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A leadership journey: How advising shapes an institutional culture

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Abstract

Although we know advising can be conceptualized as a critical component of an integrated and comprehensive student success strategy on a campus, it is often difficult to implement. This chapter will provide a case study of the development and execution of a leadership initiative at an American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) institution to transform advising in service of the goals of student equity and success. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's advising model grew out of a convergence of a handful of key momentum points including strategic planning processes and the use of emerging data surrounding their students as a majority-minority Hispanic-serving institution. Through these and other momentum points and the approach from leaders, their institutional transformation reflects the importance of the role and shared responsibility for building student success and equity on campus.

"Advising is critical to a student's educational journey, particularly for low-income, first-generation, and/or students of color - the new majority" stated Dr. Mildred García, the American Association of State College and Universities' (AASCU's)[1] President when asked about the importance of the Advising Success Network. She highlights that "advising requires intentionality and the engagement of different stakeholders on and off campus to ensure equitable student success and movement toward institutional transformation." Yet, while we know advising can be conceptualized as a critical component of an integrated and comprehensive student success strategy, it is often difficult to implement. Campus leadership is critical to this process, serving as both an anchor and a driver of advising redesign.

In thinking about how leadership can influence advising redesign, it is important to start by centering on racial equity. This was illustrated by AASCU's Transformation Advisory Group, affectionately known as the TAG group, a peer-learning group composed of

exemplars who are mid-level student success leaders. These leaders grappled with how to bring about profound and pervasive change that realigns institutional structures, cultures, and the business model to address evolving student needs and institutional mission. The TAG leaders used *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education* by Drs. Tia Brown-McNair, Estela Mara Bensimon, and Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux as a guide to operationalize and articulate equity on their campuses. According to McNair, Bensimon, and Piqueux (2020), the equity journey starts with each of us, and the idea of engaging in self-reflection on our current equity journeys is critically important to move from intention to action with respect to equity (McNair et al., 2020):

> Educators with an equity talk *and* equity walk critically examine institutional policies, practices, and structures through a lens that questions why inequities exist to change the educational environment to support the success of students–especially students who have been historically and continuously marginalized in our educational systems (McNair et al., 2020, p. 2).

Based upon the guidance from this resource, the leaders in TAG identified a true need to operationalize equity in their work, beginning with how to have equity conversations with their peers and leaders on campus, even if the conversations were uncomfortable.

When centering advising redesign in racial equity, campus leadership has the opportunity to dismantle institutional barriers and rebuild structural and systemic operations. One way to enact that responsibility is to equitably identify, design, and implement holistic academic advising reform as a part of institutional practices, mission, and vision toward a shift in campus culture. According to Abelman and Molina (2006), "In the absence of institutional vision, advising practices can be dictated by tradition, fad, or circumstance and impacted by personality or inertia. Without vision, advising outcomes may be random and inequitable" (p. 5). And according to Dr. Adriana Kezar (2013), "For change to be transformative, it must occur along several dimensions within an organization: structural, process, and attitudinal" (p. 119). Successes in advising redesign can be measured by observed changes to the organizational structure and model of academic advising, the design of student-centered policies and procedures, and advisor attitudes, behaviors, and practices that align with the vision. Given that current institutional structures are centered in Whiteness, it is important that institutional leaders of color and members of advising departments who are of color are part of the conversation. This ensures that Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other non-White student experiences are considered when designing advising services for students. By ensuring that these leaders of color have a seat at the table, it provides them with an opportunity to inform redesign efforts.

Leadership can also emphasize data as a cornerstone of learning and understanding the student experience on campus and undergirding any redesign efforts. Being student centered begins with using data to uncover where barriers exist and where more information is needed about a student's lived experience on campus. Advisors, "like first responders and bellwethers, know how students are negotiating their institutions," (Steele & White, 2019, p. 4) and they should be included in data discovery discussions as well as redesign efforts broadly. Their unique understanding of why students leave the institution, what supports are successful in aiding students, and where barriers lie at institutions is invaluable when considering a new advising system. Data-informed advising redesign provides a unique opportunity to design a system that serves students more intentionally and effectively. Further, it is incumbent upon institutions to use institutional and programmatic outcomes and student progression and performance data (in both quantitative and qualitative forms) disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, Pell eligibility, and other demographics.

