

## PREFACE

The “Guidelines for RIT Undergraduate Advising” have been modified since their initial dissemination in May 2012. The modifications were suggested by a small group of department chairs, working together with the Director of the Institute Advising office and the Provost’s office. The revisions are predicated on the need to more clearly articulate the role of the department chair/head in the advising process. In reviewing these revised guidelines, it is important to understand that colleges at RIT have traditionally organized their resources to support advising and student success in various ways. The new advising model is designed to leverage university, college and program best practices while strategically recognizing that unique academic unit organizational approaches may be necessary in some situations.

This means that to be successful, academic advising within a college must be inclusive of the department/program cultures and effective established strategies for working with students. In practice, this requires that academic advisors maintain a deep involvement and strong working relationships with department heads, program staff and faculty. It is essential that department heads help define the terms of engagement necessary to ensuring that an effective and coordinated advising team is in place to support the students in their program and in the college, as a whole. Moving forward, the department head, college director of advising, and academic advisor(s) assigned to support students in the department will work together to best lay out specific expectations for:

### 1) Advising Team Responsibilities

- Department Chair/Head
- Associate Chair (if appropriate)
- Undergraduate Coordinator (if appropriate)
- Academic Advisor(s)
- Faculty Advisor (if appropriate)
- Support Staff (staff assistants and administrative support)
- College Director of Advising

### 2) Communication Workflow

- Program-level curricular matters
  - Program requirements
  - Capacity planning (# of sections needed)
  - Scheduling conflicts
  - Pre-requisite coordination
  - Co-op
  - Course substitutions/waivers
- Degree audit inquiries and support
- Support of degree certification processes
- Support and steps to follow in addressing regular and “tough” cases related to:
  - a. Probation/suspension
  - b. Leave of Absence requests
  - c. Withdrawals
  - d. Change of program (transfers “in” and “out”)
- Support of recruitment efforts (open houses)
- Signatures/approvals
- Who hands off to whom? How is documentation process developed so chair knows what intervention/advice has been communicated?

### 3) Supervision of Academic Advisors

- Development of annual plan of work & priorities
- Day-to-day tasks/responsibilities
- Ongoing feedback & support

## **Guidelines for RIT Undergraduate Advising System** **Revised: June 2013**

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### **Introduction**

Recent studies of current advising practices at RIT illustrate varied systems and models for advising across colleges and programs. In order to deliver on RIT's Strategic Goal (2005) "to provide the highest caliber of academic advising" and ensure that all undergraduate RIT students (regardless of program or college) receive similarly high levels of support throughout their academic career, a university-wide advising infrastructure that provides deeply integrated advisor-department relationship and right-sized advisor caseloads are needed. Establishing a sustainable advisor caseload, based on best practice in the field, will enable students to meet with their academic advisor on a regular basis to discuss academic progress, receive curricular and developmental support and identify concerns. Integrating advisors into both the college community and academic units they support helps establish an advising culture aimed at providing students with a sense of belonging.

Towards this end, RIT will better define, strengthen, and give guidance to its current advising model and offer all undergraduate students a more coordinated and unified approach to high quality academic advising services. This new advising model builds on the current strong working relationships between department chairs and advisors and is premised on the creation of a cohesive and integrated advising network that provides undergraduate students with a primary academic advisor who is trained to support their academic advising needs. This will include mandatory and targeted advising to meet differing levels of student need as well as degree milestone advising that supports satisfactory academic progress towards graduation.

Finally, these guidelines specifically address undergraduate advising. Graduate advising, while equally important to our students, more generally occurs with a strong relationship between the student and a faculty member in the graduate program.

### **Characteristics and Components**

#### **Role Clarification: Professional Advisors and Faculty Advising**

In this enhanced approach, students will be assigned to a primary academic advisor (professional staff member) and will also have an assigned faculty advisor. Both will be available to students throughout their undergraduate career. Both will work closely with department heads to ensure that departmental expectations and curricular requirements are appropriately translated and communicated. Academic advisors will act as the lead for student advisement, with the understanding that academic advisors and faculty advisors within a college will need to take a coordinated approach towards the advising of students. This coordinated approach will be led by

department heads and the college director of advising. The academic advising system will provide two different methods of advising: prescriptive and developmental advising. *Prescriptive advising* provides students with the information that is crucial for academic success including the provision of necessary procedural information, such as:

- Degree requirements and related University policies
- Process and timeline for registering for classes
- Process for dropping or adding classes
- Process for changing major or college
- Necessary prerequisites for graduate school

*Developmental advising* offers holistic support for a student's growth as a learner, community member, and emerging professional. Examples of developmental advising:

- Encouraging informed decision-making by the student, which may include providing referrals to resources when a student is missing information or in need of different assistance
- Partnering with a student to evaluate progress towards academic and life goals, and if necessary, assist with alternate planning
- Counseling students about suitable academic paths given their interests and priorities
- Anticipating student needs/concerns in order to provide assistance

It is expected that academic advisors will regularly provide a blend of prescriptive and developmental advising, and faculty advisors will more frequently provide discipline specific, career related and professional field advising. While students will continue to work with their academic advisor all the way through to graduation, their faculty advisor will be especially helpful as they progress and need deeper career advisement and planning. The end result will be a partnership among department heads, faculty, and advisors to provide comprehensive, excellent advisement for all undergraduate students.

