

**An Advising Model for Community College
of Philadelphia
Faculty Council on Education
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I. Introduction:

In this document, the Faculty Council on Education proposes an academic advising model for Community College of Philadelphia. Our proposal is based on a consideration of the overall goals of academic advising and of those particular aspects of an advising system that meets those goals.

In order to design a model that corresponds to our working mission statement and to the current state of knowledge about academic advising, we begin with an analysis of current advising theory and practice. Based on this analysis we describe a “model” advising system, by stating characteristics that make an advising system effective. We then look at advising at CCP and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the system. There is a limited record of evidence regarding negative and positive impacts of the current system of advising, which we describe below. However, because advising can have a strong effect on student success (both positive and negative), we believe it is essential that our advising system be fully assessed. Finally, we provide a set of recommendations that we believe will significantly improve advising at CCP by making it more responsive to the needs of the students. To help ensure that our recommendations are consonant with our institutional values, we also look to the College Mission to provide a context for our proposals. We explored the organization of advising at other institutions in order to adapt ideas and models to the student population and institutional context of CCP. In addition, we propose a structure that will allow us to address various student constituencies with appropriate flexibility.

II. Characteristics of Effective Advising Systems

Academic advising has been a specialized area in higher education since the late 1970s. This is the period when the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was formed. Professional publications in the academic advising field provide a forum for discussion of values, goals, and procedures in advising systems.

NACADA has developed and revised a set of core values for academic advising in higher education, and the organization encourages the use of this statement of values in advising programs (NACADA 2004). Unfortunately, the NACADA statement deals almost exclusively with the responsibilities of individual faculty members doing advising and does not address how institutions should structure advising systems. The NACADA statement is helpful, however, in outlining the kind of advising relationships that an advising system should foster.

NACADA publishes articles in its journal, *Academic Advising Today*, which examine good qualities of advising systems. In addition to the *functions* provided by academic advising, advising systems are asked to provide opportunities for particular kinds of relationships. Examples of these aspects include the following list, from (Kuh, 2006):

- Advisors know their students well...
- Advisors strive for meaningful interactions with students...
- Advisors help students identify pathways to academic and social success...

Writers on advising such as Kuh emphasize that “advising” is an activity that goes beyond the brief “schedule-building” encounters that take place in advising sessions. “At high performing schools, the educational and

personal development goals of advising are shared across multiple partners, not just the person ‘assigned’ this task.” According to Kelley (2008) “Academic advisors should view students as actively constructing their understanding of the mission of the institution, including concepts like becoming responsible citizens, liberally educated persons and critical thinkers.” “Faculty, student affairs staff, and mentors along with professional academic advisors comprise the multiple early alert and safety net systems for students...” In other words, academic advising is a system that depends on integration of its components throughout an institution. “An effective advising program is one prime factor in increasing student retention. Academic advising assists students in many ways, and each campus must make a concerted effort to develop a strategy to retain students (Noel, 1978).”

A number of values and standards underlie the practice of effective advising. First among these is the need for students attending the college at any location and in any academic curriculum to have consistent information about and equal access to advising services. There must be continuity within the academic advising system itself that affords the opportunity for advisor and advisee to maintain an ongoing relationship that is academically appropriate and agreeable to both parties.

Faculty responsible for advising within a particular program or curriculum should be permitted to be the primary or sole advisors for students in that program or curriculum, if the student so requests. In addition, advisors should have a choice concerning their specific advising roles or assignments, based on individual expertise and interests. Advisors should act as liaisons and have the requisite information available to facilitate student referral to other staff and services, as appropriate. A list of resource people should be made available to be contacted by the advisor for unusual or difficult situations.

Confidentiality must be strictly maintained about personal information concerning a student, unless the student gives explicit permission to disclose it. Faculty must advise in an ethical manner putting the needs of the student before the needs of the individual faculty member, program, curriculum or department.

