Project Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Development of a comprehensive, customer-serviced based, advisor training program.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>6-Supporting Institutional Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Planned Project Kickoff 06-01-2009, Actual Completion 06-30-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Updated</td>
<td>09-14-2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reviewed</td>
<td>09-22-2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Created</td>
<td>11-24-2009</td>
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<td>Version</td>
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1: Project Goal

A: To increase student satisfaction with the entire advising process and to foster the perception that advisors care individually about students.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Pulaski Technical College began a mandatory advising program for new students in summer 2005. The college only has a limited number of full-time advisors (one full-time advisor was hired in 2005, and that number was recently expanded to three total in 2010) to serve our entire student population of over 11,000. Part-time advisors also serve as the advisors for the majority of new (and current) students. Part-time advisors may work few hours and sometimes only work for one or two semesters, so new advisors are constantly being identified and trained. A comprehensive training program is needed to ensure that all advisors are adequately trained and have the necessary skills to work with our population of students. This project was identified based on data from our participation in Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College, Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, CCSSE, and the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey. Data consistently shows that students are concerned about the knowledge base of advisors, especially related to knowledge of degree plans and transferability of courses. Students also express that counselors and advisors do not “care for them as individuals”.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The division of Student Services will be most affected by this action project. The advising program is housed under Student Services.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Enrollment and registration are the key organizational processes that will change or improve as a result of this action project.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: This project will begin in June 2009 and end July 2011. The project has been divided into two areas of training for both faculty and professional advisors to include a general overall guide to advising (Advising 101) and a hands-on training manual.

The Academic 101 guide will be an overview of the advising concepts and include standard areas of advising that for the most part remain constant. The purpose of the Advising 101 guide is to ensure accurate information is being used across all PTC campuses by faculty and professional advisors. The guide will include fifteen modules:

- PTC’s mission, goals and structure
- Advising expectations of students
- Academic advising
- Institutional expectations of advising
- The advisor-student relationship
- References and resources
- Electronic advising resources
- Special student programs
The hands-on training manual will consist of the tools advisors need to do an actual advising session. The manual will be an online and interactive resource and have an assessment portion to allow for evaluation of advisors’ proficiency level, skills, and knowledge. The assessment portion will also allow for adjustment and modifications of the training as needed. The advisor would have available to view videos of advisors and students role playing advising sessions.

Timeline:

- **Advising Modules**: Modules will be programmed and ready for use by December 2010. Current advisors will complete instruction in these modules by July 1, 2011, with ongoing completion for new hires after that date.
- **Hands-On Training**: Online manual and resources will be ready by April 2011. Current advisors will complete training by July 1, 2011, with ongoing completion for new hires after that date.
- **Information Gathering**: Six distinct needs assessments and outcome evaluations will occur.
  - **Advisor Survey**: Needs assessment will be completed by March 2010.
  - **Faculty Survey**: Needs assessment will be completed by May 2010.
  - **Graduating Student Survey**: Evaluation of current practices and needs assessment (pre-training implementation period) will be completed by July 2010.
  - **Current Student Surveys**: Evaluation of current practices and needs assessment (pre-training implementation period) will be ongoing throughout Fall 2010. Both local and Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory surveys will be conducted.
  - **Professional Advisor Focus Group**: This piece will be completed by September 2010.
  - **Faculty Advisor Focus Group**: This piece will be completed by October 2010.
- **Ongoing Outcome Evaluation**: Following July 2011, students and advisors will complete outcome evaluation instruments to gauge effectiveness and promote improvement.

6: **Project Success Monitoring**

A: Students will have the opportunity to complete an evaluation, either online or paper, about their satisfaction with the advising process. Evaluations will take place in mid-semester after students have had the opportunity to attend classes and effectively evaluate the information received. Advisors will be asked to complete evaluation instruments as well. Based upon evaluations, the training and follow-up for subsequent semesters may be revised. See timeline section for detailed description of evaluation methods and dates.

