



## Undergraduate Advising Training Needs Assessment Survey Report *Executive Summary*

In May 2020, 233 faculty and staff mentors and advisors from departments across the University and three regional campuses completed the Undergraduate Advising Training Needs Assessment Survey. Responses will help to inform future training opportunities offered by the Office of the Provost Undergraduate Studies Academic Innovation Team.

### NACADA Core Competency Model

The survey was based on [NACADA's core competency model](#)'s foundational elements for effective advisor training programs and practice and fall under three major areas:

- Concepts advisors should understand
- Information advisors should know
- Skills advisors should demonstrate

Topics were grouped into these three areas and participants were asked to rate each for levels of importance, responsibility and competency.

It is meaningful to note that for *every topic*, the levels of **importance** and **responsibility** were scored higher (respondents indicated these topics are important and part of their responsibility) than the level of **competency** (respondents indicated they did not feel as competent about these topics), **thus illustrating the need for an advising training program for undergraduate academic advisors and mentors.**

### Next Steps and Recommendations

In collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning, the needs assessment survey will help to inform a project that aims to create an *online training platform* for advisors and mentors across the University. The project name is **Pitt ACT: The University of Pittsburgh Advising Certification and Training Program**. The following considerations for the project have emerged:

- Collaboration across the University for the project will be key to the project success
- Connecting advisors to campus resources and information will be an important aspect
- Pitt-specific advising and mentoring technology will be a focus
- Ensuring a balance between University-wide consistent information and departmental referrals will be key
- Providing additional ongoing/yearly training and professional development opportunities is a must

### Qualitative Responses and Comments from the Survey

“How soon can we start?”

“I'm thrilled to see you're using the NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies. NACADA is a wonderful, invaluable resource for academic advisors and they have done a lot of great work on the history, theory, and practice of advising.”

“It might be good to create different modules for each subject area and then group the modules into levels.”

“The program will need to be flexible as we have advisors in many different programs and roles.”

## Undergraduate Advising Training Needs Assessment Survey Report

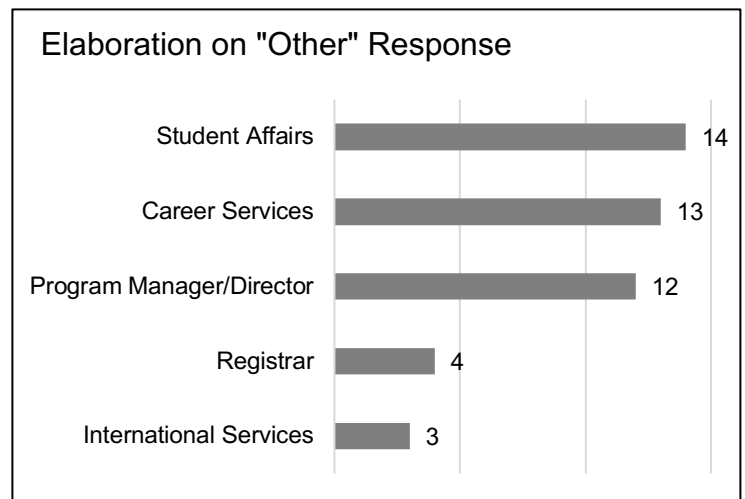
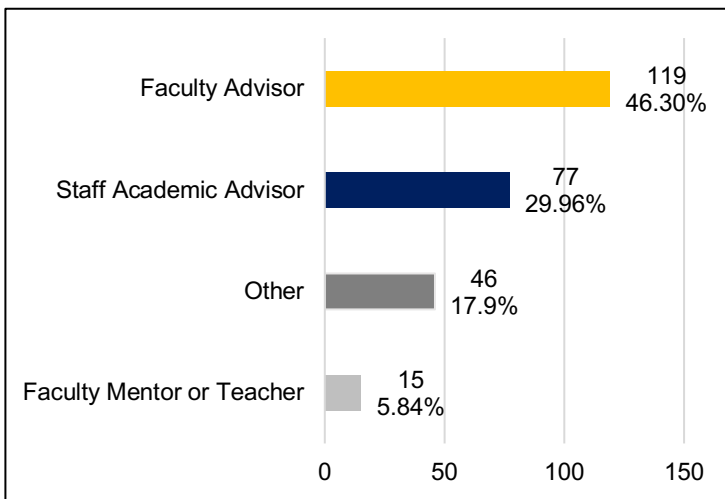
In May 2020, the University of Pittsburgh's Office of the Provost Academic Innovation Team invited undergraduate faculty and staff advisors and mentors to participate in a training needs assessment survey.

