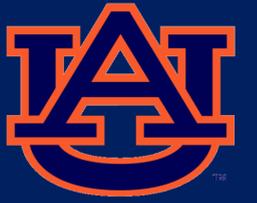




Getting Everyone in the Game

A Proactive Team Approach to Undergraduate Advising

Elizabeth Smith, M.S. & Codi Plaster, M.Ed. – College of Agriculture - Auburn University – Fall 2018



Purpose

The College of Agriculture (COAg) at Auburn University dates back to 1872, when the East Alabama Male College became the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama. As a land grant institution, the college has a mission that is three fold:

- Prepare student to become future leaders in agricultural & environmental sciences, agribusiness, & society
- Make scientific discoveries & innovations & develop technologies related to food, energy, the environment & human health & well-being
- Provide education & training to agricultural producers, agribusinesses & other stakeholders



In 2016, Auburn University implemented a professional academic advising model across campus. The COAg initially allowed each department to determine the best structure for meeting the needs of their respective students. This resulted in an inconsistent approach to undergraduate academic advising across the college. Concerned faculty members within the Poultry and the Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences (CSES) departments verbalized a desire to maintain a positive connection with the undergraduate student population while at the same time passing along the bulk of the academic advising responsibilities to the college's professional academic advisors. Strong relationships between undergraduates and faculty are a tradition within these two departments and the faculty within the departments verbalized their desire to preserve this tradition. The result a Faculty Mentoring Program established and coordinated by both Codi Plaster and Liz Smith, academic advisors within the COAg.

Challenges

Change requires adjustment by all involved and can often be a difficult process. During the development of this program, the COAg transitioned in key administration personnel. Auburn University introduced the role of professional advisors across the campus. And, each COAg department utilized their own unique faculty advising protocol to address the needs of undergraduate students. This approach, however, lacked continuity across the college and resulted in confusion on the part of students and faculty members alike.

A needs assessment plan was created prior to the full development of this program in order to ensure faculty mentors were comfortable with their new role as mentors. The information gained through this process was strategically used to plan the first Faculty Mentor Training for both the Poultry and CSES departments. At this time, the faculty mentors within our 2 departments included approximately 40 associate and full time professors whose undergraduate advising experience spanned from 0-10+ years. A survey was initially emailed to the faculty mentors to identify those aspects of mentoring which were most interesting to the them and the results were used to create the agenda topics for the first meeting. The topics which most interested the mentors were identifying informational deficits related to career, college, campus and community resources and defining the faculty mentor role.

The first Faculty Mentor Training was held November 27th, 2017. It had been scheduled for earlier in the semester but was cancelled due to scheduling conflicts for many of our targeted audience. Fourteen mentors attended and provided constructive and supportive feedback afterwards. A faculty request for additional professional development opportunities was the result. The second workshop is scheduled for Tuesday, September 25th and will focus on communication strategies and skills for working with today's undergraduate students.

In order to ensure that future workshops meet the needs of the mentors, surveys will be distributed following each workshop requesting topics for consideration for future trainings. Current plans are to host 1 workshop each semester if schedules permit.



Moving Forward

For the Fall 2018, the Poultry Science Department has identified 13 faculty members willing to serve as faculty mentors, this includes teaching, extension, and research appointments. A formalized event will be hosted each Fall and Spring semesters to bring faculty and students together in a relaxed but professional setting. Students will be matched with a mentor based on career interests, general compatibility, student preference, and faculty availability. Students are not required but strongly encouraged to confer with their mentors on professional networking, undergraduate research opportunities, student worker positions, internships placement*, career paths, job openings, graduate school process, etc. A faculty mentor booklet is being developed to provide students information on the mentor program, each faculty mentor's background & research areas, as well as information on how to prepare for their faculty mentor meeting, and pages for notes. This program is being coordinated through the academic advisor for the department.



The CSES department has identified 19 faculty members, including 7 members of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System who are volunteering to be faculty mentors for our undergraduate students. Mentor assignments are made by the academic advisor and happen the summer between the freshmen and sophomore year. Mentors and students are paired based upon mutual career interests. Students are then encouraged to meet with their faculty mentors at least once a semester to build that first professional relationship. Topics of discussion during these meetings will include experiential learning and internship opportunities, networking, research experiences, and career plans after graduation. Mentors are also encourage to share information regarding unique course opportunities that are applicable to the student. The CSES department is working to construct a Faculty Mentor page on their departmental website to provide helpful information to both student and mentor alike.