

**Report of the**

**Provost Task Force on Undergraduate  
Academic Advising**

**The University of Texas at San Antonio**

**September 2010**

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The task force wishes to express special thanks to Dr. Gabriel Acevedo, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, for lending his expertise in helping to design the "Spring 2010 Survey of Selected Classes" and for analyzing the results.

## **Charge**

### **for the**

#### **Provost Task Force on Undergraduate Academic Advising**

In various feedback sessions over the past year, several concerns have arisen regarding academic advisement for students at UTSA. These concerns include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- students' inability to see an advisor when most needed;
- students receiving course advice that later turns out to be wrong;
- students receiving conflicting advice from two or more different advisors; and
- lack of coordination between centrally-supervised advising services and college-based advising centers.

Although steps have been taken to address some of these concerns, the Provost Task Force on Undergraduate Academic Advising is to examine each of them, plus any others that might be known to task force members, and ascertain whether each represents a systemic problem, or is anecdotal in nature.

For each of the issues that are determined to be systemic problems, the task force is asked to provide suggestions for remedies, along with the estimated cost for implementing those remedies (if applicable). For those concerns that appear to be more anecdotal in nature, the task force should suggest ways that we can better communicate to students so that appropriate expectations for advising services are developed. The task force may use exemplary solutions from other universities and community colleges in proposing solutions, but should also think creatively within the UTSA context about ways to improve advising.

The ultimate goal for the university is that all students have adequate access to course advisement at regular intervals during their studies, and that the advice they receive is accurate and appropriate to the educational goals of each student. The Provost would appreciate a report by May 15, 2009— if it is not possible for the task force to finish its work by that time, a progress report is acceptable, with some indication of when the task force will be able to complete its work.

## Executive Summary

The Provost Task Force on Undergraduate Academic Advising began to meet in April 2009 to discuss the four items listed in the charge to the task force plus other issues that arose during our discussions. The committee looked at several existing reports that pertained to academic advising at UTSA. In an effort to gain additional input from students, the task force decided to conduct student focus groups so that students could express their opinions on the efficacy of academic advising at UTSA, a method that would allow task force members to ask follow up questions. Although focus group meetings were well marketed, attendance by students was low. The task force decided on an additional strategy to gain student input which was to send staff to the advising centers to survey and interview students as they finished their visits to the centers. This led to a bit more information from a somewhat larger portion of the student body. However, the panel decided that it might not have received input from a representative sample of UTSA students. In particular, the task force felt that we may have failed to have offered a voice to those students who would never attend a focus group meeting and who rarely visit advising centers. In order to get a more representative sample of students to voice their opinions, the task force decided to go directly to classes in order to get more student input. In Spring Semester, 2010, the task force received overwhelming support from the faculty for us to come to their classes and conduct the surveys. A significant number of undergraduate classes at all levels were surveyed in April 2010. The task force is now convinced that it indeed has obtained a representative sample of our undergraduates at all levels who have had the opportunity to give their input on undergraduate academic advising at UTSA.

The task force reviewed the charge concerning the inability of students to see an advisor when most needed. The committee received enough evidence to be convinced that this is a legitimate concern of students that needs to be addressed by the university. In fact, it was the issue that most consistently arose in all of the forums for obtaining information from students. The committee perceives that the advising centers are overwhelmed with the number of students seeking appointments with many students waiting for several weeks and up to a month for their scheduled appointments to see their advisors. The wait times for students to see advisors are often excessive despite the fact that the student to advisor ratio at UTSA is 312 to 1, near the NACADA standard of 300 to 1. Furthermore the wait times for UTSA undergraduates to see advisors compares unfavorably with the wait times at other institutions across the State including several UT System institutions that have reported higher student to advisor ratios than UTSA. The task force makes the following recommendations to mitigate the problem of the inability of students to see an advisor when most needed:

1. Install the appointment scheduling software AdvisorTrac.
2. Provide a modest increase to the number of academic advisors.
3. Develop a comprehensive advising website where students can receive answers to frequently asked questions and more.
4. More effectively utilize CAPP, the electronic degree audit system.
5. Better market the non-peak advising periods encouraging students to use those periods for their advising appointments.

6. Have centers go to all walk-in advising during the 1<sup>st</sup> week of registration and the 1<sup>st</sup> week of the semester.

The installation of the AdvisorTrac software is underway and is being piloted by the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center. It will be rolled out to the other advising centers as soon as the Office of Information Technology and Undergraduate Studies Support and Technology Services are certain that the UTSA application is functioning properly. The online website and the more effective use of CAPP will provide self advising tools for students seeking answers to routine questions and hopefully will serve to reduce the traffic in the advising centers. The better marketing of the non-peak advising periods should help to more evenly spread out the visits to the advising centers smoothing the peaks and valleys of advising traffic.

In reviewing the charge to the committee that students sometimes receive course advice that later turns out to be wrong, the task force did find some evidence that incorrect advice is given to students by academic advisors from time to time. But the task force believes that this problem occurs sporadically and does not appear to be systemic. Each advising center has a system in place to assess the performance of its advisors, and each center takes steps to remediate advisors found to be deficient in their performance such as making excessive advising errors. To reduce the instances of students receiving incorrect advice, the task force makes a few recommendations including the following:

1. In addition to the present training in place for new advisors, initiate uniform and periodic training workshops for all advisors.
2. Develop check lists for advisors appropriate to the level and major of the advisees to ensure that all the important issues are covered in all advising sessions. (Sometimes advisors and students forget to raise important issues during a session which sometimes leads to claims of misadvisement.)

Also in reviewing the charge that students often receive inconsistent or conflicting advice from two or more different advisors, the task force found evidence that this has indeed occurred on occasions. However, as noted above, the task force believes that the instances of advisors giving conflicting advice occurs infrequently and does not appear to be a systemic problem. In order to reduce the problem, the task force recommends the following:

1. Each advising center, to the extent possible, should devise a system whereby each individual student sees the same advisor when visiting the center.
2. Continually stress and reiterate in training to advisors that each advisor clearly point out that there are other options when suggesting to a student the advisor's preferred option to complete a degree requirement. This will help the student realize that a second advisor who presents an opinion that is a different option for completing the degree requirement is not necessarily conflicting advice.

The task force reviewed the charge concerning a lack of coordination between the centrally supervised advising center, the Colleges' Freshman Advising Center (CFAC), and the college-based centers. The task force recognizes that this was indeed the case in the past, but all parties seem to have worked together to almost eliminate this issue. College deans, associate deans, and advising center directors have worked closely with the Director of the CFAC to coordinate their processes, working to implement college and departmental admission criteria, where applicable, and smoothing the transfer of sophomores to the advising centers of the colleges. The task force recommends that this collaboration and communication between the CFAC and the colleges continue, and that the colleges enhance the involvement of the CFAC advisors and its director in various college forums and meetings where critical information related to academic advising is discussed. Although some of the college associate deans did identify some issues that still need to be resolved in this regard, it appears that they could easily be addressed by improved communication between the colleges and the CFAC.

There were also concerns expressed regarding expectations and advice being given by other areas such as Athletics, the Honors College, and Veteran Affairs. There has been enhanced collaboration resulting in designated liaisons, from each center, assigned to these areas.

Another critical issue that the task force considered was the issue of customer service by the advising centers' personnel. Many students expressed frustration with the unhelpful attitudes of the advising center staff including the academic advisors, and the lack of friendly atmospheres in some of the centers. The committee feels that customer friendly employees set the tone for positive and successful visits to advising centers by students. The task force recommends that the university institute a regularly offered series of customer service training programs for advising centers' personnel using professional experts in this area.

The committee feels that academic advising at UTSA is effective, has improved significantly over the years, and has the potential to become a commendable system. The task force believes that more consistent processes across the system from advising center to advising center utilizing best practices and more efficient use of resources employing technology will facilitate improved undergraduate advising at the university. We believe that the recommendations in the report can serve to move the academic advising system at UTSA in the direction of becoming an exemplary model for advising.

