

# **ACADEMIC ADVISING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

The Standards and Guidelines set forth embody the ideal of advising at Western Illinois University (WIU). This document will direct us in our efforts to provide students with an outstanding undergraduate advising program. The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the NACADA Statement of Core Values were two resources used to develop this document.

## **PART 1: MISSION**

The mission of the academic advising program at Western Illinois University is to support the overall mission of the University, i.e. “by enacting our values and supporting the synergy between instruction, research, creativity and service, Western Illinois University prepares a socially responsible, diverse student, faculty, and staff, population to lead in the global society.” The primary purpose of the advising program is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their life goals.

Academic advising should be viewed as a continuous process of clarification and evaluation.

Students deserve honest, friendly, respectful, dependable, accurate, and professional service. In order to serve students well, academic advisors understand that they are responsible to many constituents who comprise WIU academic communities.

## **PART 2: PROGRAM**

The academic advising program should identify resources to assist students in overcoming specific personal, physical, or educational problems or skill deficiencies. The academic advising program should identify environmental conditions that may negatively influence welfare and propose interventions that may neutralize such conditions.

Individual academic advising conferences must be available to students each academic term. The academic advisor should review and utilize any available data about student academic and educational needs, performance, aspirations, and challenges and must collaborate in collection of such data. Confidentiality of individual student records must be maintained.

While the ultimate responsibility for making decisions about life goals and educational plans rests with the individual student, the academic advisor assists by helping to identify and explore alternatives and the consequences of decisions. Institutional goals for academic advising should include:

- Development of suitable educational plans
- Clarification of career and life goals
- Selection of appropriate courses and other educational experiences
- Interpretation of institutional requirements

- Enhancement of student awareness about educational resources available (e.g., internships, study abroad, honors, and learning assistance programs)
- Evaluation of student progress toward established goals
- Development of student decision-making skills
- Reinforcement of student self-direction
- Referral to and use of institutional and community support services
- Collection and distribution of data regarding student needs, preferences, and performance for use in making institutional decisions and policies

### **PART 3: ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP**

The academic advising program must provide leadership that supports and encourages academic advising and the role it plays in student development and integration. The support may come in the form of human resource functions; allocation of adequate financial resources; strong communication; staff empowerment; professional development; and/or allocation of appropriate physical conditions.

This is attained through various councils and committees. These include, but are not limited to: The Council of Academic Advisors (COAA), which includes sub-committees such as Assessment, Campus Affairs/Public Relations, Professional Development and Networking, and Awards and Recognition. The governing body of this Council also has the authority to create ad hoc committees as needed. Further, each College and advising area also has its own localized Council. Serving on these councils, are representatives who embody their area on the COAA. The COAA also has representatives on governing bodies outside of advising, such as the Council on Admission, Graduation, and Academic Standards (CAGAS), and can also assign members to other governing bodies as needed.

The academic advising program must be structured purposefully and managed effectively to achieve stated goals. Program structure must include current and accessible policies and procedures, written performance expectations for all advisors, organizational charts, and clearly stated program and service delivery expectations.

The academic advising program must monitor websites used for distributing information to ensure that the sites are current, accurate, appropriately referenced, and accessible. Evidence of effective management must include use of comprehensive and accurate information for decisions, clear sources and channels of authority, effective communication practices, procedures for decision-making and conflict resolution, responses to changing conditions, systems of accountability and evaluation, and processes for recognition and reward. The academic advising program must align policies and procedures with those of the institution and provide channels within the organization for regular review.

The design of the academic advising program must be compatible with the institution's organizational structure and its students' needs. Specific advisor responsibilities must be clearly delineated, published, and disseminated to both advisors and advisees. Students, faculty advisors, and professional staff must be informed of their respective advising responsibilities.

The academic advising program may be a centralized or decentralized function within an institution, with a variety of people throughout the institution assuming responsibilities.

#### **PART 4: HUMAN RESOURCES**

The academic advising program must have adequate and qualified staff to fulfill the mission of that service and to implement all aspects of the program. A variety of staffing arrangements may be used. Advisors may be full-time or part-time professionals who have advising as their primary function within the institution or may be full-time professionals who have other responsibilities, such as teaching or administrative duties. Paraprofessionals (i.e., graduate students in practicums, internships, or assistantships) may also assist advisors.

Paraprofessionals must be carefully selected, trained with respect to helping skills and institutional services and procedures, closely supervised, and evaluated regularly. Paraprofessionals must recognize the limitations of their knowledge and skills and must refer students to appropriate professionals when the problems encountered are warranted.

To ensure that professional staff members devote adequate time to professional duties, the academic advising program must have sufficient clerical and technical support staff.

Adequate staff should be available to meet students' needs without unreasonable delay. Caseloads should be such that advisors are able to allow an appropriate amount of time for students to discuss plans, programs, courses, academic progress, and other subjects related to their educational programs.

Academic advisors should have an understanding of student development; a comprehensive knowledge of the institution, its programs, academic requirements, majors, minors, and student services; a demonstrated interest in working with and assisting students; a willingness to participate in pre-service and in-service training and other professional activities; and demonstrated interpersonal skills.

Advising professional staff members must hold an earned graduate or professional degree in a field relevant to their current position or must possess an appropriate combination of educational credentials and related work experience.

