



Academic Advising Program Review
California State University Sacramento
November 16-17, 2023

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Executive Summary

California State University Sacramento also referred to as Sac State, engaged NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising to perform a program review of academic advising on November 16-17, 2023. Dr. Chrissy Davis Jones and Mr. Casey Self met with members of the campus community to develop an understanding of the strengths and challenges facing the institution's academic advising program. The following report is grounded in NACADA's Nine Conditions of Excellence of Academic Advising and practical frameworks for effective advising. It reflects a robust review of the materials provided by institutional representatives and observations drawn from a full agenda of on-campus meetings with campus constituents. The executive summary highlights overarching strengths, challenges, and recommendations, before delving into the detailed report.

Overall Strengths

Technology:

- Sac State utilizes EAB Navigate, and it appears to be a popular tool with many advisors to communicate with students, schedule appointments, and address campaign initiatives. One concern is that it does not appear EAB is used consistently across campus by all individuals performing advising roles. The University should implement a standard expectation regarding EAB for academic advisors.
- Sac State is a Peoplesoft institution for managing student information systems and processes.

Institutional commitment:

- The individuals we met during our two-day visit, and messages we received regarding campus leadership demonstrated significant institutional support to the overall student experience, including the academic advising experience, even though staffing resources are not at the desired levels.

Student Purpose and Pathways:

- Several individuals, including the students we met, indicated how helpful the roadmaps for each major are to provide registration directions for students seeking assistance. It is noted, however, that roadmaps are not available for all Sac State majors.

- Sac State is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) which is great because the University opens doors to post-secondary education for members of the Hispanic/Latinx community!

Overall Challenges

- At Sac State, academic advising responsibilities reside in Student Affairs, i.e., Student Success Center, Enrollment Services, i.e., equity-based advising and EOP, as well as Academic Affairs, i.e., faculty advisors/major-based advising. Many departments across the campus offer “advising” services, which is listed as a function within EAB Navigate for multiple departments. The advising structure is highly decentralized with little to no cross-campus advising coordination. With multiple departments noting that they offer advising, it creates a lack of clarity about which individual or department “owns” campus advising and who is ultimately responsible **AND** accountable for academic advising overall within the University.
- The lack of clear ownership for academic advising between general, College, and department-based advising has produced unclear expectations, confusion, and miscommunication about academic advising across the University. This results in challenges related to the delivery and quality of academic advising, inconsistencies in advising practices, structures, [implementation of] policies, and general expectations across the University.
 - Because ownership of advising is decentralized and unclear, advising pedagogy, expectations, and accountability are inconsistent.
- The University lacks a shared definition, mission, vision, goals, and outcomes for academic advising at Sac State. The lack of a shared foundation has created an inconsistent academic advising experience for Sac State’s undergraduate students.
- The current advising practices are unsustainable and leading to burnout. The structure of advising duties, lack of advisor assignments (for proactive caseload advising), and the student handoff including to whom, do not align with the vision of advising at Sac State.

Advisor Selection and Development:

- A clear delineation of responsibilities is essential for the development of a sustainable advising system and a university-wide assessment plan. These efforts can also contribute to a more consistent, positive undergraduate advising experience at Sac State.

- There is a need to understand, assess, define, and reevaluate the role of faculty advising in the current model. For example, should the role of faculty in advising focus on mentoring or coaching students in their profession/field and graduate school?

Communication and Collaboration:

- In the absence of leadership with authority to make overarching changes, advisors, including professionals in other departments who perform “advising duties,” have formed informal networks to address student issues and concerns, which results in unevenness and inequitable outcomes.
- Sharing of advising duties between primary advisors in the Student Success Centers, advising adjunct offices, and faculty advisors is inconsistent and undependable within certain majors and the Hornet Launch project.
- There appears to be confusion, miscommunication, and distrust related to the Hornet Launch Project.
 - The Project started in 2019 to meet course mandates by the CSU system.
 - The initial launch was not a university-wide effort and excluded key constituency groups like academic advisors. Fall 2023 marked the fourth iteration, or “re-launch” of the Project.
 - Additionally, the Project has been overseen by multiple offices, i.e., Offices of the President and Undergraduate Studies, then the Registrar’s Office, and now, as a partnership between the Offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs including Enrollment and Engagement. Hornet Launch now has a cross-functional leadership Team, which the Consultants commend.
 - The Project seems to have been understaffed based on the size/scope of work, and lack of integration with the University’s technologies including access to data, expectations, and timeline. The Associate Deans in the academic colleges also indicated their time commitment to Hornet Launch is overwhelming.
 - Based on feedback received in almost every interview meeting, it appears that the initial launch did not include a university-wide communication plan as there was a lot of confusion around the “what,” “why,” and “how” (to change schedules) of the Project.

Student Purpose and Pathways:

- Students who have been previously dismissed or disqualified from the University are being reinstated to university without academic college or academic advising

interactions. There appear to be no clear criteria on what it takes to return and no critical academic guidance when students are allowed back into the university.

- The consultants received positive feedback about the academic roadmaps; however, we report that not all colleges and/or programs have roadmaps for their students. This was an area of concern for the consultants and interviewees, including students because it creates inequities in the advising experience at Sac State.
- The consultants received mixed reviews about communication in general and Hornet Launch specifically, the purpose, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Project, including the lack of input and engagement from advising professionals. The consultants understand the importance of ensuring that new students have classes during their first semester to jump-start their academic journey at Sac State. It is also critical to gain information from students about their life outside of Sac State, their 'why', i.e., purpose, and if their majors changed **before** the University selects classes for them. Additionally, the process for students to change their schedules should be communicated in advance as well as easy to navigate.

