Executive Summary

Advising Professionals at UWM rarely have the opportunity to share their expertise with one another and provide input on the advising practices in place at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This Advising Unconference provided an outlet for Professional Advisors to engage in purposeful conversation around nine advising-related topics throughout an all-day event. The outcomes of these discussions was quite remarkable. The summative report below outlines the conversations and resulting recommendations of those who attended. These summaries of the meaningful discussions was reviewed by the Enhancing Advising Committee, which in turn, created recommendations to be considered by the Academic Services & Advising Leadership Council and other campus administration to determine the feasibility and timeline of implementation.

The five recommendations that will are detailed within the report are as follows:

1. **Create a new position, called the Assistant Provost of Academic Advising, to connect Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and oversee Academic Advising at a campus level.**
2. **Develop an Advising Technology Work Group.**
3. **Develop an Advising Core Competencies Work Group.**
4. **Develop a Consistency of Student Experience Work Group.**
5. **Create an Advising Professional Development Sub-Committee.**

Event Overview

The Enhancing Advising Committee (EAC) hosted this event with the goal of engaging in purposeful conversations about the current issues facing the professional advising staff at UW-Milwaukee. The event followed the Unconference approach to discussions about selected topics to create a space for the UWM Advisors to provide their perspective on the future of this important aspect of retention on campus. There were 9 topics scheduled throughout the day and we pre-selected facilitators and note-takers for each session. Those individuals were tasked with the responsibility of generating discussion with their respective groups and guiding the discussion to:

1) important ideas to consider, called “take-away items” and
2) next steps, which would be charged to the EAC, labeled “action items”

This structure was utilized to ensure that the conversations had purpose and would drive future influence on advising at UWM. The schedule and topics were as follows:
To create a truly interactive experience, the above table was also a live document on the OneDrive, in which all participants had access. Each of the topics was a link to a document, which was a summary of the next steps and important points (i.e. action items and take-away items) taken by the note-taker. This interactive document allowed for individuals to follow conversations during and after the Unconference and was the document utilized by the EAC to determine how to implement ideas and disseminate information gathered during this valuable advising professional development opportunity. The EAC findings and recommendations are detailed in the “Event Outcomes” and “Impact on Advising” sections of this report.

Lunch was generously provided by the Provost’s office, which was greatly appreciated by the participants. The lunch conversations and networking were focused around a question posed to those in attendance- If money was not an issue, what would you want to see happen with advising at UWM? This is of note, as there were several ideas shared at lunch that are important considerations as we move forward in focusing on advising on campus.

**Event Outcomes (summary of action items/take-aways)**

**Math Pathways Session**

This session was led by Kyle Swanson, Math Department Chair and faculty member. The Math Department has implemented many changes in how the Math curriculum is delivered on campus and is working to encourage student success through remedial math courses. The information shared in this session prepared Advisors for the upcoming announcement regard the winter math sessions for students in Math 92/94/98. Of note is that this information had been shared previously at the AAPC meeting and should have been disseminated to advising staff. The need for improved sharing of information from AAPC to advisors is necessary.

**Advising Consistency of Student Experience**

Consistency of student experience does not equate consistency of office procedures or implementation
Should campus-wide Advising Learning Outcomes be developed for initial advising meetings?
Should UWM create a campus-wide Advising Syllabus?
Should a workflow chart be developed for each school/college in regard to policy implementation?
Is there a possibility of digitizing processes which currently require paper trails and several signatures?
Are all schools/colleges following University Policies in their current implementation? If not, how were differing procedures developed? How can UWM streamline the implementation of policies across schools/colleges?

PAWS/Registrar’s Updates

Brian Hinshaw shared updates from the Registrar’s office related to PAWS features- including the student notes feature (under development), class permissions and prerequisite enforcement options. Currently, UWM does not have a centralized student note system and questions were raised around the record archiving standards at UWM, FERPA and capacity for UWM to centralize student notes. The theme that emerged from this session was a recognition that there are too many systems being used for student notes at this point and there is a lack of training in the area of note-taking for advisors. Two action items are recommended as a result of this session:

- Campus enforcement of prerequisites, procedures for wait lists and implementation of repeat policy needs to be consistent across campus.
- Survey advisors to find out what systems are being used in advising units and reasons to support one system over another.

