

FINAL REPORT OF THE  
UNDERGRADUATE ADVISING TASK FORCE

The State of Dedman College's Offices for Advising and Records  
With Conclusions and Recommendations

April 21, 2011

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The Task Force began meeting in November 2010. Over a series of meetings the Task Force talked with Jennifer Haden (Dedman Associate Dean for Student Records), Robb Pocklington (previous Dedman Associate Dean for Advising), Scott Bartlett (current Dedman Associate Dean for Advising), Gwendolyn LaCroix (Dedman Advisor), Timothy Norris (Dedman and Performing Arts Pre-Major Advisor), Janet Hopkins (Dedman and Pre-Law Advisor), Annie LeBlanc (Dedman Degree Counselor), Tiffany Heape (Dedman Degree Counselor), Remonda Hammock (Assistant to the Associate Dean for Student Records), Kathy Stephens (Dedman Advisor), Pamela Chiu (Dedman Advisor), Karen De Olivares (Pre-Medical Advisor), Dania Ortiz (Dedman Advising Center Administrative Assistant), Eileen Hoy (Dedman and Lyle Advisor), Barbara Mohrle (Director Cox Academic Advising), Sheumona Miller (Dedman Advisor), Jeanene Renfro (Dedman Advisor), Nancy Skochdopole (Director of Transfer and Transition Services), Ashley Stone (Director New Student Orientation and Student Support), Dennis Cordell (Associate Dean General Education), and Deanie Kepler (SMU Parent Liaison).

The Task Force obtained the most recent review of advising nationwide, the 2004 NACADA (National Academic Advising Association) report, The Status of Academic Advising: Findings from the ACT Sixth National Survey. The report of the Education Advisory Board (see [www.educationadvisoryboard.com](http://www.educationadvisoryboard.com)), Undergraduate Academic Advising Structures at Mid-Size Private Institutions, was also examined at the recommendation of Assistant Provost Tillman.

The Task Force also studied advising and records offices and policies at our benchmark and aspirant institutions. In particular we considered the University of San Diego, the University of Denver, Rice University, Vanderbilt University, Dartmouth College, Baylor University, Texas Christian University, Emory University, Marquette University, Boston College, Wake Forest University, Duke University, University of Tulsa, the University of Southern California, Pepperdine University, American University, Duquesne University, Brown University, Northwestern University, Lehigh University.

## DESCRIPTION

The description below is not meant to be exhaustive but to provide highlights.

We begin with a historical description of admission and advising. These two are intertwined as will become clear below. Students entering SMU as freshmen have been admitted in a variety of ways over time. For example, the 1961-1962 course catalog states, “Applicants for admission to The College of Arts and Sciences, The School of Engineering, The School of Music, and The School of Business Administration should make application for admission to the University on forms furnished by the Office of Admission. In addition, applicants for admission to The School of Business Administration and The School of Music should also fill out supplemental forms ...” In the case of Business Administration students were admitted into “the Pre-Business

Administration Program of The College of Arts and Sciences.” It appears that students entered the other Schools directly (Music and Engineering).

By the 1976-1977 catalog students were admitted into University College, a “non-degree granting, liberal arts college of the University.” Meadows was now the School of the Arts and there was a School of Humanities and Sciences. University College was created by the Master Plan of 1963. As noted in the 1976-1977 catalog, “All freshmen enter the University College. Students later transfer to one of the degree-granting schools of the University but they may continue to take courses in the college throughout at least three years. ... The entire faculty of the University constitutes the faculty of the college.” It appears that prospective freshmen did not have separate forms to fill out for the Schools of Business or Arts. However, students who intended to enroll in Meadows at the time of admission were given a faculty advisor from the School. University College was headed by a Vice-Provost.

By the 1980-1981 catalog University College and The School of Humanities and Sciences were merged into The College. In the following year The College became Dedman College.

A performance audition was added for students who wished to enter the performing arts. This additional requirement appears for the first time in the 1979-1980 catalog. Subset requirements first appear in the 1983-1984 catalog in connection with entrance into Cox. Over the last several years the number of programs with subset requirements has increased dramatically to include Cinema-Television, Advertising, Journalism, CCPA, Psychology, and all Engineering majors. Under the current 2010-2011 system a number of majors have subset requirements for admission.

