

# A Comparison of Developmental Advising at Two Small Colleges

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*Students' perceptions of advising styles at two small colleges were measured. Although students reported developmental advising at both institutions, the mean score at one college was significantly more developmental than the other.*

Greenwood (1984) describes academic advising as "one of the most important and influential components of a higher education institution . . . [having] the capacity to become a primary integrating factor that brings students, faculty, . . . and curriculum together into a truly meaningful educational whole" (p. 64). Crookston (1972) defines developmental academic advising as being designed to have the effect that Greenwood describes. The developmental advisor views the student as a self-directed learner and strives to transfer responsibility for academic planning to the student while helping the student develop decision-making and problem-solving skills. The advisor does not answer questions routinely but directs the student to proper resources (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982). Because of its problem-solving nature, the benefits of developmental advising go beyond those that can be expected in a non-developmental advising relationship. Even though the student and the advisor actually spend little time together, the student is engaged in activities recommended by the advisor to enhance individual thinking skills (Thomas & Chickering, 1984).

In contrast Crookston (1972) defines non-developmental, or prescriptive, advising as a relationship in which the student is closely supervised. The advisor focuses on the student's limitations and takes initiative to fulfill requirements. Long-term educational planning is not a central goal of prescriptive advising, nor is the acquisition of problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Despite the conceptual work of Crookston and others (e.g., Gordon, 1988; Grites, 1979; Habley, 1981; Hardee, 1961; and Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, & Associates, 1984), reviews and surveys find that students are dissatisfied with advising services (Boyer, 1987; McLaughlin & Starr, 1982; Winston & Sandor, 1984b). As-

tin, Korn, and Green (1987) report that after two years 52% of the respondents in the American Council on Education-University of California at Los Angeles Cooperative Institutional Research Program were least satisfied with academic advising as one of the personal services offered by colleges and universities. The authors express particular concern for the low rating because they identify advising as the principal tool for involving students in their studies.

Developmental advising receives attention in the literature, in student personnel and higher education graduate programs (Goetz & White, 1986; Grites, 1989), and in planning and policy arenas (Gordon, 1982; Grites, 1989), but is the concept built into campus advising programs? If so, what aspects of these programs are transferable to other institutions? To explore these questions, students' perceptions of academic advising at two colleges were investigated. Respondents were assessed at the ends of their respective extended advising periods to determine their perceptions of advising style. Although both groups reported that they were developmentally advised, College B scores were significantly more developmental than College A scores.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

All freshmen under the age of twenty at two women's colleges participated in the research (College A,  $n = 127$ ; College B,  $n = 140$ ). Older freshmen were excluded to control for exposure to previous postsecondary academic advising. Institution-reported Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for College A were  $M = 1073.20$  and for College B were  $M = 796.04$ . In addition to SAT scores, student-reported variables of high school grade point average, parents' combined income, previous college experience, residential/commuting status, and full-time/part-time status were tested for a possibly significant relationship to developmental advising score. Although College A and College B students differed significantly on high



**TABLE 1**  
**A Comparison of Advising Programs at College A and College B**

	College A	College B
Advising Director	Associate Academic Dean	Faculty Director
Student participation	Required	Required
Length of advising program	One semester 15 weeks	Two Quarters 20 weeks
Number of faculty advisors	36	9
Description of delivery system	Group and individual meetings with faculty advisors. In addition 12 of the 36 advisors meet with students in focal clusters.	Group meetings with faculty advisors.
Size of advising groups	3 - 8	12 - 20
Number of group meetings	2*	20
Faculty training	Prior to fall semester 1½ days 2 hours	Prior to fall quarter
Planning	Done in fall by faculty advisors and associate dean	Done the previous spring; joint effort of director and advisors
Topics of discussion advising groups	Academic orientation, study skills, college catalog, course selection procedure, exam orientation	Orientation to college time management, course planning, registration, career planning, goal setting, four year academic plan

\*College A students also met nine times with faculty focal cluster leaders who may or may not have been their faculty advisors.

My advisor and I plan my schedule together.

E-----F-----G-----H  
slightly very  
true true

(Winston & Sandor, 1984a, p. 1).