7: **Project Outcome Measures**

A: The benefits of the project will be better prepared, more satisfied students with increased engagement with the advising process and with individual advisors and counselors, leading to increased retention and graduation rates for students. We will know we have accomplished our project when students show increased satisfaction, through evaluation, with the knowledge and customer service skills of advising and counseling staff. Advisors trained will also evaluate the training immediately following and mid-semester, and this information will be used to revise training as needed.

8: **Other Information**

A: Based on PTC data and best practices at other similar colleges, the Director of Counseling and Advising, the full-time advisors, and the Title III Student Tracking Specialist will develop a training program to include: (1) an online advising manual (2) online training modules; and (3) a series of on-campus training opportunities. All training will focus on building an excellent knowledge base of college degrees and certificates, college policies and procedures, services available to students, and customer service skills. In addition, a communication plan will be developed to effectively gather information about changes in degrees, policies, procedures and new
programs so that advisors can be informed and knowledgeable. Follow-up activities will also be planned such as (1) advisors will contact those advised via e-mail and/or letter or telephone/text to welcome to PTC and encourage return visits to the advising center and (2) advisors will contact those advised to congratulate on campus achievements or send e-cards for birthdays or holidays. The key assumption of the project is that effective training of advisors will lead to increased student satisfaction, and ultimately, though improved information, guidance, and engagement, increased retention, and degree completion rates.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The project has been divided into two areas of training for both faculty and professional advisors to include a general overall guide to advising (Advising 101) and a hands-on training manual.

Timeline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Anticipated Completion Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advising Modules</td>
<td>In development</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on Training</td>
<td>In development</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Gathering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor Survey</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Survey</td>
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<td>May 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduating Student Survey</td>
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<td>June 2010</td>
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<td>Current Student Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Advisor Focus Group</td>
<td>In progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Advisor Focus Group</td>
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<td>October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation of Advising Taskforce</td>
<td>In development</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
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2: Institution Involvement

A: The Director of Counseling and Advising and the Coordinator of Academic Advising are in the process of organizing an Advising Task Force (ATF). The purpose of this Advising Task Force (ATF) is to develop a comprehensive advising model for implementation of advising strategies and assessment activities to improve the advising system and training processes at Pulaski Technical College. The ATF will also be charged with developing and expanding an Institutional Advising Plan to include suggestions for division advising plans and training modules that will contribute to the continuous improvement of an advising model benefitting the student, the institution and the community. The purpose of an Institutional Advising Plan is to propose an advising structure of divisional faculty advising which builds on the integration of all appropriate components and resources for an effective, comprehensive approach to student and institutional advising needs through training and professional development of advisors.

The ATF would come together to integrate and collaborate on the development of an Institutional Advising Plan with the following objectives:

- Enhance the collaboration between academic and student support areas to ensure continuous improvement to advising system
- Devise strategies to emphasize a synergistic relationship between faculty advisors and professional advisors
- Define responsibilities for division advising in a general scope (individual division deans and faculty will set up division advising plans)
- Develop a support and compensation plan for faculty advising
- Continually recommend improvements for advising processes campus wide
- Be familiar with student and institutional concerns and be an advisory to student support services and academic affairs on these concerns
- Assist divisions in the evaluation of the division advising plan
- Assist divisions in providing opportunities for advisors to become more knowledgeable and skilled with academic advising professional development
- Assist with the development of methods to ensure that the information collected from students and/or faculty for advising plans is used for program improvement and enhancement
- Ensure quality and availability of divisional academic advising so that students will have confidence the advising they receive is accurate, timely and relevant to their particular needs

3: Next Steps

A: In partnership with the Director of Institutional Research, the Director of Counseling and Advising is in the process of analyzing and evaluating the completed assessment feedback from faculty, current students and graduates to modify and adjust the two training pieces appropriately for optimal learning and ensure advisors are meeting the needs of students.