Understanding where equity gaps exist at the institution can guide the conversation about why they are happening and how advisors, and the advising system broadly, can help support and guide students at critical junctures in their undergraduate experience. Strategic use of data and equity-minded assessment practices allow leadership to provide structure and accountability for what must be considered in an advising redesign.

Although the principles and role of leadership in advising redesign are transferable, it is critical to understand institutional characteristics, context, and culture in this process. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Concept of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2006), discussed in chapter 2, purports that academic advising objectives differ among institutions based upon the particular mission, goals, curriculum, co-curriculum, and assessment methods established for the respective campus (White, 2000). Advising models (i.e., centralized, decentralized, faculty, or professional advisors) vary by campus and can often be legacy approaches that no longer serve the needs of the students, hence the need for advising redesign. The importance of relationships between students and faculty, as well as students and advisors, cannot be understated. Yet when an advising system does not clearly articulate the roles of faculty and professional advisors within the system, the student is most affected. An advising model should reflect an understanding of the student body and its diverse needs as well as how and who can best provide that information and support throughout a student's career. There is no best model for advising systems within higher education. However, best practice is to ensure that the advising system is designed to support the students specific to the institution while providing faculty and advisors particular roles within the system. Clarity within the model strengthens the ability for it to function as intended. This benefits all who work within and interact with the system.

An institution that redesigns systems, including advising, to improve student success outcomes must have a clear sense of what they want to accomplish, as well as why and how to make that type of change. The approach should facilitate shared governance and collective decision-making (Kezar, 2001), use data to illustrate and define where students face barriers, and generate sponsorship from leadership across the institution to ensure the change is implemented and sustainable. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) recently underwent a full-scale advising redesign that resulted in improvements in student success outcomes. The change process also fostered better connections among students and advisors that were instrumental in helping students address the myriad challenges they faced throughout the pandemic. The remainder of this chapter will tell the story of how UTRGV identified and leveraged momentum points to facilitate their redesign and how the approach of leaders from different places in the institution led to institutional transformation, including an increased sense of shared responsibility for student success as well as an attunement to what equity means on the campus and how it impacts how the unique needs of students are served.

LEVERAGING MOMENTUM TO DEVELOP A NEW ADVISING MODEL: A CASE STUDY

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) is a comprehensive academic institution of higher education located in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) of South Texas, along the Texas-Mexico Border. The RGV has an estimated population of approximately 1.4 million, almost one-third of whom are under 18 years of age. In addition, a significant portion (90–96%) of the population is Hispanic/Latino and speak a language other than English at home. Less than two-thirds of RGV residents aged 25 or higher (2015–2019) graduated from high school, and less than 20% (2015–2019) earned a bachelor's degree or higher. More than

25% of the population lives in poverty, with per capita income ranging from approximately $14,000 to $17,500 and median household income (in 2019 dollars) ranging from just over $30,000 to $40,000.

UTRGV was established to serve the higher education and health needs of the Rio Grande Valley by providing access to a quality education and health care in a region of the country that is historically underserved. Its mission and strategic plan focus on addressing gaps in educational attainment and student success, enhancing access to health care, conducting research to improve the lives of community members, and engaging with the community to improve and sustain the region. UTRGV recognizes that one of its strengths is the bilingual and bicultural community it serves and is committed to being a model bilingual, bicultural, biliterate institution, implementing several strategic initiatives to meet that goal.

