

REPORT OF THE UMBC ADVISING TASK FORCE

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CHARGE TO THE UMBC ADVISING TASK FORCE

The primary goal of the 2017/2018 UMBC Academic Advising Task Force is to provide specific recommendations that will improve the student experience and foster student success through academic advising. The formation of a Task Force and charge is directly related to the goals and objectives of the new UMBC strategic plan and was identified as a priority and first step towards implementing the plan by the VPs and Deans.

Using student success as a cross cutting theme, the Task Force will assess our past and current efforts in academic advising and provide a draft set of recommendations to the Provost by December 2017. The Task Force should pay particular attention to the opportunities created by the emerging roles of assessment, technology and analytics in advising. The Task Force will produce a final report with recommendations in early Spring, 2018.

The formation of this Task Force arises within the context of the recommendations contained in the 2004 consultant's report on Academic Advising at UMBC and the Advising Work Group's 2008 report. The 2008 report contained recommendations and "next steps", many of which (but not all) have been implemented over the past decade.

The overarching recommendations of the 2004 consultants' report and the 2008 Advising Work Group were:

- UMBC would strategically benefit from hiring additional professional advisors.
- Create a career ladder within UMBC's employee classification system to promote the retention and progression of academic advisors.

The proposed "next steps" were:

- Ensure that we have the most effective and efficient degree audit system and prerequisite checking that SA can provide.
- Continue to evaluate the way in which advising occurs at Orientation. Is the one-day model the best one for our students? Do we really have the time needed to introduce them to what they need to know to begin and sustain a successful career at UMBC? If what works best for our scholars is a two-day program, would it not be in our best interest to consider this model for all of our students? What other models should we consider if we continue to be dissatisfied with our current program?
- Support the Office of Academic and Pre-Professional Advising as the office responsible for advising leadership, advocacy, and assessment.
- Consider, per Eric White's report, whether or not the future of advising at UMBC is best served as a component of Enrollment Management. He states..."Most institutions like UMBC place the academic advising oversight on the academic side of the house. This allows an easier identification for the faculty with the endeavor and allows professional advisors with such reporting lines typically easier acceptance by the faculty."

- Consider how we can effectively address the needs of transfer students. Providing them with direct access to an advisor happens within each department in a different manner and often on different time tables. We need to standardize this process, and we also need to evaluate their “first year” needs as they transition to UMBC.
- Consider how we will reward faculty for their role in advising. If we move faculty out of the role of academic advisor for the first year or two of a student’s academic career, is the University in a position to take a strong stand on the role and expectations of faculty as advisors for upper level students? This model will only be effective if professional advisors can move students out of their advising load into that of faculty members who understand that advising is a University priority that is built into the reward structure. Are we willing to place a high value on this work, and if so what will that look like?
- Work with OIR to ensure the development of assessment tools that will assist us in evaluating our efforts.
- Consider developing systematic advising protocol for students with grade point averages below 2.0. Such a systematic advising protocol would include comprehensive reporting of “below 2.0 populations” to Department Chairs and Advising Coordinators on a semester basis; the introduction of intrusive advising contracts; and the monitoring of these students from both a departmental and University-wide perspective. Such an initiative would need to include a clear mandate on the delegation of responsibilities for training advisors, managing the process and executing such a program.
- Consider what type of peer mentoring/advisor model would be most effective for our students.

The research and recommendations of the Task Force should consider the following issues and needs:

1. Perform an assessment of the outcomes arising from recommendations and proposed next steps in the 2008 report to understand the impact that they have had on improving the student experience at UMBC, including student success measures such as graduation and retention rates and time to degree.
2. Conduct an assessment of UMBC’s existing assessment processes and procedures as they relate to advising outcomes. Develop recommendations that serve to strengthen the assessment of advising at UMBC and to close the assessment loop.
3. Examine the role and impact of academic advising in driving student retention and success and improving the student experience at UMBC and through best practice research. What is the current relationship between advising and student success and how might it be changed to strengthen this relationship, especially with the development of analytics and other academic advising tools? How can advising support enrollment and the goals and objectives of the new strategic plan?
4. Building on the work of the UMBC t-STEM Initiative, evaluate how the current academic advising model works for transfer students and how it affects the integration of transfer students into the general community. How can we best prepare for demographic and socioeconomic changes that may increase the number

of transfer students attending UMBC? How can advising combined with more intensive use of data help close other achievement gaps?

