Advisors' Attitudes Regarding Transfer Students

Patricia G. Mahon, Fort Hays State University
Michael Dannells, Kansas State University

This study allowed us to determine differences in advisors' attitudes toward students who matriculate at their 4-year institutions (native students), students who transfer from community colleges, and those that come from other 4-year institutions. Results show that advisors view transfer students to be less prepared, less motivated, less knowledgeable about requirements and procedures, and less able to adjust to the upper-division academic environment. Potential consequences of advisors' attitudes are discussed along with suggested avenues for addressing them.

Over the past several decades, community colleges have grown more rapidly than the rest of higher education. By 1996, 2-year public institutions (1,088) accounted for approximately 48% of the undergraduate students in public higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 1996–1997), substantially more than the 24% in 1970 and 14% in 1960 (Grubb, 1989). The transfer function (the movement of students from one postsecondary institution to another) is one of the most important aspects of community college services (Bender, 1990). However, in studies where student ability, level of aspiration, and socioeconomic status are controlled variables, students attending 2-year colleges prior to enrolling in 4-year institutions were found 15% less likely to obtain a Bachelor's degree than those who started their education at the 4-year institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Attrition occurs while the student is at the community college, during the transfer process, and during the first year of attendance at the 4-year institution (Dougherty, 1987). Critics contend that community college students experience a "cooling out." That is, those who may have acquired the baccalaureate leave community colleges with lowered aspirations thereby reducing their educational achievements (Grubb, 1989; Clark, 1960). Those who earn a degree often do so by a circuitous path; Cohen (1994) states, "The process is analogous to the likelihood of one's reaching a desired destination after having boarded a nonstop flight as compared with one who has to change planes along the way." Other skeptics maintain that the proximity and lower costs of community colleges attract qualified students away from 4-year institutions.

However, students who effectively transfer, are successful in their first year at 4-year institutions, and are motivated to complete Bachelor's degrees do not suffer a postgraduation employment disadvantage due previous community college attendance. These students compete for jobs of equal occupational and economic status as their nontransfer counterparts (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

In 1990, Knoell suggested that states were better organized with respect to the coordination of student transfer and program articulation than ever before. State governments, frustrated by students' problems in transferring from community colleges to public 4-year postsecondary institutions, have enacted legislation that direct public schools to develop and carry out state-wide articulation and transfer policies (Cicarelli, 1993).

Advisors at the 4-year institutions provide an important link in the transfer process. A study conducted by Morris (1986) examined transfer-related problems as perceived by advisors from 2-year colleges, advisors from 4-year institutions, and transfer students. In Morris's study, advisors from 4-year institutions indicated that transfer students had problems resulting from the academic preparation and advising received at the 2-year colleges. The community college students were also viewed as having more problems with academic adjustment to the 4-year institution than transfers from other 4-year schools. Morris's findings are consistent with those of Remley and Stripling (1983) who found that with respect to advisement, advisors at 4-year institutions saw few problems at their own level and believed most of the difficulties were centered at the 2-year colleges.

Purpose

This study compared the opinions held by academic advisors from 4-year institutions toward three categories of students: those who matriculate at the advisors' institution (native students), those who transfer from a 2-year community college, and those who come from another 4-year institution. Advisor attitudes were further analyzed in regard to the following characteristics: size of the advisor's institution; the advisor's aca-

demic affiliation; the number of years of advising experience; whether or not the advisor was located in an advising center; whether or not the advisor attended a community college; whether or not the advisor had ever worked at a community college; and whether or not the advisor had received in-house advisor training (in general and in relation to transfer students).

Methods

Population

The postsecondary education system in Kansas is comprised of 6 public institutions, 1 municipal university, 19 community colleges, and 13 private 4-year institutions. In the fall of 1993, 170,227 students were attending these postsecondary institutions. The community college enrollment was 62,433. Enrollment at the six public institutions totaled 79,094 of which 59,856 were undergraduates (Kansas Legislative Research Department, 1993). Of the 59,856 undergraduate students, 5,709 students were transferring to a public institution. Over half (52.2%) were coming from community colleges within the state (Kansas Board of Regents, 1994). The population of interest was the academic advisors at the six 4-year public institutions. The study was conducted in the spring of 1994.

