

Students' Early Alert Systems in Taiwanese Universities: A Study of Current Uses and Restrictions

Pei-Shan Hsieh

Center for Teaching and Learning Development
National Taiwan University

Meilun Shih

Center for Teaching and Learning Development
National Taiwan University

Abstract

The development of students' early alert systems (EAS), or students' learning alarm systems, has long been discussed by administrators and researchers in higher education. They are considered a powerful mechanism for evaluating student learning effectiveness, predicting potential learning difficulties, and identifying academically at-risk students. The rapid growth of information technology has made the EAS advanced in scale and practice. However, although most universities in Taiwan have established similar preventive systems or mechanisms, few studies have focused on exploring actual uses of and possible restrictions on existing EAS. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to outline the current situation of EAS in Taiwanese universities. We explored the following questions: (1) What types of EAS have been established in universities in Taiwan? (2) What are the main functions and mechanisms of the current EAS? (3) What are the actual uses of EAS in universities? (4) What are the possible restrictions on and solutions for using EAS? Data were gathered from 56 public and private universities in Taiwan. Experts familiar with or in charge of EAS design, development, and use in these universities were interviewed by telephone or face-to-face. We found that although the utility rate of EAS in most universities tended to be high, faculty resistance and difficulty in follow-up assessments on EAS utilization were the two common restrictions that occurred across campuses. To enhance the use effectiveness of EAS, faculty and administrators from both departmental and institutional levels should be involved. In addition, this study suggested that in the future, universities must attempt to strengthen collaboration among units related to EAS, improve the evaluation of EAS effectiveness, and provide additional early alert indicators of students' academic performance.

Keywords: Early alert system, Students, Evaluation of learning effectiveness, Students' learning alarm system