

The New Advising System Is a Disaster

To bring you up to speed: this summer AUCA overhauled its academic advisory system, *dunking* the burden of advising students of all years *exclusively* onto regular professors. 2/4 advising systems went *down*: office (department) managers and peer advisors are out, leaving students only with professors and Academic Advising to go to. The current situation is *laughable* (I am a software engineering student and my advisor is a [!] *fitness* instructor), though perhaps those who actually need the system find this less funny. Don't get me wrong: our university has had many controversies—harassment, study.auca.kg, "W" grade policy—but all of them pale in comparison to the current advising system. The new "faculty advisor" system is the single worst, most impactful, and most damaging thing to ever strike AUCA.

On my own volition, I conducted a series of interviews with students, faculty, and staff to understand the current situation, trace its origin, and identify potential solutions.

Because of the hurried implementation of the new system, everyone is confused, frustrated, and angry—and we are going to see the worst of it in the near future. Right now, the following is happening: freshmen are confused because the *already complicated* advising system was not explained to them properly; seniors are frustrated because they don't know which courses they need to take to graduate; faculty are overwhelmed; and faculty and staff are angry because hours spent scrutinizing the new system in debates amount to nothing! Meanwhile, the university administration is not yet willing to concede—and will "remain adamant for the remainder of this academic year," from the words of the administration. And in the midst of all this, real damage is being done—damage which we do not yet fully see: students picking wrong courses and wasting credits, seniors not graduating, *students dropping out of the university out of frustration with the system*.

What landed us here was a series of unfortunate events and decisions: (1) two pivotal office managers—Sasha and Raushan—leaving the university; (2) there is a clause within every faculty member's contract, stating that "every faculty member must take up 10 advisees." The key thing to understand is that [1] office managers were exclusive to

large departments, like SFW and BA, and [2] the ten students-to-advise clause was exclusive to small departments, like ESCS. Then, a reform-driven member of the university administration decided to extend the 10-students policy onto large departments to fill in the void left after office managers leaving. There is just one problem: large departments do not have nearly enough professors for all of their students—even if you load down every faculty member with 25 students-to-advise (which was done anyway). As such, the Academic Advising office was repurposed to work with faculty (meaning the peer advisor program was terminated), now training “faculty advisors”. As a result, all of the faculty at AUCA had 2-3 training sessions on how to be a faculty advisor. Combine that with the fact that many professors are unfamiliar with the system and you get the recipe for *disaster*.

This article will not present solutions—though there are some key takeaways to be learnt from this breakdown. (1) communication would have solved this situation. When the system was first proposed, nobody among faculty was in favor of it. Notwithstanding, the administration still put the system through. Why ask for advice if you will ignore it anyway? My point exactly. (2) there needs to be coordination within the administrative body. Though I refer to administration as a single body, it is not a single entity and every person within it has contradicting opinions and orders. Precisely because of that, despite debates still raging, no consensus can be reached. (3) such watershed changes should be rolled out slowly and handled with much care. Moreover, there needs to be a written record covering the system and edge cases. (4) lastly, cheapening out backfires. This discord is going to cost the university a lot of students—despite its ongoing efforts to keep up student retention through other means. Unless we come up with a functioning advising model soon, this situation will go into the history books as the most disruptive thing to ever go down in AUCA.

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