

Final Report
Advising Taskforce
February 20, 2007

Process

Charged with gathering information about academic advising at UW-Eau Claire, the committee decided upon several approaches and, over the course of the next several months, completed the following:

- a review of an Advising Mission Statement draft [Appendix A]
- four web-based on-campus surveys: students, faculty, department chairs, and Academic Advising staff [Appendices B, C, D, E]
- a review of advising structures at other institutions, within and outside of the UW System [Appendix F]
- a review of each UWEC College and Department webpage [Appendix G]
- a review of Department personnel plans regarding faculty advising [Appendix H]
- informational meeting with three College Associate Deans [Weil, Hoggatt, Solberg] and with Dean Wendt
- informational meeting with Academic Advising staff
- phone and email contacts with offices that serve students' academic needs: International Studies, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Office of Students with Disabilities, and the Nontraditional Student adviser
- attendance at a NACADA Faculty Advising Seminar
- a visit by an outside advising expert: Dr. Jayne Drake [Appendix I]

General Findings

The information the committee gathered proved to be very interesting, affording us helpful insight for our task at hand. First and foremost, we found consistent evidence that academic advising is taken very seriously at UW-Eau Claire. Furthermore, we recognize that the present commitment to this vital component of higher education has a long history, that many policies, practices, and procedures are in place that both reveal longstanding commitment as well as an ongoing evolution of advising based on regular evaluation of our structure and methods.

All of the surveys we administered reveal more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with the quality of academic advising. It was reassuring to see so much high praise--from students reporting on their faculty and/or Academic Advising staff advisers, from faculty reporting on their advising responsibilities and advising work with students, from the professional advising staff reporting on their work with undeclared students, and from department chairs reporting on their department cultures regarding advising.

We expected to see some "good news" in the survey results, and we did. However, we also expected to find some criticisms and problem areas, and we did. The committee then used these problems and criticisms as a basis for categorizing issues that we believe need to be addressed at UWEC.

Furthermore, when our outside consultant came to campus, having read our survey data in preparation for her visit and while here meeting with the committee, with the Academic

Advising staff, and with department chairs from all of the Colleges, she too identified several areas where problems exist. As we had requested of her, she subsequently made several recommendations based on both what she learned from her examination of academic advising at UWEC and her expertise in advising. What she identified as problems/issues coincided for the most part with what the committee determined needs improvement.

Finally, this Taskforce was charged with studying faculty advising at UW-Eau Claire and identifying its strengths and weaknesses. Many of the weaknesses we have identified involve complex issues that transcend unit or department jurisdiction. We believe that these advising issues require further examination and deliberation before ideal solutions can be formulated. We recommend further formal inquiry into academic advising at UWEC.

Recommendations

Overall Structure

Academic Advising at UWEC is offered in two ways: Faculty advising and professional Academic Advising. This kind of combination structure is common among academic institutions like ours, and is especially in our UW sister institutions. On the national level, while some universities rely on Faculty advising only and some on professional advising only, most employ a combination similar to ours.

The Taskforce recommends no change in the basic structure of advising at UWEC.

Specific Recommendations

1. Advising Mission Statement

The Taskforce recommends approval of an Advising Mission Statement [see Appendix A] which we see as foremost and crucial because of the vital role a mission statement plays: it *defines* advising at UWEC; it *expresses* our “philosophy” of advising; it *guides* policy, procedure, practice; it *clarifies* the role advising plays for both students and faculty/staff advisers. The Taskforce further recommends that an approved Advising Mission Statement be included in the University Catalogue, the Faculty and Academic Staff Academic Handbook, and on all College and Department web pages.

2. University Council of Advisers

The Taskforce recommends the establishment of a Council of Advisers. Under the purview of the Provost, this council should have the mandate to recommend policy related to academic advising. Therefore, the membership of this committee must include not only expert faculty, but also college administrators, such as Associate Deans who work closely with faculty. It should also include the Director of Academic Advising and others who work closely with academic advising. It is important for this council to represent Faculty. That this body have authority is vital in terms of this Council’s viability; that is, this body must be charged with

more than simple oversight of advising on campus, such as information gathering/reporting, etc. Several very important and complex issues related to advising, particularly faculty advising, need to be addressed at present and, likely, in the future. These include the following:

A need for

- Policies and procedures for evaluation of faculty advising
- Policies for weighing advising in personnel actions
- Rewards and recognition for effective advising
- Criteria and procedures for departmental distribution of advising workload

Additional Council responsibilities might include the following:

- Advise the administration/Senate on matters related to advising
- Develop and implement plans for increasing effectiveness of advising
- Monitor and provide feedback on the effectiveness of all advising programs and initiatives

3. Advising Section of Annual Report

The Taskforce recommends that the Annual Report from each department include a section specifically identified as "Advising." This will provide a place for Chairs to report on any plans to evaluate, to strengthen, and to improve advising in their departments. It also provides a place for any significant changes in department procedure to be reported.

