

ASSESSING THE  
ADVISING LANDSCAPE

**HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY**

EVALUATION BY – SOCIOLOGY 590: PRACTICING SOCIOLOGY



# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This report is based on research completed during the Fall 2016 semester by the students enrolled in the Sociology 590: Practicing Sociology graduate course at Humboldt State University. The course was taught by Dr. Meredith Williams. The study was conducted in cooperation with Dr. Kathy Thornhill, Director of Undergraduate Advising, Career Services, and Community Based Learning. The study also received guidance from Angela Rich, Research Analyst for the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The goal of the research was twofold: first, to give graduate students the chance to gain hands-on experience a large-scale, meaningful research project. Second, to provide a snapshot of current advising practices at Humboldt State University to the campus community, comparing the findings to national best practices. Ideally, these findings will give HSU opportunities to be reflective, and assess the current state of policies and procedures around academic advising, to best support our student success goals and university mission.

The research team consisted of twelve graduate students:

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The research team would like to thank Dr. Kathy Thornhill for all of her insight, and the obvious care for student success with which she approached this project, and approaches academic advising broadly. We would also like to thank Angela Rich for her research abilities, pushing us to measure what we want to measure. A special thank you to Janae Teal for analysis, formatting and data visualization for this report. We would like to thank the Provost, Alex Enyedi, for supporting the study by communicating with the campus community on our behalf. We would also like to thank Gay Hylton with her help compiling the survey population, and Jess Rodriguez-Garcia for designing the study logo. Thank you to Dr. Steve Martin, who generously shared the data he and the Department of Environmental Science and Management have collected on their academic advising, and to Dr. Steven Hackett who shared the report he created, studying the academic advising practices in the College of Professional Studies with Anna Thaler Petersen and Patrick Penelli.

Thank you to all of the faculty and professional advisors that so thoughtfully shared your time and stories with us. Thank you for all you do to support students at Humboldt State University.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coordinated, focused academic advising makes a difference in the engagement and retention of college students (Campbell and Nutt 2008; Tinto 1999). High quality academic advising is a critical strategy for increasing the retention and satisfaction of students (for a review, see Swecker, Fifolt and Searby 2013). Strong academic advising also signals the commitment of an institution to its students' education (Tinto 1999). National organizations such as the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), and a growing collection of scholarship, have outlined several best practices for ensuring focused and effective academic advising practices to support student success.

***“Good advising might be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (Light 2001:81).***

In the Fall 2016 semester, 12 graduate students in the Sociology master's degree program studied advising at Humboldt State University to compare current campus advising ideologies and practices with national best practices, gleaned from NACADA and a review of literature on advising best practices. Using focus groups, interviews and a survey of faculty and professional advisors<sup>1</sup>, the student researchers explored the advising landscape at Humboldt State University. Our key findings include:

- Being effective academic advisors is important to faculty and professional advisors. There are many people on campus who are very engaged with advising as a mechanism to support students.
- Faculty advisors both define and practice advising differently than professional advisors. For faculty advisors, advising is based primarily on helping students register for major courses. Professional advisors embrace a more robust mentorship role as advisors.
- Professional advisors report practices that closely align with national best practices.
- Overall, there is a lot of inconsistency across campus, when it comes to academic advising. At the university level, there seems to be little or no accountability, no clear vision, and inadequate training for faculty advisors. Given the importance of academic advising for retention and student success, this should be a priority for Humboldt State University.

More about the study, and a more robust exploration of the findings, can be found in the rest of this report. It is our hope that this research can help HSU get closer to national best practices in its advising, to support student learning, to show our students we value their learning experience, and to support Humboldt State University's Strategic Plan and the California State University System's 2025 Graduation Initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Professional Advisors are staff whose primary duties are academic advising. This includes advisors in the Academic and Career Advising Center (ACAC), the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the Indian Teacher and Educational Personnel Program (ITEPP).

## **METHODS & RESPONDENTS**

The research team invited professional and faculty advisors to participate in the study in three ways: being in either one of four focus groups (90 minutes) or being individually interviewed (approximately 60 minutes), and taking a survey of 35 questions. All three parts of the study took place during the Fall 2016 semester. Questions were written by the student researchers, and interviews and focus groups were conducted by student researchers.

It is important to note that respondents are not necessarily representative of all faculty or professional advisors; it may be the advisors who are most engaged with the role were more likely to volunteer to participate. Overall, respondents (especially those in the focus groups and interviews) reported a high level of enjoyment with, and care for, academic advising. Generally, they reported feeling advising was important to student success, which aligns with best practice research on academic advising. Their perspectives may not always, therefore, represent the feelings of all faculty or professional advisors. Still, this study gave unique and intimate insight into currently used processes and ideologies across the HSU campus, from 38 departments and programs.

### **FOCUS GROUP**

#### **RESPONDENTS (N = 19)**

There were a total of four focus groups held with 19 respondents. Three of the focus groups consisted of faculty advisors (10 participants), and the other focus group was for professional advisors (9 participants). To maintain the confidentiality of the small group of respondents, we did not collect demographic information. One of the focus groups was a group of faculty from the same department. That department is heavily invested in advising, therefore, the results in this report reflect that high level of engagement, and the cluster of respondents in one college.

### **INTERVIEWS**

#### **RESPONDENTS (N = 16)**

The research team conducted 16 one-on-one semi structured interviews with faculty (12) and professional (4) advisors on campus. Of the 12 faculty advisors, seven were from the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, three were from the College of Professional Studies, and two were from the College of Natural Resources and Sciences. To maintain the confidentiality of the small group of respondents, we are not reporting demographic information in this report.



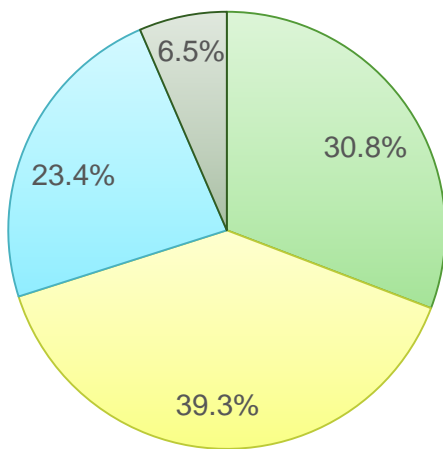
# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## SURVEY

### RESPONDENTS (N = 112)

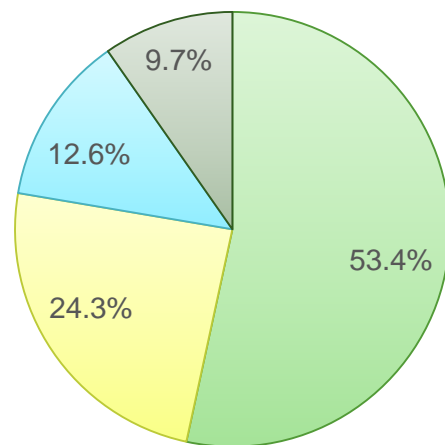
In addition to participating in an interview or focus group, faculty and professional advisors were invited to participate in a survey. 276 were invited, and 112 participated, for a 40.6% response rate. Participants closely aligned with the demographics of the institution, in terms of college: 33.6% of the survey population was in CAHSS, 24.7% in CPS, 36.2% in CNRS and 5.5% were professional advisors.

