

BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY ALERT PROGRAMS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY ALERT PROGRAMS (EAP)	3
STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING EARLY ALERT SYSTEMS	3
WHO SHOULD EARLY ALERT SYSTEMS BE GEARED TOWARD?	4
TONE OF COMMUNICATIONS	4
TIMING/FREQUENCY OF EARLY ALERTS	4
FACULTY ROLE.....	5
FORMALITY OF MODELS.....	5
REPORTING STRUCTURE FOR EAP	5
OFFICES RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATION	6
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REACHING OUT TO STUDENTS?	6
FORMS OF EARLY ALERT COMMUNICATIONS BY MODALITY	7
OUTCOME MEASURES	7
COMMON CHALLENGES IN ALERT IMPLEMENTATION.....	7
MISCELLANEOUS.....	7
CASE EXAMPLE	8
FREDERICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE (FCC).....	8
REFERENCES	9

BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY ALERT PROGRAMS (EAP)

Steps in Implementing Early Alert Systems

1. Identify the Target Audience

Use data to define the target student population. Questions to ask include:

- Is there a specific population graduating or succeeding at a lower rate?
- Is there a highly competitive department unable to serve all its applicants?
- What courses most students taking? What courses have the highest registration and DWF (drop, fail, withdraw) rates?
- Are there specific demographic populations that follow the national trend for graduation rates?

Identify target staff support agents. Increase campus partnerships for intervention success. Questions to ask include:

- Which campus programs will most help facilitate successful interventions?
- Which campus program are most students in the target audience affiliated with?
- Within these programs, who is most likely to aid in the Early Alert & Intervention?
- Does the program need to have multiple responders?

Ask early, ask often, and ask multiple populations. Questions to ask include:

- Which out of the classroom experiences does this the target population of students most utilize?
- Who are the “front line” members of the institution, both inside and out of the classroom? Are they able to create a student referral?
- Is there efficient and effective communication between the “front line” offices and early alert and intervention?
- Will the increase in referral opportunities enhance the information currently obtained for the student population?
- Will the increase in referral opportunities be able to receive interventions as needed?

2. Define a clear intervention process.

Institutions should:

- Respond to the student, not the problem.
- Provide more than one point of contact for intervention.
- Provide clear and concise steps for recovery.

3. Create a formal feedback system

Institutions should:

- Define an intentional and positive message for audiences.
- Answer the following questions with regard to the early alert responder:
 - o How will the cases be managed?
 - o Who will respond to each student and how is that determined?
 - o How will the team discuss interventions?
 - o How often will the team discuss intervention progress?
 - o How will the team know an intervention is complete?
 - o What information is important to keep for assessment?
 - o What information is helpful for campus partners to have for interventions?
 - o What information is helpful for campus partners to have for assessment?
- Respond to Referrers
- Let them know what their feedback/help is building:
 - o acknowledgement of referral
 - o information regarding the intervention progress
 - o opportunity to easily provide feedback

Who Should Early Alert Systems Be Geared Toward?

- At-risk populations: This is a typically a resource-dependent decision (how many staff are available to reach out to identified students) (Note: see Step 1 of steps outlined above).
- Often times, early alert has only been applied to populations of first-year students (or first semester at the CC level); however, retention issues beyond the first year/semester suggest that early alert might be make a significant impact on attitudes and behaviors of upperclassmen as well.

Tone of Communications

- “Less formal, more frequent, less intimidating, more closely linked to the faculty member who is teaching the course.” In other words, the tone of communications and outreach needs to migrate away from the notion of early *warning* (as many systems were originally dubbed) and into the idea a supportive, person-centered intervention strategy.

