



CAS Academic Advising Plan: Expectations, Challenges, and Possible Strategies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Provost's Charge	3
Existing Expectations	3
CAS Context	4
CAS Advising at the College Level.....	.4
Current Challenges6
Possible Strategies.....	7
CAS Advising at the Departmental Level	8
Basic Departmental Components.....	8
Basic Elements of the Plan	8
Basic Issues to Consider.....	9
Departmental Options.....	9
<i>OPTION A: One-on-one advising with special interest events</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>OPTION B: One-on-one advising paired with materials/events for all majors</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>OPTION C: Group advising for first- and second-year students, one-on-one advising later.....</i>	<i>10</i>
Supporting materials.....	11
¹ Strengthening Academic Advising at UVM	
² Provost's Charge to Academic Deans: Academic Advising Plan	
³ CAS Faculty Minutes (11-6-2012)	
⁴ CAS Retention Improvement Plan (November 2012)	
⁵ CAS Retention Improvement Plan: Progress Report (June 2013)	
⁶ CAS Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation: Our Strategic Steps (August 2014)	
⁷ CAS Academic Advising: College Level Initiatives—AY15	
⁸ TAP Faculty Fellows (December 2014)	
⁹ Executive Summary - College of Arts and Sciences Strategic Planning Initiative (May 2014)	

Academic Student Advising: Expectations, Challenges, and Possible Strategies

Provost's Charge

On September 25, 2014, in response to the *Strengthening Academic Advising at UVM* report¹ submitted by the Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate in collaboration with the Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning, Provost Rosowsky charged the academic deans of each college or school with developing an "Academic Advising Plan."² The charge specified that the plan ought to be based "on best practices and tailored to the unique needs of students in each unit." In addition, the charge specified that each plan should comply with each of five requirements:

1. *Include guidelines for advising responsibilities in workload assignments . . . and . . . indicate how advising is considered in performance reviews;*
2. *Recognize faculty members and staff members who excel at student advising;*
3. *Ensure developmentally responsive advisement sessions by class year . . . and . . . specialty needs . . . coordinated by faculty members and/or advising professionals;*
4. *Seek ways to engage and involve third- and fourth-year students as peer mentors to first-year students in designated first-year courses; and*
5. *Ensure that all first-year students receive, during their first semester, an orientation to academic advising and associated roles and responsibilities, as well as information about the Four-Year Plan for Career Success.*

Finally, the charge stipulated the plan would need to be submitted to the Provost's Office by November 21, 2014, and included three additional mandates:

1. *Faculty, students and staff should participate in developing the plan;*
2. *The plan should specify how the college will assess advising effectiveness and how often the plan will be reviewed for revision considerations; and*
3. *The plan must be posted and updated as needed to provide timely and accurate information.*

Existing Expectations

Faculty advising is crucial to helping students make appropriate academic choices and is key to improving student retention and on-time graduation. The Office of the Provost has identified a list of ten faculty advising responsibilities that should be fulfilled within and across all academic units:

1. *To clarify University of Vermont policies, regulations, programs, and procedures.*
2. *To be available to meet with advisees.*
3. *To be knowledgeable about program(s) in which he/she advises.*
4. *To communicate his/her expectations to advisees.*
5. *To establish, post, and maintain adequate office hours throughout the semester with particular emphasis given to registration and the add/drop period.*
6. *To refer advisees to appropriate sources of information and services.*

4 | CAS Academic Advising Plan

7. To offer advice on selecting courses and to assist advisees in developing their academic plan.
8. To be a responsive listener and to refer advisees to appropriate support services.
9. To discuss candidly with advisees their academic performance and the implications of their performance for the future.
10. To assist advisees in the transition from college to career.

