

Faculty Advisors' Attitudes towards Undergraduate Advising in a College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences: A Non-Experimental Study

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Abstract

In this non-experimental study preliminary data collection, the authors sought to better understand perceptions of advising by faculty in a Midwestern, college of agriculture and natural resources. Participants were asked to respond to a variety of questions on a five-point Likert-type scale, rating the process and perceptions of undergraduate advising by both the advisor and students. Respondents were also given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions regarding the advising process and their perception of student's advising experiences. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of advisors found the advising process to be effective, 87% found advising pleasant and rewarding and 72% believed students were neutral in their perceptions of advising. Six broad themes emerged from the open-ended questions: relationships with students, faculty perceptions of students' attitude of advising, degree of effectiveness, frustrations with advising, recognition and reward and areas for improvement. Faculty valued building relationships with students, but felt that it was not properly rewarded and that more training should be done to prepare advisors. The results of this survey could pave an opening for a more extensive assessment

interpretation study of faculty advising within this college at a later time.

Key words: undergraduate, advising, faculty

Introduction

While higher education has existed in the United States since 1636, most campuses consisted only of "tutors" and students until sometime in the 1800's. It was not until the introduction of curricular electives in the 1870's that entering freshmen were required to consult with an 'advisor', typically a faculty member to select their course of study (Kuhn, 2008). Students had only a limited number of professionally-aimed courses of study from which to choose. As post-secondary education curricula expanded and students began to have a choice in their academic pursuits, colleges saw the need to provide more specialized individual guidance for students in making wise course decisions. Thus, academic advising became formally recognized as an independent venture in the 1970s. The field has continued to grow and expand with the needs of colleges and universities and so too have the number of advising models within higher education. A "faculty-only" model

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Faculty Advisors' Attitudes

is one of many models, employed commonly on college campuses (Kuhn, 2008).

Advising is critical to student satisfaction (Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1994; Noel et al., 1986). Advisors are frequently among the first contacts students have with their new educational institution. They can serve students by encouraging them to become involved in activities inside and outside of the classroom that can aid in their success (Kuhn, 2008). In short, advisors have the opportunity to shape students' educational paths, an endeavor that comes with much responsibility. In order to ensure that advising is effective, universities must continually evaluate their practices. As Cuseo (2008) explains:

“Assessing the effectiveness of academic advisors delivers a strong and explicit message to all members of the college community that advising is an important professional responsibility; conversely, failure to do so sends the tacit signal that academic advisement is not valued by the institution and that the work of academic advisors is not worthy of evaluation, improvement, and recognition” (p. 369). With increased efforts to recruit and retain students within the college, the role of academic advising in the process needs to be evaluated.

The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) relied primarily on a faculty advising model. According to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Fact Book (2012), CASNR had the highest first year retention rates (74.9%) of students staying within the college for freshman entering in 2010. Much of this increased retention has been credited to faculty advising efforts. One faculty member said, “Our retention rate seems to speak well for advising, even though it isn't the whole reason.” However, little has been done to quantify the impact of advising on this campus. The purpose for this non-experimental study was to gauge faculty members' perceptions about advising, how it impacts their jobs, and how they see student engagement in the advising process. The results of this survey could pave an opening for a more extensive assessment of faculty advising within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Materials and Methods

Advising System

The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln employs predominantly a faculty advising system for undergraduate advising. There are a total of 105 advisors for 28 majors in the college. While most programs utilized a faculty-only model, a few exceptions do exist: the School of Natural Resources utilizes an academic coordinator in addition to faculty advisors, while the department of Biochemistry has

a full time advisor plus shares a split advisor position (0.25 FTE) with Forensic Science (0.75 FTE). Although one professional advisor participated initially, responses were not included to focus solely on faculty perceptions. The number of faculty advisors and advisor loads varies by department. While students are encouraged to come in for advising, it is not mandated and certainly, the degree to which it is promoted varies from department to department.

Survey Design

All faculty advisors in CASNR were asked to complete a survey to share their impressions and experience with undergraduate advising to determine their overall satisfaction with the current advising system within the college. The surveys asked initial demographic information including department advised in, teaching appointment percentage, number of years advising undergraduates and current number of undergraduate advisees.

Participants were then asked to respond to a variety of questions on a five point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). These questions related to the advisor's rating of the academic advising process and their perceptions of undergraduate advising by both the advisor and students. In addition to Likert-type scale survey items, respondents were given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions.

