

Report of the

Academic Advising Council (AAC) on
Undergraduate Academic Advising at UTSA

The University of Texas at San Antonio

October 2014

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Purpose of the Report

The Academic Advising Council (AAC) is a venue for advisors to discuss ideas and concerns, as well as share best practices between the advising centers. In order to assess the needs and concerns of the UTSA advising community, the Academic Advising Council created an advisor survey that was distributed amongst members of the advising community.

Academic advisors are on the front lines daily assisting students with their advising needs. Various groups have surveyed students on academic advising at UTSA in the past. The advisor survey seeks to provide advisors the same opportunity to formally express their ideas on how to improve advising practices, strengthen relationships with students, and foster employee relations. This feedback is considered especially important to the advising community in light of the recent changes to the advising structure and processes. By conducting this survey, the goal of the AAC is to help improve the UTSA advising community so advisors can best continue to support students and assist UTSA in reaching Tier One status.

The following report outlines the 2014 AAC Advisor Survey results, along with recommendations. The survey consisted of 20 questions which were divided into three areas:

- Advisor Training & Development
- Employee Relations
- Best Practices

The AAC hopes that the UTSA administration (e.g. Provost and VP for Academic Affairs, Vice Provost and Dean of University College, Associate Vice Provost, Associate Dean of University College, Executive Director of Advising, etc.) will seek to engage in a dialogue about these issues with the advising community so that the recommendations made can not only be considered but implemented by the university. An invitation is therefore extended to all who may be interested to discuss the results of the survey and report with the AAC.

Executive Summary

The Academic Advising Council (AAC) began developing the 2014 advisor survey in Spring 2014. After numerous discussions, the AAC decided to use their 2012 advisor survey as the basis for the new survey. The same basic design was used with 20 questions falling into one of three areas: advisor training & development, employee relations, or best practices. Many questions from the previous survey were used again with the intent to compare the results of the two surveys. Some questions were changed because they were no longer relevant, and there were also new questions that the council wanted to ask regarding advising.

SurveyMonkey was again chosen as the means by which to design and distribute the survey. The 2012 survey was only sent to advisors; however, the council decided to extend an invitation to complete the current survey to others in the advising community including center directors, athletics advising, health professions advising, etc. The link to the survey was initially distributed by email on July 7th, and a reminder was sent on the advising listserv approximately one and a half weeks later. Participants had two weeks to complete the survey. Some advisors did not receive survey access from the initial AAC emails for various reasons (e.g. not being on the advising listserv); however, AAC representatives were tasked with forwarding the link to all advisors in their center.

The AAC targeted 92 staff members from the advising centers, Honors advising center, University Health Professions Office, Athletics Advising, and USSTS when delivering the survey. Seventy responses were collected for a response rate of 76%. For the most part, the advising community was eager to provide feedback about advising and offer suggestions on how to improve practice, and the AAC is confident that a representative sample completed the survey.

In general, there seemed to be consensus on most of the issues covered in the survey. All survey questions and the top responses are included in the “Survey Results” section of this report; however, certain topics will be given more attention in the “Discussion & Recommendations” section based on the frequency with which they were reported in the survey, the amount of attention given to them in previous reports, and the AAC’s perception of their current importance in advising.

Along with the survey results, the AAC decided to review several documents in order to better inform the recommendations. The following documents will be referenced in this report:

Year	Title	Referred to as
2013	Academic Advising Restructuring Proposal	Restructuring Proposal (2013)
2012	Academic Advising Plan	Advising Plan (2012)
2011	Four Year Graduation Rate Improvement Plan	GRIP (2011)
2010	Report of the Provost Task Force on Undergraduate Academic Advising	Task Force Report (2010)
2006	Report of the Subgroup on Student Academic Support, Taskforce on Improving Student Success and Graduation Rates	Academic Support Report (2006)
2005	Report on Academic Advising and the Academic Advising Centers at the University of Texas at San Antonio for the NACADA Consultant Bureau Site Visit	NACADA Report (2005)

The “Discussion & Recommendations” section seeks to identify current and persistent problems in advising and offer solutions or areas for inquiry in order to address them. **The AAC believes it is particularly important that the administration (e.g. Provost and VP for Academic Affairs, Vice Provost and Dean of University College, Associate Vice Provost, Associate Dean of University College, Executive Director of Advising, etc.) review the “Discussion & Recommendations” section in detail.** Many of the problems in advising are interrelated. Some of the overarching issues identified are continued low compensation, Career Ladder ineffectiveness, high workloads, poor communication, low morale, ineffective technology, a perceived lack of leadership, and a lack of advisor involvement or input in planning. Many of these problems have plagued advising for years although the potential causes or circumstances surrounding them may have changed over time. For instance, when speaking of ineffective technology respondents may currently be referring to DegreeWorks, Global, etc. whereas in the past they were referring to CAPP, AdvisorTrac, etc. Each point in time had its own unique programs or issues. However, *ineffective technology* has been a consistent problem.

Similarly, several of the recommendations are related because they fall under a broad topic, although the particular components involved may be different. For instance, a broad recommendation is that advisors be more actively involved in initial planning discussions. With advisor involvement we may have been able to prevent problems with the advising restructure, technology initiatives, and academic unit functions. This means that several offices and groups will need to be open to collaborating with the AAC and the advising community by involving them on task forces, when programming advising tools, or in curriculum/catalog meetings. While involving advisors in each of these groups is a specific recommendation, the *lack of advisor involvement in initial planning efforts* is the broad issue that unites them.

The “Next Steps” section offers some general actions that need to be taken going forward. The list is not comprehensive but highlights some of the most important steps needed. Recommended next steps were made for several different groups (e.g. the AAC, the advising community, the advising administration, and the university administration).

I. Introduction & Overview

The Academic Advising Council was formed in the fall of 2011. Few opportunities existed before this time for advisors to discuss concerns and best practices in advising. The first advisor survey was administered by the AAC in the spring of 2012 to determine the needs and concerns of the UTSA advising community. Prior to this time, advisors were seldom asked for comprehensive feedback on advising at UTSA. Various groups had surveyed students about academic advising, but the AAC survey sought to provide advisors the same opportunity to formally express their ideas on how to improve advising practices and foster employee relations.

In the spring of 2014, the AAC followed the recommendation of the [2012 AAC Survey Report](#) to administer an advisor survey every two years. Obtaining advisor feedback was considered to be especially important in light of the recent changes in structure and processes in advising. A large number of new advisors and continued discontent in advising also justified the need for a second survey.

The 2014 advisor survey used the same format as the 2012 survey by organizing questions into three areas: advisor training & development, employee relations, and best practices. Approximately half of the questions used were taken directly from the 2012 survey, some questions were altered or deleted completely because they included outdated information, and new questions were created by the AAC Survey Committee to address issues consistently discussed at meetings. The advisor training & development section focuses on issues such as the delivery of training, future training topics, effectiveness of training for new hires, and campus processes. The employee relations section focuses on issues concerning workload, the career ladder, advisor compensation, advocacy, and barriers to success. The best practices section focuses on current practices in advising related to morale, collaboration, and advisor effectiveness. It also includes questions to determine which policies/practices the advising community would like to change and which issues they would like the AAC to address.

After the advising community was given two weeks to complete the survey, six members of the AAC tabulated the survey responses. SurveyMonkey automatically provided basic statistics and graphs for questions that contained Likert-scales, but advisors had to categorize any short answer responses to identify common themes. Two advisors were assigned to each of the three survey sections to code short answer responses. Each pair coded their section together in order to form consensus for improved consistency and reliability. The survey committee then reviewed the questions for further reliability.

The survey is the primary source used by the AAC for this report, because it gives advisors a voice. Several themes started to emerge from the responses, so the previous reports on advising at UTSA were examined for information about the themes. With this information, the AAC believes it has obtained a picture of many of the current issues in advising and the factors that have contributed to them over time. This report will present an overview of the 2014 survey data before discussing the common themes and recommendations.

II. Survey Results

This section contains a summary of the 2014 survey results. Due to the wide range of information given by respondents, questions will focus on the most common responses. Demographic data is presented first followed by the survey results which are organized according to the three subject areas: Advisor Training & Development, Employee Relations, and Best Practices.

Demographics

Question 1: What is your current title?

Answered – 70, No Response – 0

RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Director	6	8.57%
Assistant/Associate Director	3	4.28%
Senior Program Director	1	1.42%
Program Coordinator	2	2.85%
Academic Advisor	12	17.14%
Academic Advisor I	17	24.28%
Academic Advisor II	16	22.85%
Academic Advisor III	7	10.00%
Academic Advisor IV	2	2.85%
Athletics Advisor	2	2.85%
Health Professions Advisor	1	1.42%
Teacher's Certification Advisor	1	1.42%

Question 2: How long have you been advising at UTSA?

Answered -70, No Response – 0

RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
0-1 year	10	14.28%
1.1-3 years	16	22.85%
3.1-5 years	12	17.14%
5.1-10 years	20	28.57%
10.1-15 years	7	10.00%
15+ years	2	2.85%
"Several years"	1	1.42%

The median response was between 3.1-5 years, so half of respondents have been in advising at UTSA for less than 5 years.

Advisor Training & Development

Question 3: How would you like future professional development/trainings to be presented? For example, webinars, brown bag lunches, conferences, workshops, study days, etc.

Answered – 63, No Response – 7

Top Responses		
RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Workshops (classroom style)	26	41.26%
Conference style	22	34.92%
Study days	17	26.98%
Webinars	16	25.39%
Brown bag lunches	11	17.46%

Overall, approximately 41% of respondents would like future trainings or professional development to be presented in workshops (classroom style). Also, approximately 35% of respondents prefer Conference style, approximately 27% prefer Study Days, and approximately 25% prefer webinars. Many respondents were open to any format but had additional comments regarding training. For instance, many respondents mentioned having food, including interactive elements in presentations, providing manuals for future reference, and utilizing online modules to improve training.

Question 4: What professional development/training topics would you like to see more of?

Answered – 49, No Response – 21

Top Responses		
RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Professional development (holistic advising, stress management, etc.)	Several	-
Special populations (Veterans, International, etc.)	17	34.69%
Software (DegreeWorks, Global, Banner, Learn, EARN, etc.)	11	22.44%
Policy & procedure changes	4	8.16%
Best practices	4	8.16%

Training topics that respondents would like to see more of tended to fall into two areas: informational topics (e.g. academic programs, special populations, etc.) and professional development (e.g. advising style, stress management, etc.). The most commonly mentioned topic that respondents would like to see is training about Special Populations (e.g. Veterans, International, Athletes, etc.). Software, including DegreeWorks, Global, Banner, EARN, and Learn, was the second most commonly mentioned topic that respondents would like to see more of. Respondents reported needing additional training on software used due to inadequate initial trainings, software not functioning properly, etc. Other common topics mentioned included training regarding policy and procedure changes and best practices.

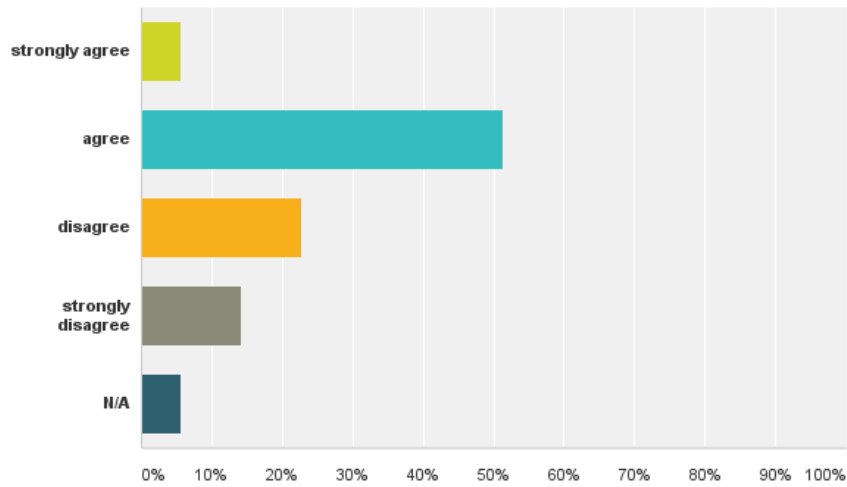
Question 5: I utilize the USSTS Advising Blackboard tool.

Answered – 70, No Response – 0

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	4	5.71%
Agree	36	51.43%
Disagree	16	22.86%
Strongly Disagree	10	14.29%
N/A	4	5.71%
Total	70	

Q5 I utilize the USSTS Advising Blackboard tool.

Answered: 70 Skipped: 0



Overall, approximately 57% of respondents agreed that they utilize the USSTS Advising Blackboard tool and approximately 37% of respondents disagreed.

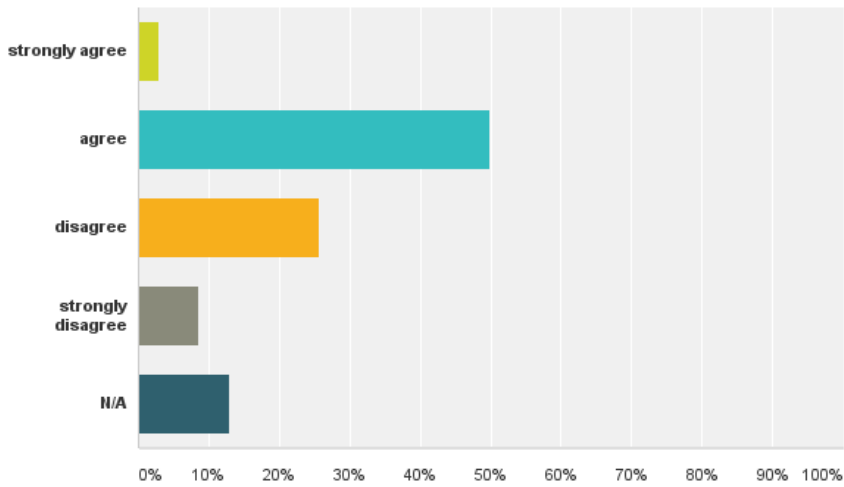
Question 6: I find the Advising Blackboard tool useful.

