

QUICK QUESTION

Online Newsletter from the Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity



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Welcome

By Ann Austin, Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity



Hello colleagues and welcome back to campus! For those of you new to Utah State University, welcome to Aggie Land!

You will find two sections in this first *Quick Question* of the 2009–2010 academic year. First, you will find several excellent resources prepared by the Retention and First-Year Experience Office (Noelle A. Call, Director) to help all of us meet the needs of our students. These include the following documents: Campus Resources—a quick reference sheet for the campus

Community that provides information on resources for students needing help with academic, health, and social challenges in the university environment; Early Academic Alert Program – an explanation of the Early Academic Alert Program and how to use this resource to support your efforts in working with students who are having academic difficulty at any point in their four years at USU; Classroom Retention Resources – This document briefly highlights ways that faculty members and instructors can have an impact on student retention in their classrooms and in their interactions with students.

In the second section, “Larry’s Corner”, Vice Provost Larry Smith answers several oft-asked questions relative to the process of tenure and promotion. These include the following: specific actions a candidate can take to ensure that they have a good sense of their progress toward promotion and tenure; selection of the tenure advisory committee and making changes to the committee; attendance of ombudsperson at meetings of the tenure advisory committee or with the department head.

I hope you will find this edition of *Quick Question* helpful. As always, your suggestions are welcome. Please email them to ann.austin@usu.edu or melissa.keller@usu.edu.

Helpful Documents for Working with Students

Contributed by the Retention and First-Year Experience Office

The three documents below were developed by the Retention and First-Year Experience office. These resources will be helpful when putting together syllabi and preparing for the new semester.



The professional staff of the Retention and First-Year Experience office:

Aaron Anderson, Assoc. Director

Noelle Call, Director

Krystin Deschamps, Matriculation Advisor

Lisa Hancock, Program Administrator, New Student Orientation

The Early Academic Alert Program

The Early Academic Alert Program is designed to identify students who are having academic difficulty at any point in their four years at USU. By identifying these students, the staff of the Retention and First-Year Experience Office can attempt to address their needs, thereby increasing the likelihood of their success. The primary goal of this program is to assist faculty and staff in improving the motivation and performance of underachieving students in an effort to better USU's capacity to retain these students. While the faculty member should always be the first person to establish contact with the student and address issues, it is true that often faculty do not have the time or resources to get to the root of each student's problem. The Retention and First-Year Experience Office can support faculty in their efforts to help students.

How does this work?

- Early Academic Alert is a system for identifying students who are having difficulties in a given course. Faculty awareness of potential student problems constitutes the backbone of the Early Academic Alert Program. Students may be identified for Early Academic Alert for a variety of reasons, including frequent absences, lateness, test scores, language skills, and writing ability. Faculty members and instructors who have identified such issues should submit names or A numbers at the following Web address: <http://www.usu.edu/rfye/earlyalert/>.
- Once the notice is received, the Retention/FYE Office will contact students via e-mail, appraising them so they can take steps to improve their performance in the class. The names of students identified in the process are also sent to academic advisors. Advisors contacted before midterm can assist students in making more informed judgments about academic plans.
- When a student comes to the Retention/FYE Office, a professional staff member meets with the student. Together the staff member and student discuss academic concerns, and the staff member suggests resources for the student to access. A follow-up e-mail is sent within 10 days.

Sample e-mail sent to students

Hello USU Aggie,

Your instructor, Andy Anderson for BIOL 2060, notified our office and requested that we inform you that at this time your academic performance in his course is putting you at risk of receiving a grade below a C. We understand that there are many factors that may be contributing to your performance in class, and that every student's situation is different. Whatever the case may be, there is still time to improve your performance in this

class. We would like to visit with you and help you explore resources that can enhance your ability to achieve academic success. Please take a moment to stop by the Office of Retention and First-Year Experience, at your earliest convenience. We are located in room 314 in the Taggart Student Center, and our office is open Monday through Friday from 8a.m to 5p.m. In addition we strongly encourage you to act on the following suggestions to improve your performance:

- Talk with your instructor. Ask them for ideas to improve your success.
- Visit with your academic advisor. Your advisor has been notified of your instructor's concern about your performance to date and is available to assist you in taking the necessary steps to insure your future success in this class.
- Visit the Academic Resource site at <http://www.usu.edu/arc>, which has information about study skills, free tutoring services, and the supplemental instruction program.

