**Project Plan for Optimizing Virginia Tech's Degree Audit System for Student Success**

This project plan outlines a structured approach to further develop Virginia Tech's degree audit system, ensuring it meets the needs of students and campus partners while enhancing overall functionality and user experience.

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**Project Overview** [(back to top)](#Contents)

Virginia Tech acquired the Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) in 1989 and went live in 1994. Since then, DARS has effectively served as a compliance-focused tool while supporting graduation clearance processes, facilitating departmental curricular innovation, and dynamically tracking students' academic journeys.

This project aims to optimize Virginia Tech’s degree audit system to better serve today’s Hokies and align with foundational shifts in campus policy, particularly the move in basing undergraduate degree requirements from the date of graduation to the date of entry. Key initiatives will include migrating the system to the cloud, upgrading its functionalities, and integrating it more fully into advising practices. A critical goal is to enhance the overall student experience and increase system utilization with the ultimate goal of supporting student success. Through these improvements, we aim to ensure that the degree audit system remains a vital resource for both students and advisors, fostering academic success in a modern educational landscape.

**Project Personnel**

* Sponsors: Rick Sparks & Rachel Holloway
* Champion: John Leech
* Project Manager: Chris Akers
* Team & Resource Manager: Clyde Cridlin
* Project Team: DARS Group
* TES/Transferology: Vicki Langford & Transfer Team

**Project Objectives** [(back to top)](#Contents)

1. Ensure the degree audit and associate planner are key tools for student success at Virginia Tech.
2. Move to the cloud and upgrade the uAchieve platform.
3. Increase/update internal encoding expertise.
4. Leverage the degree audit platform in new innovative ways that are rooted in student success.
5. Integrate the degree audit fully into advising practices and degree management initiatives including developing best practices to ensure smooth transition from admitted student to alumni.
6. Improve the student experience and increase overall student utilization of the system.
7. Integrate student and advisor perspectives into the encoding and decision-making processes
8. Improve existing and establish new, relevant partnerships across campus to support degree auditing operations.

**Definition of a Degree Audit System** [(back to top)](#Contents)

A Degree Audit System is a comprehensive software tool administered by the Registrar’s Office, primarily designed to ensure academic compliance and accurately track student progress toward degree completion. Beyond this critical role, it serves as a vital university resource, supporting advisement and various academic processes to enhance the overall student experience and promote student success. Its core functionalities support several critical areas:

1. **Promote Student Success**: utilized correctly, a degree audit can be a key tool to support student success. Specifically,
   1. **Early Identification of At-Risk Students**: The system can flag students who are falling behind in their coursework or not meeting critical milestones. This allows advisors to intervene early, providing the necessary support and resources to help these students get back on track.
   2. **Personalized Academic Plans**: By analyzing a student’s progress and remaining requirements, the system can help create personalized academic plans. These plans can include recommended courses, timelines for completion, and strategies for balancing course loads, all tailored to the individual student’s needs and goals.
   3. **Enhanced Communication**: The system can facilitate better communication between students and advisors by providing a clear, shared view of academic progress. This transparency helps ensure that both parties are on the same page and can work together more effectively to address any issues or concerns.
   4. **Resource Allocation**: By identifying common areas where students struggle, the system can help the university allocate resources more effectively. For example, if many students are having difficulty with a particular course or requirement, the university can provide additional tutoring, workshops, or other support services to help students succeed.
   5. **Career Pathway Guidance**: The system can integrate with career services to provide students with insights into how their academic choices align with potential career paths. This can help students make more informed decisions about their courses and majors, ultimately leading to better career outcomes.
   6. **Timely Graduation**: By providing a clear roadmap to graduation, the system helps students avoid unnecessary courses and stay focused on their degree requirements. This can reduce time to graduation and help students enter the workforce or pursue further education more quickly.
   7. **Feedback and Improvement**: The system can collect data on student outcomes and use this information to continuously improve academic programs. By understanding what works and what doesn’t, the university can make data-driven decisions to enhance the overall educational experience and support student success.
2. **Academic Compliance:** The system is essential for maintaining the accuracy of academic records, ensuring that students meet all requirements for their degrees as mandated by institutional and regulatory standards.
3. **Graduation Clearance:** The degree audit plays a vital role in the graduation conferral process, providing automated checks against degree graduation requirements and facilitating a smooth transition for students approaching graduation.
4. **Self-Serve Student Success:** By clearly outlining requirements and progress personalized to the student, the degree audit system fosters student success. It helps students understand what is needed to graduate and allows for timely interventions when issues arise, ensuring they stay on track.
5. **Access to Critical Data:** The system provides unique data that cannot be accessed through other platforms, offering key supportive insights into curricular mapping, academic exception utilization, degree management, course effectiveness, compliance with academic policies, and more to support Virginia Tech’s graduation rate goals.
6. **Academic Policy Analysis:** The data generated by the degree audit system aids in analyzing academic policy impacts and outcomes while supporting campus leadership in making future data-informed decisions.
7. **Regulatory Compliance:** It is leveraged for various compliance areas, including:
   1. **Veteran Benefits:** Ensuring that coursework meets the criteria for veteran education benefits.
   2. **NCAA Compliance:** Monitoring student-athlete academic progress to adhere to NCAA eligibility requirements.
   3. **Title IV Fund Compliance:** Assisting in compliance with federal financial aid regulations by tracking SAP and coursework applicability according to FSA standards.

