Lessons Learned in the Academic Planning Coach Pilot Program

As with any pilot program, the first year of the Academic Planning Coach Program has been a learning experience for everyone. We have developed a wide variety of resources for both faculty coaches and students. These include a comprehensive training curriculum, a simple online record-keeping tool for notes on student meetings and communication with advisors, and an online site that serves as a reference resource for coaching details.

While the majority of our student cohort participated in the program this year, there were many who didn’t respond to the coaching opportunity. So next year, we are opening the program to any of the 3000 students in the QEP Target Group (First-Time-in-College, Degree Seeking, Full-Time students). We will be marketing the coaching program during orientation and asking students to sign-up at the beginning of Fall. While all students won’t take advantage of the Academic Planning Coach Program, those who do will be starting on the right foot, developing a solid degree plan that will lead to successful completion!

Meanwhile, we are also looking for more faculty who would like to join the program and serve as Academic Planning Coaches. We hope to match students to coaches based on campus, and when possible, on schedule/availability and area of study/interest. We hope this will lead to a strong foundation and positive start for both coaches and students. If you are a faculty member and interested in joining the program, please click here for more information.

As an undergrad I attended a medium-sized university where the advising department dealt with thousands of students. It was a big shift for me from my small-town high school counselor who spent hours helping students decide their future path. The advisors at my university scheduled students for thirty minute sessions and expected the student to already have their semester and their future planned out. This was a difficult concept for a student like me who was not yet sure what I wanted to be. Two years later I picked a major and was appointed an advisor from the history department. It was during these advising sessions that I learned just how helpful a college advisor could truly be. My history advisor spent hours with me planning what courses I would take in order to finish my degree and ensuring I felt comfortable with my degree plan. When I became involved in the advising process myself as an Academic Planning Coach, this is what I sought to do with my students.

Over the two semesters I have been an academic planning coach, my goal has been to create an environment where the student is comfortable asking questions about topics such as course selection, financial aid, and issues in their lives that are making it difficult to succeed at Collin College. I have seen students benefit greatly from meetings with a dedicated coach who they feel comfortable talking to about school and life. Through our meetings, two of my students have decided on a career path and have begun to plan how they will get there. It has been incredibly rewarding to see their uncertainty turn into excitement as they have a goal for the future and a plan to achieve that goal. I think that the Academic Planning Coach program has been a wonderful addition to Collin College. It has been a pleasure to be part of the pilot program, and I hope Collin will expand the program so even more students can take advantage of such a great resource.