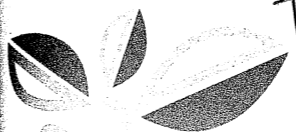


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Sharon  
Thank you  
for sharing  
your  
expertise!  
Marie



## CHAPTER 11

### The Assessment Process: Connecting Advising and Learning

Sharon A. Aiken-Wisniewski

Hi Karleton,

Welcome to the U! I am Sharon, your academic advisor for your first year. (My contact information is attached.) As your advisor, I am here to listen to your experiences and questions, provide information on campus resources, and assist you in clarifying your academic goals. As we build our advising relationship, you will learn how to navigate the policies and processes of the campus. Throughout your first year, you will learn how to

- identify your major through exploration,
- declare your major,
- monitor your major with a degree audit,
- develop a graduation plan to complete your curricular and extracurricular experiences in four years, and
- engage with resources that support your academic plan.

I am excited to be part of your campus experiences. Occasionally, I will check with you to ensure the best advising experience possible for you. In fact, here's a link to a short survey of five questions that I'd like you to complete so I can start understanding your needs: [www.welcomefromadvisor.edu/advisingquestionnaire](http://www.welcomefromadvisor.edu/advisingquestionnaire). It is quick, anonymous, and helps the university offer the most beneficial advising possible.

Also, I will be at the President's Welcome on August 22nd at the Academic Advising table and wearing a name badge. Let's meet there if possible. If I don't see you and haven't heard from you beforehand, I will call you to set up an appointment as soon as the semester begins. I want to meet early and often so that we can create a clear path to meeting your college goals.

Enjoy the summer and don't hesitate to contact me as you prepare to enroll at the U.

Best,

Sharon

Transitions are exciting for everyone involved in the experience, whether a first-year student such as Karleton or an academic advisor such as Sharon. As expressed in the e-mail to Karleton, transitions require support, engagement, understanding, and some level of direction to prevent or overcome fear and anxiety. Therefore, when initially developing a relationship with a first-year student, the advisor clarifies the roles of each in the partnership and the way their respective responsibilities contribute to learning. Also, advisors should make clear that the advisee provides feedback on the interaction as a contribution to the assessment plan, which helps planners, practitioners, and administrators understand the impact of advising on student learning, belonging, retention, and completion. The items for feedback inform stakeholders on the areas of satisfaction, need, and learning as well as advising delivery. In addition to identifying learning outcomes and measures of advising contributions to learning, assessment gives administrators a way to evaluate the most effective advising techniques for establishing direction for transitioning students and their advisors and for securing resources for their support.

This chapter offers a focus on ways academic advising affects first-year learning and student success. Advisors of first-year students need to understand the process of learning from the student perspective to ensure effective delivery strategies. In addition to an introductory description of assessment, topics include development of learning outcomes and the academic advising assessment plan, advising strategies that complement learning outcomes, selection of evaluation and measurement tools, and analysis and use of data to facilitate needed change. Based on advisee feedback, the assessment plan provides practitioners with direction for advising students in the most-important first college year. Advisors who understand the assessment process can effect change for their first-year advisees as well as lead others to appreciate the value of assessment for the institution.

### Assessment Plan and Process

The assessment plan offers four important measures that contribute to the successful achievement of student goals:

- The findings from an assessment can explain the impact of advising on the first-year student experience. Therefore, the plan should include a focus on ways students learn about tools, policies, and practices that influence academic goal achievement. Some measurement tools ask students to evaluate the quality of the experience or describe the advising interaction.

- The assessment plan communicates metrics on advisee retention and completion. By documenting all interactions with first-year students, advisors provide information for a comparative review of specific advising encounters with completion data to identify actions that advance (or impede) goal attainment and institutional mission.
- The plan provides practitioners information about the student experience. Measurement tools that collect student descriptions of advising communicate specific advising practices that facilitate student success.
- The metrics from a comprehensive assessment plan provide evidence for continuing or infusing new resources into the advising process. (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010)

Comprehensive assessment plans allow advisors and other stakeholders to identify learning outcomes, measure the contributions made to learning, and evaluate advising techniques for effectiveness in helping first-year students transition to college. They enumerate the metrics for determining the best way to support advisor–advisee interactions and the areas in which students benefit (or not) from advising practices. The information for an assessment offers a foundation for dialogue on creating or improving programs and practices.

### Advisor and Student Roles

Students share their undergraduate experiences with advisors every day. Their stories detail their perceptions of teaching styles, engagement experiences, activities in the residence hall, and noncampus events. For example, many advising conversations revolve around course exams or grades—assessment measures that students experience continuously. Students and advisors recognize that assessment in the educational process determines the learning of students and may form the basis of important dialogue, such as when exploring the importance of a test in math or political science.

