



Academic Advising Review Consultant Visit Report

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

February 9-



Prepared for Valdosta State University, February 9-11, 2016

At the invitation of Valdosta State University, a NACADA Consultant team was identified to conduct a review of the academic advising program. This review was intended to provide guidance to campus leaders regarding the organization, delivery, and support of academic advising. The NACADA Consultant Team included:




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Wes Habley, 2004

Introduction

The role and importance of academic advising in supporting student success has changed significantly over the last few years, as has who is involved in its delivery. Once primarily the purview of faculty members, many institutions and, in particular, public universities, now also have professional staff members who serve as academic advisors. The importance of academic advising to student persistence and success in college continues to be documented in the research such that academic advising is

Whether faculty or professional, advisors play an integral role in the success of students by inviting them



process, to apply decision-making strategies, to put the college experience into perspective, to set priorities and evaluate events, to develop thinking and learning skills, and to make informed choices.


- x The NACADA Concept of Academic Advising



Academic Advising at Valdosta State University

Until recently, academic advising at Valdosta State University was highly decentralized and school-based. In 2013, a Centralized Advising office was established with responsibility for advising all first-year students. Once students reach the 30-credit threshold and provided they are in good academic standing, they are transitioned to their respective academic colleges for advising. Undeclared students remain with the Centralized Advising office until they declare a major. It should be noted that advisors within Centralized Advising are assigned to specific majors and/or colleges; this liaison relationship appears to be better within some colleges than others.

At the College




in majors that are cohort-based and/or in which course sequences are such that getting off-track has significant consequences for timely degree completion.

From the student perspective, there appears to be a disconnection between the expressed advising philosophy and actual practice. During our discussions with students, whether those were in a formal



will help facilitate relationship building between Centralized Advising and these other units and, in particular, with Career Services.

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some Colleges is the result of this lack of process involvement. The communication between Centralized Advising and the Colleges in general is uneven leading to a lack of confidence about messages being given to students and feelings of disengagement from their majors. At a macro-level, folks expressed concern about what is perceived as a lack of transparency around decision-making that leads to confusion about directions and processes. In addition, we found faculty and staff that were unfamiliar with the role of the 70/80 Committee and few faculty members on that committee. While we recognize that committees can become too large, there does need to be outgoing communication from the group about their charge and what they are doing. The institution needs to make a concerted effort to be more inclusive in process as well as transparent with information and to support multiple forms of information sharing so that faculty, staff and administrators are on the same page.

- X **Organizational Structures.** Current structures for academic advising sometimes mean that students must develop relationships with 3 advisors over the course of their Valdosta experience. In Colleges where the transition from Centralized Advising is to a faculty advisor, the number of students to be served outweighs the amount of time faculty members have available, particularly in the College of the Arts & Sciences.

- X **Philosophy and Mission.** A review of the website found several different mission statements regarding academic advising at VSU. This is confusing and leads to inconsistency. There needs to be a general, institutional philosophy, vision, values and mission statement with regard to academic advising. Having a set of institutional statements about academic advising does not preclude Colleges and Centralized Advising from creating their own, provided these are aligned

- X **Advisor Roles, Responsibilities, and Development.** Professional development for faculty and staff is limited. While Central Advising gives a Master Advisor training it is not well utilized by faculty. Usage of Graduate Assistants in advising, while holding some potential, is rendered ineffective in the absence of appropriate training and level of compensation over other graduate assistantships on campus. The level of compensation relative to other assistantships on campus contributes to high turnover in this role. This means that training is constant, ongoing, and lacking any substantive depth of the relational and conceptual underpinnings of the field.

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- x **Identify Campus-wide Leadership for Academic Advising.** Identify an individual and office with responsibility for actively overseeing and coordinating academic advising program. The person identified must have significant background in academic advising at a university level as well as the academic credibility to work with faculty. In addition to campus-wide coordination, the responsibilities of this position would include oversight of training and professional development, assessment, development of advising resources and chairing the Academic Advising Council recommended below, to name a few.

We recommend that this position report to the Provost to connect it with Academic Affairs and signal the importance of advising to the campus. In addition, essential to the success of this role is having support and buy-in from all senior administration, including the Deans of the Colleges. Without this level of authority and responsibility for advising, the inconsistency and confusion that currently exists will continue.

One potential model would place coordination for academic advising within the portfolio of one of the Associate Provosts. Another model would be to appoint an Executive Director or Assistant Provost for Academic Advising. In either case, the Centralized Advising unit would have a direct reporting relationship to this individual.


- x **Establish an Academic Advising Council with academic and student affairs stakeholders as members.** Leadership for this Council would come from Academic Affairs and include advising leads in the colleges and faculty advisors along with representatives from the Registrar, Financial Aid, Career Services and IT. The Council would be chaired by the individual responsible for the coordination of advising campus-wide. Among the charges to this Council would be to:
 - o Develop a shared understanding of what academic advising is that results in the development of a shared vision, mission, and set of student learning and advising delivery outcomes to be used in the development of an assessment plan.
 - o Inventory policies and procedures with the goal of streamlining processes and removing unnecessary barriers for all students.
 - o Map the student experience from admission through graduation to identify choke points in the experience.
 - o Review orientation and develop outcomes for this important portal to the Valdosta student experience. There is a dissonance between faculty interests in being part of orientation and the Orientation programs perception of the same. Faculty feedback suggested that some felt they were disinvited even though they wanted to attend, while the Orientation folks felt that they were removing a burden from faculty. The lack of communication seems to have led to misinterpretations of intentions from both faculty members and those involved with organizing Orientation. , many indicated that orientation was somewhat chaotic and not particularly welcoming.
- x **Bring Consistency to Advisor Roles, Responsibilities, and Professional Development.**
 - o Design an advisor training and development program grounded in the NACADA Core Values, CAS Standards and advising and student development theory. As Andersen (1997) keep them stimulated, challenged and progressing toward a meaningful goal. The best way to do that--especially among new students--
 - o Develop a rewards and recognition structure for all advisors. This investment is essential to keeping advisors current and engaged in effective practice. Schlossberg noted that



individuals respond positively when they know that they matter, and when people feel they do not matter then they are marginalized. Rewards and recognition require little outlay from the university, but speak volumes to employees about their value to the institution. In addition, VSU should become intentional about designing and developing a reward process to recognize outstanding academic advisors internally and externally through NACADA recognition program.

- Create a career ladder for academic advising positions. Position descriptions for academic advisors are developed by individual units. Inherently, this creates the potential for responsibility as well as compensation inequities. In fact, there are some inequities that currently exist as a result of restructuring. Reviewing and developing a career ladder for academic advisors at VSU is an important step toward resolving these inequities.

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indicative of a campus willing to take a step back, take a hard look, reflect, and then move forward as a community.

-wide coordination for