

**Centre for Academic Advising:**  
**The Central Resource for Undergraduate Advising and Transition**  
**at the University of Regina**

Choose or Change Your Program or Major  
Develop and Navigate a Degree Plan  
Understand Academic Regulations and Procedures  
Deal with Academic Difficulties  
Overcome Transition Issues  
Add, Drop or Withdraw from a course  
Review Your Academic Path  
Get Referred to Appropriate Support Services

Submitted by

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In order to enhance the transition and retention of students into the University, the delivery model in which academic planning and support to students is offered must change. Instead of silos within individual faculties, there must be integration and sharing of advising responsibilities between the faculties and a centralized office that supports the advising and transition of first and second year students to the University of Regina. This will create the greatest impact on the retention and success of our students.

In the following pages, a shared model of advising will be explained that will result in the following improvements to our current system:

- a central office on campus focused on academic planning for students;
- services that are more visible, accessible and timely;
- implementation of a campus wide degree audit software;
- coordinated programming for at risk students;
- direct referrals to Tutoring, Accessibility Services, Cultural Supports and Counselling;
- advising staff within the faculties to focus on third and fourth year students;
- a coordinated voice on campus to speak to advising related issues;
- cross training and developmental opportunities for advising staff; and
- coordinated conversion, advising and registration of incoming students.

### **The Shared Model of Advising at the University of Regina**

The time has come for the University of Regina to switch from the *decentralized* model of advising, inherited from the University of Saskatchewan 40 years ago, to the more commonly used *shared* model of advising. In the shared model of advising incoming students, transfer students, students with transition issues, at risk students and those that are still exploring their academic options are serviced by a centralized advising office. This leaves the advising staff within the faculties to deal with third and fourth year issues of major course selection, ensuring timely graduation and identifying opportunities within the field, whether it is graduate school, professional programs or career identification.

By hiring personnel to staff the Centre for Academic Advising from within the ranks of the advisors currently serving in the faculties, we are able to incur no additional costs for human resources. Some staff would stay housed within the Faculties to advise third and fourth year students and some staff would be relocated to the centralized office. The huge benefit of hiring current advisors from within the ranks of the faculties is the knowledge base that is brought to the central unit. These knowledgeable advisors bring knowledge of the internal workings of the departments and faculties and cross train with each other. This results in a centralized service that is knowledgeable about programs throughout the University and is directly connected to the faculties and faculty personnel.

Attainable within the next fiscal year is the design and implementation of this centralized office with an **optimal launch date of January 6, 2016**. (This will greatly depend on the

timeliness of change management in coordination with Human Resources and the availability of Facilities Management to renovate in a timely manner.)

Many higher education practitioners and scholars believe that “*retention is advising.*” The focus of this initiative is to provide the best experience for students that facilitate their efficient and successful graduation.

### **Advantages and Strengths of the Shared Model**

- The new model allows for a centralized office with a focus on **successful navigation** of the University system and dealing with **transitional issues** that arise with new students, **transfer students**, and **students in academic jeopardy**.
- Third, Fourth and Fifth year students will be served by the Faculty Advisors who will advise on graduation requirements, graduate school, connections in the field of study, what to do with their degree, specialization areas, etc.
- **Each faculty will have a designated lead advisor within the Centre** for Academic Advising that coordinates with the Associate Dean, attends faculty meetings, and brings the latest approved information back to the team. This is the continued connection to the faculties.
- **All advisors** within the Centre for Academic Advising **will be cross trained** with the lead Advisor being the specialist when there are unique questions or scenarios.
- There will **always be a Quick Question Desk open** at the front.
- There will be a rotating schedule of advisors taking walk-ins, advisors taking appointments, and advisors taking phone or Skype appointments.
- **Walk-in appointments** for academic triages **will always be available**.
- There will be a computer bank within the unit where **peer student workers would help register students** if needed after their appointments with the advisors.
- There will be **standardized training for new advisors**, as well as **coverage when an advisor was sick, on leave, on vacation**, or when an advisor leaves and there is a need to rehire.
- There is a **career development and progression path for advisors**, as they will now be staff of Student Affairs.

