The transformative potential of mid-term grades & feedback for student success

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Session Overview

1. JMU context introduction

1. Early student success system overview

1. Evolution of mid-term grades recommendation

1. Mid-term grade & feedback research study

1. Discussion

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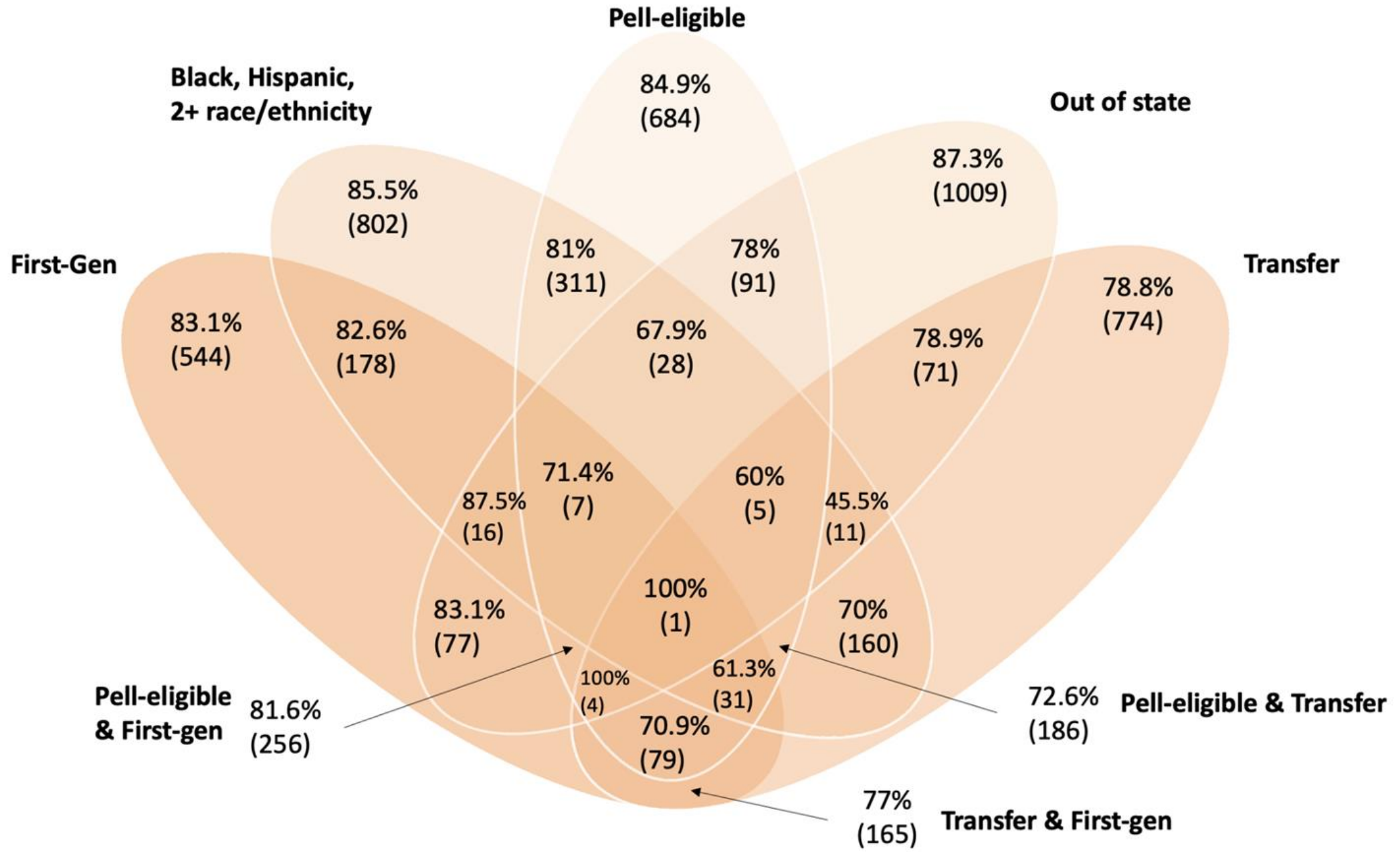CHANGE