Office 365 Implementation

This session was led by Toby Deutsch from SOIS and was selected because of the high integration of technology in the SOIS Advising Unit. The theme that emerged from this discussion was that there were questions about how to best utilize Office 365 when working with students, specifically in how to share documents and video conferencing/screen sharing. One other theme, not related to Office 365, emerged related to how technology is implemented within advising offices across campus. The resulting questions and action item were:

- How are advising notes and student files being shared within and across schools?
- What systems are being utilized?
- Action item: Create a survey to poll advising offices on how each unit is implementing technology for student notes.

UWM Advisor Core Competencies

This discussion was facilitated by the EAC Chair, Jen Hayes, and the theme that emerged from this session was that there is not a consistent expectation for the role of advising across campus. Many Advisors attending shared that they do not believe the Profession of Advising receives the respect
and recognition on our campus. There is not a set of Core Competencies for the Advising positions across our campus, therefore, the skill sets and educational background of individuals hired in these positions is inconsistent and often lacking in training related to student development or adult education. Several action items were developed as a result of this session, including:

- Core Competencies should be developed and assessed for Advising Professionals at UWM. If there are cases where Advisors do not meet the expectations set in the Core Competencies, UWM should provide support and development opportunities for those individuals already working in Advising Positions.
- After implementation of Core Competencies, there should be a concerted effort to hire highly qualified Advisors who have an educational background related to the field of Advising (e.g. Student Development, Higher Education Administration, Adult Learners, etc.).
- UWM should develop a training program for Advisors.
- Ongoing discussions and presentations to campus constituencies (i.e. faculty) about the importance of Academic Advising as it related to retention and the student experience.

**PAW'D Mission Possible: Academic Preparedness Seminar**

Nicole Heinen, Lauren Leesac and Brian Hinshaw facilitated this session related to the newly developed Academic Preparedness Seminar that first year students were to participate in during Panther Academic Welcome Day. This team has already solicited feedback from facilitators of the seminars and students and the results thus far were overwhelmingly positive. The group engaged in this conversation had several items to recommend for future discussion or action:

- Success of this seminar needs to be shared with AAPC, ACN and upper-level administration
- Future discussion is recommended around the idea of requiring this seminar for the students who do not attend the Panther Academic Welcome Day, either in a First Year Seminar, LLC course or Ed Psych course.
- After fall semester grades post, Brian Hinshaw will gather data about those students who participated in the Mission Possible seminar in comparison with students who did not to determine whether or not this seminar had a significant impact on student success. This report will be shared with campus constituencies.

**Student Success Collaborative & MAP-Works**

This session was facilitated by Angie Sadowsky and Alejandra Lopez and focused on how these systems differ from one another and how their use could be implemented on campus as complimentary programs. Concerns which emerged from the conversation were that there has not been clear expectations outlined as to how these systems should be utilized in tandem with the other systems in use at UWM, or how to use them with one another. The group in attendance of this session had varying levels of understanding each or both system. Several action items were set after the discussion:

- Develop a plan of implementation of the systems and clear expectations/guidelines for the Advising staff across campus.
- Create training sessions for beginners, as well as review and drop-in sessions as a support for more experienced users.
Encourage Advising supervisors to become more knowledgeable about the systems and have directives from those positions in the advising units to use the systems more regularly to increase individual proficiencies with the software programs.

Successes & Challenges

Although this session was smaller in size, the facilitator, Brian Williams, was able to guide the group through a discussion about the successes & challenges of advising at UWM. A common theme that emerged was related to the lack of understanding on campus about the profession of advising and its importance. The group was able to determine action items that could promote awareness and understanding at all levels across campus:

- Develop a presentation that could be delivered at various meetings and orientations across campus to increase understanding of Professional Advising. Given the nature of UWM as a research institution, the rationale for this type of conversation would be best supported with current national research findings from NACADA.
- Create an Academic Advisor Liaison program for faculty and staff, with the eventual goal of creating a position that would assume this role.

Career Advising

Kristin George and Pam Schoessling led a conversation about Career Advising at UWM. Kristin shared updates about the Career Development Center to improve student services. The themes that emerged from the discussion were as follows; career advising is important for students early in their academics, it is necessary to increase collaboration between programs and CDC to improve outcomes for students and UWM has a good foundation to build upon in the area of career advising. After establishing the current state of affairs for career advising, the group developed the following action item:

- Advising staff and Faculty should be provided professional development to increase their ability to incorporate Career Advising when meeting with students.