A detailed description of the specific roles and functions for academic and faculty advisors as well as other important contributors to the advising ecosystem are found in Appendix A.

### **Organization and Staffing**

- The Provost's Office will provide strategic leadership for the academic advising system, setting expectations for college participation in the new model. Oversight for implementation of the new system will be carried out by the director of the Institute Advising Office who will:
  - Have responsibility and authority to guide the implementation of the new model, including overseeing the organizational and infrastructure requirements;
  - Evaluate the new advising model and provide evaluation outcomes to academic units, including best practices across colleges;
  - Partner with colleges to ensure that primary academic advisor and supplemental faculty advisor for each student is entered and updated in Student Information System;
  - Recommend advising administrative policy, standards and processes in consultation with the University-wide advising leadership team.

- A University-wide advising leadership team, comprised of an advising director from each college, will coordinate academic advising services within their college, communicate with in-college constituents, and supervise the day-to-day advising services.
- Academic advisors will be systematically and routinely evaluated within the colleges by the college director of advising with consultation from the head of departments they serve.
- Student feedback on the quality of services will be regularly solicited and analyzed by the Institute Advising Office to improve the model and implementation of the model.
- Together with the Institute Advising Office Director, the University-wide advising leadership team will create a well-defined assessment plan to measure the achievement of goals and outcomes within the colleges.

### **Hiring and Caseloads**

- Academic advising within colleges will be centralized in mission and implemented within the context of ensuring that departmental programmatic needs are met.
- Academic advising caseloads will be between 275:1 and 300:1, a metric reflective of industry standards. Reduced caseloads for special populations will be established when feasible.
- While every student will be assigned a primary academic advisor, academic advisors will also be trained in their college's programmatic requirements, to the degree possible, to maximize the efficient use of resources and offer the most seamless support for students.
- The Institute Advising Office will partner with the hiring college to ensure a consistent process for the coordination, recruitment, and hiring of academic advisor.
- Students who require triage or specialized advising attention maybe assigned to the Institute Advising Office for additional support, coordination, and referral.
- University Studies is a comprehensive advising resource to support students who wish to change majors within RIT. This resource will be part of the advising resource system available to colleges and students.

### **Moving Towards the New Advising System**

The new advising system will be in place by fall 2014. The University will require a period of transition, however, to implement the principles, policies and infrastructure that guide the new advising system.

### **Expectations for the Short Term and Beyond**

During this transition period, even though components of the new advising model may vary by college, the following transitional expectations will apply:

#### **Transitional Expectations**

- A coordinated approach to the structure of advising teams (consistent position descriptions, guidelines for promotion, etc.) will be developed by the advising leadership team in conjunction with Human Resources, in consultation with the academic leadership team, and approved by the Director of the Institute Advising Office.

- Colleges will work towards implementing the new model, which includes role clarification for department chairs, faculty, academic advisors and administrative support staff (specific functional responsibilities of each are found in Appendix A).
- The recent addition of incremental academic advisors will impact baseline advisor caseloads and help move the University forward with desired advisor caseloads.
- Supervision of advisors will transition to the dean-approved director for advising in each college.
- The college advising director will work closely with department chairs to develop supervisory expectations that provide department chairs with open channels of communication and a defined role in the performance evaluation of advisors serving students in an associated program.
- Colleges will continue to explore strategic designation of space for advisors within the college, so that advising space is easily accessible to students and other advisors. Ongoing consideration toward how to effectively assign office space for advisors who support multiple programs or departments is strongly encouraged.
- The fluidity of college enrollment from year to year will be considered as needed in equalizing advising caseloads. When changes in advising assignments are warranted because of enrollment shifts, the Institute Advising Office will work with the college advising director(s) and academic program leadership to recommend a satisfactory student/advisor ratio.

