

# The Evolution of Academic Advising: One Institution's Historical Path

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*The 130-year history of academic advising at a large land-grant university is explored. The story of how advising structures, procedures, and programs were created to meet growing numbers of students, the increasing complexity of the curricula, and the expanding advising needs of a diverse student body emerges in the descriptions related.*

**KEY WORDS:** advising profession, advising role on campus, history of advising, history of higher education

## Introduction

The complete history of academic advising in American higher education has never been adequately recorded. References are made to its beginnings in the colonial colleges when the presidents and later the faculties assisted students with academic (as well as personal) concerns. Rudolph (1962) traced the first recognition of advising to The Johns Hopkins University in 1877 when a system of faculty advisers<sup>1</sup> was established. In 1889, a board of freshman advisers was created at Harvard because "size and the elective curriculum required some closer attention to undergraduate guidance than was possible with an increasingly professional faculty" (Rudolph, 1962, p. 460). Rudolph also traced the historical and societal events that formed and shaped the institutions of today. Because the history of advising reflects the history of higher education in America, it must be examined within this broader context.

Although the development of academic advising at The Ohio State University, a large land-grant university, is presented here, the fascinating picture of the historical, societal, and economic events that influenced it can be projected to many types of institutions. This academic advising history of Ohio State offers a portrait of how advising structures and procedures were created to meet increasing enrollments and expanding student-advising needs. While college environments and the delivery of advising have changed during the last 130 years, some basic advising issues and concerns (e.g., how to reach out to students, how to reward advisers) have not.

In this history, not only is the evolution of aca-

ademic advising described, but the history of other services and programs, as they relate to advising, is also illustrated. The evolution of the freshman orientation course and some student services, such as counseling, career services, and the creation of programs for special students, is described. Because the history of each undergraduate college (or department) at The Ohio State University is unique, this history conveys more about the role of the undergraduate colleges than the position of the university on advising. As indicated at several historical junctures, however, the university's actions made a significant impact on the way advising has affected and still influences students.

Many of the innovations and changes in advising that are reflected in this history may mirror those on other campuses that experienced the same influences during the same periods. Therefore, this 130-year history of academic advising at The Ohio State University may motivate other advisers in many types and sizes of colleges and universities to record their histories. The additional contribution from other researchers would provide a much needed picture of the history of advising and how it has evolved in different types of institutions.

## The Early Years

Although no written record of advising delivery at Ohio State was kept during the early years of the college (from 1870 to 1878 the college's name was The Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College), one can assume that the past presidents and faculty members gave students the same counseling and guidance that was customary at the time. In 1873, the first Ohio State president is said to have met with freshmen after Friday chapel every week to orient them to the college. These meetings probably met the same need as does the currently used freshman survey course.

The first written reference to advising was in the 1902 university catalog in which the College of Engineering invited its students to apply to the professor for "consultation or information regarding work in any class or . . . in regard to their status as members of the College of Engineering, or for the filing of petitions, changes of course, changes of class cards, adjustment of schedules and similar

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of "adviser" (rather than "advisor") is used here because it is the rendering that has been used by The Ohio State University throughout its history.

needs” (The Ohio State University, 1902, p. 98). Students were told, however, to apply to the president “on matters affecting their connection with the University, or in any way connected with the discipline of the institution” (The Ohio State University, 1902, p. 98).

Four years after the first mention of advising services in the college’s catalog, the term “student advisers” was noted in the bulletin of the College of Arts, Philosophy, and Science (later named the College of Liberal Arts). The college announced a “system of advisers, the chief objects of which are . . . to assist the undergraduate in choosing studies that will result in a well-rounded course and will achieve most economically the purpose which the student has in view in his course” (The Ohio State University, 1906, pp. 22–23). Advisers were also to “promote personal relations between students and instructors” and “aid the student in all matters connected with his university life” (The Ohio State University, 1906, pp. 22–23).

#### *Early Freshman Survey Courses*

The first freshman survey course was taught by the Dean (faculty) of the College of Agriculture in 1916. It provided a general discussion of the field of agriculture and was intended “primarily to assist the student in selecting his courses for the succeeding years” (The Ohio State University, 1916, p. 82). The other undergraduate colleges soon followed with their versions of a freshman course. Most courses were taught by the deans, but the amount of academic credit given varied from one credit for 1 semester to two credits for 3 semesters. Although the content of each course was tailored to the agenda of each college (i.e., selecting a major, curricular requirements, vocational opportunities), basic information concerning student adjustment to the new environment (i.e., study habits, time budgeting, student services) was included in all catalog descriptions the courses. By 1923, most colleges required a freshman survey course; the Survey of Agriculture even included a topic called “personality improvement.”

