

Differences in Traditional and Nontraditional Students' Preferences for Advising Services and Perceptions of Services Received

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When traditional students' perceptions of advising were compared to those of nontraditional students, the traditional students placed more value on developmental advising. Overall, traditional students were less satisfied with both the developmental and the prescriptive advising that they had received. However, both groups reported discrepancies between the developmental advising they wanted and what they were receiving.

Nontraditional learners comprise the fastest-growing population in higher education (Haponski, 1983; Steltenpohl & Shipton, 1986). Administrators, deans, and admissions officers had been anticipating this influx for the past two decades. The National Center for Education Statistics (1977) reported that the proportion of undergraduates 25 years of age and older increased from 28% in 1972 to 36% in 1977 (Kuh & Sturgis, 1980). It has been predicted that by the year 2000 half of the college students in the U.S. will be over the age of 22 (Carnegie Council, 1980; Haponski, 1983; Heretick & Doyle, 1983).

At the same time that the nontraditional student population has been increasing on college campuses, the percentage of high school graduates entering college has been decreasing ("Trends in Higher Education," 1982). With declining enrollments of traditional students (18-22 years), higher education has in most cases welcomed older students (Steltenpohl & Shipton, 1986).

In a national survey conducted by the NACADA Task Force on Adult Learners, college and university administrators consistently pinpointed academic advising as the most appropriate support service for meeting the needs of the new population (Polson et al., 1986; Polson & Eriksen, 1988). In a paper presented at the national conference of the Society of Educators and Scholars (Lightner, 1984), academic advising was criticized for ineffectively responding to the needs of college students, particularly returning nontraditional students.

As early as the mid-70s, revolutionary

changes were underway in curricula and instruction (Cross, 1981) to accommodate the learning styles that had previously been identified for nontraditional students (Grites, 1982). But in academic support services such as advising, adaptations in delivery have not been as apparent. One reason for this may be the lack of empirical research on what changes need to be made.

In this last decade, however, there has apparently been more concern about issues pertaining to nontraditional learners (Andrews, Andrews, Long, & Henton, 1987; Grites, 1982; Haponski, 1983; Heretick & Doyle, 1983; Mercer, 1989). For instance, the first Task Force for Advising Adult Learners met at the National Academic Advising Association conference in the fall of 1985. Three years later, as a result of greater awareness of the needs of these students, the NACADA Board of Directors voted to change the temporary task force to a standing Commission on Advising Adult Learners. This act reflects NACADA's commitment to meeting the needs of nontraditional students (Polson, 1989). Subsequently, in the Fall 1989 issue of the *NACADA Journal* (9[2]), a section that included a comprehensive bibliography was devoted to research on nontraditional learners.

It appears that decisions are now being made from a more informed perspective rather than from mere speculation as to what nontraditional students need or do not need. However, more studies of this nature will clarify this population's needs and may improve their academic support services.

This study attempted to determine whether preferences for academic advising were unique to this nontraditional population or whether all college students, regardless of age, have similar preferences for advising. Winston and Sandor (1984) found students preferred the developmental approach to advising regardless of age. Another study (Andrews et al., 1987) found that younger students expressed higher needs for information than did older students.

A secondary purpose was to determine

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These past few years: As editor, I marvel when a manuscript is submitted that has actually been prepared according to our written instructions. We direct authors to submit four copies of a manuscript prepared according to APA guidelines. Our assumption: People pay attention to instructions and will exhibit evidence of having done so. Not!

* * *

Maybe nobody pays attention anymore. Is it all up for grabs? Am I merely trying to make sense where no sense is to be made?

To quote a chemist friend, "Entropy needs no maintenance."

Reference

Schein, H. K., Laff, N. S., & Allen, D. R. (1987). *Giving advice to students: A roadmap for college professionals*. Alexandria, VA: American Association for Counseling and Development.

Howard K. Schein

Announcing:

The Advisor's Toolbox

In upcoming issues of the *NACADA Journal* the editors hope to launch a section entitled "The Advisor's Toolbox," which will consist of very short research reports or conceptual articles based in the literature. Therefore, in addition to the types of articles customarily solicited, the editors will also welcome much briefer articles (from one to three typed pages). Note that these contributions will differ from the short speculative pieces and advising hints that are published in the *Newsletter*.

