

Pikes Peak Community College: A Model for Change

Institutional Description:

Established in 1968, Pikes Peak Community College (PPCC) is the largest and most diverse post-secondary educational institution in southern Colorado and offers the most widely accessible and affordable education in the Pikes Peak region. As part of the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) it is in its 50th year of operation, PPCC is an open access, public community college offering associate of arts, associate of science, and associate of applied sciences degrees as well as various certifications in career and technical fields. PPCC has the highest percentage of Pell Grant recipients in the Colorado Community College System among urban colleges at 34% of the total student population. With over 150 programs of study and three full-service campuses across the city of Colorado Springs, PPCC serves approximately 19,000 students annually and contributes 390.3 million dollars to the local economy.

History of Program Development:

In the fall of 2012, the leadership of PPCC reviewed the results of the most recent Community College Survey of Student Satisfaction and Engagement (CCSSSE). The data showed a marked dissatisfaction on the part of students with how available academic advising was being delivered at the institution. As a result, only 49% of students were seeking out an advisor (CCSSSE data). The College had, for many years, split academic advising services between the New Student Scheduling office and faculty advisors. The New Student Scheduling office operated with part-time advising staff and as the name implies it was a “scheduling” service for new students who were beginning their journey at PPCC and was the epitome of transactional advising. New students who sought out the office were “scheduled” into classes, assigned to a faculty advisor, and then told to meet with their faculty advisor prior to the next registration period. It was

reactive in nature and students simply queued at the door for hours as the registration window began to close from one semester to the next.

A name change in 2008 to “Career Planning & Advising” (CP&A) did nothing to change the proscriptive and transactional nature of advising at PPCC. The economic downturn in the fall of that year led to a record number of students attending PPCC and this growth strained an already ineffective advising system which, coupled with a lack of formalized training for faculty and CP&A advising staff, discouraged any development of advising best practices and trends.

Subsequently internal surveys showed a number of factors contributing to the dismal 2012 CCSSSE findings, most significantly the data showed that nearly 75% of students who registered for fall classes did so when faculty were not available between spring and summer semesters yet culturally the institution still considered faculty the primary advising component of the college. In truth, despite the changing needs of our students, academic advising at PPCC had remained essentially unchanged for nearly two decades.

Recognizing the need for substantive change, institutional leadership created a mandate for changes to advising by including it in one of the Institution’s 5-year Strategic Goals beginning in the fall of 2013.

FY13 Focus Goal: Aspire to perfection in each student’s first year experience by... learning everything we can from institutions with successful academic advising systems while developing a plan to transform our own. (PPCC Executive Leadership Team, 2013)

The President of the College, Dr. Lance Bolton, tasked the Vice-President of Student Services (VPSS) and the Director of CP&A with developing a vision and a plan for accomplishing the Strategic Goal by radically reformatting the academic advising model at PPCC. A comprehensive committee, the Advising Model Task Force was formed, consisting of

institutional representatives from instructional and student services leadership, faculty, advising, administrative assistants, and students.

Goals and Objectives:

Using the 2012 CCSSSE data as the starting point, the Advising Model Task Force thoroughly investigated institutional advising practices. Kicking things off, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness conducted a detailed survey of faculty advisors, CP&A advisors, students, and administrators to determine their perceptions of academic advising. It was critical to learn how each unit perceived the role of an advisor and what exactly “academic advising” meant to them. In November of 2013, following nearly a year of data-gathering and review which included visiting other institutions (Valencia, Sinclair, and Johnson County Community Colleges) and inviting to campus top experts in the fields of advising and student services (Dr. Terry O’Banion, Dr. George Kuh, and Dr. Kay McClenney from the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas) the Task Force presented its findings to the leadership of the Institution. The findings clearly demonstrated the need and rationale for a stronger, more reliable, effective, and responsive advising connection that could reach a significantly larger portion of the student body and could still be nimble enough to address their most pressing advising concerns. With the President’s support, the VPSS and the Director of CP&A began redefining how academic advising serves, supports, and teaches students at PCC.

The recommendations of the Task Force included:

- Moving to a case management advising program by increasing full-time advising and administrative staff within CP&A
- Creating a strong core of fulltime, professional advisors in a centralized office for students

- Integrating technology solutions to streamline communications, scheduling and student access to appointments with advisors
- Transitioning faculty advisors to a well-defined “faculty mentor” role that would create a stronger sense of “connection” for students
- Creating a robust advisor-training program that is adaptable, up-to-date and comprehensive enough to meet the needs of professional advisors and those who advise students in informal settings.

Program Description: 2013-2015:

In order to implement the recommendations of the Task Force, the CP&A office transformed from 10 part-time and 4 full-time advising staff to an office of 15 full-time professional advisors and 8 part-time advising staff. The college president injected \$250,000.00 into the department to facilitate new positions and supportive technology.

