Construir el Camino: How Hispanic-Serving Institutions Design and Deliver Academic Advising

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Executive Summary

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) mirror the increasing diversity within higher education. As HSIs actively cater to students, particularly those of Latino/a/x backgrounds, academic advising emerges as a prominent institutional strategy for student recruitment, retention, and graduation. However, while existing literature often delves into the practice of advising to serve underrepresented and minority populations, it frequently overlooks the unique identity of HSIs as a critical factor and unit of analysis. Most organizational literature on academic advising takes into account traditional institutional characteristics such as sector and type but rarely accounts for the HSI identity of the institutions. This oversight presents an opportunity to gain deeper insights into the organizational structures of academic advising at HSIs.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap in the literature by offering a deeper understanding of academic advising structures, approaches, target populations, and social media efforts within HSIs. The study's findings draw from qualitative data collected from 23 academic advising leaders at HSIs and shed light on how these institutions structure academic advising to effectively support their diverse undergraduate student body. Consider the following:

- HSIs identify a number of purposes for academic advising including course registration, retention, sense of belonging, learning, and familial learning environments.
- HSIs use a range of organizational models for academic advising, with the majority adopting shared models that involve both faculty and professional academic advisors. These models vary from the split model to the dual model. Some HSIs also employ a centralized approach, while a very small number adopt a decentralized model, specifically the Satellite Model.
- Proactive/intrusive advising, the predominant approach to academic advising at HSIs, involves targeted interventions by academic advisors to enhance student motivation, address potential issues proactively, and provide guidance on educational resources, all aimed at boosting student success.
- The majority of HSIs require all undergraduate students to engage in academic advising, some institutions employ a more innovative approach by focusing mandatory advising on specific student populations. The top five targeted groups for academic advising include probation/suspension students, first-year students, student-athletes, new transfer students, and graduating seniors.
- Instagram stands as the preferred platform for HSIs to communicate crucial academic advising information to students. This is followed by YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, with emerging or less frequently used platforms including TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and institutional apps.

This research underscores the dynamic nature of academic advising at HSIs and the importance of evolving with the needs and preferences of students. It highlights the significance of personalized support, flexible mandatory advising, and the value of faculty advisors in a shared model. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of advising and aligning it with contemporary communication trends, HSIs can better serve students in their academic journeys and contribute to their success.

Introduction

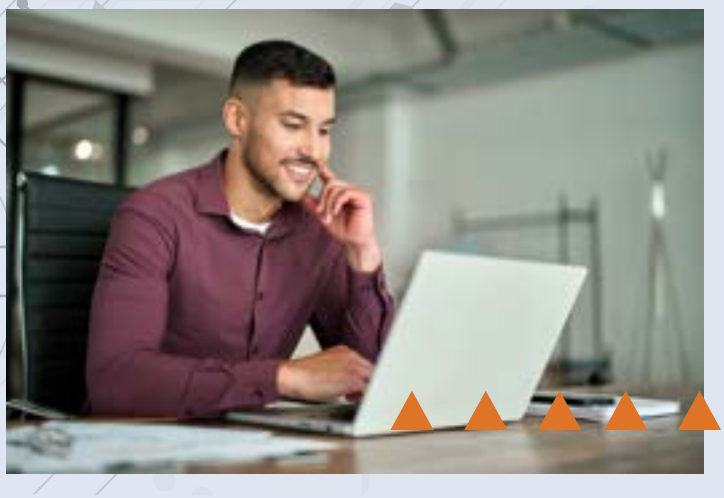
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are accredited, degree-granting public or private nonprofit higher education institutions with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment (Santiago, 2006). From 2007 to 2017, the number of eligible HSIs has significantly increased from 264 to 523 (Excelencia in Education, 2017). In 2023, there were 600 HSIs comprising 20% of all colleges and universities (Santiago, Arroyo, & Cuellarsola, 2024). This growth inspired researchers to explore these unique institutions closely.

