

IOWA

Academic Advising Self-Study Report

Fall 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spring 2024, a self-study committee was convened to collect campuswide feedback and provide recommendations on how to strengthen the impact of academic advising on student success at the University of Iowa.

Campuswide Feedback

The committee gathered diverse perspectives on academic advising from interviews with college and unit advising leads, student focus groups, and a faculty and staff survey. Key takeaways and overarching data themes include:

- **Affirmed purpose and meaning:** Students, faculty, and staff reinforced the value of advising, and its role for holistic student success that contributes to retention and graduation efforts.
- **Desire for shared practices and learning outcomes:** Some students shared how vastly different advising experiences can be by individual advisor, while many faculty and staff shared the need to create campuswide shared practices, learning outcomes, and assessment that centers students' voices.
- **Unique needs for primary versus faculty advisors:** Responses varied by faculty and staff, highlighting the imperative to focus on the unique needs of both primary role advisors and faculty advisors. For example, while students report enjoying the faculty advising relationship, on average, faculty report feeling less confident in skills associated with advising national best practices.
- **Expanded professional development and training:** Advisors expressed a desire for greater internal and external opportunities that focus on broader technology training, expanded opportunities to connect with colleagues across campus, and promoting student wellbeing and belonging.
- **Technology enhancements:** Students and advisors shared appreciation for the range of technology available. Advisors demonstrated a need for expanded training, and having a greater role in technology development and improvement.
- **Stronger campuswide collaboration:** Many advisors shared a desire for more opportunities to learn from and with advisors across campus and form stronger partnerships with campus partners.

“ The most rewarding aspect of academic advising is the relationships we get to build with students... **If students know there is someone who cares about them...and understands their needs, that is when they are most successful.** Advising is a powerful tool for student retention and success, when understood across all levels.”

Recommendations

Five recommendations emerged from campuswide feedback, along with consideration of an external review process conducted in the fall 2023 semester and additional external resources, including national advising professional standards and reports.



*Full list of recommendations and strategies are detailed on [pages 19-21](#).

Next Steps: Implementation

Implementation will span multiple years and necessitate a flexible process driven by partnerships across colleges/units and alignment with collegiate and institutional strategic priorities.

Leadership and guidance: The Advising Council is a representative group of advising leadership from colleges and central units, and in consultation with the Office of the Provost and collegiate associate deans, will provide overall guidance on the implementation process.

Implementation team: Given input from the Advising Council, the Office of the Provost and collegiate associate deans will appoint members of the implementation team who represent campuswide advising and various advising roles and experiences to begin meeting early in the Spring 2025 semester

*Additional implementation details are on [page 22](#).

“ From entry to graduation from one college to the next – what does the advising path at Iowa look like... **What can we promise to all students about their advising experience?**”

PROCESS OVERVIEW

The University of Iowa includes academic advising as a strategic priority in the UI 2022-2027 Strategic Plan. An external review was conducted in the fall of 2023, and while the recommendations provided useful insights, more university specific data and information is needed to address this strategic priority. Therefore, a committee to conduct a self-study was convened by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education in Spring 2024 to address gaps and prioritize recommendations from the external review.

Deliverables

1. Assess external review recommendations and propose prioritization of key recommendations.
2. Provide guidance for the collection and synthesis of the following to better understand the current landscape of campuswide academic advising:
 - Meetings with advising leadership across colleges and the Academic Advising Center
 - Student focus groups
 - Campus partner feedback
 - Primary role and faculty advisor survey
 - Select institutional and collegiate assessment data
 - Additional information as determined by the self-study committee
3. Create recommendations for efforts to advance academic advising in alignment with institutional strategic priorities.

The committee used findings from the self-study, alongside the external review, NACADA Pillars, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for academic advising to make recommendations to the Office of the Provost and collegiate leadership. The purpose of this self-study committee was to develop recommendations that will **strengthen the impact of academic advising on student success**.

