

Course Program Migration and External Transfer Analysis in Davao Oriental State University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the key factors driving students to shift between different course programs at Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU). Using a qualitative approach, the research examines academic, social, and institutional influences that affect program migration. Data were collected through interviews with students who experienced program shifts, selected through a convenience sampling method. Thematic analysis revealed recurring themes such as academic challenges, misalignment of career aspirations, peer influence, and institutional barriers, including limited faculty support and rigid policies. Additionally, financial constraints and evolving career goals were found to play a significant role in students' decisions to change programs. The findings provide valuable insights for the university to enhance academic advising, improve student support services, and align programs with career aspirations, ultimately aiming to reduce program migration rates and improve student retention.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, ensuring student retention and completion is a global concern, with trends showing stagnant graduation rates despite increased access (Caballero, 2020; CHED, 2024). In the Philippines, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) face pressure to improve these outcomes amid rising enrollments (Cruz, 2023).

At Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU), a case in point is the 64.5% graduation rate for the 2019–2020 student cohort. This study explores the complex, often nonlinear academic journeys of these students—focusing on course program migration—and investigates how academic, social, financial, and institutional factors interact in shaping such pathways (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Aquino & Castillo, 2019).

Students may shift programs due to:

- 1) Academic mismatch or underperformance,
- 2) Misaligned career goals,
- 3) Financial hardship,
- 4) Social influence from peers or family,
- 5) Institutional barriers such as ineffective advising or inflexible policies.

Understanding these motivations is vital to refining academic advisement and institutional support mechanisms.

Research Objectives and Significance

This study seeks to explore the course program migration of students between academic programs within DOrSU.

Specifically, it aims to:

- 1) Identify key factors influencing student decisions to shift academic programs.
- 2) Map trends and patterns of program migration across different student cohorts.

Significance of the Study:

- 1) For students: Helps inform course decisions and improve academic satisfaction.
- 2) For parents: Provides insight into program shifts to better guide children's academic choices.
- 3) For DOrSU: Informs development of policies to reduce unnecessary course migration and enhance student support.
- 4) For SUCs and policymakers: Offers evidence-based recommendations for improving retention and curriculum alignment.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Course Program Migration in Higher Education

Program migration—students changing their academic paths—is a persistent issue in higher education globally. Lao et al. (2022) identified academic mismatch, job market awareness, and shifting personal interests as primary

motivations behind students changing programs. Silver (2023) emphasized how such changes often reflect broader transitions in student identity and future planning.

Research by Maina (2020) revealed how socio-economic conditions and family expectations shape migration decisions, especially among first-year students. Jobe et al. (2021) highlighted the role of institutional culture and support systems in preventing program shifts, particularly during the first year of study.

Faculty-student disconnects also affect decisions. Marade and Brinthaup (2018) found discrepancies in how students and instructors view valid reasons for changing majors—students prioritize personal fulfillment, while faculty often attribute it to academic failure.

Wright (2018) and Denice (2021) both observed that proactive academic advising and clarity in career goals reduce unnecessary program switching. Meanwhile, Steele (2020) and Harper et al. (2023) pointed out that students entering college undecided are significantly more likely to change programs later.

Collectively, these studies underline the need for better alignment between student interests, institutional systems, and academic advising to reduce course migration and improve completion rates.

Factors Influencing Program Migration

Academic Factors

Tinto (1993), Bean and Metzner (1985), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that program difficulty and lack of academic fit are common triggers for course migration. Misalignment between program content and career goals leads many students to switch programs. Jaradat (2017) advocated qualitative studies to unpack students' motivations for shifting programs in local contexts.

Social and Cultural Influences

Grolnick (2009) emphasized the role of parental support and autonomy in student persistence. Tinto (1993) also noted that peer relationships and social engagement significantly affect academic commitment and retention.

Institutional and Financial Constraints

Institutional factors such as advising quality, policy rigidity, and faculty-student engagement affect student retention and mobility (Aquino & Castillo, 2019; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Becker's Human Capital Theory (1964) suggests that students consider financial returns, costs, and career prospects when selecting or shifting programs. Additionally, Litmeyer and Hennemann (2024) emphasized using predictive tools (like machine learning) to identify students at risk of dropping out or shifting.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses a dual-theoretical lens:

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Becker's (1964) HCT posits that students make education-related decisions—including program changes—based on perceived costs, benefits, and long-term career outcomes. This theory explains the economic rationale behind course shifting, especially when students perceive their current path as misaligned with market prospects or beyond their financial means.

