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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a model in-service training program for assisting faculty members in functioning as academic counselors (as differentiated from their traditional role as academic advisors) during a pre-enrollment freshman counseling and advising program: the first stage of academic advisement. A model for assessing the impact of the training program is also presented. The in-service training program is designed to sensitize faculty to the diverse academic abilities, interests, and aspirations of entering students. A major program objective is enhancing student success by facilitating a better understanding of each student's unique characteristics, thus encouraging a more individualized approach to instruction and academic advisement as a result of the faculty member's successful completion of the training program. It is noted that faculty who serve as academic counselors in a freshman counseling and advising program will be better prepared to assist in development of a campus-wide retention program that places special emphasis on student experiences during their critical first 6 weeks on campus. The criteria used to select academic counselors, the counselor's orientation conference for participating faculty, and the strategies that can maximize program impact are discussed. The paper concludes with a brief review of several assessment designs. Contains 73 references. (GLR)

Assessing The Impact of an Academic Counselor Training Program: The Development of Faculty One Step Beyond the Role of Advisor

by

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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF AN ACADEMIC COUNSELOR TRAINING PROGRAM: THE DEVELOPMENT OF FACULTY ONE STEP BEYOND THE ROLE OF ADVISOR

Higher education in the 1990s will be characterized by an increasing concern for serving the educational needs of non-traditional as well as traditional students in the most cost-effective manner. Student retention, especially in light of declining resources (Jaschik, 1991) and numbers of students available to sustain enrollments (Voorhees, 1990), will continue to be one of the major targets of campus strategic plans. To meet the educational requirements of students with diverse entry-level abilities, backgrounds, and aspirations, there will be strong emphasis on personalizing the instructional process for each student. Educators have advocated this practice for years. Now is the time to deliver on this promise, thus maximizing scarce institutional resources for student benefit. Individualized instructional strategies will become more evident as institutions place high priority on developing and implementing approaches to accommodate students with diverse academic abilities. Technologies, now available to facilitate individualized instruction, will be used increasingly on campuses and at distances to serve learners (Feasley, 1983; Hall, 1991).

Faculty development programs will become more prevalent as academic leaders recognize the critical importance of assisting professors to understand the characteristics of diverse student populations and to "discover, try, master and evaluate alternative ways to help each student learn." (Lindquist, 1978). Faculty in-service training programs not only will be concerned with

improvement of instruction but will also focus upon other ways to improve retention by facilitating a positive, personalized relationship between student and professor. In addition to the traditional role of instructor, faculty will serve in other key roles: mentor, friend, campus liaison, and advisor (Noel, Levitz, Saluri, 1985). By the year 2000 it is projected that at least 80% of American colleges and universities will have well-defined faculty development programs to improve student retention. This level of faculty development activity will contrast dramatically to the low percentage (approximately 18%) of faculty/instructional development programs revealed in the Beal and Noel study (1980).

In response to the need for faculty involvement in student success, this paper describes a model in-service training program for assisting faculty members in functioning as academic counselors (as differentiated from their traditional role as academic advisors) during a pre-enrollment freshman counseling and advising program or the first stage of academic advisement. A model for assessing the impact of the training program is also presented.

The in-service training program is designed to sensitize faculty to the diverse academic abilities, interests, and aspirations of entering students who will become members of their English, education, engineering, sociology, and other classes. One of the major objectives of the program is to enhance student success by facilitating a better understanding of each student's unique characteristics, thus encouraging a more individualized approach to instruction and academic advisement as a result of the faculty member's successful completion of the training program. Faculty

who serve as academic counselors in a freshman counseling and advising program will be better prepared to assist in development of a campus-wide retention program that places special emphasis on student experiences during their critical first six weeks on campus (Noel, Levitz, Saluri).

CRITERIA USED TO SELECT ACADEMIC COUNSELORS

Before discussing the in-service training program, it is important to review the criteria used in selecting faculty to serve as academic counselors. Quite obviously, selection of the most qualified faculty members is essential to the success of the pre-entry counseling and advising program; however, procedures for selecting faculty to participate in advisement programs have traditionally been nonexistent or ill conceived (Keller, 1988). Therefore, considerable emphasis should be placed on using criteria that will result in the selection of competent and motivated faculty members.

