PROPOSAL 4
Strategic Planning Funding Proposal

WRITERS’ CENTER/GENERAL UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING

Project Leads

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Abstract: This project will facilitate student success by providing additional personnel to General Undergraduate University Advising so that this office can engage in activities it currently does not have the staff for. These activities include identifying “at risk” populations of students for targeted advising, supporting faculty development around advising, and advising the at-risk population of students in transition between majors individually and in group sessions. Writers’ Center Responders, professionals with expertise in working one-on-one with EWU students, will be trained as “backfill” for experienced advisers. The development of training, group advising, and web-based group advising materials will be completed during the course of this limited project. Data from the rate of use by students in transition between majors will serve to inform Academic Affairs about whether additional personnel for GUAA will significantly support student success.

Intro:

Tom Santora entered EWU in 1998 ready to declare as an education major. An Alaskan resident, he did not expect to be selling shoes in Spokane seven years after matriculating. Nonetheless, in Fall of 2005, with nearly 225 credits, Tom has exhausted his financial aid, so he is stopped out, three courses short of a BA, waiting for summer ’06, when he expects to have enough money saved to finish. He is no longer an education major, but is now in Interdisciplinary Studies, and he got there via Business.

As a TRIO student, Tom thrived on the personal attention and careful advising available to him through the TRIO program in his first year. When he returned as a sophomore education major and tried to see his TRIO adviser, he learned that this service was so longer available to him. Because he was sure he wanted a career in elementary education, he self-advised. Unfortunately, he did not self-advise accurately, and ended up taking courses that didn’t satisfy prerequisites or
that didn’t provide the needed skills (for example, he took MATH 212 instead of 115). When he finally declared a major, he received advising in that major only. However, perhaps because he didn’t have the prerequisite knowledge, he found that major unsatisfying and changed to another major with a different set of prerequisites and skills. Finally, he heard from a friend about Interdisciplinary Studies, a program he says he “wished [he] knew about from the start,” declared that as his major, received clear advising in the major from someone trained to understand the whole spectrum of undergraduate needs, and he is now three courses from graduating.

Tom persisted through major changes and “wasted” courses, but many students do not persist. EWU loses a greater percentage (34%) of its students after the second year of school than after the first year (18%). This corresponds to the time when access to GUAA becomes unavailable to many students. Like most institutions, EWU has not kept data on why students leave the university – there are “major gaps in the persistence literature … on student retention after the first year” (Seidman, 131) but “one comprehensive study” identified “inadequate academic advising as the major characteristic linked to attrition” (Noel, Levitz, Saluri, and Ass’n, 245).

This project is designed to plug some of the holes that Tom fell into, thus enabling EWU to retain and graduate our students in a more efficient manner.

**Project Goals and the Strategic Plan**

Tom’s engagement in his learning was disrupted because he didn’t use what he learned initially in his advising to guide his progress, and because he failed to insist on thorough advising in the major once declared. The faculty advisors in the first two majors he chose were unable to assist him to consider other majors because the environment in which they have worked has not yet supported their understanding of different programs. The strategic plan prioritizes remedying both of these problems by establishing an environment conducive to student engagement in the rigors of academic life by supporting faculty/staff
development. This proposal describes a project that would facilitate the success of students like Tom by providing the information and tools upon which such success rests, either through direct contact with advisors, or by contact with faculty recently given additional training by advisors.

The proposed project will enhance access to effective, comprehensive advising which will increase retention to graduation by providing “backfill” staffing which will allow experienced advisers to

a. Develop databases and materials
   - databases of “at risk” students (based on key elements in the literature – for example, students with high SAT scores and low GPAs)
   - electronic materials for an on-line advising tutorial to enable those students who try to self-advise to understand when they must seek assistance

b. Support faculty to advise more comprehensively (including general education and major-change advice)

c. conduct group and individual advising sessions with students “at risk” or transitioning students.

