

University: North Carolina State University

Program: Virtual Advising Center

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### **Description of Program:**

NC State has a virtual advising center, “Advising Central”, that is available to all prospective and current undergraduate students at NC State. It complements rather than replace other advising efforts on campus. It is a virtual advising center in that the majority of advising (91%) takes place via email or over the web. An additional 15% of our advising takes place over the phone and 8% is in person. This totals more than 100% as students seek multiple advising sessions in multiple formats.

- **To whom is the strategy or initiative directed among first-year students?**

Advising Central is there to help first year students in several ways. We are an advising source for students as they make their way from prospective status to new admit to newly attending student. We answer questions during the admissions process, before and after new student orientation and during the first year. Since there is no general college at NC State, many of the first year students we seek to help are those that admit to a major, but later realize they are undecided or interested in another major and want to change but do not have the benefit of being in a program that allows them to fully explore their options.

- **Among these targeted students, how many or what percentage participate or benefit? In not all targeted students participate, how are participants selected?**

Participants self select themselves. They can email us any time of the day or night, any day of the week. Advising is according to their needs and demand. In our first year of operation, we had over 72,000 separate visits to our site (18,800 were one time visitors, whereas 5,500 repeat users most often used our site: for an average of 10 visits per user). 3000 students were advised directly via email, phone or in person. Five percent or 150 of the students who emailed us identified themselves as prospective freshmen. In our first round of assessment we did not separate out current undergraduates by class.

- **What connections does the program or strategy have to formal classroom experiences and learning outcomes?**

At present the program does not connect to the formal classroom experience except for visiting lectures in first year orientation classes.

- **What qualitative or quantitative assessment data are available to suggest effectiveness?**

We use software to help us understand quantitative usage of our website (how many visitors, from where, how often by hour of the day, day of the week, and more). In the past, we have used a web-based survey sent via email to those who interacted with an adviser via our site to secure qualitative data.

- 74% were traditional college age students (18-22)
- 20% were prospective students (16% transfers, 4% freshman)
- 74% were considering double majors
- 71% were decided or very decided about their major
- 29% were less sure or undecided about their major
- But 44% admitted to wanting to change their major
- 93% had grades of 2.0 or better; 52% had grades of 3.0 or better

Students most often asked about:

- 59% had questions related to a specific major
- 38% had questions about admission to the university
- 25% had questions about placement in courses
- 25% had questions about academic skills
- In 64% of the cases, we advised the student as well as referred them to other people on campus.
- In 36% of the cases we handled the student's issue on our own.  
The most common referral was to another human being: the lead adviser in the student's academic field of choice.
- 87% could clearly understand the advice they received
- 80% found it easier to get advising help
- 84% said the advice they received helped them make an informed decision and
  - 31% helped them decide to attend NC State University
  - 21% helped them stay in school
  - 13% helped them readmit to NC State
  - 13% helped them graduate from NC State
- 91% would recommend Advising Central to a friend

In our next round of assessment, we hope to retrieve information not only in a survey format, but to use new software that will help us manage and track email contacts between students and our advisers. This software will provide regular reports on sorting and summarizing information from students who ask questions through Advising Central. It will also allow us to update our survey and send it out on a regular basis, closer to the point of service. We also intend to break down our analysis by class, gender, gpa and other identifiers. Finally, our long-range assessment

goal is to compare and track a group of Advising Central student users to a similar group that does not use our site and compare the differences in their progression through school.

- **How long has the program strategy been practiced? How has it evolved?**

The program has been in existence since September 10, 1999. It has evolved in several ways:

- 1) Advising Central now has special access and features for faculty advisers;
- 2) We have recently installed software that allows our site to be increasingly interactive for users. (Please reference our FAQ button on our web site). In addition, this product allows us to manage and measure our email in a way that contributes to our assessment efforts and gives us a better way to survey our users for qualitative data
- 3) We were recently awarded a \$9,900 grant to install sophisticated teleconferencing systems in nine remote community colleges and two virtual adviser offices. The purpose will be to have live virtual advising appointments over the computer and web for prospective transfers at these institutions. This will take place in Spring/Summer 2002.

- **Have others emulated the practice, or has it received formal recognition for effectiveness?**

Yes. Advising Central has enjoyed well-received presentations at NACADA regional and national conferences over the past two years. In addition, we are frequently contacted about how the center was started from various institutions. Many times, other educators will try to emulate a piece of our center, but not replicate the entire effort. As a result, there are very few truly virtual advising centers yet around the country. We define a “virtual advising center” as a place where the majority of the interactive contacts with student advisees is through the use of technology. A static website is not a virtual advising center. A physical advising center with a web page with the email addresses of advisers is not a virtual advising center. The virtual advising centers in existence to date are: Penn State, Pima Community College, Weber State and Coastal California Community College. Arizona State University/ School of Communication, Indiana University Southeast have implemented some virtual advising principles. University South Florida used our concept of virtual advising and applied it to the creation of their new virtual New Student Orientation program. University of Memphis is considering creating a virtual advising center.

- **What is the source of funding? Is the funding available?**

In order to demonstrate the interest of students and staff in creating Advising Central, we raised over \$65,000 on our own as we took the proposal forward. Annual budget is \$150,000 and we are funded out of the Office of the Provost and the Division of Undergraduate Affairs. Funding is available. We do, however, do our best to take advantage of grants and other sources of outside funding for new initiatives.