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ANALYSIS OF STUDENT AND FACULTY OPINION OF ACADEMIC ADVISING SERVICES

As college student enrollment continues to decline on regional and national levels, faculty members and administrators alike are increasingly concerned about the corresponding loss in revenue. Closely aligned with this concern, and also with the increased intensity of recruitment activities, is the emphasis on college student retention. At the same time, the quality of academic advising provided to an institution's students is being carefully scrutinized, particularly for its relationship to retention. This article reports on the results of a questionnaire dealing with faculty and student perceptions of the role of advising and the advisor in academic institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Both Grites¹ and Habley² have written extensively about the important role academic advising plays in overall student retention. According to Dr. Lee Noel (NACADA's 7th Annual Conference in October 1983), a well-planned developmental academic advising program reduces the institution's drop-out rate, is linked to the student's achievement and overall learning, and helps the institution maintain academic standards.³

Despite these positive comments regarding the benefits of a good academic advising program, "almost every study of undergraduate education in recent years has cited as a major problem the poor quality of academic advising that students receive."⁴

Further, it is reported in many institutions that students frequently complain about the inaccessibility of academic advisors. Whether an institution employs faculty, staff, peer advisors, or a combination system, with or without computer-assisted advising, complaints still arise.

Many factors contribute to these problems. Faculty members and students might have different perceptions of the academic advisor's role, and, thus, have conflicting expectations.

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Do students want advisors to be student-centered—serving as a friend, supporter, counselor? Do faculty members see the advising role as solely administrative and impersonal, providing program information only?

In addressing the issue of expectations of advising, Larsen and Brown wrote that advisors and advisees generally agree on the responsibilities each has in advising sessions. They did, however, recommend adoption of a formal statement that can be used to help both parties identify the specific expectations of advisor and advisee at the outset of the relationship.⁵

METHOD

Samples

During the spring 1983 advising period, a project was undertaken at the Speed Scientific School of the University of Louisville to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the current system of academic advising in that engineering college. The advisors wanted to determine ways in which the system could be improved if necessary, but first they wanted to determine faculty and student perceptions of the overall academic advising process and the advisor's role in that process. All faculty members in the college ($N=73$) were asked to complete a questionnaire dealing with the quality of, and the problems related to, academic advising. In addition, the full-time staff members responsible for academic advising were also given questionnaires. A total of 28 (38.3%) completed questionnaires were returned. Table 1 provides the characteristics of the faculty/staff sample.

During the spring preregistration period, all students in the college ($N=1723$) were presented with a questionnaire about academic advising. Forms were returned by 328 undergraduate students, for a return rate of 19%. In addition, seven graduate students responded to the survey. Table 2 gives the characteristics of the student sample. The student sample size is fairly large; unfortunately, the return rate is poor.

The Speed Scientific School contains engineering, computer science, and applied mathematics programs. This marked the first time the academic advising process had been evaluated by faculty and students of this college. Although the student and faculty samples of this study come from specialized areas, the authors believe that the results of this study will be of interest to faculty and students from other disciplines as well.

Instrument

The faculty/staff questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part, to be completed by all respondents, deals with faculty perception of both the advising process and the role faculty advisors should play in the process. The second part, completed only by those who had served as advisors within the last two years, addresses the specifics of advising, such as the advisor's availability, the number of advisees assigned, and the amount of advisor/advisee contact. Since these questions deal with the advising process as it is now being implemented, actual facts were required.

The student questionnaire includes general questions about advising services and specific questions about the importance and quality of academic advising in their academic experience. The questionnaires appear at the end of this article.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Faculty/Staff Sample

| | Number | % of Sample |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-------------|
| Department/Office | | |
| Applied Math and Computer Science | 5 | 18 |
| Chemical and Environmental | 5 | 18 |
| Civil | 3 | 11 |
| Electrical | 9 | 32 |
| General Engineering Studies | 3 | 11 |
| Mechanical | 1 | 3 |
| Technology | 2 | 7 |
| Status | | |
| Tenured | 18 | 64 |
| Probationary | 5 | 18 |
| Temporary | 3 | 11 |
| Permanent (Staff) | 2 | 7 |
| Academic Rank | | |
| Professor | 11 | 39 |
| Associate | 8 | 29 |
| Assistant | 6 | 21 |
| Staff | 3 | 11 |

