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Open Option Advising at Iowa State University: An Integrated Advising and Career Planning Model

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Since 1973, students at Iowa State University have been allowed to enter the College of Sciences and Humanities (S&H) without declaring a major. This undeclared population (Open Option) increased from five percent in 1973 to 34 percent in 1980. If preprofessional students (i.e., law, medicine, veterinary medicine) who enter without declaring majors are added to this population, the percentage for 1980 jumps to 47 percent. The growing percentage of students choosing Open Option forced the S&H College to re-evaluate its advising services for Open Option students. The results of a study conducted in 1977 indicated problems in the effectiveness of advising for Open Option students. To improve the advising of Open Option students, the College of Sciences and Humanities developed an advising center and career planning/orientation course. This paper describes the development and evaluation of the center and the course.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN OPTION ADVISING MODEL

The 1977 study conducted in the S&H College focused upon four areas:

1. Reasons students enroll as Open Option.
2. Assessment of advising for Open Option students.
3. Processes Open Option students used to select majors.
4. Comparison of the number of changes in majors for Open Option students with students in declared majors.

Between January 1977 and May 1977, questionnaires were given to all S&H students who changed or declared majors (N = 610). Results from the questionnaire showed that 47 percent of these students entered without majors because competing interests made it difficult for them to pinpoint a single major; 28 percent entered undeclared because they lacked information about majors. Thus, 75 percent of these students believed they needed assistance in career planning before selecting a major.

Advising of Open Option students in 1977 was done by two groups of advisors: (1) professional advisors in the Dean's Office and (2) faculty advisors in departments which had agreed to advise these students. The students' assessment of the effectiveness of these advisors (the second part of the study), produced a clear distinction: 96 percent of the

students advised by professional advisors were satisfied, but only 68 percent at the students advised by faculty advisors from departments were satisfied. Three reasons for student dissatisfaction with their advisors dominated the responses:

- advisors did not care about the student personally (32 percent),
- advisors knew little about college courses and procedures (28 percent), and
- advisors knew little about courses outside their own departments (18 percent)

These responses reveal the types of problems encountered when advising of Open Option students is assigned to departmental faculty.

The third part of the study examined the process by which Open Option students selected majors. In answer to the question, "What motivated you to choose your major?" over half the students responded "An introductory course taken to fulfill distribution requirements." Paradoxically, Open Option students indicated they were dissatisfied with the assistance received from advisors in course selection, yet their choices of majors were made on the basis of courses selected.

The final part of the study compared the number of changes in majors made by Open Option students with the number of changes made by students in declared majors. Eighty-eight percent of the changes in major were made by students who had entered as declared majors; only 12 percent were made by students who had entered as Open Option. Apparently, the process of exploration used by students resulted in satisfaction with their choice of a major.

As a result of the 1977 study, an integrated advising system was established. A diagram of the model is presented in Figure 1. At present, all Open Option students are advised in the Open Option Advising Center (OOAC). Students who are undecided are assigned to one of the seven professional advisors. Those who have decided on a broad area (i.e., arts, humanities and communication; sciences and mathematics; social and behavioral sciences) are advised by a faculty member from that area. These faculty hold half-timed-visiting appointments in the Center. Students who have decided on a preprofessional arm (law, medicine, vet-medicine) are advised by specially trained preprofessional advisors.

