

Destination Integration: **Perspectives of Students and Advisors about Improving Academic Advising**

Part 2 of a Series on Academic Advising
from the CSU Student Success Network

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Executive Summary

In the first report in this exploratory study of efforts to improve advising, researchers at the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) interviewed administrators from five California State University (CSU) campuses and reported on the key strategies these campuses are implementing to integrate academic advising services across their colleges, divisions, and departments. This second report adds to this discussion by bringing in the voices of advisors and students at these five campuses, summarizing the perspectives of faculty advisors, professional staff advisors, and students in the context of campus efforts to improve advising.

Across administrators, advisors, and students, we learned that advising on these campuses is largely focused on course selection and program planning. While many administrators and advisors expressed a goal of providing a more holistic and cohesive experience for students by integrating academic advising with other services, students confirm that advisors largely help with academic planning and that more holistic services are primarily experienced by students in special programs for underserved populations. Students largely concurred with administrators' descriptions of the major challenges facing advising. They cited issues with limited access to advising, a consequence of the financial constraints reported by the administrators. Students also cited problems with the fragmentation of advising, related to the many differentiated advising roles on campus and a lack of communication across different advisors and advising offices. Students introduced a concern about a lack of personalization in advising, noting that advising approaches seem routinized and that the information provided is rarely targeted to their particular circumstances.

Students and advisors suggested a range of solutions to improve advising that align well with each other and with the perspectives of administrators. When asked about the potential effectiveness of several options for improving advising services, advisors were most optimistic about improving the accessibility and quality of advising interactions, such as requiring individual advising at regular touchpoints, making investments to hire more advising staff, helping students build long-term relationships with advisors, and offering services at more convenient times and locations. While agreeing with these priorities, students also pointed to online or virtual formats as a way to make advising sessions more accessible, especially for nontraditional students, and to access just-in-time information. Advisors viewed strategies that reach all students as more effective for closing equity gaps than programs focused on specific populations or than training in implicit bias. While students largely thought that advising is accessible to all, they pointed to a need for advising that is sensitive to differences in personal circumstances.

Various eAdvising tools represent a significant strategy that campuses are pursuing to improve the delivery of advising services, including tools that help with scheduling advising appointments, allow students to develop multi-year degree plans, provide advisors with access to student record data, allow advisors to share notes about students, and support the use of early alerts or other proactive outreach to students in need of advising support. Advisors who are familiar with these tools are generally hopeful about their potential, but faculty are considerably less familiar with the tools than staff advisors. Students value eAdvising tools as a complement to face-to-face advising but say tools are not yet meeting their expectations.

Professional development for advisors represents another key strategy that campuses are pursuing to improve advising, and advisors are generally positive about its potential. Staff advisors have more access to and are more positive about professional development than faculty, but both groups see room for improvement. Students would like advisors to be better trained in understanding requirements holistically and tailoring advice to their unique situations. While most faculty value the role of professional staff advisors, both faculty and staff advisors see room to improve their partnerships, and students want better integration between the advising provided by faculty and professional staff.

Based on our research with administrators, faculty advisors, professional staff advisors, and students at five CSU campuses, the broad strategies that the campuses are using to improve the integration and efficiency of advising appear to provide an important foundation for addressing most of the challenges we found. At the same time, the perspectives of advisors and students brought to light several areas that may need more attention and targeted improvement efforts as campuses move forward.

As campuses deliberate about ways to continue investing in efforts to improve advising, we offer the following recommendations to consider, drawing from our research findings across the two reports:

- Offer advising in more flexible times and formats to facilitate better access, especially for nontraditional students who are juggling commuting, work, and family obligations.
- Create more meaningful mandatory advising touchpoints that ensure all students receive advising services at critical junctures in ways that are tailored to their needs and provide significant engagement.
- Disseminate knowledge and information through consistent training of advisors to support a seamless, integrated advising experience that can save students time, prevent frustration, and help ensure that institution-wide advising resources are used efficiently.
- Support a more personalized approach through professional development for advisors that includes a focus on the affective dimension of advising, and better use of technology that can personalize students' advising experiences.
- Improve the effectiveness and integration of eAdvising tools, as well as the training provided to both students and advisors, with particular effort needed to improve the implementation and use of online degree-planning tools that campuses hope to use to better target course offerings to meet student demand.
- Provide more professional development customized to faculty and strengthen faculty-staff advisor partnerships, which requires campuses to track which faculty serve as advisors, something most campuses we studied did not currently do.
- Assess the effectiveness of advising improvement strategies, including their impact on equity goals, and explore how data and evidence about equity can be used to support professional development efforts that increase awareness among advisors of the unique challenges and needs of nontraditional and underserved student populations—student groups that together make up the majority of CSU students.
- Continue to create oversight structures that allow for integration and efficiency—in broad consultation with key stakeholders and considering unique campus contexts.

As acknowledged by the administrators, advisors, and students included in this study, students benefit from advising that responds to their needs in a holistic way, rather than placing the primary burden on them to find what they are seeking across a fragmented advising ecosystem. As campuses continue to pursue improvement strategies, we urge them to move beyond a narrow focus on coordinating academic planning and to consider ways to integrate the full range of academic planning and other student services to realize the vision of holistic advising to better support student success. The experiences and perspectives of students, advisors, and administrators about advising can help guide these efforts.

Broad Agreement about Advising; New Insights from Students and Advisors

In our first report in this series, we interviewed administrators from five California State University (CSU) campuses and reported on the key strategies these campuses are implementing to integrate academic advising services across their colleges, divisions, and departments. This second report adds to this discussion by bringing in the voices of advisors (including both faculty and professional staff) and students at these five campuses. For the most part, the advisors and students we surveyed and spoke with are on the same page as administrators about advising challenges and strategies, but they also shared additional thoughts about how their campuses could improve advising to better support student success.

For example, the advisors and students largely agreed with administrators that advising on their campus is currently focused primarily on academic planning, and that there would be value in moving toward a more holistic approach that integrates academic advising with other functions, such as co-curricular, career, and financial and mental well-being supports. Students' descriptions of their difficulties with academic advising matched well with administrators' assessments that better coordination across advising units and better use of limited advising resources are the primary challenges faced by campuses. Students, however, also emphasized a need for more personalized advising services, both in face-to-face and online interactions. For their part, the advisors were generally optimistic about the potential value of the strategies their campuses are adopting to improve advising, but said they want to see more attention on improving the quality and accessibility of advising, better use of eAdvising tools, and more opportunities for professional development.

These findings are based on a survey of advisors and focus groups with students, as described in this report, as well as interviews with administrators that were described in Part 1 of this series, *Destination Integration: Strategies to Improve Academic Advising*.¹ This two-part exploratory study was undertaken on behalf of the CSU Student Success Network by the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) in order to share campus policies and practices to inform others who may be seeking to improve advising on their campuses, in support of greater student engagement, learning, progress, and completion in the CSU.²

As described in our first report, the five CSU campuses in this study are focused on integrating advising services within a decentralized advising environment, to better leverage advising resources and improve student retention and graduation (see Findings of Part 1 box).

FINDINGS OF PART 1 IN THE SERIES ON ACADEMIC ADVISING: *DESTINATION INTEGRATION: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC ADVISING*

Campus challenges:

In a decentralized structure, with academic advising distributed across multiple divisions and offices, campuses are facing two broad challenges according to administrators we interviewed:

1. How to improve communication and integration of advising services across colleges, divisions, and departments, and with other campus units such as tutoring, career centers, and financial aid.
2. How to ensure the most effective use of limited advising resources.

Campus strategies:

While maintaining decentralized advising structures that preserve departmental autonomy and some variation in advising approaches, the campuses appear to be pursuing five broad strategies to better integrate academic advising and leverage limited advising resources. Most of these are in the early stages of implementation:

1. Advising councils, committees, task forces, and summits are being used to better integrate advising services while retaining decentralized structures and staff reporting lines.
2. eAdvising tools are being implemented to support workflow and analytical functions to better target advising resources and support a more proactive approach to advising.
3. Professional development trainings and events are being used to create community, disseminate effective practices, share information, and increase consistency in advising.
4. Shared positions and cross-functional advising teams are being developed to encourage cross-unit collaboration.
5. A senior administrator has been designated on some campuses to be responsible for coordination of campuswide advising.

This report summarizes the perspectives of faculty advisors, professional staff advisors, and students in the context of these efforts to improve advising (see Research Methods box and Appendix). When used alone in this report, the term “advisors” refers to both faculty advisors and professional staff advisors. It is important to note that most campuses were unable to provide an accurate list of faculty advisors to recruit for the survey, as they did not consistently track which faculty serve students in that capacity. In addition, while the overall survey response rate was 25 percent, it varied substantially, with 17 percent of faculty advisors completing the survey compared to 52 percent for staff advisors. Where we found significant differences in the responses of the two groups, we note them; otherwise, we report responses in aggregate. We conclude this report with recommendations for improving advising across the CSU system, based on input gathered from the administrators, advisors, and students.

RESEARCH METHODS

- We recruited campuses to participate in this research through outreach to contacts across CSU campuses. We targeted campuses that we had identified as working to improve academic advising, based on our earlier research on efforts across the CSU to improve student success.³ In targeting campuses for inclusion, we worked to ensure some variation in campus location and in the nature of the changes being made to academic advising. We offered anonymity to participating campuses in order to encourage participation and candid responses; therefore, we do not identify them in this report.
- We reviewed research and other information related to academic advising in broad access universities, including advising-related surveys conducted by other organizations. In concert with what we learned during our interviews with administrators summarized in Part 1 of the series, we used the information gathered to develop a survey for advisors and a focus group protocol for students.
- We administered the survey to faculty advisors and professional staff advisors across the five campuses in October 2018 using Qualtrics survey software. We recruited advisors to participate via email using email addresses provided by the campuses or gathered from campus websites (N=344).
- We conducted student focus groups at each of the five campuses in November 2018 (14 focus groups, N=88 students). At one campus, we conducted two focus groups: one for students new to the campus in fall 2018 and one for students with senior class standing. At the other four campuses, we conducted three focus groups, with the third group comprising students representing an underserved student population, which was recruited in different ways at each campus.
- We analyzed the closed-ended survey items using SPSS Statistics and coded the responses to open-ended items thematically. We recorded the focus groups and conducted content analyses of the transcriptions.

