



U N I V E R S I T Y O F
SOUTH CAROLINA[®]
A I K E N

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FIRST PACE PROGRAM

Study conducted in Spring 2008

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Executive Summary

This study investigates patterns of academic performance and institutional retention among two freshmen cohorts (2006 and 2007) in an effort to determine if participants in the First Pace Program perform comparable to their peers who have not participated in the program on several demographic factors and measures of semester hours attempted, semester hours earned, GPA, and Persistence. Major findings include:

- Relatively, First Pace students are twice as likely to be part-time students than are non-participants, and are much more likely to be male students than what one would expect based upon the gender distributions of the non-participant cohorts.
- First Pace students consistently attempt (approximately 1 hour) and earn (approximately 5.35 hours) fewer semester hours than non-participants.
- Similar to findings that led to the development of the First Pace bridge program, First Pace students are almost twice as likely to have a first semester GPA below 2.0 as non-participants.
- First Pace students do however perform comparable to freshmen who do not participate in the program when SAT scores and grades in core high school classes are controlled for. There was no evidence of a statistical difference between the two groups and the pattern of semester GPA and USC GPA across semesters relative to their predicted GPA is the same for both groups.
- The retention rate (first year to second year persistence) is 72.2% for First Pace students compared to 66.0% for freshmen who did not participate in the program but this “advantage” disappears by the start of the 4th semester (Spring 08). Relative to non-participants, attrition of First Pace students seems to occur more between semesters as opposed to within a semester. Because this finding is based upon only one cohort of data, it will have to be tracked over a couple of years to determine if this is a reliable finding.

Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness examined the academic success of students who participated in the First Pace Program. This summer bridge program, initiated in 2006, was designed to assist students who may be under-prepared for college work to make a smooth transition from high school to USC Aiken. The program was developed and proposed by the Freshman Admissions Action Team of the Enrollment Planning Team (PTE) in 2005. Data from Fall 2000 to 2003 were examined in the development of the program. Those data indicated that from 2000-2003, 11-15% of the entering freshmen at Aiken were students who had graduated in the bottom 40% of their high school class. This group of students was found to be twice as likely to earn a USCA Fall GPA under 2.0 as were students who had finished in the top 60% of their graduating class. In an effort to lower their risk of poor college performance and attrition, the First Pace program was designed for freshmen who had finished in the bottom half of their high school class.

In 2006, the program was offered to 174 students and 18 (10.3%) chose to participate. Out of the 18 students who participated, 13 (72.2%) successfully completed the program; 5 students had grades below a C. Because the program was a pilot, no admissions decisions were tied to performance and all 18 participants subsequently enrolled for the Fall 2006 semester. The Faculty Assembly voted in favor of expanding the program in the Fall of 2006 in conjunction with the creation of a provisional admissions option. The new policy required that all students provisionally admitted would have to participate in the program beginning in 2007. In 2007, 32 of the 38 participants successfully completed the program.

In this study, the two cohorts (2006 and 2007) that have completed the program have been tracked to determine if the First Pace Program has been effective in assisting participants to perform comparable to their peers who have not participated in the program. Several measures have been examined to assess the effectiveness of the program, including: semester hours attempted, semester hours earned, GPA, and persistence.

Demographics

The demographic makeup of the 2006 and 2007 First Pace cohorts in terms of gender, part-time/full-time status in their first semester, and ethnicity/race relative to the entering freshmen classes is presented in Table 1.

These data indicate the likelihood of a First Pace student enrolling as a part-time student is approximately double that of the freshman cohort across both years. As well, the likelihood of a First Pace student being male is greater than what one would expect based solely upon the distribution of gender within the freshman cohorts. Race and ethnicity do not appear to be significant factors in determining First Pace participants; the relative distribution of the racial profile is comparable for First Pace participants and the Freshman cohorts.

	Fall 2006 Freshman Cohort		Fall 2007 Freshman Cohort	
	Total Freshman Class	First Pace Students	Total Freshman Class	First Pace Students
Full-time	622 (92.3%)	15 (83.3%)	584 (93.3%)	28 (87.5%)
Part-time	52 (7.7%)	3 (16.7%)	42 (6.7%)	4 (12.5%)
Total	674	18	626	32
Gender				
Male	239 (35.5%)	11 (61.1%)	216 (34.5%)	18 (56.2%)
Female	435 (64.5%)	7 (38.9%)	410 (65.5%)	14 (43.8%)
Ethnicity / Race				
Non-resident	6 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Black non-Hispanic	191 (28.3%)	2 (11.1%)	166 (26.5%)	8 (25.0%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	3 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	10 (1.5%)	1 (5.6%)	10 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Hispanic	14 (2.1%)	3 (16.7%)	11 (1.8%)	1 (3.1%)
White non-Hispanic	423 (62.8%)	12 (66.7%)	393 (62.8%)	15 (46.9%)
Race/ethnicity unknown	27 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (6.4%)	8 (25.0%)

