

Foundations of Excellence: Academic Advising
Final Report & Key Recommendations

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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.”*

National literature supports this effort. In What Matters to Student Success, Kuh and Kinzie note *“the quality of academic advising...is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment for students at 4-year schools”*.¹ Indeed, four-year colleges with relatively higher retention and graduation rates typically incorporate advising practices that include advising interventions, sufficient advising staff to ensure manageable caseloads, integration of advising with first-year programs, and an approach that combines academic advising with career/life planning.²

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 that produces measurable results.

Committee Process and Guiding Principles

In order to align efforts related to academic advising across multiple strategic initiatives, we reviewed recommendations from the Transitions and Organization Foundations of Excellence (FoE) committees; Academic Futures; the Inclusion, Diversity and Excellence in Academics (IDEA) plan; and the Campus Advising Exploratory Group. We reviewed best practices in the field as a basis for our work and performed a review of the current advising landscape at CU Boulder. (See Addendum) This report reflects key advising recommendations as well as feedback received from stakeholders across campus.

This committee identified a key principle underlying our recommendations--that advising should be holistic, inclusive, comprehensive, and personalized, with an aim to empower students to engage actively in and take control of their curricular and co-curricular lives. Student feedback indicates a desire for an advisor who has an expansive knowledge base that can span multiple majors and minors and include advice 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, in a timely fashion, particularly when they need more nuanced advice about a particular aspect of one of their degree components. Across all elements of their academic experience, students value having an advisor who can help them develop goals, understand how their curricular and co-curricular experiences align with those goals, and help them pivot as needed.

To meet this expectation, our plan suggests a more expansive role for advisors, a paradigm shift both in terms of student perceptions and in articulating the value-add offered by regular contact between students and advisors. Advisors must be more proactive in reaching out to students and must contribute more to student learning, particularly among vulnerable populations such as first generation, low-income, non-traditional, and

¹ From Kuh and Kinzie’s, *What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature Commissioned Report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success*, 2006

² *What Works in Student Retention - Four Year Public Institutions* <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515398.pdf>

underrepresented minority students. They must build relationships with students and be given the agency to personalize student support based on those relationships.

We believe this basic concept--that advising, done well, has a key role to play in student success, persistence, and belonging--demands that we give advisors the bandwidth necessary to provide exceptional service to help students navigate a large and complex campus and make meaning of its many opportunities.

Recommendations

- 1) Adopt a campus-wide vision and mission statement for advising. (See Appendix A)
 - Each advising program should reference and align these statements with their own.
 - We particularly like the approach the College of Engineering & Applied Science has taken in terms of communicating their mission statement along with learning outcomes and statements of support, and we encourage all advising units to view [their approach](#) as a model.

- 2) Establish campus-wide coordination and cooperation across advising programs to align approach, outcome, and assessment.
 - While we believe that advising services, budgets, and supervision should remain within the individual colleges, schools, and programs, campus-wide coordination will ensure a consistent, high-quality, and impactful advising experience to all students regardless of year in school or degree program.
 - This cooperation should include 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 encourage advising programs to adopt a neighborhood model (a co-located team of advisors serving similar disciplines) where possible. This model offers a consistent language to describe how advising is structured and offers flexibility for both students and advisors by increasing availability and reducing duplication of efforts.
 - 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 (SLOs) that comprise the CU Boulder Advising Curriculum:
 - SLO 1: Students experience a sense of psycho/social belonging. (FEEL)
 - SLO 2: Students develop a growth mindset. (APPROACH)
 - SLO 3: Students engage in optimizing their degree planning process. (TECHNICAL)
 - SLO 4: Student engage in a process of career/life planning. (LONG TERM & HOLISTIC)

- 3) Adopt a student-driven model of advising.
 - The academic advising landscape should reflect a variety of roles, including professional staff advisors, academic coaches, faculty mentors, and peer advisors. (See Appendix B) Certain roles can be leveraged at key points along the student journey: peer advisors are especially helpful in the first year as students navigate the transition from high school to college, while faculty engagement is especially important in the junior and senior year.
 - In order to ensure that students experience a seamless connection among multiple advising resources, we recommend two organizational strategies.

