Developing, Implementing, and Assessing an Early Alert System

Annual Conference on the First Year Experience (2010)– Session CI 163

Dale R. Tampke, Ph.D.
Dean, Undergraduate Studies
University of North Texas
940.565.4321
dale.tampke@unt.edu

The Main Points

• Our Context - UNT
• Early Alert as a Concept
• Project Scope (the tech-y part)
• Building Advocacy
• How EARS works
  — End-user
  — Responder
• Data from AY 2008-2009 (and what we've learned so far)
• Enhancement plans
• Questions

The University of North Texas

• Located in Denton, TX
• Enrollment – 36,000
• High Research university offering 99 bachelor’s, 104 master’s and 49 PhD programs
• Faculty – 1007 full-time, 430 part-time
• FTIC retention – 75%
Early Alert as a Concept

- Grounded in literature on undergraduate retention
  - Student behavior can predict attrition
  - Early intervention can change outcomes
- First efforts were course-centered
  - Poor performance
  - Excessive absences
  (Think “mid-term” grades)

More on the Early Alert Concept

- Expansion to campus-wide availability
  - Include psycho-social concerns
  - Web front end
  - E-mail back end
  - Authentication varies
  - Integration varies
- A common issue:
  How many faculty use the system?

Our Idea...

- Integrate with student system
- Start with a focus on faculty (make it easy for them)
- Designate a central receiver of the data
- Expand beyond “academic” issues
- Have a ready referral
- Begin a personal, caring conversation
- Increase student success and persistence
Building the System

- Include stakeholders
  - Students (8 from office staffs)
  - Faculty (12 from Arts and Sciences)
  - Academic Advisors (10 from all colleges)
  - Student Services (15 areas)
- Get their feedback at the conceptual stage
- Adopt a good idea
- Faculty test group

The Set Up

- PeopleSoft Campus Solutions 9.0
- Early Alert Referral System (EARS) 1.0 (available from audit roll and class roll)
- Instructors of record receive an e-mail reminding them of EARS
- Accessed through the faculty portal (The “Faculty Center”)
- Nightly report delivered to Academic Readiness
- Follow-up within one day of receiving
- Points of contact in each college

Accessing Early Alert – From the Faculty Center
To the class roster...

From the Class Roster...

To the Early Alert Form
Reasons for Referral

- Poor class attendance
- Poor performance on quizzes/exams
- Poor performance on writing assignments
- Does not participate in class
- Difficulty completing assignments
- Difficulty with reading
- Difficulty with math
- Sudden decline in academic performance
- Concerns about their major
- College adjustment issues
- Financial problems
- Physical health concerns
- Mental health concerns
- Alcohol or substance use concerns
- Roommate difficulty
- Disruptive behavior
- Absent from work
- Student needs veterans assistance
- Other concerns (text box)

Other features

- Relationship to student
  - Professor, instructor
  - Teaching assistant, teaching fellow
  - Academic Advisor
  - Mentor
  - Department administrator
  - Campus Employer
  - Club, organization advisor
- “I have had a conversation with the student”
- Send a copy of the referral to the student (via e-mail)

What Happens Next...

- Review report every morning
  - E-mail prompt
  - Excel file
  - Send an e-mail acknowledgement to faculty member (manual)
- Includes following information
  - Demographics
  - Student ID
  - Faculty member’s name
  - Course
  - Reason(s) for referral
Follow-up

• First responders – Routine referrals
  – Residence hall staff
  – Course Interventionists
• More serious issues
  – Academic Readiness Advisors
  – Academic Advisors
  – CARE team
  – Counseling, Health Center

Follow-up (more)

• E-mail, call, text, visit
• Caring conversation (no scolding)
• Emphasize mattering
• Resources
• Self-efficacy
• Focus on academic success
• Follow-up² (we need to get better at this)

YEAR 1 DATA

AY 2008-2009
Alert Frequency by Week in Semester

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Fall (n=255)</th>
<th>Spring (n=280)</th>
<th>Campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-resident</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Time in College</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Undergraduate</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for Referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Reason Cited</th>
<th>Fall (%)</th>
<th>Spring (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor class attendance</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor performance</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not participate in class</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental/physical health concerns</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about major</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive behavior</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/Substance use concerns</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who is Referring?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to student</th>
<th>Fall (n=255)</th>
<th>Spring (n=280)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor or instructor</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisor</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcomes

- Literature suggests early intervention impacts:
  - Student success
  - Student persistence/progression
- GPA (semester and cumulative)
- Re-enrollment
- Use a within-group comparison

Preliminary Findings

- Fall
  - FGPA = 1.39
  - CGPA = 1.94
  - Persistence = 70%
- Spring
  - SGPA = 1.46
  - CGPA = 2.10
  - Persistence = 64%
Preliminary Findings (Course Grades)

Fall
- A's – 3.4%
- B's – 5.9%
- C's – 11.9%
- D's – 12.3%
- F's – 43.0%
- I's – 1.3%
- Drops – 21.7%
- Other – 0.0%

Spring
- A's – 4.4%
- B's – 12.9%
- C's – 12.8%
- D's – 9.7%
- F's – 38.9%
- I's – 0.9%
- Drops – 17.7%
- Other – 2.7%

Contact Types (Frequencies)

- Fall (n=255)
  - Faculty – 13.3%
  - Staff – 31.4%
  - E-mail only – 65.9%
- Spring (n=280)
  - Faculty – 12.1%
  - Staff – 62.1%
  - E-mail only – 31.8%

(out the percentages exceed 100 because of duplicated contacts)

Outcomes by Contact Type (All)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Term GPA</th>
<th>Persistence (% re-enrolling)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty  (n=25)</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff    (n=80)</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail only (n=168)</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty  (n=34)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff    (n=174)</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail only (n=89)</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What we have learned

1. Including faculty in the design was critical
2. Linking to class roll, self-populating made it easier for faculty to use
3. Faculty generally focus on course-related issues
4. Personal faculty contact is the most effective follow up
5. E-mail contact by itself is not effective
6. Some positive effect on success and persistence based on type of contact
7. Timing of alert has no apparent effect on success or persistence
8. Tracking confirmed contacts needs improvement
9. EARS is not a "large class" solution

Plans for EARS 2.0

• Available campus wide, secure portal
• E-mail confirmation for referrals
• Group alert capability
• Include SRI scores
• Data warehousing
• Notification for multiple alerts for the same student
• Use for mid-term reporting (e.g. athletes, other scholarship students)

References