The survey link was provided through an e-mail to all faculty advisors in CASNR with a reminder sent two weeks after initial survey distribution date. The survey was provided in an online format through a Google form. The survey procedures were approved by the University of Nebraska - Lincoln's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and completion of the survey indicated consent.

Data Analysis

Mean, range and standard deviation were calculated for responses to Likert-type questions. Due to the wide range of responses, the percentage of advisors who agreed (4 or 5), were neutral (3) or disagreed (1 or 2) was calculated and compared. The responses to the open-ended question items were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The first step was horizontalization of the data (Creswell, 2012). Researchers reviewed the responses and identified common statements or themes. Next, the researchers reviewed the responses as a group to find commonalities among the responses. These commonalities were then grouped into meaning units (Creswell, 2012) and reviewed again until themes emerged to find the essence of the faculty advising experience.

Results and Discussion

Approximately 46% of CASNR faculty advisors (47/102) responded to the survey. Because the college only has three professional advisors, the authors excluded their responses from the survey, focusing solely on faculty perceptions. The author who advised in CASNR at the time of the study refrained from completion of the survey. The average teaching appointment was 42% with a range of 0 to 100% for those that responded (Table 1). There was large variation in the teaching appointments of the faculty that responded (SD = 30.9). Five respondents indicated a teaching appointment of less than 5%, while all others had appointments greater than 20%. The number of years advising varied from 4 months to 38 years with an average of 13 years. The average number of undergraduate advisees for survey respondents was 22 with a range of 0 to 120 (SD = 23.1). The sample provides a broad picture of advisors within the college. A variety of practices are utilized for assigning advisors in CASNR; some departments utilized only one faculty member for all students while others use multiple faculty with fewer advisees per faculty member.

When asked about the efficacy of the advising process, 95% of advisors found the process to be effective, nearly half of those (40%) rating it as highly effective. In regard to their attitude about advising, 87% found the process to be pleasant and generally rewarding and none felt it was a negative experience. However, when asked about students' perceptions of advising, 72% felt that students were neutral on the advising process finding it neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Further research conducted on student perceptions of faculty advising in CASNR is an important piece to the proposed assessment project. From the quantitative questions (Table 2), advisors seemed to agree that they were able to give accurate advice regarding curricular requirements (89% agreed), options following graduation (98%) and serve as a resource related to choice of major (81%) or career (85%). This aligns with results from the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, where 98% felt competent to plan class schedules and 94% felt competent to assist with career choices (Horstmeier, 2006). Results were mixed about advisors' ability to assist with advisees' personal problems (45% agreed, 25% were neutral, and 30% disagreed). However, most indicated that they felt

comfortable referring their advisees to student support services on campus for matters that are beyond their expertise (92%). Noting that faculty feel adequate about the logistical tasks of advising (creating degree plans, dealing with curricular requirements and career options), faculty appear less confident in the interpersonal and social components required of advising, which may impact their responses to why they feel students could be neutral, rather than positive. As such, increasing the expectations of the interpersonal tasks and bolstering advisors' interpersonal ability to address personal student concerns may improve the students' perception of the advising process. The results parallel those found on faculty advising at other institutions (Horstmeier, 2006; Meyers and Dyer, 2005). In terms of student use of the advising services, most felt that students kept appointments (77%), but results were mixed as to whether students came with a pre-planned schedule (21% agreed and 45% disagreed).

The qualitative results from this survey of faculty members fell into six broad themes: relationships with students, faculty perceptions of students' attitude of advising, degree of effectiveness, frustrations with advising, recognition and reward and areas for improvement.

Table 1. Demographic information of faculty advisors in CASNR responding to survey (n = 48)

Item	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Teaching appointment, %	42	0	100	30.9
Number current undergraduate academic advisees	22	0	120	23.1
Years advising in CASNR	13	0.33	38	11.2

Table 2. Percentage of faculty advisors who agreed (4 or 5), were neutral (3) or disagreed (1 and 2) based on current academic advising structure.

Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
I give accurate advice and answers on curricular requirements.	4	7	89
I give accurate advice and answers to student questions relating to their options after graduation.	6	2	92
I serve as a resource person to my advisees on matters relating to choice of major.	6	13	81
I serve as a resource person to my advisees on matters relating to career choices.	6	9	85
I help my advisees with their personal problems.	30	25	45
I refer my advisees to campus support services for assistance on matters that are beyond my expertise.	4	4	92
I encourage my advisees to become involved in campus life and off-campus community service.	4	32	66
I make detailed notes after each of my advising appointments.	47	23	30
Students often do not keep appointments.	77	14	9
Students often do not come with any pre-planned schedule.	45	34	21

Faculty Advisors' Attitudes

Relationships with Students

Fundamentally, as with any helping profession, relationships were paramount to the level of energy most faculty extended to advise when adding it to their already heavy teaching and research loads. Most responses were pleasant: "I find advising VERY fulfilling and wish that there was more time for it in my day/semester." Another described advising as a "critical aspect of our positions for student academic success."

Within this theme, many sub-themes emerged. One faculty member noted that advising afforded him/her to have a constant hand in the undergraduate program: "Advising allows me to get to know our students better, to help determine if our programs are on track with their career goals, and to help with retention by making sure students' questions and concerns are answered. Additionally, it helps me adjust or modify their courses if needed to suit individual academic or career needs." Advising, thus, ensured that students were in the right program, that the university may retain them and that a more individualized course of study could be planned to meet the needs of students. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that faculty contact correlated to increased retention and persistence toward degree completion. Accordingly, faculty advising may improve graduation rates among students who utilize it. This faculty member's remarks also indicate the explicit value faculty advisors can have in shaping the department curriculum, thereby streamlining and connecting the disparate aspects of the student's academic experience.

A few advisors noted how the relationship (one-on-one teaching) in advising differs from their teaching in the classroom. One response was: "Advising allows me to have an influence on the way students think about their overall University education and life in general - as opposed to being focused on a single subject, which occurs in my courses." Faculty want students to feel free to share what else might be going on in their lives: "I try to get them to open up about their personal lives as a means to get to know them better and because of the strong impact personal decisions have on their academic and professional careers." Thus, the concern of these advisors goes well beyond "doling out classes." With the emphasis on the development of the whole student, these responses illuminate the principle of "advising as teaching" (Appleby, 2008).

Advisors noted that they felt personal satisfaction seeing students succeed: "I have many long-term, positive relationships with past advisees. Most advisees show appreciation for time and effort provided by their advisor. It is a pleasure to watch young people mature and become contributors in society." Several advisors commented on their relationships with students evolving

into friendships and eventually, peers and colleagues. Holland discussed the notion that individuals choose their occupations because it fits their personality and having a congruent environment allows for more satisfaction, stability and persistence (Zunker, 2006). The responses in this study indicate that advisers gained much personal satisfaction, which could also explain why the average longevity of time spent advising in the college has been 13 years. Similarly, Retallick and Pate (2009) found that students found faculty who shared their interests, were aware of their professional needs and listened were the best mentors.

Once these relationships are developed, faculty members see the benefits being reciprocated. One advisor wrote:

"Advising is establishing and building your professional relationship with students. I now have enough years in the business to experience the benefits of this relationship building work. Former advisees are now peers, providing insights, advice and resources for my day to day teaching and research work at UNL. Most importantly, the past advisees become advisors and mentors for current UNL students in professional work. As a result, advising as well as teaching have knit me into the fabric of Nebraska agriculture. Advising gives you the opportunity to make your professional contributions as a faculty member complete."

On one level, advisors have a sense of personal and professional satisfaction when they see their students succeed, but some also enjoy additional benefits as they rely on these former students to contribute and teach them. The flow of knowledge goes both ways, enabling these maintained relationships to provide a personal and professional network. One faculty member indicated that they offered to be 'Advisor for Life' for their students, communicating with them long after they graduate: "I recently got a [former student] that was super bright and super unfocused. I listened to him a lot and helped him discern his true joys. He just finished a PhD and got a job (without a post-doc)...I smiled all day on that one!" Quality mentoring includes not just advising related to class work, but also personal and professional development (Wolfe et al., 2009).

The results of this section of the survey suggest that while some faculty advisors understand and appreciate the component of relationships, others do not. As one of the participants stated, "Faculty need to understand that a vigorous undergraduate program is essential to most departments/disciplines, and that advising is critical to a successful undergraduate program." Smith (2002) highlights the wealth of guidance that students find from having advisors that help them grow developmentally, rather than just provide a prescription for completing

their degree requirements. Having a faculty member that enjoys that relationship and seeing students succeed empowers the student to increase their motivation. Faculty that enjoy their role as advisors will provide additional resources outside of prescribing a major, which is also evidenced in the results of this study that show that a majority of faculty provide resources beyond the prescriptive requirements of their majors (Table 2).

