

Academic Advising Program Review

**Buffalo State College
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**NACADA Academic Advising Program Review
Prepared for Buffalo State College**

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Executive Summary

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.”

This phrase, often attributed to W. Edward Deming, seems relevant to this review of academic advising at Buffalo State College. This is by no means a criticism of the hard work and accomplishments to date, but merely an observation that while the design of the College Senate’s 2016 program was very intentional with regard to improving the academic advising experience for students, the administrative structure was also intentionally designed to support the autonomy of academic departments. What seems to be missing is the central leadership responsibility and authority necessary to coordinate and manage the overall program to ensure that the whole is, in fact, greater than the sum of its parts. The recommendations made in this report are anchored in the first one:

- **Establish leadership for academic advising, with responsibility and authority for the campus-wide coordination and management of academic advising within the Provost’s office.**

While the delivery of academic advising within individual departments might be different, it is important that the whole be coordinated in such a way that the variations are visible and transparent to others and are moving toward the same shared goals. Central coordination helps to set the stage for the collaboration and communication necessary to achieve transparency and leverage the expertise that exists across Buffalo State College.

It should be noted that Buffalo State’s interest in improving academic advising has been a long-standing agenda item. The 2016 College Senate sub-committee report was fairly comprehensive in its approach to the review of academic advising. “Academic Advising at SUNY Buffalo State” articulates a vision and purpose for academic advising and offers a guide and mapping of the curriculum for academic advising throughout the student lifecycle. The report also speaks to a mandatory advising plan and issues related to staffing. The 2016 report was a good start.

By Fall 2017 a mandatory advising plan was approved for implementation; University College was restructured as the Academic Commons. The Provost formally charged the Academic Advising Advisory Council with oversight, assessment, and consultation regarding academic advising on the campus. At least to these consultants, the specific responsibilities for the Council did not seem to be clear.

In 2018, Buffalo State College was awarded a Title III grant that included activities related to academic advising. The funding provided support for completion coaches as well as additional professional advisors. Completion coaches, according to the grant proposal, were to work with newly admitted students throughout their first year. The professional advisors would be included within the Academic Commons where more comprehensive academically related support activities, including centralized academic advising, would be housed. The intent of the Title III funding seems to be to enhance the institution’s ability to realize the College Senate’s vision for a campus-wide academic advising program.

Much has happened with regard to academic advising at Buffalo State College since the 2016 report by the College Senate. However, academic advising remains, in the views of most with whom we spoke, inconsistent and uncoordinated. In addition, as enrollments decline and the student profile changes, the importance of collaboration and communication cannot be underestimated, especially in a resource-challenged environment. The current challenge is to capitalize on the significant amount of work already begun and to bring consistency to the academic advising program at Buffalo State. In the end, what is needed is central leadership with the responsibility and authority to coordinate and manage the academic advising program. Articulating and communicating a shared understanding of what academic advising is as well as the desired outcomes for student learning that can be used to guide development is important to bringing cohesion to the program.

The recommendations in this report fall within five (5) broad categories. These categories, along with the major recommendation within each are listed below. These are further explained in the narrative of the report.

Leadership, Collaboration, and Communication

- Establish leadership for academic advising with responsibility and authority for the campus-wide coordination and management of academic advising within the Provost's office.

Institutional Commitment to Academic Advising as Integral to the Teaching and Learning Mission of Buffalo State College

- Develop a shared understanding of what academic advising is at Buffalo State College.

Student Purpose and Pathways

- Map the student experience from the point of admission through graduation and beyond. This includes a process review for policies and procedures to understand the intersection among practices and to address unintended barriers to student progression and success.

Advisors Roles, Responsibilities, and Development

- Clarify and support the roles of all academic advisors/support professionals (i.e., completion coaches, EOP Counselors, etc.) as well as the responsibilities of the central academic advising office.

Use of Technology

- Support the use of technology through the development of training programs and materials.

Buffalo State College's initiatives with regard to equity, inclusion, and diversity should inform the recommendations. Indeed, equity, inclusion, and diversity should be a guiding principle for this work.

Purpose of the Review and Visit

Dr. Susan Campbell and Mr. Blane Harding, two consultants from NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising were invited to visit Buffalo State College on September 9-11, 2019. The purpose of the visit was two-fold: 1) to conduct a review of academic advising as well as related processes and services and to offer recommendations for improvement and, 2) to offer a keynote address and set of professional development workshops on the topic of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Both visit goals were to inform the work of the institution's efforts with regard to a Title III grant. The latter was specifically designed to support Buffalo State College's efforts to be responsive to the changing demographics of the campus and to promote understanding of the cultural differences inherent in that change.

Framework for NACADA Consultants' Work

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) has endorsed three documents that inform the philosophy and practice of academic advising. These include: *NACADA Concept of Academic Advising*, *Core Values of Academic Advising*, and *the Core Competencies of Academic Advising*.¹ Effective academic advising programs will reflect the philosophy contained in these documents. The following points address our major assumptions about successful academic advising:

- Academic advising is best viewed as a form of teaching and integral to the success of the teaching and learning mission of higher education institutions. As Marc Lowenstein (2005) observes, "an excellent advisor does the same thing for the student's entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course." (See *Appendix F*). Advisors teach students to value the learning process, to apply decision-making strategies, to put the college experience into perspective, to set priorities and evaluate events, to develop thinking and learning skills, and to make informed choices as they enter, move through, and exit and institution.
- The *NACADA Concept of Academic Advising* identifies three essential components of advising: curriculum (the "what"), pedagogy (the "how"), and student learning outcomes (the "intended results"). These student learning outcomes are based upon what we want students to know, be able to do, and value/appreciate from participating in the academic advising process.
- Effective practices in advising programs consistently address three issues. First, it is critical that all who serve in the role of academic advisor (whether professional staff or faculty), receive adequate training and professional development opportunities. The training needs to be developmental, ongoing, and should include five major areas of concern to advisors: the conceptual, informational, relational, technological, and personal elements of advising. Second, there must be appropriate rewards and recognition for advisors. Third, it is critical that the advising program include an outcomes-based assessment plan that is systematic, ongoing, and includes multiple measures to understand what and how students are learning what we expect them to learn from the advising experience.

- Finally, when done well, academic advising can have a significant impact on student success as reflected in an institution's reputation, as well as its retention and graduation rates.

Another important document, *Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising*, has historically been used in the field to serve as a framework for the review of academic advising programs. The CAS Standards have been revised over the years to be more responsive to the learning dimensions of academic advising, i.e., through the articulation of the Six Domains of Learning in the Standards.

