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## The Creation of Successful Student Subjects: Foucault's Power/ Knowledge Framework and the Danger of Failing Early Alert

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**THE CREATION OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENT SUBJECTS:  
FOUCAULT'S POWER/KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORK  
AND THE DANGER OF FAILING EARLY ALERT**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE CREATION OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENT SUBJECTS: FOUCAULT'S POWER/KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORK AND THE DANGER OF FAILING EARLY ALERT**

Sue Ann Cecilia Curran  
Old Dominion University, 2022  
Director: Dr. David F. Ayers

The purpose of learning analytics is to improve and optimize learning using student data (Siemens, 2013). An early alert warning is learning analytics designed to promote student success (Baneres et al., 2019; Fount, 2019; Lawson et al., 2016; Villano et al., 2018). An early alert has an intervention component that includes, at minimum, an email that provides information about college resources to address the issue (Arnold & Pistilli, 2012). Some early alert interventions include a personal outreach by a staff member at the college through a phone call or text message (Choi et al., 2018).

At Care Community College, when faculty raise an early alert, the system sends an email to the student at risk of failing a course. The email intervention can initiate a relationship between the student and the faculty member or an advisor. In this study, I examined formation of the successful student subject through students' experiences with an early alert and the interactions and building of relationships between students, faculty, and advisors with the early alert phenomenon.

Previous studies have focused on the outcome of an early alert intervention, such as retention or course grade (Calvert, 2014; de Freitas et al., 2015; Lourens & Bleazard, 2016; Miller & Bell, 2016; Villano et al., 2018). Instead, I wanted to focus on human interactions to view what happens with an early alert learning analytic.

This post-intentional phenomenological study focused on connections between students, faculty, and staff involved in the danger of failing alert at Care Community College, a community college in a mid-Atlantic state. Using Vagle's (2018) post-intentional phenomenology methodology, I analyzed the data using Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) power/knowledge as my theoretical framework. I discovered that power operated to form knowledge to shape at-risk students as successful college students.

Findings reinforced literature about the role of interventions and the importance of relationships for student success (Felton & Lambert, 2020; Tinto, 1993). Results also supported Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) power/knowledge framework that both poles of biopower create knowledge. The interaction of power and knowledge shaped at-risk students into successful students.

Copyright, 2022, by Sue Ann Cecilia Curran, All Rights Reserved.

To my parents

Thomas M. Hickey, PhD

1943–2019

Whose ceaseless encouragement and support inspired me to pursue this degree

and

Lois C. Hickey

The embodiment of faith, resilience, and persistence who helped me finish

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.*

—Ecclesiastes 3:1

Earning my doctorate was a goal of mine since college. There have been times when I thought this day would never come. About 4 years ago, I made the decision to return to school to achieve this goal, despite my concern that I had waited too long. When I expressed my concern to my father about how old I would be when I finished, he dryly reminded me that I would be older with or without the doctorate. If it was my goal, I should pursue it.

I want to thank those who helped me reach my goal. I would like to thank my academic advisor and Dr. Ayers for his support and encouragement. Whenever I encountered a potential roadblock in my program or dissertation, he helped brainstorm a way forward. I thank Dr. Laura Smithers for introducing me to thinking with theory, which enabled me to apply my way of thinking, using hermeneutics as a framework, to understand biblical scripture to another analytical framework, Foucault's power and knowledge. I thank Dr. Crompton for giving me an opportunity to work for her as her graduate research assistant, which enabled me to develop my qualitative research and data visualization skills. I thank Dr. Carrie Klein, an expert and author about the role of learning analytics. Dr. Klein was the first author who I thought wanted to find the human in learning analytics and started me on this research journey.

I would like to thank the students, faculty, and success advisors from Care Community College who participated in my study. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, all interviews were conducted on Zoom. The students invited me into their lives and their homes to share the most personal details and feelings about their experience with the danger of failing early alert. I

would especially like to thank Lawrence, who helped facilitate my connections to the participants in the study.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of learning analytics is to improve and optimize learning. The first Society of Learning Analytics conference in 2011 defined learning analytics as “the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs” (Siemens, 2013, p. 1382). Student learning analytics data sources include learning management systems, advising systems, student information systems, and early alert systems.

An early alert warning is learning analytics designed to promote student success (Baneres et al., 2019; Fount, 2019; Lawson et al., 2016; Villano et al., 2018). The purpose of an alert is to notify a student that their current academic performance or behavior puts students at risk of not passing or completing the course (Baneres et al., 2019). A faculty member enters the alert in an early alert technology system, which sends an automated email to inform the student. The automatic message from the early alert system informs the student there is a problem, such as poor attendance or low grades (Arnold & Pistilli, 2012; Baneres et al., 2019). Ideally, receiving the alert helps the student address the issue before the problem negatively impacts the student’s successful completion of the course (Fount, 2019). An early alert has an intervention component that includes, at minimum, an email that provides information about college resources to address the issue (Arnold & Pistilli, 2012). Some early alert interventions include a personal outreach by a staff member at the college through a phone call or text message (Choi et al., 2018).

#### **Background of the Study**

Relationships are integral to student success in postsecondary education (Felton & Lambert, 2020; Tinto, 1993). Relationships can be between faculty members, advisors, family

members, friends, or mentors. When an intervention occurs in an early alert, a student or an advisor at the college initiates a relationship. Because a connection and its impact are difficult to measure, a framework provides a means to analyze what happens with an early alert intervention. In this study, I examined the formation of the successful student subject through students' experiences with an early alert and the interactions and building of relationships between students, faculty, and advisors with the early alert phenomenon.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Researchers have viewed learning analytics as a panacea to improve student academic performance and increase persistence through using data to optimize learning environments. Research has indicated learning analytics data could predict grades or retention (Abdous et al., 2012; Moreno-Marcos et al., 2018); however, these studies were exploratory in a single class or in a departmental subject (Dawson et al., 2019). Other researchers described how critical relationships are to student success, despite the disconnect between learning analytics and human connection (Felton & Lambert, 2020; Johansson & Felton, 2014; Tinto, 1993). Researchers have evaluated learning analytics for effectiveness in terms of the outcomes it produces (Lourens & Bleazard, 2016; Miller & Bell, 2016; Strang, 2016; Villano et al., 2018).

Researchers in learning analytics studies have examined early alert as an automated process that follows Koopman's (2019) input–processing–output model. In Koopman's model, student data are in an early alert attached to the student's digital record. Processing was the intervention executed through email notification to the student or contact from an advisor at the college. The desired result, or output, was a successful student. In this model, researchers measured student success using quantitative data such as course grades or student persistence. What happened in the intervention was irrelevant if the outcome was a quantifiable successful

outcome, such as a grade or persistence. Students became a collection of data to be controlled and manipulated to produce the desired outcome through the intervention. Peer reviewed and instructional research studies have focused on measurable results, such as retention (Calvert, 2014; de Freitas et al., 2015; Lourens & Bleazard, 2016; Miller & Bell, 2016; Villano et al., 2018).

The role of human interaction is lost in the exclusive use of data to measure how learning analytics promotes student success. Learning analytics does not address the complexities of the human experience (Parkes et al., 2020). Instead, student learning analytic data are used to produce a specific outcome. Thus, a student can become a collection of data points to be manipulated and is not a partner in learning analytics. Focusing exclusively on outputs “serves to foster skewed power relationships within higher education settings and frames learning analytics as a means to achieving institutional aims rather than servicing students’ learning” (Roberts et al., 2016, p. 2). Slade and Prinsloo (2013) framed this omission as an ethical issue limiting a student’s agency; however, the student experience and understanding of learning analytics data, along with the human connections formed, are missing in studies of the early alert phenomenon.

### **Purpose Statement**

The intent of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to understand how community college students experienced their college’s use of early alert learning analytics data. I used Foucault’s (1975/1995, 1976/1990) framework of power/knowledge to analyze the student experience with learning analytics to understand how the successful student subject was created.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used Foucault’s (1975/1995, 1976/1990) power and knowledge as the theoretical framework to understand the movement of power and the creation of knowledge in the practices

of an early alert for community college students, faculty, and success advisors. Through power/knowledge, the successful student subject is formed. The *danger of failing early alert* facilitates power movement through interactions between students, faculty, and advisors.

Foucault (1976/1990) identified two forms of biopower: disciplinary power and biopolitics. Disciplinary power acts on individuals; biopolitics manages populations. I conceptualized power as relations. Power is “an open, more-or-less coordinated . . . cluster of relations” (Foucault, 1980, p. 199). The phenomenon of the early alert revealed disciplinary power in the connections between students, faculty, and advisors. The management of the at-risk population of students exposed biopolitics. Foucault (1994/2000) wrote, “What characterizes the power we are analyzing is that it brings into play relations between individuals (or between groups)” (p. 337).

Biopower constructs knowledge of what is known to be true, and knowledge is expressed through norms and discourse (Hall, 1997; Mourad, 2018). For example, the norms and discourse about what constitute a successful college student are used to shape an at-risk to fail student into a student who passes classes and returns to college (i.e., retention), and graduates (i.e., completion). Biopower and knowledge inform one another. This power enables the creation of knowledge, and knowledge enables the movement of power. Foucault (1980) stated, “The exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information” (p. 51). It is how people connect, and through that movement of power, people come to know themselves as subjects. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) stated, “Power relations produce subjects who exceed their own identities, subjects who can never know in advance the effects of power relations embedded in their cultural practices” (p. 62). For example,



the students know themselves as successful college students through the phenomenon of the early alert.

Colleges put in motion the strategy of identifying students who are at risk for failure so they can connect them with resources and support to learn to be successful (Arnold & Pistilli, 2012; Wong & Li, 2020). The objective is for students to pass their classes, so they come back the next semester and eventually graduate and become a measurable unit of success. Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” (p. 144). The outcome of these two modes of power is the creation of the norm (i.e., a successful college student). Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “A normalized society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (p. 144).

The danger of failing early alert produces student self-knowledge along with knowledge about how to be a successful college student (Foung, 2019). The alert facilitates the movement of power through the interaction between students, faculty, and advisors (Renick, 2020). It also formulates knowledge of the behaviors of the successful student (Arnold & Pistilli, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the phenomenon of danger of failing early alert shape students' experiences at a community college?
2. How does movement of power and creation of knowledge occur in the practices of an early alert in the experiences of: (a) community college students, (b) student success advisors, and (c) faculty?

### **Professional Significance**

The significance of the study was it enabled educators to view how the phenomenon of early alert works to form successful students. Researchers have previously used enterprise resource system data from student information systems, learning management systems, and early alert systems to develop analytic learning models that identify at-risk students (Calvert, 2014; Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Lourens & Bleazard, 2016). Quantitative researchers have assessed learning analytics' impact on outcome or retention (Villano et al., 2018; Wong & Li, 2020). My study examined learning analytics from a different perspective. I employed Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) conception of power/knowledge in the theoretical framework for my data analysis. My study traced and documented the movement of power and knowledge creation for students, faculty, and advisors when they experienced the early alert phenomenon.

Learning analytics studies evaluate effectiveness, which academic leaders call student success. Student success in this framework can be measured, calculated, and compared to make a seemingly objective judgment about its effectiveness. I used Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) knowledge/power as a framework to shift the approach to studying learning analytics and the conversation about how they work. Weller (2020) stated, "Probably more than any other ed tech application, learning analytics necessitates a moral philosopher or social scientist in the room alongside the developers" (p. 149). To understand the phenomenon of early alert, a different perspective is needed.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

The methodology for this study was a post-intentional phenomenological study. The goal of post-intentional phenomenology "is to see what the phenomenon might become" (Vagle, 2018, p. 136). I studied the early alert phenomenon. I conducted the study with participants from

a mid-Atlantic state community college. Participants included students who received the danger of failing early alert, faculty, and student success advisors “who collectively represent the range of multiple, partial, and varied contexts” (Vagle, 2018, p. 147) of the danger of failing early alert. Participation was voluntary. Participants were recruited by being informed of the study and provided an informational flyer (see Appendices A and B). If the person was interested, the person contacted me directly. The college did not know who participated. Student participants received the danger of failing early alert in the Fall 2021 semester.

Data collection methods included document analysis and interviews. Documents had the college’s early alert policy and procedures, email notifications to faculty to raise early alerts, and the student’s email about the alert. I conducted individual interviews with participants who could “provide a thorough and rich description of the phenomenon” (Vagle, 2018, p. 147) of the early alert. I interviewed 10 students who received the danger of failing early alert, six faculty members, and six student success advisors. All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. I completed one interview with faculty and student success advisors and two interviews with each student participant. The first student interview occurred after the faculty member raised the alert. The second interview took place at the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester. I used the otter.ai software (<https://otter.ai>) to transcribe interviews and edited transcripts to align accurately with the recording.

I used Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) approach of thinking with theory for data analysis. I read the transcript alongside Foucault’s work on power/knowledge. Mourad (2018) stated, “Foucault’s approach is focused on analyzing discourse about practices that use and produce knowledge about people” (p. 325). Additionally, Mourad (2018) stated, “Power and knowledge

work in tandem on individuals and groups to manage their behavior based on norms through the exercise of disciplinary power and biopower” (p. 329).

### **Delimitations**

The study took place in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022. The study included faculty, advisors, and students who participated in the early alert phenomenon at a mid-Atlantic state community college. Student participants received an early alert notification about the danger of failing at the midterm of Fall 2021. Faculty participants used the early alert system and raised the danger of failing alert. Student success advisor participants included existing staff members and former staff members who performed the intervention of directly contacting the student either in person, by phone, email, or by text message.

### **Summary**

Researchers have measured outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the phenomenon of early alerts (Sønderlund et al., 2019; Wong & Li, 2020). I used Foucault’s (1975/1995, 1976/1990) theory of power and knowledge to understand the movement of power in an early alert and the formation of knowledge in the phenomenon of the early alert.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature about studies involving learning analytics and early alerts. I also examine research about student relationships with faculty and staff and their impact on students’ academic success. Finally, I explain Foucault’s (1975/1995, 1976/1990) theory of power and knowledge through his writings. I used power/knowledge as the theoretical framework for my research and how it connects to phenomenology as my methodology.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Learning analytics has its roots in business practices where analysts use data to predict and increase efficiency (Drake & Walz, 2018; Hosch, 2020). For example, some businesses have large amounts of customer and sales data to build prediction models to promote productivity and increase profit. Likewise, colleges and universities have large amounts of data about their students. Commercial vendors have developed learning analytics systems following the business model, including early alert systems, using college student data to improve student performance. Therefore, learning analytics uses student data for “the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs” (Siemens, 2013, p. 1382).

Higher education institutions have implemented learning analytics systems to address student success for at-risk students (Choi et al., 2018; Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Renick, 2020). Academic leaders and researchers conceptualize student success as course grades, retention, or graduation, which are all measurable constructs. The approach to using learning analytics varies by institution based upon the college’s strategic goals (de Freitas et al., 2015). College leaders have used learning analytics to help students pass their classes and prevent attrition.

This chapter begins with an overview of learning analytics in higher education. Next, I discuss the different data sources of learning analytics with a focus on early alerts. I explain the importance of an intervention to early alert learning analytics. Then, I discuss the importance of relationships between students and a faculty or staff member at the college to a student’s success. Finally, I describe how I used Foucault’s writings on power and knowledge as the theoretical framework for the study and aligned with post-intentional phenomenology methodology.

## **Learning Analytics in Higher Education**

Higher education enterprise resource systems and relational databases facilitate the development of learning analytics (Hosch, 2020). College enterprise resource systems include student information systems, administrative and financial resource systems, and learning management systems. These systems generate data about students, including demographic information, course enrollments, grades, and course activity. By analyzing historical data, college administrators can predict which students would do well in future courses based upon students sharing similar attributes or characteristics with previously successful students. Outcome prediction studies have focused on grades (Baneres et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2012) and retention (Calvert, 2014; de Freitas et al., 2015; Lourens & Bleazard, 2016; Miller & Bell, 2016). Thus, studies in learning analytics developed algorithms to make predictions about course outcomes and persistence.

### **Data Sources for Learning Analytics**

Learning analytics data come from many sources in higher education. Data sources include learning management systems, student information systems, advising systems, and early alert systems (Baneres et al., 2019; Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Villano et al., 2018). Data tracked in the various systems include attendance, grades, historical academic data, test scores, login frequency, and activity. Data points are used individually or combined in an algorithm to predict how students will perform. For example, if a student is anticipated to not perform well in a course, someone at the college intervenes by contacting the student. Helping a student learn comes in many forms. For example, a student could receive additional help or support if the analytic identifies the student will not do well. Some learning analytics software predicts a

student's likelihood of success in a course to recommend future classes. Learning analytics has been applied using data from different course systems.

### **Learning Analytics, Early Alert, and Interventions**

Early alerts are a form of learning analytics. An early alert system is designed to use data about a student's academic performance or attendance to notify them when their behavior puts them at risk for not passing the course or dropping out of school (Baneres et al., 2019; Villano et al., 2018). There are two primary early alert data sources: (a) using historical student data compared to the student's current performance to predict the student's likelihood of failure (Lawson et al., 2016) or (b) faculty observation. Once early alert data exist in a computer system, learning analytics can be used to identify and track students' academic performance.

Researchers have focused on pairing an early alert with an intervention (Macfadyen & Dawson, 2010; Smith et al., 2012). Forms of intervention include "increasing students' study performance, offering personalized feedback and improving retention" (Wong & Li, 2020, p. 7). Improving retention is a student success metric. An intervention implies contact or interaction—someone from the college, faculty, or staff communicates with the student.

Student success literature has stressed the importance of a connection to the college for retention. Tinto (1993) studied the factors that caused university students to stay in school. Although Tinto's work focused primarily on the factors that influence students to remain enrolled at 4-year colleges, Tinto also examined community colleges. Unlike 4-year schools where students reside on campus and participate in cocurricular activities, community college students are commuters and are on campus primarily for classes. Tinto found the key to retaining community college students was not the outside activities that were so important for 4-year

college students. Instead, community college students who had a relationship with a faculty or staff member were more likely to persist.

Relationships are critical for community colleges students to persist (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020). Researchers studying learning analytics evaluate student success (e.g., retention, grades, graduation) using predictive data to perform an intervention to influence the outcome (Sønderlund et al., 2019; Wong & Li, 2020). An intervention is an integral part of an early alert. In addition, researchers have examined whether the performance of intervention impacts the student's course outcome; however, these researchers do not delve into the relationships and interaction between students and the faculty and staff at the college (Choi et al., 2018; Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Wong & Li, 2020). My study addressed this gap in the literature.

### **Intervention Based on Learning Analytics**

An intervention paired with learning analytics improves students' success (Baars & Arnold, 2014; Baneres et al., 2019; Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Miller & Bell, 2016; Weller, 2020). The purpose of an intervention is "to prevent learners' academic failure by monitoring their progress, providing additional instruction or support that matches the learners' needs and influencing their physical intellectual, and moral development" (Wong & Li, 2020, p. 8). Identifying students as at risk, informing students and faculty, and encouraging an intervention increase retention (Miller & Bell, 2016; Sønderlund et al., 2019). Although data sources for a learning analytics model and implementation may vary, effective use of learning analytics requires action to promote student success. Faculty and staff members use learning analytics data to identify and intervene to help an at-risk student succeed (Baneres et al., 2019; Lester et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2012).



Baars and Arnold (2014) developed a model that used students' grades to determine whether a student was at risk of dropping out and a survey to understand student motivation. Baars and Arnold discovered students who did not complete or failed their first two exams were less likely to pass the class, and these students had a lower intrinsic motivation. Therefore, Baars and Arnold recommended developing an early alert system because a student's level of risk to failure can be identified after just two tests. Baars and Arnold also suggested educators use an early warning system to provide feedback to students for a recommended course of action to improve the student's course outcomes and college resources to assist the student.

Baneres et al.'s (2019) gradual at-risk model uses test grades to identify students at risk. Baneres et al. defined *at risk* as the likelihood a student will fail the class. As students complete more assessments, the model adapts and updates their at-risk status based on their grades. The system shares the student's at-risk status with the student and the instructor. Baneres et al. suggested direct student feedback could motivate students to improve by informing them about what future grades are needed to pass the class.

### **Student Expectations of Learning Analytics**

Student expectations of learning analytics include privacy and ethics and feedback and intervention (Whitelock-Wainwright et al., 2019). Studies focusing on student expectations about learning analytics illustrate student's concerns with helpful feedback and privacy issues. In addition, students are often unaware of the extent of how their demographic and academic data may be used to track and label them (Ifenthaler & Schumacher, 2016; Slade & Prinsloo, 2013).

### ***Ethics and Privacy***

One ethical consideration is that students may not be aware of how their demographic and academic data may be used to track and label them (Ifenthaler & Schumacher, 2016; Slade

& Prinsloo, 2013). When a label or code associated with an at-risk status is assigned to a student in an enterprise computer system, such as an early alert system, this datum becomes a part of the student's academic data. Some students may find this information motivational and use it as an impetus to improve their academic performance. Others may become discouraged and drop the class (de Freitas et al., 2015). If a student is categorized as at risk to fail, it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Baneres et al., 2019). The faculty member's language to frame the student's academic performance issue could be interpreted as negative or positive. A more negative message could make the student think there is no chance to pass the class. Lawson et al. (2016) stated a faculty early alert email that offered help would be more encouraging than an email from a faculty member stating the student would fail if an assignment was not completed.

