

NACADA Advising Program Award

Major Change Advising
University Advising Center
University of South Carolina

Institutional Description

The University of South Carolina-Columbia (USC) is the state's flagship public, comprehensive university founded in 1801. The University offers over 350 programs of study for undergraduate and post graduate degrees. The total undergraduate enrollment is over 25,000 students, and total undergraduate and graduate enrollment is over 34,000 students. Undergraduate academic programs are offered through 11 degree granting colleges and schools.

Program development (how, when, and why the program was developed, including problems encountered, organizational concerns, budget, and other practical considerations)

Program Inception (Spring 2010)

The Major Change Advising program was piloted at USC in January of 2010. The program was created to meet the advisement needs of students who were in the process of changing majors. The program was originally named Cross Campus Advising (CCA) and was housed in the Student Success Center within the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support.

At the time of program inception, academic advising at USC fully operated within a decentralized model, with advisement being managed and provided by faculty and/or professional staff advisors in different colleges and schools. While this model benefitted students in that advising services were tied to the students' program of study, there was little to no support for student changing majors. Academic advisors only knew the curriculum for the programs they advised and couldn't advise students toward their new intended major nor did they have the capacity to advise potential new major changers along with their current caseloads. The need to support students who were in the process of changing majors was evident, and CCA was developed to fill this gap at the University.

Initial staffing for the program was a graduate assistant with the hope of future professional staff if the pilot was successful. There were 73 total student visits during the Spring 2010 program pilot semester.

Early Years & Program Growth (Fall 2010- Spring 2015)

CCA quickly grew from an ancillary service to an essential part of the advising experience at USC. A full time professional staff position and graduate assistant position was created beginning Fall 2010 to continue the growth and development of the program. By the end of the first full academic year (Fall 2010 - Spring 2011), there were over 1,200 student visits.

Over the next four academic years a variety of service and staffing models were employed as student demand for major change support increased. Between the academic years 2011-2012 to 2013-2014 student visits increased from over 2,800 to over 5,400. Additionally, In 2013, CCA underwent a name change from Cross Campus Advising to Cross College Advising better align with the program's purpose of helping students navigate the change of major process between colleges. Service models changed from appointment only, to drop-in and appointment, to intake/follow-up, drop-in, and appointment. Staff providing major change services during this time included professional staff, graduate assistants, and peer advisors. While the peer advising model is effective for many advising programs, the complex and

varying curriculum and major change processes at USC was not conducive to sustaining this type of advisement.

One of the greatest challenges during this time was the development of partnerships with academic units. Having support from academic units was of vital importance to ensuring the success of the program. With CCA being housed within the student affairs unit and all official academic advisement happening in academic affairs, there was much trepidation and concern from colleges and departments regarding CCA's role in advisement. CCA staff would have to know curriculum across all programs of study and specific college processes & procedures to provide accurate major change advisement. Effort was made to meet with each academic unit to receive updated information including curriculum changes and change of major processes. The Coordinator attended all University Advisor Network meetings, serving as Secretary, as well as Change of Major sub-committee meetings. Detailed tracking documents were also created to keep record of issues and concerns regarding CCA services, as well as students, within specific departments.

Organizational Transition & Current State (Summer 2015-present)

In spring of 2015, the report, "Re-envisioning Academic Advising at the University of South Carolina", outlining the University's goals for improving academic advising was released. Shortly after the creation of the University Advising Center within the Office of the Provost in the Division of Academic Affairs was announced. It was decided that CCA services would be moved from the Student Success Center to the new University Advising Center. The program was also renamed Major Change Advising (MCA) to clearly define its function and role within advising.

MCA now employs only professional staff advisors (4 positions) and utilizes a mix of scheduled and drop-in appointments. Since joining the academic affairs unit, formal partnerships and agreements have been established with each of the 11 colleges in regards to major change advisement. In most cases, students who are planning to change majors and meet with an MCA advisor do not have to also meet with their assigned college advisor. Their college is notified of the intent to change major and clears the student to register for courses. This is extremely helpful for students who would otherwise have to see multiple advisors and would be left with little support when changing majors.

Program Goals and Objectives

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1. Provide supplemental advising support to undergraduate students to optimize student retention, persistence, and engagement on campus.
2. Collaborate with academic college/department liaisons and campus partners to ensure accuracy in major change advisement.
3. Guide students in transition through major exploration processes that facilitate intentional decision-making regarding academic program of study.

Student Goals & Objectives

1. Identify and utilize campus resources to make intentional academic decisions and explore career goals
2. Reflect on academic experiences to identify areas of academic strengths and weaknesses
3. Develop and implement an academic plan as they navigate the change of major process
4. Understand University academic policies and general advising processes
5. Identify their role as an active participant in their academic success

Program Description

Major Change Advising serves all undergraduate students who desire to change their majors prior to graduation. Full-time professional staff advisors work one-on-one with students in transition to provide support and guidance through the major change process. MCA appointments are scheduled for 30-minute sessions, and MCA also offers drop-in hours for students who have a quick question and/or are in need of supplemental advisement as they work through the major change process. For highly competitive majors, students are also encouraged and advised for a parallel/alternative degree option. Students are encouraged to matriculate into a new major after two major semesters of meeting with a Major Change Advisor in order to progress to graduation in a timely manner (parallel/alternative majors are also discussed in these situations).

