Rethinking Academic Advising through a Career Development Lens

Academic advising is key factor in the success of college students, with comprehensive advising being the cornerstone of college student success and retention (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). In an effort to enhance student success at USM, we propose a plan to reorganize advising services to be centralized both physically and administratively. Furthermore, the National Association of Academic Advising articulates that the core concept of academic advising includes attention to career development needs of students. Thus, we propose a strong career development component to be included in a new centralized academic advising structure that is currently missing in USM advising services.

Our proposed plan for centralized advising will allow standardization of services for all students, but includes a mechanism for central advising to be coordinated with additional services offered by departments (e.g. faculty mentoring, major specific workshops). Centralized advising would be staffed by credentialed professionals that specialize by colleges, majors, or undecided student areas. Advising staff could assist with referral to other campus services, such as the Writing and Speaking Center, Counseling Center, Career Services, and UNV courses to enhance the use of these resources.

Research on college retention suggests incorporation of career development assistance is a key component of successful advising programs (ACT, 2004), thus we specifically include the addition of a career development course as a component of advising that will be mandated for incoming undeclared students or by referral (by oneself or advising staff). This faculty-developed, three-credit course would lead students through a theoretically and empirically informed career development process. Specific contents of this course would include discussion of self-knowledge (e.g. interests, abilities, personality, and work values), career options information, career decision making skills, and negative career thinking that may inhibit successful career decision-making. Additionally, a large and small group model will be utilized for this course. Students can be grouped into small groups according to their interests, needs, or background. This will allow for a community to develop among like students as well as a supportive environment that can address individual career development needs. The effectiveness of college career courses has been studied extensively (Folsom & Reardon, 2003) and even linked to student retention rates and academic performance (Folsom, Peterson, Reardon, Mann, 2004-2005), suggesting USM students will likely benefit from the addition of a career development course.

Implementation of centralized advising with a mechanism to include career development into this process would impact Southern Miss undergraduate students in many ways.

1. Student awareness of their personal values, interests, and skills, as well as knowledge of Southern Miss major/degree options would be enhanced
2. Increased academic success and increased retention
3. Increased decidedness among undeclared majors, as well as more confidence in making future career decisions, likely leading to shorter degree completion times.
4. Through the more efficient major choice process and greater awareness self and career options, retention may be further enhanced as students are happier with their Southern Miss experience, and more satisfied in their chosen majors, additionally enhancing our university’s reputation.