Addendum to the
FoE Academic Advising Committee Final Report and Key Recommendations

March 2019

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I. The advising landscape at CU Boulder

Current advising practice

Advising programs and services are currently decentralized and vary significantly across campus with regard to approach and structure. Advising units are primarily housed in colleges and schools, with some notable exceptions.[1] Most advisors are professional staff members, and there is limited use of faculty advisors.[2] Several advising units include academic coaches and peer advisors as well.[3]

Most advising units follow a caseload-based model, which identifies an assigned point person for each student, though it is common for students to be assigned to more than one advisor. This can happen across units or within a single unit, with a different advisor for each major and minor on record. Across traditional advising programs, there is no common guideline for optimal student/advisor ratios.[4] Overall trends related to student contact vary by unit, as do expectations of advisor availability and modes of advising offered.

Key partnerships exist with both the Division of Student Affairs (e.g. Counseling & Psychiatric Services, Career Services, Students of Concern and Case Management) and Enrollment Management (Financial Aid, and the Office of the Registrar). We believe opportunities exist to improve partnerships and cooperation between advisors and these offices.[5]

There is no common technology[6], organizational structure, or shared assessment strategy across advising programs. There are, however, commonalities across subsets of programs, and collaboration across all facilitated primarily through the Campus Advising Executive Council (CAEC). CAEC is convened by the Office of Undergraduate Education and comprised of directors and assistant deans of advising units.[7]

Students served by special academic programs [e.g., McNeill, the Miramontes Arts & Sciences Program (MASP), the Presidents Leadership Class (PLC), and the Herbst Academic Center] have a primary point of contact in that program as well as an assigned advisor within an academic advising unit. In some cases, special academic

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[1] *Exceptions include the University Exploration & Advising Center (UEAC), which reports directly to the Office of Undergraduate Education; advising services in the Division of Continuing Education (CE); and the advising that occurs in special academic programs like those found in the LEAD Alliance or in Residential Academic Programs.*

[2] *Faculty are deployed in varying capacities. In the College of Music, five percent of the faculty service requirement is devoted to advising students, while in the School of Education faculty serve as advisors to all licensure students. With these exceptions, faculty tend not to be involved with advising in a formal capacity, though faculty mentoring does occur in a limited number of CEAS departments as well as in the College of Arts & Sciences.*

[3] *A&S, CEAS, and the UEAC have academic coaching programs embedded within the advising units; these units, along with ENVD and Leeds, make use of peer advisors/peer mentors. These roles are distinct from the role of academic advisor and supplement academic advising provided by professional staff.*

[4] *Caseloads range from ~260/1 in the College of Engineering & Applied Science to ~625/1 in the College of Media, Communication & Information (CMCI).*

[5] *In some cases, there is greater overlap of content. For example, Career Services advisors discuss majors and minors, while academic advisors discuss career pathways. Career advisors are embedded in Leeds, the College of Engineering & Applied Science (CEAS), and Continuing Education; in those programs the relationship between academic and career advising is more formalized.*

[6] *MyCUHub, built on the Salesforce CRM platform and maintained by OIT, is used by several advising units but not all and not consistently. Leeds uses a separate instance of Salesforce and shares notes from their advising interactions with MyCUHub users.*

[7] *One example of current collaboration is the CAEC group's work with Human Resources to define a common salary and position structure across advising programs on the Boulder campus.*

programs and related student support units maintain caseload-like approaches based on student cohorts; in other cases these serve as supplementary and ad hoc support for students. International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), for example, is available on an ad hoc basis to the international undergraduate population, a group that often requires more targeted advising support to meet their specific needs.

Funding model

Each advising program is funded through the college, school, or unit in which it is situated. This model allows each unit to determine how best to prioritize advising. However, without established campus-wide standards for advisor salaries and caseloads, there are significant disparities between advising programs. The bulk of most advising budgets is devoted to staff salaries, with a modest operating budget covering professional development costs and day-to-day operations. Several advising units have no direct oversight of their own budgets.

Strengths and gaps

The strength of advising on this campus is in its people, with many professional staff and faculty committed to student success. Locating advising within colleges enables advising to be defined, designed, provided, and assessed within localized academic and disciplinary contexts. This essential structure ensures that advising is tightly integrated into the academic disciplines advisors serve.

We believe it is a strength to have advising programs situated within colleges and special academic programs and we see examples of good practice in different units. In particular, the "neighborhood model" in A&S has seen good outcomes. With this model, a small team of advisors is co-located and works with students across a small set of related disciplines; this approach allows students to change majors while remaining with the same advisor, and allows for a more efficient deployment of advising resources. In Leeds, the required advising contact in the first four semesters is a good example of an advising curriculum, while in Music, devoting part of the service requirement to faculty advising is a good model for formalizing a faculty mentoring role at key points along the academic path.

While decentralization provides many benefits, gaps can occur unless careful and sustained attention is paid to communication, collaboration, coordination, and parity. Unintended inefficiencies, inequities, and/or barriers for students can result from differing advisor-to-student ratios, disparate methods of assessment, and inconsistent advisor availability. Improved coordination and collaboration are key.

