

Advising on Advising Final Report

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Introduction

Our GI2025 Working Group on Academic Advising met seven times from November 2021 through March 2022. We focused our discussions on two Recommendations for Areas of Focus from the March 2021 NACADA Student Success Teams and Academic Advising Program Review. The two recommendations we focused on were:

- Develop institutional vision, mission, goal statements and outcomes for academic advising.
- Develop a required and proactive advising model.

The NACADA report offered multiple recommendations, but these two recommendations align with the top challenges our group identified based on our collective CSUF advising experiences. The top challenges we identified are:

- Advising is super fragmented.
- Students experience too many hand-offs.
- Student advising experiences vary widely.
- Advisor training is inconsistent.
- Our advising structure is unclear to students, faculty, and staff.

Exploring these two specific NACADA recommendations offered the best opportunity to address our identified challenges most effectively.

Recommendation 1. Vision, Mission, Goals

We recommend the following vision statement for CSUF academic advising:

Academic advising at Cal State Fullerton empowers students to fulfill their academic goals and pursue their purpose and professional aims.

This vision statement makes explicit that CSUF academic advising is to be holistic in nature, covering course registration for both General Education and major courses, degree planning, and career preparation. This holistic nature is very different from models of academic advising which are transactional in nature and focus primarily on getting students enrolled in courses. Professional advising gives students both a path *to* graduation and a path *after* graduation. The difference between traditional and professional advising is shown in the EAB graphic in Figure 1.

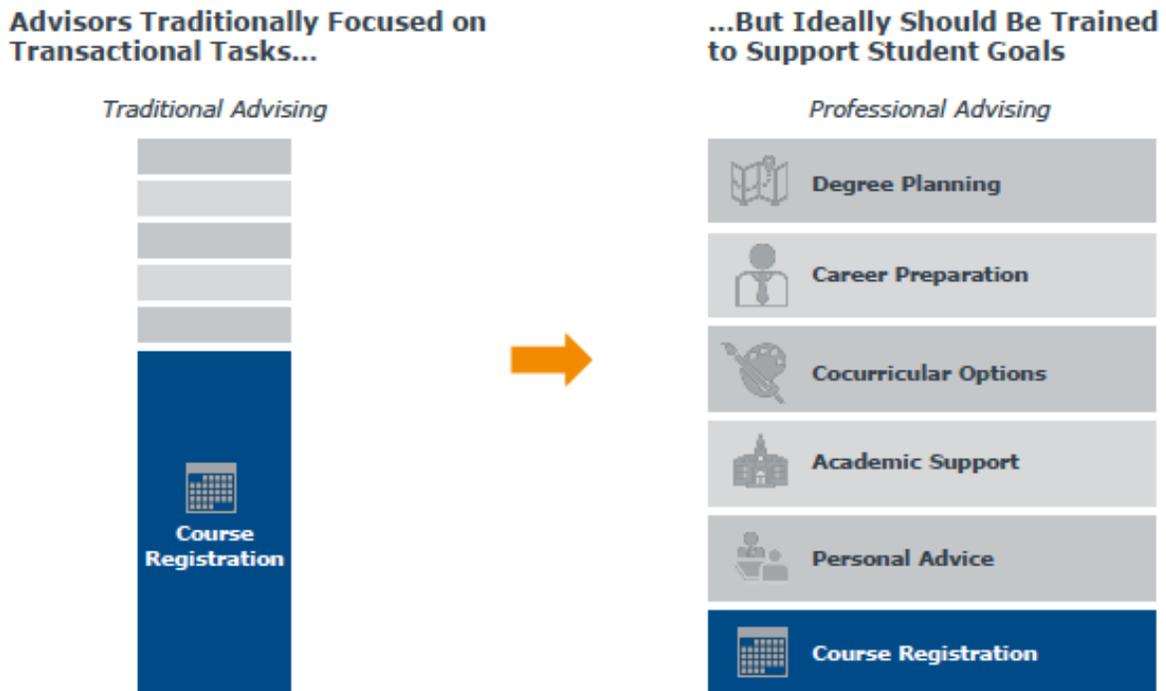


Figure 1. EAB graphic showing the difference between transactional and holistic advising. From: *Achieving Pathway Goals with Student Centered Design*. Education Advisory Board, Community College Executive Forum, p. 12.

