BEST PRACTICES IN STUDENT ADVISING

August 2015

In the following report, Hanover Research presents best practices in structuring and delivering advising services. This review includes insights from the research literature and interviews with topic experts. The report concludes with profiles identifying key features, initiatives, and challenges of advising services at several specific institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Student advising is a core function of higher education institutions and, in recent years, institutions have increasingly turned to academic advising to improve student retention and success.[1] Moreover, survey data suggest that students rate academic advising as one of the most critical aspects of the college experience.[2] In light of the importance of academic advising for students' educational experience and outcomes, institutions have undertaken diverse strategies to ensure that their advising practices fully support students, especially students from at-risk student populations, throughout their educational career.

In this report, Hanover Research reviews best practices for structuring and delivering student advising services, including both academic and financial aid advising. This report will aid institutions in evaluating the effectiveness of current advising practices and developing strategies to enhance advising services. Hanover's review draws insights from the research literature on effective advising practices, as well as interviews with experts in the field. This report concludes with detailed profiles of the advising models employed at three specific institutions.

The report comprises the following two sections:

- **Section I: Best Practices in Student Advising** reviews the research literature on general principles for effective student advising, including nationwide data on the most common advising models and practices at U.S. institutions. This section also discusses strategies for providing effective advising services to student populations at greater risk for attrition.
- **Section II: Advising Services at Individual Institutions** profiles the advising services at three specific institutions. In each profile, Hanover provides an overview of the institution's model for structuring advising services, along with descriptions of any notably unique or successful practices. Profiled institutions include:
  - Boise State University
  - Kennesaw State University
  - University of Northern Iowa

[1] [1] Doubleday, J. "With an Eye Toward Retention, Colleges Amp Up Advising." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 2, 2013. https://chronicle.com/article/Under-Pressure-to-Hit-Learning/143303/
[2] Habley, W.R. and R. McClanahan. "What Works in Student Retention? Four-Year Public Colleges." *ACT, Inc.*, 2004. p. 7. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515398
[2] "Academic Advising Highly Important to Students." Noel-Levitz, 2009. https://www.noellevitz.com/documents/shared/Papers_and_Research/2009/AcademicAdvisingHighlyImportant09.pdf

KEY FINDINGS

- **There are three broad models for delivering academic advising services, with the most popular model splitting advising duties between a centralized office and academic units.** These three models are:
  - **Decentralized**: all academic advising is performed by faculty or staff members in individual colleges or departments
  - **Centralized**: all academic advising is performed by professional advising staff located in a central administrative office
  - **Shared**: advising duties are shared among professional advising staff and faculty.
- **Nationwide, many mid-sized public institutions tend to employ a shared model.** Among these institutions, the most common model is for the institution to advise undeclared students through a central office, while students who have declared a major are assigned a faculty or staff advisor in their academic college or department. According to nationwide data, the number of full-time professional advisors employed at mid-sized public institutions generally falls between four and 15.
- **Although intensive or "intrusive" advising can benefit all students, this strategy is particularly effective for student populations with historically lower retention rates.** Intensive/intrusive advising strategies include more mandatory contact and multiple communication streams between students and advisors, as well as early-alert systems that trigger advising services when students show signs of struggling. Both expert recommendations and observational research suggest that these strategies can improve retention rates among adult/non-traditional students, transfer students, and low-income/first-generation students.
- **Although there is no agreed-upon ideal caseload for academic advisors, institutions should consider tradeoffs between breadth and intensiveness of advising services as well as resource constraints.** At most mid-sized institutions, average caseloads for full-time professional advisors fall between 170 and 848. Experts in the field of academic advising recommend adapting caseloads to the particular needs of an institution's students and the range of services the institution wishes to provide. However, lower caseloads do require additional staff resources, so institutions must consider resource constraints in determining caseloads.
- **Inter-departmental professional development workshops are an effective means to promote collaboration and knowledge between academic and financial aid offices.** Workshops and presentations in which financial aid staff inform academic advisors about financial aid policies and procedures can improve academic advisors' ability to identify and support students who may need additional assistance with financial aid.

SECTION I: BEST PRACTICES IN STUDENT ADVISING

In this section, Hanover Research reviews best practices in academic and financial aid advising for students at higher education institutions. These best practices are drawn from the research literature on academic and financial aid advising, and address organizational and staffing models along with recommendations for providing adequate support for particular student populations. In addition, Hanover uses survey data collected by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and the educational nonprofit ACT to identify common practices.

Hanover's research on this topic suggests that the existing body of research on academic advising is considerably more robust than that regarding financial aid advising. Consequently, although this review discusses strategies for both academic and financial aid advising, the former receives greater emphasis. However, given that these two types of advising share a number of fundamental goals, many principles of best practice for academic advising (e.g., manageable caseloads and targeted services for at-risk populations) are likely to be similarly effective when applied to financial aid advising.

In preparing this report, Hanover conducted a number of interviews with experts in the field of student advising, including senior advising professionals at several specific institutions. We rely on the insights of the following experts throughout the remainder of the report:

- **Kristan Venegas** is associate professor of clinical education and research associate in the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California.[3]
- **Tomas Baiza** is director of academic and career services at Boise State University.[4]
- **Chris Hutt** is director of the Center for New, Exploratory, and Students in Transition at Kennesaw State University.[5]
- **David Marchesani** is associate director of academic advising at the University of Northern Iowa.[6]

[3] Venegas, Kristan. Associate Professor of Clinical Education and Research Associate, Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, University of Southern California. Telephone Interview. May 28, 2015. Dr. Venegas is a nationally-recognized expert on both academic and financial aid advising, having published widely on best practices in advising low-income, first-generation, and minority students. She has also worked professionally as both an academic advisor and financial aid advisor.

[4] Baiza, Tomas. Director of Academic and Career Services. Telephone Interview. May 27, 2015.

[5] Hutt, Chris. Director, Center for New, Exploratory, and Students in Transition, Kennesaw State University. Telephone Interview. May 27, 2015.

[6] Marchesani, David. Associate Director of Academic Advising, University of Northern Iowa. Telephone Interview. May 28, 2015.

ADVISING AND STUDENT RETENTION

As noted in the introduction to this report, advising and related services are at the core of many institutions' strategies for improving student retention. The centrality of advising initiatives to retention efforts is evident in the results of nationwide surveys conducted by ACT in 2003 and 2008. These surveys asked administrators at four-year public institutions to identify retention practices at their institutions and rate each practice's contribution to retention. Both surveys found that administrators believed advising initiatives (including academic advising centers, increased advising staff, and advising interventions for selected student populations) made the greatest contributions to retention.[7]

However, the fact that administrators *believe* advising programs to be effective retention strategies does not establish that these initiatives actually increase retention. In fact, as reviewed below, **although there is some theoretical and correlational support for the idea that effective advising improves retention, research has not established a firm causal relationship**.[8]

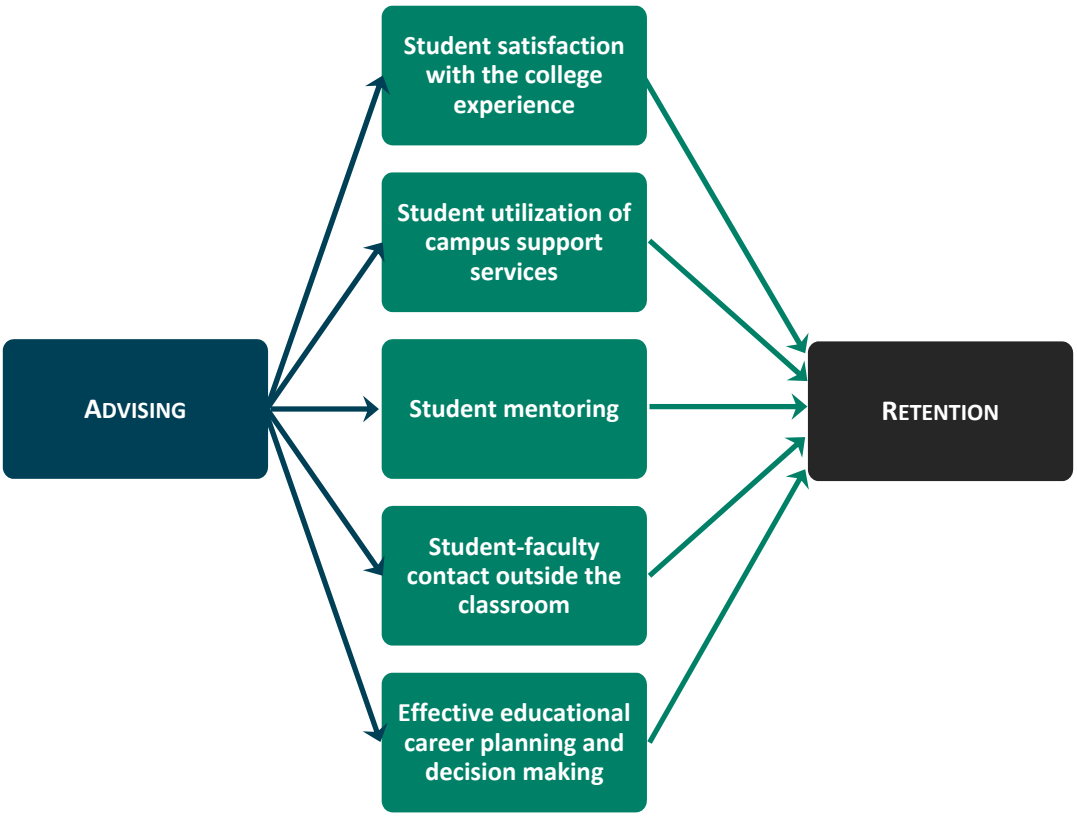
In a 2003 review of the literature on academic advising and student retention, Joe Cuseo of Marymount College identifies five variables that are empirically associated with both quality of advising and rate of retention. Each of these factors suggests a potential mechanism by which advising may promote student persistence. That is, high-quality advising services may increase retention indirectly by, for example, increasing student satisfaction, which in turn increases the likelihood that a student will remain enrolled (see Figure 1.1). As Cuseo demonstrates, there are varying degrees of evidence to support each of these connections (i.e., between advising and intermediate outcomes, and between intermediate outcomes and retention). Overall, however, Cuseo concludes that "a strong case can be made that academic advising exerts a significant impact on student retention through its positive associations with, and mediation of, variables that are strongly correlated with student persistence."[9]

