

Proposal to Pilot an Advising Practicum

The Office of Academic Affairs proposes to pilot an Advising Practicum. As a day-long series of events held each term, the Advising Practicum creates space in the academic calendar to emphasize and enhance the role advising plays in a Beloit College education.

Rationale

Advising is central to Beloit's distinctive approach to developing liberally educated men and women. Indeed, it is among the strengths that have secured Beloit's reputation as a "college that changes lives" and make Beloit a national leader among liberal arts colleges. Further, curricular discussions over the past two years have repeatedly acknowledged the centrality of advising in the new curriculum, both because the new requirements demand that students plan effectively, and because strong advising relationships are crucial to student success and the advancement of institutional goals.

The Advising Practicum provides a curricular space for targeted group advising based on students' stage of development as well as their specific interests, needs, and goals. Because it provides a structured opportunity for students to reflect on their educational trajectory and to connect that trajectory to personal and societal concerns and goals, it is highly consonant with the notion of the liberal arts in practice. It also provides an opportunity for academic departments to develop meaningful and innovative disciplinary and career-oriented programming appropriate for their majors, to provide valuable resources for and perspectives on the practice of the liberal arts at Beloit and beyond, and thus to build stronger ties with future alumni.

The Advising Practicum also provides a curricular space for the advising workshops that constitute a central component of the Initiatives Program, the pilot phase of which was endorsed by Academic Senate in May 2010. Setting aside a full day presents various offices, departments and programs with opportunities to inform students about their options (for study abroad, community-based learning, specific majors and minors) and to engage them in imagining possible educational and career trajectories. It also allows the active involvement of seniors and juniors in mentoring and inspiring their younger peers. An Advising Practicum thus enables Beloit to develop innovative approaches to student mentorship that do not necessarily entail a long-term investment on the part of the students involved.

Finally, instituting an Advising Practicum would provide a valuable opportunity to enhance faculty development around advising, and to generate elements of an advising "syllabus." It might also enable faculty to demonstrate their development as advisors in a way not simply based on self-reporting and student surveys, and thus would enable FS&P to attach more concrete value to advising in assessing faculty performance.

Description

During the Advising Practicum, students will attend workshops, panels, and discussion sessions geared toward enabling students in all years of college:

- to reflect on their experiences so as to identify their strengths, challenges, and interests;
- to articulate their goals and develop strategies for achieving them;
- to explore educational and career opportunities with the assistance of faculty, staff, and (current and former) students; and thus,

- to make well-considered choices about their educational and life trajectory at Beloit and beyond.

The day would be structured so as to enable students to attend all events appropriate to their stage of development. The following *hypothetical* schedule is meant to illustrate some of the possibilities, not to be constraining in any way:

9:00 - 10:20	<p>Initiatives Program advising workshops</p> <p>Initiatives advisors (students' liberal arts advisors for the first three/four semesters of college) would engage students in reflecting upon the skills and perspectives they should be developing as students of the liberal arts and members of local and global communities, and why those skills and perspectives matter and have practical value. They would also inform students about opportunities for study abroad, community-based learning, Venture Grants, and so forth. Students would identify their strengths, interests, and challenges, set goals, and identify strategies and resources for meeting those goals. Student mentors (juniors and seniors) would model how thoughtful planning contributes to a rewarding educational trajectory.</p>
10:30 - 11:20	<p>Concurrent sessions (1)</p> <p>These sessions address specific student interests, needs, and goals; they would be led by staff and faculty with relevant interests and expertise. While primarily directed at helping students make informed, thoughtful decisions in the first and second year, they might also include programming for juniors and seniors. First- and second-year students would be directed toward appropriate sessions by their Initiatives advisor. More advanced students would be recruited to help lead sessions or participate in panel discussions. Sessions would address topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing for study abroad Preparing for community-based learning Writing a successful Venture Grant proposal Deciding on a major Sophomore slump to sophomore surge Student leadership positions at the college Planning your Liberal Arts in Practice experience Career planning and preparation Pros and cons of graduate school
11:30 - 12:20	<p>Concurrent sessions (2)</p> <p>More of the same.</p>
12:30 - 1:50	<p>Lunch meetings</p> <p>Departments would host lunches (perhaps simply at a table in Commons or DKs) at which prospective majors could meet and talk with faculty and current majors.</p>
2:00 - 3:50	<p>Programming for majors and minors (prospective and declared)</p> <p>Departments would use this time to offer opportunities for students to explore internship opportunities, career options, graduate study, upcoming course offerings, thesis-writing preparation, current issues in the field, strategies for networking, connecting to alumni, securing internships, and preparing for the job market—whatever a department might consider most valuable for its majors and minors.</p>
Evening	<p>Invited speaker(s)</p>

