Destination Integration:
Strategies to Improve Academic Advising

Part 1 of a Series on Academic Advising
from the CSU Student Success Network

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Executive Summary

Many campuses across the California State University (CSU) system are seeking to improve academic advising as part of their efforts to increase student progress and graduation rates. In this exploratory study of efforts to improve academic advising at five CSU campuses, researchers at the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) working on behalf of the CSU Student Success Network identified a focus across the participating campuses on better coordinating advising services across colleges, divisions, and departments and improving their integration with other campus units, such as tutoring, career centers, and financial aid. Through their efforts, these campuses seek to better leverage their limited advising resources to improve student outcomes. This report, based on in-depth interviews with 36 administrators involved in improving advising, describes the campuses' efforts and the context in which they are occurring.

As is the case at many universities across the country, academic advising services at CSU campuses are often distributed, or decentralized, across multiple divisions and offices. While this decentralized structure is valued for its support of departmental autonomy and variation in advising approaches in response to local contexts, it poses a significant challenge to ensure adequate communication and coordination across advising units. Across the campuses we studied, we uncovered five strategies to coordinate efforts more effectively and leverage limited advising resources to better support student success:

1. **Advising Councils, Committees, Task Forces, and Summits.** All five of the campuses we studied are using standing and ad hoc committees to better coordinate advising services while also retaining decentralized staff and unit reporting lines, advising structures, and advising practices. This strategy has low barriers to implementation and is widely perceived as a helpful and nonthreatening way to improve communication, build community, align efforts, and integrate planning within a decentralized advising environment.

2. **eAdvising Tools.** The campuses we studied are using a range of eAdvising tools, both homegrown and commercial, in various stages of implementation. The tools are intended to support workflow and analytical functions across the campus. Stakeholders are hopeful about the potential of the tools to target advising resources where they are most needed and to support a more holistic and proactive approach to academic advising. However, implementation efforts are still in the early stages; technical challenges, as well as barriers to changing stakeholders' attitudes and practices, remain impediments that need to be addressed.

3. **Professional Development Trainings and Events.** All five campuses are expanding professional development opportunities for advisors, largely through internal trainings and events. While these efforts primarily reach professional staff advisors, they also include some faculty. Professional development is perceived as valuable for creating community, disseminating effective practices, sharing information, and increasing consistency in advising, but campuses face challenges in finding and allocating resources for professional development and finding ways to target the unique needs of faculty advisors.

4. **Shared Positions and Cross-functional Advising Teams.** All five campuses are using cross-functional advising teams or shared advising positions to encourage cross-unit collaboration, with approaches ranging from pilot efforts to efforts at scale. While these strategies require mindset shifts for personnel who may be used to more traditional reporting structures, interviewees were receptive and showed a desire to develop more cross-functional coordination and collaborative teams.

5. **Senior Administrator with Campuswide Advising Oversight.** Four of the campuses have designated a single individual responsible for the coordination of campuswide advising. While the perceived effectiveness of the position is mixed due to challenges associated with positions that rely largely on influence rather than a direct line of authority, they are thought to be helpful in spearheading some of the other strategies campuses are pursuing.

Most of the campus strategies are in the early stages of implementation, and information to evaluate their impact are not available. The administrators we interviewed, however, said that they believe these efforts have the potential to improve relationships across units that have not had a strong history of effective collaboration. Administrators also predict improved relationships between faculty and professional advising staff. They said that the strategies, and particularly the use of eAdvising tools, could help the campuses better target limited advising resources. Some common challenges that the campuses face include: the management of change within large, traditionally siloed bureaucracies; making changes that affect the faculty role or the faculty's level of engagement in advising; "initiative fatigue;" and the need to integrate these efforts into other reforms occurring across the CSU system.

Based on our interviews, we identified two areas in which all five campuses could increase their attention on creating and communicating more coherent strategies for improving academic advising: addressing equity gaps and using data to understand the effectiveness of advising. While most interviewees acknowledged considerable focus at their campus on the general issue of disparities in student progress and outcomes, few reported specific efforts to address equity gaps via changes to advising or identified specific evidence-based interventions to reduce equity gaps. Similarly, interviewees recognized the importance of using data, but did not articulate clear and widely understood plans for using data to measure the effectiveness of advising reforms. These findings could reflect an issue of communication, with interviewees in different positions having varying levels of familiarity about campuswide strategies in these areas.

Our research to understand efforts to improve academic advising continues on these five CSU campuses, with plans to survey faculty and professional staff advisors as well as focus groups to explore students' experiences with academic advising. A report summarizing the results of the additional research is planned for spring 2019 and will include several implications drawn from the experiences of the participating campuses. Our purpose is to share campus-level policies and practices to inform others who may be seeking to improve academic advising on their campuses, in support of greater student engagement, learning, progress, and completion in the CSU.

Many CSU Campuses Are Working to Improve Academic Advising

The 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) are planning and implementing a wide range of new programs and approaches aimed at increasing graduation rates and reducing equity gaps among students, partly in response to Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI2025), which was launched systemwide by the Chancellor's Office in 2016.[1] As part of these systemwide efforts to meet the goals of GI2025, many campuses seek to improve academic advising, with a focus on better coordinating advising services across colleges, divisions, and departments, and improving their integration with other functions, such as academic, career, and financial aid support. At CSU campuses and other universities across the country, academic advising is often distributed, or decentralized, across multiple divisions and offices, reflecting, at least in part, the importance placed on shared governance and faculty control over curricular matters in higher education. By improving the communication and coordination of services campuswide, new strategies at some CSU campuses seek to better leverage limited advising resources to improve student retention and graduation.

These findings are based on a study exploring efforts to improve academic advising at five CSU campuses, undertaken by researchers at the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) on behalf of the CSU Student Success Network.[2] The research included a review of national literature on academic advising at broad-access universities, a review of relevant documents and websites for the five participating CSU campuses, and interviews with administrators involved with academic advising at each campus that explored the context for their efforts to improve these services (see Research Methods sidebar and Appendix A: Research Methods). The primary improvement strategies we found across the CSU campuses studied are:

- the use of advising councils or committees;
- the development and implementation of eAdvising tools;
- the expansion of professional development opportunities for advisors;
- the use of advisors in shared positions and teams; and
- the creation of a new position on campus to coordinate advising across units.

