

Creating the Case for a New Academic Advising Model at Winona State University: A
Review of the Literature

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The Link between Academic Advising and Retention

“Academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. For this reason, academic advising ... should be viewed as the ‘hub of the wheel’ and not just one of the various isolated services provided for students...academic advisors offer students the personal connection to the institution that the research indicates is vital to student retention and student success” (Nutt, 2003).

The retention literature has long recognized academic advising as one of the three most effective strategies, along with academic support and orientation programs, for improving student success. Although there has not been a direct, causal relationship established between advising practices and retention, good advising promotes many outcomes that are also associated with a high rate of retention, such as student satisfaction, effective academic and career planning, goal setting, familiarity with and use of campus resources and support services, and student/faculty interaction outside the classroom.

Joe Cuseo presents a strong argument for the connection between advising and retention in his manuscript, “Academic Advisement and Student Retention: Empirical

Connections and Systemic Interventions,” first published on the First Year Assessment listserv in 2003. In this document, Cuseo points out that numerous studies have shown that a student’s level of satisfaction with his or her experience in a particular college or university is linked to that student’s likelihood of staying at that institution, and students also report that good advising and contact with their academic advisor is of high value “relative to other student services” (p. 5). Thus it is reasonable to expect that a student who is dissatisfied with the academic advising he or she is receiving may be more likely to leave. In fact, Cuseo reports that a study conducted in 1989 involving a large number of first year students revealed that students who experienced what they reported as “good quality” advising withdrew at much lower rates than those who experienced poor advising or no advising (Metzner, 1989).

In addition to student satisfaction, academic and career planning, as well as goal-setting in general, are expected outcomes of good quality advising. These activities also impact a student’s likelihood of staying in college. Research shows that most students, in fact about 75%, enter college without having made final decisions about majors and careers, because even those who declare a major right away are likely to change that major during their college experience (Cuseo, p. 6). So most students are making these decisions while they are in college, and this exploration can and should be part of the academic advising experience. Since prolonged indecision about a major is associated with a higher rate of student attrition (Astin, 1977), it stands to reason that advising which includes effective academic and career planning can have a positive impact on retention.

Academic advisors are often the source of information about campus resources and support services for their advisees. Good advisors will refer their advisees to specific sources of support when they perceive there is a need for that support. Since the research shows that students who use these services are more likely to persist, this suggests another link between advising and retention. And finally, faculty/student interaction outside of the classroom, which is how the majority of academic advising is delivered, has a very strong correlation to student retention. In fact, based on data from an extensive study involving 200,000 students at over 300 institutions, Alexander Astin concluded that “student faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other variable” (Astin, 1977, p. 233). Frost (1991) agreed with this conclusion, citing numerous other survey results and stating that the faculty/student interaction dimension of advising is particularly important for three reasons: 1) unlike many other student services, advising is experienced by most if not all students in an institution 2) advising provides a natural opportunity for out-of-classroom contact and 3) advising involves intellectual discourse between faculty member and student, which is especially valued by students (p. 10).

In 1994, AASCU (American Association of State Colleges and Universities) published an extensive list of “model” retention practices in place at 76 member institutions. Although the practices varied widely among the participating schools, the majority included some type of academic advising activity among their list of retention practices. Academic advising was one of the most common themes, along with early intervention, involvement of faculty and senior administrators, and required orientation for new and transfer students, that came out of this compilation of model practices.

A comprehensive study of retention practices was conducted by ACT in 2004. The findings are published in a document entitled “What Works in Student Retention: Four Year Public Colleges” (Habley and McClanahan). These findings lend further support to the strong connection between advising and retention. According to this study, academic advising, along with first year programs and learning support services, makes the “greatest contribution to retention in four-year public colleges” (p. 6). Additionally, when retention practices at high-performing (in terms of retention and graduation rates) colleges were compared to those of low-performing colleges, it was found that high-performing colleges provide services that include advising to a much greater extent. Some examples are advising interventions with special populations of students, more advisors, integration of advising with first-year programs, advising centers that include career/life planning, and intrusive advising for students in academic difficulty. Finally, the participants in the survey (all from four-year public colleges) agreed that advising is one of the three most effective retention practices (p.7). The survey concludes that campuses who want to impact retention should focus on the strategies that have been shown to be high impact, value-added interventions, including improved academic advising.

