



ENHANCING THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

In this guest editorial, Gary Kramer relates some excerpts on the five points of a successful advising program from a paper in press entitled "Developmental Advising to Enhance Freshman Success," written by Gary Kramer, E. D. Peterson, and R. W. Spencer, to be published as a chapter in John Gardner and Lee Upcraft's book, Enhancing Success in the First Year of College, a Jossey-Bass publication.

Ernest Boyer in his book, *College, the Undergraduate Experience in America*, described several "tensions" found in America's colleges that negatively influence the quality of the undergraduate experience. An area of interest to the professional advisor is Boyer's assessment of the role of academic advising on college campuses.

His assessment is mixed, depending mainly on the type and location of the institution. Small, private liberal arts colleges received higher marks for their advising services than public, research universities. Generally, results from Boyer's national survey indicated that "at least half the students had never sought advice on financial, vocational, or personal matters. And almost one in five had never sought advice on academic matters." Rather than discussing academic goals, Boyer reported that advising was related to "schedule-juggling" instead of focusing on what academic interests or needs the student expressed. Almost half the undergraduates (48 percent) reported that "students at their college are treated like numbers in a book." Again, percentages varied according to the institution type. In many cases, Boyer observed that institutions lacked a definition or mission of their academic advising services, particularly the role of faculty in advising students.

Will Rogers was once asked what he would do to stop German submarines from tracking and sinking allied ships. He replied, "warm up the Atlantic Ocean" to bring the subs to the surface. When asked how he intended to warm up an ocean, he explained, "I've told you how to resolve the problem, you'll have to figure out the details."

The problems of the undergraduate experience, especially the effectiveness of academic advising, Boyer cites, are not new. They are old problems that continue on, persistent and irritable. To resolve them once and for all may be like trying to "heat up" the Atlantic. Although professional advisors cannot offer a panacea for all of higher education's ills, they can do certain things to raise the quality of the student's undergraduate experience, particularly as it pertains to academic advising.

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To change the condition of academic advising on college campuses, I'd like to offer a few suggestions that I feel are fundamental to a successful advising program:

- develop a philosophical and theoretical base for advising students,
- identify institutional and student characteristics,
- improve the performance, visibility, and viability of academic advising,
- integrate computer technology into the academic advising process, and
- use NACADA, particularly this journal, and other advising resources available.

A brief explanation of each of the above follows.

Developing a Theoretical Base for Academic Advising

Concepts of student development have only recently reached the discussion stages in the advising field, but theories about student development have been of interest in higher education for several years. These theories are important for advising because they suggest ways

- (1) to understand how the academic information an advisor provides can benefit the student,
- (2) to invite students to be partners in the advising process, not just recipients of advice, and
- (3) to integrate the aid of other campus services to satisfy students needs (Walsh, 1979; Miller and McCaffrey, 1982; Hillman and Lewis, 1981; Ender, et al., 1983; Schroeder, 1982; Winston and Sandor, 1984; Kramer, et al., 1987).

Advisors must be in a position to anticipate needs, discriminately offer students information and planning assistance, and coordinate institutional resources to promote student development. Indeed, advisors should coordinate the various services students need and provide the best possible environment for student progress. As Thomas and Chickering (1984) point out, "developmental academic advising entails giving students the best advisors have to offer."

Identifying Institutional and Student Characteristics

To be responsive, colleges must clearly describe the characteristics and needs of their entering students. Today's student is entering college with different needs, educational perspectives, motivation, and preparation (Hodgkinson, 1985). Educators, states Hodgkinson, need to use "the educational system from the perspective of the people who move through it."

A college should be prepared to teach students about its philosophy, curriculum, and academic goals. Learning about an institution's academic expectations and requirements at appropriate intervals during the educational process allows students to plan their present and future academic programs intelligently. The academic advising process can be greatly enhanced by institutions knowing the characteristics of their incoming students and by student awareness of the characteristics of the institution they choose.

If students' backgrounds and characteristics, as well as their initial commitments, are taken into account in the advising process, the individual student will be better integrated into the social and academic systems of the college. This integration fosters greater commitment to the college and to the goal of graduation (Pascarella, 1986).

Improving the Process of Academic Advising

The advising program on many campuses lacks a clear sense of institutional mission or priority; many institutions have no comprehensive statement about academic advising. The role of academic advising should be defined clearly in appropriate institutional publications. Furthermore, there are few effective systems to evaluate academic advising; thus advisors receive no recognition for successful advising (Cartensen and Silberhorn, 1979; Kramer, et al., 1985). To clearly define the role of academic advising services on campus and then to take active steps to measure the perceived effectiveness of the services is important for program visibility, improvement, and viability.

I would advocate the following five principles for planning and administering an academic advising program:

- 1) Develop a mission statement and definition of the institution's advising program.
- 2) Reassess the goals of the advising program—an inevitable and ongoing process. Institutions and their programs and goals are fluid.
- 3) Establish criteria against which results of the advising program can be assessed.
- 4) Report program activities and findings to colleagues, faculty, and college administrators. By doing so, advisors can increase professional credibility, encourage acceptance of advising in the academic community, and improve advising services to students.
- 5) Involve the campus community in developing the academic advising plan. When others are involved in developing the plan, there is greater likelihood that the mission of advising is clearly understood, that the program will improve in goal achievement, and that advisors will perceive the value of planning.

