

University Senate Academic Advising Committee Report to Senate Council: Dual Reporting for Campus Academic Advisors

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Academic advisors play a vital role in the academic mission of our university. They work closely with faculty members with whom they may co-advise students in many colleges. Even in colleges without a faculty advising model, professional advisors are the link between students and faculty. In most colleges currently, they are supervised by faculty with extensive backgrounds in student advising.

The University Senate governs academic policy on our campus, including academic advising. The Senate Academic Advising Committee specifically sets standards for advising, ensures its quality, and advises the Senate on matters pertaining to advising. (See relevant SR's in Appendix B)

Response to given reasons for the change to dual reporting

While none of the committee members have seen the proposal to move advising to a dual reporting mode (51% to SAL, 49% to college), we recognize that the details have yet to be determined. However, from meetings that various of us have attended, we have gleaned the following justifications:

- A. More uniform professional development
- B. More uniform training
- C. Better marketing
- D. More uniform experience for students
- E. Budgetary, money saved through "efficiencies"

The University of Kentucky's professional academic advisors are highly educated, but in all professions, ongoing advancement of professional skills is essential, as are professional opportunities such as opportunities to travel to conferences to promote professional advancement and dissemination of best advising practices within the UK advising community. We support items **A** and **B**, but do not see the need for dual reporting to two units to accomplish this task.

Recommendation: Continue ongoing effort to standardize basic training and professional development opportunities across the campus without changes to reporting.

Advising is, by its very nature, an educational activity. Students' individual needs vary, as do the needs of different programs within a college, and certainly between colleges as well. A successful advisor puts the educational and personal needs of individual students at the forefront of their efforts. We do not see item **D** as being complementary to our mission of student success, which is best enhanced through providing individualized advising experiences tailored to the needs of individual students. Colleges define and subdivide duties related to student advising and student support services in ways that fit their individual missions. This effort would be hampered by an attempt at standardization. Furthermore, standardization is unlikely to be successful if faculty continue to provide some upper level advising. We believe

colleges are best suited to make personnel decisions that affect the educational mission of the unit.

We are also concerned that an undue emphasis on **C** would encourage advisors to consider the interests of the University of Kentucky ahead of the individual needs of students. This emphasis would result in a dereliction of our duty towards the educational needs of students, our most sacred mission.

Recommendation: Preserve the existing reporting structure in support of the unique educational missions of our individual colleges.

We recognize the extreme financial exigency that the University of Kentucky faces, and we are grateful for the decision to protect advisors during a time of college budget cuts. We are unclear, however, that the savings that would accrue from **E** would offset the mental anguish and uncertainty caused to the UK advising community during a time when their focus should be solely on student retention and success. Now more than ever, advisors are needed to help the university mitigate the loss of students to uncertainties surrounding the pandemic.

Other planned and completed moves to dual reporting have focused on employees who either do not or only peripherally support the academic mission (philanthropy, IT). Unlike academic advisors, they seem a more natural fit for a dual reporting system and their mission will be less disrupted by the transition.

Recommendation: Recognize the turmoil that would be caused to the advising community at this critical time. Make budget cuts through efficiencies related to staff that are less critical to student success.

CONCLUSIONS:

Our academic advisors are a highly educated and skilled workforce that is integral to our academic mission. Their role is entwined in the educational mission of their various colleges and departments, and their well-being at a critical time for retention is crucial. While we support a certain degree of standardization of professional development and training, a “one size fits all” approach threatens to undermine a college’s unique educational mission. We recommend that we continue the college-level authority over how students are advised so that colleges can make the best decisions for their particular student body, student-centered decisions that ultimately benefit the university as a whole.

Appendix A: More detailed concerns

- **Marketing-driven advising vs. student-centered advising-** Sometimes UK’s financial interest does not align with the student’s educational or financial situation. Would advisors be forced to make market-based recommendations against the best interests of individual students? Advisors advising students to take classes outside of UK was cited as a concern driving this change at the 5/5 Senate Council meeting, yet there are many situations where a student may need to take a class outside of UK (ex: failing CHE 105 or MA 113 too many times at UK, then taking it at BCTC; needing to take summer classes yet being too low on financial aid to afford out-of-state tuition/summer room and board at UK).

