Report of the Task Force on Advising

I. Creation of Task Force on Advising

A. On August 24, 2015, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Chair of Faculty Congress charged the Academic Advising Task Force with a directive to explore and recommend the “most appropriate plan for UH Hilo” to improve student advising. See attached letter.

B. The Academic Advising Task Force members represent the various schools and divisions, and were selected because of their reputations for being strong advisors:

- Kekoa Harman (Ka Haka `Ula O Ke`elikōlani)
- Patrick Hart (Natural Sciences)
- Terrance Jalbert (Business)
- Cheryl Ramos (Social Sciences)
- Bruce Mathews (Agriculture)
- Christopher Lauer (Humanities)
- Jodilynn Kunimoto (Advising representative)
- Faith Mishina (ex-officio) Vice Chair of Congress

C. To improve student retention and to encourage faster graduation rates, the charge to the committee was to select the appropriate model(s) for advising, to propose a timeline for implementation, and to report to Congress the findings. The charge also requests that Faculty Congress ultimately pass a motion endorsing a campus-wide plan for advising.

II. Work done by the Task Force

A. The Task Force on Advising met every other Monday during the Fall Semester of 2015. Specific faculty were consulted to expand the committee’s understanding of key issues.

B. Review of the literature:

i. Models of Advising

- Renick (2014) GPS Advising at Georgia State University.
• Miller (2012) Structuring Our Conversations: Shifting to Four Dimensional Advising Models
• Pardee (2004) Organizational Structures for Advising
• King (2008) Organization of Academic Advising Services

ii. Methods for assessing advising

• Survey Questions collected via UHHiloAdvising@gmail.com
• U.S. Education Delivery Institute evaluation of UH Hilo’s advising network, October 2013.
• December 2013: UHH Student Academic Advising Survey Findings Report
• Fall 2012 Advising During Orientation Week Feedback
• Fall 2013 Advising During Orientation Week Feedback
• Memorandum of Agreement, University of Hawai‘i System, Transfer of General Education Core Requirements, May 2010

C. Review of Past Congress Motions:

1. May 2013 Motion by Mark Panek to identify departments in need of advising assistance
2. September 2013 Minutes: The VCAA reports the beginning of “intrusive advising” in CAS.
3. September 2013: Memo to Chancellor with a Motion to identify departments in need of advising assistance. Motion passed 13-0.
4. October 2013: Memo from Chancellor acknowledging the September 2013 Motion.

D. The Fall 2013 Orientation Feedback reflected both student reaction to advising and the observations of participating faculty. Students rated their advising experience as poor 8.33%, fair 27.78%, good 50%, and very good 13.89%. Faculty observed that the general receptiveness of students during advising week was good. (This appears to be a good time to connect with students.) However, only small numbers of students attended. The biggest problems revolved around transfer students whose records were not in place, and their anxiety levels were high.

E. The survey of faculty in Fall of 2015 appeared to be very successful. Many faculty members expressed positive views of advising procedures. GE was a big complaint. GE is poorly understood by some faculty who consequently refuse to do GE advising.

Another common complaint was that students weren’t assigned an advisor on STAR until 3 or 4 weeks into the semester. The student should know his advisor by advising week, the optimal time for student receptivity.
The delay for transfer students in receiving their credits provoked strong objections from advisors. This lack of credit records frequently leads to incorrect choices for courses, and can delay the transfer student's graduation.

Another complaint dealt with cross-listed courses; the student should be able to select the alpha for which these courses count (like at Manoa).

A strong case was also made that there is no mechanism which formally introduces the student and the advisor to each other. Though advising is not mandatory, there should be a strong incentive for students to seek advising.

F. To show the overlapping responsibilities for advising currently in place, the Task Force developed the attached Chart. Currently, the Campus Advising Center delivers personal/developmental advising, General Education requirements advising, Graduation Requirements advising, Major Requirements advising, aid in selecting classes, and career advising. Faculty in CAFNRM, CAS, COBE and KHUOK participate in advising of major requirements, career, jobs, graduate schools and selecting classes. Point persons in the faculty advise students concerning major modifications, requirements for GE and graduation.
III. Findings and Recommendations

“Shared” Model of Advising at UH Hilo

Advising at UH Hilo is a shared responsibility distributed between the Advising Center, colleges and departments, and special programs. The Advising Center is primarily responsible for advising all first time freshman in their first year, all undeclared majors, and major changers. Students seen at the Center also include first time transfer students upon matriculation before they are assigned an advisor in their major, and anyone who requests extra-departmental advising because of varying conflicts or difficulty contacting their advisor. They are also the advisors on duty for all students during the three-month Summer and one-month Winter Break period. Colleges and their respective departments are assigned responsibility for advising students who have declared a major, including transfer students. Special Program advisors, (i.e., Student Support Services, Disability Services, Kipuka, Minority Access and Achievement Programs, etc.) provide extended advising services and programs unique to the populations they serve.

