

Jeremy Thomas is the current president of the Texas Academic Advising Network and has served a total of four years on the board in various positions. In his position as president, Mr. Thomas represents over forty institutions and an active membership of over three hundred academic advisors. During his term on the board participation in the annual conference has tripled, training for groups such as Licensed Professional Counselors was added, and ties to state and national organizations was strengthened.

He has spent the last nine years working in higher education. Mr. Thomas spent five years working at the university level and the past four years at the community college level in various administrative roles. He is currently the Director of Admissions and Enrollment Services at Angelina College.

Mr. Thomas' academic areas of expertise include academic advising development, student motivation, and student development. He is a doctoral candidate in education at Grambling State University. He received a Graduate Certificate in Academic Advising from Kansas State University and a Master of Education degree from Northwestern State University.

He has conducted presentations at the National Academic Advising Association Annual Conference, Louisiana Academic Advising Association, Texas Academic Advising Network, National Association of Developmental Educators, and the Council for Adult and Experimental Learning International Conference. Most of my research has centered on student success as it pertains to academic advising, adult motivation, and summer bridge programs.

Mr. Thomas holds memberships with the National Academic Advising Association, Texas Academic Advising Network, Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Offices, and Phi Delta Kappa International. He currently serves as a community college representative on the ApplyTexas Advisory Committee.

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I would like to thank the senate higher education committee for their attention to such an important topic. Academic Advising is a critical function that does not often garner enough attention and is essential to academic success at higher education institutions. On behalf of the Texas Academic Advising Network and its membership, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am hopeful that these hearings will prove useful in the further development of the field.

How do we define advising?

It is interesting to know the large number of varied definitions you may get on a single campus and across the state. For many in higher education, students and parents see advising as only helping with course selection and registration. In some cases, advising may be used as the carrot for other initiatives across the university (such as Orientation which usually ends with students being told they will be advised and registered). With such a limited view of advising it is not hard to see why advising is often the “fall” guy. Academic advising is not just registering or getting students in classes. As an academic advisor you must be aware of the various state, federal, and institutional policies and procedures as well as the short and long term consequences there might be for the student. An

academic advisor is an advocate for the student and institution as well as state policies and guidelines.

I believe my colleagues in 2005 clearly defined the concept of academic advising. Below is the preamble and link to not only the concept of academic advising but also National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) statement of core values and CAS: Standard and Guidelines for Academic Advising.

Academic advising is integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education. Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community. Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution. Regardless of the diversity of our institutions, our students, our advisors, and our organizational structures, academic advising has three components: curriculum (what advising deals with), pedagogy (how advising does what it does), and student learning outcomes (the result of academic advising).

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Concept-advising-introduction.htm>

Advising at a State level

As a state, we currently have the lower academic course guide, Texas Common Course Numbering (TCCN), Field of Study (FOS), and a Common Core but applications of these policies vary from institution to institution as variation may occur. For example, is it easy for a student that needs 6 hours of the Core component area in History to know that if they took HIST 1301 at institution X and transferred to institution Y, that they would only need to complete (HIST 1302)? However, this might not be as clear for a student trying to satisfy the core Government requirement.

There are also state policies such as *Undergraduate Credit Limitation*, *Three-Attempt Rule* and *6-drop limit* that students and advisors must also be informed about and know the short term and long term consequences. For example, if a student has completed multiple Associate Degrees and later decides to return to complete a bachelor's degree he or she could be faced with being assessed an additional charge due to the credit limitation.

Often a student will say “my advisor told me to take it” -as a reason for taking a class they didn't need for their degree or when a course doesn't apply.

Many times when talking or working with a student you learn that the “advice” was that of a friend or family member who didn’t know the specifics of the student’s degree requirements or in some cases the student just took the class because their friend was taking it. Generally, in the cases where students have taken courses that don’t apply, it’s usually a result of changing majors (going from a degree with limited restriction to one that is very restricted) or degree type (Associate to Bachelor) or transferring from multiple institutions.

Advisor Diversity

Academic advisors themselves are as diverse as the students they serve. I am not referring to ethnicity, but I am speaking of educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and job requirements. There is no way to define a “typical” advisor. The requirements vary across the state. Some advisors have bachelor degrees, while others have doctorates. Some academic advisors have degrees based in a behavioral science such as counseling while others may have more specific degrees that fall within the field they are advising. One size does not fit all, and institutions must pick their type of advisor to meet institutional mission and goals.

