



# 2012-2013 Academic Advising Program Evaluation Report Executive Summary

Presented by the MSU Academic Advising Council Assessment Committee  
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## Introduction

The influence of advising is underestimated in studies investigating the impact of institutional initiatives, and it is understudied in the broader literature (Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010; Habley, 2009). The impact of advising needs to be measured and communicated in terms that align with current higher education accountability demands (Keeling, 2010). However, significant work remains for most institutions, including MSU, to develop assessment processes to impact and communicate advising outcomes (Light, 2004).

In alignment with a paradigm shift toward advising as teaching that produces measurable outcomes, institutions may initially wish to evaluate alignment of advising programs with the learning-centered paradigm (Gordon, 2004; Hurt, 2007; Lowenstein, 2005). Through exploration of documents guiding MSU advising, literature related to advising assessment, and MSU's existing advising assessment data, the purpose of this study was to evaluate MSU's advising program theory (i.e., identified strategies for achieving measurable outcomes) and existing data to inform recommendations for advancing MSU's advising assessment efforts. The carefully planned and timely dissemination of results from this study can foster a sense of involvement, pride, and ownership among the many MSU employees who advise students—motivating them to embrace assessment as an avenue to celebrate achievements and improve advising.

## Scholarly Context

Assessment of academic advising is less advanced than that of classroom learning (Kelley, 2008), and the link between advising and student achievement needs to be demonstrated. Advising systems are evolving along with higher education toward a need to demonstrate accountability through measuring performance outcomes. This accompanies a paradigm shift toward viewing advising as teaching—thereby facilitating assessment of how advisors teach students to develop skills and understanding necessary for success. However, improved assessment practices and an expanded scholarly foundation are still needed across the field of advising.

Identifying desired advisor outcomes (e.g., accountability, empowerment) and related student learning outcomes (e.g., self-efficacy, responsibility, study skills, perceived support) is complicated and may be guided by exploration of student expectations and experiences, analysis of program structure and mission, and review of related scholarly literature (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, Hawthorne, 2013).

## Evaluation Findings

### RQ1: How can MSU's advising program theory be understood through related program documents?

Typological analyses (Hatch, 2002) demonstrated that documents guiding advising at MSU align with extant literature (Lowenstein, 2005; Young-Jones et al., 2013). The documents implicitly articulate advising program theory, meaning that assumptions inherent in MSU advising are not clearly tied to expected outcomes.

- **Advising Mission Statement\***: Each element of MSU's advising mission corresponds to conceptual and operational constructs identified in the literature.
- **Best Practices for Academic Advisors at Missouri State University\***: Activities are suggested for MSU advisors. Although no measurable outcomes are articulated, this is an important source of information for identifying desirable outcomes.
- **Be Advised: Help Your Advisor Help You\***: Elements suggest but do not clearly articulate measurable student outcomes (e.g., producing a degree audit, demonstrating knowledge of program requirements and course prerequisites).

While the connection between advising and expected outcomes is clearer in the "Be Advised" document than through the mission statement or advisor best practices, program theory is not articulated in a manner directly facilitating outcome measurement.

### RQ2: What can be learned about MSU's advising program impact through analyzing existing data?

- **Demographics**: The freshman sample ( $n = 500$ ) consisted primarily of White (85.4%) female (60.2%) students with 10.6% reporting Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin. The senior sample ( $n = 645$ ) was comprised of mostly White (86.2%) female (59.5%) students, 3.3% of whom reported Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- **Personal responsibility for academic planning**: Most students reported that they would or did take the lead role in decision making with input from their advisor (freshmen = 67.2%; seniors = 62.3%), followed by students partnering 50/50 with their advisor (freshmen = 24.4%; seniors = 23.4%).
- **Personal responsibility for post-graduation planning**: Among freshmen, 66% expected to take the lead role with input from the advisor, while 45.9% of seniors reporting doing so. Only 17% of freshmen expected to make all decisions in this area, whereas 45.4% of seniors reported making all related decisions.
- **Overall experience with MSU advising**: Most students reported extremely positive or positive experiences (freshmen = 75.6%; seniors = 75.8%).
- **Meeting after 75 credit hours**: Most freshmen (91.2%) reported expecting to meet with their advisor occasionally or at least once a year after completing 75 credit hours, and 85.1% of seniors met with advisors at least once a year after that point.

