Advancing Advising: A collaborative approach to transform advising & the student experience

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About US

Echo Pittman, PhD
- 17 years at Memorial
- 5 years in the advising administrative role
- Oversight of advising outreach and initiatives for first-year students and exploring students
- NL Liaison, Nacad region
- Board of directors TESL Canada (2012 to 2015)

Sarah Arnott, MMSc, PMP
- 17 years in higher education
- 11 years at Memorial
- IT strategy, planning and liaising
- IT lead for student success initiatives

Background: Memorial University

- The largest comprehensive university in the Atlantic provinces
- The only university in the province (Public university)
- 5 main campuses
- 12 Faculties & Schools; 100+ program options
- 18,600 students / 12,000 undergraduates
- ~2,300 first year students (St. John’s)

Why we needed change

Student enrolment was down each year from 2014-2017

Room to improve the Fall to Fall retention and overall Graduation Rate

Various student surveys prompted a closer examination of our systemic barriers
Differences in academic advising

- Academic advising in Canada is relatively recent and requires further development (Fricker, 2015)
- Similarities outweigh the differences
- Differences include
  - Privacy legislation
  - Types of institutions
  - Academic program structures

The value of Advising

Advising is an integral part of any retention, persistence, and student success initiatives on a campus (Fricker, 2015; Nutt, 2009).

“...advising is one of the most important services for helping students become aware of their intellectual and emotional growth, in particular, and for helping them monitor the progress in their development” (Gordon, 2002).

“Advising is a way to connect students to the campus and to help them feel that someone is looking out for them” (Kuhn, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005).

Advising imperative

To provide high quality academic advising experiences, educational institutions nowadays also need to consider and find ways to incorporate data and technology into the advising process (Nutt, 2016) to best support an increasing diversified student population.

How we made changes

- Decide which target group of advisors to focus on
- Host 10+ consultation sessions focusing on what we have done well and what Memorial can help
- Encouraging but not aggressive/demanding
- Showcase the new advising tool but focus on understanding the actual needs of each unit
- The outcomes should be action based

Common Advising Barriers

- Resource issues
  - One Centralized Office (~2,800 students)
  - 3 FT academic advisors
  - Reactive mode
  - Proactive: email outreach without data input
- Departmental advising
  - Some advisors look after more than 1000 students
  - Academic Advising is not mandatory
Common Advising Barriers

- Diverse understandings of what academic advising is
  “Students should seek advice on matters such as course selection, registration, dropping/adding course registrations, selecting/changing an academic program, entrance requirements for degree programs and interpretation of university regulations. It is especially true that students in the early stages of their degree program should seek academic advice.”
- Feel disconnected & frustrated towards conflicting advice

Common Advising Barriers

- No time and no incentives to utilize data
- Excel files not user friendly

Advising Review Recommendations

- Monitor advising loads and modify them for effectiveness.
- Invest in building and strengthening advising infrastructure and support.
- Make self-help advising tools available and accessible to students.
- Actively educate students about the importance of academic advising.
- Improve accessibility and process in academic audits.
- Where appropriate, faculty and school advising offices should be in a centrally organized location, where advisors have access to shared resources and collegial support.
- Require students to declare faculties and programs of study.
- Greater promotion of advising services.
- Maintain a well-resourced Academic Advising Centre (AAC).
- Form a campus-wide academic advising working group.
- Review the advising support process for specific groups of students and enhance academic advising coordination and support to these students.

Coordinated Professional Development & Training

Perhaps the most important need in academic advising today is effective training. While it is evident that while exemplary practices exist for the development of advisors at many institutions, much remains to be accomplished in order to lift the level of advising effectiveness (Habley, 2000; Ford, 2007; McClellan, 2007).

Actioned Recommendations

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Coordinated Professional Development & Training

Training and professional development helps cultivate talents, encourages a culture of learning, and builds collegiality and collaboration across campus to deliver high-quality advising and support student success (Bryant, Chanani, Endres, & Galvin, 2006).

Minimal costs
High level of buy-in
Active participation another slide for PD (How do we plan PD at MUN)

Coaching
Advising first year students: The power of purpose and movement toward self-efficacy
Get to know the Blundon Centre
How to start a difficult conversation with students
Effective Communication
Building your network
How to manage stress

Enhancing advising using technology

“If utilized effectively, technology in advising contributes positively to the student experience, supporting goals toward increased retention and improving learners’ academic success.” (Pasquini, 2011)

Enhancing advising using technology

Simplify, expedite, and increase access to information
Enhance relationships through online dialogue and proactive outreach
Improve the student experience and access to support services
Modernize advising practices

Student Success Management System

Smart student profile including predictive risk indicators
Appointments scheduling and communications tools
Advanced search and campaign management
Coordinated care network
Navigate: Advising Technology

- Convenient, helpful for advising session preparation
- User friendly, facilitates direct contact with students
- Enables consistent advising across units
- Improves scheduling of appointments for advisors and students
- Campaign function for proactive and/or targeted communications

Early results

Increased student engagement

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<td>2017</td>
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Using data to plan outreach activities

- Share our outreach results
  - # of the students who have declared a major
  - # of the students who have performed better
  - # of the students who have persisted to the following semester
- Share our enrolment data

Using data to validate our outreach efforts
Positive Feedback

“This session provided a reminder to reflect on our current practices and to explore possible ways to improve our practices when working with students.” - Difficult Conversations Session

Excellent, really great practical tips/examples. Really applicable to my work.” - Incorporating Coaching Conversations into Advising Practice Webinar

An excellent session that really helped me be aware of the importance of self-care. It also provided me with practical practices to cope with physical stress during my work.” - Stress Management Session

“Great! Please keep these sessions coming. Maintaining a connection with other advisors is essential to my mental health!! [Seriously!]” - Incorporating Coaching Conversations into Advising Practice Webinar

“Excellent. Was to have advising focused PD. We NEED more advising PD!” - Incorporating Coaching Conversations into Advising Practice Webinar

“Great to have panelists from such diverse roles across campus.” - Difficult Conversations Session

Lessons learned

- Start Small
- Grow Steadily
- Don’t plan the whole thing
- Expect challenges – it will not go smoothly!

Differences became more apparent...

But similarities outweigh them

- First Canadian university to join EAB Student Success Collaborative
- Considerations
  - Cloud service
  - Differences in terminology and structures
- Mitigation
  - Contract negotiation
  - Privacy Impact Assessment
- Worked with EAB during implementation

Plans for the future

- Continued expansion of Navigate
- Self-service degree audit tool
- Improved course scheduling
- Improved academic calendar publishing tool – better access to information by students

What’s next
Discussion:

What are examples of innovation in academic advising that worked well at your institution?

References


