Committee and Charge:
Moira Dempsey and Cary Green served as co-chairs for the Early Alert Sub-Committee of the University Council on Student Experience and Engagement (UCSEE). Committee members include the following people: Tracy Bentley-Townlin, Office of the Dean of Student Life; Louie Bottaro, Advisor, College of Liberal Arts; Linda Kasper, Residential Life; Patrick Moser, College Student Services Administration graduate student; Robin Pappas, Academic Success Center; Candy Pierson-Charlton, INTO OSU; Tony Wilcox, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences; Kris Winter, New Student Programs & Family Outreach; The committee was charged to examine strategies that OSU might follow in order to provide timely interventions for students who struggle academically. The committee met six times from January through March 2010; subsets of the committee met to gather information on such topics as Blackboard, large bacc core classes at OSU, data, and comparator institutions. We relied heavily on the Education Advisory Board report, “Hardwiring Student Success: Building Disciplines for Retention and Timely Graduation.”

In examining the process and criteria for developing an Early Alert Referral Process for Oregon State University, the committee developed the following guiding principles:

- Maintain a student-centered approach
- Focus on first-year students
- Make assessment and data-based decisions for design, implementation, and improvement
- Build for success – it is critical to have a manageable cohort for the pilot year
- Avoid redundancies – utilize current assets and align with existing parallel efforts (i.e., Student Care Team)

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.

The Local Context
OSU is currently at work reviewing, designing and instituting a network of initiatives aimed at improving undergraduate education and engagement. The context for introducing an Early Alert system at OSU is
securely in place given the emphasis on improved first-year advising; a renewal of the delivery, marketing, and intent of the Bacc Core; a consideration of service learning and undergraduate research, and more. The Early Alert Sub-Committee is aware that the integrated nature of student success calls for a network of programs and interventions as is evidenced in the national conversation. Thus, the introduction of an early alert system at OSU is timely and stands to be combined with a variety of efforts to engage students and improve retention.

Alerts for students in academic difficulty can occur on a continuum: 1) prior to the start of the term using the Insight Resume and other admissions data; 2) early in the term, using attendance and performance indicators; and 3) at the end of the term, using Academic Warning and Academic Probation flags. For purposes of this report, we have focused on alerts occurring during an academic term with an emphasis on early in the term. For now, we believe the bridge programs, EOP, and referrals from the Undergraduate Admissions Committee and Insight Resume readers stand as an intervention for pre-term alerts at OSU. Further study of the AW and AP rates at the end of term may shed light on opportunities to be developed in light of the current emphasis on first-year advising. Therefore, we believe that the pilot stage of this new initiative ought to focus on alerts in the midst of the term.

Features of Academic Struggles of OSU Students
After reading and discussing the Education Advisory Board’s “Hardwiring Student Success” documents, the Early Alert Sub-Committee identified and discussed issues that may impede first-year student success. These issues include the following:

- Risk-factors (traits) students have when entering the university
- Student awareness of academic resources
- Student engagement in large courses
- Class attendance
- Low mid-term grades
- Student health-related issues.

Specifically at OSU, the committee reviewed the newly implemented Withdraw from the University Survey Results. Fifty-five students completed this survey fall term 2009. Of those responses, the top reasons students reported leaving were for “personal reasons” (62%), and 40% of those students cited personal illness as the reason they were withdrawing from the university. The second most common reason for withdrawing was for “academic reasons” (38%), and 31% of those students said their withdrawal was a result of “not succeeding academically.” Overall, 62% of students said they planned to return to OSU at some point. Additionally, we reviewed statistics on OSU Students on Warning, Probation and Suspension—see data summary in the appendix. This document summarized the number of students placed on warning, probation and suspension from various class standings over various terms. 99 students with “freshman” standing were academically suspended last spring term. The Early Alert Sub-Committee also looked at first year enrollment and success rates in Bacc Core “high-risk” courses. In reviewing this list, ART 101, MTH 111, MTH 112, CH 201, and STAT 201 had the highest D/F/W rates and/or lowest average course G.P.A. rate for OSU students. (Please see appendix).

Early Alert Conceptual Process
The Academic Success Center under Academic Affairs will serve as the hub for an early alert effort at OSU, and the early alert program will be a collaborative effort with other units in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Early alerts may be gathered in several ways: 1) faculty, staff and advisors report students in difficulty by means of an early alert form; 2) Blackboard may be used to track attendance, log-ins, or performance indicators; 3) early feedback may be solicited in large Bacc Core classes. Once
alerts come into the hub, a team of professionals will triage the information and ensure a quick turnaround for a response or intervention.