Table 2 shows the academic characteristics of the 2006 and 2007 cohorts in terms of class ranking broken out into participants and nonparticipants of the First Pace program. In its pilot year (2006 cohort), the First Pace participants were ranked in the middle half of their high school class (i.e., between the 25th and 75th percentile). In the 2007 cohort, the relative high school ranking of the participants shifted to the bottom 60%, in accordance with the adoption of the provisional admissions' policy.

High School Deciles	Fall 2006 Freshman Cohort		Fall 2007 Freshman Cohort	
	Non-Participants	First Pace Students	Non-Participants	First Pace Students
(top of class) 1	96 (14.6%)	0 (0.0%)	81 (13.6%)	0 (0.0%)
2	138 (21.0%)	0 (0.0%)	99 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
3	133 (20.3%)	1 (5.6%)	212 (35.7%)	0 (0.0%)
4	102 (15.5%)	2 (11.1%)	106 (17.8%)	0 (0.0%)
5	67 (10.2%)	4 (22.2%)	36 (6.1%)	10 (31.3%)
6	55 (8.4%)	7 (38.9%)	13 (2.2%)	16 (50.0%)
7	22 (3.4%)	3 (16.7%)	5 (0.8%)	3 (9.4%)
8	9 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.2%)	2 (6.3%)
9	6 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)
(bottom of class) 10	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.1%)
Unknown (blank)	27 (4.1%)	1 (5.6%)	40 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	656 (100%)	18 (100%)	594 (100%)	32 (100%)

Analysis of Semester hours attempted and Earned

An analysis of the semester hours attempted indicates that on average, First Pace students attempt approximately 1 semester hour less than their non-participant colleagues. As well, they earn on average 5.35 hours less than nonparticipants; across cohorts and semesters, First Pace students have an 87.9% completion rate, while non-participants have a 93.25% completion rate. While this finding merits monitoring, the finding should be viewed cautiously due to the variability across semesters.

Cohort Year	Measure	First Pace Students	Non Participants	Total
2006	Number in Cohort	18	656	674
	Average hours attempted Fall 06	12.39	13.99	13.95
	Average hours earned in Fall 06	11.82 (95.4%)	13.15 (94.0%)	13.12 (94.1%)
	Average hours attempted in Spring 07	12.65	13.98	13.94
	Average hours earned in Spring 07	11.41 (90.2%)	12.75 (91.2%)	12.71 (91.2%)
	Average hours attempted in Fall 07	12.92	13.83	13.80
2007	Average hours earned in Fall 07	11.15 (86.3%)	13.09 (94.6%)	13.04 (94.5%)
	Number in Cohort	32	594	626
	Average hour attempted in Fall 07	13.63	14.17	14.14
	Average hours earned in Fall 07	10.87 (79.8%)	13.21 (93.2%)	13.09 (92.6%)

