Peer Advising: A Supplement to, but not a Substitute for, Faculty Advising

LOIS G. GOLDBERG, *is a career counselor in the Center for Career Planning and Placement, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.*

To support their use of undergraduates as academic advisors, administrators frequently cite several studies[1] favorably comparing peer advisors with professional and faculty advisors: that students seem at least satisfied with peer advising as with faculty advising; that colleges increasingly use paraprofessionals in various ways; and that students frequently complain about faculty advising, argues for using trained undergraduates in academic advising for undeclared majors.[2]

I believe peer advising is an excellent supplement to, but not a substitute for, faculty advising. Indeed, experiences at many institutions confirm that peer advisors do a good job. But advising systems based primarily on undergraduates as academic advisors have two inherent problems: 1) they underestimate the importance of student-faculty interaction, and 2) they promote a limited view of the goals of academic advising.

One reason for faculty advising is the benefit of student-faculty interaction. Feldman and Newcomb found that "the faculty . . . is clearly seen by individual students to be of more influence than their fellow students on their intellectual development and on their occupational and career decisions."[3] Furthermore, Astin found student-faculty interaction the most significant factor in student satisfaction with college. He reported that "students who interact frequently with faculty are more satisfied with all aspects of their institutional experience . . . ."[4]

The advising relationship can reward both students and faculty. Overlooking the benefits of good advising experience is unfortunate. The problem is that quality advising experiences with faculty occur too seldom. Often we view advising as suc-

[1]The reader should consult the following studies which compare the effectiveness of peer advisors with faculty advisorr: Coke R. Brown and Rosemary Myers, "Students vs. Faculty Curriculum Advising," *Journal of College Student Personnel,* 16 (1975), 226-231; Wesley R. Habley, "Advisee Satisfaction with Student, Faculty, and Advisement Center Advisors." Diss. Illinois State University 1978; R.A. MacAleese, "A Comparative Evaluation of Faculty and Student Paraprofessional Academic Advisement Programs," Diss. Florida State University 1974: John P. Murry, "The Comparative Effectiveness of Student-lo-Student and Faculty Advising Programs," *Journal of College Student Personnel,* 13 (1972), 562-566; M. Lee Upcraft, "Undergraduate Studenrs as Academic Advisers," ***Personnel and Guidance Journal,*** 49 (1971), 827-831.

[2]Ursala Delworth, Grant Shernood, and Neff Caraburri, *Student Paraprofessionals:* A ***Working Model for Higher Education,*** Student Personnel Series, No. 17, (American College Personnel Associarion, 1974).

[3]Kenneth A. Feldman and Theodore M. Newcomb, ***The*** *Impact of College* ***on*** *Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1969). p. 258.

[4]Alexander W. Astin, *Four Critical* ***Years*** (Washington, ***D.C.:*** Jossey-Bass, 1977), p. 223.

cessful if advisors provide accurate academic information to undergraduates, monitor their progress, and make sure they graduate on time.' Such tasks as these peer advisors do well and faculty do begrudgingly — and with less success. If, indeed, we view advising as information dissemination, procedural assistance, and record keeping, then it seems reasonable to substitute peer advisors for faculty advisors. Crookston, Grites, Mash, and others, however, believe we must begin to adopt a developmental view of academic advising that goes beyond merely providing accurate information.' Their models, as well as the one I propose here, require skilledfaculty to perform professional functions.

What do we mean by "academic advising"? The model below divides academic advising into six components.

1. ***The How To's (The Basics).*** This aspect of advising entails explanations (and re-explanations) of the logistics of academic life such as how to plan a schedule, what are credit hours, and what the normal course load is. It also consists of procedural information unique to each institution: how to register, how to drop and add courses, and when to declare a major. These questions advisors hear again and again with each new freshman class. Many college freshmen are anxious to know answers to such questions, but avoid asking for fear of seeming ignorant to their advisors.

2. ***Information and Referrals.*** This component requires that advisors provide accurate, up-to-date information concerning college policies, degree requirements, and academic options (e.g. matters ranging from placement tests and waiver exams to studying abroad). When advisors cannot answer certain questions or assist students with particular problems, they should refer them to appropriate individuals or offices. Although we generally agree advisors should avoid spoon-feeding advisees, some information in college catalogs is out-dated, vague, or hard to understand. Students must be able to seek clarification from advisors.

3. *Record Keeping.* This component involves maintaining student records and using them in advising. It sounds simple, but neither students nor faculty have been good at it. Students should keep track of coursework they have completed and make sure their advisors' records are current. On the other hand, advisors should be aware of advisees' progress and should record notes of appointments.

4. ***Experiential Advice.*** We must not overlook the importance of this component. It includes, but is not limited to, passing on information about course content, teaching styles, and anticipated class size for specific courses; helping students balance their course loads based on individual preferences and abilities; familiarizing students with how the institution works; and sharing strategies for choosing courses, registering efficiently, buying books, taking exams; joining campus organizations, and making friends.

'**Donald J. Mash, "Academic Advising: Too Often Taken for Granted," *The College Board Review*, 107 (1978), 32-36.**

'**Burns Crookston, "A Developmental View of Academic Advising as Teaching," *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 13 (1972). 12-17; Thomas J. Grites, "Student Development through Academic Advising: A 4 X 4 Model," *NASPA Journal*, 14 (1977), 33-37; Mash. pp. 32-36.**

5. ***Advising For Academic and Personal Growth.*** This component should represent the crux of advising. Advisors should encourage intellectual development and help students identify and realize their potential in a more general sense. Encouraging intellectual development suggests that advisors challenge student program choices and recommend coherent academic planning.

Many students and their parents expect academic advisors to play an active role in vocational decision making. Advisors should be able to advise those wishing to pursue graduate study or seeking employment. For many students, vocational aspirations change frequently. Advisors can help students develop a realistic picture of their strengths, their weaknesses, their unique qualities, and their values. Appropriate referrals to counseling and career service offices on campus are essential.

6. Role Models or Mentors. Perhaps this component we too often take for granted. By role models or mentors, I refer to individuals who take a special interest in student development — by setting an example of excellence and by being available to provide advice and support, they encourage students to achieve their potential. Students seek models to emulate among both peers and faculty.

If successful academic advising consists only of providing accurate academic information to undergraduates, monitoring their progress, and making sure they graduate on time, then peer advisors can do as well as faculty advisors.

Probably the most effective, efficient advising program would address the above six components of advising with some combination of peer, faculty, and professional advising. Such a program could employ maximally the use of our resources by permitting peer advisors to do those tasks they enjoy and do well, and by selecting, training, and rewarding faculty to perform all other functions.