Report from the Campus Advisory Exploratory Group (CAEG)

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To: Russell Moore, Provost

Fm: **Michael Grant and David Sherwood, Co-Chairs; Linnea Avallone, Kathryn Tisdale, Jeanne Meyer-Brown, Jim Austin, Joyce Kinde, Members**

The CAEG hereby submits to you its report of our findings in response to your charge to accomplish a high-level, campus-wide review of advising, focused on undergraduates, with the goal of making recommendations about how the campus might be able to significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of our advising effort, inclusively. We have consulted previous advising studies on this campus, sought outside advice from research groups, examined recent reports from other universities, and interviewed numerous advisors, advising supervisors and deans, seeking their perspectives in every case. The committee then attempted to identify those areas and practices which seem most likely to provide strategies to make the process more successful for our students and our advising staff more productive. The recommendations below represent our best judgments on what those items are and how they might be used to advance the quality of undergraduate advising, campus-wide.

With this document, the committee provides our full list of recommendations so that if you wish to direct some emendations or request more detail, we stand ready to do that. Otherwise, we consider our task accomplished.

 Our strategy has been to identify those principles, ideas and concepts which seem to us most likely to have a positive effect on our students via undergraduate advising but we have deliberately avoided working down to the level of operational choices or specific implementation tactics. Our perspective has been to provide some high level recommendations which, if implemented, will require substantial additional effort and work on each one in order to define operational paths to successful accomplishment without undue disruption in the necessarily ongoing processes of advising.

Establish a Director of Advising for the campus

We recommend the creation and establishment of a new position--Director of Advising--who would have campus-wide administrative, budgetary and operational responsibility for all undergraduate budgets, advising staff, facilities, training, evaluation and assessment. The Director would, of course, need to become intimately familiar with all the various subsets of special advising needs within individual schools and colleges and, perhaps, even down to the department level in many cases. The Director would necessarily have direct accountability for the success of all advising to include intra-

university transfers. Investigation of some recent changes and patterns at other large public universities motivated and supported our opinions that there are numerous advantages to a centralized approach as compared to college/school-centered approaches in general. Those schools who have recently transitioned to a centralized, campus-wide model have reported more consistency, better inter-unit communication, and more efficient training. There is also good evidence of improved graduation rates largely attributable to advising changes. The use of a single, campus-wide set of software products enhances the ability for advising offices to cover for sickness, vacation and turnover challenges plus that type of structure adds to the consistency of advising, especially for students with undeclared or cross-college interests. Administrators are better able to track the relationship between advisors and retention rates, graduation rates and other measures of student success related to advising quality.

Establish a campus-wide faculty/staff/student advisory committee

We recommend that a campus-wide advisory committee be established to work closely with the Director to present the particularities of each college/school from an inclusive perspective. This committee should function as an 'expert' base that the Director can call upon when needed and they should provide strategic as well as tactical advice and recommendations to the Director. The group should be small enough to be operationally nimble while providing good coverage of the entire campus and advising special challenges such as FERPA issues, transfers, returning veterans, intra-university (and inter-campus) transfers, etc.

Create a directed, hierarchical strategy of advising

We recommend a shift in advising strategies such that the significantly different advising needs of students are recognized in the structural organization itself. For example, we know that a significant fraction of undergraduates need only minimal, occasional guidance and advising assistance beyond teaching them how to use the Degree Audit system, to refer to the published graduation requirements, etc. In order to effectively deploy our limited advising resources, we recommend that we develop a more explicitly intentional effort to sort and respond to those differential student needs. To that end, we recommend that a formal system of advising 'tiers' or 'layers' be generated, each of which would have clearly defined responsibilities directly reflecting differential student needs. We note that this type of arrangement would implicitly indicate possible career advancement pathways for advisors, a valuable structural asset. We recommend establishing three categories of advisors: (a) senior level professional advisors with appropriate high-level credentials who are well paid, stable, long-term professionals and who operate at the highest levels of knowledge, experience, responsibility and judgment, (b) mid-level advisors who deal with frequently encountered problems that lend themselves to established standard practice responses and who are actively supervised by senior level advisors, (c) first level advisors, mostly undergraduate peers, who are explicitly charged with assisting students who request advice about the well-defined mechanical components of academic advisors such as how many hours of this or that are specified in the catalog rules, how to effectively use the degree audit software and the centralized advising software available to students for self-help and similar advising tasks. This level of advising would require very close, sustained, and careful supervision from mid-level and senior advisors

but could be quite attractive to students who might be more inclined to talk with a peer than a staff person.