Analysis of Grade Point Average

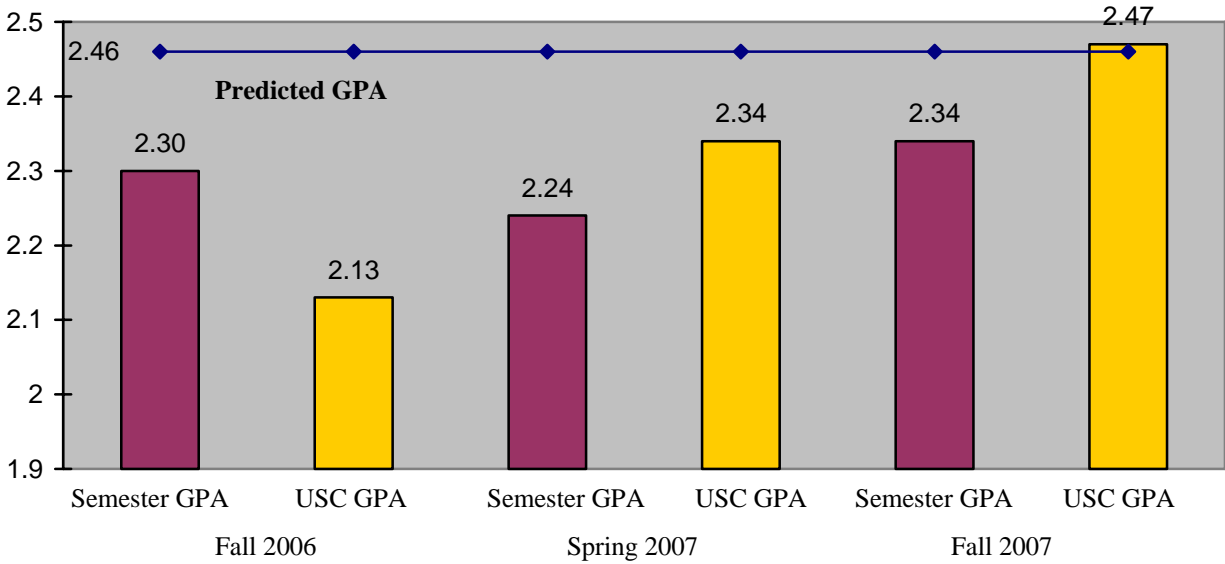
Overall, students in the First Pace Program have a lower predicted GPA than do students who are non-participants. This is not surprising, given that the program was specifically designed for students who for various reasons may be under prepared for college. For the 2006 cohort, the predicted GPA for nonparticipants was on average 2.75, while the predicted GPA for participants was on average 2.46. Similarly, for the 2007 cohort, the predicted GPA for nonparticipants was on average 2.75, while the predicted GPA for participants was on average 2.26.

Table 4 shows the percentage of First Pace and non-participating students in each cohort who had a semester GPA below 2.0 at the end of their first semester. The findings are reminiscent of those discovered during the development of the program. First Pace students are still twice as likely to earn a USCA Fall GPA under 2.0 as are students who do not participate in the program.

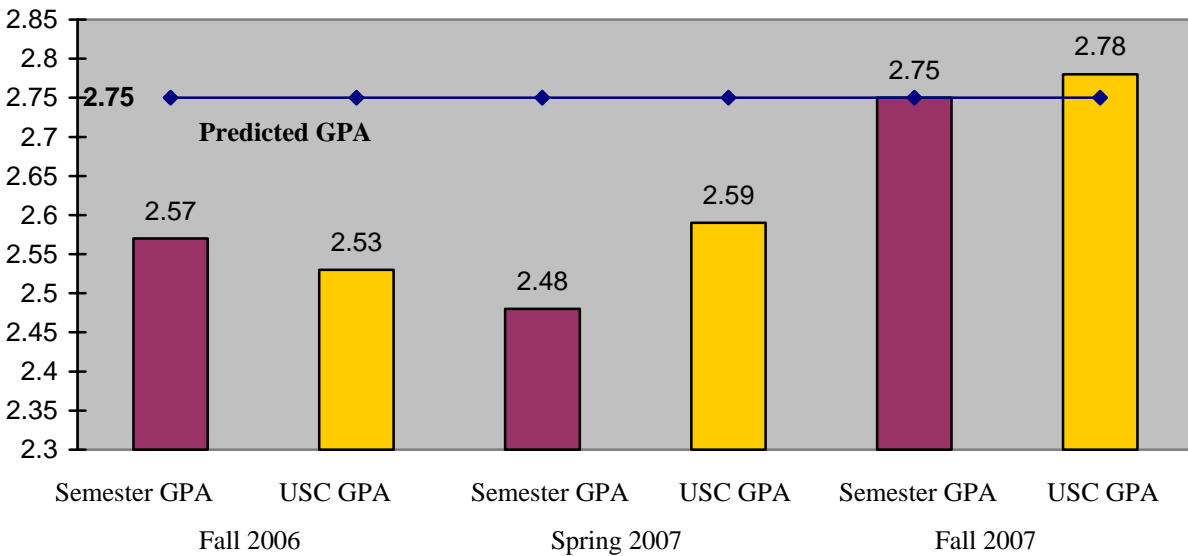
GPA	Fall 2006 Freshman Cohort		Fall 2007 Freshman Cohort	
	Non-Participants	First Pace Students	Non-Participants	First Pace Students
< 2.0	23.2%	41.2%	21.1%	50.0%
2.0 or above	76.8%	58.8%	78.8%	50.0%

After controlling for SAT scores and grades in core high school courses, the First Pace Students are found to perform comparable to freshmen who do not participate in the program. Although the data for the 2006 cohort indicates a small short-term advantage for the program participants than nonparticipants relative to their predicted GPA's, this advantage is neither seen in later semesters nor in the 2007 cohort. For both participants and nonparticipants the pattern is the same, there is a slow and steady increase in the overall USC GPA toward the predicted GPA, which is reached by the third semester. The semester GPA drops slightly from the first to second semester before rising toward the predicted GPA for both the First Pace participants and freshmen who did not participate in the program.

