



Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

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For other retention information, go to our web site at <http://castle.eiu.edu/~core>

Want to contact us? Send us an email at core@eiu.edu

Eastern's Early Alert System

Eastern's home-grown Early Alert System (EAS) was first offered as a pilot in FA11. Information Technology Systems (ITS) built the EAS as a way to let students know early in the semester that their professors had concerns about their classroom performance. These concerns could be related to attendance, performance, or failure to complete assignments.

The EAS runs through PAWS and allows instructors to alert both the student and a support team to issues that need to be corrected in order for the student to be successful.

Instructors log into their course in PAWS and click on one of three options:

- ◇ Non-attendance
- ◇ Poor performance on tests or assignments
- ◇ Incomplete or missing assignments

There is also a box for comments to help the support person assigned to the students know more information when

talking to the student about strategies to improve.

Once a faculty member sends an alert, an automatic email is generated to the student's email account. Students who are living in EIU housing will receive a personal visit from their RA concerning the alert they received. RAs are trained on how to discuss these alerts. For example, they explain the importance of class attendance, the availability of tutors and other resources like the Student Success Center or the Writing Center; they encourage students to talk to their faculty members and to be organized about completing assignments on time.

Students living off-campus receive phone calls and/or email contact from the EAS GA. Several attempts are made to contact the student on a given alert.

All faculty are encouraged to use the alert to send wake-up calls to their students who are not performing up to

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CORE Corner: Spring Update

In SP15, CORE has been working in two subcommittees to divide its retention work. Many of the faculty who sit on CORE have been working with Karla Sanders to meet with departments whose majors were shown to be a risk factor in the Retention Predictor.

For each meeting with the department chair and/or assistant chair, CORE prepared a separate spreadsheet showing

retention at-risk factors of the major in relation to the entire freshman class.

Chairs were also given information concerning 1000 and 2000 level courses offered by their departments that were on the high D/F/W list and were gatekeeper courses. High D/F/W courses are those in which 30% or more of the students receive a D, F, or withdraw from the course. CORE examined this list

for 6 semesters to look for patterns in gatekeeper courses, courses required to begin or continue in a major that are taken early in the college career.

While some departments did have a gateway course that provides a stumbling block for new students, many did not, so the discussions looked to other factors.

These factors included students' academic

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Spotlight On . . . Family & Consumer Sciences

Did you know?

Undeclared students are some of our most at-risk of attrition.

The FA13 freshman cohort had nearly 300 students listing “undecided” as their major their first year, and these students had a retention rate of 62%, well below the class average of 76%.

The FA13 undecided students were 6% less likely to be first generation than freshmen with a major.

Undecided students are 10% more likely to have a high school gpa below 2.84 than a freshman with a major. The FA13 freshmen with this profile had a 50% retention rate compared to 76% for all freshmen.

In addition to the financial and other factors that predict student attrition or retention, the Retention Predictor showed several departments whose retention rates were below the University average, indicating that the choice of certain majors was also a risk factor for students. One of these departments is Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS).

The School of Family and Consumer Sciences was “at risk” due to the poor retention rates of FCS majors from the freshman to sophomore year. Karla Sanders coordinated a meeting with Drs. Simpson and Sherwood, FCS Administration, and Dr. Jeanne Lord, Associate Dean of LCBAS, to analyze and discuss reasons for the low retention rate from the predictive model.

While the years used to build the model showed this department to be below the

average freshman to sophomore retention level, the current year’s data for the FA13 entering class revealed a marked improvement. The retention rate for freshmen in this department had increased from 73% to 94%. So, the topic of the meeting quickly changed from *why is the retention rate below the average* to *how did we have such a dramatic increase in retention in one academic year?*

Drs. Simpson and Sherwood believe that two significant changes took place that had an impact on students’ motivation and enthusiasm to remain in the major and/or return to school for their sophomore year: 1) revisions in the introductory core course, and 2) a change in faculty assignments.