Under the University College system (pre-1980) most advising was done by SMU faculty. With the creation of Dedman College, the Dedman Advising Center was created with pre-majors (Dedman I) advised at the Center. This system continued until 2004 when Dean Neel split the Advising Center into two offices, the Dedman College Advising Center and the Dedman Office for Records. Both Associate Deans reported to the Dean of Dedman College until this past year when they began reporting to the Senior Associate Dean of the College.

The primary task of the staff of the Dedman College Advising Center is to advise all pre-majors (Dedman I students). Advising occurs in two primary phases, during orientation and during the academic year. Before the fall semester of their freshman year, students attend a two-day orientation during the summer referred to as AARO. During an AARO session, students meet with a Dedman advisor (not always the same advisor they will see when they arrive in the fall) to arrange a schedule for the fall and, time permitting, devise a four-year plan. Students are expected, but not required, to meet with their Dedman advisor early in the fall after arriving at SMU to discuss long range plans including the development of a four year plan, if time permits. Later that same fall they meet with their Dedman advisor to sign up for spring courses and again in the spring to choose courses for the following fall. In their sophomore year, they are expected to meet with their

advisor every semester until declaration. Students choose majors in a variety of ways. Dedman advisors play a key role in many of these decisions by helping a student understand the options in light of the student's interests and abilities. This is only as effective as the advisor's knowledge of the student and of SMU as a whole. By the time students are juniors, having chosen a major, they rarely meet with their pre-major Dedman advisor.

In most cases students remain in Dedman I until they declare a major (although a few continue to meet with their Dedman I advisor, mostly now as a mentor, throughout their undergraduate experience). Some students are admitted into the various schools after one or two semesters at SMU. These include BBA Scholars, Meadows Scholars, and Meadows performing arts students. These students are advised by the Dedman I advisors typically for their first semester. In the case of Meadows, Meadows Scholars and performing arts students also have Meadows advisors. All Engineering pre-majors are advised by an advisor in the Lyle School of Engineering who handles both Engineering and General Education requirements. Finally, one advisor is dedicated to advising students in the University Honors Program (UHP) providing guidance on the Honors curriculum. As long as a student remains in the Honors program they maintain the relationship with the Honors advisor.

Several staff members of the Advising Center have administrative duties in addition to their advising responsibilities such as helping prepare for orientation and training faculty advisers in the Dedman departments.

The staff of the Dedman Office for Records maintains academic records and monitor students' progress toward declared majors. In addition to enforcing Dedman College policies and procedures, the Office also files Applications for Candidacy to Graduate with the Registrar's Office and certifies those candidates upon completion of their degree requirements. The records staff also have an advising function in that the degree counselors serve as Academic Advisors for the remaining students in the Evening Studies Program, for students who change majors, and in handling special cases.

Once a student has declared a major (typically by the end of the sophomore year), he or she is assigned a major advisor in the appropriate department. In some departments this role is carried out by one faculty member (the Director of Undergraduate Studies, DUS), in others several faculty members carry out this responsibility, and in some departments with large numbers of majors (e.g., Economics) advising is done by professional staff.

Transfer students who are uncertain about a major or who have not yet completed the requirements necessary to enter a major are advised by Dedman advisors.

For clarity throughout this report we will refer to the staff members of the Advising Center as Dedman advisors or simply advisors. The staff of the Office for Records will be called degree counselors. Faculty and staff within academic departments who advise students will be called major advisors. The current job descriptions for the Dedman Associate Deans for Student Advising and Records were created by the current Associate

Dean for Records and are provided in Appendix A along with job descriptions of Dedman advisors and degree counselors.

Several highlights of the 2004 NACADA report are relevant. Most institutions (84%) have one person (henceforth called a director) assigned to oversee advising.<sup>1</sup> At less than 37% of four year private institutions do directors spend most of their time in administration though this percentage is growing.<sup>2</sup> There are broadly seven models of advising used at Colleges and Universities: the “Faculty-Only Model” (no advising office); the “Supplementary Model” (small advising office, all advising transactions require a faculty signature); the “Split Model” (Undecided students see professional advisors, all others see faculty); the “Dual Model” (Faculty handle major requirements, professional advisors handle other requirements including general education curriculum); the “Total Intake Model” (Professional staff advise initially, then after major selection, faculty take over); the “Satellite Model” (Each school has separate approach); and the “Self-Contained Model” (All advising done strictly by professional staff).<sup>3</sup>

