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EXPANDING THE ADVISING TEAM

The Student Advising Center (an intrusive, centralized advising center) at Emporia State University has become a catalyst for team building throughout the whole campus. This paper examines the process and results of such teamwork from four different perspectives: presidential, enrollment management, centralized advising, and faculty. This article demonstrates that a commitment to advising from central administration, statewide Board of Regents, and an expansion of the advising team can create positive effects. The results obtained are a reduction in freshman attrition, higher graduation rates, and an increase in credit hours generated.

A sound academic advising program can assist a university in improving its retention rate. College retention is a campus-wide responsibility which includes faculty advisors, professional counselors, student affairs professionals, administration, admission recruiters, residence hall personnel, financial aid workers, librarians, clerical personnel, and security officers. Retention is not the total goal of an advising program, but the by-product of expanded services and expanded teamwork provided to students on the college campus. Tinto (1988) argues that effective advising plays the central role in the development of effective retention programs. A team approach in advising and retention has repeatedly proven successful in various campus settings as cited in the studies below.

Trombley (1984) states that mounting evidence exists that a comprehensive approach involving faculty, support staff, peers, and professional counselors is essential to the successful completion of student academic goals at the University of Vermont. Abrams and Jernigan (1984) developed a program at Eastern Michigan using various academic support services in a team approach in which the use of support services by high-risk college students was found to affect their academic success positively. The use of a consultation program among the counseling center, residential life, personnel, student advisors, consultants, and administrators provided evidence that such programs had a positive impact on the growth and development of students at Emory University (1985). Maher and Illback (1985) used a team approach as a strategy to facilitate implementation of counseling and other intervention programs. This article will focus on the expansion of the advising team at Emporia State University and the positive outcomes obtained.

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ADVISING AT EMPORIA STATE

Prior to the creation of a centralized advising program, advising for declared majors was done by all faculty. They received little training and had no evaluation of their work. Advising for undeclared students was done by peer advisors supervised by a graduate student in the counseling center. Such a decentralized system resulted in numerous student complaints and a significant attrition rate. Considerable competition existed between faculty advisors and peer advisors; faculty felt that the undeclared students were remaining in that condition too long.

In the fall of 1984, Emporia State University created the Student Advising Center (SAC) to improve the advising delivered on campus and to increase freshman retention. This center was created as an intrusive, centralized advising service for all freshmen and undeclared students.

Last year SAC's seventeen advisors worked with 1,298 students for 2,961 advising sessions. Based on advisee evaluations, the overall SAC average was 3.71 on a 4.0 scale. The advising approach provides individual attention to the students and lets them know faculty are concerned about them and are willing to provide students with the assistance they desire (1983). Lee Noel (1978) has stated that students who receive effective academic advising tend to feel positive about their institution as a whole. This attitude has been found to be valid for Emporia State University.

COMMITMENT OF CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

The advising commitment begins in the president's office. All too frequently campus services are organized hierarchies which deal with the problems in ways that inadvertently impede the effective delivery of those same services. Therefore, services must be well organized, appropriately advertised, and efficiently administered. Problems must be resolved at the earliest possible moment and within the office where the problem is identified. Such responsiveness to student needs can only take place in a campus atmosphere that fosters teamwork.

The commitment must involve staffing, physical resources, and a budget. A budget should include operating expenses; equipment; salaries for clerical and professional staff, graduate assistants, and student workers; and faculty compensation. Faculty compensation can be provided through extra remuneration or released time, or included as part of overall salary. Advising must not be an added on, unrewarded responsibility for those involved.

Communication in all forms is essential for effective administration. The central administration should process written materials rapidly, share them with other administrators, return phone calls promptly and personally, and be responsive to requests from the advising center. Central administration should also provide technical support such as computers, programmed material, electronic typewriters, and updated recordkeeping devices.

Administrative reporting lines need to be clearly delineated to faculty, students, and administrators by the central administration to prevent misunderstandings relative to authority, responsibility, and accountability. Emporia State University's advising program reports to the academic vice president, which clearly designates the academic commitment of the institution and involvement of the faculty in the advising program. In developing a compatible team, the chief executive officer must realize that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Administrators should recognize their own shortcomings and appoint others who will complement the team. Central administration should create a positive attitude among all the members of the university team — faculty, staff, secretaries, receptionists, custodians, housekeepers, food service workers, administrators, and other non-faculty employees.

