

# The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

## Des Moines Area Community College

Project Details			
<b>Title</b>	Early Alert Referral (EAR) Program	<b>Status</b>	REVIEWED
<b>Category</b>	1 - Helping Students Learn	<b>Updated</b>	09-30-2015
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b>	10-08-2015
	<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b> 07-01-2014	<b>Created</b>	11-18-2014
	<b>Target Completion</b> 10-30-2015	<b>Version</b>	1

### 1: PROJECT SUMMARY

**A:** DMACC is capitalizing on the internal resources at the College, InfoPath Counselor Referral System (SharePoint), the Quit Attending (QA) System and Banner Administrative Data system on the SWATRACK screen to design a proactive referral/support system that assists students identified by the college as being high risk for academic persistence. This Action Project is a pilot to study and refine the current voluntary referral process to a proactive advising management system that connects students to appropriate student support services e.g. academic advisors, counselors, financial aid specialists, Academic Achievement Center resources, etc, earlier in the term where intervention is most successful.

### 2: PROJECT RATIONALE

**A:** In 2006, DMACC set course retention, persistence, and completion as a component of its FIRSTS Goals initiative. A Completion Task Force was established and continues to meet regularly. All metrics regarding student retention, persistence and success (4R2 in the 2014 Systems Portfolio) are monitored regularly. The data studied has been the impetus for the creation of the Early Alert Program. DMACC has identified 30 gateway courses that are a frequent barrier in the academic persistence of underprepared students. Students who fail to pass these courses are less likely to continue their education and more likely to drop out. And, while DMACC is a large multi-campus institution with many service resources available for student support, it can be difficult to ensure that students are aware of what's available.

DMACC's InfoPath Counselor Referral System was created three years ago in order to replace the ineffective process of using emails and phone calls for referrals that was in place at the time. While electronic forms are now generated that can gather and share information throughout the organization they are completed at the discretion of individual faculty members using the InfoPath Counselor Referral System. As well as the InfoPath Counselor Referral System, DMACC utilizes Mid-term reporting and the Quit Attending (QA) System. The tools exist at the College; the value of using them together has not been fully exploited.

DMACC wrote for and received a College Success Grant from Great Lakes Community Investments providing the staffing resources to develop and implement this program for the 2014-2015 academic year. The program fits well into pre-existing retention initiatives. The goal of this Action Project is to develop and pilot a more proactive referral protocol for faculty and staff to work together to connect students to resources while there is still time to salvage the semester.

It is anticipated that it will take a year to establish and institutionalize the new protocols. The project is set up to collaborate with stakeholders, design processes, collect/monitor/analyze data, make modifications and repeat the process. The Action Project is structured tightly in a "learn and adapt" mode. This ensures careful consideration of all party's needs.

### 3: PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

**A:** The project has multiple deliverables that will be monitored for assessment for both the grant and the quality of the initiative. Review/analyze the current InfoPath Counselor Referral System – July 2014

- Redesign the counselor Referral Form – July 2014
- Develop training materials – August 2014
- Execute training pre-Fall 2014 and pre-Spring 2015
- Pilot implementation in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
- Follow-up between student services staff and participating faculty – weekly summary reports throughout the semester August-December 2014 January-May 2015
- Never Attended reports generated, analyzed and shared – Sept 2014
- Midterm Reporting/Quit Attending outreach - attempts 3 per student documented and communicated – ongoing

- Review processes/protocols and modify as needed – end of term Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
- Monitor of student participant grades, completion rates and weekly referral reports reviewed at term end – end of term Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
  - While this project is serving all students in the district, DMACC will monitor a specific cohort of historically at-risk students.
- Modify the protocols to adapt and refine at year end June 2015

Progress for the grant will be formally reviewed on the following dates: 02/20/2015, 08/07/2015, 10/16/2015.