Advisors explain the significance of curricular assessment to students within the context of an academic major or skill set, and they apply these same communication skills when describing the value of advising assessments to stakeholders inside and outside their own units. To establish or refine assessment plans, they immerse themselves in identification of the learning that transpires through advising.

### The Advising Cycle

Advisors who understand the principles of assessment appreciate the professional growth that they experience from student feedback garnered from

measurement tools. At its most basic level, assessment is created by a cyclical and systematic process of inquiry that emerges through a purposeful plan. In the case of advising, assessment is used to evaluate student knowledge and the ways they learn (Maki, 2002, 2004). Figure 11.1 shows the stages in the assessment process and the ways they connect to explain learning.

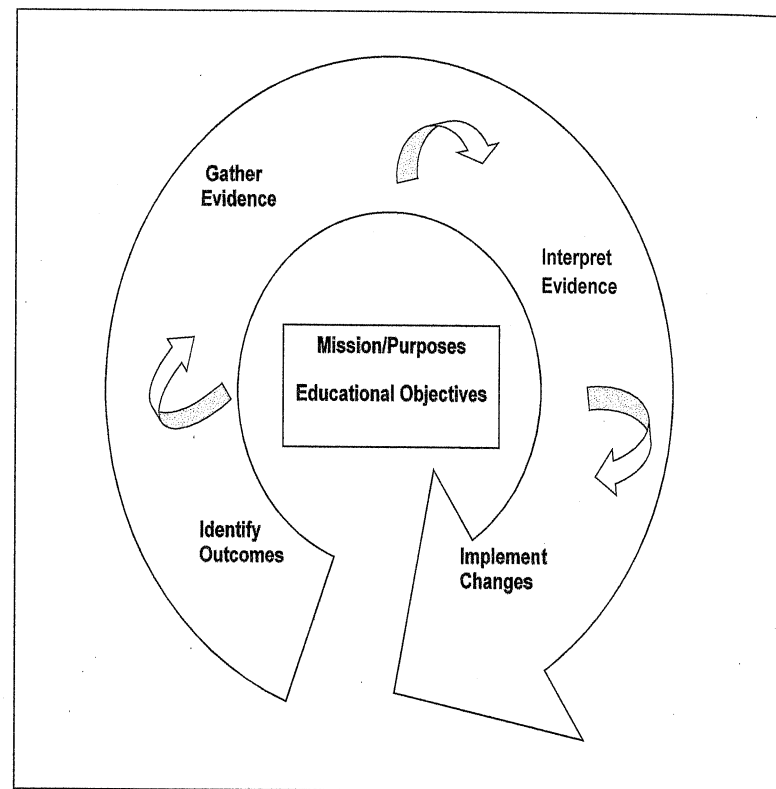


Figure 11.1. Maki's assessment cycle. Adapted from "Developing an Assessment Plan to Learn About Student Learning" by P. L. Maki, 2002, *Academic Librarianship*, 28(1-2), p. 12. Copyright P. L. Maki. Used with permission.

From the beginning, an assessment process needs a champion, someone who understands academic advising and facilitates the process. This facilitator assumes many titles, includes other human resources, such as an assessment committee, and often emerges from the ranks of advising practitioners or administrators. Each institution organizes leadership of assessment based on resources, personnel interest, and organizational culture. In this chapter, this person is referred to as the *assessment coordinator*, but he or she may hold another

title on a specific campus. The coordinator facilitates the process and draws upon the advising community to participate throughout all parts of it. Advisors who actively engage as or with the assessment coordinator recognize that the benefits offset the time and planning needed to implement the assessment (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

The assessment plan is initiated based on the development of a vision and mission as well as related objectives for unit, program, or campuswide initiatives (Campbell, 2008). When creating assessment-related documents, or the core statements on which they are based, the assessment coordinator seeks involvement from the advising community. After creating the assessment plan, advisors communicate and reinforce foundational messages to students through their advising relationships.

Next, the objectives are translated into specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) that clarify the goals for students to know, do, or value based on the academic advising process (NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising [NACADA], 2006). As shown in Figure 11.1, measurement tools are created to collect evidence of met and unmet SLOs.

During the interpretation stage, data collected from various measurement tools are analyzed to verify the learning gained and the points in the advising process where it was demonstrated. Advisors who understand the source of data can better determine the ways they apply to advisees.

