



## Post Achieving the Dream Study Issue Brief on Efforts to Transform Advising

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Two cohorts of 16 Washington community and technical colleges participated in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count (AtD) from 2006 through 2015, with the goal of increasing student success and closing equity gaps. Funding for these cohorts was provided by College Spark Washington. As part of the initiative, we conducted an independent, third party evaluation, also funded by College Spark Washington, to document and evaluate the impact of AtD on participating colleges, provide timely feedback to the colleges to help inform their efforts, and document lessons learned and their implications for policy, practice, and systems. This included conducting regular college site visits and structured interviews, analyzing Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) data provided by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, participating in statewide meetings of the colleges, and reviewing AtD reports and other documents.

This issue brief is part of a post-AtD study funded by College Spark Washington that takes a deeper look at the impact of AtD on the participating colleges and their implications for efforts to increase student success and close equity gaps moving forward. This brief is focused on advising. It reviews the AtD colleges' advising interventions; profiles two AtD colleges' advising interventions that took a systems approach and built an enhanced, proactive advising model; and assesses the lessons learned from AtD colleges' advising efforts and their implications for policy, practice, and systems.

This brief draws on evaluation work done over the years of the initiative, additional college site visits and interviews with those involved in the AtD advising interventions, and a review of research in the field.

### **About this series:**

This is the second in a series of issue briefs analyzing the impact of Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count on two cohorts of 16 Washington community and technical colleges that participated in AtD from 2006 through 2015, with funding support from College Spark Washington; and the implications for efforts to increase student success and close equity gaps moving forward.

The first issue brief focused on institutional change and assessed the overall progress made by colleges in achieving broad institutional changes; the factors affecting this, positive and negative; and the lessons learned about institutional change at community and technical colleges. Future issue briefs will focus on precollege reforms; broad, strategic professional development; and equity. Additional years of college level student outcome data will also be analyzed.

# REVIEW OF ACHIEVING THE DREAM ADVISING INTERVENTIONS

Almost all of the 16 community and technical colleges that College Spark funded to support their AtD work undertook advising interventions during that time period<sup>1</sup>, as shown in the table below. We categorized these interventions as follows: entry/first-year; classroom-based; targeted to specific groups of students; proactive; program area specific; and technology supports. The categories reflect the various aspects of advising that were addressed by these colleges' AtD interventions. They also align with directions in which the field of advising is headed and are consistent with approaches to advising suggested by Guided Pathways essential practices and the Community College Research Center's Sustained, Strategic, Intrusive and Integrated, and Personalized advising model (described later in this issue brief). A check mark indicates that the college included AtD intervention activity in that category at some point in its work. We discuss the key elements in each approach and the value it can add for students, and provide examples of promising interventions in each category. We would like to note again here that this brief is meant to focus on a specific time period related to AtD work, and that some of these colleges have since pursued improvements in advising going forward.

## Entry / First-Year Advising



**Why is this important?** Early advising serves a key purpose in welcoming, engaging, and guiding students when they enter college—setting the stage for students to feel that they belong in college and that they have some initial purposeful direction in their studies. And more broadly, the provision of advising in a student's first year can help them avoid the kind of early aimless wandering that leads to excess credits, a demotivating lack of direction, and using up financial aid before completion. The intent is to give students the early structure and information they need to create and follow an educational plan that will lead to a credential. Early advising also provides the opportunity for early identification of potential barriers and making connections to college services and resources.

About half of the 16 colleges, as part of their AtD work, provided some form of advising to new students either shortly before or during their first quarter. (We include orientation here only if it had an identifiable advising component). The coverage and intensity of early advising interventions varied considerably. Some colleges targeted their efforts to specific groups; others, to all new students; and levels of student “touch” ranged from brief group advising during onboarding to one-to-one work on educational plans.

One example of an innovative approach to entry advising came from Edmonds Community College, where faculty and staff would try to meet students right after placement testing and walk them over to New Student Advising group sessions—an action meant to welcome and engage students and prevent early student loss after testing. Edmonds' Triton Jumpstart Orientation (at last report, scaled up to be

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1. College Spark funded six colleges during 2006-10: Big Bend, Highline, Renton, Seattle Central, Tacoma, and Yakima Valley. It funded 10 colleges during 2011-15: Bellingham, Clover Park, Edmonds, Everett, Grays Harbor, Lower Columbia, Northwest Indian College, Skagit Valley, Spokane Falls, and Whatcom.

