

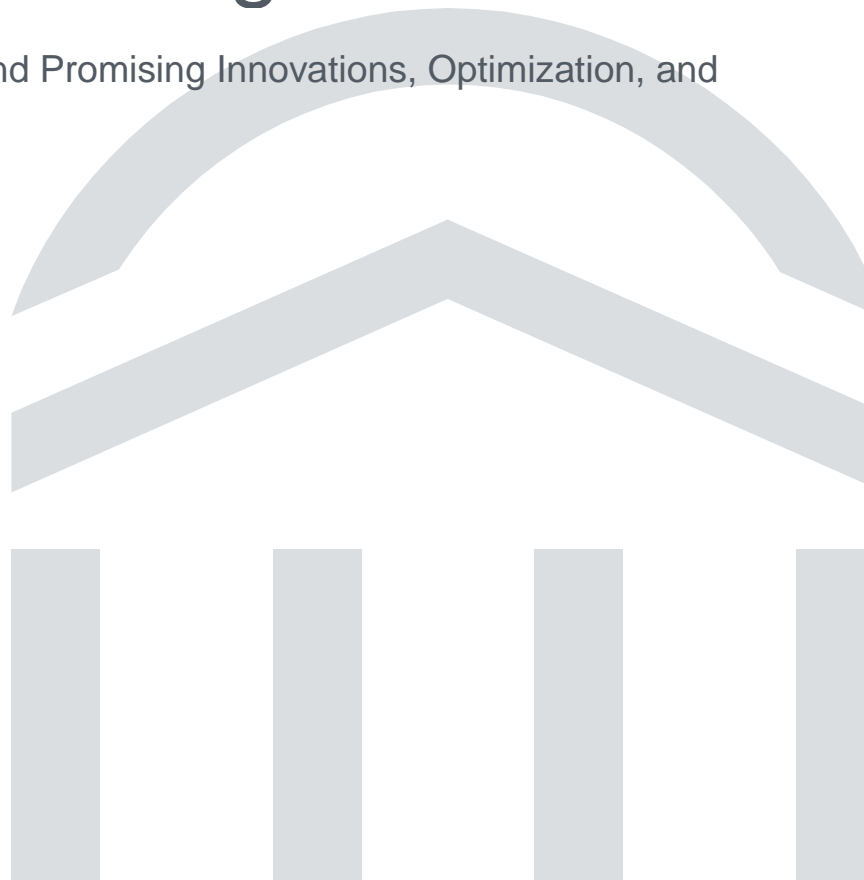


Education
Advisory
Board

Community College Forum

Organization of **Academic Advising Services** at Community Colleges

Standard Advising Models and Promising Innovations, Optimization, and Evaluation



Community College Forum

Sam Rittenberg
Research Associate

John Tannous
Research Manager

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Most institutions rely on both professional staff and faculty to deliver academic advising. Professional advisors typically serve incoming students and undecided students while faculty generally advise a load of students in their respective colleges or departments. Only one profiled institution relies solely on professional advisors. Most institutions assign students to specific advisors; however, some rely on general advising pools and walk-in hours to steward limited institutional staff time, especially of professional advisors.

Professional advisors offer greater availability than faculty advisors but lack specialized knowledge across academic areas. Professional advisors typically work on 12-month contracts and specialize in student-facing advisement interactions. Faculty most often work on nine-month contracts and balance many competing (e.g., lectures, assessment, academic planning). However, faculty advisors can offer department- or field-specific knowledge of course sequencing, industry requirements (e.g., licensure), and career opportunities.

Competitive and/or limited-entry academic programs often feature dedicated professional advisors to help students navigate prerequisites and course sequencing. Several profiled institutions employ dedicated advisors for nursing, health sciences, and other STEM fields. These advisors typically only advise students enrolled or seeking enrollment in their respective portfolio of programs.

Grant-subsidized programs often earmark funds to maintain their own exclusive and dedicated advisors. For example, the provisions of the Department of Labor's recent round of TAACCCT grants to community colleges require awardees to reserve funds for advisors that serve their program enrollments. The dedicated academic advisor for grant-funded program often subsumes responsibilities including outreach, intake, counseling and career assistance. Grant-subsidized programs and their advisors often do not persist beyond when grant monies deplete.

Faculty advisors in select academic programs may opt to organize local advising services that deviate from the institution's general arrangement to accommodate faculty preferences and skills. Faculty advisors in the criminal justice program at **Institution C** consolidate advising responsibilities among a core group of faculty members, despite union contracts or institutional policies that require all faculty members to carry advisement caseloads. Union contracts or institutional policies may require overload pay or course release for faculty who take on additional advising responsibilities. Faculty advisors for select programs at **Institution A** may also arrange to serve students within their portfolios from the point of matriculation, subsuming the traditional role of professional advisors during intake.

