

PROJECT PLAYBOOK

# The Academic Recovery

A Diagnostic Framework for Reducing DFW Rates and Redesigning Student Support Systems



UNIVERSITY  
INNOVATION  
ALLIANCE



# Table of Contents

---

## **UIA Academic Implementation Framework**

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
I. Introduction .....	2
II. About the Playbook.....	4
III. Campus Approaches to Academic Recovery .....	5
IV. Guide to Implementing Academic Recovery.....	6
V. Lessons Learned from Campuses.....	8
VI. Key Takeaways .....	9
VII. Next Steps.....	9

## **Implementation Playbook**

Start Here.....	10
Phase 1: Diagnose Your System.....	12
Phase 2: Design Your Minimum Viable Intervention .....	14
Phase 3: Implementation Checklist.....	16
For Faculty: Why This Is Not About Blame .....	17
Begin Where You Are .....	18



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic Recovery is a dynamic, student-centered strategy that re-engages students after course failure while delivering measurable academic and financial returns for institutions. Developed and tested across 11 large public research universities, the UIA Academic Recovery model targets students who previously earned a D, F, or W in high-enrollment gateway courses that disproportionately block degree progression for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students.

Across two academic years, participating campuses served more than 1,400 students across 100+ courses. On average, students in Academic Recovery outperformed peers by **17% in retake pass rates**, demonstrated **higher term-to-term retention**, and in several cases generated **net-positive institutional revenue through improved persistence**. Most importantly, Academic Recovery initiated broader institutional change through faculty course redesign, new data infrastructure, revised advising and probation policies, and cross-unit collaboration. While individual sections may be particularly relevant to specific roles, Academic Recovery efforts are most effective when coordination occurs across units.

### How This Playbook Can Help You

This playbook is intended for:

- **Institutions** looking to adopt or adapt Academic Recovery at their own institution and within their own contexts
- **Systems and intermediaries** interested in reducing DFW bottlenecks at scale

The playbook outlines the core components that drive impact, documents multiple implementation models, and provides a practical guide for replication while allowing for local adaptation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### History of the Academic Recovery Project

The UIA Academic Recovery (AR) Project emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as a direct response to intensified inequities in student academic outcomes. While high D, F, and W (DFW) rates in gateway courses have long challenged institutions, the pandemic magnified their impact, especially for low-income students, underrepresented students, first-generation students, caregivers, and working learners. These students faced compounding barriers, including lost wages, increased family responsibilities, disrupted learning environments, and mental health challenges.

### Why Academic Recovery Matters

Non-passing grades in foundational courses interrupt degree progression, increase time to completion, lower GPA, and can create challenges with financial aid eligibility. These academic setbacks often carry psychological consequences such as eroding confidence, belonging, and motivation for students already navigating structural inequities. Financial costs associated with retaking courses further increase stop-out and drop-out risk.

Data consistently show that a small number of high-enrollment gateway courses account for a disproportionate share of DFW outcomes and course retakes. Institutions unintentionally

perpetuate inequities by allowing these DFW bottlenecks to derail student progress, unless some form of an intervention is in place to prevent them.

Academic Recovery reframes course failure as a systems challenge rather than a student's shortcoming. By intervening quickly and intentionally, institutions can restore momentum, eliminate gaps caused by undifferentiated outcomes, and improve retention and completion.

perpetuate inequities by allowing these DFW bottlenecks to derail student progress, unless some form of an intervention is in place to prevent them.

Academic Recovery reframes course failure as a systems challenge rather than a student's shortcoming. By intervening quickly and intentionally, institutions can restore momentum, eliminate gaps caused by undifferentiated outcomes, and improve retention and completion.



## Participating Campuses



UNIVERSITY OF  
CENTRAL FLORIDA



University of Colorado **Denver**



NORTH CAROLINA  
AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL  
STATE UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY OF  
ILLINOIS CHICAGO



**Oregon State**  
University



THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF UTAH



**PURDUE**  
UNIVERSITY®



**VCU**



Together, these campuses served more than 1,400 students across 100+ courses over multiple academic terms. These institutions represent a range of academic calendars, student populations, and governance structures, enabling model adaptation across contexts.



