

I. **Institutional description:**

Founded in 1818, Dalhousie University is one of Canada's oldest universities, attracting more than 18,000 students from Atlantic Canada, Canada and around the world. A medical-doctoral institute, Dalhousie has 13 faculties and over 200 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. Located on the east coast of Canada, Dalhousie is a member of the U15 group of Canadian research-intensive universities. In 2013, under the leadership of the then-new president, the institution embarked on a period of rigorous analysis and thorough consultation, which resulted in a comprehensive statement of priorities: *Inspiration and Impact: Dalhousie's Strategic Direction 2014-2018*.

**Program Development:**

The goal of Dalhousie's [Strategic Priority 1.1](#) is to raise the retention of first-year students to become competitive with the U15 average. Currently, we experience approximately 17% attrition of students from December of year one to December of year two. To identify the path to improving these rates, we engaged consultants, reviewed literature on student success, gathered institutional best practices and embarked on an in-depth multi-variate and univariate analysis of ten years of Dalhousie student data. This resulted in a better understanding of the risk factors of our entering students, both pre-and post-entry.

The literature clearly demonstrates that student success is contingent on students' participation in both curricular and co-curricular activities and that, for students to be successful, it requires a commitment from both the student and the institution. Considering the overwhelming evidence that we can influence the success of our students, Dalhousie committed to providing more targeted and holistic supports to first and second year students.

In August 2017, funded by a large donation, we reorganized our central advising area and moved away from the old model of transactional/prescriptive advising to open a new Student Success Centre focused

on developmental advising and career exploration. The Centre's advisors participated in two weeks of training, including sessions on:

- student development theory,
- the three pillars of advising,
- NACADA competencies,
- social justice and advising,
- and appreciative advising.

Once the Centre opened, there was a concerted effort to “brand” advising in a way that demonstrated how it went beyond helping students to choose and register for courses and aligned with the academic mission of the institution. As a result, the Dal “On Track” suite of programs was created. Informed by research, theory (such as Lizzio’s 5 Senses of Success, Appreciative Inquiry, Strengths-based psychology) and evidence-based strategies, the programming focuses on helping first and second year students to be successful as they face various transitions in and throughout their time at Dalhousie. The program’s “advising curriculum” focuses on the delivery of enhanced, intentional and ongoing academic advising and consists of three streams:

- Start on Track: a series of eight online orientation modules;
- Stay on Track: Student Success advisors work with students on increasing their academic self-efficacy and developing academic, career and engagement goals;
- Back on Track: a 12-week support program offered in the winter term for first and second year students who struggled academically in the fall term.

The primary budgetary costs for the On Track program are related to assessments as well as the incentives of the program. Incentives are provided to encourage both participation in the program, as well as successful completion.

The non-salary budget for On Track is:

	<b>Budget</b>
Training costs	\$3,000
Communications/Swag	\$1300
StrengthsQuest	\$4200
LASSI	\$1500
LASSI Modules	\$3500
Resources	\$1500
Incentive Prizes	\$1100
Tuition stipends	\$4500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$20, 600</b>

## **II. Goals and objectives:**

The overarching goal of the On Track programming is based on the need to consider students holistically, from a student life cycle perspective, while focusing on the importance of proactively providing supports to students who are struggling academically. The program objective is to increase the persistence and success of participating students. In addition, each stream of On Track has identified goals and learning outcomes.

## **III. Program description:**

### **Start on Track:**

The goal of Start on Track is to assist students in understanding the anticipated values, norms and behaviours that they can expect as a first-year university student, while providing opportunities to become integrated into the university community. The objective, aligned with CAS Standards, is to

facilitate the transition of new students into the institution while preparing them for their educational opportunities and student responsibilities.

