



### College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Advising Council

#### Issue:

The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) at the University of Florida (UF) is known for its student-friendly focus and quality academic advising. Over the years that I have been at UF, there has been a shift from a faculty-only advising structure to a faculty-staff partnership in academic advising. All academic units in CALs employ at least one professional staff adviser. Those advisers report to the department chair, but are guided by college and university policies and procedures. As Associate Dean, I communicate regularly with faculty and staff advisers, but felt that there was an opportunity to develop a council of staff advisers to provide them with a voice in college practices and also an opportunity for personal and professional development.

#### What has been done:

The process began in May of 2012 by discussing the idea with a group of 3 experienced advisers in the college; one of whom was part of a similar advising council in another UF college. I visited NACADA (the premier academic advising association) headquarters in June of 2012 and in July the college hosted a retreat for undergraduate coordinators, advising faculty and staff to discuss the concept. One outcome of the retreat was support for the development of a CALs Advising Council made up of staff advisers.

Since that time, the Council has been formed, by-laws established, and monthly meetings were held from September through May. Voting members represent each of the undergraduate academic programs and the Council is run by four elected officers: Chair, Chair-Elect, Recording Secretary and Communications Chair. The Council has three standing committees: Best Practices, Professional Development and Outreach. The CALs Advising Council Mission statement and goals are listed below:

*The Mission of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences College Council is for all undergraduate students to reach their educational goals with high achievement and to graduate. To fulfill our mission the Council is committed to the following goals:*

- *Providing timely and accurate advising and information in a supportive environment;*
- *Developing systems that support and enhance student learning and achievement;*
- *Developing links across campus to ensure seamless navigation of the educational system from admission to graduation;*
- *Providing students with information regarding resources and opportunities related to career pathways;*
- *Enhancing training and professional development for professional staff advisers;*
- *Promoting recognition of the role and functions of professional staff advisers.*

#### Impacts/New Partnerships:

One of the almost immediate impacts of this project was solidifying a network of professional staff advisers. Most of our advisers work in isolation and while they may have know the names and email addresses of contacts in other departments, they didn't necessarily operate as colleagues. Even the members "guiding coalition" (to reference the book *Leading Change*) hadn't worked together before.

From our first meetings forward the collegiality and camaraderie that was built in this process were palpable. I also believe that establishment of the Council has made our advisers more confident and I expect they will take on leadership roles at the university level.

**Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)**

It will take some time before we can truly evaluate the impact of the CALS Advising Council on the student experience, but we can use the college's exit survey questions on advising as metrics. Aside from those larger goals, there have been several outcomes this year resulting from the formation of the Council.

1. Change in college procedures: The Best Practices Committee has begun a dialogue with the Dean's Office about several long-standing practices. The committee is sensitive to the workload of the Dean's Office and is looking for ways to expand the departmental roles to enhance services to students. Departmental advisers now have the authorization to change student's catalog year and process course drops. Other changes are in discussion.
2. Engagement in recruiting: The Outreach Committee planned and implemented a "Gator Day" event at a nearby community college. This was an opportunity for departmental advisers to meet and recruit potential transfer students. Dean's Office staff assisted, but the majority of the effort was made by the Council members.
3. Engagement in freshman orientation: The College hosts two information sessions at each of 22 two-day Preview orientation events from mid-May through mid-July. Presenters at these sessions had always been Dean's Office staff. Through dialogue and engagement with the Outreach Committee, several Council members were trained and presented sessions this summer.
4. Engagement in professional development: The Professional Development Committee has provided input to the CALS Teaching Resource Center to shape an "advising track" in the upcoming annual CALS Teaching Enhancement Symposium.

It has been gratifying to see staff advisers from all across the college embrace this new organization and take ownership of it. I expect continued growth and engagement from the group and I expect them to continue to look for ways to enhance our advising system. I hope to be able to support them more financially in the coming year.

**How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?**

The book *Leading Change* was a great resource for this project. Each of the eight steps Kotter outlines in his book were present in our process. I believe the creation of a guiding coalition was instrumental to the success of the project to date along with generating several short-term wins. In this case, the people I worked with to develop this Council were not direct reports, so it was important to quickly establish a team, a vision and broad-based acceptance.

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