

Support For Academic Advising: Faculty Advisors' Views

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Faculty advisors in a college of agriculture and home economics were surveyed to determine their perceptions about support for academic advising in the college. They rated the level of importance of selected advising support functions and their level of satisfaction with support they received for those advising functions. The most critical advising need, based on the difference between the level of importance and level of satisfaction, was to recognize advisors' efforts related to academic advising. Priority approaches for helping faculty with their advising were: development of an advising handbook, release time from committee assignments, and training workshops covering topics such as updates on rules and regulations, student referrals and career development.

Introduction

Academic advising is widely recognized as a critical element, not only for student satisfaction and success in academic programs and college life, but also for student recruitment and retention. The key to good advising is the academic advisor. Grites (1979) believes that four interrelated factors (all focusing on the advisor) are critical to good advising. These are: a) selection of advisors, b) training advisors, c) evaluating advisors, and d) compensating and rewarding advisors. In a recent study of 754 institutions Crocket and Levitz (1984) found that: a) most institutions provide only a minimum of training for advisors, b) three-

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fourths do not consider advising effectiveness in promotion or tenure decisions, c) the vast majority of institutions have no systematic appraisal of either their advising programs or individual advisor performance, and d) the majority of institutions have no formal recognition or reward system for advisors.

There is, then, a serious need for improving support for academic advisors. There has been little research done on what types of support is important to advisors or their perceptions of the support they receive. Also, it is not clear whether advisor perceptions vary based on differences in their personal characteristics or differences in advisor roles. Because of this lack of data to guide decision making, as well as an ongoing concern for understanding and improving academic advising, the Washington State University (WSU) College of Agriculture and Home Economics Improvement of Instruction Committee (IIC) conducted a comprehensive three part study of academic advising in the College (Fernandes & Jimmerson, 1988; Leonhardy & Jimmerson, 1991). The portion of the study reported here focused on support for academic advising as perceived by academic advisors. It was assumed that data from advisors was essential as a basis for making decisions about training, evaluation, and rewards for advisors.

Editor's Note

Academic advising now receives major attention on campuses. Lots of opinions exist pro and con. However, advising has not been the subject of a detailed study in agriculture until a significant effort in a case study at Washington State University was recently supervised by Ronald M. Jimmerson. Here is the second in a series of three manuscripts that covers agricultural academic advising in detail at one institution from the students, faculty, and administrators perspectives. For your quick reference, they are:

- Fernandes, D.L., and R.M. Jimmerson, "Case Study: Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising," *NACTA Journal* 32(4), 20-22.
- Dillsi, M. and R.M. Jimmerson, "Case Study: Academic Advising: Faculty Advisor's Views," *NACTA Journal*, 36(2).
- Leonhardy, L.H., and R.M. Jimmerson, "Case Study: Advising Needs as Perceived by Students, Advisors, and Administrators," *NACTA Journal*, scheduled for Volume 36, Number 4 (Dec. 1992).

Objectives

- The objectives of this study were to determine:
- advisors' perceptions of the "level of importance" of selected advising support functions,
 - advisors' perceptions of "current level of satisfaction" with support received,
 - "need for support" based on the differences between "level of importance" and "level of satisfaction",
 - whether needs varied based on selected characteristics and perceptions of advisors,
 - advisors' perceptions of assistance needed for improving performance in academic advising.

Procedures

Data were collected for this study using a survey mailed to all academic advisors in the College with the exception of those serving on the IIC who did not participate because of their role as an advisory committee. The survey was developed by the researchers in cooperation with the Improvement of Instruction Committee (IIC) and the College Director of Resident Instruction. The questionnaire was reviewed several times by the IIC and Director during its development. It was then pilot tested by administering the survey to ten WSU faculty members outside the College of Agriculture and Home Economics. Only minor wording changes were made based on the pilot test.

Of 77 eligible advisors in the college (all College advisors excluding those serving on the IIC) 59 completed and returned useable surveys. This represents a 77 percent return rate. Use of the population of advisors and the good response rate provide a sound basis for generalizing the findings to the College. Transferability of findings to other colleges or settings should be made with caution and in consideration of the similarities and differences with the conditions at WSU and characteristics of the advisors studied here.

