Preferences for Academic Advising Styles

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This psychometric study was designed to test the feasibility of measuring college students' preferences for developmental and prescriptive advising styles as separate constructs. Part 5 of the Academic Advising Inventory (Winston & Sandor, 1984b) was revised into two independent scales, one for measuring preferences for developmental advising and the other for measuring preferences for prescriptive advising. Results suggest that the two scales have a reasonable item structure, and the internal consistency reliability is reported to be modest. Of greater theoretical importance, the two scales are found to be largely independent. The practical implications of this independence are discussed relative to future applications and research.

Introduction

Higher education in the United States has changed radically since its inception in the 17th century. Once solely the province of the White male elite, college campuses have gradually opened to women, minorities, and the middle class (Cohen, 1998). The once rigid curriculum has expanded to include a nearly infinite number of courses and degree program choices. Students faced with this myriad of curricular choices need knowledgeable guidance in establishing and clarifying values, developing goals, and making academic and extracurricular choices in support of those goals; all of these factors play a role in overall student development.

Effective academic advising should be at the core of a developmental approach in higher education (Shane, 1981). Academic advising is a process in which the advisor helps the student to develop his or her total potential (O'Banion, 1972). Few college experiences influence student development as much as academic advising (National Academic Advising Association, 2002). The nature of the relationship between advisor and advisee is of critical importance for student success (Crookston, 1972). Interaction with an academic advisor gives the student the opportunity to learn and understand degree requirements, learn about extracurricular opportunities, discuss major and career options, and consider life values and goals. High quality advising is essential to student learning and leads to improved retention rates (Austin, Cherney, Crowner, & Hill, 1997; Creamer, 1980; Creamer & Atwell, 1984; Crockett, 1985; Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Grites, 1979; Habley, 1982; Ting, 1997). Greenwood (1984, p. 64) described academic advising as "one of the most important and influential components of a higher education institution."

As the role of academic advisors continues to gain attention, and as college student populations become increasingly diverse, an emphasis on advising styles has continued to be a salient concern. Much of this discussion has revolved around two opposing ends of the advising continuum: the prescriptive, or traditional, model, and the more modern, or developmental, approach. In 1972, Crookston introduced the construct of developmental advising, through which total student development is promoted. Many researchers and practitioners have since concluded that the developmental advising model is superior to the prescriptive model, through which only student academic goals are addressed (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986; Creamer, 1980; Crookston, 1972; Winston & Sandor, 1984a).

Developmental advising can be defined as a systematic process to help students achieve educational, personal, and career goals through the use of institutional and community resources (Winston & Sandor, 1984a), and it is designed to promote the total student development that Chickering (1969) had described. Developmental advising tasks include agreements between advisor and advisee regarding who takes the initiative, who takes responsibility, and how knowledge and skill are obtained (Crookston, 1972). Developmental advising is a decision-making process, and therefore, communication and shared responsibility is emphasized in the advisor-advisee relationship (Crockett, 1985).

Prescriptive advising can be defined as an authoritarian relationship (Herndon, Kaiser, & Creamer, 1996). Through this paradigm, the student is presumed to be unmotivated, and advisors are expected to take full responsibility for staying well-informed and for telling students how to satisfy requirements (Winston & Sandor, 1984a). The prescriptive model places the responsibility for decision making with the advisor; therefore, if the decision does not turn out to be in the student's best interest, the advisor is

at fault (Crookston, 1972). Crookston has also described the prescriptive model as a doctor-patient type of relationship. It is clearly a model based on the expertise of the advisor rather than a collaborative effort between advisor and advisee.

Institutional changes in advising delivery services consistently reflect a developmental approach (Creamer & Creamer, 1994), which seems a reasonable strategy for handling the developmental factors affecting 21st century students. However, not all students prefer the developmental approach (Fielstein, 1989; Saving & Keim, 1998). Differences in advising style preferences lead one to question the appropriateness of a normative approach for all advising situations. Regardless of the advising style they receive, students are, in general, dissatisfied with the quality of the academic advising they receive (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986; Guinn & Mitchell, 1986; McLaughlin & Starr, 1982; Noel-Levitz, 2001). At the same time, students consistently rate academic advising as a service that is important to them (Noel-Levitz, 2001). If students have different preferences for advising style, are generally dissatisfied with advising, and see advising as important, the exploration of advising style preferences may be important and may help advisors provide services that are more consistent with a student's individual needs and preferences.