College	Entry / first-year advising	Classroom-based advising	Targeted advising for specific groups	Proactive advising	Program area specific advising	Technology supports	Summary
Bellingham	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Proactive advising. Includes mandatory advising/registration element, advisor identification of early needs, assignment to students by program of interest, and work with program faculty.
Big Bend		✓	✓				Regular advisor visits to college success classes. Mentoring offered to 1st quarter Latino students (later discontinued).
Clover Park		✓	✓				Lowest-level developmental English class linked with advisor-taught college success class to target extra support to high-risk students.
Edmonds	✓		✓				Faculty/staff-provided group advising after placement testing, to about a third of new students.
Everett	✓						Mandatory entry advising and mandatory 3rd quarter faculty advising.
Grays Harbor			✓				One coach added—first targeted to at risk students; later, to students close to graduation; then absorbed into student services as generalist.
Highline			✓				ABE/ESL-to-college intervention included some 1:1 faculty advising to help with transition.
Lower Columbia						✓	Canvas course advisor tool developed (automated advisor assignments, improved communications, etc.) and other technology advising aids.

College	Entry / first-year advising	Classroom-based advising	Targeted advising for specific groups	Proactive advising	Program area specific advising	Technology supports	Summary
Northwest Indian College	✓	✓	✓				Entry advising including ed plans, financial planning, etc.; mid-term outreach to at-risk students; first year experience advisor attending FYE class.
Renton							N/A
Seattle Central							N/A
Skagit Valley	✓						Group advising for new students as part of orientation. Participation estimates varied.
Spokane Falls	✓				✓	✓	New advising system created. Each academic department designed its own advising model, with consulting, training and online tools provided by faculty counselors. Students with less than 30 credits required to meet with advisor twice a quarter.
Tacoma	✓	✓	✓			✓	First quarter advising; advisor dashboard tool for early alert; college success class required for academically at-risk students that integrates advising/creating ed plan into class assignment.
Yakima Valley	✓						Advising for developmental math: math faculty-developed tools for advisors to use in encouraging students to take math and placing them correctly.
Whatcom						✓	iPASS integrated into their broad FYE AtD intervention.

mandatory for all new students) included a curriculum focused on dependable strengths, self-efficacy, and resiliency. And Bellingham asked entering students to complete the College Student Inventory<sup>2</sup> as part of their entry activities so that advisors could do early, proactive reaching out to new students who might need extra support.

Several colleges mandated entry or first-quarter advising for all new students, with at least a couple enforcing this through blocks on registration. Colleges that made significant efforts to provide most or all of their new students with educational plans included Bellingham, Everett, Northwest Indian College, and Tacoma.

## Classroom-based Advising



**Why is this important?** Advisors go to where the students already are rather than waiting for individual students to seek them out. It also allows for working with groups of students, increasing advising reach and engagement with and among students. Classroom-based advising can be used to focus on a selected theme, subject, or program, and be integrated into instruction through class assignments and activities. It generated some innovative approaches during AtD.

AtD-related work in this area was done by around one-third of the colleges. These efforts varied in their intensity, from advisors making informational visits to college success classes all the way to serving as co-instructors in selected classes.

Some promising examples focused on ways to integrate advising into instruction. Both Tacoma Community College and Northwest Indian College incorporated advising-related assignments into classes. Tacoma's college success class, aimed at academically at-risk students, included doing education plans as class assignments. Northwest Indian College taught developmental English students how to write financial aid essays and apply for scholarships—combining writing instruction with proactive advising on financial aid (identified as a significant barrier in retaining students fall-to-fall). Clover Park Technical College linked several sections of their lowest-level development English class with an advisor-taught college success class. While these efforts covered limited numbers of students, there is potential in classroom-based advising for a much broader student reach. Note that is also possible for college success classes to function in this way—but whether they do would depend on curriculum and instruction approaches.

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2. See <https://www.ruffalonl.com/complete-enrollment-management/student-success/rnl-retention-management-system-plus/college-student-inventory>.

## Targeted Advising for Specific Groups



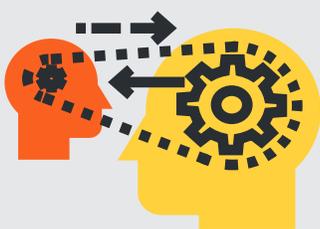
**Why is this important?** Targeted advising takes advantage of students being clustered in a specific group or class. It can thus include both an efficiency component and at the same time deepen student engagement through cohort-building. It allows for customizing advising supports that can best fit specific groups' cultural interests, values, and needs, including the development of a comprehensive, holistic approach with academic, leadership, mental health, and other components connected to college success.

Half of the 16 colleges did some form of targeted advising as part of their AtD interventions. These included providing extra advising or mentoring assistance to specific racial/ethnic or low-income groups; to individual students identified as being at-risk through early alert-type information; to groups of students testing at low placement levels for math and/or English; and to students who had not declared a program intent.

