A Policy Discourse Analysis of Academic Probation

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In this policy discourse analysis study, I explored the discourse of academic-probation policies for undergraduate students in Dominican higher education institutions. Policies from twelve universities described strategies of power throughout. Academic-probation policies were characterized by their brevity and focus on disciplinary actions for students who did not meet the established academic standards. Key implications are related to issues of student marginalization in higher education institutions. Future policy revisions should address the punitive measures and the implications of being classified below "normal" and should refocus on institutional retention as a policy.

Dans cette étude portant sur l'analyse du discours en matière de politiques, je me penche sur le discours des politiques portant sur la probation académique des étudiants du premier cycle dans certains établissements d'études supérieures en République dominicaine. On retrouve, tout au long du texte des politiques des douze universités étudiées, des descriptions de stratégies de pouvoir. Les politiques portant sur la probation académique se caractérisaient par leur brièveté et leur accent sur les actions disciplinaires visant les étudiants qui n'atteignaient pas les normes académiques établies. Les implications principales touchent la marginalisation des étudiants inscrits dans des établissements d'études supérieures. À l'avenir, les révisions des politiques devraient aborder les mesures punitives et les implications d'être classés sous la norme pour se recentrer sur la rétention institutionnelle.

A common issue universities encounter is students who do not meet institutional academic requirements, otherwise termed *minimum grade point averages*. These students are on the threshold of not being retained or completing their academic majors. As part of a solution to the aforementioned problem, academic-probation policies are set in place to inform retention practices.

Academic probation is considered an institutional policy that groups and classifies students based on their academic grade point averages (usually below 2 points on a scale of 4 points; Arcand & Leblanc, 2011). Probation is also intended as an intervention for students who do not meet the minimum academic requirements with retention purposes (Hoover, 2014; Houle, 2013; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Despite the intent of informing retention practices, academic-probation policies are controversial because of their punitive nature and may even be an obstacle to overall student academic success (Casey, Cline, Ost, & Qureshi, 2018).

According to Arcand (2013), academic probation was established in higher education decades ago. More specifically, probation can be traced back as far as 1921. For instance, Colvin

(1921) described probation as being below the average in terms of intelligence and a complete failure in college work. Stone (1922) compared men on academic probation with peers who had "superior scholarship records" (p. 298). Similarly, May (1923) and Held (1941) associated probation with being below the academic standard or average. Being on probation also meant that students'

> parents or guardian are notified of this fact. An attempt is made to assist him, wherever possible, in adjusting factors which seem to be affecting his work adversely. If, after a probationary period, it is evident that the student's work does not show any likelihood of reaching at least the minimum level required for graduation, he is asked to withdraw. If after such a student has been out of school for a time, the administrative staff and the student believe that the conditions which hampered him before are now removed, he may return on trial for another chance. If a student fails to do the work satisfactorily on his second trial, he is dismissed and further admission is denied him. (Held, 1941, p. 319)

Reeder (1942) referred to academic probation as a student's failure to meet scholastic standards, leading to dismissal from the higher-education institution. By the 1970s, academic probation was also used to describe undergraduate students that performed below the minimum grade point average but could stay in the institution under the condition that they improve their grades or be dismissed from the institution (Arcand, 2013). Similarly, Lindo, Sanders, and Oreopoulos (2010) defined probation as a threshold measured by a student's grade point average that can lead to escalating penalties, such as being suspended from the university for one year.

Overall, academic probation has been used to designate students who do not meet institutional academic requirements. The idea of probation has remained the same throughout time (Arcand & Leblanc, 2011). Nevertheless, to understand the policies pertaining to academic probation, the historical context of how they emerged in education must be taken into consideration.

The vast majority of higher-education institutions have focused mostly on attracting students since the idea of retention flourished in the 1950s (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012). As college-student populations grew, institutions designed selective admission policies, which meant that institutions were more selective with the type and quality of students that could attend (e.g., students from elite families; Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012). "The rise of selective admissions policies developed not only to ensure that students were academically qualified, but it also became a way to weed out undesirables," (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012, p. 17). Unwanted students were usually from minority or low-income groups and were considered deficient or intellectually inferior (Valencia, 2010).

According to Valencia (1997), from 1890 to the 1930s, intellectual inferiority or deficiency was explained as a transmitted genetic code (genetic-pathology model), meaning that intellectual differences were inherent, considering that Whites were "superior." Such deficits were manifested as limited academic capacities, linguistic deficiencies, and lack of motivation for learning (Valencia, 2010). A deficit perspective creates a context for students that promotes generalizations about their abilities, and in this process, these individuals are classified and stigmatized even more (Smit, 2012). Power relations are established in which students' experience being disabled rather than prepared for academic success (Smit, 2012).