## II. ABOUT THE PLAYBOOK

### Purpose of the Playbook

This playbook is designed to support institutions in designing, implementing, and scaling effective Academic Recovery initiatives. The UIA shares evidence from over two years of campus data and their lessons from scaling innovations into actionable steps.



Centers students retaking courses as a distinct population with predictable needs and barriers.



Documents multiple academic recovery models across institutional contexts (summer, full-term, probation-linked, quarter system).

### This Playbook



Highlights evidence-based components associated with improved retake success and persistence.



Provides an implementation roadmap grounded in real campus practice rather than theory alone.

Academic Recovery expands our traditional view of remediation by providing a proactive intervention that treats course retakes as a critical moment for institutional support and redesign.

### III. CAMPUS APPROACHES TO ACADEMIC RECOVERY

While all campuses shared core design elements, implementation models varied based on academic calendars, governance structures, and student populations.

#### A Summer Programs

**North Carolina A&T (Math Scholars Institute)** – Focused on high-DFW math courses with peer coaching and structured tutoring in compressed summer terms.

**University of Illinois Chicago (Summer Edge)** – Integrated first-time and repeat students into small, cohort-based summer sections with intensive success coaching and supplemental instruction.

**Georgia State University** – Scaled Accelerator Academy with tuition subsidies, progression grants, academic coaching, and embedded supplemental instruction (SI), demonstrating strong retake and retention outcomes.

#### B Academic Warning / Probation-Linked Models

**Arizona State University** – Embedded recovery supports within existing academic standing interventions, emphasizing peer coaching and reflective learning.

**Virginia Commonwealth University** – Leveraged the Campus Learning Center to align academic coaching with probation policies and early registration incentives. Found this program saved more than \$200k in retaining students and improving their academic progress.

#### C Full-Term Programs

**University of Central Florida** – Expanded supplemental instructional availability, embedded coaching, and increased participation through redesigned fall/spring offerings.

**University of Colorado Denver** – Iteratively refined eligibility, recruitment, and instructional design to better capture students at risk.

**Purdue University** – Shifted from online summer pilots to in-person fall/spring models with redesigned math pedagogy and mindset supports.

**University of Utah** – Focused on faculty-led redesign, early intervention strategies, and syllabus-level changes to support repeat learners.

#### D Quarter System Programs

**University of California, Riverside** – Transitioned from generic SI to discipline-specific tutoring aligned with gateway STEM courses.

**Oregon State University** – Incentivized faculty course redesign and integrated peer support within quarter-term structures.

#### E Integration with Student Success Programs

**Oregon State University** and **Virginia Commonwealth University** embedded Academic Recovery elements into existing advising, coaching, and learning center infrastructures to support sustainability.



## IV. GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING ACADEMIC RECOVERY

### Academic Recovery Theory of Change

Across campuses, we found that when high-DFW gateway courses are paired with intentional supports for repeat-takers, academic structure, coaching relationships, and financial relief, students are more likely to succeed and persist. Over time, these improvements generate gains across the board, retention-based revenue, and institutional learning that reshapes how campuses address anticipated academic barriers.

Where to Begin	The How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data identifying high-DFW courses and repeat-takers</li><li>• Faculty willing to redesign or teach recovery sections</li><li>• Academic coaching, SI/tutoring, and advising capacity</li><li>• Modest financial resources for tuition support and incentives</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Targeted recruitment of repeat-takers</li><li>• Dedicated or adapted course sections</li><li>• Embedded academic coaching and peer learning</li><li>• Supplemental instruction aligned to course demands</li></ul>
Early Success Outcomes	Long-Term Success Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher retake pass rates</li><li>• Improved GPA and academic standing</li><li>• Increased term-to-term retention</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased accountability for the success of all students</li><li>• Shorter time to degree</li><li>• Improved institutional revenue and efficiency</li><li>• Scalable, proactive models for preventing future DFWs</li></ul>

## A Minimum Viable Academic Recovery Model

Institutions seeking to replicate Academic Recovery should distinguish between **non-negotiable design elements** and **contextual adaptations**.

