

Summary of Discussions on Academic – Standards of Academic Progress
Prepared by Stephen Arthur from minutes for Student Development Committee
November 2007 – April 2009

In November of 2007, the Student Development Committee (SDC), a sub-committee of the Educational Advisory Council (EAC) of Portland Community College (PCC), decided to discuss the Academic Standards of Academic Progress (A-SAP) guidelines and policies. The goal of the SDC was to investigate ways the A-SAP process could be streamlined, made easier to understand and the most effective way to communicate the policy to students.

The SDC's discussion about the A-SAP could be summarized into the following categories: communication of A-SAP structure to students, communication with students about their current academic standing, the relationship between A-SAP and student registration, the structure of the A-SAP process itself and whether or not the current A-SAP process is accomplishing our student retention goals.

The SDC has continued discussion on all of these topics up until the April 9th, 2009 meeting. Heather Lang, Associate Dean of Students at PCC Rock Creek, volunteered to organize a district-wide group of A-SAP practitioners to review the suggestions made during the course of the SDC meetings. Stephen Arthur, SDC scribe, volunteered to summarize the suggestions made by the SDC. The suggestions were going to be reviewed at the next SDC meeting and sent to the practitioner taskforce.

Communication of the A-SAP process

There appear to be a number of issues with informing students about the A-SAP process itself. Specifically, the effect A-SAP standing has on a student's enrollment status and financial aid, as well as what students can do if they consistently do not meet the A-SAP requirements. One issue of concern is how students are informed about the A-SAP requirements. It appears that most students are not aware of the requirements until they receive a letter notifying them that they did not meet the requirements and are on academic alert, probation, or suspension. The following suggestions are focused on increasing awareness among students about A-SAP requirements, and ways to explain the process if a student enters academic alert.

1) Use of CG courses – It was suggested that the A-SAP process be covered in the Student Success CG courses. The A-SAP process might be covered in some CG courses, but currently it is not an overall course requirement.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ The CG courses are designed to introduce new students to college policies and outline academic success in higher education
- ✓ Could be fairly easy to modify existing syllabi to include this information

Arguments Against

- ✗ CG course curriculum is very full as it is now so adding more information could be difficult
- ✗ CG course instructors might not be familiar with the A-SAP process
- ✗ Students seem to ignore information regarding A-SAP until they receive a letter notifying them of their poor standing

2) **Use New Student Online Orientation** – It was suggested that the A-SAP process could become part of the student orientation that new students are required to complete before they can register for courses. It is the committee's understanding that the A-SAP process is covered in all one-on-one student orientations, but not in the online orientation.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Every new student has to take the Online Orientation

Arguments Against

- ✗ The Online Orientation is already fairly long and students might not be able to retain all of the information
- ✗ Students seem to ignore information regarding A-SAP until they receive a letter notifying them of their poor standing

3) **Create a New Online Tutorial** – It was proposed that PCC create a new online tutorial that students in poor standing would access instead of the registration page, when they try to register for classes in the following term. The student would have to complete the tutorial before any registration holds are lifted.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Online tutorial could answer students' questions about why they are not able to register
- ✓ Online tutorial could save time in advising/counseling offices by directing students to resources available to them
- ✓ Online tutorial could be the best way to reach students who have difficulty coming to campus
- ✓ Use of an online tutorial ensures that we contact the student unlike the hardcopy letters that are currently being used to notify students

Arguments Against

- ✗ Potential loss of the one-on-one interaction between advisors/counselors and students
- ✗ Not sure if it is even possible to set up the system to remove holds after tutorial is completed

4) Include A-SAP information with Financial Aid award letters: It was proposed that detailed information about A-SAP be included with all financial aid award letters. This could help students distinguish between the A-SAP processes and the Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (F-SAP) requirements and how each effects their enrollment.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Students will be aware that the F-SAP and A-SAP are two separate processes
- ✓ Students will be aware of how their academic standing effects their enrollment
- ✓ All students receiving financial aid will receive this information

Arguments Against

- ✗ Students receiving financial award letter are primarily interested in the information about the amount of the financial award
- ✗ Students seem to ignore information regarding A-SAP until they receive a letter notifying them of their poor standing
- ✗ Could result in more printing costs, material costs and possibly postage for a system that might not be effective

