Case study for student advisement centers

Donald Ray Elmore

University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract
The growing complexity of institutions of higher education, the threat of declining enrollments, and the greater diversity of student populations entering colleges and universities have sparked a renewed interest in academic advising. Advising programs are no longer viewed as a set of scheduling procedures, but are now becoming involved in the development of the students' total potential (Abel, 1980).
A CASE FOR STUDENT ADVISEMENT CENTERS

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Donald Ray Elmore
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Thomas W. Hansmeier
June 23, 1986
Date Approved
Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Jack F. Kimball
June 24, 1986
Date Approved
Second Reader of Research Paper

R. Krajewski
6/26/86
Date Approved
Head, Department of Educational Administration and Counseling
The growing complexity of institutions of higher education, the threat of declining enrollments, and the greater diversity of student populations entering colleges and universities have sparked a renewed interest in academic advising. Advising programs are no longer viewed as a set of scheduling procedures, but are now becoming involved in the development of the students' total potential (Abel, 1980).

Student development personnel are concerned about student advisement programs on college and university campuses. "Almost every study of undergraduate education in recent years has cited as a major problem the poor quality of academic advising that students receive in the department of their major" (Johnson and Sprandel, 1975, p.16). Other studies have produced evidence that there are critical problems associated with the faculty-only approach to advising. Increasingly, there are research and evaluation efforts to determine the effectiveness of advisement programs. However, advisement is still considered one of the weakest aspects in the college student's total educational experience (Mortimer, Astin, Blake, Bowen, Gamson, Hodgkinson, and Lee, 1984).

Changes in the approach to student advisement are
taking place. One change involves the establishment of Student Advisement Centers, which are staffed by professional advisors. These centers are designed to replace, or supplement, faculty advisory systems. They exist in various forms, and their functions may differ slightly from one college or university to another, but one thing common to all is the centralization of advisory personnel, records, and materials associated with the process of student advisement.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) To examine several problems associated with faculty advisory systems; (2) To point out some advantages of the Student Advisement Center approach.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FACULTY ADVISORY SYSTEMS

In a national survey, 45 percent of the students found academic advising to be of little value (Carney & Barek, 1976). Student dissatisfaction with faculty advisement systems has created concern among those who have researched the subject, and causes of this dissatisfaction are being sought.

Dressel (1980) stated that advising, a critical task requiring skill and commitment, is not always
recognized as a priority; that qualifications, skill, and desire to advise are not always considered when faculty members are appointed to advisory positions; and that many assignments are made solely on the basis of need.

Polson and Jurich (1979) also indicated that a faculty member's ability to advise is seldom considered prior to his/her being given advisory responsibilities. In this vital area, which affects the academic progress and future of so many, no prior evaluation of the faculty member's advisory skills is made before s/he is appointed to the responsibility of guiding students through the maze of academia.

Full exploration of a student's potential is seldom attempted by his/her faculty advisor, and vocational plans often are not discussed with the student (Polson and Jurich, 1979). Though a student may have many other needs, registration and course selection still rank highest as the two most frequently discussed topics during meetings with his/her faculty advisor (Moore, 1976). These shortcomings may be due to the lack of training programs designed to increase the effectiveness of faculty advisors.
Training should be given to all faculty advisors, and their advisory training programs should include information on career guidance. However, because of their lack of training, faculty advisors are not always capable of seeking out and recognizing new developments in vocational trends or career opportunities. Therefore, they cannot make this information available to their advisees. Though extensive training is required in most other areas of the academic community, Ginzberg (1971) has pointed out that universities, where the teaching faculty are given the assignment of advising, have not looked upon advising and career guidance as seriously as they should.

Some argue that the use of faculty personnel in advisory capacities will improve the quantity of faculty-student interaction outside the classroom. In actual practice, however, this has not been proven to everyone's satisfaction (Donk & Oetting, 1968). According to one student survey, faculty advisors have too many other things to do, and not enough time to effectively carry out their advisory responsibilities. This survey, taken at Brigham Young University, documented student dissatisfaction with faculty
advisors in that advisors, too often, were not available, were not current on graduation requirements, and showed a lack of interest in advising (Kramer, Arrington, & Chynoweth, 1985).

