



# Factors Contributing to Student Placement into Academic Probation at Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA)

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**Abstract:** *In higher learning institutions, realities have proven that many students fail to perform successfully and earn a degree in the stipulated time horizon, yet causes have been discussed extensively with no consensus. This paper, therefore, was aimed at finding out the root causes plunging students into academic probation at the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA). The study adopted a descriptive research design and a convenience sampling technique targeting all students who were at least in their second semester at the university in the academic year 2020–2021. Data were obtained through dissemination of 352 copies of questionnaires to students who have ever fallen into academic probation at AUCA. Findings revealed that limited adequate institutional support, the students' personal behavior and the problem of leaving far from the University were among factors that contributed to poor academic performance of students, hence sinking them into probation. To lessen this phenomenon, the study recommends the establishment of a continuous counseling system to AUCA students; improving students' support as well as working towards availing accommodation to students so that the student's academic performance would be improved significantly.*

**Key words:** *Academic Performance, Probation, Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA)*

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## 1. Introduction

The ultimate objective of any student enrolling at a university is to complete the program and earn a degree in the stipulated time horizon. This suggests that there are no students who can enroll in a university with the intention of failing. However, in many higher learning institutions, realities have proven that many students fail to achieve that objective. A research conducted in the United States (U.S) at Harvard University in 2010 revealed that 79% of students born into the top-income quartile families acquire bachelor's degrees, while only 11% of students born from bottom-income quartile families graduate from 4-year

university programs (Renzulli, 2015). He argued that one half of all students who begin college fail to graduate, hence resulting in waste of talents, time and resources, mostly financial resources. Duffy (2010) stressed that the percentage of students who were placed on academic probation at Onondaga Community College increased from 6% in 2005 to 8% in 2008.

At the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) as far as academic performance is concerned, Butera (2016), established that out of 11,557 registered students from the year 1984 up to 2016 at AUCA, only 3,847 students graduated (32%) while 4,895 students (42%) were dismissed from the university due to poor performance.

To help academically strong students to continue with the same trend and those having poor academic performance to revert the trend, Higher Learning Institutions usually set up strategies to retain students by encouraging them to maintain a high Grade Point Average (GPA) throughout the period spent at the university pursuing their intended academic qualification. Practices in some higher learning institutions of (HLIs) to help students who experience difficulties in their academic journey is to put them in an academic probation. Academic probation is generally imposed on a student having observed poor academic performance, demonstrating some problems in many courses of the program or in a course (Kelley, 1996). According to Sabot & Wakeman-Linn, (1988), high grades lead to rewards and more desirable than low grades which lead to sanctions which include putting some students on probation for remedial or dismissing students who perform below the threshold.

Academic probation serves as a form of punishment aiming to encourage satisfactory students to keep up and a method to inform students who perform poorly of the seriousness of their academic situation that may expose them to leave the institution due to their unsatisfactory performance, should this persist (Tovar and Simon, 2006). Indeed, it is one academic policy designed to alert students, that they are not meeting the minimum academic standards of the institution” (Hoover, 2014). At AUCA, a student whose GPA is less than 12/20 (60%) enters into probation for one or two semesters. During that period, students are given chance to improve their GPA and get out from the probation a score of 12/20 and more. If they are not able to do so, they are dismissed from the University. Students who cannot satisfy the requirements, even if they get the opportunity to redo courses they failed, they will be charged for retaking those courses and consequently not being able to graduate at the same time with the better performing students.

In that perspective, academic probation is considered as a notice to a student who falls below a university's requirement level for good academic performance. Flecher (2017) said, Colleges and universities in United States currently use academic probation as a way to signal students of the need to improve performance or an alert to discontinue their education at the school.

Academic performance is most frequently measured by grade point average (GPA), or may also be evaluated by the number of credits/modules completed vis-à-vis the target. During this period of probation, the student is expected to reorganize him/herself towards achieving good academic performance, hence scoring to the set minimum GPA or above. However, there is no study on factors affecting students to get into academic probation at the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) that researchers are aware of.

