ADVISOR EXPERIENCES AT POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Field Perspectives
March 2024

ADVISING SUCCESS NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

This field insight initiative, conducted by Paritii, LLC was dedicated to understanding the perspectives and needs of advisors in post-secondary education, with a particular focus on their challenges in supporting Black, Latinx/a/o, Indigenous, and poverty-affected students. The team engaged with an array of advisors from different educational settings, including staff advisors, faculty advisors, and deans across 2-year community colleges, 4-year universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), in order to uncover a diverse set of perspectives.

Embracing the principle of targeted universalism, this initiative focused on collecting first-hand observations from these underrepresented groups, with the aim of understanding the few to help the many. Through these interactions, we uncovered the key areas in which advisors need help in supporting students as well as which technological capabilities and features advisors felt could most alleviate their workloads and aid them in assisting students towards better outcomes.

The goal of this compilation of insights is to provide institutions with real-world perspectives from advisors that can inform their student success strategies.

There is a particular focus on the key themes unearthed from advisors, including challenges around changing job descriptions, success measures and data availability, varied understanding of student needs, mixed levels of student engagement, and a need for greater interdepartmental coordination. In addition, key insights related to advising technology are included. These field perspectives help the field:

- Better understand who advisors are, their motivations, and the challenges they face in providing advising.
- Assess the specific needs and gaps in advising support to enhance student outcomes, with a focus on Black, Latinx/a/o, Indigenous, and poverty-affected students.
- Explore technological opportunities to address the identified needs and challenges.

For more resources on how institutions are addressing these and other challenges, visit **www.advisingsuccessnetwork.org**

KEY THEMES

Changing Job Descriptions

- Advisors feel the definition of their job is evolving from degree planning/audit and academic guidance to holistic barrier removal or 'social work', as one advisor put it. Therefore, advisors define successful advising as eliminating barriers to student success and operating by students' definitions of success.

- In that vein, the definition and measurement of success is changing as well. Some advisors are adapting their success measure of 4 or 2 years to graduation, depending on institution type, to a more individualized measure of success per each student. Success can be eight years to graduate if that is what the student needs. Success can also be graduating from a feeder 2-year institution to a job instead of continuing to a 4-year institution per student goals.

Success Measures and Data Availability

- Advisors feel their job is getting harder to measure, and they don't have enough time and data about students to help them all, or at least prioritize those who need the most help.

- Advisors feel they have little social capital to really effect the changes they need to better help students. For example, resources that students need are under the institution's purview, and though advisors can make recommendations, they have no actual power to get things done.

- Some advisors feel the data they need to do their work is available in various forms, however, the data is too siloed to be meaningful, or there might be gatekeepers due to privacy issues preventing access to critical data that could help them understand students better. They would like systems to talk to each other so they have a holistic picture of student needs.

Understanding of Student Needs

- Advisors with similar lived experiences and those who come from the college community typically feel they understand their students' needs, however, they may not always know a specific student's life situation unless the information is offered up by the student in conversation, or the student reaches out for help in a specific situation.

- Some advisors, especially white advisors at Tribal colleges and other MSIs, however, report wanting some cultural sensitivity training to sensitize them to the unique experiences of their racially minoritized students to allow them to do their work better.

- Challenges related to transportation, housing, childcare, internet, and access to personal laptops are critical for many students.

- Advisors recommend providing "soft skills" and self-advocacy training to help equip students with the tools needed for success in college.

> " It is difficult to protect front-line advisors from administrative expectations and quotas. It is really hard to take the more corporate and business side of the college and filter it through a student advisor perspective. "

> " I think I have a fair understanding of challenges for racially minoritized students. However, due to my own experiences and biases, I don't always think about the trauma that is passed down or think about how their identities continue to affect them. "

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KEY THEMES

Student Engagement

- Some advisors find it difficult to engage students until a crisis arises. Although some students have the knowledge and tools to search for what they need, others do not. Advisors spend time "chasing students" to find out how they are doing and intervene as needed.

- Advisors have learned that it can be better to put themselves in their student's path as a way to increase student engagement.

- Some sub-populations of students like athletes or students in specialized programs receive proactive advising as a program requirement or benefit. Advisors would like to see similar levels of resources, technology, and processes applied to the general student population.

- Most advisors are generally aware of the resources available for students, but due to data privacy protections they do not have access to data that shows which students would benefit most.

- Advisors would like to know their students better, but due to high caseloads and other constraints, they are unable to spend enough time with most of them.

- They would like the time to customize outreach and services to their racially minoritized student caseload instead of treating the students the same with mass communications.

