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 problemsolving 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 nondevelopmental 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 nondevelopmental, 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). Astin, 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 transferrable 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, studentreported variables of high school grade point average, parents' combined income, previous college experience, residential/commuting status, and full-timelpart-time status were tested for a possibly significant relationship to developmental advising score. Although College A and College B students differed significantly on high

school grade point average (t(200) = -7.52, p < .001), SAT scores (t(197) = 12.70, p < .001), and parents' combined income (t(191) = 4.14, p < .001), none of these variables were significantly related to developmental advising score, and they were subsequently eliminated from the analysis.

Students supplied entering information at the beginning of the fall term and completed a commercially available advising inventory at the end of their respective advising periods in group settings. To detect significant differences in mean advising scores for each institution, t tests were **performed**. Response rates on the advising inventory were 61% for College A (n = 85) and 84% for College B (n = 119).

Many similarities exist between the two liberal arts women's colleges. Both require each freshman to **participate** in extended advising programs that commence **during** orientation and function for 15 weeks at College A and 20 weeks at College B. Both programs are staffed by faculty advisors and include scheduled group meetings. Differences exist, however, in the structure of the advising delivery systems.

Each freshman at College A is assigned to 1 of 36 advisors on the basis of the student's academic preference. While participating in the research, each advisor at College A counseled from three to eight students. Two hour-long group advising sessions were required; advisors were requested to meet individually with students more often. In addition, 12 of the 36 advisors met with combinations of three advising groups in focal clusters nine times during the fall semester. Here participants discussed academic orientation and study skills, the college catalog, course selection procedure, and exam orientation. Before the beginning of the semester, advisors attended a two-hour session in which they and the associate academic dean, who has administrative responsibility for freshman advising, determined the schedule for the extended advising program.

The nine **College** B advisors are assigned to advising groups on the basis of the students' residence areas. Freshmen participate in a required two-quarter seminar course that includes orientation, advisement, registration, and personal development **components**. Advising takes place in the seminar, which is led by the advisor and meets weekly for one hour. Students living in the same residence area are assigned to the same seminar group. Commuting students are randomly assigned to the groups. During the study, group size ranged from 12 to 20 students. Topics for discussion at the weekly class meetings included orientation to the college, time management, stress management, course planning for winter quarter, registration, career planning, goal setting, and the creation of a four-year academic plan. Before the beginning of the quarter, advisors attended a one-and-ahalf-day workshop to orient them to the freshman seminar program, acquaint them with registration issues, and review the college catalog. The freshman seminar schedule had been determined the previous spring by the program director with input from faculty advisors. The director is a faculty member receiving one third released time to serve in this capacity. Table 1 compares advising delivery systems at College A and College B.

Instrument

Participants completed the Academic Advising Inventory (Winston & Sandor, 1984a) to measure their perceptions of the type of advising they had received. The inventory evaluates advising programs from a theoretical perspective that allows comparison across institutions (Winston & Sandor, 1984b). Based on Crookston (1972), contrasting orientations of developmental and prescriptive advising relationships are described.

Fourteen pairs of items describing the nature of the advising relationship compose the continuous developmental-prescriptive (DPA) scale of the advising inventory. Scores from 14 to 56 indicate a **prescriptive** relationship in which the advisor identifies the student's problems and gives detailed instructions for solutions. Scores from 57 to 112 indicate a developmental relationship in which the student is encouraged to identify problems and participate in finding solutions; the student and the advisor share responsibility for academic planning (Winston & Sandor, 1984b).

Respondents make two decisions about each pair of items on the DPA scale. They decide which of two statements better describes the advising they have received and how accurate that statement is for their situation. For example,

My advisor plans my schedule.

AB	C	D
very		slightly
true		true
OR		
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	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 2 hours	Prior to fall semester 11/2 days	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

 TABLE 1

 A Comparison of Advising Programs at College A and College B

*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.

EF	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-

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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.

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) 14 - 56		
	Developmental Response (14 questions × 5 through 8) 57 - 112		
Topics of the scale	Learning about programs and courses Vocational opportunities Interest in outside activities Realistic academic goals Help with other-than-academic problems Time management Class registration Choice of major Academic progress Identification of alternatives in decision-making Class schedules Grades and test scores		

 TABLE 2

 Description of the DPA Scale of the Academic Advising Inventory

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 **experi**ence. 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	70.91	14.48	- 3.96***
College B	79.02	14.32	
***p<.001			

12

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 decisionmaking 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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