

Academic Advising Centre:

A Unifying Resource for Undergraduate Advising and Transition at the University of
Regina

Submitted by the University of Regina Academic Advising Professionals (URAAP)
University of Regina
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Academic Advising at the University of Regina has developed over the past 20 years based on individual needs and goals of the faculties. As the demographics change and the needs of our students become more complex it is imperative that the University develops a comprehensive retention strategy and academic advising program to coordinate service delivery. Best practice and literature supports that academic advising is integral to retention, and the advising professionals at the University of Regina are looking forward to working with senior leadership to develop a program and strategy that supports an increase in student retention and coordination of messaging and service for students.

URAAP has had an opportunity to review and reflect on the information contained in the concept paper on academic advising submitted by the AVP (Student Affairs) on April 24, 2015. There are elements that are congruent with goals identified by the advising professionals regarding advising and transition services. URAAP would like to propose a shared-model alternative to the concept paper as it was presented.

In the following pages you will find our reflection on the strengths we have identified in the proposal, and an alternate model for consideration by senior leadership that will not only achieve student success goals as outlined by the university's strategic plan, but also is mindful of fiscal considerations and the current asset base we have in our professional advising staff.

Areas of support for the concept paper

- High profile location near Registrar's Office for prospective and undecided students
- Collective approach to advising that will help align advising practices across campus - emphasis on a collaborative, collegial approach, which currently exists, but is further emphasized by advisors working in close proximity to one another
- Increased support for the needs of exploratory/undecided students & at-risk students
- Improved coordination of conversion messages
- Coverage when advisors unavailable*
- Degree audit software implementation
- Recognition that advisors contribute to student retention and success
- Professional development opportunities for advisors
- Quick question desk in a high profile area
- Peer assistants provide developmental opportunities for students
- Improved communication/connection to other advisors*
- Additional career advancement opportunities appreciated*

* of particular value to those in smaller Faculties

Review of literature and research pertaining to advising models

It is important to recognize that advising professionals in the current model provide students with:

- Assistance on navigating the university system;
- Transition support and intervention throughout all years of study;
- Referral to support services
- Determining appropriate program direction based on student interest and strengths;
- Advising students on graduation requirements, career prospects and connection to their field beginning in year 1;

Prior to moving forward with any change in service delivery, it is important that an analysis of current service be conducted, and a formal student survey be conducted to determine how best to deliver academic advising at the University of Regina. The scope of change suggested in the concept paper provided by the AVP (Student Affairs) is without data and research of the current context.

URAAP has conducted extensive literature review of best practices and types of models prevalent in comparable universities in Canada and North America. A shared-model for delivery of academic advising is very common amongst universities of similar size to the University of Regina, but the structure and goals of the shared space differ from what has been proposed to date. The most common shared-model used by comparator universities as identified through the Canadian University Survey Consortium¹ consists of an advising centre that is part of the academic/student success services and focuses on supporting students until a program declaration is made, at which time students are referred to the departmental advisors. Research does not indicate that splitting students by year of study (1/2 and 3/4) is the ideal version of a shared-model for advising. Rather, an advising centre is typically responsible for targeted student populations, such as exploratory/undecided students and students at risk of probation or discontinuance². Once students achieve the goals identified in the shared centre, and in concert with the faculty, students are directed to their faculty. It is important to note that some students may take one semester to accomplish this; others may take three or four. The emphasis should be on the process as it pertains to the individual student and not only the level of standing.

Academic Advising is about more than transition issues and course selection, especially within the first two years – relationship development, advising as teaching, and establishing trust is instrumental in student satisfaction and retention.³ All of these lead to more successful transition. The establishment of trust and relationship building begins before our students have been accepted to the University of Regina. Feedback received by students support how important meeting, and establishing a long-term rapport, with an advisor is throughout their time with us, and experience illustrates that students are willing to wait for their appointment if they are able to see the advisor with whom they feel most comfortable. Academic advising is not transactional.

¹ Carlton University, Simon Fraser University, Thompson Rivers University, Université de Moncton, University of New Brunswick, University of Victoria, Wilfrid Laurier University

² <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Organizational-Models-for-Advising.aspx>

³ Western New Mexico University as retrieved on 05/20/07 <http://www.wnmu.edu/admin/forums/AdvisingTaskForce/01Feb19Minutes.htm>

Creation of an Academic Advising Program (AAP) for the University of Regina

Collaboration and communication has increased with the development of URAAP and the desire by that group to create a community of practice. Institutionally, there are still varying levels of student experience that may be enhanced by a coordinated program that faculties assist with developing and are charged with implementing. A formal AAP will establish the defining principles of Academic Advising at the University of Regina. These would be principles that would be adopted across the campus and would guide the work, the values, the expectations and outcomes of advising on campus. These guiding principles would be the roadmap for best practice and consistency across campus. The AAP will also set benchmarks for which formal evaluation can be completed and metrics that can be used for determine success and satisfaction levels. There are many tools available to assist with this process, but most notably would be the CAS Standards for Academic Advising.

