



# AACSS

ACADEMIC ADVISING  
CONSULTANTS & SPEAKERS  
SERVICES

## Academic Advising Program Review

Governors State University

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Representing the NACADA Academic Advising Consultants and Speakers Services, Dr. Patricia Griffin and Dr. David Spight visited the campus of Governors State University (GSU) to conduct a formal review of academic advising February 9-10, 2022. At the request of GSU, the consultant team spoke with Associate Provost and Associate Vice President Dr. Rosemary Johnsen, Director Lisa Helm, and Coordinator Haley Walsh to discuss the goals of the review. The consultants were charged with conducting a comprehensive examination and providing guidance and recommendations regarding the organization, delivery, and assessment of academic advising at GSU. Prior to the campus visit, the consultants were provided background information about the strategic enrollment plan and the academic advising program at GSU.

### **Strengths:**

1. Campus view of academic advising
  - Undergraduate advising
  - Graduate advising
  - Faculty advising
2. Committed Academic Advisors
3. Diversity of Advising Staff
4. Dual Degree/Transfer Specialists

### **Challenges:**

1. Specialization of Academic Advising
2. Advisor Roles and Responsibilities
  - a. Undergraduate Advisors
  - b. Graduate Advisors
3. Training and Professional Development
4. Technology Systems
5. Assessment
  - a. Student Learning Outcomes
  - b. Advisor Professional Core Competencies
  - c. Programmatic Outcomes
  - d. Advising Syllabus
6. Undergraduate Academic Advising Center Facilities
  - a. Location
  - b. Space
  - c. Privacy and FERPA

### **Recommendations:**

1. Assign students to advisors more generally in the UAAC.
2. Define or create a position to assume central responsibility for graduate advising.
3. Review the various applications/technology tools in use to support advising.
4. Develop a formal on-boarding training for new advisors.
5. Establish a Professional Development Program.
6. Develop a formal assessment plan for academic advising.
7. Revise the Undergraduate Advising Syllabus
8. More clearly define how academic advisors are evaluated.

9. Improve the location of the UAAC.
10. Ensure that advising offices provide privacy for students.
11. Provide administrative/reception support to the UAAC.

## INTRODUCTION

Representing the NACADA Academic Advising Consultants and Speakers Services, Dr. Patricia Griffin and Dr. David Spight visited the campus of Governors State University (GSU) to conduct a formal review of academic advising February 9-10, 2022. At the request of GSU, the consultant team spoke with Associate Provost and Associate Vice President Dr. Rosemary Johnsen, Director Lisa Helm, and Coordinator Haley Walsh to discuss the goals of the review. The consultants were charged with conducting a comprehensive examination and providing guidance and recommendations regarding the organization, delivery, and assessment of academic advising at GSU.

Academic advising at GSU is currently set up as a mixed model, with centralized advising at the undergraduate level, decentralized graduate advising, and faculty advising (especially in the College of Health and Human Services).

In 2014, GSU began admitting first-time in college students. Prior to this, admitted either transfer or graduate students. The advising model was decentralized, with advisors located in the separate colleges. In 2018, the decision to centralize undergraduate advising was made and move to a central location that was available occurred. Graduate advising, however, remained decentralized. In terms of models for delivery of academic advising, there are a number of options. Regardless of the model in use, faculty, staff, administrators, and students all play a key role in student success efforts at an institution.

The institution engaged in the development of a new strategic enrollment plan to guide the academic years from 2022 to 2026. The strategic enrollment plan included a number of ideal outcomes, including three that academic advising plays an integral role in achieving:

- invest in student success with all student types and levels
- improve retention and persistence, and
- create efficiencies and effective enrollment and business processes and systems to support enrollment tasks while removing barriers to student success.

Academic advising, when done effectively, is integral to supporting the academic mission of the institution, and more specifically contributes to the likelihood of student success. Academic advisors, whether faculty or staff, assist a student with learning how to navigate the institution and persist to degree completion. As part of this effort, advisors play a role in identifying and advocating for the removal of barriers to student success.

One of the actions taken by the institutional leadership as a result of the new strategic enrollment plan was to have a review conducted by NACADA consultants. Prior to the campus visit, the consultants were provided background information about the strategic enrollment plan and the academic advising program at GSU. During the two-day visit, the consultants met with a number of different campus stakeholders, including:

- Students
- Undergraduate Primary Role Advisors
- Graduate Advisors

- Faculty Advisors
- Dual Degree Program Director and Transfer Specialists
- Chairs and Supervisors
- College Deans
- Administrators from Related Units: Admissions, Financial Aid, Housing, Registrar
- President Cheryl Green

The specific schedule of meetings during the visit is included as *Appendix A* in this report.

This report highlights 1) the strengths associated with the current mixed model, 2) the challenges with the existing organization of the delivery of advising, and 3) provided recommendations for GSU leadership.