CAS Context

Faculty advising has been a focus of attention and discussion in CAS for many years. A recent example was the November 6, 2012 CAS Faculty Meeting.³ At this meeting faculty disagreed about what constitutes “advising,” what different roles should be assigned to faculty and staff advisors, and whether advising loads should be distributed equally across tenure-track faculty or whether advising and teaching loads could be differentially but equitably distributed (e.g., faculty excused from “formal” advising would teach more). Following the faculty meeting, the Dean tasked a committee within his staff to assess CAS’s current practices at the time⁴ and to offer recommendations to improve advising and retention efforts.⁵ These efforts culminated in many improvements that are captured in a document entitled *CAS Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation: Our Strategic Steps (August 2014)*.⁶

CAS Advising at the College Level

In collaboration with CAS academic departments and programs, individual faculty, and university-wide offices, CAS Student Services has developed a comprehensive set of initiatives to help our students navigate their myriad academic choices, track their academic progress, and find the right kind and level of academic and student-life support. (See CAS Academic Advising: College Level Initiatives—AY15.⁷)

The CAS advising model at the college level already fulfills many of the expectations or requirements listed in the Provost’s charge of September 25, 2014. Below we address how the expectations are or will be met.

1. Include guidelines for advising responsibilities in workload assignments . . . and . . . indicate how advising is considered in performance reviews.

Each CAS unit has separate Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure Guidelines (RPTs) and Faculty Evaluation Guidelines (FEGs) that specify advising loads either as a specific percentage of the overall faculty load, or as a component of the specific percentage assigned to teaching. All RPTs and FEGs list advising expectations for faculty and indicate how advising is considered in performance reviews. Most CAS departments will undergo a review of their RPTs and FEGs in 2015, which will create an opportunity to update advising responsibilities, workloads, and other considerations in performance reviews, as well as in RPT decisions.

2. Recognize faculty members and staff members who excel at student advising.

The CAS Dean’s Office is working on a plan to recognize faculty participation in the First-Year Teacher-Advisor Program (TAP). We have a working draft of a TAP Faculty Fellows and

Awards Program⁸; we are also in the process of appointing and charging a committee of faculty, CAS staff, and students to offer recommendations to enhance the prestige and value of the First-Year TAP. In addition, CAS is currently reviewing its bylaws and is considering changing the responsibilities of the “Nominations and Elections Committee” to include the tasks of creating new faculty, student, and staff awards and recognitions, as well as nominating CAS personnel for University-wide and Extramural Awards. The creation and selection of “advising awards” for faculty and staff would be another of the committee’s tasks.

3. Ensure developmentally responsive advisement sessions by class year . . . and . . . specialty needs . . .

CAS already tailors advising to specific student groups, including class year (e.g., Freshman Orientations; Undeclared Majors/Changing Majors Workshops for Sophomores; Design Your Life Course for Juniors and Seniors) and specific needs (e.g., orientations for transfer, international, and ALANA students) (CAS Academic Advising: College Level Initiatives—AY15⁷). Departments and programs have been asked to specify how they will comply with this requirement within their own advising practices.

4. Seek ways to engage and involve third- and fourth-year students as peer mentors to first-year students in designated first-year courses.

CAS already engages upperclassmen in assisting more junior students in specific courses or with specific tasks and assignments (e.g., the CHEM 031 Project; the Writing Center). In addition, we are looking into the viability of adding a “peer mentoring” component to TAP, and have encouraged departments to create peer-advising programs within their units. (See page 5 below.)

5. Ensure that all first-year students receive, during their first semester, an orientation to academic advising and associated roles and responsibilities, as well as information about the Four-Year Plan for Career Success.

Identified as one of our current challenges (see page 6 below), CAS plans to accomplish the implementation of the 4-Year Plan by ensuring that every TAP instructor is well versed in the 4-Year Plan; and CAS will use it to encourage and guide students to link their college experiences and activities with their career and life goals. The Dean’s Office will train faculty and track the fidelity with which they contribute to implementing the Plan. Faculty training has already been initiated through sessions conducted by the Career Center. The Dean’s Office is in the process of developing a standard survey to assess what is working, and what might need improvement. (See page 5 below.)

Finally, the charge indicated the plan would need to address three additional mandates:

1. Faculty, students, and staff should participate in developing the plan.

Faculty and staff have collaborated closely in the development and implementation of the advising practices and recommendations contained in the plan. Students have provided

6 | CAS Academic Advising Plan

feedback and participated in the Student Experience Subcommittee of the CAS Strategic Planning Action Committee, which identified “Advising” as a College Priority⁹.

