State of-the-Art Academic Advising

Eastern Washington University

Strengths and Weaknesses Report

To

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Executive Summary

In January 2015, EWU senior leaders formed the Academic Advising Task Force (AATF) and charged the group with completing research regarding strengths and weaknesses of current EWU advising practices, including gathering data as needed through focus groups, external consultants’ reviews, current advisor groups, and departmental/College faculty and staff.

Following eight weeks of research and discussions with various constituent groups (see Appendix B), including a thorough review of EWU internal reports, quantitative and qualitative student satisfaction data, and academic advising literature related to students’ needs, the AATF conducted an analysis for the current academic advising system at EWU and identified the following key strengths and weaknesses:

**Key Weaknesses**

- Inconsistent academic advising practices, policies and procedures.
- A lack of timely, accurate, and relevant information for students and advisors.
- Excessive caseloads decrease access to academic advisors, and do not allow for proactive student/advisor relationships.
- Insufficient academic forecasting and course scheduling across campus.
- A lack of training, clarity, and consistency in the roles and responsibilities of faculty and professional advisors.
- A lack of advising and targeted services for undecided, sophomore, and transfer students.
- Insufficient availability and use of technological tools for students and advisors.

**Key Strengths**

- All faculty, GUAA, and most of the college academic advisors hold a minimum of a master’s degree, or have at least 5 years of academic advising experience. This qualified core of advisors has a strong understanding of degree/major preparation and general education requirements, respectively.
- EWU professional academic advisors have a solid understanding of student needs at key transition points. (Student needs defined in Appendix C).
- Strong advising support programs for at-risk students in specialty programs.
- A culture of campus collaboration that supports students’ achievement of academic and personal goals. Examples include firstSTEP, Majors Fair, and Pathways and referrals to CAPs, and Disability Services.
- Available infrastructure that allows for technology support of student/advisor relationship.
- Dedicated advising services for specific populations which offer a lower staff-to-student ratio (ex: student-athletes and TRiO).

Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of EWU’s current academic advising system was the first stage in completing the charge assigned to the AATF. In stage two, the AATF will develop and propose a new model for academic advising at EWU. The formal proposal will be submitted to the PEC on April 17, 2015. While the strengths and weaknesses identified in this study will be considered as the AATF moves forward, these strengths and weaknesses will not define a future academic advising model. Instead, the AATF will rely heavily on student needs, the recommendations of external expert consultants, and a review of national best practices to implement a State-of-the-art advising program for EWU.
Academic Advising Strengths and Weaknesses

On January 23, 2015, the Provost, Dr. Rex Fuller, the Vice President of Student Affairs, Stacy Morgan-Foster, the Vice President of Information Technology, Gary Pratt, and the Vice President of Business and Finance, Mary Voves, charged the Academic Advising Task Force with completing research regarding the strengths and weaknesses of current EWU advising practices, including gathering data as needed through focus groups, external consultants’ reviews, current advisor groups, and departmental/college faculty and staff.

The AATF conducted eight weeks of research and discussion with various constituent groups (see Appendix B) to identify key strengths and weaknesses of the University’s current academic advising system. A thorough review of EWU internal reports, quantitative and qualitative student satisfaction data, and academic advising literature related to student needs was utilized to complete this analysis.

In addition, the committee was provided a summary of salient literature regarding academic advising in order to inform its discussions (see Appendix C). This literature review identified three key factors that increase student satisfaction with academic advising:

- Advising relationship between student and advisor
- Exchange of timely and accurate information between advisors and students
- Advisor accessibility

The academic advising structure (decentralized, centralized, shared), the academic advising model (faculty only, staff only, or split model), or the academic approach (proactive/intrusive, appreciative, prescriptive, developmental), is less relevant to students’ satisfaction with academic advising than the ability to access an academic advisor in a reasonable timeframe; receiving accurate and timely information from academic advisors; and/or the academic advising relationship between students and academic advisors. A state-of-the-art academic advising program will provide: timely, accurate, and relevant information to students; consistency in academic advising practices, policies and procedures, including who sees whom and when; and adequate support for the student and advisor relationship.

AATF Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis

Strengths and weaknesses have been organized thematically by student transition periods, including the following:

- the transition period into college (from matriculation to the start of classes)
- the first year of college
- the second year of college
- the transfer into Eastern Washington University from another institution
- the junior/senior years
- career planning and graduation

Additional themes included an examination of the impact of EWU policies, practices, procedures, administration, workloads, assessment, advisor development, facilities, and technology use in academic advising.
Of particular concern in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of students’ experiences was the lack of congruency in quantitative and qualitative student satisfaction data. The low number of student participants in student focus groups, student satisfaction surveys, and the difficulty in collecting individual student satisfaction reports contributed to this lack of congruency. In order to increase the number of student participants contributing to this report the NACADA Consultants met with over 50 students during their visit. They obtained qualitative data that supports the strengths and weaknesses identified by the AATF.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current First Year Advising Program**

Multiple primary advising units see first-year students: General Undergraduate Academic Advising (GUAA); the College of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (CSTEM); and specific populations such as Athletics, Eastern Advantage, Honors, Office of Global Initiatives, TRiO, CAMP, American Indian Studies, and Music. Nearly 500 first-year students admitted in fall 2014 were advised by specific population advisors. Just over 400 students admitted in fall 2014 were advised in CSTEM. The remaining first-year students, about 700, were assigned to GUAA.

All first-year students have a mandatory advising requirement which remains in effect until the student reaches 45 credits. Advisors working with specific populations offer hour long appointments, and may meet with students more than once per quarter. Advisors in CSTEM and GUAA accommodate large caseloads by offering group information sessions and 30 minute appointments once per quarter. The format and information covered in academic advising appointments with first-year students changes based on the advisor. Most advisors will teach students how to: use EagleNET, SOAR, to read a catalog, and to read the class schedule. Additional topics covered in academic advising appointments include major exploration, competitive program requirements, academic planning, and academic progress.

