

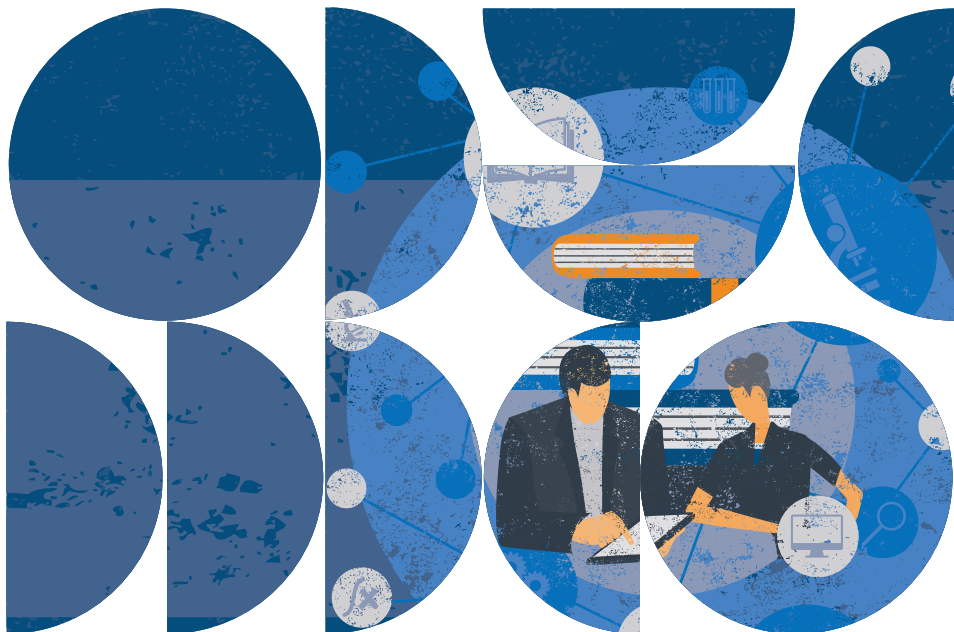


EAB

# A Student-Centered Approach to Advising

Redeploying Academic Advisors to Create Accountability  
and Scale Personalized Intervention

Academic Affairs  
Forum







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Redeploying Academic Advisors to Create Accountability  
and Scale Personalized Intervention

# Academic Affairs Forum

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The Academic Affairs Forum is a member-based organization that provides best-practice research and market intelligence for provosts and vice presidents for academic affairs.

We offer our members expert advice and innovative strategies for tackling their most pressing issues, tested and proven to work by their peers at other institutions across the country. Rather than reinvent the wheel, our members benefit from the learning of thousands of other colleges and universities facing the same challenges.

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# Top Lessons from the Study

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## Academic Advising Falling Far Short of Potential on Most Campuses

### **No one is held accountable for student success.**

As pressure on campus leaders to demonstrate improvement in student success continues to mount—whether through public rankings, performance-based state funding formulas, or proposed federal aid conditions—the question of ownership and accountability on campus remains unclear. Administrators seeking to answer that question have typically either launched awareness and training campaigns to create shared accountability among faculty, staff, and leadership, or delegated responsibility over student success to a central retention office or “czar.” Both models have severe limitations:

- **Absent meaningful incentives and clear goals, shared accountability efforts merely dilute responsibility.** Instilling a sense of ownership among all faculty and staff has the benefit of reflecting the true complexity of student success—every interaction a student has with the institution has the power to deflect their likelihood to persist. But as is often lamented, “If it’s everyone’s job, it’s no one’s job.” Faculty and staff busy with their day-to-day core responsibilities rarely have the bandwidth or tools necessary to improve institutional retention and graduation rates.
- **Central retention offices lack authority over institutional policy and struggle to garner unit-level support.** By appointing a core administrator or committee within academic affairs to address student success, provosts can make a strong, symbolic statement and enable cross-departmental communication. But without real authority to author or alter institutional policy, these offices devolve into sounding boards for general ideas, goals, and complaints.

### **Advisors are best positioned to “own” student success, but rarely deployed effectively.**

Many campus leaders are turning to academic advising as the unit or activity best positioned to deflect student outcomes. Shifting the emphasis of advising from basic transactions toward activities that significantly impact retention and timely completion, however, remains a nontrivial pursuit.

## Challenges to Creating Accountability in Advising

### **1. Advising organizational structures reflect internal silos rather than student demand or need.**

Professional and faculty advising models are predominantly decentralized in academic units, making it unlikely that students who move from one program to another will remain with their initial advisor. It is also difficult for advisors to track students over time, across majors and minors, and throughout their activities on campus.

### **2. Appointments and outreach are focused on academic issues, ignoring underlying causes of attrition.**

Given the limited time available with each student, the limited amount of student information made available to advisors, and the organizational incentive to focus primarily on curricular questions, advisors are often unaware of and unable to treat underlying personal, financial, or medical problems that are known to drive attrition.

### **3. Advisor time and support resources are either spread thin or deployed narrowly to one subpopulation.**

The inability to quickly identify and intervene with students at risk for attrition has led most institutions to two suboptimal extremes. Either they rely on a “one size fits all” standard that treats all students the same (wasting resources on students who don’t need it and underserving students with acute issues), or they devote the overwhelming majority of their advising investment toward one or two student segments thought to be at increased risk, such as first-term students or athletes (leaving others with far fewer resources than are necessary).

### **4. Data provided by early warning systems and predictive analytics is rarely leveraged to target at-risk students.** More information is clearly needed to better match institutional resources with the individual students who need them most, but information without clear context or meaning serves no one. Few institutions have been able to create reliable decision rules with data linked to student success that allow advisors to prioritize students according to risk and track their progress.

# Top Lessons from the Study (cont.)

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## Building a Student-Centered Advising Model

**1** How can we restructure advising assignments to enable consistent, personalized coaching?

**Assign student caseloads to advisors to ensure continuity and accountability.**

Personal relationships with faculty and staff provide a tremendous boost to student engagement, and advisors are often expected to establish and expand those connections. Ensuring that each student has one primary advising contact responsible for their progress and compliance is the first, most important step in preventing most causes of attrition. Advisors with consistent caseloads are better able to leverage both data and time with individual students to assist those in need with the right advice.

**Align advisor program assignments with student major migration patterns.**

By studying student enrollment patterns through initial and final declared majors, institutional leaders can align professional and faculty advisors with set caseloads of students matched to a related group of programs. This minimizes hand-offs for students who switch majors, increases advisor familiarity with related curricula, and enables consistent tracking of advisor performance.

**2** How can we better deploy advisor time and support services against a student's underlying problem(s)?

**Model and monitor student risk based on both academic and non-academic factors.**

The root causes of student attrition are often complex and non-academic in nature, making it nearly impossible to identify many struggling students on the basis of grades alone. Progressive institutions incorporate a wide variety of demographic, financial, and behavioral information into their analyses of student attrition to uncover the variables most closely correlated with success.

**Prioritize the frequency and focus of advising based on student risk profiles.**

No single type of intervention will serve all at-risk students, and no institution can afford to intervene with every student at each step in their academic career. It is therefore critical that advisors use the data available to them through predictive risk modeling to identify the best support strategy for each student and to allocate scarce professional and faculty advisor time to those who need them most, at the point at which they need them.

**Adjust risk stratification based on degree progress and engagement throughout student careers.**

Even the most sophisticated predictive risk model will err some of the time. Advisors should use students' ongoing degree progress and behavior cues (such as gaps in attendance, campus involvement, or transcript requests) to adjust an individual student's risk profile on a regular basis.

