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Early Alert Changes

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Amy Hackney, Dan Bauer, Chris Caplinger, Michelle Cawthorn, Rob Clouse, Marshall Ransom, and an-hoc committee to examine early alerts

Early Alert changes

Motion

The Faculty Senate endorses the following proposed changes to the early alert system, effective Fall 2017:

1. The name of the alerts will change to "academic alerts" to distinguish early alerts from the growing number of other alerts students receive. Specifically, the change is designed to prevent confusion between "early alerts" and "eagle alerts."
2. Students will receive alerts or an indication that no alert is warranted based on their enrollment in specific courses. This is a change from the current system, which bases alerts on students' classification as freshmen. More specifically:
   a. The current early alert "satisfactory" will no longer be an option. All other alerts will remain.
   b. Faculty are encouraged to submit academic alerts as soon as students exhibit behavior not conducive to success in the course. The current faculty due date for submission of early alerts (the 34th day in fall or spring) will remain for the new academic alert system. Faculty must submit "no alert" if students have not merited one as the deadline approaches. This ensures that faculty have submitted and allows for follow up in cases where they have not. Students will not receive a pop-up message when they log into My.GeorgiaSouthern for "no alert" but will be able to see the "no alert" submission in WINGS.
3. Faculty will submit academic alerts for all courses in Areas A-E of the core curriculum.
4. Departments with oversight of courses will have the option of including additional courses in the academic alert system. Course additions submitted by April 1 will be effective the following fall semester.

Rationale

Alerts are most appropriate for introductory courses in which students often struggle and/or which are gateways for progression in the major. The current system, based on students' classification, inefficiently identifies students who may be struggling in these courses. Some students for which faculty wish to submit are not able to receive alerts (and indeed, a growing number of students enter Georgia Southern as sophomores due to AP or dual enrolled credit and never receive alerts). In other cases, faculty end up with a small number of students classified as freshmen in an upper division course for which early alerts are less appropriate. In this case, they often only find out they need to submit when they receive a pop-up message or communication from their dean's office. This change will simplify the process and align it with its intended purpose.

Areas A-E of the core will capture the majority of courses departments would choose to add, without requiring action on departments' part. The opt-in process for courses beyond Areas A-E of the core is designed to allow departments to identify gateway and other courses where alerts are most appropriate.

On behalf of an an-hoc committee called by the provost to examine early alerts: Dan Bauer, Chris Caplinger, Michelle Cawthorn, Rob Clouse, Amy Hackney, Marshall Ransom

Response:

Minutes, 10-31-2016

Chris Caplinger (Director, First-Year Experience): After Academic Standards met, he called that committee's chair, Bill Levernier, to ask for clarification about what he'd like to see going forward because the committee had expressed some concerns about not really knowing exactly what the provision that they voted down was about. Caplinger offered clarification and asked if Levernier wanted to take that back to Academic Standards, but Levernier said he thought it best to go directly to the Senate. There are four provisions in the motion:

- A name change from "early alerts" to "academic alerts" to reduce the confusion with other types of alerts, such as "Eagle Alerts."
- The big change is from issuing alerts based on the student's classification as a freshman student, to making it automatic for all students who are in core courses, Areas A-E, or in any other courses that departments would opt into, and they would have the opportunity to do that annually by April 1.
- Parts 3 and 4 are subsets of 2, identifying courses subject to the alert process.

[*Secretary's Note: Janice Steirn (CLASS) spoke, but is inaudible. It was about non-freshmen already knowing how they are doing in their classes.*]

Mark Edwards (COSM), a member of the Academic Standards Committee, said they had discussed this and the key point isn't that students don't know that they aren't doing well, but that the alert "mobilizes infrastructure because some students know that they are not doing well, but they can't do anything about it. They're depressed. They're financially strapped and there are outfits at the University that can help them, but they won't help them unless they know about it, and that's what the alert is for."

Rob Pirro (CLASS) asked Provost Bartels what happens when an alert goes out.