### Program structure

Start On Track consists of eight online modules on the topics of: academic readiness, financial readiness, community & citizenship, consent & sexualized violence, alcohol safety and health & wellness, using the libraries and academic integrity. Each module includes informational text, short videos, images, and situational quiz questions to educate students on key transitional issues, resources and supports available to them, and to help them make informed choices and decisions. Hosting the modules on Dalhousie's online learning management system, Brightspace, helps students familiarize themselves with the system they will be using for their academic classes. Completion of individual modules is incentivized with a themed prize draw for each module. Completion of all modules results in the students' being entered in a draw for a \$250 tuition bursary.

The following chart provides the modules name and associated outcomes.

<b>Module</b>	<b>Associated Senses</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Investing in Your Future	Sense of resourcefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- why you should create a budget</li> <li>- where to find your tuition and fee information</li> <li>- important terms for understanding your student budget</li> <li>- how to create a budget</li> <li>- understand how to make up shortfalls in a budget</li> <li>- where to look for help with financial concerns</li> </ul>
Getting off to an A+ Start	Sense of capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understand key academic/university terminology</li> <li>- identify at least three important note-taking strategies</li> <li>- learn at least three new skills to help you be successful in university</li> </ul>
Taking Care of Yourself – Mental and Physical Health	Sense of resourcefulness and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learn key services provided by Dalhousie Student Health &amp; Wellness</li> <li>- know when to visit on campus, walk-in services, and the hospital</li> <li>- understand basic sexual health</li> <li>- know how to access Student Health &amp; Wellness services</li> <li>- know how to access Athletics &amp; Recreational Services</li> <li>- understand health coverage as a Dal student</li> </ul>
Alcohol and Safety	Sense of resourcefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- potential harms related to alcohol/drug consumption and strategies for reducing harm when consuming these substances</li> <li>- resources to assist with alcohol and substance related concerns (emergency or non-emergency) on and off campus</li> <li>- alternatives to alcohol and substance consumption available to you on campus</li> <li>- how to get involved with on-campus associations that support alcohol and substance free events</li> <li>- how to access safe transportation</li> </ul>

		- Canadian laws surrounding alcohol/drug consumption
Consent & Sexualized Violence	Sense of connection and resourcefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learn Dalhousie's definitions of sexual violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault</li> <li>- identify examples of verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment</li> <li>- learn about the importance of consent in healthy relationships</li> <li>- learn how to access supports and services at Dalhousie related to sexualized violence</li> </ul>
Becoming a Citizen of Dal – Community and Citizenship	Sense of culture and connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learn how to navigate role of being a university student (expectations, rights student conduct)</li> <li>- understand and increase capacity on importance of diversity and inclusivity</li> </ul>
Using the Libraries	Sense of capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- which library is your "home" library</li> <li>- how to register your Dal Card as your library card (and why you should do it)</li> <li>- how to tell when an assignment is a research assignment</li> <li>- how to find credible information for research assignments</li> <li>- how to get research help from the Dalhousie Libraries</li> <li>- how to track your assignment progress using the Assignment Calculator</li> </ul>
Academic Integrity	Sense of capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify the consequences of academic offenses at Dal</li> <li>- identify additional resources to learn more about academic integrity</li> <li>- identify support services at Dal related to academic integrity, including how and when to access them</li> </ul>

### Stay on Track:

The goal of Stay on Track is to provide intentional, individualized developmental advising to students in the first two years of their program. Focusing on student strengths, Stay on Track is grounded in an appreciative approach and helps students develop capacity for meaningful decision-making. Learning outcomes and assessment measures have been influenced by a number of resources including CAS Standards, Bloom's Taxonomy, Lizzio's Five Senses of Success and Appreciative Advising. Starting in October 2017, Stay on Track was available to first and second year students in direct-entry undergraduate programs.

### Program Structure:

Intake to the program begins in October and occurs on a rolling basis until March 1<sup>st</sup>.