Answered – 70, No Response – 0

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	2	2.86%
Agree	35	50.00%
Disagree	18	25.71%
Strongly Disagree	6	8.57%
N/A	9	12.86%
Total	70	

Q6 I find the Advising Blackboard tool useful.

Answered: 70 Skipped: 0



Overall, approximately 53% of respondents agreed that the USSTS Advising Blackboard tool is useful and approximately 34% of respondents disagreed. These figures are correlated with the figures from question 5 regarding usage of the USSTS Advising Blackboard tool.

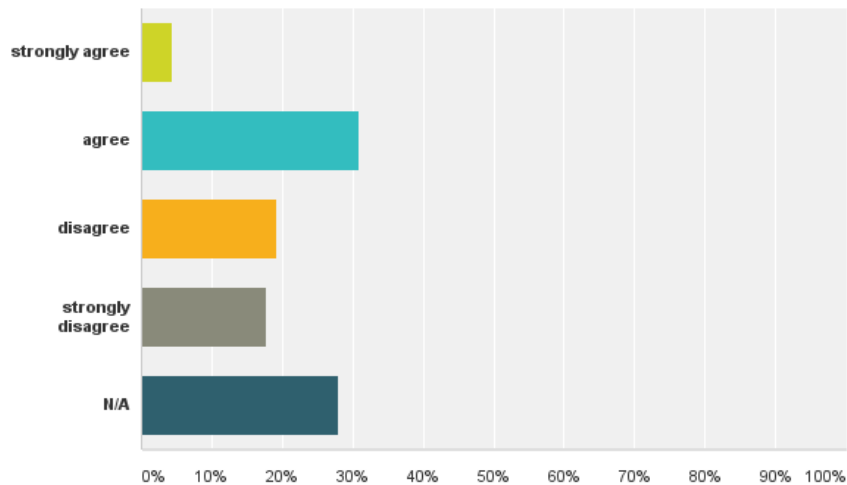
Question 7: The New Advisor Training was sufficient.

Answered – 68, No Response – 2

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	3	4.41%
Agree	21	30.88%
Disagree	13	19.12%
Strongly Disagree	12	17.65%
N/A	19	27.94%
Total	68	

Q7 The New Advisor Training was sufficient.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 2



The purpose of this question was to gauge perceptions of “New Advisor Training” (NAT) for recent hires. Some respondents seemed to answer this question with regard to the trainings that were conducted as part of the new advising structure, so the answers were interpreted as best as possible. Opinions on NAT were mixed with 35% agreeing, 37% disagreeing, and 28% not giving an opinion on whether it was sufficient or not. The most common responses mentioned not being offered NAT until several months to one year into employment (16%) or never being offered NAT (10%). It seems that many instead have relied on training within their center for teaching them the knowledge needed for their day-to-day responsibilities.

Question 8: What ideas do you have to improve Academic Advising training at UTSA?

Answered – 52, No Response – 18

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Ongoing/More frequent	10	19.23%
Online modules/videos	8	15.38%
Manuals/Standard processes	7	13.46%
Delivery (size, space, etc.)	5	9.61%
New Advisor (early training, benchmarks, mentors, etc.)	4	7.69%

Many ideas were given to improve training for advising, but the most mentioned topic had to do with needing ongoing and/or more frequent training. Almost 20% of respondents felt that initial trainings were not enough or done too soon before the material would be applied. They expressed the need for follow-up/ongoing trainings. Others mentioned the possibility of shorter but more frequent trainings for advisors so that too many things are not covered at once. The second most common suggestion concerned developing online modules or videos that new and current advisors could access when needed. Many believe it is an especially good option to ensure that new advisors can get the information they need whether a trainer is available or not. Similarly, respondents also suggested that a common manual with information regarding processes, policies, etc. be established, regularly updated, and made available for advisors to access as needed. Respondents also made suggestions regarding the delivery or logistics of trainings, including having smaller groups, rooms that do not echo, and hands-on learning when applicable. Finally, several respondents mentioned several measures that could focus on improving training for new advisors which will be discussed later.

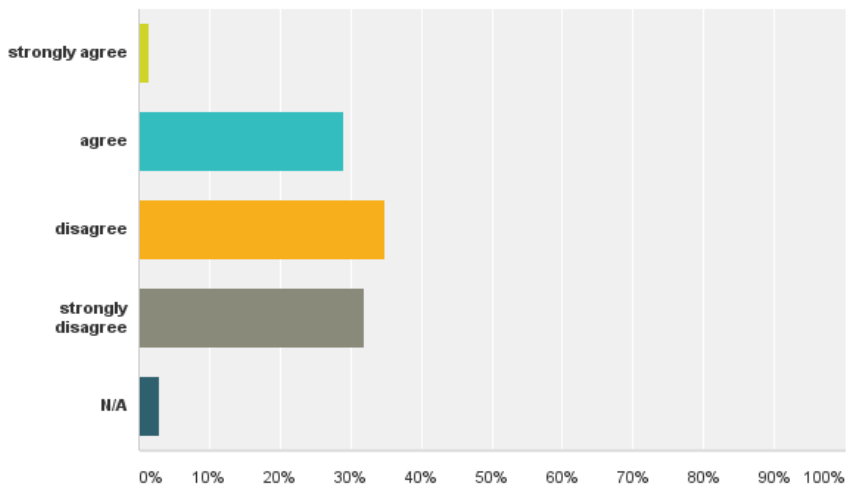
Question 9: The processes are clear in regards to campus academic policies, procedures, and petitions.

Answered – 69, No Response – 1

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	1	1.45%
Agree	20	28.99%
Disagree	24	34.78%
Strongly Disagree	22	31.88%
N/A	2	2.90%
Total	69	

Q9 The processes are clear in regards to campus academic policies, procedures, and petitions.

Answered: 69 Skipped: 1



Approximately two-thirds of advisors do not believe that processes are clear in regard to campus academic policies, procedures, and petitions. Almost one-third cited differences between academic unit preferences and advising center practices as the primary reasons why things are unclear.

Employee Relations

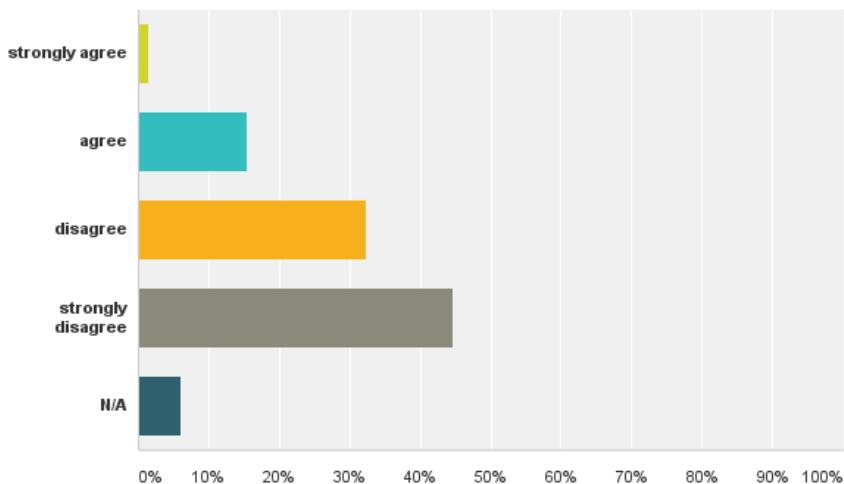
Question 10: I feel the workload - including student supported programs, projects, etc. - is manageable.

Answered – 65, No Response – 5

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	1	1.54%
Agree	10	15.38%
Disagree	21	32.32%
Strongly Disagree	29	44.62%
N/A	4	6.15%
Total	65	

Q10 I feel the workload - including student supported programs, projects, etc. - is manageable.

Answered: 65 Skipped: 5



Overall, 76.94% of respondents do not think the workload is manageable. The top two short-answer responses, which were mentioned a total of 33 times, referenced too many job duties or high caseloads as reasons why the workload is not manageable. Other common reasons cited for the workload not being manageable were needing to work more than 40 hours per week, new technology not helping as intended or even adding time to documentation practices, advising new content areas, new tasks constantly being assigned by the administration, and resources not being equal across centers.

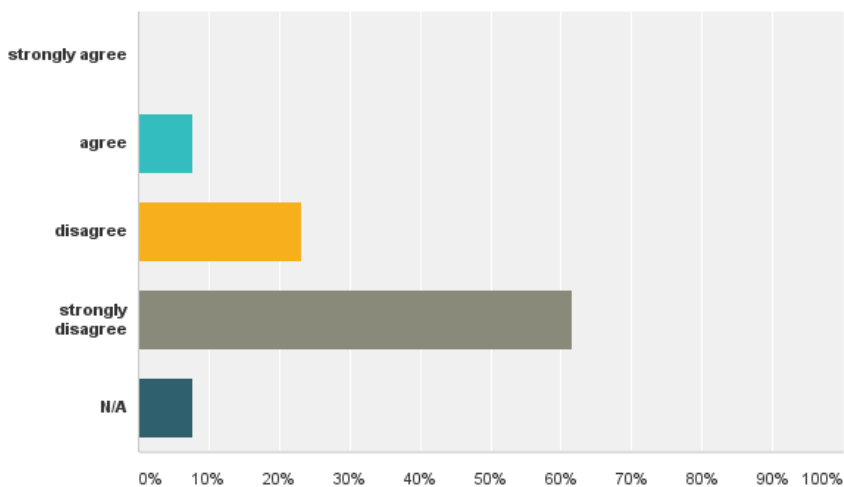
Question 11: The currently enacted Career Ladder is fair and equitable.

Answered – 65, No Response – 5

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	0	0.00%
Agree	5	7.69%
Disagree	15	23.08%
Strongly Disagree	40	61.54%
N/A	5	7.69%
Total	65	

Q11 The currently enacted Career Ladder is fair and equitable.

Answered: 65 Skipped: 5



Overall, 84.62% of respondents do not think the Career Ladder is fair and equitable, with 61.54% strongly disagreeing. The most common short-answer response, which was mentioned 21 times, referenced the career ladder not existing or being frozen as the reason why it is not fair or equitable. Another common reason cited for it not being fair and equitable was the inability to be promoted due to reclassification of vacant positions to a lower level, having to switch offices for promotions, and limitations placed on the number of positions at each advising level (II, III, & IV). Many comments also mentioned that some people are promoted without meeting the minimum qualifications while others are passed over for promotions despite exceeding the minimum qualifications.

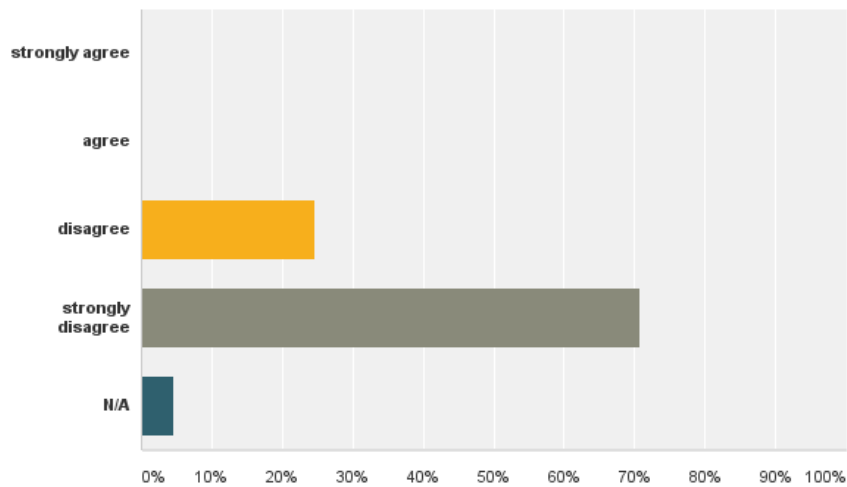
Question 12: Advising salaries are commensurate with advisor qualifications.

Answered – 65, No Response – 5

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Agree	0	0%
Disagree	16	24.62%
Strongly Disagree	46	70.77%
N/A	3	4.62%
Total	65	

Q12 Advising salaries are commensurate with advisor qualifications.

Answered: 65 Skipped: 5



Overall, 95.39% of respondents do not think advising salaries are commensurate with advisor qualifications, with 70.77% strongly disagreeing. Not a single person agreed in any way that advisor salaries are commensurate with advisor qualifications. The top short-answer response, which was mentioned a total of 27 times, referenced salaries not aligning with education level or experience. Other reasons cited include: UTSA salaries being lower than those of similar positions at UTSA and at other local institutions, salaries not being commensurate with advisors’ duties, salaries not being competitive for the recruitment and retention of advisors, and lack of difference in pay based on qualifications such as education or experience. Many respondents also mentioned the need to base salaries on something other than longevity alone and suggested that HR review the career ladder. It was suggested that several factors could play a role in advisor salaries including merit, level of education, and years of experience.

