

Students Perspective of Advising Effectiveness

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The thing which makes it all (advising) worthwhile is that probably no one is more valued in the career of a student than a knowledgeable, compassionate adviser. Hoops, 1983.

Academic advising in higher education, traditionally, has not received the same attention as teaching. Advising, on many campuses, consists of only class scheduling in preparation for the next term (Wilder, 1981). Some programs continue to exist primarily for student recruitment and retention rather than concern for the individual's growth (Wilkinson, 1983). Yet, the continuing relationship between advisee and adviser is likely to have more impact on a student than a one-term student-instructor relationship.

Evaluations of teaching effectiveness are performed routinely at most schools. Teaching evaluations provide feedback for course improvements and are frequently employed in faculty promotion reviews. However, many advising programs, including that in Agricultural Economics at North Dakota State University, have no channels through which students can communicate their perceptions, evaluations and suggestions for improving advising services. As a result, an opportunity to serve students is ignored, and a potential source of information for recognizing and rewarding faculty advising activity is not utilized (Wilkinson, 1983).

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of a case study which assessed students' perceptions of academic advising in the Department of Agricultural Economics at North Dakota State University.

Current Advising Practice

Incoming agricultural economics freshmen are assigned to one of four advisers. Three assist students entering fall quarter with course selection, scheduling, and registration. The fourth performs similar functions for persons entering winter quarter. An adviser normally counsels the same students throughout their undergraduate studies in Agricultural Economics, anticipating that four years later their advisees will graduate and the advisers will again be available to advise entering freshmen. This four-year cycle, along with a one-credit freshman orientation course taught by the adviser, helps promote student-adviser communications and identify particular needs and interests of undergraduates. Advisees, however, may change advisers if the students feel another faculty member could better serve their specific interests.

One agricultural economics adviser has primary responsibility for initially advising transfer students. Because this adviser focuses on the special needs of transfer students, less time is required by other staff to be familiar with other college curriculums. Similarly, one faculty member advises all students minoring in Agricultural Economics.

The number of advisees per faculty member fluctuates widely depending on individual commitments (e.g., research) and on what phase of the cycle the adviser is in (e.g., freshmen advisers often also have several senior advisees who have not yet graduated). Currently the number of students per adviser ranges from none to over 40 (Figure 1).

Procedure

Three student populations were surveyed: (1) 1982 graduates, (2) undergraduates in attendance spring quarter 1983, and (3) entering freshmen fall quarter 1983.¹ Both spring 1983 undergraduates and fall 1983 entering freshmen were surveyed during classes. Fall 1983 freshmen were surveyed in the orientation class section taught by their respective advisers. Approximately 75 percent of each group completed a questionnaire (236 of 309 undergraduates and 53 of 72 freshmen). Survey instruments were mailed to 1982 graduates with a response rate of 58 percent (45 of 77).

Expectations

Respondents were asked to rank characteristics considered desirable for academic advisers. Four general categories were identified with five specific characteristics in each group (Table 1).

All three student groups indicated the same order of importance for *approachability* characteristics. Ranked highest was that *the adviser be friendly. Interest in the student* and a *willingness to meet with advisees* were ranked second and third. *Ability to concisely answer questions* was fourth followed by the expectation that *advisers interact with advisees in informal, nonacademic situations*.

The three student groups consistently ranked the *provision of accurate information about courses* as most important in the *general information* category. Graduates and freshmen considered *referrals to other persons* as second in importance and *maintaining records of advisee programs* as least important. Conversely, spring quarter undergraduates ranked *maintenance of advisee records* as second and *referrals to other persons* as last. This difference in rankings among the student groups may be due to a difference in their immediate interests. Undergraduates are probably highly interested in completing their education on time whereas entering freshmen and graduates may be more idealistic and striving to maximize the benefits of attending college.

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In the category of providing *information specific to the major*, graduates and freshmen agreed that *explaining the requirements of the major and demonstrating the relevance of courses and their effect on educational goals* were most important. *Providing accurate information regarding alternatives to the program of study* was considered important by all groups. *Information about career opportunities* was relatively more important to graduates than the other two groups.

