

**ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER AND  
DISABILITY SERVICES  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
May 1, 2009**

**Academic support** for students, **advising services** for faculty and students, and **disability services** for students, combine to support the College's goal of academic excellence and student-centered transformative education while incorporating the perspective of transition and student development issues. All three services aspire to teach students how to set and meet high expectations with the goal of attaining their full potential. In addition, we provide support to faculty as they set high standards for their students and meet new challenges in their classrooms.

Our work covers the **full spectrum of academic performance**, including assistance with academic probation and suspension, plus encouragement for Phi Beta Kappa and other fellowships and awards. In so doing, we assist students in learning basic study skills and arranging accommodations for students with documented disabilities, and planning for best use of learning opportunities that lead to exciting next steps after graduation. Unlike more traditional support center models, we devote our efforts to a continuum of educational components that intersect with the Counseling Center, Career Center, Registrar's Office, Center for International and Cultural Education, Diversity Center, Writing Center, and many other departments.

We coordinate the offering of summer registration on campus and handle readmissions (students returning from withdrawals, academic and disciplinary suspensions, medical leaves). Among other activities and initiatives, we participate in the First Term Seminar (FTS) Advisory Board, international student friendship family program, retention effort, and the proposal for coordinating advising for fellowships and awards. We work with mentoring for students of color and with the alcohol education mentoring program. Furthermore, we have also participated in the establishment of an all-campus Leadership Initiative, the Living/Learning Initiative, and Orientation review. We have certainly helped shape college policy in relation to disability accommodations.

As we look ahead to 2020, we are informed by looking back twenty years and noting three changes: 1) the changing demographics of our student population; 2) the College's expectations of faculty; and 3) use of technology in our work. We aspire to be seen by our sister institutions as a cutting-edge model of a campus-wide advising/mentoring community that is attentive to professional development for faculty, administrators, and staff. We are especially cognizant of future areas of growing need such as working with students with complex psychological and disability diagnoses and serving at-risk immigrant, multilingual, and first-generation populations. In tough economic times in particular, we see our work as helping with orientation and retention efforts and articulating the value of how a liberal arts education relates to practical career uses or further study. Such intentionality is highlighted in the Academic Programs and New Initiatives Task Force documents for Commission Gustavus 150.

## SECTION 1 — MISSION, VISION, GOALS

### Academic Support

**Mission.** Assist all students to develop their learning strategies, establish and focus on their academic goals, and encourage the inclusion of academic experiences outside the classroom, college, and country in their academic plans. In addition to connecting with first-year students through First Term Seminar (FTS) classroom visits and residential hall presentations, we intentionally target certain groups of at-risk students and offer outreach, support, and mentoring in whatever venues are possible.

**Vision.** Offer more personal attention to unusual circumstances as we collaborate more with the Counseling Center, Health Service, Residential Life Office, and the Dean of Students Office. Maintain an awareness of needs in the classroom—ways to help faculty and their students—directly or through supporting campus tutoring programs. Utilize technology when appropriate to teach basic study skills, offer instruction on learning styles and strategies, and provide examples of successful students.

### Advising Services

**Mission.** We provide professional development opportunities for faculty advisors so that advising becomes a high-level interaction among students and colleagues and so that mentoring is an assumed component of the relationship between faculty and their advisees as well between students and faculty in the classroom. We also provide advising support to students as a supplement to the advisor/advisee relationship to help students navigate the academic possibilities both in and out of the classroom.

**Vision.** We ensure that faculty, students, and staff who participate in advising have the ability to: 1) articulate the usefulness of a liberal arts education; 2) connect academic work with its application to the needs of the world; 3) articulate the value of experiences in and out of the classroom; 4) understand graduation requirements and what makes a whole experience for students; 5) match theory and application; and 6) facilitate students' growth into a self-actualized people. We seek to formally acknowledge faculty contributions to advising and mentoring and give them credit for increasing their time and availability to students, thus making it possible to match the quality of advising with the quality of mentoring.

### Disability Services

**Mission.** We provide equal access to all programs for students who have documented disabilities by means of appropriate and reasonable accommodations. On a regular basis, we identify and refer undiagnosed students for testing and assist them in qualifying for accommodations, thus enabling them to achieve a level of quality consistent with their abilities. In order to strengthen faculty work with students, we offer specific information about the nature of individual disabilities, as well as reasonable accommodations, and provide ongoing education about disability issues to faculty, students' parents and Admissions staff. We maintain a system that supports clear communication between faculty and students, while assisting students to develop

self-advocacy. In addition, Disability Services consults with other offices regarding compliance with the law and serves as a liaison between faculty and students.