This exploration included efforts to define, identify, and describe HSIs through political and racialized constructs (Excelencia in Education, 2023; Garcia, 2018), as well as an examination of what it truly means for an institution to serve, rather than merely enroll, Latino students (Garcia, 2017). Researchers also focused on understanding the intricacies of enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), retention (Montanari, Vogel, & Vasquez, 2023), completion (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, 2017), and post-completion efforts (Bermea, 2022) at HSIs, especially in relation to Title V Funds, and how these differ from other institutions (Arroyo & Santiago, 2023). The research aimed to pinpoint HSI strategies and practices that not only cater to Latino students but benefit all students, showcasing their impact on student success.

HSIs must consider how they can best support Hispanic students, as emphasized by Garcia (2017), while also aligning their efforts with the broader advising structure, institutional programs, and the model of practice.

The rise of HSIs has coincided with the increased enrollment of Latinos in higher education. This surge in Latino enrollment has spurred the academic advising community to delve into comprehensive research and scholarship, especially centered on understanding and enhancing the advising experiences of Latino students. Notably, Latino students have consistently rated academic advising as one of the most crucial services, prompting institutions to take action to make advising experiences more intentional and beneficial (O'Banion, 2020). However, these students have also reported negative experiences with advisors (Rendon et al., 2014). To address these issues, culturally responsive advising strategies have been explored and have demonstrated positive impacts on Latinx students (Negroni-Rodriguez, Dicks, & Morales, 2006), with a strong link to Latino student success (Hatch & Garcia, 2017).

Within this branch of inquiry, HSIs are known to provide student support programs that are culturally responsive (Martinez & Gonzales, 2015; Chaney, Martinez, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998) and offer integrated advising models that take into account the culturally rich backgrounds of Hispanic students (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Their work is influenced by their understanding of the specific type of HSI they serve, as highlighted by Nunez, Crisp, and Elizondo (2016), and the significant impact their institutional role has on Hispanic students on campus, as explored by Contreras and Contreras (2015). Thus, HSIs must consider how they can best support Hispanic students, as emphasized by Garcia (2017), while also aligning their efforts with the broader advising structure, institutional programs, and the model of practice, as discussed by King (2008), Hunter, Henscheid, and Mouton (2007), and O'Banion (1994), respectively.



Aim of Study and Goals

Despite the growth of Latino enrollment and research within the academic advising community, HSIs' unique identity as institutions has often been overlooked in academic advising research. Therefore, it is essential to explore how HSIs structure their academic advising efforts to serve Latino, as well as all students. The primary goal of this report is to explore how HSIs structure their academic advising efforts be:

- Understanding the purpose of academic advising at HSIs.
- Discovering the models of academic advising at HSIs.
- Classifying academic advising approaches at HSIs.
- Identifying key academic advising populations at HSIs.
- Learning of social media platforms to share academic advising information at HSIs.

As national enrollments continue to increase in both number and diversity, HSIs have large enrollments of students of color. The national demand for institutions to increase the completion of students of color has placed pressure on HSIs to elevate their strategies for student success and rethink how they both enroll and serve students on their campuses (Garcia, 2019). In particular, academic advising is among the services at HSIs, along with other MSIs, that functions as recruitment, retention and completion (Bermea, et, al, 2023). With little understanding of how HSIs organize their institutions to provide academic advising, this report presents an opportunity to:

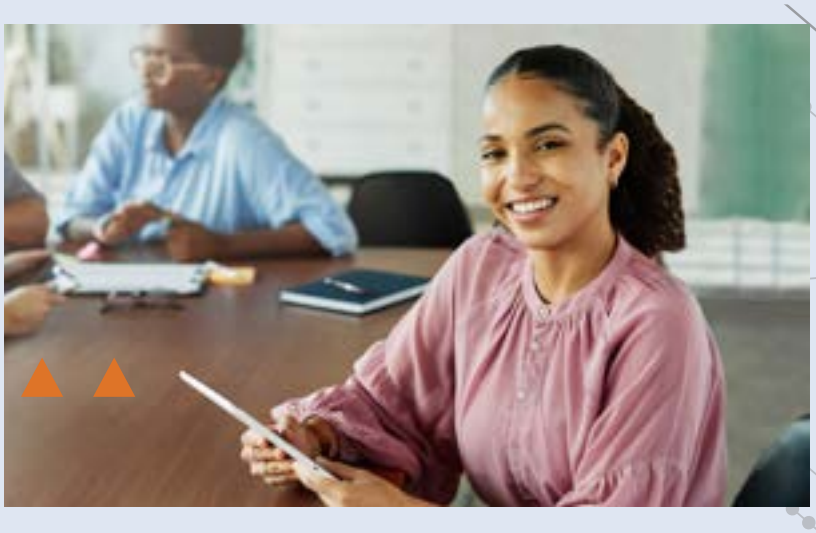
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of academic advising at HSIs.
- Highlight efforts to enhance academic advising at HSIs.
- Strengthen the national narrative around academic advising as a high impact practice for student success within HSIs.

Approach

My qualitative research explores the structural aspects of academic advising within HSIs. I aim to understand these aspects within the unique context of HSIs, considering their specific characteristics and identities. To conduct this study, a qualitative questionnaire approach was employed, guided by Creswell (2012), and administered to 23 academic advising leaders in HSIs. My questionnaire explored six key areas: institutional characteristics, academic advising models and structure, academic advisor competencies, responsibilities, training, evaluation methods, academic advising technologies, and communication strategies.

To gather the data, invitations were extended to 46 academic advising leaders representing various types of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Ultimately, 32 leaders participated, including 23 from HSIs. This report focuses on the responses from the 23 HSIs. Notably, two of the HSIs held dual MSI identities, combining their HSI designation with either Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution (NASNTI) or Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) status.

To analyze this rich dataset, thematic analysis was employed, as per Saldaña's (2021) approach. My analysis helped uncover recurring codes and themes within the responses. Importantly, institutions with dual MSI designations were included in multiple analyses, strengthening the depth of the study while respecting their unique identities. To enhance my study's rigor, I engaged in self-reflection through journaling, ongoing discussions with colleagues, and nearly two years of data immersion were undertaken. My study's findings are effectively presented using visual tools like infographics - making the results more accessible and informative.



Purpose of Academic Advising

For many HSIs, academic advising plays a central role in guiding students through their academic journey. HSIs identify a number of purposes for academic advising including course registration, retention, sense of belonging, learning, and familial learning environments, reflecting advising as strategy and practice.

When looking at how academic advising is perceived at HSIs, there is a clear emphasis on common priorities. The facilitation of course enrollment is highlighted as a primary function, reflecting its importance in supporting students' academic pathways. Closely following this is the goal of enhancing student retention, which shows a shared dedication to supporting students' persistence and overall success. Next, fostering a sense of belonging and supporting student development are key aspects of advising, demonstrating a holistic approach to student growth. Additionally, academic advising is valued for its role in facilitating student learning, aligning with the broader educational mission. Lastly, while slightly less emphasized, creating a familial learning environment is also recognized as an important aspect of advising, contributing to a supportive academic community.

The priorities of academic advising in HSIs reflect a multifaceted approach, acknowledging the need to not only guide students in course selection but also to promote retention, holistic development, and a sense of belonging. This comprehensive perspective encapsulates the vital role academic advising plays in supporting the success of students in HSIs.

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Models of Academic Advising

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The shared model, which combines faculty and professional academic advisors, is the most prevalent. This model encompasses two main variations: the split model, where faculty provide discipline-specific advising while academic advisors assist with subsets of undergraduate students, and the dual model, where students benefit from both a faculty advisor focusing on program/major specifics and an academic advisor who handles general education, academic policies, registration, and similar matters.

Around a third of HSIs opt for a centralized model, where academic advising occurs primarily in a center staffed by professional academic advisors or counselors, and faculty members may also participate in advising within the center.

In a minority of cases, a decentralized model is employed by HSIs. This includes the Satellite Model, where academic advising centers or offices are situated within and managed by individual colleges or schools. It's noteworthy that the faculty-only model was not identified within this study.

