

# **Using Starfish as an Instructional Tool for Student Engagement and Success**

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Thursday, May 15 | 11:00-11:50AM | Wallace Library, Room 3440**

## **Welcome! Please take a seat.**

# Using Starfish as an Instructional Tool for Student Engagement and Success

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RIT

## Session Overview

**This session will explore best practices for integrating Starfish feedback into course design and focus on three areas to effectively leverage Starfish alerts to support student success:**

- Timing
- Tone
- Content

## Session Goals

**In this interactive presentation, participants will:**

- Consider how early interventions through Starfish can help support student success and engagement
- Examine how to deliver communications at key points during the term to foster a positive learning experience
- Discuss strategies to encourage student participation and growth

## Why Starfish?

- **Starfish is a centralized system that allows you to:**
  - Communicate directly with student
  - Share info with others connected to student (academic advisor, support advisor, department head, etc.) to see relevant information and communications to help support
    - Alerts can be a catalyst for more discussion with student
    - Referrals to services can be provided based on what a student shares about their experience
  - Layer instructor and department support with advisor(s) support

## Using Alerts to Encourage Growth and Learning

- In addition to learning specific academic content, many students are also learning *how* to learn
- Sharing feedback with a student may help them identify strategies to improve their academic performance in your course and beyond

## Micro-Discussion

**What types of messages do you currently share through academic alerts?**

# Consider: Timing of Feedback



## Starfish Availability

- **System is ready and available to communicate on the first day of classes**
- **Two campaigns during fall and spring semesters:**
  - Weeks 4-6 early feedback
  - Weeks 8-10 mid-term feedback
- **System remains available through the end of the semester**

## Sharing Early Feedback Through Starfish

- **Think of an academic alert as an invitation to begin a conversation around course success**
  - Early communication & feedback allows students more time to adjust behavior & change approach
  - Invite and normalize ongoing dialogue through visits to office hours, conversation after class, etc.
- **Advisors also benefit from faculty sharing early feedback via Starfish**
  - Provides a holistic perspective of how a student is doing across all courses
  - The earlier advisors have information, the earlier they can offer support/resources

## Integrating Starfish Into Your Course Structure

- **Goal is to align plans for Starfish use with important dates to deliver communications at key points within your course**
- **Compare your course outline to Starfish campaign dates**
  - First campaign – Weeks 4-6
  - Second campaign – Weeks 8-10
- **Outside of campaigns, when would be a good time to communicate with students?**

## Reflection

**At what points in the semester do you typically provide feedback?**

## Weeks 1-3: Identify Early Concerns

### Raise a manual flag for:

- **Attendance/Participation**
  - No login to MyCourses
  - Attendance concerns observed early in term
  - Lack of participation/engagement in class activities/discussion
- **Low Assignment/Quiz/Test**
  - Low grade earned on the first assignment(s), quiz, or an early test
- **Multiple Academic Concerns**
  - Student displays a combination of the above

## Weeks 4-6: Overall Review to Date

- **Raise flags via the first Academic Progress Report campaign for:**
  - Poor attendance or excessive tardiness
  - Lack of participation/engagement in class
  - Low homework or quiz grades
  - Low exam grades
  - Overall average is low (below a C)
  - Student's success is at risk

## Week 7:

- **Raise manual flags for:**

- Grades recorded after academic progress report closed
- Recent changes in academic behavior/performance

## Weeks 8-10:

- **Raise flags via the second Academic Progress Report campaign for:**
  - Change in academic behaviors
  - Inconsistent performance
  - Student's success is at risk

*If the course still has several assessments, continue to encourage course recovery and re-engagement for successful completion. If not, re-engagement may help provide a foundation for re-taking the course in the future.*



## Weeks 11 and Beyond

- **Concerns about course assessments after Academic Progress Report closed**
- **Recent changes in academic behavior/performance**
- **Student's success is at risk**

## Reflection

**Check out the “Sample Course Schedule Utilizing Starfish” and think about a course you’ve taught before. Contrast that with the semester calendar:**

- **How do you map your course assessments within a semester?**
  - Do you have multiple methods of assessment during the semester?
- **Do students have opportunities to recover?**

## Micro Discussion

- What did you notice?
- How can you let students know your typical timepoints for communicating through Starfish?