Improvement and the Scholarship of Advising:

- Currently, there is no formal or systematic assessment of the academic advising program at Sac State. The assessment of advising is important to implement for support of the overall academic advising system at the University.

Highest Priority Recommendations

Organization:

- Identify the leadership of academic advising at Sac State. This individual/office should have authority and responsibility for making strategic changes and improvements for the entire campus academic advising program using the expertise of the university-wide Advising Council to guide decisions.
- Re-define the charge, purpose/scope, deliverables, and membership of the **Advising Council**. Clearly outline the scope of work, responsibilities, and decision-making authority of this Council. One key role the council should play is to enhance communication overall with the academic advising community regarding updated information to help **all** advisors perform their roles.
- Leverage the strengths of a university-wide Advising Council to create a university-wide definition, mission, vision, goals, and outcomes (student learning outcomes and programmatic learning outcomes) for academic advising at Sac State. This information will serve as the foundation for the University's academic

advising system that departments and disciplines can build upon to reflect the uniqueness of the students they serve.

Advisor Selection and Development:

- Create a robust, structured academic advising training/professional development plan for all academic advisors including primary advisors, faculty advisors, equity-centered advisors, e.g., EOP, international students, etc. The University may consider the following outline which is based on national advising standards and the feedback/input received during the interview meetings.
 - Incorporate NACADA’s Pillars and Core Competencies -
 - Informational
 - Conceptual
 - Relational
 - Suggested session topics may include:
 - “General Education (GE) Advising”
 - Advising and student learning
 - Technologies to support advising
 - Financial aid basics
 - Working with special populations like first-generation, minoritized, and/or historically underrepresented groups (HUGs), international students, students living with disabilities and accommodations, and more.
- Role clarity will strengthen the academic advising program at Sac State regardless of the organizational model, e.g., decentralized, centralized, etc. Ensuring that **all** academic advisors, students, and colleagues across the University understand the roles and responsibilities associated with each academic advisor position in all Sac State offices.

Improvement and the Scholarship of Advising:

- Develop a formalized assessment plan for academic advising.
 - In creating an effective assessment plan, the necessary components like the vision, mission, and goal statements must be in place at Sac State. An assessment plan can be developed to gather data and information to evaluate the outcomes and effectiveness of changes that are implemented to the advising system, such as the Hornet Launch project. A strong plan will include the instruments and evaluation methodologies, the names of those who will be responsible for gathering the data, a timeline for assessing various components, the methods for reporting results, and the processes by which the assessment will be shared and reviewed for future

improvements to the system. Student and Programmatic learning outcomes, not simply student satisfaction of advising, should be assessed annually. This will require comprehensive advising outcomes, rubrics and/or scorecards, and measurements for determining achievement of the learning outcomes to name a few specific recommended assessment components.

Student Purpose and Pathways:

- Reimagine Hornet Launch and identify the benefits for the student and university. Create a student-friendly and manageable process for staff and includes academic advising and orientation experience into the Hornet Launch effort.
 - Based on our overall experience, we **recommend** Hornet Launch only focus on first semester schedules for first-year students. Any block scheduling considered after the first semester should include options for the academic advisor and student to review before schedules are finalized.
 - Education to advisors, students, and parents regarding how to change the initial course schedule given to the student is not clear and readily available.
 - There is now a group that helps coordinate and plan for the Hornet Launch project, including those representing academic advising. This group is fairly new. We recommend this group continue to explore opportunities for academic advising involvement in the overall project.
 - A different strategy is to create block schedules based on roadmap major requirements (6-9 credits) and allow students/academic advisors to select the most appropriate block for each student based on their specific needs during normal registration periods at orientation. Partial block schedules also allow students flexibility for choosing courses they are interested in to fulfill GE/Math/English Composition requirements and the opportunity to learn how to register themselves in classes.
 - Utilize course reserves strategically to set aside certain courses for first-year students, and also allow for unreserved seats for allowing additional students access to courses.

Introduction

On November 16-17, 2023, a Consultant from the NACADA: Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA), visited California State University Sacramento (Sac State) to conduct an in-depth academic advising program review. The team consisted of Mr. Casey Self, Arizona State University (ASU), and Dr. Chrissy Davis Jones, Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC). The consulting team met with stakeholders from across campus over two days to gain an in-depth understanding of Sac State advising program structure, processes, and practices. These groups consisted of the professional advising team, faculty advisors, administrators, and staff who are invested in creating a richer academic advising experience. A schedule detailing the colleagues and offices that participated in the visit as well as a visit overview are included in this report (see Appendix A and B).

Prior to conducting the virtual review, the consulting team held a virtual conference with Ms. Miesha Williams, director of academic advising, and My Sayamnath, senior associate director of academic advising. They shared some documents that provided an overview of some policies, processes, and practices. The detailed discussion and documents helped the consulting team learn more about the culture, structure, and policies that govern the academic advising program at Sac State. It was important for the consultants to understand the dynamics given the current environment and the impact it has on advising, technology, staffing structure, and other resources.

