

**THE ACADEMIC ADVISING AND EXPLORATION CENTER:
DR. RICHARD TELFER'S SUCCESSFUL VISION OF
ACADEMIC ADVISING FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – WHITEWATER**

**Bruce J. Bukowski, Director
Pamela Tanner
Matt Jurvelin
Academic Advising and Exploration Center
University of Wisconsin – Whitewater**

Academic advising in its simplest form first occurred in higher education during the 1870's. Prior to the 1870's students enrolled in the same courses and no electives were available. The college ideal was defined as was "a large family, sleeping, eating, studying, and worshipping under one roof" (Rudolph, 1962, p. 88). Colleges had no student services, administrators, secretaries or custodial staffs. Colleges were composed of a president, two faculty members and a few tutors. By the 1870's the social climate in higher education became very formal and rigid. Students kept in line by an inflexible system of rules. Faculty could no longer speak to students on a personal basis and students could no longer approach faculty. As this time period progressed students became more rebellious and demanded more course selections and better interaction with faculty and staff (Gordon, Habley & Grits, 2008).

The introduction of curricular electives initiated the need for some form of advice to be given to students. Greek, Latin and other traditional courses were still being taught, but more practical courses were provided as alternatives for the student. Adding an elective system was controversial for the faculty who wanted to keep the traditional curriculum. The development of an academic advising process was one of the responses to the new course electives. In 1877, Harvard and John Hopkins were the first colleges to offer elective systems for students and were the first to initiate a primitive form of advising (Thelin, 2004). The word "advisor" was first used by Daniel Coit Gilman, president of John Hopkins University, and the initial definition was someone who gave direction to a student concerning academic, social, and personal concerns (Franklin, 1910).

In the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's, as universities were developing student support programs, academic advising utilized the faculty-only model where students were assigned to a faculty member for review of their course selections. This format was the dominating form of the academic advising model used through the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's. In the late 1970's, the National Academic Advising Association was founded and in a short period of time research articles by O'Banion (1972) and Crookston (1972)

examined advising as an activity and conceptualized how students can be advised. Prescriptive and developmental advising were terms to describe how students could be advised. In the early 1980's, organizational models were defined and analyzed by Habley (1983). The faculty-only model was still the most prominent model utilized by the universities in the 1980's and remains the model most utilized today. Other models have been implemented by universities and colleges in the last 20 years. These models include supplementary, split, dual, total intake, satellite and self contained models. Students in these models are advised in many different ways by faculty, centralized offices, college offices or combinations.

Advising at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater

The Academic Advising and Exploration Center (AAEC) at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater opened in 2003 in response to a student initiative to improve academic advising. Through that initiative, a fee designated to support academic advising was approved by the student body and the Board of Regents. The fee provided and continues to provide financial resources to support an advising center to serve the interests of first year and undeclared students. Prior to the AAEC (which is defined as the total intake model of advising) the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater utilized the faculty-only model. The primary purpose of any academic advising program is to assist students in the development of a meaningful educational plan. The mission of the AAEC is to provide intrusive and developmental academic advising to assist first year and undeclared students with their transition to college and their development of an educational plan consistent with their personal values, interests and abilities. The students are required to meet with an assigned advisor, one-on-one, two times each semester. Advisors help students understand the academic and administrative processes of the university and the nature of its academic programs. Additionally, they provide information regarding course selection, assist in developing short-term and long-term academic plans, and provide referrals to the various specialized campus services.

The Academic Advising and Exploration Center complements the ***Programs and Learning*** area of the Strategic Plan. The AAEC focuses on supporting students by providing intrusive and developmental academic advising to assist students with their transition to college and their development of an educational plan consistent with their personal values, interests and abilities. The AAEC has established a protocol for the general advising of students, but has also focused on the unique advising situations presented by the different clientele that the AAEC serves. The unique programs developed internally which have enhanced advising at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater include students in the following students: intercollegiate athletes, international students, students in resident halls, career and exploration for undeclared students, youth options, probationary students and non-clientele students.

With the inclusion of the developmental advising model and its move to outcomes-based goals for students, the AAEC has placed itself in the forefront of what is occurring

nationally in academic advising. With this developmental advising model, students are presented with a learning environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of the students.

Evaluations by Students

Student satisfaction with the AAEC is measured in both the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the internal student evaluations given each semester. The NSSE provides evidence of student satisfaction with academic advising at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. The NSSE survey shows that the student satisfaction for the first year students has increased on a 4.0 scale from a 2.57 in 2002 (prior to the opening of the AAEC) to 3.30 in 2007. Students were asked “Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution.” The national average for this question on the NSSE survey for first year students was 2.98.

The effectiveness of the AAEC’s learning outcomes is measured through internal evaluations. The information collected is used to support program and service improvements. These surveys not only measure student satisfaction, but also evidence of student achievement of academic advising outcomes.

Evaluation by Outside Consultant (Dr. Susan Campbell-Former President of NACADA)

“In summary, the AAEC is a highly effective unit that, by all metrics available, is achieving its goals. It is a unit that is organizationally sound with strong leadership. Indeed, in the opinion of this reviewer, the AAEC truly represents an example of best practice in academic advising--this unit has a clearly identified mission, an articulated set of outcomes for student learning and for the delivery of academic advising, has the resources (human and financial) it needs to achieve its mission, and has the support of the UWW campus administration. Finally and most importantly, students, through responses on the annual survey, the NSSE, and the interviews during this visit provide additional support for the success of the AAEC. The increase in the NSSE metric regarding the quality of academic advising and the evidence from the surveys that students are learning those things that the Center has identified as outcomes are indicators of an academic advising program that is grounded and intentional.”

“It is hard to find a campus more committed to students and student success than the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. Very clearly faculty, staff, and administrators have at the center of their work, student persistence and success. By the very fact that a student initiative on academic advising emerged and was supported on the campus also speaks to the genuine regard for students on this campus. Valuing students by respecting their involvement in the educational process is considered, in the retention literature, one of the key campus conditions that promote educational effectiveness. Indeed, the history of UWW with regard to inclusion speaks to this culturally-embedded element of the campus.”

Conclusion

Dr. Campbell's review illustrates the AAEC's commitment and success toward highly effective advising relationships across the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater campus. This success is directly related to student financial support for the improvement of first year advising allowing for an intensive and engaging retention approach at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater.

The AAEC has grown and has ingrained itself into the university structure over the past five years. Communication and collaborative relationships with the university community have been developed and high satisfaction by groups within the university community has been indicated in the outside consultant's Program Review Report. The AAEC has become the focal point and leader in academic advising for the university. The AAEC has become involved in all academic committees related to academics and advising on campus over the past five years. This involvement has had a great impact on improving university wide policies, procedures and practices on all areas related to academic advising.

Note: In The Fall of 2008 the Academic Advising and Exploration Center at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater was honored by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) as a program winner. It was the only advising center to win this honor out of over 800 in the country.

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