The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Baker College

Project Details	
Title Design of a Process for Student Advising	**Status** COMPLETED
Category 1-Helping Students Learn	**Updated** 09-14-2009
Timeline	**Reviewed** 09-30-2009
Planned Project Kickoff 03-01-2007	**Created** 11-24-2009
Actual Completion 12-31-2009	**Version** 3

1: Project Goal

A: This project would result in the design of a new model for advising for students. As part of this project, a needs analysis of what different segments of students need from advising will be explored along with a review of current practices across all of our campuses and best practices at other institutions to identify what works. The project will also provide an opportunity for collaboration between admissions, student services, career services, and academics on how to most effectively provide advising. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that students start in the right program, receive the support needed to persist to graduation, and begin rewarding and successful careers.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In the Noel-Levitz Survey in 2005, advising was an issue where we were not meeting student expectation. A significant number of Conversation Day provocative propositions also called for strengthening our student advising processes. Retention data and data from the Constellation Survey provide support for this project as well.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Academics (counseling and academic advising in particular), Admissions, and Career Services

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Student advising begins with admissions before a student enrolls with Baker College. Beginning with new student orientation, admissions hands the student off to academics. As the student nears the end of their program, Career Services assists the student with work experience and identifying employment opportunities. Advising includes assisting a student select a program and deciding what classes to take and assisting with other decisions.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: We anticipate spending approximately a year in the planning phase before initiating pilot projects. The pilot phase should also last a year. The results of the pilots will be used in the third year to finalize a system-wide design for advising.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The action team will meet monthly to review progress. The leaders of the four action teams will also meet periodically to review progress of the four projects.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: One measure will be student satisfaction with advising as indicated on the Noel-Levitz survey. The action team will develop additional measures related to student retention and other outcomes.