Four criteria are employed to select faculty to be academic counselors. First, a faculty member must have a strong student orientation and have demonstrated the ability to relate well to students, both academically and personally. Data collected during the preceding school year concerning the faculty member's effectiveness as an academic adviser (Kapraun, Coldren, 1980) can provide considerable insight into the faculty member's suitability to function as academic counselor. Second, a teacher must be genuinely interested in serving as academic counselor. Participation is voluntary and therefore, should reflect an intrinsic motivation. Although a faculty member is reimbursed for serving as academic

counselor, the monetary reward should be secondary to a strong sense of commitment to the primary purpose of academic counseling. A third criterion is a faculty member's willingness to be innovative and flexible. The faculty member serving as academic counselor assumes a role much different from the traditional role of teacher in a group setting. In-depth, one-to-one academic counseling requires a willingness to invest the necessary time and energy to develop the expertise to perform the critical task of academic counseling. Fourth, a faculty member must realize that he is neither expected nor qualified to perform psychological counseling. In summary, the academic counseling process involves in-depth evaluation and discussion of a student's academic abilities and interest in a particular program of study.

COUNSELORS' ORIENTATION CONFERENCE

Once selected, faculty participate in a Counselors' Orientation Conference, a three-to-four-day program designed to provide them with the knowledge and skills essential for effective academic counseling. The conference has three important components. The first component focuses upon familiarizing the participant with changing demographics of the freshman population and their implications for higher education. A second component provides information to enable the academic counselor to address the typical concerns of an entering freshman. The third component of the Counselors' Orientation Conference develops and refines the participants' academic counseling skills.

Today's Freshmen Population

In familiarizing faculty with demographic changes, three types of information are needed: overview information concerning today's freshmen, an up-to-date institutional summary of salient characteristics pertaining to students currently enrolled at the college or university; and, a review of trends and practices designed to enhance the educational experiences of college students.

Overview information includes a synopsis of the latest research findings pertaining to changes in students as a result of the college experience and the anticipated benefits of a college education (Bowen, 1977; Pascarella, Terenzini, 1991). The implications of these findings are also discussed. Selected readings from How College Affects Students (Pascarella, Terenzini, 1991) and The Undergraduate Experience in America (Boyer, 1987) should serve as key resource documents. The topic of changing student demographics should highlight projections pertaining to traditional college students, older students, commuter students, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Projections and implications can be effectively presented to faculty members through a review of selected chapters from Shaping Higher Education's Future (Levine, 1989) and The Freshman Year Experience (Upcraft, Gardner, 1989). Most institutions of higher learning are involved today in educating a growing number of adult learners; therefore, a discussion of readings which focus on the design of entering programs for adults would be valuable (Schlossberg, Lynch, Chickering, 1988).

The institutional summary of student characteristics can be used to reinforce major findings in regard to changing student demographics. This summary should emphasize the implications of trends pertaining to a specific college or university and should be presented by the chief student affairs officer who is usually well prepared to sensitize faculty (Sandeen, 1991) to the realities and challenges they will encounter in assisting entering freshmen during the pre-enrollment process. The chief student affairs administrator should also stress the importance of collaboration and partnerships between academic and student affairs (Brown, 1990), a prerequisite for the development of comprehensive orientation and transitional programs and services (Tinto, 1987) that emphasize social as well as academic dimensions of integration into the university (Pascarella, Terenzini, 1980). The extent of a student's involvement with an institution of higher learning, as defined by Astin (1977, 1984) and Boyer (1990), determines the likelihood of the student "connecting" at a particular campus and persisting to a degree. The institutional culture, campus environment, and policies and practices of involving colleges have been identified; in addition, specific recommendations are made for creating involving colleges. An "involving college" is one which provides a variety of co-curricular activities for students. In addition, this type of institution provides easy access to and rewards for involvement in these activities. In an involving college, the environment encourages out-of class student learning for both academic and personal development (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, 1991; Kuh, Schuh, 1991).

Educational practices designed to enhance the experiences of entering freshmen may encompass topics such as multicultural awareness (Richardson, Skinner, 1991; Green, 1989; Pedersen, 1988), learning styles (Kolb, 1985), applications of student development theories (Moore, 1990; Knefelcamp, Widick, Parker, 1978), drug/alcohol education (Doweiko, 1990), and other topics which will be of significance in working with the entering student population. Appropriate speakers and resource materials can be used to insure delivery of pertinent information to academic counselors. Emphasis should be placed on practical applications of the concepts presented.

Acquiring Information to Address Freshmen Questions

The second component includes two types of information: general information and student information. General information is classified as academic or non-academic information.

