Outstanding Advising Awards: Tips on Putting Together a Successful Nomination Packet

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Each year, many individuals are nominated to receive a NACADA Outstanding Advising Award. Some find compiling an advising portfolio daunting without the assistance of someone familiar with the process. Regardless of your comfort level, here are a few tips that may be beneficial in navigating the NACADA award nomination process.

Each institution may only nominate one individual per category for a national award. Some colleges and universities have established a systematic approach to nominating advising professionals, faculty advisors and/or advising administrators; this includes the establishment of an advising portfolio that highlights the attributes of those nominated. Although not mandatory, one similarity often noted in national award winners is that of institutional recognition for outstanding advising or advising administration. The selection process used for an institutional award can be used as the filtering process to determine who will be nominated for a national award. At Utah State University (USU), we use the same criteria for our institutional advising awards that NACADA uses for its national awards. As a result, the portfolio of an institutional advising award winner already addresses the same criteria used by NACADA in determining its award recipients. It can be helpful if there are several months between the time institutional awards are presented and the NACADA nomination due date. This will give nominees plenty of time to make modifications and improvements to their portfolios.

Along with the portfolio, the person nominating the individual must provide two additional items for submission to NACADA. The first is a completed nomination form; the second is a summary of the nominee’s qualifications. In this document, the nominator (often a campus advising administrator) should summarize the extent to which the nominee meets the award criteria, citing letters of support, data, or other materials illustrative of exemplary performance as an advisor. The creation of this document requires an investment of time by the nominator. At USU, this responsibility is shared. As staff members assist the administrator in reviewing the portfolio, they identify key pieces of information and quotes that the nominator may use in the summary.

I would recommend that institutions without institutional advising awards consider creating them. This should be initiated through the chief administrator responsible for academic advising. Although Utah State University allows only one winner per category per year, there are many advisors who are recognized through the process. Just being nominated is an honor for many individuals; I have never met anyone who was upset by being nominated. Most nominees feel a level of gratitude that someone noticed and expressed appreciation. Even to those who may not win, the process provides a learning experience and prepares them for the next time an opportunity comes their way.

Many individuals nominated for a national award are intimidated and uncertain about the process. A nominee has a huge advantage when he or she is assisted by someone familiar with the process; when possible, ask a previous award winner to serve as a mentor to assist the nominee. The opportunity to actually study a winning portfolio goes a long way in relieving the anxiety that comes from working in unfamiliar territory.

In recent years, advisors at Missouri State University (MSU) have been frequent recipients of national advising awards. MSU has developed an award-winning Master Advisor Program in which participants are required to complete a rigorous training program. Advisors who complete this program receive a certificate signed by the president of the university. Through this program, MSU advisors receive excellent professional development and are well-qualified to receive national awards.

There are many other ways in which one advisor might have an advantage over another in being considered for an advising award. One example might be the knowledge and skills obtained through the completion of the Kansas State University Graduate Certificate Program offered in conjunction with NACADA. The program is designed to benefit advisors at any level.

Advisor recognition should be the direct responsibility of the advising administrator. At USU, we have a system in place that makes it easy for me to nominate the recipients of our institutional awards for NACADA awards; not following through would be unfair to those who are eligible. However, the advisor can’t be considered for a national award unless I, as the advising administrator, fulfill my part of the nomination process. It’s not a question of “if” I will nominate someone, or “when” will I find time to nominate someone, but rather “who” am I going to nominate. Fortunately, the university has a process in place that determines that for me.

In summary, to improve your institution’s chances of being successful in obtaining outstanding advising awards at the national level, I would encourage advising administrators to:

1. realize that advisor recognition is the advising administrator’s responsibility,
2. encourage and support advisors in professional development opportunities,
3. recognize outstanding advising professionals, faculty advisors, and/or advising administrators through institutional advising awards,
4. assist nominees in putting together advising portfolios,
5. where possible, ask a previous award winner to mentor the nominee throughout the process, and
6. allocate sufficient time to put together a well-written summary of the nominees qualifications and how he or she fits the criteria for the award.

Advisor recognition should not be just an afterthought or one of those things we will do if we get around to it. A very well-planned, systematic approach is crucial to success in the award nomination process on a regular basis.

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