

The Relationship of Student Satisfaction With Advising to Administrative Support for Advising Services

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This study revealed that students in a College of Business reported receiving fewer of what were identified as priority advising activities than did students in two other colleges at the same university. Interviews with the associate deans of the three colleges revealed that student satisfaction was related to administrative policies and attitudes, including advisor/advisee ratios.

In the 1970s researchers began to document the positive outcomes associated with student-faculty interaction outside the classroom (Astin, 1977; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975). Astin found that faculty-student involvement was related to student satisfaction with an institution. Satisfied students often cited the receptiveness of faculty to develop personal relationships with students as central to their satisfaction with a particular college or university. Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, and Bavry (1975) studied eight institutions of higher education and found similar results. Students who were frequently interacting with faculty reported more favorable attitudes toward their college experience in general.

The quality of advising has been found to relate not only to student satisfaction and morale (Wilder, 1981) but to student retention as well (Crockett, 1979; Habley, 1982; Trombley, 1984). Tinto (1975) suggested that informal interaction with an advisor may increase a student's social integration, thereby increasing the likelihood that he or she will stay at that institution. The advising relationship can offer a "natural context within which to strengthen a student's link to the campus" (Trombley, 1984, p. 234).

Despite the interest and concern in improving advising in the 1970s, many studies revealed dissatisfaction with current advising practices (Hornbuckle, Mahoney, & Borgard, 1979). Even in the 1980s studies continued to report the inadequacy of advising services (McKinney & Hartwig, 1981; Winston & Sandor, 1984). A literature review by McLaughlin and Starr (1982) highlighted students' "overwhelming" dissatisfaction with the advising they were receiving (p. 15).

Many variables can contribute to how advising is delivered and, consequently, to students' level of satisfaction with advising. These variables include (a) lack of administrative support, (b) limited resources, (c) lack of recognition or reward, (d) lack of consensus about the role or function of the advisor, and (e) difficulty in evaluating performance (Guinn & Mitchell, 1986). In addition, there are mixed findings concerning whether a prescriptive approach or a developmental approach to advising is preferred (Fielstein, 1989). Fielstein reports that, in general, students perceive prescriptive advising activities as a higher priority. However, whether students believe that their advising experiences actually reflect their priorities and whether administrative priorities match student priorities remain unclear.

The purposes of the present report are (a) to further examine previous data (Fielstein, 1989), (b) to address these latter issues, and (c) to determine whether the findings differ across colleges within a university.

Methods

Subjects

The target group for this study was sophomores and seniors at a Southwestern land grant institution with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 14,000. A total of 90 students participated from three undergraduate colleges: Agriculture and Home Economics ($n = 14$), Arts and Sciences ($n = 37$), and Business ($n = 39$). The number of subjects from each college was selected in proportion to the total number of majors in that college. To ensure that students had adequate experience in advising upon which to make ratings, only sophomores and seniors were selected. Of the 90 students, 48 were male and 42 were female, with almost all students being Caucasian (97%). There were 44 students between the ages of 19 and 21, 27 students were 22-24, and 19 students were 25 or older.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was constructed as part of a larger project on academic advising (Fielstein, 1987, 1989). Thirty advising activities were identified based upon a review of existing instruments measuring student perceptions of advising (Grites, 1981; Trombley, 1984; Winston & Sandor, 1984), questionnaires from several other colleges and universities (e.g., South Dakota State University and the College of St. Benedict), and informal interviews with academic advisors. These items were then used in a pilot study to ensure that major areas of advising had been included and to ensure that the wording was clear. Subsequently, a list of 20 advising activities was included in the final questionnaire (see Appendix).

The questionnaire was designed to determine student priority ratings for each advising activity and to determine how descriptive each item was of present interaction with their advisor and advising in general. Students rated each activity as 1 (not a priority), 2 (priority), or 3 (high priority). The same list was restated, and the students were asked to rate each activity in terms of how descriptive they thought each item was of the interactions they have had. Students rated each activity as 1 (not descriptive), 2 (descriptive), or 3 (highly descriptive). Subsequently, the researchers combined all high priority responses with priority responses and all highly descriptive responses with descriptive responses.