5) Include a link to A-SAP in Hold Notification Email: The committee proposed that a link be added to all emails notifying students that a hold has been placed on their account. The link would bring student to a webpage containing A-SAP information.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would provide student with easy access to information about A-SAP process
- ✓ Student would be open to the information because it could provide details about the hold on their account

Arguments Against

- ✗ Not sure if it is possible to modify the current hold notification email
- ✗ Might be confusing to student if the hold was placed for a reason other than A-SAP standing, such as F-SAP standing or account balance

6) Include A-SAP information at end of Registration: It was suggested that after a student completes registration online and presses “submit,” the A-SAP policy will pop-up for the student to read before registration is complete. There could also be a box that students need to click to verify that they have read the policy.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would provide information to the student early on (first time they register)

- ✓ Would provide repeat exposure to the information as student continuously enrolls in courses
- ✓ Would reach the vast majority of students who register for courses

Arguments Against

- ✗ Students could become numb to the information because they see it all the time
- ✗ Students seem to ignore information regarding A-SAP until they receive a letter notifying them of their poor standing
- ✗ The majority of the students who receive the information will be in good academic standing, thereby reducing relevance of the information

Communication of a Student's Current A-SAP Standing

Currently, when students do not meet minimum A-SAP requirements, they receive a letter in the mail from the college. The committee explored additional methods of contacting students and notifying them about their academic standing. As well as experimenting with different timeframes for notification, so students would learn about their standing as soon as possible.

1) Use MyPCC Background "Color Code:" It was proposed that a color code be used to convey a student's academic standing with a visual stimulus in addition to text. The committee also discussed using a small icon (such as a thermometer) or a blinking icon (like the iterations of a smiley face) on students' MyPCC homepage that they could click on to learn more about their current academic standing. One possible color code could be a green background signifying "good standing," a yellow background signifying "poor" or "probationary" standing and a red background indicating the student has been "suspended." There was discussion of where the color backgrounds could be applied, including MyPCC homepage, the tab for My Courses on MyPCC and the background for the registration page itself.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would clearly indicate the student's academic standing in more than one medium (text as well as color indication)
- ✓ Changing colors could catch the student's attention and prompt them to learn more about why their background changed and how it relates to their academic standing
- ✓ The Green-Yellow-Red color code is easily understood because of traffic light metaphor

Arguments Against

- ✗ Color system would clearly display a student's academic standing to everyone who was able to see the computer screen, this could be a large invasion of privacy and possibly go against the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). However, it was also

noted that students access private information in public computer labs on a regular basis, including email, class schedule and even grades.

- ✘ It is uncertain if creating the icon or new background would be possible on MyPCC
- ✘ Uncertain if the creation of new background or icons would interfere with access software
- ✘ Could be difficult for students who have difficulty distinguishing colors or are sensitive to flashing lights (check with Office for Students with Disabilities)

2) **Creating a Notification Letter Used by All Campuses:** The SDC’s current understanding is that every campus uses a different form letter to notify students about their academic standing according to A-SAP. Also, each campus has a different A-SAP process with different offices involved (the table below shows the current structure). Students from different campuses, who had received letters regarding their A-SAP standing, gave very different accounts about the information included and the tone of the letter.

Current process

	Cascade	Rock Creek	Sylvania
Alert	Letter sent to student	Letter sent to student	Letter sent to student
Probation	Meet with an advisor	Meet with a counselor (not an advisor)	Meet with a counselor <u>or</u> an advisor
Suspension	Meet with a counselor (not an advisor)	Meet with a counselor (not an advisor)	Meet with a counselor <u>or</u> an advisor

The SDC recommends creating a single letter to be used by all of the campuses that outlines the next steps of the process; for example, making an appointment with an advisor/counselor to remove a hold on a student’s registration. Letters informing students about academic suspension for one year should also include a detailed outline of the appeals process and language that notifies students that they are able to appeal their suspension.