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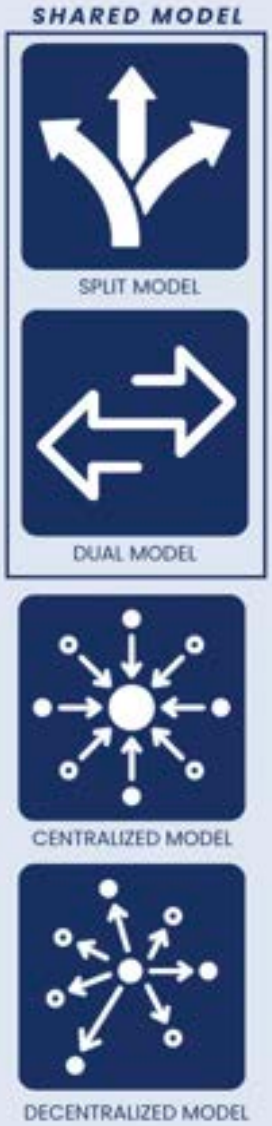

Approches of Academic Advising

Proactive/intrusive advising, the predominant approach to academic advising at HSIs, involves targeted interventions by academic advisors to enhance student motivation, address potential issues proactively, and provide guidance on educational resources, all aimed at boosting student success.

The primary advising approach at these HSIs, proactive/intrusive advising, is characterized by advisors actively intervening with students to provide support and guidance. This approach seeks to enhance student motivation, address potential challenges before they escalate, and educate students about the various educational resources at their disposal. Its core objective is to increase the likelihood of student success.

Many HSIs also employ developmental advising as an approach. Developmental advising focuses on nurturing students' personal and academic growth, emphasizing long-term progress and holistic development. Advisors aim to assist students in setting and achieving their educational and life goals, fostering a deeper understanding of their potential.

In some instances, HSIs use prescriptive advising. This method involves advisors prescribing specific courses and actions to students based on their academic progress, ensuring they follow a prescribed path. It's a structured approach designed to help students meet academic requirements efficiently.

Finally, participating HSIs identified appreciative advising. Appreciative advising is rooted in a positive and strengths-based perspective, emphasizing the unique qualities and achievements of each student. Advisors in this approach guide students in recognizing and leveraging their strengths to achieve their academic and career goals.

These varied advising approaches reflect the commitment of participating HSIs to supporting their students in distinct and tailored ways. Proactive/intrusive advising stands out as a proactive strategy, emphasizing early engagement and comprehensive support. Meanwhile, the inclusion of developmental, prescriptive, and appreciative advising approaches underlines the diverse and student-centered approaches HSIs employ to ensure their students' success and well-being.

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Target Populations of Academic Advising

The majority of HSIs require all undergraduate students to engage in academic advising, yet some HSIs employ a more innovative approach by focusing mandatory advising on specific student populations. The top five targeted groups for academic advising include probation/suspension students, first-year students, student-athletes, new transfer students, and graduating seniors.

At a majority of HSIs, academic advising is a requirement for all undergraduate students. This universal approach ensures that every student has access to academic guidance and support. However, some HSIs have adopted a more innovative strategy by tailoring mandatory advising to specific groups of undergraduate students. These targeted populations often require more concentrated support due to various factors, such as the transition to college, academic challenges, or the need for specialized assistance while dealing with limited institutional resources.

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The top identified targeted populations for academic advising at HSIs are as follows:

- **Probation/Suspension Students:** Academic advising is particularly crucial for students who find themselves on academic probation or suspension. Advisors work closely with these students to develop strategies for improving their academic performance and returning to good academic standing.

- **First-Year Students:** First-year students are at a critical stage in their academic journey. Academic advisors provide essential guidance to help them navigate the transition to college, select appropriate courses, and establish a solid foundation for their future studies.

- **Student-Athletes:** Student-athletes often face unique challenges in balancing their academic and athletic commitments. Academic advisors play a vital role in helping them manage their schedules, meet academic requirements, and maintain their eligibility.

- **New Transfer Students:** Transfer students may have distinct needs as they adjust to a new academic environment. Academic advisors assist these students in evaluating transfer credits, ensuring a seamless transition, and making informed decisions about their academic pathways.