SMU’s approach is a combination of these models but is closest to the Dual and Total Intake models while sharing some common features of the Split model. Among private four-year institutions 17% use the Split model while only 7% use either the Dual or Total Intake models. Most institutions comparable to SMU use either the Faculty-Only or Supplementary model (64%). In this sense we are closer to the four-year public institution approach (46% Split, 15% Dual and Total Intake).<sup>4</sup>

The predominant method of advising pre-majors at four-year private institutions that employ faculty as advisors is through for-credit courses (18%) or small group meetings at orientation/registration (50%).<sup>5</sup> The average percentage of time these faculty devote to advising is 10.7% at comparable private institutions which represents a decrease from 1998 of over 1%.<sup>6</sup> Training of faculty advisors is accomplished mostly through single day workshops once a year (43%) or via individualized training (43%).<sup>7</sup> SMU offers one-on-one advising to pre-majors through its professional advising staff, both at AARO and during the academic year (see below).

At private four-year institutions with advising centers the mean number of advisees per advisor is 153.2.<sup>8</sup> Fewer than half of these institutions require students to contact the professional advisors about any decision including course registration.<sup>9</sup> Training of professional staff is even weaker than the faculty training at those institutions that rely on faculty advising.<sup>10</sup>

The Education Advisory Board (EAB) Study of Undergraduate Academic Advising at Mid-Size Privates examined seven institutions: American, Brandeis, Catholic, Dartmouth, Notre Dame, USC and Wake Forest. They note a range of structures from faculty-only advising (Dartmouth) to all advising carried out by professional staff (College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, USC).<sup>11</sup> As was found in the NACADA study little training is provided to faculty advisors.<sup>12</sup> At none of the institutions that use faculty in advising are course release or supplemental pay needed as incentives; faculty consider it part of their responsibilities (note that NACADA encourages awards for good advising

as an appropriate incentive).<sup>13</sup> Four distinct models for advising undeclared students are considered. The first two, professional advising and faculty advising have already been mentioned. The remaining two are hybrid models (compare with the NACADA models described earlier). The three-tier advising structure has peer, professional staff, and faculty advisors working in conjunction.<sup>14</sup> A two-tier model utilizes advising fellows and first-year advisors, where the former focus on exploring majors.<sup>15</sup> In these models a large segment of the professional advisors are considered generalists. At Notre Dame, with a first-year class of approximately 2000 students<sup>16</sup>, there are 12 generalist advisors<sup>17</sup>, and thus about 175 students per advisor (these advisors meet with the students only during the first year) which is slightly larger than the NACADA average. At USC there are ten generalists<sup>18</sup> with an incoming class (freshmen and transfers) of around 1650 students<sup>19</sup> for a ratio of 160 students per advisor. The report recommends a hybrid model.<sup>20</sup>

Among the other universities we considered, the University of San Diego, the University of Denver, the University of Tulsa, and Rice University employ faculty to advise pre-majors. These are supplemented with small professional advising staffs. First year fall semester advising is done as part of a week-long advising period just before the semester begins. At several universities with professional advising offices, advising staff members are allocated as students arrive for meetings rather than being assigned a permanent advisor.

## FINDINGS

In meeting with the various SMU constituencies (see above) a number of problems were uncovered. The most serious problem is inadequate staffing. While this is true of both offices it is more severe in the Advising Center. The current number of advisors is eleven within the Dedman College Advising Center and two in the Lyle School of Engineering for pre-Engineering majors. Dedman advisors often have fall caseloads of up to 240 students (this number excludes those students who continue to seek assistance from their Dedman advisor even after they have declared a major) while in the spring, as students declare majors, the caseloads shrink to around 180. As a result advisors no longer know students well and meeting times are insufficient, especially in the fall. This has resulted in shallow advising with fewer opportunities to explore the full range of possibilities offered by SMU.

The problem is worse during AARO where one hour meetings have shrunk to forty-five minutes. The meetings during AARO are critical since they involve beginning to plan a student's four year course of study as well as selecting the courses for the first fall semester. Less time has resulted in less planning than was done previously and has led to inconsistent information being given to students. Students attending later AAROs are faced with less selection leading to less useful "default" schedules. This is also the one time advisors meet with parents. As some students are still making a decision on which University to attend at AARO it is essential to provide them (and their parents) with a positive experience.

