



Davis Division Academic Senate

Request for Consultation Responses

Advising Implementation Plan

December 11, 2014

The Advising Implementation Plan was developed by the Advising Subcommittee of the Blue Ribbon Committee on the Undergraduate Student Experience (BRC). The subcommittee through the Advising Implementation Plan addresses five BRC undergraduate advising recommendations. The Plan is distributed for Academic Senate feedback. This RFC also includes a memo from Chair Knoesen providing background and seeking committee response to specific questions.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (AGRICULTURE)

December 12, 2014 3:44 PM

The CAES Executive Committee agrees and supports the objective to improve advising and assisting students in planning their curricula.

With regard to this Advising Implementation Plan, concern was expressed with the adherence to the standard of 1:350 advising to student ratio as different majors have different advising needs and complexities such that a strict reliance on this standard will put some at a disadvantage.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES)

December 10, 2014 9:22 AM

Objective 1, #2a Target Audience

This should state Master Advisor's or other faculty dedicated to advising. New faculty may not be involved directly in undergraduate advising when they first start.

Chapter 2, Objective 1, Rationale

How does changing the title of a "Master Advisor" to "Chair of the Undergraduate Program in X" constitute a change that requires teaching relief or monetary compensation? This paragraph probably belongs under objective 2.

Chapter 2, Objective 2, Rationale

The document suddenly switches to "advising" meaning undergraduates doing research with a faculty member. This type of advising needs to be clearly separated from helping students choose the best major and classes to complete a degree or prepare for a specific type of career or graduate school.

The suggestion that "advising" be a required part of the tenure agreement is not a good idea for two reasons. First, the suggestion needs to define which type of advising the suggestor is talking about. Second, forcing all faculty to do any type of advising is likely to cause some students to receive very bad advising.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (ENGINEERING)

December 11, 2014 6:59 PM

The COE Executive Committee agrees with objectives to enhance advising as it helps students make their educational decisions. Depending on implementation, there can be significant concerns regarding the formulation of Strategies to meet Objective 2 (address faculty incentives for greater engagement in student advising so advising is valued). The wording of changing service to obligation in merit and promotion considerations is concerning. Further assurances and details on how faculty time and other responsibilities will be compensated (or alleviated), due to the implied new obligation, are needed before any opinions can be expressed.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (LS: HACCS)

November 21, 2014 4:48 PM

I would make a distinction between academic advising and research mentoring. At this point, academic advising is done by staff in many departments. As for research mentoring, it is more typical of some fields than of others. For these reasons, I think it would be hard to generalize when it comes to faculty rewards.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (LS: MATH/PHY SCI)

November 4, 2014 5:16 PM

The Executive Committee of the College of Letters and Science has discussed this document. We have two concerns, one fairly general and one much more specific.

Our general concern is that the document fails to distinguish two very different kinds of "advising": helping students choose the right course of study and mentoring student research. Both are important, but their needs are very different. Thus, for example, the development of online tools is directed mainly toward the first function, while the steps toward "faculty incentives for greater engagement in student advising" is presumably directed toward the second. By blurring this distinction, the document makes it harder to identify the measures needed to meet the different needs.

Our more specific concern: several of us independently picked out the sentence on page 8, "Elevate undergraduate advising out of 'service' designation in merits and promotions package to an obligation inherent in the tenure agreement," as an *extremely* troubling idea. If "advising" here means such things as directing students toward the right courses, this is completely inappropriate for many departments, in which a few faculty and staff specialize in this role; it is asking that we replace experienced, competent people with random faculty members so that everyone meets the "obligation." If, instead, it means mentoring undergraduates, it is equally inappropriate: some faculty deal mainly with graduate students, some have research programs in which it is very difficult to involve undergraduates, and some, frankly, are simply lousy mentors. Read literally, it is a proposal to change the faculty expectations of "research, teaching, and service" to "research, teaching, service, and advising," which is a completely inappropriate elevation of the role of advising. And as one member of our committee pointed out, this would make Davis quite unattractive to new hires.

