Summary: Equitable Advising Pilot

Following a year of planning, in 2016 the University Advising Executive Committee proposed to the Provost an initiative called “equitable advising.” Its intent is to increase students’ success and persistence to graduation by freeing up advisors’ time from routine tasks and targeting their professional skills to students with high needs, or needs for higher-level conversations. Allied goals include opening up student access to course registration in a timely fashion to secure needed seats for progress in their degrees, thus assisting departments with section management and hiring decisions.

The data informing this recommendation included an advisor workload study; analysis of registration holds; study of advising systems nationally; availability of new advising communication tools (SSC Campus); analysis of advisor caseloads; and analysis of seat availability in high demand courses.

The equitable advising initiative focuses on developing student self-sufficiency for simple registration and degree audit tasks, and decouples advising and registration for students who are making good progress after their freshman year and before a junior-year check-in. It is not about preventing students from seeing advisors; quite the reverse. Decoupling of academic advising from course registration supports the goal of providing advising in an equitable, not equal, manner, and creates time for deeper conversations with students.

Mandatory advising, i.e., with a registration hold, remains in place for students who have fewer than 30 semester credits at WSU or more than 75. This includes both first-year students and transfer students. These students are the most academically and socially vulnerable as they transition to WSU. During these meetings, advisors assist students with the tools for educational success, both technological and academic.

Once students have progressed beyond their first year, they will have the knowledge and experience to more successfully navigate their educational paths. Students with 30-75 credits will not be required to meet with an advisor only to register for classes. Assigned advisors will still be available to students for all other advising topics: educational goals, internships, career choice, and study abroad. All these will have time and space to occur that for too many students is lacking now. A required meeting with a full-time or faculty advisor would take place at the point of graduation application (or 75 credits) to ensure students are on track, and to check that requirements are met. Students can meet with advisors at any time, subject to advisors’ availability.

The pilot has run for four semesters. For the pilot, a threshold GPA was set (2.0). Pilot data show that student outcomes in terms of progress to degree, GPA, course selection, academic deficiency, and so on are no different than the student population not part of the pilot. However, the pilot has surfaced a several concerns that may or may not result in a request to defer full-scale implementation to Fall 2019:

- Unsustainable manual processes for entering, changing, and deleting students from the grouping in the SIS as they move through credit milestones and other statuses (e.g., academic deficiency). Currently this falls on an already overloaded clinical instructor who has volunteered to do it. ES will need to be more involved to develop some kind of automation for the long run.
- Concern that sufficient support materials will not be in place in time for Fall 2018 universal rollout, given ongoing delays in some key technologies from ES.

Advising leaders Susan Poch and Terese King are working with the Equitable Advising leadership group to determine solutions and timelines.