

ENCOURAGING STUDENT USE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines best practices in encouraging students to use academic advising services, including appointment scheduling.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Allowing students to initiate advising meetings by making appointments in advance is a critical part of a larger conversation about effective community college academic advising. Discussions of scheduling practices and student-initiated appointments overlap with broader concerns about the convenience, content, consistency, and logistics of academic counseling services. This report examines different strategies used by community colleges to encourage student use of academic advising services:

- **Initiating Contact with Students:** This section explores tactics whereby the advising office initiates contact with students to encourage them to speak to an advisor. Mandatory advising policies, either as a requirement for course registration or as a targeted intervention for specific, at-risk students, are also discussed.
- **Leveraging Technology to Improve Efficiency:** In addition to scheduling changes, community colleges nationwide are experimenting with other strategies to make advising more efficient. This section explores the use of social media platforms and other forms of technology for improving the efficiency of outreach and scheduling services.
- **Reinforcing the Relevance of Academic Advising:** The final section discusses ways of ensuring that academic advising plays a more prominent role in students' lives. Advisors should meet students early, often, and with enough seat time to connect with students on a more personal level.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Enforcing mandatory advising appointments has been found to increase student use of academic advising, but also carries some risks.** While institutions have experienced increases in advisor meetings as a result of mandatory advising policies, such requirements have been found to further isolate at-risk students and potentially hurt retention efforts.
- **Studies have shown that students are more likely to meet with an academic advisor after repeated contact initiated by the advising office.** More specifically, email and phone calls from support staff and students' own advisors have been found to be successful in encouraging students to make appointments when advising is not mandatory.
- **Email remains students' preferred method of contact compared to other forms of technology and social media.** Moreover, students favor email for scheduling appointments or asking quick, uncomplicated questions, though traditional, face-to-face meetings are still the preference among students for all other advising needs.

- **Students are more likely to seek academic advising appointments and derive more satisfaction from advising meetings when they are able to have more holistic conversations with their advisors.** Furthermore, by not requiring advising appointments to occur at the beginning of the term, advisors have more time to connect with students on a more personal level.
- **In addition to becoming more frequent and more efficient, students' encounters with academic advisors should also be clearly integrated into their academic career at large.** Forging this relationship early – such as through high school partnerships or during orientation – can help to students realize the different ways that academic advising can be beneficial in their academic lives.

SECTION I: INITIATING CONTACT WITH STUDENTS

A study of more than 70,000 community college students in their first semester of enrollment indicates that 46 percent of these students never consulted their institution's academic advising/planning services between their decision to matriculate and the end of the first three weeks of enrollment. Despite its contributions to student success, community college academic counseling faces a variety of challenges that contribute to the fact that nearly half of students never set foot in an advising office.¹

The first strategy to increase use of academic advising services is to remind students, using email and phone calls, to make an appointment with their advisor. Alternatively, institutions can make advising appointments mandatory by placing restrictions on students who fail to comply, either as a universal policy or only for targeted students. Used as an intervention method, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) writes that academic advising should include "a systematic process whereby instructors alert someone at the college when students in their classes are struggling academically, and that person contacts the students in an effort to get them the assistance they need."²

The following paragraphs describe advising models that encourage students to be proactive about seeking academic advising, especially when they show signs of needing guidance or assistance.

PERSONAL REMINDERS

Personal reminders have been demonstrated to be highly effective in encouraging students to make academic advising appointments. A 2008 study at a large state university tested the effectiveness of "non-mandated intrusive advising" intended to encourage, but not require, access to academic advising services among first-year students.³ Overall, the study revealed that the use of emails and phone calls to contact students "significantly increased the probability that students scheduled an appointment during their first semester."⁴ As part of the intervention, the university's advising office sent a bulk email to a group of students. Those who did not respond received follow-up phone calls from administrative support staff; if this initial phone call was unsuccessful, it was followed by a personal phone call from the student's advisor. By the following term, 90 percent of this group who received contact beyond the initial mass emailing had made an advising appointment.

