General recommendations

I. Work to improve information management and information flow.

II. Strive for better communication among the various offices dealing with academic information (e.g., UIS, CAS Records) and the consumers of that information (including administrators, advisors, faculty, and students).

III. Improve dissemination of information about available tools, so that students and faculty are aware of what can be accessed and how it all works. Consider developing video-based tutorials for specific functionalities (on the model of the videos available on the Apple web site).

IV. Establish regular training in processes and technology relevant to advising, for new and continuing advisors and student services staff.

V. Establish a standing Advisory Committee on Advising, to work with the various units (e.g., UIS, CAS Records, etc.) as the college moves forward to address issues such as those raised above. The advisory committee, in conjunction with the Associate Dean for Student Academic Life, will be responsible for regular assessment and feedback of the effectiveness and development of technology used in student services.

Recommendations for the near and medium term

I. Update student services web site with useful content, in particular, post all forms online to be downloaded, printed, and mailed or hand-carried to the destination office (in short term); transition this to online form processing in medium term.

II. Until the university can invest in a state-of-the-art software package to support academic advising, improve functionalities of the existing system, and eliminate (to the extent possible) the use of paper forms in favor of enhancing online capabilities.

1. Allow students to declare or change their major and minor online.

2. Once a student has declared a new major or minor, the student should be offered a link to a department web page that includes information about the program as well as details about advisor selection/assignment and the procedure for requesting a change of advisor. (For a possible model of the welcome page allowing students to express advisor preferences and other considerations for advisor assignment, see http://www.bu.edu/rs/forms/welcome/.)

3. Allow departments access to a database that displays (preferably in real time) students who have added/dropped their major or minor (listed in reverse chronological order).

4. Provide advising codes to advisors (for all majors, not just for a student’s “primary” major) electronically (rather than as paper labels). Preferably the advisor should be able to access this information on the Link (so that departments do not have to spend staff time distributing this information to advisors and hunting down codes that have not been provided).

5. Advisor listings should be associated with a specific program. So if a student drops a major, his or her advisor from that major should also be deactivated (at least by default; an option could be provided to add an advisor independent of a specific concentration if this is deemed to be necessary/desirable). Advisor listings should also be deactivated after a student has graduated (so that current advisor lists should not include students who have graduated).
6. Improve the interface that enables departments to update records about advising assignments.

7. Explore potential models (and technical support) that could be offered to departments to assist with management of information locally and interface with the university systems.

8. Add a functionality (currently under development) for advising notes to be entered. This functionality may also be used to store records of other types (e.g., review of graduation requirements).

9. Enable the advisor to view the student’s planner (if so authorized by the student – perhaps via a checkbox); this would be quite useful during advising meetings (and students are often surprised that advisors currently cannot view this information).

10. Clarify and broadcast policies about data access to departments.

11. Allow advisors to file “petitions” electronically (e.g., to allow change in the way in which a particular course is counted with respect to major or minor requirements).

12. Maintain a record of course equivalencies (for courses transferred from other institutions or from study abroad programs, especially BU study abroad programs), so that requests do not need to be duplicated.

13. For study abroad programs, numbering across semesters should be consistent (i.e., unique numbers should represent unique courses; where this is not the case, the course number assigned by IP should be allowed to count for credit more than once, as is currently the case for Topics courses, for example). Right now, the computer system cannot deal with two courses offered in different semesters that have the same number.

14. Allow students access to information about future course offerings as much in advance as possible, to facilitate academic planning. The course registration process should be expanded to involve planning for future semesters; this could be “smart,” allowing electronic feedback (e.g., “sorry, that course isn’t going to be offered a year from now”) or “dumb” (just a statement of intention, but allowing for commentary by advisors).

15. The “what if” degree audit function should be available to students.

16. The process of applying to graduate and checking on graduation status should be completely online. The online graduation application process should be coordinated with an overall planning process for attending the various ceremonies and wrapping up their academic careers. Central to the academic piece of this is the transcript and the student’s plan for the final year of coursework, which will be associated with an ongoing commentary by advisors and graduation officers.

17. Use information available from the students’ planners to assess ASAP where there may be insufficient numbers of sections to meet demand.

18. Implement a “waiting list” functionality on the Link.
III. Improve access to information relevant to advising

1. Develop a comprehensive section of the CAS Web site with information about advising, for both faculty and students. This would be an online version of an advising handbook: one-stop shopping for information related to advising (and could be inspired in part by handbooks that may now exist in various CAS departments and other colleges).
   a. This should include a “what's new” area, for listing of new programs, courses, important dates, etc.
   b. It might include a FAQ section.
   c. This should include a list of all majors and minors in the college, with a link to the departmental web sites that include requirements for these programs and a listing of faculty advisors.
   d. Department web sites should include a link to this CAS Advising site.

2. Integrate information from the BU web site (e.g., about academic requirements for various programs) into the Link, so that a student who is engaged in academic planning has access to the full range of information that would be useful.

3. Improve search functionalities across the BU web site, including search through course listings.

4. Improve the organization of the CAS Web site to make it easier to find things (and encourage departments to do this as well).

5. Improve the online BU Directory: relevance of results returned, and user-friendliness of the interface.

6. Re-examine the procedural interface among colleges for declaration of minors in another college, and provide better information about procedures for advisor selection/assignment for specific programs. (Other colleges generally require an advisor's signature before a student can declare a CAS minor in their own college; in SED, the requirement is that all requirements for the minor actually be fulfilled before the student can declare the minor officially. This makes it difficult for CAS departments to provide appropriate advising services to those students.)

Long term recommendations

The Link should be a portal into all information and processes relevant to the management of students’ academic careers. It should combine the functionality of an electronic portfolio for storing and processing academic work; web resources for all relevant academic information (with good search tools); applications for various programs; communication with professors, advisors, and administration; planning; and registering for classes; tools for administrators to monitor student populations. The various “stakeholders” (students, advisors, professors, administrators, even parents) will have various levels of access to information and processes.