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# **Academic Advising Program Review**

Texas State University

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## **Introduction**

At the invitation of Kambra Bolch, JD, Assistant Vice President for Academic Success, on behalf of Gene Bourgeois, PhD, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, two consultants from NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising visited Texas State University in San Marcos on November 2 and 3, 2022 to conduct an in-depth academic advising program review. The team consisted of Patricia Griffin, PhD, and Mark A. Taylor, JD, PhD. Patricia is the Director of the Academic Advising and Career Exploration, Associate Professor of Communication Studies, and University Academic Probation and Suspension Officer at Fort Hays State University. Mark has served in campus-wide advising leadership roles at three public universities, most recently as Director of University Advising at James Madison University.

In the months prior to the review, conversations had occurred within the Texas State academic advising community regarding how best to serve first-year classes growing both in size and in the number of college-level credit hours earned prior to entering the university. The consultants' review focused on first-year advising, currently provided primarily within the PACE Center through PACE Academic Advising. Recognizing that first-year advising does not occur in isolation, the expectation and message to those invited to participate were that the consultants would engage with PACE Academic Advising as well as the larger advising community and would provide recommendations to strengthen academic advising throughout the institution.

Prior to the campus visit, the consultants met virtually and communicated regularly with Kambra Bolch, and many documents and resources were shared and reviewed. The detailed discussions and those resources provided helpful insight into the culture, history, expectations, practices, structure, and policies that inform and reflect academic advising at Texas State and first-year advising in particular, while also offering perspective on current issues and considerations.

The consulting team met with various stakeholders over two days in an effort to gain an understanding of not only PACE Academic Advising but also advising policies, practices, and structures at Texas State. These meetings included the PACE advising team, Provost, Deans and Associate Deans, college advising leadership, academic advisors from across campus, and campus partners who regularly collaborate with advising colleagues. No students attended the two meetings scheduled for them, so this report does not include student feedback and perspectives. A schedule detailing those who participated in the visit is included in Appendix A.

## **Framework for Consultants' Visit**

It is important to clarify the consultants' perspective on academic advising as a preface to our observations and recommendations. NACADA has endorsed several pillars that address the philosophy and practice of academic advising: NACADA Concept of Academic Advising, NACADA Statement of Core Values, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising, the NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies, and most recently the Conditions for Excellence in Academic Advising (EAA). Links to each of these documents may be found on NACADA's website: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars.aspx>.

Advising programs that are considered “best practices” in the field will reflect the advising philosophy contained in these foundational documents. For the purpose of framing the context of this academic advising program review, the following points address major assumptions about successful academic advising:

- Academic advising is best viewed as a form of teaching and is integral to the success of the teaching and learning mission of higher education institutions. As Marc Lowenstein (2005) observes, “an excellent advisor does the same thing for the student’s entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course.” Advisors teach students to value the learning 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.
- The NACADA Concept of Academic Advising identifies three essential components of advising: curriculum (what advising deals with), pedagogy (how advising delivers the curriculum), and student learning outcomes (the result of academic advising). These student learning outcomes are based upon what we want students to know, to do, and to value and appreciate as a result of the academic advising process.
- Finally, we are convinced that, when done well, academic advising has a significant impact on student success as reflected in part through an institution’s retention and graduation rates.

This report highlights strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations to consider in an effort to enhance both first-year advising and academic advising throughout the university and comes with our high regard for our Texas State colleagues and their commitment to academic advising and student success.

### **Strengths**

Texas State University’s many strengths will serve the institution well as it reflects on and develops a cohesive academic advising program. Although we highlight six specific areas here, the primary strength of Texas State lies in its commitment to a close examination of itself as that relates to student success. Placing students at the center of this introspective process is essential to making programmatic improvements.

- The value of a common entry point and advising experience for first-year students is recognized by most on campus, and the colleagues with whom we met generally support the current advising model with PACE Academic Advising serving nearly all first-year students. Colleagues often indicated, however, that a lack of support, financial and otherwise, inhibits the model from fully realizing its potential.

For example, in our meeting with three Deans and the Associate Deans (from all but one of the degree-granting colleges) who supervise the college advising centers, observations about the current academic advising model included:

“Based on the evidence, the model is working.”

“The model is fine, but advisors are overstretched.”

“I do not think the model is at fault.” (indicating advising is not “appropriately resourced”)

“Academic advisors are not valued on this campus. They are not supported.”

“Our current model does a good job with that.” (referencing academic progression and student transitions)

“The model works.”

“The evidence does not indicate there is a problem with first-year advising.”

“PACE does a great job.”

- The Assistant Vice President for Academic Success in University College provides strong advocacy and support for academic advising, although campus-wide advising leadership is not formally part of her portfolio. The AVP has demonstrated an appreciation for and strong commitment to the two academic advising offices she supervises within University College and to those across campus. Both the AVP and the Director of PACE Academic Advising appreciate the perspective outlined in our previous “Framework” section and recognize the relationship between effective academic advising and student success. They have garnered significant credibility and respect within the advising community.
- PACE Center academic advisors and advising colleagues across campus appreciate leadership’s efforts to improve academic advising as evidenced by this program review and were grateful for the opportunity to share during our campus visit. With nearly 75 participants (about 50 in person and 25 virtual), our lunch meeting with academic advisors was characterized by thoughtful feedback and lively conversation, demonstrating the potential for a large, engaged advising community at Texas State.
- The current model theoretically positions PACE Academic Advising well to support first-year students, to develop meaningful connections with their students, and to earn a strong reputation for expertise regarding Texas State’s first-year students, issues that impact their success, and strategies to best support those students. Some of the challenges identified here – including but certainly not limited to significant deficiencies in technology and data – present barriers to realizing the full benefits of that model, and the recommendations are intended in part to address those barriers.
- University College can develop the internal expertise both to serve as the trusted go-to for all things first-year and to support continued improvements in academic advising at Texas State. In the meantime, leadership should look with confidence to the Director of PACE Academic Advising and his team to assist with accomplishing many of the recommendations detailed in this report.
- Given ongoing campus conversations about student success and the commitment of those interviewed to effective and efficient changes to enhance the student experience, Texas State is at a good inflection point to examine critically academic advising throughout the institution and first-year advising in particular. The timing is ideal for establishing an academic advising program with a more consistent model across the institution, including

a common vision, mission, goals, and learning outcomes that are responsive to student needs and institutional goals.

