

**Illinois State University
Provost Task Force on Advisement**

**Recommendations for Undergraduate Advisement at
Illinois State University**

Section I- Current Status of Advising at Illinois State University.

It is imperative that Illinois State University have an effective, comprehensive, and efficient system of academic advising. Many students start college without a clear academic goal. They often do not understand the principles or structures of either general education or their major, and they often have only a vague sense of how to plan their course work within the major and outside it to meet basic requirements while shaping a plan of study that addresses their personal and professional goals. Advisors and advising are a primary way Illinois State University educates students about their education.

ISU Advisors are academic professionals, who focus on each student as an individual with unique educational needs and potential. Not only do Advisors organize and provide accurate and timely information so that students can make informed and responsible decisions, they also teach students about the full range of opportunities available at ISU and thereby help students develop productive, realistic goals and help them develop the thinking, learning, and life management skills to meet present and future academic needs. Most simply, Advisors provide students with tools, information, and the contexts for understanding how the different aspects of the academic program relate to each other, and they enable students to manage their ISU education effectively and responsibly. Not only do Advisors play a crucial role in helping students understand how to direct and manage their education, they also help articulate ISU's academic culture, values, and standards and thus make an important contribution to the academic integrity of the University and the programs they represent. And, finally, Advisors contribute significantly to the University's planning through their detailed understanding of the curricular needs of students.

The importance of the contributions of Advisors and advising to ISU's educational mission are, we believe, clear, and the rising cost of attending ISU and the potential impact of Truth in Tuition further underscore the need for the University to optimize the effectiveness of advising.

At ISU advising is a distributed system, comprised of University College Advisors, Department and School Advisors, and program Advisors who work with students (such as student athletes, honors program students, and ROTC students) who have additional specialized needs or identities and must meet additional program requirements. The distributed nature of the system offers certain advantages. It means that University College Advisors, who best understand the needs of entering students, work with that population, while Department and School Advisors, who best understand the needs of students within the various majors and the resources available within a specific program, work with the sets of students once they have been admitted to a particular major. The distributed nature of the system, though, also creates certain challenges. Students are not always sufficiently clear about how the advising system is structured, and this can create confusion for students about where to go for advising, especially when they are

making a transition from one academic status to another. Also, Advisors may not always have a clear sense of how the different parts of advising system should fit together in practice in order for the system to function consistently and effectively for students. This at times leads to confusion and inefficiency. The principles and basic design of ISU's distributed system of advising is basically sound, but the practice of it needs to be clarified and strengthened. The distributed system needs to be more clearly and fully articulated (in both senses of the word). Those responsible for advising, whether administratively or as an advising professional, need to clearly understand how the different features of the system integrate into a functional whole. And the system itself needs to function for the student as a coherent system—one that is understandable and accessible and where both duplication and gaps are minimized. In particular, the current distributed approach to advising needs to function more smoothly and consistently—both for Advisors and students—at those times when students make transitions from one academic identity or status to another. These points of transition (when a General Student declares a major would be one example) are challenging precisely because they are moments when the student must often shift from one Advisor to another. Similarly, the distributed approach needs to function more smoothly and consistently when two or more Advisors share responsibility for a student's course of study (for a student athlete, for instance, the Department or School Advisor has lead responsibility for the student's graduation requirements, while the Athletics Advisor has lead responsibility for the student's academic performance as it relates to NCAA eligibility).

The current approach to advising at ISU is reasonable. Indeed, the size, complexity, and structure of the University make it hard to imagine a system that wouldn't be, at its root, distributed. That said, the advising system can, we believe, be made more effective through the recommendations and strategies that follow in the second section of this report. Primarily, these emphasize the need to

- Clarify and strengthen the functional integration of the different components of the distributed advising system so that the design and principles of the overall system are clear to both Advisors and students and so that the system consistently meets the needs of students and supports the academic values and missions of the University, Departments, and Schools;
- Use technology more effectively, both to enable Advisors to handle routine matters more efficiently to free up time to work more closely with students on matters where the Advisors' professional expertise can most make a difference in the student's education, and also to provide students with information and tools to support more effective self-advising on routine matters;
- Promote a University culture where students assume responsibility for managing their own education in collaboration with their Advisors by drawing on the tools and training provided by the University.

