# Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4

Charge and Membership 7

Introduction 8

List of Recommendations 11

Recommendations Timeline 12

Detailed Recommendations 15

Conclusion 35

References 36

Appendix A: Advising Task Force Charge

Appendix B: CAS Advising Standards

Appendix C: Advising at USM
   - Dual Advising Model Overview
   - Faculty Advising Liaison Program at USM
   - Online Advising at USM
   - Advising Structure Timeline Since the 1980s
   - Executive Summary of MAC Program

Appendix D: Assessments Conducted by Advising
   - USM Advising Survey, 2015
   - Beth Higgins, Ed.D, Advising Analysis

Appendix E: Graduating Senior Survey 2015 & 2013

Appendix F: NSSE and FSSE Surveys
Appendix G: Assessments Conducted by Advising Task Force, 2015-2016
-Professional Advisor Focus Group Summary and Notes
-Faculty Advisor Focus Group Summary and Notes
-Student Focus Group Summary and Notes

Appendix H: USM School and Department Advising Policies

Appendix I: NACADA Recommendations on Advisor Load
-Personal Communication, Marsha Miller
-Advisor Load, Rich Robbins, NACADA Clearing House
-Effective Ways to Deal with Large Advising Loads, Debra Y. Applegate & Gayle Hartleroad
-Advising Load Statistics, NACADA Survey 2011

Appendix J: Literature Reviews
-Retention
-Non-traditional Students
-First-Generation Students
-Multicultural and Minority Students
-Online students

Appendix K: Joe Cuseo, “Academic Advising and Student Retention”
Executive Summary

Purpose
The Advising Task Force was charged by USM’s president Dr. Glenn Cummings with conducting an internal review of academic advising at the University of Southern Maine. The Task Force was comprised of faculty, advising professionals, and students. This group worked together to investigate the past student, faculty and professional advisor experiences as well as examine institutional documentation, advising literature, and national best practices. The ultimate goal of Advising Task Force was to produce a report and recommendations that offer a framework in which academic advising at the University of Southern Maine provides a unified, pronounced, and student centered experience.

Milestones
During the 2014-2015 academic year academic advising at USM has gone through a significant change. The past institutional leadership acknowledged the need to change advising and therefore decided upon a dual advising model. The dual advising model assigns each student with a declared major a faculty and professional advisor from time of enrollment through graduation. This change was implemented beginning fall 2015. Along with the dual advising model, a Faculty Advising Liaison program was developed and implemented during the same time period. The Faculty Advising Liaison Program focuses on making an institutional cultural change through faculty advisor development, creating advising leadership within each department, and fostering ongoing communication with the professional advising unit. Nearly every undergraduate department has a Faculty Advising Liaison (FAL) to assist in improving the student advising experience. Faculty leads and the director of Academic Advising worked together to identify programmatic needs, gain faculty buy-in, and design and implement the program. USM’s first Academic Advising Workshop was offered in the Fall of 2015 and the overall feedback highlighted the program’s success and specific needs for additional advisor development.

Problem
The University of Southern Maine has been struggling with improving an uneven approach to academic advising for several years. The data from the 2015 Advising Survey, Graduating Senior Surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) results showcase the ongoing concerns relating to academic advising and the need for the student academic advising experience to change. In addition, the NEASC self-study report highlights academic advising as an institutional experience that could positively influence student retention and persistence. The report also indicates concern relating to the
inequity of advising loads, career advising, assessment, and the unevenness of the student experience.

**Recommendations**
The eight recommendations we make are informed by historical data, an inventory and assessment of current advising practices, focus groups with key constituencies, and a review of advising best practices. Further the recommendations could be characterized as "low investment, high return" actions that serve the larger goal of delivering effective academic advising and supporting student success.

1: Establish an Advising Mission with Clear Goals and Outcomes
2: Adopt a Systematic Developmental Advising Model with Proactive and Intrusive Strategies
3: Implement a Shared Advising Model with a Team-Based Structure
4: Create a Comprehensive Advisor Training and Development Program
5: Create a Mechanism for Assessing Academic Advising
6: Improve Advising Support Materials and Technology
7: Develop Diversified, Data-driven Retention Programs
8: Establish Rewards and Incentives for Good Advising

**Outcomes**
It is the hope of the Advising Task Force that cultivating an advising experience that is unified, pronounced and student centered will lead to tangible outcomes that are associated with student retention and persistence: increased faculty-student contact outside the classroom, effective educational and career planning, increased student use of academic and other campus support services, improved student satisfaction with USM, and a sustained academic advising cultural change that is valued.
Charge and Membership

In September 2015, President Cummings asked Professors Lisa Walker and Jerry LaSala to co-chair a task force charged with studying advising practices at USM and making recommendations if appropriate with the goal of improving student success and the secondary goals of improving retention and graduation rates. The charge can be found in Appendix A.

The members of the Task Force are:

Lisa Walker, Professor of English and Director of Women and Gender Studies, Co-chair
Jerry LaSala, Professor of Physics, Co-chair
Cheryl Laz, Associate Professor of Sociology
Dan Panici, Associate Professor of Communication
Dan Jenkins, Assistant Professor of Leadership and Organizational Studies
Beth Higgins, Director of Academic Advising
Blaise Maccarrone, Academic Advisor
Mindy Hull, Online Student Advisor
Rebecca Tanous, Student Body President, senior chemistry major
Casey Nicholas, junior biology major.
Introduction

The Advising Task Force has been charged with conducting a review of USM’s advising program using an academic self-study process as a model, with an eye toward improving student retention and persistence. USM’s freshman retention rate hovers at 69%, about 6% points less than the national average. Even more alarming, our 6-year graduation rate is about 31%, well below the national average of 58%.

