

NEWS RELEASE



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Show Them the Way: More Advising in Community Colleges Leads to Higher Levels of Engagement

AUSTIN, TX – A report released today by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (the Center), *Show Me the Way: The Power of Advising in Community Colleges*, confirms that students who receive more advising—more time with advisors and more in-depth discussions in their sessions—are more engaged. “If community colleges want to increase student engagement, one place to start is by examining the foundation of academic advising,” said Evelyn Waiwaiole, Executive Director of the Center.

Sixty-two percent of first-term students and 78 percent of returning students report meeting with an advisor, yet the advising experience is not the same for all community college students. In terms of structure, content, and intensity, advising varies. This variation matters. Students who have longer initial advising sessions, who meet with advisors more often, and who say an advisor helped them develop an academic plan are more engaged.

“In Texas, community college students who earn an associate degree are leaving with an average of 86 credits, but most students only need 60 credits to graduate,” said Waiwaiole. “As colleges redesign for guided pathways, there is a need for self-reflection. Colleges should take a close look at their advising programs and ask whether their advisors, and in turn their students, are receiving all of the information and support they need.”

The data in the report are based on survey responses from over 90,000 returning students at 188 institutions and almost 40,000 first-term students at 94 institutions.

Among the highlights for returning students are these:

- The initial advising session for almost half of students lasted 16-30 minutes, but students who met with an advisor for more than 30 minutes had higher engagement scores.

- Eighty-six percent of students reported that an advisor explained which classes they needed to take to reach their academic goals, but only 65 percent said that an advisor helped them develop an academic plan.
- Almost two-thirds of students (65 percent) reported that their advisor did not discuss when their next advising session should be.
- Approximately 2 in 5 students (39 percent) reported that an advisor discussed regional employment opportunities with them based on their career interests.
- Half of students interested in transferring to a four-year institution reported never using the college's transfer advising services, yet those who utilized the services reported higher engagement.

“Clearly, advising is not the same for all students,” said Waiwaiole. “But, when advisors are spending more time talking with students about developing an academic plan, their career ambitions, and opportunities for employment—this is where community colleges are seeing greater student engagement.”

One group of students seems to have a qualitatively different advising experience than others: student athletes. For instance, when looking at returning students, 67 percent of student athletes said they were required to see an advisor before registering for classes, compared to 54 percent of non-athletes. Sixty-nine percent of student athletes reported meeting with the same advisor multiple times during a term, compared to 55 percent of non-athletes. “A focused model such as this demonstrates that many colleges already have approaches to advising that lead to higher engagement,” said Waiwaiole. “It may be cost prohibitive to scale up a comprehensive advising model that currently is used for only a small group of students, but colleges can evaluate their processes for small-scale in-depth advising and consider which aspects of the model might be used for all students.”

The report's supporting materials include discussion questions for the college community to consider as well as video clips from focus groups that the Center conducted with students and advisors. These supporting materials can be used to spur internal conversations about colleges' own advising models. The report also includes a link to student and advisor focus group guides that can be used to capture different perspectives about the advising experience.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement is a service and research initiative of the Program in Higher Education Leadership in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.