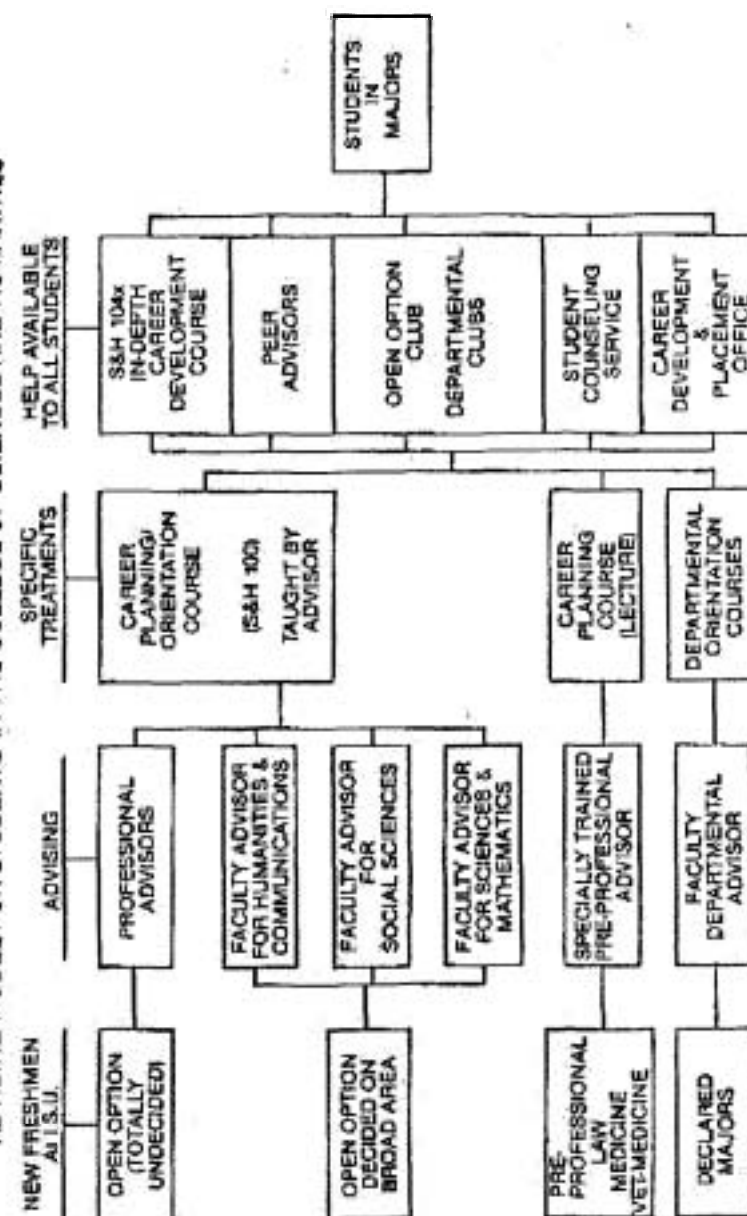
Students first meet their academic advisors during a two-day summer orientation. At that time, the student and advisor plan a course of study for the first term, and students are given the option of registering for the career planning/orientation course taught by their academic advisor.

The Open Option Advising Center also houses the peer advising program. Peer advisors are carefully selected and trained during spring term for approximately 100 hours in communication skills, university rules, regulations, and procedures. They hold office hours in the Center during the busiest portions of the day and assist with the career planning course. The peer advising program is funded by the Parents' Alumni Association; each peer advisor receives \$100 per term.

During the year, the Open Option population has the following changes:

- Students change to Open Option from majors in the S&H College, and from other colleges.

FIGURE 1
ADVISING MODEL FOR STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES



- Students who have been reinstated after being dropped from the University for academic reasons are asked to remain Open Option for awhile to reassess their interests, values, and abilities in terms of their chosen major.
- Students desiring to change majors must sometimes remain Open Option until their grades are high enough for acceptance into their chosen major.

The objective of the Open Option Advising Center is to meet the needs of undecided students at whatever stage of career development they might be, and student evaluations of the advising program indicate that the Center is achieving this objective.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAREER PLANNING/ORIENTATION COURSE

In 1978 a career planning and orientation course, Sciences and Humanities 100 (S&H 100), was taught in a large lecture format to approximately 100 Open Option students. To evaluate the course, a study was performed with three groups of students: (1) fifty Open Option students taking S&H 100; (2) fifty Open Option students not enrolled in the course; and (3) fifty students who had declared majors. The students completed pre-tests and post-tests consisting of Task III of the Developmental Task of Young Adults. Task III provided data on: (1) appropriate educational plans, (2) mature career plans, and (3) mature life-style plans. Results of this study (Table I) show that the students in the career planning/orientation course scored lower on the pre-test than either of the other populations but made greater gains throughout the quarter, surpassing the other two groups in "appropriate educational plans" and "mature life-style plans." In the section measuring "mature career plans," students taking the course made greater gains than those of the other two samples, but remained somewhat lesser than the others on the post-test scores. Finally, this study also indicates that S&H 100 was effective in the areas evaluated.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CAREER PLANNING/ORIENTATION COURSE

The Open Option Advising Center's present teaching responsibility is Sciences and Humanities 100. Two key assumptions underlie the course:

- 1) The advisor, instructor for the course, provides an ideal environment to assist the student to explore career planning strategies, to cope with the university, and to understand the world of work. The classroom links the advisor and advisee on a weekly basis.
- 2) To successfully explore the broad range of career opportunities, students must understand their values, interests, and abilities, and realize the importance of motivation and decision-making skills.

