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Peer Advising in a School of Business

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The use of trained students to deliver services for other students on campus is a common practice. In many colleges and universities, students serve in various roles as tutors, peer counselors, resident advisors and orientation leaders. Frequently, personnel in Student Affairs find such assistance enables them to increase the depth and breadth of programming. In addition, they can vary services for students in a cost effective fashion. Ender, McCaffrey and Miller indicate that programs involving peer group assistance can have a positive impact on the development of college students, and students in helping roles may serve as role models for successful behavior.¹

Program Background

In 1981 students in the School of Business at Ithaca College, with administrative support, initiated the concept of peer advising to supplement faculty efforts. Other programs similar in nature were studied, and personnel in Counseling were consulted, in order to formulate guidelines for a program in the School. Students in the pilot peer advising program were also involved in responding to questions during preregistration.

A Task Force on Advising for Ithaca College had surveyed 665 students on the campus to assess the quality of advising services. Through classes and by mail the task force reached 15 percent of the students from each of five Schools. Survey questions attempted to discern student perceptions in a variety of areas on advising: advisor rapport; availability; knowledge of requirements in major and nonmajor areas; assistance in planning in academic and nonacademic matters; ability to refer; and overall effectiveness of conferences. The results for the School of Business, while adequate, were not as favorable as faculty hoped, but they did show that a peer advising program was needed. For the past several years the faculty-student advisee ratio has exceeded the ability of faculty to give personal attention to each student. It is also believed that on certain issues, students might be more comfortable approaching other students rather than faculty members. In order to increase personalized assistance, a group of students has been selected and trained in School of Business procedures, basic counseling, and Ithaca College services. A position as peer advisor requires the skills of competent older students who will share their experiences and information with other students. Thus, the program increases opportunities for student responsibility as well.

¹ S. C. Ender, S. S. McCaffrey and T. K. Miller, *Suggested Guidelines for Trainers: Students Helping Students*. Athens, Georgia, Student Development Associates 1979.

Selection Process

Over a three-year period, the following guidelines and procedures were established and followed in choosing peer advisors. Approximately twenty students competed for positions, and six to eight were selected.

Candidates must have a 2.75 grade point average or above and submit an application with two faculty recommendations. Faculty recommendations are carefully screened to determine the kinds of skills and personal qualities that a faculty member has observed in the candidate. The application form includes these general questions:

1. What characteristics do you think are important for a peer advisor to have?
2. What advising needs do business students have?
3. What course work have you completed that is related to academic advising/counseling (i.e., psychology, communications, marketing, etc.)?
4. Have you had any experience that you feel is relevant to your work as a peer advisor?
5. What do you see as benefits to you personally if you serve as a peer advisor?
6. Describe yourself showing what skills, qualities, values, attributes, etc., you have to become a good peer advisor (please attach a separate sheet).

A committee of peer advisors and a faculty advisor review these applications for completeness and carefulness of responses. The committee looks for applicants' understanding of peer advising, its values for students and for themselves as well. How potential candidates view their background and course work in relation to a peer advising position is also examined. The responses are accorded a number of points by each reader and averaged. The application form, faculty recommendations, and grade point average are used for initial screening purposes, using a grid, and final applicants are invited for interviews. See Table 1.

TABLE I
PEER ADVISING CANDIDATES
(GRID FOR INITIAL "PAPERS" REVIEW)

Name	GPA	Year	Major	Related Course Work	Relevant Experience	Comments
1. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
2. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
3. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
4. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
5. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
6. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
7. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
8. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
9. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
10. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
11. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]
12. [Name]	[GPA]	[Year]	[Major]	[Course Work]	[Experience]	[Comments]

Interviews of approximately an hour in length are conducted with a faculty advisor and two peer advisors. Each team of interviewers attempts to incorporate similar questions so that the candidates will be assessed in the same manner. Questions are designed to elicit applicant responses to the common questions and difficult situations that arise during peer conferences. Table II lists questions used in interviews.