Organizational Models of Academic Advising

An understanding of the basic organizational models that exist is essential to any discussion of academic advising. The organizational model determines how advising services are delivered to students, and these models can vary widely campus to campus.

It is generally accepted that there are three basic types of advising organizational structures: centralized, decentralized, and shared. These types can be imagined on a continuum as shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Academic Advising: Types of Organizational Structures

Within this continuum, there are different delivery methods; generally there are seven delivery models that are recognized as specific structures of academic advising. The seven models all fall within one of the three basic structures. This is shown in Figure 2 below.

Centralized	→	Shared	→	Decentralized
Self-Contained		Supplementary Split Dual Total Intake		Faculty Only Satellite

Figure 2: Academic Advising: Organizational Structures and Delivery Systems

These seven delivery models were first identified by Wes Habley in 1983. Each of these organizational structures and delivery models offers distinct advantages and disadvantages. A description of these models and some of their unique features as described in Pardee’s “Organizational Models for Academic Advising” (2000) follows:

Centralized Model: A centralized advising model is one in which an institution relies on an advising center, usually staffed by a director and professional advisors, to provide all academic advising to students. The *Self-Contained* delivery system is the only specific model that falls within this category. This model offers the advantages of consistent advising, delivered by professional staff that value advising and are trained, recognized, and rewarded for providing quality advising. The services are generally accessible to students and highly visible, usually coming out of one location.

One distinct disadvantage of the Self-Contained model is the cost; advising centers with adequate staff to provide advising to all students are expensive to operate. Additionally, the advantage of students interacting with teaching faculty outside of the classroom is lost in this model. Because of this, there are relatively few institutions using the centralized model in this pure form. Schools that do use this model are largely two-year schools, and only 12% of institutions participating in a national survey on advising used this model (Habley and Morales, eds, 1998). In a study conducted by Winona State University staff member Michael Turgeon, in which he examined the advising practices of 50 colleges and universities in a study of best practices, none were found to have a centralized advising structure.

Shared Model: In a shared model, advising functions are split between department advisors and professional advisors. In the *Supplementary* model, each student is assigned to a departmental advisor, usually a faculty member but sometimes a professional advisor who is part of the department, but there is also a central advising center or office that provides some administrative support for advising. This office may provide some

advisor training and some coordination of the advising process, but generally the office does not have any authority over the advisors and thus there is often a lack of credibility. Another disadvantage to this model is that students in special categories are not treated any differently and thus may not be well served.

In the *Split* model, initial advising of students is split between department advisors and professional advisors in a central advising office. Usually, students who have not declared a major are assigned to the central office, while students with majors are assigned to faculty in that department. The Split model also provides special advising services for identified high-risk groups, such as undecided or underprepared students, which can be one advantage to this model. A potential disadvantage occurs in the transition between the central and the departmental advising, which may not always be smooth, but this can be alleviated by effective coordination and communication between the advising center and the departments.

A third shared model is the *Dual* model. In this model, students actually have two advisors, one from the department of their major (assigned at the time they declare) and one from a central advising office (assigned from first enrollment). Advising duties and functions are split between the two advisors; students see both of them. One disadvantage to this model is the potential for problems in the clear understanding of the roles and duties of the two advisors. There may be overlap or duplication or, worse, gaps in the service provided to students.

The last identified shared model is the *Total Intake* model. This is when all initial advising of students is done in a central advising office, and students are transitioned to a departmental advisor after meeting a certain set of criteria in addition to declaring the

major, such as completing a certain number of credits or meeting general requirements or meeting pre-major requirements. While this model also can create problems for students in the transition between the two service providers, it does offer consistent upfront advising and also recognizes the value of the relationship with the faculty advisor once the student is in the major and has an established foundation.

The greatest challenge with any of these shared models is the difficulty of coordination between the departments and the central advising office. Also, the coordinator or director of the central advising office generally has no say in the selection, supervision, or rewards of department (usually faculty) advisors, and training and support is provided but not always utilized. A shared structure is the most common advising structure in place, with 54% of institutions participating in the national survey reporting the use of this structure (1998). In Turgeon's survey of advising practices, he found that 38 out of 50 schools surveyed were using some type of shared advising structure, with the split model being the most common specific delivery system (2007).