- **Metrics-** No metrics have been given to the Committee to demonstrate that advising as it is now is not working, other than the observation that students do not have a uniform experience. As noted above, we would hope that a truly student-centered advising model **would** lead to a non-uniform experience. A non-uniform experience is not convincing evidence of a lack of quality advising. The Committee would like to see metrics and see the Colleges be given a chance to rectify any problems before making such sudden, large scale changes.
- **Evaluation of advisors-** Who does it and how are already complicated subdivisions of labor complicated by the 51/49 split?
- **Definition of advisor-** In addition to professional and faculty advisors, some staff without the title of advisor advise students, while some (most) advisors have roles beyond the traditional role of advisor, including student support services and teaching. How would these people and the units they serve be affected? What about college-level advising supervision such as Directors and Assistant Deans of Advising?
- **Faculty advisors-** Many colleges and departments have faculty advisors who advise upper level students. These relationships help students build their professional networks and provide them acculturation into their chosen fields. They are also important relationships for future development initiatives. How do faculty advisors fit into the idea of providing a “uniform experience”? Does UK plan to move to professional advising only? Or would faculty also be asked or trained to advise in a given, uniform format, a move that would likely be unsuccessful?
- **Hiring/firing-**Who has the ultimate say in this, the college or SAL?
- **College-level advising needs-** How standardized would the advising become? Would colleges be able to adapt for their own needs, and would they have to ask SAL’s permission to deviate from the campus-wide “standards”?
- **Motivation behind change-** Because a detailed proposal was not submitted to the Senate Academic Advising Committee, we have had to speculate on the motivation behind making such a large change with such a short turn around. Putting information that we have heard from various sources, the Committee is very concerned that a major motivating factor behind this decision is for budgetary reasons, rather than the desire to better meet student needs. For example, in the UK-wide email sent on April 21 with regards to the major budget shortfall, included on the list of ways to reduce the operating budget was the statement “To better leverage our resources, we will move forward with shared services via dual-reporting line relationships for several key areas...”. It would seem like the timing of shifting all Academic Advisors to dual-reporting lines coincides exactly with this statement. Furthermore, other recent and proposed positions to be moved to dual-reporting lines include philanthropy, recruiting and marketing, all of which are clearly positions to revenue generating activities. Academic Advisors do not seem to “fit” with these other positions in terms of a goal of generating funds for the University and there is significant concern that a move to dual reporting may result in advisors being encouraged (or trained) to advise students to make academic decisions that are not necessarily in the student’s best interest, but would result in additional revenue being generated for the University. One of the major responsibilities of the Senate Academic Advising Committee is to “set standards for the quality of academic advising” (S.R. 1.4.3.5) and therefore if the change in reporting line proceeds, this committee will be monitoring the situating closely to insure that academic advising quality is maintained at a high, and student-focused standard.
- **Timing of change-** The Senate Academic Advising Committee is concerned about the timing of the proposed change and how that will adversely affect advisors. July 1

is less than two months away and it does not appear that these proposed changes have been fully communicated to the individuals that are most affected by the change: the advisors. July 1 is also right in the middle of the busiest time of the year for Academic Advisors, See Blue U. This year more than ever when there is so much uncertainty about how these conferences will be structured, it seems extremely disruptive to the process to also change the reporting lines of these “front line” individuals. The Administration has consistently stated over the last several months that the “health, safety and well-being of our campus community is our top priority.” Making such a dramatic change to the reporting line, is likely to result in significant uncertainty and stress in the Academic Advisors during an already stressful time, which seems to go directly against ensuring campus community well-being. The rush to make this change by July 1 has not been explained or justified in any of the very limited materials provided to the Senate Academic Advising Committee.

Appendix B: Relevant SRs

1.1.2.4 Educational Policies

*Policies concerning the following: academic conditions and requirements for admission, attendance and graduation; curricula; course offerings; course evaluation; **student advising**; undergraduate, graduate and research programs; professional program; and academic service functions centered in an educational unit. (GR III; GR VII.A.4-7; AR 1:4.III.F)*

1.2.1.1 Functions of the University Senate

The Governing Regulation (GR IV.A, C) specify that the Senate has no administrative or management responsibilities, and that the functions of the University Senate, either directly or through its committees, councils, and other bodies, include the following:

- 1. To determine the **broad academic policies of the University**, including the similar academic policies that may be necessary by governmental or accreditation agencies, and to make rules to implement these policies (SR 5-8).*

1.4.3.5 Senate Academic Advising Committee (SaAC)

The SaAC shall consist of three elected faculty members from the University Senate who are currently advising students; three students (two student senators and one student at large) to be selected by the Senate Council upon recommendation of the President of the Student Government Association; three professional advisors, selected by a process adopted by the UK Advising Network and the Senate Council; one member from the Provost’s Committee on Advising; and one ex officio member: the Associate Provost for Student and Academic Life. The committee shall:

- 1. **Regularly review the effectiveness and accountability of academic advising throughout the University***
- 2. **Set standards for the quality of academic advising***
- 3. **Advise the Senate Council about all recommendations or proposals to the Senate regarding academic advising.***