Proposed Academic Advising Centre

Assuming that the university is already committed to moving forward with a form of central/shared advising office, URAAP welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the policy development, and offers the following suggestions for structure (purpose) and complement:

Structure

The Academic Advising Centre will provide the following:

- Coordinated conversion messaging and strategy for new students to the University of Regina
- Targeted support for high risk/at risk students (must be defined before identified), qualifying students (students missing requirements, average, or seeking entry to a particular program/faculty) and exploratory/undecided students. Once a program has been declared or criteria met, students would seek primary advising through their faculty/department;
- Coordination of early alert and academic recovery programming
- Book appointments with faculty/department advisors for students requiring more detailed program information
- Provide back-up support for advising required during peak periods, when a faculty advisor is sick, unavailable, on leave or on vacation (especially important for smaller units)
- Quick question desk and peer mentorship/registration assistance
- Referrals (Student Success Centre, Counselling Services, Career services, faculty)
- Coordinate training for new advisors and professional development opportunities for all academic advisors.

Complement

- Coordinator
- 4 APT advisors (2 supporting at risk/academic recovery; 2 to support exploratory and qualifying students)- could also include resource advisors from URInternational, ESL transition
- 1 CUPE support staff
- 3 Student Assistants (CUPE)
- Student Peer Advisors

Strengths of the URAAP Proposed Academic Advising Centre

This proposed centre:

- addresses a gap that has been identified by academic advisors for many years – a proactive approach to working with high risk/at risk students and exploratory/undecided students which has the potential to increase retention and student satisfaction;
- it will reduce the financial outlay as the remodeling of spaces will not be significant;
- if developed under the umbrella of an Academic Advising Program, more consistency of service and expectation can be defined and measured throughout campus.
- recognizes the strengths that we currently have with regards to advising professionals and practices, while creating more consistency of experience and messaging for the students
- provides increased options for students to receive timely information and have quick questions answered, but maintains the often-complex relationships and specialized program information accessed through the faculties.

Degree Audit Software

URAAP concurs with the assessment of degree audit software provided in the concept paper. There are many efficiencies to be gained in faculty offices (not having to manually update grades in excel files at the end of each semester) as well as ready-access to program progression for the students and faculty (advisors and administration). An implementation team consisting of members of URAAP and the Registrar's Office will ensure that faculty and student services are represented in the needs analysis and policy and procedure development.

ATTACHMENT 1 - Collection of URAAP feedback regarding the concept paper on academic advising submitted by the AVP (Student Affairs) to Dean's Council.

Upon receipt of the document on April 27, 2015, URAAP convened a meeting to discuss how to approach collection and distribution of feedback. A survey was sent to all URAAP members to identify the level of support for the model as presented (0%), strengths of the proposed model, concerns with the proposed model, and suggestions for moving forward. Over 50% of URAAP members completed the survey and support a modified version of the shared-model being recommended by the AVP (Student Affairs).

Following are the concerns and questions identified by the members, many of which have been addressed in the main submission:

- Not clear what problems are being addressed
- Advising is a key aspect of a retention strategy, but it is not a substitute for a retention strategy
- Research indicates that the 'total intake' model (and the split by 'year of study') proposed is not necessarily the most commonly used, or the best version of a shared model. A different version of a central unit could be much more beneficial to students at the U of R. URAAP would like to be involved in the development of such a Centre, if a Centre is inevitably where this institution is heading toward.
- Proposal doesn't reflect the U of R context and is unsupported by evidence
- Faculty connection to first- & second-year students greatly diminished with no clear benefit to students or Faculties
- Unclear how student 'hand-off' works
- Fear that Faculties' administrative work will be divorced from institutional knowledge of student plans and intentions – to the detriment of students
- No evidence other models were considered
- Expecting staff in one office to know all programs is expecting a lot [the high level of detail required of generalist advisors may be unrealistic] and may result in many errors for students. This may result in students consulting with Faculties for accurate information, resulting in increased workload for offices with fewer resources than presently
- Avoiding the above situation may necessitate program reforms
- Quality of advice will be poor and in two years students can be harmed by not having detailed program knowledge. How will the unit be accountable to students and faculties for such situations?
- Might Luther & Campion be more attractive to prospective students in Arts, Science, and Fine Arts?
- Services provided by Centre no different than what is currently done in Faculties
- Not clear how students in off-campus programs are affected
- Students will be increasingly confused about where to go for help/advice
- Proposal assumes a lot about students and programs, that is not supported by the collective experience of current advisors or data
- Proposal is rushed, leaves many important details unaddressed
- Academic advising not overseen by academics. Student Affairs relinquished its former academic programming because of this – why is academic advising being seen differently?

