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Introduction

The primary focus of the Advising Work Group of the SSTF is on the effectiveness of advising policies and procedures within the university and the accessibility and quality of advisement for students in relation to student retention.

Clearly, a direct correlation between advisement and retention at SCSU exists based on the 2013 Student Success Task Force Report. According to the Report based on the NSSE results, 64.5% of students talk with advisors/faculty ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’. Only 35% of students report engaging with their advisors ‘often’. Additionally, freshman students who registered for spring 2013 classes compared to students who did not register stated the quality of academic advisement was significantly better than those who did not register.

Comments heard from students were a factor as well. Some of them are listed below:

- “What is this magic number we need?” (nontraditional student)
- “I am a transfer student. Transfer students are “lost” students here.” (transfer student)
- “I only meet with my advisor to get a PIN number. He does not help me out very well at all.”
- “My advisor knew so little that she spent half of our meeting asking the secretary questions.”

An early step of the Group was to establish the following objective:

“Establish a supportive advising culture at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) designed to improve student satisfaction and retention. This will be fulfilled by creating a university-wide policy for academic advisement with a cohesive set of advising guidelines and supports.”

The guidelines and supports would serve all populations at SCSU which includes traditional, commuter, transfer, part-time, and non-traditional students. The Group recognizes the “most at risk” students for advisement are the ones moving from freshman to sophomore year, especially those who have not declared a major and transfer students.

The objective of the Advising Work Group is predicated on a campus culture change at the University. This change requires the commitment of all SCSU employees in the belief that the students are our customers. This must be recognized by each employee. The commitment to students’ needs to be modeled from the top and extended through every employee rank at the University.

Advisement at the University needs to go from a reactive to a proactive approach.

The Advising Work Group recognizes the impact of advisement on student retention and as such, puts forth the following recommendations.
**Long Term Recommendations:**

- Move Academic Advisement from Category 3 (Service) to Category 1 (Teaching) in the Tenure and Promotion, Renewal and 6th year assessment process and documents. These changes would require a change in the AAUP contract, Article 10.9 and 11.8. as well as the Faculty Senate Documents Part II B2(c).

  **Rationale:** Moving advising from Category 3 to 1 will place greater weight/emphasis, prioritizing this advisement role and its inherent responsibilities.

- Offer release time, credit hours or other workload adjustments for interested, skilled and effective faculty advisors who will take a leadership role in advising a significant number of their department’s students.

  **Rationale:** Identifying and training key faculty advisors will facilitate effective advisement and positively impact student retention. This will increase access to advisors.

- While attending the University, students will have no more than 2 advisors-freshman/sophomore advisor before moving into Major Advisor. Students who have declared majors by the end of their freshman year would move into departmental advisement. Much of this is currently occurring within the University with FYE instructors advising students through their 2nd semester of their freshman year and sophomore year, if they have not yet declared a major. The disconnect in consistent, coordinated advisement occurs with adjunct faculty teaching FYE courses, who are not on campus after students 1st semester. In this situation the Group recommends that these students be assigned to the FYE Office or Academic Advisement until the student has declared a major.

  **Rationale:** Minimizing the number of advisement contacts will facilitate an improved customer service approach compared to the current method. Students with fewer advisors should benefit from accessibility, consistency, and familiarity, especially regarding the level with which their advisors will know them, their academic performance, and potential for academic success. This likely will enhance student retention, as well.

- The use of PIN numbers should be discontinued for students who have been accepted into their major, i.e. Nursing, Education, Social Work, and Education or are declared majors of a department. This would not occur before students’ junior year.

  **Rationale:** Once many students reach the junior year or are declared in a major, they have a prescribed path that needs to be followed. By doing this, students will be forced to take ownership of their schedules and graduation requirements. This also would free up faculty to focus more time on “at risk” students. Further, this will “free” the environment of many students’ last minute race to obtain a PIN number, and promote an unconstrained advisement meeting to discuss educational concerns and goals.
Short Term Recommendations:

• Implementation and utilization of university-wide Advising Policies and Procedures (attached). This document outlines roles and responsibilities of advisors and advisees. This document will be accessible on the SCSU website. All departments would use this as a general guideline.

  Rationale: Advising Policies and Procedures will serve as guidelines to support advisement from the student and faculty perspective.

• Implement faculty “advisement training.” Although most faculty are well versed in advisement related to their department major, faculty need to readily know where to refer students who are changing majors, who and how to access support systems for the student, i.e. tutoring center, counseling services, and who to contact regarding questions that are relative to other department’s courses and university procedures, i.e. grade replacement, etc.

  Rationale: If students are receiving accurate information from a trustworthy source they are more likely to establish a rapport with the advisor, and be satisfied with the advisement they receive.

• Reconfigure banner web’s “How to Obtain a Degree Evaluation” so that student or advisor can access the information through one step.

  Rationale: Currently in order to access a Degree Evaluation a student or advisor needs to go through 6 or more steps.
Addendum to Advising Working Group

Below is a list of items the group sees as issues and/or fixes to help in the Advisement process:

- No student should ever be turned away from the Academic Advisement center
- Mechanism should be established for central electronic depository advising information
- Flow charts established for the advising process and easily assessable for students to view
- Adequate staffing of the Academic Advisement Center
- Existing technology, such as the electronic bulletin boards should be utilized to increase student awareness of advisement in terms of scheduling advisement sessions, registration dates, and advisement policies and procedures.