
Chapter 3 Academic Advising

Beginning on the next page you will find a scan of the 3rd chapter of the 2008 Student Services in Community and Technical Colleges Practitioners Guide. This is being distributed with permission from Jessica Gilmore-English, the current President of the Washington Student Services Council, in an effort to make more widely available sections of a manual that was only ever available in print. This is specifically intended for the members of the Task Force on Community and Technical College Counselors for research purposes.

We find it important to emphasize that the information you will find in the pages below is dated 2008 and before. As this information is over ten years old, it can provide a historical look at the state of counseling services in the Washington Community and Technical College system, but may not reflect the current reality of counseling services. We ask that you keep this in mind as you read this material.

If you need the information below in a different format and for any other questions, please contact Lexi Swanson at lswanson@sbctc.edu or 360-704-4390

Mission
The mission of academic advising is to educate and support students in developing meaningful and realistic plans to reach their academic and career goals.

Services and Functions
Advising services focus on providing timely and accurate educational information for students on degrees, certificates, courses, college policies and procedures, as well as campus and community resources. Current research indicates that student retention and academic success are correlated to the quality of advising the student receives (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Nutt, 2003; Seidman, 2005).

In their work, advisers approach students from a developmental and holistic perspective. Additionally, advisers assist students in the development of effective problem-solving skills, self-advocacy, decision making, and personal responsibility. There is a strong commitment among advisers to work collaboratively with instructors, staff, and administrators to support student success and retention. Advisers use individual, online, and group advising; orientation programs; educational publications; and resources on the Internet. Advising services frequently coordinate advising training for teaching faculty and staff (Gordon, Habley, Wesley, & Associates, 2000).

Staffing and Organizational Structure
The strong commitment to academic advising as an essential student service has been sustained throughout the Washington State community and technical college system. However, the delivery systems and staffing vary significantly among the colleges. There are several primary models used throughout the two-year college system, including

- the academic advising center model as the primary source of academic advising. Advisers staff the advising center. Their primary focus is on academic advising and educational planning. In this model, counselors focus on personal counseling, career exploration, crisis counseling, teaching, and/or specific educational programs;

- a counseling center model that provides personal counseling, career exploration, and advising. This model relies primarily on faculty counselors and less on exempt and nonexempt staff to provide advising;

- the academic department model uses faculty or staff advisers that are more aligned with, and in some cases located within, the specific academic departments;

- a combination of the above models.
Whatever the model, advising is also provided by teaching faculty as well as advisers assisting special populations or programs such as Washington Achievers, international students, WorkFirst, TRIO, and student athletes. Beyond the models identified, each campus differs in its service delivery and student outreach. As a reflection of campus priorities, history, and resources, each college has determined how it manages issues such as

- mandatory student participation in a new student orientation and/or academic advising;
- contractual expectation that teaching faculty advise students;
- use of a drop-in or appointment advising service;
- identification of advisers as generalists or program/degree specialists;
- professional and educational standards for advisers;
- provision of advising services for online, evening, and weekend students;
- development of adviser training and coordination.

In fall 2007, 25 of the 34 community and technical colleges participated in a survey on advising that explored issues such as mission, staffing, structures, best practices, challenges, and future goals. Based on the survey results, it is clear that the adviser staffing differs from college to college as shown in Table 1 (Spencer, 2007).

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staffing model</th>
<th>Number of colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primarily faculty counselors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily exempt/professional staff</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily classified staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of exempt and nonexempt staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of faculty counselors, exempt, and/or nonexempt staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost all colleges required a baccalaureate degree for employment as an adviser and on many campuses a master's degree was preferred or required. Approximately 75% of the campuses used advisers as generalists who assisted students regardless of program or degree, although some colleges had their advisers serve as division or department liaisons. A few campuses reported that their advisers were assigned to advise either professional-technical programs or transfer degree programs.

The survey results indicated that 20% of the advising programs offered their services primarily on a drop-in basis, 5% relied on scheduled appointments, and the remaining 75% used a mix of drop-in and appointments. Some schools that schedule appointments indicated that during the week or two prior to each quarter, they used a drop-in model in order to see the maximum number of students.

Advising services often have some or sole responsibility for new student orientation programs. The policy on whether orientation should be mandatory for new students varied campus to campus. The remaining colleges required attendance only for targeted student populations such as Running Start students, international students, GED/High School Completion students, and/or work force participants.

