

Recommendations of the Advising Reform Team for the Integrated Student Experience Goal Team

February 13, 2018

The Advising Reform Team began meeting during the summer of 2017 with the task of making recommendations on a new advising model for the college, consistent with the Integrated Student Experience and its transition to using Guided Pathways. The process of our team was deliberate, and in many ways exploratory, researching what other pathways schools were doing in this regard. Our work initially focused more on the theoretical, than practical, looking at the advising process design from a more macro perspective. Our approach followed from the pedagogy of [NACADA](#), that academic advising is “a teaching and learning process,” and that “the relationship between advisors and students is fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior.”

In 2016, NECC participated in an Achieving the Dream mediated iPASS (Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success) activity, mapping out the advising process and compiling preliminary information for advising redesign. The goal of the iPASS work was to examine existing structures and assess the college’s readiness to move “from a model of advising focused on information provision or course registration to one in which advising is sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized (SSIPP)—in which students have a dedicated advisor who can connect them to a coherent, institution-wide network of services.” The team used this work as a foundation for additional planning.

During the fall semester, work had commenced on the advising portion of Achieving the Dream’s Integrated Student Support Redesign Toolkit, a more detailed and involved treatment than the iPASS mapping activity. The toolkit served as an instrument to guide the team as it pivoted more towards operational aspects. It is clear that advising is an important and inseparable component of the ISE, woven throughout the entire structure. We recognize the need to speed up the implementation of the all of the elements of the ISE approach, and every person on the Advising Reform Team is committed to a successful redesign that best serves the needs of our students and fosters their success.

Because the ISE implementation was scheduled to begin a new, advanced phase in January, the team decided at the December meeting that its members could best serve the ISE by focusing on implementation issues, either in an active or advisory capacity, and a formal recommendation should be made at the next ISE meeting in February.

The recommendations below are based on the research completed by the team and the discussions held as a group, and should serve as a guide for the implementation process.

I. Organizational and Structural Recommendations

Advising Separated from Onboarding

Professional academic advising should be separate and distinct from the onboarding process at the college. It is important for students to learn about non-academic services and how to access them, however it is inefficient for advisors to meet this need during initial sessions with new students when the focus should be on career and academic goals. Consideration should be given to completely embedding those objectives in the orientation process.

Faculty Collective Model

As faculty are subject experts, and define the learning outcomes and objectives for academic programs, their role in advising is essential for all students. As students transition to the meta major centers, faculty become their primary advisor. Advising redesign needs to be structured in a way that fully engages the faculty, vesting them in the process and delivery of services. Advising needs to be articulated as an equal, shared responsibility of all faculty within the centers.

Advising and Career Integration

Career services should become more integrated with advising, cooperatively engaged in advancing the student experience. Students should have exposure to career services early in their support program. Academic advisors and career professionals should be able to draw from the same knowledge base in order to guide students on the path that is most appropriate for them. Career guidance should be provided within the context of the curriculum pathways to more fully enact a federated approach to student success.

Meta Major Integration

Professional academic advising needs to be aligned with the guided pathways that are being developed as part of the Integrated Student Experience. Advising should occur in the meta major centers for students that have been transferred successfully. Advisors or academic liaisons with expertise or area knowledge should be aligned with each of the centers as professional resources.

Intrusive Advising Approach

In our research, those models that are experiencing the greatest success have implemented a more intrusive approach to monitoring student progress. Advising should be mandatory and proactive. This is especially important in the early stages of a student's progress, when they are most likely to leave the college or struggle. More frequent contact with students is needed, a byproduct of which will be stronger relationships with students. Intrusiveness can be effective through various modes, and we recommend adopting a mixed-modal approach that combines enhanced technology and human resources.

Technology Investment

Redesigned advising activities at NECC should include support for e-advising to the greatest extent possible. Available technologies hold tremendous promise for increasing the scope and efficiency of academic advising at Northern Essex, and the college should invest in a product that will address the entire student life cycle, and integrate with the current information system architecture.

Case Management Model

The promise of technology should not eclipse the extraordinary impact that personal and human relationships can have on student success. Software enhancements are an important piece of advising, and when used effectively will improve the way that students experience the college, including early alerts. There is ample evidence, however, that the human element is necessary to achieve the overall desired results. Being able to make personal connections early in a student's college career is a key factor in student success. Intensive tracking of the most at risk students is best achieved by academic professionals trained in this activity. Advisors should manage a finite number of students through transfer or graduation, providing consistency to students throughout their NECC career.

Additional Advisors

The role that the human element plays in professional academic advising is real and well documented. To achieve the goals to which the ISE aspires, additional advisors should be hired to reduce existing student caseloads, particularly aimed at students who are deemed “high risk” and require more intensive monitoring. The Advising Reform Team is aware of the college’s financial situation, and the implications that lean budgets have on hiring. However, such an investment in human capital could have a direct impact on completion and retention.

II. Assessment Recommendations

Implementation should be accompanied by a written evaluation plan that includes sufficient formative metrics to assess the progress and effectiveness of the proposed changes. Metrics could include the degree of professional development that has occurred at certain benchmarks, the number of students being advised by the new model, their satisfaction with the advising activities, change in wait times for advising appointments, etc. To the extent possible, the leading indicators should guide the implementation as it progresses.

III. Budget Recommendations

Technology-assisted advising should be part of a larger software purchase by the college, and not a separate product. Integrating the technology will reduce time to adoption and ease the transition by affected staff. A student lifecycle management system is likely to cost \$100,000-\$150,000, with significant recurring costs, both human and technological, that will need to be factored in. Faculty workload adjustments and advising assignments will come with associated costs, estimated at \$10,000 annually. Two additional full time professional advisors would significantly reduce wait times and caseloads, and would carry a cost of approximately \$75,000 each annually.

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