

ACADEMIC COUNCIL REPORT

SESSION:

Public
Non-Public

ACTION REQUESTED:

Decision
Discussion/Direction
Information

TO: Academic Council

DATE: March 1, 2022

PRESENTED BY: Dr. Lori Livingston, Provost and Vice-President, Academic

SUBJECT: Update on Student Success Initiatives

MANDATE:

We are updating Academic Council on our strategic approach to supporting undergraduate student success, including a brief summary on our efforts over the past year. The purpose of this briefing note is to prompt further discussion on what additional strategies we need to consider and/or pursue going forward.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT & RATIONALE:

At its January, 2021 meeting, Academic Council engaged in a discussion regarding the University's multi-pronged approach to supporting student success. These efforts included: (a) specialized programming for students experiencing academic difficulty (i.e., LEAP); (b) coordination of student-centric academic advising activities; (c) establishment of strategic committees to support our efforts (e.g., Student Success Committee, Strategic Enrolment Management Committee), and; (d) leveraging data to identify students at risk (e.g., early alert systems). The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Academic Council with an update on these activities and to seek your input and direction on how we may continue to improve upon and grow, as well as identify new strategies, in support of student success.

PROGRAMMING FOR AT RISK STUDENTS

Enrolment into the Learner Enhanced Academic Program (LEAP) is offered to first year students who, at the end of an academic term, are either placed on probation or suspended from their degree program. Students sign a learning contract which stipulates that they may proceed with a reduced workload in their current academic program while concurrently attending all of the LEAP program's weekly information and coaching sessions and required assignments. Failure to adhere to these conditions results in removal from the LEAP program and the re-imposition of their probation or suspension status.

The program is a cooperative effort supported by the Registrar's Office and the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC). Short 10-15 minute weekly sessions focus on topics such as effective learning habits, goal setting, short-term planning strategies, time management, and other core

skills to support individual success. Students are required to attend the weekly session and thereafter meet in one-on-one or group coaching sessions with assigned academic coaches.

Since the program began in the Fall 2020 term, a total of 250 undergraduate students from all Faculties (excluding the Faculty of Education) have enrolled in the program. About 81% (n=202) students have successfully completed the program and transitioned back into their academic programs of study. While we have some anecdotal evidence of students successfully re-engaging in their academic studies following completion of the LEAP program, we are currently in the process of completing a fulsome quantitative analysis of the extent to which students experience continued academic success following completion of the program.

STUDENT-CENTRIC ACADEMIC ADVISING ACTIVITIES

In March, 2021 the university adopted a new model of oversight pertaining to Faculty-based advising activities. Simply put, the new model includes a centralized (or umbrella) approach aimed at developing consistency across Faculties with respect to advising processes and practices, while at the same time allowing the Academic Advisors to remain situated within their units to provide discipline-specific advising supports.

Reporting to the Deputy Provost, Dr. Dan Crouse as Director of Advising is now working with a group of dedicated Managers of Advising (i.e., Amy Anderson, Theeben Jegatheesan, Kerry Morrison) to envision a student-centric approach to academic advising as well as programmatic and educational supports for all Academic Advisors.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND STRATEGIC ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

In the Spring of 2021, the Office of the Provost reconstituted the Student Success Committee and established a new Strategic Enrolment Management Committee. The former is focused on a number of “sticky campus” initiatives (e.g., dedicated Orientation programming for new incoming students, monitoring student performance throughout the student life cycle) while the latter is embracing the Deans and other senior leaders and managers from across the institution in all matters pertaining to student recruitment (including the development of new programs and recruitment pathways), retention, and success.

LEVERAGING DATA

To understand student success, we need to monitor student performance throughout the completion of academic programs. The Student Success Committee is currently in the process of identifying an effective “early alert system” with input and support from the TLC, IT Services, the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, and others. The notion here is to move beyond the use of relatively primitive and localized efforts within given Faculties, to a more fulsome university wide approach in support of all students. The earlier we can identify students at risk of not completing their academic programs, the sooner we can provide supports in an effort to ensure their success.

IN SUMMARY

Once we admit a student into an academic program, we have an ethical obligation to support them along the course of their academic journey. We must constantly remind ourselves of this obligation and routinely challenge ourselves to adapt as needed to find new ways to help them to succeed.

In order to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, a commitment to program evaluation with

respect to all of our efforts is a must. We must also commit to continuous improvement in all that we do including challenging ourselves to think about what other existing resources might we leverage or adapt to support our students. Although not mentioned in the previous examples, support services for students (e.g., financial aid, student mental health and wellness, etc.) provide overarching support to all that we do.

NEXT STEPS:

We often measure student success via dedicated metrics (e.g., year-over-year retention rates in relation to incoming high school grade averages), yet the pandemic has at least for the time being brought into question the validity of such data. High school grade inflation, socioeconomic challenges, personal burdens, etc. have complicated the use of such data in the current term. There is no doubt that we will resume to using metrics in the not too distant future.