Related to ethical considerations are student privacy considerations. Students may not realize their student demographics and previous academic record data are being analyzed and tracked in the college's computer system (Lawson et al., 2016). Lawson et al. asserted student consent is related to collecting their data, not the analysis or use for learning analytics. Students may not want their data personal data shared or used for analysis of their performance. Ifenthaler and Schumacher (2016) found students were willing to share their academic data, but they were not willing to share their personal information or online academic behavior. However, the learning management system learning analytics data tracked students' online behavior in conjunction with their data stored in the student information system. Jones (2019) stated that even with the good intention of improving student learning, learning analytics raises privacy concerns due to monitoring student activity and intervening when the student does not perform as desired. Students may not have access to their learning analytics data (Lawson et al., 2016). Colleges use third-party vendors to host and manage their enterprise systems; these commercial

companies have access to large data sets of student information. Companies may use learning analytic information to develop new products or build their models for their financial benefit. Students may not be aware their college uses their information in this manner (Jones, 2019).

### ***Feedback and Interventions***

Colleges seek to use feedback and interventions in conjunction with learning analytics to support student learning to help students complete their courses. Students want feedback to help them learn (Hilliger et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2017). Students expect an intervention promptly to help them do well in school (Hilliger et al., 2020). If a student is not doing well in the course, the student wants to be notified (Roberts et al., 2017). However, positive tone of the message is essential (Baneres et al., 2019).

In a survey of college students at an Australian university, Roberts et al. (2017) found over 80% of participants wanted to receive an early alert notification about their academic performance. Roberts et al. found students preferred automated alerts rather than personalized notifications from their course instructor. Students felt a personalized warning directly from the faculty member raises “concerns about being surveilled” (Roberts et al., 2017, p. 325).

### **The Importance of Relationships to Student Success**

An intervention triggered by learning analytics may be more effective in producing a student success outcome when a person from the college is involved (Renick, 2020). When an advisor or a faculty member has direct contact with a student, Felton and Lambert (2020) found students were more likely to have a positive outcome and persist at the college. Relationships are an essential part of student success. Tinto (1993) studied student attrition and discovered community college students who had a relationship with a faculty member were more likely to

persist. The relationship between students and faculty and staff at colleges with learning analytics and interventions speaks to the importance of relationships.

Felton and Lambert (2020) advocated for a relationship-based education instead of the existing transactional approach where the outcome of a student's course effort and grade is a degree from the college. Through a qualitative study with interviews with faculty, staff, and students from community colleges and 4-year institutions, Felton and Lambert illustrated the value of relationships to student success. This "web of relationships [is a] diverse community of advisors, coaches, mentors, teachers, friends, and confidants [that students can] look to for inspiration, information, challenge, direction, and opportunities" (Fenton & Lambert, 2020, p. 29). Fenton and Lambert (2020) also stated, "The central challenge of undergraduate education is guaranteeing that every student has the powerful human interactions that ignite the fire of passion" (p. 12). However, relationship-based education is staffing intensive (Fenton & Lambert, 2020). An early alert learning analytic means colleges can automate a connection between a faculty member and a student to promote student success. The intervention is the point where a relationship can form between a student and someone at the college.

The tension in learning analytics is its application to automate, predict, and control measurable outcomes, with it needing to help form the relationships critical to student success. Parkes et al. (2020) advocated that learning analytics "be recast as a tool that promotes, rather than replaces, respectful, personal dialogue" (p. 114). Thus, a framework is needed to understand learning analytics on the importance of relationships in higher education. Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) conception of how power and knowledge coexist and create each other provides a framework to view the role of relationships in learning analytics. To Foucault, "Power is a

relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a ‘power relation’” (Deleuze, 1988/2006, p. 70). Thus, power is a lens to view learning analytics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Foucault (1975/1995, 1976/1990) was a 20th-century French philosopher who analyzed how power and knowledge construct subjects. Foucault exposed power and knowledge in the social institution of the prison and sexual norms. By studying punishment and sexuality, Foucault (1980) made “visible what was previously unseen” (p. 50) in exploring what has become “self-evident . . . but wasn’t self-evident fifty years ago” (p. 51). Foucault (1980) began the study by addressing “how do things happen” rather than “how is it that we progressed” (p. 50). Foucault (1994/2000) analyzed power and knowledge in institutions “to create a history of the different modes . . . human beings are made subjects” (p. 326). Foucault explained the operation of power and knowledge in the analysis of punishment in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (Foucault, 1975/1995) and sexuality in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (Foucault, 1976/1990).

Foucault (1975/1995, 1976/1990) described the creation of subjects through power and knowledge in his writings about the social institution and the formation of social norms. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (Foucault, 1975/1995), he explained disciplinary power, or a form of power that operates on individuals. In his subsequent work, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (Foucault, 1976/1990), Foucault introduced biopower and two poles of biopower: (a) disciplinary power and (b) biopolitics. Biopolitics operates on groups; by contrast, disciplinary power acts directly on an individual. Disciplinary power and biopolitics work together. Although someone can see the power working on an individual or a group if you have one form, the other is there too. My description of Foucault’s knowledge and power breaks down

the concepts into discrete topics; however, the forms of power and its relationship to knowledge in the formation of subjects are interrelated.

### **Foucault's Concept of Power and Knowledge**

Power is manifested through relations or connections between individuals or groups. Power is often conceptualized as sovereign power where force or domination is exercised (Foucault, 1975/1995, 1976/1990). Power enables relations between people or groups (Foucault, 1994/2000). Power is “an open, more-or-less coordinated . . . cluster of relations” (Foucault, 1980, p. 199). Power relations are different from relationships of communication. Communication “transmits information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium” (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. 337). If the communication generates meaning that acts on a person or group as the “objective” or “consequence of certain results,” then the relationship of communication is “in the realm of power” (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. 337). Power does more than share information; it enables people or groups to know things.

Foucault (1975/1995, 1976/1990) wrote about the effects of power by describing how knowledge is formed in social institutions. In these institutions, Foucault's work examined “the productive effects of power as it circulates through the practices of people in their daily lives” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 49). Knowledge is expressed through discourse and embodied in norms. Ball (2013) stated, “Discourse is the conditions under which certain statements are considered to be truth” (p. 19). These truths are the basis of the formation of norms. Norms are “continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms [that] quantify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 144). Norms are a “penalty of coercion [where] the individual to be corrected must be entirely enveloped in the power that is being exercised over him” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 129). These norms shape and guide individuals and groups to the

normative standard. Ball (2013) stated, “Discourses produce the objects about which they speak” (p. 20). Discourse and norms are forms of knowledge that generate power that creates the subject.

### **Disciplinary Power**

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, Foucault (1975/1995) traced the shift from torture to imprisonment as a form of punishment for his explanation of disciplinary power in the 18th and 19th centuries. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* opens with a description of gruesome public torture in 1757 as an example of sovereign power to trace the “disappearance of torture as a public spectacle” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 7) to punishment designed to “manipulate the body of the convict . . . at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and with a much ‘higher’ aim” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 11). The aim was to transform the prisoner. Foucault (1975/1995) differentiated between punishment using sovereign power and prisons operating by exercising disciplinary power. The outcome of sovereign power on a prisoner was death, whereas disciplinary power functioned to transform a life. In the 19th century, criminals were housed in penal institutions that served to train criminals through disciplined activities and surveillance (Foucault, 1975/1995). Foucault studied how the change in punishment happened and its effects on power and knowledge.

### ***Disciplined Activities***

Prison activities were designed to direct a prisoner’s behavior and actions. Foucault (1975/1995) wrote, “The chief function of the disciplinary power is to ‘train’” (p. 170) the prisoner. Foucault described using a timetable and participating in activities such as marching to teach precision and positioning of the body. The purpose of imprisonment “wasn’t the outcome of a straightforward calculation of immediate interest (internment . . . ), but that it arose out of a

whole technology of human training, surveillance of behavior individualization of the elements of the social body” (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. 231). A prison was “an apparatus intended to render individuals docile and useful, by means of precise work upon their bodies” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 231). No set plan put the structure in place; however, this structure became institutionalized in prisons. As a result, imprisonment was focused on controlling the criminal’s body through surveillance and enforcing normative behaviors.

Foucault (1975/1995) identified new techniques in 18th-century prisons designed to train prisoners and create a docile body. These techniques were manifested in practices at the prison and rendered a body docile so it “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 136). One practice was to physically separate prisoners into separate spaces or enclosures. Separation served “to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual to assess, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 143). Separation with each prisoner having their place enabled the prison to make its supervision of the prisoners more efficient. Separating prisoners put each one in an individual space where the prisoner could not see other prisoners work, and the isolation “made possible the supervision of each individual and simultaneous work of all” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 147).

Foucault (1975/1995) said this model of training and separation was also used in apprenticeships where “the classroom would form a single great table, with many different entries, under the scrupulously ‘classificatory’ eye of the master” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 147). Students were placed by level of learning with those in the “highest lessons . . . placed in the benches closest to the wall, followed by the others . . . moving towards the middle of the classroom” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 147). Students could not move or change their assigned location without the permission of the “school inspector” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 147). Like the



prison warden, the school inspector could view all students simultaneously. Because each student had a specified location, the school inspector could instantaneously see if someone was missing or in the wrong spot.

### ***Surveillance***

Surveillance enabled the operation of disciplinary power. Foucault (1975/1995) described Bentham's panopticon model as a prison where the person in the tower in the middle can view every prisoner, yet the prisoners cannot know if they are being watched. The prisoners are constantly under the possibility of surveillance by "eyes that must see without being seen" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 171). The chance of someone seeing the prisoner misbehave is enough of a deterrent to getting the person to behave in the desired manner. The purpose of the panopticon is "to introduce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 201). The prisoner's awareness of being observed and acting in a manner based upon potential surveillance is disciplinary power. The prisoner's body is being controlled and responding to being watched.

The individual prisoner thinks they are constantly being watched and adjusts their behavior in response to perceived surveillance (Foucault, 1975/1995). Surveillance becomes an efficient operation of power by producing the desired outcome and, as such, a knowledge of acceptable behavior in prisoners. Surveillance is "a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power [that is] a decisive economic operator" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 175). Power operation becomes more efficient by not applying physical force, like torture. At the same time, surveillance in schools emerged due to an increased number of students, which resulted in the introduction of new classroom roles to help the teacher supervise student activity (Foucault, 1975/1995). Students began to supervise one another as "intendants, observers, monitors, tutors, reciters of

prayers writing officers, receivers of ink, almoners and visitors” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 175).

Roles, such as distributing supplies, were material tasks. In contrast, those in an observational or monitoring role provided additional discipline that a teacher could not as quickly offer in a classroom with many students.

Through describing disciplined activities and surveillance, Foucault (1975/1995) introduced disciplinary power and how it led to knowledge formation. Foucault (1975/1995) stated power and knowledge are inseparable because power “produces knowledge [and] is one of the conditions of knowledge” (p. 27). In addition, Foucault (1975/1995) stated, “The knowable individual [is] caught in the relation of powers, as that creature who is to be trained, corrected, supervised, controlled” (p. xvi). Foucault traced how knowledge forms and the shift in power that makes that knowledge is known in social institutions. Norms that are formed are the embodiment of knowledge created by disciplinary power.

Effects of the practices of imprisonment produced knowledge that established norms of what behavior was expected of prisoners. Disciplinary practices of corrective training and surveillance were “disciplinary mechanisms [that] secreted a ‘penalty of the norm’” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 183). The penalty of the norm was the criminal who was outside the expected behavior and needed to be disciplined through training and surveillance to behave in a normalized, noncriminal way.

### ***Docile Bodies: The Subject of Disciplinary Power***

Disciplined activities and surveillance were used to shape the prisoner and form knowledge of how not to be a criminal (Foucault, 1975/1995). The effect was creating a way to make a docile body (i.e., an individual who conforms to expectations and norms). Foucault (1975/1995) stated power “is exercised through invisibility; at the same time, it imposes on those

whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility” (p. 187). The prisoner comes to know themselves as a “knowable individual,” which is an “individual caught in the relations of power, as that creature who is to be trained, corrected, supervised, and controlled” (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. xvi). The prisoner, an individual under constant surveillance, alters their behavior to conform to the imprisonment expectations (Foucault, 1975/1995). Practices such as solitary confinement act on the individual to shape and create a new subject. It is being in solitary confinement and being isolated from other prisoners as a penalty that is both “individual [and] individualizing” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 236). Isolation gives the prisoner time to reflect and repent, which “provides an intimate exchange between the convict and the power that is exercised over him” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 237). The prisoner’s conscience acts on the prisoner. The operation of power and knowledge forms subjects. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, Foucault (1975/1995) introduced disciplinary power and the interaction with knowledge to create subjects. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault (1976/1990) illustrated power does not just act on individuals; it also acts on a population simultaneously. He introduced the concept of *biopolitics*—a power that operates on groups of people and works with disciplinary power to form knowledge and create subjects.

## **Biopolitics**

Foucault’s (1975/1995) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* laid the groundwork for analyzing the interaction between discipline power and knowledge. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault (1976/1990) identified another form of power, biopolitics, that works in conjunction with disciplinary power to form knowledge. Foucault referred to disciplinary power and biopolitics as the two poles of biopower. Foucault (1976/1990) applied his analysis of biopower to “the deployment of sexuality” (p. 150) because “deployments of

power are directly connected to the body” (p. 151) and “to the regulation of populations” (p. 145) through “birthrate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices” (pp. 25–26). Disciplinary power operates on individuals, such as a prisoner. Biopolitics implements regulations through the government to control a population. Disciplinary power and biopolitics work together to form knowledge.

### ***The Two Poles of Power: Disciplinary and Biopolitics***

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault (1976/1990) described the two poles of biopower: (a) disciplinary power and (b) biopolitics. Disciplinary power is “centered on the body as a machine” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 139). It operates on an individual’s body with the same techniques of disciplined activities and surveillance as it does with the prisoner. Disciplinary power has the same objective as it does with the prisoner in the deployment of sexuality to “increase . . . the usefulness and its docility” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 139) of the body. However, the deployment of sexuality also included the population, and biopolitics was the form of power.

In the 18th century, a shift occurred from a European country’s sovereign overseeing their subjects to a government managing a population. Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “The emergence of population [was] an economic and political problem” (p. 25) because the government depended on the population’s existence and success for its survival. The population’s wealth, labor, and resources depended on how many people lived and died. Public health initiatives emerged through the government to promote longevity and techniques to increase or decrease the birth rate. Foucault (1976/1990) wrote, “At the heart of this economic

and political problem of the population was sex” (p. 25). Sex became the target of biopolitics. Depending on what the population needed to survive, interventions and regulations encouraged or discouraged an increase in the population’s birth rate (Foucault, 1976/1990). Interventions and controls sought to manage “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 139). Interventions were needed because people required the development of social institutions such as “universities, secondary schools, barracks, [and] workshops,” which meant “birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 140) could cause problems to the operation of these institutions if not appropriately managed. The government executed the operation and management of the population through direct and indirect methods.

### ***Regulation of Populations***

Biopolitics was the form of power that operated on the population “through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 139). Optimization and efficiency were the goals of managing a population. Regulations were a means to optimize an action on a people to have the maximum impact with little effort or resources. Through knowledge, groups were identified as targets and formed the population to be managed. The population was studied as a complete unit and “gave rise . . . to comprehensive measures, statistical assessment, and intervention aimed at the social body or at groups taken as a whole” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 146). Foucault (1976/1990) used eugenics as an example of a method to regulate the population. Rulers practiced eugenics through “determining good marriages, of inducing desired fertilities, of ensuring the health and longevity of children” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 148) from aristocratic families. However, as the population emerged, “perfecting the species” had to be practiced through “exacting administration of sex” (Foucault, 1976/1990,

p 148). The “new concept of race” replaced the management of aristocratic bloodlines as the knowledge that was used for “perfecting the species” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p 148). Foucault (1976/1990) stated Nazism combined disciplinary power and biopolitics for “a eugenics ordering of society . . . in the guise of an unrestricted state control” (p. 149) with the discourse promulgated of the superior race resulted in a “systematic genocide of others” (p. 150).

The knowledge of which race was pure or better formed through practices associated with eugenics. Foucault (1976/1990) attributed the start of racism to the shift to biopolitics. The regulations and interventions from biopolitics determined where someone lived, who someone married, and what education they received. This power formed the knowledge that certain races had to be managed and controlled for “protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race” (p. 149). Biopolitics formed the knowledge of races protected and included in the ideal population. Knowledge was used to optimize people who could no longer be managed as sovereign subjects through an aristocratic bloodline. Biopolitics functioned by having the power to optimize the lives of a population efficiently. Biopolitics “had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without the same time making them more difficult to govern” (Foucault 1976/1990, p. 141). Optimization made it more efficient by forming members of the population in a certain way. Governmentality was the mechanism that managed the population.

### ***Governmentality***

In biopolitics, governmentality provides the framework for the regulation of populations. Foucault (1994/2000) stated, “The government’s purpose was the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health” (p. 217). Government managed the welfare of the population through “the right disposition of . . . wealth, resources,

means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, and so on” (Foucault, 2003, p. 235). Governmentality delivers interventions and regulations to support its objectives with the population. As a result, the government acts “either directly, through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly, through techniques that will make possible, with the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directly flow of populations into certain regions or activities, and so on” (Foucault 1994/2000, p. 217). The government was “employing tactics rather than laws, and even using laws themselves as tactics—to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such-and-such ends may be achieved” (Foucault, 2003, p. 237). The tactics formed regulations that encouraged or discouraged birth rates, such as “taxation, scarcity, depopulation, idleness-beggary-vagabondage” (Foucault, 2003, p. 261). Regulations made it appear as if the population was “‘naturally’ dependent on multiple factors that may be artificially alterable” (Foucault, 2003, p. 261). If the government deems there are too many people, the tax system might discourage births by making it more expensive to have more children. Government not only uses laws, but also “changes in attitudes, of ways of acting and living that can be obtained through ‘campaigns’” (Foucault, 2003, p. 261). The phenomenon of the population “renders possible the final elimination of the model of the family and the recentering of the notion of economy” (Foucault, 2003, p. 240).

When the shift was made to governmentality and a population, statistics were the mechanism used to assess the status of the aggregate group. Statistics provided summative information about the population’s “rate of death and diseases, its cycles of scarcity and so on” (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). Although statistics provided a picture of the political economy, the family remained the smaller unit of measure. Statistics made “it possible to quantify these

specific phenomena of the population” (Foucault, 2003, p. 241), such as birthrates and death rates. However, the statistics had to be quantified through the family because it was “considered as an element internal to the population, and as a fundamental instrument in its government” (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). The knowledge from the family came through disciplinary power; biopolitics formed the knowledge of the health/status of the population.

Power and knowledge were in both the family and the population; they are interconnected for knowledge. The family “remains a privileged segment, because whenever information is required concerning the population (sexual behavior, demography, consumption, and so on), it must be obtained through the family” (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). The population was informed of knowledge, but it was implemented through the family.

Biopower’s two poles were inseparable from the population’s regulation and control of sexuality. Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “Spread out from one pole to the other of this whole technology of sex was a whole series of different tactics that combined in varying proportions the objective of disciplining the body and that of regulating populations” (p. 146). Through governmentality, the discourse and norms associated with the population were communicated. The individual had to be shaped, controlled, and created as a docile body to adopt the discourse and behave according to the norms expressed through the discourse. Disciplinary power “was never more important or more valorized” (Foucault, 2003, p. 243) when managing a population. Biopolitics included “the collective mass of the phenomenon” by managing individuals in the population “in its depths and details” (Foucault, 2003, p. 243). Governmentality provided the mechanism for biopolitics to form knowledge to manage the population.



### ***Knowledge Through Discourse***

Disciplinary power and biopolitics shape social institutions by generating norms and producing discourse. Discourse is the means for knowledge formed through biopower to be exposed. Discourse “is about language and practices [and] defines and produces the objects of our knowledge” (Hall, 1997, p. 72). Foucault (1994/2000) detailed “how the rendering of sexual behavior is translated into discourse” (p. 238) through power and knowledge in his writings. The discourse was about what people thought or perceived to be true, which Foucault (1994/2000) called “the discourse of true and false” (p. 237). The discourse was not about what was factually true but under what conditions something became known as true or false and the effects of it. An impact of sexual behavior being translated into discourse was “having provided historians with a category so ‘self-evident’ that they can write a history of sexuality and its repression” (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. 238). Foucault (1976/1990) further explained, “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). Discourse is the knowledge created by power; this power generates more knowledge.

Through the discourse of sexuality, the development of new categories or populations of people emerged to be studied, analyzed, and judge with quasi-scientific knowledge (Foucault (1976/1990). The sexually precocious child, homosexuals, and hysterical women became populations known through the discourse of sexuality. The discourse about these populations produced subjects “who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces” (Hall, 1997, p. 80). Power produces discourse, which becomes knowledge. Knowledge forms power. Through the interaction of power and knowledge, new subjects are formed.

## The Creation of the Subject

The subject was the focus of Foucault's (1976/1990, 1994/2000) research. Foucault's (1994/2000) object was "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (p. 326). In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault (1976/1990) examined how disciplinary power and biopolitics made human beings subjects. Knowledge is gained from the discourse that springs from disciplinary power and biopolitics; this knowledge shapes and creates the subject.

Disciplinary power operates on individuals to shape their knowledge about themselves (Foucault, 1976/1990). Disciplinary power is "embodied in institutions such as the army and the schools, and in reflections on tactics, apprenticeship, education, and . . . societies" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 140). Disciplinary power works on the body by getting individuals to change their behavior or actions in response to actual or perceived surveillance. Disciplinary power also shapes subjects, influencing and changing what a person knows or how they behave. The criminal in a penal institution becomes a prisoner subjected to a structured existence of work, meals, and exercise. The prisoner's awareness of being surveilled makes the prisoner modify their behavior to the expected norm, a docile body that conforms to prison standards.

Biopolitics operates on populations through "an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 139). Biopolitics emerged to address "the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 140). Biopolitics operates on populations by "exerting a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 137). Foucault (1976/1990) saw biopower as a set of forces that "makes it possible to use its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order"

(p. 93). Through biopolitics, knowledge is formed due to being a member of a managed and controlled population.