### **Areas for Improvement**

We are identifying areas for improvement that affect both the university's academic advising efforts and University College's work toward equitable student success (e.g., persistence and timely graduation). Many of the stakeholders interviewed are aware of these challenges and have begun to identify processes and practices to address them. Some opportunities for growth, however, may be out of the purview of certain constituency groups, and collaboration with and support from campus leadership will be necessary to fully resolve them.

- The university lacks a shared definition, vision, mission, goals, and outcomes for academic advising, and Texas State undergraduates do not have a consistent academic advising experience during their time on campus. There appears to be no common understanding of academic advising as a teaching and learning activity. In much the same way that those who teach are involved with the curriculum, pedagogy, and learning, academic advisors must also be aware of the curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes of advising throughout a student's educational experience. Better connecting the advising community's work to Texas State's academic mission, values, and strategic planning will elevate the role of academic advisors and highlight the importance, scope, and impact of academic advising at the university.
- The lack of clear ownership for academic advising and inconsistencies between PACE Academic Advising and the colleges, among all advising offices on campus, and in student transitions between them have produced unclear and misaligned expectations, communication, and accountability for academic advising throughout the university.
- The absence of campus-wide leadership for academic advising has resulted in a lack of advocacy for and common understanding of academic advising and the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors. Resulting challenges include (oftentimes significant) inconsistencies in the quality and delivery of academic advising as well as in advising structures, practices, policies, and expectations across campus.

Some college advising centers on campus, for example, do not rely on (and have recently abandoned) online appointment scheduling for their students – certainly a best practice in the profession – and unfortunately some of those college advising operations do not currently allow students the option of an in-person advising appointment.

- While PACE academic advisors are highly regarded by their colleagues, we consistently received feedback during our interviews about the 1) significant amount of information those advisors are expected to know, 2) workload demands that impact their ability to effectively support their students as originally envisioned, and 3) high turnover, a challenge faced by advising centers across campus.

- Turnover affects advisor experience levels and continuity in the student advising experience, while reflecting and contributing to low morale among advisors. Morale issues did emerge from our conversations, with academic advisors often indicating their work was underappreciated, misunderstood, and unrecognized. The university does not currently have a formal recognition and reward system for academic advising.
- Texas State has a relatively large number of full-time professional academic advisors, but there does not seem to be a real sense of community among academic advisors at the institution. “I don’t know the last time we had all the advisors on campus together” and “We don’t even know who the other advisors are” were common sentiments, suggesting a disconnect and reflecting the significant turnover among advising professionals on campus. We did learn that advisors in the past had formed and served together on campus teams related to their work (e.g., training, recognition, career and transfer advising), but those efforts faded due to a lack of interest, support, and/or time.
- The lack of campus-wide academic advising assessment – specifically an outcomes-based assessment plan that connects advising with student learning – negatively impacts the design of systematic processes that inform and drive changes in advising practice and philosophy. Assessment can serve as a mechanism for continuous improvement, and the absence of an information-rich environment that is outcomes-focused limits the institution’s ability not only to assess the effectiveness of academic advising but also to ensure resources and expertise are applied most effectively.
- Significant deficiencies in technology and data are barriers to academic advisor effectiveness and student success efforts on campus. Technology consolidation and data access need to improve at Texas State. Technology used in academic advising includes Banner, Ellucian Degree Works, and SARS. The lack of 1) consolidated student records and information for academic advising, 2) student access to online appointment scheduling, and 3) accessible advising data are all concerns for the academic advising program. There is currently no easy mechanism for collecting, interpreting, and utilizing advising and student data in support of retention, four-year degree completion, and career outcomes. Limited data hinder well-informed outreach and interventions for targeted student populations and prohibit proactive planning for advising and assessment.
- The timelines related to registration time tickets and calendars (course, program, and curriculum) impact academic advising regarding overload scheduling and an inability to assist students with the appropriate curricular information that may impact their next semester. These issues reflect poorly on academic advising. The compression of the registration time tickets for courses into one week (<https://www.registrar.txst.edu/registration/access-periods/spring.html>) creates an overload on academic advisors to meet with each student prior to their time ticket. The timelines laid out in the course calendar, program calendar, and curriculum calendar (<https://www.txst.edu/curriculumservices/>) do not allow for changes to be through the approval system and input into the technology system prior to registration time ticket availability.

## Recommendations

### **Reassess the utilization and allocation of academic advising resources within University College.**

University College currently houses two academic advising offices: University College Advising Center and PACE Academic Advising, both reporting to the Assistant Vice President for Academic Success. We understand that institutional history, culture, and personalities oftentimes inform organizational structures and can serve as barriers to change. We encourage, however, a rethinking of the current bifurcation of academic advising in University College to better integrate and leverage existing resources to best support all student constituencies within University College, including but not limited to first-year, exploratory, and general studies.

Viewed through the lens of the student experience and driven by the best interest of Texas State undergraduates, this organizational change within University College has the potential not only to improve student-advisor ratios but also to allow for more personalized academic and career exploration, more meaningful advising conversations, improved collaboration among University College colleagues, and a greater impact on student success beginning at orientation.

- EAB (2018). *A student-centered approach to advising: Redeploying academic advisors to create accountability and scale personalized interventions*. Retrieved from <https://umaine.edu/provost/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/11/A-Student-Centered-Approach-to-Advising.pdf>

### **Explore a caseload approach with all first-year students assigned to a first-year academic advisor based on their major or pathway.**

There is an obvious commitment within University College to equip all students from varying backgrounds and experiences with the necessary tools to be successful in college. They do not rely on a one size fits all approach and consider each student individually to meet them where they are. Within that context, a caseload rather than the current team approach would align with and support University College values. Ensuring that every first-year student has one assigned academic advisor (and in turn that every first-year advisor has a caseload of students) clearly identifies for students their advising contact, encourages holistic advising relationships, and increases ownership and accountability for an assigned group of students for each first-year advisor.

Aligning advisor caseloads with a cluster of comparable majors (known as meta-majors on many campuses) will increase the confidence of students and campus colleagues in PACE academic advisors' knowledge of the majors in their assigned caseload. At the same time, PACE advisors will be able to develop more nuanced expertise with respect to their assigned majors, which likely will nonetheless necessitate an in-depth knowledge of many majors across multiple colleges. Although PACE first-year advisors will remain familiar with and receive training on all majors, this approach will increase not only their expertise but also their satisfaction, confidence, and sense of ownership in working with their assigned students. Majors associated



with each cluster should be reexamined regularly based on major change data to increase the likelihood that students changing majors will most likely do so within the same cluster.