Effective advising, especially in a distributed system such as the one at ISU, must be built on a culture of responsibility, in which Advisors understand their complementary roles in supporting each ISU student through the delivery of timely, comprehensible, and academically sound information and in which students understand that they are expected to keep themselves informed and make informed decisions about their education.

An effective advising system also requires adequate resources. Some of these, as the Strategies that follow indicate, are technological. The core resource, though, is, of course, the trained, committed professionals who serve as Advisors in University College, in Departments and Schools, and in such programs as ROTC and Athletics. The ratio of Advisors to students will appropriately vary from unit to unit depending on

such matters as the complexity of the program and its requirements, but it is crucial that each unit assess its needs for Advisors and maintain an adequate level of staffing.

It should also be noted that one problem that some in the ISU community seem to associate with advising cannot be solved through advising. While proactive and effective advising can help reduce the number of General Students who meet minimal ISU academic standards but do not qualify for a major, advising is not the source of this problem nor is it, even potentially, the solution. Advisors and advising help implement academic program and policy. Advisors cannot establish academic standards. The problem of General Students who meet minimal standards for good standing but do not qualify for a major is a problem, at root, of how academic standards and policies in different parts of the University and at different levels of the University interact and articulate. These matters need to be addressed by those who have the authority and responsibility to determine academic standards and policies. Advisors have much that they can contribute to this discussion, but it is important to recognize that Advisors support and help implement academic policies and standards; they do not define or enact them.

Section II – Strategies and Goals

The Advisement Task Force has identified the following strategies and goals that need to be addressed in order for Illinois State University to create a cohesive advising system.

Strengthen the functional integration of the different units and professionals involved in advising so that the system functions as a cohesive whole for students and an efficient whole for advisors.

- Develop and maintain a campus-wide advising organizational chart that defines how the responsibility for advising is distributed across and shared between University College, Departments and Schools, and areas such as Honors, Athletics, and ROTC. This organizational chart should clarify how each unit and its professional staff fit together to provide a consistent, integrated advising system that meets the needs of ISU students. And this model should be supported by a clear administrative mechanism for continued planning, assessment, and accountability of the system and its delivery of advising.
- Assign a senior-level academic administrator the responsibility of helping the campus develop this organizational chart and the principles that inform it and then to monitor and coordinate advising on behalf of the campus.
- Establish a committee of Advisors representing the different components of the ISU system, faculty, and academic administrators to work with this senior-level administrator to review, formulate, and maintain the organization and policies needed to support an effective, cohesive campus-wide advising system.
- Establish clear protocols of communication between this senior-level administrator and the Colleges and Departments and Schools (either directly or through the College Deans) so that this senior-level administrator can work with the Colleges and Departments and Schools to assess advising on campus without compromising the academic and administrative authority of Colleges and Departments and Schools.

- Update and clarify the role and position descriptions for University College Advisors, Department/School Advisors, and program (ROTC, Honors, Athletics, etc.) Advisors so that they are consistent with the organizational chart for advising, while also reflecting the specific features of advising within the Advisor's unit.
- Have University College, each Department and School, and each program that delivers advising (such as Honors, ROTC, and Athletics) review its advising practices and assess the adequacy of its staffing for advising.
- Develop protocols for exchanges and collaborations among University College, Department/School Advisors and other advising service units to promote cross-training and enhance communication and understanding across these advising areas.
- Formalize the Advisor Professional Development Committee (currently sponsored by University College) with representatives drawn from University College, at least one Department or School Advisor from each College, and one Advisor from a program (such as ROTC and Athletics). Charge this Committee with organizing yearly orientations for Advisors, with developing other professional development programs that can strengthen advising, and with promoting communication and collaboration across the advising system.