Impact on Advising (recommendations from EAC)

Based on the outcomes and suggestions of the Advising Professionals in the nine sessions outlined above, the Enhancing Advising Committee has developed a list of recommendations to be reviewed by the Academic Services & Advising Leadership Council (ASALC) for further discussion and implementation at UWM. The recommendations were categorized based on themes that emerged from the anecdotal data gathered.

Assistant Provost of Academic Advising

This suggestion stems from a long-standing need on our campus for one person to coordinate academic advising at UWM. Historically, the individuals and groups on campus who are passionate about the profession of advising have been the catalysts for continual enhancement of advising on our campus. As the profession of advising has evolved and its importance in a student’s retention has been recognized, it is timely to have the discussion for someone to be hired to ensure that this can be an individual’s primary focus. UWM deserves to have a dedicated position to lead advising efforts forward. Although the passionate individuals and groups aforementioned are making
progress, it is not a recognized aspect of any current job description and is not sustainable in its current structure.

If there was an Assistant Provost of Academic Advising, there would be a clear connection between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and the Provost’s office. This position would also collaborate with the Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness as Gesele Durham has been instrumental in encouraging the forward momentum in advising during the past year. If this proposed position would be establish, it is the sincere hope of the EAC that both the ASALC and EAC would be able to provide input in the development of the position description and participate in the Search and Screen process.

Advising Technology Work Group

This work group would be responsible for determining the current software systems being used by advising professionals on campus, the purpose of the individual programs, and the effectiveness of each. The objective would be to create a recommendation that would package selected programs to improve the efficacy of Advising as it relates to retention of students and accurate tracking of student success. This suite of programs will then be piloted by Advisors on campus with the objective of creating a systematic approach to implementation of technology in advising that is consistent across campus. All technology related themes that emerged from the conversations should be considered as this group develops their final recommendation.

Advising Core Competencies Work Group

In response to the lack of core competencies for Advisors at UWM, this is a necessity as we move toward providing a more consistent experience for students who use advising services across campus. This work group would be responsible for researching current trends and developing a recommendation for an Advising Core Competencies document. After approval, this set of standards would be utilized as a measure for performance evaluations, hiring practices and expectations for advising units at UWM.

Recommendations and some potential ideas for exploration that this work group could pursue include:

- Investigating the NACADA Emerging Leaders Program
- Creating a partnership with the Higher Education Administration Graduate Program
- Developing a standard orientation for new and not-so-new advising staff
- Creating a professional advising mentoring program

Consistency of Student Experience Work Group

The work of this group would surround the experience a student has as it relates to advising at UWM. This group would be responsible for the research and development of a campus advising syllabus, identification of advising training needs, collaborate with campus constituents with regard to implementation of University Policies and other support programs with the goal of streamlining the advising practices on campus.

Advising Professional Development Sub-Committee

EAC plans to host professional development sessions for advisors during the summer months to follow up on topics that were raised at the Unconference. This sub-committee will be responsible for
determining the schedule of topics and securing presenters for what we are calling the “Advising Summer Institute”. Possible topics to be covered:

- Current Advising Trends (NACADA and regional conference topics)
- Career Advising
- Advising Student Notes Best Practices
- MAP-Works & SSC Implementation in Advising
- Student Development/working with Adult Learners
- Advisor Mentoring

The objective for professional development opportunities for advisors, as determined by the EAC, is to create a continual progression of learning and advancement of advising at UWM. This committee will review content of Unconferences, A2S Summits and Summer Institutes, as well as the advisors’ feedback and guidance from leadership on campus to determine what should be offered for advising staff on campus.

**Future Planning (participant feedback)**

This Unconference was well attended and appreciated by the advising staff. Having a forum to express their perspective on the work they do and the future of what advising could be at UWM was energizing and pleased many people in the room. Of course, with any event there is feedback that should be considered when planning for the future. Here are recommendations for future programs, which are similar in their format:

- Reserve several rooms so that the conversations are easier to follow. We were in the ballroom and conducted the entire day in that space, which was not always conducive to large group discussions.
- Break large groups into smaller groups to increase the amount of dialogue and participation.
- Suggestions about the length of the day and the number of topics varied- some wanted more sessions, others wanted a shorter day.
- Although there was an appreciation to have the conversation with advisors only, there was recognition that it would be fruitful to have faculty and administration become a part of the discussions as well.

Overall, this was a great opportunity and for the first event of its type with advising staff, it was a success. The EAC plans to hold another Unconference in fall of 2015 and attempt a true “Unconference” with the topic selection happening the day of the event.

*2014 Unconference Event Report submitted by Jen Hayes, EAC Chair*