UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PROVOSTIAL REVIEW OF ACADEMIC ADVISING SUPPORTS

2023-2024

Contents

University of Toronto Provostial Review of Academic Advising Supports 2023-2024

Effective academic advising is pivotal in fostering student success and ensuring timely degree completion. This Review of Academic Advising Supports aims to provide an overview of the current state of academic advising services for undergraduate students offered by first-entry divisions within the University of Toronto (U of T), highlighting strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations for enhancement.

Academic advising for undergraduate students has historically been the responsibility of divisions at U of T. More recently centralized initiatives have been implemented to support academic advising across divisions in alignment with the shared institutional commitment to creating supportive educational environments that foster intellectual exploration and student wellbeing. Specifically, investments have been made in centralized initiatives that support advising through training (i.e., the Academic Advising Training Program) and technology (i.e., the Student Advising Service).
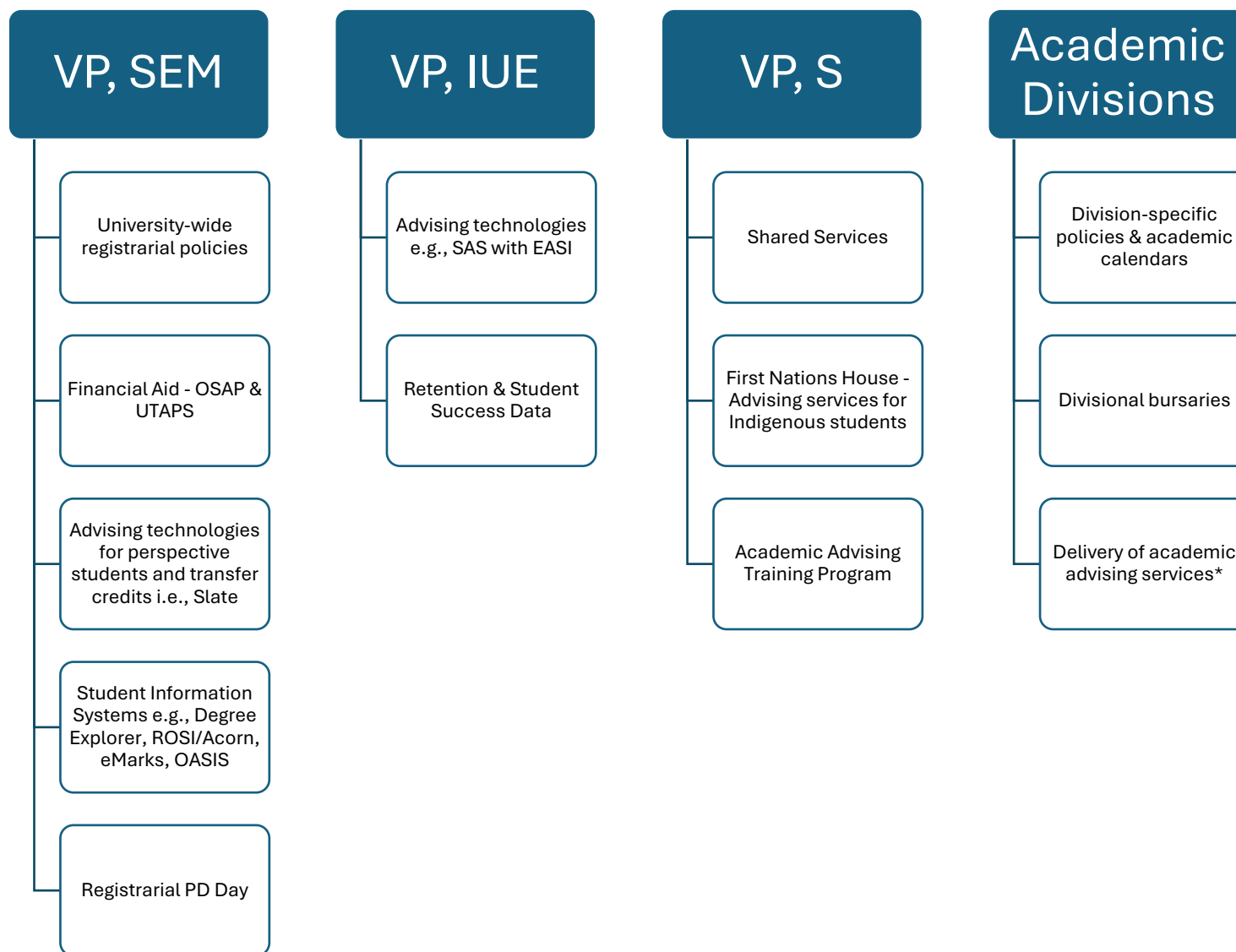
Building off these new developments this Review was tasked to assess two key aspects of the evolving nature of institutional engagement in academic advising:

- The current responsibilities across Vice-Presidential and, within the Division of the Vice-President & Provost, Vice-Provostial portfolios for student academic advising services, policies, and technologies.
- The relationship and intersection of institutional and divisional academic advising services, policies, and technologies.

This review was mainly conducted through consultations with academic and administrative staff within the University's shared service units and advising staff within the academic divisions offering first-entry undergraduate programs. Data from the 2021 Student Experience at a Research University survey and the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement were also analyzed as part of this review.