Respondent's College



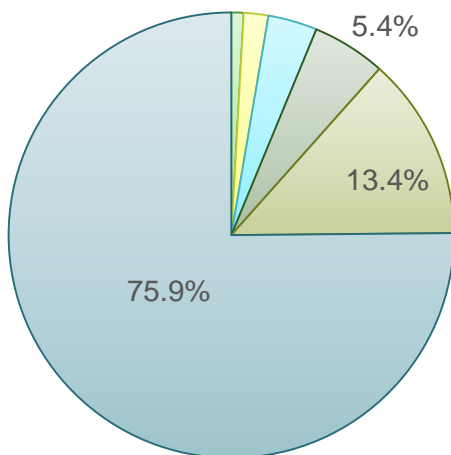
■ CAHSS ■ CNRS ■ CPS ■ Professional

Respondent's Position



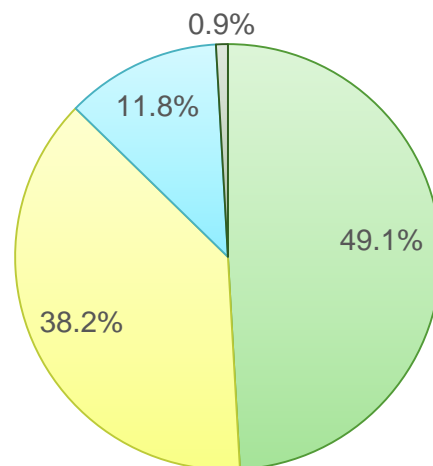
■ Tenured Faculty ■ Untenured Faculty  
■ Lecturer ■ Professional Advisor

Respondent's Race



■ Black ■ Other  
■ American Indian ■ Asian  
■ No Answer ■ White

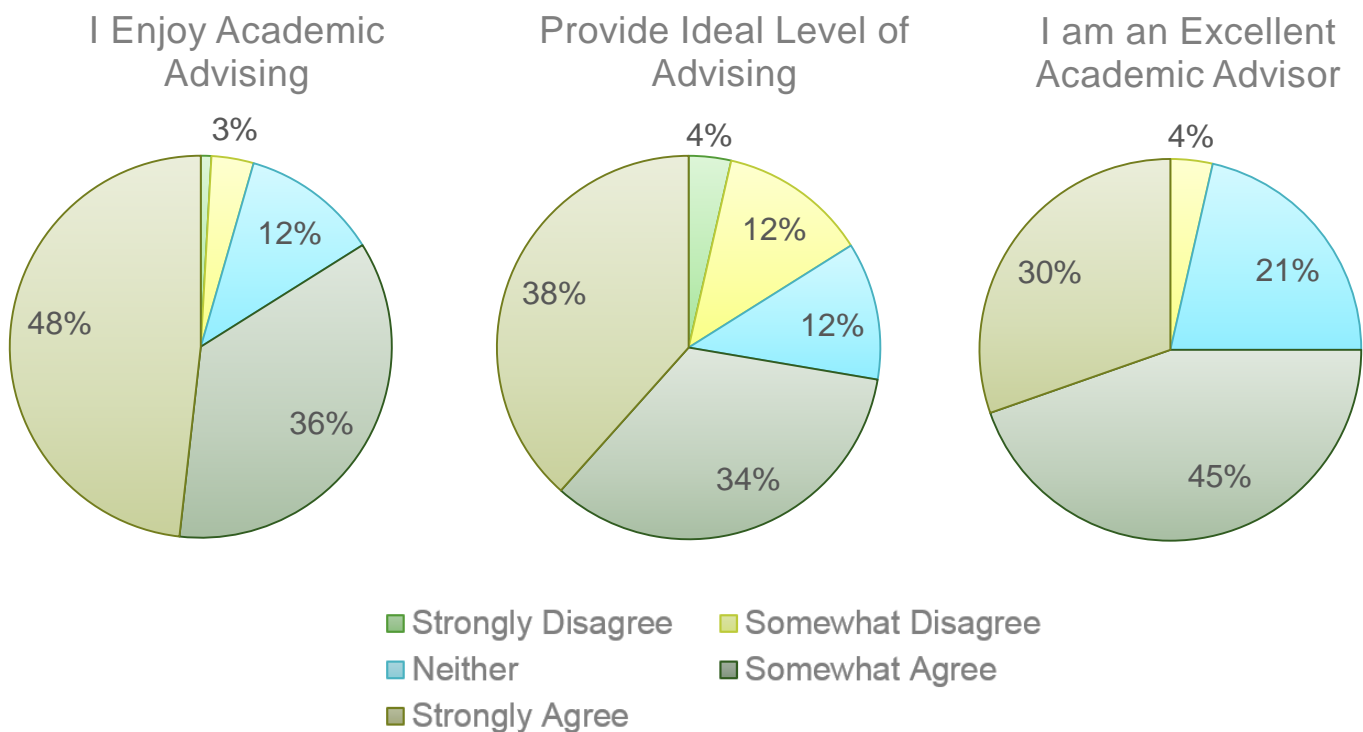
Respondent's Gender



■ Female ■ Male  
■ No Answer ■ Transgender

## INTRODUCTION

The faculty and professional advisors at Humboldt State University believe in academic advising, and they enjoy doing it (nearly half “strongly agree” they enjoy academic advising). Fewer advisors (38%) strongly agree they are providing an ideal level of advising, and even fewer (30%) strongly agree they are an excellent academic advisor. Between the survey, focus groups and interviews, it was clear that faculty and professional advisors understand the value of advising, but they are not always consistent in their delivery, and they do not always feel like they have sufficient training and/or resources. Few faculty advisors are able to prioritize academic advising to the extent that they keep up on national best practices, but utilize their years of experience with teaching and mentoring students to try to be effective advisors.



In this section of the report, we will compare national best practices to current HSU procedures and processes, first at the level of programs, then at the level of individual advisors.

## FINDINGS BY BEST PRACTICES

### **PROGRAM LEVEL BEST PRACTICES**

With all three research methods, faculty and professional advisors were asked about their knowledge of policies and procedures at the level of their department/program and the university. Advisor responses were compared to best practices at the program level. To maintain a cogent study, not all components of each best practice were probed; future research should ask more about specific concepts.

