Questions and Answers regarding Recommendations about Student Withdrawals 04052019

1) *How does this policy solve the issue of equity regarding the statistic given that there has been a disproportionate number of African American females withdrawn from class? Also, was this statistic, supplied as the basis for suspending FIWs in the first place, accurate and statistically significant? If not, this compromises this entire process.*

   The recommendation proposed a process that is consistent throughout the College. Consistent processes promote equity and limit potentially arbitrary and damaging practices. The data presented and used as the impetus for this initiative were statistically significant and can be found and reviewed on Institutional Research's homepage: https://www.monroecc.edu/depts/research/. Summary tables can also be found within the recent Provost's Spring Update, also on the IR webpage.

2) *Are we going to get feedback from across the College? Some, including committee members, were under the impression that would happen prior to implementation. The report presented the actual policy as a draft.*

   We have created a mailbox (withdrawal@monroecc.edu) for any comments or concerns. Also, the proposed policy will follow MCC's standard policy development process that includes opportunities for the campus community to provide feedback through the portal; changes to the draft policy will be considered during that process.

3) *Are portions of the report describing benefits to students as well as concerns going to be shared with the College? Some benefits were shared at the Provost's Town Hall 4/1. The College was not presented with any other supportive information regarding the recommendations or the fact that the Committee also recognized concerns and challenges of this policy.*

   The committee's report has now been shared with the college community. As mentioned, the report includes benefits to the student and concerns and challenges related to the recommendations. Specifically, the report states that "[A]fter numerous discussions, we understood more deeply the relationship between class attendance and course success. When students miss class, they miss important details and information as well as the opportunity for a deeper understanding of a topic. In addition, attendance in class helps faculty build relationships with students, and these relationships can be the foundation for understanding the individual supports each student needs to be successful in the course."

   Additionally, further communications with the committee members emphasized the potential benefit the notification at 10% of absences reached can have on all students, not solely those impacted disproportionately by FIWs. This initial notification provides a means of early intervention and will be shared not only with the professor but with those members of the support system for that student at MCC (potentially the student's academic advisor, counselor, veteran advisor, EOP counselor, co-curricular advisor, athletic coach, etc.). This will allow multiple individuals to reach out to let the student know that there is a group of people at MCC who want them to succeed and have recognized a concern.

   Specific benefits also listed within the report include:

- Students will have a clearer understanding of the withdrawal policy, and this will set the same expectations for every course at the college

- This withdrawal process is consistent from course to course and instructor to instructor so that students will be withdrawn in a uniform and equitable manner

- Starfish helps detect at-risk students in time to provide outreach and wrap around supports

- Encourages best practices in course design

- Makes connection between attendance and success more visible and less arbitrary

- Students can appeal for reinstatement in the course using a standard process

Regarding concerns, from the committee's report, "[T]he committee had the benefit of feedback from its diverse membership, and additionally reached out to the Chair Network, the Title IX Officer, Disability Services and Health Services for feedback on this process. The feedback is included here so that the Provost may take it into consideration when deciding whether or not to implement this policy and process." Below are listed concerns from the report.

- Requiring faculty to take weekly attendance will be a significant change for the college, and present challenges.

  - Compliance will be difficult to enforce. Faculty are currently required to report attendance twice per semester, but there is still significant follow-up communication and "nagging" that has to happen in order for everyone to comply.

  - The committee recommends that the college explore alternative attendance-taking options, such as swipe stations, etc.

- Faculty will need to be vigilant and proactive in order to comply with Title IX and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

  - Because students will be withdrawn automatically, faculty will need to remain aware of students who are pregnant or who have the *Flexible Attendance* accommodation in order to reinstate the student promptly.

  - Disability Services expressed concern that too much responsibility would fall on the student.

- Implementation will need support from Computing.

  - Programming will be necessary to link Starfish attendance to Banner.

  - Blackboard settings will have to be adjusted so that students do not immediately lose Blackboard access.

    - This is necessary for students (especially online students) to continue attending class throughout the appeal process.

- There were philosophical objections to the policy and protocol.

  - There was discussion about the ability of some students to pass courses without attending. This policy would effectively forbid that, and there are some who object.

Others feel that there is a fundamental flaw in a course if students are able to pass without attending, and that this consideration is therefore minor.

- o Some object to faculty, especially adjuncts, being forced to keep attendance.

- o Some object to a "one size fits all" policy and procedure.

4) *If implemented, will this be conducted as a trial so we can collect and then analyze data to determine if this new policy is having a positive impact on equity? Or success and retention?*

The recommendations will not be implemented as a trial but if, as we analyze data from the processes created, we find that we are causing unintended harm to students or student populations, then the recommendation will be revisited. We will look for all outcomes to attendance-taking including the impact, if any, on success and retention.

