BAYLOR UNIVERSITY’S
TASK FORCE ON ADVISEMENT PROPOSAL
Approved by the Task Force on Advisement on April 12, 2013

Introduction

The Task Force on Advisement (TFA) met monthly during the 2012-13 academic year to develop a university-wide vision for the advisement of undergraduate students at Baylor with related recommendations. The group was charged to study national best practices in university-wide advisement in order to:

I. Develop a common vision for the advisement of undergraduates at Baylor, and
II. Make recommendations to the Executive Vice President and Provost that will improve advisement in all units and yield a shared vision regarding quality advisement that draws upon the expertise and experience of faculty and advisors.

We submit this document containing recommendations for consideration by the Executive Vice President and Provost.

Executive Summary of Key Recommendations

1. For quality and consistency purposes, advisement campus-wide should be guided by the newly-minted advising syllabus created by this Task Force: Philosophy, Outcomes, and Responsibilities for Academic Advising (POR).
2. Baylor should shift to a model where formal advisement for degree progress purposes is done by professional staff while faculty members serve as mentors to students.
3. Undergraduate students should have as few advisors as possible from matriculation to graduation.
4. Baylor should purchase u.direct to allow advisors to perform degree planning appointments with all students.
5. Anyone serving as an advisor of record must uphold Philosophy, Outcomes, and Responsibilities for Academic Advising and participate regularly in professional development. Advising and advisors must be assessed accordingly.
6. Based on the recommendation from this Task Force, Academic Advisement has been renamed University Advisement. This will allow the campus to understand better this office’s role as a centralized point of contact for the advising community.
7. By fall 2014, University Advisement should serve all exploratory and pre major students. It should also serve any students who are in transition from one unit to another.
8. By fall 2014, the other advising areas should be prepared to ensure that Philosophy, Outcomes, and Responsibilities for Academic Advising is being upheld for assigned students.
9. No later than academic year 2018, all juniors should have at minimum a degree-planning appointment with the advising area of the college/school.
Baylor University: Philosophy, Outcomes, and Responsibilities for Academic Advising

The first goal of the TFA was to set common standards for undergraduate advisement at Baylor.¹ The TFA began by building consensus around what advisement should look like at Baylor, regardless of a student’s classification, major, and/or program. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) recommends that every campus have a document, often called an Advising Syllabus, to serve as a campus-wide advising guide. While several professional advising offices at Baylor have created such a document, a university-wide vision for the advisement of undergraduate students has not been articulated. To create a university-wide document, the TFA studied syllabi created by Academic Advisement, the Hankamer School of Business Undergraduate Programs Office, and University Scholars. In addition, the TFA reviewed other universities’ documents and read the Standards and Guidelines related to advisement programs provided by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS).² Rather than an Advising Syllabus, we developed the Philosophy, Outcomes, and Responsibilities for Academic Advising (POR) document included with this proposal.³

In the Philosophy, Outcomes, and Responsibilities document, the TFA affirms that accurate, timely information for student decision-making is critical for timely progression from matriculation to graduation. While necessary prescriptive advisement focuses exclusively on the delivery of accurate information to students (e.g., what classes the student should take to stay on track for graduation), the TFA recommends instead a developmental approach to advisement which operates on the assumption that liberal learning is undergirded by a deepening understanding of self in relation to the world. Or, as White and Schulenberg argue convincingly, “Academic advisors are in a strategic position to engage students in thinking about the larger purposes of their educations.”⁴ Thus, advisement should consist of a deep, challenging, and ongoing conversation between the student and advisor about carefully crafting an educational program including curricular and co-curricular components suited to the student’s developing self-understanding and self-actualization as well as the academic possibilities available on the Baylor campus.

The POR document significantly raises expectations for quality advisement of undergraduate students at Baylor, highlighting learning outcomes for students along with specific roles and responsibilities for the advisor and the advisee.⁵ With this guidance in place, a student should have a consistent advising experience regardless of which advising area he or she visits. We will develop a simple “quick-reference” version of this document to allow students, faculty, and advisors to garner efficiently the main content of the POR.

Faculty Mentoring Complemented by Professional Advisement

The TFA strongly affirms that the faculty/student relationship is a primary hallmark of the Baylor undergraduate experience. Faculty members guide and mentor students on multiple levels

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¹ All references to “student” in this document are understood to apply only to undergraduate students.
² See Appendix 1.
³ See Appendix 2.
⁵ See Appendix 2.
in their formation, including discipline-based and inter-disciplinary intellectual development, undergraduate research, fellowships, internships, service learning, graduate school admission, and career placement.

However, a faculty member’s time is not best spent keeping abreast of the complexity of program offerings and regulations at Baylor. Therefore, the TFA recommends that professional advisors serve as advisors of record for all students. Every student should have access to a professional advisor at every stage of his or her undergraduate education. Once students have declared a major, they should have a faculty mentor available to them as well. Considering salary level, expertise, and expectations of faculty members and professional advisors, the TFA recommends that Baylor shift to a model where faculty members serve as mentors while professional advisors take responsibility for assisting with the degree progress of students under their purview. Such a model also facilitates Baylor’s ability to respond to expectations of various constituencies such as the U. S. Department of Education, the Texas State Legislature, parents and employers concerning degree access, quality and attainment, as well as timeliness of student degree completion. Moreover, it is in the best interest of each student and Baylor University that each be informed and involved as they determine their choices which may have an impact on graduation or the ability to complete the chosen academic program.