An inspiring alumnus/a or panel of alumni would speak about how a Beloit liberal arts education has informed their choices and provided valuable opportunities.

Schedule (Two Scenarios)

We propose that the Advising Practicum be held in the middle of the term, just prior to the start of Advising Week. COA may wish to consider other weeks of the semester. In any case, the particular day of the week represents an important decision. We recommend avoiding Monday and Friday, so that students are not tempted to turn the event into a three-day weekend. Because Symposium Days fall on Thursday, we recommend that Thursday also be avoided.

We propose two alternate scenarios for COA's consideration. Scenario 1 describes the costs and benefits of holding the Advising Practicum on Tuesday; Scenario 2 describes the costs and benefits of holding the Advising Practicum on Wednesday.

Scenario 1: Tuesday Schedule

In this scenario, we would hold the Advising Practicum on a Tuesday, and revise the end-of-term and exam schedule to avoid incurring any net loss in class days. The lost Tuesday would be made up by extending classes to Thursday (rather than Wednesday) of the final week of the term. Friday, up to 7:00 p.m., would function as the study period. The first exams would be scheduled for Friday evening from 7:00-10:00 p.m. As before, the exam period will end on Tuesday.

Benefits:

- There would be no fewer class-days per term
- We would no longer need to make the final Tuesday in the term a "Thursday"

Costs:

- Typically, there are more Tuesday-only courses offered than Wednesday-only courses, and more Tuesday/Thursday courses offered than Monday/Wednesday and Wednesday/Friday courses. Thus, holding the Advising Practicum on Tuesday rather than Wednesday will likely impact more courses.¹
- Holding the Advising Practicum on a Tuesday would impact an entire week's class in the case of the Tuesday evening 7:10pm-11:00pm course (Slot V).

Possible Remedies:

- Tuesday-only courses could be moved to Friday for the week of the Advising Practicum. For example, Slot P (Tuesday 1:00-3:50) could be moved to Slot T (Friday 1:00-3:50). Typically, there is only 1 course (or fewer) offered in Slot T. Further, faculty could elect to move Slot O (Tuesday 9:00-11:50) to Friday 7:10-10:10 for the week of the Advising Practicum.
- The 7:10pm-11:00pm Tuesday course (Slot V) could be moved to Thursday 7:10pm-11:00pm for the week of the Advising Practicum. Because Tuesday/Thursday 7:10-9:00 (Slot U) and Tuesday/Thursday 7:10-10:00pm (Slot W) can still meet on Thursday evening, and since there will be an additional Thursday added at the end of the term, the Advising Practicum will have no net impact on Slots U and W in terms of lost class time.

¹ Based on fall 2010, spring 2011, and fall 2011 courses, approximately 19-20 Tuesday-only and Tuesday/Thursday courses were offered. During the same three semesters approximately 10-11 Wednesday-only, Monday/Wednesday, and Wednesday/Friday classes were offered.

Scenario 2: Wednesday Schedule

In this scenario, we would hold the Advising Practicum on a Wednesday and maintain the current end-of-term and exam schedule, in which the last day of classes is Wednesday and exams begin Friday morning.

Benefits:

- Fewer courses will be impacted than with the Tuesday schedule. See note 1.
- There are no four-hour evening courses Wednesday, thus there will be no need to find an alternate time to meet in the same week.
- The Wednesday evening slot that is set aside for all-campus events is conducive to an alumni panel program.

Costs:

- In practical terms it makes little sense to add an additional day to the end of the term, as it will mean adding in an additional Thursday, which is not needed, or turning the final Thursday into a “Wednesday,” but this would mean two consecutive “Wednesdays” in the final week. Thus, the Wednesday schedule will result in fewer traditional classroom hours for Wednesday courses.