5. Determine how we can more effectively integrate the services provided by professional, faculty, and peer advisors while allowing those involved in advising to do what they do best. How can we best utilize the increasing amount of information we gather on student success into the advising process and what are the best practices in the field? How will these different groups coordinate more effective advising methods or a case management approach?
6. Examine the current advising model as it relates to significant enrollment growth, over the past few years and in the future. Is our current model scalable?

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Although the United States is among the most well-educated countries in the world with over 40 percent of working age adults having attained a postsecondary degree, many countries have surpassed the U.S. in the percentage of young adults with a college degree (York et al., 2017). In a globalized world in which the better paying jobs migrate to the appropriately educated workforces, this fact has motivated many organizations - in higher education and in the public and private sectors - to address the many barriers to student success in attaining a postsecondary degree. College education matters more now than ever before in providing realistic opportunities for Americans to earn decent wages and lead productive lives (Lumina Foundation, 2017). In our knowledge-based economy, more and more jobs require a college education. Since 2011, the U.S. economy has added 11.5 million net new jobs for workers with postsecondary education but only 80,000 for those with a high school diploma or less (Carnevale et al., 2016).

A number of national higher education organizations have implemented specific initiatives with the goal of increasing the percentage of adults with a college degree. For example, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) jointly established Project Degree Completion (PDC) in 2012 - an initiative aimed at contributing to the national goal of having 60 percent of working age adults in the U.S. possess a college degree by 2025 (York et al., 2017). Between the two associations' membership, the presidents of nearly 500 institutions committed to collectively award 3.8 million more bachelor's degrees by that time. Hallmarks of the initiative include a commitment by participating institutions to "constrain per-student educational expenditures while pursuing enhanced educational quality," to support student access and diversity, and to undertake efforts to reduce average time to degree. As a part of PDC, these collective institutions will increase the number of college degrees they award from an estimated 14.6 million to 18.4 million between 2012 and 2025.

State governments across the United States have also made college completion an important priority in recent years. In 2009, the Governor announced Maryland's completion goal - by 2025, at least 55 percent of the State's residents age 25 to 64 will hold at least an associate's or bachelor's degree. Senate Bill 740 (College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013) established a number of requirements aimed at increasing college and career readiness and college completion in the State of Maryland. Among the law's requirements is timely degree completion through improved academic planning, fulfilled in part by the establishment of degree pathways at Maryland higher education institutions. Students are encouraged to use the degree pathway, and in consultation with an academic advisor, to develop an individualized degree plan based on their academic preparation, interests, and goals.

Academic advising plays a critical role in increasing college completion rates and promoting student success. More than four decades of research has shown that academic advisors can

help with student engagement, academic planning, decision making, and problem resolution. Students who feel connected to an institution, feel cared about, and have clear academic and career goals are more likely to persist in their academic endeavors than those who do not (Drake, 2011). Research has shown that regardless of institutional type or the composition of the student body, students who are successful tend to be those who have developed a positive relationship with an academic advisor, a faculty member, or an administrator who help them navigate the academic and social life of the academy (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Against this backdrop, the UMBC Advising Task Force performed an assessment of the outcomes arising from recommendations and proposed next steps articulated in the 2004 consultant's report on Academic Advising at UMBC and the Advising Work Group's 2008 report in order to understand the impact they have had on promoting student success at UMBC. The Task Force conducted an assessment of UMBC advising and registration cycle and considered how advising is currently assessed at UMBC. We analyzed data from student surveys completed after orientation advising and from advising-related surveys done in COEIT and CAHSS, and discussed the need for a comprehensive campus-wide assessment of advising that will help us understand if we are meeting our advising goals and objectives. In addition, we considered ways in which technology and analytics might be leveraged to promote student success and how lessons learned from the Gates Grant t-STEM Initiative might be used to improve transfer student advising.

Task Force members were drawn from across UMBC - professional advisors, faculty advisors, department chairs, student affairs representatives, dean's office representatives, enrollment management, and the Division of Information Technology (DOIT) (See Appendix). The Task Force had 7 meetings from May to December, 2017. Our work was informed by up-to-date literature on best practices in student advising, including publications from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students, the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, and the Educational Advisory Board (EAB). In addition, DOIT hired Brandt Braunschweig, who earned his Ph.D. in Information Systems at UMBC, to investigate functional requirements for updating our advising system. He interviewed stakeholders and groups throughout campus and submitted a detailed report of his findings for the Task Force's consideration. In addition, the Task Force reviewed commercially available products such as EduNav.