A more detailed description of the research methods is in the Appendix along with some characteristics of survey and focus group participants. The survey and focus group protocols, along with the full set of results from the survey, are in the [Technical Appendices on the CSU Student Success Network website](#).

Agreement that Focus of Advising Is Academic Planning, but Holistic Approach Desired

Key Findings:

- Advisors and students confirm previous findings that the current institutional focus of advising is on helping students with course selection and program planning.
- Staff advisors, in particular, experience a gap between their personal philosophy of treating the student holistically and the institutional approach of focusing on academic planning, perhaps reflecting their training in counseling that often emphasizes holistic approaches.
- Students value a more holistic approach when they experience it, but describe it as rare, often occurring within the context of special programs.

In our first report, administrators told us that advising at their campus is largely focused on course selection and program planning. Many expressed a goal of better integrating academic advising with other services like career planning and other academic and nonacademic support services, to provide a more holistic and cohesive experience for students. However, they characterized efforts to do so as nascent and aspirational, while current efforts to improve advising focus on better coordinating across units that provide academic advising, to better integrate General Education (GE) and major advising, and to provide more consistent academic planning.

“Assisting students with program planning [is part of advising], but being a support and resource for them in a variety of ways [is also important]. This includes being available to address problems outside of the classroom, giving them information about career possibilities and graduate school, and encouraging them to address the question of what matters to them in life.”

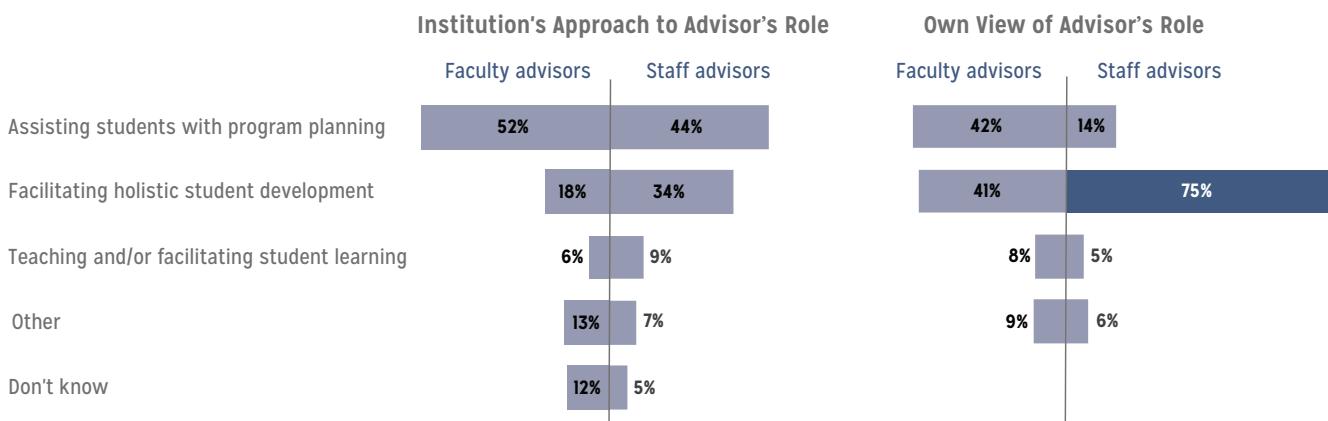
– CSU Faculty Advisor

Advisors largely agree that advising on these CSU campuses focuses on helping students with course selection and program planning. Using categories adapted from a national survey, we asked advisors to identify the approach that represented their own perspective on the primary role of the advisor as well as their institution's current approach (see Figure 1). A majority (52%) of faculty advisors and a plurality (44%) of staff advisors indicated that their institution's current approach to the primary role of the advisor involves assisting students with program planning. This approach focuses on degree progress, including creating and updating a multi-year degree plan, helping students select courses, and periodically conducting degree audits to ensure students are on track to complete degree requirements and graduate.

Advisors' own views of their appropriate role are often focused on facilitating holistic student development, particularly for professional staff advisors, among whom 75 percent expressed that preference. This view focuses holistically on both affective and cognitive domains of student development, addressing dimensions such as financial and mental health, co-curricular opportunities, and career coaching, in addition to helping students succeed academically. Among faculty advisors, there was an even split between those who think the advisor's primary role is to facilitate holistic student development (41%) and those who think program planning is the appropriate focus (42%). This difference may reflect that faculty have training in their disciplines while professional staff advisors generally have training in counseling or related fields that often emphasize the value of a holistic approach.

Figure 1

Advisors most often report that program planning is the current focus of advising, but staff advisors strongly prefer a more holistic approach.



“Advisors are focused on what requirements are there on the academic requirements page, and, ‘Just do these courses, get your degree, and get out,’ kind of stuff. But people don’t tell you, ‘If you do this minor with this major, that will help you a lot afterward,’ and stuff like that. No one talks about that.”

– CSU Student

Students also report that the primary focus of the advising they receive is on course selection and academic planning. Advisors provide guidance and information on course requirements and selection, with information related to GE requirements usually provided by a professional staff advisor and information about major requirements provided by either a faculty advisor or a staff advisor in a college-based advising center. Based on their experiences, students described holistic advising as the exception rather than the rule. Those who report receiving more holistic advising—including nonacademic support, guidance about academic enrichment activities, and career and graduate school services—are typically part of a program targeted at a special population, such as the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). Or those students have exercised substantial personal initiative to seek out additional resources and support, such as from a faculty member. In some cases, students praised specific advisors who go above and beyond to provide more holistic service, but they said that these connections are infrequent. Students would like more holistic advising and value it when they receive it.

“Academically, I go straight to the [central advising center]. They’re the ones helping me with my path to get out of here. But [the advisor] in EOP, she’s awesome. She’s a great advisor, a great supporter. We can sit down and we can talk, and we can figure out whatever it is.”

– CSU Student

“[My advisors] show concern about how you are. ‘How’s school going? How are you handling work and school? How are you doing?’ They want to know about you. I like that because I am a single mom, so I don’t get somebody at home always wanting to know how I am doing. So it’s nice that when you go see your counselor, I see it as genuinely, they’re concerned about you and making sure that you’re all right.”

– CSU Student

Lack of Access, Fragmentation, and Lack of Personalization Are Significant Challenges

Key Findings:

- Students concur with previous findings that limited access to advising resources, along with fragmentation and inconsistency in the information provided, are major institutional challenges.
- Students also shared concerns about lack of personalization as an additional challenge, including having access to advisors who are caring and engaged as well as receiving advising that is tailored to their needs.

In Part 1 of this series, we found that campuses face significant challenges resulting from fragmented advising services and limited advising resources. Students largely concurred with the description of the problem culled from interviews with campus administrators, citing challenges with limited access and fragmentation of advising that largely echoed administrators' concerns. However, they added texture to the challenges already identified, and they introduced a broad concern about the lack of personalization of advising, which was not discussed by administrators.

Limited Advising Resources Impinges on Students' Access to Advising

Students report a variety of difficulties accessing advising resources, including not enough advisors, difficulty making appointments, unreliable or inconvenient hours, long wait times for drop-in hours, and rushed appointments. They said that limited resources are sometimes directed at key points in their educational journey, such as efforts to target incoming freshmen or students about to graduate, which can place other students at a disadvantage. Nontraditional students—those who commute substantial distances to campus, student parents, and those who work significant hours on weekdays—face more challenges accessing advising. The formats in which advising is available, typically face to face during regular business hours, make it difficult for these students to access resources. Inability to schedule appointments at convenient times or at all are part of the difficulty, and the limited office hours of faculty advisors pose a particular challenge for students. While some students report more advisors being added or more extended hours being instituted, these changes are not yet sufficient to address the problem. Similarly, virtual access to advising, based on what we heard from students, is rarely offered at their campuses.

“[Availability] is sometimes right in the middle of the day, so it conflicts with a lot of classes. When you can't get an appointment with them at a specific time, they'll say, ‘Well, we have walk-in hours at so-and-so time.’ But they're usually at lunch time or right after, which is when most of the science classes are given. So you have to choose whether you go see that advisor or you go to class.”

—CSU Student

“If you have to commute from [another city], most advisors won’t work around your bus schedule to get here, and your school schedule...You’ll have to wait over a month to see them in that period [when they’re available], and then they’ll cancel out of nowhere, and you just rode the bus for an hour and a half for nothing.”

– CSU Student

Students Struggle with the Fragmentation of Advising

Students also pointed to the fragmented advising environment as a major challenge. The many differentiated advising roles on campus and an apparent lack of communication across different advisors and advising offices can result in piecemeal information. Students reported experiences of “not knowing where to go” or being bounced around from advisor to advisor before finding someone who could help them. They also frequently had to “start over again,” with each new advisor, explaining their situation from scratch. Students said that the disconnect between GE and major advising contributes to this challenge, as the advising office they need to consult about GE requirements is generally not the same place they go for major advising.

“They threw me at so many different advisors...and they just pin-balled me around until they finally shoved me on the one person who actually was in charge of what I needed done...So, they finally pin-balled me into the right lane.”