While the current literature is replete with studies that suggest general student preferences exist for a model of advising (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986; Broadbridge, 1996; Winston & Sandor, 1984a), little has been done to identify the underlying constructs that differentiate advising style preferences. Saving and Keim (1998) specifically recommended further research to explore relations of student personality traits with preferred advising style. Daller, Creamer, and Creamer (1997) found that advisors do not vary their advising styles between students. Yet, advising needs are very person specific, vary among students, and change over time for individuals (Shane, 1981). The literature suggests that advisors need to recognize individual differences and modify advising procedures accordingly. One might argue that both forms of advising, developmental and prescriptive, are necessary, and furthermore, that they could be complimentary rather than mutually exclusive. Our research is based on the complimentary nature of the two models of advising.

To explore some of the individual differences that contribute to a student's advising style preference, we studied the relationship of two constructs, developmental advising and prescriptive advising. This study is a prerequisite to a broader line of inquiry that will support better grounded theory in academic advising. To set this foundation for further study, we addressed the research question: Do the items in the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) (Winston & Sandor, 1984b) reflect two distinct constructs, developmental and prescriptive advising?

The research question is significant because findings will allow us to examine some underlying assumptions that may impact student success. If developmental advising and prescriptive advising are, indeed, two separate constructs, then the implications for advisors, faculty members, and other student affairs practitioners are immense. The structure, organization, and delivery processes might best be suited to the individual's pattern of preferences and needs relative to the two advising modes.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted at a large, comprehensive university in the southwestern United States. The undergraduate enrollment at this institution is approximately 20,000. We selected the sample for study from students enrolled in upper division classes in the College of Arts and Sciences. A random list of classes was generated by the Office of Planning, Budget, and Institutional Research using the following parameters: each class was to be an upper division class in the College of Arts and Sciences, and each class was to have a minimum of 20 students enrolled. To control for the effects of differing advising models among colleges, we did not include classes from other colleges. We selected upper division courses to exclude freshmen who may have limited experience with academic advising and may respond to the AAI inventories from a profoundly less stable perspective than their upperclassman peers (Winston & Sandor, 1984b).

We asked instructors of each class on the random list for permission to administer the survey either as an in-class or extra credit homework assignment. Two hundred twenty-eight students in six courses (one junior-level psychology course, one junior-level journalism course, one senior-level journalism course, one senior-level sociology course, and one senior-level communication disorders course) participated. Thirty-nine student surveys were later excluded from the data analysis because the respondents had indicated a major outside of the College of Arts and Sciences. Two surveys were also later excluded from the analysis due to unusual response patterns.

We collected the data during September, October, and November of 2002. A total of 187 surveys

were included in the analysis, which equaled 82% of the initial participant pool. The sample included 53 males (28.3%) and 134 females (71.7%). One hundred forty-nine participants (78.9%) were age 22 or younger. Seventeen participants (9.1%) were between the ages of 23 and 25, and the remaining 13 participants (6.9%) were age 26 or older. Students reported their racial backgrounds as follows: White or Caucasian/European, 161 (87.0%); Native American, 16 (8.6%); Black or African American, 5 (2.7%); Hispanic, Latino/a, or Mexican American, 2 (1.1%); and Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1 (0.5%). Data for this item were missing in two cases.

Most of the participating students were juniors and seniors. One hundred seven (57.2%) were fourth- or fifth-year students; 68 (36.4%) were third-year students; 11 (5.9%) were second-year students; 1 respondent (0.5%) reported first-year standing. Fourteen academic majors were represented in this sample. The participants included 71 (38%) journalism majors, 52 (27.8%) psychology majors, 23 (12.3%) communication science majors, 20 (10.7%) sociology majors, 6 (3.2%) art majors, 4 (2.1%) biology majors, and the remaining 8 (4.2%) students reported having one of the following majors: physiology, chemistry, Spanish, zoology, political science, history, biochemistry, and undecided.