Most institutions evaluate academic advising through student satisfaction surveys; contacts lament that surveys often have low sample sizes and reflect polarized biases. Advisors often deliver negative or unwanted information to students about their academic progress and degree planning, which may impact their evaluation. Contacts report that the type of advisor (e.g., faculty, professional staff) does not typically impact student satisfaction levels.

2) Organization of Advising Services

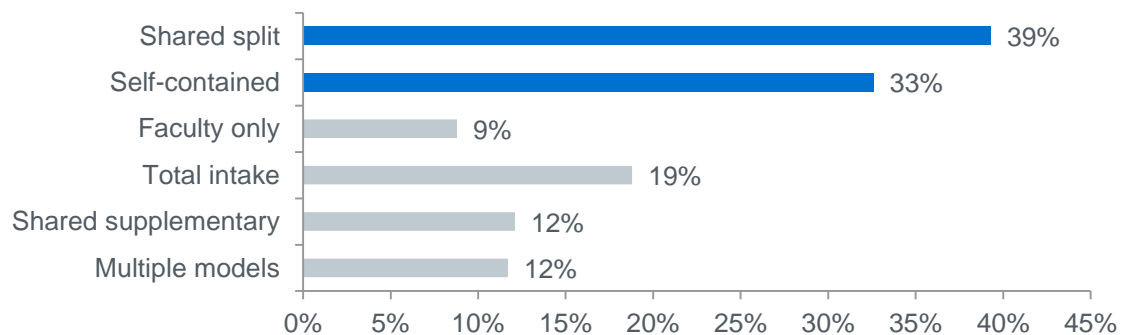
Advising Models

NACADA Survey Reveals Two Dominant Advising Models Among Two-Year Institutions

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) surveyed 239 two-year institutions and asked respondents to indicate which of the following five advising models are used on their campuses; respondents could select multiple options, resulting in a multiple models category:

- **Self-contained:** All advising occurs in a center staffed primarily by professional advisors or counselors; faculty may also advise in the center.
- **Faculty only:** All advising is done by a faculty member, usually in the student's academic discipline.
- **Shared supplementary:** Professional staff in a center support advisors (usually faculty) by providing resources/training.
- **Shared split:** Faculty members provide advising in academic discipline while staff are responsible for a subset of students (e.g., undecided, pre-majors).
- **Total intake:** All incoming students are advised in a center; students may be assigned elsewhere later.¹

Frequency of Academic Advising Models at Two-Year Institutions



Source: 2011 NACADA National Survey of Academic Advising
Aggregate percentage exceeds 100 because respondents could select multiple model options.
n=239 two-year institutions

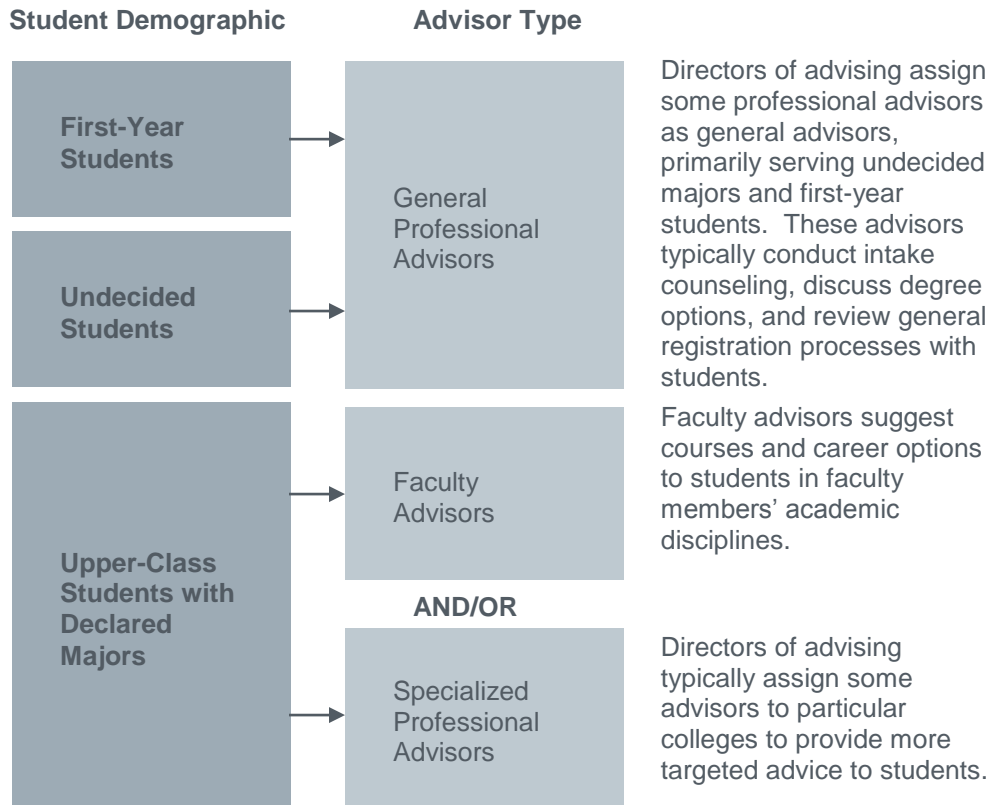
Most Profiled Institutions Rely on a Shared Split Advising Model

