

Peer Advising: A Working Model

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The transition into higher education involves a number of challenges for new students and responsibilities for faculty, staff, and returning students. Whether or not some of your students persist at your institution may, in part, depend upon the program designed to help them become oriented, advised, and registered. Here we discuss the development and implementation of a Peer Advising Program established at a small, public four-year university in the Midwest. We describe the components and evaluation of the program and discuss our observations and conclusions drawn from a working model.

Student participation in academic advising has existed for some time at the college and university level. Recognizing that new students needed both "immediate information and reassurance during their initial period of adjustment," Brown established a program of academic assistance based on student-to-student counseling procedures at Southwest Texas College in the middle 1960's.¹

Lately, interest has increased in the use of academic advising as institutions grow more complex, enrollments threaten to decline, and student populations become more diverse.²

Academic advising programs in higher education are as diversified as the missions and purposes of colleges and universities in the United States. It is important that they be designed and implemented to meet the unique needs of each student body. As new students enter their new academic community, we have seen evidence that their values change during the first six to eight weeks of their collegiate life.³ A number of research studies have indicated that one most important factor influencing attrition or retention of students on-campus involves establishment of a meaningful relationship with one person associated with the academic program.⁴

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¹William F. Brown, "Student to Student Counseling for Academic Advisement," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, (April 1965).

²Janice Abel, "Academic Advising: Goals and A Delivery System," *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 21 (March 1980), 151-155.

³P. H. Rossi, "Working Paper," Research Conference on Social Science Methods and Student Residences. University of Michigan, 1964.

⁴Lee Noel, "College Students Retention: A Campus-Wide Responsibility," *The National ACAC Journal*, 21 (July 1976), 33-36.

Use of peer advisors to assist in academic, personal, and career advising of new freshman students has produced positive results³ and helped freshmen in their transition to the academic community.⁶

With the above information in mind, and in an effort to help new students at the University of Wisconsin-Superior (UWS) adjust to and cope with their new environment, we established a Peer Advisement Program during the 1978-79 academic year.

Development and Implementation

In December, 1978, a formal proposal seeking financial assistance to develop the Peer Advisement Program was submitted to the UWS Steering Committee on Academic Planning, and received approval in early February, 1979. At this time, we queried each academic department about participating in the Peer Advisement Program and, if so, to identify individuals who could serve as peer advisors for their department. Academic departments from all four UWS colleges decided to participate in the Peer Advisement Program. At the same time, the Office of Student Life and Services and the Office of Undergraduate Academic Advisement selected candidates to work with exploratory students. By the beginning of May, 1979, all peer advisors were chosen and a series of in-service sessions were conducted to prepare them for advising, at the freshmen summer orientation, advising, and registration sessions.

Components

Descriptions of the major components of the Peer Advisement Program at UWS follow:

Assignments — All new freshmen entering UWS are assigned a peer advisor. If the student has declared a major, the academic department offering that specific major designates a peer advisor. If the student is an exploratory student, he receives an advisor specially trained to work with students not yet declaring a major.

Selection — Peer advisors are junior and senior students selected to participate in this program by faculty members from academic departments, the Office of Student Life and Services, and the Office of Academic Advisement. The criteria for selecting the peer advisors varies from one academic department to another. Pleasant personality and a good academic record, however, seem to be common characteristics among all students selected.

Supervision — Each academic department designates one or more faculty to supervise their peer advisor(s). The Office of Student Life and Services and the Office of Undergraduate Academic Advisement supervise advisors working with exploratory students. Figure 1 illustrates the working relationship existing among the Office of Academic Advisement, faculty members, and peer advisors.

³M. Upcraft, "Undergraduate Students as Academic Advisors," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 49 (1971), 827-832.

⁶C. R. Brown, *Evaluation of a College Curriculum Advisory Program Utilizing Student Advisors*, Pocatello: Idaho State University, 1972. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No Ed 063 906).

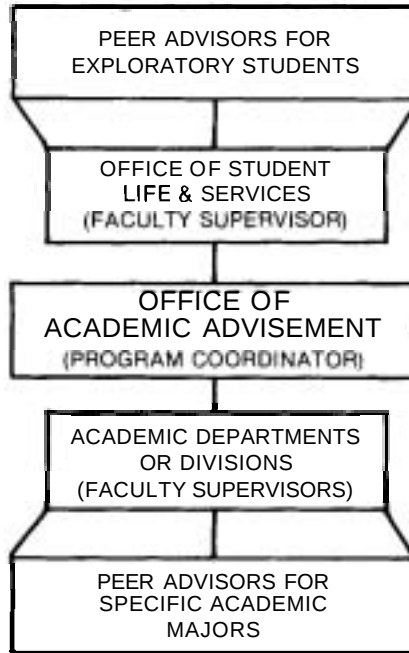


FIGURE 1. Peer Advising at UW-S

Office Space — Each peer advisor is provided with office space located near the office of their supervisor(s). Peer advisors are expected to maintain regular weekly office hours and be available to advise at all registration sessions. In addition, they are expected to attend in-service sessions held throughout the academic year.