Most of these strategies are still in the early stages of implementation. This report describes the campuses' efforts and the context in which they are occurring. Additional research will explore the perceptions and experiences of advisors and students in relation to these efforts to improve academic advising, with findings to be published in spring 2019. The second report will include a summary of what we learn from the administrators, advisors, and students, and some implications for efforts to improve academic advising across the CSU system.

RESEARCH METHODS

- We reviewed research and other information related to academic advising in broad-access universities, along with documents related to current issues in the CSU, and used the information to develop an interview protocol (see Appendix B: Interview Protocol).

- We recruited campuses to participate in the research through outreach to members of the Advisory Board of the CSU Student Success Network as well as contacts at other CSU campuses. We targeted campuses that we identified as having some focus on improving academic advising during earlier research on efforts across the CSU to improve student success.[3] We offered anonymity to participating campuses in order to encourage participation and frank discussions and, therefore, do not identify them in this report. In targeting campuses for inclusion, we worked to ensure some variation in campus location and in the nature of the changes being made to academic advising.

- We reviewed advising-related information for the five campuses in available documents and on campus websites.

- We conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 administrators involved in efforts to improve academic advising in both academic and student affairs (such as associate vice presidents over advising, associate deans of colleges, and directors of advising). We recorded the interviews and conducted content analyses of the transcriptions in order to identify common themes. Because the campuses were offered anonymity, we do not highlight specific practices on particular campuses, but rather describe, in more general terms, strategies that are similar in type across most or all of the participating campuses.

Efforts to Improve Advising in the Context of Reforms Nationally and in the CSU

Research literature finds broad consensus that high-quality academic advising has benefits for a range of student outcomes, including GPA, retention rates, and graduation rates.[4] Nationally, there has been a gradual shift in universities' overall advising philosophy—moving from a transactional approach that is primarily focused on academic course planning toward a more holistic or comprehensive approach that provides academic and nonacademic resources and support to enhance overall student development.[5] The holistic advising philosophy integrates aspects of several promising approaches: developmental advising, which emphasizes the relationship between the advisor and the student; strengths-based advising, which focuses on helping students know and leverage their assets rather than merely addressing deficits; and proactive advising, which puts the onus on the advisor to initiate and maintain contact, a method that can be particularly helpful for underserved student groups.[6,7,8] The general consensus from the literature suggests that comprehensive, yet personalized, approaches offer the most benefit to students.

The shift toward a more holistic approach to advising also coincides with the increasing professionalization of advising.[9] Academic advising was not historically viewed as a professional field integral to student development, but rather as a bureaucratic function to dispense information.[10] However, the increasing diversification of the college student population over the past several decades influenced views on the nature and purpose of academic advising and led to efforts by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) to support greater professionalization through the development of standards and the training of advisors.[11] The gradual professionalization of advising has been reflected in changes to advising structures on campuses. Traditionally, general education (GE) advising was provided in a universitywide advising center, either under academic affairs or student affairs, and faculty provided advising for students' major program of study in academic departments within colleges. Increasingly, some universities are adopting or scaling up a model of having major advising provided in college-based advising centers, either utilizing a mixed model (advising by both faculty and professional staff advisors) or a model that relies predominantly on professional staff advisors in partnership with faculty who provide academic mentoring and career counseling.[12] As universities hire more staff advisors, they are taking new steps to ensure these employees are well trained, appropriately evaluated, and properly rewarded.[13]

As advising methods become more student-focused, so too have the technological tools that can be leveraged to improve student engagement, personalization, and overall communication. Universities are increasingly using eAdvising tools to facilitate interaction and improve connections between students and advisors.[14] These tools are also being used to direct advising resources at certain junctures, such as orientation and planning for the second year of courses, as well as toward students who could benefit most from support at certain times, such as students who are a few units away from graduating or who are at risk of not completing major requirements.[15] Research in broad-access institutions cautions that, in order to improve student experiences with advising and their outcomes, eAdvising tools must be accompanied by changes to advising structures on a campus, the processes used by advisors, and campus values and culture around the importance and role of advising.[16]

Within the CSU, GI2025 sets ambitious goals for improving graduation rates, reducing time to degree, and eliminating equity gaps across student populations. These goals have significant implications for academic advising, as students' abilities to make timely progress through their degree programs can be affected by the quality and timeliness of the advising support they receive.[17] In addition, as part of its guidance to campuses concerning GI2025, the CSU Chancellor's Office has encouraged efforts to improve advising, including recommendations that campuses hire additional advisors to serve as retention and graduation specialists, use data to identify students most in need of advising, and implement more proactive approaches to providing these services to students.[18]

The remainder of this report describes what we learned about the challenges campuses are attempting to address through their changes to advising, the types of changes they are making to advising structures and processes, the difficulties they face in implementing those changes, and the perceptions of interviewees about the benefits to date of the strategies they are pursuing. We also describe several opportunities for increased attention in campus efforts, based on our study.

PARTICIPATING CAMPUSES HAVE DECENTRALIZED ADVISING STRUCTURES

All five campuses that participated in this research have some variation of a decentralized structure for academic advising, as is common across the CSU and other universities. The specific structure of advising varies across institutions. One common decentralized model provides advising related to GE requirements through a universitywide advising center and advising related to students' majors by the specific college or department. Among the five campuses we studied, common features include the following:

- A central advising center serves students with no declared major and in most cases provides GE advising to all students. There is variation in whether that center is housed in student affairs or academic affairs.

- Colleges, or individual departments within the colleges, provide major advising. There is variation in who provides that advising both within and across campuses. Faculty do some of the major advising at all five campuses. Two of the campuses rely primarily on faculty for major advising at all colleges, with variation in how that role is distributed among individual faculty members. At the other three campuses, some colleges rely on a mix of professional advisors and faculty, while other colleges rely primarily on one group or the other to provide major advising.

- Regardless of the specific structure of major advising, the campuses illustrate the broader movement toward professionalization of advising. All five are using professional advisors based in the colleges to some extent, and several have set up advising centers at each college.

- Special programs for certain populations of students include enhanced advising services (such as the Educational Opportunity Program, or EOP), although the number of students with access to such programs is a fraction of the number who meet the programs' eligibility requirements.

- Academic support, including help with academic planning and progress, is reported as the primary function of advising; at four of the five campuses, however, interviewees said they would like to provide a more developmental approach—one that is more student-centered and more holistic in the supports it offers. In some instances, particularly for those in roles that serve special populations of students, proactive advising and comprehensive approaches were the driving philosophy behind their advising services.

Campus Challenges: Coordinating Across Advising Units and Resource Constraints

In our interviews, we asked administrators to describe the major challenges their campuses face in providing students with effective academic advising. Their responses largely fell into two broad categories: 1) the need to ensure adequate communication and coordination across advising units that are distributed across campus divisions and departments, and 2) concern that resource constraints limit their ability to provide academic advising that supports all students in meeting their educational goals.

> "I think the decentralized advising model has a lot of advantages and it makes sense, but it's a big, clunky model. Without any kind of direct reporting line to any one person, it makes it hard to make sure people are doing things consistently and to hold them accountable."

Coordination and Communication within a Decentralized Advising Structure

The issues around coordination and communication were described, in large part, as leadership challenges that derive from the decentralized structure for providing academic advising. Interviewees described a lack of clarity across their campuses about who is ultimately responsible for advising and what roles different advising units, and the staff and faculty advisors within those units, are expected to play. They believe that this results in a lack of accountability for advising processes and outcomes. The distributed leadership for advising often leads to different priorities and conflicting messaging to advisors—issues often exacerbated by frequent leadership turnover.

The different reporting lines of advisors make it difficult to coordinate efforts across advising units and lead to significant variation in processes and practices across campus. For example, interviewees said that there is significant variation in whether and to what degree professional staff advisors are involved in major advising, and in whether faculty are well informed about GE and graduation requirements and if they do any advising around those issues. Achieving effective coordination across faculty and staff advisors was described as a challenge by some interviewees, making it difficult to provide students with a cohesive advising experience.

> "I think that our faculty are experts in their field, and they're wonderful mentors for students…But when they have the mentoring piece and professional staff advisors have the piece related to other student services, there isn't one point of contact for students to get a holistic picture. With faculty being in academic affairs, and being responsible for teaching and educating our students, they're not always as informed about some of the things that happen in student affairs."

Advising practices vary across campus advising units, such as the use of scheduled appointments as compared to drop-in advising, and the extent to which advising is mandatory and on what schedule. While interviewees noted that such variation is, in part, a natural consequence of decentralization and allows for departmental autonomy in approach, many expressed concern that some of the variation

affects the nature and quality of the advising students receive. Advisors in different units often receive different types and amounts of training and professional development, have different levels of access to information, and have different understandings of campuswide policies. Interviewees believe that these differences, and insufficient coordination more broadly, have negative consequences for students. They reported that students are often confused about where to go for advice about particular issues, when and how to access services from a particular advising office, and whose recommendation to follow when advisors offer conflicting guidance.

> **"There are some advising centers where they do only general education advising and no major advising, so there's a lot of confusion across the board in terms of who owns which students and where do they go. Students can get the runaround, which is not a pleasant experience for our students."**

Limited Resources for Advising

In addition to the challenge of effectively coordinating advising across units, nearly all interviewees pointed to resource constraints, and the high student-to-advisor ratios that are a consequence of those constraints, as a significant factor limiting their ability to provide the amount and type of academic advising that is necessary to support all students. According to interviewees, high student-to-advisor ratios limit their ability to use advising approaches that they believe would be more effective, such as mandating that students see advisors at particular intervals and being proactive in reaching out to students rather than waiting for them to show up at an advising office. Advisors' workloads make it difficult for them to be more intentional and organized in their work, and to find time to collaborate with each other to share effective approaches to supporting students. The high student-to-advisor ratios limit student access to advising and their ability to develop relationships with particular advisors. They limit the time advisors can spend with students to make comprehensive academic plans beyond the next term, and to address the growing needs of the diversifying student populations across the CSU— needs that extend beyond academic planning to include complex financial, family, and personal issues.

> **"Advisors are overworked, and they really don't have time to discuss students' needs in detail until there is a serious problem or the student complains. In my college, we have three advisors and about 2,300 students in our majors. Each student would average a few minutes per semester with an advisor, so you really can't sit down and talk about anything in depth. Quality is hurt by the lack of availability of advisors' time."**

Interviewees expressed concern about disparities in resources across advising units that lead to inequities in the caseload of advisors working in different offices and in the access students have to advisors based on their major. The inequities in workload apply to faculty advisors as well as to professional staff advisors, as the expectations around faculty advising vary substantially across colleges and departments, and some faculty receive "assigned time" for advising students while others are expected to do advising on top of a full teaching load.[19] Along with workload issues, interviewees said that even when resources are available to hire additional professional advisors, inadequate salaries and limited career ladders make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff, particularly for campuses in higher-cost areas of the state.

> **"The major challenge is the volume of students we're advising—the volume of work. It's hard to justify carving out time to be reflective and thoughtful, and to have intentional conversations about how to improve advising when we know there is a line of students, and every hour that we are not available for appointments is going to be felt at another point in the calendar."**

Many interviewees expressed concern related to both of these challenges—coordination across advising units and limited resources—involving the gaps and duplication of effort that can occur in a decentralized advising structure. They said that some students can easily "slip through the cracks" while others receive advising through multiple programs and offices. They said that campus resources may not be effectively deployed to maximize overall student success.

The desire of the five campuses to deploy their limited resources more effectively and to achieve better coordination across advising units, along with investments and guidance by the Chancellor's Office through GI2025, are leading to efforts to implement strategies to improve academic advising, as described in the next section.

Five Strategies to Better Integrate Advising in a Decentralized Structure

Across the five campuses we studied, we uncovered five strategies that are being deployed to address the two broad challenges identified above: 1) to coordinate efforts more effectively while maintaining the existing decentralized reporting structure common to academic advising at all five campuses, and 2) to leverage limited advising resources through this improved coordination and communication to better support student success. In this section, we describe each strategy, characterize the extent of its utilization across the five campuses, and identify the perceived benefits and challenges as described by multiple interviewees across the campuses.