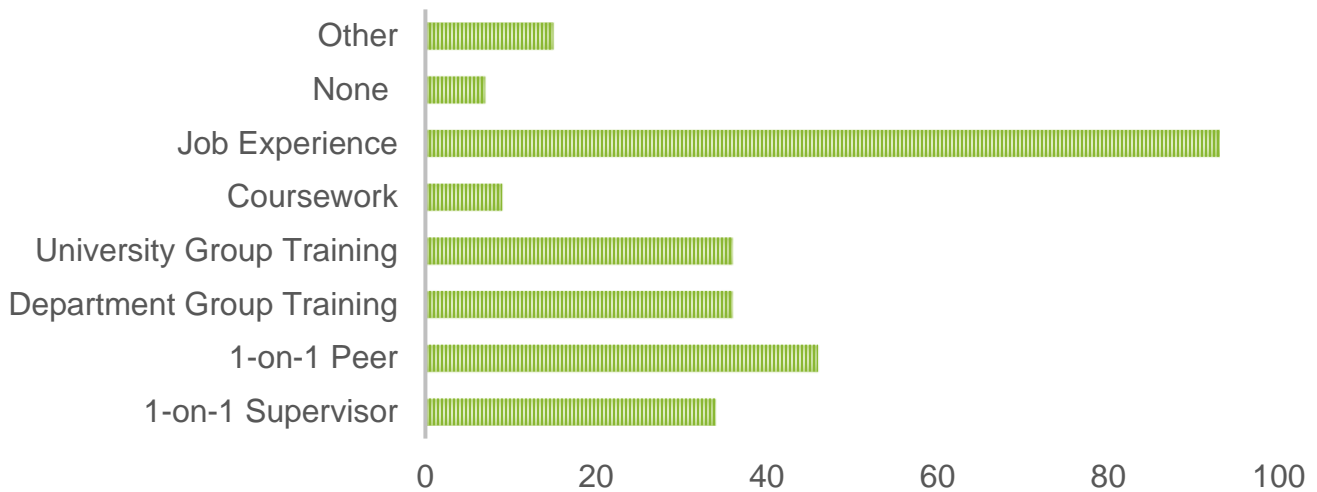


# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## TRAINING AND ORIENTATIONS

**Best Practice:** Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities and resources to advisors (Education Advisory Board 2015).

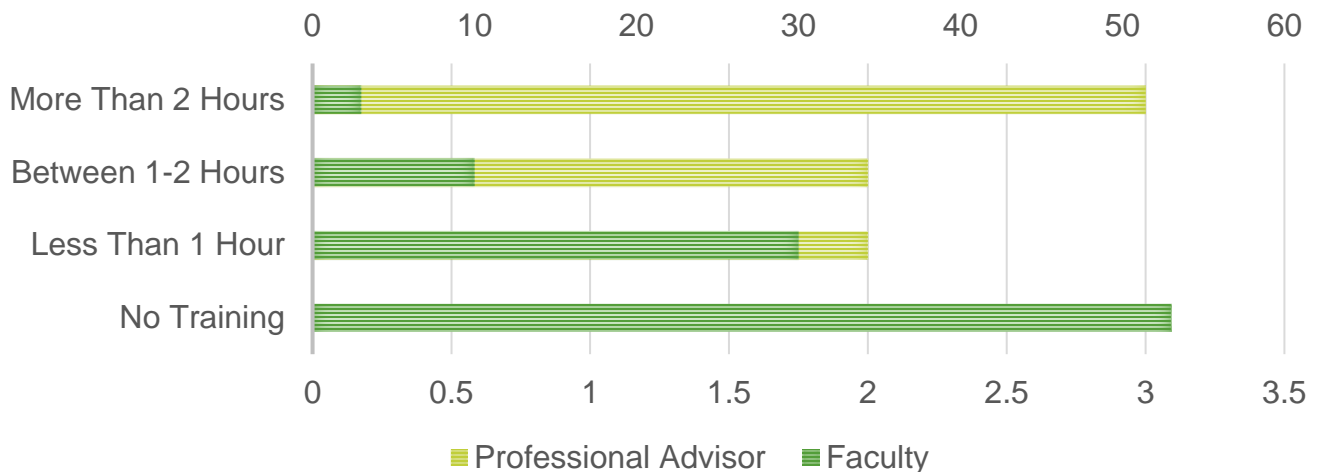
### TRAINING COMPLETED AT HSU (N=112)



#### Current HSU Practices:

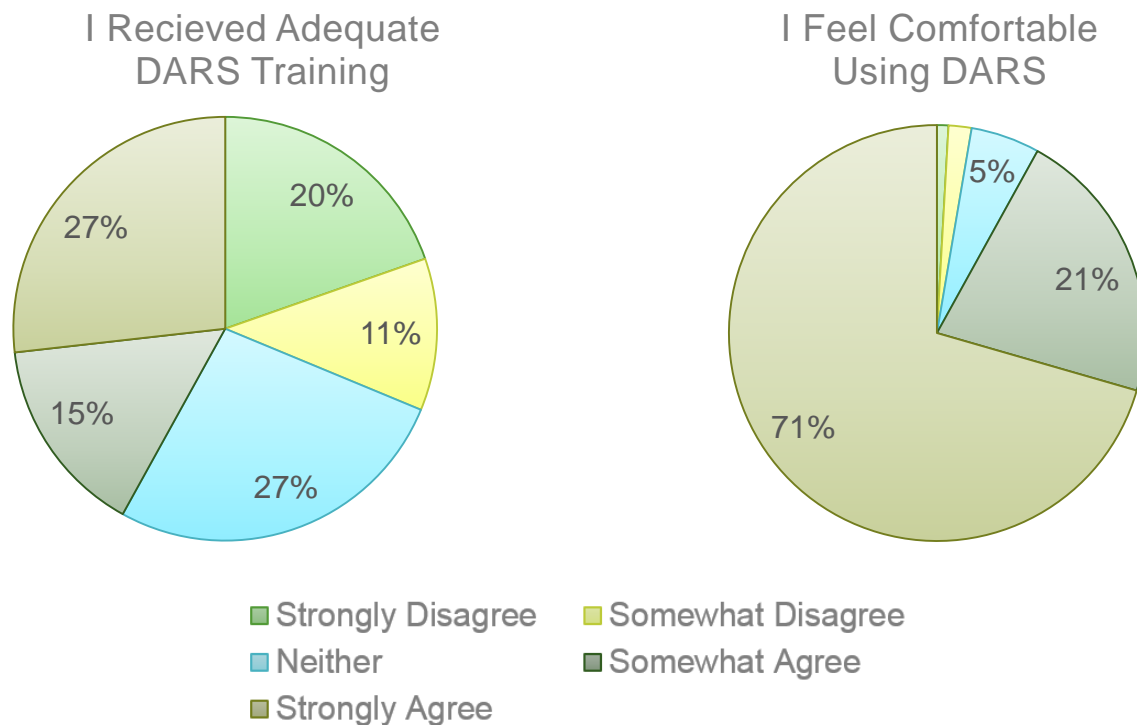
- In the survey, respondents were asked what training they had completed at HSU. They were asked to select all that apply, so figures do not add up to 100%. The majority of professional and faculty advisors reported they received training on the job (93, or 83%). About two out of five respondents (46 or 41%) received one-on-one training from a peer, and 34 (30%) received one-on-one training with a supervisor.

### DARS TRAINING RECEIVED (N=103)





- 103 of the survey respondents (96 faculty, 7 professional advisors) answered a question about receiving training with DARS. Comparing professional to faculty advisors, over half (53 or 55%) of faculty reported no DARS training, and about another third (31% or 30 respondents) reported less than one hour. Three of the professional advisors (43%) reported over two hours.
- Only about one-quarter of respondents (27%) strongly agree they received enough DARS training, and one-fifth (20%) strongly disagree. Over 70% of respondents reported feeling comfortable using DARS.