Throughout the 1930s, the deficit perspective that existed regarding students continued.

However, a retention perspective started developing. The focus of undergraduate institutions was to retain students from their admission until graduation. Berger, Ramírez, and Lyon (2012) refer to this period as the early development of retention. Evidence of the retention perspective were the numerous models and studies of university student development that emerged in the context of higher education.

The first studies on retention of university students developed between 1930 and 1950, and by the 1970s, they began to take shape with numerous seminal works (Demetriou, & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). For example, in 1938, several studies on college-student mortality were conducted. These studies explored attrition, degree completion, impact of factors (e.g., gender, age, institutional characteristics), and overall departure (e.g., academic dismissal, lack of interest; Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012).

By the 1970s, Spady proposed a sociological model of student departure to explain the college -student interaction (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012). The congruence of student attributes and institutional norms served as an explanation for retention (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012). Other authors, such as Vincent Tinto, provided insight into student retention as explained by student characteristics, their commitment to the institution, and graduation influencing departure (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012).

The retention perspective arose due to the increased access and admission of diverse students, making institutions create mechanisms to help students succeed academically (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Students who did not meet the academic standards were not regarded as having inherent intellectual issues but as students who needed to be retained and developed in their capacities for academic success. Overall, both the deficit and retention perspectives have been present in a parallel manner and influenced how students are viewed in terms of their intellectual capabilities.

Research related to academic probation in higher education has included a focus on students' experiences. Duffy (2010) explored student experiences during academic probation and concluded that some students are motivated to reflect on goals and future probabilities. Additional research with 23 undergraduate students showed that academic probation was an emotionally detrimental period for these students. Specifically, students perceived being placed on academic probation as a failure, stigma, and embarrassment. Students often hid the fact that they were on academic probation from friends, family, and others in the institution (Barouch, 2015).

Other studies showed how students were affected during academic probation (Fletcher, & Mansur, 2010; Giampa, & Symbaluk, 2018; Holland, 2005; Sage, 2010). For instance, students referred to being on academic probation as shameful, humiliating, disturbing (Arcand & Leblanc, 2011; Duffy, 2010; Houle, 2013), and affecting their self-esteem, self-concepts, and self-efficacy (Arcand & Leblanc, 2013; Hsieh et al., 2007). Moreover, students on academic probation are less likely to be retained and graduate than students who are not on academic probation (Mathies, Gardner, & Bauer, 2006), as academic probation might dissuade them from continuing their higher education (Lindo, Sanders, & Oreopoulos, 2010; Tovar & Simon, 2007).

In the context of the Dominican Republic, a qualitative study was conducted to explore the experiences of students on academic probation and better understand how they made sense of their academic status and specifically, what it meant for Dominican undergraduate students to be on academic probation (Barouch, 2016). An interpretive analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the main themes of mediocrity and exclusion. Key findings were related to students' concerns about what other people might think of them being classified in such a manner and

how the aforementioned feelings extended throughout their time on academic probation (Barouch, 2016).

Few studies have been conducted to explore academic-probation policies. For instance, Hoover (2014) studied how probationary students and administrators perceived the policy of academic probation. The findings suggested that academic-probation policies were considered penalties rather than intervention for students (Hoover, 2014).

In their exploration of academic probation, student performance, and strategic course taking, Casey, Cline, Ost, and Qureshi (2018) suggested that probation policies might be controversial and punitive in nature. Furthermore, if probation policies discourage students' efforts, they may reduce persistence, especially among underrepresented students, who are often at greater risk of being on probation (Casey, Cline, Ost, & Qureshi, 2018).

Research that specifically employs discourse analysis to examine academic-probation policies in Dominican higher education is scarce. Although studies on undergraduate Dominican students address their experiences during academic probation, policies should also be considered as guides to institutional behavior, and in terms of the possible intended and unintended consequences they have on individuals (Allan, Iverson, & Ropers-Huilman, 2010). The way the academic-probation policies frame students has an impact on people's perception of them because policies produce particular realities and social contexts. For these reasons, the purpose of this study was to analyze the discourse (text) of academic-probation policies of Dominican higher education institutions.