#### *Freshman Week*

The first “freshman week” was established in 1927 with an elaborate structure, including a freshman handbook, cadres of small groups with student leaders, assigned meetings, and athletic events. Students also met with their faculty advisers for personal interviews, where their plans for a university education were discussed. Rudolph (1962, p. 460) reported that during the 1920s most colleges and

universities “were busy perfecting various systems of freshman week, freshman counseling, and faculty advisers. . . .”

#### *Advising Students who Changed Majors*

A procedure for major changers was outlined in the bulletin for the College of Liberal Arts in 1928. Each student was instructed to notify the dean of “his choice of field of concentration in which he proposes to center his interest for the remainder of his course”; however, this choice “may be reconsidered and changed for adequate reasons” (The Ohio State University, 1928a, pp. 36–37). The dean would notify the department of the change and a new adviser would be designated. (Undecided students were not acknowledged or provided special advising until 1940.)

#### *Establishing a Junior Dean System*

One of the most important actions taken by the university in support of academic advising was implemented in 1928 when the Central Committee on the Freshman Problem recommended that a system of junior deans be established in each of the undergraduate colleges. The rationale for these junior divisions was that the “character of the student body in the first two years of the University is such as to call for rather distinctive treatment” and that these needs “are not being sufficiently provided for under present conditions” (The Ohio State University, 1928b, pp. 68–69). The junior dean system was charged with the responsibility “for establishing more intimate cooperation between the various colleges, and coordinating activity in the solution of common problems.” The Office of the Junior Dean was to provide “close supervision of the work of the Freshmen and Sophomores, to help them adjust themselves to their new conditions, and to act as their chief adviser in all university matters” (The Ohio State University, 1928b, pp. 68–69). This system of junior deans served as the model for advising until the University College was established almost 40 years later.

#### *Advising Older Adult Students*

Reference to “mature students” was made in the bulletins as far back as the late 1920s, but a more detailed plan to admit older adult students appeared in the 1935 *General University Bulletin*. Under the heading of Admission of Special Students of Mature Years, the bulletin indicated, “A person of mature years who is unable to meet the entrance requirements in all respects, under certain circumstances may be permitted to matriculate for specified

courses for which he can demonstrate adequate qualifications” (The Ohio State University, 1935, p. 16). Not until 1942 were the first evening classes taught as Twilight School “for the benefit of persons occupied during the day but desirous of continuing their education after five o’clock” (The Ohio State University, 1942, p. 7). However, no college or university academic advising was offered in the evening.

#### *Advising Undecided Students*

Another landmark came in 1940 when the university first recognized in print the existence of students who were undecided about a major. *The College of Arts and Sciences Bulletin* (The Ohio State University, 1940, p. 47) described an exploratory program that would make it “possible for students to explore the various offerings of the University under the guidance of experienced counselors and members of the faculty.” This exploratory program offered

an opportunity for students to discover their aptitudes and interests and to find their vocational or professional places by testing themselves in different fields of study. Their selections of courses are to be made in light of their aims, interests, and abilities. The entire guidance facilities of the College are available to these students. There are no fixed requirements except the courses in military science, physical education, hygiene and Arts Survey. (The Ohio State University, 1940, p. 47)

The program was arranged for two kinds of students:

(1) those who want to try out a number of different courses before making a final selection of college curriculum. Such students, as soon as they feel that they are ready, will be advised to transfer to one of the established curricula of the University leading to a degree or certificate; (2) those who plan to remain in college only one or two years, and do not prefer to follow any of the established curricula leading to degrees, or to follow the General Education Program. (The Ohio State University, 1940, p. 47)

Students were also informed that “no special classes or sections are organized for students in the exploratory program. They enter the regular classes of the University and are subject to the same requirements as to quality of work and attendance as are other students in the University” (The Ohio State University, 1940, p. 47). The student enrolled in this program was warned that he might “find some

delay in meeting the requirements of his chosen curriculum” (The Ohio State University, 1940, p. 47).