– CSU Student

One consequence of the fragmentation is inconsistency in the type and quality of information provided. Students reported receiving insufficient guidance or inaccurate information on important matters that could affect timely graduation, such as which course can be “double-counted” as meeting requirements for GE and the major, how transfer credits count, and which “catalog year” was relevant for their course of study. They said there is wide variation in the quality of advising information they received. Some particularly proactive students reported that they deliberately consulted multiple advisors about the same question and compared results to make sure they received accurate information, a practice which, if widely used, would present a further drain on already limited resources.

“[As advice to another student], I would say to visit more than one [advisor] per semester. Don’t go to one counselor. As a matter of fact, I would say don’t go to two. You should go to more than two every semester, because they’re people and they’re not consistent. They’re all very different.”

– CSU Student

“There’s a disconnect between General Ed and majors...General Ed advisors can tell you the general requirements to graduate, but they can’t tell you the specific requirements for you to graduate within your major. I think that’s where people get lost. They get all checked off, get all the greens in their General Ed, but when they’re trying to graduate with their degree, [advisors] say, ‘Oh, you can’t because you didn’t do these classes.’”

– CSU Student

Students Experience Advising Services as Impersonal

In addition to the challenges with limited access and fragmentation in advising, students reported that advising lacks personalization, in that it is rarely targeted to their particular circumstances. Students frequently reported routinized approaches to advising, such as having advisors simply hand them a program “roadmap” listing course requirements or point them to a course catalog as a means of providing guidance on what courses to take. Students said that advisors rarely provided information that helped them distinguish the value of choosing one course option over another in the context of their interests, goals, or other circumstances. They indicated that it was uncommon for advisors to suggest internships or other opportunities targeted to their career aspirations. In addition, students said that many advisors appeared rushed, uncaring, or disengaged. This was particularly common for their first encounter with advising, typically group advising at orientation. Taken together, students’ comments point to a desire for advising that considers their needs holistically and directs them to appropriate opportunities and services based on their individual situations.

“Sometimes it feels very cookie cutter, especially when picking classes. At times, I’ve gone in and wanted them to tell me more about my options...My advisor was just typing, typing, typing, and set up all my classes and handed it to me...It was just very cookie cutter, like, ‘Here it is, you’re set to go.’”

–CSU Student

Students and Advisors Point to Similar Solutions to Address Advising Challenges

Students and advisors suggested a range of solutions to improve advising that align well with each other and with the perspectives of administrators, as summarized in our first report (see Findings of Part 1 on page 6). The sections below describe their suggestions and add context about students' current experiences with advising that inform their views about changes that could better support them.

Additional Changes Needed to Improve Accessibility and Quality of Advising Interactions

Key Findings:

- Advisors and students value mandatory advising as a strategy to improve advising, but they emphasize that interactions should be meaningful rather than pro forma encounters.
- Students and advisors think advising services should be offered at more convenient times and locations, and students also point to online or virtual formats as a way to make sessions more accessible, especially for nontraditional students.
- Advisors and students value the importance of building long-term relationships. While students do not necessarily expect to be assigned a single advisor, they would like the institution to do more to integrate multiple advising touchpoints into a seamless experience.
- While students value self-advocacy, many noted that mandatory advising was valuable for first-generation students and others who would not otherwise know to seek it out.

When asked about the potential effectiveness of several options for improving advising services, advisors were most optimistic about improving the accessibility and quality of advising interactions, such as requiring individual advising at regular touchpoints, making investments to hire more advising staff, helping students build long-term relationships with advisors, and offering services at more convenient times and locations (see Figure 2).⁴ Advisors are much less enthusiastic about changes to the oversight of advising, such as changes to reporting lines or committee structures.

“Students often avoid advising because they don’t know what they don’t know. Enforced face-to-face advising allows students to see the various hurdles to graduation that they may not have even been aware of. It necessitates an early stage of planning.”

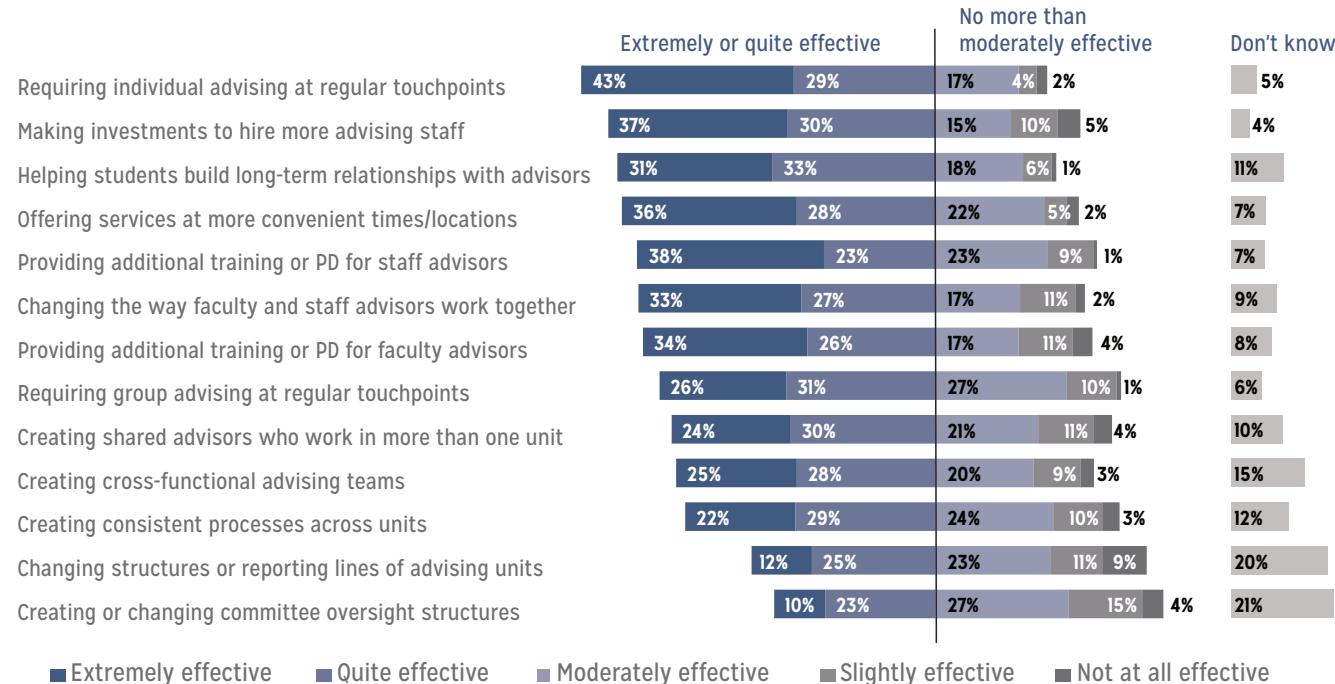
– CSU Faculty Advisor

Faculty and staff advisors both rate the potential effectiveness of requiring individual advising at or near the top. However, they have slightly different perspectives about the potential of other changes, which correspond to their respective points of view. Staff advisors are much more positive than faculty about making investments in hiring additional professional staff advisors, with 85 percent of staff advisors thinking that would be quite or extremely effective, compared to 48 percent of faculty advisors. Staff advisors are also more positive than faculty advisors about the value of providing additional training for those staff, with 69 percent and 44 percent, respectively, thinking it would be quite or extremely effective. Faculty value changing the way faculty and staff work together and providing additional

professional development for faculty more highly than either hiring or training professional staff advisors. Staff are also more positive than faculty about creating consistent processes across units (62% and 38%, respectively), which could reflect the high value faculty place on autonomy, concerns with their own departments, or a lack of awareness about campuswide efforts to create more consistency.

Figure 2

Advisors rated mandatory individual advising as potentially the most effective effort to improve, though nearly all strategies were rated extremely or quite effective by a majority of advisors.



On the whole, however, advisors are largely positive about the potential benefit of all of the strategies we asked them about. Variation in what they view as valuable may reflect their function or role, which is concerned with direct student interaction rather than advising oversight. While there is less enthusiasm for changes to reporting lines or committee oversight structures, a substantial number of advisors who did not rate them positively said they do not know about the effectiveness of those strategies rather than finding them ineffective. Faculty were more likely than staff advisors to respond “don’t know” across most of the strategies, indicating they may be less familiar than staff with efforts to improve advising.

“Requiring students to meet with an advisor is great; however, this has become more prescriptive advising than developmental. Nothing suggests [a developmental approach] in our current models of advising.”

– CSU Staff Advisor

Students' views were largely consistent with perceptions of faculty and staff advisors. They also offered some additional insights. Students viewed mandatory advising as helpful when it encouraged them to access resources they might not have known about or might have been "too intimidated" to use. Some students said that the registration blocks used to enforce mandatory advising were inconvenient. They described mandatory advising as a waste of time for perfunctory tasks like completing paperwork, or for students who already know what they are doing. Both students and advisors emphasized that mandatory advising must be executed thoughtfully rather than in pro forma fashion.

"At first, advising was really intimidating for me. That's why I went, because it was mandatory. I think getting over that intimidation didn't really happen for me until this year when I realized that advisors' job is to help me."

– CSU Student

Students also offered insight into when and how group advising experiences best meet their needs. For example, most students found the mandatory group advising that they received as part of orientation to be lacking. They described the number of advisors on hand to help with their specific questions as insufficient and said they wished they had received more information during orientation to help them prepare to select appropriate courses. This provides further evidence of students' desire for more personalized advising, regardless of the context in which it occurs. In contrast, a number of students said it was valuable to have the required one-unit orientation courses that are associated with specific majors, which are designed to integrate advising and career mentoring into the course content, along with other major-specific subject matter. Some students said they wished such courses would be replicated more broadly. Optional workshops offering advising to groups of students, timed to coincide with registration periods or to train students in the use of specific eAdvising tools, were also described as having positive benefits.