Ken Baron and Sarah Shin, Co-Chairs of the Advising Task Force, interviewed the deans of CAHSS, CNMS, COEIT, and the Erickson School, as well as the dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, chair of social work, director of the counseling center, and director of undergraduate admissions to get their perspectives on student advising. Findings from the interviews were discussed by the Task Force and incorporated into recommendations.

Some members of the Advising Task Force also serve on the Undergraduate Student Success Committee and the Persistence Committee, two campus-wide committees focused on

promoting student success, and the work of the Task Force was simultaneously informed by the efforts of these committees.

The process outlined above has led the Task Force to conclude that, while UMBC has clearly made substantial progress in many areas related to advising since the Advising Work Group's 2008 report, there is room for further improvement. Below, we first note significant achievements related to academic advising that UMBC has seen over the last ten years. We then discuss areas that require further improvement.

Achievement 1: Formation of the UMBC Academic Advising Community

Prior to 2006, no formal means existed to help academic advisors from across UMBC to meet regularly to discuss their work. This changed when the UMBC Academic Advising Community was established to provide a forum for professional academic advisors, faculty, administrators, graduate students, and other campus staff members involved in advising to discuss new academic policies, technological improvements, new majors and minors, and campus initiatives that impact advising. Currently, the UMBC Advising Community has over 350 members, who share best practices related to advising, important registration deadlines, and introduction of new advisors, courses, and retention campaigns.

Achievement 2: Degree Audit and Suite of SA Advising Tools

During the 2009-2010 academic year, a new suite of PeopleSoft Student Administration (SA) advising tools was introduced at UMBC to facilitate advising and registration. With a focus on expediting the advising process for students and advisors, the SA Suite of advising tools was created with simplicity and transparency in mind. Over the years, new tools and features have been added to the suite, including a degree audit which outlines all major, general education, and university requirements associated with degree completion. An "exploratory" version of the degree audit - *What if* - was subsequently developed to allow students to "try on" different majors, minors, and certificates, facilitating their decision-making process.

Achievement 3: Expansion of the Total Number of Professional Academic Advisors

The 2008 Report of the Advising Work Group recommended that additional professional advisors be hired to meet the advising demands of a growing student population. Since 2008, nine full-time professional advisors have been hired to serve students in multiple departments in a "cluster" capacity throughout campus. CNMS and COEIT have expanded their professional advisor staffing to provide comprehensive academic advising services to thousands of UMBC students. In CAHSS, individual professional advisors have been hired for Psychology, Health Administration and Policy, and Interdisciplinary Studies. In 2017, CAHSS also secured professional advisors in Global Studies and Music as well as a "generalist cluster" advisor for the whole college.

In addition to providing full time student advising throughout the academic year, professional advisors assist in summer and winter orientations, and coordinate admissions/recruitment events, academic actions reviews, Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) reviews, retention campaigns, and reinstatement case reviews. As year-long providers of these services, professional advisors promote student success in measurable ways, and contribute to increasing retention and graduation rates, critical measures of “accountability” and “effectiveness” within the University’s infrastructure.

Achievement 4: Active Use of Advising-Related REX Reports

Accessing student data used to be very difficult prior to the introduction of PeopleSoft SA and REX - UMBC’s data warehouse and reporting and analytics tool. REX has now become an integral part of UMBC, with staff members from across UMBC using the system to make important decisions about enrollment goals and strategies. For example, the Office of Academic Advising and departmental advisors use REX to identify students at the end of Advance Registration that are not yet advised and/or registered and conduct targeted outreach to these students to assist them in getting advised and registered.

Achievement 5: Significantly Improved Orientation Advising

During the 2007-2008 academic year, the academic advising portion of the orientation program was relocated from the basement of the AOK Library to the 7th floor. This relocation ushered in a host of improvements in logistics, technology, and quality control, and enabled the provision of a markedly improved “first-time” advising experience for all freshmen and new transfer students. The new location with better lighting, temperature control, noise reduction, and added space not only made it possible to conduct more efficient, large-scale advising sessions (up to 200 students per day), but also boosted morale among orientation advisors and added a new level of professionalism to the program. A specialized orientation readiness report that “proactively” highlights all registration-related holds has been created, along with a host of “orientation team management roles.”

The quality of orientation advising has improved significantly over the years, as evidenced in recent student survey results. The Task Force analyzed three years’ worth of orientation survey data: 2015 (N=2,513); 2016 (N=2,062); 2017 (N=1,540). Overall, student satisfaction was very high. About 90% of respondents found orientation advising to be good (4) or excellent (5). This result demonstrates a clear improvement in orientation advising since the 2008 report of the Advising Work Group. Most of the positive student comments centered around how “helpful”, “patient”, and “supportive” the advisors were. The negative comments described how advisors were not always familiar with students’ majors, an issue which may be addressed by having more major-specific advisors available at orientation advising.