¹"A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success." Center for Community College Student Engagement. 2012. p. 12. http://www.ccsse.org/docs/matter_of_degrees.pdf

²"High-Impact Practices for Community College Student Success." Center for Community College Student Engagement. 2014. p. 5. http://www.ccsse.org/docs/Matter_of_Degrees_3.pdf

³Schwebel, D., Walburn, N., Jacobsen, S., Jerrolds, K., and Klyce, K. 2008. "Efficacy of Intrusively Advising First-Year Students via Frequent Reminders for Advising Appointments." *NACADA Journal*, 28:2. <http://www.nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/0271-9517-28.2.28>

⁴Ibid., p. 29.

Discussing the success of the intervention, the authors of the study posited that by not requiring that students make advising appointments prior to course registration, it allowed for the appointments to be spread throughout the term. Advisors could therefore spend more time with students and expand discussions beyond logistics of registration to “critical topics such as career development, major selection, goal development, college success strategies, and most important for this population of first-year students, adjustment and transitional issues.” Furthermore, **the extra time for advising appointments “allowed professional advisors to be genuine advisors with educational planning rather than routine course planners and schedulers.”**⁵

A follow-up study conducted in 2012 evaluated the effectiveness of slightly different contact methods.⁶ All students received emails two or three times per term regarding the availability of appointment slots or occasional electronic reminders from the registrar. Meanwhile, a select group of students received extra reminders about advising during each semester of enrollment, using three-step process, until students made an appointment with their advisor: first, an email from the student’s professional advisor inviting him or her to make an appointment; next, a phone call from administrative support staff during the fourth week of classes; finally, a phone call from the advisor during the fifth week of classes. These outreach efforts were repeated each term of enrollment for this group of students, until graduation. The study found that these methods of contact had a significant impact on student use of advising services: the outreach group averaged 6.47 individual contacts with their advisor, compared to 5.72 contacts among students who did not receive additional reminders.⁷

MANDATORY ADVISING APPOINTMENTS

The Gates Foundation’s Completion by Design project seeks to redesign curricula and student services at 20 community colleges in four states. Its goals are to raise completion rates, contain costs, maintain open access, and ensure that educational quality remains high. Completion by Design’s proposed interventions for preventing student attrition and ensuring that as many students as possible complete their program include “mandatory ‘intrusive’ advising” with a focus on attendance, life skills development, and ensuring that students choose clearly defined paths to degree.⁸

The program recommends that mandatory advising appointments occur at regular intervals from admission to graduation. From students’ entry into an academic program until they are 75 percent finished, the initial advising regimen should be augmented with online “intensive advising.” This monitoring enables advisors to keep track of their progress and

⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶ Schwebel, D., Walburn, N., Klyce, K., and Jerrolds, K. 2012. “Efficacy of Advising Outreach on Student Retention, Academic Progress and Achievement, and Frequency of Advising Contacts: A Longitudinal Randomized Trial.” *NACADA Journal*, 32:2. <http://www.nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/0271-9517-32.2.36>

⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

⁸ Nodine, T. et. al. “Changing Course: A Planning Tool for Increasing Student Completion in Community Colleges.” West Ed. p. 11. http://completionbydesign.org/sites/default/files/site-uploads/main-site/pdf/changing_course_v1_fb_10032011.pdf

diagnose any potential problems as early as possible. Once students are close to graduating, Completion by Design recommends another round of “mandatory ‘intrusive’ advising” in order to make sure that they graduate as planned and are prepared to enter the workforce.⁹

Though not rigorous as the Completion by Design project’s intervention, Florida’s Chipola College (Chipola) illustrates the impact of mandatory advising for incoming students on various performance indicators. Chipola implemented a series of policy changes to improve student engagement and increase graduation rates, including:¹⁰

- Scheduling mandatory 45- to 60-minute advising sessions for entering students
- Abolishing late registration to ensure that students cannot start a course at a disadvantage
- Allowing for early registration to improve convenience

Six years into this improvement initiative, the proportion of students reporting that they “sometimes” or “often” visited the advising office increased from 59.7 percent to approximately 71.5 percent. The College also recorded a small increase from 72.0 percent to 78.7 percent of students indicating that they agreed that they were provided with “the support needed to... succeed at this college.”¹¹

