

# THREE EVIDENCE-BASED ADVISING STRATEGIES

## to Support College Completion

Colleges recognize that student advising has the potential to improve college completion rates.<sup>1</sup> To better understand the **advising policies, programs, and practices that support postsecondary success**, the College Completion Network conducted a three-part study.

- **Focus groups** with administrators at 47 colleges in 2022 identified the advising strategies in use on college campuses.
- A **systematic review** of the research literature from the past two decades summarized the evidence on college advising strategies.
- A **gap analysis** compared the findings from the focus groups and systematic review to distill the gaps between research and practice.

The study found **three evidence-based advising strategies** with the potential to support students on their path to college completion. The study also identified **seven advising strategies** that were widely used by colleges but had low evidence establishing their effectiveness. [Learn more](#)

### Three evidence-based advising strategies

**High use, high evidence:**  
 Widely used by colleges and high-quality evidence of success

- **Wraparound supports**

**Low use, high evidence:**  
 Not as widely used but high-quality evidence of success

- **Comprehensive and holistic advising practices**
- **Learning communities**

### Seven other advising strategies

**High use, low evidence:**  
 Widely used, but research has not yet established effectiveness

- **General advising practices**
- **Faculty advising**
- **First-year experience courses**
- **Mentoring**
- **Proactive advising**
- **Informational interventions**
- **Career-focused advising**

### Address students' basic needs with wraparound supports

**Almost all (95%) of the colleges interviewed offered wraparound supports** such as basic needs assistance, emergency aid programs, childcare and transportation assistance, healthcare or mental health services, assistance with applying for financial aid, and assistance with enrolling in other benefits or entitlement programs. The need for such supports is likely to increase due to pandemic-related challenges.<sup>2</sup>

### High Use, High Evidence

**Evidence:** Two rigorous studies of comprehensive case management programs found positive effects of wraparound supports on student outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

**Next steps for policy and practice:** Colleges may consider implementing or expanding access to wraparound supports to address a range of student needs. For best practices and to ensure equitable access, consult the cited studies and confer with peer colleges.

## Help students navigate college with comprehensive and holistic advising



The advising strategies with the most promising evidence of effectiveness tend to be comprehensive and holistic.<sup>4</sup> Such strategies go beyond course planning to support students throughout their time in college. These strategies may help students connect to supports, navigate the complexities of college and life, and establish meaningful relationships.

**Evidence:** An evaluation of the comprehensive Accelerated Study in Associate Program at the City University of New York found positive effects

on student outcomes,<sup>5</sup> as did a study of the program in Ohio.<sup>6</sup> Two other studies met criteria for promising evidence.<sup>7</sup>

**Next steps for policy and practice:** Many colleges cite resource constraints as a barrier to offering comprehensive and holistic advising, which may help explain the strategy's low use. To carve out time and space for advisors to engage more deeply with students, one approach is for colleges to take advantage of technology platforms to conduct more rote tasks, such as course placement.

## Connect and engage students with learning communities



Although strong evidence supports the use of learning communities for student advising, college administrators reported using this approach less than other strategies.

Learning communities may include first-year experience courses, which cover various programs that provide academic supports and help students build community. Other learning communities may use a small-group format or organize around a theme or affinity group (such as students with a common major or demographic characteristic), enabling more extensive, targeted, and culturally competent advising. For example, one college used learning communities to support students of color.

**Evidence:** Three studies found strong evidence of the effectiveness of learning communities on short-term student outcomes,<sup>8</sup> and six studies met criteria for promising evidence.<sup>9</sup> In each case, the learning communities studied were accompanied by other supports, such as enhanced counseling, tutoring, textbook vouchers, and peer mentoring.

**Next steps for policy and practice:** Colleges may consider implementing learning communities as part of a broader, comprehensive strategy to support students throughout their college journey.

## Advising strategies with mixed support



The following advising strategies were widely used by colleges but had low levels of evidence supporting their effectiveness.

- General advising practices (such as new student orientation)
- Faculty advising
- First-year experience courses
- Mentoring
- Proactive advising
- Informational interventions (such as nudging)
- Career-focused advising

**Next steps for policy and practice:**

- **Gather data.** Colleges can collect data to better understand student experiences with and perceptions of these strategies to strengthen advising practices.
- **Reconsider and refine.** Focus groups suggested some of these strategies, such as faculty advising, may be less beneficial for students.<sup>10</sup> Colleges may want to reconsider and refine their approach to these strategies.
- **Evaluate results.** Colleges may want to partner with researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of these advising strategies.

TO LEARN MORE, read the full report [here](#).



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