- **Advisors providing career-related information:** More freshmen (89%) reported expecting advisors to provide information about career-related options than seniors (43.6%) reported receiving.
- **Advisors providing information about cocurricular involvement:** More freshmen (50.8%) expected information from advisors about cocurricular involvement opportunities (e.g., internships) than seniors (21.7%) reported receiving.
- **Advisor support of best possible MSU education:** More freshmen (93.8%) reported expecting advisors to support them in seeking the best possible education at MSU than seniors (78%) who reported experiencing such support.
- **Advising as teaching:** Typological analyses of qualitative student feedback revealed themes that elucidate Lowenstein's (2005) conceptualization of advising as teaching. Findings guided recommendations of measurable outcomes related to advisor accountability, advisor empowerment, perceived support, student responsibility, student self-efficacy, and study skills.
- **Freshman expectations versus senior experiences:** Chi square analyses revealed that freshmen held significantly higher expectations than seniors reported experiencing with regard to information provided through advising (i.e., academic rules, regulations, and deadlines; referrals to campus resources; career related options; study habits and time management; and, opportunities for involvement).
- **GPA predictors related to advising:** *Advisor information* (i.e., related to majors, minors, and careers), *advisor support*, and students' levels of *personal responsibility* for planning were revealed as significant predictors of senior GPA. The regression model explained 4% of GPA variance, predicting with 95% confidence a GPA range between 3.06 and 3.62 based on scores for the three predictors. In light of the restricted GPA range of 2.00 to 4.00 for students to continue their studies at MSU, a 4% increase in GPA related to academic advising is meaningful.

### Assessment Recommendations

#### **RQ3: How can MSU improve its advising program assessment and evaluation practices?**

The present study incorporated empirically supported constructs from the literature into evaluation of MSU's advising program theory and impact. NACADA (2004) recommended as a core value that advising processes be shaped by understanding of institutional and student expectations.

- Results of this study demonstrated how student expectations are addressed by MSU's advising program and how these findings align with institutional expectations broadly defined in MSU's advising mission statement and identified best practices.
- Findings highlighted deficiencies in advising outcome measurement and informed recommendations for addressing them.

**For MSU Provost and Associate Provosts to consider:**

- Purposefully communicate elements of this study’s findings (e.g., survey summaries\*) with college deans and program directors, and encourage their receptivity to working with the taskforce recommended below.
- Appoint an advising assessment taskforce comprised of faculty, staff, and students with an interest in advising assessment and with at least one representative from Computer Services. Charge the group to collaborate with AAC’s Assessment Subcommittee to implement the following recommendations across campus programs with advising components. As possible, support group members with stipends or release time toward this effort.
  - Review and expand the preliminary assessment plan\* resulting from this study to create a comprehensive advising assessment plan for MSU. This will require additional mapping of recommended outcomes and adding new outcomes identified by programs and offices across campus.
  - Create rubrics to assess specific outcomes, conduct focus groups, and program computerized data collection tied to screens frequently accessed by advisors and students through My Missouri State. Investigate how such assessment tools can best be embedded into normal work flow (Bolman & Deal, 2008).
  - Collaborate with the Office of Assessment and AAC Assessment Subcommittee to develop a five-year plan to evaluate one outcome a year, and develop plans to disseminate findings (i.e., to whom, how). Once the plan and data collection tools are in place, the AAC will have access to a consistent influx of data upon which to base future recommendations for enhancing MSU advising (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

**Qualitative and quantitative analyses in the present study revealed that MSU’s advising practices are empirically grounded and producing desirable results. Findings of this study highlighted individual and programmatic practices that MSU can celebrate while providing recommendations to enhance future advising assessment efforts.**

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\*See Academic Advising at Missouri State University: 2012-2013 Program Evaluation Report