

MEMORANDUM

To: **Gillings School Faculty and Staff Members**

From: Barbara K. Rimer *BKR*

Date: April 9, 2019

Subject: Changes in Student Affairs at the Gillings School

This memo is laid out in several sections, starting with a brief rationale, and our plans, for student affairs work that will be done over the next few months, and then, for those who are interested, more detailed background about the rationale for change.

Section 1: Why I am writing to you

As the end of the semester fast approaches, I hope you all are doing well.

The purpose of this email is to tell you about changes we are making in student affairs across the school, with input from many people, including school leaders, faculty, staff and students. Changes are focused on one overarching goal—to ensure that every Gillings student has access to high-quality, consistent student services from the time they consider applying, through the application process, to enrolling as students, and throughout their time at Gillings, to positions, careers and becoming engaged Gillings alumni.

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This is not about saving money. To stay the best, we must strengthen the entire continuum of services to students. We recognize that it will cost more to serve students better. We must invest in student affairs. Our accreditor expects it of us, and it is the right thing to do. Yet, we must do so efficiently and in a way that is scalable, sustainable, accountable, appropriate, permits cross-training, and provides career development and advancement opportunities for people in the positions. The changes we are making must be positive for students, student affairs professionals, chairs, program directors, departments and the overall school.

By the start of fall semester, 2019, the foundation of the Gillings Student Affairs Ecosystem must be in place.

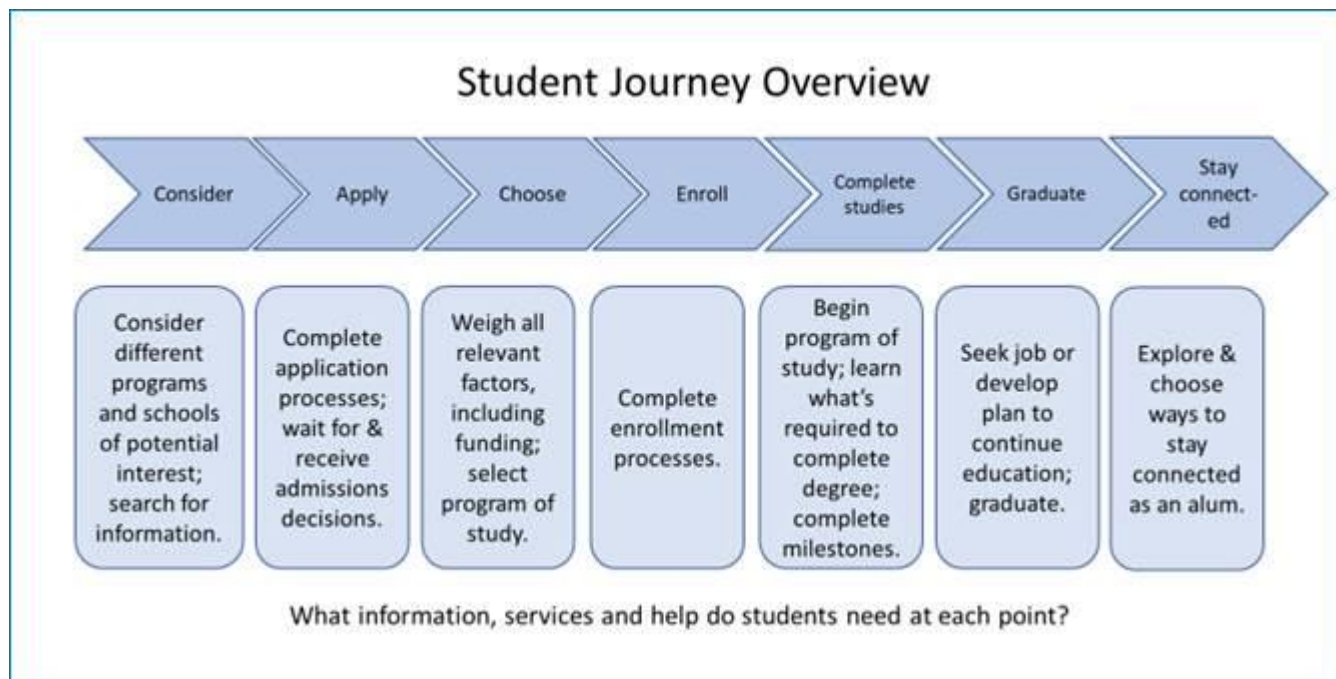
Over the past six months, we conducted an accelerated design process, heard from many stakeholder groups, met with members of our school's Dean's Council and Chairs' Committee and sought their input on multiple occasions. Scores of staff and faculty were involved and many students, as well.

