Organize to Advise— Effectively and Efficiently

Thomas L. Frey

Abstract

Detailed explanation of an efficient procedure for collecting and organizing information related to the task of advising students successfully.

Weigers challenged all college advisors in his June 1973 article in this Journal, toward dedication in advising [2]. He emphasized the human relationship that must develop between student and advisor. A more comprehensive evaluation of the advising role was presented by Campbell, in his book, *In Touch With Students* [1]. But neither of these authors dealt specifically with how to organize advisee files with needed information and details required to achieve the excellence they describe. This article attempts to fill that gap by focusing on a procedure for collecting and organizing information related to student advisees.

Students expect and should receive advice tailored to them as individual human beings, similar to the personal attention we demand from doctors in medical treatment. To accomplish this, there must be an efficient system for compiling needed details and it must be organized to provide nearly instant access for the advisor. Furthermore, the system must require a minimum of the advisor's time or it will not be used. Based on observations of advising in two land-grant colleges of agriculture, I suspect that too often students receive advice from advisors who know too little about the students they are advising. This is not intentional of course, but it may occur without student or advisor ever realizing that certain factors are not being considered that relate to the decisions being made.

Thomas L. Frey is associate professor of agricultural finance in the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Challenge of Advising

Webster defines advise as follows: to give advice; to counsel. Advising, according to the dictionary, implies the making of recommendations as to a course of action by someone with actual or supposed knowledge and experience, while counseling implies the giving of advice after careful deliberation. What advice do students want from their advisors? Most common perhaps would be such items as what courses to take and associated concerns with registration, along with help and direction in career guidance, reference letters, and job placement. But there is much more, *e.g.* part-time employment — where, how much, and when; activities, housing, adjustment to college life, coping with life in general during college years, and for some, encouragement for graduate or professional education. Little or no advance warning may accompany such questions. The phone rings, the student knocks on the door, or a prospective employer calls, all leading to questions that affect the future life of a precious human being — an advisee.

On the advisor end, we find a busy person, deeply involved with teaching, committees, research, and other students, and who on occasion, may have trouble recall-

Exhibit A

Biographical and Family Data

Social Security No._____ Name_____

Date of birth_____ Option_____

Single ☐; Married ☐; H.S. rank_____ Campus location:

Father or Guardian_____ Name of living unit_____
(Please show if dorm, apt., etc.)

Permanent Home Address_____ Address_____

_____ Zip _____

Phone for above_____ Phone No._____

Ages of sisters_____ Date of first visit with Frey_____

Ages of brothers_____

Short Statement by Student

Please provide relevant details of your background.

a) If from a farm, describe size and type of farm, and your involvement in it.
b) If nonfarm background, describe any relationship you have had to farming.
c) Provide some background on yourself--high school activities, junior college details if relevant, employment and other experiences PRIOR to college.
d) Describe any unique details about your family that might help me better understand your situation, e.g., sickness problems, death of parents or family members, other family members in college, etc.
e) Short statement of what your goals are--what do you hope to accomplish with your college education, and at this point, what do you plan to do after graduation? If graduate school is a possibility, mention this.
f) Other details.

Exhibit B

COURSE PROGRAM

Actual ☐

Worksheet ☐

Name _____

Option _____

Yr. 19__ -	FALL				SPRING			
	Course & Number		Hours	Grade	Course & Number		Hours	Grade
	Hrs. to date	Sem GPA	New GPA		Hrs. to date	Sem GPA	New GPA	

ing the name of the student. If, in addition to these conditions, the advisor does not remember or have available many details about the student, how sound is the advice offered?

We cannot avoid the extensive involvement and time pressures facing most college advisors. But within the reach of each advisor is the development of a system that can provide, at his fingertips, relevant details about each advisee. A doctor does not attempt to remember every detail about each patient. Likewise, a good credit man develops a system for collecting and recording pertinent details, and has them readily available to base future decisions on. With the aid of a few forms, a secretary, and a well organized file for each advisee close to your desk and telephone, you too can base answers to students' questions on "actual" knowledge — not "supposed" knowledge. And it will require a minimum of staff time.

Types of Student Information Needed

Four basic categories of information are necessary: (1) biographical and family data; (2) past and proposed course program, showing performance by course and by semester; (3) record of extracurricular activities and work experience by semester since high school; and (4) a continuous record of concerns and questions raised by the student in office visits and phone calls. In addition, the file must contain all test scores and material related to entering the University, and all correspondence related to the student. For agricultural students at the University of Illinois, there is also a senior check sheet showing course requirements yet to be met.

Biographical and Family Data

Exhibit A shows the format used by the author to collect biographical and personal data. Having complete home and campus addresses and phone numbers make it possible to contact the student or his family at any time. The high school rank provides a quick guideline to past performance, *e.g.* 20/100 - 80th percentile. On the written statement by the student, I want to know a student's background and concerns as he sees them. This statement, along with goals the student has established, reflects the environment out of which he comes. It helps me to interact better with the student in relation to where he is at the moment.

Past and Proposed Course Program

Exhibit B shows the format for recording courses taken and grades received. By including the semester grade point average as well as the overall grade point average to date, it is possible to tell at a glance how the student is doing academically. It reflects patterns and trends in performance and shows weak and strong spots in a student's program. (Note: While Exhibit B shows only one year, in reality an 8-1/2 x 11 sheet is used that allows five years to be shown, with room at the bottom for summer school and correspondence credit.) I keep two sheets in each file, one for actual courses taken and another as a worksheet for planning courses for future semesters. My advising is predominantly of upper classmen. Therefore, it is often possible on the first or second visit by a student to work out a tentative course program for his junior and senior years. This is done on the worksheet. Revisions and further additions are also entered on this planning sheet on subsequent visits.