We acknowledge the technological deficiencies identified during our visit and the resulting barriers to these approaches but remain hopeful that the best interests of Texas State undergraduates and the advising community ultimately will drive appropriate and responsive technological solutions.

“Universities have an opportunity to facilitate interaction between the institution and students through on-campus academic advising. Building relationships between students and the university as a whole can only enhance the student experience, and as Tinto describes, aid in a student’s decision to stay. Investing in academic advising and strategically expanding communication between students and advisors (e.g., offering evening and/or virtual appointments) may be one important strategy that institutions can adopt to achieve this goal.” (Tippetts, et.al)

- Tippetts, M. M, Brandley A. T., Metro, J., King, M., Ogren, C., and Zick, C. D. [Promoting Persistence: The Role of Academic Advisors](#). Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice 2020 24:2, 526-547
- Kardash, S. M. (2020). *Holistic advising*. Retrieved from <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Holistic-Advising.aspx>
- Fox, J. R., and Martin, H. E. (2017). Academic advising and the first college year.

### **Strengthen PACE Academic Advising’s role and voice in New Student Orientation.**

During our campus visit, we learned about concerns surrounding New Student Orientation (NSO). Given its central role in supporting first-year students, PACE Academic Advising should likewise have a significant role and voice in the planning and execution of NSO to increase the effectiveness of academic advising during orientation and to better support the transition of first-year students to the university.

The upcoming shift of NSO responsibility from Admissions to Student Affairs presents an exceptional opportunity to reexamine and strengthen the role of PACE Academic Advising in NSO, in partnership with Student Affairs colleagues ultimately responsible for NSO at Texas State. This reexamination should include improvements in communication with students prior to orientation and in sharing information with academic advisors in preparation for and throughout orientation. This is also an opportunity to consider potential process and structural enhancements, including group advising and college or major specific orientation days that allow for more predictability, better preparation, and increased academic advisor effectiveness.

**Identify milestones, in partnership with academic units, at which point first-year students transition from PACE Academic Advising to the appropriate college.**

First-year students transitioning to higher education, regardless of credits earned, benefit from a common experience that ensures they have the necessary information and support to succeed during that crucial first year in college. This often is especially true for first-generation students and those from under-represented populations. At Texas State, students are entering the university with a growing number of college-level credit hours earned prior to matriculation. This college credit does not equate to academic, social, and emotional preparedness. With strong institutional support, PACE Academic Advising is best positioned on campus to provide that consistent experience and contribute significantly to student preparedness. Students who are not retained generally have transition and success challenges related to academic preparedness; financial, personal, and/or medical issues; major or career confidence; and social engagement. Universities must be agile and equipped to identify these student success barriers early, intervene, and then connect students with resources from the beginning of their time on campus.

We encourage Texas State to continue conversations with college partners about the appropriate milestones – completion of certain prerequisites or gateway courses with a minimum grade, for example – for first-year students to transition from PACE Academic Advising to their college and major of interest. Milestones informed by common barriers, curricular and otherwise, allow for more thoughtful student transitions so the following considerations should be included in campus conversations.

1. FAFSA and scholarship application submission
2. Submission of all official transcripts (high school and college), ACT or SAT
3. Completion of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) or its exemption
4. Orientation participation
5. Timely registration with an academic advisor
6. Student employment
7. First-year seminar participation
8. Regular advising contacts each semester
9. PACE career exploration for major selection
10. Degree plan initiated with an academic advisor
11. Career plan initiated with Career Services

Each student is unique and will demonstrate a readiness to transition at different points in the academic career; for some that transition to a college advising center may occur following the first semester, while other first-year students will benefit from at least a year with PACE Academic Advising. We are confident that Texas State colleagues will explore and identify milestones and considerations that best support the success of their student population.

**Clearly identify or establish a campus-wide leadership position to assume responsibility for academic advising.**

Texas State's advising model with a decentralized system after a common first-year experience is not unique in higher education. In such environments, however, it becomes even more critical that the institution clearly identifies leadership in response to the following question: "Who is

responsible for academic advising at Texas State University?” Those interviewed during our visit struggled to answer this question, and responses did vary, with many indicating that no one is responsible for academic advising on campus. Once this question is answered, we believe this individual will then be well-positioned to articulate the specific expectations, goals, and outcomes for all academic advising units at the university. We are not suggesting that academic advising be wholly centralized and removed from the individual academic colleges.

Many higher education institutions have adopted a comparable role to coordinate their advising-related policies, procedures, and delivery. Most often these positions do not have direct authority, nor reporting lines, over every academic advisor nor advising director. This advising leader should understand as a result that authority does not equal power, and leadership involves cultivating trust and confidence. Although not “in charge” of all academic advisors on campus, this leader will have the ability to educate, advocate, and influence in strengthening the academic advising culture at Texas State.

This campus-wide role can make a significant difference by providing advising leadership with respect to:

- Advocacy for the significance and impact of academic advising and for the value of the work of academic advisors across campus
- Structure and approach for the campus-wide assessment of academic advising
- Coordination of broader campus-wide advisor training and professional development initiatives (onboarding and ongoing)
- Technology that supports academic advising and academic planning that is consistently utilized across campus (e.g., electronic notes and forms, degree audit, early alerts, online appointment scheduling)
- Academic advising council or comparable advising leadership group on campus
- Liaison work with NACADA at the state, regional, and national level and with other organizations committed to student success

Centralized messaging and efforts regarding university expectations and aspirations for academic advising have the potential to increase the quality and consistency of advising policies and practices that, with ongoing assessment, can result in higher student satisfaction, persistence, and timely graduation.

### **Define academic advising.**

Both Texas State and University College will benefit from the development of a clear and comprehensive definition of *academic* advising, informed by philosophy and practice. The lack of a common definition means that the skills, training, processes, and values necessary to advise students may remain inconsistent as well as misunderstood and underappreciated by students and campus decisionmakers.

- Larson, J., Johnson, A., Aiken-Wisniewski, S. A., and Barkemeyer, J. (2018). *What is Academic Advising? An application of analytic induction*. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1202423.pdf>.

