



PennState

SCHREYER INSTITUTE FOR
TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Supporting Student Success Through Early Intervention

The first few weeks of the semester set the trajectory for students' behavior and success in a course. Data from Penn State's Division of Undergraduate Studies shows that [early intervention matters](#): students alerted to a need to adjust their learning strategy in the *first four weeks* of the semester have higher pass rates than those who receive such alerts later in the semester.

What are the early indicators I could observe?

As an instructor, even before high-stakes exams and assignments, you can note signs of student engagement in assignment quality, participation behaviors, or attendance patterns. Sharing your observations early can support success by encouraging students to adjust their learning behaviors, or reinforce positive ones, at a time when intervention will be most impactful. These are some indicators you might consider noting in the first few weeks of the semester, before significant graded work:

- Attendance
- Completion/quality of homework assignments
- Quality and frequency of participation
- Interaction with materials/assignments using [Course Insights](#)
- Performance on [low-stakes assignments](#)
- Contributions on [entry/exit tickets](#)

To talk about possible early indicators in your courses, please feel free to reach out to [faculty consultants](#) at the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence.

How does Starfish support student success?

At Penn State, Starfish [progress surveys](#) are used to raise concerns (flags), share kudos, and make referrals in surveys intended to support early improvements (weeks 3–4) and informed enrollment decisions (weeks 7–9). More broadly, Starfish serves as a tool for developing student self-awareness and agency, helping students effectively navigate available University resources and services, such as academic advising, [tutoring support](#), scholarship advising, success coaching, and athletic counseling. Starfish supports student success by:

- Connecting students to their wider academic support network, including [resources](#) shown to substantially improve retention.
- Helping students recognize patterns in their academic behavior—both their strengths and their challenges.
- Keeping support networks in the loop with timely information about students' academic progress, strengths, and needs, strengthening these relationships and providing real-time information to support providers so they can reach out to students strategically, based on who could most benefit.

- Allowing academic advisers, instructors, and students' broader support networks to share information and [support students as a team](#).

Here are the [messages](#) students automatically receive from Starfish when you submit flags, kudos, and referrals. To learn more about how you might talk with students about Starfish at different moments throughout the semester, review the resource on [Talking with Students about Starfish](#).

What else can I do in Starfish?

- For larger courses, you might consider using the [Zoom In](#) feature to share course progress with students and their support networks, with flags and kudos automated based on student grades in the Canvas gradebook.
- For [more flexibility](#), Starfish offers the ability to manually raise flags or kudos for one or more students. You can use this feature or Zoom In at any time of the semester, even outside of progress survey times.
- You can use Starfish to set up [office hours](#) for students who are currently enrolled in your courses. Starfish allows you to share a [direct scheduling link](#) with students and connect appointments to your [external calendar](#). Students are already using Starfish to schedule appointments with academic advisers and other support areas, so they are familiar with this feature.

Where can I learn more?

If you are looking for professional development, functional training, consultation, or new configurations, contact [Starfish team members](#) to talk through your questions and discuss solutions that work for you and your academic unit.

If you experience a technical challenge, you can try the faculty/staff or student [troubleshooting guide](#). The [Starfish Info](#) website also provides links to submit incident tickets or share feedback. For more information on getting started:

- The [Quick Start Guide for Instructors](#) provides useful resources for learning the basics.
- For a step-by-step guide on *progress surveys*, review the [“Completing a Progress Survey” how-to article](#) and [demo video](#).
- Review [video demos](#), [how-to articles](#), and [Starfish news stories](#).