### Non-Negotiables (Required for Impact)

1. Focus on high-enrollment, high-DFW gateway courses
2. Intentional recruitment of students retaking those courses
3. Structured academic support beyond the classroom (coaching + SI/tutoring)
4. Reduced financial burden for retaking the course
5. Ongoing use of data for iteration and improvement

### Adaptable Elements (Context-Specific)

- Term timing (summer vs. fall/spring vs. quarter)
- Delivery mode (integrated vs. standalone sections)
- Incentive structures (cash vs. non-monetary)
- Coaching model (peer, professional, hybrid)
- Integration with probation, advising, or learning center models

## B Core Academic Recovery Structure

### 1. Foundational Course Focus

- Target gateway courses with high DFW rates and high enrollment
- Prioritize courses that block progression in structured degree pathways

### 2. Wraparound Academic Support

- Supplemental Instruction or discipline-specific tutoring
- Success coaching (preferably peer-like or lived-experience-informed)
- Cohort-based learning environments

### 3. Financial Assistance and Incentives

- Tuition/fee subsidies for retaken courses
- Small progression grants tied to behaviors (attendance, engagement)
- Non-monetary incentives (priority registration, embedded resources)

## C Using Data to Select Courses

### 1. Data Access

- Registrar and institutional research collaboration
- Ability to identify repeat-takers in real time

### 2. Key Outcomes Beyond Pass Rates

- Retention and persistence
- GPA recovery and academic standing
- Eliminating gaps for students most at-risk of not passing
- Cost savings and revenue retention

## D Recruitment Strategy

- Early identification plus just-in-time outreach
- Multi-channel communication (texting, advisors, faculty referrals)
- Clear, asset-based messaging that avoids stigma

## E Who and Which Offices to Include

### 1. Key Stakeholders

- Faculty and department chairs
- Learning centers and advising units
- Registrar, bursar, financial aid
- Institutional research and IT

### 2. Aligning Services to Outcomes

- Match supports to student behavior and course demands
- Avoid over-reliance on financial incentives alone
- Build feedback loops for iteration

## V. LESSONS LEARNED FROM CAMPUSES

- Structured academic support matters more than financial incentives alone.
- Peer and relational coaching outperforms transactional models.
- Recruitment is often the hardest operational challenge.
- Faculty engagement is the primary lever for sustainable scale.
- Academic Recovery catalyzes broader system-level shifts than when treated as a learning process versus a pilot.



### VCU Impacts and Outcomes

VCU scaled its Academic Recovery initiative from a single introductory psychology course into a multi-course intervention (MATH 151, CHEM 101, UNIV 111, BIOL 101). The team treated incentives as a lever: the pilot paid a flat \$1,500 to enrollees, then shifted to milestone-based payments to reward sustained engagement. Non-monetary rewards (early registration) reinforced midterm coaching milestones. Implementation evolved to combine the Campus Learning Center's coaching expertise, an Academic Recovery Orientation session, proactive texting outreach, and sustained coach outreach—moving the model from “get students in the door” to “keep students engaged” across the semester. VCU's Academic Recovery project dramatically reshaped the campus approach to identifying and supporting students through their journey of gateway coursework while demonstrating significant ROI.

#### Program Impact

- Participant retention: **80% for Academic Recovery participants vs. 53% for non-participants (substantial differential).**
- Revenue impact: VCU calculated \$208K in retention-based revenue gains with a net gain ≈ \$128K after program expenses.
- Dose-response effect: Students attending ≥5 coaching sessions in a semester showed materially better course outcomes.
- Participation growth: Milestone incentives + orientation + intensified coach outreach drove increased and sustained use of academic coaching.
- Faculty buy-in and shifting system mindsets: Project secured important faculty buy-in and redefined “barrier courses,” catalyzed faculty engagement with student success data, and inspired similar initiatives across departments.



