

Early Alerts: Improving Retention and Closing the Equity Gap

Quality Enhancement Plan 2024 | James Madison University

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Key Points

- The QEP is a required component of our university-wide regional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), as part of our pending 2023 decennial reaffirmation
- Topic must focus on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success as defined by JMU.
- Selection of QEP topic must be based on funded, existing priorities as shown in current planning documents.
- QEP planning must show allocated appropriate resources and anticipated assessment.
- Success of the QEP is based on assessment of the initiative as a whole.

Introduction to Early Alerts

The National Clearinghouse for Early Alert Initiatives in Higher Education (2021) states:

The Early Alert Program model works by addressing a variety of issues that any student may have during the entire term. The institution will offer timely outreach through services and assistance. Early Alert Programs provide early feedback to students and offer assistance to students at the immediate time of academic or behavioral need. After receiving feedback from faculty about their students who may be having difficulties, the Early Alert administrator or team will contact the students through letters, emails, and phone calls and offer help through campus services and programs.

More succinctly, Simons (2011) provides the following definition, “Early alert systems have been defined as “formal communication systems institutions put into place to help with the timely identification and intervention of students who display attrition risk factors.”

Hanover Research (2014) suggests that, particularly since 2009, successful programs share common components of broader institutional retention strategies. Fusch (2012) indicates that it takes various campus partners within an institution to effectively manage a successful program. Furthermore, Lynch-Holmes et al. (2012) specify that “referrers” and “responders” are made up of a complex network of professionals working together, in an efficient model, for the same purpose – overall student success. Lastly, early alerts are most effective when they serve specific target populations of students yet allow the interventions to be modified and tailored based on the specific needs of the individual student (Varney, 2012).

QEP Purpose

Create a data-informed, formal, proactive, feedback system that sends notifications about targeted student segments to JMU practitioners who can take action to intervene.

Goal

At JMU, faculty and administrative staff from multiple academic units and colleges support and facilitate the engagement and retention of students. The goal of the QEP, titled *Early Alerts: Improving Retention and Closing the Retention Equity Gap*, is to create a data-informed, formal, proactive, feedback system that sends notifications about targeted student segments to JMU practitioners who can take action to intervene. The overarching goal of this segment of the project, thus the responsibility of the QEP Director, will be to research and design a comprehensive early alert system that will assist in reversing the decline in the overall retention rates and narrow the equity gap observed for students from underrepresented groups; Black, Indigenous, Students of Color (BISOC); low-income; and first-generation college students at JMU. Success of this stage of the initiative will be measured by the identification, design and preliminary evaluation of:

1. alerts that prompt practitioners when students need assistance, and
2. an intervention plan that aligns with the alerts to provide just-in-time and appropriate support based on the students’ needs.

Objectives

- Targeted Segments: Identify the specific student populations that will be targeted by the system
- Staffing: Identify the team needed to manage and maintain the system (send, receive and act on alerts)
- Data: Identify the indicators, and their sources, that will be used to trigger the alerts
- Schedule: Build a schedule of when alerts will take place
- Intervention: Design a strategic method and process of outreach for targeted student segments through a system that includes personalized attention to specific student needs

ChangeMaker Approach

One significant component that will set JMU apart is our approach to developing the initiative by adapting and implementing the ChangeMaker mindset and approach to our research and decision making.

The [ChangeMaker Mindset Implementation Task Force](#) has been finding ways to connect and strengthen existing work at the university in a way that is distinctive to JMU, embracing and operationalizing the idea of Being the Change. An outgrowth of the Entrepreneurial Mindset Task Force, this group envisions a host of initiatives that will make innovation and changemaking more visible, efficient, coordinated and powerful.

Budget

- Once planning is underway over the summer, we'll be able to more accurately estimate the budget required between now and 2024.
- We plan to work closely with OBM to develop a detailed budget that leverages already allocated resources when possible.

Timeline

The top-level deadlines are:

- April: President Alger announces the QEP topic to the university community and BOV
- May: QEP Director and Working Group are selected
- May 2021-Summer 2022: QEP Working Group begins setting goals, priorities and deadlines
- Fall 2022: SACSCOC Compliance Report is due
- January 2023: QEP Report is due
- April 2023: SACSCOC visit and evaluation of QEP; select QEP Implementation Team
- Fall 2023: Early Alert is implemented

Personnel/Involved Areas

1. Rudy M. Molina, Jr., - Adviser (AA, SASEM)
2. Jonathan Stewart – Adviser (SA, FIA)
3. Paul Mabrey – QEP Project Director
4. TBD – Working Group Members (number to be determined based on project scope)
5. Doctoral Assessment Graduate Assistant – TBD (AA, CARS)

References

Definition of Early Alert. National Clearinghouse for Early Alert Initiatives in Higher Education.

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Hanover Research (2014). Early Alert Systems in Higher Education

Lynch-Holmes, K. et al. "Early Alert and Intervention: Top Practices for Retention." ConnectEDU. 2012. p.

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Simons, J. "A National Study of Student Early Alert Models at Four-Year Institutions of Higher Education." Arkansas State University. 2011. p. 3.

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