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## **Provost Task Force on Undergraduate Academic Advising Final Report**

### **I. Introduction**

The Provost Task Force on Undergraduate Academic Advising undertook activities to address the concerns outlined in the charge to the task force. The concerns about undergraduate academic advising outlined in the charge were the following:

- students' inability to see an advisor when most needed;
- students receiving course advice that later turns out to be wrong;
- students receiving conflicting advice from two or more different advisors;  
and
- lack of coordination between centrally-supervised advising services and college-based advising centers.

The task force used several means to gather information. The members looked at existing reports and documents regarding academic advising at UTSA. In Spring Semester 2009, it conducted student focus groups in an attempt to get student input on academic advising at UTSA. In Fall Semester 2009, the task force conducted student interviews and surveys outside of advising centers after students completed advising sessions. Also, a more methodical examination of our students' views on academic advising at UTSA was carried out in Spring Semester 2010 by surveying arbitrarily chosen classes.

### **II. Structure of Academic Advising at UTSA**

Undergraduate Academic Advising at UTSA is conducted by professional advisors housed in various advising centers across the university. Freshmen with declared majors are advised by the Colleges' Freshmen Advising Center (CFAC) whereas freshmen who have not declared a major are advised by the Tomás Rivera Center. Each college with the exception of the two colleges housed completely at the Downtown Campus, the College of Architecture (COA) and the College of Public Policy (COPP), has an advising center which advises its majors that are sophomores or above. The Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center (DTUAC) has advisors representing each college except the Honors College, and houses all of the COA and COPP advisors. All undergraduates, including freshmen, who have not declared a major are advised by the Tomás Rivera Center (TRC), which has locations at both the Main and Downtown campuses.

Each college advising center except the Honors College Advising Center is supervised by a Director of Advising who reports to one of the associate deans of the college. The supervisor of the advising center in the Honors College is an Academic Advisor III who reports to the associate dean of the Honors College. The Director of Advising of the



CFAC reports to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Director of Advising of the DTUAC reports to the Vice Provost for the Downtown Campus, and the Director of Advising of the TRC reports to the Executive Director of the TRC. The Executive Director of the TRC reports to the Associate Dean for Retention and Graduation. Honors College students are advised by the advising center of the college of their major and by the Honors College Advising Center. Students interested in pursuing careers in the health professions may seek advisement and support from the University Health Professions Office (UHPO).

The Executive Director of Advising is responsible for coordinating all academic advising at the university providing leadership for a comprehensive advising program at UTSA, managing the budget and personnel allocations to the advising centers, developing and coordinating university wide training programs and professional development for advisors, and overseeing the implementation of advising policies, procedures and best practices. She is the supervisor of the Office of Undergraduate Studies Support and Technology Services that provides technical and other support for academic advisors at UTSA.

The Executive Director of Advising, the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Associate Dean for Retention and Graduation, and the Director of the UHPO all report to the Office of Undergraduate Studies.

The COEHD Advising Center has academic advisors whose responsibility is to advise each student seeking a major in the COEHD and has teacher certification specialists that assist students in meeting the requirements to become certified teachers, including COLFA and COS majors who are seeking to become certified to teach in their major or related fields at the secondary level.

Since the primary function of the University Health Professions Office is to provide guidance to students interested in pursuing careers in the health professions helping those students fulfill the requirements for gaining admissions to health professions schools and not concentrating on the requirements to obtain UTSA degrees, this report will discuss the UHPO peripherally, but not focus on that office.

### **III. Existing Reports**

The task force reviewed the following existing documents to better understand academic advising at UTSA:

- Report on Academic Advising and the Academic Advising Centers at The University of Texas at San Antonio for the NACADA Consultant Bureau Site Visit: March 7-9, 2005.

- Report of the Subgroup on Student Academic Support, Taskforce on Improving Student Success and Graduation Rates, June 2006.
- Graduation Initiative’s Research on Barriers to Graduation, May 2008.
- Freshman Advising Proposal: A Plan to Strengthen the Freshmen-Sophomore Connection, May 2008.

Some of the findings and recommendations found in the above documents will be referenced in this report.

#### IV. Observations

The following are some strengths and weaknesses of the UTSA undergraduate academic advising system that the task force found to be fairly evident.

##### Strengths of the UTSA Advising System

Student to Advisor Ratio: According to a 2007 report by the UT System, the student to full-time equivalent (FTE) advisor ratio at UTSA is 312:1, which is near the standard set by NACADA of 300:1 and which compares favorably to the student to advisor ratios of the other UT System institutions. More recent data from Fall Semester 2009 shows that the overall student to advisor ratio at UTSA was 318:1 and varied by advising center from 286:1 to 372:1. (See Table 5)

**Table 1: Undergraduate Student to Advisor Ratio – Fall 2007\***

Institution	# FTE Advisors	Student/FTE Advisor
UT Arlington	41.0	459
UT Austin	138.4	271
UT Brownsville	27.5	593
UT Dallas	38.0	258
UT El Paso	31.5	541
UT Pan American	28.0	542
UT Permian Basin	3.7	830
UTSA	80.2	312
UT Tyler	11.4	471
UT System Average	44.4	370

\* Source: UT System Academic Institutions, THECB:  
<http://www.utsystem.edu/osm/accountability/2007/SectionI.pdf>

The Career Ladder: The implementation of the career ladder in Fall Semester 2007 appears to have improved the morale of the advisors, decreased the turnover of academic advisors, and, thereby, is serving to increase the number of experienced advisors. Prior to the implementation of the career ladder, in order to be promoted, an academic advisor was required to take on additional responsibilities such as supervisory or degree audit assignments decreasing the time available to devote to academic advising. The career ladder offers opportunities for an advisor to be promoted while still maintaining his or her status as a full time academic advisor. Experienced advisors are less likely to make advising errors.

Highly Qualified Advisors: The advisors are very educated, all with at least a bachelor's degree and at least two years of experience, with most having master's degrees, and some with doctoral degrees or working toward obtaining doctoral degrees.

### **Weaknesses of the UTSA Advising System**

Excessive Wait Times for Students to Advising Appointments: In spite of the relatively low student to advisor ratio, it is evident that students needing an appointment to see an academic advisor often must wait several weeks and, in some colleges, up to a month to see an advisor. Although there are opportunities to see advisors quickly in brief "walk in" sessions for answers to simple questions, students needing to discuss more complex matters are often frustrated with the long waiting times for their appointments. This self-evident observation seems to be borne out by the data collected during the task force's examination of the issues.

Communication and Information Exchange for Transfer Students: Since there is no mandatory advisement or orientation for transfer students, many transfer students often have little awareness of the university's academic policies, requirements, and procedures.

The Present Weak Economy: As a result of the weak economy over the past two years and funding limitations, the career ladder promotions have been temporarily placed on hold. Currently there is a freeze on advising career ladder progressions until funding issues are resolved. Although there is no evidence that this limitation is the reason for some recent advisor turnover, it has in some aspects decreased morale when the marketed and promised progressions are not occurring.

## **V. Information Gathered**

### **1. Online Advising Survey by Students**

During Spring Semester 2009, 1492 UTSA undergraduates were invited by the academic advising community to participate in an online survey. Sixty-three students participated in the survey. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

## **2. Student Focus Groups**

In Spring 2009, the task force conducted student focus groups in an attempt to get students' perceptions of academic advising at UTSA. The task force was divided into five focus group teams organized by colleges, the Colleges' Freshman Advising Center (CFAC), the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center (DTUAC), the Tomás Rivera Center (TRC), and the University Health Professions Office (UHPO). The five focus group teams were (1) the COB and Honors College team, (2) the COEHD and CFAC team, (3) the COLFA and COE team, (4) the COS and UHPO team, and (5) the DTUAC and TRC team. Each focus group team conducted one or more student focus groups involving majors from the respective colleges and students utilizing the respective advising centers. The purpose of the focus groups was to hear students' concerns about academic advising at UTSA directly from the students themselves. Although the task force members have read the comments of students found in the several documents, the hope was that by asking follow up questions during the focus group meetings, the task force would be better able to understand the issues that have arisen. The following set of common questions was developed to help the focus group meetings to be as uniform as possible:

1. Please describe your experience with being able to contact your advising center or academic advisor. When you visit your advising center, are you made to feel welcome and that the advisors and staff are there to help you?
2. How often do you go for advising (Never, once a semester, once a year)?
3. When you visit your advising center, do you feel that your concerns, questions, or issues are addressed? Is your advisor knowledgeable of degree requirements, university policies, and administrative procedures at UTSA such as registration procedures, withdrawal from the university policies, policies on course prerequisites, policies on academic probation, course repeat policies, etc.?
4. What are your preferred methods of communicating with your advisor: phone call, e-mail, WebCT, appointment, walk-in?
5. Describe any situation on campus where you received conflicting information concerning course selection or degree requirements.
6. Describe your best experience, worst experience, and overall experience with academic advising at UTSA.
7. What recommendations would you make to improve academic advising on campus?