It was also suggested that the letters include the web addresses of all the resources available to students to aid them in their academic progress. By including the web address, the student would be able to find current schedules and hours online, and account for changes made from term to term.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ This could help create a more uniform approach towards the A-SAP process across the district
- ✓ It ensures that all students receive information (the same information) about resources that can aid them
- ✓ Student service employees will know exactly what information has been distributed to students who have not met A-SAP requirements

Arguments Against

- ✘ Campuses in the district do not currently have a uniform system to deal with A-SAP and students might get confused about who they make appointments with (advisor or counselor) depending on which campus they attend
- ✘ Could potentially use a large amount of resources to create the letter, both professional (time used by committee to draft and approve letter) and material (additional paper to include campus academic support resources) as well as possibility of increased mailing costs for notice letters
- ✘ Might not be possible to implement depending on ability to align all PCC campuses into a uniform policy with regard to A-SAP process

3) Send Email Notification to Students Entering Poor Standing: The committee discussed sending an email to students who enter into poor academic standing immediately after grades are turned in. The email would contain the same information as the letter.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Students would receive the email earlier than the letter, giving them a greater opportunity to seek academic advising/counseling and change their course schedule appropriately
- ✓ Letter would act as a reminder of A-SAP policies and available resources

Arguments Against

- ✘ Uncertain if it is possible to identify students who fall into poor standing and automatically send emails to only those students
- ✘ Students might not check their MyPCC email consistently so information still might not reach them in a timely manner

4) Send Email to Students Who are in Danger of Entering Poor Standing: The committee discussed a possible faculty requirement to identify students who are receiving below a C grade at midterm and send an email to those students with information about A-SAP.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Directly aids students in the greatest danger of not meeting A-SAP requirements with enough time in the term to access academic resources
- ✓ By limiting the emails to students below C level will limit the additional work required by faculty
- ✓ Students appreciate feedback from faculty about their course progress

Arguments Against

- ✘ Creates additional workload for faculty
- ✘ Could be difficult to get faculty buy-in
- ✘ Participation in process might be difficult for part-time faculty

5) Creating a Uniform Diagnostic for Interventions: It was proposed that when students actually sit down with their advisor/counselor that there be a uniform “diagnostic” with the students to see which

services they have contacted or considered using in the past. This could ensure that the student is briefed about all services available on campus that can aid them academically. This was also seen as a neutral way to discuss the services offered by the Office for Students with Disabilities and ask students if they have ever thought that they might have a learning disability, or have been tested for a learning disability.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Students will receive information about all available student resources in a one-on-one setting, ensuring that they are aware of all the services available and can be a safety net just in case the student did not read the list of resources included in the notification letter
- ✓ Offers a confidential and non-threatening environment to discuss learning disabilities as well as an opportunity to discuss the availability of disability testing

Arguments Against

- ✗ Could potentially reduce the options that advisors/counselors find available, if they feel that they are confined to the list of services
- ✗ Could potentially increase the length of a visit to an advisor/counselor and therefore increase their workload, or require more advisor/counseling positions to keep up

Registration and A-SAP

Students who do not meet A-SAP requirements often run into a number of issues involving registration. One of the most common issues is that students register for courses before they finish the previous term. This can result in a student being able to register for a course in the next term, even though they do not pass the prerequisite course in the current term.

Another issue involves students who receive a letter notifying them that they have been suspended because they have not met A-SAP requirements for three consecutive terms. In most cases, students who receive this letter have already registered for courses in the next term. If the students do not drop the courses they will be charged for them, however, a number of students believe that their registration had been nullified by their suspension.

The committee also discussed ways to increase communication between offices and campuses with regard to academic holds, in case the student tries to lift the hold by meeting with another college employee. Ideally, the person who originally put the hold on the account would be contacted to discuss the circumstances for that particular hold. This would ensure that the student would meet the original conditions of the hold, while being able to access resources from other college offices.

The committee also discussed whether or not modifying access to registration for the next term could work as a motivator for students who are in poor academic standing.

1) Modify Current Hold Process: The Committee's understanding is that currently, once a hold is on a student account, then any advisor/counselor can access the account and lift the hold. However, in the

case of a hold due to suspension, only the person who placed the hold on the account can remove it. The committee proposes creating a system that would require communication with the person who placed a hold on a student account for probation status in addition to suspension status.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ This would make sure that the student is meeting the requirements of their academic agreement while on probation
- ✓ This would increase communication between college offices, especially between campuses
- ✓ This would allow students to access multiple campus offices and resources

Arguments Against

- ✗ This could add a considerable amount of time to lifting a hold if the original person is out of the office, or no longer available (i.e. retired or left the college)
- ✗ The person who placed the hold might not have created an academic plan with the student and could find the required contact bothersome
- ✗ Creating an additional step to remove the hold could be discouraging to a student trying register
- ✗ This could complicate relations between offices, for example if there were differing opinions about the requirements in the student's academic agreement

2) Require Signed Progress Reports Before Registration: It was suggested that students who are currently on academic probation would only be allowed a temporary registration period for the current term, but would not be allowed to register for the following term until they bring a Course Progress Notification (CPN), signed by all of their instructors, to their academic advisor/counselor.

