The Critical Role of Advising

Last year a student services review was completed and the consolidation of academic advising services was one of several recommendations that has been implemented. As Thomas Fitzgerald points out in the Free Press September 14th edition, advising is a critical component of the college student’s educational experience. USM leadership has heard the student voice and the advising model at USM has changed beginning Fall 2015.

Two major changes include the implementation of a dual advising model and the Faculty Advising Liaison Program. These changes are designed to assist students in identifying and achieving their educational and career goals utilizing an advising as teaching model and a strengths-based approach. This approach assists students in constructing meaning, skill identification and development, critical thinking, learning strategies, and helps to build the scaffolding of knowledge and transferable skills while identifying the student’s individual strengths.

The key programmatic goals of the USM Dual Advising Program is to increase student satisfaction with their advising experience and increase retention through student advising and support strategies. This will be accomplished by the following:

1. Connecting student academic, career, and life goals to major, general education, and community based learning opportunities.
2. Helping students understand the value of both faculty and professional academic advising.
3. Supporting student learning through learning strategy assistance, career advising, and proper referrals.
4. Assisting students with institutional navigation by teaching students how things work, how to maximize available resources, and how to understand and become part of the campus ecology.
5. Contributing to University-wide efforts to promote institutional integration.
6. Providing current and accurate advising information.
7. Being as accessible to students as possible.
8. Developing meaningful relationships with students.
9. Identifying and removing barriers that prohibit student success.

Within the model students who have a declared major will have a faculty advisor within their department and an academic advisor from Advising. The dual advising model relies on the critical role faculty play in the success and retention of students, making partnerships and collaboration between students, faculty and academic advisors a key component of its success.

The Faculty Advising Liaison Program focuses on creating an institutional cultural change through faculty advisor development, creating advising leadership within each department, and fostering ongoing communication with the professional advising unit. The goals of the Faculty Advising Liaison Program include:

- Improve the student perception of the advising experience
- Provide students with faculty and professional advisors who are informed, available, empathetic and committed
- Develop a culture of faculty advisor development
- Create an understanding of advising through collaborative learning opportunities
- Increase communication between departments and the professional advising unit
- Increase student retention and persistence to graduation
- Increase institutional commitment to advising

The data that informed the changes in the advising program focused on undergraduate students. This fall graduate students will be surveyed to identify their needs. Institutional leadership will then be able to make appropriate recommendations once the voices of the graduate student population is heard.

Assessment of the new model will be important in order to make appropriate changes to support the success of USM students. In addition to the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Graduating Senior Survey, a yearly student survey will be implemented to inform the practice of advising at USM. The advising model will be assessed using comparable data and other ongoing assessments. It is important to match the advising needs of our students with how USM provides advising, assessment will help us do that.