

Addressing High DFW Rates in College Courses

1. Course Redesign

- **Assessment Redesign:**
 - Break the course content into smaller, digestible modules. Each module should focus on a key concept/skill with its own assessments, allowing students to grasp material in increments and receive feedback before moving to the next topic.
 - Implement frequent low-stakes assessments (quizzes, reflections, or discussions) within each module to help students track their progress, reduce test anxiety.
 - Incorporate diverse forms of assessment that test higher-order thinking and application rather than rote memorization. Utilize projects, case studies, group presentations, or real-world problem-solving tasks.
 - Introduce frequent assessments (e.g., weekly quizzes, in-class activities) rather than relying on high-stakes exams as the sole determinant of grades.
 - Redesign courses to be inclusive of diverse learning styles by incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic teaching methods. Offer a variety of assessment types (e.g., written, oral, project-based) to accommodate different strengths.
- **Flexible Grading Policies:**
 - Implement flexible grading approaches such as contract grading, mastery-based grading, or grade-replacement policies. Allow students to retake certain assessments or resubmit assignments if they show improvement in their learning.
 - Offer opportunities for students to drop their lowest exam or assignment score to alleviate pressure and account for learning progress over time.
- **Active Learning and Student Engagement:**
 - Shift from traditional lecture-based courses to active learning environments that promote student participation. Incorporate group work, problem-solving sessions, discussions, and peer teaching support activities (Learning Assistant Program—new model that would need funding and pedagogical change).
 - Encourage peer collaboration by creating study groups or learning communities within the course that are facilitated by mentors or teaching assistants.

2. Curriculum Revisions

- **Reevaluate Course Prerequisites:**
 - Ensure that students entering the course have the necessary foundational skills and knowledge. Adjust the prerequisite structure to require preparatory courses if students are consistently underprepared.
 - Offer diagnostic exams/testing at the start of the course to identify gaps in student knowledge and provide resources (e.g., online modules, ASM tutoring) to bridge those gaps early on.

- **Reevaluate Course Scheduling:**
 - Offer hybrid or flexible course schedules for students balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities to ensure they can remain engaged in their coursework.

3. Faculty Participation in Early Intervention and Academic Support Systems

- **Early Warning Systems/UMKC Connect (work in progress):**
 - Implement early alert systems that track student performance through grades, participation, and attendance in the first few weeks of the semester. Identify at-risk students early and refer them to advising, tutoring, or mentoring services.
 - Automate notifications for students who fall behind on assignments or exhibit low participation, encouraging them to seek help before their grades suffer further.
- **Tutoring or Lab Sessions:**
 - For courses with persistently high DWF rates, add tutoring or lab sessions. These can be offered through academic support centers or integrated into the course as additional required time for skill development.
- **Supplemental Instruction (SI):**
 - Introduce peer-led supplemental instruction sessions outside of class, where trained students (who have excelled in the course previously) facilitate group study sessions, clarify difficult concepts, and model effective study strategies.
 - Make attendance at SI sessions optional but strongly encourage participation by linking it to exam preparation.

4. Enhanced Faculty Training and Support

- **Professional Development on Teaching Strategies:**
 - Offer ASM workshops or seminars for faculty teaching high-DWF courses to introduce them to active learning techniques, inclusive teaching practices, and student-centered approaches.
 - Provide training on how to recognize signs of academic distress in students and how to refer them to appropriate support services
- **Collaborative Teaching:**
 - Encourage team-teaching approaches where faculty from different disciplines collaborate to offer interdisciplinary perspectives. This could help students struggling to see the relevance of course material to their broader academic or career goals.
 - Pair newer instructors with experienced mentors who have successfully managed similar courses to share best practices and troubleshooting strategies.
- **Inclusive and Equitable Pedagogy:**
 - Integrate culturally responsive teaching practices that make the content relevant to students' diverse backgrounds and experiences, increasing engagement and motivation.