

Evaluating and Expanding the Academic Alert Initiative at UMass Amherst

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UMass**Amherst**

Undergraduate
Student Success Center



Study: Academic Alerts Slash Course Withdrawal Rates by 30%

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/retention/2025/01/22/research-shows-academic-alerts-impact-grades-withdrawals>

Most universities have systems to alert students to low grades or high absence rates, but there's been little evidence showing they change student outcomes. New research from Oklahoma State shows the notifications are worthwhile investments.

By Johanna Alonso

January 22, 2025

Han, K., Meints, K., Burns, L., & Loper, K. (2025). Instructor use of academic alerts and its impact on student outcomes: controlling for selection bias. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2440552>

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Evaluating the Short-term Causal Effect of Early Alert on Student Performance

Published: 06 June 2024

Volume 65, pages 1395–1419, (2024) [Cite this article](#)



Student Success Research to Practice Collaborative (SSRPC)

Undergraduate Student Success Center

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Musbah Shaheen, Assistant Professor, Center Affiliate

Katrina Calhoun, Assistant Professor, Center Affiliate

Evidence Synthesis Partnership

Eric Toole, Evidence Synthesis Librarian

Jennifer Friedman, Education Librarian

Goal: Synthesize all existing research on the effectiveness of academic alert systems in enhancing student success

Findings expected this summer



The Academic Alert Initiative at UMass Amherst

Presentation



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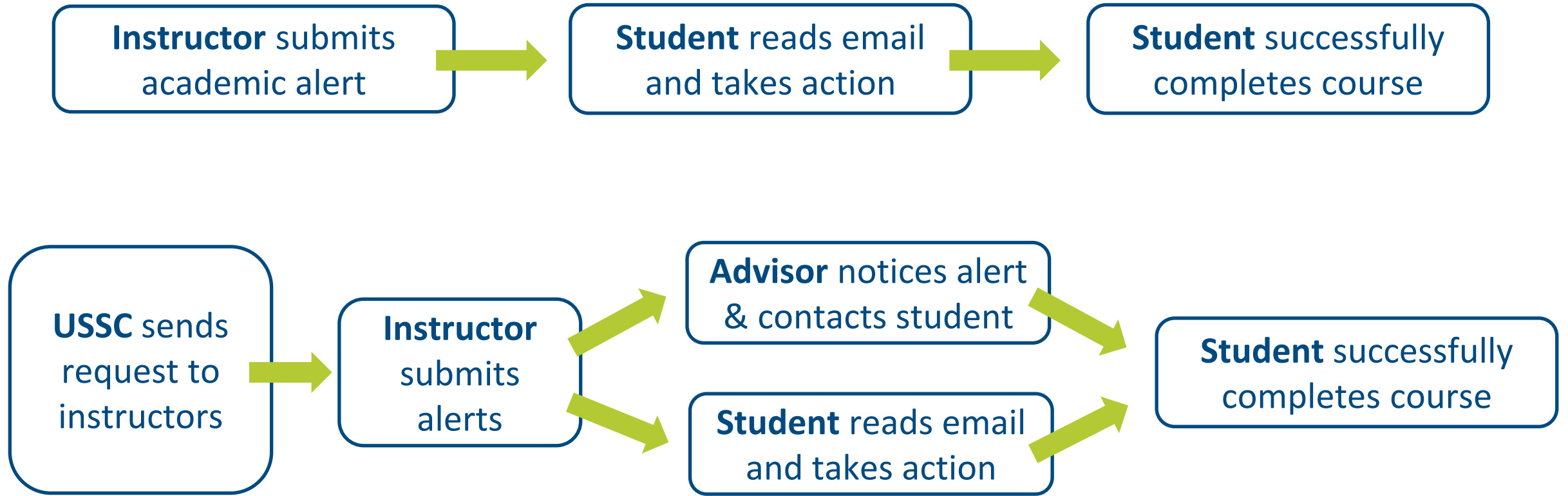
1. Overview of the Initiative & Institutional Context
2. Do Instructor-Issued Alerts Improve Students' Academic Performance?
3. Improving Processes for Students, Faculty, and Advisors
4. Engaging Stakeholders to Expand the Academic Alert Initiative
5. Moving Forward: Collaboration & Assessment