- McGill, C. M. (2019). The professionalization of academic advising: A structured literature review. Retrieved from: <https://meridian.allenpress.com/nacada-journal/article/39/1/89/430129/The-Professionalization-of-Academic-Advising-A>.

### **Develop an institutional vision, mission, and goals for academic advising.**

PACE Academic Advising has developed a mission, vision, goals, and student learning outcomes, and many college advising centers on campus should also be applauded for developing and publicizing mission statements. To be most effective and to gain the necessary support, however, the university needs a campus-wide shared vision, mission, and goals for academic advising and that is best achieved by having all advising stakeholders involved in the discussion and represented in the final product. The advising process should be student-centered, engaging, transformational, and inclusive, and these same values should inform this effort.

An institutional vision, mission, and goals will provide a common purpose and understanding of academic advising among all constituents. University College and PACE Academic Advising should be key players in these campus-wide efforts to 1) develop and codify a vision, mission, and goals for academic advising, 2) clearly communicate the expectations across campus, and 3) ensure that all professional academic advisors are offered professional development to execute consistently the vision, mission, and goals.

### **Clarify and promote academic advising roles and responsibilities.**

Role clarification will strengthen the structure of the academic advising system at Texas State and in University College, ensuring that students, academic advisors, and all colleagues understand the advisor roles and responsibilities. This exploration – along with the development of a definition, vision, mission, and goals – will be responsive in part to the concerns we heard from many about expectations and responsibilities “outside of academic advising” being imposed on academic advisors. The clear delineation of responsibilities is essential for the development of learning outcomes and an assessment plan. These efforts can also contribute to a more consistent, positive advising experience for Texas State undergraduates.

We recommend that University College and campus partners participate in a process mapping exercise to outline the current and future states of advising at Texas State. This discovery process should include who does which tasks, the transition of students to and from University College, ownership at each step of the process, communication strategies, and the alignment of learning outcomes from first-year advising through degree completion. Process mapping allows advising stakeholders to walk through the advising lifecycle to identify key touch points (when), outcomes per touch point (what), related activities (how), and responsible parties (who), while considering opportunities to leverage technology during specific touch points as part of proactive advising.

- Folsom, P., Yoder, F., and Joslin, J. E. (2015). *New advisor guidebook: Mastering the art of academic advising*. Newark: Wiley.

### **Develop a robust formalized professional development and training program.**

There is a significant unmet need for formalized professional development and training – both onboarding and ongoing – for advising colleagues across campus. This investment is essential to keeping advisors current and engaged in effective practice. The training and professional development program should also reinforce the similarities between advising and teaching, and some of the efforts already underway in the PACE Center can provide a foundation for this campus-wide program. This training is best delivered in a live, interactive environment.

Quality, ongoing advisor development is central to changing an advising culture, implementing a quality advising program, and improving the student advising experience. Key elements of an academic advisor development program take into consideration the campus-wide vision, mission, goals, and student learning outcomes. We recommend the identification of required conceptional, informational, and relational core competencies for all Texas State academic advisors. The comprehensive list could be developed by a new professional development and training committee with university-wide representation or by a comparable and inclusive advising group already in place. The purpose of defining these competencies is to identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising; to guide professional development; and to promote the contributions of academic advising to student development, persistence, and success. A comprehensive approach to advisor training and development includes the following components:

1. *Conceptual*: encompasses what the academic advisor needs to understand about the student and the institutional advising culture, the ideas and theories that advisors must understand to be effective in their practice, academic advising core values and the concept of academic advising.
2. *Informational*: refers to the knowledge that advisors must have to guide the students at their institution.
3. *Relational*: involves the communicative skills and interpersonal approaches advisors must build, including those critical to establishing advising relationships with students.
4. *Technology*: includes the knowledge of and skill with technological resources that support the work of an academic advisor.
5. *Personal*: recognizes that an understanding of self (as an academic advisor) requires not only knowledge about one's values but also an ongoing awareness of self and the application of skills in self-assessment, self-regulation, and growth.

An institutional training and development program for advising can be part of an annual review and planning that influence merit and promotion for academic advisors. There are many NACADA resources available for developing training and professional development programs.

- Smith, B. & Cunningham, L. (Eds). (2022). NACADA Core Competencies (2022). 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Pocket Guide. NACADA.
- Archambault, K. L. & Hapes, R. L. (Eds). (2022). Comprehensive Advisor Training and Development: Practices That Deliver. NACADA.

- NACADA Clearinghouse for Training & Development.  
<https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/Administration-of-Advising/Advisortraining.aspx>
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS Standards) - Academic Advising Programs. Retrieved from  
<http://standards.cas.edu/getpdf.cfm?PDF=E864D2C4-D655-8F74-2E647CDECD29B7D0>
- Givans Voller, J. (2012). *Advisor training and development: Why it matters and how to get started*. Retrieved from <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advisor-training-and-development-Why-it-matters-and-how-to-get-started.aspx>
- McClellan, J.L. (2007). *Content Components for Advisor Training: Revisited*. Retrieved from NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web site:  
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advisor-Training-Components.aspx>
- Ford, S.S. (2007). *The essential steps for developing the content of an effective advisor training and development program*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/advisingissues/AdvTrng-Steps.htm>
- Folsom, P., Joslin, J., & Yoder, F. (2005). *From advisor training to advisor development: Creating a blueprint for first-year advisors*. Retrieved from the NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web site  
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Training-Blueprint-for-New-Advisors.aspx>

### **Identify and publish student learning outcomes and process delivery outcomes.**

It is recommended that the university create student learning outcomes (SLOs) to refine objectives for academic advising across the institution and throughout the students' educational careers at Texas State. SLOs are statements that specify what students will know, be able to do, and value as a result of participating in the academic advising experience. SLOs specify an action by the student that must be observable, measurable, and able to be demonstrated. A clear set of expectations and outcomes for all professional academic advisors is also recommended. Process delivery outcomes (PDOs) are statements that articulate the expectations regarding how academic advising is delivered and what information should be delivered during the academic advising experience. The Texas State advising community should develop its own set of student learning outcomes, clear guidance on the processes of advising (including when and how to transition from first-year advising to the colleges), and the methods to assess those learning outcomes.

