extent permitted by Section 40104.1 of Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, each campus may use plus and minus designations in combination with traditional letter grades of A, B, C, and D.

1. AU (Audit). The following catalog statement reflects the minimum requirements for enrollment as an auditor. Authority to permit enrollment in this status rests with each campus. When audit status is permitted, students may not change from credit to audit
later than the census date for the term for which the student is enrolled in the course for which such grades are to be awarded. If enrollment as an auditor is permitted, the following statement together with any further campus requirements shall appear in the campus catalog:

Enrollment as an auditor is subject to permission of the instructor provided that enrollment in a course as an auditor shall be permitted only after students otherwise eligible to enroll on a credit basis have had an opportunity to do so. Auditors are subject to the same fee structure as credit students and regular class attendance is expected. Once enrolled as an auditor, a student may not change to credit status unless such a change is requested no later than the last day to add classes in that term. A student who is enrolled for credit may not change to audit after the _____ week of instruction. (Insert appropriate number for campus.)

2. I (Incomplete Authorized). The “I” symbol shall be used only when the faculty member concludes that a clearly identifiable portion of course requirements cannot be met within the academic term for unforeseen reasons. An Incomplete shall not be assigned when it is necessary for the student to attend a major portion of the class when it is next offered. An Incomplete is also prohibited where the normal practice requires extension of course requirements beyond the close of a term, e.g., thesis or project type courses. In such cases, use of the “RP” symbol is required. The conditions for removal of the Incomplete shall be reduced to writing by the instructor and given to the student with a copy placed on file with the appropriate campus officer until the Incomplete is removed or the time limit for removal has passed.

A student may not re-enroll in a course for which he or she has received an “I” until that “I” has been converted to a grade other than “I”; e.g., A-F, IC.

An Incomplete shall be converted to the appropriate grade or symbol within one year following the end of the term during which it was assigned provided, however, an extension of the one-year time limit may be granted by petition for contingencies such as intervening military service and serious health or personal problems. Where campus policy requires assignment of final grades on the basis of numerous demonstrations of competency by the student, it may be appropriate for a faculty member to submit a letter grade to be assigned in the event the Incomplete is not made up within one year. If the Incomplete is not converted to a credit-bearing grade within the prescribed time limit, or any extension thereof, it shall be counted as a failing grade in calculating grade point average and progress points unless the faculty member has assigned another grade in accordance with campus policy.

The following statement shall appear in the campus catalog:

The symbol “I” (Incomplete Authorized) indicates that a portion of required course work has not been completed and evaluated in the prescribed time period due to unforeseen, but fully justified, reasons and that there is still a possibility of
Executive Order No. 1037

earning credit. It is the responsibility of the student to bring pertinent information
to the attention of the instructor and to determine from the instructor the
remaining course requirements which must be satisfied to remove the Incomplete.
A final grade is assigned when the work agreed upon has been completed and
evaluated.

An "I" must normally be made up within one calendar year immediately
following the end of the term during which it was assigned.

This limitation prevails whether or not the student maintains continuous
enrollment. Failure to complete the assigned work will result in an "I" being
converted to an "IC" symbol, unless the faculty member assigns a specific letter
grade at the time the Incomplete is assigned, which would replace the "I" in the
student's record after the calendar year deadline.

3. IC (Incomplete Charged). The "IC" symbol may be used when a student who
received an authorized incomplete "I" has not completed the required course work within
the allowed time limit. The "IC" replaces the "I" and is counted as a failing grade for
grade point average and progress point computation.

4. RD (Report Delayed). The "RD" symbol may be used where a delay in the reporting
of a grade is due to circumstances beyond the control of the student. The symbol may be
assigned by the registrar only and, if assigned, shall be replaced by a substantive grading
symbol as soon as possible. An "RD" shall not be used in calculating grade point
average or progress points. Although no catalog statement is required, whenever the
symbol is employed, an explanatory note shall be included in the transcript legend. The
registrar shall notify both the instructor of record and the department chair within two
weeks of the assignment of RD grades.

5. RP (Report in Progress). The "RP" symbol shall be used in connection with thesis,
project, and similar courses in which assigned work frequently extends beyond a single
academic term and may include enrollment in more than one term. The "RP" symbol
shall be replaced with the appropriate final grade within one year of its assignment except
for master's thesis enrollment, in which case the time limit shall be established by the
appropriate campus authority. The president or designee may authorize extension of
established time limits.

The following statement shall appear in the campus catalog:

The "RP" symbol is used in connection with courses that extend beyond
one academic term. It indicates that work is in progress but that
assignment of a final grade must await completion of additional work.
Work is to be completed within one year except for graduate degree
theses. (Insert campus statement describing the time limit for theses.)
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6. **W (Withdrawal).** Withdrawal from a course (or courses) may be permitted, without restriction or penalty, during a time period established by the campus. However, this time period shall not extend beyond the census date. No symbol need be recorded in such instances. In connection with all other approved withdrawals, the “W” symbol shall be used.

