

# Beyond the Developmental and Prescriptive Dichotomy

## What Students Want from Academic Advising

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### Research

#### PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

- Research indicates that a key strategy for improving student satisfaction with advising is meeting their expectations for the advising process.
- Community colleges have diverse student bodies and students may not have uniform expectations for the process.
- Academic advisors need to have a better understanding of their students' expectations for the advising process.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do community college students describe expectations for the academic advising process?
2. How are students' expectations met or not met during the advising process?

#### DATA COLLECTION

- 17 Semi-structured Interviews
- Demographic survey for each participant
- Sampling Method: purposeful sample of current CCAC students from a variety of backgrounds and academic programs

#### DATA ANALYSIS

- Transcribed interviews
- Initial coding: In Vivo coding, or using words or short phrases used by the participants themselves to serve as codes
- Thematic coding: themes, concepts, and categories that emerge, especially those which could be useful to inform/improve practice
- Check-ins with advisor, working group of colleagues, and participants as appropriate to ensure trustworthiness of analysis

### Findings: What Students Experienced

#### LACK OF CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR ADVISING

- Many students did not know what to expect from academic advising.
- Students did not know they would have as many choices to make; in particular, many were not prepared to select specific times.
- "We're not used to all of this. Here, all of the classes have numbers, like math 80, 90. I was in math 108. I didn't even know what that meant. It's a lot to take in all at once."

#### KNOWLEDGE

- Students' most common expectation for advisors is that they would have a high degree of knowledge about all college programs and services.
- Many advisors met this expectation. Students said this helped them have confidence, a sense of direction, and a plan.
- Some advisors did not demonstrate this level of knowledge. One student said, "When I stepped out of the room, I didn't have a good idea of what to take or what classes would fill which requirements. I would figure it out myself...I expected them to be more knowledgeable."
- Students wanted to know why they were taking each class. The idea they would be in a "random" or useless class was persistent.

#### "THEY CARED" VS. "JUST DOING THEIR JOB"

- Students felt like their advisor cared when they took the time to discuss students' backgrounds, interests, and goals. Also, a friendly and less formal approach to the interaction contributed to the sense that the advisors cared.
- Students perceived advisors as "just doing their jobs" if they only focused on the class schedule and took a very formal or business-like approach to the interaction. Feeling like their advisor was rushing them to move on to the next student also contributed to a sense that advisors were just doing their jobs.

### Conclusions: What Students Want

#### A PERSONAL CONNECTION

- Students want a personal connection with their advisors. Discussing students' background, strengths, and interests contributes to forming this connection.
- A less formal, friendly approach and not rushing the interaction also helped to facilitate a personal connection.

#### KNOWLEDGE

- Students expect their advisors to be knowledgeable about a wide variety of topics, particularly related to degree requirements, transferability of credits, and timely graduation.
- Referrals to other services were regarded positively when students were able to get the assistance they needed. Referrals were seen as "getting the run around" when they were not useful.

#### ASSURANCE

- Students want to leave advising with a sense that they are on the right track. They want to have a plan and a sense that they know what to do.
- It is important to empower students to make their own decisions, but it is equally important to provide support, feedback, and guidance for them in the process.

#### THE WHY

- Students want to understand the purpose of their classes. Many students feared wasting their time in "random" classes. Explaining that classes meet a gen ed was often not enough. Students want to know why that skill is important to them.

#### A COMBINATION

- Students value elements of both prescriptive and developmental advising. Instead of opposite ends of a spectrum, they should be viewed as different tools in our toolkit.