**3** Which students and outcomes should professional and faculty advisors be held accountable for?

**Professional advisors should manage high-risk student support over time and across silos.**

Most low- and medium-risk students are best served through the strategic assignment of specific interventions (tutoring for students with academic needs, financial literacy sessions for students accumulating debt). High-risk students, however, require consistent coaching and tracking from professional advisors able to ensure compliance and coordinate a variety of services, especially when they demonstrate multiple types of risk.

**Leverage faculty as mentors for low-risk students and potential transfers.**

Interested faculty are best deployed toward students without acute financial, academic, personal, or medical problems, and those who are considering transfer or withdrawal due to a lack of engagement. Faculty members' intimate familiarity with disciplines and connections to related organizations and professional opportunities often allow them to have a significant impact on "high-flyer" retention and post-graduation success.



# A Student-Centered Approach to Advising

Redeploying Academic Advisors to Create Accountability and Scale  
Personalized Intervention

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- 1. Structuring Advising to Enable Consistency and Accountability**
2. Targeting Intervention Strategies Based on Student Risk

# Academic Advising Too Narrow in Focus

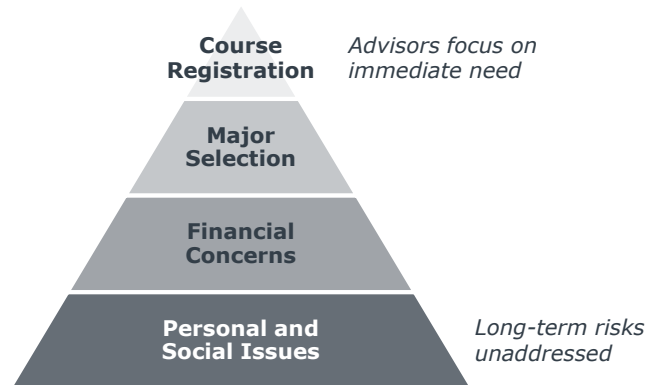
## Emphasis on Curriculum Leaves Underlying Problems Untreated

### Most Advising Models Built to Reflect Program and College Structure, Not Student Needs

A disproportionate share of advisor training and effort is devoted to the course catalog, and keeping up with offerings and program requirements certainly requires a great deal of attention.

The result of this is an advising approach designed to help students in a given program register for next term, rather than to help all students persist and graduate on time. Given this fundamental disconnect, it is no surprise that students struggling with issues unrelated to curricular navigation are underserved or even unknown by advisors on many campuses.

### Curricular Concerns Only Tip of the Iceberg



### Early Alert Systems Over-Rely on Classroom Symptoms and Faculty Utilization

The advent and expansion of early alert tools among universities is a step in the right direction. These tools augment the limited view of a student provided by final grades and one-off advising interactions with data provided by faculty throughout the term on attendance, behavior, or class performance.

Still, these systems are constrained by the environment in which they are used—by faculty, in the classroom, and often only in a small subset of courses. Even substantial gains in system adoption (which are difficult to achieve) leaves advisors with an incomplete picture reflecting academic symptoms of larger and potentially unrelated issues, ranging from financial distress and social anxiety to major choice and career preparation.

#### Campus Early Warning System

##### Common Flags

- Poor attendance
- Lack of participation
- Missing assignments
- Low midterm grade
- Poor study habits
- Low cumulative grade

##### New Additions

- Lack of writing proficiency
- Lack academic readiness
- Disruptive behavior
- Complaints from peers
- Attending wrong section
- Unresponsive to attempts to contact
- Sudden change in mood
- Illness or poor hygiene
- Repeated requests for extensions

#### Often Overlooked



Non-academic reason for poor grade or attendance



Top academic performers thinking about transfer



Academically on track but disengaged or homesick



# No One Accountable for a Student's Success

## Inconsistent Contact and Conflicting Advice Jeopardize Persistence

### Absence of Ownership in Organizational Model at Odds with Advisors' Desired Coaching Role

The association of advising with departmental curricula (rather than student caseloads) and inability to effectively target students at risk for attrition has made it impossible for universities to hold advisors responsible for student success. Long-term student outcomes are simply not the advisor's primary responsibility, since he or she only has limited interactions with the student around course selection.

This absence of ownership creates a number of problems for both the student and the institution:



*Students shuffled between support units with no main point of contact*



*Institutional staff uncoordinated, unaccountable, and underutilized*

#### Conflicting Advice

Major advisors, faculty, staff, and peers send mixed messages about requirements and recommended pathways to graduation

#### Limited Information

Each faculty and staff member starts over with student, missing critical background information, context, and longitudinal reference data

#### Difficult to Navigate

Student expected to find appropriate information and support on their own, with little coordination between organizational units

#### No Performance Evaluation

Impossible to assess and incentivize student coaching since no individual or unit is held responsible for a student's success or failure

#### No Personal Connection

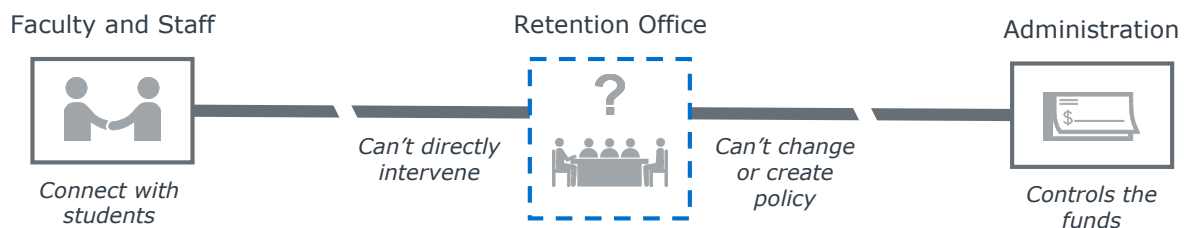
Student sees variety of different staff members in short, transactional interactions; feels like just a number

#### Can't Track Compliance

No one monitoring student compliance with services and activities prescribed by advisors or following up to check on progress

### Central Student Success Offices Lack Decision-Making Authority and Capacity for Intervention

To remedy the diffused nature of student support within a decentralized advising structure, many institutions have created a dedicated committee or office tasked with coordinating and improving student success efforts on campus. But without real authority to author or alter institutional policy, these offices devolve into mere sounding boards for general ideas, goals, and complaints. Campus leaders can neither change the behavior of departmental advisors, faculty, or staff through a central student success office, nor can leaders use the office to directly track and intervene with at-risk students.

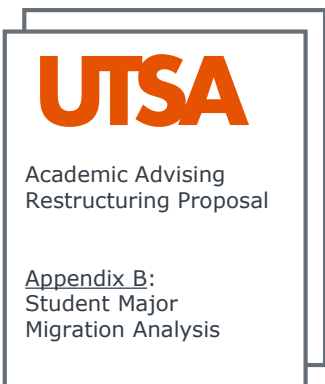


# Enrollment Patterns Provide Re-organization Blueprint

## Understanding Student Major Migration to Realign Support Structure

### Major-Based Advising Model Falsely Assumes Most Students Remain in One Program

Providing students with a dedicated point of contact at the university throughout their career can make a significant impact on engagement, retention, and completion. Leaders at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) hoped to leverage professional major advisors to create a more responsive and consistent source of support, but were stymied by the problem of major-switching: 76% of their graduates finished in a different major than the one they first declared. The vast majority of students, it follows, switch major advisors at least once, and because of a traditional “walk-in” approach to advising, students may see several different advisors within each major.