Strategy 1: Advising Councils, Committees, Task Forces, and Summits

All five of the campuses we studied are using standing and ad hoc committees to bring administrators and advisors from different units together in order to coordinate advising services more effectively while also retaining decentralized staff and unit reporting lines, advising structures, and advising practices. The leadership for such committees is usually provided by a senior administrator, often assisted by key staff, who has an explicit or de facto role in campuswide coordination of efforts to improve academic advising, and whose responsibilities are met in part through this convener role.

The campuses described several types of committees:

- Standing advising councils bring together campuswide cross-functional leadership, such as associate vice presidents in academic affairs and student affairs, college associate deans, directors of academic partner units (such as tutoring offices), as well as senior administrators from the office of the registrar, enrollment planning, housing, information technology, and other nonacademic units for regular (usually monthly or bi-monthly) meetings focused on advising.

- Standing committees meet regularly (usually monthly or bimonthly) to bring together middle leaders (which may include associate deans, advising center managers, and line advisors) to disseminate information and share effective practices and challenges at regular intervals.

- Ad hoc task forces or subcommittees, with varied representation, are charged with a specific time-limited task or piece of work, such as developing a campuswide professional development curriculum or an advising assessment framework.

- Advising summits meet less frequently (usually not more than annually) and engage the campuswide advising community in tackling large-scale strategic planning efforts, such as developing a mission and vision, student outcomes for advising, a strategic advising plan for the campus, building an advising community, and providing professional development.

Perceived Benefits. Interviewees' perceptions of the benefits of such committees include:

- better alignment of efforts within a decentralized advising environment;
- improved communication and sharing of information about advising policies;
- opportunities for frontline advising staff to provide direct input to senior administrators about efforts to improve academic advising;
- community-building across individuals and divisions/departments from all corners of the campus charged with advising-related responsibilities;
- an exchange of effective practices and development of more consistent practices across campus without necessarily standardizing procedures; and
- an ability to engage a broad range of campus stakeholders in strategic, campus-level planning to improve advising within a distributed leadership environment.

> **"The business of the Advising Council has been to have each college come to the table and say: Is there anything we can learn from each other? We don't dictate to the colleges what to do, but we do look at current practices, and it wouldn't necessitate or exclude developing policy in the future. I think that as the Council gets more formalized, I could see them having a lot more input in that area."**

Implementation Challenges. All of the campuses we studied reported positive results with this integration strategy, and it has low barriers to implementation. To launch, the strategy typically requires a senior administrator with sufficient authority to convene a cross-functional, cross-campus committee and sufficient staffing and resources for some logistical support. The administrators we interviewed were receptive to these efforts, and there was no evidence of concerns such as might be raised by restructuring efforts that involve changes to individual or unit reporting lines or top-down standardization of practices.

> **"I had the opportunity to serve on the Advising Summit Committee for two consecutive years. It's an opportunity for all of us to get together and share best practices in our departments—student affairs and academic affairs, faculty and student advisors. It's truly open to the entire campus community. I love that because I'm all about collaboration: let's work together. In my opinion, that's what's going to really help our students."**

Summary. The use of advising councils and other campuswide committees and summits has high utilization and low barriers to implementation. The strategy is widely perceived as a helpful and nonthreatening way to improve communication, build community, align efforts, and integrate planning within a decentralized advising environment.

Strategy 2: eAdvising Tools

The campuses we studied are using a range of eAdvising tools and employing multiple platforms, both homegrown and commercial, in various stages of implementation. At some campuses, tools have been retired and replaced with new platforms that offer enhanced functionality as eAdvising tools that are available commercially continue to evolve. The eAdvising tools in use across these campuses support both workflow and data analytical functions, including:

- facilitating students' access to **appointments** with advisors;
- requiring or encouraging students to complete multi-year **academic degree plans**;
- providing advisors with access to reliable **student record data**;
- allowing advisors across the campus to **share notes** about students; and
- supporting the use of **proactive advising** campaigns or early alerts that target outreach to particular student populations based on shared characteristics (such as high-unit seniors or lower-division students with identified risk factors that may impede academic progress).

> **"The advantages are we can reach more students who actually need to be seen as opposed to students who would be fine on their own. We can start to track how many contacts students have had and start to see how they're doing as a result. We are starting to work on an extended coordinated care network, where advisors can start to make referrals. We can just be much more proactive and make the kinds of interventions that can make a difference for these students."**

Perceived Benefits. Interviewees' perceptions of the benefits of eAdvising tools include:

- the ability to manage limited advisor resources by using tools to target students who need advising most;
- more efficient utilization and accessibility of staff resources and space through the use of online appointment functions;
- more effective academic planning sessions through the use of degree-planning tools;
- more consistency and coordination in the advising that students receive from multiple offices through the use of shared notes and access to reliable student record data;
- ability to surface barriers for students through analysis of aggregated student record data; and
- potential for implementation of more holistic advising models through the integration of partner units such as career centers and student learning centers.

> **"The Degree Planner has been very useful because it's a student-facing tool as well as an advisor-facing tool. In the past, students had paper plans, which maybe lasted a week or two before they got lost or got shredded in the bottom of a backpack. So now these degree plans are all online, and students can access them at any time."**

Implementation Challenges. While interviewees were frequently positive and hopeful about the potential of eAdvising tools to improve advising on their campuses, they also identified a range of challenges associated with their use, including both technical challenges and challenges related to engaging stakeholders and achieving broad adoption of the tools. Some commonly cited challenges include:

- lack of opportunity for some stakeholders to give input on the technology selection and implementation;

- glitches in getting eAdvising tools up and running effectively;

- churn due to rapid changes in the vendor environment and frequent tool migration;

- lack of integration of the multiple eAdvising platforms in use at campuses, which can include a mix of commercial and homegrown products;

- concerns about the accuracy of and timely access to data and information in various systems;

- challenges in identifying and utilizing data that are actually predictive of student success;

- challenges with training advisors who do not already possess a skill set in using data and technology;

- barriers to engaging faculty in utilizing tools (for example, inputting information needed for early alert processes and using features that allow advisors to share notes about students);

- barriers to engaging students in utilizing tools (such as creating degree plans and responding to early alerts);

- inconsistent usage of eAdvising tools across campus units, which limits their effectiveness;

- concerns that proactively targeting students based on specific risk factors may stigmatize students or lead to implicit bias;

- the need to have thoughtful and coordinated processes in place to support students once problems are identified through data analytics; and

- limited participation by units outside of academic advising, delaying the potential for eAdvising tools to support more holistic interventions.