#### 4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

**A:** The Early Alert Referral Program is based in Student Services. Leadership is provided by the Executive Dean of Student Services and a lead Academic Advisor dedicated to the coordination and implementation of this project. A district-wide Advisor Task Force has been established. Faculty teaching the 30 identified gateway courses will be trained in the new reporting protocols along with advising/counseling staff on the campuses involved in the Action Project. District Chairs, Academic Deans, and Provosts will participate in the monitoring and follow-up to ensure that the protocols continue to be implemented consistently and correctly for the duration of the project as well as institutionalization at project end. The Grants Office supported the development of financial funding resources for the project. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is providing student data on retention, success and persistence to support writing of the initial grant proposal and monitoring of the effectiveness of the protocols. The District-wide Completion Task Force headed by the CAO of the College with representation from each campus, the Executive Dean of Student Services, Academic Achievement Center Program Director, TRIO Program Director and the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness will monitor activities and data. DMACC's President and Cabinet are monitoring all aspects of the initiative.

#### 5: PROJECT CONTROL

**A:** While this project is serving all students in the district, DMACC will monitor a specific cohort of historically at-risk students for impact and success. This cohort is defined by the following characteristics:

- Enrolled in at least one gateway course at the Ankeny or Urban campus location, and
- Low-income (Pell Grant eligible) or
- Minority (as indicated on application for admission)

Data regarding retention, persistence and success will be collected and monitored.

#### 6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

**A:** This Action Project is following a “learn and adapt” methodology that should forestall most challenges as all participants/providers are being brought to the table to develop it. The major challenge would be the costs involved in the increased demand for services. The President and Cabinet are very involved in the monitoring of this project and fully supportive of the initiative.

#### 7: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**A:** This Action Project complements the current University College Transfer Action Project initiative which has a goal of not only ensuring that students receive the academic and support services they need to remain in school, but also the support they need in determining their future academic plans and transferring to a four-year college or university after completion of an Associate's degree at DMACC.

### Project Update

#### 1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

**A:** General Project Status: X\_Completed  
Original Project Start Date: 07 /01 / 2014

Originally Projected End Date: 10 /30 / 2015

Anticipated Completion Date If Not Completed: NA

This Action Project experienced a successful 2014-2015 academic year. The Early Alert Referral process was funded in part by a one year Great Lakes College Success grant, and goals established in the grant proposal were satisfied. The Action Project received wide-spread support during the pilot year, and college administrators have decided to provide continued support for the EAR process into the 2015-2016 academic year.

As documented in the 2014 System Portfolio Institutional Overview in response to President Obama's call to increase the number of America's college graduates by 2020, and in alignment with DMACC's Strategic Plan of 'First in Quality', the Early Alert Referral Action Project was initiated by the Completion Task Force. The Completion Task Force was established in 2006 and is led by DMACC's Chief Academic Officer. The 'First in Quality' goal indicators that are aligned with this Action Project are:

- Within term credit retention,
- Fall-Spring and Fall-Fall credit student persistence,
- And graduation rates.

All metrics regarding student retention, persistence, and success (4R2 in the 2014 Systems Portfolio) are monitored regularly. The data studied has been the impetus for the creation of the Early Alert Program Action Project.