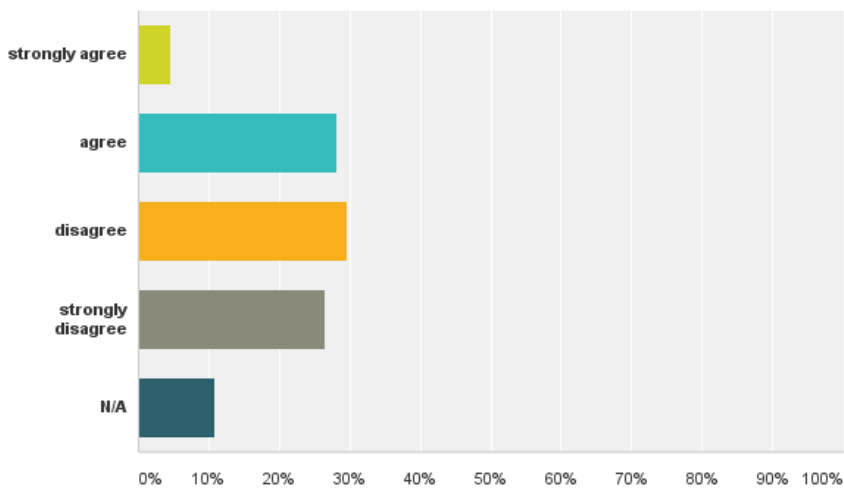
Question 13: I find my concerns are well advocated for.

Answered – 64, No Response – 6

ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Strongly Agree	1	1.54%
Agree	10	15.38%
Disagree	21	32.32%
Strongly Disagree	29	44.62%
N/A	4	6.15%
Total	65	

Q13 I find my concerns are well advocated for.

Answered: 64 Skipped: 6



Overall, 76.94% of respondents do not think their concerns are well advocated for. The top short-answer response, which was mentioned a total of 12 times, referenced the lack of positive results despite countless attempts to voice concerns as a reason why they feel there is no advisor advocacy. Many of the short-answers revealed that respondents believe their supervisor advocates for them, but that there is little to no advocacy or care for advising above the center director level. Many expressed that there are too many levels of administration which block communication between administrators and advisors, and that little communication or feedback is sent back down the chain to advisors even when they do reach out with concerns.

Question 14: What do you perceive as barriers to being successful in your job?

Answered – 55, No Response – 15

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Workload/Caseload too high	15	27.27%
Lack of administrative encouragement, support, and/or appreciation	11	20.00%
Poor leadership, vision, and planning by the Provost with regard to the restructuring	9	16.36%
Not enough time in the day	8	14.54%
Low morale and high stress due to poor compensation and no hope of advancement	8	14.54%

Roughly 27% of respondents perceive a high caseload or workload, which can lead to poor quality of service, as being a barrier to being successful in their jobs. Twenty percent of respondents also feel that the lack of encouragement, support, or appreciation from administrators is a barrier to being successful. Other common reasons cited as barriers to being successful were, poor leadership/vision/planning by the administration with regard to the restructure, not having enough time in the day to complete job duties (overtime frequently required), software that does not function properly, and low morale and high stress due to poor compensation with no hope of advancement/raises/merit pay. Several other reasons were cited, showing that there are numerous factors currently preventing advisors from being as successful in their jobs as possible.

Question 15: What is it about your employment at the university that you value the most?

Answered – 62, No Response – 8

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Working with & supporting students	27	43.54%
Relationships with/support of supervisors & colleagues	20	32.25%
Being part of a community of staff/faculty that work hard and care about students	13	20.96%
Benefits (e.g. insurance)	11	17.74%

Roughly 43.5% of respondents claimed that working with students and supporting their success was what they valued most about their employment with the university. Also, roughly 53% of respondents cited the relationships with their supervisor and colleagues and/or being part of a community of talented faculty/staff that genuinely cares about student success as what they valued most about their jobs. Benefits, specifically insurance, was also cited by about 18% of respondents as something that they valued about their employment at UTSA. Several other reasons were cited less often.

Best Practices

Question 16: What are some of the morale boosters utilized in your center?

Answered – 53, No Response – 17

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Food	17	32.07%
None	11	20.75%
Feeling of being a team	10	18.86
Birthday recognition	7	13.20%
Director comments/actions	6	11.32%

Food, mentioned by 32% of respondents, was the morale booster most commonly identified as being utilized in centers. Eleven respondents claimed that there were no morale boosters being utilized in their centers. Other significant morale boosters mentioned were the feeling of being part of a team, recognition of birthdays, and comments or actions from the director.

Question 17: What types of collaboration and/or training between advising and other organizations on campus would you like to see (Academic Departments, Financial Aid, etc.)?

Answered – 50, No Response – 20

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Fin. Aid, GCO, Registrar	16	32.00%
Academic departments	14	28.00%
Between advising centers	11	22.00%
Career Center	4	8.00%
Athletics	4	8.00%

Almost one-third of respondents mentioned that they would like to see collaboration and/or training between advising and Financial Aid, the Graduation Coordination Office, and/or the Registrar’s Office. Twenty-eight percent also mentioned collaborations with Academic Departments to include involving advisors in departmental meetings and creating a streamlined system for petitions/substitutions. Twenty-two percent also believe that there needs to be more collaboration between advising centers to include creating a unified communication plan for advising centers and discussions on how to advise special student populations (freshman, etc.). While many additional offices were mentioned, one of the topics mentioned across the recommendations was that advising needs to be included in discussions that determine processes and policies that will affect their daily work whether it be with academic departments, student services, etc.

Question 18: What top three issues would you like the Academic Advising Council to address in the 2014-2015 year?

Answered – 58, No Response – 12

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Advisor Pay	31	53.45%
Career Ladder	19	32.76%
Communication	14	24.14%
Training	11	18.97%
Morale	11	18.97%

Over half of respondents referenced advisor pay as one of the top issues they want AAC to address in the 2014-2015 year, by far the most mentioned issue. The second most mentioned issue, the Career Ladder, was cited by approximately one-third of respondents. Communication mentioned by almost 25% of respondents refers to all forms of communication within advising including between centers and between administrators and advisors. Training, including money for off-site professional development, and morale were also common mentioned issues. Several other issues were stated less often including caseload levels and policy/procedure issues.

Question 19: What are some best practices from your office that you feel have enhanced your ability to be a better advisor? Please list them below and provide examples.

Answered – 41, No Response – 19

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Teamwork	14	34.14%
Training	9	21.95%
Self-motivation	6	14.63%
Supportive management (directors/assoc. deans)	5	12.19%
None/Not sure	5	12.19%

Teamwork was by far the most mentioned practice that has enhanced respondents’ abilities to be better advisors. This includes being able to ask each other for help, assisting others in the completion of tasks, and respecting one another. Training was the second most mentioned practice. Trainings mostly centered on those offered by other advisors who were experts in particular areas. Some respondents cited their own self-motivation to perform well and/or help students above all else as a best practice. Receiving support from directors and deans was also a commonly cited practice. This includes providing feedback, having an open-door policy, and involving advisors in decisions. Some respondents reported having either no best practices or were unsure at this time what practices in their center enhance their ability to be a better advisor.

Question 20: Is there any practice/procedure that you would like to change in advising as a whole at UTSA?

Answered – 46, No Response – 24

Top Responses		
ANSWER CHOICE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Better/more communication	10	21.74%
Smaller/No caseloads	6	13.04%
Eliminate secondary majors	3	6.52%
Transition between centers	3	6.52%
Advising style	3	6.52%

The top practice that respondents would like to change in advising is to improve communication. Respondents referred to quickly informing everyone of changes, being more transparent to promote trust, and streamlining processes as elements of improved communication. Respondents would also like to see smaller or no caseloads. Reasons included caseloads being too high, turnover counteracting the purpose of caseloads, and students, especially freshman, changing majors too often. Some respondents would like to eliminate secondary majors, because they do not see them as ever being expert content areas for advisors. Some would also like to see the transition process between centers improved. A few respondents were concerned with how the attitude of advising is not in the best interest of students' development and would like to see us trend toward a more educational advising style.

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III. Discussion & Recommendations

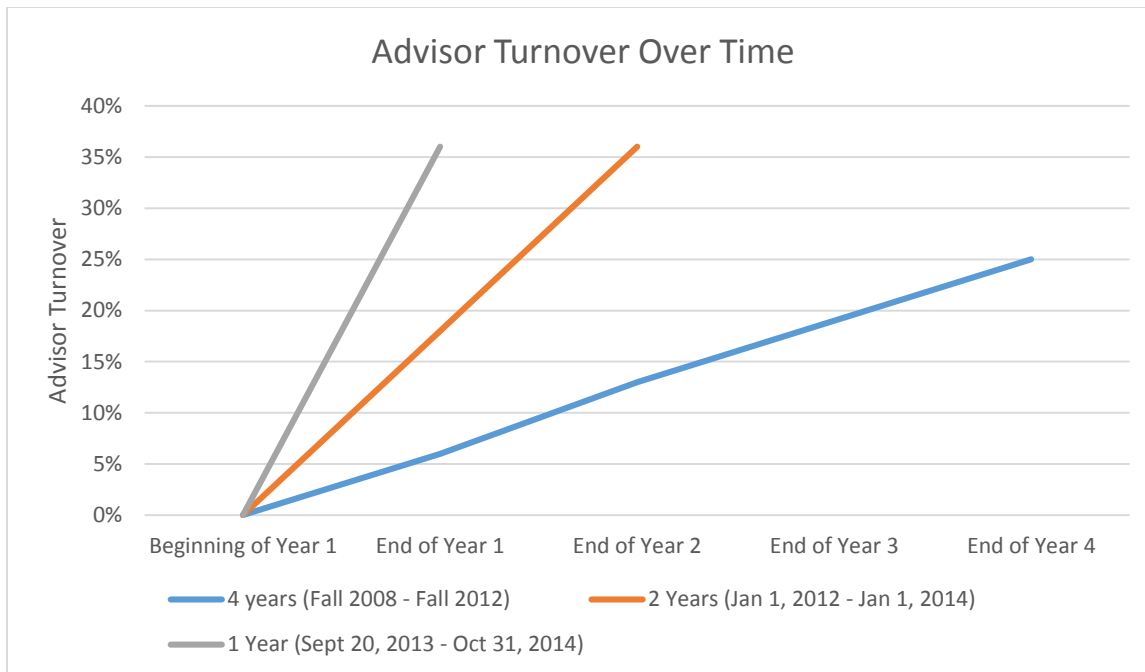
The following section will discuss the major themes found from the 2014 Advisor Survey, as well as relevant information from the previous reports concerning advising at UTSA. Discussion topics may not directly correspond to a survey question. Instead, they may stem from responses to many questions and information from various reports that highlight a common issue. Therefore, they are not listed according to the three survey areas. Recommendations for each topic are listed at the end of each topic section. A complete list of recommendations can be found at the end of the Discussion & Recommendations section on pages 50-53.

Almost all of the issues identified and recommendations made in our investigation have been repeatedly identified or proposed over the last decade by various groups, both internal and external to UTSA. Unfortunately, many of the positive forces working in advising have had to come from center-level efforts and initiatives. As a whole, the advising community continues to be left out of policymaking bodies that create many issues that advisors in turn must address. Until these issues are addressed and recommendations acted upon, significant improvement in advising as a whole will likely remain unattainable from a systemic viewpoint. Similar to the inconsistent implementation of the new advising structure, half-measures taken to address the below issues will not result in the desired changes.

A. Advisor Retention/Turnover

According to the Academic Advising Plan (2012), 75% of advisors were retained over the 4-year period from Fall 2008 to Fall 2012. This rate could have been influenced in part by the introduction of the Career Ladder in 2007 (Task Force Report, 2010). Two more recent sets of statistics obtained from the Office of Institutional Research (see [Appendix A.](#)) and by advisor count paint a much different picture in regard to recent advisor retention/turnover.

According to the Institutional Research report, only 64% of the 87 advisors present January 1, 2012 were still in advising two years later. Information gathered by advisors also shows that of the 80 advisors present September 20, 2013 when the cluster assignments were made public (see [Appendix B.](#)), only 64% will still be present at the end of October 2014. The cluster assignment figures do not include changes in the UHPO, Honors advising, or Athletics advising because they were not part of this particular list. It also does not include those advisors who have switched centers in the past year but have remained in UTSA Advising. One director also left during this time frame. Obviously advisor retention/turnover is becoming an increasingly serious issue when the more recent 2-year & 1-year retention rates are lower than the previous 4-year rate. Although the 2-year & 1-year time frames overlap slightly, few of those (only 9 out of the 29) who will have left during the 2013-2014 time frame were also counted in the 2012-2014 statistics. A majority (~70%) of those who have left in the past year have done so since January 1, 2014. For a visual comparison of advisor turnover statistics, see the figure below.



Unfortunately, some of these statistics do not even reflect the entire situation. For instance, for the 2012-2014 retention statistics, only those who were present January 1, 2012 were considered in the retention rate. Some advisors were hired after this date and left before January 1, 2014 meaning that their loss is not reflected in the data.