Computer Technology and Academic Advising

Collegiate institutions have become "technological laggards." They have not understood the value of or made the commitment to using technological advances to improve student advising, particularly as a means to impart academic information to students. Most institutions today—despite all the computer programming and hardware available—still advise students with a catalog in one hand and a ditto copy of college requirements in the other. The result is a manual tracking of student academic requirements, a method that has plagued institutions and students since its inception. This traditional practice is not only unproductive, inaccurate, and inefficient, it also leaves little time for advisors to concentrate on more important issues, such as student development, retention, and academic planning.

Because institutions are becoming increasingly complex and because information given to students is often repetitive, the use of computer-assisted programs to facilitate, manage, and monitor academic progress is especially important (Sampson and Pyle, 1983).

Computer-assisted advising is the best solution to the most fundamental advising **problem**—getting accurate academic information to advisors and students. Its flexibility is such that it can work with any type of academic advising delivery system—faculty, peer, or professional.

NACADA and Other Advising Resources

NACADA is dedicated to the support and growth of academic advising and advisors. An important resource within NACADA is its Consultant's Bureau, whose purpose is to provide inexpensive consultations to improve institutional academic advising. Through NACADA's refereed journal, members are kept abreast of research in and evaluation of academic advising programs, student development theory as applied to the advising setting, and critical issues confronting the advising field.

Another key resource for advisors is the document, *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Services/Development Programs*, published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (1986). These guidelines provide direction for establishing and monitoring an academic advising program.

In summary, to enhance the role of academic advising on campuses, advisors must be able to 1) assess the environment of the institution and represent it clearly to new incoming students, 2) communicate the mission/purpose or role of academic advising via institutional publications, 3) incorporate concepts of developmental theory to promote the best possible environment for student development, 4) develop professional credibility with faculty and campus administrators through ongoing evaluation and improvement of the advising system, and 5) contribute to the quality of students' academic experience and establish a viable academic advising program by integrating ideas from the NACADA Journal and NACADA national/regional conferences.

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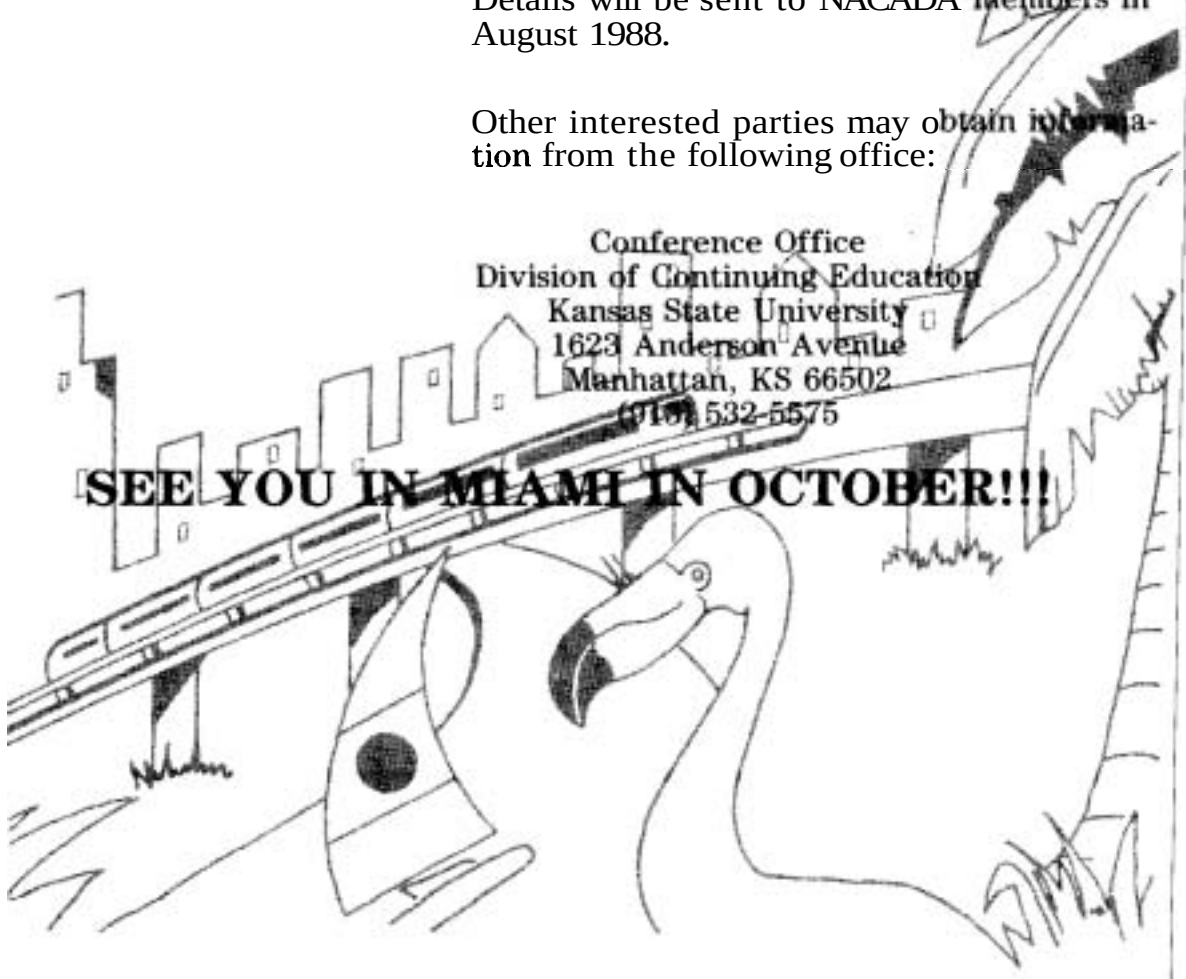
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ARTICLES

