Early Alert Pilot Initiatives  
Academic Care Team Report  
June 1, 2011

History and Charge

In March of 2010, the University Council on Student Success and Engagement (UCSEE) issued a report by the Early Alert Sub-Committee outlining current trends in supporting students through an early in the term intervention for students who might benefit from additional support. Such initiatives have proliferated across the nation of late, and the UCSEE wanted to determine the feasibility of an early alert effort for OSU students. The sub-committee studied research, surveyed universities with early alert programs, looked at national trends, and student needs at OSU. The committee recommended that OSU conduct pilot studies for fall, winter, and spring of 2010/2011 to determine the best course of action. Their specific recommendations follow.

Recommendations for Early Alert Pilots for 2010-2011

1. The Academic Care Team—the Early Alert Committee recommends the formation of an Academic Care Team (ACT) to manage and triage notifications about students experiencing struggles in their academic lives.

2. Fall Term Pilot—The Early Alert Committee suggests that the fall term U-Engage and LinC-Learn sections be utilized as a first effort for early warning.

3. Winter Term 2011 Pilot—this pilot could provide an entirely different approach to early alert from fall term. In this case, we suggest that we address the issue of large Bacc Core classes.

4. Spring Term Pilot—The Early Alert Committee recommends that WR 121 be the focus of a spring term pilot.

5. Early Alert Form—The Early Alert Committee recommends that an Early Alert Form be made available to faculty, staff, and advisors for reporting academic concerns about students to the Academic Care Team.

Overview of pilot efforts for 2010/2011:
The recommendation to establish an Academic Care Team was implemented in short order in fall of 2010. The team is comprised of professionals from Student and Academic Affairs representing a broad array of student support services (membership listed below). The team worked together to establish a partnership with HHS 231 to track attendance, collaborated with U-Engage, Chemistry, and Writing 121 faculty and GTAs, and worked with a bacc core class for the pilot initiatives outlined above.

Academic Care Team Membership:
Tracy Bentley-Townlin, Director, Disability Access Services  
Jill Childress, Residence Hall Director  
Clare Creighton, September Scholars Coordinator, Academic Success Center  
Moira Dempsey, Director, Academic Success Center  
Tiffany Fritz, UESP Academic Advisor, Academic Success Center  
Cori Hall, Academic Advisor, College of Science  
Linda Kasper, Director, Residential Education  
Nicholas Martin, CSSA graduate student  
Janet Nishihara, Director, Educational Opportunities Program  
Mike Olson, FYE coordinator, New Student Programs and Family Outreach  
Candy Pierson-Charlton, Academic Success Coordinator, INTO, OSU  
Mary Prindiville, BEST Program Coordinator, Academic Success Center  
Ruth Sterner, HHS Academic Advisor, Health and Human Sciences  
Kris Winter, Director, New Student Programs and Family Outreach
Summary of Outcomes from Pilot Efforts

The ACT found that students in general do not respond to email offers of support, and we therefore have questions about other modes of contacting students. We recognize that considerable marketing and outreach is needed in order to bring faculty into conversation and participation in early alert efforts. In like manner, students need to be informed of a campus initiative aimed at identifying academic difficulty early in the term. And finally, OSU must shore up academic support services if we are to have the capacity to refer students to the necessary tutoring, coaching or other academic support services. We are under-resourced in these areas especially with no centralized tutoring.

The National Conversation

“Early Alert Programs have proliferated across the nation as institutions implement best practices for student success and retention. In the study of twenty “Project Deep” institutions, George Kuh details some of the successful early alert programs and concludes that “we cannot overemphasize the importance of a dense web of student success-oriented initiatives held together by redundant early warning systems and safety nets.” Alan Seidman’s retention formula calls for “Early Identification and Early and Intensive and Continuous Intervention” in order to ensure student success and persistence (Seidman 2005). Vincent Tinto is a strong proponent of early warning systems that identify students before mid-term grades. He writes, “The treatment of student needs and problems should occur as early as possible...and should be approached in an integrated fashion” (Tinto 1993). The consistent emphasis on “networks” and “webs” in the literature highlights the significance of developing a model that integrates resources and information sharing to ensure both comprehensive student intervention and effective assessment.” (Quoted from Early Alert Report March 2010)

New learning about Early Alert efforts surfaced when three OSU professional attended the NACADA Student Success and Persistence conference in Florida in February 2011. Susan Campbell and Charlie Nutt report that nationally many early alert efforts fail 1) because institutions fail to do an intensive study of students targeted for early alert 2) programs are developed without a focus on factors affecting success on that particular campus and 3) many efforts focus on study skills and fail to address issues of student commitment to education in general and to institution in particular. (NACADA Pocket Guide Series PG07)

In addition, Joe Cuseo, Professor Emeritus of Marymount College and long time expert in student success and attrition, cites component practices that are integral to the success of early alert efforts including faculty motivation, mode of delivery of early alert messages, targeted population for early intervention, and campus community involvement. The cautions from NACADA and Cuseo align with the experience the Academic Care Team had in piloting several efforts this past year. See appendix for Cuseo handouts.