Provost Bartels said we "have begun to implement across all of the colleges' advising centers, intervention advisors, so this is a place where that information goes so that they actually can identify and know which students are having difficulty and then make appropriate appointments with them to bring them in, talk to them and try to figure out what the problems are. Get them directed to resources that might be helpful." Caplinger added that the alert also goes to others, including those in the Academic Success Center. And the proposal would make it "a real alert." Currently, at mid-term students actually have to check to see if they have an alert, and they haven't been doing that. With the proposed system, it will grey out the back of their screen when they log into myGeorgiaSouthern and say in text that they have an early alert posted for a course and the reason for that alert. This was designed by a group of faculty.

Moderator Flynn noted that currently, when he issued alerts, he has an option to mark everybody S, and asked if that option would remain, thus saving the time of people who have 300 students or so.

Caplinger said that option would remain, allowing faculty to mark all as No Alert and then only changing those that need an alert, and they were working with the IT folks to alter the program so that one click, instead of two, would be needed for each student alert. They are also looking at other ways to streamline the process.

Janice Steirn (CLASS) said that is only part of the issue. Before any clicking, faculty like her may have to review 300 grades because she was not aware of how each student is doing in her large classes.

Provost Bartels said one major concern is our Complete College Georgia work in terms of retention of students, with students not necessarily understanding where they stood,

nor getting the kind of attention that they might need or the direction they might need if they were having difficulties, so this also is intended to improve our retention rates. She noted a plethora of literature about how this kind of early intervention actually does make a difference in retaining students and correcting their poor performances. Our retention rates beyond the freshman are still not so good. Her personal and professional opinion was that, in a place that prides itself rightfully on being student-centered, this was an important step for us to take in terms of making sure that we are assisting students in a timely fashion so they can be successful in their work.

Marc Cyr (CLASS) noted that at any time before end-of-term the best he can do is give a guesstimate as to whether students are okay or not. He also noted that it was 5-6 weeks into a term before he had enough grades in to make that guesstimate, and asked how early "early" would be.

Caplinger understood concerns about how accurate such an early grade could be and whether it can be accurately predictive, but the concept of an early alert based on something not being turned in or poor attendance or other legitimate reasons is "a shot across the bow of students to say this type of behavior or this type of performance is not going to bode well." It will have no permanent grade impact but might help turn things around.

Cyr favored the proposal, but was concerned that too early a date might drive him to alter his curriculum to suit the date, and he thought that was the reverse of how things should work. So he wanted to know how "early" the deadline would be.

Caplinger said that would remain as it is now, the 34th calendar day of the regular Fall or Spring term. He noted that even earlier, if a problem is detected, would be better.

[*Secretary's Note: Jake Simons (COBA) spoke but is inaudible except for his name, though it seems to have been about classes outside areas A-E.*]

Caplinger did not know how many departments would opt in, but just A-E would increase the students helped, and while that number was knowable, but he would have to work it out. He added that the proposal would also fix the current problem of faculty wanting to alert some students but being unable to do so because they have sophomore status. The same frustration can occur when there is a student with freshman classification in an upper division course.

Caplinger thought faculty could set those dates for themselves and "do it again closer to that thirty-fourth day."

Mujibur Khan (CEIT) said his experience was that these kinds of student are doing badly not because of some academic reason, but for reasons that lie somewhere else. He asked if guardians or parents would be alerted as well because frequently it is family reasons that are involved. Moderator Flynn noted that that is against the FIRPA law, though Caplinger noted that students can give permission for such communication.

Cyr noted that issues like depression and financial stress mentioned by Edwards are not confined to freshmen, and he had seniors in his core classes who needed lots of help. Caplinger noted that the group that developed the proposal considered that situation and this was one reason for designating A-E classes for reporting because in some senior classes there is no early grade on which to base an alert. Pirro noted that strategy left freshmen in upper division courses out of the net. Caplinger thought those numbers were small, and that advising needed to take that into consideration for freshmen who might benefit from greater oversight.

Moderator Flynn asked to move the motion to a vote. It was Moved and Seconded. Then Ted Brimeyer (CLASS) asked if there was a quorum present because there have been cases where the validity of such votes on policy was questioned later when a quorum might not have been present. Counts were done and a quorum was present. The motion was Approved.