Advising Center Program Review  
Western Carolina University  

Report  
Submitted by  

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I. Introduction  

The Western Carolina University Advising Center Program Review was led by external reviewer Dr. Ruth A. Darling, Assistant Provost for Student Success at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Dr. John Habel, Professor of Psychology and Mr. Larry Hammer, Registrar served as the internal reviewers on the team. The Director of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, Mr. David Onder, served as the primary institutional contact for the Review Team throughout the process. Dr. Darling served as the lead author of the report and facilitated the individual and group interviews. Each Review Team member was responsible for the initial draft of several specific report sections. The final report represents the collaborative thinking of the Review Team with unanimous support of the recommendations. The Review Team agreed that the summary report should follow the outline and format suggested in Appendix C of the WCU Handbook for the External Reviewer. When deemed appropriate, the Review Team has included issues within the various sections that step outside of the suggested format.

A description of the visit length  

The WCU Academic Advising Program Review began with a dinner meeting of the review team members on Sunday, February 6, 2011 and continued with interviews and work sessions through mid-afternoon, Tuesday, February 8, 2011.

A summary and description of meetings conducted by the review team  

Throughout the two days, the review team participated in interviews with administrators, faculty, advisors, Enrollment Services staff, Student Affairs staff and students. The Review Team requested a meeting with the Deans which was added to the schedule at 2:00 pm on Tuesday, February 8. The Deans of Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education were able to clear their schedules for a brief meeting with the team. The full Program Review itinerary and participant list is in the Appendices of this report. Students attending the lunch and not listed on the itinerary were Ginny Jessup, Jacob Shope, Josh Burr, Travis Wright and Rebecca Smith.

A similar protocol was used for each of the individual and group interviews –

- Darling began each meeting with introductions and a brief explanation of the purpose of a program review
- Each participant gave a brief description how h/she interacts with the advising center and the staff
- Participants were asked to engage in a conversation concerning the strengths of the advising center or a description of “what works well”
- Participants were asked to discuss the challenges facing the advising center from their unique perspectives
Participants made observations about opportunities for improvements in advising that would positively impact the students’ undergraduate experience and improve advising programs and practices.

At the end of each session, the participants were asked if there were any final comments they would like to share with the reviewers.

Each member of the review team engaged with the participants asking questions and seeking clarification.

Notes on the discussions were taken by each of the review team members and discussed during the review team work sessions.

Data sources used by the program review team included both qualitative and quantitative data. Program reviewers noted there were limited data on advising or an assessment report of the Advising Center. The follow data and reports were reviewed during the program review and utilized during the report writing:

- Interview data gathered during the program review process
- Document and web site analysis of the following:
  - Advising Program Review Report
  - WCU web site pages
  - WCU QEP
  - WCU Faculty Handbook 2010 – 11 (Section 5.17)
- SGA 2007 Resolution on Advising WCU Institutional reports
  - Student demo/bio information
    - Fall 2010 Census day statistics
    - Spring 2011 Census day statistics
    - GPA by SAT and HSGPA data from 2007, 2008 & 2009
  - Undergraduate retention and graduation rate reports
  - 2010 WCU Sophomore Survey
  - 2010 WCU Senior Survey
  - 2009 NSSE Report
- Advising Center reports
  - AdvisorTrac student usage reports of the Advising Center
  - AdvisorTrac summaries compiled by OIPE
- Raleigh News and Observer, 2009-2010 UNC System Salary Database

II. Analysis of Program

The Review Team agreed to use the standards for analysis of programs as outlined in the National Academic Advising Association’s (NACADA) publication, Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook, the NACADA Concept Statement on Academic Advising and the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. These three documents as well as team members' advising expertise guided the inquiry. In general, these national advising standards support the following as critical components for advising programs: Vision and Mission statements, Goals, Objectives and Outcomes, Advising Policies and Processes, Advising Program Organization, Delivery and Roles/Responsibilities, Advisor Development and Advising Tools and Program and Advisor Assessment.
Provide a brief synopsis of:

**The primary unit functions** (as stated in the Program Review document, p. 5)

In order to place the primary unit functions within a context for review, the Review Team agreed to first consider the Mission, Goals and Objectives as outlined in the Program Review Report.

The mission of the Advising Center is to promote the growth and development of students as they develop educational plans and choose career and life goals. The holistic approach to advising students involves developing one-on-one relationships with students to support and encourage them in their decision making processes; teaching skills to assist with academic persistence and success; and serving as a professional resource to the total university community in support of individual and institutional goals.

Observations of the Review Team:

- The mission appears to be the first sentence of this paragraph and supports the mission of the institution and the QEP. A mission statement should reflect the purpose of academic advising and serve as the institution’s roadmap to reach its vision and affirm its values for academic advising.
- The next sentence lists three broad goals that state broadly how the Advising Center will fulfill its mission. Goals serve as the long-range expressions of the desired future state for academic advising. The first two items apply directly to the teaching/advising role and relationship, the third item applies to the broader University leadership role of the Advising Center, its Director and the staff.
- The three top priorities as stated on p. 6 should be fully integrated with the goal statements and can be expanded upon in specific objectives and outcomes.