Theoretical Framework

Power

Probation policies are controversial and punitive in nature for undergraduate students (Casey, Cline, Ost, & Qureshi, 2018). For a better understanding of these policies and how they shape students' reality, the concept of power has to be taken into consideration.

Power is a productive force that, through discourse, constructs social identities and produces particular realities for individuals (Iverson, 2010). It is also transmitted through knowledge and discourse at the micro and macro levels of society. At the macro level, ideologies, structures, and institutions are examined, and at the micro level, specific discursive practices are examined (Iverson, 2010). For this study, microlevel discursive practices are those found in the academic-probation policies, which shape individuals' ways of thinking and acting.

Power through politics, as a discursive practice, establishes and/or reinforces institutional norms, values, and hierarchies. Power can be exercised in several ways as indicated below.

1. *Surveillance*, which is the use of experts to monitor and increase efficiency (Gore, 1998).

> The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible. (Foucault, 1995, pp. 170–171).

2. *Regulation* is the explicit use of regulations to invoke a rule, often through the use of rewards and punishment (Iverson, 2010).

3. *Normalization* is the use of comparisons to invoke conformity to a standard (Iverson, 2010), or defining what is normal (Gore, 1998). Furthermore,

   normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by joining them one to another. Since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (Foucault, 1995, p. 183).

4. *Classification* is the differentiation of groups or individuals from one another (Gore, 1998; Iverson, 2010).

Method

The intent of this manuscript is to fully develop a published research note in the Alberta Journal of Educational Research (*A Policy Discourse Analysis of Academic Probation in Dominican Universities*). The published research note provided and overview of an ongoing research study. Some of the content and data in this manuscript derive from the research note. Nevertheless, this manuscript contains the completed data set and is fully developed.

According to Iverson (2005), conventional policy studies are intended to develop better policies to address social problems. However, these approaches do not examine the assumptions of the solutions to the problem and do not recognize their implications. An alternative approach is one that integrates a critical perspective and considers how the text (document) under study is given meaning (Iverson, 2008). The analysis of politics under a critical approach allows for the study of a text focusing "on silences and exclusions" and at the same time gives voice to those who do not have a voice (Iverson, 2010, p. 195). Policy discourse analysis was used to investigate academic-probation policies as a solution to the issue of students who do not meet academic expectations to understand what reality these policies (texts) produce for undergraduate student populations.

Data

Official information from the Dominican Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology was used to select undergraduate institutions. Only the institutions of higher education the Ministry recognized were considered for this study. The data consisted of undergraduate academic handbooks that were available online from the institution's webpages. In total, only 15 out of 30 higher-education institutions had their handbooks available online, and of those handbooks, three were not included because they did not mention academic probation. Additionally, each of the institutions' webpages was searched to ensure the inclusion of academic-probation policies that were not contained in the academic handbooks. Searching the webpages confirmed that all information on academic-probation policies were contained in the institutional academic handbooks. A total of 12 higher-education institutions were included in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Academic Probation Policies and Institutions

Institution	Academic Probation Policies (location)
Institution 1	Academic Handbook 2017
Institution 2	Academic Handbook 1998
Institution 3	Academic Handbook 2008
Institution 4	Academic Handbook 2016
Institution 5	Academic Handbook 2014
Institution 6	Academic Handbook 2016
Institution 7	Academic Handbook 2014
Institution 8	Academic Handbook 2001
Institution 9	Academic Handbook 2013
Institution 10	Academic Handbook 2018
Institution 11	Academic Handbook 2011
Institution 12	Academic Handbook 2016

Integrity

Policy discourse analysis does not adhere to the conventional standards of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Nevertheless, the following strategies were used to verify the study's integrity: discussing the research process and findings with qualitative methodologists as a way of questioning ideas and problems related to research to achieve credibility (Krefting, 1991; Mullet, 2018) and constant communication with peers to examine the data and its interpretations (Iverson, 2005).

Data Analysis

After the academic handbooks and information from higher-education institutions were integrated, they were inputted into the Atlas.ti program, creating a single project file. The qualitative analysis software allowed for organization of the information for data analysis. In general, data analysis consisted of coding, categorization, and identifying the predominant themes of the academic-probation policies. Coding consisted of deductive coding strategies. A list of codes was generated based on the theory used and inquiry of study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Based on the critical perspective, each of the power strategies was codified (surveillance, self-regulation, normalization, and classification) in each document and then across all documents.