It is a simple matter to keep the "actual" course program current. Following each semester, grade reports for all advisees are sent to each advisor. With secretarial help, data can quickly be recorded in the file, noting any special condition such as scholastic probation that may exist. Once data is recorded each semester, the advisor may want to go through all files to spot any trends or special circumstances that need special attention. On oc-

Exhibit C

WORK EXPERIENCE
and
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Name_____

	FALL	SPRING	SUMMER
Yr. 19__ - __	Activities & Responsibilities: Employment - Source & time involved:	Activities: Employment:	Activities & Employment:

casion, I have written those showing substantial improvement, to congratulate them and encourage continuance of forward progress.

Record of Work Experience and Extracurricular Activities

Exhibit C illustrates the form used by the author to gather these details. Prior to using this approach, I really did not know the involvement of my advisees. This data is most useful as one advises on course loads and as reference letters are written. By keeping this updated, students can better recall the specifics of their involvement. The more a student reveals about himself, the more clues there are for understanding and really knowing him as a person. I found also, prior to use of Exhibit C, as well as the other exhibits, that I would sometimes ask the same question more than once. Now I keep everything recorded and can avoid such embarrassment, and can develop a much deeper and broader knowledge of each student.

Notes from Office Visits

Exhibit D reflects a page devoted to notes I feel necessary following each visit or phone call. Again, it is keeping track of seemingly minor details that lets a student know you are sincerely concerned about him. I like to attach his ID card or photograph in the upper left-hand corner, to assist in keeping names and faces straight during the early stages of contact:

File Organization

A manila-type folder is used for the student file. Two-hole access binders are used on both the left and right sides of the file, binding materials at the top. On the left side, the order is as follows, with

(1) being on top
(1) Course program — actual
(2) Course program — worksheet
(3) Work experience and extracurricular activities

Exhibit D

Picture or ID card in upper lefthand corner

Name_____

Option_____

Notes from Office Visits and Conversations

On the right side, the order is as follows, with (1) being on top:

(1) Notes from visits and phone calls
(2) Biographical and family data
(3) A senior check sheet (when available)
(4) Test scores and entrance details
(5) Correspondence

Conclusion

This article has described one advisor's attempt to gather and organize relevant information about an advisee, needed as a basis for advising that student. The privilege of counseling students in regard to personal and educational matters is precious. We must approach the task with dedication by offering the very best advice possible. As a prerequisite for giving that advice, we should insist having the necessary background information.

References

1. Campbell, John R., *In Touch with Students ... A Philosophy for Teachers*, Chapter 4. Educational Affairs Publishers, P. O. Box 248, Columbia, Missouri, 1972.
2. Weigers, Howard L., "So You Want To Be An Advisor," *The Journal of the National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, (June 1973).

USE OF UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING LABORATORIES TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

John S. Avens and Byron F. Miller

Abstract

A case study reporting success in learning behavior when students become a part of original ongoing experiment to solve a real world problem. Student preference for such involvement reported.

Direct contact with hundreds of undergraduate students at Colorado State University through teaching and advising over the past 7½ years, leads us to believe many undergraduate students want to do something real, meaningful and useful as part of their educational experience. That is, they want to supplement their lecture/-text book learning with real experiences they can participate in firsthand rather than watch or just hear about. They want to contribute to the welfare of mankind and they want to do it now. They don't want to wait until they graduate. They want to get their hands dirty, learn by direct experience and be a useful part of what is going on in the real world.

Teachers of agriculture who are also involved in agricultural research have an excellent opportunity to provide this "learn by doing something real" experience for some of our undergraduate students, while at the same time accomplishing the objectives of their research interests and programs. Why not allow students, through undergraduate laboratory courses, to conduct useful research to help solve "real world" problems? Thus, they can learn by contributing and getting directly involved.

John S. Avens is assistant professor in the Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

Byron F. Miller is associate professor in the Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

Published with the approval of the Director of the Colorado State University Experiment Station as Scientific Series Paper No. 1998.

One Case Study

A teaching laboratory experience was provided in which undergraduate students participated directly in conducting an original ongoing research experiment to help solve a real problem concerning microorganisms and poultry meat.

The students' challenge was to determine the effect of thawing method on the number of microorganisms on frozen turkey carcasses after thawing. Their work was done as part of the food microbiology unit of a course, "Poultry Products Technology". Many students had not previously had a microbiology course. This laboratory exercise helped them to visualize and experience bacteria in food and thus provided reinforcement to the classroom learning sessions on food microbiology.

The experiment had seven treatments (thawing methods for frozen turkey carcasses), as listed in Table 2, with seven replicates of each treatment. The experiment was conducted by four different classes over a 4 year period 1968 to 1971 (Table 1). The measurement was number of aerobic microorganisms (bacteria and molds) on the skin of the thawed carcasses.

Each student analyzed one replicate turkey carcass, thawed by one of the seven methods (Table 1). The analysis involved removing skin samples, four from each thawed carcass, blending them separately in diluent fluid and dispensing alliquots of the dilution into petri dishes. Melted agar growth medium was then poured into the petri dishes and swirled to mix with the sample. When the medium had solidified, the petri dishes were incubated until each bacterial cell from the turkey skin sample had multiplied into a visible colony which could be counted. Aerobic microorganism counts were multiplied by the dilution factor and an average microorganism count per cm^2 of carcass skin was calculated for each of