- Kraft-Terry, S. and Kau, C. (2019). *Direct measure assessment of learning outcome–driven proactive advising for academically at-risk students*. Retrieved from <https://nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/NACADA-18-005>
- Hurt, R. L. (2007). *Establishing outcomes, developing tools, and assessing student learning*. Retrieved from <https://nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/0271-9517-27.2.36>
- Martin, H. (2007). *Constructing learning objectives for academic advising*. Retrieved from <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Constructing-student-learning-outcomes.aspx>

### **Develop an ongoing assessment plan.**

Successful advising programs include an assessment plan. Like training and professional development, assessment is not a one-time event. An assessment plan can be developed to gather data and information to evaluate the outcomes of the changes being implemented to the advising system. A strong plan will include the instruments and evaluation methodologies, the names of those responsible for gathering the data, a timeline for assessing various components, the methods for reporting results, and the processes by which the assessment will be reviewed for future improvements to the system. The following specific assessment components are recommended:

- Student learning outcomes, not simply student satisfaction of advising, should be assessed annually. This will require not only the writing of advising learning outcomes for the entire university, but also rubrics and measurements for determining achievement of learning outcomes.
- The development of an advising program review for each unit/department/college to be done every 3-5 years and focused on the quality of advising as evidenced by adherence to the vision, mission, and goals statements and achievement of learning outcomes.

We suggest that professional development on the topic of assessment be provided with the involvement of the Office of Institutional Research. In addition, an institutional team could be charged with developing a plan while attending a NACADA Assessment Institute. This annual Institute provides the opportunity for team members to develop a plan while working closely with experts in the field of advising assessment. Extensive resources on assessment can be found at <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Assessment-of-academic-advising.aspx>.

Finally, a standardized method to measure individual advisor effectiveness for annual review should be developed, with advisors receiving feedback from students, peers, and administrators. Utilization of this process will assist in validating a more developmental approach to advising, rewarding not just content but context, and validating growth in the conceptual and relational components of the academic advisor's role.



- NACADA's Student Outcomes of Academic Advising Survey (2022). Retrieved from <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Research-Center/Outcomes-Surveys.aspx>
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### **Institutionalize an advising recognition and reward system.**

Developing a recognition and reward system for academic advisors is essential to affirm and reinforce the value of academic advising and the contributions of academic advisors on campus, especially where advisors feel disenfranchised and underappreciated. Rewards and recognition can require little outlay from the university but speak volumes to employees about their value. All academic advisors in every college on campus need to be recognized by the administration for the important work they do.

Texas State should become intentional about designing a structure that treats academic advising as an integral part of teaching and learning. Academic advisors can assist with suggestions for the most relevant reward and recognition system that reflects the culture and needs of the university. This system may include support for professional development activities; flexible scheduling; an advisor breakfast or lunch, particularly after extremely busy advising times; and an advisor of the month program. The new structure should also include an annual university-wide advising awards program designed to recognize individual academic advisors who are making significant contributions to develop and implement quality academic advising. Winners of these university awards can then be nominated for NACADA's Regional and Global Awards Program: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Events-Programs/Awards.aspx>. The NACADA Clearinghouse includes several resources that discuss the importance of advisor reward and recognition.



### **Explore opportunities to expand and strengthen academic advisor career ladder.**

We recommend the reexamination of a career ladder for professional academic advisors, which will necessitate either a significant overhaul of the current “promotional” structure or the development of a new advisor career ladder. Although Academic Advisor 1 and Academic Advisor 2 positions currently exist on campus, in reality the opportunity to advance in the role of an academic advisor with greater responsibility and corresponding salary increases is very limited or nonexistent for most on campus. A more robust career ladder would reduce turnover and increase the experience and expertise among advisors, ensuring more consistency in advising and less disruption in the advising process for students.

- Taylor, M. A. (2011). Career ladders and performance evaluations for academic advisors. In J. E. Joslin & N. L. Markee (Eds.), *Academic advising administration: Essential knowledge and skills for the 21st century* (Monograph No. 22.) (p. 133–144). Manhattan, KS: National Academic Advising Association.
- Taylor, M. A. (2011). Professional advisor credentials, career ladders, and salaries. Retrieved from the NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web Site: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Professional-Advisor-Credentials-Career-Ladders-and-Salaries.aspx>

### **Clarify and pursue potential sources of financial support for academic advising.**

The Student Success Fee (previously Advising Fee), administered by University College, was often referenced as the sole source of funding for academic advising at Texas State. At the same time, many questions exist about how those funds are distributed and to whom, and the rationales for those allocations. Increased transparency with respect to the Student Success Fee would seem responsive to these questions and address potential misperceptions about the role and intent of this budget. Although we learned, for example, about a formula based on advisor-student ratios for determining the placement of new advisor hires, that understanding is not widely held, and there remains uncertainty among advising colleagues about the availability of and decision-making with respect to those funds. Given the significance of academic advising in advancing institutional objectives and the current constraints on advising expenditures, we encourage Texas State leadership to explore opportunities to increase its investment in advising resources, whether through a central budget like the Student Success Fee or through greater reliance on the colleges to provide financial support for their highly valued advising centers.

### **Develop an advising communication plan.**

The PACE Academic Advising team is encouraged to partner with colleagues in the colleges, in the Registrar, and across campus to further develop a communication plan to support how academic advisors, faculty, and ultimately students learn about changes in curriculum, policy, procedures, and practices that impact academic advising and student success. Communication between and among students, faculty, and all colleagues should be very intentional so that

constituents get the information they need in a timely manner. At Texas State, there is not a standard protocol for sharing information with or among academic advisors. Some information sharing currently exists, but it must be done consistently so that it reaches all corners of advising to ensure students receive accurate information. Course, program, and curricular changes often do not reach advisors in a timely manner. There should be an immediate and direct way for this information to get from the colleges or academic departments to the academic advisors.

Campus conversations to address communication deficiencies should focus on utilizing technology to bridge the communications gap and create a platform for uniform information sharing. The institution should also review web-based communication regarding academic advising. Advising webpages should remain dynamic and up-to-date to ensure students have access to good information and appropriate referrals.

### **Pursue current technology and data availability.**

It is important Texas State invests in current technology that streamlines and supports the efficiency of advising practices in both usage and data availability. Using multiple systems (Banner, Ellucian Degree Works, SARS) cause inefficiency in entering, importing, and extracting data by advisors and other users of the information. We encourage the institution to research current technologies and decide on a single system that satisfies the needs of your campus to help support student success. Academic advising should have a seat at the table along with other academic success representatives and strategic campus partners.