Five of six profiled institutions rely on both professional staff and faculty members to deliver academic advising services to students. Professional advisors with broad knowledge of the institution and general education requirements typically serve first-year and undecided students. Professional staff members advise incoming students at all profiled institutions through group intake sessions or one-on-one sessions during orientation. Faculty advisors with specialized knowledge of discrete academic areas and industries more effectively advise upper-class students with defined interests.

1) Education Advisory Board (2013). "The Future of Academic Advising: Delivering High-Impact Guidance at Scale." National Academic Advising Association (2011). "National Survey of Academic Advising," <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/2011-NACADA-National-Survey.aspx>.

Channeling Students into Advising Services

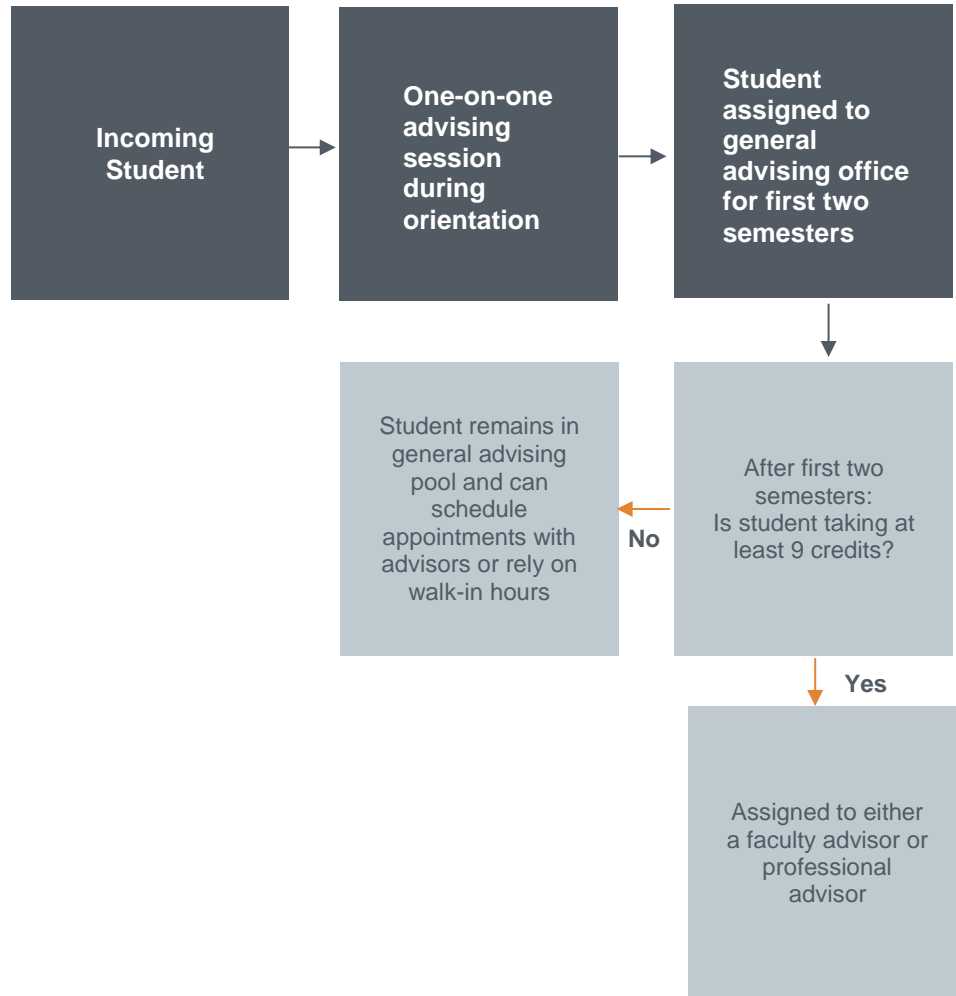
Synthesized Model



Institutions often alter this model to accommodate staffing levels or student needs. At **Institution F**, faculty members advise students who seek applied science degrees and professional staff advise college transfer students.