Journal readers are encouraged to submit work to be considered for publication in "The Advisor's Toolbox." For further information call Howard Schein at (217) 333-7881.

received. This difference between developmental and prescriptive items was slightly greater for nontraditional than for traditional students. If the discrepancy between the Importance and Received ratings can be taken as indicative of

students' satisfaction with advising, traditional students were less satisfied than nontraditional students, and all students tended to be less satisfied with developmental advising activities than prescriptive advising activities.

TABLE 1
Demographic Profile of Subjects

	<i>Traditional Students</i>	<i>Nontraditional Students</i>	<i>Total Students</i>
SEX			
Male	10 (10%)	13 (13%)	23 (22%)
Female	49 (47%)	31 (30%)	80 (78%)
ACADEMIC STATUS			
Freshman	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Sophomore	24 (23%)	7 (7%)	31 (30%)
Junior	22 (21%)	16 (15%)	38 (37%)
Senior	4 (4%)	7 (7%)	11 (11%)
Graduate Student	14 (14%)	7 (7%)	21 (20%)
AGE			
17-20	32 (31%)	0 (0%)	32 (31%)
21-24	23 (22%)	0 (0%)	23 (22%)
25 or older	4 (4%)	44 (43%)	48 (47%)
ETHNICITY			
Caucasian	49 (47%)	41 (40%)	90 (87%)
African-American	8 (8%)	0 (0%)	8 (8%)
American Indian	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Other	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Did Not Indicate	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
COLLEGE			
Arts & Sciences	15 (15%)	12 (12%)	27 (26%)
Education	24 (23%)	15 (14%)	39 (38%)
Health & Applied Sciences	20 (19%)	17 (17%)	37 (36%)
MARITAL STATUS			
Single	47 (46%)	5 (5%)	52 (50%)
Married	9 (9%)	31 (30%)	40 (39%)
Divorced	1 (1%)	6 (6%)	7 (7%)
Did Not Indicate	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	4 (4%)
CHILDREN			
No Children	51 (49%)	13 (13%)	64 (62%)
Children	8 (8%)	30 (29%)	38 (37%)
Stepchildren	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME?			
No	27 (26%)	17 (17%)	44 (43%)
Yes	31 (30%)	27 (26%)	58 (56%)
Did Not Indicate	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
ADVISOR IS:			
Faculty	40 (39%)	26 (25%)	66 (64%)
Staff	17 (16%)	14 (14%)	31 (30%)
Have No Advisor	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)
Other	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)
Did Not Indicate	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)

whether nontraditional students describe their advising experiences in the same way as traditional students.

For this study, we used the NACADA Task Force's 1986 definition of the nontraditional learner: "a person who is a high school graduate or holder of a GED and who has been away from formal education for at least two years" (Polson et al., 1986, p. 3). These nontraditional learners may hold either full- or part-time jobs, may have established their own homes, and may have assumed roles other than that of student. Nontraditional students are often part-time learners because education is often not their primary concern (Polson et al.).

Methods

Subjects

The subjects for this study were selected from undergraduate and graduate students from a state university in the southern Midwest that has a student population of approximately 8,000. Deans on campus singled out courses most likely to have substantial numbers of nontraditional students. Table 1 presents demographic information on our study subjects.

Questionnaire Development

Having reviewed previously published instruments (Fielstein, 1989; Grites, 1981; Kapraun & Coldren, 1980; Trombley, 1984; Winston & Sandor, 1984) and advising questionnaires from several other institutions and having held informal discussions with advisors and advisees, we identified 60 activities common to undergraduate academic advising. Students in the Personnel in Higher Education graduate program and the senior author edited the items and reduced their number to 34. Three faculty advisors reviewed the questionnaire to ensure content validity and clarity. The Appendix reproduces the final questionnaire.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered during class. All subjects agreed to participate; therefore, the response rate was 100%.

The questionnaire elicited a numerical rating on a 5-point Likert scale for each advising activity. Students were first asked to rate the importance of each advising activity on a scale ranging from (1) extremely unimportant to (5)

extremely important. After completing the Importance rating, students were asked to reread the items and rate each according to how descriptive they thought the item was of their interaction with an advisor or with advising in general. The descriptive scale ranged from (1) not descriptive to (5) extremely descriptive. Thus, students indicated their preferences, as well as their perceptions of advising services they had received.

