Revitalizing Advising at PSU

Gallery Walk
Here’s what we did:

- The Advising Redesign Workgroup interviewed 65 professional advisors across PSU. The goal of these interviews was to gain a deep understanding of the needs of the advising community, and to use the wisdom of the community to guide our work in redesigning advising and career services at PSU.

- To share what we learned, we had two public gallery walk sessions on April 25 and 26, attended by 58 members of the PSU community.
During the gallery walk, we displayed the insights that we gathered from our interviews, and asked for further input from the advising community.

Thank you for the great response, engagement, and input!
Interview Insights:

**Autonomy**
- The PAC currently values both autonomy and teamwork within their positions.
- Advisors are happier and more effective in their jobs if they are allowed to play to their strengths.
- Advisors like elements of a centralized framework, but want the autonomy to help their students, their way.
- There is fear that the redesign will result in a loss of autonomy.
- Advisor autonomy is crucial: source of joy and feelings of effectiveness.

**Community**
- Advisers want more personal connection with other advisers -- want a community of advisers
- Building community among advisors is more than attending trainings together.
- Value placed on both autonomy and community - needs to have flexibility to honor uniqueness of different dept/units student needs.
- Collaboration and (sense of) community between departments and advisors (Prof, Faculty, Deans) are integral in building and supporting a centralized advising model.
- Implementing redesign model could be a way to create/ enhance community (if done well).

**Training and Skills**
- Conflict between value of some standard training/practices/ skills for advisers and desire for specialization and different approaches for different units.
- Advisors should all have a common set of basic skills, as well as a common mission. Training should support this.
Interview Insights:

**Common Practices & Specialized Advising**

- The PAC would like to have a common set of practices, but would like the ability to customize based on population or culture of the unit.

- General support for common practices, communication, connection, but without advising becoming less specialized.

- PAC wants to be an integrated community with common practices and opportunities to connect professionally and socially, but also want autonomy and flexibility.

- PAC see value in consistent practices and centralized advising if their expertise, autonomy, and sense of community are maintained and valued.

- The PAC wants clear communication between departments and professional advisors, so professional advisors can effectively advise students.

- PAC wants a simple and user-friendly, record-keeping and analytics platform. It should include prospective students through post-bacs.

**Faculty Advisor Role**

- The faculty role is critical in advising at PSU, but is inconsistent across units.

- The PAC is not in consensus on faculty role in advising.

- The faculty-advisor connection is critical; there is a disconnect in how units/departments utilize and view these connections.

- The role of faculty in advising is very important, but the limitations of faculty are problematic. (Limited availability, incomplete knowledge, and skill base.)

**Specialized Advising**

- The PAC enjoys being experts in and advising within their field(s). There is a fear regarding losing identity and trust with students and faculty.

- Expertise is critical in building connections (on and off campus) and providing details students need.

- PAC values their expertise in their specialties and feel that expertise is undervalued.

- Many advisors value being specialists in an academic discipline, and even feel it is critical to being an effective advisor. They do not want to be generalists.

- Specialized advising is a key component of successful advising.
Interview Insights:

**Student Interaction as a Source of Joy**
- Relationship with students is an important element/source of joy in the advisor role.
- Advisors serve as mentors; we must not love this.
- The value advisors bring is in the human connection with students. Technology can't replace this.
- PAC love working with students and knowing their students. This is their source of joy.
- Advisors are student-centered and value student relationships.
- Deep sense of commitment to helping students achieve their goals.
- There is general consensus among the PAC on enhancing the 1:1 relationship with students; it is integral to look closely at the student pathway from pre-PSU to career.

**Difference in Roles & Workload Across Units**
- Departments and units do things differently. This creates inconsistencies and questions.
- There is a wide variety of duties/expectations for faculty advisors among departments.
- Advising responsibilities vary (sometimes greatly) between different schools/colleges/pre-professional programs.
- Need to appreciate responsibilities of advisers beyond 1:1 advising and how they differ across departments/units.

**Valuing Advising Teams**
- Many advisors deeply value and enjoy their team.
- From advisors in academic teams, an overwhelming message of value for those teams.
- Advising model needs to protect and/or expand teams that work well. Teamwork crucial to source of joy.

**Diversity and Cultural Competency**
- There is a lack of cultural competency on campus and a need to integrate diversity/relationships-building into practice with students.
- Diversity in advising community helps connect with our students.
- We need to build a more diverse PAC and ensure that PAC is culturally competent.
Chaos of the System

- PSU lacks a "front door." Students do not know how to enter PSU and get connected to the resources they need to get started.
- Students do not know how to navigate their way through PSU once they are here.
- Many in the PAC are ordered to do work by admin in multiple units (ACS, Dept., College/School). There is little or ineffective coordination and communication. This leads to advisors being overburdened and to a chaotic structure.
- There are too many bosses/people making work for PAC and they don't coordinate. This leads to chaotic system and overburdened advisors.

Feeling Undervalued

- Advising is a distinct profession that needs to be visibly valued at PSU.
- The PAC does not feel like PSU as a whole values the work they do.
- Many in the PAC feel undervalued by admin and/or faculty, which contributes to low morale and burnout.
- PAC sometimes feels unappreciated as a profession while also carrying big responsibility for student success at PSU.
- Advisers need advancement opportunities that demonstrate their skills are valued.