### **FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONSULTANTS' VISIT**

Before describing our observations and recommendations, it may be helpful to know our professional perspectives which serve as the frame, or the lens through which we approach the practice of academic advising. NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) has four documents, or pillars, which serve as the foundation for the practice of academic advising. These four documents are: NACADA's Concept of Academic Advising, NACADA's Statement of Core Values, NACADA's Core Competencies for Academic Advising, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising. Links to these documents can be found at:

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars.aspx>

Advising programs that are considered effective in the field reflect the advising philosophy contained in these documents. For the purpose of framing the context of our review of GSU's advising program, the following points address our major assumptions about effective and successful academic advising:

- Academic advising is best viewed as integral to the success of the teaching and learning mission of higher education institutions. 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 is concerned with), pedagogy (how advising delivers the curriculum), and student learning outcomes (the results of academic advising). The curriculum and pedagogy are guided by the core competencies for academic advising that are integral for advisors to know. The student learning outcomes are based upon what we want students to know and/or understand, to be able to do, and to value and appreciate as a result of engaging in the academic advising process.
- Effective practices in advising programs consistently address three issues. First, it is critical that professional advisors, whether staff or faculty advisors, receive adequate training and professional development opportunities from their initial on-boarding.

Academic advisor training needs to also be ongoing, not simply a onetime session, and it should include the three core competency areas of concern to advisors: conceptual, relational, and informational. Secondly, there must be appropriate rewards and recognition for advisors. This includes career advancement opportunities. Thirdly, it is critical that the advising program be measured for effectiveness through the implementation of a continuous assessment plan that goes beyond student satisfaction surveys in order to determine if the learning outcomes for advising are being achieved.

- Evidence suggests that strong academic advising programs are a key component to successful comprehensive student success strategies (Drake, 2008; Light, 2001; Troxel, 2018). When done well, academic advising has a significant impact on student success as reflected in an institution's retention and graduation rates.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

### ***Strengths***

#### **Campus View of Academic Advising**

The view held by many stakeholders was that advising was positive and an integral piece of the institution's commitment to student success. Additionally, advisors were thought of as crucial to retention and degree completion efforts on the campus. Of note, many stakeholders felt advisors were nice and responsive, especially during the transition to remote instruction.

#### ***Undergraduate Advising***

Stakeholder groups expressed that the undergraduate advisors did an excellent job of providing support to students. More specifically, the chairs and supervisors in the colleges described the undergraduate advisors as knowledgeable, collaborative, engaged, and key to a number of processes such as department course planning and internships. The students echoed that the undergraduate advisors were helpful, especially with understanding degree audits and felt that the advisors deserved more recognition for the work they do. Of note, the students felt the advising they specifically received from the first-year advisor was aligned with their high expectations that an advisor not just discuss classes to take, but to also discuss educational and post-college plans.

#### ***Graduate Advising***

For the graduate advisors, again chairs and supervisors expressed those advisors were effective, especially with regards to developing study plans for students, planning orientation, and the application processes.

#### ***Faculty Advising***

The faculty advisors we met with were highly dedicated and engaged and showed genuine interest in the students they advised. There appeared to be a sense of strong collaboration between the faculty advisors and the undergraduate advisors, especially when developing resources such as study plans for students.

### **Committed Academic Advisors**

At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and with both primary role staff advisors and faculty advisors, there was a positive attitude exuded by those providing advising. There existed a strong desire for professional development at all levels and more intentional training as advisors expressed wanting to learn more about how to develop into better practitioners. The advisors are committed to students and GSU. They are student-centered and collaborative. The acting director of the Undergraduate Academic Advising Center (UAAC) is a good choice as the undergraduate advising team feels she is working to nurture and help them to develop as advisors and the team was highly responsive to this shift in culture in the center. They enjoy the comradery and respect among the team.

### **Diversity of the Advising Staff**

Of note, the academic advising team was clearly representative of the diverse student population. Though this is not a guarantee of having a strong foundation in cultural competency, and though the work in developing cultural competency is a never-ending journey, there was at no point concerns with how academic advising at GSU was able to support students from a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences. None of the stakeholders described a need to improve the cultural competencies of the advising team, including most importantly, the students.

### **Dual Degree/Transfer Specialists**

An additional advising strength at GSU appears to be the dual degree/transfer specialists. The team is knowledgeable about each of the undergraduate degree programs and provides students assistance with the transition to GSU prior to application for admission through their handover to the UAAC. Additionally, the transfer guides used by the dual degree/transfer specialists are a great resource for students considering transfer to GSU.

### ***Challenges/concerns***

#### **Specialization of Academic Advising**

A concern that was expressed in nearly every meeting centered around the delivery of advising organized by college/majors/degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Though specialization allows for an advisor to become an expert in a particular program or programs, when that advisor is not available or leaves their advising position, a gap in knowledge is created leaving students unable to receive effective advising. For undergraduate students, this might be reflected in the coverage during evening hours in the UAAC. For example, if a student majoring in business seeks advising, but that evening there is not an advisor assigned to business majors working, then the student cannot get the help they need. There is limited cross training for programs unless the advisor moved from a different area. For both undergraduate and graduate students, when an advisor leaves or is out unexpectedly, it leaves them without an advisor who is well trained and knowledgeable in their program in order to assist them. There exists at that point a significant loss of institutional history/memory which most directly impacts the students. Again, this challenge is one at both the undergraduate and graduate levels even though one level delivers advising in a central location and the other level is decentralized.



