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ACT as a Strategic Resource in Enhancing the Advising Process

DAVIDS. CROCKETT, *Vice President, Educational Services Division, The American College Testing Program, Iowa City, Iowa*

Strategic — "necessary to or important in the initiation, conduct, or completion of a planned effort"

Resource — "a source of support, information, or expertise"

A fundamental purpose of The American College Testing Program (ACT) is to provide programs and services that assist students in informed educational and career decision making. Through its programs and services, ACT is also committed to providing institutions assistance in their continuing efforts to serve students more effectively. This article describes a variety of ACT programs and services that are "Strategic Resources" designed to support and enhance the academic advising process in college and university campuses. They are:

1. Assessment Resources
2. Advising Management Resources
3. Advisor Training Resources, and
4. Professional Consultation Services.

ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Good advising is based on the premise that advisors can never know too much about the persons they are advising. An individual student's educational/career decisions are enhanced by the availability and use of information by both the advisor and advisee. Developmental advising has as its basic component assessment activities which enable the advisee to formulate and clarify his or her own values, interests, abilities, and goals, and to relate this self-information to educational and career information in an integrated and meaningful way.

The ACT Assessment Program (AAP)

The most widely known and used ACT service is the ACT Assessment Program. Approximately one million college-bound students take the AAP each year and request that their

reports be sent to colleges and universities of their choice. The ACT Assessment Program consists of four tests of educational development (English, mathematics, social studies, and natural science), a Student Profile Section, and an educational interest inventory.

The results of this assessment provide the most comprehensive information about a student's abilities, educational/career goals, special needs, interests and background currently available to postsecondary institutions.

Since the majority of students providing ACT information to colleges and universities do so in advance of their enrollment, advisors have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the advisees through the ACT College Report prior to their first interview with them. Advisors can identify patterns of needs and goals, interests and abilities, and then formulate questions that need to be discussed with the student. This pre-interview technique will make face-to-face advising session more valuable to the student, and greater time can be spent assisting the student to focus on relevant aspects of the decision-making process.

In summary, the ACT College Report provides the following advantages for use in the academic advising process:

- It presents a comprehensive picture of a student's needs, interests, background, and abilities.
- It is available before the student's enrollment and advising conference.
- It is easy to use and interpret.
- It is useful in ascertaining patterns of consistency and inconsistency.
- It provides advising leads and points of departure.
- It is an advisory tool; it is not intended to replace the knowledgeable and interested advisor.
- It relates directly to common advising concerns, such as long- and short-range educational/career planning; evaluation of abilities and interests; course sectioning and placement; and developmental assistance.

The advisor's good judgment is needed to assess the current level of a student's educational/career planning. A unique feature of ACT Interest Inventory is the linkage of student's interest dimensions to the Map of College Majors and the World-of-Work Map printed on the back of the ACT College Report (see Figures 1 and 2).

The Map of College Majors and coordinate points can be used to show the similarity of an individual's interests to the interests of other groups of people (college students) in a variety of educational majors and programs. Similarity of interests with fellow students and colleagues has long been considered one of several important aspects of satisfaction in a field of study or occupation. These scores can be used to help students identify educational majors in which they share common interests with other students.

The World-of-Work Map and region indicator may be used to show the similarity of an individual's work activity preferences to the work tasks and activities which characterize groups or families of occupations. The similarity of a person's preferred activities to the activities typically involved in an occupation is an important aspect of job satisfaction. This procedure can be used to help students explore possible career alternatives in terms of relevant work tasks or activities.

The main concern is that students consider educational, life, and occupational goals simultaneously. The Map of College Majors and the World-of-Work Map are intended to help students consider short-term educational decisions and long-term career directions.

It would be unwise to suggest that an ACT College Report is a substitute for a skillfully conducted interview, the mature judgment of a professional advisor, or the genuine interest in people that advisors usually exhibit toward students. It would also be unwise to suggest that the availability of an ACT College Report will obviate the need for additional information from some students. However, an understanding of the information on the ACT College Report could make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of advising sessions, and make requests for additional information more precise and useful.

The ACT ASSET Program for Two-Year Institutions: A Student Advising, Placement, and Retention Service

The ACT ASSET Program is a locally-scored success-oriented assessment program combining academic skill measures with immediate advising and placement services. It is designed for group administration and staff time efficiency, and includes immediate scoring capabilities for walk-in orientation and registration programs. A choice of NCS, Scan-tron, and self-scoring answer sheets is offered.