Overview of Academic Advising Services at the Provostial Level

Key responsibilities that impact academic advising services, including shared services, technology, institutional policies and advising staff professional development, expands across four vice-provost (VP) portfolios including the VP, Students, VP, Innovations in Undergraduate Education (IUE), and VP, Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM). Reporting to the Provost, academic divisions are responsible for delivering academic advising services to students. See Figure 1 for a high-level overview of key responsibilities related to academic advising services at U of T.

VP, SEM
- University-wide registrarial policies
- Financial Aid - OSAP & UTAPS
- Advising technologies for perspective students and transfer credits i.e., Slate
- Student Information Systems e.g., Degree Explorer, ROSI/Acorn, eMarks, OASIS
- Registrarial PD Day

VP, IUE
- Advising technologies e.g., SAS with EASI
- Retention & Student Success Data

VP, S
- Shared Services
- First Nations House - Advising services for Indigenous students
- Academic Advising Training Program

Academic Divisions
- Division-specific policies & academic calendars
- Divisional bursaries
- Delivery of academic advising services*

*Often the first point of contact for students for all advising needs of current students including personal advising or support for managing challenges and crisis situations.

Figure 1. High Level Map of Current Responsibilities Related to Academic Advising at U of T

Summary of Divisional Academic Advising Delivery Models

At U of T a shared advising model is commonly used by divisions to deliver advising services. In a shared model, advising generally starts in a central administrative office and advising responsibilities are shared with academic units[1]. Each administrative office responsible for offering academic advising to students decides how these services are delivered to students.

For all three campuses, the delivery of academic advising services generally encompasses academic, personal, and financial advising. Part of the service provided by divisions is acting as the first point of contact for students and a liaison for referrals to shared services.

University of Toronto Mississauga

At the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), academic advising services are structured to support approximately 15,200 students. Academic advising is a shared responsibility between the central Registrar's Office and academic departments. The Office of the Registrar (OR) is the primary place where all students can go for academic advising. At the frontline of the OR, a team of nine Student Success Representatives, comprising six full-time and three part-time members, serve as the initial point of contact for students seeking support. A dedicated team of seven full-time academic advisors provide more in-depth academic advising through drop-in individual appointments and programming initiatives, such as Friday Chats facilitated by advisors and supported by peer leaders, aimed at enriching the student experience. Notably, UTM's Registrar's Office prioritizes group advising sessions as an integral component of its service delivery model. UTM OR group advising includes general and theme-specific drop-in chats with advisors and themed workshops, most of them offered in cooperation with campus partners (the Career Centre and the Academic Skills Center) to offer more holistic support to students who have questions about academic planning or face challenges with their degree progress.

Additionally, departmental advisors offer specialized support tailored to students' academic pursuits and co-curricular interests. These advisors provide insights into program requirements and research opportunities specific to their academic programs.

A distinctive feature of UTM's advising infrastructure is the integration of technology to streamline processes and enhance accessibility. The AskRegistrar platform, powered by ServiceNow, facilitates efficient triaging and response to student inquiries through ServiceNow instead of email. This is coupled with e-Tools (also called Admin Tools), a proprietary Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which is used to manage appointment bookings and maintain shared advising records including notes. e-Tools is accessible to advisors at the Registrar's Office as well

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[1] The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) defines three shared advising structures for delivering advising: shared-supplementary, shared-split, shared-dual. In these advising models the advising responsibilities are shared between advising staff and a faculty advisor. This differs from U of T's shared advising structure which typically more self-contained to one or more administrative offices of advising staff with little to no academic advising being provided formally by an assigned faculty advisor. In some smaller academic units, it is the case that advising is shared with a faculty member e.g., the Associate Chair, Undergraduate of that unit, but this is not the norm.

as advising staff at academic units, whereas notes and records in the AskRegistrar platform are not available to departmental advisors.

University of Toronto St. George Campus

At the University of Toronto St. George campus (UTSG), academic advising encompasses a diverse array of advising models. Within the Faculty of Arts and Science (A&S), a shared decentralized model of advising is used where the college registrar's office holds the primary responsibility for providing academic advising to members of their student communities. Academic advising is a shared responsibility with academic department offices who provide academic program specific advising to students applying to or enrolled in their specific academic programs regardless of college affiliation. Until the implementation of the Student Advising Service (SAS), a student's advising record was not typically shared outside of the college registrar's office. With the implementation of the SAS, some aspects of a student's advising record, including interactions and referrals with other offices are shared but advising notes are not typically shared outside the college advising team. In addition, the A&S Office of the Faculty Registrar also provides centralized advising to current students to help navigate faculty and university resources as well as navigate centralized faculty services including exams and transfer credits. Rotman commerce has a unique advising office at A&S, it is technically an academic unit but also provides advising services similar to a college to support students enrolled in Rotman programs.

The Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering (FASE) employs a shared-split model, whereby first-year students receive centralized advising at the First Year Office (FYO) regardless of which engineering discipline they are enrolled in before transitioning to a departmental advisor when they transition to their second year of study. Students in the Engineering Science program have a dedicated set of academic advisors that guide students from their first year onward. FASE's advising staff have access to a locally developed CRM developed to manage advising appointments and the student's advising record. Advising notes recorded in the system are typically shared between the FYO and departmental advisors.