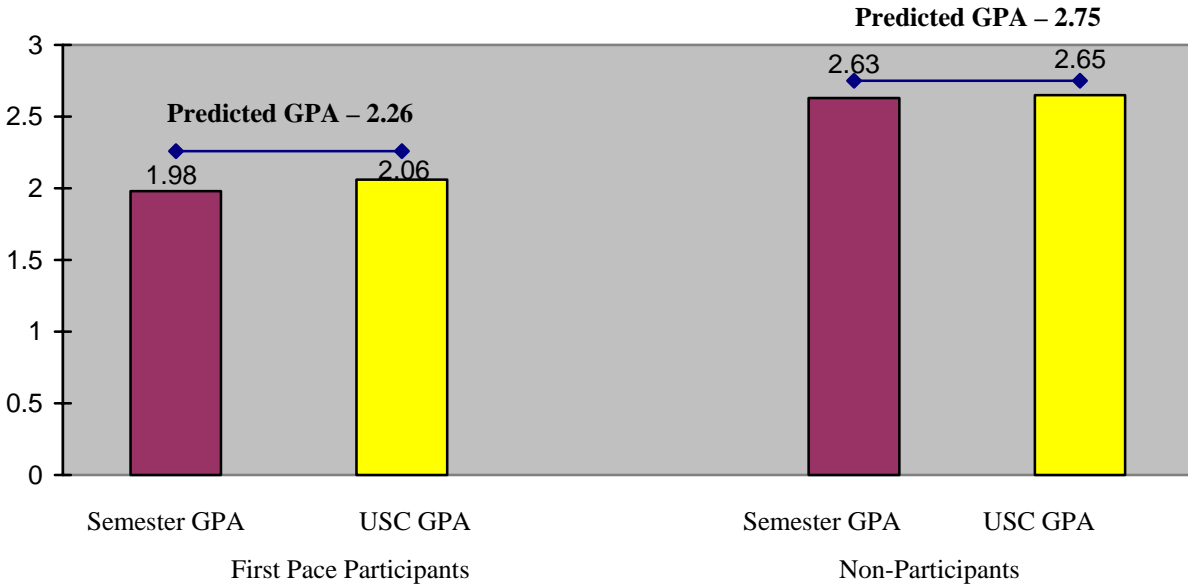
2006 Cohort: First Pace Participants' GPA



2006 Cohort: Non-Participants' GPA



2007 Cohort: Participants' and Non Participants' Fall 2007 GPA



Analysis of Persistence

An analysis of persistence data indicate that there is a slightly higher rate of attrition from the time of admittance until the first full fall semester of enrollment (See Table 5) for First Pace students. The retention rate (i.e., persistence from the first to second year) is larger for students who participated in the First Pace Program (72.2%) compared to freshmen who did not participate in the program (66.0%), but this disappears by the start of the 4th semester (Spring 08). These initial findings would suggest that the program has a positive effect on retention, and that further research on additional students in future years is needed to confirm the extent of this effect with some reliability. These early findings seem to indicate that compared to non-participants, First Pace students are more likely to complete a semester in which they have enrolled; attrition of First Pace students seems to occur between semesters as opposed to within a semester.

Cohort Year	Measure	First Pace Students	Non Participants	Total
2006	Number in Cohort (Admitted students)	18	656	674
	Number (%) that completed Fall 06	17 (94.4%)	634 (96.6%)	651 (96.5%)
	Number (%) enrolled in Spring 07	17 (94.4%)	583 (88.9%)	600 (89.0%)
	Number (%) that completed Spring 07	17 (94.4%)	576 (87.8%)	593 (88.0%)
	Number (%) enrolled in Fall 07	13 (72.2%)	433 (66.0%)	446 (66.2%)
	Number (%) that completed Fall 07	13 (72.2%)	427 (65.1%)	440 (65.3%)
2007	Number (%) enrolled in Spring 08	10 (55.6%)	410 (62.5%)	420 (62.3%)
	Number in Cohort (Admitted students)	32	594	626
	Number (%) that completed Fall 07	30 (93.8%)	576 (97.0%)	606 (96.8%)
	Number (%) enrolled in Spring 08	27 (84.4%)	526 (88.6%)	553 (88.3%)