To better understand how students move through the university (and thus restructure professional advising around that movement), UTSA’s provost commissioned an analysis of student major declaration and graduation patterns based on five years of data. The analysis identified each graduating student’s initial intended major and the major they completed upon graduation, excluding transfer students and double majors.

The first notable trend observed was that most students gravitate toward a small number of popular majors. Biology, interdisciplinary studies, psychology, management, and communication comprised 42% of graduates, and the next five most popular majors added another 21% to the total. Nearly two-thirds of all graduates, then, fall into UTSA’s 10 most popular majors.

### Analysis of Unique Major “Roles” Suggests Need to Restructure Advising Assignments

Even more important was UTSA’s discovery that different majors naturally fell into reliable enrollment patterns. Some majors, such as computer science, tended to send many initially declared students to other majors but rarely received new students to take their place. UTSA called these “donor” majors. Some accepted many more students than they exported, such as social work. Some, such as nursing, were dubbed “static majors,” neither accepting nor exporting many students, operating instead with a relatively steady student population. And finally, “pivot majors” accept about as many students as they export, with English as a reliable exemplar. These categories illustrate the complexity of the institution’s curriculum and the limits of a decentralized approach not only to advising, but also to program design and policies.



#### Donor Majors

Students leave these majors more often than they enter

*Example:* Computer science



#### Acceptor Majors

Many students switch into this major but few students leave

*Example:* Social work



#### Static Majors

Students who start in this major rarely leave; few students switch in

*Example:* Nursing



#### Pivot Majors

Equal numbers of students transfer in and out of the major

*Example:* English

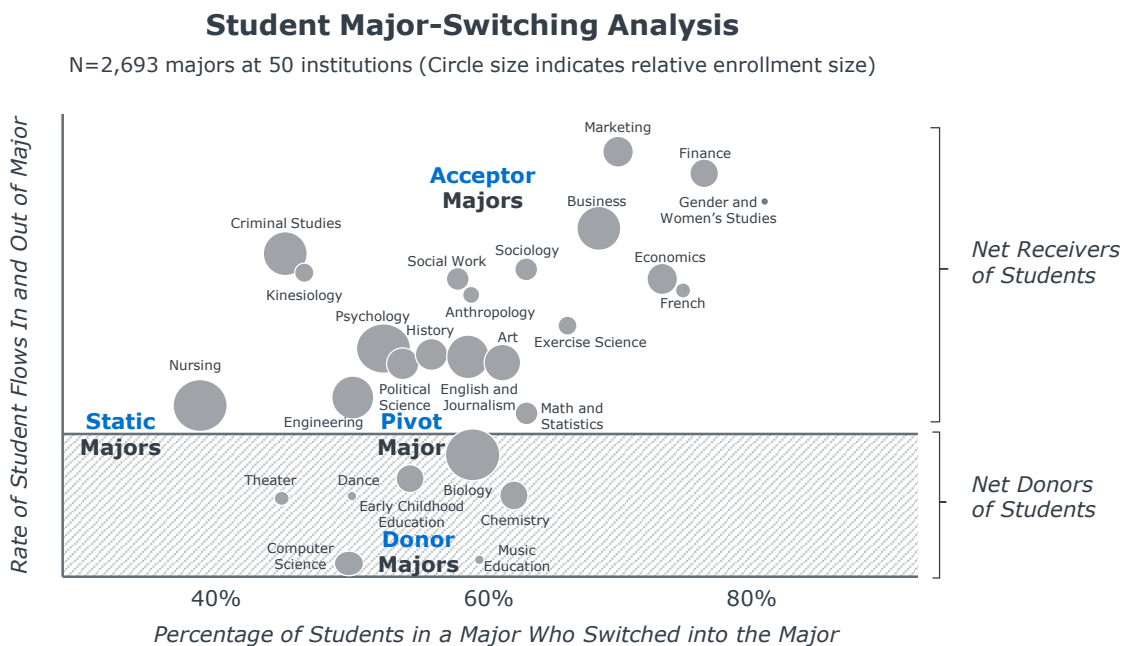
Source: “Academic Advising Restructuring Proposal,” Prepared by John H. Frederick, Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University of Texas at San Antonio, Aug. 6, 2013.

# Smarter Planning Through Major Migration Data

## Improving Curricular Design, Performance Metrics, and Advising Caseloads

### Major Migration Analysis Uncovers Critical Distinctions Across Institutions

Significant variation in undergraduate migration patterns between programs is not unique to UTSA. The chart below illustrates major migration patterns across 50 institutional members of EAB’s Student Success Collaborative, plotting each institution’s major enrollments against axes reflecting the rate of student migration (both in and out of the major) and the share of students in each major that switched from another major.



These patterns have important implications for program assessment, course scheduling, curricular design, and the development of major advising caseloads that account for historical student migration patterns.

<p><b>Accountability Metrics by Major 1</b></p> <p>Incentives and unit assessment (retention and graduation targets, course success goals, and service course availability) should be calibrated to reflect major migration trends.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Acceptor majors should be held more accountable for graduation rates, donors for service course success.</p>	<p><b>Course Capacity Planning 2</b></p> <p>Units can plan general education and upper-division sections using trend data on migration rates and closely related major enrollment.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Acceptor majors should plan upper-division elective sections in coordination with related donor major enrollment.</p>	<p><b>Coordinating Prerequisites 3</b></p> <p>Programs should minimize unnecessary course duplication and repeats to make it easier for major switchers to stay on track for timely graduation.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Donor major entry courses should count toward common acceptor major requirements, reducing wasteful credits.</p>	<p><b>Guiding Advising Caseloads 4</b></p> <p>Caseload assignments should be based on common major migration patterns, allowing students a strong chance of remaining with one advisor after switching majors.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Each advisor should be trained on a related set of majors in each role based on historical trend data.</p>
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Source: Student Success Collaborative analysis.

