

**Report on Advising Responsibilities
of P&S Advisers at Iowa State University
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Prepared by the University Academic Advising Committee
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“Academic advising is an intentional, collaborative relationship based on trust and mutual respect that promotes the student’s development of competence, autonomy and sound decision making skills. Adviser-student interactions are grounded in teaching and learning and are vital in promoting student growth and personal development through learning, discovery, and engagement. Academic advising supports the mission of the University”.¹

“[Universities] should lay out for entering students a vision of the whole college experience that they can illustrate and support with evidence from their own programs. They should show students what is at the top of the ladder. This vision should be sewn from the fabric of students’ experience at the college, not tackled together from fragments of the whole cloth of wishful thinking.

For students, the parts of their educational experience are given meaning in terms of their conception of the whole. The learning environment of the student certainly includes the classes the student takes, but it includes all of those classes, and their relationship to the rest of the students’ experience....the experiences that most deeply affect students in school or college are more often than not outside the classroom.²

“Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience....”³

Student learning, satisfaction and success are critical to the success of the university. Academic advising plays a central role in that success, serving as a hub of students’ interaction with the university. From visits made by prospective students to graduation and beyond, advisers serve to connect students to the learning, services, experiences and people that give meaning to their university experience.

¹ Iowa State University 2007-09 Catalog

² Tagg, John. *The Learning Paradigm College*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, 2003.

³ Light, Richard J. (2001) *Making the Most of College: College Students Speak Their Minds*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

As budgets and demographics have changed the ways in which universities are shaped, so too has academic advising changed at Iowa State University. This report was prompted by the concerns raised in the 2005 Survey of Undergraduate Advisers, which gave evidence of the broad and widely varied scope of responsibilities now being performed by academic advisers at Iowa State University.

Members of this subcommittee met regularly through the Spring 2007 semester, and on two occasions also met with members of ISU's Office of Human Resource Services. We reviewed the results of the 2005 UAAC survey and compared these with those outlined Human Resources Class Title lists and position descriptions. Initially encouraged by HR to develop new responsibility statements for each of the Adviser I-IV positions, we ultimately determined that the variation of responsibilities, titles and loads was too great to make such an effort accurately represent the work currently performed by advisers. Instead, we have resolved to present generalized conclusions of our study with recommendations for action by UAAC.

Our central conclusion mirrors that of the UAAC report of 2006: The position descriptions for P&S Academic Advisers, which have not been systematically reviewed since the 1993 restructuring of the P&S system, do not accurately reflect the breadth and complexity of current responsibilities.

The changes seen in advisers' responsibilities in the years since the Peat Marwick review can be attributed to multiple factors, the most significant of which are outlined below.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHANGES SINCE 1993 REVIEW

I. There is no university-level coordination of academic advising

The administrative structure of advising has led to many of the changes, challenges, and variation we see in advising positions. Academic advisers are employed by departments, or in college academic services centers. Advisers may be one of many in a group or serve alone. Some are the sole P&S employee within their units. Although a member of the Provost's staff has responsibility for coordinating an information list serve for advisers and serving on the Undergraduate Programs Council and UAAC, there is no central coordination of what advisers do, nor are there consistent guidelines for limits of responsibility, workload, or rewards for work performed. Moreover, Deans and Department Chairs have little training in, or incentive to learn about, the processes of the P&S system.

Many of the responsibilities assumed by advisers since the 1993 review have been imposed "horizontally" from administrative units outside those that employ advisers, chief among these are their involvement in the university's sharply increased

recruitment efforts (centered in the Office of Admissions, Academic Partnership Program (APP), Experience Iowa State, and New Students Programs), and retention efforts (Academic Success Center, Learning Communities, Office of the Registrar).

Example: In 1993, Admissions asked advisers to meet with prospective students and families if they had requested such a visit. For the past many years, meetings with advisers are a standard part of the “menu” offered to visitors. Admissions asks that each unit have someone, usually the advisor, available a minimum of one hour each day, Monday – Friday, for most weeks of the year.⁴ In addition to these meetings, advisers are expected to write letters to prospective students at various stages of their recruitment, develop recruitment materials and marketing displays, reply to individual inquires from high school students, parents and counselors; develop and deliver group programs in the Experience Iowa State programs (many held on weekends), perform distance advising and off-campus visits with students in the new Academic Partnership Program, as well as develop and maintain relationships with their advising counterparts in participating campuses of the APP schools, maintain APP records and coordinate their efforts with other ISU offices involved in APP.