At the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education (KPE), the Registrar's Office delivers academic advising services to students through a fully centralized model. KPE has three advisors and a manager to support academic advising. Students can connect with an academic advisor through the Student Advising Service (SAS), by phone, or email and meet with an advisor through group sessions and drop-in or scheduled individual appointments. Similarly, most academic advising services are delivered through the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design Registrar's Office with some additional advising delivered by program directors and faculty members. Students can connect with an advisor at the Registrar's Office by phone or email and individual appointments are available but limited by staffing capacity[2].

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[2] At the time this report was written Daniels had only one academic advisor to meet with both graduate and undergraduate students with additional staff providing front desk advising.

Across all Faculties at UTSG, a multifaceted approach to advising, leveraging various communication channels and appointment modalities are utilized. Email, phone, one-to-one appointments, drop-in sessions, and group advising sessions are among the commonly utilized methods for facilitating both transactional and in-depth advising interactions.

University of Toronto Scarborough

At the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), academic advising is facilitated through a centralized office dedicated to supporting both academic and career-related inquiries. The Academic Advising & Career Center (AACC) academic & learning strategies team of 12 staff consists of Academic Advisors and Academic & Learning Strategists, with the latter role providing both academic advising and learning skills support. Together with their career colleagues, the team collectively serves 14,000 students. Housing academic advising, learning support, career counselling, and employment services in one office provides UTSC students with seamless support and straightforward referrals. Students at UTSC have access to a range of engagement options, including email correspondence, online consultations, group advising sessions, and individual appointments. Notably, UTSC demonstrates a deliberate commitment to equity and inclusion by offering specialized support for Black and Indigenous students.

A shared model between the AACC and academic programs exists at UTSC, like other divisions, where academic advising related to academic area of study and program specific co-curricular opportunities is supported through the academic departments. Advising records, including notes, and advising systems are not shared between the AACC and academic department advising staff, with communication and referrals typically taking place over Teams or email.

Student Feedback on Academic Advising at U of T

The data collected by the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the 2021 Student Experience at a Research University (SERU) survey was analyzed as part of this review.

National Survey of Student Engagement

Overall, U of T typically shows lower percentages of engagement with academic advising, but similar ratings of quality compared to peer institutions[3].

Students in their final year of study indicated fewer interactions with academic advising than students at peer institutions. Notably, interactions that would be considered proactive advising practices such as reaching out about academic progress or performance and following up regarding a recommendation received the rating Very Much less frequently than peer institutions and Not Applicable more frequently than peer institutions. A summary of these reported interactions is in Table 1.

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[3] For advising specific NSSE questions responses from final year students at U of T were compared to combined responses from the following universities: Florida State University, Ohio State University, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, University of Cincinnati, University of Missouri, University of Texas at Arlington, University of Utah, and University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Table 1. Summary of responses from students in their final year of study about advising interactions compared to peer institutions.

Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following?

		Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much	NA
Been available when needed	UofT	13%	35%	31%	11%	10%
	Peer	9%	29%	36%	23%	2%
Provided prompt and accurate information	UofT	11%	32%	34%	13%	10%
	Peer	9%	27%	38%	24%	3%
Provided information about learning support services	UofT	12%	31%	30%	12%	14%
	Peer	14%	29%	28%	18%	10%
Notified you of important policies and deadlines	UofT	14%	28%	32%	15%	11%
	Peer	10%	25%	35%	26%	4%
Reached about your academic progress or performance	UofT	42%	20%	12%	5%	21%
	Peer	36%	24%	17%	14%	9%
Followed up with you regarding something they recommended	UofT	37%	22%	13%	2%	23%
	Peer	31%	23%	18%	13%	14%
Actively listened to your concerns	UofT	18%	30%	23%	11%	18%
	Peer	14%	27%	27%	22%	9%

Similarly, respondents in their final year also indicated lower percentages of discussions related to developmental advising discussions, such as discussions with an advisor about their academic goals and future plans, how their programs of study relate to these goals, co-curricular opportunities, and well-being. Table 2 summarizes the responses from U of T and compares them to peer institutions. U of T students reported fewer discussions about academic goals and their programs of study compared to peer institutions, with 39% of students indicating they never or rarely discussed their academic goals with someone at the institution compared to 29% of students at peer institutions. Only 6% of students indicated someone discussed their academic goals with them very often, compared to 15% at peer institutions.

Table 2. Summary of responses from students in their final year on advising discussions compared to peer institutions.

Thinking about academic advising, about how often did someone at your institution discuss the following with you?

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	NA
Your academic goals and future plans	UofT	16%	23%	29%	14%	6%	11%
	Peer	10%	19%	30%	21%	15%	4%
How your major or expected major relates to your goals and future plans	UofT	20%	20%	27%	14%	7%	12%
	Peer	13%	18%	27%	21%	17%	5%
Special opportunities (study abroad, internship, service-learning, research, etc.)	UofT	21%	22%	26%	12%	5%	14%
	Peer	18%	21%	26%	16%	10%	8%
Participation in co-curricular activities (organizations or clubs, performing arts, sports, etc.)	UofT	26%	22%	23%	10%	5%	15%
	Peer	25%	23%	21%	13%	8%	10%
Resources for your well-being (health, counseling, financial guidance, etc.)	UofT	19%	22%	28%	13%	5%	13%
	Peer	19%	21%	27%	16%	9%	8%

Respondents ranked both faculty and student interactions higher than their interactions with advisors or student services. More students responded "Not Applicable" when asked to rate their

quality of experience of interactions advisors (18%) or student services (23%) compared to interactions with students and faculty (<10%). Quality of rankings from students in their final year of study ranked their interactions slightly higher or similar to U15 schools, indicating the interactions they did have with advisors and student services were on par with peer institutions indicating potentially more issues with access than quality of academic advising at U of T.