We also collected data concerning the number of times students had contact with their advisors during the semester prior to the study, the length of each visit, and whether their advisors were faculty or staff members. We found that 19 students (10.2%) had met with their advisors 1 time in the previous semester. One hundred sixteen (62.0%) participants reported contact with an advisor between 2 and 4 times during the previous semester. Thirty-three (17.6%) students reported meeting with an advisor 4 to 6 times; 9 (4.8%) students reported meeting with an advisor 7 to 10 times during the semester; 9 (4.8%) students reported meeting with an advisor more than 10 times. Only 1 respondent (0.5%) reported not meeting with an advisor at all during the previous semester. Finally, students were asked to provide their cumulative grade-point average (GPA). They reported a GPA range of 2.0 to 4.0. The average self-reported GPA for the sample was 3.26.

Instruments

Participants completed Part 3 and Part 5 of the AAI (Winston & Sandor, 1984b). These two parts (subscales) were designed to measure satisfaction with advising and preferences for advising style, respectively. The AAI is comprised of five parts: the Developmental/Prescriptive Advising scale; advisor-advisee activities; satisfaction with advising; demographics; and preferences for developmental or prescriptive advising. A total of 72 items are included in the entire instrument. Part 3 contains 5 items, and Part 5 contains 14 items. The entire instrument takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and is best administered in a group setting.

Preferences for Developmental/Prescriptive Advising Scale

Part 5 of the AAI, the Developmental/Prescriptive Advising scale, is comprised of 14 items that each list two statements for students to evaluate. Each item represents an 8-point continuum from prescriptive behavior (low scores) to developmental behavior (high scores). For example, a sample item in the original AAI reads, "My advisor tells me what I should major in, OR, My advisor suggests steps I can take to help me decide on a major." Respondents are asked to first choose which statement most accurately describes their experience and then decide the relative truth of the statement (from "very true" to "slightly true" on a 4-point scale). Low cumulative scores (14 to 56) indicate a preference for prescriptive advising or a preference for the advisor to function as the expert and prescribe remedies to problems. High scores (57 to 112) indicate a preference for developmental advising or a preference for a collaborative relationship and an emphasis on the student's total education and well-being.

Internal consistency reliability for the Developmental/Prescriptive scale was obtained using Cronbach's alpha. The test manual (Winston & Sandor, 1984b) reported that the alpha coefficient for the entire scale is .78. Winston and Sandor estimated construct validity by comparing scores of groups of students who were expected to perceive academic advising differently. One group of students, who were enrolled in the Developmental Studies Division at the University of Georgia, included marginally prepared freshmen who received intensive developmental advising. The second group of students included regularly admitted freshmen who received more prescriptive academic advising. The first group was predicted to perceive the advising they received as more developmental than the second group. As predicted, scores on the Developmental/Prescriptive scale were significantly different for the two groups ($p < .001$), with the first group perceiving the advising received as being more developmental than the second group had perceived for their experiences

(Winston & Sandor, 1984b).

We designed this study to determine if preferences for prescriptive or developmental advising can be measured as two separate constructs. Permission was obtained from Roger Winston to rewrite each item as two separate items. One item measures student preference for developmental advising and one item measures preference for prescriptive advising. For example, using the sample item above, the first statement reads, "My advisor tells me what I should major in." The second statement reads, "My advisor suggests what steps I can take to help me decide on a major." For each statement, participants select a response from "very important" to "very unimportant" on a 4-point Likert scale. We calculated reliability and validity estimates for the revised instrument. Part 3 of the AAI, through which demographic data are obtained, was administered to the sample unchanged.

Demographic Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire, which we had developed, was administered to determine the participants' majors, whether they were primarily advised by a faculty or staff advisor, and the frequency of meetings per semester with the advisor. Based on the literature that suggests individual attention can be an important contributor to student success (Crockett, 1985), the questionnaire includes items regarding the length of the average advising session and the number of visits with an advisor per semester. We used the information to determine whether number and length of advisee-advisor meetings were associated with students' overall satisfaction with advising. We used the information regarding student majors and the students' assigned advisors to gain a more precise description of the advising experience.

