

Proposed Changes to “Midterm Grade” Reporting

For many years, we have reported “midterm grades” for students in our classes who were not doing satisfactory work or who seemed to be on a trajectory to earn a D or F in our classes. These reports went to students and their advisors and were made in time for students to consider dropping a class they were not likely to pass. The reports also provided an opportunity for advisors and faculty to encourage students to invest more energy into a course in order to improve the likelihood that they would succeed in the course.

As we explore new ways to support students who are struggling to succeed at Westmont, we are finding that earlier information about those students—earlier alerts to their struggles—can help us intervene more effectively. Advisors, Sheri Noble, Sonya Welch, coaches, and others have a better chance of connecting students with helpful resources if the student and those supporters get earlier notification of a student’s need.

Consequently, we would like to propose three minor changes to the protocol for submitting midterm grades.

First, we recommend changing the nature of the assessment. Rather than treating it as a midterm “grade” that is typically computed from grades on work submitted so far, we would like to label the report an “early alert.” Faculty would report an early alert for students who seem to be on a trajectory that may result in a poor grade in the course. That concern may be a result of poor grades on assignments. It may also be informed by observing that a student has poor attendance in class or is not engaging meaningfully in class discussions or assignments.

Since these early alerts will not be grades, we would like to use a set of codes in the report that indicate the nature of the concern. These codes could include, for example,

ATT = poor attendance

LG = low grades on assignments or exams

TUT = recommend tutoring or help with study skills

What additional codes might be helpful? WebAdvisor has the capacity to record any specified three-symbol code.

The third change we recommend is to the date these early-alert reports are made. In past years, midterm grades were reported in week 9 of the semester. We would like to move the date for the early-alert reports to week 6. This change would allow students who receive reports to make earlier adjustments to their work and study habits, and thus give them a better chance of succeeding.

Finally, if you were on Senate last year, you may recall that we discussed the fact that some faculty don’t seem to submit midterm grades, even when they have students doing poorly. If we implement these recommendations, we would like to remind faculty that we expect everyone to submit these early alert reports for students about whom they are concerned. Because we follow up specifically with students who receive two or more reports, hearing from every faculty member who has a concern about a student is important for our efforts to support students.