**Vision.** We intend to provide ongoing disability services that match the increasing needs for staff, space, adaptive equipment and expertise, while maintaining ongoing collaboration with the Counseling Center, Health Services, Residential Life, and the Dean of Students Office. As the population of students with disabilities changes, we will offer a continuity of services surrounding complex multiple, interfering disorders. In order to serve students better, we will assist in developing confident and supportive faculty who can learn new ways to teach and measure the academic understanding of students who have disabilities. As equipment becomes more personalized and less expensive, we will improve technological support by providing up-to-date adaptive equipment and access for students with disabilities. Because Admissions staff and other departments have responsibilities connected with recruitment of students, we will provide ongoing education for the staff in those areas to aid in effective recruiting.

## **GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

Overall goals include continued collaboration with colleagues, timely services to students and faculty, incorporation of mentoring and leadership initiatives, attention to retention efforts, and wise use of technology while being cognizant of and maintaining the essential need for face-to-face communication and relationships in advising. We will continue to see ourselves as part of the whole enterprise by participating in a broad spectrum of activities in the life of the student and of the College.

Another goal affecting our office in the future, as we expect numbers of students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELL) to increase, has to do with space, staff and expertise. While keeping our proximity with the Counseling Center paramount, we will need space for any number of the following positions: a tutor coordinator, additional administrative or program assistant, an adaptive technology specialist, alternative testing coordinator, ELL support person, and/or tutoring and testing rooms.

### **Goal 1. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Ensure that skills and the professional development of Academic Advising Center staff meet the highest standards of practice.

### **Goal 2. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Develop and deliver outreach programs on an annual basis for faculty and students.

### **Goal 3. (Academic Support)**

Assess the campus tutoring program and explore other models.

### **Goal 4. (Disability Services)**

Ensure that appropriate campus constituencies are educated about disability issues and aware of available services.

**Goal 5. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Meet needs of increasing at-risk populations (athletes, first-generation, Greeks, sophomores, students on academic probation, immigrant populations and students with disabilities).

**Goal 6. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Offer a web presence and technology that meet student and faculty needs.

**Goal 7. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Raise the level of academic expectations for all new and current students.

**Goal 8. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Successfully address transition and self-advocacy issues from high school to college.

**Goal 9. (Advising Services)**

Continue to evaluate and improve summer registration, especially in light of technological advances and changing needs.

**Goal 10. (Disability Services)**

Plan ahead for an expected increase in the number of students with disabilities.

**SECTION 2— STRATEGIC REVIEW**

**Strengths**

There are many strengths associated with the history of operation and current practices of the Academic Advising Center and Disability Services. We undertake periodic office reviews by external evaluators every 7-10 years and have more information on our strengths and challenges in those reports as well. Because the Academic Advising Center and Disability Services has seen tremendous growth and change over the past 20 years, we look both backward and forward in illuminating some of the strengths summarized in the list below.

- ◆ Quality printed resources and online materials for faculty advisors and students have been created and updated regularly.
- ◆ Our location with the Counseling Center, in a line of traffic in the Student Union, in proximity with the Center for Vocation Reflection (CVR), Career Center, Community Service Center, and Dean of Students Office is prime.
- ◆ Collaborative participation in training of faculty advisors, facilitating Orientation, organizing summer registration, working with the Peer Assistants (PAs), advising and registering international students, supporting Admission open houses, etc. is important in the life of the College.
- ◆ We feel mutual respect with faculty, students, and colleagues.
- ◆ Although we are housed organizationally under Academic Affairs, we intersect with Student Affairs from collaboration with student service offices and programs to attending and presenting for faculty at offerings through the Kendall Center for Engaged Learning.

- ◆ We strive for timely action to student and faculty issues and concerns by responding both proactively and reactively to Academic Alerts, arranging accommodations, conducting queries for grades disasters, sharing information with colleagues, etc.
- ◆ Our services demonstrate our sincere interest in educating the whole spectrum of students by ability and by total college experience.
- ◆ We consistently review and evaluate our services for improvements.
- ◆ We remain attentive to student support by work supervisors, coaches, etc. as we believe mentoring happens in many places on campus.
- ◆ There are opportunities for voluntary conversations with students about the value of liberal arts, the importance of self-advocacy, the opportunity for life-long learning, and taking individual responsibility for learning.
- ◆ We feel support from the Provost's Office and Academic Deans in our reporting structure in addition to support from many other professionals and offices on campus.