A number of those interviewed noted that the number of students receiving inaccurate information from the advisors has grown over the last several years. While in some cases the outcome is minor, in many situations serious problems develop later that lead to difficulties for the degree counselors who are advising students at the end of their career at SMU. The Committee believes this is due in large part to lack of training for new advisors, to poor ongoing communication with and training of current advisors, and to advisors having to keep track of the needs of too many students.

Due to an unacceptable turnover rate of Dedman advisors some students are passed from advisor to advisor during their first two years. This problem is exacerbated by having advisors tied to particular academic areas so that if a student's interests change so does the advisor. The Committee heard reports that there were students who had had four advisors by the time they selected a major. This makes consistent guidance and the development of a four-year plan more difficult and leaves students feeling confused and neglected. Retention of such students is compromised. The situation would be worse were we to adopt a first-come-first-serve model of assigning students to advisors each time they came by to schedule a meeting as is done at some universities.

Several individuals also described a lack of effective communication between the Dedman College Advising Center and other key student offices on campus. These include a lack of timely information to advisors from admissions before students arrive at their AARO session, difficulties in working with online files, lack of information on recent changes in major requirements, and inadequate updating of contacts and information about other university resources.

Until this past December the Advising Center provided no training to the Dedman Directors of Undergraduate Studies. These directors provide much of the curricular advice to Dedman majors. Most are rotated into the position for a three-year term. With little training, most likely provided by the previous DUS, Dedman majors are not getting the attention or information they need from major advisors. This shows up in the number of difficult cases degree counselors must work through and is more acute for students with more than one major or minor. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of students who return to their pre-major advisor for assistance.

Problems of perception also surfaced during our investigation. A number of advisors reported having a sense of isolation from and a feeling of under-appreciation by the rest of the campus community. They acknowledged that they often felt they take the blame for errors they did not cause. This can be traced back to the poor communication lines between the Dedman College Advising Center and the other campus constituencies. The advisors reported a perception of being undervalued resulting from minimal compensation and no opportunity to participate or benefit from membership in professional organizations.

The role of the Dedman Office for Records is often perceived by those outside the Office as one limited to policing policy and procedures. As policing is seen in largely negative terms this attaches an unnecessary stigma to the position of degree counselor. The

current staffing for this office includes the Director, her administrative assistant, and three degree counselors. In a restructuring last year one support person was removed from the Office. It is clear that this lower staffing has proved problematic.

In the current system advisors and degree counselors lack clear career paths and opportunities for professional advancement. This leads to lower morale and higher turnover within both Offices.

## CONCLUSIONS

First, professional advisors offer a viable solution to providing quality advising to pre-majors at SMU both in the University curriculum and in exploring possible majors. This solution is also a good fit for SMU in which we have invaluable experience. In this we chart a separate course from most of our cohort institutions as noted earlier in the NACADA survey data but follow the recommendation of the EAB Report. We claim that the fundamental weakness in our current approach to advising Dedman I students is not a lack of faculty presence but rather a lack of resources as evidenced by the advisor overloads, as well as insufficient training and marginalization of advisors. Past experience as described by previous and current advisors and directors indicates that when advising loads were closer to the limits recommended by NACADA (153) fewer mistakes were made and advisors felt capable of providing the personal attention especially to students who were experiencing difficulties (these students take up a considerable portion of an advisor's time). In talking with Dedman major advisors, most of whom are faculty, it is clear that they do not feel competent to advise students on the current general education curriculum or on the University Curriculum to be implemented in the fall of 2012. With increasing expectations placed on faculty in research as SMU continues its pursuit as a major research institution, it is unreasonable to expect faculty to advise pre-majors (recall the data on time devoted to advising above in the NACADA report for four-year private institutions). Well-trained professional advisors can effectively guide students in developing an academic plan, enable them to navigate through the University Curriculum to maximize their time at SMU, and help them find a major.

Similarly as the curriculum becomes more complex and faculty expectations change, professional degree counselors are best equipped and placed to understand and handle policies and procedures related to graduation and to assist the DUS and other Dedman major advisors in carrying out their critical roles.