Advisor Characteristics and Perceptions

Table 1 summarizes characteristics of faculty advisors surveyed. These can be useful for comparisons with other colleges and advisors and in deciding the extent to which data presented here are applicable to other situations. Faculty advisors are fairly evenly represented by rank, years at WSU, years of advising experience, and by age. The high percentage of male respondents reflects the high proportion of male faculty in agricultural departments. About three-fourths of the advisors surveyed had tenure. About half the advisors advise one to 10 students, 40 percent advise 11 to 30 students and 10 percent advise over 30 students.

Table 2 summarizes several aspects of advising from the advisors' point of view. Over 90 percent of advisors meet with advisees two to five times per year with three visits being the mode. About 80 percent feel the number of meetings they had is about right. Over 70 percent say their meetings with advisees last 15 to 30 minutes and about 90 percent think the time they spent is about right. Only about 55 percent believe faculty should have a choice about whether

Table 1. Characteristics of Faculty Advisors.

Present Rank	Frequency	Percent
Professor	23	39.0
Associate Professor	20	33.9
Assistant Professor	15	25.4
No Answer	1	1.7
Number of Years at WSU		
1-5	12	20.3
6-10	13	22.0
11-15	15	25.4
16-20	7	11.9
21-35	11	18.6
No Answer	1	1.7
Tenure		
Yes	43	72.9
No	15	25.4
No Answer	1	1.7
Gender		
Male	46	78.0
Female	13	22.0
Age		
Under 30	0	0.0
30-39	15	25.4
40-49	19	32.2
50-59	17	28.8
60 and over	6	10.2
No Answer	2	3.4
Years Advising		
1-5	20	34.0
6-10	15	25.5
11-15	12	20.4
16-20	6	10.2
21-31	6	10.2
Number of Advisees		
1-10	29	49.3
11-20	16	27.2
21-30	8	13.6
31-68	6	10.2

or not they become an advisor, but, about 81 percent say they would volunteer to be an advisor if given a choice. Overall, faculty advisors think the advising services of both the College and the University are adequate. While the College is rated higher than the University, most advisors see room for improvement in both. This conclusion is supported by data presented later.

Need for Support

To examine advising support, faculty advisors were divided into two groups; those who advise Curriculum Advisory Program (CAP) students (i.e. students who have not yet declared a major; n=22) and those who advise certified majors.(n=37). The researchers believed these two groups of advisors might have different views of support for advising since their advisees have different types of needs. The data, presented in the next section, partially support this view. Those advisors who advised both types of students were asked to respond as either a CAP or as a Certified Major advisor based on the version of the questionnaire they received. The proportion of advisors receiving CAP or Certified Major versions matched the proportion of each type of student advised in the College.

Faculty advisors rated eleven advising support functions for two factors: "Level of Importance" and "Level of Sat-

Table 2. Advisors' Perceptions of Advising.

How often did you meet yearly with advisee?	Frequency	Percent
Once	2	3.4
Twice	12	20.3
Three times	27	45.8
Four or five times	15	25.4
More than five times	3	5.1
How adequate were the number of meetings?		
About right	46	78.0
Too few	6	10.2
Undecided	6	10.2
No answer	1	1.7
Average time spent in each meeting?		
Less than five minutes	1	1.7
Five to fifteen minutes	10	16.9
Fifteen to thirty minutes	42	71.2
More than thirty minutes	6	10.2
How adequate was the amount of time spent?		
About right	51	86.4
Too little	3	5.1
Undecided	3	5.1
No answer	2	3.4
Should faculty have a choice to advise?		
Yes	32	54.2
No	15	25.4
Undecided	12	20.3
Would you volunteer to be an advisor?		
Yes	48	81.4
No	6	10.2
Undecided	5	8.5
Does college meet student advising needs?		
Exceptionally well	11	18.6
Adequately	35	59.3
Less than adequately	7	11.9
Poorly	3	5.1
No answer	3	5.1
Does WSU meet student advising needs?		
Exceptionally well	5	8.5
Adequately	34	57.6
Less than adequately	15	25.4
Poorly	2	3.4
No answer	3	5.1