Results

The analysis of academic-probation policies of twelve Dominican undergraduate universities confirmed normalization, classification, regulation, and surveillance. Throughout the institutional academic handbooks, probation policies mostly emphasized normalization and

regulation, then classification and surveillance. Furthermore, regulation and the disciplinary actions that followed to ensure compliance with and obedience to institutional regulations comprised most of the academic-probation policies.

Normalization

A common point of reference among the policies of these higher-education institutions was the requirement to maintain a minimum grade point average for the academic period and for the cumulative grade point average. Academic periods were defined as trimesters, quarters, or semesters, depending on the institution. The minimum academic term or cumulative grade point average was usually 2.0 points on a 4.0-point scale, which was considered the standard scale. For instance, Institution 1 established in its policies, "All students will be in a normal condition when they possess a minimum grade point average of 2.00 points, both in the current academic period or in the cumulative grade point average." Institution 12 also defined normal academic standing: "A student that obtains a cumulative and term grade point average of 2.0 and over has a normal academic standing." Policies for Institution 5 mentioned that normal academic standing is achieved when "a student's' grade point average in an academic period is 2.00 or more." Institution 9 also stated that the normal academic condition entails a students' cumulative or term grade point average that is equal to or greater than 2.0.

These policies imposed a standard for normal academic standing. Students were ranked based on grade point averages, and students below the standard (2.00) would be placed on academic probation. For example, "Every student that from the second academic term earns a term or cumulative grade point average between 1.00 and 1.99" will be on academic probation (Institution 8). Similarly, Institution 11's policy stated, "The student will be on academic probation when his or her term grade point average is under 2.00 points (1.99 or less)." Even though these students were not considered "normal," these policies created homogeneity among probationary students. For instance, "Academic probation is a special condition in which the student is placed when not maintaining a normal academic condition" (Institution 3).

Students on academic probation are considered temporary and are dependent on compliance with the established institutional norms. Their academic status is not considered normal, allowing the segmentation of these students to be maintained in the institutions.

Classification

Closely tied to normalization, student-classification practices followed and were evident in academic-probation policies. Groups of students were differentiated from one another. Specifically, policies described how students were sorted as having a normal or probationary standing. For instance, the policies from Institution 4 stated, "When a student's cumulative grade point average is equal to or greater than 2.0, his academic condition is normal, unless he has obtained an academic term grade point average less than 2.0 in the last two academic terms completed" (Institution 4).

Policies from Institution 2 confirmed grouping of students: "A student will be in normal academic condition if he/she complies with the following two provisions, (1) At least one of its last two academic term grade point average is equal to or greater than 2.0. (2) The cumulative grade point average is equal to or greater than 2.0." Policies from Institution 6 similarly described segregation of students: "All undergraduate students that obtain a term and

cumulative grade point average equal to or greater than 2.0 are considered in normal condition."

Students who are not classified as having a normal academic standing would be differentiated as students on academic probation. For example, policies from Institution 12 indicated that "a student with a cumulative grade point average lower than 50 points" will be placed on academic probation. Institution 11 also categorized students based on academic probation: "A student is on probation when the academic term grade point average is below two points (2.00) (1.99 or less)."

Being classified on academic probation fosters a "them" condition in relation to a "normal" standing. Other forms of classification result from being on academic probation. For instance, policies found at Institution 1 described students on academic probation as unsatisfactory: "When the cumulative grade point average is between 1.00 and 1.99 and the academic period grade point average is greater than or equal to 2.50 points, it will be said that the student has unsatisfactory academic progress."

Other institutional policies refer to these students as deficient when they remain on probation over consecutive academic periods. For example, Institution 9 provides a definition: "Academically Deficient: this denomination applies to all students that in two consecutive academic terms reached a term or cumulative grade point average below 2.0."

Classification was aligned with the established normative standards that used systems based on numbers to further differentiate students' academic status. Students who were not in normal academic standing were also classified. These policies reaffirmed the institutional position by making the classification clear in the students' academic transcripts. Furthermore, disciplinary actions for students followed when they were placed on academic probation.

Regulation

Beyond the normalization and classification of students, numerous sanctions were described in academic-probation policies. These disciplinary actions' purpose was to ensure "self"- regulation in these students, meaning that the consequences stemming from academic probation could only be lifted when the student decided to "self"-regulate and take the necessary steps to return to normal academic standing. These probationary sanctions were immediate or extended over a period of time for students.