[7] [1] Habley and McClanahan, Op. cit., p. 15.
[2] "What Works in Student Retention? Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities Report." ACT, 2010. pp. 7–8. http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/PublicFour-YrColleges.pdf

[8] [1] Habley and McClanahan, Op. cit.
[2] Cuseo, J. "Academic Advisement and Student Retention: Empirical Connections and Systemic Interventions." National Academic Advising Association, 2003. p. 1. http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/6781576F-67A6-4DF0-B2D3-2E71AE0D5D97/0/CuseoAcademicAdvisementandStudentRetentionEmpiraclConnectionsandSystemicInterventions.pdf
[3] Oertel, B. "Creating the Case for a New Academic Advising Model at Winona State University: A Review of the Literature." Illinois Student Assistance Commission, 2006. p. 1. http://www.isac.org/dotAsset/5aaa670f-29d9-4f4b-828e-9fa7a6157a41.pdf
[4] Swecker, H.K., M. Fifolt, and L. Searby. "Academic Advising and First-Generation College Students: A Quantitative Study on Student Retention." *NACADA Journal*, 33:1, 2013. http://www.nacadajournal.org/doi/abs/10.12930/NACADA-13-192

[9] Cuseo, Op. cit., p. 1.

Figure 1.1: Potential Model for Advising's Effects on Retention



Source: Adapted by Hanover from Cuseo[10]

More recently, a 2013 study by researchers at the University of Alabama and Auburn University found that the more frequently first-generation college students met with an academic advisor during their first year, the more likely they were to persist into a second year. The authors note that this finding is consistent with other results reported in the literature.[11] However, in this and similar studies, students were free to choose how many advisor meetings to attend; therefore, it may be the case that preexisting characteristics (e.g., motivation or academic skills) lead some students to both voluntarily seek frequent advising and persist in their education.

ACT's report on the 2003 survey, which examined the relationship between retention practices and institutional retention and graduation rates, provides somewhat stronger evidence. This analysis revealed a number of practices that high-performing institutions (i.e., those in the top quartile of both retention and graduation rates) are much more likely to employ than low-performing institutions (those in the bottom quartile).[12] Figure 1.2 shows the retention practices that exhibit a large differential between usage at high- versus

[10] Ibid.
[11] Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby, Op. cit., p. 49.
[12] Habley and McClanahan, Op. cit., p. 17.

low-performing institutions (regardless of overall usage rate). As reflected in the table, a number of advising-related practices appear on this list. In other words, one of the characteristics that separates institutions with higher retention rates from those with lower rates is the tendency to use advising-related initiatives such as increased advising staff and targeted advising for selected student populations.

Figure 1.2: Differential Retention Practices of High-Performing vs. Low-Performing Institutions (Four-Year Public)

Retention Practice	% of High-Performing Institutions Reporting Use	% of Low-Performing Institutions Reporting Use
Advising-Related Practices		
Advising Interventions with Selected Student Populations	94%	68%
Increased Advising Staff	46%	36%
Integration of Advising with First Year Transition Programs	62%	52%
Centers that Combine Advising and Counseling and Career/Life Planning	36%	23%
Freshman Seminar/University 101 (non-credit)	26%	16%
Performance Contracts for Students in Academic Difficulty	61%	42%
Other Practices		
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab	72%	62%
Summer Bridge Program	68%	48%
Course Placement Testing (recommended)	47%	27%
Residence Hall Programs	100%	81%
Extended Freshman Orientation (credit)	56%	40%

Source: ACT[13]
Advising-related practices are highlighted

Based on the available evidence, it is plausible that frequent and/or high-quality interactions between students and advisors can improve retention rates, particularly for student populations with high risk of attrition. However, it remains possible that the apparent relationship between advising and retention reflects further unknown factors, and that effective retention efforts will ultimately need to address these factors.

[13] Ibid.

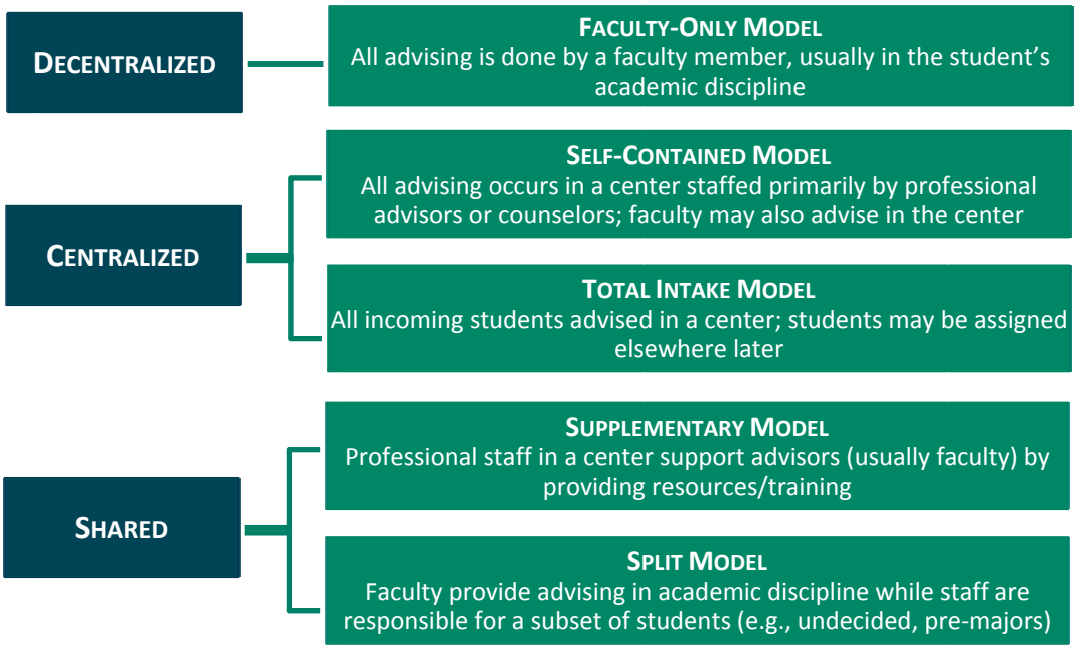
DELIVERY MODELS FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

According to Celeste Pardee of the University of Arizona and NACADA, there are three basic organizational structures for academic advising services:

- **Decentralized**: professional or faculty advisors are located in their respective academic departments.
- **Centralized**: professional and faculty advisors are housed in one academic or administrative unit
- **Shared**: some advisors meet with students in a central administrative unit (i.e., an advising center), while others advise students in the academic department of their major discipline.[14]

Institutions may implement these broad types of structures in a number of ways, as shown in Figure 1.3. Importantly, advising in shared models may be performed by professional advising staff in addition to or instead of faculty in the relevant college or department. For example, at Kennesaw State University (profiled in Section II of this report), individual colleges use different combinations of faculty and professional advisors.[15]

Figure 1.3: Categories of Advising Models

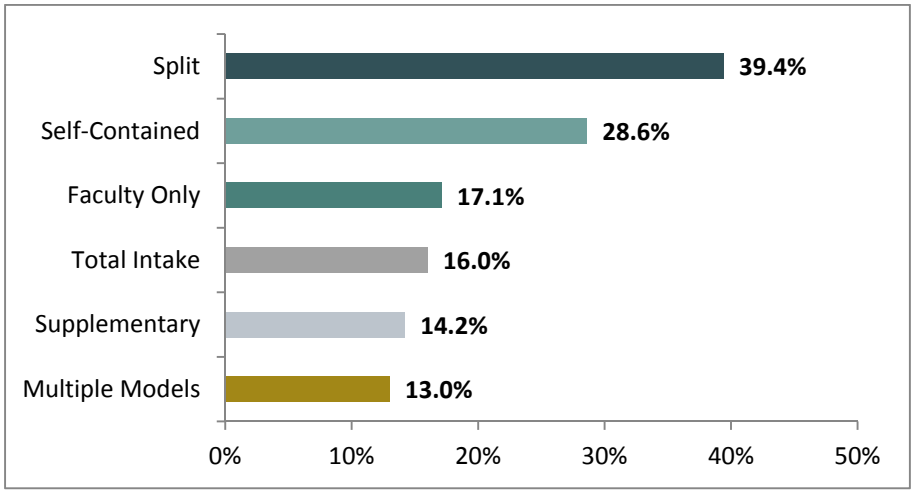


Source: Adapted by Hanover from NACADA[16]

[14] Bulleted text quoted verbatim from: Pardee, C.F. "Organizational Models for Advising." NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web, 2004. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Organizational-Models-for-Advising.aspx
[15] Hutt, Op. cit.
[16] [1] Pardee, Op. cit.