There should be consistent and efficient support for the advising program and its leadership. The leader should work collaboratively with Counseling and Student Services, as well as with the advisors. Appropriate technology should be provided to support the advising program, along with adequate training in its use. A convenient and consistent mechanism for evaluation of the advising program and services by all those involved must be put in place.

In order for an advising system to be effective, those serving as advisors must possess several qualifications. At an institutional level, advisors must have either an academic background or experience in the area of advising and should demonstrate intimate familiarity with the academic curricula for which they advise regarding requirements for the curricula themselves, programs, and individual courses. This qualification also presupposes familiarity with policies and procedures as well as knowledge of other personnel and offices at the institution for appropriate referral.

On a more personal level, advisors should be comfortable working with the diverse student population of the institution, so that they can address the social, psychological, economic, and ethnic issues that are important to students. All advisors should also have the following qualifications: commitment to serving in an advising role, adherence to professional and ethical behavioral standards, compassionate and steady presence, discernment in sorting out problems, and resourcefulness in recommending courses of action. Finally, advisors

need to possess active listening and other communication skills, and understand the necessity of keeping interactions student centered.

III. The Current System of Advising at CCP

As stated in the College catalog:

Academic Advising is provided to students in all programs of study at the College. Advisors are faculty members from various disciplines who work with students in good academic standing to verify educational plans, review program requirements and select courses; together, they ensure that each student's chosen program of study integrates and supports personal, academic and career goals. In addition, students are assisted with transfer information, graduation status and referrals to college offices and resources as needed. Students are also provided information about institutional policies, procedures and programs. While the ultimate responsibility for making decisions about personal goals and educational plans rests with each student, the advisor assists by helping to identify and assess various options and the consequences of a student's choices.

The present system of advising has some positive aspects, the most notable being the fact that students who are advised by faculty in their program of study develop a relationship with their advisor. They receive competent and experienced advising due to the long term nature of their contact with faculty as well as faculty's deep knowledge of the program.

Although there are some aspects of the present system that work well, the current state of advising is of great concern to the faculty. It is not only the FCE that has expressed concern about advising at the College. The Early Success Task Force, in their report dated July 26, 2007, identified advising as a significant internal barrier to student success. It called our advising system "dysfunctional," and stating, "Currently we have a disjointed academic advising system that cannot provide the support that our students need." The Faculty Council on Education notes that the current system of advising at CCP meets few of the functional goals that characterize effective advising, and does not consistently provide students with advisors who meet the criteria for good advising.

The main weaknesses of the current system are:

1. Failure to ensure that all advisors have received adequate training, both faculty fulfilling the six hours and those who are paid advisors
2. Assignment of students to faculty advisors not familiar with the students' curricula or well versed in dealing with undecided students
3. The failure to ensure continuity of experience for students by providing them with the same advisor or at least one with expertise in their own curricula
4. Poorly coordinated hours of operation between advising and registration; for example, students may need to return another day to register for classes for which they have been advised

5. The current system of alphabetical assignment of the advising schedule does not effectively meet student needs in some instances. For example, advisors with expertise in health careers or science may not see students until high demand courses, such as Biology, are filled. CAP instructors advising their own classes need flexibility to time individual appointments as to be reasonably sure whether a student is passing, and/or to be able to offer students suitable time schedules and instructors appropriate to the individual student.
6. There is an apparent double standard in the application of specific criteria and expectations for acceptance as a “paid advisor,” but not specified for other advisors. Students should expect that all those who advise are fully qualified to do so. (See Appendix A)

IV. Institutional assessment of the current system of Advising at CCP

While there is extensive anecdotal evidence regarding negative and positive impacts of the current system of advising, to our knowledge there has been no thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of academic advising at the College. Nevertheless, several reports from the Office of Institutional Research highlight the significance of the advising process to student success and satisfaction at CCP. Looking at those reports, which date from 2004 (it was felt earlier dates would not be as relevant for our purposes) we discover a relationship between student services, such as advising, and student persistence. Specifically:

- Report # 137 *Reasons for Student Attrition at Community College of Philadelphia (March 2004)* is based on the results of a survey among three groups of CCP students: those who did not meet their educational objectives, those who met them partially, and those who met them fully in terms of attaining their educational objectives. As might be anticipated “information and assistance provided by Academic Advising for course planning” had the lowest satisfaction rating among the group of students who did not accomplish their educational objectives (p.9). This report concludes that “...individual counseling and advising sessions should focus on student short-and long-term educational goals. Students with undefined educational objectives should be provided with advising that translates their nonspecific educational goals into programs of study where coursework and desired outcomes are clearly linked” (p. 18). This report also states that sophomores were more negatively affected than freshmen were in their persistence by factors such as poor advising. Finally, numerous student responses to the question, “What could the College have done to encourage you to continue your education at CCP?” are included in Appendix A of that report, which frequently point to the need for greater and more involved contact with advisors or counselors.
- Report #156 *National Community College Benchmark Project (March 2006)* contains data from a fall 2001 cohort that dealt with student persistence among the colleges taking part in a national benchmark survey. Success was defined as students who complete a degree, certificate, or transfer within 3 years. Our “neighboring” community colleges, Bucks, Delaware, and Montgomery, also participated in this survey. All three of these schools had a high ratio of advisors to students than CCP and demonstrated equal (Montco) or slightly better persistence rates (Bucks and Delaware.)

- Report #163 *National Community College Benchmark Project: National and Statewide Comparisons (March 2007)* follows up with a Fall 2004 cohort which shows that the three previously mentioned schools maintained a higher ratio of advisors to students than CCP, but this time had significantly better results for 3 year degree or certificate completion (25th percentile rankings for each of them as opposed to a less than 10th percentile for CCP).
- Report #174 *National Community College Benchmark Project: Peer Institution Comparison (November 2007)* follows a student cohort from 2003-2006 in regard to student success, as previously defined, and the results show an even greater disparity between CCP and the three neighboring community colleges in terms of student persistence, with CCP remaining at the less than 10th percentile ranking and Bucks, Delaware, and Montgomery County at the 75th percentile and above. Again, the ratio of advisors to students in counseling and advising functions is higher in all three of the other schools.
- Report #173 *Student Use and Satisfaction with CCP Support Services Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)*. Relevant findings are that academic advising and planning are among the most heavily used of the nine CCP student services: academic advising/planning, career counseling, job placement, peer or other tutoring, skills labs, financial aid, computer lab, student organizations, and transfer credit assistance. In comparison to the CCSSE cohort, CCP students utilized these services at a slightly higher, though not statistically significant, rate. More relevant for our purposes, however, is that CCP students rated academic advising/planning as the most important of these services. At the same time, CCP student satisfaction with support services fell below that of the other CCSSE schools, although again not at a statistically significant rate. This report concluded, “Academic advising/planning; computer labs; and financial aid advising were ranked highest in importance by CCP students. These three support services were also used most frequently by the College’s students and received high satisfaction scores among the nine support areas.” (p. 10) However, if we interpret the findings of the CCSSE report in relation to the ratings used, we find that CCP student satisfaction with academic advising scored a 2.11 on a three point scale, with the highest score of 3 indicating “very satisfied” and a score of 2 indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Scores of 2.11 for advising and 1.99 for transfer credit assistance hardly indicate a high degree of satisfaction since CCP students were only slightly more than “somewhat satisfied” with advising and even less than that with transfer credit assistance.

The overall picture based on these institutional reports then is that while CCP students utilize and value advising services more than students from the other institutions, both their satisfaction with these services and persistence towards educational goals lag behind many of the students in the schools studied, including the other three community colleges in the Delaware Valley. Whether this difference can be explained by the lower ratio that exists between advisors and students at CCP is not clear, and we do not mean to suggest that simply having more advisors would improve the quality of advising. Indeed, when we look at the number of students based on the *Final Harrisburg Reports* of the Spring 2009 semester: *New college-level students who have chosen a non-select degree curriculum, or those who are admitted to a select curriculum* total 3,190, *New college-level in Liberal Arts: General Option and Culture, Science and Technology (CST)* total 11, 277 (both exclude Developmental and ESL students), and *New developmental and ESL students* total 3,712, assuming 30 minutes per advising session per student we estimate 1,595, 5,640 and 1,856 would be needed respectively to advise these students. (See Appendix B) Instead, we believe that a systematic approach should be undertaken to restructure the advising system at CCP in order to better meet the

educational needs of the students, improve student satisfaction, and increase student retention and persistence.