### **Staffing of the Centre**

The proposed complement of staff within the Centre for Academic Advising will be 8 APT staff and 1 CUPE. These staff members will be moved out of the present faculty advisor ranks identified as 27 – 32 staff members currently tasked with advising duties. (Some members are not solely responsible for advising, but supporting the faculty offices in other areas. **Identification of advisors that wish to be engaged full-time with students is imperative.**)

Some faculties and one of our federated partners has already offered to have one of their advisors relocated to this central service.

The staff complement will be organized as follows:

- 1 x Manager of the Centre for Academic Advising (APT)
- 1 x Coordinator of Advising (APT)
- 6 x Academic Advisors (APT)
- 1 x Administrative Support (CUPE OP SERV)
- 3 x Student Assistants (CUPE)
- 10 x Student Peer Advisors (Volunteers)

- **Manager of the Centre for Academic Advising** will be responsible for the entire unit, all staff, all processes, and meeting targeted outcomes. The Manager is expected to be a player-coach and participate in walk in rotations and take appointments.
- **Coordinator of Advising** will be responsible for the front end of the operation including the Admin and Student Staff and the Student Peer Advisors. This position would ensure client service levels, student and volunteer staffing and scheduling, and would serve as the Manager during the Manager's absence from campus. The Coordinator is expected to be a player-coach and participate in walk in rotations and take appointments.
- **Academic Advisors** will be responsible for participating in every form of advising students offered within the Centre. That could be walk in, by appointment, by phone, by Skype, quick question, or group advising. Each advisor will serve as a liaison to one faculty and serve as the resident expert on that faculty. They will train the other advisors in the faculty programs and bring all changes to the group. They will attend faculty councils and coordinate with the advising staff within the faculties.
- **Administrative Support** personnel will provide administrative support to the advising staff, as well as provide exemplary client service to the students seeking advising. They will be able to answer quick questions and refer appropriately to services on campus when needed. They will work with the student assistants and volunteers for desk coverage and distribute phone and email inquiries to the professional staff when necessary.
- **Student Assistants** will aid the admin support and professional staff with whatever tasks necessary to facilitate the best experience for the students seeking information. They will also provide break and lunch coverage for the admin support staff.
- **Student Peer Advisors** will be a volunteer force trained to facilitate simple questions by students with a heavy focus on aiding and instructing students on registration and degree audit software processes. They will provide appropriate office developed resources to students such as information sheets, degree templates, and referrals and directions to campus support offices.

### Scope of Service

The following students will be serviced by the new Centre for Academic Advising:

- Exploratory, Undecided, and Transfer Students new to the University

- First and second year students in Arts, Science, Fine Arts, Kinesiology and Health Studies and Nursing, Qualifying Year or first and second year students in Business, and first year students in Education. (Engineering programs do not usually participate in this model due to accreditation issues)
- First Nations University of Canada students would be serviced within their first two years as we will have a direct connection to FNUC to service their students and refer appropriately to their support services and programs
- Luther and Campion students could access these services under a similar arrangement to FNUC
- At Risk/High Risk students in concert with the Student Success Centre
- RTD students in concert with the Academic Recovery Program and the Arts Transfer Program

The division of service, first and second year students served by the Centre for Academic Advising and students in their third year and beyond served by the faculties, is not a random decision. The division is purposeful for the following reasons:

- Transition issues to campus and university in general happen during the first two years. By the third year within on campus, these issues have dissipated and the remaining students have learned to navigate their new environment.
- The bulk of programs are designed with most general education and liberal arts requirements in the first two years of study. The courses for the majors are mostly concentrated in the third and fourth years.
- Students who are trying to work towards entrance into a professional program or delayed entry program will have found out by their third year whether or not they will be gaining entry into their ultimate choice. If not, they are still in the stage of exploration and decisions on final majors.
- The average North American university student changes their major three times during their university career. Most of these changes will happen and be resolved within the first two years. Most third year students will be entrenched within their final program of choice and will need the focus of the advisors within the faculties to plan for their timely graduation.
- RTD students are usually in the first two years of study. This forces the students to withdraw from their program and relocate academically to another faculty in the hopes of returning to their first choice program. This is the perfect time to deal with the transition issues and the reality that the students may need to pick a different major.

