University of Delaware

Undergraduate Student Advising

Report of the Task Force on Undergraduate Advising

April 2, 2018

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UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW

The Task Force on Undergraduate Advising examined the current state of undergraduate advising at the University of Delaware – our challenges and opportunities for improvement. It is divided into two sections. In the first section, we describe the current state of advising and the challenges that we encounter with our current advising model. The second section provides recommendations for improving what we do.

ADVISING TODAY

Decentralized Model   Advising at UD is decentralized with each college having its own system. Moreover, departments and schools within a college may handle undergraduate advising in different ways. In general, we have three basic advising models across the colleges. CANR, CAS and CEOE rely heavily on faculty advising. In general, Lerner, CEHD and COE have professional advisors for the first two years and faculty advisors for upper division students. For the most part, CHS has developed a model in which professional advisors are available to students for all four years, and faculty serve as mentors to students.

Faculty Advisement   With 907 students who have declared a major in the college[1], the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources has a faculty based advising model that is coordinated by the Office of Undergraduate Student Services (OUSS; senior assistant dean, academic program manager, administrative assistant). OUSS manages the delivery of all undergraduate recruitment, academic advising functions, special events and student support services for CANR. OUSS has an open door policy and provides support to potential students, current students, alumni and faculty.

The College of Arts and Sciences has 6955 undergraduate students in over 70 majors across 23 academic departments and several academic programs. The CAS Undergraduate Academic Services (CAS UAS) includes a Senior Assistant Dean, an Assistant Dean for Student Services, an Assistant

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[1] Enrollment numbers are from the Registrar's Fall 2017 official extract of students who have declared a major in the college. Students who have more than one major are counted for each major.

Dean for Student Success, 5 academic program coordinators, and an academic program coordinator who manages outreach to first-year students and oversees the NUCLEUS program, which serves about 1000 CAS students. CAS relies heavily on faculty advisors. A few larger departments and one department with complex student admissions and advisement issues have hired a professional advisor or assigned an administrative assistant to handle routine advising issues (Biological Sciences, English, Psychological and Brain Sciences, Music, Political Science). CAS UAS also includes advisement for the Associate in Arts program. The Associate in Arts Program with 816 students utilizes a two-tiered advising model. Faculty advisors are assigned to all first-year students. Professional academic advisors are assigned to all sophomores. The Assistant Dean for the AAP coordinates advising on all of the AAP campuses and reports to the CAS Senior Assistant Dean.

The College of Earth, Ocean and Environment has 433 students who have declared a major in the college and relies heavily on faculty advising. The assistant dean handles students who have complex programs, experience difficult personal issues or are interested in changing majors. She also serves as the resource for all faculty advisors, and coordinates the CEOE student ambassador group.

Professional Advisors and
Faculty Advisors

The Lerner College of Business and Economics with 4229 students who have declared a major in the college has a two-tiered advising model that incorporates both professional advisors and faculty advisors. Their Undergraduate Advising and Academic Services (UAAS) office is responsible for all advising in the college and works closely with the faculty advisors. In general, freshmen and sophomores are advised by professional advisors in UAAS and transition to faculty advisors for their junior and senior years. However, the Finance Department has found it to be more cost effective to have a professional advisor handle routine advising issues with juniors and seniors, with faculty available to mentor students.

With 939 students who have declared a major in the college on the main campus, the College of Education and Human Development has a two-tiered advising model that

incorporates professional advisors, an advisement center and faculty advisors.[2] In the School of Education, students begin with a professional advisor and transition to one of two faculty advisors in their junior year. In Human Development and Family Sciences, freshmen and sophomores are assigned the HDFS advisement center. In the advisement center, a professional advisor trains and oversees graduate students who meet with the undergraduate students. HDFS juniors and seniors are assigned a faculty advisor but frequently drop in the advisement center for routine issues. The CEHD Student Services Office coordinates undergraduate advising across the two academic units.