Approximately once every seven years, NACADA and ACT collaborate to conduct the National Survey on Academic Advising, which collects information from advising professionals on the advising models and practices at their institutions. This survey has historically found that the **shared** approach is the most common. For example, in 2003, 55 percent of institutions reported using a shared structure, while 32 percent used **centralized** structures and 14 percent **decentralized** structures. These results were similar to those of the previous survey in 1997.[17] According to the most recent survey in 2011, the **split model**, wherein faculty and professional advisors share advising responsibilities, appears be the most commonly utilized of the two shared models, and the most popular model overall (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Prevalence of Advising Models, 2011



Source: NACADA[18]

A consistent finding of national academic advising surveys is that the types of organizational models used vary by type of institution. **The 2011 survey found that larger institutions tend to employ centralized, self-contained models, while smaller, private bachelor's institutions are more likely to employ a faculty-only model.**[19]

The shared split model appears popular with many institutions, suggesting that this approach may carry certain general advantages. However, specific institutional factors play a role in determining the most effective model for a particular institution and student population. One such consideration is the proportion of students who enter the institution without a declared major. For example, Dr. Baiza of Boise State University noted that the institution has recently seen an increase in the number of students who declare a major immediately upon enrolling. Because Boise State University advises undeclared students

[2] Model descriptions quoted verbatim from: Carlstrom, A. "Chapter 5: Advising Models (2011 NACADA National Survey)." National Academic Advising Association, 2011. p. 1. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Portals/0/Clearinghouse/M25/M25%20Chapter%20chapter%205%20updated.pdf

[17] Pardee, Op. cit.

[18] Carlstrom, Op. cit., pp. 4-6.

[19] Ibid., pp. 2–3.

through a central office and declared students through academic units (shared split model), this shift has resulted in increased advising responsibilities for academic units and a corresponding decrease in the volume of advisees for the central office.[20]

GENERAL BEST PRACTICES IN ACADEMIC ADVISING

Although a variety of advising practices are in use at higher education institutions, **three broad strategies enjoy widespread support among researchers and practitioners**. These three strategies (listed with summaries of key features in Figure 1.5) are: proactive or "intrusive" advising, student success courses, and early alert systems.

Figure 1.5: Successful Advising Strategies

Intrusive Advising	• May include systems to monitor academic performance, periodic phone calls to the student, and signed contracts/study plans outlining student goals and steps needed to achieve them. • Widely recommended for historically at-risk student populations, including academically disadvantaged/underprepared students, ethnic minorities, first-generation college students, and students of low socioeconomic status.
Student Success Courses	• Integrate instruction and advising by providing advisory services in a classroom setting. First-year seminars/success courses have consistently demonstrated effectiveness in facilitating institutional orientation and academic skills. • Advisors can deliver basic information to an entire classroom but also address individual issues one-on-one as they arise. • Voluntary courses may fail to reach students with the highest risk of attrition. However, mandatory courses may present a barrier to enrollment for some students.
Early Alert Systems	• Target the most at-risk students: if students miss a certain number of classes or fail to receive certain grades, they receive a call from a counselor offering assistance. Faculty and advisors track student progress to provide a personalized, supportive environment. • Integrated computer systems can ensure up-to-date monitoring of student progress and timely responses to student risk indicators.

Source: Adapted by Hanover from various sources

Intrusive Advising

In a recent review of literature on academic advising services, David Crockett of the educational consulting agency Noel-Levitz notes that policies establishing mandatory advising sessions may be preferable to promoting voluntary services. **These mandatory or "intrusive" advising policies assume that students most in need of advising services do not voluntarily pursue them, and that advising can serve as an early intervention for students**

[20] Baiza, Op. cit.

experiencing problems.[21] In fact, Crockett reports that without mandatory advising appointments, 86 percent of students who need assistance do not voluntarily seek out advising,[22] and concludes that "student self-referral simply does not work as a mode of operation in promoting intervention and persistence."[23]

Echoing the necessity and utility of proactive advising, Jennifer Varney of Southern New Hampshire University identifies four key elements of the "intrusive" approach to advising:

- Early intervention at the first sign of any type of difficulty (risk factors can be identified in the admissions process)
- Introduction of rules, policies and procedures, along with clear explanations and expectations of students
- Monitoring progress of students to determine how well they are using information provided
- Customizing intervention and targeting it specifically toward student needs[24]

Zane State College in Zanesville, Ohio, recently instituted an intensive advising program for struggling students. Under this program, once a student is identified as being at risk of dropping out, advisors use a variety of means to establish contact with the student, including email, phone calls, Facebook messages,[25] and (if all else fails) in-person visits to the student's courses.[26] While previous intervention plans at Zane State College also encouraged students to meet with an advisor, the current approach makes the recommendation much stronger: according to Stacie Mahaffey, director of Zane State College's Student Success Center, "It was implied as a mandatory meeting … We didn't say you had to come in, but it was implied."[27]

STUDENT SUCCESS COURSES

Student success courses are "specifically designed to teach skills and strategies to help students succeed in college (e.g., time management, study skills, and test-taking skills)."[28] These courses, also called "First Year Experience" courses, are an extension of the orientation experience, and research suggests that such longer-term foundational-skills

[21] Crockett, D. "Modes and Models." Noel-Levitz. pp. 129–130. http://www.dixie.edu/reg/SEM/DCrockettModesandModels.pdf
[22] Ibid., p. 135.
[23] Ibid., p. 133.
[24] Bulleted text quoted verbatim from: Varney, J. "Proactive (intrusive) Advising." *Academic Advising Today*, 35:3, 2012. p. 2. http://www.ship.edu/uploadedFiles/Ship/Advising/Resources_for_Faculty/advisor_handbook/Proactive%20Advising%20Article.pdf
[25] Ibid., p. 9.
[26] Abdul-Alim, J. "Report: 'Intrusive Advising' Among Best Practices for Community College Student Success." Diverse Education, February, 2012. http://diverseeducation.com/article/16812/
[27] Mahaffey quoted in: Ibid.
[28] "A Matter of Degrees: Practices to Pathways," Op. cit., p. 4.

courses can improve both student outcomes and retention.[29] An analysis of the effects of "Student Life Skills" (SLS) courses offered at Florida community colleges found that for both developmental and non-developmental students, "students who enrolled in a SLS course were eight percent more likely to complete a credential, three percent more likely to transfer, and eight percent more likely to remain enrolled after five years," even after controlling for students' academic preparation.[30]

Typical elements of student success courses include training in time management, goal-setting, study skills, technology skills, and cultural diversity.[31] The following is a representative example of learning objectives for a student success course, from Rio Salado College in Arizona:

- Identify and apply time-management strategies.
- Identify and apply goal-setting strategies.
- Identify preferred learning style and describe its relationship to teaching and learning strategies.
- Identify and utilize interpersonal communication skills.
- Identify and utilize strategies to organize study materials.
- Identify and utilize note-taking strategies.
- Identify and utilize textbook, academic, and classroom strategies.
- Identify and utilize test-taking strategies.
- Identify and utilize strategies to improve memory.
- Identify and utilize strategies for critical and creative thinking.[32]

Importantly, while there is considerable overlap in the typical components of these courses, some researchers point out that the specific features of student success courses that are most effective in improving first-year success and long-term retention have not yet been identified.[33]

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[29] [1] Moore, C. and N. Shulock. "Student Progress Toward Degree Completion: Lessons from the Research Literature." Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, California State University, Sacramento, September, 2009. pp. 1-2. https://moodle.elac.edu/pluginfile.php/62351/mod_resource/content/0/R_Student_Progress_Toward_Degree_Completion.pdf

[2] Boylan, H. R. and D. P. Saxon. "What Works in Remediation: Lessons from 30 Years of Research." The League for Innovation in the Community College, 2005. p. 8. http://inpathways.net/Boylan--What%20Works.pdf

[30] Moore and Shulock, Op. Cit., p. 7.

[31] Fain, P. "Success Begets Success." *Inside Higher Ed,* February 21, 2012. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/02/21/student-success-courses-catch-slowly-community-colleges

[32] Bulleted text quoted verbatim from: Abts, M. "Effectiveness of Online Community College Success Courses." League for Innovation in the Community College, June, 2013. http://www.league.org/blog/post.cfm/effectiveness-of-online-community-college-success-courses

[33] Zeidenberg, M., Jenkins, D., and Calcagno, J. C. "Do Student Success Courses Actually Help Community Colleges Succeed?" Community College Research Center, June, 2007. p. 6. http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/success-courses-help-students-succeed-brief.pdf

EARLY ALERT SYSTEMS

Early alert systems provide timely notifications to both students and advisors when students show signs of struggling academically and can facilitate crucial advising interventions.[34] For example, if a student has multiple unexcused absences or missed assignments in a course, the instructor can document this pattern in an electronic system. The presence of such warning signs in the system then triggers notifications to the student and an academic advisor (either the student's existing advisor or a dedicated staff/faculty member with expertise in advising academically at-risk students). This method of sharing information ensures that students, faculty, and advisors are all equally aware that the student is at risk for poor academic performance. Moreover, early alert systems allow academic advisors to step in to offer guidance and direct students to additional support resources in time to prevent more serious academic difficulties.[35]

The use of early alert systems to trigger needed interventions has grown more sophisticated in recent years as new technological tools have emerged. Some educators, such as Georgia State University (GSU) Vice Provost and Chief Enrollment Officer Tim Renick, have argued that these advanced tools can be highly effective in promoting student success and persistence, particularly among high-risk students.[36] **In particular, predictive analytics can help institutions identify risk factors and automatically trigger interventions for students in high-risk circumstances.**

In a 2014 Interview, Renick described GSU's approach to using data analytics and highlighted several outcomes of the initiative. To develop a predictive model of likely pitfalls for students, GSU used 10 years' worth of institutional data about students' characteristics, their interactions with the institution (e.g., when they registered for courses), and their academic performance in order to identify variables that affect academic success and persistence. Using this model, GSU has been able to identify, for example, what grades in a lower-level math courses are necessary to succeed in an upper-level chemistry course, and uses these data to intervene to prevent students from registration decisions that will ultimately jeopardize their pursuit of a degree. As Renick puts it, "we're not sitting back and waiting for the student to take the chemistry class and get an F."[37] When students enroll in courses for which they are ill-prepared, advising staff are able to intervene within 48 hours. Renick reports that this kind of rapid response is "something [GSU has] never been able to do at scale before."[38]

[34] Reddick, K. et al. "Maximizing the Use of an Early Alert System through Advisor Outreach." *Academic Advising Today*, 37:4, December 2014. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Maximizing-the-Use-of-an-Early-Alert-System-through-Advisor-Outreach.aspx
[35] Ibid.
[36] Renick, T. "Predictive Analytics Support Success among At-Risk Student Populations (Part 1)." The EvoLLLution, August 1, 2014. http://www.evolllution.com/opinions/audio-predictive-analytics-support-success-at-risk-student-populations-part-1/
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

Frequency and Length of Advising Appointments

When institutions establish advising policies, they may consider the frequency and length of advising appointments. According to the sixth annual ACT Survey of Academic Advising, 55 percent of advising meetings last for five to 15 minutes. Twenty-six percent of meetings are 16 to 30 minutes long, and 13 percent do not meet at all or meet for less than five minutes. Only 6 percent of meetings last more than 30 minutes.[39] While the literature does not identify an optimal length of time for advising meetings, research finds that students who meet with advisors for longer periods of time tend to experience greater satisfaction with the advising process.[40] Nevertheless, the distribution above suggests that typical advising sessions likely need not exceed 30 minutes in length.