# From Departmental Silos to Major Clusters

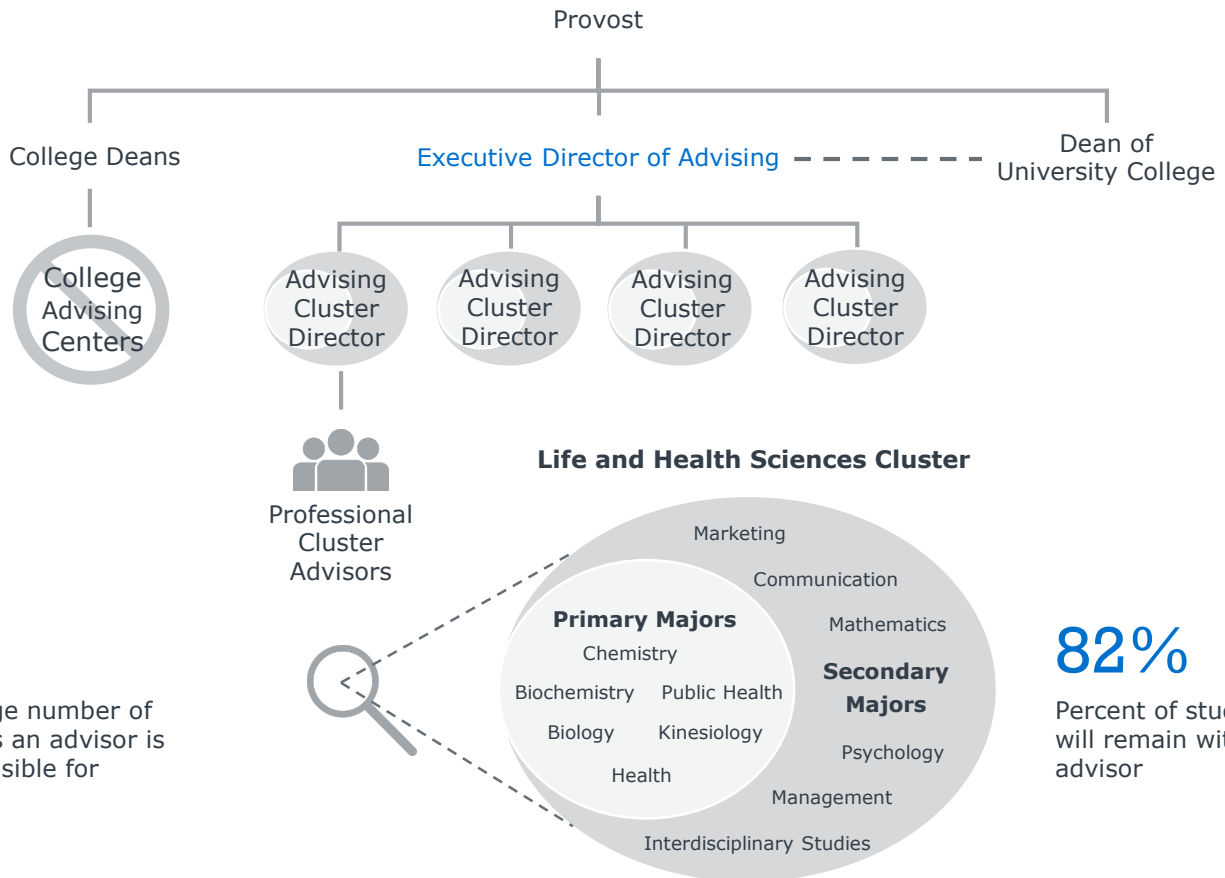
## Centralizing Reporting Lines to Enable Cross-College Deployment

### Redeploy Distributed Major Advisors into Centrally Designed (and Controlled) Clusters

Prior to the 2014 reorganization, advisors at UTSA were grouped into “centers” controlled by college deans. The centrally appointed executive director of advising, who focused on training, policies, and evaluation, had little influence over advisors’ actual responsibilities.

The first organizational step necessary to build a caseload advising approach on the new foundation provided by major migration patterns was to centralize professional advising under the provost and dean of the university college. The executive director of advising worked with university leadership and new advising cluster directors on the creation of trans-college cluster assignments to maximize the potential for students to remain with the same advisor, even in the event of one or more major changes. Each advising cluster director is responsible for liaising with academic departments and evaluating the performance of advisors under their supervision.

In the “Life and Health Sciences” cluster example shown below, 82% of UTSA graduates over the previous five years remained within the included primary and secondary majors. Administrators calibrate each cluster to balance the likelihood that students would remain within the cluster, with reasonable limits on the number of majors an advisor can be expected to be responsible for and the disciplinary relationships between the programs. Undeclared students are grouped together in a specialized advising cluster designed to aid and accelerate major selection.



12

Average number of majors an advisor is responsible for

82%

Percent of students will remain with one advisor

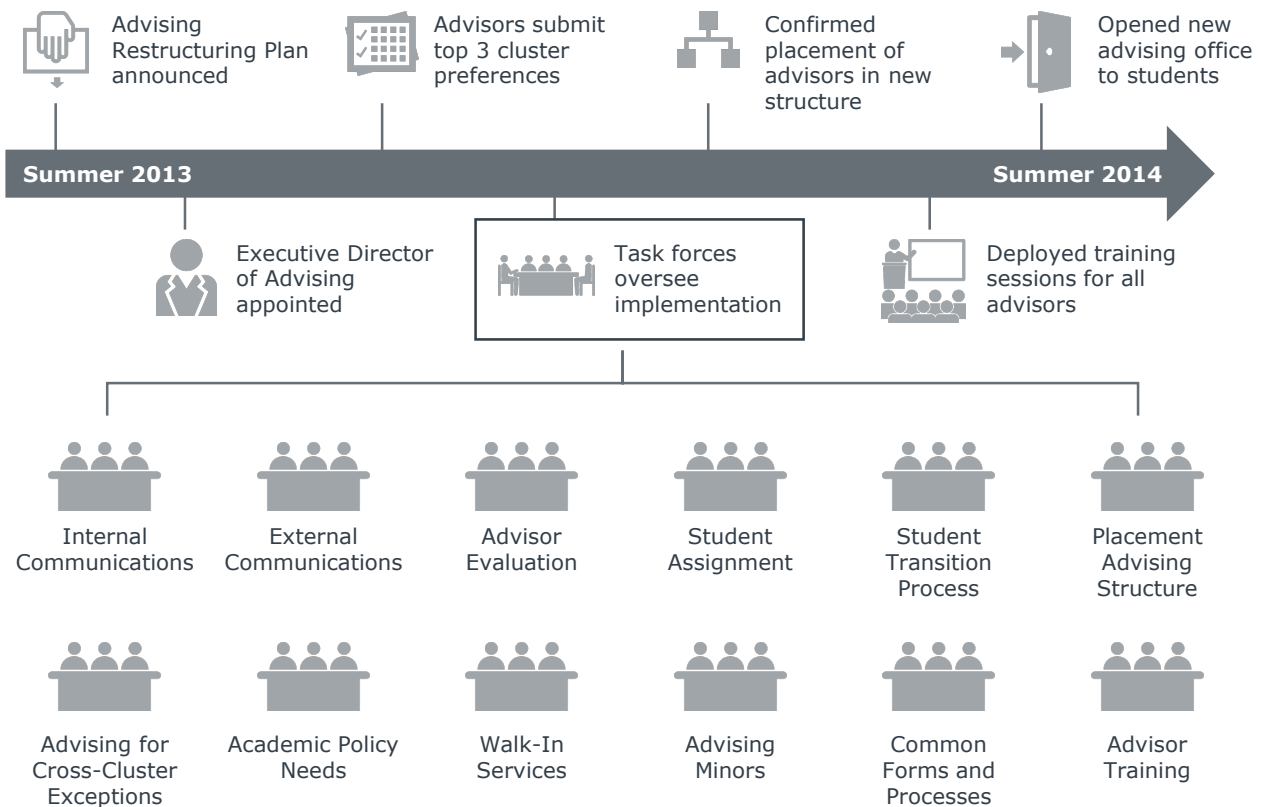
Source: “Academic Advising Restructuring Proposal,” Prepared by John H. Frederick, Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University of Texas at San Antonio, Aug. 6, 2013.

# Attention to Detail Prevents Growing Pains

## Accelerate Change and Build Buy-In Though Task Forces and Training

Moving from the proposal to full implementation in the space of one academic year required intense transitional planning, decisionmaking, and rapid organizational change at UTSA. No fewer than 12 task forces were formed to tackle each of the various issues implicit in reforming student advising around major migration patterns and standardizing the institution’s approach to ensure consistent levels of quality.

### Aggressive Implementation Timeline Requires Anticipation of Pain Points and Exceptions



Advisors were encouraged to participate in task force proceedings and share preferences on cluster placement to minimize disruption, but reminded that student demand would ultimately dictate staffing decisions in the new structure. With greater central oversight and more reliable student caseloads, advisors at UTSA are now much more accountable for student persistence and graduation.

### Implementation Advice

- ✓ Invite advising staff to participate on taskforces to provide input on future operations and garner buy-in
- ✓ Allow advisors to state cluster preferences, but communicate that placement will ultimately be dictated by enrollment
- ✓ Confer management responsibilities to advising supervisor with central oversight

Source: "Academic Advising Restructuring Proposal," Prepared by John H. Frederick, Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University of Texas at San Antonio, Aug. 6, 2013.