The College of Engineering with 2454 students who have declared a major in the college has a two-tiered, distributed advising model. On paper, all students who are matriculated into an engineering major are assigned a faculty academic advisor from that major. However, each department has a professional academic advisor who does the majority of the advising on a day-to-day basis in their respective department. The professional advisors are not assigned as the official advisor in UDSIS. Although advising is coordinated by the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Services, the professional advisors do not report to the Assistant Dean.

Professional Advisors with
Faculty Mentoring   With 2609 students who have a declared a major in the College of Health Sciences, CHS has moved to a model in which professional advisors are the primary advisors for most students, and faculty take on the role of mentors. The advisors are located within the departments rather than being under the Assistant Dean. Currently most of their majors, except for nursing students, have professional advisors all four years.

Professional Advisors   Finally, the University Studies Office with 5.2 FTE professional advisors serves 1,458 students who have entered UD without a declared major.

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[2] CEHD also has 32 students in the Associate in Arts—Elementary Teacher Education program in Georgetown who are advised by the AA-ETE program coordinator in southern Delaware.

AACRAO Evaluations   The Task Force did not conduct its own evaluation of the quality of advising on campus but relied on two recent external evaluations. In 2013 and 2015, the University charged AACRAO Consulting with assessing our enrollment management operations, which included undergraduate student advising. The evaluations included input from students, faculty, staff and administrators. Both evaluations highlighted shortcomings in the way we manage advising. Key observations were:

1. Because academic advising is decentralized, it is difficult to provide consistent, accurate and updated information to students.

2. UD does not have an advising manual that provides up-to-date information on policies and resources.

3. UD does not have a training program for new and continuing academic advisors.

4. Advisors devote a lot of time to evaluating student files for completion of graduation and degree requirements.

5. Advisors often spend a lot of time creating course sections and schedules to meet the anticipated needs of enrolling students with very little analytical data to facilitate this work.

6. Overall, advising at UD does not promote student satisfaction or student success.

**Overall Challenges
in Advising**   Although there have been some changes in advising since the AACRAO evaluations, there is still a general perception that across the entire university, we are not succeeding at providing strong advisement for our undergraduate students. In part, the University has not established clear expectations for advisors. The three problems that are consistently raised about advising are accessibility to an advisor, accuracy of information and consistency of advising.

Accessibility. Students tend to look for quick feedback on their questions, but they are not always able to locate their advisors. We do not expect faculty to always be available in

their office. They are also not required to post drop-in advising hours for their advisees. Consequently some students find it difficult to contact their advisor and make appointments to meet with their advisor. Similarly, in some colleges, there are not enough professional advisors for students to handle the numbers of students needing appointments in a timely fashion.

What happens when faculty are not in their office for a student? Students may turn to their assistant dean's office or seek out a faculty member who has developed a reputation as being a good advisor. In either case, the assistant dean's office or the other faculty member tends to become over-burdened with additional advisees, which in turn makes it harder for their assigned advisees to make appointments. Similarly, when a student who is assigned to a faculty member has a more complex advising question, the faculty member generally sends the student to the assistant dean's office or if there is a professional advisor in the unit who is supposed to handle, for example, freshmen and sophomores, the student is sent to the professional advisor. Again, the additional advising appointments make it more difficult for these advisors to handle their assigned advisees.

Accuracy of information. With responsibility for advisement distributed across colleges, UD does not have a general training program that new advisors are required to attend. We have not created a central repository for all policies, procedures and current information. Consequently, advisors are not always up-to-date in their knowledge of requirements and procedures.

Consistency of advising. Currently many forms of advising exist across the colleges and UST. Some work better than others. Ideally, UD would move toward consistency in expectations for what an advisor does, in the information available to students from faculty and professional advisors, and in the way students schedule their advising appointments. The Task Force also believes that we would serve students better if there were consistent university-level messaging on key topics (e.g., probation, dismissal, senior checkout).

