

Webinar #4: Using Evaluation to Improve Academic Advising

Noel-Levitz Advanced Advising Webinar Series

July 25, 2007

Developing a Mission Statement for the Academic Advising Program

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In the opening paragraph, the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising state that the "...academic advising program must develop, record, disseminate, implement, and regularly review its mission and goals." In spite of this clear assertion, however, confusion and frustration abound on many campuses as they wrestle with the concept of developing a mission for the academic advising program. Much of this confusion stems from a lack of clarity in the definitions of terms associated with this process. This lack of clarity is evident to the point that the definitions of strategic planning, vision, mission, goals, and objectives (as well as several other terms) are commingled in the literature to the point that it is nearly impossible to ferret out the essentials. This article is intended to simplify the development of an advising mission statement by providing advice, a series of processes, and content considerations.

Process Considerations

- **The mission statement must be consistent with the mission of the institution.** This consideration is often overlooked. Yet, if the advising program is not connected to the institution's mission (or strategic plan or vision), then the program becomes peripheral and perfunctory. An excellent approach to integrating the institutional and advising mission statements is simply to extract those statements in the institutional mission that focus on students. Then ask the question "How can our advising program contribute to the realization of this mission?"
- **The development of the mission statement must include a wide variety of constituencies.** While it would be very easy for a few like-minded individuals to agree on a mission statement for the advising program, advising functions in an open system. Individuals who deliver, receive, and support the delivery of advising must be engaged in the process of developing a mission statement. While it is neither practical nor wise to have all individuals involved in the early stages in the development of the mission statement, it is important that all constituencies be represented in these early discussions. And, it is equally important that the work of this team be shared campuswide, in an iterative process requiring several draft versions. Because advising engages so many faculty and staff, the iterative process may be time consuming and fraught with political mine fields. Yet broad involvement is the only way to ensure constituent ownership of the mission statement.

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- **The mission statement should serve as a guide to the decisions we make about what we do and how we accomplish what we do.** The operant term in this consideration is the word 'guide.' The flow chart below depicts the mission statement as the driver of goals and objectives for advising which in turn anchor program strategies and delivery.

Mission Statement Flow Model



One of the major and observable flaws in many advising mission statements is that they focus on the *what* and the *how* of advising. This flow model suggests that although detailing the what and the how are critical elements in the delivery of advising, they should be *guided by rather than included in* the mission statement.

- **Assessment is critical to the achievement of the mission statement.** The Mission Statement Flow Model depicts a feedback loop from program and advisor assessment to the mission statement, the goals and objectives, and advising program strategies and criteria. Without on-going assessment, it is not possible to determine with any certainty that the advising program is accomplishing its stated mission.
- **The mission statement must be prominently displayed and promoted.** Many campuses do an excellent job of developing a mission statement. Yet for some reason it is common for the mission statement to languish in obscurity once it has been affirmed, viewed as an intellectual exercise: a necessary, but unhelpful document. Because the mission statement is the focal point of advising, it must be visible in publications, presentations, and representations. The mission will not be realized unless it is prominently displayed as a constant affirmation to all constituencies that deliver, receive, or support advising.
- **The mission statement must be regularly reviewed and, if necessary, revised.** Students change, programs change, advisors change, institutions change (albeit slowly).

It is folly to assume that the mission of advising might not change. With this in mind, the mission statement must be reviewed periodically for either re-affirmation or revision. Just as in the initial development of the mission statement, those reviewing the statement should include individuals who deliver advising, individuals who receive advising, and individuals who support advising.