The implications of such a high turnover rate include inconsistent advising for students, fewer veteran advisors, and greater demand on current advisors to make up slack due to vacancies. It also works against GRIP (2011) and Restructuring Proposal (2013) concepts, such as an “advisor for life,” that are dependent upon retaining advisors. Turnover is often so much of an issue that students have commented on it formally in the Academic Support Report (2006) and informally in advising sessions with their “new” advisor(s). The impact of turnover goes beyond advisor caseload/workload numbers to impact current advisor availability and time. New advisors require significant amounts of training to be brought up to speed on the many facets of advising at UTSA, and current advisors are the primary trainers for new advisors. Current advisors therefore are tasked to see more students during the months it takes to fill a position and train a new advisor, while also setting aside time for training. The Academic Support Report (2006) recommended filling vacancies as soon as possible, but despite the best efforts of center directors, the paperwork for vacancies is often lost in the bureaucratic approval process for weeks at a time. Only in the past few weeks has the Executive Director of Advising been given approval for an expedited process that will allow vacancies to be filled more quickly in response to the dire need present in advising to address the high turnover.

Factors influencing retention/turnover identified by the advisor survey include, salaries not being commensurate with qualifications and salaries not being competitive compared to similar UTSA positions or advisor positions at other institutions in the area. While not specifically

mentioned with retention, many of the other issues identified by the survey like high workloads, lack of appreciation, and little opportunity for advancement likely impact the retention/turnover rate. Informally, several advisors have identified the factors that contributed to their leaving UTSA including some non-institutional reasons such as planned retirement, maternity, etc. Others who have left over the last year have reported institutional factors though such as receiving a promotion or increase in pay in another office, institution, or field, issues with the restructuring, not feeling valued or respected, etc. Human Resources did not ask those who have left for any information about their decision to leave, but more formal means of determining the reasons why so many leave advising should be conducted. Many of the comments from the survey show that advisors are doing their best to support UTSA, the students, and each other, so more needs to be done to support and retain them.

Recommendation A.1	Address advisor turnover/retention immediately to alleviate workload demands (see many of the other recommendations for more specific actions, particularly the recommendations concerning compensation, the Career Ladder, and workload).
Recommendation A.2	Create formal processes for determining why people leave advising so that any identified issues that contribute to turnover can be addressed. If HR will not include this information in exit procedures, the advising community should create their own process.

B. Advisor Compensation

Advisor compensation and the Career Ladder were the top two issues that respondents wanted the AAC to address in the upcoming year. These two topics being by far the most mentioned issues helps illustrate their importance.

Currently, advisor salaries are below those of other similar positions at UTSA (see table below). This issue was previously identified in the Academic Support Report (2006) when it was recommended that advisor salaries be increased to match those of a Career Counselor; however, there is again a discrepancy. Various reports have mentioned the importance of advising, and the Restructuring Proposal (2013) even went as far to compare some of the work of advisors to that of counselors. Differences in compensation, however, remain with advisors being at the bottom of the salary range.

Salaries for entry-level positions at UTSA	
Position	Entry Salary (minimum)
Academic Advisor I	\$30,000 (recent posting)
Career Counselor I	\$38,500 (from CC Director)
Athletics Academic Coordinator I	\$32,000 (recent posting)
International Undergrad. Admissions Advisor	\$36,000 (recent posting)

The difference between salaries continues when looking at different points on the career ladder for each office. For instance, the average salary of an Academic Advisor II is \$34,763, while the average for a Career Counselor II is \$41,874 according to data from the [Texas Tribune Government Salaries Explorer](#). Only 1-of-6 Career Counselor IIs makes *below* \$40,000 while only 2-of-23 Academic Advisor IIs, who each have over 10 years of experience, make *over* \$40,000. Additionally, 18-of-23 Academic Advisor IIs make less than \$35,000. These positions both require similar levels of education and experience according to the official requirements listed by [UTSA Human Resources](#). Furthermore, many of the offices at UTSA use a salary range for new hires and often hire new staff above the minimum salary listed on job postings. Advising on the other hand hires staff at a set rate with no room for negotiation.

UTSA academic advising positions also pay less than advising positions at other schools in the area. Although more formal information should be gathered, a quick look at the recent hiring site postings for the Alamo Colleges and Texas A&M University-San Antonio show entry-level advisors making \$38,000 and \$34,000 respectively. It is worth mentioning that these schools also only require a Bachelor’s degree (or even a combination of education and experience equal to it) compared to the Master’s level normally required for many UTSA positions.

When considering advisor compensation exclusively from a qualifications standpoint, not a single survey respondent agreed that salaries were commensurate with qualifications. Respondents do not believe that salaries are aligned with experience and education levels, since many positions require years of experience and at least a Master’s degree. As mentioned previously, several institutions in the area pay their advisors a higher salary despite lower requirements. Also, respondents do not believe that advisors are compensated for the responsibilities and demands of their positions.

Lastly, many staff members have expressed, through the survey and informally, being open to other types of compensation (e.g. free/discounted parking, Rec Center memberships, etc.). On top of all of the mentioned issues is rising cost of living. Advisors have been unable to receive cost of living raises for some time and did not even receive merit pay in the 2014-2015 year; however costs, including those related to employment like parking, continue to rise.

Many recent interview candidates have cited the low pay when declining job offers in UTSA Advising. Centers are missing out on preferred candidates and may be having to conduct several searches for a single vacant position. If advising is indeed as important as multiple reports have indicated, then the administration needs to take steps to improve advisor compensation in order to recruit and retain quality advisors.

Recommendation B.1	Increase advisor base salary to adjust for cost of living and to be more competitive with similar positions at UTSA (Career Counselor) and advising positions at other local institutions (Alamo Colleges, TAMU-SA, Texas State, etc.).
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Recommendation B.2	Determine how advising could negotiate salaries within a range, similar to other offices, for each position depending on qualifications.
Recommendation B.3	Consider other measures besides salary increases to improve advisor compensation (e.g. Free/discounted parking, etc.).

C. Advising Funding

Another issue with advisor compensation is that it is based solely on funds gained from advising fees which is itself dependent upon enrollment. In fall 2013 it was announced that the Career Ladder would be suspended based on lower total enrollment resulting from a large graduating class and small incoming freshman cohort. While recruitment and enrollment of freshman is not within advising’s scope, advising does play a significant role in improving graduation rates according to the GRIP (2011). In the current system, advising is unduly punished due to factors outside of their control even when potentially performing their role well. The NACADA Report (2005) also mentions the possibility that the fee creates the customer service and informational environment in advising, as opposed to an educational one.

Increasing the advising fee or using additional/alternative sources other than fees to fund advising should be considered. Assuming that the \$120 advising fees for 25,500 undergraduate students are the sole source of advisor salaries, increasing 90 advisors’ salaries by only \$4,000 would mean an increase of \$360,000 or \$14 for each student. A change in the fee structure to generate \$1,700,000 was proposed in the GRIP (2011), but it has been speculated that the change was denied by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Efforts such as these, while still inadequate to fix the problem, should be communicated to the advising community so that the effort to address problems can at least be recognized and documented. As a fee increase is unlikely to happen any time soon, does not fully address the compensation issue, and puts the system at the mercy of enrollment, it is essential that alternative means of funding be identified to supplement or replace the current structure.

Additionally, an examination of the usage of advising funds generated by student fees should be conducted. The investigation should focus on cost-saving measures that could free up additional funding for staff salaries or reinstate the advisor travel/professional development budget. For instance, the Advising Plan (2012) identified several initiatives that would utilize advising fees that should perhaps be reconsidered. For instance, it was mentioned that advising might partner to utilize the Ask Rowdy website to help answer frequently asked questions. While this idea has merit, advising has its own site that includes an FAQ section. Also, it would need to be shown that students are indeed using the site at a high enough rate to answer advising-related questions to consider it a sound investment.

Similarly, while Global (CRM) and DegreeWorks have the potential to aid advisors and students, they are currently ineffective. Many advisors still do not use DegreeWorks as a primary means of tracking degree progress or completing graduation audits. It begs the question of why thousands of dollars are poured into programs/initiatives that do not work or do not assist advisors in completing certain aspects of their jobs, again at no fault of advisors. Advising funds should be invested in the areas in which we have previously and continue to rely on, which is still predominantly on the work of advisors.

Even more concerning is the suggestion that advising fees be used for initiatives and programs outside of advising. For instance, the Advising Plan (2012) referenced the advising fee as a source of funding for the recruitment and training of peer mentors for the AIS courses. While this program is part of an overall effort to improve student success and ultimately graduation rates, it does not fall under the umbrella of academic advising and should not be funded by a designated fee.

Whether some of these initiatives were indeed funded by the advising fee has not been confirmed. Both Global and DegreeWorks were reportedly funded by grants, but the mere proposal that advising funds be used for initiatives such as these is concerning. Information about how different academic programs or services are funded should be more transparent, and an investigation into the use of funds generated from the advising fee should be conducted by the AAC.

Recommendation C.1	Increase the advising fee and/or identify additional/alternative sources of funding for advisor salaries.
Recommendation C.2	Examine how advising is funded at other institutions.
Recommendation C.3	Require all students who might seek to utilize advising services to pay some form of an advising fee (e.g. non-degree seeking).
Recommendation C.4	Review the current usage of advising fees for cost-saving measures that can be redistributed to other areas like staff salaries.

D. Career Ladder Methodology

According to the Advising Plan (2012), the university does its best to retain good and experienced advisors, and the current Career Ladder rewards advisors based on the accumulation of knowledge and skills and recommendations from supervisors. It has been stated that previous promotions required advisors to take on new responsibilities, while the Career Ladder allows advisors to remain advisors first, essentially providing more veteran advisors for student contacts (Advising Plan, 2012).

In practice, however, the Career Ladder rewards advisors based simply on longevity or internal consideration depending on the position (a copy of the Career Ladder obtained from the UTSA

SACS accreditation report from 2010 can be found in [Appendix C.](#)) It is perhaps assumed that during the set time frame advisors have accumulated the knowledge and skills mentioned as a prerequisite for the promotion. While that may certainly be the case, this system does not take into consideration that advisors accumulate this knowledge at different speeds based on their individual situations. It also does not take differences in education, experience, merit, and contribution to the advising community into account when determining salary. Unlike other offices who have a salary range that they can work in, under this system, there are no incentives for advisors to exceed the minimum requirements.

Overall, 85% of survey respondents do not believe that the Career Ladder is fair and equitable. Reasons cited include it being constantly frozen and it being difficult to be promoted. Currently, advisors face the following barriers when trying to be promoted according to the Career Ladder: having vacant positions reclassified to a lower level, having to switch offices for a promotion, and limitations in each office on the number of positions at each advising level. All of these barriers work against retaining quality advisors, and some work against the “advisor for life” concept even when advisors are retained within UTSA advising. For instance, some advisors must switch offices for a promotion and thus serve a new population of students.

Additionally, multiple survey respondents voiced concern over inconsistent promotion or hiring practices. They claim that some promotions or hires were granted without the staff members meeting minimum qualifications listed on the Career Ladder or the official HR job descriptions while others who exceeded the minimum were passed over or not even considered. The current requirements are not ideal, but until they are officially changed, advisors expect that they be adhered to and applied consistently across centers.

Many of these issues aren’t even relevant when the Career Ladder has been frozen more often than it has been active. The Career Ladder is constantly affected by outside forces such as the recession (Task Force Report, 2010) or the previously discussed decrease in overall enrollment. An occasional negative influence may be understandable, but having many continued issues points to a problem. Generally, advisors are of the opinion that we functionally do not have a Career Ladder. Given the recent turnover and high workloads that have resulted, the remaining advisors need to be given the opportunity to move up lest we lose them too. It is essential that the freeze be lifted as soon as possible as a short-term measure to improve advisor retention.

Recommendation D.1	Identify and incorporate factors other than longevity, such as education, experience, and contribution to the advising community, as part of the Career Ladder requirements.
Recommendation D.2	Examine the Career Ladders and promotion systems of other institutions for ideas and best practices.
Recommendation D.3	Remove barriers, such as reclassifying positions and limiting the number of advisors of each level, which block Career Ladder promotions for qualified advisors to reduce turnover and support the “advisor for life” concept.

Recommendation D.4	Apply consistent and transparent promotion/hiring practices that adhere to official requirements and descriptions.
Recommendation D.5	Consider temporarily unfreezing the Career Ladder in order to give those advisors who have stayed through the restructuring a raise in order to avoid losing more people.
Recommendation D.6	Shorten the time requirements for promotions.

E. High Workload

High advisor workload was a common theme in the survey responses and was even the most commonly mentioned barrier to being successful in advisors’ jobs. Chief among the current issues increasing advisor workload is the aforementioned turnover, but many other issues have been identified as contributing factors to high workload in the survey and in the previous reports (GRIP, 2011; Task Force Report, 2010; Academic Support Report, 2006; NACADA Report, 2005).

Administrative tasks. Common among many of the reports was the high level of administrative work performed by advisors. Much of the administrative work, including processing forms for other offices, completing graduation audits, and documenting appointment notes, is related to advisors’ primary responsibilities; however, it does not negate the fact that it takes time away from additional student interactions.

Additional administrative work, while still related to advising goals, is more secondary to advising and may not be handled by advisors at other institutions. For instance, intrusive/special programs that seek to address issues with probationary students are initiated by advising centers at UTSA. These types of programs are needed, but they increase demand for advising and create further administrative work for advisors.

Advisors also participate in many special events (UTSA Day, orientation, etc.) and serve on committees (AAC, Rowdy Experience, DIT, etc.). While these are again important in the overall advising picture, it forces advisors to reserve time on their schedules that could be used for advising activities. Furthermore, advisors routinely receive additional duties from the administration, such as testing DegreeWorks for problems and outreaching to active students not enrolled for the next semester, which further exacerbates the issue of advisor time.