Professional advisors are generally full or part-time staff positions that are sometimes located within a specific department or may be part of a larger advising

center. The mode of delivery and model varies from campus to campus. Why? Because the model used is designed to meet the specific needs of the institution. Some small institutions may use faculty only for advising or may have a central advising center where advisors are experts in all majors. Others may use advisors within specific colleges or departments. Most institutions have evaluated which model works best for them. This evaluation must be done locally and systematically, meet the needs of students, and be designed to meet the institutions overall mission.

Often there are differences in the expectation and duties of the faculty and professional advisor. Faculty are experts in their field and often have a sense about career opportunities, carry smaller advising loads, and often do not advise lower classmen. The relationship between the student and advisor (faculty or professional staff) is important and something that many advising programs pursue as a means to improve student persistence.

Advising Expectations

Regardless of the advising model, advisors should be encouraged to recognize the need to support and challenge their advisees to understand the commitment, hard work, and resilience that are essential to success – in college

and in life. With this in mind, we must remember that it is often necessary to offer different faculty and professional advisors trainings.

Training Options

The content of an advisor development program can also vary depending on the situation. Some schools develop their own program, while others use outside sources. At some campuses they consider it required to attend conferences, while others do not. Annual conferences hosted by individual institutions, state meetings held by the Texas Academic Advising Network, and conferences held by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) afford academic advisors the opportunity to share ideas and receive training that may not otherwise be available.

Over the last year the state advising organization, Texas Academic Advising Network, has enhanced our annual conference as a result of a very active board and membership. For example, last year we were authorized to offer continuing education units (CEU) to Licensed Professional Counselors, and this year we plan to add Licensed Social Worker CEUs. To continue meeting the needs of our membership we are working to add a pre-conference workshop on ethics.

Graduate programs have begun to appear, and we encourage our membership to enroll. NACADA and Kansas State University created a graduate certificate in Academic Advising five years ago to encourage continued

development in the field. They have since introduced a Master's program. Sam Houston State University has a similar graduate certificate program.

Accountability

Accountability in advising also varies throughout the state depending on the specific policies of the institution. Most institutions take the approach that we must be accurate in our advice every time and take disciplinary action when repeated "misadvising" occurs. Institutions and organizations follow policies as outlined in the NACADA core values and Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education guidelines.

As an organization, NACADA promotes best practices and recognizes outstanding advising by program, faculty, and professional advisors and provide funding for graduate work.

Transfer Students

As complicated as advising can be, it is more challenging when working with transfer students. At the community college, advisors have the extra burden of being academic major experts not only for their school, but also trying to make sure they are considering the courses that will or will not work at the multiple institutions the student is considering. Transfer students enter the community college for multiple reasons and often have no idea where or what degree they

want to complete. For example, a major course requirement in engineering from the University of Texas at Tyler is different from that of Texas A&M. These individuals may also enroll in multiple institutions concurrently both physically and through electronic delivery.

A simple, “I am an engineering major” is often not enough to meet the needs of the student. In order to be properly advised, it is important to provide them with as much information as possible to help the student make informed decisions.

P-16/Dual Credit

With over 90,000 high school students taking college courses mostly through their local community college, there is extra pressure to provide academic advising earlier. Many colleges in the state have developed partnerships with local school districts to begin providing career services in the eighth grade. The invention of the early college has now brought freshmen and sophomore high schools students to our door step with the added complexities of meeting high school and college requirements. Classes offered to high school students are usually basic core required courses that work in most degree programs, but not all. An advisor must be aware of future goals and plans of this young student.

Closing Remarks

It is our feeling that there are many good academic advising practices in our state. State and national organizations offer our member institutions the

opportunity to share information and develop new competencies. The Texas Academic Advising Network allows for the sharing and training of ideas with colleges in our own state. As a general rule, here are ideas that we feel should be kept in mind when looking at accountability of an academic advising program.

1. Advisor to advisee ratios should be developed in a way that each student is given enough time to meet with their advisor without being rushed.
2. A reward system should be established through awards, stipends, and other forms of recognition.
3. Faculty advisors should be allowed to count advising in their workload, tenure process, or receive some other form of compensation.
4. All faculty and professional advisors should be required to attend professional development opportunities regularly to update their advising skills. These opportunities should include training on state and federal policies and procedures.
5. Annual performance evaluations of advisors should be conducted.
6. Advising programs should be evaluated routinely to ensure student needs are met.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I am available for any follow-up questions you may have.

Texas Academic Advising Network

Charge 4: Accountability

Respectfully submitted,

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