

Advising Task Force Executive Summary May 23, 2018

While academic advising has tremendous value to students for their academic and personal development, it is often not handled productively. This issue is not only with FSU, but with institutions of higher education in general. Strong academic advising helps students achieve their goals as well as increases their retention.

Near the end of Fall 2017, the Provost convened an Academic Advising Taskforce to address the issues of improving academic advising. At the beginning of the Spring 2018 semester, a series of town hall meetings was conducted with members from Admissions, Financial Aid, and Athletic Coaches, Faculty from the College of Education, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the College of Business, as well as an open forum for students. Nearly 200 faculty, staff, and students participated. Each group addressed seven questions, and then those assembled voted on the most important items and strategies. These questions, with the major themes that emerged from the town hall meetings, follow. The information has been distilled into the following summary points, but, upon request, a summary of the raw information is available for your perusal.

Summary

FSU does not have an effective advising system. Faculty and students are frustrated by the inconsistency, service, engagement by faculty, the timeline to graduation, and the weak career advice provided to students.

Questions and Major Emergent Themes from the Town Hall Meetings

1. What is advising?

There is a lack of understanding of what advising is on the part of both faculty and students. Many faculty view advising as activating the students so they can register in PAWS. Conversely, students are not cognizant of the functions of their advisor nor are they aware of the myriad ways their advisor can help them. Academic advising should help students identify their expectations for their major, set realistic goals, create a path for achievement, prepare for graduation and career opportunities, and be able to address 21st century challenges.

2. What are the mission and desired outcomes of FSU's advising program?

There is no clear mission with agreed upon outcomes which has created a patchwork approach which is erratic, unproductive, and does not meet the needs of the students. The mission statement should articulate a unifying, comprehensive, and institution-wide purpose for academic advising and include the intended outcomes of academic advising as well as clear expectations for students and academic advisors.

3. What organizational structure(s) will FSU need to appropriately support students and achieve advising goals?

FSU's inconsistent advising structure is perhaps its greatest challenge. As a community, we need to agree to an advising structure and determine the "owners" of that system. A standard university-wide set of policies and procedures needs to be developed.

4. How can FSU use technology to improve the way we advise and support students?

Technology is underutilized as a tool to assist students. Many faculty and students are unaware of the technology available to them or how to utilize it effectively. Academic advisors and students need technology-based tools to help plan degree paths, connect students to resources, and track progress

and support interventions with performance dashboards. Training in the existing tools and development of additional tools are needed.

5. How should FSU enable faculty and staff to provide the best possible advising and support for students?

Currently there is inadequate training at all levels. Thorough and periodic training encompassing the philosophy, goals, policy, processes, and technology is necessary for academic advisors to enhance student success and effectively connect students with resources. In addition, academic advising should be integrated into a variety of non-academic functions, such as those offered by Student Affairs and Athletics.

6. What practices, policies, and processes will FSU need in place to promote the highest quality student advising?

Advising is segregated and patchworked. There should be university-wide collaboration and communication to bridge the gaps between colleges, departments, and extracurricular activities. Perhaps the implementation of such schemes such as co-advising or peer-to-peer advising with entering students, coupled with technology, will make the advising process more effective.

7. How should FSU measure and report advising outcomes to ensure accountability and promote improvement for the advising program?

Lack of assessment of the academic advising process does not allow evaluation of what constitutes “good” advising or actions which need improvement. There needs to be a systematic plan to assess academic advising, which should lead to improvements and innovation through measurement. Assessment should involve both direct and indirect measures, including multiple feedback pathways, and clearly distinguish faculty/academic advising responsibilities. We need to be aware that every faculty member is not a good advisor. Perhaps this can be addressed by allowing some faculty to focus on teaching/advising and providing other responsibilities for faculty who are not proficient as advisors. There could be incentives for advisors who excel.

Next Step

In early Fall 2018 there will be a call for faculty, staff, and students to participate on several work groups to begin collectively formulating solutions to the problems identified during the town halls. The major goal will be identifying a campus advising paradigm that addresses the diversity of our students and of the academic programs across campus.

The taskforce’s work will be augmented by our participation with the Excellence in Academic Advising (EAA) process, co-sponsored by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and the Gardner Institute. FSU is one of 12 charter institutions selected nationally to work with NACADA and the Gardner Institute to “refine, validate, and establish the aspirational standards for colleges and universities to evaluate and improve academic advising.” Our collaboration in the EAA process will begin in June. Look for additional information in the coming months.