### **Advisor Roles and Responsibilities**

After speaking with each of the stakeholder groups, there did appear to be quite different ideas about the role of academic advisors. Some described the positions as clerical, course registration specialists, administrative support, data specialists for department or other duties as assigned by departments. Others described advising as about helping students to develop and implement educational and post-college plans. For some advisors, the work was described in a very transactional way. The lack of common understanding of the role of an advisor may be the reason behind why some stakeholders feel that advising needs to be significantly improved. Some of the administrators we met with from the related units believed advisors had the responsibility of making sure students enrolled, which reflects a misunderstanding of the role of advisor, which is not to focus primarily on enrollment management but on student learning and success.

#### ***Undergraduate Advisors***

The undergraduate advisors expressed an interest in a more transformational relationship that goes beyond just discussing class schedules for the next term. Similarly, the students had the expectation that advisors discuss more than just classes with them. Undergraduate advisors have the same position description but do many different duties and have an inequity in the load of advisees they have assigned. In terms of students in transition, from Admissions, the Dual Degree Program, or a new major, there also appears to be inconsistency of practice, which may also be the result of a lack of clarity of advisor roles.

#### ***Graduate Advisors***

Some stakeholders felt advisors were more reactive rather than proactive, especially at the graduate level. Though it also appeared that the responsibilities assigned to graduate advisors was far from consistent from one college to the next. In addition, as expressed by the college deans, there exists a lack of central oversight regarding advising practice at the graduate level.

### **Training and Professional Development**

It was clear that there was a lack of any formalized, consistent, initial training for academic advisors, and this was true for all types of advisors, undergraduate, graduate, and faculty advisors. This lack of training exacerbates the issues related to loss of institutional memory when an advisor leaves their position. Additionally, with no formal consistent training, advisors themselves may lack a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Of note, this is a common challenge facing institutions given the time and resources that are necessary in the initial development of a formal training program.

Professional development was something for which advisors expressed a strong interest and desire. Some expressed they were unaware of the opportunities outside of the campus. Others, as we found in the course of our conversations, did not take advantage of opportunities that were made available.

## **Technology Systems**

Access to technology systems was identified as inconsistent across advising. Slate, Starfish, and Colleague were mentioned but not everyone knew what they were or what they are used for in working with students. Too many technologies were identified as issues for students, faculty, and staff. These challenges with technology often occur when there is a lack of understanding of the scope needed for the technology to address, a lack of the appropriate stakeholders (especially users) involved in the process of selecting technology to purchase/develop/use, and lack of training at the time of implementation.

One other note, the technology does not currently have the option for advisors and academic departments to see notes from each other to support student. Students could be more effectively and holistically served if there was better information sharing about student interactions with advisors, departments, or other student support resources. Still, caution should be used when determining what roles should have access to what student information.

## **Assessment**

Academic advising at GSU is not currently assessed in an intentional way. Though one stakeholder group mentioned the campus has utilized the Ruffalo Noel Levitz survey, the questions associated with advising are focused on student satisfaction rather than student outcomes (Troxel, DiGregorio, Guertin, Harris, & Spight, 2019).

### ***Student Learning Outcomes***

The undergraduate advising community at GSU in the past had developed a vision, mission, goals, and learning outcomes for students, however, the advisors did not appear to be knowledgeable about them. It did not appear that at the graduate level any such guiding statements, goals, or outcomes have been developed. The lack of clear student learning outcomes makes it difficult for the campus to know if advising is effective and leads to different advisors approaching the work in inconsistent ways.

### ***Advisor Professional Core Competencies***

There exists, as mentioned earlier in the report, core competencies for professional practice of academic advising provided by NACADA. Though copies of these competencies have been distributed to some of the academic advisors at GSU, there has been no assessment of proficiency measured. Training and professional development activities, as a result, may not be addressing the appropriate needs of advisors, whether faculty or staff, undergraduate or graduate.

### ***Programmatic Outcomes***

Though attempts have been made at developing student outcomes, there do not exist any programmatic outcomes to be measured as part of a comprehensive assessment plan. Again, the lack of programmatic outcomes makes it difficult to know if the advising being provided is effective. It also makes it challenging to know if the right appropriation of resources is being allocated for advising to support the achievement of those programmatic outcomes.

### ***Advising Syllabus***

The UAAC has an advising syllabus, but both the students and advisors were either unaware of what was included, did not refer back to it, or did not know it existed. This was created prior to admitting first-time in college students to GSU or the creation of the UAAC. This may be the result of an advising syllabus without any assignments, actions, follow-up or updating included.