Membership

Mirra Anson, Office of the Provost

Josh Atcher, College of Engineering

Tamar Bernfeld, Center for Teaching

Allen Bradley, College of Engineering

Tammy Faser, Health Sciences related undergraduate advising

Marissa Green-Francescon, Office of Assessment

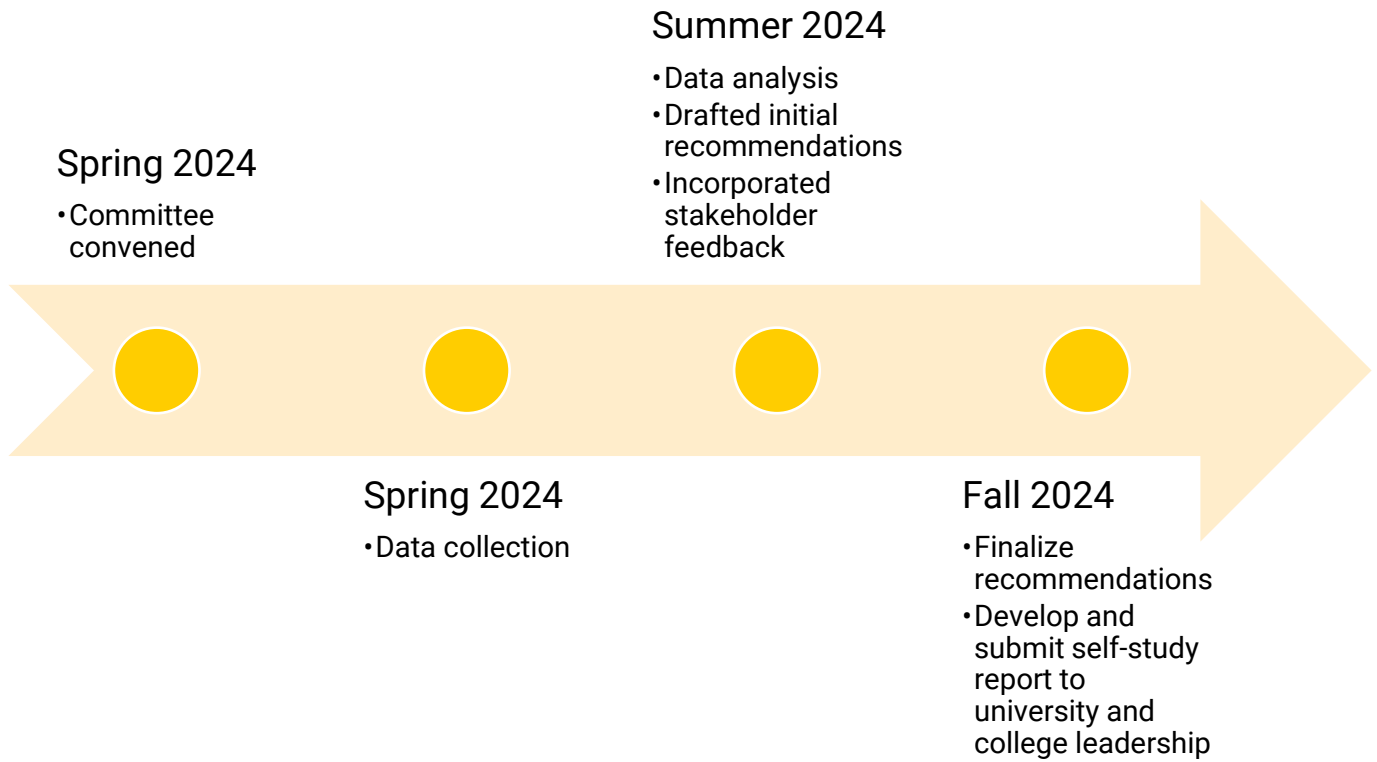
Diane Hauser, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Shari Piekarski, Tippie College of Business

Maria-Victoria Perez, Office of the Provost

Maureen Schafer, Academic Advising Center

Timeline



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Data collection spanned student focus groups, interviews with college and central unit advising leads, and a survey that was distributed to all faculty and staff who provide academic advising.

Themes

Each area of data collection provided unique findings; however, there were several themes that thread throughout the feedback from students, faculty, and staff.

Affirmed purpose and meaning

- Student focus group participants shared that they understood and valued the role of advising in their success.
- Faculty and staff survey respondents generally found academic advising as a meaningful way to engage with students and reiterated that **advising is a critical mechanism for holistic student success**, and ultimately, student retention and graduation.

Desire for shared practices and learning outcomes

- Some students shared how advising experiences can be vastly different depending on the advisor.
- Many faculty and staff shared the need for a greater shared understanding of academic advising from a campuswide context, and the need to **create shared learning outcomes** and associated assessment that **centers students' voices**.

Unique needs of primary versus faculty advisors

- Responses varied by faculty and staff, highlighting the imperative to focus on the unique needs of both primary role advisors and faculty advisors.
- For example, while students report enjoying the faculty advising relationship and a majority of faculty found advising students to be a meaningful experience, on average, faculty report feeling less confident in skills associated with advising national best practices.

Advisors' time

- Both advisors and students shared perceptions that advisors may not have enough time to fully prepare for and/or meet with advisees.
- Further, advisors reported that **time and resources are barriers to engaging in professional development** and collaborating with campuswide advising colleagues.

Expanded professional development and training

- Advising leads emphasized the importance of professional development in enhancing advising skills and knowledge.
- Students in the focus groups expressed appreciation for advisors who were well-trained and knowledgeable, noting that effective advising significantly improved their academic experience. However, they also pointed out inconsistencies in advising quality, suggesting a need for more standardized training for advisors.

- Survey results further supported this theme, with many respondents indicating that **professional development opportunities, such as internal and external training, are important.**
- Advisors also expressed a desire for more robust technology training, opportunities to connect with colleagues across campus, and training on student wellbeing and equity/inclusion.

Stronger campuswide communication

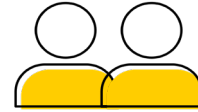
- Some students observed a lack of communication while transitioning advisors, while others shared very positive experiences with communication during the advisor transition process.
- Advisors shared a **greater desire for enhanced communication with advisors in other areas, campus partners, and students.**

Enhanced campuswide collaboration

- Similar to communication, students and advisors shared varying experiences.
- Some students shared they wished advisors were able to more readily able to provide connections to campus resources.
- Advisors shared a need for **more opportunities to learn from and work with advisors across campus** and form stronger connections with campus partners.

Technology enhancements

- Students and advisors shared appreciation for the range of technology available to help support the academic advising experience.
- **Some technology was reported more helpful than others, and advisors demonstrated a need for expanded training** opportunities, and having a greater role in technology development and/or institutional decision-making processes on the role of technology (such as AI) in academic advising services.