The academic information, presented by representatives of the colleges of the University, focuses upon a review of the admission requirements, academic/career opportunities for the various programs of study, and academic standards pertaining to curricula offered by the colleges. A videotape presentation entitled "Introducing the College/University to Freshmen" summarizes much of the pertinent information which an entering student should know about the academic structure of the institution. This presentation also provides an excellent overview of the institution for the academic counselors and is used to summarize those presentations pertaining to dissemination of academic information.

Non-academic information is presented by representatives from the Office of Student Affairs. Their information pertains to key support services such as financial aid, career development and placement, academic improvement programs, residence halls and campus activities, counseling services, health and wellness programs, campus access strategies for disabled students, and other programs and services designed to contribute to tne staying environment (Noel, Levitz, Saluri) of the campus. An effective pre-enrollment counseling and advising program should be linked with student programs and services available on campus to address the whole student (Tinto) from the perspective of enhancing social as well as academic development.

Student information is defined as information that is collected and analyzed concerning the academic background of each entering student. This information includes as a minimum three items: profile of academic abilities, admission profile, and an education planning survey. The profile of academic abilities summarizes a student's SAT or ACT test scores, high school grade point average, and placement test scores and recommends entry-level course work relative to English, mathematics, chemistry, and other disciplines where effective course placement is particularly critical to the success of an entering student. Grade expectancy data are also presented concerning a student's potential for success in various curricula. The admission profile summarizes the essential information concerning a student's high school academic background and also provides a prediction for college success in verbal and quantitative subject areas. The education planning survey is a self-

report instrument that provides considerable insight into a student's thoughts and perceptions concerning academic/career planning and also assesses a student's study and time management skills. Staff of the Division of Undergraduate Studies at the Pennsylvania State University have provided exemplary leadership (Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, 1984) in their use of the profile of academic abilities, admission profile, education planning survey and other strategies to assist students in clarifying academic/career goals.

Collected and analyzed over a period of time, data from these three sources can be combined systematically to develop an "early warning system" or estimate of "dropout proneness" (Tinto) for various student populations. Therefore, appropriate interventions can be introduced early enough to improve the retention of high-risk students.

Student information is presented to academic counselors in the form of a mock student counseling folder similar to the counseling folder the academic counselor will receive for each student who participates in the counseling and advising program. Consequently, this information can be readily applied in the third dimension of the Counselors' Orientation Conference--the development and refinement of academic counseling skills.

Academic Counseling Skills

The personalization of general and student information for each freshman is the basic objective of the academic counseling process. To perform this vital task, the effective academic counselor must be able to: *interpret test results, evaluate academic preparation* for a

particular program (based on test results and supporting information), and *communicate* to the student information which will assist in formulation of a realistic academic/career goal.

Various activities are employed in assisting the counselor to develop these essential skills. Initially, a videotape presentation pertaining to the interpretation of the placement test profile summarizes the important issues to be considered when performing a test interpretation, including a review of the latest course placement recommendations relative to English, mathematics, chemistry, and other core disciplines. Next, each counselor is asked to complete an interview preparation sheet for the student described in a mock counseling folder. Then, each academic counselor presents to other counselors an evaluation of this student's academic preparation for a particular academic program. Through group interaction, counselors critique evaluations and summaries of counseling interviews. Another exercise includes the review of videotaped counseling interviews conducted during the counseling and advising program of the previous summer. The group outlines the positive and negative aspects of each interview and makes specific recommendations for improving the academic counseling process. Important resource materials concerning test interpretation, the academic counseling process, and course placement actions are provided to the academic counselor for future reference.

STRATEGIES TO MAXIMIZE PROGRAM IMPACT

As a result of participation in this intensive training program, the selected faculty members are well prepared to assist entering

freshmen in developing accurate expectations relative to entry into a program of study. Helping students to clarify academic/career goals by personalizing complex information on programs of study and student support services is a major task of the academic counselor (Kramer, Spencer, 1989). Various individual and group counseling activities should be employed to achieve the overall goal of the pre-entry program--beginning the academic and social integration (Tinto) of entering freshmen into the institution.

The faculty member trained and now experienced as an academic counselor is in an excellent position to make contributions that go beyond assisting students to develop realistic academic/ career goals. Strategies should be pursued to maximize the contributions of faculty members trained as academic counselors in the second stage of academic advisement. (All advising which occurs after the pre-enrollment counseling and advising program is considered to be the second stage of academic advisement.)