Reflection & Small-Group Discussion

Time for Questions



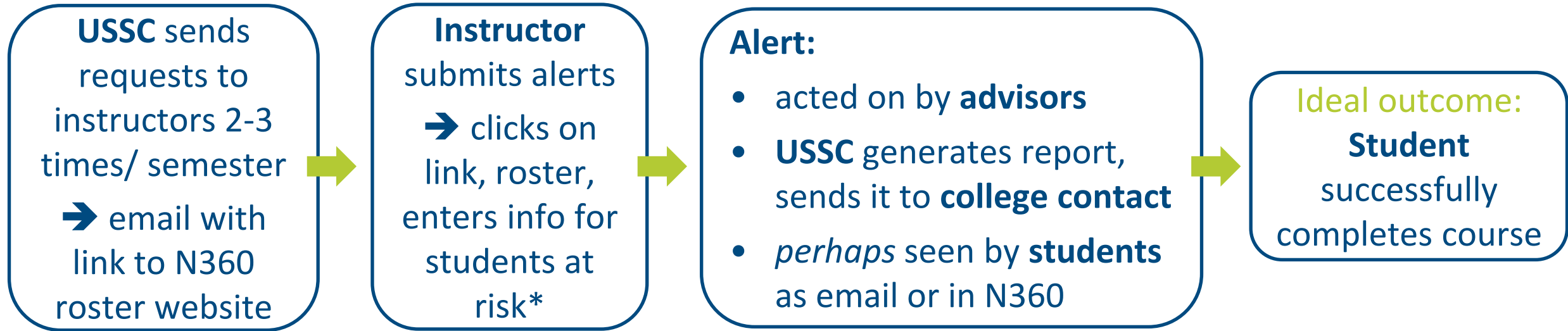
1. The Academic Alert Initiative at UMass



Academic Alert & Advising Software since 2018:



Academic Alert Initiative at UMass



*Instructor determines who is at risk

Academic Alert & Advising Software since 2018:



Institutional Context – Why Take a Closer Look at Academic Alert (Now)?



2. Do Alerts Improve Students' Academic Performance?

Campus Data

Grade Outcomes of
Alerted Students



Department Data

Suspension rates



Course-Level Data

Mid-semester and
final grades



Campus Data: Alerted Students

Improved Grade Outcomes for Students Who Take Action

Advising or LRC Support	Grade Outcome	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024
Yes	--	n = 436	n = 345	n = 331	n = 380
No	--	n = 1164	n = 877	n = 1002	n = 741
Yes	C- or higher				
No	C- or higher				
Yes	D+/D/F				
No	D+/D/F				
Yes	W				
No	W				

Kristiana Parillo



Betty Annan



Departmental Data: Resource Economics

Offer extra support for instructors:

- UPD sends additional reminders
- UPD works with instructors to submit academic alerts in Navigate



