

Raising the Bar:

INTENSIVE ADVISING PROGRAM SETS NEW ACADEMIC SUPPORT PRECEDENTS

Dr. Jossalyn Larson and Professor Elizabeth Roberson have created an intensive advising program for students struggling in ETC courses. The program works by allowing ETC professors to refer struggling students to an intensive advisor, who can then help each student develop and execute a personalized academic recovery plan.

By the end of the program's first semester (FS 21), more than half (58.5%) of participants had raised their grade from the D/F/W range to a C or better. "The program was successful because faculty was involved," Larson explained. "The person who was an intermediary between the student and professor was a faculty member."

Larson and Roberson observed that, even though course professors are willing to help struggling students, the students often find it easier to be open about their difficulties with an intermediary who has no influence over their grade. "Some students confided that they were too embarrassed at times to approach their professors and admit they needed help," Roberson said.

Intensive advisors have subject-matter knowledge and familiarity with courses, instructors, and assignments, and a portion of the program's success can be attributed to their expertise.

Larson and Roberson want to make intensive advising available to more students in ETC courses. Even though program participants in Spring 2022 saw improvement, the total number of F's in ETC courses went up between midterms and finals. This was probably because many students did

not start seriously struggling until late in the semester and missed their chance to get a referral from their professors.

To address this scenario, the Fall 2022 version of the program asked professors to check their rosters for struggling students during weeks 3, 6, 9, and 12 so that more students would receive a referral and be offered help before it was too late.

As the program continues to develop, Larson and Roberson hope to develop new intensive advising strategies specifically for weeks 9 through 12. They will also continue to refine the program as they collect data on its effectiveness throughout 2023.

In Fall 2022, Larson and Roberson started a second initiative involving GTA-embedded tutors. As part of their work as graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), several graduate students studying technical communication were assigned to tutor individual struggling students.

The hope is that this method of providing department-specific personalized help will prove just as effective as intensive advising by faculty members and easier for other departments to adapt and maintain. "We are hoping we can create a model that can be adapted by departments across the campus," Larson said. ■



Dr. Jossalyn Larson