

Title V – East Focus Group Data (Spring 2016)

As one aspect of the improvement processes built into the Title V grant on East Campus at Valencia College, the Office of Institutional Assessment and Director of the grant enlisted current staff (Assistant Directors, Advisors, and Staff Assistants) to conduct five Focus Groups during April 2016. These staff members were recommended by their supervisors and trained by the Office of Institutional Assessment. They supported the conversations as facilitator, observer, and notetaker teams. The staff documented what role the students believe faculty play in advising, how students perceive the transfer process, and any barriers to getting the assistance they need.

20 students participated in the focus groups; 8 were in their first two semesters, and 13 had taken SLS 1122 The New Student Experience course. The student participants are seeking degrees in athletic training, biology, business administration, dental hygiene, electrical engineering, elementary education, film, finance, information security, management, music performance, nursing, physical therapy, secondary education, sign language interpreting, social work, sports medicine, and veterinarian sciences.

| Research Question(s) | Selected supporting quotes(s) from participants | Focus Group Themes | Elements of the Theory |
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| Student perceptions of advising | | | |
| 1) What should the role of faculty be in advising students? | <p>“The websites are pretty straightforward like all of the documents are there.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>“The Valencia website is pretty straightforward. Everything is broken down in details. I think it is a good website if you were looking for information.”</p> | Students use websites for general ideas. | Faculty advisors will not replace other avenues where students seek advising, but should keep in mind students learn by receiving advising as needed. |
| | <p>“It’s just one class that was listed on the blue paper they give you at orientation.... I just took the 4 classes they put at the bottom.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>“I went to the advising office like I said before. He gave me that paper and he said that that was all the classes I have to take. That is how I take my classes. I have been like 3 times.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>“I see the advisors like... financial aid. I always go if I have a question or If stuff is not adding up right. That is when I go.”</p> | Students get advising from orientation, the advising center, and financial aid advisors. | |
| | <p>“Asking people like other students that have been there the year before or two years before just see what they do.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>“I haven’t really went to an advisor. I received help from a friend that I have. He’s more ahead than I am, but he is on</p> | Students listen to peers who already have a degree plan. | |
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| <p>1) cont. from page 1. What should the role of faculty be in advising students?</p> | <p>the same path of engineering and with all of the information he has gathered he was able to tell me you know the classes that I should take and in what order will best fit me.”</p> | | |
| | <p>“My friends try to go the advisor only when needed... but they will go to like 3 different advisors.... Just pop from each office to each office because like we said one will give you, “Take biology,” and then the next one would be like, “No, you don’t have to take biology you can just graduate but you have to take something else,” and you're like wait which one do I do need to take? & “You will never get the same answer from two advisors. Not once.”</p> | <p>Students go to several offices to make sure they are getting the same, correct information.</p> | |
| | <p>“Information like I’m taking the right classes and heading in the right track, not taking anything I don’t need to take.”</p> | <p>Students want the advisor to be confident they have the right information.</p> | <p>Faculty advisors need experiential knowledge of the student’s degree requirements.</p> |
| | <p>“If they are in our field they know what you want to do. They can help us pick out the classes. They can say, ‘No, you do not want to take this class because this class is not needed’ or ‘Do not take this class with this person because they are not going to really give you the information that you need.’ I feel like that is better than somebody who has not ever taken the class sits down and tells you to take it.” & “I mean if they do all careers... I know they are not 100% sure every single time based on every person's career because they do not know. They just go about whatever I am guessing the book or computer whatever they look at, and that is what they go by.” & “Someone who is outgoing who is in the same field as me.”</p> | <p>Students want to be assigned to advisors who have been on their same career path.</p> | |

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| <p>1) cont. from page 1. What should the role of faculty be in advising students?</p> | <p>“Unfortunately I did not know the pre reqs at the beginning of me coming into college, so it is going to take me another year for me to get the pre reqs.... I need biology before I take microbiology and things like that.” & “I didn’t know all that I had to do is take 5 pre req classes and then I could enter and nobody really told me that, so now it is just better that I get my full AA so I just kind of wasted a lot of time and money.”</p> | <p>Students feel they get information late (after already wasting time and money).</p> | <p>Students benefit when faculty advisors set expectations and provide program planning information early.</p> |
| | <p>“I filled out this little form to see when I’ll be taking classes my last few classes and it said Fall of 2018 because I kind of messed up my first semester.” & “An academic Advisor like in the main office gave me this whole schedule of like now until I graduate.... What they did was they spread out how many courses require lots of papers and stuff like that... so that way you are not overwhelmed with writing like 7 papers a week.... So I had one advisor like that that broke it down like that... They took me into consideration.”</p> | <p>Students expect to have a plan mapped out of all the course requirements to degree.</p> | |
| | <p>“I would say for whoever needs advising to find someone that is... kind of in your field.... One person that has been in your field that... can sit down and look with you and be like hey since you are trying to transfer here, you may need this.” & “It sounds like we all are kind of on the same boat here so I imagine most students would be too. If they need help picking their class they go to an advisor. If we need help with career choices we would probably go to one of our teachers.”</p> | <p>Students go to the Valencia professor teaching in the discipline they want to get a degree in for transfer help.</p> | <p>Students know they will need assistance to transfer.</p> |