Discussion of ACT Pilot Efforts 2010/2011

1. Attendance Tracking

The Academic Care Team tracked attendance in a large, baccalaureate core course and emailed students who had missed significant amounts of class. The ACT team members wanted to determine whether email outreach to students early in the term would affect their long term attendance record and/or academic success in the baccalaureate core course.

The ACT chose to track attendance in an HHS 231 course taught by Professor Erica Woekel during both fall 2010 and winter 2011 terms. HHS 231 was chosen by the team because it is taken by large numbers of first-year students, is required of students in all majors, and the ACT could utilize Professor Woekel’s experience with and use of clicker technology to track attendance. Woekel provided access to Blackboard to ACT member Linda Kasper and graduate teaching assistant Charlotte Emigh in New Student Programs and Family Outreach. ACT team members created a series of emails to send to students who had missed significant amounts of class throughout the fall and winter terms. Email messages were to be sent out at the end of Week 2, Week 4 and finally at the end of Week 6. Messages were crafted to be appropriate for the number of times a student had missed class and for the number of notifications from the ACT.
The information below summarizes the findings for attendance tracking for fall and winter terms. Term by term data may be found in the appendix.

Attendance Tracking Numbers for fall 2010

Of the 792 students enrolled in the HHS sections for fall 2010 and winter 2011:

- 43 were contacted one time to express concern over attendance
- 15 were contacted twice over attendance concerns
- 10 were contacted on all 3 occasions to note continued concern over attendance

**68 students in total were contacted. (Totaling 103 separate email contacts)**

Of the students contacted by ACT during fall 2010 and winter 2011:

- 20 were on Academic Warning at the end of the term under study
- 9 were on Academic Probation at the end of term under study

**43% of those contacted were not in good academic standing at the end of the combined terms**

Of the students who were **not contacted** due to attendance concerns during fall 2010 and winter 2011:

- 59 of 724 students were on Academic Warning at the end of the term under study
- 25 were on Academic Probation at the end of the term under study

**10.6% of those not contacted were not in good academic standing at the end of the combined terms**

Attendance tracking results:

- AW, AP data indicates that attendance is correlated with academic success. In this instance we were identifying the right students for an intervention.
- We were able to resolve clicker issues early in the term. While trouble shooting technology is not the purview of the ACT, it certainly was useful for the instructor to have these issues cleared up. She reported much less student traffic in office hours during week 10 than in the past.
- We were disappointed in the low rate of response to ACT emails. Since the emails suggested campus referrals, we have no way of identifying any follow-up actions on the part of the students contacted.
- Since our data correlates with the findings in the Hardwiring Report published by the Education Advisory Board, we believe that more robust communications to students about the importance of attendance are in order.

2. Term by Term Referrals

One of the 2010/2011 pilot efforts was to provide an efficient way for faculty and staff to refer students who they perceived to be in academic difficulty to the Academic Care Team. We are grateful to the technical expertise offered by the staff of Disability Access Services in supporting the development of a web-based Academic Concern Form for use by faculty and staff. The site is secure and requires onid authentication. Academic Care Team members are enrolled on the site with administrative status in order to view any concern forms that have been submitted. The site can be viewed at [https://secure.onid.oregonstate.edu/login?service=acad_care](https://secure.onid.oregonstate.edu/login?service=acad_care). Please see the appendix for a copy of the form which allows faculty to refer students for a variety of reasons.
Two Academic Care Team members were designated as “on call” pairs for one or two weeks during fall, winter and spring terms. All ACT members rotated through the “on call” system each term. “On call” ACT teammates were responsible for monitoring the ACT website for any faculty student referrals. If a faculty member submitted an online student referral form, “on call” ACT members were responsible for following up with the faculty member making the referral, and contacting the student to see what support might be needed. ACT members were intentional about the tone of all communications with students. We established a protocol that shifted the referrals mentioned in the email as appropriate to each case.

The Office of the Dean of Student Life also prepared an information folder titled “Resources for Consultation and Referral/For Use with Students of Concern” that was widely disseminated to faculty and staff on the OSU campus winter term 2011. The cover of the folder lists the Academic Care Team as a resource for students experiencing academic difficulty, and gives the Academic Success Center and its telephone number as a way to connect with the Academic Care Team for assistance.

At the fall term 2010 U-Engage training, instructors were informed of the Academic Care Team and were told this group could be a source of support if they had students struggling in their U-Engage classes. More specific follow-up was sent to each U-Engage instructor in October, giving faculty a full definition of the purpose of early intervention efforts and how the ACT could help them to support their students. The email included a direct link to the ACT referral website.