Framework for Consultants' Visit

It is important to clarify the consultants' perspective on academic advising as a preface to our observations and recommendations. NACADA has endorsed several pillars that address the philosophy and practice of academic advising: NACADA Concept of Academic Advising, NACADA Statement of Core Values, the NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies, and the Nine Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising (EAA). Links to each of these documents may be found on [NACADA's website](#).

Advising programs that employ promising practices will reflect the theoretical foundations of advising contained in these documents. For the purpose of framing the context of this academic advising program review, the following points address major assumptions about successful academic advising:

Academic advising is best viewed as a form of teaching and is integral to the success of the teaching and learning mission of higher education institutions. As Marc Lowenstein (2005) observes, "an excellent advisor does the same thing for the student's entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course." 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 deals with), pedagogy (how advising delivers the curriculum), and student learning outcomes (the result of academic advising). These student learning outcomes are based upon what we want students to know, to do, and to value and appreciate as a result of the academic advising process.

The [Nine Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising](#) framework was created through a partnership with the [John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education](#) and NACADA. These conditions acknowledge the role of academic advising in promoting student learning, success, and completion as well as the complexity of higher education and organizational change. They are specifically designed to serve as measures for improving practices, processes, and institutional culture surrounding academic advising in an evidence-based manner that supports broad campus change.

The consultants have chosen to situate the findings and recommendations of this report within the framework of the Nine Conditions of Excellence for Academic Advising, including strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations to consider in an effort to enhance academic advising at California State University Sacramento.

Strengths, Challenges, and Recommendations Organized by Conditions of Excellence

The findings of this review are organized into strengths, challenges, and recommendations integrated within the Nine Conditions of Excellence.

Commitment

Explanation of Condition

Institutions recognize that academic advising is integral to the students' educational experience and the institution's teaching and learning mission. This commitment begins with an institutional academic advising mission statement that is informed by the values and beliefs of the institution and dedicated to an inclusive and equitable student learning centered approach. Both widely understood and articulated in institutional documents, this statement informs practice as well as the administration, organization, delivery, and assessment of academic advising.

Strengths

- The faculty, staff, and students we met at Sac State were deeply invested in the overall academic success of students, including the academic advising process.
- Student Success Centers are present in each academic college. The overall purpose of these centers is crucial for students to have a place where they can go for assistance with overall academic needs.
- The Academic Advising Center plays a critical role in providing students key advising-related services, and currently plays a significant role in the overall academic advising structure for Sac State as well as provisioning key services for all students.
- Faculty, staff, and administrators view academic advising as a critical component of the student's educational experience, and the desire is there to make improvements to the overall student experience.
- Sac State has clearly identified key student populations to provide additional support through specific offices/services such as transfer students, equity offices, International students, etc.

Challenges

- Sac State currently has no clear institution-wide academic advising vision, mission and consistent understanding of what academic advising consists of at the institution.

- Numerous roles exist which are referred to as “advisors” but there is no clear definition or general understanding of what roles advisors should fulfill. The term advisors is generally used to describe those who help students navigate the Sac State system, however there is currently no clarification between “advisors” and those who fulfill “academic advising” roles at the institution, or the difference between the two.
- There is not a clear understanding of which administrator or which office at Sac State is ultimately responsible for the academic advising program. The lack of a clear indication of who is responsible for the Sac State Academic Advising program is resulting in confusion on who should be leading the charge and providing overall direction regarding academic advising initiatives for the institution. A lack of a clear academic advising leader will continue to result in various offices and support services forging ahead on their own which will continue to result in duplication of services.
 - When upper administration at Sac State receives complaints or concerns related to academic advising, there is no clear individual who has the authority to address and change academic advising processes and procedures to prevent similar complaints and concerns from occurring again.
- Sac State was not able to provide data on clear advisor to student ratios at the institution. There is a clear sense of overlapping advising responsibilities at various locations, and lack of understanding for overall advising caseloads. Many students, staff and faculty are unclear where students are actually supposed to go for academic advising assistance.

Recommendations

- Create an institution-wide vision and mission statement for academic advising.
 - The academic advising community and key campus partners should engage in a critical conversation to identify what the overall mission and purpose of academic advising should be at Sac State.
- Clearly Identify the key staff/faculty roles Sac State wishes to enhance overall support of students, and then specifically identify those individuals who should be responsible for assisting students with monitoring their degree completion, and addressing the challenges associated with students staying on track for graduation. These individuals should have access to specific technology tools and data to be informed about student academic progress and should be required to communicate this progress to others.
- Clarify which students should receive specific support services from which offices at Sac State. Each academic advising location should have a clear

understanding and list of which students they are responsible for, and should be engaged with through EAB campaigns, etc.

- Identify an individual, or office, at Sac State that is ultimately responsible for the overall direction of, and responsibility for academic advising. This individual/office should have authority to provide overall directions related to academic advising efforts and have ultimate responsibility/authority to make changes when necessary.

Learning

Explanation of Condition

Excellent advising programs have curricula, pedagogies, and student learning outcomes for academic advising explicitly articulated throughout a student's educational experience. These outcomes are aligned with the institution's academic mission, and goals and are systematically assessed and refined based upon documented assessment results. Institutions ensure that academic advisors are knowledgeable about the institution's expected learning outcomes, curriculum, pedagogy, and the student learning process. This commitment to learning is widely understood and articulated in institutional documents, informs practice as well as the administration, organization, delivery, and assessment of academic advising. Most importantly, institutions ensure equity in the academic advising experience for all students.