In the last step in this cyclical process, the administrators propose changes in programming and delivery based on analysis of data, and the advising coordinator communicates the change, as part of the advising culture, that emanates from the cycle (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Campbell, 2008; Maki, 2002, 2004; Robbins & Zarges, 2011). This strategy for continual, dynamic improvement provides metrics for data-informed decision making (see chapter 10), and the advisors who know the many resources that contribute to assessment can exert influence as well as establish and advance SLOs, advising delivery strategies, and measurement tools for first-year students.

### Student Learning Outcomes for Advising

A learning outcome defines "the skills and/or knowledge we would like our students to obtain" (Gahagan, Dingfelder, & Pei, 2010, p. 11). It is specific, measurable, and addresses the information, endeavors, and beliefs that students know, do, or value after participating in academic advising (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Martin, 2007). The development of SLOs involves three key elements:

the learner, the knowledge the learner is expected to gain, and the ways that knowledge is framed by the advisor to promote comprehension and learning (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

First, advising administrators must learn the characteristics of the advisee population. The demographics for first-year students reflect more diversity than those of populations that matriculated in earlier generations (see chapters 1 and 7). By understanding student demographics, these administrators devise advising strategies that focus on information delivery to advance SLOs and engage the student. This focus on the learner allows for selecting and delivering advising with strategies shown useful for the identified learners in similar institutional types (see chapter 2).

Second, led by the assessment coordinator, planners collaborate to craft SLOs that articulate expectations about the knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes that students demonstrate due to advising. The assessment coordinator reviews the strategic plan, mission statement, and other documents to clarify the direction and focus for undergraduates (Campbell, 2008), and advisors identify the way these guiding statements apply to academic advising, especially for first-year students (see chapter 2). As Martin (2007) indicated,

Learning objectives [outcomes] need to be tailored to fit the needs of the university, college, or departmental environment in which students function. They also must be shaped to fit the academic advising model in use and, of course, they must be tailored to the needs of the students being advised. (para. 10)

Furthermore, the advising coordinator and other stakeholders must know the national initiatives that inform the campus culture and advising (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Holzweiss, 2012). The national conversation on undergraduate degree completion driven by the Lumina Foundation, Complete College America, and the U.S. Department of Education are affecting the message that advisors need to communicate (see chapter 1). Also, these groups offer resources and strategies that educators, including advisors, must merge with institutional values, tools, and techniques to enhance a student's chances of degree completion. For example, at the University of Utah (2015), the Plan to Finish initiative is composed of strategies and messages that academic advisors use to help first-year students select a major, organize courses to complete, and create a time line for graduation while considering the appropriate curricular and cocurricular activities to include in the plan (see chapter 8).

Third, the advisors must frame learning experiences specific to academic advising. One theoretical perspective, advising as teaching, explains delivery of academic advising by incorporating pedagogical concepts, such as learning outcomes, to establish the relationship between students and advisors (Hemwall & Trachte, 2003, 2005). Specifically, as an instructor explains the concepts that the students will learn in the upcoming term, advisors articulate expectations for advising as identified through SLOs (see chapters 2, 3, and 8).

Advisors who advocate for the advising-as-teaching model may find the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy useful for constructing SLOs of advising (see, e.g., Iowa State University, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 2015). They may also appreciate advice from Suskie (2009), who explained the importance of using a strong verb in building an SLO because the statement communicates the acquisition of specific behaviors, skills, processes, or content. In addition to clarifying SLOs, the assessment plan must identify resources for advising delivery, particularly those organized for first-year students.

### Measurements of and Reasons for Assessment

The assessment plan for advising first-year students must communicate the type of information necessary so advisors and students can work together on clear, shared goals. The assessment coordinator and planners need to consider ways to measure key campus goals and document the contribution from advising. Some plans are based on feedback that advances student satisfaction and learning or meets specific, articulated need; others are informed by SLOs or the foundations of advising practice. The assessment plan that balances evaluation of student learning and satisfaction as well as guiding theoretical constructs, delivery strategies, and campus goals offers a holistic approach to understanding the entire student experience; it does not focus on one aspect, such as courses or majors. Through this holistic approach, the advising community and other institutional stakeholders discover student learning through advising, the strengths of current practice, and the opportunities for growth. (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010)

As the mission of an educational institution, student learning drives both the curricular decisions and support initiatives disseminated to stakeholders, including students and their families. For example, descriptions of teaching and learning comprise mission statements as well as marketing materials sent to students (see chapter 4). Also, a syllabus states the SLOs and modes of delivery and evaluation (Thurmond & Nutt, 2009) (see chapter 3). The regional accreditation process in the United States provides reviews and informs the choices of SLOs for specific disciplines and support services. Using these

markers for student learning, practitioners and administrators need to articulate the contributions of advising to the learning experienced by first-year students. (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010)

