

Report on UCA's Progress Reporting Process

Office of Student Success
Academic Advising Center
Athletic Academic Advising

Fall 2018

IN BRIEF

For the past two academic years, UCA has replaced the traditional “Mid-Term Grade Reporting Process” with a “Progress Reporting Process” in order to more effectively reach out to students in academic distress and improve student outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Like many universities, UCA has long collected undergraduate mid-term grades from faculty and reported these to students. Most recently, mid-term grades were reported only for first-year students (or students in 1000-level courses). Reported around the mid-point (eighth week) of the semester, these grades were intended to ensure that students had an understanding of their progress in their courses as of that date.

Several concerns have arisen from UCA faculty over the years concerning the effectiveness of mid-term grades, however, including:

- a) The process and/or the student often assumes, incorrectly, that this “mid-term” grade reflects fifty percent of the student’s graded work in the course, and is, therefore, a good indicator of his/her likelihood of success in the second half of the course. In reality, many courses are not structured so that half of the assigned work is actually completed by mid-semester. As such, a student’s mid-term grade may not be a good indicator of his/her final performance in the course, and may be misleading (negatively or positively) because of this.
- b) Reporting a student’s grade at the mid-point of the semester may come too late in the semester to allow or encourage the student to make changes and improvements. These could include:
 - Changes in his/her behaviors (attendance, study habits) in order to improve academic performance;
 - Addressing missed information and improving comprehension going forward;
 - Dropping the course and replacing it with another (such as a half-semester course).
- c) Reporting mid-term grades for all first-year students or all students in 1000-level courses can be time consuming, while still missing a large number of at-risk students.

PILOT PROGRAM

UCA’s 2017-2022 Strategic Plan includes a primary emphasis on supporting students in achieving academic success. Goal 1 of the Plan states:

UCA will support and empower students to succeed. Actions to improve retention and graduation rates to the levels already specified by the Board in the KPIs must be UCA’s first order of business.

Furthermore, Sub-goal A states that:

Every student will be afforded guidance and support for her/his development of the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve academic and personal success.

In an effort to provide more guidance and support for our students, and given faculty concerns about the Mid-Term Grade process, a task-force within Academic Affairs consisting of staff and faculty from Student Success, Academic Advising, and Athletic Academic Advising explored and piloted a Progress Report process during the 2017 and 2018 academic years.

Progress Reports differ from mid-term grade reporting in that they are:

- Generally conducted earlier than the mid-semester point in order to address concerns in a timely manner. Reports may also be repeated throughout the semester.
- Intended to indicate how well a student is functioning in a class as of the report date. This could include attendance and participation rates, as well as grades received.
- Targeted toward specific cohorts of students, generally those deemed at-risk by the institution, rather than large groups of students.
- Reported to the student, but also followed up on through an intervention process involving appropriate campus personnel.

Although use of progress reports across the general student population is a fairly recent development nationally, this system has long been used for monitoring student athletes on many campuses, including UCA.

The Pilot

During the 2016-2017 AY and 2017-2018 AY, Progress Reports were issued by the Academic Advising Center through GradesFirst to faculty in lieu of mid-term grade reporting. Faculty were asked to provide the student’s current grade and to indicate if the student should be considered “at risk.” A drop-down menu of reasons the student might be considered at risk included:

- Academic Performance
- Class Attendance
- Academic Content

Results of the pilot year requests were as follows:

Term	201710	201720	201810	201820
Populations included	<30 hrs, probation, UCAN, student athletes	<30 hrs, probation, UCAN, student athletes	<60 hrs, probation, UCAN, student athletes	<60 hrs, probation, UCAN, student athletes
Date first sent	10/4/2016	3/2/2017	10/4/2017	2/23/2018
Requests sent (student x # of courses)	12,651	9342	30,365	19,213
Responses from faculty	11,476	8,850	28,008	16,974
% Completion	90	94	92	88
# of students marked at risk	1,514	1,317	3,306	2,577

During both years, students were notified via an email from GradesFirst that they had been reported as being at risk in a specific course by a faculty member due to academic performance, attendance, or academic content, and were encouraged to contact the faculty member and/or the student’s advisor for consultation.

As part of the second year of the pilot, students reported as being at risk for *academic performance* or *attendance* (only) were considered “open cases,” and appropriate personnel were asked to contact the student (academic advisors, tutoring staff, peer coaches). Once staff contacted the student (or made several unsuccessful attempts to contact the student), the case was identified in GradesFirst as closed.

Term	201710	201720	201810	201820
# of “at-risk” reports received	1,514	1,317	3,306	2,577
Open cases	N/A	N/A	2600	2579
Unique students				1408
Cases closed			24%	20% (525)

As reflected above, closing cases proved difficult. However, as this was in part due to the need for greater training of staff, as well as the need to incorporate this process into staff schedules and calendars for the semester, this should improve moving forward. Condensing multiple “open cases” into one case per student, as recommended below, should also improve outcomes.