Strengths

- Sac State currently promotes a shared responsibility model for student success, in that there are many opportunities across the campus for students to seek assistance regarding overall academic success.
- The Academic Advising Center trains and prepares peer leaders to attend the first-year seminar courses and provides general student success strategies. The student leaders we spoke with indicated they believed this was a successful strategy to help first-year students become successful. It was shared that approximately 30% of first-year students participate in this class, which currently fulfills a GE requirement. It was stated this may change in the future.

Challenges

- Sac State has not identified specific learning outcomes for the student academic advising experience. Once these learning outcomes are identified, then those filling academic advising roles can implement pedagogical strategies.
- There is a lack of coordinated assessment strategies for academic advising efforts across campus. While we did hear briefly about some student surveys,

etc., it was not our impression that this is a university-wide effort and there was no plan or indications of changes made as a result.

- The first-year seminar course does not currently include academic advising-related activities and assignments.

Recommendations

- As part of the vision and mission discussions, Sac State should identify specific student learning outcomes expected as a result of the academic advising experience. Student outcomes should include what you want students to be **able to do, know, and value** as a result of interacting with academic advisors. These student learning outcomes should be widely published to educate the academic advising community on what outcomes are desired.
- Assessment strategies which include assessment of student learning outcomes, student satisfaction indicators, and collection of data regarding the numbers and types of academic advising interactions occurring at all advising locations should be implemented. Assessment results should be shared widely to enhance conversations about improvements and changes to be made to the academic advising experience.
- Campus leaders affiliated with the first-year seminar course should consider adding academic advising-related activities and assignments to the curriculum. Examples could include the teaching of the Academic Requirements Page, Roadmaps, and other key degree monitoring tools that students can access. Assignments could then include preparation for future semester course planning which will enhance student conversations with academic advisors. In a more robust approach, successful completion of these assignments could meet the required mandatory advising interaction for the next semester.
- Consider implementing academic advising-related activities and assignments into first-year courses required by majors. Faculty teaching these introductory courses could support the overall success of their majors by including course requirements that result in students learning about being successful in their major and at Sac State.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

Explanation of Condition

Excellent academic advising demonstrates a commitment to the values and culture of inclusivity and social justice beyond merely equality of opportunity. Excellence calls for individual and institutional conversations that promote understanding, respect, and honor diverse perspectives, ideas, and identities. Academic advising policies and

practices reflect a commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity and, in turn, a commitment to universal design principles for learning.

Strengths

- Sac State has established crucial equity and affinity centers across campus to provide student success assistance to several student groups who may need additional support. Our tour of these centers was impressive and reassuring that Sac State values diversity and wants all students to be successful.
- The Academic Advising Center has established formal liaison partnerships with the MLK Center (one of the University's equity and affinity centers) where academic advisors spend time in the center to meet with students regarding their academic advising-related needs.
- Visibly, it is evident that the Sac State Academic Advising Center prioritizes having staff who represent the student population at Sac State. While there are always challenges in keeping good staff members, it was reassuring to hear leadership discuss this desire to have a diverse staff (i.e., Black Males) of advisors.
- The International Students office provides staff to help students be successful and also reaffirms their strategy to get students connected to their appropriate academic advisor related to academic requirements, etc.

Challenges

- The international Students office and others indicated there are challenges with helping first-year students get into appropriate schedules in a timely manner due to key paperwork and processes not occurring until late in the summer. The International Students office does host its own orientation program, but this occurs later in the summer after students have arrived on campus.
- The Academic Advising Center does not currently have liaisons assigned to all equity and affinity centers across the campus. There were some concerns expressed about others in those equity and affinity centers providing advising-related assistance for which they may not be appropriately trained.

Recommendations

- Maintain and encourage Academic Advising Center liaisons to and with **all** equity and affinity centers across campus. Once a more formal advisor training and development strategy is in place, use the liaisons to enhance the overall knowledge of equity and affinity center staff.
- Consider strategies to enroll prospective international students into classes (partial schedules) earlier in summer months like all other students. When international students arrive on campus, use that orientation program to educate students about all support services available, including academic advising. Those who do not attend the international student orientation could then be removed from classes.

Advisor Selection and Development

Explanation of Condition

Institutions employ effective and equitable selection, professional development, and appropriate recognition and reward practices for all advisors and advising administrators. Institutions and/or units establish clear expectations and requirements for all advisors as well as systems for formative and summative feedback to advisors to provide consistency for students and support program sustainability. Ongoing professional development programs reflect the institutional commitment to learning. Professional development also ensures that all academic advisors are current in advising skills and knowledge and that advisors, through their advising practice, reflect the core values and competencies for excellent academic advising.

Strengths

- The College Student Success Center advisors receive onboarding/new advisor training. Additionally, some departments, e.g., EOP, colleges and/or majors offer training for their advisors.
- The integrated advising model which deploys primary advisors to Student Success Centers across the campus seems to be working well based on institutional culture.
- Peer mentors for first-year seminar receive training from program coordinator in the Academic Advising Center.