As from the surveyed literature, it is clear that poor academic performance is related to a number of factors of which there is no consensus that the researchers are aware of, leading to students' poor academic performance, hereafter being plunged into academic probation at AUCA that was conducted. This paper sets to find out the root causes leading students into academic probation (a signal calling for improving academic performance) at the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA), hence filling up this gap. The paper is very relevant as it raises awareness on why students' fall into probation, thus attracting opportunity to make a follow up on students who have failed and assist them to improve. It will also help the university to review its policies about academic probation by including measures to give assistance to students who face this problem of academic probation and devise strategies for alleviating it, hence increasing the number of graduating students within the stipulated time horizon or even reducing suspensions. This will probably end up or lessening the expulsion from the school as well as drops out related to repeated academic probation (Kelley, 1996).

## 2. Literature Review

The general systems theory developed by Hanson (1995) postulates that various personal characteristics, academic challenges and family background experiences contribute to the failure or success of university students. Saying it differently, sum of parties equal the whole. Family background and life, proficiency in languages of instruction, education background, employment responsibilities, and sponsorship among others can be factors contributing to the academic probation experience, failure or success. For example, in 1984, about 10% of Henderson State University's students were placed on academic probation each semester, while 6% were suspended (Garnett, 1990). Among explanations underlying the failure to achieving the objective of graduating in the time horizon or not even graduating are based on the general systems theory (Hanson,1995; Fauzan,Vellasamy, Prabha, Gurusamy and Alias, 2017). In the same line of thought, in attempting to understand the causes leading to academic probation, Heider (1959) found out that the cause was a combination of personal and environmental forces. Sometimes HLIs' students do perform poorly because of a lack of ability or academic skills, but also nonacademic factors may impede students' academic performance (Schee, 2007).

In relation to academic factors, such as educational background, course selection, language of instruction, teaching methods, grading system and institutional support (academic advisory, induction, accommodation, restaurant, books) among others, have a paramount role in students' academic performance.

Ahmed (2014) and (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012) presented some possible factors that cause academic probation.

Among them are difficulty in understanding language, weak communication skills, weak educational background, grading is too difficult, involvement with other activities, wrong course selection, lack of seriousness in studies, family problems, and personal problems and proper guidance.

Smith and Winterbottom (1970) found out that among students enrolled at Princeton University who were on academic probation in the 1970s pointed more on academic factors to be the cause than personal concerns. These academic factors were lack of positive motivation to undertake academic work; unrealistic optimistic expectations related to grades that those students were waiting for their evaluations.

In regard to course selection, induction and language of instruction, students entering higher learning institutions perceive academic life as very demanding (Kausar, 2010). They fail to balance academic demands and social life requirements. Academic demands include the selection of the university, course selection, the concern of embracing a new style of teaching, notes taking, evaluations, competition, use of library and electronic resources. Social life requirements point to a new social environment, religious activities, and extra-curricular activities that need to be well articulated to the academic work. Therefore, studies such as that of Kausar (2010) and Mattlin (1990) have proposed a pro-active strategy to reduce the stressfulness of such new academic life, which is academic induction.

In order to understand the classroom lectures and reading of text books that are in English, a student is required to have a good level of proficiency of the English language in listening, reading, writing and speaking. By conducting a study on factors prompting students into academic probation at Golden West College, Isonio (1995) found past academic history to be strong predictor of academic performance. This suggests that students who do not have required skill levels in language, a solid background in science areas and math as well as information have serious problems in successfully completing their specific programs and classes. In addition, students who don't have sufficient information about the relationships between course content and pre-requisites at the university where they do enroll, requirements for degree and transfer, academic standards and expectations, and some kind of occupational and personal goals after graduation are candidates to poor academic performance. Furthermore, the selection of colleges and majors matter. Some students fail to succeed academically because they select a wrong major or college/university (Damashek, 2003).

