

Academic Mentor Program Assessment 2014: Results

Executive Summary

The Academic Mentor Program (AMP), coordinated by the Office of Residence Life, is designed to support first-year students who are on academic probation. The program is open to any first year student who is on academic probation (i.e., GPA is below a 2.0) after his/her first semester at JMU. Students participate in the program on a voluntary basis. All students who are on probation receive an email invitation to participate from Academic Affairs.

Academic Mentors are experienced JMU students who have received training and information about setting academic goals, time management, note taking, exam preparation and learning styles. Each academic mentor is paired with 2-5 mentees. The mentors conduct several small group and individual meetings to help first year students plan their strategies for academic success. All Academic Mentors are well informed about university policies and services, and thus can assist mentees in identifying and seeking any additional support they may need. Each mentor is required to spend at least 4 hours interacting with their mentee during spring semester, and two of these hours must be in person. They are also required to engage in four activities over the semester with their mentee: goal setting, learning styles assessment, time management activity, and using the GPA calculator. The mentor is to act as a resource as well as a support person for the student. If a strong connection is made between mentor and mentee, more contact hours may occur.

The current objectives of the program focus on students' GPA. Specifically, the goal is that students who participate in the program will increase their GPA and move off academic probation. There is an expectation that students who participate in the AMP will experience greater improvement in GPA, and a greater percentage of them will move to good standing (i.e., not on academic probation) when compared to students who did not participate. JMU classifies a student as being in academic good standing if their GPA is greater than or equal to 2.0. This report compares the students who participated in the program to those that were invited but chose not to participate. We compared the percentages of GPA increase, magnitude of GPA increase, and number who moved off academic probation. It should also be noted that freshmen on academic probation receive no extra support beyond the opportunity to engage in the AMP.

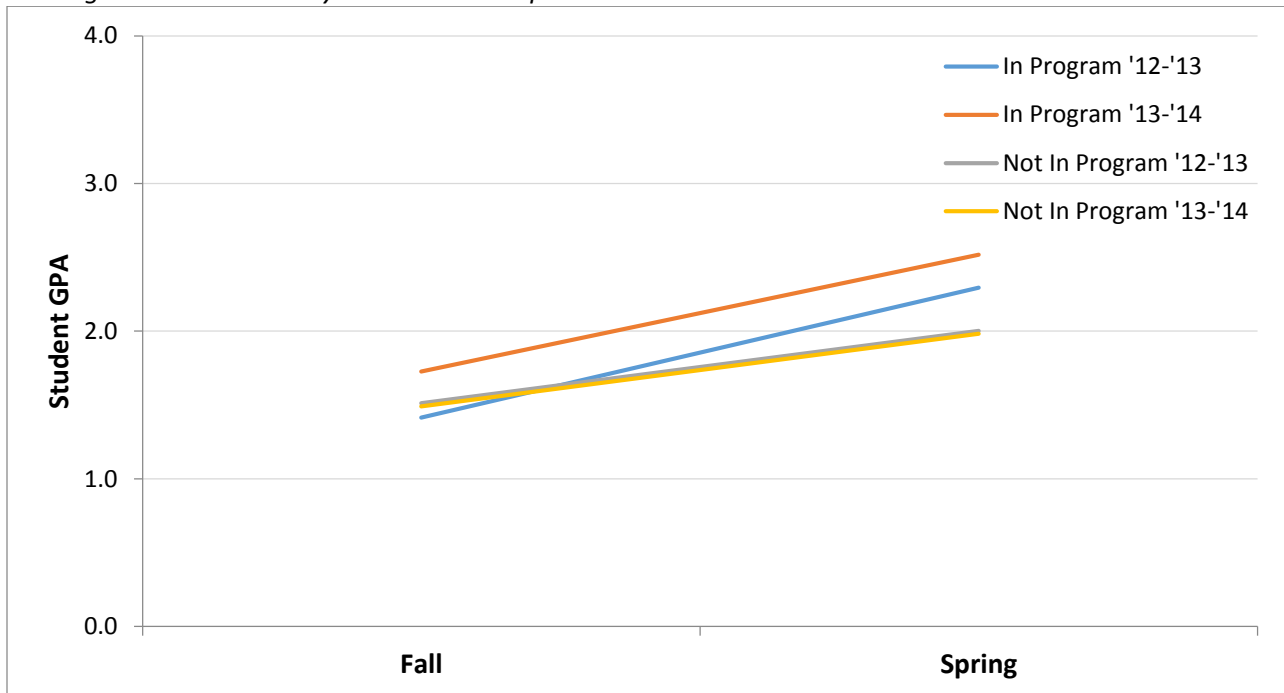
In addition to these objectives regarding GPA, program coordinators were also interested in mentor and mentee reports of their experience in the program. To better understand what mentees felt they were gaining from participation in the program, they were given an attitudinal survey in Qualtrics before and after the program. Students were asked to rate their attitudes on a number of questions concerned with perceived support, confidence, expectancy regarding academic performance, and valuation of classes. In addition, three open-ended questions were included. As in past years, mentors were required to log every interaction with their mentee, provide a summary, and provide their thoughts. This data was used to understand what components of the program stood out to mentees and mentors, and also to determine whether mentors and mentees met for the required minimum amount of time.