Table 2'
emographic Characteristics of Student Sample

| | Number of Participants | % of Sample |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Department | | |
| Applied Math and Computer Science | 56 | 16.7 |
| Chemical and Environmental | 27 | 8.1 |
| Civil | 12 | 3.6 |
| Electrical | 82 | 24.5 |
| Mechanical | 40 | 11.9 |
| Technology | 118 | 35.2 |
| Status | | |
| Freshmen (1st year) | 122 | 36.4 |
| Sophomores (2nd year) | 146 | 43.6 |
| Juniors (3rd year) | 40 | 11.9 |
| Seniors (4th year) | 20 | 6.0 |
| Graduate/professionals (5th year) | 7 | 2.1 |
| Classification | | |
| Full-time | 258 | 77.0 |
| Part-time | 77 | 23.0 |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study there appears to be substantial agreement among advisors and students in terms of responsibilities of advisors and expectations of students. Nearly all advisors (96.4%) agree that they should provide their advisees with information on major requirements, and 75.5% of the student respondents rate their advisors as excellent or good in this category. Both faculty and staff advisors indicate that their duties should include providing a wide range of information to their advisees, although a majority (64.3%) feel that advisors should neither be responsible for providing information on campus resources nor (67.9%) on university rules and regulations. With regard to the personalized aspects of academic advising, most of the advisors (85.7%) indicate that it is important to have some understanding of the advisee's personal problems, and most students (80.1%) rate their advisors as "excellent" or "good" in showing a positive, friendly attitude toward them. Although good intentions and friendliness do not necessarily mean that the advisor will understand or help with the student's personal problems, a good rapport can be a positive element in the advisor-advisee relationship.

Student responses regarding the quality of advising are rather consistent with advisor data rating the importance of various advising duties. This research indicates that students believe the advisors perform advising duties well in areas where the faculty advisors perceive their responsibility to be. However, in areas such as general university rules and regulations and campus resources, which academic advisors perceive as less important, many students (34%) responded "not applicable," which may indicate that such information had not been requested of the advisor. Most academic advisors who responded to the questionnaire do not believe it is their responsibility to provide such information, and many students do not even request such information from the academic advisor. In general, about three-fourths of academic advisors and students rate advising services as "excellent" or "good."

The data from this study suggest that academic advisors would like advising to be included more systematically in the academic assignment process. A majority (66.7%) indicate that advisors should be relieved of some committee responsibilities because of their advising loads. Yet many of the academic advisors resist being held fully accountable for their advising duties. More than half (57.1%) indicate that using the quality of advising services in merit evaluations or in the promotion and tenure process should be on a voluntary basis only.

A summary of the responses from the faculty/staff questionnaire is given in Table 3, and a summary of the responses from the students is presented in Table 4. Of particular interest is the fact that 61.9% of the faculty/staff respondents had not received any special assistance or training to prepare them for their advising responsibilities, but 60.7% believe workshops or training sessions would be helpful.

SPRING 1983 — ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT FACULTY MEMBERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Each Speed School faculty member and student is being asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the academic advisement process. A major purpose of this questionnaire is for you, as faculty members, to determine how important you feel it is to serve as an academic advisor and whether the performance of advisors should be used in the promotion and tenure process as one criterion to judge overall effectiveness of academic assignment. Even though you may not currently be serving as an academic advisor, your responses to this questionnaire are most important. If you are currently an advisor, your responses are vital. Please respond to all questions as thoughtfully, honestly, and completely as possible. It should require no more than 15 minutes of your time. You need not give your name. When you have completed the questionnaire, please return it directly to the General Engineering Studies Office through campus mail. Thank you for your cooperation in this project.