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- PAC values their expertise in their specialties and feel that expertise is undervalued.
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**Under-resourced & Overburdened**

- The PAC is under-resourced which is leading to burnout, feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration.
- Professional advising community is feeling under-resourced and overwhelmed by the number of responsibilities/"things" they are asked to take on.
- Students need more access and timely access to advisors. We do not have enough advising resources, especially during busy times (e.g. registration).
- Desire for ability to provide holistic advising-- current case-load prevents this.
- Technology and tools are valuable, but we still don't have enough people in PAC to use them effectively.
- So many ideas to help improve but overload leads to no time to accomplish anything.
- The PAC is frustrated by the lack of flexibility, time available, and resources within their role.
- PAC often feels unable to be proactive in outreach due to overloaded schedule and being under-resourced.
- Desire for more resources and organizational support for the PAC.
- In order to feel a source of joy, work/life balance and case-load of advisors needs to be addressed.

**Role of Advising in Student Retention**

- PAC knows that their connection to students is powerful, but knows that retention is affected by many factors.
- Student success includes advising but also classroom/campus climate and curriculum design. (Curriculum can get in student's way.)
- There is a feeling that advisors are going to be responsible for retention of students and that they will be penalized if retention goals are not met.
- Advising redesign will not address all retention issues/challenges; there is a need for more mandatory and consistent practices (both virtual and institutional).

**Career Advising & Career Counseling**

- There is no common understanding across the university on what career advising vs. career counseling is.
- There is no common understanding amongst advisors on their role in career advising vs. career counseling.
- There is a demand from students for more career advising and information.
- Career advising and career counseling are critical and need to happen with more students, but we need a clear understanding of the differences between the two.
- Holistic advising needs to include career component.
Interview Insights:

**Pathways & Advising Redesign**
- It is crucial for a student to have a good first experience with advising. Since this often happens at orientation, we need to rethink how we do advising at orientation.
- Early connections to advising and quick access to advisors set stage for student advising experience.
- PAC values "human" resources (personal adviser connection) and believes that systems should support that connection and not the other way around.
- Advising model needs to include effective strategies to implement intrusive advising.
- No Silos.
- Model needs to take into account needs around: Entry (Orientation); Time-sensitive questions (quick access); Relationship-building; Specialized advising/mentoring
- The advising redesign process, specifically pathways, needs to address/include exploratory students.
- There is a disagreement amongst PAC on whether a student should solely see one advisor their whole time at PSU.

**Feelings of Uncertainty about Advising Redesign**
- There is uncertainty around the goals, objective and outcomes of advising redesign.
- There is nervous energy/fear around the idea of advising redesign.
- Questions about the value of advising redesign. PAC doesn’t see the system as broken.
- Some in the PAC don’t believe the redesign process will really incorporate their voice.
- People are either excited about the redesign or they are fearful.
- PAC is both fearful of and optimistic about advising redesign.
- There is a concern that anything different will hurt students.
- There is uncertainty and skepticism about the advising redesign process, how we are going to do it, and if it will change our current challenges.
Here’s what you shared with us during the event:

- Celebration of advisor/student work as part of the PAC
- More connection between faculty advisors and PAC. Students' success is not only a PAC issue.
- Advising needs of students at different stages should be assessed. If we know what they need when they need it at different times in the process, we can better allocate resources. Some advising needs are the same for all students. Other needs are dependent. Model should address these.
- Cross-disciplinary effort needed: Admissions, Financial Services, Student Affairs, Housing, Faculty, etc.
- Data analytics and human connection: Design Thinking provides a middle way.
- Specialization can be good, but should still be able to help generally so to not say 'I can't help you with that.'
- How are students involved in the Advising Redesign?
- Advising is a profession; should require a Master's Degree.
- More support of faculty advisers -- I’m 50% adviser and I see students from 18 departments (Math advisers)
- Issue of language/terminology. A "department advisor" (OR!) may mean different things on different parts of campus.
- Need more career specialist voices in this conversation and planning redesign.
- Consider how to be more inclusive of diversity of student needs.
- UNST represents an important, complex, and pervasive path for students and should play a significant role in Advising Redesign.
- Student responsibility?
- Learned helplessness among students?
- How about the role of the student? Their responsibility and ownership?
- Idea of implementing change in terms of policy (SAP) into Redesign and support of students.
- Advising should be holistic/whole person: Academics, Career, Success, basic needs/barriers
- Increased use of tech for efficacy efficiency
- Internship must be required.
- Providing holistic advising, financial aid info to students at community college
Next Steps for the Workgroup:

- Transcription of advising interviews for team review, as needed.
- Continue to interview a pool of faculty advisors, and send out a survey to all faculty.
- Conduct student sessions to engage student voice and ideas.
- Work on a plan that allows us to synthesize insights, develop concepts, and gather community feedback.
- Continue our research into available PSU data regarding students and advising needs, as well as solutions/strategies used by other institutions.

Thank you for your continued participation in this process!