For alerts received, the responding team will determine appropriate resources and, when possible, will identify a person with a primary relationship with the student (advisor, referring faculty, DAS, etc.). The team will initiate contact with the student via email or via personal outreach from team member or other identified professional. Some cases may call for a meeting with the student while others may need a referral to a campus resource. Students may be referred to any of OSU’s existing resources: SHS, CAPS, DAS, ASC coaching, UHDS, advisors, Greek Life, etc. A primary concern of this committee is the lack of centralized tutoring at OSU. We advise that the responding team be cautious about triggering alerts in areas in which OSU cannot adequately respond. For example, establishing a trigger in Math 111 with its high DFW rates could create a situation in which we could not adequately respond if students expected math tutoring. The responding team will be responsible for follow-up and closing the loop with the originator of the alert. Responses to alerts must be quick to be effective—especially in quarter systems.

**Technology**
As we gathered information on the use of technology in comparator institutions, we encountered a broad range of approaches. Purdue clearly has the highest level of technological use, at $47 per student with a highly developed Blackboard interface that assigns risk analysis for each student. Maps-Works is another software program that has been reviewed by OSU’s UHDS but is too expensive to be considered at this time.

At OSU, we do have access to Blackboard and a resident expert to advise the early alert team. Our system has the capability of identifying students who have not logged in to review course materials. The Blackboard system can also integrate with “clickers” to monitor student attendance. We recommend further review of FTE needed to utilize Blackboard and other local technologies—see long term recommendation at the end of this report. Please see document on Utilization of Blackboard in the appendix for further detail.

**Systems/Models @ Comparator Institutions**
Three major issues raised include 1) having software capable of automating correspondence and surveillance, tracking student progress, and facilitating assessment efforts; 2) devising and maintaining consistent assessment practices; and 3) generating and maintaining faculty awareness and buy-in.

Additional details may be found in the descriptions for each institution below.

**Purdue University (Undergraduate Enrollment: 32,377)**
Purdue University uses a software program called Signals that was developed in a joint partnership by SunGard Higher Education, Purdue University and the Purdue Research Foundation. The software monitors the students’ academic behavior patterns and academic performance to determine whether they are at risk of earning low grades in individual courses. Information about students at risk is communicated to the student and faculty on the software dashboard using “stoplight” signal prompters (green = low risk, yellow = moderate risk, red = high risk) that encourage students to take action to improve their performance in the class. Additionally, the software identifies pre-programmed strategies or resources the students can use to improve their performance in a specific class. Professors also have access to the students’ signal status in their courses and have the ability to identify interventions for students as early as the second week of the term. According to the Purdue University website, pilot programs conducted with 2000 students in 2006-2008 found that 67 percent of students receiving a yellow or red warning improved their effort and grade in their course. The cost of the software is approximately $47 per student.
Colorado State University (Undergraduate Enrollment: 21,204)
Colorado State University has a program called Taking Stock at Mid-Semester administered through a partnership between residence halls and advising that is geared toward first-year students to identify early warning signs of academic concerns and aid with the first-year transition. This program asks all freshmen to take a survey through a software program call MAPS-Works (Making Achievement Possible). Once the survey is completed, a personal report is generated and shared with the student’s Resident Assistant, who has received specialized training in academic referral. The student then has the opportunity to have a “one on one meeting” with the RA to talk about transition issues and receive information on campus and community resources. This program provides peer-to-peer intervention and information sharing for the student. There is no formal assessment practice in place for this program.

University of Tennessee-Knoxville (Undergraduate Enrollment: 21,000)
UT Knoxville’s program is called First-Year Intervention (initially called Early Alert). The system is set up to target first-year students earning a grade of C or lower in their classes. All intervention is conducted through email. Due to the cost, their IT staff developed software that interfaces with Blackboard to track the student progress and to facilitate the correspondence. Tracking and faculty contact occurs twice per term. Twice per term, faculty receive an email from the Associate Vice Provost and Director – Student Success prompting them to review their student rosters and to use the available form to notify the FYI team of students who show signs of academic risk, including low scores on tests, failure to complete homework, repeated absences, adverse behaviors in class, etc. In response, the students receive emails with an overview of their academic progress, a link to a site where they can read their professors’ evaluation of their performance to date, and a reminder about the resources available to them. The student’s information is also sent to the Academic Success Center and to advisors so that the student’s primary contacts are informed about and ready to address the student’s needs.

One special facet of this program is its emphasis on faculty buy-in. The provost sends a letter to faculty at the beginning of each academic year reminding them of their integral role in facilitating student success and encouraging them to participate consistently in the program. This is followed within the week by an additional letter from the Associate Vice-Provost and Director – Student Success thanking faculty for their support and participation. There is no formal assessment for this program.

