

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ADVISING CENTER

PROGRAM REVIEW

A five member review team composed of Nancy S. King, Chair; Charlie L. Nutt; Angela D. Allen; Miriam Z. Langsam; and Joshua S. Smith visited IUPUI on May 8 and 9, 2006 charged with conducting a review of the University College Advising Center (UCAC). In advance of our visit we received the extremely comprehensive Self-Study developed by the UCAC and a list of questions that will be addressed in this report. During our visit we were very impressed with University College (UC) and in particular the Advising Center that serves more than 6300 students. The Center is indeed the centerpiece of UC and overall seems to be working well. During the two-day visit the review team had the opportunity to meet with various campus constituencies that have varying levels of interaction with the UCAC. We were encouraged to hear that these groups view their relationship with the Center in a positive light. The role of the academic advisors is perceived to be very important to transitioning freshmen into the degree-granting schools. In addition, the individuals we met with all recognized the complexity of the advisors' jobs since IUPUI has no core curriculum and therefore it is necessary for the advisors to have knowledge of over 180 degree programs. A common theme that ran through all of our meetings was that the UCAC had indeed improved student satisfaction with advising since its creation in 1997.

DEFINITION/ PHILOSOPHY OF ADVISING

While there is a clear mission statement for the UCAC, the team does not find that there is a universally agreed upon definition of the nature and purpose of academic advising. Although advisors, administrators, and staff use the terms “prescriptive” and “developmental” to describe their advising, there appeared to be very little consensus or ability to describe exactly what advising means in University College. What we heard clearly from the students we met during the review was the importance of establishing a relationship with the advisor. As one student said, “I think it’s important to feel like you matter to advisors so that you are comfortable going to them when you need help.” Overwhelmingly they supported the idea of having a specific assigned advisor who would know them as individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Develop a clear and widely articulated philosophy statement that defines exactly what academic advising means in the context of University College. Specifically all advisors, administrators, staff, and students should understand the nature and purpose of the academic advising experience. We suggest that the development of this statement should be one of the first projects given to a proposed Advising Council. Furthermore we recommend that the Executive Vice Chancellor make the appointments to this group in order to give it appropriate clout. We also recommend that the Council be chaired by the Director of the UCAC.
- 2) Explore the possibility of assigning specific advisors within the UCAC. Certainly the accessibility of advisors is important and is currently provided for

through walk-in advising, emails, and evening and weekend hours; but there would be value in having an assigned advisor who might be able to establish a relationship with the advisee. One possible approach is to assign the learning community instructor as the primary advisor for the students in his or her sections.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO LEARNING COMMUNITIES

- 1) The learning communities offer excellent opportunities for developmental advising to occur; however, there needs to be better training of the learning community teams (instructor, advisor, peer mentor) so that there is a clear understanding of advising goals.
- 2) Address the problem of students not being able to get into learning communities. Currently approximately 15-20% of students are unable to get into a community during their first semester at IUPUI. Often students from high-risk backgrounds or who experience barriers to college success tend to enroll late. In addition students who are awarded conditional admission to IUPUI are normally at the bottom 6% of their high school graduating class and these high-risk students are sometimes left without a learning community assignment because of their late registration. A long-term recommendation is to create some special sections to accommodate these students. A short-term option is to set aside some seats in each learning community for these students who are most in need of intervention.
- 3) As mentioned previously the ideal would be for the learning community advisor to be the assigned advisor for the students in the community and to remain as those students' advisors for the entire first-year experience.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The unit has developed a set of very clear and ambitious student learning outcomes and advisor outcomes for the academic advising in University College. While the data provides some initial indications that outcomes are met, in actuality the surveys utilized only respond to the advisor outcomes. The data for demonstration of achieving student learning outcomes is limited because it primarily uses student perceptions and there is little evidence that real learning has occurred. As a result, the team does not feel that the student learning outcomes have been met. The team did not find that the interactions between the advisors and students intentionally support the achievement of the learning outcomes because in our meeting with the advisors they seemed unaware that the learning outcomes exist and they did not appear to understand how their interactions with students should be providing the instruction for teaching the outcomes. The assumptions made by the advisors that they are “meeting the outcomes without really focusing on them” indicates that there needs to be work done to intentionally design learning experiences for students in individual advising sessions, group advising, and the learning communities that focus specifically on the stated learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Advisor development needs to be more closely tied to learner outcomes so that advisors understand clearly the role they play in the teaching and learning relationship that characterizes the most meaningful advisor-student interactions. When advisors see advising as teaching and know the outcomes they want students to achieve, they can be more intentional about structuring advising activities in such a way that true learning occurs.