It goes without saying that retention and persistence are important not only for the fiscal health of the institution, but also for the larger goals of the university, which include increasing student ability to “thrive in professional, institutional, and civic arenas” (Young-Jones 2013, 9). Retention and advising must be placed within the context of the institution’s educational mission and goals. As Eric White explains, “the ultimate goal of a functioning academic advising program is to engage students as scholars, thus transforming the student experience. Academic advisers work with students to enable them to be confident and assertive in their own abilities to learn, generate, and apply new knowledge and to empower them to embrace their own knowing, learning, thinking and decision making” (2015, 11).

It should be noted that advising, by itself, cannot improve retention. Indeed, advising is only one among many effective retention practices. As Charlie Nutt reminds us, “successful academic advising programs cannot be solely responsible for retention rates on a campus. As the hub, advising is one piece of the retention puzzle. Retention efforts must focus on all components of the campus and building strong and effective connections between the advising program and the various components of campus” (Nutt, 2003). USM must also focus on the other characteristics of campus life, including reinvesting in high quality academic programs that have been cut in recent years, and improving supplemental/developmental academic support services.

However, advising has a positive impact on several variables that are strongly correlated with student persistence, including student satisfaction with the institution, student-faculty contact outside the classroom, student mentoring, student utilization of campus support
services, including academic support services, and effective educational and career decision making.

Given that our 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement suggests that our students do not always find USM to be a caring place, it is intuitive that an increased focus on delivering consistent, quality advising to ensure that students make contact with a significant person in the college can help us with the goal of making students feel cared for by the institution. The data from the 2015 Advising Survey, Graduating Senior Surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) results showcase the need for the student academic advising experience to change. The following themes, which emerged from the document review, highlight student needs within the academic advising experience:

1. Clarity of degree requirements and policies
2. Consistency of information
3. Increased communication from advisors
4. Career advising that assists with connecting academic major with career pathway
5. A sense that faculty/professional advisors are concerned about and care for their students
6. Increased advisor skill-set
7. Faculty/professional advisors that are accessible, available, and responsive

To achieve the above, the University of Southern Maine will need to fundamentally change the institutional advising landscape. Although some initial changes to the advising model were implemented in the Fall of 2015, much work remains in order to provide an advising experience that is unified and centered on student learning. USM has an opportunity to utilize academic advising to create an institutional culture of educational connection and learning.

The Task Force has a number of recommendations for advising program development at USM. Some of these recommendations speak to efforts that are already underway, and some can be implemented immediately. Others need time, planning, further input from stakeholders, and institutional resources. The specific list of recommendations that the Task Force proposes
serve the larger goal of delivering good academic advising and supporting student success. We hope that improving our advising at USM will lead to the following outcomes, which are all associated with retention and persistence:

- Increased faculty-student contact outside the classroom
- Effective educational and career planning.
- Increased student utilization of academic and other campus support services, especially by at-risk students.
- Increased student satisfaction with the institution.

There is no single set of “best practices” that USM can lift wholesale from either a peer institution or the advising literature. Best practices depend on a university’s mission and goals, its academic programs, the composition of its student body, its advisor workload, and its financial resources. However, the Advising Task Force has found Joe Cuseo’s work on student success and advising programs to be especially useful in considering advising at USM. In his article “Academic Advisement and Student Retention,” Cuseo lists the following strategies for strengthening academic advising programs:

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.
7. Include advising effectiveness as one criterion for recruiting and selecting new faculty.
The Task Force set about its work with his advice in mind, and drew on people at USM with experience in advising. Together, we gathered a history of advising models and structures at USM, inventoried departmental advising practices currently in use, reviewed existing assessments of advising at USM, conducted focus groups with faculty, professional advisors and students about their experience of advising, and conducted literature reviews on retention and best practices for advising for special populations represented at USM. After completing these tasks, we arrived at consensus on a set of recommendations on how to improve academic advising for USM students. These recommendations are:

1: Establish an Advising Mission with Clear Goals and Outcomes
2: Adopt a Systematic Developmental Advising Model with Proactive and Intrusive Strategies
3: Implement a Shared Advising Model with a Team-Based Structure
4: Create a Comprehensive Advisor Training and Development Program
5: Create a Mechanism for Assessing Academic Advising
6: Improve Advising Support Materials and Technology
7: Develop Diversified, Data-driven Retention Programs
8: Establish Rewards and Incentives for Good Advising

This report suggests a timeline for recommendations and gives a detailed summary of each.
Advising Task Force Recommendations Timeline

FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

Advising Mission and Structure of Advising Services
- Create USM Academic Advising Council
- Establish that the Provost’s Office the primary reporting line for academic advising
- Appoint an Assistant Provost of Academic Advising that reports to the Provost
- Create an advising mission statement
- Define “good advising”
- Establish goals/outcomes for advising

Developmental and Proactive/Intrusive Advising Strategies
- Determine how to assign faculty advisors to undeclared freshmen
  - consider “front-loading” strongest advisors with first-year and at-risk students
- Review advising plans for undeclared, first-year and probation students
- Review role of advising in Orientation
- Develop strategies for students who need advising after hours

Shared Advising Model with Team-Based Structure
- Define and clarify the roles of professional and faculty advisors and administrators
- Review advisor-advisee ratios with national standards in mind
- Review the following structural relationships
  - Career advising, general advising, and advising in the majors
  - Internship advising, general advising and advising in the majors
  - Online advising, general advising and advising in the majors

Advisor Training and Development
- Plan a convocation on advising
- Perform needs assessment to determine future topics for advisor training
- Continue advisor development opportunities (similar to fall 2015 Advising Workshop)