Some academic programs allow first-year students to declare a major. If a student declares into one of those programs, they are reassigned to a college/faculty advisor. All first-year students are strongly encouraged to identify a major within their first year. However, many students will be ineligible to declare their preferred major until their sophomore or junior years due to program and major admission requirements. Students ineligible to declare may remain assigned to the first-year advisor until the program/college advisor will accept the student, or until they are reassigned to a GUAA advisor at the first-year advisor’s request.

**Strengths**

- Among both first-year students and seniors, ~50% rate their interactions with academic advisors highly (a 6 or 7 on a scale from 1 “poor” to 7 “excellent” in the NSSE 2014 engagement indicators); this seems to correspond with data from the Noel-Levitz 2nd Year Pilot Inventory data in which approximately half (56%) of first-year students expressed satisfaction with the “level of communication with [their] academic advisor.” EWU is relatively consistent with its NSSE peers (Far West Public and Carnegie Class).

- 76% of firstSTEP student survey respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the student advisement/registration component of the orientation session (76% rated the program “good” or “excellent”). Additionally, 88% of firstSTEP respondents stated that their advisor was “friendly and made me feel welcome,” 89% stated that their advisor was “knowledgeable and able to answer my questions,” and 94% stated they would “feel comfortable contacting my advisor.
following firstSTEP if I had a questions or needed advice.” (2014 firstSTEP Survey N=~280, varies by question)

- All academic advisors work with the firstSTEP staff to coordinate information for new students.
- Students are assigned to an academic advisor after admission confirmation and are able to contact the advisor early.
- First-year students are required to meet with an academic advisor before registering for the next quarter. This mandatory requirement means that at least one institutional representative will connect with a student once a quarter for the first 45 credits.
- Advisors support a student’s career discovery process by referring undecided students to the Career Services CRSV 210 class during the second and third quarter of the first year.

**Weaknesses**

- The scheduling and registration session at firstSTEP focuses on the transaction of registration instead of beginning the students’ holistic student development. (B&G, BPA, and Academic Advising Workgroup).
- While students are assigned to their advisors early in the admissions process, students may be unable to meet with their advisor due to advisor availability until firstSTEP or later. Many faculty contracts do not include summer, and non-faculty advisors typically have few options for providing back-up during leave times.
- During summer 2014, approximately 100 students or parents expressed dissatisfaction with the advising experience at firstSTEP. Concerns most commonly expressed by parents and students included: dissatisfaction that they had not received an individual advising appointment, dissatisfaction with their assigned academic advisor, dissatisfaction with courses for which the student registered. (Anecdotal, complaints received by the Director of Academic Advising)

Throughout the first-year, students report finding it difficult to schedule timely academic advising appointments with their advisors. GUAA and CSTEM advisors report feeling rushed because of the limited amount of time they have with students and the number of students they are required to see.

- If a first-year student declares a major and then changes his/her mind, the university has no procedure for “undeclaring” that student. The student remains a declared major until they identify a new major to declare. The GUAA sees this most frequently with students originally declaring majors in CSTEM. First-year students declare majors in the sciences or engineering fields and then realize after one or two quarters that they lack the aptitude or the passion for the major they declared. These students are usually routed to the GUAA for advising until they identify a new major.
- Lack of clear first-year learning expectations among first-year academic advisors means that not all first-year students are receiving instruction on tools, resources, or preparation for reassignment to a college/faculty advisor.
- Students have reported that advising appointments are both too short and too long. Advisors may not be interpreting a student’s needs correctly, or may not have flexibility in their schedules to allow for longer appointments.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current Academic Advising Program for Second Year and Undecided Students**

There are four categories of sophomore students:
- Students who are **decided** about their major and **declared** in their major of choice (decided-declared)
- Students who are **decided** about their major but **undeclared** in their major of choice (decided-undeclared)
- Students who are **undecided** in their major and **undeclared** (undecided-undeclared)
- Students who are **undecided** in their major but **declared** in a major (undecided-declared)

Each category of students presents a different advising process.

Decided-declared students are assigned to faculty advisors/program advisors in the academic department. Decided-undeclared students are students completing requirements for program/major admission. The Decided-undeclared students are assigned to either a GUAA or a college advisor, depending on the department, until they are eligible to declare and they are then assigned to a faculty advisor.

Undecided-undeclared students are typically assigned to a GUAA advisor to explore major options. Undecided-declared students remain assigned to the advisor for the major they declared. They can opt to remain with that advisor, but that faculty advisor may not know the nuances of the new program the student is pursuing. Faculty advisors encourage these students to request an advisor change. Most students requesting a change of advisor are reassigned to the GUAA for assistance in exploring major options.

Sophomores normally stay with their current advisor as they transition into the second year, but many do not actively seek advice. At the beginning of the second year, students with more than 45 credits are not required to meet with an academic advisor unless they are on academic probation. Additionally, when sophomores seek academic advice, the advice is usually tailored toward connecting and preparing the student for their particular major. The information covered in an academic advising appointment at this level differs per department, per advisor, and per student.

**Strengths**
- Career Services has developed a course, CRSV 210, which provides students with information about career decision-making. In the last year, 120 students have taken this course. Academic advisors are successful in referring students into CRSV 210. Course outcomes indicate that students have used the time to explore their skills, abilities and interests.
- Eastern Advantage, TRiO, and other specific populations have also developed similar career-based workshops for their participants. Program feedback indicated students used the time to explore their skills, abilities and interests.
- Career Services reaches out to students who are undeclared and offers career decision-making services.
- Undecided students are advised centrally, allowing for a greater level of support as these students are exploring majors.
- Eastern’s professional advisors work closely with student affairs staff to provide the most up-to-date information and appropriate referrals to students. There are liaisons between GUAA and Career Services, Financial Aid, and the Registrar’s Office. Undergraduate Studies and Student Success (USSS) and Career Services have successfully collaborated on a number of programs, including the Majors Fair.
Weaknesses

- The re-assignment of students to college/faculty advisors lacks clarity, continuity and consistency. This is especially harmful to sophomore students because of the diverse admission requirements for each department. Academic programs determine credit or course requirements needed prior to accepting students into a major. These requirements can change without going through an oversight process.