Wages — Peer advisors receive hourly wages for their services, monies allocated through work study or student assistance funds.

Advisees — We try to assign no more than twenty (20) students to each advisor. Figure 2 indicates the approximate number of new freshmen students and the number of peer advisors working for each academic department and those advising exploratory students.

Evaluation

The Peer Advisement Program at UWS appears to be a successful endeavor. During the two week advising periods for Winter and Spring quarter, 1979-80, we

Academic Department or Division	Number of Freshmen Students	Number of Peer Advisors
College of Business	70	4
Art	32	2
Music	15	1
Communicating Arts	28	2
Biology	21	1
Chemistry/Physics	10	1
Geosciences	10	1
Language & Literature	10	1
History	8	1
Mathematics	9	1
Political Science	20	1
Psychology	27	2
Sociology/Social Work	37	2
Elementary Education	28	2
Physical Education	23	2
Exploratory Students	102	7
TOTAL	450	31

Figure 2.

distributed an advisor evaluation form to freshmen students to obtain their perceptions about advising services they had received. The combined results of this evaluation for both quarters appear in Tables I through IV. Students' comments in Table IV have been summarized and paraphrased without changing their original meaning. A total of thirty (30) percent of these forms were returned. Evidently the respondents had positive feelings about their advisor, indicating sound endorsement of the Peer Advisement Program. In addition, all of the academic departments at UWS have decided to continue to use peer advisors for the 1980-81 academic year. This unanimous support indicates that the faculty also generally agrees that the Peer Advisement Program at UWS meets the needs of most freshmen students.

Personal Observations and Recommendations

After more than a year of development, we have observed some positive effects of the peer advising program and have identified some important points about peer advising we wish to share with you. Some of our perceptions seem consistent with those stated by other researchers in the field of academic advising:

1. Peer advising provides an immediate and meaningful relationship with at least one person on campus for most freshmen.
2. Peer advisors can meet with students in many different settings (i.e., snack bar, athletic events, campus housing, etc.), providing for a variety of opportunities and perhaps a more natural advisor/advisee relationship.

Peer Advising: A Working Model

This questionnaire asks you to evaluate your Academic Advisor for the 1979-80 school year

ADVISORS NAME _____
LAST FIRST

Please mark your responses directly on this form and return the form to the Office of Academic Advisement
Main 210

GENERAL INFORMATION
(Check the one most appropriate to you.)

1. I am a . . .	2. I am currently carrying . . .	3. The College in which my major is included is
A ☐ Freshman	A ☐ 0-5 Credits	A ☐ Undecided - no college
B ☐ Sophomore	B ☐ 6-9 Credits	B ☐ College of Business/Economics
C ☐ Junior	C ☐ 10-15 Credits	C ☐ College of Education
D ☐ Senior	D ☐ 16-19 Credits	D ☐ College of Fine Arts
	E ☐ 20 or more credits	E ☐ College of Letters and Science

II. RATING OF ADVISEMENT FUNCTIONS

- SA ☐ If you strongly agree with the item
A ☐ If you tend to agree with the item
U/NA ☐ Undecided or not applicable
D ☐ If you tend to disagree with the item
SD ☐ If you strongly disagree with the item

MY ADVISOR.. .

	SA	A	U/NA	D	SD
A. Helps in clarifying a major					
B. Helps in clarifying career or occupational goals					
C. Helps in developing study skills					
D. Informs me of general academic or course requirements					
E. Helps with personal-social problems					
F. Helps me relate personal values to reasons for college					
G. Helps in selecting courses					

III. RATING OF ADVISOR CHARACTERISTICS
MY ADVISOR.. .

	SA	A	U/NA	D	SD
A. Makes it easy for me to make an appointment					
B. Usually keeps appointments					
C. Suggests options					
D. Encourages me to make my own decision					
E. Helps me plan a four-year program					
F. Directs me to use college resources					
G. Understands advisee point of view					
H. Is well-informed on requirements					
I. Is usually rushed					
J. Is usually busy					
K. Makes me feel at ease					
L. I would recommend this advisor to another student					

IV. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Figure 3. UW Superior Advisor Evaluation Form.