The advising program must ensure that staff members are knowledgeable about and trained in emergency procedures, crisis response, and prevention efforts. Prevention efforts must address identification of threatening conduct or behavior of students, faculty members, staff, and others and must incorporate a system or procedures for responding, including but not limited to reporting them to the appropriate campus officials, such as an emergency response team.

#### **PART 5: ETHICS**

All persons involved in the provision of advising services to students must maintain the

highest standards of ethical behavior. All employees at Western Illinois University must complete ethics training and sexual harassment training each year.

Advisors must comply with all requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. They must ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained with respect to all communications and records to the extent that such records are protected under the law and appropriate statements of ethical practice. Information contained in students' educational records must not be disclosed except as allowed by relevant laws and institutional policies. Advising staff members must disclose to appropriate authorities information judged to be of an emergency nature, especially when the safety of the individual or others is involved, or when otherwise required by institutional policy or relevant law.

All advisors must recognize the limits of their training, expertise, and competence and must refer students in need of further expertise to persons possessing appropriate qualifications.

Advisors must not counsel or aid students in circumventing institutional policies or regulations. When confronted with situations in which students have violated or circumvented established policy or norms, the advisor is obligated to address the issue and refer students to the appropriate agency accordingly.

Advisors are responsible to the college or university in which they work. They respect the opinions of their colleagues, remain neutral when students present them with comments, questions, or opinions about other faculty or staff, and are impartial about academic programs.

## **PART 6: LAW, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE**

The academic advising program must be in compliance with laws, regulations, and policies that relate to respective responsibilities and that pose legal obligations, limitations, risks, and liabilities for the institution as a whole. The institution must provide access to legal advice to professional staff as needed to carry out assigned responsibilities. The institution must inform advising staff and students in a timely and systematic fashion about extraordinary or changing legal obligations and potential liabilities.

AAP must regularly review policies. The revision and creation of policies must be informed by best practices, available evidence, and policy issues in higher education.

## **PART 7: DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND ACCESS**

The academic advising program must make strides to keep the university free from discrimination. It must not discriminate on the basis of ability; age; cultural identity; ethnicity; family educational history (e.g., first generation to attend college); gender identity and expression; nationality; political affiliation; race; religious affiliation; sex; sexual orientation; economic, marital, social, or veteran status; or any other basis included in institutional policies and codes and laws.

Keeping the university free from discrimination can be done by promoting safe environments and open ideas, and encouraging the learning and experiencing of new cultures. Academic advisors can accomplish this by attending conferences, workshops, and training seminars, visiting resource and cultural centers, or working with other professionals in specified areas.

Academic advisors must be able to recognize and appreciate the diverse population a university encounters, and be open to new ideas and beliefs.

The academic advising program must adhere to equal opportunity laws in all activities. The program must ensure that its services and facilities are accessible to the needs of special student populations.

## **PART 8: INSTITUTIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

Academic advising is an extension of the educational process, which is highly dependent on a one-to-one relationship. Advising effectiveness is also dependent upon close working relationships with other institutional agencies, the faculty and the administration.

The academic advising program must reach out to relevant individuals, campus offices, and external agencies to:

- Establish, maintain, and promote effective relations
- Disseminate information about their own and other related programs and services
- Coordinate and collaborate, when appropriate, in offering programs and services to meet the needs of students and promote achievement of student learning and development outcomes

## **PART 9: FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

The academic advising program must have funding sufficient to carry out its mission and to support the day-to-day operations and functions of advising. In addition, consideration should be given to supporting institutional memberships in appropriate professional organizations; relevant subscriptions and necessary library resources; attendance at professional association meetings, conferences, and workshops and other professional development activities. Printing and media monies should be sufficient to provide quality printed and non-print information to support the advising activities. Funding support for in-service training of advisors, particularly those for whom the advisory function is a part-time or secondary assignment, should be available.

## **PART 10: TECHNOLOGY**

The academic advising program must utilize electronic resources to maintain constant contact with students. This refers to any electronic resource students can use to gain information about their academic program (including email correspondence with an advisor, departmental web pages, STARS, Facebook, Twitter, etc). Advisors must recognize that technology has a huge impact on how students communicate and adapt

to changing technological needs.

The program must continue to utilize the “advisor encumbrance” that requires every student, with the exception of students in the Bachelor of General Studies Program, to meet with his or her advisor before registering for courses. This system helps students determine the proper coursework to fulfill their graduation requirements, thus aiding in retention. The distance education advising must provide for appropriate real time or delayed interaction between advisors and students.

Academic advisors must have access to computing equipment, local networks, student databases, including software programs for advising and the internet.

## **PART 11: FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**

Academic advisors must be provided with adequate facilities to fulfill their mission. As applicable, the facilities should include the following: private offices or private spaces for advising or meetings of a confidential nature; office, reception, and storage space sufficient to accommodate assigned staff, supplies, equipment, library resources; and meeting space. Facilities should afford privacy, freedom from visual and auditory distractions, adequate space, and a secure atmosphere.

## **PART 12: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

Advisors must develop and utilize appropriate methods to evaluate the functions performed in an advising setting. Results of these evaluations must be used in revising and improving programs and services, identifying needs and interests in shaping directions of program and service design, and recognizing staff performance.

A standing sub-committee of the COAA, the Assessment committee, will create and implement a plan consisting of methodologies, such as advisor and student evaluations, to demonstrate accountability and provide ideas for areas of continuous improvement. Advisors must recognize that discretion is necessary when evaluating these results.

Prepared by a subcommittee of the Council of Academic Advisors

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