Many people—some advisors included—view advising as unidirectional process whereby information is simply distributed to the student. To circumvent the problem, Habley (1986) outlined three realms of advising: conceptual (knowledge of students and student body, philosophy of advising, and on the context of the school, laws, policies, procedures and resources); informational (degree requirements, career information, etc); and relational (interpersonal skills and communication skills for effective relationships with students). Training is often relegated to the informational component while the other two are abandoned (Habley and Morales, 1998). To be effective, advisors need training to master tasks in all three areas. Indeed, with training expanded to include conceptual and relational elements, advisors will not only be more effective, but also, be more comfortable in their roles and get more satisfaction from their jobs.

Faculty Perceptions of Students' Attitude toward Advising

When asked to comment on how students viewed the advising process, the results were mixed. Many respondents acknowledged that students were appreciative of their advising efforts, noting, for instance that the students recognize, "that advising is an added work load for faculty." Another advisor found that "students look forward to touching base with me each semester...I often find that students request meetings at other times besides [registration period] ...this could aid in retention if they have concerns or questions that I can help the resolve." A few faculty also noted, "students who take advantage of these services are more engaged in their education." This quote supports Tinto's Student Engagement Model regarding student engagement and persistence (Tinto, 1994). Students who are engaged in the advising process are more likely to complete their degree.

However, faculty members were also aware that many students did not always enjoy the process: "Most students view visits to their advisor's office as a necessary but negative obligation, but because it's not actually required many stop going later in their degree programs...few stick it out...[and] actually gain a lot from the interaction." One of the ways students could benefit from seeing an advisor was to see the 'bigger picture:' "For many students, the whole process of

correctly sequencing classes to meet prerequisites and build a solid academic program is confusing. They often don't look at the entire 4-year degree program. Instead they just focus on what needs to be done now, so they find it beneficial to have someone looking at the bigger picture with them." One advisor even found this to be a "fun" venture. A relationship with the student in which the advisor has some context for the student's life can aid them in offering guidance specifically geared toward them. This is where the relational component of advising is critical to student success.

Other advisors noted that many students did not show up for advising appointments or make any effort to see an advisor; one admitted, "I'm not sure how students feel. I would like to know. I probably only see a little over half my advisees in any given semester. Does that mean they think it's an unpleasant or unhelpful experience? I hope not." One advisor summarized students' perception very succinctly: "You cannot lump all students into one answer! Some students love the process. Others never show up." Knowing that many questions about the advising process would be unanswered in this survey was precisely what made the authors decide to embark on this multi-phase assessment. An upcoming phase will later include a better understanding of the students' perceptions.

Degree of Effectiveness

Most study participants viewed their advising system as moderately effective, often qualifying their response: "While I have great advising experiences, I feel I could be doing much better. It is sometimes difficult for me to make/find the time needed to accommodate student requests for meetings between advising sessions. Even though I would very much like to be available, the teaching, research, outreach and service responsibilities sometimes make it difficult for me to keep up with all of them." Another faculty member reiterated the theme of faculty being overwhelmed, lamenting, "there is logistically no way that we faculty can provide a meaningful advising experience for our students anymore—with our numbers that have doubled in the past 10 years. The college will need to decide if it wants more students, which it does, how academic advising will look like in the future and it is not going to be how it has looked in the past." That faculty members feel strapped for time and resources likely perpetuates a negative perception of faculty members' availability in the minds of the students. Although future research should address students perceptions of advising in this college, it may be fair to say that structuring out more time for faculty to advise and faculty emphasizing the importance that advising plays in their personal

Faculty Advisors' Attitudes

profession, may help to raise both the effectiveness as well as student's perception of availability and help that advisers have (see Hemwall, 2008).