Advising Support Materials and Technology
- Provide more print publications, including catalogs and course offerings at registration
- Review the “user-friendliness” of MaineStreet Course Search
- Provide accurate and detailed Degree Progress Reports for majors and minors
- Make graduation planners for majors easily available
• Make advising announcements in Monday Missive
• Offer to set up “youcanbook.me” or other scheduling software for faculty advisors
• Choose a student retention platform/software

**Diversified, Data-driven Retention Programs**

• Gather institutional data (retention and graduation rates) on subpopulations of students that need specific advising interventions
• Review advisor-to-advisee ratios and determine if new hires are needed
• Get data on student use of academic support services and retention rates
• Gather advising office data—number and types of appointments (student needs and preferences)

**Incentive and Reward**

• Include effective advising as a criterion for new faculty hires
• Establish Faculty Award for Excellence in Advising
• Put an example P and T report with a discussion of Advising on the Provost’s web site

**MID-RANGE PLANS**

**Advising Mission and Structure of Advising Services**

• Disseminate Advising Mission and Goals

**Developmental and Intrusive Strategies**

• Create pre-major course clusters for undeclared students
• Create incentives for students to make and keep advising appointments
  • eg. allow self-registration for students who complete an advising plan in weeks prior to pre-registration
• Integrate advising notifications into student Blackboard environment
• Email monthly advising newsletters to students
• Purchase retention software and establish an early-alert system for at-risk students
  • Monitor grades and attendance

**Shared Advising Model with Team-Based Structure**

• Hire professional advisors as needed to adjust advisor-advisee ratios
• Adjust structural relationships among offices that advise as necessary
Training and Development
- Hold a convocation on advising
- Choose new topics for advisor development based on needs assessment
- Continue advisor development opportunities (like fall 2015 mini conference)

Advising Support Materials
- Student Advising Handbook (tied to mission)
- Faculty and Professional Advisor Handbooks (tied to mission)
- Advising Syllabus (tied to mission)
- Create a more robust self-serve student resources/policies/advising portal or resource that both online and face-face students can use (perhaps to include a virtual advising mechanism)

Diversified, Data-Driven Retention Programs
- Choose subpopulations for supplemental academic advising interventions
- Strengthen Academic Support services based on data
- Adjust number and type of advising appointments offered based on data

Reward/Incentive
- Increase starting salary of professional advisors to be on par with competitors
- Develop rewards/awards for faculty and professional advisors
- Create Career Ladder for Professional Advisers
- Send teams to NACADA summer institutes

LONGER-RANGE PLANS

Developmental/Intrusive
- Integrate advising modules into EYE and/or other first-year classes

Reward/Incentive
- Revise P and T documents to reflect importance of academic advising

Assessment
- Develop an assessment mechanism to evaluate advising
- Phase out FAL Program
Recommendation 1: Establish an Advising Mission

with Clear Goals and Outcomes

"Only 54% of postsecondary institutions have a written statement that articulates the purposes and procedures of their advising program... At best, this suggests a lack of clarity about program mission and goals; at worst, it suggest that advising is not considered to be a bona fide educational program with important goals and objectives." Cuseo 2007

For advising at USM to be effective, it is important that all members of the community have a clear understanding of the mission and goals of advising. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education states that advising programs must:

Develop, disseminate, implement, and regularly review their missions, which must be consistent with the mission of the institution and with applicable professional standards. The mission must be appropriate for the institution's students and other constituents. Mission statements must reference student learning and development. (2014).

It is worth pointing out that USM’s Mission Statement makes no mention of advising and little of students. Our first recommendation, then, is that USM create an Advising Mission Statement. The mission statement should be developed by an Academic Advising Council (see below and Recommendation 3), and reviewed by the Faculty Senate, Academic Advising, and the Provost for adoption. The Advising Mission Statement should be based on a data-supported understanding of the demographic and developmental profile of USM students, and an understanding, supported by learning theory, of what they need to be successful both academically and beyond the University. The mission statement should also define and clarify the roles of advisors, both professional and faculty, of students, and of upper-level and mid-level administration in the advising process.

The Advising Council, reporting to the Provost, should evaluate our recommendations and oversee and coordinate their implementation, as well as providing ongoing community engagement with academic advising. The Advising Council should comprise representatives from the faculty (appointed by the Faculty Senate), the professional advising staff, the
professional staff who serve identified subpopulations of students, the students, the Center for Collaboration and Development, enrollment management, and the Provost’s Office. We recommend that the Council be co-led by the Director of Academic Advising and an Assistant Provost of Academic Advising, appointed by the Provost. The first task of the Advising Council will be to develop the Advising Mission Statement.

**Recommendation 2: Adopt a Systematic Developmental Advising Model with Proactive and Intrusive Strategies**

**Developmental Advising**

Our philosophy of advising at the University of Southern Maine is developmental, not prescriptive. According to Crookston (1972), prescriptive advising likens the typical relationship between an advisor and advisee to that of a doctor and patient, where both the advisor and advisee see a clear differential on who has the authority and expertise. When students need advice, they seek out an advisor who listens to their problem and then prescribes a treatment. Consequently, the advisor’s role ends as soon as the student leaves. Developmental advising, on the other hand, re-evaluates the roles of the advisor and advisee. Here, the relationship goes well beyond simply giving information or signing a form. Instead, both parties appreciate and share responsibility for a student’s success, and both embark on an on-going relationship to develop the whole student (Barron, 2014; King, 2005). Further, this deeper degree of interaction between the advisor and the student (Crookston, 1972) focuses on the student’s potentials, developing the student’s self-direction, joint decision-making and problem-solving, and creates a shared division of control and responsibility. Specifically:

- Academic advising is a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. It is a decision-making process by which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and
career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary." (NACADA, 2003)

Proactive/Intrusive Advising

"Institutions should deliver academic support intrusively--by initiating contact with students and aggressively bringing support services to them rather than offering services passively and hoping that students will come and take advantage of them on their own accord." Cuezo

While the overarching philosophy of advising is developmental in nature, some populations, including at-risk students and first-year students, require a more proactive advising model. Intrusive advising is similar to developmental advising but calls for the advisor to initiate contact at key points during the student’s postsecondary education (Glennen, 1975; Varney, 2012) for the purposes of developing a caring relationship, monitoring student progress, and encouraging students to seek help when they need it by using the advisor as a trusted resource. Intrusive advising differs from traditional advising in that it puts the responsibility for making contact with the advisor rather than the student.

