

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATION FOUR

**General Recommendation Four:** The committee recommends that the college make necessary adjustments in the advising and counseling area in order to assure that a systematic program of academic and other educational program advisement is in place that adequately informs and prepares faculty and other personnel responsible for the advising function. The college should assure that:

- Advisors help students make appropriate decisions concerning academic choices and career paths.
- Specific advisor responsibilities are defined, published, and made available to students (3.D.10)

### COLLEGE RESPONSE

Advising at Clark College has improved significantly since the last accreditation self-study and evaluation. Many activities have occurred to improve the students' advisement. These include:

- Advising Department Reorganization
- The Clark College Advising Plan
- Advising Educational Plans
- The Degree and Certificate Worksheet Taskforce
- AdvisorTrac
- Advising and Registration Procedures
- Academic Early Warning

#### **Advising Department Reorganization**

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the new Director of Advising was hired. The Director met with the Interim Vice President of Student Affairs/Dean of Student Success and the advising staff to identify areas to improve. Many areas needing improvement were identified, one of which was the organization of the Advising Department. The Director of Advising supervised all eleven advisors and seven support staff. In addition, because most advisors were responsible for advising students in all of the college's educational programs, they were expected to develop and maintain an extensive breadth of knowledge. The Advising Department, in consultation with the Student Affairs Council, developed a reorganization plan.

The Advising Department reorganization plan identifies lead advisors by program area. These programs include 1) Health Occupations/Education; 2) Business Technology/Computer Technology/Database Networking/Associate of Arts Transfer; and 3) Transfer/Developmental Education. These three areas encompass all of the certificate and degree programs at Clark

College. Each area will be led by an advising divisional manager and have multiple direct report advisors who will work with students in the programs. This organizational structure will allow advisors to specialize in specific programs and keep up with program changes. Ultimately, advisors will become experts in these programs, professionalizing the advising services at Clark College.

Under the new organization, the Advising Divisional Managers serve as the liaisons to the program faculty. Through a clear and accountable line to the program faculty leads, the managers are responsible for working with their respective program faculty and for communicating with both faculty and program-specific advisors. The managers will also assist faculty advisors with the advisement of students within their programs.

The reorganization of the Advising Department also designates an Associate Director of Advising. The Associate Director will be responsible for heading up projects such as identifying, tracking, and assisting students on Academic Probation; co-chairing weekly advising meetings; working with the Director to seek and provide professional development training; leading student satisfaction projects and data compilation; and serving on some college-wide committees as the advising representative. In the event of the Director's absence – due to vacation, illness, or professional conferences – the existence of an Associate Director provides continuity of accountability and reporting lines.

Because additional resources will be needed, full implementation of the reorganization plan will occur over a three-year period. The President's Executive Cabinet made the commitment to allocate the necessary resources over the three-year period. The first phase began in January 2010 when the Health Occupations/Educational Advising Division Manager was hired. The second phase was to begin in July 2010. However, due to the hiring freeze mandated by the state legislature, the college is actively pursuing grant resources to fully implement the reorganization. (Appendix 4.1)

### **Clark College Advising Plan**

Through the leadership of the Director of Advising, a college-wide group is developing the Clark College Advising Plan. The Plan, currently in draft form, is subject to change. This comprehensive Plan represents the college-wide advising activities found in both Student Affairs and Instruction. The Plan offers a mission statement, objectives, and outcomes. The advising mission statement states the following:

*By providing accurate, timely, and consistent information, Advising at Clark, in collaboration with faculty, guide, support, and help students develop lifelong learning skills, plan and achieve their educational and career goals, and establish a connection between students and Clark College.*

The Advising Plan identifies four objectives as follows:

- **Program Comprehension:** Develop an understanding of degree or certificate requirements so that remaining classes and timeliness of completion are clear and accurate.
- **Educational Planning:** Develop an educational plan that addresses academic, career, and life goals.
- **Student Responsibilities:** Develop an awareness of personal responsibility for education and career plan.
- **Campus Resources:** Develop skills to successfully navigate and use campus services and tools.