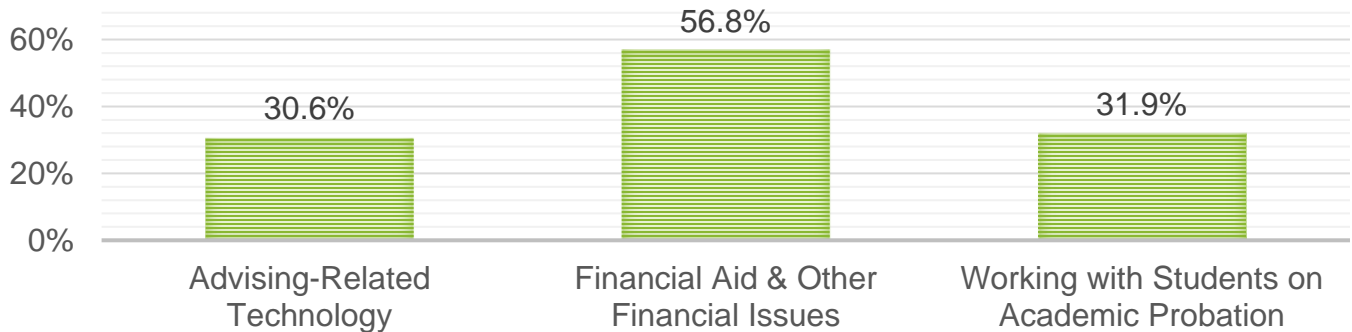


- In focus groups and interviews, faculty advisors reported little or no training on how to be an academic advisor. Most reported the bulk of their training to be self-initiated. Overall, they expressed feeling undertrained and underprepared for advising. Some faculty reached out to professional advisors or peers for training or help with advising questions. Many faculty reported wanting more support and training for advising.
- Professional advisors, in focus groups and interviews, reported receiving training before their time at HSU, plus shadowing and mentorship with advisors on campus. They also reported receiving advising best practice literature as a packet from NACADA.
- Over 40 percent of faculty advisors did not report feeling comfortable with financial aid guidelines, compared to 80 percent of professional advisors. More professional advisors also reported comfort with advising hold policies and who to contact with questions.
- Respondents were also asked in which areas of academic advising they would like more support. Top answers, by college and professional advisors, are outlined below.

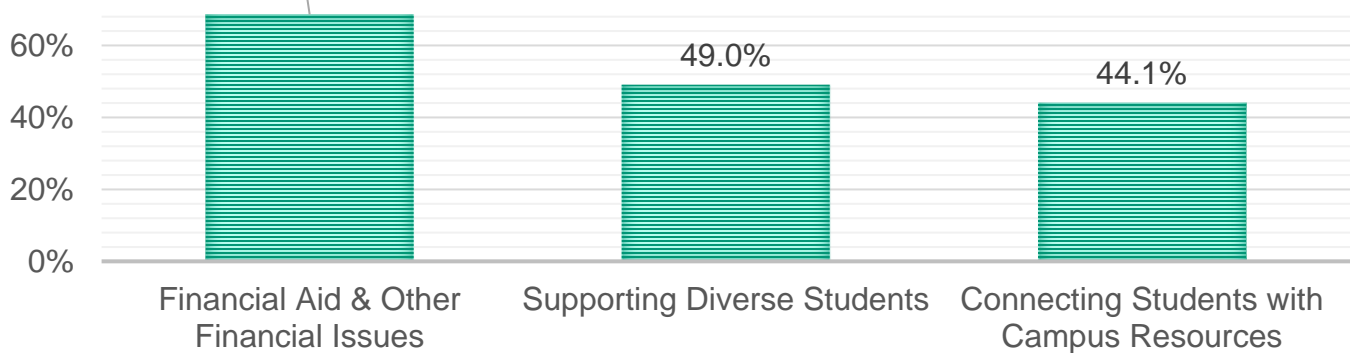


# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

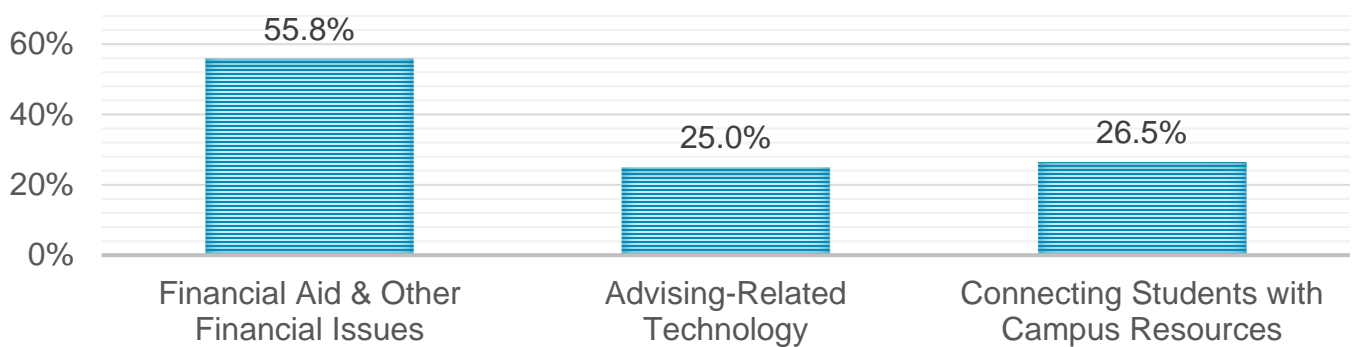
## ARTS, HUMANITIES, & SOCIAL SCIENCES



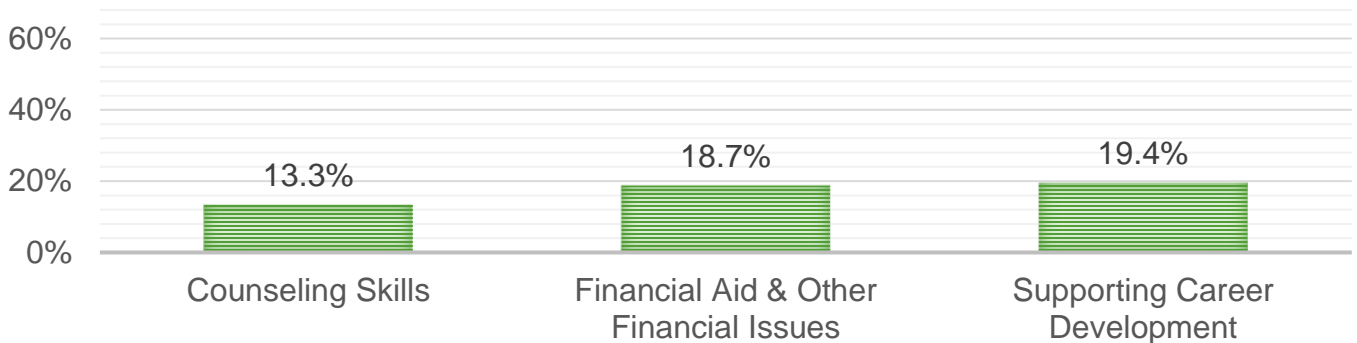
## NATURAL RESOURCES & SCIENCES



## PROFESSIONAL STUDIES



## PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS





# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## COMMUNICATION

**Best Practice:** Maintaining regular contact with all advisees.

**Current HSU Practices:** In the focus groups, both faculty and professional academic advisors reported primarily using email to maintain contact with their advisees. Three advisors reported using text messaging, while two reported using Facebook as a method of communication.