### Utah Impacts and Outcomes

Utah's U Succeed combined targeted recruitment, inclusive pedagogy, and embedded supports into a cohesive course-level model. Leadership began with data-driven targeting and generous scholarships to recruit motivated students. Instructional practices were redesigned for inclusion—scaffolded lessons, collaborative learning, adjusted assessments, and small-class environments. The model embedded academic supports (required/optional study pods, coach appointments) and experimented with an optional AI tutor in the online environment. Implementation emphasized cross-unit coordination (deans > department coordinators > advisors) and faculty ownership of early action strategies.

#### Program Impact

- Retention gains: Fall 2024—students in the Academic Recovery model who passed the course had retention rates 11% higher than AR students who did not pass, and 8% higher than non-AR students.
- Normalized support use: Embedding supports in courses shifted academic help from “optional” to “expected,” increasing utilization across student populations.
- Improved student experience and outcomes: pre/post surveys showed the program meaningfully increased students' academic confidence, and **drove nearly 70% more passing students**, cutting the DFW rate dramatically from nearly 100% to 33%.
- Faculty engagement: Faculty voluntarily expanded roles, developed early-action strategies, and partnered with department leaders to institutionalize changes.
- Peer support and coaching: Peer coaching and mentoring, as well as study pods, were effective complements to instructor efforts and we found this to be true at other campuses.
- Policy influence: The embedded course supports influence administrative policies and course design incentives at the departmental level.

## VI. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Academic setbacks are predictable and addressable.**

---

- 2 A small number of courses drive disproportionate barriers and opportunities for improvement.**

---

- 3 Academic Recovery yields the best results when campuses adapt the project for their specific campus' needs.**

---

- 4 Campuses see stronger results when the student experience is placed at the center of the intervention, instead of departmental needs.**

---

- 5 Academic Recovery offers both student success and financial ROI.**

## VII. NEXT STEPS

To sustain and scale impact, the UIA recommends institutions move beyond stand-alone Academic Recovery programs and instead institutionalize the high-impact components that drive student success. This includes expanding Academic Recovery efforts to additional high-DFW courses and departments where students are most likely to struggle, while making deliberate investments in faculty development and the data infrastructure needed to support timely, informed decision-making. This work must shift from a largely reactive model focused on students after failure occurs to a proactive, prevention-oriented approach that leverages early alerts to intervene before students fall off track.



# Implementation Playbook

## START HERE

If you are reading this playbook, you are likely grappling with high DFW rates and the very real consequences for students who fall behind or leave altogether. You may not have new funding, additional staff, or the ability to launch a fully resourced program tomorrow. That is okay. This work is designed to meet you where you are.



### The Core Premise

Academic Recovery begins with a simple but powerful premise: higher education design is the problem—not students, faculty, advisors, or staff.

You cannot redesign what you cannot see. The act of mapping your current system is the first move toward change.

# 83%

**Pass rate when students  
retake courses with  
embedded support  
(vs. 53% without support)**

The first step is not to build something new. The first step is to see your current system clearly.

Start by asking two simple questions:

1

**What is our current policy for course repeats?**

2

**What actually happens to students after they earn a D, F, or withdrawal?**

Pull the data on how many students are repeating which courses and how many times. Look especially at gateway courses where failure delays or derails progress. In several campuses in this project, faculty discovered students who had repeated the same course five, seven, even ten or more times. Those patterns were invisible until someone asked the question.

Next, process-map the student experience. When a student fails a course, what steps does your institution expect them to take? Who contacts them, if anyone? What information do they receive? What support options are available, and how easy are they to access? This step costs no money. It requires time, curiosity, and honesty. It often reveals that the system students encounter after failure looks very different from the one leaders imagine exists.

## WHO THIS PLAYBOOK IS FOR

This playbook is for campuses willing to look honestly at their DFW patterns and take responsibility for redesigning systems that are not serving students well.

This playbook is for:	This playbook is not for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutions that want to reduce DFW rates and improve progression in gateway courses</li><li>• Campuses serving students who are juggling work, family responsibilities, and financial stress</li><li>• Teams that may be under-resourced but are willing to start with data, listening, and small changes</li><li>• Faculty, advisors, and administrators who believe that failure is not a student flaw but a design signal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutions looking for a plug-and-play solution with no local adaptation</li><li>• Campuses that want to add a tutoring program without touching course design</li><li>• Teams unwilling to examine how institutional policies and practices contribute to repeated failure</li></ul>

This playbook is especially relevant for rural, regional, and under-resourced campuses where adding new programs or staff is not feasible in the short term. Many of the first steps described here require no new funding—only different questions and different coordination.

Academic Recovery is not about blaming any one group. It is about acknowledging that many of our systems were designed for a different era and a different student population. Redesign requires collaboration, humility, and a willingness to listen.

## THE EVIDENCE: WHY THIS WORKS

In too many institutions, the response to a DFW is hope. We hope the student retakes the course. We hope they do better next time. We hope things work out. The evidence shows that hope is not enough.



### Hope Is not a Strategy

Across Academic Recovery campuses, one clear intervention consistently changed outcomes:

When students retook a course with embedded academic and relational support, **they passed at an 83% rate, compared to a typical 53% rate** for students retaking without support.

What matters most is not the label of the program, the size of the incentive, or whether the course looks innovative. What matters is that students are not asked to repeat the same experience and hope for a different result.

## PHASE 1: DIAGNOSE YOUR SYSTEM

Every campus that made meaningful progress in Academic Recovery started in the same place: they stopped guessing and looked directly at what was happening to students after a D, F, or withdrawal.

### Step 1: Pull Course Repeat Data

Before designing a program, hiring staff, or adding new supports, ask these questions:

- Which courses have the highest DFW rates?
- How many students are repeating those courses?
- How many times are individual students repeating the same course?
- What actually happens to students after the second, third, or fourth attempt?

When campuses pulled this data, they often discovered patterns that had been invisible. Students repeating the same gateway course five, seven, even ten or more times. Students burning through time, financial aid, and confidence while technically remaining “enrolled.” Course repeat policies that existed on paper but offered little real guidance or support in practice.

#### Why This Step Matters

DFW is not a single event—it is a pathway. For many students, a first failure quietly becomes a pattern of repeated attempts, delayed progress, and eventual departure.

Until a campus sees that pathway clearly, the default strategy remains hope.

The first step of Academic Recovery costs almost nothing. It requires no new funding, no new staff, and no new program. It requires access to basic institutional data and the willingness to ask uncomfortable questions.

#### Sample Data Request Template

Copy and paste this request directly to your Institutional Research, Enrollment Management, or Student Success Analytics team.



#### Sample Data Request

We are beginning a focused review of course repeat patterns and student outcomes following D, F, or withdrawals in high-DFW gateway courses.

We are not looking for a dashboard summary at this stage. We are trying to understand student pathways after failure.

#### Please provide the following for the past 3–5 academic terms:

1. A list of courses with the highest DFW rates, including enrollment counts and DFW percentages by term.
2. For each of those courses, the number of students who have repeated once, twice, or three or more times.
3. Student-level repeat histories including: number of attempts, term sequence, and final outcome (pass, continued enrollment, stop-out, withdrawal).
4. Time between course attempts and whether students remained continuously enrolled.
5. Any existing limits or policies on course repeats and whether those limits are being enforced.
6. Where available, basic student characteristics for repeaters (Pell status, first-generation status, race/ethnicity), aggregated to protect privacy.