About half of these efforts remained small and eventually petered out. However, some colleges used their initial efforts as a template for expanding their advising work. For example, Bellingham Technical College began its broad enhanced advising model by targeting proactive advising to pre-program students because their data showed those students left at higher rates, but as described later in this brief, they expanded the model over time into a much more comprehensive advising system.

When targeted advising is done as a separate small effort, it seems much more likely to stay small or fade away due to either labor intensive elements or from lack of use or effectiveness. Its promise may be more likely to be realized when it is an intentional part of a larger, coherent advising system.

## Proactive Advising



**Why is this important?** Proactive advising connects advisors with students before needs arise. It is state-of-the-art advising that combines elements of prescriptive and developmental advising to engage students and build relationships, develop student knowledge and skills in managing college goals and career exploration, monitor student progress and provide help before problems manifest themselves, and give them information and guidance at key decision points. For the purposes of this brief, we define proactive advising as a coherent, comprehensive advising structure that builds in multiple advising contacts initiated by advisors and/or faculty. An ideal model might also include a case management approach in which each student has a consistent advisor or advising team throughout college.

Bellingham Technical College's enhanced advising intervention included many elements of a proactive advising system, including advisor-initiated contacts with students, early efforts to identify and offer help to

at-risk students, a student tracking system that allows advisors to monitor progress of students on their caseload, and advisor/program partnerships. Spokane Falls' early alert intervention went well beyond the minimum auto-letter to students, and included both professional advisors and peer advisors who were assigned to reach out on a case by case basis to provide help.

### Program Area Specific Advising



**Why is this important?** Advisors that work in specific program areas develop advising expertise in their those areas, including specific knowledge about course requirements, career options, and employers in the field. They can become familiar figures in and around classrooms, building relationships with their students over time and participating in teaching/advising partnerships with instructors.

Although this approach to advising is gaining popularity as Guided Pathways spreads, only a couple of colleges did related interventions during their Achieving the Dream time. Bellingham Technical College made this a cornerstone of its enhanced advising intervention, with advisors assigned a caseload of students based on student programs of interest. Those advisors worked with faculty to ensure students were on track, visited classrooms, and developed ongoing working relationships with program faculty. Spokane Falls designed a new system in which each academic department developed its own advising model, in consultation with an assigned faculty counselor and supplemented with optional-use faculty training and access to relevant student information.

### Technology Supports



**Why is this important?** The development of new technology tools is helping colleges to automate certain components of advising. Technology tools can help with assigning advisors, making appointments, monitoring progress, creating and tracking degree plans, standardizing notes and information about students and being able to share such information with faculty and staff who need to know it, scheduling, and other tasks. This in turn can allow advisors to make the best use of their training and abilities to work with students when needed. The adoption of these tools can produce significant improvements to the reach and quality of advising if the tools are integrated into a coherent advising system that makes uses of its various resources in an intentional, strategic way.

During Achieving the Dream here, about one third of the participating colleges included some aspect of this in their interventions. Examples ranged from Lower Columbia's adaptation of Canvas for faculty and staff to organize and track their advising to the development of broader student tracking tools by Tacoma and Bellingham. In the middle of their Achieving the Dream work, Whatcom Community College also

participated in a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation iPASS grant in 2013, implementing an online degree planning tool and early alert system. While this was not technically part of their AtD work, it is likely that it had a meaningful impact on their First Year Experience AtD intervention, and the college recently reported that the iPASS tools have allowed it to pursue other educational initiatives for which it might not otherwise have had the resources.

This field—technology tools that support or enhance advising—is in a state of rapid development. It will be important for colleges to view these as part of a larger, strategically designed advising system rather than as ends in themselves.

## COLLEGE PROFILES: BELLINGHAM'S ENHANCED ADVISING AND RENTON'S HIGH TOUCH ADVISING

### Bellingham Technical College's Enhanced Advising

Bellingham Technical College is one AtD college that took a systems approach to its advising intervention, with a focus on building an enhanced, proactive advising model. This model takes into account all of the key elements identified in the last section of this issue brief: entry/first-year advising, program area specific advising, targeted advising for specific groups, classroom-based advising, proactive advising, and technology supports.

#### Key Elements

- **Entry/first-year advising.** Bellingham's onboarding process includes required small group advising and registration sessions organized by program of interest. As part of these sessions, students meet their academic/career advisors; take the College Success Inventory (CSI), the results of which are used to help identify students with immediate needs, tailor and target advising actions, and connect them to needed services and supports; register for classes; learn about available resources; and network with other students in their program of interest.

The mandatory nature of these sessions is enforced through blocks on registration.

For the most part, the academic/career advisors students meet with as part of the small group advising and registration sessions will be the same advisors they work with throughout their time at the college, according to Caryn Regimbal, Bellingham's director of advising and career services.