Intrusive advising often begins with establishing a relationship between advisors and students at a mandatory orientation, and continues throughout the semester. For example, Garing (1993) suggested four critical times: (a) during the first 3 weeks of the semester, (b) at midterm, (c) during the preregistration period, and (d) in between semesters. In addition, students may be required to meet with their advisor every semester to develop a personalized plan, discuss their progress, and examine their short- and long-term goals. We should encourage students to make and keep advising appointments by offering incentives, such as self-registration for students who complete an advising plan in advance of pre-registration.

We can also use some of our existing platforms to reach out to students. For example, advisors might email new advisees before they begin school, and advising announcements might appear in the Monday Missive, which students look forward to reading. Following up emails with telephone calls to students who miss meetings has also proven to be effective (Schwebel, 2008). We might also consider building advising into EYE classes or other first-year classes, as the literature to support this practice is extensive.
A more widespread use of early alert systems such as the one in place for student athletes would help us intervene with at-risk students, and the continuation of a proactive plan like "Project Reach Out" will identify students short of one or two graduation requirements finish their degrees.

However, USM Faculty and Professional Advisors must not trade the practice of intrusive advising at the expense of more developmental practices. Instead, advisors are empowered to integrate the two models and Barron (2014) offers several strategies doing so. For example, creating an advising website on Blackboard that all first-year students can regularly access is a way to be intrusive because every time students log on for their course websites, they have an opportunity to see and be reminded of advising. Then, to incorporate a developmental approach, the information can be organized into folders along a developmental continuum. Another strategy to be both intrusive and developmental is to email first-year advisees a monthly newsletter that highlights critical information relevant to that particular part of the academic year (Barron, 2014). A student advising handbook and an advising syllabus will also encourage students to think about their roles in the advising process. Finally, creating pre-major course clusters for undeclared students will help them focus their educational plans in preparation for choosing a major.

Changing the culture of advising at USM means upgrading many of our academic advising processes:

First, we must remove the artificial linkage of preregistration and advising. This current practice creates a negative perception of the advisor as gatekeeper and is prescriptive in nature.

Second, we must offer open advising appointments during preregistration. Like the prior process, this practice artificially links advising with preregistration. It is our responsibility as a university and as advisors to create a culture where advising can be developmental. Student meetings with advisers should also occur apart from context of course selection. If we want students and advisors to reimagine the relationship between advising and student success in higher education, we must facilitate more developmental and intrusive, rather than prescriptive, dialogues. For example, instead of focusing the advising meeting solely on course
selection, students and advisors should be empowered to discuss career goals, scholarly interests, student involvement, and assessment tools (e.g., StrengthsFinder) as well as referrals to academic and campus resources or offices as needed.

Third, we must make it a priority to see first-year students within the first month of the semester, and several times during the semester, versus only once during preregistration (Barron, 2014; Bigger, 2005; Kramer, Tanner, & Peterson, 1995). This practice creates opportunities for conversations beyond transactions.

Fourth, and furthermore, advisors must support and encourage students to participate in campus life. Astin’s theory of involvement (1984) states that “student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience” (298). Thus according to Astin’s theory (1984), the more engaged students are, the more likely they are to graduate. Pace’s theory (1984), which also values the use of integration to engage students, relates the quantity and kind of academic opportunities available to students by an institution, to the degree that students utilize those opportunities to improve their educational experiences.

Fifth, faculty advisors must assume roles as mentors and developers versus gatekeepers. In addition to expanding the advising relationship beyond course selection, faculty should provide career and academic development related, but not limited to internships, service learning, and departmental/university programming (e.g., involvement in the department’s programs and student organization(s), resources (e.g., books, journal articles, websites, videos) that pertain to academic and/or career goals, graduate school exploration and planning, and knowledge and expertise regarding employment opportunities (e.g., making on- and off-campus referrals as appropriate). Further, the faculty advisor should encourage academic balance, e.g., adding a minor, second major, and/or thoughtful selection of elective courses.
Recommendation 3: Implement a Shared Advising Model with a Team-Based Structure

“There is a growing recognition among advising professionals and researchers that a shared structure can incorporate the best features from the decentralized and centralized structures. An ideal shared structure would take advantage of the expertise of faculty advising in their departments (decentralized), while relying on professional advisors in a centralized administrative unit to meet the special needs of students, such as incoming freshmen, academically at risk students, minority students, student athletes, or undecided students.”
Celeste F. Pardee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Academic Advisors</th>
<th>Faculty Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Led by Director of Academic Advising—works hand-in-hand and facilitates Advising Council meetings with Assistant Provost</td>
<td>Led by Assistant Provost of Advising—works hand-in-hand and facilitates Advising Council meetings with Director of Academic Advising (stipended or course release)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Responsibility is Academic Advising / Registration; advises student from first semester through graduation</td>
<td>Primary Responsibility is student mentoring, career advice, academic development, scholarships, internships, graduate school exploration, waivers and substitutions for major requirements, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development opportunities, e.g., NACADA regional conference, best practices in advising</td>
<td>Professional development opportunities, e.g., mentor workshops, special student populations, and faculty advising practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Focus groups indicate that students value both professional and faculty advisors, for different reasons. They appreciate the availability of the professional advisors at a central advising office for drop-ins, for obtaining information about policies and procedures, and for timely responses to specific questions about their educational plans. They appreciate faculty advisors for their holistic understanding of academic majors, and their ability to draw on
knowledge of the field to give advice about course selection and graduate school and career preparation. The literature on retention emphasizes the importance of faculty-student contact outside the classroom, and given our students’ sense of disconnection from faculty and their need to feel that they “matter,” it makes sense to pair students with faculty advisors as early as possible.