# A Student-Centered Approach to Advising

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Personalized Intervention

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1. Structuring Advising to Enable Consistency and Accountability
2. **Targeting Intervention Strategies Based on Student Risk**

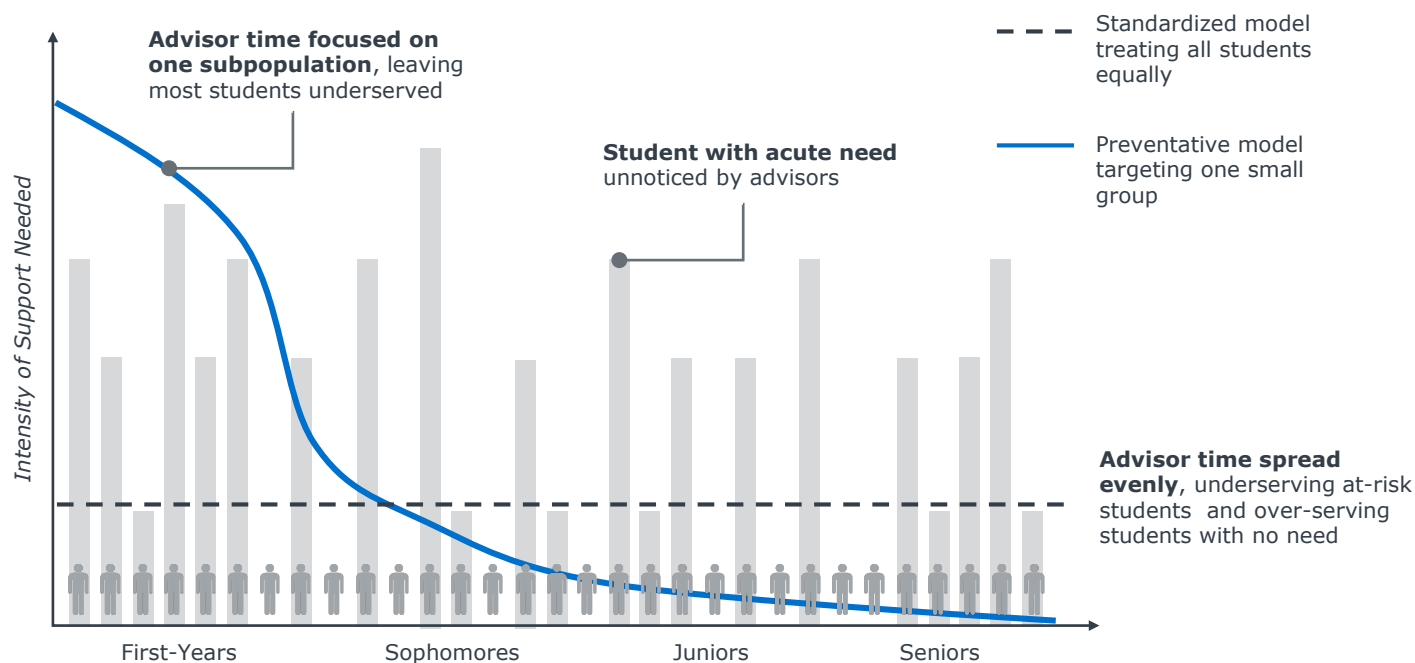
## Never Enough Staff, Time, Resources

Inability to Target Support Leads to Superficial Service for Everyone

### Most Institutions Caught Between Suboptimal Extremes in Apportioning Advisor Time and Attention

Advising leaders and administrators find themselves stuck between the utopian ideal of personalized attention for every student at the moment they need it (whether they know it or not) and the practical, financial, and logistical impossibility of providing that attention.

Many institutions report anecdotal success from efforts at targeting particular resources to specific populations of students, most notably through investments in first-year experience programs with mandatory advising and in intensive coaching for student athletes, who are often both at greater academic risk and under greater pressure to persist by campus and regulatory stakeholders.



### Cost-Effective Coverage of Student Need Improbable Without Better Data and Decision Support

Serious obstacles stand in the way of expanding these intensive, or even intrusive, approaches to advising to the student population at large. Most institutions simply cannot afford the professional staff investment required to correctly diagnose and treat the underlying problems faced by each student throughout their academic career. Further, the typical university lacks the data and decision support infrastructure required to target advisor time and resources strategically, understanding that they cannot be with every student at once.

Too often, students who do not proactively seek out mentors and counseling are left with a very limited advising experience, far short of the "success coach" paradigm that has been shown to impact retention and graduation rates among more nontraditional student populations.



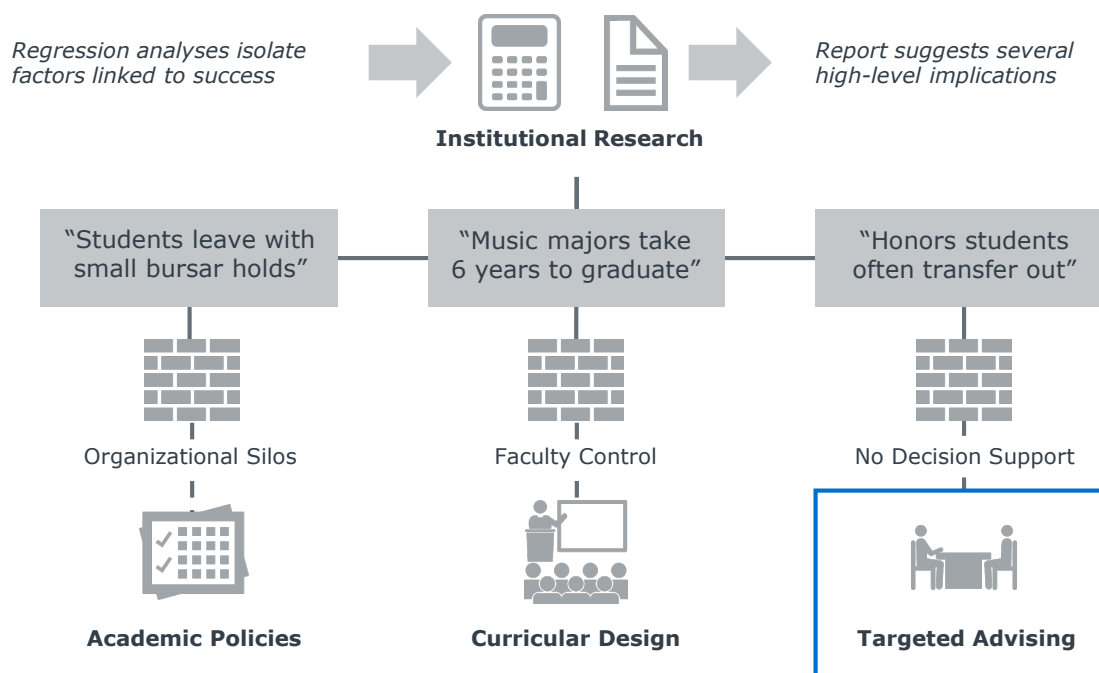
# Attrition Analyses Rarely Acted Upon

## Most Institutions Fail to Integrate Data Insights into Advisor Workflows

### One-Time Analyses Plentiful, but Rarely Leveraged to Change Policy, Curriculum, or Advising

Reports detailing the factors most strongly correlated with academic success, retention, graduation, and attrition fill file cabinets at hundreds of colleges and universities. Most advising models, however, make little use of student data to plan outreach and interventions.

