ADVISING CENTER: New Model Emphasizes Student-Advisor Relationship

In a strategic move to enhance the student experience and to ensure that students reach their fullest academic and personal potential, the School of Arts and Sciences Advising Center comprehensively reviewed its current practices. After extensive research, analysis, and many thoughtful meetings with an outside consulting firm, the Advising Center has realigned its advising structure. It has moved away from a traditional advising model that focuses more on course selection to a developmentally focused advising strategy that provides a student-centered approach, creates a shared responsibility between advisor and student, and helps students to draw a connection between their academic goals and career paths.

Unveiled in spring 2010, the developmental advising model calls for students to be active participants in the advising process, to define their career goals, and to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students. With the implementation of developmental advising, all Arts and Sciences advisors actively engage with students to determine academic plans, connect them with institutional resources, encourage student involvement with cocurricular programs, and help to prevent academic difficulties.

"While the Advising Center had the core of this developmental model already in place, the implementation of self-service enrollment in fall 2009 really paved the way for us to move completely to a developmental advising structure," explains Mary Beth Favorite, director of the Advising Center. "Advisors now can spend more time building relationships with students and developing meaningful conversations about career goals and graduate school opportunities."

In September 2008, the Advising Center contracted with Noel-Levitz, Inc., a higher education consulting firm, to evaluate the entire advising structure and make recommendations for a plan of action. Over a two-year period, Jim Hundrieser, associate vice president at Noel-Levitz, met with a wide variety of campus entities, including senior administrators in the School of Arts and Sciences undergraduate studies office, to review current practices and evaluate every facet of the advising program. Throughout this process, Hundrieser worked with the Advising Center staff to identify priorities and pinpoint steps to be taken to improve the student experience.

To better facilitate the developmental advising model, the Advising Center restructured and redefined its organizational team. The new staffing model consists of a director who will reach outward to build relationships across campus, an assistant director who will manage the day-to-day advising functions, three team leaders who will guide teams of advisors and work in specialized interest areas, and administrative and advising staff.

The review process identified numerous successful practices that will continue in the new advising structure. One particular system is the strong two-tiered advising model. One tier consists of 5,000 Arts and Sciences students who have yet to declare a major and students preparing for admission to preprofessional programs. First-year students will continue to meet individually with their advisors during their PittStart Session, twice during their first term, and once after that until they declare a major. All other students will meet with their advisor at least once per term until a major is declared. The second tier of students consists of those who have officially declared a major. These students will transition to their respective academic departments for advising.

"The Advising Center should be applauded for its intentional efforts to require all students to meet with the advisor at least once per term. This is a hallmark of the center and should be continued," says Hundrieser. "With the addition of technology, particularly the use of CourseWeb, advisors can be in contact with and checking in on their advisees on an ongoing basis."

"The Arts and Sciences Advising Center already had in place a dedicated team of professionals committed to student success that served as a strong foundation upon which to build future improvements," says Hundrieser. "I encountered an amazing spirit of collaboration between advisors and other units across the campus and an eagerness to focus on strategies to maximize the University experience for students."

For more information on the School of Arts and Sciences Advising Center, visit www.as.pitt.edu/advising.

DID YOU KNOW?

- An "on call" advisor is available every day in person or by phone to answer quick advising questions.
- Students can chat live with Advising Center staff members through an instant messaging Web chat or find an answer to their advising questions on a forum page. To find out more, visit www.as.pitt.edu/undergraduate/advising/imforum.
- Advisors participate in professional development programs every month to stay current on a broad range of advising issues.
Advisors Are Passionate about Making a Difference

Playing a positive role in her advisees’ academic lives is Katie Bruce’s top priority when advising students. “When I was attending college, I had such great advisors who were a wonderful sounding board for me. I would like to emulate them and challenge my students to learn more about themselves, to expand their world view, and to engage in what the University has to offer.”

With a master’s degree in counseling psychology from Pitt, Bruce has been an advisor for 11 years. “It is thrilling to get to know my students and help them achieve their dreams. They are all such, unique, interesting people with an amazing set of skills. I love when they are open to exploring all of the possibilities that a liberal arts education offers.” For Bruce, the most satisfying aspect of being an advisor is seeing the proverbial light bulb go off in a student’s head when it all finally clicks and makes sense, particularly when his or her career interests align with his or her major.