We met with the Chairs' Committee April 3, 2019, to discuss the part of the ecosystem focused on current students, primarily.

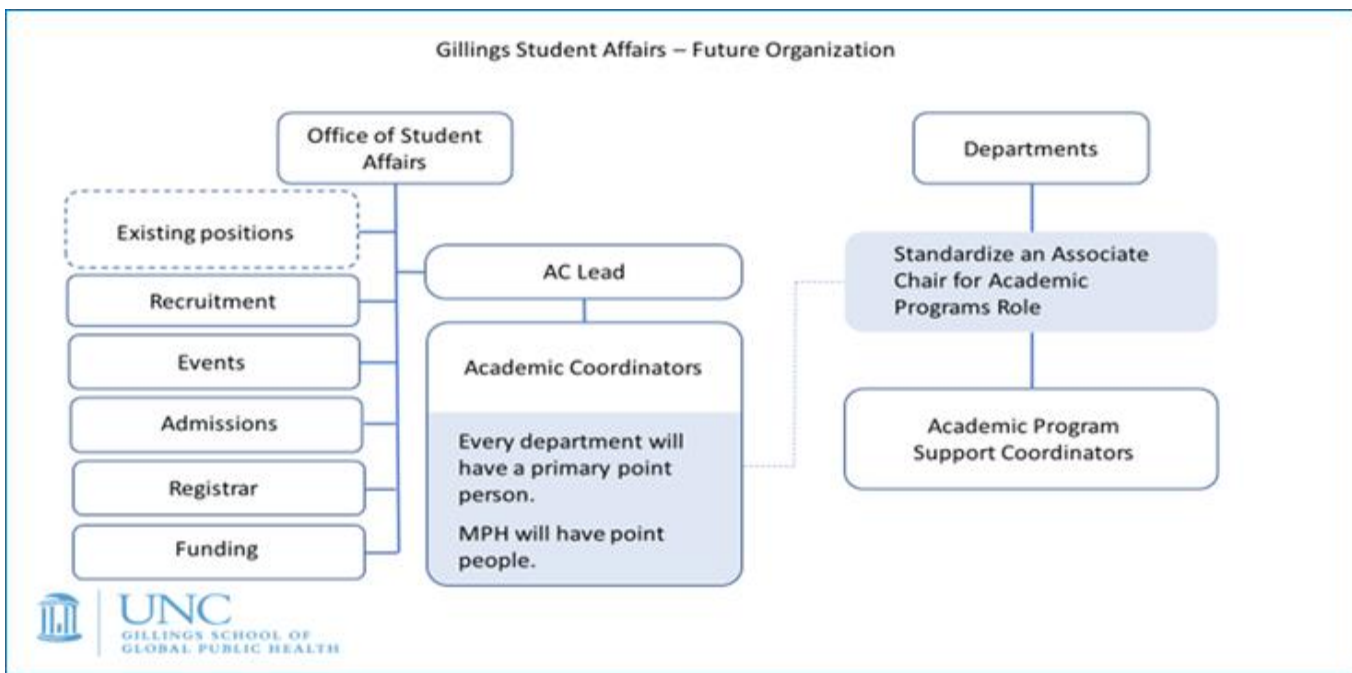
Later that day, we convened nearly all student affairs professionals in the School. **First, we reassured them that everyone in student affairs who wants to continue working at Gillings will have a position in the new organizational structure.** If anything, we will need more people in student affairs positions over time, not fewer. All roles will receive supervisory support and be expected to meet performance standards. We will provide or support professional development for staff who need additional training to occupy available roles they have been hired into. **No one's pay will be reduced.**