> I feel like more culturally relevant trainings for staff and faculty members would be helpful to understanding challenges for racially minoritized and poverty-affected students. I wish we had more informal gatherings in places where we can meet students on the same level.

Lack of interdepartmental coordination

- In order to have a full view of a student's life situation and needs, advisors typically have to look in multiple systems, if systems are available. It is not uncommon to need three or four systems to find out a student's grades, financial situation, etc. At lower-resourced schools, there may not be any systems, or there may be outdated systems that are difficult to use and are not integrated into the newer systems. Some advisors report using spreadsheets or paper folders to record their notes during student meetings. These notes are not shared, and are therefore lost when there is turnover. Without streamlined data systems, students have to repeat themselves multiple times and can feel frustrated and uncared for.

- Advisors are fatigued and unable to cope with high caseloads and are therefore mostly handling crises for students who ask for help. Other students may struggle without any assistance.

- Aside from systems and data collaboration, coordination between programs, such as affinity centers that directly support racially minoritized and poverty-affected students, would greatly benefit students.

> I love those moments when I feel like I have helped a student reduce stress or anxiety around a certain issue and helped them create a plan of action.

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ADVISING TECHNOLOGY OPPORTUNITIES

Advisors identified several ways technology could be useful in alleviating their concerns and helping them better serve their most vulnerable student populations.

Time & Engagement

Advisors noted high caseloads as a barrier to forming genuine connections with students. Advisors perform repetitive tasks and spend a lot of time on transactional processes.

How technology can help

- Remove/automate transactional tasks from advisors e.g. scheduling, course registration
- Chatbot to answer common questions e.g. registration timelines, due dates, etc.
- Automated long-term degree planning
- Automated alerts on when a student is deviating from a planned course path, has too many absences, is failing a class at the midterm milestone, is at risk of losing a scholarship, etc.
- Better communication tools using text messaging and social media to reach students where they are

Data on Student Context

Data is siloed in multiple places, some analog and some digital. Advisors would like a single source for student information: a complete profile, student class registration, and course progress in real time.

How technology can help

- One source/hub with a comprehensive student profile where advisors can see individual data (for example, who is on financial aid, who has children, etc.) to be able to proactively direct them to available resources.
- Easy way to look across systems to identify leading indicators and intervene on time.

- One source for individualized student plans and goals.
- Cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed care training programs.
- Identify students in need of additional support so advisors can spend more time with these students.

Resources for Holistic Barrier Removal

Some institutions have available resources, but advisors do not know about all of them, nor do they know which students need them and when.

How technology can help

- Predictive analysis of course demand to ensure students can get in the classes they need when they need them.
- Self-service for common resources especially in sensitive cases where students might not be comfortable reaching out.
- Automated connection and triage to other departments and resources based on student needs, e.g. scholarship opportunities.
- Career planning to help students find internships and jobs after graduation.
- Soft skills training to help students advocate for themselves.

For more resources on how institutions are addressing these and other challenges, visit www.advisingsuccessnetwork.org

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ABOUT PARITII

Paritii is a woman-owned and operated firm delivering tech-enabled, data-driven, sophisticated, sustainable and equitable strategies for social impact.

We are a full-service social impact consulting firm that leverages equity-aligned technology as a solution. We work at the intersection of technology, strategy, and justice. Our work includes:

- Research, Testing, & Development: human-centered, equity-minded design and UX of bold, precise and culturally-sustaining products.
- Thought Partnership: articulate complex, intractable problems to clearly articulated solutions for immediate and sustained impact.
- Culture & Change Management: design equitable programs and processes, cultivate cultural competency and advance an inclusive perspective to critical work.

Paritii EdTech Support

Paritii aims to ensure that individuals and groups across all lines of difference can benefit from the latest innovations in the global EdTech solution areas.

> www.paritii.com

ABOUT THE ASN

The Advising Success Network (ASN) is a network of organizations and individuals partnering to engage higher education institutions in holistic advising redesign activities to advance success for Black, Latinx/a/o, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and poverty-affected students. Working alongside institutions, the network brings together students, faculty, advisors and other student support staff to build cultures of care that support students in achieving their personal, academic, and career goals. The network supports the field in reflecting on and addressing institutionally-imposed barriers to student success by providing access to national experts and identity-conscious resources and services.

The ASN is coordinated by **NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education**, and founding core partners include **Achieving the Dream**, the **American Association of State Colleges and Universities**, **EDUCAUSE**, **NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising**, and the **National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition**.

> https://www.advisingsuccessnetwork.org

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