In addition to these documents, NACADA, in partnership with the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, has developed a set of aspirational standards for academic advising and is currently piloting a comprehensive self-study and evidence-based decision-making process with a set of 12 institutions. The Nine Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising draw from the above-mentioned documents and offer multiple lenses through which to review elements critical to academic advising. The purpose of the current pilot is to validate the Conditions as well as the taskforce-based process. This project is mentioned because of the relationship between the observations and recommendations in this report to these Conditions. In this regard, they offer conceptual organizers for the recommendations and inform the plan moving forward. For reference, the list of Conditions is included in Appendix E.

All of these documents frame and reinforce the consultants' view that academic advising programs should be student-centered *as well as* student-learning centered. In this regard programs should be outcomes-based.

The Report

What follows is a narrative that reflects our observations, offers additional specificity with regard to our recommendations, and suggests next steps. The topics addressed include:

- *Structure of the Visit*
- *General Observations: Context, Strengths and Challenges*
- *Discussion and Recommendations*
- *Summary and Next Steps*
- *A Note Regarding Staffing*

The Appendices include supporting documents such as the content of some of the conversations we had with stakeholders and resources we thought would be useful as the institution moves forward.

Structure of the Visit

The schedule in *Appendix A* outlines the specific meetings the consultants had with faculty, staff, administrators, leadership, and students. In addition to these organized sessions, the consultants met with students individually and in small groups in and outside the Student Union. Our goal was to understand academic advising at Buffalo State College from the perspectives of advisors (professional and faculty), administrators and, most importantly, as experienced by students.

In addition to discussions with individuals and groups, the consultants reviewed several documents related to the visit, including the recently funded Title III grant proposal, reports from the College Senate on academic advising, mission and learning outcomes drafts for advising, and assessment documents from the office of Institutional Effectiveness. Also reviewed were institutional documents such as the Strategic Plan as well as materials available on the website and external sources (such as College Results Online, College Completions, and IPEDS). All of these materials helped us to better understand Buffalo State College.

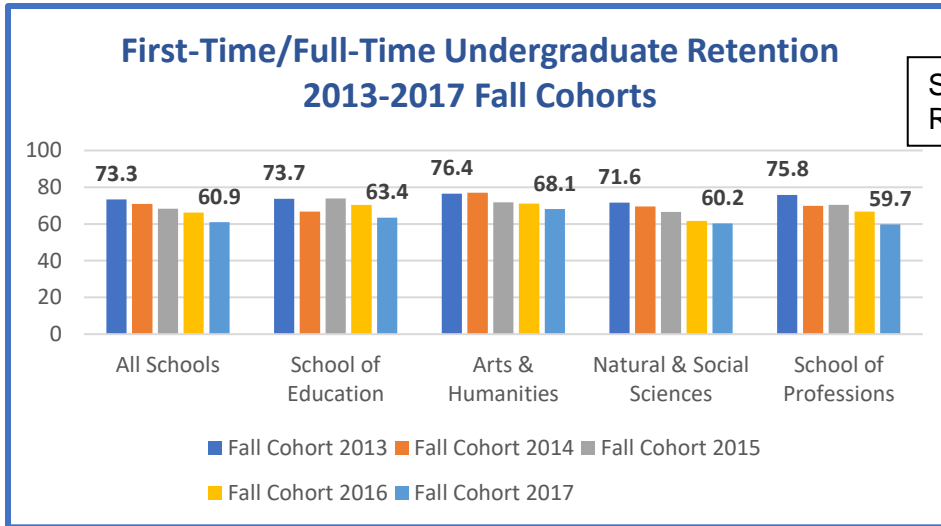
Context, Retention, and Graduation Rates

Context. Buffalo State College is a comprehensive institution within the SUNY system. As with other comprehensive institutions, Buffalo is experiencing struggles maintaining enrollment at the undergraduate level. According to Buffalo State College's Institutional Research Office, the number of undergraduate students decreased by 5.22% from Fall 2017 to Fall 2018. During the same time period new undergraduate students (transfer and first-time) decreased by about 7.5%; new first-time students decreased by a little over 3%. Retention rates have also declined, adding to the enrollment concerns.

On balance, the undergraduate population at Buffalo State remains primarily "traditional-aged". Data from IPEDS College Navigator indicate that, as reported for Fall 2017, 86 percent of undergraduates were age 24 or under. It is also important to note that a percentage, albeit small at .5%, of students 24 or under are also parents. Of the students 25 and over, this percentage increases to 25-26%. (data from IR, Sept. 2019). Further analysis would be needed to determine whether or not the parental status of undergraduate students is on an upward trajectory.

What the available data do show is the increasing diversity of undergraduate students at Buffalo State College, both in terms of ethnicity and place of residence, i.e., the number of students of color and the numbers of students coming from areas further away than the Buffalo, New York region. This change presents challenges for retention and graduation rates. With regard to residence, the percentage of undergraduate students who hail from the NYC Metro area has increased from 26.1% in Fall 2015 to 30.8% in Fall 2018 (IR Report). With regard to ethnicity, in Fall 2013, minority students represented 35.1% of the total undergraduate headcount at Buffalo State. The Fall 2018 Institutional Research report on enrollment indicates that the percentage is now more than half of the undergraduate enrollment at 53.8%. Buffalo State undergraduates have high financial need with 53.8% of all undergraduate students and 67.6% of entering first-year students being Pell-eligible.

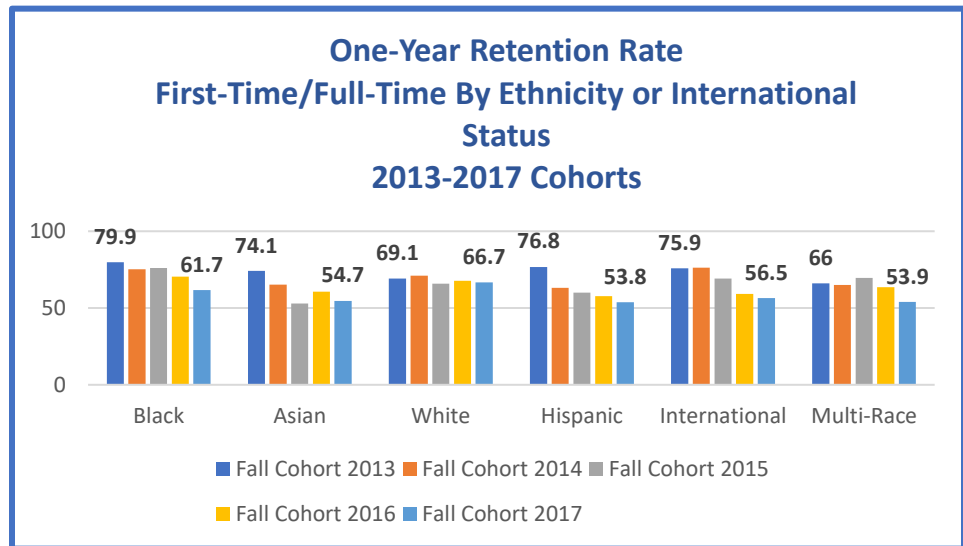
Retention and Graduation Rates. The retention and graduation rates at Buffalo State are important to review, particularly as they relate to the changing student profile. Retention is the ability of an institution to keep a student enrolled and is reflected in retention rates. As indicated in the table below, the retention rates for Buffalo State College have declined overall and across all schools. The table below offers a snapshot of overall retention and retention by school.