The Advising Task Force is recommending a model of advising that has an enhanced shared approach. This approach would provide students with an advising team that works together from the time of enrollment through graduation to positively influence students’ ability to achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals. Currently there is a 54 credit hour shift in the primary advising responsibilities, in which students begin with a professional advisor and transfer to a faculty advisor late in the sophomore year. The enhanced approach would remove the credit hour shift, assigning all incoming freshmen, including undeclared students, a faculty advisor, and allow students to maintain a relationship with a professional advisor throughout their careers.

A shared advising model leans on the skills and strengths of each of the faculty and professional advising partners. Faculty are well-versed in their academic discipline and provide specifics regarding the major. The primary strength of faculty members is that they bring a level of advising and professional mentoring that only experts within that particular academic field of study can provide. The professional (also nationally called the “primary advisor”) strengths include extensive knowledge to provide advice and information regarding University policies and procedures, general education requirements, and major exploration. The professional/primary advisors are also available for year-round student support.

The shared advising model also emphasizes a key characteristic of successful programing: collaboration. Joe Cuseo writes that “effective programming involves cooperative partnerships between and among different organizational units of the college, encouraging them to work interdependently in a coordinated, complimentary, and cohesive fashion to support the student as a whole person” (“Defining Student Success” 11). Representatives from campus offices such as TRIO, Disability Services, Veterans Services, should be prepared to join advising teams as appropriate. The Advising Council should review the structural relationships between the existing central advising office and online advising, as well as between academic
advising and career services, with an eye to making all these services seamless, well-integrated and student-friendly. For example, students in focus groups conveyed a sense that, currently, referrals from advisors to career services are fortuitous rather than predictable. A clear understanding of responsibilities for students, professional advisors, and faculty advisors and liaisons from other campus offices will be necessary for the overall success of the USM Academic Advising Program.

Faculty Advising Liaisons are the third facet of the enhanced shared advising approach that sets the USM model apart from a general dual advising model. A continuation of the MAC program, which was associated with an 8.3% bump in retention for CAHS (Executive Summary of MAC Program, Appendix C), the faculty advising liaisons create the linkage between faculty and academic departments and professional advising to facilitate collaboration. During the period of implementation of the shared advising model, faculty advising liaisons can provide advising leadership within academic units. Each department sets the stage for peer-to-peer faculty relationships and advisor education, and can help change the culture of advising within academic units.

One comment that we heard many times, especially from faculty, was that there has been an overwhelming amount of change in the past year, including loss of resources and a new advising model. Recognizing that not all departments will be able to participate, the Task Force still recommends that departments with resources to commit to this type of work assign a faculty member to serve as a faculty liaison for a period of two years. The FAL program should be reviewed after the implementation stage of the shared advising model to see if it might be discontinued once advising is more integrated into faculty workload. Currently the liaisons are provided a stipend depending on departmental faculty FTE. The Task Force recommends that faculty be compensated with equal discretionary funds used for professional development opportunities or other activities that support student learning. This change could decrease the overall cost of program implementation, and will encourage faculty professional development.

In addition to the faculty peer component, the Advising Task Force recommends revitalizing the Student Peer Advising program to support student learning and expand the institutional advising community. The Peer Advising Program can be utilized in different ways depending on the needs of the student and departments. Peer advisors can be deployed to
academic departments as well as specific academic support programs while being trained and
managed by the centralized advising unit. Studies have shown that the use of peer advisors can
positively influence the student advising experience (Koring, 2005).

One of the goals of the enhanced shared approach is to create an institution where
good advising is a community commitment focused on student learning and success. In addition
to creating an institution-wide commitment, an enhanced shared approach creates a
centralized area that has responsibility for developing and maintaining advising resources
(advising handbook, trainings and materials, etc.) and acts as an informational hub, referral
destination, and training source. This centralized advising unit also provides additional support
for and professional knowledge of specific student populations (conditionally admitted, early
academic alerts, undeclared, probationary, and English language learners, for example). The
Student Peer Advising program can also be organized, implemented, and managed through the
central advising hub.

Finally, the Advising Task Force recommends that academic advising report to the
Provost. A developmental model of academic advising, an understanding of advising as
teaching, and a mandatory advising load for faculty all suggest that at USM, advising is seen as
more than an enrollment service, and that it is central to the teaching mission of the university.
Typically, at institutions where advising is mandatory, and at institutions that see advising as
teaching, advising reports primarily to academic affairs (King 2011). Other reporting options are
student affairs, enrollment management, or combined reporting models, but the Task Force
believes that the goals of combined reporting can be achieved through another structural
mechanism—the Academic Advising Council.

To ensure that the enhanced shared model is an institutional commitment to academic
advising, the Advising Task Force recommends that there is appropriate leadership of the
program, faculty and professional advisors. The council should be co-led by the Director of
Academic Advising and a faculty member appointed as the Assistant Provost of Academic
Advising. In addition to co-leading the Academic Advising Council, the Assistant Provost of
Academic Advising will work in partnership with the Director of Academic Advising to
implement the USM Academic Advising Program.
Additional duties of this appointment will include:

1. Serving as the Provost’s Office Faculty Advising Liaison and the leadership partner with the Director of Academic Advising
2. Coordinating professional development advising opportunities for faculty
3. Conducting and encouraging research about advising
4. Creating an annual report on faculty advising to be submitted to the Provost and Director of Academic Advising

The Academic Advising Council will guide the overall community responsiveness to academic advising through ongoing discussions, examining best practices, initiation of the assessment of academic advising, and implementation of the USM Advising Award and the promotion of professional development.

