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Senate Executive Committee Request for Information

The Early Alert system for informing students in core classes of their academic status has been changed since last year and is not functioning properly.

Submitted by: Marshall Ransom

9/14/2018

Question(s):

1. Why was the existing early alert changed? 2. Why is it not possible to fix an error? If one accidentally selects "Yes" indicating that a student is at risk of failing, that "Yes" cannot be unclicked. A "No" can be selected, but that might not be the appropriate message at that time. 3. After submitting perhaps several unsatisfactory indications for students, those student names disappear from the accessible list. Thus no later correction perhaps to an "S" is possible. Why? 4. Two "robo" emails are sent to the submitting professor indicating that the student has met with their advisor (sometimes that happens) and also that we have "Case Closed." The case may be far from closed. These emails amount to dozens, over a hundred for those with large classes.

Rationale:

Early alerts for core courses and others chosen by departments are important in providing students with warnings about their performance in courses. A system for doing this which has dysfunction is not acceptable. I have tried to inform the Provost's office about this situation and received one response in late August asking for the names of students who had disappeared from my list. Since then I have tried and failed to get a follow-up response.

Response:

Dr. Christine Ludowise: 10/16/2018

RFI Early Alert System

Questions:

1) Why was the existing early alert changed?

During consolidation, the Georgia Southern Academic Alert policy was reviewed and the recommendation was to adopt this policy for the new Georgia Southern University. The Academic Alert system used by Georgia Southern was built by our ITS team. There were concerns that the system would not be workable for an institution with three campuses. In addition, Georgia Southern also used EAB GradesFirst for athletic progress reports and Armstrong State University used EAB Campus for various student alerts. Instead of using multiple tools and platforms, the decision was made to consolidate the three into EAB Campus (now Navigate).

Part of the decision to change the Academic Alert system stemmed from the limitations of our home grown tool and interface. Some of those limitations included:

- a) Advisors, faculty, and administrators had to pull a Business Objects report to determine if a student had received an Academic Alert. There was no notification to advisors or faculty when an Alert was issued. The Business Objects report is unwieldy and not user friendly. And, as a result, both reporting and follow-up with students were inconsistent.
- b) Although students received notification about their alerts, no one else did. Concerns were raised that the alerts were not facilitating discussions between student and instructor and student and advisor.
- c) Each semester, faculty raised concerns about the lack of feedback about what actions were taken – or not taken – when an Alert was submitted for a particular student.
- d) We needed a better way to track the impact of the policy and assess its impacts – or lack of impacts – on student success.

2) Why is it not possible to fix an error? If one accidentally selects “Yes” indicating that a student is at risk of failing, that “Yes” cannot be unclicked. A “No” can be selected, but that might not be the appropriate message at that time.

Academic alerts are intended to be a snapshot of a student’s standing (at risk/not at risk) in a class at a particular point in time. It’s an early warning system.

Instructors are given a period of time to submit Academic Alerts. The system is designed so an instructor may submit Academic Alerts multiple times but not multiple times for each individual student. A student could get an Academic Alert (attendance, poor grades, lack of participation, missed assessments, multiple issues) in multiple classes or in one class. The intention is to give students a warning that they are at-risk of not passing early enough that they can make adjustments and, hopefully, pass their class(es). As soon as an alert is submitted, a student’s advisor is notified and steps are taken to reach out to the student. The student also receives an email about the alert and then a follow up from his/her advisor. The feedback to students is very quick – if the student is checking his/her email and his/her phone.

An instructor can submit alerts multiple times by using the first button at the bottom of the alerts page. That button is marked “Submit only marked students (but I’m not done)” and has the following description beneath: “This button submits students you have marked as being “at-risk”. You can re-use the link in the Academic Alert/Progress Report email, at any time, to report concerns with the remaining students in your classes.”

3) After submitting perhaps several unsatisfactory indications for students, those student names disappear from the accessible list. Thus no later correction perhaps to an “S” is possible. Why?

Academic alerts are intended to be a snapshot of a student’s standing (at risk/not at risk) in a class at a particular point in time. It’s an early warning system.

Instructors are given a period of time to submit Academic Alerts. The system is designed so an instructor may submit Academic Alerts multiple times but not multiple times for each individual student. A student could get an Academic Alert (attendance, poor grades, lack of participation, missed assessments, multiple issues) in multiple classes or in one class. The intention is to give students a warning that they are at-risk of not passing early enough that they can make adjustments and, hopefully, pass their class(es). As soon as an alert is submitted, a student’s advisor is notified and steps are taken to reach out to the student. The student also receives an email about the alert and then a follow up from his/her advisor. The feedback to students is very quick – if the student is checking his/her email and his/her phone.

Hopefully, once an at-risk alert is issued, the student will reach out to his/her instructor and will work on a plan to improve performance in that instructor’s course. Nothing in the Academic Alert system prevents an instructor from keeping his/her students up-to-date on their standing in the course. And much of the feedback that has been received from faculty is that while there are improvements that can be made to the user interface of the new reporting system, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students who have contacted instructors about their grades.

4. Two “robo” emails are sent to the submitting professor that the student has met with their advisor (sometimes that happens) and also that we have “case closed”. The case may be far from closed. These emails amount to dozens, over a hundred for those with large classes.

We sought faculty input into what communications should be sent when alerts are submitted and to let instructors know that advising teams would follow up with students. We wanted to address the concern raised about lack of feedback and feeling like alerts were submitted and going into a black hole. We also spoke with institutions that use this platform about their experiences and asked them to make recommendations. We have collected feedback and will review, with a faculty committee, to determine what adjustments can and should be made for Spring 2019. Changes to the numbers and types of communications will be considered and will likely be adjusted for future terms.

The advising teams are reaching out to students on a daily basis, as well as advising for Spring and Summer 2019 registration. If a student is not responding to his/her instructor, it is likely that s/he is not responding to the advisor, as well. An advisor can indicate that no contact was made after attempting to contact the student multiple times. The “robo” email language is part of the communication plan and will be evaluated at the end of Fall term.

10/16/2018, Minutes

f. RFI on Early Alerts

Chris Ludowise addressed these questions.

1. Why were early alerts changed? It happened through consolidation. The Armstrong EAB was adopted.
2. Why can't an error be fixed? We are working with a tool that we were developing before semester started. We are trying to adjust.
3. Early alerts are a first-time warning for students. The expectation is that faculty and advisors will follow up. It isn't an ongoing process.
4. As far as all of the emails sent to faculty about early alerts, she claimed that the communication plan was designed by a faculty committee. She said they did their best with what they had. The committee will reconvene to consider feedback from Faculty.

The following discussion ensued:

Marshall Ransom (COSM) is concerned that a student's name was obscured from his view after he submitted his early alerts. Also, the canned email was not accurate as sometimes students had not met with advisor.

Chris Ludowise responded that this was an error. If a student got multiple alerts, there may have been a disconnect. They are working to be clearer in communication.

Attachments/Links: [Early Alert Changes](#) (2016)

[Recommended changes to the early alert-midterm grades policy](#) (2014)

