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INTRUSIVE ADVISING OF FRESHMEN IN ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY

Intrusive interventions with second semester freshmen on probation is a concept of deliberate intervention in order to enhance student motivation to utilize structured assistant modes. The model is consistent with current research on retention. A three-point theoretical model of intrusive advising is presented and an example of a successful framework used at Old Dominion University is described.

INTRODUCTION

Retention of college students at the freshman level is a national concern in higher education. Although these freshmen meet admission requirements, and therefore are predicted to be successful, more than one-third of all entering freshmen will not be continuous students into a sophomore year (Noel & Levitz, 1983). The fiscal concerns of retention of freshmen have helped shift the emphasis of higher education policy from the "revolving door" concept of student continuance by selection of those who "make it through the freshman year" to an emphasis on retention that involves evaluation-remediation, pre-college orientation, and academic counseling during the formative freshman year. Because of these concerns, many colleges and universities have increased support for academic advising as a necessary retention focus. A general model of pre-college and freshman year advising is in place at a large number of colleges and universities. Still, freshmen retention rates remain troublesome. Research data are fairly clear in showing that the freshman year is the crucial adjustment period for college students and the major determinate of continuance (Sprandel, 1976; Rowrey and Wilkinson, 1986). Many academic advisors are trained to identify academic needs of their students, and most freshmen advisors are also skilled at identifying adjustment and orientation problems. Yet colleges that continue to lose large numbers of freshmen do not utilize these advisors' skills to identify and assist students who are experiencing real or perceived failures that result in their dropping out of college.

Orientation has been identified as the primary focus for the sound development of the variable of proper academic fit, with orientation classes as a particularly effective mode for the development of student motivation for academic success (Heckle, et al., 1972). Academic and orientation interventions usually are based on the assump-

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tion that students will self-identify their needs and seek help. Although these "continuous orientation" programs are effective, students involved are usually self-selecting and therefore have behavioral patterns of seeking help that are not characteristic of many freshmen in academic difficulty.

The term "intrusive" has been used in advising literature (Tinto, 1975; Glennen, 1975; Tate, 1981; Appleton, 1983; Vowell and Karst, 1987) to define intervention strategies. This paper defines "intrusive advising" to mean deliberate structured student intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty in order to motivate a student to seek help. By this definition, intrusive advising utilizes the systematic skills of prescriptive advising while helping to solve the major problem of developmental advising which is a student's reluctance to self-refer. It is theoretically based and has been tested by a research project which has shown that it enhances student retention (Earl, 1987a).

Even when orientation programs are mandatory, they are less effective than intrusive advising because they do not utilize motivation for success as the primary focus. Because of a lesser sense of competency about their academic skills, first-year students are probably more responsive to intrusive interventions by their academic advisors than are upperclass students. Intrusive advising is particularly successful with freshmen whose academic difficulties are strongly based on motivational rather than skill factors. Intrusive advising can motivate students with low grade point averages at the end of their first semester to self-identify early enough for remedial actions to improve their academic performance. It identifies an academic crisis event in a student's life and directly offers academic assistance early enough for the crisis situation to maximize motivation to accept assistance.

THE INTRUSIVE CONCEPT

Intrusive advising is a viable current option for student retention. It is a continuation of the four distinct stages of the development of college attrition (Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985). Each stage is a developmental extension of retention theory. The first stage is characterized by predictive models such as the "early warning system" developed by Astin (1975). The second stage is an emphasis on action-oriented responses that are based on programming such as study skill units, academic success groups, and orientation classes (Beal and Noel, 1980). The third stage was an emphasis on campus-wide participation in retention efforts. During this stage the National Academic Advising Association was organized and many campuses developed retention steering committees with both faculty and professional counselors as members. Smith (Smith, et al., 1981), created the nomenclature for this stage with his term "innovative quality of life model." The importance of faculty-student relationships is the main concept during this stage. The final stage of the development of a theory of retention is a concern about professional staffing. Keller (1983) defines staffing as an approach for getting the right person in the right place.

The theoretical basis for an intrusive model of advising includes all four of these stages. First, although intrusive actions are not based on predictive models, they are direct responses to diagnosed academic problems and can therefore be called diagnostic models. Intrusive advising is clearly the type of action-oriented response that was pro-

duced during the second stage. The third stage, holistic campus involvement, is related to the central theme of intrusive advising: specific counselor intrusive interaction with students' academic adjustment rather than just their scheduling needs. In addition, intrusive advising is an institutional strategy that is related to the teaching concept of orientation. Finally, the intrusive model emphasizes the importance of the role of trained and responsive professionals. Russell (1981) implies the content of intrusive counseling when he defines the tasks and knowledge that academic counseling professionals must have to meet the student's "myth of self-reliance." He lists specific informational tasks that are the responsibility of counselors who are working with probationary students. Among the topics he lists are appropriate course load, when to repeat failed classes, how to withdraw from classes, meeting prerequisites, and effective use of general requirements.