Through biopower, new populations formed. Foucault (1976/1990) wrote about how children were sexualized and the hysterical woman as examples of new populations. Management of new populations combined “disciplinary techniques with regulatory methods” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 146). Children and women were existing populations; however, the division of these populations into the subgroups of childhood sexuality or hysterical women meant the groups had to be managed and controlled to be brought back to the norm.

Childhood sexuality became something to be managed with the implementation of institutions where children came together, such as schools and dormitories. Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “Precocious sexuality was presented from the 18th century to the end of the 19th and an epidemic menace that risked compromising not only the future health of adults but the future of the entire society and species” (p. 146). The discourse was that children had a sexuality that had to be managed and controlled for institutions to operate optimally. Regulations were put into effect to prevent children from exercising their sexuality.

An example of the use of sex as the object of power to produce knowledge is “the hysterization of women” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 146) as something to be managed in the 18th century. The interventions and controls on the population of these women “involved a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 146) and “was carried out in the name of the responsibility owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society” (p. 147). The subject of the hysterical woman was created through the knowledge formed of a woman’s body being understood and defined in terms of reproduction. Biopolitics, in turn, formed knowledge about what is normal and

abnormal behavior for women. Knowledge of acceptable and unacceptable behavior enabled biopower to exert influence over individuals and populations. The acceptable behavior produced norms. When women did not exhibit the normative behavior, they became hysterical women who were subject to disciplinary techniques to get them to behave in an acceptable manner.

Even if something is not spoken, it is part of discourse through the practices implemented to align with the discourse. Foucault (1976/1990) talked about how schools were organized “based on the assumption that this sexuality existed, that it was precocious, active, and ever present” (p. 28). Control of the sexually precocious child became a public problem with medical professionals articulating it to educational institutions and families. The assumption sexuality existed transformed “adolescent sex into discourse [and] grew to considerable dimensions” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 28). The discourse formed norms of expected behavior of a population. Biopolitics creates a normalized population of subjects; it creates and manages population norms, and norms form the subject in that image.

### **Phenomenology as Research Methodology**

Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research methodology that uses a theoretical framework for data analysis (Soule & Freeman, 2019). Researchers using phenomenology as a research method focus on a person’s experience, not perception, of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). Philosophically, phenomenology tries to make meaning from the lived experience. Vagle (2018) described phenomena as how “we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living” (p. 20).

There are three main approaches to phenomenology. The two most known approaches are Husserl and Heidegger (Peoples, 2021). Husserl developed the transcendental approach, which separates the researcher from the phenomenon. Heidegger developed a hermeneutic approach

that uses a cyclical analysis process because Heidegger believed the researcher cannot be separated from their involvement with the phenomenon. The process of analysis considers “the meaning of the phenomenon entangled in our everyday existence” (Soule & Freeman, 2019, p. 863). Finally, Vagle (2018) applied post-structuralism to phenomenology in a post-intentional approach. A post-intentional approach aligns with the post-structural concept that there are no dualistic absolutes and the relationships between subjects and objects in the world are essential. The post-intentional approach focuses on the connections between the subjects and objects. As a result, the post-structural phenomenology approach “rejects binary positions (good or bad; right or wrong), and instead offers ongoing critiques of structures and binaries, what they produce, what they will allow, what they will do not allow, and so on” (Vagle, 2018, p. 15). The approach focuses on the relationships and connections in the phenomenon by analyzing what happens in the phenomenon.

The difference between the three approaches to phenomenology is in their intentionality of the researcher. According to Soule and Freeman (2019), “Intentionality means that when we think, we experience, or direct our gaze towards an object something appears to us, is there, or has affected us, whether we are conscious of it or not” (p. 857). Intentionality describes the connectedness between subjects and objects in the world (Vagle, 2018).

First, Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology focused on understanding the phenomenon’s essence (Peoples, 2021). For Husserl, a phenomenon was “the thing itself” (Vagle, 2018, p. 7) in the human experience. In Husserl’s approach the researcher can separate their judgements from the experience of the phenomenon. To separate the researcher’s experiences and biases from the analysis of the phenomenon, Husserl proposed bracketing (Vagle, 2018). Bracketing is “suspending your judgments to focus on the studied phenomenon”

(Peoples, 2021, p. 30). Because Husserl separated the researcher's experience to get to the phenomenon's essence, applying a theoretical framework would prevent the researcher from getting to the phenomenon.

Second, Heidegger's hermeneutic cycle approach to phenomenology studies the phenomenon in the context where it manifests. The hermeneutic circle analysis is an iterative look at the whole of the data collected and analyzing them in parts, then back to the whole (Peoples, 2021; Vagle, 2018). Whereas Husserl advocated bracketing, Heidegger did not bracket because the researcher's experience is incorporated into the analysis. Instead, Heidegger recommended that phenomenological researchers journal their experiences.

A third phenomenological approach and the approach I took in my research is Vagle's (2018) post-intentional phenomenology. Post-intentional phenomenology merges phenomenology with post-structural concepts. It also introduces a dialogue between theorists' writings and the phenomenon to view the experience of the phenomenon. According to Vagle, it is impossible to separate the researcher's experiences from the data analysis. Instead of bracketing, Vagle proposed the researcher keep a post-reflexive journal throughout the study as a means for the researcher to write down their thoughts and experiences. Then, the researcher uses the journal writings in the data analysis.

There are two advantages to using a post-intentional phenomenological approach. First, it allowed me to approach my study of the danger of failing early alert by using a theorist's writings to explore the experience of the phenomenon with the subjects and objects that are part of it. Second, the post-intentional phenomenology highlights the importance of connections. From a post-intentional view, community college students and staff interact throughout the phenomenon of the early alert. Using a theorist "serves as a way to discuss and open up

complicated movements and interactions, as well as a means to explore how these assemblages encounter the work of post-intentional phenomenological craftwork” (Vagle, 2018, p. 135). My research design enabled me to explore these connections.

### **Summary**

Learning analytics, including early alert, are studied by researchers almost exclusively in terms of measurable outputs (Baneres et al., 2019; Calvert, 2014; Lourens & Bleazard, 2016; Wong & Li, 2020). Quantitative research often focuses on analyzing effectiveness in terms of desired outputs. Quantitative approaches overlook the human experience and interaction in the phenomenon of the early alert. Using Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) thinking with theory approach, I researched learning analytics from a perspective that included the relation and connection between subjects in an early alert. Thinking with theory uses concepts and ideas from a theorist in dialogue with the data in the analysis. I used Foucault’s conceptualization of how power and knowledge work together for my data analysis. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology I used to collect and analyze the data.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

I used post-intentional phenomenological inquiry to understand how community college students, faculty, and advisors experience their college's use of learning analytics from an early alert system. The phenomenon under study was the danger of failing early alert at a community college in a mid-Atlantic state in the United States. The study used Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) framework of power and knowledge to explore how the phenomenon of the early alert operates to create successful student subjects who pass classes, persist at the college, and graduate. I analyzed the movement of power and knowledge formation in subjects when a faculty member issued a danger of failing alert to a student.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the phenomenon of danger of failing early alert shape students' experiences at a community college?
2. How does movement of power and creation of knowledge occur in the practices of an early alert in the experiences of: (a) community college students, (b) student success advisors, and (c) faculty?

#### **Research Design**

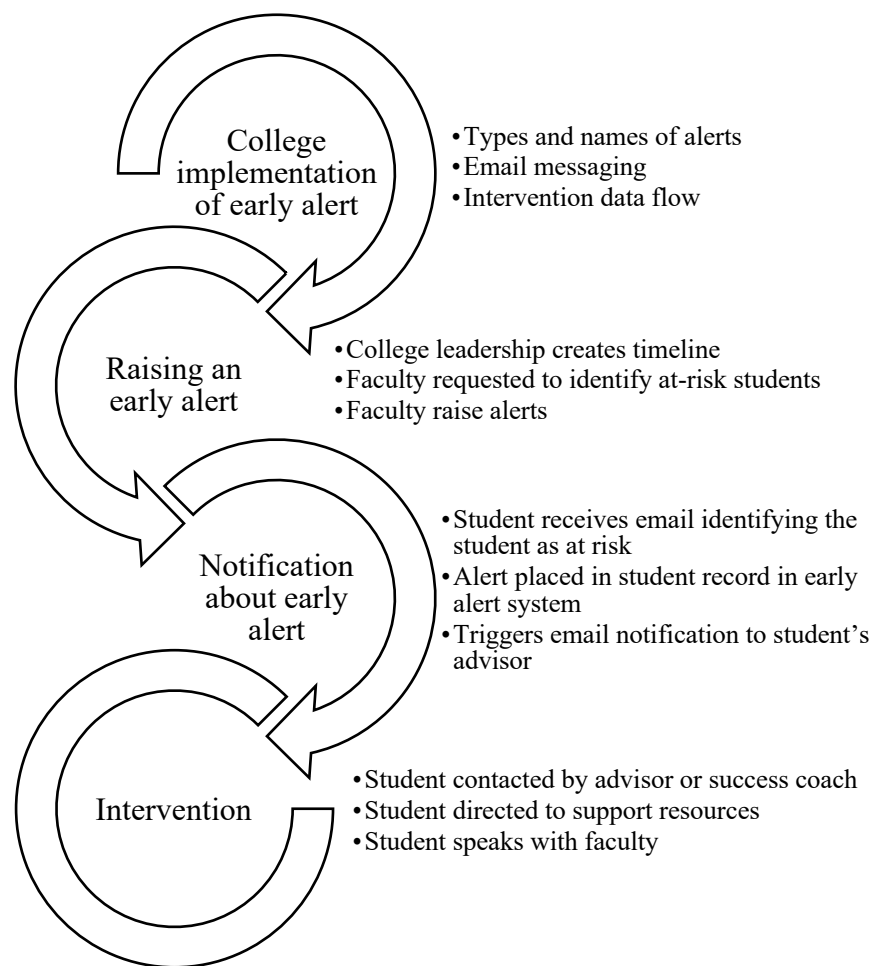
I used Vagle's (2018) approach to post-intentional phenomenological research. Postqualitative inquiry does not have a specific, step-by-step method (St. Pierre, 2021). However, Vagle (2018) described a five-part cyclical process as a starting point for post-intentional phenomenological research. The first step is to "identify a post-intentional phenomenon(s) in context, around a social issue" (Vagle, 2018, p. 140). I studied the



phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert. The social issue this alert addressed is student success.

Colleges use early alerts to identify and help students who are not likely to persist (Villano et al., 2018). For community colleges, administrators measure student success through “transfer to 4-year institutions . . . scores on standardized college entry exams, college grades, and credit hours in consecutive terms, which represents progress toward the degree” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 5). College leaders consider student success the key to retention, graduation, and upward mobility for community college students (Floyd et al., 2019; Gill & Harrison, 2019). The social issue I addressed was how student success is equated only to measurable constructs, such as not failing or persistence.

The second step Vagle (2018) proposed was to “develop a clear yet flexible process for gathering phenomenological material appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 139). Based on the literature, I expected the phenomenon to produce relationships among students, advisors, faculty, and administrators at a community college (Felton & Lambert, 2020). Therefore, I created a preliminary mapping of the community college’s early alert desired process (see Figure 1). Figure 1 depicts the movement of the alert from its creation to the student interaction with the student success advisor or course instructor and also identifies the people and documents related to the phenomenon of the early alert.

**Figure 1***Early Alert Mapping*

The college's director of early alert identified the faculty, students, and advisors involved in the early alert phenomenon. The director also described the early alert program and the process associated with the danger of failing early alert. I aligned data sources with my research questions from this initial data gathering activity (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Data Sources for Research Questions*

Research questions	Data sources
1. How does the phenomenon of danger of failing early alert shape students' experiences at a community college?	Transcripts from individual interviews with student participants using Zoom Written artifacts, including emails and text messages sent to the student from the college Researcher's journal
2. How does movement of power and creation of knowledge occur in the practices of an early alert in the experiences of: (a) community college students, (b) success advisors, and (c) faculty?	Zoom transcripts from individual interviews with student, faculty, and staff participants Written and graphic artifacts from the early alert director about the early alert process at the college Researcher's journal College's student success website

Vagle's (2018) third step is to develop a post-reflexion plan as means for the researcher to journal their experiences and assumptions. I used the post-reflexion method to journal my experiences and assumptions before, during, and after data collection. My post-reflexion did not separate my beliefs and experiences from the data analysis. Instead, I tried to understand "what frames [my] seeing" (Vagle, 2018, p. 153) of the phenomenon. Vagle (2018) recommended the researcher draft an "initial post-reflexion statement" and use a journal to continue to "post-reflex" (p. 155) throughout the study. The journal was the means of creating my post-reflexion plan and a data source for data analysis.

The fourth step of Vagle's (2018) post-intentional phenomenological methodology is data analysis. In this step, I read the post-intentional phenomenological material alongside Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) concept of power/knowledge manifested. Through this process, I looked for intrarelations that "emphasize emergent relations within phenomena" (Kuntz, 2015, p. 87). I focused on the practices, strategies, and discourses of an early alert that created subjects who

were successful students. For Foucault, discourse happens when people accept statements as truth (Ball, 2013). In a post-intentional phenomenological study, the essence of a phenomenon cannot be isolated and captured; the focus is on the interconnection of relationships. To better understand it in the data analysis, I read a theorist's writings alongside the study's data.

I read Foucault's writings alongside the data gathered to conduct my analysis. Using a theorist's concepts "helps us extend our thinking beyond an easy sense" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 7). I used Foucault's power/knowledge writings from *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1975/1995), *The History of Sexuality, Part I* (Foucault, 1976/1990), *Power/Knowledge* (Foucault, 1980), and selected essays in *Power* (Foucault, 1994/2000). Using Foucault's conceptualization of power/knowledge, I examined the data to "analyze power relations as something that circulates within and among the practices of people" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 56). Foucault identified the techniques of power that produce norms on populations, knowledge of right and wrong, or truth or fiction. Foucault's power/knowledge is a helpful framework to apply to the study of early alerts in higher education because "education is . . . employed to reinforce select norms, to produce a degree of self-regulation" (Kuntz, 2015, p. 41). I analyzed the effects of power in the phenomenon of the early alert to identify what forms of power were in use (see Table 2). Finally, I explored the post-reflexions from my journal with the collected data and Foucault's writings on power/knowledge.

**Table 2***Areas of Analysis*

Area of analysis	Foucault's framework/definition
Power	Looking at the strategy to see disciplinary power and biopolitics in operation. A strategy is "a certain relation of forces [power]" that "not only to maintain itself, but to accentuate, stabilize and broaden itself" (Foucault, 1980, p. 206).
Knowledge	Examining the discourse of the danger of failing early alert to gain insight into knowledge formed. "Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 101).
The subject	Foucault identified three means by which human beings become subjects: "modes of inquiry that try to give themselves the status of sciences . . . objectifying the productive subject, the subject who labors, in the analysis of wealth and economics" or "the objectifying of the sheer fact of being alive in natural history or biology" (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. 326).

The fifth and final step is to create "a text that engages the productions and provocations of the post-intentional phenomenon in context(s), around a social issue" (Vagle, 2018, p. 139). In this step, the researcher writes to bring together a description of how the phenomenon takes shape. Instead of categorizing data into groups or themes, I wrote about power/knowledge in early alerts. Kuntz (2015) described it as "a transition away from logics of extraction to a more relational means of identification" (p. 51). This writing is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Context of the Study**

The context of the study is the set of practices associated with a danger of failing early alert at a community college. Care Community College, a pseudonym, was a community college in a mid-Atlantic state and was part of a statewide system at the time of the study. The community college was in a town with a 4-year state university, where students typically aimed to transfer. Interviews took place over Zoom (<https://zoom.us>) in my home office. Participants joined the interview virtually from the college, at home, or in a car. I worked on my journaling at

my house. I focused on the connections between students, faculty, and staff involved in the danger of failing alert at Care Community College.

The phenomenon I studied was the danger of failing early alert. The college used the alert to communicate that a student would not complete the class with a passing grade unless something were to change. The alert notification included information to direct the student to college resources to help the student make necessary changes and decisions not to fail the course. I chose the danger of failing early alert as the phenomenon to study for several reasons. First, the college had instructed faculty to raise this alert when a student had a D or F grade and was in danger of failing the course. Second, when a faculty member raised the danger of failing alert, the early alert system opened a case that Lawrence, a student success advisor, described as one of the alerts “serious enough to open a case” about the student. The early alert system triggers a notification to the student success advisors that the student has a case open. Only three alerts created a case; the other two did not. The danger of failing, referral to the student success office, and social or personal concern alert types opened a case in the system. Lack of engagement/participation in class and a performance concern did not. Finally, the college had positive feedback alerts, including good engagement, off to a good start, outstanding academic performance, and showing improvement. However, positive alerts did not create cases, nor did the college initiate contact to direct resources to the student. Due to the connections between students, faculty, and advisors in the danger of failing alert, analyzing power and knowledge was a means to examine how the successful student subject is created.

### **Identification of Participants and Data Sources**

Participants in the study were students, staff, and faculty members involved in the early alert phenomenon for a danger of failing early alert at Care Community College. I chose to

interview people in these three roles because each role had a different point of interaction and experience with the alert and one another. The chosen participants “experienced the phenomenon under investigation . . . provide a thorough and rich description of the phenomenon, and . . . collectively represents the range of multiple, partial, and varied contexts . . . identified” (Vagle, 2018, p. 147). Because students, faculty, and advisors represented different roles involved in the early alert phenomenon at the college, I recruited multiple people in each of these roles.

### **Participant Recruitment**

I recruited participants at the college by working with the early alert director to identify potential participants. The director ran a query to generate an email list of students who received the danger of failing early alert. Students in the list received an email inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The email described the study, participation expectations, and compensation. Student participants received a \$25 Amazon gift card for each interview completed. Because students contacted me directly if they wanted to participate, the college’s early alert director did not know the identities of the student participants.

The director generated a list of students who received a danger of failing alert in a Fall 2021 course. As a result, 14 students who received the danger of failing alert contacted me about participating. Students completed an online consent form that contained two screening questions to confirm they received the danger of failing alert and were over 18 years old. A copy of the student consent form is in Appendix C. Once the consent form was completed, I sent students a link to an online scheduling form to schedule an interview at their convenience. Out of the 14 students who contacted me, 10 students scheduled and completed the first interview during the Fall 2021 semester; furthermore, 8 of the 10 students returned for a second interview in the Spring 2022 semester. Of the four students who contacted me but did not complete an interview,

two students scheduled an interview but canceled it; one of the canceling students had to work, and the other student's father passed away the day before the interview. I sent the remaining two students a second email to schedule their interview, but I did not get a reply.

The college's director of early alert assisted with recruiting faculty and advisor participants. The director forwarded the faculty and advisor recruitment flyer in Appendix B to faculty members and student success advisors at the college. Because two of the three student success advisors had only been working at the college for 3 months, the director also forwarded the flyer to three former student success advisors. As a result, six faculty members and six advisors participated in the study. A copy of the faculty and staff consent form is in Appendix D.

Faculty participants included an English instructor, a humanities instructor, two math instructors, and two student development instructors. All faculty participants had raised the danger of failing alert in at least one class in the Fall 2021 semester. The advisor participants had interacted with students who received the danger of failing alert by contacting them by phone, email, text, or in person.

### **Data Sources**

Interactions with participants produced interview transcripts, archival documents, and journal notes. Table 3 contains a description of the data sources. Archival documents included the email to faculty requesting complete progress reports, which raised alerts; the email communication to students notifying them about the danger of failing alert; the college's student success webpage; an image of a progress report in the early alert system; and a document with the college's alert types and the follow-up process for each alert.



**Table 3***Description of Data Sources Used for Analysis*

Data source	Description	Data analyzed
Early alert director	Interview with early alert director to map the early alert process at the college	Interview transcript
Faculty	Faculty member who raised the early alert for the student	Interview transcript
Students	Students who received the danger of failing alert: the first interview during the semester; the second interview the following semester after the course was completed	Interview transcript
Student success advisors	The academic advisor or success coach who contacted the student as an intervention to provide support to overcome the danger of failing alert	Interview transcript
Early alert system progress report form	De-identified screenshot of a progress report from the college's early alert system	Image
Early alert email to faculty	The email faculty members received from the college asked them to complete a progress report to issue early alerts to their academically at-risk students	Email text
Early alert email notification to student	The email sent directly to the student informed the student a faculty member had raised an early alert	Email text
College documentation on all early alerts	The description of all early alerts used at Care Community College. The document also included: when to use the alert, what happens when the alert is generated, and form of intervention (if any). The documentation also included the language in students' emails for each alert	Word document
College student success webpage	Webpage on the college site with information on making appointments with the student success advisors, information about academic warning and probation, and study skills	Webpage
Researcher journal	Journal the researcher created for post-reflexion plan	Journal text

**Data Gathering**

The primary data source was interviews with participants who had experienced the danger of failing early alert. The interviews were semistructured using Roulston's (2010) phenomenological interviewing approach and an interview protocol. However, I asked many questions as "follow up to the participant's responses . . . to gain specific details of the

participant's experience" (Roulston, 2010, p. 17). I also requested documents and images associated with the early alert process at the college during interviews with participants.

I interviewed students, faculty, and staff about their experiences with the danger of failing early alert in the Fall 2021 semester. All interviews were conducted using Zoom, were recorded, and were later transcribed. I held the interviews after the midterm of the fall semester. The college requested faculty raise the danger of failing early alerts between the semester's midterm and before the last day to withdraw without a grade penalty. The early alert director interview protocol is in Appendix E, the faculty interview protocol is in Appendix F, and the student success advisor interview protocol is in Appendix G.

