ACADEMIC COUNCIL REPORT

SESSION:		ACTION REQUESTED:	
Public	☒	**Decision**	☐
Non-Public	☐	**Discussion/Direction**	☒
		Information	☐

TO: **Academic Council**

DATE: **January 24, 2023**

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

SUBJECT: **Student Success and Retention Initiatives**

MANDATE:

We are updating Academic Council on our strategic approach to supporting undergraduate student success. 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 March 1, 2022 meeting, Academic Council engaged in a strategic 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 in all that we do to inform current and future efforts. The purpose of this briefing note is to provide tan update on these activities and to seek your input and direction on how we may continue to improve upon, as well as identify new strategies, in support of student success.

PROGRAMMING FOR AT RISK STUDENTS

Enrolment into the Learner Engagement 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. They must also complete all 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 supported by the Registrar's Office and the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC). Weekly in-class 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.

Since the program began in the Fall 2021 term, a total of 340 undergraduate students from all Faculties (excluding the Faculty of Education) have enrolled in the program (Table 1). Excluding the Fall, 2022 cohort, about 59% have successfully completed the program and transitioned back into or graduated from their academic programs of study.

Table 1. **Data illustrating the rate at which students remain in good academic standing in order to continue within their chosen programs of study.**

Term	Total Registrants (N)	Initial Registrants Still Enrolled/Graduated (n)	Success Rate (%)
Winter, 2021	90	50	55.6
Spring, 2021	111	59	53.2
Fall, 2021	22	16	72.7
Winter, 2022	33	26	78.8
Fall, 2022	84	81	96.4*

*These students will begin to transition back to their programs of study in Winter, 2023.

STUDENT-CENTRIC ACADEMIC ADVISING ACTIVITIES
In March, 2021 the university implemented a new approach to undergraduate student advising, moving from services that were managed on a Faculty-by-Faculty basis to a centrally-led overseen by a Director of Advising and three dedicated Managers of Advising. This has created a student-centric approach to academic advising, as well as a more consistent and accessible service model. Through the use of data to inform change, as well as a commitment to continuous improvement, the Advising leadership team has enacted the following initiatives:

- **Streamlining of work to allow Advisors to spend more time with students**. Historically, the Academic Advisors carried out a number of administrative tasks alongside their advising duties. These non-advising tasks have been re-allocated to dedicated administrative staff, allowing Advisors to better allocate their time to advising students.

- **Creation of a dedicated First-Year Student Advising Team**. Student retention challenges are largely an issue of first-year student attrition. Each new incoming student is now assigned a dedicated advisor to work with them from the time they accept an offer of admission to the completion of their first year of studies.

- **Increased presence and engagement in Orientation Week-related activities.** The Academic Advising Leadership team is now involved in the planning and preparation of new student orientation activities.

- **Expansion of service accessibility**. The hours of operation for Academic Advising, have now been expanded to include evening hours. Students now have real-time access to Advisors between 8:30 am-9:00 pm, five days per week.

- **Increased accessibility via the introduction of new appointment booking tools and communication platforms and grid scheduling.** Booking an appointment with an Academic Advisor has been standardized across the university with the introduction of a common appointment booking software program. Students also now have the option to book an individualized appointment or to attend a drop in advising session in-person or virtually, or to chat with their Advisor via email or live chat. Individual Advisor schedules have been "grid scheduled" such that specific time slots are identified for providing services in differing formats. The individual Advisor schedules are then overlapped to ensure that each mode of communication can be accommodated throughout the workday.

- **Cross-training of advisors across Faculties**. Academic Advisors are now receiving training across "sister" program areas and Faculties. This supports emergency coverage when members of the Advising team are unexpectedly absent from their posts.

- **Roll-out of more proactive advising initiatives**. In addition to the creation of the First-Year Academic Advising Team, upper year Advisors are now actively connecting with students (e.g., proactive messaging, pop-up advising sessions, dedicated seminar sessions) before they find themselves in academic difficulty.

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. We routinely collect and monitor data as a way to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, as well as to challenge ourselves to make modifications and improve results over time.

In addition to the data included in this report regarding the successful return of students enrolled in the LEAP program to their degree program of choice, the Academic Advising Leadership team routinely monitors and collects data to inform decision making. For example, during the Fall, 2021 term, the team began gathering data on two key metrics; that is, the overall percentage of undergraduate students who engage with academic advising services (i.e., 29.7%, with a range of about 25% to 36% between Faculties), and, the total number of contacts made with academic advisors (i.e., N=19,621) and the preferred mode of contact (i.e., n=14388 or about 73% via email).

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 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:

The recruitment of new students and retention of our current students are outcomes of our strategic priorities. Supporting student success through initiatives such as the LEAP program, the continuous enhancement of Academic Advising supports, and the overarching adoption of a student-centric approach is a must. This will lead to improved graduation rates and student satisfaction results, as well as ensure revenue and funding stability.

However, in addition:

1. Are there other strategies that we need to pursue or consider pursuing in support of student success and especially so as we slowly emerge from the pandemic?