2. The plan should specify how the college will assess advising effectiveness and how often the plan will be reviewed for revision considerations.

As indicated earlier, the Dean’s Office will develop (in consultation with faculty) a standard survey to assess advising within departments and programs. Students across CAS will be surveyed regularly to assess what is working, and what might need improvement. The plan will be in a continuous state of review and revision.

3. The plan must be posted and updated as needed to provide timely and accurate information.

Our current Advising Plan, CAS Advising: Enhancing Recruitment, Retention, and On-time Graduation—AY15, is being rewritten and organized for effective web posting. We are also in the process of updating the way in which we present and organize our material for prospective and current students. As departments review and revise their advising plans, the college will assist them in posting their advising plans. Updates will be conducted as changes occur.

Current Challenges

Learning and getting into the habit of implementing the 4-Year Plan: The 4-Year Plan is a new tool students may use to reflect, explore, set, and accomplish goals to maximize their growth and advancement at UVM. CAS faculty members are expected to use the 4-Year Plan to encourage and guide students to link their college experiences and activities with their career and life goals. The Dean’s Office must train faculty and track the fidelity with which they contribute to implementing the 4-Year Plan.

Fulfilling many roles and maintaining high expectations for each role: *The art and science of juggling teaching, research, service, and advising roles under very demanding circumstances.* Individual faculty advising can be particularly challenging in departments and programs with very large numbers of majors. Faculty in large departments often report not having time to mentor advanced students because of the time required to assist junior students with basic tasks such as course selection. The Dean’s Office must assist, but departments must ensure we fulfill students’ needs at each level of their academic development.

Addressing Student Concerns: Whereas the majority of our students report being satisfied with the advising they receive, greater consistency across each of the following actions would increase our effectiveness:

1. Consult with, or give advanced notice to, students prior to changing their assigned advisor.
2. Reduce the frequency with which students are reassigned to advisors.
3. Interact with students in ways that convey we are genuinely interested in them and their future.
4. Communicate clearly our availability and accessibility, and respond promptly and effectively to their inquiries and requests for help.
5. Improve faculty readiness to advise undeclared students.

The Dean’s Office will work with departments and faculty to address sources of student dissatisfaction with the advising available and received.

Increase student participation in internship and career-oriented activities: Nationally, 67 percent of the undergraduate Class of 2013 had interned. By comparison, 44 percent of UVM students interned, with CAS lagging behind at 36 percent. This is important for our students because about 65 percent of interns receive permanent offers from intern sites. The main barriers or challenges include getting students excited and prepared; lack of access to paid internships or at least scholarships to cover living and tuition costs associated with taking unpaid internships offered by many non-profit and small, for-profit start-ups; and complications associated with per-credit internships (cost of remunerating faculty advisors, monitoring the adequacy of the internship experience, and associated red tape and regulations). The College's Board of Advisors has developed a plan in coordination with the Dean's Office to facilitate our students' access to and participation in high-quality internships. The Board has recommended that the Dean create a full-time internship coordinator position, and has committed to support a Dean's Fund through their philanthropy, as well as to make use of their personal and professional networks to create internship opportunities for our students.

Possible Strategies

Engage Campus Resources: Seek help to coordinate, share, or divide advising roles with existing programs or units (e.g., the Career Center). Alternatively, create new partnerships or programs to assist faculty (e.g., create a peer-advising program).

Engage the CAS Dean's Office: We can offer a wide range of advising services, including

1. Workshops for advisees within the department on topics including course selection, choosing/changing majors, navigating campus services, etc.
2. Advising drop-in hours within the department, with Dean's office providing staff in conjunction with departmental or program faculty
3. A departmental liaison to serve as consultant and advocate
4. Tailored workshops for faculty around pre-specified needs (e.g., undeclared students, transfer students, internships, implementation of the 4-Year Plan, etc.)
5. Systematically incorporated and delivered co-curricular advising activities

Improve access to information and communication strategies. Create and regularly update departmental and program-specific web pages dedicated to advising.

Create and implement advising intake forms and protocols: Prefilled intake forms help students prepare for their advising sessions, allow faculty to be ready to address the student's needs, and allow the department/program to track major areas of advising demand.