College/Unit Advising Lead Interviews

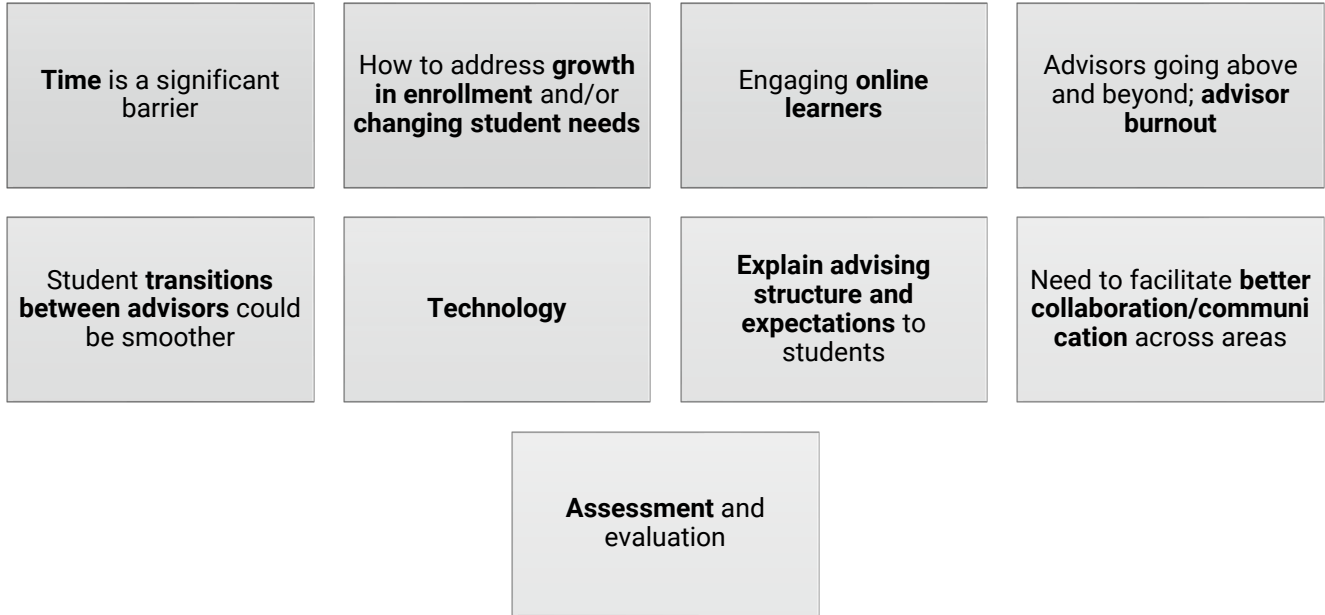
Interviews with advising leadership at multiple colleges and units that serve undergraduate students gathered information on advising structure and caseload distribution, professional development and training, advising learning outcomes, strengths and areas of growth, suggestions for centralized support to help college advising, and prioritizing external review recommendations.

Below is a summary of the shared areas of strengths, areas of growth or barriers, and proposed centralized supports to help support college advising.