The purpose of the survey was to gain an understanding from the advising and mentoring community as to the most important needs for their practice. The survey was based on [NACADA's core competency model](#), with the outcomes of advising practice being conceptual, informational, and relational. Survey responses will help to inform competency areas and learning objectives for future advising and mentoring training programs.

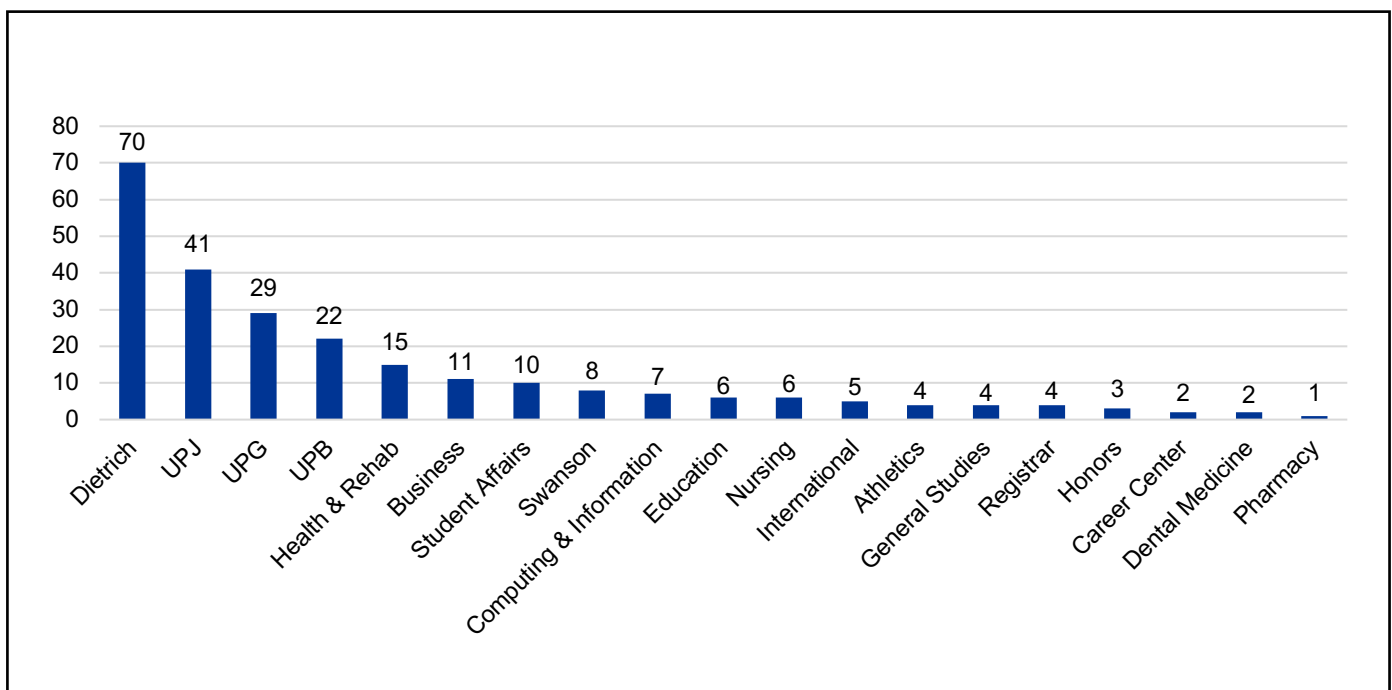
### Scope

A total of **223 participants** completed the survey in its entirety.

*What is your undergraduate advising or mentoring role at Pitt?*



*In which college / school / unit do you advise or mentor undergraduate students?*



## NACADA Competency Questions

Based on NACADA's core competencies, the survey included three sections where participants were asked to rate their **Understanding of Concepts**, **Knowledge of Information**, and **Ability to Perform Skills**. These three major areas represent the foundational elements for effective advisor training programs and practice.

In each section, participants were given a series of topics, and then asked to rate on a **scale of 1-5**:

- 1.) How **important** do you think this topic is for the practice of undergraduate advising and mentoring?
- 2.) Is this topic part of your **responsibility** as an undergraduate advisor or mentor?
- 3.) How **competent** do you feel about this topic as an undergraduate advisor or mentor?