One of the first charges of the council should be to develop a university-wide mission statement that provides the roadmap for the USM academic advising experience and complements the institutional mission. Cooperatively aligning academic advising with institutional values, mission, and goals will assist in establishing institutional advising standards. It is critical that the advising standards are agreed upon by the Council and accepted and supported by senior institutional leadership. This agreement will assist in insuring that academic advising becomes an integral component of student learning and success.
Recommendation 4: Create a Comprehensive Advisor Training and Development Program

"Advisor preparation and training has a demonstrable impact on student retention, as evidenced by lower attrition rates for students whose advisors received training in advising techniques--relative to students whose advisors are untrained." Cuseo

Faculty and professional advisors are at the core of the success of the USM Academic Advising Program. A yearly professional development plan for academic advising will need to be implemented in order to continuously educate faculty and professional advisors, develop competence in advising skills, and remain current on advising practices and institutional processes. A solid partnership with the Center for Collaboration and Development that has institutional financial support will be necessary to assist in the implementation of a successful academic advising professional development plan. Training and development should be tied to USM’s advising mission, and should have clear goals focusing on the conceptual, informational and relational components of advising.

The immediate goal of a training and development program should be to clarify USM’s advising mission and structure, especially to faculty and students. Focus groups suggest that faculty advisors are unclear about what the current advising structure is, and need clarification about how roles and responsibilities differ for Professional and Faculty Advisors.

A second short-term goal should be to perform a needs assessment to determine training and development needs at USM. Such an assessment should be based on institutional data about USM’s subpopulations that will help us determine what students have unique advising needs, and how we can address them.

We can use existing formats, such as the Fall 2015 “mini conference” directed at Faculty Advising Liaisons and Professional Advisors, to deliver development programming. Topics that have proven successful in the past include FERPA training, financial aid and scholarships, career advising, and mental health issues in advising. Student focus groups suggest that topics such as Maine Street Advising Notes, internship advising, and advising ESOL students should be offered in the future. We might also consider a year-long convocation on advising, and sending more teams to NACADA summer institutes, to spread a culture-shift in advising at USM.
Once we have a clear sense of our mission and goals, advising manuals for faculty and professional advisors should be reviewed and updated, and provided in both electronic copy and in hard copy to employees.

**Recommendation 5: Create a Mechanism for Assessing Academic Advising**

USM has engaged in assessing academic advising (see appendices). Advising surveys and focus groups both indicate that the student perception of advising at USM is uneven, and that advising services are delivered in various modes with varying degrees of effectiveness, depending on the program/department. Themes that recur in existing assessments are that the informational component of advising could be improved at USM; that frequent changes of advisor are confusing and disruptive of the student's sense of connection; that advisor knowledge of major requirements and university policy is inconsistent; that more diversity-awareness among advisors would improve advising; that better career advising is needed; and that nontraditional students need to access advising outside of regular business hours.

Just as USM needs an advising mission statement, USM needs to develop an Advising Assessment Plan that incorporates the entire Academic Advising Program and is informed by national best practices. Much like the current advising experience, the assessment of advising is uneven. The most recent campus-wide assessment of advising has been general surveys and the Advising Task Force work. A new commitment to advising assessment will be necessary to identify specific student and advisor learning outcomes and programmatic outcomes that are directly related to the institution’s and the advising program’s mission, goals, and values.

Identifying measurable outcomes for the advising program and continuing the program self-assessment in order to determine which new initiatives are successful or need improvement will be essential. Program assessment should go beyond student satisfaction surveys. Both faculty and professional advisors should have the opportunity to assess aspects of the advising program including advisee-to-advisor ratio, orientation, support materials, technological tools, and the effectiveness of administrative policies and procedures. Assessment should be designed with formative goals in mind—it should focus on the strengths of our current advising system, as well as areas for improvement.
Evaluations of individual advisors can be both formative and summative. The existence of a regular advisor evaluation mechanism will signal the importance of advising at USM, and the evaluations themselves should convey to advisors both strengths and areas for improvement.

In addition to an overall assessment of the advising program, the Faculty Advising Liaison program should be assessed. The Advising Task Force recommends the Faculty Advising Liaison program be assessed before a decision is made about whether or not to continue the program after implementation of the new shared advising model.

Mechanisms for assessing advising may be internally-developed or purchased from an external source, but they should be tailored to USM’s needs. In addition to using a Likert scale, the assessment should include a place for written comments, and should incorporate student self-assessment. Before an assessment mechanism is used, it should be reviewed and approved by faculty advisors, professional advisors, and students. It is recommended that an assessment sub-committee be developed from the Advising Council in order to develop an institutional advising assessment plan that will identify the appropriate assessment mechanisms.
Recommendation 6: Improve Advising Support Materials and Technology

Focus groups with faculty advisors, professional advisors and students revealed a need for a combination of printed material and technological resources that would help improve the advising experience at USM. Across the board, we heard that a printed list of course offerings would make pre-registration advising and course selection easier. In the past, the Free Press has printed course offerings. Some departments and programs also provide a printed list of course offerings each semester to majors, a practice which should be supported by the institution. Sample graduation planners might be incorporated into such printed materials for student reference. While such materials might cost the University money, they will also encourage browsing for courses by enrolled and potential students, a feature that MS Course Search does not readily offer.

Both faculty and professional advisors have also requested that print catalogs be provided, as the online catalog has not effectively replaced the print copy—it is not easily searchable, nor is it the most convenient source for looking up academic policies and procedures. Many of us hang onto dog-eared copies of old catalogs, using the online catalog as a last resort.