8: Other Information

A: An action team led by the System Vice President of Academics has been formed to oversee this project.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The AQIP Advising Action Project Team met three times during the 2008-09 academic year (October 1, 2008, January 21, 2009, and April 29, 2009) to review the FYA statistics regarding student persistence rates, discuss the student tracking system implementation, and debrief the training needs and structure for the upcoming academic year. The following highlights the deliberations from these meetings: (1) The AQIP Advising Action Team spent a great amount of time during their meetings reviewing the persistence rates for individual first year advisors. There was an inconsistency of students assigned to first year advisors, due in part to the original decision to include only first time, full- or part-time students with no developmental education courses in the cohort for this project. However, the statistics indicate that there is no substantial correlation between the number of student assigned to individual first year advisors and the subsequent persistence rates of their students. The committee has reviewed the statistics regarding persistence rates from quarter to quarter and from fall to fall. The final statistical analysis will conclude on October 7, 2009 after Fall enrollment is finalized. The committee will reconvene after this date to complete the evaluation of the project's intent—impact student persistence rates from fall to fall. After this meeting (October 19, 2009), a final report will be tabulated and routed to the System Chief Academic Officers, Presidents, and System Executive Committee. This report will include recommendations for the institution to consider in the future. (2) During the deliberations for the AQIP Advising Action Project, the team discovered that more training was needed for the student tracking system. To that end, approximately 20 training sessions were conducted for various system user groups to review and demonstrate the appropriate utilization of the student tracking system. The development of this software system has allowed for assigning student advisors, tracking advising visits, student program messaging system, making appointments online, and sharing of information relevant to all students, a group of students, or individual students. The system also incorporated a student status and red light/yellow light system, which alerted advisors of special groups of students and issues were brought to the attention of students when they were meeting with staff members. Through the various system user group meetings and training sessions, feedback was given to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the tracking system. Version two of this student tracking system will be available before fall quarter commences in September 2009. The electronic questionnaire was implemented for new students that provided demographic information as well as information about the students' confidence regarding choice of program and ability to do college level work. This questionnaire was beneficial to first year advisors prior to meeting with individual students. (3) The initial week-long training for the FYAs was analyzed by the committee. Based on the evaluations and feedback from the FYAs attending the training, the committee decided that the training was beneficial as a comprehensive introduction to all departments within the institution. However, the committee did decide that the training should be conducted closer to the beginning of fall quarter 2009 (sometime in September) and perhaps broken down in modules and expanded over a period of time, instead of a week-long schedule. This allows for the FYAs to acclimate themselves to their campus environments, work with the current FYAs on their respective campuses, and focus on one department at a time. Also, five system FYA meetings were held during the 2008-09 academic year (September 17, 2008, November 24, 2008, January 26, 2009, March 23, 2009, June 22, 2009). These meetings were devoted to debriefing best practices with advising, training techniques, and informational sessions for the first year advising of a student. The System Vice President for Academics also met twice individually with each FYA throughout the academic year to review his/her individual statistics and to discuss strategies for increased persistence of the cohort groups. Eighteen First Year Advisors were hired throughout the system and continued with the project for the entire 2008-09 academic year. All attended a week-long training in August in of 2008 and attended the system FYA meetings mentioned above. Training was facilitated by staff from the following departments: Academics, Admissions, Business Office, Career Services, Computer Information Systems and Financial Aid. After this initial training, system meeting were held with this group. The group identified the following training modules that would benefit their positions: Personalized Rotation Schedules; Campus Offering Lists – System Rotation Schedule; Student Solar System Training; Financial Aid Questions and Expectations; Transfer Applications; Computer – Hands-on Training; Job Shadowing; Basic Attending Skills Training (Speaker / Role Playing); Consistent Implementation of Programs – Timelines for Professional Track Students – Strategies to Assist Students to Start Various Cohorts; Handling of Probationary Students; and TRA / TAA – Michigan Works – More information. The first year advisors also attended a two-day training session on June 8 and 9, which included the following topics: Kind of College; Phoning; Information Gathering; Business Model; Financial Aid; Online Campus; and Town Hall Meeting with Re-entry Students. This training was facilitated in collaboration between the academic, admissions, and financial aid departments.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The membership of the AQIP Advising Action Project Team changed somewhat this academic year but included a wide representation from both campuses and departments to help maintain the general awareness of the AQIP Advising Project. The membership included system staff and staff from six out of ten campuses. Campus representatives include one President, a VP for Admissions, a Director of Career Services, two Deans, a First Year Advisor (FYA). System staff includes the VP for Academics, VP for Finance, the Director of Scholarships and Grants, and a Computer Programmer/Analyst. Team members continued to solicit input from their departments and campuses. And as indicated in the answer to the first question, various departments have been trained on the utilization of the tracking system and were involved in the training for the FYAs. Regular updates on the project, specifically regarding persistence percentage rates were presented to various groups. The System Chief Academic Officers, Presidents Council and System Executive Committee were updated on the project during their monthly meetings and apprised of the budget implications; they continue to support the project. Team involvement and motivation continues to be high because of the success of the project's measurable persistence rates, which continue to increase for the first year advising cohort. Since all departments who meet with students have utilized the Student Tracking System, there continues to be a widespread interest in and support for the implementation of this advising program due to the accountability measurements that have been instituted, along with the support of the student tracking software for increased communication throughout campuses and the entire Baker College System.

3: Next Steps

A: Assessment and evaluation of the project will conclude in mid-October regarding the measurable outcome of this project regarding the persistence rates of first-time, full- or part-time students with no developmental education courses. Data will be analyzed and recommendations will be made regarding this action project for future considerations. The project team will make specific recommendations regarding further implementation of this first year advising process to include more than just the cohort identified in the 2008-09 academic year. The performance of each First Year Advisor will be reviewed and evaluated for fit for this position. There will be continued training and support provided to the First Year Advisors. They will meet at least quarterly as a group to share concerns and best practices. New training will be modified and implemented for newly hired FYAs for the 2009-10 academic year. Version two of the Student Tracking System software will be rolled out before the beginning of fall quarter 2009. Utilization of the tracking system will continued to be monitored for further training opportunities and modifications needed for user effectiveness.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: This action project provided a consistent implementation of academic advising that addressed the gaps that were identified by the institution that included elements such as, effective "hand off" of a new student to an identified academic advisor, accountability measurements of the academic advising process, and effective communication among all departments within the academic institution. The project has resulted in stronger working relationships and collaboration among various departments across campuses. Elements of this advising model could be adapted to other institutions as a more "effective practice." The development of an in house student advising software system which allowed various departments and campuses to track visits, share appropriate information, and identify student issues definitely resulted in a more efficient and effective tool to better assist students. This may be an "effective practice" that could be adopted or adapted by multi-campus institutions whose students commonly attend more than one campus.