Placement advising information in the ASSET Program is built on the following measures:

BASIC Skill Measures

Numerical Skills (18 minutes)
Reading Skills (20 minutes)
Language Usage (11 minutes)

ADVANCED Skill Measures (administered to reflect program goals of students)

Elementary Algebra (25 minutes)
Intermediate Algebra (25 minutes)
College Algebra (25 minutes)
Advanced Language Usage (25 minutes)

A "letter to students" (locally developed) introduces the process to students. Complementing the letter is the Educational Planning Form, designed to immediately integrate information about the student's educational background, plans, and needs with the assessment results. The four-part self-carboning form immediately provides a copy of the results for: 1) the student, 2) the advisor, 3) the testing office, and 4) the research office. Through the use of campus developed advising worksheets keyed to the institution's catalog and learning services, group leaders are able to properly prepare students for registration. The ASSET Action Guide includes samples of these worksheets and other ideas for implementation.

The effect of quickly bringing together the "assets" of students and institutions at the time of entry, is a highly positive first impression for students. ASSET contains information to help staff members provide intrusive advising services targeted for students with specific needs.

The ACT ASSET Program also incorporates a research support system for accountability, placement, and retention information. The two key features of the system are an "Ability Profile Report" for students in specific programs or majors, and "Grade Experience Tables" relating assessment results and course grades (up to ten locally selected courses) which will provide placement information.

In summary, the ACT ASSET Program is designed to provide a positive, effective and

systematic approach in assisting students as they begin their educational experience at two-year institutions. The goal of the Program is to equip students (through sound advising and appropriate course placement services) to attain greater learning success, with the resulting outcome of increased retention.

VIESA: Self-Scored Vocational Interest Experience and Skill Assessment

VIESA is designed to assist advisees in assessing their values, interests, abilities, and experiences and link this information about themselves to the worlds of education and work. VIESA can be administered and self-scored in 45 minutes or less. As they complete VIESA, advisees build a list of career possibilities that includes typical types of educational preparation and wage references for occupational descriptions in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.

DISCOVER: A Computer-Based Interactive Career Information and Guidance System

The most recent and exciting method for integrating personal, academic, and career information is through computerized guidance and information systems. Gordon⁴ provides an excellent summary of the advantages of such systems in the context of the academic advising process:

1. *Computer systems provide a personalized exploration of self.* If students wish to take an interest inventory or an ability measure or to clarify work values, the computer program offers these opportunities in a clear easy-to-access way.
2. *Voluminous, up-to-date occupational information is offered in an easy-to-understand format.* Many career libraries struggle to keep occupational and job market information current. Computer systems are updated annually based on many sources, including current government, business and industry data.
3. *Computerized systems are excellent tools for helping students integrate personal and occupational information.* Computer programs can relate students' interests, values, and abilities to specific career fields. The students often can receive a detailed description of these alternatives in a printout.
4. *Computer systems can teach students decision-making strategies.* Some systems have built-in programs for helping students experience the decision-making process itself. Students can simulate a variety of choices without taking the risks associated with real-world decisions. Computer systems are safe places to practice different decision-making styles and strategies.
5. *Students are in control.* The computerized approach encourages students to be intimately involved in their own career planning. They are not relying on other people's opinions or wishes. Through different combinations of personal factors they can experience different outcomes.
6. *Computer systems can help students plan for appropriate action.* Once certain decisions are made, students are presented with a list of action steps in some systems. Implementation of a decision becomes more structured and easier to accomplish.

⁴ Virginia N. Gordon, *The Undivided College Student: An Academic and Career Advising Challenge*. (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1984.)

ACT'S DISCOVER allows users to assess their interests, abilities, and values and receive results instantly for use in investigating educational/career options. Designed to supplement the skills of the advisor, DISCOVER offers the strongest guidance component currently found in a computer-based system of its kind. The program operates on a variety of computer systems commonly used in colleges and universities. DISCOVER users have found it to be an effective advising tool, because it makes the time spent between advisees and advisor more meaningful and productive.