Although the model of "intrusive advising and orientation" differs in organizational form from either the "developmental" or "prescriptive" model of advising (Winston and Sandor, 1984), this apparent difference in structure is not as important as the differing methods of relating to student motivation. Intrusive advising, therefore, is different from, but draws values out of, both prescriptive and developmental advising.

Prescriptive advising mandates that a student's performance follow set prescribed curriculum requirements, rules, and regulations. Student motivation is secondary to required performance since the student is not in a learning mode. The prescriptive model does not solve the retention problems based on motivation to perform. In the intrusive model, prescription as made by the professional is essential but is part of a curriculum or learning mode context and is a response to a perceived crisis.

Developmental advising is generally a one-to-one (or small group) interaction between a counselor and a student who is motivated to seek assistance. At large universities, this model's success depends on workload distribution, availability of counselors at crisis times, and student self-motivation. The model's greatest time of inefficiency occurs precisely at the time of greatest student need: the few weeks just preceding drop/add and registration deadlines.

What is needed is a model of advising that identifies a point in time of "critical" student needs and strongly recommends continuous orientation modes that are responsive to student motivation for success. These modes are structured with the specific content of integration skills necessary for academic success.

A THEORETICAL MODEL OF INTRUSIVE ADVISING

The theoretical basis of intrusive advising as a model of retention is based on three advising principles found in the literature:

1. *Academic and social integration are the keys to freshman persistence in college.* Tinto (1982), whose model of retention advising coined the phrase "intrusive," lists "personal variables" and "informal interaction among students and faculty members outside the classroom" as important components of this fit. Self-direction and the evaluation of personal variables are an intricate part of intrusive orientation Processes.

2. *Deficiencies in this necessary integration are treatable: students can be taught orientation skills through intrusive advising* (Glennen and Baxley, 1985). It has been recognized for many years that a student's perception of personal "fit" to a university environment is one variable of academic persistence (Astin, 1971; Berdie, 1967; Feldman and Newcomb, 1970) during the freshman year. College freshmen on probation who are experiencing a freshman year in which their "fit" to their choice of a college or university is challenged by a grade point average below the minimum standard need intrusive interventions. The intrusive mode of counseling is based on the premise that this "fit" is conceptual and can be learned by a student. A part of the curriculum of orientation is student adjustment to the institution by learning specific integration skills. Rather than just looking at institution variables, intrusive advising looks at and seeks to change student orientation variables.

3. *Motivation is not the cause but the result of intrusive intervention activities.* Student motivation to seek assistance does not need to be an operational variable in this treatment. Intrusive orientation does not depend on volunteerism but is a response to identified cognitive need. Sappinton (1980) experimented with behavior modification by paying sixteen students to participate in a self-controlled study skill program. The eight students in the experimental group significantly (T-test) increased effective study time, while the control group not receiving the intrusive help did not significantly improve. Pawlicki and Connell (1981) found that a structured self-management technique taught to eighteen volunteer, academically marginal students significantly improved their grade point average. In a study by Earl, Murray, and Jacobson (1983) ANOVA and T-test statistics in a pilot project using a screening questionnaire showed that intrusively treated probationary freshmen did significantly better scholastically than a control group. A tally of the results of the questionnaire used in this project listed the most frequent reasons for probation as 1) conflict between class and job, 2) inadequate financial aid, and 3) inadequate student-faculty contact. Once these issues were identified by the questionnaire, they were intrusively addressed by academic counselors. In all three of these research projects students learned self-management and thereby increased their academic performance. The theory of intrusive orientation operates on the premise that student response is based on motivation to succeed rather than just on motivation to seek remediation or counseling help. Students are intrusively identified and placed in a curriculum that capitalizes on motivation to succeed through self-evaluation, learned study skills, and learned involvement in campus life.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE MODEL: AN EXAMPLE

These three theoretical principles of an intrusive mode of counseling were tested at Old Dominion University during a spring semester by a select group of trained academic counselors in the School of General Studies (Earl, 1987b) and the model was found to be successful.