Utilize information technology more effectively to support Advisors and advising by enhancing communication across the advising system and increasing the efficiency in the handling of routine matters.

- Provide Advisors with technology, including computers, that supports full access to all electronic advising tools.
- Provide and maintain training for Advisors in the use of electronic advising tools, especially those that can create efficiency in the handling of routine matters (such as how to create and use folders of pre-written responses to reply to frequently asked questions), those that can improve efficiency in tracking the needs of different sets of advisees, and those that can enable Advisors to communicate effectively to groups of advisees (such as “advising channels” and list serves).
- Enable Advisors to submit and track sub-waivers electronically.
- Provide Advisors with uniform access to advising screens.
- Develop an Advisor Channel on the iCampus Portal (or suitable alternative) that would serve campus Advisors.
- Develop an intranet for Advisors that would include and support
 - a comprehensive listing and explanation of ISU advising policies;
 - ISU advising procedures and forms for overrides, probation, and other standard advising actions;
 - worksheets and templates for frequently used letters;
 - contact information for all Advisors;
 - descriptions of “best practices” for advising at ISU.
- Revise the mainframe field that displays a student's assigned Advisor so that it includes a history of the student's Advisor by term, the dates of changes in the assigned Advisor, and who initiated the changes.
- Maintain a list serve for all current Advisors and provide for regular updating of the list serve's membership.

Expand the use of information technology to provide more information to students so that they can better plan their education and manage it responsibly and effectively.

- Provide students direct and convenient access to the information needed to track their academic progress, to evaluate academic options, and to manage routine decisions about their education.
 - Develop a central advising web resource that would include:
 - an overview of the advising system and advising process at ISU so that students can quickly determine where to go for different advising needs and how to proceed;
 - Advisor contact information;
 - a checklist of each student's academic planning responsibilities (such as why and when to see an Advisor, how to contact one's Advisor, the need to have a plan of study, how to access and use one's academic progress summaries, etc.);
 - answers to frequently asked advising questions,
 - self-directed materials for addressing general education questions (both the ISU and IAI protocols), including, where appropriate, links to external sites such as www.itransfer.org.
 - information on such matters as the internal transfer process, general requirements for qualifying for majors and minors and for changing majors and minors, application procedures, dates, and deadlines etc.
 - information on the admission requirements, application deadlines, and applications procedures for each ISU major and minor, contact information for each Department and School, and the date the information was last updated.
 - integrate the review and updating of this information into the yearly institutional review of the *Catalog* to insure currency and consistency of information in both print and electronic resources;
 - establish a consistent campus terminology for the requirements and processes.
 - As part of the iCampus Portal, design and implement an electronic advising portfolio for each student that would be the student's official advising record.
 - This portfolio should include the name and contact information for the student's current Advisor(s), the student's advising history (including record of "hand audits" and sub-waivers), plan of study, academic progress summary, and working transcript.
 - This portfolio should be designed to support, where it is appropriate and practical for the particular unit, transacting routine advising matters on-line.
 - This portfolio should allow students to generate hypothetical plans of study based on their currently completed course work for majors and minors they would like to consider, and it should enable students to access plans of study for these majors and minors.
 - This portfolio should provide access to information about the major and minor change process (requirements, deadlines, forms, etc.) and,

- where appropriate to the program, allow the student to initiate the major/minor change application process.
- Students should, through this portfolio, be able to subscribe to “channels” that provide information for those considering a specific major or minor and “channels” that provide information for those in specific majors and minors interested (see below). Any member of the ISU community would be welcome to subscribe to these major and minor “channels” and list serves.
 - This portfolio would be available, also, to the Advisor or Advisors who have responsibility for the student, and it should be designed so that Advisors with overlapping responsibility for a student can appropriately coordinate the student’s advising (for student athletes, for example, Department/School Advisors are responsible for the academic implications of the student’s course choices and performance, while the Athletic Advisor is responsible for the student’s NCAA eligibility).
 - Explore creating a centralized electronic “help desk,” where students can post general advising queries (modeled on the web interface used for computer tech support requests).