JMU Context

Fall 2022 facts and figures:
- 20,346 undergraduate and 1,878 graduate students
- Public R2 university located in Harrisonburg, VA
- Majority in-state (79%), women (59%), and white (88%)
- 89.2% first-year student retention rate (Fall 2021 cohort)

Accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
- On-site review for reaffirmation of accreditation took place April 2023
- Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) work began in Fall 2021
  - Theme: "Early Alerts: Improving Retention and Closing the Equity Gap"

89.2% Retention Rate (2021)

Early Student Success System Framework

○ Evidence-informed
- ■ Iterative process, small pilots
- ■ Data-informed reflection

○ Empowerment framework
- ■ Agency
- ■ Asset-based, positive
- ■ Pro-active

○ Culture & change management
- ■ Technology necessary, but not sufficient
- ■ A university ready for students

○ Data ethics
- ■ Transparency, agency in participation
- ■ Research question driven processes

○ Individual & systems approach
- ■ High-touch, personal care
- ■ Leveraging technology & data across groups

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Early Student Success System 1.0
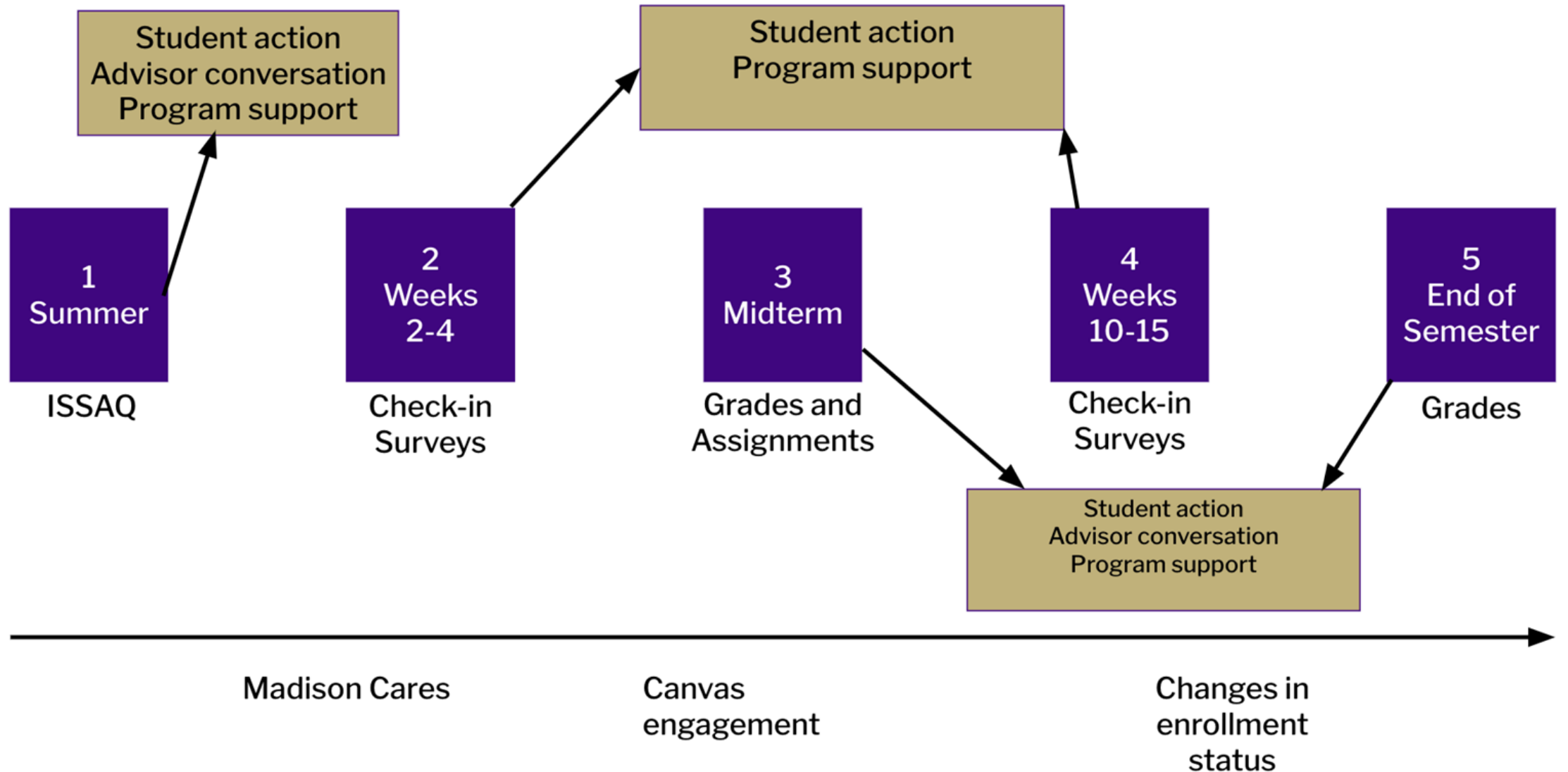
Rethink Midterm Grades Recommendation Timeline