- First, that advising programs designate a lead to serve as a first-point-of-contact for students. This is especially helpful for certain transactions, e.g., student success interventions like early alert or academic standing support.
- Second, that each advising program designate an advisor to serve as liaison to the CU 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 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.
- We recommend that students be required to meet or connect individually with their academic advisors each of their first four semesters so that students can 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.
- In addition to required individual appointments, we suggest increased diversification of advising modes; this includes increased same-day availability consistently offered across campus, group availability during peak registration periods to increase timely access, and development of online resources, including adoption of a common online chat tool.
- The committee recognizes that no single advisor will have in-depth knowledge of every academic program and we encourage advisors to prioritize helping students to integrate all aspects of their degree plan. Advisors should help students understand what questions to ask and partner with other advising colleagues to develop an understanding of complementary content areas and key resources.
- Advisors must be proactive in reaching out to students and monitoring student progress. This can be accomplished through strategic use of data and development of advising dashboards.
- Advising programs should standardize and capitalize on the use of technologies (degree audits, online degree planners, etc.) so that students can drive some of their own planning and advisors can increase time assisting students in a meaningful way with integration of their educational and personal goals.

4) Reduce caseloads.

- In order to deliver on our commitments outlined in our vision and mission statements, caseloads must be reduced to provide appropriate student/advisor ratios.
- Student-to-departmental/disciplinary advisor ratios should average 200-250/1³ overall.⁴ (See Appendix C)
- Caseloads for first-year advisors should not exceed 175 students.
- We acknowledge that the addition of new advising lines to achieve these student/advisor ratios will affect the structure of some advising programs and that additional supervisory support will be necessary to accommodate this growth.
- We have consulted with Human Resources to determine appropriate strategies to expand the applicant pool for all potential new positions in order to ensure an increasingly diverse advising staff.
- We acknowledge that the addition of new advising lines will impact advising spaces and that we will need to think creatively about space utilization.

³ Ratios may vary slightly across programs to account for differences in how programs manage multiple advisor assignments and/or how advisors are assigned to advise students in particular majors.

⁴ This ratio aligns with AAU peers.

5) Adopt a First Year Advising model campus-wide.

- After reviewing first-year advising models at other institutions⁵ and data related to implementation of a similar model in A&S⁶, we support implementation of a model at CU Boulder that adheres to some common principles:
 - First-year students should be assigned to a single academic advisor.
 - 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.⁷
- First-year advisors should serve in a holistic academic advising role that incorporates some aspects of career advising and academic coaching in order to support students in their academic transition from high school to college and to facilitate professional goal setting from the start of their academic career. In this capacity they can support first-year students who receive course alerts and combine academic and career exploration, referring to more in-depth academic and career support resources as needed.
- We believe first-year advisors should 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, partnership with the Office of Financial Aid would allow advisors to work proactively with students who have financial holds that prevent registration.
- 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. As mentors, peer advisors can assist with email advising (e.g. respond 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.
- We recommend several possibilities for partnership with Residence Life. We commend the Residential Experience model and suggest integrating advising topics into the first two semesters. We believe first-year advisors should offer a physical presence in the residence halls during key times of the year and we recommend partnering between first-year advisors and RAP Program Coordinators to supplement registration support during the first year.
- Partnership between first-year advisors and disciplinary advisors should also be prioritized. First-year advisors should help first-year students connect with academic departments as part of the exploration process, through involvement in department-sponsored activities, connection to department-sponsored listservs, and access to disciplinary advisors during campus-wide drop-in hours.
- 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. To better orient students to the meaning

⁵ Centralized advising and/or a focus on advising in the first year is a common organizational approach across the nation. Two examples of note include the model in place at the [University of South Carolina](#), which is the national leader in First Year Experience, and the University of Texas San Antonio, which has recently [re-organized advising across campus into several academic neighborhoods](#).