Minimize and, to the extent possible, eliminate confusion for both Advisors and students as to who is responsible for what as students make transitions from one academic status to another (such as the transition from General Student to student in a specific major and the transition from one major to another).

- Establish consistent guidelines and protocols for who has primary responsibility for each student’s academic advising at each stage of each of the transitions typical at ISU, so that University College Advisors and Department/School Advisors can have a clear understanding of who advises the student at each stage;
- Establish a procedure for communicating these protocols to the student.

Establish clear expectations and protocols for students with multiple identities (such as honor students, athletes, probation students, SSS/Trio, Minority Academic Scholars, Military, New Start, readmitted students, etc.) and for the Advisors who work with them.

- Establish and effectively communicate to students and Advisors who is ultimately responsible for the student’s academic advising in these situations where several Advisors share responsibility for the student.
- Establish protocols for communication for Advisors working collaboratively with multiple identity students and utilize the proposed electronic advising portfolio to support and structure shared advising responsibilities for these students.

Improve the ability of ISU students to manage their own education responsibly and effectively.

- Establish clear expectations for all students about their responsibility to manage their own education, define how the campus's advising system and resources contribute to this process, and communicate clearly to students university expectations.
 - Make sure that the occasions and materials ISU uses to orient new students to the University (the *ISU Catalog*, Preview materials and presentations, Passages, websites, etc.) include material that communicates the University's philosophy of advising, the advising system and its protocols, advising resources, the University's responsibilities, and the student's responsibilities and that these materials present policies and procedures in a consistent manner.
 - Include in Department and School advising materials information that communicates the University's philosophy of advising, the advising system and its protocols, the University's responsibilities.
- To the extent possible without compromising academic standards, simplify and strengthen the process for declaring a major or minor, qualifying for a major or minor, and for changing majors and minors.
 - Increase the information provided to students, both those interested in a specific major or minor and those accepted into the major or minor, about the academic goals, expectations, and requirements of the major or minor and the procedures for applying. The strategies for providing this information should be appropriate to the resources of the Department or School and consonant with its academic mission. Strategies could include:
 - regular orientation for prospective majors and minors,
 - email communication via a pre-major and/or major channel (or similar channels for minors) on the iCampus portal,
 - web sites
 - group and/or individual appointments.
 - Standardize major and minor change periods, major and minor change processes, and the terminology used to define and communicate these processes for those Departments and Schools, unless the unique needs of the program require an alternate period and/or process.
 - Minimize procedural barriers to being admitted to majors and minors.
- Organize advising procedures and optimize resources to emphasize support of students at points of transition.

Improve advising for General Students to help reduce the number of students without majors.

- Ensure that General Students have access to sufficient services, programs, and courses to guide them in their decision-making process.
 - Initiate additional university codes for General Students to divide this population into at least three distinct groups: students who are early in their college career and are preparing for a specific major; students who are early in their college career and exploring possible majors; and students (whether native students or transfers) who have failed to qualify for their intended major, are having difficulty qualifying for a major and/or have been dismissed from their major for academic reasons. (Students preparing for a specific major could be given a code that is a decimalized

version of the code for that major; students searching for their first major could, for instance, be coded 099.00, those dropped from a declared major coded 099.01 and those not admissible to a department coded 099.02.)