From the very beginning, an identified challenge was how to divide students into caseloads that ensured equal distribution among advising staff but still made sense academically. At PPCC, there are 4 academic divisions, each headed by an Academic Dean. However, the divisions vary in size and scope and dividing students simply along these lines was neither equitable nor logical. Ultimately, the conclusion on how to assign students drew inspiration from Colorado’s use of the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) at the secondary level. The ICAP is aligned with the Colorado Career Cluster Map and by dividing the college’s programs along the career cluster guidelines (and by association, assigned Holland codes), a system for logical and equitable distribution of students was developed.

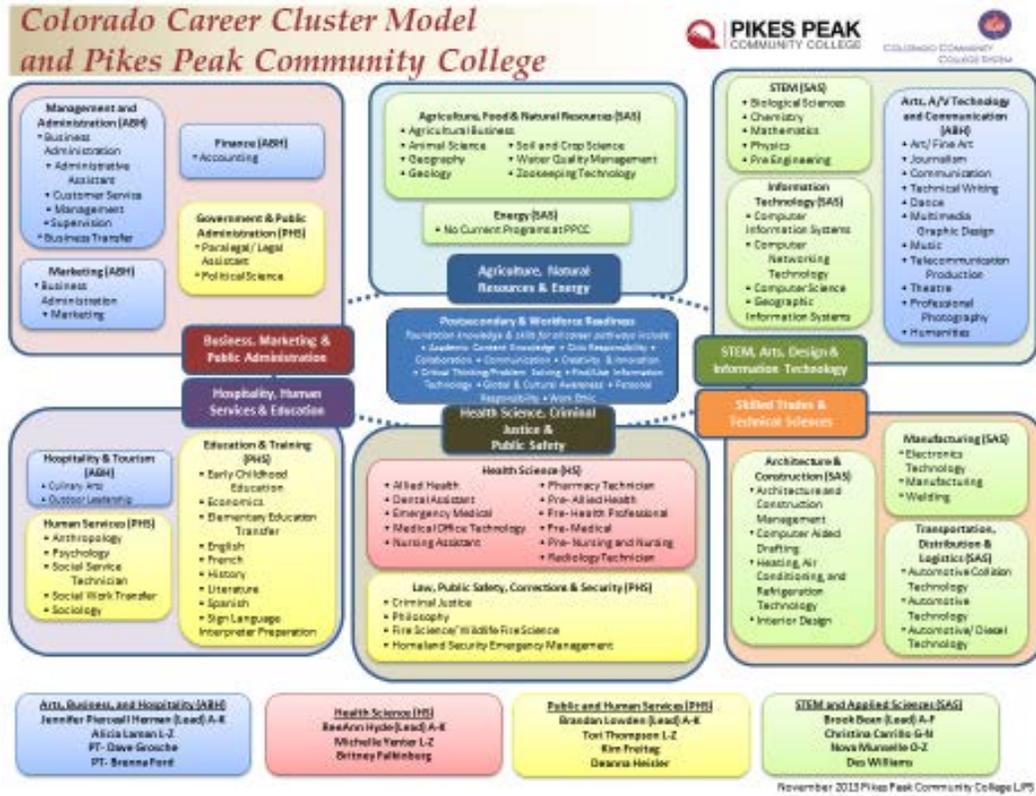


Figure 1. Pikes Peak Community College Majors by the Advising Career Cluster. This figure illustrates how PPCC programs of study are divided by Career Cluster in the A&T Department.

A second major challenge was that for over 2 decades advisors in CP&A (previously New Student Scheduling) had been almost exclusively State of Colorado retirees, who worked part-time and who were limited to the number of days they could work in a calendar year. Expanding the fulltime staff was not enough. There would still be an operational need for part-time advising staff. In the new model, a close partnership was developed with the Student Affairs and Higher Education master's degree program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS). By employing graduate students who were seeking careers in student services, CP&A was able to grow an established, trained, and enculturated workforce that created a ready pool of candidates for any full-time openings.

The effectiveness of the transition relied heavily on the ability to identify technology that would serve the needs of staff and students with regard to access and reporting and that could be easily integrated into developing practices and processes. After considering several options, the institution purchased a scheduling and appointment tracking system (SARS) that was adaptable, web-based, and which allowed for multiple layers of data collection for assessment purposes. Beginning in the fall semester of 2014, once the foundational pieces of the transition began to fall into place, individual student caseloads began to be assigned to professional case manager-advisors. Caseloads were and still are sizeable – with each fulltime advisor managing a caseload of approximately 850 students and part-time advisors managing approximately half that number. Career Planning & Advising also established a departmental assessment program that assesses Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's) within CP&A. The assessment of learning within advising is essential to ensuring that CP&A is connecting with students in a learning and supportive way. CP&A, as a part of Student Services, received high praise from the Higher Education Learning Commission for the work accomplished in this regard (HLC Site Visit Report, 2014). As a result, advising and leadership staff from the department have presented on the department's assessment program at NACADA regional and state conferences sharing the success of its assessment program.

Program Description: 2016-2018:

As institutional data began to reflect the correlation between the changes in advising and the steady growth in retention rates, graduation rates, and degrees awarded, the effectiveness of the changes to advising lead to the further expansion of the department. In November 2016 the Career Planning & Advising Department absorbed the Testing Department and together they formed what is now the largest department in the Student Services Division, the “Advising &

Testing” Department, further demonstrating the institution’s commitment to and belief in

the efficacy of the transition and the importance of effective advising in the student experience.

This move led to the creation of a new position within the department; one that would bridge the space between advising and testing and ultimately facilitate a reduction in the number of placement tests required by students with a goal of decreasing barriers to the student journey.

The Entrance Advising Specialist position was created and an “advise first, test second” protocol lead to a reduction of over 20% in the number of placement tests given in 2017 when compared to 2016 – while enrollment grew, bucking a national trend in community colleges, in the academic year beginning fall of 2017. As performance improved institutionally, demands on professional advising staff increased correspondingly and in December of 2016 the president recognized the dedicated work of the advising staff and gave each of the fulltime staff an 8.1% pay-increase.

Procedures for Program Evaluation:

PPCC’s Institutional Effectiveness (IE) department has worked closely with Advising & Testing in the transition to the case-management model. Data collection is key and IE has been instrumental in conducting quality surveys and in interpreting nationally recognized surveys (CCSSSE, SENSE) and in guiding elements to be examined to determine effectiveness.

Customized advising questions are used in the CCSSSE survey that aid in capturing qualitative and quantitative elements. Important data points are also extracted to show correlation with institutional goals and outcomes with regard to retention rates; success rates; transfer rates; and graduation rates.

Results/Outcomes:

Data reflects the efficacy of the new advising model in a number of ways. Institutionally retention rates, graduation rates, transfer rates and the number of degrees awarded have all increased steadily since the transition to the new model began. In the Colorado Community College System of 13 institutions, PPCC has gone in the past 5 years from “worst to first” with regard to retention rates among large, metropolitan schools, (see appendices). Strong correlative data represents the impact that Advising & Testing has had on this steady and positive growth in key student-success indicators. For the Fall 2014 cohort of students (keeping in mind that advising is not mandatory) those students that came through advising experienced at much higher GPA, (.56 on average; .88 for students identifying as black), much higher retention rate (85% fall to spring, compared to 58%; 58% fall to fall compared to 38%), when compared to those students who did not come through advising, (see appendices). Other indicators show the positive changes made in academic advising at PPCC. Prior to our transition, the midpoint of fall registration fell generally around the 2nd week of July, indicating that nearly half of the students who were going to register for fall classes did so in the last 4 to 5 weeks of registration. In 2017, data showed that the midpoint of registration had been moved to the first week of June. This is impactful (as McClenney’s research has shown) it can be assumed students who register early are more likely to persist and retain whereas students who register late are far more likely to be less successful.

Potential for Adaption by Other Institutions:

The new advising model at PPCC can be readily adapted by other 2 and 4-year institutions. Many of the practices outlined in this nomination can be adopted without significant resources. Identifying simple and efficient practices that aligned with solid student development theory and

advising practice completed much of what was accomplished. Several institutions within the⁹ Community College of Colorado System and from across the country have inquired about PPCC's advising transition, and PPCC has shared data and relevant materials with regard to our transition on a regional, state, and national level. Data demonstrates the impactful, positive outcomes for students and is indicative of the resulting culture of cooperation and trust between Advising & Testing and Instructional Services, as well as other Student Services offices. In fact, the increased level of cooperation and trust generated by the new model is perhaps – for any institution – the greatest benefit.

Supporting Materials:

PPCC Official Website: <https://www.ppcc.edu/about>

PPCC Instructional Services Website: <https://www.ppcc.edu/instructional-services>

PPCC Institutional Effectiveness Website: <https://www.ppcc.edu/institutional-effectiveness>

Fall 2015 CCSSEE Data

PPCC Advising Website: <http://ppcc.edu/advising>

PPCC 2013-2014 Complete Data Book:
file:///Users/elizabethmontano/Downloads/Data_Book_2013-2017_2.pdfBook

The PPCC President's Address, Spring 2018
file:///Users/elizabethmontano/Downloads/PRES_Spring_PDW_2018_ACCESS.pdf

Advising data for fall 2014 PPCC students:

