

**Salt Lake Community College
Academic and Career Advising Office
Program Review
External Review Team Report
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Submitted by:

Dr. Lee Hinckley
Academic Advisor, University Studies
Utah Valley State University
Orem, Utah

Dr. David Hubert
ePortfolio Director and Political Science Professor,
Salt Lake Community College

Dr. Ann Parker, Lead Reviewer
Vice President for Student Development
Pima Community College Desert Vista Campus
Tucson, Arizona

RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify the role of the Academic and Career Office Advisors on the campus.

There is every indication that the advisors in the Academic and Career Advising Office are committed to assisting students and giving the best direction and advice that they can. The training program is a positive step in ensuring that advisors are given the support they need to be successful. However, the rest of the campus has a different view of the commitment and ability of the staff, and there is a general view the office does not utilize student development theory in its approach to advising students on academics and careers.

Each group we met with had its own idea of what the advisors were doing and/or what they should be doing. The general perception is that the Academic and Career Advising staff spends more time on mundane or transactional tasks, such as approving a student's schedule or removing a hold, rather than helping students see the big picture, encouraging them to develop lifelong learning skills, and holding them accountable for following policies and program requirements. Rather than encouraging the easiest route with students, advisors need to help students understand the connection between a major or program of study and their career goals; the general feeling was that this was not happening during advising sessions.

Leadership in the Academic and Career Advising Office needs to provide a strong, unifying mission to the entire campus about the roles and responsibilities of all the advisors. We recommend that a group of staff from the Academic and Career Advising Office be brought together to establish clear guidelines as to what their job responsibilities are and what students, staff and faculty can expect from them. Staff should be expected to know campus policies and to enforce them with students. This mission needs to be prominently displayed in the office and should be constantly reinforced by the advising staff.

In order to help lighten the responsibilities of the staff in the Academic and Career Advising Office, it was recommended that recognition of outstanding students should be removed from this office and placed with the Dean of Students or the Provost.

Develop Student Learning Outcomes that focus on the development of critical thinking skills and a commitment to self-responsibility.

The Academic and Career Advising Office included its Student Learning Outcomes in the Self Study; however, it was interesting to hear from the Provost that he thought that Office needed to develop learning outcomes. In reviewing the current learning outcomes, it appears that they are quite broad, somewhat vague, and not connected to the current practices of the Academic and Career Advising Office. Therefore, one recommendation the Review Team has is for the Office to revisit its Student Learning Outcomes to make them more results-oriented. The outcomes should focus on ways to provide more intrusive advising with students; to assist students in determining their career plans; to provide them with a clear understanding of their program of study and how that helps them meet their career goals; and to move students

towards self-efficacy. Currently, the office is viewed as mainly helping students with a series of transactions.

Academic advising and career advising should be more closely linked; career advising has to be a part of the academic process and should occur early in the student's career at SLCC. To meet this need, the Academic and Career Advising Office should develop Student Learning Outcomes that are tied directly to student development theory. All of the advising staff should be involved in developing these outcomes so there is a strong sense of ownership of the outcomes.

Continue to provide positive professional development opportunities and develop a sense of empowerment among the advisors.

The Academic and Career Advising staff members are committed to providing accurate information to students, but often feel that the long line means they should get students in and out as soon as possible, and students sometimes feel that the advisors are "too relaxed" and give out information just to give students something before they leave. The staff should be tapped for their expertise and for their help in brainstorming ways the processes in the office can be streamlined.

One way to allow more staff input would be to change the Meeting Agendas to include more time for staff to spend in discussing issues/case studies/policies/best practices amongst themselves. Updates from Departments and other Student Services areas could be shared in the Announcements and Updates Newsletter that is now only sent out during Rush or through emails. Staff could also be directed to the Intranet for reminders about program requirements, etc. These weekly meetings should be scheduled for an hour and a half at the most; all the advisors agreed that two and half hours was counter-productive as most of them "tuned out" after an hour or so.

In addition to the weekly meetings, we recommend that all student services staff have a scheduled meeting at least once a semester, although monthly would be better. This would provide an opportunity for all staff to discuss updates in curriculum and policies that affect students (such as new Financial Aid policies or changes to programs of study), would provide more training for all staff; and would encourage networking and collaboration between student services offices. These meetings should last for no more than one hour to ensure that staff are getting the most pertinent information quickly and effectively.

Staff would also benefit from mini-field trips to the other sites to learn about specific programs or to attend information sessions that are already offered to students.

The Program Advisors appear to be more knowledgeable about their specific program(s) and therefore more comfortable in the advice they give to students, while general advisors often seem unsure of the advice they give to students. One recommendation is to assign general advisors to programs so they can have more in-depth knowledge about some of the programs

at the college and serve as program specialists for their peers. This might help the General Advisors feel more secure in their advising.

The I-Drive could be developed further as an effective resource for advisors. Staff mentioned the need to standardize the I-Drive so that information is easy to find and is up-to-date. We recommend that the office create an I-Drive Task Force made up of Academic and Career Advising staff who can review the Intranet and determine its effectiveness in providing current, easy to find information for all advisors.