However, mandatory advising policies do carry some risk. *Inside Higher Ed* reports that some community college leaders are “wary” of intensive intervention strategies due to their upfront cost and potential to drive down enrollments in a community college system that values open access. For example, Oregon’s Klamath Community College (Klamath) implemented mandatory advising and eliminated late registration for courses as part of a push to improve retention rates. While Klamath experienced a 20 percent dip in enrollment in the short term, the long-term benefits of this initiative have resulted in an increase in fall-to-winter term retention rates from 60 percent to 80 percent.¹²

INTRUSIVE ADVISING

“Intrusive” advising can be combined with mandatory advising or implemented on its own in a way that targets only specific populations of students, such as those who show risk factors for dropping out.¹³ Also known as “proactive” advising, this strategy involves

⁹ For a complete overview of the Completion by Design strategy, see: Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁰ List summarizes content from: “A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success.” Center for Community College Student Engagement. Op. cit. p. 25.

¹¹ “Excerpt: 2013 Chipola College Fifth-Year Interim Report Impact Report of the Quality Enhancement Plan, pp. 4-5.” Chipola College. 2013. p. 1.

<http://www.sacscoc.org/institute/2014/2014SIHANDOUTS/Tuesday/Hartzog2Tues.pdf>

¹² Fain, Paul. “Biting the Bullet on Completion.” *Inside Higher Ed*. February 20, 2013.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/02/20/community-college-learns-boosting-retention-comes-cost>

¹³ Varney, Jennifer. “Proactive (Intrusive) Advising!” *Academic Advising Today*. September 2012.

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Proactive-%28Intrusive%29-Advising!.aspx>

academic advisors contacting students personally to encourage them to seek advising services. The CCCSE reports that, as of spring 2012, only 28 percent of students who encountered academic difficulties in developmental courses reported being contacted by an academic counselor or other college representative. **In cases where academic advisors performed this intervention, students were 1.67 times more likely than those who were not contacted by their college to successfully complete a developmental English course.**¹⁴

Miami University's Hamilton Campus (Miami Hamilton) demonstrates the use of intrusive advising as part of a mandatory advising policy. Miami Hamilton places a hold on registration for at-risk students each semester until they meet with an academic advisor. When students appear to be at risk of failing their courses or missing critical program deadlines, advisors can require a meeting prior to key events including registration, financial aid deadlines, add/drop period, and deadlines specific to individual academic programs.¹⁵

One argument against imposing penalties on students who do not meet with their advisor as part of a targeted intervention program is that it can cause these vulnerable students to become further isolated. Conversely, while this practice increases the burden on some students, the extra requirement forces them to be proactive at an earlier point than they otherwise would. Joe Murray, director of academic advising and retention services at Miami Hamilton stands by the mandate as an effective way to get students to seek help prior to a crisis. He asserts that:

By the time a student realizes they're in trouble and asks an academic advisor for help, it's usually too late for anything other than a conversation about dropping. **The more you can front-load outreach into pre-term or start-of-term communications, the more options the advising office has to offer students.**¹⁶

¹⁴ "High-Impact Practices for Community College Student Success." Center for Community College Student Engagement. Op. cit. p. 17.

¹⁵ Fusch, Daniel. "A Diagnosis for Academic Advising: 3 Missed Opportunities." Academic Impressions. January 11, 2013. <http://www.academicimpressions.com/news/diagnosis-academic-advising-3-missed-opportunities>

¹⁶ Ibid.

