

BRIEFING DOCUMENT – FOCUS ON ACADEMIC ADVISING

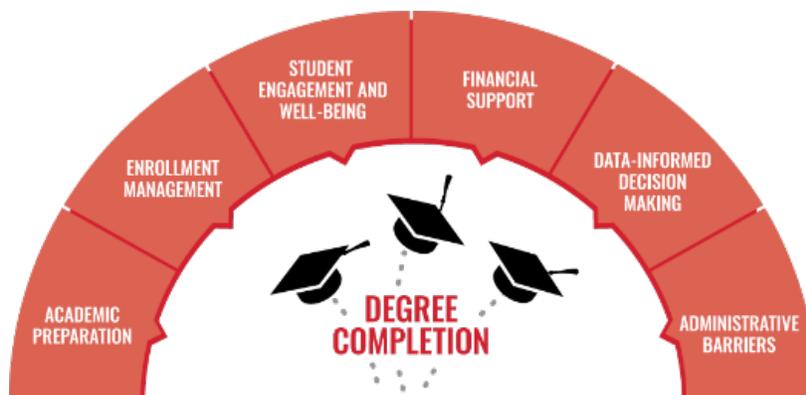


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Progress on Graduation Initiative 2025

The CSU Chancellor’s Office recently announced progress made on reaching our goals for Graduation Initiative 2025. Specifically:

- The 4-year graduation rate for the first-time student cohort that began in 2016 and graduated in 2020 or earlier was 30.9 percent. This rate is the highest ever for the CSU and marks an increase of 3.2 percentage points from the previous year.
- The 6-year graduation rate for the first-time student cohort that began in 2014 and graduated in 2020 or earlier remained steady at 62.4 percent.

- The 2-year graduation rate for the transfer cohort that began in 2018 and graduated in 2020 or earlier was 43.5 percent. This rate is the highest ever for the CSU and places the university within 1.5 percentage point of the 2025 goal of 45 percent.
- The 4-year graduation rate for the transfer cohort that began in 2016 and graduated in 2020 or earlier increased to 78.9 percent. This rate is the highest ever for the CSU.
- Students from historically underrepresented communities – those who identify as African American, Native American or Latinx – continue to make gains in their graduation rates. This year the gap between the 2014 cohort that graduated within six years with their peer group was 10.5 percent – slightly narrower compared to 11.1 percent the prior year, but the same as the year before that.
- Pell eligible students also continue to make gains in their graduation rates. The gap for the 2014 cohort that graduated within six years narrowed slightly to 9.2 percentage points, compared to 10.2 percent the prior year.
- CSU recorded a record first-year retention rate amidst the pandemic with 85.5 percent of 2019's first-year students returning to campus for the fall 2020 term.

In its April 2016 Undergraduate Outcomes Report, the CSU had the following to convey about improving persistence and graduation rates (CSU, 2016, p. 41).

Efforts to Articulate Clear Pathways to Degree and Career

There are many paths to the bachelor degree. The ability to provide a preferred path, timely advice, sufficient courses, alternative paths, and reflections of the impacts of choices affects student success. Exploration, augmentation, and expansion of the following should be considered:

- Expand use of degree audit and planning software to inform students of their progress towards degree;
- Leverage eAdvisement tools to provide major/concentration/program specific guidance beyond traditional face-to-face advisement sessions;
- Explore and potentially augment support for academic advisement;
- Explore and potentially augment support for career advisement;
- Explore tools that would allow students to designate a preferred schedule with alternative choices to provide an early indicator of scheduling demand;
- Leverage degree audit and course scheduling tools to anticipate course demand and proactively adjust available courses in core major pathways;
- Explore tools that demonstrate to students the impacts of course choices on their established path to degree; and
- Explore impact of default academic planning settings of a four-year degree path for freshmen and two-year degree path for transfers on progress and time to degree metrics.

The salience and importance of academic advising in realizing the goals of Graduation Initiative 2025 are notable. When implemented effectively, advising activities feature prominently in

leveraging students' academic preparation, managing enrollments, promoting student engagement and well-being, and eliminating administrative barriers. This report focuses on ways in which advising has contributed to the GI 2025 endeavor, as well as areas for enhancement going forward.