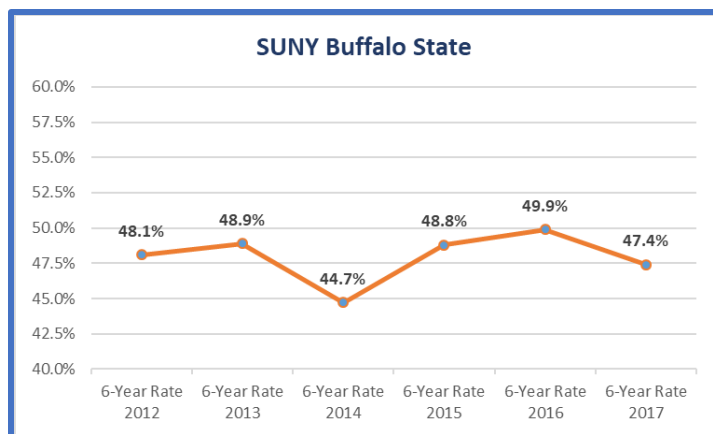
Source: Fall 2018 Institutional Research Report on Enrollment

In this same time period, retention has also decreased across ethnic groups as indicated in the table below. The retention of international students has also declined.

Source: Fall 2018 Institutional Research Report on Enrollment

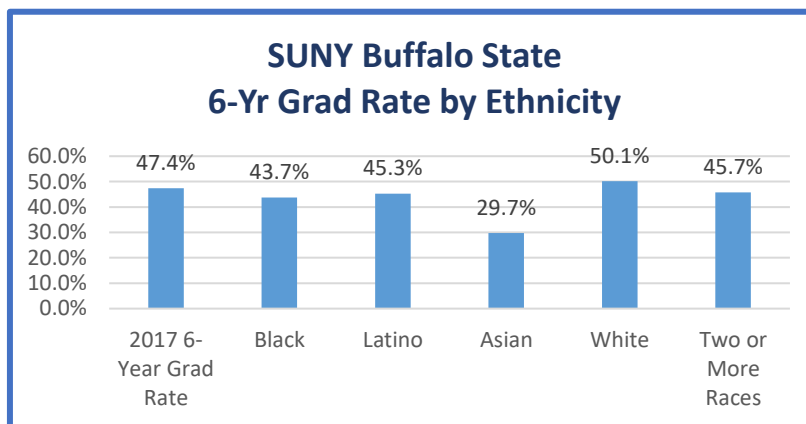


Coupled with recruitment challenges, decreasing retention rates are certainly cause for concern. Completing the enrollment picture are the 6-Year Graduation rates. These have fluctuated a bit but, with the exception of the rate for the cohort graduating in 2014, have remained in the 47-50% range. There are differences, however, in the graduation rates by ethnicity as the tables below suggest. The retention and graduation rates by ethnicity should offer important insight as the institution continues its equity, inclusion, and diversity initiatives.



6-Year Graduation Rates by Cohort Year
Source: College Results Online

6 Yr Grad Rate by Ethnicity
Source: College Results Online



Recognizing the changing student profile, the institution has initiated a number of programs and services to respond directly to student needs and also garnered external support to provide important financial resources. While much-needed, external resources have, at times, constrained how the College has been able to respond to change given particular grant guidelines. In addition, some programs and services are System-level or State-level initiatives and, as such, simultaneously offer great opportunities and guidelines that may or may not preclude making changes in structures and reporting. Also noted as important considerations are the contracts in effect for faculty and professional staff members.

It appears that there are many moving parts at Buffalo State College intended to improve the student experience. In the end, leveraging the strengths to overcome the challenges through coordination, collaboration, and communication will yield good results.

Strengths and Challenges

Strengths. The strengths we identified combine to reveal a commitment to the college and to student success. The most notable—and important for the academic advising program—include:

- Buffalo State College is the Campus that Cares. This was evident from the individuals with whom we spoke who represented all levels of the institution. Faculty and staff members want Buffalo State College and its students to succeed.

- The commitment from senior leadership to improve the student experience—and academic advising in particular—is clear. The leadership is extremely supportive of positive change yet, also want that change to be intentional and responsive to the needs of students.
- There are several initiatives intended to support student success in college. Examples include EOP, SAYY, COMPASS, and the newly developed Completion Coaching Program.
- There seems to be almost universal recognition of the positive impact academic advising can have on student learning success. As articulated in many of the conversations with administrators, faculty, and academic advisors, academic advising is generally seen as being more than transactional.
- The campus has experienced and seasoned professional advisors both in the Academic Advising Center in the Academic Commons and within those Schools where professional advisors are embedded.
- The College Senate report of 2016 offers a beginning blueprint for the campus to follow with regard to improvements in academic advising. The initial work regarding articulating an institution-wide mission is in the 2016 report. The campus has also begun work on developing a set of learning outcomes for academic advising to guide further action.

Clearly Buffalo State has the interest to reverse declining retention and graduation rates through improvements in the academic advising experience of students. The campus seems to be at a critical point in its organization and delivery of academic advising.

Challenges. The challenges we observed are, in some cases, structural and in others more related to processes and procedures. Addressing these will be important to achieving institutional goals to improve the student experience overall and the academic advising experience in particular.

- Buffalo State functions in a highly decentralized way, appearing to be a federation of schools and departments. ‘Siloed’ was a term often mentioned. One consequence of this decentralization is that there can be a void in communication. This seems to be the case here. Many on campus indicated they do not know what others are doing or, in some cases, know that they even exist (especially troubling on a campus of only 7000ish students). One example was the extent to which few knew about the existence of completion coaches, although they had only been hired within the last few weeks.
- Collaboration across areas, including Schools and departments is limited, thus existing expertise and experience at Buffalo State College is not as effectively utilized as it could be. This pattern of non-collaboration also contributes to the communication void.
- The pathway for students through Buffalo State College is not clearly understood; there is little evidence of a roadmap for students that reflects milestones and reveals the intersection of processes and people. There are, in some cases, curricular maps, but it doesn’t appear that these are widely available to others across the college.

