

University of South Carolina Lancaster

Act 629 – Summary Reports on Institutional Effectiveness

Fiscal Year 2007 – 2008

I. INTRODUCTION

As an integral part of the University of South Carolina, USC Lancaster strives to assist its pre-baccalaureate students in attaining and refining their skills in the areas of communication, critical thinking, cultural literacy, and personal development. Students in the specialized associate degree programs (business, nursing, criminal justice) focus on those areas most appropriate to their professional and educational needs. Broadly committed to equity, USC Lancaster

- Seeks to make education accessible, affordable, and convenient
- Encourages teaching innovation and adaptation
- Encourages participatory student learning
- Provides a supporting educational climate that actively and positively addresses intellectual and cultural diversity, and
- Responds affirmatively to the needs of its students.

A more detailed discussion of the institution's General Education Goals may be viewed online at <http://usclanaster.sc.edu/acadstu/GEG.htm>.

II. ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT AT USC LANCASTER

USC Lancaster views academic advisement as a critical element in student success. Advisement is thus a cooperative effort between students, faculty, staff and administration. Upon admission to USC Lancaster, students are assigned an academic advisor, based on their intended major or area of concentration.

Most academic advisors at USC Lancaster are full-time faculty, although the campus does utilize some part-time and adjunct faculty as well as academic support staff from programs such as the Opportunity Scholars Program and the Academic Success Center, to meet student needs. A complete listing of advisors is found online at <http://usclanaster.sc.edu/admissions/major-advisor.htm>.

Academic Advisors are available to incoming freshmen at all three orientation sessions during the summer months. In addition, all faculty academic advisors are required to schedule and maintain a reasonable number of office hours per week (usually equivalent to the number of hours of instruction – 10 to 15) during the regular semester so as to be available for student advisement.

CONDITIONALLY-ADMITTED (CAP) STUDENTS

USC Lancaster's admissions criteria are identical to those of USC Columbia. The campus is dedicated, however, to providing all students who demonstrate the promise of academic success an opportunity to attain a university education. Thus, the campus is permitted to accept students conditionally who do not meet all requirements necessary for regular admission to the University. These students are designated as Conditionally Admitted (CAP) students and are subject to the following guidelines:

1. Academic advisors carefully assist students in selecting courses for their first year, based on high school transcripts, SAT scores, and USCL assessment tests.

2. Students are permitted to designate a major in any field of their choice and, in most instances, the courses taken will be applicable toward a degree.
3. Students are required to earn a minimum of thirty (30) credit hours at USC Lancaster and have at least a 2.0 grade point average before they will be allowed to transfer and enroll at the USC Columbia campus. (Many majors, however, require a higher GPA. Students wishing to transfer into such programs must meet all requirements of the program.)

A full description of USC Lancaster admission policies may be found online at <http://www.sc.edu/bulletin/Lancaster/admissions.html>.

CAP students are assigned special advisors who have undergone on-campus advisement training at workshops and "refresher" sessions which are held at the request of the Admissions Office or the Office of Academic & Student Affairs. CAP advisors are encouraged to review each student's transcript carefully, assess the student's strengths and weaknesses, and assist with the preparation of an academic schedule which will enhance the likelihood of student success. CAP advisors also explain to the student that in many cases, he or she will not complete all degree requirements within the normal time frame. The goal of the CAP Advisor is to form a reasonable schedule and program of study for the student that will conclude ultimately with the awarding of the academic degree being sought.

USCL COUNSELING CENTER AND THE OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

In addition to regular academic advisement, USC Lancaster maintains an on-campus Counseling Center which provides academic, career and personal counseling. Entering students are informed about the counseling center at Freshman Orientation sessions and are encouraged to make appointments with the center as needed. The Counseling Center can make students aware of services available on campus which may assist them in succeeding in their college career.

Information about USC Lancaster's Counseling Center is available online at <http://usclancaster.sc.edu/counseling/index.html>.

The **Opportunity Scholars Program** (Student Support Services) is one of the five TRIO Programs funded by the United States Department of Education. The Opportunity Scholars Program (OSP) is designed to help first generation college students make the adjustment to college life. OSP helps motivate students to obtain a four-year degree (and beyond) from the colleges of their choice. Through academic advisement and developmental support, the OSP staff will strive to provide students with a solid foundation on which to help them succeed in college.

In terms of academic advisement, OSP staff monitor student schedules, courses, grades, etc. The program also sponsors group sessions (as well as individual assistance) for students to improve time management, study skills, and test-taking skills. The program also provides academic tutoring, cultural events, and assistance with career planning, college transfers, and financial aid issues. Additional information is available online at <http://usclancaster.sc.edu/osp/index.html>.

III. ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

Academic advisement policies at USC Lancaster are established by the administration based on the recommendations of the Academic Advisory Committee of the Faculty Organization, which regularly reviews all advisement procedures.

During the week of 28 October 2007, the Academic advisory administered a survey of faculty, staff, and administration regarding academic advisement at USCL. Thirty-two (32) individuals, of whom twenty-three (23) identified themselves as full-time faculty, responded to the survey. (It should be noted that not all respondents currently serve as academic advisors.) The results of the survey indicated a number of issues of concern which were addressed or which are presently under examination/review:

A. Training

Issue: In general, respondents felt the need for additional advisor training.

Response: The Office of Academic Affairs has agreed to set up advisement workshops when requested.

B. Balancing the Advisement Load

Issue: Currently, a small number of advisors have an unusually large number (over sixty) advisees.

Response: The Academic Advisory Committee is currently working with the Academic Dean and the Academic Division Chairs to make distribution of advisees more equitable.

C. Resources

Issue: Several respondents felt the need for greater (and easier) access to advisement resources and up-to-date materials.

Responses and Suggestions:

- The Faculty Welfare Committee could consider Advisement as an area of expertise in the Mentoring Group Plan.
- One (or more) staff member(s) could be designated as "advisement coordinator," responsible for maintaining a library of up-to-date information for advisors.
- Some resources are available through the Admissions office. Degree outline pamphlets are available for each Associate's degree awarded by the campus (Arts, Science, Business, Criminal Justice, & Nursing), as well as a limited number of USC baccalaureate degrees, including Business, Computer Engineering, Computer Information Systems, Criminal Justice, HRTM, Pharmacy, Psychology, Sport & Entertainment Management, TSTM, etc.
- Many curriculum guides for baccalaureate degree programs at USC are available online and are updated regularly.
- Faculty are encouraged to remain in contact with colleagues and academic departments on other USC Campuses (especially Columbia) in order to be aware of curriculum changes which are proposed and considered.
- Through the Regional Campuses Faculty Senate, USC regional campuses elect a representative to the USC Courses & Curricula Committee. This representative sends regular reports to campus Academic Deans (and to all interested faculty) about curriculum changes which are proposed and considered.

D. Advisement Center

Issue: Should USC Lancaster establish a separate "advisement center" with professional academic advisors instead of utilizing faculty advisors?

Response/Suggestions: Respondents appear to have mixed feelings on this subject:

- 84% believe it is appropriate for faculty to advise students academically

- 47% of respondents consider it appropriate for full time staff members who also teach to serve as academic advisors
- 66% indicated support for establishing some kind of advisement center (with limited responsibilities)
- At least 50% of respondents did not indicate a strong opinion either for or against establishing an advisement center
- Student and alumni survey indicate satisfaction with quality of academic advisement currently provided

In Fall 2007, as a part of its strategic planning process, USC Lancaster surveyed current students and alumni regarding various facets of their academic experience at USCL, including academic advisement. The results of the survey were as follows:

Student Surveys

- 88% of students strongly agree or agree with the statement "USCL's academic advisement program has been helpful and effective for me."
- 89% strongly agree or agree that Advisors are available to assist with academic scheduling.
- 80% strongly agree or agree with the following statement, "USCL has an effective educational, career, and personal counseling program." (11% responded "Don't Know").
- 95% of students think the quality of academic advising is adequate or better.
- 95% of students think the availability of faculty advisors is adequate or better.

Alumni Surveys

- 97.1% of respondents thought the quality of academic advising was adequate or better (2.9% responded N/A).
- 88.6% of respondents thought the availability of career and personal counseling was adequate or better (2.9% responded N/A).
- 97.1% of respondents thought the availability of faculty advisors was adequate or better.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on faculty, student, and alumni surveys, there is a high level of satisfaction with USCL's current academic advisement model. The Office of Academic Affairs will continue to work closely with the faculty Academic Advisory Committee to improve the quality of service by making adjustments where needed. These include:

- A. Regular assessment of advisement loads to ensure equity.
- B. Annual or semi-annual advisement workshops for academic advisors.
- C. Continued updating of degree program pamphlets in Office of Admissions.
- D. Clearly stated procedures during heavy advisement periods. To help students find their advisors, the Committee recommends that advisors post their preferred procedure(s) for coordinating meeting times, on their door and/or on their homepage. Some suggested procedures:
 - Sign-up sheet on advisor's door.
 - Make appointment by email.
 - Make appointment by phone.
 - Walk-ins welcome during specified hours.
- E. Continue to study feasibility/advisability of creating an Advisement Center to serve some students.