Results

Identification of Subscales

The data from all subjects on both their preferences and their perceptions of services received were evaluated using common factor analyses. The first two factors extracted from these analyses accounted for 39.70% and 56.65% of the total variance on the "Importance" and "Received" ratings, respectively. The first factor was labeled "developmental advising" and the second "prescriptive advising" (cf. Crookston, 1972). Subscales were defined for these two factors by selection of items that, for both types of ratings, had a factor loading of at least .50 on one of the factors and a difference in loadings on the two factors of at least .25. Based on these criteria, 13 of the original 34 items were selected for the developmental subscale (Table 2) and 8 were selected for the prescriptive subscale (Table 3).

Developmental and prescriptive subscale scores were obtained for both the Importance and Received ratings. These scores were obtained by computing, for each student, the mean response for the items on each scale.

Comparisons of Traditional and Nontraditional Students on Subscales

Subjects were classified as nontraditional students if they answered yes to the question: "Has there ever been a lapse of more than two years when you were not enrolled in school?" Subjects who answered no to this question were classified as traditional students. Using this criterion, 59 students were classified as traditional and 44 were classified as nontraditional.

The mean developmental and prescriptive subscale scores for these two groups are displayed in Figure 1. Students rated the prescriptive items higher than the developmental items, both in terms of importance and in terms of perceived similarity to advising that was actually

