

# Enrolment Action Plan | 2009

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**Project Title:** Undergraduate Student Advising Project

**Project Description:**

The purpose of this project is two-fold. First is to deliver a report to the Provost and Vice-President Academic describing the current state of undergraduate student advising on campus, a business case for enhancing the current system and an outline of multiple alternatives, including the pros and cons of each, for an enhanced system. This report will be developed under the guidance of the working group suggested below. This report will recommend a campus vision for student advising, and will inform decisions by PCIP for future investments in student advising services. This project will articulate the roles and responsibilities for the various contributors to student advising, including faculty, professional advisors, student services administrative staff, and senior students.

Upon accepting the final project report, it is anticipated that responsibility for development of an implementation plan will be assigned to the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning. The implementation plan could include a further request to PCIP for funding to assist colleges and academic support units redesign and augment what is now in place for student advising.

The second purpose of this project is to conduct a comprehensive review of the academic advising system in the College of Arts and Science, facilitating a prominent aspect of the Arts and Science integrated plan. The College will conduct a comprehensive self-study of student academic services and advising practices in the College. The study will include a scan of advising which takes place in departments and quantitative data analysis to understand the activity levels, current student demographic population being served and student perceptions of service quality. The results of the study will be summarized in a self-study document which will serve as a resource document for the external agency review of academic advising in the College. The external agency (to be selected; could be the National Academic Advising Association) will be retained to conduct its review through on-site visits and provide a report to the Dean of Arts & Science summarizing the strengths and problems associated with the College's advising services, and provide recommendations on how to appropriately apply best practices in academic advising within the College. The report will also be shared with the overall project team and the review may serve as a pilot for the same type of review in other colleges.

Both parts of this project will be supported by a local consultant who will serve as project manager, conduct most of the research and write reports.

**Executive Sponsor:**

Ernie Barber, Vice-Provost Teaching & Learning

**Project Manager:**

Local Consultant to be hired

**Suggested Working Group:**

Louise Alexitch  
Alison Renny  
Tom Steele  
Tonya Wirchenko  
Representative from Student Central  
Representative from Student Employment and Career Centre  
USSU Vice-President Academic  
Representative of Academic Programs Committee of Council  
Representative of professional advising staff  
James Pepler

**Decision Makers:**

The working group, with leadership from project manager and in consultation with executive sponsor, will have responsibility for the final report and its recommendations.

The Academic Programs Committee of Council will be responsible for recommending to Council any policy decisions that may arise from the report.

The results of this project are expected to inform decisions by PCIP, by colleges and by SESD regarding future investments in student advising services.

**Need:**

Given the substantial investment of time, commitment and financial resources required to attend a university, it is important that students be given every possible opportunity to succeed in their academic and career goals. We must have accessible and integrated academic and career advising systems which help students explore, develop, clarify, commit to, articulate and achieve meaningful academic plans and career goals, even as those goals change. In support of those providing advising, we must ensure that policies and procedures are understood to the degree that students receive consistent advice from multiple sources. Further, there is a need to raise the profile of the importance of advising as a valued and significant activity on campus, recognizing great advising, and supporting the professionalization of these services where appropriate. Throughout this project and the implementation of its recommendations, all students at the University of Saskatchewan (domestic, international, Aboriginal, on-campus, off-campus and distributed learners) will experience a coordinated network of student advising regardless of when or where they encounter the system.

In 2009, the undergraduate student forum recommended that “Given that accessible, high-quality academic advising is among the most important services provided to students, and significantly affects retention, student success and the quality of the student experience, members of the Undergraduate Forum strongly recommend to senior university officials (at both the University and College levels) that enhancements to the accessibility of academic advising be identified as among the very highest priorities for investment as part of the “Improving the Student Experience” priority area during the second cycle of integrated planning at the University of Saskatchewan.”

