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Introduction What is an Early Alert (EA) system?

Early Alert systems or ‘early warning systems’ are institutional support programs that have become nearly ubiquitous in higher education, particularly at the 2 year or community college level. Early Alert (EA) systems are intended to provide additional and targeted support to students by utilizing faculty and staff reports. EA systems allow the institution to identify students with risk factors for attrition, and then intervene to ameliorate the obstacles those students may be facing. Such risk factors include: early or frequent absences, missing assignments, or needing additional support to be successful on assignments. Socio-emotional factors may also be relevant, but are not the focus of most EA systems, including UNM-Taos’.

Research has shown that EA systems, in partnership with interventions such as tutoring and advising, can be very effective in improving student retention, persistence and graduation rates. Part of this effectiveness may stem simply from apprising students of their own progress in the class. Many students are either unaware of or confused about how well they are doing in their courses. EA systems are an institutional channel by which students, faculty and advising staff all get on the same page about the student’s progress. This creates an opportunity for discourse regarding challenges the student may be facing and also to collaboratively problem solve for each student. Part of this collaborative problem solving consists of connecting students with the resources we have on campus.

UNM –Taos is moving towards a centralized and intensive multi-tiered EA reporting system. This means that all referrals (from Faculty or Staff) are collected by a single individual, and are then disseminated to the appropriate advisors to begin personalized interventions for each referral.

Early Alerts has been designed with a campus-wide buy-in in mind. Although this handbook is written specifically for Faculty at UNM Taos, the EA system also welcomes any alerts or information from staff as well. We all have friends and family in the community, many of whom are attending our institution. If you know something about difficulties one of our students is having in their classes, please send an email to taosearlyalert@unm.edu following the same guidelines set out later in this document to the best of your ability.

Our mission at UNM – Taos is to support student success. Effective implementation of an EA system will be a huge step forward in achieving this goal.
What is the point of the Early Alert system?

The Taos Early Alert system is meant to provide an extra layer of support for all of our students. The majority of our students would be considered ‘high risk’ by many other universities. They are often first generation, working full time, have families, are low income, or are in developmental coursework. With a student population like this it is important to have an integrated network that monitors their progress, collaborates for their success, and celebrates their achievements.

Early Alerts allow us to coordinate our efforts to improve student pass rates, retention, and graduation. We do this by collecting information about students who are struggling and using this information to perform interventions for these students. These can consist of emails, phone calls, and in-person advisement sessions in which we discuss the obstacles students are facing and find solutions that are feasible for that particular student at that particular time of the semester.

What Early Alerts is NOT:

- The purpose of EA is **not** to give students a ‘stern talking to’. Rather, the system is designed to help students problem solve by informing them of resources and teaching them skills they need to be successful.
- Being on the EA list is **not** shameful, and should not be treated as such. Having difficulties in college is the **norm**, not an aberration. Students often feel shame for having to seek help regardless, so we need to keep the discourse around seeking help positive, encouraging, and accepting.
**Target Population for Early Alert** *Which students will be covered by the EA system?*

We are concerned about the success and progress of all students in all of our classes, including dual-enrollment students. However, we want to be particularly aware of the difficulties that may face students in under-served populations (students of color, low income, adult learners, etc.) and students in our developmental coursework sequences. That is why it is important to be proactive; as a faculty member, you have the most face-time with students of anyone in the institution. You are the front lines. You are the ones best able to identify students who are struggling in classes or need assistance. You are also the people who should first approach struggling students to determine whether you can help.
**Staffing** *Who will manage the system and who will refer to the EA system?*

The Taos Early Alert system will be managed by an Early Alert (EA) Coordinator (EAC), currently one of the advisors. The EAC will monitor the taosearlyalert@unm.edu email address for your referrals, and send them on to the appropriate advisor for each student. This removes the burden from you as faculty of memorizing exactly who you should speak to about each individual student. Once action has been taken regarding each referral, you will hear back from the EAC with the outcome and any changes to the situation for each student. This will close the loop.

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**Information Flow**

![Information Flow Diagram]

- Faculty
- EAC
- Advisors

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**Indicators** *What indicators should trigger an Early Alert referral?*

When you see these behaviors in a student, it is advisable to contact them to resolve the issue. If you cannot resolve the issue or feel the student needs additional support, then refer the student to the EA system.

