

**Brooklyn College 2005-2010 Strategic Plan**  
**Report of the Subcommittee on Undergraduate Academic Advisement**

**Introduction**

To best serve our students, academic advisement at Brooklyn College must be comprehensive and accessible to all students, regardless of when they are on campus or where they are in their progress towards their degree. It must provide accurate and timely information and must be responsive to the developmental needs of individual students. Research has shown that a one-size-fits all approach is not appropriate, even for easily defined categories of students. The literature on advising regularly recommends significant training efforts for faculty and staff well beyond the concerns of course selection and degree audit. It also supports an explorational model of choosing a major that begins with self-awareness and moves through educational knowledge, occupational knowledge, and decision-making knowledge, at which point students possess analytical abilities to synthesize their knowledge and awareness toward academic and professional success.

**Mission Statement**

In keeping with the major goals of the Brooklyn College Strategic Plan, the mission of undergraduate academic advisement is:

- To develop and maintain a coordinated and comprehensive institutional approach toward student advisement
- To enable all students to make a successful transition to undergraduate life
- To empower students to identify appropriate career and life goals and to connect these goals with their educational choices and experiences
- To enable students to take personal responsibility for setting and achieving their academic, career and personal goals
- To provide students with accurate and timely information about institutional policies, procedures, opportunities, and resources
- To enable students to develop individual educational plans that are consistent with their personal values, goals, and aspirations
- To enable students to evaluate their academic progress and to make appropriate adjustments to their educational plans
- To produce graduates who are responsible and self-directed lifelong learners

**Opportunities and Possibilities**

The new core curriculum will require campus-wide sharing of information and cross-training of faculty and staff. These activities should provide opportunities to discuss effective ways of advising students about changing requirements and of helping them understand the underlying philosophy and purpose of the core curriculum.

Existing initiatives in peer advising, e-advising and group advising offer the opportunity for institutionalizing best practices throughout the college. Such opportunities would not require significant additional funding.

Many junior faculty have demonstrated that they are eager to interact with students in ways that extend beyond the classroom and the dissemination of departmental requirements.

Learning Communities for first-year students offer promising venues for informal and formal student advisement.

Successful advisement programs at other CUNY and non-CUNY colleges (e.g., Medgar Evers) offer models for further study and possible adaptation to the needs of Brooklyn College.

A new CUNY-wide forum of advising directors holds great promise for providing new ideas for advising at BC.

### **Existing Undergraduate Academic Advisement Programs at Brooklyn College**

- Academic Advisement Center (AAC)
- The On Course Advantage (TOCA): winner of 2005 Outstanding Advising Program Award from National ACademic ADvising Association (NACADA)
- Freshman Year College: honored as winner of Theodore M. Hesburgh Award and Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award; selected as one of twelve Founding Institutions in the national Project, Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year
- SEEK Program
- Magner Center for Career Development and Internships
- Office of Services for Students with Disabilities
- DegreeWorks online degree audit
- Transfer Interest Groups (TIGs)
- Office of Adult Degree Programs
- Office of Pre-professional Advisement
- Departmental advisement for majors and minors
- Pre-registration academic orientation workshops for all entering students
- Gateway to the Major Project
- Student Academic Progress Alert (mid-semester warning and outreach system)
- Academic Probation Project

### **Goals and Initiatives for the Future**

The most important promise of the West Quad Building is that it will bring together all student services in one central location. Student advisement is the missing piece of that promise. Students need a guide to the system. Ideally, the college should have a stand-alone advisement center located either in the West Quad Building or in some other highly

visible and accessible location and open at times that are convenient for day, evening and weekend students. The Center would have the staff and the e-tools to monitor the progress of all BC students. There would also be a follow up system to see that all students are seen by their assigned advisor at least once a year. The advisor's function in AAC should be clearly distinguished from the regulatory and enforcement functions that have traditionally been handled by that office. The advisor should get to know the student and essentially be a BC guide who would point the student to other services, open doors and guide them to their departmental advisors. The use of e-tools would enable advisors in AAC to seek out the forgotten students and try to keep them in the loop and would offer help and encouragement for everyone.

In the event that the college is unable to find the resources (financial and physical) to achieve this vision completely, the following steps will go a long way towards fulfilling the mission of undergraduate academic advisement:

- Create a culture of advisement throughout the college. All members of the administration, faculty and staff need to see appropriate, timely formal and informal advising as integral to their professional responsibilities.
- Review and simplify rules and regulations and provide easy mechanisms for disseminating changes in policies and procedures. Create an electronic roadmap for academic progress for all students.
- Find appropriate balance in AAC between regulatory and advisement functions. To the degree possible, regulatory and "enforcement" functions (e.g., probation) should be separated from developmental advisement. Students must be introduced to the office and its programs upon their entry to the College. Once students arrive at the Center, they should find a wide variety of resources that will suit their needs. For example, many first-year students come to college not knowing what they would like to major in. The Center should provide information on core courses, major requirements from the various disciplines, and a comprehensive list of contact numbers for students to get further information. The Academic Advisement Center should be the hub from which students are directed to other resources such as the Magner Center. Renovation and reorganization of the AAC facility should be undertaken to create a more welcoming environment.
- One characteristic of successful advisement programs is that students have a personal relationship with an advisor. This might be implemented to some extent if students are encouraged to see the same advisor in Academic Advisement and if counselors in AAC are assigned to particular academic specialties such as business, arts, education, etc. Advisors should offer workshops in their areas of specialization, with faculty from the departments and representatives from the Magner Center serving as resources. In order to implement these initiatives, the number of fulltime professional advisors in AAC should be increased.
- Encourage early exploration and declaration of major. Research shows that a significant number of students do not declare a major until well into their studies. The data suggest that these students demonstrate significantly weaker retention and graduation rates than their colleagues who have declared a major earlier in

their academic career. Student engagement, whether with an academic program or with co-curricular activities, is integral to student success.

