Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Between Office of Academic Affairs
And
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Reference: Tools for Improving Orientation Advising

I. Purpose

This MOU outlines partnership roles and responsibilities for implementation of the Provost Challenge project: Tools for Improving Orientation Advising

II. Project Description and Key Project Outcomes

Overview:
Creating a system able to provide professional and faculty advisers with sufficient information about student academic preparation at freshman and transfer orientations. This would include making available to advisers a unified one to two page snapshot of an incoming freshman’s high school transcripts, AP/IB scores, ACT/SAT Scores, and any community college credits earned. For incoming freshman and transfer students in a pre-health or other specialized degree program which requires recent math placement scores, this would entail including a requirement which would prevent students in these programs from signing up for orientation until they have either completed the ALEKS math placement exam or verified that they have successfully completed a college level math class with a C- or higher in the 12 months preceding their first term of attendance at PSU.

Key project outcomes (as agreed by Project Lead and Vice Provost):
1. Increased number of freshmen taking the math placement exam prior to attending orientation
2. Increased number of freshmen students completing science and math sequences in their first year at PSU
3. Increase in timely completion of degree programs due to adequate preparation and correct placement of students in math and science sequenced classes in their first term
4. Increased retention of freshmen STEM majors due to more informed orientation advising
5. Increased completion of pre-health curriculum by freshmen due to more informed orientation advising
6. Increased identification of high achieving students able to be successful with higher credit loads in their first year of college (many high-achieving students can easily take more than the typical 13 credits a term so could be advised accordingly)
7. Increased identification of lower achieving students leading to more referrals to campus services, college success curriculum, and preparatory classes
8. Improved faculty and professional adviser orientation experience due to availability of more thorough advising information

III. Funding
The project team will be funded up to $6,800 to achieve the outcomes established for this project. Vice Provost for Academic Innovation in consultation with Provost and the appropriate dean may increase, reduce or terminate funding for this project.
IV. Funding Agreement Terms
The funding agreements in this document are contingent upon completion of the proposed project as describe above. Changes to the agreements, timetables or funding will be based on written agreement between the College/Department and Office of Academic Affairs designees. OAA will provide an index code that will be used for funding of this project. There will be no transfer of funds.

V. Resolution of Disagreements
In the event of a disagreement that cannot be resolved by the parties, resolution will be through agreement of Vice Provost for Academic Innovation and the Dean of the Department's College or Director of the Unit.

WITNESS WHEREOF, the representatives have signed this Memorandum of Understanding on the

29\[August\] day of August, 2013.

Martha Dyson, Project Lead, Academic Adviser, CLAS
Robert Mercer, Assistant Dean, CLAS

Sukhwant Jhaj
Vice Provost for Academic Innovation and Student Success

Sue Beatty, Dean, CLAS

Enclosures:
- Copy of reThink PSU: Provost Challenge project proposal
#96 Tools for Improving Orientation Advising

Last modified: February 20, 2013 – 10:57am

Project Lead
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Challenge
Inspiration Challenge

Abstract/Summary
Creating a system able to provide professional and faculty advisers with sufficient information about student academic preparation at freshman and transfer orientations. This would include making available to advisers a unified one to two page snapshot of an incoming freshman’s high school transcripts, AP/IB scores, ACT/SAT Scores, and any community college credits earned. For incoming freshman and transfer students in a pre-health or other specialized degree program which requires recent math placement scores, this would entail including a requirement which would prevent students in these programs from signing up for orientation until they have either completed the ALEKS math placement exam or verified that they have successfully completed a college level math class with a C– or higher in the 12 months preceding their first term of attendance at PSU.

Introduction
Since orientation is often a freshman’s first major encounter with PSU, her or his experience there has the potential to make or break that student’s connection with the university. In order to take full advantage of our opportunities for positive connection at this event, we need to ensure that students are receiving the best academic advising possible. While advisers are currently doing a fabulous job with the resources available to them, there are tools which are currently unavailable to us which would enable us to give freshmen students a much more positive and satisfying advising experience at orientation.