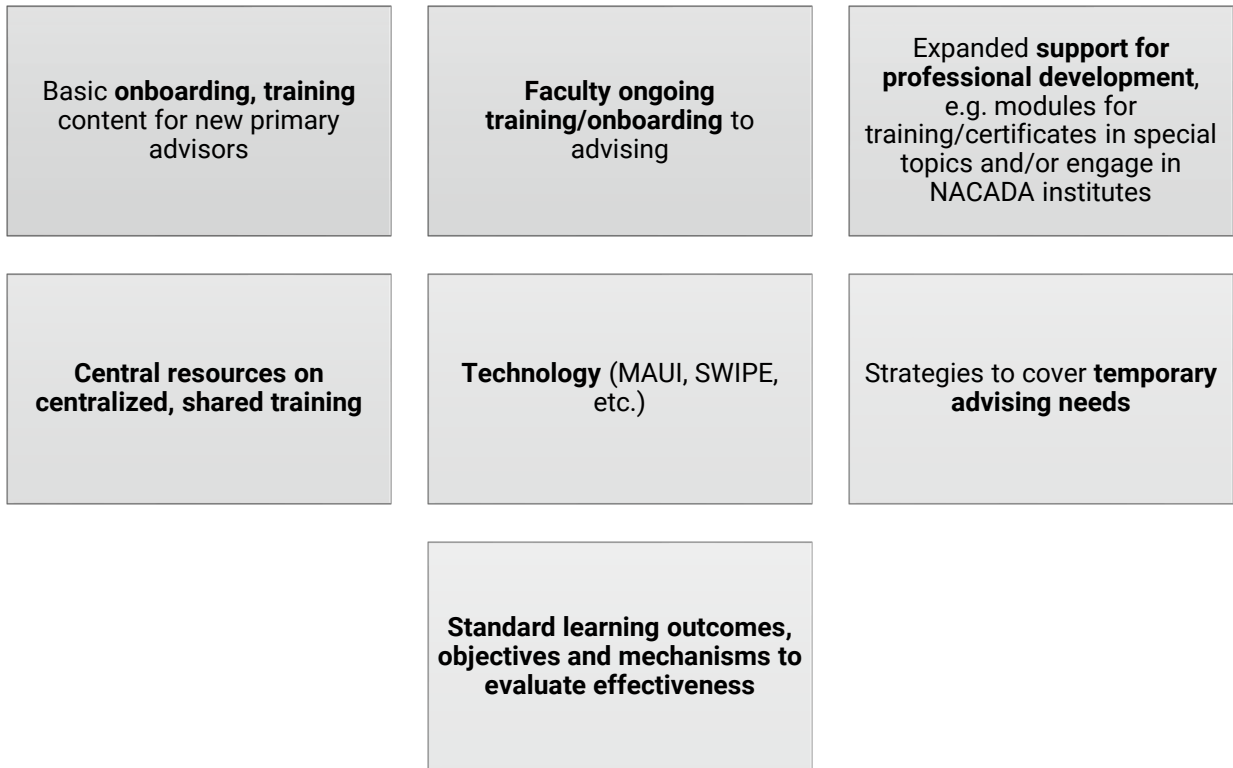
Strengths

Holistic approaches, large role in student success “more than classes, we are part of a student’s entire journey”	Cross-trained across departments and/or generalist approach	Collegiate and/or departmental integration	Addressing transfer student needs
Engagement in experiential learning	Individualized, tailored personal support	Helping students with resiliency , work toward college degree aspirations	Creativity in helping students navigate systems
Mandatory advising	Teaching-orientated focus	Proactive approach	Small case loads and tight-knit advising partnerships (smaller colleges)
	Balance of maintaining advising standards with autonomy for unit/college needs	Advising Council	

Areas of growth/barriers



Suggestions for centralized support





Student Focus Groups

Over 60 students, whose advising experiences varied across multiple colleges/units, participated in focus groups throughout spring 2024. The purpose of these focus groups was to gather perspective on students' perceptions and experiences around academic advising at Iowa. Perspectives gained from these focus groups are critical to ensure that student voices are considered in the self-study recommendations.

Overall, deep appreciation for and value of advisors

- Openness and care
 - *"Every time I walk in, my advisor asks me how I am and how my classes are going. The first 15 minutes we chat, and that is really nice, forming an authentic relationship."*
- Communication, both general and individualized
 - *"My advisor let me know when a class I really wanted was opened – a new section opened – and my advisor let me know over a break, and that communication, especially over a break, was really nice."*
- Connections to additional educational opportunities
 - *"My advisor has helped me think about different majors and has been helpful in connecting me with other students and faculty in other majors."*

Uneven experiences for students as they transition advisors across department, college, unit

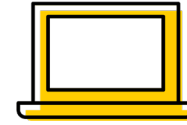
- *"My freshman year I was a health major and worked with my advisor about switching to business – so my advisor connected me with someone in that area. Then there was someone to help with the next steps and they talked about my interests...that showed they cared about me."*
- *"My advisors switched four different times, and I was only told twice who that advisor would be. I get changing advisors, but no communication about the change was frustrating."*

Appreciation for faculty connections; however, desire for greater consistency

- *"I have had a good experience with faculty being friendly. I asked one professor what they think about a class, and they were very helpful, so I ended up switching to this professor for my advisor."*
- *"It doesn't feel like there is much continuity between professional advisors and faculty advisors, you have to start completely over."*

Advising technology overall very helpful, with a few suggestions for a more seamless experience

- *"MyPlan is the most helpful tool for students to plan out classes. Degree audit is helpful, but one complaint is that there is not a comprehensive degree audit feature for double majors/minors/etc."*



Faculty and Staff Survey Results

Faculty and staff who provide academic advising services to undergraduate students were invited to respond to a survey in the spring 2024 semester. The purpose of the survey was to gather perspectives from both faculty and staff about perceptions related to advising responsibilities, culture, cross-campus communication and collaboration, and the role of various advising technologies. The survey also collected perceived levels of confidence regarding a range of advising skills and knowledge. The results are critical to ensure that the self-study recommendations incorporate the voices of academic advisors from across campus. The full survey report is linked to in the appendix in this document.

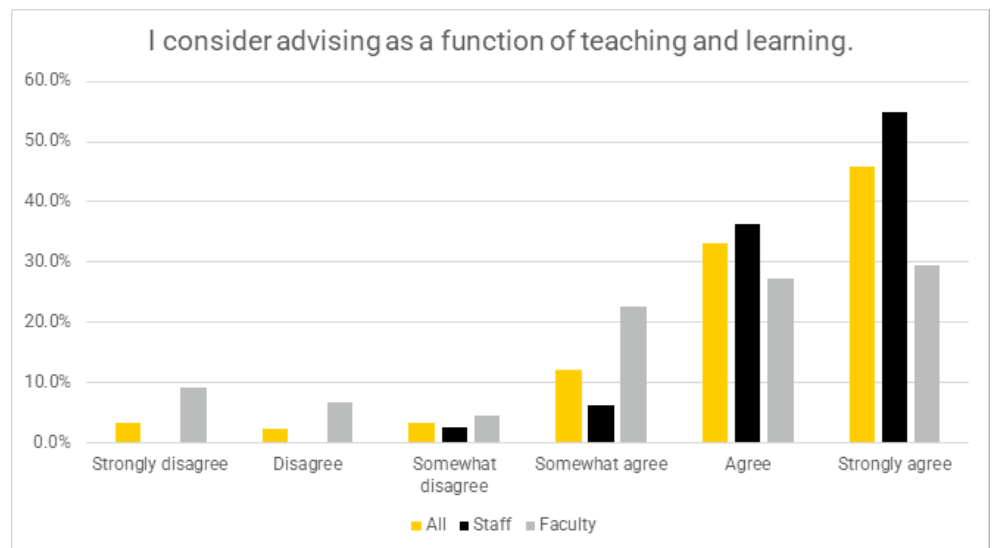
The survey was broken down into the following five components.