- 2) A major element of successfully meeting student learner outcomes is the clear articulation of the outcomes to students. There are a variety of ways to accomplish this articulation. The team recommends that the UCAC consider developing a common advising syllabus that would include the desired learning outcomes and the activities and experiences that would insure that students meet the outcomes.
- 3) The team strongly supports the integration of career planning and the UCAC. Ideally the Career Development staff will be housed with the advising center once the new Campus Center is completed and more space is available in University College. We also recommend that closer attention be paid to those students who are not admitted to some of the more competitive fields. Clearly they need assistance in making alternative career plans and identifying a suitable academic program.

FACILITATION OF STUDENT TRANSITION TO THE SCHOOLS

The UCAC appears to be doing an excellent job of moving students into the degree-granting schools in a very timely manner. The “56 hour rule” does seem to work and we heard several of the representatives from the schools remark that “the hand-off to the schools is very smooth.” If there is a downside, it is the strong focus on “moving them out to the schools” without perhaps spending enough time with developmental advising and career guidance to ensure that they will be making an appropriate choice of major. In addition, there does not seem to be a formal process for transitioning students from University College to the degree-granting schools. Although this is not currently seen as problematic, it would serve all constituencies well if the UCAC initiated a more

formalized process that involved paperwork or preferably computer programming support to facilitate the transition process in the future.

The team heard extremely favorable comments about the value of the joint advisor positions that play a dual role as part-time advisors in UCAC and part-time advisors in the schools. Indeed these joint positions provide a much needed continuity between the UC and the schools.

REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

The review team was impressed with the comprehensive nature of the data collection and analysis provided in the Assessment section of the self-study. The report provided several inquiry questions that guided the assessment process for 2005-2006. Conversations with leadership indicate that an Assessment Committee has been formed and that they played an active role in developing learning outcomes and commenting on the development of surveys and focus group protocols. We are encouraged that the Assessment Committee will lead conversations with advisors and University College at-large regarding the findings of the current assessment.

The overall impression of the Assessment report is favorable and we would like to congratulate University College for devoting extensive time and energy on research and assessment. In particular, each section of the Assessment report follows a systematic procedure in accordance with APA. It is notable that the researcher provided factor analysis results for the major surveys and intentionally notes limitations, many of which are common in assessment in higher education settings.

According to the results of the assessment, students advised in University College Advising Center are more satisfied with advising now than they reported in 1999. The

review team was not provided with comparative results for peer institution, but the consensus of the team was that IUPUI students' rating of satisfaction and importance of advising processes were equal to or greater than students at similar institutions. For example Table 7 shows that the average scores on the subscale hover around the 4-point mark on the scale. *Interaction* and *knowledgeable* subscales were rated the highest, which aligns with student reports of importance. (See Table 8). The learning gain analyses in Part 4 were intriguing and we encourage University College to continue this type of research design. Gains were greatest in the areas of Goal Setting Efficacy, Career Decision Making Efficacy, and Engagement. A closer examination of the pre-test, post-test items gains suggests that students are more confident in their ability to function logistically in the academic arena. However, it should be noted that the greatest gain emerged on the item "I have an academic plan for the next year." This reflects what the UCAC advisors told the team: the majority of their advising time is spent with prescriptive advising.

There were some concerns about the multiple regression analyses modeling. For example, in Part 3, the results show that linear regressions were run to isolate the factors explaining variation on advising outcomes. Independently, each analysis could hold up under the weight of measurement error inherent in the survey. However, when conducting multiple comparisons, it is recommended that one control for experiment-wise error rates to avoid against inflated p-values. A second limitation appeared in the qualitative analysis. It is not clear what philosophy and practice were adhered to when codes were identified and themes generated. For example in Table 15 the response "They helped me out in regards to what classes I needed and didn't waste my time" could be coded as "Helpful," but was used as an example for Schedule/Class/Major (p. 29).

Furthermore, the counting of codes to generate descriptive statistics needs to be supported by a philosophical approach to qualitative analysis. The review team found it aligned with a postpositivist approach. While understanding the time constraints associated with conducting qualitative analyses, we recommend a concerted effort to move the approach further down toward the qualitative end of the quantitative-qualitative continuum.

We are encouraged with the effort and findings in the Assessment report, the review team is concerned about (a) insuring that results are used for decision making, and (b) the extent to which assessment activities will be sustained. Given the time constraints we heard throughout the review, we question who will be responsible for conducting assessment data collection and analysis once Michele Hansen is pulled back to assist with other University College reviews and assessment work. Additionally, we questioned whether there is the internal capacity to develop and pursue inquiry questions not included in the current Assessment report.