Challenges

- A clearer delineation of responsibilities is essential for the development of a sustainable advising system and a university-wide assessment plan. These efforts can also contribute to a more consistent, positive undergraduate advising experience at Sac State.
- There is a need to understand, assess, define and reevaluate the role of faculty advising in the current model. For example, should the role of faculty in advising focus on mentoring or coaching students in their profession/field and graduate school? If faculty are providing academic advising, do they have the access and training to key advising tools and technology to provide students with needed information?
- Advising adjacent offices (i.e. equity and affinity centers, as well as some college advisors, etc.) are not part of the formalized training program offered through the Academic Advising and/or the College Student Success Centers.

Recommendations

- Create a robust, structured academic advising training/professional development plan for all advisors including primary advisors, faculty advisors, equity-centered advisors, e.g., EOP, international students, etc. The University may consider the following outline which is based on national advising standards and the feedback/input received during the interview meetings.
 - Incorporate [NACADA's Pillars](#) and [Core Competencies](#) –
 - Informational
 - Conceptual
 - Relational
 - Suggested session topics
 - “GE Advising”
 - Advising and student learning
 - Academic Advising/Student Development Theory
 - Technologies to support advising.
 - Financial aid basics
 - Working with special populations like first-generation, minoritized and/or historically underrepresented groups (HUGs), international students, students living with disabilities and accommodations, and more.
 - CSUS Advising Policies and Procedures
 - Identify an academic advisor training and development coordinating position and/or advisory group. Involve new and veteran advisors and key campus partners in the campus advising program.
 - Collaborate with CSUS HR Training and Development office to offer general advisor development sessions.
 - Consider hosting a semi-annual or annual campus advising conference or development day and include all key campus partners.
- Role clarity will strengthen the academic advising program at Sac State regardless of the organizational model, e.g., decentralized, centralized, etc. Ensure that **all** academic advisors, students, and colleagues across the University understand the roles and responsibilities associated with each advisor position type.

Improvement and the Scholarship of Advising

Explanation of Condition

Institutions are committed to systematic assessment and evaluation to sustain continuous improvement and equitable achievement of learning outcomes. Institutions recognize the complexity of the educational process and embrace its theoretical underpinnings. As a result, institutions develop evidence-based plans for continuous assessment of both advisors and advising programs. Members of the academic advising community are expected to be both critical consumers of, and contributors to, the scholarly literature, including the effects that advising can have on students and the role of advising in higher education.

Strengths

- There is good energy and momentum around building and improving Sac State's advising structure.
- Based on interviews with the advising leadership of the Student Success Center(s) as well as some of the advising partners, there appears to be interest in assessing the effectiveness of Sac State's advising system that includes the Hornet Launch project.
- College Associate Deans indicated there is interest by some staff and faculty to participate in advising research-related activities.

Challenges

- Currently, there is no formal or systematic assessment of the academic advising program at Sac State. The assessment of advising is important to implement for support of the overall advising system at the University.

Recommendations

- To ensure the effectiveness (and efficiencies) of Sac State's advising program, it should develop a formalized university-wide assessment plan that is assessable and assessed regularly.
 - In creating an effective assessment plan, the necessary components like the vision, mission, and goal statements must be in place at Sac State. An assessment plan can be developed to gather data and information to evaluate the outcomes and effectiveness of changes that are implemented to the advising system. A strong plan will include the instruments and evaluation methodologies, the names of those who will be responsible for gathering the data, a timeline for assessing various components, the methods for reporting results, and the processes by which the assessment will be shared and reviewed for future improvements to the system. Student and Programmatic learning outcomes, not simply student satisfaction of advising, should be assessed annually. This will require

comprehensive advising outcomes, rubrics and/or scorecards, and measurements for determining achievement of the learning outcomes to name a few specific recommended assessment components.

- Promote research opportunities connected to academic advising practices and processes. Utilize [NACADA Research](#) resources to promote faculty and staff participation in creation of, and utilization of research.

Collaboration and Communication

Explanation of Condition

Effective academic advising requires coordination and inclusive collaborative partnerships among stakeholders across campus. These partnerships foster ongoing communication, promote artifact and resource sharing, and support creative solutions for the success of all students. A collaboratively developed strategic communication plan involves frequent and intentional exchanges of information and ideas, is routinely reviewed and updated, and advances a shared aspirational vision for academic advising as integral to teaching and learning.

Strengths

- The partnership between student affairs and academic affairs for the creation of the Student Success Centers is commendable. The messaging we heard was that most everyone is satisfied with the Student Success Centers and the staffing patterns.
- The integrated advising model was also mentioned several times throughout our visit as being a successful strategy. Academic Advising Center advisors also commented on the benefits of having regular face time with each other positively affects the overall service each group can offer students. The advisors mentioned they regularly refer students to each other in the Advising Center and Student Success Centers.
- As previously mentioned, the Academic Advising Center liaisons with the MLK Center equity and affinity. As we toured the other equity and affinity centers everyone mentioned communication between the Academic Advising Center and their areas is working well.
- Student leaders and administrators both commented on how well the Sac State student government leaders have been involved with key committees and initiatives involving academic advising. Student involvement and feedback is critical to strong academic advising programs.

