

NACADA

The Global Community for Academic Advising

Academic Advising Review Consultant Visit Report

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

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At the invitation of Valdosta State University, a NACADA Consultant team was identified to conduct a review of the university's academic advising program. This review was intended to provide guidance to campus leaders regarding the organization, delivery, and support of academic advising. The NACADA Consultant Team included:

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“Academic Advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution.”

Wes Habley, 2004

Introduction

The role and importance of academic advising in supporting student success has changed significantly over the last few years, as has who is involved in its delivery. Once primarily the purview of faculty members, many institutions and, in particular, public universities, now also have professional staff members who serve as academic advisors. The importance of academic advising to student persistence and success in college continues to be documented in the research such that academic advising is increasingly considered central to any institution’s retention strategy.

Whether faculty or professional, advisors play an integral role in the success of students by inviting them to become part of the community of scholars that is the university, and mentoring them in their interactions with faculty members, administrators, staff members and peers. Advisors help students navigate complex systems, facilitate the exploration of life and career goals, and challenge students to think critically about their experiences with the curriculum and co-curriculum. Advisors demystify the curriculum for students, explaining connections that are often implied, but seldom clearly explained. Advisors teach students how to ask and reflect on the tough questions of “What am I doing?” or “Why am I studying this subject?” Or even, “Do I have the right disposition or abilities for this field?”

Academic advising, done well, is a combination of challenge and support. The challenge to students is to think beyond the here and now and the support for them is the encouragement to move forward in the face of disappointment. It is a labor and time intensive activity that requires an institutional commitment to reinforce it as a priority. Successful academic advising programs are intentionally designed, outcomes-based, and considered integral to the student academic experience.

Successful Academic Advising Programs

NACADA has endorsed three documents that address the philosophy and practice of academic advising: *NACADA Concept of Academic Advising*, *NACADA Statement of Core Values*, and *the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising*. NACADA website links to each of these documents can be found at: www.nacada.ksu.edu/resources/standards.htm.

Advising programs that are considered “best practices” in the field will reflect the advising philosophy contained in these three documents. For the purpose of framing the context of our review of Valdosta’s advising program, the following points address our major assumptions about successful academic advising:

- Academic advising is best viewed as a form of teaching and is integral to the success of the teaching and learning mission of higher education institutions. As Marc Lowenstein (2005) observes, “an excellent advisor does the same thing for the student’s entire curriculum that



the excellent teacher does for one course.” Advisors teach students to value the learning process, to apply decision-making strategies, to put the college experience into perspective, to set priorities and evaluate events, to develop thinking and learning skills, and to make informed choices.


- The NACADA *Concept of Academic Advising* identifies three essential components of advising: curriculum (what advising deals with), pedagogy (how advising delivers the curriculum), and student learning outcomes (the results of academic advising). These student learning outcomes are based upon what we want students to know, to be able to do, and to value and appreciate as a result of participating in the academic advising process.
- Effective practices in advising programs consistently address three issues. First, it is critical that both professional advisors and faculty advisors receive adequate training and professional development opportunities. The training needs to be ongoing, not simply a one-time session, and it should include five major areas of concern to advisors: the conceptual, informational, relational, technological and personal elements of advising. Secondly, there must be appropriate rewards and recognition for advisors. Thirdly, it is critical that the advising program includes an assessment plan. Like training, assessment is not a one-time event. It must also go beyond student satisfaction surveys in order to determine if the learning outcomes for advising are being achieved by students.
- Finally, we are convinced that, when done well, academic advising can have a significant impact on student success as reflected in an institution’s retention and graduation rates.

Academic advising programs should be student-centered as well as student-learning centered. In this regard, effective academic advising programs are outcomes-based. With this as prelude, we provide a summary of the issues and questions explored during our visit and present a set of recommendations for consideration by the leadership of Valdosta State University.

Context for the Visit

Valdosta State University, not unlike other comprehensive universities, is very much concerned with student persistence* toward graduation. Within an increasingly competitive recruitment environment, the leadership at Valdosta has focused its energy on identifying and implementing strategies to support student success and reduce the number and percentage of students leaving Valdosta. As part of the University System of Georgia, Valdosta must also tend to issues related to time-to-degree to increase the 4, 5, and 6-year graduation rates.

