University of North Georgia QEP Topic Concept Paper: Advising

This paper outlines the developmental and intrusive advising at UNG that can provide students with the tools, skills, and support needed to achieve their academic goals. The proposed advising model includes the following components:

- Institutional resources including professional advisors, degree sequence maps, and availability of necessary number of course sections
- Predictive/intrusive advising using the EAB-type software that results in increased progression/graduation/retention rates and fewer excess credits
- Developmental advising by professional advisors where students acquire information, develop skills, and improve cognitive development

Current trends, best practices, supporting data
Current trends and best practices
Institutions of higher education, including University of North Georgia, have historically allocated the majority of support services to the most academically underprepared students; however, students with first year grade point averages (GPA's) below 2.0 have low percentage graduation rates despite extensive support. Greater opportunities for successful intervention with students who earn first-year GPA's between 2.0 and 3.0 have been largely ignored, even though small academic gains for this "murky middle" population correlate with meaningful gains in graduation rates. Additionally, promising students within this population are the most likely to leave college early, even though they are in good academic standing. (https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/10/maximize-graduation-rates-colleges-should-focus-middle-range-students-research-shows)

Current research highlights several student behaviors linked to the risk of attrition regardless of student GPA: enrolling in excess and often unnecessary credit hours, choosing majors late in the college career, performing poorly in courses critical for success in the program of study, and failing to gain admission into upper division major coursework and/or professional programs, such as nursing. To address these risk factors, best practices for academic advising are shifting focus away from generic interventions that over-rely on grade point averages to targeted interventions designed to address predicted risk profiles and support achievement of critical milestones and informed choices. The trend includes centralized advising services staffed with professional advisors trained in the institution's academic disciplines as well as in educational software and advising strategies that best support individual student needs. Faculty assume the role of mentors, helping students gain a better understanding of their majors and what it takes to be successful both within the institution and as part of a larger community.

Predictive analytics, degree maps and intrusive, on-time advising are essential components of advising programs that successfully use targeted strategies to enhance retention and graduation rates. Innovations in technology allow institutions to calculate the likelihood of graduation for every student based on their academic history as compared to past students. At-risk students are prioritized and organized according to course completions and grades determined to be predictive of success in their programs. Advisors are also provided with information regarding the student's likelihood of graduating in a wide range of majors offered by the institution.

Degree maps offer guided pathways through programs of study from matriculation to graduation to encourage student choices that are informed and deliberate. Students make the "big picture" choice of meta-majors, broad academic pathways in major areas such as business, science or social science. As students move toward specific majors, their pathways narrow and course requirements, course sequences, course availability by semester, and necessary credits are laid out for them. Students who enter college on generalized pathways and progress to specific degree program maps are less likely to waste credit hours or to enroll in credit hours that are "off track" for their programs of study.

Technology and degree maps form the basis for intrusive, on-time advising, which takes place when students fall off track in their programs of study. Each degree map contains critical milestone courses that must be completed on schedule to ensure timely progression. Professional advisors trained in the use of educational software can track milestone courses and be proactive in providing interventions when and where they are most needed. For example, when a key milestone course is not successfully completed, a software system can flag both the student and advisor and place an administrative hold on the student's account that requires a meeting. This system allows advisors to focus their efforts on students most in need of support services, including the population of "murky middle" students who have the best chance of persisting to graduation with only small academic gains.

Supporting data
National, state, and local data supporting the need for this type of advising model
State and national trends towards degree completion and performance-based funding have focused the spotlight on more intentional advising to support student progress. Data on Georgia students provided as part of the Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) initiative revealed that only 4.2% of associate degree-seeking and 13.0% of bachelor's degree-seeking students graduate on time while only 10.9% of associate degree-seeking and 49.4% of bachelor's degree-seeking student graduate at all. For part-time students, the data are even less encouraging. On average, students are taking 79 credits to complete a 60-credit associate degree and 134 credits to complete a 120-credit bachelor degree.

Currently, UNG retention and graduation rates for first-time, full-time, baccalaureate degree-seeking students exceed the USG sector average; however, subgroups such as Cadets and part-time students report lower performance.