While the Task Force has endorsed the use of professional advisors and degree counselors it also recognizes that the current division of labor between the Offices of Advising and Records is no longer optimal. We considered combining these Offices into one. While this might lead to improved communication between these Offices we rejected this approach for several reasons. First the new curriculum is not owned by Dedman College but the entire faculty of SMU. While this is stated explicitly in the University Curriculum document adopted by the faculty, it is important to demonstrate

this symbolically as well. Having a separate office that is focused on the University Curriculum with the title University Advising Center reminds faculty in other schools of the universality of pre-major education. This title also suggests a university-wide need to support and fund “non-major” advising. Several of the other schools have advising staff to help faculty advise majors so it is consistent for Dedman to do the same. This is enhanced through separate offices. Having a distinct Office of Records and Academic Services will allow us to provide more targeted training to our DUS and other faculty advisors. With the current arrangement (and with one in which there was one office) this function easily falls by the wayside in the face of more urgent demands. The Office of Records and Academic Services will also be responsible to communicate changes in policy or curriculum to both the UAC Director and to major advisors.

The Task Force believes a number of factors have had an adverse effect on student support and retention. These include the high turn-over in advising and records staff, the lack of sufficient advising staff to provide pre-majors with quality assistance/guidance, the lack of training of new advising staff and ongoing communication and training of current advising staff, and the lack of training for DUS and major advisors.

The current practice of labeling pre-majors as Dedman I students has several shortcomings. It is confusing to both faculty and students. In addition students who declare a Dedman major lose out on the cachet of association with the College since they have always been Dedman students. We believe this has hampered efforts to develop a solid identity and long-lasting relationships with the College. As noted above this is a relatively recent phenomenon (1981).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the Task Force recommends that the Dedman College Advising Center become the University Advising Center. The Task Force proposes the following vision and mission statements for the new Center.

### Vision Statement – University Advising Center

The University Advising Center will empower students to maximize their academic and curricular experience during their time at Southern Methodist University while preparing them for future success. This will be accomplished by the following activities: guiding students in developing an individual educational plan during their tenure as undergraduates; providing each student with accurate and timely information concerning the University curriculum that is focused on his or her interests and goals; partnering with Dedman College and with each School, department, and major and with the other student services including the new Residential Commons; and providing advisors with exceptional training and support.

### Mission Statement – University Advising Center

The University Advising Center will empower students to navigate the complexity of the undergraduate curriculum to maximize their academic experience at Southern Methodist University.

The Task Force recommends that the Director of the University Advising Center will report to the Senior Associate Dean of Dedman College. The position would require that the Director have a terminal degree in his/her respective field with a Ph.D. preferred.

The Task Force recommends that each SMU student be assigned an advisor in the University Advising Center (henceforth called the UAC advisor) who will provide advice on the University curriculum during the time the student is an undergraduate at SMU including after the student has declared a major. Freshmen will be required to meet with their UAC advisor three times in their first year: once in the early fall, once before registering for the spring semester, and once before registering for the fall semester of the second year. By the end of their spring semester, freshmen will have completed a preliminary four-year plan with the help of their UAC advisor and will understand how to manage that plan as it changes during their time at SMU. By the end of their spring semester freshmen will also have developed a short list of potential majors to explore in their sophomore year (see below). Undeclared sophomores will be required to meet with their UAC advisor twice: once before registering for the spring semester of their sophomore year and once before registering for the fall semester of their junior year. During one of these meetings, they will select a major. We recommend that sophomores who have declared a major (for exceptions see below) meet at least once (preferably early on) to discuss their progress in the University Curriculum. As is currently done, some students such as performing arts students admitted into Meadows via auditions and BBA scholars are expected to declare their major much earlier.

Students accepted into the BBA program will subsequently receive all advising, including University Curriculum advising, from their Cox advisors. The Task Force recommends that BBA students who are interested in second majors continue to meet with their UAC advisor to discuss these options. If they choose to declare a second major they would, like all other SMU students, acquire an advisor in that major.

Advising for SMU pre-majors who are also pre-Engineering students will be handled, as is the current policy, through the Lyle advising staff. These staff members, while not reporting to the UAC Director, should join the regular UAC staff meetings organized by the UAC Director to receive updates on the curriculum and to discuss areas of common interest and concern. At the point at which a pre-Engineering student appears to be unable to meet the Engineering subset requirements, a joint meeting with the student, a UAC advisor, and a pre-Engineering advisor should be held to discuss the student's options.