1. Your department _____
2. Academic rank _____
3. Which of the following best describes your status?
Temporary ☐ Probationary ☐ Tenured ☐
4. If you are currently serving as an advisor or have been an advisor within the past two academic years, please indicate your advisement area(s) (you may check more than one):
☐ Undergraduate advisor for engineering students
☐ Graduate advisor
☐ Advisor for technology students
☐ Not an advisor
5. Three methods of academic advising are listed below. Please rate each method on a scale from 1 to 3 in which 1 indicates the method you would prefer to use and 3 the method least desirable:
☐ Mass advising groups led by qualified faculty members
☐ One-to-one advisor-advisee contacts
☐ Students reading the university bulletin, departmental publications, and semester class schedules and "advising" themselves
6. Do you believe individual students should be assigned to specific advisors?
 Yes ☐ No ☐
 If no, please suggest an alternative method _____
7. Do you believe students can receive better academic advisement if they are allowed to choose their own advisor rather than being assigned to a specific advisor?
 Yes ☐ No ☐
8. Should students retain the same advisor once they are admitted to a particular unit, assuming they do not change majors?
 Yes ☐ No ☐
9. In which of the following areas should students expect to receive information from their advisors? (Check as many as desired)
☐ University rules and regulations (e.g., residency requirements, grading policy, etc.)
☐ General education requirements
☐ Major requirements
☐ University graduation requirements

- ☐ Campus resources (e.g., student health, counseling services, etc.)
☐ Career, graduate, and professional school plans
☐ Planning class schedules
☐ Personal problems
10. How important is it for an advisor to know his/her advisees well enough to recognize them and call them by name?
- Not important ☐ Somewhat important ☐
 Moderately important ☐ Very important ☐
11. How important is it for an advisor to have some understanding of the individual advisee's personal and/or learning problems?
- Not important ☐ Somewhat important ☐
 Moderately important ☐ Very important ☐
12. Do you believe that workshops or departmental training sessions on academic advising techniques or resources would be helpful?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
13. Should advisors routinely have access to pertinent information about the advisee (e.g., placement test scores and transcripts)?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
- If yes, please specify what types of information _____
-
14. If a faculty member is assigned to be an advisor, should he/she be relieved of some committee responsibilities? (You may check more than one)
- Departmental ☐ School ☐ University ☐
 Should not be relieved of committee assignments ☐
15. If the quality of a faculty member's advisement services were used in the promotion and tenure process or in merit evaluations (e.g., to offset a limited creative or publication record, etc.), should it be:
- a. A voluntary, supplemental category? Yes ☐ No ☐
 b. A mandatory, separate category? Yes ☐ No ☐
16. If advisement were considered in the promotion and tenure process, or in merit evaluations, how much weight should it be given?
- No weight ☐ Minimal weight ☐ Modest weight ☐
 Fairly heavy weight ☐ Very heavy weight ☐
17. Are you in favor of students completing an annual evaluation of all academic advisors, by name and department?
- a. For use in the promotion and tenure or merit evaluation process?
 Yes ☐ No ☐
 b. For the advisor's information only?
 Yes ☐ No ☐
18. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of advisement services within your department?
- Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Average ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY CURRENT ADVISORS OR FACULTY MEMBERS WHO HAVE SERVED AS ADVISORS WITHIN THE PAST TWO ACADEMIC YEARS. PLEASE ADVANCE TO THE COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS SECTION AT THE END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE IF YOU DO NOT FIT INTO EITHER OF THESE TWO CATEGORIES.

19. Have you ever received **any special** assistance or training to prepare you for your advising responsibilities?
 Yes ___ No ___
 If yes, please describe _____
20. Do you know approximately how many advisees you are assigned each semester?
 Yes ___ No ___
 If yes, please specify approximate number _____
21. How many office hours per week do you make available for student contacts, including nonadvisee contacts? _____
22. On the average, how many hours should you be expected to spend with your total group of advisees?
 per week _____
 per semester _____
 per academic year _____
23. Do you feel the need for additional office hours for academic advisement beyond those needed to fulfill necessary contacts with students in your classes?
 Yes ___ Occasionally ___ No ___
24. How important is it to supplement your regular office hours at the beginning of the semester and during preregistration and registration periods for purposes of advisement?
 Not important _____ Somewhat important _____
 Moderately important _____ Very important _____
25. In reference to the total number of students who contact you for advisement each academic year, please estimate the number of contacts you have with the typical advisee:
 ___ 0 - 1 times per academic year
 ___ 2 - 3 times per academic year
 ___ 4 or more times per academic year
26. On the average, how much time do you spend with an advisee during a typical advisement session? _____
27. Are any types of student records available to you when you meet with student advisees?
 Yes ___ No ___
 If yes, please specify _____
28. Please list, in order of importance, the major or recurring problems you encounter in performing the functions of an academic advisor.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Please list here any comments or recommendations you may have regarding the academic advisement process and how it may be improved.