Under this advising model, professional advisors commit to refer actively students to faculty mentors for intellectual, research and career-development formation whenever possible. Professional advisors will build strong partnerships with academic areas. For example, a specific advisor in CASA will be the Psychology/Neuroscience liaison while a specific advisor in University Advisement will work closely with members of the School of Engineering and Computer Science. Further, professional development of advisors will be guided in large part by faculty expertise (see the Creating Accountability for Quality Advisement and Assessment section below).

Most of the professional schools at Baylor (HSB, LHSON, SOE, and SW) have made the shift from faculty to professional advisement over the past decade. The School of Engineering and Computer Science is prepared to implement this model beginning within the next academic year. The School of Music plans to continue to use a faculty advisement model. A number of departments within the College of Arts and Sciences expressed hesitation at making this move because faculty desire maximum contact with their students and an advising appointment is a regular and expected interaction. As a result, the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies will work with Department Chairs and Undergraduate Studies Directors in these departments to set up a vetting process and procedures whereby possible exemptions to the guideline that students be formally advised by a professional advisor are considered. Given that consistency and quality of advisement are a shared goal, exemptions should only be made if advisement within these departments upholds the POR, including being responsive to students in a timely manner, entry of notes in the Unified Advising System, and participation in advising professional development. Part of the vetting process includes a regular review of the effectiveness of advising within departments which have sought exemptions. Further, within the School of Music and the College of Arts & Sciences where faculty members will continue to advise formally students, the TFA recommends that advisement be a part of the annual performance review for these faculty members.
Number of Advisors

Because students thrive developmentally through longer-term relationships with advisors and mentors, the TFA recommends that students should have no more than two advisors unless the student changes majors from matriculation to graduation. The TFA recognizes that only 40% of students graduate with the major that they originally designated upon matriculation,\(^6\) therefore, the proposed assignments create the greatest consistency possible.

Technology

Recognizing that our greatest and most costly resources on campus are faculty and staff, the TFA recommends—to the extent possible—helping students pre-plan and indicate their preferences as part of using technology for prescriptive advising functions. Many universities are leveraging technologies to provide efficient delivery of straightforward advising information. The Education Advisory Board’s study, *Meeting Student Demand for High-Touch Advising* provided the basis for the following recommendations:

I. Administering on-line placement exams wherever possible before June Orientation.

   The Math Placement Exam will be administered on-line beginning with the fall 2013 cohort.

II. Building clearer pre-matriculation messages via web portals and on-line tutorials.

   New Student Programs has worked closely with University Advisement and Admissions to create an electronic preview book to prepare new freshmen for Orientation (now available). Web portals also need to be created specifically for the critical month of July to keep students engaged in learning about what to expect at Baylor, with another separate set of messages for transfer students. New Student Programs, the advising community, and Admissions will continue to work collaboratively towards these efforts over the next two years.

III. Purchasing u.direct, a hosted software product that is compatible with our degree audit system in Banner.

   u.direct will allow students and advisors to plan, in a sequenced fashion, courses that will fulfill requirements, accurately estimate graduation, and create more time for quality advising conversations. For incoming students and transfers, this system also has the capacity to generate possible course schedules allowing time for a developmental conversation even during the face-to-face advising time at Orientation.

IV. Charging the ongoing Academic Advising Council (AAC) to research ways to best use advisors’ time and expertise fully to engage students in ownership and understanding of their education.

   The TFA recommends studying closely what competitor universities are doing, searching for ways to continue to better leverage our human resources. The TFA also

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\(^6\) See Appendix 3.
recommends that the AAC, in collaboration with Career and Professional Development and Student Life, explore creating or purchasing robust tools to 1) facilitate the major selection process and 2) navigate students through curricular and co-curricular learning (see second Learning Outcome in POR).

**Creating Accountability for Quality Advisement and Assessment**

A staff or faculty member who serves as an advisor of record will be expected to attend a minimum of three professional development sessions offered by University Advisement per year. The Assistant Director of University Advisement, who will oversee advisor development, will modify the Professional Development Advisory Board to comprise equal numbers of faculty and staff. The sessions should not only educate advisors on accurate, timely information related to programs at Baylor and advising technology, but also include sessions on developmental aspects of advising in alignment with the POR. The Professional Development Advisory Board may elect to bring in national experts, although additional funding may be needed to increase the options and exposure available for the advising community. In addition, advisors should regularly participate in and contribute to national and state-wide organizations such as NACADA and TEXAAN.