I conducted two interviews with students: (a) one in the midterm of the Fall 2021 semester and (b) a second interview in the Spring 2022 semester. I selected this timing for the first student interview to capture their immediate reactions and response to receiving the early alert notification. At this point in the semester, the student did not know the official grade outcome of the course with the danger of failing alert. I met with each student participant individually and conducted a semistructured interview through Zoom. The first interview protocol for students is in Appendix H. I completed a second interview with student participants at the beginning of the following semester after they received their final grades for their courses. Phenomenological interviewing may include more than one interview with participants (Roulston, 2010). The purpose of the second interview was to ask follow-up questions from the first interview and find out the outcome of the course. I also asked questions about participants' demographic data. The second interview with students was my final phase of data collection. The second interview protocol for students is in Appendix I. Upon completion of the interview,

student participants received a \$25 Amazon gift card to compensate them for their time and participation in the study.

All interview recordings were transcribed using otter.ai, a web-based transcription service. I reviewed all transcripts for accuracy. In addition, I created aliases for participants and the college study site. My interview approach enabled me “to gain detailed descriptions” of the participant’s “lived experience” (Roulston, 2010, p. 17) to use for data analysis. I had 31 interview transcripts from students, faculty members, and advisors about participants’ experiences with the danger of failing early alert.

In addition to the transcripts of participants’ interviews, I gathered data from students, including emails and texts they received from the college about the early alert. The director of early alert provided the electronic document with the email text students received for all early alerts at the college, a screenshot of a de-identified progress report from the early alert system, and a link to the college’s student success website. Finally, I kept a journal where I recorded my thoughts and ideas from my readings and the interviews, which formed the basis for my post-reflexion plan.

### **Positionality Statement**

For 6 years, I managed the early alert system at a community college system. As the early alert coordinator, I managed the system’s day-to-day operations and coordinated the system’s configuration with the college representatives like the student success advisors in the study. I focused on keeping the early alert system working. I assumed the early alert system promoted student success because the college and system office leadership publicly advocated it. I thought early alert learning analytics could solve community college students’ problems (e.g., falling courses, dropping out) by predicting a potential failure to prevent it from happening. I thought

data could inform people at the college early and often, and they could apply a fix as a remedy to the student attrition problem and help students be more successful.

While I worked as the early alert director, my children entered college. One child struggled in their classes. I had conversations with my child about how to respond to being in danger of failing and what the implications of failing a course would be. Discussions with my child and working with college early alert directors made me realize how important having someone intervene and talk through response options could help students.

I became interested in understanding the intersection of early alert learning analytic data and relationships. I was curious about how relationships and connections facilitate or hinder the operation of an early alert for a student in danger of failing a course. Finally, I wanted to know if and how faculty members, student success advisors, and students connected and worked together.

### **Data Analysis**

Using Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) power/knowledge as a framework, I analyzed data from the interview transcripts and documents about early alerts at the college. This form of analysis is Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) thinking with theory approach, which is in line with post-intentional phenomenology. Thinking with theory uses a theorist's writings as a companion when analyzing study data. Reading Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) works, alongside my transcripts, the college's early alert documentation, the texts of emails to students and faculty, and my research journal enabled me to "extend [my] thinking beyond an easy sense" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 7). It gave me the tools to examine data using a poststructuralist approach free from coding or charting themes. I selected Foucault's power and knowledge as the theoretical

framework for analysis of the data related to power and knowledge in the phenomenon of early alert at Care Community College.

Data analysis in post-intentional phenomenology focuses on the connections in the phenomenon. Researchers do not separate the data into elements that can be categorized and grouped into themes; Kuntz (2015) referred to this approach to data analysis as a “logic of extraction” where the researcher separates the data from their context into distinct data points “to make something ‘knowable’ through extracting it from the immediate context it manifests” (p. 44). Instead, the post-intentional phenomenologist examines connections, assemblages, or entanglements in the data to look for relations or associations in the data gathered (Vagle, 2012). The researcher should observe where they connect or experience a disconnection. The researcher should also pay attention to what they assume is normal, their immovable beliefs, and observations that surprise them. Kuntz (2015) advocated for “a transition away from logics of extraction to a more relational means of identification” (p. 51). I performed my analysis using Vagle’s (2012) relational approach rather than an extractive approach.

For this study, I used a theoretical framework to examine relationships and connections in the data. Specifically, I used Foucault’s (1975/1995, 1976/1990) writings about how power/knowledge work together to create the subject and recognize the effects of power and knowledge in creating the successful student subject. Foucault’s writings enabled me to approach the data with this framework to explore relationships and connections between participants in the phenomenon of the early alert.

The approach to looking for connections and relationships in the data is diagrammatical thinking. *Diagrammatical thinking* is a way of analyzing data in qualitative research that seeks to recognize the process of becoming through the various relations and connections that form the

subjects and objects in the phenomenon (Freeman, 2017). Like Kuntz's (2015) anti-extractive logics approach, Freeman's (2017) diagrammatical thinking for data analysis emphasizes relations instead of sorting the data into categories. Diagrammatical thinking "requires that researchers step away from . . . inductively- or deductively-derived logical conclusions, where language and other systems account for their conclusion, and turn to the analysis of assemblages in motion" (Freeman, 2017, p. 100). Thus, diagrammatical thinking enabled me to analyze the data to see connections and relationships formed in the phenomenon of the early alert.

I began data analysis by rereading Foucault's writings alongside the experiences shared by participants to illuminate where power and knowledge manifested in participants' understanding of the early alert in their lives. First, I examined the practices of early alert. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) stated, "Power relations . . . circulates within and among the practices of people" (p. 56). Foucault (1994/2000) described practices as the "places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect" (p. 255). Power manifests through the relationships of participants who interact in the practices associated with the early alert.

I interwove Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) writings on power and knowledge with the data to illustrate how power moves in the phenomenon of the early alert and how knowledge is constructed. I reviewed the data and my post-reflexive journal using Foucault's writings on power/knowledge to identify the movement of power and the construction of knowledge through connections and relationships. Foucault's (1994/2000) approach "consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (p. 329). I examined the discourse produced from the power relations in the early alert to understand the knowledge formed and accepted as common sense about what makes a college student successful. To understand how a student at

risk of failing is created, I looked at what was happening in the discourse using early alert learning analytics, and I used this approach to understand the danger of failing alert.

I began data analysis by identifying examples of how the participants' words expressed power and knowledge in the interview transcripts. Power is conceptualized as relations but knowledge manifests through norms and discourse (Foucault, 1994/2000). For power, I looked for stories that described strategies executed after connections were formed. For knowledge, I looked at what participants spoke as truth expressed through norms and discourse.

My data analysis process was cyclical. I read transcripts, reread Foucault, looked at my reading notes, and thought about my reflexions. By reading these documents—not straight through, but in parts—I could ask questions about the texts and make connections to the data. Vagle (2018) referred to this process as a “careful reading of these phenomenological materials in dynamic and playful dialogue” (p. 157), which I did with Foucault's theory of power and knowledge and my post-reflexion.

I followed Vagle's (2018) process by initially completing “a careful line-by-line reading of interview transcripts” (pp. 156–157), archival documents, and my journal in conjunction with one another. I looked for conceptual connections between segments of data and power and knowledge. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) called this process *plugging in*, wherein the theorist and data are read and analyzed alongside one another to show “how each constitutes the other and . . . sprouts as something new into threshold” (p. 10). The plugging process enabled me to create a new and different understanding of the experience of the danger of failing early alert phenomenon.

I read the transcripts and made notes where I thought participants' words aligned with power or knowledge. I reread Foucault's writings, connecting participants' experiences with the

phenomenon of the early alert and Foucault's description of power/knowledge. Aligned with my literature review, I looked for statements of truth and the knowledge that bound them together. I wove participants' narratives of their experiences with Foucault's description of power/knowledge.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study, which is characteristic of all qualitative research, was results are not generalizable to other college populations or different alert types. However, the description from the analysis of the danger of failing early alert at Care Community College should inform others to use early alert systems to notify students in danger of failing a course.

Another limitation was using a text written in another language as the primary text for analysis. Foucault wrote *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* in his native language of French. I used the English translations of these texts. Even though scholars have translated both works, subtle cultural differences and nuances in language use are lost in translations; conceptualizing power and knowledge are examples of translated words that carry different meanings.

### **Summary**

Post-intentional phenomenological methodology enabled me to collect data about the early alert phenomenon at Care Community College. Analyzing interview transcripts, documents, and my journal, I described the types of power and its movement and how that forms knowledge in the subjects involved in the early alert. The exercise of power occurs in the relationships between participants, and the knowledge created shapes them as subjects. In the next chapter, I discuss the results.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert creates subjects through power and knowledge. The strategy of the early alert enables power to move from one subject to another, which forms knowledge. Two forms of power are exercised as “a mode of action upon the action of others” (Foucault, 1994/2000, p. 341): (a) disciplinary and (b) biopolitics. Disciplinary power manifests in the early alert when a faculty member or advisor interacts with a student to get them to become a successful college student. Biopolitics is expressed through the college managing the at-risk population of students through the practices of an early alert. Students gain knowledge about themselves, and as college students, through disciplinary power and biopolitics. Power and knowledge are constantly forming and shaping one another to create subjects. The power/knowledge of the danger of failing early alert can transform the failing student and the at-risk population into successful college students that pass classes.

The following two research questions guided this study:

1. How does the phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert shape students’ experiences at a community college?
2. How does movement of power and creation of knowledge occur in the practices of an early alert in the experiences of: (a) community college students, (b) student success advisors, and (c) faculty?

In this chapter, after introducing the participants, I explain the practices of the early alert at Care Community College; these practices form the strategy of the early alert. Next, I explain how the phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert operates and shapes students’ experiences at a community college to address the first research question. Finally, I share

examples from participants where disciplinary power and biopolitics manifested after the danger of failing alert was raised. To address the second research question, I describe the knowledge students formed by being an at-risk of failing student at the college. Finally, I show how the knowledge generated from biopower shapes the student into being a successful college student.

### **Participant Information**

I gathered participant information from interview data. All participants were given pseudonyms to keep their identities private. Although participants' gender and race are important, my analysis did not use these demographics. Therefore, I did not include gender and race information in the tables. I also did not want to compromise my participants' identities by providing unnecessary, detailed demographic information about them. I used students' self-described gender identity to ensure I used the correct pronouns when I referenced the student in the analysis of the results.

### **Student Participants**

The student demographics table (see Table 4) includes the student's age, if they were a first-semester student, if they were a first-generation student, and if the student was receiving financial aid. In addition, the subject area of the course and the course grade are included. Student demographic and class data were gleaned from the first interview. Table 5 contains information about the course(s) in which the student received the early alert. I collected missing student data during the second interview. The tables with the summary data are followed by a more detailed description of each student's academic goals and early alert context.

**Table 4***Student Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	First semester	First generation	Receiving financial aid
Amy	23	Yes	No	Yes
Andy	19	Yes	No	Yes
Becca	Unknown	No	Unknown	Yes
Cameron	26	No	No	Yes
Donna	38	No	Yes	Yes
Gloria	24	No	Yes	Yes
Michelle	18	Yes	No	Yes
Nancy	18	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Wanda	19	No	Yes	Yes
Yolanda	31	No	No	Yes

*Note.* Becca and Nancy only participated in the first interview; thus, some of their demographic data are unknown.

**Table 5***Student Danger of Failing Early Alert Participant Course Information*

Pseudonym	Course	Delivery method	Grade
Amy	Student orientation	Online asynchronous	A
Andy	Humanities and social sciences	In person	C
Becca	English	Online synchronous	Unknown <sup>a</sup>
Cameron	Humanities and social sciences	Online asynchronous	F
Donna	Humanities and social sciences	Online asynchronous	C
Gloria	English	Online asynchronous	F
Michelle	Student orientation	Online asynchronous	B
Nancy	Science	In person	F <sup>b</sup>
Wanda <sup>c</sup>	English	In person	D
	Math	In person	F
	Computer science	Online asynchronous	C or D
Yolanda	Humanities	Online asynchronous	W

<sup>a</sup> Becca's final grade was uncertain because she did not participate in the second interview the following semester. <sup>b</sup> During the first interview, Nancy stated it was too late for her to withdraw from the class and she would fail. <sup>c</sup> Wanda received the danger of failing alert in three classes.

***Amy***

Amy was an 18-year-old, first-semester, full-time college student. Her educational goal was to get her bachelor's degree in education. She was in the liberal arts degree program at the college. She planned to transfer to an in-state, 4-year state university to complete her bachelor's degree. She was enrolled in 14 credit hours. Amy received the early alert notification in the student orientation course. The course was in a 12-week session and was synchronous using Zoom. Her instructor was Ms. Smith, a faculty participant in the study. Amy had technical issues and was unable to submit her Week 2 assignment. Amy spoke with the teacher. The instructor did not accept late work; however, Amy could have earned extra credit to make up for the missed

assignment by attending supplemental, synchronous class sessions via Zoom. Amy received an A in the course.

### ***Andy***

Andy was a 19-year-old, first-semester college student from South America. He was studying engineering and planned to transfer to an in-state, 4-year university to get a chemical or industrial engineering degree. Andy received the danger of failing alert in a 10-week humanities course because he forgot to complete quizzes and view video lectures. Andy contacted the instructor about the alert. He received a C in the class.

### ***Becca***

Becca was a single mom who was pursuing her associate's degree in education. Before receiving the alert, her financial aid was reset, and she could not receive a grade lower than a C in the class. Otherwise, she would have lost her financial assistance. Becca received the danger of failing alert in an English class. She reported she received the danger of failing alert every semester. She contacted her instructor after receiving the alert, and the instructor allowed her to turn in assignments late. Unfortunately, Becca only participated in the first interview.

### ***Cameron***

Cameron was a 26-year-old student who was pursuing a certificate in entrepreneurship and another one in political science. She had two early childhood education certificates she earned from the college when she was 20. She worked as a nanny but her educational goal was to get certificates to become an entrepreneur. She received the danger of failing early alert in a humanities class for the political science certificate. Traditional class sessions are 16-weeks. The college also has 8-week class sessions. The first 8-week session starts in August at the beginning of the traditional semester. The second 8-week session starts mid-October. Her course was a

second 8-week course offered online. When she took the course, she did not have internet in her home. She completed her online coursework either at her boyfriend's house or when she was on campus for another course. She missed a week of school due to being in the hospital for a medical issue. She informed the instructor beforehand and was granted an extension. However, after she returned, the instructor raised the alert and asked her via email if she planned to complete the class. She stopped completing her work after that point. Cameron received an F in the course.

### ***Donna***

Donna was a 38-year-old student who aspired to enroll in a nursing program to get her nursing degree. She was taking prerequisite courses for the program and took classes from 2008 to 2012. In 2012, she entered the nursing program and said she “flunked out” in her 1st semester. Fall 2021 was her 1st semester returning to school. She thought she needed additional prerequisite courses to reapply for the nursing program; however, she realized she had already completed the prerequisite coursework and was only required to take the nursing program entrance exam. At the time of the study, she worked in a hospital in the neonatal intensive care unit. She wanted to be a registered nurse when she graduated. She received an email notifying her she had received the danger of failing alert in a humanities course. The email included information about scheduling an appointment with a student success advisor. She set up an appointment and spoke by phone with the student success advisor, who encouraged her to keep going because she had time to raise her grade. She received a C in the course.

### ***Gloria***

Gloria was a 24-year-old, first-generation student. At the time of the study, she worked as a nurse's aide. She was pursuing an associate in science degree and planned to transfer to

become a physician's assistant. She wanted to enroll in a 4-year state university in another city. She received the danger of failing alert in an online English class. She struggled with the course. She contacted her instructor to see if she could get extra credit or get another opportunity with an assignment, but her instructor did not offer that opportunity in the course. She failed the course. However, she connected with a student success advisor through a text message, who encouraged her to register for classes the following semester. The text message was unrelated to the alert she received.

### ***Michelle***

Michelle was an 18-year-old, recent high school graduate who was initially pursuing a career studies certificate in cybersecurity. Instead, Michelle decided to pursue a graphics and media arts certificate and a web technologies certificate because they were more creative technology fields. At the time of the study, it was their 1st semester in college. Michelle received the danger of failing early alert in the 2nd week of the student orientation course. The class was an online 12-week class. Michelle received it because they were turning in only half the assignments. Michelle was not familiar with the learning management system (i.e., Canvas) and missed seeing assignments to complete. As a result, Michelle only submitted half of the assignments due. Michelle attended additional synchronous Zoom classes with the instructor to get extra credit and received a B in the course.

### ***Nancy***

Nancy was a recent high school graduate in her 1st semester of college. She wanted to become a surgical technologist and was enrolled in a degree program at the college. She planned to get a job after her degree and return to school for her bachelor's degree, if necessary. She received the danger of failing alert in her in-person science class. Nancy thought her grade in the

course would be an F because it was too late to withdraw when she received the alert. Nancy only participated in the first interview.

### ***Wanda***

Wanda was a 19-year-old student in the general studies program. She wanted to enroll in a program at another community college not offered at Care Community College. She was taking the general education courses for the other program at Care Community College because, at the time of the study, she resided near the college. In the 2nd week of classes during the Fall 2021 semester, she had the COVID-19 virus and was hospitalized. She missed 3 weeks of classes until she recovered and could return. She received the danger of failing alert in three classes: English, math, and computers. She received the email notification when she returned home from the hospital. She worked with her professors and obtained accommodations, including class notes and extra time to turn in missed assignments. She received a D in her English class, an F in her math class, and either a C or a D in the computer class. She did not receive her final grade from the instructor, and she did not realize the college's student information system contained a transcript of her courses and grades.

As a result of the grades for her courses, she was not making satisfactory academic progress (SAP) and was at risk of losing her financial aid. She appealed the SAP ruling and was able to keep her financial assistance to remain in school. A condition granting the SAP appeal was she was required to meet with a student success advisor. Starting in Spring 2022, she regularly met with a student success advisor, Lawrence.

### ***Yolanda***

Yolanda was a 31-year-old returning student. She attended a private university after high school but did not finish her degree. At the time of the study, she worked as a personal chef and



was taking classes. Her educational goal was to complete coursework at the college and then transfer to a 4-year state school for a specific program. Her father became sick midsemester and passed away a few weeks later. Her grandmother died a month later. She had to travel out of state frequently after her father's death to help her family.

She received the alert in a humanities class required for the program at the 4-year university. The class was a second 8-week class, and she spoke with the instructor via Zoom after receiving the alert. The instructor advised her to withdraw before the grade penalty instead of trying to catch up so it did not bring down her grades in her other classes and hurt her chances of transferring. She received a W (i.e., withdrawal) in the course.

### **Faculty Participants**

Faculty participants included four full-time instructors and two adjunct instructors. All participants taught courses that transferred to 4-year institutions (see Table 6). The math instructors also taught technical math courses, which were part of an applied associate's program. The early alert system allowed faculty to raise alerts at any time during the semester. Midway through the semester, faculty received an email notification from the student success office prompting them to complete a progress report.

**Table 6***Faculty Participants*

Pseudonym	Subject area
Dr. Haas	Math
Dr. Jones	Student orientation (adjunct)
Dr. Kern	Humanities and social sciences
Dr. Nelson	English
Dr. Smith	Student orientation (adjunct)
Dr. Warner	Math

***Dr. Haas***

Dr. Haas was a math teacher who primarily taught all levels of math classes, from Calculus III to technical math. Dr. Haas had taught math at the college for the prior 8 years. He taught as an adjunct math instructor for 2 years before being full time.

***Dr. Jones***

Dr. Jones taught student orientation at the college as an adjunct. She was previously employed in a nonacademic role at the college and, at the time of the study, was employed by a private organization. She taught exclusively online.

***Dr. Kern***

Dr. Kern was a humanities and social sciences professor who had, at the time of the study, taught for the past 30 years, with the last 20 being at Care Community College.

***Dr. Nelson***

Dr. Nelson had taught for over 25 years and had been at Care Community College for the past 11 years. She taught all levels of English: developmental English corequisite with English composition, both semesters of English composition, and world literature.

***Dr. Smith***

In addition to adjunct teaching student orientation, Dr. Smith was employed at the college as an academic coach. Academic coaches were a separate group from the student success advisors; however, they worked together on initiatives, such as contacting currently enrolled students who were not registered for the upcoming term. At the time of the study, she had been at the college for 9 years.

***Dr. Warner***

Dr. Warner was a math teacher who had taught math for the 15 years prior to the study. For the last 10 years, she had been at Care Community College. She was a member of the college's committee when the first early alert system was adopted in 2013.

**Student Success Advisor Participants**

Student success advisors worked in the student success office at Care Community College. Their two primary job functions were to manage a caseload of students who were not making SAP and to respond to students who received early alerts that created a case. The danger of failing early alert created a case in the system. Danger of failing early alert cases were assigned to student success advisors for follow up.

Student success advisors were different from academic advisors at the college. Academic advisors focused on academic advising on students' courses and programs. The college website described the role of student success as helping students overcome hurdles that obstruct their development into an informed and complete individual. At the time of the study, the office had three full-time employees. Because two employees had been in the position for less than 3 months, I interviewed former student success advisors. Table 7 includes participants' pseudonyms and the years they were employed at the college.