The plan defines the current system and outlines the future advising system. The advising plan takes into account the diversity of students' educational intents and situations. Clark College students access educational opportunities for a variety of reasons, including basic skills education, the selection of certificate and degree programs, classes needed to transfer, and more. In addition, students access education through various mechanisms such as online courses, the Weekend Degree Program, and classes at multiple campus sites. They also utilize numerous funding initiatives such as Workfirst, Veterans, and Running Start. The Advising Plan outlines the college's role in making sure students receive accurate and consistent information regardless of how or why they are seeking the educational opportunities Clark College offers. Moreover, the plan outlines the responsibilities of both students and those serving as advisors within the college.

Completion and adoption of the Clark College Advising Plan is expected by June 30, 2010. (Exhibit 4.1)

### **Advising Educational Plans**

In June 2009, advisors were directed to create educational plans for the degree-seeking students they advise. Each educational plan lists the student's identification information, the advisor who assisted in its creation, and the program the student intends to complete. Each plan also provides space for students to record data for nine quarters of classes. The advisor works with students to enter the necessary classes by quarter to complete their educational goals at Clark College.

Advisors who meet with degree-seeking students either create an educational plan or update the educational plan located in a common directory. The common directory allows all advisors

to access each student's worksheet and educational plan as they work with students. Although faculty advisors have not been connected to the common directory yet, the goal is to provide them with access to the educational plans of all students. The educational plan process provides continuity in advising information and accountability of the advisor. Since June 2009, more than two thousand educational plans have been developed for students. (Appendix 4.2)

### **Degree and Certificate Worksheet Taskforce**

In September 2009, a group of advisors from the Advising Department were tasked with creating worksheets for all degree and certificates offered by Clark College. The worksheets identify the distribution areas and total credits required for each area within each degree and certificate. When the advisor meets with the student, he or she fills in the courses completed within each distribution area of degree or certificate. Advisors have lists of eligible courses for each distribution area to help the student choose appropriate coursework. In addition, advisors utilize the digital direct transfer agreement worksheets to further identify required courses within the distribution areas.

These worksheets, coupled with the educational plan, are expected to be a valuable advising tool that will assist advisors with accuracy and consistency of information. The worksheets have been created and are currently being proofread. Advisors began to use the worksheets in their visits with students in April 2010. As advisors meet with students, they update the worksheets based on the student's coursework and the worksheets are then saved on the common directory. The common directory allows all advisors to access each student's worksheet and educational plan as they work with students. (Appendix 4.3)

### **AdvisorTrac**

AdvisorTrac is a technology solution purchased by the College to provide further continuity of advising. Historically, advisors have struggled to provide each student with information consistent with his or her previous advising sessions. The current student management system lacks the technology needed to store and track advising notes after student appointments. Moreover, the Advising Department advises such a high volume of students that students cannot see the same advisor, and physical files are not a realistic solution. Therefore, students would frequently see an advisor who might be unaware of the content of the student's previous appointment(s). As a result, a student might get conflicting advisement based on a misunderstanding or miscommunication.

AdvisorTrac is a web-based software program that allows advisors to keep secure notes after advising sessions. These notes are accessible to all advisors at the college. The result will significantly improve consistency, increase accuracy, and produce less confusion for students

working with multiple advisors. Moreover, the Advising Department's front-desk area will use the program to improve efficiency of checking-in students and to provide data needed to plan and predict future advising needs.

Multiple areas in the college will be expected to use AdvisorTrac. The Career and Employment Services Department plans to utilize AdvisorTrac to track students as well as community members who use their services and schedule appointments. It is also anticipated that after the Advising Department integrates the software into their everyday work, faculty advisors throughout the college will be able to use the product.

AdvisorTrac is currently installed in the Advising Department, and staff will receive training at the end of March 2010. Full implementation of AdvisorTrac is expected in April 2010.