Advising Responsibilities and Culture

- A majority of respondents agree that advising responsibilities include being accessible to advisees, communicating institutional policies/procedures, matching each advisee’s needs with resources/appropriate referrals, assisting with planning courses/majors/minors, and working with advisees on long term education plans linked to students’ goals. Overall, there was **general agreement on the scope of responsibilities for an academic advisor.**

- Staff are more likely to agree that **academic advising is a function of teaching and learning** compared to faculty.
- A majority of respondents shared that they find providing **academic advising creates meaningful engagement with students**; however, faculty were slightly less likely to agree or strongly agree compared to staff.

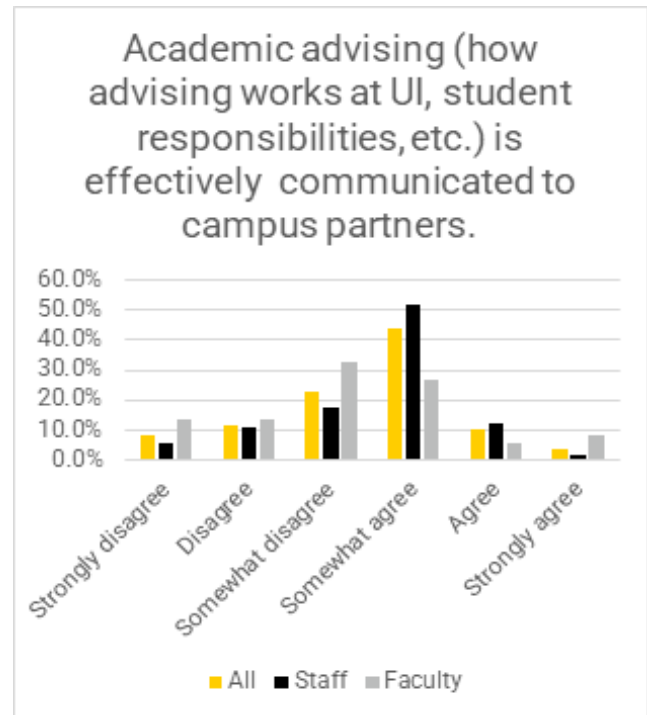
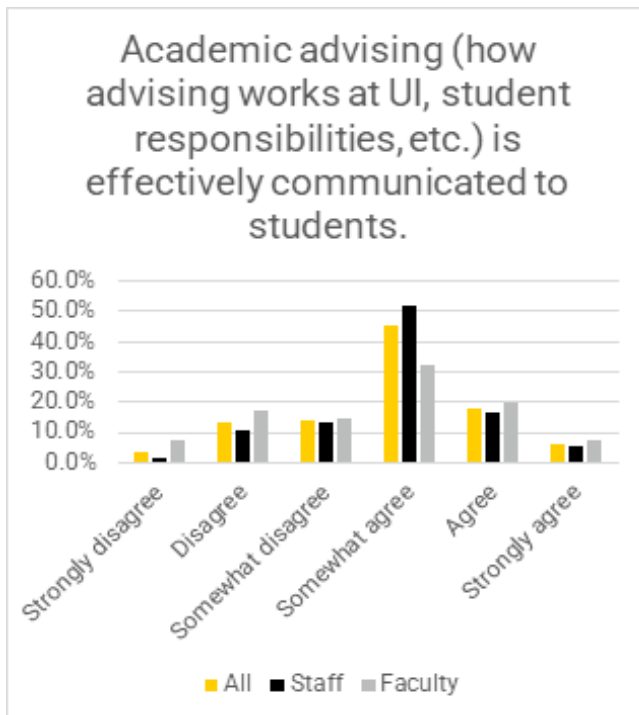


- Respondents’ perceptions of how various groups on campus (students, senior administrators, college leadership, departments, and faculty) value academic advising were varied. In general, staff were slightly more likely to perceive higher levels of value across these groups compared to faculty. **Senior administrators were the group perceived to value advising the least. Departments and students were perceived to value advising the most among groups.**

- A majority of respondents agreed that **advising should be mandatory in the first year and second year**, with staff slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree. For years three and four, respondents were less likely to agree that advising should be mandatory; however, faculty were more likely than staff to agree advising should be mandatory.

Collaboration and Communication

- Responses were varied regarding to what degree academic **advising is effectively communicated** to students and campus partners:



- Respondents were asked a series of questions about their **confidence across advising skills that are recognized to be important when helping students** transition (to a new advisor, major, etc.) and helping students who may be experiencing concerns. Responses across the various skills suggest a majority of respondents feel confident; however, staff are more likely to feel confident or very confident, compared to faculty who are more likely to feel somewhat confident or confident.