- Sophomore students are not required to meet with an academic advisor and, in many cases, may not have timely access to an academic advisor due to advisor workloads. This lack of interaction with an advisor can create a feeling of disconnect with the university. Students find themselves without an advisor at a critical transition point at which independent research indicates students need additional academic advising support—not less.

- College representatives (staff and faculty) often do not have the time to build advising relationships with students due to high caseloads and split job duties. Students will continue to see GUAA advisors because of the rapport they have developed with them.

- Program admission requirements and college/faculty advising parameters can and do change frequently. These changes do not always filter down to the students and advisors in a timely manner. This can result in a student fulfilling the wrong expectations for program admission, and then being denied to the program.

- According to the Enrollment Management student focus group, students cite concerns that advisors have low academic expectations of them. Part of this is due to the competitive nature of some programs. If a student is competing for a spot in a highly-competitive program, then getting into the program becomes a higher priority than graduating in four years. In those cases, advisors may recommend a reduced credit-hour load in order to improve the student’s chances of getting into the program.

- Students also express a need for more connection with advisors. College advisors and specific population advisors are actively recruiting students, and are not available to advise students.

- There are a limited number of seats in CRSV 210, which prevents all students who need the class from taking it.

- The major declaration process is confusing for students to navigate. The process is confusing to advisors as well, given that the process is different for many departments. Once declared, a student must remain in the declared major until he/she can complete the declaration process for a different major. EWU does not have a process for “undeclaring” a student from a major if the student changes his/her mind.

- Once declared, students are not required to meet with their new advisor until they apply for graduation. If students decide to “undeclare” or switch majors after declaring the first time, they tend to self-advice and “float” between programs, with no intervention.

- New students entering EWU with extensive credit through Running Start or other venues may not be required to meet with an advisor until major declaration.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Current Academic Advising Program for Transfer Students

The advising situations for transfer students vary based on total credits transferred, major requirements, and whether the student earned the credit before or after high school graduation.

Students with 40 or more transfer credits earned after high school graduation are most often assigned to a college advisor. Exceptions include colleges who will not advise a transfer student until the transfer
student has met program admission requirements. In these cases, the transfer student is assigned to a GUAA advisor. GUAA and college advisors remain as the advisor for these students until they are eligible to declare a major.

Transfer students with 90 credits or more have the additional requirement of declaring a major during their first term to avoid a declaration hold on their student record. If transfer students with more than 90 credits are eligible to declare a major immediately after admission confirmation, then those students are assigned to faculty. However, if those transfer students do not meet the admission/major declaration requirements for their desired program, they remain with a college advisor until they are eligible to declare.

First-year students with fewer than 40 transfer credits are assigned to first-year advisors for their initial advising contact, but may be reassigned to a college or faculty advisor during the first or second quarter based on declaration eligibility. Additionally, a first-year student’s status changes at the end of their first quarter based on credit totals. For example, a first-year student with 40 transfer credits is only required to meet with an academic advisor twice—once to register as a new student, and again to register for their second quarter.

All transfer students are required to meet with an academic advisor before they can register for their first quarter. After that initial meeting, most transfer students have no additional requirement to meet with an academic advisor. Undeclared transfer students with more than 45 credits and less than 90 credits are required to meet with an advisor in order to get their major declaration form signed. Declared students, regardless of credits earned, are required to meet with an academic advisor to have their graduation application signed.

**Strengths**

- The development of the Transfer Center has been instrumental in building relationships with the community college system in Washington. The increased awareness in transfer students’ needs has resulted in a 3.4% increase in transfer student persistence, as well as in the following accomplishments:
  - state-wide articulation agreements (DTAs)
  - dual enrollment program (Destination Eastern)
  - program articulations
  - reverse transfer agreements
  - central location and single point person for communication of information
  - coordination of curricular review, leading to the establishment of transfer equivalency tables
- The Director Transfer Center is working closely with CC advisors to instill in students the transformative benefits of academic planning to be “major ready” as they transfer into EWU.
Weaknesses

- “100% of transfer students and ~60% of first-year students bring in transfer credit – but they do not receive and evaluation until much later.” There seem to be significant delays in evaluating transcripts (Kari Blinn, BPA 2014). The facilitator also noted that when recruiting students, one of the three main questions students ask is: “How will my courses count?”
- Due to the volume of courses slated for evaluation, most of the work is being completed through a reactive process. EWU has two people handling transcript evaluations, and one person working with SOAR. The Director of the Transfer Center is handling equivalencies upon request. These three functions are time intensive and even the automated portion of this process requires substantial human decision-making.
- Some community college (CC) advisors are not seeing the advantages of Destination Eastern in its current form. CC would rather create individual articulation agreements.
- Transfer students may or may not be assigned directly to faculty. Faculty may or may not inform transfer students of the tools and resources available to them. Faculty may or may not take the time to help a student create an educational plan.
- Transfer students have reported dissatisfaction with faculty advising due to the lack of faculty availability, the insufficient time spent on tools, resources, and educational planning (Student Focus Group, 2014).
- Faculty are typically not available during the summer months to advise new transfer students.
- Class schedules are not forecasted out enough, preventing students from defining a comprehensive academic plan, and there often are not spaces for students in currently offered classes.
- Undecided transfer students lack an educational plan and have completed many, if not all, of the general education requirements. EWU offers few introduction to the major courses to assist these students in identifying a path.
- Inconsistent advisor assignment practices create confusion among campus advisors making referrals and among students seeking help from advisors as they attempt to change areas of interest.
- Transfer students do not receive the same instruction and referrals that are provided to traditional first-year students. Transfer students are often unaware of the resources available to them, or of EWU policies, procedures and practices.
- Banner does not recognize transfer work in SOAR as having met pre-requisites for registration, creating barriers to registration for students when timely access to a course can mean the difference in a shorter time to degree.
- An increasing number of prospective transfer students are requesting transcript evaluations, academic advising, and course scheduling before they apply to the university. These students are shopping for a college that will accept most (if not all) of their credits and allow them to have a seamless transition from one institution to another. Our current system is not designed to provide this level of service.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current Academic Advising Program for Upperclassmen