#### *Religious Activities*

Religious affiliation and activities were important aspects of many early college requirements. During the last part of the 19th century, many state universities required students to attend chapel. When the second president of The Ohio State University did not carry out the Board of Trustees’s order that attendance at daily chapel exercises be compulsory for all students (because he did not agree with this policy), he was not renewed. Although not directly related to advising or counseling, a description of religious-affiliated student activities was included in the student services section of the university bulletin for several decades after the second president’s departure.

Although the YMCA housed a student activities office in the Student Union for many years, the position of religious coordinator was created for the first time in 1945. Money contributed by the University Religious Council and Alumni Development Fund enabled the Board of Trustees to appoint a counselor for religious affairs. The description in the university bulletin read, “Students are encouraged to affiliate with appropriate groups and to participate in worship, study, and social functions designed to promote their personal and spiritual development” (The Ohio State University, 1945, p. 20). At that time, “14 major Protestant denominations, together with Roman Catholic and Jewish foundations, maintain professional staff workers serving students at the University” (The Ohio State University, 1945, p. 20). A coordinator for religious activities was continued into the 1970s as part of student affairs.

#### *Vocational Guidance*

Vocational guidance was included in the counseling and advising function early in the university’s history. Because Ohio State is a public land-grant university, vocational education in the areas of agriculture and engineering were dominant in the early years. The vocational theme can be found in the content of the freshman survey courses that have been offered from 1916 to today in the Colleges of Agriculture and Engineering. In 1941 the president of the university indicated that the institution was “aware of the necessity to have as complete as possible a picture of occupations so it can offer more effective guidance and better placement of its students” (Sawyer, 1970, p. 91). As a result, the Occupational Opportunities Services was created

to “meet the need for professional guidance to students and to provide technical service to college offices that also counsel students. It works in close cooperation with the colleges in advising students in relation to their long-term educational and vocational plans” (The Ohio State University, 1950, p. 20). Vocational testing was available at the service as was “a large collection of books and pamphlets dealing with a wide range of occupations” (The Ohio State University, 1950, p. 20).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the proliferation of college placement services indicated the importance placed on this function. Career information and counseling as well as job search assistance and placement were offered by every college at The Ohio State University. The following description in the 1960 *College of Commerce Bulletin* (p. 34) exemplifies this service:

To utilize your college education and live up to the expectations of your family, friends, and University, it is imperative that you be happily placed in a position utilizing your training, interests, and qualifications. Although the College does not guarantee its graduates positions, it assists them in their career and employment efforts by maintaining a Placement Office.

#### *University Counseling Center*

Although counseling was provided early in the history of the university by the president, deans, and faculty members, the staffs of the deans of men, deans of women, and the junior deans provided this service in subsequent years. The first university-wide career counseling office was the Occupational Opportunities Service. In 1960, when the need became apparent for a more general counseling service, the University Counseling Center replaced the Occupational Opportunities Service. As stated by the director in 1963, the Counseling Center was to be of “service to the student body exclusively,” in career planning, reading and study skills improvement, vocational interest and aptitude testing as well as “dealing effectively with personal problems and environmental pressures” (Sawyer, 1970, p. 92). Today, the staff of the University Counseling Center emphasize personal counseling, but they also oversee the separate Career Connections Office that provides career exploration and counseling-service components.

#### **The Establishment of University College**

In the early 1960s, the freshman problem once again surfaced, and in 1966 University College

was established to “promote excellence in lower-division education” (Murphy, 1966). The establishment of University College was another landmark in advising at the university. It signaled that the administration and the faculty were concerned with the academic needs of freshmen and sophomores. This concern for the freshman problem was reminiscent of the impetus for creating the junior deans system in 1928. The academic advising and orientation of new students rested primarily with this new college, which was also given responsibility for teaching the freshman survey course. The degree colleges worked closely with University College advisers who presented and explained the curricular programs aligned with the colleges. College representatives also contributed to the freshman survey sections in which their unit was represented and took an active role in the freshman orientation program.