*The consultants differentiate the terms “retention” and “persistence”. “Retention” is generally considered to be defined as an institution’s ability to keep a student enrolled through graduation. Inherent in retention are the institutional activities and processes that impact the student experience. “Persistence”, on the other hand, is best considered from the student’s perspective as defined as a student’s desire and ability to continue towards degree completion. As such, persistence reflects the skills, supports and abilities students bring to their education and their desire to remain enrolled. The two terms are obviously highly related. In the end, retention is, as Vincent Tinto (1997) suggests, the by-product of a good educational experience and not an end in itself.



While early reports indicate that recruiting efforts for next fall's class are promising, i.e., the Open House apparently had the largest attendance in the university's history and applications have increased in double-digits over last year, the leadership understands the cost-benefit of improving persistence rates over continually expanding recruitment efforts, perhaps without regard to market targets, in order to replace students who have chosen to leave without graduating. The cost of recruiting a new student is three times the amount of retaining a current student, thus it is economically sound for the university to focus efforts on retention. It is very much in Valdosta's interests to not only stabilize the incoming class size, but to reduce student attrition to stabilize enrollment over all class years.

Valdosta State University appears to be at a critical point in its development. The seemingly continual "interim" nature of those in senior leadership positions has resulted in a general state of "interim fatigue" on the campus. This has taken its toll on faculty and staff members where, in the case of the latter, reporting relationships have frequently changed. This has led to some level of inertia around initiatives as folks are hesitant to take action in anticipation that the next "interim" will change direction or the next supervisor will have different expectations of performance. In particular, this is evident with regard to the President and Provost positions. Generally, the campus is supportive of the direction in which the current senior leadership is moving the campus. That said, there is, simultaneously, a general sense of worry over the campus as people anticipate additional interim appointments. All seem to agree that the sooner there is permanency in positions—in particular the President and Provost—the better it will be for those who have witnessed the constant turnover in leadership.

The current senior leadership at Valdosta has taken significant steps to identify organizational and enrollment issues and champion initiatives that, in both the short- and long-term, will lead to sustainability for this campus. One such initiative has been the 70/80 Task Force on Retention.

The Task Force began meeting in October, 2015 and was charged with:

...progressively increasing the overall retention rate of Valdosta State University towards, and above, 80% through a variety of pragmatic and cultural transformations (October, 2015 Presidential Monthly Report)

With cross-functional representation and chaired by a faculty member, the Task Force parsed its work into developing a strategy to include short term approaches to build on currently successful programs and longer term approaches grounded in cultural change to ensure sustainability of institutional efforts.

The review of Valdosta State University's academic advising program emerged as a way for the Retention Task Force as well as the campus community, to better understand the landscape of academic advising at the institution and to answer questions such as "What is working well?", "What actions can be taken to build upon our successes and address our challenges?", and "How should academic advising be organized and delivered at this comprehensive university to support the success of a diverse student body?" To provide responses to these questions, the consultants reviewed myriad institutional documents, including catalog materials, institutional reports and data, as well as human resource information related to academic advising position descriptions. The consultants also spent three days on the campus meeting with and interviewing campus stakeholders, including administrators, faculty members, staff members and, most importantly, students. What follows are our observations and recommendations for consideration about academic advising at Valdosta State University. It perhaps goes without saying that, in the course of 3 days, it is difficult—especially for outsiders to the culture—to capture everything and then be prescriptive in our recommendations. Our hope is that this document, and the recommendations for consideration in it, will be a useful starting point for a continued dialog about academic advising at Valdosta State University and its contributions to student success.

Academic Advising at Valdosta State University

Until recently, academic advising at Valdosta State University was highly decentralized and school-based. In 2013, a Centralized Advising office was established with responsibility for advising all first-year students. Once students reach the 30-credit threshold and provided they are in good academic standing, they are transitioned to their respective academic colleges for advising. Undeclared students remain with the Centralized Advising office until they declare a major. It should be noted that advisors within Centralized Advising are assigned to specific majors and/or colleges; this liaison relationship appears to be better within some colleges than others.


At the College-level, how academic advising is organized and delivered varies widely. Some colleges, like the College of Business Administration, College of Nursing and Health Sciences, and College of Education and Human Services have advising centers within the respective Dean's office. In these colleges, students who transition from Centralized Advising work with the professional advisors in their college. At a point in time, normally at the upper-division level, students are then transitioned to a faculty advisor who works with them through graduation. Neither the College of the Arts & Sciences nor the College of the Arts have college-based advising centers. In these colleges, students who are ready to transition to their college are assigned faculty advisors.