Because advising can have a strong effect on student success (both positive and negative), we believe it is essential that our advising system be fully assessed. The FCE believes a number of assessment tools, including a survey instrument, should be developed regarding the effectiveness of the advising process at CCP.

V. Recommendations

The FCE's vision of an improved academic advising plan and process is described as follows, including the appropriate roles and responsibilities of students, counselors, and faculty advisors. As a starting point, we recommend the adoption of an advising mission statement to provide a framework for the development and assessment of our advising system.

The following (inspired by the advising mission statements of a range of other colleges) is offered as a "working" mission statement, intended to reflect the FCE's ideas of the role of academic advising at the College.

The mission of academic advising is to assist students to define, plan and achieve their educational goals. Academic advisors assist students in making meaningful decisions by knowing the resources of the College, by understanding the needs and goals of individual students and by helping students bring these elements together in the development of a meaningful educational plan. Academic advising addresses the diverse cultural and academic background of students at the College. It is a decision-making process that is ongoing, multi-faceted, and the ultimate responsibility of the student. (See Appendix C)

A student is assigned to an advisor who is well versed in the student's chosen curriculum. If possible, the student consistently sees the same advisor in order to develop a more in depth relationship that gets beyond the mere act of course selection. With the advisor's guidance, the student is expected to know the curriculum as well as the policies and procedures required for individual programs. An advisor works with the student to develop academic and career goals and is knowledgeable about transfer agreements if appropriate to the student's situation. The advisor-student relationship can begin during new student orientation, during which groups of students meet with their advisor to learn about campus resources and academic goal setting. The goal of the advising relationship is to sequence the learning opportunities through time so that they build on one another in a way that allows students to integrate each new idea with the preceding ones.

Counselor and Advisor Roles:

Both counselors and advisors do academic advising. The distribution of advising tasks between advisors and counselors is based on the different expertise and professional credentials of the two groups. Counselors advise those students who require closer monitoring and greater psychological expertise. Advisors who are teaching faculty should advise students who would benefit from the advisors' familiarity with a particular disciplinary or curricular area.

Many, if not most, CCP students are not prepared for the new information, demands, and requirements they will encounter within their chosen curricula. Students should attend a first-semester orientation event that gives a solid introduction to the College. Nevertheless, students are not going to learn all they need to know to navigate through their college career in one orientation session. They need to be periodically reminded and redirected by an advisor who can oversee their choice of courses and the process of registration with them. (See Appendix D) Our students are introduced to counselors and/or advisors when they first enroll at CCP. However, within the current advising system, there is no structure in place which assures students that they will meet with the same advisor (or any advisor at all, at times) to plan a sequence of coursework, update curricular changes, and receive transfer and career information. Thus, there is a need for a system that integrates academic advising into a comprehensive, ongoing orientation that consistently informs and assists students as they progress in their college experience. Counselors and curriculum faculty should collaborate on formats for each of the programs based on students' needs.

Since not all students enter CCP with a clear goal, we have designated categories of the four most easily identified student types. Currently, a group advising program is being studied to address the large number of students in need of advising. Additionally, we propose ways these particular students may be guided most effectively toward their goals. Therefore, we recommend that counselors and advisors be assigned as follows to the four cohorts listed below in order to respond to student needs.