- Fall 2021
  - Research phase
  - Focus groups particularly insightful

- Spring 2022
  - Development phase
  - Stoplight progress report recommendation

- 2022-2023
  - Design & implement phase
  - Academic Unit Head meeting
  - Research pilot study

What are current impressions of mid-term grades at your institution?

JMU's Current Midterm Landscape

- Institutionally, only expected for students with < 27 credit hours
  - About 70-75% of eligible students receive their midterm grade
  - Little communication about midterm grades

- Focus group feedback:
  - Time-consuming and unsystematic process for those who input them
  - Lack transparency in who uses or should use mid-term grades and for what purpose
  - Lack reliability and meaningfulness in that there are inconsistencies in how and if midterm grades are reported and a lack of representative assessments at that point in the semester
  - Untimely in that they are reported too late into the semester for students to make significant changes
  - Reactive (versus proactive) retention practice

Rethink Mid-term Grades Recommendation

- Meaningful feedback on the student's current academic progress in the course, that puts the onus on the student

- Useable (in a practical and timeliness sense) information for advisors and students

- Ease of use by instructors (balance between nuance and simplicity/time to complete)

- Universal buy-in from stakeholders (faculty, advisors, and students) based on transparency and understanding of how the information is or will be used

- Can be scaled up so that a mid-term report is provided for every student

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Rethink Mid-term Grades Recommendation

- Traffic light system: color & symbol
  - Red/square: significant changes need to occur to be successful in course
  - Yellow/triangle: you (student) are encouraged to speak to instructor about performance in course
  - Green/circle: you (student) appear to be successful in course to this point

- Progress report open longer (~ 2 weeks through 8 weeks)

- Accomplishes goals based on initial focus group feedback
  - Meaningful feedback to students
  - Intended to be clear and easy to use/act on
  - Removes system & cultural barriers

Red Square

Yellow Triangle

Green Circle

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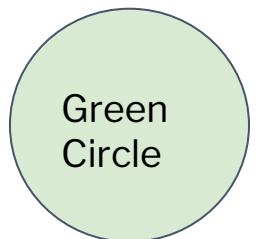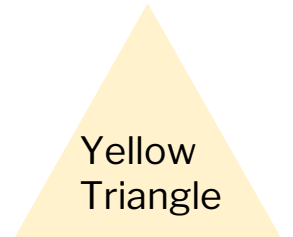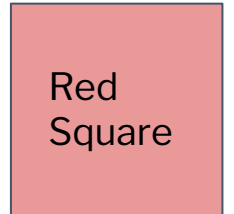
Reactions to mid-term grade recommendation?

Mid-term Grades Study Intervention

PART A - Communication with students about mid-term grades

- Information about the mid-term self-assessment in Canvas (if the instructor is also implementing Part B)
- How the mid-term grade was calculated
- What assignments remain in the course that will be factored into the final grade
- Where to view mid-term grades
- What are the best steps for students to take if they need to improve their grade, including encouragement to meet with the instructor and/or their advisor
    - The best method to contact the faculty member if they have questions

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Mid-term Grades Study Intervention

PART B - Student reflection on mid-term grades

- Prior to assigning mid-term grades, students voluntary completed ungraded 5-question self-assessment