Define and communicate the circumscribed role of academic advising at CU for students and parents

We recommend that strong efforts be made to precisely shape student and parental expectations of what advisors can and should do versus what parents and student sometimes think they can and should do. There has been a recent trend for student and parental expectations to expand unreasonably and, especially, into areas lying outside the academic advising purview. For example, advisors may be called upon by students to provide advice about psychological, sociological and financial problems. Further, many students (and parents) expect the advisors to function as individualized, personalized monitors of students' individual situations with the student's role mostly being one of acquiescence. We recommend a shift in both the expectation--and the actuality--of advising responsibility toward a larger share for individual students and a smaller share for advisors. One likely consequence of this shift would be to minimize the expectation that all students would have a single advisor throughout their undergraduate career, as valuable as that can sometimes be. We believe that the students will be better served if they look at advising as a competent, available and easy-to-use, team-oriented service rather than as an individual monitoring operation.

We also recommend significant attention be given to employing group-level advising strategies where the ratio of advisors to students can be quite resource efficient with respect to staff time and physical spaces. Much of this type of advising will not be FERPA sensitive and provisions can be made for individual cases where that is an issue.

Create a strongly student-focused system, temporally and spatially

We recommend the creation of at least one campus-wide advising center, ideally located near the heart of the main campus (e.g. Norlin Library, the University Club, the UMC or some similar location) and we recommend that this center be staffed with hours significantly outside the normal 8-5 workday and M-F workweek. We are cognizant of student preferences being different from the standard administrative workday and workweeks; they surely would prefer, for example, a 10-7 daily schedule over an 8-5 schedule. And beyond that, evening advising options would likely be much appreciated by our students. We also recommend a large proportion of advising time be structured as 'walk-in' times to supplement a formal appointment option.

We also recommend that advising resources be structured to recognize the variable demands from students generated by registration times, graduation times, etc. This may entail temporary advisors or variable annual work cycles among permanent advisors or other possibilities. Ideally, the central advising center should be arranged in such a way as to accommodate these variable resource levels needed to respond to variable student needs. Flexibility directed toward meeting student demand should be the primary operating principle.

Enhance faculty roles in advising

We recommend that faculty be an integral, valuable part of the overall student advising process. In particular, faculty should assume regularized responsibility for group advising to interested students with respect to topics that faculty are most qualified to talk about. For example, faculty can provide the best advice about professional preparation and careers for they can best provide general professional mentoring. The faculty is clearly in the strongest position to do this kind of mentoring-focused advising expertly and this role would partly relieve the professional advising staff from undue expansion of their responsibilities into these areas.

Campus wide advising software

We recommend that the campus-wide concept we advocate employ common, campus-wide advising software systems where all advisors have access to identical information with identical training requirements. This approach fits well with our recommendation for a campus-wide Director of Advising structure and would allow an integrated view of weaknesses, strengths, in a broadly inclusive context which, ideally, would permit the Director to focus on maximizing efficiency and effectiveness of the over-all campus advising effort.

We recommend that we join the current development project, headed by the Education Advisory Board (of which we are members) designed to create and deploy advising software specifically focused on improving retention and, especially, improving graduation rates. We were greatly impressed with the documented success in actually moving graduation rates upward significantly given the great, and frustrating, stability of those numbers despite many efforts to improve them (here and in higher education in general). The general principle of this particular project aims to provide pre-emptive-style advising well before academic probation, suspension, failure, withdrawal and similar academic problems. Their data show that a student who may well be meeting all academic minimum requirements is still on a path that will not take them to graduation because they have chosen the wrong path, major or field. Early alerts and pre-emptive advising on this situation dramatically improve rentention rates which translate into overall graduation rate improvement. The software takes a strongly pro-active outlook where advisors are provided with tools to reach out to students before they get into the standard categories of probation, suspension, dismissal, etc. The software incorporates student academic and biographic records, comparative data for other students in the major with respect to grades and graduation rates in a 'next-generation'advice context, identifies 'off graduation path' individuals early on and provides for initiating advising contact with those students who may be in jeopardy of leaving CU before graduating but not realize their situation.

This recommendation comes with two important caveats: (1) this committee has not engaged in a comparative shopping effort and we do know there are competitors with somewhat similar goals, including our already installed D2L (and paid for) system and (2) this is an ongoing, development project,

not one which has been available and 'de-bugged' extensively for years. In the latter case, the committee thinks the opportunity for Boulder to be an active part (being an 'alpha' member) of shaping and influencing the software development outweighs the disadvantages of dealing with a moderately new product which has a short but successful track record.

We also recommend devoting considerable on-campus software development resources to generating a self-selection software tool for students to use before they see advisors. This tool should allow those students who choose to be almost entirely responsible for their own advising high confidence that they are properly on track and can rely on the DARS system and published requirements. It should also allow them to self-identify when they need expert advising assistance.