

Monthly Advising Reports: A Technique to Demonstrate the Contributions of Advising Units

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A centralized advising center promotes its value to the university community by generating monthly reports based on a functional analysis of academic advisor activities. The functions include advising, teaching, conducting workshops, giving lectures, performing research, providing departmental outreach, and advising student organizations. Each month the completed reports are submitted to administrators and faculty members to demonstrate the contributions of the Academic Advisement Center to the campus community.

Confronted with economic problems, higher educational administrators often look to cut programs and services which they believe are expendable. Since academic advising has been viewed by some faculty members and administrators as a nice, but superfluous activity, it may be a target on some campuses for severe cutbacks or modifications. Advising formats that use professional advisors appear to be especially vulnerable to attacks. For example, Grites, Stockton, and Kelly (1994) point out that some critics of advising programs state that advisors are a financial liability and that "faculty members must reassume responsibility for freshmen advising" (p. 1).

Consequently, it may be in the best interests of academic advising units to become more proactive and to develop strategies which can demonstrate advisors contributions to their colleges and universities. One academic advising department developed and implemented a monthly advising report in order to demonstrate its overall impact on the campus community.

The project was undertaken by the Academic Advisement Center at The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio. The University of Akron is an urban, midwestern university with an enrollment of approximately 26,000 students. The university is comprised of the University College and seven degree-granting colleges. New students are placed in the University College until they have met the specific requirements to transfer to one of the degree-granting colleges. Approximately 10,000 students receive academic advising through the Academic Advisement Center, which consists of 20 professional advisors who are centralized under the Director of the Academic Advisement Center.

Methodology

A strategy for demonstrating the contributions of the Academic Advisement Center involved the development of a monthly report which summarizes the various activities performed by advisors. The Academic Advisement Center Report was distributed monthly to various administrators and faculty on campus.

The first step in developing the report was to identify the advisor functions which have a demonstrated value to the student body, faculty, administration, and university governance. As a result of the functional analysis recommended by Grites, et al. (1994), the activities performed by the Academic Advisement Center were categorized as follows:

- Advising
- Teaching
- Guest Lecturing
- Departmental Outreach
- Student Organizational Contact
- Workshops
- Research
- Committees and University Governance
- Community Outreach
- Other

In addition to the functional categories, the Summary Report showed monthly student contacts. See Figure 1.

After each month the various activities of advisors, beyond direct advising, were categorized as previously described. This process was time-consuming and somewhat tedious; however, the benefits of gathering and organizing the information into a meaningful report far exceeded the necessary expenditure of time and effort. A final report for fall semester 1994 was generated which summarized all of the advising activities for the semester. The report is shown in Figure 1.

The completed report provides a clear indication to university administrators and faculty members of the plethora of activities and services that the Academic Advisement Center provides to the entire campus community. Advisors had over 8,000 student contacts during the 1994 fall semester. Administrators and faculty may have to ask what other department(s) would have the expertise and willingness to devote over 500 hours to performing

departmental outreach activities, conducting workshops, teaching, advising student organizations, and conducting research relevant to student personnel issues. As Grites, et al. (1994) point out, who would perform the functions shown in Figure 1 if the Academic Advisement Center did not exist or would be reduced in size?

Discussion

The generation of monthly activity reports may offer the following benefits to advising units. First,

the advising report offers an opportunity for advising units to promote its services to the campus community. Subsequently, the visibility and the contributions of advising units are more likely to be enhanced throughout the campus community.

Second, more accurate information regarding the role of advising units could be made available by advising activity reports. For example, some administrators and faculty members may have preconceived ideas, based on their own experiences and on hearsay, about advisor duties. In some instances

Figure 1 Academic Advising Report For Fall Semester 1994.

Advisor-Student Contacts			
Day Appointments			
	<u>Appointments</u>	<u>Walk-ins^a</u>	<u>Total</u>
September	1,519	N/A ^b	1,519
October	1,786	428	2,214
November	1,676	920	2,596
December	1,300	N/A	1,300
DAY TOTALS	6,281	1,348	7,629
Evening Appointments			
	<u>Appointments</u>	<u>Walk-ins</u>	<u>Total</u>
September	79	31	110
October	106	14	120
November	134	30	164
December	44	N/A	44
EVENING TOTALS	363	75	438
GRAND TOTALS	6,644	1,423	8,067

^aWalk-ins are students who do not require an appointment to ask an advisor a brief question.

^bN/A indicates that student-advisor contacts were not counted during the indicated month.

Guest Lecturer Summary

Advisor	Frequency	Class
A	3	University Orientation and Career Planning
B	1	University Orientation
C	1	University Orientation
D	5	University Orientation
E	2	University Orientation and Communication Pedagogy
F	1	University Orientation
G	1	University Orientation
	<u>14</u>	

Teaching

Advisor	Courses
A	University Orientation
C	University Orientation
N	University Orientation
F	University Orientation
G	University Orientation
O	Western Culture
P	Career Planning
E	Career Planning
Q	Generic CADD

Workshop Summary

Advisor	Activity	Department
A	Interview Skills	Career Center
E	Time Management	Fraternity
	Time Management	NEOUCOM
D & E	Workshop Strategies for Probation Students	University College
D	Leadership (Academic)	Fraternity & Sorority
P	Workshop	College of Education