Other regular advising "touchpoints" during the first year include follow up on quarterly three and six week progress surveys submitted by program faculty, as part of the college's early alert system; and group registration sessions, which often take place in-class.

- **Program area specific advising.** Academic/career advisors specialize in major program areas or pathways (i.e., nursing and health, business and computer technology, engineering, advanced manufacturing, transportation and mechanical technology, industrial technology, culinary arts, and fisheries and aquaculture). As a result, academic/career advisors develop knowledge of the programs and relationships with faculty.
- **Targeted advising for specific groups.** Initially, Bellingham and its academic/career advisors targeted enhanced advising to pre-program students—those preparing to enter their programs—because of lower retention rates for those students. It was subsequently expanded to serve both pre-program and program students. However, there are academic/career advisors who specialize in serving adult basic education students, with the goal of increasing their transition rate; and academic transfer students.

In addition to the advising provided by academic/career advisors, there are also coaches funded through TRIO and Title III grants who provide coaching as well as academic and student supports to low income students, first generation students, and others. And coordinators for workforce funding programs such Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET), Opportunity Grant, and Worker Retraining provide coaching and support services, along with funding to eligible students.

The advising, coaching, and support efforts of academic/career advisors, Title III and TRIO coaches, and workforce funding program coordinators are coordinated through student success networks. These are technology backed networks that make it possible for all those working with an individual student to see other providers in the student's network and case notes. Faculty are also part of the student success networks.

One feature of the student success networks is prioritization when it comes to identifying which network provider will serve as a student's first point of contact for something such as a three or six week progress survey submitted by faculty, according to Regimbal. For example, if a student has access to a TRIO/Title III coach, the first point of contact will be the coach. This makes it possible for academic/career advisors to serve students who don't have access to a TRIO/Title III coach.

Another feature is differentiation in terms of roles and responsibilities. For example, academic/career advisors focus more on program specific academic planning and direct work with program faculty.

There is also collaboration among academic/career advisors, TRIO and Title III coaches, and workforce funding program coordinators when serving students they have in common.

- **Classroom-based advising.** As part of enhanced advising, academic/career services are integrated into the classroom. For example, academic/career advisors go into the classroom to help students with next quarter registration and conduct career workshops. TRIO and Title III coaches also go into the classroom to provide services and supports.

One of the benefits of in-class, embedded advising is that advisors and coaches meet students where they are rather than requiring students to come to them. However, faculty are protective of class time and there needs to be a value-add from their perspective, according to Dave Dettman, one of Bellingham's academic/career advisors.

- **Proactive advising.** Academic/career advisors, TRIO and Title III coaches, and workforce funding programs coordinators all have assigned caseloads of students they actively reach out to. For academic/career advisors, caseloads are based on major program area or pathway. Every student is assigned an academic/career advisor. For TRIO and Title III coaches and workforce funding program coordinators, caseloads are based on students meeting eligibility requirements (e.g., low income, first generation student, etc.).

Academic/career advisors also have a quarterly advising curriculum that spells out specific advising activities by week (e.g., follow up on faculty's three and six week progress surveys and group registration).

With enhanced advising, academic/career advisors see students more regularly and, as a result, can go into more depth, according to Dettman. A relationship is built. It's also made a difference with faculty. With academic/career advisors having prescribed program areas, faculty and deans know who to talk to.

This makes it possible for faculty to focus their advising efforts on content as well as industry, careers, jobs, and mentoring, according to Dettman and Regimbal.

- **Technology supports.** Bellingham's enhanced advising makes extensive use of technology supports, including an advisor data portal, which provides easier access to student information; an early alert system; degree planning and degree audit functions; student progress monitoring; the technology backed student success networks; and student communications. It has used Hobsons' customer relations management (CRM) system and its Connect, Retain, and AgileGrad modules to support the work. In 2017, it phased out Retain and added Starfish.

