University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

## University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

Scholastic Committee                                          Campus Governance

Fall 2003

# History of Academic Alert

Scholastic Committee

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/schol_com

# A Proposal for Implementing an Early Alert Intervention for Academically At-Risk Students

## by

### Ferolyn Angell, Kathryn Gonier-Klopfleisch, Leslie Meek, Paula O'Loughlin and Sandy Olson-Loy

### Acting as a Subcommittee of the Scholastic Committee

"I think we've gotten too focused on treating them as independent adults and letting them sink or swim on their own. I was more inclined to do that when I was younger, but the older I got the more I realized that at least my students in South Carolina were more likely to be successful if I made them do certain things. Once the students did them, they found out that they were helpful and then they pursued them voluntarily. One of the things we've learned ..... is that students recognize they need help and they report all kinds of stress, but do they go get the help? No, they don't. A best practice would be to mandate student's participation in more of these interventions."

John Gardner, 2003
Executive Director, Policy Center on the First Year of College
University of South Carolina

**Retention Concerns:**

The retention task force charged with investigating the issues surrounding retention of enrolled students found a strong positive correlation between cumulative GPA and student retention, with those with the highest GPAs more likely to graduate from UMM. Although other factors obviously influence students' decision to leave UMM, low GPA was found to be one of the strongest predictors of a student's decision to leave. This suggests that providing early, proactive academic help to struggling students may aid greatly in our retention of those students. In addition, good academic standing is necessary for receiving federal financial aid (SAP guidelines) and we have recently lost a significant number of academically struggling students because they cannot afford to attend UMM without financial aid. For these reasons, we believe that our students in academic difficulty need a significant amount of intervention and that that effort will directly and positively affect the retention of students.

Currently, students and their advisors are informed when students are placed on academic probation or suspension, but students are not actively encouraged or compelled to seek academic help from instructors, advisors, the Academic Assistance Center or any of the other entities on campus that offer academic assistance (although MSP does intervene proactively with first-year minority students). While some highly motivated students do seek academic help on their own, many students do not and simply give up. We believe that these students can be helped and retained if they are identified as soon as they first encounter academic difficulty and are given active encouragement and the tools to succeed academically. We believe that we can institute an early alert system that can both increase retention and decrease SAP probations and suspensions.

**Edgewood College Intervention Program:**

We have examined several models of academic intervention and the one that seems to fit UMM best is from Edgewood College in Wisconsin. Edgewood is a small, undergraduate college, about the size of UMM. Their entrance criteria consist of: an 18 on the ACT, a 2.5 high school GPA and upper 50% high school class rank. The average GPA of an entering class is 3.2 and the average ACT is 23. Almost all of their students maintained an A or B average in high school. Unlike UMM, Edgewood has little racial diversity, with most students identifying as Caucasian. In addition, they have professional advisors as well as faculty advisors, and advising loads are lower for professors than they are here.

Beginning in Fall 2001, Edgewood instituted an early-alert system targeted towards freshmen in academic difficulty (this was later expanded to include sophomores also). They formed an Early Alert Committee, which consisted of the Dean of Students, Associate Academic Dean, Director of Residential Life, Associate Director of Residential Life, Coordinator of Disability Services, a Learning Support Specialist and a mental health counselor who acted to design and facilitate the process. The actual implementation of the Program infrastructure and implementation for the program is coordinated by the staff of the Learning Support Services at Edgewood.

Edgewood identified students at risk in a number of ways:

1. Students admitted on conditions.
2. Students already on academic probation at the beginning of the semester.
3. Suspended students reinstated via appeal.
4. Students receiving mid-term alerts (they actually have mid-term grades).
5. Faculty feedback on students who were missing classes or who were not turning in homework. Beginning on week 4 of the semester, faculty received a weekly automatic email message that asked four yes/no questions about each freshman in their classes:

   ○ Has the individual student missed more than 2 classes?
   ○ How many classes have they missed?
   ○ Is that student's work being submitted in a timely manner?
   ○ Has the professor given the student any feedback?

(A student is flagged as being at-risk if more than one faculty member expresses a concern or a professor identifies a student more than once as having a problem).

There is no expectation that faculty members will change their current practices in a class. For example, if a faculty member does not normally take attendance, there is no expectation that they will begin to do so. Faculty are simply being asked to continue their normal practices, and if they notice a problem, to report it.

