



**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS**

OFFICE OF INTERNAL AUDIT

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July 16, 2018

Dr. Richard Benson, President,  
Ms. Lisa Choate, Chair of the Institutional Audit Committee:

We have completed an audit of Academic Advising, as part of our fiscal year 2018 Audit Plan. The objective of our audit was to ensure university practices are offering consistent levels of support for undergraduate students. The report is attached for your review.

Overall, we concluded that while university practices are providing support for undergraduate students, opportunities exist to improve and provide consistent support for students across the university related to academic advising practices. Management has reviewed the recommendations and has provided responses and anticipated implementation dates. Though management is responsible for implementing the course of action outlined in the response, we will follow up on the status of implementation subsequent to the anticipated implementation dates.

We appreciate the courtesies and considerations extended to us during our engagement. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments regarding this audit.

Toni Stephens, CPA, CIA, CRMA  
Chief Audit Executive



## Executive Summary

### Audit Objective and Scope

To ensure university advising practices are offering consistent levels of support for undergraduate students. The scope of our audit was fiscal year 2017.

### Conclusion

While university advising practices are providing support for undergraduate students, opportunities exist to improve and provide consistent support across the university.

### Audit Recommendations by Risk Level

Recommendation	Risk Level	Estimated Implementation Date
(1) Balance Advisor Workload for the University	Medium/Low <sup>1</sup>	May 31, 2019
(2) Enhance Advising Standards for the University	Low	May 31, 2019
(3) Develop Process to Provide Support to At-Risk Students	Low	May 31, 2019

### Responsible Vice President

Dr. Inga Musselman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

### Responsible Parties

- Dr. Jessica Murphy, Undergraduate Dean
- Dr. Dennis Kratz, Dean of Arts and Humanities
- Dr. Anne Balsamo, Dean of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communications
- Dr. James Bartlett, Interim Dean of Behavioral and Brain Sciences
- Dr. Poras Balsara, Interim Dean of Engineering and Computer Science
- Dr. Jennifer Holmes, Interim Dean of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences
- Dr. George Fair, Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies
- Dr. Hasan Pirkul, Dean of Management
- Dr. Bruce Novak, Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

### Staff Assigned to Audit

Project Manager: Toni Stephens, CPA, CIA, CRMA  
 Project Leader: Ray Khan, CFE, CIDA

<sup>1</sup> This risk level is considered Medium/Low. Internal Audit believes the risk could moderately expose UT Dallas; however, the Provost stated, "I believe that all of the risks are low. For the first risk, when considering the total number of advisors in undergraduate education and the schools combined, the student-to-advisor ratio is within the recommendation."



## Report Distribution

<p><i>Members of the UT Dallas Institutional Audit Committee</i></p> <p>External Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Lisa Choate, Chair</li> <li>• Mr. Gurshaman Baweja</li> <li>• Mr. Bill Keffler</li> <li>• Mr. Ed Montgomery</li> <li>• Ms. Julie Knecht</li> </ul> <p>UT Dallas Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Richard Benson, President</li> <li>• Dr. Hobson Wildenthal, Executive Vice President</li> <li>• Dr. Kyle Edgington, Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations</li> <li>• Mr. Frank Feagans, Vice President and Chief Information Officer</li> <li>• Dr. Gene Fitch, Vice President for Student Affairs</li> <li>• Dr. Calvin Jamison, Vice President for Administration</li> <li>• Dr. Inga Musselman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs</li> <li>• Dr. Joseph Pancrazio, Vice President for Research</li> <li>• Mr. Terry Pankratz, Vice President for Budget and Finance</li> <li>• Mr. Timothy Shaw, University Attorney, ex-officio</li> </ul>	<p>Responsible Parties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Jessica Murphy, Undergraduate Dean</li> <li>• Dr. Dennis Kratz, Dean of Arts and Humanities</li> <li>• Dr. Anne Balsamo, Dean of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communications</li> <li>• Dr. James Bartlett, Interim Dean of Behavioral and Brain Sciences</li> <li>• Dr. Poras Balsara, Interim Dean of Engineering and Computer Science</li> <li>• Dr. Jennifer Holmes, Interim Dean of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences</li> <li>• Dr. George Fair, Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies</li> <li>• Dr. Hasan Pirkul, Dean of Management</li> <li>• Dr. Bruce Novak, Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics</li> <li>• John Jackson, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education</li> <li>• Advising Directors</li> <li>• Associate Deans of Undergraduate Education in the Schools</li> </ul> <p>External Agencies</p> <p><i>The University of Texas System</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System Audit Office</li> </ul> <p><i>State of Texas Agencies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative Budget Board</li> <li>• Governor’s Office</li> <li>• State Auditor’s Office</li> <li>• Sunset Advisory Commission</li> </ul>
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## Background

Academic advising is conducted to provide insight and direction on academic, social, and personal aspects that have an impact on a student’s academic career. At UT Dallas, each school is responsible for determining the academic advising process they will follow. Within the individual schools, there were approximately 40 advisors responsible for advising approximately 16,000 students during the spring 2017 semester. There is also an advisor in Undergraduate Education.