Assessment Recommendations

1) The review suggests that the Assessment committee begin to develop action inquiry questions to assess the extent to which advising services and future changes in advising processes impact students and advisors. For example, during our visit we heard discussion and ideas about changes in the following: group advising vs. individual appointments in orientation, requiring advisor signature/password for the entire year students, assigning advisors, and evaluating the STAR program intervention and student preferences for advising (e.g. nontraditional vs. traditional).

2) The bulk of the assessments focus on student perceptions of the advising processes and advising outcomes. The analysis of learning community participation and subsequent outcomes most closely aligns with an intervention study. Since the learning community is the medium where developmental advising is most likely to occur and be fostered, we recommend that future studies examine student work related to academic advising. This qualitative analysis will provide demonstrable evidence that students are meeting the stated learning outcomes in advising.

3) We strongly encourage the Director and the Assessment committee to insure that the findings of the self-study play an active role in staff development and decision making. In addition to retreats and staff meetings in the upcoming year, discuss ways in which the vast amounts of data and analysis will be used to help advisors, advising leadership, and administrators make decisions in the next five years.

4) The scope of the data collection and depth of analyses was almost overwhelming for a service unit to digest and act upon. It would have been preferable to incorporate some of the tables and general findings within the body of the self study (as opposed to the appendices) supported by a summary of major findings. While not your intent, placing the entire Assessment report in the back of the document suggests that Assessment occurred after practice, rather than as an integral component to effective advising practice.

STRUCTURE AND WORKLOAD

The structure on the organizational chart is a bit confusing and does not seem to reflect what actually exists. For example, the faculty group is listed at the top of the chart

which implies they are involved in the management of University College when, in fact, they seem to be acting currently in a purely advisory role. Also it is not advisable for an Assistant Dean to be reporting to another Assistant Dean because it sends a message about the importance of one area over another. In addition, the organizational chart does not seem to reflect the central role that the advising center plays in University College. Otherwise the structure appears to be appropriate. Far less satisfactory is the workload of the UCAC advisors. Their duties seem especially heavy in the fall semester for they are carrying on average four to five learning communities in addition to devoting time to walk-ins, appointments, committee work and maintaining their professional knowledge base. Considering the fact that IUPUI does not have a core curriculum but rather unique requirements for different schools and even programs within schools, the advisors must absorb a tremendous amount of information about requirements, changes, deletions and additions of programs. Given the workload and the fact that the salary for advisors in UCAC have historically been substantially lower than advisors in the schools it is not surprising that there is significant turnover in the UCAC. We understand the salary issue is being addressed and we applaud that effort; however, we also understand that the way the salaries are to be raised hinged on the elimination of a position within the Center.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Ideally we would like to see more advisor positions added to the UCAC, but understanding that resources are an issue, at the very least we recommend that there be no additional cuts. Any additional cuts would have a very negative effect on the advising service provided to students. We also suggest that you explore the possibility of adding an advising fee as a way of funding additional positions. Several colleges and universities have instituted such

fees successfully. In addition, we recommend that you investigate the feasibility of having some of the departments participate in cost-sharing as a way of recouping some costs involved with the joint advisors while continuing to provide this extremely valuable collaboration.

- 2) The “burnout” problem among advisors needs to be addressed. Raising the salary will certainly go a long way towards accomplishing this goal. In addition, we understand that a group is studying the possibility of a “career ladder” and that will help with the burnout as well.
- 3) Advisors should be encouraged, mentored and rewarded for their scholarship in the academic advising profession. There are a variety of professional development experiences beyond conference attendance and presentations. For example, there are publication opportunities in various advising publications such as the *NACADA Journal*, the NACADA quarterly *Academic Advising Today*, the *NACADA Clearinghouse*, and *The Mentor*, an electronic journal out of Penn State.

TECHNOLOGY

The team finds that the UCAC is making effective use of technology in a multitude of ways to enhance the advising experience. In addition to direct use with students (web pages, online information, email correspondence, and instant messaging), the center has planned strategically for the use of technology to streamline and improve the processes and procedures of advising. The team encourages the unit to continue this strategic planning and implementation of technology to streamline the advising process.

RECOMMENDATION

One area that the team recommends that the UCAC explore is utilizing the On-Course CL for the learning community instructional teams in the development and planning of these courses and their student learning outcomes.