Timing/Frequency of Early Alerts

- No clear cut evidence for the “perfect time” to provide notifications/interventions (some find no effect); others encourage the earlier the better

Faculty Role/Buy-In

- Require faculty to attend workshops and other training sessions to illustrate how the program can serve at-risk students and to show the many reasons students may have for performing poorly in classes or for not attending class, such as poor study skills, poor time management and lack of career goals.
- Having faculty members participate in the development of the early alert program is also important to getting them to accept the program.
- Personal faculty contact may be the most effective follow up for flags (email contact in and of itself may not be enough)

Formality of Models

Schools fall into three categories in terms of how developed their systems are:

- Formal (clearly defined system for early alert, reporting lines, etc.)
- Informal
- Mixed model (both formal and informal elements to early alert)
- *Most satisfaction with early alert program: mixed model*

Reporting Structure for EAP

Table 6

Reporting Division of Early Alert Programs (N = 500)

	Frequency	Percentage
Academic affairs	228	45.6
Combination of AA and SA	122	24.4
Enrollment management	12	2.4
Student affairs	132	26.4
Other	6	1.2

Offices Responsible for Coordination

Table 7

Campus Source Responsible For Early Alert Coordination (N = 500)

	Frequency	Percentage
Centralized campus coordinator	66	13.2
Centralized EAP office with support staff	9	1.8
Individual with other campus duties	130	26.0
Office with other duties	174	34.8
Committee or team	107	21.4
Other	14	2.8

Who Is Responsible for Reaching Out to Students?

Table 41

Party Responsible for Initiating Student Outreach (N = 500)

	Frequency	Percentage
EAP coordinator	277	55.4
EAP staff	150	30.0
Faculty	153	30.6
Academic advisors	257	51.4
Campus counselor	101	20.2
Student life representative	155	31.0
Peer counselor	48	9.6
Other	51	10.2

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

Forms of Early Alert Communications by Modality

Table 43

Method of Initial Student Outreach (N = 500)

	Frequency	Percentage
US mail	57	11.4
Email	441	88.2
Instructor contact	171	34.2
Social networks	54	10.8
Telephone	206	41.2
Other	56	11.2

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

Outcome Measures

- Three broad categories: academic/social/personal, for example:
 - Student satisfaction with program and services
 - Retention rates
 - DFW rates
 - Faculty impressions of early alert success
 - GPA
 - Utilization of support services
 - Mitigate adjustment issues and feelings of belongingness to campus community

Common Challenges in Alert Implementation

- Faculty/staff buy-in
- Too many alerts received by advisors and counselors
- The intervention plans varying within campus settings
- After responding to alerts, no identified way to “close the loop.”

Miscellaneous

- Example forms:
 - <http://www.cvcc.vccs.edu/Student%20Services/Advising/EarlyAlertForm.asp>
 - <http://www.pittcc.edu/experience-pcc/student-services/counseling-services/early-alert/retention-student-progress.htm>
- See attached PDF “Early Alert Process”

- See attached presentation about one community college's implementation of early alert
- Suggest joining early alert listserv at Arkansas State:
<http://registrar.astate.edu/earlyalert/listserv.php>.

CASE EXAMPLE

Frederick Community College (FCC)

In Maryland, Frederick Community College (FCC) tested an early alert system in a few courses during the 2007-08 academic year. "Initially, the process involved a Web-based form that faculty in the pilot course could complete when they had a concern about a student's performance," said Debbie McClellan, vice president of student learning services at FCC.

The goal was to eventually integrate the early alert process within FCC's student information system—which stores course rosters—to make the process easier for faculty. But that would have been too time-consuming for the IT staff.

Instead, FCC started with a handful of courses and used a Web-based form that faculty in the demonstration project could complete. This gave college officials time to evaluate how they wanted the program to work before IT committed resources to develop the program. FCC eventually expanded the early alert to all courses in 2008.

With the new system, faculty members had access to an electronic roster for their courses that allowed them to easily tag students who were not attending class or had poor grades. The system provides an automatic form that allows an instructor to identify the concern and make recommendations for services or interventions, such as a student/faculty conference. The information is shared with the student through his or her college e-mail account and the case is assigned an academic advisor.

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