The course is offered to Open Option students on a recommended, rather than required basis and is taught in sections of 18-22 students. The class activities include a departmental fair; a lecture on study skills; a lecture on university rules, regulations, and registration; classroom exercises in assessing personal interests, abilities, and values; introduction to resource material on career planning (*Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*, *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*); assessment of the Strong-Campbell

TABLE I
DEVELOPMENT OF APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL PLANS
MATURE CAREER PLANS AND MATURE LIFE-STYLE PLANS
PRE- AND POST-TESTS COMPARING THREE GROUPS OF STUDENTS IN 1978

I. Developing Appropriate Educational Plans

	Beginning of the Quarter	End of the Quarter
Undeclared in S&H 100	9.43	12.83
Undeclared, not in course	11.55	12.22
Declared in Majors	12.40	12.27

II. Developing Mature Career Plans

	Beginning of the Quarter	End of the Quarter
Undeclared in S&H 100	6.29	11.00
Undeclared, not in course	8.56	12.22
Declared in Majors	11.97	12.07

III. Developing Mature Life-Style Plans

	Beginning of the Quarter	End of the Quarter
Undeclared, in S&H 100	13.00	15.14
Undeclared, Not in course	15.00	14.55
Declared in Majors	14.87	14.27

States are from the Student Developmental Task Inventory. Developmental Task III: Developing Purpose. Used by permission of the authors: prince, Miller & Winston, 1977)

Interest Inventory; a career day; departmental presentation on career opportunities in specific disciplines; an interview with someone in a specific career; and a written summary of the student's state of career development at the conclusion of the course. *If You Don't Know Where You're Going You May End Up Somewhere Else*, by Campbell, is used as a basis for discussion and activities.

The course's primary objectives include:

- 1) Continued orientation to the university—its rules, regulations, procedures and services;
- 2) Introduction to the academic majors available and the career possibilities and job opportunities within the various majors;
- 3) Introduction to career planning resources that will enable the student to explore careers of interest independently;
- 4) Analysis of the student's values, abilities, and interests which provide a better understanding of the self in relation to the world of work;

- 5) Continued contact with the academic advisor so that the advisor can keep abreast of where the student is academically while the student proceeds in search for a major;
- 6) Participation in a small group experience where the student may share concerns, feelings, and ideas.

Some of the class activities require further explanation:

- **Departmental Fair:** Representatives from all departments in the University assemble in one room so students can easily obtain information about areas of interest. The fair is publicized in the student newspaper and is open to all students.
- **Career Day:** On the basis of student requests, the S&H 100 faculty contacts professionals in the community and invites them to discuss their careers with small groups of students. The response of the professionals has been positive.
- **Departmental Area Presentations:** These panel presentations were designed to acquaint students with areas such as life sciences, communications, etc. Because of logistical difficulties and unevenness of quality, these presentations were dropped and replaced by a visit to the department of the student's choice.
- **Career Interview:** Students are required to interview someone in a field that interests them. The S&H 100 faculty provides a set of questions to assist the students in conducting the interview, and the students are asked to turn in a summary of the results. This activity has consistently been a top-ranked item in student evaluation of the course.
- **Career Information Sheet:** The information sheet is a brief summary of the activities of the course, in particular the information discovered in career resources such as the DOT and the OOH. This information serves as the basis for the student's final paper, which is a self-assessment of the student's stage of career development.

EVALUATION OF THE COURSE

The course is evaluated annually, and the results of the evaluation serve as a catalyst for modifications in both class activities and format. The evaluation administered at the conclusion of the course produced positive results and indicated areas for course modifications. The highest-rated items (Table B) in the course objectives section seem to be those most easily quantifiable. The highest-rated items in the course activities section were primarily from the career planning segments: the career interview, the departmental fair, the textbook, and the career day.

Course activity ratings (Table II) indicate student preferences for active involvement rather than traditional lecture format. The two lowest-rated items, departmental presentations and interpretation of the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII) were subsequently modified for the next year.

