



ACADEMIC ADVISING

STUDENT FEEDBACK

PRESENTATION

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PREFACE

This is based on a relatively unscientific sampling of students on campus. Students who provided feedback include a wide cross-section of student leaders (Student Society Presidents from virtually every faculty), a number of board members from URSU, student members of University Council and Senate and various acquaintances of the URSU executive.

Their feedback was occasionally harsh – this has been mostly smoothed out, but the overwhelmingly critical response is reflective of the fact that nearly every student asked had either been affected by inefficient academic advisement or knew someone who had been.

Finally, note the use of the word “inefficient”. Students’ broadly agreed that Advisors are professional and polite, try to be helpful, and are consistently knowledgeable in their specialization. The complaints of students were almost always directed at the system and the constraints placed upon academic advisors.



AVAILABILITY

Students had problems with accessing advisors. They cited the following challenges;

- **Advisor to student ratios** – A mandatory minimum ratio should be established as current ratios are bad. ex: 1 advisor for 1400 students in Engineering
- **Contacting advisors is difficult** – Students' feel there should be a centralized booking system or at least a centralized contact page (especially for new and international students).
- **Priority Access** – Students don't know if there is a capacity to identify or help students who are in particular need or unique need (ex: probation, special demographics, international, ex.)
- **Social Media is no Substitute.** – Students weren't big fans of internet advising; they want real conversations.



AVAILABILITY ANECDOTES

Students shared the following anecdotes about outcomes of Availability problems;

- **Society Advisors** – Student Society's are starting to offer first year advisory sessions to students who can't access Academic Advisors because of multi-week wait times
- **"RA" advisors** – Several RA's reported responding to distress calls for students who were worried/depressed/anxious because they didn't know how to sign up for classes. These calls come at 3am on a Tuesday. RA's feel un-trained and unprepared but help students cope as best they can.
- **Campion and Luther Advantage** - Advisors are noted as being very available; students felt like they could do more to offer innovative supports and career help
- **Office Hours aren't Student Hours** – Students need to be able to access registration at all times. Existing information is difficult to find and is impenetrable for most students.



INFORMATION

Students gave feedback about how and what information is they get from advisors;

- **Only Reactive** – Information about programming changes are only ever circulated to students when they ask advisors; students wondered why it isn't linked on UR Self-Service or alongside course selection
- **Academic Enforcers** – Advisors were reported to be very hesitant to help students with programs outside of the “norm”. Some students perceived advisors as saying “no” and “closing doors” rather than telling students helping students do what they want and “opening doors”.
- **Impersonalized Advising** - Students reported feeling like a number. Advisors don't have time to get to know students (and don't seem to have files on students) so class selection advice is given in a vacuum.

INFORMATION ANECDOTES

Students shared the following anecdotes about outcomes of Information problems;

- **Faculty-Only** – Students who switch faculties in inter-disciplinary degrees found it impossible to get good advice. Advisors don't communicate well amongst each other and mid-stream transfers (ex: BA/BED, 3rd year; students leave ED and become ARTS students) are forced to build new relationships with advisors.
- **SURPRISE!** - Every single student asked either knew someone who had been forced to extend their program or had extended their program because of unclear or incorrect advice.
- **Specialists** – Many Advisors are specialists; If students don't know who is the specialist for their area of study and pick the wrong advisor they receive little or no useful help with class selection.
- **Planning Sheets** – Students loved to receive tables that let them slot in classes. Students wished they were available online rather than only at appointments.



ROLES & SUPPORTS OFFERED

Students identified following unmet needs;

- **Referrals** – Students often need to be referred to other services, advisors with different areas of expertise, tutoring etc. There is no “priority line” for referrals which means students spend days or weeks in limbo
- **Academic ‘Enforcers’** – Some students felt advisors acted as door closers (telling people what wasn’t possible) rather than door openers (letting people know what they can do). This was very frustrating.
- **Career Advice!** – Students want to ask “I want this job; what classes should I do? Who should I seek out? Are there student groups or professional groups I should be affiliated with? External designations?”. This information generally isn’t available. Some students felt advisors were acting more as “class schedulers” rather than advisors.



ROLES AND SUPPORT ANECDOTES

Students shared the following anecdotes about lack of role clarity and advisor support;

- **The Overwhelmed advisor** – One student leader had an advisor reach out to him and ask him to “make friends with and introduce to other students” for a student who was severely depressed and who was on academic probation. The Advisor didn’t have time. The student has been directed to proper psychiatric help.
- **Problems with inclusivity** – One student reached out to an executive informally after she withdrew from University. This student suffers from a chronic illness and at the start of her semester, an advisor recommended she take 3 classes to be classified as full time to qualify for scholarships and other funding. The student felt the pressure to take full-time classes but couldn’t manage them during her sick days. She felt that the advisor was too “textbook” with her, rather than examining her personal circumstance and helping her make realistic goals.

PEYAK ASKI KIKAWINAW & CONCLUSION

At URSU we feel that improving Academic Advising on our campus is one of the most significant benefits students all students will feel as part of Peyak Aski Kikawinaw. All students will benefit from a more consistent and robust Academic Advising experience.

We also feel that addressing these problems can have a significant positive impact on student mental health by reducing stress and anxiety sources on campus. Addressing the issues in this presentation and other is of critical significance to our students.

Finally, we feel that there are substantial sustainability benefits in improving this model. Notably, financial and administrative efficiencies are almost guaranteed as faculties move away from a “faculty-only” advising model to one that is more interconnected and collaborative, more student friendly and more efficient. We encourage deans to consider student stakeholders and move to a “shared” model of academic advisement.



QUESTIONS?