Procedures

To obtain the final sample of 90 students, approximately 195 names were randomly drawn from the three colleges based upon an enrollment roster provided by the Office of Institutional Research. Attempts were made to contact each potential subject for a telephone interview, during which the questionnaire was administered by the first-listed author of this study. Ten students stated they did not have time to answer questions over the phone. Some students could not be located. After a student was called four times without making contact ($n = 26$), the name was dropped from the list. Twenty-nine students did not have phone numbers listed but did have addresses. Questionnaires were mailed, and students were given two weeks to respond. This procedure yielded 15 returned questionnaires out of 29 (53%). Due to time constraints, a follow-up questionnaire was not sent.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the three colleges' associate deans who were directly responsible to their respective deans in matters of advising. The questions asked were:

1. Does your advising system vary between the departments, or is it relatively uniform in its organization and its procedure?
2. Is there a written policy clearly stating the position of the college in regard to the philosophy and goals of the advising system?
3. Do you have policies that require an advisor's consent or signature before an advisee can take certain action?
4. How are faculty members selected as advisors?
5. Do you have in-service training for advisors?
6. How are advisees assigned to advisors?
7. Does your college have a method for assessing the effectiveness of its advisors?
8. Is advising recognized or rewarded in your college?
 - (a) Is advisor effectiveness a criterion for promotion or compensation?
 - (b) Are advisors with full advisee loads given release time?
9. What are the strengths of your advising program?
10. What changes in the advising system do you foresee in the immediate future for your college?
11. In the last 10 to 15 years, there has been a renewed interest in the student development movement with its holistic approach to advising and its emphasis on a personal relationship between advisor and advisee. How practical is such an approach for your college?

The purposes of the interview were to determine whether the associate deans' perceptions of advising were in line with the students' perceptions and to obtain a clearer understanding of the particular philosophy held by each college with respect to advising.

Results

Student Satisfaction Across Colleges

Table 1 shows (by college) the percentage of students rating each item as a priority (note that *priority*, here, refers to responses of both "high priority" and "priority") and the percentage of students rating each item as descriptive (i.e.,

TABLE 1
Mean Percentage of Subjects Rating Activity as a Priority and as Descriptive of Their Advising Experiences

	Agriculture & Home Economics		Arts & Sciences		Business	
	priority	descriptive	priority	descriptive	priority	descriptive
Suggesting ways to improve study skills	79	36	81	41	79	21
Helping with personal problems	79	71	65	51	67	26
Explaining requirements for graduation	100	93	100	95	100	62
Making referrals to other campus offices	86	71	86	59	92	31
Building self-esteem and self-image	50	29	49	30	51	18
Keeping regular office hours and being accessible	100	93	97	84	100	62
Explaining registration procedures	93	79	81	84	82	51
Talking about problems with family and friends	43	50	24	30	18	8
Discussing course selection	100	100	100	97	100	82
Explaining university policies and procedures	93	100	89	70	87	46
Helping plan a course of study	93	93	100	84	100	64
Knowing student's background	71	86	51	43	49	21
Exploring career options	93	86	89	73	95	44
Making out-of-office contacts with students	36	36	30	27	23	10
Helping improve interpersonal skills	29	43	30	24	28	8
Discussing long-range goals	86	79	92	65	85	31
Discussing educational goals	93	86	100	84	97	56
Asking questions and listening to responses	100	93	92	73	92	56
Knowing student's values and attitudes	64	79	62	38	54	28
Being personally acquainted	93	100	81	68	82	41

"highly descriptive" or "descriptive") of their experience.

To determine overall satisfaction with advising, responses to each item were categorized as (a) priority-descriptive, (b) priority-not descriptive, (c) not priority-descriptive, or (d) not priority-not descriptive. For each subject the percentage of responses in each category was calculated. Table 2 shows, by college, the mean percentage for each category. The focus of the present report is on those activities that students rated as priorities.

As shown in Table 2, students in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics rated 79% of the items as priorities. Of these priority items, 69% were also considered descriptive of their advising experiences. Similarly, students in the College of Arts and Sciences rated 75% of the items as priorities, with 57% of these considered descriptive. However, an opposite pattern was observed for students in the College of Business. Although these students also rated a large percentage of the items as priorities (74%), only 36% of these were considered descriptive.

These statistics can be used as an index of student satisfaction with advising. Based upon their ratings, students in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics and the College of Arts and Sciences were generally satisfied with their advising, whereas students in the College of Business were dissatisfied with advising.

