

WHY are midterm grades important?

Midterm grade reporting is an important aspect of college education, as it can have a significant impact on student retention and success. Here are a few reasons *why*:

1. **Early identification of struggling students:** Midterm grades provide an opportunity for students and their faculty/ instructors to assess their progress and identify any areas where they may be struggling. This can be particularly helpful for students who are at risk of falling behind in credit hours, losing aid eligibility, withdrawing, or dropping out. Not to mention, students who are struggling academically often are experiencing difficulties in other areas of their lives (financial, mental or physical health, familial, or social). This metric has been helpful in increasing ESF's ability to identify students early, but our current system does not provide information about all the classes students are currently taking.
2. **Motivation and accountability:** Midterm grades can motivate students to stay on track and take their studies more seriously. Seeing their grades early in the semester can also make students feel more accountable for their performance and more likely to seek help if needed.
 - a. The article by Woosley and Miller (2009) examines the predictive power of midterm grades on later college success, focusing specifically on the role of motivation.
3. **Opportunities for intervention:** When instructors notice that students are struggling, they can offer support and guidance to help them get back on track. This may include additional tutoring, workshops or recitations, or other resources to help students improve their grades.
 - a. Ross and Jackson's study in 2015 suggests that midterm grades were a better predictor of student success and retention than other demographic and academic variables. The authors suggest that midterm grade reporting can serve as an early warning system for students at risk of academic difficulty and could be used to provide targeted interventions to improve student outcomes.
4. **Improved student outcomes:** Studies have shown that students who receive regular feedback and support are more likely to stay enrolled in college and achieve academic success. By providing midterm grades and support, colleges can help improve student outcomes and ultimately increase retention rates.
 - a. The study conducted by Cook and Sherfield (2012) examines the effectiveness of mid-semester progress reports on student retention in higher education. The researchers conducted a quasi-experimental study by randomly assigning students in two sections of a course to either a control group or a treatment group that received mid-semester progress reports. The results show that the treatment group had a significantly higher retention rate than the control group, suggesting that mid-semester progress reports can be an effective intervention for improving student retention. The study provides evidence for the importance of regular

communication between faculty and students and highlights the potential benefits of implementing mid-semester progress reports to support students and improve retention.

In summary, midterm grade reporting is an important tool for ESF. This tool would also enable faculty to have a finger on the pulse of their course in a more tangible way. \ By identifying struggling students early on, providing support and resources, and motivating students to take their studies more seriously, colleges can help students achieve their academic goals and stay on track towards graduation by helping them connect, reengage, and make informed decisions about their courses before they must face more serious consequences such as needing to late withdraw, or failing multiple courses for them to deal with in subsequent semesters. This tool can also potentially identify if a student is in the right major earlier on. We have discussed the topic of “orphan Fs” which occurs when students receive multiple failing grades and then proceed to switch majors and have no recourse for addressing those previously failed courses. They stay with a student for their entire tenure at ESF and can deflate their GPA significantly. We have seen how a change of major can often be transformative for students, so we hope this process will help ease the pain of switching majors and help advisors connect with students earlier on in the semester.

The **HOW:** Implementing Midterm Grade Reporting at ESF

Our goal is to help carve out a process to make the reporting of both midterm and final grades easier and streamlined. Dr. Neal Abrams has been collaboratively working with Jim Somm and Ken Stvan to help engineer a simplified process for uploading grades to Banner using Argos. This is still in development, but the team is diligently working to create some resources for faculty by the end of April. Once this process is complete, there will be support for all faculty, but this will be particularly useful for faculty who have larger courses or multiple sections. We hope to continue to gather feedback to ensure that this process can happen in order to help the institution and community in supporting student retention and success.

Advisors are also a critical component to this process. Academic advisors will be notified of the students who are currently failing one or more courses and we will be able to create targeted communications to encourage students to connect with their academic advisor or curriculum coordinators regarding their current status.

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