Students in their final year of study were asked to identify challenges to their academic success. Advising was one of the top five challenges identified by respondents, with 59% identifying lack of good advising as a major or minor challenge to their academic success. Course availability/scheduling (79%), finances (76%), academic performance (75%), and personal or family problems (70%) were the other top challenges identified. These are notable because often these challenges can be mitigated or supported through academic advising so potentially access to good advising could help reduce other challenges students identify at U of T.

Student Experience in the Research University

From the SERU 2021 survey, students reported lower satisfaction of their experience with academic advising compared to nine peer institutions in the US as seen in Figure 2. Other than satisfaction for getting into the major of choice, the largest gaps between satisfaction ratings for U of T compared to peer institutions were seen in academic advising.

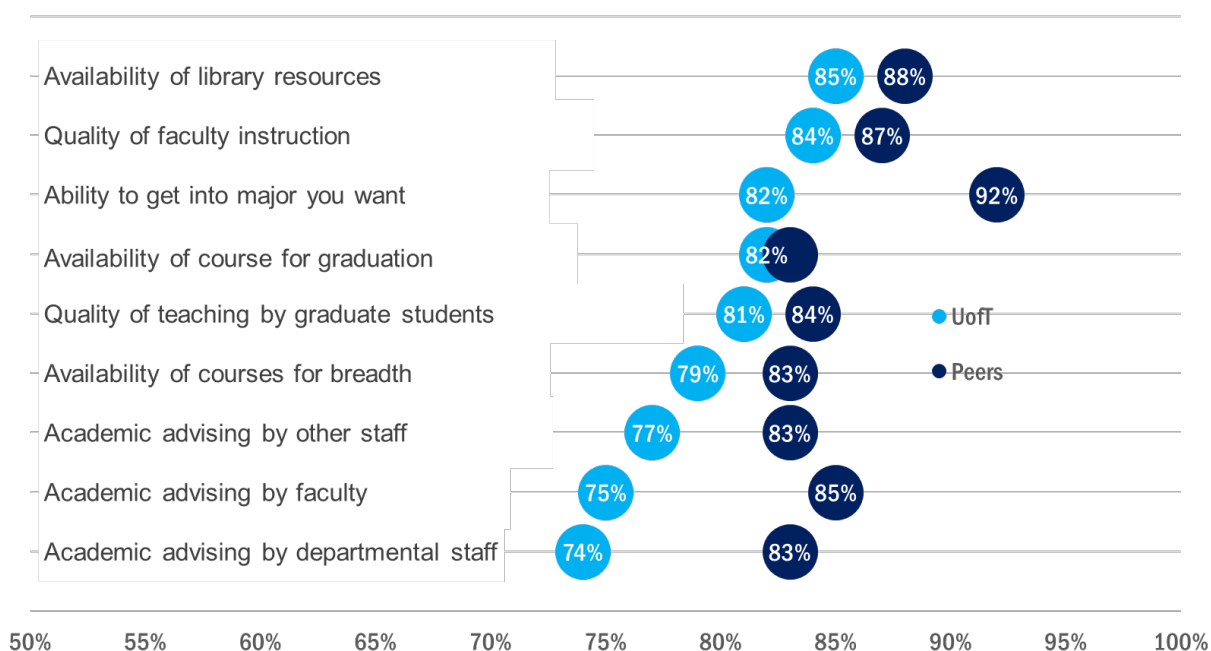% of students responding somewhat satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied

	UofT	Peers
Availability of library resources	85%	88%
Quality of faculty instruction	84%	87%
Ability to get into major you want	82%	92%
Availability of course for graduation	82%	82%
Quality of teaching by graduate students	81%	84%
Availability of courses for breadth	79%	83%
Academic advising by other staff	77%	83%
Academic advising by faculty	75%	85%
Academic advising by departmental staff	74%	83%

Figure 2. Satisfaction ratings for all undergraduate years at U of T compared to peer institutions.

Overall, the responses from the 2023 NSSE and the 2021 SERU survey identify opportunities for improvement of advising services at U of T.

Themes from Consultations

In recent years, many units and divisions have tried to review and consider how academic advising could be improved for undergraduate students. As the University builds from this current report and continues to implement the necessary central support for academic advising across the three campuses, such efforts must be made in concert with the formal and informal ways that Faculties, departments, or units have sought to improve their own advising processes. Some examples of these efforts are: (a) UTM's Advancing Academic Advising Project (started in 2023 and ongoing), (b) FASE's Dean's Task Force on Academic Advising (2015 – 2016, final report found here), (c) The Academic Advising Training Program (AATP) (launched in 2022 and ongoing), and (d) The Review of the Role of the Colleges on the St. George Campus, notably the recommendations of the Residences and Student Experiences Working Groups.

For this review we met with senior academic and administrative leadership, directors of advising offices, academic advisors, and directors of shared services (i.e., international experience, accessibility services, learning strategy support, career advising services, and crisis supports) from divisions across the university.