Overview of Academic Advising

Across the 23 CSU campuses, approaches to academic advising vary broadly. On some campuses, advising is primarily a faculty-driven activity; on other campuses, professional staff advisors bear the bulk of the responsibility for advising; by design or by default, these staff may be situated in a number of various units, including but not limited to academic advising centers (both centrally reporting or through academic college deans' offices), career development programs, disability services offices, Educational Opportunity Programs, identity-based/cultural centers, intercollegiate athletics, residential life departments, and veterans student services. Still other campuses have a model that distributes the work among faculty and staff.

Organizationally, advising typically reports through either the Academic Affairs or Student Affairs cabinet areas, but oversight and coordination may occur anywhere from highly centralized model to a highly decentralized model. Advising sessions can occur in one-on-one or group settings; appointments may be preferred, or walk-ins are encouraged.

Advising may be fragmented, whereby certain individuals advise regarding major requirements, while others advise regarding general education requirements; advising may also be integrated, where the students holistic pathway to degree is taken into account – any may also be addressed in concert with other student success needs, such as academic accommodations, career exploration, financial aid and basic needs, learning assistance, and mental health (an approach that has been facilitated by the adoption of Education Advisory Board's Student Success Collaborative technology platform). In addition, advising activities can go beyond a targeted focus on the academic pathway – coaching, mentoring and other efforts designed to promote self-efficacy, foster engagement, and improve student outcomes may also be incorporated.

Campuses are often asked to provide their advisor-to-student ratio. This can be a challenging figure to provide, given that advising is organized and delivered in so many ways. A February 2021 survey conducted by Student Affairs & Enrollment Management indicates that across the CSU, over 900 professional staff advisors – located in centralized advising units and other programs/offices - are available to serve our 480,000 students, a ratio of one staff advisor for every 532 students. Actual campus-based ratios range from a high of 1:988 to a low of 1:265. Consider NACADA's benchmark data (Robbins, 2013):

Based on NACADA *2011 National Survey of Academic Advising* (Carlstrom, 2013), the median case load of advisees per full-time professional academic advisor is 296, or a ratio of 296 students to one full-time advisor. By institutional size, the

median individual advisor case loads are 233, 333, and 600 advisees for small, medium, and large institutions, respectively.

However, it's important to not utilize this ratio as a sole or primary determinant regarding advising capacity. Campuses must also assess the profile of their student cohorts and determine that nature of advising services that any given student may need. Things like academic preparation, first-generation or low-income status, majoring in a STEM field, and many other factors should be considered.

Regardless of who provides the advising or where the work is situated on the campus, advising should and does share common aspects and attributes. Kuhn (2008) has stated that **academic advising** occurs in "situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach" (p. 3). Winston & Miller (1982) assert that,

"Academic advising is a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. It is a decision-making process by which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary."

Proactive, or intrusive advising, involves initiating purposeful outreach to students with the goal of establishing rapport within a relationship of care and empathy that leads to improved academic motivation and persistence – ideally establishing a connection with students before barriers and challenges arise that cannot be resolved (Earl, 1988). Complete College America (2020) indicates that campuses who adopt proactive advising require advisors to "take a preemptive approach that anticipates and helps eliminate concerns, roadblocks, and barriers affecting student success." Further, through strategic and consistent outreach, these campuses "ensure advisors are a resource for students, working with them to create a holistic plan for a timely graduation."

The Pell Institute asserts that proactive advising strategies to closely monitor progress and then assertively intervene whenever warning signs emerge are particularly useful when serving low-income, first-generation, and/or historically underserved racial/ethnic minorities – who generally must face additional systemic barriers to student success not experienced by their peers (Engle & O'Brien, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Opportunities to Enhance Advising

The **California Higher Education Recovery with Equity Taskforce** convened by Governor Gavin Newsom in August of 2020 has explored the role of advising among other strategies in ensuring that the state's public institutions of higher education recover from the impacts of COVID-19 in a manner that is more integrated, equitable, and resilient than before (First, 2020). They recently released their report in February 2021, entitled [Recovery With Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic](#) (Education First, 2021). Eleven recommendations were offered by the Taskforce and the third states "Retain Students through Inclusive Supports," which calls on campuses to "...develop an affirming and supportive culture that promotes student wellbeing and academic success, institutions must intentionally, thoughtfully, and creatively evaluate and, as necessary, redesign current support activities and develop new practices and programs" (p. 14). More specifically, Dr. Loren Blanchard, who as CSU's Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs served on the Taskforce, indicated that during its deliberations, the Taskforce embraced the following vision for advising:

Match students with a professionally trained champion who will coach/advise students one-on-one on their academic, career and personal goals and pathways, including helping students proactively navigate support services they qualify for, using predictive analytics to support each student's success in completing degrees.