The three student groups were again consistent in the *counseling* category. *Offering suggestions but allowing the advisee to make decisions independently* was considered most important, followed by *offering an opinion when asked*, and *motivating students when the adviser believes advisees are not performing to their capability*. *Willingness to provide encouragement or to talk about nonacademic problems* was considered less important.

Realizations

Wording of expectations facilitated comparison of advisees' expectations and reactions to their personal experiences. Each of the 18 characteristics statements was rated from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Graduate mean ratings range from 2.4 to 3.5 whereas the mean rating for the other two groups ranged from lows of 2.8 and 3.0 to a high of 3.6 (Table 2). Advisers received their highest characteristic ratings for *willingness to meet with advisee*, *being friendly and approachable*, and *keeping appointments*. Lowest ratings were given for *providing accurate information regarding alternatives in the program of study*, *helping select electives which fit the advisee's long-range goals*, *resolving problems which affect academic performance*, and *willingness to help with nonacademic problems*. These observed adviser attributes correlate highly with the expectations of the previous section.

Comparisons of Student Groups

Similarity of advisees' expectations and realizations permitted comparisons between what students deemed desirable and perceptions about their advising experience. Students desired *advisers to be friendly*, and an overwhelming majority felt advisers were. Advisees, on the other hand, wanted their adviser to *provide accurate information regarding courses*. Even though students agreed faculty members did provide accurate information, the rating was not as high as for other characteristics. Graduates and spring quarter undergraduates agreed or strongly agreed that *advisers allow enough time to talk during meetings*, even though it was considered less important than *friendliness and interest in the advisee*.

¹Former students who either dropped out of school or transferred to another major or college were initially identified as a sample group. This study did not include these individuals due to difficulty of obtaining current addresses.

Expectations Ranking

One hypothesis was that different types of students (e.g., class standing, age) would have different expectations of their advisers. This hypothesis was rejected overall because expectations (as reflected in ranks assigned to various characteristics) were not significantly different. Significant differences oc-

Table 1. Advisee Expectations of Agricultural Economics Advisers

	Relative Ranks ^a		
	1982 Grads	Spring 1983	Fall 1983
Approachability			
is friendly and approachable	1	1	1
is interested in me and what I say	2	2	2
is willing to meet with me when I need assistance	3	3	3
answers my questions concisely	4	4	4
interacts with his advisees in formal, nonacademic situations	5	5	5
General Information			
refers me to other persons for assistance when appropriate	2.5	5	2
provides accurate information regarding courses	1	1	1
helps me understand university procedures	4	4	3
maintains accurate records of my progress	5	2	5
provides an example program to guide me in planning my selection of courses	2.5	3	4
Information Specific to the Major			
provides accurate information regarding alternatives in my program of study	2	3	2
provides me with information about career opportunities	3	4	4
explains requirements of my major to show relevance of courses and how they will affect my educational goals	1	2	1
provides information regarding alternatives to the agricultural economics major.	5	5	3
knows me well enough to understand how my individual needs influence my academic goals	4	1	5
Counseling			
is willing to talk about my nonacademic problems	5	5	5
is willing to provide encouragement when I need it	4	4	4
offers suggestions but encourages me to make decisions independently	1	1	1
offers his own opinions when I ask him for them	2	2	2
motivates me to increase my academic efforts when he believes I am capable of greater academic achievement than I am currently attaining	3	3	3

^aRanks represent how variables were ranked against one another in groups of five.

curred, however, in the way two characteristic categories were ranked. A Kendall's coefficient of concordance (Kendall's W) was calculated to measure the degree of association among sets of ranks (Mendenhall, Ott, Larson, 1974). Since ranks for *approachability* and *counseling characteristics* were identical among the three student groups, Kendall's W would equal 1.0, meaning perfect association ($W=0$ would indicate perfect disagreement). However, the coefficient was 0.56 for both *general information* and

Table 2. Advisee Realizations of Agricultural Economics Adviser Performance.

