

Student Affairs Departmental Overview

Student Academic Advising Center

The Student Academic Advising Center (SAAC) staff includes a Director (who also oversees the Career Services Office and Disability Services), 5 professional academic advisors (four 9-month and one 11 month who is shared ¼ time with Disability Services), 1 program associate (9-month) and two student honors interns.

SAAC's primary mission is to provide academic advising services for undeclared majors and students in transition by providing individual academic advising for students who are uncertain about their majors or career choices. SAAC Advisors help undeclared advisees:

- understand the purpose and value of general education as part of the college experience;
- learn the “ground rules” governing University requirements, policies, and procedures;
- select courses which fulfill General Degree Requirements and match students' interests and possible majors;
- use and understand their Degree Progress Reports to the fullest extent; and
- take responsibility in the advising and decision-making processes.

In addition, the Student Academic Advising Center provides the following services for the UWSP campus:

1. Academic Alternatives Advising
Assist students from other departments who (1) are questioning their choice of major or (2) have been dropped from their major, to explore other academic/career options.
2. Late Drop and Withdrawal Appeals
Review and act on requests (via committee) to drop courses or to withdraw after university deadlines.
3. Associate Degree Advising
Help students select courses satisfying AD requirements as well as elective courses that might complete bachelor degree general education requirements and/or complement their future career goals.
4. Experiential Learning
Meet with UWSP students seeking credit for college-level learning obtained by experiences outside the traditional academic setting.
5. UW-Connections Program
Advise students who are dually enrolled at UW-Madison and UW-Stevens Point.
6. Miscellaneous Services
 - Meet with prospective students and parents (e.g. UWSP Viewpoints, athletic team recruits, Admission Office referrals);
 - Present (on request) to various campus groups on general advising information;
 - Participate in campus-wide and UW-System committees (e.g. Faculty Senate, Curriculum, Gen-Ed Review, UW-System Academic and Career Advising Taskforce).

Student Affairs Assessment Written Report

Unit Name: *Student Academic Advising Center*

Date: September, 2009

Intended Outcome #1(Learning Outcome)

Undeclared students will take responsibility for their academic experience by coming prepared to advising meetings, utilizing relevant academic resources, and being aware of campus/community support services.

Experiences, Programs, Services, or Interventions

- New Student Meeting (NSM): “Mandatory” group presentation highlighting major/career exploration topics and online academic resources (e.g. myPoint web registration, Degree Progress Report)
- Individual advising appointments at least once per semester
- Email correspondence
- Meeting Preparation Worksheets (Freshmen & Continuing)
- Advising Syllabus
- SAAC website (www.uwsp.edu/advising)

Methods

- **New Student Meeting Evaluations:** Evaluations were given to students who attended the New Students meetings held in Fall '08 & Spring '09. In Fall 2008, 219 out of 276 students completed the evaluation (79% response rate). In Spring '09, all 17 students who attended completed evaluations (100% response rate).
- **Exit Survey to declared majors:** This survey was sent via Survey Monkey to 466 former SAAC advisees who declared majors during the 2008-09 academic year (74 responded; 16% response rate).
- **Focus Groups:** Focus groups were conducted with SAAC advisees who declared majors during the academic year (September 2008-February 2009). There were 2 focus groups with 6 students per group [April 2009]
- **Advisee Preparedness Survey:** Advisors gauged and tracked advisee preparedness through peak weeks of registration advising (Spring '09).

Results

New Student Meeting- Most new students enter UWSP in the fall, so fall sessions are better attended (total students and invited/attended percentage). Students rate NSM structure and content highly:

	Fall 2007	Spring 2008	Fall 2008	Spring 2009
Composite score	4.17	4.49	4.32	4.47

Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale: 5-Strongly agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree

Select comments on what was helpful from New Student Meeting:

- *What to bring to advising appointment*
- *How to prepare for advising meeting*
- *Where to find DPR*

Select comments on how to improve New Student Meeting

- *Too boring*
- *Talk more on using Timetable*

Spring '09 Advisee Preparedness Survey- From March 30-April 17, advisors subjectively assessed preparation level of advisees for fall registration. Of the 288 students advised during that time, preparation levels were recorded:

- 29.17% (n=84) Very Prepared: Brought DPR, worksheet, and/or list of courses or questions
- 39.58% (n=114) Somewhat Prepared: Brought DPR or worksheet or list of courses

- 31.25% (n=90) Unprepared: Had little or nothing prepared for advising session

Exit Survey – In the survey, students acknowledged knowing how to use myPoint tools, DPR, and were familiar with campus resources (Q2, Q5, Q6). Students also recognized important role advising plays in their experience (Q10).