In fall 2020, UTRGV enrolled 32,441 students in undergraduate and graduate programs, with 92% of students coming from the RGV. Among enrolled students, 27,272 (84%) were undergraduates, and 62% of undergraduate students (88% of undergraduates receiving aid) were eligible for Pell Grants. A significant proportion of the undergraduate population identifies as a first-generation college student. Over 90% of the student body identifies as Hispanic/Latino, mirroring the population of UTRGV's primary service region.

Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education ranked UTRGV as third in the nation for awarding bachelor's degrees to Hispanic students and fourth in the nation for total enrollment of Hispanic students in 4-year institutions in the country. At the same time, while it may not appear so at first glance, UTRGV's student population is incredibly diverse, representing a wide range of backgrounds and experiences that shape student access to and success in the pursuit of higher education. As such, the institution serves a very distinctive student population, one which increasingly represents the ever-changing demographic at institutions of higher education throughout the country.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's story of institutional transformation begins in 2012 when the University of Texas System Board of Regents voted to approve a plan that would significantly expand higher education in the Rio Grande Valley by adding a campus, a medical school, and health clinics to serve the three-county area. The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) was renamed The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2015, and, in 2016, the former campus of The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) became part of UTRGV. Since its inception, UTRGV has focused on providing high quality educational opportunities for its unique student population. UTRGV's mission "to transform the Rio Grande Valley, the Americas, and the world through an innovative and accessible educational environment that promotes student success, research, creative works, health and well-being, community engagement, sustainable development, and commercialization of university discoveries" guides and focuses its continued development of programs, services, and operations. With the expansion of the institution in 2015–2016, UTRGV reiterated its dedication to meeting the needs of the RGV region, including providing the support services that students need to successfully complete their college degrees in a timely manner. The expansion required a significant revision of important academic support services, including academic advising, to serve a larger student population across multiple teaching sites.

As one might imagine, change of this magnitude brought a host of challenges and opportunities, not least of which was the merging of multiple and distinct institutional cultures. Faculty, staff, students, and senior leaders at the newly expanded UTRGV had to create a new, shared mission, values, priorities, policies, and practices to unite them and guide the work. One area where this work was most urgent—and led most clearly to institutional transformation—was in the development of a new academic advising model for undergraduate students based on a shared sense of responsibility for student success across

divisions and stakeholder groups. A significant challenge to the work of redesigning advising was that the academic advising models at UTPA and UTB were very different. As UTRGV welcomed its inaugural class of students, it needed to settle on an advising approach that would meet the needs of all undergraduate students while respecting the roles of a variety of stakeholders, most especially faculty, in this work. The reimagining of UTRGV's advising model grew out of a convergence of a handful of key momentum points, including emerging data that pointed to equity gaps for first year students, feedback from stakeholders on how the UTRGV advising model wasn't meeting the unique needs of key subpopulations of students, institutional strategic planning processes, and participation in multiple grant projects and partnerships at the state and national level.

Leveraging the momentum of equity-driven data discussions

UTRGV's first year retention rate had been declining since a record high of 80% for the inaugural 2015 cohort. The president established a priority of returning to that number, and equity-minded data analyses and application have guided that effort with respect to identifying certain sub-populations of students who are particularly at risk for attrition in their first year at the institution.

More specifically, when data were disaggregated, three subpopulations of students emerged for whom practices needed to shift to better serve them and meet retention goals. Disaggregating data by ethnicity at a majority minority HSI, like UTRGV, is not particularly helpful. Knowing the wide range of diversity that exists in the over 90% Hispanic population requires one to dig deeper to understand the subpopulations and the unique assets and needs they have. To understand the first subpopulation, it is important to note that the Rio Grande Valley has one of the highest populations in the state of high school students enrolled in dual credit coursework, which means they take college courses that count for both high school and college credit at the same time. Students who have these "prior college credits" when they enter the university are at an advantage when it comes to understanding the college experience and expectations, and their outcomes generally reflect that. Conversely, students who enter UTRGV *without* any prior college credits, which represents about 40% of entering cohorts (~1900 students), are retained at 10–12 percentage points lower than those who have prior college hours at the point of matriculation. Second, undecided students (i.e., those without a declared major) are a small but growing number of UTRGV undergraduates each year and have a second-year return rate that is 9 percentage points fewer than peers who have declared a major. It is understandable why students without a clear path are less motivated to return, but this data was a stark reminder of the responsibility to customize approaches to meet their unique needs. The final equity gap for first-year students was for students who have not yet passed the Texas College Readiness exam, approximately 8% of the incoming class prior to fall 2020. While UTRGV has a highly successful summer bridge and corequisite program in terms of pass rates, these students' retention rates are 16 percentage points less than peers who meet those state benchmarks before matriculating to UTRGV. If students fall at the intersection of two or more of these categories, their chances of returning for a second year at the institution are even worse.