- 68% of survey respondents reported their program or department has no expectation for the number of times they communicate with each advisee per semester.
- About two-thirds of the faculty advisors from CAHSS, 70% of CNRS faculty advisors and half of CPS faculty advisors email with their advisees one or two times per semester on average. More than half of professional advisors email with their advisees more than five times per semester on average.
- In interviews, most advisors (faculty and professional) reported seeing their students more than once a semester, especially if they are struggling academically or personally.

**On average, how often do you communicate with each of your advisees over email per semester?**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
1-2 times	67.7%	71.8%	50.0%	14.3%
3-4 times	32.3%	20.5%	33.3%	28.6%
5+ times	0.0%	7.7%	16.7%	57.1%

## ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY

**Best Practice:** Advisors should interact with students outside the classroom, informally, frequently, and on a long-term basis (Cuseo 2003).

**Current HSU Practices:** In interviews and focus groups, faculty advisors reported being available, with open doors, especially during registration season. Professional advisors reported open doors throughout the semester.

*“I will bend over 40 times backwards and do flip-flops if you keep me in the loop and I can help you. I want to help you. But I cannot help you if I do not know.”  
(faculty advisor, interview)*

**Outside of registration season, how many hours do you spend on academic advising each week, on average?<sup>2</sup>**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS
< 1 hour per week	32.7%	23.1%	20.8%
1-4 hours per week	67.7%	66.7%	41.7%
5-9 hours per week	0.0%	7.7%	20.8%
10-15 hours per week	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%
15+ hours per week	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%

**How many hours total do you spend on academic advising each semester, on average?**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS
> 10 hours per semester	9.7%	7.7%	0.0%
10-20 hours per semester	32.3%	12.8%	12.5%
21-30 hours per semester	22.6%	28.2%	12.5%
31-40 hours per semester	12.9%	23.1%	20.8%
31-50 hours per semester	12.9%	10.3%	12.5%
50 + hours per semester	9.7%	15.4%	37.5%

<sup>2</sup> We did not ask professional advisors this question, as advising is their primary job duty.



# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## MISSION AND OUTCOMES

**Best Practice:** Develop (collectively) and widely share a mission for academic advising that connects to the teaching and learning mission of the institution. In that process, identify clear outcomes for student learning, and for the delivery of academic advising (Campbell and Nutt 2008).

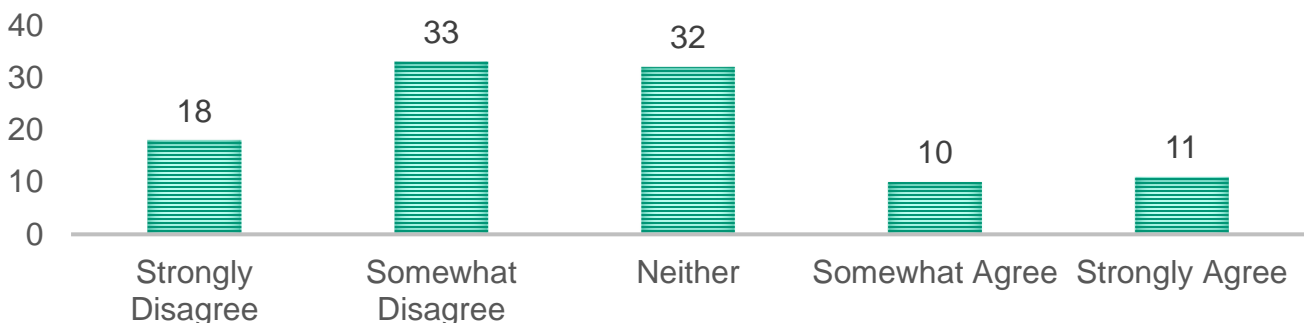
**Current HSU Practices:** In the survey, respondents were asked if their department or program has a clear vision of advising, then they were asked if the university has clear vision for academic advising (see below). The chart for program vision is broken down by faculty and professional advisors; the chart for university vision displays all respondents together.

### My department/program has a clear vision for how we handle student advising

	Faculty	Professional	Combined
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	7.2%	0.0%	6.7%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	12.4%	0.0%	11.4%
<b>Neither</b>	20.6%	0.0%	19.1%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	27.84%	37.5%	28.6%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	31.96%	62.5%	34.3%

- All seven professional advisors in the survey strongly/somewhat agree their program or department has a clear vision for academic advising. For faculty advisors, about 60% somewhat or strongly agree, and about one-fifth (19%) somewhat or strongly disagree.

### UNIVERSITY VISION (N=104)



- In focus groups, advisors reported there was variation in ideas about what constitutes good advising, based on department or program, without much consistency. No respondents reported the university having a clear vision for advising. Few reported a vision at the department or program level, though several faculty advisors reported having informal discussions and norming as a department/program.
- More than 90 percent of the faculty advisors for CAHSS and CPS, and about 80 percent of the CNRS advisors, agreed they were familiar with departmental advising requirements. All 100 percent of the professional advisors agreed.

**I am familiar with departmental/program advising requirements.**

	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	3.2%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	0.0%	10.3%	4.2%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	3.2%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	12.9%	20.5%	29.2%	57.1%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	80.7%	59.0%	66.7%	42.9%

**I am familiar with university advising requirements.**

	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	6.7%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	3.3%	10.3%	16.7%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	13.3%	12.8%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	30.0%	23.1%	41.7%	42.9%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	46.7%	46.2%	41.7%	57.1%

## DEFINITIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

**Best Practice:** Academic Advising is a student and an academic advisor establishing a relationship to facilitate decision making, resource identification, problem solving, and goal setting in the advisee's personal, professional and academic endeavors (National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) 2003).

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In the focus groups, professional and faculty advisors expressed their definitions of academic advising.
- **Professional Advisors:**
  - *Roles:* teacher, mentor, counselor, cheerleader, coach, facilitator, advocate
  - *Duties:* Providing a framework for students to understand university norms; helping students find classes; help students to feel like they belong; providing a holistic college experience; help students with personal issues; help students navigate a college system built on privilege.
- **Faculty Advisors:**
  - *Roles:* mentor
  - *Duties:* Help with scheduling, help with classes, help with major contracts, help with four-year plans, help with requirements; direct students to resources; connect students with internships or jobs; help students take ownership of progress; help guide students through systems; help students identify skills; prepare students for a career; help students register; learn aspirations, skills, abilities and interests of students; help with problem solving.
  - Some faculty advisors reported a difference between advising and mentorship. Advising involved helping students organize and sign up for classes, and working on major contracts. Other conversations, like career advising or personal support, was different from advising, and not limited to their formal advisees only. Faculty reported those conversations with many other students outside of their official caseload.
  - Some faculty advisors articulated not wanting to push their advisees too hard, or that it was better to wait for students to be open with their needs; professional advisors often mentioned it was their role to push. Overall, professional advisors reported utilizing a more intrusive style of advising.





# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## INCENTIVES AND REWARDS

**Best Practice:** Develop campus programs and structures that recognize the value of academic advising and reward academic advisors for their contributions (Campbell and Nutt 2008).

**Current HSU Practices:** According to the survey, most faculty advisors and professional advisors agree they are receiving incentives to be an excellent academic advisor from the level of their department or program. When asked about the university level, however, most faculty advisors disagree the university provides such incentives.