## **Undergraduate Academic Advising Center Facilities**

### ***Location***

Many of the stakeholder groups expressed concern for the location and space allocated for the UAAC. More specifically, the location of the center is tucked far away from many of the other student services and student common spaces on the campus. This contributes to a sense that advising is “too far from everything” and feels “physically inaccessible.” In other words, the location discourages students from seeking academic advising. Some indicated a safety concern due to the isolation, especially at night.

### ***Space***

The students described the advising space as cramped and uninviting. The lack of a receptionist or individual to greet students also contributed to a feeling that the environment is unwelcoming, especially after walking the long way down the halls to arrive at the center.

### ***Privacy and FERPA***

The current office spaces the advisors are located within do not provide privacy as the walls do not reach the ceiling. The students expressed concerns about other students and advisors hearing what they were discussing during appointments. The lack of privacy does put the institution at risk of repeated violations of the FERPA rights of students. Additionally, it constrains the advisors’ ability to advise students holistically.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Organization and Delivery of Advising at Governors State University**

As mentioned above, one of the challenges to advising delivery at GSU is the potential for loss of institutional memory as the result of advisors leaving positions or being unexpectedly gone for a variety of personal reasons. The specialization of advisors also minimizes the access and availability to advising, especially in the evenings in the UAAC, for example, where the advisor(s) may not be trained to assist any student pursuing any major. As a result, we recommend some changes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels to help address this challenge.

#### **Recommendation: Assign students to advisors more generally in the UAAC.**

The centralized model of the UAAC is a good model around which to organize the delivery of advising to undergraduate students at GSU. The assignment of students to advisors by majors, however, contributes to the potential for institutional memory loss when advisors move on. With advisors assigned by major, it limits the availability of advisors trained to assist students during later hours of each day. For these reasons, we

recommend that UAAC advisors be assigned not by specialized majors, but rather in a more general way. The dual degree/transfer specialists reflect an example of how advisors can become highly knowledgeable about lots of majors and degree programs. How this might look could be to assign multiple advisors to all of the majors in a college, or more generally, assignment of advisors to students interested in any major.

There are pros and cons for each option but minimizing a change of advisor from one advisor to another would be important to consider as students would prefer a consistent connection rather than speaking with a different advisor each time they need advising. Handoffs from one advisor to another, no matter how well done, can be challenging for students. Minimizing the number of handoffs should be an important consideration. This also may mean that rather than having one first year advisor, assigning first year students across all advisors in the UAAC might be a way to reduce the number of handoffs and ensure assigned caseloads are more equitable.

Advisors would need to be cross trained. This would directly address the challenge of potential loss of institutional memory. Such a change would also increase the likelihood that when a student seeks advising in the UAAC in the evenings, that advisors would be knowledgeable and able to assist a student regardless of the major the student is pursuing. It would increase availability and access to advising within the existing operating hours.

Still, we recognize the importance of advising being integrated with the colleges and recommend that advisors be given liaison assignments with the colleges and/or departments. As there are four colleges and nine advisors, more than one advisor could be assigned as a liaison to the same college to ensure sustainability of relationships, greater availability to departments and colleges, and more effective distribution of liaison duties.

The duties for advising liaisons could include, for example:

- serving as the point of contact in the UAAC for the colleges
- attending department or college meetings as needed
- keeping other UAAC advisors up to date on information needed to advise students interested in those majors
- updating the materials, resources, and information
- providing the informational training to new and continuing advisors

Of note, the acting director and assistant director would not be liaisons given their additional responsibilities.

**Recommendation: Define or create a position to assume central responsibility for graduate advising.**

This recommendation is not suggesting that graduate advising be centralized in the same way as undergraduate advising. A decentralized model for graduate advising is not uncommon. There is, however, a concern with consistency at the graduate level. Some of the graduate advisors were described as highly responsive while others were described as reactionary. We do not necessarily fault the graduate advisors as we see this reflective of a need for better organization of advising at the graduate level. Additionally, the graduate

advisors expressed a need for someone to better coordinate training and professional development. Having a central person that would provide some oversight to the graduate advising efforts would provide better consistency across advisors, more intentional training and development, more timely coordination of assessment of graduate advising, and centralized support when a graduate advisor is either out unexpectedly or leaves their position. This position would not necessarily need to be a direct supervisor for the graduate advisors but would have responsibility for ensuring graduate advising was effective, consistent, and supportive of the graduate student population.

**Recommendation: Review the various applications/technology tools in use to support advising.**

There appeared to be some inconsistency expressed in terms of who has access to which systems. Reviewing and defining the scope of each application, and then determining appropriate levels of access by role, would clear up much of the confusion and help to ensure that the applications are being used in the most effective manner. This may simply require reviewing with each role what systems they do and should have access to, and how to utilize those tools. The Family Educational Right to Privacy (FERPA) can be utilized as a guide for determining who based on responsibilities should have access to which technology at GSU. The scope of the technology and the job responsibilities will help to align access and serve the students in a way that is compliant among employees.

Important in this process is the inclusion of academic advisors in the processes of planning, selection and/or development of technology tools, and the implementation of technology to ensure that the new tools are useful and accessible.

