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Community College Case Study on Early Alert

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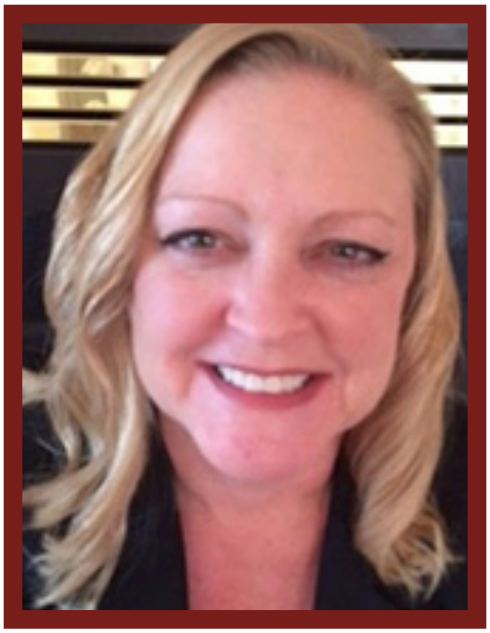

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Community College Case Study on Early Alert

We are happy to share the findings of Dr. Reynold's research, first published in the May 2018 Instructional Leadership Abstract.

Mid Valley Community College (MVCC), a pseudonym, is an example of a community college early alert system that has had some great success. The faculty at MVCC voted to implement the use of early alert report by all faculty in 2016-2017 as part of their 5-year strategic plan. While MVCC may not have had 100% participation in the early alert report, they did find that a majority of faculty participated, and an increase in referrals in the 2016-2017 academic year, particularly in the fall of 2016 when the initiative was freshest on the minds of the faculty (Reynolds, 2018).

Early Alert Statistics Fall 2016

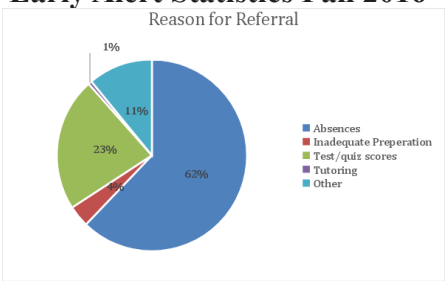
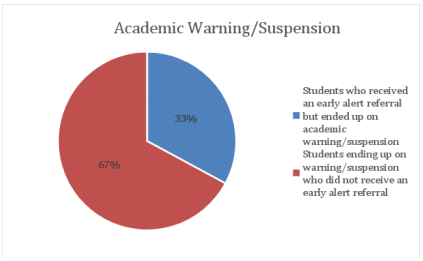


Figure A

There were 164 referrals for 97 different students in the fall 2016 semester. Twenty-two instructors made early alert referalls in the fall semester.



51% of students who received an early alert referral in the fall semester were not on academic warning/suspension at the end of the semester

A Case Study

Providing feedback to students enhances the college atmosphere toward students' academic competence (Tagg, 2003). This case study takes a closer look at that feedback in the form of the early alert report. Prior to this case study research, a survey was conducted of the community colleges in one Midwestern state (Reynolds & Friedel, 2018). One of those colleges surveyed shared the results that you see in this case study. This community college case study can be an example for any college in determining which early alert reporting system is best for them. The significance of the study is that the comprehensive system used by MVCC is easy to use since it is online, and may provide similar results for other colleges. Several themes emerged from this research when interviewing faculty and administrators at MVCC, which are identified by headers.

Attending Classes

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, and Kinzie (2008) addressed how communication among the faculty and staff is important in providing the resources and services needed that can help students who are struggling. How do you reach those students to indicate that the behaviors they are making could lead to poor results? One of the largest issues for students is attendance. The survey conducted of the Midwest community colleges prior indicated that one of the major reasons identified for students referred to their early alert system is attending classes. In fact, nine of the 13 (almost 70%) survey responses indicated attendance as a factor for referring students to early alert (Reynolds, 2019). As shown in the data from MVCC (Figure B.) from 2016-2017, the overwhelming rea-

son that students are referred to the early alert system is due to missing classes. For a community college with approximately 1500 students, 25% of faculty members from this small community college were individually interviewed about their perceptions and use of the early alert system. The faculty interviews conducted support this phenomenon illustrating what a key issue attending classes is for community college students, and how it negatively impacts their success in their courses. All of the instructors interviewed from MVCC indicated that attendance is an important aspect of the early alert referrals, and most of the faculty shared that the number one reason for referring students to early alert is attendance (Reynolds, 2018).

Early Alert Statistics
2016-2017 Academic Year

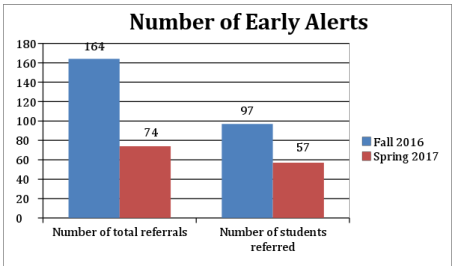


Figure B

In this case study, attendance is the most common issue for struggling students, and will continue to be a large part of the early alert report for many community colleges. While attendance may not be the only reason that a student is struggling, the early alert statistics reports provided by MVCC indicate attendance (absences) as the largest of the many reasons that students are being referred. Having multiple reasons for the early alert report helps identify for the student their actions that are having negative repercussions on their academic success. Administrators of the early alert report are urged to choose an early alert system that includes attendance as a category for reporting, and not use systems that only indicate grades.

Easy-to-use system

The best early alert system is not helpful if no faculty use it. Making the early alert system easy-to-use is key. In the survey of the chief academic officers, they were asked if satisfied with their current early alert system. Seven out of 12 (58%) indicated a response of very satisfied or somewhat satisfied (Reynolds, 2019). In fact, most faculty at MVCC had overall positive attitudes toward their early alert system; and only had a couple changes that they would recommend to their current system (Reynolds, 2020). In fact, of those positive responses, the faculty members interviewed all shared that their early alert system's best features were easy to use, online which makes it easy to access and fill out, and quick.

Time is short

Most of the faculty at MVCC shared that this lack of time is a challenge and can cause some students to not get referred, or not get referred as early as they should. An easy-to-use system for faculty is important to ensure completion of the forms, such as an early alert report. As indicated by many faculty at MVCC, the easy-to-use system is one of the best features about their early alert report. In addition to MVCC, the majority of the community colleges surveyed in this midwestern state were satisfied with their early alert system (Reynolds, 2019). MVCC is a great example of a community college early alert system that is effective.

Results

More referrals were made to the early alert report in the academic year 2016-2017 than in the previous five years; the administration suspects this is due to a commitment made by faculty that August to use the early alert report. Twenty-two instructors referred 97 students for a total of 164 referrals (some students received multiple referrals by different instructors during the same term) in the fall of 2016 (Figure A). The results that semester for the students correspond to these increased numbers. One hundred fifty-four students were referred in 2016 -2017 academic year in 238 referrals by faculty. After those terms, 54 percent of those students were not placed on warning by the college, meaning that they were able to improve their attendance and academics that term after being placed on early alert. For the student who was struggling, by placing them on early alert, which identified, and intervened with support and services, MVCC significantly reduced the percent of students who were on warning, which lead to increased retention.

Summary

A consistent theme from the MVCC faculty interviews was that they felt busy and had to juggle priorities. Faculty need to feel supported, and

providing resources for faculty that make it easy sends a great message. Administrators need to continue to offer support and resources to encourage the faculty to complete the early alert report, as MVCC's example demonstrates, their efforts were returned in lower turnover and higher retention.

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