Advising Technology

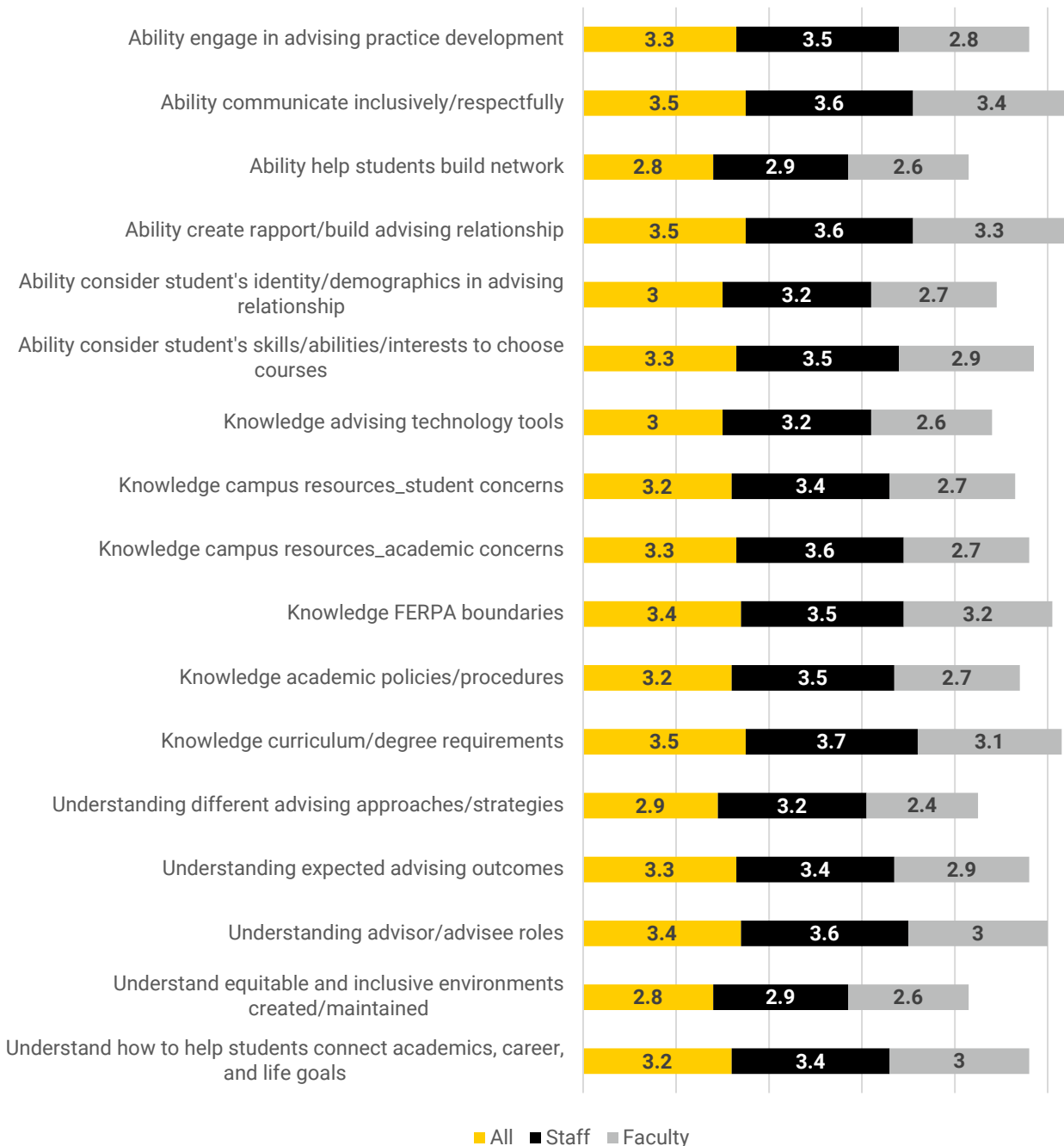
- A majority of respondents agree that various academic technologies available are useful when supporting students, with the **degree audit being the most useful and schedule builder and sample plan/my plan being somewhat useful**.
- The largest difference between faculty and staff perceptions of useful technology was the appointment scheduler. **Faculty were less likely compared to staff to share that schedule builder is useful** when supporting students in the academic advising role.

Confidence in NACADA Core Competencies

- When advisors were asked about their confidence in important skills related to academic advising from NACADA, on average, most advisors shared that they are confident in their skills. Faculty did share slightly lower confidence with NACADA competencies. Also, both faculty and staff felt less confident in helping students build their network and how inclusive and equitable environments are created/maintained.

Please share how confident you feel in the following areas.

1 - Not at all confident 2 - Somewhat confident 3 - Confident 4 - Very confident



Open-ended Responses

1. What has contributed to your growth in providing academic advising?

- Appreciation for internal and external (NACADA, program of study specific) trainings
- Recognized importance for topics on student wellbeing and equity/inclusion
- Connecting with advisors across campus
- Connecting with campus resources and associated staff/faculty
- Informal mentoring/connections with colleagues, learning on the job

“

“I appreciate our opportunities to engage with advisors across campus as well as faculty as we discuss student success and how to best serve them. I think better understanding of all our roles will only enhance the student experience.”

“

I have had the opportunity to participate in several NACADA conference (both regional and national) and these have been instrumental in exposing me to new ideas and topics related to academic advising, as well as to help me build my network of advising colleagues.”

