Cheryl J. Polson
Virginia N. Gordon

ISSUES IN ACADEMIC ADVISING REVISITED

This report on major issues facing academic advising summarizes research conducted for NACADA in 1985 and compares the results to those of a similar study completed in 1980.

Like many aspects of higher education, academic advising is subject to change. Academic advising has evolved from a faculty advising system for freshmen in colonial times (Rudolph, 1962) to a combination of faculty, full-time professionals, peer and paraprofessional advisors. Academic advising has received renewed recognition as a vital service on many campuses in recent years. The scope of advising has expanded, and an awareness of how students develop and what their unique needs are at many stages has broadened our perspectives on advising's purposes (Winston, et al., 1984). These expanding roles make monitoring the changes in academic advising a critical activity.

The American College Testing Program (ACT) has initiated several surveys over the last decade to determine the state of advising nationally (Carstensen & Silberhorn, 1979; Crockett & Levitz, 1983; Crockett, Habley & Cowart, 1987). The most recent survey indicates ". . . that academic advising continues to lack coordination and direction on many campuses. It continues to be a highly decentralized function with responsibility left to the various academic units and departments" (Habley, 1988). The major change reported was that institutions were doing more systematic *program* evaluation. Other areas such as advisor evaluation had not improved significantly.

Polson and Cashin (1981) surveyed NACADA members in 1980 to determine advising practitioners' perceptions of the issues and research priorities associated with advising. An open-ended questionnaire asked advisors to state their impressions of effective and ineffective practices on their campuses. Some of the concerns that advisors identified included lack of support for advising, use of faculty advisors and how they were selected and trained, career advising, and the lack of communication and coordination within their institutions. When asked what needed improving on their campuses, respondents listed rewards for advising, organizational changes, advisor training, career advising, and evaluation.

★ *CHERYL J. POLSON, is an assistant professor in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Kansas State University.*

VIRGINIA N. GORDON is coordinator of Academic Advising, University College, The Ohio State University.

ducted five years later using the same open-ended questions as in the Polson-Cashin survey. Solicited were advisors' perceptions of advising personnel, clients served, and characteristics of advising. Opinions about changes in available resources and how they affect the quality and quantity of advising were also requested. Advisors were asked to indicate what they considered to be the important issues in advising from their campuses' perspective.

The intent of this study is to provide a continuing assessment of the problems, concerns, issues, and advances in the field of academic advising. Identifying the trends and shifts in perceptions and attitudes about administration, programs, and the processes of advising is important if the field is to positively expand and improve its contributions and role in higher education.

Procedures

Members of the NACADA board of directors were sent the survey utilized in the 1981 study and were requested to submit ideas for additional questions. Their feedback was used in developing the final instrument. In addition to the original nine demographic, general information questions and the four open-ended questions which were originally used, seven open-ended questions were included to determine if and in what ways advising had changed in the last five years (the exact wording of the questions appears in the results section which follows).

The questionnaire was maile'd to all members of NACADA, an organization whose membership consists of faculty, administrators, advisors, counselors, and others in academic and student affairs concerned with the intellectual, personal, and vocational needs of students. During September 1985, the first mailing was sent to the entire membership, 925 members. To obtain a maximum set of responses, a second mailing went out during November 1985. Six hundred usable responses were returned from the combined mailings. The data reported in this article derive from those 600 responses. When there were multiple respondents from the same institution the senior author assigned a mean response, based on the entire group on questions 13, 14, 15, and 16. These questions asked respondents to discuss specific changes on their individual campuses. It was thought that a more representative study would be conducted if such steps were taken. For each of the open-ended questions the senior author read through approximately one hundred responses each in an effort to determine the general topics respondents tended to address. Based upon these findings, as well as those identified in the first study, a number of categories were defined for each question. The senior author then read all 600 responses to the eleven open-ended questions and categorized them. A frequency count for those categories in which a number of responses fell was completed. Two of the open-ended questions appeared to be redundant of information gained from other questions and were not included in the final analysis.

Results

Responses to the nine general information questions received from the 600 **NACADA** members who returned the questionnaire are seen in Table 1. Comparative demographic data were not available on the total **NACADA** membership, but with the 600 people responding out of a membership of 925 at the time of mailing (65 percent), it is likely those responding represent the total membership. The **NACADA** membership responding does not reflect proportionately United States higher education, however. For example, 64 percent of the respondents came from public colleges, while only 47 percent of the colleges in the United States are public. Typically, the respondents most likely were administrators devoting 75 percent or more of their time to advising, with an average of 150 undergraduate advisees and no graduate advisees. They tended to have an eight-year history as an advisor and were employed in a public-state-controlled institution where the highest degree offered is the doctorate.