SECTION II: LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

In recent years, institutions have explored how technology and social media can be used to facilitate communication and streamline processes like scheduling appointments and identifying high-priority student needs. This section discusses student preferences for communication and explores additional scheduling practices that can be enhanced using different forms of technology.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media offers an opportunity for advising offices to maintain relationships with their advisees, disseminate important information, and remind students to make advising appointments. However, advisors need to be strategic about which platforms they use to communicate with students. A 2012 feature in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* cautions that without careful planning, using social media to reach students can become an ineffective, “scattershot” method.¹⁷

More specifically, a 2014 study found that students had strong, negative opinions regarding the use of social media platform such as Facebook and Twitter in academic contexts, and generally preferred that social media be reserved for nonacademic aspects of higher education. Overall, the study demonstrated that **email was the preferred method of contact.**¹⁸ A more recent study supported these findings, demonstrating that **students “prefer to email their advisors to make an appointment to meet or to ask a short, simple question. For all else, most students prefer to sit down and chat in their advisor’s office.”**¹⁹

Other applications such as Skype and Adobe Connect, which allows users to view documents during video conferences, can also be useful for online conferencing in situations where a face-to-face meeting is not possible. However, the use of online conferencing programs does require new technology, including cameras and headsets, as well as professional development for advisors.²⁰

¹⁷ Mangan, Katherine. “As Students Scatter Online, Colleges Try to Keep Up.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. September 10, 2012. http://chronicle.com/article/Digitally-Savvy-Students-Play/134224/?cid=cc&utm_source=cc&utm_medium=en

¹⁸ Gaines, T. 2014. “Technology and Academic Advising: Student Usage and Preferences.” *NACADA Journal*, 34:1. <http://www.nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/NACADA-13-011>

¹⁹ Noonan, J. and Stapley, J. 2015. “The Demise of In-Person Academic Advising is Nowhere in Sight!” *Academic Advising Today*, 38:1. <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/The-Demise-of-In-Person-Academic-Advising-is-Nowhere-in-Sight!.aspx>

²⁰ Gaines. Op. cit.

ENHANCING SCHEDULING PRACTICES

Not all effective technology use is aimed at communicating with students. Advisors can also use interactive tools to evaluate their services and program offerings and make decisions about what practices are working. For example, Forsythe Technical Community College in North Carolina experimented with a platform that links their advising appointment scheduling program with Advisor Trac software. This scheduling innovation enables the college to keep better track of students who use the academic advising center and provides data on usage patterns that the college uses to modify its advising program.²¹

West Ed's 2010 report on students' and advisors' perceptions of academic advising at California's 112 community colleges proposes three scheduling innovations that could make the advising process more efficient and ensure that advisors can triage requests and prioritize the most urgent needs. The report's recommended initiatives include "express" lines in counseling offices, text messaging responses for quick or frequently asked questions that do not require a full appointment, and using "counseling assistants" to handle routine questions and procedures.²² Similarly, the University of North Carolina Charlotte recommends that institutions offer advising appointments that accommodate a variety of student schedules and ensure that the online appointment book is kept up to date so that students can fill cancelled spots.²³

California's Golden West College offers a particularly well-developed advising website that presents students with several convenient ways to address questions of varying complexity. The advising office website is laid out to highlight key resources such as a prominently displayed Frequently Asked Questions page and a college policies reference guide. It offers a link for e-Counseling via email for quick questions, but cautions that "many issues are too complex to be answered through email." The website recommends a formal counseling appointment for personal counseling, transcript evaluation, and discussing placement test results. There are three levels of in person counseling sessions that include five minute walk-in sessions for "brief questions," an "express counseling" option that allots up to 30 minutes for transcript evaluation and registration, and full-service counseling sessions offered from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm Monday through Thursday and 8:00 am to noon on Friday.²⁴

²¹ "Advising & Registration Best Practices." North Carolina Community College System Office. 2009. p. 8.
http://www.ncccommunitycolleges.edu/sites/default/files/basic-pages/student-services/best_practices_manual.pdf

²² Venezia, Bracco, and Nodine. "One-shot deal? Students' perceptions of assessment and course placement in California's community colleges." San Francisco, WestEd. 2010. p. 22.
<http://www.saddleback.edu/uploads/la/documents/OneShotDeal.pdf>

²³ "Best Practices in Undergraduate Academic Advising." University of North Carolina Charlotte. June 2012. p. 1.
<http://advising.uncc.edu/sites/advising.uncc.edu/files/media/Best-Practices-in-Undergraduate-Academic-Advising.pdf>

²⁴ See: "Welcome to the GWC Counseling Department!" Golden West College. 2014.
<http://www.goldenwestcollege.edu/counseling/>

