

Abstract

Objective

Early intervention for students needing academic improvement is critical for student success. Furthermore, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education Standard 17 requires that the college develops, implement, and assesses its policies and procedures related to student progression throughout the PharmD program. This study is aimed to discuss modifications in the Marshall B. Ketchum University College of Pharmacy (COP) tracking system and academic progression and describe the effectiveness of the updated system.

Methods

The COP modified its original tracking system and developed a new early warning system, "Individualized Plan for Academic Success System (IPASS)," to track students with academic difficulties in a given quarter. Stakeholders' input was solicited in the form of in-person faculty interviews and student surveys in the development of this new tracking system. The changes included sending notifications to course coordinators instead of the student advisors and tracking the IPASS system for each exam. Additionally, starting with the Academic Year (AY) 2021-2022 Fall Quarter, the COP Office of Academic Affairs started identifying students placed on IPASS in more than one course to implement additional interventions in collaboration with the Office of Student Affairs. The impact of this new system was assessed by correlating the number of initiated IPASS events with students' performance in a course.

Results

The IPASS was implemented 478 times, which resulted in 60-course failures for P1 to P3 students in didactic courses in the AYs 2021-22 and 2022-23. The results of our study indicated a course pass rate of 87.5% post-IPASS for all pharmacy students.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated the usefulness of a new early warning system that can identify at-risk students early in their academic progress so that the deficiencies can be remediated.

Introduction

The students enrolled in pharmacy and other health professional programs are expected to have appropriate cognitive knowledge, psychomotor skills, attitudes, and values that guide their academic success and future career pathways¹. However, some students struggle academically to transition from undergraduate to graduate or professional school education. Early identification of underlying deficits and gaps between undergraduate and professional school instruction is imperative in the successful progression of these students through the curriculum².

Admissions Committees across pharmacy programs in the US traditionally use proxy criteria such as admission grade-point average, Pharmacy College Admission Test scores, and interview scores to assess the academic success of matriculating students in the pharmacy program^{3,4}. However, it is not possible to identify all struggling students by these methods as they fail to capture the difference in expectations in professional versus undergraduate education. Additional approaches for assisting these students include accurate prediction and targeted prevention of failure.

Failure of students to recognize and reflect on their deficiencies adds to the complexity of managing at-risk students. To identify and rectify the source of the deficits proactively, programs should take several practical steps, including early detection of academic performance problems, an action plan to aid students in developing beneficial strategies for efficient time management, studying and examination-taking skills, or counseling and mentorship to help facilitate student-driven learning.

This study is aimed to discuss modifications in the Marshall B. Ketchum University COP tracking system and academic progression and describe the effectiveness of the updated system after multiple years of use based on feedback from faculty and students.

Methods

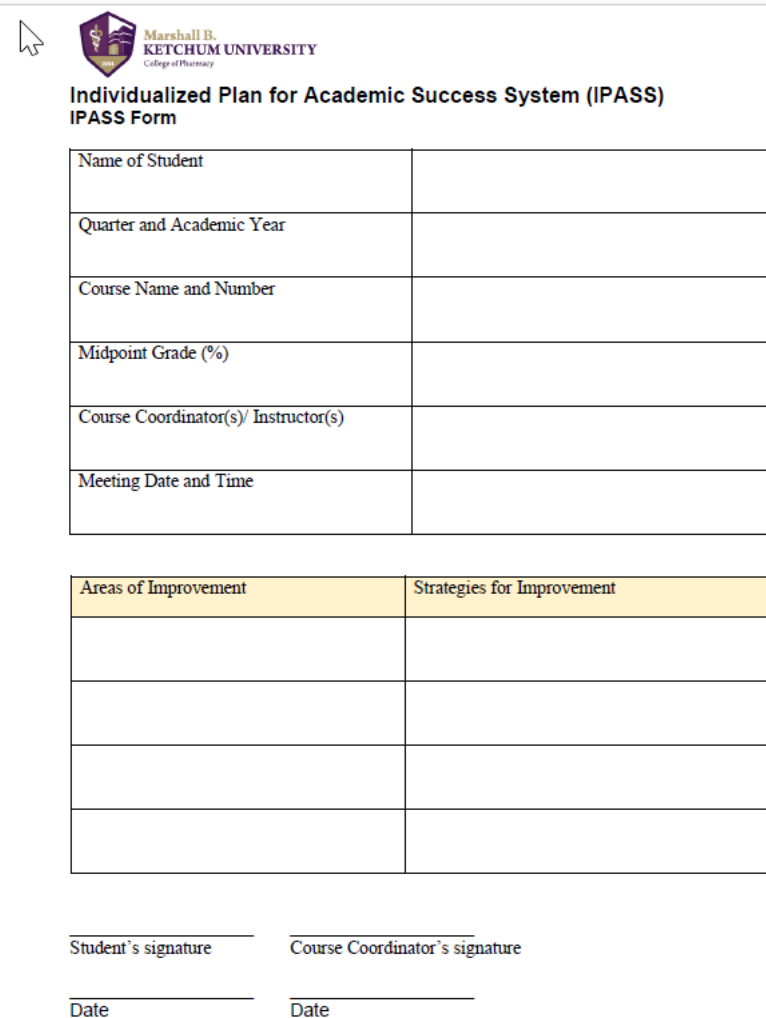
The COP initially used Early Tracking System (ETS) to track students with academic performance deficits. All faculty members were surveyed after the first year of using the ETS to evaluate its educational effectiveness. The majority of the faculty members believed the system required improvement. The program was modified and renamed "Individualized Plan for Academic Success System (IPASS)." Some of the significant changes that were made from ETS to IPASS included the involvement of course coordinators, the participation of the assistant dean for student services, and the notification of the associate dean for academic affairs. The identification threshold was increased from <70% to ≤75%.