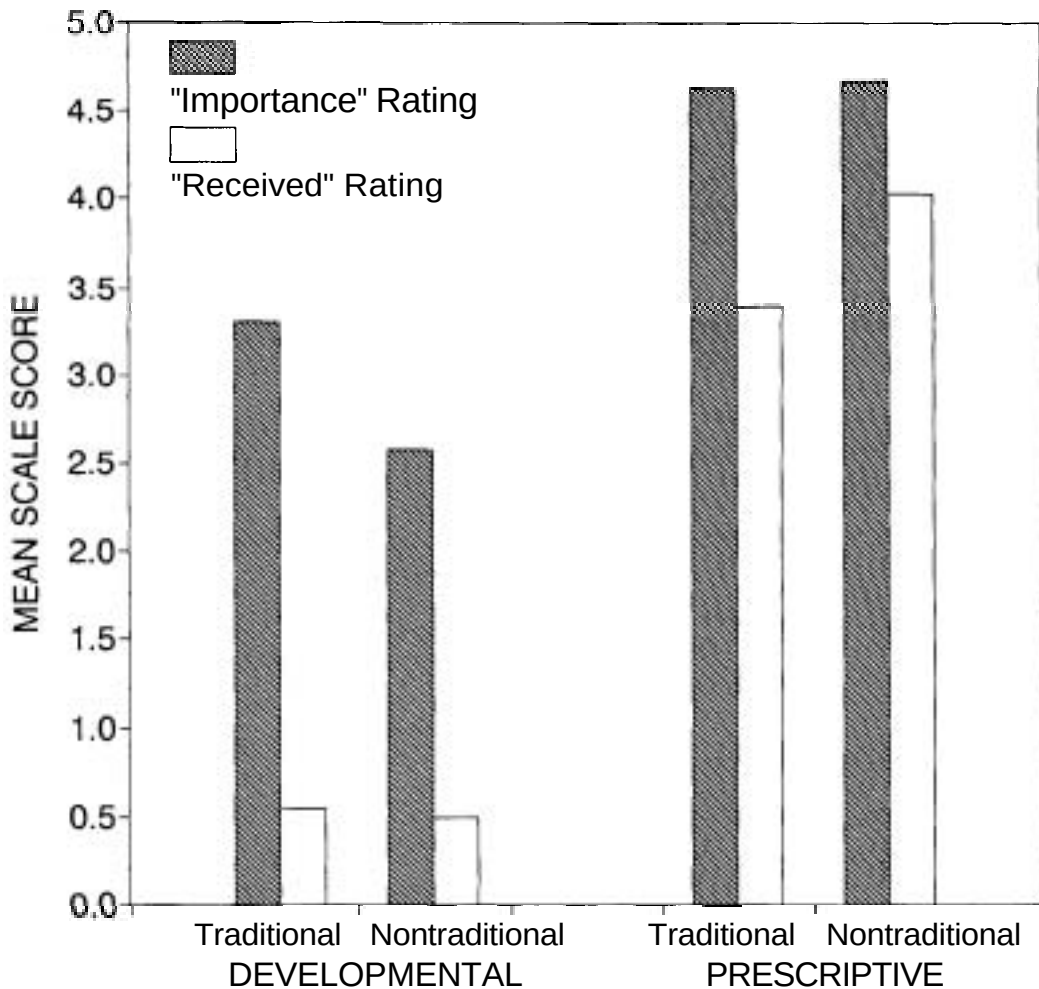


Figure 1. Mean developmental and prescriptive subscale scores for traditional and nontraditional students who were asked to report the importance of advising activities and their perceptions of advising that they actually received.

These observations were confirmed by a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial analysis of variance (traditional/nontraditional student $\times$ developmental/prescriptive subscale $\times$ importance/received rating). The last two factors in this analysis represented repeated measures. This analysis revealed significant differences between ratings for the developmental and prescriptive subscales, $F(1, 100) = 1092.68, p < .001$, and between the Importance and Received ratings, $F(1, 100) = 523.94, p < .001$. More importantly, significant interactions were obtained between type of student and subscale ratings, $F(1, 100) = 14.75, p < .001$, and between type of student and the discrepancy between importance/received ratings, $F(1, 100) = 12.07, p < .005$. In addition, a

significant interaction was obtained between the Importance/Received discrepancy and subscale, $F(1, 100) = 118.35, p < .001$. Neither the main effect of type of student nor the three-way interaction was significant, $F_s < 1$.

The conclusion that traditional students were less satisfied with advising activities than were nontraditional students was confirmed by analysis of a separate item on the questionnaire. This item asked, "On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied, how satisfied are you in general with the advising you have received?" The traditional group had a mean score of 3.288, compared to the nontraditional group's 3.750, $t(100) = 1.996, p < .05$.

Discussion

The developmental approach to advising (Crookston, 1972) advocates shared responsibility between the advisor and the student; it promotes initiative and growth in the student. The prescriptive approach is more didactic, and the advisor, as the authority, assumes primary responsibility for the advice prescribed. The developmental model, therefore, is an ongoing process in which advisees are encouraged to discover solutions for themselves (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982). Typical developmental items were (a) talking to students about problems with family and friends, (b) offering encouragement, and (c) sorting out conflicting values, beliefs, and attitudes. Typical prescriptive items were (a) providing information regarding course selection, (b) explaining registration procedures, and (c) making sure students enroll in appropriate courses.

Our findings contradict previous studies that suggest there are no age differences in preferences for developmental advising (Winston & Sandor, 1984) and other studies that seem to indicate that nontraditional students will require more advisor intervention (Polson, 1989). And even though these findings suggested that nontraditional learners may receive more prescriptive advising, it did not suggest that they preferred more prescriptive advising than did traditional students. Nontraditional students rated developmental items significantly lower in importance than did the traditional students.

It is not surprising that both student groups rated the prescriptive items higher than the developmental items in terms of importance. After all, not all students want to become personally acquainted with an advisor and to explore educational/career goals (Fielstein, 1989; Trombley, 1984), but it is reasonable to expect that students want accurate, timely information prescribed by an advisor in a professional manner.

Our findings should raise concerns for providers of academic support services. Overall, the results suggest dissatisfaction with the advisement received by both traditional and nontraditional students on this campus. Traditional students had a significant discrepancy between their preferences and their perceptions of the prescriptive advising they had received, and both groups had a significant discrepancy between their preferences and their perceptions of the developmental advising they had received.

Institutions of higher education will need to

be responsive to the advising needs of the nontraditional student. Further research will be necessary to specify effective advising interventions. Various limitations inherent in this study suggest the need for follow-up research. For instance, the small sample was taken from a single, mid-sized state university in the southern Midwest and may not represent the general college student population. As a result, these findings should be generalized with caution.

This preliminary study, however, paves the way for further investigation into the actual nature of the advising relationship from the nontraditional student's perspective. Advisors and their nontraditional advisees will benefit from such investigation, as will administrators, deans, and advising directors, who will be selecting and training advisors and planning programs to recruit and retain the new "older" students of the 1990s.