Sample

The 400 subjects for this study were randomly selected from 933 advisors identified by the six public institutions as academic advisors in the areas of arts and sciences, business, and education. The total number of advisors was divided, based on university identifiers, as follows: arts and sciences, 673; business, 160; and education, 100. A sample of 200 arts and sciences advisors was obtained in the following ways: a) all 23 full-time advisors were included and b) the remaining 177 faculty advisors were randomly selected from university-generated, alphabetically arranged lists until the sample of 200 was reached. A pool of 100 business advisors was obtained in the following ways: a) all 23 full-time advisors were included and b) the remaining 77 faculty advisors were selected by choosing every second name from the six alphabetically compiled rosters. All 100 education advisors were asked to participate. Seventy percent, or 278 advisors (137 Arts and Sciences, 69 Business, and 72 Education), responded to the survey.

Instrument

The eight items which comprised the basis for this study were part of a larger survey. In addition to examining advisors' attitudes toward transfer students and the transfer function, the larger study (not included) researched advisors' opinions about the Transfer Agreement and Articulation Guide between Kansas community colleges and the Regent institutions (those public institutions, including the six included in the smaller study, which are governed by a state board of regents). Demographic questions relating to advisor characteristics were also asked. Selected items from instruments constructed by Banks and Byock (1991), Morris (1986), and Parmley (1990) were utilized. These previously conducted surveys were particularly helpful because they addressed articulation of community college transfer students to 4-year institutions. Each of the questionnaires had been administered to advisors at community colleges. The works of Morris and Parmley were also given to advisors at 4-year institutions.

The 1994 survey presented here, pertaining to advisors' attitudes toward transfer students, employed a 4-point modified Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The information was coded as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, agree = 3, and strongly agree = 4.

The dependent variables for this study were the following eight statements assessing advisor attitudes:

1. Students who intend to obtain a baccalaureate degree should begin their collegiate experience at the institution where the student intends to graduate.

2. Students get as good a start toward their baccalaureate if they start at a community college.

3. Students adjust easily to the upper-division academic environment at my institution.

4. Students on this campus lack motivation to complete the baccalaureate.

5. Students are academically prepared for upper-division courses in my college/department.

After these initial five questions, a screening question, "As an academic advisor, I work with students during their process of acceptance into my college/department," was asked. Advisors

who answered "yes" were asked to respond to the following questions. Sixty-eight arts and sciences advisors, 25 business advisors, and 39 advisors from education departments responded affirmatively and continued the survey.

6. Students seem to understand the admission requirements to my institution prior to enrollment.

7. Students are fully aware of course registration procedures prior to their initial enrollment.

8. Upon initial application for admission into upper division courses, students meet the admissions requirements for my academic department.

Procedures

Cover letters and copies of the questionnaire were mailed to the selected advisors. Follow-up postcards were mailed to advisors who did not respond within 2 weeks. Advisors were told that their participation was voluntary and that the information gathered would be used anonymously for research purposes.

Statistical Methods

The first two survey items asked for advisors' opinions but did not ask that they respond separately for each category of student. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to determine opinion differences among advisors according to various advisor characteristics. Each null hypothesis was tested at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post hoc multiple comparison was utilized to further analyze those instances where the univariate F was found to be significant.

Advisors were asked to respond separately to each student category on survey items 3–8. For each statement, advisors were requested to consider their opinions about native students, community college transfer students, and other 4-year transfer students. A two-way, repeated-measures analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine attitude differences among the categories of students (repeated factor) and the presence of any link between advisor characteristic and student category. The main-effect hypothesis for advisor characteristic was of no interest; the characteristics were not rated by their relative influence on advisor opinion. Each null hypothesis was tested at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level and LSD post hoc comparisons were used where significant differences between advisor characteristics, as related to student category, were found.

Results

Results of the ANOVA on the survey items 1 and 2 are shown in Table 1. In response to the statement "Students who intend to obtain a degree should begin their collegiate experience at the institution where the student intends to graduate," advisors from smaller institutions ($\leq$ 9,999 enrollments) reported a significantly greater degree of agreement than did advisors from large institutions. Also, arts and sciences advisors indicated significantly more agreement than did advisors from either education or business departments. In consistent fashion, when responding to the statement "Students get as good a start toward their baccalaureate if they start at a community college," advisors from large institutions expressed greater agreement than those from smaller institutions. Also, advisors from colleges of education reported greater agreement than did those from colleges of arts and sciences or business. Advisors who had attended a community college expressed greater agreement than those who did not.

