

**National Academic Advising Association
Outstanding Advising Program Award Nomination for**



First-Year Advising & Retention Center

Institution Description

Clayton State University cultivates an environment of engaged, experienced-based learning, enriched by active community service, that prepares students of diverse ages and backgrounds to succeed in their lives and careers.

Through a distinctive combination of proven and innovative methods of teaching and learning, Clayton State University excels in preparing students from many walks of life to meet the challenges of living and working in a dynamic, global society.

Clayton State currently has more than 40 undergraduate majors in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Business, Health, and Information and Mathematical Sciences. The University's School of Graduate Studies has nine master's degree programs.

Clayton State's diverse student body currently has in excess of 500-dual enrolled students among the University's total enrollment of more than 7000. However, the average age of the student body is 28, evidence of Clayton State's long-standing reputation as the region's foremost provider of higher education to non-traditional (age 24 or greater) students.

In addition to the main campus in Morrow, Clayton State also has an instructional site in Peachtree City, Clayton State – Fayette, and holds undergraduate classes in Henry County at the Academy for Advanced Studies in McDonough.

Complementing Clayton State's academic programs are a thriving continuing education program and the College of Business' Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which provides one-on-one counseling to new and existing businesses in Clayton, Fayette, Henry and Spalding counties. Highlighting the Continuing Education programs is the Film and Digital Media Center, and its new \$300,000 sound studio at Lucy Huie Hall on Tara Boulevard in

Jonesboro. Whether students' career path extends toward working on-set, off-set, or in other areas related to Georgia's growing digital entertainment media industry, the Film and Digital Media Center, under the direction of nationally-renown industry expert Barton Bond, will get them on that path.

Program Development

The First-Year Advising and Retention Center (FYARC) at Clayton State University was established in 2011. Prior to this time, all campus academic advising was decentralized and first-year students were advised in their respective colleges and departments with other continuing students. A campus wide mandatory advising policy required freshman students to meet with academic advisors at least once a semester. Typically, the purpose of the academic advising sessions was to help students select courses to take the following semester. However, the university's administration wanted a more intrusive approach to support the progression of first-year students and increase retention, so the First-Year Advising and Retention Center was created. The center would centralize academic advising for first-year students and coordinate the existing first-year experience program, which included learning communities and CSU 1022: University Foundations course. When the center opened after week three of the fall semester, the expectation was that students would visit the center more than once a semester as they had done traditionally with decentralized college advisement. Therefore, the center's staff implemented a monthly advising requirement for all new freshmen. As a result, the center had 238 student visits in September and 471 visits to the center the second month. However, measuring the effectiveness of academic advising sessions to increase student retention and progression was a challenge. As a result, the center created an advising curriculum for each required advising session and implemented three different sets of evaluations, in addition to its end of the semester staff evaluations, to measure the effectiveness of academic advising throughout the semester. Each evaluation correlates to a distinctive advising appointment. This assists the center's staff with improving its services to support the developmental needs of students. Today, the center continues to improve its services for student success.

Goals and Objectives

The following is a list of three goals and their correlating objectives and outcomes related to the center's academic advising program:

GOAL 1: Increase the retention of students from the first to second year of college.

Objective/Outcome:

- 1a. Provide effective programs and services each semester that support the holistic needs of first year students and promotes second year retention.

- 1b. CSU 1022: University Foundations course, designed to assist students' transition from high school to college, will be offered to all new first time freshman each semester.

- 1c. FYARC advisors will regularly meet with first-year students during their first semester of enrollment.

- 1d. Freshmen will connect with the campus community by engaging in the First-Year Experience Series.

GOAL 3: Enhance the first-year academic advising experience.

Objective/Outcome:

- 3a. During advising sessions, FYARC advisors will help students address their academic and psychosocial strengths and weaknesses.

- 3b. Provide opportunities (training sessions, seminars, etc.) for first year freshmen students to develop familiarity with registration system before reaching sophomore status.

3c. Assist students with understanding the core curriculum and how it relates to the attainment of a college education during advising sessions.

3d. Assist students with identifying appropriate majors based on individual interests, abilities and skills utilizing the Major FOCUS career exploration tool during the first year of college.

3e. Each semester, host a Freshman Registration Party to help students learn how to search and register for courses.