First, faculty trained as academic counselors should be employed as instructors in a freshman seminar. This seminar can be developed in content similar to the widely emulated University 101 of the University of South Carolina (Jeweler, 1989) to facilitate the effective transition of entering freshmen to college (Tinto). Ideally, entering freshmen should be assigned to the faculty member who served as their academic counselor in the pre-enrollment program. Therefore, continuity is established and academic progress can be more readily monitored since the counselor is already familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of specific entering freshmen.

Second, those faculty members who have served as academic counselors in the pre-enrollment counseling and advising program should be used as trainers of other faculty advisors. Since faculty members trained as academic counselors have acquired considerable knowledge and skill relative to the academic advisement process, they are in an excellent position to influence the development of effective advising among their peers. An in-service training program sponsored by these faculty will have both credibility and expertise essential for improvement of second stage academic advisement.

Third, the involvement of additional faculty members as academic counselors should be encouraged. There is a direct relationship between the number of faculty members involved and program impact. A rotation of interested faculty can be developed to permit each faculty member to function periodically as both academic counselor and freshman seminar instructor.

Fourth, statements of specific outcomes/objectives should be formulated for the total programmatic effort (Nichols, 1991). Whenever possible, the outcomes should be defined in terms of student and faculty behavioral changes and improvement in student retention rates. The involvement of faculty and staff in determining specific accountability measures is critical to program success.

Fifth, each year an in-depth analysis of the program's impact should be conducted through a comprehensive evaluation system which includes: analysis of retention rates for first-year students; student evaluations of the pre-enrollment counseling and advising program, the freshman year seminar and other key first-year courses; and, assessments of mentoring and academic advisement

effectiveness. The improvement of academic advising through formative evaluation (Scriven, 1970) is especially critical in light of the 1984 national survey of 4,500 undergraduates by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer, 1987) in which more than one-third stated that academic advising was "not very adequate" or they "never sought advising." An important evaluation research study (Shapiro, 1986) would be to compare the instructional and advising effectiveness of faculty trained as academic counselors with that of those faculty who have not had such training.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

New student counseling and advising programs as well as freshman seminars have traditionally focused assessment activities on student behavioral changes resulting from participation. Dependent variables have been operationally defined, usually in terms of impact on students (Rice, Keefer, Elam, 1991), in the following areas:

- *retention* (Avenoso, Bishop and Flynn, 1989; Bauska and Phibbs, 1989; Centner, 1985; Cuseo, 1991; Dunphy and DiGiorgio, 1985; Fidler, 1991; Lenning and Mohnkern, 1986; Pascarella, Terenzini and Wolfe, 1986; Rice, 1991; Rosenblatt and Vinson, 1987).
- *academic achievement* (Astolfi and McGillan, 1989; Chapman and Reed, 1987; Fidler and Hunter, 1989; Hopkins and Hahn, 1985; McKeachie, Pintrich, and Lin, 1985; McNairy, 1985; Upcraft and Gardner, 1989; Wilkie and KucKuck, 1989).

- *knowledge of the institution* (Carskadon, Goree, and McCarley, 1989; Cuyjet and Rode, 1987, Russell and Siers, 1984; Toscano, 1985)
- *attitudes toward college and faculty* (Fidler and Hunter, 1989; Lawson, 1983; Rice, 1990; Ragle and Krone, 1988; Thomas 1989; Upcraft and Gardner, 1989; Prola, Rosenberg and Wright, 1977)
- *involvement in extracurricular activities* (Astolfi and McGillan, 1989; Chapman and Reed, 1987; Cuyjet and Rode, 1987; Russell and Siers, 1984)
- *use of academic services* (Fidler and Hunter, 1989; Pascarella, Terenzini and Wolfe, 1986; Rice, 1990)
- *improvement of academic skills* (Hembree, 1988; Himelstein, 1983; Rice, 1984; Woodward, 1982)
- *personality factors* (Elfner, 1985; Holland and Huba, 1989; Martin and Dixon, 1989; Murray and Apilado; Twale, 1990)

The evaluation of orientation programs/courses and freshman seminars in terms of student behavioral change is obviously an important research domain and one which requires continuous study and refinement.