**Table 7***Student Success Advisors*

Pseudonym	Years at college
Ann	2021 to present
Heather	2014 to 2019
Lawrence	2005 to present
Patty	2018 to 2021
Sally	2014 to 2019
Wayne	2021 to present

**Early Alert Practices**

College staff used an advising and early alert technology system called EAB Navigate to track and notify students that they were in danger of failing a course. A student success advisor configured the system to send the faculty an email midway through the semester requesting faculty members to identify students who were in danger of failing the course. The email linked to the EAB Navigate system to a form called a progress report. An example of the email is in Appendix J. All college faculty received an email requesting feedback about their students' attendance and academic performance in their classes. The email was linked to the EAB system's progress report, which listed all the students in the class with a drop-down list of predetermined alert options. An example of the progress report form is in Appendix K. Notifying a student they are in danger of failing was one of the drop-down options on the form. The complete name of the alert is *danger of failing—consider withdrawing*.

**Faculty and Advisor Early Alert Practices**

The early alert system triggered two actions when the faculty member raised the danger of failing alert. First, the student received an automatic email notification with a standardized

message informing them that they may fail the course. The email instructed students to contact their instructor or an advisor in the student success office for assistance. The second action was creating a case in the early alert system. When a case was made in the system, the system automatically notified the student's academic advisor. The student was flagged in the system for follow up from a student success advisor. The student was assigned to a student success advisor's caseload of at-risk students. Advisors contacted and tracked at-risk students to assist them with responding to the alert.

The college employed three student success advisors who worked with at-risk students on academic probation along with students who received a danger of failing early alert. Each advisor had a caseload of students they initially contacted and followed up with regularly. Lawrence (i.e., a student success advisor) tried to "reach out to the students . . . try to figure out what is happening . . . [and] read the notes by the faculty or adjunct who sent in the alerts." Students on academic warning, or students who had their financial aid reinstated, were automatically assigned to an advisor's caseload. The college administration required students to meet with their advisor regularly when on academic warning or when their financial aid was reinstated.

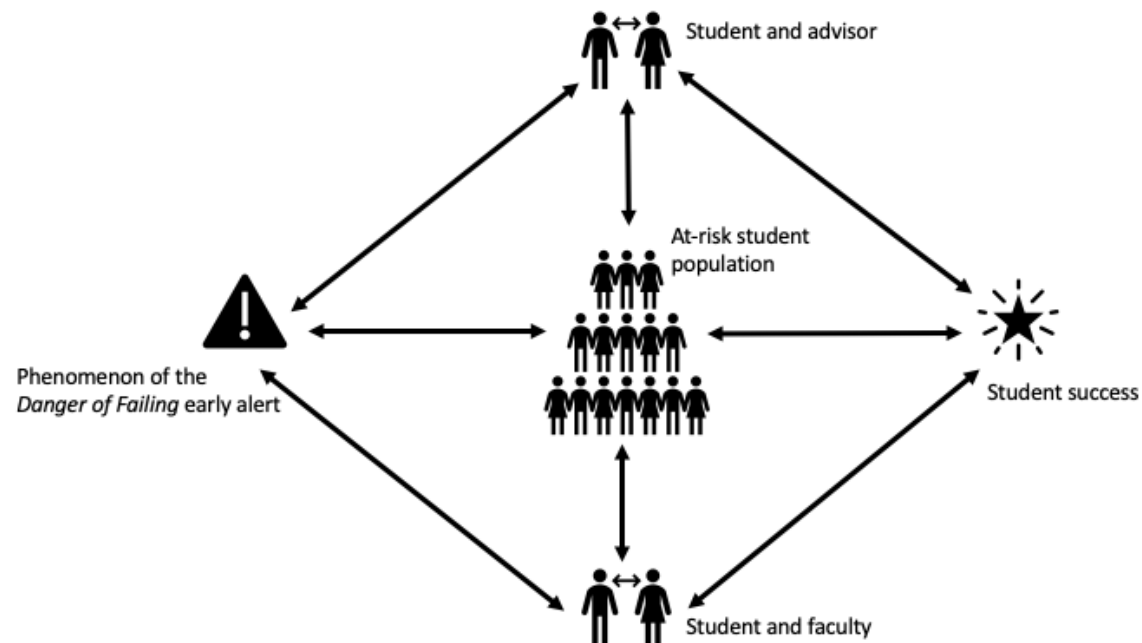
### **The Phenomenon of the Danger of Failing Early Alert**

The college's processes for managing an at-risk students formed the practices of the early alert. The danger of failing alert is the phenomenon that shaped the experiences of students, faculty, and staff. Figure 2 illustrates the network of relationships that could occur when a faculty member raised an alert. Students, faculty, and advisors formed connections in response to the alert. The email directed the student to contact the instructor. By contacting the instructor, the student developed a relationship with the faculty member. By being tagged in the early alert

system as at risk of failing, the student also became a member of the at-risk population. The student success advisors tracked and managed this group of students, and the students were added to the success advisor's caseload. An individual advisor may have attempted to make a direct connection with the student and form a relationship. Connections and group membership were the means to get the student to become successful in the course by passing the course and continuing at the college toward their educational goals. The desired outcome from these relationships was student success.

**Figure 2**

*Network of Relationships in the Danger of Failing Early Alert*



## **The Student Experience of the Phenomenon of the Early Alert**

When a student received the alert notification email, they knew they were considered at risk. Some students knew they were failing their course, but others reported being surprised because they thought they were doing well. The alert email notification produced fear and other negative emotions in the students. Students reported feeling “scared,” “upset,” “disappointed,” and “nervous.” Carmen characterized receiving the alert as “pretty rude,” and Yolanda said it felt “a little defeating.” Andy “panicked for a split second.” Yolanda was “shocked” because the class “was going to be [her] softest course and [her] cushion.” Yolanda received the alert when she was out of state for her father’s funeral and described it as “the worst timing.” Nancy “knew from the beginning that [she] was going to fail.” These students were part of the college’s at-risk population, which is biopolitics. Biopolitics operates on populations through regulation “through all the far-reaching effects of its activities” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 145) and “interventions aimed. . . at groups taken as a whole” (p. 146). The email functioned as a large-scale, generic intervention aimed at all at-risk of failing students.

The alert notification email instructed the student to contact their course instructor (see Appendix L). Students were told to “meet with your instructor by the next class period to help you get back on track in this course.” Amy, Andy, Becca, Cameron, Gloria, Wanda, and Yolanda contacted their instructor after receiving the alert to arrange a Zoom or in-person meeting to address the danger of failing alert. Donna contacted Wayne, a student success advisor, after receiving a direct text message from him about the alert. Michelle talked to a friend who was with Michelle when they received the alert email. Nancy did not speak with her instructor or an advisor because she realized it was too late to withdraw from her course.

Disciplinary power became visible when students directly interacted with another individual about the alert. Disciplinary power “touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions, attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday life” (Foucault, 1980, p. 30). The alert exposed the two poles of biopower. The disciplinary power and biopolitics in the phenomenon of the danger of failing alert created knowledge in the students. The processes and procedures to create, respond, and manage the alert initiated relationships between students, faculty, and advisors that did not previously exist. Students learned new things about themselves as college students through the relationships, and students reported having new knowledge about resources at the college. Some students developed confidence to succeed as college students. In the next section, I discuss how disciplinary power was at work in the danger of failing early alert.

### **Disciplining a Failing Student**

After a student was identified and notified that they were in danger of failing a course, staff members at the college, either faculty or advisors, attempted to work one on one with the student to help them pass the course. Faculty and advisors described two methods of trying to assist the failing student. First, advisors—and, to a lesser extent, faculty—worked with students through a series of practices designed to train them to be successful college students. Practices included developing study skills, giving referrals to the tutoring or writing center, or connecting the student to services and resources external to the college. Second, faculty and advisors used surveillance methods to monitor the student’s actions and progress toward becoming a successful student. Through the training and surveillance practices, staff at the college attempted to shape the in danger of failing student into a successful college student.



## **Disciplining Activities**

Faculty and advisors engaged in various practices designed to help students in danger of failing a course to pass the class. The operation of power and knowledge worked to form a subject, which was a student who does not fail a course. Power operated through the connection between the student and faculty member or advisor. Power also worked between the faculty member and advisor through the alert being a means to get the advisor involved in responding to the failing student. Through these interactions, students, faculty, and staff formed the knowledge of what a student needed to do to pass a course. Through the interaction of power and knowledge, early alert practices worked to help a student in danger of failing to pass a course.

### ***Faculty Movement of Power***

Faculty members raised the danger of failing early alert to reach out to advisors to get their help responding to students failing their course. The movement of power and knowledge for advisors occurred between advisors, students, and faculty members. Dr. Kern was “appealing to his colleagues for help because . . . he has not managed to make a connection with that student.” The faculty–student relationship did not exist or was not strong enough to engage the student to respond to the alert. Dr. Hass used the early alert system to ensure he and the student were “not the only people responsible for the student being successful.” Dr. Warner stated the alert got “an extra person to talk about these things,” such as study skills or using campus resources when she was “not getting through to [the student].” Faculty also engaged the advisor if an issue outside the student’s academic performance impacted their ability to succeed in the course. Dr. Haas stated he “reaches out to the student success office directly if there is a particularly unique challenge that [he] is not sure how to handle.” When the faculty member could not form a

relationship or needed help addressing the student's situation, the early alert was a mechanism to engage the advisor to get the student success advisor's assistance with the student.

The action of raising the alert was a movement of power using that relationship to connect to an advisor from the student success office. Ann, a student success advisor who had been in the position for 2 months, worked at "developing the relationship with faculty [so] a teacher can feel confident with reaching out to [her] to get to the student." Wayne reached out to "professors to schedule a 5–10-minute pop-in" during class time to introduce themselves, talk about resources in the office, and give "handouts and business cards." Wayne's in-class introductions enabled faculty to "start to see [their] faces."

A faculty member and a student success advisor spoke about their relationship without knowing the other person mentioned them in their interview. Dr. Nelson talked about a relationship that was formed with an advisor through their email communication about students with the danger of failing alert. A student success advisor, Patty, would "follow up with the faculty member over email" about "students that had more substantial consequences riding on their failure," such as losing financial aid. Dr. Nelson did not interact with Patty on campus; rather, they interacted through emails about students. Dr. Nelson "knew that the advisors were working just as hard, or harder to try to keep students in the game." The phenomenon of the early alert connected these two individuals to work together.

Through this relationship, faculty and staff formed the knowledge that the advisor was responding to all the early alerts. According to Dr. Nelson, an advisor "contacted the student absolutely every time." Heather, a student success advisor, experienced "a strong relationship with faculty at" Care Community College, and "the faculty knew [the advisor] who was getting the alerts." Through their relationship, advisors and faculty believed someone contacted every

student with the danger of failing alert. By knowing one another through the alert, not necessarily in person, the faculty member used the danger of failing alert to engage the advisor to help create a student who did not fail their class.

***Building Rapport: A Mechanism to Facilitate the Movement of Power***

After being connected to a student through a danger of failing early alert, advisors attempted to build rapport with the student and form a relationship. A relationship with the student made the advisor more effective in helping the failing student. Rapport was a mechanism to move power to facilitate the creation of knowledge in the student about what it took to pass the course. The connection and relationship enabled advisors to communicate directly with a student about why they were failing and what needed to change to help them pass the course.

Advisors deliberately engaged in discussions unrelated to school to build rapport to facilitate communication between the advisor and the failing student. Lawrence tried to “get a laugh” and “break the ice” by talking about something the student “cares about that is not school related.” Sally reported wanting “to get to know them . . . and talk to them about their experiences in general” at the college to “build that relationship and help them in some small way.” Wayne disclosed that he worked to “build up some sort of rapport, so that [students] feel like they have someone to confide in or trust and is in their corner to help them figure out how to be successful.” Heather shared her outreach to students was “very personalized . . . using their name” and that she was “aware that their professor” raised the alert to let them know that “I see them.” Advisors deliberately exercised communication activities to form a relationship.

The rapport that formed when an advisor first contacted a student about the alert enabled the student to share their struggles. It was the beginning of developing a relationship with the student. Because of this relationship, students returned to the advisor for help in subsequent

semesters about issues other than failing a course. Heather called herself an “advocate . . . cheerleader . . . supporter . . . [and] someone who believed in” the student. Peggy described the impact of building a relationship that students came back as “the person they seek out because [she] met them where they were in a way that was empathetic and honest.” Even though Heather was no longer at the college at the time of the interview, students “still email [her] and keep [her] posted.” Building rapport led to relationships between students and advisors that went beyond the semester the alert was received.

Relationships enabled students to get additional support from advisors to help them respond to the alert. Advisors accompanied students to appointments with faculty members. Sally shared a story about a student who had “a lot of medical concerns” and “struggled with . . . talking to the faculty” about the issues. The faculty member did not know about the student’s situation and Sally shared they kept “putting in alerts [that] the student was struggling.” Sally offered to accompany the student to the appointment and requested permission from the faculty member to “help facilitate that conversation.” The student “advocated for themselves and had a productive conversation,” which Sally credited to the “comfortability of [the advisor] being in the space for [the student].” Sally believed her actions formed a “community of support” for the student. Wayne also accompanied students to meetings with faculty and described this practice as the advisor being “a medium between faculty and students.” Rapport was the movement of power that functioned as “an open, more-or-less coordinated . . . cluster of relations (Foucault, 1980, p. 199). Rapport was the conduit for the cluster of relations between faculty, advisors, and students.

All advisor participants mentioned techniques they used to build rapport and how important it was to help the student respond to the danger of failing early alert. When a student

interacted with an advisor about the alert, the student “was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it” (Foucault, 1975/1990, p. 138). Lawrence believed that rapport was essential because students did not “want to share and talk with someone they do not know terribly well” about “things that are going poorly.” Sally alleged that without building rapport, the student would push back because the advisor, who the student did not know, “is contacting [the student] because [the student is] failing a class.” Rapport was the mechanism that helped power move to form a connection with the student.

### ***Connecting the Student to Resources***

Once an advisor built rapport to determine why the student was failing, the advisor worked to connect the student to resources designed to help the student be successful. Sally described the operation of connecting students to resources to be successful in a course as being “like a wheel.” The student success advisors were “at the center of the wheel [and] the spokes [connect the student] to other resources.” The advisors forged “the connections for the student.”

Through their meetings, advisors worked with students to understand why they were failing and how to respond. Advisors also used strategies to train students to develop better planning and study skills. Wayne used “different sorts of strategies,” including having the student use a worksheet and their class schedule to map their day as a “full on guidance conversation of making them think about what they do” to find gaps where the student “can throw in time for study or building in time for their online classes.” One student checked in with Wayne weekly to evaluate his study routine’s success, and Wayne helped him “change up his routine” when it was not working. Wayne said his role was “coming up with repeated patterns to help people develop a routine that works for them.” The advisor taught failing students how to become successful college students through a series of practices.

Advisors' actions included mapping out the course schedule, providing a referral to the writing center, providing a referral to external agencies, or coming with the student to talk to a faculty member. These actions were an example of disciplinary power used to shape the student into a student who did not fail. Patty equated student success to "changing behavior [and] becoming better at time management and organization." The aforementioned techniques were used to create a successful student subject. Heather would work with the student to develop "action items that they could start working on" and made "a follow-up meeting within 3 days" of their initial conversation. Heather shared that "having somebody as an accountability coach" and "waiting for you to come back and explore what worked and didn't work is motivational and feels good too." The one-on-one connection helped shape the student into a successful student.

Through the phenomenon of the early alert, power moved in the relationships between faculty, advisors, and students to create knowledge about resources available to help students. The norm was how the student was expected to behave and act to succeed as a college student. Like the prisoner who is disciplined in the individual cell, one-on-one relationships between advisor and student were a means to use disciplinary power to shape the student's behavior.

### **Surveillance: Instructors Partnering With Student Success Advisors**

Faculty and advisors engaged in surveillance activities to track failing students. Faculty monitored their student's performance in the course to determine if a danger of failing alert needed to be raised. Dr. Haas, Dr. Kern, and Dr. Nelson shared they attempted to speak directly to the student before raising the alert. Dr. Jones and Dr. Smith raised the alert first to get the student success advisor involved as soon as possible. Faculty also granted access to student success advisors to see their students' grades. In Foucault's (1975/1995) description of disciplinary power, surveillance functions as something constantly happening in the background

that the prisoner is aware of but cannot see. Faculty and advisors were always able to surveil the student.

Faculty members monitored a student's attendance, assignment completion, and grades to determine if they should raise a danger of failing early alert. Faculty members also enabled advisors to surveil student activity by adding the advisor to their online course site. Advisors and faculty could look at the early alert system to view alerts raised in other courses and during previous semesters. Advisors had access to students' demographic information and transcript stored in the college's student information system.

Instructors could add advisors to their courses in Canvas, the learning management system, as teaching assistants. Dr. Nelson requested a student success advisor be assigned to her classes. As a teaching assistant, the advisor could see the student's activity and grades in the course. Although some advisors noted they requested this access, instructors also reached out to students. Dr. Nelson tried "to partner more intentionally with them [the student success advisors]" by putting a student success advisor in her developmental English Canvas class. Dr. Nelson liked success advisors having access to her classes because they did not have to "wait for [her] to see how somebody is doing in the class; they can see if somebody is turning in work." Patty found access to the student's course activity in the learning management system "helpful." When Patty met with students, the information gave her "more context for what was happening in the classroom." Sally described the access as "getting to know them, their history by peeking through their account to see how they had done so far." At one point, advisors had access to all courses in Canvas without faculty permitting them; however, Patty said "that privilege was revoked." Access to Canvas gave Patty more information to go "into these outreach or conversations with students with more context for what was happening in the classroom." Once

this access was removed, Ann shared advisors had to “take the student’s word for it” and “what [the instructors] are saying too.” Access to online course sites enabled advisors to surveil a student’s attendance, assignment completion, and course grades.

Faculty and advisors could view alerts from other classes, from previous semesters, and students’ activity in meeting with support services on campus. This information enabled Ann “to see trends for the student [because] it goes on their history.” Ann liked knowing “if a student gets an alert [in a previous semester because] it says on their account.” Ann “could see in 2013 they got an alert in psychology, and that’s kind of nice.” The early alert system also included advising tools, the ability to make and track appointments, and alerts raised in other courses. Dr. Smith stated that in the EAB Navigate system, she “can see how they are doing in their other classes . . . if they have missed appointments or were no show . . . if they even tried to make an appointment, or who has reached out to them.” The faculty member could view if the student’s behavior in their class was also occurring in other courses. Dr. Smith stated she could look in EAB Navigate “because there is a record of . . . the communication,” and she can “see that they have emailed them, or texted them, or tried to call them.”

Power and knowledge work together in the danger of failing early alert; they cannot be separated. Foucault (1980) stated, “It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (p. 52). Disciplining activities and surveillance were techniques that moved power and were mechanisms to get the student to the norm of the successful student. Activities included surveillance, watching the student’s academic performance, and disciplining the student through developing the skills of planning and time management when meeting with an advisor.



### **Biopolitics: The Management of At-Risk Students**

The phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert operated on individuals through disciplinary power and managed the entire population of at-risk students through biopolitics. The two forms of power were inseparable and made up the two poles of biopower. Disciplinary power acted on the individual student who received the danger of failing alert through the advisor's one-on-one interaction with the student. However, the student was also a member of a group identified as at risk of failing. The college's student success office staff managed and tracked at-risk of failing students. The student was referred to the student success office to be managed as a member of the population of at-risk students. Biopolitics operated on the population of students at the college who were in danger of failing a class. Disciplinary power and biopolitics worked together in the early alert. Advisors from the student success office at the college managed at-risk students as part of their caseload. By managing students as a caseload, the limited advising staffing resources could more efficiently work with all at-risk students. Working with students as a caseload instead of individual students also served to optimize as many students as possible into successful college students.

### **Mass Notification of At-Risk Students**

Because the college had over 5,000 students and the number of alerts raised ranged from 10 to 100 per day, the three advisors in the student success office used a set of procedures to manage contacting students at risk of failing. College faculty and advisors used "precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 137) to inform students they were at risk of failing a course. The standardized process of student notification began with all in danger of failing students receiving the same email message notification.

The first step in the notification process was the student receiving an email about the alert. The early alert system automatically generated the message once the faculty member raised the alert. The email did not have a sender. Donna, a student, stated the email came from “whatever department sends out that email” but could not identify the department at the college. The return email address was a “do not reply” to this email address. Andy, a student, described the alert as “an automatic email from the community college . . . not from [his] teacher’s email.” The email had no signature or any college staff members’ names in the text. The email text used anthropomorphism with its opening “[Care Community College] cares about your success in your coursework” (see Appendix L), giving human-like qualities—such as care for the student—to the college, and not to the faculty member or advisor. The automatic, generic email message was applied to all scenarios of students in danger of failing.

### ***Boilerplate Messaging***

Every student with the danger of failing alert received the same message text. Receiving the same message enabled the college staff to reach many students more efficiently. The email only included the course name and did not include any details about why the alert was raised. Without specific information, the email notification applied to all students in danger of failing a course. Even though the faculty entered notes in the early alert system, EAB Navigate, the students did not receive a copy of the notes, nor could the student view the notes in the early alert system. As a result, Dr. Hass called the current messaging to students a “boilerplate.” When Dr. Haas lost the ability to send a custom message to the student, he “stopped putting as much information in the alert because [he] didn’t know how that information was being used on the back end and what consequences happened as a result of it.”

The messaging did not contain any personalized information about the student or situation because it was designed to maximize use by applying it to all students at risk of failing. Heather, an advisor, shared the emails were “sterile,” and she “learned through [her] experience that students read those emails and didn’t feel a connection to them.” Cameron, a student, pointed out the automated messaging did not incorporate conversations about due date extensions or other arrangements to complete missing assignments. To Cameron, “Whatever thing that is automatically generating the message to be sent to people . . . does not know that we are also real people who may be doing whatever the things are already to make them not be failing.” The mass notification of students for efficiency resulted in lost details and lost individual information about the student with the alert.