In the event a single system cannot be identified to meet the needs of Texas State, then an agreed upon suite of technology platforms (including an advising platform) should be implemented and consistently used across the system. Whatever the system, it should allow for ease of access to both historic and current data for analytics and reporting. This may require development of data governance policy, protocol, and procedures for your institution that are not in existence.

Encoura calls to attention the issue that many institutions currently are reliant on outdated technology that no longer supports the institution's need. Selection of new technology should allow for authentication to access on- and off-campus. This allows for increased flexibility and adaptability that supports automation and agility, ease for engagement, real-time data analysis, and data integrity, along with mobile and social enhancements that contribute to the improved experience of users, including students. Overall, newer technology can reduce the institutional burden on maintenance and increased capacity for better performance.

Items for consideration that relate to academic advising processes would be the integration of data for advising effectiveness and efficiency, an application that is easy for students to access and understand, and the integration of business processes that are utilized by faculty, staff, and students for loading data, holds that impact registration, an effective electronic note system that can be accessed by advisors with educational need to know, assigning advisors to advisees automatically by established cohorts, and online appointment scheduling. These are considerations that can assist with retention of students and persistence to graduation through enhanced advising related experiences.

This decision requires acknowledgement of information that is hard to access or not accessible to inform student support needs (Banner, Ellucian Degree Works, SARS, etc.). Texas State needs accessible data, reports, and analytics with increased transparency across the institution for those with educational need to know to assist students. This process provides an opportunity to reflect on what is currently not provided and/or easily accessible by faculty, staff, and students. Additional items can be clearly identified by academic advisors and advising center directors.

Go live timelines need to be carefully considered to avoid release immediately prior to the beginning of registration time ticket availability for students and prime advising times for those registrations. This is a prime time for academic advising appointments with students preparing to register. Advisors will need training that is provided and supported with job aids so that they can effectively utilize the system and assist students in learning the new technology as well. A planning tool is essential to support academic advising at critical touchpoints from intake through graduation. However, we cannot stress enough that academic advisors must be involved in the planning and implementation; otherwise, the institution risks selecting a very expensive tool that is not effective in supporting students. While Texas State should remain focused on technology as a tool to support student success and student success initiatives, the tool should NOT drive decisions about initiatives and student success programming. The technology needs to work for your institution.

Data availability and transparency are critical for student success and the success of academic advisors. A key piece to this requires all units across the university to use the same technology systems and enter electronic advising notes after every student contact so that academic advisors are supporting data availability for other advisors and for students, especially those in transition.

Dedicated analysts/programmers for advising and their related systems supporting continuous quality improvements to the various systems would be a plus in getting the data available for administration, directors, and academic advisors. They can work to achieve better data availability for the following and more.

1. Advising lists broken down by cohort (advisor assignments)
2. Missing information by student (high school transcript, dual credit transcripts, ACT/SAT, TSI, etc.)
3. Change of major data and notifications of changes
4. Predictive analytics for course success (sequencing or not in same semester courses)
5. Reports that show risk characteristics for individual students
6. DFWI data for courses for first-year students
7. Reports of closing the loop on student service referrals
8. On-time registration data
9. Early warning notifications
10. Internal assessment of student learning
11. Advisor evaluation summaries

Data availability informs academic advising processes for student success, retention, and persistence to graduation. Data can inform decision-making through assessment, user experience, and appropriate security.

Training is critical when rolling out a new technology and data availability. It is also recommended that professional development and training on how to use the adopted technology to its fullest potential be provided for all advisors as well as how to access data resources and how they can be maximized for advising. The technology needs to be employed consistently by all academic advisors. Any system needs to be explored to see how electronic notes can be entered and viewed by all advisors. A way to write and access notes from each advising session must be made available to prepare for students in transition and their subsequent advising sessions. This training along with job aids that can be accessed continuously by users are critical to continued success, especially for processes that are not regularly utilized in the technology.

- Howard, S., Irvin, M. & Sauter, J. *Technology as a tool for advisor development* in Comprehensive Advisor Training and Development (2022). 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. NACADA:Stylus. pp. 203-218.
- Miller, M. Do Student Information Systems Need a Tune Up? (2019). Retrieved from <https://encoura.org/do-student-information-systems-need-a-tune-up/>
- Eduventures *An Overview of Cloud-Based Student Information Systems (SIS)*. Technology Solutions and Analysis. Retrieved from <https://www.sisglobal.com/share/5331--Eduventures--An-Overview-of-Cloud-Based-Student-Information-Systems-SIS.pdf>
- Almond-dannenbring, T., Easter, M., Feng, L., Guarcello, M., Ham, M., Machajewski, S., Maness, H., Miller, D., Mooney, S., Moore, A., & Kendall, E. A Framework for Student Success Analytics (2022). Retrieved from <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2022/5/a-framework-for-student-success-analytics>

### **Establish a campus academic advising network.**

We encourage the establishment of a campus academic advising network to provide a forum for fellowship, professional development, and communication (in-person, listserv, and virtual). In contrast to the academic advising council or an advising leadership team chaired by a campus-wide advising leader, these groups are oftentimes grass roots efforts led by academic advisors, with elected officers in some instances, and inclusive of all members of the advising community. Institutional support is important to ensure the (generally modest) funding, time, and space needed for network meetings and activities.

The advising network can serve as a valuable sounding board as campus administrators consider student success questions and initiatives, often becoming a trusted collective voice on decisions that impact students. This should not be a time-intensive effort for any one individual, and any initial investment can pay significant dividends by improving connections among academic advisors, advisor engagement with meaningful campus conversations, and the visibility of – and respect for – the academic advising community at Texas State.

## Conclusion

Effective academic advising can contribute significantly to Texas State's student success goals and priorities. This academic advising program review was designed to evaluate first-year advising on campus, identifying strengths and challenges while suggesting opportunities for growth and development. Recognizing that first-year advising and campus-wide academic advising efforts are inextricably intertwined, this report's recommendations can help support policy, processes, and structures that strengthen and elevate academic advising throughout the university.

Academic advisors are representatives of the institution who should be well-positioned to develop meaningful advising relationships with their students, and those advisors can help students build a connection to the university community. The resulting sense of purpose and belonging contributes to student growth and persistence. We strongly believe that Texas State can positively impact retention, timely graduation, and student success by further prioritizing and investing in academic advising and by implementing impactful advising enhancements. This report can be viewed as a living document with recommendations and resources to support the university's efforts.