Areas to Continue to Strengthen

Commitment, Expertise, and Collaborative Nature of our Advising Community

> *"Without the care, dedication, and advocacy of their Academic Advisor, many U of T students would not be able to successfully complete their degree. Indeed, an academic advisor can play an essential part of one's academic journey."*

> - Manager of Advising Services

The University of Toronto is fortunate to have such a caring, dedicated, and compassionate group of members of our advising community. Throughout the discussions with advisors, advising managers, senior administrative leaders, and registrars and registrarial staff, it was clear how committed the group of advising staff are to support and guide our students to help them achieve their full potential. Many advisors spoke about the fulfillment of working directing with students and expressed an interest in being able to better serve more students if specific issues could be addressed. In addition, several advisors noted how they felt they were well supported by their direct managers and administration teams.

The strength, knowledge, and ability of the U of T academic advising community has been furthered in recent years through relevant educational credentials that many advisors have taken the initiative to complete. There are a number that have completed, or almost finished, their Masters in Higher Education degree. Many have taken advantage of other professional development opportunities that have been offered through professional organizations (e.g., CACUSS[4], NACADA[5],

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[4] Canadian Association of College & University Student Services - Canadian Association of College & University Student Services (cacuss.ca)
[5] NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising - NACADA > Home (ksu.edu)

etc.), or have participated in the recently developed Academic Advising Training Program (AATP) at the University of Toronto. As new people are hired into these types of roles, the job descriptions and requirements are also incorporating such educational backgrounds. This growing professionalization of the academic advising community is enabling the ongoing enrichment of how students can be supported through their journey at U of T.

Many academic advisors spoke about how they appreciated the supportive and collaborative environment within the advising community at U of T. From providing real-time informational support through tools like MS Teams, to being available for emotional support, groups of advisors within divisional units rely heavily on each other to meet the daily challenges of their roles. Across the broader advising community, which includes support through Shared Services and other offices (e.g., Accessibility Services, Financial Aid, Housing, etc.), the collegial and collaborative environment that enables referrals and additional support was also highlighted by many. It is important to note that advisors who are the lone advisor within a program or departmental office often do not have such a community for support. As well, advisors raised "closing the loop" within the referral process as a significant area of concern.

Use of a Variety of Models for Advising Access

It was observed that many advising offices have made specific efforts to expand how students can access support. Effective and robust front-line advising teams can address some of the urgent transactional needs, refer to relevant online sources of information, enable meaningful triaging of issues, and make the necessary connections or referrals for more complicated situations. The offering of drop-in appointment times and hybrid appointments have also been effective ways to meet the high-volume demands at the specific times of year when an academic deadline is approaching (e.g., course registration, add/drop dates, etc.)

Leveraging Technological Support

> *"UTM's AskRegistrar system has been a game-changer in terms of managing the volume of student advising requests"*
>
> - Assistant Registrar

Prior to the launch of the Student Advising Service (SAS) in Winter of 2022, which is being implemented in specific divisions across U of T in a staged process, a few units developed their own technological tools or approaches to support their academic advising mission. UTM's award-winning[6] AskRegistrar system has had a positive impact on the workflow for academic advisors and enabled the Registrarial team of advisors to provide more holistic support through more detailed appointment records and information management. The Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering (FASE) also developed their own Advising Portal in response to one of the recommendations of their Academic Advising Task Force. Similar to the AskRegistrar system, this Portal supports improved, more

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[6] See Application accolades for UTM Registrar team | Office of the Vice-Principal Academic and Dean (utoronto.ca) and Ontario University Registrars' Association Honours U of T Staff for their Work - University Registrar's Office (utoronto.ca)

personalized advising services through access to a fulsome student record and profile, integration with ROSI/ACORN, appointment management (e.g., student online booking and reminders), online form completion and document sharing, shared appointment notes, and some degree of follow-up tracking and monitoring. Finally, other units, such as Rotman Commerce and the Registrar's Offices at UTM, have turned to tools like ServiceNow to improve their advising efforts in similar ways.

Academic Advising Training Program (AATP), Onboarding, and Ongoing Professional Development

> *"Advisors are often providing a warm localized introduction to the university. They have expertise in academic and program requirements and there is an overwhelming desire for more training, support, and resources to enhance their work to be more holistic."*
>
> - Senior Administrative Staff

A significant strength of the current academic advising landscape at U of T is the Academic Advising Training Program (AATP) that has been developed and delivered by a small team of dedicated managers who saw the need for such a program. U of T should prioritize further development, expansion, and sustainable delivery of this program, with leadership through the Provost's Office.

The approach to onboarding new employees into academic advising roles varies across the institution. It was found that some offices provided clear and detailed onboarding processes, while others were more haphazard, often due to situations of urgent and demanding needs for people in such roles. This is a particular challenge for academic program advisors that often work in small teams or individually. There is an opportunity for U of T to leverage the effective onboarding and transitioning approaches observed within some units, to develop a more robust onboarding and ongoing professional development process that could be shared by all advising managers. The integration of AATP into this process, and the creation of a multi-level training program should be a focus for the University in the months and years to come. Such a program also needs to incorporate components that support people to take on and manage the emotionally challenging aspects and labour of these positions, which have become increasingly prevalent given the evolving nature of student needs and circumstances.