Advising has become the go-to area for implementing these intrusive/outreach programs and special projects related to student success, but have not received additional staffing to help support these programs. Even when advisors support certain initiatives, like the Early Alert program, they simply do not have the time to be responsible for all of them with the current caseload model. Many respondents echoed

the Academic Support Report (2006) suggestion of hiring more support staff to alleviate some of the administrative and secondary duties from advisors. Support staff could serve multiple roles in advising including completing more of the administrative work, developing streamlined processes and centralized information stores, serving as leads for special projects/events, representing advising at events or on committees, working to improve training, managing intrusive/outreach programs, etc. These professionals could work under the umbrella of the Executive Director of Advising, and offices such as Learning Assistance and the former Graduation Initiative are examples of the types of staff that can provide valuable support for the students and academic advisors even when not a part of advising.

Restructuring additions & Caseloads. As part of the new restructuring, advisors are now facing a new challenge that increases their workload: performing all duties for their caseload students. For instance, during the summer, advisors were juggling the competing demands of orientation, graduation audits, routine advising, DegreeWorks testing, etc. Previously these duties could be delegated to specific centers or advisors, but all advisors are required to engage in these activities now. While the concept has merit, it seems to be a less effective and efficient way of completing the many tasks related to advising. Previously, a percentage of advisors could be placed on a special project while the remainder of advisors ensured that students had access to advising services. Now, students are more restricted by having to see their primary advisor and are therefore at the mercy of the advisor's schedule.

Also, caseloads for some centers are much higher than the 300-350:1 student-advisor ratio recommended, and advisors are concerned that resources do not seem to be equitable across centers. Having smaller or no caseloads was the second most mentioned practice that advisors would like to see changed. A review of the caseload numbers needs to be conducted, and new advisors need to be hired for areas in need.

Time demands. Not having enough time to complete job duties was the fourth most mentioned barrier to success on the survey. Advisors who may have considered their previous workload high but manageable are now finding themselves working over 40 hours per week to keep up with the demands. Others find little time to engage in secondary or tertiary activities and are simply trying to stay afloat with seeing students, all while dealing with the added pressure of compensating for and trying to fill vacancies. The electronic programs that should be helping alleviate some of the demand on advisors are not functioning properly and instead create more work for advisors (see topic "H. Technology" below for more information). With the increased demands, there is also no time available to assess service or investigate new/best practices.

Recommendation E.1	Consider options for mitigating increases in workload due to advisor vacancies. Example strategies could include having a temp advisor pool of ex-advisors (similar practices currently exist for some centers during summers/peak times), hiring a “flex” advisor position that would shift continually based on demand/vacancies, etc.
Recommendation E.2	Ensure that vacancy paperwork approval is given priority to limit periods of being understaffed.
Recommendation E.3	Consider hiring support staff to handle more administrative and special programs demands. These professionals could be concerned with improving the efficiency and effectiveness of advising. Additional staff working closely with but not in advising may also need to be added to take on certain programs/initiatives.
Recommendation E.4	Consider diversifying responsibilities among staff (similar to previous center practices), so that all advisors are not doing all activities and students have some flexibility to see a different advisor if needed.
Recommendation E.5	Re-evaluate and redistribute resources in order to create similar student:advisor ratios across centers.
Recommendation E.6	Designate time for the advising community to assess services and investigate new/best practices to improve student support.

F. Poor Communication

Whether it is in regard to hiring practices, academic policies and procedures, changes in advising, etc. communication needs to be vastly improved. A lack of communication was cited as an issue in numerous areas throughout the survey. Communication was the third most mentioned issue that needs to be addressed by the AAC, and it was the most mentioned practice that respondents would like to see changed in advising. Issues with communication have plagued advising for years and are documented in multiple reports (Restructuring Proposal, 2013; Advising Plan, 2012; Academic Support Report, 2006; NACADA Report, 2005). In general, communication needs to be streamlined when possible, more frequent among various offices, and more transparent. Lack of advisor involvement in planning groups is a key element that contributes to the communication problems. Specific issues and recommendations for different communication streams will follow.

- 1. Administration-Advisor communication.** One way in which communication needs to be improved is with regard to communication between advisors and the administration (e.g. Provost, University College administrators, Executive Director of Advising, etc.). Currently there are multiple levels of communication between those on the front lines of advising and those making decisions. Advisors and center directors are unclear of the conversations being had on their behalf. Even when concerns are passed along, it is unclear if the original message remains consistent or complete by the time it reaches

the administration. This hierarchy has its purpose; however, it also alienates staff from the administration and decreases morale. The advising staff is not asking to have the Provost available to address every complaint or issue, but helping advisors feel heard can go a long way toward improving job satisfaction and ultimately the level of service they provide to students (NACADA Report, 2005).

This communication divide also means that administrators do not always have much of the relevant information needed to make sound decisions. Advisors seek to provide constructive ideas or feedback to improve services; however, they often feel that their words fall on deaf ears because they never receive responses. Advising's role generally consists of implementing and troubleshooting the policies and procedures created by the administration. Many times the administration has expressed surprise over unanticipated problems with a decision, while the problems were quite obvious to advisors from the beginning. Had advisors been consulted in the formulation phase of the decision, they could have offered insight that may have prevented problems from occurring.

As mentioned, advisors are often tasked with administrative duties that seek to rectify problems, but it would be much wiser and more effective to actually discuss issues with advisors and include them in future planning to prevent such trouble (NACADA Report, 2005). In the end, advisors are having to put time and work into these issues anyway, so concentrating their efforts on the front end could reduce the overall time or work required of them and improve administrative decisions. The Academic Advising Council having to take the lead with a survey and report on advising from staff's perspective illustrates how advisors have been routinely left out of discussions related to improving advising. Although the Advising Plan (2012) characterizes the Annual Advisor Workshop as a forum for giving input on existing, new, and proposed policies, in practice it has become much more informational with a small component of providing feedback on what the presenters choose to discuss. As it only occurs once per year, there is no way to have a continued dialogue regarding topics presented.

Additionally, had the administration taken the time to seriously examine advising at UTSA, they would have needed to discuss issues with the staff actually working in advising. Hosting a Q&A once the new structure was already in place or having advisors serve on task forces after decisions were made was not an effective use of advisor involvement. Furthermore, the advising community did not receive any updates on the recommendations made by the many task forces convened by the Provost. Even when asked to provide input, advisors tend to feel that their efforts are in vain when they receive no indication that their recommendations were considered. The advising community still hopes that they will receive feedback from the Provost regarding the recommendations made by the restructuring task forces.

Many advisors are willing to aid the administration and are constantly doing what they can to improve advising. The administration simply needs to harness the energy already being expended by advisors so that each group can benefit from a partnership. The administration could benefit by preventing duplicated or competing efforts by having advisors work alongside them. Staff would benefit by having an improved sense of ownership over their jobs and from receiving recognition from the administration that advisors can be valuable members of the institution. Any organization is likely to create more buy-in when those affected by decisions have had a hand in shaping them. The suggestion to involve advisors more is not new and has been mentioned as far back as the Academic Support Report (2006). The university has shown interest in involving students and faculty in planning, but it is time that they extend the same collegial attitude to the professional staff.

Recommendation F.1.1	Eliminate barriers to communication by increasing direct contact between advisors and the administration. For instance, regular (monthly/semesterly/etc.) meetings should be held with the AAC and administrators (Provost, Deans, etc.).
Recommendation F.1.2	Include AAC representatives in regular administrative meetings.
Recommendation F.1.3	Include advisors and directors on initial <i>planning</i> task forces/committees instead of during finalization of decisions or when cleaning up issues after implementation.
Recommendation F.1.4	Increase transparency so that the advising community is aware of the conversations being had on its behalf.
Recommendation F.1.5	Ensure that communication flows in a continuous loop by providing regular feedback to the advising community.

2. Colleges-Advisor communication. Another way in which communication needs to be improved is with regard to communication between advisors and the colleges. Some departments/colleges enjoy a healthy level of communication with the advising centers. The creation of official department liaisons has helped both groups identify points of contact for the exchange of important information.

Nevertheless, a persistent problem between advisors and the colleges has stemmed from the lack of uniform policies and procedures in the academic offices (Restructuring Proposal, 2013). Around two-thirds of survey respondents do not believe that processes are clear in regard to campus academic policies, procedures, and petitions. The primary issue has come from the varied preferences of each academic office. Advisors constantly have to navigate the ambiguous and ever-changing world of faculty preferences and procedures. For those academic units that advisors work with frequently, this is less of an issue; however advisors will have to contact many different offices as part of their duties. Having to keep track of the preferences for each office results in wasted time spent verifying the procedure for that particular department chair. These problems have

been repeatedly identified (Restructuring Proposal, 2013; Task Force Report, 2010), and the Restructuring Proposal stated that the new structure would promote consistent policies and procedures for advising as one of its goals; however, many practices continue to be anything but consistent.

Over time some advisors have managed to influence the processes and policies of the academic departments they work with. Unfortunately, some refuse to let advisors have any input into departmental advising matters. In order to establish consistent practices, the order will have to come from and be backed up by the administration. After having a discussion with all of those involved, processes based on efficiency and the best interests of students should be established.

Also, many academic units behave similarly to administrative offices by making decisions without consulting advisors. While faculty are the experts on the curriculum and content of their disciplines, they do not always see the impact that certain decisions will have on students or their progress toward graduation. Multiple reports (Restructuring Proposal, 2013; Academic Support Report, 2006) have proposed including advisors in meetings regarding curricula changes, catalog revisions, and class scheduling. Again, while some faculty are open to these types of relationships with advisors, others are not. Advisors could serve a vital role in these meetings as they are often the ones who point out mistakes that the academic departments overlooked, such as errors in the catalogs. Advisor involvement might also help speed along the core/catalog/etc. approval process so that information will be available sooner to the UTSA community. For instance, the 2014-2015 catalog was not officially published until after orientation for incoming freshman had already begun. This meant that advisors were giving students unofficial information for part of the summer until the final catalog was released.

Recommendation F.2.1	Establish and enforce consistent procedures for the routing of forms, petitions, etc. for all academic offices.
Recommendation F.2.2	Include advisors in academic unit meetings concerning curricula changes, catalog revisions, etc.

3. Communication between centers. While less of an issue than those mentioned above, communication between advising centers also needs to be addressed. This includes improving the way information is distributed and following uniform practices. These issues have resulted in continued consistency issues that students and staff have complained about before. At times it also creates an atmosphere in which centers feel like they are working against each other.

Consistency issues have continued largely because centers have different interpretations of policies and procedures. Some survey respondents cited the way in

which information is distributed as being a contributing factor to this issue. For instance, many times when information is left to trickle down to advisors it does not reach all that need it or it becomes distorted resulting in differing interpretations or practices.

An example from this summer, although this situation seems to have finally been addressed, was when centers had different practices regarding seeing students with a second major that was housed in a different center. Some thought that these students were to be seen by their primary advisor regardless of whether the second major was a primary or secondary major of that center, while others believed that a second advisor would be assigned to cover the second major. Despite several emails and discussions between center directors and the Executive Director, there was often not a clear answer regarding this policy. Advisors would often hear one thing from their director and another from a colleague. There was no central source to reference to determine what the policy was and it resulted in students receiving conflicting information.

Having written information from a central source so that a concrete statement can be referenced in these situations can be helpful. For instance, the Advising Center Directors Council (ACDC) could designate a communications officer to disseminate information on the advising listserv instead of having multiple directors deliver the information in different ways. Email is currently used in this way for some notifications; however it is not always efficient and requires staff to create a method by which to organize the information. This can make retrieval difficult. Many would rather see more centralized stores of information on the advising website or Blackboard page which mirrors the recommendation made by the Task Force Report (2010). Over half of survey respondents already utilize the advising Blackboard page, and more could be influenced to use it if steps are taken to organize it into a central hub of information for advisors. Emails could still be sent when changes occur as a heads up, but a manual of procedures, for instance, should be updated in this centralized location for future reference.

Advisors would also like for everyone to have access to common forms and their instructions, the degree plans for ALL majors, etc. Advisors currently have to request certain items from other centers or find them online/on the i-drive. If these documents have not been verified or updated recently, advisors may be using outdated information or forms when advising students.

Some of the attempts to unify basic advising practices, like requiring all advisors to document advising notes in Global, are not being followed. There seems to be no check on whether these things are being done or not, and some of the same old issues of trying to verify information given by one advisor continue. Having a unified system for documenting and recording contact data doesn't just help advisors communicate with each other. The NACADA Report (2005) mentions that consistent record keeping can

help provide reliable data from across centers that can be used in justifications for increases in resources, proposed changes, etc.

Many of these issues will require the Executive Director, ACDC, and AAC to coordinate policies and procedures, but advisors should also be given the opportunity to discuss the practices of each center. Several survey respondents mentioned the desire to increase networking and social opportunities among advisors, and events to discuss advising issues could be coordinated to serve both a social and functional purpose. Once standard forms of documentation and processes are established, efforts would need to be made to determine whether the system is efficient and being followed.

Recommendation F.3.1	Distribute information in a more formal, centralized way when possible to promote consistency and provide a means of reference.
Recommendation F.3.2	Create centralized stores of information for advisor reference (e.g. Blackboard course with an operations manual, common forms, degree plans, training materials, etc.).
Recommendation F.3.3	Create and enforce uniform practices for documentation, data recording, etc. that can be used by all centers.
Recommendation F.3.4	Increase opportunities for staff to socialize, discuss best practices, and address concerns.
Recommendation F.3.5	Include AAC representatives in director meetings (ACDC).