2. What training and/or professional development would help advance your growth in providing academic advising?

- Learning different advising strategies
- More robust technology training
- Greater opportunities/resources for external professional development
- More opportunities to connect with advisors across campus
- Better collaboration and communication with campus resources
- More training on student wellbeing and equity/inclusion
- More feedback for advisors for their success and development
- More from students/assessment of advising from student perspective

“

I think meeting with other offices that we typically refer students to would be helpful so that we can focus on all the resources UI has for students rather than meetings on "big ideas" - taking on a more "local" viewpoint would be beneficial, especially for newer advisors.”

“

I would like to see more assessment of advising within my unit, having an opportunity to develop assessment tools would be great.”

3. In what ways might academic advising be improved on our campus?

- Creating/incorporating advising standards and consistency across campus
- Smaller caseloads, more advisors
- Greater recognition (especially from campus leaders) and compensation, more opportunities for advancement
- Logistics (improved advising practices/policies, technology aspects)
- Better prepare students on how to engage in advising
- Address unique faculty needs
- Greater focus on student development, less on advising as transactional
- More onboarding/training and professional development



Developing a consensus on what advising should look like across campus. From entry to graduation from one college to the next - what does the advising path at Iowa look like and what are the minimum expectations. Right now the advising experience varies from College to College and between departments. What can we promise to all students about their advising experience?"



Greater support from our individual colleges and university-level through opportunities for advancement and promotion (demonstrating value for the profession and individual advisor). Higher starting salary for advisors. Campus-wide recognition of advisors (outside of staff awards)."

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Multiple external resources informed the committee's recommendations:

- NACADA external review in the fall 2023 semester
- NACADA pillars
- CAS standards for academic advising
- The Equity-Excellence Imperative – Boyer 2030 Commission Report
- The Future of Advising Report from The Chronicle of Higher Education

NACADA External Review Recommendations

To provide initial guidance on how to advance strategic priorities related to campuswide academic advising, external reviewers working with NACADA visited campus in September 2023. The reviewers spent two days on campus, meeting with faculty and staff from multiple colleges and units. The full external review report is included as an appendix.

While the review was instrumental in providing multiple recommendations to strengthen academic advising, the review was not able to include the perspectives of student voices and additional information about the unique structure and needs of academic advising at the University of Iowa. Several of the external review recommendations were identified during meetings with college/unit advising leads, and threaded through the self-study committee's recommendations (indicated below with an asterisk*).

1. Create a culture of advising as teaching and learning*
2. Create a senior level position to oversee academic advising
3. Facilitate stronger collaborations within the existing advising structure*
4. Build a culture of advising through assessment and professional development*
5. Improve advising technology*
6. Improve enrollment management
7. Develop a reward and recognition program for academic advising*
8. Establish equity within advising loads
9. Create a career path for academic advisors*
10. Increase diversity within the advising community
11. Create a communication plan*

Additional External Resources

The committee reviewed the NACADA pillars, CAS standards, The Equity-Excellence Imperative – Boyer 2030 Commission Report, and the Future of Advising Report from The Chronicle of Higher Education. Important considerations from discussions about these external resources that informed the self-study's recommendations are listed below.

- More **consistent culture in advising**; shared idea about what advising is and what we want students to learn from advising at the University of Iowa.
- **Collaboration and communication**, including improving how other areas across campus understand what advisors do and recognize advisors' insights about students; this insight can help shape policies and practice.
- Focus more with faculty training; understand how faculty fit into overall structure and promote consistency in faculty advising; frame **faculty and academic departments as partners** in the advising process.
- **Shared onboarding, training, professional development, technology, assessment, and use of data analytics**; we need to have dedicated staff centrally and across colleges to pull that all together as opposed to "add-ons" to existing positions.
- **Equity issues in advising** is something to define and prioritize; this connects to resource advocacy and development.
- **Technology and rethinking tools from the student perspective**, not institutional perspective. Many students prefer personal interactions with advisors, so we must make sure technology does not drive advising interactions, but instead enriches and supports interpersonal connections.
 - Consider the **expanding role of AI** and ensure academic advisors are included in decision-making regarding the use of AI in advising.
- Improve the positionality and campus culture/mindset that **academic advising is a function of teaching and learning**.
- Strengthen the role of the **Advising Council** and explore ways to continue to **enhance the campuswide advising community**.
- Nature of **mandatory advising**; this will necessitate further discussions about how faculty/staff are engaged in the advising process and what kinds of resources would be needed to expand mandatory advising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The self-study committee drafted recommendations based on initial findings from data collection and prioritized external review recommendations. The committee also reviewed external sources to inform recommendations, including the NACADA pillars, CAS standards, The Equity-Excellence Imperative – Boyer 2030 Commission Report, and the Future of Advising Report from The Chronicle of Higher Education.

1. Create a shared foundation and culture of academic advising across all colleges.

Potential Strategies:

- Create shared learning outcomes and assessment strategies for advising that span all colleges/units
- Establish common expectations, training requirements, etc. that address collegiate support/needs, and faculty and primary role advisors
- Develop and implement evidence-based advising practices/approaches for faculty and primary role advisors to follow, which also addresses collegiate needs
- Address inequities in student access to advising services
- Improve equity in advising caseloads and responsibilities in the context of advising structure and services

Related NACADA External Review Recommendations:

- Culture of advising as teaching and learning
- Facilitate stronger collaborations within the existing advising structure
- Build a culture of advising through assessment and professional development



2. Address critical advising technology needs.

Potential Strategies:

- Expand the role of academic advisors in campuswide discussions and decision-making on the application of technological innovations
- Expand MAUI Advising Functional Lead role to a full-time position and expand responsibilities to include data analytics in advising and assessment of advising
- Add collegiate representation in MAUI project governance structure
- Explore advances in technology to improve advising and support student success
- Develop and implement a new degree audit tool/system

Related NACADA External Review Recommendations:

- Facilitate stronger collaborations within the existing advising structure
- Improve advising technology



3. Expand training and professional development resources, advance career pathways, and promote equitable pay structures.

Potential Strategies:

- Create centralized tools for training and professional development that can be used across colleges/units
- Identify personnel and resources for development and expansion of training and professional development
- Create expectations for ongoing professional development that are relative to primary role and faculty advisors
- Establish career pathways within colleges/units to improve retention of primary role advisors
- Increase base salaries for advisors that are equitable across campus

Related NACADA External Review Recommendations:

- Facilitate stronger collaborations within the existing advising structure
- Build a culture of advising through assessment and professional development
- Develop a reward and recognition program for academic advising
- Create career path for academic advisors



4. Facilitate stronger communication across the advising community, campus partners, and students.

Potential Strategies:

- Create formal systems and processes to facilitate consistent, timely, bi-directional communication between advising units and faculty advisors, campus partners, and campus administration
- Leverage upcoming advising page in MyUI and Advising at Iowa website to communicate information about advising to students and their families; include concept of the advising “team” to support students throughout their time at UI

Related NACADA External Review Recommendations:

- Create a communication plan
- Facilitate stronger collaborations within the existing advising structure



5. Address unique needs of faculty advising.

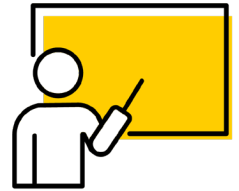
Potential Strategies:

- Elevate role of advising in faculty reward structure across rank and track
- Implement standards and required training (modules and in-person) for faculty advisors
- Explore faculty learning groups that engage faculty in understanding the role of academic advising as a function of teaching and learning

- Create more collaboration and opportunities for relationship building between faculty and departmental/collegiate advisors
- Designate personnel to coordinate faculty advising at the collegiate level supplemented by centralized support
- Include faculty representation on the Advising Council

Related to NACADA External Review Recommendations:

- Reinforce a culture of advising as teaching and learning
- Facilitate stronger collaborations within the existing advising structure
- Build a culture of advising through assessment and professional development



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Given the comprehensive nature of the self-study’s recommendations, implementation will span multiple years and necessitate a flexible process that outlines clear leadership and guidance, identifies individuals who reflect the breadth of the campuswide academic advising community to work on implementation, incorporates a timeline with outcomes and goals, and identifies necessary resources.

Leadership and guidance

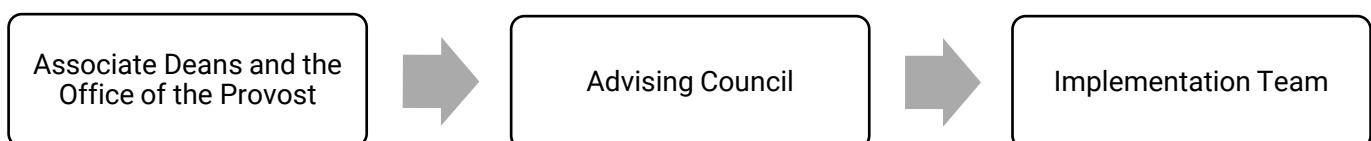
The Advising Council is a representative group of advising leadership from colleges and central units. This group, with consultation from the Office of the Provost and collegiate associate deans, will provide overall guidance on the implementation process. The Advising Council will:

- Provide oversight and develop a structure for recommendation implementation. This structure may evolve into a campuswide strategic plan for academic advising, in alignment with institutional and collegiate strategic priorities.
- Develop structure for and convene a campuswide implementation team.
- Prioritize recommendations and work with implementation team to develop a timeline that also reflects overall outcomes and goals.
- Develop and engage in both formative and summative assessments to monitor implementation progress and make adjustments as needed.

Implementation team

Given input from the Advising Council, the Office of the Provost and collegiate associate deans will appoint members of the implementation team who represent campuswide advising and various advising roles and experiences to begin meeting early in the Spring 2025 semester. The implementation team will:

- Develop a timeline and associated outcomes and goals, based on recommendation prioritization from the Advising Council.
- Identify recommendations that can be implemented without additional resources, and others that necessitate additional funding and/or personnel.
- Potentially, develop and submit a P3 strategic plan implementation fund proposal to provide structure and resources needed to advance recommendations.
- Identify partnerships to leverage campus expertise on faculty development (Center for Teaching; Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology; and Distance and Online Education; and collegiate resources).
- Develop a detailed implementation plan (or draft advising strategic plan) by the end of the Spring 2025 semester.



APPENDIX

1. Full report from Spring 2024 academic advising survey that was distributed to faculty and staff providing academic advising to undergraduate students.
2. Full report detailing the NACADA external review recommendations.