



The Academic Advising Crisis – Students and past advisor weigh in

BY: ELLA BARRY / ON: SEPTEMBER 13, 2023 / IN: FEATURES

The Academic Advising department at UCCS experiences a high turnover rate that is becoming increasingly prevalent. This affects students, UCCS staff and department members, past and present, in different ways.

Senior communication major Tyler Hyong has had three academic advisors in seven semesters. His first and longest running advisor left halfway through his sophomore year, and he’s had a new one every year since.

“[UCCS] talks about advisors as if they’re your best friend throughout your entire college career, but I’ve had three different little friends that I’ve barely known anything about,” Hyong said.

Hyong briefly had their [chancellors award](#) revoked due to a miscommunication within the Academic Advising department after taking classes that didn’t meet the requirements for the award.

“I didn’t meet the requirement, even though I was told by [my advisor] that these would fulfil my credits to get my chancellors award,” Hyong said. “I was very upset obviously; I mean the chancellors award helps out a ton. It eventually resulted in [the department] realizing that they did screw up and being like ‘just don’t let it happen again.’”

Hyong explained that his own experiences with advising, along with stories he’s heard from friends, have made him hesitant to connect with his advisor.

“It feels like I really had to just navigate myself through this whole college degree,” he said.

Like many other students, Hyong wonders why the Academic Advising department has such high turnover rates. “It seems like they’re the kind of office you would like to avoid,” Hyong said.

While the reason for leaving the UCCS Academic Advising department may be different for everyone, former UCCS advisor Katie Pritchard, who held her position advising Communication and deciding students from February of 2022 until April of 2023, spoke about the main reasons she left.

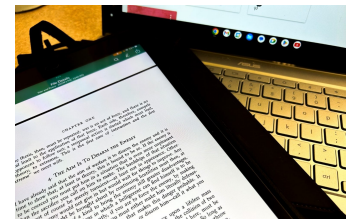
“I’m a single mom with two kids and I have been working my butt off for six years to try to get to the point where I would have enough money to take care of me and the kids without asking my family for help,” she said. “I get this first job, which I’m really grateful to get and it was a great experience, but the reality of ‘I’m still not making enough money’ hit fast.”

According to a [Communique article](#) from 2019, UCCS graduates with a master’s degree earn a median salary of \$50,996 one year after graduation, and yet Pritchard, who received her master’s in Student Affairs and Higher Education (SAHI) from UCCS, was hired by the university at just \$42,000 a year.

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Out of the 23 advisors currently listed on the [UCCS Academic Advising page](#), three have PhDs, 19 have master's degrees, and only one has a bachelor's degree.

Pay wasn't the only thing that influenced Pritchard's decision to leave. "[I had] 250-300 students, and because I was hired under grant funding, I had one of the lowest caseloads," Pritchard said.

When one of her coworkers resigned, Pritchard's caseload temporarily increased to roughly 500 students for about a month until a replacement advisor was hired.

According to a [2011 survey](#) conducted by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the median caseload for academic advisors in the U.S. was 296 students.

"I left the end of April. [My replacement] didn't start until the first of June," Pritchard said. Despite giving a month's notice, Pritchard's position went unfilled for a month after her departure, during which another advisor had to temporarily take on her caseload.

"I did worry about deciding students, like they were wandering around without any idea what to do or without any help. There were probably a lot of students that I didn't know of who fell through the cracks," Pritchard said.

Pritchard also spoke of the lack of upward mobility within the advising department. Following her annual review, Pritchard got a raise of roughly \$800.

"It would have been enough to pay my parking permit," she said.

Despite the high turnover rates, Pritchard expressed her love for academic advising. "I think we had really dedicated advisors who are in these roles because they really care about students and would go above and beyond what they were expected to do," Pritchard said. "I appreciated being in that kind of team, but then you face burnout or you're just not making enough money to survive in Colorado Springs."

Pritchard now holds a position as a Student Success Specialist at Colorado College where she advises 83 students.

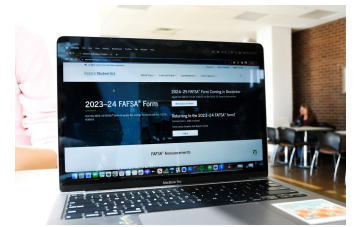
This article and the ones that follow are a part of a series on the effect of the inner department struggles of the academic advising department both on its employees and students.

Updated 9/14

UCCS academic advising located in Main Hall. Photo by Kira Thorne.

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Scribe@uccs.edu

University Center Room 106
1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway
Colorado Springs, CO 80918

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