In light of this vision, the Chancellor's Office regards the following elements as critical to engendering a culture of high-tech/high-touch advising:

1. Efficient organizational structure, understood via self-assessment and process-mapping;
2. Institutional capacity to generate accurate four-year degree pathways and deliver the curriculum accordingly;
3. Quality assurance efforts (including ongoing training and professional development activities) to maximize the impact of service delivery; and
4. Dedicated resources for and effective use of data analytics to drive priority-setting and decision-making.

Specifically, campuses are also encouraged to consider the following advising strategies if they do not already do so.

Advising Syllabus

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) preamble for their *Concept of Academic Advising* (2006) states:

Academic Advising is integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education. Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their

roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and global community. Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution. Regardless of the diversity of our institutions, our students, and our organizational structures, academic advising has three components: curriculum (what advising deals with), pedagogy (how advising does what it does), and student learning outcomes (the result of academic advising).

In other words, advising is a core element of the teaching and learning mission of institutions of higher education; the relationship cultivated and sustained between advisor and student can be a meaningful one that contributes in positive ways to the student's educational journey. Given this, it is essential for campuses to develop and routinely review and update an **advising syllabus** to include specific student learning outcomes, to set expectations for student rights and responsibilities throughout the advising process, and to help cultivate a sense of what it means to become a member of the university community.

All campus stakeholders who participate in providing and receiving advising should be given the opportunity to provide input into the advising syllabus; the syllabus also serves as a guide for developing and implementing training and capacity-building for those faculty and staff who deliver advising. Learning outcomes ideally should be organized by cohort, e.g., lower-division versus upper-division, first-year through senior year, meta majors, to ensure specificity and relevance of those learning outcomes. The curriculum and pedagogy should be designed to best achieve the desired learning outcomes and can be either prescriptive or aspirational in nature – taking into account the unique mission, culture and context of the CSU campus. Each student should receive a copy of the advising syllabus upon matriculation, and the syllabus should be readily accessible on the campus' webpage.

Case Management

An understanding of case management arises from the health and human services fields, which indicate that "Case Management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's and family's comprehensive health needs through communication and available resources to promote patient safety, quality of care, and cost effective outcomes" (Case Management Society of American, n.d.). Further, a central aspect of the philosophy undergirding case management is as follows:

"Case management facilitates the achievement of client wellness and autonomy through advocacy, assessment, planning, communication, education, resource management, and service facilitation. Based on the needs and values of the

client, and in collaboration with all service providers, the case manager links clients with appropriate providers and resources throughout the continuum of health and human services and care settings, while ensuring that the care provided is safe, effective, client-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable. This approach achieves optimum value and desirable outcomes for all stakeholders” (Commission for Case Manager Certification, 2020)

The case management process is typically comprised of anywhere from 6-9 phases (the number and names of phases vary across disciplines and organizations), which occur in an iterative and non-linear fashion; some students will need help in all phases, while others may only need support through a few phases or enter into the case management process *in medias res*. In all situations, the approach is holistic in its framing of the student’s unique context and available resource network. Typically, the most common phases are: (1) Screening; (2) Assessing; (3) Evaluating risks; (4) Planning; (5) Implementing; (6) Following up; and (7) Evaluating outcomes.

The key benefit of case management for college students is that one individual is serving as an advocate and champion for the student, and ensuring they are connected with all aspects of care. This approach has become particularly relevant with the rise of basic needs initiatives across all 23 CSU campuses; student affairs practitioners have quickly learned that students rarely present with simply a basic needs challenge. More often than not, there are associated barriers to student success occurring simultaneously - learning challenges, financial crisis, mental health issues, and others. Use of a case management model also reduces or eliminates the degree of administrative or bureaucratic “runaround” students are often subject to as they attempt to address all of their needs.