College- and Department-Level Advising

Finding:

It seems clear that the vast majority of faculty members are willing to put time and effort into advising their students successfully. In the various surveys the task force consulted, students frequently praised the care and efficiency of their faculty advisors, and faculty members often expressed an eagerness to advise more students if only the students would seek out advising. Nevertheless, we encountered numerous stories of students who fell through the cracks, were unable to identify or contact their advisors, or received conflicting or erroneous advice about university requirements. Some of these anecdotes reflect administrative problems, which will be considered below, but many of these problems also arise from the inconsistency and opacity of different departments’ approaches to advising.

The task force considered several one-size-fits-all approaches, including requiring all students to meet with an advisor before registering, embedding professional advisors in each academic unit, and developing a more regimented course of study for all majors, but in the end we decided that UH Hilo’s diversity was a strength rather than a liability. Asking all colleges and departments to use the same advising model would be both undesirable and likely futile.

One of the largest pukas in our advising structure appears when faculty members don’t know the answer to a question, and refer students in a general way to the Registrar or Advising Center. Colleges need to do a better job of communicating what resources are
available and whom to contact in such situations, but academic units also need a clear decision structure on such issues.

**Recommendation:**

We recommend that each college, department, school, or program clarify its advising model so that colleges and Student Services can communicate more effectively. In particular, we recommend that every department, school, or program do the following:

1. **Elect an Advising Point Person.** The task force recommends that each academic unit elect an Advising Point Person (APP). This person should have familiarity with STAR and both departmental and university-wide graduation requirements. S/he would be responsible for answering difficult advising questions, addressing complex advising situations as are often presented by transfer students, and coordinating departmental advising with the Advising Center and other resources at the University. Some small-to-medium-size departments may decide that it is most efficient for their department chair also to serve as Advising Point Person, but in many programs, the APP will be another faculty member. Given the large amount of work such a position requires, course releases ought to be awarded to APPs in larger programs.

2. **Consider an Embedded Professional Advisor.** The task force also recommends that academic units consider integrating an embedded professional advisor within their unit, and that the administration fund such advisors on a trial basis. Other universities have found tremendous success when full-time advisors set up offices in specific departments to advise students on a drop-in basis. When CAFNRM was able to do so from 2002 through 2004, it had its highest retention rates ever. The Task Force recognizes that there likely aren’t enough resources to move to a universal embedding model, even if advisors were shared across multiple departments, but experimenting with the model in a few large programs might demonstrate its value through higher retention rates.

3. **Decide and communicate how official advisees are divided among the faculty.** Students often seek out advice from the faculty members to whom they are closest, but some of the students who are most at risk of dropping out or falling behind never see their advisors even if the students are contacted by their official advisors. The task force recommends that Division Chairs and/or Deans inform all faculty members of their official advisees each semester, but in order to do so the department needs to communicate how its advisees are distributed among faculty. In some programs, the Advising Point Person may be listed as the official advisor for all students in the major (and should be compensated accordingly), and in other units advising may be divided up alphabetically (or by some other principle) among all full time, tenure-track, or tenured faculty. Furthermore, departments should also specify whether all faculty members in the department are able to sign off on program modifications, or only the official advisor should sign off. Whenever possible,
departments should promote continuity in advising except where students wish otherwise.

Administrative/Campus-Wide Advising

Problem 1: GE advising is particularly problematic, and some faculty refuse to advise the students concerning GE as they do not wish to make mistakes. Overloading the Dean’s office with GE advising questions is not recommended as the Dean’s office deals with all the course modifications.

Recommendation 1a: There should be a campus-wide GE Point Person to whom all faculty could direct their GE questions by email or telephone. It is likely that a course release for this Point Person on GE will need to be granted.

Recommendation 1b: Each adviser should have a GE requirement checklist to be more familiar with GE requirements (an example is attached).

Problem 2: Students need to know who their advisors are by the week before classes. This is especially critical for transfer students whose time to graduation is shorter and whose choice of course sequences must be identified to prevent the student from spending an extra semester or two in the University. This complaint was strongly expressed in the faculty poll.

Recommendation 2a: Create a mechanism that introduces students to their advisor by the week before class. The meeting of students and advisors should take place during advising week and the first week of classes while there still is time to switch to a critically needed class. If the advisor is assigned to a student, s/he shouldn’t be changed unless the student requests a change. Students should be allowed to maintain their familiar advisor or change their advisor if they do not connect well.

Problem 3: Transfer credit evaluations: Perhaps because of understaffing or the use of casual hires, transfer credits often are not evaluated in a timely manner. Transfer students cannot assess accurately which courses they need to reduce time to graduation. This was a major complaint in the faculty poll.

Recommendation 3a: Transfer students should have their transfer credits evaluated by Orientation week, one week before classes start. This would enable advisors to catch redundant classes and substitute classes needed for graduation.

Recommendation 3b: Transfer students should be alerted of the particular importance of seeing an advisor during orientation week in order to avoid delaying their graduation or enrolling in redundant coursework.
Problem 4: There needs to be a better mechanism by which students are introduced to their advisor.