	2009	2008
Q2. Knew how to use my Degree Progress Report for academic planning.	3.53	3.56
Q5. Knew how to use myPoint to find information that relates to my academic success (e.g. registration, UWSP Catalog, policies, and procedures).	3.59	3.63
Q6. Was familiar with campus resources available to me (e.g Tutoring Learning Center, Counseling Center, Career Services Office).	3.23	3.12
Q10. Felt that academic advising plays an important role in my college experiences.	3.55	3.31

Responses were on a 4-point Likert scale:4- Strongly agree; 3-Agree; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree; Not applicable

Focus Groups- The focus groups were conducted at the end of the 2009 spring semester; the tapes have been transcribed, but the staff have not yet interpreted the results. Initial review of notes indicates that advising plays an important role in major decision process by linking general degree requirements to exploration. Students indicate this relieves some pressure to choose a major immediately. Students also acknowledged the importance of an advisor exposing them to variety of resources and making referrals to other campus units.

Implications for Practice

The elements detailed above provide SAAC with a picture of how students utilize information that is critical to the academic experience.

- Exit survey instrument verifies that students are recognizing the importance of advising in their experience and are utilizing the numerous tools and resources. Students appear to demonstrate initiative and ownership of their experience, reflected by their responses to understanding the value of the GDRs as an exploration tool, utilizing myPoint and their DPR to plan and prepare for registration, and seeking referral to relevant campus units.
- Continue the New Student Meeting to set the stage for registration advising and major/career exploration. The New Student Meeting provides students with information about registration and major/career exploration at a critical time in their UWSP tenure. Student comments occasionally speak to “information overload” and dry delivery. Internal discussions have highlighted alternate delivery methods for registration how-to and major exploration.
- To achieve student recognition of their responsibilities in the advising relationship, SAAC developed worksheets and asked students to complete them before their appointment. SAAC piloted a Preparation Survey to see how many students were completing task. SAAC will continue to discuss ways to provide students with additional tasks/tools in order to ensure full participation in advising process.
- SAAC improved the resources available in the front lobby area, providing easy access for students waiting for advising appointments. Additional information on campus resources was provided, including a display on co-curricular opportunities through SIEO, a brochure rack with information from offices such as the Counseling Center and TLC, and additional books available for check-out.
- Currently the campus is engaged in revamping the General Education Program. As this occurs, it will become critical that advisors in SAAC and throughout campus are provided “training” on the new GDRs and can articulate their importance to students.

Intended Outcome #2(Learning outcome)

Students will develop and implement academic plans and educational experiences congruent with their

interests and abilities.

Experiences, Programs, Services, or Interventions

- Advisors meet with undeclared advisees at least once per semester; they also meet with other students who are in transition between majors or seeking to explore majors/career options.
- Advisors refer students to Career Services for vocational assessments, career exploration workshops, or meetings with Career Counselors.
- Students are introduced to various tools such as the 3-Semester Plan, online resources such as the SAAC website and Career Portal, and a resource library in the office lobby.
- Information regarding major/career exploration is communicated via programs such as Orientation, New Student meetings, and ViewPoints.

Methods

- **Focus groups:** Focus groups were conducted in Spring 2009 with SAAC advisees who had declared a major during the academic year.
- **Advisee Exit Survey:** This electronic survey was sent to former SAAC advisees to address their perception of a) whether they achieved various learning outcomes; b) how helpful their SAAC advisor was in assisting them in meeting these outcomes; and c) ways in which SAAC can improve the quality of advising [Spring 2009].

Results

In general, students self-reported that they felt they understood academic requirements for majors and selected a major that was a good fit for their interests and abilities:

Advisee Exit Survey:

By the time I declared my major, I:	2009	2008
Was familiar with the requirements for majors and/or minors I declared.	3.38	3.12
Felt the major I chose reflects my personal interests, skills, and abilities.	3.52	3.48
Understood the importance of taking part in experiences outside of the classroom (e.g. career exploration workshops, student organizations, sports, work/volunteer activities).	3.42	3.22

Responses were on a 4-point Likert scale: 4- Strongly agree; 3-Agree; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree; Not applicable

Students also responded that their SAAC advisor assisted them in "making realistic choices consistent with their abilities and interests" (mean=3.53) and were "knowledgeable about the requirements for majors they were considering" (mean=3.5).