## **Training/Professional Development**

**Recommendation: Develop a formal on-boarding training for new advisors.**

An onboarding process is used to help new employees feel welcomed and prepared as well as adjust to the social and performance aspects of their jobs as quickly as possible. Onboarding can increase acclimation, retainment, and engagement of employees. There are multiple items to consider regarding onboarding of new advisors. Two of those items are:

- How long should onboarding last?
- Who should assist with onboarding new advisors?

In the *New Advisor Guidebook: Mastering the Art of Academic Advising* (2015) the New Advisor Development Chart (19-34) there are topics and length of the development at Year One and Year Three and Beyond. This shows that onboarding starts as introductory and then is part of ongoing training. Advisors who have not participated in different trainings should start with the program to get everyone to the same minimum training levels. This would include all advisor types (professional, faculty, and graduate).

Training is crucial to enhance the depth and breadth of an advisor's skills. Advising is more than class registration and require the appropriate knowledge to cover all areas related to advisors working with students.

**Recommendation: Establish a Professional Development Program.**

These recommendations are necessary and important for undergraduate, graduate, and faculty advisors. Current advisors may need to participate in some of the training that may have been lacking at the time of their initial on-boarding, especially if changing student assignments in the UAAC require cross-training.

There are three component categories of core competencies for academic advising: conceptual, relational, and informational. The learning of some of these core competencies should be included in the on-boarding training. Other competencies can and should be addressed as part of a formal professional development program.

The **conceptual** competencies involve the context of the practice of academic advising. This includes the core values of advising, theories relevant to advising, approaches to advising practice, expected outcomes, and how to create and maintain equitable and inclusive environments.

The **relational** competencies include but are not limited to the development of skills around relationship building, communication, planning and conducting advising interactions, promoting student understanding, facilitating meaning making and problem solving, and articulating a personal philosophy of advising.

The **informational** competencies include the knowledge of the institution (history, mission, vision, values, and culture), degree programs and academic requirements, policies and procedures, rules and regulations, legal guidelines (e.g., FERPA), characteristics and experiences of different student populations, campus resources, and information technology utilized for academic advising.

As the topical areas for training and professional development are determined, they should be aligned and mapped to the core competencies for academic advising. Additionally, some decisions will need to be made as to whether the topic is important to include in the initial on-boarding training or could be offered as part of the on-going professional development plan. The professional development plan could also include opportunities beyond the campus. We were told that advisors in the UAAC are given memberships in the state association of ILACADA, but it appeared that advisors were unaware of this or chose not to take advantage of the opportunity to connect with other advisors across the state of Illinois.

Having advisors self-assess their proficiency and knowledge of the academic advising core competencies may also be a good place to start in determining which areas to focus initial professional development efforts.

**Assessment and Evaluation of Academic Advising at Governors State University**

Development and implementation of an assessment plan for academic advising can help to address the challenges associated with clarity of advisor roles, where to focus training and on-

going professional development efforts, and how to know if the existing delivery models are effective at GSU.

Assessment, it is important to note, however, is not the same as evaluation (Robbins & Zargas, 2011; Robbins, Miller, & Zargas, 2021). More specifically, assessment is not about seeking to identify who is not doing the job they have been assigned effectively. Assessment is about the development of talents (Astin & Antonio, 2012). Evaluation, in contrast, is about determining the level of performance. Assessment looks to find where learning is occurring and where programs can be improved. Assessment is intended to tell the story of what is happening rather than evaluating how someone is doing their job.

In speaking with the various stakeholders, it does appear that there is a need for an assessment plan for academic advising. There is, however, some caution regarding how advisors are evaluated. Regardless, GSU needs to develop an assessment plan as well as revise existing evaluation process, where possible, with the collaboration of the union.

**Recommendation: Develop a formal assessment plan for academic advising.**

A formal assessment plan for academic advising will require development or revision of the following elements:

- Institutional Advising Vision and Mission Statements
- Goals for Academic Advising at GSU
- Student Learning Outcomes
- Advisor Outcomes
- Program Outcomes

***Institutional Advising Vision and Mission Statements***

Important in the initial steps involved in developing an advising unit's assessment plan is the creation of a well-known vision, mission, and goals (Robbins, 2009). Integral in that process is an understanding of your institution's mission statement. Your vision, mission, and goals should be aligned with these statements from the institution (CAS, 2018). From our conversations with various stakeholders, it appears that there is a lack of familiarity with the existing vision, mission, and goals. Additionally, with the GSU strategic enrollment plan, the existing statements should be revised or replaced to ensure that they are aligned to strategic plan.

In the case of graduate advising, a mission statement does not currently exist. As a result, graduate advising may need to be incorporated into the new and revised mission statement for advising at GSU, or a separate statement for graduate advising needs to be created. It would be important that a central unit provide oversight if a separate graduate advising mission statement and assessment plan is to be developed as it should not fall on the shoulders of one of the graduate advisors or on all of the graduate advisors without some oversight by someone not affiliated with just one college.