⁶ Pre and post implementation: student survey feedback, number of advising appointments, and fidelity to major.

⁷ This [road map from A&S](#) can serve as an example.

and value of this transition in their advising journey, an enhanced emphasis on this transition in marketing and orientation materials is recommended. First-year advisors should proactively partner with academic neighborhoods and departments to collaborate on joint programming that celebrates and welcomes students into this new relationship.

- First-year transfer students also benefit from specialized support, and would be best served by departmental/disciplinary advisors.

6) Intentionally integrate faculty and academic departments.

- There are many dependencies underlying a holistic and interdisciplinary advising ecosystem. Advisors must stay well-connected to academic departments, including partnering with faculty mentors, attending departmental curriculum meetings, and being proactive in their engagement with departmental activities.
- We recommend the Boulder Faculty Assembly (BFA) set expectations for faculty mentoring and engagement and the role of faculty in supporting student success outside the classroom. We suggest the BFA partner with the Campus Advising Executive Council to integrate faculty into the full scope of advising roles and to define and distinguish faculty mentoring from the role of a professional advisor.
- We support the ideas generated from initial conversation with the BFA Executive Committee, including the potential inclusion of retired faculty and the use of incentives; with regard to the latter, a menu of incentive options could be particularly helpful in meeting the needs of different academic units, e.g. extra research dollars vs. a course release.
- We also support the approach taken in the College of Music to designate a portion of the service requirement to advising-related duties and encourage that model where that aligns with departmental goals.

7) Be strategic and intentional in considering our physical advising spaces.

- The physicality of advising space impacts the student experience; it should be welcoming, comfortable, and accessible.
- We must balance the need for student privacy with workspace flexibility (e.g., office sharing with non-overlapping office work schedules, modular layouts that can be easily revised over time, etc.).
- When possible, co-locate advisors in a given disciplinary group, in proximity to academic units.
- Develop an “Advising Help Lab” based on student feedback and input, which can function as a cross-disciplinary resource in an open setting, akin to a Math Help Lab or Writing Help Lab.
- The campus Strategic Facilities Visioning (SFV) framework should incorporate and align with physicality needs for academic advising.

8) Adopt a consistent position and salary structure, including a career ladder and an emphasis on training and professionalization.

- Adopt a common position structure and compensation strategy to address lingering disparities and to place existing staff into appropriate levels with accompanying salary adjustments.
- To provide optimal service to students, we must commit to the ongoing professional development and the well-being of advisors in order to create a highly-trained and stable advising corps.
- Professionalization of the advising corps should become our campus standard, with staff expected to engage in an array of professional growth and development activities. Advising programs should capitalize on the use of technology for continuous improvement.

- Formalize a career ladder, including opportunities to advance while still remaining primarily student-facing. We envision a career ladder that does not require moving away from students and toward supervision in order to move “up.” We strongly believe these opportunities will help limit advisor burnout and turnover, which are key disruptors to the student experience.
- New advisor training should be managed at the campus level to avoid duplication of services and ensure consistency and breadth of training. It should address the expectation of the professional staff advisor as first-point-of-contact and source of holistic student support. Centralized training does *not* take the place of department-specific training; rather, it should be coordinated with and augmented by more specialized training in individual advising programs. This training model should be extended to faculty mentors and peer advisors as well.
- Campus-wide training must include unconscious bias training and ongoing development around diversity issues. While we are aware of many examples of advisors being proactive with underrepresented students, e.g. guiding them towards an honors thesis or highlighting a multitude of opportunities available to exceptional students, some students of color and first-generation students have reported subtle bias by academic advisors and felt they were not encouraged to find minors, majors, certificates or other opportunities in more demanding fields.
- We recommend the Office of Undergraduate Education incorporate a campus-level training position to develop materials, coordinate professional development opportunities, and offer support to individual units.
- 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. Advisors can support faculty teaching first-year courses by offering insight and suggestions for working through some of the common challenges to the student transition from high school to college.