**Primary functions**

Staying within the context of accepted standards for advising, the Review Team viewed the primary functions as a set of objectives (as stated in the Program Review document, p. 5). Objectives articulate the broad expectations regarding the delivery of academic advising and for student learning outcomes. Objectives are not measurable, however learning and process outcomes can be measured. The Review team considered the listed “key functions” in the Report as addressing what would be considered program objectives in terms of the delivery of advising.

1. Serve as first enrollment advisor for all new freshman students
2. Assist departments with transfer students
3. Serve as resource to departments through liaisons
4. Serve as a professional resource on academic advising to faculty and staff
5. Process forms required for university and course withdrawal, declaration of major, course waivers, overloads
6. Coordinate academic recovery programs
7. Facilitate appeals process for students (academic suspension and refund)
Observations of the Review Team:

- the objectives stop short of addressing any general expectations for student learning
- the focus on “process and delivery” contribute to misperceptions and a lack of understanding as to what the role of the Advising Center is as it relates to advising, student learning and its campus-wide role
- the confusion exists across interview groups, e.g. faculty, administrators, staff and students

**Are they appropriate for WCU’s student body?** The Review Team noted the following:

The mission is appropriate for the WCU student body and it supports the University’s mission as well as the focus of the QEP, however it could be more clearly stated within the teaching/learning context of the institution’s mission and QEP. The Review Team noted that the advisors should not only “promote” but also “support” the growth and development of students. The mission statement serves to address the professional advising that takes place in the Advising Center but the Reviewers expressed concern that there appears to be competing perspectives on the advising mission as it relates to university advising in general and the role of the Advising Center. The team questioned if WCU advising could exemplify best practice if there were competing missions. The use of various phrases by the interviewees to describe advising represents different perspectives and notions of what advising should be at WCU - such as “advising is teaching,” “developmental advising,” “advising case management,” and advising is “mentoring.” Bringing different notions of advising missions to the same discussion clearly spoke to why there was confusion as to the role and purpose of the Advising Center and to the need for clarity and direct communication – at all levels.

The Advising Center’s goals are currently embedded within the mission statement which results in goal statements that are not perfectly clear. If goals are not clearly stated and communicated, confusion as to the unit’s purpose and direction will result. Throughout the interviews and in the cases of particular individuals and groups, there emerged several possible competing goals and perceptions as to the role of the Advising Center on campus. An example of a competing goal concerns the advising of students in a major. The Advising Center staff considers it important that students in majors can also be advised by the Advising Center. Deans of certain colleges want all majors advised in their assigned major departments and in most cases by faculty advisors. In some instances, the same opinions apply to students in the “pre-major” status within a College.

When considering the question, “are the functions appropriate for WCU’s students,” the Review Team agrees that it is not possible to adequately address this issue since there are no learning outcomes that define what the students should know, do and value as a result of their advising experience in the Advising Center.

**Are they consistent with professional norms or standards?**

Overall, the Advising Center’s key functions or objectives as outlined in the Report and as reported by the interview participants are consistent with professional norms. However, the functions/objectives are not fully developed. Professional standards (CAS Standards on Academic Advising and the NACADA “Concept Statement” on Academic Advising) as well as team member expertise were used to determine this finding.
The unit’s programming activities and/or services

The Programs and/or services of the Advising Center are noted on pages 12 – 13 of the Program Review Report.

Are the programming activities and services appropriate to stated mission and objectives of the units?

The Review Team agrees that the programming and services outlined in the report are appropriate for the stated mission and objectives. Each of the programs listed are associated with a specific goal and objective. The issue again lies with the disparate views on and interpretations of the stated Advising Center mission, goals and objectives. The lack of clarity in the stated mission, goals, objectives and outcomes as well as gaps in communication between and among various units and their leaders concerning the role of the Advising Center contribute to the confusion and some frustration that was expressed during the interview process. The Director should be in a position to clarify and communicate the mission, goals, etc. – given he is empowered to do so and his authority legitimized with academic and student affairs administrators and faculty.

The Review Team noted that there is no reference in the key functions or in the programming activities to the role of Advising Center staff in advising student-athletes. The student-athlete advisor is mentioned in the partnership section of the report. Close scrutiny and collaboration with the Compliance Officers in the Athletic Department are critical when combining institutional degree and academic planning with the NCAA progress towards degree (eligibility) requirements. This relationship moves beyond the normal “partnership” relationship into one of institutional control and NCAA compliance.

Are the programming and services adequate to meet the expressed needs of the unit’s constituent groups?