Information on at-risk students is collected from the various offices and instructors and collated by Learning Support Services, whose personnel then make a decision about what kind of intervention the student needs. The most common intervention is to contact the advisor who then contacts the student and formulates a plan for them to succeed or who refers them to the proper academic assistance entity (Learning Support Services furnishes a flier to faculty about academic and other kinds of help that is available). If a student does not respond, a second effort is made by someone else with a personal relationship with that student to attempt to get them help. A data-base allows the intervention team to track the concerns identified by faculty members and others, as well as the intervention and follow-up. While help primarily consists of academic intervention, it can also include advice and encouragement to contact the mental health counseling office, disability services or some other non-academic entity on campus, if such intervention seems warranted.

What can the student expect to occur? Students will receive a call or an email from their advisor who will ask them to come in and talk. The advisor will attempt to identify what kind of intervention the student needs and will give the

appropriate information and guidance to the student. It is expected that the amount of help given by the advisor will vary greatly from situation to situation. For example, at one extreme, advisors may simply counsel the student to talk to their professors about their performance. At another extreme, advisors may draw up a 'contract' with the student about their goals and ask students to come in for regular meetings and updates. If students do not comply, the advisor will contact academic assistance and a second effort will be made to help the student.

**Results of Edgewood intervention:**

- In the Spring of 2003, two years after they began the program, over 90% of students who were identified as being at-risk at the beginning of the semester were in good standing at the end of the semester.

- The Dean of Students reports a strong increase in retention that she credits to this program.

- In the first year, only 30% of faculty participated, however, after two years of effort and education, approximately 2/3 of faculty now participate.

- The staff of the Learning Support Services report that a culture change has occurred among faculty and they are now more proactive about helping students and contacting Learning Support Services. They also report that a similar culture change occurred among students, so that students no longer view asking for help or being referred for help as punishment or as being singled out. Many students began attending workshops sponsored by LSS (attendance increased from 2 - 3 students per workshop to 15 - 20 students per workshop. Some programs reached capacity and additional sessions were created). This culture change has partly come about because they enlisted the instructors in their version of First Year Seminar to promote and advertise their workshops and the academic help offered on campus.

**Our Proposal:**

We propose to begin a three-year pilot program based on the Edgewood model at UMM in the fall of 2004, that is focused on all students, not just freshmen and sophomores. An Early Alert/At Risk Student Intervention Team would be established to oversee the process, develop intervention strategies and support campus communication and culture change. This team should parallel the broad-based approach used at Edgewood College and should include: a representative from the Academic Dean, a representative from Student Affairs, the Director of Residential Life, the Coordinator of Disability Services, a staff member from the Academic Assistance Center, a representative from mental health counseling, a staff member from MSP and a faculty member of the Scholastic Committee who act to design, facilitate and monitor the process. Models at other colleges also include an athletic trainer, a Campus Minister and the Director of Campus Safety and Grounds.

The program would be based in the Academic Assistance Center. The Edgewood Model was implemented with no increase in personnel, but rather a refocusing of existing resources from underutilized programs to more coordinated intervention. We envision the same process for UMM; it should require no increase in personnel, but will undoubtedly require a restructuring of current duties and efforts of the AAC staff. Costs associated with this pilot would consist of copying costs for informational materials for faculty and students, possible workshops for faculty and students and expenses related to setting up the automated e-mail system to contact faculty. Once the system is in place, it should be fairly easy to maintain and oversee, since the Academic Assistance portion of the load is mainly record-keeping and contacting the advisors or other concerned parties. The staff at the Learning Support Services at Edgewood indicated that twice a year, one person spent a full week on the system, and after that it took a couple of hours a week to maintain. Edgewood 's Learning Support Services staff is very similar in number to our Academic Assistance Center staffing.

**Implementation Challenges:**

- Much of the information that will be handled by the AAC and the Early Alert Committee will be confidential and we will have to be sure that FERPA guidelines are met. Committee members will need FERPA training.

- Faculty involvement is critical to the success of this plan and thus faculty should be encouraged to participate in this plan. One way culture change often occurs is through the younger and newer members of a community. Thus, one prong of encouraging faculty involvement is to introduce this program to new faculty at faculty orientation. One potent argument to woo faculty to participate that the Learning Support Services used at Edgewood, is that putting students into this system often actually saves individual instructors extra work related to those students who are struggling in a class.