Recommendation 4a: Send an email to students and advisors. The email to announce advising should contain 1) the dates for advising 2) the list of students to be advised and their emails 3) attachments for course modifications, 4) attachments of forms for graduation and an ADVISING SUMMARY TOOL SHEET for each major. (See attachment.) Faculty should maintain an on-going record for each student with the summary tool sheet. Some faculty are more organized than others. Nevertheless, advising comes at a very busy time of the semester, and this inclusive email would speed the advising process. It might also better motivate students to contact their advisors given the details and complications upfront.

Problem 5: Students who change majors often do not know who as been assigned as their new advisor.

Recommendation 5a: Create a mechanism that flags students who switch majors and immediately assigns them an advisor in their new department.

Problem 6: When a student registers for a cross-listed course at UHH, s/he cannot choose the course alpha that applies to the student’s intended pathway. This unspecified intention provokes confusion for both the student and the advisor later on, particularly if several semesters have passed, and the connection is forgotten.

Recommendation 6a: Cross-listed courses should be handled like they are at Manoa. When the student registers, the student should be able to choose the way the cross-listed course should count. This would help the advisor and the advisee.

Problem 7: Seniors are often late in pulling together their documents for graduation.

Recommendation 7a: There should be a Senior Week in September and February before respective graduation application deadlines to encourage seniors to get their classes and paperwork in order for graduation.

Problem 8: Placement Assessments: Many students do not take or delay taking necessary placement assessments for math and natural science courses.

Recommendation 8a: Placement assessments should be taken the semester prior to the student’s enrollment in such classes, and/or ideally at the point of matriculation.
Problem 9: Advising Tools: In the time crunch of the advising period, departments should not only receive the recommended email complete with advisees and necessary forms, but the departments should have several tools to aid advisors that have been created specifically for department faculty.

Recommendation 9a: Colleges and departments should develop program-specific on-line and/or hardcopy brochures, advising sheets, and checklists that advisors can use to guide them in student advising. (See attached Advising Summary and booklet on a major’s core requirements, electives, and credit hours needed which also includes the major’s four-year plan for graduation.)

Recommendation 9b: Hard-copy catalogs should be available to all faculty upon requests.

Problem 10: Under-resourced departments: Advising in large departments is significantly hampered when the number of majors far exceeds the number of faculty and courses offered.

Recommendation 10a: Filling faculty positions for such departments is critical to retention and graduation of students. Faculty and administration alike should continue following a student-centered enrollment strategy in determining and filling university staffing needs.

Problem 11: Under-scheduled office hours: Some faculty members do not schedule the five mandated hours of office hours each week.

Recommendation 11a: Remind faculty that contracts require them to schedule five hours dedicated to office hours each week. All faculty hours and pictures should be posted as directory information online, so students can more easily meet with an advisor.

Problem 12: Bridging the gap between students and department/college advisors. Some students are hesitant to approach faculty for advising and instead rely on their friends for advising which at times results in poor or incorrect advice.

Recommendation 12a: Establish Peer Advising in departments and colleges, building on the resources available within departments/college (e.g. students, Advising Point Person, Department Chair), the Advising Center (e.g. Peer Advisors and Trainers), Special Centers (e.g. PALS/MAPS, Kipuka), and the Registrar’s Office (e.g. STAR training).

Problem 13: STAR exhibits limitations when programs integrate major requirements with general education requirements. These limitations cause reporting issues concerning which courses have been completed and how many total credits have been earned.
**Recommendation 13a:** Continue to improve the STAR system to more precisely and clearly handle these issues.

**Problem 14:** Advisor Training. Faculty are hesitant to assume advising responsibility when they believe they are not adequately prepared.

**Recommendation 14a:** Ongoing training courses for STAR should be continued and publicized. Ongoing training for faculty on relevant topics in regards to advising students across campus should be continued and publicized. Participation in this type of professional development should be recognized and awarded by leadership of the University.

**Recommendation 14b:** New faculty orientation should include a longer and more detailed section educating new faculty members on how to use STAR.

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**Timeline for Implementation**

The Charge Letter given the Advising Task Force suggests implementation of their findings Fall of 2016. To that end, we recommend the following:

1) The first reading of the Task Force motions at the December 18 meeting of Congress.

2) The second reading of the Task Force motions in the January meeting of Congress, and the subsequent vote.

3) If the motions pass, the report goes to the Vice-Chancellor and then the Chancellor.

4) Academic units:

   a) should explicitly vote on the Advising Point Person during the Spring semester of 2016.

   b) should develop in-house Advisory Tools sheets and material for their faculty.

   c) that wish to embed a professional advisor should communicate this desire to the VC as soon as possible.

5) Changes in evaluation of transfer students need to be seriously addressed in the Spring semester of 2016.

6) The 14 recommendations should be considered on an on-going basis by the Administration.