Partners and their Contributions

The only resource required to enact this plan is personnel. The GUAA staff could choose to do any of these things, but it would be at the expense of meeting with students. Currently the advising staff is stretched so thin that students may wait as long as three weeks for a half-hour appointment. This project would free up the time of experienced advisers to work on these initiatives by providing easily-trainable personnel who could take over some of the more routine advising duties like meeting with new students.
Writers’ Center Responders are professionals with graduate coursework and degrees, familiarity with the university, with a track record of successful one-on-one interactions with students. The “caring attitude” like that exhibited by Responders (as documented in the Writers’ Center assessment measures) is “the single most potent retention agent on campus” (Noel, L, S, Ass, 245). However, Responders are limited to half-time positions by the current budget, and so these individuals who have exhibited tremendous skill at enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning are available to work half-time as advisors.

Responders are already adept at working with students because of their exceptional listening, rapport-building, and information synthesizing skills, so they could be trained as advisors more quickly than professionals who have little experience working one-on-one with our population of first generation and transfer students. After an initial training period of 3 weeks, they could be able to backfill for the experienced advisors who could then embark on the new initiatives described in this proposal. Besides providing skilled candidates, the Writers’ Center will also contribute paid time for studying advising training materials; when Responders are on the center schedule but do not have an appointment they can study advising materials, SIS codes, or Banner instructions individually or with others. Typically such early-quarter “down time” is spent reading *Writing Lab Newsletter* or comparing notes on interesting sessions.

Like advisors, Responders are experienced at coaxing insights about intellectual, career, and personal goals out of students, using a “relational” rather than “transactional” (Kramer 28) approach in their “appropriate interventions” (Kramer, 15). The “secret to successful retention... lies in the willingness of institutions to involve themselves in the social and intellectual development of the student” (Tinto, p 6). Responders can bring experience and discipline-based strategies about collaboration to their work with students and to share with their colleagues in advising.

**Specific Project Tasks, Goals, Assessment Strategies and Itemized Costs**
The attached chart describes each of the tasks proposed for this project, the outcome goal for that task, an indication of whether the task would be a one-time or continuing event, the timeline for completion or initiation of the task, the resources required for the completion of that task, and the total cost of that task. Each of the tasks falls into one of the three categories mentioned above – development of databases or materials, supporting faculty, or advising individually or in groups. The cost for personnel hours is calculated at the current average Writers’ Center rate of pay. According to HR, Responders working in this capacity would not accrue benefits. Please see Appendix A for a chart that outlines these elements.

Assumptions:
We assume that this project will begin at the start of winter quarter. All dates on the timeline are set in relation to this assumption. It would be possible for Responders to start this work earlier, however, if the process allows it.

In order to fill these positions, interested Responders will apply (presenting the same materials as all applicants do) to the director of General Undergraduate Advising who will make the selection. We have designed this project so that four separate Responders would contribute up to 80 hours per week to GUAA.

Assessment of this Project:
Direct measures of assessment are preferable to indirect measures, however, with a transient population of students such as those who visit advising or the Writers’ Center, direct measures are difficult to obtain, especially in a relatively short period of time like that available for this project. It would be ideal to track students who participated in the enhanced advising events longitudinally to determine whether this population is more likely than the general population to persist to graduation. It would be even better to interview students before and after visits to advising about their belief system about education, but such a project would be expensive and would draw down the pool of funds otherwise available for meeting with students. However, useful data for continuous
improvement can be gleaned from self-report surveys of student behavior; both the Writers’ Center and GUAA routinely survey students to determine whether the goals of each unit are being achieved. Surveys would be generated and tabulated for each of the new elements made possible by this project.

Integration and Interdependence
Obviously the most pointed, direct focus of this project is on intervening with students in the advising process to facilitate the kind of thinking and planning that leads to academic success. However, student success will also be the by-product of the interface of these two offices. Staff members in both offices read scholarship about one-on-one instruction; both facilities see students who, for different reasons, perceive roadblocks to their success. The integration of these staff members who do similar jobs in different venues will enrich the working environment. This project provides a model to the university for integrated, interdependent facilities.

Sustainability
Many of the tasks described in this project would yield completed, useful product during the funding period. The development of an on-line advising tutorial, workshops for faculty and students, and the compilation of advisor-advisee lists would benefit GUAA in perpetuity. The continuing elements of the project – primarily the upgrade in availability of advising to students currently not served by GUAA – should be studied by Academic Affairs to whether this project should be continued at any level with base funding.

References: *I have to stick these in.*