Higbee (1979) found that faculty advisors are often not current on information concerning general educational requirements, not aware of available university services designed to aid the student who may have personal or academic problems, and are often too busy preparing for lectures, checking research results, or preparing an article for publication.

Many students have been stunned to learn, often through other sources, that their faculty advisors have been granted sabbaticals and are no longer available to assist them (Higbee, 1979). Not only are their advisors gone, but all of the students' advisement histories are also gone. These students must, again, go through the processes of assignment to other advisors, adjustment to their new advisors' routines and approaches to advising, and the development of a comprehensive history relative to all previous guidance received.

Since faculty advisory systems seldom require the compilation of records related to the students' visits
and discussions with their faculty advisors, the memories of the advisors and the advisees are the only sources of information available to verify all that has transpired in past advisory sessions. If problems develop, the students are faced with situations in which their recollection of events must be weighed against the advisors' recollection of those events. This could be avoided if accurate records of students' visits and discussions were kept by faculty advisors.

Students' failure to meet academic requirements for course completion, due to a lack of information, or due to incorrect information being given out, is another problem associated with faculty advising. This has caused anger and frustration among administrators. Departments have been forced to waive requirements to allow students to finish courses on schedule (Higbee, 1979). Dressel (1974) explained that when student requirements are not met, due to inadequate faculty advising, course requirements must be waived for students who follow a professor's advice and then find that it will be impossible to graduate on schedule.

The faculty advisor is not always sufficiently knowledgeable of the many facets which affect the
student's academic life. Among these are curriculum requirements in the student's major and minor fields, graduation requirements, registration requirements and procedures, student personnel services available on campus for the student, job market and current employment information, the mechanics of adding and dropping classes, changing majors, transferring from one university, college or department to another, evaluating transfer credits, petitioning for grade changes or grade point recomputations, and procedures involved in acting as a student's advocate within the department or the university. This, according to Wendell (1977), sounds like a full-time job, but it is all accomplished in the approximately 3.6 to 5.9 hours weekly that professors give to all areas of advising. This, again, gives emphasis to the importance and necessity of keeping accurate records. With such heavy work loads, it is highly improbable that faculty advisors can keep accurate mental records of all current information related to the areas mentioned above and, at the same time, also keep accurate mental records of what advice was disseminated to whom among their several advisees. Accurate recall may be possible for a short period of time, but it becomes
difficult beyond that. Still, many advisors fail to protect themselves, the institutions with which they are associated, and their advisees by keeping accurate, up-to-date records of advisory sessions with students.

The older, more established system of faculty advising has been around as long as American higher education itself. When it was first instituted, however, college enrollments were smaller, the institutions were not as complex, and less research and publication were required of the professors. Today's professor, on the other hand, often expresses frustration over the number of hours spent on an activity for which there is still little, or no, financial compensation, and which is to be done in addition to his/her other professional requirements.

The final problem to be considered here is related to the fact that a lack of adequate advising has been cited, by Wynne (1979), as one of the reasons students change schools. Crockett (1978) suggested that advising is the cornerstone of student retention, and Grites (1979) voiced his belief that there is a direct linkage between student retention and the quality of academic advising. Students have also been
vocal concerning the fact that any university with a less-than-adequate advisory system should not be surprised when students no longer choose to attend there. Students may opt to experience the difficulties involved with changing schools, rather than remain at a school where the advisory system is inadequate. They are, by their actions, making a forceful statement concerning the importance they place upon university advisement programs. This could also serve to verify that the quality of an advisory system can affect the academic community's educational and economic structure (Abel, 1980).

