Report of the Task Force on Advising and Career Placement

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Executive Summary

The Task Force on Advising and Career Placement met from May-September 2006 to respond to Goal 1 of the 2010 strategic plan, which highlights academic advising and career placement as important activities to assist students as they progress through and beyond their university education. The Task Force was charged with enumerating and evaluating the current practices and strategies for academic advising, career placement, and graduate school preparation and recommending action items to increase the effectiveness of these activities.

I. Academic Advising

Academic advising is best performed through collaboration among the student, the advisor, and the University, where responsibility is shared for student success. Although advising is organized differently by unit and is performed by a variety of people – graduate assistants, professional advisers, and faculty -- best practices are the same across the board.

Adviser responsibilities:
- Recognize that advising addresses the University’s teaching mission
- Provide accurate information about curricula, degree requirements, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations
- Assist students in successful course scheduling
- Guide students toward a timely graduation
- Make appropriate referrals
- Provide students with career guidance
- Serve a key function to promote retention and student success

Student responsibilities:
- Take ownership of the advising process
- Communicate career and long-term goals as well as other information pertinent to advising
- Be knowledgeable of curricular requirements and stay abreast of any changes
- Monitor their own academic progress
- Attend scheduled advising appointments

University:
- Assess advisors and advising programs for continuous improvement
- Collect and disseminate accurate information clearly and concisely
- Provide routine faculty and staff development
- Provide necessary technological support
Recommendations

- Encourage academic units without professional advisers to appoint an expert on advising issues.
- Designate a single searchable website devoted to advising FAQ’s and keep it updated.
- Turn on the degree audit across the University to improve advising.
- Make unofficial transcripts available on-line in real time to all advisers.
- Assess advisers for continual improvement.
- For units not already tying advising success to promotion and tenure, consider doing so.
- Encourage all advisers to sign on to the advising listserv and participate in advising development opportunities.
- Consider the role of parents in advising.
- Ensure that PROMISE students and their advisers are informed regarding changes in the program.
- Ensure that PROMISE students and their advisers are updated each semester about each student’s status (GPA and earned credit hours) so that the scholarship is not lost due to oversight.

II. Career Services

Like advising, career placement is highly decentralized at WVU. The College of Business and Economics and the College of Engineering and Mineral Resources developed their own career placement units some years ago when the Career Services did not respond to the needs of their students. That said, however, a revitalized central Career Services unit could play an important role in providing opportunities for other students and in coordinating services across the institution.

Recommendations

- Be strategic
- Communicate effectively with all constituencies: student, academic unit, employer
- Provide career counseling and development
- Offer job seekers instruction on professional preparation
- Serve as the central University office for employer development
- Aggressively cultivate relationships with key employers
- Serve as the central clearinghouse for internships and employment
- Operate effective listservs to post information
- Coordinate all employer campus visits
- Encourage student involvement
- Collect data
- Do assessments of services
- Make changes for continuous quality improvement
- Work with alumni who want to help students secure jobs
- Modify or eliminate MonsterTrak
Charge
The Strategic Plan Implementation Team requested that Provost Lang and Vice president Gray form a Task Force on Advising and Career Placement.

That Task Force met from May-September 2006 to respond to Goal 1 of the 2010 strategic plan, which highlights academic advising and career placement as important activities to assist students as they progress through and beyond their university education. The Task Force was charged with enumerating and evaluating the current practices and strategies for academic advising, career placement, and graduate school preparation and recommending action items to increase the effectiveness of these activities.

Academic Advising
Retention consultants nationwide say that academic advising is a national problem. Throughout the country advising is criticized as ineffectual at best or detrimental at worst. The crux of the problem is definitional: what exactly does “advising” comprise? Millennial students, who have grown up overscheduled and highly supervised by both parents and high school teachers, believe that academic advisors should play the role of both parent and high school guidance counselor.

