# Training Future Academic Advisors: One Model of a Pre-Service Approach

*Virginia N. Gordon, The Ohio State University*

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One of the most important components of an effective advising program is *well*-trained academic advisors. Traditionally, we think of training advisors *after* they are working as faculty or full-time professional staff. An ongoing, well-conceived training program can provide the continuity, broad base of knowledge, skills, and specific information crucial to sound advising.

Another approach to training is to offer *future* faculty, student personnel staff, higher education administrators, or professional counselors opportunity to study advising as subject matter while still enrolled in their graduate programs. Both the traditional and pre-service approaches could address the same basic issues and content area. While recognizing the uniqueness of each institution's advising system, some of these topics might include an introduction to student and career development theory and practice, organizational systems in which advisors function, advising skills and techniques, and methods for self and program evaluation.[1]

Dressel[2] discusses the importance of student advising and the limited view that many faculty hold regarding their responsibility in this area. Advising is a complex process, and though many practicing advisors recognize this, few systematically work at improving their own advising skills. Some advisors are never formally expected to learn how to advise on their own. When a formal training program is offered, it is often the newly appointed advisor's first exposure to the intricacies of the advising process.[3,4]

When we consider these factors, a pre-service course approach includes many advantages. It can provide an understanding of general advising purposes, policies, and procedures. It can foster positive attitudes and enthusiasm for advising as a process and as a professional activity. It exposes the myths and mysteries of advising, thus allowing future advisors to build the confidence they need for future responsibilities.

A graduate-level course of this kind has been taught at The Ohio State University for over fifteen years. It was created originally to teach master's-level students in the Student Personnel Program about advising as a process and as a professional career. Although the pragmatic focus of the course has remained unchanged through the years, the type of students enrolling has become more diverse. Typical enrollments now include students from many graduate programs in addition to student personnel, e.g., higher education administration, guidance and counseling, psychology, education, history, biology, English, and other academic disciplines. Occasionally a faculty member has enrolled in the course. Students receive two credit hours for the course (one academic quarter in length). The following description of The Ohio State course includes objectives, content, materials, and course requirements.

## Course Objectives

We could have approached the graduate-level course in two ways: a broad introduction to academic advising or an in-depth treatment of a few specific topics. We chose the first approach since we wanted to provide a sound foundation for students whose future professional responsibilities might lie in this area. We reasoned that detailed aspects of advising are learned best in specific academic environments. The objectives for the course are conveyed clearly to students at the outset. Students' reasons for enrolling are solicited, and their interest and needs are incorporated in the curriculum when possible.

The course content was chosen on the basis of the following objectives:

1. To provide a general introduction to academic advising from historical, philosophical, and practical perspectives;
2. To acquaint students with a variety of advising delivery systems, advising skills and techniques, and practical perspectives;
3. To familiarize students with academic advising literature and to apply what they read to practical assignments.

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## Course Content

The first class segment introduces students to advising as an integral part of higher education. The historical roots of academic advising are examined, and its endurance is attributed to the vital part it plays in fulfilling college students' needs and expectations. Many definitions of advising are proffered, and students are encouraged to talk about their own experiences and impressions of advising. Philosophical and theoretical underpinnings also are advanced. Student and career development theories are related to the advising process. Through this general introduction, students gain appreciation for advising as a legitimate and important function.

The second segment of the course introduces students to a variety of organizational models and delivery systems. The strengths and limitations of each type are discussed. The systems described include faculty advising, computer-assisted, group, self-advising, peer, and paraprofessional. The Advising Center concept is introduced as a new and effective vehicle for integrating many resources. Faculty advising, full-time professional advising, and peer advising are demonstrated by bringing people serving in these capacities into the classroom. Advisors working with these systems on a daily basis describe their organization, policies, information systems, type of administrative support, referral systems, in-service training, and evaluation methods. Students are able to compare and contrast different delivery systems through this personal contact as well as through a variety of reading assignments. Since the final assignment for the course is to design an advising program, these sessions provide substantial practical information.

A third segment of the course introduces advising techniques, skills, and resources necessary to effective advising. Communication skills are demonstrated through simulated advisor interviews. This segment builds on skills students already possess but specifically relate to the advising relationship. Samples of advising materials are distributed in class so that students can examine actual advising resources, including handbooks, manuals, curriculum sheets, etc. The interaction and reliance of advisors on other campus resources are discussed.

Another class focuses on advising special populations. A panel of advisors working with minority, disabled, honors, and adult students is invited into the class to discuss the special techniques and resources needed to advise these unique groups. Students in academic difficulty also are profiled, and the special services needed to advise them are discussed.

Career advising receives special attention in the course since advisors are involved in frequently helping students make educational and vocational decisions. Life and career decision-making models are outlined, and students participate in activities designed to introduce them to the advisor's role and responsibility in this important process.

Several class sessions include in-class presentations by students. Students receive a list of suggested topics to research for these presentations (see Table 1).