"[My] department makes you take a one-unit class your first semester here, and then also your last semester. They make you find career mentors, and I think it's really helpful."

– CSU Student

Students also agreed with advisors regarding the value of having more flexibility in the hours and formats in which they can access advising. As noted earlier, students pointed to the challenge of accessing advising appointments while juggling class schedules, work schedules, lengthy commutes, and family responsibilities. They observed, in particular, challenges for nontraditional students, such as transfer students, parents, commuters, and those who work significant hours outside of school. To make it easier to access advising, students said they would like appointments to be available outside of normal business hours, although some advisors said that extended hours were underutilized when offered. Students would also like to see more widespread use of technology, such as video appointments, for remote advising sessions.

"In our department, we have tried extended evening hours and did not see much response. We hear students complain about limited advising hours, but do not see enough use of extended hours to justify the cost to staff."

– CSU Staff Advisor

Students also agree with professional staff advisors that hiring more advising staff would help to improve the accessibility of advising. When offered a “magic wand” to make any change they would like to improve advising, a number of students said they would use it to increase the number of advisors. As one student put it: “Boom, more advisors. For everybody.” They also perceived a direct connection between increasing the number of advisors and being able to require advising at regular touchpoints and have extended hours to make advising more accessible—changes that both advisors and students value.

“If they could do [something] like FaceTime, that would probably be very helpful, because it’d be easier from my room or something. I could just talk to my counselor instead of having to drive out here for it. I’d be driving longer than the time I’d spend in the counseling office.”

– CSU Student

Like advisors, students also value the opportunity to develop long-term advising relationships, but they do not necessarily expect to be assigned a dedicated advisor for their entire university career. Rather, they would like more collaboration across advisors, including consistent training, cross-training of GE and major advisors, and sharing of notes from advising sessions so they do not have to start over again with each encounter. While a few students thought a single, assigned advisor would help, others appreciated being able to access multiple advisors, as long as they can have a seamless, integrated experience in which knowledge and information are disseminated across all the advisors they contact.

Students placed value on self-advocacy in successfully navigating the advising environment. Students who reported more personalized advising relationships often indicated that they took initiative to develop these relationships or that they came about by happenstance and then were nurtured either by the student, the advisor, or both. When asked to give advice to a younger sibling or friend, their most frequent advice concerned examples of self-advocacy, such as being proactive about seeking advising early, documenting questions and answers in writing, informing themselves about requirements, and taking the initiative to build relationships with faculty members. Nevertheless, institutions could do more to help students navigate the college environment, especially first-generation students and other underserved populations. Many students noted that mandatory advising was valuable for those who would not otherwise know to seek it out, providing answers to questions they might not have even known to ask. Relying on student self-advocacy could do a disservice to first-generation and underserved students and limit progress on campus equity goals.

“Double-check everything [the advisors say] because they’ll give you the tools that you need, and they’ll talk to you and they’ll answer your questions, but you kind of have to do all the math and everything yourself...have a plan, and then have another plan on top of that in case you don’t get your classes.”

– CSU Student

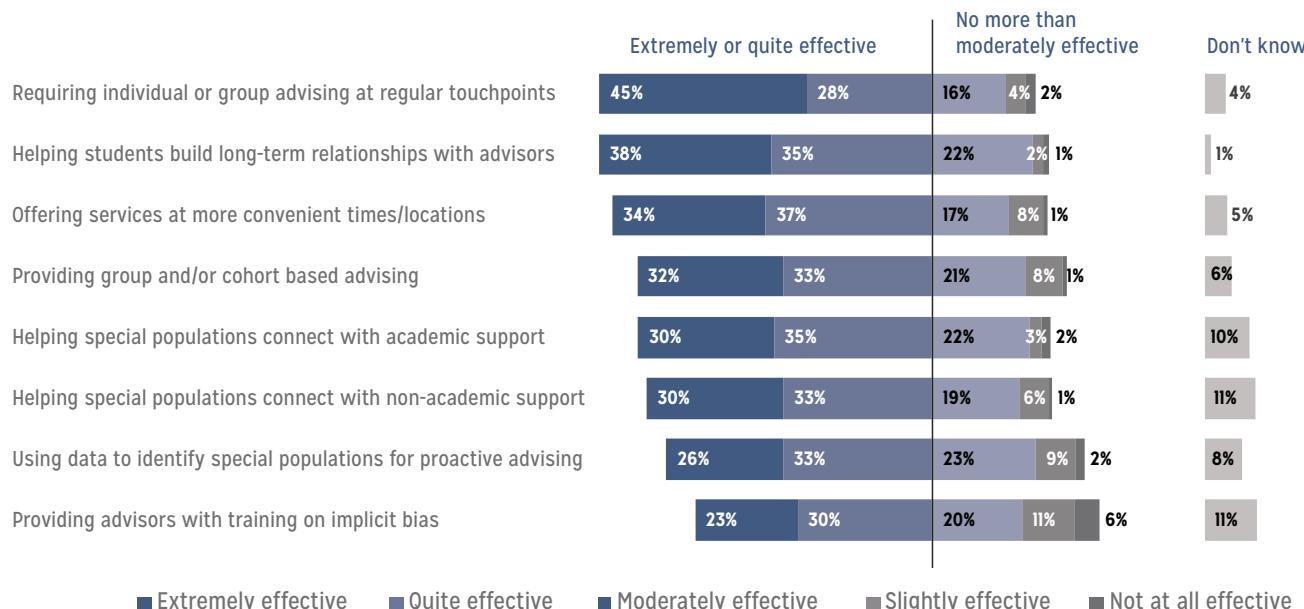
Broad-based Strategies and Professional Development Valued for Closing Equity Gaps

Key Findings

- Advisors view strategies that touch all students as more effective for closing equity gaps than programs focused on specific populations or training in implicit bias.
- Students largely think that advising is accessible to all, but still point to a need for advising that is sensitive to differences in personal circumstances.
- Students who are in special targeted programs value the personalized, holistic advising they receive, and wish it were more widely available.

When asked about specific strategies for closing equity gaps, advisors' responses were consistent with their overall rankings of effective advising strategies (see Figure 2 on page 15). That is, they ranked the same changes that could potentially touch all students (such as requiring individual advising at regular touchpoints, helping students build long-term relationships with advisors, and offering services at better times and locations) more highly than programs or interventions targeted at special populations of students or training in implicit bias targeted at advisors (see Figure 3). Nevertheless, a majority of advisors were positive about all of the strategies for improving equity.

Figure 3
Advisors see potential of strategies for reducing equity gaps.



We asked students in all of the focus groups whether they thought advising was accessible to specific student populations, such as underrepresented minority students, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, and first-generation college students. In general, students reported that advising services were accessible to these populations, and they pointed to specific programs that were available to meet the needs of these students. However, they also underscored the need for more flexible times and formats for advising sessions, particularly for commuter and nontraditional students with family and work obligations, as noted above.

While students did not specifically call out issues related to cultural insensitivity among advisors, some made comments framed as advisors' failure to understand students' "background" or "personal situation," which may have been references to such issues framed in a way students were more comfortable describing. Some students said that accessing advising could be intimidating and that more sensitivity to the unique circumstances of individual students was needed. Although not widely expressed, at least one student and one advisor specifically pointed to a need for more training for cultural competency.

"I am the pre-med advisor, and I have not received any sort of training nor help on how to advise our diverse student population. I am a white male and 99% of the students I advise do not look like me nor have had similar life experiences as me. There needs to be more resources/training for faculty and faculty advisors to learn cultural competence."

– CSU Faculty Advisor

"Advisors don't understand certain circumstances. My advisor said, 'Oh, well, you did this wrong.' Not trying to be mean or anything, but then it discourages students from wanting to go back or get advice. Maybe some type of training in understanding that people have different circumstances and why they might not be able to graduate in four years, and that students are from different backgrounds, could help."

– CSU Student

Campuses offer special programs that provide a more comprehensive set of services to specific populations. EOP, the largest of such programs, serves low-income students who need admission assistance as an exception to the minimum entrance requirements, or who are judged by EOP personnel as requiring a full range of services to succeed. Students in the program receive extra financial assistance along with learning skills development, tutoring, and academic advisement. EOP receives at least four times as many applicants as it is able to admit.⁵ Smaller programs offering similar services also serve a fraction of the students meeting eligibility requirements. Students who are receiving services as part of such programs feel fortunate to receive a level of wrap-around, holistic services that are not available to the general student population, and students who do not have that extra support are keenly aware of what they are missing.

"I'm shocked by the 15-minute advising meetings [that other students experience]. I literally have [special program advisors] try to keep an hour [appointment], even if I have nothing to talk about. They're just, 'What's going on? How are your grades doing? How does [your degree progress report] look? Hey, what are you doing outside of school? You're not stressed out or anything?"

– CSU Student

“It’s really cool for the people that get to be in those groups, but for the other people that don’t get to be in those programs, it really sucks...People that are exposed to those programs...have all these announcements, like so many beneficial things that will help you out...You’re struggling in a class, they’re like, ‘Oh, okay. There’s this for you guys,’ but the other students are like, ‘Oh, I never knew about that.’”