1. *New college-level students who have chosen a non-select degree curriculum, or those who are admitted to a select curriculum:*

Teaching faculty should advise new college-level students who indicate interest in a non-select degree curriculum or who are admitted to a select curriculum. Based on faculty members' program or curriculum affiliation, they should be assigned to students who are entering their respective disciplinary areas. As these students progress in their studies, they should continue to see the same advisor in order to facilitate the advisees' academic success. The guidance and encouragement that advisors extend toward their advisees over the course of time is essential to the persistence of the student and ultimately the student achieving their final goal.

2. *New college-level in Liberal Arts: General Option and Culture, Science and Technology (CST):*

Both counselors and teaching faculty should have a role in advising students who are unsure about their curricular or career direction or who have not been accepted into their chosen major or program. We need to develop a mechanism that will help us identify students who are essentially undecided about their academic and career direction, even though they have been assigned to some curriculum. We need to do a better job helping students identify an appropriate curriculum as they enter the College.

We recommend that an "Exploration Center" be established. This Center would be staffed by counselors and teaching faculty who have an interest in this population and have some expertise in either a particular program, or curriculum or in directing students who would benefit from guidance and information. These students will be determined according to their answers to questions about curriculum choice posed during placement testing. Students interested in a select curriculum are included in this group because many would benefit from further exploration into possible majors and curricula. This is, either because they may not have done a thorough search, or because they are not

certain of acceptance into the curriculum of their choice. We recommend that advising in this unit focus around decision making based on knowing one's strengths and interests, exploration into curricula, and making realistic choices that will help ensure success.

3. *New developmental and ESL students:*

We recommend that students who place into developmental programs (CAP, CLC, ESL, Act Now and CSP) see the same advisor throughout their experience in the basic skills program. Such an advisor should be a counselor or member of the teaching faculty in the specific program in which the students are enrolled. This is particularly important for such students since their integration into the college and their retention is more at risk than that of students who place into college-level classes. We recommend that these students switch to a curriculum advisor once they have achieved college-level work and leave the developmental program. Students may also transition into working with an advisor or attending workshops in the Exploration Center if they have not yet chosen a specific curriculum.

4. *Probationary students:*

Because of the special expertise of counselors, we recommend that counselors continue to advise students on academic probation, since they have need for closer guidance than students in good standing.

See flowchart for graphic representation of advising recommendations.