The challenge that almost every institution faces is translating these analyses into action, either by auditing and changing academic policies found to be obstacles to desired outcomes, by revisiting general education or program curricula linked with course repeats or extended time to degree, or by integrating findings into advisor workflows to devote more time to students with characteristics known to increase attrition risk.



Even when aware of the need for of better data to predict and track student risk, academic advisors typically fail to incorporate the available data into either one-on-one interactions with students or proactive outreach strategies to particular student segments. This is not a mere question of will, however; there are a number of systemic obstacles preventing their use of predictive analytics:

- **Information overload:** Hundreds of variables and data points confuse rather than clarify
- **Ambiguous implications:** Statistical relationships rarely imply obvious solutions
- **Limited training:** Most advisors receive no instruction on the application of analytics
- **Limited time:** Advisors are already overwhelmed with appointments and walk-ins

# Building a Holistic Student Risk Model

## Laying the Groundwork for Data-Driven Intervention Decisions

### Full Picture of Attrition Risk Factors Necessary for Actionable Analysis

A clear understanding of which demographic, academic, and behavioral factors correlate most strongly with student success outcomes at your institution is critical in moving beyond “data paralysis” and a reliance on “gut” instinct to prioritize and rightsize advisor intervention.

Eastern Connecticut State University (Eastern) realized the shortcomings of its historical risk prediction model in 2010, discovering that their underlying assumption about attrition—students leave due to poor academic performance—failed to account for the majority of withdrawals from the institution, many of which resulted in transfer to the larger University of Connecticut a mere 15 minutes away. While Eastern had begun to invest in central professional advising staff, they needed a way to identify and support this broader, more varied population of students within the scope of their existing, limited resources.

### Overcoming Conventional Wisdom to Build Consensus for Reorganizing Advising

The first step in enabling a risk-based, targeted approach to advisor intervention was to construct a data-driven risk model that can effectively predict attrition and academic failure (defined as earning lower than a 2.3 GPA after one year of enrollment). Eastern adopted two separate regression models—one to identify the factors most closely correlated with academic failure, and the other to identify those linked to withdrawal from the university.

They found, for example, that students who did not list Eastern as their first choice institution when filling out the FAFSA were significantly less likely to remain at the institution, though they were no more likely to struggle academically.

This more robust model allowed administrators and advisors to begin exploring alternative approaches to student support that map more closely to the underlying problems students face in the lower division.

#### 2008 Risk Model

Original assumption: *Students withdraw due to poor academic performance*

- High school GPA
- First term GPA
- SAT score
- Major

#### 2011 Risk Model

Two regression models designed to capture academic, financial, motivational, and engagement factors; sorted into quintiles

##### Academic (<2.3 GPA):

- 15 variables

##### Withdrawal:

- 30 variables

#### Predictive of Academic Risk

- Male
- STEM major

#### Predictive of Withdrawal Risk

- Commuter status
- Non-local
- Federal loans
- FAFSA choice

#### Predictive in Both Models

- High school GPA
- Athlete
- Ethnicity
- School district



# Building Targeted Advising Cohorts

## Students Grouped According to Type and Intensity of Risk

### Proactive Risk Assessment Creates Actionable Decision Rules for Advisors

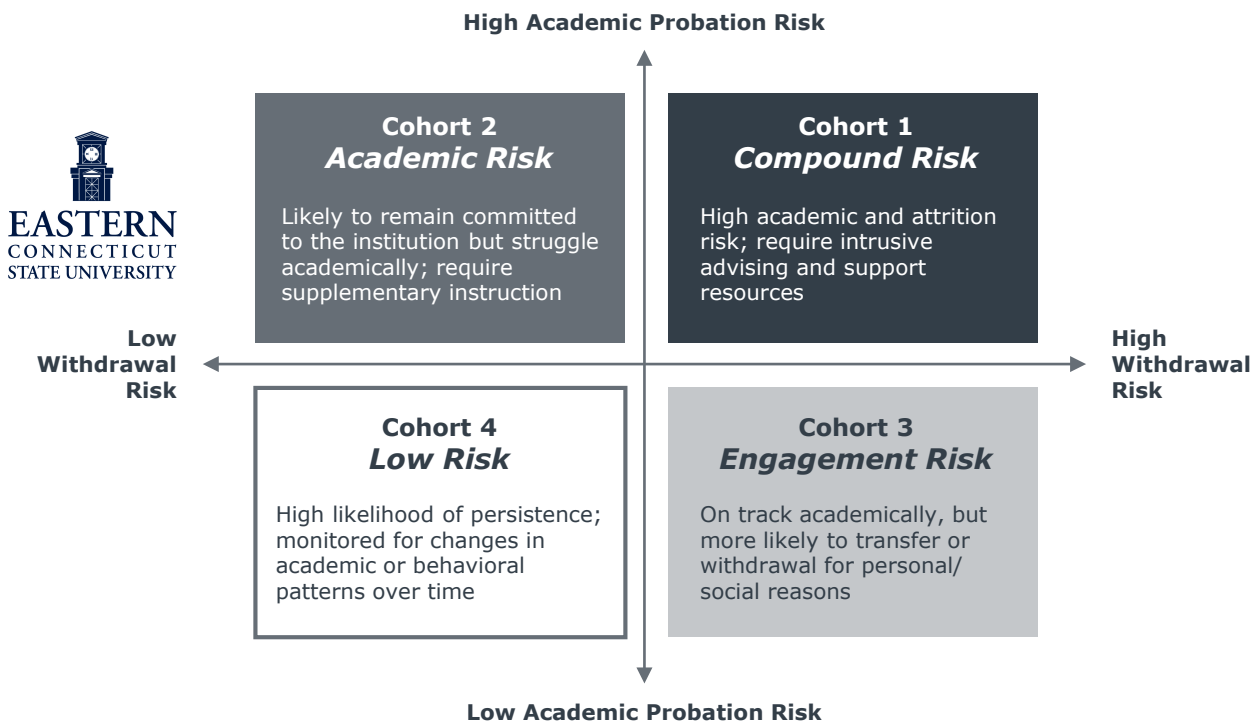
Rather than simply expecting advising staff and faculty to apply data on attrition risk to their interactions with students, administrators at Eastern assign each incoming student to one of four “targeted advising cohorts” based on the combination of their academic and withdrawal risk.

Students who are likely to both struggle academically and consider leaving the institution are placed into Cohort 1 and given the most attention from professional advisors. Those less likely to leave, but just as likely to struggle academically, are placed into Cohort 2. Students who are likely to do well academically but are at high risk for withdrawal or transfer are placed into Cohort 3. And finally, the remaining students with neither academic nor withdrawal risk are placed in the fourth cohort and monitored over time for changes in standing or behavior that might warrant a move to another cohort.

A student’s membership in a given cohort is visible only to advisors, who are trained on the optimal suite of resources for each group. Professional advisors at Eastern focus primarily on the first 45 credits of a student’s career, at which point a student’s assigned faculty advisor assumes greater responsibility. Both advisors are given a set caseload to ensure continuity.

### Fine-Tuning Categorization Over Time

Advisors use student data, including both academic and non-academic indicators, to shift students between targeted advising cohorts when necessary. As a student progresses toward a degree, initial indicators of risk become less and less predictive, creating a need for advisors to augment student risk profiles with behavioral data over time.