– CSU Student

eAdvising Tools Have Yet to Meet Expectations

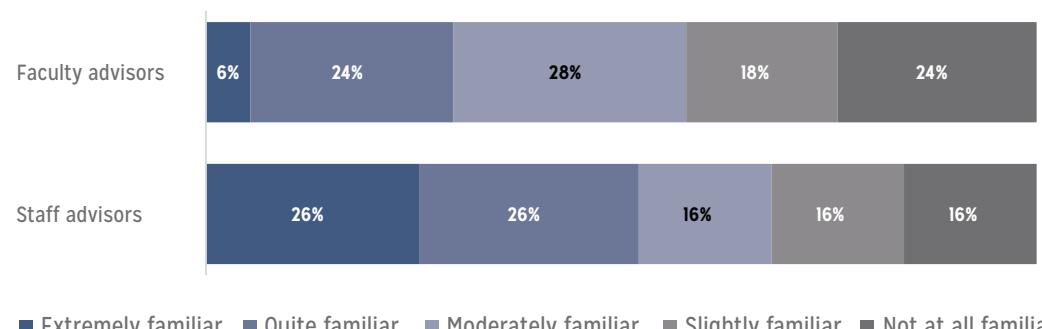
Key Findings

- Advisors who are familiar with eAdvising tools are hopeful about their potential.
- Faculty are less familiar with eAdvising tools than staff and also less optimistic about their potential to support functions like choosing a major and accessing career advice.
- Students value eAdvising tools as a complement to face-to-face advising but say tools are not yet meeting expectations.
- Students point to the untapped potential of both eAdvising tools and communication technology more broadly to support greater personalization, integration, and efficiency of advising.
- Advisors and students all point to inadequate training in the use of eAdvising tools.

Our interviews with administrators for the first report indicated that eAdvising tools represent a significant strategy that campuses are pursuing to improve the delivery of advising services, including a variety of technical platforms that facilitate the scheduling of advising appointments, allow students to develop multi-year degree plans, provide advisors with access to student record data, allow advisors to share notes about students, and support the use of early alerts or other proactive outreach to students in need of advising support. Administrators described most tools as in the early stages of implementation. Consistent with this finding, advisor familiarity with eAdvising tools varies, and is higher among staff than faculty (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

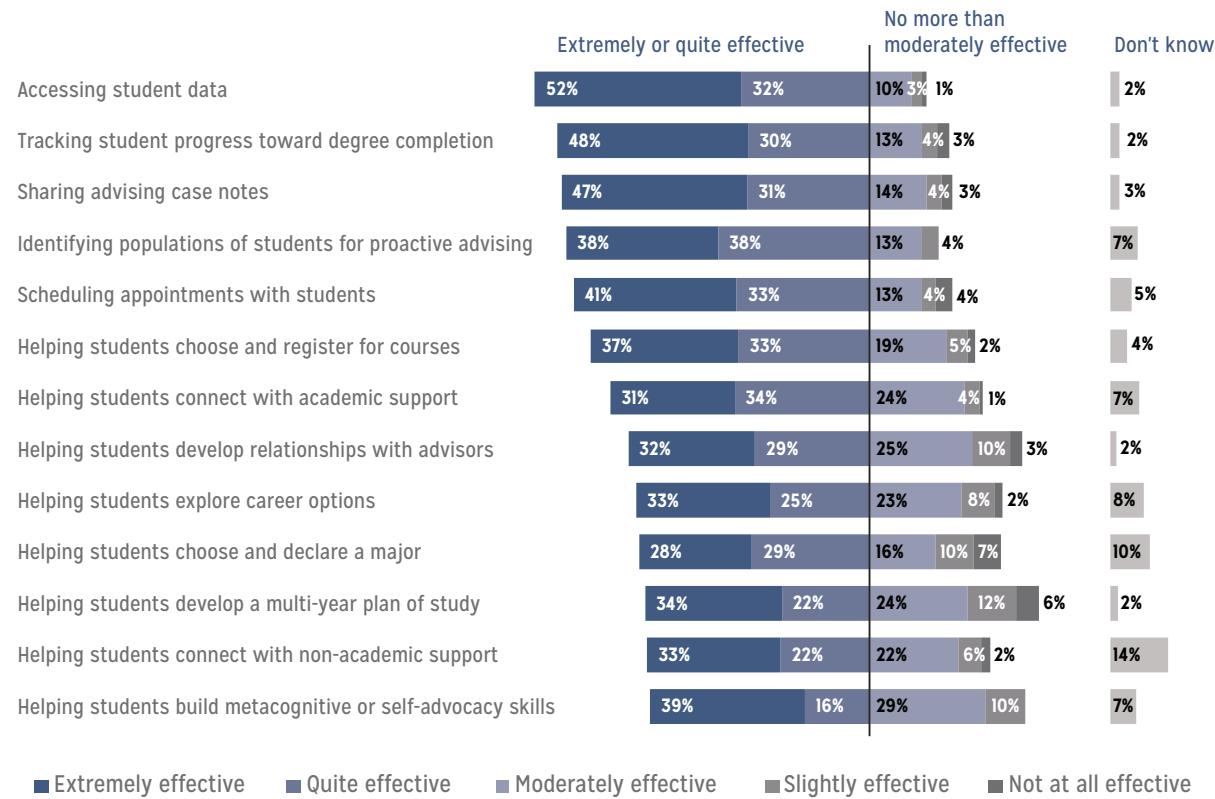
Familiarity with using eAdvising tools is higher among staff than faculty advisors.



Among advisors familiar with eAdvising tools, most are hopeful about their potential effectiveness for a wide range of uses (see Figure 5). They rank uses such as accessing student data and providing degree audits at the top, likely reflecting more long-standing uses of student information technology on campuses. Also highly ranked are functions associated with newer student success technology platforms targeted at improving advising that are being implemented on many campuses, such as identifying populations for proactive advising, sharing advising case notes, and scheduling appointments.

Figure 5

Advisors have positive views about the potential effectiveness of eAdvising tools for a variety of uses.



Advisors were somewhat less hopeful about the potential of eAdvising tools for functions such as helping students explore career options or choose and declare a major, and faculty were significantly less positive than staff on their value for these purposes. Only 40 percent of faculty thought eAdvising tools were quite or extremely useful for either of those functions, whereas more than two-thirds of staff thought they were.

Although there has been a lot of focus on implementing degree-planning tools across the CSU, helping students develop a multi-year plan of study got somewhat less support from advisors, likely reflecting frustration with implementation challenges that were also echoed by students, as discussed below.

“Do we have these tools just so we can say we have them, or are we going to really make these things work for our students and advisors? The Degree Planner, although great in theory, creates more work for our advisors. Mostly, it is inaccurate and doesn’t work well with some majors.”

– CSU Staff Advisor

In terms of training on the use of eAdvising tools, advisors say campuses could do more to help them utilize eAdvising tools effectively. Only half of professional staff advisors and fewer than a quarter of faculty said that campus efforts to help them use the tools have been quite or extremely effective. Advisors also give low marks to campus efforts to help students use eAdvising tools, with fewer than a quarter saying efforts to help students have been quite or extremely effective, although faculty are more likely to say they do not know how effective efforts to help students have been. This is consistent with what students say, as discussed below.

“I really love that degree progress [report]. Just seeing those things go from red to green. I’m more of a goal-oriented person, so I just say, ‘Okay, by the end of this year, I need to see all these things go green.’ So, I really love that...sense of accomplishment as you go along.”

– CSU Student

Like advisors, students welcome the growing use of eAdvising tools on campus, including degree planners, degree progress reports, and class scheduling software. However, students’ expectations for eAdvising tool effectiveness, integration, and training are not yet being met. Students gave multiple examples of user interfaces that were clunky or that did not contain up-to-date information. In other cases, they described the difficulty with needing to have multiple screens open simultaneously so they could toggle between different tools, such as course descriptions, degree planners, class schedulers, and class registration tools.

“When you’re navigating between the schedule of classes, your academic requirements, and then your degree planner, and then your actual shopping cart for your classes, you get lost in all of it.”

– CSU Student

Students also said that the use of eAdvising tools was not well integrated with face-to-face advising sessions. For example, students said that some advisors did not consult online tools, required students to bring in paper copies of online plans, or instructed students not to use online tools because they were inaccurate. Students’ descriptions of the uneven effectiveness of degree-planning tools was consistent with advisors’ lower ranking of the potential of multi-year planning tools, suggesting that degree-planning tools are currently falling short of their potential.

“I asked my counselor if we could plan my next three semesters on the degree [planning] tool, and she said, ‘No, we can’t do that. That’s not what we do here.’ She said, ‘You have to do it on your own time. We can plan this semester.’”

– CSU Student

Students reported that campuses are not yet doing enough to help them become familiar with the purpose of existing tools and how to utilize them. Many received their first introduction in student orientation; however, they reported that instructions were usually inadequate and that they were overwhelmed by too much information in not enough time. Left on their own to figure out how to use the tools, some used trial and error to orient themselves and others turned to friends who have more experience on the campus to teach them informally. Group workshops during the academic year, when offered, were cited as a positive training format by students who attended them. Students would also like to see online tutorials and more formal use of peer mentors for helping them get the training they need. Students reported that individual advising sessions are not a reliable source of training or orientation to eAdvising tools. In some cases, they reported that advisors just use the tools, without teaching students how to use them. In other cases, advisors do not use the tools at all and tell students they need to figure it out on their own. This may reflect insufficient training on the part of advisors, lack of time in advising sessions, or both.

“I just figured everything out myself by exploring the site. They don’t actually tell me these things. I just found the requirements for it [by trying out], ‘Hey, what does this button do?’”

– CSU Student

Students view eAdvising tools as a complement to face-to-face advising, with potential to support greater personalization of the advising they receive. They described a variety of ways that smarter use of technology can support a more personalized advising environment: questionnaires submitted in advance of appointments can help students get advice tailored to their situations; electronic summaries of advising meetings can ensure that accurate information is acted on; and the use of shared notes can ensure that all advisors they meet with have access to the same information about prior advising sessions. Students said that some of these suggestions are stated practices on their campuses, but they are implemented unevenly by advisors. They said they wished that such practices were universally adopted.