TABLE I
General Information

1. I am a . . .

- | | | |
|----|-------|-----------|
| A. | 135 | Freshman |
| B. | _____ | Sophomore |
| C. | | Junior |
| D. | | Senior |

2. I am currently carrying

- | | | |
|----|----|--------------------|
| A. | | 0-5 Credits |
| B. | 10 | 6-9 Credits |
| C. | 75 | 1-15 Credits |
| D. | 40 | 16-19 Credits |
| E. | 10 | 19 or more credits |

3. The College in which my major is included is . . .

- | | | |
|----|----|--------------------------------|
| A. | 51 | Undecided, no college |
| B. | 32 | College of Business/Economics |
| C. | 12 | College of Education |
| D. | 14 | College of Fine Arts |
| E. | 26 | College of Letters and Science |

3. By using peer advisors, we can reduce the advisor/advisee ratio from that ratio involving faculty advisors, thus providing for a more overall personal and individual academic advising program.
4. Compared with one year ago, more freshmen students have met with their advisor during the advising period for each quarter. Therefore, apparently UWS freshmen tend to relate better to peers than they do to faculty. We are convinced that this phenomenon has little to do with the services rendered by faculty; rather, it apparently relates to the willingness of most freshmen to share some of themselves with peer advisors in their new learning environment.
5. Peer advisors can be effective "intrusive counselors." During each quarter of the 1979-80 academic year, peer advisors made numerous per-

TABLE II
RATING OF ADVISEMENT FUNCTIONS

My Advisor. . .	FREQUENCY IN %				
	SA	A	U/NA	D	SD
A. Helps in clarifying a Major	38	34	25	1	1
B. Helps in clarifying career or occupational goals	30	35	31	1	1
C. Helps in developing study skills	22	24	41	10	1
D. Informs me of general academic or course requirements	67	28	4		
E. Helps with personal-social problems	22	17	47	10	2
F. Helps me relate personal values to reasons for college	22	21	44	10	1
G. Helps in selecting courses	60	28	8	2	

TABLE III
RATING OF ADVISOR CHARACTERISTICS

My Advisor. . .	Frequency In %				
	SA	A	D	SD	
A. Makes it easy for me to make an appointment	71	22	1	1	1
B. Usually keeps appointments	55	30	10	1	2
C. Suggests options	52	30	14	2	
D. Encourages me to make my own decision	50	32	15		1
E. Helps me plan a four-year program	25	32	37	4	
F. Directs me to use college resources	24	37	31	5	
G. Understands advisee point of view	41	38	17	1	1
H. Is well-informed on requirements	51	32	11	2	1
I. Is usually rushed	8	8	18	31	32
J. Is usually busy	10	15	21	31	21
K. Makes me feel at ease	65	28	4	1	
L. I would recommend this advisor to another student	64	28	5		1

sonal contacts with each advisee that were logged in addition to meeting with them during the advising period.

- Peer advising, like any other type of advising, should be locally developed to meet the individual needs of your campus. Components of other programs can be adapted to develop individual advising programs; however, we consider no one program completely exportable. Each campus has its own specific problems and student needs.
- Peer advisors need good faculty supervision and proper in-service training initially and on a continual basis. A consultant, with a background in

TABLE IV
ADDITIONAL ADVISEE COMMENTS

MY ADVISOR:

knows how to make a student feel really comfortable.

helped me understand academic requirements, answered my questions clearly, and most importantly made me feel at ease when talking with her. I really like my advisor; she comes down to the student's level and makes them feel at ease.

has always been very helpful when I've asked for assistance

is very nice, has a good personality, and is very helpful.

is very friendly and well informed; she knows what she's talking about!

understands how tough it is to be a first year student.

counseling or student personnel, is invaluable to assist in the in-service effort.

8. Business meetings, also held on a regular basis, are essential in keeping good communication and a feeling of solidarity among advisors — particularly important if advisors have office space throughout the campus and, therefore, may not come in frequent contact with one another.
9. An advising program should consist not only of peer advising, but also students should have opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with faculty advisors, especially in their major area of study.

We believe that the Peer Advisement Program has helped meet some freshmen needs at UWS. This program will continue to undergo constant evaluation and possible modification as students' needs change. For example, we project that the UWS freshmen class will consist of a greater percentage of students twenty-five years and older in the next few years. As this prediction becomes a reality, most likely the Peer Advisement Program will contain more advisors in this age group. In any event, we look forward to peer advising as an integral component of our advising program.