

January 19, 2017

Carolyn Thomas

Vice Provost and Dean, Undergraduate Education

RE: Academic Advising Audit Project #16-14, Management Corrective Action D

Dear Carolyn:

The final report of the academic advising audit, with a focus on Section D, was forwarded to all standing committees of the Davis Division of the Academic Senate. Responses were received from Undergraduate Council (UGC), the Undergraduate Instruction Program Review Subcommittee (UIPR), the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI), and the Faculty Executive Committees (FEC) of the College of Letters and Science and the College of Engineering.

Overall, committees disagreed with the audit's conclusions and recommendations in section D, as summarized below.

Section D Conclusions

According to the audit, "Undergraduate students may be disadvantaged by limited engagement with faculty. College Deans' offices estimate that only half of their faculty regularly participate in undergraduate advising." The audit believes this rate of participation is "modest."

Committees disagree with the assessment that a 50% participation rate in formal advising is modest. UGC "strongly disagrees with this interpretation, and would contend that such a level of participation in *regular advising* is very good to excellent participation. It is worth noting that additional faculty members also participate in *ad hoc* advising and mentoring." Similarly, as UIPR notes, "Since the modes, goals, and sites of undergraduate advising vary significantly across different colleges, and are context-dependent, committee members questioned the validity of the blanket statement in Section D of the report's Recommendations that reads 'Undergraduate students would benefit from more direct contact with faculty advisors.'"

In addition, undergraduate students engage significantly with faculty outside of formal advising hours. According to UIPR, "one of the most important advising sites for undergraduates aiming to pursue research careers in the sciences comes through research lab internships where they work alongside, and can consult with, faculty, Post Docs and graduate students. As a more general observation, the Report does not address the diverse sites of advising." Likewise, the FEC of L&S notes that "we appreciate the value of faculty involvement in student progress. Indeed, faculty voiced that they already spend a substantial number of hours meeting with students to discuss coursework, research, and/or career goals. This advising takes place in weekly office hours, additional appointments with students, and in laboratory or research settings."

Section D Recommendations and Management Corrective Action

The audit recommends that "Improved student-faculty advising can result from a cultural shift in which students are intentionally connected with faculty for intellectual mentorship in partnership with staff advisors. OAA should develop and highlight a sample framework that might animate that shift."

Management corrective action D thus states: "OAA will select a college or division to pilot a model program focusing on faculty advising of undergraduates. The model will be developed by a working

group of faculty and professional staff in the college or division most familiar with best practice collaborations between staff and faculty advisors.”

Because colleges and departments vary in their advising needs, committees disagree with the recommendation to create a centralized faculty advising structure. “If UCD wishes to increase faculty advising,” writes the FEC of L&S, “such a recommendation or requirement would need to be very flexible to allow departments to identify optimal strategies that work well in their particular context. A ‘one size fits all’ approach is unlikely to be successful, given large differences between departments in how faculty already advise students, the kinds of advice faculty would be well-equipped to give, and the kinds of advice students most often need.” UGC concurs: “The need for an implementation of faculty advising and mentoring varies tremendously across colleges and across majors and this variation is ignored. The concept of generic ‘best practice’ that can be applied broadly across this variety is inappropriate.”

Furthermore, committees think the audit’s intention to initiate a “cultural shift” in student-faculty advising is ill conceived, and point out that the audit failed to establish what the goals or outcomes of such a shift are supposed to be. “The report did not elucidate the nature of, or vision for, the faculty advising activities that might take place,” writes COCI, “but suggested a model program be developed by a working group of faculty and staff. We suggest that a clearer up-front focus on specific desired outcomes for students would facilitate development of useful and effective programs(s). Currently the nature of the desired outcomes seem vague. We also note that while it was recognized that a ‘cultural shift’ would be necessary to improve student-faculty advising, actually precipitating such a shift will be exceptionally difficult, especially if proposed from a top-down structure.” UGC agrees: “The fourth recommendation (pg.8) of the report is poorly articulated, and specific desired outcomes are not described. The suggestion that a ‘modification of campus culture’ is needed is mislabeled as a ‘recommendation.’”

COCI’s concluding remarks summarize well the thoughts of Davis Division committees: “While most faculty would agree that ‘improved student-faculty advising’ is a desirable goal, without clear elucidation of desired outcomes of such advising and statements of how activities will lead to outcomes (which is not provided by the report) it will be difficult to build strong faculty support across the campus.”

Conclusions of the Davis Division

While enhancing student-faculty engagement is, on its own merits, a worthwhile goal, the Davis Division disagrees with the audit’s conclusions regarding the current state of faculty advising and does not support the proposed management corrective action. The audit did not recognize the diversity in the needs and means of faculty advising across majors, which led to its flawed recommendation to undertake a centralized effort to define a single set of best faculty advising practices. We all share the goal that students should have sufficient, timely, and effective advising to facilitate their academic success; any changes to advising practices or structures should be in the service of specific outcomes within specific disciplinary contexts.

Moving forward, the Senate recognizes the critical importance of advising for student success and hopes the OAA will continue to provide resources to colleges, departments, and faculty members to facilitate their ongoing work in advising.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachael Goodhue".

Rachael Goodhue
Chair, Davis Division of the Academic Senate
Professor and Chair, Agricultural and Resource Economics

c: Ed Caswell-Chen, Chair, Undergraduate Council
Edwin M. Arevalo, Executive Director, Davis Division of the Academic Senate