- Ignores the value that students (and advisors) place on the student-advisor relationship that develops over years. Research says this is tied to satisfaction with advising and thus, to **retention**.
- Proposal fails to advance a vision for advising
- Fails to address URAAP's previous (& repeated) requests
- Why can't the current structure be made to work better?
- How was the staffing complement in the Centre decided? Is it adequate to serve such a high need student population?
- Undervalues work of CUPE student services team members in suggesting their work can be done by student volunteers/assistants and providing an insufficient number for the amount of advising to be required
- Many First Nations University students chose that school, over the U of R, for its smaller, more intimate and hands-on student support. Including their students in this Centre may dishonor those students' intentions.
- Concept paper and timelines provided fail to include student feedback/input
- Despite URAAP requesting one, no formal assessment of advising has been done
- Fails to address existing workload and the increases resulting from the Centre
- How will we know the Centre is effective? How was the current model deemed inadequate?
- Advisors balance other duties along with student appointments; what does this balance look like with the Centre and for those who work at the Centre?
- What happens if a position is transferred to the Centre and the individual doesn't want to go?
- How are advisors in the Centre to keep current with program developments when they see students all day, every day?
- How much will this proposal cost to implement? What other uses are there for that money?
- Our experience is that there are few 'quick questions' – advice depends on individual students and knowledge of their complete situation
- Faculty members often contact advisors to follow-up with students struggling in their class – this may be lost if Faculties not responsible for such students
- Will students in a central unit be aware of the option and benefits of study at a federated college?
- How will students advised in a central unit be (re)assured of the value benefits of studying the fine and/or liberal arts as opposed to being directed toward professional Faculties?
- This could result in advisors being reclassified across campus – to their detriment, even if they remain in a Faculty.
- Untrue that students focus on general education requirements in first two years – all are encouraged to work on major requirements
- Does such a small unit really require a manager and a coordinator?
- How does processing of transfer credit interface with the Centre? Academic Action (and supporting students on Academic Probation?)
- URAAP provides advisors with a voice on-campus, also advisors have good working relationships with Associate/Deans & faculty who respect our advice on student decisions and program planning. Centre affords no greater input than present.
- How are first- and second-year students to be defined? Terms not used here.

ATTACHMENT 2 – Summary of research categories explored by URAAP

Research does not indicate that splitting students into ‘first 2 years’ and ‘second 2 years’ is the ideal version of a split model of advising.

- “Perhaps the clearest example of this model is where an advising office has jurisdiction over students who have not yet declared a major, transferring that jurisdiction over to a faculty advisor once a student has declared a major. This same model is common for students who may have unique advising needs such as athletes, special populations, or nontraditional students. Typically, the advising office does not instigate academic transactions in this model; those transactions remain the in the jurisdiction of the assigned advisor in the academic subunit.”
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Organizational-Models-for-Advising.aspx>
- “In the Split Model, found at 27% of all institutions, advising is carried out by faculty in their departments, as well as the staff of an advising center. The latter is usually responsible for a particular subset of students (e.g., those who are undecided on a major, freshmen, those on academic probation, pre-majors preparing for a professional program). When students have satisfied certain criteria, such as declaring a major or completing prerequisites for admission to a professional program, they are reassigned to advisors in the school or department that offers their major. The Split Model is the dominant one at 4-year public colleges and universities; nearly half (46%) of these institutions are using this model.” See: [Reporting through Academic vs. Student Affairs](#)
- “Split model divides the initial advising of students between an advising office and the academic subunits. The office advises specific groups of students, such as those who are exploratory or developmental. Once specific conditions are met – for example, choosing a major or completing developmental course work – students may be assigned to an academic subunit, where they could be advised by faculty, full-time advisors, paraprofessionals, or peers.”
<http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CDQQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.isac.org%2FdotAsset%2F5aaa670f-29d9-4f4b-828e-9fa7a6157a41.pdf&ei=S5A9VIXeloa7ogS85IGgDg&usg=AFQjCNFTQqRUENEnc7dgiRaBwM6pjW06Q&sig2=-uyCZ-9X6dul9YLZgxubba>

Advising in the first 2 years is about more than transition issues and course selection. There is a lot of relationship building, teaching/learning, trust establishment, etc. involved.