Decentralized Model: In a decentralized organizational structure, all advising services are provided by departmental faculty or staff. There are two very different specific models, however. In the *Faculty Only* model, all advising is done by department faculty in their offices. Students are either assigned to a faculty member in the department of their major or, if they are undeclared, to one of a group of faculty who have been identified or have "volunteered" to provide advising to students without majors. This model offers the advantages of low cost and proximity to department faculty. Some of the disadvantages can include inconsistency in the quality of advising and even in the

information provided by advisors. Usually, faculty providing the advising in this model are not evaluated or rewarded for good advising, and have no incentive for placing special emphasis on this work.

Another decentralized model, the *Satellite* model, provides advising through central advising units located in each department or college within a university. Each of these separate units operates independently and may have different policies and procedures. Some disadvantages of this method include the high cost of operating several different units and difficulties in meeting the needs of the undeclared students and the students changing majors or otherwise in transition. Usually this model does offer the student accessibility and consistency within that area, as the advising is usually provided by professional advisors.

The difficulty of both decentralized models tends to be coordination of advising and consistency for students. Having a completely decentralized system certainly can create problems for students who are experiencing change in their academic and career goals. Also, if there is a coordinator of advising in this system, it is usually a person with multiple responsibilities, who has little or no authority over the advisors providing the advising, and no real way to ensure that advising is done well or in any kind of consistent fashion. Decentralized models are less common in most types of institutions, with only 28% of the 754 institutions participating in the ACT study utilizing this model (1998). Most of those schools were either small, private schools (Faculty Only model) or large four-year institutions with more than 10,000 students (Satellite model). Turgeon identified only twelve examples of decentralized models in the fifty institutions he studied (2007).

Fitting Advising Model to Institution

“From an institutional perspective, academic advising programs and services are second only to the instructional mission in most colleges and universities in their pervasive reach to all students throughout their time at the institution” (Creamer, Creamer, and Brown, 2003).

There are many variables that factor into the question of which advising model is best for a particular institution. Institutional characteristics such as type (two year or four year), governance (public or private), and size are factors (Pardee, 2000). For example, two-year schools are more likely to find centralized systems work best for their populations, while four-year schools usually favor a split or decentralized model. Larger institutions might benefit from satellite models, and very small schools might be able to meet student needs with a faculty only advising system. Other factors such as institutional mission (research or teaching institution), programs (technical, liberal arts, professional), and admission requirements (liberal, traditional, selective) affect the determination of which advising model is best suited for a particular institution. Another important determinant is the amount of resources that a college or university is willing and able to dedicate to academic advising.

Student and faculty characteristics are also factors. The diversity of the student body and whether or not there are significant numbers of nontraditional students, part-time students, and/or distance learners are factors. For example, a faculty only model might work best for a school with a large number of distance learners, or a centralized

model that includes an advising center with hours beyond the traditional school day might work best for a school with a large population of part-time or nontraditional students. If students are primarily residential, that may work well for a satellite model with centers based in the residence halls. Schools with a large number of undeclared students may find a split model, with professional advisors advising undeclared students, is their best fit.

Although studies have been conducted to determine the most effective advising model, there is still no clear conclusion. Effectiveness of any given model will vary depending on institutional context. Assessment results will also vary from the student to the administrative perspective – students have been known to rate a model as very satisfactory while administrators believe that same model is not meeting their needs (Pardee, 2000). Some researchers have claimed that there is an ideal model based on institutional type, but the recommendations vary. Many institutions find that the best model is one that combines the strengths of several different models, uniquely fitted to their own institutional climate, needs, and context.

In spite of the lack of agreement about any one advising model being the most effective, there is general agreement in the literature about the essential elements of an effective advising model. Creamer, Creamer, and Brown postulate that *administrative collaboration*, which they define as “a shared commitment of effort and resources to a common goal that generally requires a high level of interaction,” might be the most important element of an effective organizational advising structure (2000, p. 211). Administrative collaboration requires cross-unit communication and cooperation. Both academic and student affairs must be involved in the collaborative efforts. Valencia

Community College is a good example of a school that has a fully-integrated, collaborative approach to advising, exemplified by their “LifeMap” system of academic planning which is highly visible on their web site as well as on their physical campus (see <http://www.valenciacc.edu/lifemap/>).