The Task Force recommends that the current tags, Dedman I and Dedman II, be abandoned. Dedman I students will become SMU pre-majors, and Dedman II students will become Dedman majors.

The Task Force recommends that students arriving at SMU with a declared interest (including BBA and performance students in Meadows) have access to a mentoring program in the area of interest. These areas will be determined at AARO or during the fall meeting of the UAC advisor and student. Each department will decide the form this mentoring program for “pre-majors” will take. Mentoring plans should be developed in conjunction with and coordinated through the UAC. Some possibilities include the use of individual faculty or staff mentors, group events, and peer mentors. Groups of departments (e.g., Dedman Division II Departments) could host a major fair. Undecided students will also be encouraged to participate in these efforts as a way of exploring various majors. Undeclared students would be advised on majors by their UAC advisor until they declare their majors at which time they would be assigned a major advisor. Students would continue to see their UAC advisor for certain issues involving the University Curriculum.

The Task Force recommends that plans for the Residential Commons must include coordination with the UAC with the expectation that some advising will be delivered through the Commons (e.g., UAC advisors on-site). In particular the Task Force recommends that the UAC Director in conjunction with RLSH explore the use of peer-advising in the new residence halls.

To determine the optimal number of students per advisor two phases must be addressed, AARO and advising during the academic year. We assume going forward an entering freshman class of 1400. As noted above until recently students have had one hour advising periods during AARO. A number of current advisors and AARO staff expressed that this was essential. The Task Force agrees. Assuming one hour meetings, an advisor can meet with 10 students in an AARO session. Each summer we currently have 11 regular AAROs (and one extra AARO at the end), 4 transfer AAROs and 1 international AARO. Currently the maximum size of an AARO session has been 140 students. Thus, we would need a minimum of 14 advisors to handle AARO, and since the UAC Director cannot have a full AARO load, that puts the number at 15. Since it is desired that students have the same pre-major advisors at AARO and during the academic year, this provides a basis for the minimum number of advisors. Additionally, both Dean of Students Lisa Webb and Vice President for Student Affairs Lori White expressed a desire for fewer AAROs. This would not only save the University money but would also allow for a less intense AARO season. From the numbers above with three additional advisors two fewer AARO sessions would be required (one session accommodates roughly 140 students, so in going from 11 to 9 AAROs would require handling about 280 students over 9 AAROs or 31 more students per AARO. With each advisor handling 10 students per AARO that is roughly three more advisors. The number of students at an AARO session would now be capped at 171 which can be accommodated with the available dormitory space). Thus with 18 advisors a significant savings in costs can be achieved each year. More importantly the advisors would be better able to serve the students as a result of the less exhausting schedule which in turn, we hope, would lead to higher yield from AARO (fewer students deciding to go elsewhere).

The second critical phase is academic year advising. As was pointed out by the advisors on the Task Force, the most critical periods during the academic year are those before spring and fall registration. Assuming an advisor sees  $M$  (here  $M$  is an integer) freshmen at fall registration time, we assumed based on advisors' experience with the current curriculum, that they also see roughly  $3/4M$  sophomores (these estimates will need to be re-examined within the next three years). Although they would still have juniors and seniors, these students will be required to see their UAC advisors at off-peak times. We estimate the number of juniors and seniors needing to meet with their UAC advisor to be  $3/4M$ . If we assume 15 advisors (which includes the UAC advising staff and the two pre-Engineering advisors) then this implies a first-year load of 102 and 77 sophomores for a peak load of 179 (the UAC Director having a 50% load, the two Associate UAC directors and pre-Engineering advisors at 80% loads, 10 UAC advisors at 100% loads for a total of 13.7M students for a class of 1400). Currently fall registration advising happens over a three week period. If an advisor sees a student for one half hour (a minimum) then a total of 89 hours is needed to handle the 179 students. Given that an advisor can meet with students 35 hours per week, already a grueling schedule, this will necessitate 2.5 weeks, just under the typical three weeks currently used. If the advisor meets with the student for forty-five minutes then 134.2 hours are needed or almost 4 weeks. Thus, this number of advisors allows the rudimentary advising requirements to be met but at a cost of less than satisfactory advising (both for students and advisors). The Task Force believes this is the maximal load that can be handled and leaves little room for error or inadequate advising and exhausted advisors. It also allows little flexibility for more difficult advising situations. Under this model each advisor would meet with 255 students during the academic year, again, we believe, a maximal number (nominally each advisor is responsible for 408 students, 102 per class, but we expect only 255 will actually meet with the advisor per year). If instead we have 18 advisors (16 UAC advisors including the Director and the two Lyle pre-Engineering advisors) the numbers are freshmen and sophomores are 84 and 63, respectively for a total of 147 at the peak period. With forty-five minute advising sessions the number of hours is 110 or just over 3 weeks. This is far more satisfactory. The estimated total number of students an advisor would meet per year is 210 (with a nominal number of advisees of 336). These numbers put us much closer to the NACADA recommendations and are more in line with Notre Dame and USC. We expect that with the increased attention advisors will be more capable of handling suspension and probation cases, providing valuable information about the selection of a major, and helping students learn to take advantage of the new features of the University Curriculum. Ultimately the Task Force believes this will improve retention and four-year graduation rates and that students leaving SMU will have a greater level of satisfaction.