** Longitudinal data is available for the Exit Survey, but the numbers have not changed much over the years, so we have chosen to focus on data from the past two years.

Select comments on advising:

- *My advisor was more than helpful and took the time to really go over things with me and refer me to further resources that helped me decide what my major was.*
- *[My advisor] was really caring and made me feel like I was the only person she advised.*
- *[My advisor] was so enthusiastic about my success at college.*

Suggestions to improve advising:

- *Provide more direction or options*
- *More knowledge about different majors and Career Services*
- *Offer longer advising appointments*

Focus groups: Some general themes that emerged from the data include:

- Students indicated many influences shaped their decision on a major. Family was a major influence in deciding what major to choose and when to declare. Other influences included individuals such as academic advisors, Career Services, professors, and alumni. Also, students' choice of major was shaped by their future goals, life values, and the nature and reputation of the academic program. Participants stated that they found majors based on trial and error and through taking GDR/other classes that they found interesting. Helpful resources included: SAAC/Career Services; vocational assessments; resources in the Career Services library and the campus library; and conversations with CAs or students in the major.
- Student suggestions included:
 - Provide additional information on majors/careers (e.g. major/career fair during orientation or before classes start)
 - Orientation is important for setting the tone re: advising and being undeclared—may need to re-think aspects of Orientation
 - Important to share message with students that it's o.k. to be undeclared

Implications for Practice

- The staff are working on revising ways to effectively provide information on majors/careers to students. The advisors attended conferences (NACADA; WACADA) to learn various “best practices” and are discussing possible workshops and programs (e.g. Speed Advising) to implement.
- SAAC is engaged in ongoing discussions with Career Services to brainstorm ways to make major/career exploration in our two units an intentional and seamless process. Career Services staff will provide professional development training sessions for SAAC staff related to the vocational assessments, and how advisors can better work with students to process the results and discuss next steps [Fall, 2009].
- While still being interpreted, it is hoped the focus group sessions will provide SAAC with a richness of information through qualitative measures that will complement the exit survey. Focus group comments will be interpreted to see if certain themes arise regarding influences on major exploration. We hope to learn more about what information or influences are playing a major role in students' decision-making processes.
- In the exit survey this year and in past years, students sometimes reference negative advising experiences elsewhere on campus. SAAC recommends the institution focus attention on improving advising campus-wide, and follow up on the suggestions outlined in the Advising Task Force report. Clearly there are budgetary implications to some of these suggestions, especially those related to staffing and other resources.

Intended Outcome #3 (Service outcome)

Students will be satisfied with their advising experience in the SAAC Office (demonstrated by a mean of 4.5 or above on a 5-point Likert scale).

Experiences, Programs, Services, or Interventions

- Advisors meet with undeclared advisees at least once per semester; they also meet with other students who are in transition between majors or seeking to explore major/career options.
- Ongoing professional development and training is provided to front desk staff, student assistants, and advisors.

Methods

Student Satisfaction Survey: Students were asked to complete this brief paper survey immediately following their advising appointments (Spring, 2008). We received responses from 373 students including 216 freshmen (58%); 106 sophomores (28%); 44 juniors (12%); 6 seniors (2%); 1 no response

Results

Appointments per year	#	%
Once	42	12%
Twice	199	53%
Three times	85	23%
3+ times	46	12%

Currently, advising appointments are 30-minutes long. Although there were a few remarks in the comments section regarding longer advising appointments, when asked on the survey: Did you feel you had enough time during your advising appointment?" 362 students (98%) responded "yes" and 9 students (2%) said no.

The results of the satisfaction survey indicated a high level of satisfaction with their SAAC Advisor.