Goals	To support the University's goal to enhance student success and thereby increase undergraduate retention and graduation rates, the Advising Task Force strongly believes that we need to and can improve undergraduate advisement. Specifically, our goals are to improve (a) the accessibility of advisors, (b) the accuracy of information and (c) consistency in the quality of advising across campus, and (d) accountability for the quality of advising.
Context for Change	We recognize that the quality of advisement varies greatly across campus and that we have faculty, departments and colleges that have prioritized advisement and excelled in their delivery of high quality advisement to their students. Here we note key contextual factors that contribute to advising at UD.
Pockets of Excellence	Although undergraduate advising overall is not a strength at UD, the Task Force recognizes that we have units that handle advising well. There are departments in which the culture supports and values faculty advising, and faculty strongly believe that the relationships established with their advisees are critical to the overall success of their students. There are individual faculty across the University who have taken on high advising loads and who excel in providing advisement to their students. Finally, there are colleges and departments that have created advisement centers to handle advising more effectively. It is generally felt that those units that have worked hard to create a strong advising program for their students will be less receptive to efforts to centralize advising at the university-level.
Faculty Advising Workloads	According to the Registrar's Office,[3] we have 548 faculty with advising assignments ranging from 1 to 475 students. Of these faculty, 432 (79%) have fewer than 30 advisees. More than half of these faculty (252) have 15 or fewer advisees. In the Collective Bargaining Agreement, a work assignment of 30 advisees counts as ½ credit contact hour. Credit for undergraduate advisees is given in blocks of 30 students and may not be prorated (CBA 2016-2021, p. 41).

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[3] Based on advisors who are "active" in Human Resources (e.g., not on leave) on January 9, 2018. This accounts for 20,743 majors; minors were not included.

Because the majority of faculty with advising assignments have fewer than 30 advisees, any changes to our advising model (e.g., moving to professional advisors) will not necessarily result in cost savings by freeing up substantial amounts of faculty time.

Finally, the Task Force notes that the University has changed priorities over the years. Today there is more emphasis on research, graduate education and engagement activities than a decade ago. Even if faculty want to devote time to advising, they are pulled in multiple directions and simply have less availability for advising.

Staff Advising Workloads

Advising workloads across professional staff vary from an estimated 35% to 100% advising, where advising means working with students on issues related to understanding majors and minors, registering for classes, and help with other issues directly related to student support. During course registration and New Student Orientation, advisors have little time for other duties. During non-registration periods, advisors typically have other duties. Some of these activities are "advising-related" responsibilities (e.g., review of online degree audit and student transcripts; process course substitutions; Blue Hen Success Collaborative outreach; communicate with students regarding deadlines and requirements; process excused absences; work with students on probation).

In most colleges, professional advisors also do a myriad of activities that are more or less related to student support, including preparing student newsletters, coordinating convocations and student award celebrations, managing college recruitment activities (e.g., communications with prospective students, Blue and Golden Saturdays, Discovery Days, Decision Days, special events for middle and high school students) as well as responsibilities that are less tied to advising (e.g., course scheduling, coordinating alumni weekend events, managing student research symposium, teaching first year seminars or other courses, coordinating living learning communities, advising student groups, managing college ambassadors, overseeing student success programs (e.g., ASPIRE, NUCLEUS, UD Scholars), college/department curriculum committees, creating

marketing materials for department or college majors). Many of the professional advisors are considered part-time advisors and part-time administrative assistants with responsibility for duties such as purchasing supplies for courses, handling book orders, supporting accreditation reviews and maintaining the department chair's schedule.

Any changes to our advising model needs to consider the fact that most professional advisors handle other critical duties within their college or department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overarching Recommendations

The Task Force provides a number of recommendations to improve consistency, accuracy, accessibility and accountability of our advising, but we begin with four foundational recommendations.

