

Promising Practices for Equity Practitioners

Practice tips to identify and support students at risk of failure

This brief outlines an evidence-based equity practice that supports students' success. The evidence comes from an impact evaluation funded by the ACSES Equity Frontiers Program. It shows how an approach used at Curtin University can be adapted by other practitioners. Access the full report [here](#), or on the ACSES Trials Registry at <http://acses.edu.au/trials-evaluation/trials-registry/>.

What equity practice we evaluated

Curtin University's Academically At-Risk Student Management (AARSM) initiative identifies students who may be at risk of failing early in the term. Students were flagged as academically at risk if they engaged with their online unit (via the Learning Management System (LMS)) 15 times or fewer in the first three weeks. The equity team then proactively contacted these students by email and SMS, offering guidance and support.

Key findings and practice implications

Early LMS engagement predicts later success. Students who engaged less (via Blackboard clicks) in the initial weeks of a unit were less likely to submit assignments and more likely to achieve lower grades.

 **Practice tip:** Use LMS data (e.g. clicks) during the first three weeks of a unit to flag students who may need support. Group them by risk level (e.g. low, high) according to the number of clicks.

Students at moderate risk benefit from timely contact. Students who engaged infrequently (10–15 clicks) responded well to proactive information and advice. They were more likely to make informed choices, such as withdrawing before census date instead of failing the unit.

 **Practice tip:** Contact these students *before census date* via email and SMS. Use positive, encouraging messages that help them make informed decisions about continuing or withdrawing.

High-risk students are harder to reach.

Students with very low engagement (fewer than 10 clicks) did not respond well to email, SMS, or phone outreach.

 **Practice tip:** Explore different ways to reach high-risk students, such as peer mentoring or staff follow-up in person.

Information alone is not enough. Providing information did not increase engagement, assignment submission, or grades.

 **Practice tip:** Consider how to integrate targeted academic support, such as tutoring, study skills workshops, or follow-up check-ins with these at-risk students.

How to implement this approach

This approach can be implemented with minimal time, likely less than 15 minutes of time for each student. You will need to:

In Week 3: Pull together students engagement data from your LMS. Identify students who engaged with the unit (clicks) 15 times or fewer, and then group these students by their risk level (e.g. lower risk=10–15 clicks; higher risk=fewer than 10 clicks).

During Weeks 3–4: Contact the *lower risk students* using email and SMS. Use the provided message templates as a guide and adapt the wording to suit your context while maintaining a positive tone. Test alternative approaches to engage *higher risk students*.

Email template for lower risk students

Hi <NAME>

We hope you are well. My name is <insert name> and I am your <insert title> for this semester.

Our team offer personalised guidance and support to help students navigate the challenges of their initial university experience, fostering a smoother transition into academic and university life. <Provide brief instructions for booking an appointment>.

I've seen that your engagement on Blackboard is lower than we would recommend at this time of semester. I thought I would check in to see how you are going with the unit.

Life can be busy sometimes, juggling life and university so there may be many reasons why you have not been able to engage with Blackboard in the last few weeks. However, if you have fallen behind in your studies or need additional support, I am here to help.

Below are some useful links and information which may assist you with your Blackboard engagement:

Blackboard & systems assistance:

Blackboard is <University Name> learning management system where important information like your classes, units and course details are kept.

How do I access this?

To access Blackboard, go to <provide instructions>

System tutorials and assistance:

<insert list of supports, such as how to use Blackboard, IT support, administrative help, and appropriate use of Gen-AI technologies>

If you are struggling with your current course load, or are not sure if university is for you, you may wish to reconsider your unit load by utilising the upcoming "Census Date" by <insert date>.

This means that you can withdraw from your unit (or course) without receiving financial penalties. For more information, or if you have any questions, you can contact <insert contact link>. **Withdrawing from units and/or course after this date will result in financial penalty. For international students, withdrawal may impact on your visa requirements.**

If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to contact me using the below details.

Thank you again, and I hope you have a lovely rest of your day.

Best,

<FYA NAME>

<EMAIL SIGNATURE>

SMS template to follow up with lower risk students

Hi <PREFERRED NAME>

This is an important message from your <title> at <University name>. Please check your student email account for more information. Have a lovely day!