The Task Force members first identified best practices as endorsed by NACADA (National Academic Advising Association). (See Appendix 1) Members spent the rest of May and June examining advising as it is practiced centrally at the Undergraduate Academic Services Center and within the colleges at WVU. The School of Journalism, for example, provides a one-stop shop. Advisers admit to hand-holding and to helping students deal with personal problems. They are clear that when the problem moves beyond their education and expertise, they refer students to the Carruth Center. The College of Engineering and Mineral Resources has a recognized, especially effective version of UNIV 101 called ENG 199, led by Professor Jack Byrd. ENG 199 requires students to
sign a FERPA waiver at New Student Orientation so that parents may be contacted by faculty. Faculty send a newsletter to parents informing them of upcoming tests and the milestones their children will face throughout the first year.

This high-touch approach has created enviable retention numbers with Engineering students, high-quality pre-professional students who must follow a restricted curriculum with few electives. It is less likely to be effective, however, with a different population of students who take a less structured curriculum and are less sure of life’s direction.

Associate Provost Cheryl Torsney shared with the Task Force members the “Constellation of Advising” handout, which details various advising opportunities available on the WVU campus: academic, psychological, career, lifestyle, personal, etc. (See Appendix 2) The handout documents that advising is provided by multiple individuals and multiple units. The Task Force suggested that students and parents must recognize that in a decentralized organization such as West Virginia University, advising is a more a collaborative process engaged in by many than a service provided by a single individual. If expectations regarding advising are managed more effectively, students and parents may become more satisfied with the assistance students are given.

Task Force members concluded that parents, students, faculty, and staff need to understand that responsibility for advising is shared. Students and the people providing the various sorts of advising must take appropriate responsibility and communicate goals clearly. While faculty must take their advising responsibilities seriously (and should be assessed and rewarded for exemplary advising), students must take ownership of their own advising by making and keeping advising appointments, formulating questions, using the information provided to make good decisions, and following through on a plan that moves them toward graduation.
The proper role of parents elicited energetic discussion. While some members of the committee believe that parents should be made partners in the education of their students, other members believe that students need to be taught how to take charge of their own lives. The Task Force remained divided on this issue, deciding that individual units are free to involve parents as they see fit.

**Recommendations for Improved Advising**

Recommendations embrace several areas but focus on communication, technology, and university practice. Communication among central-level and unit-level advisors should be improved. Timely updates about PROMISE scholars’ academic standing could assist them in planning summer course work. Improved use of technology could assist with providing advising FAQ’s across campus, degree audits, and availability of complete transcripts in real time. In terms of University practice, units without full-time professional advisers should appoint an expert on advising issues responsible for keeping the unit updated on current practice and policy. The University could also recognize exemplary advising through the annual evaluation process.

For ease of reading, the Task Force created the following bulleted list of recommendations for improved advising:

**Communication**

- Encourage all advisers to sign on to the advising listserv and participate in advising development opportunities.
- Communicate in a timely fashion to students, e.g., about changes in their programs of study, PROMISE qualification status, etc.

**Technology**

- Designate a single searchable website devoted to advising FAQ’s and keep it updated.
- Turn on the degree audit across the University to improve advising.
• Make unofficial transcripts available on-line in real time to all advisers.

Policy
• Encourage academic units without professional advisers to appoint an expert on advising issues.
• Assess advisers for continual improvement.
• For units not already tying advising success to annual performance evaluation, consider doing so.

II. Career Services

According to the professional standards as established by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the primary purpose of career services is to “assist students and other designated clients in developing, evaluating, and/or implementing career, education, and employment decision plans.” (See Appendix 3) Best practices pertain across the board although colleges and universities differ in how services are delivered.

As with academic advising, career services has become decentralized at many institutions. In this decentralized model, a very small central office manages administrative tasks such as career fairs, interview scheduling, etc. Other institutions have centralized career services office with independent academic units offering placement services to more specialized and professional majors. Yet others employ the liaison approach, where a central unit coordinates overall operations, while the career counselors have a dual reporting structure to the central office and the Dean of the college to which they are assigned. It is apparent that the responsibility for career advising has developed from individual campus cultures, student needs and desires, and available resources.