A centralized intrusive advising center can act as a catalyst for the support of central administration as it participates in the assessment movement. It can focus attention on advising as a primary tool in increasing student satisfaction and student retention. It can gather data to make a financial statement about the fiscal impact good advising can have.

ADVISORS IN THE STUDENT ADVISING CENTER

SAC's success and campus-wide influence have come in part from the composition of its professional staff. There are seventeen advisors, sixteen with faculty rank in an academic division; the seventeenth is the associate dean of students who advises primarily undeclared students. The support staff includes a director, a half-time associate director, a classified secretary, and seven student paraprofessionals who process advising forms and handle a variety of office tasks.

When the center was created, it met resistance from some faculty and administrators who were not familiar with a centralized advising concept. Many were concerned about losing their advisees. That resistance has virtually disappeared as many faculty have been involved as advisors in SAC and observed its effectiveness first hand. Participation in SAC has caused a chain reaction in the faculty attitude toward advising.

Advisors usually serve in the center for three years with one-third turnover of advisors each fall. This rotation provides continuity and offers more faculty the advisor training and experience that SAC provides. Over the years, this system builds a sizeable population of faculty with direct SAC experience. Since 1984 thirty-eight regular faculty, two division chairs, and two professional staff members of student affairs have advised in SAC.

Each academic division has a faculty advisor in SAC, giving every academic unit an ownership in the center's operation. SAC encourages teamwork among these advisors to initiate new ideas and to deal with problems as they occur. The goal is to decrease provincialism among advisors and to nurture a "university perspective" while dealing with advisees. Such teamwork enhances advising effectiveness and enriches the individual advisor.

Student affairs personnel are also active participants on the advising team. The professional staff members who have served in the Student Advising Center have participated fully in the activities of SAC. Their presence has broadened the communication between academic and student affairs and enabled students' needs to be met more expeditiously.

Through monthly inservice meetings and informal exchange in the office, advisors hear up-to-date information about the various academic disciplines. If a student concern relative to psychology surfaces, for example, the representative from that division helps clarify and solve that problem. These communications are especially helpful in advising undeclared students, who need current information about many majors. This information often goes beyond curriculum guide sheets and the college catalogue. In addition to improving the faculty members' advising within SAC, knowledge of several majors and networking with diverse faculty and students enriches these advisors' teaching and makes them more active participants in the university community.

SAC's effectiveness has also had the ripple effect of improving advising throughout the university. Once students are transferred from SAC they tend to expect quality time from their upper division advisors. Students have become less tolerant of an advisor who merely fills out a form or "rubber stamps" a program of study. Students want the same "developmental" treatment from the divisional advisors that they receive in the Student Advising Center. Thus SAC functions as a catalyst for teamwork among faculty and between faculty and students as it raises expectations of students and abilities of advisors to meet those expectations.

THE ROLE OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT IN ADVISING

Another element of the advising team is the Enrollment Management Division, which deals with the attraction and retention of students. It consists of the offices of admissions, registration, financial aid, career development and placement, honors program, residential housing, university relations, and the Student Advising Center. The offices primarily concerned with the attraction of students are admissions, financial aid, university relations, and the Student Advising Center. The offices primarily concerned with retention are registration, career development and placement, housing, the honors program, and, again, the Student Advising Center (SAC). SAC is a catalyst for both goals of Enrollment Management: attraction and retention.

The Student Advising Center serves a unique role in the attraction function. Programs for students who are coming to visit the University for the first time are planned and directed by SAC. These programs permit prospective students to be tested, to become acquainted with the campus and the various services available, and to meet with their advisors to schedule classes.

Admissions, registration, financial aid, and housing perform key roles in making these programs successful. The teamwork among these various offices is crucial to success. SAC philosophy of developmental, intrusive advising is passed on to the personnel in these services as it coordinates these new student programs.

The Student Advising Center also performs a critical role in retaining students at Emporia State University. With its emphasis on intrusive advising (Glennen, 1983, 1985, 1989), SAC takes the initiative, anticipates students' needs, and provides assistance. It intervenes and takes an active approach instead of merely responding to a crisis.