### Spring 2017 University Totals:

School	Spring 2017 Undergraduate Enrollment <sup>2</sup>	Spring 2017 Undergraduate Advisors <sup>3</sup>
School of Arts and Humanities	378	2
School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication	1,271	3
School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences	1,888	4
Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science	4,318	10
School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences	777	3
School of Interdisciplinary Studies	840	4
Jindal School of Management	3,851	7
School of Natural Science and Mathematics	2,634	7

To improve advising practices for the university, the Office of Undergraduate Education created the Advising Directors Group. This group consists of advising directors from all of the schools so that advising issues noted in one school can be addressed for the entire campus. The Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education helps coordinate the various advisors.

The University utilizes the Student Book system to document all communications between advisors and students. This system also provides the advisor with degree and contact information for the student. All of the schools and other departments that have interactions with students, such as the Student Success Center, Office of Undergraduate Education, Office of Graduate Studies, and Office of Student Affairs, have access to this system. The Provost’s

<sup>2</sup> [Spring 2017 Enrollment](#)

<sup>3</sup> Student Book Data



Technology Group is responsible for maintaining this system and works with the Office of Undergraduate Education to provide access the system.

## Audit Objective

To ensure university advising practices are offering consistent levels of support for undergraduate students.

## Scope and Methodology

The scope of this audit was fiscal year 2017 and our fieldwork concluded on January 5, 2018, and management's responses were received on July 15, 2018. To satisfy our objectives, we performed the following:

- Gained an understanding of university academic advising practices and the Student Book system
- Determined if advisors were sufficiently documenting communications with students
- Determined if the need for appeals were sufficiently documented within Student Book.
- Calculated the amount of students that were advised within each school and by each advisor within each school to determine the advisor workload and individual advising rates within each school
- Verified that advisors are consistently documenting the advice that is offered to students
- Identified whether students were given assistance prior to being at-risk of placement on academic or scholarship probation.
- Met with school advising directors, Dean of Undergraduate Education, and Provost Technology Group to discuss Student Book utilization, data, and documentation

We conducted our examination in conformance with the guidelines set forth in The Institute of Internal Auditor's *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*. The *Standards* are statements of core requirements for the professional practice of internal auditing.

Additionally, we conducted the audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



## Conclusion

Based on the audit work performed, we conclude that while university advising practices are providing support for undergraduate students, opportunities exist to improve and provide consistent support for students across the university.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation received from the management and staff in the Provost’s Office, the Office of Undergraduate Education, and the advising directors from all of the schools as part of this audit.

## Audit Results and Management’s Responses

Strengths and Controls Noted During the Audit
Advising directors meet on a regular basis to discuss advising challenges on campus.
An advising system which is used to document communications between students and advisors has been developed and implemented for the university.
Documented records within Student Book cannot be changed after they are created and access requires an active netID.
Documented communications between students and multiple advisors are sufficiently providing advisors with an understanding of the advice provided to the students.

Although the above strengths and controls were noted, opportunities exist to enhance academic advising as outlined below. The Risk Levels are defined in [Appendix 1](#).

Observation and Risk Level	Risk/Effect	Recommendation
<p><b>Provost’s Overall Response:</b> <i>On behalf of Academic Affairs, I wish to express my appreciation for the constructive and helpful interactions between the Audit staff and the various leaders and colleagues that work in and supervise the area of Academic Advising. Academic Advising is a significant element in the complex are of student success, a primary UT Dallas goal, and an important element in the public’s perception of our performance in this same general domain. Very often, problems, real and perceived, in university performance in the area of student success are simplified in the public discourse to inadequate or inept academic advising. Hence, for both internal substantive reasons and for external public opinion, it is important to pay continuing attention to all aspects of what is referred to as Academic Advising. Therefore, activities such as this audit are very useful in raising the level of attention devoted to this key element of the university’s educational mission.</i></p>		
<p><b>1. Review Advisor Workloads (Medium/Low)</b></p> <p>The National Academic Advising Association conducted a study that found that the median case load for one full-</p>	<p>Higher than recommended workloads could put additional pressures on advisors and</p>	<p>Advisor workloads should be reviewed with each school to ensure that the needs of the students are being met. Consideration should be given to setting workload</p>