For the winter term pilot, the ACT worked with Chemistry instructor Margie Haak to encourage referrals via the Academic Concern Form. After the first mid-term, the instructor referred a number of students to the ACT. ACT members followed the established protocol and sent personalized emails based on appropriate templates developed by the ACT. In hindsight, we recognized that we missed an opportunity to train the Chemistry lab TAs regarding early alert and the importance of early referrals.

The spring term pilot included a more intentional training session with GTAs and instructors who were teaching sections of WR 121. The training included discussion about the high level of contact that WR 121 instructors have with students in their courses and the advantage that brings in identifying concerns early in the term. Susan Meyers, Director of Writing in English, reported enthusiastic response to the training which was done in conjunction with Lisa Hoogesteger from the Student Care Team. The GTAs felt better prepared to communicate their concerns with attendance and quality of work with students and also had a clear understanding of the referral process from crisis to academic difficulty. The training was so successful that Susan Meyer has already scheduled a similar training for the fall orientation of new English GTAs.

Students flagged for follow-up in the above three term pilot effort included students who missed one or more classes within the first two weeks of the term, demonstrated low or no engagement in the classroom, appeared to be isolated from other students, or exhibited poor performance in early assignments. The ACT contacted students via onid email as outlined above, and we encouraged instructors to notify students that they could expect to hear from the Academic Care Team. While we had minor success with this effort at early intervention, once again we were dismayed at the very low rate of response to our emails. One student from fall term did come in for academic coaching and has continued to use ASC services. Of 23 students referred to the ACT through the referral form, only 5 students replied to our email outreach. We do not know if the others accessed any recommended services as a result of the email.

3. Learning from Early Efforts for the 2011/2012 Year

Consultation
As the role of the ACT developed, we found that assisting faculty and GTAs by consulting on particular concerns was very helpful. While this service was outside the original vision for Early Alert, we recognized that faculty sometimes needed to consult with someone who had training with academic and other concerns, had connections to many resources, and yet was separated from the classroom and could provide an appropriate and confidential perspective on the best way to follow up with students. In the cases we worked with, we generally found the following to be true:
• Students frequently responded better to in-person contacts or e-mail contacts with individuals with whom they were familiar (i.e. instructors or teaching assistants) as opposed to an e-mail contact from a representative of the Academic Care Team with whom they had no prior relationship.
• A consultative model seemed to be effective for faculty members who had the primary relationship with the student in question, as often they just needed a second opinion or perspective on a classroom situation.
• The ability to talk with and consult on issues of academic concern seemed to empower faculty to respond in meaningful ways in the classroom or in one-on-one meetings with the student.

Education Outreach
The ACT recognizes that a robust and comprehensive education outreach program may enhance students’ academic experiences overall. Obviously, Academic Care Team members should be adequately trained in academic, personal and social resources available on campus in order to make appropriate case management decisions and referrals. In addition, we need a strong outreach program so that faculty and TAs understand how to appropriately and effectively utilize the Academic Care Team. Students need Blackboard and clicker training in order to maximize the benefits of classroom technology. OSU must persist in the wide dissemination of information on academic resources and encourage students to connect with programs that will benefit their performance.

Crisis Response
As is to be expected, it is common that students who are in academic trouble are also experiencing crises in other areas of their lives. One of the most important unintended outcomes of our work was understanding our role in assisting with academic concerns, when to refer to other resources and consult as necessary (such as with the Student Care Team), and being very aware of what our role is and what it is not for students who are in need.

We found that the Academic Care Team fulfills a helpful niche, while at the same time not quite fulfilling the roles that Early Alert at other campuses may fulfill. Part of this is due to a quarter system, part of this is due to resources available, and part may be due to the culture around outreach and communication for students on campus.

We also found that our ability to partner is critical in the success of an ACT model. As mentioned previously, understanding our role as unique and separate from the Student Care Team, developing our role with faculty and staff, and partnering with the Center for Teaching and Learning will be important for the ACT to be successful. Additionally, we want to make sure that the appropriate players are at the table for ACT. This may mean including faculty, the Registrar’s Office, a representative from the Center for Teaching and Learning, and others as part of the Academic Care Team.

4. ACT Report Recommendations

a) Allocate time and resources to further develop current support programs on campus.

Rationale: No early alert program will be successful if we do not have the capacity and resources to support students when they wish to seek help. Improving and increasing capacity and quality in existing programs will allow us to serve more students who seek help with their academics.

Action Items:
– Evaluate existing support programs (Math LC, CLC [Worm Hole, Mole Hole, etc.] WC, September Scholars, BEST, athletics) and create a report measuring number of students served, impact of program, and capacity for growth
– Based on evaluation, create a strategic plan for appropriate changes, growth, and continued assessment
– Increase institutional support (i.e. funding) for existing programs
– Develop a communication infrastructure between support programs
– Increase marketing and outreach of academic resources for students, faculty, and staff
b) **Continue the landscape study to gather information in regard to students’ perceptions of academic success and current OSU efforts to respond to students who are struggling.**

Rationale: In the design and implementation of programs such as early alert, Academic Care Team, and other success support programs, we need more information about factors that contribute to student success on campus, and current efforts in other areas of campus.