Although we feel that the focus group meetings were fairly well marketed to entice the students to attend, for example, by offering free light food, the focus group meetings were not well attended. We suspect that one of the reasons for the poor participation by the students in the focus groups is that the focus groups were conducted near the end of the semester when students were more concerned about completing term papers and preparing for final examinations.

We wish to point out that the students attending the focus group meetings tended to have had positive experiences with the UTSA undergraduate advising system. Most focus group attendees seemed to be self-motivated students who sought out answers to their questions, and may not have represented the typical UTSA student who does not engage academic advising as much. Although some students attending the focus group meetings did have some problems and negative experiences with academic advising, we were unable to locate a significant number of such students even though we did meet with students that were reported to have expressed concerns with academic advising in other settings.

Detailed results of the focus group meetings can be found in Appendix B.

### **3. Student Interviews and Surveys**

The task force sponsored student surveys and interviews outside of the advising centers after student appointments and visits with advisors. The interviews and surveys were conducted during busy times at the beginning of Fall Semester 2009 (August 27, September 1 and 3, 2009) and non-peak times a few weeks into the semester (September 24, October 6 and 7, 2009). Students completed a survey card and were asked to respond to some open ended questions, the same questions that were asked of the focus groups during Spring Semester 2009. All students leaving the advising centers were asked to fill out the survey card, and every fifth student was asked to respond to the open ended interview questions.

The following are the questions that appeared on the survey cards:

1. I was promptly acknowledged when I entered the center.
2. The advising center hours of operations meet my needs.
3. The advisor listened and provided me with information that addressed my concerns.
4. The advisor provided me with accurate information about requirements, prerequisites, etc.
5. The advisor is approachable and easy to talk with.
6. The advisor showed concern for my personal growth, development and success at UTSA.
7. I have outlined a plan to achieve my educational goals.

8. My advisor has helped me by recommending courses appropriate for my educational goals and abilities.
9. My overall experience with the office was satisfactory.
10. What was the format of your contact with you advising center?

The permitted responses to questions number 1 to 8 were strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The responses permitted for Question Number 9 were yes or no, and for Question Number 10 walk-in, appointment, phone call, e-mail, or other.

For the non-peak period, 216 students completed the surveys and for the peak period, 415 students did so. Survey participants were also permitted to supply open ended responses, which can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2 and Table 3 below show the survey results. For questions number 1 to 8, points were assigned to each response for each question. Strongly agree was assigned 4 points, agree 3 points, disagree 2 points, and strongly disagree 1 point. The total points earned were summed and divided by the maximum possible points that could be earned, and converted into a percentage. The percentage for each question for each center is listed in Table 2 and Table 3.

**Table 2: Survey Responses - Non-Peak Times**

Center	Total # of Students	Q #1	Q #2	Q #3	Q #4	Q #5	Q #6	Q #7	Q #8	Q #9	Q #10
COB	35	97.9	92.1	98.6	94.3	97.9	92.9	90.7	95	35 Yes 2 No	22 2 A, 11W,
COE	3	100	91.7	83.3	91.7	91.7	100	100	100	3 Yes	1 A, 2 W
COEHD	23	95.8	88.7	98.7	98.7	97.3	98.7	94.4	93	23 Yes	8 A, 15 W
COLFA	41	91.5	90.2	91	89.1	89.4	84.6	90.6	83.3	38 Yes 2 No	25 A, 3A/W, 12 W, 1 NR
COS	27	91.7	82.4	90.7	88.9	91.7	86.1	89.8	86.1	25 Yes 2 No	9 A, 2 A/W, 16 W
CFAC	15	98.3	95	98.3	98.3	98.3	95	90	95	15 Yes	8 A, 7 W
DTUAC	19	88.2	81.6	90.8	90.8	89.5	90.8	86.8	85.5	19 Yes	14 A, 5 W

Honors	20	92.5	95	96.3	97.4	96.3	96.3	93.8	95	20	16 A 4 W
TRC	33	93.9	94.7	98.5	96.2	98.5	93.9	85.6	93	33	31 A 1 A/W, 1 W
Average		94.4	90.2	94.0	93.9	94.5	93.1	91.3	91.8		

**Table 3: Survey Response – Peak Times**

Center	Total # Students	Q #1	Q #2	Q #3	Q #4	Q #5	Q #6	Q #7	Q #8	Q #9	Q #10
COB	51	96.1	90.2	96.1	96.1	95.1	94.6	92.2	93.9	49 Yes 2 No	15 A 1 W/A 35W
COE	23	91.3	88	94.3	94.3	95.5	94.3	84.8	90.9	23 Yes	23 W
COEHD	21	94	84.5	90.5	88.1	92.9	86.9	91.7	84.5	23 Yes	2 A, 19 W
COLFA	93	85.8	85.5	89.4	87.2	90.8	87.5	86.7	85.6	86 Yes 2 No 1 Yes/No 1 NR	25 A, 8A/W, 59 W, 1 NR
COS	55	87.3	84.3	92.5	90.1	92.3	88.9	88.9	86.5	52 Yes 3 NR	13 A, 39 W 3 NR
CFAC	74	94.3	94.6	96.2	92.9	91.6	89.9	87.2	90.5	74 Yes	74 W
DTUAC	36	92.4	81.3	94.9	92.6	95.7	90.7	88.6	85.0	35 Yes 1 No	3 A 1A/W 32 W
Honors	27	87.1	78.3	83.8	81.6	86	80.5	88.1	81.3	27 Yes	17 A 4A/W 6 W
TRC	35	95	89.3	96.4	92.9	97.8	92.9	88.6	91.4	35 Yes	2 A 33 W
Average		91.5	86.2	92.7	90.6	93.1	89.6	88.5	87.7		

The above tables show that the responders had a very positive opinion of advising by their respective advising centers.

The responses to the interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Most of the responses were positive with a smattering of comments expressing frustration with their experiences with the respective advising centers.

#### 4. Spring Semester 2010 Survey of Selected Classes

In an attempt to gather information on a population of students that we were not able to capture through the online survey, at the focus group meetings, or visiting advising centers, we decided to conduct a more methodical survey of students in arbitrarily chosen classes at the university. In April, 2009 a survey of 138 classes in which the survey instrument was administered to over 3800 UTSA undergraduates. This method allowed us to access a more representative sample of the total student body.

The following are the questions to which the students were asked to respond:

1. The advising center hours met my needs
2. My advisor listened and provided me information that addressed my concerns.
3. My advisor provided me with accurate information about requirements, prerequisites, etc.
4. My advisor is easily approachable and easy to talk with.
5. My advisor showed concern for my personal growth, development and success at UTSA.
6. I have outlined a plan to achieve my educational goals.
7. My advisor has helped me by recommending courses appropriate for my educational goals and abilities.
8. My overall experience with advising is satisfactory
9. How satisfied are you with academic advising provided at UTSA?

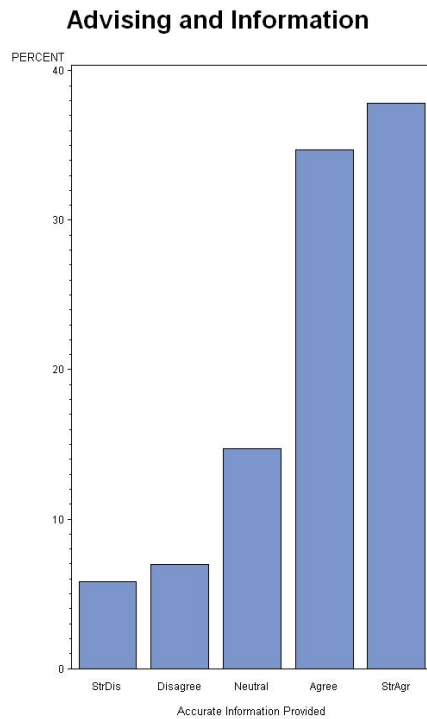
The allowed responses to Questions Number 1 to 8 were strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, or strongly disagree, and the allowed responses for Question Number 9 were very satisfied, satisfied, neither, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied.