An advising effectiveness assessment plan needs to be developed and should include measuring such factors as 1) graduation, retention, and/or career placement rates, 2) student feedback, and 3) the learning outcomes in POR. Evaluation of each office should include benchmark goals appropriate for more consistent advising, as well as tracked progress toward those goals over time.

An overall assessment plan of university-wide advisement assumes continual refinement of the assessment plans for individual advising offices. In particular, individual advisors will be evaluated annually in light of POR and their advising unit’s progress benchmarks with a view to on-going maintenance and sustained improvement.

**Duplication of Advising Efforts**

Information Technology gathered information on required advisement for students. Over the past five years, only 12% of students on average were required to see more than one office for advisement. However, some of the duplicate areas are not actually duplicates (for example, there are JOU and CASA flags for sophomore JOU majors; however, these students only have to see one advisor). Removing these false positives, the percentage is closer to 10%.

**Prehealth Students:** The TFA recognizes a need for advisors and students campus-wide to receive regular updates from the Prehealth Programs Office so that advisors can better coach students concerning acceptance into health-related programs, particularly in the freshman and sophomore years. (Once students are juniors and seniors and have a strong academic profile, the Prehealth Programs Office will begin working more intensively with students on preparation of dossiers for the professional schools. This is a function distinct from advising.) The Prehealth Programs Office has agreed to provide additional regular workshops for students and advisors to

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7 See Appendix 4.
ensure that timely and accurate information is communicated to students pursuing health-related careers.

**Student-Athletes:** In compliance with NCAA stipulations, all student-athletes are required to be monitored closely and registered by a professional advisor in Student Athlete Services. In addition to their advisor of record, student-athletes must also see a professional advisor in Student Athlete Services before registering. While this represents a certain duplication of effort, the TFA weighed the pros and cons of changing the system (either not having students see only Student Athlete Services or not seeing the academic advisor of record); neither of these options appeared desirable or feasible.

**Honors College:** Duplication of advisement occurs between the Honors Program and some departments.

**Structure of Advising Assignments**

The TFA determined that the way advisor assignments are made should be modified. The current assignment structure does not undergird the learning outcomes and philosophy of the POR. The TFA hereby recommends that the university-wide advising office (currently Academic Advisement) have formal responsibility for the advisement of all undecided students and any students in a pre-major while the unit-based advising offices oversee the advisement and degree planning of students with declared majors. Because Academic Advisement will serve students more broadly, the TFA recommends changing the department’s name to University Advisement.

**University Advisement:**

*Students seen for formal advisement:*

I. Exploratory (Undecided) students (all classifications)
II. Pre-Majors (all classifications)

*Other students:*

I. Students in transition from one unit to another

**Primary Roles and Responsibilities:**

I. Uphold the POR at Baylor
II. Ensure that new students are on a path to success at Baylor by helping them develop academic skills as well as personal and professional goals
III. Demonstrate and communicate knowledge of all majors and programs clearly and objectively and indicate to students where they can receive more information about each major and meet faculty from that major
IV. Provide professional development to advisors campus-wide (faculty and staff)
V. Coordinate advisement campus-wide, esp. new student registration (TR and FR), in collaboration with the Council of Advising Directors
Advising Offices within the Units (A & S, ECS, HC, HSB, LHSON, SOE, SOM, SW):

Students overseen through unit advising process:

I. Students entering the majors or programs directly as new students
II. Students accepted into the majors or programs

Other students:

I. Students transitioning into the unit or program

Primary Roles and Responsibilities:

I. Uphold the POR at Baylor
II. Ensure that new students are on a path to success at Baylor by helping them develop academic skills as well as personal and professional goals
III. Indicate to students where they can receive more information about each major and meet faculty from that major
IV. Ensure quality advisement for all students under the purview of the office, even if advising is by faculty
V. Perform graduation planning for students at least once during the junior or senior year

Reward and Recognition

NACADA recommends that every university have a system in place to incite excellence in advisement. In close collaboration with the Professional Development Advisory Board, a Reward and Recognition Committee will be set up to consider how best to incentivize advisors campus-wide to contribute to the national advising landscape and work towards excellence at Baylor. The Reward and Recognition Committee will be facilitated by a staff member of the University Advisement office, but should include three professional advisors from across campus, three faculty members, and one member of the administration such as an associate dean. While award(s) may be given out at the annual Day of the Advisor ceremony, additional funding is being requested to make a monetary recognition possible as well.

Timing of Implementation

This proposal has significant implications for staffing and there are many details to formalize. We recommend that the advising community embrace the POR to the extent possible as soon as possible. Further, we recommend that most of the recommendations go into effect by the fall of 2014. This will allow the 2013-14 academic year as a planning and transition year. By the fall of 2014, we expect the advisor assignment restructuring to be largely in place. By fall 2014, faculty and staff members who formally advise students will be held to the new standards expressed in the POR document. Beginning this summer, an Implementation Team will be put in place to create a specific four-year plan for putting all of the necessary resources in place to implement this proposal.

8 Note that most of these offices have significant other functions beyond these minimum requirements for advisement offices. Some examples include assisting in regular recruitment activities, certifying graduation, and teaching and developing courses.