“All three of [my advisors] told me they were going to write notes about [the sessions], and I never got it. They never posted it online...They tell you that, ‘We’re going to.’...It’s a rule that they’re supposed to give you the notes and a summary, but it has never happened for me.”

– CSU Student

Students also value technology for helping them efficiently access just-in-time information. They appreciate advisors who are accessible electronically, for example those who respond quickly to email or text communications for questions that do not require a more in-depth face-to-face discussion. In general, they would like more access to technology for just-in-time information, such as convenient chat or text options available outside of regular business hours and better website navigation. For institutional dissemination of information, they would like less reliance on mass emailing and more use of targeted push communications tailored to their specific situation. Some also suggested a single communication portal or hub that they could access proactively when they need specific information or to check for communications.

“It’d be nice if I could just shoot somebody an email and get a response within an hour. Honestly, sometimes you just have a simple question, and I’d rather take two minutes to write an email than to take 20 minutes or a half an hour to go physically see them about it.”

– CSU Student

“I feel like we get too many emails, and we have to shuffle through them. It’d be nice if there was somewhere online where we could see all the notifications.”

– CSU Student

More Professional Development Is Needed, Especially for Faculty Advisors

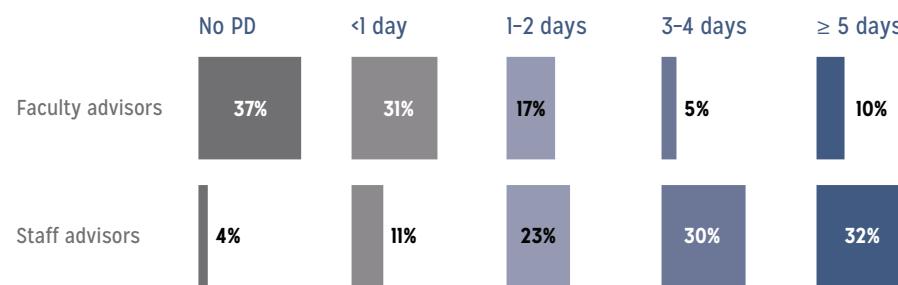
Key Findings

- Staff advisors have more access to and are more positive about professional development than faculty, but both groups see room for improvement.
- Students would like advisors to be better trained in understanding requirements holistically and tailoring advice to their unique situations.

Professional development for advisors represents a key strategy that campuses are pursuing to improve advising, as reported in Part 1 of this series. As shown in Figure 2, advisors are generally positive about the potential effectiveness of professional development in improving advising. However, faculty advisors are much less likely than staff advisors to have had access to professional development in the last year (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Faculty advisors have had limited professional development related to advising in the last year.



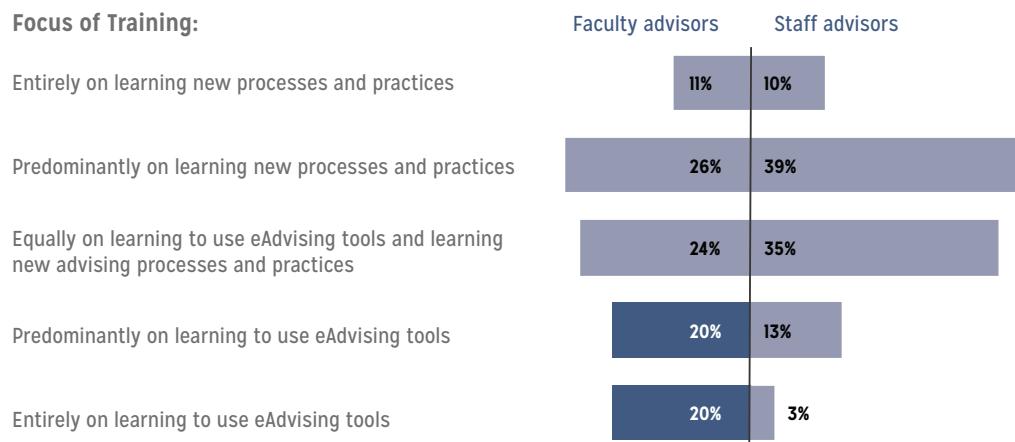
“Training and professional development for faculty advisors has the most potential but, because it is currently voluntary, I believe it is also currently the least effective improvement effort on my campus. Not enough faculty are involved in these initiatives to change the dominant approach to advising among faculty from program planning to holistic advising.”

—CSU Faculty Advisor

The type of professional development offered to faculty and staff also varies (see Figure 7). Forty percent of faculty report that professional development they do receive is focused exclusively or predominantly on learning to use eAdvising tools. In contrast, staff advisors are more likely to report that the training they receive integrates learning about new advising processes and practices. It would appear that both groups can benefit from training that focuses broadly on how to incorporate eAdvising tools into the advising ecosystem rather than narrowly on technical training. Staff also tend to value the professional development they have received somewhat more than faculty (see Figure 8). However, only about a quarter of faculty advisors and a third of staff advisors rate the training they receive highly, suggesting room for improvement for both groups.

Figure 7

Among those with some advising-related training, the focus of the training for faculty advisors was more often on learning to use eAdvising tools, compared to staff advisors.

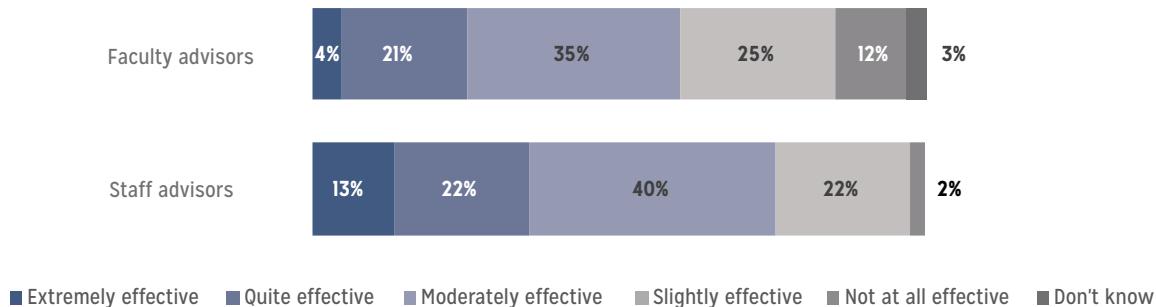


“While it is immensely helpful, in principle, that we are being supplied with so much new data on our departments and programs, it has also been overwhelming, and most faculty and staff lack the skills to understand or analyze this mountain of data and draw sound conclusions based upon it.”

— CSU Faculty Advisor

Figure 8

Staff advisors were somewhat more positive than faculty about the value of advising-related professional development they had received.



Students, likewise, point to a need for professional development or additional training for advisors to improve the quality and seamlessness of advising they receive. For example, students described the need for cross-training of advisors to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of both GE and major requirements, so they can provide better advice. Some students also said they wish that advisors would be better trained to address their unique circumstances and to provide advice that is sensitive to their particular needs. As noted earlier, advisors ranked training in implicit bias as the least effective strategy for promoting equity, but feedback from some students and advisors suggests that more training in different students' circumstances and needs would be useful in improving the personalization of advising.

“Even if it was just one advisor per college that had knowledge in GE, too, if they’d train [major advisors] in GE. Maybe that’s not their forte, but they at least have an idea of the classes that would transfer over, or how to navigate that, that would be helpful.”

– CSU Student

Partnerships between Faculty and Staff Advisors Need Strengthening

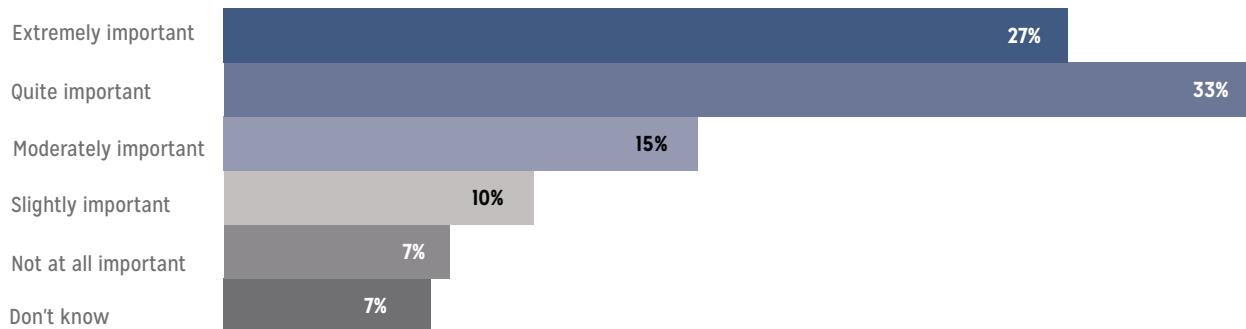
Key Findings

- Most faculty value the role of professional staff advisors.
- Both faculty and staff advisors see room to improve their partnerships.
- Students would like more integration between faculty and staff advising.
- Faculty identified inequitable compensation for their advising contributions as an issue they would like to see addressed.

Faculty are generally positive about the role of professional staff advisors, with well over half saying they are quite important or extremely important in helping students achieve success (see Figure 9). However, both faculty and staff see room to improve the effectiveness of their relationships (see Figure 10). Fewer than half view their current relationships with each other as quite or extremely effective. In response to open-ended survey items, a number of faculty advisors described challenges with how they are compensated for advising and with an inequitable distribution of workload across colleagues.

Figure 9

Most faculty advisors appreciate the important role professional staff advisors play in helping students achieve success.