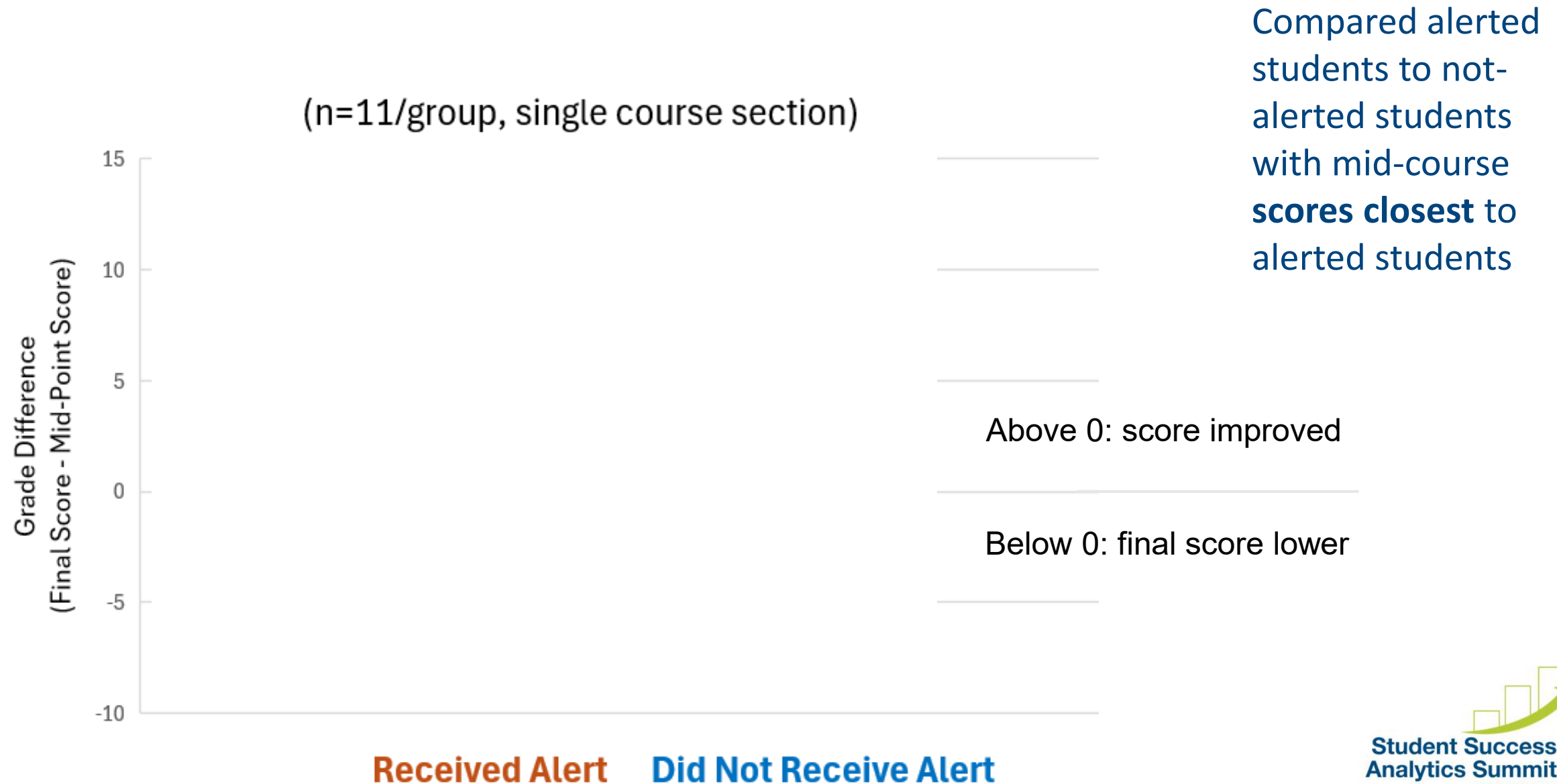
Dorise Heller,
Director of
UG Advising



Nathalie
Lavoie,
UPD

Year	# Primary Majors	Course Participation	# Alerts	Advising	Suspension & Dismissal Rate % (#)
2021/22	276	no partner courses	no data	Outreach only if multiple alerts or GPS < 2.0	
2022/23	315	16 (9F/7S)	65	Outreach after each alert	
2023/24	360	19 (13F/6S)	75	Outreach after each alert	
2024/25	367	20 (12F/8S)	119	Outreach after each alert Improving instructor requests: timing, challenging courses	