Example: Among ISU’s retention initiatives are the highly regarded Learning Communities, which have relied heavily on the participation and coordination of academic advisers. Advisers play a central role in the new Academic Probation program, with expectations for increased and time-sensitive meetings with students, management of registration holds and recordkeeping.

The most significant obstacle to promoting consistency and quality in academic advising is that the university has no established guidelines for what constitutes a reasonable and effective advising load. Advising loads vary by college, P&S classification and administrative responsibilities, but these factors cannot in and of themselves explain the range of loads currently assigned to advisers at ISU. Advising loads of full-time P&S Advisers II - IV range from 74 to 765 students (Appendix II). Regardless of classification or other administrative responsibilities, it is impossible to believe that the student who is one of 765 has access to the same kind of advising available to the student who is one of 74. Simple math gives evidence of these differences:

Example: The new Academic Probation (AP) policy requires students to complete an Academic Intervention form and then meet with their adviser within the first ten days of the semester to discuss their Intervention responses, receive advice on resources and actions that may improve their academic performance, and make any recommended adjustments to their class schedule. As part of this process,

⁴ Note: the weeks in which visits are limited or not arranged are set by Admissions and do not necessarily coincide with lulls in the advising calendar. Consequently it has become difficult for those who are the sole advisers in their unit to take vacation or attend professional development events off or on campus.

advisers must also make file copies of the Academic Intervention form, add information on the meeting to their records, and release the registration hold on their students' Access Plus accounts. AP meetings will typically last 30 minutes. Assuming that 13% of an adviser's students were placed on Academic Probation or Warning in a given semester (slightly lower than the university average seen in Spring 2007), an adviser a load of 300 advisees would have 19.5 hours of the first two weeks of class consumed by Academic Probation meetings. In fact, data collected on this first semester of the new AP system showed that 20 advisers had between 31-49 students on Probation or Warning, and 10 advisers had more than 50. The top ten advisers with the highest number of students on W/P had a combined total of 670 advisees or 23.7% of all students on W/P – all of whom were supposed to be seen in the first ten days of the semester, and were to be fit into schedules that were already busy with prospective students, continuing students, and a host of administrative tasks.

Example: Advisers are called upon to write letters of recommendation for students for study abroad programs, internships, scholarships, awards, admission to graduate programs, and employment. Conservatively estimating that 5% of an adviser's students would request such a letter in each semester, and that such letters would average an hour to research, write, print, prepare a file copy for, and mail, an adviser with 150 advisees would spend 15 hours writing letters of recommendation; an adviser with 300 advisees would spend 30 hours. These hours must either be taken from those available for other responsibilities or added to hours worked.

Given the variation in loads, it is not surprising that 25% of the nearly 4000 ISU undergraduate respondents to the Spring 2006 Student Survey of Academic Advising Services rated the quality of academic advising that they received from their college or department as "fair" or "poor." 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed that advisers have positively impacted their continued enrollment. From the same report's qualitative data, we know that when presented with the opportunity to suggest "one thing that I would do to improve advising" there were more than 1000 comments expressing a desire for more time with their adviser, and that advisers "know me as a person." These numbers are alarming.

Students expect advisers to respond to e-mails promptly, to be readily available, to know them well enough to provide them with information and advice pertinent to their individual needs. These expectations coupled with excessive advising workload create a strong disconnect between student expectations and staffing decisions related to advising.

In the most recent National Survey on Academic Advising conducted by ACT (2003), data were collected on the mean number of advisees assigned to each full-time equivalent adviser. The survey showed that the mean number of advisees assigned to full-time

advisers at four-year public colleges is 285/1. According to Wes Habley, Office of Educational Practices Director at ACT, Inc. and former President of the National Academic Advising Association, there are few, if any, public recommendations on advising load. But off the record, many experts in the field of academic advising suggest the target adviser load for full-time advisers should be about 300/1 and for full-time instructional staff about 20/1. There are institutional factors that should guide decisions on adviser load and institution-specific questions that must be explored before determining appropriate adviser loads.⁵

The quality of teaching and learning in large classes has been a topic of concern at Iowa State for some time. This concern needs to be extended to the quality of advising.

