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"Academic advising is a developmental process which

assists students in the clarification of their life/career

goals and in the development of educational plans for the

realization of these goals. The advisor serves as a

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facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning

experiences through course and career planning and

academic progress review, and an agent of referral to

other campus agencies as necessary." (American College

Testing Program, 1984).

While there is general consensus on the importance of good academic advising to student success and support for the ACT's developmental concept of advising, there is less agreement on the most effective model for delivery. Acknowledging that the availability of financial resources and constraints on their allocation affect choices concerning academic advising models, Creamer and Atwell (1984) addressed the relative merits and drawbacks of counselor-oriented and faculty-oriented advising systems.

Proponents of faculty-oriented advising argue that:

* the teaching and the advising processes are similar

and interrelated,

* faculty can provide expertise on the career options in

their fields,

* faculty advising promotes increased contact between

students and teachers, an important element in student

retention.

Those who support professional counselor-oriented systems suggest that:

* faculty lack the time and interest to be effective advisors,

* faculty may not be aware of current employment trends,

* counselors are in a better position to refer students to the

appropriate institutional resource,

* counselors have greater experience in goal setting, career

and life planning, and personal problem solving.

Mandatory Advisement--Several colleges are attempting to improve contact with students by requiring that students meet on a regular basis with their advisors. Whenever possible students should have the opportunity to meet with their advisors before they register for their first class. As an alternative, advisors should hold meetings with groups of advisees during orientation or the first week of classes. Some colleges are requiring that new students attend an orientation class or workshop to help them understand important aspects of the college.

Team Approaches--A number of colleges have implemented advising programs in which counselors and teachers work together as a team, with one or the other team member doing most of the advising depending upon the college.

Recognition--Whether the delivery model utilizes teachers, counselors or a team approach, the efforts of those involved in academic advising must be rewarded. Possible rewards include financial compensation, such as bonuses, college-supported conference attendance, travel and allotment; consideration in promotion and tenure decisions; public recognition via mention in publications, appreciation events, and notices to parents.

Training--In-service training should cover basic counseling skills and techniques, and simulation and role-playing activities. Advisement manuals can also ensure consistency and knowledgeability. These manuals should cover college policies, rules, regulations; curriculum and academic requirements; procedures for course withdrawal, substitution, credit-by-examination, etc.; financial aid information; veterans assistance information; college resources; community referral services; transfer options; and advisor responsibilities.

Computer Assisted Advising--A number of schools, including Miami-Dade Community College in Florida, Oakton Community College in Illinois, and Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico are using computers in academic advisement. Though the programs vary from school to school, most have the following features:

* all courses required for program completion are listed

in a computerized database,

* prerequisites needed to enroll in courses are specified,

in some cases prohibiting students from enrolling in classes

for which they have not completed the required work,

* information on which requirements a student has completed is

recorded in a student's data file,

* unique circumstances (such as course waivers, substitutions,

advanced placement, military, and transfer credit) are also

recorded,

* individual messages to students regarding their progress

toward degree achievement or their failure to meet academic

standards are generated automatically, access to information

on student progress is afforded to students and counselors

either on-line or as a printed report.

Research suggests that in practice both types of models of advising may have fallen
short of their intended purposes. A survey of 14 New Jersey community colleges
(Houpt, 1985) reveals that, according to counselors:

* the most successfully fulfilled aspect of counseling was

the provision of accurate information about institutional

policies and procedures, while the least successful was

the development of students' decision-making skills,

* greater administrative recognition of the importance of

advising, expanded advisor training, and better advisee

outreach were needed,

* one-third of the community colleges had no training for

advisors, one-third provided some in-service training,

and the remaining third had some sort of orientation,

* few colleges used formal evaluation processes,

* at four-fifths of the colleges there was no formal

reward or recognition for advising. Houpt points out that many of these findings

paralleled national trends.

IMPROVING ACADEMIC ADVISING

Concern for the quality of academic advising and recognition of the important role it can play in promoting student retention and success underpin current efforts to improve advising. Houpt (1985), Kazazes (1982), Wilder (1981) and Friedlander (1983) recommend such means as selective recruitment of advisors, in-service training, evaluation, the use of computers, compensation and recognition for advisors, and mandatory advisement policies.

Formalized Plans--One of the major problems with academic advising is seen as the perception on the part of people responsible for program implementation that advising is primarily an informational function. Implementing a developmental model of advising requires that a written plan detailing the goals and functions of academic advising be prepared, reviewed, and revised as needed, so that all members of the campus community are aware that a plan exists and are familiar with its objectives. The college's plan for advising should also implement processes to assist students in planning coherent academic programs and in integrating their educational pursuits with their life goals and career aspirations.

Advisors--Advisors must be willing to do more than help students schedule classes. Potential advisors should be screened to ensure that they are willing to talk to students about personal, career, and educational goals, and about academic progress and problems. At minimum, the advisor should (1) be a specialist in the student's discipline and be familiar with the field's academic requirements and career opportunities; (2) be knowledgeable about the college's regulations and its resources; (3) know when to make referrals; and (4) have a basic understanding of human behavior and communication.

The benefits of computer-assisted advising include reduced time in evaluating student transcripts, improved accuracy in advisement, ease in obtaining information, reduction in costs, and more efficient use of advisor time.

Evaluation--Systematic and periodic evaluation of advising programs is essential to their effectiveness. The ability to assess whether an advising system is meeting its goals rests with students and administrators. Students should be surveyed on a regular basis to determine whether their advisors:

* are consistently available

* keep regular office hours

* get to know the students personally

* make appropriate referrals

* have a positive, constructive attitude

* are on time for appointments

* have the information the students need

* discuss personal and academic goals

* keep the students up to date on their course

of study

Effective advising systems meet the needs of the college's constituencies and further the goals of the institution. The improvement of academic advising can promote students satisfaction with the college experience and encourage them to remain in college long enough to fulfill their educational goals.

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