Undecided juniors will have a major declaration hold placed on their academic record and must meet with an advisor to register for classes. Undecided juniors and seniors are either completing program admission requirements and are not yet eligible for declaration, are still undecided, or are unaware that
they had to file a declaration form. Declared students will have no hold and no requirement to meet with their faculty advisor until they apply for graduation.

Strengths

- Most faculty and professional advisors care about the success of their advisees. Faculty members expressed their passion for high-quality academic advising during the EWU Strategic Planning Conference Breakout Session (2014) n=~100.
- Many faculty members expressed their desire to be part of a quality academic advising model.
- Faculty connect students to a wide range of resources for career success. Examples include: assistance in finding internships, undergraduate research opportunities, professional associations, GRE preps, graduate schools recommendations, and career networks.
- Academic departments, which provide excellent faculty academic advisors, enhance the student’s advising experience by expanding the conversations to include internships and preparing for the Senior Capstone (junior and senior year).
- The degree audit system (SOAR) works well for those who know how to use it. More than 8,000 students (“unique users”) have used SOAR this academic year.
- Colleges have professional advisors who usually handle transfer students or special cases. These professional advisors are sometimes the most knowledgeable people on campus regarding graduation requirements.

Weaknesses

- Faculty leadership mentioned their frustration with the lack of recognition and rewards for their advising accomplishments:
  People will do what they get rewarded for. There is no release time or reward for doing advising. There needs to be some reward to do that if you expect faculty to advise… Faculty members get more recognition for publishing papers rather than volunteering to help students. (B&G)

- Departmental advising by professional advisors tends to be more consistent (one or two advisors versus unlimited numbers of faculty). College advisors are more knowledgeable about major and graduation requirements, but they may have less knowledge about the mentoring connections so critical at this stage of a student’s career.
- Although the current faculty CBA outlines an expectation for faculty to advise students who are declared majors/minors in their department, no reward for doing so currently exists.
- Article 5: Tenure and Promotion, of the CBA, does not take into consideration the performance of academic advising duties. If academic advising is not a component of a faculty member’s Faculty Activity Plan (FAP), then all other performance measures within the plan take priority over academic advising.
- There is no formal advisor-training program for faculty advisors, which may contribute to their hesitancy to answer academic questions that fall outside their specific discipline.
- Faculty advisors are tasked with providing advising services in addition to their normal teaching and research workloads, resulting in minimal time for academic advising. As a result, some students return to their college advisor or to GUAA frequently because their faculty advisor is unavailable.
- Currently, Eastern pairs an upper-class student with a faculty advisor once the student declares a major. However, faculty members consistently refer their students to the GUAA office for
questions about general education requirements. This discontinuity between advising services runs counter to best practices literature regarding a quality advising relationship.

- Few departments have enough faculty to effectively handle additional advising loads.
- Students have inconsistent advising experiences due to decentralized decision-making and the resulting variance in academic requirements developed by colleges and departments. These requirements serve as gates to control admission to programs. Units implement these requirements to manage workload and to make sure high achieving students enter their programs.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Academic Advising Administration and Workload in the Current System**

Eastern utilizes a decentralized advising model, where students may see different academic advisors depending on their academic interests. In order to coordinate advising functions and policies across campus, an Academic Advising Workgroup (consisting of practitioners), and an Academic Advising Task Force (consisting of university directors and administrators), was created. The workgroup reports to the Director of Academic Advising.

EWU’s academic advising model is housed within Academic Affairs. The GUAA reports to the Director of Academic Advising, and this position reports to the Vice Provost of USSS, who in turn, reports to the Provost. There are approximately nine college advisors and 300 faculty advisors reporting to college deans spread among EWU’s three main campuses (Cheney, Riverpoint and Bellevue).

**Strengths**

- EWU provides academic advisors with opportunities for professional development by supporting attendance at local, state and national academic advising conferences. EWU ACADA also provides campus information sessions specific to relevant academic advising topics.
- Students are becoming more aware of the advising service at the kiosk desk in the Learning Commons. GUAA is seeing an increasing number of students with general questions.
- College advisors are housed near the deans’ offices for their programs. These advisors provide information and support to college deans and faculty, as well as liaise with GUAA advisors.