Considering teaching methods, grading systems, books and academic advisory, findings from some studies point them out for contributing in one way or another to the academic performance of students. Studies conducted by Tinto (1993); Gordon & Habley (2000) and Pascarella and

Terenzini (1991) concluded that academic advisory has direct a correlation with students' academic performance. They argued that some students fail because of lack of academic advisors and sufficient academic support services. Hoover's (2014) findings pointed out that students who were placed on academic probation acknowledged of not having sufficient knowledge about conditions to be placed on academic probation prior to having experienced it. On the contrary, high involvement in advising that includes assisting students in identifying root causes of poor academic performance, generating personal student responsibility for problem solving and decision making help in changing the course of events for future actions (Schee, 2007). Fauzan et al. (2017) reported that the score of students who failed because they did not consult their lecturers was 10.7 percent. In a study conducted by Reyes (1997) in six institutions of higher learning in the US found out that academic and career advisors have an important role to the success of students.

In addition, students' communication skills (with colleagues, lecturers, administrators, sponsors/parents) and their commitment (attendance, work on assignments, and timetable for studies) contribute in their academic performance. The success in any enterprise integrates communication with stakeholders. In an academic environment, the performance of a student is linked on how the students communicate effectively with teachers, administrators, colleagues and parents or sponsors. It is argued that students with poor communication skills are likely to perform poorly in comparison with those having better communication skills, hence leading them to fall into academic probation (Ahmed, Chowdhury, Rahman, Talukder, 2014). Poor communication skills hinder students to ask questions to teacher regarding topics on which they have problems, making oral presentations of their works as well as logging claims whenever is necessary.

Regarding weekly working time as a factor contributing to falling into probation, Fauzan et al. (2017) found out that 56% of survey students spent between 1 to 5 hours per week for academic commitments, 28% spent 6 to 10 hours weekly and 17% spent between 11 to 15 hours per week. None of the surveyed students spent a minimum of 20 hours for academic purposes with an average of 4 hours per day that are required for material revision while the recommended hours of effectively use of time are eight (Xiong, Wang, A., Wang, L. and Yu, 2014). According to a study by Hoxie (2015), 74.6% of students who were placed on academic probation had not paid attention to attend workshops that were regularly organized by the university.

On-campus physical facilities (Accommodation, Restaurant and other physical facilities) contribute to students' academic performance (Lau, 2003). Dormitories, restaurant, study rooms facilitate the student to organise the work without less time consumed in traveling as well as cost involved. Sport grounds, help the students to make

physical exercises that are important to academic life as they contribute to physical fitness and a conducive mind in studying. Career centres provided to the student councils, reduce the fear of the new entrant to the university on the new style of living and studying while also explaining to the student potential future job prospects. Multimedia tools also help students to improve their language skills.

In assessing academic performance, personal problems (dating, alcohol consumption...) of students also affect students' performance. In the study conducted by Bolden, Durodoye, and Harris (2000) on reasons that led students into probation by community college students, they found out that most students who were falling into academic probation or dropping out of college had family issues, consumption of alcohol, and self-esteem. Similarly, Hoxie (2015) found out that 37.1 % of students went to academic probation due to personal problems that obstructed their ability to concentrate on their academic duties and complete their work/or study timely and effectively. Similarly, Lee (2017) reported that 49.1% of students who were placed on academic probation stated that personal or relationship problems affected adversely their academic performance.

Students lacking experience to cope with new cultures that they are encountering face also the risk of performing poorly (Isonio, 1995). In their study about factors leading to poor performance of students, Mohd, Kalarani, Sonya, & Eshodha (2017) found out that time management and procrastination to be contributors. Mushtaq & Khan (2012) argue that guidance is also a factor through which a student can improve his/her study attitude and study habits, hence contributing relatively to positive academic achievement. Students who benefit from proper guidance by their parents, teachers or other informed people do perform well in their exams.

These academic factors were lack of positive motivation to undertake academic work; unrealistic optimistic expectations related to grades that those students were waiting for their evaluations. Some students do drop from the university or college because they do not know how to study the complex information encountered (Fauzan et al., 2017). Renzulli, (2015)'s findings demonstrated that students who fell into academic probation were unable to complete their basic tasks due to their postsecondary lives of pretending to be mature, hence affecting regular class attendance, communication with their professors, completing required reading, time management skills leading to employing minimal study and self-regulation.