Action Items:
- Investigate the student experience/student perspective: what are current and incoming students struggling with? Explore academic behaviors, interactions with faculty, navigation of resources, transitional hardships, etc.
- Create a map of campus communication: What are colleges/departments/offices currently doing to communicate academic concern (i.e. Academic Warning emails, Academic Probation emails, suspension notification)
- Explore the question: How are we as an institution recognizing student success?
- Work closely with the advising community for a common understanding of issues that students face
- Identify areas in which new students need to be knowledgeable to be successful and provide training before they are too far into the term (academic resources on campus, how to use Blackboard, how to use clickers, etc.)

c) **Increase faculty/staff/GTA training, awareness, and involvement in responding to students who are experiencing academic difficulties.**

Rationale: Faculty and GTAs often have the most direct contact with students and the most immediate knowledge of students who are struggling in their classes. By providing training and support to faculty and GTAs we increase their ability to respond. In addition, many teaching staff members have an established relationship with many of their students (if nothing else by virtue of being assigned to the course) and thus have the potential to leverage that relationship to respond to students in difficulty. Faculty outreach to students may be more effective than the outreach of a third party (ACT member) or a technology based outreach effort.

Action Items:
- Develop a collaborative relationship between the Academic Care Team and the Center for Teaching and Learning, so that ACT can communicate themes or trends with regard to training needs and concerns that may be helpful for teaching faculty and GTAs.
- Consider role of Academic Care Team or Academic Success Center (which already serves informally in this capacity) in providing consultation and support to faculty as well; article role clearly in future planning.
- Identify and streamline resources, reference material, and training resources in one location for faculty to easily access as needed.

d) **Delay implementation of technology-based solutions and software programs that address early alert until needs assessment is complete and adequate infrastructure is in place.**

Rationale: A technology platform is expensive and is only a good as the campus plan and communication system that would undergird its use. We believe that further groundwork is necessary before investing in technology. *Please see the appendix for an overview of the technology resources that the team investigated and especially for the overview by Joe Cuseo.*
Action Items:
- Further research on tech options/software programs
- Investigate opportunities with OSU’s new portal system
- Ensure that our primary resources/existing structure are strong enough to support increase that will likely result with appropriate and future use of technology.

e) Establish clear, measurable objectives for the Academic Care Team, and other early alert entities, taking into account strategic planning and changing landscape at OSU

Rationale: Clear objectives and a vision for the future of the Academic Care Team (as well as other early alert initiatives) will give the group clear direction for how to proceed with their work, and the ability to conduct ongoing assessment of the impact of that work.

Action Items:
- Articulate the role of the Academic Care Team with regard to:
  o Faculty consulting/GTA development & training, etc
  o ACT membership
  o ACT training and development
  o Academic Concern Form Online
- Develop a vision and plan for Early Alert activities at OSU including plans for:
  o Articulating goals, objectives, and approach (proactive vs. reactive)
  o Achieving faculty buy-in/involvement
  o Utilizing an outreach approach beyond email
  o Defining target populations
  o Consideration of outreach to specific populations
- Work in collaboration with the upcoming efforts of the UCSEE to isolate two or three reasons for student attrition from the Wang study and ensure that we have adequate interventions in place
- Ensure appropriate training for Academic Care Team members
Appendix

Joe Cuseo’s Overview of Early Alert Programs...............................................................page 9

Technology Overview....................................................................................................page 13

Pricing for Technology Options.....................................................................................page 14

Academic Concern Form...............................................................................................page 15

Sample Email..................................................................................................................page 16

Term by Term detail on Attendance Tracking...............................................................page 17
Early-Alert (Early-Warning) Programs: Definition, Advantages, Variations & Illustrations
By Joe Cuseo
Published on the Learning Assistance Listserv

What defines an early-alert program?

Early alert system may be defined as a formal, proactive feedback system though which students and student-support agents are alerted to early manifestations of poor academic performance (e.g., low course grade at or before midterm) or academic disengagement (high rates of absenteeism). It is unclear whether non-classroom-based indicators of students at risk for attrition are being routinely used as part of early-alert systems (e.g., little or no contact with academic advisors, or failure to register for following-term classes, failure to renew work-study, financial-aid, or campus housing agreements, requesting transcripts before eligibility to graduate).

What is driving the growing interest in early-alert/early-warning programs?

Two key developments appear to account for why early-alert programs are proliferating:

1. The rapid growth of technology-mediated commercial systems designed to facilitate the early-alert process. These systems reduce the need for time-consuming, labor-intensive clerical work and allow for delivery of immediate ("real time") progress reports to students and student-support professionals.