Institution C

The advising model at **Institution C** incorporates general advising pools, professional staff, and faculty advisors to effectively leverage limited resources.



Union Contracts Often Require Faculty Advisement

Faculty members at some profiled institutions belong to unions or collective bargaining associations that standardize advisement responsibilities across the faculty to promote equity. Union requirements may limit flexibility in the organization of advising services; however, negotiated solutions may include overload pay or course release.

Professional Staff Provide Increased Availability to Students

Full-time professional advisors typically serve students 40 hours per week throughout the calendar year while faculty members work on 9-month contracts and must balance advisement with their other priorities (e.g., teaching, research). Summer is the busiest time of year for academic advisors due to course registration and enrollment; however, faculty members are often unavailable. Institutions that rely heavily on faculty advisors encourage students to seek assistance through appointments or walk-in hours with professional staff when faculty advisors are unavailable.

Impact of Advisor Type on Desirable Advisor Characteristics

Desirable Characteristics for Academic Advisors	General Education Requirement Knowledge	Academic Program Knowledge	Transfer Eligibility Knowledge	Industry Knowledge	Accessibility	Marginal Cost to Institution
Advisor Type						
Professional Staff						
Faculty Advisor						



No Impact



Minimal Impact



Moderate Impact



Significant Impact



Complete Impact

Most Commonly Noted Advantages and Disadvantages of Professional Staff and Faculty as Advisors

Professional Advisors



- University-wide knowledge of degree programs, academic policies, and graduation requirements
- Training in career-mapping, counseling, etc.
- Enables faculty to focus on other responsibilities



- May lack knowledge on particular features of a specific degree program
- Can lack perspective on departmental issues (e.g., extracurricular opportunities related to major)
- No experience with students in a classroom setting

Faculty Advisors



- Can serve as academic mentor
- Unique perspective on students' academic strengths and weaknesses
- Potential author of reference letters; networking resource
- Special insight regarding specific subject area



- Lack of institutional knowledge on topics such as graduation requirements or transfer
- Faculty may not allot sufficient time for advising responsibilities
- Often lack formal training



Part-Time Virtual Advisors Mitigate Burden on Limited Institutional Staff

Institution D offers students the ability to access part-time advisors virtually through live online chats and rapid-response emails. The institution hired former employees to serve as part-time virtual advisors and offers stipends to existing staff who take on additional work. Contacts note that virtual advisors serve approximately 4,000 students per month.

Differentiated Programs

Consider Decentralizing Advising Service Models to Mitigate Program-Specific Challenges

Many institutions maintains some academic units or programs that feature a dedicated or differentiated set of advising services distinct from the institution’s general advising model. Contacts attribute these distinctions to institution-specific historical narratives, faculty member preferences, external regulatory requirements, and grant stipulations.

Niche Advising Programs

Circumstance	Example
Department faculty members prefer to consolidate advising responsibilities amongst a core group of members.	The criminal justice program at Institution C disperses advising responsibilities among only five of 18 department faculty members; these five are particularly skilled and interested in advising. The department receives special permission to deviate from the institution-wide union contract that requires all faculty members to advise at least 18 students per semester; contacts speculate that the five advisors receive overload compensation for their additional service.
Limited-entry and competitive programs require strict course sequencing and prerequisites.	Institution F employs six professional staff members to advise students enrolled in limited-entry health science programs and students seeking admission to competitive clinical experiences.
State professional licensure boards require dedicated programmatic advisors.	Institution B employs a professional advisor dedicated to nursing programs to satisfy the state’s Board of Nursing requirements. The dedicated advisor is part of the centralized advising office, but only works with students enrolled or seeking enrollment in nursing programs.
Grant stipulations require dedicated programmatic advisor.	Institution E , recipient of a U.S. Department of Labor Grant, offers programs for trade-displaced workers, veterans, the unemployed and underemployed, and low-skilled individuals. The grant requires (and funds) a dedicated program advisor to perform intake counseling, academic advising, and career coaching for students in those programs.
Large programs transfer many students to one target institution	Institution F employs a professional advisor dedicated to engineering students. Engineering is the institution’s largest program, and many students transfer to a state flagship institution each year.
Institution partners with local organizations to provide courses off-site	Institution D offers credit-bearing courses off-campus at the site of community-based organizations. The institution employs dedicated advisors to facilitate the programs.