**Vision statement.** Often, vision statements get confused with mission statements. The vision statement should be something aspirational for your advising program (Robbins, Miller, & Zargas (2021).

It should not be something easily accomplished as it needs to provide the place to continuously strive to get to, but never something the group is finished with at some point in the future. It may be that the team has a vision to be an exemplary example of academic advising programs for others to want to aspire to be like, but even that vision requires continually trying to maintain that status through continuous and never-ending improvement.

**Mission statement.** Mission statements often get confused with vision statements and/or goal statements. The mission statement should be clear, concise, and express very specific information. The process for developing the mission statement should involve the academic advisors (Bresciani, Garner, & Hickmott, 2009). Your program's mission statement should include what your advising program is seeking to do, for whom, and how (Robbins, 2009). Too often, advising programs attempt to justify the importance of advising within the mission statement. As this will become more apparent through the overall assessment plan, including such sentences are unnecessary and overcomplicate the mission statement. The simpler and more concise the statement, the easier it will be for advisors to know, understand, and remember the mission of the advising program.

### ***Goals for Academic Advising at GSU***

For many, the development of an assessment plan can get rather confusing as mistakenly the words goals, objectives, outcomes, etc. get used incorrectly and interchangeably in a variety of settings. Goals are intended to be overarching actions that help your team to achieve its mission. Goals are measured by assessing outcomes that are aligned with each of the goals (Bresciani, Garner, & Hickmott, 2009). If the mission statement is focused on students, which is often the case for advising programs, it makes sense that the goals might be focused on the students. Still, as the assessment plan will include student outcomes, advisor outcomes, and program outcomes, it is best to consider at least one goal that is relevant to each of those outcome areas. Generally, having three to five goals is considered good practice. It is quite possible that these goals are derived or taken directly from the strategic enrollment plan that has been developed at GSU, keeping in mind that advising is not enrollment management.

### ***Student Learning Outcomes***

Too often, student services units develop assessment plans based on frequency of contact and/or satisfaction with services. Though frequency of use helps an office manage resources and address student traffic needs, it does not adequately explain whether the service provided was effective. Additionally, though student services units want students to feel welcome, comfortable, and supported, satisfaction is also not indicative of effectiveness. Many national survey instruments of advising, unfortunately, do not measure student learning, but focus on satisfaction (Troxel, et al., 2019). Measures of student learning, when coupled with advisor and program outcomes, however, reflect



whether or not the support program was effective. This is true for advising programs as well as other student services at an institution.

Student learning outcomes should be developed around answering three questions:

- What do we want students to **know** as a result of participating in academic advising? (Cognitive)
- What do we want students to **do** as a result of participating in academic advising? (Behavioral)
- What do we want students to **value or appreciate** as a result of participating in academic advising? (Affective)

Ideally, through answering these questions, an advising program can develop roughly eight to ten student learning outcomes, aligned with one or more of the goals. There are a number of ways to have advisors determine these outcomes. One might have the advising team brainstorm all of the possible answers to each of the three questions and then code the responses into eight to ten learning outcomes that capture what the full brainstormed list includes. An example may be that a number of statements refer to students utilizing different campus resources. Rather than have a learning outcome for each resource, there might be one outcome like this, for example:

- *As the result of engaging with academic advising, students will use campus resources and tools to help them to be a successful student.*

By framing your student learning outcomes using those three questions, it helps provide clarity as to what is being measured: cognitive, behavioral, and affective.

### ***Advisor Outcomes***

The advisor outcomes are essentially what professional skills and competencies should an advisor know, do, or value in order to continuously develop as an advisor. The learning measured with these outcomes is that of the advisor. Advising programs can develop their own advisor learning outcomes using a similar process of seeking to answer the questions regarding what an advisor needs to know, do, and value. The academic advising core competencies developed by NACADA in 2017, however, provide a ready-made list of competencies for advisors to learn and become more proficient about. Using the core competencies also helps to align the outcomes more easily with training and professional development efforts.

Using a self-assessment where advisors reflect on their level of proficiency with each of the core competencies for academic advising can be a good place to start to determine where there may be opportunities for raising the level of understanding and improving practice. This initial self-assessment serves as a pre-test measure and then may be used as a post-measure at the close of each assessment period.

### ***Program Outcomes***

Sometimes also referred to as delivery outcomes, program outcomes communicate the expectations regarding how academic advising is delivered and include what should occur when students engage with academic advising (Aiken-Wisniewski, 2010; Robbins & Zargas, 2011). The Council of Academic Standard in Higher Education (CAS) have developed and regularly update, with the help of representatives from NACADA, professional standards for academic advising programs. Program outcomes can be derived or taken from these CAS standards.

The other consideration regarding the academic advising program outcomes development would be including a variety of stakeholders that could participate in this process to get a 360-degree view of how Governors State University is doing in advising. But again, a clearer understanding of the role of advisors is needed for some stakeholder groups before such a step should be taken.