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION ADVISING

The advisors seem to be disappointed with the advising that occurs during New Student Orientation. Students, on the other hand, report being satisfied with the process. Perhaps the explanation for the students' satisfaction is that they end their one-day experience with a finalized class schedule, and clearly students associate advising with scheduling. In contrast, the advisors' frustration with orientation advising may lie in the fact that they are unable to allocate a sufficient amount of time to each individual student. Of necessity the advising during orientation is primarily prescriptive in nature. On most campuses one-day orientations are generally chaotic and somewhat rushed. There are some ways, however, to improve the orientation advising that we suggest you consider.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) One way to offer students who need more time devoted to advising and to streamline the process during orientation is to provide opportunities for incoming students to meet with an advisor prior to the day of orientation. We suggest that you pilot this with a group of students during some defined days and times.
- 2) Revise the JAG 101 handout to include a diagram that reflects the definition of advising and a flow of what happens when. A special distinction needs to be made between advising and course scheduling. From the very outset

students need to be educated about the purpose and goals of academic advising that go beyond simply scheduling classes.

- 3) Emphasize the importance of a follow-up advising appointment after orientation. This appointment should be separate from registration and should deal with the “bigger” advising issues such as goal setting, career exploration, and decision-making skills.

HIGH-RISK STUDENTS

As reflected in the Self Study, Students Taking Academic Responsibility (STAR) is an intervention program in the UCAC to assist students on first-time probation. This program provides resources to low-performing students to assist them in improving their academic success at IUPUI. Besides advising, this appears to be the only program specifically directed at assisting high-risk students. In order to increase the retention rate, especially among students from high-risk backgrounds, there must be more interaction with these students *before* they are placed on probation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Use the mid-term grade reports as an opportunity to bring these students in to meet with an advisor to suggest specific ways to improve academic success and to engage in true developmental advising.
- 2) Consider assigning one or two advisors in the UCAC to the at-risk group. These advisors should be well trained in the characteristics of the high-risk student and the resources that they can be referred to for assistance. Most importantly there must be an emphasis on follow-up with these students. Having these advising “specialists” work with the low performing students

will provide an enhanced opportunity for these students to build a relationship with a caring representative of the university—an important factor for all students but especially for those who are most at-risk.

- 3) As recommended previously we strongly believe the high-risk students, who often enroll late, need to be in a learning community during their first semester. You may elect to establish some sections that target high-risk students or to save back some seats in all sections to accommodate these who are most in need of support.

ROLE OF UCAC CAMPUSWIDE

The review team believes that the UCAC needs to play a larger role in advising across campus. Clearly the overall advising delivery system is very decentralized and that is most appropriate in a large, complex institution like IUPUI. Nevertheless, there needs to be a central “voice” or advocate for academic advising and in the opinion of the team the UCAC is poised to fill that role. One of the major advantages would be a heightened awareness of the meaning and value of academic advising throughout the university. Certainly the use of joint appointment advisors has helped to raise the visibility and understanding of advising, but there is more that the UCAC could do if it were to become the “hub” of advising at IUPUI.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The UCAC will need to improve communication across campus in order to become the centralized voice for advising in an appropriately decentralized system. One recommendation for accomplishing this communication is an

Advisor Newsletter which can be either print or electronic. Examples of features to include in the newsletter are “tips for getting the most out of advising appointments,” an “advisor spotlight” with interviews with particularly outstanding advisors about suggestions they have for becoming an effective advisor or a listing of the responsibilities of advisors and students in the advising relationship.

2) During our visit we heard several comments about the advising workshops conducted by the UCAC and made available to faculty and staff. Clearly these workshops can offer guidance and professional development to advisors throughout the university, both faculty and full-time advisors. We encourage the UCAC to continue providing this training and indeed to increase the awareness and opportunities of campus advisors to participate. Having the support of central administration, Deans and department heads would help in increasing the numbers of advisors who attend the workshops.

3) As indicated earlier in this report, the team very much supports the creation of an Advising Council with representation from all areas of the University. Having the Director of the UCAC Chair this Council would help to further establish the center as the central hub of advising at IUPUI. During our visit we heard many very positive comments about the leadership provided by Dr. Buyarski in her role as Director of the UCAC. The review team is convinced that her leadership needs to be extended more widely as Chair of a campus-wide advising council.

Finally, we very much enjoyed our visit to your fine university. IUPUI has much to be proud of and certainly University College and its Advising Center are outstanding additions to your campus. We were especially impressed by the openness of those with whom we met and the respect that people on your campus have for the UCAC. It was apparent to us from both our meetings with various groups and the impressive Self-Study that advising for the population served by UCAC has definitely improved since the creation of the Center. Clearly it has benefited from excellent leadership and a willingness on the part of the staff to continue to improve. Like all institutions, there are some areas where improvements can be made. We sincerely hope that our observations and recommendations will be helpful as you seek to make an excellent program even better and to facilitate student success at IUPUI.