Implementing our advising vision requires that advisors are trained and knowledgeable in multiple areas (academics, financial aid, student care and support, career options). A benefit of this model is that it will decrease the sense of an “advising season” which peaks during course registration windows and allow advising appointments to be spread evenly over the entire academic year. To be clear, academic advisors will not take the formal role of financial aid, mental health, or career counselors. Rather, advisors will make space to address these topics when they engage with students in their academic planning. This conversation enriches the relationship and comfort level between advisor and student and enhances the student sense of belonging through academic advising. Advisors refer and at times escort their students to the appropriate non-academic resources as needed.

Recommendation 2. Develop a required and proactive advising model.

Table 1 shows how many FTF started in each college in Fall 2017 and then in Fall 2019 how many remained in that same original college, how many were in a different college, how many were no longer enrolled at CSUF, and the total number and percent who either changed colleges or left the university. The data are from the Tableau dashboard located here

<https://mytab.fullerton.edu/#/views/MajorMigrationPatterns/MigrationPattern?:iid=1>.

After four terms, 35% of our entering CSUF FTF are not in the **college** they originally entered and/or are no longer enrolled at CSUF. If we include the undeclared FTF, this total rises to 41%. Most colleges are about 50-50 in terms of students leaving the college versus leaving the university.

Table 1. Student college migration pattern for Fall 2017 FTF cohort.

College	Fall 17	Remaining in original college Fall 19	Different college Fall 19	Not enrolled at CSUF Fall 19	Total changed college/left university Fall 19	Percent changed college/left university Fall 19
CBE	755	517	104	134	238	32%
CCOM	237	169	39	29	68	29%
COTA	301	212	40	49	89	30%
ECS	655	387	134	134	268	41%
HHD	601	445	59	97	156	26%
HHS	774	521	115	138	253	33%
NSM	551	250	175	126	301	55%
Other	563	111	340	112	452	80%
TOTAL (declared)	3874	2501	666	707	1373	35%
TOTAL (declared + undeclared)	4437	2612	1006	819	1825	41%

In developing an advising model, we sought to address the top challenges identified in the introduction; increase student retention; and facilitate the path to degree for students who change majors as well as those who enter CSUF as undeclared majors.

With these goals in mind, we recommend an academic advising model which employs professional advisors for first- and second-year students and college-based advisors for third year-students and beyond. These two sets of advisors work collaboratively throughout a student’s career to make advising feel seamless to students as they progress through their CSUF career. In this proposed model, upon acceptance of their CSUF admissions offer, first-year students are assigned to a professional advisor, as part of that advisor’s caseload. The advisor’s name and contact information are included in university Welcome materials, so the student has an immediate, personal touchpoint with the university. This professional advisor will provide holistic academic advising for the student throughout the student’s first four terms at CSUF.

Transfer students are students with junior standing who have successfully transitioned out of high school and through the first sixty units of college, but are new to our CSUF campus. As such, transfer students require college based advising support while also requiring some of the same supports our entering FTF require. The best mix of college-based and professional advising support for transfer students requires further discussion.

Our advising vision statement includes empowering students to fulfill their academic goals *and* to pursue their purpose and professional aims. To meet both of these objectives, we recommend grouping both advisors and students, albeit grouping advisors and students by different criteria as explained next.

The first part of our vision statement (“fulfill their academic goals”) is accomplished through advisor training and grouping. Specifically, advisors will be trained in *all* foundational first and second year pathways. This broad training will enable advisors to treat each student in their first and second years as an explorer seeking to identify their academic passion. We further recommend analyzing historical CSUF student major migration patterns and grouping academic majors into six to eight aligned groupings based

loosely on these patterns. Each advisor will be assigned to one of these groupings and receive additional training beyond the broad foundational pathways, specific to these curricular paths. Because the groups are loosely defined by student migration patterns, this approach will maximize the opportunity for students to remain with the same professional advisor if/when they change majors. The foundational pathways and additional curricular training of professional advisors will be done in partnership with faculty experts from each department relevant to the assigned grouping.