**My department provides incentives to be an excellent academic advisor.**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	6.7%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	3.3%	10.3%	16.7%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	13.3%	12.8%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	30.0%	23.1%	41.7%	42.9%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	46.7%	46.2%	41.7%	57.1%

**The university provides incentives to be an excellent academic advisor.**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	48.2%	40.0%	60.9%	42.9%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	33.3%	31.4%	21.7%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	14.8%	22.9%	13.0%	42.9%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	3.7%	5.7%	4.4%	14.3%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%



## ASSESSMENT OF ADVISING

**Best Practice:** Design systemic and systematic processes of assessment to inform and support changes in philosophy and practice (Campbell and Nutt 2008).

**Best Practice:** Assessments should take place at multiple levels, including student assessment of academic advisors, advisor assessment of the advising program, advisor self-assessment, peer assessment of advising, and assessment of advising by the program director (Szymanska 2011).

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- Some areas of campus evaluate their own advising practices. For example, the College of Professional Studies conducted a robust study of their college's advising practices in 2013. The Department of Environmental Science and Management has been surveying their students to evaluate their advising practices for more than five years.
- In the interviews, faculty advisors reported no formal feedback was given by the university, or by their departments. Some faculty reported informal feedback and acknowledgement amongst each other, within the department.
- In the survey, advisors were asked if they receive feedback on their advising from students, peers and/or their chair or supervisor. See tables below.
  - Students: Faculty advisors in CAHSS (32.1%) and CPS (39.1%) somewhat agree they receive feedback from students. CNRS faculty are split, with one-third somewhat agreeing and one-third somewhat disagreeing they receive feedback from students. 43% of professional advisors strongly agree.
  - Peers: About one-quarter of CAHSS and CPS faculty advisors somewhat or strongly agree they receive feedback from peers, compared to just over 10% of faculty advisors from CNRS.
  - Chair/Supervisor: Professional advisors were the group most likely to agree they receive feedback from their chair or supervisor. More than 85% somewhat or strongly agreed, compared to less than 40% of CPS advisors, less than 20% of CAHSS advisors, and less than 10% of CNRS advisors.



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I receive feedback from...

<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	14.3%	8.3%	8.7%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	25.0%	33.3%	17.4%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	3.6%	13.9%	21.7%	28.6%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	32.1%	33.3%	39.1%	28.6%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	25.0%	11.1%	13.0%	42.9%

<b>PEERS</b>	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	38.7%	44.7%	20.8%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	9.7%	15.8%	16.7%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	25.8%	29.0%	37.5%	42.9%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	19.4%	7.9%	20.8%	14.3%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	6.5%	2.6%	4.2%	42.9%

<b>CHAIR/SUPER</b>	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	45.2%	42.1%	25.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	12.9%	31.6%	8.3%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	22.6%	18.4%	29.2%	14.3%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	12.9%	5.3%	37.5%	57.1%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	6.5%	2.6%	0.0%	28.6%

## ADVISOR LEVEL BEST PRACTICES

In this section, we explore academic advising best practices at the level of individual advisors.

### ADVISEE CONTACT

**Best Practice:** Maintaining regular contact with all advisees, scheduling regular (1/semester minimum) meetings, or more frequent meetings, if students are struggling (NACADA).

#### Current HSU Practices:

- Nearly two-thirds (62.5%) of survey respondents reported meeting 1-2 times per semester with each of their advisees. One in ten (10.7%) respondents reported meeting more than five times per semester, on average, with each advisee.
- According to focus groups and interviews, the amount of contacts by email, and the number of meetings, varied based on student needs. One difference was professional advisors expressed reaching out more proactively, while faculty generally felt the impetus to reach out was on the student.
- In the focus groups and interviews, faculty advisors expressed concern that group advising meetings were insufficient for keeping regular contact, and properly advising, their students.

**On average, how often do you communicate with each of your advisees over email per semester?**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>1 – 2 times</b>	67.7%	71.8%	50.0%	14.3%
<b>3 – 4 times</b>	32.3%	20.5%	33.3%	28.6%
<b>5 + times</b>	0.0%	7.7%	16.2%	57.1%

**Does your department/program do group advising?**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>Yes, every semester</b>	64.5%	28.2%	45.8%	42.9%
<b>Yes, some semesters</b>	22.6%	28.2%	16.7%	14.3%
<b>No</b>	12.9%	43.6%	37.5%	42.9%



# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

**Best Practice:** Establish positive relationships by (1) being able to call them by name; (2) educating students about the roles and responsibilities of both the advisor and advisee; (3) maintaining up-to-date advising notes; (4) showing personal interest in students’ lives.

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In focus groups, faculty advisors reported that advising was complex and time consuming. Several thought that utilized correctly, professional advisors could help lighten caseloads, so students could get more time and individualized attention.
- In the interviews, two faculty advisors reported learning names of their advisees, and asking them about their personal life histories, their interests, and their goals. Those same participants reported discussing students’ academic experience, and their progress. By listening to their advisees and learning this information, they were able to connect the advisees’ strengths and needs with resources that would contribute to their academic success. The other faculty advisors did not bring up these strategies. One faculty advisor emphasized the importance of being a mentor, not a friend.
- Professional advisors reported taking extensive notes, and getting to know students at a very personal level. One professional advisor called herself a “surrogate mom.”

### **Caseload by College (Faculty) and Professional Advisors**

	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>0 – 19 students</b>	12.9%	10.5%	4.2%	0.0%
<b>20 – 49 students</b>	61.3%	47.4%	62.5%	0.0%
<b>50 – 69 students</b>	22.6%	29.0%	12.5%	0.0%
<b>70 – 99 students</b>	3.2%	10.5%	12.5%	16.7%
<b>100 – 149 students</b>	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%
<b>150 – 199 students</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
<b>200 – 249 students</b>	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	33.3%
<b>250 – 299 students</b>	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%

## TIMELY INFORMATION

**Best Practice:** Advisors should provide accurate and timely information about the university and its programs by (1) knowing departmental and university requirements; (2) knowing how to find transfer equivalencies and degree audit information; (3) knowing guidelines for Financial Aid information and holds; (4) knowing department and university deadlines; (5) knowing and being able to refer students to appropriate university resources.

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In the survey, respondents were asked about their comfort with transfer courses, as well as their familiarity with financial aid guidelines and advising hold policies. They were asked if they knew who to contact if they have questions. These results are broken down by professional and faculty advisors (see below). Respondents were asked several questions about how they stayed informed about advising-related topics. This is broken down by college and professional advisors. See the tables below.
- In the interviews, one concern that arose was not being sure about how best to advise for General Education courses.
- Another issue that emerged in the interviews was a concern that different offices around the university (e.g. registrar's office, Academic and Career Advising Center), and faculty members do not sufficiently communicate with one another. Some faculty advisors were concerned that students were therefore not receiving accurate and timely information about the university and its resources.