Degree of Student Satisfaction and Administrative Policies

To determine whether the degree of satisfaction within a college reflects current admin-

istrative policies and attitudes with respect to advising, the face-to-face interviews with the associate deans were evaluated. The information gleaned from the interviews may explain the differences in satisfaction. For instance, in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics the system of advising is uniform and does not vary with departments. In addition, a strong commitment to advising has been made by the administration. The advisors are expected to "track the students very closely while building a solid personal relationship" with the student. As the dean explained, "Advising is more than just placing a student in a class." The rationale for establishing personal relationships with students is to encourage students to feel free to seek help from their advisors if they ever have problems. According to the associate dean, 50% of the entering students personally know at least one faculty member. Because the college is known for its commitment to helping students, the dean predicted that the students within their college would indicate satisfaction with advising. When asked about future plans for advising, the dean did not anticipate any changes in practices because the administration was satisfied with present services and outcomes.

The philosophy held by the College of Arts and Sciences was slightly different. The advising system is not uniform across departments. Each department, according to the associate dean, knows what works for its students. Therefore, each department adopts the advising approach that is best and has proven most effective. It is expected, however, that each department has selected a delivery system that does not conflict with or impede the overall mission of the college

TABLE 2
Mean Percentage of Advising Items Rated as a Priority and as Descriptive of Their Advising Experiences

	DESCRIPTIVE OF ADVISING EXPERIENCES								
	Agriculture & Home Economics (n = 14)			Arts & Sciences (n = 37)			Business (n = 39)		
Priority to Student	YES	NO	TOTAL	YES	NO	TOTAL	YES	NO	TOTAL
YES	69	10	79	57	18	75	36	38	74
NO	6	15	21	4	21	25	3	23	26
TOTAL	75	25	100	61	39	100	39	61	100

with regard to advising and that the department is able to justify the position taken. The departments, explained the dean, are aware of the priority attached to advising by the college. The standards, as set by the administration, are clearly stated in the advisor's handbook, which is made available to all advisors prior to a new school year.

When attempting to better understand the dissatisfaction expressed by the students in the College of Business, it is important to note that the college was undergoing a dramatic change in its advising system. The associate dean was more than willing to discuss the present state of advising as well as to explain plans for renovating the advising system. The administration admitted that advising in the past had been neglected. Knowing that advising was low in priority, it was understandable, explained the dean, that faculty members did not perceive a need to be responsive to or effective with advisees. Taking an interest in students' advising needs was not recognized or rewarded by the administration.

In the College of Business there had been a recent realization that advising is critical and can no longer be overlooked. Advising had become a top priority for the administration in that college. In fact, beginning that fall programs specifically designed to improve advising were being implemented. The present system, however, could not be expected to have had time to significantly change attitudes about advising, according to the dean. However, changes in priorities were predicted to be markedly different in the near future. "By giving advising the emphasis it deserves, we are anticipating visible signs of improvement over the next four years, which will benefit students, faculty, and administrators alike."

Although the associate dean in the College of Business admitted that students would have valid reasons to be dissatisfied with advising, he also expressed confidence that the new program would turn attitudes around. In the new program a lower division was created to focus on freshman and sophomore advising needs, with retention as a primary objective. A newly appointed associate dean would provide leadership to the division. Faculty advisors who were known for their commitment  students and their ability to relate well to students were selected across departments. These "handpicked" faculty advisors were referred to as the "Blue Ribbon" group. They received release time for

their advising responsibilities and were expected to undergo extensive, on-going training in this area. In addition, merit salary increments would be awarded for advising services and \$500 would be awarded to the best advisor of the year.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggested that student satisfaction with advising is linked to administrative practices. Students in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics and the College of Arts and Sciences were more satisfied with their advising experiences than were students in the College of Business. Interviews with the associate deans, as was expected, generated possible explanations for the varying degrees of satisfaction among students in different colleges.

Attempts to enhance student advising raise the perennial question: "How much time will it take?" Time-conscious faculty members will want to know how to advise students efficiently without interfering with other commitments. Can faculty realistically be expected to teach full-time, garner national recognition for their scholarly contributions, serve on campus committees, be available for community service, and attend to the needs of their advisees? Is this asking too much?

Perhaps faculty should be exempt from advising. However, it is difficult to ignore the research suggesting positive outcomes associated with faculty-student interaction (Astin, 1977; Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, the advising relationship is one of the few ways administrators can be assured that faculty are connecting with students on a one-to-one basis. But from a practical point of view, is it realistic? The present findings may shed some light on this.