## 2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

- A:
- Redesign the counselor Referral Form – July 2014
    - The form was redesigned in July 2014 and made available for use by faculty and staff beginning in Fall 2014.
  - Develop training materials – August 2014
    - A variety of training materials were made available to faculty and staff in August 2014 and were updated throughout the 2014-2015 academic year. Training materials were highly detailed at the launch and later simplified to focus on clarity of purpose after the campus community became familiar with the process. Feedback from users was collected during the 2014-2015 and resulted in minor changes to the electronic form. Changes focused on increased simplicity/usability and were received well by faculty and staff.
  - Execute training pre-Fall 2014 and pre-Spring 2015
    - Early Alert Referral training was incorporated into trainings for new and returning faculty (full time and adjunct) throughout the district, and all student services staff engaged in the process received comprehensive training in July 2014. New additions to the student services team received one-on-one training during their orientation period.
  - Pilot implementation in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
    - The Early Alert Referral process was successfully implemented districtwide, resulting in 1,200 referrals in Fall 2014 and 849 referrals in Spring 2015. Referrals were submitted from every campus location. Roughly 25% of all faculty (full time and adjunct) made use of the referral system during Fall 2014.
  - Establish consistent follow-up reporting to Deans/Provosts – May 2015
    - Deans/Provosts will receive a "Year One" report after National Clearinghouse data is available in October. Deans/Provosts have been provided monthly updates on implementation data (number of EARs submitted, types of concerns being referred, etc.) at Joint Deans meetings through the 2014-2015 academic year.
  - Never Attended reports generated, analyzed and shared – Sept 2014
    - Never Attended reports are generated and disseminated every term. In addition Faculty are encouraged to complete an Early Alert Referral for students who indicate a desire to attend but fail to do so.
  - Communication attempts (3 per student per referral) documented and communicated – ongoing
    - This has been a significant improvement in the long-standing referral process and as such facilitates further adoption of the EAR by faculty. The "closing the loop" feedback process between the student services staff members and faculty has been praised by faculty members. Faculty and staff report feeling more connected to student services at the college.
  - Midterm Reporting/Quit Attending reports generated, analyzed and shared – end of term Summer 2015
    - This information will be incorporated into our "Year One" report for the grant in October.

- Review processes/protocols and modify as needed – end of term Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
  - Entering Fall 2015, the electronic form is in Version 3. Changes to the form have been subtle and focused on usability and allowing users to understand clarity of purpose even if they did not attend a formal training about the process. Users have praised the ease of use of the form, i.e. fields automatically populating information from our web service. Importantly, users understand the difference between this referral process and the academic reports which are also submitted electronically: Never Attended, Quit Attending, and Grade Reports. Users also understand (in part due to language on the EAR form), that the referral process is not to be confused with the Incident Report Form.
- Monitor of student participant grades, completion rates and weekly referral reports reviewed at term end – end of term Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
  - While this project is serving all students in the district, the institution monitored a specific cohort of historically at-risk students.
    - In Fall 2014, 672 of our cohort students were served by an EAR and/or by Academic Achievement Center services. Seventy-two percent of those students were enrolled in Spring 2015. Sixty-one percent completed 67% of their attempted credits, and 56% maintained a GPA of at least 2.0.
- Modify the protocols to adapt and refine at year end June 2015
  - The Early Alert Referral process has been embraced by faculty and staff at the college, and the process will continue relatively unchanged moving into Fall 2015. The process has been expanded to serve our HiSet and non-credit ESL students at the Urban campus beginning in Summer 2015, and will expand to that audience at the Southridge Center in Fall 2015. The network of staff members who reach out to referred students also continues to expand. Notably, the number of Academic Achievement Center faculty who will provide direct outreach to students is expanding from three in 2014-2015 to six starting in Fall 2015.

### 3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

**A:** The Early Alert Referral (EAR) system generated 849 referrals during 2015 Spring Semester. Of these 244 were of the 2015 Spring semester cohort of at-risk students. A total of 2,049 referrals were submitted during fall and spring combined. From our at-risk cohort population, 638 unique students were served by the referral process during 2014-2015.

Campus Location	Students - Fall 2014	Students-Spring 2015
Ankeny	220	126
Urban	174	118
<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>244</b>

The fall cohort population totaled 2,600 students, and the spring cohort totaled 1,937 students. In fall, 672 unique students were served by an Early Alert Referral or by the Academic Achievement Center; 25.84% of the fall cohort was served. In the spring, 480 unique students (24.78% of the cohort) were served.

Seventy-two percent of the cohort students served during Fall 2014 were enrolled in Spring 2015; sixty-one percent completed 67% of their attempted credits, and 56% maintained a GPA of at least 2.0.

### 4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

**A:** The Executive Dean of Student Services and Interim Director of Student Services provided oversight and a Lead Academic Advisor provided daily support for coordination and implementation across the district. During fall 2015, additional coordination support was recruited at campuses which experienced strong usage.