Student Integration Model (SIM)

Tinto's (1993) SIM highlights how academic and social integration affect student retention. Positive interactions with peers, instructors, and institutional support systems foster commitment to a program, while isolation or unmet expectations lead to disengagement and eventual migration.

The Human Capital Theory explains how financial limitations and career considerations drive students to reevaluate their academic choices. The Student Integration Model justifies exploring institutional and social factors—like faculty interaction, peer influence, and policy clarity—as key elements of academic persistence. Together, these frameworks guide both the qualitative thematic analysis (to understand student motivations) and the stochastic analysis (to map behavioral patterns over time), directly addressing the study's two primary objectives: identifying key drivers of program migration and mapping institutional migration patterns among cohorts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a longitudinal cohort design to explore the patterns and determinants of course program migration at Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU). The 2019–2020 first-year student cohort, including enrollees from the main and extension campuses, served as the basis for tracking academic transitions. This approach provided insight into students' migration trajectories, identifying key decision points over time (Snijders, 2010).

Stochastic and network analysis complemented this design to map program shifts and visualize inter-program mobility. This analytical strategy modeled student behavior using variables such as academic performance, strand, and aptitude scores (Goldenberg et al., 2010).

Research Sampling and Participants

The study adopted a census sampling method for quantitative analysis, covering all first-year enrollees in the 2019–2020 cohort from the main and three extension campuses—Cateel, Banaybanay, and San Isidro. The sample included students who shifted to other programs within DOrSU and excluded those who graduated on time without changes in enrollment.

For qualitative analysis, six to ten students were selected through convenience sampling, ensuring accessibility and relevance (Creswell, 2013). These students had experienced program migration and provided narrative insights through semi-structured interviews

Data Collection

Two primary data sources were utilized:

1. Secondary Data: Academic records, program enrollment history, SCAST (State College Aptitude and Scholarship Test) scores, and senior high school strands were obtained from the registrar's office.
2. Primary Data: In-depth interviews were conducted with students who had shifted programs. An interview guide, validated by experts, focused on academic, institutional, and social factors affecting migration. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

For qualitative data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method was applied to identify recurring themes in student narratives. This facilitated a grounded understanding of students' motivations and lived experiences related to course program migration.

Quantitative analysis involved Stochastic Actor-Oriented Models (SAOMs) to examine the likelihood of students shifting programs based on variables such as gender, academic performance (GWA), strand, and entrance test results (Steglich et al., 2010). The stochastic model enabled tracking of dynamic inter-program movements and detection of patterns across the student cohort.

Ethical Considerations

The study ensured:

- 1) Voluntary participation in interviews without coercion;
- 2) Anonymization of student data and adherence to university privacy protocols;
- 3) Right to withdraw without consequence;
- 4) Use of private, comfortable settings for interviews.

No conflict of interest was declared. Ethical protocols followed university research standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the thematic and stochastic analyses addressing two research questions: (1) What are the key factors driving students to shift between programs at DOrSU? and (2) What patterns and trends can be observed in program migration across cohorts?

Factors Influencing Course Program Migration

Academic Performance and Misalignment

Several students reported poor performance, especially in subjects outside their interests, as a major reason for shifting. Academic failure, lack of guidance, and course misalignment with career goals led to feelings of disengagement. Students expressed being unaware of academic deficiencies due to limited advisement, which later compounded academic delays.

These findings align with Srivastava et al. (2024) and Shakoor & Yasin (2022), who emphasize the role of performance and satisfaction in educational persistence. Course-related anxiety, exacerbated by resource constraints and pandemic-induced barriers, further complicated their academic paths.

Financial Limitations and Resource Access

Students cited the inability to afford required gadgets, equipment, or project materials as deterrents from continuing in their original programs. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened this issue, highlighting the digital divide and the lack of institutional safety nets.

As Brew et al. (2021) and Misopoulos et al. (2018) affirm, financial inequity and technological preparedness are critical determinants of student success. Institutions must address material access gaps, particularly for resource-heavy programs.

Social and Parental Influence

Peer networks and parental expectations significantly shaped student decisions. Students were influenced by friends who described better-aligned programs and parental insistence on “safe” career paths, even at the cost of personal interest.