- **Graduating Seniors:** In their final year, graduating seniors require support in planning for graduation, meeting degree requirements, and exploring post-graduation opportunities. Academic advisors help seniors navigate these critical decisions.

Whether it's universal advising for all undergraduates or targeted guidance for specific student populations, the goal remains the same: to empower students with the tools and resources they need to achieve academic success and prepare for their future.

The diversity in approaches to mandatory advising at HSIs underscores their commitment to providing personalized support to their students

Social Media Efforts for Academic Advising

Instagram stands as the preferred platform for HSIs to communicate crucial academic advising information to students. This is followed by YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, with emerging or less frequently used platforms including TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and institutional apps.

HSIs have recognized the power of social media as a communication tool for sharing essential academic advising information with their student population. The following platforms have emerged as key vehicles for this purpose:

- **Instagram** is the most preferred platform, offering a visual and engaging way to connect with students. HSIs use Instagram to post updates, reminders, and important advising information. The platform's user-friendly interface and story features make it an effective tool for sharing content.
- **YouTube** serves as the second most frequently used platform. HSIs often create video content on this platform to deliver in-depth advising information, tutorials, and insights. It offers a dynamic and comprehensive way to engage with students.
- **Facebook** serves as the third most frequently used platform. It provides a more traditional means of sharing advising information, with posts, groups, and events being common tools used by HSIs to reach their student body.
- **Twitter** (now X) is used by HSIs to provide real-time updates, quick reminders, and concise advising information. Its fast-paced and concise nature aligns with the need for timely communication.

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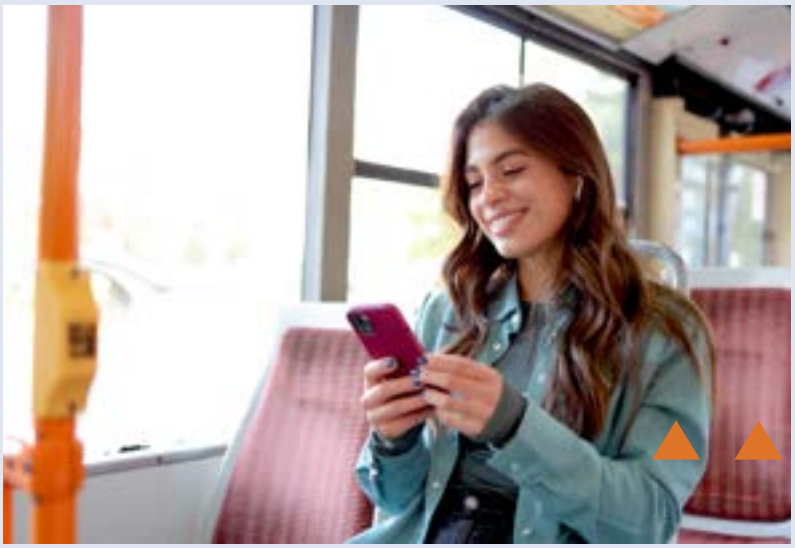

The use of social media platforms in academic advising at HSIs demonstrates the adaptability of institutions in connecting with their students.

Additionally, emerging or less frequently identified platforms include:

- A few HSIs have begun exploring the potential of **TikTok**, which offers short video content to connect with a younger and more diverse audience.
- **Snapchat**, with its focus on ephemeral content, may be used for quick advising updates and interactive content.
- **LinkedIn** is primarily leveraged for professional development and career advising, helping students with post-graduation plans.
- Some HSIs have developed their **institutional apps** to provide academic advising resources, making information easily accessible to students on their mobile devices.

The use of social media platforms in academic advising at HSIs demonstrates the adaptability of institutions in connecting with their students. From visual content on Instagram to in-depth videos on YouTube and timely updates on Twitter, these platforms serve as valuable tools for enhancing advising information dissemination. As social media continues to evolve, HSIs remain at the forefront, ensuring that students have easy access to the support and information they need to succeed in their academic journey.