Advising in the first year

First-year advisors focus on supporting students through the transition from high school to college. They are key resources for students and families during New Student Welcome and throughout the first year as students explore academic and co-curricular options. Some advising units employ a targeted approach for first-year students, with advisors devoted to working with students throughout their first year irrespective of major. A&S and Leeds take similar approaches in that students are assigned a first-year advisor, then switch to an advisor in a declared area of study after the first year. In Environmental Design, the model is extended through the second year.

Even in programs that employ a first-year model, it is not currently possible for all incoming students to work with their assigned first-year advisor over the summer. Given the large number of entering students, all advisors are called upon to work with the incoming cohort during the five-week enrollment period.

Assessment

Assessment practices vary across advising units. There is currently no strategic or fully coordinated campus-wide approach to assessment, and findings are not routinely shared or compared across units. This hinders our ability to determine objectively the efficacy of various advising practices and programs currently in place.

With regard specifically to student feedback, we do have some relevant information. The first year of the Foundations of Excellence initiative included focus groups and surveys of current students. In focus groups, students highlighted their desire for personalized academic attention and specifically mentioned the importance of meaningful relationships with advisors. They prefer a more comprehensive approach to advising that includes academic support as well as help navigating resources. The FoE focus group report also noted challenges specifically for students from underrepresented and special populations (e.g. first-generation college students, veterans, student-athletes, transfer students, international students, exchange students, and speakers of English as a second language). In particular, some of these students struggle to achieve a sense of belonging on campus. They requested more personalized academic attention overall, including advising, and they reported that they lacked information about both academic and non-academic resources on campus.

Assessment of the first-year advising model in A&S done pre- and post-implementation in AY 2012 indicated increased student satisfaction with advising. After implementation of the model, the number of students with a second major at the end of the first year increased and the number with a minor more than doubled, indicating an increase in academic exploration across the college. Other key outcomes included an increase in the number of advising appointments between first-year students and advisors and increased fidelity to major at the end of the first year compared to a more distributed advising model.

In the Institutional Research Fall 2016 Survey of Non-returning Students, 37% of respondents indicated lack of academic support, including advising, as an important reason for leaving CU Boulder. The FoE survey of current first-year students gave us a glimpse into the first-semester student perspective on advising-related topics. While most respondents felt their academic advisor cared about helping them succeed, only half of respondents indicated satisfaction with advising in general, highlighting clear gaps around issues of academic support and future planning.

Student feedback during an advising open forum in February 2019, facilitated by CUSG, indicates a desire for an advisor with a holistic knowledge base spanning multiple majors and minors, with knowledge about internships and long term strategy related to degree planning. Students report frustration with the logistics of scheduling separate meetings with separate advisors, each of whom holds information about one piece of the student's overall experience. They do value having multiple resources available when they need more nuanced advice about a particular aspect of one of their degree components but, across all elements of their academic experience, what they value in an advisor is someone who can help them develop goals, understand how their curricular and co-curricular experiences align with those goals, and help them pivot if needed.

II. External Review and Best Practice

John Gardner, President of the Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, in partnership with NACADA, the global community for academic advising, has developed an Excellence in Academic Advising program, including the identification of nine conditions of excellence for a strong advising culture on campus. He serves as our external consultant on the Foundations of Excellence initiative and has worked with us to bring these two initiatives together in the form of best practice outcomes for advising. Gardner emphasizes what matters most in academic advising:

- A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work; differentiated approaches for sub-populations, like first-year and undecided students, are necessary.
- Academic advising is a form of teaching that goes beyond course planning; it must be conducted as a teaching/learning process in the context of relationship building.
- Advising must be intentionally integrated with career planning.
- Students in college are most influenced by other students, so peer advisors are key.

A review of publications from external organizations revealed several themes emerging around best practices:
- Advising should not be passive; advisors should strategically and proactively invite students in at key points and for key reasons and to that end we need a strategic infrastructure for advising outcomes.
- Academic policies should be reviewed to ensure they do not adversely impact students, particularly those in special populations.
- Academic and career advising are complementary and should be integrated.
- Faculty engagement with students is key and should be formalized, especially in the junior and senior year, around research and community within the academic department.
- In order to create a diverse and inclusive advising environment, successful advising programs must develop hiring practices that diversify advising staff.
- Ample access to training and career advancement, similar to promotion and tenure for faculty, helps retain talented advising staff.
- Since advisors are primarily situated in academic units with an expectation to contribute to the academic experience, advising should be incorporated into a Center for Teaching & Learning to encourage and reward advisors' scholarly contributions.

In terms of the role advising plays in student retention, several retention practices at high-performing (related to retention and degree completion) four-year public colleges differentiate those colleges from low-performing colleges. Those practices include: advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff, integration of advising with first-year programs, and an approach that combines academic advising with career/life planning.[8]

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[8] from *What Works in Student Retention - Four Year Public Institutions* *https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515398.pdf*