Observation and Risk Level	Risk/Effect	Recommendation
<p>time advisor is approximately 300 students<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, the Office of Undergraduate Education recommends that advising units on campus should have a range of 325 to 350 students per advisor.</p> <p>Five of the eight schools had a workload that was higher than these recommended workloads. The university average workload of 399 students per advisor is also higher than this recommended range. <a href="#">Appendix 2</a></p> <p>The Office of Undergraduate Education also recommends that students should communicate with their advisors at least once per semester<sup>5</sup>. As shown in <a href="#">Appendix 3</a>, University advisors typically communicated with less than 75 percent of all students enrolled during the Spring 2017 semester.</p>	<p>result in poor customer service to the students.</p>	<p>goals in line with professional guidance.</p>
<p><b>Management’s Response and Action Plan:</b></p> <p><b>Comments:</b> <i>The report states that the number of undergraduate academic advisors is 40, and quotes an average student-advisor ratio of 399 across the schools, relative to the "Standard" of 325 to 350 proposed by the Office of Undergraduate Education and the median case load of approximately 300 reported by the National Academic Advising Association. The report fails to note that there also are 9 academic advisors in the Office of Undergraduate Education, so that the ratio of undergraduate students per academic advisor can be measured, alternatively, as 326.</i></p> <p><i>The report correctly indicates significant variances in the numbers of academic advisors assigned to each UT Dallas school. This variance is difficult to reduce by reallocating existing lines between schools because of the proportionally large impacts of reducing the numbers of advisors for small units in order to increase the numbers further in those schools with larger numbers of majors. Simply increasing the numbers of advisors in the larger schools obviously would improve the student-advisor ratios, but as in every dimension of university life, such additional investments would require compensatory reductions elsewhere in university</i></p>		

<sup>4</sup> [NACADA: Advisor Load](#); [NACADA: Effective Ways to Deal with Large Advising Loads](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Undergraduate Advising](#)



Observation and Risk Level	Risk/Effect	Recommendation
<p><i>operations. If implemented within Academic Affairs, the most probable reduction would be in the teaching staff. This then calls the question of the relative importance in the larger domain of student success of academic advising and good primary instruction.</i></p> <p><i>The statement asserting that there were communications between advising staff and only 75% of the undergraduate students in a semester presumably refers to two-way communications or meetings. Getting students to respond to communications from university staff is a well-known problem. Compelling meetings would require draconian measures such as blocking all registration, and could cause more harm than good.</i></p> <p><b>Response:</b> <i>Efforts will be made to identify resources with which to reduce advisor workloads in those schools in which they are heaviest.</i></p> <p><b>Estimated Date of Implementation:</b> <i>May 31, 2019</i></p> <p><b>Person Responsible for Implementation:</b> <i>Dr. Jessica Murphy, Undergraduate Dean Deans of the Academic Schools</i></p>		
<p><b>2. Enhance Advising Standards for the University (Low)</b></p> <p>The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education has developed Academic Advising Program standards and guidelines<sup>6</sup>. While the Advising Directors Group meets weekly and they have been developing guidelines for university advisors, the University does not have any standard requirements or guidelines for minimum documentation when a student meets with an advisor.</p> <p>Additionally, advisors and the Provost’s Technology Group do not have regular communications to discuss the development, implementation, and maintenance of the Student Book system.</p>	<p>Without regular communications between the schools and the Provost’s Technology Group and standard and minimum documentation, inconsistencies can occur for students.</p>	<p>The university should implement standards in line with professional guidance. These standards should be developed with the assistance of the Provost’s Technology Group.</p>
<p><b>Management’s Response and Action Plan:</b></p>		

<sup>6</sup> [Academic Advising Program Standards](#)