Recommendation 1

All first-year students, sophomores and first-semester transfer students should be assigned to a professional advisor or department/college advisement center. With this change, the Task Force believes that our students will start their careers at UD with strong advisement and have a path to follow through their junior and senior years. For first-year students, sophomores and first-semester transfer students, the student:advisor ratio for a full-time advisor should be no more than 300:1.

Looking at first-time freshmen entering UD in 2010 and 2011, about 57% graduated in a major that was different from their entry major. Of the students who changed majors, 80% will have transferred into their final major by the end of their second year.[4] Consequently, we believe that providing strong advisement in the first two years will support student success.

As noted above, the Task Force recognizes that there are advisement centers in departments and colleges that already handle advising first-year students, sophomores and transfer

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[4] Hu, X. (February, 2018). *University of Delaware Major Migration Report*. Division of Enrollment Management.

students. Additionally, some units have key faculty advisors[5] who are assigned to first- and second-year students. The Task Force does not believe that requiring these units to change will necessarily improve the quality of advising in these units. Consequently we recommend that these units be allowed to continue their current practice.

Recommendation 2	Advising should be centralized at the college level. By this we mean that professional advisors should report up to or at least be coordinated by the assistant dean of the college. This change will enable the assistant dean (or senior assistant dean) to oversee the quality of advising across the college and to gain some efficiency among units that have less than 300 majors.
Recommendation 3	Juniors and seniors are assigned to faculty advisors. Faculty are available to help students with selection and registration of courses, provide guidance on career and graduate education issues, and give advice and mentoring to support students' success.
Recommendation 4	Providing high-quality advisement to students contributes to student success. When faculty advise students, their efforts should be officially recognized as part of their workload. Consequently, the Task Force recommends that whenever possible, faculty should be assigned advisees in groups of 30 with appropriate recognition of workload adjustments. Departments that assign students to key faculty advisors should set clear expectations regarding the responsibilities of their key faculty advisors.

Goal: Consistency   **Improve consistency in the advising experience**

- Set clear expectations for advisors.
- Develop a centrally-managed advising website that will be the portal to all college advising webpages.
- Advisors should use the BHSC platform to show appointment or office hour availability.

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[5] Key faculty advisors are those faculty who have substantial advising workloads and deep knowledge of requirements for the majors in their department and strong knowledge of college and University general education requirements.

- Assign all first- and second-year students to a professional advisor or department/college advisement center.

Goal: Accuracy   **Improve accuracy of information**

- Develop a centrally-managed, web-based advising manual for all advisors to follow.
- Provide university-wide training for all new advisors.
- Provide annual on-going training for all continuing advisors.
- Inventory all existing advising websites and remove all outdated information.
- Create an Advisor Information Sharing Bulletin Board for posting information about new courses, new programs, and new or revised policies each year. All new policies go into catalog, and each summer the new and revised policies page is reset.
- All course substitutions need to be documented so that we improve the accuracy of degree audits.

Goal: Accessibility   **Improve accessibility of advisors**

- Set clear expectations for the hours professional advisors are expected to be available to students each week, especially for peak advising periods.
- Whenever possible, use BHSC platform for scheduling advising appointments.
- Establish backup plans for secondary advisor when assigned advisor is on medical leave, sabbatical leave, other long term leaves or out of office for two or more days during peak advising periods.

Goal: Accountability   **Establish accountability for overall advising quality**

- Implement student evaluations for advisors.
- Create a professional advisor award.
- Establish regular overall assessment of advising experience on campus.
- Ensure that when faculty are assigned advisees, they receive at least 30 students with additional students, as much as possible, in 30 student increments so that their advisement work is counted as part of their workload.