- The changing demographics of the student body, particularly the increasing number of students of color, presents challenges with regard to understanding and responding to cultural difference and building community. Students from “The City” seem lost.
- While there is agreement that academic advising is more than transactional, this view is not clearly articulated and used to guide the development of the academic advising program at Buffalo State College.
- The organization for delivery of academic advising is confusing. The shift from a University College to an Academic Commons is not well understood.
- The symbol for mandatory advising at Buffalo State is the PIN. Originally intended to bring students and advisors together, the administration (who can apply, who can give, who can remove) of the PIN has resulted in a view that it is more of a barrier than support.
- There is a lack of clarity/definition of roles and responsibilities among academic advisors. The same holds true for students within the academic advising process. As one chair noted, “We do not hold students accountable and they have a definite role in the process”. In addition, the current model having professional advisors responsible for first term registration is challenged by staff resignations and moves to other grant funded programs.
- The onboarding of new students is fragmented and not well-coordinated between Student and Academic Affairs. There is limited opportunity, through Orientation, for students to become academically socialized; Academic Affairs is not currently involved in Orientation planning and design.
- The use of technology as a self-service tool is hampered due to lack of training, understanding, or access.
- Access to data for decision-making, according to many, is limited. Training in how to use data in decision-making may also be needed.

Discussion and Recommendations

The organization for the delivery of academic advising at Buffalo State is a split model. Students are initially advised by a professional staff advisor and then transitioned to a departmental faculty advisor when they reach 24 credits. Students who are undeclared remain with a professional advisor in the Academic Advising Center (housed in the Academic Commons) until they declare a major. Within the schools and departments, academic advising loads vary and advising is handled differently depending on the area. Some larger departments, such as Communication, have professional academic advisors embedded within their departments. Other departments have a liaison type of relationship with one of the professional academic advisors within the Academic Advising Center, and in other departments, faculty members are the primary academic advisors for all students and, in some instances, given release time for their roles.

The transition from a University College to an Academic Commons seems to have resulted in some confusion regarding the role and identify of the Academic Advising Center. Individuals on campus did not refer to the Academic Advising Center, but rather to the Academic Commons. This confusion may be the result of the change itself or the fact that the space for the Academic Commons will not be completed until the Spring of 2020, when it will be officially launched. In either case, there is a communication void that should be filled.

Recent transitions of professional staff academic advisors to other programs, such as SAYY, have left the Academic Advising Center (AAC) short-staffed. This perfect storm of sorts presents an opportunity to reframe and rethink the organization and delivery of academic advising at Buffalo State. The recommendations in this report are intended to help bring cohesion to the academic advising program. The tasks at hand are many (as the list reveals) and the complexity requires campus wide leadership to coordinate as well as the willingness of all to collaborate. So much good work has already been started; work that needs to continue. Within our recommendations, we offer resources to consult. In addition, during our visit, we had the opportunity to meet with a number of students. The results of those conversations are included in Appendix C and Appendix D.

The text box on the next page provides a summary of the recommendations in this report. The narrative that follows offers additional explanation and some guide for action.

Summary of Recommendations

Leadership, Collaboration, and Communication

Establish leadership for academic advising, with responsibility and authority for the campus-wide coordination and management of academic advising within the Provost's office.

- *Establish the Academic Advising Council to be an action-oriented committee with representation from campus stakeholders.*
- *Develop a communication plan to support the sharing of information, policies, and procedures across divisions and departments.*
- *Keep issues related to equity, inclusion, and diversity front and center in conversations about academic advising*

Institutional Commitment to Academic Advising as Integral to the Teaching and Learning Mission of Buffalo State College

Develop a shared understanding of what academic advising is at Buffalo State College.

- *Review and refine current statements of definition, mission, vision, values, and commitments.*
- *Develop a set of student learning outcomes for academic advising that reflect what students are to know, do, and value as a result of participating in academic advising.*
- *Develop a comprehensive assessment plan for academic advising for the campus.*
- *Develop a recognition and reward system for academic advisors consistent with their primary role at the institution.*

Student Purpose and Pathways

Map the student experience from the point of admission through graduation and beyond. This includes a process review for policies and procedures to understand the intersection between and among practices and to address unintended barriers to student progression and success.

- *Redesign Orientation and include Academic Affairs in the planning.*
- *Reconsider the use of the PIN in mandatory advising.*
- *Consider developing specific learning communities for students from Metro NYC to form a sense of community.*
- *Develop a strategy to communicate expectations and responsibilities with regard to academic advising for students.*

Advisor Roles, Responsibilities, and Development

Clarify and support the roles of all academic advisors/support professionals (i.e., completion coaches, EOP Counselors, etc.) as well as the responsibilities of the central academic advising office.

- *Clarify the responsibilities of the Central Academic Advising Office in its role to support academic advising across the institution*
- *Clarify roles and responsibilities of academic advisors within each unit.*
- *Create a professional development plan for all academic advisors that includes topics related to key elements of academic advising, those being informational, conceptual, and relational.*

Use of Technology

Support the use of technology through the development of training programs and materials.

Explanation of Recommendations

Leadership, Collaboration, and Communication. Management by committee is challenging at best. The intention of the Academic Advising Advisory Council is a good one for it provides a forum through which academic advising can be discussed, reviewed, assessed, and changes be made. It remains, however, that the work requires leadership to coordinate institutional efforts and to facilitate the collaboration, and communication necessary to bring cohesion to the academic advising program.

- ***Establish leadership for academic advising, with responsibility and authority for the coordination and management of academic advising within the Provost's office.*** The College Senate report of 2016 identifies this as one of its recommendations; we reaffirm it here. It is our understanding that a new position charged with oversight of retention initiatives has recently been hired and is to report to the Provost. Consideration might be given to having that individual be the Provost's designee for this leadership role. This might potentially provide additional support for this initiative to the Associate Provost whose portfolio with regard to curriculum is already extensive.
- ***Establish the Academic Advising Council to be an action-oriented committee with representation from campus stakeholders.*** This Council should be chaired by the Provost's designee. Representation should include academic affairs as well as student affairs. Assessment/Institutional Research representation is also recommended as is having the Registrar be a member. Faculty, staff, and students are important stakeholders. Representation should also include those involved with other student support programs such as SAYY, EOP, etc. Their voices are important to these conversations.
- ***Develop a communication plan to support the sharing of information, policies, and procedures across divisions and departments.*** Such a communication plan should include effective use of technology adapted to various stakeholders.
- ***Keep issues related to equity, inclusion, and diversity front and center in conversations about academic advising.*** Buffalo State is to be commended for its work in this area. Clearly the campus recognizes the importance of ensuring the equity of the student experience and is working hard to both understand the dimensions of the issues involved and develop the competencies, programs, and services to respond. The goal is for all students to have successful academic advising experiences. Knowing who our students are and how best to effectively communicate with and support them is a critical element of equity and inclusion.