In addition to the length of appointments, institutions may also set policies regarding the frequency of meetings. Figure 1.6 displays the mean number of contacts between a student and their advisor or advising office during an academic term, based on the results of the sixth annual ACT Survey of Academic Advising. These figures suggest that two to three meetings per academic term may be sufficient for the average student. However, research indicates that students who meet with advisors more frequently generally hold more favorable views of the advising process than those who meet with advisors less frequently. While these findings do not show that the number of advising sessions is itself a causal factor, institutions may wish to err on the side of recommending more, rather than fewer, advising sessions.[41]

Figure 1.6: Mean Number of Advising Contacts During an Academic Term

Institution Type	Mean Number of Contacts with Advising Center	Mean Number of Contacts with Faculty Advisor
Two-year public	2.5	3.0
Four-year public	2.4	2.1
Four-year private	3.3	2.9
All institutions	**2.7**	**2.7**

Source: Noel-Levitz[42]

Policies for academic advising should also dictate the reasons for which students must connect with faculty advisors. Seventy-three percent of institutions require students to meet with advisors for class scheduling and registration. To drop a class, 59 percent of institutions require students to meet with advisors, and 58 percent of institutions require students to meet with advisors to add a class. Other reasons institutions require students to meet with advisors include declaring a major (54 percent), changing a major (55 percent), withdrawing from school (41 percent), requesting substitutions/waivers (69 percent), following an unsatisfactory progress report (39 percent), or approving graduation plans (58 percent).[43]

[39] Crockett, Op. cit., p. 140.
[40] Ibid., p. 143.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., pp. 134–137.
[43] Ibid., pp. 136–138.

SUPPORTING AND IMPROVING FACULTY ADVISING

Even at institutions that rely primarily on professional staff to provide academic advising, providing academic guidance and mentorship is a key role of university faculty. It is therefore crucial that faculty have adequate knowledge, training, and support to carry out this role effectively.

Allard and Parashar evaluated students' satisfaction with different advising models and found that "student satisfaction with faculty advising is very polarized," with students rating faculty advising interactions either very favorably or very poorly. In contrast, students' experience with professional advisors showed less variation, with advisors receiving neither very high nor very low ratings, though positive professional advisor ratings were lower on average than positive faculty advisor ratings. The low ratings of faculty advisors can often be attributed to students' sense that faculty advisors regard advising as a relatively low priority. In reality, studies suggest that although some faculty may neglect their advisees, other faculty appear to advise students at the expense of other duties and responsibilities.[44]

Hence, the quality of faculty advising often depends on the advisor's unique priorities, interpersonal skills, and other relational variables. Despite the variability in quality of faculty advising, Noel-Levitz underscores the importance of faculty advisors: "faculty are the discipline experts and know more about their discipline than could be expected from a generalist professional advisor."[45] To optimize a mixed model of advising, Allard and Parashar recommend strengthening the pathways between faculty and professional advisors by cultivating partnerships among various advising-related offices through training programs, workshops, regular informational meetings, and/or webinars.[46]

In his article on advising and retention, Cuseo emphasizes the importance of faculty advisors and identifies seven institutional strategies that can improve the quality of faculty advising:

- **Provide incentives and rewards for advisors to engage in high-quality advising.** Because faculty advisors, in particular, must balance advising responsibilities with research and teaching duties, institutions must provide incentives for faculty to make advising a priority. Such incentives might include courseload reductions for faculty who take on significant advising responsibilities and increasing the weight of advising performance in tenure and promotion decisions.
- **Strengthen professional development for advisors and incorporate advising training into the institution's faculty development program.** Because most graduate programs do not include training for academic advising, many faculty will likely be underprepared for advising responsibilities. Institutions should therefore

[44] Allard, F. and S. Parashar. "Comparing Undergraduate Satisfaction with Faculty and Professional Advisers: A Multi-Method Approach - The Mentor." *The Mentor*, August 15, 2013. https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2013/08/comparing-satisfaction-faculty-professional-advisers/
[45] Crockett, Op. cit., p. 74.
[46] Allard and Parashar, Op. cit.

offer ongoing (and mandatory, if possible) professional development for faculty advisors.

- **Regularly assess and evaluate the quality of academic advising.** Formal monitoring and evaluation of faculty's performance as academic advisors provides essential feedback to guide individual and institutional improvement. Regular assessment also signals the institution's commitment to quality advising, and provides additional incentives for faculty to invest time and effort into advising.
- **Maintain advisor caseloads that are small enough to enable delivery of personalized advising.** Even if advisors are competent and committed, high-quality advising is impossible if high caseloads preclude personal relationships between students and advisors. Therefore, institutions should aim to keep caseloads as low as possible. Institutions can reduce caseloads by creating additional staff positions, or by increasing the number of campus community members (faculty, administrators, graduate students, and undergraduate peers) who perform at least some advising.
- **Encourage and incentivize students to meet regularly with their advisors.** Establishing mandatory advising requirements (e.g., enforced by a registration hold) ensures that students receive advising even if they do not believe they will benefit from it. Student success courses provide a curricular strategy for wide advising exposure and establishing long-term, personal relationships between students and advisors.
- **Identify effective advisors and rely on these advisors' expertise to support first-year and at-risk students**. Students are most likely to drop out of college during their first year, and this is especially true for first-generation, low-income, and minority students. Thus, institutions should ensure that all students receive high-quality advising early in their college careers, and that at-risk students have access to qualified and experienced advisors.
- **Establish advising commitment and effectiveness as criteria in faculty recruitment and hiring decisions.** While professional development can strengthen the advising skills of current faculty, institutions can improve the quality of advising by hiring faculty with preexisting willingness and ability to invest in high-quality advising.[47]

STAFFING AND CASELOADS

Two important and related considerations in structuring advising services are the number of professional advisors on staff and the number of students for which each advisor (whether professional or faculty member) is responsible. The 2011 NACADA survey provides data on current practices in both respects, and educational advising experts have developed guidelines and recommendations as well.

[47] Cuseo, Op. cit., pp. 13–18.

Number of Full-Time Advisors

Figure 1.7 shows the median number of full-time professional advisors employed either by an entire institution or by a particular college, school, or division at medium (6,000 to 23,999 students) and large (24,000+ students) institutions.[48] As might be expected, larger institutions tend to employ more full-time advisors, whether at the level of individual units or institution-wide. In NACADA's "medium" category, the median number of full-time advisors is three for individual units and seven for the institution as a whole.

Figure 1.7: Number of Full-Time Professional Advisors by Institution Size, 2011

Percentile	Medium	Large
Institution Respondents		
25th Percentile	4	5.5
50th Percentile (Median)	**7**	**12**
75th Percentile	15	25
College, School, & Division Respondents		
25th Percentile	2	3
50th Percentile (Median)	**3**	**8**
75th Percentile	6	18

Source: NACADA[49]
Medium = 6,000 to 23,999 students
Large = 24,000+ students

Interestingly, institutions tend to employ roughly the same number of advisors whether they employ a centralized (i.e., self-contained) or shared (split) advising model (Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8: Number of Full-Time Professional Advisors by Advising Model, 2011

Percentile	Centralized	Shared
Institution Respondents		
25th Percentile	3	2
50th Percentile (Median)	**6**	**4**
75th Percentile	11.25	8
College, School, & Division Respondents		
25th Percentile	2	2
50th Percentile (Median)	**4**	**4**
75th Percentile	7	8

Source: NACADA[50]
Medium = 6,000 to 23,999 students
Large = 24,000+ students

[48] Institutional size categories listed at: "2011 National Survey of Academic Advising." http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/2011-NACADA-National-Survey.aspx
[49] "Chapter 6: Professional Advisor Load (2011 NACADA National Survey)." National Academic Advising Association, 2011. p. 8. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Portals/0/Clearinghouse/documents/Chapter%206%20-%20Professional%20Advisor%20Load%20-%20FINAL.pdf
[50] Ibid., p. 10.

ADVISOR CASELOADS

In the NACADA report accompanying the 2011 National Survey of Academic Advising, Rich Robbins, associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences at Bucknell University, notes that "there is no objective recommended case load for advisors."[51] This is because a number of institutional factors significantly affect the advising needs of the student population and the viability of various organizational models. However, data from NACADA's national surveys establish benchmarks for the caseloads of professional academic advisors. As shown in Figure 1.9, **the median number of students per full-time academic advisor is 333 for medium-sized institutions and 600 for large institutions.**[52] Average caseloads at the majority of medium-sized institutions fall between 170 and 848, and between 400 and 1,425 at most large institutions.