As part of the short-term consequences, academic-probation policies reduced the number of credit hours or courses probationary students could take compared to when they were in normal academic condition. For example, "Students on academic probation may not take more than nine credit hours or more than three courses" (fewer credit hours than allowed when the student is not on academic probation; Institution 3). Institution 11 similarly confirmed a reduction in credit hours in its probation policies: "All students with an academic term and cumulative grade point averages between 0.0 and 1.9 will be on academic probation and will not be able to take more than 18 credits" (fewer courses than allowed when the student is not on academic probation).

Students also cannot change majors during academic probation. As stated in policies from Institution 10, "Students on academic probation cannot change their majors until overcoming probation." Other short-term consequences of being on academic probation were related to eliminating the possibility of a student graduating with honors:

> The granting of honors shall be rendered ineffective in the case of: a) That the student has failed courses, b) That the student has been on *academic probation*, c) When the student has been separated by the university, either for reasons of academic performance, and / or disciplinary reasons during the course of his major. (Institution 5)

Through probation policies, Institution 11 would also nullify the possibility of students graduating with academic honors: "Obtaining academic honors will be invalidated in the case of … one or more probationary periods during the academic program, separation or suspension of the student by the university due to disciplinary reasons." Institution 12 stated in its policies that a student who has been separated from his or her major even when transferring from another institution, which occurs after being on academic probation for a period of time, will not have the right to academic honors:

> The student will not have the right to honors in any of the following cases: (a) has obtained an F, (b) has been separated from a major within the institution or in another institution (referring to transferred students that had been separated in their previous institution), (c) has received a disciplinary sanction.

Other immediate consequences were related to being separated from the major in progress. Academic-probation policies at Institution 2 indicated that being on probation for extended periods of time could lead to separation from the degree in progress: "A student will be separated from a major in the following cases…. If during three consecutive academic periods in the same major is still on academic probation."

Aside from being removed from the major, extended periods of being on academic probation would lead to a temporary separation from the institution. For instance, Institution 9 mentioned in its policies: "A student would be separated from the Institution for one academic period if the student has grade point average inferior to 2.0 for two consecutive academic periods."

In addition to the aforementioned short-term consequences, academic-probation policies would also establish disciplinary actions for students in the long term. Some probation policies emphasized student dismissal from the institution for lengthier periods. For instance, the policy from Institution 8 stated, "Students will have to abandon the university for a determined period due to low academic term and cumulative grade point averages … two times on academic probation will lead to being separated from the institution for one year."

Furthermore, when being readmitted to the institution, the student is unable to attend the program that he or she was enrolled in if still on academic probation:

> A student will be separated for the first time, and for two years, from the institution when any of the following reasons is met: a) Have in two academic periods and a grade point average lower than 1.00, regardless of the cumulative grade point average; b) three times in academic probation. When a student wants to be readmitted to the same major which he was enrolled in when being separated from the institution, his grade point average should be no less than 2.00 (not be on academic probation). (Institution 3)

Similarly, Institution 4 described in its policies other long-term consequences associated with not being readmitted to the major for an extended period of time due to probation: "A student that was separated from a major may not apply for re-entry to said program for a period of five years." When students do not comply with academic regulations, probation policies

would also sanction them by separating them permanently from the institution. For instance, "Any student that has a grade point average under 2.00 during three consecutive academic periods will definitely be separated from the institution" (Institution 10). Similarly, Institution 12 included separation from the institution in its academic-probation policies: "A readmitted student, after a definitive separation cannot be on academic probation, as he will be separated irreversibly from the institution."

Disciplinary actions across academic-probation policies were established with the purpose of ensuring (self) regulation in students. Generally, these disciplinary actions comprised most of the academic-probation policies and were straightforward with the consequences that students should expect if they do not comply with the institutional regulations.

Surveillance

Of the 12 institutions, only half mentioned institutional personnel as part of the support for students: "If a student is on academic probation, the director of his major will send his case to the counseling department to evaluate the student's situation and make the necessary recommendations" (Institution 7). Other probation policies similarly stated,

> For the follow-up of students on academic probation, the Registrar's Office will send to the Dean and / or Director and the Guidance Department a list of students on academic probation where they will be assisted in accordance with the provisions of the Regulation of the Orientation department. (Institution 4)

Hence, it can be assumed that these people are the only personnel students can rely on to meet the academic requirements. In some cases, contact with these institutional authorities was mandatory: "Students who are on academic probation must participate in the academic support programs determined by the department and the orientation and counseling unit in order to ensure satisfactory academic progress" (Institution 6). At other institutions, student permanence in the program of study during academic probation was dependent on support conditions: "Students on academic probation can stay in the same program under the condition that they attend courses related to study techniques and professional advising" (Institution 3). Academic-probation policies would also place responsibility on the student to seek institutional assistance: "Students on academic probation should seek guidance of the department of university wellbeing" (Institution 11).