On the UNG 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), UNG baccalaureate students reported a meaningfully lower level of agreement than USG students with the following statements:
- The academic advising I received on selecting, changing, or modifying my major field of student was helpful
- The academic advising I received on my post-graduation plans was helpful
- The academic advising I received helped me overcome academic difficulties

In September 2014, a survey was administered to the UNG community to identify the institution's interest in and support of select QEP areas. More than 1050 faculty, staff, and student responded to the survey. Of those that responded, 42% of faculty, 66% of staff, and 61% of undergraduate students rated "develop advising models that support student success" as "critically important to improving student learning." Faculty comment themes included moving the advising responsibility to professional advisors, enabling students to be independent in advising, support of intrusive advising techniques, and improving class availability. In a separate survey administered to faculty during fall 2014 assessing, in part, the effectiveness of the Advising Center, over half of faculty was in favor of hiring professional advisors for UNG academic departments.

Data on success at universities using similar types of advising models
Data from other universities implementing aspects of guided pathways and intrusive advising approaches has yielded success:
Florida State University: Degree Maps and other strategies to increase graduation have decreased excess credits and increased graduation rates.
- Since starting degree maps, FSU has cut the number of students graduating with excess credits in half.

- In 10 years, FSU's graduation rate for all students has increased 12%, to 74%. The graduation rate for African Americans has increased to 77%, for first-generation Pell students to 72%, and for Hispanic students to more than 70%.

Arizona State University: The eAdvisor System (software supporting major maps and intrusive advising for "off track" students) has boosted retention and success.
- First-time, full-time freshman retention rates have climbed to 84%.
- 91% of all students deemed to be on track in their programs, up from 22% three years ago.

Georgia State University: Degree maps and intrusive advising have boosted graduation rates by more than 20 percentage points in the last 10 years.
- Pell students (52.5%), African American (57.4%), and Hispanic students (66.4%) now graduate at higher rates than the overall student body.
- More Bachelor's Degrees are conferred to African Americans at Georgia State than any other US University. (Jones, S. (n.d.). GPS: A College Completion Game Changer. Retrieved from http://completecollege.org/gps-institute/)

How the topic relates to the institutional mission and strategic plan
The mission of UNG includes a focus on "providing a culture of academic excellence in a student-focused environment" that "develops students into leaders." The multifaceted advising model considered here provides students with the information, tools, and support to navigate their academic paths in an informed and highly personalized manner. Goal 2 of the UNG Strategic Plan is "Enhance leadership and the development of the whole person." Predictive analytics in combination with intrusive and developmental advising helps students identify academic and career goals early, create academic plans guided by course performance, avoid unnecessary courses, and develop the skills to take control of their academic careers. Students are then equipped to become self-directed decision-makers and leaders in their educational and career paths, now and in the future.

The role of the topic to improving student learning, benefits to the institution/students
Advising strategies that include predictive analytics, degree sequence maps and critical milestone courses help students become self-directed decision-makers who assess information and make deliberate choices about their educational careers. Advisors provide the tools with which students learn to critically think about data. Risk assessment allows professional advisors to guide students as they learn to choose majors and consider career paths. Sequenced degree maps with attending course rotation schedules help students become independent learners in charge of their own academic progression. When students fall off track, intrusive, on-time advising encourages them to self-assess in light of predicted success. Students learn to base educational goals on informed choices and to revise goals when appropriate.

When advisors intervene with students who, regardless of GPA, fail to complete critical milestone courses for their programs of study, success strategies become extremely individualized. In turn, individualization of approach supports increased student motivation to learn and apply academic strategies. Through advising sessions, students gain new skills, such as recognizing when to seek outside help, forming study groups, and gaining confidence to ask questions in class, that apply directly to their personal critical milestone courses.

For students, the rewards inherent in successful advising strategies are tangible and lifelong. Earning a college degree, graduating on time, saving thousands of dollars in tuition and fees, avoiding excess credit hours, and beginning a career sooner all contribute to increased earnings over the course of a lifetime. In addition, skills such as self-direction, informed decision-making, and critical thinking are translatable to success in endeavors outside of the educational environment.