- Instructors asked to review responses and provide feedback as appropriate

Mid-term Grades Study Data Analysis

1. Faculty reported mid-term grades ***
2. Student mid-term self-assessment
3. Course evaluations
   a. How valuable was it to receive mid-term grade information?
   b. How confident were you in your interpret and respond to your mid-term grade information?
   c. How much did you feel your instructor cared about your success in this course?
4. Faculty participant focus groups

Mid-term Grades Study Sample

Table 1

Distribution of Instructors, Class Sections, and Enrolled Students in Mid-Term Pilot Study

	Instructors	Class Sections	Enrolled Students
Total	8	19	914
By College			
College of Arts and Letters (CAL)	2	6	134
College of Business (CoB)	2	6	297
College of Integrated Science and Engineering (CISE)	4	7	483
By Course Level			
Lower-level *(100- and 200-levels, including General Education and major courses)*	5	11	746
Upper-level *(300- and 400-levels)*	5	8	168
By Course Size			
30 or less enrolled students *(ranging 14 to 29)*	5	11	249
45 or more enrolled students *(ranging 45 to 160)*	5	8	665
By Pilot Approach			
Part A *(Instructor Information Sharing)*	3	9	378
Part A and Part B *(Instructor Information Sharing and Student Self-Assessment)*	5	10	536

Mid-term Grades Study Results - Mid-term grade alignment

Table 3

GPA Point Difference Between Student Self-Reported Grade and Instructor-Reported Grade

GPA Point Difference	≤ -1.0	-1.0 > < 0	0	0 < > 1.0	≥ 1.0
Count of Students (n = 98)	8	14	33	36	7

Figure 2

Students' Self-Reported Midterm Grade (Q1) by their Indication of Alignment with Learning Goals (Q2)

Student Self-Assessment of Mid-Term Grade
and Grade Alignment with Their Learning Goals for Course

n = 362

Count of Students Estimating their Midterm Grade to be Within Range

	D/F	C	B	A
■ Green	0	1	55	139
■ Yellow	3	22	107	23
■ Red	4	5	3	0
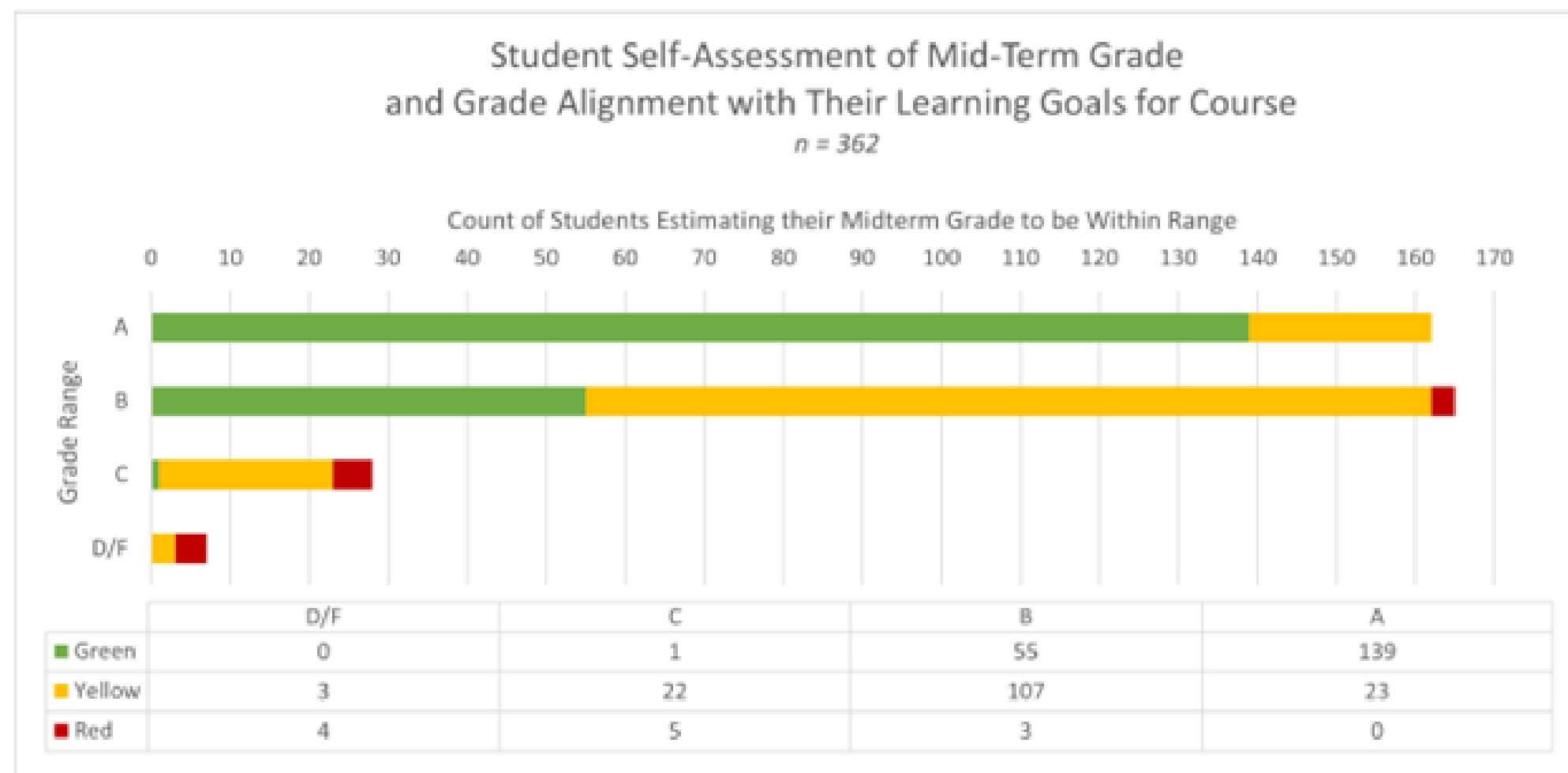
Note. Students selected green/circle if they felt have been successful in the course and are confident that they will meet their learning goals, yellow/triangle if they felt they have not yet met their learning goals but had the necessary recourses and will be able to make changes needed, and red/square if indicates they felt they needed to make significant changes and/or needed guidance on how to proceed.