Faculty training was provided district-wide (which included campus locations beyond the reach of the cohort population being targeted by the Great Lakes grant project), and referrals originated from every campus location during this pilot year. During Fall 2014 and Spring 2015, a total of 335 unique users submitted an Early Alert Referral. These 335 faculty and staff made 2,049 referrals; an average of roughly 6 referrals per faculty/staff member. The network of DMACC Student Services staff who reached out to students as a result of an Early Alert Referral expanded from 54 in Fall 2014 to 66 in Spring 2015.

Fall semester progress, including Fall-Spring retention figures, were reported to the Completion Task Force in Spring 2015 and to the

Joint Deans meeting throughout the academic year. The office of Institutional Effectiveness provided assessment and evaluation support throughout the year and will provide support beyond the successful completion of reporting for the Great Lakes grant.

The President and Chief Academic Officer provided tremendous direct support to the initiative in October 2014 when the Early Alert Referral process was included on the agenda during the annual district-wide meeting in which all DMACC employees from all locations participate.

## 5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

**A:** During the 2014-15 post-academic year listening sessions, faculty, staff, and administrators have praised the unifying effect of the EAR process. Here are some common themes from those feedback sessions:

- A “full court press” from DMACC Administration set the expectation that EAR was a high priority.
- Faculty and staff feel more connected in their efforts to serve students.
- Faculty feel more empowered to approach issues/concerns with students, knowing that a referral system is there when an additional layer of support is needed.
- Faculty praised the prompt “closing of the loop” feedback from the Student Services staff members.
- The simplicity of the process was widely praised; specifically the technical design, i.e. certain fields “auto-filling” upon entering student identification number.
- The ease of access to the form was praised. Faculty and staff can access the referral form from four (4) different locations on the DMACC webpage: (1) by searching for Early Alert; (2) through the A-Z menu and selecting Early Alert; (3) on the Counseling page; and (4) on the Academic Advising page. In addition, the faculty member can access the form through their class list(s) located on their DMACC Web Info page.
- Outreach does not include automated template messages. The personal nature of the process is appreciated by all parties.
- One administrator stressed that this process demonstrates to students that DMACC cares about their success. Multiple Student Services staff reported feedback from students who expressed their appreciation that “someone cared enough to check in on me.”
- Availability of ongoing training. Several faculty reported that they were very appreciative that the EAR coordinator was willing to meet with them, in-person, on a one-on-one basis to discuss the program and to answer their questions. Through this interaction they were personally assured that their suggestions/questions were being taken seriously, and that the students they were referring were being taken care of.
- Student Services staff appreciate the clear expectations of the process, i.e. three outreach efforts within 48-hours.
- The form was praised as being “less ambiguous” than the version used prior to the 2014-2015 academic year.

We learned that members of our community are eager to collaborate. Continued use in Spring 2015 demonstrated the process was more than a “flavor of the week” priority in Fall 2014. Administrators continued to encourage use after seeing the value of the process.

## 6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

**A:** As the EAR extends into the 2015-2016 academic year, the primary challenge is to balance staff time and effort dedicated to outreach efforts. As usage increases, staff time allotted to outreach efforts and service efforts will also increase. Each department at each campus location will need to adapt and prioritize resources. In addition, ongoing monitoring of appropriate usage and providing appropriate training to front-end users, i.e. faculty, will remain a focus.

## 7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE

**A:** September 2015: Launch Kognito (At Risk On Campus training product) to district-wide faculty and staff. This training experience is predicted to improve faculty and staff confidence in approaching sensitive conversations with those who may be struggling; it is predicted that increased confidence in approaching struggling students will result in increased awareness of barriers and increased usage of the referral process.

Fall 2015: Develop formal oversight committee comprised of administrators, faculty and staff from across the district. Leadership and direction in the pilot year was provided by a small group of individuals who developed the Great Lakes College Success grant proposal. The number of active stakeholders has grown during the pilot year which provides a growing pool of candidates to serve on the oversight committee.

Fall 2015: Formalize web-based training resources for faculty and staff. Professional development blackboard committees for faculty are active and Early Alert Referral training materials will be made available on this resource.

