

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS
AUDIT & MANAGEMENT ADVISORY SERVICES**

**Academic Advising
Audit & Management Advisory Services Project #16-14**

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Background

Academic advising services for undergraduates at UC Davis are offered at each of the four colleges, and each college takes a unique approach to the delivery of these services. The following tables illustrate:

Table 1: Sources of Advice on Degree Requirements

College	Degree Requirements		
	GE	University	Major
Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	College Dean's Office		Departments
Biological Sciences	BASC Advising Center		
Engineering	Departments in collaboration with College Undergraduate Office		
Letters & Science	Undergraduate Education and Advising Office		Departmental Advising Cluster

Table 2: Sources of Advice on Other Matters

College	College Transfer	Scholastic Deficiency	Exploration of Options	Academic and Professional Development
Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	College Dean's Office			Departments
Biological Sciences	BASC Advising Center			Student is responsible for coordinating with faculty
Engineering	College Dean's Office			Departments
Letters & Science	Undergraduate Education and Advising Office			Departmental Advising Cluster

Table 3: Mandatory Advising

College	All Students	Special Categories of Students ¹
Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	No Mandatory advising	n/a
Biological Sciences	One mandatory visit for incoming new and transfer students	n/a
Engineering	One mandatory visit annually	Quarterly mandatory advising for lower-division students in certain categories, e.g. first-generation, international, diversity, etc.
Letters & Science	One mandatory visit annually	Two mandatory visits annually for students in certain categories, e.g. first-generation, international, diversity, etc.

¹ All colleges have mandatory advising for international students.

Several non-academic units also provide academic advising-related services for undergraduates:

Table 4: Non-academic Advising Units²

Unit Name	Services Provided
Office of Student Housing	Train peer advisors; situate peer advisors in each of the residence halls for drop-in advising
Student Academic Success Center	Pre-graduate school advice; mentorship opportunities; academic success workshops; tutoring services
Undergraduate Research Center	Guidance on developing research projects; identifying research sponsors
Health Professions Advising Office	Support for students planning to pursue a career in the health industry

The Office of Academic Advising (OAA) is an administrative unit within the Office of Undergraduate Education that is charged with developing a cohesive model for delivery of academic advising services campus-wide. It coordinates advising services by offering conferences on the subject; convening committees of advising stakeholders and experts; initiating assessment of the quality of advising at UC Davis;³ developing new technologies and electronic resources for advising professionals on campus; and articulating a campus-wide vision for academic advising.

Audit Scope and Procedures

UC Davis Audit & Management Advisory Services (AMAS) reviewed the academic advising services for undergraduates provided by the Dean's offices at the four colleges, by the many departments, and by the Residence Halls.

We accomplished this by conducting interviews with Associate Deans, Dean's office and departmental advising staff, representatives from the Academic Senate, the OAA, Student Housing, the Center for Educational Effectiveness, and related information systems personnel. The subject matter of interviews was informed by background research into UC recommended strategies, National Academic Advising Association best practices, and advising program guides promulgated by peer institutions.

We also collected student survey results from advising units across campus⁴ in order to observe current levels of student satisfaction with academic advising, and identify opportunities for improved delivery of advising services.

² Only academic advising units were included in the scope of this review. The non-academic units are included here in order to describe the breadth of advising-related services available to undergraduate students at UC Davis.

³ The Academic Senate also performs a campus-wide review of advising services every seven years.

⁴ The Colleges of Letters & Science and Biological Science, and the office of Student Housing were able to provide this.

The findings in this report have been vetted with the OAA, the Academic Senate, and the Council of Associate Deans (CAD).

Conclusion

The student surveys that we collected generally expressed a high level of satisfaction with undergraduate academic advising services at each of the four colleges at UC Davis. AMAS also observes four specific areas in which the delivery of academic advising services might be improved.

1. Stakeholders in peer advising should re-evaluate the EDU 198 training process to ensure that it aligns with the ways in which academic advising units across campus are utilizing peer advisors. This report recommends that these stakeholders work together to develop a plan for realigning the delivery of peer advisor training.
2. UC Davis lacks a process for identification and intervention for students at risk of scholastic deficiency. This report recommends that the CAD work with the OAA, the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE), and other units as necessary to develop a plan for providing early warning, intervention, and/or support to students at risk of scholastic deficiency.
3. Current mechanisms for collecting feedback on the success of academic advising are not producing actionable information because they do not measure reliable proxies, nor do advising units have the personnel resources to meaningfully analyze the data that they do collect. This report recommends that OAA develop assessment protocols that measure reliable proxies, make them available to distributed advising units, look for ways to assist units in collecting and analyzing data, and report findings to senior campus leadership.
4. A culture that encourages active faculty participation in undergraduate academic advising benefits students. This report recommends that OAA promote a framework for increased faculty advising of undergraduate students.

OBSERVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**A. There is an opportunity to realign the training of peer advisors in a way that better addresses the needs of academic advising units across campus.**

Peer advisors provide an essential service to students and academic advising units at UC Davis. The current process for training them, however, might not anticipate campus needs as accurately as possible.

All of the four UC Davis colleges and several non-academic units employ students to serve as peer advisors. These peer advisors fill a variety of roles depending on where they are employed, but are commonly tasked with helping students schedule meetings with staff advisors, performing routine office duties, and providing drop-in advice on basic matters.

According to senior faculty in the Academic Senate and the colleges, the proper role of peer advisors is to share their experience in matters of student life with other students. These matters may include access to campus services, use of electronic tools, academic success strategies, and referral to other advising units.

Both faculty and staff report occasional issues related to overambitious peer advising. These include scheduling errors, misinformation about requirements, failure to make proper referrals, and attempts to provide mental health counseling. A 2015 survey of students' experience with peer advisors in the Residence Halls indicates that students were most satisfied when peers shared insight on student life matters and academic success strategies, and least satisfied when peers attempted to advise on matters that would have been best referred to a subject matter expert. Examples of these matters include personal issues affecting academic success, and major requirements.

AMAS believes that the most effective way to realign peer advising activities campus-wide is by re-evaluating the way in which the university trains them. EDU 198 is a four-unit course intended to prepare students to become peer advisors in the campus-wide summer orientation program for new incoming students. Orientation is conducted by many units including the Office of the University Registrar, The Office of Undergraduate Admissions, the colleges, and the Division of Student Affairs. It is hosted by the office of Student Housing, which plays a lead role in designing and implementing EDU 198. This course covers topics in student life, degree requirements, techniques for delivering advice, and channels for referring students to specialized services. It is not a prerequisite for peer advisor appointments in all advising units, but most units either require or recommend it. Most departments do not have alternate training programs.

EDU 198 is developed, taught, and graded by Student Housing staff with some outside input, but both the Academic Senate and the CAD express a desire to be more involved. The OAA notes that because academic credit is attached to the course, enrollment in EDU 198 is a monetary expense to students. OAA questions the fairness of requiring university employees to pay for job-specific training, and suggests offering the course through a non-academic unit so that it might be offered free of charge.

Recommendation

The OAA should convene a working group, including representatives from the office of Student Housing, the Academic Senate, the CAD, and other UC Davis units as appropriate. This working group should be charged with realigning the delivery of peer advisor training, in order to (1) meet the needs of the many units across campus that employ peer advisors, (2) manage the risks associated with overambitious peer advising, and (3) reduce or eliminate the financial burden on students who wish to be trained as peer advisors.

Management Corrective Actions

1. The OAA will identify appropriate stakeholders, and convene a meeting of a working group to realign peer advisor training by November 1, 2016.
2. The working group will finalize a plan for realigning peer advisor training, which will include measures for meeting the needs of the many units that employ peer advisors, identification of necessary resources, managing overambitious peer advisors, and reducing or eliminating the financial burden of taking peer advisor training by March 31, 2017.

B. UC Davis does not employ a process for early identification and warning for students at risk of scholastic deficiency.

Students who do not meet standards of scholarship suffer negative consequences. Colleges are aware that a number of their students will experience this, but none employs a comprehensive process for identifying these students beforehand and referring them to campus resources for academic success.

Scholastic deficiencies negatively impact a student's career by limiting access to course registration and financial aid.⁵ They also impact the university by increasing the overall time-to-graduation and decreasing student retention rates.

The consequences of scholastic deficiencies are particularly impactful for majors in the STEM fields.⁶ Associate Deans in these departments indicated that as many as 50% of their lower-division students do not succeed and have to transfer to other programs. While the colleges do collect data on these students, none employs a process for predicting scholastic deficiencies before they have this negative impact, even though UC Davis possesses tools for such predicting.