9) Develop a holistic student success ecosystem through a formal liaison structure.

- Academic coaching is a key partner to academic advising and we recommend embedding academic coaches into advising and other student support programs. With a holistic advising/coaching role for first-year advisors, and growing use of peer academic coaches and peer advisors, we believe the connection to academic coaching can be well leveraged throughout the student experience.
- The mentoring and student support offered through special academic programs (such as the McNeill Program, Athletics, etc.) should be defined and coordinated with academic advising.
- In partnership with International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), each advising unit should identify a staff member to serve as a specialist in supporting international students. This may require new positions to be distributed among advising programs or could be managed by current roles within the units. These hybrid roles should be formally charged with supporting colleagues on best practices with international students and should formally liaise with ISSS.
- We recommend regular interaction with Enrollment Management, including between advisors and staff in the Registrar’s Office, Financial Aid, and Admissions. One goal should be defining best practice protocol for referrals across all groups. Another should be improved partnership with Scholarship Services so advisors can be mindful of enrollment and credit requirements.
- Collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs is critical, specifically with Career Services. We recommend an integrated approach with Career Services and suggest that the various embedded models currently employed in CEAS, Leeds, and Continuing Education be made the standard, as they have successfully integrated academic and career support for students.

- There are many other partnerships that underlie advisors' ability to recommend co-curricular opportunities aligning with students' academic and professional interests. We recommend that communication to students about these many opportunities be personalized, coordinated, and streamlined, making use of diverse means of content delivery.
- In order to develop a more holistic and consistent strategy around the student experience outside the classroom, advising assessment should be aligned with assessment strategies employed in the Division of Student Affairs and elsewhere.

Next steps

The largest financial impact of implementing a new approach to academic advising involves 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 phased implementation plan. We seek the support of the Financial Futures initiative in this effort. Assuming these recommendations are adopted, the Office of Undergraduate Education will coordinate with stakeholders on the first phase of implementation and with Strategic Relations and Communication on awareness campaigns. Change management will be a key component in successful implementation and will be a combined effort across all advising programs and key stakeholders.

