

A New Advising Model Using a Non-Traditional Approach: Advising in a Changing Environment

Timothy Mahoney, University of Southern Indiana

Timothy Schibik, University of Southern Indiana

“Academic advising has evolved from a single-purpose, faculty activity to a comprehensive process that focuses on the academic, career, and personal development of students (Kramer, 1985).

INTRODUCTION

September 11th changed how we view many day-to-day activities. The things that both faculty and students valued most were forever altered as was the interaction between these groups. Students and faculty both feel that there are now many more uncertainties in their lives. Changing day-to-day world conditions and a changing economy only serve to exacerbate the situation.

Students are very likely to come to our campuses with complicated personal and family situations. The structure of the family continues to change – dual wage earners, divorced, stepparents, - and students are even more likely today to find themselves living between two sets of parents. Sometimes this environment does not provide them with a cohesive/consistent stable situation for support, counsel and follow-up.

Additionally, students are experiencing more and more at younger ages and are constantly exposed to great deal of information due to the recent media (internet and TV) explosion. The problem with this exposure is that they see or know more than they understand. Students need help processing their experiences.

Faculty today are being asked to broaden their role as advisors to help students deal more effectively with both their current academic pursuits and their uncertain futures.

Why are faculty being asked to fill this void? Is this part of the faculties’ responsibilities? What pathway should faculty follow to better serve the needs of their students in the future? This paper describes a case study of new approach to academic advising used in a School of Business at a mid-sized comprehensive Midwestern university. Justifications as to why both students and faculty gain from this hybrid effort will also be presented.

FACULTY AS ADVISOR?

Asking faculty to fill the role of academic advisor is not a new concept in higher education. The outcry from faculty that they have no business acting as counselors and confidants is also not new. The truth is that academic advising has been part of the faculty role at many colleges and universities in the United States since the beginning of our system of higher education (Kramer, 2003). In fact, on approximately half of all campuses in American higher education faculty members are the sole providers of academic advising (Habley, 1993). So why do many faculty still view advising as a separate function from the typical analogous three-legged stool of teaching, research and service?

The truth is that many faculty believe that advising should not be within their job description. These faculty feel that they have no time or formal training to conduct effective advising, or that advising simply relates to scheduling of classes alone. Another possible source of reluctance is the feeling that students’ needs are too many and that there is no gain to

the faculty from engagement in the process. Faculty must be convinced that advising is part of the role that drew many to academe in the first place and that there are numerous gains to both the student and faculty of a healthy advising relationship.

Significant evidence exists to support the inclusion of faculty in the academic advising process. Faculty want to teach the best most motivated students in their classrooms. Student motivation is directly related to the frequency of both in-class and out-of-class contact between the student and faculty (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). On most college campuses, the most prevalent form of out-of-class faculty to student contact is through academic advising. Thus increasing faculty/student advising contact should increase student motivation to perform in college.

Academic advising can also be viewed as teaching, the very endeavor that attracted individuals to become faculty in the first place. The view that academic advising should be part of a faculty's job description because advising is part of a faculty member's teaching responsibilities is quite well established and validated in the literature (Crookston, 1972 and Light, 2001). "The advisor, as teacher, stimulates a positive, shared, active approach to both intellectual and interpersonal learning activities" (Kramer, 1995).

So, faculty in the role of advisor represents the norm in American higher education. Faculty should embrace this role because, like teaching, it involves significant opportunities for student learning and because the out-of-class contact will have a positive impact on both student motivation and on student retention. In summary, faculty benefit from the advising role through:

- Gaining more highly motivated students
- Attracting better students to classroom, major, university

- Improved recruitment and retention of majors and minors
- Increased student referrals to classes and programs
- Mentoring quality students who may go on to graduate programs
- Provide insights into how students think, study, how they perceive ideas and concepts - reminder of how it was as a college student – useful feedback mechanism that can help in the classroom

BRIEF ACADEMIC ADVISING PRIMER

The literature on academic advising recognizes two basic advising models: the prescriptive advising model and the developmental advising model. The prescriptive model is one wherein the advisor has the main role and the student is the passive receiver of "advise." In this form of advising, the advisor has primary responsibility for the system and the process is based on a checklist of items to be discussed. Developmental advising is advising evolved from a form of teaching. This style of advising is based on two assumptions. First, higher education is a place where students can develop into self-fulfilling individuals who choose careers that compliment their life plans. Second, that teaching includes an active experience wherein students and teachers share responsibility for encouraging student growth and the growth of the community. Advising is then to be based on negotiations between the student and the advisor (Crookston, 1972).