In addition to providing more advising support materials in print, we can improve our support technology. Advisors and students alike complain that MaineStreet Degree Progress Reports are not accurate for many majors and minors, making it useful primarily for checking on the Core Curriculum. The “user-friendliness” of other aspects of MaineStreet, such as Course Search, should also be assessed. Supplementing MaineStreet with retention software would help both students and advisors track student academic progress, and aid in the implementation of early alert systems.

USM could also benefit from a more widely utilized appointment scheduling system. Currently, Professional Advisors use youcanbook.me for appointment scheduling. Faculty advisors have not been encouraged to use appointment scheduling software, nor have they been made aware of options available for Gmail users. Advisor development in this area might prove useful.
Finally, while the USM Advising Network is a repository for useful advising information, it is not the robust self-serve resource that it could be for both online and face-to-face students, nor is it a well-known, well-used portal for advising information and materials. The Advising Network should be retooled so that it becomes more fully used by the advising community.

**Recommendation 7: Develop Diversified, Data-driven Retention Programs**

"Effective delivery of advising is diversified—that is, programming is tailored or customized to meet the distinctive needs of students from different subpopulations, and the needs of students at different stages of their college experience." Cuseo, "Defining Student Success"

Currently, Advising lacks organized, institutional data on subpopulations of students that might need specific advising interventions. Broadly, we need to explore the questions below:

- Who is leaving? What subpopulations of students are most at-risk for leaving the university without completing a degree?
- When are they leaving? At what stage in their careers are students most likely to leave?
- Why are they leaving? (Academic reasons? Fiscal reasons? Health Reasons?)
- Where are they going?

Specifically, we need to know more about students in subpopulations that the advising literature has identified as having unique needs. Our diverse and non-traditional populations at USM include:

**First Generation Students:** First-generation students often require orientation to the expectations of higher education and additional support from staff and faculty to provide the supports and information that students with parents who have attended higher education institutions often receive from home. As advisors we encounter a population that does not know what they do not know and identification of this group and prescriptive methods of advising, at least initially, is crucial.
Commuter Students: Commuter students tend to struggle to feel connected to campus life. They often come to campus primarily to take classes and use facilities, and are less likely to join student organizations or events. Taking into account the three campuses of USM, this is a large portion of our population that is particularly challenging to connect with and support. Advisors need to offer flexible hours and modes of advising, and should work with commuter students on ways to feel connected to the institution.

Adult Students: Adult students also face challenges of connecting with the campus community, both within and outside of class. They often juggle school with family and employment demands, and have concerns about their ability to handle the rigors of higher education. They can be challenged by classes containing students younger than themselves, and sometimes find introductory classes remedial, frustrating, or intimidating. Support for these students needs to be flexible, in hours and modalities, as well as focused on strategies that can help them juggle their multiple priorities and create realistic expectations for their studies.

Minority Students: Minority students--those falling outside of dominant cultural categories present at the institution--can struggle to gain connections, and face discrimination and lack privilege enjoyed by many of their peers. They sometimes face challenges relating to content in classrooms and have difficulty finding advisors they feel have had a shared experience in higher education. Advising needs in this area can include helping students connect with services, groups, and staff. In addition, it is important faculty and staff have continued professional development on intercultural and diversity topics. USM should emphasize hiring practices that support a diverse staff and faculty.

Immigrant & Refugee Students: Students in this category can encounter challenges with language proficiency and understanding cultural and educational expectations. These students can also encounter challenges of discrimination and prejudice. Immigrant and refugee students require supports similar to those of first-generation students in understanding expectations, in addition to programs to support English language learning, and an awareness on the part of
staff and faculty on the immigration and citizenship attainment process and how this can impact a student’s family and financial experience.

**LGBT Students:** LGBT student experience more discrimination on campus than their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Research shows that faculty interaction with LGBT students benefit from faculty and advisors who are educated about issues that they face, and who act as allies.

**Online Students:** Online students often encounter disconnection from the campus community, challenges with time management and priority-setting, and a higher need for an on-campus advocate in their stead. Advisors need flexibility in adapting advising strategies to on-line technology available. They need to be aware of student expectations and should work to find innovative ways of establishing the advising relationship at a distance. Quality online course design and student readiness for online study are also crucial components to online student retention.

**Military Veterans:** The military veteran population can be challenged by such things as understanding and correctly documenting their educational plan to government benefits providers, and working through injury recuperation as well as other physical and mental effects of returning from active duty and adapting to the new, and very different, demands of higher education. Veterans can benefit from a connection between benefits staff and advisors, awareness of on-campus military supports and groups, and professional development for faculty and staff on veteran’s concerns.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students in this category encounter a broad range of challenges that require accommodations that can include anything from physical changes to campus to slightly different teaching strategies. Advisors part in supporting these students manifests in a strong relationship with Disability Services, continued professional development in topics related to the area, and supporting students in learning to advocate for themselves in the higher education system.
In addition to the populations above, here at USM we also have a large population of part-time and working students, as well as students with high financial need. Most often, these categories overlap individual students; advisors can encounter an adult on-line learner with a newly-diagnosed learning disability, or a minority refugee student commuting several days a week to campus and then work.

When crafting an advising mission and structure, these populations should be at the forefront of our thoughts. Working to find a “fit” for students will ensure that our advising model is supportive of diversity and aware of the true impact of our students’ cultures and experiences on advising at USM.