2. The increasing number of academically underprepared and first-generation students entering higher education; these students may not be ready to meet the academic expectations of higher education or may lack the social capital (college knowledge) to succeed without close monitoring and early support. Australian scholars, McInnis, James, and McNaught (1995), artfully articulate the ethical responsibility of postsecondary institutions to provide support for these students:

There are first year students who do not understand the difference between school and university, or who are so lacking in fundamental skills that they are not ready to take responsibility for their learning. Admitting these students without providing adequate support services and then criticizing them for failing to match up to expectations would be clearly a case of blaming the victim (p. 8).

Are early-alert programs effective?

Empirical support for the effectiveness of early-support programs is slim and consists primarily of single-institution studies involving small sample sizes and use of methodologies that are not particularly rigorous. See Appendix A, p. 6, for a sample summary of campus-specific studies.

An early-alert system should build a pilot study into its initial program-development plan that includes a plan to collect on faculty fidelity to program implementation and student responsiveness to alert message. The plan should also include a strategy for assessing the efficacy of different intervention strategies triggered by the system (e.g., their impact on students’ course or program persistence and performance). Failure to do so relegates the early-alert system to serving merely as an early-identification-and-referral procedure, rather than a bona fide student intervention-and-success-promoting system.

Although early-alert systems still lack a strong base of outcomes-based evidence, the early-process does implement a number of theoretically sound principles of program delivery, namely:

a) Proactive delivery: early-alert programs deliver early feedback and take preventative action to short-circuit student difficulties in an anticipatory fashion—before they require reactive (after-the-fact) intervention or eventuate in student attrition. An early-alert system that ensures faculty provide their students with some evaluation and feedback during the
**first four weeks of class** is not only an effective retention practice for at-risk students, it’s also an effective learning strategy that benefits all students.

b) **Intrusive** delivery: early-alert programs **initiate** supportive action by **reaching out** to students and bring support to them—as opposed to “passive programming” that waits for students to seek out support on their own. Research indicates that student use of campus support services is woefully low, particularly by students from families without a college-going tradition. Early alert represents a process of intrusive, course-integrated student support that has the potential to reach a larger number of students than passive, stand-alone support programming.

c) **Targeted** delivery: early-alert programs focus support on students those who **need** it the most, i.e., students whose behavior indicates they are **at risk** for academic failure or course attrition. This principle of targeted delivery is particularly important during times when budgets are tight and resources are limited.

d) **Personalized** delivery: students’ motivation to succeed increases when they perceive they are being noticed as individuals and that their personal success matters to the institution. Early alert is an individualized form of student support that promotes student persistence by providing personal attention and validation.

**Advantages of Early Alert Relative to Predictive Modeling**

Early-alert programs also have advantages over other approaches that attempt to **predict** at-risk students solely on the basis of their **demographic characteristics** or by measures of their pre-college **academic performance**. Early-alert indicators are measures actual college behavior that have been exhibited, observed, and documented; they are not attempts to infer or predict student behavior on the basis of group affiliation or academic history in non-college settings. Group-based approaches to identifying and supporting at-risk students also run the risk of “stereotype threat”—a form of negative self-fulfilling prophecy that may be experienced by individual members of a group that has been labeled “at risk”, which can result in a loss of self-confidence or self-efficacy due to heightened awareness of their greater risk for failure (Steele, 1997).

Instruments designed to predict at-risk students at college entry are based on students’ **self-reported** responses. Although answering “yes” to a survey question about “intent to leave” before graduation is generally a good predictor of student attrition, early-alert behavior goes beyond prediction based on self-report to prediction based on observable (objective) behavior indicating that the student is truly acting on intent—moving it from probability to actuality. Simply stated, the best predictor of a student who is at risk for attrition is student initiation of behaviors that will eventually lead to attrition. Thus, it follows that the best way to prevent attrition is to intercept attrition-initiated behavior before it eventuates in actual withdrawal.

An early-alert program can be used to identify at-risk behavior manifested in different campus contexts, such as poor performance in the classroom, disengagement outside the classroom, or behavior indicating intent to discontinue enrollment failure (e.g., failure to register for next-term classes, failure to renew financial aid or student housing, or requesting copies of transcript before eligibility to graduate). If early alert is defined broadly to include in-class and out-of-class indicators of potential withdrawal, the program acquires the potential to involve multiple campus offices and multiple members of the college community in the retention process. “Retention is everybody’s business” and successful retention requires a “total institutional response” have become truisms in the retention field. Postsecondary research supports these truisms by demonstrating that campus programs aimed at increasing student retention are more effective when Academic and Student Affairs collaborate to design and deliver these programs (Stodt & Klepper, 1987). For example, in a national research project designed to document effective educational practices (Project DEEP), it was discovered that a high degree of respect and collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs typifies institutions with higher-than-predicted graduation rates (Kuh, et al., 2005). Similar results were obtained from an in-depth study of state universities with higher-than-average graduation rates, which revealed that one distinctive feature of high-performing institutions was campus-wide coordination of retention efforts that stimulated communication and cooperation between Academic and Student Affairs (AASC&U, 2005).