How faculty advising assignments are made within the Colleges with Advising Centers was not clear, although it is presumed that since these colleges have majors that are considered professional programs, that students are connected with faculty members with whom they share an interest, i.e., a student majoring in marketing would be assigned to a faculty member in Marketing, and so on.

In those Colleges without Advising Centers, advising assignments vary from department to department and, in turn, College to College. For example, in the College of the Arts & Sciences, some departments have a single faculty member responsible for advising; others distribute students among all faculty members.

Not surprisingly, how Centralized Advising, the College Advising Centers, and Faculty Advising is viewed depends in large part, upon the nature of the relationships between and among individuals within the respective areas. The experiences, whether positive or negative, also seem to inform one's views about Centralized Advising and the College Advising Centers. For example, administrators in the College of Business Administration seem to view the relationship with Centralized Advising as a positive one and, in the longer term, think that moving to an all professional staff advising model would be best for Business students. This approach would then allow faculty members to serve as mentors to students and engage them in more career-oriented conversations. In the College of Education and Human Services, faculty seem to be interested in connecting with students earlier, preferably at the point of transition from Centralized Advising to the College; thus bypassing the College-based Advising Center. The College of the Arts & Sciences would seem to prefer to have a College-based Advising Center if, for no other reason, then to have a central point of contact within the Dean's office, to support faculty in their academic advising roles.

There seemed to be no difference of perspective among stakeholders regarding the importance of academic advising to student success and, specifically, the importance of the student-faculty relationship. Virtually all with whom we met were committed to student success and making improvements in academic advising. In addition, although there were some who were less than excited about the Centralized Advising office, it was generally agreed that this office was in its early development and should be given time to mature before shifting to a completely different structure. This perspective also stems from the fact that many are weary of being in a constant state of leadership flux and reorganization. That said, there is a concern that the Centralized Advising office might not be the best model for students



in majors that are cohort-based and/or in which course sequences are such that getting off-track has significant consequences for timely degree completion.

From the student perspective, there appears to be a disconnection between the expressed advising philosophy and actual practice. During our discussions with students, whether those were in a formal meeting setting or informally with students in the Starbucks line, we asked about their majors, their goals, and their perceptions of academic advising. Student responses, regardless of setting, were fairly uniform. More often than not, students viewed advising as “something they had to do to get their flags lifted so they could register for classes.” However, students did express wanting to have substantive conversations with significant others about the relationship between what they are studying and potential career pathways; several pointed to faculty advisors with whom they had solid relationships. One highly engaged, upper-division student with whom we met noted (this student was not a first generation college student) that our questions about his/her future goals was the first time that anyone at the University had asked those questions and engaged in a conversation (albeit short) about his/her career plans. Many of the students with whom we formally met seemed to have family members with college experience who were helpful to them; this would not be the case for first-generation college students of which Valdosta has a significant population. It should also be noted that the Career Services unit, while committed to student success, estimates that professionals in that office only meet with 10-15% of any given entering class over the course of their Valdosta experience.

In addition, the online students that we talked with expressed that they wanted to feel more connected to the university even though they were studying at a distance. They felt that interactions were geared towards on campus students and that they were somewhat marginalized. Specifically noted were office hours that seemed to cater to traditional, on campus students with little thought to distance students. Opportunities for activities such as a Career Fair were again limited to on campus students. Students noted that even small improvements like having pictures of the advisors and faculty available would help distance students to feel connected. Several students mentioned that they had missed important deadlines because no one ever communicated the information to them.

What emerged during the visit were a number of observations about the strengths and challenges facing Valdosta State University as it seeks to bring consistency to its academic advising program. The term consistency is used intentionally here. Generally speaking, the prevailing view on campus by all stakeholders is that academic advising is inconsistent. What follows is a summary of our observations as well as a set of recommendations for consideration. Within each, the consultants have attempted to provide examples to enhance meaning as well as resources that might inform direction.

