

# Show Me the Way

The Power of Advising  
in Community Colleges

2018 NATIONAL REPORT



Center for  
Community College  
Student Engagement

Colleges in Action:  
Profiles from the Report

# Asheville-Buncombe Technical College: Advising for Transfer Students Mandates Entering a Pathway

At **Asheville-Buncombe Technical College (NC)**, 45% of students pursue transfer-related associate degrees such as Associate in Science, Associate in Arts, Associate in Fine Arts, and Associate in Engineering. An increasing demand for college transfer courses and a statewide articulation agreement with North Carolina's four-year colleges and universities led the college to develop a new approach to transfer advising.

Thus, since fall 2016, all new students enrolled in a transfer program are supported through the Transfer Advising Center, which is staffed by a coordinator, two full-time advisors, and one part-time advisor. Students enrolled in terminal degree programs (who do not intend to transfer) will continue with the college's prior advising model: Advising is required for all students to enable registration, and students are advised exclusively by faculty members in their individual programs of study.

New students with a goal of transfer are assigned an advisor from the Transfer Advising Center during a transfer orientation session. All new transfer degree-seeking students are placed into a College Transfer Success course, which is mandated at the state level. In this course, students complete career exploration and then declare one of 19 pathways of study within the transfer degree programs. Career exploration includes researching careers of interest, investigating the credentials necessary for each career, and determining which four-year colleges and universities offer the credentials they are seeking.

After a student declares a pathway of study, the Transfer Advising Center assigns him or her a discipline-specific full-time faculty advisor from within the student's chosen pathway. At this point in the College Transfer Success course, the student sets up an initial meeting with that advisor. Students are required to have this initial meeting before registering for courses for the following semester. The student will work with this advisor each semester throughout his or her college career unless the student has more complex needs. In those cases, the student will receive guidance directly from the Transfer Advising Center's staff.

The College Transfer Success course is taught in a variety of time frames throughout the semester, including eight-week and 16-week versions. Consequently, students choose pathways of study and are assigned a pathway-specific advisor at different points throughout the term. The college's goal is for all new students to select a pathway during their first semester. The full impact of the pathways project and all of its components, including the Transfer Advising Center, will not be realized until the first of the students who entered in fall 2016 are projected to begin graduating.

# Community College of Philadelphia: More Intensive Advising Correlates With Increased Persistence

As part of its guided pathways reform efforts, the **Community College of Philadelphia (PA)** implemented a new advising model for the 2016–17 academic year. The college shifted away from a structure in which faculty advised all students on a part-time basis and adopted a more intensive advising model, which has an intake process that clarifies student goals and career direction and includes progress tracking and individually designed support.

While faculty still assist with drop-in advising, the college now employs nine full-time advisors, who are assigned to individual students and also assist with walk-in advising requests. The full-time advisors were initially assigned to students in the largest curricula at the college: health care, liberal arts, business, computer information systems technology, psychology, and justice programs. Beginning in fall 2016, almost three-quarters of first-time students (72%,  $N=4,059$ ) at the college were assigned to a full-time advisor.

The full-time advisors provide extensive and proactive academic advising to students using a number of formats: one-on-one, group, and virtual advising through Skype. They also stay in touch with students via e-mail; phone; and Starfish, the college's retention software. All contacts with students are documented in Starfish, and advisors use this program to refer students to tutoring and other academic support services as needed. Using Starfish, advisors also can track whether students have followed through with the referrals.

Every student who sees an advisor creates an educational plan, and students then register based on this plan. In addition to meeting in the advising offices, advisors attend sections of the college's first-year-experience course (which is required for all students in health care, business, and liberal arts) to begin the students' creation of their educational plans.

The new advising model, along with other reforms, such as the implementation of first-year-experience courses, appears to be increasing persistence. Among first-time-in-college students in the new-advising-model curricular areas, the 2015–16 fall-to-fall persistence rate was 45% ( $N=1,601$ ). After the college implemented the new advising model, the 2016–17 fall-to-fall persistence rate was 51% ( $N=2,891$ ). Additionally, among students who were assigned an advisor, the fall 2016 to spring 2017 persistence rate was 75% ( $N=2,891$ ), compared to a 70% ( $N=1,168$ ) persistence rate for students who did not see an advisor. While initial analyses demonstrate a positive impact, the college plans to continue measuring persistence rates moving forward.

# Chaffey College: GPS Centers Facilitate Early Engagement

**Chaffey College (CA)** launched its Guiding Panthers to Success (GPS) Center in 2013. GPS was developed to meet requirements of the California Student Success Act of 2012, which include students' participation in matriculation services such as assessment, orientation, and educational planning. The philosophy behind the program is that students increase their likelihood of persistence and success if they begin college with an informed goal, participate in orientation and educational planning, and understand their placement in math and English.

The GPS infrastructure—which began as a pilot in the college's old administration building—has become the first point of contact for the majority of new students and is an integral component of the new student experience. GPS Centers are now located at all three Chaffey College campus locations. Each facility has a full-time counseling faculty member as well as support from part-time counseling faculty and graduate school apprentices (known as success guides).