# **Strategies to Encourage Participation: Tone & Content**

# Fostering a Growth Mindset Around Learning

- **Dweck (2006) identified two mindsets:**
  - Fixed mindset
    - Qualities are set
  - Growth mindset
    - Qualities can be cultivated
- **How we communicate may help students understand they can change their trajectory within a course**

## Micro-Discussion

**As we think about fostering a growth mindset, what tips may students need to know and understand in order to grow and work toward success in your course?**

## Which Comments Encourage Perseverance?

- You're doing great with attendance, but your first exam was lower than I expected. I want to support you to be successful. Please check my syllabus for office hours and stop in a day this week. Email me if you need to arrange a different time.
- I am concerned about your recent exam—lets talk as soon as possible so I can help you get back on track!
- Your spotty attendance leads me to believe that you are not interested in this course.
- You failed the first test. Unless you turn things around, you will fail this course. You should consider a course withdrawal.

## Can Shifting the Tone Impact Persistence?



**Consider shifting from this:** As a reminder, there is an attendance policy for this class. You are close to the limit of course absences this semester. Any more absences and you will fail the course.



**To this:** Are you okay? I haven't seen you in a while. Often students who haven't attended in some time think it's not possible to catch up. You still can! Let's talk asap to find a way for you to get back on track. I want to see you succeed.

Civitas Learning, 2024



## Tips for Academic Alerts

- **Send feedback as early as possible**
- **Always address your comments directly to the student**
- **Consider language that focuses on a growth mindset**
- **Encouragement goes a long way!**
- **Invitation to talk in person**
- **Consider when you send the alerts**
- **As brief as possible!**

## Academic Alerts: What to Avoid

- **Suggesting course withdrawal**
- **Sending alerts with no comments added**
- **Comments that only communicate failure**
- **Sending alerts before you leave for a break/conference**
- **Talking about the student**
  - Remember, all alert comments are delivered to the student

# Resources & References

# Standard Alert Templates

All templates can be found on the Starfish website and allow for a personalized message:

<https://www.rit.edu/starfish/facultystaff/starfish-system-communications>

**From:** smfiao@rit.edu  
**Reply To:** smfiao@rit.edu  
**Subject:** [Class Name]: Academic Alert for [Student's Name]

When you send an alert to a student, the system will generate a standardized email directly to the student from your email address.

Dear [Student's Name],

Your name (as it appears in SIS), the student's name, and the name of the course are auto-populated in the email.

Your instructor, [Instructor First and Last Name], has noticed you have not been attending and/or participating in [Course Name].

Instructor comments:

Your personalized comments to the student(s) will be shown in the 'Instructor comments' section of the email. You can add comments in a report or when using the 'Raise Flag' function.

*Hi {Student Name}. I am concerned that you have missed 2 of our first 4 classes. I want you to be successful in this course. Please come see me during office hours this week so I can help you determine how to get on track before the first assignment is due.*

**Please contact your instructor as soon as possible to discuss class expectations. Attendance and participation are important for success in your studies and help strengthen your understanding of the material.**

Alerts are shared with your advisor(s) and academic department leadership. They are here to support you and can recommend additional campus resources for you. Contact information for your advisor(s) can be found in your [SIS Student Center](#).

## Resources

- **RIT Starfish Tools:** [www.rit.edu/starfish](http://www.rit.edu/starfish)
  - During Semesters, We Offer Weekly Drop-In Assistance on Zoom
- **Sample Syllabus Statement:**  
<https://www.rit.edu/teaching/syllabus-policies#suggested-policy-references>

## References

- Civitas Learning. (2024). *Advising and student success playbook*. <https://www.civitaslearning.com/resources/advising-and-student-success-playbook/>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.

**Questions?**

## Contact Us...



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