

UC Academic Advising Conference
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Welcome Address: Making Advising Central to the University
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It's a pleasure to be here. I want to welcome you to UC Davis, and I hope you have two days of valuable encounters and knowledge building. It's exciting that you're re-starting this wonderful network that never should have gone away, and it's a privilege to be your host campus and to spend some time sharing my experiences with you.

There are no harder working or more dedicated staff than our campus advising professionals, and I want to start by thanking our UC Davis advising team members here for all you do for our students and our community. *Thank you.*

I have served for a little over a year as the interim Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, a job I came into after many years on the faculty as a professor of American Studies. My own work as a historian has been on the history of technology and health, but I feel as if my work now is on the importance and practice of advising, and what it really takes to move into the 21st century in how we approach student academic support.

I suppose the fact that after thirteen years here I had to learn about professional advising on campus is itself a good starting point for my remarks today.

I served as the undergraduate faculty adviser in American Studies for several years. I didn't receive any training to do that. I gave students advice on what courses to take and what not to take and I signed off on emphasis plans, but through all of that I wasn't aware that there was a college advising center: that students could receive general advice on GE, on completing majors, on degree certification; and beyond this, that there was a place they could go to talk, to ask for advice, to get connected to other resources on campus. Really, I didn't know where the edge of my expertise as faculty was. I didn't know where I fit in the chain, and as a faculty member, I didn't know there was a chain at all. I knew how to advise students within American Studies, but not to understand the fundamental role that professional advising staff play on our campus. And I didn't see myself in a partnership with advisers to help students find and deepen their academic path

I think it's common for faculty, and even administrators, not to understand the fundamental role that advising staff have on our campuses. Why is that? When's the last time you looked at your homepage and saw *your* UC story about advising? Have you ever seen it? On campus, we don't communicate about advising. Advising is outside of the communications loop for campuses, and the stories don't get out. It's not a conversation in the colleges. With the deans and department chairs we haven't until recently, made it a topic of conversation. And even among advisers, conversation about common aims, goals, language for what you do and why it's crucial and where it's going has been missing.

Together as a community, we need to articulate the value of what advisers do and the resources needed to be advisers in the 21st century.

Making Advising Central to the Culture of the University

After many months being taught by my advising colleagues and associate deans, I think I can say:

1. We absolutely need to increase resources. *There is no way to increase graduation rates and ensure first-generation graduation rates and international success without increasing advising resources.*
2. It is not enough simply to increase advising resources. If a money shower happened right now, of course that would make things better, but I don't know that it would change the fact that advising is not central to the culture of the university. We have to make advising central to the culture of the university, and we have to do that in a way that is bound to principle.

We have to change how we think more to be more collaborative, more reliable, more humble about the limits of what we can do.

Just as importantly (and maybe sometimes this is overlooked), we have to become powerful advocates for promoting advising excellence within our campus communities, and we have to convert administrators and department chairs in to allies - knowledgeable ones.

Undergraduate excellence, I believe, depends on recruiting the best faculty and strongest, most diverse students – and on supporting both groups with highly skilled, resourced and integrated advising staff.

So as this conference faces inward – as it should – as you talk amongst each other as UC professionals and learn from best practices – I urge you to keep an ear out for how you will carry forward the message of adviser importance and put it outward to your campus community – and how you can gather your own stakeholder groups, in a concrete and a metaphorical sense – and how you can work effectively together for change.

What's happening at UC Davis

Let me tell you about our situation here, and what we've learned. In December 2012, when I was named interim vice provost for Undergraduate education, I came into

- a clear resource crunch
- a plan for growth on the order of 5,000 students by 2020
- an adviser shortage in all colleges
- budget cuts meant a lack of investment in some areas, and a crunching of job positions in others – for example, blending course readers and advising.

With adviser ratios in the range of 1:2,000 or 1:1,500, advising on our campus was desperately in need of repair - both in terms of people and tools. We had had some small new provost allocations, and some new advising tools, and those were a good start, but they were not enough.

At one of our first Council of Associate Deans (CAD) meetings after I came into this position, I recall the associate deans of undergraduate education of our colleges sharing their degrees of frustrations with adviser's loads, with systems that didn't fully interface, with tools they could imagine but didn't have. And because I happened to be the new person at a time when we had some modicum of new funds, I began to ask *why*, and then *why not?* And eventually together we moved to *when?* and *how?*

I want to say – and this is crucial – that while I’m the one up here, this is a truly collaborative venture that wouldn’t be possible without our associate deans, who have been my teachers, and our college advising directors: Beth Floyd in the College of Letters and Sciences; Mary Ramirez in the College of Engineering; Maria Saldana-Siebert and Mara Evans in the College of Biological Sciences; and Lili Bynes and Tracy Grissom in the College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences. In spite of extraordinarily busy schedules they found time to imagine the future and work collaboratively to try to get there. When they take on the job of improving advising, they’re doing it on top of 150%.

With this team we’ve identified six goals for academic advising, and the principles they’re rooted in.

Six Goals & Principles for Advising at UC Davis

Goal #1: Expand the number of advisers in the colleges & divisions

Principle: Student success depends on consistent, regular advising, and that is impossible with current numbers.

We’ve done this, adding new international advisers to all colleges and, at this point within most colleges, three or four new positions allocated either to departments or dean’s offices. This is a beginning, only a start, but an important one.

Two particularly significant elements, in addition to new resources, made this successful. First, what’s really important about the way that we went about asking for those funds is that we did it together. The associate deans decided that instead of making individual requests, they would make one common request – one document that went to the provost through me. And second, we used that document to educate the administration: we shared NACADA’s recommended 1:350 advising ratio; and we shared underresourcing across campus. It was a powerful statement of the common good different from the “shortage” argument, or the “they have it; we need it” approach; or falling into a larger dean’s budget negotiation where the message is lost.

This is the first time I ever saw administration say the word “NACADA,” and that came about because the document we submitted was created collaboratively. When we all sit separately, what we create is noise. No one can make a cohesive argument. By doing it together, CAD made administration hear.

Goal #2: New positions must have a clear relationship to professional advising staff

Principle: there is strength, and knowledge, in numbers.

Advisers are not all equally trained, and do not necessarily report to, or interact and engage with, professional advisers. Those in the departments reporting only to their MSO are siloed. They are not invited to attend NACADA, and don’t have a means to be engaged with the broader campus advising community.

So the CAD built a reporting line requirement into that document: all new advisers must have a clear relationship to professional advising staff. They’re leaving it to the colleges how to do that, whether with dotted lines or centralization, but in any case, connecting expansion to ongoing training, professional growth, and accountability within the dean’s offices.

Please do not take from this that I'm saying "consolidate all advisers." My academic department has Naomi Ambriz, who is a major adviser for students in American Studies and Women and Gender Studies. She knows these departments really well, and moving her to a dean's office would be a disservice. But we have to do some of the hard work of connecting those who are already here. Any talk of taking individual resources and consolidating must acknowledge Naomi's kind of expertise.

But we have to ask the question of how best to connect those who advise students. One model for us is the BASC, the Biology Academic Success Center. What is exceptional about BASC is that advisers were moved out of departments into one place where there's always someone to talk to, where expertise is sheared and where the college can do powerful things like have a pre-med "undeclared" of sorts. College of Biological Sciences is recognizing that many of their students are pre-med. The students don't know why they picked their major. In that sense, every pre-med CBS student is really undeclared. The first step to recognizing that students entering that college are everyone's project.

This doesn't make sense everywhere; for example, perhaps not in a large, diverse college like CAES. But what does make sense is to have people more connected than we've had in the past; to know why we have the structures we have; intentionally locate adviser where they can have the right impact; know what the relationship should be between department and college level advisers: what knowledge is sharing is needed; where one expertise begins and another ends. We have yet to assess it and see what the long term impact is. There is strength and knowledge in numbers and community.

And if advisers don't come together, they need to know why. When they don't come together, they expect students to build that knowledge base themselves.

Wherever we sit, what's the structure that makes sense? How do you know the edge of your expertise? How do you know when to send a student to someone else? Going forward, these are questions we must ask together.

Here our first Director of Academic Advising, who is arriving on Monday, who will report to Undergraduate Education and work collaboratively with Student Affairs – because we have advisers in both – will be a powerful agent of connecting.

Goal #3: Make training an ongoing process and a priority investment.

Principle: We can't transform the lives of our learners unless we make our own learning a top priority.

Some students make it through an alarming number of quarters without seeing you. When a student does see you, it is a pivotal moment in the trajectory of their education, and you need the knowledge in your pocket when that moment happens. There is no time in the student's trajectory here to put that off - especially if we want a four-year graduation rate. They need the right advice every time. And that's not possible if you're on a five-years training cycle.

So we have reinvested in yearly training funds, yearly convenings, and a professional development series. Only the advisers can create the community of stakeholders that makes sure you are adequately trained.

Goal #4: Have a common unit that creates advising tools for the 21st Century.

Principle: Nobody “has” any particular students. No department, no dean owns students. WE have students. UC DAVIS has students.

This is about technology: what technology you have, and whether everyone has it. You need technology so that when you log in, you find that student records are shared, and know that degree certification is there, and when a student is changing major you can see what they’ve taken and what will count toward a new major. If our advisers don't have all the information they need, including information from students' previous advisers, we can't meet students' needs.

In the past year, we’ve undertaken the relocation of a technology team that have been the chief architects of our suite of online tools for advisers. In the College of Letters and Sciences we had a great innovation team that had already begun work on a technology that included academic planning worksheets, GPA calculators, online scheduling, academic difficulty and minimum progress indicators. But not all of the tools developed on one side were available to students on the other side. There were concerns with security, with code, with data sharing. By relocating the team to the registrar’s office – thanks to financial support from the provost – we created neutral ground. The team is able to work on projects that meet the whole campus needs, with support from more programmers. Their gifts at problem solving are now situated where they can have the highest impact.