To address the impersonalized, boilerplate messaging from the early alert system, Dr. Haas and Dr. Jones used the learning management system, Canvas, to send individualized messages in addition to raising the early alert. When the alert was raised in the EAB Navigate system, Dr. Haas shared, “It does not send personalized comments to the student about how the professor feels how they are doing.” Canvas’s functionality enabled Dr. Jones to “send out an alert directly to [the student’s email] that says ‘I am concerned. Are you planning on withdrawing from the course? I have not heard from you. You are in danger of failing at this point.’” Dr. Jones also used Canvas email functionality to “batch [email] students that earn less than a certain point value” on an assignment. Unlike the email from the early alert system, faculty members’ email addresses and signatures were on an email sent from Canvas. The student could reply directly to the faculty member through that email.

When the student received the danger of failing email notification from the early alert system, the student had to discern why they received the alert. Michelle, a student in Dr. Jones’s

class, determined the reason for the alert by looking in “multiple places like the announcements and then the assignments,” going “to every single link.” Andy checked his grades in the Canvas app to discover “the things that . . . were kind of late . . . was not graded yet.” Nancy went into her Canvas page and saw her grades there. Students used Canvas, not the early alert system, to determine why they received the danger of failing alert.

The purpose of notifying the student was for them to know they were at risk of failing their course. The email notification texts included wordage like, “If you do not do something different, you will fail this course.” According to Peggy, “The language is meant to catch [the student’s] attention.” The email notification of the population of at-risk students was the regulation and control of biopower, which expected to generate the knowledge in the student that the student was at risk and if the student does “not do something differently [the student] will fail this course” (see Appendix L). However, students in the study experienced other knowledge about themselves being at risk.

### ***Knowledge of Being Not At Risk***

The strategy of the early alert email notification was for students to come to know themselves as failing a course to act by changing their behavior. However, although the faculty and advisors grouped these students in the population of at-risk students to be managed, the students did not see themselves as at risk of failing a course. When Cameron received the automated alert, she responded, “I am not actually [failing]. [The alert system] does not know what papers and things I have extensions on or that I am going to turn it in on Sunday.” Andy was surprised when he received the alert, stating, “Even if I submitted . . . homework, maybe 1 day later, I thought I was good.” Andy’s alert was “fixed the same day” when the instructor graded the late assignments and posted the grades. Andy never saw himself as a member of the

at-risk to fail population because he “really can’t fail a class,” saying, “that is the way I think.” Nancy “knew [the alert] was coming” and “it was not a surprise at all” because she did not have a “solid background” from high school about the course subject matter. Donna shared she “was not surprised due to the fact that [she] had started not turning in assignments, not completing the quizzes, and the discussion boards that were required each week.”

Student reactions to the mass notification email included a refusal to accept their status in the college’s at-risk population or an acknowledgment of something they already knew—that they were failing their course. By receiving the danger of failing alert, the students became part of the college’s caseload of at-risk students to be managed by advisors in the student success office. Through biopolitics, the at-risk student population was regulated by the college.

### **Caseload Management**

In addition to the student’s notification about the danger of failing alert, the early alert system generated messages to advisors and faculty and tagged student records in the system. The early alert system created a case for each student with the alert, and advisors received this information. Students with an alert became part of the caseload managed by the advisors in the student success office. Procedurally, student success advisors were expected to contact all students on their caseload to provide support; however, due to the volume at points in the semester, not all students received a personal outreach. Student success advisors used various methods to contact students with varying degrees of success. The purpose of the contact, which several advisors referred to as “an intervention,” was to identify the issue causing the student to be failing the course and identify resources to help the student know how to succeed in the class and their college career.

### ***Creation of a Case***

The danger of failing alert triggered the creation of a case in the early alert system. When an alert raised a case, the system enabled the management of the alert to be assigned to a specific person, tracked for its outcome, and closed once the advisor resolved the case. Three alert types raised a case: (a) danger of failing, (b) referral to the student success office, and (c) personal or social concerns. Advisors Heather and Ann downloaded the list of names daily to assign to a specific advisor. If the student with the alert was already part of a student success advisor's existing caseload of SAP students, the student was assigned to that advisor because they had a preexisting relationship.

The primary method of managing the caseload was for the advisor to contact students who received the alert. All advisors shared email was the most efficient means to reach the largest number of students with minimal resources. However, a second email from the advisor was not the most effective means to interact with the student. The advisor could configure the early alert system to email or text all students on the advisor's caseload with the same message. The early alert system retained emails and texts sent through EAB Navigate, and the faculty were able to view these messages.

### ***Volume of Alerts***

One of the challenges faced by the advisors in the student success office was responding personally to the high volume of alerts they received during the semester's midterm. Midsemester was when an email to faculty triggered them to raise the danger of failing alerts before the last day to withdraw without a grade penalty. Lawrence said alerts were coming into the student success office "too fast . . . to do much more than the bare minimum of trying to reach out to the student. [The advisors] do not have time to do any investigating." Lawrence and

the two other student success advisors received “about 500 to 700 alerts during that week,” which was “too much for” the three advisors in the office “to have a lot of time per student.” Lawrence shared the advisors had to reach out to students “in bulk and talking to them about the ramifications of not doing well on a course and suggesting resources.” During the time of peak volume, Lawrence and the other advisors only suggested students talked directly to them if they had “financial issues” or “if they need to withdraw, and what they can do to their future eligibility.” When advisors spoke with students, they entered the details of their conversation and action steps in the early alert system for the faculty who raised the alert to see the outcome. Professor Smith acknowledged advisors “might be overwhelmed with the sheer number of students,” which is why she did not know the result of the advisor’s contact with the student.

### ***Optimizing Success Through the Caseload***

Through the mass notification and then joining an advisor’s caseload of at-risk students, staff at the college attempted to optimize the transformation of at-risk students into students who pass their classes. Advisors used techniques including emailing, text messaging, or calling to facilitate a connection with the students on their caseload. Advisors attempted to contact students to direct these students toward a successful outcome. Knowledge expressed through the discourse of the alert was that students just needed help, and once they connected with that help, they could be successful. However, although this discourse was true for some students, other students had life issues that no college resources could fix, undo, or resolve.

The text of the early alert email (see Appendix L) the student received instructed them to contact their faculty member. It stated: “Please meet with your instructor by the next class period to help you get back on track in this course.” The second part of the email notification to students informed them they had an option to make an appointment with the student success office by

phone. It stated: “You may make an appointment with someone by calling.” The students in the study did not call the student success office. The students who interacted with a success advisor did so through direct contact with that advisor.

The exercise of power in the danger of failing alert formed knowledge in students, faculty, and advisors. The common understanding was that through techniques necessitated due to the volume of alerts and staffing levels, that student success could be optimized by directing students to resources to manage it for themselves. However, knowledge was based on the understanding that the student received the alert because of an academic deficiency that could be corrected through tutoring or study skills. Knowledge did not consider the real reason many students may have received the danger of failing alerts. Students experienced life issues that prevented them from attending class and completing assignments.

### ***The At-Risk Students and Life Issues***

The danger of failing alert connected students to resources to help them pass their classes. Academic resources included tutoring, the writing center, and time management. The discourse of the alert was that the student was failing because the student needed academic help. The email notification text (see Appendix L) to students instructed students that “it is very likely that if you do not do something differently, you will fail this course.” However, faculty stated students were failing due to life issues and things going on outside of the college that impacted their ability to attend class or complete their work. Three students had life issues that affected their class attendance and assignment completion, which resulted in them getting the danger of failing alert. Cameron was hospitalized, Wanda was hospitalized with COVID-19, and Yolanda’s father passed away midsemester. Both Cameron and Wanda failed a class; Yolanda received a W.



Faculty raised the danger of failing alert before the last day to withdraw from a course to help students make corrective action. The email notification to students stated, “Unless you do something differently you will fail this course” (see Appendix L). Dr. Nelson explained that an “in danger of failing . . . does not mean you are finished. But it does mean that you need to make some very different choices and take some somewhat drastic action to turn things around.” Dr. Haas stated when he sent out the danger of failing alert, he was saying:

I recognize that you have not logged in in a long time, and there’s really, good chance that you’re already on a trajectory to be failing. And I want to let you know that is where things are headed unless you make a drastic change.

However, when it was a life issue, it was difficult to make a drastic change or take significant action to address a life issue that the student success office could support. For example, students could not reclaim the time lost from missing school due to a hospitalization or death in the family. Faculty and advisors knew that life issues significantly impacted students’ success.

Even for the same strategy, “there can exist different and even contradictory discourses” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 102). Faculty knew students had life issues that caused them to be in danger of failing their class and used the alert to notify the student success office. Professor Kern shared some students experienced “family concerns, mental health troubles,” or anything he was “not equipped to deal with.” Dr. Haas had students with “particular personal hardship” and one student “whose mom contracted COVID-19 and ended up passing away in a brief amount of time.” Dr. Warner had students who “needed assistance beyond doing well in the course. It was more life things.” Nonacademic issues led to the student receiving the danger of failing alert.

The contradictory discourse was that the same mode of power operating was that receiving the alert and making a drastic change could address the potential failure. Faculty knew students had life issues outside of class that prevented them from being successful, and that an alert and drastic change could not resolve. A student success advisor, Wayne, noticed a

difference in why the alert was raised based on the student's age. Wayne shared that traditional college-aged "people are failing because they have no idea what to do" and were doing "what they remember from high school," which did not always work with a college workload. Wayne went on to state, "With my older students, their danger of failing alert is more family related," including sickness for family emergencies.

### **Biopolitics Summary**

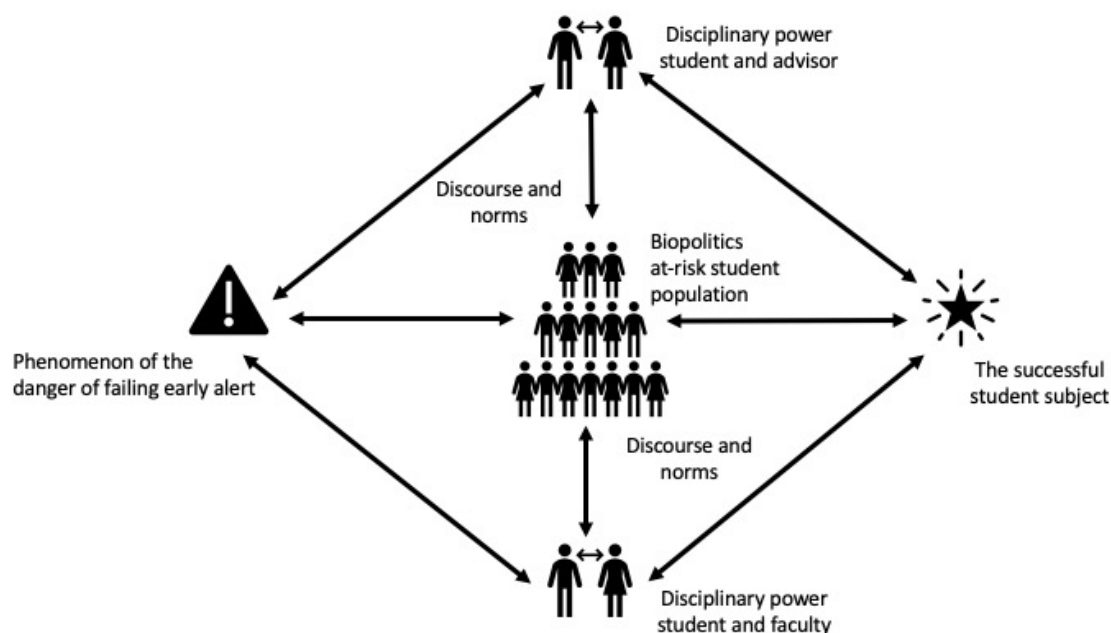
Disciplinary power and biopolitics worked together in the early alert to manage an at-risk student. Through disciplinary power, at-risk students were identified. Biopolitics operated through the student success office to control the population of at-risk students. Biopolitics worked to manage at-risk students and change the course outcome. Foucault (1976/1990) stated, "There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (p. 95). Biopolitics needs disciplinary power to create knowledge. In the next section, I discuss how power and knowledge worked together in the network of relationships of students, faculty, and advisors involved in the phenomenon of early alert.

### **Creating the Successful Student Subject**

Biopower and knowledge worked to create successful students at Care Community College. Figure 3 illustrates the network of connections initiated by the alert. The student receiving an alert, the phenomenon studied, set in motion biopower. Disciplinary power acted on students through the interventions that originated from receiving the danger of failing alert. The email instructed the student to contact the course instructor; the advisors received a notification that the student received an alert and attempted to connect with the student. Both actions were based on the knowledge formed that the student would fail the course unless the student took action to do something different.

**Figure 3**

*The Movement of Power and Creation of Knowledge and the Danger of Failing Early Alert*



Biopower works to form knowledge about the norms and discourse of a successful student. Knowledge enables disciplinary power and biopolitics to operate on students, faculty, and staff. The phenomenon of the early alert was a form of biopower because it “exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 137). Power and knowledge constantly form and create each other; power and knowledge work together.

For students, when their instructor raised the danger of failing early alert, biopower changed how the students behaved and perceived themselves and their academic careers. Receiving the alert shaped the student into a new subject through biopower. The student formed the knowledge that they were a member of the college at-risk population. The student’s

interaction with their faculty member or advisor instructed them on what they needed to do to be successful in class and college. Through power and knowledge, students worked to respond to the danger of failing early alert by shaping themselves into successful students.

The danger of failing early alert process was the strategy used by the college to shape students into successful college students. Disciplinary power occurred when the faculty member or advisor intervened with the at-risk of failing student by providing information and resources about what the student could do to go from failing to passing the course. Biopolitics was expressed through the college managing the at-risk population of students through the strategy of the early alert process. Biopower operated to form successful student subjects.

### **Teaching Students How to Become Successful College Students**

Student participants received the danger of failing alert because they missed class meetings or did not complete assignments. Faculty and some student participants shared that students did not know how to either begin a new college course, study efficiently, develop a schedule to complete tasks, nor where to go at the college for additional academic support. Dr. Nelson described the issue as students needing to learn how to “do college.” For Dr. Nelson, there were practices and behaviors that students had to learn to make them college students.

The early alert identified students who needed help learning how to be college students and understanding faculty expectations. Dr. Nelson proposed a “1st week or even before the 1st-week experience where [they] could anticipate what the obstacles are getting a good start are and just take care of them.” Students articulated there was a learning curve for nontraditional age, returning students, and the need to adapt to the change in teacher expectations from high school.

### *Learning Curve for the Nontraditional Age Student*

Yolanda and Donna identified themselves as older than traditional college students and shared they were previously enrolled in college more than a decade earlier. Both of them left school without finishing their degree. Yolanda discovered the learning environment she needed in course format and instructor interaction to be more successful in her 2nd-semester classes. Donna developed an awareness of practices to help her successfully approach completing her coursework. Both students described their approach as “more mature” after receiving the alert.

For Yolanda, the shift from in-classroom learning with no technology to online courses and digital textbooks was a challenge she had to learn to navigate. What changed, she said, was “all the courses being online, including quizzes, exams, participation, discussion forms.” She shared it was “difficult to just read off the screen and not be able to physically take notes,” which required her “to figure out problems and translate that from paper to digital,” which she found “challenging sometimes.”

The humanities class in which she received the alert was asynchronous and online.

Yolanda stated:

Since it was asynchronous, I learned a lot from having enrolled in that course and how I do not want to enroll in courses [like this] in the future. It informed me so much because I hadn’t even thought to look into my professors before.

She investigated a professor rating site and found “nuggets of good information in there about how certain professors organize their coursework, and how digestible it is for some students.”

The next semester, all of Yolanda’s classes were online and enabled her to travel out of state to support her family. However, she repeated the humanities course as online synchronous, “which allows [her] to ask more questions . . . as they come up, instead of trying to remember them in an email.” She described this process as “a completely different style of learning that [she] took on this semester.”

For Donna, her previous experience in college informed her that she would fail once she missed assignments. Donna took classes at the college between 2008 and 2012. In 2012, she entered the school's nursing program and "flunked out the 1st semester." She started retaking classes last fall to get her nursing degree. She was the only participant who took classes before the introduction of the computerized early alert system in 2013. For her, learning how to "do college" meant realizing that "it is not too late, not to give up, and to keep going and pushing" to complete the course. She described herself as being more "intentional on the hours that [she] spends studying or completing [her] assignments . . . and keeping up," and coordinated her work schedule along with her home schedule. She also asked her spouse for additional support by "speaking with [her] husband about how important it is for him to pick up his load" at home. The outcome of this conversation gave her "more time to focus [on school] and still raise [her] family and spend time with [her husband]." She focused on "limiting [her] distractions this semester because she spends a lot of time on social media and watching TV." She engaged in practices she learned from her student success advisor to make herself a successful college student.

As returning students, Yolanda and Donna found differences in college (e.g., online, more engaged advisors, early alert system) in the 10-year gap from their previous attendance. However, both students also changed their approach when they received the danger of failing alert. Previously, they both dropped out. However, the intervention of the early alert and the connection they forged with a student success advisor taught them what they needed to do. They learned they could become successful students by adopting practices of a successful student and building relationships with their faculty and advisors.

### *Adapting to the Change in Expectations From High School*

Four participants enrolled in Care Community College immediately after graduating high school. Nancy, Michelle, Wanda, and Andy were either 18 or 19 years old and had graduated from high school the previous spring. All of them spoke about the differences in workload and teacher expectations they now had as college students. Differences required them to change their approach to their academic studies to be successful. The college provided support through the information in the danger of failing alert; however, it was incumbent on the student to initiate a connection back to their faculty or an advisor. The student needed both the alert and relationship for both poles of biopower to operate to form knowledge and create a successful student.

Nancy attributed receiving the alert to failing a test; however, she blamed it on the teacher not giving them “something to improve,” like extra credit work or telling the class what to study on the test. In addition, she said she did “not have a solid background” from high school in the course content and “did not put the effort in high school.” The movement of power is multidirectional. Biopower exercises “within the social body, rather from above it” (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). Biopower does not depend on a student success advisor contacting a student; Yolanda and Donna reached out to someone at the college after getting the alert. However, Nancy felt it was the college’s responsibility to contact her, saying, “I have not seen nobody at this whole school that asked me how my class was and if I was failing, where I could get additional help.” She thought the college did not provide support for students like her who were struggling academically because “you have to get extra help outside.”

Outside help was available to all students who received the danger of failing alert. Still, college policy required students who were not meeting SAP requirements and were at risk of losing their financial aid to meet with a student success advisor to keep their financial assistance.

Wanda met with a student success advisor and “went over her goals,” helping her ensure she had “all the required classes that are needed to make the transfer more smooth and easy.” She connected to the student success advisor as a requirement of her SAP appeal, not through the early alert. Wanda was already part of an existing at-risk caseload.

Wanda changed her academic behaviors after getting the alert. She listed her behaviors:

Turning in my work earlier . . . making it a priority to be in class every day . . . going to class 15 minutes earlier . . . participating a lot more with my classes . . . paying attention a lot more . . . [and] taking a lot more notes, which has made it a bit easier on me this year because I understand what is going on.

In addition to changing her actions, Wanda also forged a relationship with her professors by “communicating a lot more” and reaching out with questions “to get everything squared away, so [she had] a better understanding.” Wanda called getting the alert “a wakeup call” that “motivated [her] to get back on [her] feet and make [her] schoolwork a priority.”

Michelle and Andy missed assignments, which caused their instructor to raise the danger of failing alert. In Michelle’s case, she “did not realize that [she] had to go to multiple places” on her online course site. Andy missed assignments and stated, “There were some quizzes and video lectures that I forgot,” and he submitted these assignments late. Michelle talked to her friends about what she should do about the alert; Andy emailed his teacher about the alert.

Michelle credited her friend who taught her how to use Canvas for saving her from receiving “that notice for other classes as well,” saying, “[Canvas] is really confusing to me.” She expressed frustration that no one at the college “really told or showed [them] – how to use Canvas.” Andy submitted his missing assignments and set “an alarm in [his] phone to never forget again.” Michelle and Andy found new knowledge about finding and tracking their assignments; the new knowledge also changed their behaviors. Getting the alert made Andy “focus more” and gave him “nudges [in] that class and [his] other classes.” Michelle “realized



that [she] should be thorough every week.” Before getting the alert, she would “skim through the weekly agenda and . . . then try to go off a memory.” Then, she started writing down her assignments.

Michelle said the most significant difference between high school and college was that students “are not being spoon fed everything . . . especially for the online classes.” Students have “to take the initiative and do everything; otherwise, [they] will fail.” As Dr. Nelson articulated, these students who are in “their 1st college class ever . . . do not know how to do college yet.” The alert generated the knowledge that an introduction to college boot camp proposed by Dr. Nelson would provide. The students learned about faculty expectations by not meeting those expectations and receiving the alert.

### ***Biopower Operating on the Students Who Failed***

Although the objective of the early alert was to form relationships between the student and an advisor or faculty member to teach the student the practices of the early alert, some students did not develop a connection that enabled them to transform the student course grade from failing to passing; however, the phenomenon of the early alert produced knowledge on the practices of a successful student. Cameron and Nancy had a strained relationship with their instructor and did not form a relationship with an advisor. Both students failed their course despite being members of the at-risk population that the college had been attempting to mold into successful students.

For Cameron, the alert was an automated message without a connection to a human being or any knowledge of her situation and arrangement with her faculty member. She felt she “took the steps to get what [she] needed [to catch up in the course] done” when she reached out to her faculty member. Cameron was frustrated by the faculty member’s lack of understanding about

how difficult it was to complete her assignments and tests. Cameron did not have internet or a computer at home. She had to do all her work on campus, and it was difficult for Cameron to finish her online tests before the due dates. Despite this experience and the lack of interaction with an advisor, Cameron made changes the following semester to shape herself into a successful student. She installed internet at her house and bought a laptop. She also modified her work hours to get off work earlier to get to class on time; she took off Saturdays to have 2 days off a week. Biopower created by receiving the alert generated knowledge for Cameron about what she had to do to become a successful student. Even though the course outcome for Cameron was not the college's objective with the danger of failing early alert, the alert still shaped her into a subject.

