

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 485

CG 031 045

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TITLE But You Teach Chemistry, How Can You Advise Me at
Orientation?
PUB DATE 2001-03-00
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the
National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
(Seattle, WA, March 17-21, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; *College Faculty; *College Freshmen;
Fast Track Scheduling; Higher Education; Models;
Orientation; Student Needs; Student Personnel Services;
*Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS University of Florida

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews a model of using teaching faculty as academic advisors during freshman orientation at the University of Florida. This way of hiring and training faculty members provides: student-faculty contact; accurate information and scheduling; fairness and accessibility of course seats; and the ability to manage academic advising during freshman orientation at a large public university. The goal of this model is to have students on track for the Universal Tracking program and the model achieves more than 98% accuracy rate with its new students. Detailed information is provided on the entire orientation advising program so that orientation directors, academic advisors, and other enrollment management professionals will be able to follow the model. (Contains 13 references.) (JDM)

But You Teach Chemistry, How Can You Advise Me at Orientation?
By Jeanna M. Mastrodicasa

Abstract

This paper reviews a model of using teaching faculty as academic advisors during freshman orientation at the University of Florida (UF), a large public research university. By hiring and training the faculty members for this purpose, UF provides student-faculty contact, accurate information and scheduling, fairness and accessibility of course seats, and the ability to manage academic advising during freshman orientation at a large public university. The goal of this model is to have the students be on-track for UF's Universal Tracking program, and the model achieves more than 98% accuracy rate with its new students.

The entire orientation advising program is explained in detail in this paper, so that orientation directors, academic advisors, and other enrollment management professionals would be able to follow the model of orientation and its advising at UF. There are numerous ways to incorporate portions of this model to any type of institution, whether it is the method to save and release seats, hiring and training faculty to give out the academic information and to perform academic advising, or for utilizing Universal Tracking.

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But You Teach Chemistry, How Can You Advise Me At Orientation?

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Paper presented at the national meeting of the National Association of Student
Personnel Administrators, Seattle, Washington, March 2001

Introduction

In the summer, freshman orientation programs utilize numerous campus resources, including academic advisors, to prepare its incoming new students. This paper will describe the model of using teaching faculty, rather than professional academic advisors, as advisors during freshman orientation at the University of Florida (UF), and will cover the advantages and limitations of the advising model. This author has served previously as the Assistant Dean of Students for Orientation as well as an academic advisor in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Academic Advising Center, which have provided opportunities to manage this model both within student affairs as well as academic affairs. This paper would be useful for orientation directors, academic advisors, and enrollment management professionals in addition to other student affairs and academic affairs administrators who work with new student orientation, particularly at large institutions.

The University of Florida

The University of Florida, a Research I institution, is located in north central Florida in Gainesville, and has a total student body of more than 45,000 as of Fall 2000. 32,680 students are undergraduates, and the average freshman class consists of approximately 6,100 as a target number. UF had the sixth largest student enrollment of all U.S. universities in Fall 1999. A member of the American Association of Universities, UF consistently ranks in the top five public universities for their number of National Merit Scholars and National Achievement Scholars (UF Facts, 2001).

A large number of students are admitted to the Summer B class, which begins in early July. The target enrollment for the Summer B freshman class is approximately 2,400, and the middle 50% of the 2000 class has a high school GPA of 3.2-3.7, with a SAT score of 1050-1220

or ACT of 22-27. The larger portion of the freshman class is admitted into the Fall class for a target enrollment of 3,600. The middle 50% has a GPA of a 3.6-4.2, and an SAT score of 1190-1360 or ACT of 26-29 (Admissions Profiles, 2000). The University Honors Program aims for a target of 925 students and admits students with a 3.9 GPA and SAT score of 1350 or higher, or ACT composite score of 30 (Honors Program, 2000). All of the high school GPA's are weighted according to a formula used by the admissions office (Admissions Profiles, 2000).