TABLE 1

NACADA Membership Survey

Responses to General Information Questions

(N = 600)

Item	Response
1. Are you primarily?	
Teaching faculty	10%
Professional counselor	10%
Professional advisor	25%
Administrator	47%
Researcher	1%
Other	7%
2. What percentage of your time do you spend in activities related to academic advising (directly advising students, managing advising activities, performing supportive activities, etc.)?	
None	1%
1 - 24%	21%
25 - 49%	17%
50 - 74%	22%
75 - 100%	38%
3. How many undergraduate students do you advise?	Median = 150
4. How many graduate do you advise?	Median = 0

6. Is your institution?

Public-state-controlled	58%
Public-local-control (county, city, etc.)	6%
Independent	17%
Church-related	17%
Other	9%

7. What **is** the highest degree offered?

Associate's	12%
Bachelor's	14%
Master's	26%
Doctoral	42%
Other	5%

8. What **is** the total student enrollment?

Less than **1,000**	8%
1,000 - 2,499	16%
2,500 - 4,999	14%
5,000 - 9,999	19%
10,000 -19,999	19%
20,000 or more	**25**%

9. In what state (province, etc.) is your institution located?
   51 of the United States plus the District of Columbia   **52%**

Table 2 provides the reader with an opportunity to compare and contrast the advising issues over the five-year period provided by the open-ended questions. However, the focus of this discussion will be specific findings of the latest study.

TABLE 2

Comparison of Responses over Five-Year Period of Advising Issues

Most Effective Aspects of Advising Systems

1980		1985	
1. Provide individual student contact	**29%**	**1.** Provide individual student contact	42%
2. Dealing with student as a whole person	**19%**	**2.** Advisor availability	19%
3. Advisor availability	**18%**	4. Provide accurate information	12%
4. Provide accurate information	**17%**	4. Help with career exploration	12%
5. Help with career exploration	**17%**	3. Faculty advisor training	15%

Types of Persons Who Are Most Effective Advisors

1. Peer advisors	28%	1. Peer advisors	32%
2. Combintion of faculty, professionals, peers	26%	4. Combination of faculty & peer	10%
2. Faculty advisors	26%	2. Faculty advisors	30%
3. Professional advisors	21%	3. Professional advisors	28%

Have Effective Programs for Particular Clients

1. Undeclared/undecided	38%	2. Undecided	27%
1. Freshmen	38%	1. Freshmen	31%
2. High risk	24%	2. High risk	27%
		3. New students	15%

Aspects of Programs That Are Not Effective

1. Requiring faculty to advise	33%	1. Aspects of faculty advising system	40%
2. Lack of support for advising	16%	4. Lack of faculty training	9%
3. Use of regular teaching faculty	15%	2. Availability of advisors	15%
4. Lack of faculty training	10%	4. Lack of communication and coordination within institution	9%
4. Availability of advisors	10%	3. Undecided students	11%
5. Poor help with career advising	8%	4. High-risk students	9%
6. Lack of communication and coordination within institution	7%	5. Lack of rewards for advising	7%

Aspects of Advising Program Needing Improvement

1. Rewards for effective advising	41%	4. Rewards for effective advising	16%
2. Organizational changes	22%	3. Organizational changes	18%
3. Improve advisor training	15%	1. Advisor training	24%
4. Improve career advising	11%	6. Career advising	7%
5. Improve evaluation of advising	10%	6. Evaluation of advising	7%
		2. Computer-assisted information	20%
		5. Increase staff accessibility	9%

advis-
vever,

42%
19%
12%
12%
15%

The NACADA members' responses to the first three open-ended questions, to what was or was not effective, and to a lesser extent, what might improve the advising program, tended to fall into four general areas:

(1) who did the advising: regular faculty, professional advisors, etc.;
(2) clientele served: undeclared, freshman, etc.;
(3) characteristics of advising: individual contact with advisees, concern for the whole student, inclusion of career development, etc.; and
(4) special aids: curriculum guides, computerized information, etc.

More detail is given below for each individual item.

The first open-ended item read:

10. Please describe one or more aspects of your advising program which you consider to be particularly effective.

The aspect most frequently described was providing individual contact with advisees (72 responses). Other frequently mentioned subjects included being readily available as advisors (33 responses), faculty training (26 responses), giving accurate information (21 responses), and advising which included career exploration (21 responses). Several respondents mentioned the types of persons serving as advisors as the "particularly effective" aspect of their programs: peer advisors (34 responses), faculty (32 responses), and professional advisors (29 responses). Others identified programs for particular clientele as being especially effective, for example, freshman (54 responses), high risk (48 responses), and undeclared (47 responses). When examining differences between institutional types there appeared to be only one area in which there was a significant contrast, that being in centralized advising. Twenty-five respondents from public-state-controlled institutions thought their centralized advising centers were the most effective aspect of their advising program, whereas all other categories reported this less than three times.