G. Lack of Advocacy, Support, and Appreciation

In the survey, a lack of encouragement, support, and appreciation was the second most commonly mentioned barrier to being successful. It was followed by poor leadership, vision, and planning by the administration with regard to the restructuring. The issue with advocacy partly stems from the issues with communication mentioned above. Even if advisors are being advocated for, they aren't always aware of the efforts being made by others. Apart from the role that communication plays, many in advising feel that the overall culture and actions of the administration are the main factor contributing to the lack of advocacy, support, and appreciation.

While many survey respondents believe their direct supervisor advocates for them, over three-quarters of advisors do not think their concerns are well advocated for at UTSA. Respondents cited the lack of positive end results and lack of advocacy by anyone above the center directors as issues. Many respondents also feel that the upper-level administrators at the university (e.g. Dr. Frederick) do not care about the advising community. Advisors perceive that their needs and concerns are not a priority, and that advisors are expendable and easily replaceable. Such disregard for advising is disrespectful and unacceptable, especially in light of claims made in the

various reports on the essential role that advising plays in student success. Advisors need to be respected and appreciated as the professionals that they are. The administration’s poor management and leadership practices are creating a hostile work environment that is driving many quality professionals away and reducing morale.

Additionally, the university has, perhaps unknowingly at times, seemed to dismiss the contributions of advisors or characterize advising as a problem. For example, the recent DegreeWorks commercials being shown on-campus and online are pushing the message that students will FINALLY graduate because of the new program. Even without specifying it, it implies that the previous absence of an online tool was a key element to them not graduating. It is understandable that the university wants to positively market a tool that it has invested in, especially when it can potentially assist advisors and students; however, the message that many seem to have taken from the commercials is that the presence of this new tool has either replaced a poor predecessor or simply filled a void that was not being cared for previously. Obviously, advising has helped students understand degree requirements for some time now, and many have taken the particular nature of the advertising campaign as an insult to the work of advisors. This is especially true considering DegreeWorks is not functioning properly and advisors remain the primary resource for helping students understand and track degree progress. In fact, advisors are also having to calm student fears due to DegreeWorks displaying incorrect information that contradicts advisors. Some might find advisors’ concerns silly or dismiss them as unintentional, but many in advising see the commercials as a symptom of the same indifference or blatant animosity that has influenced so many of the other problems in advising. At best, advisors perceive the administration as being indifferent and at worst that they do no value advising.

Recommendation G.1	Increase advocacy for advisors on all levels (by the AAC, Directors, Executive Director, Administration, etc.).
Recommendation G.2	Provide meaningful encouragement and support for advisors and show appreciation beyond yearly pep-talks and snacks/balloons.
Recommendation G.3	Consider changes in the culture to highlight the value and worth of advising to UTSA.

H. Technology

There are several issues with the technology used in advising at the moment, and it was the fifth most mentioned barrier to advisors being successful in the survey. Many of the programs and tools that were supposed to improve advising and reduce administrative work for advisors are not functioning properly. This has resulted in little help for advisors and has even increased the workload at times. Similar to other areas, issues with technology have been persistent, although the particular programs or tools may have changed over time. It is clear that little

improvement has been made in the past decade regarding technology's impact on improving advising. Most of the current problems have been related to DegreeWorks, though there are some issues with the other programs too.

- 1. DegreeWorks.** DegreeWorks has been perhaps the most hyped program introduced in the past year; however it has also been the biggest disappointment and is ineffective. DegreeWorks was supposed to help automate the degree tracking and auditing process, freeing up advisors for other activities and empowering students to take a more prominent role in planning out their degree requirements (GRIP, 2011). Advisors would still serve to check requirements, verify student-made plans, and make exceptions when necessary, but the automation was supposed to decrease the administrative work currently required of advisors when creating degree plans.

The issues with DegreeWorks are strikingly similar to those of CAPP before it (Task Force Report, 2010; Academic Support Report, 2006; NACADA Report, 2005). The program is useful for some majors and not others. Advisors tend to use it in different degrees with some not using it at all due to functionality issues. For some advisors, the lack of functionality and trying to correct the issues with DegreeWorks has added duties to their workload, which is the opposite goal of automation. As previously mentioned, many of the issues in advising are interrelated, and the problems with DegreeWorks are no exception. For instance, a functioning DegreeWorks has the potential to reduce advisor workload.

As other institutions (e.g. Texas State) are able to use DegreeWorks successfully, it begs the question of whether many of the issues seem to stem from the customized programming done by UTSA. The one common denominator with the programs not working at UTSA over the past decade is that our staff can't seem to get them to work when other institutions can. As can be confirmed by many advisors, numerous errors existed on the plans when they were initially "completed" and released. One of the errors was so substantial that there were not any major courses included under the degree requirements. This is not a technical difficulty but a gaping omission that was not identified by those responsible for the project before its release. Additional issues with DegreeWorks include it not sorting courses into the appropriate fields, it incorrectly counting courses in both the core and electives areas, and it not recognizing course number changes from different catalogs (e.g. from MAT 1223 to MAT 1224).

In the aftermath of the release, advisors were tasked by the administration with conducting testing to identify errors all while overseeing degree audits, freshman orientation, etc. The DegreeWorks team also conducted small sessions with advisors to discuss the problems, but despite advisors' efforts, problems continue and are often only corrected for a single student's plan when brought to the attention of those responsible. As with many of the other issues regarding planning and implementation, advisors are dealing with the poor planning and incompetence of another office instead

of being consulted from the beginning. It was not appropriate for a team with no knowledge of or experience with degree plans to be solely responsible for developing the electronic plans. Advisors knowledgeable about each major were reportedly consulted during preliminary discussions, but the guidelines set forth by advisors were apparently not followed during the programming stage. Many of these issues may have been avoided had advisors been included in ongoing discussions during programming. The NACADA Report (2005) made a similar suggestion about how early advisor involvement with CAPP could have remedied some of its problems and created more confidence in the product amongst advisors, but like so much of the advice given in previous reports, it was ignored during future initiatives. It is unclear if the issues with DegreeWorks can be fixed on a systemic level at this point as many of the “corrections” lead to further problems or only rectify a single student’s plan.

Other features, like the newly released “planner” function, operate so slowly that they take longer to adjust than it would take to create a plan manually. Also, many times trying to retrieve a saved plan is impossible because the system crashes. Again, DegreeWorks is supposed to reduce the amount of time advisors spend on these informational functions, but this particular feature only adds to the time an advisor would need. As with the other features, the plans are inconsistent, with similar majors not containing the same basic information. These checklists and plans are also not as customizable as many of the current electronic plans (often a Word document). Since DegreeWorks is not functioning properly and does not provide the same level of customization as current degree plans, it is disheartening to see that funds generated from the advising fee were proposed to pay for such projects (Advising Plan, 2012). As mentioned in the “Advising Funding” section, until UTSA’s electronic systems are able to perform their designated function, the administration ought to consider investing funds in the instruments that perform advising functions: the advisors.

Recommendation H.1.1	Evaluate whether systemic problems with DegreeWorks can be corrected or whether the plans need to be deleted and reconstructed from the beginning with advisor assistance.
Recommendation H.1.2	Investigate why certain DegreeWorks functions operate slowly or incorrectly and if/why this is a problem unique to UTSA.
Recommendation H.1.3	Have advisors discuss options for creating a consistent degree plan template if a commercial auditing system does not meet needs.

- 2. Global CRM.** Global, like DegreeWorks, has not functioned properly from its initial release leading many advisors to refuse to use it at all. While the notes and appointment/email tracker functions seem to be working and provide an easy means for information to be shared among advisors, many advisors are still not using these features. Many have also expressed frustration that the notes area is so small that it is

difficult to read even a single advising session’s notes without having to scroll. Even with the benefits of these features, the primary purpose of Global, displaying student information in a single screen, remains unfulfilled.

Recommendation H.2.1	Address the issues with Global not pulling the correct information from Banner.
Recommendation H.2.2	Expand the section available for recording/viewing notes and recording appointment/email interactions.

3. EARN. EARN may be the highest functioning program of those that have been introduced over the past year; however many in the advising community are not using it. Advisors were not able to explore the program in the initial training session, and there has not been any follow-up training since the program has become more active. It is also unclear at this time how many faculty members are taking advantage of EARN’s capabilities, which directly relates to how effective of a tool it will be. Even if EARN were to be utilized more by faculty and advisors were to receive further training, the introduction of another task for advisors is likely to be met with opposition. While intrusive outreach programs can be beneficial for students, advisors are unlikely to have a significant amount of time to dedicate to these activities until other duties can be eliminated or automated.

Recommendation H.3.1	Determine how EARN is being utilized by faculty members to see at what level, if at all, it is wise for advisors to incorporate it into their duties.
Recommendation H.3.2	If EARN will indeed play a part in advising, offer a follow-up training to advisors on how it functions and how it will be used.

I. Advising Style/Approach

Several respondents have suggested changes in the attitude and approach of advising. Whether it means changing the policies of the university and/or practice of advisors, many have suggested placing more importance on developing and educating students to be responsible, self-reliant adults. Currently, many policies can seem like hand-holding, and the university has created an environment where students are able to petition almost anything. Many times these petitions are approved, even when students are at fault, if it moves students closer to graduation.

Some circumstances may warrant the opportunity to petition and removing barriers to graduation is well-intentioned; however, UTSA’s system puts the responsibility on advisors to complete much of the paperwork and fails to address the student behaviors that act as barriers

toward graduation. Many situations that these students find themselves in are a result of destructive behavior, but students are often not held accountable for their actions. Instead, students learn that they can be given exceptions and that staff can solve their problems if they are pushy, ask enough people, or fill out enough forms. Even when students have a 99% chance of having a petition denied due to lack of justification or reason, advisors have no authority to deny the request and are still forced to complete the paperwork.

The NACADA Report (2005) specifically mentioned that the advising process must become more educational and developmental if it is to significantly contribute to improving retention and graduation rates. While many advisors seek to do this, much of our time is spent on informational topics due to the many issues mentioned in this report (no accountability for students, administrative work, etc.). The Restructuring Proposal (2013) hopes to help students identify major interest and congruence within the first year of advising, but little is mentioned regarding helping students become more independent or how that would occur. The use of ENGAGE results when meeting with freshman students is a step in the right direction, but little else is currently being done to promote the relational and conceptual aspects of advising.

Significant thought needs to be put toward identifying advising practices that could help aid students in their development, and UTSA needs to rethink its petition-friendly environment. As with many of the topics discussed, changing this aspect of advising could have positive impacts in multiple other areas for both advisors and students.

Recommendation I.1	Consult the advising community to develop practices/processes/etc. that can be used to encourage a more educational/developmental advising environment. This could be done in an All-Advisor Workshop setting that is not based solely on what the administration wants to focus on.
Recommendation I.2	Provide advisors further training on developmental/educational advising techniques and practices and how they can be incorporated into the specific work of their centers.

J. Orientation & Freshman Students

Previously, orientation programs followed a relatively consistent schedule with almost all activities happening at the same time and place during each program. While the new system follows a similar structure, the prevalence of problems and inconsistencies has increased. Several issues with the new advising structure for freshman orientation students were identified by survey respondents.

For instance, many believe that the practice of assigning new freshman students an advisor before orientation is unwise. Advisors are frustrated at the high number of students changing

their major at orientation or within the first year and believe that the amount of students having to change centers could be avoided by waiting to assign these students advisors. Students in many centers are changing their majors at or after orientation, so it appears that many factors influence students' decisions to change majors even when they meet the requirements for entering certain majors upon admission.

A strength of the former Colleges' Freshman Advising Center (CFAC) was that students had more time to explore major options during their first year before being sent to the appropriate college advising center. The Restructuring Proposal (2013) even mentions focusing on quality advising during orientation and the first year as a goal to improve freshman-to-sophomore retention rates and help students find appropriate major areas. The Student Placement Advising Center (STPL) strives to provide similar service for its population of students, but all advising centers are now having to deal with this issue. While advisors in CFAC and STPL could focus more on providing quality in-depth advising for these students, the other centers are now having to balance this new need with the demands of the rest of their population. How this balance was to be achieved was never discussed and, like so many other pieces of the new structure, was left up to advising staff to try to figure out.

Student Placement is not without its challenges either though. Advisors in STPL are facing the challenge of advising a large percentage of incoming freshman while also addressing the needs of transitional students of any classification. These students' situations can vary widely and can involve uncertain major interests, being exited from a previous major, etc. For non-freshman students these issues can be even more distressing if they lose credits when changing majors and face extra charges for excessive attempted hours.

Orientation scheduling is another issue that has presented a problem for many centers for several different reasons. Orientation often competes with other demands like completing graduation audits, advising continuing students, etc. as all centers now see students of every classification. Even Student Placement, which does not have certain tasks like graduation audits, is overwhelmed with orientation due to the sheer number of students they are required to see in a single day. During planning meetings, it was determined that students must have a one-on-one appointment with their advisor in order for the student-advisor relationship to begin at orientation. While this idea has merit, it also places a strain on centers that primarily see new freshman: they have too many students to see back-to-back over the course of an extended work day. For Student Placement, the student-advisor relationship will ideally only last for two semesters before the student transitions to a new advisor, yet it was deemed essential that students start developing a relationship with their STPL advisor at orientation. Despite surveys from previous orientations showing that a high majority of students (over 90%) were satisfied with group advising, the idea to continue using group sessions was shot down by the administration. While perhaps not offering all of the perks of a one-on-one session, group advising did allow for a larger number of students to be seen within the same day by a single advisor, and it still served as an introduction to forming the student-advisor relationship.

