<Theresa Bierer>

Our first story looks at a new program on campus. It’s called GPS, and while it doesn’t tell you where you are physically, it does help students stay on track.

It stands for Grade Performance Status, and it’s a program to increase communication between faculty and students. In English 105, or critical reading and writing at the university, Dr. Greg Glau uses GPS and calls it a ‘useful tool’.

<Dr. Greg Glau>

“I think students need to be reminded of how they’re doing; they need to be pointed toward possible ways that could help them, and the more the better. So I would encourage all my fellow professors to use the system to ding their students, just as a nice little reminder ‘say hey, you’re struggling here, here are some folks that might be able to help you.”

<Theresa Bierer>

The way it works is the faculty member has a list of students in the class, instead of having to look up an email address; they click on a symbol next to a student’s name, and they choose one of five different categories related to academic performance.

<David Spivey>

Students will receive this feedback, and the instructors are able to choose positive feedback, feedback on attendance, feedback on grades, on academics, and then also provide some information on resources that will help the student with academic progress.

<Theresa Bierer>

GPS is part of a larger trend nation-wide, where universities are looking for methods to increase retention by opening more avenues of communication.

<Debbie Berktold>

So it’s really trying to increase that dialogue between a faculty member and a student, so that’s the main help that a student would receive, is that they would be getting really concrete good feedback from their faculty member through their emails, and that hopefully will then generate maybe more conversations or more connections with the faculty member they’re having the course with.

<Theresa Bierer>

Along with feedback on performance in a class, the GPS system offers an easy way for a professor to suggest resources at Northern Arizona University, like introducing a student to the campus writing center or sending a link on time management skills for an upcoming project. And there’s another benefit to the Grade Performance System.

<Debbie Berktold>

“That every email that the faculty member sends out to the student automatically gets copied in something that advisors have access to, it’s like an electronic file that students have, so that if I were to meet with a student, prior to that meeting I could look through that file and I could actually then see all the different communications that student had received, whether they were positive or concerning so then I could actually help generate, depending on what the situation is, a different conversation with the student with more information that we never would’ve had access to before.”

<Theresa Bierer>

And unlike similar programs GPS is completely electronic, saving a lot of paper. Early indications are encouraging, suggesting students are finding success through the program.

<David Spivey>

Students use GPS to manage their GPA’s. So when they receive these update emails through the system, what they’ll be able to do is really look at their progress, look at their academic progress in the course…and then make decisions on what do to based on the feedback from their instructors and it’s a way for them to get those resources that they need here at the university.

<Theresa Bierer>

While GPS was two years in the making, faculty and students are just starting to use it. With about 200 faculty members communicating with more than 3600 students, who themselves are saying ‘it’s a good program’.

<Jake Hopper>

I think that GPS is a great way to track your grades and it will definitely help students stay on top of stuff, because I know it’s easy to lose track of them because you only get your grades maybe once a term.

<Theresa Bierer>

Northern Arizona University’s GPS program is expected to grow in the year ahead.