**Weaknesses**

- During the NACADA consultants’ meeting with students, many students stated they did not have access to either college or faculty advisors. Several decided to self-advice because they could not get a meeting with their advisor. (n=50 students)
- Each college has identified its own set of policies, procedures, and practices without oversight by a single administrative unit.
- Professional advisors feel their voices are not being heard. Advisors are the initial contact with students in regard to course demand and unwieldy procedures and processes, yet they feel they are not consulted in areas where they could provide critical data for decision-making.
- Students reported that it was difficult to get advising appointments. They stated they would either be advised by a non-academic advisor or self-advice. One student stated to the consultants, “Students don’t make good academic advisors.”
- Workload is a critical issue across campus. General advisors in GUAA are assigned caseloads of nearly 400 students. Some college advisors have caseloads that approach 700. Typical caseloads for full-time general advisors at four-year schools in the region are closer to 300. Since EWU is on the quarter system, the case-load should be around 225-250 for a full-time professional general advisor.
• Each college and several specific populations provide decentralized advising. This model provides students with the opportunity to connect with the unit. However, it creates issues for students when advisors do not have unit-level backup. Students want to make contact with their advisors quickly. Having to wait for an answer because an advisor is on vacation or leave generates student complaints.
• Professional advisors are not evaluated using the same methods and criteria. Additionally, some advisors are not held accountable for poor performance evaluations, creating inconsistency across campus.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current System for Feedback, Assessment, and Advisor Development
GUAA has conducted sporadic assessments of advising services across campus, but no formal and programmatic assessment process exists. Students are encouraged to provide feedback, but there is no means to collect it or analyze the data for trends. Some advisors have taken it upon themselves to implement feedback and assessment systems, but the results of those efforts only apply to that one advisor.

Additionally, there is no formal training process for professional advisors or faculty advisors. Most advisors are trained on-the-job or through other informal means. However, all advisors across campus are encouraged to join EWU’s Academic Advising Association (ACADA) in order to improve their effectiveness as advisors. EWU ACADA meets monthly to discuss critical national issues around advising, as well as changes happening at the institutional level. Professional development through EWU ACADA is not meant to be a substitute for formal advisor training—it is only a means to enhance advisor skills and promote camaraderie in the profession.

Strengths
• Among both first-year students and seniors, ~50% rate their interactions with academic advisors highly (a 6 or 7 on a scale from 1 “poor” to 7 “excellent” in the NSSE 2014 engagement indicators); this seems to correspond with data from the Noel-Levitz 2nd Year Pilot Inventory data in which approximately half (56%) of first-year students expressed satisfaction with the “level of communication with [their] academic advisor.” EWU is relatively consistent with its NSSE peers (Far West Public and Carnegie Class).
• EWU provides academic advisors with opportunities for professional development by supporting attendance at local, state and national academic advising conferences. EWU ACADA also provides informational sessions on campus specific topics relevant to academic advisors.
• EWU is developing a Faculty Commons designed to promote teaching learning and advising.

Weaknesses
• Among seniors, 46% rate their experience with academic advisors highly (a 6 or 7 on a scale from 1 “poor” to 7 “excellent” in the NSSE 2014 engagement indicators); EWU is relatively consistent (48%) with its NSSE peers (Far West Public and Carnegie Class) (n=447).
• Student learning outcomes for academic advising have not been developed on a campus-wide level. The Academic Advising Workgroup (AAW) stated, “Consistency across advisors mitigates student confusion.” All students should receive the same message about what advising is and how advisors help students.
• There is no consistent plan for assessing the effectiveness of academic advising.
• Consistent assessment of students’ satisfaction with academic advising is limited to the NSSE.
• Faculty members are not trained in the theories and best practices for advising students (B&G).
• Satisfaction survey results are not normed nationally.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of EWU Policies, Processes and Practices**

The policies, procedures and practices of advising at EWU vary from department to department. As a general rule, advisors must meet with all students who require mandatory advising. However, the length of each advising appointment and the number of meetings per quarter vary depending on advisor caseloads and available time.

**Strengths**

- EWU utilizes registration holds as a means to perform proactive advising. Students with fewer than 45 earned credit hours, students on academic warning or probation, and students who must declare their major are required to meet with their academic advisors prior to registering for the next quarter’s courses or prior to changing their schedule. This intervention is needed to ensure students are making choices that improve retention and promote academic success.

**Weaknesses**

- The BPA identified the “area of study” selection process as problematic. Students change their areas of study prior to declaring a major. However, there are no adjustments for this in the Banner system. This process is critical in maintaining accurate caseloads and records for academic advising, and in predicting future course enrollments.
- The SSRC, the AAW, and the 2014 BPA group noted that the major declaration was identified as a process that needs improvement. Students cannot currently move from a declared major back to an undeclared status. In colleges who advise students to declare a major during the first year, the lack of a process for this situation is problematic.
- Academic advisors can change the name of a student’s advisor in Banner, but the interest area code cannot be changed by any unit except the Records and Registration Office. This creates disconnect between the advisor’s name and the area of study.
- The major declaration process is linked to competitive program admission. Students who have not completed the competitive entry requirements, but have identified as a student in the competitive program, are still considered a non-major. Some of these students may have declaration registration holds placed on their records after they are juniors.
- The Student Success and Retention Committee (SSRC) identified the lack of a consistent transition policy for student advisor assignments as a challenge for new and continuing students: The point at which college and departmental advisors see students is defined differently for each group. For example, CSTEM college advisors see students immediately as freshman, the CALE and CBPA advisors do not. The Academic Success Center will see freshman interested in all majors and who meet certain eligibility requirements. It makes for some confusion among students and campus partners. (SSRC Report, 2013, p. 2)

Additionally, in a student letter written to The Easterner, the EWU student newspaper, the authors commented on the transition between first-year advisors and major advisors:

Students at Eastern Washington University feel that there is a problem that needs to be changed on campus. There is a disconnection between freshman advising and major advising. Students are unsure of who to go
to for help because they receive different advice from different advisors. This issue affects all students and causes confusion. (Madison, O’Saughnessey, Elington, and Smith, 2014)

Though this is a single letter to the editor, it describes what both faculty and professional advisors have identified as an issue when working with late juniors and seniors.