Leveraging the momentum of stakeholder feedback

When UTRGV officially began in 2015, the enormity and complexity of the challenges associated with bringing three sets of students together (continuing students from UTPA/UTRGV, transferring students from UTB, and the inaugural first year class of

UTRGV) under the auspices of the newly expanded institution could not be understated. Student success leaders solicited input from stakeholders on a model for advising. Not surprisingly, with different models at the previous institutions and student variation in academic catalogs from UTPA, UTB, and UTRGV, the feedback indicated several different issues and faculty, students, and especially advisors were not happy.

A variety of specific challenges emerged from this feedback. As one might imagine, with a 550:1 student to advisor ratio, the stress and strain on advisors trying to do right by each student was overwhelming. Further, it was all but impossible to meet the diversity of needs among such a wide array of students. Advisors shared that they felt they were not able to do their jobs as effectively as they wanted to and knew they could. They were offering the same services for all students, spending a standard 30 min with each advisee no matter how complex the student situation, and facing an overwhelming demand for appointments. Faculty also expressed a strong desire for college-specific advisors as well as services tailored to degree programs, and many of them missed their role as advisors. The Student Success Steering Council noted that the huge number of major changes UTRGV processed each semester indicated a significant need for additional support for career exploration so students could make confident choices about their majors and stick with them. And, finally, the most important stakeholder, *students*, were communicating through a variety of venues (e.g., satisfaction surveys, focus groups, Student Government Association) that they highly valued advisors, but craved a more customized approach and more time with them.

Listening to each of these stakeholder groups in isolation could sometimes lead those outside of advising to believe there was a lot of discontent with the model operating at the time. However, it was very clear to student success leadership that there was strong agreement around several foundational ideas from which to build a robust model for advising. What was needed was a model designed around the unique needs of UTRGV's key subgroups, that could meet the college- and school-specific needs and could help close UTRGV's equity gaps.

Leveraging the momentum of strategic planning processes

Student success is one of the institution's core priorities and lies at the heart of the strategic plan (see Figure 1). In service to that commitment, UTRGV strives to develop and sustain intentional strategies that will have the biggest impact on retaining and graduating students in a timely manner. As part of UTRGV's institutional strategic planning process (2015–2017), the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and Student Success Subcommittee solicited campus-wide and community feedback on the goals, key initiatives, and sample metrics that would be central to enacting the commitment to UTRGV student success. Engaged stakeholders included faculty, staff, and student representative bodies (e.g., Faculty Senate, Women's Faculty Network, Staff Senate, Student Government Association). Focus groups and town halls were held with each of these groups and community members. Through this consensus-driven process, one of the key initiatives the campus community endorsed under the student success umbrella was "to provide excellent academic advising through highly trained advisors, robust technological tools, timely outreach to students, and self-advisement tools" (UGRTV, n.d., para. 3).