Strengths and Challenges

The strengths of Valdosta State University are many and that will serve the institution well as it reflects on and develops a cohesive academic advising program. While we mention four specific areas here, in actuality, the primary strength of Valdosta State University is in its commitment to a close examination of itself as that relates to student success. Placing students at the center of this introspective process is essential to making programmatic improvements.

- **The Campus.** It goes without saying that one of Valdosta’s strengths is its campus. The campus is beautiful, the facilities well-maintained, and it is obvious that the current administration is committed to continuous improvement in support of student success. For example, the new space for Centralized Advising in the building that also houses the Registrar, Financial Aid, and Career Services is exciting. The development of this single location for multiple wraparound services

will help facilitate relationship building between Centralized Advising and these other units and, in particular, with Career Services.

- **Enthusiastic Students.** The students with whom we connected at Valdosta State University were fabulous. The ones we met as well as the ones we ‘bumped into’ were enthusiastic about being a “Blazer” and incredibly articulate about their Valdosta experience. The intrinsic motivation exemplified by the students with whom we met (formally and informally) also speaks to one of the challenges facing Valdosta’s academic advising program, that is, its ability to reach all students and not just those whose dispositions are such that they will seek out assistance and advice when needed.
- **Creative Faculty and Staff.** Faculty and staff are willing partners and committed to student success and continuously improving advising practice. Faculty and staff members seem to stay and, in fact, many of the students with whom we spoke were hoping to become employed by Valdosta at some point after graduation. In addition, even during this time of uncertainty regarding leadership, many have initiated efforts to support student success that hold promise for the future. The 70/80 Task Force has identified several what they referred to as “pockets of excellence”; these should be widely shared with the campus.
- **Commitment to Data-Informed Decision-Making.** The work of the IT and Assessment areas in developing the tools to support improvement in academic advising has been extraordinary. The areas are collaborating to develop the technology tools to gather and analyze data to early identify students at risk. Predictive analytics is highly sought after at institutions because it allows for intentional, intrusive and proactive advising with students that are identified early as having academic risk factors or those in the midst of crisis. Anytime you can get to the student either before or during is better than after the student has failed. We were very impressed with the work being done here and suggest that the university continue to support it as you will be able to better serve the needs of your students as well as putting valuable resources into areas that will show returns. Valdosta clearly understands and supports the need to invest in technology and analytics.

The Challenges, specific to academic advising, cluster around several themes, including: communication, organizational structures, philosophy and mission, advisor roles, responsibilities and development, and the use of technology in support of academic advising.

- **Communication and Process.** While every college or university has some level of issue with regard to communication, the current climate of uncertainty suggests a need to pay particular attention to ensuring that important information and key decisions are communicated to those who need to know. In the absence of information, our natural tendency is to construct our own reality. The example, while now over two years ago, that continues to bubble up in conversations, is the creation of the Centralized Advising office. Many commented that “On Friday we had OASIS, and on Monday we had Centralized Advising.” Upon further probing, it appears that discussions about Centralized Advising had taken place at more senior levels; however, in general, this information did not trickle down to faculty and staff members. Whether real or perceived, several presented a view that Centralized Advising was imposed, making the transition difficult as a result of resistance from those who felt excluded from the decision-making process. The decisions regarding which advisors in Centralized Advising would be assigned as liaisons to specific colleges is another case in point. Our observation is that the tension and lack of buy-in that exists between Centralized Advising and the Advising Centers in

some Colleges is the result of this lack of process involvement. The communication between Centralized Advising and the Colleges in general is uneven leading to a lack of confidence about messages being given to students and feelings of disengagement from their majors. At a macro-level, folks expressed concern about what is perceived as a lack of transparency around decision-making that leads to confusion about directions and processes. In addition, we found faculty and staff that were unfamiliar with the role of the 70/80 Committee and few faculty members on that committee. While we recognize that committees can become too large, there does need to be outgoing communication from the group about their charge and what they are doing. The institution needs to make a concerted effort to be more inclusive in process as well as transparent with information and to support multiple forms of information sharing so that faculty, staff and administrators are on the same page.