University College is looking critically at all areas for improvement to build a stronger academic advising program. To lead the design and implementation of first-year advising strategies and other advising practices across the university as outlined in this report, we suggest a shared approach to the work between leadership in University College and in the other colleges – that necessarily integrates and relies on the well-informed perspective and expertise of academic advisors and advising leaders on campus. NACADA provides several professional development opportunities that can guide Texas State through the development and implementation of many of our recommendations. We also suggest that, whenever possible, these efforts include campus partners likewise invested in the success of Texas State undergraduates. This approach will help with buy-in and provide the momentum needed to bring about a change in campus culture and practice.

We thank Texas State University and University College for hosting us during our visit to campus and for the opportunity to discuss academic advising with numerous stakeholders. Many colleagues on campus are clearly committed to improving academic advising for first-year students and to identifying ways to effectively support the retention and success of all students. Conversations during our visit lead us to believe the institution will proceed with enthusiasm and the right combination of speed and careful planning. We applaud Texas State's commitment to undertaking change on behalf of its students, and we wish the university great success in this endeavor.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Patricia Griffin and Dr. Mark A. Taylor

## **Appendix A**

### **NACADA Consultants' Agenda**

Texas State University  
November 2 and 3, 2022

#### Wednesday, November 2

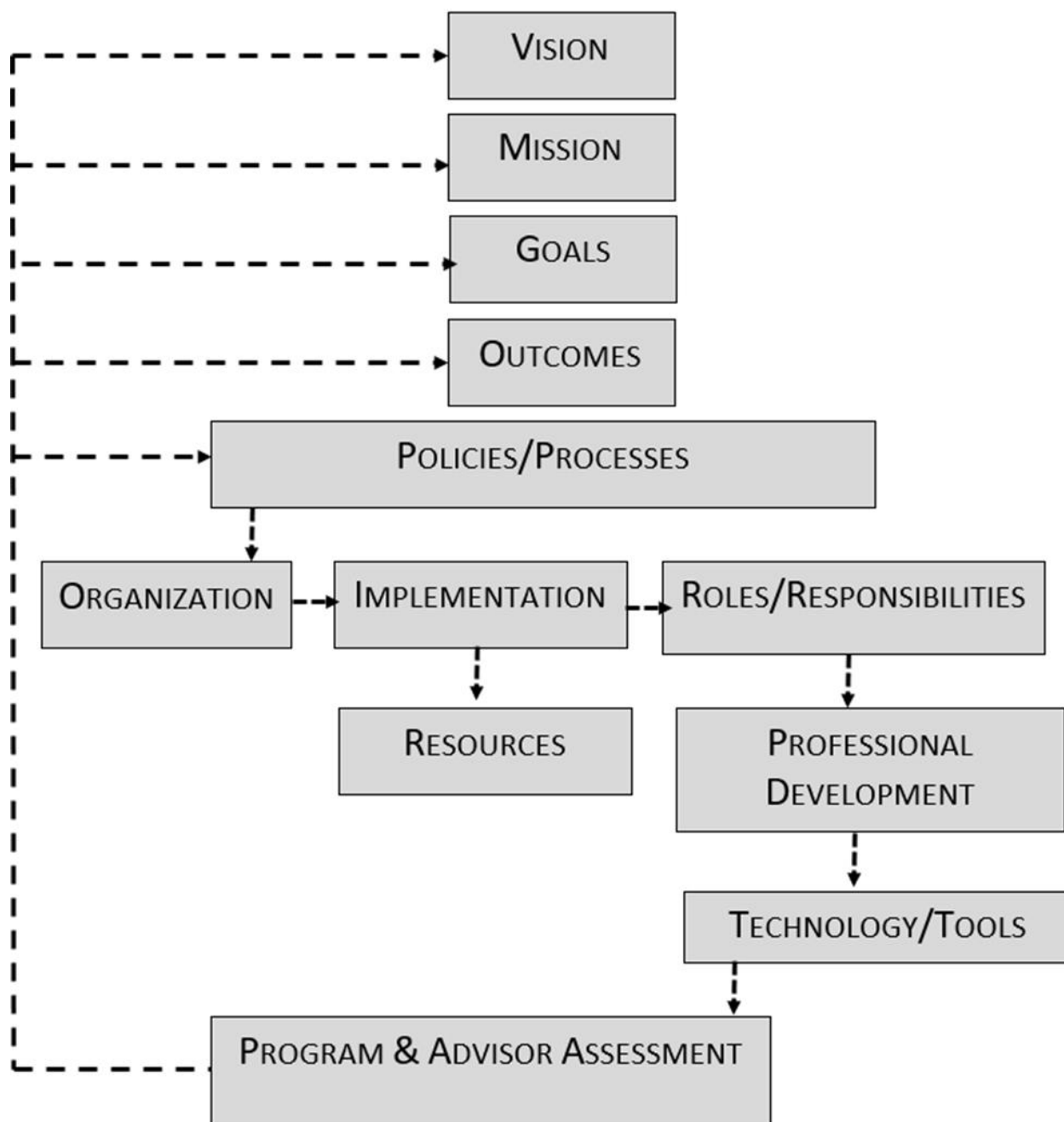
- 8:30-9:00 Tour of University College and PACE Center (Undergraduate Academic Center)
- 9:00-10:00 Meeting with Director of PACE Academic Advising, Mr. Kristopher Infante (UAC 124)
- 10:15-11:15 Meeting with PACE Academic Advising staff (UAC 124)
- 11:15-12:00 Meeting with First-Year Students (UAC 124)
- 12:15-1:45 Lunch and meeting with Advising Center Directors (UAC 474)
- 2:00-3:00 Meeting with Provost (JCK 1062) (Dr. Gene Bourgeois)
- 3:00-4:15 Campus Tour (including stops at two College Advising Centers; first stop at Applied Arts Advising [AG 201] with Mr. Charles Evers, Director; second stop at Education Advising [ED 2143] with Ms. Joya Konieczny, Director)
- 4:15-5:00 Meeting with University College Dean, Dr. Mary Ellen Cavitt (Dr. Cavitt's office)

