

Criterion 4

Faculty, Staff, and Students

4.6 Advising and Career Counseling

CEPH Criterion

There shall be available a clearly explained and accessible academic advising system for students, as well as readily available career and placement advice.

CEPH Required Documentation

- a. Description of the advising and career counseling services, including sample orientation materials such as student handbooks.
- b. Description of the procedures by which students may communicate their concerns to school officials, including information about how these procedures are publicized and about the aggregate number of complaints submitted for each of the last three years.
- c. Information about student satisfaction with advising and counseling services.
- d. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.

4.6.a. Advising and Counseling Services

Required Documentation: *Description of the advising and career counseling services, including sample orientation materials such as student handbooks.*

All departments in the school provide academic advising services that help ensure that students receive information they need to complete their program successfully. Services include group orientation sessions at the beginning of the academic year, orientation handbooks, and ongoing advising from faculty, staff, peers, and alumni.

Orientation

Every degree program in the school sponsors sessions that introduce incoming students to curriculum, training and service opportunities, financial resources, faculty, and student services staff. Some of the orientation programs also incorporate skill development, preliminary testing, team building, and other exercises. Students in the HPM residential master's programs spend an entire week on academic and social orientation activities, including a ropes course (team building exercise). Even students enrolled in distance learning programs typically spend several days on campus, touring school and campus resources before starting classes. NUTR holds an all-day retreat for new and returning doctoral students and faculty at the beginning of the school year.

During orientation, departments give each student a handbook or academic manual specific to the degree program. The handbooks provide essential information on academic and other requirements, expectations, resources, timetables, policies, and procedures. Prospective and current students may also access handbooks through the school's website, as well as via other online document management tools (e.g., Blackboard) accessed through their department's webpage. (Sample materials are in the Resource File.)

Advising

Department faculty members and student services managers are students' primary resources for advice on fulfilling degree program requirements and managing course work successfully. Although advising varies by and is tailored to students in specific degree programs, common features include:

- Faculty advisor assignments based on interests and skills;
- Regular faculty-student advising sessions;
- Mechanisms for switching advisors, if necessary;
- Access to adjunct faculty who also mentor and advise students; and
- Occasional support (for students and their faculty advisors) from OSA

Each department has at least one staff person dedicated to helping students manage access to courses, keep track of requirements, complete degree and course-related paperwork and more. Department student services staff also play a key role in notifying

students about academic-related information from degree program directors, the Graduate School, and the university.

Current students are another important source of advice on degree requirements, course selections and other academic issues about which new and other students may have questions. The BIOS Student Association and the NUTR Coalition work with student services staff to match incoming students with current student mentors. Current EPID students volunteer for Peer Counsel, a group of students who are on call to answer questions from new students.

Career and Job Placement Counseling

Career counseling services are available from departmental, school, and university sources.

Department-Based Services

Academic advisors and other department faculty provide one-on-one career counseling geared to individual students' internship and job placement needs, and also help students make employment contacts. In addition, each department has at least one staff person who helps students find internship and career opportunities. HPM has a Career Services Office and a director of professional development to facilitate and monitor summer and postgraduate placements (<http://tinyurl.com/hpmprofdev>; the department places approximately 100 students in practica each summer).

Each department also has a group of active alumni who volunteer to mentor current students. Alumni help students make critical connections between their academic experiences and their next career steps and take an active role in providing students with career-related information. The EPID Student Association, for example, invites alumni from its degree programs to participate in annual panel presentations and networking sessions on career paths, job opportunities, school-to-workforce transitions, and more. EPID faculty and staff provide administrative and financial support for these activities, including funds to help alumni travel to the university. HPM's voluntary alumni liaison program for undergraduate and master's students, HPALS, is another example of a well-organized alumni advising system that provides career and personal guidance. Launched in spring 1997, HPALS matches students in one-on-one mentoring relationships with HPM alumni (and, in a few cases, non-alumni "friends"); in 2007-2008, there were 28 student-alumni pairings. The department provides a resource manual to help structure the mentoring relationship.

Schoolwide Services

Students in all departments draw on OSA as a career resource. The director of career services in OSA offers a wide range of career counseling and job placement services to all students in the school, including:

- Individual counseling;

- Workshops (e.g., interviewing skills, resume critiques);
- Career symposia (featuring alumni);
- Annual Internship and Career Fair;
- Etiquette dinners (dining tutorials that introduce students to the proper way to present themselves professionally, greet others, socialize, and dine during a job interview, business meeting, or formal affair) and other student-coordinated programs; and
- eRecruiting and other online career resources (<http://www.sph.unc.edu/careers/>).

Student services staff throughout the school use email, web pages, listservs, and other communication mechanisms to link students with internship and job opportunities.

In fall 2008, the OSA director of career services formed a coordinating group comprising all staff who formally dedicate some time to career and placement advising. The coordinating group's primary purpose is to help career services staff provide a more efficient and comprehensive employment network for all public health students. OSA also has tasked the coordinating group with improving the way the school collects data on internships and job placements. Currently, the school relies on department-specific processes and an OSA exit survey to collect placement data; these approaches yield useful information but are time-consuming and probably are less efficient than a centralized system might be.