- **Organizational Structures.** Current structures for academic advising sometimes mean that students must develop relationships with 3 advisors over the course of their Valdosta experience. In Colleges where the transition from Centralized Advising is to a faculty advisor, the number of students to be served outweighs the amount of time faculty members have available, particularly in the College of the Arts & Sciences.
- **Philosophy and Mission.** A review of the website found several different mission statements regarding academic advising at VSU. This is confusing and leads to inconsistency. There needs to be a general, institutional philosophy, vision, values and mission statement with regard to academic advising. Having a set of institutional statements about academic advising does not preclude Colleges and Centralized Advising from creating their own, provided these are aligned with the university's mission.
- **Advisor Roles, Responsibilities, and Development.** Professional development for faculty and staff is limited. While Central Advising gives a Master Advisor training it is not well utilized by faculty. Usage of Graduate Assistants in advising, while holding some potential, is rendered ineffective in the absence of appropriate training and level of compensation over other graduate assistantships on campus. The level of compensation relative to other assistantships on campus contributes to high turnover in this role. This means that training is constant, ongoing, and lacking any substantive depth of the relational and conceptual underpinnings of the field.
- **Technology Improvements to Support Student Success.** Technology improvement priorities are a bit unclear. University web page is unclear when it comes to advising. Competing messages. DegreeWorks is a good audit system, but the initial roll out was marked with inconsistency and has led to faculty doing hand calculations of student transcripts. Students get to their last term and find out they are missing a class thereby extending time and debt to graduation. The issue in many cases appears to be process oriented (the paper application to graduate form) and financial (students lack the \$25 to apply so wait until the last minute).

Key Recommendations

Based on our observations and discussions with stakeholders, a number of recommendations are offered for consideration by the campus. While some may be more longer term and require additional resources, others are more labor than dollar intensive. Under the broader recommendation, the consultants have included some specific initiatives and activities for consideration as well. At the center of the recommendations presented here is centralizing the coordination of academic advising and associated activities within Academic Affairs.

- **Identify Campus-wide Leadership for Academic Advising.** Identify an individual and office with responsibility for actively overseeing and coordinating the entire university's academic advising program. The person identified must have significant background in academic advising at a university level as well as the academic credibility to work with faculty. In addition to campus-wide coordination, the responsibilities of this position would include oversight of training and professional development, assessment, development of advising resources and chairing the Academic Advising Council recommended below, to name a few.

We recommend that this position report to the Provost to connect it with Academic Affairs and signal the importance of advising to the campus. In addition, essential to the success of this role is having support and buy-in from all senior administration, including the Deans of the Colleges. Without this level of authority and responsibility for advising, the inconsistency and confusion that currently exists will continue.

One potential model would place coordination for academic advising within the portfolio of one of the Associate Provosts. Another model would be to appoint an Executive Director or Assistant Provost for Academic Advising. In either case, the Centralized Advising unit would have a direct reporting relationship to this individual.


- **Establish an Academic Advising Council with academic and student affairs stakeholders as members.** Leadership for this Council would come from Academic Affairs and include advising leads in the colleges and faculty advisors along with representatives from the Registrar, Financial Aid, Career Services and IT. The Council would be chaired by the individual responsible for the coordination of advising campus-wide. Among the charges to this Council would be to:
 - Develop a shared understanding of what academic advising is that results in the development of a shared vision, mission, and set of student learning and advising delivery outcomes to be used in the development of an assessment plan.
 - Inventory policies and procedures with the goal of streamlining processes and removing unnecessary barriers for all students.
 - Map the student experience from admission through graduation to identify choke points in the experience.
 - Review orientation and develop outcomes for this important portal to the Valdosta student experience. There is a dissonance between faculty interests in being part of orientation and the Orientation programs perception of the same. Faculty feedback suggested that some felt they were “disinvited” even though they wanted to attend, while the Orientation folks felt that they were removing a burden from faculty. The lack of communication seems to have led to misinterpretations of intentions from both faculty members and those involved with organizing Orientation. From students' perspectives, many indicated that orientation was somewhat chaotic and not particularly welcoming.
- **Bring Consistency to Advisor Roles, Responsibilities, and Professional Development.**
 - Design an advisor training and development program grounded in the NACADA Core Values, CAS Standards and advising and student development theory. As Andersen (1997) noted “Advising is a key to student retention. The best way to keep students enrolled is to keep them stimulated, challenged and progressing toward a meaningful goal. The best way to do that--especially among new students--is through informed academic advising.”
 - Develop a rewards and recognition structure for all advisors. This investment is essential to keeping advisors current and engaged in effective practice. Schlossberg noted that

individuals respond positively when they know that they matter, and when people feel they do not matter then they are marginalized. Rewards and recognition require little outlay from the university, but speak volumes to employees about their value to the institution. In addition, VSU should become intentional about designing and developing a reward process to recognize outstanding academic advisors internally and externally through NACADA recognition program.

