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Subject: drop date

Montana State University has stated that it wishes to graduate students in 4 years rather than the prevailing trend of 5 or more years. Given this fact, my recommendation would be to move the drop date up to somewhere between 2 to 3 weeks into the Fall and Spring semesters and no more than 2 weeks into the Summer semesters.

As I speak with students who are struggling through my course, which is required for most business majors, I will often recommend that they come in for special office hours, use Smarty Cats tutors and/or read the recommended text. Nevertheless, a typical response that I will receive from these students is that they are choosing to stay in the course, but not invest much time or effort because they plan to drop if "things just don't work out". What this late drop date creates is too much time for the student to under-invest in the course - these students never really put in the effort to succeed because they are rationally under-investing with the idea that they can drop only weeks before the final exam.

If, however, students were given a drop date within the first few weeks of the course, these same students would be forced to either invest enough to succeed in the first few chapters or drop to avoid a failing grade. The point is that this choice would occur, not 4/5 of the way into the semester, but only 1/5 into the semester, leaving students who stay incentive to invest enough to succeed or face a high cost for failing to do so.

IT is my opinion that the single biggest obstacle to achieving 4 year graduation rates, is this late drop date, which is not typical for other Universities. The idea is that we want students to be forced to put in lots of effort at the start of the course, learn the foundation of the science and then build as we go. If they never invest the time to develop the foundation, they struggle all the way through the course. An early drop date will force students either in or out of the course early enough to prevent under-investment into the foundation of knowledge needed to succeed.