### **Weaknesses and Challenges**

For all types of support in the Academic Advising Center and Disability Services, we have realized that we need to learn much more about complex, multiple interfering disorders because we find students presenting with more and more unique and challenging situations as each year passes. We recognize that we may need to attend more conferences or meetings for professional development in this area as we have been seeking information from colleagues in the Counseling Center, Health Service, Residential Life Office, and Dean of Students Office when needs arise.

In addition, we all need to make it a priority to participate in ongoing technology training, to stay current with advances on campus, to become familiar with new adaptive technologies, as well as to monitor how our students are presently utilizing technology. We recognize that we need to continually push ourselves out of our comfort zones to embrace the new ways that technology can help us deliver services in improved ways.

Some specific challenges in the area of **academic support** are listed here:

- ◆ There seems to be inconsistent recruitment, training, and evaluation of departmental tutors across campus. We are unsure of what our level of involvement should be.
- ◆ The Collegiate Fellow (CF) role seems to have been changing in recent years in ways that stray from modeling and teaching about academic support as well as no longer supplementing faculty advising.
- ◆ Faculty vary widely in their use of the Academic Alert system and are just beginning to utilize the new electronic alert feature in WebAdvisor. We keep trying to remind them about the need to share information with us in timely ways.

Challenges specific to our **faculty-based advising** system are as follows:

- ◆ An advisor training program has not been established on a regular, systemic basis. Perhaps collaboration with the faculty development programs in the new Kendall Center for Engaged Learning will help us overcome this weakness in the years ahead.
- ◆ A consistent system of evaluation and rewards for faculty advisors has yet to be created, though we do offer letters of support for tenure and promotion candidates when

appropriate. We are thankful that the newly established Theodore Conrad award for mentoring and advising recognizes faculty contributions every second year.

- ◆ There is continual faculty turn-over due to retirements, resignations, new hires, training of FTS and CII professors who have special advising considerations for first-year students, etc. It is difficult to support faculty advising in all places at all times. CII advisors don't undergo the same training as FTS advisors. Some new hires advise in their first year here due to departmental demands though we usually have new faculty focus solely on teaching in their first year.

The most pressing challenges in the area of **disability services** are summarized below:

- ◆ Simply stated, we are understaffed for the constantly increasing caseload of students seeking accommodations. Furthermore, there is a possibility that more tasks could be given to a support staff person if one had more dedicated time and attention to disability services.
- ◆ There is a lack of adequate testing spaces available for students who need alternatives to classroom exams. We need quiet spaces and would like to be able to proctor exams in some fashion. Sometimes we need readers and scribes to be available as well and that's not the best use of our time as professionals.

### **SECTION 3 — STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Goal 1. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Ensure that skills and the professional development of staff meet the highest standards of practice.

**Strategy 1.1.** Increase knowledge and competence concerning issues of diversity and cultural awareness, for staff and for faculty/advisor development.

*Tactic 1.1.1.* Research what sister institutions are doing; identify people to bring to campus or places to visit.

*Tactic 1.1.2.* At least one staff person should attend a related conference each year—to share with each other and others in the Student Affairs Division.

*Tactic 1.1.3* Engage in conversations with the Diversity Center and diverse groups on campus.

**Strategy 1.2.** Learn what would be helpful to know and is appropriate to our work with students about complex, multiple interfering disorders; what signs and symptoms to look for and how to respond.

*Tactic 1.2.1.* Schedule regular sessions with our Counseling Center staff to help us identify unusual situations and how to respond, comparable to their work with faculty around this same issue.

*Tactic 1.2.2.* Continue office proximity with Counseling Center for cross-referrals and case management.

*Tactic 1.2.3.* Continue professional development activities to increase knowledge and to stay informed of new developments as well as new methods of services and treatment.

**Strategy 1.3.** Conduct a comprehensive review of best practices in our field.

*Tactic 1.3.1.* Research literature, especially publications of national organizations.

*Tactic 1.3.2.* Review sister institutions' office models and superior examples; confer with counterparts at similar institutions.

*Tactic 1.3.3.* Review and assess effectiveness of FTS presentations, summer registration, and communication with faculty about Academic Alerts, advising, and accommodations for students with disabilities.

