

September 25, 2018

Response to Futures Advising Recommendations: The UEAC and Advising Policy

The following is in reference to statements on pages 42 through 43 of the academic futures draft report that addresses academic advising. My response will focus on particular statements within the report.

From Pp. 42-43

While the ACE/neighborhood model might function well for students with a focused area of study, there would remain an advising need for students who are truly exploratory, including so-called Alternative College Option (ACO) students. The current Undergraduate Exploratory Advising Center (UEAC) has been created to address this need. The UEAC can help guide students into the majors, schools and colleges that best fit their needs. The UEAC can also serve as a central home to those academic programmatic functions that are not departmental or college specific (e.g., Early Alert programs). As Foundations of Excellence puts it, "Unify, or at least better communicate, policies that currently differ across campus. Some of the policies that affect a lot of students include: Transferring programs or changing majors; class repeat; class drops; semester withdrawals; and academic standing."

Again, one of the challenges that students continue to express is the feeling of "bouncing around the university" when it comes to advising. The UEAC should be used as a policy and governance hub when it comes to advising issues and imperatives, such as academic advising curriculum, required advising policies, group advising and support, defining the role of an advisor and establishing synergies between the colleges/schools, the Division of Student Affairs and ODECE so that services are not replicated. We need to continue to experiment with advising and to coordinate those experiments.

With respect to the first paragraph it does make sense to suggest that the UEAC provide University-wide exploratory advising along with an integrated first year program, inclusive of orientation activities, a first-year seminar and a strategy to fully integrate new students into the University community, connect them with the full range of university resources and help them discover programs of study appropriate for their interests and aptitudes. In a sense, it would seem appropriate to adopt a structure similar to [Penn State's Division of Undergraduate Studies](#) wherein new students enter, explore and then enter a college and major.

However, the second paragraph seems to imply that the UEAC should govern advising policy centrally, even within the colleges and departments. This suggestion is troubling in that the colleges and departments seem like the logical centers of governance for advising within their respective purviews. As we all know, for undergraduates, curricula and consequently advising content necessarily differ among and within colleges. While centralization with respect to new student orientation, exploratory advising and a universal integrated first-year experience seem to make some sense, the logic for centralization breaks down amidst the wide array of unique college- and departmentally-specific programs and requirements.

There is no inherent reason why a smooth transition from high school to university to college and major cannot occur without students feeling like they are “bouncing around.” A robust in-person new student orientation followed by an equally robust first year/exploratory advising program that from the beginning connects students to their first-year advisor and subsequently to their departmental advisor(s) can serve as the infrastructure for a solid relationship between individual students and the institution. As students refine their interests and goals, they should be intentionally connected to departmental advisors any time during their first-year experience. Encouraging secondary department-based advising assignments, while students are still in first-year status and after attending a mandatory major declaration meeting, will significantly ease the transition from first-year program to departments without diminishing the primary role of first-year advisors.

By returning to the “personal connection,” starting with a rededicated, personalized on-campus new student orientation, continuing with strong first year open option/exploratory advising and finishing with a solid relationship to chosen academic departments, the journey from high school to university diploma can be a welcome path to success for the majority of our students. Key to that are provision of sufficient resources, a comprehensive first-year program with a strong open option/exploratory advising component and a mindful transition to major departments and solid department-based advising.

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