While some advisors felt their faculty responsibilities prohibited them from doing as good of a job as they could, many also admitted to having no advising training whatsoever: *"As a new faculty member, it's hard to know what the processes are for substituting or waiving courses, what's acceptable and what's seen as a no-no... This would be helpful information for an orientation session for new faculty."* Faculty often felt that they could be doing a better job if they were more equipped to give better advice about university requirements. At the same time, many recognize the importance of faculty autonomy. Determining the best way to provide training to faculty is challenging. Similarly, Horstmeier (2006) found that 64% of faculty had received no training prior to starting to advise undergraduate students. Little has been written on the ideal methodology for training new faculty advisors, but training could include a combination of formal workshops, online materials and informal mentoring from other advisors. In whatever form the training in which the training takes place, it is crucial that tasks from each of the three realms (conceptual, informational, relational) be included and equally emphasized.

A variety of systems were used by advisors to keep track of advisees. When asked if they took detailed notes of their advising appointments, 30% agreed, 23% were neutral and 47% disagreed (Table 2). Fifteen (31%) respondents indicated they use a pen and paper file system akin to a medical doctor's file. Surprisingly, twelve respondents indicated they had no system at all. One faculty member quipped, "No. This takes more time than I have." Some respondents specifically named the university-wide computerized student information systems they used as they advised students, while others expressed concern about the inefficiency or unreliability of the new electronic system. Companies and institutions have built advising note systems, which operate under the assumption that they improve retention as well as cooperation and knowledge sharing among faculty and departments. Seeing the varied responses to use of advising note systems is concerning to the researchers and it is important to ensure that faculty continue to find ways to improve note systems to allow advisers and students alike to have the most complete understanding of the advising conversations that are occurring to best guide the advising process.

Frustrations with Advising

When asked to describe the most frustrating or dissatisfying aspect of advising, the most common

comment dealt with time. Respondents explained that advising either took much of their time or that they were not recognized for the time spent on advising students. One advisor felt like they were "always in catch up mode with curriculum changes and ramifications on attempting to advise potential majors for an entire college." Another was frustrated by doing essentially clerical tasks instead of focusing on developmental advising: *"You don't need someone with a Ph.D. to pick out or check a student's classes. I prefer advising to be on a personal level, i.e. like a coach. Again, I don't advise many students and if I did, I could see where advising could become a time sink."* Only one faculty advisor mentioned the challenges of advising 200 students who are minoring in the discipline and not being "recognized in any way by the department, the college, or the system." Because some faculty view advising in such a negative light to the extent that it can be a "time sink", college administrators must place an emphasis on training, understanding and valuing the advising process in order for faculty buy-in.

Other frustrations expressed were unmotivated or disengaged students. For example, advisors were off-put by the laziness of their advisees: "Students looking for the most convenient rather than most beneficial path to graduation" and "I learned long ago...that my job wasn't to help them with career and life goals. (I offer but they aren't that interested). Rather my job is to help them navigate the system and succeed in getting a degree." Many advisors also mentioned the problems that ensue when students self-advise and "then appear at the end of their programs with a 'fix it for me' attitude." For example, they saw that students who transfer into the program and are not required to meet with an advisor "get lost in the shuffle." This can be a significant issue, as over 80% of students change their majors at least once (Rowh, 2003). Getting lost or off track can drastically increase the total number of credit hours the student may take to graduate. Ultimately, the efficacy of their system is dependent on the students actually coming for advising, but a few faculty noted that advising success is harder to quantify than teaching success.

Faculty advisors were also frustrated by "red tape." Specifically, one advisor noted the various outdated systems for advising: *"Nobody seems to own any of the processes related to advising...If we want to maintain or improve our retention numbers, we have got to ensure that students who move between majors are picked up by the receiving program, welcomed and integrated into the advising system for the new program. If we do not do that, it appears we do not care about them."* Commenting on the need for a new system, another frankly says, "the old days are over."

Recognition and Reward

Nineteen respondents believed advising was appropriately recognized and rewarded by the college while 12 disagreed, primarily pointing out that it was not enough of a factor in consideration for promotion and tenure. Conversely, at the departmental level, 23 respondents said no, while 15 said yes. Some faculty felt that advising is taken for granted unless there was a problem that causes it to surface. Having such a division for recognition indicates that there is significant work that can be done to improve the perception of advising, particularly in regards to recognizing the role of advising within faculty members' tenure and promotion considerations (Drake, 2008).