#### *Evolution of Professional Advisers*

Although the primary delivery mode for advising remained with faculty members, the increasing number of students (by 1950 enrollments had reached almost 26,000) and the complexity of the curricula created a need for greater assistance. By 1945, the junior deans were still coordinating advising services for undergraduate students in college offices. A variety of titles were being used to denote staff whose primary responsibility was to advise students. The College of Education created a full-time position of student counselor in the 1940s at a salary of \$1,380. In the 1960s, the title of “counselor” was frequently used. In 1960, Electrical Engineering was the first department to hire a full-time student adviser; the adviser’s salary was \$4,272 per annum. The title of academic adviser was used by University College for each of its full-time professional staff members. By the 1970s, the titles of academic counselor, academic adviser, and coordinator of academic advising became standard across the university. The Academic Advising Association of Ohio State (ACADAOS) was formed in the late 1980s and was affiliated with The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1992.

#### *The Advent of Technology*

One of the profound changes to advising practices was the advent of increasingly sophisticated advances in technology. A telephone registration system was instigated in the 1980s, and eventually paper was largely eliminated from the process. The ensuing technological advances used by academic advisers

helped them access the most current information, including unofficial transcripts and degree audits, about their advisees from the student database. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, residence halls were wired for computers and the number of computer labs across campus increased dramatically.

Although the use of E-mail in advising exchanges was prevalent in the early 1990s, its popularity in advising students exploded in the middle of that decade. Through a recent survey of academic advisors, Steele and Gordon (2001) found that 67% of advisers spend 2 or more hours a day in advising duties conducted through E-mail. The time is spent in responding to students, performing administrative duties, and in answering other correspondences. Eighty percent of advisers indicated that E-mail had improved the way they advised.

Technology has created new challenges and opportunities for academic advisers. On one hand, the ability of advisers to access efficiently and quickly important information about their advisees has allowed more time for personalized attention to students. However, if care is not taken to minimize its use, technology can depersonalize the institution and advising. According to the registrar, the ultimate goal of his office is to continue to integrate holistically all Web-related services so that both students and advisers have a maximally organized means to access easily people and information.

#### *Major Advising Reorganization*

In 1995, a Committee on the Undergraduate Experience made up of The Ohio State University faculty members and administrators issued a report that identified “academic advising as one of the most important elements contributing to the potential success of undergraduates” (The Ohio State University, 1995). The committee perceived problems with advising in the two largest advising units, Arts and Sciences and University College, and made recommendations to help resolve them. In 1997, the provost appointed members of the Round Table on Advising to review the academic advising and career counseling services that were available to undergraduates. Recommendations made by the members of the Round Table were concerned with a) organizational structures (i.e., direct enrollment, which dictates a decentralized college model of advising, and teaching the University Survey course); b) communication (e.g., among all advising units, between colleges, with regional campuses); c) improvement of quality (e.g., adviser training and development, adviser awards, move to full-time professional advisers); and d) link to

careers (e.g., closer links with career resources available). During the time when the Round Table members began their work, most undergraduate colleges were directly enrolling high achieving students who selected their academic programs.

Another landmark in advising occurred in 2001 when the Board of Trustees voted to merge University College and the Colleges of Arts and Sciences Administration to form two new units: the Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of Undergraduate Student Academic Services. Undergraduate academic advising and teaching of the freshman survey course were once again the responsibility of the degree-granting colleges with new freshmen assigned to either college-office or faculty advisers.

In 2001, the description of the Arts and Sciences Survey was described as “Academic requirements, University procedures, grading system, resources; student rights and responsibilities; overview of Arts and Sciences academic areas of study and services” (The Ohio State University, 2001, p. 18). The survey course in the College of Engineering mirrors the content of such initiatives. It includes “academic requirements; University procedures, grading system, and resources; overview of engineering academic areas of study and services” (The Ohio State University, 2004, p. 151). The content of these courses are strikingly similar to those offered in the early 1900s. Evidently the academic needs of freshmen have not changed much over the years.

#### **Recurring Themes**

As this history of academic advising at The Ohio State University unfolded, certain patterns or themes emerged. These themes include those associated with the advising needs of a growing student body, attempts to deal with the freshman problem over the years, the role of the freshman survey course, the delivery of career services, and changing adviser roles.

#### *Advising Needs*

As the number of students increased, the need for more faculty members and staff to provide teaching, academic counseling, and other student services became apparent. By 1928, when the enrollment reached almost 15,000, the junior dean position was established to meet the increasing need for advising. The establishment of University College in 1966 was another step in meeting the advising needs of freshmen and sophomores. The reorganization of advising services in the late 1990s and early 2000s was aimed at meeting the specific

needs of students who were directly enrolled in their degree colleges.