Appendix A: Vision and Mission Statements

Vision Statement

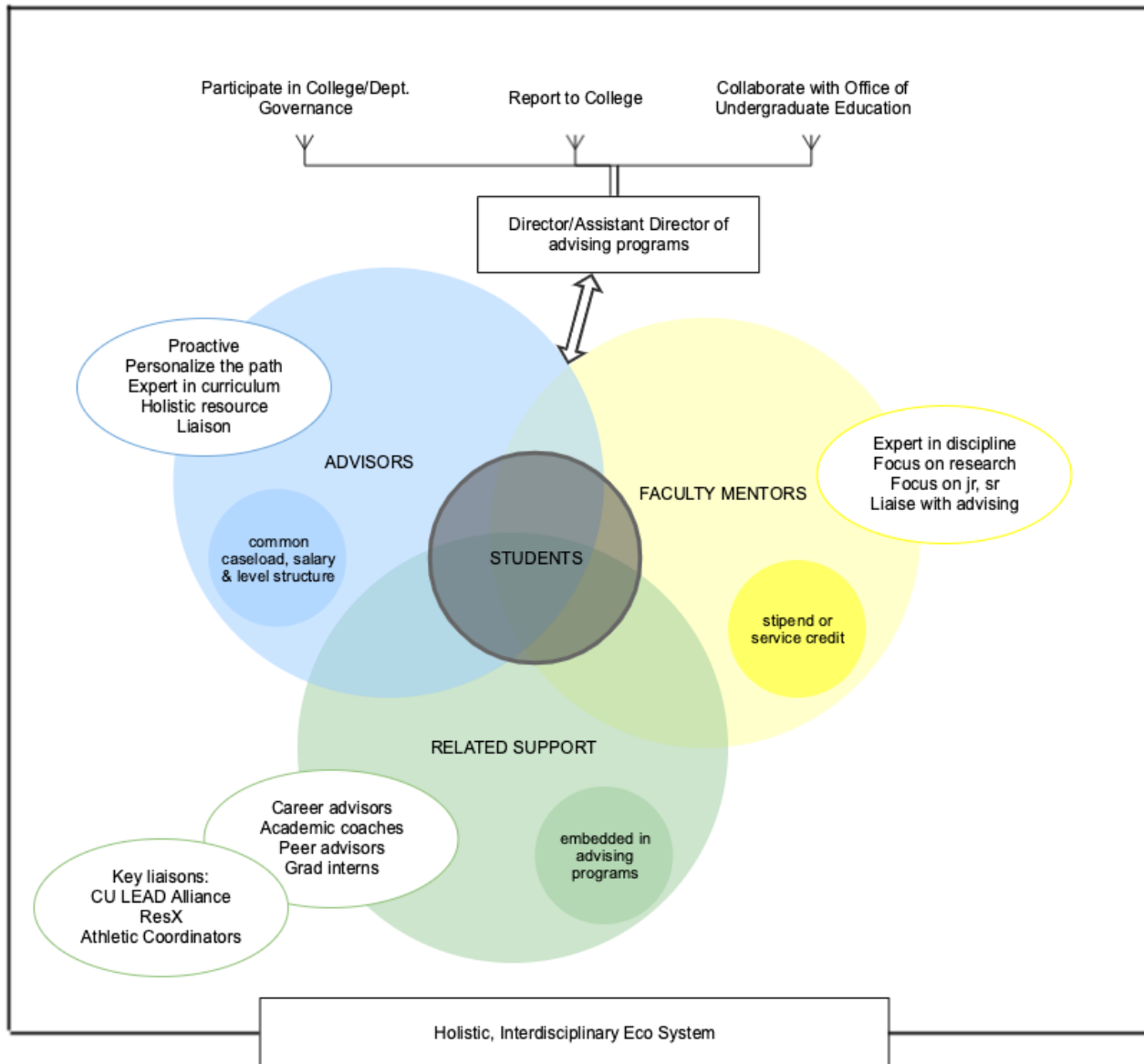
We believe every student deserves high quality, comprehensive, and personalized academic advising to help them reach their full potential. As a Tier 1 research university, CU Boulder offers many opportunities to students but also presents navigational challenges. We offer an exceptional, cohesive advising experience that guides students through the complexity of the university while advocating for them, and also empowering them to take 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 communities; they connect students to a comprehensive set of services and programs designed to enhance their experience. Advisors offer an unparalleled level of service and promote an inclusive environment designed to help all students attain their academic goals.

Appendix B: Advising Roles

A holistic and interdisciplinary ecosystem of advising is comprised of multiple roles working in concert to support students. With students at the center, several complementary roles exist: advisors, faculty, and key related support, both embedded within advising programs (academic coaches, peer advisors) and serving as key liaisons (LEAD Alliance, Athletics, Residence Life). This ecosystem is overseen by advising directors, assistant directors, and assistant/associate deans who report to the colleges, participate in college governance, and collaborate with the Office of Undergraduate Education.



Appendix C: Departmental/Disciplinary Caseload Rubric

Devote 2 hours to each student each semester (majors/primary majors):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual appointments • drop-in availability • email advising • prep, research, notes, etc.
600 hours in a semester:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~67% individual student availability if caseload of 200 • ~80% individual student availability if caseload of 250
Remaining 20%-33% of time:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proactive outreach • administrative (updating degree audits, web sites, generating list of tentative graduates, mass messaging, projects, etc.) • college/dept duties • staff/faculty meetings • professional development • teaching • prospective students, minors
= 200 students with 1.5 appts/semester on average	

Note: while this is an attempt to standardize caseloads, we recognize that individual programs/colleges/schools would customize their caseload rubric based on number of majors, additional majors, minors, specific requirements, and other factors unique to their particular circumstances.