FCS updated its core curriculum in order to better represent contemporary

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CORE Corner cont.

preparedness measured by ACT, high school gpa, and admission to Eastern through a special admission program. Other risk factors discussed were issues related to students’ ability to pay for college, first generation, and minority status. Ways to involve students in the majors, provide assistance for gateway courses or for students struggling academically were discussed.

The second CORE workgroup has focused on evaluating enrollment patterns of the 2013 and 2014 entering freshman cohorts. Evaluation of the data illuminate three areas around which the group can develop new strategies to retain students.

Financial concerns continue to be an issue for entering students. CORE tracks three financial indicators in the entering class (Zero EFC, % of need met, financial aid gap). In the 2014 cohort the percentage of students with no financial risk indicator decreased by 10%. This is

concerning given only 67% of financially at-risk students persist compared to 83% of students with no financial risk indicator.

High school gpa continues to be a strong indicator of student persistence. The data indicates that students with less than a 2.84 gpa are retained at a significantly lower rate. This group is the focus of additional advisor interaction and monitoring of academic progress. Students receiving a midterm grade indicator received additional communications to utilize support services.

Lastly, a focus on minority persistence strategies is underway. Mona Davenport and Kimberlie Moock have utilized the data to find pockets of students who are eligible to participate in TRiO. Additional strategies to increase the number of freshmen who receive support through TRiO will be leveraged for 2015.

Spotlight cont.

changes in the discipline and to streamline content from an 11-semester hour core requirement to six hours. The most significant changes occurred in the introductory core course, *FCS 2500 Foundational Focus of FCS*. While the course still links the theoretical and historical principles that anchor the discipline, the pedagogical approach has significantly changed. Classroom lectures now incorporate historical video and audio clips to make the content more “real” and assignments are designed to actively engage the students in learning the content. Dr. Sherwood, who was responsible for many of the changes

to this course, stated that her objective was to cover fundamental content while sending the message that FCS is “fun” and interactive.

While the change in retention has not been formally assessed, it is believed that the curricular changes have significantly increased student satisfaction.

The chair and assistant chair have also made a concerted effort to assign their most engaging faculty to their beginning level classes in order to make those all-important personal connections with students early in the student’s career as a major.

Early Alert cont.

their standards, and the earlier in the semester the better. Paul Brown, School of Business, uses the EAS each semester. “In freshman level classes, I feel it is just another way to inform students that I am concerned with their academic performance. I use early alert in conjunction with weekly emailed grade sheets to alert students of their below-average performance and potential for failure in courses. In upper level courses, I still feel it is a good tool to remind students that performance early-on in courses is important.”

Susan Kling, School of Business, also employs the EAS. “I mention the system in class and in emails. I tell them that I am concerned about their performance and I don’t want to wait until Midterm to let them know they are in a bad spot. The sooner I make them aware of their situation,

the sooner we can get them back on track.”

While it is difficult to measure the success of a program that is not mandatory, we do know that on average 30% of students whose names are submitted to the EAS for a course earn or D or F in that course while the remainder pass with an A, B, or C, or decide to drop the course and take it another time.

CORE encourages faculty to submit information to the EAS early in the semester—especially for 1000 and 2000 level courses. Over the past four years of the EAS’s existence more continuing students are submitted than new students, and more submissions come in around midterm or later than in the first few weeks. Kling notes, “I think it works well for students who are concerned with their grades. I think

it gets the attention of students when they are contacted by someone other than their instructor.”

However, some students will not respond to the EAS or other methods used to encourage academic excellence. The EAS was designed to hold out that helping hand to students interested in improving.

Some faculty have expressed concern that students submitted for the EAS would retaliate on course evaluations. To alleviate this concern, CORE adopted a syllabus blurb that faculty can use to explain the reason for the EAS (see below).

For safety concerns, contact the University Police Department and the Office of Student Standards, do not report via EAS.