The second open-ended item read:

11. Please describe one or more aspects of your advising program which you consider NOT effective.

The individual chosen to do advising was the area in which all institutional types expressed as being not effective (106 responses). The majority (101) of these responses focused on the use of regular teaching faculty as advisors. Thirty-two responses specifically mentioned how ineffective it was to require faculty to advise. Another thirty-one responses dealt specifically with the lack of training for faculty advisors. Twenty-three responses indicated that lack of rewards for faculty advisors was another trouble area. The availability of advisors and the poor student/advisor ratio elicited fifty responses. When looking at advising for specific student populations, the undecided (37 responses) and high risk (29 responses) appeared to be the groups which needed most attention. Lack of coordination and communication between university units seemed to be least effective in public-state-controlled institutions (29 responses). This was seldom mentioned by other institutional types.

The third open-ended item read:

12. Please describe one or more things which MIGHT IMPROVE your advising program (things which you do not presently do).

Training for advisors appears to be the area in which all institutions could improve their advising **(108** responses). Many respondents also indicated a need for computer-assisted information **(91** responses). Eighty-two responses dealt with some kind of organizational change, such as the creation of a centralized advising center or the beginning of an orientation program, or the like. Rewards for advising was another potential area for improvement **(71** responses). Increased advisor accessibility **(43** responses), evaluation of advising **(33** responses), and an increased career focus in advising **(30** responses) were also mentioned.

The fourth open-ended item read:

13. How have resources to support advising changed since 1980 (e.g., personnel, financial support, materials, training costs, etc.)?

Responses **(327)** to this question indicated that, with few exceptions, the resources to support advising had increased universally in higher education. The increases seem to cluster in two major areas: increased personnel and increased funding. Ninety-two responses indicated there had been an increase in personnel; this included personnel in general as well as professional staff and support staff. A sizeable proportion of the increases were in the financing for advising: fifty-nine responses indicated their budget had increased; and an even larger number **(104** responses) expressed that funds for training, professional development, support materials, and for special programs (i.e., orientation, undecided) had increased. Other areas which also saw an increase included access to computer-assisted advising **(36** responses), the creation of an administrative coordinator of advising **(36** responses), and a more positive attitude toward advising (26 responses). A number of respondents indicated that there had been no change, whether it be financially or in staffing areas, in the support for advising activities at their institutions **(123** responses). Only eighty-six respondents indicated they had experienced decreased support. Forty-seven of these were seen in the advising budget, often related to an institution enrollment decline. The remaining responses tended to be related to decreased personnel. The fifth open-ended response hoped to discover if the abovementioned changes had affected the advising.

The fifth item read:

14. How has the change (or lack of change) in resources affected the quality and quantity, of advising on your campus?

Only fifty-seven responses indicated there had been no change. The changes were more likely to have improved advising than not. Two hundred eleven responses indicated the quality of advising had improved. When specific improvements were cited, 'they fell predominantly into two areas, the first of which were institutionally based

were student based (29), such as students can be seen on more personal basis, advisors are more accessible, more helpful, and increased advisee/advisor contact. **A** sizeable number of respondents (148) reported that their advising had not improved. These responses tended not to cite specific reasons.

The sixth open-ended question focused on what was responsible for the above-mentioned changes. The item read:

> *15. What is responsible for the change in resources (e.g., personnel, new administration, funding sources)?*

Predominantly, the responses to this item tended to focus on positive things which had happened to create the changes in resources. **A** large number (212 responses) of these were attributed to administrative and institutional changes. For example, such things as new administrators (83 responses), administrative support (61 responses), administrative concern for advising as a retention tool (**37** responses), and administrators' change in philosophy about advising (12 responses) were cited. Other responses mentioned included increased budget from the state, obtaining new grants, and increased enrollments. Ninety-seven responses to this question tended to imply that some negative force had worked against improving their advising system. Some factors which were mentioned included decreased enrollments (26 responses), decreased state funds (34 responses), and lack of administrative support (21 responses). Seventy-two responses were hard to categorize since they were stated in a way that would not indicate if it were a positive or negative — such as funding (49 responses), reorganization of the institution (13 responses), and a change in institutional priorities (10 responses).

The seventh open-ended item read:

> *16. What types of encouragement (e.g., incentive, rewards) does your campus offer to those who excel in advising?*

Universally, across all institutional types, the recognition or rewards by institutions for good advisors is negligible (413 responses). If institutions did reward good advising, it tended to be in the form of an "outstanding advisor" award (47 responses), written recognition (21 responses), or a "pat on the back" (23 responses). For faculty advisors the form of recognition tended to be related to things such as merit pay decisions (**35** responses), and promotion and tenure decisions (39 responses). It was also reported that advising was considered part of faculty load and thus affected their overall evaluation (20 responses). Such things as released time, stipends, reduced teaching loads, and extra money for summer enrollment advising were also mentioned, but they only accounted for thirty total responses.