> **"There's a little bit of platform fatigue. In the last five or six years, it seems like they're constantly rolling out some new thing and having to train people on it, and people get frustrated. So I hope that whatever we invest in going forward, we stick with and that it's a good product and that the investment we put in training and rollout is going to be worth it."**

Summary. All of the studied campuses were increasing their use of eAdvising tools, but they faced high barriers to implementing the tools successfully and achieving widespread adoption across campus. Stakeholders said they are hopeful about the potential of the tools to target advising resources where they are most needed and to support a more holistic and proactive approach to advising. However, implementation efforts are still in the early stages, and technical challenges—as well barriers to changing stakeholders' attitudes and practices—remain impediments that need to be addressed to fully realize the tools' promise.

Strategy 3: Professional Development Trainings and Events

All five campuses are expanding professional development opportunities for advisors, largely through internal trainings and events. While these efforts primarily reach professional staff advisors, they also include some faculty. Examples of trainings and events include:

- campuswide onboarding trainings and continuing education help advisors understand relevant campus policies, GE and graduation requirements, the process for referring students to academic and nonacademic support services, and other information relevant to being effective advisors;
- monthly campuswide network meetings for advisors to share information and effective practices;
- annual or semiannual campuswide training institutes or conferences, which may include invited experts or speakers from off campus;
- training targeted to faculty;
- training targeted in specific areas, including using data for decisionmaking or implementing eAdvising tools;
- e-newsletters highlighting effective practices targeted to the advising community;
- online advising resources and webinars; and
- external trainings or conferences (such as those presented by NACADA).

Perceived Benefits. Interviewees' perceptions of the benefits of increasing professional development include:

- creation of a campuswide advising community;
- better dissemination of information and effective practices across the campus;
- more consistency in advising approaches and practices through common onboarding and continuing education;
- more effective use of limited advising resources as advisors become better trained;
- opportunities for advisors to contribute to their own professional development and campus professional development efforts through sharing expertise with colleagues;
- strategic leveraging of external expertise (such as NACADA) to raise the bar on advising efforts;
- more accessibility of information through online resources; and
- pilot efforts to offer faculty professional development specifically designed for and targeted to their needs.

> **"This past year, we made a push to focus professional development on faculty. Because on our campus, even though faculty advise, they often view themselves as faculty first so sometimes will overlook their identity as an advisor. When there was professional development for advisors, they would think, 'Oh, can I go, since I'm a faculty member?'"**

Implementation Challenges. Interviewees also identified challenges associated with campus efforts to offer more professional development for advisors:

- insufficient budget for developing internal conferences and trainings;
- insufficient budget to support advisors to attend external conferences and trainings;
- inequitable allocation of professional development funding across advising units;
- uneven or piecemeal efforts in lieu of a mature professional development curriculum, including onboarding and continuing training, operating at scale; and
- difficulty in attracting faculty advisors to trainings or events aimed at staff, which may suggest a need to partner with relevant units (such as Centers for Teaching and Learning) to develop appropriate content.

> **"I think advising should have a training budget, so you know you're developing good training and professional development for everyone, that's equitable. Not just one college having a really good program and the next one not."**

Summary. Campuses are providing more face-to-face and online professional development opportunities, primarily internally and primarily targeted at professional staff advisors. These efforts are perceived as valuable for creating community, disseminating effective practices, sharing information, and creating more consistency in advising efforts. Stakeholders would like to see more intentional allocation of resources toward these efforts, as well as opportunities targeted at the unique needs of faculty advisors.

Strategy 4: Shared Positions and Cross-functional Advising Teams

High student caseloads and burdensome workloads were identified as major challenges at every campus we studied. All of the campuses are employing a variety of strategies designed to leverage limited advising resources, encourage cross-unit collaboration, create more consistency in training and supervision, and ensure that any new investments in advisor positions are effective. Strategies include:

- creating cross-functional advising teams in colleges, where specialized staff from different units, some spanning academic affairs and student affairs, collaborate to address students' needs more holistically;
- hiring new advising positions with specialized campuswide roles, such as graduation and retention specialists, sometimes shared between a campuswide and college advising center; and
- assigning advisors dual reporting lines, such as reporting jointly to a college associate dean and a campuswide advising administrator, to foster more coordination.

> **"The cross-functional advising teams understand advising from a more holistic approach. We're exploring more around career education. We're starting to look at things like wellness and sense of belonging. Do our students have the financial literacy? Do they have the health and well-being awareness?"**

Perceived Benefits. Interviewees' perceptions of the benefits of implementing shared advisors and cross-functional advising teams include:

- the breakdown of organizational silos and increased focus on students and their success;
- better leveraging of existing staff positions to reduce duplication of effort and make it easier for students to access advising resources and support;
- better coordination among campus administrators through stipulations that new hires must be made within a coordinated structure; and
- more consistency in advising training, supervision, and practices across the campus.

> **"As we roll out these new shared advising positions, we have certain expectations around the outreach that they'll be doing and what services they'll provide. We can expect that every student who has 80 or more units has received outreach from an advisor and that there are workshops about graduation that have common content. Whether they're a business student or a student in liberal arts, they're going to have heard about how to apply for graduation."**

Implementation Challenges. Interviewees also identified some challenges associated with efforts to utilize advising staff collaboratively:

- insufficient resources to build out cross-functional advising teams, including the use of temporary, rather than permanent, funds and lack of funding for ancillary costs like office space, equipment, and training;
- challenges in implementing dual reporting lines for both advising staff and their managers; and
- varied levels of engagement and support from staff in cross-functional teams, depending on their reporting line.

Summary. We found growing utilization of team approaches to integrate campus advising efforts, ranging from pilot efforts to efforts at scale. These efforts require mindset shifts for personnel who may be accustomed to more traditional reporting structures; however, interviewees reported receptivity and success in developing more cross-functional coordination, along with a desire to continue to build collaborative teams and shared positions.