Figure 1.9: Advising Load for Full-Time Professional Advisors by Institution Size, 2011

PERCENTILE	MEDIUM	LARGE
INSTITUTION RESPONDENTS		
25th Percentile	170	400
50th Percentile (Median)	**333**	**600**
75th Percentile	848	1,425
COLLEGE, SCHOOL, & DIVISION RESPONDENTS		
25th Percentile	167	250
50th Percentile (Median)	**345**	**454**
75th Percentile	505	688

Source: NACADA[53]
Medium = 6,000 to 23,999 students
Large = 24,000+ students

As might be expected, full-time professional academic advisors at institutions using a shared model have lower caseloads than their counterparts at institutions that rely on a centralized office to supply all academic advising services (Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10: Advising Load for Full-Time Professional Advisors by Advising Model, 2011

PERCENTILE	CENTRALIZED	SHARED
INSTITUTION RESPONDENTS		
25th Percentile	204	109
50th Percentile (Median)	**365**	**267**
75th Percentile	755	625
COLLEGE, SCHOOL, & DIVISION RESPONDENTS		
25th Percentile	171	158
50th Percentile (Median)	**300**	**308**
75th Percentile	429	577

Source: NACADA[54]

[51] Robbins, R. "Advisor Load." National Academic Advising Association, 2013. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advisor-Load.aspx
[52] Note that these figures reflect the *average* number of students per advisor within an institution or division. Thus, at an institution where the average advising load is 300, some advisors may be responsible for significantly more than 300 students, others significantly fewer. These intra-institution/division variations may reflect differences in enrollment or in the types of advising services provided.
[53] "Chapter 6: Professional Advisor Load (2011 NACADA National Survey)," Op. cit., p. 16.

Medium = 6,000 to 23,999 students
Large = 24,000+ students

Again, although the survey data discussed above provide some indication of the likely range of advisors required for a given number of students, NACADA's standards do not specify precise guidelines for advising caseloads. Rather, NACADA recommends consideration of context-specific factors regarding institutional resources and student populations.[55] **In particular, the feasibility of a particular student-to-advisor ratio will depend on the nature of advising services offered.** Thus, institutions with high proportions of students who are likely to benefit from comprehensive and/or "intrusive" advising services should maintain smaller caseloads, at least for certain advisors. These lower caseloads for advisors of particular student populations may be achieved either by employing additional advisors (thus lowering caseloads across the board) or by assigning higher-than-average caseloads to those advisors who do *not* advise high-need students.

A task force appointed to review advising services at the University of Missouri-Kansas City carefully considered the issue of caseloads, and identified the following principles for taking account of student needs in determining caseloads:

- Advisors who work primarily with students who have more extensive advising needs should have fewer advisees. The institution must decide which students need more extensive advising. On many campuses those students are undecided, underprepared, adult, disabled, minority, and/or first generation.
- Advisors who work with students in complex academic programs that include rigorous institutional requirements and/or state and accrediting agency requirements should have fewer advisees.
- Advisors who work with students in transition (first-year, transferring in or out) should have fewer advisees.
- Advisors who work with students in academic difficulty should have fewer advisees.
- Advisors who work with international students should have fewer advisees.
- Advisors (full-time) who are assigned other tasks necessary for the operation of the advising program should have fewer advisees.[56]

Although experts recommend that institutions keep student-to-advisor ratios as low as possible, resource limitations often necessitate higher caseloads than institutions would prefer. Recognizing this, Debra Applegate and Gayle Hartleroad of Ball State University propose several strategies for institutions to provide effective advising services even when

[54] Ibid., p. 18.
[55] Hathaway, S. et al. "Advising Task Force Final Report." University of Missouri-Kansas City, April 2, 2012. p. 72. http://www.umkc.edu/provost/downloads/advising_task_force_report-final.pdf
[56] Bulleted text quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 73.

caseloads are high.[57] **The authors suggest that institutions can streamline advising processes by grouping students into a small number of categories reflecting specific needs, and deploying a standardized coding system across institutional units.** For example, an institution might use categories for pre-business students, honors students, and international students. If these classifications are documented in students' electronic records, advisors can quickly determine students' coursework requirements and identify potential issues. Applegate and Hartleroad point out that under such a system, "at a glance…advisors can see what type of student is being advised and know probable questions and concerns."[58] Flexible, user-friendly electronic records systems can help facilitate these sorts of technological efficiencies.[59]

FINANCIAL AID ADVISING

As noted above, existing research offers less clear guidance for the structure and delivery of financial aid advising as compared to academic advising. However, Dr. Venegas offers a number of insights and recommendations, particularly regarding effective strategies for providing financial aid advising to low-income, minority, and first-generation students.

Dr. Venegas emphasizes that institutions should have a "specific communication strategy for working with students and families" that is targeted to the particular needs of the student population at the institution.[60] That is, the institution's method of communicating with students should depend on the characteristics of those students. For example, adult students may find it more difficult to be on campus to attend a scheduled financial aid workshop. According to Dr. Venegas, evidence suggests that webinars and one-on-one phone sessions have higher participation rates among adult students than traditional on-campus workshops. Dr. Venegas also encourages institutions to maintain contact with students in ways that are more personalized, such as text messages.

Students from at-risk populations frequently face barriers related not only to academics, but financials as well. Thus, effective financial aid advising is a necessary complement to academic advising for these students. Dr. Venegas notes that such students are often unfamiliar with the higher education system, which includes lack of knowledge about financial aid procedures. Thus, she points out that these students "may not be surrounded by people who have navigated this system, so they don't necessarily know what questions to ask."[61] To illustrate this difficulty, Dr. Venegas points to recent research by one of her students, which revealed that both middle-income and low-income students often have low levels of knowledge about financial aid. However, the reasons for this lack of knowledge are

[57] Applegate, D. and G. Hartleroad. "Effective Ways to Deal with Large Advising Loads." *Academic Advising Today*, 34:1, March 2011. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Effective-Ways-to-Deal-with-Large-Advising-Loads.aspx
[58] Ibid.
[59] [1] Ibid. [2] Underwood, Z. "Paperless Advising for Today's Students." *Academic Advising Today*, 36:3, September 2013. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Paperless-Advising-for-Today%E2%80%99s-Students.aspx
[60] Venegas, Op. cit.
[61] Ibid.

different and require different responses: low-income students may be unfamiliar with financial aid because their families and peers lack experience with it, while middle-income students may have family members who handle all of the student's financial aid needs.

Given such diverging needs, Dr. Venegas recommends directing financial aid information and advice to both students and family members wherever possible. However, it is especially important to target this information to the person (student or family member) who is most directly responsible for financial aid decisions. She suggests that dedicated financial aid advisors for specific student populations (similar to the dedicated academic advisors at many institutions) can help communicate financial aid information effectively to these students and their families. This is true in large part because such dedicated advisors can establish trust and familiarity by working with at-risk students over a period of time. As Dr. Venegas notes, "in financial aid, you're talking about money. Sometimes that can be complicated for people to talk about. I think that having a level of trust is really important."[62]

ADVISING SPECIFIC STUDENT POPULATIONS

While high-quality advising is likely to benefit all students, the research literature indicates that effective advising services are particularly essential for student populations with traditionally high attrition rates.[63] These at-risk populations, which include transfer students, adult/nontraditional students, ethnic minorities, first-generation students, and low-income students, often face unique challenges in navigating the higher education system and achieving academic success. Thus, these students are particularly in need of academic and financial aid advising that supplies both the knowledge and the support required for students to persist and succeed.

Although each of these risk factors is associated with a unique set of difficulties, students in all of these categories are likely to confront similar types of barriers. Challenges that are common across groups include lack of knowledge about and experience with the structure of higher education systems, inadequate academic preparation, poor study skills, and significant extra-academic responsibilities. **Because of the significant overlap in the challenges faced by students in these populations, there is also considerable overlap in the advising strategies recommend in the literature for these at-risk students.**[64] Accordingly, Hanover's review begins with an overview of advising practices that are effective in meeting the needs of a wide range of at-risk populations, followed by more detailed discussion of targeted strategies for two populations in particular: adult/nontraditional students and transfer students. Many of the advising practices designed to improve outcomes for these two populations are likely to benefit other at-risk students as well.

[62] Ibid.
[63] [1] Cuseo, Op. cit. [2] Habley and McClanahan, Op. cit.
[64] Hsiao, K.P. "First-Generation College Students." ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, 1992. p. 3. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED351079

GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR ADVISING AT-RISK POPULATIONS

The general best practices for academic advising reviewed above are also among the strategies most frequently recommended for advising at-risk populations. That is, experts suggest that practices such as intrusive advising, student success courses, and early alert systems are likely to benefit at-risk students even more than they benefit traditional students.[65]

Building on these general recommendations, however, some advising initiatives for at-risk populations aim to erase the lines that typically exist between academic advising, emotional support, and administrative services. **In particular, mentoring and "life-coaching" are popular ways of supplying these students with ongoing support in developing academic, professional, and personal skills.** These mentors can guide students through the process of academic and personal goal-setting[66] and help develop a sense of connection to the campus.[67] Figure 1.11 summarizes the diversity of roles that mentors for nontraditional students can fulfill, as outlined by the Center for Mentoring and Learning at Empire State College in New York, an institution with a mission of serving nontraditional students.

[65] Oertel, Op. cit.