Another essential element for an effective organizational structure for academic advising is the presence of a *mission statement* for the academic advising program. Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville has proposed the following mission statement for their advising program:

“Excellent undergraduate education is the first priority of SIUE. In support of that priority, it is the mission of academic advising at SIUE to carefully guide students in formulating educational plans and to assist and support students in achieving their academic, career-related, and personal goals at the University.”
(Academic Advising Task Force Final Report, SIUE, February, 2007)

The advising mission should be consistent with the institution’s mission, and must be made readily available to the persons doing the advising (White, 2000). There should also be a common, shared understanding of the goals and purposes of advising. One way in which campuses promote this is by establishing a campus wide advising council or committee, typically made up of persons who have some responsibility for the delivery of academic advising to various student populations.

Other characteristics of effective organizational structures for academic advising that are frequently mentioned in the literature are listed below:

- Effective use of technology and available technological tools to enhance advising activities
- An advising coordinator who is dedicated to advising and has some authority over advising personnel and practices, and the selection and training of advisors
- A system of recognition and reward for advisors
- Adequate resources devoted to advising
- Evaluation and assessment built into the organizational structure

Definitions of Academic Advising: What is Good Advising?

“Academic advising goes beyond the clerical functions of scheduling classes and preparing degree plans. Good academic advising assists students in clarifying personal and career goals, developing consistent educational goals, and evaluating the progress toward established goals. Academic advising utilizes the resources of the University and refers students to the appropriate academic support services. It is a decision -making process in which the sharing of information between student and advisor promotes responsible and appropriate choices and facilitates a successful academic experience.” Western New Mexico University as retrieved on 05/20/07 <http://www.wnmu.edu/admin/forums/AdvisingTaskForce/01Feb19Minutes.htm>

Historically, academic advising was centered on the activity of helping students select and register for classes. However, beginning in the 1970’s, the theories of student development were linked to academic advising, and developmental advising became the

preferred advising method (Frost, 1991). In a developmental advising framework, advising is considered a form of teaching, advising is seen as an opportunity for helping students to develop and grow, and the responsibility for advising is shared between the student and the advisor.

Related to this movement, definitions of good advising changed. Traditionally, advising was *prescriptive*; it involved students asking questions and advisors supplying the answers. In a prescriptive advising relationship, the advisor is responsible for providing the correct advice to the student; once the advice has been administered, the student is responsible for carrying it out. The emphasis of the advising is curricular, and the goal is to enable students to complete the requirements and earn a degree. With *developmental* advising, the responsibility is gradually shifted from advisor to advisee, and students are prepared for this shift by the advisor. The goal of developmental advising is to prepare students to plan, set goals, and make decisions, and the emphasis is both curricular and extra-curricular (Appleby, 2001).

Cuseo (2003) suggests that good advising is systematic and ongoing, involving a close student-advisor relationship and frequent interactions between the student and the advisor. Good advising involves assisting students in setting and achieving their goals, and should be separated from the registration process – educational planning is the focus, not just scheduling courses, according to Cuseo. He proposes three key advisor roles or functions: 1) Advisor as humanizing agent, whose interaction with students occurs outside the classroom and in an informal setting, so that the student feels comfortable in seeking the advisor out, 2) Advisor as counselor or mentor, who helps guide students through academic policy and procedure, offers advice and listens, and refers them to

support when needed, and 3) Advisor as educator or instructor, who teaches students strategies for success and helps them understand the curriculum, the purpose of their academic program, and encourages problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making (p.13).

These three roles are closely related to Creamer and Scott's (2000) characteristics of effective advising, which are availability, knowledge, and helpfulness. Students most often cite these three characteristics are what they value most in an advisor. Effective advisors must be available and accessible, which may mean the advisor takes the initiative in meeting with the student; they must be knowledgeable enough to help students not just with curriculum and degree requirements but also with broader educational and career planning and personal growth; and they must be helpful and demonstrate an interest in and a concern for their advisees (pp. 339-340).

Much of the literature on advising suggests that *intrusive* advising, in which advisors do not just wait for students to come to them, but rather proactively reach out to advisees to provide support, is part of the definition of good advising. According to Earl (1987), intrusive advising combines the best of traditional or prescriptive advising with the best of developmental advising; students are motivated to do their best when they know that their advisor is likely to contact them. Intrusive advising is especially effective with certain high risk student populations, such as students in academic difficulty, but it has been proven to be effective with traditional students as well (Frost, 1991; Kitchen, 1995). According to Kitchen, effective academic advising provides the following to students:

- Help in clarifying and understanding values and goals
- Help in understanding the nature and purpose of higher education

- Accurate information about academic policies, procedures, and requirements
- Help with educational planning
- Help in monitoring and evaluation progress
- Help in integrating and utilizing institutional resources (p. 136).