Institutional Commitment to Academic Advising as Integral to the Teaching and Learning Mission of Buffalo State College. The research and scholarship on academic advising continues to affirm the importance of academic advising to a successful student learning experience. NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, supports the concept that academic advising is integral to the teaching and learning mission of an institution and has a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes (NACADA Concept Statement on Academic Advising, 2006). This statement also acknowledges that these elements, as with how academic advising is organized and delivered, may vary from institution to institution and that it is important for each institution to determine how best to articulate these

within their own context. This recommendation calls for reflecting on what academic advising is at Buffalo State College and aligning advising's mission with the teaching and learning mission of the institution.

- **Develop a shared understanding of what academic advising is at Buffalo State College.** There was general agreement with those with whom we spoke that academic advising was more than transactional and more than registering for courses. We do think, however, that the campus would benefit from a larger discussion about academic advising at Buffalo State College. What is its purpose? What are its goals? Academic advising may be delivered or approached differently in different schools and departments, but there should be agreement, at a higher level, on the outcomes for the process. Central to academic advising is the development of an educational plan that reflects academic, career, and personal goals. It is more than a degree audit and/or a curriculum map. What components should every student's plan have and what might need to be nuanced by the student's school or major?
- **Review and refine current statements of definition, mission, vision, values, and commitments.** Buffalo State College is to be commended for its continued efforts to bring consistency to academic advising for faculty, staff, and students. The opportunity now exists to refine and embrace an institution-wide mission and vision for academic advising that aligns with the College's overall mission and vision. The definition, mission, values, and commitment statements prepared by the College Senate sub-committee in 2016 should be revisited and revitalized. A mission statement is a roadmap to the experience; it reflects why academic advising exists. In this regard, each word has meaning for action. The NACADA Concept Statement and NACADA Core Values might be useful documents to review as this work is undertaken. Links to these documents are below.

NACADA Concept Statement:

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/Concept.aspx>

NACADA Core Values:

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/CoreValues.aspx>

- **Develop a set of student learning outcomes for academic advising that reflect what students are to know, do, and value as a result of participating in academic advising.** Inherent in the SMART outcomes are learning opportunities and experiences that academic advising can and should facilitate. These broad outcomes need to be unpacked. What do students need to know, do, and value to successfully navigate academic college processes? What opportunities are we providing for students to learn how to do what we expect through academic advising?
- **Develop a comprehensive assessment plan for academic advising for the campus.** The plan should include where and when students are to learn what we want them to learn as well as the learning experiences/opportunities we are providing. A good starting point might be to take each of the SMART outcomes of the College Wide Academic Advising Assessment and identify the opportunities and experiences being provided through academic advising to help students learn what we expect them to learn, i.e., know, do, value. Central to all of this is the philosophical position that academic advising is a core academic function integral to a successful student learning experience. The NACADA Clearinghouse

(<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse.aspx>) has a number of resources for the development of assessment plans for academic advising. The institution may also have a preferred template to use for this purpose.

- **Develop a recognition and reward system for academic advisors consistent with their primary role at the institution.** Recognition and reward systems must be meaningful; those for professional staff advisors will be different than those for faculty advisors.

Student Purpose and Pathways. Discussions with Deans, Associate Deans, and Department chairs revealed that much work has been done to develop program maps for students to assist them in navigating individual curricula. An area of particular interest to us was the student pathway through the institution from entry and onboarding through graduation. It was difficult for us to understand what happens after a student is accepted for admission. We understand that a “Good to Go” list is generated and that the list gets sorted and names get distributed to the appropriate professional advisors (whether stationed in the Academic Commons or in specific departments). The professional academic advisors then contact students to get them registered during the summer prior to orientation. Concurrently, after acceptance, new students in EOP are contacted by counselors and onboarded, students in the SAYY program are contacted by counselors and the new completion coaches are connecting with students not in the other grant-funded programs. Having a team of individuals who help students navigate the institution and look out for them has been noted as an approach that has merit in supporting student success). The tag-team approach, however, needs to be coordinated to leverage the skills and expertise of each member of the team and ensure the experience is value-added for the student). Students expressed confusion to us over having “multiple advisors” and as consultants, we had difficulty understanding the progression of the student experience through the institution. The same level of confusion existed for us with regard to policies and procedures. This was evident with regard to PINs, holds, and waivers. Faculty and professional advisors expressed frustration with the PIN system and the process of approving course waivers and changes. Many examples were offered about students being bounced from one area to another to resolve registration issues related to course approval. This was particularly problematic during the summer months when faculty and staff not on 12-month appointments were not available. Thus, this recommendation suggests a process through which the student experience is better understood.

- **Map the student experience from the point of admission through graduation and beyond. This includes a process review for policies and procedures to understand the intersection between and among practices and to address unintended barriers to student progression and success.** How does a student progress through Buffalo State College? What are the transitions like from acceptance to matriculation? When do students get assigned academic advisors? When and where do they learn about how to use technology to self-register? How are students introduced to their academic advisors? What information is shared with students to help them understand the pathway to a degree and Buffalo State’s expectations of them as students?
- **Redesign Orientation and include Academic Affairs in the planning.** Currently, orientation is a social contact and networking event during which the focus is on helping students become comfortable with the College. Although academic areas are provided some time to connect with the students entering their respective programs at Orientation, it was clear that academic administrators and faculty members want

more involvement. Orientation is an opportunity for students to become academically socialized and to become acquainted with other students who have similar academic interests. For Undeclared students, Orientation can serve as the first step toward major identification and career exploration.

- **Reconsider the use of the PIN in mandatory advising.** The PIN has been a topic of some discussion with regard to its usefulness for some groups of students, i.e., is it more of a barrier to registration than an encouragement to seek a conversation with an academic advisor. Is there a point at which a PIN no longer useful as a tool to encourage contact with an advisor?
- **Consider developing specific learning communities for students from Metro NYC to form a sense of community.** The comments from students in the first-year seminar class (Appendix B) speak to their interest in having someone “know them”. The discussion within the class revealed that many feel alone and, on their own.
- **Develop a strategy to communicate expectations and responsibilities with regard to academic advising for students.** Academic advising is a shared responsibility. How do students come to know what they can expect from academic advising and what is expected from them as partners in the process? Some institutions have moved toward the development of an academic advising syllabus. The syllabus articulates what students can expect from advising and what their roles are within the process. A syllabus would also explain the components of an educational plan. The NACADA Clearinghouse has examples of syllabi used at other institutions. A video from UNLV (University of Nevada Las Vegas) offers a glimpse as well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KATf13VOr38>

Advisor Roles, Responsibilities, and Development. In a decentralized delivery model, the clarification of roles and responsibilities is important. Also important is having a professional development plan in place for advisors of all types.