The students learned the practices of a successful student by acquiring knowledge about why they received the alert and changing their behaviors. Their action served as form of training as it taught them and enabled them to become successful students. Foucault (1980) stated, "Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power" (p. 52). For the nontraditional age students, they developed new knowledge of what actions they needed to do differently from their first time in college to be successful. The students who recently graduated high school acquired new knowledge when they had to adapt to the expectations of college faculty. Even if a student did not pass the class, the student still gained new knowledge about what to do to be successful in a course and applied that knowledge in subsequent semesters.

### **Knowing Oneself as a Successful College Student**

The phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert worked to transform students into viewing themselves as successful students, despite being told the previous semester that they

might fail a course. Foucault (1976/1990) stated, “Relations of power-knowledge are . . . matrices of transformations” (p. 99). Students became successful through the relationships between faculty, advisors, and students. Students’ words and actions displayed the transformation into successful student subjects. Students internalized practices of the successful student, taught by the student success advisor.

Initially, the alert made the students more attentive to course requirements. Michelle had received the alert in student orientation and stated, “[It] made me more self-aware that I need to make sure I’m doing everything every week.” Most students had no interaction with student success advisors in response to their early alert. Students who connected with someone at the college formed a relationship with that advisor, which enabled them to develop study skills; learn schedule planning; connect with campus resources, such as the college writing center or tutoring; develop plans to transfer; and most importantly, see themselves as being capable of being a successful college student.

Seeing themselves as successful means students ascribed qualities through a series of actions and behaviors college officials taught the students about what successful college students do. Foucault (1994/2000) described this power exercise as “on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself” (p. 314). Students Donna and Gloria internalized the qualities of a successful student through their actions of contacting professors in advance of the semester to introduce themselves, meeting regularly with advisors to get guidance for their courses and transfer, and developing a schedule to balance their family, work, and school commitments.

### ***A Strong Candidate***

Yolanda attended a private, 4-year university in an East Coast metropolitan city immediately following high school. She described herself as “a naïve and ignorant student then” and “was always so stressed.” She dropped out before completing the degree. She was intimidated about approaching a faculty member for extra help because she was “shooed away” and “rushed through” by the instructor or teaching assistant. The experience of the danger of failing early alert taught her “the scope and power of those resources” that were designed to promote student success, such as academic advising, tutoring, and the writing center. Using the provided resources, she developed a plan to complete her required classes at the community and a timeline to apply to transfer. After connecting with advisors, including the community college’s transfer advisor and the 4-year institution’s advisor based at the college, she saw herself as “a strong candidate for the program” at the 4-year institution.

### ***Changed Frame of Mind***

Donna transformed from a student who gave up at the first sign of potential failure to a student with a path forward to finally achieve her goal of getting her nursing degree. In addition to adopting practices of the successful student, including completing “assignments and hitting deadlines before they are actually due,” Donna’s “mind frame has changed a lot from [last semester].” The “extra push from the advisor” was now internalized in Donna as she realized that she “wants [the degree] bad” and did “not want to waste any more time.” Lawrence shared that, for students, “there is a lot of self-sabotage,” like what happened with Donna when she was previously enrolled. Students “are scared to be successful because if they are doing well in class, then it has to change their self-identity.” In addition to learning how to balance school, work, and family, Donna had to learn not to give up if she experienced a setback like missing a class or a

bad grade. She internalized the advisor's encouragement and could now motivate herself to be a successful student. She changed how she perceived herself and accepted the new identity of a successful student.

### ***Not the Same Person***

Gloria received the danger of failing alert in her English class. She described the class as "a struggle," and receiving the alert "was just really upsetting" and "put her off." She spoke to her teacher, "and she wasn't really having it," saying, "[The teacher] felt as though she had given me enough opportunities when she gave me feedback for my work." As a result, Gloria described herself as "apathetic," and "just kind of froze" in the class. She failed the course.

Gloria had not registered for classes the following semester. She received an unsolicited text from the college asking if she was planning to return next semester and if she needed any help with registration. As a self-described "mess," Gloria simply replied to the text with an "I don't know how." This response led to a phone call and later meetings with Student Success Advisor Lawrence, who "helped [her] with [her] classes and really actually pick out [her] associate degree and do the transfer program." Lawrence also guided her to the college's writing center and connected her to financial aid and scholarship opportunities.

When Gloria spoke about her relationship with Lawrence, she became emotional and wiped away tears. The advisor gave her "all the reasons why it is possible and reminding [her] that [she is] working on this really big goal, and it's going to take time." Without his intervention and their subsequent relationship, Gloria felt she "would have probably dropped out," saying, "I would have told myself that I would start up again at another time and keep working to save money. That was how hard it was for me." Lawrence shared he hoped he had "some sort of intervention" for students, "ideally that turns around or makes the outcomes just a bit better."

Gloria said getting the alert “definitely changed the way [she saw] herself, what [she] can do, and the way [she] reaches out to others.” This change “has also affected [her] grades” for the better “because it is the way [she carries herself] within that environment is so different now than the way [she] used to be,” which was “very closed off and not sharing why [she was] struggling.” Gloria said she “does not think [she is] the same person.” The phenomenon of the early alert transformed Gloria into a new subject.

Yolanda, Donna, and Gloria struggled in a course at Care Community College and received the danger of failing alert. They connected with student success advisors who encouraged them personally and helped them access resources to help them change their coursework and map a path forward to reach their goals. They were in a group of at-risk students operated on by biopolitics through receiving the alert notification email. Then, the students were operated on by disciplinary power through their interaction with the advisor, which produced knowledge for them of how to be a successful student. The relationship with advisors helped them construct new subjectivities as successful college students.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, after sharing and introducing the participants, I explained the practices of the early alert at Care Community College; these practices formed the strategy of the early alert. Next, I explained how the phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert operated and shaped the experiences of students at a community college to address the first research question. Finally, I shared examples from study participants where disciplinary power and biopolitics operated to form the successful student subject after raising the danger of failing alert, which addressed the second research question.

In Chapter 5, I discuss what this study brings to the practices of early alert more generally. After reviewing the design of the study, I analyze the findings and discuss the implications for practice. I also share areas for future research outside this study's scope.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

The danger of failing early alert shaped students into successful students through biopower. As individuals failing a course, students learned the practices of a successful student. As members of the at-risk population at the college, students became a member of a caseload that advisors attempted to link to college academic support resources. Mapping this movement of power and the construction of knowledge from an early alert can promote a new way to see how early alerts work at a community college and their impact on students. Instead of focusing on outputs like course grades, I studied relationships and connections to understand how an early alert operates to create a successful student. I used Foucault's power/knowledge framework to analyze how the danger of failing early alert operated as the mechanism to create the successful student subject.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Learning analytics is "the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs" (Siemens, 2013, p. 1382). Researchers have associated learning analytics effectiveness to an outcome that can be tracked and measured (Abdous et al., 2012; Baars et al., 2014; Lourens & Bleazard, 2016; Miller & Bell, 2016; Moreno-Marcos et al., 2018). Early alert learning analytics, paired with an intervention, results in increased persistence (Arnold & Pistilli, 2012; Villano et al., 2018). Interventions can include emails, phone calls, text messages, and face-to-face meetings (Choi et al., 2018; Wong & Li, 2020). These interventions involve a faculty or advisor interacting with a student. When a student forms a relationship with a faculty or staff member at a college, the student is more likely to persist and be successful (Felton &



Lambert, 2020; Tinto, 1993). The focus of this study was to examine what happened in the intervention and the relationship.

Human interactions from the relationships between students, advisors, and faculty are challenging to define and quantify. To look at the impact of the relationship as part of an early alert learning analytic, I used Foucault's power/knowledge framework to analyze the transformation of failing students into successful college students. These "relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are matrices of transformation" (Foucault 1976/1990, p. 99). Foucault's power/knowledge framework enables alerts to be seen in a new way.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to understand how students experience the danger of failing early alert. Using Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) framework of power/knowledge, I identified the operation of disciplinary power and biopolitics to create norms and the associated discourse of successful student behavior. By exposing the function of knowledge and power, I was able to write about how successful student subjects are created. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the phenomenon of the danger of failing early alert shape students' experiences at a community college?
2. How does movement of power and creation of knowledge occur in the practices of an early alert in the experiences of: (a) community college students, (b) student success advisors, and (c) faculty?

### **Summary of the Methodology**

The methodological approach was a post-intentional phenomenological study. I used Vagle's (2018) five-component process to gather and analyze data about the participant's experience of the danger of failing early alert. My process began with identifying the post-intentional phenomenon to study. Next, I studied the process of the danger of failing early alert at a community college.

The next step was gathering data on the phenomenon. Interviews were the primary data source because the documentation about early alerts was limited to the college's website and email text to students and faculty. I journaled for the third step, the post-reflexion plan. Because I had previous experience with an early alert system, journaling provided me with an opportunity to acknowledge my presuppositions and my experiences with faculty and staff.

The next step was to investigate the early alert phenomenon using theory. I used Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) thinking with theory approach where I read a theorist's writings as a framework for the data analysis alongside my data. I selected Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) power/knowledge as the framework. The final step in Vagle's (2018) process was to write about the post-intentional phenomenon.

### **Data Collection**

Participants in the study were from a mid-Atlantic community college. The college's director of early alert assisted with recruiting faculty and advisor participants by sharing the study flyer (see Appendix B) with them. All students receiving a danger of failing early alert at the midterm of Fall 2021 received an email with the recruiting flyer (see Appendix A) inviting them to participate in the study. Participants' identities were kept confidential. The college

officials did not know who participated in the study because participants voluntarily contacted me to arrange an interview.

I gathered data from multiple sources. The primary data source was participant interviews. All participants were interviewed in Fall 2021. Student participants had a second interview in Spring 2022 to reflect on their previous semester and their experience with the danger of failing early alert. The college's director of early alert provided documentation about the early alert process at the college, including the email notifications sent to faculty to complete progress reports about their students and the text of the alert emails sent to students. Additional data sources included the college's student success website, my interview notes, and my post-reflexion journal.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of reading the transcripts and rereading Foucault's writings back and forth. I also journaled my thoughts and assumptions before and during my analysis as my form of post-reflexion. Post-reflexivity explores how an individual's "prior knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs about the phenomenon . . . play a part in producing the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2018, p. 153). Because I previously worked with an early alert system, I had to acknowledge my presuppositions about how it worked. When doing my data analysis, I had to ensure I was not simply hunting for biopower and making assumptions about the knowledge formed. Through this process and repeatedly re-reading the transcripts and the theorist's works, the student, faculty, and student success advisor experiences exposed the phenomenon of the early alert.

## **Findings**

The significant finding was how the early alert transforms the student into a successful student, independent of course outcome. Power/knowledge work to create successful student subjects. Student participants who received the alert adopted the practices of the successful student. Students who received the alert were members of the college's at-risk population. Biopolitics operated on this population of students. Through disciplinary power, students learned the attributes of a successful student from their instructor or student success advisor. Advisors taught students the practices of the successful student, including time management, study skills, and using campus academic support resources.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

The study reinforced the literature about the role of interventions for at-risk students and relationships to student success. Using Foucault's (1975/1995, 1976/1990) power/knowledge framework, biopower operated to create knowledge that enabled the students to learn the practices of what a successful college student does. Students internalized these practices and transformed into successful students.

### ***Role of Interventions***

An early alert learning analytic with an intervention promotes student success (Jayaprakash et al., 2014; Sønderlund et al., 2019; Wong & Li, 2020). Interventions can include emails, phone calls, and direct contact (Baneres et al., 2019; Wong & Li, 2020). In this study, the primary intervention was emailing students at risk of failing a course; this intervention directed the student to speak with their faculty member as soon as possible. When the student became a part of a success advisor's caseload, the advisor performed subsequent forms of intervention, including text messaging, attempting to meet the student face-to-face after class, or personalized

emails. The goal of the intervention was to engage with the student to get the student to act and make changes. The intervention method had to “involve a change in student behaviors in order to have an effect” (Wong & Li, 2020, p. 15). The intervention also enabled the student to form a relationship with the faculty member or advisor.

### ***The Role of Relationships in the Creation of the Successful Student***

Findings from this study illustrated the relationships and connections to student success. Students, faculty, and staff forged a relationship after the alert was raised. Felton and Lambert (2020) found that it is not only crucial for college staff to cultivate relationships with students, but students should also “take the initiative to build relationships” (p. 118) with faculty and advisors. Yolanda and Donna reached out to someone at the college when they received the email about the danger of failing alert. Through interactions with their faculty member or advisor, they developed a relationship where they subsequently met with the staff member again when they had questions or needed assistance. By examining their relationships as the movement of power, these students were disciplined to learn how a successful student operates through the knowledge gained from the advisor or faculty member. Students learned the practices of a successful student by developing study skills, communicating with faculty, and using campus academic support services. The knowledge gained from these practices enabled them to forge other relationships or develop deeper relationships with faculty and advisors.

This study reinforced prior research about relationships’ importance to college retention (Felton & Lambert, 2020; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) found community college student persistence was linked to forming relationships with someone at the college. In my study, the student participants shared the experiences of interactions with their instructor or student success advisor. Students shared the advisors helped them develop study skills to do better in their

classes and assisted them with choosing a major, selecting courses, and applying for scholarships. Sønderlund et al. (2019) found the intervention “put the onus primarily on the student to change behavior when prompted” (p. 2612). After receiving the alert, students who had an intervention that included interaction with their instructor changed how they approached their course. Andy and Michelle missed assignments and were now more thorough when going over their learning management system and started submitting assignments early.

### ***Two Poles of Power***

Foucault (1994/2000) conceptualized power as a cluster of relations. The interaction between students and an advisor is the movement of disciplinary power. In that interaction, knowledge is produced. The knowledge includes norms, such as the practices of a successful student, and participants internalized these norms. Biopolitics also operated by making the student a member of the at-risk population at the college. The student became part of a caseload of other at-risk students that three student success advisors attempted to manage. The student success advisors used techniques, such as texting or emailing their caseload, to connect them with resources they needed on campus. Through both poles of power, Gloria, Donna, and Yolanda generated knowledge of what a successful student does and practiced those behaviors.

One student, Nancy, received the alert, but she did not reach out to anyone about the alert. She did not interact with her faculty member about being in danger of failing the course, nor was she contacted by a student success advisor. She was only added to the at-risk population caseload. Disciplinary power did not operate on her. As a result, it appeared she did not have an opportunity to learn the practices of a successful student. Because she did not participate in a second interview the following semester, it is unknown what the outcome was.

### ***Creation of the Successful Student***

Power and knowledge worked to shape the at-risk student into a successful student subject. In *Transforming Students*, Johansson and Felton (2014) described this process as critical reflection, which “involves dismantling previously held thought and belief constructions, examining them from different perspectives and then start constructing them in a new way” (p. 43). Through the alert, students learn about what caused them to be in danger of failing their course.

### **Unexpected Findings**

Although findings from the participants were consistent with literature about early alert learning analytic interventions and relationships, there were two unexpected findings. First, a student did not need to interact positively with a faculty member to transform into a successful student subject. The second finding was that students seemed unaware and unconcerned about the college staff’s surveillance activity.

### ***Negative Feedback Can Shape Successful Students***

The unexpected finding was the students in the study adopted the practice of a successful student despite the student’s course outcome. The phenomenon of the early alert “shows itself in a new way that can run counter to one’s presuppositions” (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020, p. 894). Before the study, I thought the alert needed a positive intervention from the advisor or faculty member for the student to learn how to be a successful college student. However, in the case of Cameron, she had a negative interaction with her faculty member and failed her course. The following semester, Cameron purchased a laptop and installed internet at home to complete her coursework. She also adjusted her working hours. She did not speak with a student success

advisor about the alert. No one told her directly to make these changes. Instead, she internalized the discourse of what a successful student does.

### ***Awareness of Surveillance***

Students in the study did not indicate if they were aware that their course activities and grades were being surveilled by their instructors or advisors. Lawson et al. (2016) found students may not recognize that the college tracks their academic and demographic data. Most students reacted to the alert with surprise. Andy did not know the danger of failing alert existed. Cameron questioned the accuracy of the surveillance when she shared that the computer system that sent her the email did not account for her extension to submit her assignment. Disciplinary power “presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 170) and “acts by means of general visibility” (p. 171). The person knows they are being surveilled and behaves accordingly (Foucault, 1975/1995). In this study, the students were not aware of being surveilled or changing their behavior due to being watched.

### **Conclusion/Discussion**

The implication of this study is to understand how the phenomenon of the danger of failing alert creates subjects through power/knowledge. Receiving the alert did more than change the behavior of the students in the study or link the student to other resources at the college, such as tutoring. Receiving the alert creates a new subject. Student participants saw themselves and their role in their academic success differently. Foucault’s power/knowledge framework exposes how this new subject, the successful student, is created through the alert and the interaction with student success advisors.

Using Foucault’s power/knowledge framework to approach my analysis is a different way of looking at the effects of an automated message telling a student they may fail a course.



Instead of the alert making a specific grade manifest, it operates on the student, making them into a successful college student. Two things are happening at once: (a) an individual student communicates one on one with a faculty member or an advisor to get tailored/specific help advice; and (b) the student is added to the population of at-risk students, who gets bulk messaging as follow-up to the alert due to the volume of students in this designation.

Yolanda getting a W (i.e., withdrawal) may be seen as unsuccessful in the course because it was not completed with a passing grade, and she was not awarded credit. Grades of D, F, and W are grouped as a metric for not completing a course (Villano, 2019). However, she worked with her instructor and the transfer advisor and learned how to best finish her semester by taking the W in this course so she did not bring down her other grades.

### **Implications for Practice**

Foucault's theory of power and knowledge is a means to understand how the early alert learning analytics practices create subjects. Subjects and objects are produced through power in the early alert. Power creates a collective "condition of possibility" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 93). Power is "produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 93). The power/knowledge framework creates an opportunity to understand the practice of early alert differently. When students are identified as at risk of failing, the phenomenon of the early alert is "fracturing unities and effecting regrouping" (Foucault 1976/1990, p. 96) because the student now is grouped by the college as a population to be managed. Students who received the alert reported feeling scared, upset, and disappointed. The instructions in the email about the alert told students to act by contacting their instructor. Some students spoke with their instructor and others worked with an advisor.

Identifying a student in danger of failing a course is no longer a practice just between faculty members and students. Faculty members may form a new alliance with a student success advisor. The advisor and faculty member may forge a connection. Students who developed relationships with student success advisors learned the practices of a successful student. In the semester after receiving the alert, students perceived themselves differently. The alert functioned by “furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 96). A student is marked as having this branding of at risk from the alert email. The student is in danger of failing, labeled as at risk, and grouped into an advisor’s caseload as a problem to manage and fix.

With an early alert, power moves between people engaged and the materials produced in the event of the alert. The alert generates an email to the student, a notification to the student’s advisor, and adds the student to a caseload of at-risk students managed by advisors. Foucault’s (1976/1990) work helps describe the disciplinary power and biopolitics generated from the early alert phenomenon.

In disciplinary power, the student was constantly seen, and always under surveillance. Faculty members monitored the student’s attendance and assignment completion. Student success advisors were added to the learning management system, Canvas, to observe the student’s progress. These advisors and faculty also have access to the student’s transcript in the student information system and information about alerts in other classes and previous semesters. Students were constantly monitored so the instructor or advisor could intervene if the student deviated from the norm of a successful student.

Biopolitics operates through the notification of the alert to get the student to act. College officials want to change an individual student’s trajectory from predicted failure to success. The

early alert program is a mechanism for a community college to produce a population of successful students who pass their classes, return the following semester, and graduate from the college. The practices of early alert create subjects through power and knowledge. The alert strategy is to make the students at risk of failing become successful students.

An early alert uses disciplinary power and biopolitics to control student outcomes by producing a student with a passing course grade. Using disciplinary power, an early alert is enacted on and creates the student. It is designed to teach students that there is a problem, something is wrong, and they must do something. A student can see a failing grade on a test or assignment. The early alert notification is external to the student, sent through a technology system, and notifies others at the college that the student has a failing grade. The early alert initiates a follow-up intervention.

Biopolitics is enacted to control populations, such as students at an institution of higher education. A student population at a community college is normalized to produce student success outcomes, usually in the form of persistence or a good grade in a course (Kuh et al., 2006). Implementing the early alert practice at all community colleges centralized at the system level is a form of biopolitics that Foucault referred to as the “uniformity of the apparatus” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 84). Foucault (1976/1990) described biopower as giving “rise to comprehensive measures, statistical assessments, and interventions aimed at the entire social body or groups taken as a whole” (p. 146). The early alert process works to entangle the student in institutional norms.

When a faculty member raises an early alert to inform a student they are at risk of failing, knowledge is produced for students, faculty, and advisors. This “exercise of power . . . creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge” (Foucault, 1980, p. 51). This new knowledge

from the alert notification informs the student about the possibility of failure before it happens. The faculty member's knowledge about an early alert is that if the student is made aware of the chance of failure before a failure can occur, the student can be provided with resources to prevent the student from failing the course. The advisor responds with the knowledge that the possibility of failure can turn into success with the right help and resources. The knowledge constructed generates the movement of power by directing the student toward resources that serve to discipline the student into being a successful student.

