

## Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

We seek to better support CHHS students by increasing CHHS advising staff to 1.0 FTE and a more evidence-based advising ratio. This will allow advisors to provide increased cooperative, transformative, holistic advising. Currently the college operates in silos with a few advisors who are employed at .85 FTE. This is for large numbers of students and separate staff members offer student supports. Nursing and some CHHS graduate programs have designated advising FTE, often due to accreditation guidelines. We need enough full-time staff to meet advising needs year-round. Given financial constraints one solution is to integrate student success with advising. This would lead to more advisors, more appropriate student to advisor ratios and more opportunities for advisors to engage in student success initiatives and outreach.

This could be achieved is by eliminating the career specialist position and return that term funding to an additional advising position (position had been moved during Summer 2020). This will allow the student to advisor ratio to fall within workload recommendations by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). This shift would allow current advising staff to assume the duties related to retention efforts for students on probation and/or academic warning. This could streamline the current process since advisors currently work directly with all undergraduate students and they will be more inclined to work more closely with their advisor with whom they already have a relationship.

Another method would be to keep the advisors at their current .85 FTE but fund their positions during their summer I/II using term funds. The proposal would be to reduce our current director of recruitment/outreach and marketing/recruitment analyst resources to .85FTE and use the savings on those positions to fund the advising positions. This would solve the problem of not having enough advising staff available during our largest yield event which is vital to our fall enrollment. Most importantly classes are offered all year round, thus advising staff should be readily available all year. This will allow for continuity in the services we provide and make CHHS advising resources consistent with all other WMU colleges who offer students 1.0 FTE advisors, available all year.

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

This project will involve the cooperation of many CHHS employees and units:

CHHS Student Engagement and Success  
CHHS Advising  
Marketing and Recruitment Specialists

Program-specific advisors  
CHHS Chairs and Directors  
CHHS faculty

While current staff and faculty strive to be very supportive of students, research indicates a more integrated approach will better support students. All in these roles need to shift the focus from the unit of job role to unit of each student. How do we serve the student, together? Students are our primary customers at WMU and too often they are lost in our system.

The success of the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota is based on this model. Rather than several separate specialists working in individual silos to support a patient, teamwork is built into their model of care. This leads to great outcomes for patients and can lead to improved outcomes for students.

This project needs to start with understanding. The 2019 WMU advising report indicated “It is evident there is no clear understanding among all staff, faculty and administrators what academic advising is, and how academic advisors spend their time at WMU. It is imperative to develop this common understanding so students are appropriately referred to advisors or others, and students don’t get left out of critical services they need to succeed.” p. 5.

There are many services at the university level that may not need to be duplicated at the college level. All faculty and staff need to be aware of these and efforts to support students should rely on these resources.

In addition, individuals with student contact should consider key connections for retention efforts. For example, if an advisor or instructor identifies an at-risk student, a clear partnership should be formed with CHHS student services and the program coordinator or director to provide ongoing support for the student.

The proposed change might allow the Associate Director of Professional Development to focus more on professional development programming, success coaching and hiring and training students for the anatomy table tutoring. Leaders must measure outcomes for these initiatives to determine return on investment. This might include a request for specific numbers of students who utilized success coaching and the anatomy table by semester.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Our students cannot be successful if they are not clear on the path they should follow to meet their educational goals. Everyone who works with students needs to assist with their support. However, for success in every student’s academic path, each student should have a clear understanding of their primary advisor and have year-round access to that advisor. Advisors need adequate time to use their knowledge and skills to support holistic student success in addition to helping with transactional tasks such as course scheduling.

The WMU Student Success Services and Academic Advising Program Review submitted by Dr. Cathy Buyarski and Mr. Casey Self in July 2019 recommended “Instead of only performing transactions for/with students, advisors should move toward teaching students how to navigate the policies and procedures and teaching them to make informed decisions. The university should review the current policies and procedures to identify where they can be made more student friendly or streamlined. This will give advisors more time to practice transformational advising.” p.8.

While national standards indicate a ratio of one 1.0 FTE advisor to 300 undergraduate students (WMU report and NACADA). Our current ratio of 1.0 FTE advisor to 511 students (435 students per each .85 FTE advisor). CHHS advisors have had to take a severe reduction in FTE and are employed at .85 FTE instead of 1.0 FTE. This means students who count on their advisor for advice cannot communicate with them during two months of the year. This makes forming a transformational relationship nearly impossible and often relegates advising to a transaction.

The holistic advising project will require cooperation from all faculty and staff in CHHS, most notably advising, student services, program-specific advisors, chairs, directors and faculty. Faculty and administrators need to have a basic understanding of all the CHHS programs and all the university and college level resources to support students. Faculty need to provide timely feedback to students on their course progress and submit mid-term grades. Academic advisors play a vital role in bridging the communication gap since many instructors are not familiar with the resources available in CHHS and WMU.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

It is unlikely this initiative will impact traditional scholarly research and creative activity. However, the improvement project should be established with a clear evaluation plan with measurable outcomes and resources to complete the evaluation. It is possible this activity can lead to scholarly publications.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

Due to staffing changes in 2020 many students struggle to understand who their advisor is. At the same time, new student success services have been developed in CHHS, but students have not shown widespread engagement with these services. Having the student success activities re-integrated with transactional advising will likely lead to more overall student success, measured by retention and years to graduation.

This proposal may require reorganization, restructuring and possibly subvention within the college. This could improve the adequacy of resources for our students. Proposed shifts in advising and student success services should be made based on national guidelines, measurable outcomes, and estimated return on investment.

According to the NACADA: Global Community for Academic Advising, the Core Competency Areas for Academic Advising are:

1. The Conceptual component provides the context for the delivery of academic advising. It covers the ideas and theories that advisors must understand to effectively advise their students.

2. The Informational component provides the substance of academic advising. It covers the knowledge advisors must gain to be able to guide the students at their institution.
3. The Relational component provides the skills that enable academic advisors to convey the concepts and information from the other two components to their advisees.

It is often difficult and confusing for students to go to different individuals or units for all of the above. With more integration of the excellent services currently offered in CHHS, we believe we can better support students with more individuals who can offer all the competencies expected of advisors.

6. **Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

Students in crisis take a lot of time for staff and faculty. The more we can prevent crises through holistic advising, the more efficient we can be and the more student success supports can be offered.

We hope to get to a more equitable and reasonable advisor to student ratio with advisors fully working 1.0 FTE instead of .85 so they are available to students during the academic year and also during the summer. The summer is especially important for support of incoming freshman. Notably, freshman orientation is our largest yield event which directly impacts enrollment numbers, SRM distribution and ultimately state funding. It is imperative for us to have our team of experts readily available for incoming and current students which can only be made possible by having all the advising staff available on a full-time basis.

7. **Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

8. **Contact**

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