SECTION III: REINFORCING THE RELEVANCE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

The final strategy toward increasing student use of academic advising services is to make academic advising a more integral part of students' academic lives. Contact between advisors and students should begin as early as possible. High school partnerships or involvement in campus-wide orientation allow advisors to connect with students, introduce them to the advising office's services, and convey important information using as many platforms as possible. From there, meetings between students and advisors should be designed to maximize the time for advisors to get to know their students on a more personal level as part of a holistic approach to advising.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS EARLY

Demonstrating the relevance of academic advising in students' lives beyond simply course registration begins when students first arrive on campus – or, in some cases, even earlier. The Completion by Design authors advocate “strong partnerships at both ends of the community college continuum,” including high school and four-year institutions. They contend that, at the high school level, the most important advising interventions are early outreach “with clear information about expectations” and early diagnostic and placement testing to allow students to correct academic deficiencies prior to matriculating.²⁵

California's Santa Monica College (SMC) provides one example of a successful high school outreach initiative. The college began bringing local high school students to campus in 2003 and splits the cost of bussing with the high schools. Once on campus, students take a tour, receive Santa Monica College merchandise, enjoy free time on campus, and take placement exams and fill out applications in a campus computer lab. The prospective students receive their test results immediately and then meet with academic counselors to discuss those results and begin planning out courses of study. They are also encouraged to return to campus a few weeks later and retake their placement tests free of charge.²⁶

The SMC website indicates that counselors regularly visit Los Angeles area high schools to begin building relationships with students, improve their transition from high school to college, and position themselves to serve as their students' contact person once they enroll.²⁷ The College publishes a timeline of recommended actions for high school students during their senior year. Key events are summarized in Figure 3.1.

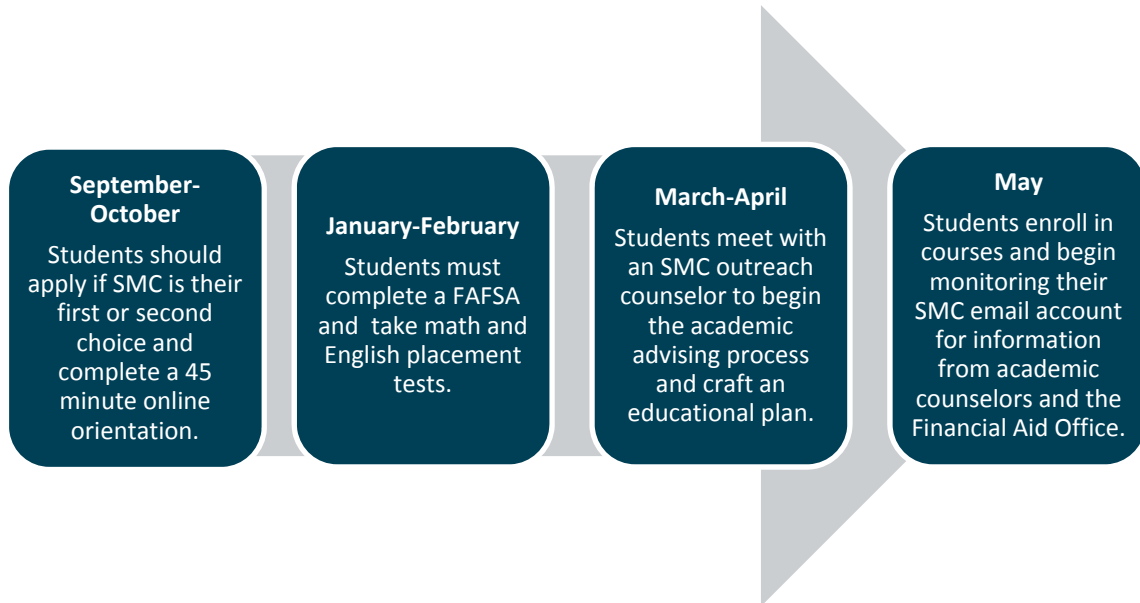
²⁵ Nodine, T. et. al. “Changing Course: A Planning Tool for Increasing Student Completion in Community Colleges.” Op. cit. pp. 13-14.