ADVISING MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

A National Survey of Academic Advising Final Report, July, 1983

Recent studies indicate that substantive advising is a key factor in student persistence. 1) Effective advising is an essential educational activity that helps students define and develop their interests, their abilities, and their goals. 2) Campus decision makers have begun to recognize the contribution that advising makes to a student's total educational experience. 3) In recent years those responsible for the administration and delivery of advising services have expressed interest in knowing more about current practices and trends in academic advising which transcend their own campuses.

In 1979, with the encouragement and support of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the American College Testing Program (ACT) conducted the first National Survey of Academic Advising. The results from this national survey have been cited frequently in articles on advising and used as a catalyst to increase support for academic advising on individual campuses. Because these survey data have been useful to members of the advising community, it was deemed appropriate to update the study to ascertain what, if any, changes have occurred in the delivery and organization of advising services since 1979.

Current undergraduate academic advising practices were examined in a second National Survey of Academic Advising conducted by the ACT National Center for the Advancement of Educational Practices in the fall of 1982. The survey instrument focused on those elements identified in the research on academic advising as important characteristics in the organization and delivery of advising services.

The data in the 1982 National Survey on Academic Advising were based on a random national sample of 1,095 two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education. The institutions chosen by a random sampling procedure that ensured responses (that would reflect national trends with a sampling error of less than 5%) were the same institutions included in the sample for the 1979 National Survey on Academic Advising.

Surveys were mailed to the Director/Coordinator of Academic Advising at each institution. In institutions where advising services are provided through individual academic departments only, the questionnaire was to be forwarded to the person overseeing these services campus-wide (e.g., Vice President for Academic Affairs). The questions pertained to the design and delivery of undergraduate advising services.

In 1982, 754 institutions responded for a return rate of 69%. This response compared favorably with the 1979 survey which had a return rate of 75%. Of the 1982 respondents, 601 or 80% had responded to the first survey in 1979, making some comparisons with the results of the earlier survey possible.

It is important that colleges and universities continue to review and evaluate their efforts in the context of current advising practices, as they move toward the goal of providing effective advising services for all students. It is hoped that results from the second National Survey on Academic Advising will encourage self-assessment and promote improvement and innovation in the field of advising.

Academic Advising Audit: An Institutional Evaluation and Analysis of the Organization and Delivery of Advising Services

An increasing number of institutions now view effective advising as an essential component of the higher education process. These institutions recognize that good advising is vital to students as they define and develop their interests, abilities, and goals. They also know that advising does not just happen; it is the result of a carefully developed institutional plan and a commitment to excellence in advising. The foundation of effective advising is improved educational/career planning, academic success, student growth and development, and lower dropout rates.

To assist institutions in evaluating the current status of their advising programs, The American College Testing Program has developed an Academic Advising Audit designed to reveal areas of strength and areas where improvement may be needed. The audit is a four-step process (information gathering, evaluation, analysis, and action planning) very similar to that which an external consultant might follow if called upon to review an institution's advising program.

The elements reviewed in the Academic Advising Audit are those that were identified in the research on academic advising as being important characteristics in the organization and delivery of effective advising services. In this sense, the audit is not empirically based. The items have face validity because they are related to elements that have frequently been associated with successful advising programs. The audit should not be viewed as a scientific instrument, but rather as an evaluation tool that can be helpful in assisting the user to analyze and improve advising services for students. Like any tool, the audit has some limitations. For example, the audit addresses the organization and delivery of advising services rather than the quality of advising by individual advisors.

The audit concludes with a set of specific recommendations based on the findings and some suggested additional resources and materials to assist the users in further study and development of their academic advising programs.

ACT/NACADA National Recognition Program for Academic Advising

In many institutions of higher education today, academic advising is an activity that receives little or no recognition. Sixty-two percent of the institutions responding to the recent ACT National Survey of Academic Advising (1982) reported that they had no formal recognition or reward system for faculty advisors. Three-fourths of the respondents indicated they had no systematic evaluation of the overall effectiveness of their advising programs. Clearly, there are few effective systems in place for the evaluation of academic advising and little reward or recognition attached to its successful delivery.

Good advising — like good teaching, publication, and research — needs to be recognized. The type of reward system employed for advising is closely related to the importance placed

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on academic advising at a given institution. Although it is important not to overlook the intrinsic rewards an advisor may find in helping students, lack of some type of tangible reward system can be an obstacle to effective advising.