EAS Syllabus Statement

Eastern maintains an Early Alert System (EAS) to help students know when they are not performing up to academic standards. Alerts may be given for poor attendance, not turning work in on time, or doing poorly on an assignment or test. EAS staff will contact you to aid in finding resources to help you be a successful student. Resources may include time management, study skills, test-taking, finding tutors, or other resources related to academic issues. I will use the EAS if I believe you could benefit from talking to a success coach about these issues.

Benefits of Student Involvement

Decades of research shows that college student involvement has a positive impact on g.p.a., satisfaction with college, and retention of students. Student involvement can range from participation in athletics, Honor's programs, residence halls, involvement in research, and participation in on-campus clubs and organizations, student government, and other activities.

Astin (1984) argues that student learning and personal growth is greatest when the student is involved in their college. Extra-curricular involvement allows students to develop interests outside of the classroom (Astin, 1984), develop social and leadership skills, enhance career and life planning decisions, increase self-confidence, improve relationships with faculty, and enhance the relevance of courses and curricula (Nadler, 1997).

In previous newsletters, CORE has highlighted the importance of student involvement in research and online courses (Fall 2014), and programs on campus that are focused on increasing student involvement, such as Residential Life (Spring 2011), New Student Programs (Fall 2011), and Minority Affairs (Spring 2014). Another important mode of involvement is Registered Student Organizations (RSOs). Active participation in clubs and organizations helps students connect with peers and faculty, which increases the connection to their college (d'Amico & Hawes, 2000).

At EIU, nearly 200 RSOs fall into the following categories: academic, social, multicultural, service, religious, Greek, athletic, political, governing, and honorary. According to EIU's Student Life Office, Greek organizations are the most popular RSO group, with about 20% of students involved in these organizations. The University Board, Student Government, and different athletic groups are also very popular.

Eastern's Student Life Office and RSOs reach out to new EIU students through the bi-annual Panther Palooza event, monthly RSO newsletters, and individual recruitment tactics by the RSOs. Panther Palooza is forum open to all RSOs that allows EIU students to learn about different groups on campus at the beginning of each semester.

Student organizations provide a potential avenue for increasing retention of students because they reach such a large number of students and are focused on increasing connections to others and the university. Ceci Brinker, Director of Student Life at EIU, stated that there are many benefits of being involved in an RSO at EIU. Students are given an opportunity to connect to the university and community, form relationships and friendships, use time in a constructive manner, gain skills to make them more marketable for the workforce after graduation, and improve leadership skills.

Other research has noted that some student organizations allow for the development of closer relationships with faculty advisors. The EIU Alumni Survey asks students what had the most positive impact on their time at Eastern and many students indicate relationships with professors/advisors, peer relationships and social activities, and involvement in RSOs or athletics have had the most positive impact on their time at EIU.

Results of our own Alumni Survey, information from the Student Life office, and existing research on the topic all underscore the importance that student involvement plays in creating an inviting environment that may promote retention of students. Faculty are strongly encouraged to interact with students outside of the classroom, not only by being available for office hours, but to create welcoming research opportunities

for students, becoming involved in student organizations by serving as advisors, and serving as mentors to EIU students.

By involving faculty in student organizations, there are opportunities to create integrative learning opportunities that can not only increase student engagement with material they are learning in their courses, but also promote student engagement with the university and potentially increase retention. Each department can invite new students to join RSOs connected to its major and consider using peer mentors and/or faculty mentors to help new students find those pathways to academic and social involvement.

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.

d'Amico, M. F. (2000). The Role of Professional Fraternities and Other Student Groups in Student Development. *Journal of the Academy of Business Education*, 1 (Winter 2000), #121.

Nadler, M. K. (1997). The value of student organizations and the role of faculty advisors. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 52(1), 16-25.



Students involved in Wesley Foundation prepare for Homecoming parade.