

# **Report from the Advising Committee**

**2017-2018**

## **Introduction**

Students, alumni, faculty and staff alike agree that mentoring relationships with students are a hallmark of DePauw. Yet, by many measures, the mission of advising at DePauw is hardly defined and development and evaluation of advising is arguably nonexistent. The quality of advising varies from one extreme of harming students' academic and emotional wellbeing, to the opposite extreme of creating lifelong trust from giving sage professional and emotional guidance and support. Tightly coupled to this variance is the severe inequity in faculty advising loads. The current system rewards bad advising with smaller loads because students naturally flock to the good advisors. The current structure of advising is not healthy nor can the positive aspects be sustained. Though there are many dedicated faculty who regularly and passionately advise a great number of students to meet advising needs, burnout is inevitable.

A serious and committed restructuring of advising, including its review in faculty promotion, must occur to restore and continue that aspect of DePauw frequently listed by all members of the DePauw community as most rewarding: mentoring relationships with students. With the implementation of the Commitment and its renewed focus on advising both in the curriculum and beyond, a broader restructuring of advising is of immediate concern to insure success of the Commitment and avoid increased inequity of workload among both faculty and staff advisors.

## **Proposed Actions**

The inequities of advising quality and workload present only one aspect of the same inequities in University service. In order to address advising issues and support the advising needs of the Commitment, most of the action items we propose require assessment and restructuring of service expectations in general. We wish to draw attention to a report from the Advising Committee submitted to COF in May of 2014 that suggested a few action items

centered on increasing the importance of advising that received no response. We feel that currently the challenges to advising are much broader and systemic, rooted in faculty expectations and review regarding university service. A deep evaluation and restructuring of DePauw policy on expectations and review is critical.

Though, we doubt the long term effectiveness of any actions that skirt these deeper issues, we recognize the complexity and difficulty of addressing the root issue. Therefore, we propose below a possible interim solution following some proposed action items that do address the root issue.

#### 1. Mission Statement on Advising

DePauw should revisit and review its advising mission statement and supporting statements of expectations for advising in the faculty review process. Advising should be evaluated according to similar metrics and standards as teaching or scholarly work. The current metrics are insufficient to highlight the importance of this service and do not ensure the quality of advising that DePauw should expect. These concerns extend to the expectations of university committee service and similar restructuring should occur to address this tightly connected issue. Crafting such a mission statement and review criteria is complex and will require collaborative effort between the Advising Committee, the Review Committee and administration.

To begin the process these committees need to perform an analysis of current service loads. Because advising and other service is tightly coupled to departmental needs, such as through FYS courses or DPC service, a university led initiative must begin by auditing service loads within each department. In particular, departments should perform an audit of advising loads. The Office of the Registrar can assist with this task.

#### 2. Staff Advising

The University needs to establish and maintain a more collaborative relationship between faculty and staff in advising, particularly to the Commitment. For many years interested staff members could attend the New Advisor Orientation where they learned advising from the faculty-advisor angle, mostly academic requirements and policies. In recent years, Staff Institute on the Thursday of New Advisor Orientation decreased staff participation. Faculty advisors' knowledge of staff members' angle on advising is limited. As Commitment advisors are trained

and begin their work, staff advising workload needs to be evaluated to ensure proper reassignment of duties or additional compensation. The Advising Committee warns that staff frequently receive additional responsibilities without additional support.

Staff often have better training and expertise in co-curricular advising than faculty members. Because of this training and expertise, many institutions employ professional advising staff as the only advisors for undeclared students. It has been noted recently that many from the student body leadership said they have greater confidence in staff in discussing their co-curricular experiences. It is reasonable to expect that dedicated faculty advisors who have or will receive required training on co-curricular advising will also be successful in both winning student trust and effectively advising them in the broader liberal arts experience. Part of this model is that both faculty and staff, both properly trained, will contribute to Commitment advising. Working together in training and directly advising students, faculty and staff can have a greater positive impact on our students.

### **An Interim Structure of Service**

Our primary consideration is to have quality advising for each student in both the curriculum and the Commitment. An additional important consideration is to maintain equity in faculty service loads. Ideally, all faculty would be expected to contribute equally to quality advising and committee service. It is clear from faculty and student responses from recent surveys administered by the Advising Committee, the Student Pathway Working Group and the Writing Curriculum Committee, that not all faculty provide the quality of advising we seek for every student. Also, in the faculty survey on advising given last spring (2017) a fraction of respondents suggested that all faculty should be held accountable to quality advising. A similar fraction of respondents suggested that only those that are good advisors should do the advising. Currently there are no clear expectations from our University culture as well as faculty review processes as to faculty duties and accountability towards advising. Working within this culture to address our primary concern of insuring quality advising for each student, the Advising Committee proposes the following interim model of service expectations for the faculty.

In addition to other aspects of academic service, faculty will be expected to contribute to meaningful service consistently and regularly in advising and/or university wide committee work. The overall service load in these two areas combined will be equally balanced across the faculty. After departmental discussion, some faculty can select to fulfill their service by advising only majors, advising only undeclared students in the curriculum, advising only undeclared students in the Commitment, only fulfilling obligations on committees or a combination of these. The exact distribution of service will be determined by faculty interest, department needs and university needs. Both departments and faculty governance should insure committee service and advising needs are met equitably,

We present here an example. A large department with many majors discusses the needs of their students and comes to consensus that a few faculty are best suited to advise the majors. These faculty divide up the load such that two faculty have a significant number of advisees sufficient to satisfy service expectations in the category of advising and committee work and thereby are not given additional duties on university committees. Another faculty member is also assigned a lesser number of major advisees but, in teaching a first-year seminar, also advises one section of undeclared students. The department determines this combined load is also sufficient to fulfill service expectations without additional university committee service. Another faculty member also advises one section of undeclared students associated with a second FYS and takes on other cohorts of students as their Commitment advisor. Yet another faculty member chooses to be a Commitment advisor to some cohorts of students, while another faculty member takes on one cohort of students as their Commitment advisor and also service on a University committee. Other faculty members in the department accept significant committee service either in a heavy committee or on multiple committees. In each of these cases the department and university determine that the expected service toward advising and committee work is satisfied.

Numerous other scenarios can reasonably meet the departmental and university needs to insure equity in service load and quality advising. Placing specific quotas is not effective since each type of service places different demands on faculty time and each department has varying numbers of majors and curricular needs. We hope that individual faculty members, departments,

and faculty governance will thoughtfully apply these rules to support each student and faculty member by insuring all advising, FYS instruction, and committee needs are met in an equitable way. It is expected that over the course of years, such as within the review cycle, each faculty member will have contributed substantially to quality advising and university wide committee work.

## **Conclusion**

This report summarizes the results from numerous meetings and surveys given to faculty and staff. Currently the expectations and understanding of advising is considered by students, faculty and staff to be inequitable and generally varying in quality. There is inequity in advising undeclared students, in many departments for majors and across campus in contributing to committee work in general. For years it has become increasingly difficult to staff FYS and fill committee vacancies. There has been some restructuring in governance in recent years to balance committee workload and hold all faculty responsible to expectations for quality advising. It has been insufficient though, in that vacancies remain despite requests of the Chair of the Faculty and the VPAA. A deep assessment of faculty expectations and review in service and advising is critical for the wellbeing of the institution.