Advisors were asked to rate each category of student (native, community college transfer, and other 4-year transfer) on six survey items that addressed the students' academic preparation and motivation as well as their knowledge of admission and registration requirements and procedures. Responses to the statements, taken in combination with the seven advisor characteristic variables, produced a 42-item, repeated-measures MANOVA.

The hypothesis of primary interest was the comparison of advisor opinion about the three student categories: native, community college transfer, and other 4-year transfer. The second hypothesis regarded potential relationships between student category ratings and advisor characteristics: We tested whether or not advisor opinions about the three types of students varied according to certain advisor characteristic or whether the opinions were consistent regardless of advisor characteristic. Results of these analyses are shown in Table 2. Raw data is available from lead author. See Authors' Notes.

We found consistent advisor opinion on the six survey items; on three statements addressing student adjustment to the upper-division academic environment, preparation for upper-division courses, and meeting admission requirements (items 3, 5, and 8), the response patterns were

Table 1 Advisors' Attitudes According to Advisor Characteristics

Survey Item	Advisor Characteristic	$N^{\dagger}$	*df*	*M*	*F*
1. Students who intend to obtain a degree should begin their collegiate experience at the institution where student intends to graduate.	Size of Institution**		1, 264		7.40
	Small (≤ 9,999 enrollments)	127		2.65	
	Large	139		2.41	
	Academic Affiliation*		1, 264		4.17
	Arts & Sciences	129		2.66	
	Business	67		2.42	
	Education	70		2.39	
	Years of Advisor Experience		5, 256		1.17
	1–5	82		2.54	
	6–10	42		2.52	
	11–15	27		2.44	
	16–20	36		2.61	
	21–25	37		2.70	
	26–38	37		2.32	
	Associated with Advising Center				0.00
	Yes	65	1, 259	2.52	
	No	196		2.53	
	Attended a Community College		1, 263		0.25
	Yes	44		2.48	
	No	221		2.54	
	Previously Employed at Community College		1, 263		2.10
	Yes	27		2.33	
	No	238		2.55	
	Trained as Academic Advisor		1, 262		0.70
	Yes	114		2.57	
	No	150		2.49	
2. Students get as good a start toward their baccaulaureate if they start at a community college.	Size of Institution*		1, 263		8.26
	Small (≤ 9,999 enrollments)	127		2.08	
	Large	138		2.35	
	Academic Affiliation***		2, 262		15.20
	Arts & Sciences	130		2.02	
	Business	66		2.18	
	Education	69		2.62	
	Years of Advisor Experience				1.22
	1–5	83	5, 244	2.35	
	6–10	41		2.20	
	11–15	27		1.96	
	16–20	36		2.11	
	21–25	36		2.19	
	26–38	27		2.22	
	Associated with Advising Center		1, 258		1.69
	Yes	65		2.34	
	No	195		2.19	
	Attended a Community College**		1, 262		9.47
	Yes	45		2.53	
	No	219		2.15	
	Previously Employed at Community College		1, 262		1.86
	Yes	27		2.41	
	No	237		2.19	
	Trained as Academic Advisor		1, 261		0.00
	Yes	114		2.22	
	No	149		2.21	

Notes. †Not all participating advisors answered every question.
Lickert Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree.
*$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
Where F ratio indicated significant mean variation within a category, LSD analysis was used to determine which characteristics differed significantly from the mean.

Table 2 Summary findings on advisor perception by student type and advisor characteristic