Furthermore, student-support agents are likely to feel more comfortable intervening with a student who has exhibited concrete actions or specific behaviors that can be referred to and used as focal points for discussion and modification. Intervention can be awkward when a support agent is working with a student who has the _potential_ to be at risk (e.g., based on pre-college performance or by being a member of an at-risk group) but has yet to demonstrate any behavior indicating they are at risk. This may be comparable to presuming a student to be guilty (of engaging in at-risk behavior)
solely on the basis of personal characteristics or prior history, without having any current evidence that the student is doing anything wrong (risky).

The point here is not to pooh-pooh the value of using demographic data and at-risk prediction instruments at college entry. Such prognostic information can be very useful; however, this information needs to be augmented or corroborated by individual diagnostic data and personalized intervention strategies.

**Types or Varieties of Early-Alert Programs**

Early-alert programs may be classified into three major categories: (a) midterm-grade reports, (b) scores on at-risk prediction instruments, and (c) pre-midterm behavioral warning systems.

**Midterm-Grade Reports**

Issuing grades at midterm probably represents the first and most commonly used practice for alerting students proactively about poor academic progress. One national survey revealed that more than 60% of postsecondary institutions report midterm grades to first-year students for the purpose of providing them with early feedback on their academic performance. Approximately 10% of these institutions obtain right-to-privacy waivers that allow reporting of midterm grades to both first-year students and their parents (Barefoot, 2001). Students with dangerously low midterm grade reports are typically notified by letter to speak with an institutional representative (e.g., academic advisor or academic dean) who, in turn, refers the notified student to the appropriate support service. At some institutions, such as New York University, academic advisors make follow-up phone calls to students who fail to respond to their initial letter of notification (Early Intervention Programs, 1992). At Brooklyn College (NY), faculty notify peer tutors when students are having academic difficulties and the tutors initiate contact with the student (Levitz, 1991).

Although use of midterm grades as an early-feedback system has a long history of use in higher education, it also has a long history of implementation limitations and obstacles. These limitations and obstacles are described below, along with potential solution strategies for ameliorating them.

1. **Lack of faculty compliance**—i.e., faculty unwillingness calculate and formally report midterm grades for all students in all their courses.

   Faculty resistance to computing and submitting midterm grades may be minimized if instructors are not asked to submit midterm grades for all students, but only for those students who are in academic jeopardy (e.g., students whose grades are C- or below). Students' midterm grades for one course in particular—the first-year seminar (a.k.a., first-year experience course)—may have the potential to serve as a vehicle for early identification of first-term students who may be at risk for academic failure and attrition. (See Appendix B, p. 8, for further details and supporting evidence.)

   Faculty compliance rates may also be increased by increasing the convenience of the grade-reporting procedure (e.g., easy-to-complete grade forms or on-line grade submission). Lastly, instructors may be expected to show higher rates of compliance if they are recognized or rewarded for doing; for instance, if department chairs and academic deans “count” their record of compliance in promotion-and-tenure decisions.

2. **Midterm grade reports are not sufficiently proactive**, i.e., they often are received and acted upon in time to make a significant improvement in the student’s course grade.

   Issuing midterm-grade reports to struggling students is a laudable practice, but as Tinto (1993) warns, by the time midterm grades are recorded and disseminated, feedback may come too late in the term to be useful or improving course performance. However, midterms grades may still be a useful way to alert the student (and advisors) of the need to withdraw from a course in which a midterm grade is extremely low. This advantage of midterm grade reports may be maximized if instructors are asked to report not only the student’s grade, but also what percentage of the student’s final grade it represents.

3. **Reporting a grade at midterm does not specify the source (cause) of the poor performance**, fails to suggest what specific action the student should take, and does not suggest what particular intervention strategy a student-support agent should take to rectify the problem.

   Effective performance-enhancing feedback should be: (a) proactive—delivered early in the learning process to allow for early error detection and correction, and (b) precise—specify clearly what needs to be done to rectify errors and improve subsequent performance. Midterm grades, although useful for informing decisions about whether or a student should persist in or withdraw from a course, represents feedback that is typically neither proactive nor precise enough to be used by students to improve their course performance and final course grade.
**Pre-Midterm Behavior Warning Systems**

Growing awareness of limitations of midterm grades for providing feedback early enough to improve course performance has led to more interest in the use of pre-midterm, early-alert systems. Identifying and connecting with students who exhibit disengagement very early in the term—before midterms grades are calculated, processed, and disseminated—represents a more proactive alert system. Campuses are relying more on earlier feedback mechanisms, based on student behavior during the first 2-6 weeks of the term (e.g., students who miss class regularly, who are chronically tardy, who consistently fail to turn-in their assignments, or who rarely are prepared for planned class activities). For instance, at New Mexico State University, attendance-problem requests are sent to instructors during the second week and sixth week of the term. Students demonstrating attendance irregularities falling into any of the following categories receive a phone call from the Office of Advisement Services: (a) first-semester students, (b) students on academic probation, and (c) students with multiple early-alert reports (Thompson, 2001).