When considering this question, the Review Team agreed that the most critical constituent is the student. The team met with 5 students, representing different majors. Even though the sample could not be considered “valid or representative,” the students were overwhelmingly supportive of the academic advising program at WCU. They were especially positive about having “multiple” advisors who they could consult, depending on their needs. The students spoke of the freedom to return to their advisor in the Advising Center to “double check” their major advisor on graduation requirements and other processes. They do not view seeing multiple advisors as negative, but rather as an opportunity to touch base with another campus person who knows them and expresses concern for their success. The issue (multiple advisors – Advising Center and faculty major advisor) that causes consternation and concern among campus leaders, staff and faculty, was considered a strength of the system by the students. The NSSE data and the sophomore/senior surveys also reflect strong support for advising at WCU – based on the students’ experience of and engagement in advising. These data are limited and more complete assessment data is needed to determine if the students’ advising needs are being met and if students are learning from their experience of advising in both the Advising Center and in their major departments.

The Review Team agreed that many good things are happening in advising at WCU as reported by various participants during the interview process. The academic department representatives were especially complimentary of the Advising Center’s staff liaison structure and spoke highly of the service and relationship. Student Affairs unit representatives spoke highly of the willingness of the Advising Center staff to collaborate with various programs and processes that support student
success. Overall, those interviewed were very complementary of the Advising Center staff, the professionalism of the staff, the genuine concern exhibited by the staff for all students, and the advising “content” knowledge in terms of Liberal Studies advising, academic policies and procedures, student referrals, transfer advising and special advising interventions to assist students in transition or at-risk.

The College Deans with whom the team met discussed their desire for a different model for advising students who had declared majors, similar to the decentralized model being developed in the College of Education for teaching majors. Several non-academic units expressed the desire for the Advising Center staff to move more out of the 8 – 5 office hour structure and spend more time programming and working with students “where the students are.” However, based on the interview data, most needs of the constituents were being met. There were specific recommendations for changes that will be addressed in the final section of this report.

The Review Team found several major themes emerging in terms of Advising Center functions, services and programs, and meeting the needs of constituents:

- Perhaps due to an unclearly articulated mission, goals and objectives, there were multiple perspectives of what the Advising Center’s role and mission is on campus or its “function.”
- There exists communication gaps and perhaps lack of clear information concerning Advising Center programs, initiatives and needs, resulting in misperceptions at several levels of leadership.
- Without assessment data (formative and summative) on the Advising Center’s programs and initiatives, it is difficult to provide comprehensive responses to the program review questions in this section.

**The planning and assessment strategies**

The Review Team noted that an Advising Center "strategic plan" was not a part of the Program Review Report. The Review Team did review the Advising Task Force Report that consists of a number of recommendations that follow several best practices in the profession and addresses several advising process concerns. It appeared that this document did serve as a planning document for several initiatives put in place by the Director. A few of the recommendations have been acted upon, e.g. an advising syllabus was developed but it has little impact or exposure, an Advising Council was appointed but it has not met regularly nor fully addressed its responsibilities as outlined, Advising Day programming was enhanced, and the Advising Center initiated changes in orientation that focused on students learning about and using critical advising tools such as the degree audit and on-line registration.

Other recommendations were not addressed, and perhaps the most important one is that of the university-wide organizational structure of advising (centralized and decentralized in each college) and the role/responsibilities of Advising Center advisors and college/departmental faculty advisors. The Review Team discussed the fact that not addressing the critical issue of structure, role and responsibilities has perhaps contributed to the various and conflicting perceptions of advising and presented barriers to an intentional planning processes.

The team agreed that no changes should be made until an in-depth assessment plan has been implemented and data gathered that would fully inform leadership decisions concerning these
critical organizational and role questions. Strategic planning needs to be a part of this decision making process.

**Can the unit document that its programming activities and services are having the intended effect?**

There is not an assessment plan in place to document that programming activities and services are having the intended effect nor are there specific outcomes for impact on learning and improvement. There is an outline of an Advising Center learning outcomes based assessment on page 73 of the Advising Center Program Review Report but it has not been implemented.

**Are the programming activities and services routinely evaluated and the results used to make improvements?**

AdvisorTrac data are used to monitor and track student appointments in the Advising Center. Changes are made in the appointment schedules to accommodate high demand time periods. AdvisorTrac data was the only report provided in the Program Review document.

**Do all staff have an opportunity to participate in planning and assessment activities?**

Advising Center staff members meet regularly and discuss the implementation of their programs and the student response. In addition, the advisors meet regularly with academic college/department faculty, collaborating on programs, serving as a resource, and responding to faculty needs in terms of advising materials and information. There is discussion and verbal feedback but no formal assessment. The Director conducts a yearly evaluation of each staff member as required by the campus Human Resource department.