- “Academic advising goes beyond the clerical functions of scheduling classes and preparing degree plans. Good academic advising assists students in clarifying personal and career goals, developing consistent educational goals, and evaluating the progress toward established goals. Academic advising utilizes the resources of the University and refers students to the appropriate academic support services. It is a decision -making process in which the sharing of information between student and advisor promotes responsible and appropriate choices and facilitates a successful academic experience.”
Western New Mexico University as retrieved on 05/20/07
<http://www.wnmu.edu/admin/forums/AdvisingTaskForce/01Feb19Minutes.htm>

- “advising should always have a goal that goes beyond providing information ... Rather than providing answers to students, advisors help to apply research-type questions to advising situations and allow students to think through the problem and develop processes which help the student with subsequent learning. It is essentially equipping students to intentionally engage their learning and help them to understand how their learning in turn engages their lives... Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities, and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes” (NACADA).”
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Organizational-Models-for-Advising.aspx>
- Learning-centered advising presumes that “it is through academic advising that students acquire the knowledge and learn the skills and predisposition to successfully navigate the educational environment and earn a degree” (Smith & Allen, 2012, p. 1).... students should appreciate the importance of establishing an advisor/advisee relationship with someone on campus and (8) that advising should be mandatory for all students.
- Research has shown that students who meet with their advisor on a regular basis are more likely to also be involved in a range of educationally purposeful activities outside of the classroom (Kuh et al., 2006). Finally, Smith and Allen (2012) found that the frequency of advisor contact was directly related to the learning that occurs from academic advising.
- Habley believed that for the advising relationship to impact retention, it must move beyond prescriptive and clerical activities traditionally associated with advising and involve a more student-centered and developmental approach.
- A common thread throughout these studies, similar to the retention and advising studies, is a primary focus on satisfaction with a faculty or staff relationship.
- http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&ved=0CDoQFjAF&url=http%3A%2F%2Fpdxscholar.library.pdx.edu%2Fcgi%2Fviewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D2043%26context%3Dopen_access_etds&ei=S5A9VIXeloa7ogS85IGgDg&usq=AFQjCNE90o2daa1sR9VHQy2ZlID-JA8kw&sig2=W2nawAd9ti2otAD-ZhKWXXQ

The proposed plan by the AVP (Student Affairs) is more of a ‘total intake’ model, which is not the most common model:

- “This is when all initial advising of students is done in a central advising office, and students are transitioned to a departmental advisor after meeting a certain set of criteria in addition to declaring the major, such as completing a certain number of credits or meeting general requirements or meeting pre-major requirements. While this model also can create problems for students in the transition between the two service providers, it does offer consistent upfront advising and also recognizes the value of the relationship with the faculty advisor once the student is in the major and has an established foundation. The greatest challenge with any of these shared models is the difficulty of coordination between the departments and the central advising office. Also, the coordinator or director of the central advising office generally has no say in the selection, supervision, or rewards of department (usually faculty) advisors, and training and support is provided but not always utilized. A shared structure is the most common

advising structure in place, with 54% of institutions participating in the national survey reporting the use of this structure (1998). In Turgeon's survey of advising practices, he found that 38 out of 50 schools surveyed were using some type of shared advising structure, with the split model being the most common specific delivery system (2007)."
http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nacada.ksu.edu%2FResources%2FClearinghouse%2FView-Articles%2FOrganizational-Models-for-Advising.aspx&ei=F-I_Vfv1MZT7oQTC9QE&usg=AFQjCNEv2zqemZN7dotskjAejTo_8y61hA&bvm=bv.91665533,d.cGU

- Actually the total intake model proposed by the AVP (Student Affairs) is only utilized by less than 10% of institutions in the US, according to this webinar.
http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CFgQFjAJ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nerche.org%2Fprojectcompass%2Fimage%2Fstories%2FWebinar_-_Organizing_and_Delivering_Advising.ppt&ei=LuM_VfzbOMbwoATlkoDgDg&usg=AFQjCNGWalZxGKtsKvnPn7jEOsElVFsuxQ
- More institutions have a faculty-only model than a total intake model
www.nacada.ksu.edu/.../M25%20Chapter%20chapter%205%20updated.pdf

Generalist advising, even in the first 2 years, may not translate to student satisfaction with advising and retention. In a generalist model where advisors advise on programs throughout the University, more errors are likely to be made. Advising load is linked to increased advisor errors. LOAD includes number of students, number of diverse groups of students, number of diverse programs.

- "Students who were satisfied with advising believed advisors were interested in their program, a reliable source of information, generous with their time, and accessible. Several themes of 'effective advising' emerged from this study regarding the importance of taking a personal interest in students, focusing on both academic and career advising, showing genuine concern for students, and being efficient in helping to solve student issues... Students were not satisfied with errors made by advisors, appointments that were not kept, advisor incompetence, and a general lack of appreciation of student needs by advisors."
- The study found that across all models and class levels, satisfaction indicators added significantly to the ability to predict student retention, in fact, for each class level satisfaction indicators almost doubled the ability to predict retention beyond what demographic characteristics and institutional features could predict (Schreiner, 2009, p. 3).
- "Some institutions have created advising centers for first-year students that encompass all majors within one first-year center. Further research should explore student satisfaction with advising functions, advising learning outcomes, and first-year to second-year retention for institutions utilizing this more comprehensive approach."