⁵ **Registration:** A student who fails to meet standards of scholarship is placed on academic probation, and if the deficiencies are not timely remedied the student becomes subject to dismissal. A student subject to dismissal may be dropped from current courses and withdrawn from the university.

Financial Aid: Financial aid eligibility is suspended for students who fail to maintain satisfactory academic progress.

⁶ Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Recommendation

The CAD should work with the OAA, the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE) and other units as necessary to develop a plan for providing early warning, intervention, and/or support to students at risk of scholastic deficiency.

Management Corrective Actions

1. The CAD will work with the OAA, the CEE, and other units as necessary to develop a plan for providing early warning, intervention, and/or support to students at risk of scholastic deficiency. Documentation of this plan will be prepared by February 15, 2017.

C. There is opportunity to improve the design, implementation, and analysis of student feedback campus-wide so as to compile actionable data on the effectiveness of academic advising.

Many advising units do not have sufficient personnel resources to collect and meaningfully analyze student feedback, and the success of campus objectives for academic advising is not easily measured.

The collection of meaningful data on the success of academic advising is limited by several factors:

1. OAA's draft vision document lists objectives that relate generally to the development of individual students' skillsets, knowledge bases, and attainment of critical transition points.⁷ OAA, informed by relevant scholarship, considers these to be the best indicators of effective advising, but accomplishment of these indicators is not self-evident, and OAA's document does not describe a process for determining whether its objectives have been met.
2. Many distributed advising units collect student feedback on an ongoing basis. Few units, however, report that they are able to meaningfully compile and analyze the data collected. There is also doubt as to whether the data collected, which relate primarily to student satisfaction, reliably reflect on the success of academic advising.
3. More robust efforts to survey students, including those performed by the Budget and Institutional Analysis division, sample only those who have advanced to graduation. It is doubtful whether the results of these surveys are actually indicative of students' experiences at UC Davis. This is because the surveys do not sample students who do not advance to graduation, and the students who are sampled return feedback during a time of celebration, not during a time of potential academic crisis.

As a result, the OAA and the distributed academic advising units are limited in their ability to utilize student feedback to optimize practices.

⁷ For example, "[Students will] know, access, and use appropriate resources..." and "[Students will] develop academic and professional relationships..."

Recommendation

UC Davis should charge a centralized, objective party with evaluating the success of its academic advising. OAA should provide this service by developing assessment protocols that test learning-based outcomes, collecting actionable feedback on academic advising, and reporting the results to leadership.

Management Corrective Action

1. OAA will develop assessment protocols that measure whether academic advising outcomes are achieved.⁸ These will include protocols tailored to measure learning-based outcomes in first-year and transitional students, as well as students completing their last quarter. OAA will develop these protocols and make them available to distributed advising units across campus by March 15, 2017.
2. OAA will begin to work with distributed advising units to perform analysis of assessment protocols by March 15, 2017.
3. OAA will develop a plan to periodically report on the success of academic advising to senior campus leadership by March 15, 2017.

D. Undergraduate students would benefit from more direct contact with faculty advisors.

Faculty are uniquely qualified to advise on academic and professional development issues, and contact between undergraduate students and faculty advisors could be improved.

Faculty advisors are in a unique position to help undergraduate students plan for rewarding futures. This is true for graduate students as well, and this report does not suggest that faculty engagement with undergraduates is more important than faculty engagement with graduates. Rather, we observe that academic advising plays different roles for students at the two levels, and this review considered only undergraduate students' advising needs.

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. AMAS identified several reasons for this modest rate of participation:

- Faculty have many demands on their time. They have duties in the areas of research, teaching, and service. Academic advising is only one of many forms of service;
- Class sizes at UC Davis are increasing; an increased student-to-teacher ratio makes it more difficult for faculty to engage with individual student needs;
- Faculty who do participate in advising often prioritize advising for graduate students;

⁸ This refers specifically to the outcomes identified by OAA in consultation with the Academic Senate and the CAD.

- Academic units are reluctant to provide incentives for faculty to engage in advising;
- There are limited resources to train faculty in advising-related skillsets;
- Some colleges organize advising services into staff-run clusters, which excludes faculty from many advising activities; and
- Students often feel uncomfortable approaching faculty for advice.

Recommendation

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

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. The program will be initiated by March 15, 2017.