While it is unlikely that advising will be reverting back to a system that includes a Freshman Advising Center any time soon, options for managing freshman students' exploratory practices need to be considered. A dedicated freshman advising center would not only free up the remaining centers from certain demands, like orientation, it would also free up the freshman advisors from tasks such as degree audits to focus solely on helping students explore major options and become more autonomous (see the discussion on Advising Approach above for additional information). Reducing these advisors' caseloads to just freshman students could also provide them time for opportunities to collaborate with the First Year Experience to offer special advising workshops or incorporate advising activities into the AIS curriculum.

As with other issues in this report, many of the issues related to orientation have resulted from a lack of involving advising in the planning process. Some advising representatives were involved in a limited role for certain discussions, but their concerns and suggestions were dismissed in favor of the current orientation structure.

Recommendation J.1	Re-examine current policies and practices regarding freshman students and orientation to consider what is in the best interest of students.
Recommendation J.2	Consider hiring more advisors or incorporating group advising sessions into orientation, especially for centers who see a large percentage of incoming freshman.
Recommendation J.3	Consider whether a dedicated freshman advising center, similar to the former CFAC, could provide better service to freshman through collaborations with the First Year Experience initiatives and intensive advising that focuses on major congruence, responsibility, and independence.

K. Morale

Morale continues to be low in advising, but several morale boosters were identified as being used widely in the advising community. Morale boosters are largely centered on sharing food and celebrating events (e.g. birthdays) within the advising centers. Other responses included the support and feeling of family that advisors have from being part of a team. Unfortunately, the second most mentioned response was that no morale boosters were currently being utilized in the centers.

While the center efforts are appreciated and may even be what helps keep staff going in stressful times, the current low morale reflects the responses from other questions regarding lack of appreciation, high workload, and low compensation (the same issues that were detrimental to morale at the time of the NACADA Report in 2005). Many expressed that the best morale boosters they could receive would be lower caseloads and higher compensation.

Until these larger issues can be addressed, it is vital that advisors and directors continue to support each other with the techniques that are currently being used as some of the only morale boosters in advising.

Recommendation K.1	(Many of the other suggestions regarding compensation, workload, etc. would also pay dividends toward improving morale).
Recommendation K.2	Expand the morale boosters used in centers to include all-advisor events such as socials, lunch events, and teambuilding.

L. What Employees Value

When it comes to what employees value about their work with the university, working with students and making a difference in their lives was by far the most commonly mentioned survey response. It was followed closely by the relationships with one’s supervisor and colleagues and the work that is done as part of a caring team. Benefits, specifically insurance, was another frequently cited topic of value. Many others were mentioned but much less often.

Most of the responses reflected advisors’ internal passions and motivations that inspired them to work in higher education in the first place. Unfortunately, that has not been enough for many who have left. Some had relationships and work that they valued taken away from them due to the restructuring, while others could not justify staying due to competing interests like higher income. Furthermore, many other offices and institutions allow staff to continue the work they love but with better compensation. The university seems to have enjoyed a decent amount of advisor retention in the past which may have been due to the personal factors that advisors value about their jobs instead of the efforts by the university to retain advisors. The Advising Plan (2012) even acknowledges that the university has a core of academic advisors who are committed to their mission to serve the students well even when promotions are unavailable. This may be true, but these professionals will not be with UTSA forever. In fact, the past year has seen the loss of an unusually high number of senior advisors. Unless more advisors are retained to take their place among the veteran advisors, UTSA may eventually lack the core group of veteran advisors that they have enjoyed.

Recommendation L.1	(Many of the recommendations in other areas could add to what advisors value about the work they do. For instance, providing advisors more ownership over their work.).
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M. Training

Training, including money for regional/national professional development, was the fourth most cited issue that respondents want the AAC to address in the 2014-2015 academic year. Training is discussed several times throughout the survey, and respondents provided a wealth of feedback about many issues related to training. The need for ongoing and/or more frequent training was the most common suggestion for improving training. The NACADA Report (2005) mentions the importance of frequent development opportunities to keep advisors' skills fresh, and survey respondents mentioned initial trainings not being sufficient or being conducted too far in advance of when the new knowledge/skills would be applied.

- 1. Delivery of training.** Overall, the advising community seems to prefer workshops and "Study Days" trainings that are offered in a classroom setting. They have also expressed interest in "conference style" trainings that would give attendees options as to which sessions to attend. Staff have expressed through the survey and anecdotally that large rooms, such as the HUC Ballroom and Denman Room, are not as conducive to trainings because of the physical environment. For instance, in these rooms there is usually an echo that makes it hard to hear those presenting, and advisors are spread out across the room which makes discussion difficult. Smaller training groups are preferred by some.

A quarter of respondents have also expressed interest in the development of online modules or videos for training purposes. It was also the second most mentioned idea for improving training. The online options would allow staff to access the training materials at their convenience and as often as needed even after the initial training (Advising Plan, 2012). It was suggested that the online trainings could include quizzes similar to the compliance modules from HR in order to determine that learning outcomes were met.

Survey respondents have also expressed that trainings need to be more interactive, especially when hands-on learning is the best way to master the material, like for a new electronic system. They would also like for training materials to be distributed to attendees prior to trainings if possible, so that they can review the material and develop questions ahead of time. Those trainings that do not come with manuals, especially those concerning electronic programs, should have manuals developed. It has also been suggested that a common advisor training manual be developed and updated as needed for all advisors to be able to reference. All training materials should be kept in a centralized location to allow advisors to access the information at any time for review. The Advising Blackboard has been increasingly utilized in this way and was suggested as a possible central location.

Recommendation M.1.1	Provide more frequent required or optional, depending on the topic, training/professional development opportunities for advisors. When deciding when to offer trainings, particular attention should be paid to when the knowledge/skills acquired
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	from the training would be applied and whether additional trainings might be necessary.
Recommendation M.1.2	Avoid using large rooms that are not conducive to discussion for future trainings in favor of more classroom settings.
Recommendation M.1.3	Develop online modules/videos for training purposes that can be used as needed by new or current advisors.
Recommendation M.1.4	Develop manuals for trainings, especially those regarding electronic programs, which can be referenced from a central location as needed after the initial trainings.

2. Topics for training. Respondents tended to mention training topics that fell into two areas: informational topics (e.g. special populations, technology, etc.) and professional development (e.g. advising style, stress management, etc.). The most commonly mentioned informational topic that respondents would like to see is training about Special Populations. Since none of the several mentioned special populations (e.g. Veterans, International, Athletes, Health Professions, etc.) were overwhelmingly common, it might be better for these trainings to be optional or for multiple subjects to be offered in a conference style event.

The second most common informational topic mentioned was software, including DegreeWorks, Global, Banner, EARN, and Learn. Respondents reported needing additional training on software used due to inadequate initial trainings, software not functioning correctly, etc. As some problems with these programs continue, it is recommended that further trainings be postponed until they are working properly.

Respondents would also like to receive training from other offices or departments on-campus. Financial Aid, the Registrar’s Office, and the academic departments were all commonly mentioned offices that advisors would like more information about. This could include information about the work they do and training on forms from their offices used by advisors. Many respondents would also like to hear from the Provost’s office and University College.

Other common informational topics mentioned included policy and procedure changes and best practices. While these are still important, they should be considered on an optional basis unless more interest is received or a need for mandatory training is identified. Another option could include frequent open forums hosted by the AAC where concerns and/or best practices can be discussed in the advising community. These forums could also serve a social function for advisors. Many respondents mentioned a desire for increased social and networking opportunities that improve morale and allow advisors to easily meet new employees and strengthen old bonds.

Several professional development topics were also identified as areas for future training. Among them, training on developmental advising and counseling techniques

was common. Respondents were interested in becoming better professionals but also providing better quality of service to students beyond informational needs. Topics related to personal wellness, such as stress management, motivation, and time management, were also mentioned. Similar to the special populations training, these trainings could be optional or offered in a conference style event.

Recommendation M.2.1	Provide training on several Special Populations and the offices that they work with at UTSA.
Recommendation M.2.2	Provide additional training on the electronic programs used once they are operating correctly.
Recommendation M.2.3	Provide open forums for advisors to socialize and discuss concerns and best practices.
Recommendation M.2.4	Provide professional development opportunities for advisors to hone their professional skills and learn strategies for promoting personal wellness.

3. New advisor training. The most common issue identified with New Advisor Training (NAT) was it not being offered until several months to one year into employment or not ever being offered to new hires. The key takeaway seems to be that NAT needs to be offered more often and within the first month or so of employment. By utilizing an online structure for some of the training, new hires could be provided with vital information much sooner.

Opinions seem to be mixed regarding the quality of NAT. Almost 20% of respondents mentioned positive experiences about NAT due to being given good basic information, enjoying meeting other new advisors, or feeling well trained overall. A few mentioned negative experiences that included NAT being insufficient for advisor needs. Currently, many have reported relying on training within their center for teaching them the knowledge needed for their day-to-day responsibilities. While center efforts are likely to remain a primary means of training new hires, many credited this system with influencing the lack of uniform processes. As efforts to streamline practices and procedures are made, training needs to either take on a more centralized role or be developed by centralized means for center use. In this way, we can ensure that new hires are being trained on the same practices and procedures.

Respondents offered several suggestions on how to improve training for new hires, including creating benchmarks for them to meet during a probationary period and providing them with mentors. Many offices currently assign mentors for training within their center, however it was suggested that perhaps they could be assigned a mentor outside of their center as another point of contact.

Recommendation M.3.1	Provide NAT more often so that it is done within one month of advisors being hired. This could include the use of online tools.
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Recommendation M.3.2	Develop uniform training tools, when appropriate, to ensure that new hires are following the same practices and procedures across centers regardless of whether their training is conducted in the center or by general advising personnel.
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N. General Practice

Respondents mentioned many practices/procedures in the survey that they would like to see changed. Many of the most commonly mentioned, like improved communication, uniform processes, and lower workloads/caseloads, have already been discussed, but there were many more. Among the others mentioned were suggestions regarding specific policies and procedures. For example, respondents would like to see advisors removed from some forms, like the Add Form. Departments are able to easily see enrollment capacity for classes in Banner, and many students have already verified that they meet the prerequisites and need the classes they are trying to add. Sole authority for Add Form approval lies with the faculty, so eliminating advisors from this process would reduce the amount of administrative duties for advisors.

A number of issues similar to that of the Add Form exist in advising. Addressing many of these smaller issues has the potential to make a larger combined impact in advising, so while they are not all discussed in this report, it is recommended that the administration and other groups engage the advising community in consistent on-going assessment of policies and procedures in order to address these smaller issues as they arise. It is also recognized that larger changes are unlikely to happen this soon into the restructuring, so some of the smaller and perhaps easier changes could be discussed as a way to start forming stronger relationships between the advising community and the administration, academic units, and other offices.

The advising community will also have to organize their concerns, even minor ones, on a more regular basis so that the AAC and others can advocate for changes. Advisors are already engaging in efforts to improve service, but a greater impact can be made if activities are expanded beyond the center level. For example, at a recent AAC meeting one center's effort to create an advisor manual for new hires was discussed. It was suggested that such a manual would be useful for all centers and using the same material could help promote consistent training and practices across centers. This type of suggestion aligns with the findings that teamwork among advisors was a highly regarded best practice in advising.

When possible, solutions or recommendations should accompany critiques in order to promote productive discussions and increase the likelihood that desired changes will be made. The advising community will need to take ownership over their work as much as possible and will likely have to put in the brunt of the work to address issues and make changes. Advisors are extremely busy as discussed throughout this report, but historically the administration and other offices have not included or consulted advising, so they must take it upon themselves to

address the issues. Advising can demonstrate how their involvement is beneficial and should be continued by providing sound solutions for problems and taking the initiative in addressing issues in advising, but they should also make sure to communicate how changes would benefit others, especially students. Benefits for other offices should also be highlighted in any recommendations in order to promote buy-in and obtain advocates. It will be up to the advising community to make sure that any expansion of advising involvement is maintained instead of regressing back to current limited involvement. Simply voicing concerns and expecting them to be addressed will not likely result in others making it a point to involve the advising community in their discussions.

Recommendation N.1	Engage in ongoing assessment of policies and procedures (such as the Add Form procedure) in order to provide relief to advising when possible.
Recommendation N.2	Increase teamwork, collaboration, and organization among advising centers for improved advocacy and impact. The AAC could help organize such efforts through committees and open forum events.
Recommendation N.3	Demonstrate the benefits that advisor involvement can have on students, the advising community, and other offices. This includes communicating the benefits for each group and providing concrete examples of how advisors have taken the lead on addressing issues.