For the University of North Georgia, the need to retain and graduate students has never been greater. There is a high economic cost to the institution associated with student attrition. Additionally, national enrollment predictions show the rate of undergraduate enrollment slowing over the next decade, so new students can no longer be used to "fill the gap" when other students drop or fail out. Performance-based funding is also becoming a reality in the state of Georgia, and Governor Deal's *Complete College Georgia* initiative challenges University System of Georgia (USG) institutions to produce an estimated 250,000 additional graduates in upcoming years. Successful advising strategies that increase retention and graduation rates will address these issues and benefit UNG financially and secure our place as a leading USG institution.

In assuming the role of mentors, faculty at UNG will be relieved of high advising loads that are extremely difficult to manage in light of teaching, research, and other service responsibilities. A substantial increase in professional advisors will allow faculty to devote more time to grant opportunities and research, thus enhancing the academic reputation of the institution nationally. Students will benefit from increased accessibility of advising services, highlighting UNG's student focused mission and producing graduates who reflect back on their time at UNG as crucial to the development of their whole person.

Resources needed to implement the topic
Comprehensive educational software that pulls together student risk profiles, degree maps, course milestones, and opportunities for targeted intervention is critical for advising efforts that enhance student retention, progression, and graduation. Two software platforms, Educational Advisory Board and Civitas Learning, are examples of software that use predictive analytics to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities students face. Both programs support informed and deliberate decision-making, guided major pathways, and intrusive, on-time advising for students who fall off track in their programs of study.

The practice of professional advising at UNG must grow substantially in order to take full advantage of predictive analytics, especially as faculty assumes the role of mentors. Current trends in supportive advising are not limited to the lowest GPA-earning students, and additional professional advisors are necessary to facilitate student understanding of the expanded data technology provides. Advisors must interpret and make use of relevant data within a developmental advising model, acting as coordinators of a learning experience that results in the exploration of life and career goals, choice of major program, and successful academic progression. Increased professional staff is also necessary for the organization of advisors into clusters serving academic disciplines offered by the institution as well as special populations, such as dual enrollment and undeclared students.

Course availability, and the corresponding need for faculty to teach in-demand courses, is also required to implement an advising program that promotes informed choices and encourages student progression. Degree sequence maps and critical milestone achievement rely on course availability and information about semester course rotations. Science meta-major pathways, for example, require students to enroll in appropriate math and science courses during their first semesters of attendance in order to stay on track in their programs of study.

Methods by which progress could be monitored and improvements measured
An advising model that includes both prescriptive and developmental components can be assessed in multiple ways. The purpose of this approach is to enable students to identify degrees in which they can be successful and support their progression. Examples of institutional measures assessed on an annual basis include:
- Decrease in average number of non-degree related credits
- Increase in progression rates
- Increase in graduation rates

- Increase in retention rates
- Increase rate of students achieving selected academic benchmarks

Several of these rates are already collected for reporting purposes while others can be collected by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness using the Banner SIS database. These data may also be collected for subgroups if the model is rolled out to select populations initially or with select components.

The developmental aspects of this model are centered on student learning outcomes related to information, skills, and cognitive development. Examples of learning outcomes might include:

Information
- Understand degree requirements
- Understand benefits of "15 to Finish"
- Awareness of student support services, such as tutoring

Skills
How to:
- Register/withdraw from courses
- Navigate Banner
- Create an academic plan/schedule
- Limit excess credits
- Overcome obstacles of class difficulty, financial issues, feelings of isolation
- Plan ahead
- Meet key academic milestones

Cognitive Development
- Articulate academic and career goals
- Explain how a course is relevant to a major and a major to a career
- Identify a major earlier in academic career
- Identify when a course or major is not working

These can be collected through an observational instrument developed for advisors in addition to student completion of a normed advising survey that focuses on developmental learning outcomes. An example includes the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) created by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA).