

DUAL MODEL OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AND FACULTY MENTORING

A PROMISING PRACTICE BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY USES TO

PROMOTE COLLEGE COMPLETION AND RETENTION OF NON-TRADITIONAL AGE STUDENTS

ABSTRACT Since 1958, Brandman University, formerly known as Chapman University College, has been serving adult learners through its mission to provide quality education with flexibility and lasting value for students' careers. Brandman holds regional accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). In 2007, Brandman recognized a need for improvement in its student satisfaction scores on academic advising. Thus, the institution needed to address options to better support its **non-traditional age students** without compromising its current **degree attainment** and **retention** rates. A key strategy emerged, which involved revamping its existing advising practices to employ a dual model of academic advising and faculty **mentoring** for all students. The advising model was devised with collaborative work groups, with expertise in a multitude of areas across the university. Subsequent to the model's adoption, the advising team created three **communities of practice** that aim toward increasing advising effectiveness and student **retention**. The three communities include: an assessment community to inform and improve advising and student **retention**; 2) a professional development community that encourages academic advisors to engage in cutting-edge and research-based academic **mentoring**; 3) an internal communications **community of practice** that cooperatively examine and share academic program and policies to add value to the student academic advising experience. Results of our efforts indicate that institution-wide, undergraduate session-to-session **retention** rates increased from 65% in 2008 up to 70% in 2010. For graduate students, this rate went from 85% in 2008 up to 85.9% in 2010. Annual satisfaction survey data indicated that reviews of academic advising went from an average of 3.8 (out of 5) in fall 2007 up to 4.21 in spring 2012. Six-year **degree attainment** has steadily maintained at around 70% of our incoming undergraduates. Regular examination advising data, research on salient predictors of **retention**, and **communities of practice** that support advising across the institution have propelled this program to meaningful translation into student success outcomes.

Strategy: Dual Model of Academic Advising and Faculty **Mentoring**

Description: Brandman University developed an advising model to better meet the needs of adult learners in a distributed-campus system consisting of 26 ground locations and a fully online campus. In the dual model, students have a professional advisor and a faculty **mentor**. The professional advisor provides academic program knowledge, assists with course sequencing, and helps students understand policies and procedures. Meanwhile, the faculty **mentor** provides support related to **industry-driven competencies** within the students' degree program. After the advising model was developed, roles were clarified between faculty **mentors**, faculty and academic advisors. Annually, academic advisors hold a "summit" where **communities of practice** unite to review academic program changes and policies and coordinate with faculty mentors to discuss program updates. A major roadblock involved changing institutional culture to value the role of the academic advisor.

Theoretical Approach: A critical piece of our promising practice includes garnering institutional collaboration across our **communities of practice**, faculty, and executive leadership. These **communities of practice** reviewed extensive research and theory on advising models, and selected best practices. In addition, the **communities of practice** were charged with removing preconceived notions and criticisms about the existing model and replacing it with a focus on the future. Arising from these efforts, the advising model emerged. The new model drew upon research showing the importance of collaboration between academic advisors and faculty **mentors** (e.g., Habley, 2000) as well as research indicating the

importance of developmental advising (e.g., Crockett, 1987). Overall, the University takes a student-centered approach, where knowledge of programs to prospective and current students is a key component of empowering students to plan, register and complete their degree. Thus, an important part of student success is ensuring that students understand their degree requirements and receive effective advising for **degree attainment**. A noteworthy accomplishment is that all students are advised upon admission where students' educational plans for degree completion are distinctly mapped. The advising model includes faculty **mentoring** to stay relevant on students' **industry-driven competencies**.

History: Our institution was alerted in 2007 when our annual student satisfaction survey hit an all-time low on its advising scores. As a result, we hired a new director of student **retention** and advising who was charged with a goal of increasing student satisfaction and incorporating effective advising with **retention**. The first stage in the process of changing our advising model included an initial taskforce to outline the goals and to examine best practices in advising. As mentioned previously, a result of these efforts was the increased collaboration and the division of three **communities of practice** that inform and improve the quality of academic advising and faculty **mentoring**.

Outcomes: Results of our efforts indicate that institution-wide, undergraduate session-to-session **retention** rates increased from 65% in 2008 up to 70% in 2010. For graduate students, this rate went from 85% in 2008 up to 85.9% in 2010. Annual satisfaction survey data indicated that reviews of academic advising went from an average of 3.8 (out of 5) in fall 2007 up to 4.21 in spring 2012. Six-year **degree attainment** has steadily maintained at around 70% of our incoming undergraduates.

Factors Contributing to Success: The most unique feature of our strategy has been our **communities of practice**. These collaborations increased our understanding of clear communication to students and advisors about degree requirements, and have increased the perceptions of the advisor as a valuable asset to the student and university at large. Further, regular collection of student data on our annual advising surveys has helped inform the **communities of practice** on areas for improvement. Finally, in collaboration with the institutional research office, the advising team conducts exploratory analyses of advising factors that predict next-term **retention**. Through these efforts, the advising team is able to hull out key strategies to target **retention** in subsequent years.

What Did Not Work: We assumed, at the outset, that the advisors and **communities of practice** would be immediately valued for their efforts. However, there was a transitional period and cultural adoption was delayed longer than anticipated. This created a need for further dialogue about the importance of academic advising for students.

How Other Institutions Can Benefit: There are three major areas where we feel that schools can benefit from our promising practices. First, institutions should take a holistic approach to advising; advising is most effective when it is not fragmented or kept separate from the institution. Second, advisors should adopt the best practices of faculty **mentors**; for example, using an advising syllabus to communicate expectations and guide the student through their education plans. Third, it is important for all stakeholders interested in advising and **mentoring** to focus on a collective vision for the future rather than a myopic view of the present.

Barriers Due to Federal Regulations: None.

Cited References:

Crockett, D. *Advising Skills, Techniques and Resources*. Iowa City, Iowa: The American College Testing Program, 1987.

Habley W., Gordon, V. and Associates. *Academic Advising, A Comprehensive Handbook*. SanFrancisco, California: Jossey Bass, 2000.