My Adviser:	Absolute Ratings ^a		
	1982 Grads	Spring 1983	Fall 1983
is willing to meet with me when I need assistance	3.4	3.6	3.4
keeps appointments with me	3.5	3.6	3.3
allows enough time to talk with me during our meetings	3.3	3.4	3.2
refers me to other persons for assistance when appropriate	3.0	3.0	3.3
provides accurate information regarding course offerings	2.9	3.0	3.2
provides accurate information regarding required courses	3.3	3.2	3.3
provides accurate information regarding alternatives in my program of study	2.9	2.9	3.0
helps me choose electives which fit my long-range goals and the requirements of my major	2.7	2.9	3.0
is helpful as I consider career objectives	2.6	3.0	3.2
is friendly and approachable	3.5	3.6	3.6
is interested in me and what I say	3.3	3.4	3.5
motivates me to increase my academic efforts when he believes I am capable of greater academic achievement than I am currently attaining	2.6	3.0	3.1
helps me resolve problems which affect my academic performance	2.4	2.8	3.1
is willing to help me with my nonacademic problems	2.7	2.8	3.0
offers encouragement when I need it	2.8	3.1	3.2
offers suggestions but encourages me to make decisions independently	3.3	3.2	3.1
offers his own opinions when I ask him for them	3.1	3.3	3.3
provides guidance but allows me to make decisions regarding my academic career myself	3.2	3.3	3.3

^aEach attribute was rated independently according to the following scale:

- 0 — Not Applicable
- 1 — Strongly Disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Agree
- 4 — Strongly Agree

All ratings had ranges of 1 to 4 with zeros omitted from computation of the mean.

Table 3. Statistical Relationship Among Rankings of Adviser Attributes by Sample Category.

Expectation Category	Overall ^b	W ^a		
		G82vs S83 ^c	S83vs F83 ^d	G82vs F83 ^e
Approachability	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
General Information	0.56	0.59	0.50	0.89
Information Specific to the Major	0.56	0.70	0.45	0.85
Counseling	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

^aKendall's coefficient of concordance, W.

^bA measure of overall association including all three student groups.

^cG82 (graduates 1982) vs S83 (spring 1983 students).

^dS83 (spring 1983 students) vs F83 (fall 1983 freshmen).

^eG82 (graduates 1982) vs F83 (fall 1983 freshmen).

information specific to the major characteristics (Table 3).

This indicates a very weak association. Restated, the three student groups ranked these characteristics differently. It might be expected that strongest differences would appear between graduates and freshmen, but association coefficients were 0.89 and 0.85 for the *general information* and *specific information* categories, respectively. The weakest association was between graduates and spring 1983 students with coefficients of 0.50 and 0.45.