**III. Analysis of staff**

Throughout the interview process, the Review Team heard many compliments about the Advising Center staff and its leadership. The criticisms were relatively few and focused more on issues of advising program organization and delivery. Several times the center and its staff were referred to as the “hub” of an advising wheel – having many spokes that branch out into the university. The relationships built through the “departmental liaisons” model were often cited as a strength of the Center. The advisors were referred to as the “experts” on campus for all matters concerning liberal studies curriculum, first-year student advising, academic policies and procedures, exploring and changing majors, transfer advising, and advising students who are academically at-risk. The Director and the advisors were noted as staff willing to be flexible and working with others on changes leading to improvements. Many interview participants agreed the Advising Center staff were “great colleagues.” And, the student participants agreed “without their support system, we wouldn’t make it!”

**Qualifications**

**Do the unit staff have the requisite degrees/credentials and skills appropriate to the program?**

Members of the professional staff of the Advising Center, including the Director of Undergraduate Advising, have the requisite degrees and skills appropriate for their responsibilities. All have earned Masters degrees and many have long experience as academic advisors and/or in other areas
of college student support. Members of the faculty, staff and administration who met with the Review Team included the members of the professional staff of the Advising Center, their colleagues from other areas of student support, selected department heads, selected students, and three academic Deans. The consensus among these persons is the members of the professional staff of the Advising Center are competent, professional and work together as a cohesive group.

Resources and Support

**Does the unit have adequate and appropriate processes and procedures for performance evaluation and promotion decisions?**

The Director conducts the performance evaluations required by the campus Human Resource unit. Currently, there are few opportunities for promotion as there is one Associate Director with all staff reporting through the AD to the Director. The Review team agrees that the development of a “career ladder” for advisors would be especially appropriate for this group. A career ladder is similar to the faculty promotion process with various levels of professional expertise and experience documented before moving to the next “level.” Titles could include Associate Advisor, Advisor, and Master Advisor. Each level would require a review of specific criteria. If achieved, the institution should commit to a certain “percent” in salary increase. A career ladder serves many different needs of an advising program, e.g. motivation to improve, opportunities for promotion that keep good employees at the University, involvement in the profession of advising and a familiarity with best practices, professional development, and ultimately, an advising program that operates within a strong, professional framework.

**Is staff compensation appropriate and adequate?**

According to the salary database of employees of the institutions in the UNC system published by the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the 2009-2010 salaries of the members of the professional staff of the Advising Center range from $31,300 to $46,900. Their mean salary was $35,640. According to data published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 22, 2010, the mean 2009-2010 salary of academic advisors/counselors at all institutions was $40,290. These data indicate the mean salary of the members of the professional staff of the Advising Center is significantly below that of their counterparts at other institutions. Reviewing these same sources revealed the Director’s salary is above that of his counterparts at other institutions. The Review Team agrees that a benchmarking survey on academic advising salaries of peer institutions would be helpful to WCU leadership as they consider a revised salary schedule for professional advisors.

**Do staff have access to adequate technological resources?**

Throughout the interview process, it was apparent that IT is a sought after resource that cannot meet the demands of its campus users. Over the past several years, various IT based academic tools have been put in place, e.g. CatWalk, Early Alert and AdvisorTrac that support academic advisors and have been shown to be effective in helping with student communication, managing advising processes and early advising interventions with at-risk students. These systems require a level of IT expertise for on-going maintenance and support that the Advising Center staff does not have. If not kept current, the systems will lose their impact and become dated. The Review Team agrees that IT assistance is needed either on staff in the Advising Center or in the form of a designated consultant from a campus-based IT unit.
Based on the interview with the Advising Center staff and Director, immediate needs for technology in terms of hardware are met through assistance from the Senior Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs.

**Professional Activity and Service**

**Does the staff have adequate opportunities for professional development?**

The Review Team agrees that opportunities for professional development are limited for the Advising Center staff. One to two staff members are supported by the Senior Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs to attend NACADA national or regional conferences each year. In addition, there are other associations within higher education that are very appropriate for advising center staff, e.g. National Resource Center for First-Year Students and Students in Transition (FYE), the National Health Professions Advisor Association, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the American College Personnel Association, to name a few. The Review Team acknowledges that WCU faculty and staff expertise, web-based development, as well as regional expertise could be a source for professional development, easing the resource issues involved in providing a comprehensive professional development program for advisors. Members of the Advising Center staff expressed great interest in and a need for professional development.

**Is the staff recognized by their peers for professional contributions to the field?**

The Review Team noted that the Director has served in several capacities as an elected leader for the National Academic Association and has made several presentations at conferences. In addition, a limited number of staff have presented at both regional and national conferences. The Review Team agrees that involvement and presentations at regional and local conferences are beneficial for a number of reasons and would support WCU advising as follows:

- Professional development for staff and faculty
- Peer review of program proposals
- Exposure to best practices
- Networking with other professionals
- Good exposure for WCU nationally and regionally
- Motivation for staff and faculty
- Use as criteria within a career ladder for advising

**Does the staff engage in an appropriate level of University service?**

“University Service” needs to be defined for professional advisors. The Review Team was uncertain if, in the case of advising, service meant providing services across campus for students, departmental faculty, etc. Or, does it mean service as defined for faculty, e.g. service on committees, service with community organizations, outreach for the university?