TABLE II
QUESTIONS FOR PEER ADVISING INTERVIEWS

1. Have you ever been to a peer advisor at the School of Business or elsewhere?
2. On what basis would you choose someone to be a peer advisor? If you were interviewing one of us, what would you want to know?
3. Do you have any ideas as to how you will become acquainted with advisees?
4. What if a student asked:
 - a. what a good "gut" course is...
 - b. which professor is really better...
 - c. how competitive is it here...
 - d. how much work is there to do...
 - e. how many credits should I take...
 - f. what is Professor _____ like...
 - g. about a change of major and indicated his/her parents wanted him/her to stay with a Business major while s/he is uncertain...
5. What are your opinions of Ithaca College and the School of Business (location, curriculum, students, diversity, facilities, other colleges)?
6. If an advisee came to you for help with schedule planning, what kinds of things would you say?
7. What would be the hardest questions for you that a student might ask? Situations?
8. What services are available for students at Ithaca College?
9. What limits do you feel exist for the peer advisor?
10. What do you think would be valuable training for you as a peer advisor?
11. What do you believe would be benefits to you if you were a peer advisor?
12. What social activities could be plan together to unify us?

Applicants are evaluated on their interpersonal skills and their ability to respond and think logically on their feet rather than having the "right answer" in mind. A training program is designed to familiarize them with policies and where to find information. When interviews are completed, the committee discusses each interview and writes comments using the rating scale in Table III. Finally, the whole group evaluates each candidate and selections are made.

The selection process is time-consuming, but an investment of time in selection helps ensure effectiveness later.

TABLE III
PEER ADVISOR INTERVIEWING RATINGS

Interviewee _____
Interviewer _____
Date _____ Time _____

Rate interviewee on each item from 1 to 7 (7 is the best possible rating). Write comments in appropriate space.

Question Numbers			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
A)	Enthusiasm high energy that is sincere, expressed en- thusiasm on College/Dept. programs and opportunities	Bored								Highly Enthusiastic
B)	Creativity original, innovative approach	Hum-Drum								New and Exciting!
C)	Ability to communicate articulates well, good eye contact, easily understood	Poor Ability								Fantastic Speaker!
D)	Commitment shows strong interest in Peer Advisors, com- mitted as a student	Non-com- mital								Highly Committed
E)	Realistic Perspective on Ithaca Life objective, rounded out answers, offers variety of "opinions"	Highly Subjective								Objective and Realistic
F)	Listening Skills	Poor Listener								All Ears!
G)	Overall Recommendation	Don't Do It!								Take This Person!!

Additional Comments

What diversity would this person add to Peer Advisors?

Training

Carefully selected students usually have the basic skills to become student helpers; nevertheless, well-planned training sessions are developed for several purposes. The first purpose of a training program is to create group identity and pride. A second purpose is to familiarize new peer advisors with the policies and procedures related to School operations. Training of an ongoing nature is a necessity because of the many details related to policies and procedures. Each session of a two-day training program is briefly described. See Table IV.

TABLE IV
SEMESTER TRAINING SESSIONS

Network Establishment	Peer Advising Team
Marketing Peer Advising	Tom Barley, Assistant Professor, Marketing
Self-directed Search	Career Counseling
Career Planning Center Tour	Career Counseling
Good/Bad Counseling	Videotape
Counseling Return-to-College Students	Susan Arledge, Return-to- College Coordinator
Interactive Counseling Session	Videotape
Aptitude and Interest Inventories	John Brown, Counseling Center

Team Building: This opening activity involves a series of experiences drawn from basic group processes. These experiences are designed to assist the group in seeing themselves as a unit with common objectives. For example, a typical exercise might involve several members banding together to "Make a Machine," incorporating movement and noise. The remaining students guess the machine's identity and a new group shares their machine.

Basic Counseling Skills: An overview of stages of a counseling interview, opening and closing session, obtaining background information from the interviewee to gain a sense of the situation, and useful counseling behaviors and paraphrasing skills are covered.

College-wide Support Services: Representatives of major student services conduct specialized sessions for the peer advisors.

The Writing and Reading Center: This heavily used resource offers the following: tutoring in writing, conversational English, vocabulary assessment, speed reading, memory exercises and study skills.

Educational Opportunity Program: Selected students who need additional tutoring in courses due to weak backgrounds and/or who need financial assistance make up this program. Peer advisors can provide an outreach to these students who may have academic problems or adjustment problems.

Counseling Center: Testing of students is performed by the Counseling Center personnel. Tests on interests, aptitudes, and background enable students to make vocational choices and find out more about themselves. Programs in assertiveness training, test anxiety, small group and individualized counseling are also available.