Achievement 6: Establishment of Advisor Training

A model for a campus-wide “general advisor training” is emerging from years of developing, conducting, evaluating, and refining the orientation advisor training program at UMBC. The Office for Academic and Pre-Professional Advising (OAPA) has developed a series of content modules and hands-on exercises that have proven effective in the training of new advisors for orientation purposes. OAPA anticipates providing training to incoming faculty, instructors, professional advisors, and interested staff members via “live training sessions” and online training (most likely through Blackboard). A survey soliciting information about academic advising needs and experience was recently distributed to all advising coordinators and academic chairs by the Assistant Director for Academic Advisor Development & Student Transition Programs, a new position created specifically to provide academic advisor training. OAPA will do a pilot training program in Spring 2018 and roll out a full advisor training program in Fall 2018.

Achievement 7: Creation of an Inter-Institutional Advising Consortium under the t-STEM Initiative and the Pathways Initiative

The t-STEM Initiative brings together advisors from UMBC and our partner community colleges to discuss programmatic and professional best practices, related to transfer student advising. This group is an important development in our coordinated efforts to create a shared set of messages for students and deepens professional relationships and conversations across institutions. Currently co-chaired by UMBC and HCC, the Consortium meets twice per semester.

Pathways, another initiative focused on transfer students, has the goal of improving the post-transfer success, retention, and graduation of computing and engineering majors from community colleges to UMBC, with a focus on women and underrepresented minorities. The initiative includes a collaborative learning community comprised of computing and engineering faculty, advisors, and administrators from six Maryland community colleges and four academic departments in COEIT.

Areas that Require Further Improvement

Although the above achievements constitute significant improvements in how advising is done at UMBC, the Task Force identified a number of major areas that need further improvement. One area concerns a general lack of consistency in advising across campus. As explained in the 2008 Work Group report, while many students at UMBC are connected to someone who is knowledgeable about their academic disciplines, many others are not. Students who do not have an established relationship with an advisor report that there is no obvious place to start the registration process. There are also students who interact with multiple advisors during their time at UMBC. The advising records of these students are often maintained separately by different advisors, making it difficult for the advisors to coordinate as a group. Overall, our current advising model falls short of providing equitable and accessible advising for all students.

A second area that requires further improvement concerns professional advisors. While there is consensus that professional advisors that have been hired since 2008 have been working well and making valuable contributions to promoting student success on campus, the current number of advisors does not adequately meet the advising needs in the colleges. Moreover, creation of a career ladder for academic advisors, a major recommendation contained within the 2008 report, has not been implemented. Developing a career ladder has many benefits including enhanced visibility and professionalism of advising on campus, improved understanding of the role of academic advisors, effectively addressing salary deficiencies and inequities, and promotion of a healthy examination of job titles, descriptions, and functions (Taylor, 2011).

A third area for further improvement concerns advising for transfer students, who constitute more than half of UMBC's total undergraduate enrollment. UMBC needs to better serve transfer students, particularly first generation and underrepresented populations, by providing coordinated pre-transfer and post-transfer advising in each college and broad campus support. This support needs to be provided in collaboration with our partner community colleges and be responsive to students' needs and responsibilities outside of school (Peters et al., 2010).

The fourth area concerns how to reward faculty for their role in advising. UMBC currently does not have shared guiding principles for advising that the entire campus can endorse. There are no university-wide expectations for advising as they are related to faculty, and it is not clear that advising is clearly established as an explicit part of faculty responsibility. Given the critical role of faculty, particularly in advising upper-level students who seek career-related advice in their disciplines, it is important to clarify faculty expectations for advising.

A fifth area concerns developing assessment tools that evaluate our advising efforts. While there is now far greater use of advising-related data on campus than ten years ago, we currently do not have a comprehensive understanding of how effective our current advising model is. Technology and analytics could be deployed to improve how we carry out advising and assess it.