[66] McDonnell, R.P., L. Soricone, and M. Sheen. *Promoting Persistence through Comprehensive Student Supports*. Working Paper. Jobs for the Future, 2014. p. 9. http://www.insidetrack.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/promoting-persistence-through-comprehensive-student-supports-_031814-1.pdf

[67] [1] "Pathways to Success: Integrating Learning with Life and Work to Increase National College Completion." Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, February 2012. http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/ptsreport2.pdf

[2] "Perkins Non-Traditional Student Recruitment and Retention: Sharing Best Practices." Mott Community College, December 9, 2013. http://www.michigancc.net/events/information/workshop/NONTRAD2.pdf

Figure 1.11: Diversity of Mentor Roles

TUTOR	• Facilitate the learning of students in particular subject areas.
MOTIVATOR	•Provide students with sufficient support and encouragement to persist despite complex life circumstances.
EVALUATOR	•Assess students' strengths and weaknesses, evaluate students' academic achievements and college-level learning acquired from prior experience.
COLLABORATOR	•Work collaboratively with students to help them achieve their goals.
ADVISOR/COUNSELOR/FACILITATOR	•Suggest ways in which students can answer their own questions, and provide support, guidance, and in some cases direct answers.
LEARNER	•Learn new subject areas, catching up in fields of expertise, seeking out new resources, new technologies, and new ways of meeting student needs.
SCHOLAR	•Allocating time to scholarly pursuits and community involvements.

Source: SUNY Empire State College[68]

In keeping with the strategy of consolidating multiple advising roles, many sources recommend providing students with a single point of contact who can connect the student to information and resources to address particular questions or problems.[69] Arizona State University has implemented this "concierge" model, giving students a personalized coach who helps them navigate institutional offices and requirements. Students and their coaches establish a personalized system of communication—choosing how often to check in and through what medium—to ensure that coaches can respond to students' questions and anxieties. Coaches are also alerted when signs of trouble emerge, such as when a student does not log into an online course space for four consecutive days, so that they can reach out to the student.[70]

Dr. Venegas, however, observes that the "concierge" model may be ineffective if the advisors in that role are not sufficiently knowledgeable in all of the areas where students may require assistance. For this reason, she recommends that if certain advisors are to serve as single points of contact, they should be personnel with extensive advising

[68] Text in figure adapted from: "Roles of Mentors | Center for Mentoring and Learning." SUNY Empire State College. http://cml.esc.edu/mentoring/roles-of-mentors

[69] McDonnell, R.P., L. Soricone, and M. Sheen. "Promoting Persistence through Comprehensive Student Supports." Jobs for the Future, 2014. p. 14. http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Promoting-Persistence-Through-Comprehensive-Student-Supports%20_031814.pdf

[70] Regier, P. "Using Technology to Engage the Nontraditional Student." Educause, September 15, 2014. http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/using-technology-engage-nontraditional-student

experience and thorough knowledge of institutional resources. In many cases, only advisors with this level of expertise will be able to recognize all the barriers at-risk students may face and effectively coordinate services across institutional units (e.g., academic advising, financial aid, and housing services).

A final consideration that should inform institutional strategies for advising high-attrition populations is that **the various categories of at-risk students frequently overlap**. That is, first-generation students are more likely to be members of minority groups and vice versa, while low-income students are more likely to have transferred from a two-year institution, and so on.[71] As a result, the students in these populations often face barriers on multiple fronts. Consequently, advisors working with any of these populations should be equipped to address multiple risk factors.

ADULT STUDENTS

As with high-attrition student populations generally, adult students often require considerable support in navigating the complex processes of registering for courses, applying for and using financial aid, and monitoring progress toward a degree.[72] McCullough recommends providing students with a "transition advisor" to help familiarize students with the structure of the institution and the various support services offered.[73] Similarly, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education advocates use of the "concierge" model to help adult students navigate the academic and administrative challenges of re-entering an educational environment.[74]

Given adult students' myriad nonacademic commitments, many experts recommend ensuring that students can access administrative services outside of traditional business hours and through multiple channels.[75] In particular, experts emphasize that although difficulty getting a financial aid or registration question answered may seem like a minor

[71] [1] Balemian, K. and J. Feng. "First Generation Students: College Aspirations, Preparedness and Challenges." presented at the College Board AP Annual Conference, Las Vegas, NV, July 19, 2013. p. 9. https://research.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/publications/2013/8/presentation-apac-2013-first-generation-college-aspirations-preparedness-challenges.pdf
[2] Dowd, A.C., J.H. Pak, and E.M. Bensimon. "The Role of Institutional Agents in Promoting Transfer Access." *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21:15, 2013. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1015338
[3] Schmertz, B. and J. Carney. "Making the Leap: Understanding the Successful Transfer of High-Achieving, Low-Income Community College Students to Four Year Institutions." Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, 2013. p. 1. http://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/Making_the_Leap_Successful_Transfer_of_High_Achieving_Low_Income_Students_(October_2013)1.pdf

[72] Dumais, S.A. et al. "Stressors and Supports for Adult Online Learners: Comparing First- and Continuing-Generation College Students." *American Journal of Distance Education*, 27:2, April 2013. https://www.academia.edu/5065414/Stressors_and_Supports_for_Adult_Online_Learners_Comparing_First-_and_Continuing-Generation_Students

[73] McCullough, T. "Five Essential Mechanisms for Supporting Non-Traditional Student Success." The EvoLLLution, April 16, 2013. http://www.evolllution.com/opinions/essential-mechanisms-supporting-non-traditional-student-success/

[74] Lane, P., D.K. Michelau, and I. Palmer. "Going the Distance in Adult College Completion: Lessons from the' Non-Traditional No More' Project." Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2012. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED539562

[75] Ibid., p. 35.

hurdle, such minor frustrations can have significant adverse effects on students' motivation to persist.[76]

Susan Aldridge, president of the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), advises that support services "should be available online or through a 24/7 call center so that the students are not at a disadvantage just because they happen to be working."[77] According to the Western Interstate Higher Education Commission, efforts to expand the availability of administrative services (through both expanded hours and more extensive internet options) at several institutions in New Jersey have shown promise as well.[78]

Studies of nontraditional students show that one of the most prevalent concerns among these students is the cost of education; consequently, **nontraditional students find clear information and guidance regarding costs and financial aid to be particularly valuable**. A 2013 survey by education marketing firm Stamats found that when prospective nontraditional students visit the websites of institutions they are interested in attending, the most-frequently-sought information concerns costs and financial aid.[79] Similarly, a study of nontraditional students at Eastern Illinois University found that the financial aid office was the most used campus resource among nontraditional students.[80]

TRANSFER STUDENTS

Research suggests that students transferring to four-year institutions from community colleges are significantly less likely to complete a bachelor's degree.[81] In a recent article for NACADA, Hatton, Homer, and Park observe that "[this] failure to attain the bachelor degree is an unfortunate result of the barriers many students face when attempting transfer from one institution to another."[82] However, the authors also suggest that "advisors can play a key role in helping students address these barriers through one-on-one advising, early

[76] [1] Pelletier, S.G. "Success for Adult Students." *Public Purpose*, 2010. http://www.aascu.org/uploadedFiles/AASCU/Content/Root/MediaAndPublications/PublicPurposeMagazines/Issue/10fall_adultstudents.pdf
[2] Pickens, M.L. "An Exploration of Factors Affecting Retention and Persistence of Undergraduate Military Veteran Students at the University of Missouri." (University of Missouri–Columbia, 2013). p. 101. https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/43020

[77] Aldridge quoted in: Pelletier, Op. cit., p. 4.

[78] Lane, Michelau, and Palmer, Op. cit., p. 35.

[79] "Serving Adult Students: Five Areas That Cannot Be Ignored." White Paper, Stamats. p. 4. http://stamats.com/resources/whitepapers.aspx

[80] Lindsay, T. "'Have You Forgotten Us?': An Analysis of Resources for Non-Traditional Students." Master's Thesis, Eastern Illinois University, 2012. p. 29. http://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1835&context=theses

[81] [1] Berger, J.B. and G.D. Malaney. "Assessing the Transition of Transfer Students from Community Colleges to a University." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 40:4, 2003. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2202/1949-6605.1277
[2] Miller, A. "Institutional Practices That Facilitate Bachelor's Degree Completion for Transfer Students." *New Directions for Higher Education*, :162, Summer 2013. p. 45. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=88230007&site=ehost-live

[82] Hatton, A., S. Homer, and L. Park. "Advising Transfer Students." NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web, 2009. http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-Transfer-Students.aspx

intervention programs, and connecting transfer students with resources."[83] In an effort to provide this targeted support, many institutions operate comprehensive transfer centers that offer some or all of the following features:

- Advising
- Orientation
- Advisor campus visits
- Career and goal counseling
- Transfer fairs
- Newsletters and transfer blogs
- Faculty involvement
- Campus visits
- Learning communities
- Honors programs
- Faculty and staff cultural competence
- External support[84]

In similar fashion, two recent studies by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education examined the institutional practices that promote bachelor's degree completion among community college transfer students. In summarizing the results of the Pell Institute's research, Abby Miller confirms the importance of transfer-specific centers and services. However, Miller concludes that:

> Perhaps more important than offering transfer specific services was the institution's overall approach to, and understanding of, the common characteristics of community college transfer students, many of whom are first-generation, nontraditional-aged, and part-time students.[85]

In particular, institutions with effective transfer services are guided by the insight that "seemingly minor logistical considerations can make a huge impact in a student's ability to persist," and therefore commonly provide such services as "extended-hour services, free transportation, and child care support."[86]

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Miller, Op. cit., p. 47.
[86] Ibid.

SECTION II: ADVISING SERVICES AT INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS

In the profiles presented in this section, Hanover Research describes the structure of academic and financial aid advising services at several specific institutions. Each of these profiles includes information gathered through Hanover's in-depth interviews with a senior member of the institution's advising staff.

