

Service Improvement Area: Academic Advising

Service Goals:

- Improved information access for students and advisors on academic requirements and student records.
- Greater opportunities for exploring academic goals and options.
- Closer integration of general advising, major advising, and post-graduate or career advising.

These areas have been noted to be of particular concern at previous student retreats and in a campus-wide review of undergraduate advising programs conducted several years ago.

Area Service Improvement Summary:

Primary improvement so far (in progress):

- *Implementation of an online "Degree Audit" and Catalog program.* Currently, undergraduate students must coordinate information from several advisors, rarely located in the same place, in order to obtain an accurate and complete assessment of their academic progress. The inconvenience and asynchrony of this process results in a failure to seek academic advising and perpetuates misinformation and resulting mistrust. The new system will have tremendous positive impact on the ability of students to participate in the advising processes essential to their academic success, and to then take an active role in the meaningful dialogue that goes into the construction of their best possible individualized academic program. The facility, convenience and integrity of an integrated degree audit and online catalog program will permit students to be far better informed about their current academic status and the multiple paths available to them. Our academic advising process for both general and major academic programs will evolve from one that dwells upon credit counting and bookkeeping to one which is content-rich in exploring academic and career alternatives. In addition, the availability of the electronic degree audit will demystify the graduation certification process, permitting students unfettered and real-time access to their academic status and progress.

Given the current timetable, all Catalogs should be available in online (searchable database) format as of July 1, 2005. "Degree Audit" should be available for use by advisors in the fall, and should then be ready for use the following spring.

Future Service Improvements:

The Task Force on Undergraduate Education is reviewing recommendations that would integrate responsibility for general academic advising and major advising within single academic units (as is now the case, e.g., in Pharmacy), rather than separately as is currently the case for many programs. In addition, recommendations about improved faculty involvement in the advising process, improved institutional support for graduate and professional school advising, and the integration of that and career advising with the other areas of advising, are under review. The implementation of these aspects of the Task Force's ultimate recommendations should greatly improve service in all such areas.

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Service Improvement Area: Providing assistance to students in addressing difficult and complex issues related to academics, student life and other concerns.

Service Goal:

To establish an Ombudsperson for Students who will provide a neutral, independent, knowledgeable, confidential, and non-binding resource for students seeking to address their most grievous concerns in a timely and appropriate manner, outside of formal university processes.

Area Service Improvement Summary:

The Ombudsperson for Students position has been established. The position has been posted on the Rutgers website, and was advertised in appropriate external publications throughout January. An Ombudsperson for Students Advisory Committee has been established, and is also acting as the search committee for this position. A very large number of applications and nominations have been received from both within and outside of the university. The Committee is currently in the process of narrowing the pool of candidates to a smaller number, and will likely begin interviewing prospective candidates within the month. We hope to select the first Ombudsperson for Students by the end of the semester.

Future Service Improvements:

In addition to assisting individual students, the Ombudsperson will identify systemic inequalities and inefficiencies in existing procedures and practices that result in regular misunderstandings, frustrations, and lost opportunities for students. The Ombudsperson will evaluate and propose changes to policies, procedures, or environments, and will provide ongoing consultative advice to senior administrators to improve the university's service to students. The Ombudsperson will work cooperatively with university faculty, administrators, and students to ensure a common understanding of student-related rights and responsibilities, to provide alternative methods for resolving issues, and to help students communicate effectively and navigate their way through university academic and student life policies, procedures, resources and services.

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