Parallel with the migration pattern advisor grouping described above, the second part of our vision statement (“pursue their purpose and professional aims”) requires helping students discover wide-ranging linkages between what they study at CSUF (academic major) and what they will do in their post-graduation lives (employment, volunteer activities, community roles, etc.). A biology major will prepare a student to become a physician but a biology major will also prepare a student to become a teacher, community advocate for health or government scientist. Alternatively, the path to teacher, community advocate for health or government scientist may begin with many different majors. Helping students envision these connections requires providing students a broad sense of how what they study can prepare them for a range of possible futures. The overlap between major and future creates a “Connection Cluster,” based on the concept of the meta-major, as shown in the Venn diagram in Figure 2.

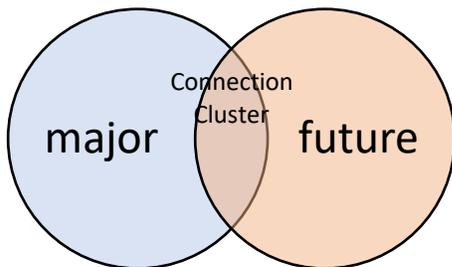


Figure 2. Venn diagram showing the overlap between what a student majors in and a student’s future which creates a “connection cluster”.

In this proposed advising model, entering FTF and transfer students select a major (or choose undeclared) *and* a Connection Cluster. The Connection Clusters are the connection or linkage between university studies and post-graduation lives. Entering students may have broad interests in specific curricular areas but may not yet have found their best fit major. Conversely, students may select a particular major as they believe that is the best/only pathway to a specific career. For example, a student chooses a psychology major thinking they want to be a therapist, but their Connection Cluster will expose them to many “helping profession” fields which a psychology major could enable, such as human resources or recreation. By this mechanism, more students may remain committed to their original major as they open their minds to previously unknown applications of their chosen discipline; and as they discover what aspects of their major are most meaningful to them. Students in different Connection Clusters could actively participate in university programs or utilize university resources specific to these professional aims rather than simply those directly related to their major, for example, the psychology major participating in a human resources or recreation careers panel, delivered through their Connection Cluster. Every student will self-select into their preferred Connection Cluster and any major may belong to any Cluster.

The key intentions of student integration into both a major and a Connection Cluster are to a) promote student *commitment to their major* while *easing the pressures of a direct line* between that major and a specific career pathway; b) engage students of all majors with broader career exposures (e.g., a Women’s Studies major attending a career panel targeted at a business oriented cluster, discovering the relevance of her major to this broad career field); c) improve persistence to degree.

Our proposed model seeks to group and train advisors based partially on CSUF historical student migration patterns and to group students according to their post-graduation aims. This model will increase student retention by assigning each first-time freshman a single, broadly trained, professional advisor who will help the student navigate the university on a generalized academic path, blending major and General Education requirements, that narrows progressively as junior year approaches. Along the way, students will choose appropriate major and General Education courses, and become informed about relevant university resources. Students will be invited to Connection Cluster events, offered in partnership with academic departments, Career Services, and other co-curricular units, which will broaden their sense of what is possible given their academic major and personal passions. A noted side benefit of this approach is that exposing students to a range of futures potentially results in a 30% reduction in changes-of-major (<https://eab.com/insights/daily-briefing/student-success/how-meta-majors-guide-students-toward-on-time-graduation/>).