GOAL 4: Guide students to identify a major program of study at Clayton State University that best matches their educational and career goals.

Objective:

4a. First-year students will complete a major exploration assessment to help them declare majors or reaffirm their major selection during their first semester of enrollment.

4b. Students will discuss the results of their Major FOCUS assessment with an academic advisor during their second advising appointment.

4c. Faculty lead Major FOCUS workshops, covering academic majors at Clayton State, will be held throughout the semester to help students plan their education, major, and career goals.

4d. The Major FOCUS Workshop series will receive positive (satisfactory/Agree Strongly to Agree) assessment ratings and responses.

Program Description

The First-Year Advising and Retention Center provides academic advising to all first-year students and undeclared students with less than 30 credit hours using a holistic advising model. Advisors in the center not only teach students how to select courses and follow degree requirements, but advisors place students at the center of advisement to foster developmental growth linked to the social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs of students. Therefore, it is typical for advisors to have conversations with students about behaviors related to note taking, studying, sleeping, eating and exercising as well as their involvement in leadership and community opportunities, all of which influence their developmental growth. To make certain students are meeting the demands of their first year in college, the center implemented a first-year advising requirement, which mandates students to meet with advisors on a monthly basis or a minimum of three times during the first semester of enrollment. This requirement ensures appropriate follow-up and continued communication with new students as they progress academically and socially. Advisors monitor students' progress utilizing the EBI MAP-Works Student Retention Management System. This system surveys first-year students during the 3rd and 10th weeks of the semester and assigns risk levels to students, so advisors can provide early intervention on issues that could affect students' success. The center also houses the first-year experience and the learning communities programs as well as the first-year common reading, service learning, major/career exploration FOCUS programs and the honor society for first-year students, Alpha Lambda Delta.

Over the years, the center's staff has implemented a variety of advising and retention strategies for first-year students. To motivate students to register for courses, the staff hosts Freshman Registration Parties in a freshman residence hall and posts advising selfie pictures through social media when students register for courses. Their retention initiatives include monitoring course pre-registration, conducting registration error checks, and creating long-term core course plans with students.

Procedures used in Program Evaluation

To assess outcomes, the First Year Advising & Retention Center uses the University’s official retention rates as reported from the University System of Georgia. In addition, program evaluations and surveys are administered to participants throughout the year. At the end of each semester, the center asks students to evaluate its services, and the staff reviews the results to make improvements. In addition, the staff reviews comments and suggestions offered after individual workshops and programs. The periodic reviews allows program coordinators to set goals on specific areas that need to be improved.

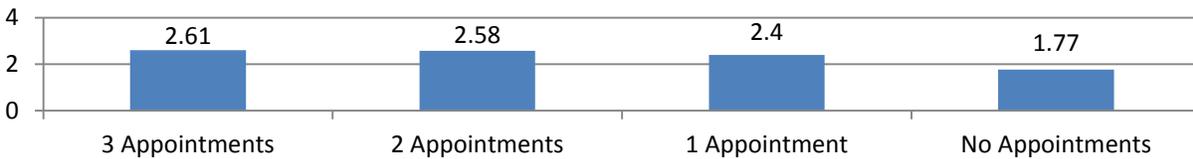
Results/outcome

Each semester, an analysis is completed to compare evaluation results and other benchmarks for the progression of students. This analysis serves as the foundation for determining if programs are meeting the needs of students and promoting student learning and development. The table below shows advising visits to the center by month for calendar year 2014. Based on assessments, first-year students visit the First-Year Advising and Retention Center on a regular basis, and advisors remain in contact with students continuously throughout the academic year.