- The AAW has representatives from GUAA, college advising, specific population programs, and student affairs units. The group stated that advising at EWU lacks a campus-wide advising philosophy that leads to inconsistent practices that confuse students. Philosophies are different in each advising area. The literature states development of a campus-wide philosophy is important for moving advising toward a consistent perspective.
- The AAW also supported the need for mid-term and early warning programs. They expressed concerns about how students will be served through these programs. If the program requires a meeting with an advisor, the advisor will need to prioritize students needing early warning intervention over those with mandatory registration holds. This becomes a workload issue.
- Academic advisors recommend that students register for 15 credits per quarter in an effort to graduate in 4 years; 27% continue to enroll in fewer than 15 credits.
- Currently, some faculty reach out to students who are experiencing attendance, academic, or behavioral issues and refer them to campus resources. However, there is no automatic or systematic way in which all faculty members provide students with information about EWU support services. Tinto, Barefoot, and Gardner stated that having an early alert system is critical to student success, and that academic advisors can serve a role in providing needed interventions.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Academic Advising Facilities and Technology**

Currently, the GUAA is located in Sutton Hall 103. Sutton Hall also houses Student Financial Services, Student Financial Aid, and the Records and Registration Office. Due to concerns related to confidentiality of student records, and over monies in the building, the doors of Sutton Hall lock at 5:00 PM and unlock at 8:00 AM. The advising space in Sutton Hall is comprised of a front desk and side-by-side cubicles. When fully staffed, the GUAA is home to six full-time advisors, one three-quarter time advisor, an Assistant Director and the Director. Appointment scheduling, taking phone calls, and greeting students at the front desk are duties performed by GUAA work-study students.

The college advisors have office space within their respective colleges. Some of those spaces are within the Deans’ offices, while other college advisors are placed in alternate locations in their college. College advisors handle their own scheduling. Faculty advisors typically have an office space from which they can advise. Faculty typically handle their own scheduling.

EWU students have access to a degree auditing system known as SOAR. SOAR allows students to track their progress in completing degree requirements. Students also have access to a schedule planning tool that allows them to create potential class schedules automatically.
**Strengths**

- UAchieve and EagleNET have been key tools in providing students with information about where they are in their academic progress. EWU has an effective degree audit system in place that can provide both advisors and students with useful tools that outline a roadmap for academic success.
- Available infrastructure that allows for expansion of technology support of student/advisor relationship.

**Weaknesses**

- Although EWU owns both applications, the implementation of UAchieve was customized in such a way that it made upgrades for compatibility with UDirect difficult. As a result, UAchieve does not perform to its fullest potential, and none of the benefits of UDirect have been realized.
- There is confusion about the differences between the portal, myEWU, EagleNET, etc. (BPA)
- GUAA, the Transfer Center, TRiO, and the ethnic studies programs are housed in multiple locations across campus. This makes coordination between these departments difficult and limits their ability to share resources.
- GUAA is limited to offering advising services from 8am – 5pm, M-F, without becoming a security issue for the other units in the building. A solution has been identified, but requires additional staffing in the front lobby. It should be noted that this solution does not secure the entire building.
- Lack of student confidentiality and potential FERPA violations are a concern for GUAA advisors in their current configuration.
Appendix A

Charge to the AATF

Academic Advising Task Force

Vision: EWU’s advising system will significantly improve our students’ academic success, retention, and time to degree. Outstanding advising will be a hallmark of EWU’s academic excellence.

Charge: In the 2014-15 academic year, the Academic Advising Task Force (AATF) will propose a state-of-the-art advising system for all EWU undergraduates that will begin at least partial implementation in fall 2015. In Winter and early Spring 2015, the AATF will (1) evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of current advising at all undergraduate levels, (2) consider proven best practices across the country, and (3) propose an advising system design that empowers students, respecting autonomy and individual situations while challenging students with high academic expectations.

State-of-the-art academic advising at Eastern Washington University will take an integrated approach to advising that includes all aspects of the student experience and assists students in meeting their personal and academic goals.

Overview of EWU’s Academic Advising

- Academic advising will be intrusive and mandatory.
- Every EWU student will have an advisor prior to FirstSTEP and orientation and then through every academic term until graduation.
- Every EWU student will have a clearly delineated pathway and schedule for successful completion of a degree.
- Students will choose a major and develop an individual graduation plan before they complete 60 credits.
- Integrated degree-audit technology and early warning systems will help to improve time-to-degree and graduation rates.
- All EWU students will have a formalized, integrated network of support services to help achieve academic goals as well as work toward career goals and other options after graduation.

Timeframe for AATF

Fall 2014 and Winter 2015

Complete research on strengths and weaknesses of current EWU advising practices. Gather data as needed through focus groups, external consultants, current advisors, and departmental/College faculty and staff. Undertake research that includes review of technologies that support academic advising. Create and review a process-map of advising for entering freshmen and transfers, including international and online students as well as students at all EWU campuses.

Identify strengths and weaknesses of current advising processes. By March 16, 2015, prepare a brief report for PEC leads in this initiative that identifies findings.

Spring 2015
By April 17, 2015, complete a report for initiative leads and for PEC that outlines a proposal for a state-of-the-art undergraduate advising system at EWU. Report should include topics such as location, technologies, training, staffing, a proposed timeline for changes, and rationale for the changes.

Sample Outcomes from State-of-the-Art Advising

With well-organized, effective advising, students will

(Cognitive)
- Know what courses are required for the major.
- Know when and how to conduct degree audits, declare a major, and apply for graduation.
- Know their advisors at every academic level.
- Know campus support resources.
- Recognize their own preferred learning style.

(Affective)
- Understand how coursework integrates across the curriculum.
- Synthesize what they learn in the classroom with other life activities.
- Develop a strong sense of personal responsibility.
- Respond and rebound positively to obstacles—develop resiliency.
- Develop an academic identity and an inspiring relationship with a faculty mentor.