The Task Force recommends that before coming to AARO students will be assigned a UAC advisor who will contact them before they arrive at AARO. In most cases we expect that this initial assignment will hold for the entire undergraduate experience. SMU pre-major records and discrepancies (including suspension and probation and the FLR requirement) will be handled by UAC until the student declares a major.

Three of the current Dedman advisors are on eleven month contracts. This is a hold-over from an earlier period. The Task Force recommends for the sake of equity among the advisors that all UAC advisors have twelve month contracts.

The Task Force recommends that the Dedman Office for Records become the Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services. The Task Force proposes the following vision and mission statements for this new Office.

#### Vision Statement – Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services

The Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services will assist Dedman majors and Dedman Undergraduate Advisors in maximizing the academic experience of Dedman undergraduates. This will be accomplished by the following activities: building and maintaining ties with the University Advising Center, Dedman Undergraduate Advisors, major advisors in other Schools, and other student services; providing ongoing training to Dedman Undergraduate Advisors; administering and enforcing policies and procedures, including graduation requirements.

#### Mission Statement – Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services

The Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services will empower Dedman majors and Dedman Undergraduate Advisors to maximize the academic experience of Dedman undergraduates.

The Task Force recommends that the Director of the Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services will report to the Senior Associate Dean of Dedman College. The position would require that the Director have at least a Master's degree in his/her respective field with a Ph.D. or Ed.D. preferred.

The Task Force recommends that the Dedman College Office of Records and Academic Services (DRAS) continue to handle most of its current responsibilities. However, it will no longer handle the administration and enforcement of policies and procedures of SMU pre-majors. The Office will now handle all communication with DUS and major advisors by providing yearly training for new major advisors and ongoing support for current major advisors within Dedman College.

While the staffing needs of the current Office for Records are not as dire as the Advising Center, the Task Force recommends that a minimum of one additional staff member be appointed to DRAS (from the current staff of four). As noted above the current Office for Records lost a staff member last year, which has led to a noticeable increase in the work load of the entire office and a concomitant reduction in efficiency. This additional staff member would have as his or her primary role training and supporting the Dedman DUS and faculty major advisors. The Task Force recommends that a serious review of the current structures for advising Dedman majors be undertaken over the next year by the Office of Records and Academic Services with the new hire having a central role.

Better advising of majors will also help us with retention and four-year graduation rates. Optimally a second staff member should be added to the group as noted below.

Some direct advising of students will be handled by the staff of the Office of Records and Academic Services. We expect this will largely be driven by the increased interest of students to major in more than one discipline. Faculty advisors are less likely to know how to make this work since their focus is on their own major. Two approaches to handling this advising load were considered. In the first, each degree counselor will also have an advising role. To accommodate the increased role a decrease in the number of students per degree counselor is necessary. Alternatively a clear wall separation can be erected that leaves the current roles of the degree counselors unchanged with advising responsibilities entirely in the hands of new dedicated advisors who would also interface with the faculty advisors. Both models are currently used at SMU and the Task Force recommends that the new Director of Records and Academic Services have the flexibility to choose which approach to follow.

All staff, both in the UAC and DRAS should be paid competitive salaries. A Master's degree is preferred for all UAC and DRAS staff.

The Task Force recommends that the budgets of both the UAC and DRAS include funds so that each staff member could join the professional organization NACADA and so that each year several of the staff could attend professional conferences.