Results

Descriptive differences were observed between students who participated and those who did not. It was found that 83% of students who participated in the AMP moved off of probation compared to 42% of students who did not participate in the program. In addition, students who participated in the AMP increased their GPA by an average of 0.79 points whereas student who did not participate increased their GPA by 0.49 points. Figure 1 (below) shows the increase in GPA over time for students

who were and were not in the program. On average, students participating in AMP had higher GPA's than students who did not participate in the program; the large effect sizes in Table 1 indicate that the differences from fall to spring were sizable, and were larger for participants than non-participants. The percentage of students moving off academic probation was significantly different for participants versus non-participants $\chi^2(1)=5.433, p =.025$. Many factors may influence GPA for a given semester, however (e.g. class difficulty, overlap with major), and some concerns may also exist since students self-select into the program. Given these limitations, causal inferences about program impact are limited.

Figure 1. Mean GPA by Year and Participation Status



*Note: Difference in Fall 2012 vs. Fall 2013 GPA for "In Program" participants is statistically significant, with Fall 2013 GPA being higher.

Table 1.
Comparative Statistics for GPA by Year and Program Status

		Fall GPA			Spring GPA			Cohen's <i>D</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
In Program	2013	1.41	0.49	33	2.29	0.75	33	1.39
	2014	1.73	0.25	23	2.52	0.68	23	1.54
Not In Program	2013	1.51	0.46	269	2.00	0.89	269	0.69
	2014	1.49	0.49	271	1.98	0.91	270	0.68

When comparing GPAs of participants and non-participants across years (i.e., Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 and Spring 2012 to Spring 2013 – see Figure 1), program participants in Fall 2013 (the current year) had significantly higher GPAs than program participants in Fall 2012; however, there was no difference in the Spring GPAs year-to-year for either participants or non-participants. This indicates that the program may be functioning fairly stably from year to year in terms of increasing students' GPAs.

Although there was an overall, significant increase in GPA across semesters, the interaction between semester and program affiliation did not significantly affect GPA this year, unlike last year. This

means that the magnitude of the semester-to-semester GPA increase was not larger for those who participated in the program versus those who did not. Thus, Objective 1.2 was not met this year. As always, outside factors influencing GPA must be taken into consideration, and thus it is not possible to make direct causal statements regarding the program's influence on GPA.

An attitudinal survey, expanded to include two new subscales this year, was administered in January and April to program participants. Results indicate that participants tended to report non-significantly higher feelings of support in April than in January. While these differences were not statistically significant, they were moderately practically significant with medium effect sizes. See Table 2 for pre/post averages for each subscale. The responses to the open-ended questions on the attitudinal survey provided more information about how the program influenced the mentees. Qualitative data indicate that mentees and mentors felt that the personal relationship, along with gaining skills such as goal setting and studying were most helpful.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics for Attitudinal Measures: Program Participants

Value	January (n=20)				April (n=20)			
	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max
Expectancy	26.85	3.38	21	32	26.55	3.38	19	32
Support	25.85	3.86	20	32	26.40	3.65	21	32
	38.20	7.24	26	48	41.55	5.20	34	48

**This table includes all students who participated in the mentorship program and completed both the pre-survey and the post-survey.*

A final area of interest is whether mentors and mentees meet for the minimum number of hours each semester. The program's directors have determined that 4 hours throughout the semester should be a sufficient amount of time to address all the goals of the program and ensure that it is implemented correctly. Unfortunately, as in past years, there has been some difficulty getting mentors to meet with their mentees for the required time. This year, 50% of mentor/mentee pairs met for the minimum time, which is higher than last year but could still use improvement.

Recap of Main Findings

1. Objectives 1.1 and 1.3 were both met this year, unlike last year. That is, a significantly higher percentage of participants moved off of academic probation than non-participants, and significantly more participants saw a general increase in GPA than non-participants.
2. Objective 1.2 was not met this year, unlike last year. That is, GPA did not statistically differ according to participation from fall to spring. Possible reasons for this can be seen in the Full Report.
3. The attitudinal survey indicated that program participants tend to report an increased sense of support after completing the program, although this difference was not statistically significant. More focus may be needed on increasing support, expectancy, and value within the mentor program.
4. Implementation fidelity is also a concern as 50% of mentor/mentee pairs met for the required minimum time of 4 hours throughout the semester. While this is much higher than last year's 20%, the number should still be improved. However, there were no significant differences in GPA observed between participants who met with their mentors for 4 hours or more and those who did not.