The policy for IPASS states that at any point during a course, at the discretion of the course coordinators ??, students may be contacted to develop and implement a plan for academic success. Before meeting with the course coordinators or instructors, students are encouraged to prepare an individualized plan for academic success using the IPASS form (Fig. 1). When approximately 50% of the cumulative course grade has been generated, or at the course midpoint, the course coordinators must identify students achieving ≤75% in the course and notify the student, the assistant dean for student affairs, and the associate dean for academic affairs.

At this stage, the student must complete the IPASS form and communicate with the course coordinator within three business days. If a student fails to comply with this policy, the student will be required to meet with the associate dean for academic affairs.

Failure to meet with the associate dean for academic affairs may result in referring the student to the Academic Progression and Professionalism Committee for further action. The students can voluntarily meet with the assistant dean for student services to address any non-academic issues or to arrange for the assignment of tutors when there is a proven need. In addition to the resources available to students within the college, multiple other resources are available through the university, such as counseling and discussions on the need for accommodation.

The Office of Academic Affairs collects IPASS data from the course coordinators. The associate dean for academic affairs communicates with the course coordinators by sending additional notifications to appropriate individuals when a student's name appears in multiple IPASS notifications.



**Individualized Plan for Academic Success System (IPASS)
IPASS Form**

Name of Student	
Quarter and Academic Year	
Course Name and Number	
Midpoint Grade (%)	
Course Coordinator(s)/ Instructor(s)	
Meeting Date and Time	

Areas of Improvement	Strategies for Improvement

Student's signature _____ Course Coordinator's signature _____
Date _____ Date _____

Figure 1: IPASS form

Results

There were 31 course failures in the first year, 20 in the second year, and nine in the third year. The course failures were higher in the first year and lower in the second and third years. The results of our study indicated an overall pass rate of 87.5% post-IPASS for all pharmacy students at the end of the academic year.

The IPASS was initiated for students with poor academic performance as defined by the IPASS guidelines. The COP successfully implemented an effective and efficient system to track at-risk students earlier in their progression cycle. This new system provided an opportunity for students to work on their academic plans proactively to enhance their academic performance. Also, it made students more accountable for their own learning. This also allowed course coordinators to play a vital role in strategizing, mentoring, and recommending appropriate student resources.

All faculty members participated in the interviews about the IPASS system. These interviews allowed the COP to identify problems encountered in administering this new program.

One mandated notification at the course midpoint in IPASS was favored over every examination in the previous academic policy. Another useful modification stipulated that students meet with the course coordinators instead of faculty advisors to finalize their academic improvement plan.

The significant drawback of IPASS discovered during faculty interviews was that there were no specific guidelines for face-to-face interactions with students. Faculty also suggested that the IPASS program could benefit from having a centralized system to monitor at-risk students more effectively. In addition to the faculty interviews, the student survey provided valuable insights into the system used.

Table 1: Distribution of IPASS initiations and course failure in the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23

	First-year		Second-year		Third-year		Total
Academic year	2021-22	2022-23	2021-22	2022-23	2021-22	2022-23	
IPASS initiations (n)	89	94	135	72	52	33	478
Course failures (n)	16	15	12	8	6	3	60
The % course failures	18	16	8.8	11.1	11.5	9.1	12.5

Conclusion

The authors believe that implementing IPASS with relevant procedural changes in the previous ETS streamlined the process in terms of identification of at-risk students and rectifying their deficits early in their progression cycle. The students became more self-aware and proactive as they needed to complete an academic success plan before communicating with each course coordinator at a predefined time in the academic quarter. Thus, the new approach offered an opportunity to academically challenge students to enhance their performance through self-reflection and feedback from course coordinators before the completion of a course block.

References

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