LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
Team 8 Cohort 2
Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

TO: Laura Rittner, Executive Director, Success Center –OACC
FROM: Amber Hare, Jeanette Passmore, Tyechia Patterson
RE: Establishing a process for training academic advisors
DATE: 8/13/22

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

The faculty and/or staff assigned to provide academic advising to students at community colleges must know the academic curriculum(s) which they advise and any advising technology used by the college. In addition, they must be able to manage large amounts of changing information. Without these processes in place students will not be able to achieve their educational goals within their desired timeframe and may also end up taking courses that will take them off track from their path to success. Consistent training across faculty advising and/or professional advising is a linchpin in keeping students on a clear and concise path to graduation. For our pathways project, our team will create a checklist that will assist colleges in incorporating career pathways and career exploration in the student onboarding process by providing recommendations that are focused on getting students to understand how their career goals are directly linked to their academic endeavors.

RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

Advising has the potential to be one of the most impactful functional areas on a college campus when it comes to student success and completion. In fact, several national student surveys have revealed that it is more important to students than financial aid, cost, or other support services (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2012; Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2015). Indeed, the importance of advising in monitoring student progress is part of the Guided Pathways work being done in Ohio and across the nation (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2022). With advising becoming a lynchpin in the quest for increasing student success, the training of advisors becomes vital to the success for institutions deploying a Guided Pathways model. Without proper and ongoing training advisors cannot support student success. Several studies have found that insufficient training and professional development is correlated with decreased student success (McClellan, 2007; Miklusak, 2009; Vivian, 2005).

There are challenges in developing and providing training and professional development for advisors when multiple roles encompass the formal and informal processes related to advising. Advisors may be professional front line staff, peer advisors, success coaches, or faculty

members (Habley, 1993). With multiple constituencies to train there are challenges with allocated budgets and time, especially in the current climate of having to do more with less.

To meet the increased need for high value advising training and development must be undertaken by the Ohio community colleges. "If there are enough advisors who are trained to engage students in self-discovery and degree exploration in their first years, time to degree will improve" (Thomas, 2017). For these reasons it is imperative that advisors of all types (faculty, staff, peer) are adequately trained.

King (2000) recommends three components to advisor training.
- Conceptual: What concepts like developmental advising do advisors need to know?
- Informational: What do advisors need to know about in-house programs and policies?
- Relational: What skills do advisors need to relate effectively with their advisees? (p. 293)

While ideal training plans would include all three components, most training occurs during the new hire phase with ongoing training limited to short hour long or half day workshops to fit the advisors' busy schedules (Koring, 2005). In many cases this means limiting the components and topics to those that are most salient or urgent. According to Brown (2008), there are five training topics that rise to the top of the list:
- The significant relationship between advising and retention.
- An understanding that advising involves much more than helping a student schedule classes.
- The need to identify students' needs early in the advising process.
- Faculty engagement in advising.
- The development and continual improvement of advisor communication and relational skills.

In addition, advisors must receive professional development in information management. Where to locate information, how to process and store information, and when to look for updated information. Even this list of important topics is likely to be overlooked when the time available for training is limited. Because training advisors is so complex the recommendations in this memo are not intended to address all the challenges with providing adequate training and professional development for advisors.

DATA EXAMINED

Using a qualitative approach and focusing on community colleges in Ohio, the advisor training plans for three institutions were reviewed. The training period for new advisors ranged from 21 days to 3 months. The advising leadership indicated that training for a new advisor involves a significant amount of information and can often be perceived as 'drinking from a fire hose'. For continuing advisors training occurs during weekly meetings. For one institution training is included in regular weekly staff meetings and for the others the training is offered as standalone sessions. Professional development also varied by institution. However, there was overarching theme of providing in-depth knowledge on the "why" advising. The institutions also

all indicated that training and professional development are a continual process and not one-time offerings. As new information becomes available it is disseminated and as advisors grow in their roles the sessions move from providing information to deepening the understanding of advising as a profession.

PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED

Addressing the continual need for academic advisor training will require cross-functional collaboration. The first step is to develop a training process and calendar. The process should encompass new and seasoned advisors and must draw on the knowledge of academic department chairs, support services directors, and frontline staff. Academic department chairs will be the curriculum experts and should be on the schedule during the period when curriculum changes are made or new academic catalogs are published. Support services directors should present enough knowledge for advisors to provide informed referrals or basic answers. It will be a delicate balancing act to provide enough information without attempting to make every advisor an expert on support services. Front line staff, such as current advisors, can provide real world scenarios and serve as ongoing support for new and faculty advisors.

The improvements to advisor training is a two-year project based on semesters to incorporate institutions that utilize faculty advisors who may not be available during the summer months. Below is what the vision for those two years.

Semester 1: Development of Advising Training Process

- Campus evaluation
  - What tools are available to help advisors
    - Electronic
    - Formal Manuals
  - Document current processes
    - What is the onboarding process for new advisors
  - Personnel
    - Job Descriptions for current advising staff
    - Faculty responsibilities for advising
- Create New Training Materials and Training Timelines
  - Create How To's for Advising
    - Videos
    - Electronic Handouts
  - Training Timelines
    - Faculty Advisors
      - Set days and time throughout each term
      - Target meeting content

- Professional Advisors
  - Monthly Meetings with Set Topics
    - Curriculum updates

Semester 2: Training & Implementation of Process

- Setting up Mandatory Training Dates
  - Work with Academic Dean's to create a calendar of training dates and topics for the next academic year. *Doing this a term in advance to help gain attendance.