Table 3

Summary of **Faculty/Staff** Responses

| | |
|---|--------|
| Preferred method of advising | |
| Mass advising led by qualified personnel | 7.1 % |
| One-to-one advisor/advisee contact | 82.1 % |
| Students advising themselves | 10.7 % |
| For one-to-one advisor/advisee contact | |
| Students assigned specific advisor - Yes | 89.3 % |
| Students choose their advisor - No | 78.6 % |
| Students retain same advisor - Yes | 78.6 % |
| Information that advisors should supply | |
| University rules and regulations | 32.1 % |
| General education requirements | 71.4 % |
| University graduation requirements | 78.6 % |
| Major requirements | 96.4 % |
| Campus resources | 35.7 % |
| Planning class schedules | 78.6 % |
| Discuss personal problems | 60.7 % |
| Importance of advisor recognizing, knowing names of, advisees | |
| Very important | 57.1 % |
| Somewhat, moderately important | 32.2 % |
| Not important | 10.7 % |
| Importance of advisor understanding advisee's personal and/or learning problems | |
| Very important | 53.6 % |
| Somewhat, moderately important | 32.1 % |
| Not important | 14.3 % |
| Responsibilities, evaluation of faculty members serving as advisors | |
| Should be relieved of some committee work - Yes | 66.75% |
| Quality of advising services used in evaluations: | |
| Yes, as voluntary category | 57.1 % |
| Yes, as mandatory category | 14.3 % |
| Weight given to advising in evaluations: | |
| No weight | 10.7 % |
| Minimal | 25.0 % |
| Modest | 46.4 % |
| Fairly heavy | 10.7 % |
| Very heavy | 0 % |
| Students should complete annual evaluation of advisors: | |
| For promotion, tenure, merit evaluations | 32.1 % |
| For advisor's information only | 57.1 % |

SPRING 1983 — ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate the effectiveness of Speed School's Advising Programs. Your evaluation will help us to improve our service to students.

Section I

1. What is your current classification?
 - ☐ freshman (0-32 hours)
 - ☐ sophomore (33-67 hours)
 - ☐ junior (68-94 hours)
 - ☐ senior (95-up hours)
 - ☐ graduate/professional
2. What is your anticipated major?
 - ☐ Applied Math and Computer Science
 - ☐ Chemical and Environmental Engineering
 - ☐ Civil Engineering
 - ☐ Data Processing (Associate Degree)
 - ☐ Data Processing (Bachelor's Degree)
 - ☐ Electrical Engineering
 - ☐ Electrical Engineering Technology
 - ☐ Industrial Engineering
 - ☐ Mechanical Engineering
 - ☐ Mechanical Engineering Technology
3. Are you enrolled in
 - ☐ Daytime classes
 - ☐ Day and evening classes
 - ☐ Evening classes only
4. Are you
 - ☐ Full-time
 - ☐ Part-time
5. Do you know the name of your advisor?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
6. How easy is it for you to arrange an appointment with your advisor to discuss your academic program?
 - ☐ I have not attempted to make an appointment
 - ☐ Very easy
 - ☐ Somewhat easy
 - ☐ Somewhat difficult
7. How many times do you usually see your advisor?
 - ☐ Never
 - ☐ Once a year
 - ☐ Less than once a year
 - ☐ Two or three times a semester

8. What is the average amount of time you usually spend with your advisor when you see her/him?
- ☐ I have never seen my advisor
 - ☐ Less than 5 minutes a visit
 - ☐ About 15 minutes
 - ☐ About **30** minutes
 - ☐ More than **30** minutes
9. Prior to attending Speed, what type of educational institution did you last attend?
- ☐ High School
 - ☐ Community College
 - ☐ 4-Year University or College
 - ☐ Trade School
 - ☐ Other. Please specify _____
10. How important is academic advising to you in relation to fulfilling your educational objectives?
- ☐ Very important
 - ☐ Moderately important
 - ☐ Somewhat important
 - ☐ Not important

[illegible]