- The program should be fairly resource-neutral except for some copying costs and setting up the system. As noted above, it is likely that some restructuring of the AAC would need to occur and one way to accomplish this would be to move Disability Services out of Academic Assistance.

- The latest retention task force report suggests that the name of the Academic Assistance Center be changed to remove any stigma from patronizing their services. We concur that a name such as Learning Support Services or some other more neutral name might be more palatable to UMM students.

- An Early Alert/At Risk Student Intervention Team that fits UMM's campus structure and culture should be identified. The program should be linked to campus governance via the Scholastic Committee and the Early Alert committee should develop a policy statement that will become policy via the Scholastic Committee.

**Timeline:**

**Spring 2004:**

Appoint the Early Alert Committee and appoint a chair.

*An Early Alert/ At Risk Intervention Team consisting of Ferolyn Angell (AAC/Disability Services), Brenda Boever (Advising), Sarah Buchanan (Humanities Division Representative), Julie Casey (Phelps) (Residential Life Representative), Ken Crandall (Athletics/Scholastic Committee /Education Division Rep), Fang Du (MSP Representative), Colleen Frey (AAC/Disability Services), Kathryn Gonier-Klopfleisch (AAC/Disability Services), Lori Koshork (Counseling Services Representative), Barry McQuarrie (Science Division Representative), Leslie Meek (Chair), Paula O'Loughlin (Academic Affairs/Social Sciences Division Representative) and Sandy Olson-Loy (Student Affairs Representative) was formed in July of 2004.*

Promote discussions about the plan with involved parties such as: Vice Chancellors Group, Division Chairs, MSP, Advising, the Registrar, Counseling, the Scholastic Committee, CRPC, the Retention Task Force, Residential Life, Writing Room, etc.

*The pilot proposal was developed and was endorsed by the Scholastic Committee, CRPC, Division chairs, MCSA, MSP, Consultative Committee, Directors of Student Affairs and the Vice Chancellors group.*

Determine how AAC can be restructured to accommodate this program.

*This discussion is on-going.*

**Summer/Fall 2004:**

<u>Design a pilot program that will fit UMM and complement existing services/alerts/interventions. br></u>

*It is determined that for the first semester of this pilot we will structure it as follows: During weeks 3, 4 and 5 of the semester, an e-mail from the Early Alert Team will be sent to all teaching faculty, asking them whether they have any concerns (either academic or nonacademic) about students in their classes. If so, a web link will be provided and instructors will be asked to identify their specific concerns on a short form, using yes or no answers. These forms will be collected by AAC, who will ask the advisors of students identified as at risk to intervene. Each advisor will be given information on interventions and resources. Participation by faculty and advisors is strictly voluntary.*

<u>Design the automatic email system and the record-keeping system in AAC.</u>

*A student has been hired to design the web submission form and those members of the committee who will have access to the data base, have received share-point training (Julie Casey (Phelps), Fang Du, Colleen Frey, Kathryn Gonier-Klopfleisch, Lori Koshork and Leslie Meek).*

<u>Our first committee meeting is scheduled for August 17th, 2004. FERPA training will be provided for all committee members.</u>

<u>A memo will go out to all teaching faculty telling them about this new intervention.</u>

<u>Leslie will attend Division meetings to introduce this new intervention.</u>

<u>Advisors will receive information on how to intervene and what kinds of services are available for those students needing help.</u>

<u>Begin the pilot and collect data for 2 years. What kind of data can we collect?</u>

- *It should be possible to write a computer program that would separate out the students we identify as at risk and we could compare GPAs from the first semester to subsequent semester GPAs.*
- *We can compare numbers of students who are put on academic probation and suspension or SAP probation and suspension before and after implementing the program.*
- *We can determine how many students are still identified as 'at risk' from the first semester to subsequent semesters.*
- *We can compare the percentage of students retained who had some kind of intervention to the percentage retained with no intervention.*

*None of these are perfect, since Early Alert is only part of the retention picture, but this kind of data should give us some idea of whether or not this is helping. At some point, we may want to do a survey of seniors asking their opinion of Early Alert intervention.*