Recent statistics reveal that only one of eight qualified high school seniors does not choose to attend college. But, of the seven who choose to attend college, only half will actually graduate (Mortimer, Astin, Blake, Bowen, Gamson, Hodgkinson, and Lee, 1984). If persistent students are changing schools because of the inadequacies in university advising systems, we may justifiably entertain questions related to the number of students that drop out of universities altogether due to these inadequacies, and whether or not they could have been retained by improving the advisory systems.
Advising is considered a necessary evil by some, and it has become an albatross to others. It has become caught up in a no-win situation within an academic culture predominately concerned with the departmental-disciplinary orientation, content coverage, and a system of reward that has little to do with the quality of either teaching or advising (Dressel, 1980). Therefore, when faculty advisors demonstrate a less-than-willing attitude toward the performance of this task, for which there appears to be little regard and few rewards, it should come as no surprise. Changes should be made to bring the importance of this academic function into focus, adequately compensate academic advisors, and remove advising from the entanglements and liabilities of the present system.

The following is a summation of the problems associated with faculty advising:

1. Advising is viewed as a low priority task by some faculty advisors.

2. Competency of the faculty member to advise is seldom considered.

3. Full exploration of the students' potential is not accomplished.
4. Training programs are lacking.
5. Faculty advisors do not remain current on pertinent career information.
6. Sabbaticals interrupt advisee-advisor relationships.
7. Requirements have had to be waived so students could graduate on time.
8. Records of student visits and discussions are seldom kept.
9. There are few incentives offered to faculty advisors.
10. Inadequate advising is one reason why students change schools.

ADVANTAGES OF THE STUDENT ADVISEMENT CENTER APPROACH

Carney and Barek (1976) found that students may use advising centers solely for academic reasons, but they also found that each academic decision, and its career ramifications, has a personal and emotional component associated with it. Olson (1981) stated that her experiences with centralized advisory systems revealed the development of close relationships between individual students and their advisors, and students often came first to the professional advisors
with their personal problems, as well as their academic problems. She also found that professional advisors were able to coordinate all aspects of the student's education in ways that faculty and other personnel could not, due to a lack of time and availability, and that coordination was an essential ingredient in helping students realize maximum professional development and personal growth.

Centralized records-keeping, and informational guidance, are other advantages offered by Student Advisement Centers. Higbee (1980) listed, among the advisor's responsibilities, the necessity of maintaining complete and accurate records. In a Student Advisement Center, these records are kept in a central location where they can be readily available to anyone needing them. The ongoing compilation of information is critical to the determination of a student's progress, needs, problems, and potential. It could also be vital to the settlement of disputes concerning advice disseminated by advisors to their advisees.

Dameron and Wolf (1974) suggested that all information available about courses, curriculum, graduation requirements, and resources, both inside
and outside the department, should be gathered by the professional advisory staff and stored in the Student Advisement Center. Current and accurate information could then be assured the student from a single, reliable source, and a major complaint associated with faculty advising could be eliminated.

Olson (1981), in a similar vein, recommended that advisement centers contain small libraries of up-to-date curriculum and career information that would be of interest to students. These libraries would be kept current by the professional staff, and enlarged upon as new information became available.

A professional advisor would be required to take the time, and make the effort, to become aware of course requirements within each discipline, changes that take place in the programs of each discipline, procedures for the scheduling of courses, and changes which may be required to avert any excessive expenditure of time, effort, and money, for the student.

Wilder (1981) suggested that, to be effective, the advisor must be knowledgeable in many areas. S/he should become a specialist in the advisee's discipline in order that s/he may have a comprehensive knowledge
of the various requirements within the student's concentration. University regulations, policies, procedures, and practices related to the academics would also be a part of the advisor's portfolio, along with knowledge of general education requirements, and procedures associated with drop-add, withdrawal, and registration.