(Behavioral)
- Seek assistance for academic skills development and planning.
- Conduct regular audit checks and attend advising sessions.
- Take an average of 15 credits per term or 45 credits per year.
- Go to faculty office hours.
- Seek a faculty or other mentor and actively engage in regular sessions.
- Create a complete academic course schedule plan.
Appendix B

Documents, Artifacts, and Constituents Groups

Documents and Artifacts

EWU Strategic Plan and State-of-the-Art Advising Initiative

Student Success and Retention Committee: Academic Advising Issues

Strategic Planning Conference - Feedback from Vincent Tinto’s groups

Strategic Planning Conference - Feedback from Barefoot and Gardner’s groups


2015: Academic Advising Workgroup Identified Issues

2015: Advising Task Force charge

2011: EWU Advising plan for SEM


2014: Student Advising Focus Group Results

2015: NACADA consultant visit – Formal feedback from faculty, students, campus community

2014 EWU Newspaper article regarding Academic Advising

Flight Plans and MAPs for programs

2014: M. Baldwin analysis of degree programs credits

2014: Lopez, Baldwin, Smith: White Paper for Improving Quarters

2014: Meeting Notes about AA with Deans and Assoc. Deans

2014: Lopez, Caligan, GUAA advisor - 2012-2014 Outcomes-based Assessment

2014: Letter to the Editor about Advising

2014: Current Student Focus Group Evaluation and Recommendations

2013: SSRC Advising Committee Recommendations

2014 NSSE Engagement Indicators

GUAA Student Satisfaction Survey results

Collective Bargaining Agreement for Faculty

Collective Bargaining Agreement for Advisors and Retention Specialist

2015: Transfer Opportunities and Recommendations

2014: EWU Advising Philosophy statement – (Campus-wide)

Request to Register without Being Advised

2014: M. Baldwin, Time to graduation information

Constituent Groups

President’s Executive Counsel (12 members)

Academic Advising Task Force (12 members)

Academic Advising Workgroup – College and specialty program Advisors (26 members)

Student Success and Retention Committee (20+ members)

Academic Affairs Counsel, Deans, Associate Deans, Vice Provosts

General Undergraduate Advisors (8 members)

Faculty Senate (40 members)

Faculty feedback during NACADA visit

Students’ feedback from multiple focus groups

Students’ feedback during NACADA visit
Appendix C

Review of Academic Advising Literature

Academic Advisor Relationship, Accurate Advising Information and Academic Advisor Accessibility
The advising relationship is paramount to student persistence toward degree completion. Schreiner (2009) found in a study of 65 four-year institutions that students are more likely to persist through the first year if they perceive their advisor as approachable and available. Sophomore satisfaction with their overall advising experience and junior satisfaction with their advisor’s knowledge of graduation requirements were also predictors of student persistence. Sickles (2004) emphasized the importance of a supportive advising relationship with first-generation students, as these students look toward advisors for guidance that other students would otherwise seek from their parents who did attend college.

Looking at more specific variables within academic advising, Mottarella, Fritzsche and Cerabino (2004) found in their study that the nature of the advising relationship may be more important to student satisfaction than the actual advising approach. Out of six variables assessed, the depth of the advising relationship was the most important for students, indicating that the more the advisor and student knew each other the more satisfied the student was with academic advising. The second most important variable was that students preferred a non-faculty advisor over a faculty advisor, and the third most important was that students preferred a relationship with the advisor that was supportive and warm. The actual approach of the advisor, whether prescriptive or developmental, was the second least important. These preferences were observed across all student groups and personalities. This is similar to the findings in psychotherapy research that indicate that the therapeutic relationship contributes to client satisfaction more than the specific approach or techniques.

A consistent finding in literature is that students prefer a non-faculty advisor over a faculty advisor, however “connecting” with a faculty member has been shown to be a factor in student success key performance indicators. In 2013, Allard and Parashar (2013) examined student satisfaction with faculty and professional advisors. The results of their study indicated that satisfaction with faculty advising varies considerably, with more reports of student satisfaction on the extremities of high and low. This differed from professional advising in that student satisfaction levels were more centralized toward the middle. This could suggest that the faculty “committed to this service perform extremely well but remain unrecognized” and that they “play a critical role in student development that professional advisors may not be able to fill” (Allard and Parashar).

Advising Needs of First-Year Students
Many universities have recognized the need to provide specific advising services to first-year students. Tinto (2012) explained the link between institutional support for first-year students and student success: By providing support for students’ “academic, personal, and social needs” (p. 24), universities that give special attention to first-year students are better able to help those students develop in a holistic sense.

Traditionally-aged, first-year students are typically transitioning from highly structured elementary and secondary educational systems. These systems most often value conformity above critical thinking and decision-making skills. Academically, first-year students lacking these skills are more challenging for both advisors out of the classroom and faculty members in the classroom (Keeling, 2003). First-year students often lack the experience and skills to maneuver through the procedures and processes inherent
in a post-secondary educational system. These students are often overwhelmed by the number of decisions they must make within their first term, choosing to ignore important decisions, or making quick decisions without consideration. Additionally, because of EWU’s status as an institution of access, many of EWU’s first-year students are under-prepared for the rigor of college level courses especially in math, critical reading, and writing. Under-prepared students need more support services. They are more at risk to leave the university before graduating and have an increased time to degree. Academic advisors assist students in strategically navigating their situation.

First-year students’ ability to transition and adapt to college life has also changed over the past 20 years (Arnett, 2011; Hunter & Kendall, 2008; Kennedy & Ishler, 2008). Today’s first-year students tend to have strong family attachments, so first-year advisors should expect more parental involvement in the students’ academic affairs. They are also more likely to need special mental and physical support, necessitating closer coordination between first-year advisors and those support functions. Additionally, a greater number of students who did not complete some college-level work while in high school are arriving at the university less prepared for the academic rigor of college classes. Therefore, it is necessary to match first-year students with specially-trained first-year advisors that will help them transition successfully from high school and through the first year of college (Tinto, 2012).