Consejos for HSIs and other Institutions

"Consejos" is a Spanish word that translates to "advice" or "tips" in English. When offering consejos, we are providing guidance and recommendations for these educational institutions to enhance their academic advising and potentially other student support services. Based on the findings, here are some key consejos for HSIs and other institutions:

Be Open to New Social Media Platforms to Communicate with Advisees.

Being open to new social media platforms in academic advising is a key component of staying relevant and responsive to the evolving needs and preferences of students. It signifies adaptability and a commitment to reaching a broader and more diverse audience. New platforms often offer interactive and engaging features that foster more meaningful connections with advisees and the potential for more effective two-way communication. These platforms also introduce trends and viral content quickly, making it possible to create relevant and relatable advising messages. By being an early adopter, HSIs, as well as other institutions, can position themselves as forward-thinking and innovative. It's crucial to cross-promote across established platforms, prioritize privacy and security, gather feedback, and provide training and resources to ensure effective use of new platforms for academic advising.

Be Aware that Not Every Advisee Requires Mandatory Academic Advising.

Recognizing that not every advisee requires mandatory academic advising is a pivotal element in fostering a flexible and student-centered approach to academic support. It acknowledges the diversity of students' needs and levels of self-sufficiency. While academic advising is invaluable for many, a one-size-fits-all approach can feel intrusive and unnecessary for some highly self-directed students. Thus, institutions should empower students to self-assess their needs and opt for advising when they see fit. At the same time, it's essential to maintain mandatory advising for specific groups, such as those on academic probation or in critical academic transition phases. This progressive approach respects students' autonomy, offering accessible and convenient advising while continuously gathering feedback to refine the process for a more student-centered experience.

Be Mindful that Academic Advising is More than Course Enrollment.

Recognizing that academic advising transcends course enrollment is vital for delivering comprehensive student support. Advising encompasses an array of services, from helping students chart their academic path and set goals to developing essential skills, navigating campus resources, and addressing academic or personal challenges. Advisors also play a pivotal role in career exploration, mentorship, and aiding students in the transition to life beyond graduation. Furthermore, they foster personal growth by engaging students in reflective discussions and ensuring cultural sensitivity. By embracing this holistic approach, academic advising becomes a multifaceted resource that empowers students with the tools, knowledge, and guidance to thrive in their academic and personal pursuits.

Be Cognizant that Learning is a Core Function of Academic Advising.

Recognizing that learning is at the heart of academic advising underscores the profound impact this support system has on a student's holistic development. It transcends the mere logistics of course enrollment to facilitate education beyond the classroom, enhance critical thinking, and promote personal growth. Advisors guide students in navigating complex challenges, nurture career exploration, and foster cultural and global competency. They educate students about academic resources, promote reflective practices, and encourage interdisciplinary understanding. Importantly, advisors instill a lifelong love of learning, ensuring that students continue to seek knowledge and personal development long after their academic journey has concluded. This awareness of the educational role of academic advising contributes to a more profound and enriching academic experience.

Be Conscious that Shared Models of Advising Require Training for Faculty Advisors.

Recognizing the necessity of training for both academic and faculty advisors within shared advising models is pivotal for a harmonious and effective advising system. Faculty advisors, who often have primary roles in teaching and research, need clear training on their advising responsibilities, including course selection, academic guidance, and when to refer students to professional advisors. Effective advising techniques, knowledge of academic policies, cultural sensitivity, and proficiency in technology and communication skills are all essential components of their training. Furthermore, fostering a culture of collaboration between faculty advisors and professional academic advisors is vital. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities and emphasizing the collection of student feedback ensures that faculty advisors continue to enhance their advising skills and adapt to the evolving needs of their students.

Be Committed to a Servingness Philosophy in Advising

Be committed to a servingness philosophy in academic advising by viewing it as a core component of the institution's commitment to supporting students. This means recognizing advising not only as a mechanism for course registration and academic planning but as an essential part of fostering students' overall growth, success, and well-being. Adopting this philosophy transforms advising from a routine administrative task into a proactive and supportive service. This perspective encourages advisors to focus on addressing the diverse and holistic needs of students, helping them navigate both academic and personal challenges. By aligning advising with the institution's mission to serve its students, advisors can enhance their impact and contribute more effectively to students' success and satisfaction.