However, adopting case management strategies are labor intensive; campuses may not be able to assign a case manager to every student. If human resource capacity is limited, then campuses can still prioritize situations in which a student will be assigned a case manager to help neutralize barriers to their persistence.

Mandatory Advising

In a 2020 review of CSU advising practices systemwide, one campus requires mandatory advising for all students, 14 campuses require mandatory advising for first-time freshman and 11 campuses require mandatory advising for transfer students. While each campus will need to carefully analyze and weigh the costs and benefits of instituting any degree of mandatory advising, mandatory advising is associated with positive impacts on student outcomes when used by a number of public comprehensive universities. Campuses have broad leeway to determine the frequency of advising sessions, who will conduct the advising, and what academic milestones should trigger an advising intervention.

Mandatory advising begins by ensuring that every participating student is assigned an advisor – ideally from the moment they submit their intent to enroll and again once they declare a major – so that they know from the start who to contact if they have concerns, questions or need assistance. Ideally, that advisor should initiate contact with the student prior to the start of their first term.

In addition, instituting mandatory advising is more effective if the practice is decoupled from the use of registration holds – which serve as an administrative barrier. Providing students with advantages and benefits for engaging with their advisor is a preferable strategy.

Clear Pathways to Degree

Providing a clear pathway to degree usually is the culmination of a broad range of interrelated efforts from various sectors of the campus. It reflects a consistent and unwavering commitment on the campus to center the academic needs of students first and foremost in how course schedules are established, instruction is delivered, and related student support services are offered. Adapted from research conducted by Complete College America (2020), activities which support clear pathways to degree include, but are not limited to the following:

- Provide every newly enrolled students, first-time or transfer, with their four- or two-year degree map, which includes the courses needed and significant milestones required that contribute to on-time graduation, e.g., math and writing courses taken in the first 30 credits, 30 total credits earned (including over summer) before starting the next academic year;
- Ensure that class courses and sections are scheduled in manner so that each student can actually follow their map, including checking that classes that are intended to be taken in the same semester are not offered at coinciding times;
- Consider offering partial or complete pre-built schedules for first-time, first-year students for their first academic term, or offer templates for smart schedules that lead to timely progression to degree (which facilitate curriculum planning for academic colleges and departments, thus reducing bottlenecks);
- Communicate regularly and often with students the importance of earning student credit loads each term that align with the credits needed for on-time graduation, for both part-time and full-time students, taking courses that support graduation requirements, as well as create the academic structures that make this pattern of course-taking viable;
- Provide career information and career exploration services to all students as a way to facilitate making informed decisions about programs of study that meets their skills, aptitudes, and aspirations;

- Offer meta majors, which allow students the chance to explore related areas of study to allow them to make informed, purposeful decisions about a major, while still making progress towards their degree;
- Deliver co-requisite support via design structures and pedagogical approaches for students needing or requesting learning support in order to pass college-level foundational math and writing courses so these can be completed in a single academic term; and
- Identify and ameliorate administrative and systemic barriers – using institutional research and data analysis - with a particular focus on those barriers which have a disproportionately greater negative impact on historically underserved students, including low-income students, students who are the first to attend college, black, indigenous, and other students of color; and students with disabilities.

Conclusion

Thanks to the contributions and service of countless faculty and staff across the CSU's 23 campuses, advising can and does contribute in notable ways to improving retention and graduation rates, but they are only one part of a comprehensive, interconnected, campus-wide collaborative that places student success as the driving force behind decision-making, priority-setting and resource allocation. Many aspects of enhancing advising involve both a transactional component and a transformational element – for example, adopting a robust, viable case management model will require campuses to engage in a fearless self-inventory about ways in which student support is siloed or fragmented, and then deliberately strive to eliminate these divisions. Similarly, budget allocation processes are often only loosely linked with curricular planning and delivery processes; to ensure that academic maps and milestones provided to students can in fact be realized, budget planning must take its lead from academic priorities. Lastly, any initiative to enhance advising must necessarily consider specific, targeted strategies to close the educational equity gap – including a reimagining of who provides advising, when and where the advising is delivered, and what the core purpose and goals of advising ought to be.

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