*Tactic 1.3.4.* Maintain awareness of changing technology for all of our services.

*Tactic 1.3.5.* Assess current use of adaptive equipment and update accordingly.

**Goal 2. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Develop and deliver outreach programs on an annual basis for faculty and students.

**Strategy 2.1.** Identify exemplary students and develop peer panels.

*Tactic 2.1.1.* Research varieties of this model according to opportunity and venue (year in residence, time of year).

*Tactic 2.1.2.* Determine target audiences by group affiliation (i.e. LSAMP, Diversity Center, Gold Leadership, BIO, FTS and CII, students with disabilities).

**Strategy 2.2.** Identify a cadre of exceptional faculty and staff with expertise for quick advising/mentoring refresher sessions with newer faculty.

*Tactic 2.2.1.* Review natural times when faculty development efforts include issues of advising (audience, time of year).

*Tactic 2.2.2.* Review natural times when faculty development efforts include teaching and testing, and of handling disability issues.

*Tactic 2.2.3.* Coordinate with Writing Center and ELL staff person for issues of grading standards, consistent treatment, etc. to be discussed among faculty.

*Tactic 2.2.4.* Keep revising academic support, advising services, and disability services' materials/definition/formats with input from faculty, both hard copy and electronic versions.

**Goal 3. (Academic Support)**

Assess the campus tutoring program and explore other models.

**Strategy 3.1.** Understand the campus culture and whether there is value in consolidation or centralization of tutoring services.

*Tactic 3.1.1.* Survey academic departments, Writing Center, Diversity Center, Advising Center services, especially disability services.

*Tactic 3.1.2.* Do needs analysis for space and staffing according to findings.

*Tactic 3.1.3.* Do needs analysis for training and evaluating of tutors.

**Goal 4. (Disability Services)**

Ensure that appropriate campus constituencies are educated about disability issues and aware of available services.

**Strategy 4.1.** Review kinds of support for students with disabilities.

**Tactic 4.1.1.** Survey the variety of support – from Admission process through graduation (i.e. Disability Services, Career Center, Center for Vocation Reflection (CVR), Writing Center, Dean of Students Office and Residential Life).

**Tactic 4.1.2.** Develop a database of success stories to inform conversations with prospective students.

**Strategy 4.2.** Cultivate faculty awareness about disability issues and reasonable accommodations.

**Tactic 4.2.1.** Develop and conduct appropriate faculty workshops.

**Tactic 4.2.2.** Develop materials designed to promote faculty knowledge of issues surrounding students with disabilities, services available and best practice methods for teaching these students.

**Strategy 4.3.** Heighten student awareness about disability issues and reasonable accommodations.

**Tactic 4.3.1.** Work with the Education Department to help inform prospective teachers about typical accommodations and how to assist students with their transition to college.

**Tactic 4.3.2.** Find venues to create student support groups and share information with the larger Gustavus community.

**Strategy 4.4** Improve awareness of Student Affairs colleagues, Administrators, Coaches, and support staff (work supervisors).

**Tactic 4.4.1.** Develop and conduct an in-service to include in annual training sessions.

**Tactic 4.4.2.** Create a Disability Services newsletter to circulate among staff and students.

**Strategy 4.5.** Advertise services and philosophy of disability services to prospective and new students with disabilities.

**Tactic 4.5.1.** Develop peer panels to help with discussions on self-advocacy skills, communication needs, and transition issues.

**Tactic 4.5.2.** Develop new materials for promotion and dissemination of information about disabilities and services available at Gustavus.

**Goal 5. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Meet needs of increasing at-risk populations (athletes, first-generation, Greeks, sophomores, students on academic probation, immigrant populations, and students with disabilities).

**Strategy 5.1.** Explore imaginative ways of preparing at-risk students.

**Tactic 5.1.1.** Consider developing a variation of a summer bridge program, perhaps as an online, distance experience.

**Tactic 5.1.2.** Consider co-sponsoring a pre-orientation week seminar, perhaps as an online, distance experience.

**Goal 6. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Offer a web presence and technology that meet student and faculty needs.

**Strategy 6.1.** Investigate ways that faculty and students use technology.

*Tactic 6.1.1.* Develop and implement a technology survey.

*Tactic 6.1.2.* Routinely review the current literature, especially for students with disabilities.

*Tactic 6.1.3.* Review other institutions' web presence.

*Tactic 6.1.4.* Review ease of accessibility to online resources and information.

**Goal 7. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Raise the level of academic expectations for all new and current students.