Moreover, while this is not the intention, the real effect of "elevat[ing] undergraduate advising out of service" is likely to be to reduce faculty incentives. The Step Plus system is encouraging greater attention to faculty contributions to service; if advising is no longer counted in this way, but is an ordinary obligation of all faculty, this will remove an incentive for faculty members to try to be exceptionally good in this area. You will end up having faculty looking around for other kinds of "service" for their merit and promotion packages instead of devoting attention to advising.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (MANAGEMENT)

November 26, 2014 2:49 PM

It might be useful to draw a distinction between recognizing undergraduate advising as a legitimate form of service rather than require it of faculty or elevate it above other forms of service (e.g., graduate advising).

Graduate Council

November 14, 2014 9:26 AM

No response at this time.

Undergraduate Council

December 15, 2014 2:34 PM

Response continued on next page.

Undergraduate Council Response to Advising Implementation Plan

The Advising Implementation Plan is far too imprecise about the various dimensions of faculty advising of undergraduates. "Advising" itself is a loose term. Faculty could be instrumental in a senior honors thesis, in an undergraduate's selection of a career given performance in key courses, or in a selection of GE courses. The various proposals, by conflating these different aspects of advising, are likely to make matters worse.

Because so many changes are constantly being made in classes and requirements, faculty members can barely keep up with how to advise their graduate students, let alone undergraduates. Undergraduates are best served by staff and peer advisors within the departments, especially in course planning, GE, degree certification, and so on. Indeed in some of those areas faculty involvement can be detrimental if delivered without accurate information in back of it.

With experience in the various types of advising, few, if any departments, involve all faculty in advising. A few faculty take on that role, perhaps a few years at a time. Perhaps those few faculty need some special training in computer systems but probably not. Which faculty member is embarrassed because students are more experienced with SYSWEB?

New faculty in particular should not be burdened with such training. Some assistant professor, busy developing new courses, submitting parts of the dissertation for publication, talking to Ph.D. students, sizing up new colleagues, would get nothing out of training about undergraduate advising. Good departments wouldn't burden a faculty member with that role until after tenure.

Faculty can be essential in providing undergraduates with advice about the type of courses or experience that will prepare them for particular post-graduate training or careers, advice on graduate programs, what faculty are working in various research areas that might be of interest to the students. Yet career advice is so varied and so delicate, it is hard to imagine that faculty involvement across all disciplines should be systematized. Very few Economics majors, to take an example, become professional economists. Why should Economics faculty be presumed to provide Economics majors with useful advice about careers. Perhaps faculty in Engineering, Nutrition, WFCB might, but most would not. Professional staff would seem more useful in these more common circumstances. And professional staff are probably better at delivering "reality checks"? For the aspiring surgeon, which faculty member should be discussing the implications of the C- in organic chemistry? It shouldn't be the professor in that course. Faculty in the current biology-oriented major might help the student accept the situation. The professor in Are Studio who was most impressed with the same student's work would not know that the student should be reconsidering career trajectories. Staff advisors probably would perform this difficult task best.

Staff advisers are already feeling the effects of the increased admission of international transfer students, in terms of trying to figure out articulation information for courses they took in their country of origin with respect to which major requirements are satisfied. This is only going to become a bigger problem as 2020 proceeds. Some centralized help in figuring out articulation of international courses before students show up at the adviser's door might be useful in maximizing advising efficiency. Faculty involvement in this process is not likely to be productive.

The Advising Implementation Plan would like to see more credit given to faculty who spend time on advising. Such a proposal seems innocuous. But there are hidden costs. For example, I advised a senior honors thesis last year. I also served on a number of Ph.D. orals exams. Neither of these activities will count the least in a merit package, let us all admit. These two activities differ only in the need for me to spend time compiling and checking the list of oral exams. I would not gain from having to prepare yet another form, on senior honor theses, that is irrelevant.

One of the proposals concerns the name for the faculty member who is the point person for an undergraduate program. It is probably best to have one name campus-wide. But whether that name should be "Chair of the Undergraduate Program in X" or "Master Advisor" is not obvious. Few students in a Masters program are confused; is not the Department Chair likely to be confused with "Chair of the Undergraduate Program?" The confusion seems most to happen in L&S, where the term "Undergraduate Advisor" is the same as used for the staff advisor. Couldn't it be left to L&S to pick one of the other terms in common usage?