The eighth open-ended question was designed to elicit information regarding current advising issues. The item read:

> *17. What do you think are the major issues confronting academic advising as a professional activity?*

The largest area of concern centered on improving the status of advising within and outside institutions. Respondents indicated there was a need to improve the status

of, advising (144 responses) as well as a need to make the field more visible (97 responses). A second issue identified was the recognition and reward for academic advising (107 responses). Concerns related specifically to the advisor were also expressed. The concerns expressed included the following: how should advisors be selected (37 responses), what roles should advisors play (24 responses), how should advisors be trained (45), how should advisors be motivated (29 responses), and how should they be evaluated (21 responses). Forty-two respondents thought attention needed to be given to such things as certification of advisors and development of professional standards. Others indicated the real issues focused on the relationship between advising and retention (48 responses) and the relationship between advising and student development/student success (53 responses). The final issues suggested were related to advising diverse and changing populations (70 responses), such as undecided, freshman, and unprepared students. Not surprisingly, the greatest number of these responses focused on advising adults (26 responses).

The final open-ended question was included to see if the issues had changed through the years. The item read:

18. *How do these (major issues) differ from those most prominent five years ago?*

Responses to this question were affected by the number of individuals who had not been in the field for five years who, as a result, did not feel qualified to answer. Almost one half of the respondents (274) felt there had been no change in the issues. The only areas which were mentioned more than ten times were the decreased number of students which had resulted in an increased attention on advising as a retention tool (21 responses) and the fact that advising was higher priority now (20 responses). Other responses were very diverse, ranging from advising of new populations to legal aspects of advising to consumerism of advisees.

Discussion

When the results of the most recent survey of NACADA members concerning effective program elements and areas of concern are compared to data collected five years earlier, some interesting changes are noted. While many of the effective and ineffective aspects of programs remain the same, the priorities in which they have been placed have shifted in a five-year period. The ability to provide individual contact is still considered the strength of many advising programs. Advisor availability, providing accurate information, and helping advisees with career exploration continue to be important and effective aspects of many programs.

Faculty advisor training was not even mentioned by the 1980 respondents, but was considered to be effectively provided by 15% of the group. This may mean that training is considered more important today and more resources have been diverted to this effort. Although rewards for faculty advising was not mentioned in the 1980 survey as an effective aspect of advising programs, it was cited in the later survey.

Special student populations receiving effective services on many campuses remain the undecided, freshmen, and academically high-risk students. "New" students, listed in the latest survey as important, was not mentioned by the earlier group. This may reflect growing interest in retention efforts for special populations of students. Rewarding faculty for advising was not cited in 1980 but is considered an effective program element by the 1985 respondents.

The program aspects that are not considered to be effective on some campuses are still faculty advising systems, lack of training, availability of advisors, and communication and coordination of services within institutions. It was also noted in the current survey that more emphasis needs to be placed on off-campus and reentry adult students.

When asked what aspects needed improving, computer-assisted information received the highest percentage. This area was not even mentioned by the 1980 respondents. Advisor training was also cited as needing improvement by a greater percentage of the 1980 respondents than the 1985 group (in spite of the fact that progress was made on many campuses in this area). Increasing staff and its accessibility was cited by the 1985 respondents as needing improvement but was not mentioned in the earlier survey.

The critical issues in the improvement of academic advising programs have not changed very much in the past five years, but their ordering as priorities has. Some areas such as advisor training and evaluation have seen improvement on many campuses but are still considered by others to be critical areas yet to be worked on. The basic advising issues identified by this survey are similar td'those 'outlined in other studies. This means that research priorities and program development can be directed intensively to the areas most in need. What is missing is an organized, coordinated approach. NACADA is in an excellent position to provide the leadership needed to assure that changes in the next five years reflect a united effort to improve advising services across all sizes and types of institutions.

References

Carstensen, D. & Silberhorn, C. (1979). A national survey of academic advising, final report. Iowa City, IA: American College Testing Program.

Crockett, D S. & Levitz, R. S. (1983). A national survey of academic advising. Iowa City, IA: American College Testing Program.

Habley, W, & Crockett, D. (1988). A national survey on the state of academic advising. In W. R. Habley (Ed.) Status of the future of academic advising: Problems and promises. Iowa City, IA: American College Testing Program.

Habley, W., Crockett, D. & Cowart, S. (1987). The ACT national survey of academic advising. Iowa City, IA: American College Testing Program.

Polson, C. J. & Cashin, W. E. (1981). Research priorities for academic advising: Results of a survey of NACADA membership. NACADA Journal, 1, 34-43.

Rudolf, F. (1962). The American college and university. New York: Vintage Books.

Winston, R., Miller, T, Ender, S. & Grites, T. (Eds.). (1984). Developmental advising. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.