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Complete List of Recommendations

Recommendation A.1	Address advisor turnover/retention immediately to alleviate workload demands (see many of the other recommendations for more specific actions, particularly the recommendations concerning compensation, the Career Ladder, and workload).
Recommendation A.2	Create formal processes for determining why people leave advising so that any identified issues that contribute to turnover can be addressed. If HR will not include this information in exit procedures, the advising community should create their own process.
Recommendation B.1	Increase advisor base salary to adjust for cost of living and to be more competitive with similar positions at UTSA (Career Counselor) and advising positions at other local institutions (Alamo Colleges, TAMU-SA, Texas State, etc.).
Recommendation B.2	Determine how advising could negotiate salaries within a range, similar to other offices, for each position depending on qualifications.
Recommendation B.3	Consider other measures besides salary increases to improve advisor compensation (e.g. Free/discounted parking, etc.).
Recommendation C.1	Increase the advising fee and/or identify additional/alternative sources of funding for advisor salaries.
Recommendation C.2	Examine how advising is funded at other institutions.
Recommendation C.3	Require all students who might seek to utilize advising services to pay some form of an advising fee (e.g. non-degree seeking).
Recommendation C.4	Review the current usage of advising fees for cost-saving measures that can be redistributed to other areas like staff salaries.
Recommendation D.1	Identify and incorporate factors other than longevity, such as education, experience, and contribution to the advising community, as part of the Career Ladder requirements.
Recommendation D.2	Examine the Career Ladders and promotion systems of other institutions for ideas and best practices.
Recommendation D.3	Remove barriers, such as reclassifying positions and limiting the number of advisors of each level, which block Career Ladder promotions for qualified advisors to reduce turnover and support the “advisor for life” concept.
Recommendation D.4	Apply consistent and transparent promotion/hiring practices that adhere to official requirements and descriptions.
Recommendation D.5	Consider temporarily unfreezing the Career Ladder in order to give those advisors who have stayed through the restructuring a raise in order to avoid losing more people.
Recommendation D.6	Shorten the time requirements for promotions.
Recommendation E.1	Consider options for mitigating increases in workload due to advisor vacancies. Example strategies could include having a temp advisor pool of ex-advisors (similar practices currently exist for some centers during summers/peak times), hiring a “flex” advisor position that would shift continually based on demand/vacancies, etc.

Recommendation E.2	Ensure that vacancy paperwork approval is given priority to limit periods of being understaffed.
Recommendation E.3	Consider hiring support staff to handle more administrative and special programs demands. These professionals could be concerned with improving the efficiency and effectiveness of advising. Additional staff working closely with but not in advising may also need to be added to take on certain programs/initiatives.
Recommendation E.4	Consider diversifying responsibilities among staff (similar to previous center practices), so that all advisors are not doing all activities and students have some flexibility to see a different advisor if needed.
Recommendation E.5	Re-evaluate and redistribute resources in order to create similar student:advisor ratios across centers.
Recommendation E.6	Designate time for the advising community to assess services and investigate new/best practices to improve student support.
Recommendation F.1.1	Eliminate barriers to communication by increasing direct contact between advisors and the administration. For instance, regular (monthly/semesterly/etc.) meetings should be held with the AAC and administrators (Provost, Deans, etc.).
Recommendation F.1.2	Include AAC representatives in regular administrative meetings.
Recommendation F.1.3	Include advisors and directors on initial <i>planning</i> task forces/committees instead of during finalization of decisions or when cleaning up issues after implementation.
Recommendation F.1.4	Increase transparency so that the advising community is aware of the conversations being had on its behalf.
Recommendation F.1.5	Ensure that communication flows in a continuous loop by providing regular feedback to the advising community.
Recommendation F.2.1	Establish and enforce consistent procedures for the routing of forms, petitions, etc. for all academic offices.
Recommendation F.2.2	Include advisors in academic unit meetings concerning curricula changes, catalog revisions, etc.
Recommendation F.3.1	Distribute information in a more formal, centralized way when possible to promote consistency and provide a means of reference.
Recommendation F.3.2	Create centralized stores of information for advisor reference (e.g. Blackboard course with an operations manual, common forms, degree plans, training materials, etc.).
Recommendation F.3.3	Create and enforce uniform practices for documentation, data recording, etc. that can be used by all centers.
Recommendation F.3.4	Increase opportunities for staff to socialize, discuss best practices, and address concerns.
Recommendation F.3.5	Include AAC representatives in director meetings (ACDC).
Recommendation G.1	Increase advocacy for advisors on all levels (by the AAC, Directors, Executive Director, Administration, etc.).

Recommendation G.2	Provide meaningful encouragement and support for advisors and show appreciation beyond yearly pep-talks and snacks/balloons.
Recommendation G.3	Consider changes in the culture to highlight the value and worth of advising to UTSA.
Recommendation H.1.1	Evaluate whether systemic problems with DegreeWorks can be corrected or whether the plans need to be deleted and reconstructed from the beginning with advisor assistance.
Recommendation H.1.2	Investigate why certain DegreeWorks functions operate slowly or incorrectly and if/why this is a problem unique to UTSA.
Recommendation H.1.3	Have advisors discuss options for creating a consistent degree plan template if a commercial auditing system does not meet needs.
Recommendation H.2.1	Address the issues with Global not pulling the correct information from Banner.
Recommendation H.2.2	Expand the section available for recording/viewing notes and recording appointment/email interactions.
Recommendation H.3.1	Determine how EARN is being utilized by faculty members to see at what level, if at all, it is wise for advisors to incorporate it into their duties.
Recommendation H.3.2	If EARN will indeed play a part in advising, offer a follow-up training to advisors on how it functions and how it will be used.
Recommendation I.1	Consult the advising community to develop practices/processes/etc. that can be used to encourage a more educational/developmental advising environment. This could be done in an All-Advisor Workshop setting that is not based solely on what the administration wants to focus on.
Recommendation I.2	Provide advisors further training on developmental/educational advising techniques and practices and how they can be incorporated into the specific work of their centers.
Recommendation J.1	Re-examine current policies and practices regarding freshman students and orientation to consider what is in the best interest of students.
Recommendation J.2	Consider hiring more advisors or incorporating group advising sessions into orientation, especially for centers who see a large percentage of incoming freshman.
Recommendation J.3	Consider whether a dedicated freshman advising center, similar to the former CFAC, could provide better service to freshman through collaborations with the First Year Experience initiatives and intensive advising that focuses on major congruence, responsibility, and independence.
Recommendation K.1	(Many of the other suggestions regarding compensation, workload, etc. would also pay dividends toward improving morale).
Recommendation K.2	Expand the morale boosters used in centers to include all-advisor events such as socials, lunch events, and teambuilding.
Recommendation L.1	(Many of the recommendations in other areas could add to what advisors value about the work they do. For instance, providing advisors more ownership over their work.).

Recommendation M.1.1	Provide more frequent required or optional, depending on the topic, training/professional development opportunities for advisors. When deciding when to offer trainings, particular attention should be paid to when the knowledge/skills acquired from the training would be applied and whether additional trainings might be necessary.
Recommendation M.1.2	Avoid using large rooms that are not conducive to discussion for future trainings in favor of more classroom settings.
Recommendation M.1.3	Develop online modules/videos for training purposes that can be used as needed by new or current advisors.
Recommendation M.1.4	Develop manuals for trainings, especially those regarding electronic programs, which can be referenced from a central location as needed after the initial trainings.
Recommendation M.2.1	Provide training on several Special Populations and the offices that they work with at UTSA.
Recommendation M.2.2	Provide additional training on the electronic programs used once they are operating correctly.
Recommendation M.2.3	Provide open forums for advisors to socialize and discuss concerns and best practices.
Recommendation M.2.4	Provide professional development opportunities for advisors to hone their professional skills and learn strategies for promoting personal wellness.
Recommendation M.3.1	Provide NAT more often so that it is done within one month of advisors being hired. This could include the use of online tools.
Recommendation M.3.2	Develop uniform training tools, when appropriate, to ensure that new hires are following the same practices and procedures across centers regardless of whether their training is conducted in the center or by general advising personnel.
Recommendation N.1	Engage in ongoing assessment of policies and procedures (such as the Add Form procedure) in order to provide relief to advising when possible.
Recommendation N.2	Increase teamwork, collaboration, and organization among advising centers for improved advocacy and impact. The AAC could help organize such efforts through committees and open forum events.
Recommendation N.3	Demonstrate the benefits that advisor involvement can have on students, the advising community, and other offices. This includes communicating the benefits for each group and providing concrete examples of how advisors have taken the lead on addressing issues.

IV. Action Steps

This section includes action items for various groups. It is recommended that each group implement these suggestions to achieve maximum advising effectiveness.

AAC:

- Discuss the survey results/report with the administration and advising community
- Seek to represent advisors in planning/decision-making
- Investigate advising fee usage
- Provide regular opportunities for advisor feedback, including the biannual survey & open forums
- Continue to address advisor compensation/Career Ladder issues
- Identify other activities to support the recommendations

Advising Community:

- Take advantage of opportunities to offer feedback to the AAC, center directors, the Executive Director, and university administration
- Take advantage of opportunities to participate in planning groups
- Take ownership over work by proactively seeking to address issues and by engaging in activities beyond normal job duties
- Follow established policies and procedures in advising

Advising Administration (e.g. Executive Director & center directors):

- Communicate advising information quickly and clearly to the advising community
- Engage in continued discussions with the AAC and collaborate with them on projects, initiatives, trainings, etc.
- Promote cross-center communication, collaboration, and teamwork

University Administration (e.g. Provost):

- Discuss the survey results/report with the AAC
- Engage in continued discussions with the AAC
- Involve advisors in planning/decision-making groups
- Ensure that academic unit policies/procedures are consistent and support students/advisors

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Appendix A. Institutional Research Data 2012-2014



Office of Institutional Research
Institutional.Research@utsa.edu

TO: Matt Keneson
Colleges' Freshman Advising Center

FROM: Brian Cordeau
Office of Institutional Research

DATE: April 17, 2014

SUBJECT: Advisor Study (201404016)

Methodology

The information requested came from the UTSA Define Human Resources database which contains all employee job records such as title, percent time, department and other key fields. An extract of all employees at UTSA was taken as of January 1st, 2012 and on January 1st, 2014. The advisors, assistant directors and associate directors were counted for each time frame. This only included positions which were filled, not the total number of positions available. Positions that were vacant during these times are not counted in this request. Those advisors who were here in 2012 were then merged with the 2014 data set to determine what their current status was (see below for definitions).

Advising Status:

Stayed in Advising – Staff member continued to be an advisor.

Stayed in Advising (earned promotion) – Staff member earned a promotion within advising. This could be a promotion to a higher level advisor or a management position within advising.

At UTSA, not in Advising – Staff member was still employed at UTSA but was in a different position.

No Longer at UTSA – Staff member was not employed at UTSA.

Results

The tables below provide below showing the counts of advisors in 2012 and 2014 and the status of the advisors over time. The first table contains the total number of advisors in 2012 and 2014 as of January 1st for each of those years. The second table tracks those advisors from 2012 to determine what their current status is.

Table 1 Number of Advisors by Title in 2012 and 2014 as of 1/1

	2012	2014	
Advising Title	#	#	% Change
Health Prof Advisor I	1	1	0%
Academic Advisor I	23	26	13%
Academic Advisor II	38	24	-37%
Academic Advisor III	11	14	27%
Academic Advisor IV	11	10	-9%
Assistant Director Of Advising	1	1	0%
Assistant Director, UHPO	1	1	0%
Associate Director Advising	1	1	0%
Total	87	78	-10%

The 10% decrease in the number of advisors is consistent with the decrease in the total number of undergraduates (7%) who were enrolled at UTSA during this timeframe.

Table 2 Current Status of Advisors from 1/1/2012

Advising Status from 2012 to 2014	#	%
Stayed in Advising	26	30%
Stayed in Advising (earned promotion)	30	34%
At UTSA, not in Advising	4	5%
No Longer at UTSA	27	31%
Total	87	100%

Of the 87 advisors in 2012, 56 (64%) were still in an advising role in 2014. The other 31 advisors were not employed at UTSA (27) or were in a different area (4). This is consistent with similar positions at UTSA.

Please let me know if you need additional information or have any questions regarding this request.

Appendix C. Career ladder

Advising Career Ladder

Grade	Salary Range	Position Title	Minimum Requirements	If UTSA employee (Eligible for reclass)	Job Duties
57	\$28,956-\$46,332	Academic Advisor I	Master's <i>or</i> Bachelor's + 2 years academic advising or related experience		Direct academic advising duties
58	\$31,848-\$50,964	Academic Advisor II	Master's + 2 years academic advising or related experience <i>or</i> Bachelor's + 4 years academic advising or related experience	2 years UTSA Academic Advising Experience plus overall rating of "SP" or "O" for both of the years	Direct academic advising duties
59	\$34,380-\$56,724	Academic Advisor III	Master's + 4 years academic advising or related experience (2 of which must be Academic Advising at UTSA) <i>or</i> Bachelor's + 6 years academic advising or related experience (2 of which must be Academic Advising at UTSA)(with Graduate Work preferred)	Internal consideration or posting of position (internal or external) if vacant. Minimum requirements apply.	Direct academic advising duties
60	\$37,812-\$62,388	Academic Advisor IV	Master's + 6 years academic advising or related experience (3 of which must be Academic Advising at UTSA)	Internal consideration or posting of position (internal or external) if vacant. Minimum requirements apply.	Direct academic advising duties; graduation/retention project(s) that benefit the college advising center; supervisory when Director and/or Associate Director are out of the office
16	\$40,042-\$58,061	Associate Director	Master's + 6 years academic advising or related experience + 2 years of Supervisory Experience (Direct or Assisted-subbing)	Size of the Center- number of advisors (minimum of 11), number of support staff including work-study (minimum of 4); Justification from the Director	Center Trainer; Supervising in Director's absence (including signature authority and DEFINE authority)
18	\$48,451-\$70,254	Director	Master's + 6 years academic advising or related experience; 3 years supervisory experience, 2 of which must be in academic advising		

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