²⁶ Venezia, Bracco, and Nodine. Op. cit. p. 8.

²⁷ “SMC Outreach Program.” Santa Monica College.

http://www2.smc.edu/schedules/2013/summer/info_policies/030_132_info_policies.htm

Figure 3.1: Senior Year Timeline for SMC High School Advising Outreach



Source: Santa Monica College²⁸

In many cases, reaching students while they are still in high school is not possible; instead, campus-wide orientation serves as a key opportunity for advisors to connect with incoming students and demonstrate the importance of advising services in their lives. A best practices overview published by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) suggests that advising offices should designate at least one representative to participate in orientation programs at their institutions. Using the short window of time that they are likely to be given, these representatives should familiarize students with the academic advising office and its services. They should also act as institutional ambassadors within the broader context of students' formative interactions with their chosen institution. While practices like these do not relate directly to scheduling, they are nonetheless important ways of ensuring that students know enough about their institutions to avail themselves of advising services, particularly in cases where participation is voluntary.²⁹

HOLISTIC ADVISING

The consensus in the literature is that advising appointments are most useful to students when they provide enough time to discuss students' plans and situations in detail. A 2009 study attempted to shed light on some of the motivations behind, as well as the psychological and emotional barriers to, student use of advising services.³⁰ In particular, the

²⁸ "Welcome California High School Students!" Santa Monica College. pp. 1-2.

<http://www.smc.edu/EnrollmentDevelopment/NewStudents/Documents/Checklists/CAHSlist.pdf>

²⁹ Self, Casey, and Therese Aguayo. "Preparing Academic Advisors for Orientation Programs." National Academic Advising Association. 2009. <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Preparing-academic-advisors-for-orientation-programs.aspx>

³⁰ Henning, M. 2009. "Students' Motivation to Access Academic Advising Services." NACADA Journal, 29:1. <http://www.nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/0271-9517-29.1.22>

study aimed to uncover reasons why students who are struggling academically are also “less likely to seek assistance from academic agencies.”³¹ While there was no clear relationship between the variables involved in the study (student motivation levels, course load difficulty, and use of academic advising services), the author found that “the factors involved in choosing to access academic advising services may be related to several factors that include students’ **perceived intrinsic value of academic advising services, sense of usefulness of the services, and notion of time and convenience.**”³² As a recommendation to institutions hoping to increase student use of advising services, the author writes that

Several issues need to be addressed: specifically the students’ self-image as learners, realistic appraisal of their academic competency, motivation to seek assistance for enhanced learning, the culture of learning, and the perceived value of academic advising services... One key element involves **engendering academic advising services as agencies responsive to solving academic issues such that they benefit students at all levels of learning. Such a strategy would promote the sense that university stakeholders expect and value success and that they care about students’ academic and nonacademic needs.**³³

Accordingly, West Ed reports that both students and advisors desire more time to discuss a variety of issues one-on-one. In particular, students reported dissatisfaction with the limited attention they received during appointments, as well as how long they waited in lines and low expectations about which courses they were capable of taking. With more time to meet, advisors could discuss their advisees’ goals as well as academic and personal challenges, help students stay on track toward graduation, and get to know their advisees on a more personal level.³⁴

Regardless of whether or not it is possible to offer longer appointments, existing appointment blocks should be used to help advisors develop a holistic understanding of their students’ needs and aspirations. The CCCSE argues that **academic advisors need to look beyond course selection and help students set and maintain long-term academic goals during advising meetings.** It also recommends regular advising appointments to update the plan, respond to changing goals and circumstances, and keep students focused on their graduation plans.³⁵

Mineral Area Community College (Mineral) in Missouri illustrates the use of more long-term, holistic advising in practice. The College pairs each student with a single advisor and encourages them to meet continuously until graduation, with the goal of making the advising office a “one-stop resource” for students. The relationship begins at the recruiting stage by assisting students with their applications and choice of programs. Once students are admitted to Mineral, “advisors facilitate the development of career blueprints to guide

³¹ Ibid., p. 28.