This would result in a hold on a student account while on probation, a temporary lift of that hold so the student can register for the current term and then the hold would be reinstated until the student turns in their CPN signed by their instructors. The goal would be to make sure students are passing prerequisites before registering for the next course in the series. The soonest the CPN could be turned in would be the first day the student would normally be able to register.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would help create a better relationship between students and their academic advisors/counselors
- ✓ Would help students avoid the registration shuffle in the next term if they do not pass their prerequisites
- ✓ Could encourage students to seek out academic resource early on

Arguments Against

- ✗ CPNs may not give a comprehensive understanding of the students actual standing in the course (ie too few points to make a valid estimate)

- ✗ Blocking registration before CPN is turned in could make it more difficult for students to get the courses of their choice with the instructors of their choice
- ✗ Creates additional work for academic advisors/counselors
- ✗ Each campus has a different system for CPNs

3) Shift Students on Probation to End of Registration: The committee discussed the possibility of having all students on academic probation placed in the final registration block for the next term. This would give them more time to see their actual standing in current classes, and would motivate them to do well so they are no longer on probation and able to register earlier.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would motivate students to get out of probationary status as soon as possible
- ✓ Would give students more time to assess their current course grades and if they want to register for the next course in the series

Arguments Against

- ✗ Concern that this would be punitive and discourage students from enrolling in future terms
- ✗ Student might enroll in unnecessary classes, to maintain minimum credits for financial aid, if their desired courses are full
- ✗ Could make enrolling in required courses more difficult because of the delay
- ✗ Could make selecting a preferred instructor more difficult because of the delay
- ✗ Uncertain if it is possible to modify current registration process from the order currently used
- ✗ Currently there are concerns with how students are notified about their academic standing, so it is uncertain how many students would know they were on probation

4) Allow Early Registration for Students on Probation: The committee discussed the option of making students on “probationary” status eligible for registration at the very beginning of the process, as long as they have met the requirements of their academic agreement and have a CPN signed by all of their instructors and showing current passing grades.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would allow students in academic distress greater access to courses that they need to complete their degree
- ✓ Would allow students in academic distress a greater chance to enroll with the instructor of their choice
- ✓ Would serve to motivate students to check in with their academic advisor/counselor early in the term
- ✓ Provides motivation to complete their academic agreement and have passing grades in their current courses

Arguments Against

- ✗ Could be seen as rewarding poor performance
- ✗ Could put additional workload on academic advisors/counselors
- ✗ Might not be possible to modify registration process to allow for early registration for students on academic probation
- ✗ Midterm grades are not necessarily indicative of how student progress in the course because too few points are accounted for at that time

5) Placing Holds on Accounts in “Alert” Status: The committee discussed the possibility of placing a hold on a student account once it enters alert status. This would result in a hold being placed on a student accounts after one term not meeting A-SAP requirements. This hold could be lifted by meeting with any advisor/counselor or other designated staff persons, or by completing an online tutorial of A-SAP requirements.

PROCESS: Run pre-registered (SWRASLS) list for students on Academic Alert (AA). Run transcripts to determine cause of AA. Discard those who did not get on AA due to GPA < 2.0, and place holds on selected AA population.

Reasoning: Looking at the pre-registered list for AA helps us to know why the student received a first alert (GPA or Withdrawal). By doing this it will help us proactively track students’ progress with enough time to intervene before start of next term.

Run transcripts at end of term on all remain above population. Distribute to designated staff. Based on end of term GPA, determine if AA students with holds will be moving to Academic Probation (AP), by running transcripts. Since grades are posted to the student’s transcripts up to 5 days before the Academic Standing report is run by Student Records, this is a tangible way to catch students going from true AA to true AP. Transcripts will indicated whether students are pre-registered for their AP term. If necessary contact students regarding next term class selection to determine appropriate class selections.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would create first contact with students as soon as they do not meet A-SAP requirements and would bring them into counseling/advising offices
- ✓ Would define A-SAP from F-SAP because F-SAP does not place holds on student accounts until after two consecutive terms of not meeting requirements
- ✓ **Would not require re-programming of existing Banner system**
- ✓ **Would significantly narrow total number of students moving to probation due to earlier and accurate intervention.**

