Strategies to Work with At-Risk Students at a Distance

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Meet Heidi

- Professional Advisor
  - BS in Business Administration
  - MS in Integrated Supply Chain Management
- Work with students from time of admission through graduation
- Proactive advising/outreach
University of Wisconsin-Platteville Distance Learning Center

- Approx. 3150 active students
- 2 undergraduate and 5 graduate programs
- 100% online
- Average student age: 35.6
- Majority of students are part-time
- 10 advisors
Who are at-risk students?

- Academic Probation
- Close to academic probation
- Admitted on final probation
- Online learners
- Adult students
How is academic probation defined at UW-Platteville?

Undergraduate students
- Good standing-2.0 or higher
- Students have 12 credits to bring up GPA
- Can be placed or admitted on final probation
- Have two opportunities to continue on final probation*

Graduate students
- Good standing-3.0 or higher
- Students have 12 credits to raise GPA

*Dependent on term GPA
What we have done in the past?

- Both undergrad and grad students receive an email and letter
- Advising Hold placed on account
- Tracking is challenging for advisors
Why change?

- **Retention**
  - Historically 2-9% of students on academic probation
  - Retention of these students is about 50%

- **Trends**
  - More students admitted on final probation
  - More students being dismissed and returning as special students
How do we plan to help these students going forward?
Communications

- New communication track from the advisor to students on probation or final probation
- Instead of being policy driven, these emails are meant to be encouraging and provide clarity to the students
- Students are placed/admitted on final probation → Receive letter/email from Distance Learning Center → Receive follow up email from their advisor
Hello XXXSTUDENTNAMEXXX,

While being placed on academic probation can be disheartening, you are not alone. I am here to help you understand the academic probation process and to create a plan for you to be academically successful.

What exactly does academic probation mean? It means your Grade Point Average (GPA) has fallen below the necessary level you need to graduate with your <insert degree name>. To graduate, you will need a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0. You will have 12 credits to raise your cumulative GPA to this level.

Prior to registering, you will need to meet with me to determine your best path forward. This may include repeating courses or taking fewer credits, and we will customize a plan to meet your needs. Establishing a plan will allow you to focus on your academic success and take the first steps towards improving your cumulative GPA to a 3.0 or better.

Let’s schedule a 15-30 minute phone call to discuss your next steps.

Advisor Name
Research shows that supplementary advising helps students who are on academic probation.

Supplementary advisor:
- Maintains a list of all students who are on academic probation and their credit/status progress
- Remind primary advisors to reach out to these students
- Track and collect data around students on academic probation for retention purposes
- Send ad-hoc communications about topics like time management, study resources, and study habits specific to probation students
Student success template

- This is a guide for advisors to use when talking to students on probation
- Will include talking points, questions to ask, topics to probe around
- Create more standardized practices around probation conversations
**PREWORK**
- Review student program plan
- Identify courses students may need to retake
- Reach out to student to schedule session
- Look at GPA to consider how long it will take to improve
- Review SmarterMeasures results

**ADVISING SESSION**
- What happened in previous semesters?
- Differences between term and cumulative GPA
- Explanation of academic probation
- How does the student plan to overcome challenges?
- Plan to raise GPA (term/cumulative)
- Repeating courses
- Payment Implications (Military benefits/Financial aid)
- Discussion about communications throughout semester
- Resources available to the student
- Lowering number of credits per semester
- Reminder about course/time expectations
- Impact of 3rd attempt courses on GPA

**POST ADVISING SESSION FOLLOW UP**
- Links to external resources/Undergrad Student Handbook
- Confirmation about future follow ups
- Course suggestions
- Move probation hold forward

**CHALLENGES STUDENT IDENTIFIED**
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**PROBATION GUIDELINES FOR REFERENCE**

**Undergraduate:**
- 12 credits to bring up GPA to good standing (2.0)
- Final Probation is continuing on probation for more than 1 semester
- Can continue on final probation twice (for a total of 3 terms)
- Continued final probation requires a term GPA of 2.0 or higher
- Can be dismissed for one semester if on final probation or continued final probation without successfully getting back to good standing within 12 credits
- If a student was previously dismissed and reinstated until their program and fails to get off of academic probation, student will be dismissed for two years
- Students can appeal the process

**Graduate:**
- 12 credits for students to bring GPA up to good standing (3.0)
SmarterMeasure is a learning readiness assessment students can take.

Topic areas include Life Factors, Personal Attributes, Technology Competency, Technology Knowledge, Reading Recall.

Created a customized SmarterMeasure test for probation/final probation students.

Both the students and advisors will receive the results.

Results include links to resources the students can use.
The maximum possible score for this section is 100%. You scored a total of 23%. Your results for each of the five areas are below.

Detailed Item Results

- Time: 35%
- Place: 20%
- Reason: 20%
- Resources: 20%
- Skills: 20%
Instructor Feedback Tool in LMS

- Previously if an instructor wants to provide feedback about a student’s performance, they send an email.
- Build an instructor feedback tool into the LMS.
  - Links to a form that instructors can fill out about the student and is sent to the advisor for follow up.
Discussion

- How does your school work with at-risk students?
- What has worked well? What needs to be adapted?
Long-term goals
Student Success Course in LMS

- Develop an online course for all students on academic probation
- Topics may be borrowed from online orientation course
- A place for resources and community
- Monitored by supplementary advisor
Student Mentoring

- Develop a mentoring program for students on academic probation
- Mentors could be peers or alumni
- Criteria would need to be developed to pair mentors/mentees
Guest posts in online courses

- Advisors would create guest news posts to posted in online courses (based on program)
  - Provide tips and suggestions to students for academic success and remind students who their advisor is
- The videos/content could be reusable
- Topics could include: registration reminders, study tips, time management tips
“Monthly Minutes” newsletter

- Scheduled newsletter to go out to all admitted students from their advisor
- Highlighting need-to-know information for the student
- Short messages—should take a minute to read
So how can I get started at my own campus?

- Review current practices
- Clarify any definitions (i.e. academic probation)
- Do your research
- Remember small changes can make a large impact
Questions?

Thank you for your time!

Contact me at: hawkh@uwplatt.edu
References