Content Considerations

- **The advising mission statement must be visionary.** It is interesting to note that several definitions of the word vision share the synonyms of illusory, unreal, dreamy, and utopian. Yet, one definition of visionary is "...marked by foresight and imagination." Applied to the advising mission statement, foresight and imagination suggests that we must imagine what would define us if we were '...being all that we could be.' We must focus on the answers to the questions: How do we want to be remembered? What is the ultimate compliment that could be paid to us? What do we aspire to deliver? What contributions do we want to make to the lives of our students? To the success of our institution? Developing a mission statement gives the advising community a rare and exhilarating opportunity to imagine, to create, and to visualize.
- **The advising mission statement must be broad.** The mission statement serves as the umbrella for the delivery of services. Yet it is important to recognize that the advising program cannot be all things to all people at all times in and in all situations. A mission statement that is too broad will not provide the direction necessary as goals and objectives are developed and program strategies determined. On the other hand, many advising mission statements are far too narrow in their conceptualization, focusing on *the what* and *the how* of the advising program. If one were to spend time reviewing advising mission statements from many campuses, it would soon be obvious that most err on the side of narrowly defining the advising program.
- **The advising mission statement must be realistic.** This consideration brings focus to the vision and breadth of the mission statement. Just as it is not possible for advising to be all things to all people, it is equally unlikely that there will be unlimited human and fiscal resources to support the advising program. Thus, the vision must be tempered by realism. The mission statement must be practical (useful) and workable (feasible). But above all, it must be achievable. A mission statement that is not realistic is nothing more than a platitude. It serves as a point of frustration rather than a stimulus to those who deliver advising.
- **The advising mission statement must be motivational.** It must provide a compelling reason to engage in advising and inspire commitment among those who deliver advising. It establishes an ideal to which advisors can aspire.
- **The advising mission statement must be short and concise.** There are many opinions on what it means to have a mission statement that is short and concise. Some individuals suggest that a mission statement should be able to fit (and be readable) on a tee shirt. Others suggest that a mission statement be no longer than three sentences or twenty-five words. The mission statement as an 'elevator pitch' has several proponents. As a brief description of the 'elevator pitch', imagine that you are getting on an elevator

and someone asks you to state the mission of your advising program. You have from the time the door closes on the first floor until it opens on the sixth floor to state your mission. If you arrive at the sixth floor and are only half way through your mission statement and you continue talking as you get off and hold the doors open to finish talking, your mission statement is too long. A review of advising mission statements from a variety of campuses reveals that most of those statements appear to have been developed with a 'more is better', 'cover all bases' approach. Verbosity and detail prevail over clarity and brevity.

- **The advising mission statement must be easily understood.** The best mission statement in the world has no utility if people do not understand it. The mission statement must be written:
 - in plain language
 - without jargon
 - without 'buzz words'
 - without ambiguous terms
 - in simple sentences
- **The mission statement must be memorable.** The mission statement for Walt Disney is "To make people happy." While a mission statement for advising is unlikely to be captured in four words, the entire process of developing a mission statement will be for naught if when asked to state the mission of the advising program; advisors must refer to the catalog, the advising handbook, or other publications. If advisors cannot articulate the mission statement, it far less likely that they will be able to live it and act in accordance with it. It is important to note that if each of the previous content considerations is incorporated into the mission statement, it will most likely be memorable.

What's next?

This article may have provided enough information to understand the process and content considerations for developing an advising mission statement on your campus. If however, you would like to 'practice wordsmithing' on someone else's mission statement, a simple mission statement rating form and discussion guide appear below.

Examples of advising mission statements appear on NACADA's website at the following address: http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/Mission_statements.htm

Additional examples may be viewed by doing a Google search with the words: **mission statements advising**.

Put a check mark in the appropriate box.

Mission Statement Rating Form					
Characteristic	Very Good	Good	Neutral	Weak	Poor
Visionary					
Broad					
Realistic					
Motivational					
Short/concise					
Understandable					
Memorable					

Discussion Questions

What did you like best about this mission statement? _____

What did you like least about this mission statement? _____

Rewrite this mission statement: _____

Resources

“CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising.” National Academic Advising Association. <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Research_Related/CASStandardsForAdvising.pdf>

Habley, W.R. “Developing a Mission Statement for Academic Advising.” Summer Institute Session Guide. 2005.

“How to Develop a Mission Statement.” Drucker Foundation Leader to Leader Institute. <<http://www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/sat/mission.html>>

Meshanko, R. “What should our mission statement say?” Idealist.org. <<http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/03/21.html>>

Miller, T.K., ed. The Book of Professional Standards for Higher Education. Washington, D.C.: Council for the Advancement of Standards, 1997.

“Mission Statement.” E-Business Plan. <http://myphil.pearsoncmg.com/student/bp_turban_introec_1/MissStmt.html>

“NACADA of Core Values for Advising.” National Academic Advising Association. <<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Core-Values.htm>>

White, E.R. “Developing Mission, Goals, and Objectives.” In Academic Advising: A comprehensive handbook, edited by Gordon, V.N. and Habley W.R. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2000.

“Writing a Mission Statement.” Bplans. <<http://www.bplans.com/dp/missionstatement.cfm>>