Section 2: What we are planning, how we will get to implementation, and what will change

We also said to the people with whom we met April 3rd that most student services jobs will change as we build a *coherent, cohesive, intentional and sustainable student affairs ecosystem* across the Gillings School, something we've never had. It will be designed to support the continuum of students' needs, from the recruitment/applicant stage through their becoming engaged alumni, as described in the figure below.



We have made key decisions about how we will deliver services to students, and the resulting structure will include centralization of some services and department-based services for others, as shown in the organizational chart below. We describe this below in *Phase 1*.



The work we are planning as part of the implementation process will be led by an Implementation Team under the guidance of Kathy Anderson, PhD, associate dean for information technology and project planning, with three core members and various experts who will join discrete parts of the process. We have not yet worked out all the details of the student affairs ecosystem. That will be the job of the Implementation Team, which will work with a very aggressive timeline since we must have people in place before fall term begins.

Phase 1. Implementation has three phases. *Phase 1*, which starts immediately, will focus primarily on current students, not on recruitment/enrollment or career and alumni services.

Roles. We will standardize academic coordinator (AC) positions in departments and work closely with people in those positions to determine who is best suited to what roles. We'll also create academic program support coordinator (APSC) positions, which will help departments work efficiently and well. These roles are not yet fully conceptualized, but likely will include work that sometimes has been assigned to academic coordinators but is not specific to AC roles. Defining and staffing these positions is the first part of creating a Gillings career development process for professionals in those roles, but there are many nuts and bolts to work through. We expect to have positions throughout the continuum described by end of April.

Reporting lines. Academic coordinators will report to a lead coordinator who will report to the associate dean for students, Charletta Sims Evans (See Future Organization table, above). ACs also will have a dotted line to associate chairs for academic programs in departments and PHLP – a role we will standardize across academic units going forward. ACs will be as close as possible geographically (in our buildings) to the departments and students with whom they work. Future updates will include fuller descriptions of these roles as we define them.