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

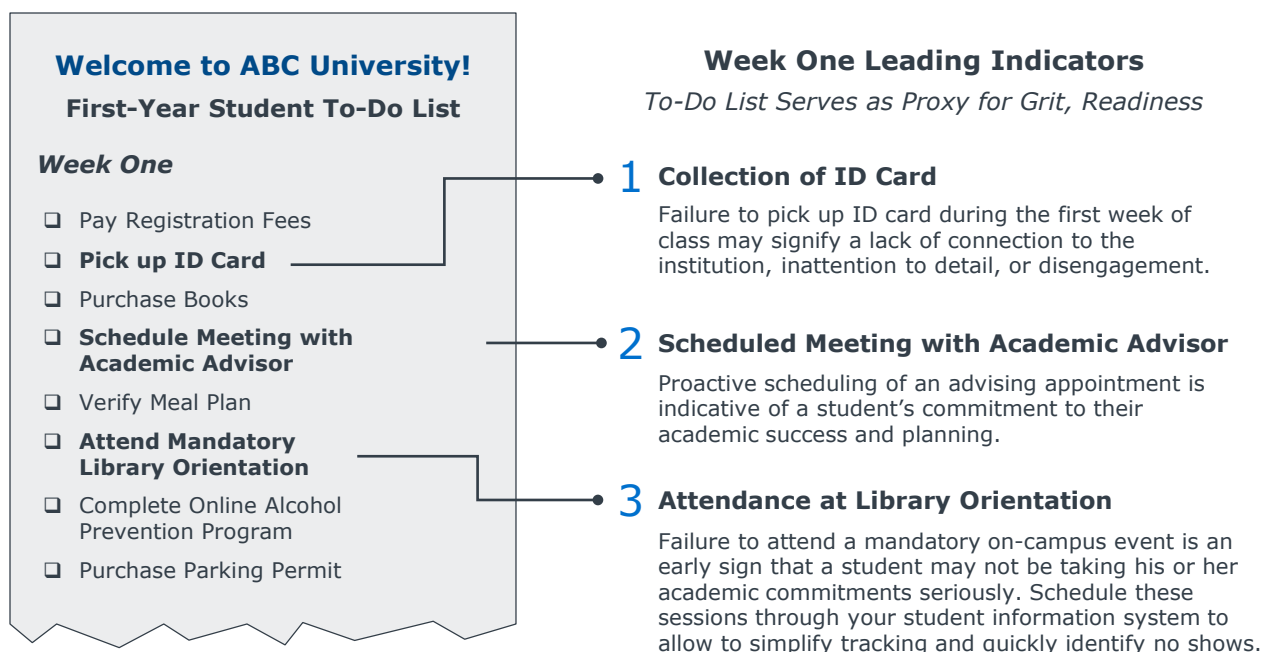
# Behavioral Indicators Calibrate Risk Assessment

## Use Measurable Engagement Cues as Proxies for “Grit”

### Compliance and Proactive Behavior Provide Early Insight into Student Motivation

Pre-enrollment factors, no matter how predictive, fail to reflect changes in a student’s situation over time and often mask critical attitudinal attributes that can help advisors decide who to target and when.

In addition to tracking academic early alerts, Eastern began using several activities required of first-year students as “proxies for grit” in an effort to identify students whose actual attrition risk is higher than the level predicted by their models.



### Advisors Adjust Risk Profiles and Intervene with Noncompliant Students

Tracking student participation in orientation activities and their overall engagement with the institution is critical not because of the importance of any one event, but because students who fail to comply with such activities in general are more likely to struggle or leave later on.

Administrators at Eastern pay special attention to first-year student library orientation, which is a required activity included in each incoming student’s week-one schedule. By scheduling and tracking the orientation in Banner, Eastern’s student information system, the university can quickly generate a list of students who failed to attend and elevate their overall risk level.

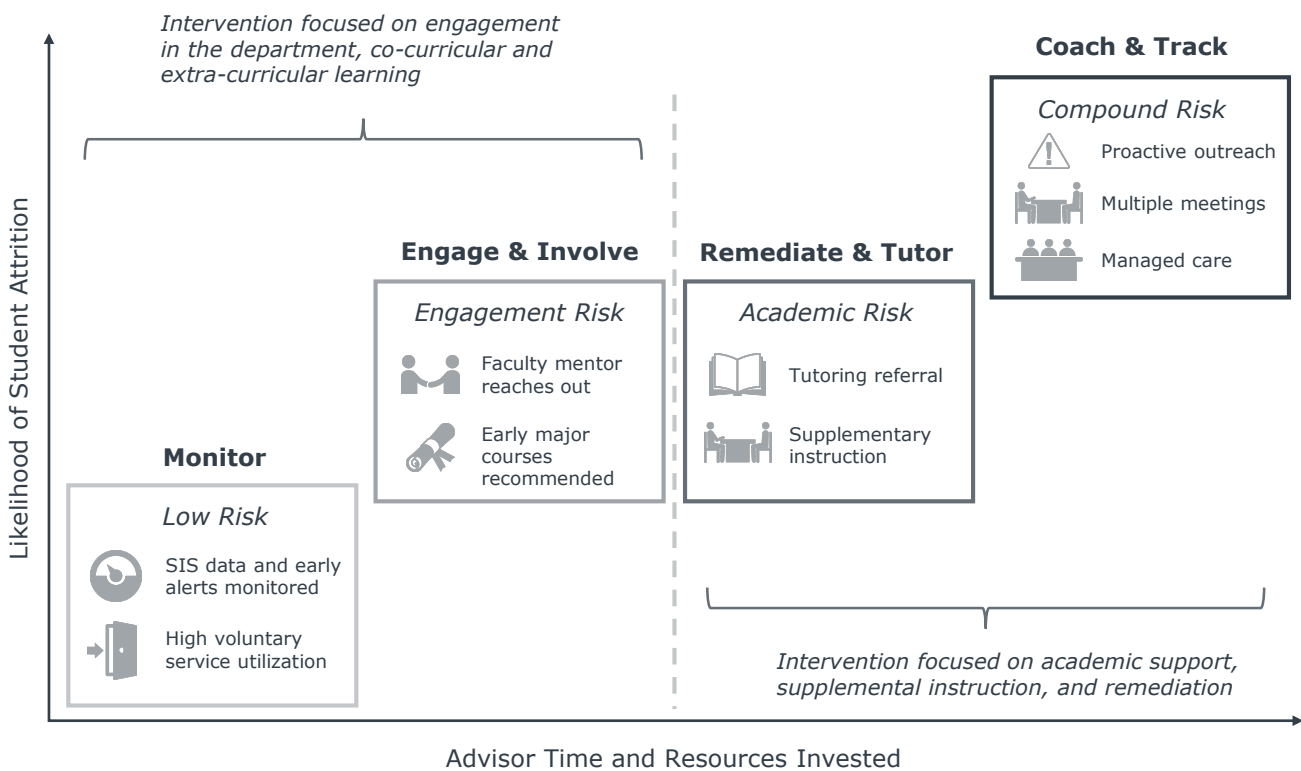
While consistent monitoring throughout a student’s career is ideal, focusing advisor attention on first-term behavior has the benefit of catching potential problems as early as possible. If advisor intervention is successful, a student’s general commitment to academic success can be improved before any serious consequences (e.g., course withdrawals or failing grades) come to bear.

# Aligning Advisor Attention with Risk Intensity

## Tailored Intervention Strategies Save Advisor Time and Improve Service

### Intensive Coaching for Students with Multiple Risk Factors, Tailored Interventions for Rest

By creating and adopting a set of a predetermined decision rules for each cohort, Eastern is able to maximize their support resources to make the largest possible impact on student success. Because predictive data drives the initial cohort placement, the institution is not reliant on advisors uncovering basic information about students in every interaction, nor on a lengthy referral process contingent on students taking action. Advisors are able to proactively connect students in each group with the most appropriate services, almost all of which are conveniently located in the same building.



### Retention Increases Across Cohorts

Cohort	2011 % Retained	2012 % Retained	One-Year Change
Compound Risk	67.3%	67.8%	0.5%
Academic Risk	74.9%	77.5%	2.6%
Engagement Risk	71.9%	75.9%	4%
Low Risk	83.7%	85%	1.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75.5%</b>	<b>77.1%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>

This revised approach yielded positive early results, with an average retention rate improvement of 1.6% across all four cohorts.

The "Engagement Risk" cohort showed the largest improvement, signaling significantly better connections between faculty and talented students who might otherwise have transferred elsewhere after their first year.

# Appendix A: UTSA Advising Clusters

Social Sciences		Engineering		Business Studies	
% of students with one advisor: 86%		% of students with one advisor: 73%		% of students with one advisor: 89%	
Primary Majors	Secondary Majors	Primary Majors	Secondary Majors	Primary Majors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anthropology</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Geography</li> <li>Global Affairs</li> <li>Political Science</li> <li>Psychology</li> <li>Sociology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies</li> <li>English</li> <li>Management</li> <li>Marketing</li> <li>Kinesiology</li> <li>History</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biomedical Engineering</li> <li>Civil Engineering</li> <li>Computer Engineering</li> <li>Electrical Engineering</li> <li>Mechanical Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management</li> <li>Finance</li> <li>Accounting</li> <li>Psychology</li> <li>Kinesiology</li> <li>General Business</li> <li>Information Systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting</li> <li>Economics</li> <li>Entrepreneurship</li> <li>Finance</li> <li>General Business</li> <li>HR Management</li> <li>Information Systems</li> <li>Infrastructure Assurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management</li> <li>Management Science</li> <li>Marketing</li> <li>Real Estate Finance &amp; Development</li> <li>Sports, Entertainment, &amp; Tourism</li> </ul>
Mathematical and Physical Sciences		Life and Health Sciences		Interdisciplinary Education	
% of students with one advisor: 61%		% of students with one advisor: 83%		% of students with one advisor: 87%	
Primary Majors	Secondary Majors	Primary Majors	Secondary Majors	Primary Majors	Secondary Majors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actuarial Science</li> <li>Computer Science</li> <li>Environmental Science</li> <li>Geology</li> <li>Multidisciplinary Science</li> <li>Physics</li> <li>Statistics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biology</li> <li>Information Systems</li> <li>Management</li> <li>Psychology</li> <li>Kinesiology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biochemistry</li> <li>Biology</li> <li>Chemistry</li> <li>Health</li> <li>Kinesiology</li> <li>Public Health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychology</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Management</li> <li>Marketing</li> <li>Mathematics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies</li> <li>American Studies</li> <li>Mexican American Studies</li> <li>Multidisciplinary Studies</li> <li>Women's Studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychology</li> <li>English</li> <li>Mathematics</li> <li>Sociology</li> <li>Communication</li> </ul>
Arts and Humanities		Student Placement Advising		Downtown Cluster*	
% of students with one advisor: 80%		% of students with one advisor: N/A		% of students with one advisor: 76%	
Primary Majors	Secondary Majors	Primary Majors		Primary Majors	Secondary Majors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Art</li> <li>Art History &amp; Criticism</li> <li>Classical Studies</li> <li>English</li> <li>History</li> <li>Modern Language Studies</li> <li>Music</li> <li>Philosophy</li> <li>Spanish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies</li> <li>Psychology</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Anthropology</li> <li>Political Science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undeclared freshmen, freshman transfers, and transfer students</li> <li>Exited / transitional students</li> <li>Pre-majors</li> <li>Provisional admits</li> <li>College Access Program (CAP) students</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Architecture</li> <li>Construction Science</li> <li>Management</li> <li>Criminal Justice</li> <li>Infancy and Childhood Studies</li> <li>Interior Design</li> <li>Public Administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies</li> <li>Management</li> <li>Mexican American Studies</li> <li>Psychology</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Political Science</li> </ul>

\*UTSA has a separate campus in downtown San Antonio with a slightly different student population and several unique programs.

# Appendix B: UTSA Advisor Guidelines

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## Forming a Core Philosophy to Guide Expectations and Service

1. Students are our highest priority.

### **The Student Experience**

2. The students' advising experience begins at orientation. Students should have the opportunity to establish a relationship with their advisor during orientation.
3. Changing majors after the first year can result in delays in graduation. Students should receive in-depth major/career exploration during their first year.
4. A student should always have an assigned advisor and be assigned the fewest number of advisors possible during their time at UTSA.
5. The student should be able to be self-sufficient. An on-track student should be able to be successful without consulting an advisor.

### **Advisor Responsibilities**

6. There should be uniform advising protocol (processes and procedures) that is followed by all advisors.
7. Advisors should be responsible for connecting students with the resources that the student needs to be successful.

### **Organizational Structure**

8. The structure of advising should easily support the student as they make transitions through the university. Typical transitions such as the transition from first year to a major and exiting a college to a new major should be supported by well-defined protocols.
9. Advisors may be experts in a particular area or major but must be able to provide in-depth assistance to any student with questions related to the curriculum.
10. Advisors throughout the university should receive core training that is uniform and consistent. There may also be specialized training based on area or major.
11. Advisors should know when to refer academic matters to appropriate faculty members.
12. The structure should be flexible and responsive using data and other forms of feedback to constantly improve the delivery of services.
13. Clearly define mechanisms and accountability for maintaining the accuracy of all content within the systems.

### **The System Foundation**

14. All requirements necessary to graduate must be included in the catalog and can only be altered at clearly defined times. Changes to degree requirements including prerequisites and other policy issues should only take place with the publication of the catalog.
15. The system degree audit should be accurate and reflect all graduation requirements.
16. There should be clearly defined processes and accountability for keeping the degree plans, milestone courses, and other graduation requirements up-to-date.
17. Transfer agreements should be clearly articulated with local colleges.

# Appendix C: Leading Indicators of Success

## Key Metrics to Predict Attrition Risk and Prioritize Intervention

### Academic Metrics

A+

1. **Credit velocity:** Students who accumulate credits quickly tend to graduate, while stop-outs often struggle
2. **Credit/completion ratio:** Upper-division non-completers tend to accumulate DFWs at higher rates early on
3. **Milestone course grades:** Use historical data to determine which courses are most predictive of success
4. **First-term GPA:** Initial grade report often sets academic trajectory and student expectations
5. **Major declaration point:** Students who declare or switch major too late can significantly delay graduation

### Non-Academic Metrics



1. **Financial concern:** Subjective financial stress often better predicts attrition than demonstrated need
2. **First-generation status:** Parental expectations and experience continue to play a critical role in persistence
3. **Employment status and intensity:** Working off campus more than 15 hours per week elevates risk
4. **Residential status:** On most campuses, commuters face many more obstacles than on-campus students
5. **Motivation and resilience**



### Proxies for Grit



#### *Institutional Commitment*

1. Pre-enrollment campus visit
2. First choice on FAFSA
3. Visiting the campus website
4. Payment of housing deposit

#### *Campus Engagement*

1. Club and activity attendance
2. Mobile application usage
3. Athletic event attendance
4. Campus leadership role

#### *Health and Well-Being*

1. Dining hall card swipes
2. Visits to the campus gym
3. Residential advisor reports
4. Intramural sport participation











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