These findings echo the cultural patterns reported by Alampay & Garcia (2019) and Yotanyamaneewong & Tapanya (2019), in which strong family influence may lead to delayed self-determination and program switching. Peer recommendations—especially in science and criminology fields—also played a role (Gaviola et al., 2023).

Institutional and Faculty Factors

Students frequently reported challenges with enrollment slots, program rigidity, and deficient academic advising. The absence of proactive intervention—especially in tracking academic deficiencies—left many confused about their options, prompting migration.

Faculty disengagement, passive pedagogy, and the lack of responsiveness to student concerns contributed to program dissatisfaction. These institutional shortcomings align with research by Hermano & Denamarca (2022) and Atobatele et al. (2024), which point to faculty-student interaction as a key component of academic persistence.

Trends and Patterns in Course Migration

A Survival Analysis with Stochastic Components was employed to determine predictors of program migration.

Variable	B	SE	Sig.	Exp(B)	Interpretation
GWA	4.326	0.958	.000	75.633	Significant
SHS Grade	0.080	0.072	.266	1.083	Not Significant
Strand	-1.103	0.456	.016	0.332	Significant

SUAST	0.005	0.008	.524	1.005	Not Significant
Random Effect	0.214	0.238	.021	1.025	Significant

Chi-square = 29.070; df = 4; p < .001

Key Interpretations:

- 1) GWA was the strongest predictor: students with lower academic performance were significantly more likely to shift.
- 2) SHS Strand also influenced migration likelihood – suggesting misalignment between pre-college background and program choice.
- 3) SHS Grades and SUAST Scores did not significantly predict program shifting, indicating that post-admission experiences weigh more heavily than pre-entry metrics.
- 4) Random Effects were significant, implying unmeasured socio-economic or institutional variables contribute to the likelihood of migration.

These results corroborate findings by Marade & Brinthaup (2018), Denice (2021), and Harper et al. (2023), who underscore the complexity of academic decisions influenced by both individual and structural factors.

Policy and Institutional Implications

The findings reveal actionable insights for institutional policy:

- 1) **Early Advising Programs:** Students with early academic warning signs (e.g., mid-GWA performers) must receive tailored guidance to preempt disengagement.
- 2) **Flexible Curriculum Structures:** Universities should reduce rigid prerequisite chains that delay transitions and discourage exploration.
- 3) **Faculty Training:** Faculty must be equipped to support diverse learners through responsive, student-centered teaching strategies.
- 4) **Social Network Integration:** Institutions should recognize peer and family influence and incorporate them into orientation and guidance systems.
- 5) **Equity in Access:** More robust financial aid and equipment support are essential, particularly for students in resource-intensive programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Course program migration at Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU) is shaped by a complex interplay of academic, social, financial, and institutional factors. While academic performance (notably GWA) emerged as a strong predictor of migration, students also shifted due to misaligned career interests, lack of academic support, and policy-related barriers.

Social influences, particularly from peers and family, were also central to student decisions. Institutional variables—such as faculty responsiveness, enrollment policies, and resource availability—were critical in either mitigating or intensifying migration behaviors. The findings affirm that course program migration is not solely a function of student capability but of systemic dynamics that require institutional attention.

To address these challenges and reduce unnecessary program migration, the following are recommended:

Strengthen Academic Advising and Early Intervention

- a. Establish an early warning system targeting mid-performing students (GWA 2.0–2.5).
- b. Offer proactive, data-driven academic advising and feedback loops.

Improve Career Alignment and Exploration

- a. Implement a guided “exploratory year” curriculum.
- b. Conduct career pathway orientations integrated with SHS strand mapping.

Enhance Institutional Flexibility

- a. Review program prerequisites and slot allocation policies.
- b. Allow intra-departmental transfers with minimal delay in graduation timeline.

Develop Student-Centered Teaching and Mentorship

- a. Provide pedagogical training for faculty to improve student engagement.
- b. Promote mentorship programs involving alumni and advanced students.

Support Financial and Technological Access

- a. Expand needs-based financial aid and equipment loan programs.
- b. Ensure equitable access to digital resources and learning tools.

FURTHER STUDY

This study was limited to one cohort at DOrSU and used primarily retrospective data. Future research may consider:

- a. Longitudinal tracking across multiple cohorts;
- b. Comparative studies across institutions or regions;
- c. Quantitative modeling incorporating psychological and motivational variables;
- d. Policy impact evaluations, especially on advisement reform and flexible curriculum models.

These approaches would provide richer insight into systemic solutions for improving student retention and minimizing course program migration.

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