Smart Planner: A New Revolution in Academic Advising

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At the University of Arizona, over 30,000 undergraduates meet with their advisors every semester to determine their course schedules and ensure they are making progress towards degree completion. Now a new tool that takes the guess work out of student's picking the correct classes to meet their degree requirements is available on the UA campus.

**Smart Planner** (formerly known as Degree Tracker), an interactive online system, helps UA students navigate course planning and creates a more efficient and engaging academic advising experience. The Smart Planner tool utilizes information from a student's record in **UAccess Student** [1], such as transfer credits, test scores and course enrollment to recommend future semester course enrollment. The flexible system allows students to adjust and personalize their recommended course schedule based on their individual needs, such as enrolling in summer courses or changing the order of courses based on dual enrollment, AP credits completed before they began college, double major requirements and more. Smart Planner updates automatically when any changes are made to the system.

Smart Planner's predictive and forward-looking capabilities help students see where they are going and how they are going to get there. The tool shows students a snapshot of their four-year plan which is continually updated based on the courses they are currently enrolled in. Students can easily see the courses they complete each semester will move them closer to graduation.

"Smart Planner empowers students by giving them the ability to see how their decisions and choices help them achieve their ultimate goal of graduation and a career," said Kathy Godwin, assistant director for curricular affairs [2].

One of the major benefits of Smart Planner is that it allows advisors more time to focus on student development and success with less emphasis on the details of course scheduling. "The ability to provide more development advising and resources to students to ensure their success while at the University of Arizona and beyond is a critical outcome of the Smart Planner offering," added Godwin.

For example, now advisors can provide interventions for at-risk students, coordinate mentoring, career and graduate school advising, and help students develop time management, study, and other skills required to be successful in college. In addition, through the use of Smart Planner, the institution is working on the ability to start seat forecasting for classes and intervene sooner when students are off their graduation path.

The predictive tool is part of an initiative that began in 2011 with the launch of **Degree Search** [3], a website that helps students make informed decisions about what major they would like to pursue. The use of Degree Search and Smart Planner together provide a powerful set of tools to help students explore majors and plan their path and time to graduation. The initiative
is collaborative campus effort supported by Gail Burd, vice provost for academic affairs; Michele Norin, the chief information officer; and Melissa Vito, vice president for student affairs.

"Smart Planner and Degree Search are critical components of our invigorated focus on student academic success to help students stay on track academically, acquire the support they need through the Think Tank and Schedule for Success and graduate in four years," said Melissa Vito. "It appears this will be the second consecutive year of increases in freshmen retention and we believe Smart Planner will add to this effort significantly."

Smart Planner has gained strong support from UA students, advisors, and administration leaders and now universities across the country are noticing how UA is using technology to advance student learning and streamline administrative functions. According to Hank Childers, Program Leader for Smart Planner and UA’s senior director of enterprise information and analytics, "the team realized it had something special in Smart Planner early on because it is a win-win situation. It can benefit any higher education institution that wants to improve retention and graduation rates as well as overall student success."

In spring 2013, UA was approached by an out-of-state university that expressed interest in licensing the rights to use Smart Planner on their campus. Since then, Childers has been working with Tech Launch Arizona, the UA initiative responsible for commercializing university-created technologies, to establish a licensing agreement for other higher education institutions to purchase rights to use Smart Planner. Childers anticipates the UA will have its first Smart Planner licensee in place soon.

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Links:
[6] https://studentaffairs.arizona.edu/