My SAAC Advisor:	Mean 2008
Helped me to understand General Degree Requirements (GDRs)	4.84
Helped me to understand academic policies and procedures	4.70
Helped me to select courses consistent with my goals and academic progress	4.90
Discussed possible majors and/or career directions with me	4.84
Answered my questions and/or referred me to an appropriate person/office	4.91
Offered helpful suggestions but left final decisions to me	4.88
Is a helpful effective advisor whom I would recommend to other students	4.91

Students' responses were on a 5-point Likert scale: 5-Strongly agree; 4-Agree; 3-Unsure; 2-Disagree; 1- Strongly Disagree; 0-Not applicable

323 students commented on their advisors' strengths; these comments were very positive, describing their advisors as knowledgeable, understanding, helpful, welcoming, open-minded, informative, approachable, supportive, and patient.

195 students responded to the question on how to improve advising, including the following comments:

- *Longer advising time if needed*
- *Know current teachers' teaching styles*
- *Tell the student exactly what they need to do [to reach] their goal more often. For instance calculating grades needed for each class to get a certain GPA.*
- *Steak buffet in the office*

The Exit Survey also indicated positive responses regarding their interactions with the professional/student

staff at the front desk (see below). A couple students did comment that at times the front desk staff appeared to be too busy at times.

During my visit to the SAAC Office	Mean 2008
I was treated courteously by the SAAC Front Office Staff	3.51
The SAAC Front Office Staff answered my questions accurately	3.46

Responses were on a 4-point Likert scale:4- Strongly agree; 3-Agree; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree; Not applicable

Implications for Practice

- In general, the comments were very positive which affirmed current practice and the excellent advising provided by the SAAC staff.
- The staff have engaged in discussions regarding shifting advising appointments from 30 to 45 minutes. We do allow 1-hour meetings for new intakes during non-peak/registration times. One staff member experimented with 45 minute appointments, and found that she was able to do this for part of the time and found the additional 15 minutes to be helpful; however, eventually needed to go back to 30-minute appointments in order to accommodate all her advisees. We are still assessing if 45-minute appointments will allow us enough time to see our advising caseloads during registration advising. A related issue is that the staff have other duties beyond advising—such as late drops and withdrawals, experiential learning, outreach, etc. These responsibilities take up a great deal of time outside of their advising duties.
- We made changes to the satisfaction survey to focus on outcomes in addition to questions regarding general satisfaction. We also decided to move to a 2-year cycle for the survey. In addition to satisfaction, we are also beginning to look more at retention data and data from other sources on campus such as the College Student Characteristics Inventory.

Intended Outcome #4 (Learning outcome)

Undeclared students on probation will reflect upon their academic standing and strategize ways to improve their GPA.

Experiences, Programs, Services, or Interventions

- Notification letter from advisor clarifying policy and meeting requirement
- Advisors informally email individual students with meeting reminders
- Self-reflection Probation Worksheet (student to complete prior to meeting)
- Early semester probation meeting, preferably during first week of class to take advantage of add/drop period

Methods

- SIM reports from Registration provide list of students on Probation 1, Probation 2, and academic suspension for each advisor. SAAC records these numbers at the end of the semester in question. SAAC also reviews report again before next semester to collect information on SAAC students not captured on initial report (e.g. re-entry, new SAAC intakes).

Results

Data table shows the number of students placed on probation or academic suspension after each semester. SAAC also tracks those students for enrollment in the next term; these are the recipients of letters and worksheets. (Students re-entering UWSP after a break of one semester or more are also sent letters and required to meet with advisor).

Term	Prob 1	Prob 2	Susp	Susp-Readmit	Total	Not Enrolled	Enrolled Next Term
Fall '07	113	10	48	4	175	15	112
Spring '08	73	18	55	9	155	26	74
Fall '08	88	16	42	5	151	28	81
Spring '09	62	17	44	5	128	15	69

Implications for Practice

SAAC's focus on targeting probation students with a more intentional advising effort could be expanded. Preliminary discussions have considered some of the following measures:

- Systematic tracking of student response to meeting request. Advisors informally track and remind students who have not scheduled appointment, but no formal structure exists to remind probation students to meet with SAAC advisor and to record number who actually do.
- Analysis of SAAC probation student data (GPA, retention) to determine if meetings are having desired effect.

The above measures could provide SAAC with more information on probation students and determine whether future programmatic measures are necessary.

- Developing a referral system with other units to encourage probation student contact with appropriate office.
- More intrusive advising measures to reach probation students.

Although these implications focus specifically on SAAC and undeclared students on probation, it is also important that the campus as a whole examine how we can better assist all students who are on academic probation in order to improve their retention and success.