Your instructor has requested that you confirm to us that you have received this e-mail by sending a reply to Noelle.call@usu.edu. In your response, please indicate the actions you plan to take to address this concern.

How is a student identified for Early Academic Alert?

- A student is identified when an instructor notices that, due to a particular reason, the student's work does not meet the standards of the class and needs improvement. The identification is made on the basis of poor performance on an early test or quiz, attendance issues, language or writing ability, or any other number of possibilities. The instructor makes the decision as to what behavior is causing concern regarding the student's success.

Who participates in Early Academic Alert?

- Faculty members, instructors, advisors, and staff work together to provide an effective system of early intervention to improve student retention and success. All instructors are given the opportunity to participate in the Early Academic Alert Program. It is each individual instructor's choice whether or not to participate.

When should an instructor use the Early Academic Alert Program?

- Any faculty member who is concerned about a student's failure to attend classes and /or a student's poor performance in class is encouraged to submit the student's name at the Early Academic Alert Site (<http://www.usu.edu/rfye/earlyalert/>) at any time in the semester. Research shows that the earlier the student is made aware of faculty concerns regarding his or her performance, the sooner interventions can be initiated to increase the student's potential to achieve academic success. **Some instructors submit names after the first test, while some wait for two tests to see if there is a pattern. While some instructors submit names of students who have scored below a C on the first test, others prefer to only send in names of students with failing grades. There is a section on the website for submitting comments. This allows instructors to indicate that they are submitting names for reasons other than low test scores.**

What should I tell the students in my class about the Early Academic Alert Program?

- Many faculty members place information about the Early Academic Alert Program in their syllabus, and also announce it as part of the class introduction. The following example is used by Professor Anderson in Microbiology:

*Hello to all Elementary Microbiology (BIOL 2060) students. USU has developed an Early Academic Alert Program for students who are having difficulty in their classes. I have agreed to participate in this program and submit the names and A numbers of **all those students who score less than 70 percent on the first exam**. This is an excellent program that is designed to assist students in being successful this semester. I have included a description of the Early Academic Alert Program below:*

- This program is being developed as a retention tool to improve students' academic persistence and to provide students with resources to support their efforts. It is designed for faculty to identify, report, and provide feedback for students who are at risk in a course. Faculty members will be able to electronically detail concerns regarding student performance and behavior or simply provide a list of students.
- These referrals will be reported electronically to the Retention and First-Year Experience Office. Within 24 hours of a referral, the Retention/FYE office will make contact with the student, and offer a meeting with the student to discuss concerns and to connect the student to campus resources appropriate to the student's needs. The Retention/FYE Office will conduct ongoing assessment to evaluate the level of student response and outcomes of the effort.

Classroom Resources

For Retention and Student Success

While the retention of students is often viewed as a central institutional concern, the practices and processes contributing to student retention are clearly and unequivocally shared throughout the institution. Given their role, faculty members and instructors are among the most vital contributors to the successful retention of students. This document will briefly highlight ways that faculty members and instructors can have an impact on student retention in their classrooms and in their interactions with students.

Retention and student success literature consistently emphasize that students persist and graduate in environments that foster learning. A university campus surrounds students with a vast array of learning opportunities, both in and out of the classroom. Students who become engaged in these opportunities and feel that they are continually learning are more likely to stay and persist to the next year.

In particular, students who are actively involved in learning, that is who spend more time on task especially with others, are more likely to learn and, in turn more likely to stay (Tinto, 1997). The most crucial individual to encourage involvement in learning is the classroom instructor.

The following ideas/suggestions are a summary of “best teaching practices” that support student success, retention and persistence to graduation.