### **Comfort/Familiarity with Advising-Related Policies/Resources<sup>3</sup>**

	Comfortable With Transfer Courses		Familiar with Financial Aid Guidelines		Familiar with Advising Hold Policies		Know Who to Contact if Questions	
	Pro	Fac	Pro	Fac	Pro	Fac	Pro	Fac
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	0.0%	3.2%	14.3%	14.9%	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	2.1%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	14.3%	7.4%	0.0%	26.6%	0.0%	12.9%	0.0%	9.6%
<b>Neither</b>	0.0%	6.4%	0.0%	19.1%	0.0%	18.3%	0.0%	12.8%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	57.1%	38.3%	42.9%	30.9%	28.6%	31.2%	14.3%	31.9%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	28.6%	44.7%	42.9%	8.5%	71.4%	33.3%	85.7%	43.6%
n	7	94	7	94	7	93	7	94

<sup>3</sup> Other practices reported on the next page.



## ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

**My program/department keeps me informed on advising practices.**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	3.2%	2.6%	4.2%	4.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	16.1%	20.5%	8.3%	14.9%
<b>Neither</b>	22.6%	18.0%	20.8%	18.8%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	32.3%	30.7%	33.3%	30.7%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	25.8%	28.2%	33.3%	31.6%

**My program/department keeps me informed of changes in graduation requirements.**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	3.2%	2.6%	0.0%	14.3%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	12.9%	10.3%	8.3%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	22.6%	20.4%	16.7%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	25.8%	30.8%	37.5%	28.6%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	35.5%	35.9%	37.5%	57.1%

**On average, how often does your department meet to discuss advising practices?**

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>Weekly</b>	0.0%	7.7%	20.8%	100.0%
<b>Monthly</b>	19.4%	20.5%	12.5%	0.0%
<b>Once Per Semester</b>	38.7%	28.2%	50.2%	0.0%
<b>Once Per Year</b>	22.6%	18.0%	8.3%	0.0%
<b>Never</b>	19.3%	25.6%	8.2%	0.0%

## ENHANCING EDUCATION

**Best Practice:** Enhance the advisees' educational experiences by: (1) Encouraging appreciation for diversity on campus; (2) promoting study abroad opportunities; (3) promoting involvement in internships, applied learning and professional organizations.

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In the interviews, six academic advisors (four faculty, two professional) reported discussing internships with their advisees. Three faculty advisors reported regularly discussing study abroad opportunities.
- In the interviews, no respondents specifically mentioned “encouraging appreciation for diversity on campus” but some of the professional advisors mentioned making students aware of cultural events, or directing students to the MultiCultural Center (MCC) or the Cultural Centers for Academic Excellence (CCAEE).
- In the surveys, participants were asked aspects of advising they included in their advising appointments, outside of: choosing classes, career planning, dealing with personal concerns, connecting students with campus resources, discussing GE requirements and discussing major requirements. 69 respondents answered. Other topics that were mentioned:
  - Internships (10 respondents), Research Opportunities (4 respondents), and Summer Opportunities (4 respondents)

## OUTREACH AND PREPARATION

**Best Practice:** Before an advising appointment, advisors should: (1) Email each advisee, reminding them to make an appointment; (2) familiarize themselves with advising tools; (3) review advising notes from previous sessions; (4) review current degree audit information; (5) review additional information about holds and grades, as available.

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In interviews, most respondents reported looking at major contracts and DARS in preparation for advising appointments. Two faculty advisors expressed they do not run a DARS report in advance; one faculty advisor reported this because it is something that can be done quickly during the appointment. The other reported not having time, due to the large caseload, to do this in advance.
- In interviews, five academic advisors (three faculty, two professional) reported preparing the students for the appointment by discussing advising tools and forms in the reminder emails they send to students.
- It should be noted that professional advisors work in offices and programs that have office-level systems in place for sending appointment reminders to students, so professional advisors are not doing this type of preparation on their own.



# ASSESSING THE ADVISING LANDSCAPE

## ADVISING FOLLOW-UP

**Best Practice:** After advising appointments, advisors should: (1) complete notes from the session; (2) follow up on any recommendations made to the student (NACADA).

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In both focus groups and interviews, most faculty reported they followed up with students if there were specific outstanding issues, but otherwise, they felt it was the responsibility of the student to get in touch with them with any additional issues or concerns.
- Faculty advisors reported inconsistent note-taking for themselves, and among their colleagues. Some departments/programs use tools like Excel spreadsheets, or Google Docs, and some use handwritten notes.
- All professional academic advisors reported completing notes on the session.

## ADVISING APPOINTMENTS

**Best Practice:** During advising appointments, advisors should discuss: (1) notes from information gathered before the appointment; (2) external factors that could impact academic success (e.g. work and family); (3) student's interests and goals; (4) grades and major requirements; (5) program of study over several semesters; and (6) follow up appointments.

### **Current HSU Practices:**

- In focus groups, professional and faculty advisors reported different processes.
  - Professional advisors reported discussing personal issues first, before diving into courses. They primarily reported discussing obstacles, goals and helping students navigate the institution and higher education.
  - Faculty advisors reported giving time to transferrable courses/credits, getting to know students and their goals, helping students to organize their schedules, going over major contracts, and discussing career opportunities.
  - Faculty advisors reported appointments time varied by student's needs and their progress in their academic career.
- In the survey, professional and faculty advisors were asked the degree to which they found various aspects of academic advising to be important, from very unimportant to very important. In the table below, we list what respondents were most likely to rank



“very important” and “very unimportant” broken down by college (for faculty advisors) and professional advisors.

- Faculty advisors ranked major requirements as the most important aspect of academic advising, followed by choosing classes. For CAHSS and CPS, connecting students to resources was the third most important aspect; for CNRS it was career planning. For advisors from both CAHSS and CPS, discussing personal concerns was ranked last.
- For professional advisors, discussing personal concerns was the most important aspect of academic advising. Choosing classes was ranked last.

### Most and least important aspects of academic advising

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Pro Advisors
<b>Most Important</b>	Major Requirements	Major Requirements	Major Requirements	Personal Concerns
	Choosing Classes	Choosing Classes	Choosing Classes	Career Planning
	Connecting to Resources	Career Planning	Connecting to Resources	Connecting to Resources GE & Major Requirements (tied)
<b>Least Important</b>	Personal Concerns	Connecting to Resources	Personal Concerns	Choosing Classes

- Most faculty advisors reported spending between ten and thirty minutes per advisee, on average. More than half of the CAHSS advisors reported spending 21 to 30 minutes, and CNRS/CPS advisors were split between 10 to 20 and 21 to 30. Most professional advisors reported spending more than thirty minutes per advisee, on average.

### On average, how long do you spend with each advisee in an appointment?

	CAHSS	CNRS	CPS	Professional
<b>&lt; 10 minutes</b>	6.5%	5.1%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>10 – 20 minutes</b>	32.3%	43.6%	33.3%	0.00%
<b>21 – 30 minutes</b>	54.8%	43.6%	33.3%	14.3%
<b>31 – 40 minutes</b>	3.2%	5.1%	20.8%	71.4%
<b>40 + minutes</b>	3.2%	2.6%	12.5%	14.3%

## **ADVISING SPECIAL POPULATIONS**

**Best Practice (First Generation):** Every meeting with an academic advisor increases the odds that a first generation student will be retained by 13% (Swecker, Fifolt and Searby 2013).

**Best Practice (Academic Probation):** Advisors should look to both internal (inability to grasp materials, lack of interest in particular courses) and external (financial, personal or family issues) root causes of poor grades. Then, (1) advisor should initiate communication via email or letter with a clear deadline for response; (2) if no response, advisor should follow up with a phone call; (3) advisor should ensure student understands the goal is to deal positively with the situation; (4) advisor should get to know root causes; (5) begin to work on a plan of action for recovery (Cruise 2002).