To register, students complete an [online form](#) and are assigned an advisor who proactively reaches out to the student. Prior to their first appointment, students complete CliftonStrengths. At the first appointment, the advisor and student review the assessment, identify student strengths and discuss both student and advisor expectations of the program. Students are required to complete a

minimum of three advising appointments with their advisor (students who wish to meet more frequently with their advisor can do so).

Program incentives include a free CliftonStrengths Inventory, a \$5 coffee card, and a \$10 bookstore voucher. Students who successfully complete all aspects of Stay on Track receive recognition on their co-curricular record (CCR) and are entered in a draw to win a \$500 tuition prize.

Learning outcomes:

- Increase students' sense of thriving by helping them discover their strengths
- Increase students' sense of engagement by helping them practice and develop their talents and strengths
- Increase sense of motivation through the identification of strengths
- Increase students' academic self-efficacy
- Assist students to use their strengths to increase their learning and grades
- Assist students to develop a strong sense of purpose through the recognition of their strengths

**Back on Track:**

The goal of Back on Track is to support the persistence of first-year students and encourage help seeking behaviours, by providing intentional and individualized supports to students who struggled academically in the first semester of their first year.

The Back on Track program is open to first and second year students, in any direct entry program, with a fall GPA of 2.0 (on a 4.3 scale) or below.

Program Structure:

Students complete an [online registration form](#) that asks what aspects of Back on Track they think would be most helpful to their success and what times they are available in January for an intake appointment.

Based on the provided information, an advisor is assigned and an appointment is booked.

The first meeting is a one-hour intake with their assigned advisor during which the requirements and outcomes of the program are explained, and the student and advisor begin co-creating an individualized program plan for the student. Students may also be asked to complete a Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI).

Students are also paired with a peer wellness coach for 45-minute individual sessions. During the first session, the coach will identify which areas of wellness the student wants to focus on, then help the student to establish initial goals for the coaching process and help them utilize their strengths to accomplish these goals. Resources may be offered for the student between sessions to facilitate their progress towards their wellness goals.

Students are required to complete three advising appointments with their Back on Track advisors, all assigned online LASSI modules, peer wellness coach meetings (optional) and any other recommended referrals/supports.

Students who complete all aspects of the Back on Track program and have a winter term GPA of 2.0 or higher will be entered to win one of five \$500 tuition rebates (redeemable for the following academic year).

Learning outcomes:

- Students will learn how to assess, articulate and acknowledge their personal skills, abilities and growth areas
- Students will gain an understanding of when and how to seek help appropriately

- Students will set and pursue at least four SMART goals through the development of an educational plan
- Students will increase grit and resiliency

**IV. Procedures used in program evaluation:**

In each Start on Track module, students complete an online quiz that tests their knowledge and comprehension of the topic. A mark of 80% on each module quiz is required for the student to be entered in the prize draw and receive credit on their co-curricular record. Students can take the quiz as many times as they need to.

As part of the Stay on Track program, several programmatic and learning outcomes have been developed to determine the effectiveness of the program as well as student learning. Success of the program is determined through evaluation of student participation rates as well as examining rates of increased student success, comparing those students (with like characteristics) who completed the program versus those who did not. A summative survey is also sent to students at the completion of Stay on Track.

As part of Back on Track, success is determined through the evaluation of student participation rates. Success is determined by examining rates of increased student success, comparing students who completed the program versus those who were eligible to participate and chose not to. In addition, the pre- and post-LASSI scores will be examined, formative and summative assessments are also completed and results analyzed.

**Results/outcomes:**

**Start on Track** measures the number of unique students completing each module, the total number of modules completed, as well as the average mark in each module. Common questions that students missed inform content for communications with students such as blogs, Facebook posts, and newsletters.