International Programs: The Ithaca College program abroad has 100-115 students per year. Approximately one-half of these students are generated from Ithaca College and over twenty School of Business students participate yearly. The faculty is British. To enter

April 1985

the London Program a student must have a 2.75 average, letters of recommendation, approval of his/her dean and advisor, and write an essay.

Internship opportunities abroad are competitive and acceptance for an internship is dependent upon the courses a student has taken, prior work experience, grade point average and letters of recommendation.

The Library: The library resource person who deals primarily with Business School materials provides information on the present status of the library's collection. Pertinent catalogs and references are mentioned briefly. Strengths and weaknesses in the present collection are discussed. This presentation enables peer advisors to advise students on general library use.

Career Counseling Center: A tour of the Career Counseling Center by peer advisors gives them an opportunity to look at materials and references and talk with counselors regarding their role in assisting students find employment opportunities.

Return-to-College Program: Occasionally students who are older return to college and seek advising. Ways of relating to these students and assisting them in practical problems (e.g., finding night courses) of finding courses that fit within their programs, as well as basic guidelines regarding transcript assessment, are discussed. They are generally older and have specific ideas about the information they are seeking.

Peer Advisor Notebook: Each participant receives a notebook of reading materials and on-the-job information for handy reference. The handouts are reviewed. Guidelines for the group are covered. Common forms, information required on them, and their purposes are noted.

Routine Questions Drill: Several experienced peer advisors head up a small group of novice advisors and ask them questions most frequently asked by students.

Role playing: Typical situations, more involved than routine questions, are enacted and appear in Table V. The concept of "when to refer" and limits of the peer advisor role are discussed as an outgrowth of these situations.

TABLE V
COMMON ROLE PLAYING SITUATIONS FOR PEER ADVISING

My parents want me to take courses in accounting but I don't like math.

How do I fill out forms for preregistration?

I don't want to take these required courses. Can I get out of them?

How do I find an elective?

If I want to change my major from accounting to personnel, what do I have to do? Will my courses all count?

Who would you recommend I take for my class in data processing?

April 1985

How can I register for courses when I don't know what I want to do?

I came to Ithaca College to be a Finance major but I can't get into any of the courses! I'm not interested in anything else. How do I get an education here?

I am getting C's and D's in my electives (major) so my cum is low. Will I get kicked out of the Business School?

I am an exploratory major. I know the jobs are in business today. What is the best major and how do I get into it?

Responsibilities

The original location of the School of Business on the fourteenth floor of the West Tower was an inconvenience for students needing advising services. So, in the first year, peer advisors responded to routine student questions mainly at registration. After the School of Business moved to the New Building, peer advisors, while continuing to provide drop-in advising services to students, have increased their responsibilities. They have placed their desks in the front of the Dean's Office of the New Building to increase their visibility and accessibility to students. They have extended School of Business advising to a variety of campus locations. The number of contacts and variety of questions they handle have also increased. In addition to supplementing faculty advising, they have expanded their services in order to be of assistance to School of Business students. Peer advisors, in conjunction with Delta Mu Delta members, have developed four informative newsletters. Several peer advisors reviewed scholarship and other opportunities for the newsletter, providing information of high priority to the students.

In the public arena, peer advisors have presented at Discovery Days sessions developed by the Admissions Office to introduce Ithaca College. They are frequently part of personal interviews with prospective students and their parents which occur all year. Representative advisors discuss the advising service with parents at Parents Weekend each fall as a segment of the School of Business program.

Evaluation

The initial assessment instituted was the Peer Advisor Front Desk Request Form. The form tallied the number of requests made in certain categories. Ithaca College has a specific set of forms, and students drop by the counter asking for a variety of these forms that must be completed. There are forms related to *changes*, such as school, major, advisor; to *registration*, registering for a minor, for part-time student status; to status in courses, adding, dropping or withdrawing; to *grades*, changing grades, pass/fail forms, incomplete forms; and to *petitions*, waiver for senior residency, and petition for transfer credit. Peer advisors were available to describe these forms for students and remind them of the various signatures needed. Students could also inquire at the front desk for professor's hours; the grader's hours; to take make-up exams; locations of graded papers or exam grades; and location of a professor's office. In addition, peer advisors often gave directions to people around the campus. The Financial Aid office and the Registrar's office were popular locations. Peers had information on deadlines for: internship proposals, mid-terms, add/drops, withdrawals, applications to transfer into the Business School and

for scholarships. They described summer school course offerings for interested students. They provided control cards students needed to enter classes. When one thinks of all the processes and procedures that are part of surviving and getting through school, one begins to get the picture of a very busy place in the front office, in fact, peer advisors dealt with thirty to fifty requests each day. The handling of routine questions lightened the loads of both faculty and secretarial staff as well as providing a service to students.