How did the College of Agriculture and Home Economics answer these questions? The secret behind their success may be attributed to some extent to the number of faculty available per student. For instance, their faculty-student ratio was 1:7. When compared to the ratio in the College of Arts and Sciences (1:11) and that in the College of Business (1:40), it is not surprising that student ratings were higher in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics. In addition, high risk students in Agriculture and Home Economics (e.g., conditionally admitted, probation, course deficient, and special needs students) were assigned to full-time pro-

fessional (not faculty) advisors. This was not the case in the other two colleges.

Were there differences in administrative priorities for promotion, tenure, and reward. Like the other colleges, the College of Agriculture and Home Economics emphasized the importance of research. However, a faculty member's ability and willingness to communicate effectively and interact personally with college students were equally important. According to the associate dean, this student-centered philosophy is clearly made known to prospective candidates when hiring. New faculty understand in advance what is expected from them.

Although taking an uncompromising stand on advising and articulating that position to faculty is important, it is equally important to take steps to ensure that this can be realistically accomplished within time constraints. This was achieved by the College of Agriculture and Home Economics by giving faculty release time to engage in quality relationships with students. In addition, when advisors distinguished themselves as exceptionally responsive and effective in their student interactions, they were recognized and/or rewarded for superlative efforts.

When asked how faculty advisors were evaluated, the associate dean in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics pointed to four informal checks within their system. To begin with, all students are assigned an advisor during Freshman Orientation. The schedule that is agreed upon is reviewed by the associate dean to determine whether it is workable and is commensurate with the student's goals, skills, and aptitude. Second, the associate dean meets at least once with each graduating senior to ensure that all degree requirements have been fulfilled. During this interview, questions are asked pertaining to the advisor's performance and overall effectiveness. Third, a survey is sent to all graduates, three to five months after commencement, to solicit information about the college in general. The item "List three people who have been most helpful to you during your college career" is often used to identify exceptional advisors. And finally, the associate dean serves on every promotion and tenure committee and supplies information relating to the faculty member's advising record in the college.

Another factor to consider may be that faculty are not cognizant of institutional goals. In many instances they are engrossed in their own projects and research pursuits and are frequently uninformed of their role in the overall mission

of the college or university. They may not be aware of the literature on advising that underscores the importance of faculty-student interaction and its relationship to student retention and student satisfaction. It may be that administrative discussions stressing the need for personal contact with students fail to filter down to the faculty member. This may suggest the importance of in-service meetings where faculty are reminded of their responsibilities to students. Because faculty may be unfamiliar with the professional literature on advising, the administration may need to share studies that are applicable to advising at their institution.

Overall, it appears that administrative support for advising does indeed affect student satisfaction. When administrators communicate their priorities and take action to ensure that their goals can become a reality, faculty may respond in ways consistent with those expectations. When faculty realize that spending time with students is not a waste of time but rather a judicious investment that will not jeopardize their academic futures, they may be more receptive to the idea of giving quality time to students.

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Appendix

Advising Survey

I am going to list several advising activities. Rate the task as to how important you think the activity is for an advisor when interacting with a student. Remember, this is what you would like advising to be.

Rate each activity as follows:

- 1 = not a priority
- 2 = priority
- 3 = high priority

1. Suggesting ways to improve your study skills.
2. Being open to the idea of helping you with personal problems when you request help.
3. Explaining requirements for graduation.
4. Making referrals to other campus offices.
5. Working on building your self-esteem and improving your self-image.
6. Keeping regular office hours and being accessible.
7. Explaining registration procedures.
8. Talking with you about problems with family or friends.
9. Discussing course selection.
10. Explaining university policies and procedures.
11. Helping you plan a course of study.
12. Knowing your background, i.e., where you are from and what high school you attended.
13. Exploring career options.
14. Making out-of-office contacts with you.
15. Helping you to improve interpersonal skills, i.e., social skills.
16. Discussing long-range goals.
17. Discussing educational goals.
18. Asking questions and listening to your responses.
19. Knowing your values and attitudes.
20. That your advisor be personally acquainted with you.

I will re-read the questions and this time please rate the activity as to how descriptive it is of the experience you have with your advisor or from advising in general.

Rate each activity as follows:

- 1 = not descriptive
- 2 = descriptive
- 3 = highly descriptive