The Review Team noted that advising center staff served on various University committees and provided or coordinated services outside of the Advising Center.

Service, if defined, could serve as criteria for assessment within a career ladder structure or within the yearly evaluation process.

**IV. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget**
Does the unit have adequate facilities to fulfill its mission?

A facilities analysis was not included in the written report provided to the review team. Adequate facilities are essential and an analysis that includes comparative data should be included in future reports. This analysis is based solely on the observations of the review team. Each constituent interview group was prompted with a question about “challenges that impeded them.” During the interviews, the review team did not hear any complaints from the Advising Center staff, the students interviewed, the Advising Center director, or any of the other groups that indicated inadequate physical facilities related to the unit’s mission.

A tour of the facilities revealed a private office for each counselor. Each office was equipped a desk, phone, computer, and upholstered seating for one or two guests. The counselor offices were all in close proximity to each other down two hallways that interconnect with each other. There was a slightly larger, similarly equipped office for the director. The director's office could easily accommodate four people in a private meeting. The front desk was well situated to service the reception space. The reception space was open with a variety of mixed seating.

In addition in the back of the Advising Center there was a 10-15 person conference room with table, white-board, ceiling-mounted data projector, and computer workstation. The conference room is shared within the building. Outside the conference room was an office cubicle and a private office that occupied orientation personnel. Comments from orientation and advising staff during the interviews indicated that both units believe they benefit from the close proximity to each other. Neither unit appeared to be impeded by this arrangement.

The advisors identified their proximity to each other as program strength. Centrality and proximity contribute to high-availability and uniform-quality of service. Proximity contributes to a high level of active collaboration within the unit. The positive comments from the student panel toward the Advising Center and the services received there also support adequacy of the physical facilities.

The Review Team thought it critical to include comments on IT support of the Advising Center and advising across campus. Multiple comments in different interviews supported the reported gap in IT’s ability to fully meet some of the basic infrastructure and operational needs of the Advising Center. Although the review team heard several good comments about IT, it was broadly acknowledged that the web-based data collection applications (Cat Walk and Early Alert) designed as stop-gap solutions were beyond the skill-set of non-technical users to manage. IT involvement is needed to refresh Cat Walk content. Reporting from Cat Walk is difficult. The Early Alert system had to be abandoned because it requires advanced technical skills beyond those currently available within the Advising Center. Advisor Track, a third party solution where advising case notes are stored, does not have IT support other than server space. Other IT support is needed to streamline several processes that are critical to how advising functions and to provide timely, accurate service to students and advisors. Areas mentioned during various interviews include transfer transcript evaluations, major declaration, and course management information processed between the Advising Center and colleges.

Does the unit have adequate budget to fulfill its mission?

The Review Team noted that a budget analysis was not included in the written report. Future program reviews need to include a budget analysis and should include some benchmarking with peer and aspirant institutions. The review team requested and received budget figures for the unit. The annual base budget is approximately four hundred and eighty-nine thousand dollars. 95% of the budget is spent on salaries.
Based on comments heard during interviews with the director and the staff there is a broad perception that the salaries are below national norms. True or false; an analysis of unit salary data needs to be included in future reviews.

Only twenty-two thousand dollars of the unit’s budget is available for daily operations. Again, based on the comments from the director and the staff this amount appears to be adequate for current operations; whether or not this is truly the case is difficult to determine based on the available data. Interview comments indicate the unit is dependent upon the budget of the Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management for professional dues, travel for professional development, and capital equipment such as technology refreshes. The unit also engages in some operational cost-sharing with other units, specifically orientation. The reviewers noted that the budget lacks any discretionary funds that could be used for new initiatives or for ongoing professional development.

V. Summary of unit strengths and areas for improvement

What is your general impression of the unit?

The unit is broadly respected by students, faculty, and staff for the quality of their work. It operates in accordance to national standards and best practice in advising. The Advising Center staff are very student-oriented; are understanding of their role in the advising process; implement advising and student success initiatives that support retention and progress towards degree completion, collaborate across student and academic affairs units to support undergraduate learning and co-curricular experiences and are organized (liaison model) to broadly support academic advising across the curriculum and University. There are several foundational areas needing Advising Center and University leadership attention that are addressed in the improvement and recommendation sections of this report.

Overall, what are the areas of strength?

