

Recommendations for Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management

Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Subcommittee, AY 2018-19

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Introduction

The AY 2018-19 Faculty Senate Academic Affairs subcommittee was charged with building recommendations from faculty for the incoming Associate Vice Provost of Enrollment Management. The purpose of these recommendations is to facilitate the new hire's transition by providing context and a sense of UCA's existing culture and priorities. In many ways, faculty are second-tier stakeholders in this search. Though enrollment, recruitment, and retention efforts affect every member of the UCA community, the effects on faculty are generally indirect. For example, EM policies affect students in ways that ultimately shape classroom practices, particularly early in the semester. EM offices often require information about students' attendance and performance from faculty, and conversely, students often request help in navigating EM procedures from faculty. In other words, policy and procedures are determined by the offices themselves based on the needs of students, and faculty involvement is tangential. For this reason, the subcommittee chose to engage in wide-ranging fact-finding to inform our recommendations.

Method

The subcommittee approached the task of gathering data in two stages. First, each member of the subcommittee reached out to the offices that will report directly to the new AVP and/or that play a significant role in recruitment and retention: Academic Advising, Admissions, Athletic Advising, Financial Aid, Registrar, Department of Student Transitions, and Transfer Services. Some members of the subcommittee conducted formal SWOT analyses; others had less formal discussions. Most met in person, though some communicated via email. All focused on gathering information about affordances and constraints of the current configuration and processes, hopes and concerns about the new position, and priorities for attention or change moving forward.

Once the subcommittee had met with representatives from these offices, we compiled our notes and identified themes that emerged repeatedly. In this preliminary stage, we identified communication--in multiple directions and iterations--as a strong value across all offices.

In the second stage of fact-finding, the subcommittee sought input from students. Subcommittee Chair Anthony McMullen attended a Student Government Association meeting in order to solicit

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information and invite interested students to a subcommittee meeting. Five students accepted the invitation and attended our November 28, 2018 meeting, and provided substantial insight into their experiences navigating EM offices and procedures. That being said, upon reflection the subcommittee recognized that it would have been beneficial to have gathered information from a more diverse and representative sample of students.

Like the staff, students frequently cited communication as an important value. In reflecting upon their comments, the subcommittee noticed that many of the themes that emerged from problems that occurred during students' transitions from one stage or office to another, whether because of a lack of support or students' lack of information on the support that was available. In synthesizing and articulating the themes that were shared by staff and students, as well as our own concerns as faculty, we placed the themes into two broad categories of findings: communication and transition points. These categories are supplemented by a synthesis of positive comments and a discussion of more concrete needs such as resources and facilities.

Findings

Affordances and Benefits Across the board, stakeholders were in favor of the new position, open to new ideas, and looking forward to the opportunity to make positive changes. Most offices, particularly those with more experienced staff with a longer tenure at UCA, cited positive internal working environments, hard-working personnel, and a generally satisfying day-to-day work experience. Changes that have been implemented in the past three years have improved conditions in some areas and have created a strong foundation for further development in others.

Communication Though communication within the offices is described as effective, communication between and among offices, with students, and with faculty was identified as a source of problems by the vast majority of stakeholders.

The students' perception is that representatives of the various offices do not have sufficient information about the roles of the other offices to aid students in solving problems. The data indicates that, while this is likely true in some instances, it is equally likely that students may not have enough information to present their problems clearly in seeking help. In either case, there is a lack of clarity about which offices oversee which parts of various processes. Duplication and redundancies among offices likely contribute to this lack of clarity.

Lines of communication between faculty and various offices have room to improve. In some cases, EM offices need information from faculty, but that information is not provided in a timely manner. Examples include reporting nonattendance and submitting progress reports via GradesFirst. In other cases, faculty need information from or about EM offices and have difficulty tracking it down. For example, the Registrar's office pointed out that they need to more effectively communicate state and UCA requirements to faculty advisors.

As mentioned above, students often do not have sufficient information about the purviews and procedures of the various EM offices. Most of the necessary information is conveyed at SOAR;

however, students who cannot or do not attend SOAR may not receive any formal explanation of university operations or their own responsibilities in navigating them. Further, even students who do attend SOAR are unlikely to have perfect recall of all of the information presented. The subcommittee believes students would be better served by reference materials that are accessible in the moment of need.

Transition points Staff and students agree that problems are most likely to occur at points of transition. While stronger communication will ease some of these transitions, by their nature they are high-risk points in the process.

Prospective student to enrolled student

The transition from prospective student to enrolled student is the most complex and potentially confusing, particularly for first generation students who might have few family resources to help navigate the transition. Many of UCA's EM are involved in this transition; the Admissions office points out the need for a "softer handoff" between Admissions and other offices such as Advising and Financial Aid. UCA has many programs and resources already in place to facilitate this process, for both first-year students and transfer students. Perhaps because of the number of offices involved, students report getting conflicting information and/or information that later turns out to have been incorrect.