**Recommendation 8: Establish Rewards and Incentives for Good Advising**

“Advising runs the risk of being perceived as a supplemental, low status and low priority activity by faculty because it typically does not carry the same professional status and resume-building value as conducting research, acquiring grants, presenting papers at a professional conference, or engaging in off-campus consulting.” Cuseo

A glaring weakness of faculty advising at USM is that in many departments, faculty advising is seen as a low-priority, peripheral activity, not valued for promotion, tenure, or post-tenure review. It is remarkable that even in the absence of institutional incentives, faculty value the intrinsic rewards of advising enough to perform the work when it goes unrecognized by institutional leadership. Ultimately a cultural change is necessary, one that elevates the status of advising as a component of teaching, and one that is valued at all levels with appropriate recognition and reward. Ideally, advising would become part of every department’s promotion and tenure criteria, again as part of teaching rather than service. But decisions to change promotion and tenure criteria reside at the departmental level, and while we can suggest, even urge, such changes, we cannot require them. So to help the culture change along, we need to develop other incentives and rewards for advising.

Documentation of Advising for Promotion and Tenure is an avenue to promote reward and incentives for good advising and an advising as teaching focus. Currently there is a slight
mention of advising in the Promotion and Tenure guidelines but the Advising Task Force recommends a fuller discussion of advising under Documentation of Teaching. Specifically, the guidelines should include:

1. A subheading titled Documentation of Advising
2. Within the Documentation of Advising subheading a narrative should focus on the following:
   a. Advising Philosophy Statement
   b. Number of advisees
   c. Description of any efforts undertaken to enhance advising effectiveness (such as attendance at workshops or conferences focused on aspects of advising enhancement); identification of any special advising assignments or innovations developed, particularly those aimed at fostering active or engaged advising
   d. Reference to any contributions made to departmental, school/college or institutional advising
   e. Faculty should also have the ability to add student advisee comments regarding their advising experiences. Much like adding information regarding their teaching evaluations, a developed Advising Assessment Plan could provide a mechanism for faculty to have access to their student comments and overall advising assessment.

In the sample P&T documents provided on the Provost’s website, the Documentation of Advising should be explicitly and prominently displayed. Even if individual departments choose not to weigh this information in P&T decisions, this will encourage recognition of advising as a crucial part of teaching and raise its profile among faculty.

Faculty also must know at the time of hiring that the institution values academic advising and that it is a critical component of their USM work. The Task Force recommends including standard questions to the faculty interview process that specifically ask candidates to share their philosophy of academic advising and to share an advising success story from their past experiences as faculty advisors. Adding such questions not only makes it clear to the
candidate that advising matters at USM, but also creates an opportunity for departmental conversations regarding advising.

In addition, significant tangible rewards for advising need to be established for both faculty and professional advising staff. Forms of reward and recognition for faculty typically include release time from teaching and committee work, financial incentives (faculty development funds, cash awards, and merit pay), and annual employee recognition awards. While awards, plaques, and preferential parking are the incentives least valued by faculty (Wallace), the Task Force Recommends that during this time of fiscal crisis, USM institute a Faculty Senate Award for Excellence in Advising, and revisit the possibility of more substantial financial rewards at a future time.

Among the professional advising staff, there is also a structural impediment to valuing improved advising in that there is little opportunity for professional advancement within Advising. USM’s salary for professional advisors is low, leading to turnover in professional advisors. On a recent visit to USM, the NACADA executive director Charlie Nutt shared that the current beginning professional advisor salary was $4,000 less than national best practice. Student focus groups indicate that changes of advisor are disruptive and disheartening, so we would do well to keep strong advisors and improve student satisfaction with the advising experience. A career ladder providing a formal pathway for advancement in title and pay scale would be valuable here. Research indicates that “advancement opportunities offer institutions a competitive edge in recruiting new advisors” (Taylor 2011). USM also increased the advising loads of professional advisors during the reorganization of the professional advising unit in 2015. The current model is based on a professional advising load of 350 students. The national average for public bachelor granting institutions is 260, and for public masters granting institutions is 179. While there is not currently an objective recommended case load, the 1990s recommendation of 300 students per advisor will likely be shifted downward as the definition of advising and the duties of delivering quality academic advising expands (Marsha Miller, personal communication, April 22, 2016). To provide true developmental, intrusive advising to our USM students, we believe that advising loads will need to be decreased to 250 per advisor.
Conclusion

The Advising Task Force understands that the next step in the process of deciding on a plan for academic advising at USM may be to obtain an external review. We are very supportive of an external review, but hope that it doesn’t slow down implementation of some of the immediate action items in our list of recommendations. Having made strides in implementing a dual advising model, USM is well-positioned to start making a difference in retention rates through improved advising practices, especially with regard to first-year and first-generation students, who often experience high rates of attrition, and for whom we do not currently have a targeted advising plan. We also recommend that there be quick movement on reviewing our efforts to begin developmental advising strategies in summer orientation programs, and having an advising plan that includes undeclared students in place by fall.

The Task Force further believes that USM has the potential to become a national model for a shared, team-based approach to academic advising. The Advising Task Force is committed to a collaborative approach to building an effective academic advising program, and has found it enormously useful to bring together such a diverse group of people to review the current state of advising at USM. Our membership includes faculty advisors from multiple colleges and professional advisors responsible for delivering advising in a variety of formats; as a group, we have come to believe strongly in the efficacy of a collaborative planning of the academic advising program, and there are members of the committee who would continue to provide leadership in the area of advising by participating in the Academic Advising Council.
References


http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-first-year-students.aspx - See more at:

http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-first-year-students.aspx#sthash.1Q7xFBNf.dpuf


student success." In M. Upcraft & G. Kramer (Eds.). *First-year academic advising: Patterns in the present, pathways to the future* (pp. 63-67): Columbia, SC: National Center for the Freshmen Year Experience & Students in Transition. 63-67.

Miller, Marsha (2016). Personal Communication, April 22.

NACADA (2003). Paper presented to the task force on defining academic advising. Retrieved from NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web site:

http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/The-definition-of-academic-advising.aspx


http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Organizational-Models-for-Advising.aspx