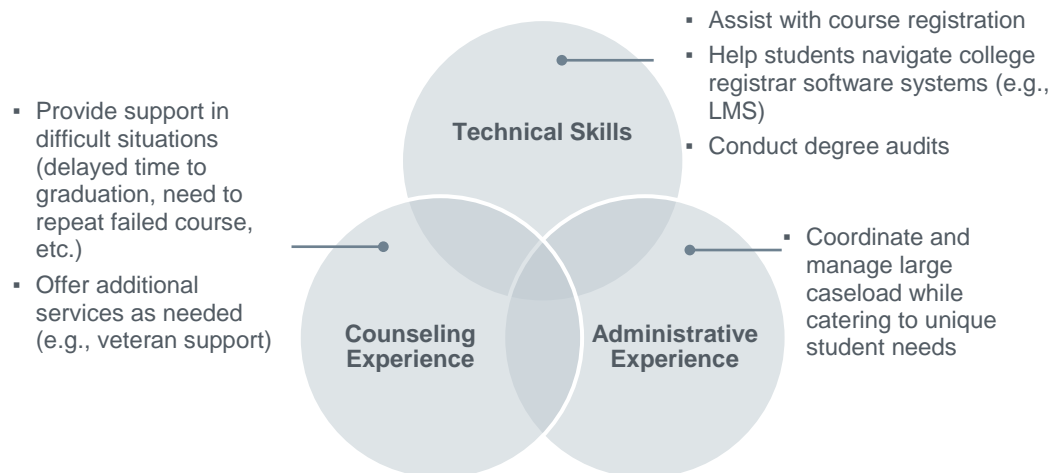
3) Optimization of Advising Services

Training

Professional Advising Staff Require Technical, Administrative, and Counseling Experience

Most institutions employ master's degree-holding professionals to serve as professional advisors as they possess the specialized skills and training necessary to advise and counsel students. In addition to a master's degree, ideal candidates should also possess administrative, technical, and counseling experience. Administrative and technical experience ensures advisors can understand and navigate the details and software systems involved in the academic advising process; counseling experience ensures that advisors possess the communication and listening skills necessary to counsel students in challenging personal and academic circumstances and to mitigate problematic situations (e.g., delayed time to graduation).²

Advisor Key Skills Matrix



Require Six to Eight Weeks of Training and Observation for Professional Advisors

Professional advisors undergo training to acclimate themselves with the academic advising process at a new institution (e.g., course registration, degree audit). Administrators also outline advisors' responsibilities and expectations during the training process to apprise advisors of the performance evaluation metrics. Advisors typically undergo training for six to eight weeks prior to their first independent contact with a student.³

2) Education Advisory Board (2013). "Academic Advising at Community Colleges: Assessment and Evaluation Strategies."

3) Education Advisory Board (2013). "Administration of Academic Advising at Community Colleges."

New Hire Professional Advisor Training

Weeks One to Four

- Attend lecture and discussion sessions led by experienced advisor or director of advising
- Attend workshops on special topics instructed by campus representatives (e.g., registrar, deans of different academic colleges)
- Shadow tenured advisors (10 to 15 hours per week at **College H**)
- Review training manual regarding advising protocol and registration processes

Weeks Five and Six

- Advise under observation of tenured advisors
- Continue training sessions that review advising protocol and degree requirements

Train Faculty Advisors through Abbreviated Workshops

Due to limited schedules, faculty typically cannot participate in the comprehensive training offered to new professional advisors.

Professional advisors host one or two training sessions per semester for faculty advisors and also provide one-on-one training sessions to faculty members on demand. Since faculty are already familiar with courses within their academic discipline, faculty advisor training workshops focus on general advising strategies and issues unique to community college students. Most institutions include advisement training for faculty during new faculty onboarding sessions, but do not require ongoing training throughout their tenure. At **Institution A**, the deans of each academic college partner annually to facilitate an optional “advising institute” for all faculty members.

Training for Niche Program Advisors

Contacts at profiled institutions do not report that distinct advisors for niche or differentiated programs require additional specialized training. This applies both to faculty and professional advisors. Full training sessions for programmatic advisors would be inefficient due to limited participation and variance in each advisors’ responsibilities. Most specialized training occurs “on-the-job.”

Encourage Cross-Campus Communication to Supplement Training

Although professional advisors in centralized offices are typically generalists who serve students across academic disciplines, the directors of advisement at **Institution B** and **Institution F** assign advisors to specialize in particular portfolios of academic programs or departments. For example, one advisor at Institution B counsels all students in STEM programs. Advisors regularly attend faculty and department meetings for their assigned programs to stay abreast of unit-specific changes, concerns, and questions. This facilitates ongoing relationships between professional advisors and faculty members to more effectively meet student needs. In typical advising models, faculty members interact most with the director of advisement and not professional advisors themselves.

Consider Dedicated Advisors to Target At-Risk Students with Intrusive Advising Tactics

Some institutions employ an intrusive advising approach for students who experience academic difficulties (e.g., excessive absences, frequent low test scores). Advisors proactively contact these students to prompt them to schedule advising appointments. During these appointments, advisors discuss the student's challenges, help students locate support services (e.g., counseling, tutoring) and help students establish academic goals to improve their performance.

