



To: Dr. Kim McNeely
Dr. Richard Lariviere

From: Charlie L. Nutt, NACADA/Kansas State University
Jo Anne Huber, University of Texas Austin

Date: December 2, 2008

Re: Campus-wide Advising Audit

On November 17-18, 2008, Mrs. Jo Anne Huber and Dr. Charlie Nutt visited Kansas University as a team from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) to conduct an evaluation of the academic advising program across the institution. A full two days of scheduled meetings commenced with an overview by Provost Richard Lariviere of his expectation, followed by meetings with the Assessment Team, the staff of the College of Arts and Sciences advising team, the team of advisors in the University Advising Center and representatives from the professional schools (except for the School of Architecture) and a student – focus group. Additional input was solicited from interested faculty and advising staff not scheduled originally. At the conclusion of the second day, the consultants held a follow-up with the provost to offer some verbal comments highlighting strengths/challenges of KU's advising followed by a summation with the Assessment Team offering those same insights.

Introduction:

There is a growing body of knowledge about how academic advising can impact student success and student learning. Campbell and Nutt (2008) state that “academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their engagement, success, and the attainment of key learning outcomes. Viewing academic advising as an educational process moves it from a paradigm of teaching that focuses on information or inputs to a paradigm of learning that focuses on outcomes for student learning. In this way, academic advising supports key institutional conditions that have been identified with promoting student success” (p. 4).

Vincent Tinto (1999) asserts in his article “Taking Retention Seriously: Rethinking the First Year of College” that good advising is one of the key conditions that promotes retention for it reflects an institution’s commitment to the education of students.”

Further, Campbell and Nutt (2008) outline a set of guidelines that institutions can use to develop a coordinated, effective academic advising program that is linked to teaching and learning and focused on student learning success:

- Collectively develop and widely share a philosophy/mission for academic advising that links to the teaching and learning mission of the institution
- Identify clear outcomes for student learning and the delivery of academic advising that are derived from the philosophy/mission and that guide the development of learning outcomes
- Design systemic and systematic processes of assessment to inform and support changes in philosophy and practice

- Implement comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs that are informed by the identified outcomes for student learning and for the delivery of academic advising.
- Develop campus programs and structures that recognize the value of academic advising and reward academic for quality academic advising and for their contributions to the field.

Tinto, V. NACADA Journal, V19,n2 p5-9 Fall 1999.

Campbell, S, Nutt, C. Peer Review, V10,n1, p 4-7, Winter 2008

These guidelines will frame many of the team's recommendations for Kansas University.

Strengths

Some wonderful work has been done to internally review KU's advising program. While offering recommendations for change and tying those to learning outcomes that work as well as the consultants' visit identified the following strengths:

- The commitment of the University to truly examine under a microscope how academic advising is conducted in a very decentralized way while recognizing the nuances of the individual units
- The collegiality of the Assessment Team was evident as voices were in unison to make KU the best it can possibly be for the students foremost but also for faculty and staff advisors. This overarching theme trumped any individual unit or personality as they viewed the big picture.
- The Online Advising Tool is a definite strength which will be utilized by those who advise students, perhaps only professional staff initially, but eventually, by faculty members as well. A priority was established to make this viewable to students as well through their KU portal. In addition, on the heels of this initiative, the automated audits for students will be unveiled.
- There is a clear, focused, and articulated mission statement for academic advising that is the foundation for decisions and initiatives across the University.
- The University has identified 10 learning outcomes for academic advising across the university and initial assessment data has been collected and analyzed to determine how each School, the University Advising Center, and the College has met those learning outcomes.
- The University Advising Center provides strong support for all entering students at the University and their work is highly respected by the faculty as well as the other advising professionals on the campus.
- The advising specialist positions in the College have been well received by the department administrators and faculty and are providing much needed support to students in those departments.
- There is open and collaborative communication between the UAC, the College, and the Schools in regard to student issues and academic advising.
- Top-level administrators are supportive of the value of academic advising to the success of students.

Challenges

In addition to the strengths we found at KU, we also found a number of challenges that the university needs to address:

- While the On-line Advising Tool is a strength and asset to enhancing the quality of academic advising provided to students, it also has its challenges that must be dealt with:
 - Campus buy-in to the On-Line Advising Tool is very limited – primarily to members of the Assessment Team and some advisors in the UAC and some advising specialists in the College.
 - While there are plans to make this move, the On-Line Advising Tool needs to be available to students to view through their portal.
 - The graduate/degree audit system needs to be completed and linked directly to the On-Line Advising Tool to provide students and advisors the very same information in the same format from one location.
- There is little on-going, comprehensive, and consistent professional development provided for advisors. The professional development that is done is in the individual units and very limited in scope – professional development that has been planned and implemented is poorly attended by the faculty.
- There is little opportunity on campus for advisors, both professional and faculty, to network and learn from each other.
- There is no comprehensive reward or evaluation system for advisors.
- There is no career ladder or growth opportunity for professional advisors or advising specialists.
- There is inconsistency in the quality of advising that students receive across the campus – primarily based on whether they are advised by a professional advisor/advising specialist or faculty member or some combination of a professional advisor/advising specialist and faculty member.
- There is confusion for students as well as some advising unit as to the role of the UAC and the schools and the College for new in-coming students.
- There is no common or intentional process for transition from the UAC to the College or the schools or vice versa when a student changes majors.
- There is presently no permanent group who deal with issues across campus concerning academic advising and student success.
- There is little utilization of technologies across campus for communication with students and communication between students and advisors.
- There is no avenue for on-going and intentional communication with students concerning academic advising issues and technology issues.