With more than 18 years of advising experience at Pitt, Stephanie Whatule finds helping students to navigate a system that can be complex and bewildering the most satisfying aspect of her job. “Because there are so many options, particularly for students who are undecided about a major and career path, it can be perplexing for students to determine which course of action to take,” says Whatule. With a master’s degree in English from Pitt, Whatule’s initial goal was to conduct research and to teach as a full-time faculty member. “I thrive in an academic environment. However, the more I worked with students in the group setting of a classroom, the more I realized that I wanted to instruct them in a different way. I like the personalized approach of individual advising appointments. I enjoy getting students acclimated to Pitt’s unique environment as well as preparing students to think independently, ask questions, and take full advantage of the wonderful resources available at Pitt.”

Academic achievement brings many rewards, including a $50 award. Students who end the fall term with a 4.0 GPA and complete a minimum of 12 credits of letter grade will see a $50 award posted to their PeopleSoft accounts. If your son or daughter qualifies for this award but does not receive the $50 by the end of January 2011, please contact us at pittpride@as.pitt.edu.

The School of Arts and Sciences will host a graduation reception and recognition ceremony for the $50 by the end of January 2011, please contact us at pittpride@as.pitt.edu.

News & Announcements

• Dean’s Stars
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• December Graduation
The School of Arts and Sciences will host a graduation reception and recognition ceremony for the Class of December 2010 on Saturday, December 18. An invitation will be mailed in mid-November to those Arts and Sciences undergraduates who have applied for December graduation. For more information, contact the Office of the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies at 412-624-6480.

• Homecoming Festivities
Mark your calendars for Homecoming Weekend 2010, October 28–31. The activities planned provide you with a chance to visit with your son or daughter and enjoy the University of Pittsburgh campus community. For details, including hotel and football game ticket information, visit www.alumni.pitt.edu/homecoming.

• April Graduation Notice
Students planning to graduate in April 2011 need to apply for graduation by November 12. Application forms will be available at the Office of Student Records in 140 Thackeray Hall beginning October 28.
Arts and Sciences Appoints New Advising Center Director

The School of Arts and Sciences recently announced the appointment of Mary Beth Favorite as the new director of the Arts and Sciences Advising Center. In leading the Advising Center, Favorite draws on 20 years of advising experience at the University of Pittsburgh.

Since coming to Pitt as an academic advisor in 1990, Favorite has acquired an impressive administrative background. As a senior advisor, she coordinated the peer advisor program and facilitated the development of the Advising Center’s online orientation for incoming freshmen. Most recently, as acting director, she was instrumental in leading the Advising Center through a two-year assessment process.

Favorite’s primary goal this academic year is to complete the implementation of the developmental advising model unveiled in spring 2010. In doing so, she will continue to build on the historical strengths of the Advising Center, which focuses on individual advising. "With the integration of self-service enrollment, advisors now have more time to spend building relationships with students and actively engaging students in the process of exploring their academic interests, goals, options, and resources," says Favorite. Another important initiative is to develop further the liaisons with departmental advisors and advisors in other schools across the University in order to ensure a smooth transition as students declare their majors or transfer to professional programs.

"The work of the Advising Center is a group effort in which the sum effect is much stronger than any one individual," says Favorite. "Each day, I am enriched by the interaction with both students and staff. I work with a wonderful group of committed, intelligent, interesting people, and it is a great privilege to play even a small role in the lives of our students."

Favorite is a native of Pittsburgh and received a bachelor’s degree in theology and elementary education from Carlow University. She also has completed some graduate coursework in religious studies and communication. She has three grown children, two of whom earned degrees at Pitt and one who graduated from Le Cordon Bleu Institute of Culinary Arts in Pittsburgh. "Having my education from Carlow University and staff. I work with a wonderful group of committed, intelligent, interesting people, and it is a great privilege to play even a small role in the lives of our students."

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Advisors and Students Connect Through Technology

Through the University of Pittsburgh’s Web-based course management system, CourseWeb, students have access to a wealth of information from their instructors—including handouts, notes, sample exercises, and related readings—that augments the classroom experience. Beginning with the 2010 fall term, students advised in the Arts and Sciences Advising Center are now able to log in to CourseWeb, click on the Arts and Sciences Advising link, and have access to real-time postings and announcements from their academic advisors.