#### Thursday, November 3

- 8:30-9:00 Tour of College Advising Center (McCoy College of Business Advising [McCoy 115]; Ms. Bethany Mellum, Director)
- 9:00-10:15 Meeting with Deans/Associate Deans Supervising College Advising Centers (Alkek 441/442)
- 10:30-11:30 Meeting with Second-Year Students (Alkek 441/442)
- 11:30-12:30 Meeting with Campus Partners, Group 1 (Undergraduate Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid) (Alkek 441/442)
- 12:30-1:45 Lunch and meeting with Advisors (Campus-Wide) (Alkek 441/442)
- 2:00-3:15 Meeting with Campus Partners, Group 2 (Student Affairs) (Alkek 441/442)
- 3:15-4:15 Meeting with Campus Partners, Group 3 (Academic Services) (Alkek 441/442)
- 4:15-5:00 Wrap-up with Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and PACE Academic Advising Director (UAC 124)

## Appendix B

### Components of an Advising Program



## DEFINITIONS

**Vision:** The aspirations of what academic advising can be on your campus

**Mission Statement:** The statement which reflects the purpose of academic advising on your campus that serves as the institution's roadmap to reach its vision and affirm its values for academic advising

**Goals:** The long-range expressions of the desired future state for academic advising

**Student Learning Outcomes:** A series of statements that articulate what students are expected to KNOW (Cognitive), DO (Behavioral), and VALUE (Affective learning) as a result of their academic advising experience

**Process Outcomes:** A series of statements that articulate the expectations for how advising is delivered and what information should be delivered through the experience

**Advising Policies:** The institutional guidelines and rules that support the advising goals and outcomes

**Organization/Delivery:** The institutional delivery model for academic advising that is clear, easily communicated to all stakeholders and reflects the advising goals and outcomes

**Roles/Responsibilities:** A clear statement on the roles and responsibilities for all involved in the academic advising process, e.g., ownership/leadership, faculty advisors, staff advisors, students, IT representatives, Registrar, etc., that reflects and reinforces the goals and outcomes

**Advisor Development/Tools:** An intentional, institutional plan that provides advisors and students with the knowledge and skills needed to satisfy both the learning and process outcomes and how to fully utilize the tools available for the support of advising.

**Technology:** The IT systems used to support the organization and delivery of advising (degree audit, on-line appointments and advisor notes, automated communications, student tracking, cohort database and reporting)

**Program and Advisor Assessment:** The process through which the institution gathers evidence about the claims it is making with regard to student learning and the process/delivery of academic advising in order to inform and support improvement.



## APPENDIX C

### Factors to Consider When (Re)structuring Academic Advising

1. **Status and Need.** What is the status of academic advising on your campus? What student (and institutional) needs are met by the current system? What needs are not being met? How do you know? Start with the [NACADA Core Competencies](#), [NACADA Core Values](#), the [Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising](#), and the [CAS Standards for Academic Advising](#).
2. **Mission, Vision, and Philosophy of Academic Advising.** How does the institution articulate the role and importance of academic advising? Is there a formal and written advising philosophy easily accessible by all constituents? Is there an advising mission statement? Is there a vision statement to serve as a guide to the future of advising? Are the academic leaders and decision-makers committed to long-term support through strategic planning?
3. **Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity.** How do you facilitate “individual and institutional conversations that promote understanding, respect, and honor diverse perspectives, ideas, and identities” (NACADA, 2021)
4. **Learning.** What does the institution want to accomplish as a result of the advising program? What should students be able to know, do, and value through the academic advising experience? What strategies (pedagogies, curricula, workshops, assessments, etc.) need to be implemented to meet these goals, objectives, and intended outcomes?
5. **Is the advising system intentionally structured? Who will advise and who will oversee and lead advising strategies, goals, and objectives?** Will you utilize professional (primary role) advisors? Peer advisors? Faculty advisors? If you choose faculty, should all faculty advise, or should advisors be selected based on desired characteristics and/or willingness to serve?
6. **How will advising be delivered? What advising models** will be used to structure the delivery of advising? Will students be advised in person by a faculty member from their office? Will there be an Advising Center? Where can students find support if their assigned advisors are not available? Will students need an appointment for advising? Will students have access to both synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery for advising-related interactions? Will group advising be utilized?
7. **Is advising supported through integrated technologies?** What are the information needs for students and advisors? How can you ensure that both students and advisors have the information they need when they need it while maintaining confidentiality? Is the technology appropriate and accessible to support their learning? Is there training and support for both advisors and advisees to support the technology being utilized?

8. **Advisor/Advisee Responsibilities.** Are there stated expectations for advisors/advisees? Is there an advising syllabus that is explicitly provided to students? Is there on-going professional development for advisors? Is there an updated academic advisor handbook or does one need to be developed or revised?
9. **Student Participation.** Should all students be required to see an advisor? If not, what criteria will you use to determine who must be advised? How 'intrusive' or 'proactive' should your advising program be? What messages are automatically sent to students and how effective are they in encouraging a response?
10. **Advisor Caseload.** What is a reasonable advisor to student ratio for your institution's advising situation that is based on explicit expectations and responsibilities for the role?
11. **Assignment of Students.** What criteria will be employed to assign students to advisors? Will students be assigned alphabetically? based on major? based on their year in school?
12. **Developing Advisors' Skills and Knowledge.** What are the training and professional developmental needs of advisors and how might these best be addressed in a systematic and scaffolded program that is grounded in related higher education literature?
13. **Assessment and Evaluation.** How will you assess and evaluate the effectiveness of your advising program? What are your intended program outcomes? What do you expect students to learn, do, and/or value because they were advised? How will you know if your efforts are successful? What tools will you use, and what evidence is appropriate? How often will you conduct an assessment cycle?
14. **Recognition/rewards.** How can you provide a tangible, meaningful, and realistic reward system to advisors (both primary-role advisors and faculty advisors)? Do you have a career ladder in place to encourage continuity and stability in the advising core, and to acknowledge their role as professional educators?
15. **Integration.** What are the relationships between academic advising and campus resources? Do advisors know when, and how, to refer students to these resources?
16. **Funding.** What are the fiscal requirements of the advising program? Are monies available to adequately meet these needs?
17. **Implementation.** What must be done, and who should be involved, in the implementation of the desired academic advising program?

Miller, M. A., Anderson, M. J., Sullivan-Vance, K., & Troxel, W. G. (2021). Factors to consider when (re)structuring academic advising, 2nd ed. NACADA Clearinghouse. Retrieved from <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/-Re-Structuring-academic-advising.aspx>