

Methodology: The EAB Data Science Team conducted an observational analysis of the academic record data of nearly 1.3 million freshmen from 137 colleges and universities representing a broad array of American public and private institutions. The analysis cohort included all full-time freshmen who started college at these institutions between summer 2011 and spring 2016; neither part-time nor transfer students were included in the analysis cohort. Only regularly-scheduled terms were included in the calculation of average credits per term during freshmen year; e.g., credits taken during summer terms were excluded. Likewise, any AP credits a student may have brought with them to college were excluded. Of the nearly 1.3 million full-time freshmen included, 56% enrolled in at least 15 credits per term on average during their freshman year, while the remaining 44% enrolled in between 12 and (just under) 15 credits. Four different outcomes for these freshmen were considered: retention to the sophomore year, end of freshmen year GPA, credits taken per term in subsequent years, and, in the case of students who began between summer 2011 and spring 2012, graduation within four years. The mean average of these outcomes were measured for various subgroups of students, defined by their: average number of credits enrolled in per term during their freshmen year, cumulative high school GPA, and, for a small subset of these student, whether they were Pell recipients. (The cohort of the Pell analysis was limited to the roughly 18,000 freshmen from six private institutions that Pell data was available for. Four thousand of these freshmen were Pell recipients and fourteen thousand were not.)