Academic Credit

All first-year students and first-semester sophomores² would be expected to participate in the Initiatives Workshops, and would receive 0.25 credits (graded CR/NC) for: a) the development of an academic plan approved by their advisor; and b) their active participation in all three workshops (and therefore also a note on their transcript indicating that they did or did not pass the Initiatives Workshop). As is the case with the FYI seminar, the Initiatives Workshop is not required for graduation, but students who do not earn credit for the course would receive a grade of NC on their transcript. (See accompanying course proposal for details.) Students would need to participate fully in all the workshops (except in documented cases of illness or crisis) in order to be eligible to apply for Venture Grants in the summer of their sophomore year.

The rationale for offering credit for participation in the workshops is threefold. First, and most importantly, students will undertake credit-worthy metacognitive, reflective, and goal-setting assignments, and will be expected to complete those assignments in advance of each workshop in order to receive credit. Second, assigning credit for active preparation for and participation in the workshops signals clearly that the college values the learning that occurs in structured advising workshops of this kind. Third, the workshops are in an important sense, an extension of the FYI seminar, and offering credit for them signals that continuity (1.25 units of credit in total, note, as compared to the 1.5 units we offered in the past for the seminar alone). In response to the suggestion that other incentives, such as requiring participation in the workshops in order to study abroad, might prove weightier, we note simply that only about half of our students study abroad. The workshops are designed to reach and to be valuable to all students. Short of making

² Note that although the Initiatives workshops span only the first three semesters of a student’s education, the relationship with the Initiatives advisor lasts through the fourth semester. Students whose majors remain undeclared by the time of the Advising Practicum during the fourth semester must take part in a special workshop that morning, and must meet with their Initiatives Advisor.

participation a graduation requirement, we do not see a better way to ensure this simple aim than offering credit—for what we fully intend to be eminently credit-worthy work.

The participation of juniors and seniors, both as majors in a discipline and as mentors to younger students, would be solicited and encouraged by faculty. Exploration of potential career opportunities should also serve as a significant incentive.

Responsibilities for Oversight and Assessment

The Advising Practicum will be structured such that the morning sessions are devoted to the Initiatives Program; the afternoon sessions will be dedicated to department and program advising; the evening sessions will offer opportunities for an all-campus event focused on a theme appropriate to the day.

The co-directors of the Initiatives Program will have primary responsibility for designing, carrying out, and assessing the morning sessions. The workshop assessment plan includes both direct and indirect measures, and is part of a larger assessment plan that includes other elements of the Initiatives Program and can be connected to students' subsequent educational choices and coursework, and potentially to written work in the capstone. The written assignments that students produce in preparation for the workshops will be assessed according to a rubric to measure aspects of student agency. The assignments will be graded by the Initiatives advisor leading the workshop, but will also be collected and evaluated as part of the Initiatives Program assessment plan. The same rubric is also used to assess two pieces of writing generated in the FYI seminar, so student development can be tracked over time. The same written assignments should provide a good indication of the degree to which students invest in and benefit from the workshop. (Sample prompts are included on the course proposal form; we are working with Russell Cannon to fine-tune the prompts and rubric.) We will track attendance at the different concurrent sessions, and work with individual session organizers to develop ways of evaluating their efficacy. Finally, Initiatives advisors will ask their advisees to complete an online evaluation of the full practicum, including all Initiatives-related sessions.

Departments and programs will be responsible for designing and carrying out the afternoon session, submitting a brief report to the academic dean after each Advising Practicum. This report will offer a brief description of the specific goals the department or program was aiming to achieve, how the afternoon advising block was used, how many students took part in the various events, and what lessons were learned that will guide future planning and inform best practices across the campus.

The Office of Academic Affairs, in consultation with Alumni Affairs, will be responsible for evening programming featuring Beloit College alumni.

We propose that the pilot phase run for at least five years, both because the assessment plan seeks to connect the written work students produce for the workshops with their subsequent educational trajectory at the college, and because the workshops span three semesters. Five years will enable us to track two classes through their senior year, one class through the junior year, and one through the sophomore year.

At the end of the pilot, the academic dean will then make a recommendation to COA regarding the continuation/discontinuation of the program.