isfaction''. These were rated using a four-point scale where 0 = not at all, 1 = to a little extent, 2 = to some extent, and 3 = to a great extent. The "need" related to each function was determined by computing a paired T-test score based on the difference between mean scores on the "Level of Importance" and "Level of Satisfaction" scales. The paired T-test was used because it takes into consideration the sample means, standard deviation, and sample size and is, therefore, more accurate than simply using the difference between the means.

Tables 3 and 4 display: a) the eleven advising support functions, b) the mean and rank of "Level of Importance", c) the mean and rank of "Level of Satisfaction" and d) the paired T-values and numerical rank of "Need", in descending order, for CAP and Certified Major advisors respectively.

For the CAP advisors the T-values for the first eight support functions were significant at the .05 level indicating a true difference between "Level of Importance" and "Level of Satisfaction". Thus we consider these functions to be "Needs" (i.e. in need of more attention). In examining data in these tables note that the need scores do not

Table 3. CAP Advisors' Rating of Support For Advising.

Support Functions	Level of Importance MeanRank	Level of Satisfaction MeanRank	Need T-valueRank
University support for academic advising	2.38 1	1.08 8	4.86* 1
College support for academic advising	2.29 5	1.30 5	4.09* 2
Departmental support for academic advising	2.38 1	1.52 4	4.04* 3
Recognizing advisor efforts	2.36 4	1.08 9	3.95* 4
Preparing & training academic advisors	2.36 3	1.40 5	3.77* 5
System for evaluating academic advising	2.00 9	0.96 11	3.35* 6
Rewarding advising on equal basis w/ teaching	2.20 6	1.12 7	3.31* 7
Rewarding advising on equal basis w/ research	1.92 10	1.00 10	2.38* 8
Guidelines for academic advising	2.17 7	1.71 2	1.40 9
College mission statement about advising	2.00 8	1.52 3	1.23 10
Advisor input into selection of advisees	1.17 11	1.81 1	-1.90 11

n= 22. *PR>t=0.05

Table 4. Certified Major Advisors' Ratings of Support For Advising.

Support Functions	Level of Importance MeanRank	Level of Satisfaction MeanRank	Need T-valueRank
Recognizing Advisors' efforts	2.27 1	0.86 9	9.39* 1
College support for academic advising	2.52 2	1.12 5	6.69* 2
University support for academic advising	2.42 4	0.90 8	6.57* 3
Rewarding advising on equal basis w/ teaching	3.32 5	0.88 10	6.34* 4
Rewarding advising on equal basis w/ research	2.18 8	0.81 11	5.83* 5
System for evaluating academic advising	2.31 6	0.94 7	5.55* 6
Guidelines for academic advising	2.24 7	1.53 1	5.08* 7
Preparing and training academic advisors	2.06 9	1.03 6	5.00* 8
Departmental support for academic advising	2.45 3	1.42 3	4.60* 9
College mission statement about advising	2.00 10	1.35 4	2.51* 10
Advisor input into selection of advisees	1.54 11	1.53 2	0.21 11

n= 37. *PR>t=0.05

necessarily indicate which functions advisors consider most important, rather, which functions need attention given advisor's ratings of function importance and their satisfaction with how well functions are being fulfilled.

Based on ratings by Certified Major advisors, all functions except "advisor input into selection of advisees" are considered needs. While the need rankings vary somewhat from CAP advisor ratings, four of six functions are among the top six for both groups. For "Level of Importance", five

of six functions in the top six of both groups are the same. For "Level of Satisfaction" the functions falling among the top six are the same for both groups. In general, the "Need" scores for Certified Major advisors are higher, indicating special attention should be paid to this group of advisors. However, there is fairly close agreement about support functions between both groups. The major discrepancy is on the function "Departmental support for academic advising". This was not considered a need for CAP advisors, but was ranked third for Certified Major advisors. This might be explained by the fact that, each fall, CAP advisors are updated on advising changes for CAP students. Certified Major advisors are not formally updated.