Faculty/Student Interaction

1. Learn as many names of students as possible, and use their names in class.
2. Introduce yourself and tell the students by what name and title you prefer to be called.
3. Have students fill out 3x5 cards with their name, contact phone, and other personal information you think is important.
4. Call students or send e-mails if they are absent. Make appointments with them to discuss attendance, make-up work, etc.
5. At the end of each class period, ask one student to stay for a minute to chat. (Compliment his or her perceptive question, ask for feedback, etc.)
6. Get feedback periodically from students using a whole class, small group, or individual assessment. Conduct a personal interview with each student sometime during the semester.
7. Provide positive reinforcement whenever possible. By using a “lateral thinking technique” (adding to ideas, rather than dismissing them), you can help students feel that their ideas, comments, and opinions are worthwhile.
8. Interact with students outside the classroom. Say “hello” as you see them on campus, walk with them between classes, and if your “style” and time permits, attend activities such as student activities or performances.

9. Lend some of your reference books to students. You can initiate the process by saying, “I’ve just read a great book on _____. Would anyone like to borrow it?”
10. Use your first class meeting to help the students get to know each other, as well as you. Have the students establish a “partner” system for absences, work missed, assignments, etc. Have students exchange cell phone numbers, My Space sites, contact information, etc.

According to Richard Light, “[A student’s] job is to get to know one faculty member reasonably well this semester, and also to have that faculty member get to know [that student] reasonably well” (Light, 2001).

Classroom Environment and Curriculum

1. Personalize classes by finding unique ways to encourage individual participation and group collaborations. Suggestions include assigning class debates based on course topics, encouraging collaborative homework assignments and projects, building peer reviews/feedback into written homework assignments, and incorporating small study groups as part of course culture.
2. Utilize multiple strategies in engaging students by offering perspective beyond disciplinary boundaries, connecting with other subjects, asking students to think about topics from perspectives they will have as professionals, facilitating opportunities for students to participate in research, and providing early and frequent opportunities for feedback through regular assignments and quizzes.
3. Encourage students to visit both academic and career advisors often.
4. Give each student a mid-term grade and indicate what each student must do to improve.
5. Make students aware that attendance in the course is vital to their success. Explain your attendance policy to students orally and in writing.
6. List and discuss your course objectives on the first day. Review these objectives periodically throughout the semester to remind students of the course purpose and direction.
7. Put the course objectives in the context of the student goals. Ask how the objectives fit their personal/career goals.
8. Let students know that the learning resources you use in class are available outside the class. Be sure students know how to access these resources (Blackboard, course reserves, etc.).

Resources

Light, Richard, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Tinto, Vincent, “Principles of Effective Retention,” *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience*, 1990: 2(1), pp. 35-48.

Tinto, Vincent, “Promoting Retention Through Classroom Practice,” Paper Presented at *Enhancing Student Retention: Using International Policy and Practice* Conference, Amsterdam, Nov. 5-7, 2003. Accessible at [http://www.staffs.ac.uk/access-studies/docs/Amster-paperVT\(1\).pdf](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/access-studies/docs/Amster-paperVT(1).pdf).

Tinto, Vincent, “Classrooms as Communities: Exploring the Educational Character of Student Persistence,” *Journal of Higher Education*, 1997:68(6) (November/December), pp. 599-623.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-1.htm> An excerpt from the Classroom Assessment Techniques (CAT) handbook on the purpose and assumptions underlying classroom assessment.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm> Extensive teaching tips site with information on all areas of effective teaching and curriculum.

http://www.usu.edu/faculty_development/—Utah State University site for faculty development in all areas.

Campus Resources



Larry's Corner

By Larry Smith, Vice Provost

Below are three questions I have been asked more than once whose answers you might find helpful as a new year begins at Utah State. These three questions are about general tenure and promotion issues and process that are relevant throughout the pre-tenure probationary period of faculty.

1. What actions can a candidate take to ensure that they have a good sense of their progress toward promotion and tenure?

Honest and forthright communication among the pre-tenure probationary faculty member and their tenure advisory committee, and the candidate and their department head, are critical in ensuring that the faculty member understands the progress they are making toward tenure and promotion. In fact, the faculty code requires the faculty member to annually meet with both of these sources of feedback (below).

In addition to regular meetings with their tenure advisory committee and their department head, it would be prudent for probationary faculty members to also meet at least annually with their dean, although this is not required by the faculty code. This is because the dean is responsible for renewing a probationary faculty member's contract each and every year and submitting a tenure and promotion recommendation of the candidate to the provost. Thus, it is important that the candidate elicit and understand the perspective of the dean on his or her progress toward tenure.