Washington State University (Undergraduate Enrollment: 15,147)
Washington State University has an Aware Network that provides an online tool for faculty to report academic concerns about a student. Faculty members complete an on-line Academic Alert form that is sent to the Academic Assistance Team (AAT). The Team identifies interventions or resources for students who are at risk of academic failure. The form consists of course information, class attendance, assignments, general concerns, overall grades to date, and a section for the faculty to describe ways they have attempted to reach out to the student about their academic concerns. The Academic Assistance Team uses this information to plan a follow-up strategy with the student. The Academic Assistance Team is composed of professionals from Student Affairs/Equity and Diversity, Business and Finance, and various academic units.

The program is not highly publicized, and the location and use of the form have not been widely marketed to faculty. As a result, the AAT identifies and intervenes with five students, on average, per term. There is no formal assessment plan for this program.
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. The Academic Care Team may have membership from the following units: Academic Success Center, Education Opportunities Program, New Student Programs & Family Outreach, Residential Life, and Disability Access Services. In addition, the team may determine the need for additional membership or for consulting partners such as advisors, faculty, Financial Aid, Intercultural Student Services. The Academic Care Team will determine meeting schedules, final membership and rotating duties in the early alert effort. We recommend the name Academic Care Team since it aligns well with the Student Care Team and the Community Care Team. We further recommend a meeting of key members of the Student Care Team and the Academic Care Team to determine working agreements, as we expect there to be considerable crossover between these two bodies.

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. While the content of these classes may vary in terms of academic challenge, the committee believes they hold a unique opportunity for surveying first year students regarding their success in all fall classes. Last year, 52 out of 444 U-Engage students ended fall term on academic warning. We suggest surveying these students in their respective sections soon after the first round of mid-terms to determine which students may benefit from academic assistance. See the following chart for 2009 course enrollments for U-Engage students.

![Highest Course Enrollments for U-ENGAGE Students, Fall 2009](image.png)

*Figure 1: Course Enrollments for U-ENGAGE Students, Fall 2009*
Survey results will be assessed by the Academic Care Team to determine the level of intervention offered. Such a survey does not preclude U-Engage and Linc-Learn instructors from identifying early warning flags within their own sections. Some of these instructors may well feel that it is their responsibility to intervene with their own students if issues of attendance or performance come up. We do recommend that there be a reporting mechanism for such interventions as part of the early alert effort for that term. End of term should include follow-up and assessment of results and procedures. The scope of this fall pilot is well defined and controlled so as to allow the team to test procedures and gauge capacity in this initial step.

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. The caution for this particular pilot is to pay attention to OSU’s capacity to respond with appropriate interventions for the identified students. The Early Alert Committee recommends that there be a careful selection of one or two large Bacc Core classes in order to test approaches to identifying students in such learning environments. Several approaches could be used in this model: a) monitor attendance through clickers or Blackboard, if available; b) work with instructor to offer an early quiz as a performance indicator; c) survey students in a manner similar to the fall term pilot. This pilot may utilize a more passive approach for interventions if large numbers of students are identified. Identified students may simply receive an email notifying them of campus resources. While the committee has reservations about this approach vs. a high-touch model, we felt it important to carefully explore all available options in this first year. It will be important to gather student responses to email delivery of the intervention. If the Academic Care Team wanted to focus on a large class in a more intrusive way, the ACT could work with an engaged faculty member to do a first cut at identifying at-risk students. Then the ACT would follow-up with a phone call for a high impact intervention. Of course, a combination of email and other contacts may be used. The committee recommends that the ACT be the decision making body with regard to such matters.

4. **Spring Term Pilot**—The Early Alert Committee recommends that WR 121 be the focus of a spring term pilot. Since WR 121 is a small, attendance-based class, the ACT could work with the instructors to identify those students with sporadic attendance for an intervention. In like manner, WR 121 has numerous assignments and relatively close contact with the instructor, which would allow identification of performance or social risk factors for students in these sections. The Early Alert committee recognizes and was concerned about the “missed” students in this category, i.e., those with AP credit and those taking Writing II courses. Nonetheless, these sections would “catch” international students as would the large Bacc Core classes in the winter 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. See sample forms in the Appendix. The Early Alert effort could be announced at the beginning of fall term in various ways: University Day, CONNECT Week, and/or welcome back letter from Susie Brubaker-Cole and Mamta Accapadi. We do not recommend marketing this new form in a focused way until the first year of pilot programs have been implemented and assessed. It will be critical in these early efforts to be mindful of OSU’s capacity to respond. If we reach out too zealously, we risk being unable to respond effectively and thus frustrating staff, faculty and students alike.
6. **Complete Withdrawal Contact**—The Early Alert Committee had the opportunity to review the survey information collected in fall 2009 for students who withdrew completely from the university. The committee was impressed by the disclosures made by students, which gave us an authentic window into the struggles that many students face. We were most impressed by the number of students who expressed their intent to return to the university. We wish to strongly recommend that, in addition to the survey, students withdrawing from the university have the opportunity to meet with someone face to face. We believe we are missing the opportunity to assist students with a re-entry plan. This thinking is aligned with the work done by the Student Care Team and the Registrar’s Office on the Planned Educational Leave Program (PELP).