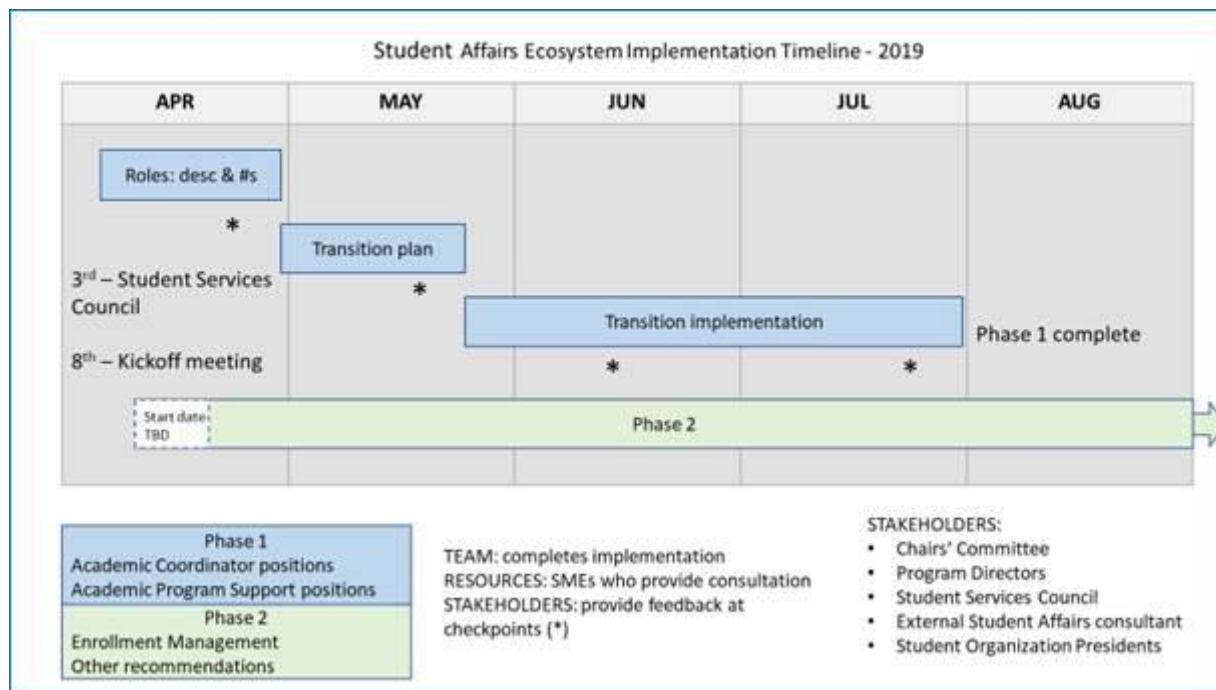
Phases 2 and 3. In *Phase 2*, we will address developing other staff roles in student affairs, focusing especially on enrollment management. Specifically, we will address staffing needs to support applicants and students. Based on feedback from student services managers, we moved Phase 2 up on the timeline to begin closer to Phase 1.

In *Phase 3*, we will focus on developing the processes needed to support students, including supporting students in understanding their funding options and making sure that everything we communicate about funding is accurate, accessible and transparent. Both the availability of funding and how and when we communicate about funding are serious concerns for applicants and students. We've also heard concerns that there should be more transparency about GRAs and other school roles that include

funding. We must get some other pieces in place before we can tackle funding, but we will get to funding as soon as possible. We also will expand our career services in *Phase 3*. We will keep you updated with plans about *Phase 3*.

Nimble processes. As we shift into implementation planning and then implementation, we will have multiple ways of hearing from you. Specifically, as we implement any changes, we will identify, and attempt to resolve quickly, any identified problems. A rapid response team will take feedback from anyone in the school and will be charged with responding within days – if not with solutions, at least with a response and a plan for finding answers. Sometimes, you may just want to be heard, and that is OK too. You can start using this mechanism now, by emailing your feedback to:

SPHEcosystem@unc.edu. We also will provide you with brief updates on where we are in the process, which is shown in the timeline below, and what has been accomplished.



Section 3: How we got to the plan we will move forward

Earlier steps in the process

To assess the appropriateness and consistent quality of the services we provide students and to plan for the future, we undertook an intensive, accelerated, six-month design process led by Kathy Anderson, PhD, associate dean for information technology and project planning. This process consisted of two separate design sessions, with student affairs staff in the first one, and key design team members in the second. In both rounds, we obtained feedback from many stakeholders, including bachelor's, master's and doctoral students, department chairs, program directors and other key faculty identified by chairs, student affairs professionals and others. Design team members collected, analyzed and studied data, including admitted student surveys, met with different stakeholder groups, including students, department chairs, academic program directors and others, tracked what our peers are doing and examined relevant literature. Then, they made recommendations for what the ecosystem should look like, including several areas where they indicated options (rather than decisive recommendations) for how to move forward. Several of us again discussed the issues, reviewed all inputs, talked with key individuals and finally, decided on key elements of the plan.

While not perfect, it has been a strong process with lots of people involved—including many of you—and lots of listening. We were impressed by the care and thought that both design teams put into the process. Now, the Implementation Team is ready to act, with strong input from several stakeholder

groups, including chairs, undergraduate and graduate program directors, student services professionals and students.