The first-year student enters an environment with new policies, processes, and practices to learn and understand. Therefore, advisors must frame and communicate SLOs with material relevant to them. To identify or develop SLOs, advisors must understand the information, behaviors, or experiences students must know, do, or value to achieve their goals. In response, students view advisors as agents of student success. Because it informs an advising-as-teaching approach, Bloom's revised taxonomy serves as a popular tool for developing statements that address factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Gahagan et al., 2010; Iowa State University, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 2015; NACADA, 2007).

Some examples of SLOs for first-year students follow. The student will

- address the advisor by name,
- schedule an appointment with an academic advisor,
- recognize the resources for tutoring in mathematics,
- identify courses that meet degree requirements for second-term registration,
- estimate a grade in a major course,
- calculate the first-year GPA as a means to ascertain academic status, and
- articulate the value of engaging with an academic advisor.

To demonstrate the intentional process, the statements include an action verb and a clause that explains the objective. Just as new students can be overwhelmed with curricular and cocurricular opportunities during the first year, advisors undertaking first-year learning assessment may also feel overwhelmed. Despite many applicable SLOs, experts recommend that those starting the assessment process select an initial few (i.e., three or four) outcomes and then increase the number each year (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Martin, 2007).

Each assessment coordinator, advisor, or administrator writes the final SLOs based on mission and campus expectations. Martin (2007) admonished that advisors not confuse SLOs with advisor or advisee responsibilities. She offered three questions to guide advisors as they create SLOs (Martin, 2007):

- What information should the student learn through academic advising?
- What skills should the student exhibit as a result of academic advising?

- What cognitive or developmental changes should the student demonstrate due to academic advising? (p. 9)

Through the use of these questions, advisors communicate to students the results of active engagement in the advising process.

### Advising Delivery

As they collaborate on SLOs and delivery strategies, advisors identify theoretical frameworks to guide the effort. These plans provide structure and direction for advising practice as well as distinguish the purpose of the advisor–student relationship. One theoretical construct—sense of belonging—is associated with persistence and academic success. Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group” (p. 3). Advising strategies not only facilitate learning but also offer opportunities for students to connect with other members of the campus community to engender a sense of belonging that positively affects student satisfaction, persistence, and goal attainment (Strayhorn, 2012) (see chapters 2, 4, and 7).

In addition to strategies to assess learning and information on the theoretical foundations that guide advising practice, outcomes referenced in the assessment plan include student retention, completion, and time to graduation. Emerging evidence suggests that academic advising exerts a positive influence on these outcomes (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Klepfer & Hull, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, assessment coordinators and planners must track these metrics for first-year students and pursue advising strategies associated with improvements to confirm the impact of advising on these and other student experiences.

Upon confirmation of the desired outcomes, the assessment coordinator identifies campus partners who offer resources for instituting the advising assessment plan (see chapter 10). For example, the institutional analysis office may offer expertise in understanding the data. At the University of Utah (2008), such a partnership resulted in evidence that students who participated in academic advising during their first term of enrollment were more likely to be retained to the second year, earn a higher GPA, and graduate in less time than those who did not. As a result, the University of Utah implemented a mandatory advising program for all first-year students that includes an individual advising session devoted to specific SLOs. By identifying and ensuring contributions to institutional goals through the assessment process, stakeholders view academic advisors as valuable players on the institutional team (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

Finally, some assessment plans incorporate measures of student satisfaction and needs. Metrics on these areas do not constitute the key point of an assessment plan, but collecting information on student perceptions and attitudes may confer advantages to those developing advising activities; that is, they can strive to create experiences that students appreciate or enjoy while learning through advising. Therefore, assessment planners should consider context when creating measures for student self-reports of satisfaction and need. By collecting select student-reported data, advisors learn the ways students view advising, which may also prove significant in certain campus reports. Also, student satisfaction with advising strategies may reinforce or redirect practice for development programming.

In most cases, the advisor serves the dual role of advocating for students and enforcing institutional policy. Because the advisor acts as both supporter and bearer of bad news, the constructs of satisfaction and need reflect complicated constructs that may yield unclear results on a self-report instrument. For example, students who learned from an advisor about the enforcement of a probation policy or the reason admission to a competitive major was denied may express dissatisfaction on the survey because they feel general disappointment or associate anxiousness with the information learned in advising. Because learning outcomes, not student self-reports of satisfaction, remain the focus of the assessment plan, administrators and advisors must direct much of the plan toward assessing advising strategies for advancing student learning.

