

Foundations of Excellence Advising Committee

Executive Summary

Academic advising is integral to student retention and success. In his 2016 State of the Campus address, Chancellor DiStefano noted the role advisors play in student retention. He said, “We have seen a cultural shift in collaborations across boundaries. We are working to develop a universal approach in advising to increase the success of our students... It’s a continuing process that we remain fully engaged in developing.” Advisors can serve as one of the few consistent elements of the student experience, enhancing the student journey from the point of matriculation through to graduation. Providing personalized and high-quality advising can help students feel connected to campus, while removing barriers to graduation. This remains our top goal. Reaching that goal will require a paradigm shift in the culture of advising to evolve beyond the transactional and into a more expansive role to produce measurable results.

In order to realize this paradigm shift, advisors must have the bandwidth necessary to provide exceptional service while helping students navigate a large and complex campus and make meaning of its many opportunities. As part of the Foundations of Excellence project, and in concert with Academic Futures and [the chancellor's retention goals and strategic imperatives](#), we believe that advising, done well, has a key role to play in student success, persistence, and belonging.¹

Guiding Principles

This committee identified a key guiding principle underlying our recommendations - that advising should be holistic, comprehensive, and personalized, with an aim to empower students to engage actively in and take control of their curricular and co-curricular lives. After reviewing the mission statements of various external advising programs, and aligning with campus-wide strategic initiatives, we suggest the campus adopt the following statements, and that each advising program incorporate these statements into their own.

Vision Statement

We believe every student deserves high quality, comprehensive, and personalized academic advising to help them reach their full potential. As a Tier 1 research university, CU Boulder offers many opportunities to students but can present navigational challenges. We offer an exceptional, cohesive advising experience that guides students through the complexity of the university while empowering them to take more responsibility for and control over the choices they make and the goals they pursue. We believe that CU Boulder will be a national leader in providing premier academic advising.

Mission Statement

Academic Advisors at CU Boulder provide students with holistic support that integrates their academic and co-curricular experiences to foster their success, persistence, and well-being. Advisors empower students to engage actively in their academic choices and campus

¹ Academic Futures recommendation Project 1: A Common Student-Centered Approach to Learning. Working with the deans and in coordination with FoE Implementation, develop a coordinated and comprehensive approach to undergraduate...student advising to ensure that all students are supported throughout their career at CU.

communities, and connect students to a comprehensive set of services and programs designed to enhance their experience. Advisors offer an unparalleled level of service and an inclusive environment, designed to help all students attain their academic goals.

Structure of Advising Services

We believe that advising services, budgets, and supervision should remain within the individual colleges, schools, and programs. However, ***campus-wide coordination and cooperation must become the norm*** to ensure a consistent, high-quality, and impactful advising experience to all students regardless of year in school or degree program. This includes formalized expectations with regard to communication, collaboration, use of appropriate best practices, and professionalization standards. Position descriptions for advising program heads should be updated to include these expectations.

We recommend adopting the neighborhood model (which groups advisors together according to disciplinary areas) within advising units, defining a common structure for advisor roles across campus, ensuring appropriate coordination when a student has multiple advisors, and formalizing liaison relationships with programs serving underrepresented and other student populations (e.g., international students, veterans, etc.)

In order to ensure that students experience a seamless connection among multiple advising resources, we recommend two organizational strategies. First, that advising programs streamline outreach for students with multiple academic advisors within a single college or program by designating a lead for certain transactions, e.g., student success initiatives like early alert or academic standing support. Second, that each advising program designate an advisor to serve as liaison to the LEAD Alliance and other programs serving underrepresented student populations, including designating a point person in each college or advising program to serve as a resource for international students.