Results

The AAI originally measured preferences for developmental or prescriptive advising on a single continuum ranging from a definite preference for developmental methods to a definite preference for prescriptive methods. However, in this study, we sought to determine if preferences for advising style could be measured as two separate constructs: one measure of preference for prescriptive advising and a second measure of preference for developmental advising. Students may not view prescriptive or developmental advising as mutually exclusive domains; rather, they may have a preference for one or the other, or both, depending on the specific advising activity at hand and the student's developmental level.

To explore advisee preferences as either distinctly developmental or prescriptive, we modified Part 5 of the AAI. The 28 anchor statements comprising the 14 items of the original AAI were included as 28 separate items with four Likert response categories. Thus, we could sum the 28 items into two separate scales, one consisting of the 14 prescriptive items and the other consisting of the 14 developmental items.

Structure of the Revised Items

To examine the structure of the 28 revised AAI Part 5 items, we performed a principal components analysis. We used the Kaiser rule, which states that factors with eigenvalues over 1 should be rotated, and found a nine component solution. However, the Scree plot showed that this initial analysis produced a substantial overestimate of the number of factors, which is a typical finding when the Kaiser rule is used. Of the nine components on the Scree plot, two stood out as having much larger eigenvalues than the remaining seven. These two components explained approximately 30% of the variance, while the inclusion of a third component added only a very small portion (approximately 5%) to the total variance explained. These observations are consistent with expectations posited by theory, which indicates the hypothetical presence of only two distinct factors: a preference for developmental advising techniques and a preference for prescriptive advising techniques. As a consequence, we decided to report and interpret the two-factor solution.

To aid in the interpretation of the factors, we first performed an oblique rotation. However, this rotation revealed uncorrelated factors. Therefore, we used a simpler, orthogonal solution (varimax). The rotated factor loadings are shown in Table 1.

Analysis of the rotated component matrix yielded interesting results. Because a majority of the items loading on Factor 1 were the developmental items, this factor was labeled the Developmental factor. The second factor was similarly identified as the Prescriptive factor. Items were used to help name the factor if their correlations with the factor were .40 or above. Although 14 items were expected to load strongly on each of the two factors, a few of the items proved to be problematic. Three of the items (1, 5, and 12) from the Developmental Advising scale exhibited weak loadings on Factor 1. Furthermore, items 2, 10, and 23 from the Prescriptive Advising scale exhibited strong loadings on Factor 1 although in theory they should have

Table 1 Rotated principal components analysis of the revised developmental-prescriptive advising scale

Developmental Items			Prescriptive Items		
Item	Component 1	Component 2	Item	Component 1	Component 2
V1	0.35	–0.09	V2	0.42	–0.16
V4	0.44	0.18	V3	0.14	0.30
V5	0.33	–0.23	V6	–0.25	0.53
V7	0.56	–0.00	V8	–0.26	0.55
V9	0.69	0.09	V10	0.70	0.17
V12	0.25	–0.06	V11	0.10	0.59
V14	0.61	0.11	V13	0.31	0.62
V16	0.40	0.08	V15	–0.10	0.49
V17	0.52	0.18	V18	–0.15	0.35
V20	0.49	0.10	V19	0.23	0.43
V22	0.53	–0.02	V21	0.18	0.36
V24	0.70	–0.04	V23	0.59	0.30
V25	0.53	–0.29	V26	–0.19	0.59
V28	0.62	–0.09	V27	0.11	0.35

loaded more strongly on Factor 2. Factor 2 had seven items with strong loadings (>.40). For Factor 2, the problematic items, other than those discussed above, were those that were expected to have strong loadings but instead loaded with values less than .40. These were items 3, 18, 21, and 27, which failed to load on either factor. An examination of all of these problematic items reveals no clear topical pattern.

Reliability Analysis

To estimate the internal consistency of the scores, we assessed reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Because the modified instrument contains two subscales, we conducted a reliability analysis for each subscale. Reliability for the scores on the Developmental Advising scale was found to be .79. Item analysis revealed that reliability could be increased by deleting items 1, 5, and 12 from the Developmental Advising scale. These items were weakly correlated with the others and diminished the overall reliability for the scale. Removal of these items resulted in a final alpha of .80.