Mid-term Grades Study Results - Mid-term grade questions

Table 4

Students' Confidence in Interpreting and Responding to Midterm Grades by Self-Reported Grade

Self-Reported Grade Range	n =	Extremely Confident	Very Confident	Moderately Confident	Somewhat Confident	Slightly Confident	Not at all Confident
A	162	21	74	48	14	5	0
B	165	3	47	73	30	12	0
C	28	1	6	8	7	6	0
D/F	7	1	1	3	0	1	1
Total	362	26	128	132	51	24	1

Table 5

Students' Value of Reflecting on Midterm Grades by Self-Reported Grade

Self-Reported Grade Range	n =	Extremely Valuable	Very Valuable	Moderately Valuable	Somewhat Valuable	Slightly Valuable	Not at all Valuable
A	162	25	79	38	16	0	4
B	165	25	68	43	19	8	2
C	28	5	9	8	5	0	1
D/F	7	3	2	0	1	0	1
Total	362	58	158	89	31	8	8

Theme	Contributing Sub-Themes	Sample Response(s)
Midterm reflection was useful for the students	Midterm reflection **helped the students to understand the additional work needed** to achieve their learning goals	*"I definitely put in work for this class, but I could be more engaged by studying more regularly and attending office hours."*
	The students felt the midterm reflection was valuable in **understanding** their **current standing in the course**	*"Midterm grades are a huge reflection of how you are doing in class. It is a great way to see what you need to maintain or improve upon."*

Mid-term Grades Study Results - Mid-term grade questions

- Mid-term reflection provided useful or actionable information for the instructors
  a. Students verbalized expectations about desired final grade and their current progress toward it
  b. Students verbalized perceived limitations to reaching maximum grade
  c. Reflection provided information about challenges/concerns students encountering
  d. Students feel midterm grade is accurate reflection of work and satisfied with current standing
  e. Students indicate what could be improved in teaching pedagogy

- Mid-term reflection was not useful or was inaccurate for students
  a. Students felt mid-term may not be representative of current progress
  b. Students felt mid-term did not reflect effort put into course
  c. Students did not reflect on mid-term but considered valuable

Table 7

Student Course Evaluation Results: Averages by Overall, Pilot Method, Course Level, and Class Size