Observation and Risk Level	Risk/Effect	Recommendation
<p><b>Comments:</b> <i>All of the players in the large team involved in Academic Advising concur with this audit recommendation. Efforts and structure are in place and active to enhance knowledge and adherence to standards of expectations and ongoing communications among all players.</i></p> <p><b>Response:</b> <i>Ongoing actions to enhance communications within the overall academic advising team and communications between the leadership of the team and external constituents, students, university administrators, and the public will continue, under close monitoring of the Office of the Provost.</i></p> <p><b>Estimated Date of Implementation:</b> <i>May 31, 2019</i></p> <p><b>Person Responsible for Implementation:</b> <i>Dr. Jessica Murphy, Undergraduate Dean Deans of the Academic Schools</i></p>		
<p><b>3. Develop a Process to Provide Support to At-Risk Students (Low)</b></p> <p>There are currently no procedures in place to identify at-risk students prior to them being at risk of being placed on academic or scholarship probation. The University is also not providing these students with resources to prevent them from become at-risk.</p>	<p>As these students are not getting resources that could provide them with assistance, they are remaining at-risk of probation which could lead to them no longer remaining enrolled at the university.</p>	<p>The University should implement procedures to identify and assist struggling students prior to their placement on academic or scholarship probation.</p>
<p><b>Management’s Response and Action Plan:</b></p> <p><b>Comments:</b> <i>The statements that "There are currently no procedures in place to identify at-risk students prior to their being placed on academic or scholarship probation." and "The university is also not providing these students with resources to prevent them from become at-risk (stet)." are difficult to understand.</i></p> <p><i>The university invests annually several million dollars in our large Student Success Center, devoted expressly to providing these resources. Likewise, there are major investments devoted to student success in programs such as Student Outreach and Academic Retention (SOAR), operated through the Office of Undergraduate Education. The challenge is to convince students who need such resources to take advantage of them.</i></p>		



Observation and Risk Level	Risk/Effect	Recommendation
<p><i>It would indeed be ideal if it were possible to forecast in advance those students who are at risk of academic failure. In some tautological sense, every student is "at-risk" of some life situation that interferes significantly with success in their classwork. The primary practical avenue to detecting "at-risk" students is when end-of-semester grades are evaluated. Academic probation is the primary response to remediating the situation, not a terminal failure. It is the process by which the university is able to take a more proactive role in working with students to develop successful actions with respect to their school work. In addition to the primary mechanism, earlier warnings of problems are available from the results of exams given before the final exams. Class attendance is a primary index of success, and non-attendance a primary index of academic difficulty. Compulsory attendance policies and rigorous attendance records would doubtless promote student success, but as with compulsory advising, it is not clear that the costs (in all dimensions) justify the benefits.</i></p> <p><b>Response:</b> <i>All elements of Academic Affairs will continue to devote primary attention to student success in all of its many dimensions. The new UT Dallas student success initiative, "Orbit: Keeping New Comets on Course," including the Quality Enhancement Plan that focuses on new transfer students, as well as the Graduation Help Desk are merely two of the most recent innovations devoted to this goal.</i></p> <p><b>Estimated Date of Implementation:</b> <i>May 31, 2019</i></p> <p><b>Person Responsible for Implementation:</b> <i>Dr. Jessica Murphy, Undergraduate Dean Deans of the Academic Schools</i></p>		



## Appendix 1

### Definition of Risks

Risk Level	Definition
<b>Priority</b>	High probability of occurrence that would significantly impact UT System and/or UT Dallas. Reported to UT System Audit, Compliance, and Risk Management Committee (ACMRC). Priority findings reported to the ACMRC are defined as <i>“an issue identified by an internal audit that, if not addressed timely, could directly impact achievement of a strategic or important operational objective of a UT institution or the UT System as a whole.”</i>
<b>High</b>	Risks are considered to be substantially undesirable and pose a moderate to significant level of exposure to UT Dallas operations. Without appropriate controls, the risk will happen on a consistent basis.
<b>Medium</b>	The risks are considered to be undesirable and could moderately expose UT Dallas. Without appropriate controls, the risk will occur some of the time.
<b>Low</b>	Low probability of various risk factors occurring. Even with no controls, the exposure to UT Dallas will be minimal.



## Appendix 2

### School Workloads

School	Spring 2017 Undergraduate Enrollment <sup>7</sup>	Spring 217 Undergraduate Advisors <sup>8</sup>	Students per Advisor
School of Arts and Humanities	378	2	189
School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication	1,271	3	424
School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences	1,888	4	472
Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science	4,318	10	432
School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences	777	3	259
School of Interdisciplinary Studies	840	4	210
Jindal School of Management	3,851	7	550
School of Natural Science and Mathematics	2,634	7	376

<sup>7</sup> [Spring 2017 Enrollment](#)

<sup>8</sup> Student Book Data



## Appendix 3

### Spring 2017 Advising Rates

School	Spring 2017 Undergraduate Enrollment <sup>9</sup>	Spring 2017 Students Advised <sup>10</sup>	Spring 2017 Advising Percentage
School of Arts and Humanities	378	320	84.66
School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication	1,271	889	69.94
School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences	1,888	1,551	82.15
Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science	4,318	2,504	57.99
School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences	777	753	96.91
School of Interdisciplinary Studies	840	8	0.95
Jindal School of Management	3,851	31.90	82.84
School of Natural Science and Mathematics	2,634	1872	71.07

<sup>9</sup> [Spring 2017 Enrollment](#)

<sup>10</sup> Student Book Data