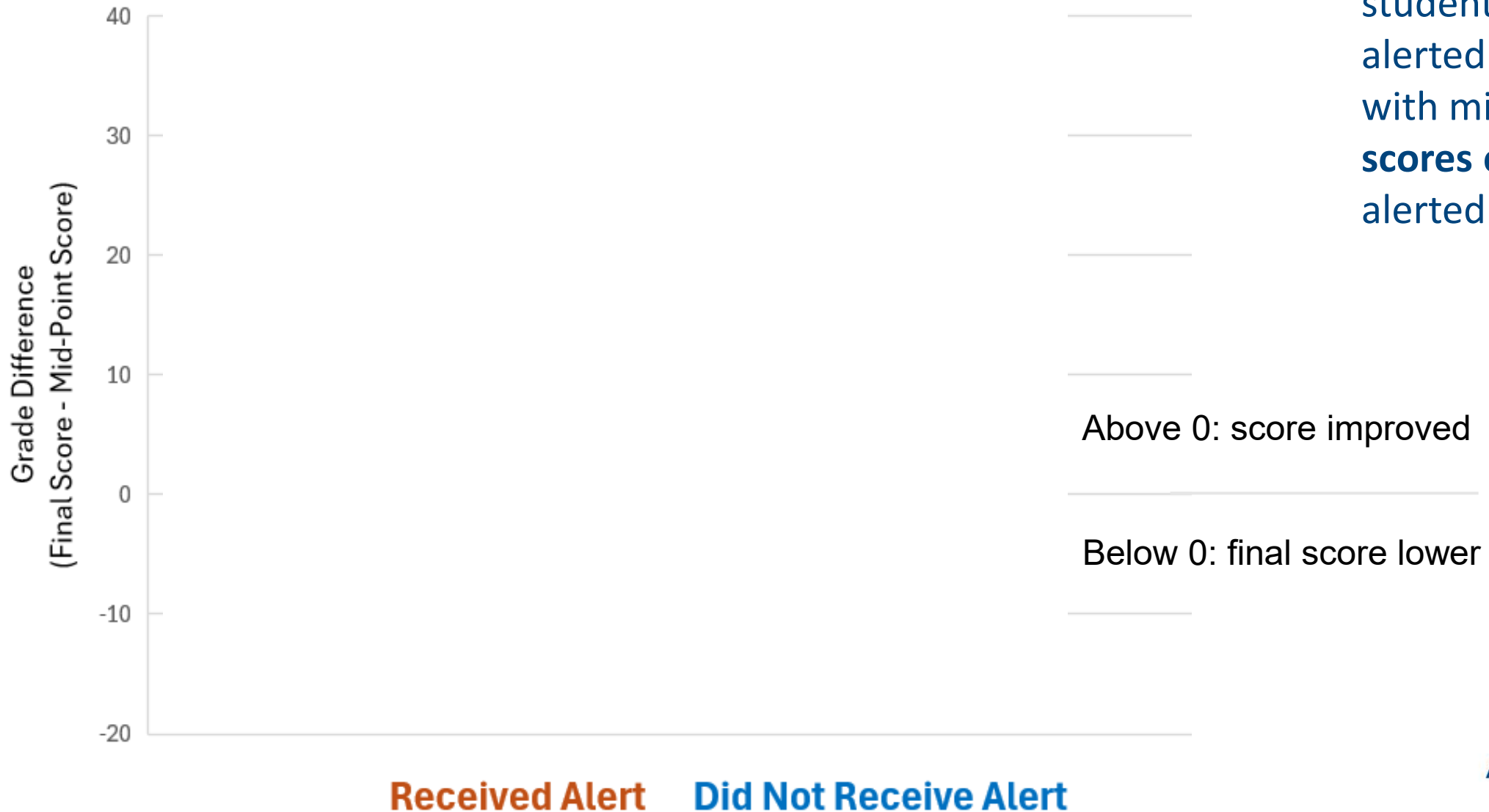
Course-Level Data: Grade Outcomes in Bio 152, Spring 2024