Shortly thereafter (2018–2019), UTRGV initiated a Strategic Enrollment Planning process with input from cross-divisional working groups. The Deputy President co-led this work with the Senior Vice President for Strategic Enrollment. The Associate Provost for Student Success (then Associate Vice President for Student Academic Success), served as a member of the Undergraduate Working Group, which was comprised of a representative

FIGURE 1 UTRGV's 5 core priorities from its institutional strategic plan. *Note.* From transforming our world
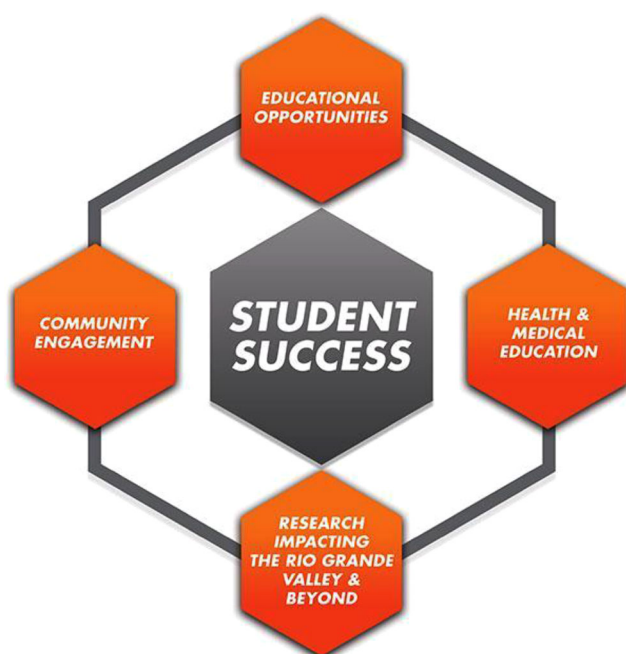
group of faculty and cross-divisional staff charged with examining UTRGV data on under-graduate students and making recommendations for initiatives the institution should consider investing in. A deep data dive revealed several promising practices that could be scaled to have an even greater impact on student success outcomes, such as retention and graduation. One of those promising practices was advising.

The student to advisor ratio at the time was 550:1. Data suggested that students who were required to see an advisor and did so were retained at a significantly higher rate than students who didn't. So, the institution made decreasing the student to advisor ratio a priority to enable more students an opportunity to meet with their advisor each year. Additionally, a new advising model had to have at its foundation, a shared responsibility for identifying which sub-groups of students needed differentiated advising and retention initiatives. This approach would require stakeholders to meet regularly to analyze student success data and to collaboratively plan and assess effectiveness of targeted, strategic interventions designed specifically for those sub-groups. Through this process, a differentiated advising model would need to be developed that leveraged strong relationships with faculty and leadership in the colleges to ensure that students received the best information and guidance possible for their specific program of study and career aspirations. Given the potential for retention impact and return on investment, the institution decided to invest in the redesign.

Leveraging the momentum of state and national partnerships & engagements

During the same time frame, the University of Texas System brought together student success and advising leaders from each of its academic campuses to develop a framework of and shared commitment to a set of advising best practices that the campuses aspired to implement. Advising professionals mined the literature and developed a rubric that

addressed topics such as caseload management, holistic advising, 4-year degree maps, and more. This engagement strengthened UTRGV's evolving advising model, providing a link to the scholarship about what institutions and students should expect from advising initiatives.

Additionally, UTRGV's participation in the Frontier Set was impactful. The Frontier Set, facilitated by AASCU, represents a diverse cohort of high performing, high-potential post-secondary institutions and systems chosen because of their potential to inform and influence institutional transformation and close opportunity gaps for every student. With its focus on advising, the Frontier Set provided UGRTV an opportunity to learn from peers and get feedback on ideas about what it means to be strategic and proactive to meet the needs of unique sub-groups of students with limited resources. Each year, UTRGV staff had the opportunity to present at conferences about their work on a differentiated advising model, as well as meet regularly with AASCU personnel and schools participating in Frontier Set. The opportunity to reflect on UTRGV's advising redesign efforts, especially its challenges, and to brainstorm with others outside of the institutional context accelerated thought processes and enhanced the ability to act with confidence back on campuses.