### **Advising Strategies That Engage Learners in Content**

The assessment coordinator initiates creation of the assessment plan by collecting resources that foster learning in advising practice. Toward this end, The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) “promotes the use of its professional standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of quality student learning, programs, and services” (2015, p. 1) for all functional areas, including academic advising. In addition, CAS articulates student learning and development domains and dimensions useful for developing SLOs (CAS, 2015). Likewise valuable, the NACADA Concept of Academic Advising addresses pedagogy and SLOs (NACADA, 2006). Both CAS standards and the NACADA Concept of Advising identify the SLOs regarding knowledge, skills, and values through ongoing engagement with an academic advisor and through various advising delivery strategies.

To conclude the assessment, the plan outlines an internal review of resources that facilitate student learning. The internal review is based on answers to the following questions:

- What is the advising model? How many advisors are available to meet with students and when are they available? Are peer advisors, graduate assistants, or interns part of the advising resource pool?
- To meet the desired outcome, should individual appointments or group advising be used to foster learning? In these circumstances, how do these delivery strategies complement each other?
- What technology tools are available to facilitate learning through advising? What opportunities can be used to augment in-person advising with technology?

By understanding the availability of human resources and technology, those developing advising strategies can address the needs of first-year students, facilitate learning, and meet institutional objectives (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

### ***Technology for Advising and Assessment***

The e-mail from Sharon to Karleton demonstrates the value of technology in advising delivery: It briefly introduced Karleton to his advisor, explained learning outcomes for the first year to be addressed through the advising relationship, and identified ways for them to meet in the near future. Karleton knows the learning outcomes before arriving on campus. Even more important, he knows the name of his advisor and how to reach her. Furthermore, through the survey, Sharon learns the best ways to connect with Karleton.

Once those committed to an assessment plan identify SLOs and the advising resources needed to meet them, they consider possible delivery strategies for learning. Individual advising sessions allow advisors to customize the information for the interaction with the student. In a face-to-face meeting, the advisor may introduce a new concept, review a policy, or check for competency on an SLO based entirely on needs of the specific student. For example, Sharon can explore Karleton’s knowledge base on the SLOs outlined in the e-mail: major exploration, a degree audit, and resources for success. Sharon will use the information garnered to create a strategy to complete each SLO. The set of SLOs establishes a foundation for the development of the advising relationship and the earliest possible communication of information that students need for success in achieving goals.

The student information system as well as advisor notes and early-alert tools provide key pieces of information that encourage development of a holistic relationship while advisors thread specific concepts through their conversations with advisees (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010). Through these technology tools, advisors like Sharon can review and check for advisee competency in SLOs (see chapter 10). For example, after explaining ways to generate and read a degree audit to Karleton, in future sessions or e-mails, Sharon can inquire to assess if he has achieved competency in generating a degree audit and interpreting the information gleaned from it.

Especially in situations of high student–advisor ratios, group advising offers an efficient way to deliver content relevant to SLOs (Bentley-Gadow & Silverson, 2005). The advisor introduces general information that all students need to know to achieve academic goals such as degree completion. For delivering general advising content applicable to all, unlawful disclosure of private information, such as outlined by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), need not concern the facilitator; however, each student in the group must seek individual advising to address issues specific to their educational experience. For example, after attending a group advising session on general education requirements, which apply to and constitute a learning outcome for all students, Karleton sees Sharon in her office for help determining the classes that best fit both the requirements and his educational goals. Because he learns about the requirements in a group advising session, Karleton can explore other areas with Sharon to augment his success, such as resources for personal involvement or potential majors. Participation in group advising allows the advisor to focus on a student's specific questions and concerns best addressed through individual appointments, but in some cases, the advisor will need to invoke proactive advising to encourage attendance in any advising meeting or individual session (Earl, 1987) (see chapters 2, 5, and 6).

Technology offers another means for delivering advising content (Steele, 2014). Communication advances resulting from the Information Age offer students, family members, and student support systems easy access to calendars, policies, class schedules, and academic catalogs. Students check the campus website for FAQs, schedule appointments with an advisor, or review the structured degree plan. Many institutional personnel also employ social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to announce or update an event as well as document it in real time. Because Sharon actively uses Twitter to talk to her advisees, Karleton follows her and like other advisees receives reminders about key deadlines and events, such as the withdrawal deadline and links to procedural

instructions and forms. These tools complement the general information heard in group or individual advising sessions, and access to this content through specific tools is intentionally built into SLOs. Furthermore, the technology tools provide data for analytics, offering important information for creating and revising the assessment plan (see chapter 10).