Conclusion

In closing, the exploration of academic advising in HSIs underscores the pivotal role of these institutions in embracing fostering student success for a diverse population. By focusing on tailored support, adapting to changing student needs, and leveraging modern communication platforms, HSIs are poised to enhance the academic journey for their student body. The emphasis on proactive advising, targeted interventions, and the incorporation of faculty advisors within shared models signifies a commitment to holistic student support. The evolving landscape of higher education necessitates continuous adaptation, and as HSIs evolve their advising practices, they solidify their position as key contributors to student achievement and academic excellence. As these institutions continue to embrace innovation and personalized support, they are well-positioned to not only reflect the diverse landscape of higher education but also actively guide students toward fulfilling and successful academic experiences.

CONSTRUIR EL CAMINO:

How Hispanic-Serving Institutions Design and Deliver Academic Advising

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) drive student success through strategic and personalized academic advising. By embracing diverse models and targeted approaches, HSIs ensure students receive the support they need, while offering key insights to enhance student support at other institutions.

PURPOSE

HSIs actively embrace advising as a key strategy, guiding students academically while fostering a strong sense of belonging and family, contributing to their overall growth and success.

- STUDENT ENROLLMENT
- STUDENT RETENTION
- SENSE OF BELONGING
- STUDENT LEARNING
- FAMILIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

MODELS

HSIs deploy a range of advising models, delivering personalized and effective support tailored to each student's needs.

- SPLIT MODEL
- DUAL MODEL
- SHARED MODEL
- CENTRALIZED MODEL
- DECENTRALIZED MODEL

APPROACHES

HSIs implement various advising approaches to actively boost student motivation and success, ensuring consistent guidance throughout their academic journey.

- PROACTIVE
- DEVELOPMENTAL
- PRESCIPTIVE
- APPRECIATIVE

TARGET POPULATIONS

HSIs ensure key student groups receive the mandatory advising and resources needed to thrive.

- PROBATION & SUSPENSION STUDENTS
- FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS
- GRADUATING STUDENTS
- STUDENT ATHLETES
- TRANSFER STUDENTS

SOCIAL MEDIA

HSIs strategically leverage social media platforms to keep students and families informed and engaged with crucial advising information.

- INSTAGRAM
- YOUTUBE
- FACEBOOK
- TWITTER (X)
- TIKTOK
- SNAPCHAT
- LINKEDIN
- INSTITUTIONAL APPS

CONSEJOS

HSIs offer valuable insights for other institutions to enhance advising efforts and create more intentional advising experiences.

- BE OPEN TO SOCIAL MEDIA
- NOT ALL ADVISING IS MANDATORY
- ADVISING IS MORE THAN COURSE ENROLLMENT
- LEARNING IS THE CORE FUNCTION
- MODELS REQUIRE TRAINING
- ADOPT A SERVINGNESS PHILOSOPHY

Bermeo, G.D. (2024). Construir el camino: How Hispanic-Serving Institutions design and deliver academic advising. New Brunswick, NJ: The Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions.

Author Biography

Gabriel Bermea is a Visiting Scholar at The Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI), where he conducts research on academic advising practices and student success within and across Minority Serving Institutions. He has over 13 years of higher education experience as a researcher, consultant, lecturer, and practitioner. His mission is to create and deliver campus-wide enrollment and student success strategies that expand access, opportunity, and success for all students, especially those from underrepresented and marginalized groups.

Gabriel is the creator of the Humanistic Advising Framework, a new approach to academic advising that emphasizes the importance of advisee growth and change to become self-actualized. He has published his work on humanistic advising, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and post-completion success in various journals and reports.

He holds a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Higher Education and Organizational Change from Benedictine University, a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Communication and Leadership Studies from Gonzaga University, and a Master of Education (M.Ed.) and a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Communication Studies from Texas Tech University.

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