

Developmental Approach to Student Advising: Implications for Teacher Educators

Godfrey Franklin

James Parker

University of West Florida

ABSTRACT. At a recently established Advising Center in the College of Education at the University of West Florida, a study examined a developmental advising approach. This study suggests that faculty advisors using the developmental approach were perceived as competent and effective. The data from the student survey responses specifically indicate student confidence in the professional attitudes of the trained faculty advisors who provided effective registration, follow-up on student records, and course options for alternative career decisions.

In the Spring of 1992, the decision was made by the administration to establish a Central Advising Center (CAC) for the College of Education (COE) at The University of West Florida (UWF). Until that time, the various departments had provided academic advising services for the students by randomly assigning that task to faculty members. However, it soon became apparent that, in spite of having been assigned advisors, students sought out preferred faculty members for their advising. From extended interviews with these students, the authors uncovered the students' reasons for their preferences of advisors. They had difficulty finding their assigned faculty advisors when they needed them, and often the faculty members appeared distracted, uninterested, or too busy. For these reasons the college administration decided that a more efficient and effective system was needed to provide advising for students on a regular basis.

The resulting Central Advising Center was located near the Teacher Education office where an extended schedule of daily appointments could be maintained by a team of trained faculty and graduate students drawn from the various departments. Those selected showed interest in student advising and were well informed about policies and procedures in both the university and departments. They were also familiar with campus facilities and the interpretation of various degree plans. From this pool, two elementary/middle school education faculty, one vocational education faculty, and one special education graduate assistant were selected to staff the center.

As a data set, the records of all incoming students from January 1, 1992 were processed in the CAC and were later kept in the Teacher Education Student Services office, while the records of the other students already admitted into the program, and who were not of the January 1st, 1990 group, were maintained in the various departments.

With the program in place, students were informed that the new system would operate in the COE's Central Advising Center at specified hours when trained advisors would be available. Thereafter, various departments in the COE, the University's freshman-sophomore Advising Center and Admissions-Registration staff routinely referred students to the COE's Central Advising Center for information and procedures for admission into the Teacher Education Program.

Review of Literature

In the early 1970's, coordinators of Advising Centers of higher education became acutely aware that traditional academic advising alone was not enough (Dassance & Batdorf, 1980). That is, helping students select courses to fulfill institutional requirements was ineffective for recruiting new students or for retaining and preparing enrolled students for future goals (Chickering, 1969, Frost, 1991). So from the holistic theory of student development (i.e., emotional, physical, cognitive, social and moral development), a model for developmental advising was incorporated widely into university student advising (Moore, 1976; Gordon, 1988), with emphasis shifted from purely academic advising to more total developmental advising.

Traditional or prescriptive advising has consistently acknowledged the authority of the advisor over the student, a top-down management model (Cope, 1981). In this relationship the student brings academic problems to the advisor for prescribed solutions. Even though students may desire a complex causal analysis of their problems in a personal and friendly relationship with the advisor, such opportunities rarely presented themselves in the past. The impact of personal and family matters on course choices, semester loads, or grade advisement simply had no place. According to Frost (1991a), students in these prescriptive or traditional advisory relationships uniformly preferred advisors who provided academic information based on clearly understood graduation requirements and university policies, since this was the best form that was then available to them.

Developmental advising is student-centered, facilitates rational processes, encourages environmental and interpersonal interactions which result in behavioral awareness, problem solving, and decision-making and proficiency in evaluation skills (Frost 1991a; Ender, Winston and Miller, 1982). Developmental advising assumes the function of teaching students to accomplish for themselves the various developmental tasks found in Havinghurst's developmental task theory, Erikson's psychosocial development theory, Piaget's intellectual and moral development theory, and Kolberg's moral development theory (Hamachek, 1990). Developmental advising is meant to help students choose academic programs that enhance their capacity for holistic development (O'Banion, 1972). Developmental advising encourages students to share responsibility for their own academic success, at the same time empowering faculty advisors to go beyond the often perfunctory process of arranging schedules and choosing appropriate academic courses (Frost 1991a). Developmental advising aspires to "encourage students to use cognitive and affective domains as they make academic, career and moral decisions" (Frost, 1991a, p. 16). In effect, a form of teaching, developmental advising thus discourages passive receptive student behavior and encourages shared responsibility for the planning of consensual learning experience.