Areas in Need of Direct Attention

Academic Advisor Workload, Evolving Complexity of Student Needs, and Additional Responsibilities

> *"I am so busy helping a small number of students with significant challenges that I cannot help my B students thrive and flourish."*
>
> - Departmental Academic Advisor

Time and capacity to meet the needs of our students is a major challenge that most academic advisors are facing. It is critical that U of T and individual units recognize the evolving nature of student needs that academic advisors are struggling to address and manage. In many cases, an

honest and open review of the workload for academic advisors is needed. In particular, it was observed that:

- Advisors noted that the demand for advising has increased and that their work requires more crisis support, case management, and advocacy than in previous years,

- Many advisors also have significant programming or administrative duties that impact their ability to effectively manage their current caseload and/or engage in more proactive or developmental advising,

Such a review of the current demands and expectations for academic advisors should also consider the local needs and priorities that exist within the different programs and contexts. For example, in some cases, academic program advisors might be well situated to provide initial career advising and support wayfinding for co-curricular/experiential learning opportunities. However, this kind of holistic and personalized advising is, for the most part, not always reasonable given the current workload demands on academic advisors.

Access to Data and Information to Support Holistic Advising

"At times, one email could take 20 to 30 minutes to properly respond to as I need to check 4 or 5 systems to understand what situation the student is facing, and what advice, resource, or referral would be most appropriate at that time."

- Departmental Academic Advisor

In nearly every unit, it was heard that advisors struggle to provide students with optimal and personalized advice because they lacked access to necessary information, or the information was difficult to access. There is a clear need for our advisors to have ready access to:

- A complete student profile, including information related to scholarships and financial implications, study permit status, connections to different parts of the world, and other aspects which would provide a more humanizing understanding of the student as a person,
- Brief summaries and appropriate notes of prior meetings with other advisors or support staff,
- History of prior engagement with university services or supports and status of recent referrals,
- The student's academic record, which would include real-time grades within current courses, and
- Curriculum-related materials, including course syllabi.

The University should continue to work towards providing a centrally supported technological tool that would enable this data and information to be easily accessible, through a single platform, to advisors. Such a tool can also enable greater consistency in advising experiences for students across the institution.

Valuing and Respecting the Expertise and Experience of Academic Advisors

There is a need to create a stronger culture of respect and engagement with academic advisors to improve the overall student experience at U of T. Advisors are often not included in policy or curriculum changes, and yet are the ones that must implement and explain such changes through their work with students. Incorporating the perspectives and expertise of academic advisors into the discussions and decision-making process for such programmatic and Faculty-level changes is needed. This may also support the need to work towards greater consistency across the institution with fundamental policies, such as the implementation of the Credit/No-Credit policy. While advisors have expressed interest in being part of such work, they need time within their overall workload to be meaningfully engaged with these processes and the relevant committees.

Improvement to Service Referrals and Wayfinding Approaches

There is a need to improve the way referrals to other supports and Shared Services are implemented and tracked. From a technological point of view, the emerging Student Advising Service (SAS) will support this effort, but some work is also needed to improve the processes and the connections between offices that would help facilitate seamless transitions back and forth between supports.

Similarly, while tools such as Navi are improving the finding and accessing of supports at U of T, the development of greater awareness across the advising and student communities about what different services and offices can offer is needed. The current lack of community engagement and connection across the advising and student support teams is, in part, a cause for this wayfinding challenge.

Lack of Clarity Across U of T of the Academic Advising Mission

In general, U of T students, staff, and faculty lack a clear understanding of what role an academic advisor can play within the overall student journey and experience. Students are unsure of what kinds of support they can receive through their academic advisor, and faculty members often misinterpret or misunderstand an advisor's role. Within the various units and offices that offer academic advising throughout U of T, there are differing sets of expectations that make up the advising mission. Some tend towards more pro-active and developmental advising goals, while others focus more on transactional processes, mostly through a lack of capacity given the high demand. In addition, it is unclear how the various types of academic advising, and advising more broadly, fit together. For example, on the St. Geroge campus, the support available to Arts & Science students through advisors in the program offices, the Faculty Registrar's Office, and the College Registrar's Offices could be more clearly defined and coordinated to provide a more seamless student experience. While it is an important goal to work towards "any door is the right door," especially at such a large institution like U of T, it is important for all community members to have a reasonable degree of clarity of the unique types of support which is offered through each door.

Recommendations

A strong academic advising program can play a pivotal role in student retention (Drake, 2011; Tinto, 1999) and in fostering students' sense of belonging (Kuh, 1997; Shaw et al, 2023). Access to effective academic advising can be especially impactful on the experiences of traditionally underserved students (Lawton, 2018; Museus, 2021). The EAB Advising Program Diagnostic (see Appendix) outlines attributions of effective advising practices including:

- University-wide advising mission and definition of effective advising including student learning outcomes
- Central, senior leader with university-wide responsibility for advising strategy, operations, and assessment
- Clear processes for advisor assignments, students flow between advisors, and referral pathways to other service providers with efficient follow-up processes to close the loop.
- Leveraging technology to streamline advisor workflow by eliminating duplicative processes and providing best practice recommendations for systems use for common advising activities.
- Clear and consistent job descriptions and hiring processes
- Providing ongoing professional development opportunities and resources to advisors
- Provide KPI data and utilize student-centered metrics to support advisor performance

The recommendations provided below consider the main themes from the consultative conversations within this EAB framework and focus on strengthening academic advising at U of T.