4. Training

Because Faculty advising is decentralized and the needs of students and faculty within specific colleges and departments vary, we recognize that some degree of autonomy is appropriate. However, the Taskforce recommends increasing consistency in terms of the following:

- **New Faculty:** New advisers must be well prepared for the important responsibilities they will assume as advisers. The Taskforce recommends, therefore, a series of training sessions: one focusing on GE and University requirements; a second one focusing on College requirements; and a third one on departmental advising content/issues. The Colleges of Arts & Sciences and Business are already providing the two broadest levels of training. The third level must be the responsibility of each department. Ideally this training should occur before faculty are assigned advisees, which usually occurs in the second year of teaching.

- **Master Advisers:** The Taskforce recommends that departments each year select faculty members to attend training on a high level with the goal of these advisers returning to their departments not only as better advisers themselves, but also ready to assist their department with ideas and practices that will improve advising in the department. Because we see this as a very important new level of training at UWEC, we recommend that the individuals participating

in Master Adviser training be awarded a stipend as both incentive for growth and reward for already having shown strong interest and ability in academic advising.

5. Required Record Keeping

Implicit in the practice of assessing advising for personnel evaluation is the necessity of record keeping that can be used as an important part of the basis for this evaluation. Given that this is an inconsistent practice across department at UWEC, the Taskforce recommends that advisers be required to use some form of record keeping. We encourage an examination of programs that provide the means for electronic record keeping.

6. Advising Awards

The Taskforce recommends additional awards for advising.

While the addition of a single campus-wide award for advising was an important step, we feel that additional awards should be developed. These awards do not have to be monetary--- plaques or even certificates would let people know their efforts have been noticed. These could include (but are certainly not limited to)

- awards at the college or even the department level for individual advisers
- awards at the provost level for departments
- awards for innovative programs, use of technology, etc.
- awards given by student organizations

7. Degree Audit Development

Both students and faculty registered strong positive responses to questions about the helpfulness of the degree audit, though some continue to find it somewhat cumbersome. However, the Taskforce recommends development of what has been called a “forward planning” component to be added to the audit. Not only would this enable students and their advisers to look ahead several semesters with some specificity, this would also create a base of data that departments could use in planning curricular offerings in upcoming semesters. Because this technology is available, we strongly recommend that this be pursued and implemented at UWEC.

8. Restrictions on “Undeclared” Status

While most students declare a major before 60 credits, many do not. The Taskforce recommends the following:

- that students declare a major as soon as possible, but no later than 60 credits, including courses in progress.
- because a few students truly need more time, students who are not ready to declare a major file a plan for subsequent semesters, to be held on record in the Academic Advising office.
- students who remain “undeclared” must have a PAC in order to register for classes.
- transfer students who are accepted with 60 credits be required to have declared a major.

These changes in policy will underscore the importance of students making important decisions and connecting with an academic department adviser as soon as possible.

9. Visibility on Web Pages

The Taskforce, having reviewed each College's and each Department's web page advising information, finds a great deal of inconsistency. We believe that an important part of creating a "culture of advising" at UWEC is how we "show" its value to students, both prospective and enrolled, to faculty, in fact, to anyone who visits UWEC's website. We recommend that each site prominently include the following:

- UWEC Advising Mission Statement
- Additional individual College/Department statements of values and information regarding advising

10. Informational Resources

The Taskforce recommends a thorough review of the written documents we provide for students for the purposes of their planning and academic decision making. Such a review could come under the purview of the Advising Council. The Taskforce has found the need for improvement, including revision of existing documents and inclusion of others, making them more accessible and user-friendly. Of greatest concern are the following:

- University Catalogue, both print and electronic forms; we recommend that both formats be reviewed to find ways to make them more user-friendly.
- We recommend that each department develop and post sample four-year curricular plans for students in their programs.
- Web-based resources for students—we recommend that each department make their advising sheets available on-line.