DPA items concern such topics as selection of appropriate courses, vocational decision making, outside-of-class activities, time management, choice of major, identification of realistic academic goals, and academic planning (Winston & Sandor, 1984a). Table 2 describes prescriptive and developmental ranges and topics of specific items of the DPA Scale.

**Results**

Table 3 displays mean scores, standard devia-

tions, and t test results for the developmental-prescriptive advising scale. **Although** mean scores of both colleges are well within the developmental range, the College B mean of 79.02 is significantly higher than the College A mean of 71.92 ( $t(202) = -3.96, p < .001$ ). Only 13 College A and 7 College B students reported prescriptive advising.

**Discussion**

Findings offer practitioners and researchers insight from two perspectives. Because students from both colleges report developmental advising, the practices the colleges have in common warrant consideration. And because College B scores are significantly more developmental than College A scores, differences are also important.

**TABLE 2**  
**Description of the DPA Scale of the Academic Advising Inventory**

Number of Items	14
Type of Response	Students choose a prescriptive or a developmental response to each item and indicate their degree of agreement within a 4-point scale for the prescriptive choice (1-4) or the developmental choice (5-8).
Scoring	Prescriptive Range (14 questions × 1 through 4) <b>14 - 56</b> Developmental Response (14 questions × 5 through 8) <b>57 - 112</b>
Topics of the scale	Learning about programs and courses Vocational opportunities Interest in <b>outside</b> activities Realistic academic goals Help with other-than-academic problems <b>Time</b> management Class registration Choice of major Academic progress Identification of alternatives in decision-making Class schedules Grades and test scores

Both student groups recorded developmental scores that seem contrary to national survey results. Astin et al. (1987) and Boyer (1987) report that college students are not satisfied with advising services and are not involved in their own educational planning. In contrast, scores at College A and College B seem to indicate that students are being encouraged to participate in the advising process and to accept responsibility for their academic futures. What are some similarities that could influence these results?

A number of common characteristics exist outside the advising programs. Both small, primarily residential, women's colleges are dedicated to undergraduate teaching. They offer a controlled freshman curriculum **taught** by fewer professors than that offered on larger, more diverse campuses. Frequent faculty-student contact both in small instructional groups and informal out-of-class gatherings is pervasive. Group means of **70.92** and **79.02** respectively on the developmental-prescriptive scale of the advising inventory lead to speculation that College A and College B students perceive developmental advising to be part of the total college experience.

In examining the details of the two advising delivery systems, we find potentially important differences. Although both colleges require each freshman to participate in extended advising programs staffed by faculty advisors, students at College A are assigned to an advisor on the basis of stated academic preference. College B students are assigned to an advisor on the basis of residence area.

Perhaps the most important differences in the advising programs are the frequency of contact with the academic advisor and the inclusion of an academic planning component in the College B advising program. College A students met with their advisors at least 2 times during

**TABLE 3**  
**Relationship between College A  
and College B DPA Scores**

	Mean	S.D.	t
College A	<b>70.91</b>	<b>14.48</b>	<b>-3.96***</b>
College B	<b>79.02</b>	<b>14.32</b>	

\*\*\*p < .001

the 15-week semester. They met 9 more times in focal clusters with a faculty member who may or may not have been their advisor. Although these students reported that they were developmentally advised, discussions included topics usually associated with prescriptive advising, namely, introduction to the catalog and course selection procedures. In contrast, College B students saw their advisors in planned group meetings 20 times during the 20-week sequence and participated in activities deliberately constructed to teach problem-solving skills. During the fall College B freshmen planned their courses of study for the following quarter, participated in career-planning activities, and then constructed a four-year academic plan. They subsequently reported a significantly higher level of developmental advising.

Although generalization is limited by the selection of students from small, single-sex colleges as participants, results may be valuable to practitioners seeking to enhance the developmental nature of advising and to researchers investigating specific developmental advising activities. Findings suggest that if the developmental nature of academic advising is to be increased, an extended advising program with planned incidences of advisor contact may offer the kind of support needed to achieve developmental advising goals. If a goal of academic advising is to encourage students to participate in the educational planning process, activities designed to teach problem-solving and decision-making skills and to provide practice in the planning process should be incorporated. Perhaps when such skill instruction and deliberate planning practice become routine advising activities, the academic integration described by Greenwood (1984) will be recognized as an expected advising outcome.

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