- Through the iCampus Portal provide advising channels that meet the needs of these different groups. Students with an intended major could be served by a “pre-major channel” for that major developed and maintained by the Department or School; students who are undecided could be served by a channel that emphasized information on options for majors and how to choose a major that could be developed and maintained by the University Advising Center. Students who are having difficulty qualifying for a major could be directed to specialized University resources designed to help them assess their difficulty and address it.
- Develop additional programming for General Students in each category to assist students in the major declaration process.
- Establish university guidelines, timelines, and policies to assist General Students in declaring a major in a timely manner, and communicate this information to General Students on a regular basis through iCampus Portal messages.
- Create student planning guides for each category of General Student that include specific steps to follow in exploring possible career paths, identifying possible majors, and how to apply for a major. These planning guides should also include recommended time lines for these steps, bench marks that students can use in tracking their progress, and clear statements of the institutional consequences of failing to be accepted into a major.
- Explore providing developmental advising programs that provide students with information regarding major admission as well as group advisement regarding the decision.
- Examine communication to transfer students admitted as General Students. Ensure that these students know and understand the internal admissions requirements for their intended major and provide options for comparable areas of studies.

Integrate Advisors into the academic planning process.

- Establish appropriate venues for academic Advisor input into the current process for creating, implementing and communicating academically related policies and procedures.
- Develop protocols for academic Advisors’ participation in the deliberations of Department/School curriculum committees, so that curriculum committees can better assess the implications of proposed changes in requirements for students’ ability to make timely progress toward degree.
- Encourage Departments and Schools to review proposed schedules with Department/School Advisors (where this is not already happening), so that Advisors can identify relevant issues of capacity and sequencing of courses that might impact students’ ability to make timely progress toward degree.
- Include an Advisor, as an ex officio representative, on the Academic Affairs committee of the Academic Senate to provide analysis of the impact of proposed changes on efficiency of advising, the system’s ability to track

students' completion of requirements, and students' ability to make timely progress to degree (the complementary expertise of Academic Advising Center Advisors and Department and Program Advisors would each be of value in this context, and having an Advisor from each group as an ex officio representative should also be considered).

- Include an Advisor on the iCampus portal planning committee (here, also, the complementary expertise of Academic Advising Center Advisors and Department and Program Advisors would each be of value in this context, and having an Advisor from each group as an ex officio representative should also be considered).
- Include an AAC Advisor and a School or Department Advisor, as an ex officio resource, on the Probation and Reinstatement committee.
- Include a University College Advisor on the General Education Committee.

Section III – Task Force Membership

Task Force Members:

Dr. Tim Hunt, Department Chairperson, English and Task Force Chair

Wendi Whitman, Coordinator of Academic Advising, University College

Danielle Lindsey, Coordinator of Special Projects, Provost Office

James Thompson, Department Chairperson, Special Education and Chair of Chairs Council

Maggie Im, Academic Advisor/Technical Coordinator, Sponsored Projects-University College

Mary Leung, Academic Advisor, Kinesiology and Recreation

Janeen Mollenhauer, Associate Director of Undergraduate Programs, Mennonite College of Nursing

Diane Skidmore, Academic Advisor, College of Business

Karen Mark, Assistant to Department Chair, Psychology

Janet Tulley, Assistant to the Director, School of Music

Task Force Support

Katy Killian, Director of Enrollment Communication and Academic Services, Enrollment Management and Academic Services

Amy Roser, Coordinator of Student Academic Services, Enrollment Management and Academic Services

Michelle Schuline, Academic Services Program Advisor, Enrollment Management and Academic Services

Appendix - Proposed Advising Tools

Creating additional advisement tools can, as the items in Section II indicate, strengthen academic advising at Illinois State University by enabling Advisors to work with greater efficiency and by providing students with the resources to manage their education more effectively. Developing and implementing the following tools will provide Advisors and students with better and more concise advising information and will enable Advisors to interact with students more effectively.

Mainframe Upgrades

Currently the mainframe does not provide information on who a student's Department/School Advisor is or an advisor history. The mainframe should be programmed to provide this information.