"The academic Advising Center continuously looks for ways to integrate technology into the advising experience, to use technology as a tool to enhance and personalize communications further with students," says Patrick Mullen, newly appointed assistant director of the Advising Center. “CourseWeb is an innovative way to communicate with students and provide one-stop-shop access for information that’s relevant to them. Advisors use CourseWeb in conjunction with individual meetings with their students.”

Successfully piloted in the 2010 spring term to a select group of advisors, CourseWeb now is available to all academic advisors in the Advising Center. “One of the advantages of using CourseWeb as part of our advising model,” says Mullen, “is that it allows advisors to customize their own community page specifically for their advisees.”

"CourseWeb allows advisors to customize their own community page specifically for their advisees,” says Mullen. “Advisors can post announcements as well as tutoring schedules, internships opportunities, and even personal information about themselves. In addition, with CourseWeb's advanced functionality, advisors have the capability to target announcements for particular community groups, including students interested in premed, prelaw, and prepharmacy."

CourseWeb is not a static communication tool. The interactive technology allows students to post comments and questions on electronic message boards and communicate actively with each other and their advisors. CourseWeb also provides detailed reports that allow advisors to see a more comprehensive picture of a student’s particular interests. This function is very useful in developing meaningful conversations with students about their academic goals and career plans.

The next phase of CourseWeb will include integrating additional functionalities, such as uploading audio files, student testimonials, and a private electronic portfolio.

As children, students learn when their interests are stimulated. Remembering or understanding something becomes effortless when their curiosity or imagination is captured. However, as students move through the formal education system, the amount of information they need to learn increases. Not only are they daunted by the sheer amount of information, but they have difficulty maintaining their attention and drive. When exam time arrives, it seems as though they will never be able to commit all that information to memory. They begin to feel pressured and, if they ever have previously failed a test, they already are emotionally conditioned to feel anxious or fearful when thinking about taking an exam.

Learning to study successfully is essential to surviving college. The following study tips can help to promote students’ success in school. Students should:

• Get organized. Have a separate notebook for each class.
• Find one place to study in their room or apartment where they can feel undisturbed.
• Locate one place on campus to study during some of their free time (e.g., a quiet corner in the library).
• Manage their time wisely.
• Have a small notebook to document daily responsibilities. Prioritize tasks and check off what they have completed.
• Take effective notes. Review their notes for each class at the end of the day.
• Visit the Academic Resource Center on campus whenever they need help with any of their subjects.
• Attend free study skills workshops offered by the Academic Resource Center.
• Use the Writing Center for assistance with developing a well-written paper.

Students should remember the following important suggestions to help them move forward on their academic path:

• Don’t be afraid to ask questions.
• Attend professors’ office hours and mentoring sessions.
• Form study groups.
• Schedule adequate time for studying, sleeping, and relaxation.
• Maintain a nutritional pattern of eating.
• Focus on the reasons for coming to college and future goals when thoughts about quitting occur.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Academic Resource Center
G-1 Gardner Steel Conference Center
www.as.pitt.edu/undergraduate/offices/arc
412-648-7792

Writing Center
M-2 Thaw Hall
www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter
412-624-6556

Math Assistance Center
Third Floor, Thackeray Hall
www.mathematics.pitt.edu/resources/mac-center.php

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Advising Center Launches New Scheduling Application

During the 2010–11 academic year, students will have access to a new tool for scheduling advising appointments. The School of Arts and Sciences Advising Center will pilot CourseWeb Advisor, a virtual online appointment calendar that enables students to set up advising meetings with their academic advisor 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The CourseWeb Advisor application, which works in conjunction with Blackboard’s CourseWeb system, is being piloted in two phases. The first phase allows students to view their advisor’s appointment calendar, see which advising appointments are available, and schedule a time that is convenient for them. An important feature of this application is the ability for students to explain the reason for the advising meeting. This feature helps advisors to prepare properly for each advising appointment and enables them to have a more productive, meaningful conversation with their students. For security and privacy reasons, students will not have access to their advisor’s personal calendar, nor will they see any other student name listed on the appointment calendar. An appointment time taken by another student will be listed as unavailable.

The second phase of CourseWeb Advisor, which will be piloted in 2011, is an early alert system that enables faculty and advisors to share information about students who may be having academic difficulty. Faculty members, staff members, and advisors will be able to work together more effectively to put early intervention practices into place to help students succeed.

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For the online academic calendar, go to www.provost.pitt.edu/information-on/calendar.html.