### **Advising and Registration Procedures**

As part of the current registration process, an advisor assigns each student a personal identification number (PIN) that is required to register for classes. The assigned PIN ensures that full-time students receive advising. The exceptions to this procedure are part-time students and students who identify as self-advised. These students receive a PIN set as their date of birth. Problems with this procedure identified through student complaints and workload issues are 1) part-time students do not receive accurate and timely advising, 2) advisors cannot effectively advise all students due to the high volume of full-time students, and 3) students may circumvent the process by receiving their PIN after standing in line at registration.

In Fall 2009, a PIN Taskforce was convened, charged with exploring alternatives, and asked to identify a workable PIN number procedure to ensure effective advisement and enrollment of all students. The taskforce comprised representatives from the Advising Department, Registration, Instruction, Faculty, and Financial Aid. They recommended the changes listed below.

All students will have a registration PIN set as their date of birth. This number does not change from quarter to quarter, except when a student earns credits within the following specific range of credits:

- New students to Clark College
- 24-30 credits
- 54-60 credits
- 94-100 credits
- 114-120 credits
- 134-140 credits
- 154-160 credits
- 180+ credits (each quarter until degree or certificate completion)

When a student falls within one of these credit ranges, he or she will be prompted to contact his or her advisor to receive a random registration PIN. After meeting with an advisor, the random registration PIN is assigned and the student is able to register for classes.

The impact of this change to advisor workload will be significant. During the Winter 2010 registration cycle, 19,855 random PIN's were assigned under the current system. For the same quarter, had the new system been in place, 4,656 random registration PIN's would have been assigned. Under the new system, the random registration PIN process will be activated during the third week of the quarter. This schedule gives students far more time, prior to the upcoming quarter's registration, to meet with an advisor, receive their registration PIN, and be prepared to register for classes online. Students will be notified via student email that they must see an advisor to receive their random registration PIN. At the same time, financial aid will be able to run their progress-toward-degree reports so that students receive notification about both their financial aid mid-program progress as well as their maximum time limitation.

Under the new system, all students, part-time or full-time, will be required to see an advisor at certain points to ensure they take the correct classes. The system produces a workload that is far more manageable because the timeframe for advising is much longer. Students have more time to address the registration/advising requirement and are not forced to see an advisor so close to, or during, their actual registration time. Lastly, it does not prevent a student from seeking additional advising services as needed.

This procedure pertains to students taking classes fall, winter, and spring quarters. All students taking classes in summer quarter will have their date of birth assigned as their registration PIN. Implementation of this new procedure will take place in Fall 2010. (Exhibits 4.2, 4.3)

### **Academic Early Warning**

Academic Early Warning (AEW) is one of the college-wide efforts to improve student retention. Piloted in Fall 2008, the AEW has become an important college-wide tool to alert students when they are not performing well academically in their coursework during the beginning and middle of the quarter. Instructors use the AEW system to get information to students about inadequate academic progress in their class. Instructors identify their perception of what is not going well in the students' performance. The student receives a letter in the mail identifying what the instructor reported. The letter offers the student assistance and recommends he or she work with the instructor to address the issues.

The Retention Advisor receives a report, listing students who have been identified in the AEW system as meeting the criteria for "at risk for academic probation." The report also discloses the information provided by the instructor to the advisor. The advisor phones and emails the students on AEW to invite them for an advising appointment. The advisor works with them to

identify their educational goals and refers them to appropriate college success workshops, tutoring services, and other support services.

## **Conclusion**

The comprehensive system of advising at Clark College has been assessed, evaluated, and improved since October 2008. The college has developed and assessed concrete, integrated, and comprehensive plans to improve the effectiveness of advising and the student experience. Representatives throughout the college have collaborated to design improvement strategies, procedures, processes, and plans that have been implemented or are planned for implementation in the near future. These changes identify the roles and responsibilities of the advisors within different departments and provide tools so that advisors can help students make appropriate decisions concerning their educational goals, academic choices, and career paths.