TABLE II
S&H 100 COURSE EVALUATION, FALL TERM 1979 (N=270)

I. Course objectives

As a result of the Course:	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1) I am better acquainted with the rules, regulations, procedures and services of the university.	84%	12%	4%
2) I know what academic majors are available to me and some of the career possibilities and job opportunities within the various majors.	92%	6%	2%
3) I am acquainted with some of the career planning resources and I am better able to explore careers of interest independently.	83%	14%	3%
4) I have a better understanding of how my values, abilities, and interests fit with various jobs and careers.	78%	20%	2%
5) My concerns about university life have been relieved and I feel more at home at Iowa State University.	66%	25%	9%

II. Course Activities	Valuable	Undecided	Not Valuable
1) Departmental Fair	79%	17%	4%
2) Lecture on Study Skills	63%	28%	9%
3) Preclassification Information and Planning	81%	13%	
4) Activities and Interests, Abilities and Values	85%	26%	9%
5) Lecture on Career Planning and Career Resources (DOT, OOH)	60%	26%	14%
6) Interpretation of SCII	59%	28%	15%
7) Career Day Discussions	74%	18%	8%
8) Departmental Presentations by Areas	59%	30%	11%
9) Career Interview	87%	10%	3%
10) Written Summary of Personal Career Development	63%	24%	13%
11) Text (If You Don't Know Where You're Going You May End Up Somewhere Else)	76%	16%	8%

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECT OF THE MODEL ON ADVISING AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Two groups of students being advised in the Open Option Advising Center (students who took S&H 100, fall 1979 and students who did not take S&H 100, fall 1979) were surveyed in the winter term 1980 to gather additional information about the effectiveness of the S&H Open Option advising model. The results of the survey (Table III) show high satisfaction with the advisor and indicate the students were comfortable at Iowa State University.

TABLE III
OPEN OPTION STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH ADVISOR
Percentage of Students Answering "Yes"

	S&H 100 (N = 105)	Non-S&H 100 (N = 211)
1) I feel comfortable with my academic advisor.	96	99
2) My academic advisor takes a personal interest in me.	96	94
3) My academic advisor has helped me select appropriate courses to fit my interests and abilities.	94	94
4) I feel more comfortable at Iowa State University now than I did last quarter.	88	89

TABLE IV
ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES
OF THE CAREER PLANNING/ORIENTATION COURSE
Comparison of S&H 100 Students and Non-S&H 100 Students
Percentage of Students Answering "Yes"

	S&H 100 (N = 105)	Non-S&H 100 (N = 83)
1) After completing fall quarter, I have a satisfactory knowledge of rules, regulations, procedures and services of the University.	96	84
2) I am aware of some of the careers and job opportunities available in the majors that most interest me.	84	71
3) I am familiar with some of the career planning resources which may be used to explore careers of interest to me.	74	40
4) After completing fall quarter, I have a better understanding of my values, abilities and interests.	86	78
5) I know how my values, abilities and interests fit with various majors and careers.	75	58
6) I have a good knowledge of basic study skills.	87	77

TABLE V
GPA, CREDIT LOAD, AND PERCENT RETENTION AFTER ONE QUARTER
Comparison of Three Student Populations

Enrollment Category	GPA	Fall 1979 Credit Load	% Retention
Open Option S&H 100 N = 275	2.81	12.1	99
Open Option Non-S&H 100 N = 285	2.60	13.3	92
Declared Majors N = 287	2.50	13.7	93

A second part of the survey measured the effectiveness of the S&H 100 course by comparing the extent to which the same two groups of students achieved the goals set for the course (Table IV). In all cases, the percentage of "yes" responses was higher for the students who took S&H 100. Differences in the response to item 3 and 5 are especially interesting. Both items were heavily emphasized in the career planning/orientation course.

An expanded study followed the academic progress of three student groups: (1) 215 Open Option students who took S&H 100, (2) 285 Open Option students advised in the Open Option Advising Center who had not taken S&H 100, and (3) 298 students who entered Iowa State with declared majors. The study compared grade point average (GPA) mean credit load, and retention for fall quarter 1979 (Table V). Retention was high for all three groups. The Open Option students compared favorably with the declared majors in both mean GPA and mean credit load. The overall retention rate for S&H freshmen entering fall 1979 was 93%.

Data for the same variables were obtained for the 1979-80 academic year, fall through spring quarters (Table VI). Retention for both groups of Open Option students remained high and compared favorably with the students in declared majors. The GPA and mean credit load were basically the same for all three groups.

