



**PennState**

**SCHREYER INSTITUTE FOR  
TEACHING EXCELLENCE**

## **Talking with Students About Starfish**

Starfish progress surveys are a critical tool instructors can use to [support student success through early intervention](#). This resource provides a few suggestions for how instructors might talk with their students about Starfish and the messages they receive through this tool.

### **What should I share with students about Starfish progress surveys?**

Many students already use Starfish to connect with academic advisers, tutors, and other support providers. However, if students do not know about progress surveys, they may be confused about the nature of your outreach. To help students understand why they are receiving information about their course progress, it is helpful to share more information about the purpose of Starfish progress surveys. A good time for this might be when you are submitting the first progress survey in weeks 3–4 of the semester.

Below are a few suggestions for what you might share with your students throughout the semester to help them better understand the role of Starfish for their academic success and that all students benefit from accessing resources and a support network. Instructors might also consider sharing an anecdote from their own experience as a student to discuss with students how important it can be to connect with others in your network.

#### ***Before submitting progress surveys:***

Everyone needs a supportive network to succeed. Starfish is a system to support your success at Penn State. As your instructor, I'll be submitting progress surveys through this system. As part of these progress surveys, I can raise flags (concerns), provide kudos (congratulations), and make referrals so that you have the resources you need to make decisions that support your learning. You have a whole network of people here who want to see you succeed—advisers, tutors, counselors, coaches—and Starfish is a tool you can use to access that support.

#### ***After submitting progress surveys:***

I want to let you know that I submitted progress surveys in Starfish for the course this week, including some kudos, recommendations, and a few flags due to missed attendance or assignments. You'll receive a message(s) from Starfish with my suggestions for your success in the course.

You may also receive a follow-up message from your academic adviser. If your adviser (or someone else from your support network) reaches out about progress surveys, take

the opportunity to respond and to work with them to build on your strengths—they are here to help you.

### ***Throughout the semester:***

At other points throughout the semester, instructors may choose to share additional information about the purpose of Starfish by including a note in their syllabus, making Canvas announcements, or through in-class announcements.

### ***Tap into your success network***

- Penn State can be a large and complex place, and the most effective learners are often the ones who learn to navigate the available resources.
- Starfish helps you connect and work in community with everyone in your network—your adviser, tutors, counselors, coaches, and other support staff. You're not navigating college alone.
- I want to make sure you have the support you need to succeed. Your adviser and others in your network can connect with you about resources that might help.

### ***Early feedback supports your success***

- Early feedback (by week 4 of the semester) can help you make adjustments at a time when changes have the biggest impact.
- As an instructor, I also note positive progress in Starfish so your adviser and others can celebrate successes with you.

### ***Make informed decisions about your learning***

- The feedback you receive helps you understand your patterns as a learner and make informed choices about where to focus and seek support.
- This is an invitation to think critically about how you learn and what you can do now to work towards your goals for this course.