To achieve and maintain the new advising model, the following operational guidelines will be followed:

### **On-going Operational Guidelines**

- Academic advisors will focus primarily on advising needs of undergraduate students, particularly first and second year students.
- Faculty will continue to provide career and professional field advising for their students.
- Undergraduate advising positions (or portions of undergraduate advising positions) will not be repurposed or reduced without prior approval of the Office of the Provost and consultation with the affected college and/or programs.
- To promote improved consistency across colleges, vacancies in advising positions will be reviewed with the Office of the Provost via the Institute Advising Office before posting and the Institute Advising Office will participate on the search committee.
- As enrollments change and resources need to be reallocated, it will be necessary for colleges and the Office of the Provost, through the Institute Advising Office director, to work together to achieve a balanced ratio of students to advisors across the University.
- An audit of advising resources will be conducted on a regular basis by the Office of the Provost and used to determine workload and allocation/reallocation advising resources.
- College directors of advising will participate in building a long-term professional development plan for advisors, and will encourage and allocate time for advisor participation.

### **Assessment Plan**

A plan for the assessment of undergraduate advising will be developed by the Director of the Institute Advising Office in partnership with the advising leadership team with particular input

from department heads. This assessment plan will focus on an evaluation of the advising system as a whole in order to determine:

- How well the system works for students as measured by student satisfaction;
- How well the system works for the university as measured by efficiency of services and advisor self-evaluation;
- Whether interventions to support students occur easily and effectively;
- Whether the student support network is well-served by the advising system.

The assessment outcomes will be analyzed by the Institute Advising Office and provided to the academic units for informed improvements and future modifications to the advising model and implementation.

## APPENDIX A

### Roles Related to Advising

A comprehensive advising system is enhanced by multiple relationships built with students. In order to provide consistent advising services across colleges and academic units, we must clearly define roles/functions related to advising. The following descriptions provide an overview of major responsibilities for roles that are consistently used across the University. Colleges that utilize associate department heads and undergraduate coordinators to assist the department chair should clarify the responsibilities associated with those roles as appropriate.

#### Professional Academic Advisors

- Act as lead academic advisor for undergraduate students at the University.
- Develop strong and positive relationship with each advisee and communicate proactively and consistently with advisees.
- Serve as an ambassador of the associated academic program to build strong connections between the students and the program.
- Provide clear and documented communication with department chairs in order to collaborate on behalf of students.
- Support student transition into the University; provide tools to support autonomy and personal responsibility.
- Focus on academic policies, procedures, and resources and how they relate to the academic success of our students.
- In concert with department chairs, help students navigate registration, degree requirements, and program expectations. This will include:
  - First year registration holds (freshman and transfer) with mandatory advising required to release hold ensure that students understand the value of meeting with their advisor.
  - Targeted advising strategies to meet students' needs at different points/year levels (i.e. study abroad planning, co-op preparation, etc.).
  - Degree progress or "milestone" meetings to map remaining degree requirements.
  - Mandatory check-in advising meetings for students on academic probation and those identified as high risk.
  - Increased intervention support for at-risk students.
- Partner with advising units across the University for information related to core liberal arts, math and sciences (general education) requirements in order to advise students regarding options for Perspectives and Immersion.
- Provide appropriate referrals and follow-up; partner with resources in greater RIT community when appropriate.
- Communicate the importance of satisfactory and timely academic progress to students, and intervene whenever appropriate.
- Employ proactive advising strategies with at-risk populations (first year, first generation, historically under-represented, undecided, transfers, probationary, etc.) and coordinate intervention strategies with department chairs, partners in Student Affairs, MCAS, and the Institute Advising Office.
- Support students with unique and/or special needs.

- Utilize technology efficiently in the delivery of advising information (email, web, telephone, etc.) and support of advising tools (degree audits, SIS reports, etc.).
- Maintain records regarding student meetings and referrals.
- Participate in ongoing training to understand curricular requirements, including general education requirements.
- Participate in professional development opportunities (at RIT, as well as in the greater advising community) in order to stay abreast of emerging research, trends, and best practices in academic advising.
- Collaborate with faculty advisors to ensure seamless support of students.

### **Faculty Advisors**

- Provide discipline-specific guidance and support, as well as advising relevant to career growth, professional field and specialized aspects of program curriculum as needed.
- Provide guidance on courses related to discipline-specific and career goals.
- Provide students with perspective on research opportunities and work environment(s).
- Collaborate and share curricular and student information with professional advisors to ensure seamless support of students.
- Partner with department chairs and academic advisors around student issues related to RIT policies and the implications of non-academic factors/decisions/influences on specific students.

### **Support Staff for Advising in College and Academic Units**

- Provide front line contact with students (phone, email, walk-in).
- Provide administrative support for advising system, which may include:
  - Offering direction to the appropriate resources to resolve concerns;
  - Operational support for advisors (academic and faculty);
  - Scheduling for advising;
  - General advising communications;
  - Support for data management & report writing;
  - Maintenance and data entry to student records systems;
  - Support for records management and processes for compliance with institutional policies.

