Executive Summary

Next Steps Toward a 21st Century Saluki Advising Model of Excellence

In July 2011, Dr. Lynn Freeman met with various groups of faculty, students, administrators, advisors and staff to review the current academic advising system at Southern Illinois University (SIU). Dr. Freeman also reviewed documents providing background information on the university, the advising program, new student orientation, and recommendations from the First Year Task Force and Advisement Committee.

The Executive Summary includes:

• shared goals and values expressed during campus visit;
• observations;
• overall prioritized recommendations; and,
• recommendations for immediate changes.

See the Final Report for details of each observation, recommendations and steps.

In the consultant’s experience, there is often a long and meaningful list of shared goals and values across advisors, students, faculty and staff; and, they are often not recognized. This is certainly the case at SIU. The following shared goals and values serve as the foundation for decisions and changes, and can serve as a reminder of the campus’ common ground when this work becomes difficult:

1) Advising is professional and important work that supports retention and student success
2) A shared campus vision and message for advising is needed, and wanted
3) That vision of advising must tie into the university’s future and mission
4) The campus must increase retention and recruitment
5) The campus must increase customer service in all student service areas
6) Technology should enable efficiency and accuracy, it is currently seen as a barrier
7) University wide academic policies need an identifiable home that is a resource for everyone doing advising work
8) Increased communication across all areas that impact advising is needed
9) Good advising is: advisors are available, information is accurate and consistent, and advisors express care for students
10) Advisors should spend less time on bureaucracy and more time with students
11) Advisors should be involved in decisions that affect their work

The following observations provide a framework for the prioritized recommendations:

1) The organizational model for the delivery of advising services at Southern Illinois University is not typical for large, public, four-year universities. The delivery is a mix of several models, which
is chaotic and confusing for students, advisors and faculty; and it creates a silo culture, which has in turn created and will perpetuate several of the key challenges for Saluki Advising.

2) Academic policies are complex, cumbersome and sometimes conflicting as a result of not having an academic policy ‘home’ or widely understood process.

3) There are sufficient human resources available for advising loads, but those resources are not distributed or being utilized in a way that effectively helps students on the front end of their college experience, in the first and second years.

4) There is no funding model in place to reward the results of good academic advising (namely, retention, successful transition into the major, and graduation). A funding model that rewards the work of student academic support services related to their successful transition to the academic college and the major will create the sense of shared purpose and mutually benefit the colleges and those services. It will also help reduce the advising and student service silos that exist across campus.

5) Student dissatisfaction – students want more availability, more consistency, accurate information and care from their advisors.

6) Advisor dissatisfaction – their work is characterized by heavy administrative/’busy’ work that prevents them from working with students on exploration and developmental needs; there is a lack of professionalization of their role on campus, and a lack of communication and inclusion.

7) Faculty/administrator dissatisfaction – campus lacks process for clear communication about policies, there is too much bureaucracy for advisors to spend time with students, too much rigidity.

8) Role of and efficacy of technology in advising is unclear and needs to be defined and developed.

9) Academic advising is narrowly defined as the selection and registration of classes.

10) Southern Illinois University has spent considerable time and resources studying advising and the experience of first year students in the context of improving student success and retention, indicating a campus commitment to improving on the hard work already being done in the area of advising.

Based on these observations, the following prioritized recommendations are offered:

1) Communication – staff involved in advising must get information about curriculum and policy changes in a timely and consistent manner; a venue for advisors to communicate on a regular basis (e.g. an all advisor email list), and an opportunity for advisors to get together a few times a year to develop as an effective campus wide advising team; and finally, an articulated and repeated vision and message about advising from campus leadership.

2) Professionalization of advising – define role across campus, evaluate current financial and human resources in advising, bring in national-level talent for on-campus professional development for advisors.

3) Transparency – decisions that affect advising must include advisors in the decision making process, and the role of advising in the mission and direction of the university must be articulated frequently and consistently.
4) Advising Champion – is A SINGLE PERSON who advocates for advisor and student needs regarding advising, and facilitate campus-wide communication; the champion must also have authority that matches responsibility. Advising resources are channeled through one office (this is also where the ‘Advising Champion’ is located) – this office has both the responsibility AND authority for advising.

5) Campus-wide model – Total Intake Model – new students enter through ONE advising program and move to college/faculty advising at an appropriate time.

6) Funding model – because student success and retention have been identified as campus-wide responsibilities, and because academic advising contributes to success and retention, it is imperative that the campus funding model include a strategy for supporting programs that provide academic advising that are not located in the academic colleges, namely, the University College and its programs.

7) Technology – all academic advisors on campus must receive training and have common expectations about how they use technology to support their roles as advisors.

Based on the prioritized recommendations, the following immediate steps are suggested:

1) Create campus-wide communication body that enables advisors to communicate with each other and with people on campus who make decisions that affect advising. There are several meetings that currently take place that members may think serve this purpose, but, frankly, they do not. Those meetings should be discontinued in favor of a newly formed, broader communication group that is charged by the Provost. The Final Report includes a description of and reference to an Advisory Council.

2) Identify the office that is responsible for university-wide academic policy, formalize academic policy process and communicate it widely and repeatedly, particularly to faculty and staff advisors.

3) Working with human resources, get advisor salary and contract data that includes total number of advisors; type and length of contracts; salaries; and distribution across colleges and programs. The purpose of this information is to help understand how resources are currently distributed, if they are distributed in the most effective way, and to begin the work of professionalizing the role of the academic advisor at SIU.

4) Establish a year-long advisor professional development program that brings speakers and workshops to campus in the areas of: technology, developmental advising and first year advising needs. The program should also include workshops for group/team development. All professional advisors should be invited to participate.

5) Adopt and promote the Vision and Mission Statement (Appendix B) written by the First Year Advising Committee in Spring 2011.

6) The University College’s reorganization, approved February 10, 2011, should also be expanded to include ALL undeclared/exploring students regardless of college. This is one step towards implementing a shared campus total intake advising model.

7) Identify and establish an ‘Advising Champion’, whose sole responsibility is the oversight and championing of the university’s advising program.
8) Chancellor Cheng and Provost Nicklow are strongly encouraged to regularly include their top two or three priorities every time they speak to groups on campus, including how advising supports these priorities, and, finally, their vision for advising for SIU. This will keep the vision and message about advising in front of the campus community.

The *Final Report* includes the additional action steps that will build on these.