Institution D and **Institution F** employ dedicated advisors to specifically target first-year students. Institution F's program focuses on first-time college students placed in two or more developmental subject areas; the institution funds the program's four advisors in part through grant money.

Enhanced Technology Tools Are Evolving Advising Processes

Advisors increasingly employ technology tools to better share information about students (e.g., advising appointment notes, automated scheduling systems), systematize degree audits, form degree maps that can conduct "what-if?" analyses of program changes, and keep general records about students. These tools are expensive, but offload manual and prescriptive advising off advisors to allow them to spend more time conducting developmental conversations and managing their caseload proactively as opposed to reactively.

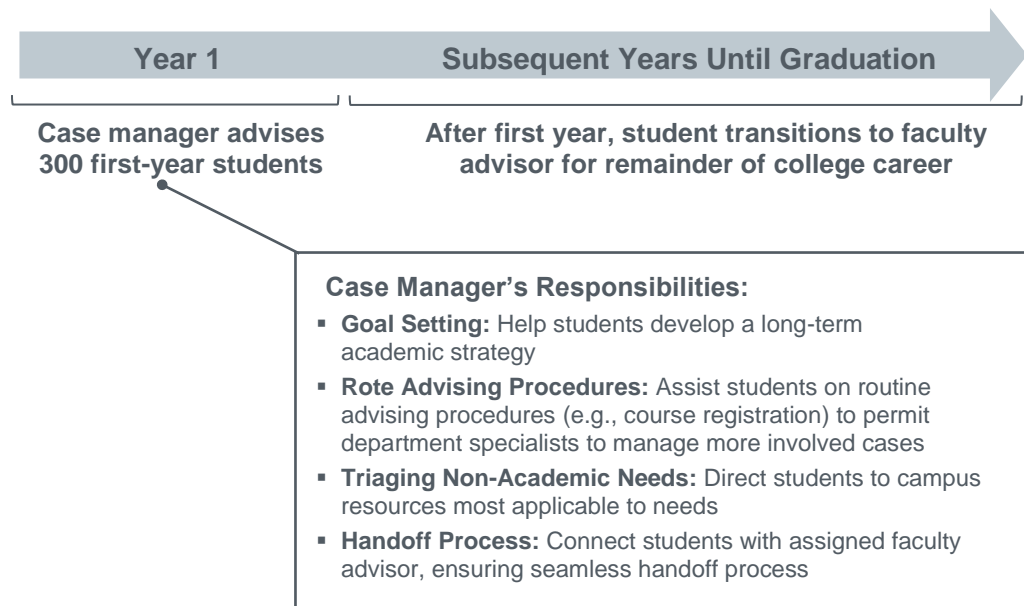
4) Institutional Profiles of Proactive Advising Models

Case in Brief: “GPS for Success” Program

First-Year Case Managers Helps Students Link Career and Curricular Decisions

At **Institution D**, the “GPS for Success” program builds early credit-hour achievement momentum among all incoming students through provision of intensive personalized support. After attending Student Orientation Advising & Registration (SOAR) and New Student Orientation (NSO) sessions, each student receives assignment to a first-year advisor; each advisor manages a caseload of 300 incoming students. The GPS for Success program prides itself on the practice of holistic developmental advising. With a low student-to-staff ratio, advisors can conduct probing conversations about student goals and motivation, monitor student performance, and proactively establish regular appointments. At the conclusion of the first year, advisors arrange a formal hand-off and introduction of students to their assigned departmental-based faculty advisors.⁴

First-Year Advisor Responsibilities at *Institution D*



Case in Brief: “BEACON” Program

Three-Pronged Approach Serves Holistic Student Needs

Administrators at **Institution K** have launched the BEACON program, which incorporates a variety of best practices into a resource-intensive model of advising.

Students must specifically apply and gain admission to the program, but all first-time students who enroll in at least six credit hours as part of a for-credit certificate or associate's degree program are eligible and informed of the program. Once informed, over 99 percent of students decide to apply; peer mentors (profiled below) encourage and shepherd students through the application process.⁵

4) Education Advisory Board (2013). “The Future of Academic Advising: Delivering High-Impact Guidance at Scale.”

5) Education Advisory Board (2013). “Profiles of Community College Career Coaching.”