Strategy 5: Senior Administrator with Campuswide Advising Oversight

Four of the campuses we studied have a designated senior administrator charged with oversight for coordinating advising efforts across a decentralized organizational structure. Key issues of note with these positions include the following:

- The clarity of administrative roles varies, with some administrators having dedicated roles for coordinating advising and others having a de facto role along with other primary responsibilities.

- Administrators typically have direct oversight of the campuswide advising center but not advising that occurs within colleges.

- The ability of the senior administrator to execute responsibilities relies heavily on influence rather than direct authority, due to the decentralization of advising reporting lines.

- The position may be housed on the academic affairs or student affairs side of the institution or may have a dual reporting line to both.

- The administrator may have some limited staffing support for achieving coordination goals, such as a dedicated position providing professional development or training for the entire campus, including training of staff and faculty who do not report to the administrator.

- The ability of the administrator to be effective within a decentralized environment relies heavily on other coordination strategies discussed in this report, such as dual reporting lines, advising councils/committees, professional development efforts, and joint oversight with the Information Technology unit to implement eAdvising tools.

> **"NACADA recommended we have one person on campus that people would see as the go-to person for academic advising."**

Perceived Benefits. Interviewees' perceptions of the benefits of such positions include:

- having someone with authority to convene committees, task forces, and advising councils to address issues related to advising affecting the entire campus community;

- having someone to lead the development and implementation of a campuswide advising vision;

- ensuring better information dissemination and more consistency in advising practices across various units;

- raising the visibility of advising issues; and

- enabling more effective advocacy for resources dedicated to advising.

Implementation Challenges. Interviewees also identified some challenges associated with such positions:

- The role can lack clarity or not have sufficient direct authority for implementing a vision for advising.
- The use of dual reporting associated with some of these positions can create confusion about accountability.
- Many of these positions have responsibility without much authority and must rely on influence or persuasion, which can limit the administrator's ability to be effective.
- Administrators may encounter challenges in gaining traction with coordinating across student affairs and academic affairs, depending on where they sit.

> **"You have to have strong leadership. There needs to be leadership from both ends—academic affairs and student affairs—leading those efforts together."**

Summary. Most of the studied campuses believe it is important to have a senior administrator charged with coordinating campuswide advising efforts across a decentralized environment. The perceived effectiveness of such positions to date is mixed due to challenges associated with positions that rely on influence without direct authority. Nonetheless, such positions are perceived as helpful in spearheading some of the other integration strategies described in this report. While their effectiveness may be partially limited by insufficient line authority, interviewees reported that these positions represent an important strategy in the coordination of campuswide advising efforts within a decentralized advising structure.

Opportunities for Increased Attention

We identified two important areas that campuses are being asked to focus on as part of GI2025 to explore systematically in our interview protocol: reducing equity gaps across student populations and using data to evaluate reform efforts. We found examples of emergent efforts in these areas; however, we did not find consistent approaches across the campuses or widespread awareness of campus efforts in these two areas across interviewees. This might reflect varying levels of information about campuswide strategies across interviewees. It could also point to a need for campuses to increase their attention on creating, and communicating, more coherent strategies around equity and the use of data to improve academic advising.

Coherent Strategy around Equity

Most interviewees acknowledged considerable focus at their campus on the general issue of disparities in student progress and outcomes. Some interviewees noted efforts to hire advisors who reflect the diversity of the student population and who come out of graduate programs that emphasize diversity, student development, identity development, and social justice. Some of the campuses provide diversity training for advisors. One campus even launched an equity and inclusion team comprising positions on both the academic affairs and student affairs sides of the university, primarily focused on diversity in hiring, especially for faculty. Another campus launched a program involving teams of advisors, staff, administrators, and faculty that is beginning to examine equity gaps in advising practices. For example, the group is looking at the longer-term effectiveness of certain interventions around advising related to remediation.

Despite these examples, few interviewees reported specific efforts to address equity gaps through the development and implementation of improvements to academic advising, nor were they able to identify specific advising interventions that had appeared to reduce equity gaps. Rather, when asked specifically about these kinds of issues, many interviewees referred to specific programs, like EOP, that target underserved student populations, but to which only a subset of eligible students have access. Based on our interviews, campuses do not appear to have a clear definition or way to operationalize equity in the context of advising.

> "But a lot of this effort to improve advising is happening on the student affairs side of the classic two-house split at a university: the academic side and the student affairs side. That is a limiting way to do it. When it comes to the focus on advisors as one of the change mechanisms towards improving equity, not enough is being done."

Use of Data to Understand the Effectiveness of Advising

From our interviews, we saw early signs that some campuses are starting to have broader conversations about data-driven decisionmaking through convening campuswide summits to identify specific outcomes and related metrics for assessing their efforts to improve advising. One campus has established a subcouncil focused on assessment that includes representatives from each of the college-based advising centers. At another campus, a data analyst was hired by one college-based advising center to work with graduate students to assess and leverage information on admissions rates, transfer rates, and graduation rates for different programs and for underrepresented student populations.

On the whole, the campuses are collecting a range of data, according to interviewees, including student satisfaction data, student achievement data, and program-level data, but there is widespread variation within and across campuses in terms of who has access to the data and whether/how data are used in decisionmaking. Current metrics are heavily focused on retention and graduation rates and do not generally include metrics related to evaluating the efficacy of specific interventions. Some interviewees expressed a desire that their campus do more around using data to assess changes in advising but indicated that limited resources and capacity currently impede further efforts in this area. Others pointed to a potential for using data in more targeted ways as campuses ramp up the implementation of their eAdvising platforms.

> "There are so many different sources of data, so we're trying to figure out what kind of report could we run that's centralized, so we're not having to go to six different places, and so that we are all looking at it through the same lens, at the different colleges, because we're all going to have this model. Let's go into it with us all trying to measure success in the same way."