Appleby (2001) suggests that the characteristics of effective advisors are the same as the characteristics of effective teachers, which builds on the idea that advising is an extension of teaching. Like effective teachers, effective advisors are well-prepared, are able to engage students, provide feedback, create an environment that is conducive to learning, serve as a resource to students, utilize available technology appropriately, and help students become self-directed.

Cuseo also presents some systematic strategies for enhancing the quality of advising, which offer additional insight into the definition of good advising. These strategies are listed below:

1. Provide strong incentives and rewards for advisors to engage in high quality advising.
2. Strengthen advisor orientation, training, and development, and deliver them as essential components of the institution's faculty/staff development program.
3. Assess and evaluate the quality of academic advisement.
4. Maintain advisee-to-advisor ratios that are small enough to enable delivery of personalized advising.
5. Provide strong incentives for students to meet regularly with their advisors.

6. Identify highly effective advisors and “front load” them – i.e., position them at the front (start) of the college experience to work with first-year students, particularly first-year students who may be “at-risk” for attrition.
7. Include advising effectiveness as one criterion for recruiting and selecting new faculty. (pp. 13-18)

Advising Students in Transition

In the fall of 2006, the second Winona State University Leadership Academy selected the topic of “advising students in transition” as its focus for the semester. The leadership academy participants identified the following five categories of students in transition for their study:

1. Transfer students
2. International students
3. Students on academic probation
4. Students changing majors
5. Non-traditional students.

These groups were selected because they present unique challenges to advisors who are trying to assist them. In a advising model like Winona State has, where faculty provide all of the advising, faculty will often be expected to advise students that fall into these categories as well as students in their majors. Faculty feel under-prepared to do this, because they lack the specific knowledge or skills needed to help these populations. The

result is that students in these categories often feel dissatisfied with the advising they receive, and may be at risk for attrition. Two other categories of students in transition, entering first year students and undecided students, were not addressed by the academy group because Winona State does have a program in place that serves these populations. The following sections will briefly describe some of the special needs and challenges of each of these special populations, along with some recommendations for enhancing advising for these students.

Transfer Students

Transfer students are a growing segment of the student population, both nationally and at Winona State. The gap between two year and four year colleges can create a challenging transition for transfer students; this transition can be eased by effective academic advising. According to Frost (1991), most transfer students already have specific academic and career goals, but need to understand the practical differences between their previous school (often a two-year school where more personal attention may have been available) and the institution they are transferring to. Effective advising techniques with transfer students can include demonstrated interest and concern on the part of the advisor, an orientation to the institution and its resources, and a quick and accurate assessment of the credits being transferred in (Frost, 1991).

Steele and McDonald (2000) identified three stages of transfer – pretransfer, transfer, and posttransfer. The transferring student experiences advising needs at each of these three stages. The first stage is the planning stage, where students may need assistance planning their transfer, which may be done with advisors at the current institution. The middle stage is where cooperation between institutions is very important,

or students may feel like they are without support. Advisors at the new institution are most helpful in the third stage, and it is particularly useful for students to be able to work with an advisor who is familiar with transfer issues.

The Fall 2006 Leadership Academy group at WSU identified specific gaps that transfer students may experience, including lack of advisor knowledge of transfer issues and lack of communication with or accessibility to advisors and/or academic departments, especially during summer months or between academic terms. Recommendations included the following:

- Consider requiring an on campus registration/orientation prior to matriculation.
- Identify a specific “transfer advisor” in each of the colleges and/or programs that students transfer into most frequently.
- Provide resources to enable faculty (or transfer advisors) to be available for advising during breaks and over the summer months. (Leadership Academy Report, WSU, 12/06)

International Students

Another growing population in higher education is the international student. The challenges of advising international students are unique, and many advisors feel ill-equipped to advise these students effectively. Priest and McPhee (2000) list the following as issues that may need to be addressed when advising international students:

- Differences in sex-role expectations and other culture clashes between the student’s native country and the United States
- Homesickness and feeling of isolation and alienation on the part of the student
- Language and communication barriers