The following chart provides a breakdown analysis of student participation in Start on Track:

Online Orientation Module Completions 2017/18			X% of participating students did X	X% of new Dalhousie students did X	24-Jan-18	14-Apr-18		AVERAGE MARK	January Intake	
		13-Dec-17		<i>New to Dal students (as of Dec 1 enrolment stats)</i>	24-Jan-18	14-Apr-18			24-Jan-18	14-Apr-17
		End of term		3600	End of year	End of year			Prize draw	End of year/term
<b>Unique students</b>		<b>555</b>		<b>17%</b>	<b>597</b>				<b>35</b>	
8 modules		146	26%	4%	142				16	
7 modules		97	17%	1%	20				0	
6 modules		22	4%	3%	90				0	
5 modules		26	5%	1%	24				1	
4 modules		23	4%	1%	29				0	
3 modules		40	7%	1%	29				2	
2 modules		153	28%	1%	41				6	
1 module		48	9%	6%	222				10	
<b>Total modules completed</b>	<b>Launch date</b>	<b>2351</b>			<b>2443</b>				<b>161</b>	
Academic	14-Jun	502	90%	15%	524		83.57%		28	
Financial	28-Jun	373	67%	11%	385		89.38%		23	
Health	12-Jul	326	59%	10%	342		97.17%		21	
Alcohol	26-Jul	305	55%	9%	319		93.84%		18	
Consent	09-Aug	271	49%	8%	281		93.12%		19	
Community	16-Aug	251	45%	7%	259		91.65%		16	
Libraries	12-Sep	149	27%	4%	159		90.43%		17	
Academic Integrity	12-Sep	174	31%	5%	174		83.71%		19	
<b>Online Orientation Module Completions 2016/17</b>										
		13-Dec		<i>New to Dal students (as of Dec 1 enrolment stats)</i>		14-Apr-17			16-Jan	14-Apr-17
		End of term		3794		End of year			Prize draw	End of term/year
<b>Unique students</b>		<b>676</b>		<b>18%</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>19%</b>			<b>64</b>	<b>73</b>
All 5 modules		250	37%	7%	287	8%			41	43
4 modules		136	20%	4%	133	4%				2
3 modules		57	8%	2%	55	1%			1	1
2 modules		29	4%	1%	32	1%			3	2
1 module		204	30%	5%	204	5%			19	25
<b>Total modules completed</b>		<b>2233</b>			<b>2407</b>	<b>63%</b>			<b>233</b>	<b>257</b>
Academic Readiness	29-Jul-16	627	93%	17%	659	17%	94.69%		60	67
Community & Citizenship	12-Aug-16	460	68%	12%	492	13%	95.60%		44	48
Consent & Sexualized Violence	12-Aug-16	473	70%	12%	508	13%	95.27%		43	48
Alcohol Safety	26-Aug-16	414	61%	11%	448	12%	95.80%		43	47
Health & Wellness	09-Sep-16	259	38%	7%	300	8%	90.94%		43	47

Assessment of **Stay on Track**, which is currently being delivered for the first time, will include the analysis of student assessment data as well as the analysis of student persistence and success trends. See attached document for a summary of preliminary student comments on their SOT experience.

**Back on Track** was first run as a pilot program in Winter of 2017. Assessment was gathered through formative and summative surveys, pre- and post-test intervention LASSI scores, improvement in GPA and persistence for students completing Back on Track students versus those who were eligible to participate but did not. The results of these measures provided us with information both on the anecdotal measures of success, as well as the more quantifiable. See attached infographic for assessment results.

**V. Potential for adaptation:**

The potential for adaptation at other institutions is high. All aspects of the programming are based on theory and research and tailored to the student body. Based on their population, other institutions can revise or simply choose elements of each program.

The creation of this program really began in 2013 with the beginning of the in-depth analysis of our student data. This work informed our understanding of our students, their needs and potential risk factors. We began thinking more critically about student transitions and key messages, and offered two online modules, available to students the summer before their first year. Since 2013, we have been able to evolve this programming into a full-fledged transition and advising curriculum: On Track. The progression of this program shows the importance of a staggered approach for maximum impact: collecting and analyzing the data, understanding student trends, creating a foundation in theory and best practice, and then piloting of programming to illustrate impact.