Proposal for First Semester Advisement of New Undeclareds and Pre-BUS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted by Mary Lee Vance to UAAC 10/3/08
UAAC Approved 10/31/08, Revised 1/16/09

Current Process:
- Effective Fall 2008 students newly admitted as freshman undeclared and pre-BUS assigned to Center for Academic Advising advisors.
- All other students, including transfers over 20 credits, assigned to undeclared advisors and academic departments per interest areas.

Proposed: Effective fall 2009
- Newly admitted freshmen undeclared and pre-BUS will continue to be assigned to Center for Academic Advising advisors, and will be required to stay with the assigned advisors for the semester.
- Assigned students who want to declare a major where it is essential to be linked with their new department during their first semester early advisement period may have a 2ndary advisor added.
- This policy change would require University Academic Advisement committee, Academic Affairs and Faculty Senate approvals.

Goals:
1. To provide newly admitted undeclared/Pre BUS students an opportunity to more thoughtfully explore academic possibilities
2. To provide an opportunity for students to “settle down” under one advisor/model that will provide consistent and continuous contacts throughout the one semester
3. To insure students requiring remedial coursework are appropriately scheduled
4. To lay the foundation for a stronger advisor/advisee relationship

Activities:
1. Undeclareds and pre-BUS will be provided specific information regarding upcoming academic advisement events and expectations during the Spring/Summer SOAR sessions
2. Fall orientation would require new students to meet with assigned advisors for workshop related to basic academic information immediately following the New Beginnings luncheon
3. Advisors will utilize advising syllabus, complete with learning objectives (programmatic goals)
4. Advisors will track students to see how they are progressing

Learning Outcomes:
1. Faculty Senate approved assessment to determine effectiveness of 3-5 primary programmatic goals will be conducted (to be determined)

Possible Other Optional Activities:
1. May pilot block registration for remedial and basic cores
2. May hold majors fair and/or develop opportunities for students to meet with department chairs and/or access major-related academic information
3. May schedule optional seminar/small group session to be held in early fall semester to discuss academic options
Proposal for Early Alert Advisement for New Undeclareds and Pre-BUS

UWS History
Fall of 2002, the University Reinstatement Committee forwarded to the University Academic Affairs Committee the concern that the University should be more proactive with early intervention efforts targeted at exit prone and/or at-risk students. The concern was then forwarded to the Undergraduate Academic Advisement Committee to review and respond with recommendations. The Undergraduate Academic Advising Committee recommended that the university establish a clearinghouse to serve at-risk students in areas of retention.

Per the 2002 NCA report, under Goal III, improving student advising and retention are high priorities for UWS. As a result, the Undergraduate Academic Advisement Committee decided to create a special retention sub group to investigate the possibility of developing a long-term coordinated, consistent and cohesive process for addressing at-risk student retention concerns at UWS. The retention sub group agreed that the Advising office would be the most reasonable location for such a clearinghouse, and agreed that the office was in a position to not only provide the needed referral and support services, but also any other needed oversight related to retention initiatives. In addition, Advising works equally with all offices on campus, as well as all academic departments and faculty. The Center for Academic Advising was approved to be the official UWS Clearinghouse for at-risk students, by Student Senate (Nov 11, 2002) and Academic Affairs (Nov 26, 2002).

Through the years since the Clearinghouse was approved, numerous retention initiatives were conducted in low-key ways: such as calling non-enrolled students; contacting students on probation, contacting students who have been given mid-semester grades, following up on faculty concerns, and multiple other forms of outreach that could be done internally and without faculty governance involvement.

Additionally, several proposals were written to justify the need for more professional academic advisors to be housed in the Center in order to implement more intrusive and more defined retention initiatives. January 2004, a proposal was submitted by the Center to the UWS Public Liberal Arts Taskforce where the focus on strengthening the advisement process for undeclared students was highlighted. The proposal identified the following concerns:

*The advising service for undeclared students is not centralized. Different departments have different procedures for hiring and overseeing advising services for undeclared students. The inability to call all undeclared advisors together for consistent updates and quality trainings is a serious limitation to the type and quality of service provided to one of the largest, most transitional, and complex student populations. There is a need to explore ways that the Center would have a set percent of advisor oversight for all advisors assigned to undeclared students, in order to increase uniform accountability to provide a more consistent method of training and advisor performance, and retention. As a result, the ability to provide consistent and high quality monitoring of policies could be more effectively evaluated. Should the advisement of undeclareds be centralized, then the ability to expose them, as a cohesive group to liberal arts options would be more feasible. Currently there are no standards for how undeclareds are handled, much less what we expect them to understand as they make decisions related to their majors, careers, and post-college goals.*
October 23, 2006 a proposal to bring undeclared and pre-BUS into a coordinated and collaborative advisement model under the Center for Academic Advising was requested by Provost Markwood and Stewart Platner (interim DOS). November 9, 2006 a draft proposal was prepared by the Center director which proposed among other things that newly admitted undeclared and pre-BUS not be allowed to change major for at least one semester. It was also proposed that full-time, dedicated advisors be hired, as they would be available for the students as needed.

However, it was not until late spring 2008 when additional staffing (two part-time soccer coaches/part-time academic advisors) was approved for the Center, and Center advisement initiatives could be increased, and the first part of this advisement model could be initiated.

**Undeclared Needs:**
In Virginia Gordon’s Advising Undecided First-Year Students chapter of the First-Year Academic Advising Monograph (published by National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition), she states:

“First-year students who enter college without an academic or career commitment must be given the time and freedom to explore in an orderly fashion. This is a critical time to learn how to gather information about their academic strengths and limitations and how they can incorporate these strengths into various major and occupational alternatives. They can experience the thrill of discovery and hone the skills of critical thinking and information management. The first year in college should be the time when students begin to lay the foundation for a lifetime of career choice and maintenance. As they mature, they will realize, with proper guidance and experience, the necessity for taking responsibility for their own continuing exploration and decision making.”

Per National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), and per the 2004 American College Testing Program (ACT) Survey, the advising ratio for a full-time professional advisor at a public 4-year institution ratio is 284.9 to 1. However, for a private 4-year institution, the ratio for a full-time professional advisor is 153.2 to 1. For full-time academic advisors at Public Liberal Arts Colleges, with over 500 students, 18.4% of the advisors time is spent directly with advisement activities. Professional advisors, like faculty, have other responsibilities and duties that must also be performed in addition to the direct student advisement contacts.

Per Wes Habley, ACT Director of Office of Educational Practices, he states: *It should also be noted that to some these figures may seem low but we must realize that many full-time advisors work in advising programs that provide services to students with specialized advising needs (e.g. undecided students, under prepared students, adult students, honors students, and/or students with disabilities)._”

The ratio of advisees to advisor is a quite a bit higher in the Center due to the need to advise pre-BUS students who were recently re-assigned to the Center. However, with the Center staff focusing on the newly admitted freshmen Undeclared, pre-TED and pre-BUS starting Fall 2009, the advisee to advisor ratio, while still high, will be more manageable than it is now if staffing remains the same.
Phase I (Initiated Fall 2007)
General Studies Department established for students previously known as undeclared – Jane Birkholz interim chair (Fall 2007)

Goals:
1. Conducted Noelle-Levitz College Student Inventory assessment on all Undeclared students (Spring 2008)
2. Incorporated CSI results with undeclared advisee meetings

Phase II (Initiated Fall 2008)
Pre-BUS and pre-TED were assigned to Center advisement staff (Fall 2008), along with undeclared students (effective Spring 2009 pre-ElEd will go directly to TED).

Goals:
1. To increase advisees understanding of the advisement process, student expectations and responsibilities
2. To increase Center advisor contact with advisees for tracking and monitoring purposes

Objectives:
4. CSI required for early advisement appointments
5. Center staff will reach out to students in early October to temperature check and to begin preparing them for early advisement, last date for class drops etc.
6. Contacts will be made with students who receive mid-semester grades
7. Since students who receive mid-semester grades are at-risk for probation, they will be called in for a special conference with Center advisors
8. After early advisement period, non-enrolled students will be reminded to see Center advisors before the semester ends (progress will be tracked)

Future Goals:
After the third phase of this advisement model gets underway, additional advisement improvements can be anticipated, not only within the Center, but also across campus that will continuously provide better services for the students such as: 1) Improve handovers (process) of students changing majors from undeclared to declared, from declared to declared and declared to undeclared, as these handovers are not always smooth; and 2) Develop a “map” or other information source for both advisors and students to create a smoother and more appropriate (visual) transition process. For example, it is not appropriate for students to transfer into a major if they do not meet the minimal prerequisites.