### **Policies, Systems, and Practices**

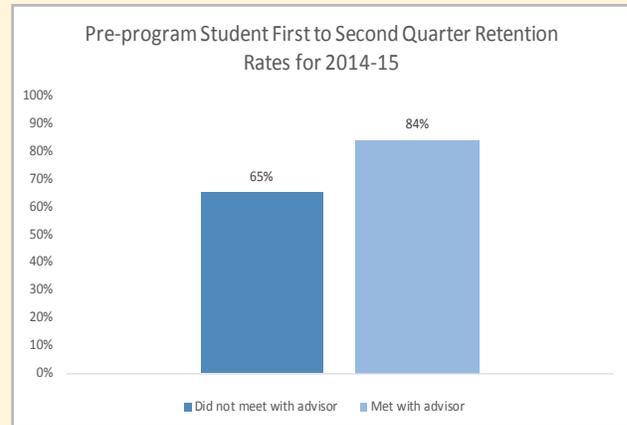
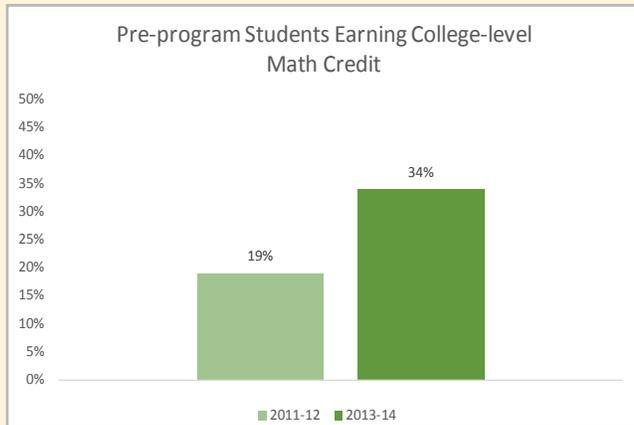
Bellingham's enhanced advising is supported by various institutional policies, systems, and practices. This includes restructuring of advising based on pathways and caseload management; investment in technology to support advising redesign; and support from IT, IR, and all of student services and instruction, according to Linda Fossen, Bellingham's vice president of student services.

It also includes specific policies such as making small group advising and registration sessions mandatory and enforcing this through blocks on registration.

Bellingham also strategically leverages grants and funding streams (e.g., TRIO and Title III grants and workforce funding programs such as BFET, Opportunity Grant, and Worker Retraining) to expand advising and coaching capacity, as part of its enhanced advising model.

## Results

Bellingham reports that its pre-program students who got enhanced advising (the initial target population in 2013-14) achieved higher Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) momentum points, compared to a 2011-12 baseline pre-program cohort. This included a decrease in students achieving no momentum from 42% to 28% and an increase in those achieving college-level math credit from 19% to 34%. Also, pre-program students who met with an advisor had a first to second quarter retention rate of 84%, compared to 65% for those who did not in 2014-15.



## Renton Technical College's High Touch Advising

Renton Technical College is another AtD college that built an enhanced, proactive advising model. Even though it was developed after its initial years of AtD participation, it is included in this issue brief because it provides another example of a college that successfully implemented this promising model as part of AtD.

### Key Elements

- **Entry/first-year advising.** Entry advising is mandatory for all students interested in professional-technical and academic transfer programs. Students are required to meet with entry advisors twice – the first time to explore career pathways, Renton's programs of study and services, and funding options; and the second time to review assessments, select a program of study, develop an academic plan, and get referrals to additional campus resources, as needed.

Mandatory new student orientation, which includes program specific information, is also part of the onboarding process. Among those leading orientation sessions are academic/career counselors, who also provide students ongoing advising and teach the required college success course (COLL 101).

Academic/career counselors stay with students from orientation all the way through to completion, according to Scott Latiolais, former dean of student success at Renton.

Another part of advising in the first year is mid-term advising, which is mandatory for all students. For students who are at risk, meetings with advisors on early alerts and satisfactory academic progress are also mandatory.

Mandatory aspects of advising are enforced through blocks on registration.

- **Program area specific advising.** Academic/career counselors specialize in program areas (e.g., business technology, health and human services, information technology, and automotive/trade and industry). As a result, academic/career counselors develop program area knowledge and build relationships with instructional faculty in their respective program areas.
- **Targeted advising for specific groups.** Some academic/career counselors specialize in specific populations such as low income students and have knowledge of programs serving these populations (e.g., BFET, Worker Retraining, and WorkFirst).

There is collaboration between academic/career counselors who specialize in program areas and those who work with specific populations when working with individual students. One brings knowledge of program areas and the other knowledge of support programs.

- **Classroom-based advising.** Academic/career counselors go into the classroom to connect with students and instructional faculty, and provide services and supports. This includes meeting with students throughout the quarter, either as a group or one-on-one. One of the benefits of this approach is that academic/career counselors meet students where they are and take services and supports to them rather than requiring them to come to academic/career counselors.

This works best when working hand in hand with instructional faculty, according to Eugene Shen, one of Renton's academic/career counselors.

Academic/career counselors also teach Renton's college success course (COLL 101), which is required for all first quarter professional-technical students and is embedded in the first quarter of professional-technical programs that are three quarters or more in length.

- **Proactive advising.** Academic/career counselors have assigned caseloads of students they actively reach out to. For academic/career counselors specializing in program areas, caseload estimates range from 250 to 500 students. Renton's programs are cohort based, with students progressing through a block schedule together as a cohort; as a result, academic/career counselors have a captive audience. It's estimated that 50 to 60 students out of an academic/career counselor's caseload are at risk and, therefore, require more attention. Academic/career counselors who serve specific populations have a caseload of about 150 students.