Students also mentioned the importance of social relationships in navigating these transitions. Students often remind each other of deadlines and share other information about navigating the institution; these helpful relationships might grow from living in proximity, attending the same classes, and being involved in organizations on campus. However, several students did not feel ready to join social groups immediately upon arrival on campus, opting instead to focus on course work. By the time they felt ready, organizations--particularly non-Greek organizations--were no longer advertising.

Advising center to faculty advisors

The Faculty Senate Academic Affairs subcommittee of AY 2017-18 produced a report on Best Practices in Advising that compiled data on advising practices at UCA's peer and aspirant institutions. To that information, we would add a few observations from the perspective of UCA students. First, students who come in with a substantial number of hours and students with double majors report having difficulty coordinating among the advising center and multiple faculty advisors. Relatedly, students who come in with hours are, in many ways, treated as sophomores despite not having the institutional and procedural knowledge of a second-year student. We don't always think of high-achieving or well-prepared students as being at risk, but it appears that there are points at which they could be more fully supported. Finally, students reported a preference for seeking disciplinary and career mentoring from faculty advisors and advice on navigating state and UCA requirements from the advising center. This preference is aligned with the findings of last year's report on faculty preferences for their own roles as advisors.

Lower-division courses to upper-division courses

Students expect the transition from lower-division to upper-division courses to be a challenge, and recognize the increased complexity and rigor of coursework as necessary and desirable. This transition, students reported, is one in which they relied more heavily on their personal relationships on campus for academic, social, and emotional support. Students who have not developed these relationships--and the attachments to campus they comprise--early on may find it more difficult to make the leap from lower-division to upper-division coursework.

Recommendations

The subcommittee anticipates that the EM offices will communicate their needs, priorities, and concerns directly to the new AVP. For this reason, we have focused our recommendations on a synthesis of our findings rather than attempting to serve as an intermediary between the AVP and their direct reports. Because of the importance of communication and listening to all stakeholders, our primary and overarching recommendation is to spend a significant amount of time learning about the culture of each EM division. We expect anyone coming into this position to take steps to make the position his/her own. At the same time, however, we do not want any anticipated changes to override any positive steps that any of the divisions may be making toward the issues raised in this document. That said, based on what the subcommittee has learned so far, we have the following recommendations:

- Address discrepancies in morale, turnover, and compensation among EM offices.
 - While some EM offices report a positive work experience, that is not the case across the board. Some offices report losing employees to other divisions on campus simply because of inadequate pay, while others are concerned about parity with other institutions. There is also loss due to employees outgrowing positions and taking opportunities elsewhere (internal and external to UCA). This turnover results in a constant need to train new employees.
- Reduce duplication and redundancies in EM processes; streamline chain of command.
 - With many relevant EM offices coming under one umbrella, there will be opportunities to eliminate unnecessary redundancies. In some cases, the conditions that created the institutional structure are no longer in place. (Some of these conditions were eliminated by the very nature of creating this new AVP position.)
- Streamline print and online resources for students and faculty.
 - As previously stated, students (and faculty advisors) are inadequately informed about each of the functions of EM offices.
 - We specifically recommend developing a print document, such as an FAQ or flow chart, for quick reference to be used by students and faculty to determine whether to go for particular issues. (See Torreyson Library Survival Guide for an excellent example of a streamlined guide.)
 - This will also be helpful for the Office of Admissions, which is often seen as the “front door” to campus. While their role is limited, the Office of Admissions often receives questions that go beyond recruitment or the admissions process. While that office has

taken steps to pull together materials to solve this problem, a streamlined interface would assist that office in helping others.

- Build upon existing peer-support programs to foster a greater connection to the UCA community.
 - UCA has developed a number of peer-support resources, including supplemental instruction, peer coaching, tutoring services, and the Center for Writing and Communication. Our experience as faculty members suggest that students thrive when they are able to learn the low-risk environment that peer-support programs allow. We fully endorse continued support and development of these programs.
 - This can also be done by promoting resources such as the numerous student organizations on campus (particular those that serve a social function but are not necessarily connected to the Greek system). SGA suggested that some students come onto campus reluctant to participate in extracurricular activities, believing that they must be completely focused on their academics. While we as faculty members appreciate the learning that takes place in the classroom, we also recognize the role that activities outside of the classroom play in the college experience.
- Consider facilities for students taking classes in the Department of Student Transitions. While the Department of Student Transitions is not directly under the AVP of EM position, the subcommittee recommends that we be attentive to how resources and facilities affect students' perceptions of how they are valued by the institution.
 - The Department of Student Transitions is for students who are taking what are frequently called "remedial" courses. Most of their classes are in Old Main, the oldest building on campus. UCA is often praised for its beautiful campus and classrooms, but that cannot be said for Old Main. While the building is certainly functional, we wonder the effect on student morale when students taking transition classes see their peers taking courses in nicer facilities. We acknowledge that there may be nothing that can be done at this time, as space on campus is limited. However, this should be an aspirational goal as the University considers space in the future.
- In seeking feedback and recommendations from the student body, look beyond consulting with SGA. While that body is clearly an excellent starting point, we suggest reaching out to a more diverse variety of student leaders on campus as well.

Respectfully submitted,
Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Subcommittee AY 2018-19

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