Goal #5: Join together across colleges to identify the problems that the tools should address.

Principle: Tools don’t solve problems, people who build tools collaboratively do.

Centralizing the tools wasn’t the most important shift in what we were doing. It was the creation of an advising stakeholder group where, for the first time, advisers from each college could agree on what our problems are, and decide what tools should be developed. This ensures that when we develop tools they’re the right ones, and they’ll be adopted, and removes the “platinum” vs. “silver” level services to students across campus.

Let me give you a cautionary tale as you look at outside vendors. As a historian of technology, I’ve written about a problem with the tech fix: unless you exactly know what it's supposed to do when you bring it, technology will create problems of its own. So I am cautious. But this is the moment that advisers must be engaged in deciding what the needs are. Outside vendors have their ideas, but we have decided to build ours on campus, but *with a stakeholder group* that brought expertise and perspective.

And it helps us create a shared advising communication network ... and the start of a shared culture that stretches across colleges: one that sees the whole of student needs, rather than only their colleges' priorities.

Goal #6: Ask whether analytics can help us.

Principle: Student success may rely upon knowing things we don’t.

What if we could know whether a student was in trouble before they were subject to dismissal? If a constellation of factors – a low midterm, low unit count for consecutive quarters, low co-curricular involvement – if this particular grouping of factors created a red flag and students received a message to come see us; or something that went directly to the student, perhaps connecting them to tutors.

This is only possible with comprehensive analysis systems that can connect admissions data to co-curricular data to the course grading/course management system. It can show us patterns in student success (which course should you take first in a series, depending on different variables, for instance?). And these can be important components in the information we use to support students in their decision making. In a sense this isn't "about" advising – it's well beyond how we think of advising now, and it requires drawing really all of the student-serving units together in a common goal. But it's about ways to put advising at the center of our campus conversation about student success, and to educate the larger academic community about what advising is, where it's going, and what impact it can have on the very things we care most about as a campus: things like four-year degree rates, student persistence, underrepresented / first generation student academic support; and internationalizing our campus community. And how we can really connect across our units to identify factors that lead to student success; and see student who are facing challenges while it's still early enough to help.

We don't know when students are subject to dismissal before they are subject to dismissal. If they were responsible for bringing one message to the table - what are the mid-range problems - tech team - develop solutions for problems already community-shared.

There's a magic thing that gets shown- iPhone - all those factors converge in a magic moment to student - *"you received a 68 on your BIS 2E midterm. 90% of students with your profile who received that grade failed the class Sarah Gonzales is peer tutor - here is her number, send her a text."*

Now, this is a very exciting to some people. But at the University of California, I ask: where is maturation part of what students get? The question of student success data analytics will not escape your campus. It will come, and you need an answer. That is a really sexy tool to Chancellors, especially for student persistence for first generation students. We need to make sure we're doing "all we can." But what is "all we can?" Some companies move advising into a data technology system. What is the interface that should be there between human, data, advising and things that pop into your hand? What would happen if you had a tool in your hand every time you got a red flag?

Technology can only become a thing that helps if we understand the problem it solves. The problem can't be, "we can't hire enough advisers, so let's put advising in the hands of student."

The only people who should be advising how technology integrates into advising should be you. And in my experience, you are the last people included in the room.

Going Forward

I want to end by saying I'm proud to be on a campus where the administration, from the chancellor to the provost to deans, is serious about supporting advising excellence. And where I'm with colleagues who have and continue to work incredibly hard to make these changes, all while doing their 150% "day jobs."

Still, these changes will only be complete, and have the impact they should – if we as a UC Davis community really make advising a long-term priority for achieving student success.

This is especially important for the faculty who will need to make decisions about how we manage student data, and how we invest funds at the college and department level; and ultimately how they inform students about what advisers really can do.

This is why we need community, advising, stakeholder groups. There is no time to wait. We will fail ourselves and we will fail our students if we continue to occupy the small spaces.

I'm not saying that advisers need to do more work. In the space of your day, as you move through campus, bring people together. Find the administrators. Find the people who will make you

There should be stories on advising. You all have people who do this job. They need to be told by you that this is part of their job too. You all have people who do this job. They need to be told by you that this is part of their job too.

I take seriously my office's responsibility to advocate – but also the opportunity to create structures in which advisers can better advocate for themselves.

As a community, we can come together with the right tools, better staffing levels, and a shared sense of goals, principles and priorities so that no matter how good individually all of you are, change relies on a collective.

Only if the campus community truly understands why, and with what benefit – we will sustain these improvements and we have to look outward, as much as we look inward, to ultimately create and protect the advising system we and our students deserve.

Thank you.