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| <p>2) What are the elements needed for a discipline-based faculty advising model?</p> | <p>Students say advising requires adaptability, caring, clarity, comfort, communication, creativity, empathy, experience, friendliness, mentorship, open-mindedness, patience, professionalism, and understanding. It must be helpful and informative, focused on the future and open to opportunities. It must not misdirect or seem strict.</p> | <p>Students have clear expectations about advising.</p> | <p>A discipline-based faculty advising model needs to be student-centered and sensitive to a student's personal circumstances.</p> |
| | <p>"It all depends on how I am in my life, whether I would want to start in the fall or whether I would want to start next spring. It all depends because my main priority is moving out getting out of where I am now stabilizing myself and then maybe I can take the time to take a class." & "I am going to try to move out of my house and move in with a roommate to a different house, and then probably going to go work in my field." & "Taking into consideration everyone individually as a person.... Maybe you cannot do that right away so taking into consideration what people are telling you like I work two jobs, or I have a family.... Working with what you are saying to get you to figure out what you need to do and how to do it to get finished in the amount of time that you want to."</p> | <p>Students have unique circumstances (living arrangements, plans to move, full-time work) that direct their planning more than academic goals and need to be considered as part of the advising process.</p> | |
| | <p>"I have heard horror stories of people who go through college and get into a job and then they hate it and then they feel like they are kind of stuck. They do not have money to go back to school. I do not want to end up being that person so ... I think that is like important thing for me for finding something that I want to do. My brother he like started out and he wanted to do like computer science or something and he ended up going into like mechanical engineering.... My best friend's sister, she went into nursing and her first day like working she just decided she hated it and she is kind of stuck there now she does not have money to go back to school.... Yeah, I don't want to</p> | <p>Students are unsure about their goals.</p> | |

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| 2) cont. from page 5. What are the elements needed for a discipline-based faculty advising model? | end up being stuck somewhere around not getting to be happy kind of like settling for my job.” | | |
| | “For me because no one like my parents didn’t go to college, my brother didn’t even go to college, so I came in not really knowing. So I was in advising a lot. All the time and they just kind of gave me a sheet of everything I needed for my AA, but I didn’t really need that because I was going for the AS. But I just did not have that knowledge. I didn’t really know.” | Students who do not have family who went to college lack understanding. | |
| | “Everyone at Valencia besides yourself knows what they are doing... I feel like rationally I know that that is not true, but it is kind of like I have the idea that this is what you were supposed to do so other people must be doing that. Must be regularly meeting with her advisers. They know their academic advisors and they have a good relationship with them. They are not afraid to go ask for advice.... I do not even know who it is. I do not know if there's a specific one to me. I feel like other people know that.” | Students perceive others get more out of advising than them. | |
| | “I would graduate in 2017 or 18 because I just started I am on my second semester.... My first semester I took three just to see how it is because I just came out of high school and then now I am taking four. This summer I am taking two, but it also depends on the money.” | Students are limited by finances in following a plan. | |
| Student perceptions of the transfer process | | | |
| 3) How do students believe the transfer system works? | “I went through with DirectConnect and I've got my transfer so once the final grades are posted then my final transcripts will go, and hopefully I will be able to start in the fall.... They are always there to help us and say if you ever have a problem come talk to us. I thought it was going to be a lot more work and then basically it was just bring the proper documents.” | Students who use DirectConnect advisors know the process. | Students working with DirectConnect or who have a clear program plan are more likely to understand the transfer process. |
| | “We talked to somebody who told her about the DirectConnect thing and you have to apply for that. You have to put in a request, but you cannot request until you have already finished I think. Right? I do not remember.” | Students are unsure when to start the transfer process. | |