- Create a career ladder for academic advising positions. Position descriptions for academic advisors are developed by individual units. Inherently, this creates the potential for responsibility as well as compensation inequities. In fact, there are some inequities that currently exist as a result of restructuring. Reviewing and developing a career ladder for academic advisors at VSU is an important step toward resolving these inequities.
- Intentionally recruit and hire Bilingual (Spanish/English) academic advisors and staff in front facing offices such as Financial Aid, Registrar's, Bursars, Student Housing. Going to university is a family decision for Latino/a's and having Spanish speaking staff will positively impact retention of this population. In addition, make sure to have materials translated into Spanish and hold at least one session at Orientation in Spanish.
- **Use and Market Available Technology.** This particularly applies to use of the degree audit system (DegreeWorks) to facilitate student understanding and benchmarking of requirements and progress to degree as well as the use of technology to facilitate things like the graduation check process (that currently requires students to complete an application). During our visit one of the consultants showed a VSU student who is very active on campus how to read a DegreeWorks audit because the student did not know how to use it. The student was amazed and impressed by how useful DegreeWorks could be, once s/he understood how to read it. Using the technology available to faculty, staff, and students, will enable advisors to have time to engage students in the richer deeper conversations they indicated they value and want. In addition, make the application for graduation an electronic process, and have it start when students reach enough credits to make them seniors. This should be an automatic process and not one triggered by an application submitted by students. Thus students will know two terms out whether they are missing any requirements. While beyond academic advising, it might be worthwhile for VSU to reconsider the \$25 application fee for graduation. This fee seems to be a barrier for students.
- **Develop a Baseline Assessment from which to Benchmark Improvement.** Ideally, the individual coordinating the university's academic advising program would initiate this assessment, the goal of which is to gauge current perceptions of academic advising on campus to inform improvement. The results should be presented in a campus-wide venue with identifiers removed from the data as the goal is to inform improvement, not embarrass any individual or unit

Conclusion

There is no "right or wrong" way to organize a campus' academic advising program. The organization must be the one that is best for the particular institution, its culture, and its students. It must be guided by standards of good practice, such as those contained in the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Academic Advising Programs. What is essential for any structure to work is that there be a high level of buy-in and support. That level of buy-in and support can only emerge when processes are inclusive, collaborative, and respectful. In this regard, the consultants applaud the campus leadership for constituting the 70/80 Retention Task Force as well as the work of the Task Force itself. This is clearly



indicative of a campus willing to take a step back, take a hard look, reflect, and then move forward as a community.

For Valdosta State University, the consultants' view is that at this juncture, campus-wide coordination for academic advising is the single most important action the leadership can take to bring cohesion and consistency to the student advising experience. Other actions, such as structures within Colleges, can flow from and be informed by this central construct. It is understood that current resource constraints make creating advising centers in each college cost-prohibitive and perhaps not practical. The reverse might also be considered, that is, conducting a realistic appraisal of existing advising centers and determining the contributions each makes to the student experience. Key questions need to be asked and actions taken based on what is in the best interest of students. Should the College of Business Administration move toward a professional advising model for all students with faculty mentors? Should the College of the Arts and Sciences create an advising center? Should the College of Education and Human Services change its structure so that faculty members are assigned to students at the point of transition from Centralized Advising? Each of these Colleges (as well as the others) have cultures and a level of academic autonomy that must be respected in any transition. Identifying campus-wide leadership for academic advising is the first move toward having these conversations with those most affected by them, i.e., faculty members, staff members, administrators, and students.

We thank Valdosta State University for the assistance and support for this review. Clearly, the faculty, staff, and administrators are committed to supporting the success of all students. The students we met with, formally and informally, have a deep love for Valdosta State University. They are also anxious to have meaningful conversations about their careers and their pathways to reach their goals, with individuals who understand the curriculum and are willing to mentor them in their journeys to complete their degrees. From our viewpoint, the end goals are clearly shared among all stakeholders; centralizing authority for academic advising and coordinating the conversations about it will certainly help VSU move toward designing a cohesive academic advising program.