• Quality of advising services provided as reported by the interview participants
• Contextualizing advising as part of the teaching/learning mission of the institution, aligning it with the institutional mission and the QEP
• Close relationship with the academic departments they serve
• Staff cohesiveness; a commitment to their mission
• Advising initiatives and student success courses housed in the Advising Center support best practices in advising and retention/student progress initiatives
• Willingness of staff to collaborate and partner across divisions and units on student programming and advising initiatives
• Qualified staff members who have the requisite degrees and skills appropriate for their responsibilities

Overall, in what areas could the unit make improvements?

The Review Team recommends that the following areas be addressed for improvement purposes. These recommendations have been situated in the best-practice advising program framework that was addressed in Section I of this report. See the appendices for a diagram representing the framework.
**Vision and Mission Statement, Goals and Outcomes**

Formulate a clear mission along with goals, objectives and outcomes that represent WCU’s undergraduate academic advising program across units

Fully implement the use of an advising syllabus in the Advising Center and with advising liaisons/departmental advising, allowing for differences in outcomes and processes for the various academic departments and curricula

**Advising Policies and Processes**

Fully utilize the Advising Center’s Advisory Council as outlined in their charge (noted in the Advising Newsletter) and the Student Advising Council

- Schedule regular meetings 2 – 3 times each term
- Create agendas with sub-groups that produce actionable items that impact campus advising programs and processes, including policy recommendations

Be proactive about sharing benchmarks and program initiatives

- **Determine where advising needs to be represented by the Director for maximizing communication with leadership in academic and student affairs, e.g. Provost’s Council, Dean’s Council, Curriculum Committee, Faculty Governance Body, etc.**
- **Develop an intentional communications plan for keeping faculty and administrators up to date on curriculum, policies and processes**
- **Improve communication and collaboration with two-year colleges, early colleges and other major “feeder” schools**

**Organization and Delivery**

Improve Advising Center’s relationship/communication with the Deans and position for college-centered advising model for declared majors

- **Explore the possibility that advising could be provided to the academic colleges and schools along a number of points between a college-centered model and a centralized model, depending on the needs and resources of a given college or school.**
- **Assess the impact of the decentralized model in the College of Education and Allied Professions in developing proposals for other advising models**
- **Consider the institutional “home” for advising. Currently, it is housed in Enrollment Services – more associated with “services” than with the teaching/learning functions of Academic Affairs and the Provost. In an effort to situate advising in teaching and learning, rather than registration/enrollment, the leadership could explore a move to Undergraduate Studies.**

Improve the Advising Center’s outreach with Student Affairs and be more visible outside of the 8 – 5 pm office day with students

**Resources and Support:**

- **Develop a complete Advising Center budget and give the Director authority to manage funds**
- **Evaluate equity of staff compensation vis-à-vis compensation of academic advisors at peer institutions.**
- **Strengthen IT support that impacts efficiency and effectiveness in implementing advising processes (e.g. major assignment, transfer evaluations) and utilizing advising tools (e.g. Catwalk, Early Alert)**
Roles/Responsibilities

- Strengthen and systematize procedures for performance evaluation of staff.
- Fully support faculty advisor role and reward as outlined in the Faculty Handbook
- Clearly define the professional advisors’ role in the context of teaching and learning

Advisor Training/Development and Tools

Help the institution understand the difference between advising as part of the teaching/learning mission of the institution and registration.

- Develop and implement an intentional faculty advisor development program based on specific learning outcomes, e.g., the difference between advising and registration, building an advising syllabus for assigned advisees
- Work with Department Heads and Deans to support and encourage faculty attendance at the sessions
- Develop a user-friendly, on-line Faculty Advisor Handbook that provides the Departments/Colleges the opportunity to add specific information for advisors
- Provide more support for staff professional development, including increasing funds for participation in regional and national conferences and opportunities for in-service professional development on campus and in the local community.
- Strengthen and systematize procedures for promotion of staff; i.e., establish a “career ladder” within the center that would provide more opportunity for promotion and greater differentiation of staff assignments.

Program and Advisor Assessment

Implement a comprehensive assessment plan

- Obtain consulting support from NACADA, either by sending selected members of the staff to the NACADA Assessment Institute or by inviting NACADA consultants to WCU to help develop an intentional advising assessment program
- Include faculty/college advising in the assessment plan
- Utilize institutional student demo/bio information in program development and within an assessment framework
- Utilize institutional student success/retention data to assess targeted initiatives
- Expand data collection procedures: consider administering satisfaction surveys to representative samples of students and faculty, especially department heads.
- Develop focus groups as part of an assessment plan for all stakeholders in the advising program
- Review selected archived data; e.g., NSSE and other institutional sources

Identify key benchmark, operational indicators related to institutional goals

- Student population served by the advising center
- New students declared by census day
- New students declared by Advising Day
- End of term Probation & Suspension stats
- Appeals outcomes
- Other indicators as identified by an advising assessment plan
Summary of Recommendations

