ADVISING
AT
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Consultant’s Report

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Advising at Washington State University
Consultant’s Report

Executive Summary

Leadership Challenges
- There is no University wide definition of advising.
- There is no clear message about the importance of advising to the institution.
- “We are not sending students the right message when we equate advising with getting their holds lifted.”
- Faculty and staff do not clearly understand the link between advising and retention or the importance of retention to the institution.
- Faculty and staff feel they are pulled in many different directions. Faculty members feel that they are being asked to be excellent in all things (research, increasing the number of doctoral students, teaching and now advising). Professional advisors feel they are not respected and that they are being asked to advise more students with fewer or the same number of professional advisors.

Recommendations
- Establish a university wide definition of advising and disseminate it to all of the University on the web page, in the catalog, or on a bookmark to be given to students like the one on “Six Learning Goals for Undergraduates.”
- Create a marketing campaign to acquaint all of the faculty and staff with the importance of advising to retention and to the other goals of the strategic plan.

Retention Challenges
- Increasing the service level to all students at WSU.
- Redirecting students who are not able to certify into impacted majors.
- Working with transfer students.
- Difference in being retained in the major and being retained at WSU and the message that advisors receive about this.
- Giving all freshman students a good start in understanding and adjusting to college in conjunction with Freshman Focus, Freshman Seminar.
- Coordination of services with TRiO and Multicultural Student Services (for students of color) and with Athletics (for services to athletes).
- Faculty Advising of variable quality. Some departments have great allegiance to faculty advising, some agree that faculty mentoring is important and some think all advising should be done with professional advisors.

Recommendations
- Give the Student Advising and Learning Center (SALC) the authority, responsibility, and resources for ensuring the quality of advising for freshmen, transfer and uncertified students. Staff SALC with an appropriate
number of professional advisors and volunteer faculty to accomplish this role.

- The SALC should create a set of standards and benchmarks for advising that are shared by all advisors on campus. These might be based on the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) guidelines for advising programs.

- Advising of uncertified students should be done by professional advisors except in departments who choose to have faculty involved. These departments should submit a plan for meeting the standards and benchmarks and for assessing the advising in their unit to SALC before being given new advisees.

- SALC should map the placement of advisors in each department with names, office locations, phone numbers, office hours, and email addresses. A current version of this map should be posted on the advising web page and made available to all department heads and administrators.

- All degree programs should maintain an updated course rotation chart on a web page linked to the advising web page to provide up to date advising information for all students—especially for transfer students.

- Current and archived degree plans for each degree program (including general education and major requirements) for each calendar or catalog year should be maintained on a web page accessible to students and to advisors.

**Assessment Challenges**

- Different departments do give advising surveys and do exit interviews with graduates, but there is no standardized survey.

- Sometimes survey data is not aggregated and analyzed.

- No system is in place to use the information collected to make decisions.

- Survey results are not shared to one central source so they can be aggregated and used effectively.

**Recommendations**

- In collaboration with campus advisors, SALC should create an assessment process to ensure that the standards and benchmarks are being met. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has produced a Guide to Assessment in Academic Advising (2005) that provides a process to accomplish this.

- Advisors whether they are faculty or professional should have a job description on which their advising is evaluated and a method of recognition or reward for good advising. Evaluation of professional advisors for uncertified students should be done using a standard process developed by SALC. These advisors could be housed in SALC or in the departments/schools. They might also split their time, spending 20 hours a week in the department/school and 20 hours in SALC.
• After students are certified, departments should be able to choose whether they should be advised by professional advisors or by faculty as long as the standards and benchmarks are met and appropriate evaluation and reward is in place.

**Challenges in Advising Training for Faculty and Professional Advisors**

• Advising training is not mandatory. “It is ironic that advising is mandatory for students but the training to do advising is not mandatory for advisors.”

**Recommendations**

• SALC should establish a mandatory training program for all advisors that will address informational, relational, and conceptual aspects of advising as well as the different levels of experience and expertise possessed by advisors.
• SALC should create a University advising organization that meets regularly to share ideas and suggestions.

