

Follow the Yellow Brick Road: Advising - A Roadmap to Student Retention

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Introduction

Imagine being Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, waking up in an unfamiliar place with no landmarks, no friends, no IDEA of where you are and how to get somewhere else. This is probably what it feels like for many first-time UW students—freshman, transfer, and non-trads alike.

Upon the recommendation of the university's Academic Advising Review Committee, the University of Wyoming administration developed and set in place the Centers for Advising in each academic unit. These Centers are linked by a common cause: providing comprehensive advising for every student on the University of Wyoming campus.

Beginning in the Summer of 2018, professional academic advisors were hired and placed in the Centers to assist students in navigating their educational experience. These advisors compliment the faculty by completing the more menial paperwork tasks, providing more access to the student body, and a more holistic approach to advising.

This is an approach we believe will lead to student retention and more successful graduation rates.

Objectives

With this presentation, we present the correlation between advising and student retention. We also present the positive outcomes collaboration between faculty, staff, and students provides.



Materials and Methods

WHAT IS ACADEMIC ADVISING?

The definition of “Academic Advising” lacks a cohesive meaning (NACADA Journal, Volume 38(2), 2018). In their article “What is Academic Advising? An Application of Analytic Induction” Larson, Johnson, Aiken-Wisniewski, and Barkmeyer, they found “that lack of a universal or corroborated definition of academic advising complicated discussions of it.” The materials they researched did not share a common understanding, purpose or activity. Those interviewed defined advising differently. Across university campuses, advising is recognized as a unique role in higher education (Cook, 2009). There are as many definitions of advising as there are munchkins in the Oz. For this presentation, we will say “advising is a tool that contributes to the institutional mission for student success (NACADA Journal, Volume 38(2), 2018).

WHY ACADEMIC ADVISING?

Many students enter college totally unprepared for the college experience. This lack of preparation ranges from academic preparedness to being unprepared for stepping into adulthood and being able to navigate through the college system alone. Many come are first generation students whose parents have had no idea how to prepare them for college-life. Some come from schools that have not truly prepared them for the academic goals they are going to face (Patrick, Furlow, Donovan, Using A Comprehensive Academic Intervention Program in the Retention of High-Risk Students). Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980) indicate that approximately 50 percent of an entering freshman class at a four-year college will remain by the end of the fourth year.

In his article, The Professional Advisor, Joseph Migden discusses the value of including professional advisors in an overall advising program. He states, “While improving student retention has become a major objective for many college and universities faced with declining enrollments, literature related to student retention indicates that quality advising programs can result in lower attrition rates (Thomas and Andes; 1987; Habley, 1981).

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING ADVISING CENTERS

In the summer of 2018, Centers for Academic Advising, in varying formats, were opened in each college. Armed with Advising Managers, some centers hired senior and junior professional advisors, some retained faculty advisors, some are implementing faculty mentors but all have a single goal: meeting the various advising needs of students enrolled at the University of Wyoming. Within the College of Engineering and Applied Science, The Center for Academic Advising is centrally located on the main floor.

To achieve cohesiveness across campus, all advisors:

- Are required to complete a four-level advising training program contained in Advising Modules housed and created in the Advising, Career, Exploratory Studies Center (ACES).
 - Support the NACADA Core Competencies. According to NACADA, “The purpose of the model is to identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising, to guide professional development, and to promote the contributions of advising to student development, progress and success.”
 - There are also in-person trainings offered throughout the academic year that provide more in-depth and individualized learning and professional development.
 - Advisors have also attended resource fairs across campus to become familiar with other programs on campus that deal with student success, such as the Veteran's Office, SOAR, ACES, Career Counseling, the STEP program, etc.
- Manage a caseload of approximately 200 students. A number of advanced students remained with their faculty advisor. In the future, faculty mentors will play an essential part of career planning.
- Senior advisors are also liaisons who attend faculty curriculum meetings and seek advice from the department heads and undergraduate coordinators.
- The advising period has been expanded from one week of 15 minute meetings to approximately three weeks of meaningful meetings where more than just the course schedule and giving of the PERC occurs.
- Responsibilities are targeted toward supporting the success of undergraduate students by implementing current research and best-practices directed towards: increasing retention and persistence, assisting students with degree planning and completion, course selection, examining options aligned with their personal, academic and professional goals, and discussing strategies to be successful scholars and professionals.
- Advisors guide students through decision-making processes and urge them to use problem-solving and evaluation skills. Detailed records management is a critical component of this position, as is the willingness to successfully assist students through their programs by being supportive and maintaining confidentiality.

Results

An advising survey was sent out at the end of the Fall 2018 semester. As this was our first semester as an advising center, we expected mixed reviews. Approximately, 278 students read the emailed survey, with 80 +/- providing responses to 14 advising-related questions. Over half responded they were satisfied with the Advising Center and/or advisors. We anticipate being able to provide more assessment reports in the future that will guide in further decision-making.

Conclusions

On her journey to find OZ, Dorothy found companions to help her along the way. She had her faithful dog, Toto perhaps a symbol of family. She also found the Lion, a symbol of courage, the Tin-Man, a symbol of compassion, and the Scarecrow, a symbol of education. - finding a brain.

As academic advisors, we are the companions providing many of the same things as the Lion, Tin-man, and Scarecrow in the student's pursuit of an education and beyond that, a career.

We assist students with academic plans consistent with their interests and abilities; provide current and accurate curricular information; interpret academic policies such as repeats for change of grade, academic reassessment, and degree requirements and serve as referrals to other institutional services such as placement and registration.

References

- NACADA Journal, Volume 38(2) 2018
NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2017). NACADA academic advising core competencies Model. Retrieved from <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/CoreCompetencies.aspx>

Web articles:

Using a Comprehensive Academic Intervention Program in the Retention of High-Risk Students, Patrick, Furlow and Donovan



Contact Information

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