One of the ways in which academic/career counselors actively reach out to students on their caseload is to go into the classroom and connect with them, as well as instructional faculty. There is a predictable, regular schedule for advising throughout the quarter with deliberate, targeted interventions – for example, program/classroom drop-ins/visits, mid-term advising days, and meetings and follow up with students who are at risk.

The week-by-week schedule includes:

- Week 1: Outreach to students, meetings on satisfactory academic progress (SAP), and COLL 101
- Week 2: Outreach to students, program/classroom drop-ins/visits, and COLL 101
- Week 3: Program/classroom drop-ins/visits, outreach to faculty regarding at-risk students (early alert), and College 101
- Week 4: Outreach to faculty regarding at-risk students (early alert) and COLL 101
- Week 5: Scheduling of Week 6 appointments with at-risk students (early alert) and COLL 101
- Week 6: Mid-term advising day, including update on progress and intervention, as needed; meetings with at-risk students (early alert), and COLL 101
- Week 7: New student registration and COLL 101
- Week 8: Pre-finals check-in with students and COLL 101
- Week 9: Program/classroom drop-ins/visits and COLL 101
- Week 10: Follow up with at-risk students (early alert/SAP), program/classroom drop-ins/visits, new student orientation, and COLL 101
- Week 11: New student orientation and COLL 101
- Week 12: Quarter break check-in with students

This kind of proactive advising is a team effort that involves academic/career counselors, instructional faculty, and the student, according to Latiolais. Instructional faculty's role is to partner with academic/career counselors, help identify students who are at risk, and serve as mentors in their field (e.g., careers, further education and training, and job opportunities).

Instructional faculty and academic/career counselors often meet together with students to discuss how it's going and identify and problem-solve any issues, according to Shen. At other times, academic/career counselors meet with students one-on-one. The counselor acts as a one stop or single point of contact for the student. If there's an issue of any kind, the student can start with the counselor, who will then work with the student to address the issue and provide facilitated referrals to needed services and supports.

It's all about relationships, according to Shen.

- **Technology supports.** Supporting Renton's high touch advising are college-developed technology tools, including an advisor data portal and early alert system. The advisor data portal makes it possible for academic/career counselors and others to access student information in

a user friendly way and keep case notes. The early alert system is used by instructional faculty to submit early alerts, which are automatically sent to academic/career counselors based on program area. Academic/career counselors then work with instructional faculty and students to resolve the issue.

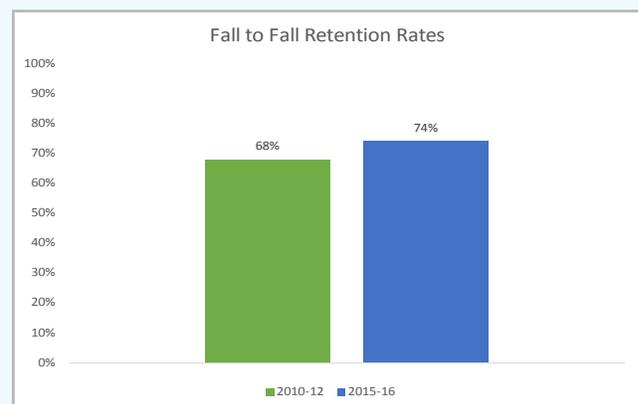
## Policies, Systems and Practices

Renton's high touch advising is supported by institutional policies, systems, and practices. For example, Renton mandates entry and mid-term advising, and enforces this through registration blocks. The college success course is integrated into the first quarter schedule of professional-technical programs. Renton supports technology to monitor student progress. It also provides advisor training and professional development. And it leverages different grants and funding streams (e.g., BFET, Worker Retraining, WorkFirst, and Title III) to expand high touch advising capacity and reduce caseloads, as part of its high touch advising model.

## Results

Renton reports that high touch advising, along with other interventions, has contributed to increased retention rates, increased student satisfaction with advising, and increased rates of transition from basic studies to college level courses. More specifically:

- Fall to fall retention rates have increased from a baseline of 68% in 2010-12 to 74% in 2015.
- Student satisfaction with advising has increased, according to Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) results. For example, the SENSE benchmark score for clear academic plan and pathway increased from 56% in 2012 to 67% in 2015. Also, the percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed that their advisors helped them select a course or program of study increased from 43% in 2012 to 68% in 2015; and the percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed that their advisors helped them identify courses they should take in their first quarter increased from 48% to 74%.



- There has also been an upward trend in the rate at which basic studies students transition to college level courses, with application of high touch advising to this population. This is especially the case for students who started in ABE/GED level courses. Their transition rate increased from 25% in 2010-11 to 29% in 2015-16.

# LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND SYSTEMS

## A Systems Approach

A range of external and internal forces, including budget constraints, labor contracts, and college cultures, combine to make advising systems vary widely from college to college in Washington State. These and other factors push each college here to try to devise its own mix of professional advisors/counselors; educational planners, navigators, completion coaches, and similar staffers; faculty involvement in advising; and technology tools to automate certain functions.

Our look across the 16 AtD colleges shows that, while most included some kind of intervention related to advising, many of these interventions stayed limited in size and scope. As we have noted in previous AtD reports, small scale efforts tend to stay that way absent a concrete plan to scale them up or incorporate them into a larger systemic reform.

With respect to advising interventions, we have also seen that attempts to deal with these systems pressures in a piecemeal way often run into difficulties and sometimes have unintended consequences. For example, a college might try to implement early alert without placing it in a larger strategy of well-considered responses or interventions. Faculty send alerts; automated form letters go out (which can discourage rather than encourage students); little or no tracking of responses occurs; and faculty get no feedback on their alerts, leading them to wonder about its value. Or a college assumes that only high-risk students need advising attention and thus concentrates their resources there, without providing much support to other students, who may also be struggling to complete. As part of a larger, intentionally built advising system, though, these actions can be effectively used.

Four colleges did make institution-wide changes in advising during their original AtD work that either were or had the potential to be systemic and transformative: Bellingham, Everett, Tacoma and Spokane Falls. Everett and Tacoma both focused on providing widespread advising support with mandatory elements during the first year of college; both are now looking at how to extend advising support through graduation. Spokane Falls designed a first-time model for engaging faculty in advising that gave academic departments the room to innovate and customize their advising approaches, with support and training from the college's professional faculty counselors.

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**Advising needs to be integrated in a sustained way through the student's college experience - not just once but at strategic touchpoints along the way where decisions or challenges occur.**

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And Bellingham is one example of a college that started with a pilot intervention that targeted intrusive advising to its pre-program students and then over time intentionally extended it into a college-wide strategic approach to advising, as described in the profile above. Thus, it is possible to start with a smaller pilot program and to take that to a larger systemic change if there is the will and leadership to do so in a strategic way.

The value of a systemic approach to advising is well established in the field. The Community College Research Center (CCRC), in its body of work on advising and student success, has looked at a wide range of research on non-academic student supports, including the role of technology. They describe a systems approach to advising they call SSIP: Sustained, Strategic, Intrusive and Integrated, and Personalized. In their view, advising needs to be integrated in a sustained way through the student's college experience - not just once but at strategic touchpoints along the way where decisions or challenges occur. Strategic use of resources might include a well-designed student success class, online advising tools, and targeting different levels of advising to students according to their needs (as, for example, Bellingham attempts to do through its early use of the College Student Inventory).



(For more on the SSIP model, see CCRC's reports, *What We Know About Nonacademic Student Supports and Designing a System for Strategic Advising*).

### Implications:

- Think systems, not services. This includes designing a whole, coherent advising system, and assigning resources (people, technologies) once the touchpoints, needs, and expected outcomes are all laid out. Process mapping tools exist to help with this—for example, iPASS (Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success) participants have used such tools, and several of College Spark's first Guided Pathways colleges have been doing process mapping for advising redesign.
- Reflect the system's underlying philosophy and values in policies and practices. This means considering how each component, from onboarding/entry through proactive/intrusive advising, puts into practice relationship-building, equity, integration of advising and instruction, and other foundational elements of systems advising. Classroom-based advising, small group advising, and affinity groups all offer opportunities to customize the system and address particular student needs.

## Enhanced, Proactive Advising Model

The enhanced, proactive advising model built by Bellingham and Renton is one specific systems approach that shows promise. Among its strengths are:

- Students connect with their advisors as part of the onboarding process and those advisors stay with them throughout their time at the college. As a result, students have a single point of contact.
- Advisors specialize in pathways or program areas. They develop knowledge of those pathways and build relationships with program faculty. Advisors also have assigned caseloads of students in those pathways that they actively reach out to on a regular, ongoing basis (this includes classroom-based advising). Because of this, they build relationships with students and can provide more in-depth advising.
- Faculty focus their advising efforts on their field of study; related careers, employment, and further education; and serve as mentors.
- Teams of advisors, coaches, and faculty collaborate in working with students to help identify issues and address them.