	Overall	Pilot Method		Course Level		Class Size	
		A	A+B	Lower level (LL)	Upper level (UL)	<30	>=45
Enrolled students	914	297	617	746	168	249	665
Count of classes	19	6	13	11	8	11	8
Count of instructors	8	2	6	5	5	7	4
Completed evaluations (Percent of enrolled)	495 (54.2%)	146 (49.2%)	349 (56.6%)	377 (50.5%)	118 (70.2%)	166 (66.7%)	329 (49.5%)
How **valuable** was it to receive midterm grade information in this course?	0.727	0.700	0.738	0.717	0.758	0.795	0.692
How **confident** were you in your ability to interpret and respond to your mid-term grade information?	0.766	0.704	0.792	0.735	0.869	0.867	0.715
How much did you feel your instructor **cared** about your success in this course?	0.878	0.872	0.880	0.858	0.946	0.946	0.845

Note. Students responded to questions on a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were converted to a 0-1 scale, where 0 represented not at all and 1 represented extremely. This table reports average responses on this 0-1 scale.

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Mid-term Grades Study Results - Faculty focus groups

- Impact on instruction
  a. Opportunity to review course structure & grading processes with students
  b. Calibrated teaching & assessment with students' course expectations
  c. Better understand individual student anxiety & identify students who may benefit from outreach
- Impact on students
  a. Helped students review own performance
  b. Better understand level of work needed for desired outcome
  c. Improved engagement with students after mid-terms

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- Suggestions for future implementations
  a. Flexibility for when mid-term grades are issued
  b. Concrete expectations for how students should follow-up
  c. Flexibility to open-ended questions added
  d. Tool for students to understand grades in context of academic requirements
  e. Reporting mid-term grades internally in LMS vs PeopleSoft

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Mid-term Grades Study Results - Recommendations

Theme	Considerations and/or Recommendations
This midterm grade approach may be **helpful to instructors**	Faculty may use the information shared at midterm and student reflections to: • Review and reflect on course structure and grading processes for both <u>themselves</u> and their students. • Adjust teaching and assessment practices to students' expectations and challenges in the course. • Identify struggling students who may benefit from personalized outreach.
This midterm grade approach may be **helpful to students**	The information shared at midterm and self-reflection may help students to: • Review the students' own performance and where realistically they are standing at the mid-term of the semester. • Better understand the level of work needed to achieve students' desired outcome in the course, and if needed adjust. • Encourage to get in touch with the faculty and ask for additional explanations/help. • Improve performance in the second half of the semester (after reflecting on the mid-term grades).

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Theme	Considerations and/or Recommendations
Suggestions for future adaptation of midterm grades	Future approaches to midterm grades should potentially: • Take into consideration class context (size, level, discipline, etc.) and structure and provide instructors flexibility in terms of 1) what parts of mid-term reflections are implemented and 2) when midterm grades are issued, while keeping in mind the academic calendar. • Include concrete expectations for how students should follow up with midterm grade instructors. • Offer flexibility to add open-ended questions to the self-assessment to suit each unique class context. • Offer a tool for students to understand their grades in the context of their academic requirements. • Report midterm grades internally (e.g., in Canvas that can be viewed only by students, faculty, and relevant advisors), versus externally (e.g., in MyMadison, where midterm grades can be viewed by a broader number of stakeholders).

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Theme	Considerations and/or Recommendations
Multi-stakeholder approach in **developing new systems**	It is important to consult the different stakeholders when developing new systems and recommendations for use. Discussions among faculty of different backgrounds and administration open the door to more in-depth discussions and thorough solutions.

Next Steps

- Work on midterm grade completion and communication within status quo

- Build out and scale-up next interventions

- Explore technological solutions for current limitations

- Advisor and student focus groups

- Disaggregate data to examine impact on equity gaps

- Continue to build awareness & participation

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Conclusion

- Midterm grades as transactional vs transformational (borrowing from leadership studies)
- Midterm grades and feedback as transformational learning (borrowing from Hoggan, Mezirow, and others)
- Cultural change management foundational
- Infrastructure change important
- Student agency & empowerment essential
- Faculty learning communities critical

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Discussion