Students who had extended contacts (ten minutes or longer) with a peer advisor were requested to fill out a Peer Advising Assessment Form. A series of questions was designed to assess the atmosphere of the meeting, the extent and usefulness of information provided, and the overall effectiveness of the program. The response to the peer advising services was highly positive. Students who used the service were comfortable with the peer advisor. In addition, they felt that the peer advisor was well informed for the meetings. Effectiveness of the program was rated highly. Nearly all students surveyed indicated that they would recommend the service to their friends.

Open-ended responses to this service were grouped under the headings of Comfort Level, Adequacy of Preparation, and Client Satisfaction. Frequently repeated phrases in the remarks are listed in an abbreviated fashion in Table VI.

TABLE VI
OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Comfort Level

Were you comfortable speaking with the peer advisors? Why or why not?

common comments: "on my level"
"relaxed, friendly"
"knew how I felt"

Adequacy of Preparation

Did you feel the peer advisor was well prepared for your meeting? Why or why not?

common comments: "organized, knew where to find information"
"knew requirements"
"informative, helpful"

Client Satisfaction

Are you satisfied with the results of your visit with the peer advisor? Why or why not?

common comments: "my questions were answered"
"no longer confused"
"saved a lot of time"

The comments referred to interpersonal and information skills of the peer advisors. Peer advisors were seen as relaxed, friendly, and enthusiastic. These qualities created an easy rapport between student-advisor and student-client. Students appreciated talking to someone on their level on certain issues, because it was easier to relate to a student than a professor. Listening skills and the time the peers were willing to spend with students were

valued. In terms of informational skills, students remarked on the organization and preparation of peers for their interviews. The fact that they knew academic requirements and School policies was impressive to students who found the catalog confusing. Students left interviews feeling relieved because their questions were answered through discussions with peers. Summary comments revealed that students saw the peer advisors as knowledgeable and helpful resources. These positive reactions to this service combined with its immediacy indicates that an organized peer advising program can be beneficial for both students and faculty.

With the rush of a large number of students to Schools of Business and relatively new faculty, academic advising services can suffer. Particularly in an undergraduate program where students want a personal atmosphere and need guidance in a variety of areas from course selection to career possibilities. A peer advisor can be a helpful first stop for students seeking assistance in matters pertaining to academic affairs or personal concerns.

...the process of academic advising can be very gratifying or it can be frustrating. In most cases the gratifying experience prevails and both the academic advisor and the advisee receive tangible and intangible reinforcement.

When the academic advisor and the advisee find the advising experience negative, it is sometimes due to circumstances beyond the control of the involved parties. Some reasons why academic advising conferences yield poor results include: lack of planning and organization on the part of the advisor, advisee or both; lack of or poor communication; goals which are unclear or unknown; information which is unclear, irrelevant or untrue; and, the academic advisor's lack of a sincere interest in assisting the student. Also, according to Gordon, most advisors lack any kind of formal training to improve their advising skills.¹

One of the most common situations which hinders good academic advising is when the faculty or professional academic advisors discover that their advising duties have a second or third priority. A first priority is lacking when faculty do not view academic advising as part of their teaching responsibility. Many institutions of higher education list three areas by which faculty are to be evaluated: teaching, research and service. If academic advising is not included in one of the three areas, faculty advisors are not likely to award a high priority to the task, and academic advising of students is then seen as a hinderance to their main interests of teaching and research. Some faculty members view academic advising as a listing of courses in which students are to register; they believe the institutional catalog serves to meet this particular student need.

On some campuses there are too many students to advise on an individual basis and faculty realize that it is impossible to do an adequate job. In such situations, advising models must

Preserving Faculty Time for Analytical Advising in a High Student-to-Faculty Ratio

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INTRODUCTION

The process of academic advising can be very gratifying or it can be frustrating. In most cases the gratifying experience prevails and both the academic advisor and the advisee receive tangible and intangible reinforcement.

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¹ Virginia Gordon, "Training Future Academic Advisors: One Model of A Pre-Service Approach," *NACADA Journal* 2:2 (November 1982): 35-40.