**The goal is to identify patterns of repeated failure and understand where institutional policies, advising, and course design may be contributing to stalled student progress.**

## What to Do When the Data Comes Back:

When Academic Recovery campuses received this data, the most important work was not statistical modeling. It was collective sense making. As you review the data, ask:

- Are there students repeating the same course more times than policy allows?
- How long are students stuck in a single requirement?
- At what point do students stop re-enrolling?
- Are there differences in outcomes after the first vs. second repeat?
- Do some courses quietly function as exit points from the institution?

Several campuses discovered students who had repeated the same gateway course five, seven, even ten or more times. In one case, a student had attempted a math course thirteen times over several years. That pattern was technically allowed, but pedagogically indefensible. These discoveries were not failures of staff or advisors. They were signals that the system was designed to allow repeated failure without intervention.

---

## Step 2: Diagnose What's Driving Your DFW Rates

---

When DFW rates spike, the most common mistake is looking only at the aggregate rate. That tells you there is a problem, but not why it is happening or where intervention will matter most. Effective diagnosis requires disaggregating the data to understand how course design, instructional context, and student experience interact.

### Data Categories to Request

Category	Data Points to Request
<b>Core Course Context</b>	Course name/number, whether it's a gateway course, enrollment size by section, historical DFW rates over multiple terms.
<b>Timing &amp; Modality</b>	Time of day, day of week, modality (in-person, online sync/async, hybrid), term offered. Note: Async online and late-evening courses consistently showed higher DFW rates.
<b>Student Characteristics</b>	Pell eligibility, first-gen status, race/ethnicity, academic year, major, enrollment intensity, work hours (if available), whether repeating
<b>Faculty Context</b>	Tenure status, years of experience, sections taught concurrently, access to TAs or learning assistants. Use to understand instructional context, not to assign blame.
<b>Course Design Signals</b>	Assessment structure (high-stakes vs. low-stakes), required vs. optional support, use of supplemental instruction, pacing in first four weeks, withdrawal timing



## Critical Framing Principle

High DFW rates are signals that the learning environment needs redesign—not evidence that students or instructors are deficient.

This diagnostic process helps campuses see the system as it is, rather than how it is intended to be.

If Your Campus Has Limited Data Capacity:	What This Step Unlocks
<p>If your institution cannot immediately provide all of the above, start with the smallest possible step:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the top 5–10 courses by DFW rate</li> <li>2. Ask how many students have repeated each course more than once</li> <li>3. Ask what happens to those students one year later</li> </ol> <p>Even this limited view is often enough to surface patterns that justify immediate action.</p>	<p>Once campuses completed this data review, three things consistently happened:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty began to recognize that repeated failure signaled a design problem, not a lack of effort</li> <li>• Leaders realized that allowing unlimited retakes without structured support was not a neutral policy</li> <li>• Teams became willing to redesign courses and supports because the status quo was no longer defensible</li> </ul>

## PHASE 2: DESIGN YOUR MINIMUM VIABLE INTERVENTION

The Academic Recovery model was tested in robust ways across multiple campuses. You may not be able to implement everything you see immediately. That is expected. The goal is not perfection. The goal is to stop relying on hope as a strategy.

### If You Can Only Do Three Things

1

**Identify one high-DFW course where repeated failure has serious consequences for student progress**




2

**Offer a retake section or structured recovery experience that is intentionally different from the original course**

3

**Embed support directly into the course experience rather than offering it as optional add-ons**

## At Minimum, This Means:

 <p><b>STRUCTURED SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Regular, structured academic support aligned to the course content</p>	 <p><b>CONSISTENT CONTACT</b></p> <p>A near-peer coach, tutor, or learning assistant who checks in and helps students stay engaged</p>	 <p><b>CLEAR COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p>Clear communication from the instructor about expectations, pacing, and available help</p>
--	---	---

This is the smallest version of Academic Recovery that still honors what the evidence tells us works.