- **Clarify and support the roles of all academic advisors/support professionals (i.e., completion coaches, EOP Counselors, etc.) as well as the responsibilities of the central academic advising office.**
 - **Clarify the responsibilities of the central academic advising office particularly with regard to its role to support academic advising across the institution.** What is the role of the Academic Advising Center in providing professional development and training for all academic advisors on the campus? Our observation is that the center is moving in that direction and, as such, can and should serve as a valuable resource and support for all academic advisors.
 - **Clarify roles and responsibilities of advisors.** This recommendation has two dimensions. The first relates to clarifying and distinguishing the roles of advisors and counselors in special programs for students, e.g., SAYY, COMPASS, EOP, from those of academic advisors. The second is about clarifying the roles of the professional academic advisors and faculty advisors, specifically, where they are similar and where they are different. This role clarification becomes all the more important when the professional advisor is housed within the Academic Advising Center in the Academic Commons.

- **Create a professional development plan for all academic advisors that includes topics related to key elements of academic advising, those being informational, conceptual, and relational.** There did not appear to be a professional development plan in place for academic advising. In much the same way that student learning outcomes guide the content of an academic advising program, these outcomes also inform professional development for academic advisors. What do advisors need to know, do, and value in order to help students learn what we expect them to learn from academic advising? Technology is also an important focus for professional development.

Use of Technology. The effective and efficient use of technology is essential to academic advising. Access to appropriate technology tools enhances the experience for students and academic advisors. Access to appropriate and ongoing training makes both possible, provided there is a commitment to use the technology. The student information system is Banner. DegreeWorks, the degree audit system draws from Banner and is used by students and advisors alike. It was noted that the advisor field within DegreeWorks is not maintained well which means that, at times, students may not be able to “see” who their advisor is and will then be directed to the Academic Commons. Starfish, the early alert system, is not well-utilized by faculty members to flag students who might be in trouble. First time students are registered by the academic advisor and then expected to register themselves the next term. A training plan for all self-service technology for all users should be developed and implemented. In particular, new students should be taught early on how to use the advising technology.

- **Support the use of technology through the development of training programs and materials.**

Summary and Next Steps

In many ways, the recommendations in this report echo those of the College Senate report and the activities of the more recent Title III grant. Both speak to the inconsistency in the student experience and the need for a more intentionally designed approach. The onboarding of students is noted as problematic as is academic advising. Issues related to role confusion and the absence of a plan for professional development are also highlighted in previous documents and this one. It is perhaps time to bring these pieces and proposals for solution together and utilize the resources of the Title III grant to do so. In the absence of this consolidation, solutions may be developed that fail to address the salient symptoms, the most important of which is understanding the dimensions of the problem.

First and foremost, the campus needs to better understand the student experience and be clear about what academic advising is at Buffalo State College. The Academic Advising Council, under the leadership of the Provost’s office, should initiate the development of a process map of the student experience and design an ideal one to be used to inform change. The onboarding of students from the point of acceptance through Orientation is problematic and, with the addition of completion coaches, seemingly becoming more complex rather than clear. A process map, constructed from the student’s point of view as they enter and move through Buffalo State, will help the campus make informed decisions about actions.

Simultaneously, facilitated workshops should be scheduled to collectively and collaboratively review and refine the campus-wide mission and outcomes for academic advising to be used to guide practice in schools and departments. With these two pieces as guides, work can then continue to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both professional and faculty academic advisors. With regard to the process map, there exists expertise on the campus to direct this work within the faculty (e.g., Engineering) and the administration, e.g., the Director of Leadership and Organizational Development. The facilitated workshops—preferably using a retreat format—would require guidance from NACADA.

Finally, with regard to structure, that is, the organization and delivery system. It perhaps goes without saying that the organization and delivery system for academic advising should be responsive to the needs of the students it is intended to serve. It should also be appropriately staffed and resourced. That said, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of professional and faculty advisors is important in this split system as is clarifying the role of the centralized advising center. In a split model, academic advising becomes a three-way partnership between professional advisors, faculty advisors, and students. The academic advising partnership at Buffalo State needs to be reset and reframed. Critical questions include: What is the best and highest use of faculty members in academic advising? What is the best and highest use of professional staff advisors? What do students need and want from their academic advisors? The student responses in the appendix offer some insight into these questions and will hopefully add evidence and value to this important conversation.

Other Considerations

Staffing. We did not directly address how the Academic Advising Center should be staffed nor whether more advisors should be embedded within departments. These discussions need to occur once a shared understanding of academic advising and the mapping of the student experience is complete or close to completion. We heard from some departments that having an embedded professional advisor would certainly be welcomed and support a shift in faculty advising toward mentoring. We heard about the challenges currently faced within the Academic Advising Center. Transitions of professional advisors to other areas have left the Center short-staffed; this was particularly problematic during the final weeks of summer and into the beginning of the semester. As consultants we do agree that given the current staffing levels of the Advising Center, the model of delivery in place of having professional advisors handle the registration and advising of students until they reach 24 credits is not sustainable. Additional staff would certainly be required.

Career Development Center. We were curious about the role of the Career Development Center with regard to its relationship with academic advising. We met with the Center as an add-on to the schedule of the visit. Career exploration and development is important to all students and, in particular to students who are undeclared as to their majors. We think that a representative from Career Development should be on the Academic Advising Council. There should be a very close relationship between the Academic Advising Center and the Career Development Center; the latter plays an important role in the development of a student's educational plan.

Opportunities for Cross-Divisional Conversations and Collaboration. We were struck by the extent to which units implied that they were not engaged in cross-divisional conversations to learn more about what each other does and how to collaborate with each other

on initiatives. Once or twice during an academic year, having a collective conversation opportunity would be helpful with regard to how connected individuals feel to the initiatives of Buffalo State College.