Recommendations

Based on the strengths and challenges identified, we have the following recommendations that can enhance the academic advising experiences on your campus:

- The Assessment Team should be renamed the Academic Advising Leadership Team and be a permanent leadership team. This leadership team would have the responsibility for focusing on issues and strategies for enhancing the academic advising experiences of students at the university.

- In regard to the On-Line Advising Tool, there are several recommendations:
 - The Academic Advising Leadership Team needs to carefully analyze additional modifications or additional features proposed for the system. In order not to get bogged down in constant changes, the Team needs to carefully determine the “necessary to have to function” and the “would be nice to have” features and then prioritize them for the university as a whole.
 - Two key features that the consultants heard consistently from all members of the campus and from the student group as well are a degree audit that is connected to the Advisor Tool Kit and making the On-Line Advising Tool information available to students through their portals. These appears to be two major features that need immediate attention
 - In order for the university to reap the full benefits of this technology, it must be used consistently across the campus by all advisors, professional and faculty. A clear message must be sent from the Provost office its use is expected, not just suggested. That also means that there needs to be a training program developed that is used across campus in order to ensure that there is consistent use of the tool.
- There needs to be both campus-wide (centralized) and unit (decentralized) professional development programs provided on a regular basis for all advisors, professional and faculty. The professional development should not be focused totally on training for the On-Line Advising Tool or on institutional policies and processes. The professional development programs should also include opportunities to engage in understanding the conceptual and relational issues in advising. Topics that might be considered are:
 - Research that demonstrates the connection between quality academic advising and student persistence to graduation and academic success.
 - Best practices in academic advising programs and experiences
 - Defining “mentoring” and strategies for being an effective mentor
 - How to set high expectations for students and their responsibility for the advising relationship
 - Assessing the student learning that occurs in the academic advising experiences students have

These campus-wide professional development opportunities should be the responsibility of the Academic Advising Leadership Team. We recommend that the Team collaborate with Center for Teaching Excellence for the delivery of these opportunities.

It must be an expectation that all professional advisors, faculty and professional, will take part in all professional development opportunities.

- The advising specialist model in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has proven to be very successful. We recommend that the university explore ways to expand that model to other departments in the College as well as schools. The collaborative relationships between the advising specialists and the faculty advisors in the departments where this model is being used have resulted in higher quality academic advising experiences for students.
- A Student Advisory Team should be established to provide student input into academic advising issues, especially communication strategies and technology utilization issues.
- The university must seriously explore the implementation of a career ladder for professional advisors to provide an opportunity for growth in their field. We recommend that a sub-committee of the Academic Advising Leadership Team be charged with working with Human Resources to create a proposal for a career ladder process. NACADA can provide this sub-committee with information on such programs at institutions like KU.

- The issues of transition across the campus and role of the UAC need further investigation. There is some confusion as to where a “decided” student should be advised and at what point should students be transitioned to the schools. For each school, there are obviously different transition points; however, the points appear to be “grey” and confusing the students. For example, pre-business majors are sometimes encouraged or required to see an advisor in the Business School but must see an advisor in the UAC to actually register. This appears to be confusing and even an “added bureaucratic” step for students. It is expected that the Advisor Took Kit will help this transition be less confusing and more seamless for students but there still needs to be further study of these issues. We heard clearly from students that they felt they were getting the run around.
- KU needs a reward program for academic advisors. The campus recognizes quality teaching but doesn’t at this point recognize quality academic advising. There are many models of successful reward programs on peer universities as well the NACADA Awards program which could be used as a model.
- We recommend that the Advising Network be re-established and re-energized for the purpose of networking and communication for all advisors, professional and faculty. There are presently little opportunities beyond some ‘brown bag’ meetings for advisors to connect with each other on the campus.

We thank the Assessment Team and the entire University of Kansas community for their hard work and hospitality during our two days on the campus. It is very clear to us that there is a culture shift occurring at KU in regard to the value and importance of academic advising. As with all cultural shifts, this shift will be slow and very deliberate, but we feel strongly that with the work the institution has already done and with the support of the Provost and other administrators to implement further changes and enhancements as recommended in this report that the University of Kansas will be recognized as a premier institution in regard the quality academic advising experience of your students.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any additional information or answer any questions.