We support the work of the CAEC group in defining a common structure for advisor roles across campus, including the new Student Success Professional job family and a career ladder. A common position structure and fair compensation strategy will encourage stability of the advising corps and reward high-performing staff. ***We recommend funding be provided by July 2019 to address lingering disparity related to advisor salaries and to place existing staff into appropriate levels with accompanying salary adjustments.***

Advising Outcomes and Approach

We recommend a strategic infrastructure for advising outcomes that includes a goal-oriented approach to interactions, with emphasis on students' academic but also personal and career goals.

To help students make positive transitions to campus, establish goals, become knowledgeable about and develop networks of resources, identify opportunities, and track progress against goals (redirecting as needed), ***we recommend that students be required to meet individually with professional staff advisors each of their first four semesters.***

In order to foster more frequent engagement and increase access, in addition to required individual appointments often scheduled days or weeks in advance, ***we suggest building in some flexibility to ensure increased same-day availability for more urgent needs, group availability during peak registration periods, and development of online resources to include adoption of a common online chat tool.***

Caseloads

In order to achieve comprehensive, holistic, and personalized advising, ***student-to-advisor ratios should average 200-250/1 overall.*** This average caseload also allows time for advisor administrative tasks, professional development and required training, necessary meetings and service requirements, etc.

Because of the exploratory nature of first-year students, and to support their special needs in successfully transitioning from high school to the collegiate environment (academically and otherwise), ***caseloads for first-year advisors/coaches should not exceed 150-175 students.***

We acknowledge that additional supervisory lines will be necessary to accommodate the growth in advising staff, but this also serves as a retention tool by providing professional growth opportunities for staff. ***We recommend that Enrollment Management work closely with the Office of Undergraduate Education to develop a rubric for increasing advising lines in parallel with increasing enrollment.***

Space Needs

The physicality of advising space impacts the student experience; it should be welcoming, comfortable, accessible, and in most cases, private. To support the neighborhood model, space must be made available to co-locate advisors in a given disciplinary group. Individual and/or joint advising spaces must be logically located and thoughtfully designed. An overall reduction in advisor caseloads necessitates the hiring of additional advisors, requiring additional advising space.

We must be strategic and intentional in considering our physical advising spaces. ***We recommend a systematic review of these spaces campus-wide to ensure that advisor space needs are met, and that campus space planners are mindful of preserving the integrity and privacy of advising spaces. The campus Strategic Facilities Visioning (SFV) framework should incorporate and align with physicality needs for academic advising. Specifically, we recommend each advising program that is not currently able to co-locate its staff work with campus space planners to develop a plan to swap current staff and faculty spaces so as to cluster key individuals together.***

First-Year Advising Model

After reviewing first-year advising models at other institutions², we support implementation of a model at CU Boulder that adheres to some common principles:

² The model in place at the [University of South Carolina](#) proved particularly instructive.

- First-year students should be assigned to a single academic advisor throughout the first year.
- First-year advisors should serve as the primary source of support for students in the first year, including facilitating connections to both academic and non-academic resources.
- First-year advisors should personalize students' academic paths, helping them establish goals, explore interests, and achieve a sense of community and belonging on campus.
- The campus should adopt a common road map for advising in the first year, including key outcomes and expectations.
- First-year advisors should meet with students at least once each semester.
- First-year advisors should be embedded in current advising programs and networked together to ensure adherence to common principles underlying the model.

We recommend first-year advisors serve in a hybrid academic advising/career advising/academic coaching role in order to support students in their academic transition from high school to college and to embed professional goal setting from the start of their academic career.

We believe first-year advisors should also cross-train with key campus partners who interface with first-year students in a transactional sense so the advisor can serve as a guide to students as they navigate the campus bureaucracy. In particular, cross-training with the Office of Financial Aid would allow advisors to work proactively with students who have financial holds that prevent registration. We recommend several possibilities for partnership with Residence Life. ***We suggest integrating advising topics into the ResX Residential Experience and recommend first-year advisors offer a physical presence in the residence halls during key times of the year. We also recommend cross-training between first-year advisors and RAP Program Coordinators to supplement registration support.***

In addition to their relationship with a professional academic advisor, first-year students will benefit from the opportunity to receive support from a peer advisor. ***Peer advisors should work closely with first-year advisors.*** In a mentoring role, peer advisors can assist with email advising (e.g. responding to general questions related to registration), manage group advising sessions, and staff registration help labs. Peer advisors can also serve as teaching assistants in transition/CU101 courses.