2. There has been devolution of faculty and administrative responsibilities to advisers

As more academic units have adopted a professional advising model, tasks heretofore performed by faculty have been transferred to advisers. Among these are coordination of internship and cooperative education programs, evaluation of transfer and study abroad credit, review and approval of Honors and ROTC programs of study, preparation and editing of catalog copy, advising student clubs, and representing the academic unit at university events such as graduation, award and recognition ceremonies, “Major Fairs” and VEISHEA. Additionally, many advisers serve on department, college and/or university committees, commonly, but not exclusively, those involving curriculum, awards, scholarships, first year programs, learning communities and assessment. This is a trend we believe will only increase as faculty who are now advising retire. There is a need to prepare what advisers will do and what advising will be in the next decade.

3. There have been changes in the student body

A higher percentage of students are coming to college, making the challenge of advising an increasingly diverse student body more complex. Students are coming to ISU having already earned college credit, they are earning credit at other institutions during their time at ISU, more are studying abroad, more are involved in distance education, there is more parental involvement, there are more students with learning disabilities, and more students with emotional disabilities and mental illness. They are coming to us at every level of academic preparation, at any age, with lives outside the university complicated by more issues than can be described. All of these factors have broadened advisers’ work, requiring understanding of these circumstances, an ability to adapt to individual student’s needs, and knowledge of appropriate resources for assistance in and outside the university community.

⁵ Habley, W.R. (2004). Advisor load. Retrieved—April 2007—from the NACADA *Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources* Web site: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/advisorload.htm>

4. The management of information has changed

The growing use of electronic communication by both the institution and individuals has also changed the way in which advisers work. Students need to be taught how to find and use the universities online resources. Students are as likely as not to relay their advising questions by e-mail, requiring responses that not only need extremely clear expression, but often require research, looking up and transmitting of URLs, providing more information or background, and consultation with other university or external resources. Students are not required to attend an on campus orientation, and thus their transition to ISU is managed entirely via electronic communication; the same is true with students in the APP program. Employers, internship programs, and other units in the university use e-mail to publicize programs, events and new classes, which must be printed and posted, or edited and sent to students.

Advising via e-mail is considerably more time consuming than face-to-face advising, and requires not only careful writing, but also a thorough grounding in the legal ramifications of electronic communication regarding academic records. Many advisers collect, edit and send information to students via regular electronic newsletters. Additionally, advisers in departments are typically responsible for the design and updating of the department's undergraduate web page. They are also responsible for coordinating the programming of their unit(s) degree audits and monitoring the accuracy of that system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. Establish standards for student-to-adviser ratios.

Developing a system of assessing reasonable advising loads will require consideration of classification, administrative responsibilities and other conditions noted in the Habley report (Appendix I). However, we believe establishment of such standards will make significant steps toward ensuring advising quality and accessibility for students, as well creating consistent levels of equity for advisers.

2. Conduct a complete review and updating of advisers' job descriptions

The 2004 Professional & Scientific Classification Compensation audit conducted by HR Audit, Inc. recommended a review of job classification every three to five years. A review has not been completed since 1993, with job reclassifications being done only an "as requested" basis. This has not only caused an inaccurate description of the breadth and complexity of current responsibilities, but also created irregularities among the job requirements and salaries within Adviser I-IV ranks. In addition, other student services staff positions, such as Program Coordinator and Student Services Specialist, include significant advising responsibilities. Clarification is needed on how these fit into the set

of position descriptions that focus on or otherwise include advising undergraduate students.

A thorough review of advising positions may or may not result in changes of classification and/or job titles, but advisers need and deserve to have the work they do accurately described, acknowledged and rewarded.

3. Develop a position reporting to the Provost's Office to oversee the coordination of responsibilities, training, development and assessment of advising.

Dr. Charlie Nutt, Associate Director of the National Academic Advising Association, visited Iowa State in 2006. In a meeting with Deans on advising on the ISU campus, he said, "You have trouble here. There is nobody in charge." Not having someone in charge has led to many of the issues discussed in this report. Advising loads have incredible variation, many of which cannot be explained by differences in classification or job title. Some advisers have extensive administrative responsibilities; others do not. Some advisers have extensive authority over the curricula they advise; others have none. Some advisers have clerical support; others have none. Some units have seen that their advisers are rewarded for their time and expertise; others have not. Units beyond those employing advisers have dictated new responsibilities and demands on advisers' time that has not been compensated in adjustment of other responsibilities, classification, or salary.

Advising is teaching. Done well, advising plays as much a part of students' university experience as does teaching. Our students want and deserve quality academic advising. In order to provide it, advisers need to be provided with conditions that support, acknowledge and reward quality work.