5: Project Challenges

A: The new advising system has created a need for more staffing. This has presented a challenge for campus budgets. Since the project's main goal was to improve the persistence rates of students for fall to fall, final numbers will not be known until after the start of the school year. The original plan was for the implementation of this project to expand during the 2009-10 academic year such that a small group of campuses would implement this advising approach with all first-year students. However, because the results of the fall-to-fall persistence rates are not available as of yet, campus administrators were reluctant to implement and hire more first year advisors without a clear picture of the project's impact. Hence, the recommendation for this expanded project will be delayed until the end of December 2009 once the final assessment results are calculated. More intensive training was needed after the initial roll out of the student tracking system. This training was very labor intensive and time consuming for a couple members of the AQIP Advising Project Team. The ongoing training of campus personnel will continue to be a challenge and will rely on trained campus personnel to establish training modules for newly hired campus personnel. Some members of the action team were struggling with balancing their regular campus responsibilities with the responsibilities generated by this action project. This was projected to be alleviated this academic year for most team members. This proved to be the case for most action team members. However, there were four action team members that participated in all of the FYA system meetings and training sessions. The goal of this action project is still to implement a comprehensive advising system for all new students. However, the three-year implementation period may need to be re-evaluated. The cohort of the 2009-10 academic year will be expanded, if necessary, in order to provide consistent student numbers

for all first year advisors. The action team recommended that the cohort given to each first year advisor for fall 2009 include all new, first-time students who do not require any developmental education courses. Additionally, if the cohort student numbers do not equate to the recommended numbers, additional students outside of these parameters be added to the first year advising cohort in order to obtain the recommended numbers indicated by the action team.

6: AQIP Involvement

A: At this time, the college is not seeking additional consultation on this project.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The institution has taken great strides in meeting with key stakeholders to not only evaluate current processes related to advising, but also evaluating the Action Project itself as it moves through the process. The institution is also showing that it is making decisions based on both data collected and the experiences of advisors. The training sessions that are being provided are extensive and inclusive, but the institution also is aware that the time commitment is a challenge. The institution is taking to heart the need to Understand Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs (AQIP Category 3) by continuously revisiting and rethinking the training needs of this project.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The team involvement within this strategic action project is clear and is representative of a large portion of the institution's community. Updates, data, and communication initiatives by this college is commendable. It is encouraging to see that involvement and motivation continues to be high for this project.

3: Next Steps

A: The continued collection and analyses of data related to the students' persistence rates is a key step in continuing with this action project. The evolvement of the training process and the implementation of the second version of the student tracking system shows that the institution is committed to the continued success of this project.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Other institutions could learn from the project and process that this institution has created. Being able to identify gaps in services and then effectively correct those by creating a more useable internal advising software is something that other institutions could implement.

5: Project Challenges

A: This action project has uncovered some barriers that the group encountered. The college quickly learned that this project lead to staffing issues on campus. Knowing that these staffing issues are also related to the institutions overall budget, the leaders of this project have noted that full implementation of this project may take longer than expected.

6: AQIP Involvement

A: N/A

Project Outcome

1:   **Reason for completion**

A: The project is being closed because the primary objectives have been addressed. Institutional changes in practice including the development of a new position (First Year Advisor; FYA), new training procedures, and new assessment and reporting standards have been implemented and institutionalized.

2:   **Success Factors**

A: The implementation of a new advising model has led to increased retention (year to year) among new first-time-in-college students. This is the most important success. Additionally, the implementation of direct metrics to understand FYA behavior has allowed the institution to better understand what interactions are leading to success and to help FYAs increase their success with students by providing direct and meaningful feedback. The interdepartmental training was also highly successful and has helped increase cooperation across departments and ensured that FYAs have broader knowledge of the institution to help students.

3:   **Unsuccessful Factors**

A: The project has failed to adequately identify what an FYA student caseload should be. Current FYA assignments vary considerably and work will continue to try and determine what these work assignments should consist of.