Appendices

Appendix A

Schedule of Visit

Appendix B

First Year Students: What academic advisors should know about them and help them learn

Appendix C

Professional Academic Advisors: What students should learn from participating in academic advising

Appendix D

Other Comments from Students

Appendix E

Nine Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising

Appendix F

Articles of Interest

Appendix A

**Title III NACADA Consultant Visit Schedule
SUNY Buffalo State College**

Advising Program Assessment: Monday, September 9th	
8:30 am	Jon Meets Blane and Sue Hotel Henry Lobby
9 am – 10 am	Meeting with the Advising Leadership Team Cleveland Hall 519
10:10 am – 10:40 am	Meeting with First-Year Students in a First-Year Experience Class Bacon 209
11 am – 12 pm	Professional Advisors Chase Hall 109
12 pm – 1 pm	Meeting with Deans and Associate Deans Chase Hall 109
1 pm – 2 pm	Lunch
2 pm – 3 pm	Student Affairs Chase Hall 109
3 pm – 4 pm	Meeting with School of Natural and Social Sciences Department Chairs Classroom A400
4 pm – 5 pm	Meeting with Sophomore, Junior, and Senior Students Chase Hall 109
Advising Program Assessment: Tuesday, September 10th	
9 am – 10 am	Enrollment Management Chase Hall 109
10 am – 11 am	Meeting with School of Professions Department Chairs Caudell Hall 110
11 am – 11:50 am	Meeting with School of Arts and Humanities Department Chairs Metcalf Room - ROCK 216
11:50 am – 1:30 pm	Campus-wide Keynote Speech by Mr. Blane Harding Burchfield Penny Auditorium
1:30 pm – 2:00 pm	Lunch
2 pm – 3 pm	Meeting with School of Education Department Chairs Bacon 305
3 pm – 4 pm	Specialty Advising Populations: Say Yes, EOP, Completion Coaches Chase Hall 109
4 pm – 5 pm	Meeting with Buffalo State Faculty and Staff Union President Chase Hall 109

Professional Development Workshops: Wednesday, September 11th	
9 am – 11 am	Staff and Faculty Advisor Professional Development Workshops Caudell Hall 127
11 am – 12 pm	Lunch
12:15 pm – 2:15 pm	Staff and Faculty Advisor Professional Development Workshops Bacon Hall 209
2:30 pm – 4:30 pm	Staff and Faculty Advisor Professional Development Workshops Bacon Hall 215

Additional Meetings:

**Career Development Center
Dean, School of the Professions
Discussions with Students in the Student Union**

Appendix B

Students in First Year Seminar Class

We asked the students in a first-year seminar class questions for which we asked for written responses. We then engaged in a conversation.

Questions:

1. What is your intended major?
2. What do you want your advisor to know about you?
3. What can your advisor do to help you succeed?
4. Do you know your advisor? Met with him/her?
5. What one thing would you change about Buffalo State College or your experience thus far?

1. What is your intended major?

Major or Intended Major	#
Biology	1
Business Administration	6 (one economics/finance)
Computer Information Systems	1
Criminal Justice	6
Health & Wellness	1
Mechanical Engineering	1
Psychology	1
Speech Pathology	1
Television & Film Arts	1
Undeclared/Undecided	6

2. What 2-3 things do you want your advisor to know about you?

Very time managed
 Serious about my future
 A little bit slow
 Room for Improvement
 Lack of Motivation
 Scared of Math
 Live off campus
 Always have a side hustle
 Don't like math, but love economics
 I procrastinate a lot
 Focus more when I like what we're doing
 Sleep a lot
 I am undecided
 I am very bad at math
 I learn traditionally
 Trying to get scholarships
 Don't like science
 My future
 Myself

I am a quiet person
 I get my work done
 I don't like group work
 Know the things I am interested in
 Know what I don't like
 Know what I'm scared of
 I don't mind lectures or small classes
 I prefer early classes over late ones
 I don't like biology
 Who I am as a student (strengths, weaknesses)
 Why I chose the major that I'm in
 My perspective on everything (what's on my mind)
 Critical thinker
 Don't like math
 I'm hard on myself (determined)
 Not good at math
 I like taking art classes
 I only want to take classes that interest me
 I hate math
 From Other place
 Happy person
 My strongest subjects
 Type of learner
 My preferred wake up time
 My likes and dislikes
 I like 1 on 1 conversations with professors
 I'll drop by occasionally
 I hate math
 I play volleyball so I am super busy
 I want to end up at physical therapy school
 I try my hardest in school but sometimes it's not enough
 My name and my face
 I don't like waking up early
 I not a fan of college writing
 I like math
 I'm caring
 I want to leave this school in 4 years
 I want to pass all my classes with As
 I want to do criminal justice
 I'm a critical thinker
 I love crime shows
 I get annoyed easily
 I try to give up sometimes
 I don't like math
 I'm very shy
 I don't like to ask for help
 I don't like people but love kids

3. What can your advisor do to help you succeed?

Let me know when I'm slipping up
 Suggest a class that can help me decide a major

Set me on a path to graduate in 4 years
 Just check on me from time to time to make sure I'm on track
 Help guide me into the right direction; I would like to meet with them
 Help me make less mistakes-if they know how to fix it
 Help you whenever you ask for it
 Help guide me to find what I want to do and fill all of the academic requirements for that field
 To put me in the best classes to suit my major so I can get the best education
 Make me comfortable—meaning adjusting to my classes
 Help navigate the correct academic path that would best fit me as a student and my major
 Communicate with me about classes I need or should be taking
 Tell me about new, interesting, different classes
 Help me with choosing classes
 To set me up with the classes I need and/or are interested in
 Make sure I am taking the classes I need
 Give me a flexible schedule
 Guide me in the right direction to make me academically successful
 Help me if I need a tutor
 Keep me update on how I'm doing in classes
 Point me to the people who can help me to make it in the world after college
 Help me change my major
 Keep me on track and motivated; try to make it "easy" for me
 My talking skills

4. Do you know your advisor? Met with him/her?

	Yes	No	Didn't Answer Question
Met/Talked with Your Academic Advisor	5	13	7

5. What one thing would you change about Buffalo State College or your experience thus far?

Try and talk to the people I don't usually talk to
 To have tried to make a schedule before being given one. To have reached out to my advisor. To have joined a summer "bridge" program.
 Meeting more people sooner before they already have their friend groups
 At the moment I wouldn't change anything; I haven't been here long enough to answer this question
 Getting "out there" more to really feel comfortable, I would want to succeed and have a successful future
 Work on networking events more (so more ppl are aware); create more events for incoming freshmen (many don't attend the freshman BBQ); ensure that students are aware of learning resources centers
 I hope the restaurant can change
 I wouldn't change anything
 Be more involved in the school to make friends; have it be easier to make friends
 Creating an outlet for students to get to know one another although they do offer clubs, it's not advertised very well; also, they should require at least one meeting with your academic advisor so you know who they are

Some things that should change are: advisor involvement; fun history teacher; better financial aid; students that would want to engage with other students

I would choose a school closer to home

I would speak to my academic advisor; introduce myself to my professors so they know me personally

More opportunities on campus to explore my interests in art and film (I commute so there may be these opportunities and I just don't know about them)

I will go to the teacher's office to get help, but meeting time can be longer

I would have more activities for students-the only activities are parties and food things. I feel like events like trips to the park, museum, movies, or maybe even general trips downtown to help new students connect

I don't have any recommendations for change

Financial aid needs to be raised

I would change the way I go about my education. If I need help I will go to a tutoring center or talk to my professor. I feel like professors should be offering their office hours more often to make the student feel more comfortable.