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A version of this article was presented at the 1991 NACADA Region Seven Conference in New Orleans and at the 1991 National Conference on Academic Advising in Louisville, Kentucky. Lynda L. Fielstein and Michael T. Scoles are Associate Professors of Psychology and Counseling. Kendall J. Webb is currently an educational examiner in the Pine Bluff public schools. The authors would like to acknowledge Jon Borton, Darcy Horton, Daniel Naegeli, Frances Shepard, and Jay Wians for their comments and assistance in the preparation of this article. Address correspondence concerning this article to Lynda L. Fielstein, Department of Psychology and Counseling, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, AR 72035.

Appendix

Advising Survey

We are conducting a survey to identify advising activities that are seen as important for an advisor from the student's point of view. The results of this survey may be used to improve advising services. Your responses to the questionnaire will be confidential. Would you be willing to participate in this study? Thank you. Again, I would like to remind you that your identity will be concealed. Therefore, feel free to express your true opinions regarding these questions about advising.

DIRECTIONS:

These 34 items should be answered according to what you want from an advisor or from advising in general. The objective is to find out what you think are important activities for an advisor to perform. When rating these activities, please refer to the scale printed on your survey.

ON A SCALE FROM 1-5, WITH 1 BEING EXTREMELY UNIMPORTANT AND 5 BEING EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, RATE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS WITH RESPECT TO ADVISING.

- _____ 1. advisors provide information regarding course selection
- _____ 2. advisors refer you when necessary to the proper college official, administrator, staff person or counselor when appropriate
- _____ 3. advisors discuss long range/career goals with you
- _____ 4. advisors are aware of your aptitude and abilities
- _____ 5. advisors explain ways to cut through institutional red tape
- _____ 6. conversations with advisors may include topics other than academics
- _____ 7. advisors are open to the idea of helping students with personal problems when requested
- _____ 8. advisors explain the requirements for graduation
- _____ 9. advisors talk to students about problems with family and friends
- _____ 10. advisors work with students to build self-esteem and improve self-image
- _____ 11. advisors explain registration procedures

(continued)

- _____ 12. advisors help students to plan a course of study
- _____ 13. advisors keep you up-to-date on degree requirements and changes in course offerings
- _____ 14. advisors help students improve interpersonal skills, i.e., social skills
- _____ 15. advisors help students develop self-help skills, e.g., study skills, time management, etc.
- _____ 16. advisors inform students of deadlines, i.e., preregistration and drop/add dates
- _____ 17. advisors offer encouragement and emotional support
- _____ 18. advisors know the student's values and attitudes
- _____ 19. advisors discuss when and where the student should study in an effort to improve grades
- _____ 20. advisors inform students about general educational requirements
- _____ 21. advisors are aware of and concerned about your social life, i.e., dating or marital problems
- _____ 22. advisors check remaining requirements for graduation
- _____ 23. advisors sign course schedules for registration
- _____ 24. advisors listen to personal problems advisees have
- _____ 25. advisors make sure students enroll in appropriate courses
- _____ 26. advisors are aware of other departments and people on campus who might be able to help their advisees
- _____ 27. advisors help develop educational plans which take into consideration personal and situational constraints
- _____ 28. advisors help you understand reasons for coming to college
- _____ 29. advisors know community resources and refer students to them when appropriate
- _____ 30. advisors meet with students more than just during preregistration or registration
- _____ 31. advisors help students set realistic academic goals
- _____ 32. advisors are sensitive to nonacademic commitments such as work and/or family demands
- _____ 33. advisors are supportive as you sort out conflicting values, beliefs and attitudes
- _____ 34. advisors are personally acquainted with their students

SECOND SET OF DIRECTIONS:

Please re-read the same 34 questions. This time rate the activity as to how descriptive it is of the experience you have with your advisor or advising in general at this university. Use the following scale and rate the activity at the end of each item (in the blank space provided).

ON A SCALE FROM 1-5, WITH 1 BEING NOT DESCRIPTIVE AND 5 BEING EXTREMELY DESCRIPTIVE OF THE ADVISING YOU ARE RECEIVING, RATE THE STATEMENTS.

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ON A SCALE FROM 1-5, WITH 1 BEING EXTREMELY DISSATISFIED AND 5 BEING EXTREMELY SATISFIED, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU IN GENERAL WITH THE ADVISING YOU HAVE RECEIVED?