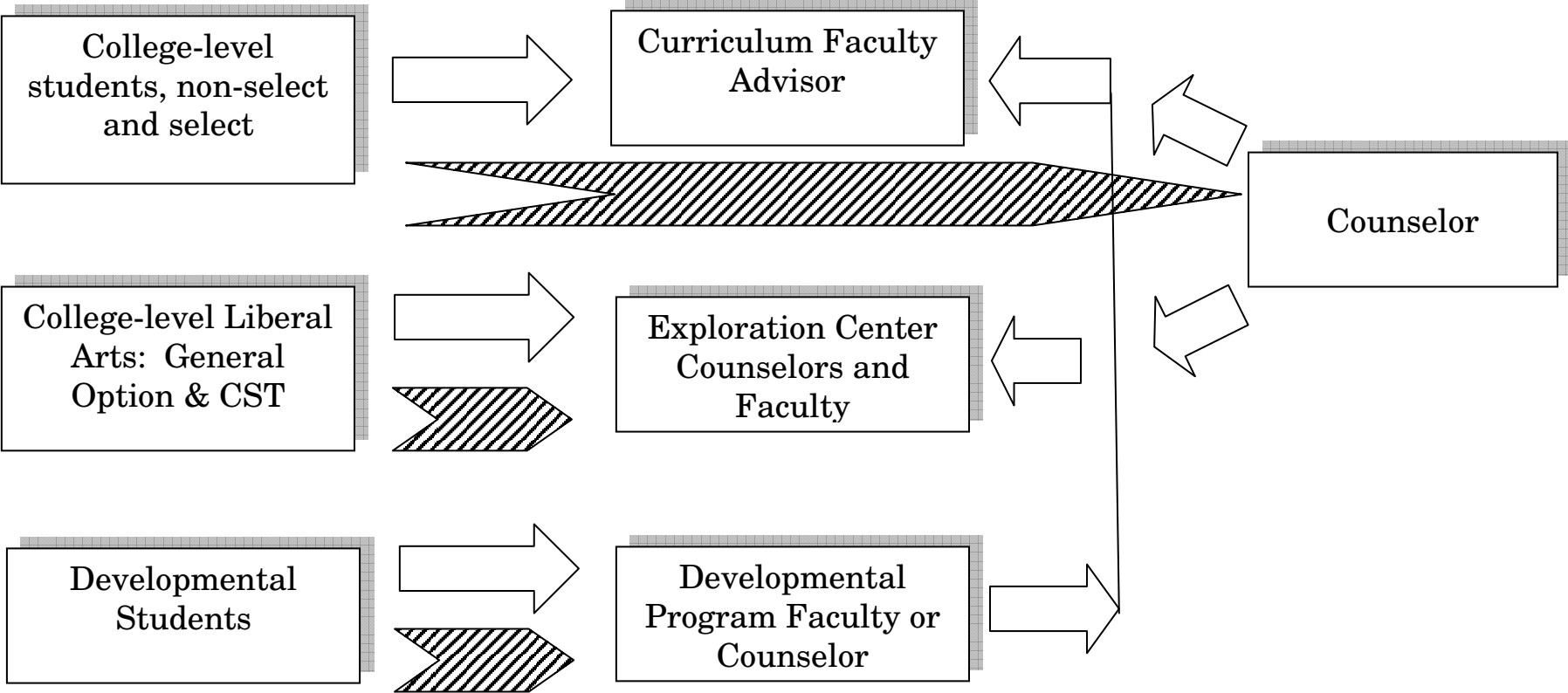
VI. Conclusion

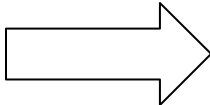
In view of the widely expressed concern of the state of advising at the College, we offer this as a basis for ongoing discussion for restructured and improved service for our students. The College mission, in part, is to encourage students to achieve “greater insight into their strengths, needs, and aspirations...” Such insight develops over time, usually requiring a sustained collaboration with a mentor or advisor who guides and encourages a student as the two come to know one another as individuals. Thus, it is crucial that advisors develop a relationship with students over the duration of their enrollment at CCP to foster the self-knowledge on the part of the students that is one goal of the CCP mission.


The advising process needs to receive assessment regularly and accurately in order to measure whether or not it has helped students define and achieve their educational goals. In addition, advisees need a system of feedback that alerts them to their progress regarding the learning goals established through the advising process (Kelley, 2008). A formal or informal system can be put in place, including student self assessment.

It is essential that a system be employed to track students' advising history. An advising interview form should be developed so that advisors meeting with students for the first time will collect a common set of information about each student. Having such a form will help alert advisors to issues that may need further attention, and will facilitate the sharing of information between advisors about particular students they may be advising. This system will allow us to stop errors in advising, protect students from “maxing out” their financial aid benefits, and increase student connections to the College, all resulting in better retention and ultimately greater numbers in graduation.

Academic Advising Flowchart




Students in good standing


Students on academic probation

Appendix A

Roles/responsibilities of advisors (Dean of Educational Support Services, 2009)

1. Assists students with the development and selection of courses and schedules consistent with student's educational goals as well as his/her official degree program.
2. Assists students with curriculum/program selection and determining progress toward certificate/degree completion.
3. Provides students with appropriate referrals to college offices and resources as needed.
4. Maintains assigned work schedule and submits required documentation in a timely fashion.
5. Performs the advising function utilizing required technology (i.e. Banner) and in compliance with College policies and procedures.
6. May serve as an Academic Advising liaison to specific academic programs.
7. Remains current with course, curriculum, and program requirements as well as pertinent College policies and procedures.
8. Keeps abreast of transfer information, articulation agreements as well as dual admissions programs.
9. Participates in relevant continuing professional development opportunities after becoming an academic advisor, when required.