Admissions, financial aid, and university relations fully understand the concept of the Student Advising Center. In fact, they advertise the function of the Student Advising Center and become its external advocates. SAC helps those other units understand their relationship and how they fit into the advising whole. Such understanding fosters teamwork as SAC acts as a catalyst in achieving such understanding.

It is essential that the units in Enrollment Management develop and nurture a strong team. The team effort requires the understanding of the unique role of each office to the overall mission of the Division and the University and the understanding that all people, not just faculty or professional advisors, are important in advising.

This concept of team is developed in a number of ways: (1) weekly meetings where each area shares its problems and proposed solutions; (2) an after-action meeting following each major event to correct any inadequacies of the current program; (3) retreats in which mission and goals are reviewed and new efforts are implemented to improve the overall operation. These procedures allow every unit to be involved and establish mutual cooperation that evolves into the team concept. It is important to understand that in team management, each unit must feel ownership and active participation in the solution of a problem. Participation is not something they have to do; it is something they want to do. SAC's presence on the Enrollment Management team facilitates this.

THE ROLE OF ADVISING IN ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Faculty who advise in the academic divisions where upperclassmen pursue their majors are equally important members of the advising team. Some units such as elementary education; health, physical education, and recreation; and English use a centralized advising approach for their majors. This centralized approach was modeled after the SAC operation. Even divisions that have not adopted the centralized model have been influenced by SAC's developmental, intrusive approach through having advisors work there and receive training. In both these examples, advising is viewed as an important part of the faculty load and faculty are evaluated and compensated for it. This increased emphasis on recognition of good advising is due to the attention focused on SAC campus-wide.

SAC facilitates faculty communication across the university to solve problems for advisees using such vehicles as Student Concern/Action Form (SCAF). SAC sends out the form to faculty who identify students in difficulty. When the Student Advising Center receives a SCAF for someone who is not a SAC advisee, the form is forwarded to the current advisor who follows up on the situation. Such intrusive advising at the upper division level readily contributes to retention.

Teamwork is particularly necessary in regard to the general education program. Decisions about general education requirements are made by the Director of General Education and a faculty General Education Council. The results of their decisions directly affect the Division advisor who is often the last to become acquainted with changes in general education requirements, because student advisees have usually completed them before coming to the advisor. The vice president of Academic Affairs and deans have to become a part of the team facilitating this communication. Division advisors need contact with admissions and transcript analysts to understand the impact of general education requirements on regular and transfer students. SAC is the catalyst for such communication as its director meets with the Dean's Council and is part of the staff of the vice president for Academic Affairs.

SAC's presence on campus has generated such ideas as freshman seminars taught by administrators (vice presidents, deans, chairs, others) who are thereby integrated into the advising team. Working with new freshmen, they convey to new students and parents that the students are important to ESU. The administrators also learn the problems, concerns, and triumphs of their students. The Student Advising Center assists and encourages student enrollment in the course.

SUMMARY AND RESULTS

Central administration must demonstrate a commitment to advising in a variety of ways. Administration must assist the professional staff in their learning process by providing in-service development programs. They must provide leadership in the development of such activities as advising institutes and workshops. Through SAC's leadership, Emporia State has sponsored advising workshops for all the advisors in the Kansas Regents' institutions, statewide institutes for all advisors, and has established an "advising concentration" in its master's degree program in student personnel services.

The Kansas Board of Regents has become very supportive of advising; for the past three years the Board has had each of the universities provide annual reports on its advising organization and outcomes. The results at Emporia State indicate that freshman attrition has been reduced by 18 percent; the four-year persistence rate has increased by 12 percent (1988). Other benefits include an increase in credit hours generated, an increase in the number of advising interviews, and an increase in tutoring contacts.

Academic advising has never been more important on a college campus. The catch words in education today include "quality," "accountability," and "excellence." They are equally relevant to advising. Institutions must make a firm commitment to provide extensive advising services on their campuses, and this can be done quite appropriately by expanding the advising team to include all parts of the university community. With the expansion of the advising team, positive effects can be observed in retention efforts. A centralized intrusive advising center can act as a catalyst for these positive changes.

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