The assessment of academic advising will be a continuous and ongoing process in an effort to continually update the training modules and manuals. With input and modifications from the Advising Task Force and analysis of the assessment surveys will allow for more defined and useable training modules.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Working on this project has brought to light a few areas that could be identified as effective practices and with better training could become best practice. One of the most important is the role of faculty advisors.

PTC has many faculty who do unofficial advising with students. This is an effective practice as they are able to develop a mentoring relationship with students. Findings by Foundations of Excellence, Achieving the Dream Community Colleges Count, National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), American College Testing (ACT), and Noel-Levitz confirm that one of the most important behaviors of retention and student success is the formation of supportive relationships. As we are identifying these “unofficial” advisors the Director of Counseling & Advising invites faculty to attend the current advisor training process. The collaboration is a win-win situation for both parties. Training the faculty to ensure they are using the advising tools accurately and appropriately helps them to better serve the student needs and the faculty can educate the advisors about their particular areas of specialization and help professional advisors identify academic needs of students interested in specific areas.

Currently most faculty in the unofficial role of advisors are not recognized for their service as a necessary and valuable entity of PTC’s core mission. Access to professional development materials will allow these unofficial faculty advisors the same information and guidelines as professional advisors in our centralized advising model.

5: Project Challenges

A: The following are challenges identified at this time:

1. Ensuring the development of valid and reliable assessments is important to obtaining accurate feedback.
2. Limited computing staff is available to assist with the development of the online training modules and manuals.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The college is to be applauded for developing an action plan to implement a comprehensive advising plan. This is an important Action Project that not only deals with AQIP Category (6) Supporting Institutional Operations, but also Categories that include (1) Helping Students Learn, (3) Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs, (7) Measuring Effectiveness, (8) Planning Continuous Improvement and (9) Building Collaborative Relationships. The project team appears to have an understanding of the challenges, the importance, and outcomes necessary for the development of a comprehensive advising plan. The College writes that the project's goal is to develop a plan that aligns presumably with the institution's mission and values, as well as with other literature and organizations that advocate increasing student persistence. The College appears to want an advising process that would support student success within the institution. Thus, as the College further reflects on the activities completed during this past year (the inputs), the project team may want to
articulate specific outcomes, which now allows for or will position Pulaski to provide specific evidence of outcomes (the outputs). This would most notably include the beginning of an implementation for an advising process. The project team noted activities undertaken the past year to achieve the goals for this process, but may want to reflect on the reasonableness of its progress given the target completion of July 2011. To that end, projects of this type are often difficult in scope so that the College’s faculty and staff may not gain sufficient momentum over time. Clearly, the evidence provided by College suggests that the project team is still gathering input to inform its overall advising plan.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The College remains on the path of gathering input from a sufficiently diverse group of participating stakeholders, and the formation of the Advising Task Force appears to remain a somewhat future development. The College is to be applauded on their involvement of both faculty, as well as non-instructional staff to make sure each constituency is involved in this project. This interdisciplinary approach appears to be composed of faculty and staff that should continue dialogue between and among groups that may traditionally not interact with one another, and this process provides additional support for AQIP Category (5) Leading and Communicating. This project represents a significant activity needed to continue the development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture.

3: Next Steps

A: Implementing a comprehensive advising plan involves many tasks and the participation of many stakeholders. The College identified the tasks, activities, and projects that are required as next steps. No doubt, the institution will need to continue to engage stakeholders and resources in dialogue to ensure that each of the component parts of the new advising plan are in harmony with the overall College mission and values. While the College plans for the implementation of this plan by July 2011, the institution may well want to reflect on the overall outcomes desired and to review the specific due dates for the completion of its remaining tasks.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The College may want to consider this development methodology not only as an effective practice but also a best practice that can be replicated not only in the development of a comprehensive advising plan, but also other types of change that needs to be introduced to the institution. The completion of the plan will by definition introduce further institutional change. The College may also want to reflect that its research methodology as a best practice to be replicated in other institutional projects.