The responses varied from no recognition to focusing on intrinsic benefits. One faculty member admitted that he/she tried "not to spend too much time" on advising, as not enough credit was given for the effort. On the opposite side of the spectrum, another advisor cared little about the recognition and instead viewed it as a privilege: *"The success of my students has been my reward. Very few individuals have the opportunity to guide and to encourage these students through their academic program as they mature as well as develop into campus leaders. Making these students to realize their potential can be challenging but well worth the effort."* The focus of this response exemplifies how advising enriches this individual's life. In our opinion, this response exhibits the model attitude for our profession.

However, faculty recognized that most advisors would need more than intrinsic benefits in order to do a good job. Survey respondents suggested incentives or rewards for advising students: *"Properly recognize the time commitment good advising requires, reward those advisors that do well - How long it takes a student to graduate is one measure, perhaps students (and maybe parents) should be asked to evaluate their advisors in a similar manner to course evaluations. Provide good mentoring to new faculty so that they can develop into excellent advisors. Finally, weed out those advisors that are unwilling or incapable of doing a good job."*

Sometimes faculty who do a good job advising tend to attract students from other advisors who do not put forward the same amount of energy and effort. As a result, some students engage in a process known as "advisor shopping." Consequently, because people who put the necessary time, energy and effort in the process are the people we want working with students, some advisors get "penalized" for doing a good job and are thus, overworked. One faculty member says, *"Carrying a heavy load wouldn't bother me as much if I knew... administrators were holding other faculty with teaching appointments accountable for their contributions to*

undergraduate education ... Most of these faculty are relatively unconnected to undergraduate education." While some concern relates to overload, this comment illustrates a point evident elsewhere: some advisors are uncomfortable with the training they have received. It is possible if the advisors who are not doing a good job were trained more appropriately, that the advising loads could be spread more evenly and give students a better experience across advisors. Again, more emphasis on relational and conceptual components of advising will assist with this goal.

When asked to describe the most rewarding aspects of advising, the words "interaction" and "helping" were prominent in the responses. Faculty advisors enjoyed the personal interactions they had with their advisees. They were proud to make a difference in the students' lives and they enjoyed getting to know the students on a more personal level than the classroom allows. Many faculty focused on the intrinsic rewards of advising: *"Advising is one of the most rewarding activities I do. Helping troubled students to succeed is by far the most rewarding and has a lasting effect on the life of the individual and enriches mine."* Additionally, survey respondents described helping students meet career goals, being successful, navigating the college landscape and "find[ing] their own path" as rewarding aspects of their advising experiences.

The issue of recognition and reward must continue to be explored. Harrison (2009) noted that this is a problem that has faced many faculty advisors for years. In fact, the second most important characteristic of an effective advisor found in his study was availability. Thus, if advisors do not spend too much time advising, students will see them as unapproachable, which impedes their development and success. Krush and Winn (2010) argue that when there are many responsibilities for faculty, it is hard to dedicate enough time to provide effective and clear advising. As a consequence, students may be receiving insufficient information at best and incorrect advice at worst.

Properly recognizing the amount of time good advising requires will be critical to the future of effective faculty advising in the college. Our survey respondents commented on the time commitment of advising students and the lack of recognition they received for their efforts. A college wide effort to improve advising should strive for a balance between teaching, research, outreach and advising. The need for professional development opportunities was also expressed, echoing the results of a 2007 survey of NACADA (National Academic Advising Association) members, which found that faculty members most highly valued such training opportunities (Drake, 2008). What seems clear is that

Faculty Advisors' Attitudes

regardless of how it is done, more recognition of the time, the necessary skills and the intricacies of the processes for advising must be illuminated. Over-simplifying the process and taking advisors and the activity for granted does not help to increase its impact. A college wide effort to improve advising should strive for a balance between teaching, research, outreach and advising.

Areas for Improvement

The final section consists of areas faculty advisors felt could be improved systematically. For example, many respondents believed it should be mandatory for students to see advisors prior to enrolling. Without such a mandate, students are free to “self-advise” and enroll in anything.