### ***Putting the Assessment Plan Together***

Once the outcomes are developed, they should be mapped to the goals. If there is an outcome that does not align with one of the goals, or a goal without any aligned outcomes, then some revision of the goals and/or outcomes may need to occur. After mapping is complete, it will be important to consider what measurements and data will be necessary to measure the achievement of the outcomes. It is not necessary to measure every outcome every year, but it is important to measure every outcome at some point. Some institutions break up the measurement of outcomes over the course of three to five years. Some arrange which outcomes to measure around the categories of cognitive, behavioral, and affective.

### **Recommendation: Revise the Undergraduate Advising Syllabus**

The current advising syllabus could be a useful tool for helping students understand what they will learn as the result of engaging with the team in the UAAC. Minimally, the syllabus needs to be updated given the changes on campus related to advising that have occurred since the development of the syllabus. These changes include, but may not be limited to:

- admitting first-time in college first-year students,
- creation of centralized undergraduate advising,
- alignment to the new strategic enrollment management plan, and
- assessment development.

As students and advisors were not as aware of the syllabus as one might hope, it suggests that as a tool, the advising syllabus is not getting used. Common reasons this occurs on many campuses is that it does not include all of the elements that a syllabus might have. If the syllabus does not include assignments, tasks, topics to cover at various stages of the student's enrollment, then it is not truly a syllabus, but more a statement on the advising process. For it to be used as a syllabus, it needs these elements and to be utilized throughout the advising relationship to help frame what a student should be considering, what needs to be discussed between advisor and student, and how a student will know if they have achieved completion of the assignment, task, learning outcome, etc.

As an example, if one of the student learning outcomes is that students will utilize campus resources to help them to be successful, one of the tasks involved on the syllabus might be:

- *Connecting with a Campus Resource. Your assigned academic advisor at GSU helps to connect you to resources and tools to help you continue to be a successful student. Your advisor will help you to learn more about the resources available on the campus. Your assignment, as a requirement of the advising syllabus, is to engage with one of the campus resources discussed with your advisor and report back what you learned or gained.*

The above example contains much more detailed wording than might need to be in the syllabus for the purpose of explanation here, but hopefully the idea makes sense.

**Recommendation: Improve the shared understanding of the unionized evaluation process for evaluators.**

It was clear that the academic advisors, especially at the undergraduate level, did not indicate a shared understanding of the evaluation process. The lack of consistency described at the graduate level also suggested that there is not a shared understanding. Clarifying the role of the advisors, whether undergraduate, graduate, or faculty advisors, and how it aligns within the unionized process would help to improve shared understanding. Reviewing the criteria at the start of each evaluation period would go a long way toward shared understanding. Additionally, reviewing the union negotiated criteria during the evaluation process would help advisors to see how their performance did or did not align. Performance evaluation is a great place to identify individual and program goals for the evaluation period. This could be related to "other" items such as liaison duties, committee participation, etc.

Commonly, academic advisors are evaluated using a number of ways. These can include student evaluations (surveys or focus groups), direct observation, and review of documents relevant to the staff or faculty members interaction with the student (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009).

As they have been developed by NACADA, the professional association for academic advising, the academic advising core competencies serve as a minimum set of criteria regarding that which an advisor should know, do, and value as a professional practitioner. Even if additional criteria are not developed that are specific to GSU, using the core competencies helps to create transparency and clarity over a currently confusing process of performance evaluation for advisors. The core values could also serve a purpose in evaluation as they reflect current professional practices, competencies, and philosophies.

Clarity of job descriptions that are tied to specific criteria for performance evaluation can reduce ambiguity for academic advisors. Expectations can be laid out along with how they are determined as met. This can also decrease stress and job discrepancy (Barbouletos, 2011). It is important for this information to be laid out at the beginning of

the cycle that will be evaluated. This allows for clarification and questions to be addressed early in the process. The criteria can be signed and dated by both the supervisor and the employ.

### **Undergraduate Academic Advising Center Facilities**

#### **Recommendation: Improve the location of the UAAC.**

A welcoming environment in higher education is important and often tied to efforts associated with inclusion and equity. This is important when considering the physical environment, a student walks into and how they are received upon arrival. The impact of the environment (UACC) that was shared in our conversations included perceptions related to warmth, privacy, familiarity, constraint, and distance. These were present across multiple conversations.

The lack of a welcoming physical environment included being located as far from the student mainstream as possible, all furnishings are very dated, colors are dull, and privacy is non-existent. Changing the location might be a difficult proposition but the opportunity to change the physical environment with colors, furniture, walls, and improved lighting (inside and outside) of center, along with better signage could be addressed more easily.

Folsom (2011) explained the importance of the facilities in which academic advising is located stating, “The design and functionality of advising space are integral to and support advising missions, goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes. The design and functionality of advising space are integral to and support advising missions, goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes.”