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Boise State University (BSU) is a public, four-year institution in Boise, Idaho, with an enrollment of 21,981 students (19,026 undergraduate) and a student-to-faculty ratio of 20:1.[87]

BSU currently employs a shared split model, whereby advising duties are shared between the centralized office of Advising and Academic Enhancement (AAE), which is led by Dr. Baiza, and faculty advisors in individual academic units.[88] Both AAE and academic departments employ peer advisors in addition to professional/faculty advisors.[89]

CENTRALIZED ADVISING SERVICES

According to Dr. Baiza, BSU is currently in the process of transitioning to a somewhat more centralized advising structure. It was previously the case that all undeclared students were advised through AAE while all declared students were advised through their academic colleges. Under the newer model, however, all first-year students will be advised through AAE, regardless of whether or not they have declared a major. After this first year, however, students with a declared major would transition to being advised by faculty in their college or department, while undeclared students would continue to be advised through AAE. Dr. Baiza notes that this change is intended to introduce a greater degree of standardization and quality control to the advising process, especially for incoming students. The change will be accompanied by an increase in the number of centralized advising staff, as well as increased specialization of professional advisors in working with particular student populations.[90]

BSU's AAE office currently houses nine full-time professional staff members and coordinates a team of seven student peer advisors (see Figure 2.1). The office is also conducting searches for several additional positions: a student success coordinator, a first-year success

[87] "College Navigator - Boise State University." National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=boise+state&s=all&id=142115

[88] [1] "AAE Programs and Services | Advising and Academic Enhancement." Boise State University. https://aae.boisestate.edu/overview/

[2] "Advising Contacts | Advising and Academic Enhancement." Boise State University. https://aae.boisestate.edu/advisingcontacts/

[89] Baiza, Op. cit.

[90] Ibid.

coordinator, and a program assistant for academic enhancement (tutoring). Dr. Baiza reports that there are also plans to develop an academic development and recovery coordinator position. The intended roles of these staff members are described in the "Advising for Specific Student Populations" subsection of this profile.

Figure 2.1: Boise State University Office of Advising and Academic Enhancement Staff

- Director
- Advising Systems Coordinator
- Student Success Coordinator
- Academic Advisor
- Transfer & Articulation Advisor
- Associate Director
- Admin. Assistant
- International Advisor/Coordinator
- Student Success Coordinator (Academic Enhancement)
- Program Assistant (Academic Enhancement)*
- First-Year Success Coordinator*
- Student Success Coordinator*
- Peer Advisors (x7)

Source: Boise State University[91]
*Position is currently listed as vacant

Although Dr. Baiza could not report exact figures, he estimates the caseload per academic advisor in his office at BSU at approximately 100. He notes that this figure is low largely because of the high proportion of students who enter with a declared major and are therefore advised through their college or department rather than AAE, under the current model. However, because these undeclared students often need more intensive advising services, advisors must perform a significant amount of work despite a low caseload.[92]

BSU advising policy establishes one mandatory advising session for all students. Students must meet with an academic advisor during their first semester, and cannot register for 2nd-semester courses until this meeting has taken place.[93] Under the previous system, undeclared students would complete this mandatory meeting with advisors in AAE, while declared students would meet with advisors in their academic units. However, as Dr. Baiza notes, the lack of standardization under this system was a primary motivation for introducing the revised model of centralized advising for all first-year students. By ensuring that all students receive basic academic advising services from professionals in AAE, BSU hopes to "create more highly-functioning students early on."[94] That is, even once AAE "hands off" students to advisors in their departments, these students will be equipped to handle academic challenges and will know where and how to obtain support for particular issues they may face.

According to Dr. Baiza, peer advisors play a crucial role in increasing the AAE office's capacity for academic advising services, but the use of peer advisors creates challenges as well. On the one hand, AAE is able to assign the most straightforward advising cases to peer advisors, thus allowing professional advisors to dedicate greater attention to students who

[91] "Our Staff | Advising and Academic Enhancement." Boise State University. https://aae.boisestate.edu/our-staff/
[92] Baiza, Op. cit.
[93] "Frequently Asked Questions | Advising and Academic Enhancement." Boise State University. http://aae.boisestate.edu/faq/
[94] Baiza, Op. cit.

require genuine mentorship. In addition, peer advisors gain valuable pre-professional experience. On the other hand, however, Dr. Baiza reports that both BSU's internal data and national research suggest that advisees tend to trust peer advisors less than professional advisors, regardless of the quality of the services provided. He suggests that a key to a sustainable peer advising program is ensuring that peer advisors are aware of this perception. Dr. Baiza further notes that the roles and responsibilities of peer advisors vary significantly across academic departments, and advocates centralized training and oversight for peer advisors across the institution.[95]

Decentralized Advising Services

According to Dr. Baiza, each academic department develops its own policies and procedures for academic advising. These policies and procedures vary considerably, and are typically informed by the number of declared majors in the department (in particular, there are no established guidelines for caseload per faculty in these departments). Some departments appoint a single faculty advisor for all majors in the department, while others distribute advising duties equally among all faculty members. Dr. Baiza notes that a drawback to this latter approach is that not all faculty may be equally effective as academic advisors.[96]

Advising for Specific Student Populations

AAE employs two full-time staff advisors who specialize in working with particular students populations: **international students** and **transfer students**.[97] Dr. Baiza notes that the transfer advisor position is especially crucial given the large number of students who transfer to BSU from community colleges. These students often require significant advising support, particularly in the area of transfer credits. In some cases, transfer students have attended multiple institutions before arriving at BSU, and may have received conflicting messages about whether and how their credits will transfer. In these circumstances, Dr. Baiza says, "you need to be able to sit down with somebody and sort that out."[98]

As noted above, the AAE office will soon include a position for a **first-year success coordinator**. This staff member will coordinate a variety of initiatives, including first-year orientation and success programs, the "advising hand-off" between AAE and academic departments, and the integration of student success strategies into foundational courses across the institution. The primary role of the **student success coordinator** will be to support students in exploring and declaring majors. Finally, the **academic development and recovery coordinator** will administer services for at-risk students. Specifically, this coordinator will be "in charge of monitoring and implementing programming and outreach for students who come in at risk, who go on probation after they've arrived, or are looking at dismissal."[99]

[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] "Our Staff | Advising and Academic Enhancement," Op. cit.
[98] Baiza, Op. cit.
[99] Ibid.

Professional Development for Academic Advisors

In order to support both staff and faculty advisors, AAE offers regular professional development workshops. To illustrate the topics covered in these workshops, Figure 2.2 displays the sessions offered in the Spring 2015 semester. Two of these workshops (highlighted in Figure 2.2) were presented by staff in the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office. These financial aid workshops aim to provide academic advisors with the tools to spot potential financial issues and refer students to appropriate resources.[100]

Figure 2.2: BSU Advisor Professional Development Workshops, Spring 2015

Why do some students try and try, but still fail?

- Join us to discuss tools and strategies to assess students' academic skills, behaviors, and beliefs that impact their academic success. We will review research concerning self-efficacy, critical strategies for effective studying, time management essentials, and managing test anxiety. You will leave with handouts and resources to share with students in need of academic or social supports.

Foundational Studies: A Curriculum by Design not by Chance

- This active workshop will provide academic advisors with the philosophy behind the Foundational Studies Program including details about Disciplinary Lens, Communication in the Disciplines, and Finishing Foundations courses. In addition, it will give advisors the tools to guide students through the program and to help them confidently respond to students' questions about various courses.

Advising Through Technology

- This workshop provides an overview of alternative methods for advising including email, phone, chat, and web conferencing; strategies for promoting a developmental advising relationship through those alternative methods; and a review of best practices for alternative advising sessions.

Faculty to Faculty: Advising as Teaching

- Hear from fellow faculty about their advising experience, including rewards and pitfalls. A faculty panel from across campus will be available to provide tips, tricks, and answer questions related to academic advising.

Spotting Financial Aid Red Flags

- Academic advisors are in the perfect position to identify situations where a referral to the Financial Aid & Scholarships Office is appropriate. Now, more than ever, a student's federal financial aid can be impacted by her enrollment, majors, and schedule adjustments. Find out how to spot situations for the student needs to anticipate if she is receiving aid.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) Demystified

- Understanding the basics of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), Remaining Credit Evaluations and the SAP Appeal Process.

Source: Boise State University[101]
Workshops shown in light blue presented by financial aid staff.

[100] "Advisor Workshop Dates and Opportunities | Advising and Academic Enhancement." http://aae.boisestate.edu/advisortraining/
[101] Text in figure quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

According to Dr. Baiza, these workshops are most popular among professional advising staff, especially newer members of the AAE team. At present, advisors are not required to attend any of these workshops, although Dr. Baiza notes that there are plans to make some sessions mandatory for professional advising staff in AAE. However, although these sessions are open to all faculty advisors, the large number of such advisors across the institution prevents AAE from establishing mandatory professional development for faculty advisors.[102]

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

Kennesaw State University (KSU) is a public four-year institution located in Kennesaw, Georgia. KSU currently enrolls 24,629 students (22,621 undergraduate) and has a student-to-faculty ratio of 21:1.[103]

KSU's current advising structure is a version of the shared split model. Under this model, the Office for New, Exploratory, and Students in Transition (NEST) advises all undeclared students, while students who have declared a major receive advising through their academic college.[104] In addition to the director, Dr. Chris Hutt, NEST's staff comprises five full-time advisors, an office manager, and a part-time director of first-year retention initiatives.[105]

OVERVIEW OF ADVISING PRACTICES

According to Dr. Hutt, academic units vary significantly in the way they structure and deliver advising services. For example, **some colleges rely primarily on faculty advisors, while in other units most advising is performed by professional staff**. There is also substantial variation in caseloads across units, with student-to-advisor ratios ranging from 100:1 to 800:1. However, Dr. Hutt echoes NACADA and other experts in noting the difficulty of interpreting these ratios, which include both full-time and part-time advisors. In addition, these ratios do not reflect the contributions of faculty who may provide significant advising but are not formally designated as advisors.[106]