Arguments Against

- ✗ Could create a greater workload for advising/counseling staff **or other designated staff persons**
- ✗ Could be discouraging to students who receive notice after their first term at the college

6) Automatically Drop Courses Without Passing Grades in Prerequisites: The committee discussed the issue of students being able to register for courses before final grades for the course prerequisites have been given. This can result in a student enrolling in a course where they did not receive

a passing grade in the prerequisite. It was suggested that students be automatically withdrawn from courses where they did not pass the prerequisites.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would ensure students have necessary background to continue in course successfully
- ✓ Would open spaces in course for students who meet prerequisites

Arguments Against

- ✗ Possibility of dropping students with incompletes, or other circumstantial situations, and student might not be able to re-register for the course
- ✗ Difficulty notifying students prior to the course being dropped
- ✗ Uncertain if this is possible with our current system

7) Automatically Drop all Classes for Student Accounts Entering “Suspension” without an Appeal: The committee discussed the possibility of automatically dropping pre-registered courses on accounts that enter into “suspension” status without filing an appeal. One of the common misunderstandings with “suspension” status is that students believe they are not eligible to attend the college, but do not drop courses they pre-registered for in the previous term. If the “suspension” is not appealed, and the student does not attend the college the following term, they will still be charged for the registered courses unless the student drops them from the account. This change would automatically drop pre-registered courses once a student enters academic “suspension.”

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Would save students from paying fees for courses they do not attend
- ✓ Would open places in courses for students not on academic suspension

Arguments Against

- ✗ Uncertain how long to wait for appeal to be processed
- ✗ If a student’s appeal is in progress during the drop date then the student could lose the courses she or he registered for and could possibly delay graduation
- ✗ It is not known if an automatic drop is even possible in our registration system

Structure of A-SAP

The SDC looked into modifying the structure of the A-SAP to be closer to the structure of the Financial Satisfactory Academic Progress (F-SAP) outlined by the US Department of Education and used by PCC Financial Aid Office. There were two main suggestions to make the processes more similar. The first would be to remove the “probation” status from the A-SAP, which would make the process of intervention similar to that of the F-SAP. The second change would be to modify the language of the A-SAP to be closer to the language of the F-SAP.

1) **Removing the Probation Status from the A-SAP:** By removing the probation status from the A-SAP it would make the format closer to the F-SAP. Currently, it is possible for a student to not meet A-SAP requirements for three consecutive terms without there being a need to appeal. For the F-SAP a student can only have two consecutive terms without meeting the minimum requirements before they need to file an appeal.

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ Will simplify the process because it would require appeals at the same points as financial aid
- ✓ Would make the A-SAP process easier to explain to students

Arguments Against

- ✗ Would eliminate the second intervention before suspension if the probation status was eliminated, this could be valuable for students
- ✗ Would require a separate appeals process to the Dean of Students, at the same time the appeal to Financial Aid is due, which might be confusing to the student
- ✗ Would make the A-SAP process too similar to the F-SAP process and could be confusing to students, staff and faculty

2) **Changing Language used for A-SAP Terms:** The SDC discussed the language used for each of the student academic standings. Currently, the terms used are “good standing,” “alert,” “probation” and “suspension.” As one committee member noted, “these same terms are commonly used in K-12 education systems, as well as our nation’s penal systems, and that they might make our students feel like they were being treated like infants or delinquents.” It was suggested that “probation” be changed to “warning” and that “suspension” be changed to “academic disqualification.”

Arguments in Favor

- ✓ New language is more humanizing and encouraging, hopefully motivating students to learn more about their academic standing
- ✓ Current terms carry a lot psychological “baggage” and could be demoralizing to students and make them feel ashamed
- ✓ Term “suspension” usually implies that the student would be barred from campus, and might discourage an appeal, or make the student believe that an appeal is not possible
- ✓ Language is closer to the terms used in the F-SAP

Arguments Against

- ✗ If the terms are too similar to those used in the F-SAP, then it might be confusing to students, staff and faculty
- ✗ The current terms “probation” and “suspension” do carry psychological weight that might motivate students to access resources so they are no longer on “probation” or “suspension”

Questions for Institutional Effectiveness

How many students enroll the term after their financial aid is cut?

How many students remain in the cycle between alert, probation and suspension status?

What is the student success rate after being notified they are placed on alert?

What is the student success rate after being notified they are placed on probation?

What is the student success rate after being notified they are placed on suspension?