General Appointment Structure and Process

Major Change Advising appointments are structured so that students play an active role and assume ownership for their academic decisions. Curriculum checksheets (see attachment), advisement forms, and plans are utilized to assure that the student is aware of the implications of and next steps for major change. The general appointment process is as follows:

- Introductions & information gathering - the MCA advisor learns more about the student and reasons for wanting to change their major.
- Major Exploration (if needed) - students explore options for new majors and opportunities they have (i.e. internships, research options, etc.) within that major.
- Curriculum checksheet review (see attachment) - advisors then review the new major curriculum with the student, going over classes taken and how they will (or will not) apply toward the new major.
- Supplemental Advisement Form completion (see attachment) – advisors lists courses that can be taken in the following semester that will meet requirements for the new major.
- Major Change Advising Plan completion (see attachment) – the student completes the MCA Plan by identifying the entry requirements for their desired program. They check off the requirements they have met as well as identify those they still need to meet before changing majors. They also identify any additional next steps they need to take. The plan is reviewed with the student and signed to acknowledging their agreement of the necessary steps to take to complete the Change of Major process.
- Major Change Advising Alternative Plan (see attachment) – this plan is only completed if a student has not met requirements to change majors after two semesters. The advisor will discuss alternate majors with the student so that they do not extend time to graduation.

Procedures used in program evaluation (quantitative and/or qualitative).

Both quantitative and qualitative measures are used to evaluate the effectiveness, impact, and outcomes of the Major Change Advising program, including measurement of Key Performance Indicators, Student Post-Appointment Surveys (measuring outcomes), and campus-wide effectiveness and qualitative surveys for advisors to evaluate the accuracy of Major Change Advising.

Service Utilization Data

Service utilization is tracked weekly to identify trends and staffing needs. Data is submitted annually for the Provost's Blueprint to measure key performance indicators and includes overall visit data, unique student visits, visits by college, appointment attendance and fill rate.

Post Appointment Major Change Status

MCA Advisors also utilize features within the EAB Student Success Collaborative system to track and communication with students post appointment. Students are added to watch lists based on intended major change and are tracked and provided communication regarding major change until a change of major is official.

Internal major change tracking processes allow us to track the number of semesters it takes a student to change their major after first meeting with an MCA advisor.

Post Appointment Student Survey

Students complete an online post-appointment survey. Included in the survey is an assessment of the resources reviewed during the appointment and the next steps that the student must take to successfully change majors.

For example, the following question is used to assess and confirm that the student knows their responsibility in the major change process:

I must do the following to complete my change of major (Check all that apply)

- Raise my GPA to: _____
- Attend a Change of Major Workshop with this College/School: _____
- Apply for new major by this date: _____
- Apply for a new major with this College/School: _____
- Take the Change of College form to this College/School: _____
- Other

Campus Partner Feedback (UAC Initiatives Feedback Survey)

A UAC Initiatives Feedback Survey was completed by UAC staff and campus partners who work closely with the UAC. For MCA services, the survey assessed referrals to MCA and invited recommendations for improvement.

Results/outcome (impact on students and/or the institution)

Prior to the start of Cross Campus Advising in 2010, students didn't have a resource for advising support outside of their academic college or department. Historically, students identified academic advising as an area of needed improvement. Once major change advising services were available, students would seek out support for not only major change, but for many other unmet advising needs.

For the past four years, there has been a steady increase in the number of students who met with MCA and successfully changed their major within one, two, and three semesters. Between 2013-2014 and 2016-2017, the number of students met with MCA and successfully changed their major after one or two semesters increased from 49% to 58%. This may be attributed to two factors:

1. Student education and awareness of the requirements and processes for changing majors (i.e. GPA requirements, application/workshop deadlines). They are making a more informed choice than they would have without MCA.
2. Professional staff advisors that allow for continuity of advisement services and follow-up communication with students.

The 2016-2017 UAC Initiatives Feedback Survey provided helpful insight and recommendations from staff. When asked, “How often do you refer students to Major Change Advising?”, 50% responded with “weekly” or “a few times a month”. When asked about the accuracy of the information students received from Major Change Advising, 69% responded “most of the time” or “always”.

Quotes from the survey include:

- “I am very thankful major-change advising exists...this is probably the best addition to advisement at USC that I've seen in many years.”
- “I'm not sure how to suggest improvement - I give a lot of credit to the major change advisors because it must be extremely difficult to try to master the nuances of all the different majors on campus.”

This positive feedback is indicative of the work MCA has done to build academic partnerships and ensure accuracy of the information they provide students.

Most recently, feedback from Major Change Advisors has helped with bringing a greater awareness to the need for additional support for students who are either not progressing within their current major and must change majors or are not meeting entry requirements for their intended major in a timely manner. Undergraduate Studies is a new program and eligible students may now be assigned to an Undergraduate Studies Advisor in the University Advising Center for an intentional advisement and plan for major change. Now, students who may have otherwise floundered in a major or between majors for multiple semesters have a dedicated advisor to help them create a plan to get on the best path for a degree.

Potential for adaptation by other institutions

The Major Change Advising program has now reached a place where there is a structure and tools that could be modeled and implemented at other institutions. This program would be effective at both large and small institutions. In a decentralized environment, we have found that one of the most important things to do is to work with and through the colleges and not above or around them. You must have the support and buy in from the colleges, both administration and advisors. At our institution, the professional staff model has proven to be most effective as the training and information that must be learned is comprehensive and constantly changes.

Suggestions for beginning implementation a similar program at another institution include:

- Development of an advisory group to identify the greatest needs of students changing majors
- Identification of all academic program entry requirements (GPA, course completion, etc.)
- Identification of all academic program major change requirements (application, workshop)
- Identification of current staff/units to house major change advising program
- Gathering of institutional major change data