For example, a faculty advisor from science enrolled in this course elected to study

**Table 1.** Suggested advising topics for class presentations

- Administrative Models for Advising
- Advising Skills/Techniques
- Peer Advising
- Residence Hall Advising
- Faculty Advising
- Advising Academically Deficient Students
- Advisor Training
- Advising for the Future
- Career Advising
- Legal Issues in Advising
- Advising the Liberal Arts Student
- Advisor Burnout
- Advising and Decision Making
- The Advising Interview
- Advising Theory
- Advising Special Students: Minority, Adult, International, Disabled, etc.
- Advisor Evaluation
- Computer-Assisted Advising
- Developmental Advising
- Advising the Undecided Student
- Advising for Job Placement
- Counseling vs. Advising
- Advising in New Student Orientation
- Communication Techniques in Advising
- Advising Materials—Handbooks, Manuals, Curricular Sheets, etc.
- Advisor In-Service Needs
- Philosophy of Advising
- Advising Centers
- Freshman Advising Courses
- Advising Athletes
- Advising as a Professional Career

communication skills, an area he considered weak in his advising. He was amazed at the techniques he learned through this research. He has since adopted many of these in his daily relations with advisees. Another student discussed the special techniques required to advise professional graduate students. Through these class presentations, students study one aspect of advising in depth and then share this information with their classmates. Students are required to provide each class member with an outline of information and a list of references on the topic they present.

Other topics discussed in the course include computer-assisted advising, freshman advising courses, evaluation, and research (if not covered earlier in class presentations). The final class treats those topics students themselves consider important to discuss.

## Course Requirements

Course requirements are designed to involve students in academic advising literature so that they may be exposed to the subjects' complexities and diversity.

The course text is T. J. Grites, *Academic Advising: Getting Us Through the Eighties*.[5] The instructor provides a comprehensive bibliography and places other related materials on closed reserve in the library. These include D. S. Crockett (Eds.), *Academic Advising: A Resource Document*,[6] T. B. Winston (Eds.), *New Directions in Student Services: Developmental Approaches to Academic Advising*,[7] and a complete set of issues of *NACADA Journal*.

Interview assignments are shared in class and provide valuable and varied insights into both student and advisor perceptions of their responsibilities and needs. The final assignment helps students to focus their learning by requiring them to design an advising program incorporating the essential components of a total advising system.

## Evaluation

Evaluations of the course are solicited during the final class session. Students are asked for their reactions to the course content, materials, value of assignments, and instructor's performance. They are asked for suggestions about additions or deletions to the course content.

Overall, evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive. Students believe they have learned much about academic advising in a short period. Both the class presentations and the final assignment rated as the most useful course requirements. Students believe the research required for these activities provided a significant learning experience.

Most students considered the content appropriate and advised that no topics be omitted. Both students and instructor have expressed frustration at the rapid pace of the course and the lack of time to discuss certain topics in depth. Some students have suggested offering an additional course to concentrate on administrative aspects of advising. Others have suggested adding a practicum component as well.

Since class size has increased every year, students are recommending the course to other students. We hope that this indicates that some graduate students are convinced that advising experience is not only important but also marketable.

## Discussion

A graduate-level course in academic advising apparently is an efficient method for training future advisors. Students completing this course in the past have written later about the value of the course to them professionally. One history faculty member, for example, claims he obtained his faculty position because of his knowledge of advising. Student personnel workers currently employed in advising positions have found the information and materials in the course relevant.

The advising profession needs to encourage academic departments in higher education, student personnel, and related areas to offer graduate-level courses in advising at their institutions. If we could encourage graduate students from many disciplines to enroll in such courses, we might build eventually a pool of enthusiastic, committed, informed faculty advisors. We would also prepare more student personnel and counseling professionals for entry-level positions as advisors. When taught at the graduate level, advising becomes a legitimate and important part of higher education. The Ohio State University experience suggests that the pre-service approach to training academic advisors is an idea worth pursuing on a national scale.[*]

[*] A roundtable discussion at the *Fifth National Conference* of *NACADA* at Indianapolis provided a stimulating exchange of ideas on curriculum and teaching methods for graduate-level advising courses. Examples of universities currently offering advising courses are The Ohio State University, Southern Illinois University, Bowling Green State University, and Oklahoma State University.

**Figure 1.** Academic advising course requirements

1. Interview an academic advisor on campus. Include work setting and type of student he/she advises, organizational context, advisor's philosophy of advising, level of satisfaction, and rewards from the work. Suggested length, 2 pages.
   Due: Value: 5%
2. Interview an undergraduate student. Include his/her class rank and major. Describe the student's needs in academic advising, what the student is receiving, and the student's evaluation of services received. Ask the student to describe the ideal academic advisor. Suggested length, 2 pages.
   Due: Value: 5%
3. Review critically three articles on academic advising (articles may be chosen from the bibliography handed out in class or others you find). Suggested length, 2 pages each.
   Due: Value: 15%
4. Present in class an issue or topic on academic advising. Research one area of academic advising and report results to class. Issues may be taken from list handed out in class or a topic you find interesting. Provide class an outline of your presentation and a list of references on the topic. Suggested length of presentation: one-half hour.
   Due: Value: 25%
5. Final paper: Design an academic advising program for a university, college, or department. Describe the necessary conditions for an effective program in that context. Include within the design institutional policy, administrative support, delivery system(s), informational systems, integrated referral system, frequency of contact and advisor load, in-service training, evaluation, and research components. Suggested length, 7–10 pages.
   Due: Value: 50%

## References


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