Survey respondents were asked to list types of institutional support to help make advising more satisfying. The responses were mixed, but two main ideas emerged; one centered around information for and training of advisors, the other on the time it takes to advise students. Suggestions for improvement were to hire more professional advisors or support staff to handle some advising tasks. One respondent said *“CASNR needs leadership at Dean level to facilitate a change to a new system of advising that will work in a modern era...a system that acknowledges the real demands on faculty time and provides the assistance to students that is needed.”* Another advisor elaborated on this point: *“Designated full time advisors in the College or in Departments....Unless a faculty person meets with advisees regularly, advising is a difficult task to master. I suspect that most faculty members do not want to advise students because of this and advising does take time away from other activities. I enjoy working with (most) students, but I occasionally feel inadequate regarding University requirements, the best instructors, etc. It's a trade-off.”* Another advisor agreed and stressed the difficulty in keeping up with the curriculum: *“I advise so few students that I am not always up on every change that happens—I advise many different options. Sometimes I think the student would be better served if we had a main advisor that knew everything and then I would have students that I advise their last couple of years on a research project.”* While this may change the dynamic of faculty advising, such a system would still facilitate ongoing connection to faculty mentoring outside of the classroom setting. Though some admitted they had trouble keeping up with all of the many roles advisors play, some faculty advisors felt strongly about keeping faculty involved in advising instead of moving to “a system of ‘paid advisors’.”

However, faculty felt that putting resources into advising at UNL would be a worthwhile investment:

“Generally speaking, I would predict that the CASNR model of faculty advising would emerge as a wise, long term investment of [Nebraska] taxpayer dollars that will impact the long term trends in tax revenue generation because it resulted in a more effective use of time and more productivity post-graduation.” Many listed faculty advising training as one component of this investment: *“Make it a requirement and provide incentives to those who do a good job at advising. Also, require new incoming faculty to receive training!!”*

Advisor training could cover many different areas. Some faculty advisors noted, for instance, that they felt ill-equipped to give career advice. In one case, “my own career is completely different from what 99% of UG students will experience.” In other words, advisors may not feel qualified to lead students through career trajectories that are different from their own. Some advisors noted they even experienced visible insecurity in advising sessions: “there are times I feel unsure of what I am doing with students and I think they can sense that from me.” This finding is consistent with Myers and Dyer’s (2005) study, in which faculty members indicated that additional training would be helpful. Recognizing the importance of training shows that they are open to training and that there is room to improve their skills in effectively advising students. To accomplish this, advisors indicated the need for resources such as workshops, handbooks and other resources; one faculty member mentioned a website that contained accessible advising information and forms.

Summary and Conclusions

This study was an important first step in understanding the current advising culture in CASNR. Our study revealed six main themes: relationships with students, faculty perceptions of students’ attitude of advising, degree of effectiveness in advising, frustrations with advising, faculty recognition and reward and areas for systematic improvement.

In her chapter on Faculty advising, Hemwall (2008) proposes three steps toward fully realizing “the potential of faculty advising”, which include: changing the language of academic advising to focus on learning and teaching and changing the support structures of faculty advisors on large and small scales. Building on her discussion and based on themes derived from our study, the authors would like to suggest implications, as well as directions for the next step of the multi-phased study:

Faculty training for advising. This training can be done in multiple ways. Having formalized training modules to address major, department, and institutional requirements, tools and advising resources is one way. Meanwhile, ongoing discussion groups and formalized

advising workshops can serve to keep faculty members up-to-date with pertinent information.

Adequately reward faculty for their advising efforts through a) course-load reductions; b) inclusion for promotion and tenure review; c) college-wide advising awards; and/or d) funding to attend advising-related conferences.

Build requirements directly into the job description that appropriately represents the amount of time that will be devoted to academic advising. Far too often, advising accounts for far more time than is outlined in one's job-description.

Develop more social and academic opportunities that build students' desire to meet with their advisors so the established relationship feels more mutual than forced and increases the percentage of students utilizing advising.

Additional information should be gathered as the next steps are taken to improve faculty advising. This includes determining:

- What are students' perceptions of academic advising?
- What is administrators' value of and perceptions of current academic advising?
- Comparison of the experiences of students with faculty and professional advisors within the college.
- What perceived role has advising played within academic success of students within this college (retention rates, graduation rates, alumni donations)?

Academic advising has been said to be harder to evaluate than teaching. In a time when governmental funding for education is based on proven measures of success, assessing the effectiveness of academic advising will help to ensure institutional support. Advisors have the opportunity to enrich the overall experience of their students and challenge them to think more broadly about their education. While faculty advising has many potential benefits for students, additional training and support are required to improve the overall process. It is our hope that advisors from other universities that employ a similar faculty model can consider the conclusions made here and glean some insight into their own campus advising culture before evaluating their own practices.

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Faculty Advisors' Attitudes

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