Other engagements with outside partners were also critical to developing the ability to articulate what it means to do equity work at a majority minority institution. For example, the Associate Provost of Student Success participated in the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) High Impact Practices Institute, engaged in Excelencia in Education's Annual Data Institute, and was a member of AASCU's Transformation Advisory Group. As a result of this exposure and involvement, a deeper understanding of equity and equity-mindedness was applied to the work in student success and, more specifically, in advising at UTRGV.

THE CONVERGENCE OF DATA, STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK, INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES, AND BEST PRACTICES FOR INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

During the time period described above, UTRGV, like many institutions, experienced significant changes to its organizational structure, including multiple leadership changes at the provost, dean, and department level. The Academic Advising Center also underwent leadership changes at the director and associate director level. Maintaining consistency of vision, strategies, and communication is challenging even in the best of times. However, deciding to enact a large-scale change effort such as the redesign of academic advising, where the support and input of these stakeholders is so critical, during a time of intense organizational change is especially daunting. Key to these changes was the ability for leaders of the institution and advising redesign initiative to listen across stakeholder groups, understand what has and has not worked, and to maintain a consistent focus on the redesign of advising in institutional planning processes, system-wide working groups, and national partnerships such as those with AASCU's Frontier Set and Excelencia in Education. Making explicit connections between data, stakeholder feedback, institutional planning processes and strategic priorities, and state and national partnerships has been critical to elevate the importance of this work for senior leadership, as well as all stakeholders involved. It also has led to a significant investment in the advising infrastructure, one that has contributed to institutional transformation by engaging faculty, professional staff advisors, and their leadership in the sense-making of data specific to each college, as well as the co-design of advising strategies to help meet institutional and college-specific equity goals, and involvement of faculty in advisor training. Building these structures into the advising

redesign ensures that there will be an expansive group of individuals at the institution and in each college who are responsible for understanding who the underserved students are and the unique assets and needs they bring. Membership of this faculty-staff-leadership group also work together to make sure the institution continues to evolve its practices to best serve these students. These responsibilities are no longer the responsibility of a single group (advisors or faculty) on campus. As such, the work can continue in the face of leadership changes in any part of the organization.

The well-planned and student-centered institutional approach employed by leadership at UTRGV resulted in the development of a model that is strategic and proactive, collaborative by design, and differentiated or customized to meet the needs of a variety of UTRGV's subpopulations of undergraduate students. This approach also included recommendations for how additional staff could be engaged to scale the work, including a blueprint for moving advising to a college-specific model using college-specific advising strategy teams. Further, the model included the distribution of students through a caseload model to an advisor who would stay with them for their full undergraduate career. It also addressed the resources this move would require, including the addition of new professional staff advisors, mid-level advising leadership, and peer advisors. Differentiated services were designed based on several proposed advisor to student ratios (550: 1, 400:1, 350:1, and 300:1) and included information about what advisors could offer students depending on the number of students they would be expected to serve. Ultimately, through the Strategic Enrollment Planning process, the president decided to invest significantly in the new model, approving the addition of 32 new advisors. UTRGV also chose this initiative, a focus on the first year advising strategy, as its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a special 5-year project that is central to the institutional accreditation. The support of the president and his executive team in elevating the redesign of advising to one of the institution's most important priorities signaled the importance of this work to all UTRGV's stakeholders, including faculty, staff (especially professional advisors), and students. It was also a clear endorsement of the idea that UTRGV is invested in knowing who our students are and what their needs are, as well as building the supports needed to help meet the equity goals it has set.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