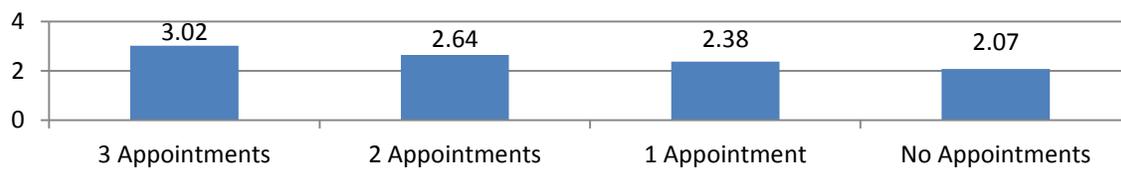
Advising Participation Usage by Month									
	Jan-‘14	Feb-‘14	Mar-‘14	Apr-‘14	May-‘14	Aug-‘14	Sept-‘14	Oct-‘14	Nov-‘14
Visits	269	208	493	490	109	371	448	897	712
Students	212	157	390	391	94	282	334	537	547

As shown in the tables below, students who complete three advising appointments have higher grade point averages at the end of the semester than students who complete less than the required three advising appointments. The average GPA for the fall 2014 semester showed a significant increase compared to the fall 2013 semester.

Fall 2013-Grade Point Averages by Completed Advising Appointments



Fall 2014-Grade Point Averages by Completed Advising Appointments



The evaluation forms were implemented during the fall 2013 semester and allow students to respond to a number of Likert scale items regarding their experiences during the advising appointments, the knowledge or skills they obtained during their meeting, as well as evaluative questions regarding their academic advisors. The evaluation results from each specific appointment for fall 2013 and fall 2014 semesters are provided below. The first appointment focuses on assisting students with identifying their academic strengths and weaknesses. The second academic advising appointment allows students to discuss and explore majors using the Major FOCUS program, a major and career exploration tool, and then follow-up with discussions with their advisors. The third appointment of the semester, allows students to meet with their advisors to discuss the core curriculum, their major, and how it relates to their overall education. Overall, each advising session proves to be essential to the development growth of first-year students during their first year of college.

Advising Appointment 1 Evaluation Results	Students who Agree or Strongly Agree	
	Fall 2013	Fall 2014
I understand my strengths and weaknesses based on my MAP-Works survey.	94% (271)	93% (270)
I am aware of resources on campus to help me improve my weaknesses.	93% (269)	97% (283)
My advisor discussed ways to help me be successful.	98% (283)	99% (287)
I feel I am better prepared to succeed after talking to my advisor today.	98% (283)	98% (280)
Total Respondents	289	293

Advising Appointment 2 Evaluation Results	Students who Agree or Strongly Agree	
	Fall 2013	Fall 2014
My Major FOCUS results make me feel more confident about my major choice.	80% (184)	84% (181)
I am aware of the major and career options available to me based on my Major FOCUS results.	90% (206)	93% (201)
My Major FOCUS results make me feel more confident about my career path.	80% (185)	90% (186)
Total Respondents	230	215

Advising Appointment 3 Evaluation Results	Students who Agree or Strongly Agree	
	Fall 2013	Fall 2014
My advisor was knowledgeable about general education, degree, and course requirements.	98% (270)	99% (247)
My advisor and I discussed what classes I should take next semester.	99% (272)	99% (250)
I understand how to search for classes.	99% (272)	97% (246)
I understand how to register for classes.	99% (273)	97% (248)
Total Respondents	275	256

The following table shows the outcomes of student learning from the center's Registration Party event which is hosted each semester to teach students the navigation and registration of courses.

Registration Party Event Evaluation Results	Students who Agree or Strongly Agree
	Fall 2014
I understand how to search for courses using the class schedule.	96% (44)
I understand how to register for courses through my DUCK account.	94% (43)
I understand which core courses I need for my major	94% (43)
I understand which courses I need to take next semester.	93% (43)
Total Respondents	46

Potential for Adaption by Other Institutions

The First-Year Advising and Retention Center has three full-time professional academic advisors who serve a freshman class of 550 students. The center's academic advising model and procedures can be scaled to any institution of any size. For larger institutions, academic advisors may not be able to handle the volume of advising sessions as FYARC advisors are able to. However, large institutions can identify specific populations within a freshman class to apply FYARC's advising model. First, advisors can determine which cohort of students would best benefit from required monthly advising and then create an advising curriculum to serve the

needs of students. For example, a series of advising sessions aligned with an advising curriculum that focuses on major and career exploration would benefit undeclared students or pre-nursing freshmen who should select a parallel major, in case they are not accepted into a nursing program. While at-risk freshmen, students admitted conditionally or have low SAT/ACT scores, would benefit from multiple advising sessions focused on effective study skills and time management techniques.