University Services

Students also have access to career counseling and placement services provided by University Career Services (UCS) (<http://careers.unc.edu/>). UCS offers a variety of services to facilitate the search for internships, part-time jobs, and career opportunities that are occasionally utilized by School of Public Health students, primarily undergraduates. On the whole, however, the primary sources of support for School of Public Health students for these services are their departments and OSA.

Other Counseling

Faculty advisors, along with school and department student services staff, may provide non-academic counseling to students on topics such as time management and conflict resolution. In situations where professional counseling is needed, faculty and staff refer students to the appropriate university office. The university offers counseling resources in a number of areas:

- Counseling and Wellness Services (Campus Health Services) provide students with confidential mental health services (<http://studenthealth.unc.edu/index.php>).
- The International Student and Scholar Services Office supports international students with services regarding passports, visas, travel, and employment regulations (<http://oiss.unc.edu/>).
- The Office of Scholarships and Student Aid Counseling offers comprehensive advice and services on financial matters (<http://studentaid.unc.edu/>).

4.6.b. Student Feedback

Required Documentation: *Description of the procedures by which students may communicate their concerns to school officials, including information about how these procedures are publicized and about the aggregate number of complaints submitted for each of the last three years.*

A variety of mechanisms at the school and university levels are available to students who want to express concerns about their program experiences or about the school.

Schoolwide Feedback Mechanisms

There are numerous opportunities within the school for students to provide feedback to decision-makers. New student orientations are an initial source of information, and program handbooks guide students to faculty advisors and student services staff. OSA regularly publicizes—on calendars, bulletin boards, and online—upcoming student meetings with the school’s deans. The student feedback section of the school’s website also reminds students of feedback mechanisms, and reports summary results and responses (<http://tinyurl.com/studentfeedbk>). Within the student body, student leaders collect feedback from students through email and online solicitations.

To summarize, school feedback mechanisms include:

- Faculty advisors and student services staff;
- Student representatives who participate in department and school governance;
- Monthly meetings with Dean Rimer and other school deans (including online sessions for distance learning students);
- Individual and group sessions with the assistant dean for students, on an as needed basis; monthly attendance by the assistant dean for students at the Minority Student Caucus meeting; semi-annual meetings of the OSA Advisory Board with the assistant dean for students;
- Presentations by student government representatives to the Dean’s Council regarding student concerns;
- Schoolwide surveys;
- Course evaluations; and
- Department exit interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

The school’s Student Input Hotlink is also available for students who wish to present issues and concerns anonymously to school leadership. The link is on the school’s website and is publicized to the entire student body in a weekly email that contains school announcements. In addition, students frequently email the dean with feedback and suggestions, and she responds promptly.

University Feedback Mechanisms

The university provides several additional mechanisms for students to submit complaints or grievances. The university Office of Student Affairs supports a student grievance process for issues related to discrimination, harassment, and other unfair practices: <http://tinyurl.com/uncgrieve>. In addition, there are policies and procedures for the adjudication of grade appeals, which are described in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* (<http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>) and the *Graduate School Handbook* (<http://handbook.unc.edu/>). These policies and processes are publicized on UNC web pages, as noted immediately above, in the school's degree program handbooks, on department websites, and on the school's website, <http://tinyurl.com/sphadvising>.

Table 4.6.b. displays the number of complaints from School of Public Health students over the past three academic years, by complaint mechanism.

Grade appeals begin with the course instructor and, if not resolved at that level, move on to subsequent levels as prescribed by the relevant process (undergraduate or graduate). The school has not had any undergraduate grade appeals, and graduate grade appeals are relatively rare. When students in the school file formal grievances or grade appeals with the university, the resolution of each case follows university procedures for adjudication.

Complaint Mechanisms	Academic Year		
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Student Input Hotlink	*9	13	11
UNC Student Grievance Process	0	1	0
Undergraduate grade appeals	0	0	0
Grade Appeals to Graduate School	0	0	0

*January – June 30, 2007; Hotlink launched in January 2007

Addressing Student Grievances and Complaints

The school's faculty and leadership take student concerns, grievances, and grade appeals very seriously. At the school level, staff and faculty members who collect complaints and concerns expressed through student feedback mechanisms, quickly report them to appropriate individuals or organizations in the school for consideration and response. For example, the assistant dean for students forwarded student complaints regarding the lack of wireless Internet access in some areas of the school to the assistant dean for information technology (IT); in response to this feedback, the school's IT staff were able to provide necessary access.

The assistant dean for students plans to provide an annual student feedback report to the Dean's Council, summarizing feedback from the school's Student Input Hotlink, schoolwide surveys, and other data collection mechanisms. Brief monthly accounts will be presented subsequently. Analysis and discussion of this type of report will allow the school's deans,

department chairs, student representatives, and others to identify trends and patterns across the school, laying the foundation for policies, programs, and other responses to alleviate problems.