### Implications:

- Redesign advising based on an enhanced, proactive model – integration of academic and career advising, pathways specific, assigned student caseloads, and advising touchpoints from start to finish.
- Adopt policies that support the model such as making entry advising and mid-term advising mandatory, enforced through blocks on registration.
- Invest in technology to support the model (e.g., advisor data portal, early alert system, degree planning and degree audit functions, student communications, student progress monitoring, etc.). Technology tools can support advisors and coaches in their work with students, but, as already noted, they need to be integrated into a coherent advising system and used in an intentional, strategic way.
- Leverage grants and funding streams (e.g. TRIO and Title III grants; workforce funding programs such as BFET, Opportunity Grant, and Worker Retraining; etc.) to expand advising and coaching capacity, as part of the model.
- Provide training and professional development opportunities in line with the model.
- Build in practices to check in on a regular basis, assess how the model is working, and make improvements or changes, as needed.

The enhanced, proactive advising model is consistent with directions in the advising field and national research on the issue. For example, CCRC's SSIP approach to advising includes mandatory and proactive elements, specialization in program areas, integration of advising and career counseling, strategic advising touchpoints along the way, integration of technology as part of a larger advising strategy or system, and joint faculty-student services professional development.

The enhanced, proactive advising model is also consistent with Guided Pathways, as it is being planned, developed, and implemented in Washington with support from College Spark Washington, in that it is pathways focused, is mandatory and intrusive for all students, monitors and supports student progress through completion, and promotes close cooperation between advisors and faculty.

It is also consistent with how colleges around the country are redesigning advising as part of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways project. As noted by CCRC senior research scholar Davis Jenkins at the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges' Spring 2017 Student Success Institute on Onboarding and Advising, key features of these advising redesign efforts are: "personal contacts early on, so students feel welcomed and valued[; a] case management approach so that every student ideally has one advisor who is overseeing his or her progress throughout[;] contact with faculty members and others in their field of interest to provide guidance and networking support[; and] responsibility for guiding students into and through program pathways shared by all faculty and staff, regardless of whether they have formal roles as advisors."

(For more information on AACC Pathways colleges' advising redesign efforts, see CCRC's report, *Implementing Guided Pathways: Early Insights From the AACC Pathways Colleges.*)

It is important to note that the two AtD colleges that adopted the enhanced, proactive advising model are technical colleges, with student populations in the 5,000-10,000 (headcount) range, a professional-technical focus, and cohort based programs. Community colleges with larger student populations and academic transfer as well as professional-technical programs would need to adapt the model. This might include providing more upfront career exploration, assigning multiple advisors to specific pathways, targeting gateway courses for classroom-based advising, and creating other cohort based opportunities such as affinity groups, with a focus on specific groups such as students of color (as one way to help close equity gaps).

## Assessing Impact

Colleges struggled to find valid ways to assess advising interventions during AtD. The large-scale outcomes measures that the colleges were asked to report on during AtD—retention, completion, and momentum points—are critical indicators of overall progress, but they do not transfer easily to assessments of individual interventions because it is so difficult to disentangle the impact of one intervention from another in a college's universe of student support services.

Some colleges worked hard to make robust efforts to assess their advising interventions with quantitative data. Bellingham, for example, was able to compare two pre-program cohorts, one that received enhanced advising and one that did not, on Student Achievement Initiative momentum points and on retention. Spokane Falls looked at course success rates for similar groups of students who did or did not receive early alert support and found little difference between the two groups, with the exception of a small group of high need students; they used these findings to consider more targeted uses of early alert.



Qualitative measures like the SENSE (Survey of Entering Student Engagement) and the CCSSE (Community College Survey of Student Engagement) are often used in assessing advising. The SENSE is given in mid-first quarter and asks students to reflect on their early academic and student services experiences; the CCSSE is given in spring and focuses on institutional and student behaviors connected to learning and retention. It was the student feedback on advising from the CCSSE, for example, that led Spokane Falls to concentrate its AtD resources on creating a new advising system that increased faculty involvement and skills in this area. Colleges can also regularly engage students, faculty and staff in focus groups. One AtD college did this by conducting in-class focus groups on the last day of college success courses.

While student feedback on advising provides one source of valuable information, it does not directly reflect advising outcomes. Research on best practices in advising assessment emphasizes the importance of using multiple measures, and recommends the use of student learning outcomes in addition to the other measures discussed above (Powers, Carlstrom, and Hughey, 2014). These could include cognitive (e.g., knowledge about key college components like the connection between their program area/degree and careers); non-cognitive (e.g., expected behaviors at work; understanding the relationship between what they're learning and their larger community roles); and skills (e.g., how to use a degree map) (Nutt, 2004).

### **Implications:**

- Design and implement an assessment system from the outset. Good assessment is an intentionally designed system of data collection and consideration, using multiple measures at different levels, from short term progress measures to long term student outcomes. It needs to be planned at the beginning of an activity or change, with a commitment to a regular cycle of doing the work; documenting and analyzing its results; making improvements; and repeating the cycle. One way to encourage this would be to require it and provide specific resources, training, and time for people to do so.

## Resources

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