The Florida legislature and Board of Regents have historically been very active in its oversight of the state universities, particularly the state's flagship university, the University of Florida. In February 2000, the governor signed an executive order creating the One Florida plan for public colleges and universities, eliminating the use of race as a factor in college admissions (Selingo, 2000). This major change in procedure, valid for the entering class of Summer B 2001, had a large impact on the enrollment in Summer B and Fall 2000 (Dassler, 2001). The unexpectedly large freshman class in 2000 tested the constraints and reinforced the validity of the model of using teaching faculty as advisors in freshman orientation.

The academic structure of the University of Florida plays a major part in the use of this model. In 1996, UF adopted a program called Universal Tracking, which consists of three components: tracking, improved advising, and guaranteed core classes. The goal of Universal Tracking is to retain and admit more students while reducing excess credit hours. Since students are admitted directly to any undergraduate major of their choice as freshmen, students are responsible for ensuring that they can remain in that major. Students can select one of three undecided majors at this point, but must choose another major before advance registration for their fourth semester (Office of Institutional Research, 1998a).

An on-line degree audit and undergraduate catalog provide a recommended semester-by-semester plan for requirements that should be completed each term for each major, and the audit compares their academic records to the minimal requirements that must have been met by that term: “critical tracking criteria.” Students who do not meet those criteria are considered “off-track,” receive a registration hold and must see an advisor to create a plan to be on-track by the end of the next semester. Students who are off-track twice consecutively must change their major to one where they do meet the critical tracking criteria. Students are only tracked after fall and spring; summers provide a chance to catch up with the appropriate criteria before fall, and do not increment a tracking term (Office of Institutional Research, 1998a).

In order to assist the new students in selecting their courses, students are given a copy of the undergraduate catalog, the schedule of courses, and a workbook of planning materials as they check in to the freshman orientation program, Preview.

Preview, UF’s freshman orientation program

Preview is a two-day orientation program with 22 sessions, which include two final sessions held immediately before classes begin in Summer B and Fall. Preview is mandatory for freshmen, utilizing a registration hold to require attendance in order to register for classes. These holds are only accessible to a limited set of advisors for summer. The program is the responsibility of the Dean of Students Office, within the Division of Student Affairs (Mastrodicasa, 1998).

One of the more striking components of Preview is its length, beginning approximately May 17 and ending July 20, with essentially back-to-back dates for three months. Three weeks during the summer contain three sessions beginning on Sunday, with the remainder of the weeks containing two sessions. The first day is very full with approximately 13 hours of programming;

the second day is advising and registration. There are two main academic components on Day 1 which utilize teaching faculty: a 90-minute presentation about academic requirements and creating a schedule in the morning to a small group of 15 or less, and a scheduling session in the small group for an additional 75 minutes in the afternoon. Undergraduate students serving as orientation leaders assist with the same small groups and with schedules throughout the day and evening. On the second day, the student meets one-on-one with the same teaching faculty advisor and prepares and registers for a schedule. College advisors and representatives are only involved in making presentations about their fields of study between the two meetings with the faculty advisor (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

In order to maximize the advising model, Preview must manage the session enrollments to allow for the groups to remain at 15 or less, and to provide each of the faculty advisors with a group of students. For Summer B admits (Preview I), there are nine sessions with twenty-one groups per session for the general student body. The cap limits are set forth by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Academic Advising Center (AAC), which manages the advising portion of Preview. The Preview I students register for both Summer B and Fall courses, and have a general cap of 255 students. For Fall admits (Preview II), there are thirteen sessions with seventeen groups, with a cap of 273 students. Preview II students register for Fall courses. For both Preview I and Preview II, there are additional students not counted in the general cap who are advised by special advisors from these programs: Achievement In Mainstreaming (AIM) students begin in Summer B only and are capped at 50 per session; Honors students can begin in either term, but are capped at 80 for Preview II and have no cap for Preview I. There is an average total attendance per session of 289 students (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Students are assigned their advising appointments for Day 2 without any regard to the discipline of the faculty advisor or intended major of the student. Informal studies done in Preview have confirmed that freshmen change their minds about their majors, even up to 20% changing the college which houses their majors (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001). Gelso and Sims found as early as 1968 that assigning advisors on the basis of intended major would be inefficient and perhaps harmful for those reasons. By assuming a high frequency of major change and that advisors are trained to assist in planning schedules for any of UF's majors, Preview does not have to spend time correlating the specialty with the advisor.