Another critical area of investigation and one which has been somewhat neglected (in comparison to student-centered research studies) is the impact of these programs on faculty members who serve as mentors and facilitators (Gardner, 1981); in this paper, they are termed academic counselors. A review of the literature (Rice, Keefer, Elam) reveals a paucity of research studies addressing the impact of orientation programs/courses and freshman seminars on

faculty participants. Specific areas to be investigated to assess faculty behavioral change include the following:

- perceptions of faculty about students attending their institution
- development of more student-centered focus (as opposed to strictly subject-matter focus)
- "humanizing" effect on faculty attitudes and behaviors
- initiation of more student-centered instructional strategies (e.g. small group activities; collaborative learning)
- effectiveness as academic advisor during academic year
- extent of impact for the long term (e.g. three to eight years after participation; longitudinal studies)
- student evaluations of courses after faculty participation (in comparison to student evaluations before faculty participation)
- instructional and advising effectiveness of faculty trained as academic counselors (in comparison to those faculty who did not have such training)
- quantity and quality of student/faculty involvement beyond the classroom setting
- influence on the way faculty relate to students in their "regular" courses

Evaluation Research Model

A well thought out and clearly defined evaluation research model is essential to the accurate assessment of the ten components or indices of faculty behavioral change resulting from training and service as an academic counselor. Ideally, a comprehensive program

evaluation system will include within its repertoire the following six evaluation designs (Fitz-Gibbon, Morris, 1987):

- True Control Group, Pretest-Posttest Design
- True Control Group, Posttest Only Design
- Non-Equivalent Control Group, Pretest-Posttest Design
- Single Group Time Series Design
- Time Series Design with a Non-Equivalent Control Group
- Before-and-After Design

Of course, the particular evaluation design(s) used will be determined by factors unique to the particular setting. The selected designs should also embrace both formative and summative evaluations.

Some possible applications of the six designs are briefly reviewed.

True Control Group, Pretest-Posttest Design

Faculty are randomly assigned to form two groups, one which will participate in the Counselor's Orientation Conference and serve as academic counselors and one group which will not participate in these activities. Pretest scores (e.g. perceptions of students, student-centered focus as opposed to subject-matter focus) will be used to determine if the two groups started at about the same point. If, at the conclusion of the program, the mean posttest for the experimental group is significantly higher than that of the control group, this difference can be attributed to the effect of the Counselors' Orientation Conference and service as academic counselor.

True Control Group, Posttest Only Design

This design is exactly like Design 1 except that no pretest is used. The random assignment of faculty to the experimental and control groups will result in equivalent groups. This design will be especially helpful when the measurements to be made are measurements of attitudes (e.g. perceptions of faculty about students, "humanizing" effect on faculty attitudes).

Non-Equivalent Control Group, Pretest-Posttest Design

Faculty are not randomly selected; therefore, the control group is not randomly assigned. This design should be used when the investigator must work with an intact faculty group who are assigned to this project rather than provided the opportunity to participate. The pretest permits a check on the similarity of the two groups, at least, with respect to the indice chosen.

Single Group Time Series Design

Faculty selected for the Counselors' Orientation Conference are used as their one control group. The same measurement (e.g. development of student-centered focus, influence on the way faculty relate to students, instructional and advising effectiveness) is made on the same faculty group at regular intervals several times before and several times after participation in the program. By determining if participation appears to influence the trend in the results, it can be determined whether or not the Counselors' Orientation Conference and service as academic counselor had an impact on the outcome measure chosen for review.

Time Series with a Non-Equivalent Control Group

This design is exactly like the previous design, except that a non-equivalent control group is added. For example, two groups of faculty are measured regularly before the Counselors' Orientation Conference and then one faculty group participates in the Conference, but the other does not or, instead, receives an alternative training program. The addition of a comparison group provides a stronger design in that the potential effect of an external or unrelated event can be taken into account.

Before-and-After Design

In this design, the faculty group selected to participate in the Counselors' Orientation Conference take a pretest before participation and posttest after participation (e.g. student evaluation of courses before and after participation in the program). The before-and-after design can be useful in formative evaluations focusing on the adequacy of implementation. However, this design is the least effective of all designs from a summative evaluation perspective since no comparative data is collected and analyzed, thus negating its value as a qualitative measure.

CONCLUSION

Collection and analysis of appropriate data will greatly enhance managerial decisions concerning modifications to the in-service training program for faculty trained as academic counselors, the *cornerstone* of the two primary stages of academic advisement for a college or university. A well organized and outcomes oriented training program, one component of a campus renewal through

quality assurance program (Bogue, Saunders, 1992), can do much to improve instructional, academic advisement, and mentoring effectiveness. Such a program sensitizes faculty to the unique qualities and needs of entering freshmen, thus enhancing their contribution to student retention in an era of increasingly diverse student populations.

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