October 2015: Complete "Year One" report for distribution to college administrators.

October 2015: Submit final Great Lakes grant report with fall-to-fall retention figures for cohort students.

October 2015: Compare and evaluate Fall 2015 Quit Attending reports with Early Alert Referral submissions.

January 2016: Evaluate Fall 2015 usage reports to evaluate campus-specific staffing needs, i.e. campus-specific assigning process, student services outreach capacity.

## 8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

**A:** This Action Project experienced a highly successful pilot year, and has maintained wide spread support across the district. The project represents one initiative among many which are designed to provide more comprehensive services to students. While the Action Project is to be retired, the success to date on both Helping Students Learn and collaboration between faculty and student support services ensure that the program will be imbedded in the College.

## Update Review

### 1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

**A:** The Action Project aligns well with AQIP Categories 1 Helping Students Learn, 1P5 Academic Student Support; and, 2 Meeting Student and Other Key Stakeholder Needs, 2P2 Retention, Persistence, and Completion. Additionally, the Action Project supports and continues other strategic initiatives of the College.

The College has identified the status of the Action Project as Completed. Based on the information provided, including the next steps, this Review considers the Action Project to be In-Progress, nearing Completion.

### 2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

**A:** The Project Declaration identified the goal of the Action Project as "to develop and pilot a more proactive referral protocol for faculty and staff to work together to connect students to resources while there is still time to salvage the semester." This goal was further delineated to several levels of sub-goals/action items, completion of which would lead to the achievement of the primary goal.

Results have been included for some of the metrics that are quantifiable: Pilot Implementation and Monitoring of student participant grades. Feedback was received, monthly update data was delivered and Never Attended reports were generated and analyzed, but no details were provided. The College may want to include more comprehensive data reporting to better inform the Annual Update. Additionally, the College may want to consider adding more specificity to the qualitative measures. Adding this level of detail to the measurements serves to better inform the institution of the level of success achieved.

### 3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

**A:** The data tracking for the number of referrals informs the accomplishments of the Action Project and demonstrates a commitment to student success. From the information provided, it is difficult to determine if the proactive referral protocol for faculty and staff to work together to connect students to resources was accomplished. Has the connection with students been proactive? How do the results on numbers served, completion of attempted credits and GPA compare to the established targets and to the comparison group, or those not referred? How do the results vary between special populations of the cohort groups? Adding perspective to the results received may assist the College in determining the level of success achieved, and inform the College about under-served populations.

#### **4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT**

**A:** The institutional involvement appears to be appropriate and involves administration, staff, faculty, and students. The level of involvement is supportive of the Principle of Higher Performance Organizations Broad-based Involvement. This is complimented by the support of the executive leaders which is reflective of the Principle of Higher Performance Organizations Leadership Support. Though an obvious group involved in the Action Project is the students that were referred, the question remains if the students were involved in identifying the type of or appropriate referrals to be made. The College may want to consider this pathway of involvement, if not already there, to inform the referral process.

#### **5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES**

**A:** It appears that the Action Project had a positive effect on the College's faculty and staff. It is commendable that the outcomes became more than the "flavor of the day." The feedback captured here, along with other feedback that might have been solicited is informative to the quality improvement cycle and helps to close the loop. It may be appropriate for the Action Project Team to reflect on what made the difference in the approach or implementation of the referral system so that the same methods might be applied to the next project or initiative that has this type of impact. The groundwork is there to institutionalize the work of the Action Project.

#### **6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS**

**A:** The challenges identified are realistic yet are ones that can be addressed. The positive feedback, evidence of acceptance and appreciation for the referral system, along with the College's focus on student success, may help in addressing these challenges.

#### **7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE**

**A:** The next steps identified appear to be ones that will lead to the completion and institutionalization of the Action Project. However, with the dates extended to January 2016, this Review, again, considers the Action Project to be in-progress, nearing completion. It is mentioned that this year served as the pilot year. The College may want to consider extending the Project by one year to realize the impact, study the data, and recommend improvements to the process.

#### **8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS**

**A:** Thank you for the comments.