The Division of Student Services, Old Dominion University, provides orientation and advising/counseling to all entering students. Full-time students who enter the

University as freshmen without previous college experience are the principal clients of freshman orientation and advising. They are invited to a two-day summer orientation program on campus. Academic planning, orientation to student services and the campus, and programming for their first semester classes are a part of this summer program. Freshmen students return to their academic advisors in the fall for additional orientation and to be scheduled for their spring semester classes. On these middle-of-semester "preregistration" occasions, scheduling is done without any records of a student's academic progress because no grades are generated until the end of the semester. At the end of the first semester, several months after students have pre-registered for their second semester, grades are mailed to their permanent addresses. Students who do not have at least a "C" grade point average are automatically placed on probation and officially notified of their probationary status. The probationary letter suggests that the student contact an advisor, but an insignificant number of freshmen respond. Usually, the next time probationary students see their advisor is in the middle of the second semester when they need to be scheduled for the third semester (sophomore fall semester). However, many students wait until early fall to register for fall classes. Since summer classes do not require an advisor's approval, many students who receive a January notification that they are on probation do not, in fact, meet with an advisor until after summer school which is six to eight months later.

Even if students meet with their advisors in the spring and discuss their probationary status, the intrusive effectiveness of this advising is reduced by at least four factors. First, the student is already midway through the second semester and, therefore, is too late for enrollment in remediation or orientation classes during the semester following the probation notice. Second, the student has continued midway through another semester without any assistance in academic planning, time management, or study skill development. The student, in most cases, is repeating the same inappropriate academic behaviors that resulted in the probationary status. Third, the student who is repeating inappropriate academic patterns is approaching mid-term and not readily agreeable to attending workshops, short-term courses, or other study skill modules because of the pressures of routine academics such as deadlines for papers and projects and mid-term examinations. Fourth, any shock impact of being placed on probation that could be utilized as motivation for improvement has softened with the passage of time and any monitoring or sharing of experiences with an advisor is therefore less effective.

Because of the risk of these freshmen leaving college because they perceive themselves to be unsuccessful students or are, in fact, suspended, an intrusive advising model was specifically directed to them. The model was a schema containing seven Components:

1. A student initiated response was ~~made~~ to an intrusive letter sent to all probationary first semester students. Students ~~were~~ specifically asked to respond either with a phone call utilizing a special "hot line" or to ~~come~~ in person to the academic counseling office prior to the end of the first week of classes of the spring semester.
2. Each of the responding students met with an academic counselor in a counseling session for an initial "exploratory session."

3. Each student was asked to complete a questionnaire listing those factors that most contributed to the probationary status. An opportunity to *free-respond* was provided at the end of the questionnaire.

4. The counselor and the student spent time discussing the questionnaire responses.

5. The student contracted a specific course of action. These actions could involve academic success groups, group or individual extended counseling, rescheduling of the current semester classes, and/or enrollment in the special University orientation class for probationary students.

6. A follow-up appointment was made with the counselor. Students not enrolled in the University orientation class made this appointment for three weeks later. Students enrolled in the class made the appointment on an informal basis by agreeing to see the counselor at least once before the advising appointment.

7. An advising appointment in which counselor and student planned classes for the fall semester and discussed current semester grades concluded the intrusive contact with the academic counselor.

This model was tested by a comparison of involved probationary freshmen to a matched control sample of probationary freshmen. The treated students had higher grades and were retained at a higher rate than the control sample at a statistically significant level when evaluated at the end of their sophomore year, three semesters later (Earl, 1987a).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Intrusive advising is a concept based on deliberate intervention to identify a problem in order to motivate a student to seek help. At Old Dominion University, first semester students on probation were intrusively identified, sent a special letter, and asked to respond via a "hot line" or an immediate advisor appointment. The intrusive treatment then provided individual and group counseling sessions. A three-semester evaluation of grades and retention showed a statistically significant grade change and continuance status for the treated students when compared to a control group. Based on this evidence of the impact of intrusive advising, a description of an intrusive model can be made.

The theoretical basis of intrusive advising as a model of retention is based on three principles supported by a study of advising literature:

The first principle is that academic and social integration is the key to freshmen persistence in college.

The second principle is that deficiencies in this necessary integration are treatable. Students can be taught orientation skills.

The third principle is that student motivation to seek assistance does not need to be an operational variable in this treatment. Intrusive orientation does not depend on volunteerism but is a response to identified curriculum need.

This theory-based model of intrusive advising has been successfully used at a large urban university. The intrusive model improved participant retention. In addition, it motivated advisors to be developmental in their approach to freshmen students by seeking to identify and respond to obvious student difficulties. The advising process thus became a part of a process of intrusive help for students regardless of the individual student's motivation to initiate improvement. Finally, the concept of intrusive advising has created a continuing demand for structured orientation delivery services such as workshops, study seminars, and academic classes.

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