The survey indicates that students generally believe that academic advising at UTSA meet their needs. For example, 73% of the students indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that advisors provided them with accurate information, while only 13% of the students either disagreed or strongly disagreed (See Figure 1):



Figure 1. Level of Agreement: “My advisor provides me with accurate information about requirements, prerequisites, etc.”

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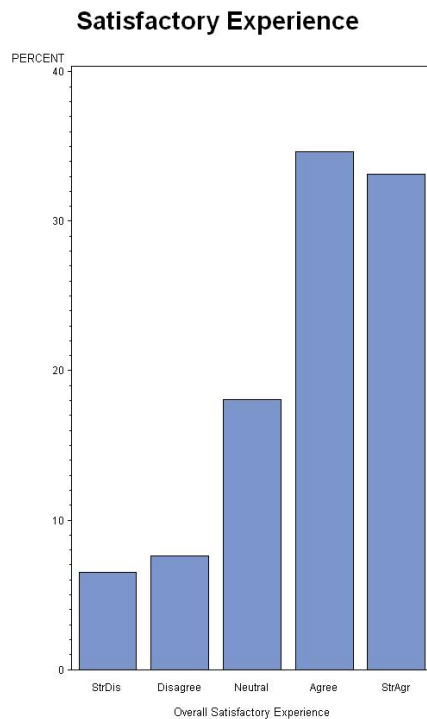
Percent  
6%  
7%  
15%  
35%  
38%

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Total N=3,871

For overall satisfaction with academic advising at UTSA, the survey showed that 68% of the student agreed or strongly agreed that their overall experience with advising is satisfactory, while only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (See Figure 2):

Figure 2. Level of Agreement: “My overall experience with advising is satisfactory.”



	Percent	Total N=3,871
Strongly Disagree	7%	
Disagree	8%	
Neutral	18%	
Agree	35%	
Strongly Agree	33%	

A copy of the survey instrument and detailed responses to the survey questions can be found in Appendix B, as well as comments expressed by students.

## VI. Findings

### 1. Students' Inability to See an Advisor When Most Needed.

The problem of students not being able to see an advisor when most needed seems to be a systemic concern for students. Many advising centers are overwhelmed with the sheer number of students assigned to them especially during peak periods when many students decide to seek advising. Some students are proactive seeking advising early and have no trouble making appointments to meet their needs, or take advantage of the walk-in hours during non-peak hours. However, many students have indeed expressed frustration with long waiting times for those who seek to meet with an

advisor by an appointment. Evidence of this frustration can be found in the focus groups reports, the students responses found in the Fall 2009 surveys and interviews, and in the comments by students participating in the April 2010 survey of classes.

The following table shows the number of advisors assigned to the advising centers.

**Table 4: Number of Advisors by Advising Center**

<i>Advising Center</i>	<i>No. Full-time Advisors-Main Campus</i>	<i>No. Half-time Advisors-Main Campus</i>	<i>No. Advisors Assigned to DTUAC</i>	<i>Total FTE Advisors</i>
<b>COA</b>			<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>
<b>COB</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1 (60%)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13.6</b>
<b>COE</b>	<b>4</b>			<b>4</b>
<b>COEHD</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>COLFA</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>
<b>COPP</b>			<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>COS</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>CFAC</b>	<b>14</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>TRC</b>	<b>8</b>			<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>4 (2.1 FTE)</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>75.3</b>
<b>Honors</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2.5</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>5 (2.6 FTE)</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>77.8</b>

Directors of advising centers are not included in these figures. Each of the college advising centers has a director except COA and COPP. COA and COPP each have 2 full-time advisors and one part-time advisor all supervised by the Director of the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center. The other colleges have advisors assigned to the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center as indicated by the table, and these advisors are supervised by the Director of the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center. The CFAC has a Director of Advising and an Associate Director of Advising. The TRC has advisors located at both the Main Campus and Downtown Campus, all supervised by the TRC Director of Advising. The Honors College has 3 full-time advisors. However, since it does not have a director of advising, 50% of the time of one of the advisors is dedicated to the supervision of the center, leaving 2.5 full time equivalent advisors to do the academic advising of the students. This table does not include the three teacher certification specialists that are assigned to the COEHD Advising Center. They are excluded since their primary focus is on the teacher certification admission processing of students seeking certification at the secondary level or post-baccalaureate students.

The following table shows the number of advisees that are assigned to each advising center, and shows the student to advisor ratios.

**Table 5: Student to Advisor Ratios – Fall 2009**

<i>Advising Center</i>	<i>Fresh men</i>	<i>Sophomores</i>	<i>Juniors</i>	<i>Seniors</i>	<i>Total*</i>	<i>FTE Advisors</i>	<i>Student to Advisor Ratio</i>
<b>COA</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>777</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>COB</b>	<b>996</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>1139</b>	<b>1869</b>	<b>3866</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>COE</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>1355</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>339</b>
<b>COEHD</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>748</b>	<b>1365</b>	<b>2716</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>COLFA</b>	<b>1454</b>	<b>1131</b>	<b>1491</b>	<b>2029</b>	<b>4651</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>372</b>

<b>COPP</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>COS</b>	<b>1403</b>	<b>874</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>1358</b>	<b>3133</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>344</b>
<b>CFAC</b>	<b>5436</b>				<b>5436</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>TRC</b>	<b>1504</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>2137</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Total</b>					<b>24772</b>	<b>75.3</b>	<b>329</b>
<b>Honors</b>					<b>713</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>24772</b>	<b>77.8</b>	<b>318</b>

\*For the colleges, the total is the number of sophomores through seniors. The number of CFAC advisees is the total number of freshman in the colleges. The Honors students are also counted in the college of their major which is also responsible for the academic advisement of these students.

One can see from the Table 5 that the student to advisor ratios for the colleges and CFAC range from 280:1 for COPP to 372:1 for COLFA. In Spring Semester 2006 when 16 new advising positions were made available across the campus, an attempt was made to equalize the student to advisor ratio for each of the centers as much as possible. However, due to changing distributions of the number of majors across the campus, some variance in the ratios from advising center to advising center has developed.

Each advising center director was asked to answer questions concerning the amount of time that students wait to see an advisor in their center. The wait time for a student to see an advisor on a walk-in type basis ranged from less than 5 minutes and up to 2 hours during the peak periods that occur at the beginning of registration. When scheduling an advising appointment, the wait time for students ranged from 1 day to 5 weeks depending on the major and college. The times allotted for each type of advising session varied from college to college. Also, the names used for the various advising session types varied from college to college as well. For example, some centers used the term “walk-in” advising and one center used the term “express advising” for the same advising session type. All centers go to “open walk-ins” during registration periods, but each operates a little differently. Some centers see students based on classification in relation to the registration schedule; others see any student that comes into the center during this period regardless of classification.

The task force believes that the problem of “students’ inability to see an advisor when most needed” is a legitimate concern. Although the student to advisor ratio is reasonable, the problem is exacerbated by students who wait until the last minute to see advisors creating the peak periods. Moreover, some advising centers have more intrusive advising requirements induced by degree requirements. For example, each COB major must see an advisor prior to gaining permission to register for their capstone course resulting in an increased advising load for each advisor in the center and increasing wait times for COB students to see advisors. Also some centers have intrusive advising programs for its majors who are on academic probation further increasing their advising loads and negatively impacting the wait times for students to have appointments to see advisors.