Like Boise State University, KSU uses peer advisors to help deliver advising services. At KSU, however, peer advisors are managed by academic units rather than NEST.[107] As such, Dr. Hutt reports that there is significant variation in the roles and responsibilities of peer advisors in different units. He also concurs with Dr. Baiza's impression that some students feel unsatisfied with peer advisors. However, Dr. Hutt has also observed that many students

[102] Baiza, Op. cit.
[103] "College Navigator - Kennesaw State University." National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=kennesaw&s=all&id=140164
[104] "FAQs - Academic Advising - The NEST." Kennesaw State University. http://www.kennesaw.edu/nest/faqs/
[105] "Advising Services - The NEST." Kennesaw State University. http://www.kennesaw.edu/nest/about/
[106] Hutt, Op. cit.
[107] See, e.g., "College of Humanities and Social Sciences Undergraduate Advising Center." Kennesaw State University. http://uac.hss.kennesaw.edu/see-an-advisor/

find it particularly helpful to be advised by a peer who has experienced the same major at the same institution.[108]

PLANS TO CENTRALIZE AND STANDARDIZE ADVISING

Although NEST serves as a central advising office for KSU, Dr. Hutt describes the institution's current model as "decentralized" in the sense that there is little standardization or central oversight of advising practices in the academic units. He notes that this arrangement has some disadvantages. For example, information flow between NEST and college-based advisors is often limited. In addition, key practices and procedures—such as when and how to refer students for financial aid advising—are not standardized across units.[109]

In light of these drawbacks, Dr. Hutt believes that a more centralized and standardized advising model would be more effective, and he expects that KSU will begin to implement such changes in the coming years. In particular, **KSU is considering creating a centralized administrative unit for advising** (housed in the senior vice provost's office, rather than NEST), led by a "chief advising officer" position. According to Dr. Hutt, the purpose of this centralized unit would not be to take over any of the advising that is currently provided through individual academic units. Rather, this unit would "establish some best practices and common standards, have an assessment component, and be a general resource so that the student experience, regardless of the academic major or college, is somewhat consistent across the university."[110] Thus, under the proposed structure, the relationship between the new central unit and academic units would resemble the "shared supplementary" model of Figure 1.3 ("professional staff in a center support advisors by providing resources/training").

ADVISING FOR SPECIFIC STUDENT POPULATIONS

Dr. Hutt reports that KSU's initiatives for advising specific student populations are currently minimal, but that there are plans to expand these services in the future. At present, one member of KSU's faculty has a part-time (.25 FTE) appointment in NEST as director of first-year retention initiatives.[111] In her capacity as first-year retention director, this faculty member monitors student grades and other potential risk indicators. If a student exhibits signs of struggling, the retention director will reach out to discuss the student's challenges, develop strategies for improvement, and direct the students to additional resources.[112] A page for faculty on the NEST website encourages instructors to alert the retention director via email if a student is underperforming.[113]

Dr. Hutt notes that although the retention director provides valuable services, the limited time currently allocated to the position limits the director's capacity to provide support to

[108] Hutt, Op. cit.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] [1] Ibid. [2] "Advising Services - The NEST," Op. cit.
[112] Hutt, Op. cit.
[113] "Report a Concern - The NEST." Kennesaw State University. http://www.kennesaw.edu/nest/facultystaff/

all first-year students who require it. He believes it would be beneficial to expand the resources allocated for this position and for advisors who could support at-risk students more broadly.[114]

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) is a public, four-year institution located in Cedar Falls, Iowa. UNI's current enrollment is 12,159 students (10,380 undergraduate), and the institution's student-to-faculty ratio is 16:1.[115]

Like Kennesaw State University, UNI uses a variant of the shared split advising model, though elements of other models are apparent in UNI's advising practices as well. **UNI has a number of decentralized advising units that are housed in academic colleges, individual departments, and other program such as Athletics**. There is considerable variation across these units as to the structure of advising services and the allocation of advising responsibilities. In addition, UNI has three central advising offices: the Office of Academic Advising (OAA), UNI*Business* Advising Office (for the College of Business), and College of Education Professional Advisors.[116] The centralized offices provide a range of services, from advising undeclared students (known as "exploring" students at UNI) to providing advising services more focused on institutional procedures rather than academic pathways. While 93 percent of advisors at the institution are faculty, the centralized advising offices and some academic and non-academic units employ professional staff advisors.[117]

OVERVIEW OF ADVISING PRACTICES

According to Mr. Marchesani, certain elements of UNI's advising practices reflect an "intake" approach. For instance, the OAA provides advising for "exploring" students. In most cases, students who matriculate with a declared major receive advising through their academic college or department. However, OAA provides advising for first-year majors in approximately 12 to 14 departments. After undergoing first-year advising through OAA, these students receive advising through their major departments beginning in their second year. Mr. Marchesani observes that the intake model gives students a structured opportunity to discuss transition issues and to reflect on their choice of major, compared to moving first-year students directly into department-based advising.[118]

The OAA currently employs four, full-time academic advisors, as well as one secretary, one graduate assistant, two associate directors, and one director. One of the academic advisors

[114] Hutt, Op. cit.
[115] "College Navigator - University of Northern Iowa." National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=northern+iowa&s=all&id=154095
[116] "Faculty / Staff Advisors | Office of Academic Advising," Op. cit.
[117] [1] "Faculty / Staff Advisors | Office of Academic Advising." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/advising/faculty-staff-advisors
[2] "Student Resources | Department of Biology." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/biology/current-students
[118] Marchesani, Op. cit.

specializes in transfer relations.[119] While the number of advisors serving in decentralized departments and advising centers varies, to provide one example, the College of Education employs two full-time professional advisors.[120]

At UNI, the decentralized structure allows individual departments and advising centers to structure advising in a way that best suits their needs and the needs of their students. The UNI*Business* Advising Office assigns a professional advisor *and* a faculty advisor to each business student. Professional advisors provide information related to "rules, regulations, policies, and procedures," especially during common transition periods, such as "orientation, scheduling, registration, [as well as] internship and career search activities."[121] In contrast, faculty advisors offer students detailed guidance related to career development and the major itself.[122]

The College of Education offers a different model of professional advising. Professional advisors within this college are the primary advisors to "all majors in elementary education, early childhood education and middle level education."[123] Unlike the College of Business, the College of Education does not appear to rely heavily on faculty advisors. Education majors receive guidance from professional advisors upon entering the institution through to graduation, further suggesting that this college does not use an intake model.[124]

Professional Development for Academic Advisors

Within the decentralized system at UNI, **OAA plays an important role as a centralized resource that offers best practices and helps to standardize advising practices** across the institution. In addition to direct advising duties for "exploring" students and first-year students in select departments, OAA offers "workshops, training, [and] in-services to help promote the quality of academic advising," thereby serving a support function for the academic advising community throughout the institution.[125]

Advising workshops are available to both faculty and staff and address topics such as financial aid, honors advising, and cultural competencies. To provide faculty with an easily accessible resource on advising procedures and recommended practices that apply across departments, OAA also publishes an online academic advising handbook.[126] Additionally, if advising issues arise that are unrelated to the student's course of study, individual advising centers and departments may consult with the OAA for guidance.[127]

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[119] "Meet the advising team." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/advising/advising-team
[120] "College of Education Professional Advisors." University of Northern Iowa. https://www.uni.edu/coe/about/centers-and-services/coe-professional
[121] "UNI*Business* Office: Your Advisors." University of Northern Iowa. http://business.uni.edu/web/pages/currentstudents/advisingcenter-youradvisors.cfm
[122] "Frequently Asked Questions." University of Northern Iowa. http://business.uni.edu/web/pages/currentstudents/advisingcenter-faq.cfm
[123] "College of Education Professional Advisors," Op. cit.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Marchesani, Op. cit.
[126] "Advisor Handbook." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/advisorhandbook/
[127] Marchesani, Op. cit.

ADVISING FOR SPECIFIC STUDENT POPULATIONS

The OAA handbook includes a section on advising specific populations, with links to individual pages outlining strategies for supporting a diverse range of students. The full list of student categories for which resources are provided is as follows:[128]

- Deciding students
- First-generation students
- First-year students
- Honors program students
- International students
- Military/Veterans
- Non-traditional students
- Student athletes
- Students changing majors
- Students with disability
- Teacher education students
- Transfer students[129]

The UNI Academic Learning Center includes Academic Achievement and Retention Services, which aims to improve student persistence and graduation at the institution.[130] According to the program website, achievement and retention advisors specialize in certain student populations, which overlap with the categories presented above. These student populations include "first-generation students, students with low incomes, transfer students, multicultural students, LGBTQ students, non-traditional students, students in academic difficulty, student veterans, underprepared students, students with disabilities, and former foster youth."[131]

Additionally, UNI's Center for Urban Education houses three federally-funded TRiO programs, which work specifically with at-risk student populations. These programs include an Educational Opportunity Center, Educational Talent Search, and Classic Upward Bound. Both the Educational Opportunity Center and Classic Upward Bound include an academic advising component.[132] Finally, the UNI Athletics division employs two academic advisors. These advisors help ensure that "student athletes stay NCAA eligible, are involved in the community, and stay on track to graduate."[133] Athletes thus have an assigned advisor through OAA or their declared major and an advisor through the Athletics division.[134]

[128] "Advising for Specific Populations | Advisor Handbook." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/advisorhandbook/advising-specific-populations
[129] Bulleted text quoted verbatim from: Ibid.
[130] "Academic Achievement and Retention Services." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.uni.edu/unialc/academic-achievement-retention-services
[131] Ibid.
[132] "UNI CUE Programs." University of Northern Iowa. https://uni.edu/eop/uni-cue/uni-cue-programs
[133] "Employee Spotlight – Stacia Greve and Kara Park." University of Northern Iowa. http://www.vpaf.uni.edu/vpaf/employee_spotlight.shtml
[134] Marchesani, Op. cit.

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