- Student focus on necessary financial and legal concerns associated with living in a different country

Through interviews with international students and an analysis of the current processes, the Leadership Academy group identified weaknesses in the advising experience of international students entering Winona State University. Advisors are often unfamiliar with issues particular to international students, and they are unable to answer questions students might have regarding visas and cultural differences. Communication barriers do exist, and advisors and advisee alike feel frustrated by their difficulties in communicating with each other. Additionally, international students' previous educational experience has often not yet been assessed and is not available to the advisor in a way that is understandable to the average faculty advisor. Finally, because international students usually arrive just before the start of the semester, and haven't yet registered for classes, they find that poor class availability also makes advising and registration more challenging.

The Leadership Academy group recommended that Winona State University consider a model similar to the one in place at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse for the advising and registration of new international students. At UW- La Crosse, international students are registered for classes before they arrive on campus. Through email, they communicate with the International Student Office about their course preferences, and that office then registers the student and works with deans and department heads to obtain seats in closed classes when necessary. Upon arrival, the student meets with an advisor in the department of their major to review the schedule and make any necessary adjustments. The advisors they meet with are professional advisors who are trained in

cultural competencies, and are knowledgeable about issues specific to international students.

Students on Academic Probation

In every college and university, some students will fail to meet the academic standards of the institution and be placed on academic warning, probation, or suspension. This may happen for any number of reasons: academic under preparedness, poor study skills and habits, lack of motivation or effort, personal or social difficulties, or poor or inappropriate choice of courses or major, to name a few of the most common. The research shows that once a student is put on notice of academic warning or probation, he or she is unlikely to voluntarily meet with an advisor or seek assistance (Cruise, 2002). Obviously, these students are a high attrition risk, as they may be asked to leave the institution if their grades do not improve, or they may leave on their own in anticipation of this happening.

Research shows that “contact with a significant person” is a deciding factor in whether or not these students stay in school (Heisserer, 2002). Therefore, intrusive advising, which entails the advisor initiating the contact and monitoring the student’s progress, is often recommended for this population. In an intrusive advising situation, the advisor “personally reaches out to students, meets with them, helps them identify the issues and situations contributing to their academic difficulty, helps them set short and long term goals, and guides them through the development of a plan to accomplish their goals which includes advisor-student follow-up” (Higgins, 2003).

The Leadership Academy group identified several problems with Winona State’s current system for the advising of students who have been placed on academic warning.

The first identified problem was that advisors are not adequately informed of their advisee's circumstances and are only involved on a voluntary basis. Students on warning are encouraged but not required to meet with a specially trained faculty member, and their own assigned advisors are only informed if and when such a meeting does take place. Even then, advisors feel that they are not familiar enough with academic probation and suspension policies and procedures to be very helpful. Finally, there is inadequate follow-up with students after the initial meeting and/or with students who do not schedule a probation meeting.

The recommendations from the academy group were as follows:

- Change from a “student-directed” process to an “other-directed” process.
Intrusive advising would be the ideal option.
- Build requirements for student-advisor contact by using registration holds.
- Clarify “paths” in the process by informing and educating students and advisors.
- Build a website for students on probation (and advisors) which clearly shows their options and recommended course of action.

Students Changing Majors

Major changers are a significant portion of the student population today. It is estimated that between 50 and 75% of students will change their major at least once during their college career (Noel, 1985; Cuseo, 2003). Students change their majors for a number of reasons – lack of information, outside influences, developmental issues, and academic difficulties are some of the common ones (Steele and McDonald, 2000).

Sometimes the change is involuntary, when a student is not admitted to the program of

the major that he or she planned to take. This is a frequent occurrence with highly competitive or selective majors.

Advisors of students who are experiencing a change of major are presented with certain challenges. Reynolds (2004) cautions that advisors need to take their time with these students, acknowledging that the change in major may also be the loss of a dream for the student. Advisors working with this population of students should feel comfortable with the expression of feeling, and be able to distinguish between disappointment and depression on the part of the student (Steele and McDonald, 2000). Advisors also need to help the student move forward, by being knowledgeable about alternative majors and career paths, and by being able to help the student start pursuing other options.