## Minimum Viable Staffing Model

Academic Recovery does not require a large new team to get started. What it does require is clear ownership and realistic expectations about who is doing what. If you are under-resourced, this is the minimum staffing configuration that still produces results:

Role	Responsibilities	Notes
<b>Academic Lead</b>	Owens course structure, assessments, and pacing. Does not need to redesign everything—the key is that the course is intentionally different.	Can be filled by one motivated faculty member
<b>Student Support Lead</b>	Owens recruitment of at-risk students. Coordinates between faculty, coaching, and students. Tracks enrollment and disengagement.	Often already on staff; does not need to be full-time
<b>Near-Peer Support</b>	Provides regular academic and relational support. Checks in weekly. Helps students stay organized, attend class, and use support.	One near-peer can support 15–25 students



### What This Means in Practice

- You do not need a new office
- You do not need a new program director
- You do need: one faculty member + one coordinating staff member + one consistent support person
- If you cannot staff all three, start with faculty plus one consistent support person
- Do not start with optional tutoring alone

## PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

If you are overwhelmed and unsure where to begin, follow these steps in order:

### STEP 1: Pull Repeat Data

- Identify courses with the highest DFW rates
- Look at how many students are repeating those courses and how many times
- Ask what happens to students after the second or third attempt

**This step costs no money and changes everything.**

### STEP 2: Choose One Course

- Select one high-DFW course that blocks progress
- Avoid trying to fix everything at once
- Choose a course where at least one faculty member is open to doing something different

### STEP 3: Change the Experience

- Do not offer the same course again
- Add structured academic support aligned to the course
- Make at least some support required, not optional

### STEP 4: Watch the First Four Weeks

- Most disengagement happens early—monitor closely
- Check attendance, assignment completion, and student check-ins weekly
- Adjust quickly



**If you do nothing else, do these four steps. They are enough to move from hope to action.**

## FOR FACULTY: WHY THIS IS NOT ABOUT BLAME

This section can be shared directly with faculty.

Academic Recovery is not about blaming students or instructors. It is about recognizing that repeated failure is a design signal.

When large numbers of capable students fail the same course—often more than once—it tells us that the learning environment is not aligned with how students learn, live, and manage competing demands. Repeating the same course without changing the experience rarely produces different results.



### What Faculty Who Participated Reported

- Students were more engaged, more prepared, and more likely to complete the course successfully
- In several cases, students in recovery sections performed as well as or better than students taking the course for the first time
- Faculty autonomy was preserved—instructors decide how to teach the course

Academic Recovery gives faculty a way to change the experience without lowering standards. What changes is that students are no longer left to navigate failure alone. Support is embedded, expectations are clearer, and early feedback helps students adjust before they fall too far behind.

**Academic Recovery treats failure as a shared responsibility and redesign as a professional act of care.**

### Common Missteps to Avoid

These are common missteps that Academic Recovery campuses learned to avoid:

<b>Do not rely on hope</b>	Hoping students retake the course and do better is not a strategy.
<b>Do not repeat the same course unchanged</b>	Repeating the same experience produces the same outcomes.
<b>Do not make support optional</b>	Optional tutoring and office hours are used least by the students who need them most.
<b>Do not start with money alone</b>	Financial incentives can help access, but they do not replace embedded academic support.
<b>Do not assign unwilling faculty</b>	Faculty engagement matters. Start with instructors who are curious and open.
<b>Do not wait for perfect data</b>	You do not need a flawless dashboard to begin. Directional data is enough.
<b>Do not try to scale before you learn</b>	Start small, learn quickly, then expand.

## BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE

Students have been living with the consequences of high DFW rates for too long. This playbook exists to help you begin the work of redesigning your institution around their needs, starting exactly where you are.

You will find in this playbook examples of campuses that implemented comprehensive versions of Academic Recovery. You will also find ideas that can be implemented incrementally. What matters is that you do something.

# 83%

Pass rate with embedded support vs. 53% without



### If You Do Nothing Else after Reading this Playbook

- Pull the data. Map what happens to students after failure.
- Listen carefully to what the system is telling you.
- Everything that follows builds on that moment of clarity.

This framework / playbook is part of the Academic Recovery document suite.