Academic Advising with Teaching Faculty

UF's orientation advising reinforces the opportunity of having its teaching faculty work directly with new students by working within small groups at a large public institution. Tinto (1999) has conducted numerous studies which show that the promotion of a stronger educational community among students, faculty, and staff results in greater student persistence. In addition, the first year of college should include connected learning experiences (Tinto, 1999).

By presenting university and state requirements to the new students, while also discussing transition issues from the high school to college, the faculty members help to personalize a large public university. Keeping in mind that students are more likely to persist and graduate when they have received clear and consistent information about institutional requirements, the presentation gives information about resources to assist students in achieving those goals (Tinto, 1999).

On Day 2, the faculty members then have individual appointments with their group members from Day 1 where faculty reviews the student's proposed schedule and checks to see if seats are available in the selected sections. Once the faculty member has completed the

academic advising session, the student then registers herself on the on-line registration system, Integrated Student Information System (ISIS) in the specially-created computer lab in the same building (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

ISIS can be accessed by the student before and after the Preview session, but a Preview registration hold is not lifted until the student attends Preview. Other uses for ISIS for the new student include checking admissions status, if the immunization requirement has been met, as well as adjusting the schedule. One screen in ISIS is accessible only to advisors, allows them to make comments about the student's recommended schedule. If students choose to make poor decisions about changing the recommended schedule after leaving Preview, the recommended schedule appears on the comments screen (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Enrollment Management and Shared Responsibility

Numerous divisions share the responsibility for various aspects of Preview. The Dean of Students Office makes all the arrangements for Day 1's space, placement exams, and manages the enrollment caps for each session. The general Preview budget is managed by the Dean of Students Office, and consists of the fees charged to the attendees of Preview. Since approximately 98% of the students who attend Preview actually enroll at UF, Preview's enrollment numbers are very accurate and are utilized by the Enrollment Management Committee, which is managed by the Office of the Provost and the Division of Academic Affairs (L.B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

The Provost's Office financially supports the advising portion of Preview, which means the funds which pay for the salaries for the teaching faculty who advise in the summer. In addition, the Provost's Office provides leadership in enrollment issues, academic requirements,

and the college sessions. Under the Provost's guidance, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Academic Advising Center manages the Preview advising program, including hiring and training the faculty advisors, reserving facilities for Day 2, determining the allocation of course seats, and coordinating and supervising the faculty advising for students. Finally, the Office of the University Registrar and its subset, the Office of Admissions, produces the data of admitted students and works with the distribution of course seats during Preview. The building that houses the Academic Advising Center is shared with the University Athletic Association's Office of Student Life, and the rooms used for tutoring and study rooms for student-athletes during the academic year are used during the summer for Preview advising and registration (L.B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Essential to this advising model is the method of saving course seats for new students that are released equally throughout each session of the orientation program despite the large student population. As a crucial component of Universal Tracking, having critical tracking courses guaranteed to students allows for students to feel comfortable coming to a later session of Preview without the fear of all the classes being taken. However, constant monitoring and evaluation are necessary to allow students with afternoon advising appointments to register for courses, and to see if it is likely that a course may run out of seats before the end of the summer. If so, the departments are required to open another section of the course. Although seats are saved also in other non-tracking general education courses that are popular with freshmen, once those general education electives are full no new seats are sought (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

The Academic Advising Center uses data obtained from the Office of the University Registrar to assess the previous summer's course demand, including the actual course

registration and the number of failed attempts to register for those courses. Note that only the seats, not the times, in the courses are guaranteed; if the student has access to a chemistry course that only has seats at 7:25 a.m. remaining, no additional seats are sought (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Hiring and Training the Faculty Advisors

The CLAS Academic Advising Center is given the charge by the Office of the Provost to manage the Preview advising program. Historically, the AAC was the home to all lower-division advising, when students would apply to be in their major and college after two years. Although their mission has evolved over time with various administrations, the AAC is still the advising center for undecided students.