Not only academic and behavioral factors, social factors including family problems, health problems (orphans, widows, divorced, parents' relationship, unwanted pregnancy, etc.), economic problems related to sponsorship (self-sponsored, sponsored), extra-academic activities as well as geographical location do influence

students' academic performance. The same study reported that between 1992 and 2004, enrollment rates for student who were of academically high-potential in high school graduates in 4-year institutions, however coming from low-income, fell from 54 to 40%, while that of those who are from moderate-income declined only by 6% (from 59 to 53%). This suggests that family economic background matters in academic performance. Some students fall into academic probation because they are self-sponsored, and therefore are to make a living to feed them. Sometimes not only, they are in charge of their own living conditions, but also that of their families. In other words, personal and family issues take priority over their school commitments (Damashek, 2003). Indeed, poverty affects academic achievement. In his study on the Effects of Poverty on Academic Achievement, Kendra Mckenzie (2019) found poverty to be one of the most prevalent indicators of academic achievement in schools today. Students from poor families have challenges to pay tuition fees, foods, dwelling place and acquiring other important learning materials such as computers, books, etc... The worst happens when students from poor family backgrounds don't have facilities to work in teams with their classmates since they are sometimes isolated by their colleagues. (Jensen, 2009).

Extra academic works affect the academic performance of students. Lau (2003) argues that when a student works for twenty to thirty hours a week for extra academic work, the likelihood to fail increases. It is argued that in such conditions, the student does not have vivid energy to attend class or to organize a self-study by reading lecture materials as well sparing a time to read books that are related to the course. This was emphasized by Olson (1990) that students attach their poor academic performance to the interference from their jobs and studies, lack of proper time management and inability of setting goals. Another seeming challenge sometime hinders the performance of students is related to students' life circumstances Michael (2008). For example, a student who finds a job after enrolling in some courses is most likely to go for adjustment in the program of day and joins the program of evening. As a consequence, the majority of these students who change the program may lose their teams (groups) of studies; lose information, without underestimating how it is challenging to combine work and studies.

As far as geographical location is concerned, studies have pointed out that it influences students' performance. A study conducted by Faizal et al. (2017) on factors of students' academic probation in an American Degree Transfer Program (ADP) in Malaysia found out that out of respondents who were on academic probation surveyed, 91% were leaving off-campus. 47% of students were leaving off-campus residences with no presence of family members, whereas another 44% live at off-campus residences with their family. Not only, the distance to the school matters, but also the location has an enormous

significance because a school is to be located in a suitable atmosphere. This suggests that it should be far away from the noises and the polluting atmosphere where the student can easily absorb what is being taught without disturbance. The school should have enough lighting, useful facilities such as libraries, toilets, playground, sinks, multipurpose rooms, work areas, lockers, storage spaces, teachers, administration. In brief, the ambience should be calm, spacious with good amenities and utilities in a visually appealing landscape (Nalanda International School, 2020). When schools lack some of these important elements, this can be a source of poor academic performance.

### 3. Methodology

The participants in this study were AUCA students with a total population of 2,785 students enrolled during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of the academic year 2020/2021, where 55.7% were from the Faculty of Information Technology, 37.1% were from the Faculty of Business Administration, 5.3% from the Faculty of Education and 0.8% from the Faculty of Theology. Those students were asked to fill a self-administrated questionnaire which was distributed to them under the supervision of researchers.

The study adopted a descriptive research design and a convenience sampling technique targeting all students who were at least in semester two. The sampling technique was adopted due to restrictions that were imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic whereby researchers were obliged to work with students who were accessible

and willing to contribute to the research as some were unable to access university’s premises easily. Though, researchers were interested in getting views from students who were in academic probation, but it was difficult to gather data from them because they felt ashamed and refused to collaborate. Alternatively, researchers adopted to draw a sample from all students.