Other colleges and universities issue early-alert forms that request additional information from the instructor that is used to help diagnose the specific nature of the problem and facilitate intervention that is tailored or customized to its particular cause. To increase compliance with this request, report forms are becoming increasingly “user friendly,” ensuring that completion of them is neither time-consuming nor labor-intensive. For instance, at Adelphi University (NY), early-warning rosters are released during the fourth week of class and faculty report students who are experiencing academic difficulty, using an efficient abbreviation code to identify the specific area(s) of weak performance: AP = Assignment Performance, CP = Class Participation, EX = Examination Performance, IA = Intermittent Attendance, NA = Never Attended, NC = Non-Completed assignments, and WE = Weak Expository skills (Carlson, 2000).

At Marymount College (CA), the offices of Academic Affairs and Student Development Services collaborate to identify and intercept academic problems during the early weeks of the term through a program titled, “R.E.T.A.I.N,” an acronym standing for: Re-Engagement Through Academic Intervention Now. Easy-to-complete forms are placed in faculty mailboxes that may be used to identify students exhibiting early behavioral signs of disengagement. Faculty are given the option of sending these forms to the Assistant Academic Dean, or contacting the Dean by electronic/voice mail to report students exhibiting early “red flag” behavior. Particular attention is paid to students for whom more than one R.E.T.A.I.N form has been submitted.

At North Central State College (OH), the COCO information system is used to facilitate the early-alert process. This computer system allows faculty access their class rosters through a website and faculty portal. If faculty wish to send an early alert to any student at any time during the term (first week through the last), they simply check a box next to the student’s name on the website roster. This takes the faculty member to another page where s/he checks the problem (non-attendance, poor homework, poor tests, other), types in notes if needed, and sends it. The electronic message goes to three places: (1) to the student’s e-mail, (2) to the college’s Student Success Center, and (3) back to the faculty member who originally sent it. An advisor in the Student Success Center then follows up with a phone call, email, or letter to the student to discuss options. The system was initially intended for use only during the first half of the term; however, faculty liked it so well, they asked for it to be available throughout the term (Walker, 2005).

In recent years, there has been rapid proliferation of technology-mediated early alert products. See Appendix C (p. 10) for sample descriptions of these commercial products, and see Appendix D (p. 11) for criteria that might be used to evaluate early-alert software programs.

**At-Risk Prediction Instruments**

Instruments have been developed to identify at-risk students by assessing their self-reported attitudes and behaviors at college entry (e.g., at orientation or during the first week of class). These instruments may also be administered at some point after onset of the academic term (e.g., 2-4 weeks), thus allowing them to function as a quasi-early-alert program by using indicators based on students’ self-reported attitudes and habits, rather than observations of student behavior or performance. See Appendix D, p. 12, for sample descriptions of these instruments.
# Technology Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology Overview</th>
<th>Proactive &amp; Predictive Approach</th>
<th>Case Management Approach</th>
<th>Faculty Managed Rules &amp; Log Based Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MAP-Works</td>
<td>Starfish</td>
<td>Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Profile Data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Grade Reports</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Grade Reports</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Data- 3 times during first-year</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alerts Notices</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Student</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Faculty</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Norming</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Resources</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>In-Messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dashboard</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Notes/Alerts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of Actions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Assessment Areas:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Commitment to the Institution</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Communication Skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Analytical Skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Self-Discipline</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Time Management</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Financial Means</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Basic Academic Behaviors</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Advanced Academic Behaviors</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Academic Self Efficacy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Peer Connections</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Social Aspects</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Environment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Roommate Relationships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Separation from Home</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Distress from Separation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Academic Integration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Social Integration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Satisfaction with the Institution</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Scheduling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackboard Integration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information System Integration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FERPA Aware Reporting Platform</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pricing for Technology Options

MAP-Works
$15,000 + max $75,000
$8/freshmen
$6/sophomore
700 freshmen = $20,600
4,500 freshmen = $51,000
4,500 freshmen & 4,500 sophomore Estimate: max $75,000 or $78,000

“Proactive and Predictive Approach”

Starfish
$32,250 for CONNECT & $32,250 for Early Alert

“Case Management Approach”

Pharos 360
$5/student + $1.50/student license fee
$5,000 instillation fee
700 freshmen = $9,550
4,500 freshmen = $34,250
4,500 freshmen & 4,500 sophomore $63,500