Overall, a majority of the universities failed to mention support personnel in their academic-probation policies, thereby conveying that probationary students mostly do not have institutional staff to rely on. Furthermore, assistance was usually mandatory, contingent on conditions, or the student's responsibility.

Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the history of academic probation (Held, 1941; May, 1923; Reeder, 1942; Stone, 1922) and previous research (Arcand, & Leblanc, 2011; Barouch, 2016; Duffy, 2010; Giampa, & Symbaluk, 2018; Houle, 2013; Hsieh et al., 2007; Lindo, Sanders, & Oreopoulos, 2010; Mathies, Gardner, & Bauer, 2006; Sage, 2010), the goal of this study was to explore the discourse surrounding academic-probation policies.

Despite the lack of information about the emergence of academic probation (Held, 1941; Reeder, 1942; Stone, 1922), it was conceived during the prevalence of the deficit-perspective period. In this perspective, minority or low-income students who did not meet academic standards were considered "intellectually inferior" as explained by transmitted genetic code (Valencia, 2010). Academic standards were used as an exclusory mechanism. The higher-education context was one of selectiveness in terms of who had access to these institutions (e.g., students from elite families; Berger, Ramírez, & Lyon, 2012), which corresponded with the segregating and oppressive nature of the deficit perspective (Valencia, 2010).

Currently, the prevalent institutional approach regarding students that do not meet academic standards is to retain them from their admission until graduation. As part of the retention perspective, institutions rely on academic-probation policies to inform retention practices. However, probation is still aligned with the deficit perspective as it classifies, segregates, and coerces students who do not meet academic thresholds.

Some have suggested that academic-probation policies are punitive toward students (Casey, Cline, Ost, & Qureshi 2018). Nevertheless, no studies addressed how these policies frame students. Advancing research related to academic probation and relying on the lens of power, the objective of this study was to explore the discourse (text) of academic-probation policies of Dominican higher-education institutions.

In general, the academic-probation policies of Dominican higher-education institutions were characterized by the brevity of their discussions and significant focus on disciplinary actions for probationary students. Furthermore, normalization, classification, regulation, and surveillance were evident across these policies.

Related to "invoking, requiring, setting or conforming to a standard, defining the normal" (Gore, 1998, p. 283), institutional policies defined normal academic standing for students. In other words, the policies shared a common reference point of maintaining a minimum grade point average, which was usually 2.00 on a 4-point scale. Aside from determining what was normal academic standing, the policies categorized students who fell below the standard grade point average minimum (1.99 and below).

Probation policies classified students based on their academic standing. These student classification practices were evident throughout the institutions' academic-probation policies. Specifically, groups of students were differentiated from one another as "normal" or "on academic probation." Additionally, some institutions would further classify probationary students as "academically deficient" or "unsatisfactory." This categorization creates a condition of "them" in relation to what is a "normal" student.

After normalizing and differentiating students, academic-probation policies established disciplinary actions for probationary students. The purpose of these sanctions was to ensure self-regulation. The consequences stemming from academic probation could only be lifted when the student decides to self-regulate and take the necessary steps to return to normal academic standing.

Students face short- and long-term consequences of being on academic probation. For instance, they cannot graduate with honors, take a normal number of credit hour or courses, change majors, or remain in their major, and they may face temporary or permanent separation from the institution. Overall, these disciplinary actions are more severe the longer a student remains on academic probation, until permanent separation.

Generally speaking, pertaining to the supervision of students to increase their retention, the institutions' policies did not mention support personnel. The absence of such supportive

institutional personnel conveyed that probationary students generally do not have institutional staff to accompany them throughout their probationary period. Furthermore, assistance from the institution was usually mandatory, contingent on conditions, or the student's responsibility.

Based on this study's results, the academic-probation policies of Dominican higher education institutions are exclusory, regulatory, classificatory, and punitive, especially when they were established for certain student populations. As long as the retention guidelines for students who do not meet academic standards are not included as policies, the institutional behaviors will not change. Therefore, the inclusion of retention policies in academic probation is pertinent. Furthermore, considering the way power constructs realities and identities through policies, one must take into consideration what experiences are being created and how these students' identities are being constructed through academic-probation policies.

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