2018-2019 AY PROGRESS REPORT PLAN

Building on the previous two years of experience with this process, the process for 2018-2019 will be as follows:

Reporting Process

Each Fall and Spring semester, faculty will be notified via email from the **Office of the Provost** of the upcoming Progress Report process. The **Academic Advising Center** will be responsible for then sending the requests for reports to faculty through GradesFirst. Requests will include directions for completing the reports and the deadline for reporting.

Once reporting begins, the AAC, AAA, and Student Success will coordinate the case management process. In order to improve the process, several additions/changes are recommended:

- The AAC/AAA/OSS will create and host an online tutorial for faculty that will explain how to complete the Progress Report, as well as the intentions behind the reporting process.
- Multiple reports for an individual student will be collected and issued to the student once (if possible within the GradesFirst system).

- Language in the system-generated email to the student will be reviewed and adjusted to be supportive and provide additional information on available resources.
- A video message from the Peer Coaches regarding the importance of class attendance will be created by OSS, and included as part of the case management process.

Target Populations

A number of sources encourage targeted reporting, rather than broad sweeps (Simons, 2011; Kaposke, 2016). While this may lighten the load on faculty, the intent is to allow better utilization of resources in following up with students most in need of assistance. Most institutions have some level of knowledge about which students are most at-risk on their campuses, and therefore can direct the Progress Reporting to those students.

At UCA, faculty will be asked to report on the following students:

- Students who have completed fewer than 45 credit hours at UCA (excludes transitional hours)
- First-year transfer students
- Students on academic probation
- Students in UCAN (first suspension program)
- Student athletes
- Students on academic Students enrolled

As the institution works to identify “gateway” courses in the Core and major programs, it may be useful also to include students enrolled in specific courses in the future.

Finally, any faculty member can submit an “Alert” on an individual student through the GradesFirst system at any time during the semester. This can be done entirely outside of the Progress Report process on a case-by-case basis.

Schedule

For both years of the pilot, the timeframe was similar to the mid-term reporting schedule. One of the first issues noticed as part of this process was the repeated pattern of the Academic Calendar’s mid-term grade due date falling after the last day to register for a second eight-weeks course.

Term	201710	201720	201810	201820
Mid-terms due	12-Oct	8-Mar	18-Oct	7-Mar
Last day to register ½ sem	11-Oct	7-Mar	17-Oct	6-Mar

Following this schedule, students have no option to withdraw from a course and replace it with an eight-week course. The Fall 2018 Progress Report schedule therefore includes an earlier **reporting deadline of October 5th**, ten days prior to the start of half-semester courses, and a month prior to the drop deadline

Term	201810	201820
Progress Reports open	24 –Sep to 5-Oct	11-Feb to 22-Feb
½ semester classes begin	15-Oct	4-Mar
Advance registration begins	29-Oct	1-Apr

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Follow-Up and Intervention Plan

When a faculty member indicates that a student on his or her roster is “at risk,” the student is notified of this and encouraged to meet with the faculty member or his/her advisor. Specific “at risk” categories also create an Open Case in GradesFirst in the student’s account. These currently include students deemed at-risk due to their academic performance or their poor attendance.

Open cases will be monitored and responded to by Academic Advising or Athletic Academic Advising (Academic Performance) or Student Success (Academic Attendance). Once contact has been made with the student, the case is marked “Closed.” In the future, the GradesFirst system can also allow open cases to be forwarded to and addressed by other campus partners, such as financial aid or tutoring, as appropriate.

Assessment Plan

To ensure that the Progress Report process is providing sufficient guidance and support to at-risk students, an annual assessment of the process and outcomes will be conducted by the **Progress Reporting Oversight Committee (Academic Advising, Athletic Advising, and Student Success)**. In addition to tracking the number of reports received, and open and closed cases, we will report to the Provost, Faculty Senate, and the Student Success and Retention Council the following:

The number of students reported “at-risk” who:

- Were contacted by an advisor/coach/other
- Were referred to a campus partner for assistance
- Successfully completed the course
- Dropped the course
- Were/were not in good academic standing at the end of the semester

Students, faculty, and advisors will also be regularly surveyed for their input and suggestions regarding the process, with results incorporated into annual reviews of the process by the oversight committee.

Recommendations

It is the recommendation of the Progress Reporting Oversight Committee (with representation from Athletic Advising, Academic Advising, and Student Success), that the Progress Reporting process permanently replace Mid-term Grade Reports as of the 2019-2020 academic year, and that this be reflected in the Academic Calendar.

References:

A national study of student early alert models at four-year institutions of higher education by Simons, Jill M., Ed.D., Arkansas State University, 2011

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success: Building ownership for student progression among individual faculty and distributed academic units, by Colin Kaposke., EAB Research, April 4, 2016