

Student Academic Affairs Committee
Activities & Actions for the 2002-2003 Academic Year
Report to Academic Senate
May 2003

- I. *“The committee shall be responsible for hearing appeals of the Student Grievances Subcommittee actions ...”*

During the fall semester, a panel of the committee met to consider an appeal of an action of the 2001-2002 subcommittee with respect to a grade dispute. The panel upheld the subcommittee’s action. Special thanks to Emily Eckman, Fred Owens, and Jeff Parks for convening on very short notice to serve on this panel.

- II. *“The committee shall be responsible for making recommendations to the Academic Senate as to policy related to ... academic advisement; ...”*

At least three different reports concerning academic advisement at YSU have been published in the last two years:

- [1] **Study Group** on Academic Advising (January 26, 2001)
“... in general Youngstown State University is negligent in the support of academic advising ...”
- [2] **Student Government** Report on Undergraduate Advisement (April 22, 2002)
“... the disappointing advisement situation.”
- [3] **Stamats** Academic Advising Audit Report (October 2002)
“The current level of support for academic advising is insufficient to serve the undergraduate population.”

The recommendations of these three studies may be generally summarized as “more” more resources, more attention, and more clarity. The general consensus of the **Student Academic Affairs Committee** is supportive of these prior studies. The **Committee’s** recommendations are presented in the following observations.

Observations on More Resources

Given the current funding situation, added funding for academic advising is very unlikely in the near term. Any changes recommended in this type of environment are bound to have implications for the allocation of current resources. The **Committee** is keenly aware of this and thus feels immediately constrained in making recommendations for the near future. Recommendations for the near future are contained in the following two sections and are, to the extent possible, resource-neutral. However, as a long-term proposition, the **Committee** recommends hiring more professional advisors, perhaps implementing the model currently used by the WCBA.

Observations on More Attention

[1] Tone at the top is critical to substantive improvement of academic advisement. To that end, recommendation number one of **Stamats** should be implemented: “Assign oversight for the advising program to an individual (Assistant/Associate Provost) in the Provost’s Office.” The **Committee** believes this oversight function should, at minimum, contain the following features:

[A] In coordination with college deans, develop and widely publish a written advisement policy for each college.

[B] Ensure that each college identifies a specific procedure or event where all new students receive the written advisement policy.

[C] Monitor and assess each college’s implementation of its written advisement policy, including all deviations from the written policy and all students complaints

[2] Student Government should be actively involved in representing the interests of students in quality academic advising. Such active involvement should include the following features:

[A] Student Government should be provided up-to-date copies of each college’s written advisement policy. The individual in the Provost’s Office assigned oversight should provide these copies.

[B] Student Government should receive and formally document all student complaints regarding academic advisement. These documented complaints would then be forwarded to the Provost’s Office for investigation and disposition as part of the monitoring and assessment function mentioned above. The chair of the Student Academic Affairs Committee should be copied on the document. Ultimate disposition by the Provost’s Office should be formally communicated to Student Government, with a copy forwarded to the chair of the Student Academic Affairs Committee.

[3] There should be recognition of excellence in academic advisement. **Study Group** advanced the idea of setting aside one distinguished professor award for excellence in academic advising. Another idea mentioned in **Committee** discussions, although not budget neutral, would be to allocate perhaps \$2,000 to Student Government for the specific purpose of allowing the students to select and reward excellence in academic advising.

Observations on More Clarity

There are two factors currently at work on campus that will help the advisement process. First, conversion to semester complications will soon become a non-issue. Second, the degree audit program is currently being developed. Its implementation may greatly facilitate academic advisement. These two factors impact the issue of clarity in academic advisement, or as one committee member stated it, the need for better coordination and clearer guidelines. Enhancing clarity in the current resource-constrained environment leads the **Committee** to the following observations:

[1] Students must take responsibility for monitoring their own progress through their programs. However, in order for them to do so effectively, they must be provided with well-organized, easily-read curriculum sheets. Thus, part of the job of the advisement function is to ensure these materials are provided to students.

[2] Advisors should never attempt advising without first having updated curriculum sheets present at the advisement session. This has implications for how advisement is scheduled — walk-in versus by-appointment.

[3] Part of the monitoring and assessment function from the Provost's Office should include careful scrutiny and evaluation of the design of these materials.

[4] **Student Government** refers to the issue of “advisement jurisdiction”. This issue arises because of the dispersal of advisement duties across professional advisors *and* faculty advisors *and*, in some cases, peer advisors. The **Committee** recognizes this approach as an attempt to “solve” the advisement problem without devoting more resources to it. Such an approach, however, creates the potential for the student to receive conflicting advice and be caught in a jurisdictional crossfire. Students suffering in a situation like this should be able to report it to Student Government using the mechanism recommended above. Further, the **Committee** strongly recommends discontinuing peer advisement. It is viewed as only slightly helpful at best, counterproductive and harmful at worst. Disbursing the responsibility for academic advising to any more groups makes the situation worse, not better. The **Committee** reiterates its long-term recommendation to work toward hiring more professional advisors to centralize the advisement function and identify responsibility more clearly.

[5] **Student Government** cites a lack of uniformity in transfer of classes from other colleges and in switching majors. Prior planning by the colleges would seem to be the key to avoiding these types of problems. Students who believe themselves to have been treated unfairly in comparison to other students should be able to complain to Student Government using the process discussed above.

[6] When proper academic advising has been rendered, it must be supported by the college deans; it cannot be subverted in the interests of enrollment enhancement. Such subversion invites students to “play the system” and makes sound academic advisement all the more difficult to achieve.