A number of smaller but important recommendations emerged from the Committee's deliberations. The Committee urges the new UAC increase and improve its web presence. New students should receive an email from the UAC advisor prior to their attendance at AARO. The pre-medical and pre-law advisors should report to the Director of UAC since not all pre-law and pre-medical students major in Dedman College. In addition to the pre-law and pre-medical advisors, the Committee recommends that an advisor be assigned the duties of pre-graduate school advisor. This advisor should be housed in the Office of Records and Academic Services since he or she will be advising exclusively Dedman majors.

The current Directors of the Offices for Records and Academic Services are also both Associate Deans. The Task Force was split on whether to recommend that the new UAC and DRAS Directors be appointed at this level. The main argument against this arrangement is that Directors in the other Schools at SMU are not at the level of an Assistant or an Associate Dean. There are several reasons in favor of appointing the new Directors of the UAC and DRAS at the level of Assistant or Associate Dean. First, the title of Dean carries more weight when dealing with faculty, parents, and other campus organizations. Second, in the case of the UAC Director, he or she oversees an operation of significant size, which warrants the additional title.

The Task Force recommends that the College award each year one advisor/degree counselor for outstanding work. Those eligible for the award would include each of the UAC and DRAS advisors/degree counselors. The Task Force recommends a second

award for Dedman DUS and faculty major advisors. A committee consisting of the UAC and DRAS Directors and two Dedman faculty appointed by the Senior Associate Dean of Dedman College would recommend recipients to the Senior Associate Dean who would make the award.

Finally the Task Force recommends that as the University Curriculum starts in the fall of 2012, a number of these recommendations be re-examined at that time and over the next few years to see if the assumptions and estimates continue to hold. A further revisiting of advising should occur in conjunction with the opening of the Residential Commons. These re-examinations should be conducted by the Directors of the UAC and DRAS.

## OUTCOMES

All SMU students will have completed a preliminary four-year plan by the end of the student's second semester.

All SMU students will have developed a short list of majors by the end of their second semester.

The majority of SMU students will have chosen a major by the end of their sophomore year.

SMU will experience an improved rate of retention and four-year graduation rates as the recommendations of this report are implemented.

Less can be expected if the recommendations are not fully implemented.

## BENEFITS

A number of benefits (in addition to the outcomes listed above) can be expected if these recommendations are fully adopted. Students will receive better advice/guidance thereby dramatically improving their experience at SMU with the hope that they will become more active alumni. As the number of UAC advisors is increased, the number of AARO sessions can be decreased since the chief limitation on the size of AARO is not housing but advising staff. This will result in decreased cost to the University. The turnover among advising and records staff will decrease which will result in improved performance and less cost. Finally better advising at all levels should translate into improved retention and four-year graduation rates.

## COSTS

The current Advising Center has eleven members including the Director. A new advisor is currently being hired. Together with the two pre-Engineering staff this brings the current total to fourteen. With one additional hire the minimal fifteen advising staff for the UAC will be in place. One additional staff member is also needed for the Office of Records and Academic Services to reach the minimal number. The cost of these two

positions is \$70,000. The Task Force recommends strongly that three additional staff be hired by the UAC and one additional staff member be hired by the Office of Records and Academic Services at a cost of \$140,000. This cost will be partially offset by the expected savings in having to host fewer AARO sessions. The total cost is thus \$210,000 (less the savings from fewer AARO sessions) which we recommend be spread over the next three years. We recommend the hiring of two new staff members for the UAC and one new staff member for the DRAS by the summer of 2011 in time for AARO (\$105,000), in the second year one new staff member for each office (\$70,000), and in year three, a new staff member for the UAC (\$35,000). One key reason to front-load the hiring is to guarantee that we will be ready for the University Curriculum in the fall 2012.

The current cost of NACADA membership is \$55.00. For the thirteen UAC advisors (including the Director) and six staff members of the Office of Records and Academic Services (including the Director) the total cost is \$1,045. With the recommended plan the cost is \$1,265. The Task Force recommends that total yearly budget of \$4,000 (\$1,500 for the Office of Records and Academic Services, \$2,500 for the UAC) with a 3% increase built in for travel (the current Advising Center budget is \$25,000, which includes funds for copying and other items, should be continued). The additional funds should be used so that advising and records staff can attend regional and national NACADA conferences.

The cost of the advising awards is \$1000.00

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