Lessons learnt in designing improvements for advising support in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Cape Town

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Introduction

Advising in the Faculty of Commerce

Advising is done mostly by full time academics, in addition to their existing teaching responsibilities

Students often contact their lecturers / advisors for non-academic issues

Advising is not a high priority and is cyclical (e.g., during registration and at the beginning of the second semester)

Problem Statement

Focus groups / surveys: Students' perspectives of advising

Advising sessions are rushed, with limited time for consultation

Mistakes made by the advisor or student themselves are often discovered too late, impacting time to completion

Students also want more informative and empowering advising sessions

Students also want a greater culture of care

Objectives

1. To assist with recurring non-academic issues so that advising sessions with academics can focus more on curriculum issues
2. To help reduce mistakes made by advisors
3. To help students prepare in advance before meeting an advisor so that the advising session can be more informative and empowering
4. To develop a greater culture of care at UCT

Interventions for Objective 1

Assisting with non-academic issues

Course Home | Content | Activities | Course Info | Grades | Help

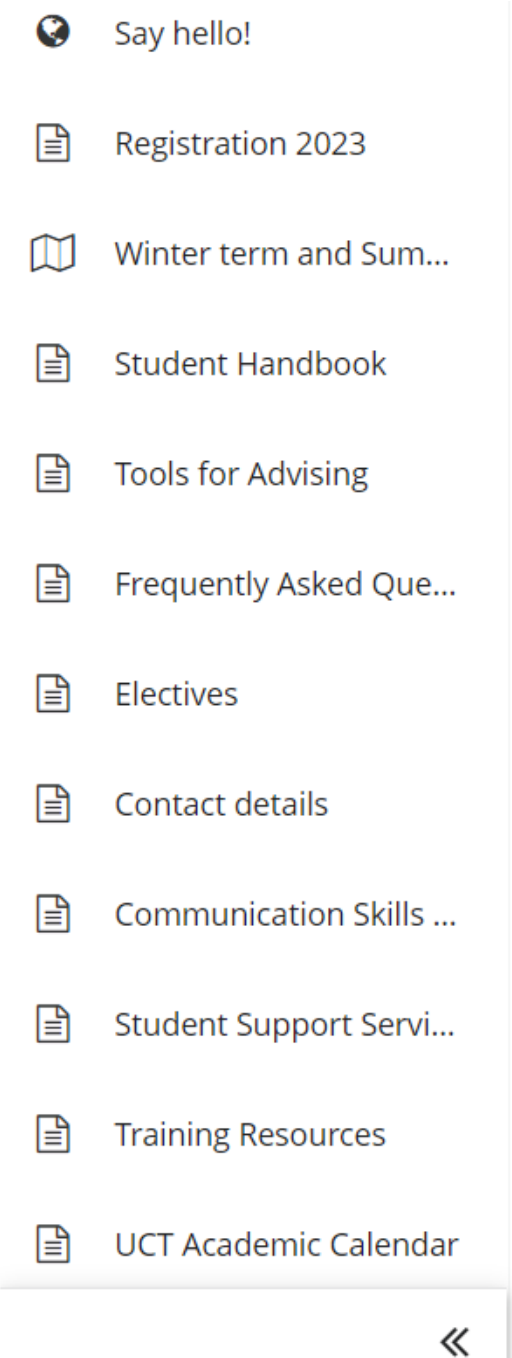
- Welcome
- Financial Goals
- Spending Diary/Budgeting
- Cash Flow Statement
- Statement of Personal Wealth

Money Matters is an exciting Pilot Project launched within the College of Accounting to support students in developing skills to better manage their student funds. The project recognises the need to support students in decision making over their funds as crucial to their wellness and stress management. This project aims to empower students with tools and techniques as well as resources. The Money Matters project recognises that the path to financial enlightenment begins early and is lifelong. Hence, the project hopes to support students on this journey.

Interventions for Objective 2

Assisting with reducing mistakes made by advisors

- Workshops and focus groups with staff members
- Academic advising site



Welcome to the Academic Advising Site!