In an attempt to discern whether other institutions have a similar problem with the wait times to see advisor, the task force did an informal survey of advising centers at other institutions. Some advising centers responding to the survey about wait times to see advisors were centers at UT Austin, UT Arlington, UT Brownsville, UT Pan American, UT Permian Basin, University of North Texas, University of Houston, Texas State University, Texas Tech University, and Arizona State University. (See Appendix B for the responses to the informal survey.) Although many of these institutions have reported student to advisor ratios significantly higher than that of UTSA, most reported that the waiting times during peak period for advising appointments ranged from 1 to 4 days with only a few reporting 1 to two weeks waiting times. For example, the College of Business at UT Arlington reported a waiting time for appointments for students to see an advisor was within two weeks during peak advising periods and within a day or so during non-peak advising periods. At UTSA, the waiting time for the College of Business Advising Center is 4 to 5 weeks during peak periods even though the 2007 report by the UT System showed that the overall student to advisor ratio at UTSA was 312:1 as compared to 459:1 at UT Arlington. This data suggest that the problem with the excessive wait times for UTSA students for appointments to see advisors is more complicated than simply the student to advisor ratio.

One important element to recognize about advising at UTSA is the heavy involvement of academic advisors in the processing and updating of much student record information, which may not be the case at other institutions. Advisors are currently responsible for receiving, processing, and providing feedback regarding petitions for the 45-Hour and 30-Hour Undergraduate Credit Limitation, the Three-Attempt rule, the Texas Success Initiative compliance report, preliminary graduation letters for students, financial aid consortium agreements and appeals, graduation degree audits, prescreening and manual registration for internships. The advisors also participate in many university and college events such as UTSA Day, Staff Council, Roadrunner Days college orientations, Meeting of the College (MOC) sessions at freshman orientation programs, international student orientation, commencement, and college specific councils or meetings. They also plan and do various outreach initiatives to increase students' awareness of advising with events such as Sophomore Day, and Majors Fair during Roadrunner Days. In every center there are one or more senior advisors that have supervisory roles and responsibilities, and may serve as degree auditors. These tasks, which are not considered with regards to the computation of the student to advisor ratios, take away from the amount of time that advisors have to spend assisting students increasing the wait times for appointments.

## **2. Students Receiving Advice that Later Turns Out to be Wrong**

While the task force did find some evidence that students occasionally received advice that later turned out to be wrong, the problem appears to be sporadic and not systemic. The advising community has been working hard to improve the accuracy of advising.

Each advising center has in place quality control systems to check the accuracy of the advice given by its advisors such as monthly random file audits of degree plans and advising notes, following a process that is consistent across advising centers as agreed upon by the directors of academic advising. Whenever an inept advisor is identified, the supervisor of the center addresses the problem and, if necessary, places the advisor on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). The chair of the task force is aware of the termination of ineffective advisors.

Whenever true misadvisement is discovered, the advisors, associate deans, and Dean of Undergraduate Studies try to rectify the problem often honoring the incorrect advice that the student received. Waivers and substitutions are granted so that the student will not be adversely affected by the incorrect advice. While our advisors receive extensive training on university and college degree, requirements and policies, there have been occasions that errors have occurred.

The task force believes that the problem of misadvisement has improved significantly at UTSA. In the 2006 study of students' perceptions of barriers to graduation conducted by the Student Academic Support Subgroup of the Graduation Taskforce where input was received from 712 students, course availability, conflicting priorities by students, and academic advising were identified as the top three barriers. Moreover, according to report that can be found in Appendix A, "48% of the students who reported academic advising as a barrier indicated that they had received incorrect information from academic advisors in their colleges." However, in the most recent survey of over 3800 UTSA students, only 13% expressed dissatisfaction with the accuracy of advising. One also needs to keep in mind that in the 2006 study by the Graduation Taskforce, the students were responding to the question "What do you perceive as barriers to your or your friends' graduation here at UTSA?", which tended to elicit negative responses. Whereas, our most recent studies tend to garner their perceptions of academic advising at UTSA whether it is positive, negative, or neutral.

As mentioned earlier in this report, one of the results of establishing the advisor career ladder beginning Fall Semester 2007 is that advisors are being retained at a higher rate in positions of academic advising. It appears that having a cadre of more experienced advisors has reduced the incidents of misadvisement over the years.

Often students perceive that they have been misadvised when they compare notes with peers that have received different advice, not realizing that the students may be following different catalogs with slightly different requirements. While the task force realizes that new policies and degree requirements are implemented for a variety of important reasons such as improving student success and updating degree programs, the task force recognizes that numerous changes to policies and degree requirements do cause a degree of confusion by students, and even for academic advisors.

The task force also believes is important to recognize that the advisors advise thousands of students each academic year and also, though there are some errors, they are minimal in comparison to the numbers served. This last academic year they had over 196,914 contacts with students via appointment (23,321), walk-in (45,581), phone (19,379) and email (108,633). This does not include the number of students they had contact with at other events previously mentioned in the report.

While the task force concludes that instances of misadvisement are sporadic, we realize that misadvisement is significant for the individual student affected, and such cases should be reduced to rare occurrences as much as possible.

### **3. Students Receiving Conflicting Advice from Two or More Different Advisors**

The perceived problem of the lack of consistency of academic advising with students receiving conflicting advice from two or more different advisors has been reported by students in various modes. For example, the problem of inconsistent advising was documented in the 2006 Student Academic Success Subgroup of the Graduation Taskforce report on Barriers to Graduation and reiterated in the Graduation Initiative's 2007 report. There are many instances in those reports where students complain that "every advisor tells you something different."

On the other hand, the students encountered by this task force through the focus groups and surveys seem to have a more positive view of academic advising at UTSA. Although there were some negative comments about academic advising, the problem seemed to occur infrequently.

The task force believes that although there are instances where students do receive conflicting advice from two or more advisors, this is also not a systemic problem and one that has been decreasing as the university has gained more experienced advisors. For an individual student, receiving such conflicting advice can result in a devastating experience, although, as mentioned in the previous section, misadvisement, whenever brought to their attention, is rectified as much as possible by the advisors, the associate deans, and Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

### **4. Lack of Coordination Between the CFAC and the College-Based Advising Centers**

The task force found that there is a considerable attempt by the CFAC and the college-based advising centers to coordinate advising and to facilitate the transfer of students from the CFAC to the college-based advising centers of students' majors at the time students accumulate the number of hours to become sophomores. The CFAC has instituted "Advisor Swap" whereby a CFAC advisor switches places with an advisor in a college for a period of time. This program gives the CFAC advisor a chance to learn more effectively the requirements for the particular major in the college, and gives the

college advisor a chance to observe first hand the challenges of a freshman advisor. The two advisors may share their experiences with other advisors in their centers in an attempt to improve the overall advising of our students.

Students are required to see an advisor in the college of their major to receive individualized semester-by-semester degree plans. Students who have not done so by the time they earn 45 semester credit hours will have registration holds placed their records until they visit a college advisor to receive the degree plans. The number of “45-hour holds” can be considered a measure of the coordination between the CFAC and the college-based advising centers as freshmen transition to their college advising centers. The fact that the number of holds for the 45-hour semester-by-semester degree plans has decreased somewhat since its implementation in Fall Semester 2007 indicates a degree of coordination between the CFAC and the colleges’ advising centers.

The following table shows the number of holds placed on students who had earned 45 or more semester credit hours and had no semester-by-semester degree plans on file.

**Table 6: 45-Hour Holds**

<i>Semester</i>	<i>Number of 45-Hour Holds</i>
Fall 2007	1440
Fall 2008	1408
Fall 2009	1052
Spring 2008	1369
Spring 2009	1536
Spring 2010	1445
Summer 2008	776
Summer 2009	701

In spite of measures to coordinate activities, there were instances reported where apparent disconnects between the CFAC and certain college advising centers occurred. The most egregious of these were claims made to the task force by students that pre-business majors often were not informed of the requirements for direct admission into a College of Business major until too late. (Students eligible for direct admission to a College of Business major must elect to do so in their first semester of registration at UTSA. Otherwise, they must remain pre-business majors until they complete certain course and grade point average requirements.) However, it has been reported by the COB Advising Center that this reported problem has been resolved whereby the COB handles this matter itself during freshman orientation programs. But the COB is struggling to devise a system to handle those freshmen which it does not have an opportunity to meet during freshman orientation programs; in particular, those



freshmen attending the late cycle abbreviated “overflow” orientation sessions and online orientation programs are not met by the COB advisors during orientation.

