

Reducing Section Variation in Course Completion

Background

One critical measure of student progress is whether or not students earn credit for attempted courses, which impacts time-to-degree, financial aid eligibility, and persistence. While course completion can be influenced by various factors outside of the classroom, one way academic leaders have an opportunity to influence student outcomes within the classroom is by examining and addressing the variation of completion rates among instructors teaching the same course.

Key Metric Definition

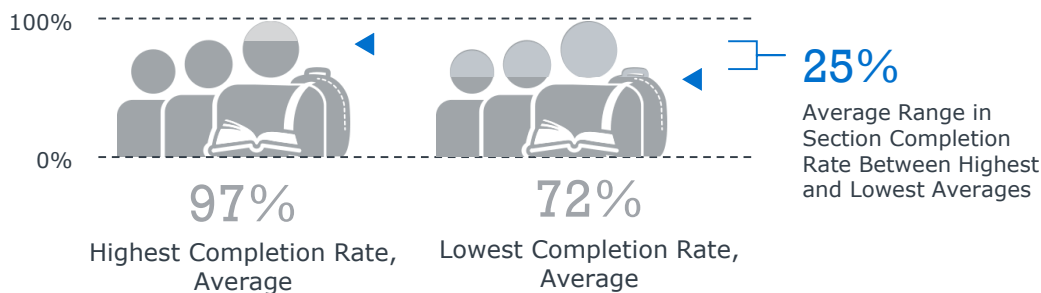
Completion Rate for a Course or Section:

Number of Earned Student Credit Hours

Number of Attempted Student Credit Hours

Instructor Variation: What's Normal?

Differences in grading practices, assessment methods, and materials across sections of the same course can result in variable and inconsistent classroom experience, impacting student outcomes. While there is not a definitive answer on how much instructor variation should be expected, analysis of 43 schools in the Academic Performance Solutions (APS) collaborative revealed that the average range in completion rate among sections of the same course is 25 percentage points.¹



To tackle instructor variability in completion rates, institutions should prioritize courses with the largest potential student impact such as high enrollment courses, general education courses, and gateway courses.



Inside this Resource

Learn how APS supports your goals to improve student progress

- Page 2-3: How to: Identify Courses with Section Variation
- Page 4: Best Practice Resources

¹) Analysis of the APS Collaborative; courses with five or more sections; 2014-2015 academic year during all course terms.

How to: Identify Courses with Section Variation

Use the steps below to explore section-level completion rate data in your APS Platform and identify opportunities to improve course completion.

1 Getting started: Set Your Filters

In the **APS Dashboard**, click on the **Students Tab**. Use the filters at the top of the page to refine your analysis.

Recommended filters: College Name, Department Name, Course Type, Course Division.

Helpful Hints

- If you're a Dean, use the **College Name** filter to view departments and courses in your purview.
- If you're a Department Chair, use the **Department Name** filter to view courses in your purview.
- Remove any course types, such as *Online*, that you may want to analyze separately.
- Filter for *Lower Division* to identify opportunities in gateway courses.

2 View the *Completion Rate vs. Attempted Credit Hour Production by Course* Chart

Scroll to the *Completion Rates* section of the page to pinpoint courses with high enrollment that have low completion rates, where improvement efforts will have an outsized impact.



Each point on the graph represents a single course. Hover over the point to see the course code, number of attempted student credit hours, and course completion rate.

Prioritize courses towards the lower right quadrant, since they have high enrollment and low completion.

3 Drill Into a Specific Course

Click on any course on the chart to open a new scatter plot and view section-level data.

4 View the *Courses with the Highest Unearned Credit Hours* Table

Scroll down to the next report on the page to see the number of credit hours that would be earned if the course completion rate is improved by 1%, 3%, or 5%. Use these projections as goals for course completion improvement in targeted classes.

Courses with the Highest Unearned Credit Hours
Scenario modeling the Impact of Improvement in Course Completion Rates on SCH Recovery by Course

Course Code	Attempted	Unearned Credits	Completion Rate	1% - SCH	3% - SCH	5% - SCH
MATH162M	5,874	1293	77.99%	59	176	294
MATH103M	4,485	900	79.93%	45	135	224
MATH211	3,564	860	75.87%	36	107	178
MATH200	2,784	618	77.80%	28	84	139
MATH212	2,449	580	76.31%	24	73	122

5 Click on the Course Code for Section-Level Details

Drill into courses with low completion rates to view the completion rates of each section.

Courses with the Highest Unearned Credit Hours » MATH162M

Course Ref No	Attempted Credit	Unearned Credits	Completion Rate	1% - SCH Recovery	3% - SCH Recovery	5% - SCH Recovery
23382	120	48.00	60.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
17632	120	42.00	65.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
14090	120	39.00	67.5%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23384	120	39.00	67.5%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23664	120	39.00	67.5%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23841	99	36.00	63.6%	58.74	176.22	293.7
22336	105	36.00	65.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
22781	105	36.00	65.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
13320	120	36.00	70.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
14067	120	36.00	70.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23385	99	33.00	66.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23951	99	33.00	66.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
20431	120	33.00	72.5%	58.74	176.22	293.7

To develop a targeted improvement strategy, determine if instructor variation is a concern or if low completion is consistent across all sections.