Faculty are invited to apply for Preview advising positions in January, and they submit a written application. New faculty are interviewed by the CLAS advising staff, who look for interpersonal skills and attempt to ensure diversity with disciplines, backgrounds, and experiences (Mastrodicasa, 1998).

A budget is given each year from the Office of the Provost of approximately \$212,000. All of the summer salaries are paid out of this sum. The nine-month faculty members are paid according to .76 or .50 of their biweekly salary, depending on if they choose to work 40 additional hours during the academic year as an advisor for their departments (and would be paid the higher .76 amount). Since the amount that is paid to the advisor varies according to their current biweekly salary, the actual number of advisors varies with the amount that can be used for their salaries. The few individuals on a 12-month contract do not receive a stipend, but are allowed some funds towards professional development. A good analogy for this process is the salary cap used by professional sports teams, who must figure out who they can hire with a

limited amount. Faculty members are sometimes asked to only take .50 of their salary because they would simply be too expensive to hire (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Faculty advisors are trained by professional academic advisors from CLAS beginning after Spring Break in March until mid-May, with two tracks of training for five to six weeks. New advisors attend two two-hour sessions per week, while veteran advisors attend one per week; both sessions are repeated once and are also videotaped for those who must miss the session (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001). Ryan (1995) found that in order for faculty advisors to perform effectively, their training must include (1) a conceptual understanding of student development and of the advising process; (2) institutional and curricular information; and (3) relational skills and knowledge to create a welcoming, nonjudgmental atmosphere for students.

As such, new advisors receive training in one-on-one advising skills, university requirements, building a schedule, basics about the student records system, and do role playing with veteran and professional advisors. In addition, new advisors join veteran advisors in sessions about freshmen transition issues, Universal Tracking, pre-med and pre-law information, a review of university requirements, placement guidelines, a panel of college representatives who discuss their college and major requirements, and using ISIS for advising purposes. At the end, a final review is held right before Preview begins (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Challenges of the Preview Advising Program

One of the largest challenges about working with orientation advising at UF is the high quality of the student body, combined with the popularity of Advanced Placement, International

Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment credits with its incoming freshmen. Although students are allowed to bring in a maximum of 30 hours of test credits (no limit on dual enrollment credits from a local college), often it is difficult to prepare an appropriate schedule for freshmen who have so many general education and basic requirements met. In addition, seats are not saved for most upper-level classes (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Since the vast majority of Preview sessions are held before any AP or IB test results are released for the tests taken in late May, students are asked to predict their score on their AP and IB exams and to assume the relevant credit as shown in charts in the undergraduate catalog. It is the student's responsibility to make an appropriate adjustment if she or he predicted incorrectly before classes begin. These predictions are used for course placement with sequential courses; for example, if the student predicts credit for Calculus 1 (MAC 2311), the advisor will override the prerequisite in the student registration system and allow the student to register for Calculus 2 (MAC 2312). If the scores come in July and the student earned too low of a score on the exam, the student needs to adjust down to Calculus 1 (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

The students' selection of majors has a tremendous impact on the entire process. Generally, new freshmen choose about 20 of the most popular majors and rarely stray from those into any of the more obscure or majors which are considered "found" at a later time. Trends in major choices are sometimes unforeseen and may have correlations with pop culture influences. Currently, more than half of the freshmen at the University of Florida consider themselves pre-med or pre-law, but a recent increased interest in pharmacy, pre-med, and engineering has put a strain on seats in General Chemistry (CHM 2045) over the past few years. In addition, the major

of Architecture has seen a large gain in student enrollment and has had to create studio classes and space as a result (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Another challenge is the frequent change of requirements and priorities by the various departments, including placement requirements, major critical tracking criteria, and other such policies. Every year has included some change, so the information requires constant updating and communication with advisors (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Other challenges revolve around the faculty advisors themselves. Creating and preparing the necessary training for the 45 faculty members requires great resources of a busy advising center. Tedious detail is needed to work out the schedules for training and the sessions as well as preparing the financial information, budget, and individual contracts with Academic Affairs. In addition, evaluations of the faculty presentations and advising sessions are conducted all summer to provide quality control and feedback. Finally, the faculty members must be students again and can be a bit challenging as learners (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Testing the Constraints of Preview Advising in Summer 2000