- **Absences**
  - Especially early in the semester, because there is still time to have a fruitful intervention with the student

- **Missing work**
  - This includes in class work, assignments, projects, tests, quizzes, etc.

- **Needs additional support**
  - Poor grades on work of any kind, to the degree that you are concerned about the student’s overall success in the course. Or indications that student requires more support than can be offered within the course

All of these behaviors can and will affect both grades and the attainment of SLOs if they become excessive. It is imperative to intervene in these situations early so that students are given time to recover from a stumble.
**Timing** When will Early Alert referrals and interventions take place?

Early Alert referrals and interventions will be embedded in a multiple stage structure. Early Alerts will be solicited from faculty at three (3) different stages in each semester. This means that the EAC will send out announcements to the faculty listserv asking for any students you may have concerns about. Each solicitation stage will emphasize particular student issues that are most important (and most possible) to address at that time in the semester:

- **Before Census date (3 weeks into semester)**
  - **Be proactive!** – Contact your students after a single absence at the beginning of the semester. Communicate with them about the causes of their absences, try to resolve it at your level if possible, refer to EA if you feel the student requires more contact and coordination than you can provide.
  - **Issues to report:**
    - **Early absences** – take into account the amount of class material that a student is missing. If you have a 1 day a week class and a student misses 2 classes, there is a significant amount of content being missed.

- **If the student has not been responsive to your own attempts at intervention or to EA attempts, and you are willing to actively drop students yourself, then please drop them from your course before census date!** It is ultimately the student’s responsibility to monitor their own course load, but if you are willing to proactively drop students it is better to drop a student from your course early than to wait to drop them after census. Dropping students after census requires a final grade for the course. Sometimes an early drop serves as a wakeup call, prompting students to get into contact with you. You can then discuss the possibility of adding the student back to your course if you feel that is the correct move. **

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**Census date**

This date is 3 weeks into every semester [Fall, Spring] **for 16 week courses**. It is important to intervene with students before this date whenever possible, because this date is the cut off for dropping classes without a W. If a student drops a class before census, that class never shows up on their transcript; it is like that class never existed for the student. If a student withdraws from a class after this date, they must be assigned a W or a grade. Having too many W’s on their transcript may affect the student’s financial aid status as much as getting a low or failing grade. Financial aid requires that students have a 67% completion rate. This means that the student **must complete at least 67% of the classes on their transcript with a grade**. If the student drops a class before census date, then it is not included in this calculation! This financial aid calculation is also the reason why it is nice to communicate with the student about whether they would prefer a W or a grade if you have resolved that they should not be in your class. Some students may have a poor completion rate but a good GPA, so taking a W would hurt them more than taking an F. However, if a student never gets back to you about their preference, it is **NOT** your responsibility to determine if a W or a low grade affects their financial aid. Go with your own best judgement.
- **Mid-semester**
  - Issues to report:
    - Excessive absences - missing a significant proportion of course content
    - Missing work – this includes assignments, projects, tests, and quizzes
    - Needs additional support – poor grades on work of any kind, to the degree that you are concerned about the student’s overall success in the course. Or indications that student requires more support than can be offered within the course. For example, students having great difficulties with writing skills may require the Writing Studio.

- **12th week of semester**
  - Issues to report:
    - Excessive absences – if a student has been missing a significant proportion of course content and is still able to recover their grade, please refer to EA. You can also refer a student to EA if you wish an advisor to discuss a W with them.
    - Missing work – if a student is missing work but it is still possible for them to make up a significant proportion of that work, please refer to EA
    - Needs additional support – if a student is struggling with your course in either content or format and you think they may require more support than you can provide, please report to EA

- Take into account that there are only certain types of intervention that are possible or feasible 12 weeks into the semester. Please note in your referral whether it is possible for the student to recover their grade in any way, or whether they should be approached about a possible withdrawal. Indicate your own preference/what you will accept. This preference will be used by advisors when speaking to students about their options.**
Timing of Reports and Issues That Should Be Reported

Before Census
- Early Absences

Mid-Semester
- Absences
- Missing work
- Needs additional support

12th week
- Excessive absences
- Missing work
- Needs additional support
How registration times affect Early Alert Referrals