Conclusions

Consistent with national trends and the goals of GI2025, many CSU campuses are implementing multi-pronged strategies to improve academic advising as a means of increasing student progress and graduation rates. Our interviews with administrators at five campuses indicate that these campuses are committed to maintaining decentralized advising structures that preserve departmental autonomy and some variation in advising approaches. At the same time, they are pursuing five broad strategies to coordinate advising services more effectively within a limited resource environment and to better integrate academic advising with other services to support student success. Strategies to better integrate GE and major advising appear to be more developed on these campuses—in part through a shift toward college-based advising centers and more reliance on professional advisors—while efforts to integrate advising with other services to provide a more holistic and cohesive experience for students are more nascent and aspirational.

Most of the campus strategies are in the early stages of implementation, and data and information to evaluate their impact are not available. The administrators we interviewed, however, said that these efforts have the potential to revise the relationships across units that have not had a strong history of effective collaboration and to improve relationships between faculty and professional advising staff. They also said that the strategies, and particularly the use of eAdvising tools, have the potential to help the campuses better target limited advising resources.

Some common challenges that the campuses face across the five strategies include the management of change within large, traditionally siloed bureaucracies and making changes that affect the faculty role or the faculty's level of engagement in advising. Other challenges across the strategies include "initiative fatigue" and the need to integrate efforts to improve advising into other reforms occurring across the CSU system. For example, interviewees reported that GI2025, the California Promise, and Executive Orders 1100 and 1110 have all increased pressure on the advising function at their campuses to help students better navigate through to timely graduation.[20,21]

Even in the face of these challenges, interviewees described positive changes in attitudes about academic advising on their campuses, including greater recognition of the value of professional advisors, appreciation for the importance of quality advising to student success, and a growing sense among advisors as being part of an "advising community" on their campus.

> **"Now that we have more resources, and now that we're looking at advising, we need to go after a culture change on this campus so that we can support our students…I think there's an understanding that we need to improve advising, but there's some hesitancy to changing what we have always done, and some fear around that. It's a mix of wanting to make things better for students, but it's also a scary place when the microscope is then on each individual advising unit."**

Our research to understand efforts to improve academic advising continues on these five CSU campuses. Whereas this research report drew from interviews with administrators, our next study will feature a survey of faculty and professional staff advisors across the five campuses, to understand their perspectives about the ongoing changes to advising structures and processes, and how those changes are affecting their work. We will also conduct focus groups with students to explore their experiences with academic advising in the context of these campuses' efforts to integrate advising services more effectively to support students. A report summarizing the results of the survey and focus groups is planned for spring 2019 and will include several implications drawn from the experiences of the participating campuses. Our purpose in publishing these reports is to inform others who may be seeking to improve academic advising on their campuses, in support of greater student engagement, learning, progress, and completion in the CSU.

Appendix A: Research Methods

Review of Literature and Documents. We reviewed sources pertaining to national trends in advising, such as the website and reports of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), as well as research on advising practices at broad-access higher education institutions. We reviewed information collected during our previous research that summarized efforts to improve student success across the CSU as a means of identifying campuses appropriate for a study of efforts to improve academic advising.[22] That earlier research was largely based on the draft versions of Student Success Plans submitted by each CSU campus as part of Graduation Initiative 2025, along with campus strategic plans, accreditation documents, and other campus planning documents. We used the information gathered through these reviews to develop an interview protocol for advising administrators (see Appendix B: Interview Protocol).

Interviews. We contacted 10 CSU campuses with diverse characteristics by enrollment size, geographic location, and descriptions of advising reforms, and received approval at five campuses to explore their efforts to improve academic advising. We offered anonymity to participating campuses and individuals in order to encourage candid discussions, so we do not identify the campuses in this report. During the summer of 2018, we conducted a total of 36 semistructured interviews with seven or eight administrators with responsibility for advising at each of the five campuses. These interviews explored the major issues campuses are trying to address through their changes to academic advising, the changes they are making to advising structures and processes, the challenges they face in implementing these changes, and interviewees' perceptions about their progress and the effectiveness of their efforts to date. Some quotes have been edited for grammar and clarity.

Analysis. We recorded and transcribed the interviews, then coded and analyzed the transcriptions to identify major themes. The themes presented in this report , related to strategies to improve academic advising and the benefits and challenges campuses are encountering in their efforts, represent issues described by multiple administrators across the campuses (i.e., we do not include issues mentioned at only one or two campuses, or by only a few interviewees). Our offer of confidentiality to the campuses prevented us from showcasing specific practices, so we provide generalized descriptions of similar efforts aimed at addressing common goals and challenges, which may be scalable across other campuses in the CSU.

Limitations. There are several limitations to our approach. First, our selection of campuses to consider for inclusion in the study was based on a high-level review of campus planning documents, which reflected what campus leaders chose to highlight, so we likely did not consider some campuses that may be undergoing similar efforts. Second, the subset of campuses that agreed to participate may not reflect the efforts and experiences at other campuses engaged in efforts to improve academic advising. Finally, our methods did not include collecting data on the success of specific strategies to improve academic advising, as such data are not readily available. Therefore, our findings concerning the impact of campus efforts to improve advising are limited to the perceptions of interviewees and are not based on direct evidence.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Researcher: Thanks so much for making time for today's conversation. We have blocked 60 minutes. Are you still available to talk until [end of meeting]?

[Introduce self]

Before we jump in, I want to provide a bit of background on the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) and then provide some context on the project.

- EdInsights is an applied policy research center at Sacramento State that works to support postsecondary readiness and success for traditionally underserved students through applied research, evaluation services, and capacity-building efforts within and across K-12 and public postsecondary education systems.

- One of our projects involves coordinating the CSU Student Success Network, an independent community of practice for faculty, staff, and administrators to collaborate within and across campuses.

- Conducting research on issues related to student success in the CSU is one of the activities of the Network, and we are currently engaged in a study to learn about efforts to improve academic advising across the system.

- We have reviewed documentation about efforts to improve advising across the CSU system and have selected five campuses for further study, including [name of campus].

- Ultimately, we hope that this project helps inform faculty, staff, and administrators across the CSU system about the progress and impact of efforts to improve advising and helps them identify opportunities to collaborate and learn from their colleagues.

- Your responses today will help us build our understanding of efforts to improve academic advising in the CSU. We want you to know that we will not be identifying the campuses that are included in the study, and we will not include your name in any public reports or attribute any comment directly to you.