Demonstrated qualifications include, but are not limited to:

1. Successful experience as an academic advisor at Community College of Philadelphia
2. Demonstrated knowledge of degree program requirements, course competencies and prerequisites, academic progress and other related policies as well as relevant transfer information
3. Commitment to the mission, vision, core values and goals of the Community College of Philadelphia
4. Interpersonal skills and the ability to work effectively with diverse students, faculty and staff
5. Strong organizational skills as well as effective oral and written communication skills
6. Understanding of academic issues pertinent to community college students
7. Competency utilizing and/or willingness to learn required technology (i.e. Banner) that supports advising functions

Selection and Evaluation of Paid Academic Advisors will be based, primarily, on the following:

1. Faculty must be recommended and approved by their Department Head and Dean, Dean of Educational Support Services, and the Director of Academic Advising.
2. Availability: After submitting the appropriate College Availability Form and the current Academic Advising Schedule Request Form by the established deadlines, academic advisors will be selected for advising assignments based on those factors outlined above as well as their stated availability in conjunction with the need for advising as determined by the Office of Academic Advising.
3. Punctuality and Attendance: Reporting on time for scheduled shifts (or appointments) and staying to complete the entire assignment. If an academic advisor is unable to report to an advising assignment, he/she must notify the Office of Academic Advising prior to the scheduled shift. Missing a shift without such notification will be considered a “No Show.”
4. Proficiency can be considered in a variety of ways including the accuracy of information shared with advisees. While advising some students may take more time, efficiency is a necessary variable in evaluating academic advisors.
5. All time sheets MUST be submitted promptly. It is expected that academic advisors will submit accurately completed time sheets at the conclusion of the pay period in which they have worked. All time sheets are due to Academic Advising by 5 pm on Fridays (or by 3 PM on Saturday during a pay period that an academic advisor has completed a Saturday advising assignment).
6. Academic advisors must be able to work collegially with faculty, staff and administrators. Maintaining a professional environment in the advising center will allow us to best serve students.
7. Finally, academic advisors should expect to maintain qualifications, adequately perform responsibilities as well as adhere to all pertinent policies and procedures. Failure to comply with the standards outlined above may result in an academic advisor being removed from the advising schedule for the remainder of a current semester and/or not being considered for additional advising assignments in future semesters.

Appendix B

Table A-10 Enrollment Trends

Credit Headcount Enrollments by Major Fall and Spring Terms

http://www.ccp.edu/vpfin-pl/factbook/HC_byMajor.pdf

Appendix C

Student Responsibilities:

The student bears ultimate responsibility for his decisions about educational and career paths, although the academic advisor plays a pivotal role in helping a student make these decisions. The successful student will work collaboratively with the advisor, will be aware of educational requirements, and will consult with the advisor on a regular basis. Students need to learn how to learn their curriculum, assess their progress in courses, and evaluate their response to their chosen major. In becoming more directed in their approach to learning, students will be better able to navigate through career changes that may take place in the future. Specifically, students need to engage in the following behaviors and activities.

1. Students must know the advisor's location, phone number and email address.
2. Students should be on time for advising appointments, or if unable to keep an appointment, contact the advisor as soon as possible.
3. Students should be aware of the General Education and Core requirements for specific programs and curricula of interest.
4. Students need to review requirements for individual majors, and consult with the advisor about possible curricular changes.
5. Student should keep a steady check on progress toward completion of degree requirements and apply for graduation when applicable.
6. Students need to follow proper procedure for registration, and be familiar with the College's academic calendar, including the College's policies on academic probation as well as academic dismissal.

Appendix D

Integrated Orientation (Allen & Smith, 2008)

1. Make students aware of campus resources that address academic problems (e.g. proposed learning commons).
2. Make students aware of campus resources that address non-academic problems (e.g. childcare, financial, physical and mental health).
3. Provide information that assists students with understanding how things work at the college (understanding timelines, policies, and procedures with regard to registration, financial aid, grading, graduation, petitions and appeals, etc.).

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