6.a. Undergraduate students may withdraw from no more than 18 semester-units (27 quarter-units).

6.b. Campuses may elect to be more restrictive on withdrawals than the maxima listed above.

6.c. The limits apply only to units attempted at the campus.

6.d. Withdrawals after the census date and prior to the last twenty percent of instruction may be assigned only for serious and compelling reasons. Permission to withdraw during this time shall be granted only with the approval of the instructor and the department chair and/or dean as described by campus policy. All requests to withdraw under these circumstances and all approvals shall be documented as prescribed by the campus. The requests and approvals shall state the reasons for the withdrawal. Records of such approvals shall be maintained in accordance with the campus record retention policy.

6.e. Withdrawals shall not be permitted during the final twenty percent of instruction except in cases, such as accident or serious illness, where the cause of withdrawal is due to circumstances clearly beyond the student’s control and the assignment of an Incomplete is not practicable. Withdrawals of this sort may involve total withdrawal from the campus or may involve only one course, except that course grade and credit or an Incomplete may be assigned for courses in which sufficient work has been completed to permit an evaluation to be made. Requests for permission to withdraw under these circumstances shall be handled and filed as indicated in the preceding paragraph, except that such requests must also be approved by the academic administrator appointed by the president to act in such matters. Such withdrawals will not count against maximums provided for in 6.a.

A “W” shall not be used in calculating grade point average or progress points.

The following statement shall appear in the campus catalog:

The symbol “W” indicates that the student was permitted to withdraw from the course after the _____ (day/week) of instruction with the approval of the instructor and appropriate campus officials. It carries no connotation of quality of student performance and is not used in calculating grade point average or progress points.
In addition to this statement, the campus catalog shall include a description of the procedures to be followed in withdrawing from a class or from the campus. Such procedures shall be consistent with all applicable provisions of this executive order.

6.f. WU (Withdrawal Unauthorized). The symbol “WU” shall be used where a student, who is enrolled on the census date, does not officially withdraw from a course but fails to complete it. Its most common use is in those instances where a student has not completed sufficient course assignments or participated in sufficient course activity to make it possible, in the opinion of the instructor, to report satisfactory or unsatisfactory completion of the class by use of the letter grade (A-F). The instructor shall report the last known date of attendance by the student. The symbol “WU” shall be identified as a failing grade in the transcript legend and shall be counted as units attempted but not passed in computing the grade point average. In courses which are graded Credit/No Credit or in cases where the student has elected Credit/No Credit evaluation, use of the symbol “WU” is inappropriate and “NC” shall be used instead. The following statement shall appear in the campus catalog:

The symbol “WU” indicates that an enrolled student did not withdraw from the course and also failed to complete course requirements. It is used when, in the opinion of the instructor, completed assignments or course activities or both were insufficient to make normal evaluation of academic performance possible. For purposes of grade point average and progress point computation this symbol is equivalent to an “F.”

If local campus policy prescribes other instances where this symbol may be used, the foregoing statement shall be extended to cover such instances.

B. Repetition of Courses

1. Undergraduate students may repeat courses only if they earned grades lower than a C.

2. Course Repeats with “Grade Forgiveness” (Grade forgiveness is the circumstance in which the new grade replaces the former grade in terms of the calculation of GPA, etc.):

2.a. Undergraduate students may repeat up to 16 semester-units (24 quarter-units) with grade forgiveness.

2.b. Undergraduate students may repeat an individual course for grade forgiveness no more than two times.
2.c. Grade forgiveness shall not be applicable to courses for which the original grade was the result of a finding of academic dishonesty.

3. Course Repeats with “Grades Averaged”:

Campuses may permit undergraduate students to repeat an additional 12 semester-units (18 quarter-units), i.e., units in addition to the 16 semester-units (24 quarter-units) for which grade "replacement" is permitted. In such instances the repeat grade shall not replace the original grade; instead both grades shall be calculated into the student's overall grade-point average.

4. Campuses may elect to be more restrictive on course repeats than the maxima listed above.

5. The limits apply only to units completed at the campus.

C. Academic Renewal

1. Under certain circumstances, a campus of the university may disregard up to two semester or three quarters of previous undergraduate coursework taken at any institution from all considerations associated with the requirements for a baccalaureate degree.

These circumstances are:

1.a. The student has formally requested such action and presented evidence that substantiates that the work in question is substandard and not representative of her/his current scholastic ability and/or performance level, and

1.b. The previous level of performance was due to extenuating circumstances, and

1.c. All degree requirements except the earning of at least a “C” (2.0) grade point average have or will soon have been met.