Pertinent sections of the code regarding this matter include:

405.7.1(2) Evaluation and recommendation by the tenure advisory committee.

After the initial meeting, the tenure advisory committee shall meet with the candidate at least annually and review the candidate's file and supplementary material to evaluate progress toward tenure. An ombudsperson must be present at all meetings of the tenure advisory committee in accordance with policy 405.6.5. The committee will submit, each year, a written report to the department head or supervisor. This report shall be submitted by December 1 for first-year and second-year appointees, by October 26 for third-year appointees, and by December 1 during subsequent years (see Table 405.1.4). Except in the year in which the tenure decision must be made, the report shall include an evaluation of the candidate's progress toward tenure and identify areas for improvement in the candidate's performance as necessary. The report shall also contain a recommendation regarding the renewal or nonrenewal of the appointment (405.6.2(1); 407.7). Copies of all reports signed by the committee members shall be provided to the candidate, the department head, or supervisor and the director (where applicable), the dean, or vice president. A copy shall be placed in the candidate's file.

405.7.1.(3) Evaluation and recommendation by the department head or supervisor.

The department head or supervisor shall, after receiving the tenure advisory committee report, meet annually with the candidate to review fulfillment of the role statement and the role assignment and evaluate progress toward tenure. For meetings held between either the department head or supervisor and the candidate to review the committee's evaluation and recommendation, the candidate or department head or supervisor may request the presence of an ombudsperson in accordance with policy 405.6.5. Subsequently, the department head or supervisor shall submit in writing to the director (where applicable), dean, or associate or assistant vice

president of extension an evaluation of the candidate indicating where satisfactory progress is being made and where improvement is needed. The department head or supervisor may recommend the nonrenewal of the appointment of the faculty member. This report shall be submitted by December 18 for first-year and second-year appointees, by November 10 for third-year appointees, and by December 18 during subsequent years. Copies will be provided to the candidate and the tenure advisory committee. A copy shall be placed in the candidate's file.

1. Who creates the tenure advisory committee and can there be changes made to it?

The department head has the primary responsibility to create and maintain the tenure advisory committee in consultation with others (including the probationary faculty member). While probationary faculty members will be consulted in all changes to the composition of their tenure advisory committee, they do not have the authority to dictate precisely who serves on their tenure advisory committee. Specific language from Section 405.6.2 (1) regarding the composition of the tenure advisory committee states:

For each new tenure-eligible faculty member who is appointed, the faculty member's department head or supervisor shall, in consultation with the faculty member and with the approval of the director (where applicable), dean, or vice president appoint a tenure advisory committee. All tenure advisory committees will be appointed during the faculty member's first semester of service. The committee shall consist of at least five members, at least one of whom is from outside the academic unit. The department head or supervisor will designate the chair of the committee.

The appointing authority for each committee shall fill vacancies on the committee as they occur. In consultation with the faculty member and the director (where applicable), dean, or vice president, the department head or supervisor may replace members of the tenure advisory committee. The candidate may request replacement of committee members subject to the approval of the department head or supervisor, the director (where applicable), and the dean, or vice president.

2. When and how often should an ombudsperson attend meetings of the tenure advisory committee or meetings with the department head?

The faculty code is quite explicit that an ombudsperson must be present at all meetings between a faculty member and their tenure advisory committee. In contrast, in meetings between a faculty member and their department head where the committee's evaluation and recommendation are being discussed, an ombudsperson "may" be present. The relevant sections of the code state:

Section 405.6.2 states: An ombudsperson must be present at all meetings of a promotion committee or a tenure committee. Ombudspersons must receive adequate advance notice of a committee meeting from the chairperson.

Section 405.7.1 states: For meetings held between either the department head or supervisor and the candidate to review the committee's evaluation and recommendation, the candidate or department head or supervisor may request the presence of an ombudsperson....

Section 405.7.1 states: Ombudspersons must be present in person, with the exception of meetings for field based Extension faculty, when they may participate by voice conferencing.