

Proposed Advisory Council for the Office of Academic Advising

Maryclaire Moroney
Associate Dean, Academic Advising
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BACKGROUND:

In May 2012, the Advising Working Group, a subcommittee of the Academic Planning Task Force at John Carroll University, submitted a final report to the University Provost and Academic Vice President, Dr. John Day. The report articulated goals for the advising program in three broad categories: Expectations, Efficacy, and Technology. The group recommended that the Provost and the academic deans provide institutional support to implement the goals identified in the study.

During the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, the Associate Dean, with the support of the CAS dean, and in concert with academic and student affairs partners across campus, examined ways and means of improving academic advising and related student support services at the University, using the APTF recommendations as a guide. In the spring of 2014, the Associate Dean had an approved plan to reorganize the Office of Academic Advising to enable the office to begin implementing the APTF goals. This reorganization was completed by mid-August 2014.

In what follows, I propose the creation of an advisory council for the newly overhauled Office of Academic Advising at the University. The purpose of this council would be to provide ongoing feedback, recommendations, and support for advising, and to offer expertise/suggestions on matters of program assessment, faculty development, and student retention. Ideally, the advisory council provides an additional source of oversight, energy, and focus to the important shared work of academic advising at the University.

The following document has three sections:

1. The APTF recommendations for University advising
2. The current organization and staffing for advising
3. A proposal for an ongoing Advisory Council to assist in the continued implementation and evolution of the APFT recommendations

1. APTF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVISING

The primary mission of the academic advising program is to empower individuals to develop meaningful plans through educational, personal, and vocational discernment.

EXPECTATIONS:

- Our advising program will facilitate reflection and integration of learning.
- Individual students will remain responsible for their own academic programs, with guidance from advisors.
- There will be a centralized, University-wide academic advising center to coordinate advising across campus.
- The academic advising center coordinator will be a permanent and full-time position.
- The center's staff will articulate the advisor role and advisee responsibilities.
- The center's staff will support pre-major, major, graduate, and special audience advising.
- The center's staff will provide advisor training and opportunities for development that are available to all faculty members and are consistent across academic units.
- The center will provide mandatory training and development for new advisors, including new faculty members.
- The center's staff will maintain consistency in follow-up with regard to warnings and notifications.
- The center will provide referrals to individual students to other offices within the University, as appropriate, including Financial Aid, Housing, and the Counseling Center.
- All faculty members will share in the responsibility of advising. The advising load will be shared equitably across faculty members, and the process of assigning the load will be transparent.
- Advising and participation in development opportunities for advising will be recognized and assessed as part of each faculty member's teaching responsibilities. There will be consistency and transparency in recognition and compensation for advising.
- The institution will periodically consider alternative advising models (such as advising as a seven-week course for all new pre-major students with a common syllabus).

EFFICACY:

The APTF Working Group recommends that assessment information be gathered by the Academic Advising Center, and used to improve the quality of all advising programs at the University. The Advising Center itself should have the following responsibilities:

- To monitor the rate at which students are satisfying program requirements, and verify that sufficient opportunities exist so that students can satisfy their requirements.
- To monitor retention of students from semester to semester and from year to year.
- To document each student's advising experience in a consistent manner.
- To regularly survey students and faculty about the effectiveness of the advising program.
- To regularly benchmark our advising program with peer institutions.

- To monitor the load on faculty advisors and monitor whether the changes in the advising load are associated with the success of the advising program.
- To coordinate and disseminate the dimensions of senior exit information as they reflect on the advising program.

TECHNOLOGY:

Appropriate technology will be made available to facilitate advising. This technology should include the ability to:

- Outline program requirements and indicate whether they are satisfied.
- Facilitate communication between advisors and advisees.
- Maintain electronic trails of documentation, including degree audit reports and e-portfolios.
- Make available online resources to support advising.
- Pursue pathways through which students can be reached, such as e-portfolios and social networking opportunities.

2. CURRENT STAFFING AND REORGANIZATION

The Office of Academic Advising used to be two separate but related entities. Until 2012, these two offices were staffed as follows:

Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Advising and Student Services:

The primary responsibility of this office was to run the advising component of New Student Orientations, to assign students to faculty for pre-major advising, and to adjudicate student requests for policy exceptions.

- Associate Dean (part-time appointment, responsible for supervising the assistant deans)
- Administrative assistant (full time)
- Records manager for graduation (full time)

Office of the Assistant Deans, Student Services:

The primary responsibilities of this office were to process academic and transient petitions, to consult with students who were on academic warning and probation, and to assist with registration changes, major declaration, and graduation.

- Three Assistant Deans (full time)
- Administrative assistant (full time)

The policy enforcement and student services work done by the assistant deans was kept structurally and functionally separated from the academic advising component of the department,

but this dichotomy did not serve students and faculty well. In effect, some academic coaching and referrals could be undertaken by the assistant deans, but their work was by design not embedded in an active engagement with and understanding of the academic curriculum. In both structure and staffing, the Office of the Assistant Deans was not well positioned to undertake the responsibilities the APTF had identified for a new academic advising center. Notably, the APTF imagined a unified academic advising center charged with (among other things) monitoring student progress, providing training opportunities for faculty, and capable of effective advising for a range of special student populations. In order to create such a center, the department's resources needed to be reallocated, so that the logistical work previously done by the assistant deans could be integrated into the intentional advising model proposed for the University.

The reorganization of these two entities, and their merging into one Academic Advising Office, evolved over the past several years, and was completed this summer. Even prior to the hiring of new staff this summer, the Associate Dean's office had already moved towards realizing a few APFT goals by piloting the cohort advising model for new students (goal: to distribute the advising load more transparently and equitably across academic units; consistent dissemination of information about academic planning and campus resources) and by replacing the paper graduation audit, and paper communications to graduating seniors, with an electronic process (goal: more effective and efficient use of technology in advising).

This single office has a leaner staff and a different focus, one better aligned with the expectations and outcomes articulated by the APTF. The new staffing is:

Associate Dean (full time)

Two assistant deans (full time)

Two administrative assistants (one full and one part time)

The mission of this office is to “facilitate reflection and integration of [student] learning” by providing substantial and ongoing training for faculty advisors, supporting “pre-major, major, graduate, and special audience advising,” and offering well-informed and effective referrals to offices across campus. As a unit of academic affairs, the Advising Office promotes the engagement of self-directed learners in the process of vocational, educational, and personal discernment. The current staff has an exceptionally rich range of expertise in the arts, social sciences, and STEM areas to use in support of our students. They come with the academic training needed to guide undergraduates through their diverse programs of study, and the professional expertise needed to develop and update advising materials for faculty. Thus, Academic Advising now embeds logistical, material support for faculty and students within the larger framework of student success through vocational discernment, academic planning, and persistence to graduation.

3. PROPOSAL FOR ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

At this point, the Office of Academic Advising would benefit greatly from a cross-departmental board offering guidance and recommendations on setting goals/priorities and implementing programs. To this end, I would like to convene a group of 8-10 representatives from academic and student affairs to provide input and guidance to the office.

- A representative from Faculty Council
- A representative from CAP
- A representative from the new CORE committee
- The Associate Deans of Boler and CAS (Calkins, Hessinger, Lacueva, Mason) to further represent divisional perspectives and experiences
- Dr. Todd Bruce, Academic Affairs, Assessment Office
- A representative from the Financial Aid office
- A representative from the Registrar's office

My request is that this group would convene by November and meet monthly throughout the academic year.