4.6.c. Satisfaction with Advising and Counseling

Required Documentation: *Information about student satisfaction with advising and counseling services.*

At least once a year, the assistant dean for students surveys the entire student body for input about their experiences in the school. Table 4.6.c. shows student satisfaction with advising and counseling services. The results indicate very high levels of satisfaction with general advising in May 2007, with over 72% of respondents satisfied with the services provided by faculty, staff, and the Office of Student Affairs. A *majority* of students in May 2007 were satisfied with career-related advising, although the level of neutral responses and dissatisfaction was higher than desirable.

In May 2008, while 61% of respondents continued to be satisfied with advising from the Office of Student Affairs, only 45% were satisfied with other advising services or career counseling and placement services. In addition to indicating a possible change in the quality of advising in the school from May 2007 to 2008, there are at least three other plausible explanations for the shift in these results. First, different cohorts may have different experiences; future longitudinal analysis may clarify this. Second, in May 2008, a set of questions related to public health competencies was added to the survey preceding the advising questions. This may have influenced views about advising, since students had not previously been prompted to think about their academic training in detail before they considered their satisfaction with advising. Third, the competency questions increased the length of the May 2008 survey. To offset this and encourage completion of the survey, advising questions were condensed from six (with two specific questions for faculty, staff and the Office of Student Affairs) to three (with specific questions for career counseling and placement services and the Office of Student Affairs and a general question about other advising services); this accounts for the "--" entries on table 4.6.c.

These survey results should also be put in the context of respondents' overall assessments of their experience in the school. In May 2007, 91% of respondents were satisfied overall with their decision to attend the school, with 48% of these *very* satisfied. In May 2008, 96% of respondents were satisfied overall with their choice of school; of these, 53% were *very* satisfied. (Surveys are available in the Resource File.) In sum, while advising services may be one aspect of the school that could benefit from some improvements, views about these services are probably not lowering overall satisfaction with the school.

The schoolwide survey is an important assessment tool because it captures feedback across programs. While creative efforts to increase response rates have succeeded, the results are still based on a minority of the student population. Consequently, school and

department leaders combine this feedback with input from other mechanisms to get a more comprehensive picture of student satisfaction.

The current data indicate the need for more precise and representative results to establish students' actual satisfaction with advising and career counseling services. The first assessment step would be for the faculty and staff leaders of the degree programs to establish additional measures of satisfaction. For example, dissatisfaction with access to faculty advising would warrant different responses than dissatisfaction with the quality of faculty advising.

Once measures are established, a survey focused on student advising and career counseling would help establish a more comprehensive picture of students' views. Leaders of the degree programs would be charged with helping to ensure that a majority of their students provide feedback on this survey. A concerted effort to establish representative results (i.e., response rates of more than 50%) are key to determining what improvements are most needed.

After the comprehensive survey, the general questions on the regular survey will be used to indicate the impact of changes or shifts in views each semester. Also, once every two years, the comprehensive survey will enhance the general data.

Table 4.6.c . Satisfaction with Advising and Counseling Services (Schoolwide Survey)												
	May 2007 (response rate = 25%) N = 1,275				May 2008 (response rate = 34%) N = 1,314				May 2009* (response rate = 42%) N = 1,374			
	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	# with an Opinion	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	# with an Opinion	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	# with an Opinion
Advising Support/ Services												
General												
Faculty advisor	72%	12%	17%	315	--	--	--	--	72%	15%	14%	568
Student services staff	84%	9%	6%	290	--	--	--	--	70%	21%	9%	542
Office of Student Affairs	72%	24%	4%	144	61%	36%	4%	332	33%	57%	10%	293
Other advising services	--	--	--	--	45%	36%	19%	329	--	--	--	--
Career-Related												
Faculty advisor	54%	23%	23%	233	--	--	--	--	49%	33%	18%	464
Student services staff	62%	20%	18%	190	--	--	--	--	40%	45%	15%	392
Office of Student Affairs	57%	37%	12%	86	--	--	--	--	28%	59%	13%	286
Counseling and placement services	--	--	--	--	45%	36%	19%	301	--	--	--	--

4.6.d. Assessment of Advising and Career Counseling

<i>Required Documentation: Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.</i>

Strengths

- Clear, easily accessible program policies and procedures
- Well-defined and supported student grievance procedures
- General student satisfaction with advising and career counseling services

Challenges

- Raising response rate in student satisfaction surveys
- Monitoring and assessing the extent to which the school translates student concerns into actual improvements
- Generating and maintaining comprehensive, up-to-date internship and job placement data

Future Directions

- Enhance coordination of department and school-level career and job placement counseling services
- Improve systems for collecting and reporting internship and job placement data
- Increase student participation in assessments of advising and career counseling services
- Maintain a high level of student satisfaction with advising and career counseling services

This Criterion is met.