Challenges

- In the absence of leadership with authority to make overarching changes, advisors including professionals in other departments who perform “advising duties” have formed informal networks to address student issues and concerns, which results in unevenness and inequitable outcomes.
- Sharing of advising duties between primary advisors in the Academic Advising Center, College Student Success Centers, advising adjacent offices, and faculty advisors is inconsistent and undependable within certain majors and the Hornet Launch project.
- There appears to be confusion, miscommunication, and a level of distrust related to the Hornet Launch Project.
 - The Project started in 2019 to meet course mandates by the CSU system.
 - The initial launch was not a university-wide effort and excluded key constituency groups like advisors. Fall 2023 marked the fourth iteration, or “re-launch” of the Project.
 - Additionally, the Project has been overseen by multiple offices, i.e., Offices of the President and Undergraduate Studies, then the Registrar’s Office, and now, as a partnership between the Offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs including Enrollment and Engagement. Hornet Launch now has a cross-functional leadership Team, which the Consultants commend.
 - The Project seems to have been understaffed based on the size/scope of work, lack of integration with the University’s technologies including access to data, expectations, and timeline.
 - Based on feedback received in almost every interview meeting, it appears that the initial launch did not include a university-wide communication plan as there was a lot of confusion around the “what,” “why,” and “how” (to change schedules) of the Project.
- Numerous comments were made regarding the lack of general information being shared regarding university updates to the academic advising community. This also includes updates between colleges and other student service offices (Registrar, Admissions, Financial Aid, etc.) related to changes in policies and procedures, curriculum changes, etc. It seems this was a strength at one time but has become a challenge in recent years with changes in leadership and staffing, as well as an unclear purpose of the Advising Council.
- Academic Advising Center leadership was commended for their accessibility to many across campus, however, comments were also shared that there are no longer opportunities for regular check-ins with advising leadership and others

across campus. There is a desire for more regularly scheduled interactions among campus leaders from various student support groups.

Recommendations

- Consider the implementation of a regularly scheduled meeting where key leadership from the Academic Advising Office, Student Success Centers and other key campus partners who provide student support meet to provide updates to each other around key student issues, processes, and procedures.
- As mentioned above, charge the Academic Advising Council with providing a key network for updates directly to all individuals providing academic advising-related roles for students.
- Strengthen the collaboration between the Academic Advising Center and other equity and affinity centers across campus with a focus on holistic student support and success through solid partnerships.
- Maintain the Hornet Launch committee which represents key individuals impacted by the block scheduling of all first-year students. This group should also consider revisions to the overall process to allow academic advisors an opportunity to review the schedules before placing students in the schedule.

More comments regarding Hornet Launch are provided in the Student Purpose and Pathways condition section below.

Organization

Explanation of Condition

Excellent advising programs are intentionally structured across the institution to meet the institutional academic mission, goals, and intended learning outcomes. The organization of academic advising must have leadership, appropriate resources, and a systematic approach to continuous assessment and improvement. The organizational structure supports equity in the academic advising experience as well as the roles of all academic advisors, regardless of title.

Strengths

- The Sac State community including the President's Cabinet is invested in strengthening academic advising university-wide, which makes a world of difference when an institution is trying to move the needle on student success in general and academic advising specifically.
- The primary advisors in the Student Success Centers expressed their appreciation for both Miesha and My's leadership of advising within their

department. The team considers their internal communication and networking to be strong as they stated they utilize each other's skills and knowledge regularly.

Challenges

- At Sac State, academic advising responsibilities reside in Student Affairs, i.e., Student Success Center, Enrollment Services, i.e., equity-based advising and EOP, as well as Academic Affairs, i.e., faculty advisors/major-based advising. Many departments across the campus offer “advising” services, which is listed as a function within EAB Navigate for multiple departments. The advising structure is highly decentralized with little to no coordination. With multiple departments indicating they offer advising; it creates a lack of clarity about which individual or department “owns” advising and who is ultimately responsible **AND** accountable for the academic advising program.
- The lack of clear ownership for academic advising between general, College, and department-based advising has produced unclear expectations, confusion, and miscommunication about academic advising across the University. This results in challenges related to the delivery and quality of academic advising, inconsistencies in advising practices, structures, [implementation of] policies, and general expectations across the University.
 - Because ownership of advising is decentralized and unclear, advising pedagogy, expectations, and accountability are inconsistent.
 - There is a lack of academic advising unity at Sac State due to various offices providing this function in various ways.
- The University lacks a shared definition, mission, vision, goals, and outcomes for academic advising at Sac State. The lack of a shared foundation has created an inconsistent academic advising experience for Sac State's undergraduate students.
- The current advising practices are unsustainable and leading to burn out. The structure of advising duties, lack of advisor assignments (for proactive caseload advising), and the student handoff including to whom, do not align with the vision of advising at Sac State.
- There appears to be a duplication of services and efforts relative to advising and student success related programming.
- Concerns were expressed regarding how different college/department advising practices differ. The primary example given was that GE advising is not provided consistently by college academic advisors. Some professional and faculty advisors are willing to advise GE requirements, and some can't or won't. This results in an inconsistent student advising experience and causes confusion.

- Additional comments regarding the inconsistent student advising experience was related to some students needing to go to multiple locations to get all information needed, while some students receive all the information needed in one location.
- Students shared their confusion and frustrations regarding needing to have a separate graduation advisor after they file to graduate. It was later explained that the Registrar is charged with assigning staff to review graduation requirements for students. These staff contact students regarding issues with graduation yet refer students to their major advisors for clarifications needed. Students shared that this experience was very stressful during a crucial time of their undergraduate experience.

