In recent years there has been much attention on academic advising, both the quality advising experience that students receive and the advising that is of lesser quality. Although mandatory academic advising has long been a unique mainstay at this research university, it has not recently been reviewed as a part of the Strategic Plan, nor has it been examined for its role in retention of students.

Sub Goal #4 of the Strategic Plan suggests that we “Provide student advising and mentoring that empowers students to complete their programs of study, improves retention, increases student satisfaction, and bolsters academic achievement.” To achieve that end, Sub Goal required actions include 1) recognition and reward for excellent undergraduate advising and mentoring, 2) communication with students regarding the planning and timely completion of an academic program, and 3) formal advising policies and procedures for each department or program. Consequently, there are myriad opportunities for academic advising to be assessed, revised, and renewed to support both our Strategic Plan and new and currently enrolled students.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) states that, “Research in the area of retention, in nearly all instances, concludes that the single most important contributor to student persistence is the development of strong relationships between students and members of the faculty and staff. Because academic advising is the only structured services on the campus in which all students have the opportunity to develop an on-going, one-to-one relationship with a concerned member of the college community, quality academic advising should be a major strategy in every college’s retention planning” (www.nacada.ksu.edu/Events/SummerInst).

A number of advising practices and situations at Washington State University provided compelling evidence for a review of the entire system: departments with faculty who do not advise and leave this task to part-time graduate students or departmental secretaries who merely lift advising holds; little to no departmental advising training; no centralized advising oversight to identify improvement areas or standardization of advising policies; colleges so overwhelmed with the number of potential majors that they sent 400+ files to the Student Advising and Learning Center for advising; and departments who see students en masse and release advising holds only once a year.

Further, a survey of faculty conducted in 2002 by a workgroup of the Strategic Goal #1 Implementation Team indicated a general frustration with a task perceived to be unrewarded and unrecognized. Disappointment with advising has been a consistent theme of alumni as noted in the past decade of Alumni Surveys. Our freshmen and seniors
responding to the National Survey of Student Engagement over the past four years report lower rates of satisfaction with advising than students at peer institutions. None of these instances suggest quality academic advising and none meet the spirit of “World Class. Face to Face.”

As a result, a memo from Alton Jamison, Interim Vice President of Student Affairs and Susan Poch, Assistant Vice President for Educational Development was sent to Faculty Senate leadership in January, 2006 to request an ad hoc advising committee be commissioned to complete a formal review of academic advising at Washington State University. Specific attention was paid to these questions:

- The presence of formal advising policies and procedures at each college and/or department level.
- Academic advising differences and similarities at the urban campuses, the Center for Distance and Professional Education, and the Pullman campus.
- Effectiveness of the current advising system for students and the relationship to their retention and academic success.
- The connections between quality advising and a structured reward system for faculty and professional advisors.
- Recommendations for improvement, reshaping, or revising the current advising system.

The Academic Advising ad hoc committee consisted of both faculty and Administrative Professional members:

- Bonnie Burkett  Business
- Chris Cook  Athletics
- John Irby  Communications
- Larry Hiller  Horticulture/LA
- John McNamara  Animal Sciences
- Jane Parker  Student Advising and Learning Center
- Susan Poch, Chair  Student Advising and Learning Center
- Mary Sanchez-Lanier  Sciences
- Bobbi Thomas  Center for Distance & Professional Ed
- Tom Whitacre  General Studies

The Academic Advising Committee (hereafter, the Committee) met frequently during the summer and fall terms to discuss, seek out and compile information, and worked toward answering the questions above. Multiple internal documents were gathered and examined. A listing of documents is on the SALC website (www.salc.wsu.edu).

The presence of formal advising policies and procedures.
The Committee assembled extensive information on advising policies and procedures as a result of a request for information from colleges and departments. The Committee asked each unit to identify advisors (name, phone, e-mail) and to provide a short description of advising services to compare the depth and breadth of advising functions. Of sixty-four departments contacted, fifty-two provided materials (81.3% response rate).

Given the variety of department size, advising styles and resource allocation, the comparison of materials reflected policies and procedures that ranged from a few worksheets and/or web references to very advanced student databases, newsletters, and training/advising guides. The majority had a few worksheets, a department brochure, some web presence, and reliance on the Degree Audit reports. However, the Committee found that there is no consistency across departments or colleges with information provided to students about academic advising policies, rights or responsibilities. Moreover, there are several departments who have no official advising policy or consistent information for students.

**Academic advising differences and similarities in the WSU system.**

An analysis of positives and negatives of advising practices on other WSU campuses was completed (information available at www.salc.wsu.edu). While this information was not necessarily germane to academic advising issues on the Pullman campus, it did offer a perspective on advising practices and gave the Committee information about other campus’ advising practices. The analysis showed that lower student numbers per advisor, a more effective reward system, and carefully structured advising practices and policies have resulted in more effective advising on our other campuses and in the Distance Degree Program. Academic advising on other WSU campuses is working well while in comparison, advising on the Pullman campus is less than satisfactory in many areas.

**Effectiveness of the current advising system for students and the relationship to their retention and academic success; The connections between quality advising and a structured reward system for faculty and professional advisors; Recommendations for improvement, reshaping, or revising the current advising system.**

The Committee engaged an outside consultant to address the final three advising concerns. Faye Vowell, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs at Western New Mexico University was selected from several consultants; their names provided to the Committee by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA).

Dr Vowell visited the campus in late October and subsequently provided the Committee a report that included both challenges the University faces with advising and recommendations to move the institution forward. She was provided the same internal documents, reports, letters, memos, data, and flow charts the Committee examined in preparation of her visit. Dr. Vowell’s primary focus was on the links between academic advising and retention. The executive summary is attached with the full report available at www.salc.wsu.edu.
Recommendations
Past studies and reports on advising at WSU have helped to make some positive changes in advising, including provision of timely and consistent information on academic regulations to faculty and students, introduction of the WSU Alive! program of orientation and advising, revision of the peer advising system, improvements in advisor training, and some recognition of advising as part of the teaching duties of WSU faculty.

However, many of the recommendations of these previous efforts have been “left on the shelf” and currently, a general sense of unimportance pervades advising. The larger WSU community, including faculty, professional advisors and upper administration must have a serious discussion on the role, importance, and effort of advising at WSU.

Therefore, at this time the Committee will not provide any specific recommendations for action other than what is present in the Consultant's Report. The Committee is generally in agreement with the spirit, if not the letter, of these recommendations.

Yet, we feel for full ownership of advising to come to fruition for individual units and faculty, it is wise to share Dr. Vowell's report widely, discuss the recommendations and implications, and then to suggest specific strategies for implementation within the University community. We feel strongly that the timing of this report, and its recommendations, if implemented, will make a considerable difference in retention and student success at Washington State University.