In an ideal world, all students would register and adjust their schedules prior to the beginning of the semester. We do not live in that world. Rather, UNM policy allows students to adjust their schedules all the way into the 3rd week of the semester. Here is the basic timeline for students to alter their schedules (assuming a 16 week course):

- **Pre-Semester Registration**
- **Census Date**
  - 3rd week of semester
  - Last day to DROP w/out a W
- **1st day of Semester**
  - Last day to ADD a class
- **2nd week of Semester**

This means an extremely late registering student is allowed to miss the first two weeks of content, by default. This sort of registration system can make it very difficult to track who should and should not be referred to Early Alerts. However, there is a simple fix:

**Update your roster before every class for the first 3 weeks.** This allows you to track who is supposed to be in attendance. If you have an absence policy, this also allows you to fairly and accurately enforce that policy. You may refer any student to EA for absences (whether they were late registers or not), but often it is best to simply take aside a late register student and reiterate your absence policy rather than refer to EA.

Updating your roster helps you to keep track of the real enrollment in your class. Students who were initially registered and then dropped the class will be removed from your course roster so you no longer need to track them or contact them about missing assignments.

**Be aware that non-16 week courses follow different registration timelines. Please contact Student Services or DOI to determine the appropriate dates for your particular class.**
**Intervention** What steps will be taken to address the Early Alert referral?

Each Early Alert referral will prompt some form of intervention. First will be an email from the student’s advisor. If that prompts no response, or an unsatisfactory response, then the student will be called. If this prompts no response, or an unsatisfactory response, advisors will try to bring the student in for an in-person advising session. If advisors are not able to contact students any other way, we may also try to find the student at times that they are supposed to be on campus.

This is the typical escalation of contact that advisors will follow. However, it may not always take this form. It is up to each advisor’s judgement, in the context of their knowledge of the referred student, to determine which actions should be taken. The interventions are meant not just to notify the student about your concerns, but also to uncover the causes of student’s behavior. Advisors will then work with students to either overcome these obstacles, or to find an accommodation for these obstacles.

**Types of Interventions**

Email  
Call  
In-Person Meeting  
Find on Campus
What should happen before I refer a student to Taos Early Alert?

Identify possible issue

Contact student to discuss issue

Determine whether student needs additional support

If student needs more support; Refer to Taos Early Alert

It is important to identify issues early and accurately in the semester. Here is the suggested process that best facilitates Early Alert referrals:

1) **Take attendance every class period.** With the new safety procedures this should be done regardless, but the practice of having sign in sheets also allows you to positively identify absences early in the semester. Per FERPA, sign-in sheets can only have students’ First and Last names. Absences are often the first sign of trouble for a student and should be taken seriously, particularly if they are interfering with the delivery of course content and will negatively affect the achievement of course SLOs.

2) **Contact the student.** Try to have a private conversation with the student, if possible, and email the student letting them know you have noticed the issue they are having and are concerned for their success. Per FERPA, you may only email students with your UNM email address to their UNM email address. It is up to your judgement how you wish to communicate with your students. However, be mindful that using an informal and concerned tone in your communications is more likely to increase student receptiveness to contact.

3) **Determine whether it is possible to resolve this issue at your level.** If all the student needs to do is communicate with you about an absence and give you a doctor’s note, there is no reason to refer the student to EA. However, if the issue goes deeper it may be best to refer the student to EA. Issues that require more contact time, more in depth conversations, or more tutoring than you are able to give should be referred to EA.

4) **Refer to EA.** If you were not able to resolve the issue with the student, you were never able to contact the student, or you feel the student needs more support to be successful than you can feasibly provide, then refer the student to EA! You may ask the student to see their advisor, but also send a referral email to taosearlyalert@unm.edu using the guidelines provided in this handbook.
**How do I refer a student to Taos Early Alert (EA)?**

Send a referral email to [taosearlyalert@unm.edu](mailto:taosearlyalert@unm.edu) and include the following information:

a. **Identify student** - Give student name and Banner ID (or NetID)

b. **Identify class** - State which class student is in

c. **Reason for referral** - Describe the reason for referral

d. **Prior contact** - Summarize your prior contact with the student regarding the reason for your referral

e. **Goal of referral** - Summarize the actions or result you wish to achieve with referral

f. **Important context** – if applicable, indicate things like whether it is possible for the student to recover their grade

Expect to be contacted by the EAC with a receipt of message, and expect communication about our communication (or attempts at communication) with the student about your referral.