Other evidence of coordination between the CFAC and certain colleges is the fact that the CFAC is presently working closely with the College of Engineering and the Department of Biology to implement their new policies for admitting freshmen into their degree programs.

The associate deans who are responsible for supervising the college-based advising centers were given the opportunity to comment on the lack of coordination between the CFAC and the colleges, and, in particular, to comment on any perceived disconnects between the colleges and the advisement of their majors who are freshmen. Responses were received from about half of the colleges, and half of the responses were positive indicating that “significant steps have been made to improve coordination.” However, there were some concerns raised about the training of some of the CFAC advisors regarding degree requirements and college policies. For example, it was pointed out that certain CFAC advisors making presentations at the Meeting of the Colleges sessions during freshman orientation programs were excellent while others showed a lack of satisfactory understanding of degree requirements for majors in the college and college policies.

The complaint by students most specifically directed at the CFAC was that the provisions of the 45-hour semester-by-semester degree plan requirement were not made clear causing them to have registration holds and struggling to make appointments with a college center advisor during peak advising periods.

## **VII. Recommendations**

The following are recommendations to address the issues raised in the charges to the task force, and to improve academic advising at UTSA. In many cases, the task force recommends that the university require consistent processes across advising centers and direct more extensive use of the technology available to the advising community in order to execute those processes as efficient as possible.

### **1. Students’ Inability to See an Advisor When Most Needed**

As noted earlier, the student to advisor ratio at UTSA is better than the student to advisor ratios of all but two of the other universities in the UT System. However, the characteristics of UTSA undergraduates, many of whom are first generation students, seem to demand proportionally more of our advisors’ time. The task force makes the following recommendations that aim to decrease the wait times for students to see their advisors. Most of the recommendations are designed to eliminate unnecessary visits by students to the advising centers, to use our advising resources more efficiently,

and to more evenly spread out the advising load over the course of a semester, decreasing the “peaks” and “valleys” of advising activity in the centers. We expect that the more efficient use of our advising resources will enable those students who need to see advisors for more complex issues to be able to do so in a timely manner. The costs associated with most of these recommendations are minimal and may be covered by available carry-forward advising fees funds. Although several of the following recommendations aim to reduce the number of visits to the advising centers by students, the task force wishes to go on record that it strongly supports the intrusive advising mandated by the 45-hour semester-by-semester degree plan requirement and the 90-hour pre-graduation audit requirement, which are crucial to promote the academic success of our students..

Implement AdvisorTrac: This advising center management and tracking software package will make the scheduling of advising appointments convenient for both students and advisors. Since students would be able to locate openings and schedule appointments online, this should relieve much of the frustration that students experience with waiting times in seeing an advisor. Presently, in an attempt to better understand how to customize the software package for UTSA, AdvisorTrac is being piloted in the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center, and should be available to be fully implemented in all the advising centers soon.

Increase the Number of Academic Advisors: The task force recommends that the university increase the number of academic advisor by 7 full time equivalent advising positions. These advisors would be strategically assigned to lower the student to advisor ratio in those advising centers with the higher student to advisor ratios and the longer wait times for advising appointments. Using Fall Semester 2009 enrollment figures, this will lower the university’s student to advisor ratio from 318:1 to 292:1. The annual cost to implement this recommendation is approximately **\$273,000**.

Install an “Ask Rowdy” Website for Academic Advising: UTSA undergraduates who meet with their advisors frequently are usually well versed in degree requirements and academic policies, requirements, and procedures. However, many students visit the advising centers only when required and are often unaware of obvious academic matters such as registration procedures. This appears to be especially true for transfer students. We propose that a comprehensive and well-organized advising web site be created where students can find information about academic advising matters. The task force recommends that the university install a knowledge based website similar to “Ask Rowdy” installed recently by Student Financial Aid and Enrollment Services Center and similar to the “Rowdy Cents” website sponsored by the Graduation Initiative to help students better plan their financial affairs while in school and to help them to see the financial advantage of graduating in a timely manner. This would be a comprehensive and user friendly website where students can get answers to the most frequently asked questions. Students visiting this website would probably not need to see an advisor in person, by telephone, or by e-mail, eliminating the need for many visits to the academic

advising centers, and, thus, reducing the load on academic advisors and freeing up advisors' time for those students with more complex advising issues.

Hire Temporary Advisors During Peak Periods: The task force recommends that the university encourage the hiring temporary advisors during peak advising periods or to cover special events that college advisors may be tasked with such as UTSA Day. The temporary advisors may come from a pool of former advisors with extensive advising experience. For example, to assist it during peak advising periods, the TRC has reported that it has been successful in hiring temporary advisors who were former advisors in the TRC and are now working in various positions in the local areas such as in the teaching profession. This would increase advisors availability to see students by decreasing the flexing of time for events or providing compensatory time. Flex time and compensatory time are usually used by advisors during the regular business hours when the advisors would normally be seeing students.

Marketing Non-Peak Advising Cycles: The University needs to better market non-peak advising periods encouraging students to use the advising centers during these "slow" periods. The plan needs to reflect consistent agreed upon non-peak periods for all centers which can be marketed university wide and not center specific. In particular, we should better market the 45-hour semester-by-semester degree plan requirements and the 90-hour pre-graduation audits so that students can see advisors concerning these matters during the non-peak advising periods thus avoiding the holds for not meeting these requirements in a timely manner.

The NACADA consultants recommended that UTSA institute mandatory advising checkpoints. The 45-hour semester-by-semester individualized degree plan requirement is such a checkpoint. However, as evidenced by the number of holds, a significant number of students do not see their advisors to receive their degree plans until forced to do so by registration holds. A clever marketing campaign is recommended to entice students to see their advisors to receive their individualized semester-by-semester degree plans before they accumulate 45 semester credits hours and holds are placed on their registration. In particular, the CFAC and TRC should ensure that each freshman is aware of the requirement. A similar marketing of the 90-hour pre-graduation audit would be valuable.

This marketing promotion can be similar to the "Got Prerequisites" campaign launched a few years ago when the university first rolled out automatic prerequisite checking. Partially due to the awareness developed by the marketing campaign, automatic prerequisite checking went off with very little consternation by our students.

Marketing and Awareness of "Walk-in" Periods: Currently all advising centers go to "open walk-ins" during the busy segment of registration periods. The "open walk-ins" periods need to be better marketed to the students and communicated to key offices such as the Enrollment Services Center. A consistent schedule for "open walk-ins"

should be established across all centers to reduce confusion by students and allow for consistent marketing to students and communication to staff across the university. The consistent schedule for “open walk-ins” would be similar to the consistent schedule currently established for the Saturdays on which the advising centers and other university services are open and available. Moreover, the task force recommends that all advising centers also go to “open walk-ins” during the week prior to the first day of classes and the first week of classes for the long semesters.

Require the Use of CAPP for Each Advising Center: Presently most advising centers make extensive use of the Curriculum, Advising and Program Planning (CAPP) software to electronically track degree requirements met by students for their specific majors. The COA, COB, COE, COEHD, and COPP advisors make extensive use of CAPP. On the other hand, COLFA and COS advising centers still rely heavily on manual degree audits often delaying the entering of essential information into the electronic system until students have applied for graduation. The task force realizes that the efficiency of using CAPP is a function of the requirements for the particular majors. For example, majors in the College of Engineering and the College of Business are very structured with limited leeway for students to make individual choices for courses. Such degree plans are well suited to be electronically verified by CAPP. On the other hand, majors in the College of Liberal and Fine Arts tend to be less structured with much flexibility allowed for students to design their degree plans. Such plans present challenges for the use of CAPP. However, the task force is convinced that CAPP can be made to work for all UTSA degree plans. Each advising center should work closely with the technology team in the Office of Undergraduate Studies Support and Technology Services in an attempt to devise procedures that will make CAPP work for all UTSA degree plans.

Relying on CAPP to do degree audits electronically will reduce the burden on advisors and degree auditors in providing 90-hour degree checks and final graduation audits. Moreover, entering the essential information into Banner will enable students to use Web CAPP to do their own degree audits online to verify that they are on track to graduation, or to see what would be the additional requirements if they should decide to change majors, eliminating the need for many students to visit the advising centers to get answers that Web CAPP can provide.