Implementation of Proposed Changes

College of Agriculture & Natural Resources

1. Estimated 420 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 487 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, .6 FTE advising by an academic program manager, 1 senior assistant dean
4. Recommend hiring **1 FTE professional advisor**

College of Arts & Sciences

1. Estimated 3066 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 3889 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, 1 senior assistant dean, 1 assistant dean, 5 academic program managers.
4. Currently, 2.5 FTE professional advisors in departments (music, English, biological sciences, psychological and brain sciences, political science; note the professional advisor in political science in administrative assistant).
5. Recommend hiring **10 FTE professional advisors** for first- and second-year students.

Lerner College of Business & Economics

1. Estimated 1581 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 2648 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, 3.4 FTE professional advisors in central office, 1 assistant dean, 1 senior assistant dean
4. Currently, 1 FTE professional advisor in Finance Department.
5. Recommend hiring **1 FTE professional advisor**

College of Earth, Ocean & Environment

1. Estimated 197 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 236 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, 1 assistant dean and .5 FTE advisor approved Fall 2017
4. Recommend additional **.5 FTE professional advisor** (i.e., 1 FTE advisor in addition to the assistant dean)

College of Education & Human Development

1. Estimated 405 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 534 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, 1.8 FTE advising by professional advisors, 1 senior assistant dean
4. Currently, all first- and second-year students are assigned to professional advisor or an advisement center. Juniors and seniors transition to faculty advisors.
5. No additional advisors recommended

College of Engineering

1. Estimated 1201 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 1253 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, 4.5 FTE advising by professional advisors, 1 assistant dean (but students are not officially assigned to the professional advisors)
4. Recommend first- and second-year students be assigned to existing professional advisors
5. Recommend professional advisors report to (or at least be coordinated by) the assistant dean[6]

College of Health Sciences

1. Estimated 1139 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 1470 juniors and seniors
3. Currently, 6 FTE advising by professional advisors, 1 assistant dean (an additional .5 FTE advisor was approved Fall 2017 but not yet hired)
4. Currently, for BHAN, KAAP and MEDT, professional advisors are available to all students. In nursing, there is one professional advisor for the 662 students in the traditional nursing BSN program.
5. Recommend hiring **an additional .5 FTE professional advisor** so that all 662 nursing students are assigned to professional advisors (i.e., +.5 FTE over fall 2017 approval)

University Studies

1. Estimated 1292 first- and second-year students
2. Estimated 166 juniors and seniors
3. UST also provides advising to students who change majors across colleges

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[6] The Task Force notes that the College of Engineering is requesting an additional 1.5 FTE professional advisors for first- and second-year student advisement to cover the imbalance of workload across departments/programs within the college. Of this, 1.0 FTE professional advisor will be housed in the central College Advisement Office to support all departments/programs.

4. Currently, 5.2 FTE advising by professional advisors
5. No additional advisors recommended

Central Resources

1. UD invests in the Blue Hen Success Collaborative (BHSC), which is an advising and data analysis platform that also provides access to the Education Advisory Board's library of research studies and best practices. The BHSC has 1 FTE in the director for student success initiatives. This role, as well as the BHSC in general, encompasses more functions than central support for advising. However, with respect to central support for advising, the director for student success initiatives provides training on the use of BHSC for advisors, does background research on best practices related to advising, academic policies, and institutional practices that affect student success, and facilitates the implementation of advising initiatives such as creating SUCCESS templates, coordinating with the colleges for targeted student outreach, and providing data and communication templates to assist colleges in strategic interventions.
2. The Deputy Provost is investing in the creation of a central, student-facing advising website and will coordinate the development of a web-based, University advising manual.
3. The Office of the Vice President for Enrollment Management is requesting an additional 1 FTE for an assistant director for student success initiatives. Similar to the director, this individual's responsibilities extend beyond supporting advising. However, related to advising, this individual will assist the director for student success initiatives in supporting University-wide use of the BHSC (e.g., training advisors, providing technical support for an expanding BHSC user base, developing and maintaining the SUCCESS templates and other materials that support advising), maintain the central, student-facing advising website, and ensure that the University advising manual is current.