BEACON Program Structure

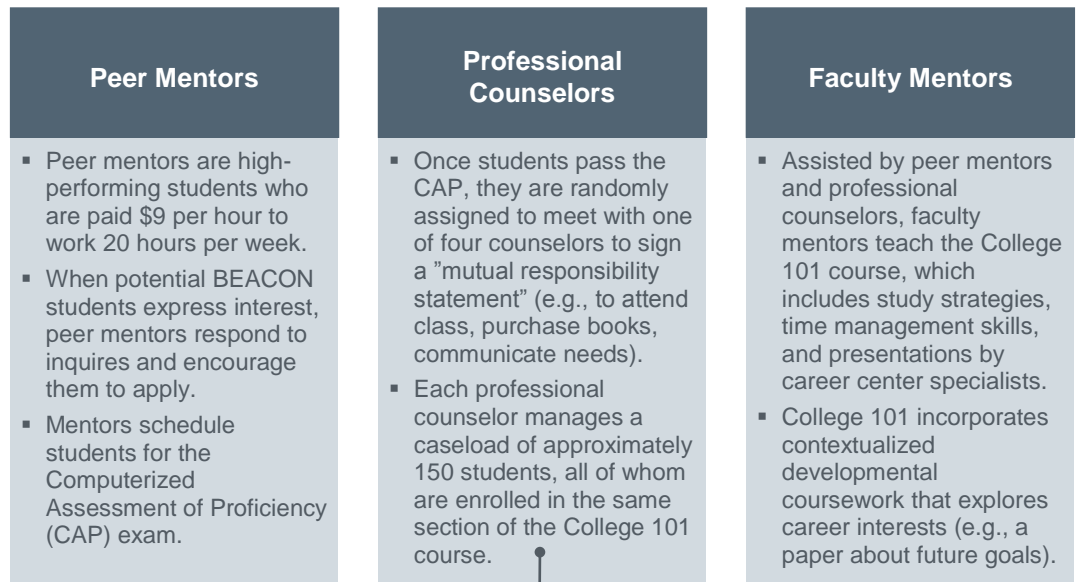
Student Intake → Counselor Assignment → College 101 Course



Semester-to-Semester Persistence

+25%

BEACON students persist at rates 25 percent above the normal campus population seeking associate's and certificate programs. The average BEACON student is 26 or 27 years old, though many are also recent high school graduates.



- Counselors are **expected to meet with students biweekly**, eventually migrating to once-a-month, and can conduct appointments in-person, by phone, or through other electronic platforms.
- Counselors serve as a **single point of contact** for all academic advising, career counseling, and success coaching (e.g., time management, motivation) throughout students' time at Institution K. Counselors refer students as needed to other college services, such as substance abuse counselors and mental health specialists.
- Students depend on counselors for **all registration needs** and may not add or drop courses by themselves. Counselors track student attendance and grades through collaboration with course instructors and intervene with students who are struggling academically.
- Program managers **evaluate professional counselors on performance of caseloads** (e.g., average levels of academic achievement, retention, and completion) and do not hesitate to terminate low-performing counselors.

Leaders Portray Pilot Program as Experiment, But Gradually Phase-in Transformative Approach to Student Services

Institutional leaders have invested resources in the BEACON program because they regard it as a way to transform service delivery and center campus culture around student success. Rather than spend political capital on controversial restructuring or cross-training initiatives affecting existing staff, institutional leaders have instead framed the BEACON program as a pilot program featuring an experimental service model delivered by newly-hired staff. However, because the BEACON program is now offered to all students admitted in fall and spring semesters, it is rapidly growing and served about one-

Resource Investment Causes Tension Among Staff

The tremendous amount of resources diverted to the BEACON program (i.e., BEACON students receive priority over other students when referred to various student services, counselors enjoy a 150-student caseload while other advisors operate on a walk-in model, etc.) has triggered tension among the student services staff.

Debate exists as to whether the BEACON programs should hire and cross-train existing staff to serve as counselors or hire only externally. Some program advocates fear that traditional academic advisors will not successfully acclimate to new, proactive models of student services.

third of total college enrollments by fall 2013.

Leadership plans to entirely supplant the traditional campus services structure with the BEACON model once almost all students admitted under the previous model graduate. Many academic advising and student services staff will undergo cross-training to become single-point-of-contact BEACON counselors or pursue other jobs across the college, though other services will remain intact (e.g., academic skills tutoring center, mental health counseling).⁶

Budgetary Resources Insufficient to Fund Program in Perpetuity

Contacts admit continued debate over the long-term viability of the program after depletion of the \$5 million Department of Labor grant, which can support the program for about three years. To continue to fund BEACON, institutional leaders have considered a number of potential programmatic shifts that may partially dilute the program but sustain its core service delivery model:

- **Increase counselor to student ratios** substantially and provide for group advising appointments at later stages in student development instead of individualized appointments
- **Eliminate the faculty mentor component** (which alone costs \$200,000 annually in course buy-out time and other staffing expenses) and task professional counselors to teach College 101 instead⁷

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid.