**Reward/Recognition Challenges**

• When faculty advise, there is no recognition or reward in the annual evaluation/merit pay or in the promotion and tenure process.

**Recommendations**

• Faculty who advise in SALC or in their departments should be evaluated and rewarded for the quality of their advising. This reward might be done in a number of ways: reduction of committee assignments, reduction in teaching or research load, additional stipend during the year, or payment for a month in the summer.
• In addition to merit pay, a Professional Advisor of the Year Award should be instituted. This award could be aligned with the NACADA Outstanding Advisor Award to give the University and the advisor national recognition.

**Recommended Advising Model**

The recommended advising model implicit in the above suggestions is the Total Intake Model where all students are initially advised in a central advising office until they meet institutionally predetermined conditions (such as certification) and then move into a department/school. The benefits of this model are a trained staff, central access for students, and possible economies of scale. Care needs to be taken to ensure that student needs and expectations continue to be met when they shift to departmental/school advisors. The person who is in charge of the central advising office would have responsibility for campus wide coordination of advising. This person should coordinate advising services with the additional support areas such as the TRiO program, Multicultural Student Services and Athletics.

This Total Intake Model would allow faculty who wish to continue to work with uncertified students to volunteer or be assigned to work in the SALC.
would also allow faculty who wanted to opt out of advising to do so. The undecided or uncertified students who are interested in but are not able to get into impacted majors could be more easily directed into other majors and retained at WSU.

I would recommend that schools and/or departments be allowed to choose the advising model they prefer with certified students. Some departments, probably the ones with the largest enrollment or the most research potential, might choose the Self-Contained Model in which all of the students are advised in a central office staffed probably by professional staff. Others might choose the Faculty Only Model if that is the departmental culture. Still others might choose a Dual Model where students are advised by professional advisors in their school/department for degree requirements and mentored by faculty in terms of graduate school or career issues. A number of things are crucial in this kind of flexible choice in regard to a delivery model: advisors need required training, standardized evaluation and appropriate recognition/reward. The chosen model needs to be clearly communicated to their students and to the Director of SALT.

**Conclusion**

At this point in its development of an advising system, WSU seems to have reached a balance of a relatively low cost method of delivery with an average result. There are pockets of advising excellence; some students are satisfied with advising while a vocal number of them are not. Investment of attention on the part of appropriate administrators, establishment of a system of clearly defined expectations and responsibility for advising, appropriate training/development, and an appropriate reward structure can move WSU to the next level of quality. A consequence of that increased quality will be greater student satisfaction and persistence/retention.
Overview
At the request of Susan Poch, Assistant Vice President for Educational Development and Director of the Student Advising and Learning Center (SALC), I visited Washington State University on October 24 and 25, 2006.

The purpose of the consultancy was to assess the effectiveness of the current advising system for students and the relationship to their academic success and retention, to explore the need for a structured reward system for faculty advising, and to provide recommendations for improvement, reshaping, revising, or maintaining the current advising system.

Advising and Retention
Institutions have come to understand the importance of advising to the student experience and to retention. Richard Light (2001) points out that good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience. The research documenting the positive impact of advising and mentoring on retention is substantial (Backhus, 1989; Creamer 1980; Fuller, 1983; Habley, 1981; King, 1993). In addition to increased retention, such interaction has a strong correlation with increased intellectual and personal development, higher academic aspirations and higher motivation (Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991), more positive attitudes toward college (Appleby, 2001) and general cognitive development (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). A number of studies have shown that these positive effects persist even when students enter college with different ability levels, different demographics, and attend schools with different rates of selectivity (Astin, 1993b; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

Advising and mentoring also positively impacts racial understanding and attitudes toward diverse racial/ethnic groups (Astin, 1993a, 1993c; Milem, 1994; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). The quality of interaction is crucial. Students want advisors and mentors to demonstrate a “caring attitude and person regard” for them (Kramer, Tanner, and Peterson, 1995; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1993) found that academic advising positively correlates with higher GPA, degree attainment, graduation with honors, and enrollment in graduate or professional school (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

But attrition, the negative of retention, is also worth mentioning. As Swail (2006) notes, each student who doesn’t persist loses valuable “life” time, probably loses his or her initial financial investment and may incur significant loan debt. The institution also loses money in terms of tuition and fees, books, services, housing, and long term alumni contributions. It must also recruit a student to replace each one that is lost.