Recommendations

- As mentioned above, clearly identify and promote the leadership of academic advising at Sac State.
 - There is confusion relative to the ownership and leadership of advising at Sac State, and while Student Affairs has several positions (e.g., EOP advisors, DEGREES advisors, Academic Advising Center advisors, College Student Success advisors, etc.) engaged with advising, there's no clear leader to facilitate both primary and faculty advising.
- Re-define the charge, purpose/scope, deliverables, and membership of the **Advising Council**. Clearly outline the scope of work, responsibilities, and decision-making authority of this Council.
- Leverage the strengths of a university-wide Advising Council to create a university-wide definition, mission, vision, goals, and outcomes (student learning outcomes and programmatic learning outcomes) for academic advising at Sac State. This information will serve as the foundation for the University's academic advising system that departments and disciplines can build upon to reflect the uniqueness of the students they serve.
- As Sac State produces an academic advising vision and mission, and role clarifications are solidified, ensure that each student is clear on who their academic advisors are, and what location they should seek assistance. This information should, ideally, be easily located on their student portal.
- Discontinue using the phrase "grad advisor" because the use of such language is confusing to students and employees. The Registrar "grad advisor" should not have direct communication with students. Registrar staff who are charged with verifying graduation requirements should work directly with college/major academic advisors, who should then work directly with students to resolve any graduation requirement issues. Students should have one key contact in their last year/semester related to meeting graduation requirements.

Student Purpose and Pathways

Explanation of Condition

Effective academic advising provides learning spaces for all students to engage in critical thinking and to define their own purpose, goals, and curricular pathways through exploration to achieve learning outcomes. Students' plans must be coherent, enrich their programs of study, and equitably support their educational goals, career, and life aspirations. Partners and key stakeholders collaboratively and closely examine all student transitions and develop policies and practices to overcome barriers and optimize learning and success.

Strengths

- Positive feedback was received about the academic roadmaps. This tool appears to meet the needs for many to assist students in planning their curriculum/courses for four years. Making tools like this available to students and parents helps them determine their campus of choice, along with the major of their choice. One concern is that not all colleges and/or programs have roadmaps for their students. This was an area of concern for many interviewees, including students because it creates inequities in the advising experience at Sac State.
- Many praised the new student orientation program during each summer. Orientation is a key component for helping students and family members positively begin their Sac State experience. There are specific programs for new transfer students who have specific needs of their own. The Transfer Center also provides individual follow-up to students after their orientation program. Some concerns were expressed about not always having enough individuals to assist during the registration period, however, those who do show up are instrumental. It is also positively noted that Sac State does require new students to engage with a university representative prior to their first semester registration.

Challenges

- Disqualified/dismissed students are reinstated to the university without academic advising interactions being required to assist the student with returning to the university in appropriate courses and/or majors. We were told there is no clear criteria on what is required for these students to return, and there is no college/advising role in the reinstatement process.
- We had several conversations regarding the University's Hornet Launch project. We received mixed reviews, but mostly concerns about the purpose,

effectiveness, and efficiency of the Project including the lack of input and engagement from academic advising professionals. We understand the importance of ensuring that new students have classes during their first semester to jump start their academic journey at Sac State, and block scheduling can be a key strategy utilized for the first semester. We also affirm the importance of having key conversations with students, and sometimes parents, as part of the overall first semester registration process as critical. Gaining key information from students about their life outside of being a student, college credits already completed through dual enrollment, AP exams, etc., their 'why', i.e., purpose for attending college, and if they are in the appropriate major before the University selects classes for them is necessary. Eliminating these key steps creates undue stress for students, parents, and those at Sac State who then become responsible (academic advisors) for helping students make changes if they don't like their schedule.

- Course reserves appear to be creating additional stress for assisting students who need to change their schedules or who are trying to access courses that have reserves.
- Several concerns were expressed regarding the human power needed to make Hornet Launch happen, both in the Registrar's Office and the colleges. Some Associate Deans indicated they are spending unreasonable amounts of time to make Hornet Launch work.
- There is no indication that Sac State monitors major changing patterns at the institution. It was also communicated that there is not a consistent university process for how students can change their majors.
- Sac State has chosen to have academic advisors who focus on different components of the student's overall curriculum. Some advisors focus primarily on GE requirements, and some advisors focus primarily on major requirements. While there may be benefits to this approach, the confusion and stress from a student's perspective in having to go to different individuals/offices for meeting overall graduation requirements.
- New Transfer student registration is challenging when all transfer courses have not yet been received and/or articulated for Sac State requirements. This leads to the perception, and sometimes reality, of misadvising and increasing the time to graduation.

Recommendations

- Create a clear, consistent policy and process that involves the academic colleges for reinstating students who have left the University for underperformance in their initial attempts at college. The current practice is not helpful to students and does not require them to engage with a university representative before returning to

Sac State. Reinstating students without college involvement also sends a message that “we really don’t care how you perform; we just want you to enroll and pay tuition.”

