

Task Force on Undeclared Students
Report to the Provost
May 24, 2007

DRAFT

The task force you created to make recommendations on improving the status of undeclared students have considered the issue and make the following recommendations:

1. **The task force recommends very strongly that the advising function for undeclared students remain in the CAP center, at least until options are thoroughly explored.**

This recommendation has two bases:

- a. There is no evidence that these students' interests would be better served by moving these students elsewhere. Actually, there is a paucity of evidence on this campus with respect to the nature and causes of specific outcomes undeclared students experience. It is clear that they persist at levels below their counterparts who have been accepted in majors (see Attachment 1). Given the fact that almost one-third of the undeclared students at Rowan entered in high risk categories (EOF-MAP, special admits), this is not surprising. We see no evidence that lower retention is associated with the current mode of advisement; nor do we have any reason to believe that shifting the advising function elsewhere would improve these figures.
- b. The current centralization of the advising function in a structure like the CAP Center is consistent with the model recommended by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). The model (often referred to as the "merged model") is grounded in the principle that students who are genuinely undecided (as opposed to those who are waiting to get into their preferred major) need much more than information about the major, course selection, or career opportunities. NACADA recognizes that self-reflective and decision-making perspectives and skills are central to the undecided students' success and recommends that they be advised by counselors specifically trained to help develop these competencies. The CAP Center is staffed by such professionals; typically, advisement based in academic program is not.
- c. If there is concern that undeclared students need an "academic home," the task force suggests that learning communities (see #4 below) may offer a richer, more diverse alternative to assigning them all to a single academic unit that may or may not resonate with their perceived interests or ambitions.

2. **The task force recommends that the campus address, in a systematic manner, enrollment management issues that currently serve as barriers to undeclared students in their search for a major.** These include:

- a. *Restricted Majors.* The practice of requiring successful completion of certain courses of maintenance of a GPA higher than that required by the university is a significant barrier to entrance into certain majors at Rowan University. The task force recognizes that accreditation or certification standards may require such

restrictions. It is also clear that no such rationale exists for some restricted majors. Some are restricted to control major size; others are restricted to “improve quality.” In both of these cases there are alternative methods to achieve the goal (e.g., introductory courses with rigorous standards) in a manner that are both fairer and more clearly based on merit.

- b. *Internal Transfers.* Three years ago the Enrollment Management Committee recommended that internal transfers be given priority over external transfers. To date, that has not been implemented. It is clear to us that we are obliged to meet the needs of existing, native students before those of others.
- c. *Major-specific GE courses.* Many programs dictate the courses their majors must take within categories of GE. Clearly, in some cases this is essential. In other cases the necessity is less clear. The effect on internal transfers is that many are required to take additional GE courses in categories in which they have already satisfied the university requirement.

- 3. The task force recommends that the university investigate, in an expeditious manner, the creation of learning communities for undeclared freshmen.** These communities could serve as sites for CAP Center activities and recruitment efforts by academic programs. Perhaps most critically, these communities could serve as academic and support networks for the students involved. The evidence of the success of learning communities in increasing retention and graduation rates among undeclared students is overwhelmingly positive. Studies of such programs at Ball State University, Portland State University, Bowling Green State University, Northern Michigan University, and California State University at Long Beach all support this claim. So do the data from pilot learning communities for undeclared students at Rowan. Since the program began in 2001, our undeclared students situated in learning communities have persisted at rates in excess of other undeclared students and the campus as a whole (See Appendix 2).

Respectfully Submitted,

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Appendix 1

Retention Data Undeclared Versus Declared Students

Cohort	Fr>Soph	Soph>Jr	Jr>Sr	5-year grad	6-year grad
2001					
Undeclared	82.3%	70.7%*	67.0%*	28.2%*	51.5%*
Declared	83.9%	78.7%*	75.4%*	44.9%*	65.9%*
2002					
Undeclared	83.7%	73.9%	68.2%	31.0%*	
Declared	85.4%	76.3%	68.5%	48.8%*	
2003					
Undeclared	82.6%	73.0%*	68.4%*		
Declared	85.1%	76.5%*	73.4%*		
2004					
Undeclared	83.5%*	74.8%*			
Declared	87.0%*	79.7%*			
2005					
Undeclared	80.1%*				
Declared	84.9%*				

* X^2 : $p < .05$

Table 2
Undeclared Students who Returned Undeclared

Cohort	Fr>Soph	Soph>Jr	Jr>Sr
2001	64%	20%	4.0%
2002	61%	19%	2.5%
2003	59.9%	19%	3.0%
2004	65.3%	21.2%	
2005	52.0%		

Appendix 2

**VOF (Visions of the Future)
Learning Communities for Undeclared Students
Retention Data***

VOF Retention to Second Fall				
	2001	2002	2003	2004
Overall Freshman Cohort	83.7%	85.4%	86.2%	87.0%
Undeclared Students	82.3%	83.7%	82.6%	83.5%
VOF Retention to Subsequent Years				
To Third Fall (Jr.) Overall 76.3%		85%	79%	NA
To Fourth Fall (Sr.) Overall 72.5%		81%	TBD	NA