Survey Item	Advisor Characteristic	Advisor Opinion			Comments
3. Students adjust easily to upper-division academic environment.	Size of Institution	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	*College of Education advisors rated CC transfers more positively than did advisors from Arts & Sciences and Business.*
	Academic Affiliation*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Years of Advising Experience	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Associated with Advising Center	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Attended a Community College	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Prior CC Employment	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Received Advisor Training	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
4. Students lack motivation to complete degree.	Size of Institution	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	*No significant interactions were detected.*
	Academic Affiliation	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Years of Advising Experience	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Associated with Advising Center	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Attended a Community College	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Prior CC Employment	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Received Advisor Training	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
5. Students are academically prepared for upper-division courses.	Size of Institution	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	*Education advisors rated all students higher than did Arts & Sciences and Business advisors. Respondents who had attended a CC rated CC college transfers higher than advisors who had not attended a CC. Advisors who received training rated CC transfers lower than did advisors without training*
	Academic Affiliation*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Years of Advising Experience	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Associated with Advising Center	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Attended a Community College*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Prior CC Employment	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Received Advisor Training*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
6. Students understand admission requirements prior to enrollment.	Size of Institution	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	*Business and Education advisors rated both CC and O transfers significantly below N students.*
	Academic Affiliation*	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Years of Advising Experience	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Associated with Advising Center	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Attended a Community College	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Prior CC Employment	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Received Advisor Training	N=O	N>CC	O>CC	
7. Students are aware of course registration procedures prior to initial enrollment.	Size of Institution	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	*Business advisors rated both CC and O transfers significantly lower than did Arts & Sciences and Education advisors.*
	Academic Affiliation*	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	
	Years of Advising Experience	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	
	Associated with Advising Center	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	
	Attended a Community College	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	
	Prior CC Employment	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	
	Received Advisor Training	N>O	N>CC	O=CC	
8. Students meet admission requirements for academic department.	Size of Institution*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	*Advisors from small institutions rated N students significantly higher than did advisors from large schools. Education advisors rated CC students higher than other advisors. Business advisors rated O transfers significanly lower than did other respondents. Advisors who attended a CC rated both CC and O transfers higher than those who only attended 4-year schools.*
	Academic Affiliation*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Years of Advising Experience	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Associated with Advising Center	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Attended a Community College*	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Prior CC Employment	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	
	Received Advisor Training	N>O	N>CC	O>CC	

Notes. CC = Community College and Community College Student Transfers; N = Native Students; O = Transfers from other 4-year institutions.

*Indicates significant interactions between advisor characteristics and student type, $p < 0.05$.

> Denotes significant difference between student types.

Where F ratio indicated significant mean variation within a category, LSD analysis was used to determine which characteristics differed significantly from the mean.

identical. Native students were perceived the most positively and community college transfer students the least positively. Other 4-year transfer students were consistently rated more positively than community college transfer students but less so than native students.

However, concerning student motivation and understanding admission requirements (statements 4 and 6), native and other transfer students were perceived more positively than community college transfer students but equal to each other. On item 7, awareness of registration, native students were rated higher than both community college and other transfer students who were rated equal.

Nine of the 42 F values for student category by advisor characteristic (survey items 3–8) were significant, suggesting that the advisors' opinions of the three student types varied according to certain advisor characteristics. Only in response to item 5, which concerned student motivation, was advisor affiliation not significantly associated with advisor comparisons of students by category. Two opinions were connected with advisor attendance of a community college: those expressed about student preparation for upper-division course work (5) and specific department requirements (8). Size of institution and advisor training were significant factors associated with advisors' opinions about student preparation for upper-division courses and their understanding of admission requirements, items 5 and 6 respectively. A more detailed explanation of the significant differences between advisor characteristics and their attitudes toward student categories is provided in Table 2.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whether the advisor attitudes displayed by the data are the result of actual advising experience or are based on stereotypes is unknown. Do advisors at 4-year institutions have these opinions because they have seen many transfer students fail? Or do transfer students fail, in part, because of advisors' attitudes? Regardless, the findings demonstrate a nearly consistent perception of transfer students, particularly those from community colleges, as being less prepared, less motivated, less informed about requirements and procedures, and less able to adjust to the environments of the receiving institutions.

As noted, these findings are consistent with those of previous research (Morris, 1986; Remley & Stripling, 1983). In addition, the relationship between specific advisor attitudes and institutional characteristics suggests that the noted advisor opinions prevail throughout academia. One must ask whether or not such attitudes are sensed by transfer advisees or are in any way reflected in the overall quality of the advising they receive. That is, are advisors fulfilling their own prophecies about transfer students?

A number of actions can be recommended based this study. Advisor training programs should be designed to address the negative bias toward transfer students. Such preparation should approach the potentially damaging effect of adverse opinions by presenting data that demonstrate comparable success rates for native and transfer students.

Dialog should continue between 4-year and community college advisors to resolve the transition problems encountered by transfer students as they enter the 4-year institution. These conversations should seek to not only identify the problems but also to pinpoint specific actions that can be taken to facilitate transitions. These efforts can be augmented by continual development and updating of degree summaries, computer degree audit systems, electronic transfer of transcripts, and tracking systems designed to monitor students as they move from one institution to another.

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Authors' Notes

Dr. Patricia Mahon is Associate Vice President of Student Affairs at Fort Hays State University. To see all the MANOVA data or to discuss the article, interested readers may contact Dr. Mahon at pmahon@fhsu.edu.

Michael Dannells is a professor in the College of Education at Kansas State University.