Most college advising centers or services have a written mission statement that guides their work. Approximately one-third have a mission statement that is tied to or articulated by a more comprehensive student services mission statement.

### Physical Facilities

The advising center should be centrally located on the campus and accessible to all students. Students are best served when advising services are adjacent to entry services such as admissions, testing center, career services, and financial aid services. Advising services are enhanced by an inviting reception area that features educational planning resources like college catalogs, curriculum guides, university transfer information, and scholarship resources. It is essential for students to have computer access to explore career and educational resources, drop and add classes, and view college and university Web sites. Advising offices should be comfortable and private.

### Quality Indicators

Most campuses conduct some type of evaluation of their advising services. The formats for the evaluation include online evaluations, focus groups, mail surveys, in-person surveys distributed immediately after an advising session, feedback from faculty and other staff, as well as in-class evaluations. These evaluations primarily focus on the level of "satisfaction" with the advising and not with learning outcomes or retention. Discussions are now underway within the Washington Academic Advising Council and the National Academic Advising Association to identify the learning outcomes that academic advising provides students.
In addition, advisers are working to quantify the role that academic advising plays in student retention and success.

Best Practices

Advisers actively seek to meet the advising needs on their campus through education, collaboration with faculty and staff, new technological tools, and improved services. Depending on the needs of the campus and the advising leadership, the innovations and best practices fluctuate from school to school. From the survey results, the types of best practices are summarized in Table 2 (Spencer, 2007).

Table 2
Best Practices as Identified by Community and Technical Advising Services or Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Number of colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased availability of advising hours and services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-stop matriculation or seamless intake for new students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty adviser and staff adviser training</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web-based advising and services</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone call and/or e-mail communication with students</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of learning outcomes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer programs for student tracking and service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and communication between faculty and staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and between staff and staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of the best practices expressed by the various advising programs include

- welcome centers or help desks located across the campus to serve new students at the beginning of the quarter. Some colleges periodically offered information tables in various campus locations;
- outreach programs, presentations, and printed materials targeted for ESL, ABE, developmental, and/or at-risk high school students to educate them about educational opportunities;
- mandatory orientation programs for all students who were seeking certificates or degrees;
- mandatory success-in-college seminar or class for targeted groups of students;
- electronic mailing lists for students that provided weekly updates and reminders of deadlines, procedures, and programs;
- new avenues for advising online;
- electronic mailing lists and/or online professional development programs to train faculty and staff advisers.

Challenges

Each advising center or service faces challenges that are unique to its campus. However, across the system, several themes emerged that advisers identified as challenges to providing quality advising (Spencer, 2007).

Adequate staffing needed for the seasonal advising cycles
The demand for advising during the registration peak times can create stress for advisers and make it very difficult to serve students without additional support.

Keeping up with the volume of advising information
Advisers share in their concern about trying to learn and organize the amount of detailed information that is required today. In addition, academic advisers need to develop tools, publications, and programs that distill this complex information clearly for a diverse student body that includes many ESL and first-generation students.

Using and developing technology tools
Not only do advisers need to learn and upgrade their technology skills for advising, they must also develop and maintain Web sites and offer and develop various online advising tools.

Staffing that is stretched to serve the wider variety of students and their schedules
With adviser staffing rarely expanding, many campuses are experiencing the challenge of serving students who are enrolling in evening, online, or weekends classes. The increased number of students who move from school to school also makes advising more complex.

Future Directions

Technology

The use of technology in academic advising will continue to expand, which poses challenges to maintaining confidentiality, training for advisers, and ensuring that students understand the complex advising information online. Advising services must also keep pace with the evolving media and technology preferences of students.

Training

There is likely to be a need for more advisers who are knowledgeable, culturally sensitive, and strong communicators. As educational program options multiply and the student population becomes more diverse, the time and training required for quality advising will expand.
Research and Retention

In the future, advisers will focus more on student retention and educational success. Advisers will support the college in creating a culture of evidence so programs and interventions are strategic and successful. Advisers will need to continually conduct research on students so advising is meeting their educational needs. There will be more focus on seamlessly transitioning ABE, ESL, and high-risk high school students into postsecondary education.

As campuses focus more on student retention, enhanced collaboration will develop between advising and instruction. Clearly, academic advising is positioned to play a significant role in improving student success and enhancing student enrollment.

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References and Resources


Spencer, G. (2007). Questionnaire for advising/educational planning center services. Unpublished survey. (Available by e-mail from edplanning@highline.edu)