- Disseminate and replicate best practices of TOCA and other special advisement programs. Special programs make their members feel special. Part of the mission of good advising must be to make every student feel important, part of a group and valued. When problems occur students need a place they can go to get help on the spot. The sense of place should extend beyond problem-solving. The college needs a group of common spaces (gathering places, conversation pits, student lounges) where students can feel at home.
- All students should be required to meet with an advisor at regular intervals throughout their college career. Students might be required, for example, to present a form or other proof as a part of the graduation requirements showing that they have visited the Magner Center, seen their departmental advisors for a set number of times, attended a workshop, and taken a library tour. Graduation and major requirements should be made clear on website so that advisement can focus on career and/or life objectives. Advisors should encourage students to become involved in internships, research, study abroad and community service and should be directed to the particular resources on campus that support these efforts.
- Systematically and intentionally explore the nature of faculty advisement. While advisement about general graduation requirements should be done by professional advisors, advising about their disciplines should be part of every faculty's job responsibility. Departments should schedule events such as once-a-semester open houses where faculty are available to talk to students about their discipline and to discuss the latest trends in their field and related areas. Students thinking about but not sure about a major should be encouraged to participate. In addition to official majors advisor(s) in each department, individual faculty have numerous opportunities to provide informal advisement and mentoring to students in their classes, labs, studios, etc. This includes non-majors in core and other introductory and/or elective courses. The faculty handbook should include lists of useful advising techniques and resources. New and continuing faculty should be kept informed of services available to help them improve their students' chances of success. The college should encourage face to face interaction between students and their instructors, and the importance of faculty office hours should be explained to students at orientation. Faculty advising of students should be recognized in the promotion and tenure process and in other venues such as Faculty Day presentations and awards.
- All departments should engage in long term course schedule planning to enable students to plan ahead and to enable them to graduate on time. Every effort should be made to avoid scheduling science labs during Common Hours.
- Faculty should post syllabi on the web prior to the start of the semester.
- Planning of co-curricular events should take place in the context of core and other classwork.
- Strengthen collaboration between offices primarily responsible for advisement with other areas of the college. Provide faculty and staff throughout the college with the information and tools to provide accurate and timely advisement.

- Administrators, faculty and staff should receive cross training about graduation requirements, campus resources and general advising.
- Broaden mission of Office of Adult Degree Programs to serve all adult students. The college needs to strengthen the network of support services for these non-traditional students. This network includes advisement for transfer students, students in the special adult degree programs, the Office of Admissions, the Office of Continuing Education, and the Women's Center. The college should take advantage of the fact that it offers a continuum of programs and services for adults ranging from literacy programs through baccalaureate and masters programs. Support services for adults must be available in the evening and on weekends, as well as during regular business hours.
  - Establish Advising Council to bring together representatives from all areas to provide undergraduate advisement. This group should institute a regular cycle of cross-training of staff from offices with primary responsibility for student advisement.
  - Institutionalize and expand peer advisement. One or two departments, including English, currently have peer advising programs for which students receive internship credit in conjunction with an internship seminar. These models can be the starting point for a college-wide/departmental peer advisement system.
  - Maximize benefits of online advisement tools. Promote widespread use of DegreeWorks, WebAttendance, WebGrade, online Student Academic Progress Alert, and other resources. Reorganize and regularly update the BC website and ensure that links to vital student resources are easily accessible.
  - Institute Junior Check to review graduation requirements. In order to ensure ontime graduation, students need to know what requirements they still need to fulfill prior to registration for their final semesters.
  - Continue to draw on students' input and recommendations in reviewing and modifying undergraduate academic advisement.
  - Change the name of the Academic Advisement Center to signal a new direction for advising on the campus. Suggestions include the Center for Student Success and the Office of Academic Engagement. Such a name change can serve as a symbol for the real change that will follow. With sufficient professional staff, the internal structure of AAC might consist of separate units that handle the advisement and regulatory functions of the office.

## **Challenges**

The recommendations in this report are intended to enhance the quality and availability of academic advisement for all undergraduate students. We believe that in a culture of advisement, where all members of the faculty and staff see themselves as playing a role in advisement and where powerful online tools such as DegreeWorks are widely understood and utilized, student success will increase, and the job of enforcing existing rules and regulations will become less burdensome. However, there will always be a need for the regulatory and enforcement functions currently performed in AAC. A review of these functions is needed to determine which ones should remain in AAC and which ones might advantageously be carried out by other offices.

Finally, it is clear that for many of the recommendations in this report to succeed, the college will need to provide additional resources to support training and ongoing professional development, to compensate faculty and staff for whom advisement is a major part of their workload, and to ensure that the offices with primary responsibility for advisement are adequately staffed.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Adelman  
Yasmin Ali  
Jennifer Ball  
Ellen Belton (Convenor)  
Sally Bermanzohn  
Evelyn Guzman  
Steven Jervis  
Yedidiah Langsam  
William Pelto  
Wayne Reed  
Tracy Rodgers  
Alma Rubal-Lopez  
Robert Scott  
Peter Weston

The following students also contributed to this report:

Samuel Aya  
Jason Linetsky  
Joseph Logalbo  
Ryan Merola  
Freddy Mezzich  
Cory Provost  
Dexter Stroude  
Christina Waszak