Given these areas for further improvement, the Task Force makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are prioritized according to impact and strategic focus:

1. Develop a shared advising philosophy statement and guiding principles that the entire campus can endorse. University-wide expectations for advising should be clarified, including how academic advising is valued within the promotion and tenure process, and how departments support faculty who are very engaged in advising. Building on the pre-transfer advising philosophy created by the t-STEM Initiative, incorporate the needs of transfer students, as well as service learning and career development principles, into a campus-wide model for advising. The advising principles should also emphasize the importance of connecting high-performing undergraduates with tenured faculty who can mentor and support the student's post-baccalaureate education goals. We recommend establishing campus-wide Academic Advising Awards for Excellence in Advising Practices (e.g., one for faculty advisors and one for professional advisors). The advising philosophy should be taken on a "road show"(UPD Meetings, Chair's Meetings, SGA, etc.) to get feedback from a broad range of constituents on campus.
2. Launch a campus-wide assessment of academic advising to allow students and advisors to provide comprehensive feedback on their advising experiences and satisfaction with the current system. Develop an assessment strategy/plan to allow for ongoing review and evaluation of our advising practices. Assessment of advising should be done regularly and driven by advising principles referred to in the first recommendation to see how well UMBC is meeting these principles. The goal of this assessment is to ensure that all UMBC students have equitable and accessible advising across all academic departments.
3. Increase the number of professional advisors and establish a career ladder for advisors. The career ladder would include salary increase increments based on measurable criteria such as professional certification and student feedback. Add proactive (intrusive) advising specialists to serve struggling students who might be reluctant to seek support. Within the category of professional advisors, add a pre-law advisor to achieve parity with our current pre-medical advising service.
4. Effective use of technology is essential to improving advising, given our current staffing levels. We recommend fully deploying Assigned Advisor functionality to all academic departments within Student Administration (SA) and reviewing existing advising tools in myUMBC and PeopleSoft for accuracy, usability, availability, and transparency of information for students and faculty. We recommend using technology and the assigned advisor functionality to triage students to get them to the appropriate advisor, with high-achieving students directed to faculty advisors and students who are not making adequate academic progress redirected to professional advisors for discussions around options to consider. We need to develop an advising system that captures all student/advisor interactions that are viewable by students and their advisors, and establish a proactive, consistent, and automated communication plan that redefines students' registration

experience. Students should be provided with tools to develop a multi-semester plan that will lead to timely degree completion. We recommend reviewing new functionality in the next version of PeopleSoft (v 9.2) to determine whether the faculty/staff advising center should remain in PeopleSoft or move to MyUMBC, and evaluating Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions for their potential use and benefits.

5. Provide professional advisors with analytical data made available by the work of the Persistence Committee to offer proactive and intrusive advising to at-risk students, keeping in mind that findings from analytics should be used to inform advising in ways that do not replace the human element in advising. Continue measuring the impact of student retention (persistence) pilot, and study the impact of a follow-up study, which investigates the effects of earlier, proactive advising, and registration campaigns. Our current advising and registration cycle should be studied to evaluate the implications of a longer advising and registration yield period each semester, including faculty entering mid-semester course grades to help students plan. Assess what kind of messaging works best with different groups of students.
6. Offer advisor training throughout the academic year through live training and online modules. We recommend including a checklist of technology tools for students and advisors and considering ways to make advisor training be part of the onboarding process for new faculty and professional advisors.
7. Building on the success of the t-STEM Initiative, reinstate a full-time Pre-Transfer Advisor in each college to offer campus leadership within the Pre-Transfer advising arena and to serve as an engaged liaison to our community college partners. Establish resources in the community colleges that support students to successfully matriculate at UMBC.
8. Establish explicit college/departmental plans to assist with summer and winter orientations, admissions recruitment events, academic actions, reinstatement, and SAP application assistance, and consider ways to support and recognize faculty who serve in these efforts.
9. Use peer advisors more effectively since they are among the most cost-effective options for improving advising. Under the guidance of the Office of Academic and Pre-Professional Advising, provide Council of Majors leaders with the kind of training (protocols, content, materials) endorsed by NACADA. Investigate what incentives can be provided to peer advisors and how to make peer advising sustainable, with minimum ebb and flow in efforts.

Overall, we believe that it is critically important to develop a strategy/plan for assessing the impact of implementing these recommendations. We recommend that the Campus Systems Executive Committee (CSEC) coordinate this effort, and the Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Advising and Student Success serve as a member of the committee. The CSEC should coordinate with the Undergraduate Student Success Committee and the Persistence Committee to set goals for student retention and graduation rates and continuously monitor progress. To track

progress, an advising dashboard might be developed based on the technology and information that is used to develop the persistence report. It is important for UMBC to establish processes, organizations, and expectations among multiple campus constituencies and workgroups that support the improvement of advising practices to translate into actions.

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APPENDIX: UMBC ADVISING TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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