



ASSESSING EXISTING ACADEMIC ADVISING PRACTICE AGAINST THE NATIONAL DEFINITION OF ADVISING

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A UCDP COLLABORATIVE GRANT: ACADEMIC ADVISING

- Eight institutions working on a national collaborative project on Academic Advising
 - DUT, MUT, NMU, SUN, UCT, UFS, UP, WITS
- Perform a baseline investigation of current institutional Academic Advising
- Expand dedicated institutional capacity for Academic Advising
- Train and develop advisors
- Enable collaborative research on Academic Advising
- Share Academic Advising best practice
- Report and monitor practice
- Participate in a national sharing platform (Academic Advising materials)



THE NATIONAL DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

WHAT: Academic advising is an ongoing and intentional teaching and learning practice that empowers the student in their learning development process to explore and align their personal, academic and career goals.

HOW: It is a shared responsibility between the advisor and advisee that aims to maximise student potential by facilitating conceptual understanding, sharing relevant information, and developing a relationship focussed on promoting academic success.

WHY: The envisaged result is that students have a meaningful academic experience while in higher education and feel a sense of belonging to the institution

AND

To help improve student retention and graduation rates.



A BASELINE INVESTIGATION OF ADVISING PRACTICES: UCT

- Qualitative Methodology
- Semi-structured interviews:
 - 6 Deputy Deans – Undergraduate (faculties) and 2 Careers Advisors (Careers Service)
 - Commerce, Engineering & the Built Environment, Health Sciences, Humanities, Law, Science
- Interviews were transcribed
- Thematic analysis

RESULTS - GENERAL: UCT

- There is no guiding definition of Academic Advising for the institution (for advisors or students)
- There is no messaging from the Executive about the importance of Academic Advising and why it matters to the student experience
- Academic Advising looks and means different things in different faculties
- Academic Advising is approached very differently in different faculties – there is very little commonality
- There is no understanding or promotion of Academic Advising as a shared responsibility
- Academic Advising is not valued by staff because the institution does not recognise it (e.g. in *Ad Hominem* promotions)



RESULTS – MORE SPECIFIC: CAREERS SERVICES

- Managing expectations
- Main role is to provide students with information and context and to help them to take whatever the next step might be
- Main aim is for students to take responsibility for their own decisions
- Careers Service staff often play a referral role

RESULTS – MORE SPECIFIC: FACULTIES

- There are some very dedicated Academic Advisors who have done this work for years
- All faculties do and are very good at prescriptive advising; developmental advising is becoming more of “a thing”
- Large numbers of students in quite a few faculties do not actually seem to know why they are here or what they are doing here (e.g., why this particular major)
- For most faculties, students do not actually know what they need despite being given a lot of information
- Academic Advising is often a reaction to something having gone wrong



ONGOING?

- “Academic Advising really kicks in around Week 6 - after first tests; advising is around whether or not to remain mainstream...”
- Usually “When things go wrong” - to gain exemptions, concessions, credits, or information about these. (SOME) students come when they need it, they don't see it as a general resource.
- “Students do not tend to self-report/seek out advising; they lack the confidence to come forward to say they are struggling.”



EXPLORES AND ALIGNS PERSONAL, ACADEMIC AND CAREER GOALS?

- Only a faculty with more course choice tends to provide “mostly technical curriculum planning” and only structures “career advice at orientation”
- Another faculty has a more set curriculum and so “advisors do a lot of career advising and often “refer to Careers Services”
- Even the most well-structured advising faculty does not provide much advice for “Students who decide to leave the faculty and need about change of direction... Some (staff) doubt as to whether they get good advice elsewhere at UCT.”



EMPOWERS STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

- A lot of Academic Advising actually happens “via the grapevine” ...following up with individuals or departments on what has been learned and trying to determine if there are different ways of doing things
- “So a lot of what actually advising is and has developed as at UCT is absolutely driven by available resources and problems of scale and volume.”
- There is a lot of repetition and redundancy in the system



RESPONSIBILITY SHARED BETWEEN THE ADVISOR AND ADVISEE?

- The Faculty Handbook is the ultimate sources of the rules. But they are notoriously impenetrable documents.
- There is no explicit work done to explain this relationship/shared responsibility to students



MAXIMISES STUDENT POTENTIAL WITH CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND SHARING INFORMATION?

- Advisors may not feel equipped to deal with issues beyond curriculum. Advisors are asked to help with non curriculum issues as much as possible but to refer students according to other needs
- No formal training, one meeting with Dep Dean during which advising role explained.
- No formal training. Before you become convenor, you are a lecturer and a type of sub-convenor. You learn on the job. Large courses, lecturers work in teams under convenor.



CONCLUSION: WHY SHOULD WE BE PAYING ATTENTION?

The vision for Academic Advising at UCT is to:

- Develop a stakeholder-informed strategy to develop Academic Advising at UCT as a high impact practice for the promotion of student success.
- Design Academic Advising as a high impact teaching and learning practice
- Design Academic Advising as a researchable practice that can contribute significantly to the national conversation

RECOMMENDATIONS: THERE IS A LOT OF WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- Invest more (time, money and resources) in staff training around advising and encouraging staff to participate
- Centralize some services
- Greater use of technology
- More engagement with students about advising
- Implement and use monitoring and evaluation systems
- Thought needs to be given as to how to recognise and/or compensate the work of faculty advisors OR fundamentally change the model



(Achieving the Dream, 2017)