Advisors may find the following three tools the most advantageous to practice: virtual engagement applications, learning management systems (LMSs), and enhanced software for degree audits and early alerts. Traditionally, relationships were forged between an advisor and a student through face-to-face interactions. Today, when an in-person meeting cannot be conducted, persons can still develop relationships online. To increase educational options for those off site, virtual tools include online degrees, and interaction tools connect the advisor and student for synchronous exchanges through cameras, microphones, and screen sharing. While maintaining FERPA compliance, advisors can deliver the same SLOs online as in sessions held in an office.

For example, standardized SLOs are successfully delivered through an LMS, such as CANVAS, D2L, and Blackboard; these tools emerged for recordkeeping of curricular endeavors but now prove useful for tracking cocurricular activities as well. The LMS can also deliver group advising virtually. For example, a workshop on a career inventory, the requirements for a major, or instructions for using the degree audit report can be placed in the LMS for students to access repeatedly and at any time. In addition, the LMS provides data on the students who engaged in the programming, when they accessed it, and the time they used to engage in it. The information from an LMS can be used to create and administer surveys to students so they can rate their advising experience (see chapters 8 and 10).

Enhanced software products include those associated with degree planning and early academic alert. Before the advent of computers, advisors wrote degree audits by hand as a means to update a student on progress or verify graduation. Today, U.S. institutions purchase software to accomplish that task, which allows advisors more time to discuss curricular and extracurricular activities with students. For example, at Arizona State University (2014), the eAdvisor system alerts a student and advisor when a critical course is not on the student's schedule, resulting in an *off-track* status. Using a system like eAdvisor, Sharon would immediately know if Karleton dropped a general education course in math or English during this first term. For Karleton, and other exploratory students (undeclared major), the software tracks requirements in English and math as critical. In addition to acting as a degree audit and planning tool, eAdvisor alerts an advisor to a deviation from a student's graduation plan (Parry, 2012) (see chapter 5).



In addition to facilitating the advising relationship and learning, technology tools provide metrics on student actions, which inform assessment plans. First-year students face a steep learning curve through which they gain familiarity with policies, practices, people, and processes unlike those encountered in high school or employment experiences. The assessment plan clarifies the information the student receives from the advisor based on SLOs, and it helps determine the timing and manner in which information is introduced and reviewed.

### **Mapping for Advising and Assessment**

As part of the assessment plan, mapping communicates a visual representation of the learning process for new students and their advisors. Through mapping, the SLO is paired with the advising strategies that teach concepts, ideas, and skills. The map communicates the timing for student receipt of the information from an academic advisor and the point at which the student should demonstrate competency. The mapping process also identifies delivery strategies, expected patterns for learning, and the appropriate measurement tools. Just as it serves to determine the delivery of advising, the map also indicates when advisors should employ assessment tools, such as a survey, focus group, advising observation, or interview to gather evidence of learning.

Figure 11.2 provides an example of the mapping process. It includes an institutional objective, an SLO, and information on the level of learning and complementary advising strategies for each level of learning. In this case, the map outlines SLOs and learning experiences designed to help students graduate within two or four years, and it also provides examples of strategies proven effective in assessing early learning (e.g., surveys, observations, audits). Sharon uses this map to provide structure for the information that she shares with Karleton during their initial advising interactions, and the map gives further direction on the learning accomplished from the advising relationship during the first year.

Through mapping, the coordinator, planning committee, and advisor contribute to the assessment plan such that the appropriate measurement tools emerge. In general, the map offers guidance for the timing of SLO assessment. At that point, the best measurement tools will determine competency level for the SLO and provide information for creating or revising the assessment plan.

<b>First-year learning outcome</b>	<b>Level of learning</b>	<b>Delivery</b>	<b>Advising strategy</b>	<b>Assessment measure</b>
Student organizes courses from institutional curriculum that complete major and degree.	Introduction	Orientation  (in-person & web tools)	Advisor (in-person) explains the concept of curriculum for degree, including degree components using an informational graphic on website.  Advisor shows students online campus catalog; introduces key concepts for degree completion by using information on this page; and discusses with student course requirements, course descriptions, faculty bio, and recommended extracurricular activities.	Pre-post survey during orientation term
	Review	First-term advising session  (in-person or online)	Advisor (in-person or online) introduces electronic degree planning tool that lists all courses for degree, critical courses to complete degree, and course scheduling patterns by academic term.  Advisor engages student in conversation on courses, resources, and extracurricular experiences to date.	Pre-post survey during first term
	Review	First term  (e-mail and workshop)	Advisor sends an e-mail to student that explains degree-planning tool and extends invitation to online workshop on creating a degree plan.	Document number invited and those who attend
	Competency	Second-term advising session  (in-person or online)	Student presents to advisor a degree plan by term via electronic degree plan tool. Students maps out degree and added electives. Advisor approves plan.	Evaluate a sample of students registering during second term to assess degree completion goals.