Course-Level Data: Grade Outcomes in Bio 151, Fall 2024

(n=23/group, single course section)

Compared alerted students to not-alerted students with mid-course scores closest to alerted students



Campus Data

Grade Outcomes of
Alerted Students with
and w/o advising



Department Data

Suspension &
dismissal rates



Course-Level Data

Mid-semester and
final grades



Insights from Interviews with Alerted Students

Goal: better understand students' experience with the academic alert program

Recruitment: Students selected from single Biol 151 section (F24): 23 students received an alert, 19 invited; 8 agreed to participate; interviews in March 2025

In semi-structured interviews, I asked about:

- about receiving the **academic alert email** and if anything in it **was helpful**,
- **challenges** students encountered during the semester,
- how the **rest of the semester went** and if they sought out any **campus resources**.

Automatic Alert Email, sent through Navigate

- Email did not seem to have made a big impact
 - 3 yes, 2 unsure, 3 no
 - None said that they used the resources in the email

Note: I cut the filler word
“like” for concision.

“Honestly, I think I just ignored it.”

“I remember getting them, but I never thought much of it. [...] So I was, okay, I gotta lock in and study, which I did. [...] But I didn't really know what to do in the moment, I guess.”

“I kind of, I don't know, I feel like it [alert] was good. Like it has pros and cons. It made me aware that the school, that UMass saw that I was struggling, even though I was aware of it, and I was okay. So, that kind of made me take it more seriously, even though I was already going to. But that kind of helped.”

- Advising was helpful
- We received feedback for improving the program

3. Improving Processes for Students, Faculty, and Advisors

Student-Facing Changes



Email notification of alert now includes:

- Instructor comments (EAB update)
- Course title in subject line
- Updated language

*Navigate360
Progress Report
Campaigns

Instructor-Facing Changes:



- All requests sent as emails with links to a single webpage* with class rosters (pilot)
- Reduced number of requests from three to two per semester
- Updated timing of requests to better align with exam/major assignment grades
- Instructors without at-risk students can respond to USSC's request

Advising-Facing Changes:



- Shifted responsibility for creating reports for student outreach from USSC to colleges
- Professional development around academic alert – holistic advising

4. Engaging Stakeholders to Expand the Academic Alert Initiative

Hearts, Minds, & Expectations



Provost-level support:
Sr. Vice Provost & Dean
of UG Education

Partnership of a staff and a faculty member → complementary expertise



Engaging Stakeholders



Partnership of a staff and a faculty member → complementary expertise



Generating buy-in from college leadership:

- Survey of college advising leadership to understand structure & extent of colleges' responsiveness to their students' academic alerts
- Presentation: UG Deans Council

College & department outreach:

- UDC presentation → invitations to present to undergraduate leadership in the largest colleges/schools
 - Faculty, staff, administrators
 - Curriculum committees, heads & chairs, UPDs/CUAs
- Worked directly with CUAs and UPDs in some departments
- Hosted event in PD series for Advising Staff & Leadership



