Chapter 10
Boosting Retention Through a Foundation of Academic Advising

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ABSTRACT
While there is no direct causal link between academic advising and increased student persistence, the role of the academic advisor can be key to an institution’s success. This chapter examines one university’s approach to redesigning the academic advising model from the ground up and committing to a philosophy of continuous improvement in academic advising, retention and student success. A decade in the making, the tools and approaches created through this process now play an important part in the institution’s success and can be a road-map for other institutions to follow as they aspire to revise and improve their academic advising models and to improve student success.

INTRODUCTION
Mission: The mission of this chapter is to provide an institutional example of improved student persistence through systematic improvements in academic advising and focused assessment of academic advising programs.

Many researchers point to academic advising as having an integral impact on student retention (Anderson, 1997; Kuh, 1997; Gardner, 2003; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2004). However, there is no direct causal link between academic advising and improved persistence outcomes. Yet, in absence of this direct link, few would argue that academic advising plays an important role in the student experience (Habley, 1987; Clark, 1989). This chapter will share the example of one institution’s successful efforts to use academic advising as a foundation for improving student retention.

Nearly every college student can recall interactions with an academic advisor since that individual often helps the student select his or her first academic courses and sometimes helps in the selection of the major program. It is the idea of open, unfettered student access throughout the academic lifecycle.
that puts academic advisors in such an influential position when it comes to retention. There are few opportunities for students to build an impactful and meaningful relationship with a staff member of the university. According to Habley (1994), “academic advising is the only structured service on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for on-going, one-to-one contact with a concerned representative of the institution” (p. 10). While faculty members will change from one semester to the next, an advisor can be a consistent thread that helps to tie all of the semesters together for a student. The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) provides recognized guidelines for the field of academic advising. CAS explains the importance of academic advising as, “a crucial component of the college experience, academic advising encourages students to cultivate meaning in their lives, make significant decisions about their futures, and access institutional resources” (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2013, p. 3).

BACKGROUND

Brandman University (BU) is a private, non-profit institution. It is a part of the Chapman University System and was established in 1958 at El Toro Marine Base in California. The university’s roots were originally established by serving military students and over time program offerings expanded to locations on several military bases. Though BU continues to serve military students, the university has expanded to include additional campuses located in civilian areas. These military and civilian campuses serve working adult student populations who wish to pursue a college degree or certificate or to complete a degree program or course of study that was previously interrupted or put on hold. This expansion has produced a distributed university that has 26 physical campuses, throughout California and Washington, as well as fully online programs. The central office, located in Irvine, coordinates strategic efforts for the university while faculty and administrative staff at each location deliver course material and support the day-to-day operations of each local campus. The student body at BU is non-traditional and diverse. The average student age is over 30 years old and the ethnic background of students qualifies the university as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Nationally, adult learners and Hispanic students have traditionally retained and graduated at rates below the average student. This makes the success at Brandman worthwhile to examine at a deeper level.

TOTALLY STUDENT CENTERED

In a recent accreditation evaluation report (2012), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) described BU as “totally student centered.” The crux of their comments centered on the university’s willingness to put the experience of the student at the center of all processes and decisions. From creating assurances of student learning in the classroom to creating student services that do not bounce students around to multiple offices to get answers, the university has committed to making sure students have an outstanding experience. One example of this commitment to students is the academic advising model that began to be developed in 2007. This chapter will focus on the role that academic advising played in helping the institution to achieve higher retention and graduation rates. Success in retention is the outcome of several key areas and it would be impossible to separate and quantify the