Currently, advisers see incoming freshmen in group advising for approximately 30 minutes to an hour at the end of a full day of orientation events. At these advising sessions, academic advisers (professional and faculty advisers alike) have virtually no information about the freshmen they are attempting to assist. There is no access to high school transcripts, AP or IB scores, ACT/SAT scores, or any community college credits which may have been earned by these incoming freshmen.

When advising transfer students, advisers are provided with transfer evaluations which indicate previous college credit earned. These evaluations are sufficient for most advising tasks. However, students in programs like pre-health, which depend on current math placement scores as pre-requisites for math and science classes in the first term of attendance, need to take the ALEKS placement test prior to registration or verify that they have completed a college level math class within the 12 months prior to beginning PSU. This need for math placement also applies to freshman pre-health students. Pre-health students are already targeted by their advisers with clear directives to take the placement exam before orientation and yet they repeatedly ignore these directions. Consequently, a more direct approach with some teeth (similar to the advising holds put on students’ accounts to mandate advising during their first year at PSU), seems necessary to achieve this end.

Impact/Significance
We know that a student’s math, writing, and science preparation is crucial to their first year success. Advisers who have a student’s academic preparation information readily accessible to them will able to advise students more accurately, thus, improving student
retention and success. In addition, requiring select groups of students (those in the pre-health or other specialized degree programs who MUST have recent math placement scores in order to register for their first term at PSU) to complete the ALEKS math placement exam prior to signing up for orientation (or verify that they have successfully completed a college level math class within the past 12 months), will enable a smoother transition for incoming students since they will be able to sign up for the proper math and science classes at orientation and will not have their academic progress delayed.

Approach and Strategy

Working with OIT to pull student information from various PSU systems in order to provide advisers with a unified, one to two page snapshot containing all the necessary advising information for each incoming student. Access to this information would greatly enhance the advising experience for our incoming freshmen and would enable advisers to provide these students with the kind of personalized advising that would give them the best possible chance of attaining academic success. While all of this information may be currently available somewhere among PSU’s many different database and IT systems, it is neither easily or readily accessible to advisers, particularly during orientation.

Working with the office of orientation to identify students in the pre-health programs (or other specialized programs requiring math placement) and to implement an additional requirement of math placement for these students prior to allowing them to sign up for orientation.

Milestones

The first step after approval of the proposal would be for advisers, orientation staff, and OIT to work together to determine the technology and funding needed for implementation.

The timeline would be dependent on the findings of that group, but would likely proceed as follows: necessary software would be purchased and a working group established to determine the exact information and format desired for the one-page snapshot. After this was determined, we could begin a trial implementation of the one-page snapshot containing the necessary test scores and High school transcript information. I would estimate that an initial dry run for the one-page snapshot could be done at the quarterly orientations for summer which are held during Spring term 2014. A final implementation would be ready for roll-out by August 2014 with every student receiving a one-page snapshot at the August 2014 orientations.

Benefits

We know that proper placement of students in classes can dramatically reduce D, W, F grades. This placement is particularly critical for STEM major due to their rigorous sequential coursework.

The short-term benefits:

Increased faculty and professional adviser confidence and competence about orientation advising due to better advising tools.

Increased student satisfaction about their orientation advising experience.

Fewer D, W, F grades based on improper placement.

Long-term benefits:

Greater student success and retention based on more competent and accurate advising – students would be getting the kind of advising they need to succeed and would be able to proceed more efficiently through their degree programs.

ALL incoming PSU students would benefit from this initiative because providing advisers with these advising tools would greatly improve student advising. ALL faculty who advise at orientation (as well as professional advisers) would benefit from this initiative because they would have the tools they need to do their jobs in a more accurate and efficient manner.