Section 4: Why we are changing student services

Rationale for changing student affairs at Gillings

Below are some of the most important reasons why we must change our service model to create an ecosystem.

1. ***It's the right thing to do.*** Many students are satisfied with the services we provide, but some are not, and not all are well-served by the current system. We do not deliver consistent, high-quality services to all students; we vary in services and models across the school. What we offer should be seamless. We can learn from the best models across the school and have been doing that. It's also the right thing to do for student affairs professionals, many of whom are overworked and have no back-up systems.
2. ***CEPH requirements.*** New requirements from CEPH demand attention to the entire student continuum as part of the way we are assessed as a school. We must document what we are doing at each step and show that we are delivering quality, consistent services.
3. ***Student needs and expectations.*** Today's students view themselves as customers with very explicit needs and expectations. They expect a lot of us and let us know when we fail to deliver. We must be staffed to deliver. Our competitors have staffed up and have re-dedicated themselves to serving students in a proactive, highly responsive way. We cannot stand still and remain competitive.
4. ***Accurate, complete and timely information and responses.*** We know from years of student affairs surveys of admitted students and others what our applicants and students value especially, e.g., quick response time for emails and calls; knowing what course of study is expected; accurate information, including transparent information about issues such as diversity and funding.
5. ***Quality, efficiency and scalability.*** The university is changing how it delivers services, with greater emphasis on quality and efficiency. Provost Blouin refers to this as operational excellence. When shown our current model, he said that it is not scalable for enrollment growth, which we need urgently, doesn't permit cross-training, may not incentivize the highest level of performance and is not structured for accountability. When the provost says this, we must pay attention.
6. ***Prior analyses and recommendations.*** We have had several examinations of student affairs, most recently, in 2016, as part of our organizational development process. That assessment recommended changes to our current structure. We focused instead on bolstering best practices across departments. This approach was not effective in correcting problems. It takes a well-functioning, responsive system to do that, not loosely coordinated individuals who often are overworked to start with.
7. ***Putting it all together.*** Last fall, in the wake of new CEPH criteria, the need to develop a plan that showed how we will comply with new guidelines, and the need to deliver services for 12 new concentrations by August 2019, I concluded that we no longer could responsibly operate as we have in the past. We initiated a design process to create a student affairs ecosystem.

Section 5: Final considerations

Send feedback, concerns and problems to:

SPHEcosystem@unc.edu

We owe it to our students to change with the times so we deliver high-quality, consistent services to all our students. We have made many important decisions about the structure and re-organization plans, but we still have other decisions to make. With your help and dedication to the task, I am confident we will get there. One key decision is that we will standardize the Academic Coordinator

position, and, it will report to a lead Academic Coordinator. This individual will report to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs (Charletta Sims Evans), with a dotted line to associate chairs for academics within the departments.

We have developed a rapid but phased approach for dealing with other important aspects of student affairs. The period of deliberation and ambiguity has been difficult for chairs and student services professionals, especially. Change is hard, and many people would prefer that we stay as we are. No organization can remain excellent by staying the same. We cannot remain the same and be a top school.

We are moving forward. As we change, please work with us to ensure that the plan is effective. Gillings School students deserve that. We will not get everything right at first, and we will change what is necessary over time. Please reassure students that the goal of our effort is to provide even better services to them. Disclosing your personal feelings about the decisions that were made in discussions with students will undermine the effort.

We need you with us to assure that the ecosystem is effective, and that our students benefit. We will communicate frequently with brief updates as we implement the change process, and will be responsive to issues and concerns, but we are moving forward. We undertook a process that was done with care and integrity. I said at the beginning that I accepted responsibility for making the final decisions about reporting structure, and I have done that. We are doing everything we can to listen to you and to mitigate your concerns and fears. Now, we will start a new journey together. We need your help to finish building and then implement the best possible ecosystem.