Figure 1 summarizes the differences between prescriptive learning/advising and developmental advising/learning/teaching.

Figure 1 – Advising Schools – Differences (Kramer, 2003. p. 4)

Prescriptive Learning/Advising	Developmental Advising/Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisor has primary responsibility • Focus is on limitations • Effort is problem oriented • Relationship is based on status • Relationship is based on authority and the giving of advise • Evaluation is done by the advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisor and student share responsibility • Focus is on potential • Effort is growth oriented • Relationship is based on trust and respect • Relationship is based on equal and shared problem solving • Evaluation is a shared process

CHARACTERISTICS OF A QUALITY ACADEMIC ADVISING PROGRAM

Typically, there are three attributes attached to quality academic advising. They are: (a) student advising by faculty is thought to be an integral part of higher education; (b) faculty-student interaction is very important; (c) faculty are supported with development opportunities related to advising (Kramer and Kerr, 1994). In addition to these attributes, the National Academic Advising Association has also developed core values to be followed by all advising programs. The NACADA Core Values are:

- Advisors are responsible to the students and individuals they serve
- Advisors are responsible for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process

- Advisors are responsible to the college or university in which they work
- Advisors are responsible to higher education generally
- Advisors are responsible to the community (including the local community, state and region in which the institution is located)
- Advisors are responsible to their professional role as advisors and to themselves personally

The proposed case study attempts to hold to both the attributes and core values noted above.

CASE STUDY OF A HYBRID APPROACH

This case study of advising is based on the following assumptions:

1. Advising should not be defined as an either prescriptive or developmental situation.
 - Students entering college today may need elements of both approaches.
 - The advisor must assess the student's immediate needs and adjust the advising role as appropriate.
2. Not every student wants or needs to be advised.
 - Some students just need directions to the restroom – prescriptive
 - Some students want guidance in their direction in life – developmental
 - Some students just need someone to listen and

- be concerned about them
3. Not every faculty member wants to or should advise students.
 - Students know how to read situations and can clearly read attitudes.
 - Students vote with their feet so eventually only those who want to advise and do will have advisees in an open system

Based on these assumptions, the goals of the advising project are to:

- Help students be successful
- Help students understand how the university system works
- Make processes easier to understand to minimize student frustration
- Help students get off to a good start in college and keep them on target with goals
- Create an environment for a positive educational experience.

This case study illustrates how advising has developed within a School of Business at a mid-sized comprehensive university. The model presented does not operate as originally conceived, but is rather a more realistic picture of how an advising system has evolved. The system serves all students and programs within the School of Business.

The School of Business involved has 43 full-time faculty split into four academic departments. There are two Masters level programs and 10 undergraduate majors within the School. All graduate advising is done by the graduate program directors. However, each faculty member within the School has an average of 40 assigned undergraduate advisees at any moment in time. The lead advisor for the hybrid advising system utilized by the

faculty within the School is a full-time 12 month contract faculty person with approximately double the normal advising load.

The key element to hybrid advising system is that it has not been defined as an either/or situation. Designed with both developmental and prescriptive advising models in mind, the system is built around the flexibility to respond to students' needs quickly. The advisor's role is to assess a student's immediate needs (prescriptive or developmental) and plan how best to address them. After addressing the immediate needs, the advisor then adjusts the advising role as appropriate. We have found that advisors need the following skills to be successful. The advisor needs to be able to:

- function in either a prescriptive or developmental role and can easily make any needed transitions
- possess listening and observation skills – ability to pick up clues to problems.
- be caring and empathetic.
- have the ability to pose thoughtful, incisive, and probing questions
- have knowledge of assessments necessary to identify the real issue(s) (clear out the distractions)
- build trust and rapport with the students.
- have significant classroom contact with students
- talk about the advising and registration processes regularly in class.