The Student Advisement Center professional would take part in curriculum planning meetings, as an observer, to insure total awareness of departmental updating of courses and any other changes to be made in the academic programs of a particular discipline. Abel (1980) suggested that members of the central advising staff should hold memberships on committees and councils involved in policy-making. Remaining current on academic changes insures the advisor's ability to accurately chart courses for advisees, as well as being able to better advise students on current events, and future expectations, within given disciplines. It is important that the advisor be prepared to act as a liaison between students and those responsible for designing course programs (Polson & Jurich, 1979).

A recent study revealed that Student Advisement
Center professionals are more willing to engage in student recruiting, by conducting off-campus seminars, than are faculty (Olson, 1981). The fact that faculty advisors may be less willing could be directly linked to a lack of time and opportunity. Recruiting requires time for preparation of presentations, travel, and delivery of the presentations. This would be a job requirement for the professional, whereas faculty advisors have to find time in their already busy schedules for recruiting.

A developmental approach to advising, which integrates the academic, career, and life goals of students, is another plus of the Student Advisement Center (Olson, 1981). The professional advisor should possess the skills required to meet the needs of the whole student, not just the academic needs alone. There is evidence to suggest that students are soliciting more career-related advice from their advisors (Wilder, 1981), and the professional advisor would have more opportunity to prepare to meet all of the advising needs of the students in this regard. The advisor's ability to give quality advice, related to the student's career choice and life goals as well as the academics, serves to enhance and increase the
student's confidence in the advising process.

The benefits of the Student Advisement Center approach are many. It could have a positive effect on the student's perception of his/her environment, verify the university's concern for student needs, increase confidence in the advisement program, give greater assurance that an advisor would be available when needed, more thoroughly meet the needs of the whole student, more positively affect student development and progress, increase student retention, relieve the faculty of the pressures associated with doing something for which they are not adequately compensated, and provide more opportunity for thoroughness and accuracy in the areas related to information gathering and storage. And, with a professional advisor carrying the work load in the area of advisement, faculty members would be afforded more time to pursue research, to publish, and to upgrade their courses (Olson, 1981).

CONCLUSION

It is important to reiterate that changes are being made in student advisement programs on college and university campuses across the nation, but several
problems associated with faculty advising remain unsolved (Polson & Jurich, 1979). Some institutions have seen the need for, and the benefits of Student Advisement Centers, but there is still no consensus on their value-versus-cost. There is agreement that the time has come to improve advisory systems, but there is little agreement on which steps to take first. The need for qualified advisors is not disputed, but the necessity for professional advisors is still being debated. And, though some argue that the establishment of Student Advisement Centers would eliminate many of the problems linked with faculty advisory systems, there is continuing discussion about how much, and what type of, advising would be done at these centers, as well as whether or not faculty advisory systems should be eliminated altogether, or redesigned to make them work in conjunction with the Student Advisement Center's operation.

A more extensive evaluation of the information which suggests that the effective execution of this vital program requires skills in advising, a dedication to advising, and time to do advising is recommended. It may then be determined that a professional advisory staff, dedicated to the
development of the necessary qualifications which help to insure effectiveness and competence, would be more desirable and more apt to facilitate student success in the academic arena. As Kramer, Arrington, and Chenowyth (1985) stated:

Students...want and need knowledgeable advisors who are both available and interested in them. Accurate, accessible information is essential to student academic progress and satisfaction with the advisement process. The question is not whether students need or want academic advice. The issue with academic advisement, like other aspects of college life, is one of quality.... Advising personnel can... provide personal relationships that contribute to the student's sense of belonging to the college community. But this requires advisors who are well informed, who are available when students need them, and who have access to current records for accurate, up-to-date information. A centralized advising center, staffed by full-time professional advisors trained
to use and disseminate academic information, may be the best way to communicate to students about an ever changing, fluid, and dynamic curriculum (p.34).

Academic advising was found to be the student service most frequently used by the students (Hoyt, 1971). Therefore, it is imperative that students be assured of the availability of advisors who are well qualified and concerned about all of the students' needs. This will not occur, however, until academic advising, a most vital function of the university program (Higbee, 1979), receives more of the attention it deserves.
REFERENCES