Correlations of Expectations and Realizations

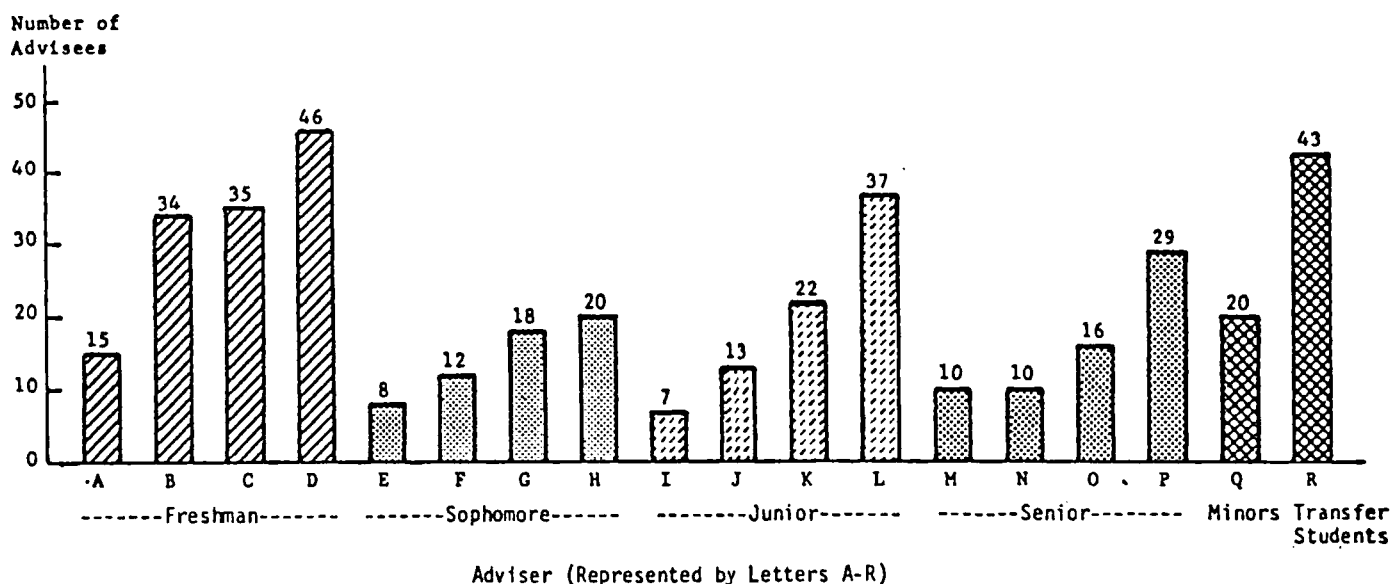
Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated to identify possible relationships between students' characteristics, how they viewed their adviser's performance, and what they expected from an adviser. There were no significant differences in students' expectations based on marital status, gender, or age. Many trivial correlations were noted which lent support to the study design (e.g., age was highly correlated with class standing, similar attributes were highly correlated).

Policy Implications

Each faculty adviser in Agricultural Economics was provided a summary of his advisees' comments. Most advisers found this to be useful in understanding their role and assessing their performance as an adviser.

The number of advisees per faculty member begins approximately equal,² but each year thereafter the distribution becomes increasingly skewed (Figure 1). This is due, in part, to the faculty member's performance as an adviser. Students are free to change advisers and do so when they learn, often from other students, that another faculty member is considered a "better" adviser. Overall, students are satisfied with advising in Agricultural Economics, although three areas for potential improvement remain: (1) reduce the discrepancies in advisee numbers, (2) redistribute advising responsibility, and (3) estimate the effect

Figure 1. Number of Undergraduate Advisees per Adviser in Agricultural Economics, Fall 1983.



advising has on students who drop out or change majors.

The uneven distribution of advisees among faculty members raises the question whether all faculty should serve as advisers. On the principle of labor specialization, the answer should be no. Furthermore, requiring all faculty to advise could be a disservice to students assigned to ineffective advisers. It may be better not to expect that all faculty members advise rather than to develop a procedure to assist students assigned to ineffective advisers. Yet not requiring advising duties of those who either do not care to advise, or are not able to successfully do so, is a reward because they will have additional time for activities that are rewarded with promotion and advancement (such as research). A system of recognizing and rewarding advising activities would offset this inequity.

Conclusions

A survey of past and present advisees provided data to assess the advising program in Agricultural Economics and revealed students' expectations of their advisers. Students were enthusiastic about having an opportunity to react to their adviser and the department's advising program. As an alternative to requiring all faculty members to serve as academic advisers, departments may want to implement a procedure to identify and utilize only their most effective advisers. This will succeed, however, only if advising is recognized and rewarded by the promotion process.

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¹Discrepancies in number of advisees for freshmen advisers (Figure 1) is due to approximately a dozen students that did not finish in four years (adviser D) and the fewer number of freshmen entering winter quarter (adviser A).

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Microcomputers in Teaching Agricultural Price Analysis

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Abstract

Microcomputer programs on the subject of agricultural marketing and commodity futures analysis have been developed in the Department of Agriculture at Western Illinois University. These programs are utilized for on-campus teaching and research, as well as for off-campus service. The programs would be of interest to individuals who trade commodity futures contracts for hedging and/or speculative purposes.

Introduction

Agricultural commodity markets have exhibited significant price volatility during the last decade. This volatility can be illustrated with the price of soybean

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