5) Evaluation and Assessment

Assessment Strategies

Assess Advising Effectiveness through Student Satisfaction Surveys and Learning Outcome Examinations

Directors of advising most often assess their efforts through meeting- or event-specific surveys and larger studies of student engagement.

Contacts note that student-facing surveys incur low response rates and often reflect extreme opinions, both positive and negative, of the students inclined to share their feedback. Students may negatively rate their advising experience if advisors deliver unwanted or uncomfortable information.

Several quantitative metrics may supplement qualitative survey data to assess advising effectiveness:⁸

- Course grades or grade point averages in specific programs
- Rate of follow-through with action plans
- Rate of response to advisor meeting requests (applicable to intrusive advising)
- Retention or persistence rates in specific programs
- Referrals to student services

Strategies to Assess Student Engagement and Satisfaction in Advising

Evaluate Advising as Part of Comprehensive Student Surveys

Common institution-wide assessments of student engagement, which also gather feedback regarding academic advising, include the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE).

Administer Advising-Specific Student Satisfaction Surveys

Some advising staff gather student feedback immediately after students visit advisors through paper and email surveys. At the conclusion of each registration period, the director of advising at **College G** emails an electronic survey to all students. The survey includes multiple choice and open-ended questions that inquire about accessibility and usefulness of advising.

Assess Student Learning Outcomes with Pre- and Post-Event Tests

The director of advising at **College J** assesses the learning outcomes of students who attend first-year introduction to advising events through pre-event and post-event tests that examine students' knowledge of registration protocol, how to access advising services, and general education and major course requirements. After reviewing test results, the director can identify areas where students showed improved knowledge to assess the efficacy of advising events. To improve future sessions, the director can incorporate more information on areas in which students are still less knowledgeable.

8) Education Advisory Board (2013). "Administration of Academic Advising at Community Colleges."

Provide Opportunities for Self-Assessment and Goal Setting

Contacts recommend that supervisors conduct informal evaluations at least once per month. This practice builds open communication between supervisors and staff members in the first months of employment. It also provides opportunities for staff to discuss difficulties and set goals to resolve them. Over time, these meetings encourage insightful self-evaluation.



Consider Case-Based Evaluations to Assess Advisors' Functional Knowledge and Skills⁹

At **College I**, the director of advising assesses the performance of advisors with six months tenure through a case-based test. The evaluation presents 13 mock cases regarding courses and registration processes. Example scenarios include:

- **Course Selection:**
 - A new General Studies student scores the following on Accuplacer: Math P=45 and Math A=48; Writing, Essay=5 and Sentence Skills=76; and Reading=59. What courses would you advise this student to take?
 - A transfer student provides you with an unofficial transcript from another community college that shows completion of Math 0306 at that college. How do you know in what math class to place that student?
- **Registration Processes:**
 - You are registering the student and receive the message "Level Restriction." What does this message mean and can you override it?

9) Education Advisory Board (2013). "Administration of Academic Advising at Community Colleges."

6) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What is the basic structure of academic advising at peer institutions and which units deliver academic advising services?
- To what extent do peer institutions decentralize advising services by academic program? Which programs or departments, if any, deliver their own academic advising services?
- How do administrators at peer institutions evaluate academic advising services and organizational structures? Upon what metrics do administrators rely to evaluate academic advising?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB’s internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
 - Education Advisory Board (2013). “Academic Advising at Community Colleges: Assessment and Evaluation Strategies.”
 - Education Advisory Board (2013). “Administration of Academic Advising at Community Colleges.”
 - Education Advisory Board (2013). “Profiles of Community College Career Coaching.”
 - Education Advisory Board (2013). “The Future of Academic Advising: Delivering High-Impact Guidance at Scale.”
- National Academic Advising Association (2011). “National Survey of Academic Advising,” <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/2011-NACADA-National-Survey.aspx>.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators responsible for advisement services at the following community colleges:

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Institution A	Mid-Atlantic	10,252 (all undergraduate)	Associate's--Public Suburban-serving Multicampus
Institution B	Mountain West	8,361 (all undergraduate)	Associate's--Public Urban-serving Multicampus
Institution C	Northeast	10,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's--Public Suburban-serving Multicampus
Institution D	Mid-Atlantic	52,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's--Public Suburban-serving Multicampus

Institution E	Missouri	15,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's--Public Rural-serving Large
Institution F	South	20,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's--Public Urban-serving Multicampus
College G	South	20,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's—Public Urban-serving Multicampus
College H	Midwest	16,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's—Public Suburban-serving Single Campus
College I	South	15,00 (all undergraduate)	Associate's—Public Rural-serving Large
College J	South	12,000 (all undergraduate)	Associate's—Public Rural-serving Large
College K	Mid-Atlantic	3,000	Associate's—Public Rural-serving Medium