Evaluation of the Advising Center

The concept of developmental advising in the College Advising Center involves discussions with students on 1) making decisions on personal options and career choices, 2) assessing programs and courses of study in light of school policies and procedures, and 3) selecting courses in scheduling and completing forms for admission to the university and also to teacher education.

Approximately one and a half years after the establishment of the College of Education Advising Center, an evaluation was conducted based on the foregoing criteria to assess whether it has been an effective means of providing complete advising to students.

Method

An evaluation instrument/survey was created by a team of faculty members from each department who have expertise in creating survey instruments and in statistics. The team was headed by the Director of the Teacher Education and Student Services. The director gave the rough draft version of the survey to some pre-service student teachers as they exited from an orientation class at the beginning of the Fall 1993 semester to complete and give us feedback. The survey team used the students' comments on the returned draft survey to write the final version of the survey (see Table 1).

Internal consistency for the instrument used in this study was .95 for all items, .81 for the first subscale (six items) and .92 for the second subscale (eight items). The Cronbach Alpha was used for determining instrument reliability. A group of 120 college undergraduates in teacher education program constituted the reliability sample.

This survey was given to randomly selected Teacher Education students during the 1993 Fall semester advising process. During the semester approximately 36 hours of advising time were provided by the three faculty advisors and one graduate student per week. The participating students indicated that they had met on the average of two times with their advisor. The students completed the survey and returned them to the Teacher Education and Student Services' Office.

The 109 students who participated in this study were randomly selected as they came to the Advising Center to make an appointment to see their advisors. The students were selected from all the departments of the College of Education: Elementary/Early Childhood, Middle School, Special Education, Educational Foundations, Secondary Education and Technology, and Educational Leadership. These were graduate and undergraduate students of both sexes from differing racial backgrounds.

Results

A rating system of 1 to 4, poor to excellent, and 5 as not sure, was established by the faculty survey team. Table 1 represents the summary evaluation of the Advisors by the 109 students who participated in the study.

Table 1

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ADVISING CENTER
STUDENT EVALUATION OF FACULTY AND GRADUATE ASSISTANT ADVISOR**

Rate your advisor on the items listed below using the following 5 point scale: ⇒ 1=poor 2=fair 3=good 4=excellent 5=not sure

I. PERSONAL ATTITUDE		- TOTALS: 109				
		1	2	3	4	5 (% of scales 3 & 4)
1.	My advisor provides for privacy with me.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		3	3	11	86	6 89
2.	My advisor listens to me.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		3	2	7	86	11 85
3.	My advisor makes me feel comfortable.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		3	2	6	96	2 94
4.	My advisor treats me with respect.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		3	2	3	98	3 93
5.	My advisor shows concern for me.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		4	2	7	94	2 93
6.	My advisor is professional in appearance.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		4	3	10	90	2 92
II. PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE		- TOTALS: 109				
		1	2	3	4	5 (% of scales 3 & 4)
1.	My advisor is available to me.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		3	4	12	87	3 91
2.	My advisor makes appropriate contact with me, (i.e., Pre-Registration).	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		5	7	10	72	15 75
3.	My advisor has knowledge of university policies, rules, regulations, etc.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		5	3	20	81	0 93
4.	My advisor uses tact and concern.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		3	2	10	92	2 92
5.	My advisor usually gives me good advice.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		4	5	13	83	4 88
6.	My advisor tries to point out several options to assist me in my decision making.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		6	2	14	83	4 89
7.	My advisor recommends other areas of help that are available on campus.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		4	8	15	87	10 80
8.	My advisor checks my progress with me.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
		7	7	20	65	10 78

From Table 1, the data show that the students in the study perceived their Advisors to be competent and effective in advising students on the basis of the developmental approach to advising that was implemented at the College of Education Advising Center.

Conclusions

The study was a descriptive study that attempted to determine whether faculty members and graduate students scheduled into the Central Advising Center were essential to its success in meeting student's needs. The Advising Center appears to have been successful based on the instruments used in this study with three faculty members and one student providing approximately 36 hours of advising per week Monday through Friday.

Faculty Advisors using developmental advising approach were rated competent and effective in assisting students with options in making career decisions, and recommend areas of help that are available on campus. The literature (Moore, 1976; Gordon, 1988; Frost, 1991a; Ender, Winston & Miller, 1982; O'Banion, 1972) in the field show that the academic and developmental advising as an on-going process is important to establishing a good relationship with students in order to help them achieve their academic and career goals.

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