Come Together: Building an Advising Community on a Decentralized Campus

Ever wonder what best practices your colleagues are using or wish that you could find ways to connect with other advisors across campus? Academic advisors serving decentralized campuses often encounter unique challenges, including isolation and lack of connections. Wayne State University is an institution with almost 100 advisors in its 12 schools and colleges. WSU’s decentralized model of advising makes it challenging for our advisors to build a community with each other, but we are not letting that stop us. Here are some examples of how we are bringing WSU advisors together.

Advisor Advocacy Groups:

The Academic Advising Council (AAC) is an advisor led group on campus that is an allied member of NACADA. Its mission is to promote a greater understanding of the role of advising in student learning and to strengthen university-wide recognition of the significance of academic advising in the recruitment, retention and academic success of Wayne State University students. Members are elected to leadership positions by their fellow advisors, and advisors are appointed to committees created by the AAC. The AAC meets once a month to proactively address issues impacting advisors and student success at WSU and includes the following committees: Advising Summit Planning, Training, Communications, Membership and Engagement, Elections and Nominations, and Advisor Volunteerism and Service

Social Events:

Events During Work Hours: Once a month, advisors meet up during their lunch hours at the Advisor Café. The Advisor Café provides a space for advisors to get out of their offices and enjoy each other’s company in an informal setting. Coffee is provided, advisors bring their own lunch and often provide a dessert or side dish to share.

Each year, the Academic Advising Council (AAC) hosts an end of the year picnic to celebrate the accomplishments of our advisors. Grilled foods are provided by the University, and the advisors bring potluck dishes to share. The picnic is held in a location that provides the advisors an option to enjoy indoor and outdoor games and fun in the sun!

The Academic Advising Summit activity is planned by the summit committee every year, and it is provided free of charge to the advisors that participate in the annual Advising Summit. In the past, activities have included a boat ride down the Detroit River, a bus tour of Detroit, and an afternoon at Punch Bowl Social. The activity is typically held on the final afternoon of the Summit.

Events Held After Work: Advisors are invited to meet once a month at a local establishment after work hours to relax and get to know each other at “Advisor Meet Ups.” It provides an opportunity for advisors to explore the community surrounding the campus. Advisors have also come together for Euchre nights, and ideas for other games nights are in discussion.

Technology Tools:

As members of the AAC Training Committee, we have led efforts to help advisors collaborate to share best practices in advising. The Advising Best Practices Collective on Canvas provides advisors
with a platform to post ideas, strategies, and lesson plans on a variety of advising topics. Advisors can also ask questions and provide feedback on posts.

The Advisor Training Academy and Academic Advising Council created the Advising Directory as a complete listing of all advisors’ contact information, as well as their areas of expertise. Advisors can quickly search for other advisors on campus by their name, ranking, expertise, and professional organization affiliation.

WSU advisors rarely did remote advising prior to the pandemic. This meant that advisors needed to quickly learn best practices for remote advising and be provided with resources to do virtual appointments. The Assist Anywhere site was developed by WSU advisors to assist all WSU academic staff with making the difficult transition to a completely remote campus experience.

**Advisor Development:**

The AAC Training Committee has created the following opportunities to orient new advisors, develop their best practices, and help with the promotion process.

A. **New Advisor Liaisons** meet with advisors new to campus over a six-week period to explain and review advising policies and procedures at Wayne State.

B. **Post-Conference reporting sessions** allow advisors the opportunity to share information they learned from recent conferences. Advisors volunteer to be a conference reporter and present their information in a large group discussion, allowing advisors unable to attend conferences to receive beneficial takeaways.

C. The **promotion workshop** pairs advisors going through the promotion process with advisors that have already successfully obtained a promotion. Advisors familiar with the process present their own promotion materials and provide feedback to advisors currently going up for promotion.

The annual Academic Advising Summit was established to support the development and implementation of an exemplary academic advising program. Sponsored by the Provost's Office and chaired by the WSU-AAC, this is a collaborative, interactive event where participants have the opportunity to understand the national perspective on the importance of academic advising for student success, participate in sessions demonstrating best practices at Wayne State, and share ideas with advising colleagues across campus.

The WSU Advisor Training Academy (ATA) exists to provide initial and on-going training, professional development, and recognition for all academic advisors at Wayne State University. In addition, the ATA serves as a means of communication, networking, and community building for professional advisors across the WSU campus.