I would change my mattress and ask that my dorm mates be more quiet at night

I would change how the campus is set upfor example, more cameras on the campus or at least in the dorm halls

The way I started because when I first started I wasn't doing homework early and I would wait until the last minute

What I would change is for there to be more academic clubs for students to get academic help and tutoring

The weather; more fun activities; better food; dorms expansion

I would fix Newmann's washing machines & dryers and the bathrooms

Appendix C

Professional Academic Advisors: What Students Should Learn from Participating in Academic Advising

This discussion resulted in the following comments regarding student learning outcomes for academic advising. These comments might be helpful to and inform the conversations about mission and outcomes.

Know	Do	Value
How to be successful in college What courses are needed to graduate How to manage time & study skills	Know how to navigate email Be receptive Take ownership/accountability	Time
Their programs (or at least some) Important dates & Banner, etc. They are not my only advisee	Come prepared with questions/concerns Advocate for self with faculty Take some responsibility	My time My knowledge Education in and of itself – themselves as students
Gen Ed program/requirements How to make an academic plan	How to drop/add courses How to access Banner/FA information Schedule meeting with advisor/faculty	Office hours Faculty/department advisors Academic planning
Roadmap to graduation Where to go for help Schedules – how to/1 of many advisees	Register for recommended courses Make informed decisions How to address instructors	Advice Time Education
Understand specific degree requirements via DegreeWorks audit sheet Understand the registration system and how to independently choose & register for the appropriate classes Gain a greater understanding of their strengths and how this applies and will apply to their future	Access & understand DegreeWorks Use Banner registration system Communicate appropriately	Their own strengths The positive effective of an advising relationship Hard work pays off in academic & professional success Problem-solving Decision-making

**Appendix
D****Other Student Comments**

On Wednesday, during the faculty and staff workshops, one of the consultants went to the Student Union to connect with students. During this day, the Union was busy. A number of student groups were 'tabling' and there was also a DJ who kept music playing, creating a festive environment. The students ranged in majors and in class level. A number were members of the soccer team.

Majors represented: Biology, Journalism, Speech & Language, Social Work, Business, History, Sociology, Fashion Design, Psychology, and Media Production. Not surprisingly, the students who were members of the soccer team, three of whom were first-year students and one sophomore felt their experiences to date had been good. A suggestion was made by one that the availability of learning communities should be made more visible and intentional. This student indicated she received a "random email" and registered for one. She found it to be "a great way to meet folks outside of the soccer team." One student indicated that, in general, students were "on their own until there's a problem." This sentiment was echoed in two other groups of students, with one transfer students indicating, "don't expect assistance, you are on your own."

Most in this small sample seemed to agree that your advising experience depends on who you get. A random conversation with two students while getting coffee found both to have had good experiences; one was in Fashion Design and the other in Special Education. The latter indicated that the person in the department who helped her during the summer 'saved her' as she was trying to get registered. Another student indicated that based on the information provided by her advisor, she ended up taking summer classes that she didn't need to take to keep her scholarship. One student who was tabling for a student organization noted her observation that students get confused when there are multiple advisors involved.

In all, the conversations revealed what Buffalo State College already suspects that is, that academic advising is inconsistent across the campus.

**Appendix
E****NINE CONDITIONS OF EXCELLENCE****Institutional Commitment**

Institutions recognize that academic advising is a shared responsibility integral to the students' educational experience and the institution's teaching and learning mission. This commitment begins with an institutional academic advising mission statement that is informed by the values and beliefs of the institution. Both widely understood and articulated in institutional documents, this statement informs practice as well as the administration, organization, delivery, and assessment of academic advising.

Learning

Institutions assure that academic advisors are knowledgeable about the institution's expected learning outcomes, curriculum, pedagogy, and the student learning process. Excellent advising programs also establish curriculum, pedagogy, and student learning and developmental outcomes for academic advising throughout a student's educational experience. Academic advising outcomes are aligned with the institution's curriculum, academic advising mission, and goals. These outcomes are systematically assessed and refinements are made based upon documented assessment results.

Advisor Selection and Development

Institutions employ effective selection practices, professional development, and appropriate recognition and rewards for all advisors and advising administrators. Institutions and/or units establish clear expectations and requirements for advisors as well as systems for formative and summative feedback to advisors. Establishing position/role requirements for primary role advisors and processes for selecting, hiring, salary scales, and retaining quality academic advisors provide consistency for students and supports program sustainability. Ongoing professional development programs ensure that those in the academic advising community are current in advising skills and knowledge and that advising practice reflects the core values and competencies for excellent academic advising.

Improvement and the Scholarship of Advising

Institutions committed to systematic assessment and evaluation recognize the complexity of the educational process and its theoretical underpinnings. They operate under the principles of ongoing, evidence-based plans for assessment of both advisors and advising programs. Members of the academic advising community are both critical consumers of, and contributors to, the scholarly literature, including the effects that advising can have on students and the role of advising in higher education.

Collaboration and Communication

Effective academic advising requires coordination and collaborative partnerships among all units across campus. These partnerships foster ongoing communication and promote resource sharing. A collaboratively developed strategic communication plan, inclusive of all institutional stakeholders, involves frequent and intentional exchanges of information and ideas, is routinely reviewed and updated, and advances a shared aspirational vision for academic advising across all units.

Organization

Excellent advising programs are intentionally organized across the institution to meet the institutional academic mission, goals, and intended outcomes. The organization of academic advising must have structured leadership, appropriate resources, and a systematic approach to continuous assessment and improvement. The organizational structure supports the roles of all academic advisors, regardless of title.

Student Purpose and Pathways

Effective academic advising directs students to explore and define their own purpose, goals, and curricular pathways to achieve learning and developmental outcomes. Curricular plans must be coherent, enrich students' programs of study, and support their educational goals, career and life aspirations. Partners and key stakeholders collaboratively and closely examine all student transitions and develop policies and practices to overcome barriers and optimize learning and success.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

Excellent academic advising demonstrates a commitment to the values and culture of inclusivity and social justice. It encourages individual and institutional conversations that promote understanding, respect, and honor diverse perspectives, ideas, and identities. Academic advising policies and practices reflect a commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Technology Enabled Advising

Excellent academic advising incorporates appropriate technology to complement, support, and enhance advising practice. This requires institutions to include academic advisors in the selection, delivery, and assessment of advising technologies. Institutions must provide on-going training in the use and potential applicability of dynamic tools as a means to strengthen advising practice and culture.

Appendix F

Articles

Lowenstein, M. (Fall 2005). If advising is teaching, what do advisors teach? *NACADA Journal*, 25(2) pp. 65-73.

White, E.R. (2015). The foundational role of academic advising in general education. *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. vii-x.