In summary, a Degree Audit System is an essential tool for fostering academic success, ensuring compliance, and providing valuable insights for both students and the institution. Its role is integral in guiding students through their academic careers, facilitating effective administration, and supporting program development to enhance student success.

**Degree Audit Advisory Committee (DAAC) Charter** [(back to top)](#Contents)

**Purpose**

The Degree Audit Advisory Committee (DAAC) was formed to guide the optimization and ongoing relevance of the Degree Audit system (DARS) at Virginia Tech for student success. Our mission is to create a comprehensive and intuitive system that not only maintains compliance and accurate graduation requirements but also significantly enhances the student experience and integrates seamlessly into advising practices. Through collaboration and innovative solutions, the DAAC is committed to ensuring that DARS effectively addresses the evolving needs of Hokies today and in the future.

**Membership & Selection Process**

The committee will include a core group of permanent members, and at times, complemented by guest members from various campus partners. Applicable leaders and Advising Directors from each college/entity will nominate and select committee members. These candidates must be active, engaged, and able to fulfill the commitments outlined in this Charter. The selection process will prioritize individuals who bring diverse perspectives and expertise. It is possible up to two additional members may be added to the committee by the OUR to ensure variety in participants.

Coordinated by the OUR, an additional all-student group will be created with the help of the Advisory Committee and advising leadership.

Permanent Representatives:

1. **Undergraduate Colleges**: One representative from each undergraduate college.
2. **Associate Level (AS) Level**: One representative.
3. **Office of University Registrar (OUR)**: One representative; co-chair.
4. **Academic Advising Initiatives (AAI)**: One representative; co-chair.
5. **Student-Athlete Academic Services (SAAS)**: One representative.
6. **Pathways General Education**: One representative.

**Leadership**

The committee will be co-chaired by the Office of the University Registrar and the Office of Advising Initiatives. The Deputy Registrar will act as the Committee Sponsor.

**Responsibilities**

The Degree Audit Advisory Committee (DAAC) will:

* Recommend enhancements of student-centric features of DARS, focusing on clarity and accessibility to improve understanding of degree audits.
* Establish a framework of best practices for the effective integration of the degree audit into advising practices.
* Assist the Office of the University Registrar to ensure the degree audit meets the needs of students and the department/college while at the same time meeting the conferral needs of the Registrar.
* Identify and recruit relevant guest members to support DAAC initiatives as needed.
* Offer insights into student needs and behaviors to inform decision-making for DARS development, including how students may/should self-serve their audit data.
* Develop strategies to educate and motivate students to utilize DARS effectively and consistently.
* Facilitate the rollout and development of degree planning tools to create streamlined academic pathways.
* Collaborate with Student Affairs and/or programs across campus to effectively introduce incoming students with DARS and its benefits.
* Determine essential data and reporting needs from the Degree Audit system to guide decision-making and resource allocation.
* Explore innovative strategies for effective degree management that foster student success.
* Create and refine resources and guidelines for advisors and students to enhance the effective use of DARS.

**Decision-Making Authority**

The Degree Audit Advisory Committee will not hold formal decision-making power. However, the group will be actively engaged in discussions, and at times will be presented with options to evaluate and provide input on. Its role is crucial in influencing decisions by offering insights and recommendations that will be heavily considered by relevant leadership, ensuring that the committee's expertise and perspectives are integral to the decision-making process.

**Meetings & Commitment**

The advisory group will meet regularly (1-2 times per month) to discuss progress, share insights, and collaborate on ongoing initiatives. The frequency of meetings will be determined based on project needs and member availability with assignments given in between gatherings. The committee is expected to represent the interests of their respective college/area and communicate developments with colleagues.

**Reporting**

The committee will provide regular updates to relevant stakeholders on any recommendations made throughout the project and beyond. Representatives may be asked to co-present in open forums or other venues.