After completing orientation and assessment, students receive counseling assistance to develop their initial education plan. Success guides and counselors also provide workshops on college readiness, assessment preparation, financial literacy, academic success for probationary students, and career planning. In addition, the Centers serve as the primary support service providing registration assistance for first-time and continuing students.

Additionally, the GPS Centers help students access and use online student support resources including self-service student planning (educational planning and degree audit), the student portal, and distance education. Continuing students may meet with a counselor or success guide to audit progress toward completion of their educational goals.

Other forms of advising also occur at the college: A cadre of full- and part-time counselors provide continuing students with more comprehensive advising, and through an instructional faculty advising program, students are advised by faculty members within their programs of study. The GPS Centers, on the other hand, serve as the primary intake and triage centers for new and returning students. Students can drop into a Center at any time for one-on-one support. Since their inception, the Centers have provided more than 45,000 orientations and assisted in developing nearly 40,000 initial educational plans. In the 2016–17 academic year, the Centers served more than two-thirds of Chaffey College's students ( $N=29,000$ ).

# Cleveland State Community College: Graduation Rates Rise After Advising Overhaul

Cleveland State Community College (TN) launched a new advising model in spring 2013 and moved to full-scale implementation in fall 2013. The new model revamps almost all aspects of the advising process.

- **Who gets advised.** The college requires all credential-seeking students regardless of enrollment status to attend advising each term, and students are not allowed to register for courses until they see an advisor, who gives each student a PIN to access registration.
- **Who advises.** New students are required to attend an orientation event in which initial career exploration takes place and after which initial academic advising occurs. After the orientation, students choose a major or academic pathway and then are assigned a faculty advisor in that pathway. While most students experience one-on-one advising with their assigned faculty advisor, they can also use drop-in services in the Advising Center, which is staffed by full-time faculty members and a few select staff, all of whom have completed the college's intensive online training.
- **Content of advising.** To ensure a consistent level of quality, the college developed checklists for each category of students with whom advisors meet. Students must also enroll in a first-year seminar (preferably in the first semester), which covers exploration of career choice in more depth, academic advising and planning, and other topics.
- **Intensity of advising.** Advising sessions for new students may take more than an hour as faculty tailor each advising session to the individual needs of the student, while sessions for students with academic plans in place may take as little as 15 minutes.

Cleveland State developed this new advising approach after the governor announced the state's Drive to 55 initiative, which aims to increase degree completion to 55% of all Tennesseans by 2025. It was launched as part of the college's 2011 accreditation work. The college used both Center survey results about advising and career counseling and internal data such as the Survey of Advising to assist in the implementation of new advising models. The college also hired a consultant from NACADA (a professional organization for higher education advisors) to review advising policies and procedures.

Since implementing the new approach to advising, the college has seen its three-year graduation rate increase from 14% ( $N=718$ ) for fall 2010 students to 22% ( $N=774$ ) for fall 2013 students. The college has also seen an increase in the number of students earning 24 credits in the first year, rising from 10% ( $N=784$ ) in 2012 to 30% ( $N=743$ ) in 2016.

In addition, students are reporting a more positive advising experience. In 2014, 59% ( $N=56$ ) of students surveyed said the advising experience was easy and helpful. In 2017, that figure rose to 78% ( $N=206$ ).

CCSSE 2017 survey results indicate that nearly 50% of students had met with an advisor twice by the middle of the spring term, and of these respondents, 24% had met with an advisor more than twice. Furthermore, 43% of students report meeting with the same advisor each time. The college uses results such as these to target areas for improvement and hopes to continue to see an increase in relationship building between advisors and advisees.

# Walla Walla Community College: Advising Changes Lead Students to Follow Advice

In 2004, **Walla Walla Community College (WA)** revamped its advising structure and process, including who gets advised, who does the advising, and when and how advising is delivered. The results are impressive: In fall 2017, about 85% of all advised students were tracked via the Degree Navigation Application (an online tracking tool), and all but two of those tracked enrolled in the classes they had been advised to take. The advising changes came after a comprehensive literature review and a close look at the college's retention rates.

- **Who gets advised and when.** Advising is mandatory for all degree/certificate-seeking students every term, regardless of enrollment status. In addition, students cannot proceed with registration until they have met with an advisor and received a randomly generated PIN, which allows them to access the registration system. The college also mandates an initial intake advising appointment for all new degree/certificate-seeking students, either right before or right after the mandatory new student orientation.
- **Who advises.** Students use the services of professional advisors until they choose a pathway of study, at which point the college pairs each student with a faculty advisor. The college requires that all faculty members serve as advisors and provides advising certification and competency evaluation as well as additional compensation. Faculty members serve as advisors for each student through degree completion and/or transfer.
- **Content of advising.** Advising sessions include a review of the student's identified academic pathway, evaluation of the student's degree audit for pathway course mapping and scheduling, and discussions around financial planning.
- **Intensity of advising.** Advising sessions last anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes depending on the nature of the appointment.

Walla Walla is now tracking students' selected transfer institutions along with their identified career pathways. The college hopes to use National Student Clearinghouse data to determine if students who have selected a transfer institution and career pathway actually have a higher rate of transfer.