

Achieving Institutional Advising Standardization Through Advisor Training and Development

Prepared by the USC Student Success Center: Cross Campus Advising

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is the nation's premier academic advising association and, as such, its Core Values serve as the guidelines for all who practice in the field. Additionally, it maintains the world's largest database of advising-related resources and materials.

NACADA places great emphasis on the importance of advisor training and development. Specifically, *the association advocates for both initial/new advisor training and ongoing advisor training and professional development as a key to **standardization** of advising services across a campus community.* All advisor training must have certain basic components including:

- conceptual (advising concepts and theories)
- informational (institutional programs, policies, and procedures)
- relational (interpersonal skills and communication)
- technological (advising-based technology)
- personal (understanding of self as advisor)

The two primary types of advisor training are detailed below. Information on supplemental training and development in the form of on-campus advisor certification programs and campus advisor networks follow. However, *before implementing any type of new training program, NACADA suggests completing a formal needs assessment.*

New University Advisor Training

Initial advisor training is absolutely integral to a successful advising culture at any university. To this end, NACADA has published a monograph that is recommended for all new advisors and their supervisors entitled "The New Advisor Guidebook: Mastering the Art of Academic Advising Through the First Year & Beyond." Ultimately, essential pieces of new advisor training should fall into one of the five components listed above. *New advisor training is ultimately tied to both student and advisor satisfaction with the advising experience, as well as advisor retention.*

Format: Many schools hold formal, multi-day "New Advisor Orientations" throughout the year to ensure standardization in students' advising experiences across the institution. Other schools choose to use a hybrid model that includes some online modules and some in-person training. All new advisors, regardless of their assigned department, are required to attend.

Content: While topics may vary, those common for new advisor orientations or trainings may include many of the following (used by Shippensburg University during their 2.5 day New Advisor Training):

- NACADA Core Values

- CAS Standards and Guidelines
- Academic Advising Legal/Ethical Issues
- University-Specific Advisement Information
- Prescriptive vs Developmental Advising
- Advising as Teaching
- Advisor / Student Responsibilities
- Advising Goals and Objectives
- Stages of Student Development
- The Advising Sessions
- Making Referrals
- Helpful Web Resources
- Case Studies
- General Education Requirements
- Advising Special Populations
- Advising Concerning Major Selection
- Academic Progress
- Transferring Credit
- Withdrawal From a Class
- Financial Aid
- Assessment

Model Programs: Indiana University – Bloomington, Shippensburg University, Utah Valley University

Ongoing Advisor Training and Professional Development

Although new advisors may experience many emotions and challenges during their first year(s) in the profession, *ongoing advisor training and professional development is equally if not more important in creating a successful advising culture at a university.* Without continuous professional development, advisors can quickly begin to feel disconnected, disenfranchised, and disengaged.

Ongoing trainings ideally create networking opportunities, increase knowledge, and reaffirm an advisor's commitment to the profession. While attending regional and national conferences can provide one avenue of professional development, *institutions must ultimately provide structured on-campus opportunities as well.*

Format: The vast majority of schools hold ongoing training as part of a workshop series offered throughout the year, with some sessions being facilitated by on-campus professionals, and outside guest speakers presenting others. Additionally, many use webinars and/or other multimedia options for some of the sessions. Generally, these events are open to both professional and faculty advisors alike, and food and/or other incentives are often provided to those who attend. While some institutions choose to make attending the professional development workshops a mandatory part of the advisor position, most do not require attendance at all (or any) of the sessions. Institutions who offer this type of ongoing training

have made it an exciting part of the campus advising culture rather than an add-on, and the expectation is that advisors will want to attend while their supervisors support them doing so.

Content: While topics may vary, *ongoing training and professional development always focuses on advisor competencies, guided by the NACADA Core Values and often customized to the particular university's advising structure and desired culture.* A sample list (used by the University of Wisconsin system) includes:

- Foundations Knowledge
- Technical Knowledge and Skills
- College Student Characteristics
- Knowledge and Application of Advising Policies at the Local Institution
- Knowledge of Higher Education
- Communication and Interpersonal Skills
- Career Advising and Skills

A workshop series should meet a wide variety of interests and skill levels, and provide opportunities for participants to actively engage in each session. It should also cover a number of different topics that relate to the advisor competencies set forth by the institution. A sample semester professional development series (used in Spring 2012 by Utah Valley University) includes:

- Advising Pedagogy Series: Applying Instructional Models to Advising
- FERPA: Friend or Foe?
- Academic Advising Supervisor Summit
- Webinar: Social Media – From Tactics to Strategy
- Advising Pedagogy Series: Appreciative Advising
- Student Decision Making
- Advising Pedagogy Series: Creative Thinking for Advisors
- Career Advising
- Your Type is Showing! Using the MBTI in Personal & Professional Development
- Webinar: From Orientation to Graduation: An Online Approach to Advising
- Web Conference: Pro Active Advising to Retain First-Year and Transfer Students

Model Programs: UC Berkeley, University of Arkansas Little Rock, Chico State University, University of North Carolina, University of Central Florida, University of Wisconsin system, Utah Valley University

On-Campus Advisor Certifications

An integral component of a competency-based ongoing advisor training and professional development program can be the establishment of an on-campus advisor certification program. Based on NACADA's core values and national best practices, *these programs are ultimately created to ensure a level of standardization in advising not afforded by attendance at general professional development events.*

Participants in on-campus advisor certification programs gain additional skills and experiences, as well as committing to and focusing on the campus' advising mission and vision. Such programs serve to validate advising as a profession and recognize those advisors who are committed to bringing the highest standard of service to their students and programs.

Often called "Master Advisor" or "Advisor of Excellence" programs, on-campus advisor certification is generally a voluntary commitment. The extra training can be provided over the course of a one- or two-day intensive workshop, or in weekly meetings throughout a semester. *Advisors participating act as a cross-functional cohort, ultimately creating a stronger bond between academic units, as well as between faculty and professional advisors.* Assessments from on-campus advisor certification programs strongly indicate that advisors feel more competent after completing the training and the majority feel that all advisors at their institution should participate.

Model Programs: Missouri State University, North Carolina State University, Western Kentucky University

Campus Advisor Networks

NACADA strongly encourages the building of community amongst advisors; to this end, many campuses choose to sponsor a professional organization specifically for advisors. These organizations generally meet anywhere from once a month to once a semester and provide the opportunity for advisors to network with and learn from one another. Depending on the institution's advising priorities, advising organizations may offer a wide variety of services to their members including a forum for meeting with university leadership, support during high-traffic times, themed social events, and career planning resources. Additionally, these groups will often partner with university administration to co-sponsor the training and professional development opportunities previously discussed.

Model Programs: Shippensburg University, Western Kentucky University

Conclusion

This report details national best practices for advisor training and development that are aligned with the NACADA Core Values. Presently, USC does not offer any university-wide advisor-specific training or development, and beginning to standardize advisement in this way will require an organized approach supported by the university administration. *Any move towards standardization should be consistent with NACADA-recommended best practices and developed holistically, taking into consideration current infrastructure, student feedback, and a common mission and vision for the advising culture at the University of South Carolina.*