TABLE VI
GPA, CREDIT LOAD, AND PERCENT RETENTION
AFTER ONE ACADEMIC YEAR
Comparison of Three Student Populations

Enrollment Category	GPA	Academic Year 1979-80 Credit Load	% Retention
Open Option S&H 100 N = 275	2.66	41	93
Open Option Non-S&H 100 N = 285	2.63	41	91
Declared Majors N = 287	2.65	42	89

TABLE VII
PERCENT RETENTION AFTER THE FALL QUARTER
OF THE SOPHOMORE YEAR
Comparison of Three Student Populations

Enrollment Category	Fall Term 1980 % Retention
Open Option S&H N = 275	88
Open Option Non-S&H 100 N = 285	79
Declared Majors N = 287	76

March 1981

The **rate** at which the two groups of **Open Option students declared** majors was **also measured** for the interval **fall 1979 to fall 1980**. By fall 1980, **53%** of those having taken **S&H 100** had **declared** majors, compared to **47%** of those advised in the **OOAC** but not having taken the **class**.

Retention for three groups was **measured** for the calendar year **fall 1979 to fall 1980** (**Table VII**). Both groups of **Open Option** students had higher retention **rates** than did the **students entering** with declared majors.

SUMMARY

The **development of the Open Option** Advising Model has:

- moved **Open Option** advising from **academic departments** to a **college** advising center,
- brought Faculty to the **Center** to represent three **general areas** (arts, **humanities** and communication; sciences and mathematics; social and **behavioral sciences**),
- brought faculty and professional **advisors together** to share their areas of **expertise**,
- used **highly trained peer advisors**, and introduced a career **planning/orientation** course.

The study indicates that students advised in the **Center** are **satisfied** with the advising they receive and **believe that** their **S&H 100** advisors are personally **interested** in their progress. Students taking **S&H 100** are achieving the goals set for the course and rate **most** of the **course activities as valuable**. Conditions causing student dissatisfaction with advising, uncovered in the **1977** study, have been changed and the present **strategies** are highly effective.

The academic progress of **Open Option** students equals that of students in **majors**. For the academic year **1979-80**, the retention of **Open Option** students were higher than for those with declared majors (**93%** vs. **89%**). The mean credit load and grade point average for **Open Option** students are equal to those of students in **declared majors**. The retention of **Open Option** students for the calendar year **Fall 1979 to Fall 1980** was greater than of students **entering** into majors. and the students participating in the **S&H** class had the **highest** retention of the three groups.

The **new Open Option** advising model in the **S&H** College is very successful and is serving as a pattern for other **colleges** at the University. It can be implemented at other **institutions where** commitment to quality advising is high.

Life Designing in the Market of the Future

ANNETTE STEINBORN. *Academic Advisor, Undergraduate University Division, Michigan State University.*

"...if we can actualize our beliefs and **goals** with repeated and consistent action, our decisions will lead us toward a future we **can** cope with and **control**... **When** we accept the first alternatives and don't look ahead to consequences. when we allow others to make our value **choices** for us. when we do not act on our **beliefs** and ideals. **then** we relinquish control over our futures and find **ourselves** floundering in a world and a body we do not understand."

— Alvin Toffler

Advisors in higher education—the time has **come** to publicly **re-define** our mission. **Of course**, we will still provide sage advice on course work and **programs**, but let us stop pretending we have a crystal ball and can see into the future. Let us **tell** those students who ask us to predict the future the way it **really** is. that we do not know which academic program **is** going to provide them with eternal employment and happiness. Let's go all the way and tell them **a college degree does** not guarantee a job upon graduation. In fact, they may find the college degree a detriment to employment when they start looking for "any job" as opposed to "The Job." and employers **tell** them they are **over-qualified**.

People invest in a college education for reasons other than the pursuit of knowledge. Many **students decide** to **attend college** because conventional **wisdom claims**: as night follows day, **college follows** high school. We **even see older** students entering academic **programs** because of a vague feeling that they have missed something and **believe** that a **college** education is the means to a **better** life, **i.e.**, more satisfying employment.

Students are seeking "the answer" to the question which major they should pursue to **be sure** of employment after graduation. What **classes** should they take to make them acceptable to the job market? The market place is **where** we **expect** to buy and **sell** goods, and many students **these days** are willing to sell or trade their identity to secure a good job. There is a lack of understanding that a **career ideally incorporates**, or at least need not conflict with. **a person's values, interests, beliefs, strengths, skills, or** aptitudes. There is **also** a lack of understanding as to what is **an** education. Dedication to illuminating these two areas for the students we advise is a challenging and exciting opportunity to advance the cause of **humanity**, and to advance our own value in **the** eyes of our students.