1. *Reimagine and establish a new vision for how academic advising fits into the overall academic journey at U of T.*

There is no strong evidence to support U of T moving to a more centralized model of delivery for academic advising services. With each advising model, there are strengths that can be leveraged and challenges to mitigate, so the resources required to centralize academic advising services do not seem warranted. Further, it was noted in our consultative discussions that delivery of academic advising services at the divisional level allowed for more tailored, specialized support for students enrolled at each division. However, like other institutions in Ontario (Gallo & McGill, 2023), a decentralized model can be more difficult for students, staff, and faculty to navigate without alignment across divisions to define what academic advising is, the duties advisors are responsible for, and the titles of advising staff.

The recommendations in this report are focused on increasing the alignment of academic advising services and duties to increase access and awareness of what academic advising is and situating it as an integral support for student success. A collective and unified understanding of academic advising by all members of the U of T community is needed to leverage the talented and dedicated advisors most effectively to best support undergraduate students.

1.1 Establish an Academic Advising Advisory Committee with representation from across U of T and from all levels of work that supports the academic advising mission. It is suggested that a new centralized leadership role be responsible for supporting this committee, and that the prior work done by the Academic Advising Training Program Steering Committee be used as a foundational resource (Academic Advising Training Program (AATP) - Home (sharepoint.com)).

1.2 With the support of this Advisory Committee, develop and socialize an institutional wide academic advising vision and mission that defines the core values and goals of academic

advising at U of T, and how this type of support fits into the overall student journey at U of T. This should specifically identify how academic advising can:

- Create a culture of care and personalized support for U of T students
- Proactively support students' mental health and wellness,
- Enable students to develop skills necessary to thrive at U of T

1.3 Develop and implement an academic advising curriculum and assessment strategy. Identify key learning outcomes and opportunities for enhancing advising practices across the institution.

1.4 Implement a system and organizational structure for making decisions and aligning academic advising practices across divisions.

1.5 Ensure academic advisors are engaged in policy, regulation, and curricular changes and development. Recognizing the contributions and insights advisors can have broadly on the student experience.

2. *Support the professional development and overall wellness of advising staff.*

Professional development for academic advising staff is key to delivering excellent academic advising for students. The award-winning [Academic Advising Training Program (AATP) pilot](#) has been extremely successful in engaging advising staff across U of T in professional development related to their advising practices. One critical recommendation from this review is a call for an institutional commitment to the professional development of academic advising staff to provide better support for staff and continue to enhance academic advising services for students.

It is also important to recognize that the needs and demands of students today have changed in recent years. This changed the academic advising role and the need for professional development of advising staff. U of T lags in this area compared to other institutions. For example, [Toronto Metropolitan University](#), York University, [University of California Berkeley](#), [University of Pittsburg](#), and the [University of South Carolina](#), offer robust professional development opportunities including multi-level advising certificates and communities of practice.

2.1 Provide funding for the AATP to implement the program on a continuing basis.

2.2 Create a full-time continuing staff position to manage the development and delivery of the AATP, e.g., Manager, Academic Advisor Training & Development.

2.3 Integrate AATP Level 1 in the onboarding and training of all new advising staff.

2.4 Continue to develop and create new professional development programming for academic advising staff including AATP Levels 2 & 3 and the AATP Community of Practice.

2.5 Reconsider and redefine the workload for academic advising roles with the goal to enable more holistic and proactive advising support for student success. This will require properly recognizing the changing demands of the student population as well as

acknowledging the administrative and programming demands many academic advisors are tasked with.

3. *Integrate, enhance, and implement technological tools to streamline and align advising services and workflows.*

To enhance the current shared advising model used in most divisions and provide a more seamless and holistic experience for students, this report recommends the adoption of a "circle of care" model similar to health care systems that promotes shared access to student information and academic advising notes. This approach will facilitate better collaboration among advisors across different offices, enabling them to work together more effectively to support students.

3.1 Utilize the Student Advising Service (SAS) to enhance a shared advising model. The SAS knowledge base, referral system, and notes functionality can be leveraged to provide more seamless holistic support to students.

3.2 Undertake an effort to expand the appropriate sharing of student information across student-support services, offices, and people, within the confines of the University's data privacy responsibilities. This work should be founded upon the goal of providing seamless and effective support for each student across the spectrum of student-facing services.

3.3 Review and assess whether it is possible to integrate other student services that support student success and retention (e.g., learning strategists, career advisors, counsellors, accessibility advisors) into a shared system with academic advising. Shared access to advising systems will ensure that all relevant staff have a complete understanding of each student's needs and progress, thereby enhancing the quality and consistency of support provided.

3.4 Integrate Quercus, Degree Navigator, artificial intelligence chat bot, and mass communication functionality into the SAS. Accessing student information in one place simplifies the user experience for students and staff. A unified system will facilitate better tracking of student progress, more efficient management of academic records, and enhanced coordination of student services. This also provides the opportunity to develop a more comprehensive student success plan that incorporates mass advising through a robust communications plan. We would recommend central support to develop mass advising and communication plans divisionally to ensure alignment to central strategies at the OVPSEM and OVPS.

3.5 Work within the emerging University's digital strategy to develop tools that can support the proactive aspects of academic advising. For example, the leveraging of artificial intelligence tools and approaches could enhance the early warning systems that vary in presence and effectiveness across the institution.