Students who begin their college experience in one of the State of Washington’s robust dual-enrollment programs are not immune from these same difficulties. When a student transitions into college with a high number of college-level credits, they will be farther ahead of their peers from an academic perspective. Developmentally, however, these students are no different from other college freshmen who enter with no previous college-level experience. In other words, these students have demonstrated the ability to complete college-level work, but may be unprepared for the complexities of college life.

Intentionally-designed, first-year programming recognizes the need to modify the advising experience and provide the additional academic support services for first-year students. Over time, the advising and support systems can scale their offerings from prescriptive, limited choices that allow for fewer decisions to a developmental model that offers a wider range of choices and decisions as students achieve a higher level of knowledge about the institution and themselves.

**Advising Needs of Sophomore and Undecided Students**

Hunter, Tobolowsky and Gardner (2010) explained that, “One of the unintentional consequences of enhanced first-year initiatives may be a sense of abandonment in the sophomore year” (p. 16). After the first year is complete, the University should take steps to strengthen the connection between the student and his/her chosen field. Without this extra guidance, sophomore students tend to fall into an abyss of academic support, especially if the student has not decided on a major. The authors also noted that the decision to pursue a specific major “may be the most significant personal decision faced by second-year students” (p. 101).

Over time, research has found mixed results related to the retention of undecided students in that some studies showed being undecided as a retention risk factor, and some studies showed that undecided students are more likely to persist than decided students (Graunke, Woosley and Helms, 2006). What many of these studies did not account for was student commitment to larger goals, such as completing a bachelor’s degree and commitment to their institution. Graunke, Woosley and Helms measured commitment to an academic major, commitment to educational goals, and commitment to an institution. They found that institutional and educational goal commitment was positively associated with degree
completion, while commitment to an academic major early in their academic career was negatively associated with degree completion.

If the university provides services to support the major-decision making process then it may be beneficial to allow undecided students the time to complete the decision-making process associated with major and career identification. Advising support should be provided to students considering a major change. However, the communication with those who have selected a major but are thinking about changing it may need to be more focused on the achievement of prerequisites and discussions of alternative majors and careers.

The primary factor that influences a student’s decision to stay in college and pursue a major is the human connection to that major (Tinto, 2012). Faculty members can play a key role in creating those connections:

Sophomores’ level of interaction and satisfaction with faculty was the only variable that significantly predicted every student outcome. It significantly predicted students’ intent to reenroll and graduate, their overall satisfaction with their college experience, and their perception that tuition was worth it….Although this finding is not new, the particular dimensions of faculty-student interaction that are most salient for sophomores is new information. (Hunter, Tobolowsky, and Gardner, 2010, p. 57)

However, interactions with unwilling, untrained or overburdened faculty advisors can deter a student from connecting with a major. (Allard, 2013)

Advising Needs of Transfer Students
The strengthening of connections to the university and to academic advisors is not only beneficial to sophomore students who started at the university, but also for transfer students who have earned credit from another institution or through exam. Nationally, institutions are seeing an increase in the number of students who begin their college experiences at one institution and then transfer into the university. This increase is part of a national trend (Deil-Amen, 2011) and academic advisors should be prepared to accommodate these students.

Demographically, transfer students are entering the university at the older end of the 18-25 year spectrum. They are more likely to be financially independent and may possibly have dependents of their own. From an identity point of view, these students will likely already identify with certain careers and have formed certain collegiate expectations from their prior experiences (Deil-Amen, 2011). The linking of their identity with college and career aspirations is what differentiates these students from first-year students. They are further along their developmental vectors than first-year students but may not have fully completed their transition; they are somewhere in between (Chickering and Reisser, 2011). Academic advisors specializing in assisting students through these specific transitions can ease the transition from another institution into Eastern Washington University for new transfer students.

Institutions are providing numerous opportunities to assist in identifying what courses count and shortening students’ time at 4-year institutions (Handel, 2013). “The transfer pathway will be an increasingly important source of bachelor’s degree holders as colleges and universities strive to meet
President Obama’s college completion agenda (Handel, 2013, p. 5). Time to degree for transfer students is critical in designing multiple pathways to completion (Handel, 2013).

EWU has begun to address the needs of the transfer student population through the establishment of a Transfer Center within Academic Affairs. The center is working with advisors in creating state-wide articulation agreements, 2+2 programs, dual admission programs, and articulation agreements with each of the community colleges as well as with special population programs. EWU offers all these pathways, including a reverse transfer agreement with Spokane Community Colleges.

**Advising needs of Upperclassmen (Juniors and Seniors)**

As students continue their transitions into their junior year, it is necessary to connect them with faculty mentors within their chosen majors. Not only do faculty members who fill these roles help further strengthen the connection between students and the university, but they also help their students understand the relevancy of their studies to their chosen vocations (Hemwall, 2008). Allen and Smith (2008) best explained the dilemma that many faculty advisors face: While their duties as advisors are often encouraged by university administrators, their effectiveness as an advisor is usually not evaluated when they are being considered for tenure or awards. As a result, advising is simply not as high a priority as research or teaching, and therefore receives less time and attention.

Faculty members do see the value of their working in academic advising. Allen and Smith’s (2008) study showed that faculty members wanted to advise students about their disciplines and the connections to life and career goals. But other advising topics, such as general education requirements and policies, were considered outside their areas of responsibility. In short, faculty members felt most comfortable advising about what they know best and preferred to have other advisors cover the rest.

Students report varied levels of satisfaction with faculty advising (Allard, 2013 and Motterella, 2004). Students report the most dissatisfaction with faculty advising when it focuses on “advising resources and general education requirements that could set back their graduation clock,” (Allard, 2013). Students report the highest level of satisfaction with faculty advising when faculty take the time to build a relationship with them (Allard). Student satisfaction with faculty advising seems to align itself then with the faculty’s preference.
References