University policy regarding academic renewal is not intended to permit the improvement of a student's grade point average beyond what is required for graduation.

2. Final determination, that one or more terms shall be disregarded, shall be based on careful review of evidence by a committee appointed by the president, which shall include the designee of the chief academic officer and consist of at least three members.

Such final determination shall be made only when:
2.a. Five years have elapsed since the most recent work to be disregarded was completed, and

2.b. The student has earned in residence at the campus since the most recent work being considered was completed:

2.b.i. 15 semester (22 quarter) units with at least a 3.0 GPA or
2.b.ii 30 semester (45 quarter) units with at least a 2.5 GPA or
2.b.iii 45 semester (67 quarter) units with at least a 2.0 GPA

When such action is taken, the student’s record shall be annotated so that it is readily evident to users of the record, that NO work taken during the disregarded term(s), even if satisfactory, has been applied towards the meeting of degree requirements. However, all work must remain legible on the record.

If another institution has acted to remove coursework from consideration, such action shall be honored in terms of that institution’s policy. But, elimination of any coursework’s consideration shall reduce by one term the two semester/three quarter maximum on the application of academic renewal to an individual CSU student’s record. Campuses may adopt more stringent policies with regard to academic renewal, but no more lenient policy maybe used regarding the removal of coursework being considered for the meeting of baccalaureate degree requirements.

D. Assignment of Grades and Grade Appeals

The following principles support the minimum standards governing the assignment of grades and provisions for appeals:

1. Faculty have the sole right and responsibility to provide careful evaluation and timely assignment of appropriate grades. (Administrative grading symbols may be assigned only in accordance with the provisions of this executive order.)

2. There is a presumption that grades assigned are correct. It is the responsibility of anyone appealing an assigned grade to demonstrate otherwise.

3. In the absence of compelling reasons, such as instructor or clerical error, prejudice or capriciousness, the grade assigned by the instructor of record is to be considered final.

4. Students who believe that an appropriate grade has not been assigned should first seek to resolve the matter informally with the instructor of record. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, the student may present his/her case to
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the appropriate campus entity, have it reviewed and, where justified, receive a grade correction.

5. If the instructor of record does not assign a grade, or if he/she does not change an assigned grade when the necessity to do so has been established by appropriate campus procedures, it is the responsibility of other qualified faculty to do so.

6. “Qualified faculty” means one or more persons with academic training comparable to the instructor of record who are presently on the faculty at that campus.

7. Each campus faculty senate has authority and responsibility for providing policy and procedures for the proper implementation of the foregoing principles.

8. Each campus president is responsible for ensuring that the policies and procedures developed by the faculty senate are in conformance with the principles and provisions of this executive order and for ensuring that such established policies and procedures are carried out.

Each campus shall implement policy and procedures covering the assignment of grades and grade appeals which include at least the following provisions:

1. The time and manner of reporting course grades including provisions for assuring that such grades have been assigned by the instructor of record.

2. Circumstances under which the instructor of record may change a grade once assigned, and procedures for making such changes.

3. A means for preliminary review of potential appeals that may resolve differences before initiation of formal proceedings.

4. Grounds for which a grade appeal is permitted.

5. One or more committees for hearing grade appeals which shall provide safeguards to assure due process for both student and instructor. Such committees shall include student membership. Student members shall not participate in assignment of grades.

6. Procedures whereby grades are assigned by other qualified faculty in circumstances where the instructor of record does not do so, including those instances where a grade change is recommended by a grade appeals committee and the instructor of record does not carry out that recommendation.
Executive Order No. 1037

7. Specification of time limits for completion of various steps in the appeal process and of the time period during which an appeal may be brought.

8. Description of the extent of the authority of appeal committee(s), including provisions which clearly limit grade changes to instances where there is a finding that the grade was improperly assigned.

9. Limitation of committee authority to actions which are consistent with other campus and system policy.

10. A statement that there is a presumption that grades assigned are correct. Thus, the burden of proof rests with the individual who is appealing.

11. Procedures for dealing with allegations of improper procedure.

12. Assignment of authority to revise policies and procedures for grade appeals to the campus faculty senate. The campus president is responsible for ensuring that such revisions conform to the principles and provisions of this executive order.

13. Provision for annual reporting to the campus president and campus faculty senate on the number and disposition of cases heard.

These policies and related procedures shall be published in a manner that ensures that all faculty and students have an opportunity to be aware of them (in class schedules, faculty manuals, student handbooks, etc.). While it is not necessary that policy and procedures be published in their entirety in generally circulated documents, such publications shall ensure that the students are aware that policy and procedures exist and where they may be obtained.

Charles B. Reed, Chancellor

Dated:
References