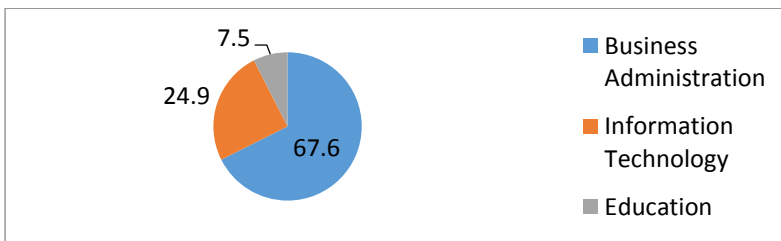
To draw sample from which primary data was collected, the sample size was obtained using the formula by (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970): as follow,

$$n = \frac{N*(Z_{\alpha/2})^2*p*q}{(N-1)e^2+(Z_{\alpha/2})^2*p*q} \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

$$n = \frac{2,785*(1.96)^2*0.5*0.5}{(2,785-1)(0.034)^2+1.96^2*0.5*0.5} = 640 \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

Whereby;  
n = sample size;  
N = the total number population of students registered at AUCA in semester 1 of the academic year 2020 – 2021;  
 $Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.96$ , at 95% Confidence level;

Coefficient pegged on the degree of confidence (here 95%,  $Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.96$ );  
p= Proportion of the population with the characteristic of interest (here, p = 0.5);  
q= Proportion of the population not having the characteristic of interest i.e. 1 – p;  
e = margin of acceptable error (here, e = 3.4%) which is less to the accuracy generally accepted of 5%.



**Figure 1: Sampling distribution per faculty**

From the findings, it is observed that no single respondent is from the faculty of Theology probably because they are very few in number and the opportunity to get them was limited, and the distribution across faculties does not follow the pattern of the distribution in the total population which may be a limitation to findings to be fully generalized to the whole population. Nevertheless, they shed light to elements that are at the base of poor performance at AUCA.

## 4. Results and Discussions

**Table 1: Responses of students regarding falling into probation**

	Frequency	Percent
No	290	45.2
Yes	352	54.8
Total	642	100.0

As the objective of this study was to assess factors that contribute to poor performance of students, hence causing them to fall into academic probation, the rest of analysis focuses on those who acknowledged having been in

academic probation (352). Table 2 gives details about factors that contributed to the poor performance of those students.

**Table 2: Regression results on factors contributing to students' falling into probation at AUCA**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.623	.102		15.882	.000
Selection of faculty/Department	.015	.025	.040	.579	.563
Proficiency in English as a medium of instruction	.012	.031	.025	.369	.713
Academic reasons (Teaching System)	-.018	.031	-.036	-.572	.568
Communication with colleagues, lectures, administrators, sponsors/parents	.007	.029	.015	.228	.820
Institutional support (induction, accommodation, restaurant, books, and other facilities)	-.054	.028	-.123	-1.925	<b>.055*</b>
Category of evaluations (Quizzes, Assignments, presentation, Labs, Exams)	-.017	.030	-.036	-.553	.581
Commitment (Attendance, work on assignments, timetable for studies)	-.013	.028	-.030	-.459	.647
Conflict between job and studies	-.012	.025	-.029	-.475	.635
Sponsorship	.039	.027	.093	1.426	.155
Family problems	-.020	.036	-.041	-.552	.581
Health problems	-.041	.037	-.081	-1.105	.270
My personal behavior	.077	.029	.171	2.688	<b>.008**</b>
Residence location (distance to AUCA)	.052	.025	.130	2.081	<b>.038**</b>
<p><math>R = 0.253</math>  <math>Adjusted R^2 = 0.028</math>  <math>F\text{-Statistic} = 1.770</math>, <math>Sig. = 0.046</math>            *:significant at 10% level            **: significant at 5% level</p>					
<p><i>Dependent Variable: Factors leading to falling into probation</i>  <i>Predictor (Constant), Residence location (distance to AUCA), Selection of faculty/Department, Conflict between job and studies, Category of evaluations (Quizzes, Assignments, presentation, Labs, Exams), My personal behavior, Institutional support (induction, accommodation, restaurant, books, and other facilities), Academic reasons (Teaching System), Sponsorship, Health problems, Communication with colleagues, lectures, administrators, sponsors/parents, Commitment (Attendance, work on assignments, timetable for studies), Proficiency in English as a medium of instruction, Family problems</i></p>					