**Example referrals: Necessary info is in bold**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ex. 1)</th>
<th>ID Student</th>
<th>ID Class</th>
<th>Reason for Referral</th>
<th>Goal of Referral</th>
<th>Prior contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about Jane Smith (ID# 100020200) in my MATH 101 class. She has been having trouble with the content of the course and has begun to miss classes. I am worried that she is not in the correct level of Math. Can you please speak to her about what she can do to catch up or help get placed in the appropriate Math level?</td>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>MATH 101</td>
<td>She has been having trouble with the content of the course and has begun to miss classes. I am worried that she is not in the correct level of Math.</td>
<td>Speak to her about what she can do to catch up or help get placed in the appropriate Math level</td>
<td>I have already referred her to CASA over email but I do not believe she is utilizing the service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ex. 2)</th>
<th>ID Student</th>
<th>Reason for Referral</th>
<th>ID Class</th>
<th>Important context</th>
<th>Prior contact</th>
<th>Goal of Referral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Smith (ID# 100003020) has missed 3 of 7 classes so far of my ENGL 120 class this semester, and it will not be possible for him to make up all of the work he is missing. I have tried to contact him over email and after class but I think he is avoiding me. Can you please contact him and speak to him about the possibility of taking a W.</td>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>ENGL 120</td>
<td>3 of 7 classes</td>
<td>Not possible to make up all of the work</td>
<td>I have tried to contact him over email and after class</td>
<td>Speak to him about the possibility of taking a W.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am willing to let him withdraw or give him the grade he earns; I just need to know his preference.
What happens when I submit a referral to Taos Early Alert (EA)?

1. Faculty refers student to EA
2. EAC acknowledges receipt of referral
3. EAC distributes referral to appropriate advisor
4. Advisor attempts to contact student
5. Advisor provides appropriate intervention
6. EAC receives report on outcome of contact/intervention
7. EAC notifies referring faculty of outcome and any changes

Early Alert Loop

- Process begins with your referral to taosearlyalert@unm.edu
- You will receive a message from the EA Coordinator (EAC) acknowledging receipt of your referral
- Referral will be disseminated by the EAC to the student’s assigned advisor
  a. Done to leverage advisor’s existing relationships with their advisees
- Student’s advisor will attempt to establish contact with the student to discuss the performance issue, underlying causes, and then collaborate on solutions
- EAC will check in with student’s advisor and notify you of the outcome and of any changes
  a. This closes the ‘loop’ for this referral.
  b. You can send multiple referrals for any student if they are having multiple issues at different time points during the semester. Each simply counts as a new referral.
What should I tell my students about Taos Early Alert?

**Preferably, nothing about EA specifically.** It is best that you inform students that you are in contact with their advisors, and use collaborative language to describe our communication. Be mindful that Early Alert is designed to function as a ‘shadow’ support system. This helps avoid any stigma students may apply to themselves or their peers for being on the Taos Early Alert list. Any public labeling of this sort is more likely to be detrimental than helpful, so *please do not* tell students that you have, or will, refer them to the EA system.

Instead, once you have decided that an Early Alert is necessary:

- Please encourage the student to see their advisor
- Send EA an email to *taosearlyalert@unm.edu* following the guidelines laid out in this handbook
- Allow some time for advisors to contact the student and intervene

The EAC will then get back to you with the outcome of the intervention efforts.
Addendum for Online Faculty

Even though you do not have in-person interactions with your students, it is still imperative that you track their virtual ‘attendance’ and performance. Virtual attendance is the record of student log-ins to Blackboard Learn. It is up to your discretion what you wish to equate to an absence and to determine your own absence policy, but please take into account the amount of content the student has missed between log-ins and how this may affect your SLOs.

It might be best to use the student’s assignment performance to determine whether a student should be referred to EA. For example, if a student is missing or failing on multiple assignments, it would be best to initiate the process leading to an EA referral. Please always follow the process guidelines on page 12 through 15.