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Appendix: EAB Advising Diagnostic

EAB | Student Success Collaborative™

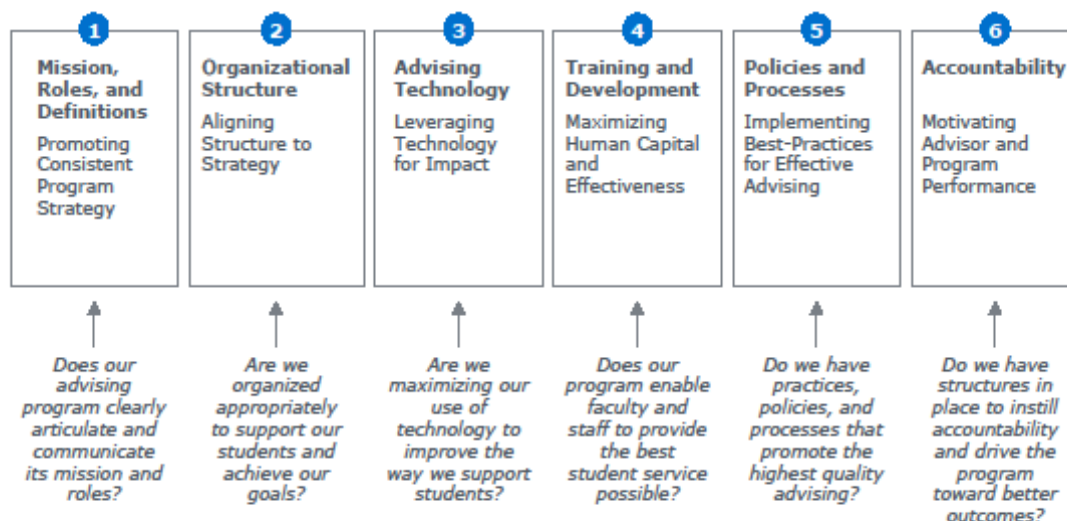# Advising Program Diagnostic

A Guide for Evaluating How Well Your Advising Strategy Operationalizes Best Practices for Student Success

Overview

The Advising Program Diagnostic is a tool designed to help members of the Student Success Collaborative™ evaluate the robustness of their advising program and how well it operationalizes best practices to support student success. Completion of this diagnostic guides members through program evaluation attribute by attribute, enabling them to identify specific areas of strength, areas for discussion, and areas for renewed focus toward improvement.

The full diagnostic evaluates program strength across 40+ attributes that span six areas of evaluation. It represents one of many resources—such as toolkits, research briefs, and case studies—that members of the Collaborative can use to improve their student success enterprise.

Six Areas of Evaluation

1 Mission, Roles, and Definitions	**2** Organizational Structure	**3** Advising Technology	**4** Training and Development	**5** Policies and Processes	**6** Accountability
Promoting Consistent Program Strategy	Aligning Structure to Strategy	Leveraging Technology for Impact	Maximizing Human Capital and Effectiveness	Implementing Best-Practices for Effective Advising	Motivating Advisor and Program Performance
Does our advising program clearly articulate and communicate its mission and roles?	*Are we organized appropriately to support our students and achieve our goals?*	*Are we maximizing our use of technology to improve the way we support students?*	*Does our program enable faculty and staff to provide the best student service possible?*	*Do we have practices, policies, and processes that promote the highest quality advising?*	*Do we have structures in place to instill accountability and drive the program toward better outcomes?*

1

Abbreviated Diagnostic

Is Your Advising Program Set Up for Maximum Effectiveness?

Area of Evaluation	Sample Attributes of Effective Advising Programs	Your Program Grade (1=weak, 2=sufficient, 3=strong)				Relevant SSC Resources
Mission, Roles, and Definitions Promoting Consistent Program Strategy	• Maintains a consensual, documented, university-wide definition of effective advising, the mission of the advising program, and student learning outcomes	1	2	3	Not sure	• The Murky Middle
Organizational Structure Aligning Structure to Strategy	• Has a central, senior leader with university-wide responsibility for advising strategy, operations, and assessment • Maintains clear processes for advisor assignment and student flow between advisors	1	2	3	Not sure	• What can health care teach higher education? • Coordinating and Restructuring around Technology to Better Support Students in Need
Advising Technology Leveraging Technology for Impact	• Streamlines advisor workflow by eliminating duplicative processes and providing best practice recommendations on which systems to use for common advising activities	1	2	3	Not sure	• Embracing Analytics to Drive Meaningful Change at Purdue University Calumet
Training and Development Maximizing Human Capital and Effectiveness	• Maintains clear and consistent job descriptions, hiring criteria, and hiring processes • Provides ongoing advisor training and professional development opportunities and resources	1	2	3	Not sure	• Winning Over the Faculty to Elevate the Quality of Advising and Mentoring
Policies and Processes Implementing Best-Practices for Effective Advising	• Maintains clear referral pathways and processes that enable effective transition of students to other service providers (e.g., tutoring, financial aid) and efficient follow up to close the loop	1	2	3	Not sure	• Re-enrollment Campaigns: A Quick and Easy Path to Results
Accountability Motivating Advisor and Program Performance	• Distributes KPI data to advisors on a regular basis to promote performance • Incorporates relevant, student-centered metrics into advisor performance evaluations	1	2	3	Not sure	• Creating a Culture Where Numbers Matter at Georgia State