## **2. Students Receiving Advice that Later Turns Out to be Wrong**

Uniform Training for Academic Advisors: Implement uniform periodic training for all academic advisors. While we presently have an effective training program for new academic advisors, the task force recommends periodic training on academic policies and procedures and on degree requirements for all advisors. In particular, we recommend, as part of this training, an annual retreat for all academic advisors. At these retreats, discussions about new university policies can be initiated with advisors getting answers to their questions. These workshops can be similar to the transfer workshops that we hold for community college advisors.

Create a Culture for Advisors to Seek Answers to Questions: The university needs to develop a mechanism for advisors to get answers to questions in a timely manner while visiting with students. We believe that such resources are currently available (the advising center directors, senior advisors, the Executive Director of Advising, the associate deans), but we need to create a culture among the advisors that it is okay seek advice from others, and that advisors can learn from each other. For example, one student stated that “my advisor was not familiar with the course I had to take.” An advisor in such a situation could have called someone to get the information, or referred the student to the department or instructor.

Improve the Data Entry Process for Newly Admitted Transfer Students: Transfer students from Texas community colleges, including those from articulated community colleges following UTSA transfer plans, are permitted to follow the UTSA catalog in effect at the time they began matriculating at the community college (within certain time limits). However, under the present UTSA Admission process, all students are admitted (including transfer students and former students returning to complete their degrees) as having the current catalog as their catalog of graduation even though those students may have been appropriately following earlier catalogs with different degree requirements. This is especially problematic for transfer students from community colleges following transfer agreements based on catalogs that precede the current catalog. A UTSA advisor looking into Banner will see the current catalog listed as the catalog of graduation for such students even though they have been correctly following earlier catalogs. One can easily understand how this may lead to the possibility of misadvisement. Another recurring problem is the one where students transferring to UTSA as “core complete” often do not get this designation marked in Banner at the time of admission. Also, single core curriculum courses completed at transfer institutions frequently are not properly tagged in the student records system as meeting UTSA core curriculum requirements. The expectation is that the academic advisors will update the catalog of graduation and appropriately tag core curriculum courses when meeting with the students, which, for a variety of reasons, does not always occur. Having the updated information from the time of admission is the ideal option.

The task force recommends that discussions among the advising community, the Office of Admissions, and the Office of the Registrar occur to alleviate some of the current Banner forms processing that advisors are tasked to do. A process should be implemented that fosters the admission of transfer students under the catalog of graduation that they were appropriately following at the time of admission to UTSA. For students following transfer plans who apply for admission to UTSA, perhaps a question can be added to the Texas Common Application where students can indicate that they are following a transfer plan, and, thus, facilitating an indicator in Banner that a transfer plan is being followed. The group should discuss developing processes to ensure that the most up to date information for newly admitted transfer students is entered into the student records system, and consider how to best perform other administrative

tasks with which advisors assist such as change of catalog and change of major processing for all students. The group should consider sharing resources to more efficiently perform these tasks.

The task force notes that for current UTSA students who take courses at other institutions, the advising community has a process in place to enter promptly that transfer work into the student records system.

Develop Check Lists for Advisors: The advising community should develop check lists for academic advisors so that all important information is covered during an advising session. For example, for freshman advising, the checklist could contain questions such as “does the student have CLEP or AP credit.” Sometimes the advisor forgets to ask and the student does not volunteer information about CLEP or AP credit occasionally resulting in students taking unnecessary courses for which they already have CLEP or AP credit fostering claims of misadvisement. For a transfer student, the checklist could remind the advisor to confirm with the student that the catalog of graduation listed in Banner is indeed the correct one.

### **3. Students Receiving Inconsistent or Conflicting Advice.**

Develop a System Whereby Students Always Sees the Same Advisor: To the extent possible, each advising center should develop a system whereby an individual student sees the same advisor when visiting the advising center fostering a better relationship between student and advisor. This would reduce significantly any conflicting advice that students receive or information perceived as misadvisement.

### **4. Lack of Coordinating Between the CFAC and the College-Based Advising Centers.**

The majority of the colleges are satisfied with the collaboration between the CFAC and the college advising center. There were some problems identified but none that cannot be resolved though continued collaboration between the Director of the CFAC, the directors of the college advising centers, and the associate deans. Several colleges have college councils in which the dean regularly meets with associate deans, department chairs, and director of the advising center. The task force recommends that the deans invite the director of the CFAC to these meetings or develop such meetings to engage in dialogs about how to better coordinate advising in the CFAC with the college policies and goals. Some colleges are presently meeting with representatives of the CFAC on a regular basis. In addition to these suggested meetings the task force believes it would be beneficial if the CFAC liaisons to be involved in their colleges Meeting of the College (MOC) sessions during freshman orientation programs. (This already occurs with some colleges.) This would give the CFAC advisors, in addition to the CFAC leadership, the opportunity to become more knowledgeable of their assigned college and increase their opportunities to meet and work with college colleagues.

The task force also recommends that the CFAC help increase students' awareness of tools such as CAPP and the importance of meeting with an advisor in the college of their major to receive semester-by-semester degree plans. By increasing students' awareness and utilization of these resources early on in their academic career, students will have tools that can help guide them in addition to their academic advisors.

### **VIII. Other Recommendations**

Use Consistent terminology: One of the items causing confusion for students is the use of inconsistent or different terminology from one advising center to the next. For example, in most centers, students may use "Walk-in" hours to see advisors with quick questions when an appointment has not been made. In the COLFA Advising Center, it is called "Express Advising" with a shorter duration than that of the other centers. There have been reported instances when students have been sent to COLFA to take advantage of their "walk-in" advising hours with the students either returning to say that COLFA does not have "walk-in" hours or not realizing or being informed that "Express Advising" is essentially the same thing. However, since "Express Advising" is of shorter duration than "walk-in" sessions in other centers, some students have expressed the concern that they feel rushed during these sessions and often feel frustrated when an advisor specializing in their major is not available during a particular Express Advising session.

Moreover, students do communicate with each other regarding advising issues providing a sort of informal "peer advising" system. These students are certain to use some of the language that they have picked up at their advising centers. In order to avoid confusion, it is important for these students to use a common language when discussing advising issues. Having consistent terminology across all advising centers will reduce students' feeling of receiving conflicting information.

*In order to reduce the confusion, the task force recommends that the Executive Director of Advising be authorized to define and command the use of consistent terminology across the advising community. For instance, the definition of a consistent term for and the parameters of what is commonly referred to as "walk-in" advising should be created.*

Use Common Processes: Since students and academic advisors often must deal with academic departments and colleges outside the college of a student's major and an advisor's college, we need to make certain processes are consistent across all advising centers and colleges. For example, requesting prerequisite overrides should be a common process across all colleges and academic departments. To avoid confusion by students, the hours of operation of the centers should be uniform including evening and weekend hours.

*The task force recommends that the Executive Director of Advising be authorized to identify processes related to academic advising that need to be common across the university, and to prescribe the details of those processes.*

Establish Common Forms: Develop standard university wide forms that are the same regardless of the center and referenced by the name of the form and not by other inconsistent methods. Presently, many forms are college specific and often present problems for advising centers outside of colleges (such as the Honors College Advising Center, the DTUAC, the UHPO, and the TRC) that frequently must interact with each of the colleges in certain matters. An example is the college specific prerequisite override forms that are different for each college, a complaint that is heard frequently from advisors. These standard forms could then be posted on the University wide advising website where students and advisors could access at any time.

*The taskforce recommends that the Executive Director of Advising be authorized to identify forms related to academic advising that need to be common across all colleges and to develop the common forms.*

Discourage Frequent Catalog and Policy Changes: We realize that the university is constantly attempting to revise degree requirements and policies to improve programs and services for our students. However, frequent catalog changes such as changes in degree requirements and changes in courses can cause confusion for students. For example, different course requirements for the same degree program are listed in different catalogs. Students under different catalogs with different degree requirements for the same degree program talk to each other and often blame the differences in academic advising on advisor errors rather than recognizing the differences in catalog requirements.