New students to the University strongly identify with programs such as Nursing, Engineering, and to a somewhat lesser degree to Business and Education. These students often identify stronger with their faculties than with the University. This is not the case in most of the Faculties that do not offer a singularly focused program. Where students get advising, as long as they are being advised appropriately, does not have an impact on their identity with their faculty. Timely, appropriate advising and transitional support allows for the student to successfully navigate their first two years and work closely with their faculty in years three, four, and beyond. This is when they are entrenched in their

major specific courses and focused on graduation and making decisions about their future careers. These students are best served by the faculty advisors and staff that can focus more specifically on these very important issues.

### **Location, Location, Location**

With the current space constraints of the University at an all time high, the location of the new Centre for Academic Advising will be located in the current Enrolment Services Office housed on the first floor of the Administration Humanities Building on the periphery of the Ad Hum Pit. During peak times the Pit will serve as an area that students could wait for their pre-booked or walk-in appointments. This location will provide an easily accessible, central location that would be highly visible to the campus community.

The conversion process of this space will be as follows:

- (1) The Registrar's Office will reconfigure their floor plan to have their staff move from the east wing of their current footprint and be consolidated in the north and west wings of the office. The scheduling unit of the Registrar's office will relocate to the current Recruitment Office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the AdHum Building.
- (2) Recruitment will relocate to the Riddell Centre and be housed in the current Tutoring space.
- (3) Tutoring will be moved to the Learning Lounge on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Riddell Centre
- (4) The east wing of the Registrar's Office will be reconfigured to house Admissions and Student Awards and Financial Aid.
- (5) The Registrar's Office front desk area will become a joint one stop service desk for Registration Services, Admissions and Student Awards and Financial Aid. Staff will be cross trained and result in staff cost savings in this area.
- (6) The Enrolment Services team will move to the new location and the current Enrolment Services office will be reconfigured to house the Centre for Academic Advising.

This Centre for Academic Advising will allow for the following workspaces and equipment to be housed: (Please see concept floor plan attached)

- 6 - 8 seat waiting area
- course registration area containing 4 - 6 computer terminals
- 8 individual confidential offices
- 2 person reception desk
- Quick Answer desk in reception area
- Small meeting room
- Photocopy and supply room
- Student and Volunteer work space
- The Ad-Hum Pit has capacity for wait times during peak periods

## **Degree Audit Software**

It has been identified as a definite need that the University invest in a cross campus degree audit software package to be used for advisors and selected personnel to track students' academic progress, program planning, and degree audit towards graduation. This software could be accessed not only by professional personnel but via a self service option by the students themselves. The Task Force on Academic Advising, the Registrar's Office, and the Academic Advisors of the University all have listed this as a high priority for student success. This serves as the opportunity to implement such software across campus with Student Affairs and the Centre for Academic Advising as the leads for implementation.

## **Proposed Time Line for Implementation**

Approval of Centre of Academic Advising Initiative (UET)	<b>April 30, 2015</b>
Change management (HR)	May – October 2015
Final designs for renovated spaces (FM)	May – June 2015
Reconfiguration/move of Registrar's staff (FM and SA)	June 2015
Renovation of new Enrolment Services Office (FM and IS)	July – Sept 2015
Movement to new Enrolment Services Office (SA)	Sept – Oct 2015
Hiring of Manager and Coordinator of Advising (SA)	October 2015
Renovation of Centre for Academic Advising (FM and IS)	Oct – Dec 2015
Decisions on Advising staff (HR and SA)	Nov – Dec 2015
Move into Centre for Academic Advising (SA)	December 15, 2015
Soft Opening of Centre for Academic Advising (SA)	<b>January 6, 2016</b>
Grand Opening of Centre for Academic Advising (SA)	March 2016

**If timelines are not able to be met by any of the stakeholder groups, the next best time for an implementation would be the beginning of the summer term of 2016.**