Table 2 indicates a causal relationship leading students to falling into probation with  $R = 0.253$ , and  $Adjusted R^2 = 0.028$ . Given that F-statistic of 1.770

with a  $p\text{-value}$  of 0.046 indicates that discussed factors jointly contribute to failing into probation at 5 percent level of significance.

Taking into consideration individual factor contribution, only three were found to be significantly related to students falling into probation. Findings suggest that institutional support (induction, accommodation, restaurant, books, and other facilities), personal behavior, residence location (distance to AUCA), were significantly associated with the likelihood of students falling into probation.

Institutional support (induction, accommodation, restaurant, books, and other facilities) is inversely associated with students falling into academic probation which indicates that if the institutional support increases by 1 percent, students falling into probation will decrease by 0.123 percent, *ceteris paribus*. This suggests that if the University provides more support to students in terms of sufficient induction, availing accommodation and restaurant, equipping the library with sufficient and relevant books, and other facilities, the probability of students falling into probation may decrease. Assessing each factor individually, 57.9% of respondents reported that induction was insufficient, 55.5% reported academic advisory to be insufficient, 70.9% reported internet to be insufficient while 59.7% and 86.6% reported library and spiritual activities to be respectively sufficient. These findings are in line of that of Hoxie (2015) whereby 79.3% of students who were on academic probation had no advising contract with any university's staff while 73.4% had not attended orientation session organized for the first years' students.

Students' individual behavior, contributes positively or negatively to academic performance. The more a student misbehaves, especially being involved in uncontrolled daunting behavior, the more likely is the student to perform poorly, hence falling into academic probation at AUCA. Findings indicate that if 1 student misbehaves, this leads to 0.171 percent increase in number of students who are likely to fall into probation, *ceteris paribus*. These findings line up with that of Schee (2007) who emphasized that those nonacademic factors such as student behavior may impede students' academic performance. These findings are also consistent with that at Babcock University by Nwosu (2017) who found out that dating behavior accounted for almost 27.1% for the variance in academic performance of undergraduate' students. The implication of this finding is that dating behavior or sexual relationship is assumed to be common distractor in academic endeavor of many students studying in higher learning institutions whereby, even brilliant students are affected. In the same vein, bad behavior related to alcohol

consumption was found to adversely affect academic performance (Ukwayi, Lucy, Chibuzo, Undelikwo, 2013).

Concerning the long distance that students travel to come to study, it was found to contribute to falling into academic probation. As the distance increases for 1 student coming from the far distance increases the probability to falling into academic probation by 0.130 numbers of students, *ceteris paribus*. Findings are consistent with that of Faizal et al. (2017) who found out that in Malaysia 91% of respondents confirmed that those who were on academic probation were leaving off-campus.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study sought to find out factors contributing to poor performance in the students' academic achievements at AUCA. Evidence from data analysis revealed key factors that were significantly at the root of students' falling into academic probation. Those factors were mainly: limited adequate institutional support; the students' personal behavior whereby some students were involved in daunting relationships and consuming alcohol, hence misusing the time allocated to studies, and the problem of the long distance to travel to reach the University. Therefore, the study recommends that AUCA leadership in charge of academics and those in charge of students' life (affairs) to introduce a counseling system and provide sufficient support such as a more intensive induction, internet connection and a tutorial system. An adequate induction will help identifying the diverse needs of students in order to better prepare them for the social and academic integration.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In order to deal with students' personal behavior, the counseling office and the chaplaincy are to work hand in hand to provide advice and monitoring. The two strategies will help students with particular behavioral challenges and preparation for an adequate support system. Last, the study recommends that the administration should construct students' residences to accommodate some students on campus. Having adequate and sufficient residential rooms for students will surely improve their academic performance.

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