**Long-term Recommendations**

1. **Assessment:** Thoughtful assessment of the first year’s activities and pilots will give us fresh insight into the challenges associated with an Early Alert Program. We strongly recommend that planning for future years be based on a realistic assessment of the finding of the pilot programs. We are concerned that further roll-out of an Early Alert Program will be hampered by the lack of resources assigned to this work.

2. **Technology:** Re-charge the Early Alert Committee or the Academic Care Team to look at technology and software systems that might assist an early warning effort at OSU should funds become available after year one efforts.

3. **Alignment with Bacc Core and First Year Advising Efforts:** If the current proposals by the Bacc Core Review Team are accepted by the Faculty Senate, we believe future efforts for an Early Alert Program should be aligned with Bacc Core requirements for the first year. In like manner, The Academic Care Team or a future iteration of the Early Alert Sub-Committee should look for ways to interface early alert efforts with recommendations from the First Year Advising Task Force.

4. **Ongoing Assessment:** We strongly recommend that the Academic Care Team design a substantial assessment plan for ongoing quality control and sustainability of the program. We noted with interest that several comparators do no assessment at all.
Appendix
Early Alert Committee

Utilization of Blackboard

PROS

- Currently available on campus with a resident expert to assist the EA team
- System already has the capability to identify students who have not logged on to review course materials or not completing homework assignments etc.
- System can integrate with “clicker technology” to review student attendance.
- Can pull the names of individuals in specific criteria query (never logged in) and send email to all, blind copy.
- Some instructors are already heavily invested in blackboard and we could utilize current faculty.
- BB is currently being used in large lecture classes at this time.
- There is already a category of “Early Alert” that can be used, no additional programming necessary.
- Use Dashboard indicators
- Can create the Early Alert team as an organization and have access to course information (would need permission of faculty)
- Use clickers to identify other academic issues: Have a “quiz” question “Did you buy the textbook”? Are you having difficulties in class and would like to be contacted by an academic success coach?
- Can download information into Excel to perform other operations with Banner and BB data.

CONS

- Blackboard — not intuitive for some. Training is needed
- EA team member or someone needs to have time to pull the data or;
- Hire someone to build codes to pull the data
- Processes are not automatic; any criteria beyond current functions would need to be developed $$.
- May need to change how instructors currently use BB to be more effective. For example, week two, first draft of paper due, week 4, second draft due; etc, have someone follow up after week two for those who did not submit the first rough draft. More of a process that would allow a student to recover than a single measurement in time.
- Blackboard is not currently be used to its full capability — training and funding issues
Early Alert Program
Faculty Referral Form

Date______________

Course Name and Number__________________________________________

Referring Faculty_________________________________________________

Student_________________________ ID#______________________________

Reason(s) for Referral (check all that apply)

☐ Ability/Preparedness – specify the student’s issue(s)
  ☐ Reading
  ☐ Writing
  ☐ Computation
  ☐ Language (non native)

☐ Potential disability

☐ Study Skills

☐ Tardiness/Absences—please indicate number of absences ______

☐ Low Quiz/Test Scores

☐ Not completing assignments

☐ Personal Problems

☐ Class Motivation/Attitude

☐ Other ____________________________

Comments (this can include suggestions for student referral to specific services or further explanation of issues indicated above)

____________________________________________________________________

What Happens to Your Referral?

❖ If possible, please share your concerns with the student prior to submitting the referral and advise the student of the referral.

❖ Your referral will be passed on to the student’s academic advisor and/or student services director depending on the type of intervention needed.

❖ You will be notified that a consultation has taken place and of the steps suggested to the student to improve the academic situation.

❖ The college policy on confidentiality of student information will be respected. However, the benefits of sharing information with the faculty member may be discussed with the student and recommended.

You may return this online or print a copy and send to the Academic Advisement Center. For more information or questions please contact Beth Miller, Director of Academic Advisement, at emiller@sjc.edu or 231-5443.