## **College Advising Leadership and Administration**

### **Dean**

The dean's leadership and support for advising is vital for the success of the advising program. The dean's role in the advising process includes the following:

- Participate in executive leadership decision making with Provost around advising via Dean's Council.
- Lead college to implement new advising model.
- Appoint an advising director for the college and partner with this individual and with department chairs to provide strategic leadership for advising within the college.
- Monitor student:advisor ratio and work with Director of Institute Advising Office to address changes/needs.
- Supervise college advising lead.
- Reinforce partnerships and collaboration between department chairs, advising leads, faculty, and academic advisors.



- Offer guidance to department chairs and directors regarding expectations for academic advisors and faculty advisors.
- Provide alternate advisement for students when appropriate.

### **Department Chair/Head (or their designee)**

The department chair plays a pivotal role in the advising process. As the departmental lead, the chair role includes:

- Develop strong and positive relationship with advisors to collaborate on behalf of students.
- Maintain open and effective communication with advisors to support their role with department.
- Work closely with advisors and college advising lead to ensure that programmatic and departmental expectations are understood and communicated.
- Work closely with college advising lead to seamlessly support the success of advisors and students.
- Provide routine feedback on performance of advisors and participate in annual evaluation process.
- The Undergraduate Coordinator (for programs with such a position) will facilitate advising, working with the Department Chair, Faculty Advisors and the Academic Advisor(s).

### **Director of Advising**

This role reports directly to the dean whenever possible and typically is an assistant dean. The lead for advising is an experienced administrator who acts as the college lead for advising, and who supervises the professional academic advisors. The director of advising is empowered by dean to participate in strategic leadership of advising across University and within the college. Major functions of this role:

- Responsible for the overall quality of academic advising in college unit.
- Lead the academic advising team and ensure the advisors are seamlessly integrated within the college.
- Serve as the liaison for the college to interface with the Institute Advising Office as appropriate.
- Work closely with department chairs to ensure a strong network of advising resources is established, that departmental advising needs are met, and that chairs have a defined role in the evaluation process of advisors.
- Demonstrate deep knowledge of best practices in academic advising, student success and retention strategies, academic success tools, and learning and student development theory.
- Work with department heads and advisors to address concerns related to academic action, probation, and suspension.
- Present difficult advising situations to Director of Institute Advising Office and team of advising leads for consultation and recommendations as needed.
- Communicate University-wide updates to curricula, advising policies, and administrative changes to advisors in home college/unit.
- Coordinate and communicate updates to the Institute Advising Office regarding curricular and administrative changes in home college.
- Communicate University advising goals and structure to home college advising community.
- Lead advising initiatives (training, communication, services, and assessment) within college/unit in consultation with department chairs.
- Participate in the development of future models of advising for the University.

- Collaborate with all advisors in college/unit to ensure seamless support of students.
- Coordinate with dean's leadership team to share information related to advising throughout the college.
- Partner with dean, associate dean, department chairs, and faculty to ensure smooth partnerships and clear expectations between faculty advisors and staff advisor.
- Partner with college curriculum chair to stay apprised of curricular change for conversion and beyond.

### **University Level Leadership and Coordination**

Leadership for undergraduate advising at RIT is provided by the Office of the Provost. The Director of the Institute Advising Office will carry out the University expectations for advising and is charged with ensuring that academic advising job descriptions, recruitment/hiring, caseloads, functional responsibilities, evaluations and professional development are executed in accordance with the new advising system.

### **Director of Institute Advising Office**

- Provides overall leadership for undergraduate academic advising services at RIT.
- Acts as a bridge for undergraduate advising information and services across the University; coordinates, shares, and disseminates consistent advising related information to all constituents.
- Serves as the lead across colleges to create and implement a consistent method of advising for all students at the university including approval of the assignment of advising resources across colleges, annual resource audit and operationalization of advising system within each college.
- Partners with advising leads to create a University-wide set of expectations and outcomes for advising.
- Establish a process to facilitate cross-college advising needs, *e.g.*, change-of-program, advisement of liberal arts, math and sciences (general education) courses. Establishes clear methods of assessment and communicate the assessment outcomes to constituents.
- Creates, implements, and maintains a communication system for advising related information and resources.
- Establish a process to continuously review and advocate for reform of University policies and procedures related to student success.
- Offers "triage" advising for students who may need referrals to academic departments, University services, and partners.
- Offers professional development and support for advisors at RIT.
- Provides consultation for colleges upon request.