³² Ibid., p. 26.

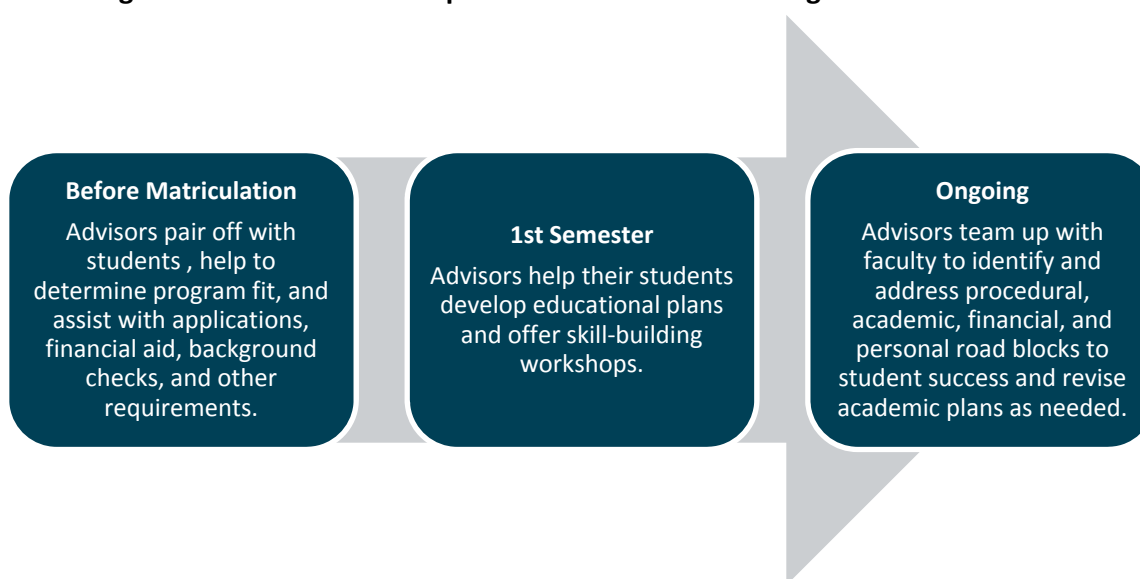
³³ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁴ Venezia, Bracco, and Nodine. Op. cit. p. 11.

³⁵ “A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success.” Center for Community College Student Engagement. Op. cit. p. 11.

the student experience, address academic or personal barriers, provide referrals, and offer job readiness training.”³⁶ This partnership is augmented by faculty input regarding students who need intervention.³⁷

Figure 3.2: Timeline of Comprehensive Intrusive Advising at Mineral Area CC



Source: Office of Community College Research and Leadership-University of Illinois³⁸

By also enlisting faculty into the advising process, Mineral has followed NACADA and Completion by Design best practices in intrusive advising.³⁹ The College has made a concentrated effort to link faculty members, who often see and report the first signs of trouble in a student’s education, with students’ academic advisors. Because academic counseling begins so early in their college careers, students enter their programs with a clearer sense of requirements and expectations. Moreover, because they are paired with specific students over the course of their education, advisors are able to develop a rapport with students that allows them to discuss sensitive issues.⁴⁰ Overall, this long-term, relationship-based program in which advisors liaise with faculty and accompany students throughout their education has helped with retention and completion.

³⁶ Richie, D. and H. L. Fox. “Strategies for transformative change: Intrusive student support and contextualized developmental education.” Office of Community College Research and Leadership-University of Illinois. 2014. p. 1. <http://occrli.illinois.edu/files/Projects/CCTCI/Reports/intrusive-student-minarea-stl.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For NACADA’s overview of intrusive advising best practices, see: Cannon, Jennifer. “Intrusive Advising 101: How to be Intrusive Without Intruding.” Academic Advising Today. 36.1 March 2013. <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Intrusive-Advising-101-How-to-be-Intrusive-Without-Intruding.aspx>

⁴⁰ Richie, D. and H. L. Fox. “Strategies for transformative change: Intrusive student support and contextualized developmental education.” Op. cit. p. 2.

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