#### *Attempts to Solve the Freshman Problem*

The freshman problem is highlighted at different times in the university's history. The definition of the problem may have differed at different periods, but it is based on the assumption that the ever-increasing numbers of first-year students, who entered the university with varying academic preparation and typical developmental needs, presented a challenge to teachers, advisers, and administrators. Attempts to meet this challenge varied. The junior deans, and later University College, were organizational changes to alleviate the problems associated with first-year student needs. To advise the increasing numbers of students who chose to be undecided, a special advising program was created within University College. Another landmark change in advising freshmen and sophomores was manifest in the reorganization of advising resources in 2001. While new students can be admitted to the college of their chosen major, the exploratory program for undecided students was once again housed in the College of Arts and Sciences.

#### *Role of the Survey Course for First-Year Students*

The university survey course, first taught in 1916, has played an important role in the orientation of new students to the university. Through the ensuing 88 years, the content of the course has remained essentially the same with some variations as important contemporary issues emerged. The course's perseverance proves that the perception of the information needs of first-year students has not changed much and that the course remains a consistent and effective vehicle for advising groups of students.

#### *Vocational Counseling*

Vocational counseling was performed in the earliest years of the university by the staffs of the colleges, who continued to offer career services geared to students in their majors. The creation of the Occupational Opportunities Services in 1941 marked the first university-wide vocational counseling effort. In the 1960s, emphasis on placement translated into efforts by many of the undergraduate colleges to provide contact with employers who came to campus to recruit students. Later many colleges changed the name of placement centers to "career services." Vocational services were expanded to include offerings in career information, exploration, and counseling as well as job search activities and employer

contact. In the late 1990s, however, the job placement function once again became the primary service offered by many undergraduate colleges. One reason for this was the creation of the Career Connections Office which now offers the individual career counseling and workshops previously performed by the colleges' Career Services Offices.

#### *Changing Role of Academic Advisers*

Over the years, faculty advisers have remained an important resource for students. Many college-office personnel, such as college secretaries, junior deans, and other full-time professionals, have served as important additions to the cadre of advisers. Each college determined when advising services needed to be expanded and how advising was organized and implemented. As enrollments increased and the curricula became more complex, other professional staff members were added. Advisers in college and department offices became more specialized. The unique needs of diverse student populations also required more specialized advising approaches. The learning of new skills and competencies has become an important challenge for all advisers. The advent of more sophisticated technology has also influenced how advising tasks are accomplished and how advisers relate to students, both in record retrieval and in personal contact.

#### **Conclusion**

The cultural intimacy of the early Ohio State campus is not directly reflected in a survey of its history, but the personal contacts, made both in and out of the classroom, were important to students. Twenty-first century students do not experience the same campus climate as their predecessors enjoyed. As Rhodes (2001) pointed out, the growth in campus size has changed the campus culture, and while every college and university in America has experienced this growth, large universities experienced a greater impact than did their smaller counterparts. With this growth came change that had both positive and negative influences on advising, and over time administrators, faculty members, and staff responded to growing enrollments by developing or fine-tuning a variety of programs and services (e.g., the junior deans system, University College, freshman orientation programs).

The many factors that have indirectly affected how advising was perceived, emphasized, and delivered over the years were not developed in this brief history. However, changing curricula, the relatively new emphasis on certain student services, and the impact of increasing numbers of minority students

have affected advising significantly. The roles of political influences and fluctuating economic conditions are also not addressed. However, recurring events and concerns were the focus of this inquiry: attempts to resolve the freshman problem; the unchanged nature of the freshman survey course; the rise and fall of religious programs and activities; the concern for special groups of students; the changing nature of counseling, placement, and career services; and the profound effects of technology on student contacts and information.

One important observation can be gleaned from this historical overview: The Ohio State University has demonstrated a commitment to effective and personalized academic advising from its beginnings. According to Rhodes (2001, p. 238), in the future, "The successful university will be knowledge based but student centered, research driven but learning focused." If history is any predictor, The Ohio State University will continue to support academic advising because it is student centered and learning focused. Future students will benefit from attending any university that is committed to these principles.

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