While there has always been a unit, and now a division, focused on student success at UTRGV, there was the lingering concern that the campus would never meet the needs of students if their success is not the responsibility of everyone who works at the institution. Key stakeholders and participants in student success efforts must include all staff and faculty, regardless of their division, college, or school. A collective focus on success also includes students, their parents and families, and community partners. Taking on an institution-level change project such as the redesign of the academic advising model has enabled UTRGV leadership to clearly and repeatedly communicate the message that all stakeholders matter. The work could not be done, nor the process "owned" by the Student Success division alone. Faculty bring knowledge of the discipline and a deeper understanding of the classes and cocurricular experiences that are particularly important for specific career goals, as well as invaluable connections to a professional network that will serve students long after they have graduated. Professional advisors have a deep understanding of how to help students navigate the institution, its policies, and its practices, as well as the academic pathways students must follow to ensure timely progress to degree

completion. Partners in Strategic Enrollment are critical to the successful onboarding of new students all the way to certifying them for graduation. None can be successful in isolation and attempting to do so would be evidence that we are not a student-centered institution paying attention to who our students are or how we need to transform ourselves to meet their unique needs.

Finally, the ability to take advantage of opportunities to further the academic advising agenda is evidence that senior leadership embrace their role as campus change agents. When faced with data showing significant equity gaps for some first-year students and an articulated vision and plan for addressing those gaps, senior leadership—most notably the president—did not hesitate to reallocate a significant resources into the advising redesign. Quick, decisive action by UTRGV leadership meant that a change that might have taken 3 or 4 years to implement was achieved in far less time, and students have been the beneficiaries.

As UTRGV implemented the QEP and continued the larger advising redesign project, which is still underway, certain values and language were consistent and began to take hold throughout the institution. As a result, Strategic Enrollment began to talk about a redesign of the orientation programming to meet the unique needs of those subpopulations in which equity gaps existed. Although students with significant numbers of prior college credit do well in terms of retention, they also have very specific onboarding and advising needs. When student success leadership first heard the orientation team describing the need for special orientations for each of these groups—with different programming—it was evident that institutional transformation is happening. This transformation focuses on equity, on understanding who UTRGV students are, and on changing institutional practices to meet those needs rather than expecting the reverse. The same thing happened in the Career Center and in First Year Experience seminars: just this year, the Career Center has created customized programming and resources for veterans, adults, transfer students, and first-year students with significant prior college credit.

Colleges and schools have similarly embraced their unique roles to support student success and their responsibility to be an active partner *with* Student Success. A crucial piece of the new advising model is the creation of college-based Advising Strategy Teams. These teams are co-led by an associate director in advising and an associate dean of undergraduate education or student success in the College/School. Remaining members of the team may include undergraduate program coordinators, student success-minded faculty in the College, and/or staff with related responsibilities. These teams meet regularly to review college-specific student success data and co-design advising interventions for students in the College/School. Faculty in each college are responsible for training professional advisors on the curriculum (hidden and explicit) of the degree plans. In some cases, faculty even partner with advisors to co-lead group advising sessions. This is a very visible way of sending the message to students (and each other) that both groups are key collaborators to ensure students get what they need, when they need it, and in a way that makes strategic use of institutional resources. Campus leadership also invested in hiring additional Student Success Peers, who are deployed across the institution in support of students. They serve as a great return on investment since on-campus student employment is a proven retention strategy in and of itself for UTRGV. These peers are an integral part of the ability to build and sustain a culture of shared responsibility for student success.

This large-scale institutional change centered on advising redesign capitalized on processes and projects that could have easily (more easily, in fact) remained in silos. To a certain extent, focusing on the same project for each of these discrete institutional planning processes and partnerships afforded the opportunity to iterate and articulate ideas, each time refining them to better match the needs of as many stakeholders as possible.

Over time, the values, the language, and the priorities of the campus community began to converge around a shared commitment to equity, students, and co-creating and nurturing UTRGV's culture of student success.

ENDNOTE

[1] AASCU has a vast network including nearly 350 colleges, universities, and systems. AASCU primarily convenes Presidents and Provosts. AASCU leads the network in the thinking on leadership engagement, cross functional communication on campus, change management, and institutional policies. AASCU was asked to join the Advising Success Network (ASN) in 2019 because the alignment with ongoing and future student success work is a strength for the Network.

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