The implication of this study is that colleges need to understand the influence this alert wields. The alert is more than getting a student to pass a class or connecting a student to academic resources. Students see themselves as a successful student by adopting the practices and internalizing these practices as making them successful. The exercise of power "operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself" (Foucault, 1994, p. 314).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Several areas for future research were outside the scope of this study's research design. A researcher could apply Foucault's framework of power/knowledge to analyze the creation of the subject from positive feedback early alerts.

#### **Applying to Positive Feedback Alerts**

For future research, a researcher could use Foucault's power/knowledge framework to analyze the creation of successful student subjects from positive feedback alerts. Care Community College uses good engagement/participation, off to a good start, outstanding academic performance, and showing improvement as their positive feedback alerts. Future researchers could explore if positive feedback alerts work to form successful student subjects. In

his interview, Lawrence inquired if I wanted to know about positive alerts. He shared how much students love receiving positive feedback:

It is humbling to think about how much it matters to the students to have someone tell them and recognize them when they have done something well. They sometimes post on their social media accounts, or they run in and tell [the advisors] about it. I imagine they are telling other people in their lives about them as well. There is a lot to be said for positive reinforcement.

Baneres et al. (2019) observed students appreciate feedback from an early alert but “it is essential to maintain a positive mood when there are still possibilities to pass the course” (p. 12). Positive feedback from alerts may have a different impact; however, positive alerts were not included in the design of the study.

### **Studying Other Forms of Power Operating in the Early Alert**

*Ontopower* is the form of power that operates before something happens (Massumi, 2015). Massumi (2015) described ontopower in relation to the war on terror. Ontopower focuses on the threat of what may happen to prevent something bad from happening. Three instructors in this study shared they raised the danger of failing alert as soon as a student missed a class, failed to turn in an assignment, or engaged in practices that could lead to failure in a course. At this point in the course, the student was technically not failing, but the threat of failure was there.

Dr. Jones stated she raised the alert as soon as something went wrong, and the student was not necessarily failing because she would “much rather [the student] get that lesson in the one credit [student development] class.” An English instructor stated that, with the danger of failing alert, she would “send that one sooner rather than later if someone doesn’t have their books and they are starting early on to have a pattern of not coming to class.” Unless the student has more than the allowed absences, the student is not failing the class. The threat of failure is there because the student may start to fail to turn in assignments or perform poorly on an

assessment. The danger of failing becomes a means to get the student to change their practices before their practices put them at risk.

These instructors used the alert as a form of preemption, attempting to eliminate the possibility of failure before it even happens. Because orientation was a course students took in their 1st semester of college, Dr. Smith was “trying to teach them this is what you need to do . . . check your grades . . . stay on top of things . . . [and] have a schedule planned out.” Additionally, “Biopower exerts a force of normalization” (Massumi, 2018, p. 62). Ontopower preempts the phenomenon to shape students by trying to change the outcome before it happens. Students are never truly a member of the at-risk population. The operation of power—through ontopower—is the preemption of trying to ensure students are never at risk of failing the course. I did not include an analysis of this form of power in this study because it is outside of Foucault’s power/knowledge framework. However, future research could explore how ontopower operates when faculty use this alert to preempt student failure of a course.

### **Concluding Remarks**

At Care Community College, the faculty and advisors used an early alert learning analytic to manage the college’s population of at-risk students. To address the alert, students were encouraged to speak with their instructor or access student success resources. Parkes et al. (2020) stated this “human interaction provides a form of resistance to the automated, faceless implementation of analytics but also encourages, values and continually (re)shapes how students and staff work together in partnership” (p. 121). The alert enabled biopolitics and disciplinary power to create knowledge. The knowledge formed more power. When power makes new knowledge, “a new apparatus . . . is superimposed on the previous one, and which, without completely supplanting the latter, helped reduce its importance” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 106).

An alert was more than a mechanism to prevent students from failing course. The alert functioned to form relationships and gave students the “condition of possibility” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 93) to become a successful college student.

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## APPENDIX A

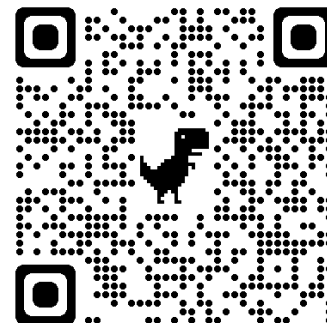
### STUDENT RECRUITMENT FLYER

#### Community College Student Participants Needed for Research Study

Graduate student, Sue Ann Curran, is conducting a study of students who receive the danger of failing early alert in the Fall 2021 semester. The purpose of the study is to understand what community college students experience when they receive the danger of failing early alert.

Students who agree to participate in the study will meet with the researcher via Zoom two times. The first interview will take place after the student receives the alert. A second follow-up interview will take place at the end of the semester. All interviews will take place remotely using Zoom and will be scheduled at the convenience of the student. At the end of the semester, students will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for each interview completed. All participant information will be confidential, and aliases will be used in any publications about the study.

If you are interested in participating, please email Sue Ann Curran at XXXX@XXX.edu or scan the QR code. Ms. Curran will send an email with additional information to schedule the first interview.



If you have questions about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Dr. John Baaki at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.edu.

*Sue Ann Curran is a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Her dissertation advisor is Dr. David Ayers. Please contact Ms. Curran (XXXXXX@XXX.edu) or Dr. Ayers (XXXXXX@XXX.edu) with any questions.*



## APPENDIX B

### FACULTY AND ADVISOR RECRUITMENT FLYER

#### Community College Faculty and Advisor Needed for Research Study

Graduate student, Sue Ann Curran, is conducting a study of connections between faculty, advisors, and students that receive the danger of failing early alert in the Fall 2021 semester. The researcher seeks to understand what community college students, faculty, and advisors experience during the early alert process.

Faculty and advisor participants will be interviewed to understand their experience with raising and responding to the danger of failing early alert. The researcher will interview faculty and advisors about their role in the process of raising and responding to early alerts.

All interviews will take place remotely using Zoom and will be scheduled at the convenience of the participant. All participant information will be confidential, and aliases will be used in any publications about the study.

If you are interested in participating, please email Sue Ann Curran at XXXXX@XXX.edu or scan the QR code. Ms. Curran will send an email with additional information to schedule the first interview.



If you have questions about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Dr. John Baaki at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.edu.

*Sue Ann Curran is a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Her dissertation advisor is Dr. David Ayers. Please contact Ms. Curran (XXXXXX@XXX.edu) or Dr. Ayers (XXXXXX@XXX.edu) with any questions.*

## **APPENDIX C**

### **STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Informed Consent Document

Old Dominion University

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Movement of Power and the Formation of Knowledge in an Early Alert at a Community College

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research project is The Movement of Power and the Formation of Knowledge in an Early Alert at a Community College.

#### **RESEARCHERS**

Sue Ann C. Curran, Doctoral Candidate in Community College Leadership

David Ayers, EdD, Associate Professor – Community College Leadership, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

Several studies have been conducted on how early alert learning analytics improve student outcomes. None of them have explained the interaction between students, faculty, and advisors in the early alert process.

If you decide to participate, you will join a study involving research of an early alert in the experience of students, faculty, and advisors at a community college. If you say YES, your participation will include up to two interviews via Zoom about your experience with early alert at the college. Approximately 20 students, faculty, and staff will be participating in this study.

**EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** There are no foreseeable benefits in participating in this study.

**COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary, yet they recognize your participation requires your time. You will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for the first interview. If you complete a second interview at the end of the semester, you will receive a second \$25 Amazon gift card to thank you for your participation.

**NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researcher will (or will not) remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. Audio and/or video recordings will be stored on password protected computers. Identifiers will be removed, and de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent from the subject. Results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later and walk away or withdraw from the study at any time.

**COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of illness or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. David Ayers at XXX-XXX-XXXX, Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at XXX-XXX-XXXX, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying you have read this form or have had it read to you, and you are satisfied you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. David Ayers XXX-XXX-XXXX

Sue Ann C. Curran XXX-XXX-XXXX

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College

of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at XXX-XXX-XXXX .

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature

Date

### **INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature

Date

## **APPENDIX D**

### **FACULTY AND STAFF INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Informed Consent Document

Old Dominion University

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Movement of Power and the Formation of Knowledge in an Early Alert at a Community College

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research project is The Movement of Power and the Formation of Knowledge in an Early Alert at a Community College.

#### **RESEARCHERS**

Sue Ann C. Curran, Doctoral Candidate in Community College Leadership

David Ayers, EdD, Associate Professor – Community College Leadership, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

Several studies have been conducted on how early alert learning analytics improve student outcomes. None of them have explained the interaction between students, faculty, and advisors in the early alert process.

If you decide to participate, you will join a study involving research of an early alert in the experience of students, faculty, and advisors at a community college. If you say YES, your participation will include up to two interviews via Zoom about your experience with early alert at the college. Approximately 20 students, faculty, and staff will be participating in this study.

**EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** There are no foreseeable benefits in participating in this study.

**COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

**NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researchers will (or will not) remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. Audio and/or video recordings will be stored on password protected computers. Identifiers will be removed, and de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent from the subject. Results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications; but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study at any time.

## **COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of illness or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. David Ayers at XXX-XXX-XXXX , Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@XXX.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at XXX-XXX-XXXX, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

## **VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying you have read this form or have had it read to you, and you are satisfied you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. David Ayers XXX-XXX-XXXX

Sue Ann C. Curran XXX-XXX-XXXX

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, at XXX-XXX-XXXX or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at XXX-XXX-XXXX.



And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature

Date

### **INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature

Date

## APPENDIX E

### DIRECTOR OF EARLY ALERT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Moderator:**

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with early alerts. Specifically, I would like to understand your experiences working with the college's early alert system.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to get verbal consent that you agree to participate in this study. You understand that I will record the conversation. I will delete the recording after 6 months. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Your identity and your college will be kept confidential. I will use aliases for all participants. Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

**Participant:**

*Responds*

**Moderator:**

1. First, I want to talk to you about the early alert program at the college. Could you describe how it works. What it is? How was it implemented? The purpose? You can just go ahead and start talking about it. I'll just ask like questions about different things about it. Describe it for someone who knows nothing about it. What it is and how it works?
2. What would trigger a student receiving a danger of failing early alert?
3. Describe a scenario of a student receiving the danger of failing alert. How does the student find out they are in danger of failing a course? What happens after the student receives the alert?
4. What means do you use to contact the student? Why?
5. Do you have certain outcomes you are aiming for or a specific outcome? Or are you just keeping it more open like that. So that if there is some sort of response or change. I do not know how to describe it.
6. I would like to get a copy of the email text that is sent to students that receive a danger of failing early alert. I would also like to get a copy of the email that faculty receive asking them to complete a progress report?

**Conclusion**

Thank you for participating today. Your comments were incredibly insightful and will help me with my study. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

## APPENDIX F

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FACULTY

**Moderator:**

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with early alerts. Specifically, I would like to understand your experience as a faculty member who raises the danger of failing alert for a student in your class.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that you received the study description and the consent form. Did you receive it?

**Moderator:**

The purpose of the study is to understand your experience with raising a danger of failing early alerts. As the student's instructor, you are the first to observe that the student is struggling academically.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to go over the process. First, I will ask you a series of questions about your role in the danger of failing early alert. Then, I will record our conversation so I can transcribe it for my research. I will delete the recording after I defend my dissertation. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Your identity and your college will be kept confidential. I will use aliases for all participants and the school. Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

**Participant:**

*Responds*

**Background:**

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- What subject do you teach?

- How long have you worked at the college?
- What is your role in the early alert process at your college?

### **The Early Alert Process**

Thank you for talking to me today. I would like to speak to you about what happens when you raise a danger of failing early alert for a student in one of your classes.

1. How do you notify a student they are in danger of failing?
2. Could you describe how you use the early alert system?
  - a. Who developed this process and why?
3. What criteria do you use to determine if a student should receive the danger of failing early alert?
4. What experiences do you have with the danger of failing alert messaging (the text of the email that a student receives)?
  - a. What role did you play in drafting the message to students in the early alert email notification?
  - b. What is your desired outcome of the email notification to the student?
  - c. What message do you want to be conveyed to the student when they receive the danger of failing alert email?
5. What is your relationship with the advisor/success coach who contacts the student about the early alert?
  - a. Do you communicate with the advisor/success coach about the student? If so, what do you discuss? If not, why not?

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for participating today. Your comments were incredibly insightful and will help me with my study. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

## APPENDIX G

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT SUCCESS ADVISORS

**Moderator:**

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with early alerts. Specifically, I would like to understand your experience as a student success advisor working with students who receive the danger of failing early alert notification.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that you received the study description and the consent form. Did you receive it?

**Participant:**

*Responds*

**Moderator:**

The purpose of the study is to understand your experience with early alerts. I want to study early alert activity from your unique vantage point. Student success advisors work with students who receive these alerts. As a result, you can share the experiences of what happens when a student receives an alert notification.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to get verbal consent that you agree to participate in this study. You understand that I will record the conversation. I will delete the recording after 6 months. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Your identity and your college will be kept confidential. I will use aliases for all participants. Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

**Participant:**

*Responds*

**Background:**

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- What are your position and areas of responsibility at the college?
- How long have you worked at the college?
- What is your role in the early alert process at your college?

**The Early Alert Experience:**

Thank you for sharing that information. I would now like you to focus on communicating with me about the experience of students receiving an early alert from your perspective.

1. How do you connect with a student who received a danger of failing early alert?
  - a. What method of communication do you use? (phone, text message, in person, etc.)
2. Describe the process of contacting a student about a danger of failing early alert. What do you discuss during that conversation and why?
3. What are typical reactions of the student when you first talk to them about the alert?
  - a. How does the student respond when you talk to the student about the early alert?
4. What experiences do you have with the early alert messaging (text of the emails a student receives)?
  - a. What role did you play in drafting the messaging to students in the early alert email notification?
  - b. What is the desired outcome of the email notification to the student?
  - c. What message do you want to be conveyed to the student when they receive the early alert email?
  - d. What are some typical ways students respond to the email about the alert?
5. What effects do you see on the student because of your involvement? Can you share an example from your experience?
6. How do you understand early alerts working in the student's college career?
7. What do you know about the student before you have a conversation about the alert? How does that information inform your conversation?
  - a. How do you use historical data about previous alerts?
8. What is it like for you to work with students who receive early alerts?
9. Is there anything you did not have an opportunity to share today that you would like me to know?

**Conclusion**

Thank you for participating today. Your comments were incredibly insightful and will help me with my study. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

## APPENDIX H

### FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS

**Moderator:**

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with early alerts. Specifically, I would like to understand receiving a danger of failing alert.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that you received the study description and the consent form. Did you receive it?

**Moderator:**

The purpose of the study is to understand your experience receiving a danger of failing early alerts.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to go over the process. Then, I will ask you a series of questions about your role in the danger of failing early alert. You will receive a \$25 gift card from Amazon at the end of the semester for your participation today. In addition, if you participate in a follow-up (second) interview, you will receive a second \$25 gift card.

Your name and your college will be kept confidential. When I write up the study, I will not use your name. Instead, I will use a made-up name. I will record our conversation so I can transcribe it for my research. I will delete the recording after 6 months. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

**Participant:**

*Responds*

**Background:**



I would like for you to tell me a little about yourself and your academic journey.

- How long have you been attending [college name]?
- What are you studying?
- What courses are you taking this semester?

**Early Alert Notification:**

Thank you for sharing. In this next section of questions, I would like to ask you about receiving a danger of failing early alert from one of your instructors? If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, we can skip it. As I said at the beginning of the interview, you can stop this interview at any time. I appreciate you taking the time to speak to me about your experiences, and I want to make sure you are comfortable.

1. What course did you receive the danger of failing alert in?
2. How did you find out that you were in danger of failing this course?
3. Where were you when you found out about the alert?
4. Have you talked to anyone at the college about the alert?
  - a. Who did you talk to about the alert?
  - b. What did you discuss?
5. What do you plan to do next? Why?

**Conclusion**

Thank you for participating today. I know this was not easy to discuss. However, your comments were incredibly insightful and will help me with my study. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. I will reach out to you to schedule a second interview in December. Thanks again. I hope the rest of the semester goes well for you.

## APPENDIX I

### SECOND STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Moderator:**

Thank for participating in the first interview last semester. I appreciate you sharing your experience with the danger of failing early alert. I have your consent form that you previously signed. I want to confirm that you would like to consent to today's interview.

**Participant:**

*Responds*

**Moderator:**

As a reminder from our last interview, if you do not want to answer a question, you do not have to. I will be recording the interview to transcribe it.

Your name and your college will be kept confidential. When I write up the study, I will not use your name. Instead, I will use a made-up name. I will record our conversation so I can transcribe it for my research. I will delete the recording after 6 months. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Upon the completion of the interview, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. You should receive that by the weekend.

Do you have any questions before I start the recording?

### Part 1: What Happened With the Course

**Course Outcome**

1. How have things been going since we last talked?
2. What happened with your course?
3. What grade did you get?
4. Was the outcome what you thought it would be? Why or Why not?
5. What courses are you taking this semester?
6. How is your progress toward your educational goals?

### **Interaction With Faculty and Advisor**

1. Who, if anyone, was most helpful for you in addressing this alert?
2. How do you feel now?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the faculty member who raised the alert?
4. (If you spoke to an advisor) how would you describe the relationship with the advisor? (Do you still talk?)

### **Impact of the Alert**

1. What (if anything) are you doing differently? Why?
2. What has changed for you?
3. What has stayed the same?
4. What negative impacts did the alert have? (e.g., financial aid, grade point average)
5. What positive impacts did receiving this alert have?

### **Part 2: Follow-up Questions From the First Interview**

#### **Moderator:**

I have some follow-up questions for clarification from our first interview. My first question is (This question will only be if I have any unanswered questions or need clarification of things said. I will use my notes on the first interview transcripts).

### **Part 3: Background and Demographics**

The final part of today's interview is demographic questions about the course and you. You do not have to answer any of these questions. I am using demographic questions to describe the students who I interviewed as an aggregate (such as three first semester students).

#### **Course Information**

What was the course that you received the alert in?

- Course ID
- Course Name
- In person or online course?
- What was the instructor's name?

#### **Participation in the Study**

1. How did you find out about this study and participating in the interview?

2. What motivated you to participate? Why did you contact me to participate?

**Demographic questions**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
4. Last fall, were you a first semester student?
5. Are you a first-generation student? (Your parent or guardian does not have a bachelor's degree.)
6. Are you an international student?
7. Are you receiving financial aid to attend [college name]?

**Conclusion****Moderator:**

Those are my questions for today. Do you have any questions?

I appreciate you participating in my study and taking the time to talk to me. I wish you all the best with this semester and pursuing your academic goals.

## **APPENDIX J**

### **EMAIL TEXT TO FACULTY MEMBER TO COMPLETE THE PROGRESS REPORT**

[Header with college name and logo]

#### **Student Feedback Request**

Dear Professor [Instructor Last Name],

Thank you for completing this campaign about how your students are doing in your [year, semester] spring 16-week class(es). Please submit this report by end of day [day of the week, month, date].

As a reminder, an email is sent to the student once an alert is raised. Any comments you make as part of the alert will not be sent to the student, but they will be visible to yourself, staff and faculty. You do not need to put in attendance or grades for every student, but it is helpful to put it in for those students you are concerned about.

The Student Success Office will reach out to all students marked as in danger of failing or directly referred to us and the earlier we can intervene the better chance that we can help keep that student. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you.

[Signature line of Director of Student Success]

Click to Begin Entering Student Feedback

The link above expires on [MM/DD/YYYY]. If you would like to provide feedback after the expiration above, please contact your administrator.

## APPENDIX K

### SAMPLE EARLY ALERT PROGRESS REPORT

#### Student Feedback


**Your information is secure.**

Security measures allow your school to adhere to government rules and regulations concerning FERPA and overall student privacy. Thank you!

**Professor :**

You have been asked to fill out progress reports for students in the following classes. Update each student based on your best knowledge of their performance at this point in the term.

EDE- : English Composition Readiness

	Student Name	Do you have any feedback?	If yes, you must identify a positive or negative alert in the dropdown menu	How Many Absences?	Pass/Not Pass?	Comments (Reminder: these comments will not be sent to the student)
1		<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
4		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
5		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
6		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
7		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
8		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
9		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
10		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

**APPENDIX L****DANGER OF FAILING EARLY ALERT EMAIL**

Dear Student,

Care Community College cares about your success in your coursework. Your instructor has concerns about your progress in this course and wants to help. This notice is not being sent to you lightly. It is very likely that if you do not do something differently, you will fail this course. Please meet with your instructor by the next class period to help you get back on track in this course.

Our Student Success Advisors can also help you in these situations. You may make an appointment with someone from that office by calling XXX-XXX-XXXX.

## VITA

**Sue Ann Cecilia Curran**  
Old Dominion University  
Darden College of Education

### **HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY, NORFOLK, VIRGINIA	2020–2021
Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Teaching and Learning	

VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Student Success Technology Coordinator, Workforce and Academic Services	2013–2019
Project Management Specialist, Information Technology Services	2012–2013
Business Process Analyst, Information Technology Services	2005–2007
Instructional Technology Coordinator, Academic Services	2004–2005
BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WEYERS CAVE, VIRGINIA	2000–2004
LMS Administrator, Department of Distance Learning	

### **OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA	2007–2012
Project Manager, Operations Department	

### **EDUCATION**

Old Dominion University	Norfolk, VA
Doctor of Philosophy, Community College Leadership	

Emory University	Atlanta, GA
Master of Divinity (Cum Laude)	
Concentration: Christian Education	
Woodruff Fellowship	

St. Joseph's University	Philadelphia, PA
Bachelor of Arts, Theology	
Minor: Politics	
B'nai B'rith Scholarship	

### **Certifications**

Project Management Professional, Project Management Institute