**Stakeholders:**

University Council through Academic Programs Committee – consultation and decision-making  
PCIP – decision-making  
Faculty members currently doing advising – to be consulted  
Advisors network – to be consulted  
Associate and Assistant Deans Academic Forum – to be consulted  
Retention Strategies working group – to be consulted  
Students – to be informed  
SESD – to be consulted  
Undergraduate Forum – to be informed  
USSU – to be consulted  
Senior Academic Leadership of Colleges – consultation and decision-making

**Stakeholder Requirements:**

To understand our current system for advising, its strengths and areas of opportunity  
To understand best practices at peer institutions and as described in the literature  
To recognize and address student needs and desires at the U of S on a college by college basis  
To examine other advising models and their advantages and challenges  
To understand the proposed alternatives, their advantages and disadvantages  
To ensure a seamless system of advising, including academic advising, career counseling, and personal health and wellness referrals  
To understand the relative importance of advising in relation to other student services

**Scope:**

Student advising includes academic, career and non-academic elements. It includes but is more than specific program advising and course selections. An institutional student advising system will demonstrate that every student is understood to be an individual and that someone is taking the time to get to know the student individually. The advising system will develop, complement and reinforce self direction and self sufficiency of students and will help them understand the educational context they are in.

In Scope:

- Development of a clearly written mission statement relating to student advising
- Improving access to program-specific academic advising
- Online, simple/straight-forward advising
- In-person advising for higher-level and more complex advising scenarios
- Advising of students not admitted to professional colleges
- Inter-college academic advising
- Identifying and prioritizing gaps in current advising services
- Proposal of multiple alternatives to address identified gaps
- Best practices research
- Practices at peer universities research
- Advising for on-campus, off-campus and distance learning
- Advising for prospective, admitted students

## Not In Scope:

- Personal counseling, health and wellness services
- Advising of graduate students

## **Constraints/Risks:**

- Need to design a system to alleviate any boundary issues between and among SESD and the Colleges while providing the best possible service to students.
- Need to understand appropriate roles and responsibilities for the various contributors to student advising, including faculty, professional advisors, student services administrative staff, and senior students
- Need to recognize fundamental differences between colleges, their differing needs, history of investment, and experiences
- Need to appropriately involve student governance and University Council

## **Assumptions:**

- That despite previous investments and despite the effort and professionalism of those currently providing student advising, there remains an opportunity at the U of S to further improve student advising
- That student advising is a core institutional function that connects all students to the institution.
- That an enhanced system of student advising will increase student satisfaction, university reputation and student retention
- That provision of student advising is a shared responsibility among colleges and central academic support units
- That the overall investment in student advising can be optimized by developing a campus-wide vision and plan for student advising services

## **Deliverables:**

- (1) A report to the Provost and Vice-President Academic documenting:
  - Current state of undergraduate student advising on campus
  - A business case of enhancing the current system
  - A review of best practices and practices at our peer institutions
  - An outline of multiple alternatives, including the pros and cons of each, for an enhanced system
  - A recommendation for a campus vision for student advising
  - Articulation of the roles and responsibilities for the various contributors to student advising, including faculty, professional advisors, student services administrative staff and senior students
- (2) An external agency review of the academic advising system in the College of Arts and Science. The priority items to be addressed through a self-study and external review are:
  - Determination of service activity, quality, strengths and gaps
  - Establishment of service priorities and targets
  - Identification of service redundancies and synergies with external student service and support units (e.g. SESD)
  - Discussion of resources and identification of resource savings or needs

- Development of new service delivery models
- Development of scenarios for restructuring to reflect College governance and structure
- Refinement of the student service vision and strategy
- Identification of academic policies and processes for revision
- Comparison with known national and international best practices

## **Milestones:**

- Review of current state of undergraduate student advising on campus – December 2009
- Best practices research – December 2009
- Peer universities research – December 2009
- Development of a business case for system enhancements – February 2010
- Outline of multiple alternatives for an enhanced system – February 2010
- Recommendation of a campus vision for advising – February 2010
- Articulation of roles and responsibilities for the various contributors – February 2010
- Organization of a self-study review in the College of Arts and Science – December 2009
- Quantitative data analysis for the College of Arts and Science – March 2010
- Coordination of external agency review – March 2010
- Coordination and writing of final report to the Provost and VP Academic – May 2010
- Coordination of final report to the Dean of Arts and Science – May 2010

## **Expected Impact on Enrolment**

- Increase retention
- Improve the student experience and their impressions of the University of Saskatchewan