**Strategy 7.1.** Develop a collection of DVD conversations with students who have accomplished a lot – for use for faculty development, student orientation, Celebration of Creative Inquiry, Admission, Advancement, etc.

*Tactic 7.1.1.* Learn how to implement and get grants for equipment.

*Tactic 7.1.2.* **Identify the students with stories and groups who would benefit from hearing those stories.**

**Goal 8. (Academic Support, Advising Services, Disability Services)**

Successfully address transition and self-advocacy issues from high school to college.

**Strategy 8.1.** Research materials regarding best practices, especially for FTS/CII faculty, and Collegiate Fellows (CFs) as well as Admissions, and new students.

*Tactic 8.1.1.* Develop materials – hard copy, PowerPoint and on the web.

*Tactic 8.1.2.* Discuss transition and self-advocacy issues annually with appropriate constituencies.

**Goal 9. (Advising Services)**

Continue to evaluate and improve summer registration, especially in light of technological advances and changing needs.

**Strategy 9.1.** Keep the quality of face-to-face advising for new students during summer registration paramount.

**Strategy 9.2.** Become knowledgeable about electronic ways to supplement, augment, and/or expedite portions of the program on campus, while not taking away the quality of face-to-face interaction.

**Strategy 9.3.** Be ready to change according to the economic climate, always trying to keep advising and mentoring relationships at the center of this process.

**Goal 10. (Disability Services)**

Plan ahead for an expected increase in the number of students with disabilities.

**Strategy 10.1.** While keeping our proximity with the Counseling Center, inquire about how to actualize expanded facilities.

**Tactic 10.1.1.** Submit proposals for expanded facilities including learning stations equipped with the latest technology aids, quiet alternative testing rooms and offices for individual tutoring of students with disabilities as finances permit.

**Strategy 10.2.** Analyze the staffing needs for such things as an additional administrative assistant or program assistant, adaptive technology specialist, and/or testing coordinator.

**Tactic 10.2.1.** Continue to track and report the increase in numbers of students with disabilities through rosters, charts, and annual reports.

**Tactic 10.2.2.** Submit proposals regarding the increased need of office space for the Coordinator/Director of Disability Services, an accommodation specialist, support staff and student workers, as finances permit.

**Tactic 10.2.3.** Institute a system providing for paid peer note takers for all students with disabilities who qualify for that accommodation.

**Strategy 10.3.** Monitor prospective student populations for expensive or time-consuming accommodation needs such as sign-language interpreters, adding elevators, or other access issues on campus.

#### **SECTION 4 – ASSESSMENT**

Rather than offering a lengthy list of assessment tools for each of the goals and strategies itemized above, we recommend the following methods to evaluate our services. Some are very specific ideas to assess a particular program or aspect of service, while others examine the whole operation in a more global sense.

- ◆ Administer annual surveys to faculty about timeliness of service, efficiency of the Academic Advising Center, printed materials and online materials, for example. Specific questions may also address such things as our communication with faculty advisors, advisor training opportunities, and feelings related to preparedness for advising and mentoring students.
- ◆ Routinely seek input from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs colleagues we work with regularly. Much of this feedback may be anecdotal observations or situational suggestions for adjustment. And, much of the input may be gathered conversationally or during ongoing weekly and monthly meetings with colleagues.
- ◆ Create postcard-sized surveys for immediate response from individual student appointments. Students could fill them out before they leave the office or return comments to us through the Post Office.
- ◆ Administer on-the-spot evaluations following workshops and presentations, especially FTS faculty training, FTS class visits, new faculty training, Summer Registration training. Strengths/useful information, weaknesses/not so helpful information, and suggestions for improvement/topics for inclusion in the future could be the focus of such evaluations.

- ◆ Conduct periodic surveys of students receiving disability-related accommodations. We could assess how students feel about their self-advocacy skills, using other campus resources, availability and response from the Disability Services Coordinator, support and understanding from faculty, usefulness of classroom accommodations, and how they've accessed assistance with out-of-class accommodations such as alternative housing, early registration, adaptive technology, and dining services adjustments to name a few areas.
  
- ◆ Periodically survey faculty who provide accommodations. We could assess the faculty's impressions of the letters of introduction for students in their classes, the usefulness of handouts pertaining to disability information, the communication with the Disability Services Coordinator, and the ease of arranging accommodations such as testing times and places, student note-takers, and advance copies of lecture notes/power points, for example.