- Reimagine Hornet Launch and identify the benefits for the student and university. Create a student-friendly and manageable process for staff and includes academic advising and orientation experience into the Hornet Launch effort.
 - Based on our overall experience, we **recommend** Hornet Launch only focus on first semester schedules for first-year students. Any block scheduling considered after the first semester should include options for the academic advisor and student to review prior to schedules being finalized.
 - Education to advisors, students and parents regarding how to change the initial course schedule given to the student is not clear and readily available.
 - There is now a group who helps coordinate and plan for the Hornet Launch project, including those representing academic advising. This group is fairly new. We recommend this group continue to explore opportunities for academic advising involvement in the overall project.
 - A different strategy is to create block schedules based on roadmap major requirements (6-9 credits) and allow students/academic advisors to select the most appropriate block for each student based on their specific needs during normal registration periods at orientation. Partial block schedules also allow students flexibility for choosing courses they are interested in to fulfill GE/Math/English Composition requirements.
 - Utilize course reserves strategically to set aside certain courses for first-year students, and also allow for unreserved seats for allowing additional students access to courses.
- Reconsider the practice of requiring students to visit multiple locations/individuals to engage in GE/major advising. Those fulfilling academic advising roles should master curriculum requirements knowledge for both areas. Separating these two requirements indicates there is a different perceived value of major and GE courses.
- Create a transfer student-friendly process to have all transfer credit articulations completed prior to transfer student registration. Create opportunities for new transfer students and academic advisors to request course articulation to occur prior to academic advising and registration occurring.
- College students change their majors for several reasons at various times in their college career. It behooves the University to create a consistent plan and process for allowing changing majors. Data collected on major changes should also help inform the university about how often, when, and from where to where

majors are changed. This data will inform key administrators and service offices to create strategies that benefit both students and the University.

- There are clear benefits to having a first-year seminar course for all students. We understand the political environment is changing to support this effort; however, we believe the benefits of creating a first-year seminar as part of the overall first-year experience is critical.

Technology Enabled Advising

Explanation of Condition

Excellent academic advising incorporates appropriate and accessible technology to complement, support, and enhance advising practice to facilitate learning success for all students. This requires institutions to include academic advisors in the selection, delivery, and assessment of advising technologies. Institutions must provide on-going training in the use and potential applicability of dynamic tools as a means to strengthen advising management, practice, student learning, and culture.

Strengths

- The EAB system supports students and academic advisors for scheduling appointments, recording meeting notes, enhancing communication between the university and the student, and utilizing critical student data to provide accurate individual academic advising. EAB allows for campaigns to focus on specific student groups, and there are plans to implement an early alert system in EAB soon.
 - University representatives who play a key role in implementing EAB strategies indicated a strong desire to have more academic advisors using the system. They also indicated a desire to learn more about academic advising perspectives for potential improvements to the system.
- The Academic Progress Report (ARP) was acknowledged by many who were interviewed to be an effective tool, especially when paired with academic roadmaps, to assist students in monitoring their progress toward degree completion.

Challenges

- Some challenges associated with EAB at Sac State include:
 - There are inconsistent practices at the University for allowing student employees access to the EAB tool.

- Utilizing EAB is not a requirement for all individuals who are fulfilling academic advising roles at Sac State. There are no common expectations regarding the use of EAB when providing academic advising support to students. This results in some student interactions not being recorded or recognized.
- Some EAB data is managed centrally with restricted access for all users. Comments indicated from some campus leaders have limited access to some data and cannot create specific campaigns needed or access student information critical to student outreach efforts.
- Some concerns were expressed regarding how first-year and new transfer students are lacking navigation skills on their student portal and the Academic Requirements Page. There is no specific university-wide strategy for how new students will learn about these tools and how to use them for degree planning.

Recommendations

- EAB improvements for consideration:
 - Create a clear expectation for all those fulfilling academic advising roles to utilize EAB in specific ways. Provide training opportunities for those needing to learn how to use the system.
 - If the University deems it appropriate, do not allow new or continuing academic advisors access to other key technology tools (i.e. Peoplesoft, Academic Requirements Page, etc.) until EAB training is complete, and clear expectations of use are understood.
 - Create an EAB strategies Advisory Group or Taskforce to allow the Sac State community to develop overall strategies, access to appropriate data, and develop training opportunities for increasing EAB use. Specifically, common expectations regarding student appointment/interactions notes should be consistently applied across the institution.
- Develop specific learning outcomes for students associated with learning how to use appropriate technology tools (ARP, student portal, etc.). Specific strategies for who is responsible for teaching students to use these tools, and measurements to assess the success of students utilizing these tools should be created.
- When considering future technology tools that will be utilized by students and academic advisors, allow for community participation in reviewing these tools to determine which ones may be more appropriate for the Sac State community in general.
- Create specific training and development opportunities for appropriate individuals to learn about, and how to use technology tools in the overall student support and academic advising experience.

Summary

Sac State is looking critically at all areas for improvement to build a stronger academic advising program to enhance the student experience. To move the work forward, the consultants recommend that the University start by redefining the charge, purpose/scope, deliverables, and membership of the Advising Council. Clearly outline the scope of work, responsibilities, and decision-making authority of this Council, as noted in the high-level recommendations. This approach will help build buy-in and co-creation of what the academic advising program at Sac State will look like in the future. We hope that you find our observations and recommendations timely and attainable. We suggest prioritizing the various recommendations to identify what can be accomplished within a specific time to avoid confusion and burnout. Appendix B provides a suggested systemic change timeline.

There are many talented and dedicated employees working at Sac State! These employees demonstrated a level of care and commitment to improving academic advising for all students. We applaud everyone for their strong desire to improve academic advising and the overall student experience. We wish Sac State the greatest success in its endeavors!