The previous section noted areas that if addressed would help clarify the role of advising across the campus community, improve communication, and fully align advising with the institution's and QEP’s missions. In addition, these improvements would make a positive impact on the Advising Center’s delivery of programs and approach to assessment. When reflecting on the interview data and considering the many good things we heard about the Advising Center, it was apparent that the summary recommendations should more fully address the broader concerns of a number of stakeholders in terms of the mission and goals of the advising center as they relate to the campus-wide advising mission, the role of both professional and faculty advisors, the place in the University structure most appropriate for the Advising Center’s “home,” the university-wide structure of an advising program and related roles and responsibilities and an assessment program that informs all decisions made about advising. The report titled “Meeting Student Demand for High-Touch Advising: Strategies and Implementation Tools for Elevating the Student Experience (2009)” was referenced and recommendations in the Advising Program Review summary are in line with the observations and recommendations made in the Education Advisory Board’s report. Since WCU is associated with the EAB, the report is an excellent resource for best-practice programs and implementation ideas. In addition, the report reviews the issues associated with several of the summary recommendations concerning professional and faculty advisor role, development and reward.

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that stakeholders had varying opinions about the broader advising issues as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The Reviewers respect these concerns and realize that changing the university model of where students are advised and who is accountable for the advising of undecided, pre-major and major students is certainly a path the University might want to consider. However, it is critical that before any decisions are made, there should be an initiative to assess the current university advising model – at both the Advising Center level and in the colleges/departments. As mentioned, there are many good advising initiatives in place. There are practices that reviewers questioned as having the impact intended, but there was no data to show impact – positive, negative, or neutral.

The Review Team also acknowledges the many changes in WCU’s leadership that are currently taking place. Leadership changes often create uncertainty that is reflected in how faculty, administrators and staff view programs, processes, and perceived outcomes. Again, the Review Team asserts the need for a comprehensive assessment program that will provide current and new leadership the data to make informed decisions about advising. This type of assessment prevents staff and program duplication and might prevent elimination of programs which in fact are successful. Also, informed decisions are critical as leaders look at resource allocation, advising and impact on student learning. Reallocation of resources to high-impact and performing programs that is framed in a collaborative assessment effort enhances institutional improvement and supports cultural change.

Based on a comprehensive assessment, the leadership can be positioned to make decisions about mission and goals, learning and process outcomes and advising organization and delivery that could be transformational for advising at WCU. The Review Team noted the growth of the WCU student population and the changes in the student population. Although beneficial for the institution, it does put the university in the position of having to deal with the “growing pains.” At the same time, resources are severely limited to support growth. These challenges may have also contributed to the different perceptions heard by the Review Team of how advising should be organized and where it should be housed for the undecided, pre-major and declared students. Assessment of the current state will position both academic and student affairs leaders to make
appropriate decisions based on student learning and academic advising - what should be learned when, who should deliver it and where – Enrollment Services or Undergraduate Studies and/or centralized or decentralized or a combination of both centralized and decentralized.

The focus should be on the impact advising has on student learning and progress towards degree completion. The Review Team recommends that the role of faculty advisors and professional advisors in student learning be clearly defined, supported, and celebrated. At times, various comments made aligned the role of the professional advisor as the person who checks requirements – similar to what a good degree audit should do. At other times, comments were made that inferred faculty advisors were not well informed and were not the best resource for students. Several comments inferred that mentoring took place only with faculty advisors. This divergent thinking about the role of advisors creates frustration and tensions. Clear learning outcomes that define the teaching role of both professional and faculty advisors, developed within a context of collaboration and partnership will contribute to an improved advising culture.

In closing, a quote from the article, ”Academic Advising in the New Global Century: Supporting Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes Achievement” written by S.M. Campbell and C.L. Nutt in AAC&U’s Peer Review, Winter 2008 follows:

*The trends in academic advising indicate that institutional recognition of academic advising is a campus wide responsibility in which all constituencies – administrators, students, faculty, and staff – work together to promote student success. As higher education continues to find itself increasingly under the microscope of internal and external scrutiny, it must identify strategic ways to demonstrate student satisfaction and learning. If considered integral to the teaching and learning mission of an institution, academic advising then offers the potential for this visible demonstration of student satisfaction and learning through the experiences of students who are well served and connected to the campus.*

The leaders of Western Carolina University have made great strides in considering academic advising as central to the teaching and learning mission of the institution, to the Quality Enhancement Plan and to student success. The work of the faculty, administrators and staff is evidence of this commitment. The promise of continued efforts in this area will further enhance the development of new foundations for excellence in the University's academic advising program, supporting the goal that WCU is an institution where students will synthesize knowledge and skills from their academic and co-curricular experiences to become intentional participants in their own learning (Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University – WCU's Quality Enhancement Plan).
Appendices
## Administrative Program Review for Advising Center - Campus Visit