Let me pause there and see if you have any questions.

[Pause for questions]

Is it alright with you if we record today's conversation? As a reminder, no responses will be attributable directly to you.

[Affirm consent and START RECORDING]

1. Advising can mean different things to different people. To begin, can you tell me about your role on campus as it relates to academic advising? How would you describe your definition of or approach to advising?

2. How would you describe your campus's current approach to academic advising, in terms of both philosophy and structure?

   a. *Probe:* What differences, if any, do you experience between your individual approach, your unit's approach, and/or your campus's overall approach?

3. What do you see as the major advising challenges facing your campus? (Prompts: coordination across functions, use of data, use of technology, staffing and resources, ability to scale improvements, training and professional development, etc.)

4. Let's focus on the various efforts your campus is currently undertaking to improve academic advising. How would you characterize your campus's approach to improving advising overall?

   We are interested in learning about any or all of the following:

   a. structures (changes to how advising is organized);
   b. processes (changes to expected behaviors and outcomes);
   c. and attitudes (how the norms around advising are being re-envisioned).

   Probes/Possible areas to explore/discuss:

   a. improvements to coordination of advising (e.g., changes to oversight, organizational structures, reporting lines, or establishment of new coordinating committees);
   b. new approaches for using data and technology (e.g., adoption of new technology platforms, new strategies for using student data to support student success);
   c. investments to hire additional advising staff;
   d. changes to the respective roles and responsibilities of faculty and staff advisors;
   e. additional training, cross-training or professional development for staff and/or faculty;
   f. developing new advising policies or practices (e.g., assigning students a regular advisor or requiring advising at certain junctures);
   g. changes to the timing, content, or desired outcomes of advising sessions;
   h. changes to the way advisors keep, use, and/or share case notes;
   i. use of and follow-up interventions related to early alerts; and
   j. creating more student-centered times or locations for accessing services.

5. Please describe the current status of the changes you've just described.

   a. *Probe:* How far along are they?
   b. *Probe:* What is the scope or scale of the improvement efforts? Do they affect the whole campus or just parts of the campus?
   c. *Probe:* How effective do you think these efforts have been or will be in addressing the challenges you have identified?

6. Please tell me more about the campus context and history to date of any implementation of advising-related technology at your campus.

   a. *Probe:* What technology platform(s) is your campus using?

   b. *Probe:* What process led to the decision to adopt that platform? What problem(s) were you trying to solve? What did you hope to gain from the adoption?

   c. *Probe:* Who was the primary decisionmaker? Who/what informed their decision?

   d. *Probe:* Who has primary oversight of implementation? What type of governance structure have you put in place to oversee the implementation?

   e. *Probe:* When did you launch the implementation of the platform? How far along are you in the process? What are your next steps?

   f. *Probe:* What do you see as the advantages and limitations of the advising technology tools you are using?

7. To what extent has student equity been a focus of your efforts to improve academic advising? Are there any specific actions that your campus has taken to address equity concerns?

   a. *Probe:* How effective have your efforts to address equity been and do you anticipate them to be?

   b. *Probe:* Are there any specific strategies that you think are or will be more or less effective in addressing equity issues?

8. To what extent are you using data to assess the effectiveness of your changes to advising (as opposed to integrating data into the advising process itself)?

   a. *Probe:* What types of data are you collecting (e.g., student satisfaction data, student achievement data, program-level data, advisor job performance data, etc.)?

   b. *Probe:* How are you using the data in decisionmaking?

   c. *Probe:* Who has access to the data? Who is charged with reviewing the data?

   d. *Probe:* Have you identified specific goals or outcomes for your advising improvements, and how are you tracking progress on those goals?

9. Thinking about your overall efforts to improve academic advising to date, what accomplishment are you most proud of?

10. Again thinking about your overall efforts to improve advising to date, what is the biggest challenge you have encountered?

11. What is the most important thing you have learned from your experience to date?

12. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about how you are implementing changes to advising to better meet your goals, what would it be?

13. As part of our research, we will be administering a survey of staff and faculty advisors on your campus in fall 2018. What kinds of things would be useful for you to learn from such a survey?

14. We will also be conducting focus groups with students on your campus in fall 2018. What kinds of things would be useful for you to learn from such focus groups?

15. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that we haven't already covered?

Endnotes

1   Moore, C., Schrager, C., & Bracco, K. R. (2017). *From scatterplot to roadmap: New efforts to improve student success in the California State University.* Sacramento, CA: Education Insights Center, California State University, Sacramento.

2   The CSU Student Success Network, established in 2016, brings together faculty, staff, and administrators from throughout the CSU system to connect and improve on progress for students. The Network is facilitated by EdInsights. For more information, see the Network website at http://csunetwork.edinsightscenter.org.

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14   Noaman, A. & Ahmed, F. (2015). A new framework for e academic advising. *Procedia Computer Science*, *65*, 358-367. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877050915029270; Kalamkarian, H. S., Boynton, M., & Lopez, A.G. (2018). *Redesigning advising with the help of technology: Early experiences of three institutions*. New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. Retrieved from: https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/redesigning-advising-technology-three-institutions.pdf.

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17   Kolenovic, et al., 2013; Kot, F. C. (2014). The impact of centralized advising on first-year academic performance and second-year enrollment behavior. *Research in Higher Education*, *55*, 527-563.

18   See *CSU Chancellor's Office Guidance on GI2025 Plans* in Moore et al., 2017, p. 13.

19   "Assigned time" refers to non-teaching assignments, funded internally or externally, that release a faculty member from some portion of the teaching load they would otherwise be expected to carry.

20   The California Promise encourages the establishment of "pledge" programs at CSU campuses to facilitate graduation within four years for entering freshmen or two years for community college transfers (see https://www2.calstate.edu/apply/freshman/getting_into_the_csu/Pages/the-california-promise-program.aspx).

21   Executive Orders 1100 and 1110 require changes to assessment and course placement processes to facilitate students' enrollment in and completion of college-level written communication and quantitative reasoning courses (see https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/why-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025/academic-preparation/Pages/eo-1100-and-1110-policy-changes.aspx).

22   Moore et al., 2017.

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