### **Current HSU Practices:**

#### ***Underrepresented Students (Including First Generation)***

- In focus groups, respondents reported differing perspectives on how to work with underrepresented students.
  - Most professional advisors reported spending time being reflective in helping students with the multiple obstacles that come from their intersectional identities, including their race, first generation status, their immigration status, being a parent or being a veteran.
  - Faculty advisors had a wider variety of responses. Most faculty reported adapting their approach with students, based on the unique needs and experiences of that particular students. Some faculty advisors expressed discomfort with making assumptions about students of color, or first generation students; they were wary of stereotyping the students. One faculty advisor reported using the same procedures with all students.

#### ***Students on Academic Probation***

Currently, students are placed on “Academic Probation” if their GPA (overall or HSU) falls below a 2.0. Students on probation receive a registration hold and notification from the registrar. Students complete an online academic probation tutorial, hosted by the Learning Center, which explains HSU’s guidelines. It also offers the students campus resources and services. As part of the tutorial, the student completes an Academic Success Plan which is emailed to the student’s academic advisor. After the tutorial is complete, the Learning Center lifts the hold.

- In interviews, no faculty advisors reported having a specific protocol for working with students on academic probation. One faculty advisor reported wanting more support and guidance for working with probationary students.
- Professional Advisors have different responses to students on academic probation, based on their program or department:

- The Academic and Career Advising Center has an extensive process in place for professional advisors working with students in their caseload. As soon as an ACAC and EOP advisor hears from their student that they may not pass a class, or as soon as the grades are posted and a student is placed on academic probation, the intervention begins. The advisor reaches out to the student by email (and other methods, as needed) to first reassure the student that probation does not reflect on who they are as a student or individual, and asks them to come in or call (in summer) their advisor to develop a plan to return to good standing. Advisors give their students intake forms that include self-reflection activities covering external and internal issues, and a checklist of successful study strategies to introduce the students to those best practices. The advisor and student will meet (ideally) at least three times to acknowledge successes, develop a success plan, and build resilience for future stressors.
- The advisors of ITEPP work very closely with students on academic probation as an additional layer of support and guidance along with their major advisors. They work with probationary students on individualized plans, prepare their students to work with the major advisors, support the work they are doing with those major advisors, and connect students to campus resources as needed.

**I am comfortable advising diverse student populations.**

	<b>CAHSS</b>	<b>CNRS</b>	<b>CPS</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Neither</b>	9.7%	25.6%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	29.0%	35.9%	54.2%	14.3%
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	58.1%	38.5%	45.8%	85.7%

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### CONCLUSION

The faculty and professional academic advisors at Humboldt State University are deeply invested in the success of their students. Academic advisors believe advising is an important aspect of student retention and success, and decades of research support this.

While most academic advisors reported believing in advising, and care for the practice, there are big differences in the experiences and ideologies of faculty advisors compared to professional advisors. Faculty advisors espouse a narrower view of the practice, seeing themselves as mentors, but largely focused on navigating the courses required, with some focus on extra opportunities (such as internships and studying abroad), but a lesser focus on personal issues. For faculty advisors, there seems to be a focus on success in the major, where for professional advisors, the focus is on success as a student more broadly. Professional academic advisors see their role more holistically, focusing on all aspects of the students' time in college.

Even within faculty advisors, there were differences in styles and ideologies. Some of this was along college lines, with faculty in different colleges prioritizing different aspects of advising. Many faculty advisors wish they were better trained, or had access to more information, to be better advisors. Several faculty and professional advisors expressed the need for more training in supporting students with financial issues, including financial aid, and personal financial issues.

***Overall, we found that when it comes to academic advising, there is a lot of inconsistency across campus. At the university level, there seems to be little or no accountability, no clear vision, and inadequate training. Given the importance of academic advising for the success of students, HSU could better achieve its missions and goals by prioritizing academic advising.***

There are several limitations to this research. This report is a snapshot of one semester, rather than a longitudinal study of advising practices. It is likely we heard from the academic advisors that felt most strongly (positively or negatively) about advising, which may have impacted our findings. We also asked advisors to give us a substantial amount of their time (up to 90 minutes) during a busy time in the semester—close to registration time. That limited who was able to speak with us, perhaps inadvertently excluding some of most engaged and busiest advisors on campus. We also acknowledge that we were unable to adequately measure every component of every best practice; we made many tradeoffs to try to take less of our respondents' time. Still, given our large research team, and our use of multiple research methods, we were able to produce a great wealth of data related to advising practices on campus. We feel confident in the depth and breadth of perspectives we were able to reach.

Future research could explore some of the national best practices in more depth, and over time. For example, future studies could explore the ways advisors enhance student experiences in more depth. Most importantly, more research is needed that speaks to the unique advising needs and experiences of our diverse students. Future studies could explore the specific needs of Latina/o students, first generation students, LGBTQ students, student veterans, student parents and more. As a university, we have clearly recognized that these groups have unique needs and experiences, but we have not responded adequately with our advising strategies. It is clear that a recurring research on the advising

practices, and reflection in our policies and procedures, could benefit the students and the faculty and professional advisors providing academic advising on campus.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on what we learned as a research team through interviews, focus groups and a survey, we developed a few recommendations to better align HSU advising practices with national best practices.

- Humboldt State University could more clearly articulate a vision of what academic advising is, and the importance of academic advising to the retention and success of all students, including (and especially) underrepresented students and students on academic probation. This mission should connect to broader teaching and learning missions of the university, and must include clear outcomes for student learning.
- HSU could provide more thorough and ongoing training, and professional development opportunities, to faculty and professional advisors. This should start with a solid training for new faculty advisors that includes information about national best practices. This training should establish a culture of advising that utilizes a holistic view of advising, including a more robust definition of academic advising, such as the one outlined by NACADA (see page 13). Additionally, the university could provide ongoing, regular communication about advising-related best practices, as well as changing procedures and policies.
- The university, colleges and departments that provide academic advising could establish and share consistent processes to get advisors regular, helpful feedback. While other types of assessment strategies are being built on campus, academic advising should be included. Between the university, colleges and departments/programs, assessment should occur at each level: self, student, peer and program. Students should have the opportunity to report on their experiences, and advisors should have the opportunity to provide feedback about advising-related policies and procedures. One initial action could be to see what types of assessment are already happening across campus, such as in the Department of Environmental Science and Management and the College of Professional Studies.
- HSU could provide incentive and reward for excellent academic advising on campus. The importance of academic advising could be articulated more clearly in campus communications about student success, and outstanding advisors could receive more public recognition as do staff and faculty for their teaching and/or service.
- The university could align policies and procedures around academic probation across departments and programs. HSU has identified this as a core issue facing student retention, and the use of an intrusive-style of advising used by ACAC and EOP provides a solid model for how to work holistically with these students.
- While not addressed in great depth in the report, group advising was brought up several times in several different ways. Overall, the feeling among both professional and academic advisors is that group advising does not work. It does not seem to substitute for regular contact between students and advisors; we suggest that departments consider discontinuing the practice, or restructuring it in a way that provides more helpful interactions with the students.

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