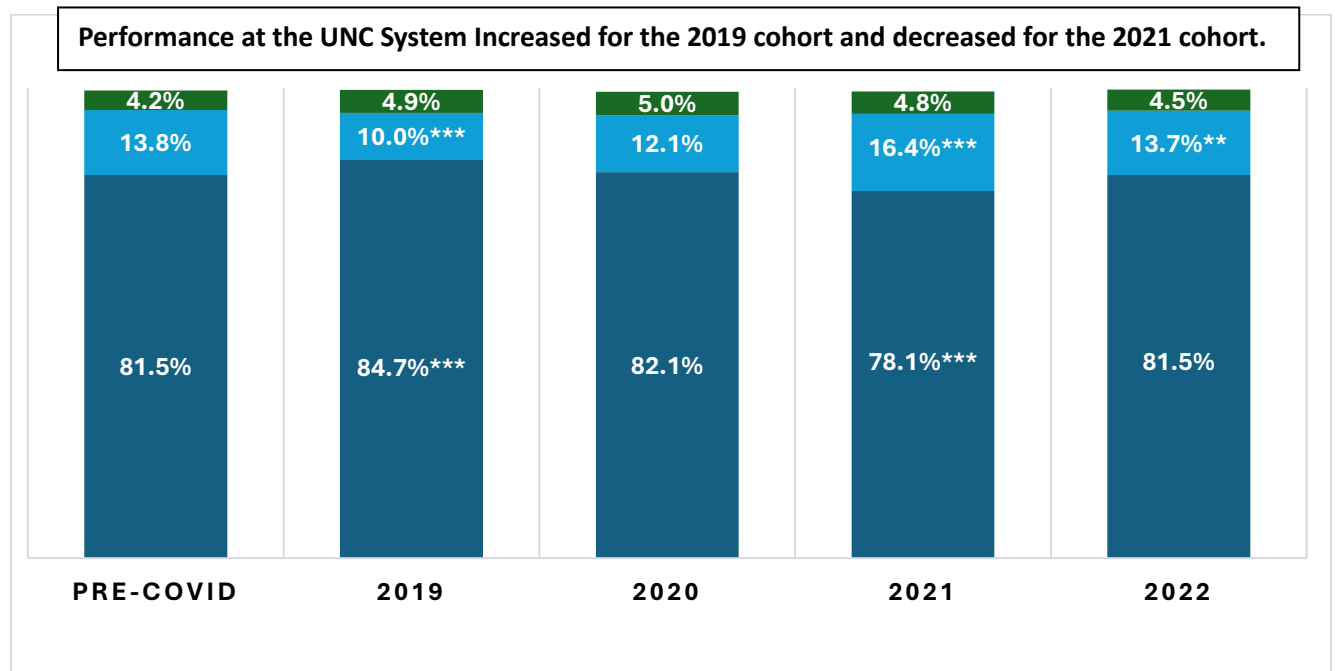


# Impact of COVID on First-Year Postsecondary Performance in University of North Carolina System Institutions

## Key Takeaways and Implications:

- First year performance was higher for students graduating from high school in 2019 and lower for students in the 2021 cohort, driven mostly by changes in the percentage of students getting Ds and Fs. There were higher negative impacts on performance for female students, economically distressed students, Black and Hispanic students, and students with lower high school GPAs.
- Summer school enrollment increased for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts. Universities within the UNC System may want to consider further expanding summer school as a way to increase credits.

**Context and Study Overview:** The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant changes in students' educational experiences. This study used statewide administrative data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the University of North Carolina System to look at the extent to which students' performance in public four-year universities was impacted by COVID. We looked at outcomes for students who graduated high school in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022; and enrolled in a four-year institution in their first year after high school. We compared the performance of those cohorts to the academic performance trends for students in the 2015-2018 high school graduation cohorts. The outcomes were successful completion of courses, withdrawals and incompletes, and the percentage of Ds and Fs in their first year of college. We also looked at summer school participation.



\*\*p≤.01; \*\*\*p≤.001

## Results:

- When compared to pre-COVID trends, we saw that students in the 2019 high school graduation cohort had higher rates of successful completion and lower rates of Ds and Fs. This was likely driven by the fact that many colleges had policies making it easier for students to pass in the spring of 2020 and in the 2020-21 school year.
- In contrast, students in the 2021 cohort had lower rates of successful completion, driven by higher rates of Ds and F's. There was no significant impact on withdrawals and incompletes.
- The decline in Ds and Fs for the 2019 cohort was larger for students with lower high school GPAs.
- Impacts were worse in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 cohorts for economically distressed students. Impacts were worse for Black and Hispanic students in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 cohorts. Impacts were worse for female students, and students with lower high school GPAs in the 2021 and 2022 cohorts.
- For UNC, enrollment in summer school significantly increased for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts. It was not statistically significantly higher than pre-trends for the 2021 and 2022 cohorts.

---

**More about this study:** This project is supported by the North Carolina Collaboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with funding appropriated by the North Carolina General Assembly via the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (H.R. 1319) (federal award identification number SLFRP0129).

**Principal Investigator: Dr. Julie Edmunds**, Director, [Early College Research Center](#) at UNC Greensboro, [jedmunds@serve.org](mailto:jedmunds@serve.org).

**Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Dora Gicheva**, Professor, UNC Greensboro Economics Department, [d\\_gichev@uncg.edu](mailto:d_gichev@uncg.edu).