We also calculated Cronbach's alpha for the 14-item Prescriptive Advising scale scores. The initial estimate of reliability for the entire scale was .68. Item 2 was removed due to a low item to total score correlation, thus increasing reliability of this scale to .69. This was the maximum reliability that could be achieved with any subset of items from the Prescriptive Advising scale.

Relation of the Two Scales

We addressed the feasibility of measuring preferences for developmental and prescriptive styles of advising. We calculated a Pearson product-moment correlation between the two sets of scores on the Developmental Advising scale and the Prescriptive Advising scale. We found this relationship ($r = .22$) to be statistically significant ($p < .01$). However, we found less than 5% common variance for the two scales, which led us to the obvious conclusion that the two scales are largely independent constructs.

Relation of Scales to Other Variables

We performed a series of analysis to determine if either advising preference was related to participant characteristics. For all analyses, nominal alpha was set at .05. We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if men and women have different preferences for advising style. No statistically significant differences were found in preference for a prescriptive approach, $F(1, 184) = 2.875$, or a developmental approach, $F(1, 182) = 2.234$.

We performed another ANOVA to determine if students in different class levels held differences in advising style preference. No statistically significant differences were found for a prescriptive approach preference, $F(4, 181) = 1.921$, or a developmental approach preference, $F(4, 179) = 0.768$. The results may reflect the overrepresentation of upperclassmen; 94% of the sample was comprised of third-, fourth-, or fifth-year students.

We performed two analyses to determine if racial groups express differing preferences for advising style. No statistically significant differences were found in preference for a prescriptive approach, $F(4, 179) = 0.898$, or a developmental approach, $F(4, 177) = 1.286$.

We conducted two analyses to determine if stu-

dents in different age categories hold differences in advising style preference. Age categories were a) below 20 years, b) between 20 and 22 years, c) between 23 and 25 years, d) between 26 and 28 years, and e) 29 or more years. No statistically significant differences were found between preference for a prescriptive approach, $F(4, 181) = 1.757$, or a developmental approach, $F(4, 179) = 1.734$. We also found no significant correlation between students' GPAs and satisfaction with advising ($r = .124$).

Discussion

The analysis of the structure of the 28 revised AAI Part 5 items provides some support for the viability of measuring preferences for developmental and prescriptive advising as separate constructs. The coefficients of internal consistency reliability found in this initial effort are sufficient so that the addition of a few new items to these scales would not be deleterious, and the reliability of the resulting data would make assessment of individual students' preferences possible. The high degree of independence of the two scales (95%) provides a strong rationale for continuing research of two advising constructs. In using these two models, advisors should consider possible student preferences and needs, which may be best met with both prescriptive and developmental processes. The findings of this study would not support the exclusive use of one advising style for all students all of the time.

The modified AAI (Winston & Sandor, 1984b) promises to provide some insight into the debate over developmental and prescriptive advising. If student preferences of advising approach depend on the advising task at hand, advisors may choose to initiate a dialogue with students early in the relationship to determine the advisees' preferences or needs. Further research with the modified measure will help to determine how advisors might use this information.

Limitations

Those conducting further research using the modified AAI should consider the limitations of this study. Although the principal components analysis suggests the presence of two distinct factors, the low percentage of variance explained by the first two components does not rule out the existence of other potential dimensions.

The sample used in the current study may impact generalizeability of the findings. First, the study involved a limited number of academic majors. A majority of respondents were female (72%) and most were White or Caucasian/European (87%). In addition, while classes were selected randomly, they were intact groups that were comprised of only Arts and Sciences majors. Finally, the advising style of the advisor as well some personality characteristics of the advisor may have influenced the students' responses to the AAI.

Recommendations

Future researchers might address the circumstances under which students prefer different styles of advising. Tasks at hand range from long-term career and lifestyle planning to discussions of specific degree requirements. Clearly, student preferences may vary depending on the nature of the discussion. Research on the characteristics of students who have various combinations of preferences for advising styles would yield results beneficial to practicing advisors. From a psychometric perspective, further exploration into the relationship of the two constructs and the ability to measure them would yield interesting results. The effects of tailoring advising approaches to students' preferences should also be related to concrete outcome variables such as time to graduation, satisfaction with advising, and academic performance. Additional studies in which more heterogeneous samples are studied and differing methodologies are utilized may add new perspectives to this important and ongoing discussion.

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