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| 3) cont. from page 6. How do students believe the transfer system works? | "I don't know the process. What is it going to take to transfer over? I don't know do you just apply...? They are going to ask... if you completed your AA. That is what I am guessing and then wait until I am accepted." | Students know their expected graduation and transfer dates, but not the process. | |
| | "The best advice I got was he told me to look for the requirements from the college website so if I was planning to go somewhere to look up what they need me to." | Students look at the other institution's requirements. | |
| | "I have to have 80 credits that can be transferred and I also have to have a portfolio of places that I worked or like experience and a resume." & "I have to do an interview for my transfer. I have to get a certain amount of general ed credits, and then I have to also have like a writing portfolio.... I have to write two short stories and then 2 short film treatments or script treatments in order to enter the program." | Students are aware of criteria like portfolio, work experience, entrance tests, and gpa. | |
| | "You have to fill stuff out and you have to put forward like you have to do all this school work first." | Students believe it takes a lot of work to transfer. | |
| | "However long it takes for them to accept me. Should not take too long probably." | Students believe Direct Connect is an automatic process. | |
| 4) What are the roadblocks or barriers to getting transfer assistance? | "My sister, she already graduated college and so I asked her, 'what should I do? Where should I look for help?'.... The one thing that we the students need to know is that we are not alone in the college.... If you can form a connection... with just other students now that is a good way to receive help and receive support." | Students refer to friends or family members who have recently transferred. | Students are looking for inroads to the transfer process that are personal, visible, and consistent. |
| | "They just go online and do their own research. That is what I think." | Students go online or start applying with no assistance. | |
| | "I feel like I should learn more about the program at UCF.... I do not know how UCF does it." | Many students don't know the transfer process. | |

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| 4) cont. from page 7. What are the roadblocks or barriers to getting transfer assistance? | "A face-to-face conversation because then I would have said something I would not be doubtful about it and I can ask anything" | Students want to meet in person to discuss steps to transfer. | |
| | "Every semester there is something different. Always something, and you go to different advisors and they will all tell you something different every single time." | Students feel like requirements change every semester. | |
| | "I have already applied and they are like tedious because they are like this class doesn't line up with this class so you have to take this class when you get there, or you took too many extra classes you don't actually need." | Courses do not align with other institutions. | |
| | "Contacting the other school I think is difficult for me because it freaks me out." | Students are intimidated to call other institutions or start application. | |
| | "I was in advising a lot and they just kind of gave me a sheet of everything I needed for my AA, but I didn't really need that because I was going for the AS.... But I just did not have that knowledge, I didn't really know." | Choosing A.S. or A.A. is challenging/unclear. | |
| | "If we are unsure of our major and our paths... it is very scary to move on to University. And going through classes and then at the end realizing man I want to change my major now. I took all of these classes, I spent all of this money, and now I have to restart it." | Changing majors presents difficulty for timely transfer. | |
| Additional student perceptions | | | |
| 5) Are there connections to the New Student Experience? | <p>"I know I would get the right track with my SLS teacher.... I knew that I could go to her with anything whether it be personal problem or school related I think that she would help me."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>"Definitely the best advice I have gotten would be from my SLS teacher just pointing me on the right track and told me what I needed, so that has really been good."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>"The DirectConnect program, I heard that in SLS."</p> | Students trust NSE faculty and say they get them on the right track. | Students create a strong personal connection with NSE Faculty and view them as a reliable resource for advising. |

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| 6) What innovations / unintended consequences are emerging? | <p>“We may see our advisors as kind of like our parents. Sometimes for certain advice we go to our parents, but for other advice we go to our friends because we feel that our friends are more at our level than what our parents are going to give us. Our parents are going to give us the advice that we do not want to hear, but it is the right one.... Our friends are going to be more open-minded and to be more useful in their thinking which is not always bad but is not always good.... An advisor who can put themselves down to our level in our shoes rather than something so strict and dry...I believe it is a skill to be able to do that.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>“If they know you truly are going to make a mistake they should be like I guess your second to parent, your moral compass. Even though we are all grown-ups and we should know how to behave, but at least try to help you a little more because they probably know.”</p> | Students seek two different kinds of advice, the been-there-done-that kind they would go to parents for and the like-minded advice they go to friends for. | Students value personal connection with faculty and respect them as experts. |

The results of the focus groups inform an advising theory that **a discipline-based faculty advising model needs to be student-centered and sensitive to a student’s personal circumstances.**

- Faculty advisors will not replace other avenues where students seek advising, but should keep in mind students learn by receiving advising as needed.
- Faculty advisors need experiential knowledge of the student’s degree requirements.
- Faculty advisors are effective when they are accessible, empathetic, and focused on personal connection.
- Faculty advisors need to empower students to use academic planning tools and resources that build student skills progressively.
- Students value personal connection with faculty and respect them as experts.
- Students benefit when faculty advisors set expectations and provide program planning information early.
- Students create a strong personal connection with NSE Faculty and view them as a reliable resource for advising.

In addition, the focus on transfer in the discussions led to a transfer theory that **students are looking for inroads to the transfer process that are personal, visible, and consistent.**

- Students know they will need assistance to transfer.
- Students working with DirectConnect or who have a clear program plan are more likely to understand the transfer process.