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Assessing Advising Outcomes

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Assessing advising is critical to its improvement and to demonstrating that advising contributes to student success. Through assessment, advisors can ensure that departmental goals are continuously evaluated, that instruments are updated as needed to meet the goals of assessment, that communication is facilitated among stakeholders, and that action is taken as necessary to improve programs that affect student learning. We offer specific guidance for planning, implementing, and improving advising assessment initiatives.

KEY WORDS: advising profession, assessment, evaluation

Approaches to Advising

Outcomes assessment may be defined as the process of gathering evidence for judging the effectiveness of a program or service. According to Upcraft and Schuh (2002, p. 18), "Assessments are undertaken to guide practice. As a consequence of the assessment's findings, practice is adjusted." The purposes and goals of a program are the bases of effective assessment; when assessments are conducted properly, policy makers can use them to judge the success of a program or identify areas for improvement.

Because several approaches to advising are practiced, each with its own purposes and goals, assessment of advising programs is complicated. Consider two well-known approaches, traditional and developmental advising. Jeschke, Johnson, and Williams (2001, p. 47) described traditional, or prescriptive, advising as a "quick and efficient" method in which the advisor explains the sequence of courses that the student should take and makes sure the advisee understands the registration process. The prescriptive approach is highly structured, with the advisor controlling the amount of information given and the way it is presented. Thus, the advisor assumes the position of authority in the relationship (Frost, 2000). Prescriptive

advising can save time for student and advisor, but some contend that those who use it fail to help students develop a sense of responsibility for their academic choices; if the advisor's prescriptions yield poor results, the student may blame the advisor's bad advice instead of taking responsibility for the choice (Appleby, 2002).

Raushi (as cited in Kadar, 2001, p. 174) defined developmental advising as "a process that enhances student growth by providing information and an orientation that views students through a human development framework" Working independently of each other, Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) first described developmental advising. Although Crookston did not draw specifically on any single developmental theory, O'Banion linked his model to the work of Chickering (Frost, 2000). In 1988, Gordon (as cited in Frost, 2000) made connections between developmental advising and three of Chickering's development vectors: competence, autonomy, and purpose.

Developmental advisors view the advisee as both a student and an individual who is maturing throughout his or her college career. They recognize that students' personal lives affect their campus lives, and they work to enable students to integrate the two. While recognizing the need to assist the student in choosing proper courses, the developmental advisor also attempts to address the needs of the transitioning student by using student development theory and providing needed information about the academic environment. The advisor strives to evaluate the student's current developmental stage (i.e., developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence) and works with the student to craft a course of study. By leading the student to appropriate resources, such as the career center and health and counseling services, the advisor cultivates a relationship "intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources" (Ender, Winston, & Miller,

1984, p. 19).

In addition to helping advisees identify and achieve life goals, advisors can use developmental advising to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching process. According to Appleby (2002, p. 134),

Well-delivered developmental advising helps students understand why they are required to take certain classes, why they should take their classes in a certain sequence . . . what knowledge and skills they can develop in each of their classes. . . and the connection between student learning outcomes of their department's curriculum and the knowledge and skills they will be required to demonstrate in graduate school and/or their future careers.

While advocates of prescriptive advising maintain that the most important aspect of advising is the assurance that students register for correct courses, advocates of the developmental approach believe that other aspects of students' lives must be addressed as well. These two approaches—just two of a number of ways scholars currently think about advising—are predicated on different goals and thus may require different approaches to assessment.

Approaches to Assessing Advising

Students, faculty members, and administrators recognize that advising is an important factor in college-student success. One can find many examples in the literature in which the quality of advising has been advocated as a critical component in influencing students' transitions to college life (Steele & McDonald, 2000), academic and social integration (Fox, Zakely, Morris, & Jundt, 1993), adjustment and need satisfaction during the first year (Kramer & Spencer, 1989), decision-making processes in selecting the appropriate academic programs and careers (Creamer, 2000; McCalla-Wiggins, 2000), achievement of maximum potential (O'Banion, 1972), and academic success and retention (Gordon & Habley, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas, and Tatum (2000) designed and administered a survey to assess psychology student satisfaction with academic advising, course offerings, career preparation, instruction, and class size. They found that student perceptions of academic advising quality, availability of advisors, career preparation, and course offerings accounted for most of the variance in overall satisfaction. Light (2001) conducted retrospective interviews with Rhodes and Marshall Scholars at Harvard University to examine the effects of advising approaches. Light (2001, p. 88)

showed that at critical points in the students' college careers, academic advisors posed questions or challenges that "forced [*students*] to think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives." Furthermore, based on more than 10 years of research, Light (2001, p. 84) concluded that advisors can affect students in a "profound and continuing way."

Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of advising, one can find few comprehensive studies of its effectiveness. In his chapter on advising assessment, Lynch (2000, p. 324) observed:

One might expect that academic advising would be evaluated with somewhat the same regularity and thoroughness as classroom instruction. Such is not the case. In its fifth national survey of academic advising (Habley & Morales, 1998), American College Testing (ACT) found that the evaluation of advising programs and academic advisors received the ninth and tenth lowest effectiveness ratings out of the eleven criteria rated. Only rewarding of good advising performance was rated lower,

More recently, Swing (2001), for the Policy Center on the First Year of College, revealed that only 63% of academic advising programs are regularly evaluated. Moreover, most administrators undertake evaluations for internal purposes, and they seldom offer descriptions of these studies in the professional literature.

Kuh and Banta (2000) and Schuh and Upcraft (2001) offered several reasons for the dearth of assessments in student services such as advising. Faculty members are most concerned about intellectual development, while their colleagues in student affairs focus on psychosocial development. Therefore, while faculty members historically have viewed classroom activity as the most critical aspect of student learning, student affairs professionals have taken a more holistic view and tend to "emphasize the social contexts of student learning" (Kuh & Banta, 2000, p. 6). Because they see student development through different lenses, faculty and student-affairs professionals often do not communicate effectively and as a result fail to collaborate, which is essential to advising assessment. In addition, time constraints, resource limitations, changing organizational contexts, and limited expertise in selecting or developing valid and reliable instruments have contributed to the pervasive inertia that faculty and staff must overcome before they can implement widespread assessments of advising

effectiveness.

Assessment scholars argue that multiple measures are needed to provide reliable and valid assessments of outcomes associated with complex, dynamic processes (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Posavac & Carey, 1996; Swing, 2001). Yet most who have published assessments of advising programs have focused exclusively on a single outcome: perceptions of the process. Most often, the researchers focused on student perceptions, but a few discussed advisor views as well. In addition, the only studies we were able to unearth that addressed specific approaches to advising (such as prescriptive or developmental) were based on a single source of data: the survey.

Saving and Keim (1998) applied survey methodology to examine student and academic advisor satisfaction in two colleges of business and found significant discrepancies in the way advisors and students perceive advising. Advisors reported that they were advising developmentally, but students rated much lower the extent to which the advisors were approaching their task developmentally. Herndon, Kaiser, and Creamer (1996) found that although both men and women prefer developmental to prescriptive advising, women exhibit a significantly higher preference for this approach than do men.

Scholars who have focused on students' assessments of individual advisors and on the interactions of student characteristics and advisor techniques suggest that advisors consider student characteristics when trying to meet student needs. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) argued that various subgroups of students require different advising approaches. Adult learners, for example, need academic advice throughout the term, advice about prior-learning assessment, and help in negotiating the academic process when family or career interferes with academic progress.

Goering and Sandwina (1997) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of student perceptions of academic advising effectiveness and found that African American and white students experience advising differently. African American students assigned lower ratings than their white peers to advisors' knowledge, professional fairness, and interaction style (friendliness). Goering and Sandwina speculated that advisors communicate differently when meeting with minority students than when meeting with white students. Pomales, Claiborn, and La Framboise (as cited in Creamer & Scott, 2000) concluded that African American students consider culturally sensitive advisors, who are aware of and acknowledge

the student's ethnicity, to be more knowledgeable and helpful than culturally blind advisors.

Creamer and Scott (2000) summarized the findings of additional studies in which researchers had examined interactions of student characteristics and advising techniques. They cited Muffo's 1997 research, which was based on the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Muffo found that white female and African American students were more likely to demonstrate help-seeking behavior by initiating contact with advisors than were their peers. African American students were more likely than those from other racial groups "to have discussed personal problems or concerns with a faculty member" (Creamer & Scott, 2000, p. 340). Creamer and Scott (2000, p. 340) concluded that effective advisors must use different strategies (e.g., issue personal invitations, meet students informally outside the office, and attend meetings across campus) "to gain comparable access to members of different [*nontraditional and nonwhite*] student groups."

Policy makers can use information on student and advisor perceptions to give direction for improving advising approaches and techniques. However, if researchers wish to demonstrate the systematic long-term effects of advising on students, they need to conduct comprehensive studies of advising impact on outcomes, such as academic performance and persistence in college.

In a study of the impact of advising styles on academic performance and persistence, Molina and Abelman (2000) found that more intrusive advising strategies were more effective, as measured by GPA and short-term retention, than less intrusive interventions that were impersonal, prescriptive, and nonnegotiable. They defined intrusive advising based on the following advisor strategies: personal contact, creation of student responsibility for problem solving and decision making, active student-advisor dialogue regarding the factors to which students attributed poor academic performance, facilitation of student identification of resolvable causes of poor academic performance, and negotiated agreements for future action. These authors published a follow-up study (Abelman & Molina, 2001) in which they found that GPA and retention of at-risk students were improved three semesters after students received intrusive advising.

Jeschke, Johnson, and Williams (2001) investigated the impact of intrusive advising over a 3-year period among psychology majors who were assigned randomly to either a prescriptive or an intrusive advising track. Students who received the

intrusive advising reported greater satisfaction with advising and felt more connected to the department than did students in the prescriptive track. However, contrary to expectations, students who participated in intrusive advising were not academically more successful than students who received prescriptive advising.

In their landmark work, *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) based their principal conclusions about the effects of advising on a very small body of research. Metzner (1989) had conducted a longitudinal study to examine the effects of advising on freshman-to-sophomore retention. Controlling for demographic characteristics and other relevant factors, such as secondary school achievement, employment, family responsibilities, college grades, college satisfaction, and intent to leave the institution, Metzner concluded that the quality of academic advising did not have a significant direct effect on persistence to the sophomore year. However, Metzner found that advising had a significant indirect impact on persistence because it positively affected GPA and student satisfaction and negatively affected students' intentions to withdraw. In a similar study, Braxton, Duster, and Pascarella (1988) had also found no significant direct effect of academic advising quality on persistence, but these authors did not test for indirect effects. Pascarella and Terenzini, along with Metzner, concluded that high-quality academic advising affects persistence indirectly through its positive influence on advisee satisfaction and academic performance and its negative association with intent to withdraw.

Learning About Advising Through Assessment

Administrators are finding it increasingly difficult to secure financial resources for higher education, and academic and administrative service units are being scrutinized as never before as potential sources of cost-saving measures. Thus, administrators and practitioners must become more efficient in using their resources. Outcomes assessment is a powerful tool for gathering evidence to demonstrate the value of advising. As Upcraft and Schuh (2002, p. 20) pointed out, "A lack of assessment data can sometimes lead to policies and practices based on intuition, prejudice, preconceived notions, or personal proclivities. . . ." Administrators can use information derived from assessments to make data-driven decisions about allocating scarce resources to programs that have a demonstrable positive impact on student achievement and retention.

Stakeholders can also use assessment to provide

direction for improving advising. Faculty members and administrators at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, were puzzled by several years of survey data showing that students were far less satisfied with career advising than with academic advising. Through a series of focus groups, researchers discovered that students wanted one-stop shopping: They wanted some career advice, through developmental advising, from their academic advisors. As a result of this assessment, administrators set up joint academic–student affairs training sessions in which faculty members learned more about career advising resources so that they could give advisees some basic information and then encourage the students to consult professionals in the career center for more specific guidance.

By using a systematic and comprehensive approach to assessment, advisors can acquire answers to questions such as the following:

1. Is our advising program meeting the most important needs of our students, such as how to balance work, family, and study time?
2. Does the effectiveness of our advising program vary across different student groups (e.g., males and females, undergraduates and graduate students, first-generation and second-generation students, Latino and African American students)?
3. How effective is our advising program in meeting the objectives we have set for it?
4. Is our advising program cost-effective? That is, are we using our resources as efficiently as possible to meet the unique needs of our students and to achieve our own goals?

Designing Systematic, Comprehensive, Advising Assessments

As noted, effective assessment must be based on the purposes and goals of a program, and theory should shape purposes. Thus, one should first contemplate the following questions before developing an assessment plan: With regard to our particular approach to advising, what are the outcomes we seek? What will happen to students as a result of advising? What will they know and be able to do based on their advising experience? How do we hope our advisees will change?

By thinking about desired outcomes, policy makers can identify program goals and objectives that will help to produce those outcomes. For example, if educators set as a goal assisting students in becoming more knowledgeable about out-of-class

learning resources, such as leadership development courses and discipline-based clubs, they might develop a related objective to produce and disseminate materials that describe these resources clearly in print and on the Web.

Practitioners who have identified desired outcomes can select or develop appropriate measures of effectiveness. For example, to determine the success of increased student knowledge about out-of-class learning resources, educators could give students a pretest during freshman orientation, then a posttest later in the year to see if knowledge had increased as a result of the descriptive materials disseminated to the students. In addition, advisors can ask students if they have read the materials, and analysts can compare knowledge scores for those who have read the materials and those who have not read them.

Educators can use theory to shape goals for advising, and they can subsequently use these goals to design appropriate assessment techniques. They can also use goals, based on theory, as the bases for interpreting assessment findings. For example, if only 20% of the students sampled said they had read the descriptive materials on out-of-class learning resources and the knowledge scores of these students were not significantly higher than the scores of students who had not read the materials, educators can determine that their objective of producing and disseminating clear descriptions of out-of-class learning resources remains unmet.

Lynch (2000) concluded that designing comprehensive assessments of advising can be difficult, not only because advising practices can differ based on differing theories, but also because advising is implemented at various levels of complexity. For example, advising may be conceptualized at the level of the individual advisor, at the academic department level, within an advising unit, or institution-wide. Thus assessment planners must be guided not only by the particular goals for student learning on which the advising approach is based but also by the organizational level on which they wish to focus their conclusions and recommendations.

Finally, while educators should be devoted to selecting or developing methods for measuring the outcomes of advising, their designs cannot be comprehensive unless they look also at the resources and the processes that produce the outcomes. They must consider, for example, the number of advisees per advisor, the quality of the space available for advising sessions, advisor access to training, and availability of information on campus services and student activities. With respect to processes, policy makers should consider the percentage of students

who see advisors; the amount of time advisees spend, on average, with their advisors; how often they speak with the advisor during the year; and whether the advising session takes place in a one-on-one setting or in a group.

Increasing Use and Quality of Advising Assessment

Although stakeholders may know the components of a comprehensive plan for assessment, such knowledge is insufficient for implementing a plan: They must engage practitioners in the process. However, educators, including advisors, are often resistant to assessments. Programs, such as advising, are extensions of the professional, so many are uncomfortable with personal and program evaluations. In addition, few can find the time to design and conduct evaluations; most postsecondary faculty members and staff already have more work than they can complete in a 40–60 hour work week. Not only does assessment take time; it also costs money. Administrators must purchase or develop, then administer and score data-gathering instruments such as tests and surveys. And finally, the time spent on assessment activities may not be recognized or rewarded within the academy.

However, we argue that assessment is cost-effective. Time and money spent on assessment can be recouped as advisors work smarter. Through assessment findings, educators can find practices that work, so they can spend precious time working on effective activities and not waste energy on programs of little measurable value. Also, by demonstrating that advising increases student satisfaction and academic success, educators may be able to keep an advising initiative (and those associated with it) from being terminated in times of financial constraint.

Even if policy makers appreciate the use of assessments, how can they convince colleagues that outcomes assessment is a worthwhile endeavor? How can everyone increase and improve the quality of advising assessment? Banta (2002) suggested characteristics of effective assessment that may provide some guidance. These characteristics can be clustered in three phases of assessment: planning, implementing, and improving and sustaining the process.

Planning the Process of Assessment

Stakeholder involvement. Major stakeholders must be involved in determining purposes and outcomes, in implementing assessment activities, in interpreting findings, and in undertaking improve-

ments. We believe that advising is such an important campus-wide activity that students, faculty members, staff, and administrators should be engaged in it and in assessing its effectiveness. In particular, because many student affairs professionals advise students, they should work closely with faculty members on any committee that may be appointed to plan advising assessment.

Timeliness. Because assessment takes time to develop, stakeholders should begin assessments as soon as students enroll so that policy makers can generate appropriate advising initiatives. To enable advisors to personalize advising, Kramer and Spencer (1989) recommended the creation of a profile for each incoming student. In building the profile, staff can consult high school transcripts, entrance exam and placement test scores, and surveys administered prior to matriculation or during orientation.

At Ball State University, analysts summarize data from a survey for entering students in a profile for each student and his or her advisor (Whitaker, Woosley, & Knerr, 2002). The student reports associated with this Making-Achievement-possible project contain recommendations and referrals that can be reinforced by advisors in individual counseling sessions.

At Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), incoming students complete a Web-based questionnaire at the time of placement testing. Through the survey, analysts gather information about student characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, first-generation status), intentions (educational goals and pursuits), needs (e.g., tutoring in math or writing, financial aid, child care), and potential conflicts with academic plans (e.g., work for pay, care for dependent children or adults). They create individual profiles for use by advisors, and they aggregate responses so that faculty members, staff, and administrators can learn the characteristics of entering IUPUI students.

Policy makers at Old Dominion University use a freshman survey to identify at-risk students, who they subsequently ask to enroll in a first-year orientation course (Policy Center on the First Year of College, n.d., a). In addition, advisors counsel these at-risk students by suggesting strategies for overcoming obstacles identified in their survey-based student profiles.

Purdue University (Policy Center on the First Year of College, n.d., b) developed a computer-based system to inform advisors about the performances of students on first and second semester exams in 100- and 200-level courses in math, chemistry, and physics. Based on the computer-generated

data, advisors contacted students whose scores were low and provided appropriate assistance.

In addition to surveys for entering students, a comprehensive plan for assessing advising should include other data-gathering strategies such as pre- and postintervention tests of knowledge, focus groups, and alumni surveys. Creators of the overall plan should specify the purposes for these strategies and identify the phase of the plan in which they should be implemented. Every strategy need not be employed every year, nor should practitioners attempt to assess every aspect of advising in the first year of the evaluation process.

Goal orientation. The assessment plan should be based on goals valued within the institution. If faculty and staff are committed to fostering undergraduate learning and retention to graduation, then they should judge the quality of advising in part by its contribution to student learning and persistence. The research conducted by Metzner (1989), Molina and Abelman (2000), and Abelman and Molina (2001) illustrate such a focus.

Clear objectives. Effective assessment is based on clear, explicit program objectives. What should students know and be able to do as a result of their encounters with advisors? Specific, measurable objectives for advising can be stated most effectively using action verbs such as describe, explain, apply, differentiate, organize, and evaluate.

Implementation of Assessment

Leadership. Knowledgeable and effective leaders guide effective assessment. When the president, chief academic officer, and chief student affairs officer give their strong and sincere endorsements, assessment can reach full flower in a fully supportive environment. The central administrators must initiate and sustain appropriate recognition and reward for those engaging in assessment. An assessment coordinator with campus-wide authority and advised by a committee of faculty members and staff who represent individual units can conduct assessments in a supportive climate. Individuals committed to assessment within their own units must provide the day-to-day leadership that will ensure sustained implementation and improvement-oriented responses.

At The Pennsylvania State University, oversight of the academic advising program rests with the University Advising Council. As stated on Penn State's advising policy Web site (The Pennsylvania State University, n.d.), the council has "sufficient authority to aid all academic units in improving the delivery of their advising systems in accordance

with the criteria for effective advising. . . .” In a similar fashion, the University of Kentucky (Policy Center on the First Year of College, n.d., c) created a University Senate Academic Advising Committee that oversees the coordination and evaluation of advising. In 2001, policy makers assessed advising by looking at freshman responses on the National Survey of Student Engagement; 77% of University of Kentucky freshmen rated the quality of academic advising as good or excellent, which compares favorably to the 66% that give the same rating at comparable universities.

Learning-centeredness. Assessment is essential to learning and is most successful where campus leaders acknowledge this. In one of their Wing-spread Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Learning, Chickering and Gamson (1987) stated that assessment with prompt feedback enhances learning. Faculty members and student affairs professionals who support assessment are committed to giving students (and colleagues) prompt and accurate feedback about the effectiveness of their performances. They can use data derived from carefully chosen assessment instruments to provide much of the information they need to communicate in this process.

Professional development. Effective faculty and staff development is critical for effective assessment. Most faculty members have not received formal training for their roles as teachers or advisors, and few faculty or student affairs professionals have backgrounds in psychometrics or evaluation. Thus, in addition to a campus culture in which assessment is supported, faculty members and staff must be able to come together to study assessment measures, their characteristics, design, and uses. Miami University provides an extensive training and evaluation program each year for academic advisors who will live in residence halls with their advisees (Coller & Mickel, 2002). Advisors complete a self-assessment of their progress in the training program via the Web. As the semester progresses experienced residence hall advisors observe the new advisors and provide feedback. Later, a coordinator observes all staff and provides appropriate critique; students are asked to evaluate their advising experiences; and student focus groups are conducted.

Unit goals. Effective assessment requires a supportive campus culture and some central coordination, but educators conduct the most effective assessment at the unit level. Personnel in academic departments and student services units engaged in advising have their own goals for advising (aligned with campus-wide goals) and their own assess-

ment plans (also aligned with campus plans).

Multiple measurements. Learning is multidimensional, and therefore, evaluators should use multiple measures of needs, resources, processes, and outcomes. In addition to surveys, which are used most frequently, interviews, focus groups, and student academic and cocurricular records that track student progress are valuable tools in comprehensive assessment designs.

Communication. Implementing successful assessment designs requires constituents to be in close communication. Each of the stakeholders in advising needs to know the results of assessment measures and understand how findings can be and are being used to make improvements. At Old Dominion University (Policy Center for the First Year of College, n.d., d) an Advising Coordinators' Committee was established to facilitate communication and coordination among advisors in various campus units.

Improving and Sustaining the Assessment Process

Evidence. Users of effective assessment procedures acquire credible evidence of learning and organizational effectiveness. Stakeholders in the assessment of advising must be convinced that the data-gathering instruments and strategies are yielding useful information. No assessment instruments are perfectly reliable or valid, so they must be improved as warranted.

Advisors at Truman State University selected items from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) for a Student Advising Report (SAR) that provides second-semester freshmen with individualized displays of their CSEQ responses alongside the average responses of their peers (Hoffman, 2002). Together students and advisors review the individualized reports and discuss ways students can improve their educational experiences. To test the hypothesis that the SAR would add value to the advising experience, evaluators asked Truman advisors: Did you and the student a) identify an area of strength? b) identify an area of weakness? c) have a discussion that caused the student to reflect on his or her academic life at Truman? d) identify an area in which the student seemed motivated to make a change in behavior as a result of the discussion? More than 90% of the advisor respondents answered the first three questions positively, and 63% thought their advisees were motivated to make responsive changes in behavior. This brief assessment suggests that the SAR can be an effective tool in improving both the advising experience and student development at Truman.

When an instrument is first used, stakeholders may be surprised at some of the information generated. To gain confidence that the unexpected findings are believable, they may need to obtain data gathered after several administrations of the instrument or corroborate data from other sources.

Continuity. The assessment process should be ongoing, not episodic. External stakeholders, such as regional accrediting associations, state legislatures, and boards of trustees, are no longer satisfied with assessment efforts that are undertaken at 5- or 10-year intervals; they want to see data that are refreshed annually, or at least every second or third year. Moreover, those on-campus personnel who are trying to produce credible evidence have diminished influence if the instruments deliver a surprising finding that cannot be corroborated for 5 years. One-shot advising assessment may lead to some important improvements in the short term, but sustained evaluative efforts are essential to keep advising approaches current and effective in meeting students' needs.

Many evaluators use longitudinal designs to assess how advising has improved student satisfaction and other important outcomes over time. For example, at Towson University the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction questionnaire was administered several times to ascertain the impact of advising program improvements (Faulkner & Cohen, 2002). Survey responses provided evidence that student satisfaction increased after several major changes were implemented.

Use of findings. To improve programs and services, policy makers should use assessment data continuously; however, sometimes the information becomes available after decisions are made and so the evaluative data are ignored. Upcraft and Schuh (2002, p. 18) observed, "The window of opportunity to influence policy and practice may be open for as little as a month and rarely more than a year." Evaluation reports may contain unwelcome surprises that stakeholders would prefer to disregard than explore. When comprehensive assessment of advising is continuous and is the basis for timely and widely disseminated reports, stakeholders pause to take stock of the findings and consider responsive changes that may need to be made immediately or over a longer period. Furthermore, analysts should present assessment results in a context that encourages active dialogue among key stakeholders so that policy makers can use the results in the development of data-driven action plans (Hansen & Borden, 2002).

Adjustments. Evaluation and improvement of the

assessment process itself should be ongoing. Because assessment instruments are not perfect, practitioners must constantly search for better measures and work to improve existing ones. As new approaches to advising are developed, advisors may need to adjust assessment plans. They may find that even the improvements based on assessment findings create a need for new assessment components.

Just as they must continuously use assessment to improve advising, advisors must monitor the assessment process itself to ensure that it is as responsive as possible to changing needs and circumstances. As Upcraft and Schuh (2002, p. 16) stated, "Assessment studies must be conducted in ways that are credible with their intended audiences, including faculty and administrators who may well determine whether these studies will influence decision making, policy, and practice."

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