Assess advising: Dean's office staff will develop (in consultation with faculty) a standard survey to be used across the college to assess advising within departments and programs; individual departments/programs could add specific questions tailored to their particular needs or advising structure, if desired. Students across CAS will be surveyed regularly to assess what is working, and what might need improvement.

Target advising interventions to student developmental needs: First-year students may need more help with distribution requirements and course selection; sophomores and juniors may need advice on whether and how to prepare to pursue graduate studies; and seniors may need help honing their interviewing skills and making graduate school choices. Whether in individual or group advising sessions, faculty and staff need to be aware of the typical needs at each stage of a student's college career.

Differentiate advising roles within departments: Instead of assigning students to individual faculty advisors, assign students to teams of faculty advisors where different team members are assigned to different roles and responsibilities on the basis of advising content or targets (e.g., undecided, transfers, at-risk students), or intervention method (e.g., individual sessions vs. group sessions; walk-in vs. scheduled sessions).

Coordinate departmental activities: To avoid duplication of efforts and to create a comprehensive overview of departmental advising strategies, appoint one faculty member (possibly the Director of Undergraduate Studies, if there is one) to be the department/program's advising coordinator. That person would be responsible for scheduling events, triaging specialized advising requests, making sure drop-in hours are staffed, working out differential advising responsibilities, etc.

CAS Advising at the Departmental Level

Basic Departmental Components

Departments and programs have been charged with preparing their own advising plans by March 1, 2015. Each plan should have two components:

1. A public statement prepared for the department or program website explaining what advising entails for their majors. This would specify where students should go for different kinds of questions (e.g., peer advisors, faculty advisors, etc.) and the format in which they would expect to receive different kinds of information (e.g., workshops, individual appointments, etc.).
2. A document for internal CAS use indicating how the plan will achieve the following goals:
 - a. Provide informational advising that meets the differential needs of students at different stages of their college careers (i.e., choosing a major, maintaining progress through a major, accessing support services, thinking about careers, etc.)
 - b. Offer mentorship in research and scholarship
 - c. Explore graduate school, as well as professional and career options

Basic Elements of the Plan

In order to create an advising plan (whether or not major changes are contemplated), departments and programs start by defining some fairly basic elements that can be shared across the entire college. These might include expectations for:

1. *Time demands:* Faculty will hold a certain number of office hours each week, with additional time devoted to advising prior to course registration time.
2. *Publicity:* Departments/programs will provide an online, up-to-date list of faculty office hours.
3. *Notification of advising changes:* Departments/programs will identify a process to notify students in a timely manner when their assigned advisor is changed.
4. *Student responsibilities:* Students will be aware of their responsibilities for advising.
5. *Advising syllabi:* Departments/programs will create and publicize advising syllabi (standard templates for these are available), clarifying the roles and expectations of faculty and students alike in the advising relationship. Each syllabus must indicate how and when the content of the syllabus will be covered.

Basic Issues to Consider

Departments and programs also need to consider *both* the variable advising needs of students *and* the practicalities of how to organize advising among faculty to best meet those needs. Specifically, departments/programs should consider the following questions:

1. Will all faculty in the department/program be expected to offer guidance to students on every advising topic?
2. Will all advising needs be addressed in the traditional format; i.e., one-on-one meetings with an individual faculty member?
3. How will equity be achieved among faculty in advising responsibilities?
4. How will assessment of advising reflect differential roles among faculty, if the department/program adopts that model?
5. Are there any strategies or initiatives in the CAS Advising Model⁷ that the department should adopt?
6. What new strategies or new initiatives can the department or program create to complement or add value to the CAS Advising Model⁷?

To facilitate the planning process, some departments/programs of similar size (e.g., Religion and Geography), interdisciplinary makeup (e.g., GRS, GSWS, and ENVS), challenges of huge advising loads (e.g., Biology and Psychology), or other points of commonality are encouraged to work together to share ideas, develop strategies, and discuss options. In addition, staff in the Dean's office are available to help facilitate conversations around advising, if desired.