To address the lack of tangible recognition and reward systems for academic advising, The American College Testing Program and the National Academic Advising Association introduced in 1983-84 the ACT/NACADA National Recognition Program for Academic Advising. These awards are designed to honor individuals and institutions who are making significant contributions to the improvement of academic advising and to disseminate information about these contributions to others in the field. The goal of this effort is to encourage wider support and recognition of the importance of academic advising by colleges and universities.

The Selection Committee evaluates nominations on the evidence of effective advising qualities and practices that distinguish the nominee as an outstanding academic advisor. Such evidence may include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following criteria:

- Demonstration of a caring attitude toward advisees
- Effective interpersonal skills
- Availability to advisees
- Frequency of contact with advisees
- Seeking out advisees in informal settings
- Intrusive behavior designed to build a strong relationship with advisees
- Monitoring of student progress toward academic and career goals
- Mastery of institutional regulations, policies, and procedures
- Use of appropriate information sources
- Appropriate referral activity
- Ability to engage in developmental advising (career and life planning) versus simply course scheduling
- Attendance at and support of advisor development programs
- Perception by colleagues of nominee's advising skills
- Evidence of student success rate, and
- Institutional recognition of nominee for outstanding advising

Evidence of an outstanding advising program includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

Innovative Quality — Programs that represent new approaches to effective academic advising. If a program has been implemented elsewhere but is new to an institution, it would be eligible.

Creativity — Programs which demonstrate the creative use of resources in the delivery of academic advising services (human, fiscal, and physical).

Currency — Programs implemented within the past three to four years.

Impact — Programs that are successful as evidenced by positive student and/or institutional outcomes.

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Transferability — Programs which have interest and are applicable to a wide variety of institutions.

In addition, the actual program description, its suitability for publication, and adherence to program guidelines are key factors in the selection.

ADVISOR TRAINING RESOURCES

Expanded advisor training program/activities was cited as the second most important need of respondents to the second National Survey of Academic Advising, because institutions have done an inadequate job of training advisors. Well-planned and properly presented in-service training sessions can be very effective in improving their advising skills and techniques. advisors are receptive to improving their advising skills and techniques. Following is a description of resources available from The American College Testing Program to assist with advisor training.

"Advising as a Teaching/Counseling Activity"

Combining elements of teaching and counseling, advising provides vital support to students as they define and develop their interests, abilities, and goals in relation to their academic and future plans.

Dr. Lowell Walter developed a videotape of vignettes that simulate advising situations, titled *A Training Program on Advising as a Teaching/Counseling Activity*, which illustrates the ways advising can serve as a link between the classroom and the personal lives of students. These vignettes, designed to stimulate discussion, focus on the student/advisor relationship and on the critical role advisors play in interpreting the curriculum. They also build a case for general education requirements and demonstrate the link between general education and effective functioning in personal and professional life after graduation.¹ The program includes a 3/4 inch, 26-minute color videotape with a training manual provided.

"Academic Advising Situations I"

program, also developed by Dr. Walter, consists of a training guide and a 40-minute 3/4 inch, black-and-white videotape on the following topics: "The Advising Process"; "Communications Skills and Academic Advising"; and "Academic Advising and Teaching." Simulates typical advising situations.²

"Academic Advising: An Individual or Group Program for Faculty Advisors"

A selected and updated version of *Academic Advising Situations I*, developed by Dr. Walter, is a unique multipurpose training program for faculty advisors. It is flexible, comprehensive, and easy to use. Designed for use either by a trainer with a group of advisors or as a stand-alone training experience for a single advisor, the program includes a 3/4 inch, 50-minute, color videotape and a 316-page training manual. It combines five academic advising simulations with eight exercises to be completed on worksheets in the manual. The exercises cover such topics as defining academic advising; the educational environment of the

¹ Lowell Walter, *A Training Program on Advising as a Teaching/Counseling Activity*, (Iowa ACT National Center for the Advancement of Educational Practices, 1983).

² Lowell Walter, *Academic Advising Situations I*, (Iowa, ACT National Center, 1980).