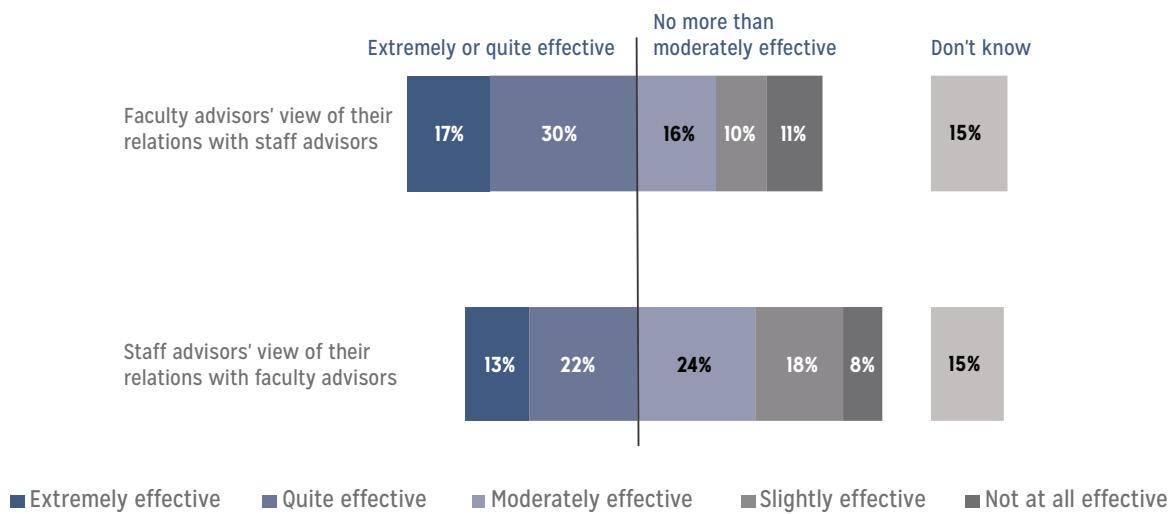


“I prefer to advise students in my department, however, I get no WTUs (weighted teaching units, a measure of faculty workload) for it. My log of advising is quite long and, while I’m happy to meet with students, it should be recognized by the CSU system and appropriate compensation given, such as assigned time.”

– CSU Faculty Advisor

Figure 10

There is room to improve the effectiveness of the relationships between faculty and staff advisors.



“An advisor is most effective when they fully understand both the program and general education components of a student’s record, along with understanding individual student needs and group dynamics.”

– CSU Staff Advisor

Students consistently expressed the desire for more integration between GE and major advising. They pointed to the need for more collaboration between general advising centers, where advising is typically provided by professional staff advisors, and major advising, in which faculty play an important role. They also wanted a more integrated approach among advisors and student services professionals, such as EOP counselors, career counselors, and other academic support professionals.

“I think they should all communicate with each other. For example, if I see my EOP counselor, my EOP counselor can talk to my major advisor and then my major advisor can talk to my GE advisor. They all talk to each other and the three of them come up with a plan.”

– CSU Student

Implications and Opportunities for Future Directions

In Part 1 of this series, we identified five strategies that campuses are using to create a more integrated advising environment and a more efficient use of limited advising resources (see Findings of Part 1, page 6). Students largely concurred with the administrators' descriptions of the key challenges campuses face in providing advising services, as well as with campus priorities for improvement. However, students also emphasized a desire for much greater personalization of services, a perspective that was not a focus for the administrators we interviewed. The advisors we surveyed were largely positive about the range of improvement strategies being undertaken and were hopeful about the increased use of eAdvising tools (if well implemented and appropriately used) and improvements in professional development offerings; however, they described opportunities for improvement as strategies continue to be executed. Overall, both faculty advisors and professional staff advisors appear to be receptive to campus improvement efforts. However, they were less enthusiastic and knowledgeable about strategies focused on advising oversight (such as changes to reporting lines or oversight committees). This is consistent with their roles, which are primarily concerned with direct advising interactions with students rather than the creation of administrative structures.

Based on our research with administrators, faculty advisors, professional staff advisors, and students at five CSU campuses, the five broad strategies that the campuses are using to improve the integration and efficiency of advising appear to provide an important foundation for addressing most of the challenges we found. At the same time, the perspectives of advisors and students brought to light several areas that may need more attention and targeted improvement efforts as campuses move forward. As campuses deliberate about priorities for continued investment to improve advising, we offer some recommendations to consider, drawing from our research findings across the two reports.

Offer advising in more flexible times and formats. Making advising available through more flexible times and formats would facilitate better access to advising, especially for nontraditional students who are juggling commuting, work, and family obligations. Potential solutions include offering alternative meeting formats, such as the use of video conferencing for advising sessions, and having extended hours for in-person advising outside of regular business hours. We recommend that campuses pilot different approaches to evaluate which ones receive the most use and prove cost effective to pursue.

Create more meaningful mandatory advising touchpoints. Requiring advising at key touchpoints is a promising strategy for ensuring that all students receive advising services at critical junctures, such as during the first year, upon entry into the major, and approaching graduation. To be effective, however, mandatory advising sessions need to be tailored to student needs and provide meaningful engagement. Integrating mandatory advising with orientation courses for specific majors may provide an effective way to embed advising into students' academic experiences.

Disseminate knowledge and information across advisors to support a seamless, integrated advising experience. Consistent dissemination of campuswide knowledge of academic policy and resources, through both training and cross-training of GE and major advisors, can help ensure that students receive consistent advice across multiple advisors. In addition, sharing of notes from advising sessions, through the use of student success technology platforms, will help ensure that students do not have to start over again with each encounter. These strategies can save students time, prevent frustration, and help ensure that institution-wide advising resources are used efficiently.

Support a more personalized approach through professional development for advisors and better use of technology. To meet students' desire for more personalized advising, campuses should ensure that professional development focuses on the affective dimension of advising, as well as covering academic requirements and other technical content. In addition, rather than seeing the use of technology as impersonal, students described ways that technology could be used to personalize their advising experience: by providing them with easy access to just-in-time information targeted to their needs; by supporting advisors with detailed information about students' situations to inform more tailored face-to-face advising sessions; and by providing electronic documentation of advising sessions to support both students and their advisors in taking action.

Improve the effectiveness and integration of eAdvising tools, as well as the training provided to both students and advisors. Significant effort is needed to realize the full potential of eAdvising tools currently being implemented and used on campuses, including improving user interfaces, integrating tools to provide a more seamless experience, and offering better training to both students and advisors to improve awareness and facility in using the tools. Training for students could include online tutorials, more formal use of peer mentors, as well as group training opportunities. Training for advisors should incorporate both technical training as well as professional development focused on strategies for effectively integrating the use of eAdvising tools, including the data they collect, into advising interactions and services. Particular effort is needed to improve the implementation and use of online degree-planning tools if they are to serve both student and institutional needs. Campuses hope to use information from students' degree plans to better target course offerings to meet student demand, but the tools are currently underused and described as problematic by both students and advisors.

Provide more professional development customized to faculty and strengthen faculty-staff partnerships. Faculty, in particular, are receiving less professional development related to advising than staff and need offerings that are targeted to their unique roles and needs. Centers for Teaching and Learning could be important and thus far largely untapped, campus partners in developing content tailored to faculty. A starting point would be to develop a comprehensive list of faculty who provide advising, as most of the campuses we studied were unable to identify faculty advisors. In addition, while there are multiple models for how faculty and staff work together on different campuses and within different academic colleges and departments, more intentional focus is needed to ensure that faculty and staff function together effectively as part of an advising ecosystem. Campus advising leaders should give thought to how faculty can be better informed about and included in all of the improvement strategies currently being pursued. In addition to providing more thoughtful professional development for faculty, issues around faculty compensation and workload related to advising should be explored.

Assess the effectiveness of advising improvement strategies, including their impact on equity goals. As we described in our first report, administrators acknowledged the importance of using data but did not articulate clear and widely understood plans for measuring the effectiveness of advising reforms. Similarly, they said their campuses are concerned about disparities in student progress and outcomes, but few reported specific efforts to address equity gaps via changes to advising or identified specific evidence-based interventions to reduce equity gaps. In the survey, advisors shared administrators' concern about equity issues and indicated that strategies that touch all students would be more effective for closing equity gaps than programs focused on specific populations or training in implicit bias. As they implement strategies to improve advising, campuses should ensure they are assessing the impact of their efforts on student success, including whether the changes help to reduce equity gaps. Campuses should also explore how data and evidence about equity can be used to support professional development efforts that increase awareness among advisors of the unique challenges and needs of nontraditional and underserved student populations.

Continue to create oversight structures that allow for integration and efficiency. While some of the recommendations above can be implemented, at least partially, at the division or departmental level, most would benefit from some campuswide oversight and resources. The findings in this report underscore the importance of oversight structures that allow for campuswide integration of advising. Strategies discussed in the first report, such as committee structures, senior advising administrators, and shared positions or cross-functional advising teams, are all potential mechanisms for making the kinds of improvements that students and advisors are requesting. Campuses, in broad consultation with key stakeholders, should evaluate which oversight structures make the most sense for their unique campus contexts.

As acknowledged by the administrators, advisors, and students included in this study, students benefit from advising that responds to their needs in a holistic way, rather than placing the primary burden on them to find what they are seeking across a fragmented advising ecosystem. A holistic approach begins first and foremost with strategies that seek to integrate GE and major advising more effectively, but it extends to various academic and nonacademic supports. As campuses continue to pursue improvement strategies, we urge them to move beyond a narrow focus on coordinating academic planning and to consider how to integrate the full range of academic planning and services available to students to realize the vision of holistic advising.

While programs offering intensive wrap-around services for special populations are not scalable with current resources, strategies highlighted in our first report, including broader utilization of student success technology platforms by nonacademic units, use of cross-functional advising teams that incorporate other student services professionals, and professional development focusing on the whole student's needs, all have promise for building a more holistic advising ecosystem across the CSU. As the campuses work to increase student progress and outcomes, the experiences and perspectives of students, advisors, and administrators about advising can help guide their efforts.

