WHITE PAPER PROPOSAL

from

UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING COUNCIL (UAAC)

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Over the past decade, the University of Arizona has undergone a transformation of its academic advising system that has become a model for universities elsewhere in the nation. This system was set in place following a two-year study conducted by the Academic Advising Task Force (AATF). The reform was funded with a continuing annual revenue stream made possible by a student tuition increase for this specific purpose, starting six years ago, and based upon an agreement between the University of Arizona undergraduate students and President Likins in a commitment made before the Arizona Board of Regents. The academic advising system is based within each of the colleges. A University body consisting of one representative from each college, called the Undergraduate Academic Advising Council (UAAC), along with the Advising Resource Center (ARC), was created to guide and coordinate the new advising system. One core element of the new system was the establishment of the ratio between students and professional advisors (generally 400-to-1) within each college. The ratio was determined by reference to national academic advising standards and in-depth time studies of our academic advisors. In the spring of 2008, an extensive campus-wide Academic Advising Program Review (AAPR) was conducted under the auspices of the Provost's Office. External reviewers from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) praised the improvements in student advising services that have occurred over the past six years.

As part of the present transformation process to identify cost savings at the University, proposals may come forward that would restructure the current academic advising system or specific actions may take place that would have the effect of undercutting the established ratios between students and professional academic advisors. For example, one proposal that has been mentioned is returning to a faculty-based academic advising model. The UA, like many other institutions of higher education, once had a system where faculty did the majority of academic advising. There is a significant difference between academic advising and student mentoring. Faculty are engaged in and experts at student mentoring. With the exception of a few units, faculty members are not as effective as professional academic advisors in performing the multiplicity of functions required to guide students smoothly toward graduation. That is why the academic advising system was reorganized at the University six years ago. Poor academic advising prior to the reorganization had caused serious problems for students and considerable concern from the Board of Regents. Returning to a faculty-based advising model is not in the best interests of the institution whether from the standpoint of student retention, student satisfaction, or more timely graduation rates.

At a recent town hall meeting, President Shelton confirmed the primary importance that students give to quality academic advising in their success both academically and in the many aspects of student life that academic advising reaches. We believe that the present advising system is responsible for this success. We respectfully request that any proposal that could lead to the restructuring of the present academic advising system and practices, or specific actions that would alter the ratio in colleges between students and academic advisors, first come before the UAAC for its evaluation prior to the reaching of any final decisions.

Keeping an effective academic advising system intact and involved in planning is particularly vital during a time of transformation. The maintenance of quality academic advising is essential to minimize and resolve the myriad problems students will necessarily encounter as whole colleges, departments, units, and degree programs change when they consolidate and transform.