Figure 11.2. Example map of student learning outcome: Student accomplishes timely graduation.



## Variety of Assessment Tools

Despite all the techniques for gathering feedback from students about academic advising, the most useful involve those that correlate to the learning being evaluated. Furthermore, before the unit engages in creating tools, they need to look at existing data-collection mechanisms. Resources being finite in higher education, the assessment coordinator should inventory information available from campus entities, especially those that include data on first-year students.

Nonadvising units use measurement tools, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement or Community College Survey of Student Engagement, for broad institutional analysis. In addition to measurement tools that provide direct data, some institutional partners can assist by allowing piggyback assessments. For example, if a first-year seminar is concluded with administration of a student survey, the assessment coordinator can ask to add items that measure the extent academic advising SLOs were met in the class. After taking a measurement inventory and establishing partnerships, the assessment coordinator identifies the information needed to develop or enhance the academic advising assessment plan; then the coordinator can turn to a variety of means to address any gaps (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010) (see chapter 10).

The 21st-century consumer is continuously asked to provide feedback on experiences from air travel to car repair to dining. As a result, some people, including students, feel survey fatigue. Therefore, assessment coordinators should look beyond the survey to garner information on the impact of advising on first-year students. When surveys provide the best means to collect the needed information, the assessor should approach campus partners skilled in survey development and administration to ensure that a well-considered and effective instrument is created.

Focus groups and individual interviews provide rich descriptive data on a particular learning experience or advising strategy from a small group of students. Although these data do not quantify the experience, the small-group discussions offer an opportunity for students to describe their experience, such as the ways they learn, so advisors can adapt their delivery of advising (Robbins, 2016). Through this process, students may affirm the value of current advising strategies and communicate opportunities to enhance learning during advising (Kvale, 1996; Morgan, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

By data mining from websites, portals, and student information systems, the assessment coordinator can determine whether a student has developed the skills that may lead to accomplishment of a certain goal. For example, many degree

audit tools identify the names of those who have generated an audit and list the times the audit has been accessed. If an SLO involves generation of a degree plan by the end of the first year, advisors can access tools within the audit to determine the extent students demonstrate competence in developing their plan.

Observations of advising interactions provide data on student learning and delivery. In this situation, the observer uses a rubric to list the criteria and levels of performance for evaluations. Descriptors of each criterion for a level of performance guide the evaluation. Upon completion, a numeric scale can be positioned on the rubric to quantify, rank, or scale the scores (Brookhart, 2013; Stevens & Levi, 2005). After developing the rubric to assess learning, the coordinator can encourage advisors to participate in peer observations and thereby evaluate content delivery and learn from one another.

Finally, student portfolio projects, now used on some campuses, provide a unique means to assess SLOs. For a portfolio, either specific to or that includes academic advising SLOs, advisees collect artifacts that document their advising relationship(s) at the college (see chapters 8 and 10). For advising, documents may include degree audits, course schedule plans, personal statements, and exceptions-to-policy petition statements. Although each item does not provide evidence of learning, in a collection, they offer insight into the advisee's experience. Therefore, the portfolio creates a tangible documentation for view by academic colleagues and highlights the learning accomplished within academic advising. It provides evidence that advising contributes to intellectual development (Suckarieh, 2010; Wilson & Gerson, 2011).

Interested advisors and administrators find many opportunities to gather data and information that shape the assessment plan. Through multiple measures—evidence coming from two or more assessment tools for each SLO—coordinators build an assessment plan that yields valid and reliable results (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Robbins, 2016; Robbins & Zarges, 2011). Once the planners identify three or four SLOs, they collect data. First, the assessment coordinator will determine the source for the data. If existing data are available from a campus partner, the coordinator collaborates to secure it. If the data must be generated in other ways, the coordinator brainstorms with others to identify tools that engage students as active participants in the assessment. Through the process, the coordinator maintains an inventory of measurement tools, their purpose, and administration frequency. Second, once data are gathered, the coordinator makes arrangements for analysis.



## AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE

The following discussion questions and activities give advisors concrete ideas and strategies for expanding their knowledge and applying the information shared in this chapter to their advising practice:

- Create an advising assessment working group for first-year SLOs and assessment strategies. Assessment takes time, and engaging in a group process will distribute the work among colleagues.
- Organize a focus group of first-year students and ask them, “What should you know, do or value after engaging with academic advisors during their first year?” Bring their responses to their advisors for discussion.
- Participants in the advising unit or campuswide advising program should develop a list of first-year SLOs. Next they should consider a variety of ways to introduce this information to students. Finally, they should collaborate on a map for each SLO to identify delivery strategies for introducing students to each goal as well as determine the time in which students are expected to achieve competency.
- Identify one SLO that could be delivered through the campus LMS. Establish a model in the LMS that details all information relevant to the SLO that students can access at any time. If the LMS has a quiz option, learn to use this function so that students can demonstrate their learning on the SLO. Through these interactive features, generate an assessment to determine the number of students who used the LMS tool to achieve competency for the LMS-delivered SLO.
- Develop ways to communicate to first-year students the advising information, behaviors, and outcomes they should know, do, or value as they engage with their advisor. Be creative and use media relevant to the student population.
- Share with the campus community the fruits of your assessment labor to find new partners focused on student learning and success.

## Analysis of the Data

A large collection of data is accumulated during the first year of a student’s college experience. For example, Karleton completed an advising survey before enrolling in the institution, and Sharon documented all their interactions with notes in the advising system. Also, Karleton declared a major and established a four-year plan that lists all the courses needed to complete the degree. Finally, accomplishments of SLOs were documented through the campus LMS, which included a competency quiz. Besides listening to Karleton’s overall comments on success, Sharon and the advising community documented the learning accomplished during his first year. Because the purposeful assessment plan produces a substantial data record for the first-year student, the assessment coordinator needs to detail the analysis in the plan:

- How will data from each measurement tool be analyzed?
- How much time will this analysis take?
- What campus resources are leveraged for this analysis?
- Who receives the report of the analysis?
- How many data points are needed to create generalizations, meeting criteria for significance, from certain measurement tools?
- How will qualitative data, rich in description, be collected and used to improve the advising practice?

The assessment plan that provides answers to these questions will drive the assessment cycle and provide information that advances the understanding of student learning and the advising experience (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010). A thorough assessment plan, completed with answers to the questions, guarantees effective data analysis and ensures that data can be used to explore, affect, and identify areas for growth and change as well as demonstrate the value that advisors place on students’ lived experiences and learning. To benefit fully from the assessment cycle, the advisor must know the information that each evaluation tool communicates about first-year student learning.

A strategy for analysis produces a deeper understanding of the strengths of the advising program and guides future improvements. As a result, the first-year advising program is informed by data collected from students, but to understand the impact of advising on first-year students, advisors must share the analysis results within the institutional community. An e-mail, announcement, presentation to Council of Deans, or social media posting highlights student learning from participation in the assessment process. Furthermore, the impacts

of assessment on academic advising inform students that participation in advising yields concrete benefits and that advisors and others at the institution value their lived experience (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

## Summary

Assessment of academic advising demonstrates student engagement with learning and identifies contributions to the institutional mission of retention, completion, and time to completion. NACADA and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition provide tools that delve into the depths and survey the breadth of student learning based on engagement with an academic advisor.

Sharon welcomed Karleton to campus and introduced college academic advising processes, including SLOs and student feedback tools, to document his first-year advising experiences. Students need this guidance as they join a higher education community. Using assessment data from previous assessment cycles, Sharon and her advising colleagues used a plan that outlined learning important for first-year students. Sharon offered information so Karleton could arrange follow-up in-person sessions where she offered advising tools for learning foundational concepts such as the general education curriculum and the degree audit system. Each encounter allowed for increases in the intensity and scope of learning.

In addition, Sharon received direct feedback from Karleton as well as indirect information taken from other assessment tools, such as those associated with the LMS and survey results. The advising connections made through the LMS and focus groups helped Karleton and Sharon understand the ways to document learning, which also demonstrated that Karleton's experiences were valued and added to the larger database for first-year advising.

As they develop strategies that complement SLOs, advisors need to consider the best way to introduce information to students and engage them in the feedback process. Through a thoughtful introduction to advising, students gain awareness of their role in the relationship and prepare to engage during the first year and later. These initial efforts result in a purposeful assessment cycle for advising first-year students, communicate the relevance of academic advising within the educational process, and positively affect the undergraduate student experience.

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