Consequences

Lack of accurate assessment of student academic preparedness would result in continued preponderance of D, W, F grades. This negative result would be felt most strongly by STEM majors for whom accurate placement is particularly critical is they are to proceed through their rigorous sequential coursework.

Students would continue to be frustrated at not getting the kind of advising they need at orientation due to lack of adequate information given to advisers about each student’s scores, transcripts, competencies, etc...

Advisers would continue to experience frustration at orientation advising because they are being asked to do a good job without the necessary tools.

Needs Assessment

Download (http://www.rethink.pdx.edu/sites/default/files/ORneedsassessment20%282%29.doc)

Inspiration Challenge Only
My proposal would support the following SS initiatives:

**Intentional Advising and Charting a Pathway to Degree Completion** – providing advisers with all the tools they need to advise students well from their first advising encounter at orientation will increase the goal of intentional advising and provide a clearer path to graduation for students.

**Identification of Students at Risk** – providing advisers with all the tools they need to advise students well at orientation will enable advisers to recognize a student at risk and will be able to intervene with appropriate strategies in a timely manner.

**Reduce the number of courses with Preponderance (20%) of D, W, F grades** – Proper placement in courses can dramatically affect D, W, F in rigorous sequential coursework. Since students do not accurately self-report academic preparation (particularly during group advising) it is imperative that advisers have access to ACTUAL academic preparation indicators.

**Tags**

New Models, Student Success, Undergraduate, academic placement, advising, retention

**Comments**

Becki Ingersoll — December 21, 2012 – 11:22am

I agree that it would be very valuable to provide information about students to advisers at orientation. The orientation office does provide a list of students by major to advisers prior to each orientation, but it is not widely used to help advisers prepare.

One thing to keep in mind is that students change their majors before and even at orientation, so if the information were provided to the advisers based on students signed up for that day’s orientation, it would need to be accessible to others should the student change and find herself talking to an adviser in a different program who does not have her information available.

Becki Hunt Ingersoll, Associate Director, Advising & Career Services

Melissa Leonard — February 22, 2013 – 4:39pm

As Coordinator of Health Sciences Advising at PSU, I strongly support the idea that PSU enforce the math placement testing requirement prior to students arriving at Orientation (at least for students pursuing programs/majors strongly influenced by math placement such as pre-health, science majors, engineering majors, etc.). In other words, while it is great that students are not permitted to register for a math course until they have completed the placement test, students are not required to complete the placement test before they arrive at a session designed to help them develop and register for an appropriate schedule of courses. It could be argued that it's no big deal that a student might not be able to register for a math course at Orientation or even in his/her first term at PSU. However, for students in certain programs (pre-health, for example), the level of math they place into often impacts their ability to choose other meaningful courses that are critical for them to begin in their first term at PSU.

Here is an example: Pre-health advisers must know what level of math pre-health students can begin in order to know what science sequence they can begin. If a student hasn't taken the placement exam (and hasn't recently completed any college level math), we're left to speculate on what they would take for both math and science, going through different scenarios — “If you get this score on the exam, then you'd take this math and this science, but if you get this score, you'd take this other math and this other science.” We then have to ask them to try to remember this when they get home and take the math placement exam. Only then can they finish their scheduling and registration process.

While we email students prior to Orientation telling them just how imperative it is that they complete math placement testing and bring their scores to Orientation, they often do not do this. Why? Because they were able to register for Orientation w/out doing the placement, and they are told that at Orientation they will be advised on the courses they need and they will then go register for those courses.

Preventing pre-health and science/engineering majors from registering for Orientation until they have completed the math placement exam would require some back-end programming. Such computer programming would require funding; this would be a practical application of reThink PSU funds that would provide a tangible benefit to students.

It is true that students who change their major or pre-professional program after they apply to PSU would be missed in this process, but it would still be a good investment that would increase the number of students who take the math placement exam before they arrive at Orientation. This would in turn increase student satisfaction with the Orientation experience and help ensure that students get off on the right foot in their first term at PSU with appropriately selected courses.