Washington State has also demonstrated its understanding of the importance of advising in its Strategic Goals. The first strategic goal is to “Offer the
best undergraduate experience in a research university.” Sub goal 4 is to “Provide student advising and mentoring that empowers students to complete their programs of study, improves retention, increases student satisfaction, and bolsters academic achievement.” To meet this strategic goal, the emphasis will need to be placed on quality advising.

Observations
In preparing this report, I reviewed the following documents:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date of Document</th>
<th>Title of Document</th>
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<tr>
<td>October 1982</td>
<td>Academic Advising Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 6, 1985</td>
<td>Faculty Manual</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 8, 1993</td>
<td>CBE wants to advise all its own students</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 13, 1993</td>
<td>1990 and 1991 graduate comments on advising</td>
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<td>Spring 1994</td>
<td>SALC Advising Handouts to students</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 22, 1997</td>
<td>Advising Task Force Report and Recommendations</td>
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<td>2000 and 2001</td>
<td>2000 and 2001 graduate comments on advising</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>WSU Goal 1 Implementation Task Force Quality Analysis of Faculty and Chair advising/mentoring survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 1, 2003</td>
<td>Work Group 2, Draft 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 13, 2004</td>
<td>Student letter—Chioma Uka</td>
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<td>February 27, 2004</td>
<td>Faculty letter withdrawing as SALC advisor—“the system is broken”</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 7 and 8, 2006</td>
<td>Email Vreeland, Tong, Jamison, Poch</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 24, 2006</td>
<td>Letter from Criminal Justice advisor to Registrar re: grad student advisor advising error</td>
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<td>April 18, 2006</td>
<td>Email re: selective certification and “raising the bar”</td>
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<td>May 18, 2006</td>
<td>Letter setting up the Ad Hoc Advising Committee</td>
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<td>October 5, 2006</td>
<td>Advising Flow Chart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2006</td>
<td>Advising at the WSU Regional Campuses &amp; Distance Degree Programs</td>
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<td>Recent</td>
<td>Power Point “How WSU Students View Advising”</td>
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<td>Department Summary Report</td>
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<td>Student Progression Through WSU system</td>
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<td>General Advising Concerns</td>
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<td>Request to Register without Being Advised</td>
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<td>Department of Civil &amp; Environmental Advising Evaluation</td>
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<td>SALC Advising Syllabus</td>
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During my time on campus, I met with the following people and groups of people:

- Students (6 seniors)
- Academic Unity Professional Advisors (30 people)
- Advising Faculty (23 people)
- Department Chairs (4 people)
- Deans and Associate Deans (2 people including Ken Vreeland)
- Student Advising and Learning Center advisors (7 people)
- Ad Hoc Academic Advising Committee (Susan Poch, Chris Cook, Bonnie Burkett, Larry Hiller, John Irby, Mary Sanchez-Lanier, John McNamara, Jane Parker, Bobbi Thomas, and Tom Whitacre)
- Faculty Senate Leadership (Chuck Pezeshki and Ken Struckmeyer)
- Student Affairs Leadership (Al Jamison, Vicki McCracken, and Larry James)
- Open forum (14 people)

My questions to the Ad Hoc Advising Committee included the following questions:

- Why are you serving on this group?
- What do you think is driving the interest in advising at this time?
- What will happen to my report? Why will this time be different from other attempts to address advising problems?
- What is the culture of decision making on this campus?
- Where does faculty and staff allegiance lie? Is it at the department, the school, or the University level?
- Is WSU involved in the quality movement at all? Is there a culture of mapping processes?
- Is there an advising mission statement? At what level was it created? Who had input?
- Is there an advising organizational chart that describes how advising is organized in every department/major? Who decides?
- Who is responsible for advisor training?
- Are the 1997 report problems still basically true?
- Who staffs SALC?
- Who decides how new and transfer students are assigned an advisor?
- Can students run their own degree audit?
- What is your portal like?
- Do you have online or phone registration? How is it working?
- Is there a University curriculum committee, school curriculum committee, a department curriculum committee? Do advisors sit on the committees? Does an SALC representative sit on the committees?
• How is advising rewarded in promotion and tenure decisions? Is it seen as teaching or service?
• What kinds of recognition should be given for good advising?
• What additional advising resources need to be put in place?

I tried to ask each group the following questions so I could triangulate the responses I received.
• What is the role of advising at Washington State University? How does it fit with the challenges the University is facing? (Mission/Vision)
• What strengths/concerns do you see with the current advising system? What changes need to be made?
• What training or development needs do you have? Is this true for your colleagues? (Training)
• Is good advising rewarded? If so, how? (Reward)
• How is advising assessed? How should or could it be? (Assessment/evaluation)
• What did you want to answer that I did not ask about?

The turnout was very good for all of the meetings and I felt the people who attended were candid in sharing their opinions and perspectives.

**Findings**

From my observation, WSU is at a crucial point in its evolution into a research university. It is striving to increase faculty research productivity as well as the number of graduate students. I observe this on the web page, in the graduate initiative from last year, in the presence of a tenure track faculty and a teaching (non tenure track) faculty, and in the increasing reliance on professional advisors in some parts of the institution. Yet some of the faculty, especially in the Agriculture programs and programs with smaller student numbers, still believe strongly in the earlier, smaller school vision of more direct contact with undergraduate students. An advising model will need to be flexible to allow these contradictory visions to be accommodated.

The delivery of advising reflects this evolution as well. In some areas, faculty, staff and students perceive that advising is done well and in others not so well. Some feel strongly that advising needs to improve, but others are satisfied with the status quo. The topic of advising seems to rise to the surface at Washington State University every ten years or so, a study of advising is carried out, but no action is taken on the results of the study. People are concerned that the same lack of action will take place in regard to this endeavor.

The following themes emerged from my interviews with people. They were also observed in the written documentation.
Leadership Challenges

- There is no University-wide definition of advising. This leads to confusion among faculty, staff and students. Some faculty think of advising as only scheduling, others think that it is “bean counting” especially when it is done by professional advisors, still others equate it with mentoring. Students tend to think of advising as getting their holds lifted. Others bewail the lack of someone who can give them the advice and encourage they need to navigate the University system.
- There is no clear message about the importance of advising to the institution. It is mentioned in the strategic plan but does not seem to be important to the majority of faculty.
- “We are not sending students the right message when we equate advising with getting their holds lifted.”
- Faculty and staff do not clearly understand the link between advising and retention or the importance of retention to the institution.
- Faculty and staff feel they are pulled in many different directions. Faculty members feel that they are being asked to be excellent in all things (research, increasing the number of doctoral students, teaching and now advising). Professional advisors feel they are not respected and that they are being asked to advise more students with fewer or the same number of professional advisors.

Recommendations

- Establish a university wide definition of advising and disseminate it to all of the University on the web page, in the catalog, on a bookmark to be given to students (like the one on “Six Learning Goals for Undergraduates.”)
- Create a marketing campaign to acquaint all of the faculty and staff with the importance of advising to retention and to the other goals of the strategic plan.

Retention Challenges

- Increasing the service level to all students at WSU. Some students get good advising and are satisfied with advising delivered by both faculty and professional advisors. Still the refrain of dissatisfaction is threaded through both written and oral communication.
- Redirecting students who are not able to certify into impacted majors. With the competing demands of the need to retain students at WSU yet having many of them desiring to be in majors that may not have room for them, some students decide to drop out or transfer. Others try to stay another year to see if they can be admitted the next year, spend extra time and money, and become more dissatisfied with WSU if they are still not admitted. Still others are redirected into a related major or to the general studies program.
But there is no systematic process to be sure that no student falls through the cracks. These students often lose self worth; feeling they have “settled for” a less than desirable option.