Career Services at WVU was centralized for many years, but became decentralized some years ago, when the College of Business and Economics
and the College of Engineering and Mineral Resources developed their own career placement units to fill their students' special needs. Recently, other units have pursued career placement independently. For example, the School of Journalism has added career placement to the tasks assigned to academic advisers, and the College of Engineering and Mineral Resources and the Davis College have both sponsored Career Days. While the formal units appear to work well for the Colleges that have established them, a revitalized central Career Services unit should assist in providing opportunities for other students as well as in coordinating services across the institution.

A survey administered on MIX in May 2006 gathered information from current students on their knowledge about and use of the WVU Career Services Center. (See Appendix 4) One hundred seventy-five students completed the survey (24 freshmen, 33 sophomores, 38 juniors, 60 seniors, and 20 graduate students). Results were consistent across class-levels: few of the students knew where the Career Services Center was located; MonsterTrak was underutilized; and communication about the services, programs, and events sponsored by the unit was rated as poor. They also felt that the unit needed to present a modern face to future employers and to make students comfortable spending time there. They suggested that the website be redesigned to be more user-friendly and that counselors be available during designated hours on Instant Messenger. In sum, the results of this survey reflected students’ desire for improved communications and technology, and better career counseling and job placement opportunities.

Both the discussion of best practices and the survey led to conversations about how technology could deliver better career counseling and placement services to our students. The system used currently to match employers with students (MonsterTrak) is neither user-friendly nor effective: it narrows the selection too tightly, and many employers do not use it to advertise open positions.
The Task Force took the discussions about centralization versus decentralization, communication and technology, and policy into account when making the following recommendations for change.

**Recommendations for a Revamped Central Career Services Office**

**Centralization Versus Decentralization**
- Hire a new Director of Career Services (see Appendix 5)
- Serve as the central University office for employer development
- Aggressively cultivate relationships with key employers
- Serve as the central University clearinghouse for internships and employment
- Coordinate all employer campus visits
- Provide career counseling and development opportunities
- Offer job seekers instruction on professional preparation
- Encourage student involvement. Engage them early in their WVU careers
- Work with alumni who want to help students secure jobs
- Continue decentralization in specialized pre-professional units, like Business, Engineering, and Journalism

**Communication and Technology**
- Improve communications with all constituencies: student, academic unit, employer, and alumni
- Operate effective listservs to post information
- Modify or replace MonsterTrak

**Policy**
- Collect data to assist with program evaluation and to provide details about job placement outcomes for WVU graduates
- Assess services and make needed changes for continuous quality improvement. Adjust to meet the changing demands of the marketplace
Possible Next Steps

While the Task Force is not charged with implementation, the members would nonetheless like to conclude the report with some possible items action items:

- Elevate Career Services to an issue of campus importance.
- Consider a campus-wide structure for career services where a central office oversees “bigger picture” items, but the actual career development occurs as the unit level.
- Consider establishing a Career Advisory Council (like the Enrollment Management Council or Rates of Student Success Committee), which looks at the bigger institutional issues.
- Educate employers, graduates, and students about the services offered.
- Survey employers who hire WVU alumni to determine why they seek out our graduates and develop a marketing strategy.
- Invest in building long-term relationships with important employers.
- Keep one “front-door” for employers, who should be treated as important campus guests.
- Work closely with the Alumni Association to encourage alumni to mentor current students and cultivate new employers.
- Improve the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data about student placement.
- Offer seminars in career development, appropriate dress, and interview etiquette.
Appendix 5

Skills Required for the Next Director of the Career Services Center

WVU is at a crossroads as it prepares to hire a new Career Services Center Director. In reviewing the NACE Standards and considering our own campus needs, the Task Force agrees that the next Director of the Career Services Center should be able to do the following:

- Articulate a vision for the organization
- Promote student learning and development
- Communicate effectively with internal and external audiences
- Work in cooperation with existing career services units at the college and/or department level
- Initiate collaboration between these units and other campus departments
- Understand and utilize technology to deliver services to students by means that are most effective for their needs
- Provide educational programs that assist students with career planning, selection, and transition from college to a professional work setting