**February 6-8, 2011 – UPDATED 2/2/11**

{Review Team Members – External Reviewer: Dr. Ruth Darling; Internal Reviewers: Mr. Larry Hammer & Dr. John Habel}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE/TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday, February 6</strong>&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Dr. Ruth Darling driving to campus from Knoxville, TN.</td>
<td>Dr. Darling to contact David Goss upon her arrival.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>McAlister’s Deli at Courtyard Dining Hall {Dr. John Habel will pick-up/return Dr. Darling to Madison Hall}.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, February 7</strong>&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30 – 8:15 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast Meeting with Linda Stanford (Interim Provost), David Onder (Assessment Coordinator), Dr. Bob Beichner (ACE Scholar) &amp; Review Team</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:15 – 8:30 AM</td>
<td>Transit to 225 Killian Annex</td>
<td>Internal Reviewers will escort Dr. Darling to 225 Killian Annex</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 – 9:15 AM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team, Student Support Services, Honors, Disability Services, TRACS, One Stop, Intercultural Programs, Leadership &amp; International Programs: Suzanne Baker, Steve Carlisle, Lance Alexis, Kurt Frederick, Mike Razdrh, James Felton, Jane Adams-Dunford, Yolany Gonell, Mike Corelli, Lois Petrovich-Mwaniki, Chris Pedo.</td>
<td>225 Killian Annex</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:15 – 10:15 AM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team, David Goss &amp; Tour of Advising Center Facilities</td>
<td>225 Killian Annex</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 – 10:30 AM</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:15 AM- 12:00 PM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team, Undergraduate Studies, FYE, Service Learning, Counseling Services, Campus Recreation, Base Camp Cullowhee: Carol Burton, Jennifer Cooper, John Ritchie, Michelle Cooper, Shauna Sage &amp; Josh Whitmore.</td>
<td>225 Killian Annex</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 - 12:15 PM</td>
<td>Break &amp;Transit to UC Dogwood Room</td>
<td>Internal Reviewers will escort Dr. Darling to UC Dogwood Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:15 - 1:15 PM</td>
<td>Lunch Meeting with Review Team &amp; Select Advising Center Students</td>
<td>UC Dogwood Room</td>
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Administrative Program Review for Advising Center - Campus Visit

February 6-8, 2011 – UPDATED 2/2/11

{Review Team Members – External Reviewer: Dr. Ruth Darling; Internal Reviewers: Mr. Larry Hammer & Dr. John Habel}

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE/TIME</th>
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<tr>
<td>1:15 - 1:30 PM</td>
<td>Transit to 225 Killian Annex</td>
<td>Internal Reviewers will escort Dr. Darling to 225 Killian Annex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 - 2:15 PM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team &amp; Fred Hinson, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor</td>
<td>225 Killian Annex</td>
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<td></td>
<td>for Academic Affairs.</td>
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<td>2:15 – 3:00 PM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team, Registrar &amp; IT: Larry Hammer, Kathy Green,</td>
<td>225 Killian Annex</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anita Samuel, Sherry Fox, Jeff Tatham.</td>
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<td>3:00 – 3:45 PM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team &amp; Advising Center Staff: Steve Baxley, Kristan</td>
<td>225 Killian Annex</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Blanton, Robert Boylan, Alicia Cameron (Graduate Assistant), Kim Cherry-</td>
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<td>Beck, Lisa Frady, Mary Lockey, Meredith McCall, Terry Michelsen,</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Pryor &amp; Will Shivers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45 – 4:00 PM</td>
<td>Transit to Madison Conference Room</td>
<td>Internal Reviewers will escort Dr. Darling to Madison Conference Room.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 – 4:15 PM</td>
<td>Meeting with Pamela Buchanan to sign paperwork.</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:15 – 5:30 PM</td>
<td>Work Meeting – Review team only</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Dinner Attending: - Review Team, David Goss &amp; Dr. Fred Hinson</td>
<td>Lulu’s (David Goss will pick up Dr. Darling at Madison Hall; Larry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hammer will return her there after dinner).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, February 8th</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30 – 8:15 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast with David Onder &amp; Review Team</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:15 – 9:30</td>
<td>Work Meeting for Review Team</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:15 AM</td>
<td>Meeting with Review Team, Financial Aid, Orientation, Residential Living</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<td>, Student Community Ethics, Student Success Centers: Sam Miller, Tammy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Haskett, Trina Orr, Keith Corzine, Chad Wilson, Shawna Young, Brian Boyer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>, Walter Turner, Chesney Reich &amp; Barbara Hardie.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 – 11:00 AM</td>
<td>Work Meeting for Review Team</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 AM -12:00 PM</td>
<td>Exit Meeting with Goss, Stanford, Lofquist, Hinson, Onder &amp; Review Team.</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 – 2:00 PM</td>
<td>Lunch/Work Meeting for Review Team.</td>
<td>Madison Conference Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>Depart Campus</td>
<td>Dr. Ruth Darling driving to Knoxville, TN via personal vehicle.</td>
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