At Winona State, the Fall 2006 Leadership Academy group identified some specific problems experienced by students changing majors in regard to the advising they received. Because a WSU student can change his or her major simply by filling out a form, it is possible that a student would go through this change with no advising at all. Contact with the new advisor is not required until the next registration period, and no contact with the old advisor or department is required. Also, since all advising is done by faculty, and most faculty are not knowledgeable about majors in other departments, advisors often are not able to offer helpful advice to their own advisees who may be considering changing their major or may be facing involuntary dismissal or rejection from their chosen major.

The academy group made some recommendations specific to this group, including a change in process that would involve assigning all new majors to a selected

department representative or the department chair, so that a designated advisor with some expertise would be the first advising contact for the new student. The group also recommended better communication between departments by establishing an “advising issues” web link and increased outreach from the University Studies subcommittee to the departments. Another recommendation was to create a standard tracking system to improve the processing of change-of-major requests.

Non-traditional Students

Non-traditional aged, or adult students, are generally defined as those who are twenty-five or older and/or have had some time elapse between high school and college enrollment. The number of non-traditional students in higher education has increased dramatically in the last twenty-five years; they are currently estimated to make up over 42% of the total student population. This number is estimated to go down over the next decade, but non-traditional students will continue to be a significant part of the student population (Steele and McDonald, 2000).

Non-traditional students present some unique challenges to advisors. Most of these students work full or part-time jobs, and it may be difficult for them to access and utilize student services, including advising, during regularly scheduled hours. They are less involved with college life and usually are managing multiple roles – and college student may not be the primary one (Frost, 1991). Their motivation for returning to higher education may have been a life-changing event such as a divorce or job termination, and they may have a history of negative experiences in education (Polson and Vowell, 1995). Advisors must understand the adult student’s unique situation and be available and accessible to be effective. They may also be called upon to act as advocate

for the adult student, for campus services and practices are not always designed with the non-traditional students in mind.

The Leadership Academy group identified problems specific to the non-traditional aged student population at Winona State. First, advisors are not always accessible at times that the student can meet. At Winona State, many of the non-traditional students attend classes at the Rochester campus. For these students, advising is not required, and that policy combined with accessibility issues has led to a situation in which many adult students do not receive any advising at all. Another issue that adult students face is difficulty accessing information about advising and registration, which is largely available on the university's website, due to the fact that they may be less technologically "connected" than traditional, full-time students at WSU, who are required to lease a laptop with software provided by the university. Finally, adult students at WSU have difficulty finding out about and following through with procedures for receiving credit for life experience, due to a lack of available information and staff to guide students through this process.

Recommendations were made by the leadership group to improve the advising experience for non-traditional students. These recommendations are listed below:

- Expand advisor availability for non-traditional students
- Improve the navigability of the WSU website to make information more accessible
- Expand opportunities for students to receive credit for life experience, including an administrative review of the current policies and procedures.

- Reconsider the current policy which allows non-traditional students to register without advisement.

Recommendations for an Enhanced Advising Model at WSU

Making the Case

The goal of the Fall 2006 Leadership Group was to make recommendations that would improve academic advising at Winona State University, especially for the five populations of students identified above. These recommendations were based on analyses of the various advising processes and procedures currently in place at Winona State, examination of some best practices in place at other institutions, selected readings from the literature, and data obtained from conducting student focus groups.

In addition to the recommendations specific to the five populations targeted, this group made several general recommendations that would benefit all students. Many of these recommendations had to do with better equipping faculty to be good academic advisors. At Winona State, the faculty do the great majority of academic advising. This is in line with research that shows both the need and the value of faculty advising (Kramer, 1995). However, for faculty advising to work well, there must be support from administration, faculty, and students, and there must be training, reward, and recognition for faculty who do quality advising. The Leadership Academy group recommended that Winona State find ways to do this, and gave the following specific recommendations:

- Publicize departments/programs that demonstrate excellence in advising
- Work with Student Senate to recognize outstanding faculty advisors

- Manage PDP/PDR (faculty development and promotion) process to reflect the importance of advising

Another general recommendation was the need to identify, train, and support designated advisors, whether professional or faculty, to work with the special populations of students in transition that are described in this paper. Finally, the recommendation was made to utilize technology more effectively by having an advising information website or portal that would be easy to use for persons adding and retrieving information and accessible to all persons providing advisement.

