Early Alert Interventions: Innovating advising or elevating stereotype threat?

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Overview / Plan

• Introductions — Who is in the room? Why?
• Key Concepts (What) — Deficit ideology, stereotype threat, racial profiling
• Application (So What) — Current research, practices at participant institutions
• Wrap-up (Now What) — Implications
Introductions

• Who is in the room?
  – Institutional Types
  – Positions / Levels

• How do you define or apply “early alert?”
  – Starfish, Mapworks, other systems?
  – Benefits / cautions / questions?
HAVE YOU FAILED?
Key concept #1

• Deficit ideology

  – Definition: locating a problem in those who are negatively impacted, rather than the systems that produce those impacts

  – Example: summer bridge programs or mentoring programs that build social capital of low-income students

  – Concern: assumes students don’t have capital, that they are in need of fixing/developing – act of symbolic violence
Key Concept #2

• Stereotype threat
  – **Definition:** psychological impact of being aware of how you are stereotyped
  – **Example:** asking students to share their racial/ethnic or gender identity before taking a placement test or completing a survey
  – **Concern:** simply asking about identities can reduce the performance of those who occupy marginalized identities. If you need to ask, ask AFTER the exam
Key Concept #3

- **Profiling**
  - **Definition:** Targeting people (typically based on race, gender, class) with excessive surveillance and stereotyping
  - **Example:** Assigning different values to the same behavior (e.g., being “loud” is seen as passionate when describing some but disruptive for others)
  - **Concern:** Though well-intended, identifying some as “at risk” suggests not just that they might be in danger, but that they are a danger.
Local context

- 830 (8%) undergraduate students of color
- 341 (41%) were listed as “at-risk” as first-year students, new transfer students, GPA < 2.5
- 180 (21% of all students of color) received alerts with indications of academic concern.

What % of White students were “at-risk”? What % of White students received academic concern messages?
Study

• Invited 219 students of color who received ANY Eagle Alert in the past year to interviews
• Completed 28 interviews, lasting 45-90 minutes, inquiring about overall experience on campus and with Eagle Alert
• Participants were balanced by year, gender, racial/ethnic identity
• Each selected an interviewer (provided photo, name, title ahead of time)
What is the experience?

For positive it’s like a build-me-up definitely, it makes me want to keep doing well in the class. And I’d say for negative it’s something pushing me further in the ground. I understand it’s important but if I know I’m doing poor in the class it makes me feel a little worse about it. OK, for negative I’d say it’s like . . . especially if you know you’re doing poor in the class . . . it’s like making it worse, I guess, if you already know it’s negative – Alice, First-Year
What is the experience?

For me, in my Eagle Alert, it was kind of like petting a dog. Like reassuring like, “Hey you’re doing okay, you’re doing okay.” And obviously if I had gotten a bad Eagle Alert it would have been associated with hitting the dog in the nose with a newspaper. You know? Like, you’re bad, bad dog. But I got a positive response so I got a positive feeling, it would be the opposite if I got a negative Eagle Alert. – David, First-Year
What is the experience?

I went to like a predominately Black school so like you know we all just faced all those stereotypes like all Black people are stupid and they fail and dropouts and all that stuff but a lot of us actually like graduated or went to the army and stuff so it's kind of like we're like proving to people that we like you might think that we fail a lot but actually we don't...it puts a lot of pressure to achieve your goals. Your goals can be set really really high but then you push yourself to achieve those goals to like prove that you're the same as everybody else just because you come from a different place doesn't mean that you don't have the same intellectual capacity as others. – Charlie, Sophomore
What is the experience?

Receiving that feedback... is like... falling down, like you’re riding a bike and falling down, and some random person picking you up or helping you up. I said random because you don’t really know the professor you just kind of like go into it.

So... it’s kind of like... I don’t really want to say this but it’s kind of like good Samaritan or, like, they don’t really need to do it because it’s not really required, but it’s a good thing that they are doing it, you know? So... it’s kind of like, reaching out that hand saying like even though I do have many other students I still can care for you guys. - Bob, Junior
What is the experience?

Sometimes when I walk through campus and they’re having activities they don’t ask me like, “oh come have a piece of cake” or “have some coffee.” They don’t ask me. I think it’s like that perception like maybe she doesn’t know how to speak English because I look like this…I don’t know…in my class we’re talking about model minority. I think that’s what it is? And how Asians are perceived to be really smart and better and everything but Hmong students, we’re like that, we’re obviously not like that…I don’t want to like fulfill the stereotype I guess. Overall I want to do better, I want to succeed, I want…I want to overcome it. I want to do better not to prove Asians are smarter. I want to do better because I should do better. - Amanda, Junior
What’s the experience?

The students...they will avoid you, well, I want to say, depending on your race, as an Asian female they will avoid you...like if you get into groups even if they are all sitting here they would just talk to each other, but not me. I mean I sat down next to you for a reason, you know? It’s the first day of class you want to make friends. And it’s not like I look like I’m not Americanized. I think? [Laughs] I mean it doesn’t look like that and I speak perfect English and, um, yeah apparently that’s not enough. So... class tends to be a stress and I’ve actually done poorly in classes before because either a professor or students who were being extremely insensitive about my existence, and if it was group projects I wouldn’t really want to interact or I would do as much as I could but my efforts would be disregarded, um, it happened a lot and then it makes you feel like you’re just not human, eventually, um, because they belittle you, um, every single day. You know? – Jessica, Senior
What is the experience?

I don’t like people thinking I am at risk for failing just based on my skin color...maybe there will be a time that I am at risk for failing...maybe people expect me to fail.

— Allie, senior
Feedback was complicated

You look like you could use a kick in the face today.
Emerging Themes

• What mattered most?
  – Personalized communication (face-to-face; not standardized)
  – Ensuring all students received feedback...not targeted groups
  – Positive relationships with family and university community

• What else did we notice?
  – Older students, those farther along in racial identity development, were more critical of system
  – Profiling students via Eagle Alert reinforced profiling that existed elsewhere in campus
  – Change needs to be made with majority populations
Implications for Practice
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– Student voices add value to studies.
  • Qualitative data on experiences is as important as #s
  • Students don’t live single-issue lives or tell single stories

– Because we value diversity, we need to measure it.
  • In what ways do existing systems (unintentionally) privilege some or disadvantage others?
  • Which critical theories can we use for evaluating our OTR programs?

– Our goal may be to ask more questions than we answer.
Early Alert Interventions

• Innovating advising? YES
• Elevating stereotype threat? YES

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Sources


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