5) *Isn't this a workload issue for faculty? Adding additional duties without negotiating? Adjunct faculty will be doing additional work but not getting compensated and may need training in Starfish.*

Currently, faculty respond to Starfish Attendance Surveys and in the fall 2018, 100 faculty voluntarily used the attendance feature in Starfish and 77 did so this semester. These examples demonstrate that faculty have the ability and capacity to enter attendance information into Starfish. The actual time and effort to enter attendance into Starfish is fairly minimal and easily accomplished, even for faculty with higher course loads. Adjuncts are, of course, limited in the number of courses they teach making the requirement less time consuming than for full-time faculty. A short training video can be produced and uploaded to Blackboard and/or a one-page step-by-step process can be created to help faculty new to the process. The committee reported: "Starfish is an easy-to-use tool with an intuitive user interface that give faculty, students, and staff the opportunity to connect."

6) *Weekly attendance is a lot to ask. What if it was every two weeks?*

Ideally and for maximum benefit to students, attendance would be entered daily, however, we appreciate the nature and workload of teaching at a community college and believe entering the attendance information weekly is a flexible and reasonable requirement. Entering the information every two weeks would reduce that opportunity to flag and intervene quickly when a student begins to miss classes.

7) *Can a student not be marked absent if they have been actively in contact (email, office hours) with the professor regarding an absence … because emergencies happen?*

In Starfish, an instructor can currently mark a student present (default setting for attendance), absent, excused, or tardy. These categories will be further defined to help eliminate ambiguity in how to account for students, however, if the student is in danger of being automatically withdrawn for technically missing 30 percent of the class time but the student is doing well in the course and communicating with the instructor, the student can easily appeal the withdrawal.

8) *How to deal with tardiness?*

Instructors can set expectations with respect to tardiness in their Course Information Sheets. Starfish's attendance categories might even help in this instance because it has a category for "tardy." Tardiness is not otherwise addressed in this process or recommendation.

9) *How do we count attendance for online classes?*

MCC uses the guidelines for attendance in online courses as outlined by the federal government for institutions that award financial aid. These guidelines will be included within the policy and procedure.

Under federal code 34 CFR 668.22(l)(7), in reporting academic attendance for financial aid purposes, the school (not the student) must document that the activity is academic or academically related, and the student's attendance at the activity. Academically-related activities include but are not limited to the following: physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students; submitting an academic assignment; taking an exam, completing an interactive tutorial, or participating in computer-assisted instruction; attending a study group that is assigned by the school; participating in an online discussion about academic matters; and initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course. Academically-related activities **do not include** activities where a student may be present but not academically engaged, such as: living in institutional housing, participating in the school's meal plan, **logging into an online class without active participation**, or participating in academic counseling or advisement.

10) *Can we really get all of the necessary IT aspects of this done by fall 2019?*

We are identifying the key business requirements for the Banner-Starfish interfacing and will continue to discuss the scope of the project with Computing Services. At present, fall implementation appears to be feasible.

11) *What about students who miss classes for student activities like clubs/organizations or sports?*

We are exploring the possibility of adding additional codes for these types of absences.

12) *Who is going to police this? What if faculty just don't enter their attendance?*

We are looking at this issue as part of the implementation process.

13) *Can the email messages to students not refer to the faculty member being concerned regarding attendance but instead the message should come from the College? Faculty who do not support this do not want students to come to them asking why they got an email about attendance/absences.*

The committee discussed this issue and decided that, in all instances, students respond best when the communication comes from the faculty member. Conversations about attendance naturally happen between the student and faculty so having the communication come from the faculty member is an obvious solution. Faculty input will be sought to help determine the content of these messages. Also, the Course Information Sheets will include language explaining the process, so the faculty member can always direct the student there.

14) *Doesn't Faculty Senate have to approve resolutions regarding this new policy? If the Senate does not support the policy, since they are solely a recommending body, will the policy implementation proceed?*

The Faculty Senate President and Executive Committee decided that the Senate concluded its role with the recommendations provided in June 2018 and would not be participating in the

implementation. Faculty Senate is a stakeholder in the policy review process and will be given ample opportunities to discuss and comment on the policy in accordance with our procedures. It would be our hope that Faculty Senate will engage in the process to make the draft policy as helpful to our students are possible.

15) *This is optional, right? Only faculty who want to withdraw students will need to complete this process.*

This is not an optional process. The idea is to provide students with equitable treatment across the College, which mean the same processes happen with every instructor.

16) *Why can't faculty just be trusted to take attendance, as we always have been in the past, and report concerns when they deem it is necessary?*

Faculty expressed a strong desire to have the ability to withdraw students from their classrooms and were vocal about the suspension of the "faculty initiated withdrawal" process. The committee has developed a recommendation that provides an equitable way for students to be withdrawn from class, but only after additional attempts are made to engage or reengage students in the work of the course.

17) *Why Starfish?*

There are three potential solutions for attendance taking at MCC; Banner, Quickly—an attendance taking plug-in to Banner, or Starfish. Banner and Quickly do not have the ability to generate email alerts for students, only Starfish has this ability. Creating alerts to warn students of their attendance status in the course is central to helping them re-engage.