Semester 3: Early Assessment of Process

- Survey both Faculty and Professional Advisors
  - What works
  - What doesn't
  - What can be changed/updated
- Use yearly student satisfaction survey to gauge their knowledge of advising.

Semester 4: Second Assessment of Process and Development of Improvement Plan

- Identify areas that need to be updated
  - What frequency do updates need to be completed?
- Develop improvement plan based on Faculty/Professional/Student survey

Measuring Success

Klempin and Lahr (2021) state individualized support using a case management approach is positively linked to increased student success. They recommend guided pathways as a means to improve student success. The first recommendation for measuring success would be to provide an individual degree plan for each student, and training professional and faculty advisors to follow that plan.

Once students have extensive knowledge of their degree plan their advisor appointments should become shorter and fewer. Advisors should also see a reduction in students taking unnecessary courses and reaching a maximum time frame.

In addition to the aforementioned items, by having both students and staff trained to follow an individual degree plan, we should also see a reduction in student debt.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

There are many challenges when it comes to academic advising training. The ratio of student to advisor numbers. Training for faculty and professional advisors and the frequency of those trainings. Inadequate use or lack of technology for advising can also be a challenge. The lack of a written process for advisors to follow. The written process should also follow a timeline that is

reviewed yearly. One of the most crucial challenges is the updates that are made yearly in curriculum meetings. Below we will detail these challenges and optional solutions.

Need for an Increase in Staffing

When it comes to challenges and with advising one of the first looks is at your staffing. Many colleges believe they are short-staffed in many areas and advising is one of those areas. The need to look at your student to advisor ratio is necessary to have consistent service among all students. While increasing staff is always the answer that departments would like to remedy this particular challenge. Some institutions may find that looking at their Student Services department as a whole may be more efficient and budget friendly. The word "reorganization" is not always seen in a positive light, but under the right leadership can bring a much-needed workload adjustment.

Consistent Training

While it is ideal to have both professional and faculty advisors adequately trained, we are aware there may be some challenges to guaranteeing that training is happening as needed. Sufficient advising training is not able to be supplied for three simple reasons: time, money and lack of training for the trainers (Koring, 2005). With that statement in mind Koring (2005) reminds us that making every minute of advisor training count is a necessity. At many institutions there is only a single advisor training workshop for faculty members that takes place during just a small portion of a required work day that happens prior to the start of the semester. The schedule for professional advisors does not look much better. While advising is their main responsibility, the amount of time necessary to correctly train a new advisor is not always available. Looking at training materials that are being used and how they are distributed is also essential to having effective training sessions. There may be some topics that need to be addressed in a face-to-face workshop where others can be addressed in an electronic format. The use of training videos personalized for your institution can also be very effective.

Inadequate Use or Lack of Technology

Institutions all have some kind of student information system (SIS). However, not everyone is aware of all the capabilities of the SIS on their campus. Unfortunately, the old adage of "that's just the way we have always done it" comes out. Now is the time to have real conversations with the Informational Technology department about what the true capabilities are of the current system. During those meetings it is also imperative that you mention what would be helpful for advising. Over time updates are made to systems that the advising department may not have been aware of. You may find that the current system does not have an adequate advising module. If the option to investigate other technology to use for advising becomes available, Steele (2014) reminds us that finding the best technology to achieve academic advising outcomes is a little more complicated.

Lack of Written Processes

Lack of written/documented processes can contribute to incorrect information being delivered during training sessions. Documenting processes will help create a more consistent training process for advisors. Having a written process also contributes to the accuracy of information that is given to students. Implementation of an advising handbook will give institutions a centrally located area for all advising information. This could create its own challenges as there is an abundance of information that will need to be included and updated annually. Setting this up on a time line for updates will help streamline the process.

No Defined Timeline

Remember training is a continual process and not a one-time offering. Defining a timeline that continues throughout the year and consistently offers topics that are imperative to the success of the advising sessions. Pre-determined topics for each training session with time for hands on learning will allow advisors to

Changes in curriculum

Curriculum changes happen every academic year. Staff, faculty and students need to be made aware of any changes in the curriculum. Knowledge sharing is imperative to the success of a student within their chosen career pathway. In many cases these changes are being made by a committee of faculty and Dean's. However, not always is this information shared within a timely manner. Incorporating this into the defined timeline and during mandatory meetings will help to stop information overload.

CONCLUSION

The potential persistence and retention benefits of a full-scale advisor training process should prompt community colleges to begin reviewing their current processes and planning for improvements. As one of the few college functions where students are guaranteed one-on-one attention, advisors must be trained and cross-trained to provide accurate information and high-quality student-centered support. With the data reviewed for this recommendation it was apparent that many quality training programs already exist. This may lessen the amount of work necessary to build on current processes and build new training plans by tapping into the advising community. Keeping students at the center of advisor training will help both advisor and student succeed.

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