6 Optional: Download and Share the Data

Click on the arrow next to the heading to open a drop-down menu with the option to download and save the data in PDF, Excel, or CSV format.

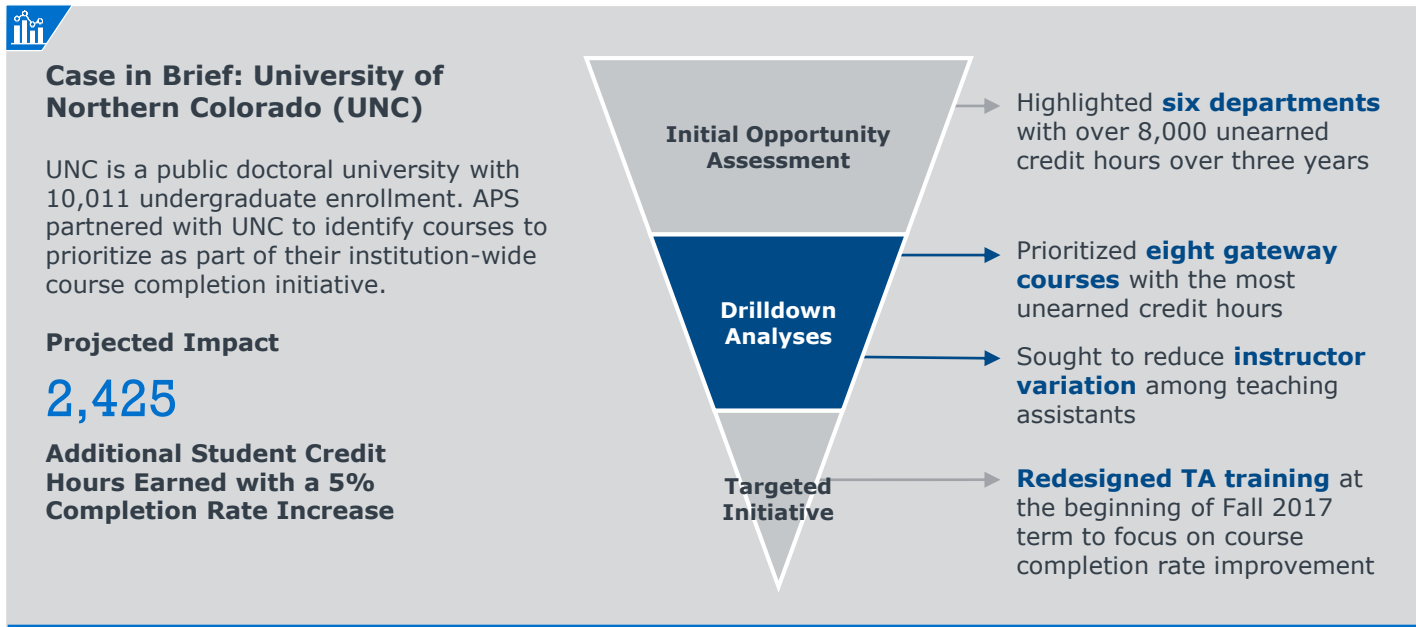
Courses with the Highest Unearned Credit Hours » MATH162M

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Courses with the Highest Unearned Credit Hours » MATH162M

Course Ref No	Attempted Credits	Unearned Credits	Completion Rate	1% - SCH Recovery	3% - SCH Recovery	5% - SCH Recovery
30100	48	19.20	60.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23310	48	19.20	60.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23382	120	48.00	60.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23841	99	39.60	63.6%	58.74	176.22	293.7
17632	120	42.00	65.0%	58.74	176.22	293.7
22336	105	36.75	65.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
22781	105	36.75	65.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23385	99	32.67	66.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
23951	99	32.67	66.7%	58.74	176.22	293.7
20431	120	26.40	72.5%	58.74	176.22	293.7

Best Practice Resources for Course Completion Improvement



Resources Available on EAB.com

Webconference: Improving Course Completion



- APS webconference that walks users through course completion rate variation analyses and provides data-driven approaches for improvement
- Includes further analyses on instructor variation and its impact on course completion
- Available [on-demand](#) at EAB.com

Toolkit: The Course Completion Playbook



- Academic Affairs Forum research detailing four key steps to increase course completion rates without reducing academic rigor
- Includes nine tactics for improving course completion rates, such as standardized assessments and course behavior alerts
- [Download](#) the playbook or watch the [webconference](#) at EAB.com

Source: Academic Performance Solutions.



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