1980s; the relationship between advising and retention; advising skills, attitudes, and techniques; the characteristics of a good advisor; and referral skills.³

Advising Skills, Techniques, and Resources

ACT has collected and developed an array of materials and papers to assist academic advisors in furthering their own development. This 175-page booklet covers such topics as: the scope of advising; advising strategies; advising skills; reminders for effective advising; student expectations from the advising process; definition of academic advising; academic advising and career planning; and additional resources.

ACT National Center for the Advancement of Educational Practices

Each year, the ACT National Center sponsors and conducts several national seminars on the topic of academic advising and services for undecided/undeclared students. These seminars have been attended by hundreds of postsecondary administrators, faculty, and staff who are interested in and responsible for advising programs on campus. Participants examine basic elements in successful advising programs, developing advisor training programs, skills and techniques for effective advising, and models for developing a successful advising program.

Midstate: A Model Use of the ACT Assessment Program

ACT is committed to helping institutions make more effective use of the data received through the ACT Assessment Program. Each year, ACT sponsors a number of Midstate Workshops for college personnel, designed to demonstrate the variety and extent of possible uses of ACT data. An important segment of these workshops is devoted to the advising process and how advisors can improve their use of information already available.

PROFESSIONAL CONSULTATION SERVICES

ACT maintains a staff of trained and experienced professionals ready and willing to assist postsecondary institutions in the improved delivery of academic advising services and in the improved use of ACT's programs and services in the advising process.

The provision by ACT of the wide array of services and materials described makes ACT an important partner with colleges and universities in pursuing our common goal of more effective advising services for students.

For more information about ACT services, materials, and publications on advising, please contact the ACT National Center for the Advancement of Educational Practices, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa, 52243, or your nearest ACT Regional Office.

³ Lowell Walter, *Academic Advising: An Individual or Group Program for Faculty Advisors*, (Iowa, ACT National Center, 1981).

FIGURE 1

MAP OF COLLEGE MAJORS

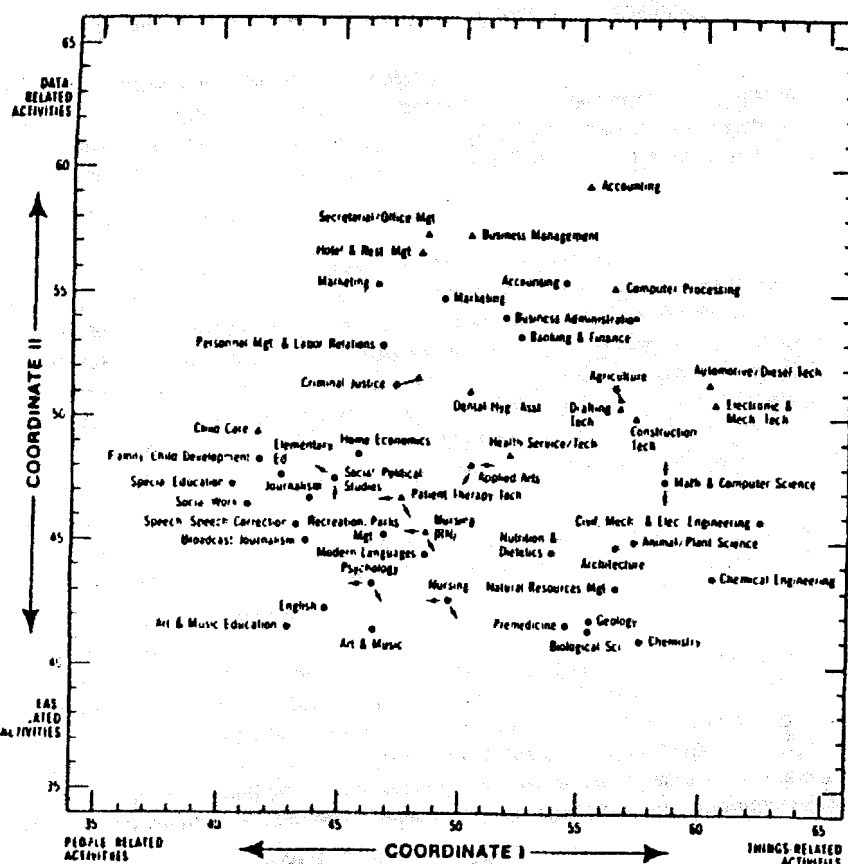


FIGURE 2

WORLD-OF-WORK MAP
(2nd Edition)