Information Clearinghouse

ISU should provide a single place where students can access major and minor admission requirements and application time lines.

- This information clearinghouse should provide requirements for internal transfer into all programs. Also it should provide Department/School application materials if appropriate.
- A universal terminology should be developed and adopted by the campus to explain the major and minor change and application process. This terminology should become the standard in all communication.
- A timeline should be established whereby major and minor requirements and application procedures can be submitted in conjunction with other appropriate campus processes.

Electronic Files

There is a clear need for a central place to electronically maintain student advisement contacts. Electronic advising files will help students with multiple identities and students in transition by providing a seamless advising experience.

- System must be created so that it is efficient and easy to use.
- Advisors must have access to the appropriate technologies to utilize the system as well as be provided with ample training opportunities.
- Files can have areas for "advisor only" notes and "student shared" notes.
- Files can show a student's degree path-especially if they frequently changed majors and/or minors.
- Allow student to electronically submit their anticipated course schedule to an Advisor for review.

Web Resources for Student Advising Information

Web resources are needed to provide students with a single place to go to understand the advising structure and process at ISU that includes,

- How advising works at ISU; how to make the transition from General Student to majoring and minoring in a Department/School; Department/School advising expectations. (explore adding this information to other areas as well: *Catalog*, Preview information, etc.)
- Answers to frequently asked advising questions such as: I can't get the Middle Core course I want, what should I do?, I need an override into an IDS course, what Department/School should I go to? I'm planning on majoring or minoring in "X", but

the computer won't let me register for a required course? Who can I see for an override? Also, questions can be sorted by the type of student (freshmen, transfers, athletes, honors, probation, double majors etc.)

- Case studies of student advising issues and solutions.
- Academic plans for majors and minors that show recommended (and realistic) sequences of courses for students who declare the major and the minor at different points (those who declare as freshman, those who declare at the start of the third year, those who transfer to ISU with an associates degree, etc.).
- Consider locating this section in the "Academic" section of the University web site and the *ISU Catalog*.

Hypothetical Academic Plans

As students explore different majors and minors, it is essential to provide them with an understanding of the requirements to complete these majors and minors. By providing this information via an electronic system, students do not need to rely on an academic Advisor for the information and instead can utilize their Advisor to clarify the information so as to understand whether that program is a good fit for them.

- In order to be effective, degree requirements must be correct and consistent with the current *ISU Catalog*.
- Elective course requirements must be considered and appropriately applied. It may be necessary to simplify the means by which Advisors apply electives. Providing a list of standard sub waivers would also be helpful.

Advisor Only Web Resources

Through an advisor intranet, information can be shared and tools can be provided to save time and add to consistency across campus. Such an intranet should, among other things, include,

- A current list of all campus Advisors and contact information.
- List of Best Practices for advising at Illinois State University.
- Sample letters and forms.
- List of advising mainframe screens and their most frequent use.
- Components that should be included (including recommended boilerplate) letters to students admitting them to the major or minor and in letters denying admission to the major or minor.
- A single campus unit will need to take lead ownership of the creation and maintenance of this site.

iCampus Portal Major/Minor/Anticipated Major Channels

Departments and Schools can more effectively answer student major, minor and anticipated major questions via the iCampus portal. Channels ensure that all appropriate students receive advising information related to their area of student.

- Automatically subscribe students based upon their major(s), minor(s) and/or anticipated major(s) and (minor(s)).
- Provide Advisors with samples of typical information that could be posted on the channel as well as a timeline.

iCampus Portal-Other Advising Tools

The iCampus Portal is an obvious place to enhance student access to advising tools. Adding the following would help students effectively manage their education.

- Allow students to declare an anticipated major or minor at any point via the portal.

- Add a General Education and IAI worksheet whereby a student can select planned courses. The worksheet should indicate courses completed, and the student should be able to save this worksheet for future planning.
- From the worksheet, it should link to courses that are currently available in the various categories.