COMMENTS

Table 4
Summary of Student Responses

| | <u>EXC.</u> | <u>GOOD</u> | <u>FAIR</u> | <u>POOR</u> | <u>N/A</u> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Advisor keeps his/her posted office hours | 33.7 | 24.7 | 6.6 | 2.5 | 32.5 |
| Advisor's office hours are adequate | 44.8 | 28.0 | 7.2 | 1.2 | 18.8 |
| Advisor allows adequate time during session | 59.4 | 24.8 | 2.8 | 0.8 | 12.2 |
| Advisor knowledgeable about major requirements | 47.4 | 28.1 | 11.1 | 1.6 | 11.8 |
| Advisor knowledgeable about university requirements | 43.8 | 30.7 | 7.2 | 2.8 | 15.5 |
| Advisor assists advisee in planning courses | 49.2 | 28.8 | 6.8 | 1.6 | 13.6 |
| Advisor knowledgeable about campus resources | 39.2 | 22.8 | 2.8 | 1.2 | 34.0 |
| When requested, advisor assists in career plans | 29.7 | 20.1 | 4.4 | 0.8 | 45.0 |
| Advisor tries to understand educational goals, concerns | 36.7 | 34.3 | 8.4 | 1.2 | 19.4 |
| Advisor takes interest in advisee; friendly attitude | 51.4 | 28.7 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 12.3 |
| Advisor does good job in meeting advising needs | 52.0 | 31.3 | 4.4 | 1.2 | 11.1 |

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the results of these two surveys, a number of suggestions surfaced as to how the advising process could be improved.

1. Systematic and periodic in-service training programs for academic advisors should be developed and implemented.
2. Academic advisors should be given references enabling them to provide accurate information on major requirements and general education requirements.
3. Academic advisors should be furnished with materials about career opportunities and graduate and professional school programs related to their academic discipline.
4. A fair, clearly articulated system of academic advisor evaluation must be established with input from all parties.
5. A periodic evaluation of academic advising effectiveness should be conducted and the results made available to the advisor being rated.
6. The university should encourage both students and advisors to integrate academic advising into the overall instructional process.
7. A reward system should be developed for those faculty and staff who demonstrate excellence in academic advising services.

While all of the above suggestions are important, the authors believe that instituting some type of reward system for excellence in advising is essential. Without a reward system, it is unlikely that current advisors will be motivated to improve their services, or that other faculty will want to serve as academic advisors. Improvements in the overall academic advising process will be difficult unless the university (or at least individual colleges within the university) actively demonstrates its concern in this area through the development of a reward system.

Furthermore, were this project to be repeated at the Speed Scientific School, changes would be made in an attempt to improve collection and analysis of the data. First of all, the faculty/staff and student questionnaires would be revised with identical questions on each where possible, so that direct comparison of responses would be possible.

Secondly, students being advised through the Office of General Engineering Studies (the academic home for first- and second-year engineering students) would be required to complete and turn in the anonymous questionnaire before being advised for the upcoming semester. Attempts would be made also to encourage faculty and staff advisors in the departments to enforce such a procedure. This would greatly improve the number of student participants in the study.

As Kramer⁶ points out, attention is being increasingly focused on the evaluation and improvement of academic advising. As more faculty and administrators realize the important role that advising plays in student college satisfaction and retention, hopefully more resources will be allocated toward the improvement of academic advising.

Footnotes

¹ Thomas J. Grites, *Academic Advising: Getting Us Through the Eighties*, Washington, D.C.: AAHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Report (1979).

² Wesley R. Habley, "Academic Advisement: The Critical Link in Student Retention," *NASPA Journal*, 18 (4) (1982), pp. 45-50.

³ Lee Noel, *Increasing Student Learning and Retention: The Best Case for Academic Advising*, Paper presented at NACADA's Annual Conference, St. Louis, October 1983.

⁴ J. Johnson and K. Sprandel, "Centralized Academic Advising at the Department Level," *University of Colorado College Quarterly* (1975), pp. 16-20.

⁵ Max D. Larsen and Bonnie Brown, "Student and Faculty Expectations of Academic Advising," *NACADA JOURNAL*, 3 (1983), pp. 31-37.

⁶ Howard C. Kramer, "Evaluating Academic Advisers: Administrator and Faculty Perspectives," *NACADA JOURNAL*, 2 (1982), pp. 30-36.