A coordinated focused advising effort originating from, and monitored by, one location seems to provide the most systematic stability. Students have an assigned advisor, but also have the additional knowledge that there is a faculty office that is “almost always open.” This central office must be easily accessible to

students in that students should not have to go through someone to see an advisor. Do not place this office within another set of offices. Have an office identified that can become an “information place” year round. Students who just have a quick query must feel comfortable come to this location and asking their question.

A key to an advising system’s success is student involvement in, and acceptance of, the system. As a starting point for orienting students to the advising program, begin with new student orientation. Talk to incoming students and parents each semester about being successful in college and the importance of advising and an advisor in this process. These discussions build a strong foundation for future interactions and place the advising process in the student’s mind as a key to success.

A successful advising strategy for new students is the “launch and pass-off” approach. Students are asked to discuss their plans, current major and future goals. Many students in early business classes are unsure as to what field within business they wish to explore. Outlining for students the possibilities within each field within the School will help them take action. Help students get over the idea that they must know exactly what they want to do in life prior to choosing a major. Once students have a better informed idea of their possibilities, they can be referred to another advisor within their chosen major for advice. The student has been launched on a pathway to a major and then has been passed off to the correct individual to help them be successful (both within and outside the School of Business).

As an entry point for current students to the advising process, many students respond well to an invitation from their current classroom instructor/advisor to stop in and discuss how they are studying for the course. During this time, the instructor can gather information on the student’s performance, relate the class subject to life, and build the basis with the student for future interactions. To help current students within the School identify their career paths, we utilize an interest

inventory to help students clarify their individual interests. Students are encouraged to begin to build a resume and to craft their educational experience around their identified interests. Caution students not to wait until their senior year to begin to think about graduation and a career. Discussion about internships, building networking skills and international educational opportunities are especially rewarding if conducted early in a student’s academic career. Students are also encouraged to develop a PTG (plan to graduation). Work out semester by semester a roadmap to degree completion. The following list summarizes the key opportunities utilized to involve students in the advising process:

Key intervention opportunities – What do students need and when do they need it?

- New student orientation – freshmen/transfers – information/extend open office
- Developing good schedules – exposure to material / adjusting / on track
- Invite students to discuss academics/study methods/ career plans
- Exploring a major – “in transition” - looking at options – Do it now!
- Classroom discussions on advising and job preparation/search process
- Develop personalized plan to graduate – structure a path to their goal
- Building a solid resume/cover letter – skill sets / employment / networking
- Job interviewing preparation, protocol and follow up

CONCLUSION

Any advising process is evolving and situational. The issues discussed during an advising session may be either prescriptive or developmental. Early student-advisor contacts may very well be prescriptive with later meeting shifting back and forth from developmental to prescriptive and back to developmental again.

Advisees are sometimes passive receptors of information and at other times must be the primary creators of their own answers and solutions.

For any advising system to work, students must believe it to be personalized and flexible. Although the questions asked and the answers given may essentially be the same across students, each student must believe that they are treated individually and have an identity to the advisor.

REFERENCES

- Chickering, A. W. and Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3 – 7.
- Crookston, B. B. (1972). A Developmental view of academic advising as teaching. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 13, 12-17.
- Habley, W.R. (1993). *Fulfilling the promise?* Iowa City, Iowa: The American College Testing Program.
- Kramer, G. L. (2003). Advising as Teaching. In G. L. Kramer (editor), (pp. 1 – 22). *Faculty Advising Examined: Enhancing the Potential of College Faculty as Advisors*, Boston, Massachusetts: Anker Publishing.
- Kramer, G. L. and Kerr, T. (1994). Redefining faculty roles for academic advising on campus. *AAHE Bulletin*, 47 (1), 17-21
- Kramer, G. L. (1995). Redefining faculty roles for academic advising. In G. L. Kramer (editor), (pp. 3 – 9) *Reaffirming the Role of Faculty in Academic Advising*, (Monograph Series Number 1). Manhattan, KS: National Academic Advising Association.
- Light, R.J. (2001). Making the most of college: Students speak their minds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.