The new student enrollment jumped considerably in 2000, with a final freshman enrollment of 6,952, up from 6,410 in 1999 (Office of Institutional Research, 2001). Preview records indicate that 7,135 attended Preview. Overall, the student body count increased to 46,107 from 44,276 between 1999 and 2000 (UF Facts, 2001). This unexpected increase in student enrollment was similar to other major public flagship institutions in California and Texas, in the "Year 0," the year before the elimination of affirmative action in admission decisions (Dassler, 2001). Regardless, UF was unprepared for the large increase in students who

chose to enroll over the past two years, and did not anticipate the enrollment (Miller and Lockette, 2000).

As Preview continued to enroll students for orientation at an incredibly fast pace in March and April 2000, the reality that the University of Florida would be over-enrolled beyond the 6200 freshman target became obvious in late spring. As a result, courses were created in expected tracking courses before Preview began, but the seats were watched very closely. New sections had to be created as the summer went on as seats ran totally out, and limitations on classroom space on campus made it challenging for Enrollment Management (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Having enough faculty advisors and rooms in the student union were also large challenges for Summer 2000. The AAC used every possibility to ensure that enough advisors were there, and rooms were secured from offices in the Reitz Union that are normally not available. Preview had to keep a very close watch on the enrollment and cap limitations for each session, and essentially spread out the maximum number of students for each session. When those limits were reached, the AAC had to go out and find more advisors, and some advisors shared some of the larger rooms (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Assessment and Accountability

The desired outcome by the University of Florida orientation advising program is having its students be on-track when they are advised and registered for fall. By analyzing initial tracking results immediately after orientation, the University of Florida has more than 98% of its students on-track after orientation (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001). The AAC then conducts a preliminary review of the course schedules of those who do seem to be off track, and compare the course registration to the comments written by the faculty advisor

on the student's record. Most frequently, there is an obvious reason why the student is off-track at this early stage; often, college credits are not yet posted from AP, IB, or dual enrollment but once they are, the student will then be considered on-track. Sometimes the student registers for courses against the advisor's advice or changes the schedule after receiving other advice from a sibling or family member. This review ensures accountability for the advisor as well as quality control for the AAC (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

One indirect goal of the Preview advising program is to provide contact for the new student with teaching faculty. The large public research university is frequently accused of being impersonal in such situations, but the small groups and the focus on academics throughout the orientation program reinforces priorities and direction necessary for continued success as a student at UF. Another indirect goal is to present comprehensive academic requirement information to the students in a clear and concise manner, which the faculty do (Mastrodicasa, 1998).

Overall, Preview as a comprehensive orientation program receives incredibly high levels of student and family satisfaction. More than 95% of the students agree or strongly agree that the "academic advising session was useful" every year in the general Preview evaluations given to students (L. B. O'Sickey, personal communication, March 9, 2001).

Conclusion

The advising model of using teaching faculty as academic advisors provides student-faculty contact, accurate information and scheduling, fairness and accessibility of course seats, and the ability to manage academic advising during freshman orientation at a large public university. There are numerous ways to incorporate portions of this model to any type of institution, whether it is the method to save and release seats, hiring faculty to give out the

academic information and to perform academic advising, or for utilizing Universal Tracking.

The unexpected increase in enrollment for summer/fall 2000 reinforced the validity of this model and its usefulness despite the large numbers. Overall, this model provides one way for large public institutions to reassure students that they will be advised accurately as well as register for required courses, as well give them faculty contact before they enroll in college.

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