Three individuals from the Fall 2006 Leadership Academy group decided to continue the work of the group through the spring semester, in hopes of fleshing out a more comprehensive recommendation for an enhanced advising model at Winona State. To accomplish this, one member, Rita Rahoi-Gilchrest, conducted focus groups with faculty advisors, asking modified versions of the questions that had been asked of the student focus groups in the fall. Her findings bear out two of the conclusions already offered in this paper. First, faculty at WSU do feel some ownership of advising, especially with students in their majors, and want to continue to be involved in the advising process. Second, faculty feel that they need more support, in the way of training, information, and resources, to do a good job of advising students.

Mike Turgeon, another of the three individuals, conducted an extensive “best practice” review of fifty different universities and their advising policies and procedures. He concluded from his study that Winona State is in the minority of institutions that do not have at least some support from professional advisors. Winona State has a shared, supplementary model, which means that all students, included undeclared, are assigned to

a faculty member for advising. There is some support in the way of coordination from the Advising and Retention Office, but there are no full-time professional advisors in this center, and this center also has a multitude of other responsibilities besides academic advising. While the shared model is quite common in universities like Winona State, there is most often a shared, split model, in which professional advisors are utilized for some populations of students, and there is an advising center which houses these professional advisors and provides support for faculty advisors as well. Turgeon's conclusion from his study was that Winona State could see an impact in retention from an investment in a true advising center.

The third individual, Barbara Oertel, conducted a more extensive literature review of advising theories, models, and proven effectiveness. The results of that review are presented in this paper. The following proposed model combines the work of the Fall 2006 Leadership Academy and the findings of the three individuals who continued the work of the group.

The Winona State Model

Winona State would benefit from moving from a shared, supplementary model to a shared, split model of academic advising. To accomplish this, additional resources would need to be invested in advising. Since Winona State's retention rate is currently slightly below the average for an institution of our type, it is quite likely that the investment in advising could be made up in increased revenues from increased retention. Cuseo estimates that retention efforts are likely to be 3-5 times more cost effective than additional recruitment efforts (2003). Mike Turgeon concluded in his report that Winona State would receive approximately \$145,600 annually in additional revenue with each

percentage point of increased freshman to sophomore retention. Additional resources would be needed to hire three professional advisors and provide release time for designated faculty to act as advising representatives for their departments or colleges. Other resources may need to be reallocated as well, such as IT resources, to bring this model to fruition. The result would be improved academic advising for Winona State students, which would lead to improved student satisfaction and increased retention and graduation rates. Below are the specific recommendations:

1. Hire three professional advisors to provide advisement to targeted student groups. Each of the three advisors would specialize in one of the following populations: adult students, students in academic difficulty, and transfer students. All of the three would work with undecided students and students transitioning between majors as well. These advisors could be housed in the Advising and Retention Center and could report to the Advising and Retention Director.
2. Designate a faculty member as the advising representative for each college and also each department with a certain designated number of advisees (300 or more?). While all department faculty would continue to have advising responsibilities, this designated advising representative would receive release time to coordinate the responsibilities of major advising within his or her college or department and to serve as a resource to the other faculty advisors.
3. The director and professional advisors from the Advising and Retention Center would work with the designated advising coordinators to plan and implement faculty training and build in systems of evaluation, recognition, and reward for academic advising. These individuals would make up a functional Advising

Council, which would be responsible for determining advising policies and practices for the university, and for creating a mission statement for academic advising at Winona State.

4. The director and professional advisors from the Advising and Retention Center would work with the International Student Office and the Admissions and Registrars' Offices to develop an improved initial advising/registration experience for students. Training would be developed and offered by the International Student Office to advisors who work with international students.
5. Allocate resources from IT to build a functional, easily accessible website or portal site that can be used by faculty advisors to post and retrieve advising information.

The recommendations above are designed to be implemented together. In the model described above, faculty would continue to play a pivotal role in advising, while professional advisors would be able to provide the intrusive advising and other special support needed to effectively work with students in transition. By specializing in one area, the professionals would be able to build the networks of support appropriate to the particular population they are working with, for example, the transfer advisor would work closely with the admissions office and the departments that receive most transfer students. The designated faculty coordinators would provide a reliable link and enhance communication between the professional advising center and the academic departments. Their input into designing faculty training and reward systems would be invaluable and essential in carrying this out effectively. Improved communication and information sharing would also be achieved by the implementation of the website or portal site

devoted to advising. All of these changes would contribute to a more coherent and collaborative system of delivering academic advising to students at Winona State University.

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