- Working with transfer students. Transfer students have a harder time understanding the system and figuring out how to meet degree requirements. They need specialized advising since they may be coming in without the needed courses to allow them to certify in a timely manner.
- Difference in being retained in the major and being retained at WSU and the message that advisors receive about this. Some advisors feel that they are being placed in the position of retaining students in a major because the funding for the unit is based on student numbers even though students have little chance of certifying in that major. This causes a turf issue where the good of the unit is valued more highly than the students’ welfare.
- Giving all freshmen a good start in understanding and adjusting to college in conjunction with Freshman Focus, Freshman Seminar. Lack of coordination could result in confusion and duplication of services and efforts.
- Coordination of services with TRiO and Multicultural Student Services (for students of color) and with Athletics (for services to athletes). Lack of coordination could result in some students falling through the cracks. They could provide additional, vital support to students with high need.
- Faculty advising of variable quality. Some departments have great allegiance to faculty advising, some agree that faculty mentoring is important, and some think all advising should be done with professional advisors and that faculty should devote their time to their research. If a faculty member’s personal philosophy is not a good fit for the advising system in his or her department, then the student is caught in the middle.

Recommendations
- Give the Student Advising and Learning Center (SALC) the authority, responsibility, and resources for ensuring the quality of advising for freshmen, transfer and uncertified students. Staff SALC with an appropriate number of professional advisors and volunteer faculty to accomplish this role.
- The SALC should create a set of standards and benchmarks for advising that are shared by all advisors on campus. These might be based on the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) guidelines for advising programs.
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• Current and archived degree plans for each degree program (including general education and major requirements) for each calendar or catalog year should be maintained on a web page accessible to students and to advisors.

Assessment Challenges
- Different departments give student advising surveys and do exit interviews with graduates, but there is no standardized survey. Without a common instrument, it is difficult to collect and compare University wide data and use that data so that it becomes knowledge.
- Sometimes survey data is not aggregated and analyzed. If a chair or department head gets too busy with the other details of their position data can sit unanalyzed. In this case, the assessment is not likely to become a regular activity.
- No system is in place to use the information collected to make decisions.
- Survey results are not shared to one central source so they can be aggregated and used effectively.

Recommendations
- In collaboration with campus advisors, SALC should create an assessment process to ensure that the standards and benchmarks are being met. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has produced a Guide to Assessment in Academic Advising (2005) that provides a process to accomplish this.
- Advisors, whether they are faculty or professional, should have a job description on which their advising is evaluated and a method of recognition or reward for good advising.
- Evaluation of professional advisors for uncertified students should be done using a standard process developed by SALC. These advisors could be housed in SALC or in the departments/schools. They might also split their time, spending 20 hours a week in the department/school and 20 hours in SALC.
- After students are certified, departments should be able to choose whether they should be advised by professional advisors or by faculty as long as the standards and benchmarks are met and appropriate evaluation and reward is in place.
Challenges in Training for Professional Advisors and Faculty

- Advising training is not mandatory. As one respondent observed, “It is ironic that advising is mandatory for students, but the training to do advising is not mandatory for advisors.” The lack of training causes requirements to be seen as too complex and hard to understand; therefore, some advisors do not try to remain current. Another consequence of the lack of training is that faculty advisors and professional advisors alike do not gain additional skills and experience with the aspects of advising that are not related to scheduling: the relational and conceptual aspects of what advisors need to understand and to do in order to better work with students.

Recommendations

- SALC should establish a mandatory training program for all advisors that will address informational, relational, and conceptual aspects of advising as well as the different levels of experience and expertise possessed by advisors.
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- In addition to merit pay, a Professional Advisor of the Year Award should be instituted. This award could be aligned with the NACADA Outstanding Advisor Award to give the University and the advisor national recognition.

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References