The recommended benchmark for professional caseload advising is a 300/1 student/advisor ratio. 4,500 entering first year students and 3,600 continuing second year students ($4,500 * 80\% = 3,600$) will require approximately 30 trained professional advisors ($(4,500 + 3,600) / 300 = 27$). To provide a consistent CSUF advising experience for all new students, the professional advisors should all report to a unified first- and second-year advising unit. The leadership for the first- and second-year advising unit will ensure each professional advisor receives centralized training in all aspects of holistic advising. Metrics for success will be developed collaboratively and the administrator will have the authority to hold advisors accountable for achieving these metrics. All advisors will integrate the same technological resources, such as the new Academic Planner, into their work and take student meeting notes in a common agreed-upon format.

For our proposed model to succeed, the first- and second-year professional advisors must work in partnership with college based advising teams composed of professional and faculty advisors who will have primary responsibility for third year and beyond students. Colleges will define the appropriate mix of professional advisors and faculty advisors to compose these college-based teams. These teams will require additional staff resources as CSUF currently has insufficient advisors to allow us to achieve our advising vision. In this model, professional advising will provide a baseline, common advising experience for each first- and second-year student. Alongside this baseline experience, faculty members may engage with first- and second-year students, individually or in groups, to discuss department specific resources or other topics of interest. In their fifth term, regardless of class standing, students will transition to college-based advisors. A benefit of this proposed model is that it will allow students to adjust and confirm their academic interests so that when they transition to college-based advisors including faculty advisors, faculty are advising students who have already discerned and committed to their chosen major. By utilizing professional advisors to advise first and second year students, the faculty advisor workload associated with advising students on course selection and registration issues in their first four terms will be reduced. This model will ensure that faculty invest their energy and care efficiently, that is, into students who have already explored other pathways, and are now committed to their major. The reduction in changes of major may yield the additional benefit of accurate records, which may lend itself to more efficient academic resource planning and course scheduling. This model will also reduce the need to pay off-contract lower division faculty advisors during the summer Orientation season.

Our advising model is shown conceptually in Figure 3.

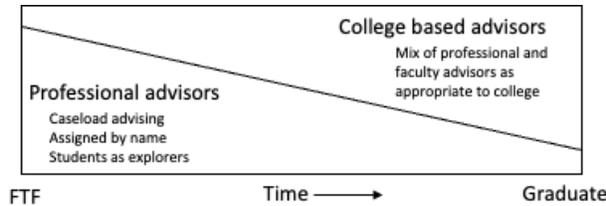


Figure 3. Conceptual proposed advising model showing increasing college-based support as students mature during their CSUF academic career. Primary advising responsibility for first- and second-year students is assigned to professional advisors and primary responsibility for third year and beyond students is assigned to college-based advisors. This transition occurs naturally as students become increasingly confident in their chosen major, self-advising tools, and navigating the university’s resources and thus rely on their professional advisor less and their college-based advisor more. Both sets of advisors collaborate to support students along the students’ entire journey as shown by the diagonal line which does not run from corner to corner of the box but rather shows overlap throughout the student’s career.

Our proposal for intensive professional advising support for first and second year students and increasing college support for years three and beyond will allow CSUF to build theoretical and structural cohesion into our students’ advising experiences. It will allow us to achieve NACADA’s mandate to “develop a required and proactive advising model” (pp. 20-21). Finally, this model addresses the top challenges identified by our working group. The challenges and their solutions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Top advising challenges identified by our working group and the solutions provided by our proposed conceptual model.

Top Challenges	Solutions
Advising is super fragmented.	Assign each entering FTF to a professional advisor by name. Institute centralized training for professional advisors who provide one-stop, holistic advising for first- and second-year students.
Students experience too many hand-offs.	Provide foundational pathway training to all professional advisors and advanced curricular expertise to advisors grouped by historical student major migration patterns.
Student advising experiences vary widely.	Identify an advising lead administrator who has authority to require training and enforce advising metrics and accountability.
Advisor training is inconsistent.	
Our advising structure is unclear to students, faculty, and staff.	Assign primary responsibility for first- and second-year students to well-trained, accountable professional advisors; assign primary responsibility for third-year and beyond students to well-trained and properly resourced college-based advising teams. Create clarity on roles and communication between the professional advisors and college-based advising teams.