In addition to the various strategies suggested earlier (see page 3), the Dean's Office has described three viable options, any of which can be used to accommodate the individual needs of any department or program. Departments should indicate which of the three options best resembles their chosen model.

Departmental Options

OPTION A: One-on-one advising with special interest events

Most departments/programs follow this model currently, including History and Geography, among many others. Here the emphasis is on an individual, personal relationship between advisor and student, with occasional group sessions offered to all majors around special topics.

- *Individual advising:* Students in the major are assigned to individual faculty members with whom they meet to discuss courses, general requirements, work and career plans, and other issues. Information is largely relayed in person, in private meetings.
- *Special topic group sessions:* Supplementing the nuts-and-bolts information delivered in private meetings, departments offer occasional group sessions to go over special topics. Such topics might include applying to graduate school, how to apply the skills developed in the major to various careers, off-campus studies options, internships, etc.

OPTION B: One-on-one advising paired with materials/events for all majors

The Global Studies Model: Here students continue to be assigned to an individual faculty member

who serves as the primary point of contact for information about the major. That relationship is, however, supplemented with group events and written materials aimed at all majors. Advising in these departments now includes the following (with the elements that are different from option A now in bold):

- *Individual advising:* Students are assigned to individual faculty members. (See Option A.).
- *Special topic group sessions:* Departments offer occasional group sessions to go over special topics. (See Option A.)
- ***Group advising:* Group advising sessions supplement information available in private meetings through individual advising. These can take a variety of forms:**
 - ***Group meetings:*** Right before course registration, large meeting are held for all majors to review expectations for the major, principles to consider in picking courses, proper sequencing of courses, etc.
 - ***Drop-in hours:*** In the period leading up to course registration, drop-in hours are held for students with pressing questions, or for those who have not been able to schedule an appointment with their assigned advisor.
- ***Advising handbook:*** Aimed at all majors, the handbook offers a central place for students and advisors alike to get information about expectations, appropriate courses, how to plan for off-campus studies, etc.

OPTION C: Group advising for first-and second-year students, one-on-one advising later

In departments with particularly large numbers of majors, advising could be divided according to progress through the program, with group activities targeting first- and second-year students, and individual advising for juniors and seniors. This allows faculty to concentrate their time and energy on mentoring advanced students through demanding coursework and into careers within or outside the field, while still providing basic registration/course selection/planning for others.

Advising in these departments includes the following (with the elements that are different from option A and B again in bold):

- ***Group advising for first and second year students:*** First- and second-year students are all assigned to a designated first-/second-year advisor, who will be the main point of contact for advising-relating needs. Information about courses, distribution requirements, course sequencing, etc., is offered through group advising sessions led by that advisor. These can take a variety of forms:
 - *Group meetings:* Right before course registration, large meetings are held for all majors to review expectations for the major, principles to consider in picking courses, proper sequencing of courses, etc. Although led by the first-/second-year advisor, other faculty in the department/program would be involved as well, so that students begin to make contact with the people they may work with as individual advisors later in their progress through the major. (See Option B.)
 - *Drop-in hours:* In the period leading up to course registration, drop-in hours are held for students with individual questions that would not have been covered in the group meetings. **More drop-in hours are necessary for this model than in Option B to accommodate the lack of many individual advisors.**

- ***Individual advising for juniors and seniors:*** As students move further through the major, they are assigned to individual faculty advisors, with whom they meet to discuss completing the major, work and career plans, and other issues.
- ***Special topic group sessions:*** Departments offer occasional group sessions to go over special topics. (See Options A and B.)

Supporting materials

¹ Strengthening Academic Advising at UVM

² Provost's Charge to Academic Deans: Academic Advising Plan

³ CAS Faculty Minutes (11-6-2012)

⁴ CAS Retention Improvement Plan (November 2012)

⁵ CAS Retention Improvement Plan: Progress Report (June 2013)

⁶ CAS Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation: Our Strategic Steps (August 2014)

⁷ CAS Academic Advising: College Level Initiatives - AY 15 (December 2014)

⁸ TAP Faculty Fellows and Awards Program: Working Paper (December 2014)

⁹ Executive Summary-College of Arts and Sciences Strategic Planning Initiative (May 2014)