Other Semester Activities

Advisor	Activity
P	Submitted article for publication; article published in July issue of <i>Resources in Education</i> . Wrote and evaluated doctoral student exam questions.
F,A,D, & P	Completed research project and paper, "Transfer Student Evaluation of Academic Advising Systems" and completed research project presented at NACADA Regional Conference in March
P	Coordinator Postsecondary High School Program
F	Coordinator of AP and CLEP Program

Committee and University Governance

Advisor	Activity
R	Member of Faculty Senate
P	Member of University Well-Being Committee, Chair Faculty Senate—Ad Hoc Member
D	Member of NEOUCOM Advisory Committee
S	Member of A.A.U.P.
F	Member of Contract Professional Advisory Committee

Notes. CEPESO stands for Continuing Education Programs and Student Outreach. NEOUCOM stands for Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine

Departmental Outreach

Advisor	Activity	Department	
H	Academic Advising, Degree Clearance	School of Music	150
E	Academic Advising, Degree Clearance Forms	School of Communications	150
B	Academic Advising and Assisting with Department Planning	CEPSO	5
I	Academic Advising and Assisting with Department Planning	CEPSO	5
D	Meetings which included curriculum planning, discipline hearings, and planning	NEOUCOM	8
C	Same meetings as above	NEOUCOM	8
D	Same meetings as above	NEOUCOM	8
J	Same meetings as above	NEOUCOM	8
E	Same meetings as above	NEOUCOM	8
I & K	Academic Advising for 60+ Program	Adult Resources Center	8
L	Coordinator of Honorary Coach Program	Athletic	25
E	Discussed Advising in "Sneak Preview Program"	Admission	2
I	Taping Textbooks	Office of Students with Disabilities	8
C	Academic Advising for High Risk Minority Students	Office of Minority Retention	90
F&L	Assisted with survey study of satisfaction and orientation	Orientation	10
D	Assisted with construction of survey for conditional/unconditional students	Asst. Vice President of Student Support Services	10

Fourteen advisors have continuous liaison responsibilities with academic departments and support departments. The purpose of liaison duties is to gather and disseminate information from departments to advisors in a timely manner. In addition, departments often seek advisor input in addressing departmental concerns.

Student Organizations (faculty advisors)

Advisor	Organization
M	Golden Key
A	Alpha Lambda Delta
N	ACES and SAFE
D	Phi Eta Sigma
L	Tau Kappa Epsilon Fraternity

The Next Generation of Computer-Assisted Advising and Beyond

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In a recent NACADA Journal "Advisor's Toolbox" article, Tukey (1994) explained ways in which personal computer software could be used to automate the process of calculating grade-point averages. Building on this particular example of computer-assisted advising, the present article introduces the next generation of computer-based grade-point average calculation programs and expands the definition of computer-assisted advising by examining additional examples of interactive, student-centered, computer-based advising programs.

David Tukey (1994) described the use of PC-based spreadsheet and Macintosh hypertext software to automate the calculation of semester and cumulative grade-point averages. In that article, Tukey suggested that the next generation of grade calculation software would automatically retrieve a student's course schedule, credits, and cumulative grade points from existing central databases and use that information in the calculation of the student's predicted averages, thus obviating the need to enter this information manually into stand-alone PC programs. At the Pennsylvania State University, the next generation of computer-assisted advising has arrived.

On-Line Grade-Point Average Predictions

In an ongoing project, Pennsylvania State University has been developing a series of computer modules, collectively known as OASIS¹ (Open Access to Student Information Systems), that gives students access via computer terminals to various academic records. OASIS modules currently permit students to view their own course schedules, grade reports, academic transcripts, and other academic records retrieved from university databases. These modules also allow students to update local and home address records, a function that directly modifies the student records database without clerical intervention. Other records-oriented OASIS modules being planned or nearing completion include on-demand degree audit (matching a student's academic transcript to the graduation requirements for a specific academic major) and point-and-click course registration (building a schedule by choosing courses from on-screen lists of open course sections).

The first interactive, advising-oriented OASIS project was initiated in spring 1995 by the Division of Undergraduate Studies at Pennsylvania State University. The primary goal of the project was to create an OASIS module that would capitalize on existing database records to calculate semester and cumulative grade-point averages based on a student's predicted grades for the current enrollment period. An additional (and perhaps more important) goal was to utilize the module to teach students the method used to calculate grade-point averages and to provide individualized information and academic advice concerning the outcomes of those calculations.

The opening screen of the Grade-Point Average (GPA) Prediction module displays the student's current schedule of courses alongside a list of valid grades (A, A-, B+, etc.). Directions instruct the student to click first on a grade from the list and then on the course(s) in which the student expects to earn that grade. An optional "No" grade allows the student to earmark courses in which the student expects not to earn a letter grade (e.g., the student is contemplating dropping a course).

The GPA module displays a table summarizing the calculations generated by the program based on the grades predicted by the student and on the student's previous academic record (credits attempted and grades earned). This table shows the *current* (actual), *projected semester*, and *projected cumulative* grade-point averages, credits, grade points, grade-point deficiencies (the difference between a current cumulative average and a higher C average), and semester standing. This screen explains the meaning of each row and column in the table, provides a cautionary message regarding the unofficial and predictive nature of the calculations, and refers students to academic advisors and official university publications for further information and interpretation. From this screen, students can take advantage of four additional options:

1. The *Important Messages* option displays a list of 10 messages related to academic progress (e.g., Dean's List average, D grades, grade-point deficiencies, academic drop). The messages that apply to this particular set of predicted grades are highlighted. The student is cautioned that different predicted grades might have resulted in other highlighted messages. For additional clarification, each message also refers students to specific sections of