

**COUNCIL OF
DIRECTORS OF STUDENT ACADEMIC SERVICES**

MINUTES

January 10, 2024

Zoom - <https://zoom.us/j/99545430954>

Passcode - 321037

10:30am to 12:00pm

In attendance: Laurie Beets, Dani Bellmer, Kyndal Campbell, Aaron Christensen, Brenda Dawes, Nick Holmes, Diane Jones, Kelly Kavalier, Randy Kitchens, James Knecht, Marissa McIntyre, Marilyn Middlebrook, Lance Millis, Linda Millis, Jeremy Minyard, Beverly Morris, Rita Peaster, Robert Raab, Sky Rogers, Shawn Rose, Kristi Seuhs, Richard Shepard, Debbie Stump, Candace Thrasher, Betsey Weaver, and Shannon Baker, Chair.

1. FAFSA Update – Linda Millis

The 2024-2025 FAFSA launched on December 30. The site was opened for a soft launch for approximately 30 minutes, and this process was repeated again on December 31. Currently, the site will only be available from 8am to 8pm. From initial reports, the FAFSA application appears to be easier for families to navigate once they successfully log in. Posters are available for distribution if you would like to display them in your office to notify students. Please contact Charly Smith.

One concern being expressed with the submission of the FAFSA is that the application can be submitted, but the student / family cannot edit to make corrections or updates. It does not mean that changes can never be made, but it is not an option yet. We are unaware of the availability of that option, because we will not receive student information or have access to view it until late January or February. We will notify students that once we are able to upload their information, they should take advantage of that window to check their application for corrections.

The Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid is dealing with a significant amount of emails and questions on this subject and unfortunately not many answers. As soon as there is something to report, OSFA will be communicating with students and will continue to update the OSFA web page and social media.

B. Weaver added that C. Smith contacted her regarding the delayed FAFSA notification on the student portal. That notice has been changed and now links the user to the FAFSA Simplification page.

2. Academic Advising Update – Shannon Baker

S. Baker notified the Directors of Student Academic Services (DSAS) to expect monthly academic advising updates for the reasonable future. The Career Development Plan for Academic Advisors is under review due to changes in advising structure in two of our colleges, where (within the next few months) all academic advisors will be reporting centrally to the Director of Student Academic Services rather than to department heads. This review of position descriptions within the colleges has been quite revealing of the vast array of responsibilities within these positions. Changes made to the CDP will be brought to the large DSAS group for review. It is important for everyone to be well represented in this process. Appreciation goes out to the Directors who have been engaged in these conversations throughout December and January, an incredibly busy times for anyone who works with academic advising.

The Coffee and Conversation events last month with academic advisors in December were well attended. The department heads have since had some questions, particularly in the two colleges where the restructuring is occurring. Email communication was submitted earlier today, specifying additional Coffee and Conversations with Department Heads in the next few weeks. These informal meetings will be held in the same format (come and go) as with the advisors.

As mentioned previously with the advising restructure, several position searches were posted just prior to the holiday break. Applications will be accepted through January 16th. Please encourage your team members who are ready for

the next step in their career to please apply. We are working closely to coordinate with Human Resources to monitor these open positions:

- *Manager positions (6)* - managers will report to Nick Holmes, and they will oversee a small group of advisors- each of them attached to a meta major group.
- *Coordinator of the First Year Experience* - help oversee the first year Seminar, which is being more centralized. This individual will also be responsible for developing a summer bridge program.
- *Coordinator for Professional Development and Academic Advisor Training* - will work with advisors across campus.

As Ferguson College of Agriculture transitions to their New Frontiers building, Student Success First Year team will make their permanent home in Agriculture Hall. There will be a need for temporary office space during this transition. As personnel move from one position to another on campus, we will make every effort to communicate to our students a university wide message to explain the scale of this change. In an effort to avoid confusion, consistent messaging will be essential when discussing assignments of new advisors to students. It is important to adopt a warm and friendly tone with our students in this transition period, even if the student/advisor meeting is virtual.

S. Baker informed DSAS of the Advising Practices working group she is leading. This group is working to create a template for the first year advising practices, to be shared across colleges to verify symmetry and alleviate confusion for advisors and students. Secondary advising will continue to work as it has in the past. After discussions with Ebonie Hill, Honors, and Marilyn Middlebrook, Athletics, S. Baker determined that the secondary advising communication flow is to remain similar to what it had been. Students still need that secondary advising experience.

S. Baker will be meeting with Provost Mendez and the Deans later this month to talk about how many academic advisors each college needs to serve their students effectively. R. Kitchens built a solid model of enrollment projections for the next 4 to 5 years that we can build wiggle room for growth up to that 250 student load so that colleges are not jumping from 200 to 250 overnight. This prediction is a less dramatic adjustment for the colleges and gives room for growth. This model will indicate when an additional advisor is needed

This semester may be a bit of a bumpy ride in terms of staffing and knowing how everything is going to feel at the end in terms of your team but S. Baker is open to questions and working through these issues as effectively as possible. The search committee teams are hoping to move through the interview process fairly quickly into February so that the search for academic advisors can then open. S. Baker will meet with N. Holmes later today to define those dates. She is also working in collaboration with M. McIntyre, who is the personnel subgroup chair on the working group committee.

S. Baker also notified DSAS of the website changes from the language of University College to Student Success.

3. Other

- B. Weaver offered an update of the new withdrawal process with the new Slate form. The new process is now being offered live. The Registrar's Office has been very helpful in helping identify those odd situations and in assisting with resolutions. So far one student retracted their submission and retained their enrollment.
- S. Baker expressed her gratitude to the Slate Team and Registrar's Office for their work to improve the withdrawal process. Students are no longer allowed to drop to 0 hours without completing a form that puts them in contact with their academic advisor who can assist them in thinking through the reasons for withdrawing. Conversations with someone from our institution can be extremely helpful before making such a big decision. It also allows us as a college to see if the student is thinking about re-enrolling in a subsequent semester. We can keep their status open, so they do not need to reapply for that semester and their academic advisor can reach out back to that student in the subsequent enrollment cycle.
- K. Kavalier announced that Jessica Priddy Bulluck will be out of the office for at least the first three (3) months of the semester, potentially longer. Please reach out to K. Kavalier for any needs specifically related to the Pre-Professional office. If there are specific prehealth questions, please feel free to contact Caitlin Laughlin. S. Baker thanked K. Kavalier for her willingness to step into that interim leadership role.
- S. Baker shared her cell phone number in the zoom chat in case anyone needed to reach her 361-228-5079. She will be checking email as well. She wished everyone well as the semester begins.

Meeting adjourned at 10:52am

Minutes were recorded by K. Campbell