Academic and Career Advising staff appear to be excited about the implementation of DegreeWorks and how it might allow advisors to spend less time going over Programs of Studies and course requirements with students and more time providing intrusive advising about students' goals and their career development. It will be imperative that staff receive robust training in all the resources that DegreeWorks will provide to students so staff can encourage students to be more self-directed in understanding their coursework and program requirements. The DegreeWorks training should include a skills test with an appropriate pass score to ensure that advisors have mastered the necessary skills to effectively use the program.

All Academic and Career Advising staff should be involved in recommending creative ways to meet the demands of the advising rush periods. Ideas include better use of technology in providing general information to students; more group advising sessions; better triage from the front desk; and a more streamlined method for dealing with academic and financial aid holds during the beginning of the semester.

Finally, while the new approach for providing training for new advisors in necessary skills and knowledge they need in 10, 20 and 60 days has not been in place long enough to determine its effectiveness, the staff needs to continue to investigate ways to provide staff training quickly and effectively. One recommendation is to develop a rigorous Canvas/ePortfolio based training program for new advisors, and a method of continuing education for advisors, perhaps through peers sharing tips with each other at meetings.

Revisit the function of the Front Desk.

While it may seem that staffing the front desk with part-time students is the best way to maximize professional staff time on appointments and walk-ins, this approach should be re-evaluated. Concern was expressed regarding the challenges the current arrangement poses for training, morale, and quality service at a critical "first point-of-contact" moment for new students.

Rotating more professional staff through the front desk to assist students might help to create a more efficient process of meeting the needs of the huge number of students that come through during the rush period. For example, an advisor at the front desk might be able to remove holds for students so they don't need an appointment, and might be able to provide more triage for students so they don't need to spend any or as much time with an advisor. Similarly, students

could be encouraged to complete more transactions on the computer so that advising meetings can focus on intrusive advising.

Since the Peer Mentor Program at the South Campus appeared to be working very well, it may be that the front desk student workers are also trained as Peer Mentors who can provide answers to questions of students who are waiting in line.

Strengthen communication and collaboration with other student services offices and with academic programs and departments.

Academic and Career Advising needs to be smarter about building bridges to the faculty and to other student services offices. There is a perceived disconnect between the office and academics, especially when it comes to communicating new academic programs and resources to students.

We would also encourage the Academic and Career Advising Office leadership to spend more time collaborating with peers across the institution about how to improve advising and career services for students. One positive step would be to visit with departments about how they would like to market their majors/programs/degrees to students, and then assist them in their efforts rather than requiring them to be involved in the Career Fair when there is little perceived value on their part.

Since the role that Program Advisors play are perceived differently by various departments and by the Academic and Career Advising Office, there needs to be a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Program Advisors, and there should be consistent guidelines established in how they are utilized by the departments. This is another area where the Academic and Career Advising Office Director can take a leadership role by listening to the needs of departments and then collaborating with faculty and their Program Advisors to develop clear job descriptions that meet the needs of the departments while ensuring that the staff have the time to meet with students.

Market the Academic and Career Services Office so students, staff and faculty are clear on resources and expectations.

The fact that the Provost was not already aware that the Academic and Career Advising Office had developed Student Learning Outcomes is an indication that the office can do a better job of clearly articulating its goals, services, and programs to students, staff, and faculty. The SLOs should be posted visibly within the office and shared with students whenever possible. Similarly, the Academic and Career Advising staff should be regularly reviewing these SLOs to ensure they understand their role in enhancing student learning and growth and that staff recognize the important role they play in helping develop students.

Students don't seem to be aware of the different types of advisors and which one(s) they should meet with depending on their needs. A list of advisors and their responsibilities should

be prominently displayed in the office and on the website, along with a list of programs, who the corresponding Advisor is for that program, their location and their contact information.

There appears to be a nomenclature problem when it comes to the Early Alert System (technically the EAAN) to assist struggling students and the Early Alert Response system for behavioral threats; the names are not sufficiently distinct enough for students, staff and faculty to understand the difference between these two resources. There should be better faculty advising for students in the first stage of EAAN, because when students go to an advisor the advisor simply tells them to work with their faculty anyway.

To the extent possible, there should be an additional and continued effort to recruit and support peer mentors. Peer mentoring at SLCC has proven to be an effective, low cost, win-win program for the students they mentor, the college, and the community it serves.

CONCLUSION

The Academic and Career Advising Office at Salt Lake Community College is an integral part of the College and provides many effective programs and resources for students, faculty and staff. The Self Study demonstrates that the Office is committed to continuous evaluation and improvement in how it provides services to students. The Review Team Members feel that this is a positive indication that the Office will review the recommendations in this report and look for ways to incorporate them into the Office functions. The Academic and Career Advising staff work hard to ensure the success of students and seem eager to continue to improve and to develop themselves as advising professionals. The fact that so many students continue to rely on the expertise of the advisors also speaks to the fact that students recognize the importance of the support they receive from the office.