Approaches to Advising Support

Advisors were asked to rate several approaches relative to their importance in assisting them in doing a better job of advising. Table 5 summarizes the seven potential support approaches prioritized by their mean scores for each item (based on a four point scale where 0 = "not at all important", 1 = "important to a limited extent", 2 = "important to some extent, and 3 = "important to a great extent"). The standard deviation for each item is also shown.

An advising handbook was by far the preferred choice of advisors for receiving assistance. Release time from committee responsibilities and training workshops were second and third selections. It is interesting to note that release time from teaching and research were low on the priority list.

In anticipation that training workshops would be highly rated as an approach to improving advising, advisors were asked to rate the importance of ten workshop topics. Table 6 summarizes the ratings of ten topics by their mean scores and standard deviations. Scores are based on the same four-point scale described for table 5. Topics are listed in order of their mean scores to indicate their priority of importance. The priority list indicates advisors place importance keeping up with information they need to know as advisors, including changes in rules and regulations, referral services and other aid available for students. Helping students gain new skills through the advising process (i.e., dealing with personal problems, time management, study skills, etc.) were lower priorities. This suggests that advisors are not interested in taking on these advising functions or that they feel they already have the necessary skills in these areas. It is encouraging to see advisor interest in assisting students with career development in light of findings of the broader study which indicated this was a high priority for students (Fernandes & Jimmerson, 1988).

Table 5. Advisors' Ratings of Support Advising Approaches.

Support Approach (n=59)	Importance	
	Mean	S.D.
Advising handbook	2.10	0.94
Release time from committee assignments	1.76	1.14
Training workshops	1.69	1.00
Computer assisted advising	1.43	1.13
Release time from research	1.36	1.09
Establishment of College advising center	1.36	1.19
Release time from teaching	1.19	1.02

Table 6. Advisors' Ratings of Workshop Topics.

Topic	Importance	
	Mean	S.D.
Yearly update on changes in rules & regulations	2.21	0.83
How where, when to refer students	2.17	0.82
Assisting students with career development	1.98	0.90
What other departments can offer students	1.74	0.89
Assisting students with decision making skills	1.74	0.91
Assisting students with study skills	1.53	0.93
Developmental academic advising	1.37	0.80
Developing mentoring relationships with students	1.33	1.00
Assisting students with time management skills	1.32	0.97
Assisting students with personal problems	1.29	0.94

n = 59

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, Certified Major advisors indicated a greater need related to advising support functions than did CAP advisors. This is reflected in the difference between the "Level of Importance" means and the "Level of Satisfaction" means and as reflected in the T- values. However, statistically significant "Needs" were found for both groups of advisors on most functions. Certified Major advisors' ratings of the function "Recognizing advisors' efforts devoted to academic advising" had the highest T-value, indicating it was the highest overall need. In addition, this item was ranked fourth by CAP advisors. This finding is supported by another portion of the larger study which showed that administrators believed that advisors are not adequately recognized for their advising efforts (Leonhardy & Jimmerson, 1991).

Priority approaches for helping faculty with advising were: a) an advising handbook, b) release time from committee assignments, and c) training workshops covering topics such as updates on rules and regulations, student referrals and career development.

Based on these findings we recommend the following: a) development of an advising handbook containing necessary material for academic advising in a format that is easily updated, b) regular training workshops which focus on assistance available to students, changes in rules and regulations, and career development, c) development of an evaluation system including a set of advising criteria and based on input from faculty advisors, students, and administrators, d) incorporation of rewards and recognition for advising into annual reviews, salary adjustments, and award ceremonies. These steps should help advisors feel support for academic advising at the university, college, and departmental levels. These steps would go a long way toward placing advising on a more equitable basis with teaching and research and would help sustain the commitment to advising that most advisors feel.

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