5: Project Challenges

A: Implementing complex, planning projects involve many interrelated tasks, and the College identified the several steps necessary to complete an effective process in this area. The College is on the cusp of making important decisions with respect to defining how their institution will implement a comprehensive advising system in the face of a lack of resource dedicated to this task. The project committee may want to further reflect on the complexity of developing a comprehensive advising plan and be clear about the challenges that may yet still exist. No doubt, the institution will need to continue to engage stakeholders and resources in discussions to ensure that each of the component parts of the comprehensive advising plan integrate with the overall mission, values, processes, and procedures of the College.

To that end the project committee may want to reflect on one or more of the following items.

- What are the consequences if this plan is not implemented by July 2011?
- What steps remain to turn the “informal” faculty advisors into “formal” faculty advisors?
- It is not clear how or if the informal faculty advisors have been used to develop a comprehensive advising model. Would the inclusion of informal faculty advisors advance this plan more quickly?
- What is the involvement of the College’s senior leadership? Could senior leadership be engaged in such a way as to allocate resources to this project to advance the progress?
- Does the institution foresee receiving financial and human capital resources to fully implement the advising plan in its entirety? Question 5 suggests that an insufficient resource exits. Would a scaled down advising plan better fit the resources expected.
- Does the College have internal information about itself through functional areas such as Institutional Research? How could this functional area assist with the development of reliable instruments? Would there be resources to outsource this development?
- The development of advising models generally require human capital with associated time on task. To the extent that the
College employs adjunct faculty, would resources exist that would enable the employment of long-time, valued adjunct faculty to both assist with the development of an advising plan, as well as perform the advising services to students as a means of increasing human capital required for the completion and implementation of this project.

- Finally, to the extent the College has multiple locations, is the College considering plans for ensuring a level quality of advising independent of location?

Finally, the College may have considerable resources at its disposal to supports its strategic planning process. The project committee may, nevertheless, want to reflect upon resources similar to the following that may assist the institution to bring its planning process to a conclusion.


League for Innovation in the Community College: [http://www.league.org/](http://www.league.org/)

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# Project Outcome

## 1: Reason for completion

**A:** Academic advising was identified as an area of concern at Pulaski Technical College based on data from the College's participation in Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College, Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey. Data consistently showed that students are concerned about the knowledge base of advisors, especially related to knowledge of degree plans and transferability of courses to four year institutions. Students also expressed that counselors and advisors do not "care for them as individuals".

The main goal of this AQIP Action Project was to develop an online Advisor Training that would be relevant to all professional advisors and faculty advisors. The key assumption of the project is that effective training of advisors will lead to increased student satisfaction, and ultimately, though improved information, guidance, and engagement, increased retention, student academic success and degree completion rates.

The primary reason for closing this project is that the overall goals of the project have been completed and the project model is in place. Although the AQIP Action project is being closed, the college plans to continually assess the Advisor Training Model to ensure information and resources are up to date and usable by all advisors.

## 2: Success Factors

**A:** Successful aspects of the project would include:

- Collection of useful information and data to build within the Advisor Training model;
- Collaboration of faculty and professional advisors/counselors from all areas of the campus;
- Ability to identify the key informational items needed for the Advisor Training model in order to provide better support/training for those individuals that perform academic advising; and
- Creation of the Advising Task Force (ATF) to focus on the development of a comprehensive advising model for implementation of advising strategies and assessment activities to improve the advising system and training processes at Pulaski Technical College.

## 3: Unsuccessful Factors

**A:** The aspect of this project that was less than successful was that the technology department at Pulaski Technical College is understaffed; therefore, having a person from technology who is dedicated to such an important project has been a struggle. The technology department staff members who provided assistance on this project were great about contributing and supporting when time allowed, but this was not a priority project from a technology viewpoint.