#### **Recommendation: Ensure that advising offices provide privacy for students.**

In the course of academic advising, advisors are building a relationship with the student. This relationship is one of shared responsibility (Frost, 1991). Students will often share private and confidential information during the course of a meeting as part of that relationship. FERPA has specific rules about what one can and cannot share, however, in the UACC, privacy does not exist from a conversational perspective given the individual advisor office walls. The walls are not framed to the ceiling and are metal that reflects sound. This is an issue that needs attention soon. Students who do not feel that they can self-disclose their situation cannot get appropriate referrals from an advisor when information is withheld.

Academic advisors need privacy to serve of their students and the university. Calls to other offices can also be heard by all in the center due to the lack of privacy. This can lead to a delay in referral and needed services in a timely manner.

#### **Recommendation: Provide administrative/reception support to the UAAC.**

Conversations with students highlighted that some students would leave without meeting with an advisor because there was no one in the reception area to assist them. The option to ring a bell has not been effective as at times all of the advisors were already with a

student. Students who feel they are not a priority will not always come back. Additionally, the bell made the environment feel less welcoming.

A more welcoming environment would also include a reception space where someone is available to check-in students, schedule appointments, and answer questions. There are multiple options to address staffing: rotate advisors on a schedule to cover reception, hire student workers to cover the hours UACC is open, hire a full-time receptionist, or utilize a combination to greet students and other stakeholders, check-in appointments as they arrive, and schedule appointments who come to the center or call the center.

With these recommendations regarding the UAAC facilities, it is important to note that the consultants understand that academic advising will still need to be provided while improvements are made and might mean advisors are still working in existing conditions until improvements can be made, as though the space is not ideal, the students still need access to a supportive, caring academic advisor.

### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

GSU's interest in supporting students as they transition into the institution through to completion of a degree was evident. The interest in ensuring students receive the best support, including through advising, was reflected in many of the conversations we had with stakeholders during the visit. The advising staff were impressive and give reason to believe that GSU advising efforts have a solid foundation upon which to build. Beginning with the strategic enrollment plan, and continuing with this review, the continued investment into academic advising at all levels with attention to the recommendations included here can raise the level of excellence of advising at GSU.

As consultants, we have had the opportunity to work with a number of institutions and can say without a doubt that we enjoyed meeting with GSU students, staff, faculty, and administrators over the course of the two days. The hospitality we experienced was greatly appreciated. The openness of individuals to share really demonstrated that the institution cares about the success of its students. Thank you for your institution's desire and willingness to engage in conversation about ways to improve the student experience through improved academic advising.

Our hope is that our observations and recommendations are helpful as your institution embarks on making positive change in academic advising. We wish you success in undertaking changes to advising that will benefit your students. And we are also more than happy to expand on any of the observations or recommendations in the future whether in writing and/or follow up meetings.

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APPENDIX A

**NACADA Campus Visit Schedule**

**All meetings will be held in the College of Business Conference Room (G262)**

**Feb 9<sup>th</sup>**

9am- Tour of Campus and Undergraduate Academic Advising Center (UAAC) with Rosemary and Haley

10am- Meeting with Undergraduate Advisors

11am- Meeting with College Deans

Noon-Lunch (This has been ordered and will be delivered to you on behalf of the Provost's Office)

1 pm- Meeting Faculty Advisors

2pm- Meeting with Graduate Advisors

3-5pm-Meeting with students

**Feb 10<sup>th</sup>**

9am-Meeting with Dual Degree Program Director and Transfer Specialists

10am-Meeting with Faculty Advisors

11am-Meeting with Related Units

Noon- Lunch (This has been ordered and will be delivered to you on behalf of the Provost's Office)

1pm- Meeting with Chairs and Supervisors

2pm- Meeting with President Cheryl Green and Rosemary Johnsen in Dr. Green's office

3pm- Debriefing with Rosemary; joined by Haley and Lisa at 3:30

## APPENDIX B

### RESOURCES TO CONSIDER

Academic Advising Concept Statement, Core Competencies, and Core Values:

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars.aspx>

Academic Advising Institutes:

- Academic Advising Administrators Institute: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Events-Programs/Events/Administrators-Institute.aspx>
- Assessment of Academic Advising Institute: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Events-Programs/Events/Assessment-Institute.aspx>
- Research Institute: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Events/Research-Institute.aspx>
- Summer Institute: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Events/Summer-Institutes.aspx>

Advising Syllabus Examples:

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-Syllabi-Resource-Links.aspx>

Advisor Onboarding and Training Resources:

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/CoreCompetencies/Resources.aspx>

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), Standards for Academic Advising Programs (2018):

<http://standards.cas.edu/getpdf.cfm?PDF=E864D2C4-D655-8F74-2E647CDECD29B7D0>

NACADA Awards and Recognition Program:

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Events-Programs/Awards.aspx>

Professional Development:

ILACADA (Illinois Academic Advising Association): <https://ilacada.org/>

NACADA Conferences:

- Annual Conference: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Events/Annual-Conference.aspx>
- Regional Conference: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Community/Regions.aspx>

NACADA Webinars and Digital Recordings: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Events/Web-Events.aspx>



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