One key milestone within the first-year model is the sophomore transition, a time in which many students begin working with an advisor within their chosen disciplinary area and are introduced in more depth to an academic community. ***First-year advisors should partner with academic neighborhoods and participate in programming that welcomes students into this new relationship.***

Affiliated Roles and Partnerships

The academic advising landscape should reflect a variety of roles that complement and enhance each other, including professional staff advisors, academic coaches, and peer advisors. Faculty mentors play a vital, but sometimes overlooked, role in this landscape. ***We recommend the Boulder Faculty Assembly (BFA) set expectations for faculty engagement and their role in supporting student success outside of the classroom, and that they partner with the CAEC group to articulate the full scope of advising roles and how they interface*** (See Appendix A).

We recommend strong and integrated partnerships with affiliated student service offices across campus, facilitated by the Office of Undergraduate Education. Examples of collaborations include:

- FY Advisors cross-training with Financial Aid and RAP program coordinators, with FY Advisors hosting availability in residence halls
- Career Services embedded in advising units
- Assigned liaison to LEAD Alliance programs
- Assigned liaison in each advising unit to support international students

In addition, **we recommend strong support for and inclusion of peer advisors and academic coaches to complement academic advising roles:**

- **Peer advisors should be hired and trained alongside first-year advisors.**
- **Academic coaches should be embedded into advising and other student support programs and they should partner closely to provide academic support in the context of a student's primary disciplinary home.**

Training and Professionalization

To strengthen our efforts to provide an optimal experience for students, we must commit to the ongoing professional development and well-being of advisors in order to create a highly-trained and stable advising corps. Professionalization of the advising corps will become our campus standard, with advising staff expected to engage in an array of professional growth and development activities. **We suggest incorporating a minimum number of professional development hours into the performance plan for each advisor.**

A common set of topics that make up new advisor training should be managed at the campus level to avoid duplication of services and ensure consistency and breadth of training, **coordinated with and augmented by more specialized training in the individual advising programs.**

We recommend the Office of Undergraduate Education incorporate a campus-level training position responsible for developing training materials, coordinating professional development opportunities, and offering support to individual units.

We also suggest the CAEC group partner with current advisors to formalize a career ladder, including opportunities to advance while still remaining primarily student-facing.

We believe advisors should be viewed as part of the teaching and learning community and encourage their role as instructors of student success courses. **As work begins on a Center for Teaching and Learning, we recommend inviting participation from the advising community.**

Assessment Plan

Regular assessment of advising services should include feedback from stakeholders but also measurement of key outcomes defined for each of the first four semesters and beyond. **We recommend each advising program adopt a common core set of student learning outcomes** that comprise an advising curriculum. Individual units could add to this curriculum as

appropriate. ***We suggest the CAEC group work with assessment coordinators in each program to define specific metrics*** to use to assess whether identified goals are being met.

Financial Implications

The largest financial impact to implementing a new approach to academic advising comes in increasing and diversifying the advising corps - both hiring additional staff advisors and creating funding to support peer and faculty mentoring. Because the gap is very large between the staffing approach currently in use and the future state that will be necessary to support these recommendations, ***we suggest a two-year phased implementation plan.***

Timelines and Next Steps

This committee will be collecting feedback from stakeholders throughout February and early March via open forums and meetings with specific audiences. We will incorporate feedback into the full report, ensure that our goals merge with Academic Futures objectives, and produce a final report during March. Assuming this report is adopted and approved, the Office of Undergraduate Education will coordinate with stakeholders, with the first phase of implementation beginning in fiscal year 2020.

Appendix A: Advising Roles