Engaging Stakeholders: Early Successes

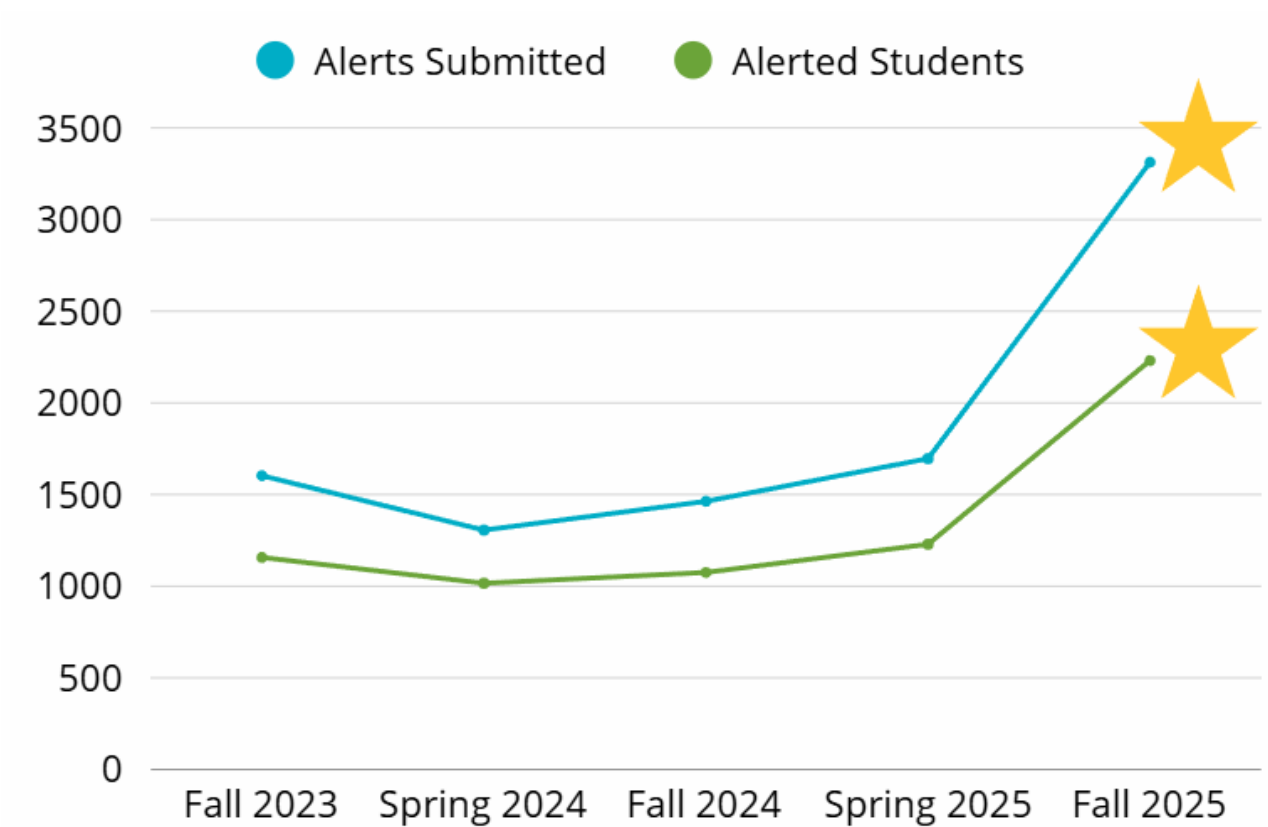
Across one year (F24 to F25):

- Number of partner courses grew by 21%
- The number of courses/course sections with at-risk alerts submitted grew by 75% in our largest college
- Number of alerts with subsequent advising and/or Learning Resource Center support more than tripled

As of spring 2026:

- Two colleges with few partner courses are now all-in.
- All nine colleges now participate with some partner courses or programs

Engaging Stakeholders: Early Successes



Academic Alert participation hit **record numbers** in Fall 2025

Number of
"At Risk"
Alerts

3,313

Number of
Alerted
Students

2,231

5. Moving Forward: Collaboration & Assessment

Collaboration

- 1. Data management - Flagship Analytics to host Navigate360 data
- 2. Data sharing with the Learning Resource Center



Assessing the impact of the expanding academic alert initiative:

- 1. College-level analyses of grade outcomes for alerted students
- 2. Academic standing
- 3. First-year retention
- 4. Deeper dive into demographic groups

	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Total # of alerted students	1075	2231
Good Standing	72.0%	73.6%
Warning	12.2%	13.8%
Probation	12.7%	10.3%
Suspension	1.5%	1.3%
Reinstated	1.6%	1.1%

Thank you!



“As a parent, it is very reassuring that the academic alert initiative would identify when help was needed before the point of my teenager getting lost and failing a class, especially at such a large institution.”

Parent of an entering first-year student