“Case Management Approach”

Blackboard
- No Current Pricing -

“Faculty Managed Rules & Log Based Approach”
# ACADEMIC CONCERN FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Last Name:</th>
<th>Student First Name:</th>
<th>ID:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class: 
Student Email (if known):

Name of Referrer:
Referrer’s Email:

## REASON FOR REFERRAL (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- [ ] Tardiness/Absences. Please indicate #: ___________
  
  *Please note # out of total. Example: Absent 5 of 10 classes*

- [ ] Low quiz/tests scores (C- or below) or below class average

- [ ] Not completing assignments

- [ ] Apathy, lack of connection or involvement in classroom environment

- [ ] Continually submits sub-standard work

- [ ] Noticeable or significant change in physical affect or demeanor

- [ ] Academic work indicates intent to harm self or others

- [ ] Other:

Please note any additional information that may be helpful to the Academic Care Team, including any contact, conversations or communication you have had with the student on this topic. If you have already referred the student to resources, please note those in the space below:

At this point, what resources do you need? What, if anything, would you like to see as a next step? Is there anything we can do to support you?

## What will the Academic Care Team do with this referral?

If possible, please share your concerns with the student, prior to submitting the Academic Concern Form, so that when possible, students will be aware that they might be contacted by a member of the Academic Care Team. Depending on the nature of the concern, we may not be able to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of you as a referrer.

Your referral will be read and responded to by a member of the Academic Care Team and an in-person or email intervention to the student will follow. We may refer students to campus resources such as CAPS, the Student Care Team, and others as applicable.

We adhere to university and federal policies on confidentiality of student information. You will, however, be notified that contact has been made with the student.
Sample Email

Hello [student],

I am writing on behalf of the Academic Care Team, a group of faculty members who work to support students in their academic success at OSU. Your U-Engage instructor contacted us out of concern because you were [missing assignments] for [her] class. [I know you have since been in contact with her, but I wanted to follow up with you to provide additional support and resources in regards to your academics.]

There are a lot of people and resources at OSU to help you if you are feeling behind. If you are facing similar situations in any of your other classes or would like help getting caught up with ALS 199, there are a range of resources available to you including:

- Meeting with your professors/instructors during office hours
- Meeting with an Academic Coach in the Academic Success Center (to schedule an appointment call 541-737-2272 or come into Waldo 102)
- Meeting with your Academic Advisor
- If you need help outside of the areas listed above and you’re not sure where to go, please visit the Office of the Dean of Student Life
- You can view upcoming academic deadlines on the Academic Calendar. Please pay special attention to the S/U and withdraw deadline, which is the Friday of week 7. If this is something you are interested in pursuing make an appointment with your Academic Advisor immediately.

As a member of the Academic Care Team, I would also like to invite you to use the Academic Care Team as a resource. If emailing, calling, or scheduling an appointment to meet with one of us would be beneficial to you, please respond to this email. In addition, if you have additional questions about any of these services, please respond to me or contact the people and offices above.

With your academic success in mind,

Tiffany Fritz and Clare Creighton

Academic Care Team

Academic Success Center
102 Waldo Hall
Corvallis, OR 97331
(541) 737-2272
Term by Term Detail on Attendance Tracking

Attendance Tracking Numbers for fall 2010:

Of the 394 students enrolled in the HHS section ACT monitored during fall 2010:

- 21 were contacted one time to express concern over attendance
- 5 were contacted twice over attendance concerns
- 7 were contacted on all 3 occasions to note continued concern over attendance

33 students in total were contacted. (Totaling 52 separate email contacts)

Of the students contacted by ACT during fall 2010:

- 15 were on Academic Warning at the end of fall 2010
- 1 was on Academic Probation at the end of fall 2010

48% of those contacted were not in good academic standing at the end of fall 2010

Of the students who were not contacted due to attendance concerns during fall 2010:

- 35 were on Academic Warning at the end of fall 2010
- 1 was on Academic Probation at the end of fall 2010

10.2% of those not contacted were not in good academic standing at the end of fall 2010

Attendance Tracking Numbers for winter 2011:

Of the 398 students enrolled in the HHS section monitored during winter 2011:

- 22 were contacted one time to express concern over attendance
- 10 were contacted twice over attendance concerns
- 3 were contacted on all 3 occasions to note continued concern over attendance

35 students in total were contacted. (Totaling 51 separate email contacts)

Of the students contacted by ACT during winter 2011:

- 5 were on Academic Warning at the end of winter 2011
- 8 was on Academic Probation at the end of winter 2011

38% of those contacted were not in good academic standing at the end of winter 2011

Of the students who were not contacted due to attendance concerns during winter 2011:

- 24 were on Academic Warning at the end of winter 2011
- 24 was on Academic Probation at the end of winter 2011

13% of those not contacted were not in good academic standing at the end of winter 2011