Appendix: Research Methods

Development of Survey and Focus Group Protocols. To select topics for the advisor survey and student focus group questions, we explored various resources and existing surveys related to national trends in advising (such as the website and reports of the National Academic Advising Association), reviewed campus efforts to improve advising based on the interviews we conducted with advising administrators (summarized in Part 1 of this series), and reviewed advising-related feedback provided during student focus groups we conducted for a previous study examining student perspectives on barriers to timely graduation.⁶ We sought and received feedback and suggestions for improvement on draft versions of the survey and focus group protocols from researchers who study higher education as well as an advising practitioner, and made changes based on those reviews.

Campus Selection. The campuses included in the survey of advisors and the student focus groups were the same ones that took part in the interviews with administrators summarized in Part 1 of this series. We recruited the campuses through outreach to contacts across CSU campuses. We targeted 10 campuses that we identified as having some focus on improving academic advising during earlier research on efforts across the CSU to improve student success and five campuses agreed to participate.⁷ We offered anonymity to participating campuses in order to encourage participation and candid responses and, therefore, do not identify them in this report. In targeting campuses to study, we worked to ensure some variation in campus location and in the nature of the changes being made to academic advising. All campuses that participated were fairly large campuses, with enrollment over 20,000 (though we included smaller campuses in our recruiting effort). We provided \$1,000 to each campus to compensate for some of the staff time spent participating in the research or helping to organize data-collection activities.

Advisor Survey. We asked each of the five campuses to provide the names and email addresses of all staff and faculty undergraduate advisors. Every campus was able to provide a list of professional staff advisors, and all names on those lists were included in the invitation to participate. One of the five campuses declined to have faculty advisors participate in the survey, out of concern about asking faculty to participate in another survey again so soon after the campus had done a faculty survey of its own. Among the other four campuses, only one was able to provide a list of all faculty advisors, with the other three campuses indicating that they do not maintain a centralized list of faculty who provide undergraduate advising. As an alternative, one campus provided a contact list of faculty who had subscribed to the campus advising newsletter distributed by a senior advising administrator. For the other two campuses, we reviewed college and departmental websites to gather the names and email addresses of faculty who serve as advisors. As the availability of this information varied by department, our lists were likely not entirely comprehensive or up to date. Our efforts yielded a recruitment sample of 1,369 advisors across the five campuses, including 314 professional staff advisors and 1,055 faculty advisors.

Table A-1 summarizes the survey response rates, which varied by campus and type of advisor. Just over half (52%) of professional staff advisors in the sample participated in the survey, ranging from 41 percent to 76 percent across the five campuses. Participation rates were much lower for faculty advisors. Less than one-fifth (17%) of faculty in the sample participated in the survey, ranging from 13 percent to 25 percent across the four campuses (faculty were not included in the survey at the fifth campus). The overall response rate for the survey, across advisor types and campuses, was 25 percent.

Table A-1
Survey Response Rates

Campus	Professional Staff Advisors			Faculty Advisors			All Advisors		
	Total Sample	Respondents	Response Rate	Total Sample	Respondents	Response Rate	Total Sample	Respondents	Response Rate
1	60	29	48%	224	46	21%	284	75	26%
2	51	39	76%	419	54	13%	470	93	20%
3	104	44	42%	87	22	25%	191	66	35%
4	56	23	41%	325	58	18%	381	81	21%
5	43	29	67%	Faculty not included in survey			43	29	67%
Total	314	164	52%	1,055	180	17%	1,369	344	25%

We administered the survey in October 2018 using Qualtrics survey software, recruiting advisors to participate via emails distributed to the 1,369 advisors on the list. In an effort to garner higher response rates, we sent two additional reminder emails to advisors who had not completed the survey. We also offered advisors at each campus the chance to win a \$100 gift card as an incentive to complete the survey. One gift card was awarded per campus, with the recipients drawn at random from among survey respondents. Table A-2 shows some descriptive information about the advising duties of survey participants (we did not collect demographic information).

The survey instrument (included in the [Technical Appendices](#)) included questions about advisors:

- role in advising undergraduate students;
- perceptions of the potential effectiveness of campus efforts to improve advising;
- familiarity with and perspectives on eAdvising tools;
- perspectives on equity issues as they relate to advising;
- views on the relationships among faculty and staff advisors; and
- perspectives on the advising-related professional development they have received.

We conducted descriptive analyses of the closed-ended survey items using SPSS Statistics and coded the responses to open-ended items thematically.

Table A-2
Job Characteristics of Survey Respondents

	Professional Staff Advisors	Faculty Advisors
Years advising students:		
0-2 years	24%	11%
3-5 years	28%	17%
6-10 years	19%	21%
11-20 years	23%	33%
More than 20 years	5%	17%
Percent of time spent on advising-related matters in a typical workweek		
0-25%	8%	71%
26-50%	15%	25%
51-75%	26%	3%
76-100%	52%	1%
Number of students advised in busiest advising season		
Fewer than 10 per week	8%	40%
10-19 per week	14%	34%
20-30 per week	31%	20%
More than 30 per week	47%	7%
Level of institution at which advising duties performed		
Institution (whole university)	29%	2%
College, school or division	50%	4%
Department within college	21%	93%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Student Focus Groups. We conducted a total of 14 focus groups across the five campuses in November 2018. We asked the institutional research offices of each campus to send us the names and email addresses for a random sample of 500 students who were new to the campus as of fall 2018 (either freshmen or community college transfers) and a separate random sample of 500 students who had senior standing as of that term. We recruited students for the two focus groups, via email, from the random samples provided by the campuses. We conducted a third focus group at four of the five campuses, in an effort to specifically target students from underserved populations. The groups were defined and recruited differently at each campus, based on discussions with the campus liaison about what would be feasible. One campus provided a third random sample of 500 student emails, for Southeast Asian students, so we recruited for that group in the same manner as for the other two focus groups. The other campuses recruited students through various offices and student organizations, including a veterans center, a program serving black male students, and a Hmong student organization. Campuses either distributed flyers through program offices, with flyers listing a website for students to sign up for the focus group, or distributed emails themselves to students in the program with a link to a sign-up sheet.

We conducted the focus groups in person at each campus, with each focus group lasting one hour. We provided lunch and offered a gift card as incentives for students' participation. The interview protocol (available in the [Technical Appendices](#)) included questions about:

- students' use of advising for different purposes, including what prompted them to engage with advising;
- their perceptions about what makes advising helpful;
- the challenges they have experienced with advising;
- their experiences with the use of technology in advising;
- their opportunities to develop relationships with advisors;
- their observations about any changes to advising since enrolling at their CSU campus;
- their perceptions about the accessibility of advising for various types of students;
- their suggestions for improving advising services; and
- advice they would give to a sibling or friend enrolling at their CSU campus about advising.

We audio recorded the focus groups, had the recordings transcribed, and conducted content analyses of the transcriptions.

A total of 88 students participated in the focus groups, with the number of students per group ranging from 1 to 12. Table A-3 shows some characteristics of the focus group participants, including their apparent gender and race/ethnicity as observed by the researcher. Overall, 65 participants were women and 23 were men. The racial/ethnic composition of the groups was very diverse, such that the third group at each campus, aimed at ensuring inclusion of perspectives from underserved student populations, did not look much different than the groups drawn from random samples, reflecting the very diverse student populations served at the participating CSU campuses.

Table A-3
Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

Campus and Group	Total Students	Student Characteristics							
		Gender		Race/Ethnicity				Initially Enrolled As	
		Female	Male	Latinx	Asian	White	Black	Freshman	Transfer
1									
	Group 1	11	10	1	7	4	—	5	6
	Group 2	5	5	—	5	—	—	4	1
2									
	Group 1	6	2	4	3	2	1	2	4
	Group 2	5	4	1	2	2	1	1	4
	Group 3	6	6	—	—	5	1	4	2
3									
	Group 1	7	5	2	2	2	1	4	3
	Group 2	12	10	2	6	3	3	10	2
	Group 3	4	3	1	4	—	—	4	—
4									
	Group 1	7	4	3	3	1	2	3	4
	Group 2	3	3	—	1	1	1	2	1
	Group 3	7	—	7	—	7	—	4	3
5									
	Group 1	1	1	—	—	1	—	1	—
	Group 2	6	5	1	1	2	3	2	4
	Group 3	8	7	1	4	—	—	8	—
Total		88	65	23	38	25	19	6	54
									34

Endnotes

- 1 Moore, C., Schrager, C., and Jaeger, L. (2018). *Destination integration: Strategies to improve academic advising*. Sacramento, CA: Education Insights Center, California State University, Sacramento.
- 2 The CSU Student Success Network, established in 2016, brings together faculty, staff, and administrators from throughout the CSU system to connect and improve on progress for students. The Network is facilitated by EdInsights. For more information, see the Network website at <http://csustudentsuccess.net>
- 3 Moore, C., Schrager, C., and Bracco, K. R. (2017). *From scatterplot to roadmap: New efforts to improve student success in the California State University*. Sacramento, CA: Education Insights Center, California State University, Sacramento.
- 4 The survey first asked advisors if their campuses were implementing (or had recently implemented) particular efforts to improve advising. Only those who answered “yes” to an item were asked to provide their perspective on the potential effectiveness of that effort.
- 5 See “Questions about EOP” on the Chancellor’s Office website. Retrieved from <https://www2.calstate.edu/attend/student-services/eop/Pages/questions-about-eop.aspx>.
- 6 Moore, C. and Tan, C. (2018). *“Get me from point A to point B.” Student perspectives on barriers to timely graduation at the California State University*. Sacramento, CA: Education Insights Center, California State University, Sacramento.
- 7 Moore, et al. (2017).



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