Establish Annual Advising Workshops on Academic Policies and Procedures: The university should hold annual advisor workshops with advisors and administrators present. At these workshops, advisors would be able to get information, ask questions, and give input regarding existing, new, and proposed policies and procedures. These annual “change” workshops may be similar to the “Articulated Colleges Transfer Workshops” that we hold every two years for community college advisors. The purpose of these workshops would not be training, but rather for an exchange of ideas between advisors and administrators concerning policies and procedures that seem to working and those which are not working well at all.

Create a Customer Friendly Atmosphere in the Advising Centers: Provide customer service training for academic advisors and for the administrative and front desk staff in the advising centers. Students often reported that the front desk staff persons were rude and showed an uncaring attitude. There were also reports by students that their academic advisors had uncaring and unhelpful attitudes during visits to the advising



centers. Having friendly and caring staff and advisors is indeed the first step in giving students a positive experience when visiting advising centers.

Improve the Accuracy of the Electronic Degree Audit System: The following are some recommendations to improve the accuracy and efficacy of the electronic degree audit system CAPP permitting students to have confidence that the online Web CAPP gives an accurate picture of the degree requirements that have been met and those remaining to be satisfied.

Students should be encouraged to run their own CAPP plans, and they deserve to have an updated and accurate electronic degree plan which they can reference and run whenever desired. Updated and accurate CAPP plans will give students “road maps to graduation” encouraging timely graduation. Some students may even be inspired by the “light at the end of the tunnel” and perform better in their classes or take a heavier course load to decrease the time to graduation. At the very least, up to date CAPP plans will let students know what credits they have earned, where they apply in their degree programs, and what requirements remain to be satisfied in order to graduate. Updated plans will decrease the possibility that a student may take a course for which he or she has already earned credit. Updated plans will also help the degree auditors in the colleges, and help the university, colleges, and department with any course demand analysis that may be implemented.

1. Establish Consistent Protocol for Transfer Courses: Currently some colleges update transfer courses to their UTSA equivalent courses in the BANNER form SHATRNS at the time that substitution or petition of waiver is approved while others do not. The practice is not consistent and the decision for updating or not updating the BANNER form seems to be left to the discretion of the college or advising center director. Updating this form immediately will enhance the accuracy of electronic degree audits by CAPP and those run by students through the online Web CAPP.

Moreover, entering transfer courses into SHATRNS as their UTSA equivalents enhances the prerequisite checking system. Transfer courses entered in SHATRNS become part of academic history and can be read by the student records system during prerequisite checking. If the substitution has been made in SHATRNS, then prerequisite checking will locate the substitution and permit the student to register for the needed course, eliminating a need for a visit to an advising center for a request for a manual prerequisite override.

2. Recommend that Advisors or CAPPWIZARD update CAPP plans in a timely manner: CAPP plans for all approved substitutions, transfer work, support work or core curriculum petitions need to be updated as soon as the approvals are final. These updates can be done by the advisor or the advisor can send and

email message to CAPPWIZARD for it to be done. These updates should be done as they occur. Advisors should not wait until the student has applied for graduation to update the plans. (The e-mail address [cappwizard@utsa.edu](mailto:cappwizard@utsa.edu) is where advisors can send requests to the technology team in the Office of Undergraduate Studies and Technology Services to update an area in CAPP for individual students.)

3. Approved support work should be entered in the support work area in CAPP: Currently, not many of the support work areas in CAPP are filled in with courses as the choices are too numerous, and students can choose from many different options. But many students, especially in the College of Liberal and Fine Arts, must have support work approved. Many times this support work approval form, which lists 4 to 5 courses, is done in advance and is available in the student's file. These courses should be entered into that student's CAPP plan. If he or she decides later to pursue another category, the CAPP plan can be adjusted accordingly. Again, this would produce an accurate degree plan for that student, would help any effort at course demand analysis, and aid the degree verification process.

*The task force recommends that the advising center of each college be required to update the BANNER form SHATRNS immediately after substitutions and petition of waivers are approved and to update the support area of CAPP as needed as soon as the appropriate approvals are obtained. The Executive Director of Advising and the advising community will develop standard step-by-step procedures to be followed once a course substitution or petition has been approved which will include updating the appropriate BANNER form. This would enable a student to visit the web to learn immediately when a course substitution has been approved and where the approved course applies on his or her degree plan.*

Establish Common Graduation Degree Auditing Procedures: Develop standard university wide graduation degree auditing protocol based on best practices currently used across the university.

*The task force recommends that the Executive Director of Advising, college degree auditors, and the Graduation Coordination Office (GCO) review and evaluate all processes and procedures, duties, responsibilities to develop this standard graduation degree auditing protocol.*

## **IX. The UTSA Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center**

The UTSA Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center (DTUAC) is unique in its set-up for service to the downtown students and community. Unlike the college advising centers at the Main Campus, the DTUAC is a "one-stop-shop" providing accessible advisors for all seven colleges at one location. The DTUAC serves all UTSA majors and

classifications. It encompasses 1 to 3 advisors for each college and includes a freshman advisor who advises for all colleges.

### **MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS**

The DTUAC reports to the Office of the Vice Provost for the Downtown Campus. All DTUAC academic advisors, regardless of college assignment, are supervised by the Director of the Downtown Undergraduate Advising Center. The Director collaborates with the main campus advising center directors, deans, associate deans and academic departments to ensure that advising needs are met for their respective colleges and ensures that advisors in their respective colleges are informed and trained in the same way as the Main Campus advisors.

Downtown academic advisors are dedicated to providing students with the same resources and opportunities that are provided to students who attend the Main Campus. The advisors regularly attend trainings and staff meetings at the main campus for their respective colleges thus allowing them to stay apprised of changes or updates to the programs they advise.

Although the DTUAC is unique in its setup, it is not always conducive to advisors assisting students when an advisor is out of the office. When one advisor is out of the office, the available advisors may come from colleges different from the college of the student's major. Generally, an advisor from another college can help with a general question; but specific questions to the degree program may require the student to come in to see an advisor for that major.

The DTUAC often sees students seeking academic advisement who feel they are unable to make timely appointments with advisors at their advising center at the Main Campus. The front desk staff of the DTUAC at times can be overwhelmed with the increased phone calls and the additional student, staff, and guest's visits to the center when they are not able to reach their college advising centers at the Main Campus.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Reassess the distribution of advisor to student ratios at the DTUAC: Although administration does periodically review the student to advisor ratios across the university, a review of the current number of advising staff per college assigned to DTUAC to the number of advisees coming into the downtown center for each college would be a better assessment of the number of advisors required to appropriately serve the more demanding majors and number of students at the downtown campus. The task force recommends that the number and mix of advisors at the DTUAC be assessed and adjusted as needed.

Increase the number of Front Desk Staff: Service at the DTUAC is very diverse. Because of its location, the DTUAC receives not only a high volume of students, staff, faculty, and community visitors who come to the downtown campus, but all colleges

are advised in one location, which requires its staff to be fluent about all university and colleges' processes. The task force recommends the addition of a permanent part-time staff person for the front counter at DTUAC which will help to consistently provide experienced and sound service to all students and visitors throughout the semesters. The annual cost for the additional part-time staff person will be approximately **\$20,000**.

## **Appendices**

The following appendices can be found using the following links:

[http://utsa.edu/success/docs/appendix\\_a.pdf](http://utsa.edu/success/docs/appendix_a.pdf)

[http://utsa.edu/success/docs/appendix\\_b.pdf](http://utsa.edu/success/docs/appendix_b.pdf)

### Appendix A. Existing Reports

1. NACADA Report
2. Report of the Subgroup on Student Academic Support, Taskforce on Improving Student Success and Graduation Rates.
3. Graduation Initiative's Research on Barriers to Graduation
4. Freshman Advising Proposal: A Plan to Strengthen the Freshman-Sophomore Connection

### Appendix B. Surveys Results

1. Online Advising Survey
2. Student Focus Groups Results
3. Student Interviews and Surveys
4. Spring 2010 Survey of Selected Classes
5. Informal Survey of Other Institutions Concerning Advising Centers' Wait Times
6. Degree Plan Formats at Various Other Texas Universities