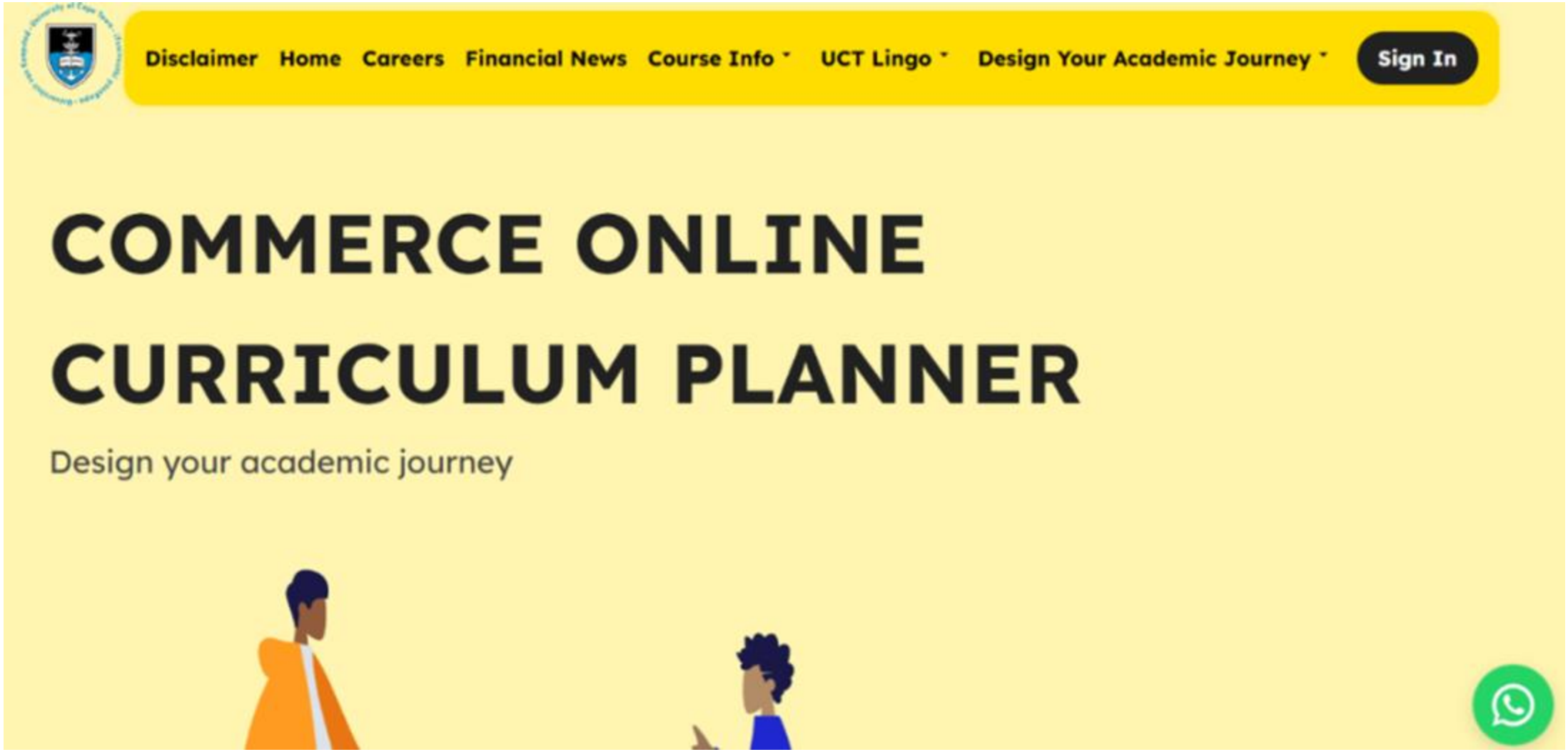
The purpose of this site is to provide Academic Advisors in the Faculty of Commerce with resources that can assist them in giving the highest quality of advising to University of Cape Town students.

Within Academic Advising, there are three streams:

Approaches	Explanation
Prescriptive	The prescriptive approach to advising suggests that advising is about helping students manage the rules and regulations around completing a major, getting a degree and graduating.
Developmental	The developmental approach focuses on imparting to the student the skills that enable them to take ownership of their academic success.
Proactive/Intrusive	Intrusive advising is pro-active intervention. It is letting

Intervention for Objective 3

Guiding students in preparing ahead of an advising session



Interventions for Objective 4

Creating a culture of care

Commerce Cares Helpdesk

Mental health workshop for advisors

Focus groups and surveys with students to better understand the experience of students

Results: Staff interventions (2021 to 2023)

Interventions for staff	No. of staff members reached
1 Workshop (*Understanding student advising in the Faculty of Commerce*) in 2021	31
10 Registration Focus Groups in 2021	32
1 UFS Advising Workshop (*Advising in Action*) in 2022	30
1 Mental Health Workshop in 2022	5
8 Registration Focus Groups in 2023	29
1 Academic Advising Site	57

Results: Student interventions (2021 to 2023)

Interventions for students	No. of students reached
1 Money Matters Workshop	12
1 Online Curriculum Planner	4798
1 Commerce Cares Helpdesk	2157
3 Focus Groups to understand the current advising process in Commerce (from a student's perspective), expectations of students, issues and areas for improvement in advising and the role of student agency in advising	13
3 Focus Groups understand the experience of students who transferred to the Educational Development Unit for additional academic advising and support in 2nd semester	16
1 survey to understand why students dropped out in good academic standing from Commerce	94
1 Feedback form (Online Curriculum Planner)	72

Lessons learnt

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4
Assisting with non-academic issues	Assisting with reducing mistakes made by advisors	Guiding students in preparing ahead of an advising session	Creating a culture of care
• Lack of interest • Course overload • Students tend not to participate in non-academic activities / e.g., may not see the benefits of a financial literacy programme • Students only seek help when a problem is already huge	• Resistance to change • Own way of doing advising • Lack of stakeholder buy-in for advising interventions	• Tools not integrated into the university's existing IT infrastructure are bound to fail • Students would only use the tool when prompted to do so	• Faculty overload: Difficult to act with care all the time

Recommendations

- Targeted interventions: Need to identify students at-risk and make certain interventions compulsory

  “Not all students need advice. Other students wouldn't graduate without it.”

- Need an academic advising mandate to get stakeholder buy-in
- New tools need to be integrated into the university’s existing IT infrastructure
- Professional advisors to contribute towards the culture of care

Thank you