It is meaningful to note that for *every topic*, participants scored the levels of **importance** and **responsibility** higher (respondents indicated these topics are important and part of their responsibility) than the level of **competency** (respondents indicated they did not feel as competent about these topics), **thus illustrating the need for an advising training program for undergraduate academic advisors and mentors, specifically in the following areas.**

### Concepts Advisors Should Understand

- Understanding how to help undergraduate students connect their academics, career, and life goals
- Understanding how equitable and inclusive environments are created and maintained
- Understanding the role and responsibilities of advisor and advisee
- Understanding expected outcomes of advising
- Understanding different advising approaches and strategies

### Information Advisors Should Know

- Knowledge of curriculum and degree requirements
- Knowledge of academic policies and procedures
- Knowledge of FERPA boundaries
- Knowledge of campus resources that address student academic concerns (change of major, tutoring, disability accommodation, test anxiety)
- Knowledge of campus resources that address additional student concerns (mental health, financial issues)
- Knowledge of informational technology tools relevant to advising roles

### Skills Advisors Should Demonstrate

- Ability to take into account a students' skills, abilities, and interests in helping them choose courses
- Ability to create rapport and build advising relationships
- Ability to help students build their network
- Ability to communicate in an inclusive and respectful manner
- Ability to engage in ongoing development of your advising practice

## Importance of the Program

Participants were asked to rate (on a scale from 1-10) how important they thought an online advising certification and training program would be to their work. **80.8% (177/219 responses) rated a 5 or higher.**

Participants were also asked to share some details about what they think is important in an online advising certification and training program and what concepts, information or skills they would hope to build upon in their work as an undergraduate advisor or mentor. The following themes emerged:

- Focusing on technology
- Connecting advisors to campus resources and information
- Training on at-risk students
- Helping students network
- Providing consistency of resources and information across the University
- Providing ongoing/yearly training and professional development opportunities
- Ensuring access or referrals to major and departmental specific training
- Offering information about different advising approaches

## Qualitative Responses and Comments

“How soon can we start?”

“I'm thrilled to see you're using the NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies. NACADA is a wonderful, invaluable resource for academic advisors and they have done a lot of great work on the history, theory, and practice of advising.”

“It might be good to create different modules for each subject area and then group the modules into levels.”

“It needs to be engaging, interactive.”

“Advising is fundamentally about connecting with students. While we can do this virtually, it is more effective in person, as with any inter-personal relationship. Would this training be synchronous or asynchronous? If virtual training were asynchronous, as efficiency would probably encourage, how do you help develop those interpersonal skills? How do you help build a community of advisors? Would the training be mandatory?”

“The program will need to be flexible as we have advisors in many different programs and roles.”

“Information within any University is constantly changing, from policies to degree requirements to reporting lines.”

“Having an online distribution of credits sheet for each major that can be updated as the students enroll that is populated from PeopleSoft accurately would be wonderful.”

“I am a faculty member advising students who are not in my discipline. I cannot answer many questions that they have!”

“Will there be an evaluation to ascertain that knowledge and expertise has been gained as a result of this training?”

“I believe there should be ongoing training, coaching or goal accountability after the certification, to ensure that process improvements are implemented after being certified. It is well known that knowledge gained in a passive format will be lost unless there is ongoing practice and opportunity to perfect new behaviors and attitudes.”

## Next Steps and Recommendations

In collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning, the needs assessment survey will help to inform a project that aims to create an online training platform for advisors and mentors across the University. The project name is **Pitt ACT: The University of Pittsburgh Advising Certification and Training Program**.

The following considerations for the project have emerged from the Undergraduate Advising Training Needs Assessment Survey:

1. Collaboration will be key for the creation and implementation of the program. Thus, the Office of the Provost has formed a workgroup of advisors, mentors and administrators from across the University to develop curriculum and an assessment plan for the project.
2. Providing a foundations level for all advisors and mentors to access is a first step. However, the project may also consider adding different levels for either subject areas or competency areas as a next step and for the certification component.
3. Advisors and mentors are often on the front lines in student success and some of the most salient relationships students will form in college. As such, they need updated and timely information, including how and when to refer students to campus resources. This program will address this specific to the Pitt community.
4. Advisors and mentors are increasingly asked to utilize more technology for their practice. Providing training (onboarding and on-going) is vital to their success. This program will address this for Pitt advisors and mentors.
5. Pitt students, advisors and mentors alike crave consistency in policy and resource information across the University. This project will provide access to this information in an equitable way for all who participate.
6. Pitt students often transition from one school/department/unit to another or seek additional majors, minors, certificates or support in more than one place. Providing access to this resource information through training programs and online toolbox information for all advisors and mentors and their students is vital for student success.
7. The online training program is one way for advisors and mentors to gain concepts, knowledge and skills. We also need to continue to offer additional opportunities for our campus community to learn, collaborate and network in this space.
8. Advisors and mentors seek to gain best practice knowledge about the profession and practice of advising, learning more about approaches in the field. The program will seek to connect advisors and mentors with this information.

*Prepared by:*

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For questions or more information about the report, visit our website  
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